The Pathway through the Hill of Kale Fortress

Revealing the time layered in the archaeological site through method of Kintsugi

Chair of Methods & Analysis/ Thesis reflection
2019-2020 Skopje, Macedonia
Qing Yu
4940687

Introduction

Methods and Analysis challenges conventional definitions of architecture and questions hegemonic interpretations of architecture as a problem-solving discipline, of the architect as an individual author, and of the built environment as a merely physical construct. Therefore, during our initial research, we were not hurrying to study the physical context at once. Based on our interests, we pay attention to political disputes, ethnic issues, and personal struggles in Macedonia. This has helped me to understand the situation beyond architecture, and interpreted the built environment relating to a broader context of social and culture aspect.

From contextual to disciplinary analysis, we were able to bring a vast field of interests which are mostly non-architectural into a very specific focus point in the built environment. different ideologies manifests physically in the city. We investigated the liminal space where the different ideologies collide. The physical junctions between territories are explicit in the materiality, levels, and obstacles when passing through space.

  I did the research within a group of four, it is interesting to see that the same research on liminality has led to four different projects. The path way I designed in order to connect the fortress with other parts of the city, presents the concept of liminality in an urban and landscape scale. To further develop it into a complete project, I confronted two main difficulties: first, translating the concept of making a subtle project in actual space; second, developing the details and the whole coherently.

Position in Practice

In the first few week when I started designing, I was distracted by a lot of good intentions I have in mind. Because it is a large-scale project, and has many potentials that can develop into different projects. I stuck at the concepts that was too abstract to translate it in the architecture forms. I jumped out of this situation when I started to revise the pictures from the site, and tried to propose a down-to-earth strategy. Thus, I made my goal clear to design a pathway, and truly believe this is an honest project that solves the real problems the fortress is facing.

The clarification and accuracy of terms I use became very useful later. It helped me stay focused in the specific designing context. I was able to discover the field of knowledges that already existed in many theories and practices.

I practiced repeatedly during the process and several versions of the master plan and relevant details. The first draft of the design focused on the general strategy to organize the circulation and views. While reading about the history of the fortress, I discovered that the it has been built and rebuilt throughout history. Putting my project in the long life of the fortress is like adding another time layer to the existing thing. Thus, I started to investigate architecture projects designed with the notion of time in mind. Igualada Cemetry by Enric Miralles became an important reference. He intended to create a threshold between the new and existing landscape. The abstract concept to becomes an actual act of digging out a slopping path into the valley. The unconventional way of using materials and detail designs corresponded with the whole. I changed the project in the second draft significantly in terms of the form influenced by Miralles. I designed the shapes as analogy of the existing geometry of the ruins and landforms. I also had some initial ideas about detailing and materiality. I started drawing bit by bit and tried to cover up the whole area of my designing range. However, I found the concept started to dispersed in the details.

For the third design version, I revised the concept, functional purpose and design disciplines. I finally found a way to translate the abstract term 'Kintsugi' I discussed at the beginning of the design in a concrete architecture form: the hard scape to mark the separated terrain and soft scape to merge with the existing landscape. The project requires thus very specific designs of the hard edges, which are retaining walls and pavements; and soft scape, which are the design of the landforms, permeable surfaces, bioswales... Faced with a lot of practical difficulties, I discovered that I do not have any knowledge in the field of practical tools landscape architects usually use. I started looking into the vertical landscape design principles. Technical solution should be trusted in systemizing the project from the general design to the detailed level.

The project evolved significantly between each version and deepened the meaning of the pathway I designed. I followed a pattern of positioning while practicing. The two aspects compensate with each other so that the project could progress deeper and deeper in terms of meaningfulness (the architecture position in the academic field), appropriation (allowance of the people to adapt to the newly-created environment and project their hopes and feelings onto it) and integration (the general aesthetic of the project and its cohesion in the social cultural context).

Open Architecture

Most of us were dealing with minimal interventions, authorizing the value of the existing, adding the new layer of meaning, or open up a possibility towards the unknown. In the design we do not control everything. We allow appropriation of the mass, and we respect other projects. The projects are open to transdisciplinary discussions, and stay curious on the full aspect of its context. During the tutoring process, we were encouraged also to exchange ideas with each other. Being open and accept the project to be questioned, criticized makes me feel "strategically safe". This is a method that is new to me after I joined this studio, and I would adopt in the future career.

Urban Landscape Design

Architecture often gives people a utopian imagination and is entrusted with the ability to help people escape from reality, but often it becomes an object to be escaped after being reduced to reality.   This social factor is commonly seen in many developing countries facing the identity crisis as Macedonia. Groundscape design as a useful way of mediating inbetween the different struggles. This project discusses the social capacity of the urban landscape design. The thresholds and boundaries are just silent indications so that the place is permeatable for everyone. The project also discussed the choose of certain materials and ways of construction in order to attune to a more specific local context. It is in dialogue with many practicies in different places.

Dilemma

  I found it contradictory between the ambition of the project and the limited range of disturbance. I was either over designing things or I had designed as if the site has not been changed at all. The balancing point is very ambiguous so that I was always struggling at this point. Because architecture construction is a devotion of time, money, labor and emotion, I always believe that using the least effort to achieve the purpose is a morraly right thing to do especially in architecture.