A RESEARCH ON POLITICAL SPACE IN BRUSSEL THROUGH TYPOLOGY AND PRAXEOLOGY
People's engagement with political space

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I   INTRODUCTION

A good design is based on good research which normally results from a proper research method. From my perspective, this is because an appropriate research method can help researchers collect, analysis, process and present the information and data in a more efficient way. As Locus says in his book, "the ways in which you ask that question are important, and if you apply the most appropriate and rigorous methods, this will ensure that your answers represent an original contribution to knowledge."[1] And it is this course provided us an opportunity to learn those methodologies theoretically and systematically. This offers us more perspectives from which we can investigate a problem when we do research. More importantly, all these methodologies were combined with cases to show how they are used in practice, which helps us to get a better understanding of them. During the lectures, there was one impressed me most, which was about researching through personal perception. Many students are confused with the contradictory between the subjective of this methodology and the objective that research should maintain. From my perspective, even though research is usually considered to be as objective as possible, I believe that good research should be subjective, which means that the researcher is supposed to design a specific research method based on his interest in the specific context. Just as "construction law" which is usually mentioned in terms of architecture design, research always needs a structure or logic by which we can follow to collect, analysis and present the information.

Without a doubt, this course has taught me a lot about each relatively complete methodology. However, since those methodologies were presented separately and individually, I wonder how they could work together. And in which way they can complement each other. As Lucas says, "disciplines rarely benefit from working in isolation, particularly when it comes to research: different perspectives allow you to think differently about places." [2] The complicated context required us to investigate from different perspectives, so sometimes more than one methodology is needed to research the same question. Therefore, I am quite interested in the relationship and synergy between different methodologies while they were used for the same problem. And it is the graduation project that provided me a chance to practice my thought.

The graduation design project required us to design a city hall, a political space, in the center of Brussel, the capital of Europe, which is well known as its multiculturalism. This city hall needs to be representative of the image of the city while providing a space for citizens to get involved in political life.

This topic is really challenging but appealing to a Chinese student like me. This is because compared with Brussel, China is more integrated in terms of policy and language, which results in a totally different public life and space. Also, China, such a huge country, is under management with a united political system while Brussel has such a complicated political structure which makes me surprised. Why this city needs this complicated political structure? And under this circumstance, how are the pollical life of the citizens? And what is the relationship between the political space and people's engagement? All these questions become quite interesting to me. More importantly, I think it is necessary to investigate and explain all these aspects from different angles so that we could draw a more comprehensive conclusion. And this exactly required us to combine several methodologies that help us to collect, analyze and present the data and information in different ways. And related to my specific research question in my graduation studio, Typology and praxeology are the methodologies I would like to use and explore. By using these two methodologies for different aspects of the same research question, I attempt to find out the advantages and disadvantages of each method while also try to discuss the relationship between them.

II   RESEARCH-METHODOLOGICAL DISCUSSION

Based on all those mentioned above, I generalize my research question for my graduation studio as the relationship between Political space and citizens' engagement. Political Space, as a container for activity, is where citizens get themselves involved in the political event. This research question could be subdivided into three sub-questions: What kind of political space exist in Brussel? And how are they related to the urban public space around? And how the citizens get themselves involved in this political space? According to these, I made a research structure as a guideline to instruct the following research. As the graphic shows, basically, the research was carried out from two different angles (System and Space) in three different layers (Brussel, Belgium, and Europe).
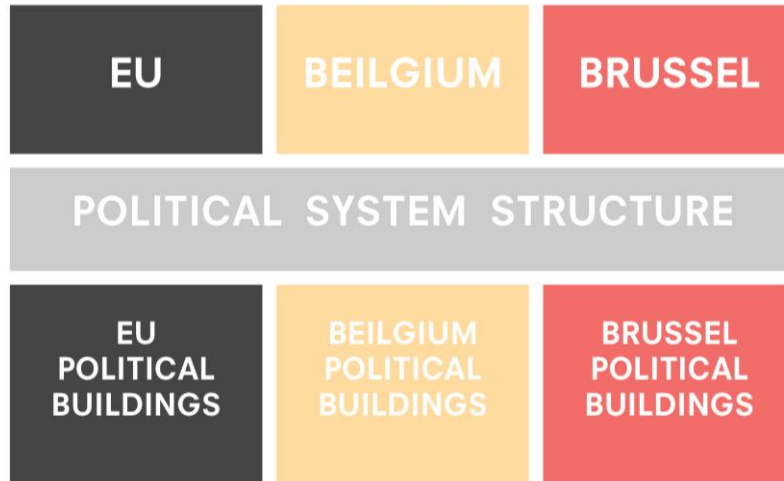

FIG. 01 The research structure

Instead of investigating the complex and pluralistic administrative spatial structure in Brussel, I began with the cause of this spatial composition. As far as I am concerned, this complicate structure is largely due to the complex political system behind. Therefore, I hope to start with the political system so that I can understand how the government works, and then try to understand the logic of spatial distribution. I went through the website of different political parties and the governments to collect data, and finally through a simple relationship chart to integrate and express information.
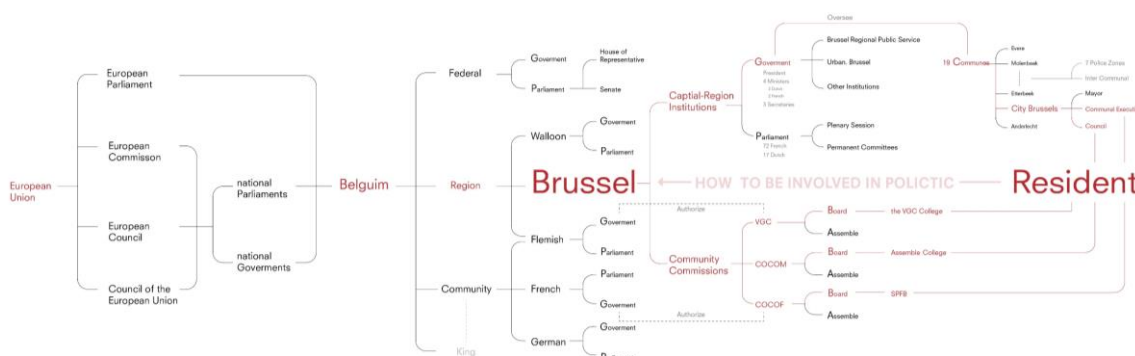

FIG. 02 The political system structure

Through the chart, we can see the distribution of power and the hierarchical relationship, which offers me guides to build up my classification. According to the political hierarchy, I divided the architectural space into several categories. Each category contained a façade of the building, section and plan in urban scale and basic information to help me understand the political space. Through comparison both within and between categories, I try to find the corresponding architectural forms and the related public

space under different power levels, which help me to generalize the commonality of this political space. Meanwhile, I also pay attention to the difference between each other and try to find out the impetus of the mutation. I think this is a methodology like Typology, a research method that extracts the space prototype from the perspective of type finds some basic properties of space.[3]
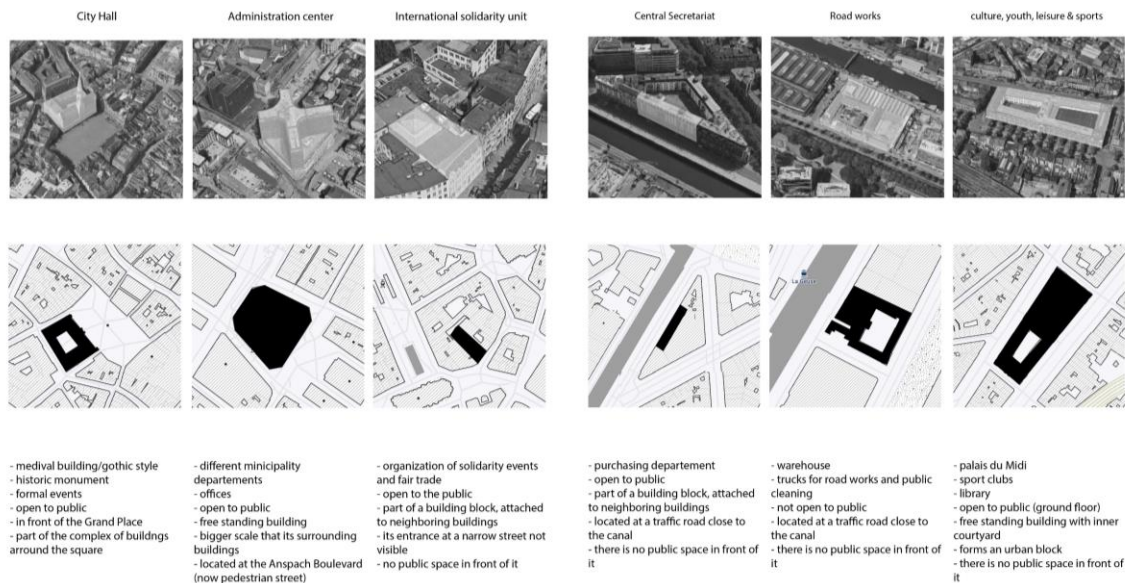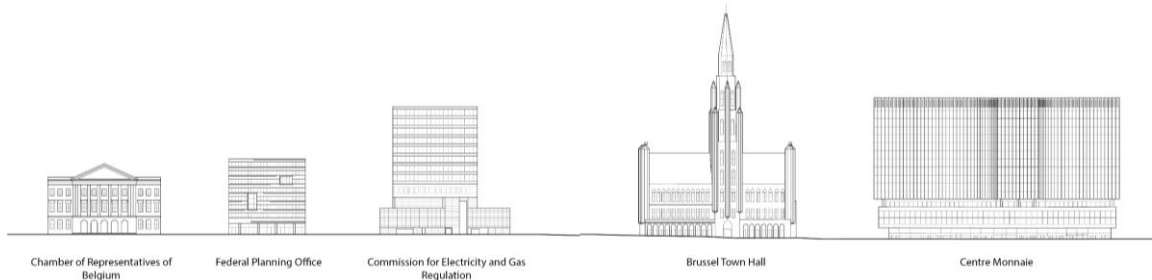

FIG. 03 The Catalog of political space

FIG. 04 The Comparison of façade between political buildings

The reason for choosing Typology is because the complex political system of Brussels has created this diversified political space, providing similar samples for analogy. At the same time, if we can find the commonality of this kind of political space, it will undoubtedly provide a powerful logical basis for the design of the city hall.

Since the topic of research is also related to citizens' ways and behaviors to participation in political life, I think Praxeology is also a suitable methodology for this research topic. It is a discipline that studies the behavior of people who react to the environment and others, then try to understand the space through the observation of human activities.[4] In order to do that, we learned about the political opinions and advocacy of different civil organizations and political groups through interviews. Also, by going through their publication and website, we got to know their ways and means to encourage citizens to participate in political activities. We observed specific activities they have hold like "picnic on the street"," pool is cool" in Brussel through pictures and then we depicted and recorded these scenes by means of axonometric drawings. This is a group study in which each group was required to depict one scene. And the comparisons of different scenarios show different ways in which people participate in political activities and express political opinions.

FIG. 05 The market held by Parckfarm

FIG. 06 The market held by Cultureghem

III   RESEARCH-METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTION

The reason for choosing Typology is because the complex political system of Brussels has created this diversified political space, providing similar samples for analogy. At the same time, if we can find the commonality of this kind of political space, it will undoubtedly provide a powerful logical basis for the design of the city hall.

Since the topic of research is also related to citizens' ways and behaviors to participation in political life, I think Praxeology is also a Throughout the whole investigation, the methodologies I mainly used were praxeology and typology. Typology is a methodology concerning prototype from history, a catalog of tried and tested responses to problems, subject to adaptation to new contexts and situations. Therefore, I would like to discuss typology in terms of historical development and current status. As for praxeology, a case will be given to bring out the discussion about its practice.

In the development process of typology history, it has experienced three stages.[5] The first phase is called the prototype typology. The most significant purpose of typology in architecture is to discover the general principles of architecture from the various arrangements in the past. When these principles return to practice, new forms will be created to respond to new environments and contexts. As the first stage of architectural typology, it basically constructed a complete framework, which explored the source of architectural forms and attempted to construct a concept to explain the problem. However, the period of the formation of the first typology determines the limitations of its content. It did not concern the relationship between type and person as well as the relationship between type and city.

At the beginning of the 20th century, "types" evolved into "paradigms". The concept of paradigm was the invention of industrialized society. It means that the typological significance lay on the mass production which could be carried out according to the principle of paradigm regulation. Different types were divided based on different functions while common principles were generated from the functional perspective to find out the universal approach. Therefore, this kind of typology which was based on paradigm was called second typology, or functional typology. It originated from the social background after the second industrial revolution when a large amount of machine production was required. Buildings inevitably became one of the contents of large-scale industrial production, thus being standardized and economic. It regarded the emergence of new types as the central theme. The second type of typology not only carries out functional paradigm categorization but also proves that modern architecture is constantly improving. However, the building was parsed, and the elements of the building were considered standard at that time. In this way, the form of architectural elements was limited and constricted. This monotonous and rigid form due to paradigm hinders people from seeking a diverse and unified eternal theme, making architecture a consumer product.

In the 1960s, originated in Italy, the new rationalist movement required people to reflect on modern architecture, claiming to liberate architecture from the consumption members and change its position which was buried in the industrial city by technological economic power. Then the contemporary typology came into being, that is, the third typology, or the new rationalist typology. Unlike the typology of the first two stages, the study of contemporary typology no longer made the type elements rational and systematic by virtue of the external "nature" to show the characteristics of true architectural typology. Instead, it was believed that both the development of the buildings at different levels and the creation of new types were the logical result of the building itself. The new typology took the city as the basis for the collection of places and new forms of the elements. Also, the city itself is thought to be a class, a terminal form of the architectural type hierarchy. This kind of thinking led to the creation of the city-architecture, which was a big feature of contemporary typology.

From my perspective, man always creates a building based on a certain prototype. The creation of the architect only provides the impetus for the transformation of the building. The architect always images

a prototype of a certain building in his mind then transform it based on a specific context. I think this is the basic philosophical thinking of contemporary architectural typology. Contemporary architectural typology suggests that there are certain types of things in the building, which are not determined by the architects, but the collective memory of the same generation. The prototype of this building is not only a visible form but a life. The cohesion and precipitation of historical events in the mind are the external manifestations of historical and cultural customs. The building itself is the surface structure while the type is the deep structure. The understanding of the city is not only visual, superficial, but historical.

As for Praxeology, a popular urban researcher in China named Zhisen, He comes to my mind. He is considered as a "city stalker", who "peeping" and "tracking" a lot of people in public space in the city to research their daily behavior.

When he was in Guangzhou, he did a particularly interesting thing. Space where he often ran through was not dynamic and most of the residents in this space were elderly people. After observing their living habits, people got used to throwing garbage into the river, resulting in the fact that there was no garbage in the dustbin.

So, one day, he got up at 5 o'clock, took off more than 300 covers of the dustbin, and set them out along the river. As a result, the amount of trash in the dustbin suddenly increased. More surprisingly, the cover of the dustbin became the table of gambling, turning the space into a positive public space where the old people started to gather and communicate with each other
According to Mr. He, the place is not defined by the designer but created by the people who use it. Therefore, before designing something, one should first turn himself into a user and try to understand the life and behavior of the people in the place. As he said, "Everyone is your teacher, and everyone's life is a book.".[6]

I think this is exactly the power of praxeology. No matter what kind of research, it seems to start around objects or social phenomena. In the end, it will return to the most essential needs of people, that is, the desire to live easily and safely, the desire to freedom and the social, and the desire to be an integral part of others' lives. And praxeology provides us a chance to get into others' lives and to know what people really need. As Yoshiharu, a Japanese architect, mentioned in an interview,[7]" I respect the value of pluralism. We accept and appreciate the actions of individuals and try to cut in with a better angle. Praxeology is a more effective theoretical framework that helps us better observe and understand people's existing behaviors. Therefore, in the design stage, the physical space is changed to improve and provide more possibilities. "

IV   POSITIONING

Throughout the development of typology, contemporary typology has no longer only focused on the prototype of architectural space, but more related to the context, the city, and people, which has become a more comprehensive and rich methodology. After reading "The architecture of the city" written by Aldo Rossi, I agree that type itself is a trait combined by many complex factors. For Rossi, the city is alive, which is connected to the collective memory of people. It cannot be abstracted to an oversimplification. As Rossi said, "Do not try to reduce the city to any of its partial aspects thereby losing sight of its broader significance".[8] The prototype, as the essence of the city, although it is predetermined, its expansion also contains infinite possibilities.

Therefore, while I research the political space, instead of focusing on the architecture itself, I have paid more attention to the political system behind as well as the urban situation around, trying to explain and understand the political space from a different perspective.

Though I try to explore different aspects of types of political space at present, I think what missing in my research is the exploration of the types in history. Because history can provide prototype and precedent as valuable source material to help us understand the evolution of the type.

Another reflection on Typology I have practiced during the research is that in the process of exploring the prototype and commonality, those filtered individualities should also be given attention. As in my research, it is important to extract the prototype of political space, but I think it is equally meaningful to compare the different points of different categories and analyze the internal causes of this difference.

For example, comparing the façade between the Grand Palace and Administration center in Brussel, the decorative style of the palace indicates its representative roles while the modern style of the administration center indicates its practical use. This can help us understand the shaping and formation logic of political space more comprehensively, which is undoubtedly very helpful for the integrity of research or design.

As for Praxeology, I think the idea of "changing or controlling people's actions" is very dangerous. "Behaviorism" in the 1970s was a dangerous way of thinking, which was criticized a lot. It tries to guide and control people's behavior, rather than protecting the diversity of behavior. On the contrary, it makes praxeology valuable. It is an effective theoretical framework that helps us better observe and understand people's existing behaviors, which could be an important basis for designing the space.

Compared with the case of "city stalker" I cited above, the limitation of my research, obviously, is the shortage of data. We can only observe the objective scenes through the fixed photos, and then depict scenes of the activity through subjective imagination. without the dynamic site observation and self-experience, the study lacks the analysis of characteristics and detail, which makes it difficult to draw a solid conclusion. However, while I was applying this methodology, I also realized it was hard to specify individual behavior. Because unlike the objective space, human acts subjectively and consciously, whose behaviors are influenced by so many factors that none of them is exactly the same. And this required research to generalize the commonality among those differences. In other word, it is definitely interesting to analyze the observation of behaviors while it might become challenging to draw a conclusion.

Therefore, I wonder if we could also divide the people into several groups in terms of user, ages or occupation, etc. and observe the behavior of the group instead of an individual. In short, classify the behaviors in types. And it is this thought that brings out my reflection and discussion about the relationship between these two methodologies: Typology and Praxeology.

As far as I am concern, Typology is a methodology concerning space in a way of comparing while Praxeology lays more importance on a human being by observing. Though they seem different in terms of research approach and object, both attempts to find the commonality of a phenomenon. And it is the different approaches and perspective which those two methodologies apply that makes them

complement with each other. The study of space is inseparable from the exploration of how people use space while the research of human behavior is also inseparable from the interpretation of space, a container of human activities.

In general, the methodology itself is a theory that is constantly updated and developed. Each methodology could be enriched and developed based on a various application under different research backgrounds, and gradually becomes a richer research theory. Also, different methodologies should not be separated from each other but compensate for each other. For the same research problem, different methodologies can be used to explore many aspects so that it is possible to obtain more comprehensive information.
As Lucas said, "Architecture is, by its nature, a complex, multifaceted field of study, meaning that no single approach can tell you everything you need to know." [9]

END NOTES:

1   Ray Lucas. Research methods for Architecture. (Laurence King Publishing, 2016), pg.7

2   Ibid, pg.9.

3   AQR. "Typology" Accessed December 1, 2019, https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide/citation-guide-1.html

4   Wikipedia. "Praxeology" Accessed December 1, 2019, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Praxeology

5   Liu, Xiaoyu. "Some Thoughts and Methodology on Architectural Typology" Xi'an University of Architecture and Technology. (Social Science Edition), February, 2011.

6   Jianshu. "Six truths that the city stalker, He Zhisen, does not tell you" Last modified March 21, 2018, https://www.jianshu.com/p/3aae1f7ee1e0

7   Youfang. "Interview of Yoshiharu: the barrier that the modern architect must break through" Last modified March 29,2018, https://www.archiposition.com/items/yoshiharu-tsukamoto

8   Rossi A, Eisenman P. The architecture of the city. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982

9   Ray Lucas. Research methods for Architecture. (Laurence King Publishing, 2016), pg.21

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ILLUSTRATION

FIG. 01   Image created by the author. (2019). The research structure.

FIG. 02   Image created by the author. (2019). The political system structure.

FIG. 03   Image created by Christilena Sideri. (2019). The Catalog of political space

FIG. 04   Image created by Qi, Meihui and Christilena Sideri. (2019). The Comparison of façade between political buildings

FIG. 05   Image created by the author and Roos van Roessel. (2019). The market held by Parckfarm

FIG. 06   Image created by Zhang, Shaoqi and Hugo Bolsius. (2019). The market held by Cultureghem