

1. The relationship between the research and the design

The graduation studio started from a very site-specific approach - visiting the site several times, having conversations with people who care about the future of the land, and discovering many details and nuances related to the character of the place and its inhabitants that were not visible at first glance. The approach that we naturally took as a group to P1, and later to the development of the masterplan and my own project, was to involve various stakeholders in the research and design process. In theory, it looked very promising, but right after talking to the different actors and getting to know them, we saw the challenges that we were going to face. Collaboration and respect for different voices require an open mind. After having conversations with ecologists, activists and residents, the challenge was to be open to changes and approach the project with empathy, to become a mediator, to bridge the differences.

The project, research and the plot itself were full of contradictions that I tried to face. The sensitive nature of the Friche Josaphat, which brought many people together and gave birth to rare flora and fauna versus housing shortage and serious city plans with land density. Ecologists who want to spread and share knowledge about biodiversity versus a lady living next door who doesn't care about the bee's future. The desire to leave the plot relatively „wild” with the least human intervention, versus the potential for social education and increasing empathy for non-human habitats. These factors have sometimes caused me to be in opposition to the given tasks, to the design of a 2400 housing masterplan or to the design of a building in this natural area. However, this questioning helped me to build up a cautious approach, to work with empathy on a different level - to space, to humans and non-humans. It helped me to see the potential of the place and the architecture that could co-exist with it.

To bridge the differences, to release the tension between the city and nature and to raise awareness about flora and fauna I decided to design a path that opens up the Friche. Along the path, the architecture with nature creates different types of experiences - starting from a more formal garden facing the city, passing through an opening of a learning centre building with workshops dedicated to the use of the site (florists, handicraft for making birds' nesting boxes or honey production with hives and communal garden), the visitor faces a wide opening of the land with different stops on the way to meet non-human inhabitants. The play with materiality starting from clay brick transforming into hemp brick and walls connects the two characters of the space (city and friche) creating a link between them. The visitor centre building works with the exhibition, not against it. Part of it is open and porous, allowing non-humans to dwell. The walls blend into the landscape, allowing visitors to take the moment and letting the flora and fauna take over the surface. The visitor centre ends with the bird-watching tower and contemplation space, to be able to reflect on the environment and enhance our understanding of it.

The composition is designed in a way to bring nature to the city and city to nature. The key for me was to work with the different layers of porosity, to create different moments of interaction with nature and allow both humans and non-humans to benefit from the intervention.

2. The relation between your graduation project topic, your master track (A, U, BT, LA, MBE), and your master programme (MSc AUBS)

My graduation project aligns directly with the nature of the master of Architecture track. Although I hesitated with my choices in the beginning and I had difficulties materializing my ideas, I believe that I reached the moment where I can fully express my ideas and understanding of the complexity of the topic. I feel confident with the concept that drives me through different scales of the project, starting from the urban level, reflecting in the form and materiality, and being expressed in the technical details. As a future graduate of the Msc AUBS program, I am challenged to demonstrate my research and design capabilities, to reflect on the process and to always approach the topic with a curiosity and desire to understand the problem. The Urban Architecture studio allowed me to work with the existing spatial and societal issues, being both the valuable finishing of my academic journey and a good start to my architectural practice.

3. How do you assess the value of your way of working (your approach, your used methods, used methodology)?

Urban Architecture Studio contributes both to the theoretical and practical engagement with the space by supporting a site-specific approach and tackling societal issues in the city. With the collaborative nature of the way of working, I got inspired by how truly valuable work is present in the collaboration and knowledge exchange, where I can widen my understanding of the space and the topic itself. A delicate approach taken into my research helped me to see the values in small moments of everyday life, to deepen our sense of beauty and care for each other. Thanks to that, I started to question the role of an architect today, who tends to forget about different existing actors and create spaces without trying to understand them.

The empathetic approach to space, humans and non-humans allowed me to become more cautious about architectural choices and to put myself in a more imaginative position. What I mean by that is that as an architecture student, I had little knowledge about different animal species and their behaviours. To be able to create a space for them, besides exchanging knowledge with specialists and diving into technical and scientific facts, I simply tried to go radical with my ideas and imagine where a bird could nest and how my architecture could facilitate that.

When it comes to design, I always link it to aesthetics. But to me, aesthetics doesn't only mean proportions and visually appealing buildings. To me, it means more how the space "dances" together, how it corresponds to the surroundings and how it can be adaptable for future changes and needs. To design with empathy for the space, we need to find a common language for the intervention and the space itself. That's why my exploration started with my view on the site (capturing different moments on collages from details to the general atmosphere; getting to know people who care about the site and exchanging not only scientific knowledge but also simple emotions that are linked to the future of the site; making sketches a drawing to try to catch the character). Finally, the cautious choice of materiality and including animal requirements in the design and technical details define the aesthetics. In essence, my project embodies a fundamental architectural principle—the choreographed interaction between space, humanity, and nature.

I also must acknowledge that not all of my methods unfolded as initially envisioned. The value of the collaborative practice and the fact I got to know many activists and people involved with the Friche brought me to the simple (in theory) idea of engaging them in the design process. However, I quickly realized that it's not easy to bring people together. Despite the lack of a group workshop, individual conversations and meetings allowed me to create an image of what project should be created on the border between the Friche and the city.

4. How do you assess the value of the transferability of your project results?

In the final part of the graduation year (after p4) I would like to dedicate myself to materializing my research and project together since I see it as a very integral part. Therefore I am planning to make a drawing of my intervention and the surroundings, to pay attention to the design on different scales: spatial (urban composition, rhythm, atmosphere, and general integration), human (what does my intervention bring to people, how does it support social encounters and how people discover the space through architecture), non-humans (zooming in into details and moments of interactions, how animals benefit from my buildings). The drawing will be accompanied by my research findings, giving it an existing atmosphere and imagining how to keep a balance between humans and non-humans, how to maintain the site and collaborate with other species. I find drawing a powerful tool because it translates our sensitivity and helps to convey different ideas that shape the project.

5. How do you assess the academic and societal value, scope and implication of your graduation project, including ethical aspects?

From the beginning of joining the Urban Architecture studio, I was accompanied by questions asked before the graduation year "whether to build and how to build?". I consider this to be a very important ethical aspect of our profession, where such a seemingly simple question we often forget to reflect on. Instead of imposing a market-profit architecture, let's get to know the place first so we can shape its future.

I see my project on the one hand as a sensitive approach to the plot, as a mediation between contrasting spaces, and on the other hand as a radical step to raise awareness of the value of biodiversity. Through research, I've discovered that architecture offers more than just shaping spaces traditionally. It can positively influence ecology, provide shelter for animals, and serve as an educational space. By considering not only its program but also its form and materials, we can craft various atmospheres, establish transitional zones between urban and natural environments, and even provoke reflections on the environment. My findings are a small but important step in showing what I believe the future of our profession should look like, how different voices matter and are not only visible in theory but also in the design.

In addition, I believe that my approach does not have to end with Friche Josaphat, but to be an inspiration for the approach of other natural Westlands in cities.

Thank you