

Reflection

Alicia Meier

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Explore Lab Studio 39 - Technical University Delft

Architecture Mentor: Mieke Vink

Building Technology Mentor: Rufus van der Ban

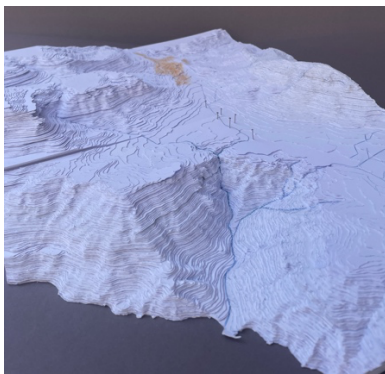
Research Mentor: Inge Bobbing

Research

My graduation project was driven by a deep-rooted personal concern. Grown up in Mallorca, I became increasingly aware of the social and ecological injustice in the island's water management: while locals endure water cuts in summer, tourists enjoy uninterrupted access to water. This tension motivated me to return to the village of Valldemossa, my childhood landscape, to uncover how water was once valued, captured, and shared.

Through on-site fieldwork, conversations with locals, and mapping of both tangible infrastructures and intangible narratives, I came to understand water not only as a resource but as a medium of culture. I gathered stories, sayings, and legends that revealed how water had shaped life, landscape, and belief systems. To express these findings, I initially planned to use spatially distorted medieval maps and narrative cartography as a reference. The goal was to map the hydrosocial universe of water. However, I felt that spatial abstraction felt artificial when the terrain itself was so spatially complex. Still, medieval cartography remained a conceptual inspiration, encouraging a more hand-drawn, narrative-based representation of knowledge. I pursued this inspiration turning to more analogue ways of working with hand-drawn maps and model-making.

A hand-cut topographic model became a central tool for reading and engaging with the layered topography of the area. Unconsciously, my design approached mirrored my research method of layering. Just as I had layered maps and stories in my research, I layered spatial sequences, waterflows and landscape in the design. The cardboard model of the site served as the foundation for carving out architectural spaces. The transparent sketch-paper plans, always drawn with the layer below in view, helped me consider relationships not only horizontally but also vertically. These analogue, tactile processes mirrored the vernacular construction techniques I admired and became central to both my research and design methodology. They slowed me down, but they also embedded my project in place and time.



Landscape model



Design model outside



Design model inside

Design

Throughout my graduation project, I explored how architecture can be more closely in harmony to the natural rhythms, vernacular knowledge, and cultural memory of a place. My aim was to rethink the relationship between water and architecture in a context where scarcity and abundance coexist. The resulting design is both a communal shower for times of water cuts and a bathhouse for times of heavy rain and flooding. In winter, the bathhouse celebrates water by offering a sensorial, collective and warm space. In summer, when water is scarce, the structure transforms into a shaded communal space for events, with only a small cooling pool remaining. The enjoyment of water in the bathhouse is an experience that, once the water is gone, the fun will be missed. It is only in times of scarcity or poor quality that we become aware of the value that water represents. It is only in the absence of something that its presence is truly perceived, a feeling which is embraced in the design.

Set within the terraced landscape of Valldemossa, the architecture challenges the conventional notion of buildings as barriers to the elements. Instead, water is embraced as a vital, sensorial, and political agent, flowing in and through the building, creating a space that drips, absorbs, and reacts. In doing so, the design challenges architecture in general, where water is always seen as a threat, something we must keep away from the built environment and only let in through a highly regulated process. The design proposes a space where natural forces and unpredictability are not only accepted but celebrated.

On enchantment and architectural positioning

A pivotal discovery during my graduation year was the theoretical framework of *enchantment*. Writers such as Jane Bennett and Alfred Gell helped me articulate what had always felt intuitive in my past designs: the capacity of architecture to provoke emotion, create resonance, and cultivate care. In contrast to the disenchanted, hyper-functional environments enabled by technology we live in, I became more convinced of the importance of architecture that communicates with the senses, traditions, and memory of a place.

This framework gave me a voice in architectural discourse and helped me position my project as both poetic and political. It allowed me to design within a familiar context not as an outsider imposing form, but as someone channelling personal memory and collective wisdom into space.

Assessing my approach

My approach foregrounded embodied research, slow methods, and analogue tools. While unconventional in the context of contemporary digital practice, this methodology proved invaluable in cultivating an intimate understanding of site, material, and atmosphere instead of superficial research.

That said, this process was not without its challenges. The biggest struggle was translating the richness of my research into design. I spent a significant amount of time unravelling the many layers of water in Valldemossa, so much so that I often got lost in them. While this deep dive was necessary to ground my understanding, it limited the time I had to fully materialize and test the knowledge in design.

I was frequently overwhelmed by the weight of the problem I had taken on, and hesitant to propose an architectural intervention in such a picturesque and emotionally loaded context. From the beginning I had no clear design direction for the design which made it difficult and feared that any gesture might feel superficial or insufficient.

Looking back, I recognize the value of long process. It led to an outcome that feels deeply rooted in its context, both spatially and emotionally. Yet, I also acknowledge that more time should have been dedicated to materially testing the research outcomes. The translation of knowledge into materiality remains an area I wish to push further maybe in the final presentation.

As I continued with my research until P4, it facilitated me strengthen to link between my research and design. Simultaneously, the specific design research required by the project nourished my research and facilitated a more coherent structure. Through the research I also become more sensible towards the multiplicity of water, realizing there are many waters on the islands, even seeing humidity, landscape and air as part of water, which the design deeply benefited from it.

Integrating feedback

My mentors played a crucial role in helping me manage this process. They helped me solidify the link between research and design and kept me grounded in the right scale, preventing me from floating too abstractly. They supported my conceptual direction and encouraged me to be more daring in my design proposals and to go beyond traditional architecture imagining new rituals, systems, and landscapes. Their encouragement gave me the confidence to design something that is as much a public bath station as it is a spatial ritual and seasonal landscape.

Equally important was their feedback on the scales I was working. For a long time, I worked in the systemic and too abstract scale, getting lost in the territorial without grounding it in the architectural. My mentors pushed me to continuously return to the site-specific, the tactile, and the experiential.

Looking ahead

As I enter the final stretch of the graduation project, my focus will be on refining the architectural detailing and atmospheric qualities of the design. I aim to recreate two interior spaces (the shower and the warm room) to test how light and water enter, move through the room and how those spaces can be experienceable, especially from the perspective of enchantment. Furthermore, I would like to develop a set of more elaborated detailed drawings (maybe putting them in three dimensional axonometry) that communicate how materials age and change, how water is filtered, guided, and celebrated in the project embracing its poetic dimension. I will also deepen the narrative component of the project, ensuring that the voices and traditions that shaped it are clearly represented in the presentation and perhaps even integrating the sound of water.

Societal and academic value

The societal dimension of the project lies in its attempt to reframe water infrastructure as a shared cultural and ecological asset. In an age of privatization and commodification, the bathhouse and communal shower act as a public common. It questions who has access to water and proposes an alternative model based on reciprocity, care, and ritual. The academic contribution of the project is in its methodological hybridity, combining field ethnography, poetic, analogue making, and theoretical framing to construct a place-based design practice.

My graduation project is a continuation of my architectural career so far, combining the diverse skills as well as positionality in architecture I have developed throughout my studies. Over time, I have noticed a personal shift bridging architecture with landscape architecture, a transition that Explore Lab enables me to explore more deeply. The project addresses environmental, social, and political topics, which are deeply significant to me. By investigating the complex relationship between water, culture, and tourism in Mallorca, I aim to make a counterstatement to the current challenges, questioning societal behaviours toward water while envisioning spatial solutions to mitigate these issues.

Transferability

While the design is deeply embedded in the Mallorcan context, I believe the principles can be applied elsewhere. The combination of local narratives, material specificity, and water-sensitive design offers a transferable framework for working in other landscapes with hydrosocial tensions. What is not transferable is the form but that is precisely the point. The project's methods resist replication in favour of the context.

Reflection questions

Looking back at my process, I ask myself:

How can one research water—an ungraspable, shifting, and political element—without becoming lost in its complexity and without oversimplifying its multiplicity?

Looking ahead I ask myself:

What is the role of poetics in architecture when addressing extreme environmental conditions and can they move beyond metaphor and become materially and socially effective? (how do we test if it truly works?)