

Reflection

on the graduation project *Moving Bodies*

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The starting point of this year's Urban Architecture graduation studio was the Lageweg area in Hoboken, Antwerp, where the former Can Factory currently serves as a temporary creative hub for artists. This situation is part of a broader issue seen in many cities: artists and small creative industries are often pushed out of urban areas as they are redeveloped, forced to occupy leftover or vacant buildings not designed for their needs. My project aims to provide a more stable and permanent solution by designing a mixed-function building with dedicated creative workspaces and housing, combined with the public function of a swimming pool to balance the needs of both the artists and the neighbourhood.

My research was based around the main question: *how do artists use and adapt their workspaces to meet their creative and functional needs?* This led to sub-questions exploring when and how they use their spaces, what spatial qualities they value, and how communal spaces contribute to collaboration or community. I was also curious whether creative work extends into the home, or if artists prefer a separation between their personal and professional environments.

To investigate this, I used the combination of interviews and participatory mapping. This methodology was developed over time. My initial focus was on how individuals adapt to and use space in general, so not specified on creative workspaces. Encouraged by my research tutor Leeke, I started small by researching my childhood home. This was inspired by the approach of Georges Perec in his *Species of Spaces*. I eventually shifted my research focus toward creative workspaces, testing interview questions and mapping exercises first with my mother, an artist herself. This process of trial and refinement was central to developing my methodology. It wasn't a fixed choice from the start, but rather something that matured as I tested what worked.

The research approach proved effective. I conducted eight interviews with artists, which provided not only answers to my research questions but also revealed unexpected insights. Most importantly, the importance of good management for a thriving artistic community, a topic I hadn't initially set out to explore. The mapping exercises were also a success. The visual results highlight how differently people navigate and occupy their workspaces, even within the same creative field.

One part that worked less well was investigating the relationship between home and workspace. I had hoped to translate this into design solutions, so integrating workspaces into, next to, or separate from the home, but most artists explicitly preferred having their workspace separate. Only one artist expressed interest in a small home-based workspace, something that could easily be accommodated in a spare room. This theme ultimately did not carry through strongly into the final design.

Throughout the research, I learned to have more trust in the process itself. As someone with a practical mindset, I usually like to know upfront whether something will succeed, but this project showed me that testing and trying out ideas before knowing if it has the desired outcome also works. Taking on this mentality enabled me to develop my methodology successfully over time. I also came to appreciate the value of working directly with end-users. The artists I interviewed repeatedly expressed the wish that similar research would be carried out by their municipality, since their needs and wishes were not taken into account at the time.

I believe the way I developed and applied my research methods holds value. The process of testing and refining methods before settling on a final approach, and the direct contact with end-users, added depth to both my research and design outcomes.

The feedback from my tutors shaped my project in several ways. While they encouraged me to add the swimming pool as a public function, which they felt would bring more dynamic and create new layers of interaction, I ultimately found that this part complicated the project. Although they are correct in what adding the public function would do to the project, it was challenging to connect the pool meaningfully to the artists' building. I often felt it took time and attention away from refining the housing and creative workspaces, which were my initial interests. On the other hand, Leeke's encouragement to focus more on the people itself, how artists' bodies move through and interact with their spaces, rather than just focusing on the creative workspaces themselves, led to a richer and more dynamic outcome of my research.

The research directly shaped my design by defining the workspace typologies needed and highlighting the importance of good management for a successful artistic community. The visual nature of my research, which focused on how bodies move through space, made the findings accessible and relatable.

My graduation project aligns with the Urban Architecture studio's focus on social themes. Within the MSc Architecture program, it addresses the needs of a specific user group, people working in the creative sector, through a mixed-function building that combines housing, creative workspaces, and a swimming pool. This reflects the program's emphasis on socially relevant and layered design challenges. Societally, my project addresses the need for more permanent creative workspaces, while also responding to the neighbourhood's need for swimming facilities. Professionally, I hope to demonstrate how fieldwork and direct end-user engagement can inform architectural design, ensuring that projects better reflect the needs and wishes of those they are designed for.

Looking ahead, I will focus on completing the last details of my research, including processing the remaining interview material. I will also incorporate the feedback I will receive during my P4 presentation and devote the upcoming period towards the P5 presentation to developing the visual materials and preparing a strong presentation of both my research and design.