

# Research plan

## The Language of Space: Unveiling Place Identity

# Delft University of Technology

## Urban Architecture

Research plan  
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*"In an era dominated by the starchitects and their iconic structures, architecture cannot be mere adjectives and exclamation marks. Cities need grammar."*

Charles Correa

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## 01 Introduction

This chapter will explain the fundamentals of the research, going in-depth into the personal motivation and architectural relevance as well as the aim and demarcation of the research.

## 02 Research scheme

The scheme that is presented in this chapter shows the main question distilled into subquestions. Furthermore, it shows a planning for the year.

## 03 Methods & sources

This chapter includes ideas on how to answer the questions proposed in the first two chapters. Furthermore, it illustrates a first exploration of the sources that could be used to answer the research questions.

## 04 Position

In this chapter an extra personal assignment is explained. This assignment focusses on positioning yourself as an individual towards complex issues.

## 05 Bibliography

The bibliography shows the sources that are used.

## 06 Addendum

Extra remarks after the first tutoring.



### Personal interest

Until now, I have walked the city of Brussels twice, but mainly wandered around the area of our project, in Schaerbeek. During both site visits, the notable contrast in the area of the North station, where the Brabantwijk is juxtaposed against the modern North quarter of Brussel, caught my attention the most. The train station acts as a physical division, accentuating the differences in wealth and prosperity. The Northern quarter has been built relatively recently, and therefore reflects a time defined by globalization. This can be easily spotted; the buildings often consist of simple geometric volumes, and the facades are made of reflecting glass.

### Problem

Because of these specifics, the buildings have no relation to their surroundings, forming almost an island within the city. The same island can be placed in any other random business district: it is anonymous, unpersonal, and it is hard to relate to or form a connection with. In this research, this kind of architecture is called 'homogenized architecture', defined as:

*An architecture that has no connection to the local culture, context, history, and building methods.*

Because of this, the architecture becomes ignorant to the place identity.

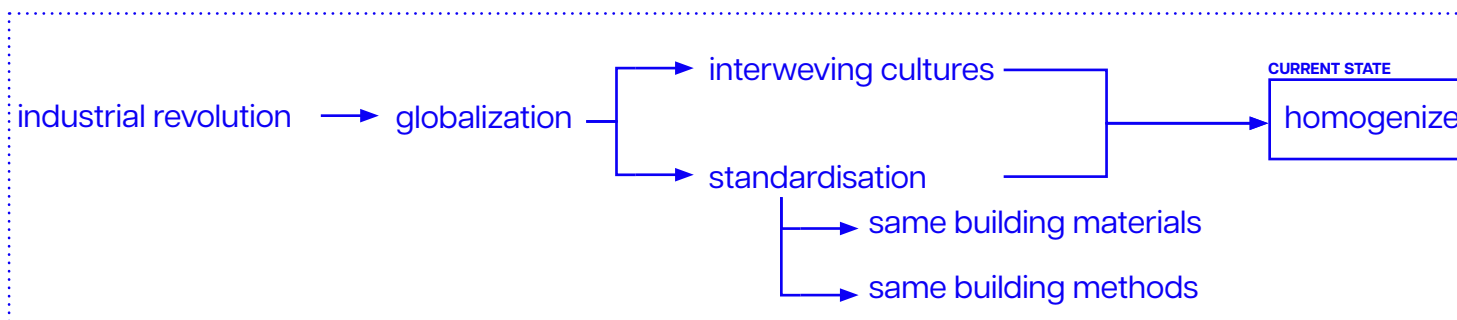
### Reason

One of the main reasons for homogenized architecture is the trend of globalization (Kinoshita et al., 2012). This trend is likely to persist, especially since building with sustainability in mind becomes evident. There is a possibility that a universal sustainable building recipe, which most likely contains wood as the main material, will be developed in the near future. This will further contribute to a uniform architectural style. If this trend continues, generic cities will emerge. In his famous essay 'The Generic city', Koolhaas (1994) views the generic city as an utopian concept, where universal happiness prevails. He opposes the historical city centres and finds them emotionless in their rigidity. They obstruct the performance and efficiency a post-modern city should embody. However, in this research, the notion of a generic city is regarded as a dystopia, as a city devoid of character and personality; a place where no one would want to live.

### Societal relevance

The importance of this research is two-folded. Firstly, it carries a social significance. Research suggests that people derive a part of their identity from the built environment (Bernardo & Palma-Oliveira, 2016). This phenomenon is called 'place identity'. Lynch (1981) defines the term as:

### Problem statement





*'the extent to which a person can recognise or recall a place as being distinct from other places'.*

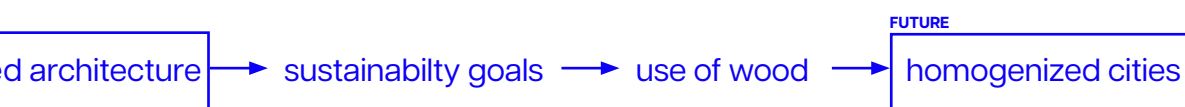
The notion of self-identity is also a highly debated subject in an era marked by modernity and globalization. The risk of architecture losing its contextual uniqueness is that it also erodes peoples sense of identity. Furthermore, when architecture becomes uniform, cities lose their appeal. Why will you travel and explore if everything looks the same? The loss of a place's identity can result in several negative consequences such as a fading sense of belonging, resulting in less attention to the local community. Moreover, those who have a strong sense of place identity are also more likely to take care to their environment and protect natural resources within

it (Bernardo & Palma-Oliveara, 2016). Place identity can also stimulate tourism, which has economical benefits (Adelakun, 2017).

Secondly, the issue of globalization and architectural homogeneity also interacts with sustainability. Globalization leads to the import of building materials from all over the world, which leads to a standardized construction process. While this has numerous advantages, there are also downsides. Local conditions such as the climate are intensively neglected. The knowledge that used to exist about building in a passive way are now overlooked. Nowadays, installations provide cooling and heating, consuming energy and money. Instead, using traditional building methods with local materials might offer a sustainable alternative.

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**Figure 2:**  
Brussels Business  
district  
(Davidson, 2023)



FUTURE

**Figure 3:**  
Diagram  
problemstate-  
ment  
(Authors own)

# Introduction

## 1.2 Research goal

### Solution

As a solution to the above mentioned problem statement, this research aims to provide an alternative for this homogenized architecture by identifying the local culture, context, history and building methods and applying that in a design. This leads to a building that fosters local identity, enhances the local culture, and is sustainable because it relates to the local climate. It should lead to an architecture that is grounded. This does not imply that every building in Brussels should from now on be built according to a framework this research will produce. On the contrary, this study should merely function as an example, as a lab, to showcase that architecture can and should, indeed, even in modern times, reflect locality.

*How can a building connect and stimulate local identity?*

In chapter 2, the main question will be distilled into multiple subquestions.

### The Friche

The identity of Brussels is a complicated one. The city has had a turbulent history, and the country it serves as the capital for only has been in existence 190 years. Furthermore, after Dubai, Brussels is the second-most super diverse city in the world (Braak, Lemble, Mastari, & Keppens, 2021). Furthermore, in Schaerbeek, a district with loads of challenges, fostering the local identity can be of great importance. Moreover, the Friche itself is still an empty piece of land. The proposed masterplan (figure 4,5 & 6), according to me, has so far not been able to relate itself to either the identity of the Friche or that of Brussels.

Earlier, the Northern district of Brussels was described as an island within the city. In a way, the Friche, in its current state, can also be described as an island. It has clear boundaries, in its topography, and due to the human intervention of placing a fence. I want to avoid the Friche becoming more isolated than it already is. Instead, the current 'island' should be connected again to the city, by architecture that stimulates the connection to the identity that is home in this area.

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### 'Vernacular' architecture

Vernacular architecture is a term that is often used in relation to architecture and identity. In literature and practice, the definition of 'vernacular' is greatly discussed and remains somewhat unclear. However, in this research, I will adhere to the following definition:

*a type of local construction influenced by geography, available materials, climate, traditions, and culture.*

While many published articles regarding vernacular architecture seek the traditional, this research aims to avoid replicating old architecture. I firmly believe that every building should be a product of its time. Besides showing the local culture it should still be contemporary. I want to stress firmly that the research should not lead to a historicizing architecture. However, the past can still serve as a valuable source of inspiration. Therefore, the question that this research tries to answer is:





**Figure 4:**  
*Josaphat master-  
 plan*  
 (Trends, 2023)



**Figure 5:**  
*Josaphat masterplan*  
 (Trends, 2023)

**Figure 6:**  
*Josaphat masterplan*  
 (Trends, 2023)

# Introduction

## 1.3 Demarcation

### **Train station**

I believe that it is necessary to narrow down the research by selecting a specific typology. This will make the project more manageable without undermining its broader objectives. I am still unsure whether to define this typology beforehand or let the research inspire me to do so. At the moment, I am particularly interested in designing a trainstation.

In the past, train stations often had a similar architectural style and have always been prominent buildings which will possibly benefit the research. Train stations began to arise mainly after the industrial revolution and it could therefore be said that they were initially never really built in a vernacular way. The choice of designing a trainstation would lead the research into a very specific direction, possibly disregarding the focus on the vernacular history of the typology itself. Furthermore, it is a typology that has not often been built using vernacular building methods or a vernacular architectural style.

For this research to work properly, the Friche should be heavily built with tall buildings, as proposed by the developers. In this way, a proper railwaystation can be designed. This station can serve as a welcome gate for the neighbourhood, and thus set an example as to how the buildings on the Friche itself should be designed and built.

Other interesting building typologies that are still considered are:

- A library
- A townhall
- A therme
- A cemetery





**Figure 7:**  
Brussels station  
(Admirable-facades, 2023)

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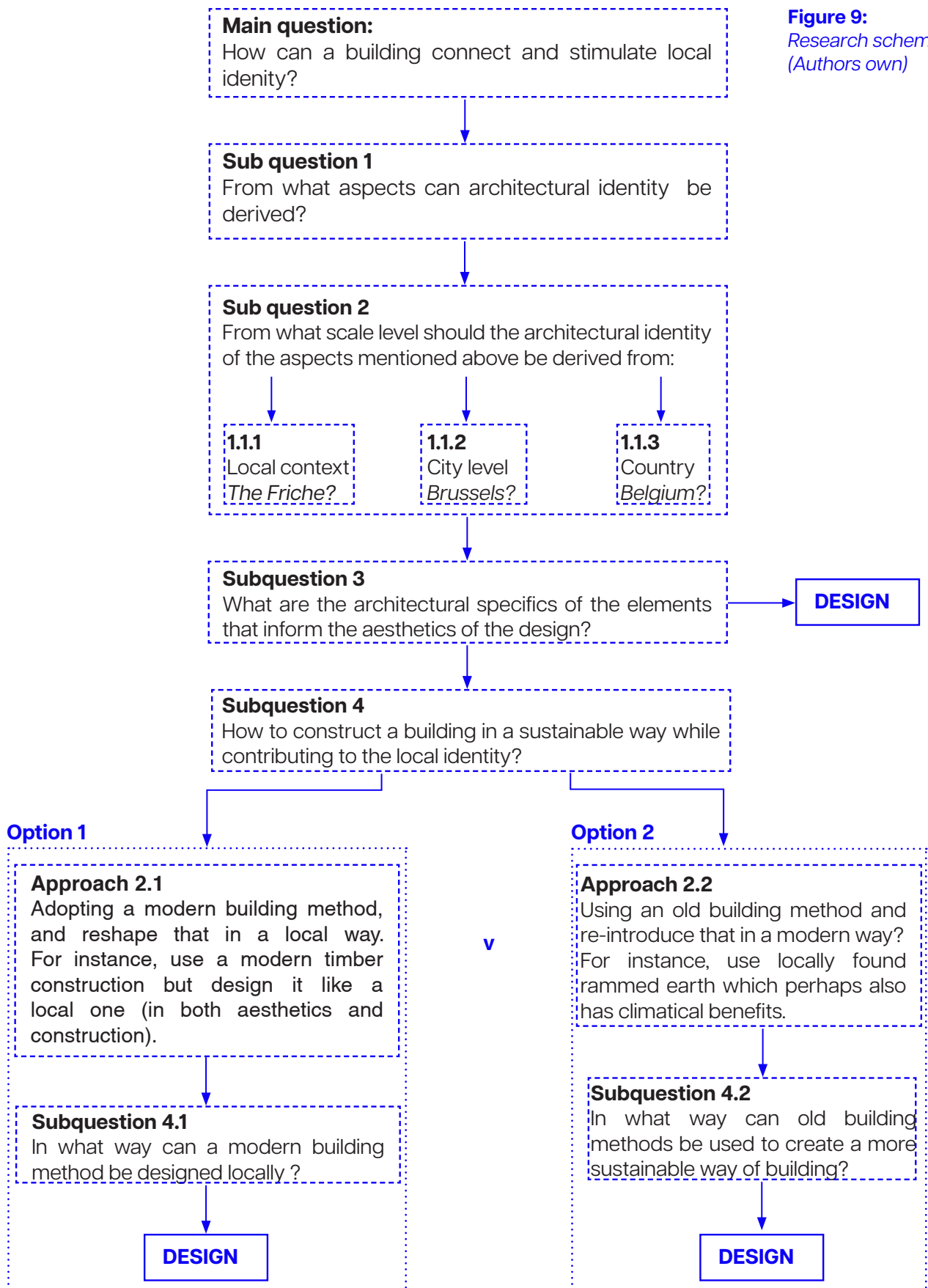
**Figure 8:**  
Evere station  
(Wikipedia, 2023)

# Research scheme

## 2.1 Questions

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The scheme that is presented on this page shows the train of thoughts of how to structure the research questions. First, subquestions 1, 2 and 3 should be answered. In the building method chapter, one of the two approaches should follow out of the answers of the previous questions. In the end, the answers should flow into each other again, giving one coherent answer to the main question proposed in this reserach.



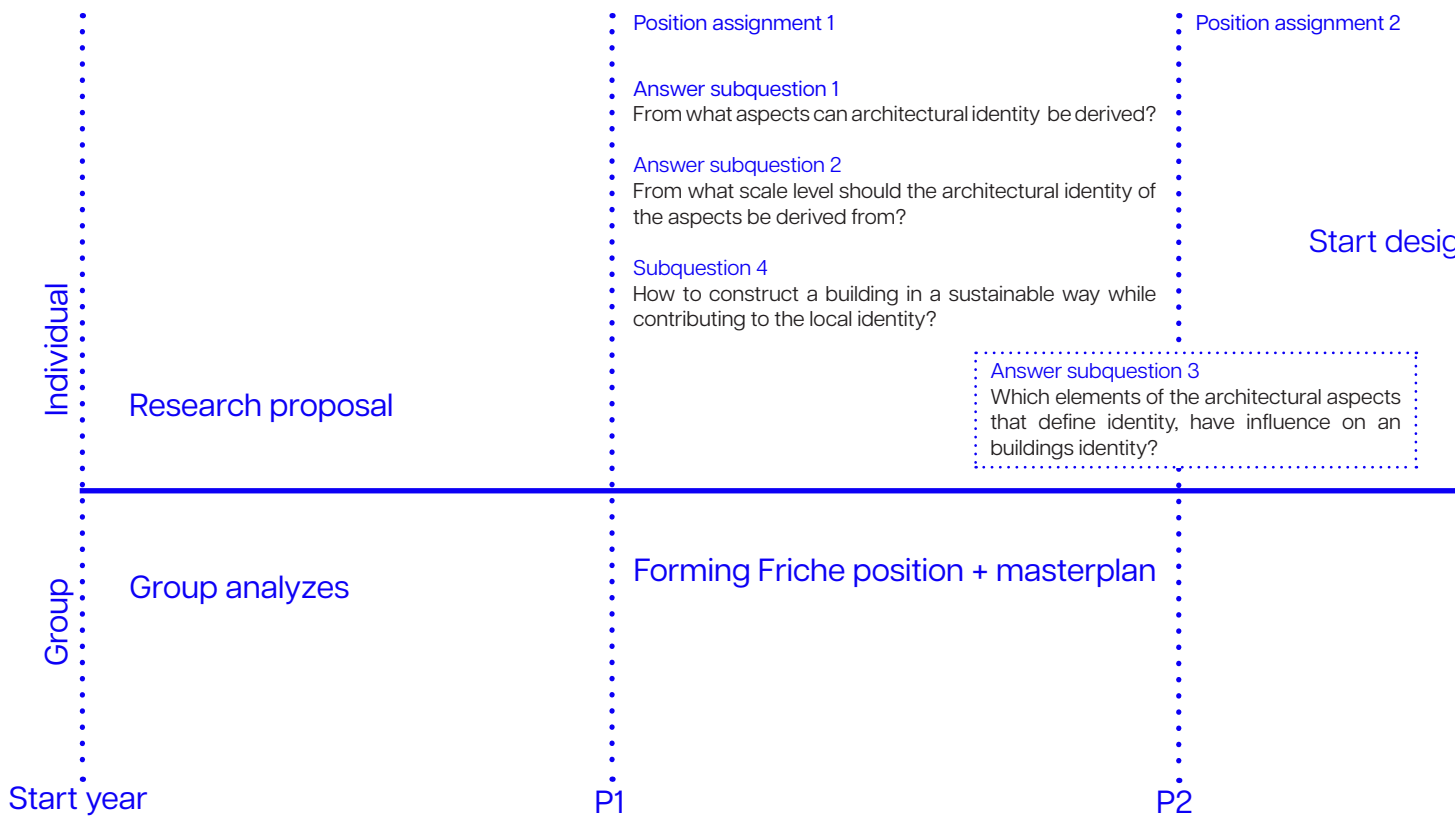
**Figure 9:**  
Research scheme  
(Authors own)

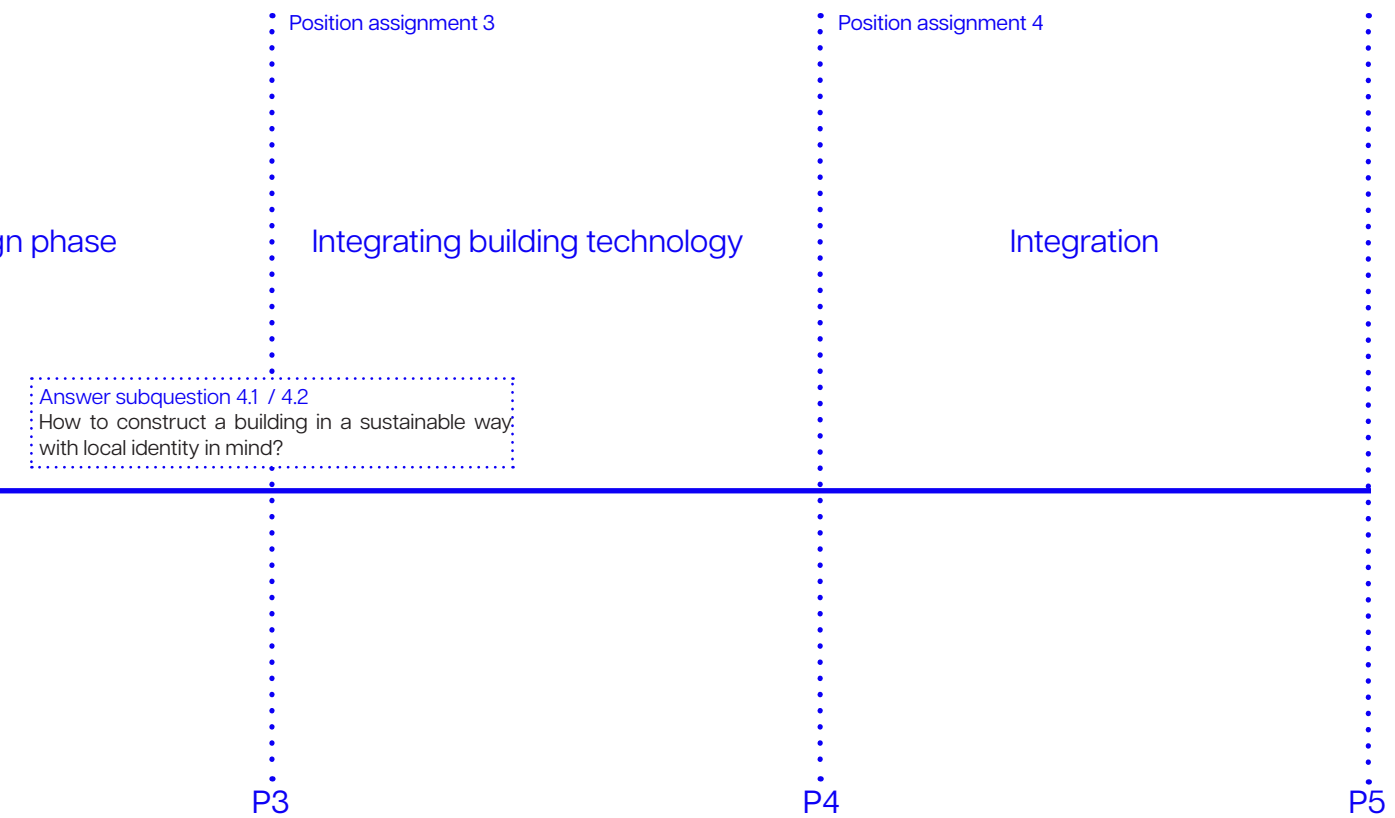


# Research scheme

## 2.1 Planning

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## SQ1: From what aspects can architectural identity be derived?

In the initial phase of the research, SQ 1 seeks to explore the various factors that influence a place's identity. So far, a quick scan of the literature has resulted in the following aspects: landscape, architecture, culture, materials and climate. However, further research into literature is required to find out if there are more aspects at play. In addition to literature research, examining case studies to understand how architects made the decisions in contemporary vernacular architecture should provide further valuable insight.

## SQ 2: From what scale level should the architectural identity of the aspects mentioned above be derived from?

A more in-depth analysis of these aspects will be conducted to determine the scale level at which the aspects should be examined in SQ3. For instance, the history of architecture might be a topic to zoom out to the whole of Belgium to identify Belgium's vernacular. In contrast, when examining the cultural aspect, the smaller scale of the neighborhood level might be more appropriate. These decisions should be supported by the same sources from SQ1 or individual (philosophical) arguments.

## SQ 3: What are the architectural specifics of the elements that inform the aesthetics of the design?

Once the scale level decisions are made, the research will proceed a detailed examination for all of these aspects. Per aspect a specific research method is required. For the landscape, climate and material, literature research will be conducted to obtain information about their specifics. For architecture and culture, additional field work is required. The book 'the concise townscapes' from Gordon Cullen will be used to map the specifics of the current architecture and cultural influences on them. A visit to the open air museum of Bokrijk, Genk Belgium, and then using the same type of drawings, will inform about the history of both the culture and architecture of Belgium.

Additional literature research should add to this.

## SQ4: How to construct a building in a sustainable way while contributing to the local identity?

At first, a decision about which approach to use should be taken. This approach will be informed by the research findings from the previous subquestions, with particular emphasis on the material aspect. If materials that are used in modern construction methods are accessible within the area, a modern building method can be applied. The research is then about finding out how to do this in a way that it still adds to the local identity. Alternatively, if local materials are more limited, the resources that are there should be utilized for construction. The historical research and the landscape research will play a role in guiding this decision-making process.

This list is an overview of a first exploration into the sources that can be used in this research.

**Case studies examples are:**

- Musée Yves Saint Laurent Marrakech, Studio KO
- Centre de Santé et de Promotion Sociale, Francis Kéré
- Winery VV by Vineti, Vincent Van Duysen Architects
- House CP, Graux & Baeyens Architecten
- Regional House Edegheem, BC architects and studies
- Woodstock, BC architects and studies
- Wadden sea centre, Dortemanderup
- Jianamani Visitor Center, TeamMinus
- Spaarndammerhart, Korthliens architecten

**Books:**

- The concise townscapes, Gordon Cullen
- Architecture and Identity, Peter Herrle, Erik Wegerhoff
- Architecture and Identity: Responses to Cultural and Technological Change, Chris Abel
- The Territories of Identity, Soumyen Bandyopadhyay, Guillermo Garma Montiel
- Urban and Architectural Heritage Conservation within Sustainability, Kabila Hmood
- HABITAT, vernacular architecture for a changing climate, Sandra Piesik
- Lo-TEK, design by Radical Indigenism, Julian Watson
- Brussels Housing, Atlas of Residential Building Types, Gérald Ledent

**Papers:**

- Effective factors in shaping the identity of architecture, Zohreh Torabi and Sara Brahman
- Local wisdom in built environment in globalization era, Purwanita Setijanti, Ispurwono Soemanro
- Challenges and Current Research Trends for Vernacular Architecture in a Global World: A Literature Review, José María Fuentes Pardo
- Studies on sustainable features of vernacular architecture in different regions across the world: A comprehensive synthesis and evaluation, Anh Tuan Nguyen
- Historic timber roofs in Belgium: overview of materials and structures (1150-1960), Louis Van den Abeele
- 'Petrification' of Brussels architecture, Paulo Charruadas, Philippe Sosnowska
- Literature review on rural architecture in Belgium: ideas to modernize farmsteads in architectural publications from 1847-1884, Christine Roels

**Museum**

Open air museum of Bokrijk, Genk Belgium

## A students struggle

I studied hbo bouwkunde at Saxion University of Applied Sciences in Enschede before I came to Delft. There, I did my studies without 'thinking much'. I was young and just wanted to get my bachelors degree as soon as possible so I could go to Delft. In 2020, I graduated my bachelors degree and in 2021 I started the Pre-master at the TU.

Already in the first weeks I noticed the difference between a university and a university of applied sciences. The education in Delft was much freer, people were thinking more independently and to stick along I began reading books about history, future, psychology, and more, listening to podcasts about philosophy and other sciences, and having conversations with fellow students about about the struggles as a student, about politics, about philosophical topics and about life in general.

During this time, when I began learning more, I also noticed that I became more and more aware of my lack of knowledge. It is a common phenomenon called the 'Dunnig-Krüger effect', the more you know about something you become aware that you do not know so much. However, this awareness also led to insecurity and difficulties in forming an opinion. I realized there are so many sides to everything.

A good example of this struggle is the main topic of this year studio: what to do with the Friche?

*Brussels is facing an housing shortage, it should be built!*

*But there are also nature issues, it should be left alone, the ecology should be thriving!*

*There are not enough jobs in the industrial sector, the unemployment rates are increasing: the industrial area of the Friche should be expanded!*

*Whaa, I do not know what I think anymore, all those options!*

Although I think every student has these issues, I struggle with them on a personal level. Therefore, I would like to reflect on my personal decision making, reflect on taking a stance in something. Positioning myself to problems, to life, to the world actually. As a student, as a future architect, but more importantly, as an individual.

That is why, after each P, I will write at least one a4 and make one collage/diagram/scheme regarding my decision making process in that period. The questions that will be answered in this texts are:

- What were the struggles?
- How did I form an opinion?
- What did I learn from this process?

In the end, the document that will come out of this will form a diary, explaining the struggles of the year, but more importantly, how I overcame them.





**Figure 10:**  
*Plan B Josaphat*  
(BRAL, 2021)

## Sources

Adelakun, O. (2017). Place Identity as Competitive Advantage: Exploring Economic Development Strategies in. Georgetown.

Bernardo, F., & Palma-Oliveira, J.-M. (2016). The importance of place identity. Lissabon: Universidade de Lisboa.

Braak, P. t., Lemble, H., Mastari, L., & Keppens, G. (2021). Unity in Diversity: The Brussels Identity Glues Everyone Together.

Kinoshita, i., Binder, h., & Okabe., a. (2012). Identity and sustainability, towards new ways of urban redevelopment in an age of shrinking cities. Hobunsya Publisher inc.

Koolhaas, R. (1994). The generic city. In R. Koolhaas, S, M, L, XL.

Lynch, K. (1981). A theory of good city form. MIT Press.

## Figures

Figure 1:

MVRDV. (2023). MVRDV designed masterplan for Brussels' tour et taxis lake side is announced. Opgehaald van MVRDV: <https://www.mvrdv.com/news/4373/masterplan-brussels-tour-and-taxis-lakeside-announced>

Figure 2:

Davidson, T. (2023). Flickr. Opgehaald van Flickr: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/ixtussy/13484837794>

Figure 3:

Authors own

Figure 4, 5 & 6

Trends. (2023, April 6). The new face of the future Josaphat district revealed. Opgehaald van Trends: <https://trends.levif.be/immo/le-nouveau-visage-du-parc-josaphat-devoile/>

Figure 7:

Admirable-facades. (2023). Centraal station. Opgehaald van Admirable-facades: <https://www.admirable-facades.brussels/nl/facades/centraal-station/>

Figure 8:

Wikipedia. (2023). Station Evere. Opgehaald van Wikipedia: [https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Station\\_Evere](https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Station_Evere)

Figure 9:

Authors own

Figure 10:

BRAL. (2021). Plan B Josaphat Manifesto. Brussel.

Figure 11:

Wikipedia. (2023). Northern Quarter, Brussels. Opgehaald van Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern\\_Quarter,\\_Brussels](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern_Quarter,_Brussels)





**Figure 11:**  
*Brussel North*  
(Wikipedia, 2023)

The short text on this page adds to the existing research plan. It is an addendum after the first tutoring on 27.11.2023. The goal of this addendum is to make the research slightly more manageable. It therefore focusses mainly on the research method.

The revised plan involves a more detailed examination of the close surroundings of the Friche. The current architecture located in the surroundings will be closely examined on multiple topics. These topics are based on the definition earlier given in the research proposal document. The key topics for examination are elaborated below:

## Geography

- Make a map of the Friche (a la Hozar)
- Describe the landscape (poem?)
- How did it arise like this (describing history)

## Available materials

- Defining a range in which the materials will be sourced (opalis. eu)
- Describe the feeling of the materiality (poem?)
- Materials façade
  - Colour
- Materials window frames

## Climate

- General climate overview
- Overhang
- Gutter
- Rainwater drainage
- Leakage sill
- Spots at the façade (moist)
- Solar panels
- Grilles in façade
- Light
- Orientation

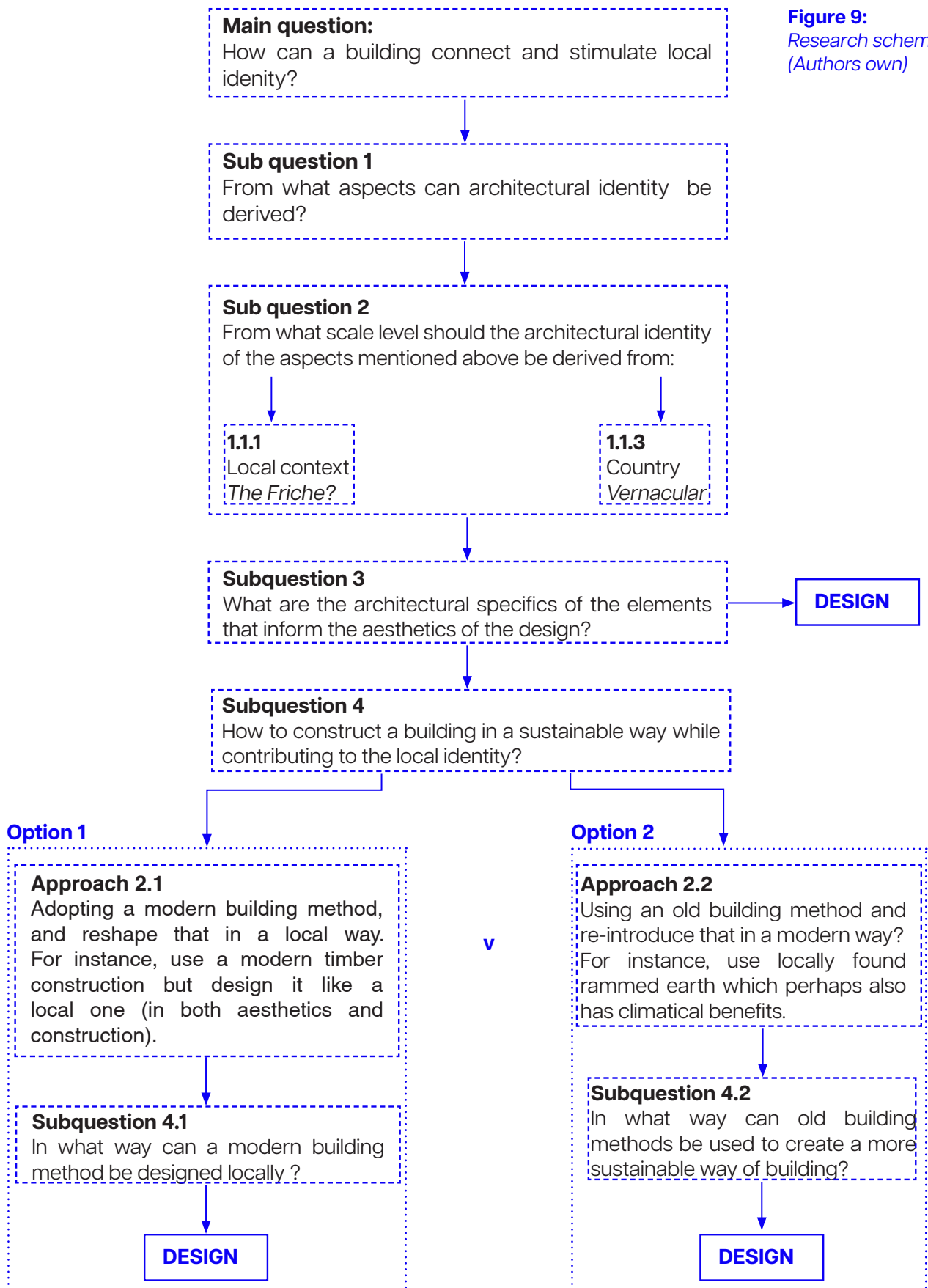
## Traditions & culture

- How to people use the buildings
- Shops
- Describe the street ballet (poem?)

## Architectural specifics

- Building mass
- Window composition
- Outside spaces
- Building method

Besides looking closely at the local architecture, the old vernacular architecture of Belgium will be examined on the basis of the same criteria earlier mentioned. This broader perspective is adopted to ensure that the new building also connects to the larger scale of Belgium's vernacular. By incorporating insights from Belgium's vernacular, the new design connects to both the local and national level, ensuring recognition in both contexts.



**Figure 9:**  
Research scheme  
(Authors own)