

The Enclosed Garden: mediator between city and nature

When I was 10 years old, we moved from a house without a garden in the center of Utrecht to a farm on the countryside, from the busy streets of the city to what we at that time thought to be a house in the middle of nature. Over the course of the 8 years that I lived there I came to discover that every part of nature that stood in the way of efficient production of crops was considered hostile by the neighboring farmers, and that it should therefore be exterminated with pesticides. Over the course of one summer the sounds of crickets and frogs that we got used to disappeared, as the crops around us turned yellow through the use of Round-up. We were witnessing a small part of the recent huge loss of flora and fauna species worldwide caused by humans, a process has already been named the sixth extinction. (Kolbert, 2015)

In an attempt to make a small change, we tried to turn our garden into a small sanctuary for nature. With some help from ecologists from the municipality we planted fields specifically for certain bee species, made wild hedges from old tree trunks to host wildlife and dug a nature pool for amphibians. Although it is an ongoing project, the difference in the amount of species we have seen in the garden is already considerable.

At the end of last summer, me and my sisters organized a small music and arts festival in that same garden. Our friends ended up sleeping in tents in the middle of the nature we had created over the years. Whenever I am returning to my parents, the garden is always a place of rest, an escape from the chaos of everyday life.

As I experienced, the garden has the potential to accommodate a large number of meanings at the same time. Foucault, in *Of other spaces*, identifies the garden as the oldest heterotopia, with the power to 'juxtapose in a single real place several spaces, several emplacements that are in themselves incompatible.' The garden, he states, is a representation of a landscape, and therefore also a representation of nature. As gardens are designed by man, it reflects the relation between man and nature.

This exact relationship is a point of high contention in contemporary cities, including Brussels. Through rapid urbanization and a resulting shortage of space, unbuilt sites are seen as potential for further urban development, threatening the existence of green space in the city. These spaces however are of critical importance as temporary water storage, as links in bio-diverse ecosystems while also cooling urban heat. They are spaces that foster a connection with nature and offer an escape from urban stress. The heterotopian gar-

den can encompass all these qualities, thus having the potential of becoming a crucial ingredient of the sustainable development in Brussels.

Gardens in cities are surrounded by urban fabric, giving them a sense of enclosure, and exactly in their meeting points with the city, there is a place for dialogue between human and nature. Foucault writes: 'Heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable.' The paradoxical character of a space being simultaneously open and closed to the surrounding city is best exemplified in the archetype of the enclosed garden. It is a place where architecture and landscape come together, where there is mediation between nature and human.

In this research I want to explore the archetype of the enclosed garden in Brussels, and specifically focus on the permeability on the enclosure.

This topic will be further examined based on the following questions:

What are the key architectural elements that define the enclosed garden in Brussels?

How can these elements impact the heterotopian character of the enclosed garden?

How can the transition from city to enclosed garden impact the relationship between human and nature in the city?

I am planning to research this topic using the following methods:

Literature studies to define the characteristics and meaning of the elements making up the enclosed garden in the city.

On-site visits to enclosed gardens in Brussels while documenting architectural elements such as walls, entrances, materials, and spatial design. Visual documentation through photography and sketches.

Analysis of the case studies through drawing of plans and sections, exploring the notions of porosity, hiding, accentuating and defining in the exchange between the enclosed garden and the city of Brussels.

The sites I want to explore in Brussels



Jardins de l'Abbaye de la Cambre

Multiple gardens in and around a monastery. These different gardens are characterized by a variety of enclosure types, all showing different relations between architecture and the garden.



Parc d'Egmont, a former palace garden

A former palace garden. The enclosure is formed by the building block surrounded it, allowing for a few small entrances, all dealing differently with changes in topography and with the showing and hiding of the garden.



Parc du Viaduc, former garden of Maison de la Solidarité, former garden of Maison de la Solidarité. It is situated between the back gardens of row housing, a railway and the street. On opposite sides, it has two contrasting entrances, one opening towards the street, the other more hidden along a pathway next to the railway. A high wall forms the enclosure towards the railway and the street.

Inspirations, art



Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *The Gates* (2005)

In the seeming opposition between the grid of Manhattan and the flowing landscape of Central Park, *The Gates* emphasizes the man-made character of the park by placing striking structures along its pathways.



Richard Long's *A Line Made by Walking* (1967)

Mans impact on nature by the simple act of walking, thereby creating a border of sorts.

Inspirations, boundary wall



Communal Living Around a Void: The Shabonos, Dwellings of the Yanomami Tribes

Communal dwellings in the northern part of Brazil, where the architecture encloses a void space while surrounded by nature.



Artificial Microclimates: Nature Within Walls in Montreuil

An architecture of walls in the Outskirts of Paris for the cultivation of peach trees, storing thermal heat to protect the trees from freezing. The structure embodies the symbolic meaning of the garden as an intermediate domain between raw nature and man-made environment.



Upper Lawn Solar Pavilion - Smithsons

Build on top of the garden wall of an old house, the architecture of the pavilion becomes the transition between the garden and its surroundings.

Inspirations, courtyard



Teylers Hofje - Haarlem

Monumental gate as the entrance gate to an enclosed courtyard.



Alvar Aalto - Saynatsalo town hall (1951)

Stairs as part of the architecture, offering an entrance to the courtyard.



FRIIS & MOLTKE Architects - Entrepenørskolen i Ebeltoft

Architecture embedded in landscape forming a courtyard that contradicts its surrounding nature through a rigid manmade landscape

Inspirations, water



Fondazione Querini Stampalia - Carlo Scarpa

Allowing the water of the city of Venice the flow into the building, allowing nature a way into the interior

Inspirations, post industrial garden



Third Landscape Garden - Coloco & Gilles Clément

A garden on top of an old submarine base, consisting of species compatible with the local climate and lack of fertile soil.

Design ambitions

In the design phase of this project, I want to explore the interaction between the Friche Josaphat and its surroundings by forming a new entrance or a set of entrances. As de Wit (2013) writes: 'the qualities of place only become meaningful if they can be experienced, if the location is perceivable as an articulate ensemble.' I believe an entrance to be a crucial element in the future ensemble of La Friche, having the possibility of giving the space meaning through impacting the ritual of entering.

I am not sure about whether the entrance needs a distinct architectural program, but I could image potential for a visitors center or research center for urban ecology, creating an architecture that programmatically could form a connection between city and nature. From this research I want to learn about the mediation between city and landscape through architecture, finding out how the human nature relation can be impacted by spatial design.

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