

P4 Reflection – Reformation of Social Structure

1. What is the relationship between my research and design?

My research mainly focuses on analysing the social needs from different districts of Brussels, social relations between the National Bank of Belgium and the neighbourhood and social behaviour within the bank. From the background research of Brussels, it can be revealed that suburbanization and community segregation are resulted from the uprise of international immigration and higher residential mobility. Re-positioning of the bank as a co-working space is powerful re-attract the young generation back to the pentagon district, thus to revitalize the city from the centre. Secondly, the research of social relations between the bank and the neighbourhood can tell an explicit boundary formed between them due to low accessibility and separation of greenings, therefore opening two sides of the bank to reallocate its entrances can enhance its visibility from the public and link up the neighbourhood through its gallery. Last but not least, studying the social behaviour within the bank can point out the impacts of the office layout to its working culture while understanding how to reform the boundary between the bank and the public through their ways of interaction. To reform and respect the working culture within the bank, office spaces are reallocated into groups and linked up by bridges which extend double-height gathering spaces. These bridges do not only serve as circulation but also signified as a breakdown of original working hierarchy within the bank. More than that, the gathering spaces can visually link up with the public walking through the gallery. Besides the working culture of the bank, the ground floor of the bank is returned to the public to become a co-working space. The building of the bank itself is no more occupied by the bank but also the public.

2. What is the relation between your graduation (project) topic, the studio topic (if applicable), your master track (A,U,BT,LA,MBE), and your master programme (MSc AUBS)?

The relation between my graduation topic and the studio topic is based on the discussion and exploration of sociological culture behind the architecture. My project is challenging the current social structure and boundaries between different stakeholders, in which I need to figure out the social relations and spatial behaviour correlating with spatial relations. Meanwhile, the studio itself is studying what the shifting role of the National Bank of Belgium might be and how it can be transformed through spatial, material and experimental terms. Therefore, it is required that I will apply a multidisciplinary approach that can reform the sociological culture into architectural elements within the academic context of Architecture, Urbanism and Building Sciences.

3. What is the research method and approach in relation to the graduation studio methodical line of inquiry, reflecting thereby upon the scientific relevance of the work?

Collective Research

- Demographic (population, immigration, social trend)
- History (urban planning, previous bank renovation, cultural studies, banking system)

Individual Research

- Site Analysis (program, accessibility, networking, visibility)
- Interior Analysis (social relations, spatial behaviour, spatial relations)
- Literary research (space syntax method, spatial system)
- Precedent studies (HSBC Hong Kong headquarter, Timmerhuis, Markthal)

The development of the individual research and design project is based on the outcomes of the research on the current social structure and the sociological analysis of the bank.

I plan to continue working through iterative cycles of sketching, drawing and model making for exploring possible strategies of designing the social plinth of the bank while testing out the new office design layout. For now, elevating the bank from the ground floor, adding bridges between office blocks and introducing residential purpose are my current idea of reforming the social structure and boundaries between staff and the public.

4. What is the relevance of your graduation work in the larger social, professional and scientific framework?

Brussels, one of the most prosperous cities in Europe, is suffering from the impacts of suburbanization and community segregation. This kind of reversed social structure should not be allowed or overlooked by the society, accumulating to lead to other social issues that can be even worse. With my graduation work, I aim to challenge the social structure within the bank, questioning and exploring possible strategies that can reform the social relations and boundaries between staff. Meanwhile, my project is changing the social relationship between the bank and the neighbourhood, being a role model of the city that even the national bank, such authoritative institution can sit on the ground and engage with the young generation.

5. Discuss the ethical issues and dilemmas you may have encountered in doing the research, elaborating the design and potential applications of the results in practice.

While working on the research of the social relations and behaviour within the bank, it is particularly difficult to prove the authenticity of their behaviour, whether the users are really interacting as we analysed through the layout plan and section. However, it is necessary to be bold to make hypothesis of how users are utilizing spaces in order to point out the pros and cons, thus to improve the ways of usage. More than that,

social housing was originally considered to be placed as a new programme in the bank which aimed to accommodate the incoming young generation. Yet, such movement cannot fulfil the social needs of requiring more spaces to work instead of living. Therefore, it is more proper to consider part of the bank as rental office space that can accommodate more young workers.