Methods and Analysis: A matter of scale
Reflection

Introduction

What began with a fascination for facades, the street, and movement resulted in a project focusing on precisely these elements. It took some time for me to grasp the significance of the steps I undertook that ultimately shaped the project's outcome. However, before going into what I learned, I'll start with a proper description of my project and design process.

Project description

The project is located in Uus Maailm, a subdistrict of Tallinn, which currently has poorly maintained buildings and streets, and has a lack of commercial functions. However, Uus Maailm is at the forefront of new (re)development projects, is well accessible with public transport, surrounded by public buildings, and connected to a square that is not yet used to its full potential. This led to the formulation of the following ambitions for Uus Maailm: Successful and recognizable (Architecture), Highest quality public space (Urban Plan), and Mixed-use: living, working, and recreation (Function).

As a result, the proposed project for Uus Maailm can be described as an arcade hybridized by a courtyard along an axis connecting a public square to a train terminal. It is a hybridization of two popular typologies of the public space and houses commercial functions, dwellings, offices and an embassy, a library, and classrooms, forming a mixed-use development. The materials used for the facades are two prominent and historically relevant materials in Tallinn, namely limestone and wood in combination with a more contemporary material, glass. The choice of materials was to showcase the characteristics of the site and to make a distinction between the inner and outer facades of the hybrid.

To make sense of an approx. 57.600 square meter irregular building, the volume was chopped into 4 regular pieces, where the irregular parts or 'in-betweens' were given their own design language. These 'in-betweens' became atriums functioning as different entrees of the building making it possible to make autonomous parts of the building. Following this decision a general grid of 5.4 m was used, slightly differing in the arcade part. The grid made an efficient and modular hybrid (glulam columns and beam construction, concrete base, and CLT floors) structural design possible. The grid and multiples thereof also come back in the interior and exterior of the building indicating the uniformity of the building.

Design process & Methods

Starting from the contextual analysis, I was able to spot my interest in facades, the street, and movement. For the contextual analysis of the site, everything was approached linearly. Firstly, a *section* was used as a method of research, crossing the whole research area which was also a line. The use of the section showed landmarks that contribute to the distinctive skyline, large

buildings in comparison to small-scale residential buildings, boundaries such as railways, and outdoor public spaces. By mapping the distinctive buildings and spaces through a section, my colleagues and I observed the expression of public space, religious, leisure, and residential architecture on the line. Followed up by **Gordon Cullen's Serial Vision**, experiencing the evolving character of the city by walking through it. Thirdly **mapping details** of facades like doors, windows, and material which we linearly organized to see the commonalities and differences. Lastly, mapping the changes of Tallinn through time by layering **archival maps**.

This constant movement from point A to B stuck with me, and I started to research the perception of the street through movement (walking) by using **gifs** of three locations chosen because of their distinctive axis. This led me to several design options, namely:

1. Revitalizing the street by activating the plinth (facade)
2. Redesigning the street itself with emphasis on the material of the street, street furniture, and greenery (street)
3. Designing an arcade that covers both the street and facade elements.

Due to a comprehensive examination of context, weather conditions, and a self-imposed restriction to an approximately 1-kilometer research area, I decided to design an arcade. Because there was an empty plot next to my site, something that is very unusual when designing an arcade, I decided to also take that as a design challenge, which led me to the hybridization of the arcade with a courtyard.

To be able to understand the architecture of arcades and courtyards I started with a typological research of these types of architecture. The research revealed recurring elements common to both arcades and courtyards:

1. Context
2. Symmetry
3. Uniformity
4. Repetition
5. Inside and outside

These elements became a framework for my design process which enabled me to determine the location, height, and composition of my project.

Thereafter I defined a concept - a guiding principle I refer to as contrast - that helped me in my further decision-making process (such as open vs. closed, heavy vs. light, serving vs. served spaces). However, in this contrast, I wanted a binding element that became the grid to still create uniformity and oneness of the building.

Striving to systemize the building while also embracing the nuances allowed me to effectively address the challenges of such a big project.

Pioneer

Conversations with students from Tallinn enlightened me to the fact that the project is novel to locals, as it introduces concepts such as pedestrianization in a country that is currently heavily car-oriented, and mixed-use development, which is only now beginning to gain traction in Tallinn. Furthermore, the hybridization of two architectural typologies in this manner is unprecedented. However, despite its novelty, it presents a beautiful opportunity for Tallinn to lead the way in architectural innovation as it does in digital innovation.

Reflection

Writing my design process in a linear way helped me realize that my project ultimately evolved into precisely what it needed to be—a result of continuous back-and-forth decision-making informed by research and design. Although it didn't always feel that way at the time, and I even experienced moments of mental block because of the perceived workload and self-doubt regarding my ability to push through and appropriateness of my decisions.

One of the most important things I learned which accounts for practicing architecture and everything else in life is something I now call the 2 P's: Proces and Patience.
This phrase 'it's a process', has become a constant refrain throughout my graduation year, echoing from friends, family, colleagues, tutors, and even in my moments of prayer. Initially, I found it incredibly annoying, longing for instant results. However, I eventually came to understand that the pace of a process is shaped by one's attitude. My attitude at that time was hindering my process, so I had to learn to be patient with myself. Process and Patience are inseparable, for you cannot enjoy a process without patience and you cannot learn to be patient without the process. Patience grows only when actively practiced just like anything else.

With that said, in the process of practicing patients, while still impatiently writing this reflection, I can say with confidence that I'm far from where I would want to be as an architect, but closer to where I need to be.