

Reflection on Graduation Project

Name: Sui-Hui (Sophie), Kuo

Student Number: 5286441

Master Track: Landscape Architecture

Graduation Lab: Urban Forest Places

Mentors: Rene van der Velde and Claudiu Forgaci

Project Title: Design for Healthy Urban Forest

1. Did the project approach work? How and why?

To examine if the project approach led to the desired outcome, there is need to look back at the aim and contribution written in the beginning phase of the project: to apply the spatial design method of landscape architecture to urban forestry, and conversely to look at landscape design with the novel perspective of urban forestry.

In this sense, I regard the approach taken in this project working well in realizing the initial aims. In the first part of the analysis, defining urban forestry by spatial morphology and underlayers through scales, urban forest became an approach to landscape quality analysis, which indicates design intervention. Moreover, in the design part of the project, as urban forest being equipped with instrumental function as “design toolbox,” landscape design approach is expanded to multispecies perspectives.

As aims and objectives being fulfilled, the approach was proved to work well in this project. I would say the objective targeted site analysis is the key to a working project approach. The health conditions of forest in south-east Randstad area were thoroughly evaluated according to theoretical principles of healthy spaces.

First by typological analysis on urban forests, generic quality profiles were built with regarding theoretical criteria. At this stage, theory basis for forest health includes landscape ecological perspective and physiological ecology, and the one for human health includes accessibility to programs and spatial experiences. The result from mapping the typologies and units on the site clearly indicates the healthy parts and weak points of the site. Moreover, generic typologies could be used instrumentally as toolbox of design intervention.

However, I encountered difficulties during the second part of design implementation, which deals with spatial and experiential design on a smaller scale. Since the analysis part of urban forest typology was only carried out at regional scale, it was only applicable on generic planning instead of actual spatial design. It appeared to be a discontinuity between analysis and design.

2. Mentor's feedback and how did I translate the it into my work?

During the project, feedback from the mentors can be divided into two aspects. First are about social layers and the criteria for human health. As spatial qualities and design principles for forest health are indicated by several landscape architectural and arboriculture theories, social health is much more complex. Social health analysis and design regard topics including affordance groups, urban context, and projection of future development. Therefore, it was suggested to be lack elaboration on social perspective throughout the project. For instance, there was lack in analysis on built layer and social pattern in typological profiles. Program and experiences were also absent in the design part. This part of feedback often reminds me to weight the forest and human perspectives equally but not to get lost in principles of landscape ecology.

The second aspect of feed back is about scales. In the beginning, I proposed a project scheme which consists of four scale levels: regional scale (1:100,000), urban scale (1:50,000), pattern scale (1:25,000), and district scale (1:7,500). My mentors suggested that perspectives on green-blue infrastructure and landscape architectonic design are forgotten in designing part of the project during my P3 period. I interpreted the feedback as my incapability to integrate multi-scale concept in the design since the idea of green-blue infrastructure often regards system at a large scale, while landscape architectural design principles regard human-scale experience. Therefore, the translation into design adjustment which reflects the role of design (1:50,000 and 1:25,000) in the bigger context (1:100,000), which review the designed area as a part of regional green-blue structure. As for application of landscape architectural design principles, reference projects such as Atlas of Urban Forest in Delft, which discusses on the relationship between forest morphology (1:7,500) and spatial experience, were borrowed as design tool.

3. How have I learned from the work?

An attempt to integrate multi-facades of urban forestry is throughout the graduation project. Several theories regardless of spatial applicability were involved and different scale levels were taken into consideration. To propose a holistic research and design project, I learned a lot about how to conclude accent of theoretical concepts and to translate general idea into spatial principles. Moreover, the ability to integrate multiple topics in a structural storyline was a main challenge, hence which I learnt a lot from.

In terms of project process, this is my first time working with the approach of "researching with design," during which there is often uncertainty about the result, requiring strong belief in self to deal with frustration from non-rewarding efforts. In addition, the loop process of research and design which often results in back-and-forth adjustment, was a lesson for me about patient and care in pursuing an ideal design.

4. How will I finalize the project?

At the final stage of the graduation process, it is necessary to comb through all the products and narrow down to a consistent project. The works include leaving out irrelevant theoretical concepts, adding more social aspects of analysis and design as suggested by the mentors, and diving deeper into detail design to human scale to finalize the concept of “designing through scales.” Moreover, I would like to polish the diagrams and to redraw some to unify the color code and visual style. Rearranging the structure of storytelling is also important to enrich the attractiveness of the design.

5. General reflection on the role of the project.

I believe that my topic is consistent with the studio topic. Since the studio of Urban Forest Places focuses on studying the relationship between forest morphology and underlying social-natural context, and further discusses about spatial qualities of urban forest types, the same approaches are used in my project. In my project, the typological analysis is conducted at a bigger scale, exploring the possibility and suitability of morphology studies on regional pattern. My project also contributes with exploring the potential of urban forest typology as a design tool. Moreover, the focus of this project on health of both forest and human provides linkage from urban forestry to other landscape topics such as sustainability and well-beings, hence potentially contributable to urbanism studies.

One may say the hypothetical project is too ideal to be practical in the real world, which is not entirely disagreeable since I encountered ethical dilemmas during the research and design. For instant, a large percentage of “new forest” designed in the project is based on locations currently occupied by greenhouses. Even though there are already discussions on potential relocation of greenhouses to other countries, it is still a controversial topic regarding huge economical benefits, change of industrial structure, and potential social issues behind. Another dilemma was carried out during deeper philosophical debate on definition of nature: What is nature in Dutch delta area? Can human design and build nature? These questions were constantly asked during the process and my answer also altered at distinct stages of the project. However, I think there is no definite answer regarding perspective to nature. The project nonetheless provides a start of thinking for the viewers.