

## Reflection

Graduation has been a roller coaster ride.

From the first introductory day of the studio where I had a slight "oh no" moment, thinking that I might have chosen the wrong studio for myself, to that being somewhat confirmed with the no-go at P2, I somehow carried on.

Despite not having passed P2 in the first round, the method described in my research plan interestingly describes, to a certain extent, the investigation I took for my P2 retake accurately. I mentioned books that I ended up using as study material, and research methods or points of focus that ended up being key points in my final project. However, at the time when I wrote all those things, my mind was on a different frequency. I focused too much on possible programs that I imagined might be interesting rather than properly studying the location itself. The result of that, during my P2, was a design with little foundation as to why the program I had come up with was most appropriate at the location I had chosen.

This wake-up call was an important moment in my process as it allowed me to realize I did not understand what the studio was about and that I needed to shift my mentality completely. The best advice I received at that point was, "Forget all the case studies, just focus on the plot". While I still sometimes stubbornly fell for this trap of thinking through references and online renders during my design process afterwards, especially in preparation for P3, this comment allowed me to redirect myself.

With this new mindset, the project shifted its focus from social cohesion, a theme I simply came up with, to simply understanding what is currently happening in the location. Having also studied the historical context of the site, what stood out was the contrast between what was once conceived for the neighborhood and reality. The aspect of Planned vs. Lived. To see that, I let go of the preconceptions I had of the neighborhood and truly observed who frequents the public space, and how they use it. With a couple of international expos and one of Belgium's most notable modernist masterplans, it was intended to be a place of exemplary recognition, a place to be modelled after, which in its essence is not negative. Today it is not seen as an example of architecture anymore. With many of the original buildings having been torn down, the location sometimes felt like a wasteland. However, because of

multiple other factors as well, it is a place rich in people who still enjoy the characteristics of the space planned 70 years ago. Design choices such as a park where people can walk their dogs and play with their children, and a playground that is enclosed enough for children to safely play on their own.

The research influenced the design entirely. Thinking how a façade can react to an observed character of the public spaces around it is an example. I feel that even in a complex spot with multiple “personalities” on each side, one design language can still meet these demands. The way of thinking and approaching the design through in-depth research, not only physically but socio-historically, was a big contrast from the previous works I had done in the track of architecture. The “contextual” analysis done for other projects was shallow and the building and program were often the most important. The process consisted mostly of imagining something you want to have built and designing it. In this graduation project, the intangibles were often the focus, something I was not used to or comfortable dealing with.

With the rise in attention towards technological developments and having a more engineering mindset myself, after going through this process, I notice that this way of looking at the world is often becoming overlooked. I believe that the result of my project can be transferred to any project at any scale. However, time is of the essence. For me to understand the context and the people who populate took time; that is something that many large architecture firms who need to deliver a competition within a month time often do not have. I think this is especially applicable to firms that work internationally as they often deal with many cultures with complex history that is not always visible to an outsider.

In conclusion, this year has been a great year of growth. Not only in terms of maturity within myself but essential for me to understand architecture in a new light I hadn't explored before. Some level of adaptability is key.