

Research plan

Repurposing and renovation projects offer valuable alternatives to the rapid demolition of buildings for new construction, yet these options are often overlooked. The question arises whether new developments truly add more value for residents and the surrounding community or if renovating existing structures would be more beneficial. Determining value can be complex, but too often, profitable new construction replaces existing buildings with little regard for the cultural and social fabric shaped by the local population.

Finding ways to preserve the value of existing structures while integrating new construction is essential. Decisions about what to demolish and what to preserve, as well as whether buildings should be permanent or adaptable, require careful consideration. The balance between architectural trends, community preferences, and long-term sustainability also plays a crucial role.

Architects have a responsibility not only to design but also to facilitate connections—between people, their environment, and the spaces they inhabit. Addressing these challenges requires looking at the value of a site from the very beginning of the process, as seen in the case of Friche Josaphat.

Discription themes

Perspectives on values in architecture

What is the value of the Friche and who determines it? The initial impetus for area development is set by governments, property developers, landowners, residents and communities in particular. Potential is seen to improve the situation with its value but what kind of values is this and from whom? Who determines what the value of a building or area is and when is it decisive for demolition, renovation or preservation?

Determining the value of a building can be complex because it depends on several factors and perspectives.

New construction

To properly assess values, it is important to have as many perspectives on potential area development as possible. There is a lot of potential in Schaarbeek for improvement, for example, safety, more and better quality housing. It is important to pay close attention to the opinions of local residents. Who know best what is going on in the neighborhood and that way you can try to look together for the best solutions. If their perspectives are not taken into account enough in the plan, the architecture that emerges will not perfectly match what the population thinks it needs. Something like this already happened during the Brusselsization in the 60s and 70s where an entire working-class neighborhood called Noordwijk was wiped out by big shiny office flats. Nowadays, the flats are largely empty and there is trauma among the people of Brussels, being afraid to lose their homes and it being replaced with new office buildings. Brussalization is an example, but in general, often in places with potential for area development, the low purchase/rental prices make them suitable places for creatives or the less established. So an area that actually still has a lot of value for this sector and this sector again in society.

In Schaarbeek, you notice the sensitivity to new construction and the possibility for gentrification by taking the example of “Good Move”. An initiative that wants to make sure you can cycle across the street more safely by building bike lanes and improving the streetscape by applying greenery. However, this is not to the liking of the current residents because they are afraid that renovating the street will make their rents unaffordable and they would be better off spending the money spent on the poor quality houses they live in. This is because no money is made available from the government for renovation, and that causes overdue maintenance. I think that gentrification is something inevitable but that better account could be taken of the current residents of such a place. When is demolition something inevitable or is it never actually? Could there be a way to make a house age beautifully and play with the concept of time and impermanence? What do you want to have permanent so that you create and preserve those values and what do you want to have temporary and flexible?

Role of the Architect & Social Design

An architect must navigate how to integrate their knowledge while allowing space for local identity and evolving needs. Some aspects of the built environment should be adaptable, reflecting changing trends and community dynamics, while others should provide lasting value and stability. Thoughtful design should respect existing populations, preserving cultural and social significance rather than displacing it. Additionally, green spaces should serve as connectors rather than barriers, reinforcing social cohesion rather than creating division. The challenge lies in ensuring that this process is inclusive, fluid, and responsive to both present and future needs.

Position towards the friche

I think that through social design you can make a socially sustainable building/area and so it has more value, can stay there longer and so is also environmentally sustainable, which I think is the most important thing in the end. I want to get away from the demolition culture and bring the existing culture of the friche together with the culture of the people around the area and connect people more with each other and blur the contrast between them. I didn't want to do anything with the friche at first because of the high value I placed on the greenery, however, the master plans for this area are waiting and I want to make sure that something like this is not created again on an inhuman scale like during the Brussalization.

Sources

The concise townscapes – Gordon Cullen

is a seminal work in urban design and planning. Cullen's book explores the visual and experiential aspects of urban environments, emphasizing the importance of legibility, focal points, and sequential movement in creating successful townscapes. It advocates for a human-centered approach to design, aiming to make cities more accessible and enjoyable for their inhabitants.

The great good place – Ray Oldenburg

discusses the vital role of "third places" in society, which are informal gathering spots outside of the home (the first place) and work (the second place). Oldenburg argues that these third places, such as coffee shops, bars, and community centers, are essential for social interaction, community building, and a sense of belonging in modern life. He emphasizes the significance of these spaces in promoting community engagement, fostering friendships, and enhancing overall quality of life.

The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception - James Gibson (chapter 8 – theory of affordances)

explores the theory of affordances, which focuses on the relationship between the environment and an organism's actions. Gibson argues that perception is not just about recognizing objects but also about perceiving how they can be used or interacted with. This theory emphasizes that our visual perception is inherently tied to our ability to understand and act upon the opportunities and possibilities that the environment offers, shaping our interactions with the world.

One way street – Walter Benjamin

is a collection of short and fragmented prose writings that reflect on various aspects of urban life, culture, and society. Benjamin explores topics such as the experience of walking in the city, the role of technology, the nature of language, and the relationship between art and politics. His writings in "One-Way Street" are characterized by their poetic and philosophical style, offering thought-provoking insights into the complexities of modern urban existence.

Live a user's manual of Species of Spaces and other Pieces - George Perec

is a collection of essays and musings on the everyday spaces and environments that shape our lives. Perec delves into the intricacies of living spaces, examining everything from the layout of an apartment to the design of public places. Through his unique observations and playful language, Perec offers a thought-provoking exploration of how the spaces we inhabit influence our experiences and perceptions of the world.

The image of the city – Kevin Lynch

Lynch explores how people perceive and navigate urban environments. He introduces the concept of mental mapping and identifies five key elements that shape individuals' mental images of a city: paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks. Through this work, Lynch highlights the importance of legibility and wayfinding in urban design and planning, emphasizing that a well-structured and easily navigable city can lead to a more satisfying and coherent urban experience.

Twenty-Five Buildings Every Architect Should Understand - Simon Unwin

is a guide that introduces readers to essential architectural structures from various historical periods and styles. Unwin provides insightful explanations of the design and structural principles behind iconic buildings, allowing architects and enthusiasts to deepen their understanding of architectural concepts. Through concise descriptions and illustrative drawings, the book serves as an educational resource for those interested in the fundamentals of architecture and design.

Architecture, Values, and Perception: Between Rhetoric and Reality - Lino Bianco

delves into the intricate relationship between architecture, values, and how buildings are perceived. Bianco examines how architectural designs are influenced by cultural, social, and ethical values, and how they, in turn, shape the human experience of space. This book challenges readers to consider the moral and emotional dimensions of architecture, highlighting the complex interplay between design, societal values, and individual perception.

Basics of Perception in Architecture - Jörg Kurt Grütter

provides a foundational exploration of how human perception influences architectural design. The book delves into how sensory experiences, cognitive processes, and cultural factors impact the way people perceive and interact with the built environment. Grütter's work serves as a valuable resource for architects and designers looking to create spaces that resonate with human senses and cognition.

The Perception and Importance of Time in Architecture - Reid Bishop

explores the role of time in shaping architectural experiences and design. Bishop delves into how architectural elements, materials, and spatial configurations evolve and impact our perception of buildings over time. This book sheds light on the temporal dimension of architecture and its significance in creating enduring and meaningful spaces.

Space, Place and Atmosphere: Emotion and Peripheral Perception in Architectural Experience - Juhani Pallasmaa

explores the emotional and sensory aspects of architectural design. Pallasmaa delves into how architecture can elicit emotional responses, emphasizing the significance of sensory perception beyond the visual sense. The book offers a profound examination of how architectural spaces can create atmospheres that deeply affect individuals' experiences and emotions.