PUBLIC BUILDING STUDIO | BORDER CONDITIONS | ISTANBUL

P5 REFLECTION

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Experiencing the boundary: Hammam in Istiklal Mahallesi

P4 REFLECTION
Aspect 1_ The relationship between the theme of the studio and the subject/case study chosen by the student within this framework (location/object).

The public building studio bases his framework on a reflection about the bostan (neightborhood), the ma-halle (orchard) and the market hall in Istanbul, which are key elements in the production cycle of food. With the arrival of the supermarket this exchange and trade chain has changed and the market hall seemed to slip away from the public domain. Thus, the programme of the studio investigates the spatial complexities of a public building, intended as a place of exchange, in a city which has become large urban agglomeration.

Following a reflection on the brief, different topics arose and I decided to chase a personal fascination. Istanbul is presented as a constantly growing urban mass which has surpassed many conventional definition in the urban vocabulary in terms of size, population, geography and logistic.

This process has been caused by several flows of migration from the countryside and the inability of the government to manage them.

I was mainly concerned about the residential emergency. Indeed, the urgent need of houses generated the so-called gecekondus. Gecekondu is a turkish term meaning "built overnight" used to describe the shelters forming the squatter villages around important cities as Ankara and Istanbul. The ernormous stream of immigrants found a place in Istanbul building their own shacks around the main industrial areas without the permission of the government.

The initial trajectory of the research aimed to understand the main characteristics of these areas which nowadays represent over 40% of the build environment in Istanbul.
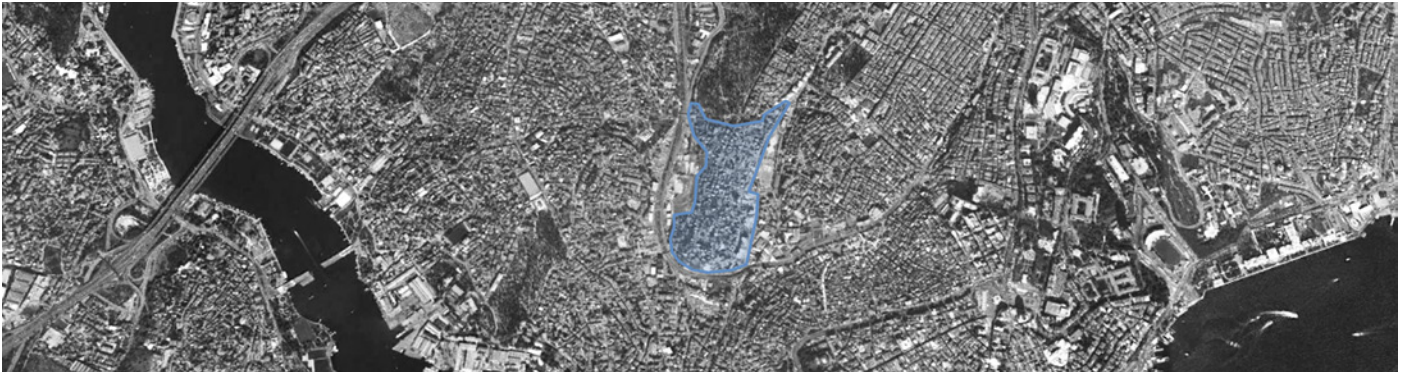
Aspect_2 The relationship between the methodical line of approach of the studio and the method chosen by the student in this framework.

Questioning the position, the brief and consequently the methodical line of approach of the Public Building studio I had the chance to mould my research using my own method. The Border Conditions studio embraced the mapping method which allows to record the spacial conditions one is referring to, "remaining faithful to the complexity and multiplicity of the phenomena" one decided to trace. I tried to seize this method reinterpreting it in my own way.

The mapping method gave me the possibility to capture information and, at the same time, to experience the spacial quality of the research site: Istiklal Mahallesi. It is a first generation gecekondu, located in the very center of the city which is partly formalized and partly under eviction.

Visiting the site has been a key moment in my research. Using the insights I got during this experience I could determinate the introvert character of the gecekondu and at a later stage I used the mapping system to represent and reflect on the dynamics generted by its nature.

Initially, the gecekondus were intended as "security islands". They were transition spaces were the immigrants could familiarize with the new environment of the city, helped by the community. The constant treat of eviction to which these spontaneous agglomerations are subjected causes a reinforcement of the introvert character of the community, consequently the security island become means of exclusion and isolation, preventing the process of integration with the rest of the city. Moreover, as a reaction to the eviction process, the community generates surveillance strategies: on one hand the inhabitants control and keeps away the possible flow of outsiders, on the other hand the control is exercised between individuals of the same community.

In order to analyze the dynamics of the control strategies I used the mapping system through a zoom-in process. From a wider context to a specif area all the control methods have been detected.
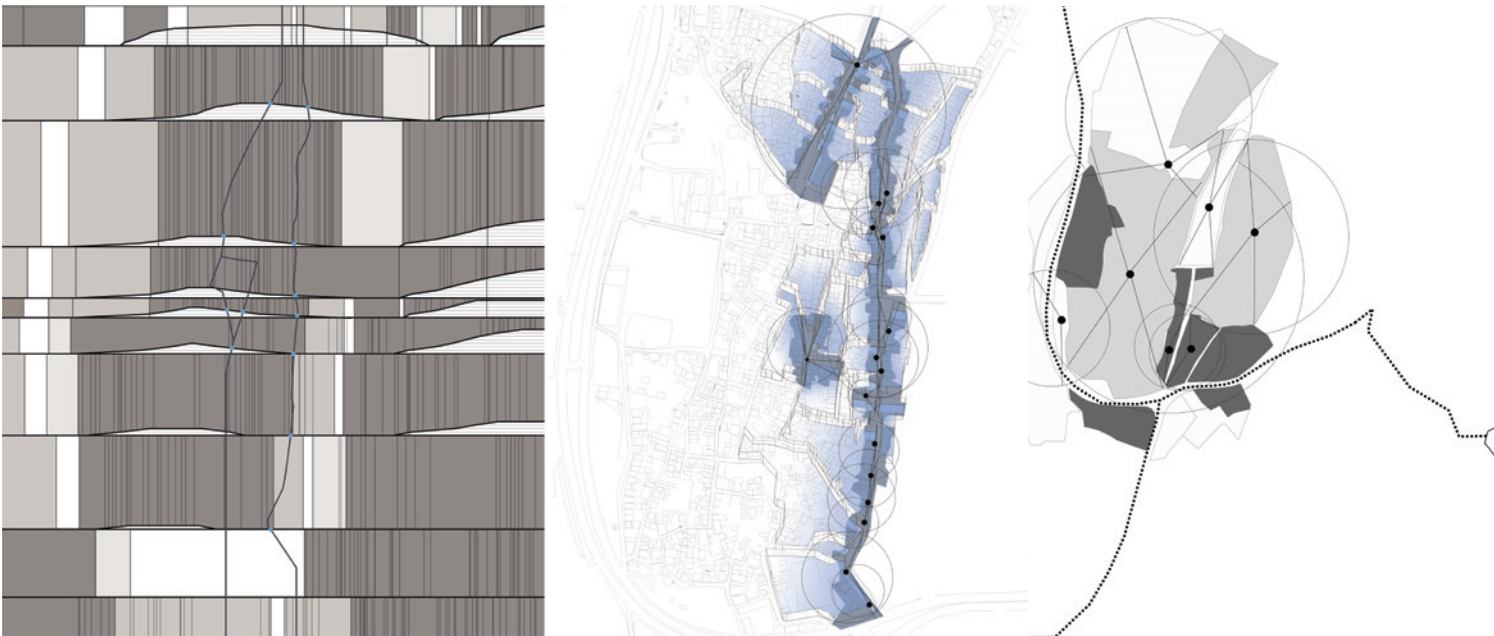
Aspect_3 The relation between research and design

The conclusive phase of the research brought me to a comparison between the control strategies used in the gecekondu and the idea of Panopticon by Michel Faucault. First of all, this parallelism allowed me to define the subjects involved in the system and secondly to explore how the control is exercised. The subjects involved are the guard and the inmates: the inmates can be represented by people not belonging to the gecekondu but also by the inhabitants themselves which therefore are inmates and guards at the same time. The area is controlled by a really simple visual system. Most of the daily activities in the slam are practiced outside the house that is pretty small. Thus, the visual control is represented by a series of borders which are always shifting according to the situation modifying the permeability of the area.

The research and its conclusive maps gave me the possibility to define specific tools and concepts for the design of the Turkish bath.

The Turkish bath or hammam, is defined by Faucault as an heterotopian space. The hammam is a space with a peculiar quality: it is connected with the rest of the city but in a way to suspend, neutralize or invert the relationships that are created and reflected by them. It is isolated and permeable yet not freely accessible like a public space. In the definition of the Turkish bath I found interesting relations with the gecekondu.

The maps have been inserted in a process of formal reduction that brought to the definition of the final design were the control is exerted through the architecture. The subjects involved in the system, which are the users (female and male) the staff members and the external people, are the protagonists of a social and, at the same time, individual experience that is driven by the concept of permitted or deny interaction.
Defining certain visual boundaries, the conclusive map (img.3) has been used as a tool to shape the Turkish bath: the outlines of the drawing have been formally elaborated into a structural system of walls. The walls are intended as a ribbon defining the interaction between the users of the hammam. The inner ribbon, which varies in thikness and materialization, manages the visual control between the two generes. The outer ribbondefiness the perimeter of the building mitigating the interaction with the outside.
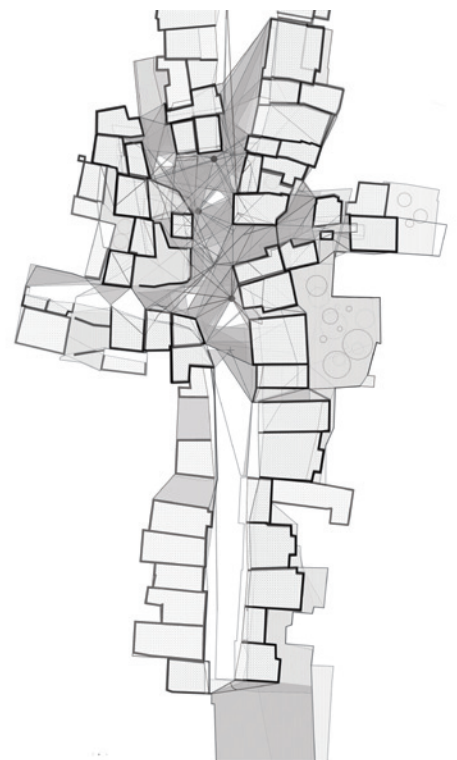Through a further elaboration of the concept the outline of the building have been sharpened resulting in the actual design of the hammam.

Img.1
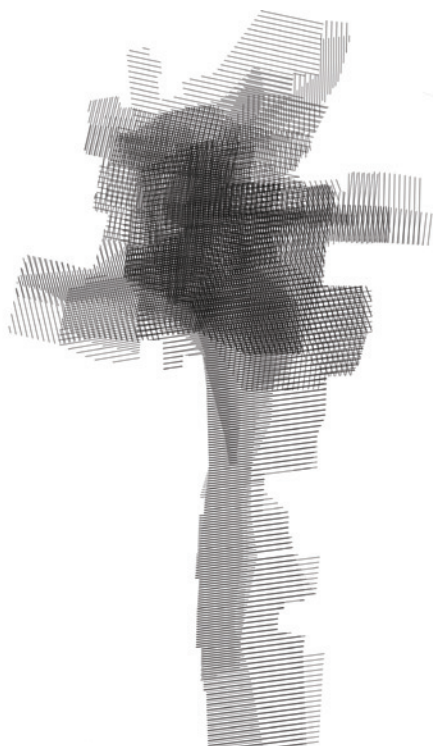
Img.2

Img.3

Aspect_4 The relationship between the project and the wider social context

In the Turkish tradition the hammam represented one of the most important social spaces. It was a place of spiritual and physical purification, were it was possible to be in contact with the body and the soul. At the same time, it was also used as a gathering space were people could meet to relax, enjoy the free time, interact and celebrate special events of the community. Therefore the hammam is based a the duality: on one hand the individual experience, on the other the collective experience.

The Turkish bath is located in a crucial point in Istiklal Mahallesi: on the sloped border of the residential area of the gecekondu but still facing an important street which is going through a series of renovations.

In reaction to the introvert character of the gecekondu, the project works a a gateway to the gecekondu, it is a meeting point for people living in the slam and the people passing by it, so the roof becomes a public square. In order to restore the traditional character of the turkish bath the only entrance is kept on the west side of the building facing the gecekondu. In this way entering the building results easier for the inhabitants of Istiklal and at the same time requires the will of an outsider to approach the area. According to a wider reflection, the hammam with its social character will function as a valve to limit or reduce the isolation of the gecekondu.