ATLAS

Safety: An Additional Landscape
Layer to the City of Brussels Atlas

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Research Plan

INTRODUCTION

During my stay in Brussels, I walked from the old center, Dansaert, towards the North Station. Along the way, I came across Places Charles Rogier, which used to be the location of the North Station until 1955. The square, with its massive size and a large umbrella-like canopy, left me both amazed and somewhat empty, given the absence of people. I remembered that I had learned that a square tends to look deserted when there are more than about 25 square meters of space per person (Alexander et al., 1977) [1]. With this in mind, Places Charles Rogier, measuring 70 by 90 meters, indeed felt deserted with fewer than 250 people present. The Places Charles Rogier stands at the juncture between the city's historical center and the northern business district, offering a transition into modern Brussels, thus walking further, I found myself amidst the tall, reflective towers of the city.

Places Charles Rogier
Source: google maps

My sense of desolation continued as I reached the residential blocks on Av. De l'Heliport, part of the Little Manhattan plan [2]. These buildings had plain facades up to the third floor, where walkways connecting the buildings were meant to be. During a conversation with the architectural firm, BureauBR [3], they revealed that their office's presence made some residents feel safer, encouraging elderly women to walk their dogs in the area again.

Av. De l'Heliport
Source: Author

Following that, I visited Friche Josaphat, the site chosen for this year's Urban Architecture Graduation Studio with the theme 'Last Green in Town.' Similar to the places mentioned earlier, it was devoid of people. However, in this particular case, it offered a surprisingly warm welcome. It felt like a place where humans hadn't overridden nature or even themselves, at least not yet. This remarkable contrast left me feeling inspired, and I couldn't help but contemplate how one could build there while treating the Friche Josaphat and its diverse inhabitants with care?

1. Alexander, C., Ishikawa, S., Silverstein, M., Jacobson, M., Fiksdahl-King, I., & Angel, S. (1977). A pattern language: towns, buildings, construction. In Oxford University Press eBooks (Vol. 1, Nummer 5). https://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA00163982

2. Tandt, C. D. (2014). Brussels's "Manhattan Project": The international style and the Americanization of European Urban space. Ulb. https://www.academia.edu/6700762/Brusselss_Manhattan_Project_The_International_Style_and_the_Americanization_of_European_Urban_Space

3. Landingspagina. (z.d.). BureauBR | Architectenbureau Bree Brussel. https://bureaubr.be/

4. Secure | Etymology, origin and Meaning of Secure by Etymonline. (z.d.). Etymonline. https://www.etymonline.com/word/secure

5. While "security" pertains to the measures in place to protect individuals, "safety" primarily revolves around how secure one feels personally. In this context, we'll primarily use the term "safety."

6. Maguire, M., Fróis, C., & Zurawski, N. (2014). The Anthropology of Security: Perspectives from the frontline of policing, counter-terrorism and border control. http://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BB16110483

As the day neared its end, I found myself filled with a range of impressions. However, it concluded on an unusual note with an attempted theft of my bag. While such incidents can occur anywhere, it made quite an impression on me. It became evident that Brussels was a city with a rich tapestry of spaces, buildings, people, languages, and more, making me contemplate what truly makes people feel at home and safe amidst this diversity.

Feeling safe, comfortable, and at home is closely tied to feeling secure. The term "secure[4]" has its origins in the Latin word "securus," signifying freedom from anxiety. Security [5] isn't a rigid concept but a dynamic one shaped by our emotions, trust, and personal experiences (Maguire et al., 2014) [6]. This feeling of safety also is inherently connected to the spaces we occupy, making it a spatial concern. The concept of thinking spatially, as discussed by Arendt (1968) [7], is linked to both people and the world. Arendt's perspective posits that individuals shape the 'Earth' into the 'World' through the creation of landscapes. To understand a landscape and the places people inhabit geomorphology [8] is often used, sometimes referred to as morphology. Geomorphology [8] focusses on the understanding of the shape and spatial structure of a landscape. Maps of the landscape serve as valuable tools for this purpose, often organized into collections found in an Atlas. However, the term "morphology" finds its origins in the Greek word "morphe," which encompasses not only the visual aspect but also highlights its unique characteristics (Teerds, 2014) [9]. Therefore, grasping a landscape goes beyond simply examining a physical map. It involves considering the tangible, social, and symbolic dimensions of the landscape [9], a realm known as human geography [10]. So researching how people feel safe within a space can be considered as a social layer of the landscape within the broader landscape.

Non-visual elements, such as safety, can be elusive and difficult to identify, often even escaping the notice of the general public. This is where the architect's role becomes crucial since they have the ability to uncover and highlight these hidden aspects through their drawings. Architects can also take immediate action to address such social concerns within the built environment, which is a facet that sometimes seems to be overlooked [11]. This oversight may happen because both the field of architecture and public discussions tend to oversimplify the discipline by primarily focusing on aesthetics [11]. Nevertheless, from my perspective, the role of an architect extends far beyond the design of buildings, as architecture and space are intrinsically connected to societal issues, including something as fundamental as safety.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The process of the Manhattan Plan for Brussels has given rise to an impressive and noteworthy built environment in the city. However, it has often created a disconnection between landscape - human or human - nature. Nevertheless, there are still such spaces within the city that remain in active use, providing an opportunity for exploration and learning about what gives people a sense of safety in this urban environment.

The perception of safety in a location is often not represented nor researched through drawing, nor is it commonly integrated into considerations regarding the built environment, let alone influencing architectural design. However, the Urban Architecture Graduations Studio's site is Friche Josaphat, which demands a delicate approach. This scenario offers an unique opportunity to explore the connection between safety (social landscape layer - human geograpgy) and the urban landscape, Friche Josaphat, (physical landscape layer - geomorphology) effectively bridging two distinct domains.

7. Arendt, H. (1968). Men in Dark Times. http://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA18770362
8. Landscape morphology. (n.d.). Oxford Reference. https://doi.org/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100050292
9. Teerds, H. (2014). Making landscape public. Making public landscape. https://www.oasejournal.nl/en/Issues/93
10. Human Geography. (n.d.). Oxford Reference. https://doi.org/10.1093/acref/9780199599868.013.0852
11. OASE Journal for Architecture #116. (z.d.). Tom Avermaete, Vronique Patteeuw, Elsbeth Ronner, Hans Teerds | Nai010. https://www.nai010.com/en/publicaties/oase-journal-for-architecture-116/246129

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RESEARCH

How to draw the safety of Brussels experienced by its users?

DESIGN

What guidelines could be taken from this visualization and used for an architectural design?

METHODOLOGY

An interactive methodology, where possible, will be used to conduct this research. However, there is also an alternative approach if needed. Ideally, both approaches will be successful.

1. Interactive Approach

Engaging in conversations with city residents to explore their feelings of safety within the city and the factors influencing these feelings. These discussions will occur at 3 different times and in 4 locations near Friche Josaphat, with the precise locations determined during a site visit. The approach is based on the concept of the mental map, as introduced by Lynch (1960) [11], and may involve three distinct methods, depending on the participant:

• Sketching: Participants will be encouraged to sketch a map of an area, highlighting places where they feel secure.
• Describing: Participants will be asked to describe the area and articulate how it contributes to their sense of safety.
• Routing: Participants will provide directions to a particular landmark or destination, outlining the safest route and explaining their choice.

For safety reasons, possibly only women will be spoken to, which will provide a certain perspective.

Mental map, inspired by Lynch (1960)
Source: unknown

Schedule of engagement of participants
moments and times
Source: Author
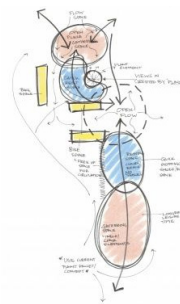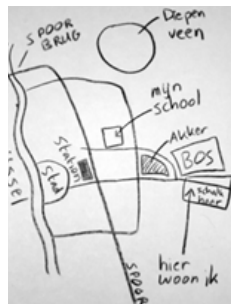
2. Static Approach

• Undertake independent exploration to evaluate safety within the city. This process involves making personal observations and studying specific landscapes, with a focus on the paths and sequences of experiences to understand the feelings of safety associated with a particular place. As noted by Walter (1989)[12], *"The feelings of a place are indeed the mental projections of individuals, but they come from collective experience and they do not happen anywhere else. They belong to the place.".* The focus on paths and sequences will be a method of narrative walking research, such as the urban walking practice 'dérive' [13] used in psychogeography [14,15]. The reasoning for this approach comes from Lucas & Solnit (2001) [16]: *"Roads, trails, and paths gradually unfold over time as one traverses them, much like the unfolding of a story. For instance,*

11. Lynch, K. (1960). The image of the city. https://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA01382449

12. Walter, E. V. (1989). Placeways: A theory of the Human environment. Economic Geography, 65(1), 93. https://doi.org/10.2307/143488

13. An unplanned journey through a landscape, usually urban, in which participants stop focusing on their everyday relations to their social environment

14. Psychogeography is a method for discovering cities through aimless wandering and playful exploration, leading to the creation of a social geography of urban spaces (Jaeneen, 2018) (See Source 15)

a hairpin turn may resemble a plot twist, a steep ascent builds suspense towards the view at the summit, and a fork in the road functions as an introduction.".

• Examine the environment and observe people's behaviors and draw patterns during 3 different times and in 4 locations near Friche Josaphat:
  - How they navigate (their chosen routes).
  - Where they choose to linger and the reasons for their choices.
  - Their activities and interactions.
  - External environmental factors at play.
  - Whether they are alone or in the company of others.
  - Further assessments will be conducted on-site.
  - And more (to be decided on site)

The insights gained through these methods will give an understanding of how safety is perceived in Brussels so that a method for drawing this perception of safety can be established, effectively adding an additional social landscape layer to the existing map of Brussels. Ideally, this supplementary layer will allow for the extraction of various guidelines, drawing inspiration from the book '*A Pattern Language*' from Alexander et al. (1977) [17] and using these insights to inform architectural designs and promote a considerate approach to build on the Josaphat Friche site.
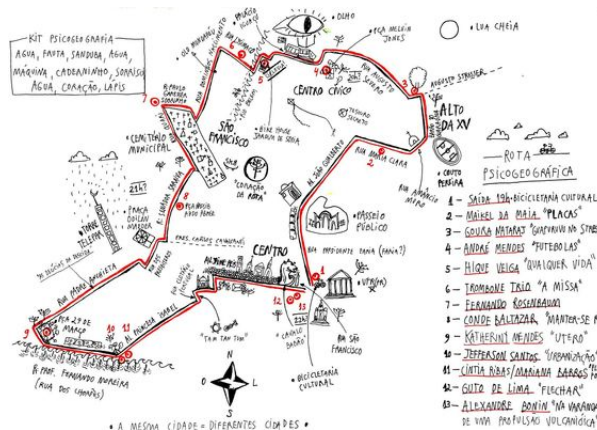
Example of psychogeography
Source: unknown
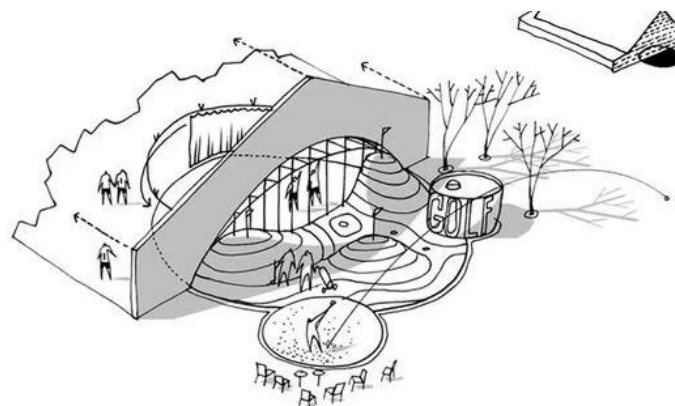
Example of drawing people's behaviour
Source: unknown

15. Jaeneen. (2018, 4 juni). THE SITUATIONISTS - Jaeneen - medium. Medium. https://medium.com/@jaeneenk/the-situationists-a79c7ac455ca

16. Lucas, S., & Solnit, R. (2001). Wanderlust: A history of walking. Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature, 55(1), 138. https://doi.org/10.2307/1348177

17. Alexander, C., Ishikawa, S., Silverstein, M., Jacobson, M., Fiksdahl-King, I., & Angel, S. (1977). A pattern language: towns, buildings, construction. In Oxford University Press eBooks (Vol. 1, Nummer 5). https://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA00163982

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The field research encompasses various methods, incorporating both interactive and static approaches. The interactive research draws inspiration from Lynch's work, "The Image of the City" (1960). Lynch posits that individuals create mental maps when navigating urban environments, consisting of five key elements: paths, nodes, landmarks, edges, and districts. He argues that having a positive mental image of a city contributes to emotional security and a harmonious relationship between individuals and their urban surroundings. Additionally, Lynch's work, "Good City Form (1984)," will be explored to gain an even more comprehensive understanding of his approach.

In contrast, static research is influenced by the concept of Psychogeography, as Wood (2010) finds parallels between Lynch's work on mental maps and Psychogeography. A method, discussed before, believed to encourage immediate opinions about a space upon entering it, shaped by both the physical attributes of the space and our instincts for evaluating its safety. The term "graphy" stems from the Greek word "graphein," meaning to write, draw, or map. The addition of "psyche" infuses a soulful dimension, connecting the Earth, the mind, and the act of walking. Psychogeographic writing offers an alternative perspective for understanding the city [18]. Furthermore, the works such as *"Walking and Mapping"* by O'Rourke (2013) will be explored to delve deeper into psychogeography, as well as Careri and Polytekton's book *'Walking as an aesthetic practice'* (2017).

Finally the work *'A Pattern Language'* of Alexander et al. (1977) will be used as an inspiration to create guidelines for designing architecture in a way that safety is ensured.

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Left figure:
Example of
psychogeography
Source: unknown

Right figure:
Example of the art
of walking
'A Line Made by Walking',
Richard Long (1967)

18. The MIT Press Reader. (2021, 16 juli). Psychogeography: a purposeful drift through the city. https://thereader.mitpress.mit.edu/psychogeography-a-purposeful-drift-through-the-city/

RESEARCH STRUCTURE