

Introduction

My choice for the studio stems from my dual interest in architecture and urbanism. I had been in doubt whether to either choose of the tracks before beginning my studies at TU Delft over two years ago. This studio proved to be the right choice, offering a project scale that matched my interests and the freedom of design.

During the first site visit, exploring the friche. I was inspired by the community which had formed there. The story about people creating a community, while the city was actively trying to construct a new neighbourhood got me thinking: could people live on the friche, while also preserving the nature? The friche, known as the 'last green in town' required a careful approach. However, this was more than just trying to find a balance between the two ideas of preserving nature and creating new housing opportunities, it was a way to learn about a lifestyle, previously unfamiliar to me.

Research

To address the contradiction, there was a need to get a greater understanding of communities. I conducted case study research on intentional communities, commons, and ecovillages. I felt comfortable conducting this type of research and could increase my knowledge in a short time. Moreover, by comparing multiple case studies, I was able to create guidelines which I could later use in my own design. These guidelines resulted in the integration of the research together with the design, which resulted in a cohesive graduation project.

The study of Walter Segal's self-build system was particularly crucial in kickstarting my design. During my P2 I proposed the idea of a community capable of self-expansion, though I lacked a method for achieving this. My research examined the Segal system and its shortcomings, while considering it's about forty years old. I recognised that while the concept of the system is usable, it would be a considerable effort to translate the system to our current standards. A primary example is the use of the wall elements which has been used in the project, but the shape of the elements has been updated.

Research to design

The research into communities and the self-build system provided a foundation for my design. The technical and architectural aspect are intertwined, as the building system has a central role in the architecture.

Therefore, this system was my main focus, my design needed a system which could both be used for dwellings and for public functions. In the end I believe I found a balance in the system which enabled me to use the grid for both functions.

At the completion of the case study research, I created a set of guidelines, which in its turn resulted in my design concepts. This set helped me focus on the right elements of my design.

I did underestimate how much time the building system would take to create and finetune. At this moment it would still take a lot of time to perfect the system. Although, the wall system itself works, the exact placement of the walls still creates some trial and error necessary.

Societal value

The community which I designed emerged from an existing group of people on the friche. The contradiction between what the city of Brussels wants, to build housing, and the protestors, who are seeking to keep the natural area, is the problem I tried to solve. The solution I came up with, a dynamic community which respects existing nature, is a way of living which is becoming more prevalent. Over the last decades more of these communities have been created all over the world. The project serves as a social example, since this community is in the middle of a large city and most communities are enclaves far from urban centres. With this project, inhabitants of Brussels could see and experience how a more ecological life is possible.

Transferability

For the building system, it would be interesting to see how another student could continue my work. I have worked out numerous challenges, but many remain, such as the align of wall elements or the sound proofing. It is a difficult task to design and create a building system with all current building regulations. In the design I have tried to align with the regulations, but the project is still an anarchist way of building, so some freedom with the regulations is allowed. After all, communities are often conceived because the members want to live outside of normal life, so why can't their buildings be as well?

The system is easily adaptable as well, the grid structure can be shaped in many ways and even the height can be adjusted. It does not even have to be a self-build system, the versatility allows it to be used for other types of projects as well.

The research I have done can also be expanded, if sources can be found or if communities are willing to help, a site visit would be the best. This would enable a more architectural review of living in a community, which is difficult to do with only online and physical sources.

After P4 (retake)

The time directly after P4 was a bit tough, at that moment it did I felt I was ready to graduate with the project at that time. Only after a while I was ready again to start with again with some fresh ideas. The discussions with my mentors helped to get some motivation. During the summer I took a break and was able to start again shortly after. In this short period, I was able to better understand my own project and the location, which was important to go to the P4. I created new ideas and concept to improve the design and altered some elements to tell my story of the community.

In the end, I personally think that the extra months have given me the time to improve the design and have given me some extra experience in the process.