

1. The relationship between the graduation project topic (The Senne), the studio (Spolia), the master track (Architecture), and the master program (MSc AUBS)

The main theme of the studio is Spolia: the concept of reusing (historical) architectural pieces. The reuse of historical elements is something I consider important for the future of urban environments.

This Senne river is my graduation topic. This is a covered river to which the city of Brussels once originated. This industrial river has been covered because it was polluted. For my project I made a research into the possibilities to revitalize the former Senne river (historical element) and into how architecture can contribute to the revitalization of this local urban infrastructure. In my project I revitalized the covered river into a public park and I developed a master plan including a new building next to this park, which is called The Senne House. This building exists of a library and housing. Through my plan landscape and architecture come together into an integrated concept.

2. Method and Approach

The approach I have taken is to use the context of the site as a starting point for this project. I started with a research on a site-specific element namely the covered river Senne. This approach has been proposed from the studio. I've studied through field research the river on different scales: from an urban scale to a building scale. Thinking on different levels is something that motivates the studio to go from a larger scale (a master plan) to a building level. It is also important to think about what a building and environment can mean on a larger scale, not only with functions but also how the form fits into the environment. The methods used to investigate this environment is field research, drawing, model making, photography, but also case studies and desk research to see how reference projects have dealt with the same topic.

3. Relationship between Research and Architecture

My research consisted of three parts: how is the covered river Senne still visible in Brussels? How can this kind of vacant infrastructure be revitalized and what effect does this have on architecture? Through my research, I saw the opportunity to give more meaning to the quality of the remaining space of the covered river. In order to do further research into this, I have analyzed the High Line. This is a park in New York that has been transformed from a vacant metro infrastructure into a park. I analyzed the park, but also the effect of the park transformation on an architectural environment. New buildings were built with private gardens attached to the park. This created different levels of nature; public garden and private gardens. Vacant space became filled up and new functions were created. The new urban landscape

created a different view on the existing architecture. In the existing buildings the back of the buildings became the front of the buildings. So, the current residents are using the existing building differently. It is not only the architect who adjusts the area with the implementation of new buildings, but also the residents themselves will adjust the existing architecture and use the space differently. This research created an awareness of the relationship between landscape, inhabitants and architecture.

My research created a vision on how I want to approach this site and what the strategy would be for this type of architecture. Especially the study of the High Line has created the basic principles on how I wanted to approach this site and especially the architecture.

The strategy for this site and architecture is not to copy the past but to built on the past. It involves making good use of the space from the past and giving it with a new functionality and meaning back to the city. It makes use of the characteristics of the old river, the inner block character. In my approach I have looked at the qualities of the past both programmatically and spatially in order to restore identity to an area that is fragmented and seems to be an area without identity. It is an architectural strategy that embraces the quality of the transformed area. Within the plan the buildings are in connection with the park.

4. The graduation project and the wider social, professional and scientific framework.

Transforming infrastructural networks is a global trend. Besides the High Line in New York, there are a lot of other examples of transforming infrastructures. A project in the Netherlands about re-using infrastructures is the Hofbogen in Rotterdam by ZUS Architects. With a length of 1.9 kilometers, the roof of the Hofbogen is the longest roof in the Netherlands. A public park where the track of the train used to be, was designed on top of the vacant Hofplein Station. And by transforming this track, the neighborhood improved impressively. Another example is the covered river Jardín del Turia in Valencia which has been transformed into a public park. The space has been given back to the inhabitants of the city. This transformation has led to the construction of a lot of new architecture along the park. There are also examples of revitalizing the past. In the Hague, for example, MVRDV wants to bring back the canals in different types, in the original state as a canal, but also with the function of a park. Their goal of reopening the lost canals is to boost the area ecologically and economically.

Re-using spaces of the past can give neighborhoods an identity. Neighborhoods can also get a new economical impulse by this, because it's interesting for companies to be located in this kind of vibrant areas. This will also improve real estate.

Redesigning this kind of areas will improve the environment ecologically, physically and mentally for the inhabitants. Nowadays, cities are growing and people live in tiny houses because they cannot afford big houses with outdoor spaces.

In the hot summer days, public green places are important and can function as the backyard for the people who live in this area. Parks are also important social places

to meet with other people. On a sustainable level this kind of places are important to improve the quality of living in the city.

Besides vacant infrastructural networks, vacant buildings are used for different purposes than their original function nowadays. Sustainability seems to be more important than ever for the current generation. Why should something be throw away if it can also be reused? In Brussels a lot of old buildings were destroyed in the past. In the 60s and 70s of the 20th century different urban development's took place in the city of Brussels. The urban developers of that time ignored the historic buildings when creating a new urban plan. This is called the Brusselization. Buildings which had been important for a lot of generations were demolished so new buildings could be built. A lot of history has gone. Architects have the chance to make use of the past. This can be done by re-using existing architecture or creating something completely new with references to the past. A lot of examples of re-using spaces of the past has shown what potential benefits it can bring. This is a lesson I have learned from this project and this is something I will use within my future career.

5. Ethical issues and dilemmas

Since my last presentation I focused on the landscape and the shape of the building. How the building should be orientated and how the connection between the building and the park could be stronger.

For the design of the park, I did research on the function of a park in relation to buildings and the residents of a neighborhood. The High Line has given identity to the neighborhood. In the same way, the High Line has the power to create a different world in the middle of an urban context.

I looked at whether I could bring the old character of the old river back into the park. Originally, the buildings were built around the river the Senne. It was a kind of hidden area. I wanted to strengthen this hidden feeling and turn the park into a hidden oasis surrounded by buildings.

I also got the question of how the Senne should be represented, what is the function that the former river has in my design? Should it be a natural or an urban version? In this park, the space is given back to the city and nature. The choice was made for a wadi that follows the old line of the river Senne. It's a sustainable version of the Senne. The space of the park is very wide. That fact gave me the opportunity to create a park with various height differences. These different levels create privacy and intimate spaces, public as well as private places. Places that can function as a place to relax or that function as a kids playground or a lookout.

I made a lot of models to study the shape of the building. In these models attention was especially focused on viewpoints, but also on the privacy of the houses. In my previous design, the houses were oriented towards each other. In the new design, the houses will be oriented towards the park, providing more privacy and integration with the surrounding natural elements. In the case of window frames, particular attention was paid to viewpoints, which also influenced the size of the window frames. In addition to the shape of the building made in relation to the park, the living experience has also been examined. All homes will have an outdoor space. This will also create an outdoor lifestyle for the residents of this building.



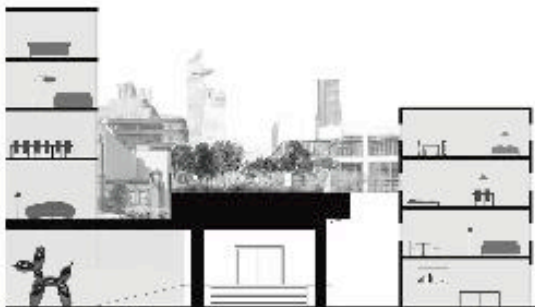
1. Historical architectural element: Senne



2. The Senne on an Urban scale



3. The river becomes visible by the architecture



4. Casestudy the High Line: connection between landscape and architecture



5. Re-tracing the past



6. Masterplan with a park in the middle of the blocks



4. Proposal: relationship between architecture and landscape