

Reflection P5

GRADUATION ARCHITECTURAL ENGINEERING
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Approach and methodology

At the start of the graduation project, my design process lacked direction and structure. I worked on many isolated studies across different scales simultaneously, without a clear hierarchy or precision. Although I understood the societal and spatial issues of Zuidplein, I did not yet understand how to translate this problem into a coherent architectural response. I struggled to structure the design process from large-scale urban questions to smaller-scale architectural and technical decisions.

A crucial turning point was learning to structure the project explicitly across scales — from city, to building, to cluster, to dwelling, to detail. This helped me understand that the project is not a collection of separate ideas, but a constellation of layered interventions that together tell one integrated story. Once I began working with this scalar logic, I gained clarity on what needed to be designed at each level and why.

In this process, I became aware that my creativity requires structure in order to be productive. Without a conceptual framework, my ideas remained abstract and scattered. With structure, my creativity could be directed and refined. Tools such as conceptual breakdowns and architectural frameworks helped me understand relationships between themes, systems, and spatial consequences. This allowed me to move from intuition-driven exploration toward a more deliberate and controlled design process.

Through this, I learned that structure is not restrictive for me, but enabling. It provides the necessary foundation for creative thinking and for maintaining coherence in a complex Architectural Engineering project.

Feedback and learning moments

In the early stages, I found feedback related to narrative and conceptual structure difficult to understand. I often did not grasp what was meant by the “story” of the project, and I hesitated to ask for clarification because I felt I should already know these things at graduation level. This hesitation was influenced by earlier academic experiences in which the complexity of projects caused me to doubt my own understanding and judgement.

As a result, I initially lost confidence in distinguishing what was architecturally meaningful from what was not. During feedback moments, my tutors gradually helped me reconstruct this structure step by step. Through these conversations, I began to understand architecture not merely as a technical object, but as a human system operating across scales — a continuous spatial process in which people enter, move through, interact, and leave with a certain experience.

A concrete design decision that reflects this learning is the prioritisation of experiential comfort over purely technical optimisation. For example, in designing housing above infrastructure,

choices were made to shield residents from direct exposure to traffic through spatial and material strategies, even when technically more open solutions could have increased daylight. This reflects a shift from designing how a building is made toward designing how a building is lived.

This change also influenced how I now observe the built environment in daily life. I increasingly evaluate spaces based on their experiential and social impact rather than solely on construction logic or technical efficiency.

Relation between research and design

Throughout the project, research played a crucial role in consolidating complexity into clarity. What initially felt like a diffuse collection of themes gradually converged into a central concept: connection, both between people and between humans and nature. This thematic focus helped me understand why the building needed to function as a bridge — not only physically, but socially and ecologically.

The research clarified which interventions were essential and which were secondary. It helped establish a clear red thread in the design, ensuring that spatial decisions, programmatic choices, and technical systems all supported the same underlying intention. At the same time, the act of designing continuously tested and refined the research, transforming abstract concepts into spatial reality.

Through this reciprocal process, research and design became inseparable, each strengthening the other.

Studio and program positioning

The project is firmly positioned within the Architectural Engineering graduation studio. It integrates structural ambition, infrastructural complexity, and environmental systems with spatial quality and social relevance. In this project, the bridge structure is not only a technical solution, but also a social act: it connects urban fragments, supports ecological flows, and facilitates human interaction.

By treating infrastructure as an opportunity rather than a limitation, the project proposes an alternative approach to urban densification. This aligns with the AE studio's emphasis on integrated design, where engineering decisions actively contribute to architectural meaning and societal impact.

Academic and social value

Where many projects treat social cohesion and ecology as separate objectives, this project integrates them into a single spatial and systemic framework. This integration reflects both an academic ambition and a personal motivation. Having experienced social exclusion and having lived in dense urban environments with limited access to greenery, I am strongly aware of the impact that spatial conditions have on wellbeing and inclusion.

Academically, the project contributes to discussions on how socio-ecological systems can be embedded within architectural and infrastructural frameworks. Socially, it demonstrates how food production — a universal and familiar practice — can function as a catalyst for interaction, inclusion, and shared ownership of space.

Rather than representing diversity visually, the project seeks to enable it spatially, by creating conditions for encounter and collaboration.

Transferability

The building is composed of modular, repeatable, and extendable residential clusters, making the concept adaptable to other urban contexts facing similar social and ecological challenges. Food production, as a basic human need, forms a universally applicable foundation for social and ecological interaction.

A key condition for transferability is the building's connection to a larger ecological system, such as a park or green corridor. Without this connection, the socio-ecological loop cannot fully function. The project therefore emphasises that human–nature collaboration requires spatial continuity, rather than isolated green interventions.

Outlook on final phase

In the final phase of the graduation project, my focus will shift from producing drawings toward strengthening the communication of spatial experience and societal relevance. While the architectural and technical framework is established, I aim to explore additional representation tools—such as physical models, renders, and atmospheric visualizations—to more clearly convey how the project is perceived and inhabited.

These complementary media allow me to communicate aspects that are difficult to express through drawings alone, such as spatial sequence, scale, intimacy, and the lived experience of being above and within infrastructure. By expanding beyond conventional architectural representation, I seek to make the experiential and social intentions of the project more accessible and legible.

In parallel, I want to further reflect on how underused and residual urban spaces—particularly those associated with infrastructure—can be transformed into meaningful public places with societal relevance. This exploration strengthens my interest in architecture not only as a designed object, but as a catalyst for reprogramming overlooked spaces into inclusive and productive environments.

Self-developed reflection questions

1. How can architecture operate as a mediator between social interaction and ecological systems, without reducing either to a symbolic or secondary layer?
2. In what ways can underutilized infrastructural spaces be transformed into meaningful public places that generate long-term societal and ecological value?