



CONFRONTING TALLINN

Research Plan | Tristan Deckers | 5312213

Introduction

This paper functions as the Research Plan for the graduation studio of 'Methods of Analysis and Imagination:

A Matter of Scale'. The aim of this plan is to guide me in the process of filtering and distilling during the starting phase of the graduation studio. Even though students are able to enrol and participate in different studios and cover a wide variety of topics, the graduation process and goal should be similar. The development of the research plan takes place between the start of the academic year and P1, a time where students start exploring the ins and outs of the studio and its specifics.

In the first few weeks of the graduation studio 'A Matter of Scale', a dive has been made into the vast entity that is the city of Tallinn, Estonia. This city acts as the backdrop for this year's research and design within the theme of human scale and architecture. Even though this graduation studio can be seen as a way to develop a universal methodology of analysing and eventually designing, the intriguing (historical) context of Tallinn is the specific working area this year's studio has to focus on. That is why before visiting the working area, the whole of the city of Tallinn has been analysed on a rather global level by all students in order to find a specific scope in which to further proceed the analysis.

Problem statement

The global analysis that I have made began with an extensive investigation into the history of Estonia and its capital, in other words, the physical diversity as a consequence of different periods, regimes and visions over time. In the first year of the master of architecture, I developed a fascination for (architectural) historical analysis and based on the works of this period, a certain belief and vision has started to root: A physical location and its character can only be understood to its fullest potential when one immerses itself into the visions, context and people of the time when an intervention was made to place in question. The merged layers of these interventions over time can be used to get a grasp of the mentality, the memory and potentially the needs of the people/a place. Tallinn is a place where these layers are relatively easily visible.

The global problem envisioned is therefore the task of designing a building in a city in a country with a vast history, an extremely versatile and differentiated population and opposing beliefs and ideas. In order to guide the process of tackling these conditions to end up with a specific research theme, brief and design, a joint analysis was set up by a peer (Bart) and myself. The topic of this research is based on a shared interest in transportation and movement through a place or city. To me, this topic was the right fit for the research of the upcoming months as one of the first hypotheses drawn was that orientation in certain areas of the city could be challenging and the connection of the city with the sea is and has been limited for an extensive amount of time.

During the fieldtrip in Tallinn, different (new) incentives arose and other factors got reaffirmed. To start, I started to add up different insights gained about a specific slice of the Estonian culture throughout the two weeks of exploration through the city of Tallinn: the ever-growing list of locations aimed at consumption, the lack of proper public buildings and the embracement of freedom and capitalism after communism. At this moment in time, October 2024, Estonia has been an independent country for almost 33 years since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. Since this moment, Estonia's culture, economy and human lifestyles have changed drastically, once again. The market and economy were expanding in unprecedented ways with limited to no overruling organisation in place. The Estonians have fully embraced their break from communism and numerous developers have found ways to exploit the city for economic benefit. This is why the population of Tallinn is now facing the development of more and more expensive dwellings and large shopping malls/areas. Is this a form of gentrification and is this process slowly gatekeeping the access to the sea from Tallinn's residents? Do Estonians enjoy spending their free time in shopping malls and meeting their friends/family in these locations?

An example of a failed attempt at developing another shopping mall around the harbour area is the Porto Franco area, a huge development which was to include a hotel, office spaces, an abundance of parking spaces and a large shopping mall. Due to corruption however, the project was never fully finished and now the residents of Tallinn are left with an empty concrete wall separating the harbour from the centre of the city.



Two fishermen making use of their only access to the sea in the city (centre) next to the Porto Franco area (own image)

Another area of concern is the sometimes easily visible lack of physical and mental wellbeing of certain groups of residents in Tallinn. During the trip, myself and other peers had numerous encounters with locals that seemed to be living on and from what there is to find on the street, locals that were limping, and locals that were struggling in other ways. A sense of unsafety was the theme in multiple conversations throughout the two weeks of the our visit. Is this feeling of unsafety justified in Tallinn and what is already being done to help certain

individuals? The city chief architect of Tallinn, Andro Mänd, has also opened up about the need for mixed use area's and neighbourhoods to avoid so called 'ghettoisation' (Parli, 2024).

Finally, it is important to address that from different perspectives from different parties and from different personal experiences, a conclusion can be drawn that Tallinn is still a city next to the sea, and not a city along the sea and coastline. Reaffirming the hypothesis drawn before visiting Tallinn about the lack of orientation in the city (towards the sea).

Research questions

To further elaborate on these matters and to address them effectively to get to the process of designing, the following main research question and subordinate questions have been posed:

'How can a public landmark help orientation in Tallinn?'

Subordinate questions:

- 'How does the way of arrival affect the perceived orientation of a (city / composition / building)?'

- 'How does a landmark help city users to orientate in and understand a city?'

- 'What does it take to design a landmark and how can a public building become a landmark?'

- 'What is a public building and what kind of public functions can be beneficial for the residents of Tallinn?'

- 'How can a building serve as a place to develop and calm down at the same time?'

- 'How is Estonian capitalism reflected in the (use of) architecture in Tallinn?'

- 'How can an existing concrete structure be reused to reflect a different narrative?'

Theoretical Framework

Arrival

Arrival in Tallinn, or arrival in a place in general, is one of the ways a place can be experienced and understood. For Bart and I, the fieldtrip to Tallinn would be the first time we visited this city. An author who has written and published about travel through a city is Kevin Lynch, who was an American city planner who was born in 1918. He performed his studies in American cities where the car was taking over the cityscape.

Lynch believed the perceived image of a city could help to redesign the 'formless' character that American cities were slowly embracing at the time (Appleyard et al., 1964). He grounded his findings on the connection between the city and the use of the car on the highway, which is somewhat at a constant speed. Here, the focus was brought to connection between the users on the road and how the city reveals itself to them (Appleyard et al., 1964).

For Lynch, the highway was the ideal tool to highlight another constant factor in a city, the imminent visual sequences of the built environment. One of the most important ways Lynch documented these sequences was through an orientation map which was built up from a self made language.

Serial Vision

When one mentions the sequence of spaces in a city or other location, another author that can add to the framework is Gordon Cullen. Cullen was a British architect who developed his method of analysis into what was later called the 'serial vision', a sequence of sketches in a city or town at walking speed (Pennink, 1976).

Cullen often conducted his research in the UK or other parts of Europe and highlighted different scenarios and types of city tissue. This method paved the way for a discussion about how buildings relate and talk to each other in a neighbourhood, street or intersection (Pennink, 1976). The most important factors here were shapes of individual or numerous buildings and their location relative to each other.

Orientation

Orientation is a topic that is linked to the works of Lynch and Cullen as these works are investigations into how buildings and area's work, but also how these area's collaborate to form a city or larger cohesive location. Lynch worked with landmarks and districts in his language to order the perceived city, put these on his map and showed when one was able to perceive these elements during the journey (Appleyard et al., 1964).

Cullen on the other hand was not dealing with the constraint of sitting in a moving vehicle but was often closer to objects in the city. He found ways of describing connections and coherence between different parts of an area in the city (Pennink, 1976).

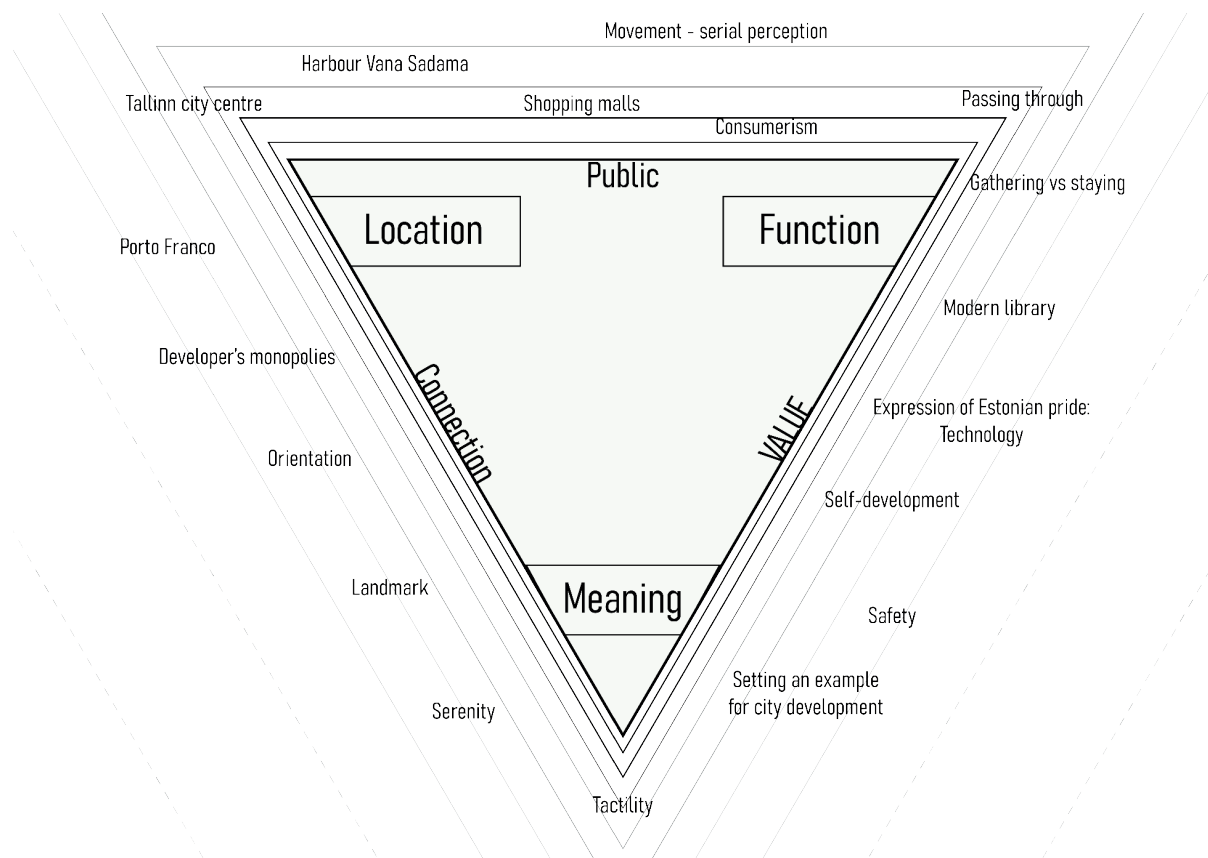
Public building

For the topic of public building, I have studied the work of Jan Gehl, 'Life between buildings' to be more precise. Jan Gehl is a Danish architect and urbanist who was fascinated by and published a lot about public life, buildings and tendencies. In this work, Jan Gehl bases public life and its quality on the occurrence of different social encounters or activities. A separation is made between mandatory / mundane tasks and more spontaneous / sporadic activities happening in a public realm (Gehl, 2011). This last set of activities is heavily reliant on the quality of the public space. This space needs to provide for human scale activities without too many obstacles. When this boundary is crossed, it is evident that one of the most

important factors for attracting humans to a public area, are other people. The activity of noticing others, seeing what others are doing or only being in the same room together is one of the best stimuli there is to the creation of public life (Gehl, 2011).

A safe city

For the process of figuring out what kind of function(s) a public building should receive in Tallinn, I try to relate to the work of Jane Jacobs, specifically 'Eyes on the street' in which she describes the importance of a mixed set of functions in all area's of a city to ensure eyes can be kept on the street and inside the building at all times (Jacobs, 1961). This will make buildings and city neighbourhoods safer and more lively throughout the day.



A diagram explaining the separation of the elements included in the research into 3 themes: Location, Function and Meaning. (own image)

Methodology

The end product of the graduation year is a design for a building in the city of Tallinn, as a result of continuous research throughout the process. Attention is ought to be put on my believe that the final design of the graduation process is only a snapshot in time, a moment of reflection on the ever-growing personal methodology of designing and researching. In the beginning of November 2024, students are asked to present their progress made at the given moment. This presentation should include, among other things, an overview of the envisioned brief and function for a building in Tallinn. The research conducted in favour of this goal can be split into three: A contextual analysis in groups of two, a disciplinary analysis done individually and a personal sum of research.

Contextual analysis

Based on the principles of the studio, students are expected to perform a (specific) contextual analysis of Tallinn to better understand the underlying layers of the current situation in Tallinn. This section of analysis, highlighting architecture when moving through a city, is in collaboration with Bart. This research is carried out as a group, Bart and I have openly expressed their expectations on the methodology, desired outcomes and operable factors as a result of the research. This is the base for the organization and precision of the research.

In collaboration with Bart and based on the work of different authors (e.g. Kevin Lynch, Gordon Cullen), an analytic method was created to try to capture arrival in a city. The research will cover the distinct factors that contribute to the feeling of arrival and the process of uncovering and understanding the city (of Tallin). A comparison will be made of three separate ways of arriving in the city through (public) transport: the bus, the train, and the ferry. In the first few weeks before the fieldtrip, Bart and I started developing a language to address the several factors involved when arriving, based on literature and own assumptions. One of the more challenging factors in creating this language, which we already found before the fieldtrip, lies in making a format that can be used and understood for the different forms of transportation.

The analysis of arrival in Tallinn can be split into three phases:

1 Arrival in the city in a form of (public) transportation

This part of the analysis is the most challenging phase to tackle. The language must be used and produced to show the difference effectively but also clearly in numerous factors contributing to the experience of arrival. Different factors that play pivotal roles in the experience of arriving in a city and trying to orientate while doing so, are 'speed', 'frame', 'field of view' and 'scale'. To obtain primary documentation for the analysis, the journeys made in the transport were filmed using two cameras.



The orientation map of Tallinn, based on the captured journeys of the train, bus & ferry, produced in our own language (own image)

Preferably for frame and field of view, the idea was to aim the cameras at different windows of the vehicle which can be perceived from a single seat in that vehicle. In the process of setting up the cameras, attention must be brought to the framing of the view, since deliberately showing the window frame of the vehicle is part of the experience and it shows the limitations of your perception during a journey in a form of transportation. This is also the case for potential objects or persons in the line of sight from the camera (viewing point) to the window. Another important factor is related to the speed at different instances during the journey, since human perception is affected by speed. The cognitive ability of a person is limited and is dependent on the speed through space. Here though, perception cannot be seen as a separate instance from scale.

The final product of this first phase of the analysis is a diagram in our own language, highlighting orientation when moving through the city (Kevin Lynch). This diagram is kept rather simple since this level of abstraction is offering the possibility of comparing varying forms of transportation. The main set of material from this phase is a series of perspective drawings of the view and the possible orientation, with the filmed footage as a base layer (Gordon Cullen). These illustrations are carefully placed along the timeline of the journey and can be seen as snapshots. The drawings are made under the conditions of using the filmed footage as a base layer and limiting the drawing time in accordance with the speed at the specific time of the journey. The composition and combination of the diagram in plan and the snapshots will in the end create an abstraction of the perceived orientation and thus understanding of the city.



A timelapse of a user cycle at the Ferry Terminal D in Tallinn, using long exposure photography (own image)

2 Locations where journeys split

The second part of the analysis of arrival in Tallinn focuses on locations where journeys of different people split after taking a partly shared journey. We have carefully chosen three locations or architectures in Tallinn where this event of dissection takes place and these are related to the chosen forms of transportation. The location chosen related to the journey by train is the 'Balti Jaam train station', west of the old medieval town of Tallinn. Secondly, the Ferry Terminal D was chosen in accordance with the analysed arrival using the Ferry from Helsinki to Tallinn. The ferry terminal D in Tallinn is particularly important because this is also my precedent to analyse, this will be further addressed later in the methodology. To round off the list, the Viru (keskus) bus-hub was chosen as a final location to be connected to the use of the bus as a way of arriving in Tallinn. The Viru location was chosen, similar to the Ferry terminal, as a means to connect the contextual

analysis to the disciplinary analysis since the Viru hotel is Bart's precedent. The movement of people at these locations are documented in numerous ways, the predominant method used here is long-exposure photography, potentially used to create GIFS. Long-exposure photography lends itself well to capture the movement of people in a static context= the architecture. Making a GIF from these images takes the analysis to another level to see how cycles work and impact the atmosphere on said locations. Besides photography and because following the cycles at these locations take a long time, we were able to trace individual users of the locations, their motives and their behaviour. Whereas the camera has the capacity to capture the sum of all users in the chosen frame, Bart and I were able to focus on single narratives at the same time. Finally, we are debating whether flow diagrams would be a productive and effective addition to the materials mentioned before.

3 The stroll between the location where journeys split and a single building

This final stage of the analysis was originally planned to be conducted as a shared work or even collaborated with another contextual analysis group, but has ultimately been left out of the contextual analysis and will shift to personal analysis. It will cover the journey from a mode of transportation to the desired destination (a building) on foot. This part of the analysis will relate a lot to the method of urban analysis created by Gordon Cullen called 'serial vision'.

This last part of the analysis still has to be developed but has the potential to reveal some of the most interesting pieces of the puzzle and will mostly focus on the area between the harbour and the city centre (Hanseatic old town, Roeterman area and Central station).

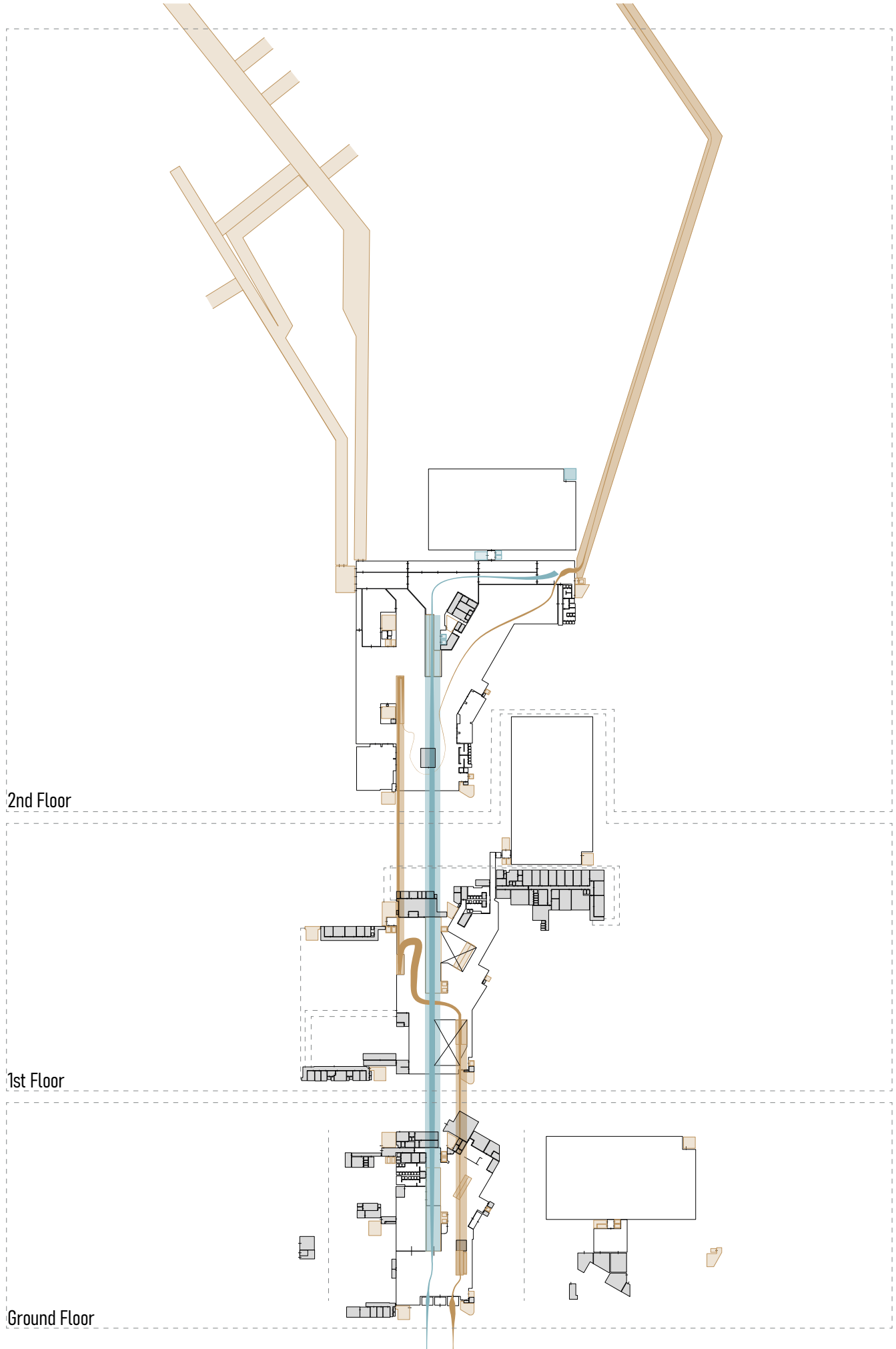
Disciplinary analysis

Next to the contextual analysis, which can focus on both architecture and everything else, is the disciplinary analysis. I am familiar with this type of research as it resonates with the principles of 'Grondslagen' in the Delft bachelor, in which students are ought to analyse the work of an architect that has preceded you in designing a building in a specific context. The project to be studied by the student, often referred to as a precedent, is the Ferry Terminal D in the harbour of Tallinn (Tallinna Vanasadama).

This analysis will be conducted through different methods. The most valuable asset to this investigation has been the interview, or rather open conversation, with the original architect of the Ferry terminal D Irina Raud. The three hour lasting conversation together with Irina and Bart at Irina's small office has revealed a lot about the visions behind the design(s) of the company but also about Irina herself. Besides verbal information about the project, Irina was able to transfer documentation about the project and its concepts. A 'plan analysis' is conducted using the written and verbal information obtained, but most importantly using the drawings of the project. Bart and I have also experienced what it feels like to use a ferry terminal to depart from and arrive in Tallinn, in this process, I was able to spend a considerable amount of time in the Ferry terminal D and was able to experience the use of the building.

The focus of the disciplinary analysis of the Ferry terminal is brought to the organization of the building in plan relating to movement. A separation has been made for the different users of the building, the staff (back-office), the departing users and arriving users. The architect Irina Raud and her team have put a lot of effort into making the experience of departing and arriving distinct and pleasant. The routing through the building for departures wraps around multiple times, people have to take turns around the building, and for most of the journey, the spaces are relatively narrow and shallow. When departing users finally arrive at the upper level however, they have a clear overview of all of the gates, the sitting areas and the surroundings of the building. This is the place where these users can finally sit and enjoy the space. It is however the question if one is really able to comfortably sit and enjoy waiting while sitting in a large open, noisy and crowded space.

Another conclusion that can be drawn is that all effort has been taken to comprise as much functions and amenities in one Terminal, the amount of users and the building itself have grown a lot over the last two decades. This has had its influence on the use of ferry docks bringing passengers to and taking passengers from the ferry's. These have been extended throughout all of the former industrial harbour. The same type of problem has been growing in terms of area used to queue for the ferry's with motorized vehicles.



A distorted sum of the Ferry terminal's plans, highlighting the experience of movement through the building and exaggerating what the building could look like if the same principles for the design of the ferry docks had been used to design the building. (own image)



A view from the Viking ferry line between Tallinn and Helsinki, looking towards the air docks of Ferry Terminal D with the skyline of Tallinn in the background (own image).

Further research

Before the field trip of two weeks to Tallinn, certain topics arose in conversations with peers and tutors and small interests started to root. One of the main underlying themes here, as mentioned before, is the understanding of a place through the process of encompassing the (architectural) history of said place. This is an analysis which has to be developed after P1 so I can better understand the hidden layers of the different area's of Tallinn since the aim is to open up different area's to each other.

For further research into the topics mentioned before relating to the research questions, different methods will be used. I am eager to make use of the limited resources available to me to gain information from primary sources, namely the other students and tutors who joined for the fieldtrip and have thus visited Tallinn.

Secondly, I suppose a large portion of the desired information for my research will be distilled from 'plan analysis' of other precedents related to my proposed design brief. These will, among others, include projects like the Oodi central library in Helsinki, the Centre Pompidou in Paris and several Chinese community centres.

The proposed design brief I presented at P1 included a modern take on a library in the abandoned Porto Franco concrete structure. Restoring orientation and connections between the city centre and the harbour area with a building housing a function that adds to the variety of public buildings in Tallinn. Essentially giving back to the city and its residents after a shameful piece of history with corruption.

Finally, during the process of developing our own 'language' to address the different travel methods, different elements stood out. Primarily, every lecture, book, website or other form of documentation has brought forward the importance of the history of the city. Different periods, and thus different political and urban ideologies, in the history have had their influence and brought forward different visions for the city and its development. When combining the historical layers of the city with experiencing distinct aspects of arrival, questions can be raised about how the city has dealt with colliding ideologies about the urban form of the city and the function of (different parts) of the city.

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