

P5 Reflection

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Introduction

The public building studio situated in Strasbourg began with an extensive research period in which each student focused upon a specific fascination that was related to the city. The research fascination for this project began with the water systems that were integrated within the urban fabric. This research angle also encompassed the relationship between the urban fabric and the water system, along with the city's approach on the topic of flood regions. This led to a project site, which situated itself within a flood prone area. The design looks at an elevated infrastructure that traverses along the edge of the flood region, while containing a series of different functions that interact with the surrounding fabric. It provides platform for interaction while also connecting the divided urban sprawls.

Research and design

The research primarily focused upon the water systems within the city, inside Strasbourg this meant the prominent canal structure that has shaped the city and changed throughout history. The primary investigation while focusing on the topic of water, it also looked at the different levels of interaction that occurred along the waterfront. The research investigation was conducted through a series of lenses, leading to three condensed images that conveyed this research. These notions were divided into: survey, systems and things. Each notion was approached from a different level of scale. Moving from a regional scale during the 'survey', too the level of the section during the 'things' lens. This provided a greater understanding of the origin of the water systems and how the city of Strasbourg has adapted throughout the course of history. From a more architectural standpoint it also provided a more in depth analysis of how interactions along the waterfront differs as one moves away form the city center.

The research continued during the second quarter as we dwelled on the topics of site, part and difficult whole. During this period the initial concept of a design manifested as we continued to further our research. The topic of flood regions became a focus point, as the city of Strasbourg continued to struggle with this phenomenon.

These findings led to the discovery of a specific site along the Ill River, a site that pertained flood risks with a wide variety of different urban structures. The surrounding landscape acted as a flood basin, a supposed buffer zone that protected the surrounding urban structures. While the risk of flooding is not a yearly occurrence, it does remain an issue within Strasbourg. The project looks at the boundary of the flood prone area; it attempts to provide a new platform where different types of interactions occur due to the diversity of landscapes. This all culminated into an elongated project that crosses along the edge of the flood zone, providing a raised infrastructure of approximately one and a half kilometers. The project crosses through a multitude of different scenarios, such as sports facilities, a raised railway system, a deserted island within the river and forest areas. This meant that while the project in a grander scheme works as a

raised infrastructure that connects the surrounding urban fabric. When we look upon the smaller section different types of interaction occur. It is these specific scenarios that I will have to elaborate upon while keeping the overall scheme in mind.

Studio topic and master track/programme

The project in relation to the studio public building explores the nature of a public building focusing upon the inherent nature of public and private zones. The project attempts to provide a raised infrastructure that moves through the natural landscape. However the raised pathways does not try to disassociate the pedestrians and cyclists from the activity that occurs below.

Instead the interaction between the two levels is an important aspect that keeps being explored at different point in the project. Looking at the nature of the public building at how different public scenes can interact with the raised platform. This is where the section of the project becomes a prominent feature as it temporarily looks at the project from a smaller scale. The scale of the project meant that during the design project the balance between looking at the grander scale of the project along with the small-scale sections remained important, as it had to become a cohesive design. The urban scale pertained a more prominent focus upon the public infrastructure, as it connects the area along with the existing infrastructure. While the specific focal points within the project pertained a more localized sense of connection, here the level of interaction with the infrastructure and what occurs below becomes important. During later stages of the project the focus shifted more towards the use of public and private spaces. While the raised infrastructure provided an open atmosphere above, the lower level that meanders through the landscape created a more sheltered region. Certain spaces below this route are strategically filled-in; the elongated shape of the public building allowed me to experiment with the use of open and closed spaces. Providing public spaces that are sheltered by the raised structure along with actual spaces that spill-out.

The project and the wider social context touching upon the transferability

The project touches upon the issue related to flooding within the site, as the elevated infrastructure crosses along and through the edge of the flood area. The research that led to choosing this specific site touched upon the flood prevention elements and how the city has adapted these within the existing water network. However while it has led to a certain level of control by providing flood retention basins and extensive lock systems it remains an issue. The project does not function as a physical wall that is meant to stop the flooding when it occurs.

Instead the raised infrastructure is being designed with the aspect of flooding being included in the design process. It looks at creating awareness in the area by situating itself along the edge of the flood area and providing a safe raised platform when a flood does occur. The project is meant to withstand a flooding scenario but does not try to stop the natural occurrence. This is also reflected in

the façade, as the structural elements in the design remain a prominent feature. Providing a public building that connects to the surrounding landscape through the public functions that are interweaved within the structure. But it also exudes a heavy structure that cuts through the landscape, with the repetitive columns and beams being prevalent throughout the structure.

While the project engraves itself within the site as it connects to the natural landscape and existing infrastructures. The concept of the design remains rather flexible. The raised infrastructure that in the current design traverses through marshlands, a river and existing infrastructures could also be applied in more densely populated areas. A prominent example of this would be the highline in New York City, the raised infrastructure moves through the dense urban fabric as it latches on the existing buildings.

Ethical issues and dilemmas

Throughout the extensive research and design period a number of obstacles were confronted. The initial research that focused upon the water network, while it provided an in depth analysis of the canal system from a historical standpoint it lacked a clear connection to the architecture. The research focused more upon the lock systems such as the Barrage Vauban. While the lock system typology did provide a sense of architecture, it limited the design opportunities during this point of the research. It was by expanding the notion of the water network and the interactions that occurred along the waterfront and flooding that led to a specific site and a design opportunity.

Another predicament that occurred during the design period was the scale of the project. While the scale of the project provided an interesting project, it also made it difficult to sometimes comprehend what the project does on a grander scale. It was by providing focal points and losing the idea that the entirety of the project had to be a building that it became clearer. The raised infrastructure did not have to be an entire building, however being an architecture student meant that I could not easily get this notion out of my mind. It was by trial and error that this conclusion was made over time.

Another aspect that provided new obstacles during the design process was the details within the section, specifically the railing and use of materials within the design. As the entirety of the building spans over a kilometer in length, the materiality becomes a prominent factor when we look at building cost to a certain degree. Hence the use of materials should be used in a smart manner in order to reduce the overall building cost. The railing along the pathway is a continuous element that stretches itself throughout the design. Hence it is important that these features provide a certain visual appeal to the user, as people move throughout the design.

Conclusion

To summarize throughout the course of researching and designing this project the scale of the project as it moves through a series of different scenarios remains a notion that could be extensively explored. However the specific focal points where the interaction occurs provide something to hold on to. The notion of it being a flood region is also something that needs to be prominent throughout the design, as it makes the design specific to the site. The final part of the graduation period will focus upon sharpening these notions and detailing these focal points more extensively.