

Position of the project

The Subtle Bank is a social project anchored in the community of Brussels. The National Bank of Belgium's headquarters in the city of Brussels consists of an entire city block in the North of the capital. The bank is highly secured and the public is restricted to the main banking hall. In the context of the building's renovation, it was important for me to rethink the Bank's interactions with the public and the communities it is situated in. This project's intention is to open this national monument to the city and its people.

My research for the public plinth during the first semester was about poverty and homelessness in Brussels. I wanted to develop the subject further in the reinvention of the National Bank of Belgium. How can a National Bank work with, and for the nation as well as the community it sits in? Is there a way to connect financial institutions and its missions with the community? The project of the Subtle Bank revolves around carving spaces for the public and community to foster interactions on a social and economical level with this generally distant institution.

The new bank includes emergency housing, community and educational spaces, as well as social investments and micro-companies offices in addition to the National Bank of Belgium's offices on the upper floors. All of these facets of the projects complete each other on a social and economical level.

Relationship Between the graduation project, the studio and master track.

Interiors Buildings Cities' studio, as the name implies, focuses on the three different scales of architecture and the interactions between them. Working from the wider context in the city to the city block and the very details of the construction as well as connecting these scales helps appreciate all of the scales and the focus needed to carry a project of this extent.

The Subtle Bank's project was constructed around the bank's potential social and economical importance in its community. It was also important for me that the project of the Bank I designed was environmentally conscious. Carefully crafted within the existing bank, the project works with what is already there, carving its path and reusing the materials demolished for the new elements.

Research methods.

The initial concept of the project was based on my research for the Public Plinth, which was a social enterprise. How to combine finance and the community? As the project evolved, the architectural decisions taken were influenced by the social threat that was previously determined. During the design phase of the project, some aspects of the design required deeper research. For instance, the reuse of materials in multiple ways, the furniture, the courtyard design and composition. The research carried out for these features of the project informed the rest of the design as they had repercussions wider than the specific subject researched. My research developed alongside the evolution of the design.

Relationship between the graduation project and the wider social, professional and scientific framework.

Architecture is a social profession. Every project, building or intervention architects work on is designed for, with and by people. In a project of this importance- a National Bank trying to redefine itself- it is important to include people as the main focus. Some of these include the community, the clients, but also the workers of the bank who will frequent the building and its facilities every day. It is also vital in this day and age to be conscious of the impact a building has on its context, but also on the wider environment and its resources. How can the reuse of material be integrated to make beautiful but nonetheless useful spaces seamlessly? My goal for this project and my future in the architectural field is to aim to achieve a balance between the need for new projects and their impact, in order to make the most of what we have to offer the community.