P4 Reflection

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Theme: Nordbahntrasse. Hybrid open space in Wuppertal.

First mentor: René van der Velde
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The graduation project is part of Flowscapes Graduation Lab (MSc 3+4 Landscape architecture 2014-15) Infrastructure as Landscape; Landscape as Infrastructure.

“The studio explores infrastructure as a type of landscape and landscape as a type of infrastructure (cf. Strang, 1996). The hybridization of the two concepts seeks to redefine infrastructure beyond its strictly utilitarian definition, while allowing landscape design to gain operative force in territorial transformation processes.”

The relationship between the theme of the graduation lab and the subject/case study chosen by the student within this framework (location/object).

The chosen location is Wuppertal - a city in Ruhr region in Germany. It is positioned in the valley of river Wupper that further flows into Rhine. It coincides with the possible locations within the framework of Flowscapes Graduation lab: Rhine-Danube watershed. The choice of this particular city derives from my own long time fascination with the innovative Pina Bausch’s dance theatre (housed in Wuppertal), my previous visit to the city and interest in post-industrial context and hilly landscape. The project particularly focuses on the site of a disused railway that crosses the whole city. This topic is directly related to the transportation infrastructures - one of the subthemes of the lab.

The relationship between the methodical line of approach of the graduation lab and the method chosen by the student in this framework.

The graduation project focuses on connecting and relating infrastructure within its context. The notion of Immanent landscape is used as a method, an intermediary tool that would help this process. Immanent landscape offers “grounding” the projects to the site and genius loci, leading to site specific and context related solutions. Looking at immanent landscape reveals the logic behind the objects and processes. This involves not only objective but also empiric data that is characteristic to a certain location. This method relates to hybrid landscape/infrastructure approach of the graduation lab where the focus is on integration of flows and scape in design.

The relationship between research and design.

The research of the project focused on two aspects - the old railway line Nordbahnstrasse and the landscape and urban context. Both of them are closely intertwined when it comes to the position of the railway in the landscape. Here topography and geology play a crucial role. Railway had a major influence in the development of Wuppertal in terms of growth and spatial configuration. It became disused with the decline of industry and later by the initiative of local inhabitants it was turned into a bike path. Besides the mutual interferences of the line and context, there are some particular aspects that look different from Nordbahnstrasse and urban context/landscape perspective. Research revealed culverted creeks that run downhill into river Wupper. These together with sealed ground are causes for occasional flood in the city. Part of the research focused on movement along...
the bike path/old railway, movement patterns of users, perception and experience of context and specifics of the spatiality of the railway. The outcome directly determined focus of design interventions - Nordbahntrasse and creek crossings and lateral connections within the existing pedestrian path and stair network. Also the nature and characteristics are related to the research findings.

The relationship between the project and the wider social context.
In the last years the success of The Highline in New York has created a snowball effect. That has caused more and more cities and communities to take a closer look at their own disused railways in hope of developing an elevated linear park. Designs of these projects are focusing on the railways as linear entities determined by legal boundaries. Some of the projects even mimic the design details and concepts of The Highline NY. In my project I focused on the lateral sections and elements as they characterize the underlying landscape and the logic of the context. This approach brings presence and experience of the context to the Nordbahntrasse and is a positive aspect in the linear post-industrial park typology. However a downside is related to the legal constraints - ownerships that might make design and construction process more complicated.

I. Nijhuis S., Jauslin D., Graduation Lab Landscape architecture semesterguide, 2014, p. 12