The studio of materialization poses a distinct design brief with a specific location and program. The graduation project within this studio is about designing the new headquarters for the United Nations Environmental Council in New York. The site for this project is located at the eastern border of the Manhattan peninsula and adjacent to the waterfront. The new building will be erected next to the existing UN buildings which have been designed by no less figure than Le Corbusier and Oscar Niemeyer among others. The design experience will take place at different levels and scales. Not only the building and its site are considered, but also the wide urban and social context matters for the completeness of the project.

The aspirations of this graduation studio are to accomplish a thorough knowledge about the site and its surroundings and, based on this previous analysis, to design architecture which responds best to the existing context. The design should be fully integrated and supportive of the surrounding conditions and help improve the living environment. Not only should the design communicate with its surroundings, but it also should convince through a smart use of materials and studied detailing. A main goal certainly is to make a preliminary architectural idea evolve into an integrated architectural design by choosing the right design input at the right moment of the design process.

Many methods and aspects have been considered along the working process. The design process went along from working in a very small scale, which considers a wide urban and social context, to zooming in until very large scales and sometimes real size studies. The master plan we developed as a group includes a proposal for the whole east coast of Manhattan which includes our site as a part of it. The site itself and the first ideas of the design have been developed through rough sketches and mass models. The concept at the root of the project has its origins from the organization of the various functions in different spaces. The UN building requires a complex program where public and non-public spaces interfere and constitute security issues. Many types of users require a conceived circulation system through the building which is distinct and effective. This led to my choice of splitting up the building into three different parts which host the entrance area, the work spaces and public functions. The immediate urban context shapes the building to fit into the rigid urban grid of Manhattan and provide pleasant perspectives and views from different angles. The vast opening in
the volume functions as a frame to picture the landscape beyond the opening and thus connecting
the refurbished shoreline along the East River and the city.
The first stages of mass studies have been carried out by the means of physical models. This allowed
me to find the right proportions and positions of the different volumes so that the whole project can
act and be perceived as one unity. The different parts communicating well with each other, the
design can be perceived as a harmonious entity. Simultaneously, photographs of these models in a
large site model and various sketches from different point of views helped me to situate the project
in the context and find the right relations with the surrounding setting. Further on the physical
models helped me understanding the building step by step from scales of 1/1000 until 1/20. The
characteristic load-bearing structure of the office building has been explored in different ways as
well as the facade and materiality of the box. I found it difficult to find the right facade type, colour
and materiality of the box to communicate well with the other parts. Therefore several colour and
texture tests were carried out to explore the effects of the facade. The end result of this experiment
was very satisfying given the fact that it led to a big progress in the design and a profound decision
about the choice of materiality. Accompanying the development of the design by physical models,
the technical study also contributes to major design decisions. The load-bearing structure evolved
together with the organization and needs of the interior spaces and the aesthetic appearance of the
building. The office building is strongly characterized by the exposed steel structure and can
compete easily with the impressive surrounding buildings of Manhattan. This construction method
being very extroverted, the opposite is happening in the box. The very large spaces of this part,
namely various auditoria and a council chamber, require a floor system with a high span capacity.
The concrete waffle slab floor possesses great spanning possibilities as well as an appealing shape
for interior space qualities. The sturdy columns supporting the concrete floors have a pronounced
presence and influence the atmosphere of the spaces. Furthermore, the detailing process of the
building addresses many parts of the design both interior and exterior. Through these materiality
and technical studies the final design presents many qualities on all scales.