Reflection

P4/P5

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The main question that I will try to answer in this reflection, is whether my approach worked out well or not - and what I learned from the project.

Logically, I started every phase of the project from a perspective that was based on other projects that I did before. It became clear quite quickly, that this project asks a lot of critical thinking about many themes that are not usually dealt with in previous projects. For me personally, this made the whole framework of the design studio a bit unclear at times and the consults went in directions that I did not always expect. However, I stress the importance of having a critical stance towards any design process. And a critical stance forces one to pay a lot of attention to the story behind a project. This is exactly where I learned the most. I will try to explain this in the following paragraphs.

The masterplan phase, which I did together with Maarten, started from an old top-down perception. Although we did understand the concept of bottom-up, I seemed difficult to gain a framework to make appropriate decisions. We came to the conclusion that we had to do a lot of research before we felt confident enough to make an actual masterplan. We learned to look for tendencies in for instance demographics, to be able to make choices that might fit the location of the research [image 1]. For me that was a very interesting search, as it gave further decisions a much deeper meaning. This is where I actually started to like the studio's bottom-up approach; it forces students to search for meaning within an complex context. The difficult question was how to use demographic findings for decisions on a masterplan level. That requires a certain level of common sense, which is not so easy to achieve. A lot of questions needed to be discussed thoroughly, such as: Is it a good idea to mix communities? What does economic data really tell about welfare? What are realistic chances for the future? Why does some data overlap? This made the process of the masterplan quite exiting. I can't say that we found a perfect or waterproof answer to all our questions. These answers might not even exist. However, the questions helped to find arguments for the masterplan, which is quite valuable as well.

The building part of the project was, just like the masterplan phase, a very instructive phase. As I used to love to work on architecture in a sculptural way, I previously conditioned myself to perform iterations with shapes and work three-dimensionally a lot. From this way of working, the 'reason' behind a design might follow from the study itself, rather than from other academic disciplines such as demography, economy, sociology and so on. And it is exactly this multidisciplinarity that seems to distinct complex projects; working bottom-up asks for a lot of understanding and...
academic research. So I had to change my methods. The result is, that just like in the masterplan phase - the project phase needed some more steps than I expected. My attention shifted towards a complex projects methodology, which slowed down my intuition in designing. I learned new things, instead of repeating myself.

I started to be interested in the decay of the existing building that I choose to work with. This brought me to the idea of enhancing decay and making the building a park partially, which was - from a masterplan point of view - a welcome argument to create a ‘public node’. Many references that showed decay of buildings inspired me a lot, but kept me away from making many design choices [image 2]. I think this is the main reason that the building technology part stayed a bit behind at the beginning. Firstly it was important to find out what I would design anyway. The references didn’t provide many greening strategies, as they seemed to be overgrown spontaneously by nature. So I tried to find out to what extent I wanted to allow resignation by nature in the building I worked with. The intention was to make a project based on zoning. Each zone was defined with help of a diagram that showed how maintained or how spontaneous the wilderness would be [image 3]. This idea was the basis for the project during months.

I took some time before I understood that I needed to design sources of greenery to be able to develop the design further and better. This was actually after my first p4. This meant that the project became more distant from some references from the beginning. Nevertheless, the purpose of the building never changed. During the process, I have learned that when one has a conceptual idea without any conception about how to design it, the question about ‘how it develops’ might bring solutions. I knew what I wanted from the beginning, but I did not yet understand how it would get there. I tried to answer this question by making phasing diagrams [image 4], while I created a catalog for greening strategies [image 5]. This helped me to design the building from its details. It gave a lot more meaning to the whole project, as it finally became materialized and spatially more refined. It can be stated that this methodology worked out pretty well, as it also enabled me to develop the building in a more technical way.

In the end, the transition from demographics to a masterplan and a project went quite well. In fact, it is wasn’t a very linear project. It was not easy either. P2 was presented with a big amount of demographic and spatial data. Later in the process it became more clear which of the information was more relevant for the project, so I deleted a lot from the storyline. This helped me to make the narrative of the project sharper over time. What I definitely have learned from it, is that exactly this process of performing iterations on the storyline and the design can make a project more intellectually challenging.

Image 3 (top): Resignation diagrams
Image 4 (bottom left): Green phasing diagrams
Image 5 (bottom right): Greening strategies in diagrams
Image sources:


