Confluent spaces for the public
A new connection with the waterfront for Mannheim

Reflection AR3LA010 - Flowscapes
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Reflection

Relationship between ‘Flowscapes’ and the project

“The studio explores infrastructure as a type of landscape and landscape as a type of infrastructure” (Nijhuis and Jauslin, 2014). According to the introduction of the graduation lab ‘Flowscapes’, landscape infrastructures facilitate aesthetic, functional, social and ecological relationships between natural and human systems with movement and flows at its core, hence the name Flowscapes. The project fits in the spatial framework of the Rhine-Danube corridor because of its location along and in-between the rivers Neckar and Rhine.

Looking at the aerial view of Mannheim, one can immediately see the disconnection between the interesting grid city center and the three waterfronts. Big infrastructural elements and zones with industrial buildings block the water from the city. This, together with the fact of Mannheim being a car friendly city, forms an interesting case for the ‘Flowscapes’ graduation lab.

“The studio is concerned with the design of new topographies by integrating new programs into the ‘genius of place’ and time, and with regard to landscape processes, the continuation of spatial quality and cultural identity of the landscape. It does this through the development of landscape architectural concepts, methods and techniques for design research and research-by-design. Our landscape architectonic design explorations require a multi-layered understanding of landscape: its spatial structure or visual landscape, history, context, or relational system and involve the underlying the ecological, economic and social processes.” (Nijhuis and Jauslin, 2014)

This project puts forward the idea of movements and flows. It does not really focus upon the flows of nature, but rather on the flows of people and traffic, especially bicycle traffic. A new infrastructure is created that will change the flows, relationship to the surrounding landscape, and the daily life of the inhabitants of Mannheim. With the bicycle as an age-old tool, a new way of experiencing the land- and cityscape of Mannheim was formed.
From research to design

For me it was important that my plan formed a turning point for the city, and will lead to a new optimism. At the moment, Mannheim is known as one of the most ugly cities in Germany. That the city has come to this point is in interesting thing. Doing research, I found out that the city was once founded as the ideal baroque city with a radial fort attached to it. Later, it developed rapidly into an industrial harbor city, and Mannheim was up for a bright future. During WW2 75 percent of the city got destroyed. Although it was of course devastating to the city, in retrospective, it seemed that this was a good moment to give the city a new boost for the coming decades. New plans were made with the modernist ideals, the city had to become cleaner, better and healthier, with the car friendly city as an import idea. But in today’s world, these beliefs are all outdated, and Mannheim needs another boost for the future, another ideal, and another optimism. My beliefs, and the beliefs of some city planners, lie with the bicycle as the tool to do this. This led to the fact that a part of my research also meant looking at other cities like Portland, Copenhagen and London, which are trying or succeeded changing the infrastructure of the city. This also meant for the cities, that there is a change in daily life, a change in the living qualities of the city, and a change of the future. Next to this, a part of my research consisted of finding out what makes good bikeways, this was partly done in the AR3LA020 course ‘Research methodology in landscape architecture’.

![Figure 3. Reconstruction plan (Source: Eine neue Stadt muß her!)](image3)

![Figure 4. Eastbank Esplanade, Portland (Source: Flickr)](image4)
Methodical line of approach

During the process, a total of five presentations have to be given. The first presentation, the P1, consists of presenting the first few findings of the chosen location and analysis. With the P2, a good analysis and the research question were presented. Also the first design ideas were already shown. The third presentation was meant to present a design. This is the period that I was still trying to figure out what direction fitted the location and project, and this took me a long time. This is also the reason I did not present a P4 according to the regular schedule. Later, thanks to the help of my mentors, the puzzle pieces started to fall together.

I will now reflect on some personal aspects of the process.

Fitting in
Personally, I always found it important that the designs I make fit perfectly in the existing context. This has always led to decent plans, but not outstanding ones. For me the motto almost always seemed to be ‘doe maar normaal, dan doe je al gek genoeg’ (act normal, then you are already acting crazy enough). And I also started designing in Mannheim this way, and I did this for a long time. Daniel and Els were constantly trying to pull me out of this way of thinking, and eventually it worked. I found out that sometimes designs do not have to be modest to fit in. A city like Mannheim, with the plans and ambitions they have, needs a big plan. And a big plan could still perfectly fit in. I think this is one of the most important things that I have learned during the process.

Variants
Another important aspect is making variants, and trying other things than that you already have in your head. By sometimes hearing “No, this is not good” you realize that what is in your head is almost always not the solution. During the first part of the process (pre P3), I did not really do this, which led to a modest, but not amazing idea. By expanding my horizon, I started to realize places where getting better after testing different ideas.

Working through the scales
This is still something I have real difficulties with. The small detailed scale is hard for me. This is partly because of my previous education (landscape architecture at the
Wageningen University), but also perhaps because a lack of skills. I try to focus on the whole, not on a single spot. This of course has advantages, but more disadvantages.

**A bright future**

In the end I think the project manages to create a change in a way of thinking in Mannheim. But Mannheim is not the only city where the problems of the postwar car friendly city play a big role. Cities like Rotterdam, Dusseldorf and Duisburg are struggling with the same problems. In today’s world, these cities are outdated and need change. Good examples are the recently unveiled plans for the Coolsingel in Rotterdam. Here, cyclists are given more space and the car traffic is being slowed down. An other great example is Portland. Portland forms a sort of oasis for cyclists in the car-dominated culture of the US.

I really believe in a future where bicycle networks form the vital veins of the infrastructure of the city. Landscape architects could play a big role in this, combining not only infrastructure, but also history, experience, landscape, etc. All over the Internet, new plans are popping up for new bicycle infrastructures. Me, I just hope that I can play a role in this new future.