

Andrius Kalinauskas 4334930  
**Graduation project Reflection**

Delft University of Technology  
Methods and Analysis: Positions in practice Msc4  
2020-05-22

From the very beginning of my final graduation year it was obvious that it won't be an easy task, since studio didn't have any specific brief regarding site, program or problem. The only clear thing was the city, although even that was not mandatory. I found this freedom challenging, but very rewarding at the same time. Studio brief was very beneficial on the first steps of the research, not by defining specific topics, but type of analysis that should be executed, which led to a very unusual selection of topics by the whole group.

My part of the research was not an exception, I started with contextual analysis of family structures, with expectation that it will provide me with clearer view of what are the fundamental values of the country. It later led me to investigate domestic living structures, from traditional Macedonian housing, to socialist apartment blocks built after the earthquake. This was very beneficial as it provided some basic criteria which allowed to discover different types of neighborhoods and read the urban tissue of Skopje. At that point research moved from domestic structures to flows and obstacles in these types of different neighborhoods. Using river as metaphor to analyze movement of the people in different conditions, led to the study of riverbed - which is built environment of the city. Using an unconventional heuristic technique such as time-lapse during two week long Skopje visit, was an interesting experience, although it didn't provide any significant insights, and the topic of the research focused on the roughness of the facades, and ornamentation, which is quite an issue with newly built neo classical architecture in Skopje.

During the site visit we got a chance to work with local architecture students in three-day workshop, during which I worked on the site of Cultural center. I didn't have an eureka moment with the site, rather my fascination with it grew bit by bit, so I decided to focus my research of roughness within that site. This gradual transfer from wondering and jumping in between different parts of the city to one specific site in my opinion was very fruitful, as I could concentrate my focus and analyze it more thoughtfully. Site of cultural center is packed with different architecture styles and buildings built in different time periods with different concepts of Cultural center in mind. In my opinion it reflects image of Skopje not only on architectural terms, but on many different levels such as layers of the city and relationship between different social groups.

My first attempts to intervene in site were very bold. I was trying to overwhelm existing architecture and "silence" it or criticize it by introducing new object that would be "louder" or judgmental, and immediately it was clear that this is not the way to go, so I left it behind. But as an exercise it was very helpful, as I realized that my analysis of roughness was not enough in order to introduce new intervention in that specific site. This led to analysis of site development over last fifty years, which allowed me to see the changes and decisions that took place and drove the site to current situation of becoming a very sensitive part of the city. Another major point to my investigation was the book of Peter Brook "The Empty Space" where he defines four main types of theatre: Deadly, Rough, Holly and Immediate, last being the very focus of his plays, where stage could be as simple as

carpet. Such a minimal setup of the play requires actor and spectator to pay full attention, as the message is being transmitted throughout very tiny and precise movements and expressions. And although my attempt to implement this theory into MOB site was not successful it did impact my final design significantly.

Designing based on the effect and not function was quite new to me. As all my previous education had a specific brief, with program or problem statement. This approach came as a challenge once I stopped with exercises of volumes and had to make actual decisions of my project. I received a lot of criticism on my design during my P3 presentation, which was very helpful, although it took me almost three weeks to rearrange my thoughts. During these weeks I was designing in order to design, and despite all the work that went into that, the project was not moving forward. So, I took a few steps back and evaluated decisions and terminology that I made before I started struggling. Once I managed to define not only “what” I’m doing, but also “why” I could look for reference projects to understand “how” to do it. Analysis of traditional French theatre led me to a very specific definition of foyer, which was my initial idea. As a result of research, for my graduation project I chose to accept the project for what the site has to offer, rather than impose for a rigid preconception. Implementing subtle project, that is executed with focus to the details, would benefit the existing architecture, without disrupting it.

Although the research had a lot of trial and error and might seem a bit chaotic, I think it all was necessary and parts of it came together as one in my graduation project.

Another major challenge was overcoming the preconceptions of Skopje 2014 project and praise of brutalist architecture. As media and local academic community tend to judge it (Skopje 2014) and dismiss it as poor quality. And I’m not by any means stating that they are wrong, there are a lot of different aspects that are discussed including corruption, money laundering and etc. but it is very tempting to go with this point of view. I think this temptation is widespread in architecture in general, painting things black and white, while usually the truth lies somewhere in between. I think that being aware of preconceptions, and making small and noble gestures, instead of trying to stand out is a quality that I want to follow as an architect.

Main mentor: Dr. Jorge Mejía Hernández  
Mentors: Dr.ir. Klaske Havik, Pierre Jennen