

Reflection

Details

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<i>Project title</i>	Shaping the Don River Valley
<i>Graduation lab</i>	Flowscapes
<i>Study</i>	Landscape Architecture

Description

In reflection the student uses a short substantiated explanation to account for the preliminary results of the research and design in the graduation phase (product, process, planning). The aim of the reflection is to look back and see if your approach worked, to understand the “how and why”, and subsequently to learn from this. The choice of method (how) and argumentation (why) which preceded the research was a part of your study plan – the reflection must contain an answer to the question of how and why the approach did or did not work, and to what extent. Finally the student has to look ahead and describes how the second part of the graduation period will be filled in. Depending on the research and design, reflection on a number of the following aspects should be included (you may choose in which order). The reflection should be in the form of a text, with diagrams and sketches for purposes of illustration and clarification.

Reflection

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

The theme of the graduation lab 'Flowscapes' demands for a project involving a certain degree of complexity which is to be achieved through dealing with different flows which are apparent in the landscape. These flows are also referred to in the graduation description as 'infrastructures', A rough categorization is made into three flow themes, being transportation-, green- and water infrastructures. Within the design project 'Shaping the Don River Valley', these flows play a crucial role.

The first steps taken to ensure the final product has the desired complexity, are implemented at the very beginning, when constructing the methodology 'Deduction and recombination'. This methodology is focused around the question 'how to deal with the landscape being a holistic entity?'. This holistic entity which is spoken of, is regarded to consist of a collection of interacting thematic layers, in which above mentioned flows form unities.

So one could say the very focus of the methodology is flows. Observations made within the application of the methodology were translated into the project definition in which the Don River plays a crucial role. The Don River is the main representative of the water infrastructure within the city of Toronto. This is supported by its importance through history in the creation and transformation of the landscape, while also during recent times where it proved its relevance during the growth of the city.

Nowadays the river does not provide a wide variety of services anymore. Instead, it shows to be a great threat to other flows, for example the transportation infrastructure. Though the reach of the flowscape, the area of influence offers clues for new spatial developments which again benefit areas along the stream. These clues are addressed by implementing a design strategy which is based on the idea of acupuncture. This strategy resolves around the idea that when designing a beneficial element along a flow, the effect of this element might be shared among other areas along this same flow. What this means for the project is that when strategically picking an area along the Don River for a design, this design has the potential to benefit areas outside of the project area. While the Don River might be the most obvious flow, other flows like transportation infrastructure within and along the valley share this same potential. This way a small scale project can guide the transformation of large scale developments through the natural holistic attitude of the landscape.

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

Continuing, one could claim that any landscape has holistic properties, and therefore any landscape would be legit as a design area. And while this is true to a certain extent, for all landscapes do indeed interact with each other, the complexity of landscapes can differ greatly, depending on the degree of overlap between layers. A great overlap leads to an increased amount of interactions, which can be defined as a higher complexity.

Toronto has a population count of over 2.6 million people. A city with this property demands a lot from the landscape. Though the flows that are within the city tend to go together quite well, for they are

mostly layers which cooperate. It gets interesting when urban layers which appear along human activity, meet natural layers which often appear in the absence of human activity, for these layers have different agendas. Differences often lead to friction, as it does in Toronto. Examples of such layers in Toronto are the hydrologic layer in which the Don River plays an important role, and the infrastructure layer. Or, when using terminology of the graduation lab, you could say that different flows clash. As mentioned, those places often lead to friction points, though not always. Opportunities rise when those layer start interacting in a way where both layers can benefit from each other, to form a mutualistic interaction. Shaping the Don River Valley creates such opportunities in an area where layers clash.

So one could say that Shaping the Don River Valley is about the bridging flows. On one hand the urban flows and on the other hand the natural flows. In neighborhoods such as Thorncliffe Park the community will benefit from an increase of water bodies suitable for recreation and an overall increase of green living space, while the nature simultaneously benefits from an increase in habitat size, diversity and increased interest. The same goes for the valley where proposed projects create a valuable park structure for the inhabitants of Toronto, while these same projects aim towards a lasting sustainable interaction with nature where the creation and protection of nature values takes an important place. This way the city of Toronto works towards a resilient future.

The relationship between research and design

The research follows from the stated research question, being: *What is an effective strategy to reconnect the City of Toronto to its landscapes at the metropolitan, district and local scale?* This question will be taken apart into three different segments to show how the design is a direct result from the research, summarized by the research question.

The first segments being 'What is an effective strategy..'. This mentioning of a strategy shows the aim of the design. Though the design is for a substantial part dealing with Thorncliffe Park and its immediate surroundings, the aim of the design is not just to create a design for this neighborhood. The area functions as an example through which many similar functioning neighborhoods are represented. The design implementations can therefore be considered to be design tools, rather than isolated implementations. Within the design these tools are represented in the different thematic solutions which build up the complete design.

Secondly the question talks about '*.. reconnect the City of Toronto to its landscapes..*'. This matter of reconnecting is not merely considering a physical reconnection. Although a physical connection does in fact contribute to solving the matter of limited accessibility, it is also about creating a renewed attitude towards the landscapes within the City of Toronto. In case of the Don River Valley landscape this translates in transforming the long existed attitude of regarding the valley as an open sewer into an attitude which takes responsibility for the values the valley inherits. The design therefore not only guides the citizens from surrounding neighborhoods into the depths of the valley through an extended infrastructure, but also creates positive interactions between the rich natural layer of the valley and the citizens of the City of Toronto both within the valley as within the neighborhoods, aiming to create a lasting relationship. A great part of the interventions therefore show an educational facet in their design. This is not only done through obvious means of educational programs that take place within the design

area, but often through the spatial exhibition of processes which are essential in the dynamics of the valley.

The last part of the research question mentions '*..the metropolitan, district and local scale..*'. Within the holistic landscape one has to recognize the fact that all design implementations create a change through several scales. Within the problem statement it is already stated that challenges which are faced concerning the Don River Valley require a vision on a metropolitan scale. After all, earlier small scale interventions addressing the challenges proved to only shift the challenge to a stage further down the process flow. On the other hand one has to realize that the local attitude of challenges which are faced within the neighborhoods ask for solutions which have a similar local scale. Even when their cause shows a metropolitan scale concern. In a similar way the valley provides challenges which outgrow the local attitude of the neighborhoods, for they cover several neighborhoods at once. The district scale can be regarded as the scale bridging the metropolitan with the local scale.

The relationship between the project and the wider social context

Shaping the Don River Valley is a project which concentrates on a specific neighborhood, Thorncliffe Park, in the city of Toronto. Although the defined area can be considered to be a small area within the vastness of the urban tissue of Toronto, interventions are a direct result from observations on a city-wide scale. Among the addressed subjects some main topics are the public transport infrastructure of Toronto, socially isolated areas within the city of Toronto and dynamics concerning the Don River itself. When designing this awareness of multiscale relevance is constantly present. This multiscale relation of project area and the city of Toronto shows again the holistic attitude of the landscape, which is also addressed within the used methodology and the research question.

While for example the public transport infrastructure within the City of Toronto covers a predominantly metropolitan scale, the Don River itself can easily be linked to a regional scale in which the full spectrum of areas within the hydrological cycle of the river are related and therefore affected by the design. This means that when the design deals with local interventions, effects on the bigger scale are constantly taken into consideration. This works both though, where small scale interventions answer the demand of larger scale challenges, but simultaneously demand a vision to be addressed on a large scale.

This multiscale approach is lacking in the current vision on the city of Toronto, specifically for the Don River area. Many challenges addressed by the design can be directly related to this absence of a bigger vision. Solutions to challenges are commonly treated on a local scale, without taking note of the holistic attitude of the landscape which often leads to a mere shift of the challenge towards a place outside of the regarded scale. Not to be confused with a solution that serves the large scale, but is implemented on a local scale.