

Graduation Plan

Master of Science Architecture, Urbanism & Building Sciences



Graduation Plan: All tracks

Personal information	
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Studio		
Name / Theme	Complex Projects MSc 3&4 Graduation Studio: Beirut	
Main mentor	Olindo Caso	Architecture / Architectural research
Second mentor	Hubert van der Meel	Building technology
Third mentor	Marija Mateljan	Architecture / Architectural design
Argumentation of choice of the studio	<p>Nowadays, the architect operates within many different scales and cultural contexts. Consequently, he needs to see the world through many lenses: as artist, organiser, politician, economist, philosopher, strategist, humanitarian, planner, and sometimes visionary. The complexity of these parameters converges into a definition of design that Complex Projects targets at each scale of the architectural thinking: region, city, building, and details. A relevant reason is how deliverables are not only used as final presentation material, but also as tool to develop, explore, and test the design. Moreover, an urban area development in Beirut is the perfect environment to apply this mindset.</p>	

Graduation project	
Title of the graduation project	The Grand Theatre Quarter
Goal	
Location	Beirut City Centre, Beirut (Lebanon)
The posed problem,	<p>In the wake of the blast on August 4, 2020, concerns have been growing about how to safeguard what remains of Beirut's architectural heritage. 85% of ancient buildings have already been lost in the three decades since the Civil War ended, as remiss state protection allowed developers to tear them down and replace them with huge skyscrapers. Now, there is a fear that structural damage done by the explosion may be used as an excuse to demolish the few that were lucky enough to have survived both the Civil War and the subsequent real-estate frenzy. Moreover, the destruction of a city is not just a physical question: the Civil War and the blast shattered the heart of Lebanese ideology and culture, undermining the very reasons for which the nation lived. The recent riots show how people are willing to re-inhabit public heritage buildings like the former Grand Theatre. These buildings represent the possibilities of what the city can still be. They give it hope and remind of a thriving Beirut. Connected to these spontaneous manifestations there is the wider popular need to gain back a political and cultural centrality: the cul-</p>

	tural rebirth of Beirut must start from its city core.
research questions,	Central Beirut is the expression of the current status quo in Lebanon. However, it is not possible to say that it expresses the cultural presence of the inhabitants as well, as they do not set foot here. How an architectural development centred around the Grand Theatre can perform a role in re-establishing a cultural presence in Central Beirut? What is the history and appearance of this object and its surroundings? What restoration theory to implement and what form to give to the relationship between the Old and New? It must be considered as well that the new theatre will be part of both the Lebanese and global theatrical scene. What are the present cultural issues, the mainstream, the emerging ideas, and how could this theatre become home to such a cultural network? The demands and production of visual culture have been rapidly increasing: the personal computing revolution made professional skills cheap and accessible. Culture 3.0 is characterised by the explosion of the pool of producers, so that it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish between cultural creators and users. People interact on the basis of non market-mediated exchanges; concerning theatre, the spotlight has shifted from the theatre itself to the public space.
and design assignment in which these result.	We understood that Beirut's collective memory is embedded in the historical artifacts of its very city centre. However, this must return to being inhabited. It is not only about recovering the heritage, it is also a narrative of the cultural presence in Beirut City Centre, of what contemporary theatrical space could do for this tortured city and its citizens. The choice of the Grand Theatre as an assignment is also a way to engage in this challenge, in relationship with the reconstruction of the city and its parts. As a first step, the design hypothesis requires a decision on the restoration policy of the existing Grand Theatre. It is a representative building of Beirut and Lebanon evolving over the last one-hundred years, but to be considered as a historical palace it must be inhabited again. However, this restoration is not sufficient to give it greater visibility if not accompanied by interventions aimed at making it the appropriate stage for the theatrical and cultural movement of the city and the country. To become institution, the Grand Theatre needs a substantial expansion that includes spaces to host a possibly growing number of specialists in this field as well as ordinary citizens.

Process
Method description
The research contemplates the analysis of multiple layers. At first, there is an investigation of the heritage

layer in Beirut. This layer goes hand in hand with the cultural one. The analysis of Lebanese culture allows certain features to emerge. There is an abundance of performances based on the translation of foreign texts, making the local scene very international; another positive impact is the large possibility of experimentation allowed by the absence of a sort of overall system. The analysis of the contemporary and global theatrical architecture layer deals with all these tendencies. The benchmarking of significant precedents is the main source of knowledge for what concerns the building in itself. Similar projects could provide inspiration or could give useful suggestions to the speculation needed in a design process. During the exercise, it will be possible to invent relying on design argumentations taken from facts and existing knowledge. These expected results are information spendable in the proper design phase: programme benchmarking and function definition, space organisations and material visualisation. At this point, we compare a catalogue of theatrical spaces with the specific situation of the Lebanese cultural scene, and to this, we apply the modern global trends of theatre design.

Literature and general practical preference

Dealing with buildings such as the Grand Theatre is not just something poetic, emotional, or nostalgic. They have a purely spatial and urban potential. After documenting the history and layer of the Grand Theatre, one can move on to sources that help designing in a complex context as this one.

- Abou Assi, E. (2010). 'Collective memory and management of the past: the entrepreneurs of Civil War memory in post-war Lebanon'. *International Social Science Journal*, Vol. 61 (202), pp. 399-409. Collective memory refers to the presence of the past in current societies: its globalisation has led to the active spread of recurrent post-conflict procedures.

- Chettiparamb, A.; Mady, C. (2017). 'Planning in the face of deep divisions: a view from Beirut, Lebanon'. *Planning Theory*, Vol. 16 (3), pp. 296-317.

There is a five-way framework to analyse context of social divisions, political turmoil, and conflict situations. How can economic liberalism and place-based identities facilitate the cultivation of deep values away from a strictly constituted identity?

- Hemke, R. C. (2015). 'Theatre in the Arab world. Perspectives/portraits from Lebanon, Syria, and Tunisia'. <https://doi.org>

Few regions of the world enjoy as much presence in our media as the Arab world. Arab theatre, however, is not mentioned in the coverage. Three contributions were written with the awareness that theatre is often the most political and spontaneous art.

- Sacco, P. L. (2011). 'Culture 3.0: a new perspective for the EU'. 2014-2020 Structural Funds Programming, EENC Paper.

In spite of the multiplication of successful examples of culture-led local and regional development, there is a widespread perception that the role and potential of culture is still seriously under-recognised. Why the share of structural funds devoted to culture fails to match the share of cultural and creative sectors?

- Toukan, H. (2020). 'Liberation or emancipation? Counter-hegemony, performance, and public space in Lebanon'. *International Journal of Cultural Study*, Vol. 23 (2), pp. 264-281.

In what way counter-hegemony is expressed in performance art, dealing with notions of public space and the publics? This piece interrogates public space and citizenship in Beirut in very different ways to express manifest and perform resistance.

Reflection

1. What is the relation between your graduation (project) topic, the studio topic (if applicable), your master track (A, U, BT, LA, MBE), and your master programme (MSc AUBS)?

Evidently, the creation of The Grand Theatre Quarter has many facets, which correspond to the integrated approach the Complex Projects Studio has. First of all, it is about the preservation of a historical object. The main necessary condition for an integrated approach is the recognition that built heritage recovery must incorporate both replacement and conservation practices. When planners and conservationists approach rebuilding war-damaged cities, there is commonly perceived clash of interest between conservation and replacement: whether to restore a pre-war built environment to the extent possible or clear urban space for improvement. This dilemma has been debated in each case of urban reconstruction since

World War II. How far is it appropriate to push conservation? How much, what parts, and how is it appropriate to preserve an object such as the Grand Theatre? Actually, after the war ended in 1990, Solidere destroyed a contrasting environment in favour of a picture-perfect site. Instead of being the gathering place of Beirutis from all backgrounds, this is now an exclusive space for appropriate people only. The built heritage alone retain the memory of the Paris of the East, thanks to it, it is possible to re-establish an artistic occupancy in a depressed area.

2. What is the relevance of your graduation work in the larger social, professional, and scientific framework?

Theatres have played a fundamental role in the growth and cultural development of our societies. Institutions that were often linked to the upper class, but still able to shape the cultural landscape of all social groups, mobilising instincts, fascinations, and values. This is the primary condition of culture and theatre in the cityscape: as mentioned, to stimulate thoughts, relationships, and debates. Thinking about Ancient Greek theatres, it is clear how this cultural expression has a public role and a primary assignment. Within an over-privatised city like Beirut, having back the Grand Theatre could mean partially re-establishing its faltering public identity.

Time planning

The MSc4 will be completely devoted to the graduation project.

- The first phase is about defining the design concept for the project, developing a preliminary massing.
Week 3.1: site analysis and massing options.
Week 3.2: programme analysis and programmatic options.
Week 3.3: analysis of ambition and design options.
Week 3.4: analysis of site vision and revise the design vision.
Week 3.5: presentation P2.5.
- The second phase is about developing the floorplans, space, and sections.
Week 3.6: functional research and develop plans.
Week 3.7: reference research and develop plans.
Week 3.8: structure research and develop sections.
Week 3.9: reference research and develop sections.
Week 3.10: presentation P3.0.
- The third phase is about developing the materialisation and form details.
Week 4.1: research on materials and developing the materials.
Week 4.2: research on structural systems and developing the form details.
Week 4.3: research on facade and developing the facade.
Week 4.4: integrating the individual work within the group vision.
Week 4.5: presentation P4.0.
- The fourth phase is about the postproduction of all drawings and visuals.
Week 4.6: finalising the research and design brief.
Week 4.7: finalising the research and design brief.
Week 4.8: finalising the research and design brief.
Week 4.9: visualising the design.
Week 4.10: presentation P5.0.