Reflection Paper

Conservative nature of Architecture in the Historical City center of Saint Petersburg

and its' influence on the architectural development of the city

Masters in Urbanism, Architecture and Building Science
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Year:2023
Track: Architecture

Introduction and Research Methods

In this paper I will be reflecting about the process of my Graduation at the Architecture track of Urbanism, Architecture and Building Science Masters at TU Delft University. I started this Graduation in 2022 at Explore Lab Graduation Studio and as all students and my own fascination and research topic. From the beginning of the project I was interested in researching the conservative approach to architecture in the city of Saint Petersburg, Russia, and how it influences the development of architecture in the city. I started this research with an intention to see how traditional elements of the architecture of the city which are so cherished by the citizens can be reused in contemporary ways to harmonize new buildings in the historical context. To do so I was planning to go to Saint Petersburg to have deep research into the architectural elements present in the city, their historical development and the act of current protection of the historic architecture. But the known events of 24th February 2022 made some changes to the original plan.

Since it was no longer possible to visit the city and a lot of sources became blocked and unavailable, I had to switch the original research method I was intending to implement (on site research together with interviews with locals and visits to local archives and libraries) to an approach which did not depend that much on exploring the city. Maybe it was the result of my own will to stay away from the happening events, maybe the fact of hard accessibility of resources, but the original research strategy was changed, which brough a lot of miscommunication and inconsistency into the research and design process.

As a result, I dove more into the reasons of formation of conservative thinking using a combination of different methods to try and unfold this complicated topic. I was looking into the historical development of the city, which had a certain purpose of becoming the capital of Russian Empire and was neglected after the October Revolution, some values that the citizens cherish today in architecture and lifestyle, the discussions that occur today about the way that the architecture of the city should develop, as well as tried to have a deeper look into the processes happening in the architecture of the city to define the roots of conservative approach and the possible gaps in between the architects and the citizens of saint Petersburg. To do so I manipulated the concept of technicities – a combination of actors, environments and technologies involved in certain processes – to get better understanding of how Architecture is formed in the city. I had a look at the processes of Architecture and Building production as well as the Living Culture and their specificities (Figure 1) and after that defined the links happening inside those fields as well as in between them (Figure 2).

In the end I can say that the research method gave a lot of input for the project, but at the same time was hard to systemise and have concrete outcomes. The combination of different methods looked like a promising start, since I was also implementing some ideas that I had when I was starting my project in the Explore Lab, featuring cultural aspects of the city, but in the end caused quite a bit of confusion for myself. Defining a more concrete method of research and focusing on one thing would probably benefit the project much more, especially taking into account the complexity of the topic and the time given. Nevertheless, I am happy I was able to bring the contextual features of the location into the research and I think combining them with the concept of technicities could be an interesting way to unfold different complex topics. Nevertheless, to work well it will need clearer framework and guidelines.

Architecture production			Buildig production			Living Culture		
PEOPLE (actors)	TECHNOLOGY (avaliable)	ENVIRONMENT (spaces)	PEOPLE (actors)	TECHNOLOGY (avaliable)	ENVIRONMENT (spaces)	PEOPLE (actors)	TECHNOLOGY (avaliable)	ENVIRONMENT (spaces)
Architects - project architects - city achitects	Archietcture/ engineering software	Architecture offices	Enginees	Machinery	Building site	Permanent citizens - native - long term integrated	Rental websites	Owned houses/ appartments
Engineers	Theoretical knowledge	Building site	Builders	Materials (+ material production) - export - import	Architecture officies	Short term citizens - work immigrants - summer workers - immigrants - students	Rental agencies	Rented houses/ appartments - long term - short term
Investors		Architecture univercities	Contractors	Crafstmnship			Student housing portals from univesities	Student halls
Governmental structures		Governmental institutions	Investors			Tourists - short term visitors - long term tourism	Instagram/VK/ Telegram	Hotels/Hostels
Contractors			Clients				Interactive maps fo the city	Places of leasure
Clients							Personal blogs	Work places
							Magazines	

Architecture of Saint Petersburg is a very enclosed circle of certain architects.	Some buildings even in good condition are getting demolished by the governmental authorities	The majority of coming students stay in the city afterwards for work
The circle excludes possibilities of large scale foreign influence.	This creates a negative view of citizens towards the construction in the historic city center	Often not local students have problems with integration, since they are seen as foreigners
This tendency results into the conservativeness of the cities` architecture without inflow of new ideas and concepts.	In the process of building the neighboring houses often get damaged – protection of them is very poor form the building side	Local people can be very arrogant towards the way we live in the city, spend our leisure time and value our home

Figure 1. Chosen Technicities, their Actors, Technologies and Environments together with contextual Specificities
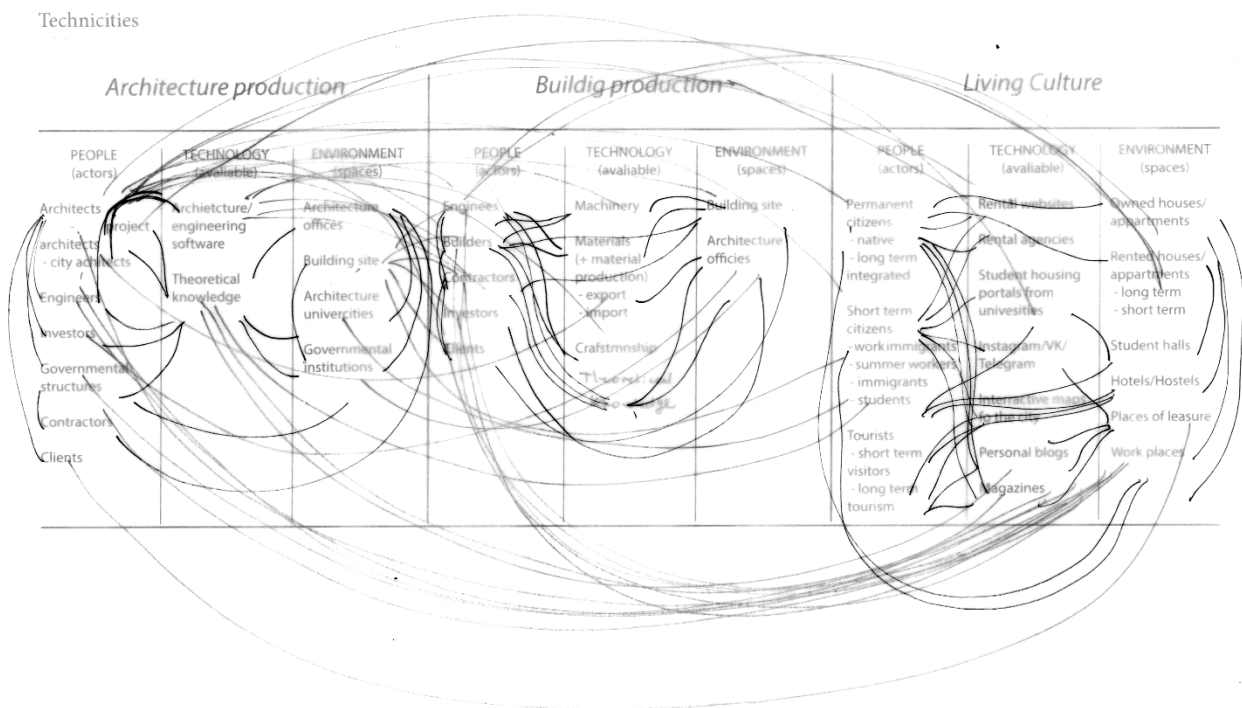

Figure 2. Relationship inside and in-between chosen technicities

Relevance of design and research to the field of study

The outcomes of the research showed me potential gaps in the relationship of the architects and the citizens of Saint Petersburg. Establishing those gaps was an important step in the research process, but it was quite hard to define which of the topics can be taken forward to make the most influence on the Field of Architecture in the city. Considering the historical research as well as the reflections on the discussions happening in between the architects in Russia today helped to make the choice that in my opinion is one of the ways that can help to start a dialogue between the architects and the citizens of Saint Petersburg.

Following the conclusions of my research I was designing an architecture university close to the historic city centre of Saint Petersburg which aim is to open up the field of architecture to the locals as well as enter the discussion about how the historical architecture and the historic city centre of Saint Petersburg should be treated. I believe that this topic can be relevant not only when we talk about Saint Petersburg, but also other cities around Europe and not only which have valued historic heritage. There are always discussions in the field of Architecture on how to treat historic architecture and what could be the ways to approach it. But most importantly how to deal with the population that opposes this change, since architecture still has to be for the people who experience it.

That is why I believe that my project, which is aiming to connect the world of Architecture Academia to the citizens of Saint Petersburg is an important design experiment, which is questioning the relationship in between the public and universities in general, exploring the possibilities how they can interact with each other. Of course, this is not the only possible way to tackle the problem and it has to be realised that the chosen topic is quite broad and complex. That is one of the reasons I tried to narrow it down as much as possible and even though it was not as successful as I wished the project shows quite an important existing gap between the Academia and the people not involved in it.

I believe that the results of this research and design project can be used not only to define and bridge the gaps in the city of saint Petersburg, but also can be applied in the cities across the world. Talking to a number of fellow students and professors I got an impression that there is an existing gap in between the field of Architecture Academia and the rest of the world and I believe that opening up this curtain in-between can help the people not involved into the field of architecture understand our concepts, ideas and inspirations better as well as give architects an opportunity to get a better understanding of the needs of the people we are designing for.