

“Loft out- the visible void in the city” Reflection

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

My graduation project is the compulsory part of the Master of Science degree at the Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment at TU Delft. My final project is directly based on the approach of the Architecture Master's track and my Master's programme. It has been developed with the methods and research approaches taught to students during the two years of the Master's in Architecture track, and specifically used and adapted for my graduation project, in order to present the research and design outcome in the best and most fitting way. Starting with research, my project addresses all scales of design, from the urban perspective to the detail, and tackles the current and crucial issues in our society and in the field of architecture.

2. How did your research influence your design/recommendations and how did the design/recommendations influence your research?

The process of the final project is based on the guidelines given to the students of the Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment at TU Delft. During this process, my research strongly influenced my design. Through critical thinking and research I found the site of my investigation in Madrid, I was able to understand the issues and relevance related to my chosen site, formulate my research questions and methods needed to develop the design and I was able to define the programme for my graduation project. Looking from the other side, thanks to the design process, I was able to validate my assumptions made during the research phase and implement them to meet the needs of the building's users, as well as the impact of my project on the neighbourhood scale. My research topic and the design I developed helped me to understand and reflect on important issues in our built environment, which led me, as an architecture student and future architect, to conclude that as designers we shouldn't shy away from difficult issues in our society, and resulted in the focus of my final project being the Victoria Kent Social Integration Centre in Madrid.

3. How do you assess the value of your way of working (your approach, your used methods, used methodology)?

During the process of my final project I used mixed methodology for my research. I started with literature and analytical observations, strongly based on creating selective maps and understanding the actor network for the chosen site and existing building, which is the main design aspect of my graduation. Through the research phase and the critical questioning of the results, I have sufficiently developed the concept for the project, which not only shows a perspective of 180 degrees opposite to the starting point of my research, but also allowed me to explore my interest in the field of architecture and navigate the direction I would like to take after graduating in the field of architecture. I believe that my approach, as presented in the graduation plan, was largely successful. Unfortunately, as the building I am using for my project is an active prison, it was not possible for me to investigate the space in person, as I had planned to do in my graduation plan. This problem was a valuable lesson for the future in understanding the difficulties involved in such a social and political project. Although this part of the plan didn't work out, it gave me a lot of motivation and clarity on how to continue with my design, as it reaffirmed my view of the problems associated with this type of institution. My design is a direct response to the approach I have taken, the methods I have used and the methodology I decided on, which resulted in a clear architectural solution.

4. How do you assess the academic and societal value, scope and implication of your graduation project, including ethical aspects?

The main core of my thesis is based on the problems related to the "ethical aspects" of design in architecture in relation to our society. The challenge of rehabilitation institutions for 3rd degree prisoners to reintegrate into society is a controversial but very important issue. Although changing the rules of how such institutions operate would take time, my project aims to show the possibilities of change and inspire people to rethink the current system. From a designer's point of view, the aim is to show how space influences people's behaviour. By understanding the current spatial values of the building, I redesigned it and adapted it to the reformed values of my project to create a place for second chances, not only for the inmates but also for the whole neighbourhood. With my project I wanted to create a space that was empowering not only for the inmates, but for anyone who needed help and support. In conclusion, I think that there is a great value in the academic and societal aspects of my project, as the scope and implication of it, tackle the addressed problems on multiple levels and show the architectural design approach that corresponds to the complexity of the social problem related to the present subject.

5. How do you assess the value of the transferability of your project results?

The value of the transferability of my final project is to show the different approaches to existing structures and systems, to challenge the world we live in from an architectural point of view. It is important that in the current climate crisis that we re-use buildings rather than demolish them. With my project I would like to emphasise that we can think outside the box and give the existing building a real second life that is meaningful to the society we live in.

6. How can critical thinking help to develop the design?

My final year project has developed over the last few months in a way that I did not expect at the beginning of the academic year. My research began with the topic of the vague terrain of our built environment, which evolved into creative spaces and the problem of gentrification, followed by a focus on the control of our behaviour in public space and the issue of freedom connected to it, and ended with the chosen topic of reintegration institution as the extreme example of restriction of freedom and detachment from the rest of the society. Through critical thinking, I believe in developing an important project that questions our society and connects it to the built environment. When working on the existing building, critical thinking helped me to question the layout and structure of the building and to understand from an architectural point of view the problems associated with it, to further develop a new strategy of how to change the building spatially so that it can support the chosen programme. It helped me also to understand that my project is not just about changing the use of the building, but changing it in a larger programmatic and spatial way. All the applied intervention and design choices in my graduation project, are the direct conclusion to the critical thinking about the research problem and values of the chosen site.

7. What is the role of an architect in our society?

It is well known that architects should be humanists. The work of an architect requires many different skills and understandings in order to create good architecture. During my project I had to rethink my understanding of an 'architect' in our society. My project does not only question the spatial quality of an existing building, but also tries to inspire change in an institutional aspect. Although I know that such a change would take a very long time, I think that an architect shouldn't just design a building, but should inspire a greater change in our social and

built environment. We have the ability to imagine a different future and present it in a visual and spatial way, so that others can be inspired to help with that change. As architects, we should think of a building in the form of a network, connecting everyone and everything on many different levels. This was also the ambition behind my graduation project.

Reflection on the decision to present the research output as a Research Play.

The decision to present the output of research as a playscript was based not only as an homage to former and current inmates, but also to preserve the emotional history of the building and to present the vision for change of the current rehabilitation centre (Centro de Inserción Social Victoria Kent).

Through the programme and spatial change, it can empower the users and transform itself into a place of second chances, allowing to fight the "prisoner" stigma and inspire a brighter future for the whole neighbourhood. The main inspiration for using the medium of theatre was the "Teatro Yeses", which was inaugurated in 1985 in the Women's Detention Centre (Centro Penitenciario de Detención Asistencial de Mujeres), which occupied the former Cárcel de Yeserías from 1874 to 1991 and still operates in one of the prisons outside the borders of Madrid. This was the catalyst for the proposal for my graduation project - to bring Teatro Yeses back within the city limits. It is also the ideal way to explain the design choices and visualise a more atmospheric approach to the project, presenting three different emotional journeys of the users at different periods, and addressing the connection between them and the building.

I understand that the format of the research output is unique in the academic world, but I strongly believe that it was the right way to present my research, which best suited the complexity of my research questions and the outcome I wanted to achieve for my final project, approaching the topic from multiple angles. The aforementioned approach, methods and methodology of my research are perfectly in line with academic guidelines and can be easily applied to other researchers and be considered of great value in academia. The play is based on the selected literature and observations of the site and is academically referenced to allow the reader to find the relevant sources. The research play is accompanied by a bibliography and a list of figures specifically required for academic research. As with any other academic essay, my research play states the problem statement and links it to the research questions, explains the research findings, the order of the research and presents all the relevant data, and presents the conclusion direct to the research objectives. With my unique approach, I would like to reiterate the importance of thinking outside the box and presenting each project individually in a way that best suits it.

Final reflection

The last few months of my graduation project have been challenging, pushing me to further explore my understanding of architecture and what kind of architect I want to become. The research and design process has been inspiring, allowing me to develop a meaningful project that considers a 'site' not as a location, but as a network of different actors and problems that we can address and influence through the creation of architecture. As my project is about the connection between the actor and the space, and the social interactions created by the programme and the space, between P4 and P5, I would like to focus more on visualising these different moments and presenting many diverse situations that could be discovered in the building I have designed.