

Reflection – P5 Positions in Practice – Methods & analysis

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During the graduation studio of methods and analysis, I got to understand what research should and could contribute to a design proposal. This studio does not limit itself to the more standard analysis approaches however, but shows there are many different ways to find, register, process and use information. The studio allowed us, and me to experiment with methods I would not have considered, would I have done my research the way I was used to in other projects during my Bachelor and my Master. Changing these ways of analysis has been tough at times, but I'm glad my tutors pushed me to undertake more thorough analysis. It has shown me that with a solid foundation of underlying principles and 'laws' that I would find in reference projects, helped me to unravel and make decisions in the design process. These tools were always right in front of me, but I never thought it would help me such a great deal in the whole process of the design. Going further, and moving towards a professional career it's soothing to know that I can fall back on these tools whenever something stands in the way of finding the answer to a challenge.

The studio Positions in practice, focussing on the city of Skopje could be very much linked to problems more widely spread than the chair of Methods and Analysis, or even the Faculty of Architecture. Skopje is a complex city with a lot of history that leaves the city with a context that is fragmented. The city that allegedly existed for over 3000 years bears the load of different religions, political views and architectural periods all in one. When walking through the bazar one feels going back in time to the Ottoman period, while the train station and the city wall reminds of a devastating earthquake and the short rise of Metabolism in the 60's, while nowadays the city centre has been covered in neo-classic architecture imposed by right-wing politicians. Finding ways how to approach the city of Skopje could help in the awareness of contemporary styles and differences present in most European cities nowadays.

Furthermore the city of Skopje has seen an amazing growth of population over the last decades, as the global phenomenon of urbanization reached North-Macedonia. As a result of this phenomenon the city is bursting at the seams, showing in the availability of both dwelling units and qualitative public space. Traffic has taken over the city of Skopje, filling streets, sidewalks and courtyards.

The analysis of the city of Skopje could, in a wider perspective, be seen as the analysis of how to deal with densification and urbanization by still ensuring availability of public space for all the citizens. On top of that it could get across a certain strategy of how to deal with fragmented surroundings with respect, without classifying something from the past as 'bad' or 'ugly'.

For me personally my graduation project, that was fed by the subject of freedom, tries to create qualitative public space that avoids political or religious charge. The project, as in earlier stages of the design referred to as 'The Node', focusses on a few topics:

- Expanding the city centre to offer both living units and public space;
- Connecting the city centre to the existing Transportation Centre that houses both the train and bus station, cutting down pedestrian commute and relation to the city centre;
- Creating a public space that adds a more flexible and temporary character to the city, offering a venue for events now impossible to house in the city centre, resulting in a freedom of use that I did not encounter in Skopje;
- And creating a public space from where citizens, together with tourists and expats, can navigate their ways into the city.

The initial part of the studio was focused on a wider analysis of the city. The 'Probing into precedents' course helped to get a historical understanding of the city and its brutalist architecture. As a group we used sensory mapping and participant observation, the last one, as I found during the assignment attached to the 'research methods' lecture series, preferably should not be used describing architectural features. Similar to that, 'narrative description' should not be used to describe social aspects of a community. However, these analyses helped to get a social and architectural sense of the city.

During this studio, I personally conducted case study analysis on a wide variety of projects, with every project either conveying the same idea, or using small but important gestures to accomplish what a fraction of my design wants to accomplish too.

One of the examples are Pedregulho by Affonso Eduardo Reidy, where height differences and a difference in character from one side of the building, or the other, were drastically different, and where the architect used the shape of the building to also create either public space or privacy, where one of both was needed. In my project, the square should have an urban character, that allows the city to mentally and physically expand, whereas the backside, or poolside needs to cater more towards the rest of the inner city.

Another one is Mathenesserplein in Rotterdam, by Jo van den Broek. This rather modest traffic square in West Rotterdam uses horizontality to make the square look wider than it actually is. It uses verticality on the other hand to highlight the 3 pedestrian areas on this square.

Then there is the Anthony van Leeuwenhoeklaan in Eindhoven. A block designed in the '50s by 'Woonbedrijf'. This 3-story building makes the 3rd floor almost disappear. It does this by minimizing the windows and accentuating the middle floor by making the entrance at this level.

In Rotterdam, the Heemraadsingel does this by making the top floors invisible by vegetation, and the Robin Hood garden project by Smithson and Smithson, by making maisonette-apartments look like one story apartments.

Furthermore the Woonbedrijf project in Eindhoven makes the distance between pedestrian and inhabitant just big enough to get enough privacy. The parallel entrance of the stairs gives more privacy too, then when the stairs would end perpendicular to the street.

The way all these case studies were executed was new to me. Usually I would only basically 'google' the place, and do research on the architect, the period it was designed in, and when relevant, the surroundings of the place. My tutor Jorge pointed this out ("Do not try to reinvent the wheel") to me and really got me to look at architecture in a different way. It means that now, looking at a project, this tool will be added to the tools I already had.

All these tools and ways of analyses together makes the choices I make more and more complete. While at first I was hesitant I now know that in every kind of analysis lies a possibility to inform the final design.