

# Reflection

Against the wall:

Elderly residential care and child daycare centre

**As part of**

Urban Architecture Graduation Lab | Spolia  
Faculty of Architecture  
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**Date**

21 May 2020

The studio Urban Architecture studies urban issues on the scale that can only be fulfilled by architecture. The theme of the graduation lab is Spolia, an archaeological term which is to place the remnants in a new environment. The site is in Anderlecht, Brussels. The paper will start with a short introduction of my project, then elaborate my understanding of urban architecture and Spolia and the relationship between research and design and finally reflect on the position I take as an architect.

My graduation project articulates and celebrates an existing wall from urban scale down to materialization on the purpose of revitalizing a historical river in the city. In different stages, the content of the wall is enriched and enhanced. The wall is brought up by the research of the historical river Senne in Brussels. The covering of the river created voids in urban blocks including the site as well. But the void on the site is fulfilled arbitrarily and becomes a negative space. The urban proposal aims to turn the space into a positive communal garden and keep the wall to evoke the memory of the river (Fig.1). Following this, I propose to build a care centre combining the elderly and children and reuse the wall as my front façade. In this way, the project deals with three issues: the urban gestures facing different sides, the combination of the elderly and the children and the reuse of the existing wall. Among these, to reuse, recompose and reconfigure the wall becomes the main theme for the project.



Figure 1 The original (left) and designed (right) urban plan

The chair of Urban Architecture offers us the opportunity to study medium-sized urban sites which are in-between urbanism and architecture. In this way, the environment is not only the background but also an essential part of the building. This means that the building cannot stand without the urban proposal, which can be shown in my project. The vital architectural scheme to reuse the existing wall is derived from urban design. And when placed among all architectural interventions along the wall, my project can finally be complete.

In terms of Spolia, it is evident for my project that the Spolia is the existing wall. It is the remnant from the original constructions and is placed in the new environment formed by new buildings. I think the most intriguing thing to study Spolia is to define it and reposition it on different scales. For my project, the essence of the wall varies between scales. It is a line in the urban plan; it is the parameter of the existing building on the architectural scale;

it has various materials and textures when it comes to materializing the design (Fig. 2). To find out what is Spolia and how I can use it in the new intervention in every phase helps me to enhance and develop my project.



Figure 2 The wall as the line (left), the parameter (middle) and the texture (right)

During the project, the research helped me to understand the city, the site and the existing. Particularly, my design is usually inspired by research. The preliminary research reveals the social and cultural importance of the river and its impact on urban spaces. These features can also be found on the site where the river Senne passed through before and catalysed a wall dividing the plot. Then the cultural spirit of the river is carried by the wall. The following research focuses on the architectural value of the wall. And it turns out to be a character. It acts between connection and separation, nature and built environment, protection and orientation, closure and openness. There is also a hidden world behind the wall where spaces are created revealing the everyday lives of the dwellers and workers. The discovery of the research makes me aware of the cultural symbol and poetic image of the existing wall. So I decide to enhance these images and share them with the community. Therefore in my design, the images of the old are 'exhibited' through the display of the original textures of the wall. And I create enclosed spaces using the existing wall and also controlled interactions between both sides of the wall, revealing the daily lives behind the wall in a modest way.

The theme of the studio, Spolia requires a careful understanding of the existing. So I mostly follow the inquiry line of the studio, take the role of an archaeologist and dig into what exists. The scientific relevance of the research lies in the investigation of drawings from archives and the documentation of fieldwork.

I believe the graduation project can offer a solution to how architects can reuse a nonhistorical parameter element in a new building and how the building can combine the two groups of the elderly and the children. On the one hand, the reuse topic refers to not only cultural connection but also sustainable reasons. By reusing the existing wall, existing structure and reclaimed materials, building materials are saved. On the other hand, the proper combination of elderly and children can benefit both generations. Elderly people will not feel isolated and it helps to teach the young about care for others. This system can additionally be expanded to invite people from the neighbourhood engaging in the events and unite the community. At the same time, the project also offers privacy for the two groups.

From my point of view, the most challenging part of the project is to keep asking myself what is the Spolia and how I deal with it. It is also the main theme of the studio and it is exciting to find the position. But as I mentioned previously, it is also the most inspiring part to enrich my knowledge, make decisions, form principles and see how many proposals my colleagues come up with. I feel delightful and grateful when I look back on the journey I have taken with the tutors and colleagues and how we work together in this difficult time of COVID-19 pandemic period. In the last phase of the project, I will continue working on the completeness of the design from the urban view down to materialization.