

Reflection

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Studio name / Theme AR3DC100 / Architectural Design Crossovers /Heterogeneous City: London

At the P3 you have to hand in the draft reflection. The main mentor assesses whether the reflection meets the criteria below and touches upon the below mentioned aspects.

At P4 a final reflection must be included as a distinct part of the written graduation report / thesis (a separate chapter/appendix).

In the reflection you use a short substantiated explanation to account for the preliminary results of the research and design in the graduation phase (**product, process, planning**).

The choice of method (how) and argumentation (why) which preceded the research, was a part of your study plan – the reflection must contain an answer to the question of how and why the approach did or did not work, and to what extent.

The why for the topic of the project still stands on itself. My own experience during my visit to London and the community kitchens further encouraged the need of investigating and designing for this topic. A change in focus has been made in comparison to the start of the project. Rather than trying to figure out the workings of whole communities and different demographics on the high streets, a shift has been made towards the social experience of individuals in the public realm of high streets and community kitchens.

The described methods of visualizing in the research plan have changed from their initial goal and are still changing in what they should portray and how they will communicate with each other. At first the expectation was to derive a conclusion on the social capacity of high streets on urban scale and micro scale separately. Later in the research process it has grown towards an urban analysis that focusses on creating an hypothesis of the sociability of the high streets and their spaces. An analysis based on factors that are derived from the literature. The micro analysis will reveal whether the urban analysis was correct or not. And it tries to capture not only which spaces are used for social being but also why. I am yet to find the way to visualize the findings on micro and urban scale, but still developing the 'how'. Therefore it is still hard to reflect on new findings. The things I have written about now mostly confirm the findings of other researches in my own context. The notions derived from these confirming findings and literature do have given me a broad understanding of what I am trying to investigate, as well as a toolbox of themes to design with. The 'what' and 'why' of what will be researched are further formulated below.

With the choice of the topic of transition and transitional spaces the notions of High Street and Community Kitchens became more interconnected in the search of how they could be beneficial towards each other. They both have a transitional character and are influenced by the rhythms of people visiting them. The topic of transition has grown to the analysis of influences of changing rhythms of the people and the day on the social interpretation of these places. Done by investigating the spaces and materiality which shape them.

Another development arose as I am moving further than what things appear to be or their primary function to how things (objects, spaces, materials, programs, etc.) are experienced and appropriated. The theme of experience and the social transition/experience I aim to design for has been more on the foreground since the P2 due to insights and steering of my mentors. At what places is the high street more than a shopping street? How is the community kitchen more than a place for a meal?

What was also rightfully mentioned by my tutors was the role of food in my project. What had begun as a passion for the sharing of food had turned into a project on social behaviour in the public realm.

My reasoning is that the community kitchens should be more widely used and accepted. They deserve a place in the progression of social food. Steering them into a new stage while setting a compatible stage for them. What is necessary for this stage to be set is the knowledge of the current context/stage and the experience of the social realm in those places, as well as the community kitchen experience. The research focuses on this partially. The design focuses on how to make it work on the high street and create a reinterpretation of what eating together means at these places. The feedback resulted in a process of rethinking of the program, the position of the kitchen and the how and where food can be shared in my project.

A process in which I have been continuously learning on the subject of social behaviour and what influences the social spaces. My understanding is still developing and processing the rich amount of literature on these topics has been interesting but demanding. Finding my way through the literature and creating the framework for my own research has been a difficult process. In the field of sociology it is easy to lose grip on the fast amount of thoughts and information. I could have translated, organised and tested my ideas more visualizations and writings. This has therefore been making it hard for my mentors to assess my project. I think that I struggle the most with prioritizing what work has to be done when and following a plan that executes the prioritized instead of deviating in at that time less important tasks. The inspiration I get from the literature draws me into designing, which results into losing the focus of the research and not finishing elements of the research. I think the energy the research gave me to design is part of the goals of the studio and that excited me. It was a search for a way to channel that energy.

So far I have been learning a lot about myself as researcher and architect. But the project has been learning me a lot as well. The thing that I have enjoyed the most from what I've learned so far is the understanding of the multiplicity of things. Architectures, objects and spaces that at first glance seem to be 'normal' but influence behaviours of people in certain ways. This multiplicity and the possibilities of it is also a big theme in my design.

Finally, you have to look ahead and describe how the final part of the graduation period will be filled in. Depending on the graduation (project) topic, reflection on the following aspects should be included (you may choose in which order; please follow the written instructions of your MSc track / graduation lab wherein the following aspects are integrated). The reflection should be in the form of a text, with diagrams and sketches for purposes of illustration and clarification.

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

The studio considers the architectural project as “a synthesis of the im/material conditions in an interdisciplinary framework that requires a multi-modal design research”. My research and design assignment connects well with this as it searches for the spatial and material aspects of built environment and the bodily experience to achieve social change. Where the design is mostly proposed on the architectural building scale, it aims to have a larger urban and societal impact. The reasoning behind it is supported with interdisciplinary findings from literature research, urban analysis and architectural investigations.

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

My design has been influenced in a great deal by the research. Different themes are used derived from used literature and from my own findings.

In relation to the community kitchen: it is important to respect the privacy of the visitors, to understand the barrier between volunteers and visitors, to understand the rhythm/ritual/process of participating in such a social food initiative, acknowledging that people have different reasons for their visit, the freedom of choice to interact or not, and the possibility to use the community kitchen space for multiple goals.

In relation to hs's and social literature: the influences of topics such as variation and permeability of spatial configurations and materiality, acknowledgement of daily rhythms of people and architectures, public space elements favourable for social behaviours (3rd spaces, 4th spaces/loose space: edges, props, thresholds, paths, nods), complexity, providing possibilities, the influence of sensory experience on the sensual and perceived social being in public space.

Initial research brought me to the topic of social food initiatives and the tackling of issues such as food poverty and loneliness. Wanting to change this with a design assignment that focusses on the acceptance and implementation of a community kitchens in a urban context, a research was set up to investigate the important aspects to succeed. The design itself is therefore not of great influence for the research, but the design assignment has been the fundament for what is researched.

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

First of all it is important to visit the sites under investigation multiple times and during different times of the day. More information and observation makes it possible to built a stronger narrative. It also exposes more rhythms that might be overlooked. This also applies to my own methods. Secondly, speaking with the people you focus on helping/supporting/investigating strengthens the bond with your own research, which I recommend even if it is not part of the research.

Because the research is partially an analysis of my own experience the viability can be doubted. A recommendation for further research could be the use of space syntax. Without cutting out the experiential part, maybe space syntax can be combined with interviews to create a map of lived experiences.

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

By creating spaces for inclusive interaction and conversations across different ethnicities, cultures, ages and classes, boundaries preventing society from moving forward in these issues can be broken down. The people who suffer from or experience these issues could help to make a difference for themselves and others. The solution cannot always be expected to be given by the government and I suggest that by incorporating the community in the route to a solution a more cohesive and solidary future. My research builds and expands on the visualization and interpretation of social presence and interactions in transitional spaces, 3rd and 4th spaces of the urban realm and social food initiatives.

I add the notions of anonymity and reciprocity of high street spaces to the list of important social influencers. The research challenges conventional perspectives by refraining from viewing high street elements in isolation. Instead, we regard them as co-signifiers that collectively shape transitions on the high streets. Beyond their capitalist and consumerist role, we explore elements or layers that possess a capacity exceeding these notions. My investigation aims to pinpoint moments of heightened lived experiences within the high street moments that mark the transition from consumerism to genuine social engagement. The research adds to raising awareness of what transition can be, in order to provide it.

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

As I try to provide an architectural solution in a common urban context in London with the aim to have an impact on societal level, I would like to think that it has a high transferability rate. I would never say that an architecture should be copied on a different side because of the differences in contexts. But I believe that the designed project showcases a multitude of important elements that can be used to improve the inclusive social presence/being of people in busy urban areas. If a high street keeps being experienced as partially more socially oriented, this could have an effect on the mental image on what a high street should be.