

Re-envisioning New Belgrade's Superblock Neighbourhoods

Human-scale superblock design in post-socialist New Belgrade.

P4 reflection

AR3MET105 Graduation Studio
Methods and Analysis
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MSc 3 / MSc 4

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Reflection

The graduation design process felt like a rollercoaster. Questioning myself and the design project many times, my mother had a stroke in front of my eyes, and it was a process of finding my way with the project. Despite these hardships, I have learned a lot about myself, the architectural world around us and taking a stance in it. This text is a reflection on the graduation design project, research, and process of the Master Architecture at the TU Delft.

During my graduation, I followed the course Methods and Analysis. This is the first studio for me with close to zero restrictions. You were the person to pick the project, location and reason why. During my bachelor, I had projects that had a set program, a set design intention and a set of technical requirements to fulfil. The Methods and Analysis graduation studio had only one set-out thing: the design location is in the city of Belgrade, Serbia. Even within the city, you had all the freedom to pick the site best for you. It felt like I was going from designing with (too many) restrictions to the other extreme of (too much) freedom. This did help me realise that being able to come up with a concrete design proposal is a useful skill that I needed to learn and guide the design.

My project is designing the last unbuilt superblock in the nine central blocks of New Belgrade. The formation of Yugoslavia with its new capital, Belgrade, caused a huge housing demand. In the 1950s a new city centre on the other side of the Sava river was designed by the functional city concept. The priority was to build housing on a mass scale and other functions did end up not being realized due to the lag of funding. The current problem is that the city centre became a big dormitory, sleeping in New Belgrade and working in Old Belgrade. The project location of superblock 26 has two commercial buildings, a nursery, and a church present in the further empty plot. The project intention was to come up with an approach and neighbourhood design for this empty plot of 360x360 metres.

During the first quarter of the studio a classmate and I did research about streets; about the ownership and appropriation of Belgrade's streets. This research ended up being really useful in making an urban plan for the empty superblock. The street research did show me the importance of street furniture to affect the speed and actions of a bypasser. This showed the influence of the research on the design, and it also went the other way. During designing I made multiple mini-investigations supporting the design. The main difference was it happened alongside the design project instead of having all the time to focus on one research. However, the back and forth of designing and researching was beneficial for the project, because it makes it more developed and realistic.

My graduation topic contains social aspects of how to bring people together in a community, how streets support social interaction and how a neighbourhood design affects this. The studio gave and strengthened the relationship between the graduation topic of designing a neighbourhood in a post-socialist superblock in New Belgrade to architecture and how architecture can facilitate it.

One year ago, right before my P2 moment, My mom and I were laying a floor in my new studio in Amsterdam. She didn't feel good and had a stroke in front of my eyes. Graduating and the whole emotional situation with my mom became too much to handle. Luckily I had the option to take a half-year break before my new P2 date. Now I am thankful to my tutors

and student advisors for making that happen. Now viewing back, I didn't get the full rest I needed, because I felt like I had left the project unfinished. This feeling did motivate me to pick the study back up. Now I am a week prior to the P4 moment and am proud that I managed to overcome the difficult time and work towards finishing my project.

The graduation process was also shaken up by this because most fellow students graduated. It was also more difficult to start up again. Luckily there was one fellow student who joined me. Working together helped me out.

The main moment where I didn't see things in a good light was before my P2 moment. Doubting the concept I had, and questioning if it was enough. I remember saying that coming up with the design concept is the most troublesome for me. My qualities as a designer lay more in the technical and end-phase of a design project. Even though I found it really difficult, I am glad that I learned how to come up with a solid design concept.

As for the feedback sessions, I have also noticed growth. In the beginning, I would change all the feedback points of the design. Later on, I developed more of my own position in architecture. That caused me to reason why I wanted to preserve certain design decisions and would agree with other feedback points. Only by writing this reflection do I now realise that this ties perfectly with one of the studio goals of developing your own position in architecture before going into the working field.

During the design process especially between P2 and P3, I didn't get the most drawings out on paper because I wanted them to be perfect. That can't happen. The project taught me it is better to first get a correct project down and improve it after. In addition, Jorge and I talked about the trajectory of learning as an architect. Now is the stage of learning in university, after this learning will continue while working. My opinion is that we will learn our entire life and I look forward to the designs I will make with the knowledge I will gather over the next 50 years. Being an architect is a privilege by being able to contribute to society and always learn and put the lessons into practice.

Lastly, accessing the project results one week prior to the P4 moment shows the values of human/small-scale design instead of a large setup in a superblock and the importance of the social aspects of humans living together. It also underlined the responsibility an architect has on making a contribution to society in the form of making a pleasant and well-designed living environment.

Working towards the P5 I wish to make a 1:50 facade fragment of the courtyard building, as well as adjust the 1:1000 site model. Besides that I wish to redesign the facades, because I mainly focussed on the floor plans, sections and details for the P4 and there is still a lot of potential left in the facades.

To close this reflection I want to say that I am grateful for all the valuable lessons I have learned during this graduation trajectory, and I am happy with it.