

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

For my last academic year, I chose the Global Housing studio on the Architecture MSc track. My graduation project will result in an urban plan that focuses on housing, environmental restoration and economic opportunity. It aligns perfectly with the Global Housing studio theme - 'repair and consolidate'. The project's socio-spatial and economic significance is what sets it apart from the other studios. As stated in the Global Housing course manual, the pressing problem of housing in the Global South requires immediate but balanced solutions. To address this issue, my research-based design solution for Grajaù, São Paulo incorporates agricultural practices and additional space for social amenities, alongside the high-density (social) housing on the site.

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

My initial approach to research differed from the final one. Originally, I aimed to investigate appropriation and agency. The wide range of self-built residences and public spaces in urban areas motivated me to explore this topic. In the outskirts of São Paulo, where plots are tightly packed and government intervention is limited, residents appear to be taking ownership of spaces through careful interventions. The exteriors of the self-constructed dwellings were customized for each unit; despite being erected from a uniform pattern, no two houses exhibited the same appearance. As I neared my P2 presentation, my study of techniques for building a sustainable community directed me towards the idea of urban farming. The location of the site, which is currently home to Hamada Farm, inspired me. After my P2 assessment, it became apparent that my research on urban farming influenced my design in a new direction: the integration of mass housing, urban farming and environmental restoration. I kept following this path as it fit my interests of the moment better and I understood that this combination had the potential to form resilient communities and explore a new type of architecture, where food cultivation was the centre.

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

Due to the shift in research and design I mentioned earlier, my research plan and written methods became irrelevant. Although the research carried out before my P2 is not particularly prominent in my design, it was not pointless. My study of appropriation and agency led me to consider urban farming, allowing me to utilise the agency formed by appropriation in an urban context, and create spaces for communities to come together. The community garden is a valuable space. Upon researching, I discovered that community gardens in Brazil have served as a tool for socio-economic development. However, I experienced delays in my design process as I constantly researched and revised my work. Unfortunately, this hindered my decision-making process. Nonetheless, I acknowledge that research is necessary to move forward in design. Having taken a break over the summer, I have gained some distance from my design and obtained a significant amount of insight into the shortcomings of my process.

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

The project is situated on the outskirts of São Paulo, where the most vulnerable members of Brazilian society live. Its objectives include the construction of social housing and the development of economic opportunities. Establishing links between these socio-spatial elements and the positive environmental attributes of urban rooftop farming through small-scale agroforestry presents academic pertinence for new concepts of building resilient communities in the Global South. All of these topics in themselves have been researched and tested, the design is intended to be a new exploration of the unique combination of these aspects. Considering the project's ethical aspects, I acknowledge my Dutch perspective, which may result in a biased view of the solutions I consider viable for the sustainable development of these communities. Nonetheless, I believe that incorporating my perspective and gained knowledge through research will add to the academic and design repository of solutions aiming towards a better and more equitable future.

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

The project has been developed with reference to its unique environment, including climate, culture, density and space. The concept is transferable to various environments, although the building itself cannot be copy-pasted. The concept is a form of low to mid-rise high-density housing with agroforestry on the roof, locally sourced materials and building knowledge, and a symbiotic relationship between architecture and agriculture. The scale of production can be easily adapted to meet necessary and viable requirements. Examining the neighbourhoods adjacent to the project site, it is evident that the modular form of the roof can be applied to other buildings with consideration for the necessary structural requirements.

6. Is it fair to place the burden of change towards reaching a sitopia on those marginalized within our capitalist and industrialized world, instead of those in control?

The most utopian option is to change the system and have an equal society where nobody is born into poverty or systematically drawn into it. However, history shows systematic changes are difficult and time-consuming. Though we must continue to progress in this, we require immediate solutions presently. The design serves firstly as a short-term solution to lift individuals from the cycle of poverty, rather than addressing the underlying root causes. Secondly, it is an example of a more sustainable way of living with food which can serve as a precedent for better and more advanced projects to come.

7. What is the value of using food as a tool and seeing the world as a sitopia concerning architecture?

The concept of Sitopia was significant in my research. Food can serve as a tool to understand the world and the way it develops. Understanding the past is crucial when taking present action to change the future. Food has always shaped us and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. Agriculture has determined settlement locations, and communal meals have long been used to unite individuals, while food has played a significant role in trade. As agriculture has become increasingly industrialised, the production and consumption of food has also had a profound impact on the built environment and infrastructure. While it is not the sole contributing factor, the study of food systems can be a valuable tool in understanding the complex networks that shape our lives, and can inform sustainable design practices for the future.