

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 topic of my graduation project is attempting to understand, both on the large urban scale, as well as the smaller spatial and architectural scale, how industrial infrastructure can be co-opted and modified to be utilised for ecological purposes. From initial urban analysis on the scale of Brussels, the idea was sparked that green corridors, an urban plan of the municipality, could be expanded on a much larger nationwide scale. In further research, exploring and documenting existing industrial developments from heavy infrastructure to small scale industrial buildings I was able to understand the existing spatial characteristics of these places, often seen as a negative, but reframe them through a lens of ecology and biodiversity.

What I found through this analysis was a unique set of urban conditions, different from most other places within cities. Places in which we occupy but are not made for our habitation. These industrial areas are utilitarian spaces of production, they are not clean, polished, safe or engaging, there is little life here. The architecture is rough, dilapidated, and simplistic. These are all negatives discussed frequently in literature I read while beginning this project. The prevailing discussion on industry in the city is how to better integrate it into the city, how to keep it clean, friendly, engaging, hospitable, and occupied at all hours. What struck me in these discussions was the disregard for the inherent or intrinsic qualities of such disused spaces, and how the discussions of the city or urbanity are always anthropocentric – If it does not work for us, it has no value.

The aim of my project therefore, in relation to the theme ‘the last green in town’ was to reassess what ‘green in town’ means, distancing it from the romantic perception of greenery and nature we have now and understand it instead as an essential piece of infrastructure – necessary for our survival.

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

From my research I concluded that many of the benefits of industrial sites with regards to ecology were due to the lack of human adaptation – roads were left unpaved, footpaths were cracked, buildings left derelict, and pests uncared about, these spaces had porosity. However from my research into maintaining the longevity of the friche, education, publicity, and connection are all hugely important to the preservation of places in the city. To deal with this contradiction between what is best for the environment, and what is best for the friche, I proposed a programme and architectural expression in direct opposition, or contradiction, to my research findings, as a way to highlight the contrasts between what human centred and ecologically centred design

look like. In a way the building imitates the harsh borders found between industrial areas and urban areas in cities, enclosing the human within the building, and leaving nature free to the outside.

In response, this approach in my building encouraged me to research small, but important ways in which we can manufacture infrastructure for biodiversity. While evident nature can suffice to an extent by itself, in order to improve the biodiversity of these places human action needs to be taken. From this thought process I then implemented architectural decisions such as raised foundations, bat houses, animal bridges, and pollinator gardens – unintrusive ways we can improve the spaces in which we inhabit.

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

The beginning of this research I began by exploring my hypothesis, that industrial areas have an existing relationship to areas of natural value such as nature reserves, parks, and agricultural areas of high natural value. For this I mapped, on a countrywide scale, industrial infrastructure (including canals and railways) against a dataset for land marked as having high natural value. While this approach got me thinking about the potentials, and to an extent proved my hypothesis, it had many limitations as simply analysing from above it is impossible to understand or assess the reality on the ground, which became evident as I was analysing these places in greater detail. The first limitation was that areas deemed of 'natural value' by a governmental body are not the whole picture, which is why I decided to continue this research as ground research instead.

For the second part of my analysis, I documented industrial sites and the existing circumstantial nature that they hosted, much of which could be considered 'invisible'. This process was much more fruitful in being able to understand the potentials of these areas. However, technicality and time were large issues in this approach, ideally, I would have preferred to be able to document more diverse types of life in my photo series, but I did not have the time nor technical capability to find and document these things on camera.

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

I believe the value of my work lies in the questions it poses, especially relating to our attitudes, mentality, and relationships with nature. However, it cannot be denied that a strong position was taken, one independent of the needs of people in the city. This projects framework centres non-human life at its core, and in a sense neglects or social and economic complexities of a city, which could be seen as of particular importance in a city like Brussels.

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

The broader ideas, discussions, and conclusions of my research can be transferred into neighbouring discussions regarding industrial and post-industrial spaces and the methodologies we use to deal with them. While some of the conclusions or suggestions of my research may be unrealistic or controversial, I believe the framework set could be expanded as a methodology of thought, not only as a set of observations.