fashion creation office

REFLECTION PAPER

gina goedert

Student Number 5377730

SEPTEMBER 2022

1. Relationship between Research and Design

Research and Design form a symbiotic relationship and consistently complement each other on a practical and academic level. Research consists of the theoretical approach driven by a specific aim and interest in a certain subject and the desire to explore and discover new elements about the chosen topic. Design represents the outcome and personal interpretation of the theoretical framework and the practical implementation of the subjective conclusions drawn from the previous research. The design concept represents the visualization of the accumulation of facts and conclusions. In turn, the outcome of the design opens new insights into the research field, adding new perspectives and new information to the existing knowledge.

This project is based upon conductive research in the context of the city of Beirut (Lebanon) through the collection of information from specific fields such as history, geography, spatial planning, sociology, contemporary local architecture, and culture with a unique focus on a chosen urban layer. In this case, the layer of the office typology. The choice for the thesis topic on the sustainable regeneration of Beirut's fashion ecosystem was derived from the findings about Beirut's past function as the fashion metropole of the Middle East and of the current state of negligence regarding the fashion industry that once contributed to the economic stability of Lebanon. This choice was grounded upon an analysis of past events and putting them in perspective of a vision of the future while taking into account the potential of the current state of Beirut. The design concept and its implementation represent the potential manifestation of the vision for Beirut's future. By rethinking the traditional office typology with the introduction of fashion-related functions and new spatial configurations, previously collected knowledge from the research translates into innovative architectural design elements.

2. Relationship between Graduation Topic and Studio Topic

After the catastrophe of the port explosion and its impact on the urban layers, the chair of Complex Projects proposed the topic of Beirut's future development. The port blast of the 4th of August in 2020 was the initiating event and only intensified the accumulated issues and challenges that the city of Beirut has already been facing for decades. Engaging in this complex setting allows for a better understanding of the current situation and draws more attention to the resulting socio-political and socio-economic problems. The current situation helped to identify the multi-layered scope of urban issues, including social, economic, or environmental (energy, pollution,…) concerns and the structural impediments to reforming the institutional framework of Lebanon. For that reason, the main question of the graduation topic requires an answer on how to rebuild a city not only in a resilient physical way but also on a deeper socio-cultural level.

The fashion industry is only one of the many industries that have suffered the consequences of a long range of crises, which are not only caused by the destruction of the city's infrastructure. The devaluation of the local currency, the diminution of the purchasing power, and the absence of fashion tourism lead to bankruptcy and closures of many fashion brands and start-ups while seeing a massive brain drain within the industry. Despite the apparently hopeless situation, the fashion ecosystem of Beirut shows exemplary resilience. Start-ups and young entrepreneurs illustrate this fact through a willingness to rebuild the industry taking into account sustainable and future resilient methods and addressing at the same time social, environmental, and cultural issues. This reflects the vision of the reconstruction of the city of Beirut and readdresses the topic proposed by the studio.

3. Research Methods and Approach in relation to the Graduation Studio

The conducted research through various fields highlights the complex nature of an architectural project and resonates with the initial idea of Complex Projects. The graduation project aims to combine spatial, historical, political, economic, cultural, and social aspects of architecture illustrating that architecture intervenes in a wide scope of different fields. Research was conducted through two different approaches proposed by the Graduation Studio. Group research focused on different urban layers with the aim to exchange and combine the collective knowledge gained from various sources in order to draw a joint conclusion resulting in an urban strategy. This part of the research enabled the students to exchange ideas, share their individually collected knowledge and develop through teamwork and effective communication an urban strategy taking into account different views. Individual research focused on one of these specific urban layers, requiring a deeper analysis of a certain aspect of the urban plan. In this specific case, the individual research focused on the office typology. This part allowed the students to work autonomously and independently within the limits of a dedicated area in order to cultivate specific reflections allowing them to create an architectural design within the framework of the complexity of the urban plan.

Through methods of mapping, online research, image analysis, non-participatory observations, literature review, and the analysis of case studies the students extracted qualitative data enabling them to formulate a research question and a project concept. The research allowed me to understand the background of the complex issues of the city of Beirut and helped to set a framework for the architectural proposal, thus putting the project into context.

4. The Project's wider social, professional and scientific Relevance

The project functions as a case study aiming toward the development of a potential prototype for a new type of building within the explicit conditions of the city of Beirut.

In terms of social relevance, I do consider that a project with the objective to help the fashion industry to flourish, would meet the needs of the local population. As mentioned above, the fashion industry is intrinsically linked to the culture of Beirut and would help local experts to find a new vehicle for economic growth. As the fashion industry is not an unwritten page in Beirut's history, the local population could use this opportunity to identify themselves with the past successes of the city while embarking on a new chapter. The project tries to highlight the need for social reform in terms of the economic and cultural relevance of the fashion industry. The project will help people to identify themselves with the purpose of the fashion institute and become a place of uncommon cooperation for the benefit of the wider society. The architectural expression underlines the need for Beirut to expose and present the ingenuity of the Lebanese population by providing the necessary space for the creative and production processes to flourish, while, at the same time, to open to the public, potential buyers, and investors.

The fashion industry is marked by high status and is difficult to access for many people without the necessary economic resources. Therefore, the project tries to counteract this trend and function as a platform for people to approach the fashion industry through accessible means. The design of the building aims toward regrouping different educational and professional facilities generating a social structure within which people can explore and develop their skills in fashion design regardless of their background. The infrastructure allows the different groups of people to interact and eliminate any form of separation between the different production processes of fashion items.

In terms of professional relevance, the project tries to symbolize the relevance of architectural design in industries, which rely primarily on the productivity and creativity. The project is constructed in a way that combines different components of the creative process of fashion design. Ranging from research to education all the way to production and presentation/visualization, the purpose of the project is to highlight how certain types of industries can benefit from regrouping the different elements of a production chain. In itself the project will not be a factory but more of a house of fashion, which promotes, besides social cohesion, new professional opportunities for the local population. In itself, the project and the location of the different components of the fashion design process have been carefully selected in order to foster interaction between the different educational, professional, and social dimensions of the fashion industry.

The architectural canvas on which his projects stands combines sustainable construction methods and materials which harmonize not only with the local environment but are in line with the inherent nature of sustainable fashion. This cohesion between the construction methods (rephrase) and the utility of the building can lead to new forms of how architecture can shape an image of an industry.

Furthermore, another key scientific point would be how sustainable construction methods can be used to foster a culture of sustainable fashion. To put it in simple words, if the project leads by example, will the users follow? Different societal trends can be influenced by relevant urban constructs as this project tries to underline in the specific context of Beirut.

5. Ethical Issues and Dilemmas

During the graduation project, the students were confronted with a variety of urban challenges that required architectural solutions. Proposing a superficial intervention in a city with such a multi-layered complexity can lead to scrutinizing the relevance of the project. The students were fully aware that the restructuring and reconstruction of the city of Beirut require other interventions besides modern architectural solutions. Prior to the development of such projects, Lebanon has a need for in-depth changes on a political, institutional, societal, and economic level within the country.

Over the course of the academic year, I tried to put into perspective whether our thorough research allowed us to grasp the reality of the situation within the city of Beirut or whether our interpretation of the situation was too narrow. A misunderstanding of the real conditions would prevent the implementation of urban designs in real-life situations. It can be difficult to promote architectural constructions of a certain magnitude in a country that currently experiences an economic collapse and a population that has suffered on many different levels as a consequence of the financial mismanagement of the government. It is also disputable whether our proposed urban interventions would support the spirit of the local population or whether they would find themselves in conflict with the cultural and societal mentality.

These concerns can be a consequence of cultural differences, geographic distance, and possibly through unintentional ignorance or unawareness of different issues by the students. On a personal level, I would have preferred to seize the occasion to visit Beirut in order to experience the reality of the situation. This experience would have allowed me to develop a more detailed and realistic interpretation of the ongoing issues and a broader understanding of the needs and problems of the people of Beirut. The acquired knowledge during such a visit would have assisted me in later decisions regarding my project. However, the research and the process of developing the project also supported the development of a higher awareness of places like Beirut, which require besides an urban rebuild additional financial aid and other forms of support.

Furthermore, the Graduation Studio provided the choice of several different topics that people within one group had to divide between themselves. The limited number of urban layer topics put the students into a situation where they had to accept certain compromises within the team leading to some students not being not completely satisfied with the distribution of the topics. Consequently, it was difficult for the students to identify a clear focus on the topic. As a result, they struggled to completely immerse themselves during the research phase due to a lack of identification with the purpose of the topic. Naturally, it would be difficult for them to justify certain choices regarding their final project, as they did not manage to align the needs of the project with their personal interests or strengths. Even though students should be able to adapt to the requirements of a given project and put their personal preferences aside, the graduation project typology would benefit from the possibility to allow students to determine the different urban layers by themselves, creating the possibility for the students to express themselves in a more open and efficient way.