

Reflection

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The Graduation Studio of Interiors Buildings Cities investigates the possible future of the **National Bank of Belgium**, located in the city of Brussels. Starting with the research of historical and contemporary office buildings and bank buildings, the studio moved to the inquiry of the **Future Bank** as an agent of institutional change. The co-existence of species, **human and non-human**, within the social and physical context of the Future Bank has been the highlight of my Graduation Project.

The bank as a collective system has been recently scrutinized due to persistent **climate change**. As Brussels is working towards a **Doughnut Economy Model**, the National Bank of Belgium investing in climate destructing companies is contradictory. My Graduation Project re-grounds the institution of The National Bank of Belgium to represent the environmental responsibilities that the bank carries towards society today.

My Research Plan, written at the start of the year, included the **feminist concern** of the environmental destructing system of the patriarchal corporate world. This female position towards the human accountability in climate change and the carbon footprint of our contemporary **economic system** has led to the creation of *The Wheatfield Project* by Agnes Denes. She established two acres of wheat on the Battery Park landfill in Manhattan, New York in 1982. The choice of location provided a strong message as it was placed two blocks away from Wall Street and the World Trade Centre, and facing the Statue of Liberty. She decided that "we had enough public sculptures of men sitting on horses."

My personal interest in the feminist environmental discourse has guided my project into a design that accommodates both **people and the natural world**. Having almost no knowledge of the accommodation of the natural world myself, I have done research into historical and contemporary **glasshouses and greenhouses**, as well as case studies and precedent studies of contemporary office buildings which incorporate urban agriculture and nature-inclusive design. The books *Making Urban Nature* by Vollaard et al., which gives practical examples of nature-inclusive designing, and *Relational Architectural Ecologies* by Peg Rawes, which describes an important feminist discourse on both the current economy and the environment, have been great sources of inspiration too.



AGNES DENES, "WHEATFIELD - A CONFRONTATION," Accessed October 31, 2021 from <http://www.agnesdenesstudio.com/works7.html>.

Having said that, I noticed that it is fairly complicated to design a workspace which defies environmental destructive systems. My design for the bank of the future proposes to compromise this destruction by creating spaces dedicated to **increasing biodiversity**. In my design, the bank will accommodate nature in the form of multiple greenhouses, maintained by the bank's employees. The name of the project '**Green, the new Gold**' stands for the new value of the bank. As money is now regulated digitally, gold is no longer relevant. Instead, the bank values its **stored carbon**, as this will be the solution for tackling the climate crisis.

The relationship between the **office and the natural condition** has been a returning theme during my graduation process. How does nature ultimately change the way in which the bank operates in the future? And what is the consequence of the introduction of nature within the office environment? How does the introduction of nature drive **institutional change** in the bank and other institutions? I found that these questions are in particular hard to answer.

I see the Future Bank as a **steward of sustainability**. The bank will be an agent of change that understands its societal and environmental responsibilities. Just like the **Ford Foundation**, which focusses on education, freedom and democracy, human behaviour, and world peace, the National Bank of Belgium will be a **guardian of the material forces of nature**, and be an example, a pioneer to the world of banking. Hopefully, other big institutions will follow as they notice how the corporate world and the natural world can function simultaneously.

Now, the last part of my process includes visualizing this co-existence, as well as finetuning the Project Journal. This visualisation will ultimately be transferred through images and physical models.

This graduation project shows the significance of incorporating nature into the urban fabric and the relevance of nature-inclusive design, which goes beyond Architecture and is relevant for all other master tracks of the MSc AUBS.

Important literature

Agnes Denes, "Wheatfield - A Confrontation," Accessed October 31, 2021 from <http://www.agnesdenesstudio.com/works7.html>.

Rawes, Peg. Relational Architectural Ecologies: Architecture, Nature and Subjectivity. London: Routledge, 2013.

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Boys, Jos et al. Making Space: Women and the Man-made Environment. London: Pluto Press, 1984.

Perez, Caroline Criado. Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias in a World Designed for Men. London: Vintage Books, 2019.



THE FORD FOUNDATION, Accessed March 31, 2022 from <https://www.raymond-jungles.com/project/ford-foundation/>