

My process of research and design of the past few months can be structured through the acts of defining, looking at and reacting to. It has been a continuous dialogue between defining and looking at certain topics or problems and consequently reacting to my findings through the development of for example the masterplan for the design site, my personal design proposal for P2 and the further architectural and technical development of the project for P3 and P4.

The process started in September when I worked on the P1 presentation in collaboration with 4 other students, Anna, Max, Jacky and Jaron. This first assignment helped us get to know Brussels and the design site through the topic of 'Green Grasses of Town' looking into the patches of urban green scattered throughout Brussels. This research introduced me to the topic of left over spaces that emerged in the dense built environment of Brussels. This caught my interest and I continued my personal research on this topic. I looked into lost space and urban fragmentation, specifically in Brussels.

Simultaneously together with Frieke, Eline and Michalina, I worked on a Masterplan for the design site (Friche Josaphat), formulating our ideas about the site, on masterplan scale. Personally I think this assignment was not really what I expected to be doing during my architecture graduation studio, since it felt more like an urban planning assignment. However, looking back at it, I do think that it was very useful to first look at the site on a larger scale, to consequently zoom in on your own specific site and project. I think the masterplan offers a good grip to develop your own project within and functions as something to fall back on if you have to rethink of why you are doing what you are doing.

For P2 I presented my research and design proposal, but unfortunately I had to take a retake. Even though that everything was clear (at least in my head), I learned that I had to focus more on the visual communication of my research and project and the necessity of this in order to properly communicate your findings and ideas. Reflecting back on this I completely understand why my retake was necessary. My personal research remained very abstract and somewhat theoretical and was mainly focused on the city scale of Brussels. For my resit I was asked to approach my research more like field work, and ground this abstract and large scale research by zooming in, more focused on the design site.

I defined the topics I was talking about more clearly and analyzed the design site through these topics. I looked at the site as a lost space in an fragmented urban fabric and analyzed the Friche as a collage of fragments all with their own characteristics. By doing this, my research really helped me inform my design, instead of them being two separate elements. This resulted in a much more grounded design proposal for my P2 retake.

After P2 we continued the process by further developing our design proposal. I mainly worked by drawing plans by hand and making a paper site model to further develop my design. I never really used to work analogue a lot, but I really enjoyed the ease and speed in which you can test and communicate your design iterations. However, I did notice that at some point it became necessary for me to put things into the computer, since I noticed that working analogue prevented me from working precisely. This counterworked me from developing my project into more detail.

For My P2, my research was still floating a bit and was approached from an birds eye perspective. I proposed to continue my personal research by zooming in even more and analyzing the site from an (human) eye level perspective. I went to Brussels to capture and analyze my personal design site in even more detail looking at for example details, tactility, materials and colors that caught my attention at the site. I looked at the fragmented site as a puzzle, made up out of different pieces. How do they fit together? Do they even fit together? I analyzed the ambiguities of the different fragments, where do the pieces differ from each other, and where do they come together? Do they meet in massing or materialization? In the rhythm or colors of the facades?

My design project developed itself into being a multi sited project, consisting out of several buildings. I developed and designed my project with a similar approach as I had for my research. I approached the new buildings as being new fragments that were added to the site and focused on the different buildings that were already present at the site and looked for ways to relate to them, in order to bring them together and create a connection through the architectural characteristics of the 4 newly proposed buildings / fragments. Through design I looked for ways to relate to the existing and implement new features.

During this period we were introduced to the BT tutors and were expected to also take the technical aspects into account. Personally I think that during the early design stages I had quite some difficulty with working on my research, architecture and building technology all simultaneously. I have had several weeks that I tried doing all three of them, which resulted in achieving barely anything. I struggled with this a lot, and I think that looking back at it, it would have been important for me to prioritize and focus on one topic at the time instead of wanting to do all three of them.

The multi sited nature of my design again challenged me to spread my focus not only onto research, BT and Architecture, but now also for 4 different buildings. It became clear that I would not be able to fully work out all buildings into detail and after discussing this, decided on working into detail on just two of them. The other two buildings follow a similar approach and a general masterplan idea for these buildings is developed, but they are not completely worked out into detail.

For P3 we were expected to make a façade fragment model, which forced us to materialize our design and really zoom in a few scale levels. At this moment I think I was still working on 1:200 scale on my design, and suddenly we had to make this façade fragment 1:33. At first it was a bit of a challenge, but I do think that it was very useful to really force us think in more detail about our project and take the next step. The feedback during P3 was really useful, having two guest critics look at our projects. This made us think about how to briefly capture and explain our projects, getting back to the core of it. For P3 I did a first exploration on a way of relating to the existing architectures present at the site. The façade fragment is part of one of the buildings present at the site. The model explores how the new buildings could relate through materiality, color and scale to the existing building.

Now, in preparation for P4, I have been trying to structure and organize my on site observations in relation to my design decisions, and have been looking for ways to properly represent and communicate my research and design relationship. I have been working on an analytical model, representing my vision on the fragments at the site, their characteristics and how the newly proposed buildings interact with each other, but also showing how they relate to the existing.

My project can be described as an exploration of a possible way to react to a site very fragmented in character. Fragmented on different scale levels: the site being a lost space, a fragment, in the city fabric. But also on a smaller scale the design site is made up out of different fragments all unique in their expression. Through my research and design I explored how to position a project in such a fragmented site?

On the urban scale fragmentation might be considered a bad thing, causing disconnection, but zooming in more, the fragmented character of a site can be very interesting, in the way how materials or volumes come together and interact. Mediating between these differences by acknowledging the unique characteristics of the specific site and reacting to them through representation, retainment or by reshaping them, I approached this project. You could say that my ensemble adds a new fragment to the site. While this might feel contradictory, I explored how by adding new fragments, connections can be made to the site, through physical characteristics but also connecting to the people by adding new functions to the site where people from the city and surrounding neighborhoods can meet.

Reflecting on the studio in general I really appreciated the amount of group work and the many excursions we have had. This caused for the Urban Architecture studio to become a close group (of friends) and allowed us to get to know each other professionally but also personally. I want to thank my tutors for all their help and guidance throughout the project. I felt like it was very helpful to brainstorm my ideas together with my tutors and it also helped me to put all the puzzles of my design, research, and building technology together. So thank you very much!

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