

Reflection

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 started with discovering the public space as a place to thrive and grow as an individual, ideally in the context of a community.

The relationship to my Architecture master's Track and master's Programme (AUBS) is the relationship between the existing built environment and the open space it composes and shapes. Therefore architectural and urban considerations come together in one project.

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

Before I went on the field trip to Spain, I focused on the impact of public spaces for a means of lifelong learning. The Madrid research made me aware of the spatial inequalities in formal education. Therefore I started to focus on the informal, formal and non-formal education of children from the ages 6-12 years. I focused the research methodology of my research plan on this sub-field of children's education and I was intrigued about areas in the city where public spaces as learning spaces would be "contested". In preparation for the trip to Spain I highlighted the neighbourhoods located in strongly contrasting zones. An example would be a neighbourhood with a high unemployment rate next to a neighbourhood with a low unemployment rate. These contrasting zones are prone to "contestation" of the public space and are often prospects for gentrification. When I went to Spain, I was aware it wouldn't be possible to talk to children. Instead, I started by visiting associations in the highlighted neighbourhoods. The first association I visited was focused on the children of the neighbourhood Zofío, which is part of the district Usera. They shared with me about the struggle the children face regarding their formal education and

how the support from home is not sufficient. The association offered programmes for children from the ages 6-17 years. They mentioned a very severe problem, which is the drop-out rates and the difficult integration of these young adults into the labour market. This made me more curious to learn more about the transition between finishing high school and employment. In hindsight, the field trip revealed the relationship between the formal education of children and the prevailing inequalities in certain neighbourhoods. My focus therefore shifted on the successful integration of young adults into the labour market. My last interview was with an association that has its office in the abandoned shopping centre called “Centro Comercial Orcasur”. The empty and run-down building intrigued me. What I learned during the interview was that many people living in Orcasur get governmental benefits. Once they would earn money, they would lose their right to receive those benefits. Therefore there are no good incentives for those people to seek employment. Instead, especially young adults join gangs and sell products illegally. I felt sorry for the young adults and the supposedly never-ending downward spiral where the young and old from Orcasur seem to be trapped. With that in mind, I returned to Delft and started to research more about the history of Orcasur.

The findings that followed the field trip and the in-depth research about Orcasur have been the starting point for the programmatic framework of my design proposal. So looking back, I consider the step between research and design coherent and reasoned. It has been challenging to repeatedly return to theory and the research findings and to coherently tie them together with my interventions.

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

The methodology that I proposed in my Research Plan differed from the journey I went on after the field trip. Which wasn't a surprise for me. I was hoping to find more specific and Madrid-related information that feeds forward my research.

Next to developing a deeper understanding of Orcasur, I tried

to dive deeper into the theory of public space. Having the site in the back of my mind, I was searching for theoretical approaches that fit my site, but it wasn't successful. This then led me to define the actual research gap for my thesis, that is: contemporary literature about public space doesn't take into consideration the *nuances* of public spaces that exist. I took a step further and specified (also related to my site) the gap in the literature.

The neighbourhood of Orcasur, like many other modernist housing developments, is characterised by large-scale and under-managed public spaces. I was bothered by the fact, that the available literature suggests with a casualness that their approach is sufficient.

By now, I have two strains of research heading towards my design. One is the research about the neighbourhood, history, demographics, and local voices. The other one derives from a literature review about the status quo of contemporary literature which is part of my position paper. In that paper, I argue my position by underlining it through critics of contemporary urban design theory.

It wasn't always easy for me to keep in line with both strains of research. There were weeks when I hyper-fixated on one and forgot about the other. Even though I wish it would have been clearer for me throughout the process, I believe that this is a normal process of a design-by-research approach.

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

My graduation project frames an aspect that is mainly overlooked in the theory of urban design. I address the shortcomings of contemporary literature in my position paper and plea for a better *nuancing* in theory. The imposition of top-down approaches in urban design through the assessed theory doesn't correspond with what the design of public space needs. Instead, as designers we ought to coordinate bottom-up developments, bringing in the people as the main actors of public space.

Concerning the ethical aspects, it seems paradoxical for me to oppose theory as being too top-down because the work that I do with my thesis pours again into the academical stain of thinking and imposes thoughts and ideas on places. I acknowledge that as an architect, I will subsequently impose order on the places I intervene. It's helpful for the process I'm in now, to consider the level of abstractness theory can take on and then step out of it consciously into the reality of things.

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

The position I take in my research can be applied and transferred to the field of urban design. That is, to apply a more *nuanced* theory of public spaces, which subsequently leads to new approaches. These approaches might be very site-specific and are not to be transferred and applied elsewhere. Otherwise, it would contradict my initial critique of the generic understanding of public space.

Upon wrapping up this reflection, the following two questions have accompanied my journey throughout:

How can my proposed practice of *spatial nuancing* be reproduced/reapplied in specific contexts outside of Orcasur?

How would I make this design proposal tangible for the locals with regard to potential implementation?