Deying Chen
5504295
Graduation
Studio ADC
05/26/2023

Reflection

Design approach in relation to research process

In my research process I was fascinated by the heterogeneous characteristics of London, especially the community that I based my research on, western Tower Hamlet. The process of researching on the edge conditions allowed me to study urban conditions under the lens of contrast. The wide range of topics and the heterogeneous backgrounds of the actors enabled me to perceive urban analysis with depth and at the same time seek methods and methodologies fitting to this wide range of research topics.

The multi layered research approach I utilized provides a coherent understanding of edge conditions as well as a solid foundation towards the design process. In contrast to the traditional methods that are used in urban analysis such as geographical mappings, the method of ''Thick Description'' that I used, helps not only with describing different edges with completely different variants but also helps with the natural transition into the earlier design process of identifying demographic targets and socioeconomic backgrounds.

My graduation project is relevant to current architectural and urban analysis because many of the current architectural academics at TU Delft focus on the study of people, the cultural and economic aspects. These aspects are becoming more and more influential in the design approaches and concepts. For example, the topic of gentrification and design for social integration has been a popular debate among current architects, and the study of edge conditions or crossing edges is an essential research base for such a type of design.

In order to design for crossing edges and social integration, I chose the approach to design space for economic, educational or leisure activities in order to bridge the contrast of socio-economic and infrastructural edges. The cross domain design requirements fit with the studio topic of heterogeneous London, which encourage the design for a diverse and multicultural city. On a bigger scale, the scientific way of studying the edge conditions as part of the urban structure is relevant to Msc AUBS program and Architectrue track for its applicability of overall research on urban space and architecture design. This demonstrates the relevance of my graduation project to my master track and programme.

In my process of developing the

design, I first continued with the research question from my research process, which focused on the question of what typologies, spatial configurations and functionalities are most fitting for such a project. In search of these answers, I looked into the urban theoretical studies of urban openness and porosity as these topics are often linked to social integration and urban equality. In terms of porosity, I concluded that there are three different scales of porosity I aim to achieve in my design, which are urban, spatial and material.

Urban porosity is highly relevant to the urban context and site selection. With the help of edge condition analysis on a 3D level, I establish a system of edges within the research area then proceed to choose my site based on the edges that should be crossed with architectural design. Therefore my urban research is connected directly to my site selection context because of its scientific and efficient approach to locate areas with conflict and potential.

Porosity on the building levels helps me with making radical design choices based on the design agendas that focus on making connections spatially and demographically. In my design process, I constantly remind myself to consider the spatial configuration that promotes visual and physical connections, and create low threshold space for promoting social interactions. Hence, this showcases that this idea of openness evolves from an urban theory to tangible design approaches.

Last but not least, porosity on the material level is highly connected to building technology and climate control, including temperature, ventilation and acoustic qualities. I emphasized on the indoor acoustic qualities of my design, both because of the context and the programs within the building. Utilizing porous material, I designed to reflect and absorb the noise from the surrounding environment and which then improves the living quality. This further reiterates how my research process has naturally led to my design goal, and the research methods have inspired my design approach.

Feedback and progression of my work

My mentors and I approached the project with the ideology of solving social problems, but the design process was completed with a realistic attitude. Because I am designing a complex building with an overlay of multiple programs, it is essential to make a solid study of the vertical organization and program components as well as the overall compositions of my design. These three basic elements in my design are highly connected and interactive with each other.

Working on the overall composition of the building, I initially approached it with the concept of collaging and contradicting, which led to extremely complicated volumes that lacked creativity and organization. My approach to finding form took a turn after the feedback given by my mentors, which suggested I need to design with both more coherence and logical organizations. With the feedback I tried to find form by comparing physical models and different variants of organization logics, especially vertical connection

that is important for linking overlapping components. The logistics and pairing of multiple compositions led to finding a coherent form in the end for me.

After the program components and their overall positions were settled, I came to realize through the feedback that small adjustments need to be made including structural and material choices, levels of residential units and circulation design regarding fire safety regulations. All these progress and detailed changes would not have happened if not for the weekly feedback given by my mentors and our countless consistent work towards perfection and creativity.

My assessment towards my project

To conclude, my graduation design has its value towards academic architecture studies and society because the topic of gentrification/inequality is highly relevant in not only London but many other metropolitan areas in the world. The gentrification in London specifically has led to enclaves of new development surrounded by working class neighborhoods, therefore creating an 'edge' area between these two. The gentrification process of London was caused by the growth of business opportunities and population. On one hand, Gentrification has led to the increase of hygiene and quality of life, but has led to the loss of identities of certain communities. Such phenomenon is common in big metropolitan areas all over the world, therefore the study of social integration in urban transitional zones is relevant in a bigger social framework.

The value of my research methods could be reflected by the result of 'thick descriptions' of edge conditions, which not only provide a thorough urban analysis of edge conditions of western Tower Hamlets, but also offer a well organized theoretical framework for future studies on urban edge conditions.

I learned from working on my graduation projects that in order to design with the function of surrounding context, architects should start with urban studies of the surrounding areas to discover the urban characteristics and potentials. Design agendas could be naturally generated from urban analysis and be implemented in the process with different layers of scales.

Because of the complexity of my project, I came to realize that when dealing with a complex context, even if the design project starts with ideology or higher theoretical ambitions, the approach should still be ultra realistic in terms of practicality. But creativity and playfulness should not be neglected in the process as well. In the end, the questions I have towards my project and its fascinating settings motivated me to keep an open mind towards this complexity that sits inside a bigger heterogeneous system.