

## EAP 2018 Project analysis

by Klaske Havik

Dear students, parents, colleagues and jury members. In the past days, I have had the great pleasure to get acquainted with the work of the graduation students of the architecture schools in Hasselt, Liège, Aachen and Maastricht, and to be part of this special occasion that brings works from different countries together. Despite the different languages and institutional contexts in which the projects were produced, this selection of works presents a rich sharing of ideas for, and concerns about, spatial development in the region.

Indeed, the works show a great sense of engagement with societal issues, exploring what could be the architect's role to address pressing issues in the region, such as the rural condition, the identity of villages, the quality of urban space, the remains of the industrial character of the region, wondering how to re-value that memory and how to appropriate these sometimes impressive but obsolete, built structures. In this text, I will start by highlighting how some of the projects have addressed the issue of the industrial legacy of the region, and beyond, even venturing into such urban conditions as London. In these projects, the students have been thinking of new ways to envision industry, as part of a societal concern about forms of production and engagement. Then, I will show how issues of memory and appropriation also appear outside the realm of industrial heritage. Projects have dealt with the re-use of empty office buildings, hospitals or post-war architecture, while other projects have been digging further into history, proposing, for instance, subtle interventions in Italian historical cities. Then, going back to the notion of the region, I will discuss some projects that seek to identify the local and social resources in small rural communities, seeking to use that potential in subtle new proposals that hope to inspire community driven development. From the rural, we will move to urban space, discussing projects that seek to deal with issues of publicness in complex urban configuration. Finally, I will highlight a few projects that may deal with several of these issues, but beyond proposing solutions to problems, the authors of these projects have seen their graduation trajectory as an opportunity to explore their own perception and imagination.

### Industry and Craftsmanship

The studio *New Economies* of the University of Hasselt studied the former industrial area along the Albert canal between Hasselt and Genk, characterized by large industrial structures and infrastructural lines such as the N702. The project of **Elke Rutten** looked into this landscape with a particular focus on the waterway- the industrial canal and the natural ponds of the Stiemerbeek. Making use of this "hydro-landscape", as she calls it, she introduces a new industry, relating environmental concerns with that of food production: a fish farm. Her project brings energy production, fish and human perception of the landscape together within a system that involves building as much as water.

**Henor Elshanaj** looked into one of the abandoned industrial structures along the same line: the former coal plant of Langerlo in Genk. She uses the ruin of the coal plant as a protective skin around a new "milieu", a tower accommodating different functions of the local community. This spatial intervention is paired with a platform that serves as a base for the tower within a tower, a horizontal base which invites for different public and collective functions to flourish. In these projects, indeed the concern about sustainability plays a decisive role, and the projects offer ways of thinking about natural resources in a more responsible manner.

Also, *The Living Factory* by **Roel Vlaeminck** thinks about ways to deal with the negative image of the polluted area and looks - like Elke Rutten with the fish farm- into food production as a possible new impulse for local economy. His project makes use of the language of industrial productivity in a new building where he combines food production with housing. The building, on the one hand, accommodates a mushroom farm while on the other hand it aims to offer a new environment for living in the area.

The *VAKhuis, A house for craftsmanship* developed by **Yves Dupont** in the same studio, also deals with the environmental and social impact of the industrial history of the region, this time by proposing a re-appreciation of the craftsmanship that many of the former industrial workers embody. His project envisions a new type of factory, promoting local manufacturing as a sustainable and socially responsible way to give new meaning to the industrial character of the area. Remarkably, the project, also in its own production and representation, shows a remarkable sense of craftsmanship, both in the drawings and the models presented.

While the aforementioned projects look closely into the industrial heritage in the rural area of Belgian Limburg, the next few projects take us to industries in the city. The project *Braugold - past as present* by **Lukas Pauw and Kay Sommer** studies a former brewery in the city of Erfurt, Germany. The project offers a strategy for the re-use of the buildings for public and touristic functions such as a hotel and a theater space, carefully handling existing qualities and providing new additions.

*The Productive Metropolis* by **Mihails Staluns** is situated in London and addresses the long manufacturing tradition of that city. Like the project by Yves Dupont, also this project sees a re-appreciation of craftsmanship as a productive way to give industry new meaning, this time in the urban environment of London. The rough tower includes production spaces for textile workshops, carpentry and a market space.

## Memory and Appropriation

Not only the aforementioned projects, engaging with industrial heritage, touch upon issues of memory. Other forms of re-use have also been brought to the fore by the different schools of architecture, acknowledging the increasingly important role that the re-use of existing buildings is playing in architectural profession. The University of Liège offered a studio specifically looking into the architectural products of the postwar era, investigating large scale office buildings and their possible adaptation to contemporary uses. How can former offices be appropriated by other users and which architectural interventions are necessary to adapt such structures to contemporary standards of comfort?

In *Sequences and perspectives*, **Thomas Compeers and Yannick Michaud** propose a strategy for the reconversion of the former building for radio and television in Liège, a building they refer to as a "functionalist machine". Through an analysis of the building, they discovered that the inner logic of the existing building, its structure and facades in fact offer great potential for re-use without destroying the monumental character of the building. In their proposal, new apartments are imagined in the structure, making smart use of the high ceilings to provide mezzanines which produce within the rough building a sense of domesticity.

In *Art BNB #The Treachery of Images*, **Maxime Coq** proposed to rehabilitate the 1968 building of National Bank of Belgium in Liège, making use of the underlying compositional structure of a square grid. The grid is repeated in a new layer in steel, which is positioned above the existing building and offers exhibitions spaces for the art collection of the National Bank. The volume, referring to the modernist language of Mies van der Rohe rather than to the neoclassical facade of the building, gives a subtle comment on the confusion of architectural styles in the existing building. **Sébastien Gilet and Thomas Pierre** also intervene in the National Bank building, proposing a MediaLab and providing a new internal route: a spiral which connects different public faculties within the building.

Going further back in time, the project for *Museo Diocesano* by **Kaspar Berbuer** of RWTH Aachen, proposes an extension of an existing museum in the delicate historical context of Milano's historical city center. Seeking formal connections with the delicate historical context, while providing a contemporary intervention, the project develops a formal language that connects to the existing structure without becoming historicizing. Its materialization in brick gives the building a certain weight that resonates with the historical gravity of the assignment.

Finally, the project *Kwartier Vier* by **Léon Nypels** of the architecture school in Maastricht shows a subtle reading of historical values in both the programme and the architectural intervention he proposes for a former mental asylum in the village of Oud-Rekum, Belgium. The interventions, delicate steel gestures in the historical buildings, reveal traces of the emotionally charged history of the site.

### **Local and Social Identity**

Such a sensitivity towards the local identity of a particular site is also manifest in a number of projects that intervene in the context of local communities and histories, or that bring new identities into an existing social and spatial structure. Indeed, the question of local and social identity is brought to the fore as driving force behind the projects.

*La Maison Eulenburg* by **Delphine Fresing** taps into the local appreciation of a former school in the historical town of Manderfeld to initiate new social activity. The building, which is now in private use, has a public courtyard. By a small intervention alongside the courtyard, the boundaries between public and private are purposefully challenged, opening up new potential for the local community to reclaim the territory of the school as a collective one.

Likewise, the project *Multigenerational Housing - Grocery* by **Anna Niessen**, which as well as the previous project participated in a studio on rurality by Liège University, studies the social and spatial potential of a specific locality in a village in the Belgian Eifel. Carefully balancing programmes for different generations of inhabitants, the project inserts a number of modest volumes into the core of the village, respecting local building typologies and topographies.

Another study of rural landscapes and communities is offered by the project *Corpus Vallis* by **Sandrine Peulen** of UHasselt, which studies the relationship between landscape and villages in the Belgian country-side, and aims to give new meaning to both landscape and community values. The project proposes both a landscape intervention, which offers a new perception of the landscape by a path that literally cuts through the surface, and a new life for an existing church, providing community facilities.

From RWTH Aachen, multiple projects touch upon these issues of local and social identity, for instance in the project *Subsistence – Agriculture between Cologne and Bonn* by **Nathalie Pszola**. As an alternative for a newly planned suburban area for the village of Sechtem, this project proposes to combine a dense model of housing with a large agricultural space for the local production of food. Taking into account concerns of sustainability and local identity, this alternative offers a new model for suburban development.

Agriculture also plays a decisive role in the project of **Stefan Otte and David Taffner**, cryptically entitled *60%Incline 80%Riesling 100%Terroir*. It looks into the wine production area of the Mosel,

and proposes a winery specifically responding to local building traditions. Both the local housing typology in Zell and am Mosel and the complexity of the wine production is studied carefully in order to develop a project completely catering for the local wine farmers. The careful elaboration of this project is worth mentioning: all levels of the process have been documented in finely designed booklets and evocative drawings of the future wine house, blending in the landscape of the Mosel region.

In other projects, the question of identity is brought to the fore in the task of introducing new cultural identities in existing urban contexts. This is the case with the project for the Turkish *Consulate General* in Cologne by **Victor Bausinger**. On the one hand, the project consists of an urban composition of straightforward volumes with a rather industrial appearance, which handle the different levels of security that come with the programme. On the other hand, subtle hints are made to Ottoman building culture, such as in the arches and in the layout of some of the inner patios. The project by **Caroline Grignard** of the University of Liège as well interweaves an oriental cultural programme -a Mosque- with an intervention within an existing urban block that formerly housed a riding arena. The cultural identity of the new users required a radical re-thinking of the circulation within the volume.

### **Urban Complexity and Public Space**

Issues of identity also play a role in a number of projects that take the urban context as a point of departure, often dealing with the relation between buildings and public space. In Berlin Spandau, **Janna Steinhart** proposes *City Oasis*, an urban quarter that focuses on pedestrian space rather than on car-related infrastructure. Here, the project explicitly leaves room for appropriation and incremental growth, by only fixing the ground floor plans and leaving the further development to the initiative of future inhabitants.

**Daniel Tüschen** draws on the potential of public urban space within his project *A High-rise Educational Building in Frankfurt*. Trying to achieve the quality of European public urban space also in an indoor educational environment, his project aims to be a prototype for a vertical learning environment in which a certain sense of publicness is shared between different levels.

**Eric Demary**, of the FH Aachen, had the task to develop a high-rise building for the Alexander Platz in Berlin. He proposed a mixed-use programme, seeing the building as a city in itself with a complexity of programmes such as student apartments, hotel rooms, offices, restaurants and shops. By using horizontal bands, the tower has an inviting rhythm that reveals some of the inner dynamics while hiding the specificity of the more private programmes.

The project of **David Breuer** -also of FH Aachen- speaks of urbanity from the perspective of a particular function: a music house. In line with recent developments such as the Elb Philharmonie in Hamburg, Musikkitalo in Helsinki or Casa da Musica in Oporto, this public building offers the opportunity to give a new impulse to an urban area by means of a strong architectural gesture. Situated in Aachen, the project has a sculptural quality, with the concert hall seemingly floating above a base which provides the facilities.

The project *Verviers Jazz* by **Nicola Galiotto** of the University of Liège also taps into this tendency of merging music with urban complexity, inserting two curvy volumes into a complex urban block, giving the music center and silence chapel it contains, an outspoken character while providing a sense of porosity, ensuring connections to the inner courtyard of the block. In this project, music is used in a metaphorical way, as the student suggests that "The site plays an improvised urban concert".

## Perception and Imagination

It is this connection between the urban and the festive that comes to the fore in the project of **Jakob Ghijsebrechts** of UHasselt. His *KARKASco* proposal for a complex infrastructural knot at the edge of the river Meuse in Maastricht is a rather excessive project which imagines to combine the festive not only with the urban but also with the dead. It is a project that celebrates the imagination, exploring different modes of burial and mourning, and seeking to connect these with the festive event of Carnival that is very present in Maastricht's urban culture. With both catacombs and a tower, the project dives into the earth and reaches to the sky, combining paradoxical programmes of pleasure and mourning.

It is in the last part of this analysis that I wish to highlight some projects of students who, beyond their formal and programmatic endeavours, have taken the liberty to explore questions of architectural perception and imagination within their work. In terms of architectural perception, the *Intercultural Center Aachen* by **Christina Klug** seeks to express questions of cultural identity through architectural means. The main inner space of her project, characterized by an abundance of arches, seems to confuse our perception; offering a remarkable, spatial experience that takes the users out of the everyday reality and brings them into a realm of contemplation.

Some students have not been afraid to venture into the subjective realms of the dream, as a source of inspiration for architectural perception. **Channah Mourmans'** *Morpheus* project developed at the architecture school in Maastricht, is such a dreamlike project, departing from the lyrics of the band Oscar and the Wolf and questioning what an autobiographical house in a forest could be. The perception of shadow and light, of lines and walls, and particularly of trees has provided the conditions for an extraordinary yet dreamlike project, presented in a large-scale model with real trees.

Presenting urban atmospheres that seem both real and surreal, the project *Arrivare a Venezia?* by **Jana Ring** of RWTH Aachen proposes three new entrances to Venice, based upon existing urban typologies that resonate with the historical character of the city of Venice. Their rhythm, colour, connection with the water as well as to earlier times and places transpire dreamlike atmospheres.

Finally, **Cente Van Hout** of UHasselt has gone beyond the borders of the possible to propose a project that may not be feasible in practice but that allows us to think critically about alternative scenarios. He proposes a radical structure - resembling utopian projects of for instance Superstudio - in *Rooms and Resistance*, to critically address the urban sprawl in the Belgian countryside, provocatively inverting the logics of public and private, of community and ownership in a highly fictional but thought-provoking design.

## Conclusion

By means of conclusion, let me state the following. We are witnessing here, in this event, this exhibition, this selection of projects, a new generation of architects, that are closely engaged with today's urgent societal questions, questions that play both on a global level and on the level of this particular region. I have admired the dedication that is present in the students' work to understand local specificities, to work with and for local communities, and to re-appreciate existing structures

and histories of the sites in which they have been operating. With these young architects, the Euregion can count on an inclusive, responsible and imaginative architectural future.

Klaske Havik 17 November 2018