Studio MAIB 34- City, Citizens and Space - City, Landscape and Infrastructure

Engagement: Legacy Master Studio

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How can we integrate a growing and transforming urban population within the existing built and un-built fabric in a way that is socially sustainable and embeds present and potential future social distancing restrictions?

What should be the role of open spaces and urban (natural and manmade) landscapes in light of neo-liberal economies which gives priority to capital driven development rather than communities welfare?

These are questions that need to be answered to build on the student's design discourse. The built-open ratio question has to be addressed in order to accommodate the socio-cultural needs of the increasing number of local communities. It needs to focus on integrating urban planning/ design and architecture in a way that they can form the backbone for community driven future developments.

Many urban and sub-urban neighbourhoods/communities in Europe can be characterized by an apparent lack of ownership towards the place they are living in creating isolated socio-cultural enclaves.

Architects, when confronted with such situations, need to decide on an approach to design which has the capacity to deal with communities in social transition. The two thematic approaches adopted for this studio overlap with each other. The approach adopted by this modus will be twofold;

A. City, citizens and space: Architectural and urban strategies integrating the theme of social sustainability in the development of collective spaces.

> *"First life, then spaces, then buildings - the other way around never works."* [1]

> Taking inspiration from the work and methodologies developed by Jan Gehl, the main idea in this studio is to understand the use of public space as a quality determining factor in the life of urban areas in social transition.

> The usual methodologies of design focus on traffic and buildings as a start point. This must be turned around so that people, collective networks and informal spaces become more visible in the planning processes and socially sustainable.

> *"In most cases, the beginning of the creation or design is a vision to create beautiful objects, which creates the "overshadowing factor", around which remains free space, with a hope that it will come to life on its own."* [2]

> This approach leaves to chance the most important aspects of collective space making which render the city dynamic, safe and attractive. The students will work to establish a different path of thinking: humans first, then the environment tailored to their needs.

> *"The road to creating successful spaces begins with putting people first"* [3]

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[1] Dixit Jan Gehl

[2] idem

[3] idem

B. City, landscape and infrastructure: Integration of social sustainability into (eco)infrastructure and landscape urbanism.

> Existing urban landscape elements (natural and manmade) have very often an inherent structuring capacity and have the potential to capitalize on their ecological, economic, social and cultural stimulus and nurture the notions described in section A.

> *"A quality of nature is that it is governed by certain rules which at the same time we're never really aware of… I am interested in creating something that would merge into this normalcy that surrounds us"* [4]

The proposed site will be located in a densely populated area of Brussels which is characterized by a very fast and relatively unpredictable transformation.

The objective of the studio is for the students to learn to equip themselves to design complimenting built and un-built spaces in accordance with the local needs of transforming areas. Development of socially sustainable collective spaces is pivotal to good city planning due to their strategic location and "in-between/standby" condition incorporating the current and future needs.

> *"Where there is nothing, everything is possible. Where there is architecture, nothing (else) is possible."* [5]

It is the vacant and unconventional collective places which could play a crucial role in maximizing the potential of a neighbourhood. Social inclusion and sustainability could be showcased as pilot projects not only for the neighborhood but also for other parts of the city.

The final outputs can range from urban strategies to architectural projects. It is the aim of this studio project to put emphasis on the interface of the built and unbuilt, the networks and the processes which span the inside and the outside and through that, create a sustainable continuity between the different scales of a neighbourhood and the city.

Image title/reference:

"Stadtobservatorium" Zurich, 1985
Installation and photo for the exhibition "Stattbilder" by Vincenzo Baviera

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[4] Quoted by Junya Ishigami, Excerpt of a text and interview by Katrien Vandermarliere, curator of an exhibition of Junya Ishigami in "de Singel" Antwerp, 2010.

[5] Koolhaas R., 'Imagining Nothingness' in: Koolhaas R & B. Mau, S,M,L,XL, The Monacelli Press, NY, 1995, p.199