

REVIEW OF DIPLOMA PROJECT

Author: Maria Chloe Tonia Rodriguez

The diploma project of Maria Chloe Tonia Rodriguez reflects on the quality of the urban design of the future Brno's South Quarter from the point of view of a pedestrian. Using the Space syntax method, it identifies problem areas (visibility of the future street network or its insufficient interconnection) and comes up with a spectacular solution of a superstructure: a multi-storey bridge, which will shift the movement of pedestrians above street level. It is intended to provide them with safety, an overview of the area, to compensate for the shortcomings of the proposed street network of the South District and simply bring them to the centre of Brno. As the title of the work suggests - the structure has "blurred borders" and "connects places".

The diploma project is elaborated extensively. In the first part, the author deals with the analysis of the place - the whole city of Brno. In this part, the reader is challenged several times by the question of whether and what connection the analyses have with the concept of the project, and is anxiously awaiting the application of the information obtained. It is impossible not to notice the similarity of the analytical part with the prepared document The Future of the Centre of Brno (an analysis for the competition of the Brno main railway station and the newly created South Quarter, which was prepared by the CCEA MOBA office). The author acknowledges this source, but she could focus more of her point of interest, or at least comment on the presented conclusions. In the second part of the analytical chapter, the author focuses on the South Quarter itself, and presents its places with views, interconnected bridges or transport solutions. In this part, it would certainly be good to hierarchize or at least comment on the findings - what the author sees as a problem, what the reader should notice and what the author will further develop in the design part.

We learn this partly at the beginning of the second part of the thesis, which is devoted to the design of the diploma project itself. The author presents her view of the South Quarter with the following questions: *"Thus it begs us to ask some questions how will a person navigate through this comfortably and safely? Will the district be used just as a transitional path between the Old City and the station? How can we create an identifiable line that merges the old and the new as one single path for public flow?"*

Chloe decided to solve the issue of safe movement of pedestrians in the new district, the author's fear of excessive car traffic and at the same time the absence of a memorable connection between the new and the old district by building a pedestrian bridge. As we will learn later, the more accurate name for the design is a multi-storey superstructure rather than a single-level footbridge. This decision itself raises further questions - why not address road safety right at street level? Will the new structure withstand the difficult task of "diverting" pedestrians instead of street events? However, I appreciate the effort to create a strong gesture that will connect the two parts of the city.

The author strengthens her idea by presenting reference projects. I searched unsuccessfully for perhaps the most well-known of similar concepts - the Seville Metropal Parasol. This part of the work might deserve more - and add there the analysis of these projects: Why did the authors of these proposals choose such a radical solution - superstructures, and what was the effect of these proposals? Did they use existing structures (as an example of the New York High Line)? Or - how big was the intervention, what materials and construction principles did they use?

Furthermore, the author deals with the Space syntax method, analyses the proposed South Quarter and especially justifies her decisions - where to start with the design of the bridge and where to place its important parts. It further analyses the South Quarter with the proposed bridge, and from the descriptions we learn about the positive effect of the structure on: improving the visibility of streets, integration of the street network and the number of choices where a pedestrian can go. At the end of this part, the author states that thanks to this, the project can be described as a human-centric design approach. It is a relatively bold statement, however we do not find in the work a definition of what the author actually means. Just by feeling what can be meant - this statement is supported by the study of few parameters (and what about materials, surfaces, landmarks, parterre, scale...?).

Chloe states that the structure will grow gradually. Which is an interesting idea, but apart from a brief description, we don't learn much more - why and how? This idea is followed by another description, where the author states that the structure can be adapted to new needs - for example, when changing to a playground, the platforms are replaced. This raises similar questions.

In the following part, the author introduces us the structure itself - its modular idea, the gradual growth of the bridge and the construction principles of the design. All this is built on a hexagon-structure, which certainly has this potential. However, the proposal works with more geometry - columns of two types, different heights, dimensions and, what is more, circular staircases and escalators. Depending on the design, various events can take place on the hexagonal platforms - we will find a kiosk or places to read here. However, these additional functions no longer strengthen hexagonal structures. On the contrary, they have the shape of a block or even a cylinder, which just stands on a shaped landing.

Unfortunately, the unexplained construction and material principle also increases embarrassment. We only know, for example, the height of the columns (25m, 23m, 20m) - but we do not know the reason for the chosen numbers.

Conclusion

The work raises many questions, to which I did not find answers in the presented material. As the already mentioned absent construction logic of the superstructure (what are the platforms built / made of, what supports them?), But also the user comfort issue (the increase of which was the main reason for the design): Will she/he really not want to see the action on the streets under the bridge? Will the South Quarter, on the other hand, not be a dead city without people thanks to the bridge? Is not the idea of a vertical separation of pedestrian and car traffic already obsolete? What will be the environment at the level of the sidewalk, ie under the bridge? How will mothers with prams, seniors, wheelchair users and blind people move under / on the bridge? How will the structure be maintained and cleaned? So, is this a sustainable proposal for the modern city?

I appreciate the courage that the author decided to react to from her point of view probably unsatisfactory designed proposal for the future Southern Quarter with a big gesture. Certainly, during the work she discovered many of the pitfalls that accompany such a decision.

From my point of view, the idea would need to be thoroughly (critically) examined and simplified so that the big gesture of a pedestrian bridge remains strong, clear and legible for the average user even after elaboration.

ECTS grade: D

