

mEYEsite*
AN EMOTIONAL APPROACH TO URBAN SITE RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT: The Department of Media Studies at the Faculty of Architecture, Delft University of Technology deals with teaching and research on the different available media, such as freehand sketching and presentation drawings, scale and computer modelling, photography, video film and on internet and communication technologies based media.

Our students investigate urban spaces also by means of these media.

The name of each program component includes the word EYE: our own eyes but also the eye of the camera: observing, perceiving, becoming aware of...

mEYEsite* proposes a working and a site research method, a way to better explore the characteristics and qualities of the urban space that improves considerably the amount of tools available for designers.

KEYWORDS: local identity, urban design, culture, public life, exterior and interior public space.

1 INTRODUCTION

The Department of Media Studies at the Faculty of Architecture, Delft University of Technology (the Netherlands) stimulates her students to explore and combine the diverse available media.

The tools they acquire, allow them also to employ other ways of expression and interaction. In addition they become able to explore and compose spaces in new exciting ways.

The Department of Media Studies deals with teaching and research on communication and visualization media, such as freehand drawing, photography, film, computer modelling and rendering and to the internet and communication technologies related media.

Our department proposes a platform, a true laboratory where students are encouraged to discover and combine all these media. As a result, they obtain powerful design and visualization instruments. These tools allow other ways of expression and interaction and permit in addition explore and compose spaces and urban forms in many new exciting ways. At the same time, attention is also paid to the possibilities for exposition, presentation and publication of different subjects.

Models and images are indispensable for designers at the time to make up, develop, and communicate their ideas. At the same time, this material should not only inform but also appeal to people.

Nevertheless, many people find it not easy to express their needs or give a correct picture of the character and the qualities of an urban space in advance. It is for them often possible to react on ideas only after the plans have been already completed.

As mentioned above, Media Studies researches as well the role media, included the so called new media, are able to play during the entire design process. And in this case, which is the significance not only throughout the design process itself but in particular in the previous steps to the design.

2 EXPLORING EXTERIOR AND INTERIOR PUBLIC SPACE

For already some years, our students investigate urban spaces also by means of media like film, sound and imaging. This specific programme is structured along different modules, based on qualitative, 'emotional' descriptions and experiences concerning urban space. In this way, they also become a unique catalogue of the urban, public space and an essential tool particularly applicable to spatial design.

The name of each program component includes the word EYE: our own eyes but also the eye of the camera: observing, perceiving and becoming aware of the different spaces we live in.

The elective mEYECity/Delft, for instance, was based on the idea of exploring and documenting urban space inspired on different topics like text fragments, selected according to the diverse feelings they might awaken, or based on own remembrances and emotions related to the particular places.

During this module students were first asked to document different neighbourhoods in the city of Delft (the Netherlands). Following a route, every student visited a different area. In this way, a visual portrait of each neighbourhood was produced.

Except for these images they were asked to write a report as well in order to try to describe the atmosphere and the most significant aspects of the visited sites.

After this first visit, a different student was now asked to follow the determined route but, in this case, after having read the particular text. These textual pieces have been selected to wake up in advance feelings or emotions associated to apprehension and violence, prestige, or poverty, for instance.

The collected images can be read in different ways: either as a sequence following the chronological order, or considering each picture as an autonomic still image. In addition, when different routes cross each other, the corresponding images make it possible to contrast the different spatial experiences.

This visual document is eventually completed with web links, text, audio, street sounds, film, 'testimonies', etc. In this way, a more comprehensive, personal version of each documented route is being created. A diary, a weblog can also be linked to the route, while different chronicles can connect with each other as well.

In this manner, students interpret textual descriptions into urban spaces, and record and catalogue the existing features and qualities.

3 mEYEsite*

The issue we present on this paper, mEYEsite*, is specially designed to train the essential skill of seeing, as described above. Together with the possibilities the different media can offer, mEYEsite* explores and describes urban space in new way. It makes also possible to express ideas and to compose designs through an effective, different and attractive approach.

But what we propose here is furthermore, to exploit the combination of one's own emotional 'load' and the chosen media, as a method to explore, analyse, and document the city.

The places we do most keep in mind are always related to emotions, pleasant or unpleasant memories.

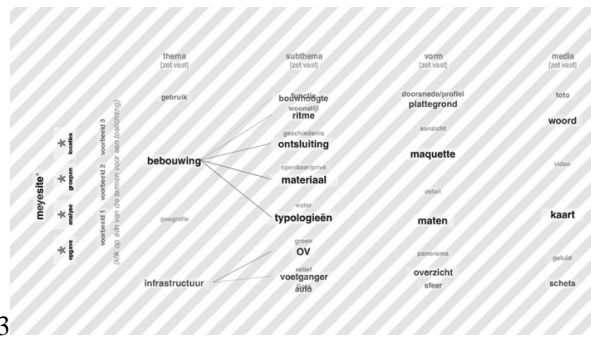
The enhancement of the experience of being at a certain site, linking a place to its people and buildings, digging into its different layers, facilitates a personal relationship with the observer and a new way of observation, registration and understanding.

mEYEsite* proposes a working and a site research method, a way to better explore the characteristics and qualities of the urban space that improves considerably the amount of tools available for designers. This material constitutes a unique catalogue of the public space and becomes essential when thinking and designing urban space.

3.1 First-year students

MediaStudies takes also part in de opening week for the new students at our faculty. During this very first mEYEsite* issue, they get acquainted with the possibilities MediaStudies can offer them to explore and understand a location.

For this purpose, a website has been specially developed showing the essential issues. Except for the needed information, such as the group they are in, the mentors or the locations themselves, a simple and clear way is presented in order to be able to establish relationships between the diverse aspects relating to the location and to start discover the way media can facilitate site exploring and understanding.



At page 'analysis' for instance, different groups of aspects concerning a location and the available media can be linked to each other showing the many different ways students can look at a place.

3.2 Advanced students

As mentioned above, we try to review the way we look at a place, to better observe and perceive. And this process is both, objective and subjective. An image, when not having been manipulated, is an unbiased document. Except for its authenticity, each drawing and each camera shot is, at the same time, a personal representation of the city.

This year MediaStudies also contributes to the MsC1 Urbanism 'Analysis and Design of Urban Form'. During the first week of this master, a group of students explores and documents a site by means of the medium film.

The initial exercise is based on diverse ways a designer (as a visitor in this case) can look at a site, depending either on different focus areas such as architectural materials and film portraits of people in the location itself or on the actual physical points of view we can look at the same site.

In the present case we make use for example, of the following options:

- IN the site, a visitor explores the architectural characteristics
- IN the site, a visitor explores the human aspects of the site
- TOWARDS/IN the site, a passer-by approaches and explores the site
- TOWARDS/THROUGH the site, a rider of a bicycle approaches and rides through the site
- TOWARDS/THROUGH the site, a rider of a bicycle approaches and rides through the site
- TOWARDS/AROUND/ALONG the site, a car driver approaches and rides along and around the site.

All these different options deliver distinctive ways to observe the same location, revealing the different layers and making possible a better understanding of the complexity of the urban site.



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4 LOCAL IDENTITY

Except for the one's own emotional 'load', the choice we make about our preferred medium –which is besides often familiar to us- is personal and reflects our style or even our values. The chosen medium strengthens significantly a personal, emotional involvement.

Accordingly, advanced students are especially welcome as well to participate of the different issues. Since they have greatly developed already an own personal style, a media 'handwriting', they can therefore take fully advantage of the proposed process.

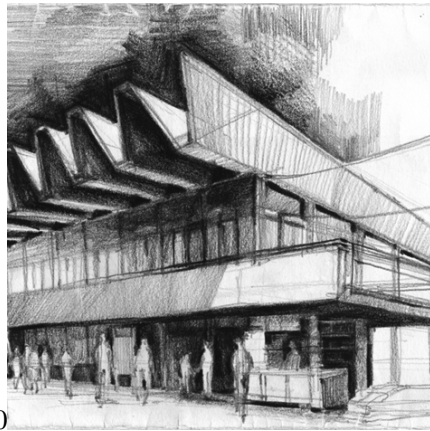
4.1 mEYEsite*Budapest

Following then the own subjective approach and personal involvement and by means of the favourite medium, the observer sees and registers the different layers of a site or a city. Freehand drawings, film, photos, sound, and interviews: all become notations that reveal and document the different aspects of the local identity.



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Freehand drawing particularly, constitutes an essential design tool. But, above all, it develops and trains our observation and perception skills: different aspects of urban sites can be analysed and expressed, such as scale, contrast, atmosphere, etc.



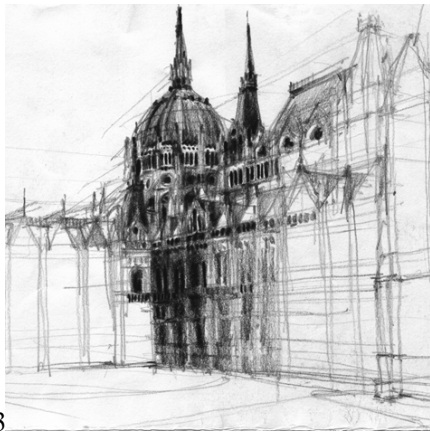
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This systematic visual analysis constitutes an extraordinarily efficient method to understand places and architecture. This process does not only facilitate understanding but it also motivates and inspires the upcoming designer.

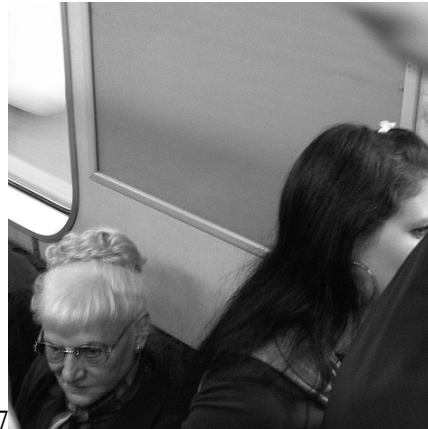
During mEYEsite*Budapest (2009) a group of students and mentors visited and ‘discovered’ this city.

By means of freehand drawing, photography or film, and collecting sounds or pieces of text each of us undertook a personal journey through the selected locations and explored the urban physical and ‘spiritual’ landscape including its architecture, its public spaces and its people.

City documents of a central square for instance, produced at different moments of the day or the night, reveal different human flows: scholars, office workers and also illegal workers being picked up somewhere very early in the morning.



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Late in the afternoon, when most people return home, groups of aged women try to draw the attention of the passers-by to their flowers or fruit. And much later, the local youth subculture will appear on the urban stage.



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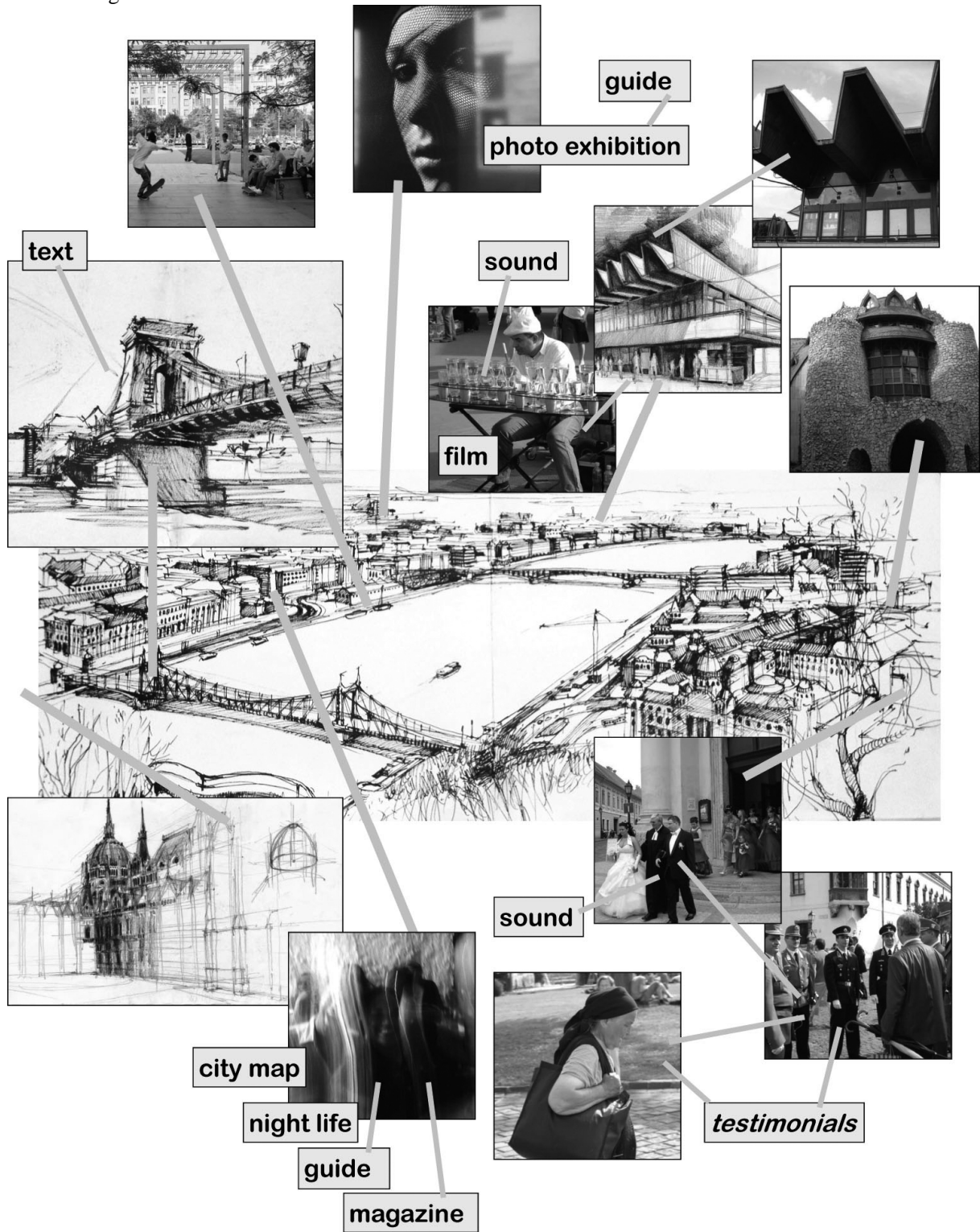
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By means of on-site interviews, for instance, we come to know more about their habits and choices in relation to the city. And visiting photo exhibitions for instance, can teach us something about the way local artists look at people or places.

All this carries also with it links to different disciplines, such as history or sociology and to social and cultural issues as well. But also, just only by including old photographs or postcards, a visual history of the site can be formed.



As a result, several presentations will have been produced. Except for exhibiting drawings, photographs and films, a web based application will be put online: an interactive digital panorama revealing, by means of links to different layers, all the collected material: drawings, photographs, films, sounds or maps and text fragments.



The different media can finally come together, proposing in this way diverse ways to combine information and offering a truly complementary portrait of the city, a sort of digital catalogue of the urban space.

As a next step, by means of weblogs, participants can react upon each other's contributions. Also, eventually other people can be invited to add comments and information.

5 MEYESITE* AND URBAN DETECTIVES IN LAGOS

The Department of Media Studies collaborates with Urban Detectives (www.urbandetectives.com) within the City Space Investigations – Lagos (CSILagos) workshop planned for April 2010.

“...The former capital of Nigeria seems to have surpassed its functional capacities long time ago. Despite its air of immediate collapse, still more than half a million migrants arrive yearly. A growth pace statistics even gave up to record: the population should be somewhere between 8-14 million inhabitants.

Lagos is the example par excellence of self organization; housing and commerce are mostly organized beyond any legal frameworks. The informal sector accounts for 60 percent of all economic activity, ranging from street hawkers to the production centres of imitations of Western goods...

CSILagos invite students and professionals alike to decipher the embodiment of informality and reflect on the potential for design and planning profession...

During this workshop the participants (students and professionals) will carry out several mappings and will at the end of the workshop present their findings...

The CSILagos is set up in three phases. The core on-site workshop 'In Lagos' will take place in April 2010.

The preparation phase 'Pre Lagos' will take place in Delft in February and March for Dutch students (and potentially also some professionals). After the on-site workshop a post-production phase 'Post Lagos' will focus on post editing and exposing the workshop results in expositions, publications and the online Urban Detectives platform.

Furthermore a GPS & Geocoding workshop will be organized by the Urban Detectives during the Pre Lagos to present the potentials of combining multimedia data with geographical data.”

6 CONCLUSIONS

Freehand drawing together with digital media offer enormous possibilities to explore, and document urban space and makes richer ways of expressing research and design possible.

mEYESite* allows students to make use of all kind of media in order to describe the qualities and characteristics of the urban space in a different way they habitually are asked to do.

The chosen medium offers an own, rich way to discover and document space and becomes an essential, complementary element when studying and designing the urban space.

Furthermore, we propose also to exploit the combination of one's own emotional 'load' and the chosen media, as a method to explore, analyse, and document the city.

The results are presented through web based sites. Each issue collects, identifies, and presents all the obtained information. This unique digital catalogue of the public space, not only allows but mainly stimulates the combination of the different documents, including sound. Designers come also to know more about composing and visualizing urban space.

mEYESite* proposes a working and a site research method, a way to better explore the characteristics and qualities of the urban space that improves considerably the amount of tools available for designers.
