

The Border has Thickness

In the middle of Flanders at the Dutch- Belgian border lies the small town of Overslag. Once, Overslag was a place where the transshipment of goods took place, from the lower canals at the polder areas to the smaller and higher canals in the direction of Gent. This transshipment happened there because of the difference in land height, from the higher sand grounds, to the lower polder clay areas. Later when the route moved westwards towards the new Gent-Yvercaete canal, the city lost its economical importance, and no signs of the past are to be seen.

The border runs right through Overslag. Traces of it can be seen through the various border poles from from the times of the Austrian Empire (which Belgium made part). Apart from that, nothing else of the border is visible. By taking a walk through the city with a map, one can follow the border through fences, lodges, wall of buildings, gardens or through the material used in the pavement. This strange relation between the border and the existing spatial elements as street, fences and at times buildings, became reason for questioning the behaviour of the border in Overslag. For me this was the starting point to investigate how the border behaved in relation to the various lots and physical elements in Overslag.

For the area of focus I chose to study the border behaviour at the Dorpatstraat in Overslag. Dorpatstraat is an ambiguous street where the northern side being Dutch and the southern Belgian. The buildings at the Dutch side have their entrances at the Dorpatstraat, whereas the Belgian side is mainly characterised by the back of the houses. The dutch side is less dense, with clearly organised lots, and a few agricultural patches. The Belgian side is more dense, many lots are build to its maximum extent. No beauty regulations are applied, resulting in a messy look with a big variety of materials, colours and textures. All the buildings here have direct access to Dorpatstraat, meaning that the houses have access to both Belgian and dutch sides of the town.

By studying the land registry regulations it became clear that the regulation lines between the two countries overlapped each other constantly and expressed itself in physical elements such as fences, traffic signs and pavement on the road.

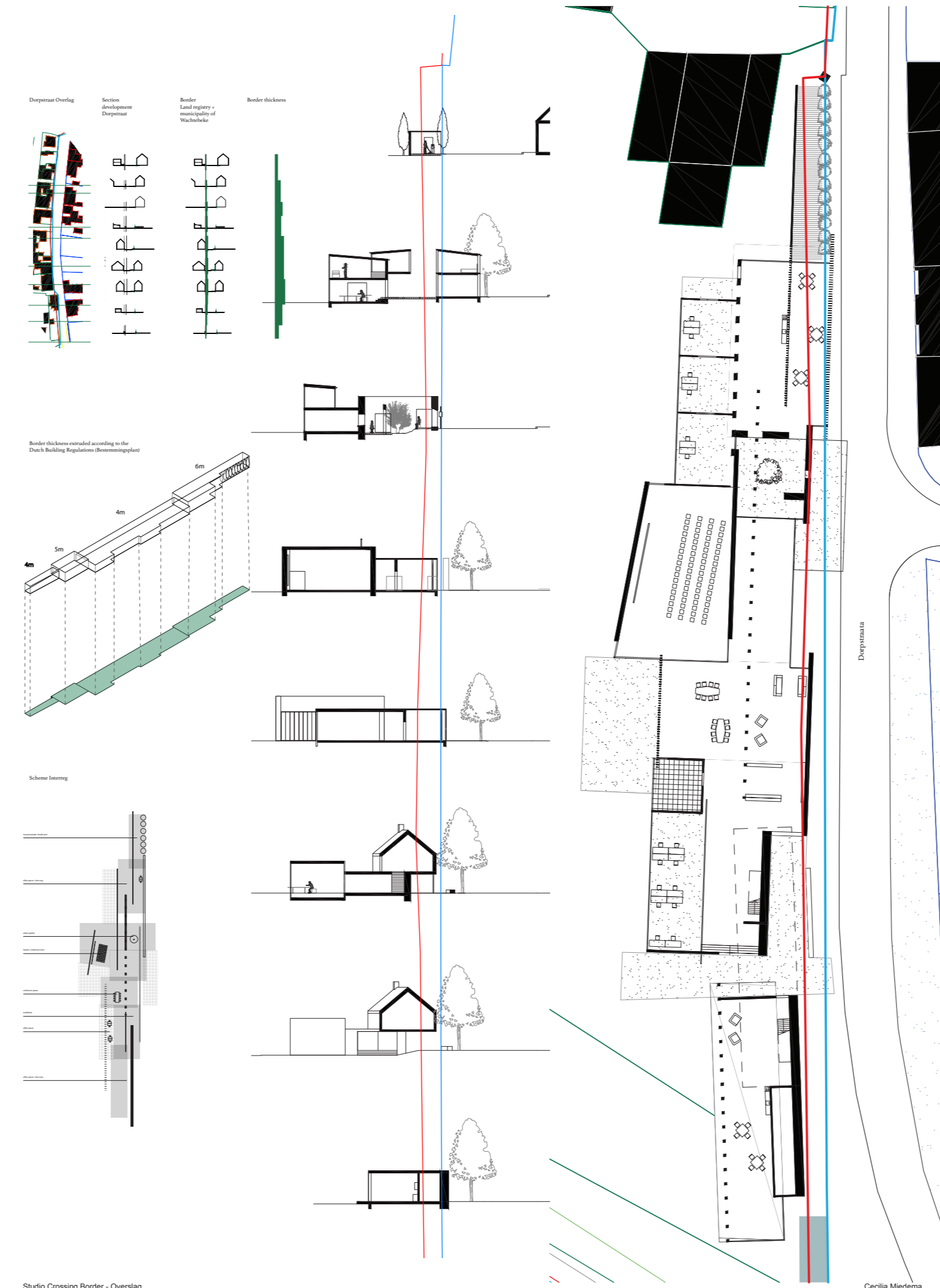
Are there are lessons to be learned from this small place looking as ordinary as it can be? I am continuing the series of sections of Dorpatstraat, now embracing the border with a exaggerated thickness, where program widens and narrows a long the NI- BE border. The border is made explicit and experientiable through the various rooms and passage-ways. The program range from cultural functions, like an open-air theatre, a bar perhaps as a small customs office of transshipment), to gardens, to working and short-stay spaces. According to the historical research, most probably what now Dorpatstraat is, was the then canal leading to Gent. The theme of warehouses is valid. Each program has its own material expression, according to their function.



Land Registry & municipality border

Legend

- NL/BE border
- Municipality of Wachteleke
- Land Registry NL
- Land Registry BE



Dorpatstraat Overslag

Section development Dorpatstraat

Border Land registry + municipality of Wachteleke

Border thickness

Border thickness extracted according to the Dutch Building Regulations (bestemmingsplan)

6m

4m

5m

4m

Scheme Interrog

