

## Whose Architecture?

I was not born in Flanders. I did not grow up here either. I arrived as an adult — educated elsewhere, shaped by values not rooted in this place, motivated by little more than the hope of a future.

### Have I become a “Flemish” architect yet?

In reality, it does not take much to become an architect in Flanders: a master’s degree in architecture, a modest portfolio with aesthetically pleasing images, basic language and computer skills. As long as I am useful. As long as an architectural office can rely on me to fill a planning gap.

Depending on scale and complexity, it can take up to five years to realise an architectural project in Flanders. I have lived and worked here for more than 16 years, side by side with people who were born here and those who were not, collectively designing and constructing the Flemish architectural landscape.

With a foreign upbringing, education, and sensitivities, every day I am part of shaping and reshaping the built environment in Flanders. Even though the projects are initiated by local investors and framed by national norms and regulations, they are born from childhood memories, formative moments at school, and values developed over the years — both “back home” and here. It is a continuous dialogue between a foreign past and a foreign present.

### After all these years, I wonder, is my architectural heritage here?

In the autumn of 2024, the Flanders Architecture Institute (VAi) published the sixteenth edition of *Architecture Book Flanders*. For over thirty years, this series has mapped the most notable architecture in Flanders and Brussels, attempting to crystallise an image of contemporary architectural culture. Notably, many of the published projects credit architects of foreign background as co-authors.

This relatively large group of individuals, despite their substantial contributions, remains largely unseen. Working in the shadows of principal architects — sometimes disadvantaged by limited proficiency in the local languages — they define fundamental spatial concepts, shape public spaces and buildings, and provide specialised expertise in construction, detailing, or building information modelling.

This observation raises questions about how the complexities of diverse heritage manifest themselves in architectural practice in Flanders. How does a condition of hybrid identity influence design ideas, image-making, working methods, or design attitudes? In what ways do cultural backgrounds, and migratory experiences shape the architecture?

### Project proposal

This project proposes an exploration of these questions through a series of in-depth interviews with architects of foreign background who are professionally active in Flanders. The focus lies not on completed buildings alone, but on the less visible layers of architectural production: personal trajectories, modes of thinking, design processes, and everyday practices within architectural offices.

The outcome of this research will be a publication that navigates through these conversations, weaving together personal narratives, reflections on identity, and insights into architectural practice. Rather than presenting a singular or unified perspective, the publication will assemble a constellation of voices, revealing the plurality of influences that shape contemporary architecture in Flanders.

By foregrounding stories that often remain unacknowledged, the project aims to expand the understanding of authorship and architectural heritage.

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