Project: New Arrivals

The graduation project of the Chair of Architecture and Dwelling is called ‘At home in the city: Amsterdam’. The assignment is to design a dwelling ensemble in Amsterdam, for me that will be on the Jan van Schaffelaarplantsoen in the Kolenkit neighbourhood. The municipality of Amsterdam shows in their ‘Structural Vision Amsterdam 2040’ several goas. The points which are most interesting for my graduation project are densification and qualitative public space. Densification is a very important point of attention for the city of Amsterdam, as they want to preserve the surrounding polder landscape while the amount of inhabitants is increasing. In the past century the city underwent several large scale expansions. One of them was the great expansion of ‘The western garden cities’ by Cornelis van Eesteren, where the Kolenkit neighbourhood is part off. Even though these neighbourhoods are dominated by high rise building slabs, the density is relatively low. The other point of attention is the high quality layout of public space, which again can be referred to the modernist expansions. The large amount of open space between the flats is a poor defined public space. For the Theme Research, conducted in the graduation studio in collaboration with two fellow students, we focussed on the subjects of interventions in an existing urban area and the creation of qualitative public space, with special attention to the combination of both. Our research question was: How can a housing block introduce new open space that is a contribution for the surrounding neighbourhood in an existing urban pattern? We explored some theory by three theories: Patrick Geddes, Aldo van Eyck and Manuel de Solà-Morales. The three of them make an analogy with the human body. Solà-Morales calls large scale city planning prosthesis, in opposition to the urban acupuncture approach. Van Eyck makes just like Solá-Morales the comparison with the human body, by stating an urban planner is a physician that can heal the body but cannot create one, while Patrick Geddes is speaking of conservative surgery. They all see the city as a body, as one working system. We should not amputate a part and built up a new one. They plead for small-scale interventions, small adjustments that will improve the area. Another similarity is that the three of them use open space as a way to improve the area.

The Kolenkit neighbourhood is proclaimed several times to be the worst neighbourhood in the Netherlands. To define which neighbourhood was the worst attention was paid to the social, physical and economic situation. The Kolenkit neighbourhood scored bad at all criteria. The dwellings are 84% social housing, and are mostly accommodated in high rise flats from the sixties with overdue maintenance. 83% of the residents are immigrant, the area has an unemployment rate of 12.5% and 71% is low educated.

First intention is to improve these numbers, but why would it be bad that 83% is immigrant. As Doug Saunders explains in his book Arrival City, it can be a very good thing, but in Amsterdam it did not work out the right way. Internationally there are examples of immigrant neighbourhoods (also called Arrival Cities) which function very well. Where the newcomers have the change to set up their own business and attract people from all over town with their foreign specialties. Sadly enough there are more examples where the immigrants gathered in the modernist social housing schemes, as those were the cheapest, where they did not have these opportunities. The streets in the Kolenkit neighbourhood are too wide to create an active city street, from one side of the street men can hardly see what might be sold on the other side. Next to that it is too sparsely populated, therefor the streets are not that well used and experienced as empty. Most of the plinths are allocated to storage-rooms, so on the ground floor there is little space for enterprises that could activate the streets. And on the upper level it is almost impossible to attract customers. Doug Saunders states that this physical environment is the main reason for most of the social and economic problems in the Dutch Arrival City.
My design is not focussed on attracting Dutch or higher educated residents but on emphasising the migrant identity of the neighbourhood and improving the conditions to start your own business and become part of the bigger society.

**How can my design on the Jan van Schaffelaarplantsoen support the Kolenkit neighbourhood to function better as an Arrival City?**

So concluding: My goal was to design a dwelling ensemble that functions as an Arrival City. An area where new arrivals get a change to start their city life. I don't want to focus mainly on immigrants but on Dutch migrants as well. My design should give a home to everybody that moves to Amsterdam and needs a first step on the ladder towards the main economy of the new city. That could be immigrants but as well students, or just graduates. I want to create an environment where inhabitants have the freedom and opportunity to start their own business.

**Design within social context**

The first goals are to create a low rise, high density area with many ground based dwellings, lots of possibilities to start your own business and with qualitative open space. To start with the open space; at the moment the neighbourhood has too much open space. All spaces are wide and spacious so they kind of blend together into one. The neighbourhood needs more well defined, small public spaces. By breaking through and denting I create a narrow active city street combined with a small square and two enclosed spaces within the building-blocks.

Low rise and high density; the maximum amount of floors of my design is five (same as surrounding buildings) and the area has a density of 220 dwellings, which means 190 dwellings per hectare, which is more than twice as much than the average density of entire Amsterdam. (88 dw/ha)

The plinths of the public spaces are dominated by shop opportunities, whereof most are a dwelling-type where the inhabitants have to possibility to use the ground floor level as business. And some are part of a Bazaar where permanent shops will function as a catalyser for the rest. With these basic strategies as a girder I support the Kolenkit neighbourhood to function better as an arrival city.

The problem of the modernist Arrival city is not a privilege of Amsterdam, but a problem that occurs in many western cities. The new inhabitants arrive in a neighbourhood which is isolated from the rest of the city, physically, socially and economically. With my design I want to show that it is possible to give a social and economic impulse to the neighbourhood with a relative small physical intervention. By creating a dense area with lots of business-opportunities I want to give the neighbourhood the tools to keep their international identity but to turn it into something positive. By bringing them the possibilities to practice their traditional crafts or to start up something new they get the opportunity to become part of a bigger network and eventually can make the step into the main city economy.