

Reflection Paper

Graduation Project 'NeighbourFOOD: Raising food awareness in the future city'

As a 3rd year Master student, during this academic year I was busy with my graduation project. The studio that I chose to participate was 'Dutch Housing: Stronghold Amsterdam'. The topic of this studio as mentioned in its studio manual concerns problems with ecology, climate, overpopulation, mass-migration, a shifting global power balance, changing demographics, etc., cities like Amsterdam will face in the future. But the question is: how do we want to live and what kind of buildings do we need to make that possible? Stated in the studio's manual 'In the Dutch Housing Graduation Studio you will formulate a vision on the future of the city of Amsterdam and design a housing project that exemplifies this vision.'

An extended research about Amsterdam was conducted by the studio's student during the first weeks of the graduation. The results of this research have presented a number of problems that Amsterdam is facing right now and is going to face in the future.

First of all, my graduation project theme deals with the problem of the lost connection between people and their food and their lack of awareness about how food can shape the urban fabric and people's lives nowadays. Therefore my project's research question was: How the architecture of a housing complex can contribute to raising of people's food awareness inside the urban fabric? To be able to give answer to this research question but also to a number of other questions regarding the design of such a building, research on different fields was done throughout the whole graduation process. Research methods such as literature research, case study research, location analysis and experimenting with design methods like sketching and modelling, were used in order to find design solutions for the problems that I faced during the design process. What I have learned from this project was that the relationship between design and research is not an act that happens only in the first stages. It is an act that I had to go back and forth multiple times when I was dealing with a number of challenges.

Furthermore, by researching different case studies of urban agriculture I came to the conclusion that food production in urban environments is a subject that is closely connected with both social and technical issues. From the research I realized that if future cities need to reach to a level that they are self-sufficient and self-sustained in the case of food supply, people need first to be more conscious about it. That meant for me that people had first to start being more aware about the problem of their lost connection with their food, and when they succeed to be aware about it, then they can move forward to the next step, which is to start creating self-sufficient neighborhoods and dealing with more technical issues. Therefore the most important factor for my design was that of educating people about the food supply problem and urban food production in general. And that could be achieved by having some food-based activities situated in the premises of the building and which have an educational character.

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May 2018

However, a critical point of this topic was finding a way to integrate these activities inside the buildings organization. And this was a challenge because I didn't have any reference project that deal with both the living and food production aspect. Thus, other research methods such as experimenting with sketching, helped me to achieve such an integration, so that all these different amenities and functions of the building come together and they are being perceived as disconnected with each other.

Moreover, I believe that the wider idea of the project as means of identity and programming of functions could be seen as a prototype for other places in the urban fabric of the city of Amsterdam. And I believe that because if Amsterdam has to deal with its food supply problem in the future, awareness needs to be raised between people about food, meaning that people need to be educated about this issue. Together with the fact that Amsterdam is also dealing with low stock in the housing market, I believe that such a project could be an interesting idea in order to address both of these issues.

Finally, I believe that dwelling architecture is probably that field of architecture which is the closest connected with people. Designing dwellings is like designing everyday shelters for people and their individual needs. In my opinion building for people and their needs, already has something moral about it. And in the case of Amsterdam which faces a big problem in low housing stock, designing a housing complex for people in need, like elderly people, never made me wonder if this was something ethical or not.

Summarizing this reflection paper, I can say with certainty that I have learned a lot during this last year. I have learned about food and its story behind the way it is produced, I have learned about elderly people and their housing needs. But most importantly I have learned about how a building that houses many different functions, can act as a whole and as a statement for people.