

An architecture museum in the old Battersea Power Station, London

09-05-2013

|| Abstract

For an integrated project it is important to reflect on the design process and research. The methods and approaches used during the process have to be considered to learn from the project in the end.

This particular design project deals with complexities involved with the conversion of an old building to an architecture museum. The re-use of the building itself is a complicated challenge, not to talk about the relationship between the old and new parts of the building. The re-use of an old building as an architecture museum adds a new set of complexities.

Therefore this reflection is structured in two parts:

The first will be a reflection on the research and the design: the results of research and the influence it had on the design process. It will include my fascination on the subject, the relationship between research and design and the influence in a wider social context.

Secondly I will explain the methods used during the design process and will reflect on the effect of these methods and approaches on my design and my planning.

| Research and design

ExploreLab is an exceptional thesis laboratory for students within the Architecture department of the University in Delft. It gives an opportunity for students to research their subjects of their own fascination and interests, which cannot be explored in 'regular' labs and design a project substantiated by research. Therefore the research is an important component for the Explore Lab graduation studio.

My research and design were based on my fascination for converted buildings and the function of an architecture museum within a converted building. In my opinion architecture is changing, the focus and attention to sustainability has become an important aspect. One of the aspects of sustainability is the re-use of old decommissioned buildings. Giving 'old' disused buildings a new function, a new life, so the building can be preserved. The functions which is given to the converted building is of importance depending on the sort of building. My interest was on the complexities and finding answers to several aspects of converting a building into a public function; a museum.

My fascination on re-use of a building and designing a public function within this building lead me to a famous landmark and old Power Station in the city of London, the Battersea Power Station. After visiting London and seeing the building myself, I wanted it to be my design project.



The Iconic Old Battersea Power Station, is a decommissioned coal-fired power station. It is the largest brick building in Europe. This disused Power Station stands on the largest undeveloped riverside site in Central London. The power station structure comprises of two individual power stations, built in two stages in the form of a single building. Battersea Power Station A was built in the 1930s and Battersea Power Station B on the east side of it in the 1950s. The two stations were built to an identical design, providing the well-known four-chimney layout. The chimneys distinguish the image of the station. The station ceased generating electricity in 1983, but over the past 50 years has become one of the best known landmarks in London. This well-known landmark was designed by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, an English architect known for his work on structures as: Liverpool Cathe-

dral, Waterloo Bridge, old Tate Power Station (now Tate Modern) and designing the iconic red telephone box. Scott came from a family of architects. He was noted for his blending of Gothic tradition with modernism, making what might have been functionally designed buildings into popular landmarks.

Since the station ceased generating electricity, there have been numerous proposals and attempts to redevelop the site. None of these plans were ever realised. Recently it has been sold to a Malaysian company SP Setia. There are still competitions to provide new ideas for the building. One of the recent competitions is from Archtriumph (year 2012). The competition focused on a new function for the building, an Architecture museum. The thought behind that particular function, an architecture museum, is the fact that the building is of such an architectural and historical value. In their words the Battersea Power Station is an 'Architectural Cathedral'. In my opinion such an architecture museum is a feasible idea, so it became an ambition for my design project. My two fascinations combined in one design project: an old decommissioned building, Battersea Power station, with a new public function, an architecture museum. The challenge to create a powerful design for a successful architecture museum.

By analysing existing architecture museums and converted museums I tried to answer the questions raised thinking of an architecture museum; what is an architecture museum? What is it supposed to be, and for whom? Is there a difference between a new museum or one in a converted building? How can you define the 'attraction - value' for a museum?

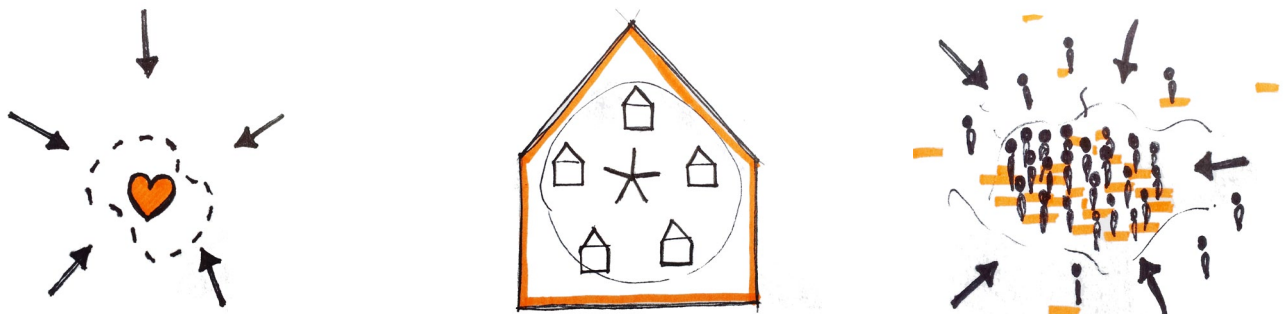
For the analysis I focused my research on several aspects which could be of help for my design: location, the architect, function, collection, experience and attraction. I analysed the following museums on these aspects: DAM Deutsches Architektur Museum Frankfurt Germany, NAI - Netherlands Architecture institute Rotterdam The Netherlands, Tate Modern London United Kingdom and ZKM Centre for Art & Media Technology Karlsruhe Germany. Two architecture museums and two museums in a converted building.

The research has helped me in making design decisions. It helped me create a few guidelines and interventions, strengthening the design and ensuring its feasibility.

The research/ analysis has shown the importance of the location of a public building. The way it is connected with public routes and buildings is a key success factor in the feasibility of the building.

By re-using a building, like the Battersea Power Station, the location is given therefore additions to the route and surroundings have to be considered carefully, to make up for things it lacks by itself. The architecture of the old building needs to be considered. The distinct features of the old building should be preserved in order for the public to have the historical connection.

The function of an architecture museum is a specific function with a specific public it attracts. In order to design a feasible museum for the city it is important to attract more than just this specific public. Attracting the general public is a challenge which can be solved in adding other functions to the building. Making the museum and building part of an attraction for the city, an experience.



Attract more public to the location by adding functions and strengthening acces.

Specific conclusions for Battersea Power Station

The location of a museum is of important value. A museum can be situated in the middle of a city centre or can be situated at the periphery of a city. The museum can be placed next to other museums or could be solitaire. The amount of people it attracts will definitely be different. It also depends on what the museum has to show: what the museum is about. A museum at the periphery of the city can still attract a lot of people because of the subject of the museum.

With Battersea Power station the location is set. I have to work with the location that is given. It is essential to add functions to the location, and strengthen the surroundings in order to attract public. It is important to enhance the accessibility of the building. Making it possible for the public to come to the area and enjoy the added functions etc. The Battersea power station is located on the South River Bank, on the map from above it seems to be close to the centre. But in reality it is not within walking distance of the highlights in London. This differs

from Tate Modern, located in a circle of highlights in the centre, whereby the public is easily attracted. So for Battersea it was important for me to strengthen the accessibility by adding a metro station, a landing space for water taxi's/ boats and walking and bicycle roads along the Thames. Also by adding a pedestrian and cycling bridge from Battersea Power station connecting to the other side of the Thames I will strengthen the accessibility.

As Battersea Power station is a landmark in London, every Londoner knows the building by its distinct shape with the four gigantic chimneys. In my opinion the most important architectural elements are these chimneys structures. Therefore these became an important factor in preserving the building. The chimneys should be the most important features of the building, an attraction on itself.

The brick facades all around have been damaged a lot, but in my opinion most facades are worth preserving. The new to build structure inside should blend in but with the old elements but still with an industrial feel. One of the special features in the building is the old control room. During the design process I realised I did not have enough information (and could not get) on these old control rooms, so I decided to use the facade as a shell in which a new structure is placed, the old control rooms interior should be preserved and replaced in the new structure. This should be part of the museum regarding the building and its role in London's power Supply history.

An architecture museum attracts a specific kind of public, mostly professional, public in the creative sector and architecture 'lovers'. On this specific public the building will never be feasible, so in order to attract more public I have added more functions to the building and surroundings. In my opinion the architecture museum should be part of a centre, an educational centre, working centre, shopping experience and meeting place. It should be the place for leading architects to give lectures, it should maybe become a place for London Architecture Biennales and should become a place for (music) festivals. The size of the building offers enough space to house all these functions. Apartments and hotels around the building should be the place to be able to live, right next to the buzzing Battersea Architecture Centre.

The architecture museum/ centre should become an experience and attraction.

Conclusion

Planning

During the design process I chose to subscribe for the competition written by Archtriumph. The deadline was set for February 2013 which was around the time of my P2 presentations. I made the decision to subscribe to give a boost to my design, by doing this I already had a design concept during the P2 presentations. In the end this helped me think out of the box and just design. But as a consequence the research part had a false start, I got behind with my research. By starting the research after the P2 the initial design decisions were more intuitive and conceptual. It was now time to use the research to strengthen the design decisions, use the research as a fundament to the design. Looking back at my design process I wonder whether or not it would have been better if the research and design went simultaneously. There will always be a trade of between intuition and knowledge.

But by going towards the end of my design process it has become clear that research is an important factor in the process. Research helps clarify certain design decisions and gives it a 'base' for these decisions. The complexity of redesigning an old building into an architecture museum, justified the effort and strengthened my ambition to design a successful museum.

