

AR3AI100 Interiors Buildings Cities Graduation Project

Mentors: Mark Pimlott, Mauro Parravicini, Jurjen Zeinstra

2023-2024

Reflection

The objective of this year's graduation project was to rethink the Stockholm City Library, designed by Erik Gunnar Asplund about a century ago, and redefine its role in the city for today's and future's needs. Dealing with such a renowned building and its site, with which it has a special relation, calls for a detailed research. So does the design of a public library, one of the most important infrastructure of a city.

Research

For this reason, the first part of the graduation studio included the Research Seminar; in its context we, collectively as a studio, researched and analyzed through drawings a series of precedent libraries designed between 1875 and 2004 by several architects which helped me understand the evolution of the library as institution as well as how contemporary libraries are designed both spatially and programmatically. We also researched Asplund's architecture, through thoroughly analyzing the Stockholm City Library and a number of other projects of him. Part of this analysis was the making of 1:25 physical models of key spaces of the library. This early contact with detailed aspects of the building, although not very clearly back then, was useful in later stages, when thinking about proportions, sizes of rooms, their entrances, circulation etc. Becoming familiar with the architecture of Asplund revealed to me a series of distinct characteristics that I kept having in mind during the development of my proposal: the attention paid to the entrance, the connection to the sky and the – at times – unexpected visual connections, the experiential architecture and the pronounced scenography in his designs.

Of equal importance was the trip we organized as a studio in Stockholm in the first month of the studio (25-29 September, 2023). There, we had the opportunity to not only experience in person part of Asplund's architecture, but also renowned buildings designed by other architects as well as the city itself. All the above were enlightening to me, since I was not familiar with the urban context of the city. The benefits would be even larger if I visited the city at a later stage or if I had been, prior to our visit, familiar with the Swedish context.

In addition to the aforementioned, in the context of the Research Seminar, but also individually, I have so far paid a number of visits in libraries in the Netherlands, in Stockholm and in Belgium which were highly informative and fruitful during the design.

A room for a library

The first design assignment in the studio was "a room for a library", where we had to design a room or fragment of a library and make a physical 1:25 model of it. In this exercise I experimented with natural light as well as sight connections utilizing the typology of the stoa. It is interesting to see now, that in my final proposal for the library certain elements of this first exercise are used.

Towards the design of the library

The output of the research, collective and individual, was that the role of public libraries has changed immensely since 1928, the date in which the Stockholm Library opened to the public; from spaces designed merely for books they have been transformed into social spaces, destined for everyone, providing a diverse program and the conditions for the people to meet, collaborate, create and get inspired. Taking the above into consideration, my project aims at providing more spaces to the public, with different qualities from the existing ones. To do this, I had decided from the very beginning to utilize both the Asplund's building and the adjacent annex building as well as the open public space between them and, by designing the public manifestation in each of them, create a whole.

Working inside the Asplund's building proved to be quite challenging. Initially, I intended to design a large public space underneath the main rotunda space but the spatial qualities of it as well as the programmatic demands lead me eventually to design this space for presentations, lectures, small theater plays etc. These kinds of spaces call for a column-free layout, thus I developed a new structural system that replaces the removed columns. Even though major interventions are needed in order to transform

the existing situation, I believe that giving the library a large space for multiple uses that can function independently even outside the library's opening hours is more than worth it.

In my attempt to add a new layer in how the library addresses the city, I aimed at activating its west wing in relation to the adjacent urban space. This led to a series of interior interventions mainly in the ground floor, where a new fourth public entrance is created, as well as in the poche spaces. The treatment of the latter was particularly challenging. Nonetheless, I trust that the overall design contributes to the creation of meaningful public space in the entire building, starting from the exterior urban square and going up to the top floor, part of which is opened to the public.

Regarding the annex building, I tried to make it an inextricable part of the library as infrastructure, placing there functions for the public and administrative ones. Spatially, I transformed the layout of the building in order to make it more flexible and adaptable to future changes. Looking carefully at the interior configuration of the building, I decided to add a new part in front of the east facade at a later stage of the design studio, serving both interior as well as exterior public spaces. This gesture gave me the opportunity to redesign the building's two facades facing the square in such a way that they constitute part of the entire intervention.

During the design process, I have thus far worked mainly with plans, sections, three-dimensional digital models, as well as physical 1:100 models to explore the new auditorium space inside Asplund's building. There are still things that need to be further explored in larger scales; I am going to engage with them in the following weeks, where I will be exploring materials, finishes and other details.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the whole research-and-design process has been highly valuable to me. To begin with, working with existing buildings revealed the challenges and constraints that this poses, as well as the beauty of exploring potentials and reinterpreting things. I've learned that deeply analyzing and understanding the existing conditions and their potentials in several scales and layers is crucial and a prerequisite for a successful and meaningful intervention. Apart from that, finding the way to create a whole through fragments – in cases of interventions in distinct areas, such as in my project – is of utmost importance. From what I've learned, the latter is greatly dependent on the architect's overall position and vision regarding the project which is informed and shaped by the research.