

Reflection P4

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Reflection

The graduation project 'Vedeelhus' - a place of integration seeks to explore spaces of encounter in inner city neighbourhoods. The effect 'a place of encounter' could have on a neighbourhood with a need for integration. The graduation project is located in the inner city of Cologne, Germany, at a small square called "An der Eiche".

This project reflects on the current refugee situation in Germany with a special focus on the local conditions in Cologne and the upcoming question of integration. The graduation project considers the long history of the city, the neighbourhood and the immediate surrounding.

Through this and the analyses of the current situation of the city and the neighbourhood the identity of the place will be further defined. The specific urban fabric, local traditions and public life of the city and the neighbourhood should be considered. Cologne as the oldest city in Germany (dating back to Roman times) and its history of a religious capital in the middle Ages need to be explored. Furthermore the city needs to be seen as a town of people, shoppers, students and tourists and as a multicultural city, with up to 30% of inhabitants in the inner city with an immigration background.

The Master Thesis aims to explore spaces of encounter to bring different residents of a certain neighbourhood into contact. To provide a place of integration, different user groups – locals and newcomers- have to be addressed.

One of the first steps of the research was to analyse the neighbourhood. The historic centre of the area is St. Severin Church. The church is dating back to the 4th century. With its location in between the main street Severinsstrasse and diagonal axes toward the old harbour it always played an important role in the neighbourhood (Fig 1).



Fig. 1 Grey: a figure ground floor plan of the area; black: the figure ground floor plan of 1571; red: important axes

Since the location of this graduation project is north of the church alongside the axes to the harbour a closer analyses of the historic fabric of this part of the city was important. This was of significands since I was searching for the underlying identity of the place. By researching the history of the location I was hoping to find an urban structure that could be adapted or transformed for the project. This was necessary since the urban fabric as found today had large open areas that needed to be redefined. The so called Mercator plan from 1571 was one of my main sources (Fig.2).

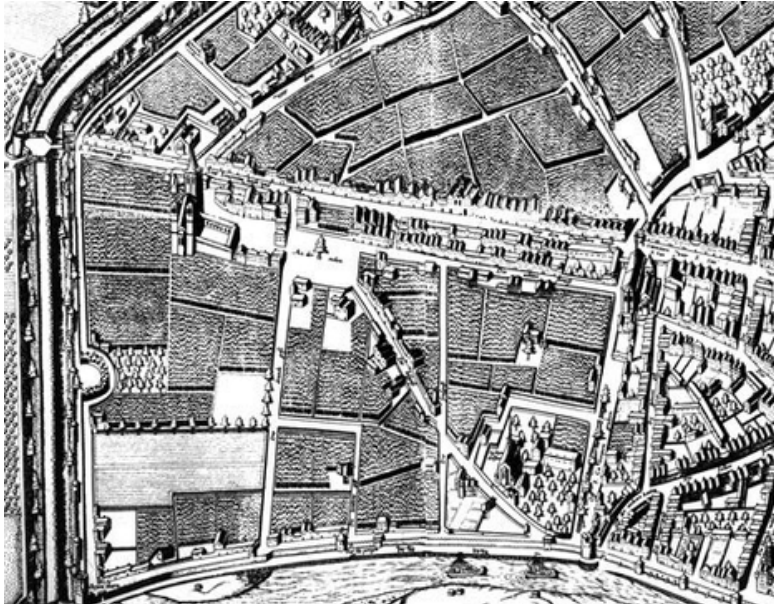


Fig. 2 Mercator Plan Cologne 1571

In this plan the square "An der Eiche" is the square in front of St. Severin. Due to this the importance of this square and its relation to the church was evident. As visible in a drawing from 1909 one of two immunity gates of the church parish was located at "An der Eiche" (Fig.3).

This gate marked the threshold between the area of the city and the area of the church; this implies that as soon as someone had crossed the gate he stood under the protection of the church. This was one of the leading motives of the design, the idea of a building that could give the feeling of a safe harbour in the city and by this could give the square its original "function" back. It was important to understand this historic situations, since the new design should address (besides being a new place of integration) motives of continuity to avoid an alienation of the local community.



Fig.3 Drawing of the immunity gate An der Eiche 1909

On one hand this historic research helped me to find the right urban solutions for the project, for example reforming the square “An der Eiche” and reshaping the street towards the harbour.(Fig 4) The analyses of the site also gave impulses for the proper typologies. It became clear that due to the differs setting of the location the new building needed to address all of them, in particular the urban situation at the square and the park like situation at the playground. In the preliminary design this aspects are address through a high tower like figure towards the urban square and a pavilion like figure towards the garden. While the ‘tower’ is a massive representative volume towards the city the pavilion is open and transparent towards the green playground. To mediate between these two typologies a courtyard was introduced. The courtyard is a typology which is recognizable to everybody as a familiar architectural space, since it plays an important role in almost all cultures. By its position and meaning it forms the central structuring figure of the design. (See Fig. 7 for the ground floor plan)



Fig. 4 Site plan explaining the different relationships towards the city and the playground

On the other hand the historic research showed what kind of spatial figures would be important to the place and its local community. Since the design aims to find recognizable spatial types or figures in both cultures, the local and the new. The effect of architectural atmosphere is based on the characteristics of spatial structures and the specific archetypal patterns of memory that every human being carries within himself. If they are addressed, they produce a physical and psychological feeling of security and comfort. (Dr.Flagge 2014)

The idea is to find the balance between these figures, to awake a feeling of home with both groups. That meant that after the analyses of the local important of the gate/entrance, the entrances of building from for example Syria needed to play an important role, too. As Fig. 5 shows the entrances and their spatial relationships towards the inner courtyard were analysed.

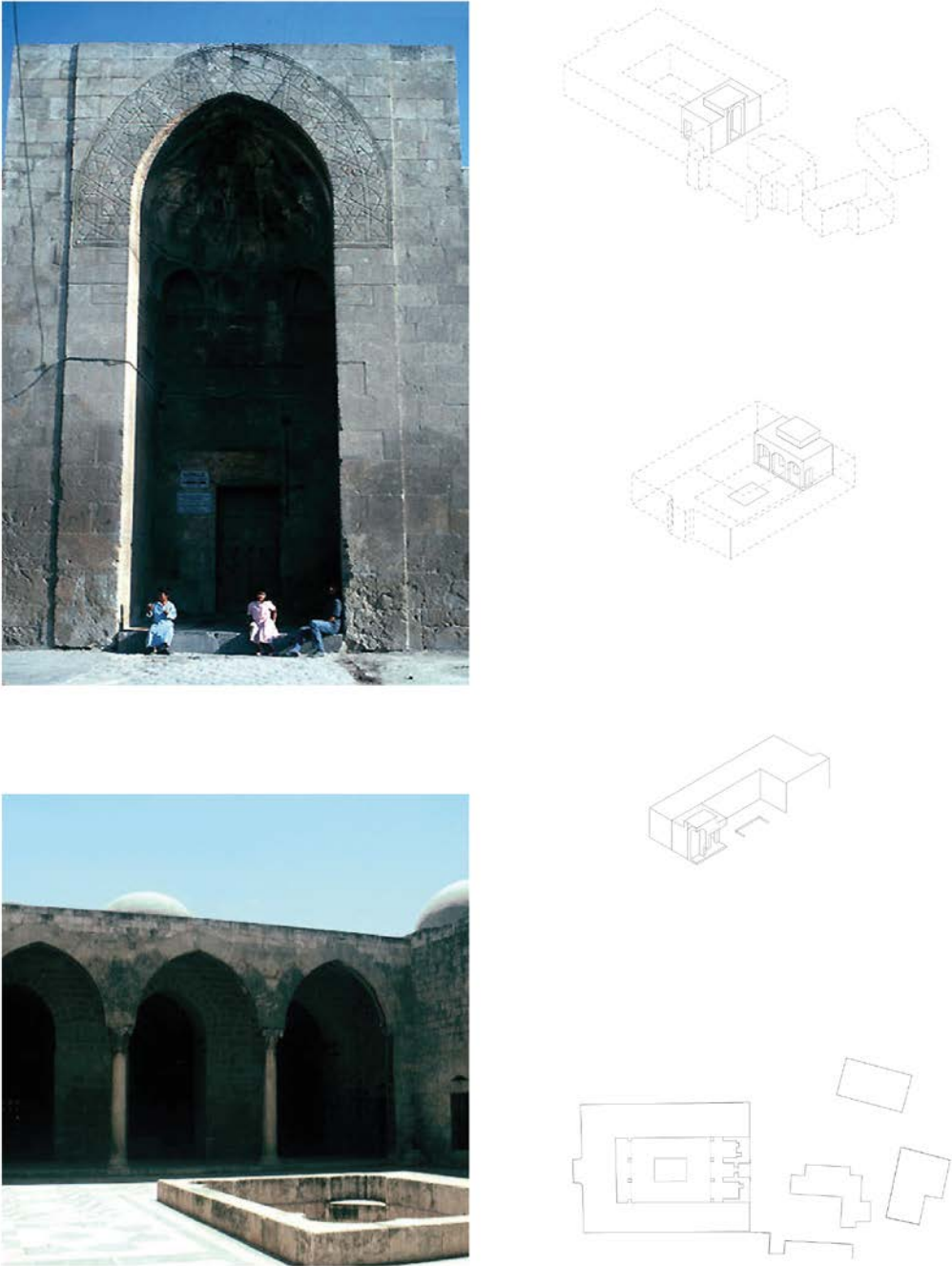


Fig. 5 Showing the analyses of a Syrian Madressas (Schools) and its sequence of entrance

Another important point of my analyses, which directly influenced the design, is the user analyses. That part of my graduation project is the one that is touching the relationship between the project and the wider social context. My analysis has identified different “vulnerable groups” in the neighbourhood. Since the project aims to be a place of integration for the whole neighbourhood, it was important to address all of these groups. To not single out the refugee and its role as a victim that is in need for help, but to establish a place that is beneficial for everybody in the neighbourhood. And by this enable the new comer (refugee) to find his place as an appreciated member of the community. To do so the design provides spaces for all this groups. After an analyses of what is needed the program of the new building was adjusted to fit the needs of all members of the community. For example the ‘Garden room’ at the back of the building can serve as an event location for the elderly home and as an indoor playroom for the children of the neighbourhood. Another example is the big L-shaped hall in the front of the building; it is connected to the open kitchen to function as an event kitchen for cooking classes, where refugees can teach locals, as well as an event hall for neighbourhood fests or a weddings. (See Fig. 7 for the ground floor plan)

Vulnerable groups in the neighbourhood

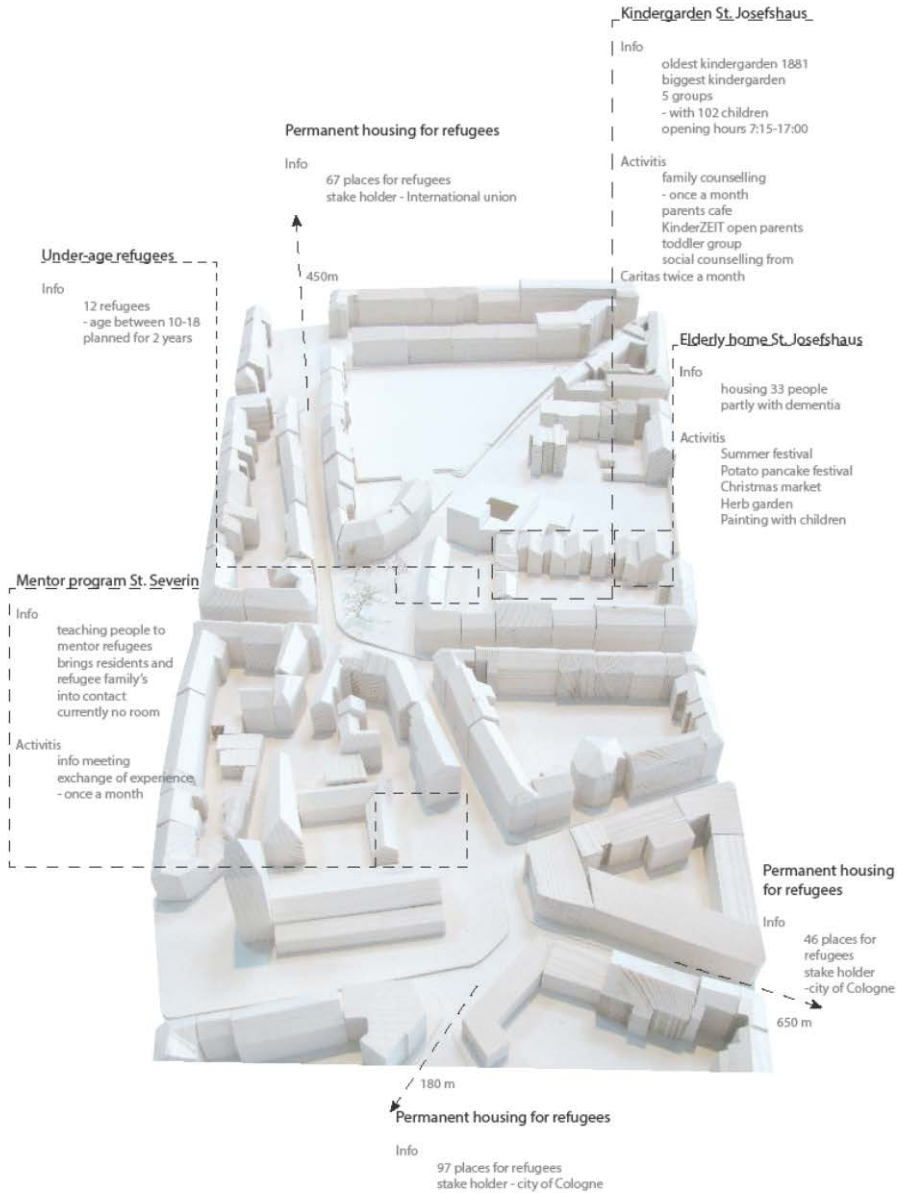


Fig. 6 Locating the different vulnerable groups of the area – showing the wider social background of the project

On study, which was part of the research concluded that a place of integration should be attached to an existing institution, like a kindergarten or school. Since there is a kindergarten next to the building site, the new building was connected to the existing kindergarten. The study stated that it is important to have an independent entrance for the new building, to avoid alienation of those who do not have any relation towards the existing institution. The ground floor plan of the design shows the connection between the kindergarten and the new building. By establishing a new square in front of the Veddellhus the kindergarten also gets a new address at this square. The new entrance of the kindergarten creates a connection between the old and the new. (Fig. 7)

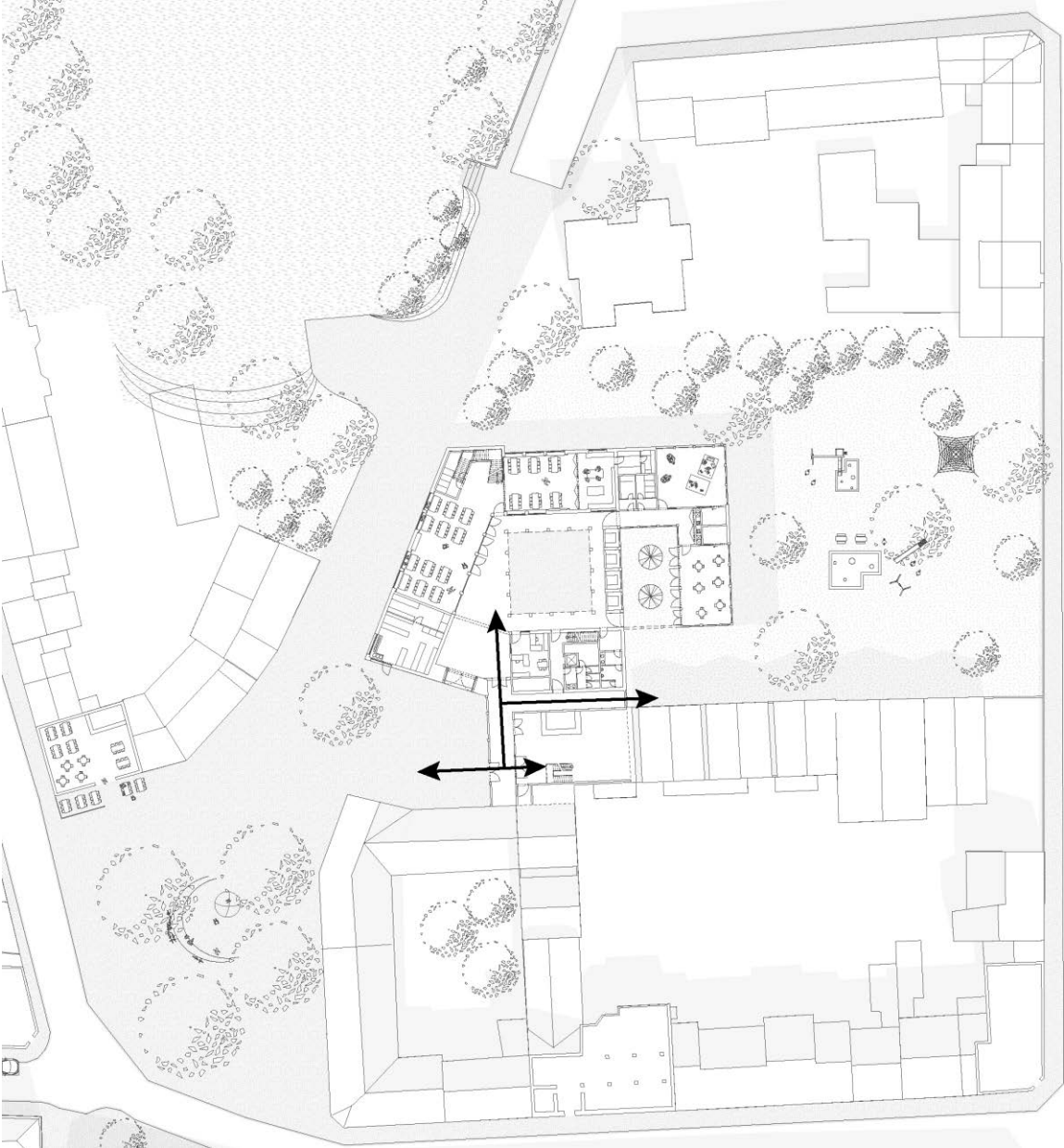


Fig. 7 Showing the ground floor plan of the design and its connection with the kindergarten