

URBAN ARCHITECTURE
GRADUATION STUDIO
REFLECTION

COMMONNESS ARCHITECTURE

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Reflection

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TU Delft

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Commonness architecture - reflection

Introduction - work process

During the last decades, the city of Maastricht was facing many shifts. The industry is gradually leaving the city, and the society has become more diverse because of the migrants and expats. However, this charming city is not free from common issues. The global crises are also visible in the housing shortage, inflation, gentrification, etc. The current politics is not fulfilling in sufficiently overcoming them. In this environment, the Boschstraatkwartier, the studio site, is located. As a studio, during the course work we analysed it on many levels, that showed how complex it is.

The initial research was divided into several fields, that showed the elements of the city, the actors and realations in the space: (1) city and factory; (2) squatters and monasteries; (3) underneath, (4) overhead and in between; (5) migrant city; architectural histories of urban renewal; (6) Paris, hints and fancies. My group's work was focused on the second topic. We visited both types of the communities, the squat - Landbauwbelang (LBB), and the monastery - St Benedictusberg Abby in Vaals. Throughout the research, we found many similarities between monastic and squatter life. Our analysis topics were the community life, the appropriation of spaces and the relation to the space outside and inside. This and mostly the current situation of the LBB - upcoming demolition due to the city's transformation plan, set our interest in the topics such as spatial justice, right to the city and gentrification.

In the next stage, as a group, we were working on the master plan. With mentioned principles in mind, we set the general strategy for the Boschstraatkwartier. The main points were to focus on the modest and everyday functions and improve the current set-up on those levels. Therefore, we decided to fill the gaps with functions such as housing, school and workplaces. At the same time, we introduce more greenery and propose key changes in the connectivity field. The major shift was the road transformation, we decided to reduce the car traffic to a minimum and move the planned tram tracks to the parallel road leading to the main square. That allowed us to create a more human scale street.

My individual project focused on the transformation of the waterfront. Using the principles set in the master plan, I decided to fulfil the need for connecting and activating the promenade with the design of the housing and culture complex. The project aims to stitch the city fabric with the river by creating a low-dense settlement and redeveloping the waterfront itself to bring life and offer new public spaces for the neighbourhood.

Because of choosing the housing function, my research moved to that field as well. After analysing the topic of cloisters and squatters, I found the example of the beguinage that was a milestone in both research and design. This specific for the region (the Netherlands, south-west Germany and Belgium) type of convent was an inspiration for connecting the new design to the history of the collectivity that was present in Maastricht. The beguines were the laywomen cloisters, focused on living as a community to help each other and the people around them. When they emerged and flourished in the Middle Ages, beguinages were the answer to women's social and economic needs. They offered them a prospect for a community and religious life coupled with personal independence, which was merely an impossible thing for the majority of women at that time. Often they adopted the typical housing quarters and created those hidden cities in the cities. Despite that the beguinages are no longer active, the idea of strong community relations in the neighbourhood is still relevant and valuable. This linked directly to the initial research on the squatter building - LBB, which was easily connected with the monastic theme. Many features overlap, and the historical connection led me to the open interpretation of the care timeline. Firstly, the beguinages, then the LBB, and now there is a new opportunity for a development that could carry this value.

As a result, my design shifted more toward the themes such as empathy and care. Therefore, I strengthen the aspects of accessibility and affordability of the proposed building. Those elements are visible in the boundary-less space and modularity that would certainly lower the costs of the building and ease the everyday life of the inhabitants.

Research - design relationship

Nowadays, cities face the growing loss of identity and social values caused by gentrification factors. The ubiquitous housing crisis shows how the essential and indispensable function of the city is not as assured and not for everyone. The capitalistic approach took over the city planning, and creating collective qualities is less a priority than an instant economic profit. Observing all of the negative effects, I wanted to look for ways to overcome the current situation. My research was orientated on the care in architecture, which is a sociological theme but also a broad topic, therefore my focus was concentrated on housing and its relation to the public space. Supported by the case studies, mostly taken from the studio site in Maastricht, helped me deepen my understanding of how the existing context results from many complex processes. Beginning from the historical dependencies and top-down policies resulting from the global economic system of instant growth, ending with small, unofficial actions of the "ordinary" people. The role of architecture is to serve people, but in this realm, the question is which people and how. With the research, I was analysing how with the urbanist and architectural methods change and adjust the space to break down the boundaries, but at the same time create a safe and lively neighbourhood. The information gained through the theoretical work helped me sharpen my position on the site and what approach I would like to choose. The whole year's work on the topics like spatial justice, gentrification

and building relationships in space to ease everyday life defined my personal point of view on the architecture profession.

The idea for the design topic of inclusive housing also derives from my personal interest in spatial and social equity and the conducted research. The city of Maastricht has a dynamic past, the production and housing were mixing, creating rich in heritage and spatially pleasant surroundings. However, the character of the project's site in Boschstraatkwartier is changing. This previously mostly industrial neighbourhood is shifting, and the Sappi Factory is moving north, outside the city's main perimeter. This leaves an open stage for the new developments. The design aims to create an inclusive environment for everyday functions, focusing on the needs of the people of Maastricht. Beginning from the master plan, the project looks into the site from a broader perspective, taking into consideration almost the whole district. The program stitches the area together by creating a variety of public spaces and inviting in the greenery through the naturalisation process of the water-land boundary. My chosen site lies just in the city centre, located on the waterfront, within walking distance of the prominent landmarks. The leading ambition for the transformation was the current stage of the promenade. Despite being in the most attractive location, it is empty, not developed and unused. This created the potential to add a new value to the public space, next to the water and surrounded by a lively, diverse neighbourhood. The housing complex with some public and communal areas and functions links to the existing urban fabric, creating the balance between private and public (the first, second and third places). On the contrary to the visible trend to build more hip, consumption-oriented settlements in the area, my design focuses is following a more modest approach. The proposed design fills the gap in the affordable dwelling market and could be a first step to overcoming a severe housing crisis. In addition, other buildings and pavilions provide the co-functions necessary to create a thriving neighbourhood, such as daycare with playground, workshop, youth centre and sports facility. The new settlement shapes the space and has the potential to create inclusive life conditions for all users, also those with less agency. It tackles the issues of spatial equity, privatisation and commercialisation of key locations in the city, as the waterfront certainly is. It is a proposition of the anti-capitalistic alternative of creating a specific type of dwelling that brings the generations together, also those people who do not fit into the normative social framework, to create a more diverse and dense city.

Methods

The research method involved a series of steps documented in a research book. One of them is the literature review on the politics of architecture and urban spaces - the books "Seeing Like a State" by James C. Scott and "The Great Good Place" by Ray Oldenburg, that both describe the strategies of city planning tendencies, including failed ones, and search a vision for revitalisation. The findings from the sociology, anthropology and political sciences will refer to the given site conditions in a critical way. The following method is historical research, looking in the past for examples of the

community-orientated facilities and their dependencies (e.g. monasteries, beguinages). The next field is case studies, and they are analysed to check different approaches to inclusive housing. One of the examples is The Masters' organisation that creates social housing for those "on the sidelines" of our society. However, the most significant impact created the Landbouwbeld (LBB) and its community. By showing how their activity, which provides a lot of value on the social level, is outside the municipality's interests. This leads to the fieldwork of visiting those places and interviewing people involved in creating them - resulting in the analysis using text and drawings pointing out the desirable features. The observation and interviews serve as the site study as well. The methods of the design project contained using the research as a theoretical base and working with the various graphic forms such as collages, sketches, etc., and physical models to design the proposed master plan and architectural project. The literature was also a significant foundation, the works by Jan Gehl and David Sim on the city, public spaces and people between buildings were a key to creating the strategy for the site.

Relation to the studio topic

In the studio, there is an interest in looking at the architectural intervention as an element of a bigger picture than only the site. During the academic year, we aimed to think on a broader scale and critically assess the given plot. This is what I find interesting, and also looking into my future career. Analysing the context and firstly setting the general overview in the form of the master plan and then placing the individual project to complement the initial intention seemed like a great challenge and opportunity to put more value into my graduation project.

The relation with the studio theme - glaneur/ glaneuses is also vital. The gleaning element is the literal transformation of the waterfront - giving a new life, character and function to the existing place. Also, the project provides second life to the tunnel, which, according to the new master plan, is no longer needed for transport purposes. For me, gleaning also has a social character, therefore the adaptation tends to avoid privatisation and create the public value for the city. The aspect of re-use is also expressed in the flexibility of the building. The modular grid allows for the multiple purposes of the ground floor, also the apartments are designed to be adaptable to the changing needs. Each element of the structure and facade can be made primarily out of re-used, affordable materials. This can add to the uniqueness and playfulness of the outside and inside of the building and help decrease construction and maintenance costs.

Ethical considerations

Throughout the academic year, I have encountered dilemmas regarding the architect's work in general. Looking through the Maastricht example, I saw

how sometimes architectural practice could serve not the noblest purposes, creating more gentrification and division. This pushed me to the position that, as architects, we should position ourselves and take responsibility for the space's shape, also regarding the social level.

During the course, I faced many ethical issues, the socially orientated theme is usually related to many contradictions between the project intention and the reality, which is sometimes cruel. Many aspects of the project are contrary to the standard practices, like locating a form of social housing on the prominent site, to maybe decrease the material gain but to improve the neighbourhood on many other levels. With the aim to avoid privatisation, the elements such as safety and intimacy are the key figures to balance. The care factor, which was my main direction, is a broad theme, and sometimes, it requires compromise. This means that fulfilling all the users' needs and balancing other aspects like functionality was sometimes unreachable, so in some situations, reducing certain values in favour of the other ones was unavoidable.

Scientific relevance

Nowadays, architecture involves many different fields, the relation to anthropology and sociology is more visible, and in the current reality, it is more and more needed. The pandemic has shed more light on the topic of care and how it is sometimes taken for granted and not appreciated. The consideration for the sick, everyday care of children, help with the chores and many others. It is usually not visible because it is so sunken in the ordinary reality therefore, bringing ease to those who help and help them take care may be an interesting direction in creating a reality with fewer obstacles and more empathy.

Relation to the wider scientific, professional and theoretical framework

The globally dominant economic system of uninterrupted growth is causing a deadly undermining of life support systems on earth and distancing humanity from successfully overcoming the climate crisis, and at the same time, from a satisfying level of lifestyle for the growing numbers of the population. Therefore, could the "care" factor be a fundamental feature and value considered in the building and city planning process? Being aware that in a world where almost everything is marketed, even the noblest ideas can be purged from their content and monetised. For example, we have observed how the concept of "sustainable development" has become an empty phrase over the decades. In the reality of the housing crisis, while the basic human need and right is not fulfilled, we can ask ourselves: how to seriously pursue this profession for the sake of people and the world? It seems that there is no change without the whole paradigm shift. The profession of architect always adapts to the changes however, maybe now it can be the actor who influences the change.

The Care Definition

During my research and design work, I created the “care” definition. The topic of care occurred as a natural consequence of my initial research, after deepening this idea, I came to the conclusion that care is easy to overlook however, it is really a base of everyday life. My understanding derives from the feminist ethics of care (care for ourselves, care for each other, care of the things or objects) and is translated to the city space. The inspiration for the format comes from the “Soft City Building Density for Everyday Life” by David Sim.

*“To be a good architect, you have to love people
because architecture is an applied art and deals with
the framework of people’s lives”*

Ralph Erskine, 2000

CARE

Care is something to do with **safety**

Trust, protected, sheltered, peaceful, clarity, sureness, protection

Care is something to do with **comfort**

Comfortable, ease, simple, intuitive, understandable, calm, soft

Care is something to do with **inclusivity**

Common, shared, open, welcoming, accessible, tolerant, gentle, empathetic, compassionate, feminist, flexible, adaptable, changeable, sociable, public, mixed-use, diversity

Care is something to do with **simplicity**

Low-cost, easy to maintain, low-tech, low-key, modest, human scale, familiar, people-friendly, everyday

Care is something to do with **ecology**

Low carbon footprint, durable, natural, adaptable, sustainable

Care is something to do with **galneur**

Reused, adaptable, flexible, changeable, mixed-use, ecological, economic

Care in architecture is about ease and comfort in everyday life.

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