

REFLECTION

Graduation topic and project description

The graduation studio Transitional Identities of the Heritage track of Architecture focuses on the transformation of civic centres in Amsterdam North. Most of the community centres are in a poor state and deserve social and physical improvement. How can the civic centre play a more significant role in the social and cultural realm of Amsterdam North, through adaptive reuse?

In my research and design project I chose to focus on a specific target group; the vulnerable youth of Amsterdam North. In my opinion, youth is the most neglected group that are most in need of a qualitative communal space. As they are facing various challenges, such as loneliness, limited economic opportunities, social exclusion and gentrification. In my research and design I introduce the youth centre as a possible architectural contribution to these problems. In this newly designed youth centre, the youth should feel seen, heard and respected by its iconic and inviting character. In creating this new hub for the youth I decided to choose two structures that already obtain a certain iconicness (see image 1; message house). The Gele Pomp and Roze Tanker are two abandoned gas stations, that stand proudly above the Nieuwe Leeuwarderweg in the vibrant colors to which they owe their names.

In transforming these gas station into a new youth centre, I am extending and amplifying the existing values that these structures already hold, and adding new values that come from the research. The cantilevered roof and recognizable character of the buildings is extended by means of an extensive steel structure that (visually) sits on the existing cantilevered roof. Thanks to the height of this new structure, the youth center becomes visible from a great distance and literally and figuratively lifts young people to a point where they look out over the city. The overhangs of this new structure amplify the cantilevered effect of the existing roof and create a constructive acrobatics, expressing the youthful urge of taking risks (see image 2). Within this steel structure various spaces 'float' that house a wide variety of functions and facilities that these youth currently do not have access to. In between these functional spaces I left several undefined spaces that can be filled in and appropriated by the youth (see image 3).

Relation between research & design and the value of my approach

In the research I firstly analysed the problems and challenges that the youth of Amsterdam North are facing. These then became starting points that I aimed to solve in the design. Subsequently I analysed the youth centre as an architectural typology. An extensive literature review resulted in a set of design parameters that are essential in designing a youth centre. This framework of parameters served as a measurement tool in conducting several case studies of youth centers. Although the concluding design principles from this exercise appeared to be less useful as a design tool as I envisioned, it helped me gain a comprehensive understanding of the design parameters (see image 4). I then consciously and unconsciously applied these parameters in the design process.

Vise versa, the design process introduced new strategies to these parameters. I for instance started to see transparency as something that could function from the inside to inside, instead of only the other way around. Furthermore, color and structural acrobatics became a new way of gaining the attractiveness that a youth centre needs.

The value of my design approach was to get a clear understanding of the important design parameters by using them as glasses through which I looked at different case studies. By then letting go of the specific principles and strategies of these existing projects, I took a step back to the general design principles. This allowed me to let curiosity and creative experimentation guide the design, while keeping an eye on the essential design parameters.

Academic & societal value and scope of implication & transferability

By taking this project to the extreme, I tried to create a response and a statement in relation to the existing youth centers in Amsterdam-North (see image 6). This project shows what a youth centre in Amsterdam North, and elsewhere, could look like if we consider its possibilities to be endless. At the same time, this project shows how even a simple, unlisted building like a gas station can serve as a suitable base for a comprehensive transformation project. Through these ambitions I hope to open a discussion about the value and potential of communal spaces for our youth, and the possibilities within adaptive reuse project.

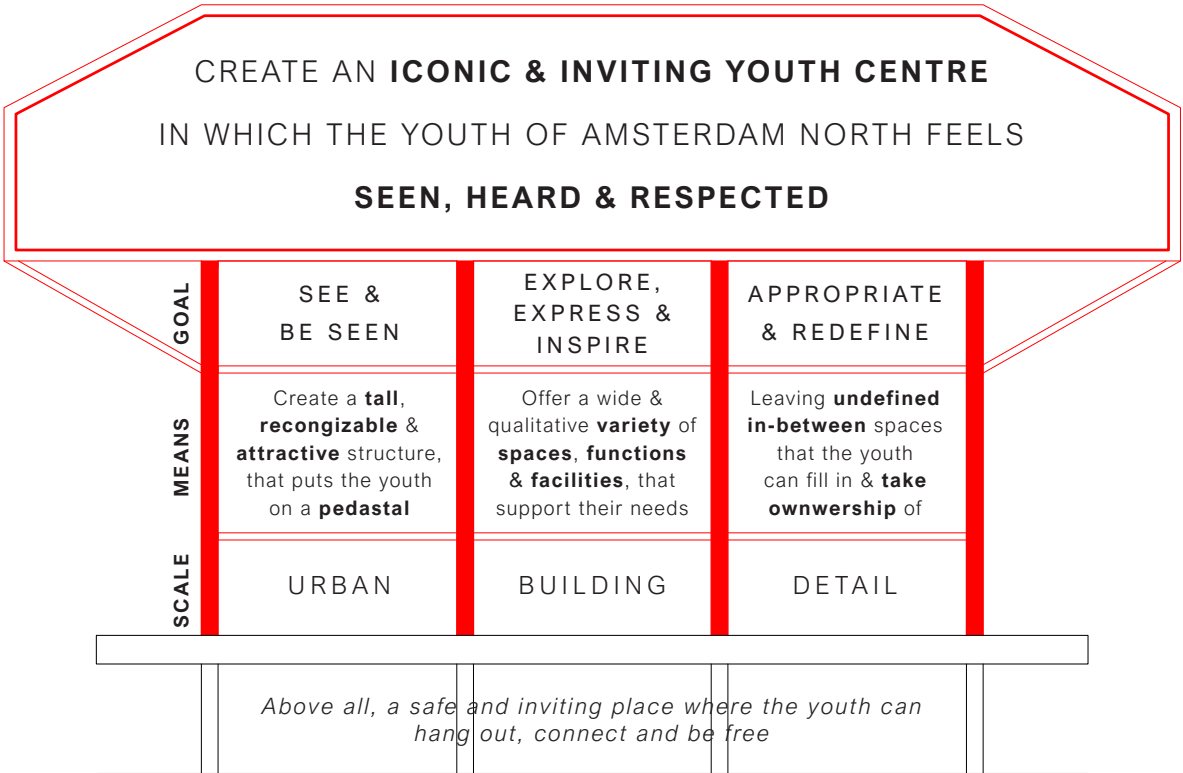


Image 1, Message House

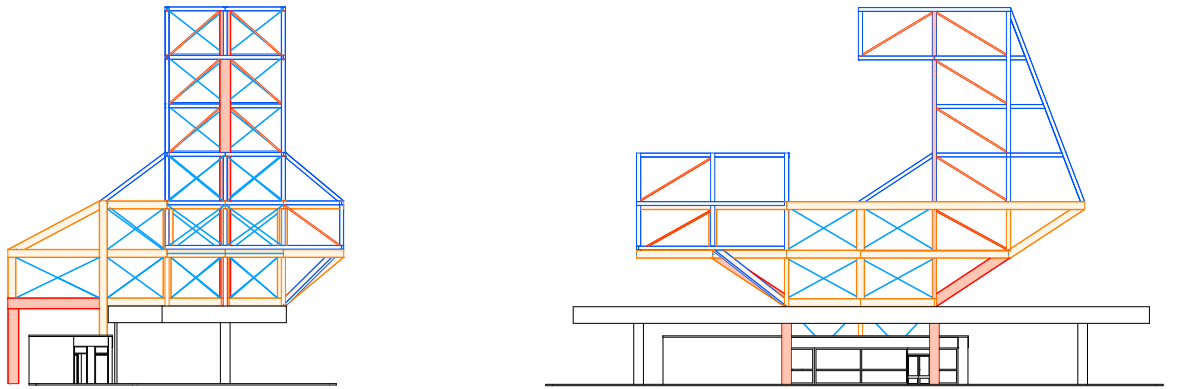


Image 2, Construction diagrams showing overhangs

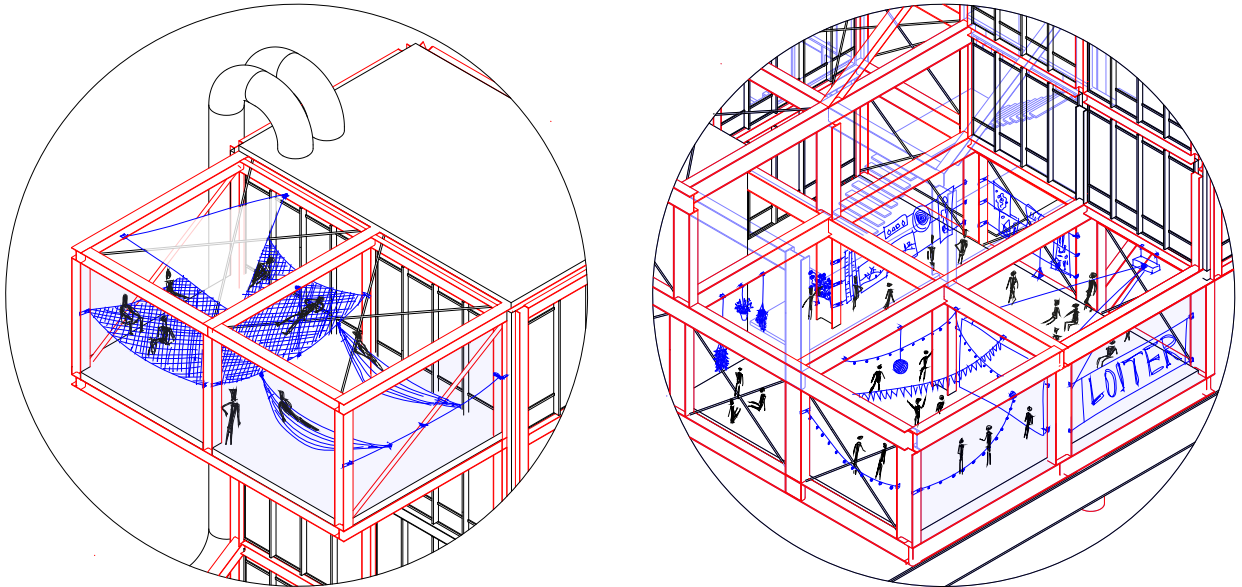


Image 3, Possible infills of appropriable in-between spaces

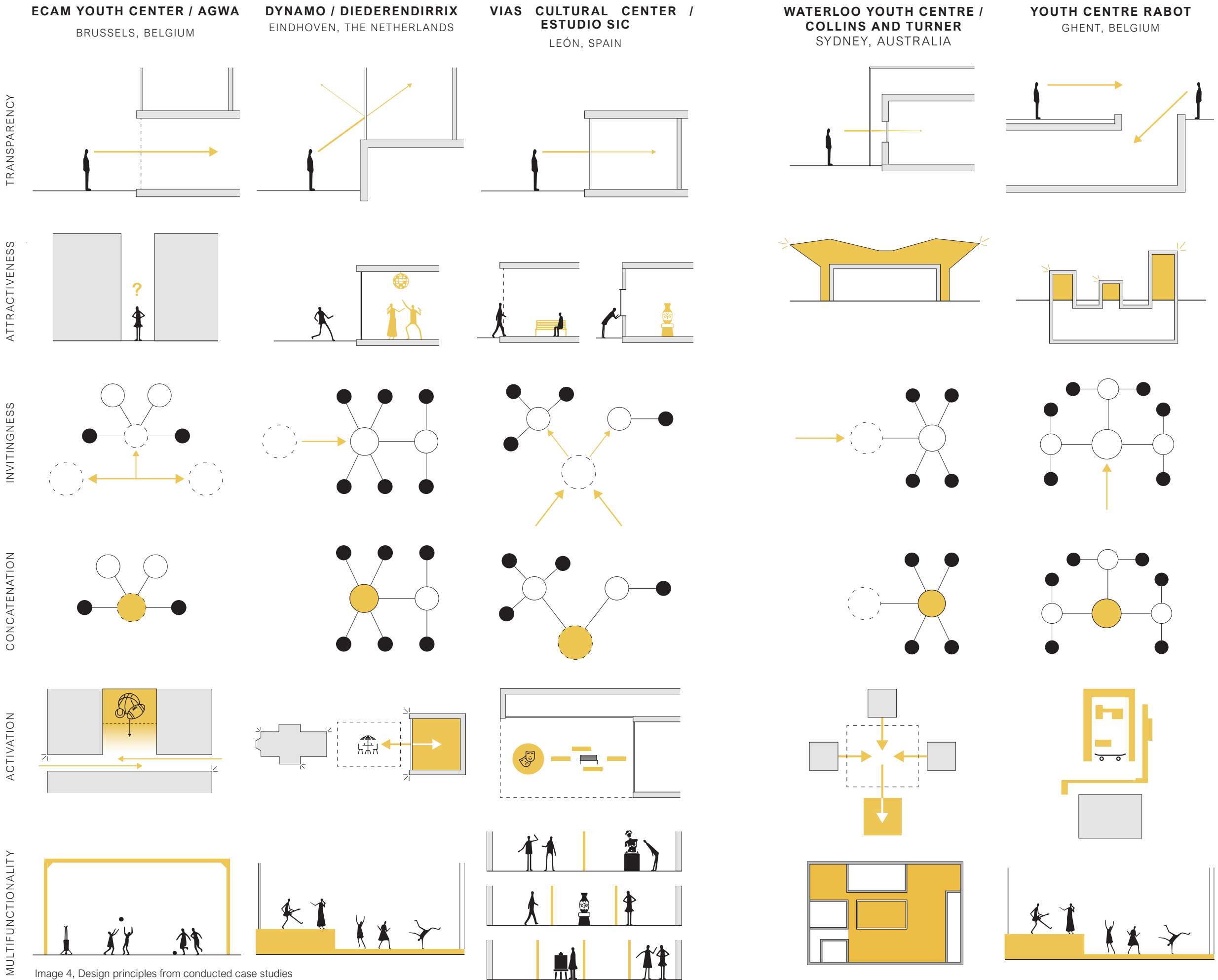


Image 4, Design principles from conducted case studies