

Public Involvement and Continuous Change

How can public
involvement help
designing for
continuous change?

Research Plan
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Introduction

This research plan is written as a methodological reflection on my graduation project which engages with a participation-based design for an adaptive architectural framework. Therein I start from the observation that the greater part of market driven architecture no longer serves people's needs. These needs change over time and so should architecture. Yet, the way architecture is built often doesn't allow this, because it is built for a certain use, but not changing uses in time.

To escape this market-driven logic, my investigation engages with the question how architecture can evolve over time together with the changing needs of the people. In investigating how public involvement can help design for continuous change and the architectural form that incorporated this approach. The goal of this approach is to create architecture that provides high quality space, is resilient and has high social acceptance.

„If you live out your life in the shared urban landscape, then you have a natural right to participate in shaping its future“

Charles Montgomery
(2015)

Theoretical Frame

Participatory approaches and adaptive design have been repeating topics in architecture in the past until today. With the growing importance of circularity and focus on social sustainability I want to get a new perspective onto these two fields and how they can enhance each other. I therefore understand the themes in a broader sense and want to study the notion of public involvement and continuous change. I want to draw a contrast to the established term participation, which is often more seen as a burden in the design process rather than an asset. Participation is understood as consulting the public on decisions that have already been made and does not continue in the user phase of a building. My understanding of the term public involvement interpretes the theme broader, as a process in which many parties are involved and co-create in every step of the design.

Many buildings are called complete, and the designer often shows no interest in them after the building is handed over

“[...] thinking about cities in time is key to understanding their dynamics.”

Michael Batty (2018)

„building and developing circular means making a place that constantly changes.“

Falco Treffers (2019)

to the user. The result is unfunctional buildings meaning loss of value and waste of the money and energy that went into producing them. I therefore investigate how a building can question itself constantly and change continuously. In contrast to the idea of flexible or adaptive architecture, where change is solved mechanically and the options are pre-designed, I understand continuous change as a certain openness and incompleteness that allows a building to evolve over time and respects unforeseen changes. This leads to a transitional design where the important questions to elaborate on is: What is permanent and what is temporary? What stays forever and what changes over time?

In the past, answers to the challenge of change have been found in ideas like modular self-built housing by Walter Seagal or the theory on open buildings by John Habraken (1972). The concept was to provide a toolkit or structural infrastructure and let the user complete the small-scale infill, which then could easily be changed. The more generic the structure, the more adaptable it is to possible functions in the future. In practice, the infills have barely been changed and the idea got out of fashion. The combination of a flexible structure with free choice and behaviorism is found Cedric Price's unbuilt Fun Palace (Fig.1) based on Gordon Pask's ideas on Cybernetics. Inspired by this unbuilt idea was the Centre Pompidou in Paris (Fig. 2), an example of generic space in which Richard Rogers and Renzo Piano created massive free span spaces to allow a maximum of flexibility. In use this was never needed but only caused a lot of extra effort for creating regular art installations. Nowadays this approach is lesser seen in new build structures but often in adaptive-reuse projects where large industrial structure are transformed like the LocHal in Tilburg.

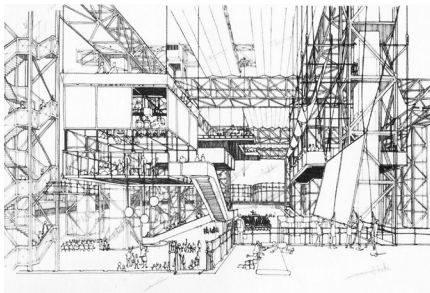


Fig. 1: Fun Palace
(Price, 1964)



Fig. 2: Centre Pompidou
(Piano, 1977)

A different approach is by Lina Bo Bardi and Frank van Klingeren, who created socially vibrant spaces by involving the people. In Bo Bardi's case the people were involved in a way that the design was incomplete and was temporary filled by the people (Oliveira, 2006). Bo Bardi worked in a manner where her understanding of the local culture and place and her appreciation of local craftsmanship gave character to the new additions. At SESC Pompeia (Fig. 3) she stayed involved

as a curator of exhibitions during the user phase of the project. Frank van Klingeren had a similar approach. In De Meerpaal the functions were all combined under one large roof with no physical separation between them, which not only allowed interaction, but also forced it. Over time the impracticalities overweighted and made the building unpopular. This shows that design needs to evolve over time, otherwise it becomes unfunctional.

Next to strategies that encourage involvement of the people during the user phase (see Bo Bardi) there is strategies that involve the people from the very beginning - in the making of the design. The idea of co-making is becoming popular in cooperative housing and is often based on bottom-up movements, like the De Ceuvvel and Schoonship in Amsterdam by Space & Matter. For public buildings this is rather uncommon and only seen on temporary projects that focus on placemaking between the initiation and development phase like the Luchtsingel in Rotterdam by ZUS. In their book *Permanent Temporality* (ZUS, 2019) they explore the temporality can be understood in a more permanent state. "How can the time factor [...] add a dimension with which space can gradually acquire meaning?", a question they state. Temporality is an important notion when speaking about social acceptance and involvement in the design, which is also visible in Bo Bardi's work, who says about her design SESC Pompeia: "Temporary things should take over and define the place; and the architecture should be directly contaminated by everyday life." (Oliveira 2006) Public buildings are part of public space, which makes thinkers like Hannah Arendt on public space or Chantal Mouffe on the politicalness of public space become relevant to my investigations.

Taken all these developments together, therefore implies a paradigm shift from focusing on the architectural product to the process. I aim to find parallels in involvement and change by looking at the examples and the discourse of the past and today. I believe that when understanding involvement and change as continuous processes throughout the whole lifetime of a building, a continuous transition, then they can enhance each other to reach a transitional design.

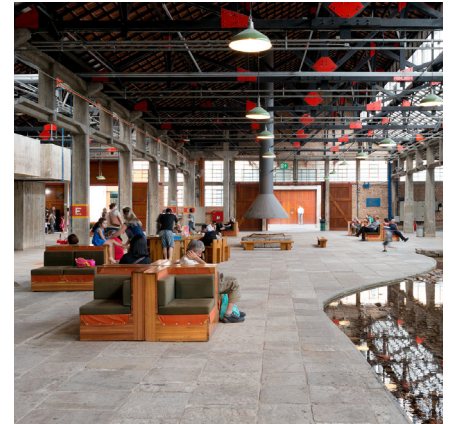


Fig. 3: SESC Pompeia, (Bo Bardi, 1986)



Fig. 4: De Meerpaal (Klingeren, van, 1965)

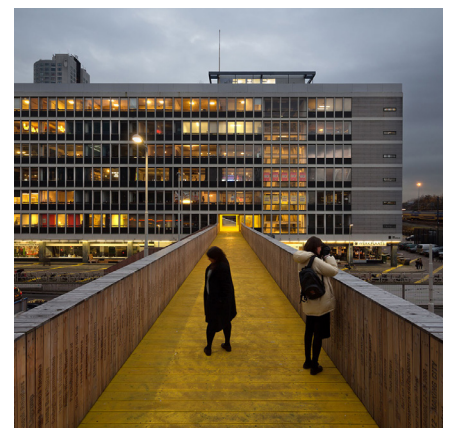


Fig. 5: Luchtsingel (ZUS 2021)

Methodological Frame

To locate the openness of participatory design processes, I conduct a comparative study of two cases. The study case Berlijn-Plein in Utrecht, a project which combines the ambitions of co-creation and circularity on all levels. Initiated four years ago the brief was to create a cultural building for the newly developed area. Instead of just placing a building in a top-down manner, the municipality started a five years placemaking program of co-creation workshops and neighborhood festivals in temporary pavilions (Fig. 6). This year the procedure for a more permanent building has started. I plan to study this project in depth and interviewing people involved including organizers, collaborating artists and visitors. A focus lies on identifying how the collaborative process was initiated, curated and managed; and how this process will continue in the future. After visiting this project last year, I plan to visit the project again in combination with Interviews. The second focus is the site case Grasbrook in Hamburg which serves as potential site. The situation is similar, because Grasbrook is also a new development area with no identity yet. I want to compare the two cases and filter which lessons from the study case Berlijn-Plein can be transferred to the site case Grasbrook and which not. The third focus is literature review and review of references with similar goals. This includes the protagonists of the discourse I mentioned before, but also contemporary examples like the work of Lacaton & Vassal. Theories on praxeology, behaviorism and how people behave in public spaces are included in this research in order to understand the context of the studies.



Fig. 6: Berlijn-Plein
(RAUM 2019)

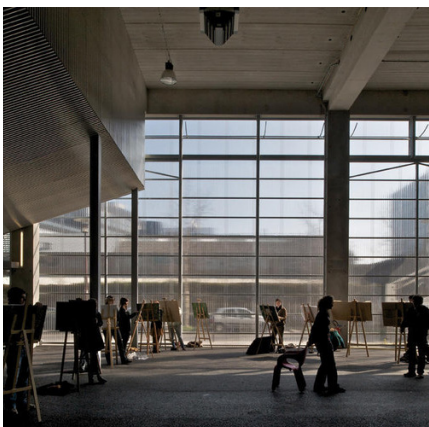


Fig. 7: Nantes School of
Architecture, Lacaton &
Vassal (2009)

My aim is that by comparing the two cases and studying the different notions attached to the topic I can translate different scenarios of appropriate answers in preparation for the project at the Grasbrook in Hamburg. The different scenarios include scales of involvement and scales of changeability and include the findings from the references. The methods towards these scenarios include case study, mapping the process of change and designing a process.

The Project

By Learning from the case study Berlijn-Plein and a comparison with the context of Hamburg, I aim to form an appropriate answer to the building site at Grasbrook in Hamburg. This study includes identifying who are the people addressed and should be involved in Hamburg? What are their specific needs? And finally what kind of building forms an appropriate response to their needs? The gained insights on how continuous change and public involvement are accommodated in a building I want to further explore in the design of building.

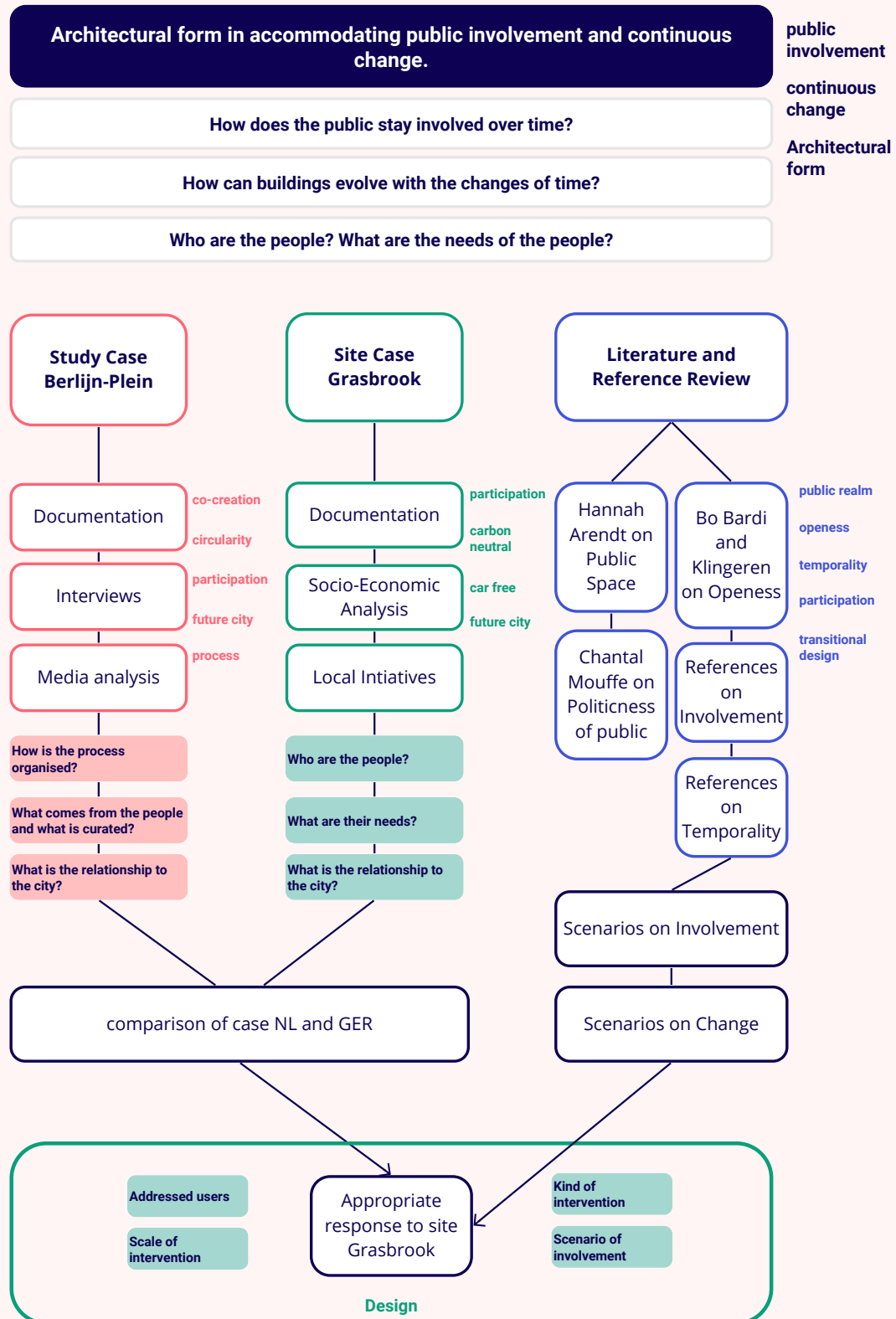
The design aims for a public, cultural community hub for the new development area Grasbrook in Hamburg. It should enhance interaction in public and serve the needs of the people in this new area. The masterplan for the area Grasbrook identifies an old 500-meter-long harbor roof as location for sport, culture, and community activities, serving the new residents of this neighborhood as well as the direct neighbors. The project plot is situated within this lane of activities under the roof, the specific location still has to be tested.

While learning from the case Berlijn-Plein I want to find out what is the appropriate response for the case Grasbrook. What are the people that the design is addressing - the direct residents or the wider public of Hamburg? Next, I want to establish how the people can be involved in the creation of this community centre. Experiences from the neighboring project HafenCity has shown that traditional planning excludes some and only serves a specific target group. Therefore, the Hamburg City is in need for a more inclusive approach for the Grasbrook. Frank van Klingereren proposes the formula that a "successful social mechanism [consists of] sixty percent perfection, twenty percent nuisance and twenty percent encounter" (F. van Klingereren cited in van den Boomen, 2019). I aim for a building with a certain incompleteness or openness to allow people to take ownership and identify themselves with the building.



Fig. 8: Grasbrook
(HdM 2020)

Diagram



Reflection

The challenge of designing my own research was an interesting experience. It forced me to elaborate on the plans and ideas that I put up for myself in the beginning of the project. This way I had to narrow the topic down and the project became more precise. At the same time, this challenge encouraged me to follow my gut feeling. Not every step has to be validated, my passion for a topic is sufficient validation to follow this path. One thing I was struggling with is finding the appropriate methods and deciding on what is worthy enough to follow. During my studies the topics and research methods are given by the outline of the studio or course. That is often validation enough to understand those methods as appropriate. When designing the research by myself defining the appropriateness of steps was sometimes difficult. The workshops and sessions with the course tutor as well as the sessions with the individual research mentor helped putting things in relation.

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