

Reflection paper

Heritage & Architecture, Revitalizing Hembrug

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P4

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Every architectural project must deal with what is already there. Every site has a history, a heritage, that is influenced by any new intervention. Within the field of Heritage & Architecture, it is this process that is the main focus. This graduation studio is an example and a rehearsal on how one must deal with and respond on heritage in an architectural project.

In order to deal with the heritage of a site accordingly, it is important to understand the heritage. Meurs (2016) explains it as that a heritage project should have its “focus on the unique qualities of the heritage”. Therefore, this project, as any heritage-based architecture project, started with an extensive research phase to understand what these unique qualities are. This phase, up till the P1 presentation, covered a research focused on two aspects. The first was to understand the site and the buildings on site in a typological way. This covered understanding the shapes, the dimension, the materials and building techniques of the different buildings and classifying the buildings according to these characteristics. This helped to get to know the buildings and thus to know what can be or should be done with them in a later stage of designing. Secondly, the research covered a more praxeological point of view. This was done to understand how the site and the buildings were originally used. Through archival records, original drawings and on-site findings a detailed story of how the site was used could be uncovered. This story helped explain a lot of questions that did arise in the typological research as well, for example the shape of the roofs, the use of a certain building technique or the spacing of the buildings corresponding to each other. Also, the presence of the abundant greenery and trees could be explained through the original function, as it was used to shelter the site from overheating, a possible explosion and later from the view from the sky.

In the second phase of the project a program for the existing site was defined. Here the research from the first phase was used as an input to define what program would suite the site best. Here specifically the more praxeological side of the original research gave its input. The presence of the large amount of greenery, that at first seemed to be there only due to neglect in the recent years, turned out to have a very specific function in the past. This shows very clearly that heritage is not only in buildings, but it can be in everything. Heritage can be from the bricks of a building, to the trees standing around it or even just in a story about the building. In the case of the Plots in the Wood area of Hembrug, the heritage is as much in the greenery as it is in the buildings. It was this conclusion that influenced the continuation of the project. The goal would be to create a site that made it able to utilize both the buildings and the nature again and where both would be preserved and enhance each other.

This led to the program, as presented in the P2 presentation, of a small-scale hotel focused on providing a tranquil place to stay in a natural environment. From this point a research by design method was adopted to develop this program and concept into a final design. During this design phase the importance of sustainability became more and more apparent. Sustainability is of course an aspect of almost every architectural project nowadays, since climate change is an increasing problem for everybody. In this project however, where the natural environment is so important from a heritage point of view, it is only logical to design a project with the lowest environmental impact as

possible. Therefore, the project aims to have a minimal invasive intervention, where materials are reused as much as possible and new additions are made from sustainable and natural materials. In this way, this project aims to be an example of how one can deal with projects where areas with abundant greenery need to be redeveloped and how to do this as sustainable as possible and thus preserving the natural environment. In doing this the buildings and the natural environment can enhance each other, instead of interfering with each other. Specifically in the case of industrial heritage projects, sustainable alternative materials are currently not always the first options, since industrial buildings are more associated with materials like steel and concrete. Therefore, this project aims to be an example of how one can use sustainable materials while preserving the industrial heritage values of the project.

It was in a later stage during the designing process, towards the P3 phase, that the previously mentioned architectural position became more and more clear. Only after continued pressing during tutoring on explaining 'why' I did certain things the way I did them, I found a way to formulate this point of view for myself. Thereafter the continuation of the designing process had a lot more clarity. I find that my architectural position herein coincides with how professor Avermaete puts it. He writes that architects should be seen "less as the inventors of radical forms or atmospheres, and more as the cultivators of a number of resources, that have always been there: territory, time, action, as well as materiality, form and technical skill" (Avermaete, 2016). In this project, it is the natural environment that is a crucial resource of the site and part of the sites heritage and it is this resource that I try to activate and to enhance.

Between the P3 and the P4 stage, most of the work has been put in elaborating on how the additions of new and sustainable materials relate to the existing heritage buildings in detail. The starting point for the detailing became, as it was throughout the entire design, to not do too much where it was not needed and thus to preserve the buildings as much as they are. Thereafter, the necessary interventions for comfort or technical reasons were done with sustainable and environmentally friendly material as much as possible. To prevent these new additions from conflicting with the old buildings they were either hidden from sight or visually 'disconnected' from the old building (for example by placing the plinth of the new floor not against the old wall but just in front of it). This view for the detailing was not present from the start on, but slowly developed throughout the design phase. This way, the detailing became a research by design study on how these new materials and old buildings can come together.

In a similar way, the entire project in the end aims to be an example of how sustainable design can join industrial heritage and natural heritage together into a new program. The site as designed will be a green refuge from the increasingly busier area of Hembrug and neighboring Amsterdam, that shows people that sustainable and green design can go hand in hand with industrial heritage buildings. By using this project as an architectural case study or reference, both in research and education as in practice, I hope that it will inspire more adoption of sustainable and green design within (industrial) heritage projects.

In translating the projects results (meaning the final design) into practice, by either imagining this project would be realized as designed or if it would inspire a similar project, economic arguments would most likely dilute the project as ideally seen. The design, through its not very effective use of square meters and use of non-standard building materials, would probably be quite expensive, resulting in an expensive hotel. Considering this, it can be argued that the natural environment of the site is not made accessible for everybody, which was one of the goals of the project, but only for those who can afford it. This starts a different ethical discussion about whether the project as designed should be realized at all. However, projects during the architectural education at TU Delft

often don't consider economic argument and therefore should be seen more as an ideal situation. Upon realizing the project, some concessions would have to be done to make it economically feasible. This way a balance could be found where the site would be too exclusive through its price.

Concluding, as mentioned before, I hope this project will inspire more people to consider sustainable design in dealing with industrial heritage projects.

References

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