

# How to make the passage become welcoming under the VROM building

Pei Zejun  
student number 4302400  
peizejun@gmail.com  
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Irene Cieraad Research Seminar AR3Ai055  
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# 1. Introduction

## Research motivation

The VROM building is too large, it is not only for civil servants, but also for general public ( especially on the ground floor), many people go across the building every day, it is a very important node in the city. The building has its own responsibility for the city, especially the lower part(near the ground). Which means the purpose of this research is more about how to design the lower parts of the building (spaces near ground).

The location(fig.1) is very important and the area is busy, but only few people would like to stay at the passage under the VROM building (fig2-3). Most of them only spend less than one minute to go across the passage. This situation also happens on the whole street from the central station to the city hall.

As can be seen in fig.6, the distance between the red area and the yellow area is 200 meters. The red area is the old city centre of Den Haag, an old street across this area, at the old street, people are tend to stay, drink and take photos. Comparing with the old street ( the spuistraat ) of Den Haag, people's moving speed in this passages(under the VROM building) is higher, which means people tend to pass through this street rather than staying here(fig.4-6).

In my design proposal, the civil servants are arranged above the 4th floor, floors below 4th are all for general public( except some entrance spaces ). So, my original purpose of the report is to find a solution or strategy to design the lower part of this building.

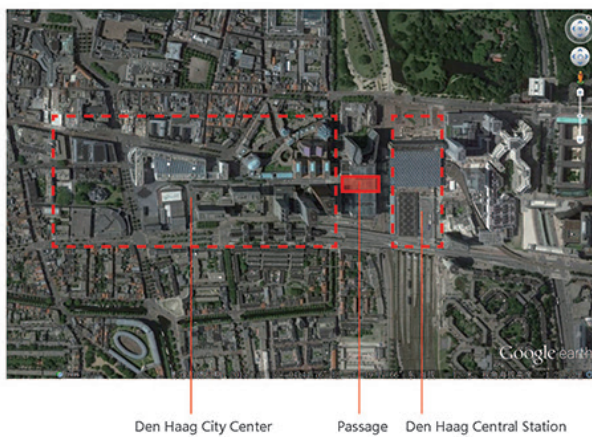


fig.1 the location of the passage

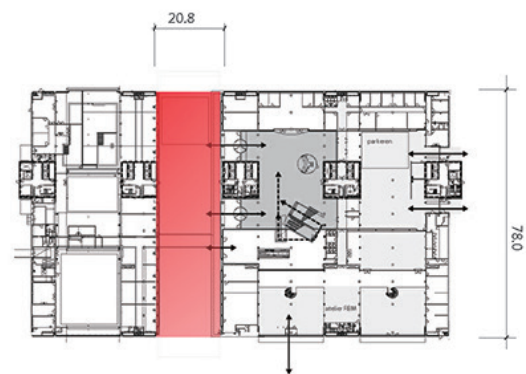
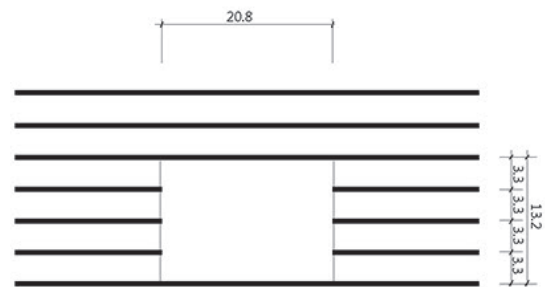


fig.2 the section and plan of the passage





fig.3 the passage under the VROM building

fig.4 the spuistraat of Den Haag



fig.5 the new street that the passage included

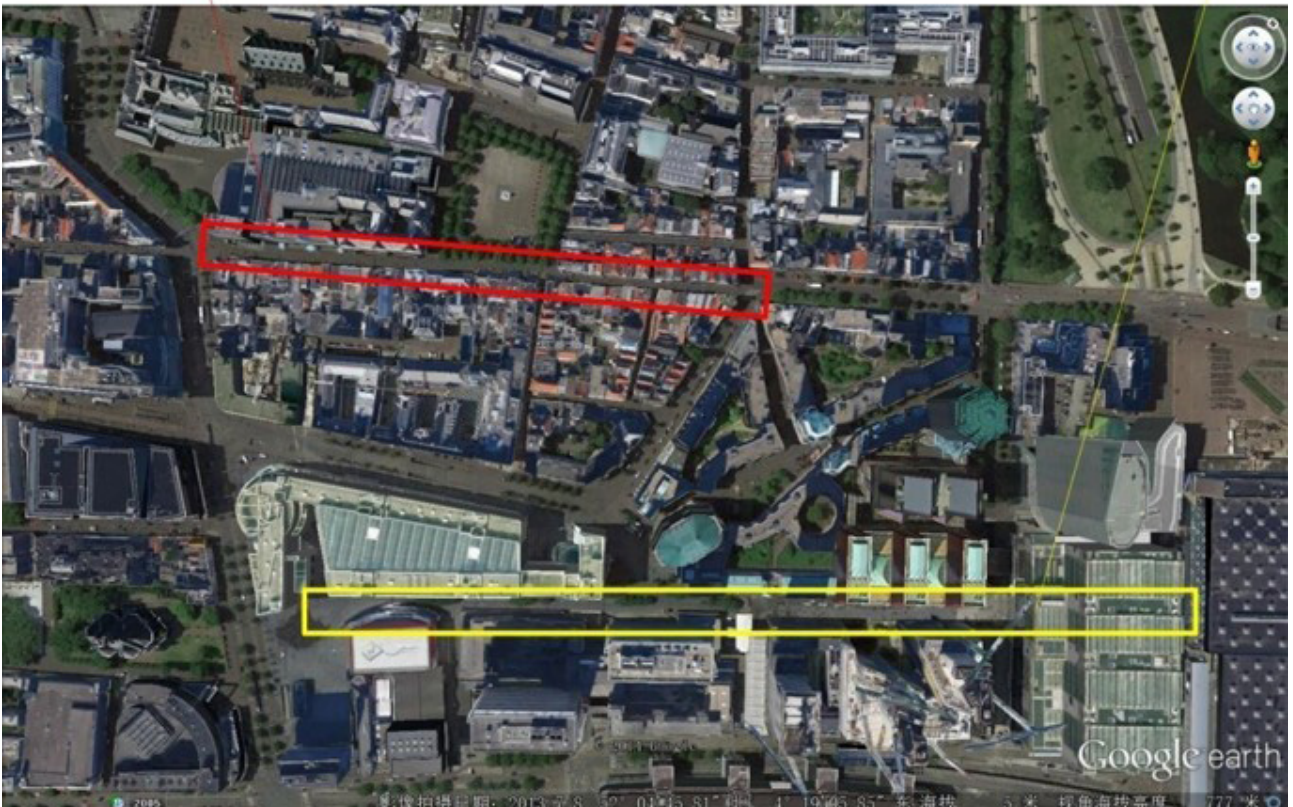


fig.6 the old street (red) of Den Haag and the new street that the passage included(yellow)



## 2. Reference case

### The indoor passage of the Rotterdam Central Plaza

The Rotterdam Central Plaza is a busy indoor commercial area near the Rotterdam central station, the main interior space of this plaza is an indoor passage. The passage connects the front square of the station and a large commercial area of the city (fig.7-9). It opens between 10:00am to 7:00pm everyday and hundreds of people walk through during this period. I choose this case as a reference because the project and its surrounding are highly similar as our site, which means it is reasonable and meaningful to make comparison between them. Lots of people pass through both passages every day, but the point is how people use them and how much people like to stay inside them.

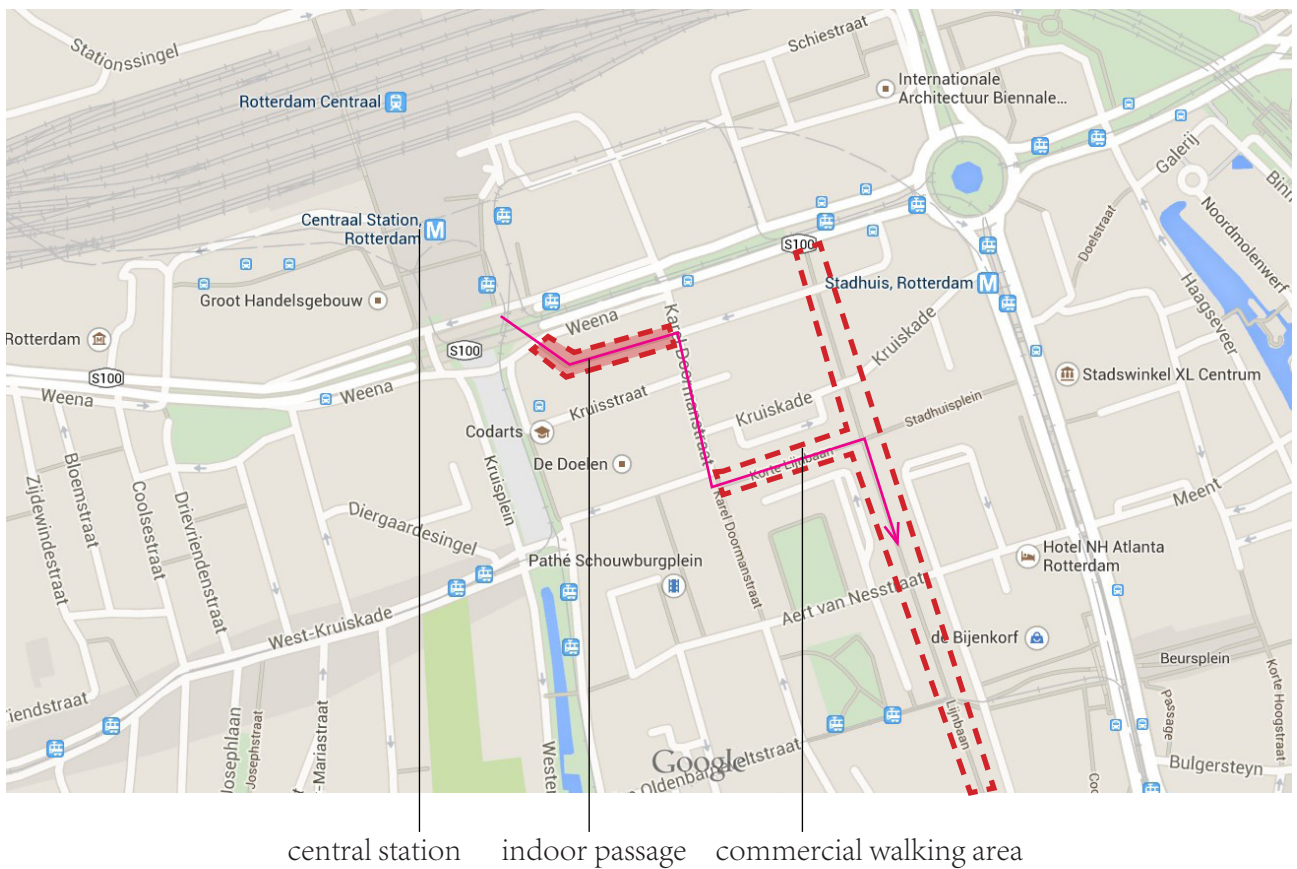


fig.7 The location of Rotterdam Central Plaza

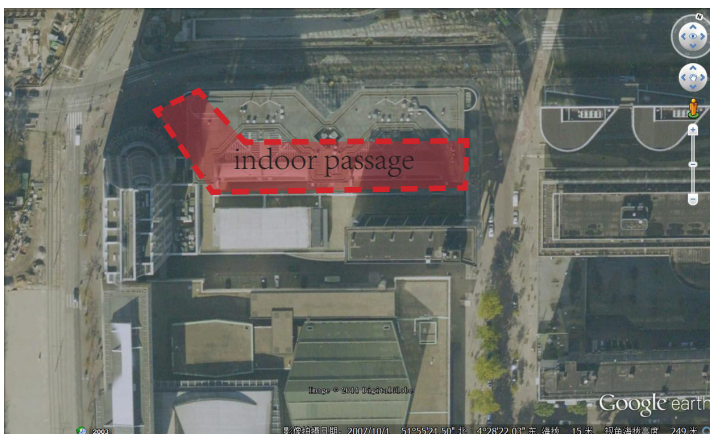


fig.8 The location of the indoor passage



fig.9 One of the entrance of the passage

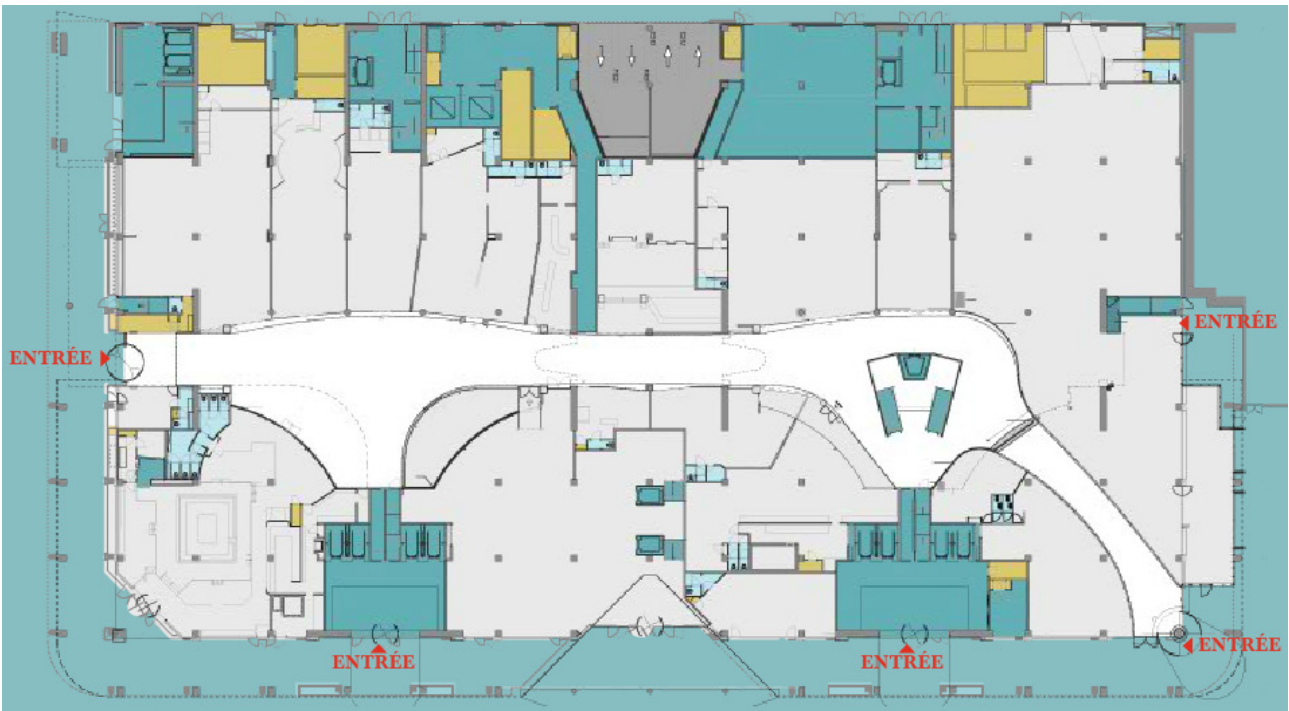


fig.10 the plan of the indoor passage  
 source: [www.central-plaza.nl/the-retail/retail-floorplans/](http://www.central-plaza.nl/the-retail/retail-floorplans/)

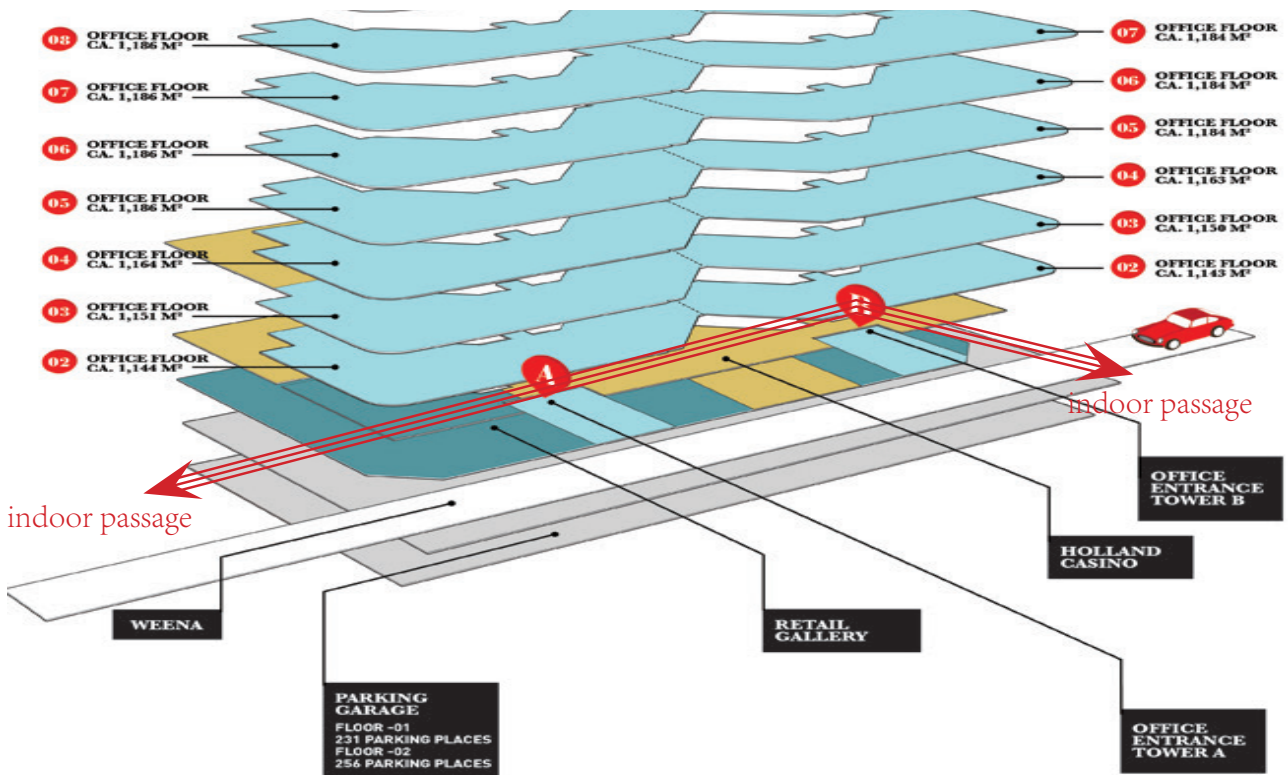


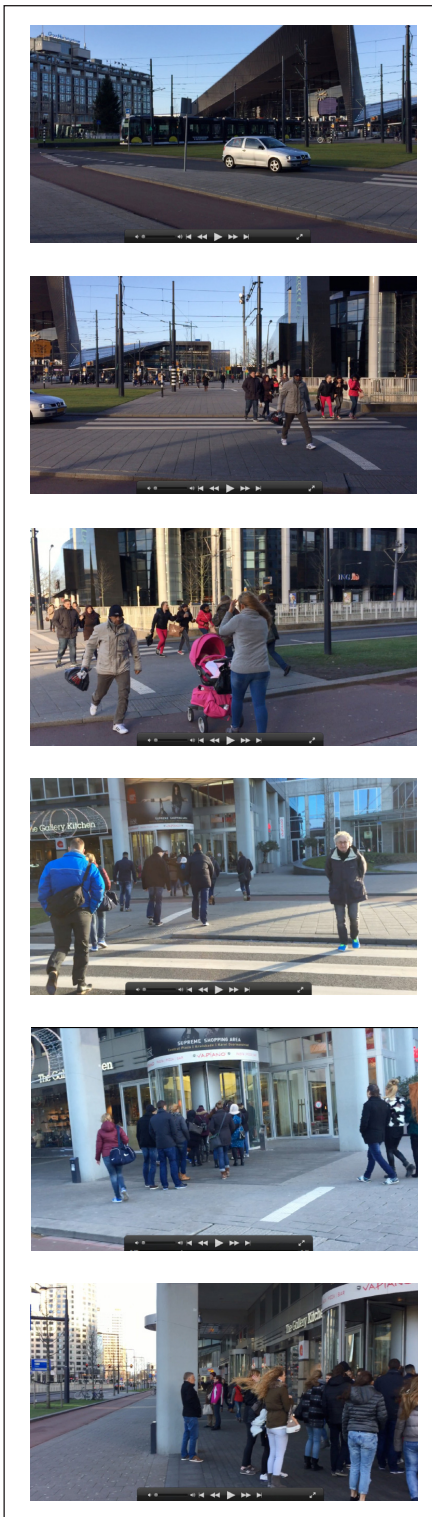
fig.11 the function of Rotterdam Central Plaza  
 source: [www.central-plaza.nl/the-office/office-floorplans/](http://www.central-plaza.nl/the-office/office-floorplans/)

The Rotterdam Central Plaza is a multi-function building (fig.11), it consists of two office towers, a big casino, a public commercial floor (the indoor passage inside) and a large scale underground parking area. The vertical functional arrangement is similar to the VROM building. There are five entrances towards the indoor passage, two main entrances at the ends, two small entrances connect the bottom of the office towers, and one entrance connect the holland casino. So, it is very convenient to get in the passage, which makes the passage a busy and important public interior space of the city (fig.10).



Above all, I want to explain the similarities between these passages. Firstly, both of them face a main station and connect to a very important and busy area of the city. In terms of the passage under the VROM building of Den Haag, it connects the center of the city and the central station. Generally, more than half of people who visit Den Haag have to pass through this passage as soon as they leave the central station. Secondly, the length of the two passages are similar. More or less, they have the same potential and possibilities in space.

I went to the Rotterdam Central Plaza to analysis the reason why the interior passage is so energetic and welcoming. I observed this space in morning and afternoon, and used videos to record the movements and people's activities.



Those two videos(fig12-13) show the two main entrances of the indoor passage — one close to the train and tram station, another close to the walking commercial area and the central part of the city.

Many people enter the indoor passage after they leave the train and tram station, or after the shopping time in the walking area. The indoor passage is more popular when the weather is awful outside. As can be seen in the series of images, in a windy and cold afternoon, people are very eager to enter the indoor passage, although, with different motivations. Not only for shopping, but also searching for a warm way to reach the central part of the city.

fig.12 images in the video of the station-side-entrance

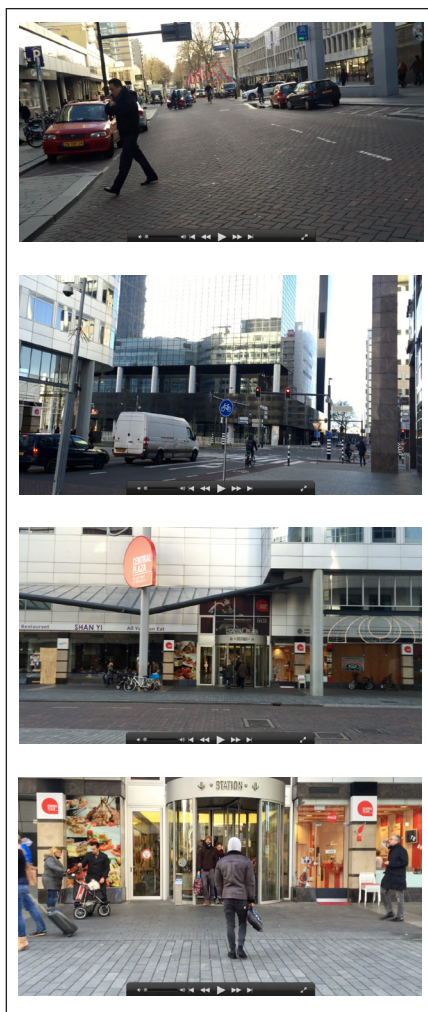


fig.13 images in the video of the walking-area-side-entrance

fig.14 images in the video of the spacial sequences of the whole passage

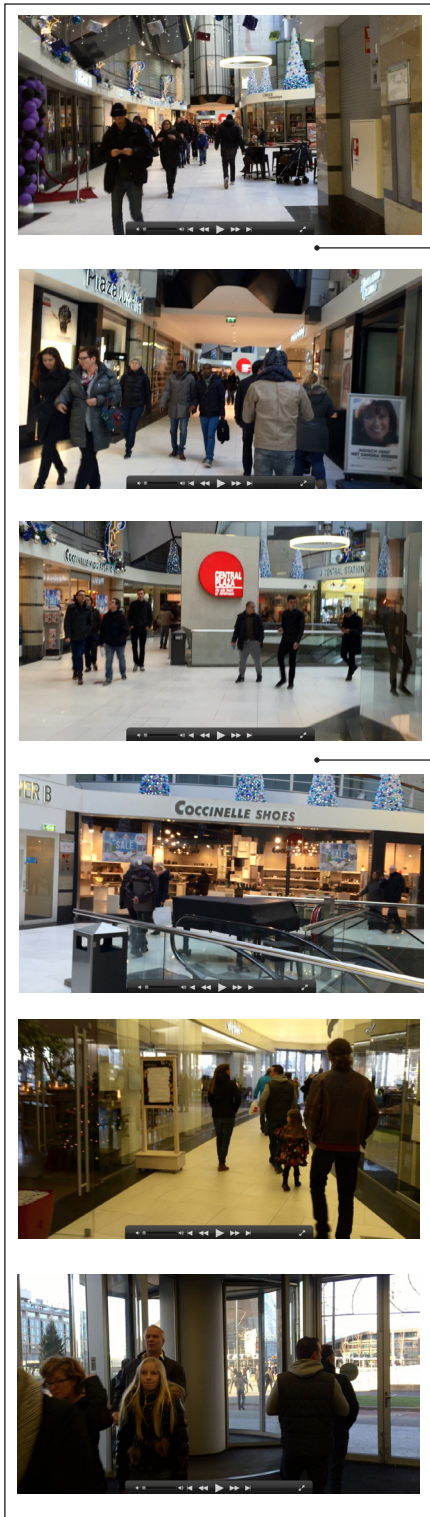


fig.15

The first square in the passage. Here, the space becomes more spacious, which provides a larger area for people to do different activities. The borders of this space are restaurants, shops, and casino. People are able to rest in this area. But with the fact that the tables are belong to the restaurant, hence not many people are willing to sit there. Lighting from the glass roof, provides an outdoor experience.



fig.16

The second square in the passage, a circulation node of the passage, connecting the two underground parking floors, and the entrance of the office-tower. Escalators enable people transmit in different layers quickly. The borders of this space are restaurants and shops. People can play the piano here if they want to. Also, lighting from the glass roof, provides an outdoor experience.

The video(fig.14) shows the whole process how people walk through the indoor passage. The space becomes narrow once people get into the entrances (width: approximately 4 meters). Space becomes larger in the middle of the route, like two small indoor squares(fig.15-16) which people can meet and play with each other, or have a rest in these squares. In the passage, people can choose different activities in different kinds of functional areas.



Activities in the passage



contemporary music show



chating and watching others in passage



shopping



eating



resting in the outside chairs



walking and standing



go to work



entertainment in casino

During the analysing process of the reference, I find some reasons why this public interior space is popular, and I can apply some conclusions of them to my VROM project.

Firstly, it is the shortcut between the busiest transport center and the most famous walking commercial area of the city. And it is also a comfortable route because of the glass roof and the climate-controlled environment. When people want to reach the commercial area, the indoor passage is the best choice of getting there. Especially when it is cold or raining outside. The video is about the surrounding spaces near the entrance, in which we can find people are gathering in front of the entrance. These people include not only tourists, but also local residents.

Secondly, the sufficient multiple function nearby supports the operating of the passage. Actually the passage is just the central part of the Rotterdam Central Plaza, surrounded by many other functional units. The ground floor integrates a famous holland casino, some theme restaurants and shops. The -1&-2 floor are big parking areas. As a result, people have many choices of activities in this building(fig.17). For example, some women enter the passage for shopping, after that they can stay in a cafe for a rest or have their lunch, then continue to look for clothes or other stuffs. if they want they can even go to the casino for entertainment for several hours, and then they can have dinner and walk out the passage via another entrance to take a walk in the walking commercial area. In this passage, we find that the space sequence and the function arrangement make the activities continuous. Some people can choose the passage as a shortcut to arrive at the walking commercial area. Also some people regard it as a good place for relaxing, eating and shopping. When someone goes across this passage, it enhance the chance people staying inside.

Thirdly, the interesting interior design makes the space attractive; the narrow-spacious spacial sequence provides many choices for activities. People are able to get an outside experience in the squares. The wall between the passage and other functions are very transparent, so that people can watch each other, every individual can feel the connection to the public space.



### 3. Interview

#### 3.1 Questions for interviews

PART 1 : questions about the existing environment

1. Do you like here?

-If the answer is "yes":

What is the Reason: is it spacious? No rains? And which is the best season you like here?

-If the answer is "no":

What is the Reason: is it too cold? Windy? Or boring?

2. Are you tired after walking through this road, from the city hall to here?

3. In this road, from the city hall to the station, which part do you like best? why?

4. Do you like or dislike this roof, why?

PART 2 : questions about potential activities

5. Do you think it is better to put some tables in this passage, so that you can sit down and drink if you want, Or, do you think it should be empty so that you can pass here more quickly? (see image 1-2)

6. If you can do something interesting here, what kind of things you prefer to do, like sitting down and having a cup of coffee, or watching an exhibition, going shopping, or just having a sit and watching other people move?

7. If you can do some activities here, like shopping or walking, do you want it under the roof, or without the roof? (see image 3-4 )

8. Usually, would you like to participate in some temporary activities on street? What kind of activities, do you like to share some experiences with us?

9. In terms of these activities, how long would you like to stay for it? Do you feel awkward or embarrassed when you leave?

10. Would you like to sit somewhere in this passage to look other people's movements, if you would, which situation you prefer to choose? (see image 5-6)

11. If some interesting events happen here, like an informal concert, do you prefer it indoor or outdoor? (see image 7-8) Or, when you are walking outside, do you want to enter a building and have a look?



image 1



image 3

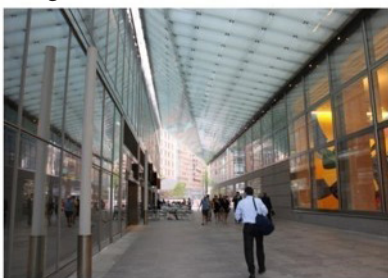


image 2



image 4

fig.18 images for conversations during the interviews





image 5



image 7

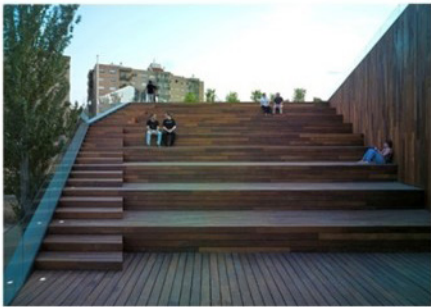


image 6



image 8

fig.19 images for conversations during the interviews

### PART 3 : questions about future project

12. If you know there will be some government apartments built here, will you feel sort of inaccessible? Or you want to enter the entrance having a look and sitting down?
13. If you can decide the function here, what kind of building do you prefer here, for example museum, cinema, concert hall, shopping mall, etc?
14. If you can enjoy leisure time after work or in the lunch break, do you prefer staying in the building or outside?
15. What do you think of the meaning of outside? Should it be entire outside environment or under artificial roof? (see image 9-10,11-12 )



image 9



image 11



image 10



image 12

fig.20 images for conversations during the interviews

## 3.2. Interview cases

### Interview case 1



fig.21 images from the video



ROB VAN AARSEN

the project construction supervisor of the new Rijnstraat 8 building

&

the project construction assistant-supervisor of the old VROM building( 23 years ago)

Answers are organised.

When asked about the exsist passage:

-It's a nice space, spacious, and fast, functional (can look to the central station)

-I like the passage because it is open, lot of fresh air, not boring, because the storage is underneath it.

When asked about activities:

-It is nice to participate a activity on the street, people used do it in Den Haag. but if the acticity indoor, even it looks attractive and you can see it, I don't want to into the building, because in the street you can listen if you want to, but you can leave at any time if you don't want continue. Looking in the street is more relax and freedom rather than inside.

-But if you have some display inside, maybe some people interested in it, but I am not one of them.

When asked about the lunch time in weekdays:

-Just sit back and relax, sometimes go outside and have a walking, smoking while looking some other people.

When asked about the preference about the images:

-(image 2)It is more effecient, especially for some people who want catch the train. but if there is free tables can have a cup of coffee, it can be nice, but it shouldn't too many so that make here crowded.





-(image 11)It is also outside, even if it has an artificial roof, but it can make you dry, also, the environment is more stable.



Other tips:

-The original designer also participates the OMA design team, and he suggests them to demolish the southern wall, because it is too blocked.

-The every end of the block is metal plate, and the concrete wall is about 2 meters inside, so you can change the surface of each end, but you can not remove the concrete wall, otherwise you need spend lots of money.

## Interview case 2



fig.22 images from the video

Niels ( the people don't prefer to share his information)

Living in Den Haag more than thirty years, his wife working in the former VROM building

When asked about the exsist passage:

-I dislike the passage because it is not attractive to us to walk through, and there are too much buildings.

-It should be more playful or greener, more trees and grasslands.

-I dislike the roof, it should be more open air, and now the passage is dark and not popular to people.

When asked about the opinion of the future in this space:

-More tables here can make it more attractive, more people will sit and stay for a while.

-It is windy so I hope designer can solve this problem, but I think is difficult to solve it under a so large building. anyway it should be still open air but can be a shelter from rain.

When asked about activities:

-I sometimes join temporary activities on streets, but it should not be too much.

-I prefer to have a look and then pass by if it is very good.

## Interview case 3



fig.23 images from the video



JELGER BLANKEN

Dutch Musician

has sufficient experiences of street temporary activities

Den Haag resident, across under the VROM building almost everyday

When asked about the existing passage:

-The space is still a little bit messy, there are already some interesting shops here, but it can be better, become more friendly.

-I like the architecture from the city hall to the station, but the color is a little bit death, in another way it is not so lively.

-I like the roof here, because it is dry and it is still open air, but at the same time I think it will be great if there are some kinds of elements of nature inside, so we don't have only an empty white space with nothing but some nature and more human activities.

When asked about activities:

-I often participate temporary activities on streets, and I don't mind to go into the building to attend some activities.

When asked about the new space in the future:

-I am very interested in how to make the government building can be accessible by general public, because usually this kind of building are closed and looks not attractive. Maybe it is a good ideal to involve general public more with government.

-Architects need try to make the building looks more accessible, for example, by using different materials.

-I like here has some places to sit, tables or big staircases, but it should be efficient as well, so if you can combine those two situations, it can be a ideal situation.

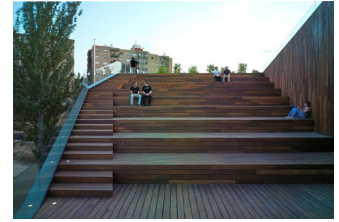
(image 1&2)





When asked about the preference about the images:

-(image 6) I think the staircase can make me feel more safe, it is a kind of social safety. people can be more relax, and can lean on the wall, also, the wood material is more warm.



-(image 8) I think both kind of concert are nice to happen here, but sometimes if I am busy, I prefer to stand for a while then leave it, also the outside music can attract much unexpected people than inside. but you need to provide sort of stable outdoor environment for the musicians.



Actually, only part of artists can use indoor rooms for their performances, but anybody can use outside space to show themselves, if a city like Den Haag, I think many people like to use outside area to show themselves.

-(image 12) I prefer the environment because it is totally outside, people will like to stay in a nature place in this kind of blocked street, we can not find many trees in this passage. If more trees under the artificial roof, it can be also attractive.



## Interview case 4



fig.24 images from the video



DANIEL NOORDMAN

Staff of the shop (GallGall) of VROM building, Den Haag resident  
he works in the passage space for almost one year  
very familiar with the commercial model in the passage

When asked about the existing passage:

-It isn't really like enthusiastic when you walk straight down the street and it is like nothing really closed by, only a few supermarkets and a few storages can provide some breakfast and quick snacks, that's basically here.

-I like here because it's convenient.

When asked about the future project:

-I will appreciate as long as the roof is more transparent so you can see what happened and give you some visual effect.

-There is already a supermarket here so it will be better if here have some places where you can just relax and just have a cup of coffee, or some good exhibitions because Den Haag is really a cultural city with a lot of arts. And it is really close to the central station, it is easier to attract tourists and local people as well.

-I like to stay or sit here have a rest and watch people moving, it can be like a city square.

-A government building can not be enclosed if the passage is still can be accrossed by people, and I also like to into the building to enjoy some exhibitions and activities if I can. Because it can be more inviting to go directly from the central station instead of immediately go to the center of the city.

-The new space should be inviting, not a large barrier to come in, not too expensive but more cultural more visualization because it is really hard to get people's attention by now. so you really have to get some special to attract people's attention.

### 3.3. Conclusions of interviews

Only about one-tenth of people in this space are willing to be interviewed, the reason is most people want to catch the time to do something, such as catch the train or go to their offices. Generally, people in this passage move fast and they look more likely to penetrate here rather than stay here.

Among the people who participated these interviews, some of them didn't mind using video to record the conversations, some people didn't like to show themselves in the video. So I only recorded the voices. Anyway, some people took their privacy seriously and I can not record anything, so I can only organise the information after the conversations.

The interview result :

- Participants 11,
- including:
- 4 videos,
- 2 voice records,
- 5 unrecorded conversations.

Because these interviews were full of interactions, the conversations were much free. Many interviewees did not follow the question strictly. Hence, the final result of interviews does not follow these question very perfectly. For some questions that almost everybody answered I apply diagrams to organise them, but for some other information, only part of interviewees talked with me, I use texts to explain them.

Feedback of questions:

1. Do you like here?(fig.25-26)

-If the answer is "like":

What is the Reason, is it spacious? No rains? And which is the best season you like here?

-If the answer is "dislike":

What is the Reason, is it too cold? Windy? Or boring?

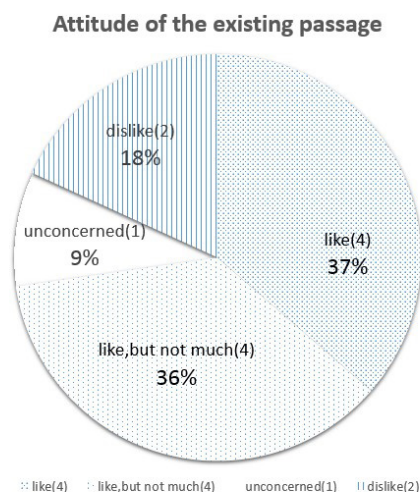


fig.25

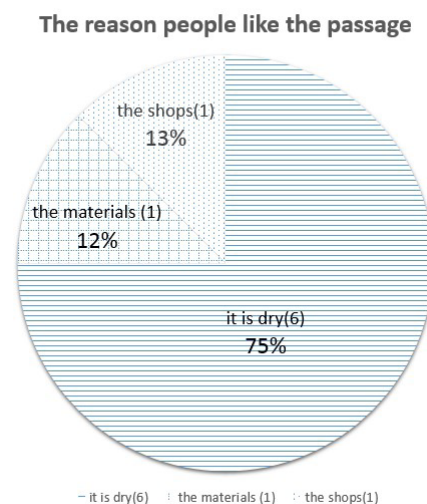


fig.26

3. In this road, from the city hall to the station, which part do you like best? why? (fig.27)
4. Do you like or dislike this roof, why?(fig.28)

**Which part of the street people like best**

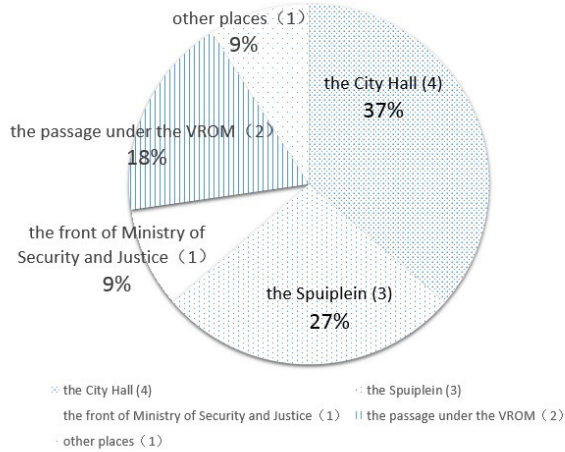


fig.27

**Which part of this space people dislike**

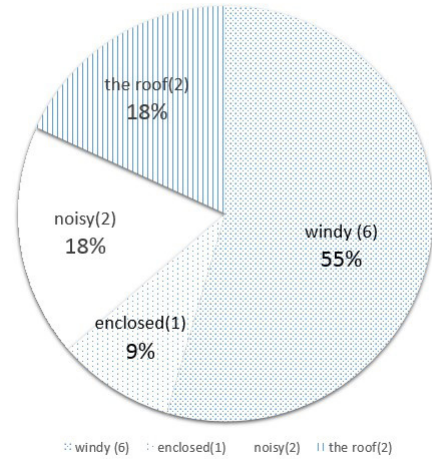


fig.28

5. Do you think it is better to put some tables in this passage, then you can sit and drink if you want to, Or, do you think it should be empty then you can pass here more quickly? (fig.29)
6. If you can do something interesting here, what kind of things do you prefer to do, e.g. sit and have a cup of coffee, or watch an exhibition, go shopping, or just have a sit and watch other people moving? (fig.30)

**Would people like some tables in this space**

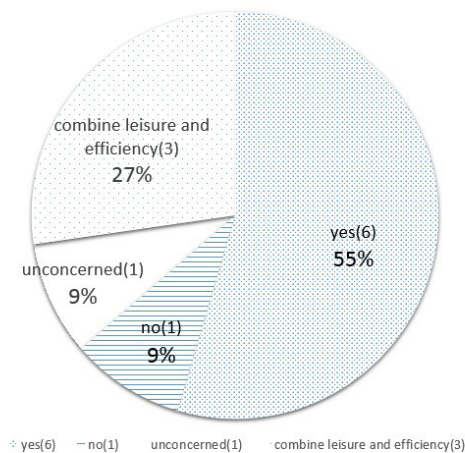


fig.29

**What kind of activities people want to do here**

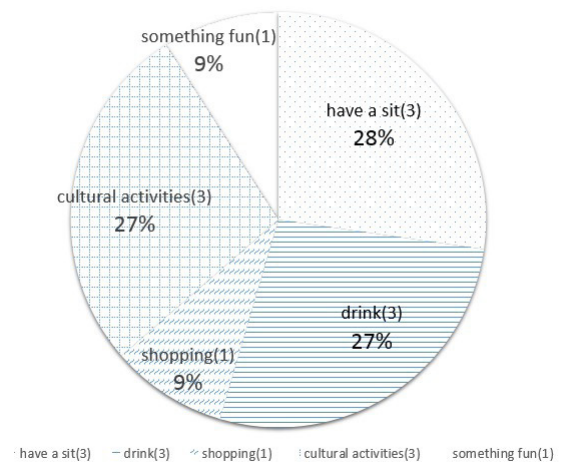


fig.30



7. If you can do some activities here, like shopping or walking, do you want it under the roof, or without the roof? (fig.31)
8. Usually, would you like to participate in some temporary activities on street? What kind of activities, do you like to share some experiences with us?(fig.32)
9. In terms of these activities, how long would you like to stay for it? Do you feel awkward or embarrassed when you leave? (fig.32)
11. If some interesting events happen here, like an informal concert, do you prefer it indoor or outdoor? Or, when you are walking outside, do you want to enter a building and have a look? (fig.32)

**Should activities under the roof or not**

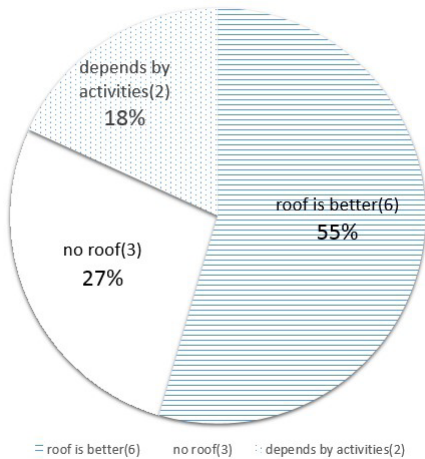


fig.31

**People prefer activities happened indoor or outdoor & People feel awkward when leaving in two occasion**

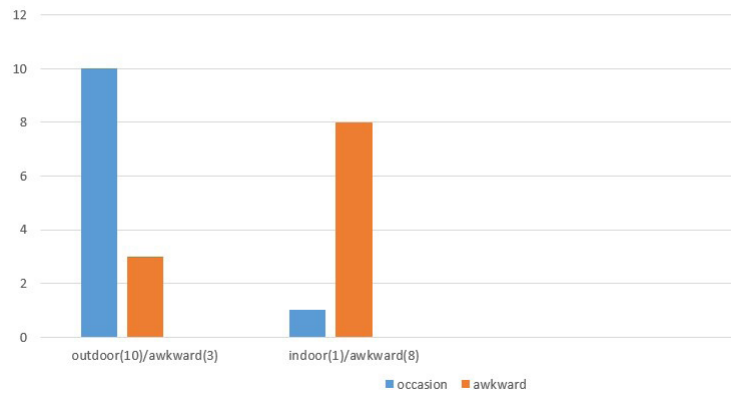


fig.32

12. If you know there will be some government apartments built here, will you feel sort of inaccessible? Or you want to enter the entrance having a look and sitting down?(fig.33)
13. If you can decide the function here, what kind of building do you prefer here, for example museum, cinema, concert hall, shopping mall, etc? (fig.34)

**People's attitude about the new government building**

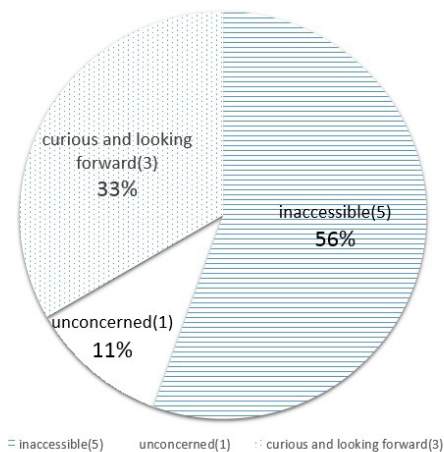


fig.33

**Function in the future here**

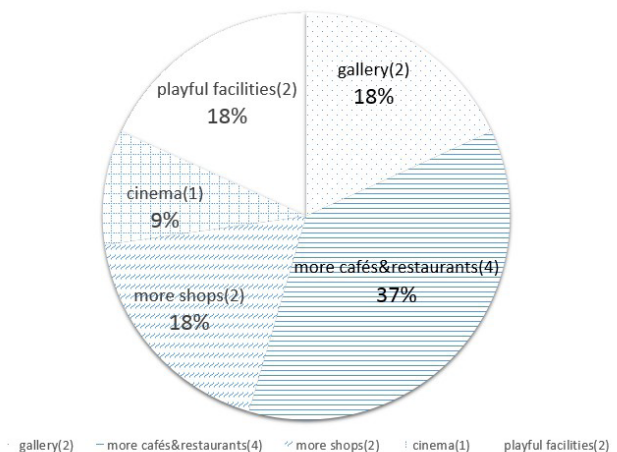


fig.34

Conclusion from the feedbacks:

About the existing space:

The roof is the main characteristic of this passage space in the whole street, keeping the space dry. It is also the reason why most people like this space more than other parts. (comfortable covered space)

The windy environment is annoying, people hope architects can provide some solutions to solve it. (comfortable covered space)

The stores and supermarkets near by are not good enough. (commercial environment)

The sidewalks around the VROM building is narrow, people have to pay lots of attention when walking there, they are not relaxed, but feel unsafe, unprotected. (safe requirement)

About the new place:

Most people would like to see more rest spaces or facilities in the passage, as tables, staircases, benches , etc. (stay requirement)

Most people would like to see more green elements in this space, because the whole street is full of concrete buildings and lack of trees. (natural experience)

People think it is a space providing passing function, because most people want to catch public transit. (functional efficiency)

It will be playful, allow people to do more activities here, e.g. informal concert, exhibition, or more interesting spaces, then it can be attractive. (behavior possibilities)

About the behavior:

Most people would like to see more temporary activities in the street, but they prefer it happens outside rather than inside, because people can whenever decide to come or leave, it is more natural and relaxing. (accessibility)

People prefer to sit aside and watch other people moving in the passage, since they don't mind the canal or other nature elements that much. In a word, people are more likely to watch other people here. (social visibility)

People prefer to stay somewhere providing them the feeling of social safe. For example leaning to a wall, or sitting on the border. (safe requirement)

People more expect to see the government building accessible by general public. (equality)

People willing to enter the government building to see what the government is doing now, because it can make people know how the city will be changed. (political transparency)

## 4. Applying to architectural design

### Architectural goals & Design directions

The conclusions from the interviews can be abstracted into some keywords, because keywords stand for the design directions or architectural goals. These keywords cover many aspects of a good project, and they can make the new project needed by the local residents and the city. These aspects should be taken into account in my design:

- |                             |                         |                          |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| (stay requirement)          | (natural experience)    | (commercial environment) |
| (comfortable covered space) | (safe requirement)      | (social visibility)      |
| (accessibility)             | (functional efficiency) | (behavior possibilities) |
| (political transparency)    | (equality)              |                          |



fig.35 the original project and the researching part

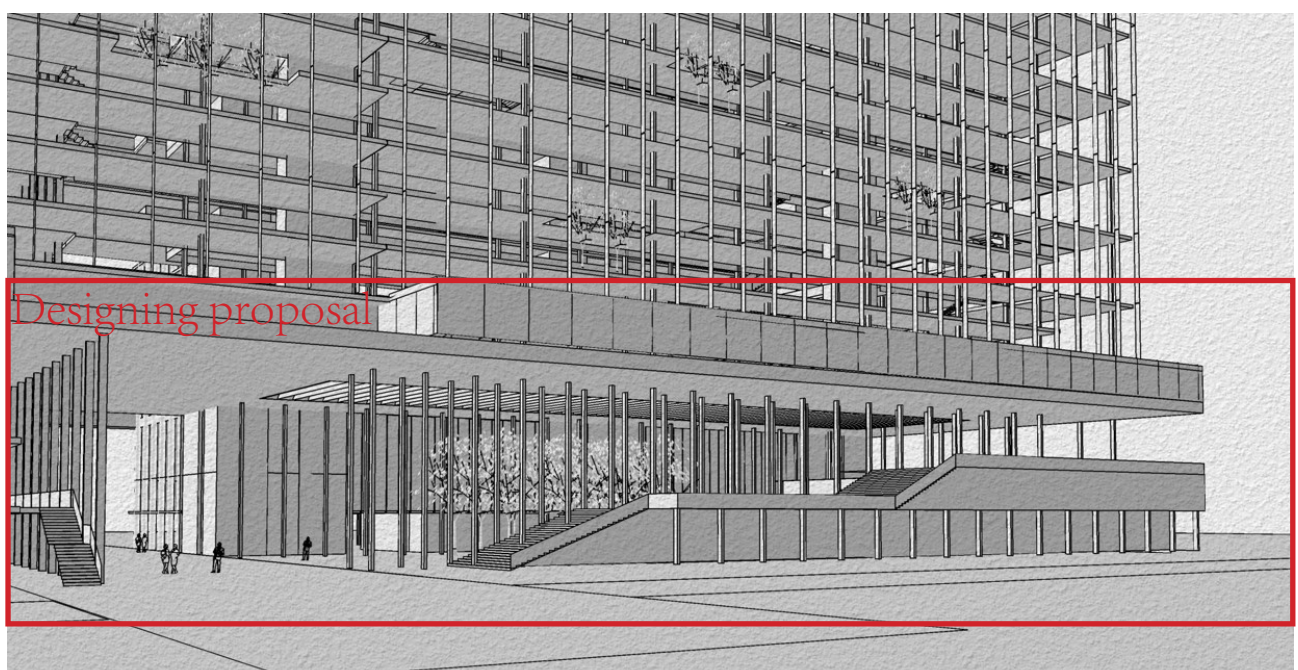
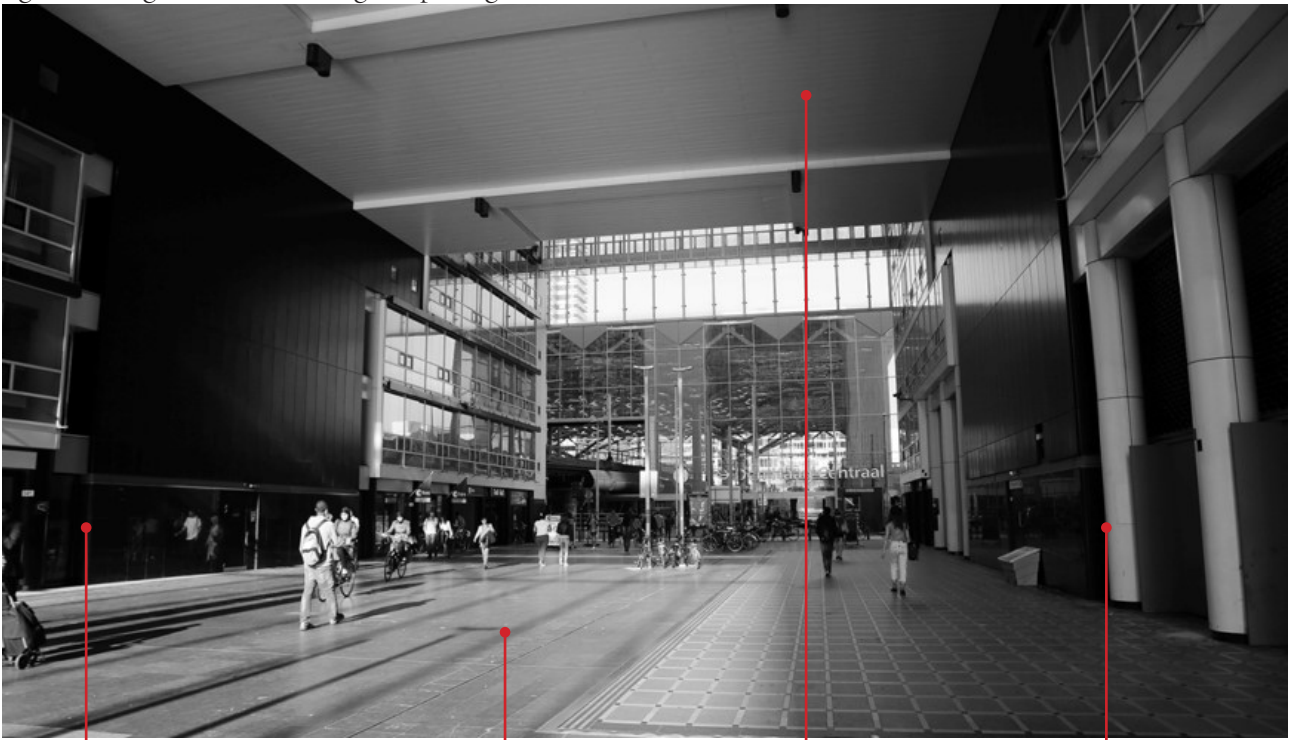


fig.36 the new project



fig.37 a image took in the original passage



(stay requirement) & (commercial environment):

A corridor in front of the cafes and restaurants, tables can be put into it. Also, there is a corridor in front of shops and galleries on the first floor.

(functional efficiency):

The fast route reserved in the new proposal, making the new passage combine two special qualities, people can sit and stay aside, or, penetrate the passage quickly.

(comfortable covered space):

The roof is a main characteristic of the original building, in the new project it is reserved, and the city square also covered by roof.

(accessibility)&(natural experience):

People can enter the city square on the right side of the passage. The public square is surrounded by many other facilities. Plants and landscape design in the city square make the space green.

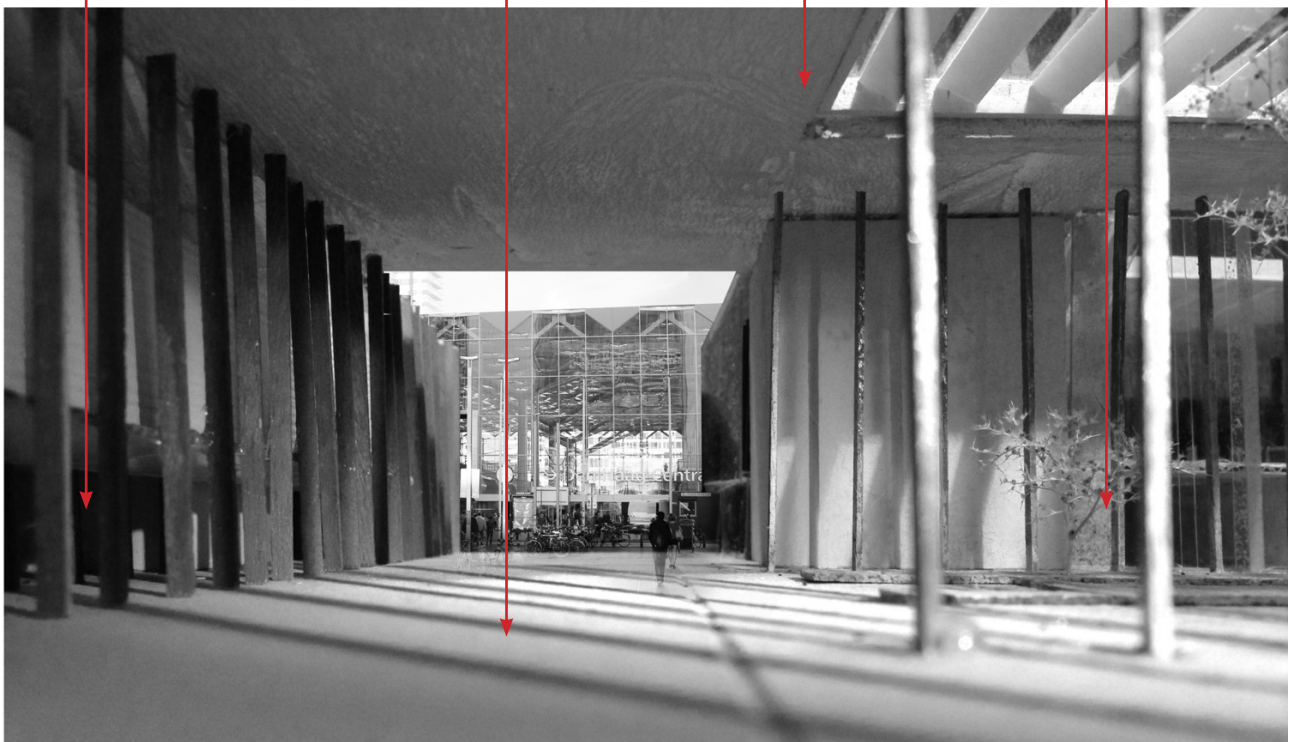


fig.38 a image took in the model of new proposal

