

Reflection

P4

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Interiors Buildings Cities

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Make Your Own Neighbourhood

A Communal DIY Marketplace for the Zomerhofkwartier in Rotterdam

Research Questions & Design Decisions

The project initially started out to be engaged with the sociocultural phenomenon around amateur production and its physical manifestation of the DIY store as an integral of everyday life in today's society. In order to gradually develop an architectural brief for the eventual design, a number of case studies has been examined in various forms: visual, logistic, social, cultural, economic. This original fascination based on the availability, aesthetics and intimacy of the public interior observed in the existing spaces opened up a wider field of literary research towards a profound understanding of the theoretical background of DIY in a historical context. The analysis of self-made creation—mainly related to domestic crafts and home improvement—has been directed to the relationship between consumption and production as the programmatic challenge for the architectural assignment. As per now, the processes around DIY are rather clearly separated and manifested in both urban and suburban conditions where public retail facilities offer materials and tools for the assembly in the private domain. Popular media and illustrative manuals have proven that the educational function of such activities is an essential part of its nature, a potential platform to show, explain, exhibit, inspire, share, help and collaborate. The digitalisation of knowledge in forms of instructions, ideas and models has isolated amateur practice as much as the exchange of immaterial information has established an own social space. The thesis takes these conclusions as a starting point to find a way of giving DIY a physical platform to bring together interests, competences and cultures by creating an urban model where building materials can be purchased, collected, reused, processed and exhibited for the benefit of the chosen neighbourhood. The economic circulation of things and thus actions aim to contribute to an identity-establishing institution for, within and through the area.

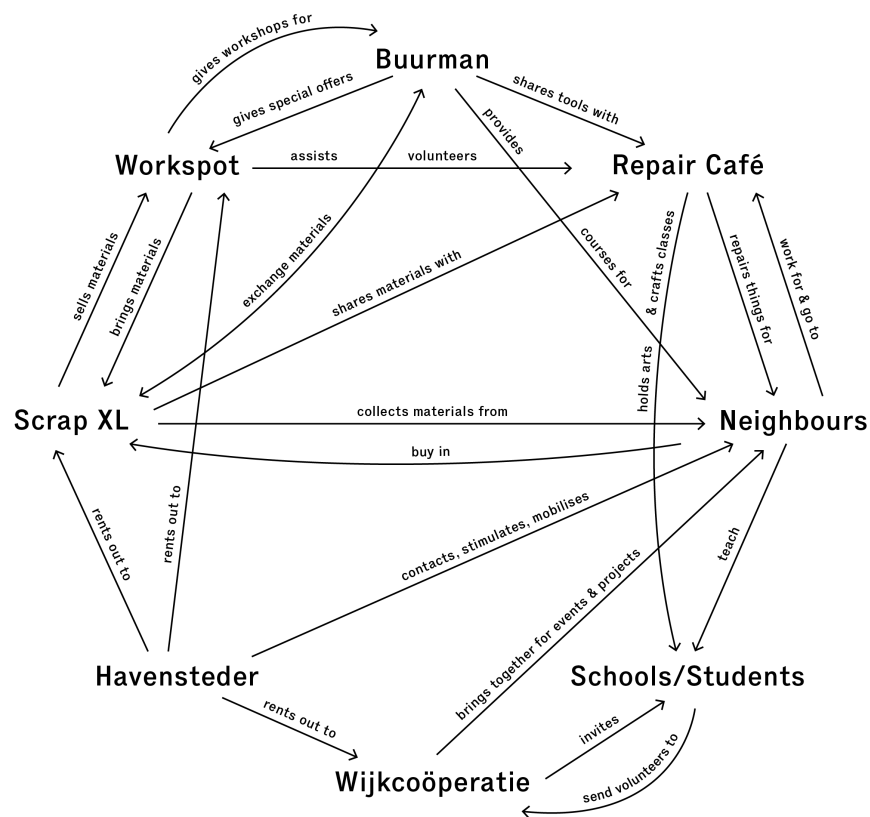
In parallel to the phenomenological investigation on the cultural conditions, a design brief has gradually been assembled to turn the personal fascination into a critical execution of an architectural programme. Being part of an open studio with a variety of themes, the choice of a legitimate site for the intervention has been a crucial part of the research. Since the means of production at hand demand an adaptive and yet framed context for its future use, the selected place offers a infrastructural foundation while being open for spatial transformation. After having tested scenarios in which the desired activities are directly inserted into an existing related typology, it has been logical to occupy a mostly vacant building in the city of Rotterdam that currently hosts workspaces for creative professionals, a social cooperative, a second hand material shop and an open event space. "Het Gebouw" is the focal point of the Zomerhofkwartier and works as an identity-establishing object for events, workshops and think-tanks for local transformations. The existing network of interests—consisting of a social housing company, active neighbours, social workers and schools—creates the ideal framework for the proposed agenda.

Project Framework

The Urban Institution

The studio is embedded in the methodology of the chair by dealing with the given framework around the City as an Archive and the building's role as an Urban Institution. It is therefore to clarify in which way the project sets itself within the discussion around these themes.

The decision to create a physical meeting point for hobbyists and professional makers, neighbours and visitors, elderly and students, private and public activities, is a reaction to developments in DIY communities towards a reconsideration of material cultures, sharing economies and building transformations. The design is meant to function as a (role) model for urban conditions in which the exchange of practical knowledge needs to be curated for the sake of a community engaged in the building of a unique neighbourhood. While aiming to prove the relevance of such an institution, the project has to be considered a testing ground for this productive marketplace. As a matter of fact, it enables social, economic and cultural values to coexist and furthermore cooperate for the improvement of each domain. The constructed network of stakeholders participating in the operation of the building—entrepreneurs, schools, neighbours, manufacturers—helps to integrate its functions within current constellations around (domestic) crafts. As a consequence of the undertaken design strategies, the public sphere of the space is extended from 12% to more than 60% by opening up the plinth and adding accessible functions that still work as independent parts. The involvement of collaborators turn the project into a new type whose main role is to provide facilities, space and knowledge for the production of (public) interiors and (private) objects.



Network of stakeholders

Interactions, responsibilities and economies among involved agents

The City as an Archive

In the context of being an adaptive model for building crafts, the programme not only means to run the everyday assembly of goods but additionally builds up a collection of creative outcomes that are successively exhibited, modified and documented for future purposes as well as the ongoing productivity of the neighbourhood. Creations are archived through means of instructions whose entirety generates the chance to teach acquired lessons to students, hobbyists and the public. This passing on of experience serves as a fundamental surplus for the project, a place where everyone can learn from everyone by watching, asking, helping and sharing.

In order to prove the realisation of this concept, the assignment finds its architectural translation in the challenge to create a local identity for the space itself while focussing on the adaptive power through its users over time, so that the project is not the sole transformation by the architect but equally dependent on the specificity created by its agents. The role of the architect is therefore to find a balance between what is necessary to initiate such an occupation and how the users are able to adapt to these conditions within their level of competence. In this sense, the proposed design gives space to continually make use of the growing archive of ideas and to be involved in the progressive restructuring of interior situations for different events and developments.

Another aspect of seeing the project as part of the wider framework of the studio is based on the idea that the collective effort functions as a platform to expose DIY activities as a public feature. The permanent and changing exhibition around the gallery showcases the neighbourhood's achievements and manifests a counterpoint to the digital provision of instructions by presenting the process behind the production in realtime. Home improvement finds a new place to be practiced from purchase to manufacturing of materials whose origins have been blurred out through the industrialisation of domestic objects in the existing typology of DIY facilities. In this logic, the thesis follows the tendency to reuse goods within a sharing economy in order to understand the very nature of its matter. The willingness to learn how things are made, where their ingredients come from and what is possible to do with them is the key element of the concept, to create a space where passion, curiosity and social ambition make up for the character of the building and therefore the neighbourhood.



All Mod Cons-The DIY Pioneers (1997)

Showcasing amateur practice as a medial enactment of creative production

Methodological Approach

The established project brief combines different functions in order to create beneficial conditions for all parties involved in DIY practice. The programme has been generated from the conclusions of the typological research to understand how the relations between materials, interiors and final objects are today and then taken as a guideline to add facilities around the offered objects. The result of this methodology is the horizontal distribution of products defining the vertical crossover of workshops dedicated to different types of machinery: wood, metal, textile, synthetics, paint. These factories are positioned independently as islands and define open spaces between them, where free workspaces, a repair café and assembly lines are orientated towards the materials they are engaged with. The flexible area on the ground floor is framed by the public gallery and divided by an assembly path through the building that offers devices to spontaneously fix, spray or cut objects "on the go". As a result, the specificity of a project gradually increases from the outside to the inside of the building and is closely linked to the amount of time spent on certain tasks. The character of the final design is determined by this spatial organisation related to the complexity, demanded competence and dimension of what is to be made and automatically defines a number of circulations for each type of user: the professional craftsman using the heavy machinery in the workshop, the volunteer expert taking time to repair a neighbour's electronic device in the open workspace, the student wanting to learn about special techniques or the hobbyist finishing a piece of furniture on the way home. This interrelation of visits creates special moments in the building that need additional attention, spaces for social interaction and inspirational exchange. In the wider context of the city, the place is considered a central point for (social) DIY activities and the distribution of goods as a joint venture between ScrapXL and Buurman, both initiatives which focus on the collection and reuse of building materials on different scales.

Sociocultural Conditions

The course of investigating on the posed research questions and the established design proposal is guided by the aim for responsibilities towards several domains: the domestic crafts as a cultural event, the chosen neighbourhood as the main actor of the project and the material culture as the ingredient for the activation of the site. As a central theme for the brief as well as the execution of the project, the social aspect of making things (together) serves as a counterproposal to the service-orientated nature of the DIY store in particular by motivating and sensitising people to question the manufacturing of everyday objects beyond the pure assembly of ready-made elements. The idea of empowering the community through the collective process shows how existing conditions can be rearranged and curated in order to bring together ambitions related to the interiors of everyday (public and private) life.

Agenda

As a concluding statement of this report it is necessary to provide a preview of how the project can be further developed and finalised to answer the relevant issues that have been eliminated throughout the graduation process. The main concern of the design project at this stage is to elaborately show how the logistics on site influence the architectural manifestation in the interior spaces. It is therefore inevitable to materialise one established scenario in detail, including a realistic selection of products to be made by equally using available materials to prove how the relationship between the execution and the potential occupation adds a spatial quality to the existing structure. A representative fragment of the design is planned to develop the narrative towards a coherent project dedicated to self-made production under the guidance of professional knowledge for the DIY community.