

P5 REFLECTION

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Amsterdam is an increasingly popular city, with more than ten thousand people moving there every year. And like many cities in the world it has to densify to be able to house all these newly attracted people. The process of densifying already started in Amsterdam with the transformation and upgrading of former industry areas and other abandoned locations. This new densification should not only be new houses for estate agents to sell, but have an active role in the urban fabric and add clear qualities. This asks for new public spaces, functions and hierarchy on these locations. The question would be what is needed for Amsterdam to densify in this (social) sustainable way?

The main goal of this project is to create inclusive connections between different people, program, infrastructure and fragmented blocks in one new center to the site. It consists out of a metro station combined with a library. The building is situated on two clear axes, the metro tracks and a perpendicular pedestrian connection below. The library above this crossing is shaped as a square, creating a fitting balance between both of the axes. This clarity in shape causes it to be on the one hand a humble, but on the other hand recognizable form. In the middle of the volume a circle is carved out of the volume to have clear visual connections from the library with both connections below, bounding the different program parts together.



LARGE SCALE INFRASTRUCTURE ON SITE

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RESEARCH AND DESIGN

My interest in the project started with the assignment sketched by the chair. The development of a vision for Amsterdam in 2050 is fascinating because it pushes the students to speculate further than other graduation chairs might do, but in doing so maintain to be backed by an extensive research. Except for the city in which the research and project take place, there is no designated site, building or program, leading to a natural transition from personal fascinations in the research towards a final result. Combining this with the amount and accuracy of the data and researches available about Amsterdam, the projects have a very relevant contribution to creating a future vision for the city in general.

Especially at the Amsterdam Overamstel location – a part of the city in between the center and its periphery – the research came to clear results about social fragmentation, physical barriers and possible solutions for this. With the already ongoing transformation there, the location in its current state is an example of how the process is not supposed to unfold.

The research done about the “2050-aspect” of the program and society opens up new possibilities concerning design. In terms of library design a clear shift from the traditional library focusing on collection towards a focus on creation and unfoldment of the individual. In this way people gets in touch with new technologies and transfer knowledge about this. The building should also provide for spaces to be inspired and exhibit the created,. In terms of design this expresses itself in a focus on makerspaces and exhibition spaces instead of the traditional reading spaces and archive. For the building type of a metro station there is a shift from mono-functional transfer hub towards a more elaborated complex with spaces for small and easy accessible commerce and space for culture. Besides, there is an increasing focus on public transport, increasing the people flows it should be able to serve.



NEW HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GRADUATION TOPIC, STUDIO TOPIC AND MASTERTRACK

The Complex Projects chair is about researching and architecturally resolving complex issues which emerge from a larger political and socio-economic source. The point is becoming an architect and project developer in one to create a better understanding of the process, its context and the forces around to take notion of, instead of just architectural design itself.

For Amsterdam this issue – or rather challenge – means densifying the city in a sustainable way. With a context of growing inequality between different socio-economical groups and a housing market which is in the spotlight of the media it is necessary to find a fitting balance between the points of view of different parties. This project aims to capture this balance of sustainable development within an urbanistic vision and architectural project.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE METHOD CHOSEN AND THE METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH OF THE GRADUATION STUDIO

The whole of Complex Projects graduation studio is divided in four parts. The first two parts (MSc3) focus on the research done. This starts in the first phase with a focus on gathering, arranging and selecting relevant data on general topics about Amsterdam as a group. The second phase (until P2) is a more personal research done, focusing on location, possible program and a formulation of goals



INDUSTRY AND LOW VALUE COMMERCE AT OVERAMSTEL

the design should meet. This method was important to integrate in my personal design process, especially to understand the broader context of current processes going on in Amsterdam and prognoses of developments until 2050. Because of this, it was possible to design a building which functions on the one side as an efficient junction in the infrastructure, but on the other side creates new attractive public space, creating a new center for a new neighborhood in the urban fabric of Amsterdam.

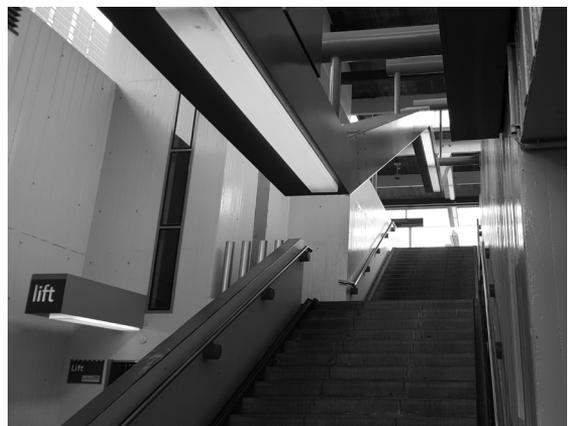
For this type of project the graduation studio research method (hard data) forms a solid foundation, but in order to make the transition to design a personal fascination should be clearly formulated. Doing the project in my hometown of Amsterdam made it easier to get a deeper understanding of the processes behind the facts and knowing the relationships and opinions within society. It is a combination of these two which lead eventually to an integrated public building based upon facts, but less tangible factors as social inclusion as well.

LOCATION AND REASON FOR THE PROJECT

The location of Amsterdam Overamstel is currently an area in transition. Transforming from a mainly industrial area with low value commerce space, towards a new residential area close to the city center. In its current

state, there is a lot of large scale infrastructure there. With two highways, two large roads to the city center, three metro lines and a train track cutting through the location, it gets very fragmented by this. These barriers at the location might – when the built environment is transformed – cause problems of (social) inequality between the different fragments.

The current metro stations do nothing more than facilitate a stair to the metro platforms. The buildings are low, dark, windy and at night sometimes even dangerous. Besides that they do not create a connection under the train and metro tracks unless there is checked in for a metro ride.



SPAKLERWEG STATION INTERIOR

Within the vision the graduation group developed, we naturally try to solve these problems. New connections are made, focuses have shifted and new functions introduced. The new connections are so called activity routes, which stimulate physical activity for pedestrians and bikers. In terms of mobility, the area will be less car friendly but instead the metro connections will become more important. Those become the new entrances and centers to the location. It makes sense to position newly introduced public functions close to one of these stations.

The Spaklerweg metro station is in the most deplorable condition of the three stations on site. Located only 500 meters away from Amstel station, this station is currently under used by its direct surroundings and merely functions as a transfer station. Combined with the overall vision for the site, it makes sense to move the station a bit further away from the Amstel station and instead connect it with one of the introduced activity routes. This means a move of 250 meters away from the city center. Now the station is on a infrastructure knot, which means better transfer possibilities and more meaning for its direct environment, especially considering the fact that there is a large group of new inhabitants moving to the location. In order to really let it function as the heart of the location, a fitting public function had to be found. This resulted in a library added to the program, making it not only an infrastructural hub, but also adding attractive and inclusive public spaces to stay and develop knowledge for everybody.

THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE WIDER SOCIAL, PROFESSIONAL AND SCIENTIFIC FRAMEWORK

Amsterdam and the majority of cities in the world have an increasing population which forces the city to expand. Amsterdam however has reached its municipal borders, meaning that instead expanding they will have to densify drastically. This creates more pressure on the city and its veins, the infrastructure, so a reorganization of the system is needed. The current large scale infrastructure in areas which are to be redeveloped might cause social and physical fragmentation, encouraging an already growing inequality within the city of Amsterdam.

This sentiment of growing inequality is a hot topic in the city. Several political views clash with each other about topics such as gentrification, a widening gap of income classes and a cramped housing market. As an aspiring architect/urbanist it is necessary to understand these topics and be able to adapt to them or consciously totally alienate from it and change the focus of the research and project.

In order to solve these problems it is needed for the Amsterdam municipality to acknowledge these upcoming issues and its effect social demographics of the city. With this mindset and following investments from the municipality but also the real estate sector it will be possible to realize this type of project. This project could function as a case study for the redevelopment and transformation of areas emphasized on large scale infrastructure and how to implement new hierarchies and connections within those locations.

CONCLUSION

Looking at Amsterdam with its current and future densification, clear problems and clashes with current infrastructure and other (physical) barriers will arise. This project offers a clear solution on how to deal with these problems with creating connections in the broadest sense of the word. By doing this a new hierarchy between public space, infrastructure and its surrounding neighborhoods is established. This is an essential part in (re-)developing the urban fabric in every city around the world.

The thoroughly done research in the studio might form an example on how to structure the design process later in practice. Obviously also in practice a lot research is done nowadays, but the designs themselves originate from clients instead of flowing from research. The research often starts after the project is assigned and a deeper understanding of location and its sentiments lacks. Shifting this order around might cause interesting results and makes it possible to use the research methods learned in this chair in practice.