YOUTH EMPOWERMENT CENTER
Designing a community center for the vulnerable youth of Amsterdam North

Research Plan - Revised
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INTRODUCTION

The youth of Amsterdam North is facing serious challenges. Many live in poverty and economic uncertainty. They find themselves in stressful home environments and have limited access to education, sports and recreation (Meester, 2022). Along with a lack of meeting places and social exclusion, these issues create loneliness among many young people in Amsterdam North. External oppressions make the situation of these young people even more difficult. Gentrification threatens their stability and connection to their local community (Hutak, 2021). Furthermore, they often bear the brunt of social exclusion and stigmatization, and they are restrained to hang out in public spaces (Martineau, 2006). If the vulnerable youth of North continues to be driven out of their home environment, and are constrained of having social engagement in public spaces, where will they find a safe space for crucial social interactions?

This research will investigate the contribution to the vulnerable youth of Amsterdam North, trough a youth centre. This not only implies the coping with stress and loneliness, but also in developing empowerment among oppressed youth, to improve group bonding and mental health (Bemak et al., 2005). Especially for at-risk youth with a less capacity for self-improvement and empowerment, assisted development is crucial (Lott & Rogers,2005). How can a youth center contribute to this empowerment of at-risk youth? What is the role of architecture in designing such a youth centre? To answer these questions, this research addresses the complex debate about the architectural role of designing a communal space for young people. To understand the complexities of this topic, the debate will be divided into three categories. (1) The societal dimension connects the centre with larger societal ideas, such as education and the participation in the public realm. (2) The social dimension focuses on the notion of interaction, community building, and social engineering. (3) The spatial dimension examines the physical environment, and spatial strategies when it comes to flexibility, multifunctionality and appropriation. These categories create a clear framework for the analyzing of a wide spectrum of perspective about the architecture of youth centres.

Subsequently, a set of architectural parameters will be introduced to establish a more tangible framework for the assessment of case studies. These parameters belong to one or more categories of the youth centre dimensions, thus linking the debate about design strategies to the specific case studies.

The parameters used for assessing the projects are: (1) Flexibility, (2) multifunctionality, (3) invitingness, (4) appropriateness, (5) concatenation (of spaces), (6) transparency, (7) attractiveness, (8) uniqueness, (9) contemporality, (10) engagement, (11) activation, and (12) sturdiness. With this framework of criteria, a variety of case studies will be assessed, some of which in person. Findings of these studies will be fed back to the debate about the role of architecture, in designing a youth centre for the vulnerable youth of Amsterdam North.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The youth in Amsterdam North face significant struggles. Almost a quarter live in poverty, the level of education is remarkably low, and they have limited economic opportunities. (Meester, 2022). Additionally, the majority of these youth is experiencing loneliness (GGD, 2023). In the developmental stage they are in, alienation could lead to chronic loneliness, social isolation, depression, anxieties and suicidal ideation (Loades et al., 2020). Moreover, together with economic uncertainty, loneliness could encourage group formation and engagement in criminal activities (Krijnen, 2017). In the fight against loneliness among youth in Amsterdam North, a youth center could play a paramount role. Besides the socio-economic struggles, the youth of North also face other external oppressions. Gentrification is forcing families that live in poverty to move elsewhere, putting pressure on the youth and threaten their connection to local community (Hutak, 2021). Another issue is social exclusion and stigmatization. Hang-around youth is associated with violence and aggression. Meanwhile, the residential environments are increasingly expected to be orderly, quiet and clean (Martineau, 2006). To address the issues of social injustice, empowerment of the youth is crucial: "Programs that support empowerment or act in the face of oppression, result in group bonding and improved mental health" (Bemak et al., 2005). Critical youth empowerment programs engage youth in actions that advocate change in organizational, institutional, and social policies and values (Jennings et al., 2006).

How can a youth center contribute to this empowerment of at-risk youth? What is the role of architecture in designing a communal space for youth? How does the design of a youth centre determine the appropriation and use of its spaces? These are all questions that come to mind, when entering the

discussion of the youth centre. For the different design approaches and its development, have truly constructed a complex debate about the role of the architecture in the youth centre. This discussion will be divided in three categories, to provide a clear, systematic framework to help understand the complexities of the topic: 1) The societal, 2) The social, and 3) The spatial.

Firstly, the societal dimension seeks the intersection with larger societal systems. In the late 20th century, the youth centre was mainly seen as pedagogic architecture. During the Social Constructivism, it was utilized as a radical education tool (Müller et al., 2015). On the contrary, Marco di Nallo advocates a more democratic type of architecture, encouraging creativity and informal education of youth (2014). The idea of education still persists in contemporary youth centers, but the educational goals have changed. Another discussion in the societal domain is the positioning between notions of collectivity and individuality, between participation in the broader public realm and the desire to stand out. In The Mille Clubs Programme, this resulted in prototypes that were either autonomous in relation to its context, or entangled within the wider public domain (Avermaete, 2018). Subsequently, a new youth centre in Amsterdam North will have to position itself within the wider society. What could be design strategies for such a centre when it comes to education and participation?

Secondly, the social side of the youth centre mainly focuses on social engineering. In her essay, Jennifer Mack examines the Swedish youth centre as a space of both social control and personal freedom. Mainly being designed for problem youth, Swedish youth centers of the mid 20th century served as a key tool for social reforming. At the same time, young people could meet others around hobbies and leisure without explicitly perceiving its 'citizen nurturing' purpose (2015). In contemporary developments, the contradiction between liberation and control seems the shift to the latter (Müller et al., 2015). Meanwhile, the self-built Youth Clubs of Peter Hübner demonstrate the social engineering through participation and involvement: "the continuing social success of his centers shows that the process of rooting them in the neighbourhood and society has a permanent value." (Jones, 2015). What can we learn from existing youth centers when it comes to social control or personal freedom? How can appropriation and participation contribute to social-engineering?

Lastly, many discussions regarding the youth centre are of spatial concern. In the early 20th century, there were very rigid ideas about the design of a youth centre. An example is the manual for the design of boys' clubs, including a precise format of spaces, materials, and furniture to affect the behavior of youth (Russel, 1908). Other examples show a more flexible perspective. The Sint-Antonius parish house in Utrecht, did not only have flexible designed spaces with folding partitions, but also a multifunctional roof that could be turned into a skating rink in winter (Müller et al., 2015). The Withywood Youth Centre of 1961 further builds upon the concept of flexibility and multifunctionality: "An uninterrupted series of linked spaces is created, within which activities can be pursued in proximity and harmony." Withywood was able to accommodate seventy-two discrete activities (Robertson, 2009). In his youth buildings, Frank van Klingeren pursued an imperfect and unfinished building to create space for the unexpected and spontaneous (Bergen et al., 2003). Equally, Hertzberger understood that the building (of a school) itself "is not the game, but rather a means to make the game possible." Cuyvers on the other hand, deliberately focusses on a play of sight, in stead of action (Driessche, 2003). These three categories define the broad dimensions in which the role of architecture of the youth centre is discussed. This research aims to lay out the different approaches, strategies and theories within these domains, to then take a position for the design of a centre for the vulnerable youth of Amsterdam North.

RESEARCH QUESTION

What is the role of architecture in designing a youth centre for the vulnerable youth of Amsterdam North?

Sub questions

1 What are the problems and oppressions concerning vulnerable youth of Amsterdam North?
2 What is the role of architecture in designing a youth centre, within the societal, social, and spatial dimension?
3 What parameters should be taken into consideration when assessing the design of a youth centre?
4 How can a youth centre contribute to the empowerment of vulnerable youth in Amsterdam North?

Withywood Youth Centre (1961). An uninterrupted space allows different activities to be pursued in proximity. Müller A. & Pietsch S. (2015)

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To understand what design strategies are applicable for a new youth center in Amsterdam North, the problems and needs of these young people will be examined. The municipality of Amsterdam (Meester, 2022) and the GGD (2023) published a factsheet and map about the socio-economic, physical and mental situation of these youth. Hang and Jost (2023) explain the cause and effect of loneliness among youth. Martineau talks about the problems concerning 'hangjongeren' in Amsterdam North, and how they are inflected by wider social (2006). Massih Hutak talks about the circumstances in Amsterdam North when it comes to gentrification and urban identity (2021). To respond to these oppressions, the theory of youth empowerment is introduced. Pearrow defined this as "a process of increasing personal, interpersonal, or political power, to take action and improve their life situations'' (2009). She presents a Teen Empowerment (TE) Program to prove youth have the capacity to make meaningful change in their community. Such an empowerment programme could be included in the design of a new youth centre.

In their book, Pietsch and Müller set up the stage for a versatile debate about the role of the architect in designing a youth centre (2015). They introduce topics as pedagogy, flexibility, appropriation and identification. Subsequently, various essays and articles present their perspective in this debate. Mack examines the Swedish youth centre as a space of both social control and personal freedom, serving as a tool for social reforming, while providing a site for the social live of disadvantaged youth (2015). Jones introduces a different way of social engineering, referring to the

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Club des Jeunes ED/Kit (1972). Daniel Bertrand developed a self-build system, that allowed for a large number of combinations. and the youth could assembly themselves. Müller A. & Pietsch S. (2015)

self-built youth clubs of Peter Hüber. They show the community building by actively involving the users in the design and building process (2015). Di Nallo touches upon this idea of 'democratic architecture', advocating for a unfinished building: "Not the architecture, but the programme and the life of the youth will determine its atmosphere." (2014). Frank van Klingeren sees this idea of 'imperfect architecture' as a means for the 'ontklontering' of Dutch society, creating spaces for the spontaneous and unexpected (Bergen et al., 2003). Equally, Robertson recognizes the flexible use of the Withywood Youth centre, by creating an uninterrupted space (2009). Furthermore, Avermaete introduces the notions of collectivity and individuality, stating that the youth centre could either participate in the public realm, or actively stand out (2018). Reid explains how participation in a contemporary trend, can make the youth "feel contemporaneity and learn to live as people of the future" (2002).

To link these theories and positions to concrete design approaches, various articles will be used to create a set of design criteria. This framework of parameters will than be used to assess the architecture of existing youth centres. In the early 20th century, Russel already pointed out the importance of a <u>transparent</u> and inviting building for a boys' club: "The passer-by should always be able to see at a glance what is happening inside." (1908). Robertson elaborates on the topic of <u>invitingness</u> by means of a bustling and cheerful character: "The entrance should look like a busy hotel: bright, accessible, attractive and at all times visible from the road." (2009) Furthermore she accentuate the importance of a <u>multifunctional</u>, uninterrupted series of <u>linked spaces</u>, to "capture young people's interest whilst simultaneously enabling discrete supervision." The self-built youth centers of Peter Hübner demonstrate the value of <u>engagement</u> and involvement in the design and building process (Jones, 2015). Both Di Nallo (2014) and Bergen (2003) elaborate on the topic of <u>appropriation</u> and <u>flexibility</u>, by creating an unfinished building that provides the unexpected and spontaneous. Hoebink emphasis the activities and programme of the centre, advocating for the <u>activation</u> of space around the building to facilitate play and sports (1966). Reid (2002) and Robertson (2009) address a <u>contemporary</u> architectural style, "to create a honest and functional environment, where the youth feels respected." Pietsch and Müller notice an increase in iconic architecture of contemporary youth centres, through expressive forms, materials, or colours. This idea of <u>attractiveness</u> and <u>uniqueness</u> is also seen as key points by 'Joined Up Design' (The Sorrell Foundation, 2010). Lastly, Pietsch and Müller emphasize practical aspects as maintenance, <u>sturdiness</u> and protection from vandalism.
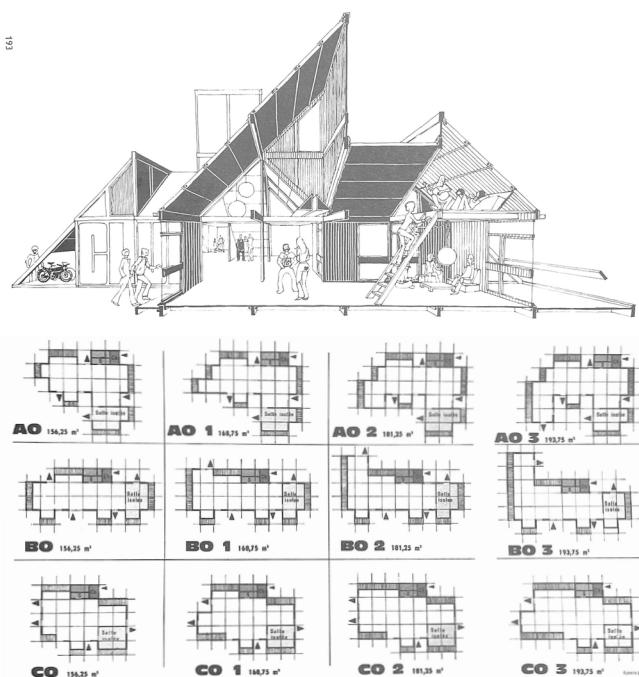
METHODS

A variety of research methods will be used to answer the research questions. Each research method will work hand in hand to gain a strong body of knowledge about the youth of Amsterdam North, and the role of architecture in designing a youth centre

Literature study

Firstly, existing studies and theories provide the framework of knowledge for the specific problems and challenges (e.g. loneliness, gentrification, and stigmatization) among the youth of Amsterdam North, and how they relate to the youth of Amsterdam North. Next, the concept of youth empowerment will be proposed as a possible solution of these problems.

Secondly, a variety of essays and articles will be used, to examine the role of architecture in designing a youth centre. As shown in the theoretical framework, these theories and perspectives will be divided into three comprehensive categories (societal, social, and spatial). As such, a systematic framework will be constructed, to structure the complex debate about the architecture of a youth centre. By organizing the existing theories and perspectives, this research eventually aims to position itself in this ongoing debate, to understand the societal, social and spatial demands of a centre for the vulnerable youth of Amsterdam North. To fully comprehend the design approach for such a youth center, existing projects will be analyzed. Various articles and essays will help establish a framework of parameters to assess existing youth centres. These obtained parameters will then function as a assessment framework for the individual case studies.

Case studies

Several case studies will be done to understand the design approaches for a youth centre. The set of parameters will be used to assess different aspects of the design. The aim of the case studies is to understand the different ways in which a design can approach these parameters. The findings of the case studies will be linked back to the role of architecture in the societal, social and spatial realm of the youth centre. Ideally this could then be associated with the needs of a youth centre for the vulnerable youth of Amsterdam North.

The case studies are: (1) Sticky Fingers, by Rue Royale Architectes; (2) ECAM Youth Centre - AgwA; (3) Rivas Vaciamadrid - Mi5 Arquitectos; (4) La C@va - Aquidos; (5) the Youth Recreation & Culture Centre - CEBRA+ Dorte Mandrup; (6) Haus der Jugend Kirchdorf - Kersten & Kopp; (7) Rabot youth centre - Beel & Achtergael; and (8) Sjakket Youth Centre - PLOT. Furthermore site visits will be done to The Valk Talent Factory, 'T Kofschip, De Hood, Willemeen and Dynamo.

Qualitative research

Besides the case studies, multiple site visits will be executed to examine the actual use and appropriation of these youth centres. By inspecting the building from close up and interviewing its users, a deeper understanding of the project aims to be achieved. This should reveal the potential difference between the design approach of the architect and the use and appropriation of the youth. Once a clear understanding of the different design approaches within the framework of parameters is achieved, an interview or workshop with the youth of Amsterdam North will be done, to understand their needs for a new youth centre.
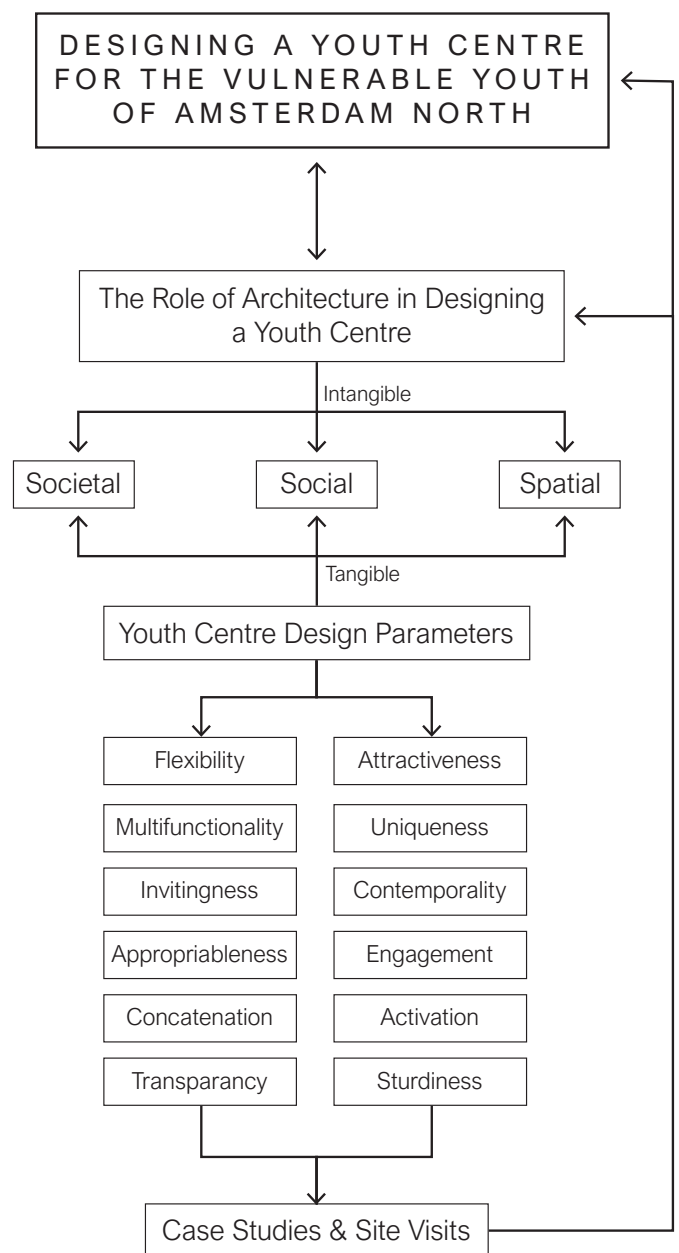
Methodology scheme with research and design parameters. The top of the scheme shows the theoretical side of the research. The bottom shows the framework for analyzing the practice of designing a youth centre.

RELEVANCE

There is an adequate amount of knowledge about the architecture of the youth centre. The found literature reveals a complex debate about the role of the architect in designing a youth centre. What is missing is a clear structure to grasp the different perspectives and a tool to assess the architecture of the youth centre. This research aims to create a framework for understanding the complexities that the design of a youth centre brings with it. Subsequently it will construct a framework of parameters to assess the architecture of existing youth centres. These parameters will help to conduct different case studies.

By comparing various case studies through these parameters, a thorough comprehension of the different design approaches to a youth centre will be obtained. Finally, the relevance of these frameworks and comparison will be proved, by utilizing them in the understanding of the needs of a specific target group, in this case the vulnerable youth of Amsterdam North. The goal of this research is to construct a potential design approach for the centre of this specific target group. In this development, the knowledge gained will contribute to solving the problems of this youth, and assist in the empowerment they need, by means of this new youth centre.

Youth center De Hood / Atelier Kempe Thill. Source: Ulrich Schwarz, Archdaily
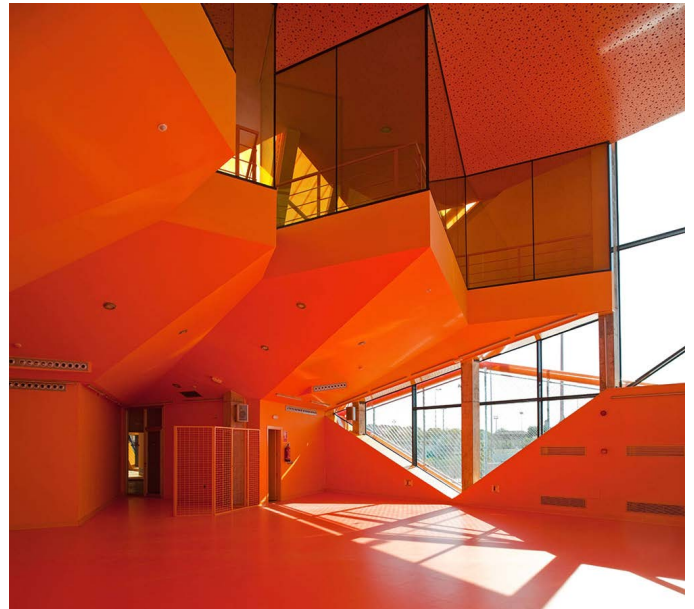
Rivas Vaciamadrid Youth Center / Mi5 Arquitectos. Source: Miguel de Guzmán, Archdaily

Youth Recreation & Culture Center / CEBRA + Dorte Mandrup. Source: Archdaily

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