P4 reflection paper

Master of Science Architecture, Urbanism & Building Sciences

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Studio information
Chair: Architecture: Complex Projects
Theme: AMS-Mid City, Amsterdam 2050
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Title: Event Platform: Reinventing a New Relationship Between City and Water

Introduction:

The graduation lab is an exploration of urban scenarios and new architectural typologies in the Amsterdam City for the years 2050 and beyond. The interventions are divided in 5 distinct areas of 2x2 km site, along the city ring road border which is set to be the prospective growth within the next 30 years. My group's project is located in the Westport area on the intersection between the A10 highway and the river IJ. Our goal is to analyze and predict the future developments in the area, the effects of technology and effects on mobility, density, spatial and social organizations as well as architectural typologies that will take place in the whole area in order to propose an individual project that will analyze, challenge or contribute to these issues.

During our first visit to the site, I was immediately drawn to the existing landscape of the waterfront. I observed that it takes over such a large part of the site and yet it currently serves only a very monochrome purpose. This initial observation led me to conduct an in-depth research on the waterfront in Amsterdam as well as others in the world. With this theme, I was determined to come up with an innovative and most efficient design that would revolutionize Amsterdam's experience of the connection with the waterfronts.

Project description:

The main issue examined in my project is the efficiency of waterfronts. The current trend of waterfront developments in Amsterdam and globally leave waterfront areas designed as a 'thin zone', packed between a body of water and buildings. This occurs with many types of buildings and functions on various scales, for example when the edge of the water is 'greenwashed' with a green zone or a promenade, followed by a road or buildings and called as a revitalized or redeveloped waterfront. My project aims to explore the possibilities of creating a waterfront that serves as a better integration of city and its functions with the quality and functions of the body of water. This means that instead of a linear waterfront currently trending for decades, I am exploring creating a network of zones that deepen the water edge that borders the city from water. To achieve this I conduct an exploration of the relationships and interaction between various important aspects such as land, water, architecture and people in a highly dense urban environment.

Research methods

In my research I aimed to understand the functionality of the waterfront in the city of Amsterdam and how it can take an essential role in satisfying the city's vision for the future. I conducted the research with the following methods: field study, mapping of the site, interviews with the city's officials and lastly analysis of other waterfronts in the world.

Field study

The multiple visits to the site of our project were crucial to the development of this research. They initially sparked my idea and motivation to explore the waterfront as I noticed that it takes a large portion of the surrounding and yet its purpose is limited in its functionality - it simply links in a linear way water with the land. With later visits, I was able to continue my analysis. My main observations were: the site is heavily industrial - the presence of multiple factories around is visible. This site is also very disconnected from the rest of the city and thus it feels deserted as there are not many people walking around. The public function seems limited due to lack of healthy mixing of different zoning such as housing, cultural, recreational and working.

Mapping

As a group, we mapped out the infrastructure to further understand the location. My initial feelings from the field visits were confirmed - the connection of the site with the rest of the city is provided for the industrial part but public functions are minimal. In addition, the waterfront is a very thin line that serves only as a linear link between the water and the road.

Stakeholders vision for the future

A very important part of the research was to understand what are the expectations and visions for the city in 2050. Through the interviews and research done by the city of Amsterdam's officials, it turned out that the city is expected to continue growing. Thus the issue at stake is overpopulation and how to best approach it. Our group decided to focus on figuring out how to maximize the quality of life while maintaining and further growing the efficiency of the site's structure.

Other waterfronts in the world

My research included also other waterfronts in the world. I thought about the major ones that I had explored myself in the past: London, Oslo, Frankfurt, New York City. A big difference with Amsterdam was that all of these and other cities had a stronger relationship with their rivers through public parks, promenades, and different architecture projects. It set an example of what Amsterdam seemed to be lacking in terms of the present quality of the river. However, it also allowed to set a precedent on how the revitalized projects use the industrial waterfront's structure in order to bring new functions to the city, which I discuss more in the my design decisions.

Relationship between research and design

Through my research I came up with a simple way to understand the historical development of waterfronts. The very original purpose of the waterfront was to utilize the water for transportation and as a source of basic necessities, food and water. I call it historic waterfront or Waterfront 1.0.

With industrial revolution came separation of the city and industry, therefore the industrial functions overtook the waterfront in strides for growth. Heavily dominated industrial waterfronts overtook the cities shores - the second waterfront era or Waterfront 2.0 With time, people started appreciating the presence of water, near their every day functions and with growth of sustainability and quality of life, we now use it not just for practical matter but also to esthetically and emotionally improve our lives - that is Waterfront 3.0. In this waterfront era we revitalize existing industrial areas and bring new quality and function to the city and water edge. However, through my research of analyzing all the mentioned waterfront types and transitions I have come to realize that the Waterfront 3.0 typology is currently built on the structure of the previous industrial waterfronts, which served completely different purpose. Hence, my project attempts to break down the existing old waterfront structure, break down the thin edge and provide a new, Waterfront 4.0, structure that has a new function and a new relationship with the city and water.

With the research of other waterfronts and concert halls typology, I realized that this type of building is a very good choice to bring the main vision to life.Through research on concert hall typology I concluded that as public and social architecture they are paradoxically bordered and secluded from the access and use of people. As many great architectural projects built on the edge of the land next to the water and not on the waterfront overall. Hence, to further relate to the reinvention of thin-edge waterfronts, I re-designed the concert hall and opened it up to the public by transforming the existing shell of the concert halls into a zone for public activity, city functions and place for integrated performing spaces and waterfront and public life.

Project on a wider social context

The project is tackling multiple issues at the same time. It challenges the existing notions and trends by deconstructing the design of waterfronts and concert halls to the core idea and principle and built it back up in different ways. The waterfronts are zones between the city and water combining two important elements, yet we design them as a straight line that you can pass by with your car or bicycle. Concert halls are huge venues that can combine large amount of people for various activities, uses and social gatherings, yet they are many times bordered in a shell sitting next to the water and controlled with access and use. My project tends to deal with these issues in a different way challenging the way we see and experience things now and most likely within 30 years. It tries to articulate and create the waterfront with its own identity and typology and concert hall that can be opened to the public and becomes integrated to the city via different spaces with multiple uses that relate to the water, to the city and to the performance spaces themselves. Hence the project tackles the issues of efficiency in the future densified Amsterdam and the efficiency and use of public spaces and buildings.