

Reflection

on architectonic and social relevance

Waldorf School within the cultures of craft

This graduation studio Cultures of Craft focuses on cultures of building crafts in architecture and the city. The crafts are approached in their widest sense as a process somewhere in between thinking and making. The process of making specific building elements or materials and the culture behind this craft are closely studied. The emphasis lies on the intricate cultural meaning behind tactile topics in the built environment. Every specific culture of craft is based on a long local history with strong traditions, but also on new future-proof developments within the craft.

By studying a certain craft in detail every student shaped his or her vision on the future of that craft in specific and building crafts in general. During this graduation year I studied the relatively traditional craft of making stained glass. While filming this craft and comparing different building crafts I noticed the great amount of real handwork involved in making stained glass. The importance of handwork and the creative freedom of the craftsmen that I analyzed in the craft of stained glass were the personal core values of craft. Although these values are currently lacking in appreciation within regular education, I learned to appreciate these values and their importance in the education of children and adolescents. By teaching children to appreciate intellectual wisdom and creative crafting as equal values in society, so thinking as well as making, the children will be broadened in their individual development.

The idea that learning comes through making things by hand, thus crafting, is closely connected to the anthroposophical education of the Waldorf School. Craft related courses are strongly integrated into the Waldorf curricula to stimulate the creativity of children and to broaden the development of the individual. By designing a new secondary Waldorf School I aim for a broader appreciation of craft in the city and society, starting with the children.



Within the personal graduation project there are two main approaches towards craft. The project is not solely based on the material and tactile side of crafts, but even more so on a craft-based approach in education. While both sides of craft are approached by very differing starting points, these two themes can really enhance each other according to me.

The anthroposophical view on education and on life in general can be expressed and enhanced in the building by using specific building crafts. In a way the building and the way how it is made will become a didactic device to show how traditional building crafts can be used in contemporary architecture and to raise awareness for sustainable issues. Additionally the craft of stained glass, which started as a catalyst to think about the Waldorf education, enhances the architecture of the school by adding dynamic colour and light. So in the end the material side and the craft-based approach in education come together in the building and its program.

Relation between research and design

In this graduation studio the relation between research and design is rather specific. Especially in the first semester, while researching building crafts and formulating the design assignment, I noticed that the research was based on seemingly coincidental findings that gave the graduation project a specific direction.

In the studio, we started with a film research in which every student intensively studied a specific building craft and its craftsmen for a week. Out of this film research the personal core values of craft resulted. The values found in the craft of stained glass were used as a motivation to develop several scenarios and the design project itself. In advance I could never have thought that the argumentation for the entire graduation project would be built on specific findings in the film research. The film research, which was focused on a rather specific and small topic, was a catalyst to think in a certain way about the whole topic of craft and to

formulate the direction of the design project.

In a way this seemingly coincidental way of research does not seem to be very scientific. If I would have filmed another culture of craft or another craftsman within the culture of stained glass, I probably would have headed for another direction during the research project. This shows that the starting point, which is in a way the hypothesis of the project, influences the outcomes of the research itself. While in other research which is solely based on scientific values, the outcome should be the same regardless of the hypothesis, in design research the outcome seems to be influenced by what the designer finds on his or her path. And the path itself again is influenced by the focus and interests of the designer himself.

During the rest of my education at the Faculty of Architecture at the TU Delft, I was never this conscious of the fact that the outcome of design research is influenced by coincidental factors we find on our design path. This is something which makes research in design distinct from purely scientific research and which makes the working method of designers very different. Currently I have the strong conviction that everything in life is based on and influenced by what one finds underway. And it is part of the role of the designer and architect, to decide what he or she will do with these findings.

Personal approach within Architecture of Interior

Since the beginning of this graduation studio I noticed the particular approach of the chair Architecture of the Interior. The phenomenological approach of this chair in which the tactile experience of spaces is very outspoken, corresponds with my ideas about architecture. The tactile experiences and materiality are according to me essential elements of architecture, because they influence what the user sees and how the user perceives the building.

Therefore I agree with the emphasis of the chair on real material models over computer models to study the impact of design decisions. This

rather specific design method can be used very well as a tool to study the relation between spaces, materials and connections. Additionally, working with real materials makes you come closer to the tactile experience as a designer. By modelling by hand, one learns so much more than one can ever be able to understand in the computer. It is therefore by no means a coincidence that crafting things as an educative method is a central focus point of the program of my graduation project.

Within the methodical line of the studio, which is in itself another culture of craft, producing material models as a design method was relatively new to me. During the former education at the Faculty of Architecture, models were mostly made to show final designs. The model as an object of study in itself gave new opportunities to design with.

On the other hand there appears to be a certain consensus in this chair that every model, drawing and product should be made as if it is a final model; every product appears to need a certain degree of perfection that I think is not necessary or even desired, at least not always. The method I prefer to choose, is to work in a sketchy way in which the product is not made to tell precise and fixed answers, but to give myself the freedom to find unpredicted solutions. During the design process it is more about the story behind a product than the product itself. In this way I feel a difference between the methodology of the chair and my own working methods.

Additionally, I have the feeling that the chair has a very specific preference on what is esthetical and what is not. Esthetics appear to come from simplicity, serenity, strong but simple gestures and the use of specific materials. I live with the conviction that if we all think like that, in the end we only make architecture for ourselves and for fellow architects. According to me we have to think more about what users want, because in the end architectural studies should result in pleasant spaces that are perceived by their users as such. I plea for architecture for users, instead of architecture for architects only.



The project in its social context

In this graduation project one of the main research questions is how the Waldorf School can engage with and contribute to the city of Delft, both socially and spatially. The relationship between the individual and the collective, building and city, human and fellow-man, is a core theme for the design on an urban and architectural level. Like the way a person is always integrated within the larger society, the building is also situated within a larger context.

By placing the secondary Waldorf School in the city center, the school can give added value to the city. Therefore this specific project can also be valuable for other architects and urbanists. Secondary schools are mostly placed at the side of cities, where they work as autonomous building ensembles. Placing them in the city center could create new functional relations and opportunities.

By placing secondary schools in city centers, the scholars are closer to existing companies which enables the school and the city to create mutual collaborations. Companies could for example enable the scholars to do small internships or open days to show what they do and companies could at their turn learn from what happens in the schools. Additionally citizens can benefit from the available resources such as the craft ateliers, which gives them the possibility to practice crafts that would otherwise be out of their range. Next to that it could literally mean that the scholars are placed in society earlier in their lives, which enables them to learn more about their individual role within the collective.

The research question focusses on the social and spatial aspects of a secondary school within the city center. As architecture is a very spatial oriented study, the outcomes of the graduation project are mainly on a spatial level. According to me the answers on a social level stay limited to the possibilities that the designed spaces create. As a designer I can intend to design an urban plan and a building that act as catalysts for all kinds of social possibilities that I would want to happen there. But the fact

stays that we can never proof whether the building and the public spaces surrounding it will really work like that; in this case whether the building will really engage with and contribute to the city. In order to proof the social 'skills' of the building, the building has to be build, which requires a real life test.

The central thing we can do as architects is to design the public and private spaces as inviting as possible, in order for citizens to make use of the schools crafts ateliers for example. We can make use of our designerly skills to give shape to future possibilities. So the real answer of every design project will always be given on a spatial level with social aims acting as foundation.

My position as a social architect

For every design project I try to find the core values of what the architecture should do or should provoke. My position as a social architect is that we should respond with our designed spaces to specific social topics within the design project and search for social issues that are going on in the wider field of the project.

In this case it was very important to look at my time as a Waldorf scholar and to use central elements that I found valuable back then in the education. Out of these memories the importance of the great hall was distillated for example, which was a central design topic during the graduation project. Next to personal memories, stories of teachers and parents were used to notice for instance the dilemma and search for a new identity within the anthroposophical community. The memories and conversations resulted in the core values for the design, in which rhythm, movement, nature and reinterpretation were the central focus points. Social and anthroposophical values were thus translated into architectural themes.

Next to core values that change from design to design, an architect starts to create his own style and preferences. This results in overarching

themes that come back in multiple projects. In my case, I always try to merge the buildings in with the surroundings; whether the surroundings are natural, or in this case, more urban. Additionally I really appreciate the relation between the building and the nature; the hard solid object within the soft and changing nature. I think buildings should try to be soft, welcoming and inviting to the outside world.

Finally I can say after multiple design projects at the Faculty of Architecture that the use of natural materials and the research into coloured and transparent materials are recurrent elements. These elements will come back from time to time. They are based on instinctive motivations that have less to do with project specific topics and more with personal fascination. In the end I believe every architectural project results out of a combination of project specific findings and more general and personal architectural ideas one creates over time.

*20th of June 2016, Delft
Hannah Wessels, 4135261*