

P4 Reflection

Detox Life Sharing Community

Social Housing for Future NEETs

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Project Description

In the future society, although technology development and the rising consciousness of personal health may lead to a pleasant and comfortable life for many, some minorities who don't have money or resources will be left behind. One of them are NEETs.

NEETs stands for those who are not in Employment, Education or Training, and have already caused social problem in contemporary society. The number of NEETs in Europe, America and Asia is increasing every year, posing threat to economy and public health. In 2100, it is believed that the number of NEETs even will soar to an unimaginable level. This is mainly due to three factors. The problem of addiction brought about by advanced future technologies will make human beings more isolated. The dramatic changes in the job market will eliminate those who are less competitive and lack adaptability. The gap between the rich and the poor will result in serious health gap. These factors all lead to NEETs, and make them probably the most vulnerable marginal group in the future society. We can even say that in 2100, we are all likely to become NEETs.

Studies done by UK and Japanese government show that there are two main problems of the NEETs. The first one is their poor living environment. They usually put themselves in enclosed, narrow and messy living conditions that are extremely damaging to mental and physical health. The second is that they have no ways to improve their skills and establish confidence. They need places for human interaction, to learn and work together: not only to gain knowledge, but also to enhance their interpersonal skills and regain their self-esteem, so that they can return to society.

I therefore propose to build a future detox community for NEETs. It is a new type of social housing that no longer targets to provide basic standard living condition for people. Instead, it will be a government monitored housing that focuses on helping people regain values and confidence.

The focus will be on treatment. According to the programs in several detox and rehabilitation organizations such as Retreat and Camp Grounded, there are three main principles in this type of community:

1. Collective working & learning as a therapy;
2. Green as a cure
3. 2 stages of detox related to technology use

Furthermore, this community will be a place for connectivity. The connectivity will be displayed on four levels.

1. Urban level: connecting the social housing area(where the project is located) and the adjacent sports area;
2. Community level: connecting the NEETs community with local community;
3. Building level: connecting two stages of NEETs;
4. Unit level: connecting every residents with each other.

Relationship between research and design

My design is directly derived from my research. As I mentioned in the previous section, three main principles guide my design. First of all, residents will be cured by involving in various collective activities such as co-living, co-working, co-learning, sharing chores, etc. An environment with lush green and urban farming will be provided for both relaxation and labor. There will also be a clinic that serves both the community and the local people. There will be two phases of dwellings that are separated but also connected at certain points (by the garden platform and by the central circulation core). All the units are temporary, varying from 2 month to 2 years, depending on personal situation.

I also mentioned that this community will be a place of connectivity. On urban level, my project stands between the social housing area and the sports area. The semi outdoor spaces of the community will be sports field and playground for public, functioning as a transitional spot between two areas. On community level, the connectivity will be achieved through a continuation of the community green belt into the ground floor: allowing local people to use all the functions, and mingle with NEETs. On building level, two stages of NEETs are connected through a huge platform functioning both as garden and as urban farming field. On unit level, each residential units share communal spaces with others, such as toilet, kitchen, living room, study room, etc. People are encouraged to come out of their own space and interact with others.

My design also benefits from our 2100 group vision. Amstel area will become a dense area where low-income people struggle to find affordable, good quality dwellings. Furthermore, as technology evolves, various diseases have been eliminated and human life expectancy increases. As Emerson once said, "The first wealth is health".

Regarding "partial densification" in the social housing sector, densification will be realized in economical ways such as promoting mixed-use building. This determines that this social housing I am designing must achieve economic efficiency and multi-functionality. For example, the community have various public programs on the ground floor such as open theater, a clinic, a shop and a cafe. Speaking of health, I design the program and organization of my building according to treatment methods. For instance, in the phase 1 residential parts, residents are required to stay in a calm and relaxing environment. Therefore the units are in the layout of a "village", with constant exposure to greenery and meditation and yoga spaces.

Relationship between graduation project, studio theme and MSc. Architecture program

For graduate students who are about to enter the working environment, the Complex project studio can provide them with the ability to gain comprehensive understanding about building projects. Students approach design issues from a more macro perspective,

examining urban development and even social evolution. Their research capabilities will be improved considerably.

One of my personal fascinations is the future urban development. This year the design assignment of Complex Project is Amsterdam in 2100, offering me a chance to build up radical future scenarios through the consideration of social, economic, cultural and spatial factors. At the same time, I will be able to exercise my ability to synchronize design from different scales, say, from urban strategies to architecture to building details.

The used research method in relation to the graduation studio methodical line of inquiry

The main research methodology I choose for my thesis is Historical Research. Specifically, I look into how to build up a historical narrative, along with the study of chronology and mapping. Historical narratives are always associated with two important concepts: time and space. Historians construct stories through chronology (time), and set physical backdrops (space) to describe events. Our research assignment strongly relates to "space" and "time", as we are inspecting how Amsterdam will change spatially in a time frame of 80 years. This correspondence to some extent also leads to my decision of choosing chronology and mapping as supplemented research technique.

The process of historical research is also in line with that of Complex Project. Our studio exercise can be summarized by three stages: data collection, analysis of trends, and formation of a personal perspective. Students are required to look back in history, collect data, identify development patterns and build their own story lines accordingly. This is strongly in accordance with structuring a historical narrative. According to American historian Hayden White, historical narrative is a practice which is critical about the explanation of the structures and process of its study object. Historical research first accumulates data and evidence from the past, then arranges them in "an interpretative framework". By drawing on historical experience, one recognizes the law of development of specific affairs, thus forming a unique interpretation.

The relationship between the graduation project and the wider social context

According to UN forecasts, more than half of the world's population will live in urban areas in 50 years, and places like Amsterdam are no exception. The city center of Amsterdam is already too crowded. In order to take on more residents, it is necessary to find new development areas at urban fringe, and Amstel is one of them. The Amsterdam 2040 vision also views Amstel as a rising working-living area. At present, several new projects have taken place, and it is likely that in 80 years Amstel will become a popular sub-city center for local residents who crave for a work-life balance.

By 2100, technological innovation will dramatically change people's lives. Extreme poverty will be eliminated and people's basic needs will be met. Social productivity and physical and mental health will become society's new pursuit. As population rises, more minority

groups like NEETs will definitely appear in future Amstel. It is predicted that future NEETs may account for 30% of the total social population. And how to reintegrate them back to society will be the main issue.

The relevance of the Detox Community to the broader social context is reflected in its ability to become a new, widely replicated model of social housing. Such a community has the potential and is also necessary to be established in every resident community. It is not only a place of treatment, but more importantly a community center that can be enjoyed by a wide range of people. By sharing a variety of public projects such as workshops, theatres, treatment centers, technology zones, etc., this community will be able to serve to a larger urban environment. Furthermore, this community promotes the lifestyle of self-sustaining. By implementing local traditions like gardening and urban farming, NEETs in the community recover through collective working, which makes this community as a showcase of alternative lifestyle. Other than a life is under full control by robots and machines, people in the future also can go back to nature and achieve self-sufficiency. This makes the Detox Community a model for future humanized habitation.

Issues and dilemmas

As a future-oriented studio, the biggest problem I encountered during the design process was how to balance reality and the future. In terms of conceptual design, on the one hand, our thoughts is still dominated by current design logic. On the other hand, we must take into account possible future development trends. In terms of building technology, how to predict material and technology innovations, how to satisfy the future needs, what will be brought by the climate changes... All these presents practical problems.

Another issue is the control of design flow. With a large building constituting of several different parts, I experienced some difficulties grasping the core of the design, which is achieving connectivity on different levels. Furthermore, time management is also very important, and at the beginning of the semester I may spend too much on massing and conceptual design. In the future I will further train myself to make quick and sharp design decisions.