

architect-developer

P4 reflection

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Explore Lab 22

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The circumstances of my desired field of research and design, the role of the architect-developer in the building industry, brought me to the master graduation studio Explore Lab 22 as it was the only studio at the TU Delft which would allow me to combine the roles of real estate development and architecture in one project / studio. Even though it is in my opinion an important field of study, as these two professions are embedded in one other, such a collaboration on the academic level is yet barely present.

My desire to research deeper on the role of the architect as a developer is connected to the poor situation on the real estate market in the country of my origin, the Czech Republic, and to my feeling of the need of different roles architects start taking and will need to start to take in the future. This approach of mine towards architecture has developed through my personal experience from working for architects as employee, working for my own clients and city representatives in the Czech Republic which I can compare with the approach towards architects and architecture with experiences I gained while working in Switzerland and studying in the Netherlands among others.

The aim of my research is to find out how the architect-developer is a meaningful figure to contribute to the building process and to see whether and how the architect-developer can help to improve the built environment in the Czech Republic.

The further ambition of the graduation project is to deliver not only a theoretical work but be as real as possible during the design and project development process and try to include the aspects of the regular building development in my work.

With the knowledge and awareness of the complete practical building development process due to the academic nature of my project the building development process will conclude with the design of the building.

Research - Theory

Since not much has been researched on the topic of the architect-developer my research was based on my personal observations which I have been supporting by available literature, case studies of built projects created by regular real estate developers as well as architects acting as developers. Atop interviews of real estate developers who collaborate with architects in an equal relationship during all building process phases were conducted.

The goal of the research itself has been to find out how the architect-developer is a meaningful figure to contribute to the building process and how the architect-developer can help to improve the built environment in the Czech Republic.

The initial research about the two different actors, architect and real estate developer, in the building process allowed for a clarification of their roles and goals in the building process as well as the desired outcome of such process. Defining issues such as the level of involvement of architects in the building process, responsibilities dependent on the relationship between the two actors in the building process, approach to the quality and profit of projects or space for individual and creative approach to project creation was very well supported by the conducted interviews. The practical examples and experiences of the interviewed developers created a necessary link to the praxis and allowed for a step outside theoretical environment. Which is for me and my research of a high value.

What has shown to be the biggest source of information were any kind of interviews. Recorded interviews, printed interviews or interviews conducted by me live helped to form the content and topics which needed to be researched to discover the poor quality of real estate development in the Czech Republic as they unveiled practical constrains of the profession. Without the interviews topics, such as the quality of building codes and building standards, the influence of a bank on a project or the role and importance of dweller's demands on a quality of a project would probably be impossible to discuss and evaluate their impact on the image and quality of the built environment.

Regular real estate development case studies served well to illustrate the impacts of the obsolete legislation and building regulations, inflexibility of banks and the built buildings and developer's decisions. The case studies of projects created by architects acting as developers, though being smaller scale developments than those done by real estate developers, illustrated the possibilities and different approaches towards the dwellers individuality, the space adaptability, the use of adjacent spaces,

approach to the existing context of the built environment and substituting the missing and obsolete building regulations or the use of materials.

The different scales of case studies showed the possibility of different approach. The smaller project the more space for appropriation and individuality. At the same time, it also proves that architects acting as developers is quite a young profession and architects are still learning and mainly learning by doing (also because the education in architecture and in real estate development are poorly connected) how to manage such projects. What will be interesting to see in the future is what will happen when the projects created by architects-developers will increase in scale.

Research - Design

As part of the design process the steps, which are taken in the building process by any real estate developer or a builder, were also taken but carried out by me acting as an architect-developer who has been educated by the findings in the previous research on the real estate developers and architects-developers.

Emphasis has been put on the site selection, feasibility study and project definition as those are steps which influence the final outcome of the building in the early phases of the building process. After these steps are made the building has very often its clear form and program decided. A process which I wanted to question and illustrate different approaches to this process by architects acting as developers and regular real estate developers.

As the location of my project is Czech Republic a site which allowed for interaction between different stakeholders, functions and existing building and a new form. For these reasons a former electrical substation in the inner city of Prague was selected. The site is located in the inner part of the city, therefore it could be a lucrative location for any development. Though due to the need to tackle the presence of the existing building as well as the presence of an experimental theater within the existing building, the site could be ruled out of any consideration by a regular real estate developer. A mix of functions, dealing with existing structures and extending the building process, as discovered in the research, is for real estate developers in the Czech Republic considered nowadays still as a project complication.

In my approach, I have tried to proceed as I would proceed in reality. From selecting the site, to feasibility study, legislation requirements and allowances, volumetric studies and program definition to materiality and its costs and durability. Every

decision made have been confronted with real information such as defining the strategy under which conditions is the project feasible, the conditions of the existing structure, the way of reinforcing the existing structure to allow for the addition on top of the building, the building code regulations or the definition of dwelling's target group and its influence on the typology and materiality.

The need to make decisions which are as real as possible with the relationship to aesthetical qualities and financial feasibility shows the complexity even in a rather smaller development such as mine. It is more and more clear that the involvement of other professionals than an architect is required and necessary. At this moment, it can be observed, that in such processes the architect becomes the idea provider and project manager and in the collaboration with other experts in the building industry (building technology, statics, building management, budgeting, climate control, marketing) the ideas and the whole project is further on formed and developed.

Social context

We can see architects in these days becoming not only architects in the traditional sense but also becoming involved in fields outside of architecture while collaborating and communicating with cities and inhabitants not only through drawings but also by actions to provide better living environments. The full and under paid job market in architecture forces architects to be creative not only in terms of designs but in terms of jobs. We can observe a desire of young architects for independence and self-managed offices in order to have some jobs. The role of architect-developer is a job not very much explored and common yet. It is obvious that it is not a job for anybody, but it is a niche on the architecture market and a possibility not only for young architects how to contribute to the built environment. Through the architect acting humbly and responsibly as an idea creator, manager and developer, the whole real estate development can become a truly interdisciplinary process where the knowledge of the involved experts is put together. And I believe the final outcome of a building created through this process will be beneficial to the cities, environment and the users of these buildings.