

Reflection on Graduation project P4/P5

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Studio: AR3AI045 Interiors Buildings Cities MSc 3 Graduation Studio

Thesis Project: Re-uniting the city and the university

Site: Gasthuisplaats, Delft

Reflections:

The graduation studio 'Spaces of Collection' seeks to explore the relationship an institution has with the city that accommodates it; how it both addresses and makes the city. The institution in this case is the Delft University of Technology, which will make its appearance through a building to be situated in Delft's historical center. The agent of this return will be a complex of 'spaces of collection' for the accommodation and display of artefacts in various university collections.

As we all know, due to some historical reasons, the buildings and campus of the Delft University of Technology moved out of the city center which has weakened the link between the city and the university not only on spatial level but also on social and cultural levels. This isolation undoubtedly generates negative effects on the development of both entities.

It is in this context that my graduation research mainly focuses on how to rebuild the active connection between the university and the city of Delft by creating an urban institution, which could not only instill new energy to the old city center, but also offer an opportunity for the university embedding itself in the city again. Through many case studies, such as the CREA cultural center in the Amsterdam, International Centre for Life in the UK and so, I find that instilling social function into a university building is an effective way to promote integration between the city and university. In the case of the CREA, it becomes an invaluable addition to the neighborhood. It is an excellent example showing how to transfer a university building into an urban institution by opening its door to the publics. In this case, the CREA is a cultural organization of the University of Amsterdam, which organizes a broad range of cultural activities such as lectures, debates, theater and dance performances and exhibitions not only for students but also for all non-student users. By doing so, this joint-used university facilities promote local cultural development and enrich residents' spare time life. Meanwhile, most of local residents hold positive opinion on the CREA and it gain finance and reputation for the University of Amsterdam. Another prominent case is the International Centre for Life case, Newcastle University builds a new urban institution integrating science, education, leisure and commercial uses to engage in local social development, which seeks to create a science center in the city. What the university does is not only transplanting education function into this new site but also setting many public-oriented functions in this center, such as life science center and conference center. The ICfL is not a university faculty isolated from surroundings, it is an urban institution jointly used by different social groups, which brings vitality to this region. It is a win-win situation.

By doing this survey, I found that the main disconnection between the city and the Delft University

of Technology is not only on the spatial level, but also on the cultural and social level. In order to restore this broken relationship, the physical return by setting a university building in the historical city center is not enough. We should implant an urban institution which has proper programme and attractive activities to bridge the gap between the city and the university, the residents and the students in the city of Delft.

Under this consideration, my design is a cluster of three independent buildings and in-between outdoor space. These three buildings are inter-related and operating as a whole urban institution. The main construction is the archive which is a four-floor high building standing distinctly in the middle of the site. It not only serves as a storage room for the university collection, but also works as a city 'living room' -- a multi-function hall open to the public. (The precedent palazzo della ragione and anatomy theater in Padua, Italy give me a lot of inspiration). This hall is supposed to provide a meeting place for local residences, students and even tourists, in which people can attend lectures, join debates, explore collections and visit exhibitions. By the combination of functions, activities and users, we could build an inherent connection between the city and the university. In addition to this main building, there are also two other constructions surrounding it, one provides study spaces and the other one services as a club, which are both open to students and local residents. These two buildings adopt a more modest attitude to merge into the city context.

The Activities happened in one building is the keys to define its nature. In my opinion, an urban institution must have two characteristics. One is expertise, the other one is publicity. So, in my design, the building firstly works as a professional archive which stores university's collections, meanwhile, it should also be a public interior for gathering and visiting. One of the best example of urban institution in Delft, from my point of view, is the Prinsenhof Museum which is a cluster of several buildings and functions. It is not only a municipal museum exhibiting the history of the city Delft and the Dutch royal family, but also a place for local residents and visitor to rest, to gather and to hold events.

In addition to the proper programme and function setting, the building should fit into the city context at spatial level and provide a suitable space for these activities. More specifically, in my design, due to the intricate and miscellaneous existing buildings on the site, I try to use the newly built constructions to reorganize the texture and transfer the negative outdoor space into the positive one which includes a big square and several small courtyard. All these space are connected and inter-related. As to the materialization, I apply local typical material – brick to the study space and club parts, which enable them merge into the surrounding brick buildings. On the contrary, in the archive part, I use the concrete casing to highlight its status.

This project proposes a move of the TU Delft to the historical center as both a further invitation to the public, and a way of embedding Delft students and academics in the city itself. In the larger social framework, it is a logical and desirable project to reunite the city and the university.