

# INTERIORS, BUILDINGS, CITIES

## RESEARCH PLAN

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### Introduction

The mission we undertake in this studio comprises four pillars of investigation. Firstly, the Doughnut Economics theory formulated by Kate Raworth, which will lead the way for Amsterdam the following years. Then comes the history of Amsterdam's urban, social and economic development through the years that gives the context into which we are called to make our proposals. Another crucial pillar is the hotel as an architectural type itself. Lastly, there is the architects' community and their role into this complex condition. By doing research into these topics, we are then called on to suggest new forms of hotels that fall into the Doughnut theory, for this new era in the city of Amsterdam.

### Problem Statement

Personally, as far as Doughnut economics theory is concerned, I have focused on some anchor points. Firstly, to *See the big picture*. Raworth in her Doughnut Economics theory describes the lack of a goal, of a project, that current economic theories present, and how that stops us from improving. This is also a crisis of the architectural project, in the sense that architecture has lost its sense of purpose, of responsibility. Architecture has the power to become an agent of change towards a new direction if it chooses its purpose. It is also important to be critical on the face of sustainability matters, to go beyond this false use of the idea of sustainability an empty and cold strategy, and handle these practices in a meaningful way, to examine how they can serve our planet and enrich our architecture.

Then, to *Design to distribute*. Raworth suggests economics to become more distributive and regenerative by design. Architecture must be regenerative and distributive as well. An architecture of a closed cycle, that derives and sticks exclusively to one idea or a very specific set of ideas, is not adequately complex to hold through our ever more complex society and economy.

Lastly, to *Nurture human nature*. This concept is all about cultivating all the best instincts and tendencies in people, and exploit them in favor of the economy

and the society in general. Another important factor for architects is to learn to think about systems and interconnect them in order to make societies grow.

In this context, the type of the hotel also comes into play. Historically, the hotel as a concept began by meeting the basic needs for food and shelter, to care for the ill, bring together the upper classes of society, until our days that it holds many different roles. Thus, it addresses issues of survival, but also social engagement, contemplation, power exercise and creativity.

Regarding Amsterdam, hospitality is embedded in the city's history and present. Although hotels in the city started as a place of shelter, they have grown to become the supporting pillar of a whole industry of tourism, which Amsterdam cultivated during the 19th and 20th century. This tourism industry was also based on a "sterilized" experience of the city as a theme park where one can be entertained, consume, and take things to the edge, most often in the expense of the city's sustainability. Therefore, in the last years, the city faces an extreme explosion of rent prices, while at the same time it is a relatively small city, with mixed uses throughout, that cannot support anymore neither its residents nor its tourists.

### Research Questions

After this overview of conclusions in regards to the research, there are several questions that emerge.

Firstly we have to think if in our current globalized and interdependent society, we can really fix things without a radical and deep political change. That leads to the next question, how does one build locally in a globalized world? How can a distributive system be applied to a globalized world?

Secondly, there is the matter of the role of the existing built environment, in this change of route towards the Doughnut. Amsterdam's center for example, is quite well defined in terms of its built stock and architectural heritage. What level of freedom is there to operate according to the Doughnut principles? How far can we go so that we don't damage the city's cultural profile, heritage and image?

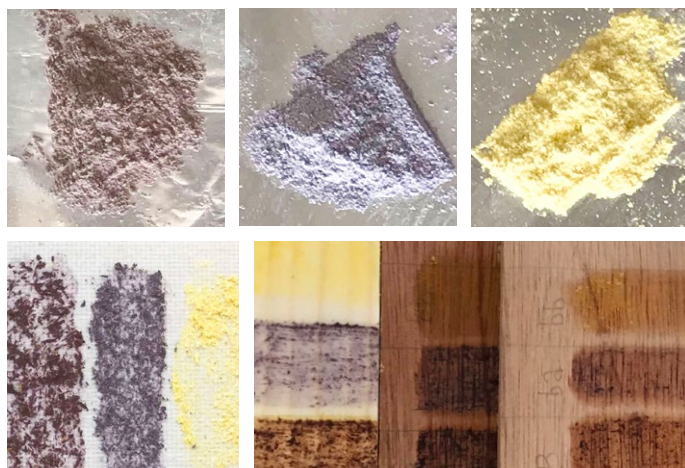
This provokes us to think about the new city hotel, to whom will it address? By whom will it be operated? What role will the invisibles of society (cleaners, maintenance people, workers...) have in it? Who will profit from it? How can it be a means of entering the Doughnut, and more specifically, be an agent of regeneration in a circle of environmental and social sustainability?

## Methodology

The attempt to address these questions is going to be realized through a research by design, with the form of a design proposal, of the new city hotel in Amsterdam.

Before diving in to this project, another preliminary one was formulated, as a first response to all of the questions mentioned above. This project, called *New Circular Materialism(s)*, is essentially an inquiry into technique, and the relations between architecture, materials, and all beings that interact with it (humans and animals). It emerged from two points of interest. Firstly, from an intention to make the best possible use out of a by-product of a huge industry in the Netherlands, as is tulip cultivation and trade. This circular and regenerative life of products or waste has the potential to change the way several industries operate for the benefit of the Doughnut. Secondly, from a reflection on how to reinterpret and interfere with strictly protected and saturated urban contexts like Amsterdam centre. Here, there is also the matter of coming closer to the Doughnut, by implementing new technologies and socially beneficial policies into our most fragile and cherished settings.

Hence, tulip petals were used as a raw source to explore the possibilities of natural paint production. Sustainable, non-toxic dyes from recycled sources have the potential to be extensively used in construction, especially timber, and benefit humans and animals of cities, with regards to healthier and more sustainable environments. Along with a different approach towards new architectures within Dutch historical contexts, an approach that opens the way for more extensive timber constructions, the project's products renegotiate architecture's position withing the Doughnut ring, both on a social and an environmental level.



Tulip dye powder and paint samples on timber

Taking on from this project's principles and intentions, I am going to the main desing project of the New City Hotel.



The site I chose is located in Leidseplein, in Amsterdam's historical center. Leidseplein square is a historically significant public space, characterized by lots of night clubs, restaurants, theatres and musical stages, as well as luxurious hotels. Since its creation as one of the city's main gates during the Golden Age, it always had the role of a transit and lively space where people would reside and entertain themselves before or after going for business in town. Through the years various events and demonstrations took place there. The corner plot measures approximately 15x30 meters, and it is surrounded by many notable buildings, namely the International Theater of Amsterdam, the Casino and the City Theater. Currently there is an existing building in the site, which is about to be redeveloped. The redevelopment proposal raised some objections due to the fact that the current residents would have to move out. Nevertheless the project will go on.

There are a lot of reasons why this site is personally the most suitable to host the new city hotel. Firstly, it is situated right in the heart of an area that seems to be completely following the mainstream touristic profile the city keeps to this day. To try and put a hospitality building that comes in opposition to this established regime seems quite sensible, challenging, and meaningful. In addition, it brings up a nice opportunity to examine how a new architecture can be implemented in one of the city's most dense and oldest spots, protected to a large extent as monumental and historical.

The hotel will try to not stand exclusively on one side of the tourists/residents dipole, because I believe this is not a fruitful approach. It is going to be an urban building with a strong sense of publicness and appropriation, and this kind of buildings need

the least amount of user-target specificity possible, in order to be resilient and accommodating to the complex life of the city.

Consequently, within this proposal I will attempt to examine the relationship of the new building with the other buildings around it, in terms of volume, architectural style, and character. How can a new structure be appropriately designed in order to stand equally as a public hub among the others, with the same importance and impact on the city's urban life? Moreover, I will try to find ways to restore the lost coherence of the urban open spaces around the site. At the moment, several public spaces of different scales and functions co-exist with each other without a consolidated hierarchy or identity. How can a new volume be placed in order to articulate a well-functioning urban ensemble?



The site and the surrounding spaces

Through these two main courses there will also be a search for a new architecture with strong references to Dutch architectural tradition, but one that redefines lost materials like timber and gives them a new life and substance. Timber was integral in Dutch architecture (the International Theater was built and burned twice before it was constructed with brick and stone), but then it was abandoned. How can it be reintroduced in contemporary scene, while being safe, sustainable, and at the same time having a strong enough public presence for the city?

This research will be based on design, precedents study, model making and literature review.

## Conclusion

The ultimate goal for this project is the creation of the New City Hotel. This will concern a public space that gives a fresh perspective to its urban environment, that dialects with the city's life and users in a different manner, and that introduces a more sensitive approach in regards to circular economy, social regeneration, and contemporary architecture within the Doughnut. A resilient and flexible space capable of hosting any possible event and social agent.

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