

## P4 REFLECTION – DEMOCRATIZATION OF PRIMARY EDUCATION IN THE SHRINKING REGION AROUND VLEDDER, DRENHTE

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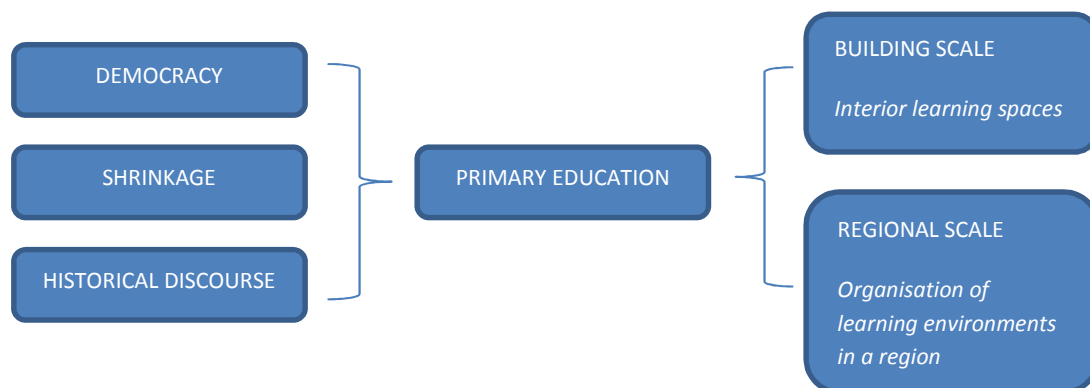
### Relationship between theme of studio and subject chosen

The theme of the studio is 'democracy'. The interpretation of the meaning of democracy is taken from the philosopher John Dewey. He distinguishes formal, social and economic democracy. Within the social democracy, the relation with education can be found. Social democracy is defined as a society that is democratic throughout the whole of its social fabric. This is equal to the idea of community life itself and the community is regarded as the one that provides the fertile ground for growth of meaningful experience. The process of making experience meaningful is called education. This means that education mostly happens in the community itself. Therefore the idea of the school as an independent institute has changed. A democratic learning landscape means that learning happens in the community. The spatial implications of this are that there are many spaces within the community that are used for learning: a network of learning.

A democratic community furthermore provides the opportunity for the development of distinctive capacities and individual contributions. Since people have different talents and different ways of learning, the learning space itself should also be differentiated in order to be able to accommodate a democratic learning space. The architectural meaning of this is that the interior of the learning space should be changed into a learning space that gives the opportunity to learn in different ways and to learn different things.

### Relationship between research and design

The research can be divided into three aspects, all related to education: democracy, shrinkage and the historical discourse. The relationship between the research and the design can be found on two different levels of scale, namely on a building scale and on a more regional scale.



### Democracy – building scale

The research about the relation between democracy and the building scale focused on the interior of learning spaces. Main conclusion was that a learning environment can only be democratic if it is a community in which every single pupil has the opportunity to discover and develop their own talents, so that all of them will flourish and not only a few. The differences in talents and ways of learning has been found within the learning styles of David Kolb and the multiples intelligences theory of Howard Gardner. Four aspects turned out to be important for the design: differentiation of learning spaces (form, size, material, colour, light), creating different centres of attention, creating different amount of intimacy and treating both the interior as the exterior as learning space.

The design contains a differentiation of learning spaces by dividing the learning space into four main rooms, in which each room can be used for different purposes. The interior wall provides more

private learning spaces and the independent furniture elements are more focused on groups. Spaces have different forms, sizes and adjustable lighting. There aren't many colours used, but one colour in different tones. According to the research, there's a lack of differentiation in materials. There are many focus points within the learning space, that creates different centres of attention. The amount of intimacy is created by making a learning space more open or closed towards the surrounding. The exterior is connected to the interior by shaping the interior learning space around an exterior part.

#### *Democracy – regional scale*

This part explored if the idea of democracy can change the organisation of learning spaces in an area. According to the philosopher John Dewey, it is the community that provides the fertile ground for growth of meaningful experience. The process of making experience meaningful is called education. This idea can be found in the vision of the whole region. The idea consists of two home bases, several typical learning centres and all the other existing facilities (related to the real practise) within the area. Those altogether form the learning environment. This means, spatially the whole community is involved in the educating process. The home bases are there in order to create a safe environment from whereon children can explore the outside world.

#### *Shrinkage – building scale*

The context of a low-density shrinking area shows a lot of small buildings on individual plots. The design fits into this small scale identity by designing a small school for only 120 pupils, instead of the at this moment popular approach of creating 'brede scholen'. The (dis)advantage of this is that multiple groups of different ages learn in the same classroom, otherwise it wasn't possible to offer such a varied learning space. To create a relation with the community and facilities they need, a small community space has been included in the design.

#### *Shrinkage – regional scale*

The research about shrinkage mostly focused on aspects related to liveability: accessibility, mobility, other functions in school buildings, the school as a meeting place and unoccupied buildings. The idea of considering the whole region as a place to learn and to involve all those spaces over the region in learning, is a concept that could fit in cities and growing areas as well. However, the interesting part is that issues related to the liveability, can be tackled by using this concept of organising learning environments. The accessibility and mobility is more or less equal, since children go to different places: sometimes they can go by bike, sometimes they need to take the bus. The use of existing buildings in the vision prevent them of closing and unoccupied buildings that can give the area a negative image. Since there are many places in the region used as learning space, a lot of meeting places are created for the local community.

#### *Historical discourse – building scale*

Historical typological research shows that the classroom itself has barely changed last century. Initiatives to create a more varied learning space mostly happened in the communal space. Architects like Hertzberger introduced the L-shape classroom and played with architectural components, such as different ceiling heights, columns and stairs to create different places to learn within a classroom. However, those designs were a first attempt to create different places to learn. The design focused on a total make-over of the ordinary classroom. The design shows a huge variety of learning spaces and the normal table-chair combination has almost disappeared.

#### *Historical discourse – regional scale*

Within the historical discourse two elements are important: the scale of the school and the identity of the school. For a long time it was normal that each village had at least one school. Due to a decline in the amount of pupils and at the same time the idea of putting multiple functions in a school building, a lot of schools have been closed and put together into one big school with many other facilities. Especially in villages, there's a lot of resistance against closing schools. The other aspect is

related to the 'schoolstrijd', which ended with an equalization of state education (non-religious) and private education (religious).

The idea of considering the whole region as a place to learn and to involve all those spaces over the region in learning, creates small buildings, otherwise there would be too much learning space. The idea that children need a home base from whereon they can explore the world, gives the opportunity to keep both state education as private education, since there are two home bases in the area. The other learning facilities are designed for common use.

### **Reflection on methodical line of approach**

Roughly the graduation period can be divided into two parts: research and design. By dividing this so sharp in two periods, there was less possibility that the design would influence the research. On the other hand it was also hard to combine them, since the research part was not totally defined from the beginning. The discoveries during the research, led the research itself. This caused a delay in the designing part, but also led towards more depth within the research and in the end it even led towards a complete different learning space than regular. This approach led to for me surprising results, which I couldn't have imagined when I started this project.

Looking back to the portfolio of all the drawings I've made last year, one particular aspect is remarkable. At the moments there are drawings from multiple different scales, the development is faster than in those phases that is focused for a longer time on one aspect. This is probably also the most important thing I've learned about designing: it doesn't matter how scary it sometimes is to go very quickly through all scales (social context, urban context, form, function, construction), do it, because working on those scales at the same time, makes the decision process a lot easier and faster. And sometimes solutions are found in a different scale than first thought. This was probably also the reason why I was struggling a little bit after the P2 with the design. The input from the research was mainly related to the social context and function. I had to work more on the different scales to get other input than I was actually doing. This is a skill I can improve in the future.

The approach of the building technology in relation to the architecture was to let the technology serve the architecture. This was a method that was working very well. By knowing what kind of image you want to create, it's easier to draw a detail. For example: as an image I had in mind a very abstract silhouette of a barn. In order to create this, an on-going material for the façade and roof would suit the best to this approach. Slate tiles (material and technique) are a nature product that can realize this.

### **Relationship between the project and the wide social context**

The social relevance of the project can be found in the change the project aims to make in the educational debate / school buildings. Educational buildings affect all people, because everybody will attend school for at least some years in their life. Actually, in a very important period in human life's. During the primary school period, a big part of the character, the social skills, the physical condition and the cultural luggage of people are formed.

School buildings reflect the ideas about the position of the child in society and how the most effective forming of the student can be achieved. School buildings show which basic competences are the most important for the client, user and the architect. Furthermore, primary schools belong to the most important public buildings, not only spatially, but also in a human life.

To acknowledge multiple forms of intelligence and ways of learning, is the start to make education more effective and efficient for pupils and teachers. The possibility to discover and develop every talent an individual has, can be the start for each individual of becoming more successful in life.

This starts with a new generation of children, but as they grow older, the whole society will benefit of the education they had. The educational space aims to give the opportunity to each individual to flourish and gives the opportunity to the community to become democratic through its whole social fabric.