

# THE PRODUCT OF THE NEOLIBERAL STATE

A methodological reflection of the process from the neoliberal system to the built environment

Student

Jeroen van den Heuvel (4812484)

Chair of Complex Projects, "Hotel New York"

Thesis "Foreign investments in the neoliberal state"

I THE PROCESS OF ECONOMICS TO THE URBAN CONTEXT

The France philosopher Henri-Louis Bergson elaborates in his '*An Introduction to Metaphysics*' (Bergson, 1912) on the fact that there are two ways to interpret the world; the analytical way and the metaphysical way. Hereby the analytical way is about the approach of science, measuring things, order and structure, in a mathematical way. The metaphysical on the other hand, focuses on the approach of philosophy, behind the natural and perceptible, with intuition. He argues that these two interpretation methods should come together. Bergson doesn't relate this specifically to architecture, but to me, architecture is about this coming together of the intuitive and the measurable world. It is about the intuitive and creating of concepts which results in the measurable practice of architecture, as it therefore serves as a bridge between the analytical and metaphysical. However, the ways to 'construct' this bridge, can be done in countless ways. In here, the importance of research-methodological sense emerges.

For me, research methodological awareness is important during the whole process of a design project. From the analysis to the synthesis to the evaluation. The constant reflection of your own research in relation to research-methodologies can help in the process as it serves as a kind of guideline and can help you develop further if one might get stuck in the process. It helps to construct the bridge from the intuitive to the graspable. With the whole process I mean creating context, to design, to the technique and even communication. Because in the end, architecture has a lot to do with communication as well. By having recourse to the research methodological during communication, this can serve as an umbrella of the whole, and therefore boost communication for both the narrator as the recipient.

The lecture of Robert Gorny and the first part of the lecture of Marieke Berkers were valuable in my process. With the first part of Berkers, I'm referring to her elaboration on the socio-historical roots, rather than the overarching theme of praxeology and anthropology. I applied the socio-historical topic to my own research to be able to get a clear starting point which eventually will evolve in a typology research for the studio in a way that Gorny fired the starting signal for this.

The overarching theme of the studio Complex Projects – Hotel New York is about 'migration'. In this deceptive named studio, the theme of migration has to relate to the city center of Rotterdam. To be able to come up with a clear topic which subsequently would serve as an overarching theme of my thesis, a theme of migration which can possibly link to the urban environment was sought. Concerning this, the lecture of Berkers really encouraged me to not just pick a random theme to research, but to dive in this socio-historical context that relates to migration and consequently was interesting to develop further in the research. My own specific thesis topic that relates to this overarching theme of migration, is about the globalized movement and system of neoliberalism. Therefore, a relation with this complex migrating system of neoliberalism with the urban context of Rotterdam is sought. Summarized, the neoliberal system acquires that almost all the companies are privatized and the market is liberated. This results in companies going abroad, therefore business migrate all over the world. Because of the expanding competition of businesses, foreign companies in cities as big as Rotterdam are actually *needed* to compete with other western cities. Therefore my research question reads: how can a city like Rotterdam embody the desire for foreign business branches? Hence, in my research I look at the system of neoliberalism, which is the direct cause of this desire of foreign companies, the proportion of influence this system had in Rotterdam, why today's Rotterdam still has this desire and finally how can this need possibly be satisfied. The approach of this listing contains different kind of methods throughout the process, which shall be treated in the next chapter.

## II THE MAKING OF THE PRODUCT

Rather than a single research-method, the research consists of different methods in the previously notified aspects. While the theme of neoliberalism prevails as the holistic whole, the open-end approach was the essence of the research throughout the whole process and therefore the one method led by itself to the other, with the exception of the typology research. While specific findings in the open ended approach of this research were of vital importance for the progress of research methods as well, emphasis on the substantive findings won't be included in this essay due the limited length of this part.

Socio-historical theoretical research was necessary to accommodate the knowledge of the system of neoliberalism. David Harvey's *A brief history of neoliberalism* (Harvey, 2007) served as the primary source. While this doesn't yet relate to architecture, resemblances with the method of historical research that is elaborated in the work of Wang et al. (2013, pp. 175) can be found, as it contributes primarily to the narrative of the research. The perspectives that Forty illustrates in Wang et al. (*ibid.*), as the fact that history research brings something from the past into view, was the direct result of this approach. To perceive to what extent Rotterdam implemented this system, politics of space became an important matter to analyze the, as Lefebvre puts it (Lucas, 2015, pp. 141), commercial processes of commodification in the case of the contemporary, in this case neoliberalism. By analyzing the politics of space, further research tended to go into data mining with analyzing the why of the current desire of Rotterdam. In this part of the research, the method really shifted from the qualitative research to quantitative research and therefore it proves already to be a mixed methods research as discussed by Creswell (2014, pp. 35). In the pursuit of the embodiment of the desire for foreign companies, quantitative research was still done, only typological research became the prominent factor in this stage, as dictated for the whole studio.

When reflecting back on the research it became obvious to me that the both quantitative deduction as the qualitative induction played a major role in forming the resulting hypotheses, in the way that Wang et al. (2013, pp. 33-34) describes these notions as well. The deductive part was created posterior to the inductive part. This was done in a way by ushering an inductive theory about neoliberalism, which in essence reads that this system has migrated all over the world. This initial constructed statement had to be consolidated. Eventually the theory in relation to Rotterdam was affirmed, but also if it didn't, it would still make an interesting case to develop further for research. It is interesting to see that framing the initial research of neoliberalism in historical traits and now relating it to the qualitative research strategy is a combination that isn't uncommon, as it both seeks the socio-physical phenomena within complex contexts, as Wang et al. elaborates on this method (2013, pp. 222).

But by studying articles that related architecture with the system of neoliberalism after this step, I felt that linking both principles of the city and neoliberalism in this stage were rather too forced. The heuristic approach of directly linking the measurable architecture with the subjective of neoliberalism, didn't really work as it felt too compulsive. Linking the phenomenon of neoliberalism to architecture, and more specifically a design brief, was therefore postponed on purpose. While research from the start was already open-ended, this qualitative open-ended (Wang et al., *ibid.*) approach helped to gain more understanding of this globalizing world structure, and helped as well to narrow the research down to something that can be naturally related to architecture instead of forcing the link. As is discussed in the work of Lucas (2016, pp. 142) about politics and architecture, is that architecture exists within this network of interests, from local planning and governmental structures, through to global finance and markets. Therefore this step the politics of space was conducted by consulting governmental rapports and visions, both historically and contemporary editions. This mixed use of methods results in a cross-disciplinary approach of the project, as is elaborated by Lucas (2016, pp. 58). The research combined contains the work of mainly economic geographers, critical theorists and urban planners, which are then all woven in each other in a deductive way which resulted in the next steps.

### III REFLECTING THE PRODUCT

As discussed in the previous chapter, different kind of methods were used to conduct the research. As the last and current step in the progress, typological research will be done. Therefore I will focus on this method in this chapter as it allows to dive deeper in this research method, rather than analyse all the different used methods in a brief, compressed way. The typological method itself can also be considered as a mixed method in the definition of Creswell (2014, pp. 268), as it contains both quantitative as qualitative data. Qualitative data in this case is very important as it helps to understand the pragmatical application of the high-tech business sector (a result of substantive findings in the progress of research). Besides only getting familiar with the pragmatical implication of the high-tech business sector, the typological research can also contribute to the quantitative, as it will provide space in numbers, which in the end should result in a specific program bar that serves as a design brief.

While I try to not link the system of neoliberalism too forced as previously mentioned, the change of the high-rise typology itself is an inevitable consequence of the neoliberal system that was implemented since 1973. The system of neoliberalism allowed companies and therefore knowledge to migrate all over the world, hence the competition of business increased exponentially. Therefore the desire for being innovative was of utmost importance and thus new innovations called for new kind of typologies. Typology research itself was first conceptualized in the period of Enlightenment in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, inspired by Newton's now called classical mechanics, as a systematic thinking that could be represented in all activities. In here, type was understood as the general form or structure of beings or objects (Güney, 2007, pp. 7). As architecture changed over the years, so did concept of 'type' changed during the modernist era in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Type became stereotype as also the statement of form follows function represents this change and led arguably to the cost of architecture in a certain way. After the concept of 'type' changed to 'stereotype' during the modernist period, typological research was again introduced in the form of architectural neo-rationalism, where Italian practitioners as Aldo Rossi and Giorgio Grassi played a prominent role. In here they emphasized the continuity of form as an unbreakable chain which all connects with the growth of the city in housing, street and the city itself (*ibid.*, 2007, pp. 13). The city therefore isn't zoned functionally as the modernist architects were pursuing, but is defined by a clear representation of the typologies. Therefore, classification of these typologies became important to establish comparable criteria in the design process (Jacoby, 2015). Because in my research I will focus both on the qualitative aspect as the quantitative aspect of the typology, I will elaborate on the organizational typology as the qualitative and the spatial typology as the quantitative.

The so called Gillen typology relates to the qualitative aspect of typology research, which distinguishes the office typology by sector and characteristic based on processes, such as for instance the high-tech sector (Annali, 2010). This kind of typology research therefore allows to order and compare organizations in categorical types, which relates to my research as it dives into a specific type of office typology. This means that merely researching the office typology itself isn't sufficient enough, it needs to be more specified. So by conducting a more detailed typological research, it allows to dive deeper in a specific typology and therefore get more knowledge on how a specific typology is organized. This stated approach rather than the broad approach of typologies, is obviously the result of the different types of research methods that were done before.

Currently, a lot of quantitative methods research concerning the typological approach have been conducted. The so called Mixed-Use Index (MXI) is a quantitative method that essentially organizes the programmatic organization with a formula of percentage of housing, working and amenities (Provoost, 2010). While this could be interesting in a stage were a clear program bar has to be constructed, in the first stage of typological research the mathematical-analytical approach of the spacemate (Berghauser & Pont, 2009) has more value in a general way to determine the program based on typological research. Indexes like the floor space index, open space ratio and ground space index can be related more specifically to the qualitative research done in the first part, as it provides

the opportunity to translate the types of the high-rise office to specific square meters and therefore the desired design brief.

### IV THE ARCHITECT AS THE PRODUCER

In my research, the main question reads: how can a city like Rotterdam embody the desire for foreign business branches? While this is basically the question for my research thesis itself, the active formulation also encourages automatically the methodological aspect. With this I mean the sense of the 'how can' formulation, instead of 'how does' or 'how is'. With this active question in relation to the methodological awareness, I was able to frame the broad attribute of the question with the use of mixed methods. While the complex approach of using basically four different research methods within the process of research, the reading and lectures of the course helped to be aware of this and therefore to steer the research in certain ways. Obviously not every lectures contributed as much as others. As can be seen in the previous chapter, I started with the position of Gorny about the type and the typological, and specified it further by being more concrete on the type of the high-tech office. Also, while the essence of her lecture might be more about the praxeology itself, the use of the socio-historical context as a part within the praxeology was something that I extracted and basically implemented as the main guideline of my research, without continuing in any form on praxeology. And this general allowance (or possibility) to construct your own kind of approach, really contributes to discover your own unique position in the field of architectural related research.

That being said, the general approach of the studio of Complex Projects, allows to discover your own topic and ways of approach, however within a quite strict framework. By mandating the topic of migration within the thesis, it can either steer the approach in a more graspable way, but also limits the possibilities. Arguably, all the lectures or readings that were emphasizing on things like anthropology, praxeology or had a more metaphysical or philosophical nature, were not of much use in the studio of Complex Projects as a way to determine or approach the main topic. The topics therefore balances automatically more towards the analytical than the metaphysical. In addition, the site of the future interventions are mandated to be within a strict border in the city center of Rotterdam. But as mentioned before, in the progress there is also a guideline of research. With this I mean that there is an obligation to deliver typological research as well. While I agree that this is indeed necessary to argument a program bar, it also generalizes the approach of the different projects within the studio, as there comes this general process of going from city analysis, to area research, to typological research and finally a design brief. As mentioned in the introduction, I believe that methodological awareness is important in the field of architecture. However, being aware of these methods, relying on one specific method and emulate this through the whole process might ignore other approaches which could eventually contribute to the research as well. As Lundy puts it, architecture dissolves certain problems rather than finding true solutions (Lundy, 2018, pp. 36). And approaching the same topic with different methods might dissolve more problems

Concluded, my position in architecture is deduced by my personal fascination on the problematical context in terms of politics, economy and history and which possibly can relate to architecture. The correlation with different disciplines encourages to obtain a broad knowledge within a certain heuristic whole, in this case neoliberalism. This results in the use of different kind of methods along the whole process in relation to my research question. To really approximate such broad topic and process it to something architectural, the use of different modi is inevitable. Therefore this position consists of research layers within the main layer of a mixed method research. However, I won't say that these layers within the main layer are irreplaceable. The causes of these methods are argued in a way that I believe these could work. But of course time didn't allow to really test different methods within the different steps within the mixed use of methods. Therefore I can't conclude that these layers in the mixed method were the optimal selection, but during the process they were rather the logical selection.

## THE PRODUCT OF THE NEOLIBERAL STATE

### REFERENCES

- Annali, M. (2010). Office Site Typology. Retrieved from <https://repository.tudelft.nl/islandora/object/uuid:79f75d12-8de3-4fe8-8d66-9b946ae1ca6f?collection=education>
- Bandini, M. (1984). Typology as a form of convention. *AA Files*, 6, 73–82. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/29543402>
- Berghauer Pont, M.Y. & Haupt, P.A. (2009). *Space, Density and Urban Form*. Retrieved from <https://repository.tudelft.nl/islandora/object/uuid%3A0e8cdd4d-80d0-4c4c-97dc-dbb9e5eee7c2>
- Bergson, H. (1912). *An Introduction to Metaphysics*. New York, U.S.A.: The Knickerbocker Press.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research Design*. Thousand Oaks, Canada: SAGE Publications.
- Güney, Y. I. (2007). Type and typology in architectural discourse . Retrieved from <http://fibe.balikesir.edu.tr/dergi/20071/BAUFBE2007-1-1.pdf>
- Harvey, D. (2007). *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford, Verenigd Koninkrijk: Oxford University Press.
- Lucas, R. (2016). *Research Methods for Architecture*. Zaltbommel, Netherlands: Van Haren Publishing.
- Lundy, C. (2018). BERGSON'S METHOD OF PROBLEMATISATION AND THE PURSUIT OF METAPHYSICAL PRECISION. *Angelaki*, 23(2), 31–44. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0969725x.2018.1451460>
- Sam Jacoby (2015) Type versus typology Introduction, *The Journal of Architecture*, 20:6, 931-937, DOI: 10.1080/13602365.2015.1115600
- Provoost, M. (2010). *New Towns For The 21st Century* (1st ed.). Nijmegen, Nederland: Sun Uitgeverij. Retrieved from [http://joostvandenhoek.com/mediapool/80/805179/data/MXI\\_paper\\_2009\\_vandenHoek\\_1\\_.pdf](http://joostvandenhoek.com/mediapool/80/805179/data/MXI_paper_2009_vandenHoek_1_.pdf)
- Wang, D., & Groat, L. N. (2013). *Architectural Research Methods*. Hoboken, NJ, United States: Wiley.