The assignment of the graduation studio is to design a healthcare building in North Amsterdam. I chose cancer patients as the target group to research and decided to design a cancer center. As a new kind of healthcare facility, the cancer center is a supplement of hospital and not meant to replace it. People could take medical treatments from the hospital and get all kinds of other supports from the cancer center at the same time.

The relationship between the theme of the graduation lab and the subject/ case study chosen by the student within this framework

The theme of the graduation studio is ‘the Healthy Environment’. I chose cancer patients as the study group because cancer has been the most important source of mortality not only in the Netherlands, but also around the world. When people got cancer, it will have an enormous and long-term influence on both themselves and their families. I am sure that the study of the cancer center could be important and also inspire other healthcare buildings.

Nowadays, the most common treatment methods for cancer are surgery, radiotherapy and chemotherapy which could all be received from hospital. However, only the hospital treatments are far from enough. The environment of hospital is always unwelcoming and hardly comfy which strengthen these negative feelings. The needs for cancer patients on psychological and social aspects are hardly fulfilled from hospitals. Cancer center is a new kind of healthcare facility which is different from hospitals. The aim for these kinds of healthcare centers is to help reestablish an everyday life for the cancer patient by means of counseling, therapy, social activities, physical rehabilitation through various activities, lectures and so on for the cancer patients and their families. Thus, the cancer healthcare center will function as a supplement of hospitals, and be a place for the cancer patients to go before, after or in between hospital treatments.

Because there is no cancer center in the Netherlands at the present, cases will be studies from the neighbor countries United Kingdom and Denmark. Maggie’s Center in UK is an earlier mode. They are always very small and only providing counseling programs. Then, this mode was developed in Denmark and includes rehabilitation programs. However, these two modes can only serve for out-patients. To develop the mode further, I added a care hotel so that patients from other places can live there and take part in a short-term rehabilitation program.
From several sites provided in the studio, I chose a site which locates at an intersection zone of living area and industrial area. This site now is divided by several roads and a bit isolated. However, the advantage of the site is that along the north and east sides, there are a lot of trees and an interesting green slope. The urban aim of the design is to make full use of the positive existing environment and improve the quality of the site by the intervention of the cancer center.

On the site, there are two buildings. One is a temporary party center which will be removed as the site for the cancer center. The other one is a two-storey office building. Though the office building which stands in the corner is quite normal, it helps to provide a context for this site.

The relationship between research and design

The research can be divided into two parts, the study of the patients’ needs and the character of the site.

When doing the research of the patients, I have found that most of the patients mentioned that they like the cancer center because they could meet other people who are in a similar situation with themselves. They could make friends and learn from each other. Furthermore, I found that the social interactions between different users are also in different hierarchies. Different space in different privacy should be provided for different social activities. Thus, my main theme in the design is to encourage both formal and informal social interactions between different users.

For the site, the green space is a positive aspect. To combine the green space with the social space is an important aim in this design. At the sides facing the noisy road and the office building, the edges follow the urban context. The wings of the building extend to the green space and enclose the green space into the courtyards of the new building. The height of the building decreases towards the green sides so that people could feel the courtyards are not totally closed. In the middle, a circular sensory garden is created as a quiet place for contemplation.

On the ground floor are the most public programs. Different programs are organized by different courtyards. The most public courtyard is the activity garden. People doing different activities could have a visual interaction through the courtyard. The café will be the most formal social space. On the first floor are mainly the treatment programs including counseling rooms and group rooms. Around the three courtyards, the circulation forms three loops. When people walking through the corridor, they could experience different gardens both inside and outside, and see activities on ground floor and first floor. The corridor becomes an informal social space. Along with the corridor, a lot of sitting space is provided for informal encounter and social activities. On top floor is the most private program of hotel. Different living rooms with different views and roof
forms become the social space for the in-patients to meet. A courtyard in-the-air becomes the outside social space.

The relationship between the methodical line of approach of the graduation lab and the method chosen by the student in this framework

During the graduation studio, there is a research seminar as a supplement of the design studio. In the seminar, I made deep research on both the site and the patients group. The urban target and the needs for the patients are also the most primary two parts through the whole design stage. During the research, I analyzed several cases and also visited one of them in Copenhagen and interviewed the staff there. From the staff and many interviews of the patients in this center from the Internet, I got a better understanding of the programs and the users. Then, we used the results of the research to translate into architecture in the design studio.

When coming back to the design studio, I firstly worked on the urban context. I went to the site during different seasons to observe the changes of the site, and found that the atmosphere was quite different when the leaves fell out. In the first weeks, we worked together in groups to make urban models in different typologies and discussed the potentials of each one. Then, we spent weeks to make a 1/20 room to elaborate the atmosphere of interior. To think from urban scale to interior scale alternately is an efficient way in this studio. During the process, I also keep combining drawings and making models in different scales.

The relationship between the project and the wider social context

Cancer is now becoming one of the most important sources of mortality around the world. Not only the cancer patients themselves but also their families and friends will suffer a great change of their lives. What they need is not only the medical treatment for the disease but also all kinds of supports for their lives. The cancer center should play a more important social role for these people. The center should be more like a club or even home for the patients rather than a hospital or a clinic to create a cozy environment. On one hand, I am trying to develop the current mode of cancer center as a new prototype. On the other hand, the exploration in this project could also inspire other kinds of healthcare buildings.