Revitalizing Rotterdam
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The research and design studio of Public Realm is exploring the meaning of public realm in the light of current urban redevelopments occurring in the city center of Rotterdam, taking into account the progressive shifting from a period of ever increasing real estate pressure to the current situation, characterized by paying more attention to the transformation of the existing fabrics. The research refers to the area fenced by the Coolsingel, Binnenwegplein, the Lijnbaan and Van Oldenbamevelplaats. It consists of an existing urban block at the south edge of the inner city after war re-structuring in the light of Van den Broek & Bakema Lijnbaan proposal, which hosts the early modern headquarter of the ABN AMRO bank. Both the studio as the project are following the same line. Where the studio is focusing on the transformation of the area in order to attain a greater public realm, the project itself is concentrating on the vitality of the area and the necessities to accomplish these. On a programmatic level as well as on an architectural level several applications had to be done. The urban transistor which amplifies and extends the existing networks also need support by adding and transforming programmatic and formal configurations.

The analysis was focused on the different network systems, relating to the public and private domain, how they affect the morphology of the urban structure and how they relate or potentially contribute to a stronger vital public domain of the Lijnbaan area. To clarify how the Rotterdam network operates we separate into three main layers and two bearing sub layers. Responding to the harsh juxtaposition of network layers, sub-layers, and flows, with in a cacophony of successive architecture and urban plans whom are al contradicting the previous and following styles, motivates the fundamentals of our design project. Nodes, spatial and fluent stratification, super-commercial, modern, and momentum are the main criteria to reconstruct connections between the Coolsingel and the Lijnbaan-area generating a more vital city center.

These conclusions eventually led to a concept for the urban scenario and an architectural design. Where the research ended with the necessity of vitalizing the existing network of Rotterdam, the urban approach continued with this notion. Different flows eventually are combined with a hybrid building that is conceptualized as an urban transistor that can amplify and switch the several network flows in order to disable this problematic curfew in the Lijnbaan area. In order to emphasize and strengthen the idea of increasing liveliness of the area by amplifying, switching and reconnecting the several flows the smaller individual architectural design had to correspond to the master plan and research. One of the individual design responsibilities, which is the Rotterdam Fashion Institute, had to contribute to this principle as well. The overall design of the master plan consists of an under and upper world enclosed by a network that operates in three dimensions, all in order to strengthen extend the existing networks. An architectural translation can be found in the RFI with a vertical urban landscape of streets and squares that weaken the experience of the conventional and monotone corridor in order to obtain a circulation that requires qualitative continued and discontinued experiences.
The methodical line of approach of the studio and the method that eventually was used individually, both corresponded to each other. On a methodical level the studio itself focuses and relates to topical issues in urban development, especially today’s inner city developments in Rotterdam. Several topics were treated during the course seminar lecture series that had to contribute to a greater understanding of the existing urban developments and the history of constantly changing blocks and successive architecture within the urban fabric. In order to understand Rotterdam researches had to be done on several scales, from mapping the different zones to the acquisition of a better understanding of the network, from the various fundamental axes to the comprehension of the urban blocks of Rotterdam.

There were not only functional and spatial requirements for success but also a development and enhanced social variety. There for the relationship between the project and the wider social context lies in the specifically choice of program added to the area. In the last thirty years the municipality of Rotterdam tried to weaken the hardcore characteristics of business and consumerism in the city center by the addition of more cultural facilities. By creating a wider range of facilities the city could change from a urban tissue mainly characterized by its modernist segregation of functions to a large variation of program which eventually leads to more vital city center with new fashion settlements, events and a wider audience. The addition of a new creative branch of fashion related facilities acts as an extension to the accomplishment of more liveness, more diversity and a greater public realm. A new entity in the city of Rotterdam can eventually acts as a starting point of a new range of dense urban blocks. Will this push the city in a new comfortable path where projects do succeed or is it just building in a series of attempts to revive Rotterdam.