P5 Reflection

Elderly Home for Dementia Patients

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The Architecture of Interior Graduation studio/The Healthy Environment

This report reflects on the complete design process of an elderly home for the dementia patients in Amsterdam North. I'll shortly discuss the four aspects of my design as following.

The relationship between research and design.

The research part of this graduation program can be divided into three parts, two of which are research seminars related to the course, the other one I called it self-research. The first research seminar was combined with the film workshop, the main purpose was to get a general idea about healthcare building in Netherlands. The building I analyzed was St. Jozef Hospital, which consist of several small clinics. From the analysis I learned how a healthcare building is organized, how the different part of the building working together, and what the patients’ perception of the building. All of these research from the film work could not be applied directly to my design, but it has broaden my view and provided me of new perspectives to looking at a healthcare facilities.

The second research seminar started simultaneously with the design process, we conducted a research on the chosen patient group which was related to the design target group, in my case, the target group would be the Dementia elderly patients. By doing this research, I learned a lot about Dementia, and also about the dementia patients, how they behave, what they can or can not do, what do they need, etc. These are all inspirations for the concept design of the elderly home, a lot of ideas came to my mind which were all about how to provide a better place for the dementia patients. Later, several case-studies were made and we went to see one of the cases, the Hogeweyk, and also made an interview with the manager of the Hogeweyk. After this I had thoroughly understanding about the elderly home for dementia patients, and got more practical ideas for developing my own design.

The last part of the research, self-research, goes parallelly with the design. Case studies and research on the dementia patients continued here but focused on more subtle aspects. These aspects, not like the first two which providing ideas and concepts for the design, had influenced on improving the
qualities of the design, really related to the well-being of the dementia patients.

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

The main theme of the graduation lab was to design a non-hospitalized healthcare institute and deal with the relationship between interior and exterior. Nursing home for dementia elderly patients is different from general nursing home. It is supposed to be a combination of home and professionals. As is known that nursing homes are always institutionalized style, elderly people who living in a nursing homes always unsatisfied with the living environment, the quality of their later life are not good. Since general nursing home is not welcomed by the normal elderly home, neither it will be accepted by the dementia patients who have more critical demands. So it is very important to design a better living environment both interior and exterior for the dementia elderly patients. I see the opportunities and also challenges.

The location of the design is in Huize Antonius, Amsterdam North. The urban context of the site is quite clear, but the situation in the site is a bit complex. The chances is to combine the new building with the existing buildings to create a non-institutionalized building for the patients which is exactly fit the theme of the graduation lab.

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

The studio is organized in a way that students are free to choose their own target group and design location, within the theme of non-hospitalized healthcare. The chosen design location would involve existing structures which would have to be transformed or replaced. The way you conduct your design is quite free.

In the design process I have chosen several methods to help me push the design forward. Doing research in different ways, such as case study, interview with the people who are relate to the project, and making a film to explain my idea, I think by dealing with different media and people, really helps to organize my own idea and thought. Also I had visited several healthcare buildings including the Hogeweyk, this made me aware of how the reality was and how to do the design under the academic conditions. Walking into the chosen site was also a different experience compares when you looking at the site in the computer, I got a lot from the site visit. Furthermore, by making physical models from different scale, I can really focused all aspects of the design in order to improve the quality of the design.
The relationship between the project and the wider social context

The aging problem is a worldwide issue, and how to improve well-being of the elderly people is very important for all the society. Living environment for elderly people is one of the crucial aspects for the elderly people. Currently, elderly that cannot stay at home by themselves anymore are placed in a home for elderly. Up to the present day these homes are generally traditional nursing homes. These environments have a defined structure and this is the reason of their institutionalized appearance. This structure is supposed to be efficient, by means of a centralised set-up and a straightforward organization. However, an efficient oriented building certainly cannot meet the comfort demand for the elderly people, that’s why elderly people are not always willing to go to a nursing home for the rest of their life, needless to say that for dementia elderly people that is far more not enough.

It is seems to be a common sense that elderly home for dementia elderly patients is always has a closed, isolated environment, isolated from the society. So the life of the patients are always limited in a certain space, for instance a corridor or just a floor, they cannot reach to the real world, go to the garden and communicate with normal people, therefore their health condition will get worse and worse, not what it meant to be. So a new type of elderly home for dementia patients is urgently needed, for example the Hogeweyk, an ideal world for the dementia patients, but this project is so limited due to its utopia idea, which trying to create a mini world inside the building. It is not realistic to create “Trueman show” everywhere in the world, but the Hogeweyk provides an idea that we can create a better living environment for the elderly dementia patients.

So what I am doing here is trying to integrate the new building with the existing urban tissue, trying to combine the elderly home with the church and school in the site to create a community which would be a better place for the dementia patients. For my understanding, to make full use of the existing conditions to create a workable living environment for the dementia patients is more realistic than just faking a world for them.