Shared spaces in a domestic environment

Reflection P5

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‘Het schrijven van een reflectie is een goede oefening waar je veel van kan leren. Een moment waarop je terug kijkt wat er is gedaan en wat er is geleerd. In mijn geval is dit jaar onbedoeld een moment geworden waarop ik automatisch op alles terug ging kijken. Momenten voor, momenten na. Een project voor en een project na. Deze reflectie is het eerste moment dat ik op het project als geheel terug kijk. Ik heb het proberen op te schrijven en te omschrijven, maar naar mijn mening is het een klein stukje van een veel groter verhaal. Ik weet niet of ik het ooit in zijn geheel zal opschrijven, maar met deze reflectie ligt een eerste begin.’

‘The aim of this reflection is to look back and see if the approach worked, to understand the ‘how and why’, and subsequently to learn from this. It also contains a summarized description of the process and an answer to the question of how and why the approach did or did not work, and to what extent.’
The fascinations about our changing (becoming more isolated) life style, the declining need for people to posses things and a few existing systems that show us that people seem to want to share (temporary) more possessions with each other, were the beginning of this project. Throughout the project this fascination did not change. The methodology to design for this fascination did. The intention of this reflection is to attempt to visualize the different methods and to understand the difference between the methods. The first few sketches after finishing the research indicate how little the topic changed. The drawing shows the process of cooking, trying to find out if it was an individual or a collective activity and if it is functional or social. Actually trying to find out were the possibilities for sharing in the process of cooking lay, defining the activities to share with multiple users.

Prior to this drawing a research was finished. The method envisioned at the beginning of that research is related to the following three topics: shared space, domestic environment and social behaviour. The goal of these topics was to gain a better understanding of the shared space in a domestic environment and its effect on the social behaviour of the users. Our expectations of the shared space, changes in the domestic environment and personal needs for space and privacy were the guiding elements throughout the study. Investigating the domestic environment, focussing on the difference in domestic rituals through time, was the start of the research. To understand the domestic sphere the workshop in Kortrijk, Belgium, during the interior biennale was visited. It gave a better insight of how big the topic actually is, maybe to large to explore, especially since it only is a small part of a much bigger research. However it also led to Space Caviar, a group who investigates the home in a more unconventional way. The group wrote a book called ‘SQM: The Quantified Home’. This book draws the scale of our rapidly changing lifestyle using data, fiction, and a critical selection of homes and their interiors. To understand sharing in the domestic environment better Hein de Haan was interviewed. He designed a lot of collective spaces, including Vrijburcht, were he lived himself. He gave the insight in how many rules there actually are if you want to design a collective space, but he also gave the understanding in how many benefits there are while sharing spaces.
In the scheme below the first methodology is displayed. This methodology was presented during P1. An ambitious plan to understand almost everything about the domestic environment and a big part of social economical analyse. The research intented to understand the behaviour of people in shared spaces.

A scheme of possibilities was also presented. The scheme shows if an activity tends towards private and individual or shared and collective. This scheme is based on a hypothesis and was the beginning of an experiment among users later.

Another scheme of big influence in the further research was the scheme of domestic operations (domestic activities, domestic places and domestic attributes) distributed over three domains (private, collective shared and public). Below the scheme for Vrijburcht is shown. Later the research focussed on the domestic activities, but the domains remained the same.
This ambitious plan to understand the domestic environment as a whole, its changes and expectations of the users, through case studies, literature research and a social economical analyse came to a rest due to circumstances. The project lay silent from mid December till mid February. It was an unexpected pause in the project and an emotional period. Time was needed to understand many other things besides this project and to give everything a place. Gradually the project started again. Never looking to far ahead. Trying to find a way to combine the project before and after and especially trying to dissociate the project from the occurence, seeing it as a stand-alone thing.

The short break and the book of Space Caviar gave the understanding that the topics needed to be redefined. The domestic environment is a graduation research by its self. What it is really that drew the attention to this topic? And what is it to be found out? It seemed that the usage of spaces is something that was interesting for this research in the first place. The topic became the usage in the domestic environment. How were the users using their spaces? How is it now? What are the expectations of the users? The overall main question of the research became: ‘Where are the possibilities (and limitations) within the domestic domains for sharing spaces and activities with multiple users.’ Different from the first methodology the focus should be more on the users, the activities and the domains in the domestic environment. In fact the parts of P1 that were the most interesting were selected. For example the possibilities scheme and the activities in the domestic operations scheme. The part of the social economical analyse was processed in a different way. Instead of investigating the behaviour, the users were asked to place different domestic activities in the possiblities scheme. In this way it was still possible to learn something about the social conditions of the shared space. For example which activities are the most suitable for sharing, but behaviour became less interesting. In the scheme below the outcome of all the users together is shown.

![Outcome experiment](own illustration, 2015)
The different methods used further were: case study, interview, observation and literature research. This new method gave the opportunity to make the research, and especially the outcome visual. The research is visualising, through different points of view, to which of the domestic domains the activities performed in a domestic environment tend towards, and therefore more or less collective. The insights from literature (the past and the present), the (future) users and the practical experience (case-studies) were translated into schemes. One scheme combining them all was the final outcome of the research and the start of the design. What the most used for the design was the ability for activities to be flexible. The activity that is the most flexible is the activity where the most possibilities lie, suitable for the private space as well as the collective shared space.

The answer to the research question is therefore, the possibilities within the domestic domains for sharing spaces and activities with multiple users lie in the ability of activities to be flexible. The limitations lie in the most stern activities only suitable for the private or shared space. With this outcome, the design goal was determined as: ‘Creating (collective) living spaces for groups of multiple users in combination with a (social) public space at Noordplein in Rotterdam. The spaces are designed from the performed activity, in and around the domestic sphere.’

The design was automatically divided into two parts, a collective living and a public space. The challenge in this task was the border between those two and the benefit that could or could not be derived from the combination. Since the research focussed on the activities performed in the domestic environment the start of to design was designing activities for a group of 8-12 people. What do we need if we design a house where we can only sleep? Or eat? It gave a different view on the activities alone. For example, by designing only for sleeping the orientation towards the sun becomes important, whereas if you design it in combination with other activities the location of the bathroom is more important. It was a good exercise but did not bring the design as a whole. If looking back at the project now, the information gained during this exercise is not really used in the final design.
This is because the activities stayed independent from each other whereas my design required to combine the different activities and to create a border between the activities.

What is implemented carefully is designing from the most private cell, actually the most limited, unflexible activities. The most private activities, derived from the research (sleeping, showering and going to the toilet), are combined in one cell. This is assigned to one person. From this one cell you will gradually share more and more, first by two persons, then four and so on. The dwellings are connected to a public (spatially attractive) deck. This deck is also the route across the location, Noordplein in Rotterdam. It is the connection between the visitor and the resident. The deck lies between three dwelling floors and is literally the connection between those floors by stairs. The border between the dwellings and the public space is a wooden wall. By using different materials, different heights and sizes of the spaces, the functions are explained.

If looking critically at the spaces, use of material, relation between research and design and the visual outcome, further exploration can be done regarding the wall and the possibility to put more permanent activities in the wall or at the border between the different groups of users. The activities derived from the research are all positioned in the design, but a big part of the design is about a public space and the border between the private spaces. This is an opportunity to research on a bit more. Furthermore the visual outcome, ‘the look of the design’ and the way the public space is shaped can work really well, even if you would only use it to walk through.

As written in the beginning it is difficult to describe a process of such a long period. The most important turning points in the design and research are described. The small break in the project, the change of methodology while keeping to the fascination made the project improve. A lot has happened last year and the rhythm of this project brought serenity and always and opening to continue learning. It was a pleasure to work on, the rhythm and regularity from this project will be missed.