INTRODUCTION:

The project is located in the Binnengasthuis area in Amsterdam. This part of the city of Amsterdam houses a mixture of buildings and architecture styles, a rarity where many famous Amsterdam architects have contributed to. The spatial structure of this part of Amsterdam is unique, the location is the result of a layered construction in which the buildings have been fitted in combination with green structures (courtyards, streets and squares). The project is a renovation of 80s social housing building in the heart of the binnengasthuis area. With my design I wanted to create programmatic social diversity that could be also reflected in the architectural image through a variety of forms, materials and facade elements in a social housing block of the 1980s which is lacking of these qualities. This reflection paper is part of the graduation studio. The goal of this paper is to reflect the final product of the studio, which is the design but also on the methodological approach which led to it.

In the next paragraphs I will discuss the following aspects:

- the relation between the theme of the graduation lab and the subject chosen by the student within this framework.

- the relationship between the project and the wider social context.

- the relation between the methodical line of approach of the graduation lab and the method chosen by the student in this framework.

- the relation between research and design

The relation between the theme of the graduation lab and the subject chosen by the student

The central theme of the studio is Housing in Historic context of Amsterdam. Being born and raised in Venice, Italy, which is another European city that faces the same kind of problems in housing like Amsterdam, I developed a sensible vision on this subject, with the aim to find out new possibilities of housing in the city center that could bring a more broad range of housing types for varied spectrum of people.

The assignment for our studio was to design a housing project within the boundaries of the Binnengasthuis terrain, former monastery, and hospital area which today mostly host University administration buildings and Humanity faculties. We started the studio in groups. Each group had a defined topic of research which was set by our tutors.

My chosen topic of research was the 1970s 1980s urban renewal and housing architecture in Amsterdam. Although the architecture of these buildings contrast with the 17th and 18th century architecture, they hold certain social principles which are very important for the well being of their inhabitants. The decision for this specific topic came also from my personal interest in reading about Aldo Van Eyck, Herman Hertzberger, Theo Bosch and many of the Dutch of architects which were active in this period and their, attention in there architecture for the human individuality and the spontaneous, diverse and natural side of the city.
In today’s housing shortage, the ways of doing of the architects in that era can be considered as a powerful source of information. Therefore for the graduation research I decided to look back at some examples of housing in the architecture of the 1970s and 1980s in the city center of Amsterdam, and specifically to the Nieuwmarkt housing project by Theo Bosch and Aldo Van Eyck, and the Binnen-gasthuis housing block by Paul de Ley.

The relation between the project and the wider social context

Today Amsterdam, like many other cities across the world, is being haunted by gentrification which is dividing the city into economical levels and as a consequence increasing the cost of living and particularly of housing. The lively mixture of the population that has always been present in Amsterdam’s city center is being threatened by this process. The current housing stock is no longer in accordance with the residents’ aspirations and the City of Amsterdam is therefore seeking to shift the emphasis on social rented housing (which started in 1902 with the housing act) to more privately owned housing.

For this reason, many inhabitants of Amsterdam continue to live in social rented housing, causing stagnation in the housing market. Furthermore the younger sector of the population (young couples, apprentices, graduates, etc.) struggle to find suitable accommodation. The risk is that Amsterdam will completely lose the identity and the liveliness of its local communities, the socially produced spaces in its urban environment and also the attention for human individuality which had been hugely praised by some prominent (and socially active) Dutch architects of the 1970s and 80s.

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

Studio Approach:

The studio of Heritage and Housing has two main goals. The first step in the methodology applied concerns the conclusion in a value assessment of the the urban planning, architectural and technical analysis of existing context, with deep understanding into the history of the place and the current situation and problematics. The second step would be to implementation strategies which must also be developed for ethical, aesthetic, intangible and technical improvement.

In the first semester we developed a research report and we formulated a research question which would be the central theme throughout our graduation project. With the input of the research and analysis made in the first semester, I chose to work in an objective way, creating my own method of generating a toolbox of architecture elements for the design intervention.

Personal Approach:

In the P2 presentation I stated that it would be auspicious to demolish the entire building. After developing new ideas I made the choice of keeping the main structural body in order to remember its significance during the period it was constructed, yet at the same time making my own intervention more clear and visible with the use of a diverse structure, materialization and architectural form. This led to my research question; “How do you manage to create programmatic social diversity that could be also reflected in the architectural image through a variety of forms, materials and facade elements in a social housing block of the 1980s which is lacking of these qualities?”

I approached this question from two different aspects: Creating social variety in the building based on introducing different types of apartments and creating a new architectural language in the fa-
cade through new elements and volumes. In order to work with this approach in an objective way, I based the new design on a modular approach which would create a new type of system within the building.

In order to bring a functional variety in the building, I had to rearrange the organization of the apartments and public functions and I based the new arrangement on a modular approach. In addition to this I wanted to tackle the gentrification process which is happening in Amsterdam by choosing not a specific type of users but rather a more heterogeneous and balanced mix of target groups: young and old, middle class, startups etc., which eventually will correspond into different housing sizes such as small studios, apartments, or maisonettes. Furthermore the new intervention incorporates other functions than living, for example a kindergarten and a study space/ cafe for the university in order add to the diverse mix which is typical of Amsterdam.

In Paul de Ley's building the typology of the apartments are quite similar, besides a small number of exceptions. Despite the fact that in this building a variety of elements are present, they all contain the same language throughout the project and are based on serial production and economic detailing, repetition and using materials which are hardly recognizable throughout the surrounding.

For this reason, what I wanted to do was to bring the heterogeneity of Amsterdam in this design intervention that would result in a dynamic architectural typology. Consequentially the new intervention contains eight different types of apartments where a variety of population groups can find themselves a suitable apartment. The diversity of the apartments draws the new architectural language of the building which is less rigid and repetitious thanks to the new volumes that appear together with the new apartment types.

In order to achieve this variety I made the subjective decision to create a personal toolbox of elements based on the historic architectonic features of the city of Amsterdam and at the same time I took the decision of replacing the facades because the detailing of the current building does not apply to todays standards also in regards to its technology. The new toolbox would bring together the various elements in Amsterdam and the possibility of their serial production for large scale project such as this one.

The relation between the research and design:

I started this design intervention as a research the buildings of this period, then focusing more on the Binnengasthuis project by Paul the Ley. Exploring the project on the Binnengasthuis I was fascinated with the quantity of principles and ideas that this building could hold. The problem arises though when I realized

![Diagrams showing some of the modular window elements, above; (a) window elements; (b) composition array.](image)
that these principles were compatible with the housing idea of the 1980s which were based on the equality or similarity of the dwellings which are reflected also in the exterior appearance of the building, resulting in a monotonous and repetitive architecture.

Today as a society we focus more on diversity in the city and we try to recognize ourselves in a larger range of buildings, in which housing has to declare its own variety. This situation pushed me to explore what kind of possibilities the building offers for contemporary housing needs, unlike the 1980s when the project was constructed. Therefore the question to my self was: “What can I do today, as a student of architecture of 2015, to add to this building that will make it catch up with the period we are now living in, and to make it answer the needs of today’s diverse and fast changing society in a more dynamic way?”.

My design project tries to show a way of integration of a housing project of the 1980s into our modern times. The aim of this project was to explore ways of doing, defining certain methodological guidelines that could help architects to transform these buildings into a contemporary housing projects and to define them with new aesthetics which are based on the synthesis of typical architectural elements of Amsterdam Therefore this research is not only applicable at the Binnengasthuis terrain but can be useful in some of these transformation of the 80’s housing stock in the Netherlands where these frictions are visible.

CONCLUSION

During the graduation studio I was also encouraged to explore complexity on different scales, from social, to political, to the architectural language and so on. My ambitions for this studio were to discover architectural methods that could help me create variety on both a programmatic and aesthetically level, in order to alter the sizes of the apartments together with bringing architectural variety to the exterior appearance of the project and I think it succeed.

Nevertheless I am not entirely satisfied with the final appearance of design product, because i think it needs further elaboration in the sense that the architecture is not complete or finished. In my opinion the overall project is lacking of certain detail. There are many different architectural elements in this project which differentiated each block which form the building from one another but I believe that by introducing even more elements to the toolbox, this could really create a successful final product.

Or What if each block could be designed an individual architects yet at the same time following and respecting the guideline which have already been defined? would the project improve? or get worse? It would be interesting to know in the future how this project can develop more.

In designing this project I also came across certain understatements, for example it was very hard to introduce in this building different kinds of programs, because this 80s structure was designed in a way that it could house few types of apartments, the resilient concrete structure with its 2.5 meter grid has proven to be to narrow to accommodate completely new functions ( such as public ) the height between the concrete slabs is only 2.80meters which is not enough to host public function at today standards. But yet again it did allow me to create different types of apartments for different types of users.

This project may be a small contribution to science but in a wider sense it is also a statement on what I believe architecture should be about. In the contemporary world architects are often faced with existing urban realities- rarely do we have a situation where we have to deal with a complete fertile ground; at least this is the case in Europe. To find solutions, extensive research must be undertaken in order to fully understand and adequately respond to the requirements of the project and interpret the needs of the user. In my opinion the modern architectural project should represent a synthesis of the constituent elements of the city, where everything is generated by a simultaneous engagement, creative and critical; that claims the right to a modern language and spatial organization responsive to the needs of today’s dynamic societies.
To sum up, this year long operation was extremely valuable for me, I have learned that dealing with the existing, but also the historic context means to deal with a certain level of complexity between what can be achieved and the vision of the architect or designer. During my investigations I discovered new opportunities and new methods and I think this process has had for me not just a scientific/academic value, but also it was of great significance at a personal level in a continuous exercise on how to balance interests, priorities and feasibility.

REFERENCE


LITERATURE AND GENERAL PRACTICAL PREFERENCE


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