Public Incubator
Afstudeeropdracht Schiekadeblok

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This graduation project for the Public Realm studio is part of the Public Buildings Department within the Faculty of Architecture at Delft, University of Technology under supervision of Ir. Susanne Komossa, Ir. Nicola Marzot and Ir. Jelke Fokkinga. This graduation project is a combined project of Christiaan van Hegelsom, Mark van Strien and Jeroen Dijkgraaf in which each of the members had an individual approach towards their design.

The studio explores the meaning of Public Realm in architecture. In this research, new programs and strategies have to be developed to meet the city’s social, political and economic problems, and needs in the 21st century. Analysis of the site, not only shows the location of the design assignment in its historical, contemporary and future context but also includes spatial, social and economical aspect.

The location for this project focuses on the ‘Stationskwartier’ and the ‘Schiekadeblok’. This site is mainly interesting due to its decaying public spaces, large contrast, and its disfunctioning position within the main economical district of Rotterdam.
The research of this project deals with the disconnections of public space which are experienced by the pedestrian. It concerns the fragmentation of experiences which forms the starting point of our project. In the physical realm solutions can be found in strengthening the experience of the city fragments and hence the location of the project.

The rapid change of experience while moving through these city fragments formed the basis for revaluing the existing Schiekadeblok in order to stress the concept of change of experience within public space. In the city of Rotterdam, buildings are being demolished and rebuilt completely. Because of this destructive rage it becomes difficult for people to get a bond with the physical city itself. Rotterdam needs to revalue its existing structures in order to build the memory of the city. This collective memory is essential for the experience of the city.

Within the city, urban economy often plays an important role in the disconnections of public space. The program for this project is chosen for its relation between public space and urban economy. It deals with current problems that exist in Rotterdam and on the design location. Reacting on the image of the “working city,” the program makes a relation between economical, social and spatial problems by opening up urban economy and regenerating public space.

These topics formed our main researchareas which led to a masterplan
A morphological analysis and a mapping of the pedestrian experience of Rotterdam, led to the conclusion that the city is fragmented. PLAN ‘45 of Witteveen and van Traa already shows the separation by roads and a programmatic division in different areas. Neighbourhoods were mapped based on the experience of the pedestrian. Based on differences in scale, architecture, function, street profile and users, these neighbourhoods were mapped on top of the Rotterdam layout. Due to the scale and close proximity, the experience of these neighbourhoods cause a rapid change of experience while moving through the city. This is the quality of Rotterdam.
Lijnbaan as fragment within its context.

The transition from housing to the large economical district of Rotterdam.

One of the last historical elements left.

Fragmentation Analysis Rotterdam.
The Stationskwartier is characterized as a "large-scale economy" and portrays itself as such, in a programmatic and typological manner. Large concerns with a national or international span, like the Nationale Nederlanden, ABN, Fortis and Unilever settled their headquarters along the Weena. Typologically this resulted in large building ensembles.

The ‘Schiekadeblok’, however, is a collection of small companies. Typologically this results into a chain of individual buildings.

The good thing here is that the small firms have a more local attitude which bonds with the city. The block however, should also have an experience which is comparable with its surroundings.

A new combination, on a programmatic and a typological manner, with a local feeling and a more global character should improve the location as a whole.
The fragmentation of Rotterdam has a big impact on the public space. By defining important streets as the Lijnbaan and the Weena, the streets in-between become rather undefined, resulting in places like the Delftseplein and Delftsestraat, which have no interest for the public. One of the main causes is the non-functional public plinth, lack of street benches and greenery in these parts of the city. Considering that Delftseplein connects to the central station it has a high potential for people entering the city. Today, the street exclusively offers entrances to parking garages. A definite increase of public functions and a transformation of the large private buildings in the plinth is needed.
A similar discontinuity of the public carpet appears in the Delftsehof. The function of the parkinglot and the backsides on the plinth of the surrounding buildings are causing the disfunctioning of the place. Though the hidden square offers a fantastic spatial and programmatic opportunity for people who explore the city. The square can even be seen as a spatial interval in the line of streets and buildingblocks. A chance to develop a new version of the Dutch Urban Block.
“Laten we nou eerst eens zorgen voor een homogeen stadscentrum met een kosmopolitische uitstraling. In plaats daarvan blijven we slopen en bouwen en slopen en bouwen… Het is bijna een proces van creatieve destructie. Zo ontstaat er geen culturele basis en zijn er in Rotterdam onvoldoende, structurele herkenningspunten die juist moeten zorgen voor binding van bewoners met de stad”.

(Quote stadshistoricus P. van de Laar, Metro 3 feb 2009)

Due to the destructive rage, which Van de Laar is describing, it becomes difficult for people to get bound with the physical city itself. Rotterdam needs to revalue its existing structures in order to build the memory of the city. This collective memory is essential for the experience of the city, and therefore, it is important to look more carefully to the transformation of the Schiekadeblok.

By stressing the idea of an internal court-yard, creating a square with a collective and internal atmosphere, the significance of the urban block is strengthened. By using the existing structure for a new purpose the building has much more value for the memory of Rotterdam and at the same time it has economical advantage.
Rotterdam is often referred to as a “working city”. In general, Rotterdam has a low education level which is leading to increasing social, cultural and economical differences between inhabitants of Rotterdam. Because of these increasing differences, students, starter’s en people with a high educational level are moving out of the city. In order to stop this exodus of people with a high educational level, the municipality has to invest more initiative that request a collaboration between businesses, knowledge organizations and the government bureau. They need to invest in new and young companies in order solve their existing problems.

An incubator is a catalyst for entrepreneurs and businesses, which assists starting companies in developing healthy organizations. Within Rotterdam and throughout the Netherlands incubators are connected to specific business segments. By bringing these different business segments together, innovations are stimulated. By increasing the scale and thus the impact of the incubator can grow into an urban attractor, because of its ability to connect a huge variety of ideas and people.

The idea of an incubator as a collective of small companies, corresponds with the idea of a local feeling with a global impact, and thus fits within the idea of the large-scale economy.

The incubator as an urban attractor does not necessarily start a spin-off between the public and urban economy, resulting most of the time in a closed off environment towards the street. Therefore we started working on a program that could enhance this relation and in which both entries would benefit. Three functions where selected that could create the transition between urban economy and the public.

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Revalue and intensify

The transformations that we propose are based on a revaluation and intensification of the existing Schiekadeblok. By changing the existing way of functioning, or adding other parts new connections and interpretations can be made.

Transformations of the block

In order to create an urban block and enhance the idea of an internal space a row of buildings is added that follow the line of the train tracks. Due to this transformation the location becomes a unity with inner urban density.

To unite the different buildings and provide a better connection for the program, a tube-like internal connection is made on the third floor. By connecting the different buildings, the block becomes a whole.

A new volume, in the middle of the large former parking lot, creates different smaller squares, with each a specific character.

The last transformation is the adding of the three volumes that will house the transition, between the public and the private program. Due to the completion of the block, the internal connection and the collective squares the plot is functioning as a unity and is therefore able to compare itself with the buildings on the Weena, and at the same time contain its local attitude.
Public transitions

Through the different transformations, the public transitions changed. On the outside of the block a public plinth has changed the appearance of the block, creating more liveliness on these streets. At the same time the entrances of the office have become passages between the outside and inside of the block. With the idea of a front- and a backdoor entrance, the relation between the incubator offices and the street is maintained.

When entering the urban block through one of the three openings, a change of sphere takes place.

The sphere changes from public to a more collective experience due to the fact that the square are directly related to the incubator building. In fact the squares form the external connection between the different incubator entrances. The close connection between the square and the building should stimulate people to go outside, to be part of the incubator itself.
With the design for the urban scenario and the three public additions, the spatial differences between the existing and the new parts were used as a metaphor to manipulate the relation between urban economy and the public. As the existing structure holds the incubator, the new parts are reacting within different concepts on this existing structure, interlocking the 2 programs. The individual projects are all based on two principles: spatial change of the existing structure and the addition of new spaces. Both concepts generate new architectural experiences.

The existing buildings offer a great flexibility due to the grid system. Within the projects we searched for new spaces by transforming the existing structure in order to find a new architectural meaning. This architectural meaning was found in new configurations of materialization, measurements, construction, color and size.