

SHAPING THE OUTSIDE SPACE THROUGH PLAY NARRATIVE



reflection on the graduation project

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Reflection

Aspect 1. The relationship between the theme of the graduation lab and the subject / case study chosen by the student within this framework (location / object)

The flowscapes graduation studio seeks to reinterpret infrastructures as flows and processes that allow the development of social and ecological interactions. The topics of the studio encompass flows such as transport, green and water landscape infrastructure and energy flows.

In the context of the project “Shaping the outside space through play narrative”, play is defined as an action that invites to constant reinterpretation of space, and to development of new relations between the user and the surroundings. The project is concerned with the introduction of strategies related to play to stimulate a new dynamic in a derelict area, to disclose and activate a hidden identity.

The project focuses on the lack of identity and the huge contrast in dynamics of flows found in derelict, interstitial spaces, located in dense, central urban areas. In the context of Feijenoord area, the focus is on water infrastructure as a potential structuring element of the site, transforming the two harbour areas from the backside of the area to an active riverfront. The study and proposal for the Feijenoord area consisted of defining specific flows and patches and designing them as flexible and dynamic mobility places. The strategy aims to intervene in specific intersection points and thresholds, which act as a structure for the mobility routes.

Reflection

Aspect 2. The relationship between research and design

In the context of the studio, both design research and research by design methods are incorporated. Using the two approaches contributed to the formulation of a coherent design, based on both theoretical background, and observations and analysis of the site. The process of selecting, hierarchizing and incorporating play related theoretical principles from various fields – philosophy, architecture, and urbanism – into a landscape architecture project was a complex one. The observation and conclusions of the site analysis were necessary in order to extract and define the design principles – polycentric, flexible and dynamic. The design framework – polycentric, flexible and dynamic – is applicable at different scales and different site locations that present similar characteristics – derelict, central, urban, living areas.

The main play related design framework researched was the one defined by LeFaivre: polycentric, interstitial, and participatory. The study of the design framework directed the approach for the project: the layered approach.

While successfully used in case of Amsterdam – City as Playground, the design framework is only partially fit for nowadays derelict, dense, central urban areas. In such areas there are little to no left-over spaces that the interstitial design tool addresses. Additionally, developing participatory design is more successful in small scale designs, rather than in strategy proposals.

Reflection

Aspect 2. The relationship between research and design

The chosen study case as a derelict central urban area is Feijenoord island, located in Rotterdam. The project studies the design of the urban landscape in relation with the notion of play. Looking into the characteristics of the site, I used the polycentric design tool that addresses the routes and places in the area. As an addition to the design framework, the flexible design tool was used, one that addresses the age and cultural background of the population. Having a landscape architecture perspective, an important role is played by the natural dynamics, in addition to the social dynamics. Site specifically, the dynamic design tool focused on the water tidal range and on the vegetation layer.

The particularity of the polycentric, flexible and dynamic design framework is that it does not focus solely on the social layer but also implies the way the natural dynamics can contribute to an interactive and playful environment, and as a result can contribute to the identity of the place.

For the detailed design, I researched the work by Stevens that defines 4 types of play – vertigo, simulation, competition and chance defined in relation with the uses of public space. They are based on the four types defined by Callois - âgon, alea, mimicry, and ilinx. In Stevens' 'The ludic city' research, specific elements are emphasized - the intersection, boundaries, thresholds, and urban furniture. Following this line of thinking, I further detailed and expanded them according to the specificity of the site: diversity in vegetation, height difference, water, and materiality. Within the context of the project some additional elements were defined such as level of enclosure, light (reflection of light), sound, and art elements. All these elements can be re-examined in future projects - emphasized or muted, according to the site specificity.

Having input from theories with roots in various fields and feedback of the site allowed me to work through scales, and adjust the design framework from the strategy proposal phase to the detail design phase.

Reflection

Aspect 3. The relationship between the methodological line of approach of the graduation lab and the method chosen by the student in this framework

The layered approach was used in order to better understand and depict the complexity of the topic of play and the complexity of the site. The underlying natural, cultural and urban context where studied through analysis of maps, old postcards, photographs and site visits. Through this analysis the flows, patches and borders were identified. The social layer was addressed through site observation, interviews, and definition of specific actors. The play layer incorporates different types of play spaces identified in the area. The layered analysis contributes to the definition of the design framework – polycentric, flexible and dynamic.

Working through scales emphasizes the applicability of the design framework from neighborhood scale to the urban square. The design framework defined initially as polycentric, flexible and dynamic, is further detailed until it reaches the definition of specific spatial characteristics such as difference in height, vegetation diversity, materialization, light sound and art elements. The design strategy is characterized by both top-down and bottom up approach.

During the span of the project, I was closely guided by my mentors in order to gain knowledge about the topic of play and the way to translate it into the design. To complement the guidance from the two mentors I have also attended several workshops and conferences. These workshops and conferences entailed the topic of play and narrative writing. Moreover, I have engaged with PhD architecture and urbanism students that research the topic of play and had brainstorming sessions and meetings where my work was reviewed. In the project I explored different ways of representation, from hand drawings to computer drawings and physical models. Plans, axonometries, two dimensional schematic perspectives and three dimensional perspectives are used in order to represent the notion of play.

Reflection

Aspect 4. The relationship between the project and the wider social context

Most often, central derelict areas undergo a process of gentrification that lead to displacement of population and social conflicts. The play related strategy in derelict urban areas has the role to create and recreate an identity that counterbalances the negative effects of gentrification. By designing specific playful focus points, taking in consideration flows of people, dynamic of water and vegetation, and multiple uses and users of the space, the image of the area is recreated.

One of the specific areas of design is central area of Feijenoord, Persoonsdam area. The proposal spanned from the need of gathering different flows into one promenade route, to designing specific play areas, water related areas that invite to contemplation, simulation, and to areas that change their functions according to the time of day, week and moth (market, exhibition, skate area).