P4 Reflection Paper

For the graduation studio The Place of Work, I made a redesign for the former VROM-ministry in The Hague. The building, next to The Hague central station will house two ministries and the Immigration office in the near future.

DESIGN AMBITION

When I started with this project, I set myself two main goals. The first was to give the building a transparent, inviting character towards the public. Government buildings have a public function but the entrance and lobby are often insufficiently inviting and transparent to the public and users. A reason for that, are the privacy and security issues of the ministries.

The second was to improve the internal structure of the former VROM ministry. In the old situation, this was not clear for the users and visitors, with as result that they got lost inside the building.

RESEARCH

The reason why I choose this studio is because of the focus on the users. I find it interesting to design from their point of view, their needs and their experiences. In this project, there are two groups of users, the public and the employees. Both groups have different needs towards the building.

The public needs to connect with the building, and the user of the building. To lower the threshold of entering the building, I researched ‘the act of entering’. I think that the entrance of the building is not only the passing of the vertical plane, but an experience that will lead you into the building. In the end, I had an overview of elements that give an (government) building a transparent and inviting character according to the people of The Hague, which I used in my design.

For the employees I investigated the different kind of workspaces. It is hard to create the ‘ideal’ workspace for everybody. By exploring the different kind of workspaces I was able to join them onto one office floor. In this way I tried to create different kind of workspaces to meet everyone’s needs.
DESIGN STRATEGY

One of the biggest obstacles for me was the size of the building. So I started by making a clear scheme for the whole building to make it understandable for me and the future users. Therefore, I divided the functions into three layers, the public layer on the ground floor, the connection layer on the fourth floor and the work layer from the sixth floor up. Every layer has a different focus, and has its own character.

The connection with the public is mainly focused on the ground floor. By taking away part of the building, a square appeared. By adding different functions around the square, this will become a place to stay, instead a place to move. Different elements will guide the public and the employees inside the building. The public layer will have the feeling of a public square, the materials used for the outside square will continue inside the building to bring the feeling of the square inside the building.

The second layer will focus on ‘meeting'; places are created where different kind of conversations can happen. There will be an international congress and meeting centre situated on this floor. The users of this layer will not only be the employees, but also the visitors of the ministries. The connection with the public will be a visual connection from the lobby to the square. The different materials used will help to define the different uses on this floor. Harder materials are used for the circulation, while softer materials are used for more private conversations.

The work layer needs to provide a healthy work environment for the employees. Because there is not one work environment that is suitable for every employee, I tried to create different kind of workspaces to meet everyone’s needs. Because this is the most private part of the building, lighter and softer materials will be used for these floors.

One of my goals was to make the internal structure understandable for the users. By moving the main circulation outside the existing cores, the main route through the building was made visible. This helps the user to orientate inside the building. The main circulation is accentuated by the materials used, to guide the user naturally through the building.

When you move through the building, you move from public to private. This will also be visible in the materialisation of the building, you will move from hard to soft materials, from the outdoor square into the ‘living room’. By using the different kind of materials consistent, the uses of the different spaces will be clear for the users.
With my design I don’t want to ignore the existing building, but make use of its values. To transform it, instead of rebuild it. The existing structure is very typical for the building, and I want to preserve that. This structure also made is possible that a big amount of daylight accesses the building. I consider this of high value. So besides the removal of part of the building to create the square, I’ve adjust the building for its new function with minimal interventions. By simply move the main circulation along the cores, instead of through it, the building became much clearer. It is interesting to see what the effect of such a simple change in this big building can improve the whole experience.

At the beginning of this project, I set myself two goals. Improve the internal structure of the building and to give the building a transparent, inviting character towards the public.

Because of the interventions I have made, the building has now a clear internal structure that naturally guides the users and the visitors through the building. The displacement of the main circulation and the new sightlines improved the orientation of the users inside the building.

A big building as the VROM-building needs a clear sequence of spaces to help to understand the building. The introduction of the three different layers in the design, and the consistent use of materials, clarifies the way the building works. The routing through the building that I proposed connects the three layers with each other. And the materialisation will guide the user along that route.

To create the transparent, inviting character of the building, I used elements that came out of my research among the public of The Hague, such as a guiding element on the square and the surprise of the atrium if one enters. Whether there elements will have the desired effect is not to say. Elements which operate for one person, do not need to have the same effect on the other. But I think that the element in combination with the location of the building and the functions will work as planned. By mapping the different options and combine them in my project, I have met everybody’s needs.

The main problem I did encounter was the scale of the building. I found it hard to get a grip on the size of it. This kind of building requires a different design approach; every decision has an effect on a big part of the building. I was not used to work on this scale, so for me it was very instructive. The way I handled the scale is to work with repetition and exceptions. Repetition to get some clarity inside the building and exceptions to help the users orientate.