REFLECTION P4 AND P5 (ALL TRACKS)

University Library Amsterdam – The Library as Public Retreat

“CITY CAMPUS”

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The first research and analysis on *Library as a Public Retreat* took place within the design studio as a group, as described in the Graduation Plan (P2). To understand the rest of the content, this has been the situation:

The research for the design within the design studio started off with a one-week-workshop. Through intensive talks we came to a matrix of three types of buildings that could suit the location; 1. the courtyard type, 2. filling the plot type, 3. the object type. After this we enhanced five points; 1. context, 2. typicality, 3. spatial organization, 4. appearance and 5. role of the interior to describe its meaning both for the design as for the location.

The research for the design within its context started off with exploring four different locations. By taking position in choosing one location, the first step into the graduation project was made.

1. The relationship between research and design

The base for the research of the theoretical part took place in the research seminar. An antropological approach has been used to find out about the program that is both wishful for the user as well as for the context. The information for this has been gained by a questionnaire. The conclusion from this questionnaire led to the headlines of the design in use coming up.

With the anthropological research it became clear that the UvA itself would like to create a new university library in the inner city of Amsterdam, since it is spread over four campuses and each campus has its own study center. In this case the UvA also still needs a studycenter (library) in the inner city campus (Binnengasthuis). This means that the image of the UvA connected with the inner city can maintain. With the questionnaire I found that for the user student it is very likable to study in the inner city of Amsterdam since it is appreciated as a place to study by its surroundings. It is also a place to meet with activities afterwards - connected to the innercity. To specify what is needed in a new university library, the answers to the questionnaire described what routines of students are. The conclusion is that the students use the library as a club. They come together to chat and study and that is basically it.

This part of the research offered a pragmatic way of looking at the project or design.

The base for the research of situational part took place in the design studio. After the workshop we continued with exploring four locations in Amsterdam as a new destination for a university library; 1. Binnengasthuis, 2. Sarphatistraat, 3. Frederiksplein 4. Zuidas. In this way we lit the historical and structural meaning of Amsterdam, by describing its relations to the (inner) city. I've learned that this part of the research was rather vague or rhetorical and did not determine any design decision at all. I chose to stick with the anthropological research, which describes both the wishes for the users as the wishes for the UvA why a new library is to be placed on the Binnengasthuis.

So by actually comparing these two researches I clinged the design to the Binnengasthuis. By this I’ve learned the most important part: to rely on a pragmatic view, which can deliver the most useful information.

The base for the research of the thematical part we made with analyzing the Rolex Center (Lausanne), Bibliotheque Nationale (Paris), State Library (Berlin) and the British Library (London) was to get a notion on famous images of libraries. After
that we continued with price competition entries for Jussieu by Herzog de Meuron, Toyo Ito, Jean Nouvel and OMA as well as entries for price competition BNF by Siza, Stirling, Perrault and OMA to see how different the same questioned program can be treated.<theme>

This part of the research could inspire one to find an image with which one could continue.

This spectrum of different kind of researches took place during the entire Msc 3.

I think the relationship between the research and the design can either be seen as stretching one student’s own position or feeding the knowledge one may need to know before taking position.

The part of the research in which we made models and proposed quickly a design on site has worked on an intuitive level. In my opinion, the intuitive level of the research connects directly to the design itself.

2. The relationship between the theme of the studio and the chosen subject

The framework Library as a Public Retreat offered me to think about public affaires. Because precision in formulation and expression was asked and since these buildings serve everybody, social questions arised. I chose to develop the Binnengasthuis as a rather neutral inner terrain of the very inner city of Amsterdam to point out that with the matters of architecture rather closed areas can open up. The surrounding buildings can find their backdrop on this inner place. Now one can say: “Nobody asked for this area to be opened up”. It is still the line of approach in this thesis I wanted to follow, since I did not try to make a new interior for a library, but one for the city, which benefits has been studied and explored during Msc3.

In my proposal there are three buildings, organized by its program (outcome from the questionnaire): studycenter, seminarbuilding and chatcafe, the last one connected to the Mensa (UvA). They are also organized by the typological thinking; all constructed with the same types of construction and dimensions. The spatial qualities are therefor not defined by the buildings itself but by the surrounding elements and its connecting views. The decision was made that the building itself would never want to work like that. With the idea that the buildings or the interiors are created by its function like a painting or movie that never changes, I chose for the same kind of architecture, so the more obvious it becomes that context and situation are the one that change.

3. The relationship between the method of the studio and the chosen method

The method of the studio during the design process consists mostly of drawings on different kind of scales to create an overall image of the quality of the plans. After this, a precise model is required. With these products, other products can be easily adressed like interior photographs.

Since a presentation model is a very time costing product, my planning totally did not work; it was a flop. I only know by now that I could have started thinking about the final presentation model and see this as the most indefinite product of all products or - more important - how to make this indefinete model in a quite early stage. My own chosen method has been often very mathematical, which helped me a lot in the end.
by realizing the model in the camlab. Adjustments could be quickly made. So the original plan of the graduation plan (P2) I should have projected in a far more early stage for the product model, following the three points in this order 1. Makability, 2. Usability and 3. Esthetics. Not only for me to learn to decide, but also to follow the method of the studio, since a model is a requested endproduct.

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

The ambition to make Binnengasthuis a public area as a connecting factor for the UvA lasted during the research and thinking about other options of placement of a university library in the city of Amsterdam. It made the first ambition only stronger.

After research and thinking of other options for dealing with the impact of a university library on wider locations than on the Binnengasthuisarea, the conclusion was made that the most realistic way to modernize the downtown campus of the UvA meant creating a public space in the interior of the surrounding enclave of belonging buildings to the UvA. Other locations on a wider scale from the inner city could undermine the historical power of the library (image of UvA). The most central and connecting place of the Binnengasthuis area could get an interior for the surrounding to make economy flow more creative.

By placing a university Library in the middle of the centre, the economics of the inner city can rather benefit this impact. The social housing in this area now may put a hold on one of what could be the most refined places of the inner public city to make economy also work by teachers and students. (Compare the effect of social hierarchy in 20 households living in social housing, or 200 to 2000 persons coming every day to this place to spend their times together).

There has been fight hard for this building in the 70s and it is very special for social history; people standing up for belongings of people that have less. To be very critical at last: maybe nowadays themes as scheefwonen are a pityful result from once social housing, they are rather not sozialising up the inner city of Amsterdam at all. Therefor I suggest to open up this very closed and hidden area of the UvA and create a public interior that could function as a University Library where people would come together to share their minds as unifying UvA’s humanities could be.

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