Reflection Paper
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Studio
Name/Theme: Health@BK/Health Lab
Teachers/Tutors: Engbert van der Zaag, Pierre Jennen & Robert Nottrot

Within the Health Lab we had the freedom to develop our own graduation project related to the main subject: healthcare. The challenge for me was to create my own restrictions by setting goals and guidelines to convert this freedom into a clear project. The studio offered different workshops, discussions and lectures to develop a broader understanding of the healthcare sector and to feed our search for a challenging graduation project. We had to kick off our search by picking a healthcare sector; I decided I wanted to go for a project concerning maternity care. This choice is based on personal preferences, the fact that I was not ready to dive into a more emotional subject and the interesting evolving market of maternity care.

Feeling at home
As a group we developed the overarching theme ‘feeling at home’ (thuisgevoel) to be our first guideline through our graduation process. Together we made a (Dutch) documentary discussing the importance of ‘feeling at home’ in a healthcare facility elaborating on different sectors within the Dutch healthcare system. Through very personal interviews with patients and caregivers combined with research data we show that the wellbeing of the end-users should be taken in serious consideration during the design process of a healthcare facility. The documentary shows that if a patient feels comfortable, or ‘at home’, at a healthcare facility the stress levels drops and the patient will need less medicine and will recover faster. In medical terms they also call this a ‘healing environment’. This environment is also beneficial for the productivity of the staff. With this knowledge I set my first goal: my project will take the user and the importance of ‘feeling at home’ in consideration.

Research directions
In my search for more goals and guidelines to shape my graduation project I got the great opportunity to integrate a real project: the development of a blueprint for a dozen maternity clinics in the Republic of Côtes d’Ivoire. This (small) internship
provided me more guidelines to develop my graduation project. Namely: a region (abstract location), a more defined purpose, a project scale and lots of knowledge. With all this new information I had to take a step back and look at the bigger picture: I could just create a design that ticks all the boxes that the company offered me but I wanted to do more for my graduation project and most importantly stay true to my first goal to create a project that will take its user and their comfort in consideration. Encouraged by my mentors I challenged myself to create a design that is feasible in practise but also proposes to go further than the given directives. That is why I not only studied the demographic data but also the culture, the architecture and the building techniques and materials of the Republic of Côtes d’Ivoire. Furthermore I elaborated my personal fascination for innovative and radically simple Central African architecture with precedent studies.

Design challenges
The next step was to merge my three research subjects, (1) Dutch maternity care and ‘feeling at home’, (2) The Republic of Côtes d’Ivoire and (3) precedent studies of innovative Central African architecture, into one set of design principles. I generated four main principles based on my goals that operate as guidelines trough my graduation project, and I really needed this guidance. First of all the principles were my tower of strength during the rocky period after my main mentor suddenly disappeared. Secondly, after I regained a mentor, the principles challenged me because my mentor would repeatedly encourage me to evaluate and test my design on my own principles in order to detect if I could take my design even a step further. In that way my goals and guidelines influenced and formed my design on different levels and scales. For example: by keeping the ‘feeling at home’ theme in mind, and therefore the increasing intention to create a personal connection to a building, I set the goal that the building should be constructed by local people with local materials. Taking this further to challenge myself in making a reversible and most of all circular building by making this a design principle. This goal is visible through the whole design process, from the first space mapping: pushing towards a modular system, to the construction and the details: pre-fab repetitive structure of smaller timber units.

Broad and general application
By searching for the simplest form, a wooden structure with a rammed earth fill, it is possible to construct the design on different locations with local timber and local earth. Furthermore the base of the building, which is formed like a pier, makes it possible to build the clinic on every type of land. In this way it is suiting the directives of my internship, the maternity clinic can be build on a dozen locations, but it also offers the transferability to other locations. In addition its flexibility is possible to re-size or re-shape the building by adding or removing modules making it easier to adapt to different functions and needs.
Conclusion
The studio initiated and encouraged an extended research period; sometimes this was really frustrating because I spent so much time on the documentary and all the different research subjects that it felt like I would never start designing, to keep myself motivated was challenging sometimes. But when I started with my design I understood why it was so beneficial to develop these clear restrictions based on my research. Because there was so much freedom in the design assignment I would have been lost without my goals and guidelines. With keeping them in mind I was able to make well-considered design choices based on my own set of goals and guidelines resulting in a consistent design.