Reflection report

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Reflection report

Introduction

Based on the described aspects written in the graduation manual, this reflection report will explain the relationship between design and research.

Title of the project: **Third place in the everyday life of patients and parents**

A cancer counselling centre and family house for children and parents at De Baan in Rotterdam.

1 The relationship between research and design, the methodical line of approach of the graduation lab and the method chosen by the student in this framework

The project assignment of the studio is to design a non-hospitalized health care institution on one of the various given sites in Rotterdam. The studio believes that buildings for healthcare are amongst the most urgent design tasks for an architect. For patients, the interior of a care institution becomes a replacement of the whole outside world. Therefore, the focus of the studio is to give priority to the experience and quality of space, above the technical, organizational and financial issues. The proposed sites provide both opportunities for new buildings as well as a number of existing structures to be altered, restored or replaced. In all projects, the relationships between outdoor and indoor spaces and the design and meaning of gardens play a central role.¹

The studio operated by starting with extensive research on the different health care institutions. We researched existing related projects and case studies. In addition, the proposed design locations were analysed. The architectural instruments we found in the reference projects² were explored and tested on the different locations. Drawings and physical models were the main methods during this research. Based on this group research everybody made a choice for both the program and the location.

The program of my choice is a cancer counselling centre for children combined with a Ronald McDonald house. The cancer counselling centre is a place where children can forget that they are sick but also can get support when they need it. It is (besides their home and the hospital) a third place in their daily lives. For the parents it is ideal to combine the counselling centre with a Ronald McDonald house. When their own home is too far from the hospital the Ronald McDonald house offers the solution.

After the choice for program and location was made, we analysed and studied them again individually. A lot of precedent studies where done to come to a suitable program of requirements.

The program of the cancer counselling centre is based on the idea of a Maggie’s Centre. Maggie’s centres are care institutions emerged in England, the concept is founded by Maggie Jencks. She was diagnosed with breast cancer when she was 47 and was told there was nothing to be done, that she only had a few months to live. She then joined an advanced chemotherapy trial and lived for another 18 months.

¹ The Architecture of the Interior, website information
² Like the program, nature and contradictions like privacy/collectivity and specificity/domesticity
During those months she wrote about her patient’s perspective on the impact of the new treatment. Her writings were published in an article called “A View From The Frontline” in which she describes her need for:

- Information
- Psychological support
- Advice on nutrition
- Exercise and relaxation therapies

This article forms the foundation for the program of the Maggie's Centres. The centres offer three kinds of support:

- Social: like group therapy or just talking with other patients,
- Practical: how to deal with hair loss, or advice on eating well
- And emotional: like workshops in expressive art or creative writing.

I gained a lot of knowledge about the program and the desired type of atmosphere by researching different Maggie’s centres.

During the design process I’ve tried to delve into the users group of my building as much as possible. I have done research into the use of Ronald McDonald houses, the relationship between patient and family and how to design spaces specially for sick children. I did this by visiting different locations, interviewing people with experience with cancer and analysing many reference projects.

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

As mentioned before, the graduation studio proposed a number of design locations. After the group research I’ve chosen the location of “De Baan” in Rotterdam. De Baan is located in the city centre and I’ve chosen this site because of the urban context and its easy accessibility. Besides that, the Erasmus Medical Centre is very close and the area contains several schools. Partly due to the location I choose to design the cancer counselling centre specially for children. The program of the building and the location fit well together although it also raises questions. Most of these questions are about the privacy of the patients and how the urban context can contribute to the wellbeing of the patients.

A lot of care institutions are decentralized. Studies have shown that placing patients in a green and natural environment contributes to the healing process. It makes them feel better and heal faster. The positive effects of these “healing environments” should be maintained when designing a care institution in an extreme urban context like “De Baan”. This makes the outside spaces (and therefore the relation inside/outside) become very important.

My main research question during the design process was:

- How to position a care institution in an extreme urban context?

Because this is a rather broad research question, I divided it into sub questions:

- What is the relation between outdoor and indoor spaces in the building?
- How to maintain the privacy of the patients without isolating them from the surrounding?

I answered these questions on the basis of research. This involved precedent studies, excursions and testing different possibilities. Although I thought at the start of the design
process that I would benefit a lot from making physical models I hardly used this research method. On the advice of the teachers I researched a lot by making sketches. This was a quick and easy way to research the different possibilities and has helped me a lot.

Now the project is almost finished, the design is a well-functioning care centre that meets the desires of the different user groups. It provides the neighbourhood with commercial spaces and sport facilities, the patients of the Erasmus Medical Centre with a place for children with cancer to get support and it provides a home for their family members.

3 The relationship between the project and the wider social context

The location of “De Baan” is an interesting transition area from the 19th Century City to the “Wederopbouwstad” (reconstruction city). After the bombing of the second world war the area became an example of post-war architecture.

Nowadays the area is considered a “wederopbouw aandachtsgebied” (reconstruction area) and because of the central location in the city it’s logical to densify the area and realise high rise building blocks. There is no respect for the current urban structure in these new plans. Because of the economic crisis however, these ideas have been stalled for some time. This gives room to reconsider these plans and to explore the option to maintain the unique qualities of the area within new developments. With my design I want to offer an alternative proposal, taking into account the qualities of the area.

These qualities are, in my opinion, the quite atmosphere of the inner street in the area and the small scale feeling, besides the fact that the location is in the city centre. I included these qualities in my design by, for example, staying away from high rise, creating a courtyard which is open towards the street and aiming for a small scale feeling in my building.

The program of my proposal will become more and more important in the future. The Maggie’s Centres that emerged in England are hugely successful and the concept is spreading out all over the world at the moment. The move to create a similar centre aimed specifically at children is a logical next step.

Creating a cancer counselling centre for children, and because of this creating a third place in the lives of sick children and their family, will improve their quality of life.