TOOLBOX FOR SOUTHWEST THE HAGUE
based on principals of Jane Jacobs

GRADUATION PLAN & REFLECTION
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<td>Location: Morgenstond, The Hague</td>
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PREFACE

This graduation plan and reflection is part of the RMIT graduation studio for the University of Technology, Delft. On behalf of the graduation project students are directed to analyze the postwar southwest neighborhoods of The Hague, based on a theme of one’s choosing. In a later stage this research will contribute to an intervention in the district. The project is executed under supervision of ir. L. Spoormans and ir. W. Quist.

Delft, January 2013
Johannes Hendrik René Buitenhuis
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>- Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>- Problem Statement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>- Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>- Goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>- Method description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>- Reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>- Bibliography</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

During the Industrial Revolution many people moved to big cities, where industry had been established. In most Dutch cities the population doubled between 1875 and 1900. To house these people new neighborhoods like de Pijp, de Dapperbuurt in Amsterdam and Spangen in Rotterdam where planned and built after 1875.¹

The deep and narrow three-to-four story houses were usually of poor quality and inhabited by large families in small, dark, and humid rooms. This way of building was known as revolutiebouw and can be recognized by its ground floor commercial space with one door to reach the ground floor and one for the stairwell to the top. The houses were often three windows wide and crowned by a roof frame with a white canopy and a lifting beam.¹

After the Second World War the Netherlands had to deal again with a housing shortage. Influenced by new thinking in the field of urban planning, the industrialization of the building process, a general lack of money, and de Woningwet, a new kind of urban planning and a new architecture was born in Holland.²

These new neighborhoods are often recognizable by monotonous architecture, buildings which are surrounded by green lawns, and facilities which are clustered together. Examples are the neighborhoods Overvecht in Utrecht, De Bijlmer in Amsterdam, Pendrecht in Rotterdam and Morgenstond in The Hague.

Theme

My area of interest can be characterized as ‘Lively public spaces versus lifeless public space.’ The theme was chosen out of my observations of the post-war neighborhoods' often quiet and insufficient public space – there seems to be a striking lack of vitality in these neighborhoods.

Comparing postwar planned districts with unplanned organic neighborhoods or even the prewar urban expansion areas, I can’t help but prefer the well-used Sarphatipark in Amsterdam over the unused green strips of Morgenstond in The Hague. I prefer the lively streets of De Pijp in Amsterdam over the deserted streets of Pendrecht. I prefer the mixture of program and building age over the monotonous architecture of the public housing projects.

1) Schade
2) Cormier
PROBLEM STATEMENT

The realization of prewar expansion neighborhoods was often without a systematic approach nor was attention paid to long term issues.3

It is highly remarkable that these prewar expansion areas, such as de Pijp in Amsterdam and Vogelbuurt in Utrecht, were able to rise above their initial problems and evolve into the most popular districts of the Netherlands.

Unfortunately the outlook is less bright for the postwar neighborhoods, which were designed as a response to the appalling design of the prewar urban expansion districts.

These days there are – despite good intentions, careful planning and government controlled legislation – many concerns about the qualities of these districts. They are associated with unsafe streets due to social and economic problems; the maintenance and renovation is often too expensive; and developers have questions about the abundance of green space and the low property values. Nowadays many postwar neighborhoods are demolished to make place for new projects as a part of urban renewal."}

RESEARCH

Main research question

How does one give shape to a design that contributes to a well-functioning vibrant urban street life?

Additional questions

-What is the philosophy behind the postwar neighborhoods?
-Is it justified to associate postwar neighborhoods with quiet and insufficient public space?
-With the theme “lively public spaces versus lifeless public space” in mind I want to analyze the postwar neighborhood Morgenstond in southwest The Hague and investigate if and why there is a lack of a vibrant street life in this borough, and what the consequences of this absence implies.
-Is it possible to formulate a toolbox/concept design strategy, which produces a design with positive effects on the neighborhoods vibrancy?

GOAL

Toolbox

The aim of the project (concept) is to create a toolbox of design solutions that will lead to the overall enhancement of the living conditions of the neighborhood Morgenstond.

Preliminary urban plan

By using this toolbox at preliminary urban plan scale I create a representative preliminary plan, which shows how the city could grow naturally, using ingredients which stimulate the neighborhood’s vibrancy.

Intervention building block

In addition a intervention at building block scale is designed within the urban plan. The goal is to base architectural, technical and aesthetic interventions on the toolbox.

3) Blom, Jansen, van der Heide
METHOD DESCRIPTION

Exploratory research

The first goal was to create a first impression of the neighborhood. The used method was a guided tour in the neighborhood by housing cooperation Steadion. A second tour, guided by the studio mentor. And a third self-organized tour in order to become familiar with the selected project area.

Literature research

Another used method was a literature research. The literature was selected on basis of the Exploratory research, or was chosen on the advice of supervisors.

Within this literature research I investigated the theory of an opponent of the existing urban typology of the neighborhood. This resulted in an extensive study of the theory of Jane Jacobs.

REFLECTION

Analyzing postwar urbanism

By analyzing post-war urbanism I figured out that a lot of these districts are based on the central ideas behind Ebenezer Howard’s Garden City principles. As a part of this graduation project I researched the relation of the lack of liveliness on streets and Howard’s concepts concerning zoning, decentralization, etc.

Learning from Jane Jacobs

While searching for an answer to my main research question I read The Death and Life of Great American Cities from Jane Jacobs and discovered an interesting overlap between Jacobs’ theory and my chosen theme.

In the book she wrote in 1961 she criticized postwar urbanism. She describes the need for cities to have an extremely complex and intricate diversity of facilities in order to generate a well-functioning vibrant urban street life. And she explains the urban principles which are harmful for the neighborhoods vitality. These principals are visualized into a diagram.

4) Jacobs
A successful neighborhood needs according to Jacobs three main characteristics.⁴

There must be a lot of eyes focused on the public space. These eyes are from the natural users of the street, residents, visitors, owners of the businesses and other facilities. Sufficient visual control is only possible if the buildings are focused on the public streets.

Need for a reasonably constant use of the sidewalks to make sure there are more eyes focused on the street and to make sure the people in the buildings are also keeping their eyes on the streets. Nobody likes to watch out the window onto an empty street as people prefer to see activity. In other words, they enjoy being a spectator of the “ballet of the sidewalks”.

There must be a clear distinction between public space and private space. Different spaces must not merge into an undefined space without a clear border.

It’s not easy to accomplish Jacobs three main characteristics, in order to ensure a vibrant street life. People can for example not be forced to use the street when there is no need for them to use it.⁴

The fundamental element for this kind of public control is, according Jane Jacobs, a substantial amount of diverse companies, stores, bars and restaurants along the sidewalks, especially places that are open during evening and night. This diversity gives the residents and visitors reasons to use the sidewalks of that area at all times. In this way the owners of these places become informal security guards since they hate vandalism and crime and want their customers feel safe. The activity that is generated by people that are shopping or using the sidewalks to get from one place to another also attracts other people and this means more eyes focused on the street.⁴

Jane Jacobs arrived at four principles for healthy cities by making observations of neighborhoods in use. She discovered that the most economically successful areas, as well as those that were the safest and most pleasant to be in, had these for characteristics:

Analyzing the urban plan

I analyzed southwest The Hague, and focused particularly on the planning phase of the district Morgenstond. I did this by reading articles and documents which mainly had to do with the design phase of the project area. In order to discover a relationship between the lack of vibrancy and the urban plan I focused particularly on the schemes.

⁴) Jacobs
In 1934 the Dutch architect W.M. Dudok was asked for an expansion plan for The Hague on a proposal from Berlage. In 1949 he developed: Concept-structuurplan voor Groot ‘s-Gravenhage, a master plan for the extension of the city.4 Dudok was, similar to several other post-war urbanists from that era, worried about the endlessly growing city that may grow too large. His processing of this ‘problem’ led him to the idea of the expansion plan that worked as “the finishing expansion” for The Hague.5

Within this master plan Dudok designed the neighborhoods Moerwijk en Morgenstond. After the Second World War Dudok proposed a decentralization concept in order to limit the growth of the city. This decentralization was a typical modern thought in urban planning taken directly from the ideas of Ebenezer Howard.6 & 7

Analyzing postwar architecture and detailing

At architectural and detail scale I took a closer look at the housing complex between the Coevordenstraat and Haveltestraat in the western part of Morgenstond. Again I focused particularly on the schemes.

After the Second World War the Netherlands had to deal with a housing shortage, influenced by new thinking in the field of urban planning, the industrialization of the building process, a general lack of money, and de Woningwet. This influences contributed to a certain standardization and rationalization which had an important effect on the vibrancy of neighborhoods.8

Analyzing the current situation

In order to understand the current situation of the neighborhood I studied literature and future plans of the municipality. And I studied statistics concerning the current residents types. This is done by a sample study, and by interviewing a part of the residents.

An important conclusion was the dominant monotony of the population with low income. This eventually creates a monotony in services and thus a lifeless streetscape.9

Creation of the toolbox/ concept

The aim of the project is to create a toolbox of design solutions that will lead to the overall enhancement of the living conditions of the neighborhood Morgenstond, mainly through stimulating the vibrancy of the neighborhood. I want to develop the toolbox in such a way that it can serve as a guideline for future urban developments. Inspired by Jacobs’ theory, I decided to incorporate particularly the aforementioned principles into my design toolbox/ concept. Together with tree new principles which encourage liveliness.

5) van de beek, van der Heijden
6) www.denhaag.nl
7) DSO
8) Blom
Relation of toolbox and program

The main objective was to intensify the level of street vibrancy of the neighborhood. A chance from current situation (black line) towards a stabilized vibrancy level of public space (blue line).

The method to accomplish this is the mixing of functions and program (diagram below). This mix of functions is a response to the current functional monotony.

Using the toolbox at urban plan level

By using this toolbox at preliminary urban plan scale I create a representative preliminary plan, which shows how the city should grow naturally, using ingredients which stimulate the neighborhood’s vibrancy.

Block volume

The evolution of the rough main shape (closing the building blocks with new building volume and breaking up long blocks) is directly based on the toolbox. For this steps, various methods have been employed including 3d studies, model studies and sketch studies.

Typology

There is also chosen for different types of residents. Different types of residents means: varying life patterns and thus a varying use of public space. This connects directly and indirectly to my earlier formulated objectives. Different types of residents means different needs as well.

Program

The next goal was to integrate program into the volume. This concerns, in contrast to the surrounding environment, a mixture of functions from conceptual considerations.
The housing typology is based on the types of residents:

A, Low income residents inhabit (stay in) the existing unmodified homes.
B, Singles or couples, people who do not require garden and starters inhabit the corner apartments. When the two top floor apartments are combined they are suitable for medium/high income residents.
C, Entrepreneurs in need for a business space at home inhabit the ground bound dwellings. Spatially these properties offer possibilities for family expansion.
D, 18 individual gallery apartments are merged into 6 ground bound houses. Ground floor is suited for a business at home.

Public & privat

As previously stated, the four building types are positioned as a closed block. The open corner become arranged as bicycle parking / stairwell.

The courtyard will be set up as private gardens and circulation space. The public space around the block is destined for infrastructure.

Addition of benches, grass, tiles and pavements along the commercial plinth make this space more interesting for pedestrians to stay a while and perhaps use the new commercial functions.

Design of the apartment

At four corners of the block rise apartments.

1, Starting point was a volume based on surrounding morphology and street directions.
2, By rotating the apartment volume it seems that the building looks into the street. This choice is consistent with the concept (buildings must be focused on public space). Besides this a contrast is created between commercial ground floor and apartments on the floors above.
3, At one floor the living room is focused at public space, at the other floor the balcony is focussed on public space. This is realized by vertical variation of apartment configuration.
Design of ground bound dwelling

When I reflect on the design of the dwellings it become clear that the design is based on functional matters rather than on Jacobs ingredients.

1. The starting point was once again a volume.
2. Housing width is made visible through separating walls in sight.
3. Individual home are highlighted by a cutout balcony.

Design of renovated apartments

The renovate apartments are comparable treated as the ground bound dwellings.

1. The starting point was enveloped by a new facade.
2. Housing width is made visible through a cut out entrance portal and individual stairwells

Materialization

Buildings are wrapped with a glass facade. The facade is composed of transparent glass and semi transparent glass. The degree of semi-transparent glass depends on the degree of privacy of the space. Blind walls are carried out in brick. Cut-outs are emphasized by means of a different material, namely a wood facade. The commercial space at the ground floor of the apartment is wrapped with concrete slabs.

Technique

The technique and method of construction is inferior to the architectural ambitions. Considering the poor condition of the existing building parts which I want to reuse/renovate it was important that the new thermal skin completely encloses the existing structure.

Main activities can be divided into the following steps:

Demolition: demolition of non-bearing walls.
Cutting of openings in the balconies.

Structural work: New interior walls, extension of the constructive walls at the location of the balconies. Masonry of end façades and stairwells.

Subcontractor work: Installing woodwork Assembly of facade construction. I tried to apply relatively logical, and a frequently used construction method (reynaers CW50 aluminium facade system) in order to keep down the cost of construction.

Finishing: Installations, glazing, sedum-roofing system.

Relationship between methodical line of approach of the studio and the method chosen by the student in this framework

"RMIT is concerned with the tension between preservation and renewal in architecture and construction. The conservation and transformation of existing architecture is of vital importance given its social, economical and cultural relevance. For the contemporary question in architecture the awareness of an appropriate balance between the
old and the new in developing and creating new ideas is a fundamental concern. 9

I choose to use a toolbox based on Jane Jacobs ingredients in order to establish a design that contributes to a vibrant neighborhood. I think the translation of Jacobs ingredients perfectly fit into the methodical line of approach of the studio. Her ideas motivated me, to re-use a significant percentage of the building. I want to make this clear in the following paragraph:

To create diversity, cities and neighborhoods need buildings with varying types and varying building ages. Particularly a high percentage of old buildings according Jacobs. Old renovated buildings in good shape are strong ingredients against a monotone neighborhood. But more important is a large number of buildings of low value to make sure that there is a variety in economic efficiency. If there are only new buildings in a neighborhood, the companies and individuals that rent or buy the buildings will have to be able to bear the costs. Wealthy established companies and wealthy individuals, retail and food chains, banks and supermarkets are able to succeed here where restaurants, little bars, book and antique stores, art studios, and students more often occupy older buildings, giving a neighborhood an attractive and original character. Flourishing diversity in a city means a mixture of companies with high profit, medium profit, low profit and without any profit. The age of buildings in relation with the functionality is relative. In a vital neighborhood almost nothing is too old to use. There are always people without a lot of choice that end up in these places or middle class families that are looking for a bargain to renovate. Cities need a variety of old buildings because these are the breeding places of new primary diversity. 4

Relationship between of the studio theme and the chosen subject/case study

Housing corporation Staedion proposed to destroy this six (case study) blocks. I am - after reading The Death and Life of Great American Cities - convinced that integrating a part of these building blocks, and her current residents, contributes to vibrant neighborhood. 10

Also, when new construction is desired, I prefer the addition of new building mass within the existing urban fabric instead of extending cities by means of suburbs or the expansion of ‘groeisteden’ such as Rijswijk.

A critical remark on my concept is the following: Jacobs describes that new - vividness enhancing projects - within a typical postwar neighborhood are pointless. In her eyes, the negative effects of postwar ideas are too strong. 4

Despite this I decided to go on with my (vividness enhancing project) because new developments, such as the realization of the new municipality office, as well as the current urban planning policy of The Hague government, better fits the ideology of Jane Jacobs. My expectation is that these developments, together with my design, contributes to a neighborhood with a healthier balance of vividness.

The relationship between the project and the wider social context

Nowadays The Hague considers the need for varying types of building and building age and the need for population concentration theory as a solution of socioeconomic problems – signifying a consideration of Jacobs’ principles.

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9) (Coenen) door: Spoormans, Quist
4) Jacobs
10) Staedion lecture
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