INTRODUCTION

First of all, the reason why I chose to do the rMIT studio *Mixed projects the Hague* as my final project. A big part of future assignments for architects and urban planners will be redesigning existing places, buildings and structures. One of the biggest assignments is to redevelop vacant offices, which have a very high vacancy rate at the moment. I want to gain experience and knowledge in redesigning offices for this future. That is also why I choose to do the office building at Koningskade 4.

More specific the office building at Koningskade 4, which will be left in 2016 by Rijkswaterstaat. This is not the only building that will come onto, the already strained, office market in The Hague. Not every office can be turned into an office again, because the short lifespan offices have. What’s new today is old tomorrow. New concepts like *Het Nieuwe Werken* only decrease the demand for offices. So what to do next with these former governmental buildings, which stand in the middle of city, full of opportunities to bring back life to the cities?
PROBLEM STATEMENT

Everyone knows the desolate businesses terrains next to the highway. But a lot of offices in the city aren’t a bit better. These offices, especially the ones of the government with their large scale, don’t do anything for the city. Mostly they are inward looking buildings with all the functions within the building. So employees park their bike or car, enter the building and at 5 p.m. they do the reverse route to home. This is also the case with the building at the Koningskade 4. It stands at a prominent location between Malieveld, the old city center and the rich neighborhood Benoordenhout, but it stands totally isolated from all these rich locations. Its plinth has a totally closed façade, out of black bricks and it has a large distance towards the road by its green. The building is retreated although it is designed as a transparent and accessible governmental building.

But what if this office building becomes a lively place, which has a positive impact on public spaces within the city? Places where several activities can take place, where it’s safe, where people want to walk and bike outside, eat outside and to be a spill within the rich places the building is surrounded.

One of the people who research public life and mainly lively places is Jan Gehl. He developed strategies to research public life and also determined the elements which influence public life. I want to use his strategies and understandings of the elements to analyze the Rijkswaterstaat building on what extent the building contributes to a lively place and which could be improved. Also the elements determined by Gehl could provide design solutions.

My research question is then: What would improve the liveliness in and around Koningskade 4 if one follows the methods of Jan Gehl?

A sub question in this research is; to what extent can the existing building be changed to accommodate liveliness?

FRAMEWORK

Gehl his analysis and designs focuses on life of people. His order of analyzing is life, space and then buildings (Gehl, 2010). This looks in contradiction with the assignment of a redesign, because the building is the starting point. But the work of Gehl also starts within an urban context, also often in important historical and cultural places. Even in these places it is important to realize which activities have to take place as an end view for the place, where architecture is a tool to achieve this and not a goal. If the tool doesn’t work anymore we have to repair it and therefore we first have to know what the tool has to do.

But this is still a kind of generic. One thing Gehl is doing is to look at the existing city and carefully map which elements generate possibilities for activities and which activities. This is also in line with the work of Christopher Alexander. Who has researched many years, different elements in the build environment and describe what they do to humans and how they have to look like. In his book the pattern language he calls these elements patterns. It’s called pattern because the elements are more like models, open for interpretation, and also because the elements are linked to each other, so a coherent system can be designed (Alexander, 1977).

If we compare the work of Herman Hertzberger to that of Jan Gehl, some similarities come up. Also Hertzberger works with back casting, first the activities, then space and at last the building. The main difference is that Hertzberger works from the interior to the outside, where Gehl works on an urban level, Hertzberger designs buildings. But it is easy to see also here the similarities. In his book Ruimte en leren (2008) Hertzberger describes his projects with terms as squares and streets. By using these terms, comparisons between an existing city and a building is easy to make and could be a source of inspiration.

To enhance life within his buildings, Hertzberger first maps the activities the building has to accommodate. In the schools he designed this is most evident. Here places are created along the hallways for
activities like individual work, reading, theater and playing. This is done by adding niches and corners to the hallway, but also by the experience of these places. The places are made place by detailing, different light and materialization and by view. These places are almost every time multifunctional. For example staircases are made wider and cladded with wood and cushions, so the staircases can be used as a stand or sitting area as well. What is essential is adding value to elements, so they can be used in several ways. An example Hertzberger gives is that old cars always had a step to get in. This step can also be a seat when people go picnicking.

What these people which I mentioned have in common is that they are from a postmodern era. Where CIAM for instance wants a separation between activities and where most of the architecture has very minimalistic details, the people I mentioned want the opposite. Mixing people and activities, and adding meaning to details are the keywords. But most importantly the focus is on human activity. Not tailor made design for a most efficient use of space but analyzing which activities should and could take place. To do this two things are important. The knowledge of human experience; which spaces and elements do what to human emotions? This is the episteme of phenomenology. Another aspect is how people are using space, the episteme of praxeology.

POSITION

My position within the field of rMIT follows out of the names mentioned before. For me the life is the most important factor when dealing with existing buildings. An object based approach, where most attention goes to conserving the old qualities, only leads to a museumification of a city. A good example for instance is Venice, once a beautiful city to live in, but more and more a city without residents. This is evident in the documentary I Love Venice (Muskens and Racké, 2013). So in my opinion contemporarily life should be the starting point and more important than the building. Besides nowadays we have excellent tools at our disposal for capturing a building. A building can be photographed or drawn and (digital) models can be made, so a future generation could see the building in an original state.

In my case the building at the Koningskade stands in the middle of the city. But now it is just an inward looking building and forms an unpleasant connection in the urban fabric. A lot of open space is around the building, but hardly used. In my opinion the buildings upcoming vacancy is an opportunity to improve this situation. The buildings biggest quality is its double curtain wall, which is one the first in the Netherlands and a great example of the influence of American architecture in the Netherlands. But if this façade isn’t compatible with contemporary use, the façade should yield.

The building is very big though. It has 35,000 square meters of floor and is 70 meters high, where the surrounding buildings are mostly three story dwellings. Rem Koolhaas states in his book S, M, L, XL (Koolhaas and Mau, 1995) that with bigness the context is irrelevant (fuck the context). I have a different opinion; big buildings can be sensitive to their context. Mainly the plinth of the building is an important factor as Gehl observed before (Gehl, 2010). So most of the design attention should go the plinth and the direct adjacent urban space. Here the building at Koningskade should be changed the most because at the moment it doesn’t contribute to a lively city.

My position within the episteme of phenomenology is that I want to research the experience of the everyday. So not to investigate highly sensitive buildings like the Jewish museum of Daniel Libeskind or most of the work of Peter Zumthor. But the experience of places where people feel safe, or the feeling of time when people pass buildings. This is in line with the work of Gehl, in cities for people (Gehl, 2010) he describes the maximum depth of a theater, which is determined by the possibility to see the expressions of an actor on stage. In praxeology it is important to realize that people are different and have a free will. Architecture cannot change how people act. But there are some patrons on how people behave on a certain element. For instance, what Gehl calls the edge effect; people are tend to walk next to the buildings instead of in open space, because in that way they feel protected. In this way phenomenology and praxeology overlap, because mostly the way people tend to use a space is determined by the experience of it.
METHODS

Gehl uses two main methods for analyzing the life in the city; by empirical surveys and mapping of activities. This is then translated into graphs, numbers and maps as part of the analysis and for making the data visible (Gehl, Gemzøe, Kirkaes & Søndergaard, 2006). In the book *New City Life* (Gehl et al., 2006) a couple of places in Copenhagen are analyzed on the elements that determine lifelines. This is translated in a diagram so that the places could be compared to each other. Among the elements are subjects as; how well the place offers protection against the elements, human scale, something to see and safety. These subjects are a result of the empirical surveys and the mapping but also of an analysis of the senses of humans. For example after the fifth floor, there is no connection with the city, because nobody can see and hear people at the ground floor anymore (Gehl, 2010).

A same kind of analysis is done for the Rijkswaterstaat building, by first determining the elements that determine lifelines by observing and mapping places in The Hague. After that a spider web diagram is made so the street around the Rijkswaterstaat building could be compared. Thereby making it clear which elements need some improvement and which already are good enough. The main element that needs improvement is the plinth of the building. The surroundings of the buildings have a lack of human scale, visible activities and an unclear separation between car and foot traffic. Also there isn’t much to see, no differentiation in details or green. Because this is a crucial link between the neighborhood and the old inner city, this has to be improved.

Next to an obligated program of requirements, I want also to make a program of activities. This is a way to start with life in the design. A good example is the table made by the 8 and the opbouw, as seen in figure 2. Here activities are displayed as diagrams, which is an excellent tool to visualize the activities. At the time they didn’t knew active seniors though. This is also in line with the episteme of praxeology.

The way the episteme of phenomenology is going to be implemented into the design is by making perspective drawing and big models to have an experience of the space. A good guideline for knowing what different elements do to the experience of humans is the book *Experiencing Architecture* by Rasmussen (1964). For instance the book discusses how rhythm in the facade can be lively or dead, which is important for the design of the plinth of the building.

![Figure 2 Recreation Needs of Different Age Classes: De 8 en De Opbouw, 1939 (Hoogstraten, 2013)](image)

To answer the question how far one should go for with changing a building to make it more lively case studies are done to determine my position. This is consideration between the interest of the users of city, money, cultural value, social value and my own opinion. So some case studies are done of redesigned offices where the physical relation of building with its context is improved.
For instance, the former AMRO-bank office building in Amsterdam, which is transformed by ZZDP architects into hotel school and a hotel. The original building is built in 1972 by Piet Zantstra. For the transformation the façade is cleaned and the glass replaced. The main intervention is to replace the closed ground floor façade with an open transparent glass façade. (de Architect, 2013). Hereby the building opens up to the environment and makes activities around the building possible. In combination with a more gentle urban design, the open façade invites people to come in. Also with eyes nearby it is comfortable to eat and meet outside the building. Overall the building has its original appearance but improved its relation by replacing the ground façade and urban design. This is in line with the thoughts of Jan Gehl that a ground floor has the greatest impact on the life around the building. Also this is in line in his thoughts to have an open and transparent at the ground floor, so activities are visible and making other people on the outside comfortable enough to use the space around the building.

CONCLUSIONS

The approach to redesign the plinth of an existing building to accommodate life in and around of the building is an appropriate when dealing with buildings which have a local or almost no value. If the building has a higher value, the building should seek other solutions then redesigning the plinth of the building. But for the Rijkswaterstaat building, opening the plinth is a good solution to improve the liveliness of the city. The value of this building is subsidiary to the intervention, because city life is more important.

To design a good plinth, attention should be paid to the epistemes of praxeology and phenomenology. In this way the experience and the use of the space around and in the building is incorporated. Also next to the plinth of the building, attention should be paid to the spaces around the building and how one goes into the building.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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