P4 Reflection
New directions in the Public Interior

Msc 4 The Architecture of the Interior
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This reflection is written as part of the msc 4 studio The Architecture of the Interior. In it, I will reflect upon several aspects that are part of the undertaken research and the resulting design. These aspects include 1) The relationship between research and design; 2) The relationship between the theme of the studio and the subject/case study; 3) The relationship between the methodical line of approach of the studio and the method chosen; and 4) The relationship between the project and the wider social context.

The relationship between research and design

The studio commenced with the analysis of several public spaces, such as Rialto area in Venice, Sergels Torg in Stockholm and the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele in Milan. These are all perceived as working, or successful, public spaces. The aim of this analysis thus was to make us familiair with the idea of the public space and the several ways in which it emerges in the city.

As a second part of research, a Research Seminar was followed in which we had to study our project area, the business district of Zuidas in Amsterdam. This area has, like any other place, its own peculiarities and atmosphere.

Through my research I learned new ideas on public space by writers such as Pallasmaa, Gehl and Whyte. These authors - and architects - showed me which elements are important for the attractiveness of a public space. It is through these elements, mostly found directly around us in the ground facade or the ground itself, that the user of a space can relate oneself to a public space and in that sense become part of the public space.

At Zuidas, these elements are not or under represented. Therefore the research part of this graduation project has led me to a certain extend to the subject of my project: a public interior at Zuidas.

The relationship between the methodical line of approach of the studio and the method chosen

As mentioned, the project started with an analysis of public space, both on a larger (European) scale and on the scale of the location of the project (Zuidas). Simultaneously, a Lecture Series on Research Methods was attended. During these lectures, the episteme as a larger framework of consideration was discussed. As a result of these lectures, a position paper was written.

The paper focussed on a specific methods through which architecture can be conducted, namely that of an architecture of the senses. In this method, the focus of the design lies on the experience of the user when moving through a space. It seems that this experience can be shaped by the addressing of the senses in particular ways. Together, these ways are part of one atmosphere that is carried out through a space.

I believe that when architecture is considered through this method, a lot of contemporary architecture would fall short. Therefore the use of this method is not only an interesting view on designing, but also a critique towards the apparent mindlessness of several pieces of architecture from this time.

According to me, most of the architecture of the current buildings of Zuidas could be placed in this last group. The buildings are made to impress the eyes, but the they do not impress the person as a whole. The public parts of the buildings do not try to invite, they do not seem to try anything at all.

The relationship between the theme of the studio and the subject/case study

Zuidas consists of a chain of public spaces, surrounded by high-rise offices and interrupted by a train station. The chain starts near the centre of Amsterdam, and ends at an odd bridge that is situated against the borders of Amsterdam Buitenveldert. However, there is no central place within this chain. The existing public spaces are isolated from each other, and while moving along the chain, the spaces seem to cause alienation rather than association.

In my design, I propose a new public interior that is situated adjacent to the train station of Amsterdam Zuid and functions as both a prelude to the train station and an individual public space. Here, it becomes part of the concatenation of existing public spaces that shape the central axis of Zuidas.

By placing it in the heart of the axis, the public interior tries to achieve not only a level of association between the user and the interior space but also between the user and the surrounding public spaces. I have done this with regard to the following aspects of public space: the ground and atmosphere.

At the ground, we have the closest connection with our surroundings. Our senses are being stimulated the most, through sight, but also through touch, smell and hearing. It is at the ground where we experience the entering of a place.
In this experience, we become aware of the atmosphere of a place. This can be an inviting one, a sad one, a serene one and many more. Through this experience of atmosphere, the space can become a memory that the user literally can come back to.

A building that inspired me greatly is the Crystal Palace. In here, the ground addresses its users with things to see, to touch, to smell, to experience. Everyone is roaming around and enjoying the atmosphere. But the ground would not be the ground without the glass ceiling that is so high that it barely seems there. But it is there and because of that the streets become a space.

The result of my thoughts is a scheme in which the ground functions as this beehive element, where roaming functions of transport and shopping are juxtaposing a garden and a gallery in which people can wait and stay for a while. The different experiences are all fit under one larger roof, with a vast amount of air that provides the interior with its actual atmosphere.

The relationship between the project and the wider social context

Through my proposal, I am hoping to remind the observer of the allure that a public space can attain. Not only allure in a monumental way, but also in a social way. In the past, the public space was the space where people would meet each other and therefore the public space was a social space. In contemporary times, where we do not need to go outside anymore to get into contact with other people, places like these tend to be forgotten or considered not necessary anymore.

This scheme could therefore be seen as a critique on contemporary architecture and social structure, but at the same time it does not want to be reminiscent of times in which buildings such as the Crystal Palace flourished.

I believe that contemporary public interiors are not attractions anymore. However, they can aim to facilitate the possibility of encounters between strangers, and to facilitate the moment in which people that are moving through the space can experience their surroundings and enjoy them.