

Graduation reflection

Hui Ophelia Lin

4404297

Interior studio – Healthcare

Introduction

For my graduation project I chose a site which is enclosed by five different buildings with outdoor car parking located inside the block. Although the site situates along the river, it has no connection and benefit from it. The existing street which penetrates the site from east to west, connecting busy street to the river side is not fully discovered either. Based on these starting point of the situation, I decided to not only insert a care program into the traditional residential neighborhood, but also improve the quality spatially and socially with architecture intervention.

1. The relationship between research and design

No design can start without research and understanding of the site. It starts with historical study of Rotterdam development, from pre-war to the 70s drastic transformation in city fabric. The understanding of developments help me to know the changes in different period, further, to establish argument about building to be respected or replaced. Parallel to the process of historical research, study on the site help me to understand the present situation. Three aspects are included: status quo, problem and solution. Firstly, by doing the site research and visiting into different building and apartments, a real and inner situation is unfolded. After knowing the current situation, I am able to address the problem of the existing and the reason why it leads to nowadays situation. In the next stage, solution is proposed with comprehensive studies on precedents. Traditional Dutch hofje prototype, contemporary interpretation is used as an inspiration and source that can help me to understand and improve the existing neighborhood. By comparison, different measures which are used in different location, all contribute to the reasoning of a space quality critically. Finally, the research covers target group. For dementia people, certain consideration should be paid attention throughout the design. To better understand their barrier-free space, a home for elderly group and people with mental illness, we took excursion to dementia projects in Belgium and within the Netherlands. In sum, the research benefits design in three steps. Firstly, to help understand the historical development and nowadays situation, to know the origin and transformation, then address the problems and propose conceptually design solution; secondly, by looking into the traditional Dutch hofje and contemporary precedents, the solution is critically filtered and improved with inspiration and understanding of the site and space; thirdly, a study on target group can guide the design from user's perspective. To understand and experience the way of movement, the way of life.

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

The theme of the graduation lab is healthcare environment for dementia group. Instead of providing an institutional dementia care center, the purpose of the graduation lab is to explore diverse ways of insertion. To keep the original social structure, minimize future changes when one enters his demented stage, a care program is gently inserted into the neighborhood while keeping the most of the existing social network. On the other hand, due to the mental illness and difficulty in wayfinding, a secured and pleasant wander routine should be considered for demented people. Therefore, a typology that offers easy orientation and calmness in urban environment is chosen to study. Hofje, a traditional Dutch architecture typology, integrates collectiveness and individuality in one enclosed space. With a door which is almost hidden from the streetscape, a carefully designed center garden brings a beautiful oasis into the concrete city. A pleasant environment provides quality which echoes with traditional way of living to the residents. With invisibility of the exit, it ensures the safety of wander experience for mental illness people. Furthermore, to understand the current interpretation of the hofje, numbers of dementia projects are selected to study. Hogeweyk is one of the most important reference to my design. It introduces sequences of gardens, which can be accessed freely with wheelchair. Gardens are connected outdoor, while each one is embraced by the groups of care units. The separation of groups of dementia people can help the recognition of identities which inspired my design. However, a clear access on the exit is not always the best solution for demented group, as it creates an obvious fence to the outer world which give the feeling of the physical boundary. Another examples taken into consideration are the Kloosterhof Pamele and Sergison Bates Carehome in Belgium, Nofel in Austria, Le Medi in the Netherlands. With the comparison of gardens and building height, a proportion is studied for contemporary living style. The interpretation of entrance location and appearance, the ways of movement within certain limit, give me the inspiration for the design project.

3. The relationship between the methodical line of approach of the graduation lab and the method chosen by the student in this framework

Six major methods are used in the approach of the graduation lab. First of all, constant visit on the design site throughout graduation year, help me understand the site situation in different time and day. With observation and interview with residents about their daily routine, their behavior in different places, it offers me the starting point to understand the relationship between space and social network. With reference study, the lines of reasoning and framing the solution, and design concepts goes parallel with research. On the later stage, experiment with different proposal is used, from the scale of urban intervention to the interior of use's perspective. It includes hand drawing, computer drawing, digital modeling and physical modeling. Among all, the hand drawing technique help me to think in a 3-dimensional way and physical modeling offers me an opportunity to experiment the proportion of the architectural language, especially in real environment. The last but not least, the critical thinking help me to refine my decision. With series of comparison of different materials and proposal, back and forth study throughout scales during design process, every decision is made through the reasoning of pros and cons, through the thinking of priority and necessity, and the consequences and influences on the architecture and social context in each step.

4. The relationship between the project and the wider social context

From the research of the site, one of the most severe problem I addressed is the access and the sudden transition between most private territory – home, to the most public area – traffic street. Without enough buffer space for residents to rest and meet neighbors, it reduces the opportunities to establish social network. Thus the initial idea of the concept is to bring pedestrian and residential traffic together to increase opportunities of passive connection and meeting. Secondly, I introduces a plaza in the center of the block to offer a transitional space from the public to private, a rest before entering into different levels of privacy. This idea provides experience of sequences of the space, can serve not only the chosen site, but it is applicable to other neighborhood, to increase the opportunity for social connection between groups and neighborhoods. Secondly, the interpretation of traditional Dutch hofje in the city environment, as for a calm oasis in the concrete forest, can help the recognition of the identity and intertwine the contemporary living style with traditional thinking about space.