

'The Living Incubator: A Place For Exchange'

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Graduation reflection - P5

Motivation

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I am fascinated by

the potential of architecture to connect people

I would like to know how to

create an inviting place for exchange

With which I hope to

inspire people to see the potential in each other

Because I believe that

together we can achieve more than alone

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During my stays abroad, I lived in a communal house where everyone was always welcome. We had many different friends, travellers and strangers stay over, which always led to interesting conversations and the exchange of experiences and knowledge. This made me realise how inspiring these encounters were and how important these places are for people to meet to be able to exchange. And that made me wonder; which places facilitate these encounters and exchange and how can architectural design contribute to the creation and stimulation of these?

Reflecting this gained insight on our society, we are currently in an economical, environmental and social crisis (Grosclaude et al., 2014). Our society is dealing with increasing individualisation as well as the problems of loneliness and social integration, while our urban population density is ever growing. Scarcity of (natural) resources as well as space is increasing, causing prices to rise. It is apparent we need to change our lifestyles. Due to the democratisation of digital practices an increasing interest in the sharing economy can be seen, on a big scale. Not only in a digital environment but also in people's direct living environments, a shift towards the shared is apparent. Sharing could offer a solution to the problems stated above, especially in an urban environment with a high density where all facilities are closely located, we do not need to have everything for ourselves if we don't use it consecutively. I could not help but think these social places earlier named are even more relevant when looking at the bigger picture. In a day and age where our lives are becoming more digitalised and 'connected', an urge for 'real' experiences can be seen, which can be shared with like-minded people. The need for community is increasing, and for it good physical spaces.

Graduation project

My fascination for the social potential of architectural design led me to Explore Lab, where I researched the topic through my research question; 'How can architectural design contribute to the creation of social space in a shared living environment?'. Literature review has been the main research method, complemented by the use of precedents to illustrate the theories. In broader sense a survey, personal interviews, case visits and

empirical research have been used to get a greater understanding of the social context, the problem statement, different ways of shared living and their success. The relevance of this research lies in the investigation of the role of architecture in our shift to a new lifestyle in a more shared living environment. It elaborates upon the research question and its subquestions such as what social space is, how social behaviour and built environment are related, how the borders are defined within and how we 'read' these and what this entails for its architectural design. Various authors and their visions and theories are discussed and even though different words have been used, an overlap between topics in these theories can be seen and their architectural importance for the contribution to social space. These can be summarised in three key characteristics; territoriality, multiplicity and accessibility. These characteristics represent and comprise multiple components, as discussed in the research. It concludes that architecture can not be determinant, but should be facilitative and provide for the possibility - of various activities and interpretations - to occur. It should leave space for the users to give 'infill' to the physical structures designed, by their way of interpretation, appropriation and inhabitation. The architect needs to understand the importance of these key characteristics that contribute to the creation of social space and should strive to design spaces that foster social interaction and liveliness, where exchange of knowledge, ideas and experience can take place and community can flourish, in a harmonious shared living environment.

The knowledge gained through the research functioned as my starting point and underlying framework for the design, in which I strived to contribute to the creation of social space by incorporating the stated characteristics. I designed 'The Living Incubator'; a physical (architectural) environment that facilitates sharing, exchange and interaction in the everyday life. It hosts a mixed program containing residential, recreational, commercial and office spaces. Minimal private (residential) space is complimented with collective and public spaces, which provide room and flexibility for exchange to a diverse group of people and space for social interaction, idea exchange and cross-fertilisation between different people and disciplines. The creation of social space and the optimisation of space, finance, resources, time and social possibilities through architectural design were focal points.

The design involves the transformation of two existing vacant buildings located within the Baankwartier, Rotterdam. Originally destined for demolition, the neighbourhood has been in decay since these plans got cancelled due to the economical crisis. The post-industrial neighbourhood now hosts an interesting variety of functions and people, but due to its introvert character and lack of public spaces and functions, these are disconnected and the place has accumulated a desolate atmosphere, attracting criminality. Densification of this inner-city location is desired and could add a boost to the neighbourhood. The 'Living Incubator' is designed to act as a catalyst for its direct environment and to create a place where the neighbourhood and its people can come together.

The architectural design aims to be facilitative and provide for possibilities to occur, and to foster smart usage of resources by sharing that leads to optimisation of space, finance, time, impact on the environment and social opportunities. The buildings have been shaped in such a way that they stimulate social space through the use of design tools related to the notions of territoriality, multiplicity and accessibility. The building becomes a place for overlap and exchange in all scales and integrates the various complex aspects and users, regarding both a short term and long term vision.

Literature review conclusion

Understanding and importance of:

1. Territoriality



Clear demarcations
Privacy zoning
Boundaries
Appropriation
Familiarisation

2. Multiplicity



Polyvalence
Interpretation
Affordances
Accommodative potential
Usage

3. Accessibility



Physically
Optically
Communication
Social security
Routing

Translation

Research to design

Research

Goals

1. Territoriality

2. Multiplicity

3. Accessibility

Design

Tools

Materialisation

Hierarchy

Intimacy

Program

Time

Form

Transparency

Apertures

Routing

Boundaries

Privacy zoning / Contrast

Sense of belonging / Familiarity / Appropriation

Activities / Users

Usage / Organisation

Accommodative potential / Affordances

Visual connections / Views

Physical connections / Transition / Interaction

Guidance / Sequence / Encounters

