TEDx event center

Connecting the Binnengasthuis and the city

Reflection paper
Liselotte Koppenol
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Liselotte Koppenol</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student number</td>
<td>4020316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adress:</td>
<td>Ruyschstraat 87 H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1091BX Amsterdam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td><a href="mailto:l.w.m.koppenol@student.tudelft.nl">l.w.m.koppenol@student.tudelft.nl</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project</td>
<td>Binnengasthuis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First mentor</td>
<td>Ir. W.L.E.C. Meijers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second mentor</td>
<td>Ir. J. van de Voort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third mentor</td>
<td>Ir. Sara Stroux</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External examinor</td>
<td>Ir. S.A. Bentinck</td>
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Introduction

As the graduation project is coming close to its end it is time to look back and reflect on what has been done the last two semesters. In this reflection paper the different phases of the graduation process that have been followed these semesters will be described, analyzed and reflected on chronologically. In order to be able to reflect on these phases it is important to firstly describe the method which was chosen and the relationship with the methodical line of approach of the graduation studio. The phases of the graduation process in general were earlier described in the Graduation Plan: the research & analysis phase, the concept phase and the design phase. After the analysis and reflecting an overall conclusion will be given.
Method of design process, own ill.
This illustration describes the method of designing. The starting points form the beginning and can be looked back at during the whole process. Then the guiding theme references and experimenting work together to be able to make decisions. During this process the domains (form, route, construction, urban and social) and models support the decisions.

Graduation process, mentors Heritage & Architecture
This is the graduation process as given by the mentors of the Heritage & Architecture studio. A generic and specific process work together to create a design.

Graduation process, own ill.
This illustration shows my own interpretation of the graduation process.
Method

In the illustrations of the left page you can see the general graduation process and my own interpretation of it, as already given in the Graduation Plan.

The design studio of Heritage & Architecture concentrates on valuable heritage tasks. It is our task to find an appropriate balance between the old and the new. “The core of the studio is the manner how cultural historic and technological information are translated into a design.” (Graduation Studio Manual Heritage & Architecture)

In this studio we deal with an existing building and therefore the analysis and objective value assessment of the existing are very important. These are necessary to be able to value the existing and preserve it by development. The cohesion of research and design together with the fact that it should be a iterative process is also very important.

The used method started with how the studio usually handles this, with the analysis and the value assessment. It was later on that I realized how my thematic research had connected these elements. To answer the subject of the research it was necessary to combine the analysis with literature and the value assessment. How this worked eventually will be explained in the next chapter.

Within the design process the theme of the studio gave a clear method of making alternatives. ‘Tolerance for change’ to me means searching a balance between the maximum and the minimum you can change within the historical context. This is something that has been tried to do during the whole project. Also the method that was introduced in the Graduation Plan has helped a lot. Working with the elements guiding theme, starting points, references, domains, experimenting and models gave guidance in difficult times.
The Mensa building, ADP architects
Here you can see the existing structure, the U-shaped building with between its wings the addition Paul Dirks. The building to the left is the administration building to which a connection was intended. This connection has never been realized.
Reflection

Research & Analysis

The project
The site of the project is the Binnengasthuis area in the city center of Amsterdam. This area was originally a monastery but changed in function over time into a hospital and now the university of Amsterdam has most of the buildings in use. The main theme of the studio is exploring the tolerance for change. “The assignment is an architectural design developed individually by research by design based on typology, relevant societal program and use for the buildings of the Binnenstads campaigned of the University of Amsterdam.” (Graduation Studio Manual Heritage & Architecture)

My assignment
Within the first three weeks of the project we had to formulate our own assignment. By finding our personal fascination within a generic subject but also with observation of the specific site we could find our backbone for the research and design. After walking around on the site I immediately found my interest. On this historical site with large characteristic buildings the interventions from the 1980ies immediately caught my eye. Although a fascination was found it was very hard for to formulate a relevant research question with a specific scope. This resulted in a vague first personal assignment and a slow start of the graduation project.

After starting the analysis of the site and buildings the decision was made to focus on one building, the original New Clinic which is now used as the Mensa restaurant. This building was re-designed by Paul Dirks in 1981 who made an addition to the original structure in a Post Modern style. Finally a research question was formulated: 'What was the vision behind the intervention performed on the Mensa building, how has the experience of the building changed and how can this new insight help in re-designing the old hospital to create a more qualitative connection between the old and the new structure?'

Analysis
After the research question was formulated this gave an idea on how to do the analysis. First we were doing it with the whole group, trying to find questions we wanted to answer about the site and the buildings. This gave us a general idea on how the site works but it wasn’t very relevant and to the point yet. By using the research question in the analysis I was able to find out exactly what I wanted to know. The research was based on finding out how the ideas of architects behind dealing with historical buildings has developed through time and also by finding out how the experience of the Mensa building has changed after the addition from Paul Dirks. Here the research and analysis came together very well and therefore had a close relationship. The analysis of the site and building was at the same time an answer to the question of how the experience of the building changed after the addition of 1981. The experience of the building had changed very much in aspects of routing and daylight and the most interesting and characteristic parts of the historical building were now hidden. The theoretic research helped a lot in understanding interventions to historical buildings and also how this addition was made possible. Here the discovery was made that Paul Dirks was inspired by the Louvre pyramids when he designed this addition.
Extensive Value assessment, own ill.

The illustrations above are a small part of the extensive value assessment. The first illustration gives an idea about how the floorplan is valued, in the lower illustration the new addition is valued in a section.
Value assessment

The value assessment was underestimated at first. The value assessment was done quite roughly and only gave a general idea of the values of the building. The existing building was valued highly and positively and the addition was valued indifferently, resulting in the fact that it should be demolished completely.

At the first formal assessment (the P2), were the Msc3 semester would be completed, the work of the first semester was presented. This included the research and analysis part, value assessment and a concept for the design. The comments at the assessment were mainly on this subject. It was not clear yet what would be improved by the intervention I was planning to do. Another point was also the fact that this addition was done in another time period and maybe for that time it was a very successful example of Post Modernism. Just because in 2015 we believe it is ugly and doesn’t fit in the context doesn’t mean that it should be valued indifferently. This resulted in a re-take for the P2.

This re-take was very hard but it has proven to be a crucial moment in my graduation process. In the two weeks after I worked on an extensive value assessment I found out that the addition in 1981 actually had positive values, which could be used in the design. The addition has created an atrium which is now the central focus point of the building and improved the logistics of the building. The atrium has a connection with the whole building and the route makes it possible to go from one wing to the other without walking a long distance or through the outside space. To find out how the addition would be valued in its own time literature was used and the conclusion was that it is not a successful example of Post Modern architecture. At the re-take presentation I could tell exactly why my proposal was going to improve the current situation by precisely formulating the positive and indifferent values of the building. This improved value assessment also lead to new starting points and a new design concept.
Connect UvA to the city

Program of possibilities, own ill.

Create vivid public space and connect buildings

Stimulating entrepreneurs
Connecting people
“Ideas worth spreading”
Lecture hall
70 employees
100 volunteers
Offices & flex spaces

Program, own ill.

Restore typology

Starting point, own ill.
This is the main starting point. The pink area represents the atrium that should be remained. The arrow represents a volume that will connect the two wings.
Concept

Possibilities and program
After the analysis we were asked to find out the possibilities for the site and the chosen building. Doing this has helped a lot in the concept phase. The possibilities seen for the site was to continue the process of opening up the site to the city and to reduce the gap between the students and business. From this the masterplan resulted and also a program for the building. The decision was made to create a new office for Tedx Amsterdam. In this office the volunteers would have places to work and come together but there would also be a lecture hall for the events. Together with a woman who works at Tedx Amsterdam a program of requirements for the building was created.

Starting points
From the research & analysis, the value assessment and the possibilities and program the starting points for the design were developed. The most important aspects were the fact that the route and the atrium should be preserved, as a result from the value assessment. There should also be a connection between the buildings on the Binnengasthuis area and a direct connection with the new library that will be situated opposite to the building. The building should have an inviting character and the interesting and historic parts of the existing structure should be emphasized. These starting points were very important for the whole coming process. The new and improved value assessment turned out the be crucial in the design process as it lead to these new starting points which are the most important arguments for my following decisions.
Design sketches, own ill.
These sketches and section show how the design has developed from idea to drawings. The shape and placement of the lecture hall, the front view and the plans have changed greatly over time.
Design

Research to design
The goal of the research was to find new insights which could be used for the design. After doing the research, analysis and extensive value assessment I was actually surprised by what I found. The research on the ideas of architects on interventions helped a lot with understanding the building. The value assessment and analysis of the building and its context gave insight on the influence of the addition on the building. The gained insight was that the atrium and the route were actually positive values and they should be kept as they are. As said before in the starting points these aspects have a main role in the design.

Design process
When looking back on the design process you can see that I like to work from scale to scale. The most important intervention is the lecture hall that has been added to the building. This is a new volume inside the atrium and took a lot of time to develop. First I was very reluctant in creating a symmetrical shape. After trying this however it turned out to be the right decision. Here I really had to go outside my own box and draw something that seemed unnatural at first. After this the connection between the lecture hall and the existing building had the main role in many decisions. The theme of connecting space also helped a lot in making decisions. After the main volume of the lecture hall was developed I was able to zoom in and look at the spaces and the materials. One aspect that I kept postponing was designing the façade and the roof. In the last weeks before the P4 this turned out to be a very important aspect in the whole design and only then I realized that this should have been designed much earlier. This is also when I realized that the detailing is very important. From former projects I know this but still I tried to put this off as long as possible. The reason for this is not very clear to me. Although I am not an expert in drawing technical details I like doing it. Now I think, the cause is that it is difficult for me to make decisions. This has been a challenge throughout the whole process. The result was that the design process went quite slow. Now I believe that making decisions can be done faster, especially because later you can always change them. But making decisions is crucial to find out which aspects of your design need more development.

Another interesting fact in my design process is that I can get stuck on one subject or element in the design. Especially in the beginning I was focusing very much on the atrium and the new lecture hall and less on the whole idea. In the tutoring moments I would get pulled out of the element to retrieve the overlook on the project.

Sometimes during the last couple of weeks I could have a small panic attack when I thought about everything that had to be done. In time I learned to deal with these moments. It became clear to that some processes, like the struggle with the lecture hall or with the design of the roof, are processes which you have to go through. Only by doing this you can create a product that you really support and believe in because you have developed it in depth.
Looking back on the past semester I can say that I had a slow start. The making of my assignment was quite hard and the reason for this was that it was difficult to explicitly say what interested me about the site. Here I learned, that talking about this with people and by explicitly saying what you think, helps. In this period the tutoring and debating was also very helpful. When finally I had a sound research question I could give direction to my thoughts and get to work.

In the research and analysis phase I turned out to be very content with my subject. Here I was able to find a balance between the analysis and the research, between the generic theme and the specific site. Later when I improved the value assessment this turned out to be a positive and crucial contribution to my project. This also meant there was a distinct relation between research and design as I used the obtained new insights as a leading role in the design.

When starting the concept design the possibilities I found were very useful to me. These resulted in the program and eventually together with the research and analysis in the starting points. The program is an essential part of my project and gives the wider social context. By implementing a function, that is accessible not only for the students but also is interesting for business, these two groups can be brought together. From my own experience and from hear say there is a large gap between students and business. In the Ted office students can attend lectures, follow workshops or just walk through, as it has become part of the campus route. Companies can give workshops, attend lectures and rent spaces.

Together with the program also the use of the value assessment is part of the wider social context. Reusing buildings is important now and in the future and for this the recognition of the existing values is very important. In my project this value assessment has led to important decisions in the design which give respect to the biography of the building.

In the design process I noticed that the making of decisions is very hard but necessary. There are times in which you get stuck on one element but finally after developing this element you will be content with the result. These are processes that are necessary.

In conclusion I am very proud of what I have accomplished the last two semesters. It was quite hard some times and at some moments I thought it wasn’t going to work but eventually I can say that I support my design and believe this can be a real improvement for this area.