PART II

Evaluation of the site on the Westersingel in Rotterdam

as an ideal location for an asthma youth & lifestyle centre

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1. Introduction

The chosen site is situated at the Westersingel in Rotterdam, where nowadays the Rijndam rehabilitation centre is set. It is an interesting location, because of its strong variety in urban context. Although the site is nearby the inner city, it is not as dense and urban as one might expect. The Westersingel is a part of the green wedge that starts with Het Park, located near the Westzeedijk and ends at the Rochussenstraat, at the edge of the Museum park. The Westersingel can be described as a green and quiet street, maybe a bit to quiet. It is characterized by beautiful houses in classical style on both sides and the different elevations on the site.

A location in Rotterdam might not seem to be obvious as a site for an asthma youth centre, because large cities are often associated with air pollution. However, the site of the Westersingel offers in my opinion a lot of possibilities and qualities, as I will examine more closely in this report.

My goal is, to design a rehabilitation centre in Rotterdam for children with asthma or other lung diseases, from the Randstad region. This way the centre is close to their home. This makes it possible to create an outpatient centre, so the children will be able to live at home while following the treatment. When I imagine this centre, I see it as a place that exudes light, space and, most importantly, air. The centre should feel as a place where you can breathe. Light, space and air were the ideals of the hygienic city movement (during the reconstruction period in the thirties) for a reason. The site of the Westersingel can offer all these qualities inside a busy city as Rotterdam, which is not that common. The low density of buildings, the vicinity of both the Museum park and Het Park, the lush and calm surroundings and the large amount of available space can all contribute to this idea. What the site can offer the centre and vice versa will be examined in this report. This will be viewed from multiple standpoints arising from different types of context. Hopefully, this will result in a layered image of the potentials.
2. The history of the site

The site at the Westersingel has continuously been connected to healthcare since the end of the nineteenth century. Before that, the site was a part of the so-called land of Hoboken. This land was an extensive and very green estate, owned by the family van Hoboken. Their residence was set as well on this estate, near the Westzeedijk. The first connection between healthcare and this location was made in 1890 in the form of hospital, funded by Elisabeth and Maria van Dam. The hospital was situated in a few larger villa’s along the Westersingel. However, the hospital grew so rapidly that around 1900 it was in need for new construction. The new building, designed by Hooijkaas and built in 1904, was the first larger building in these surroundings of little houses and villa’s. Remarkable is, that the entrance is situated on the museum park side, instead of the Westersingel side. This idea originated from the road that was planned upon the land of Hoboken. In the thirties, the new expansion plans were already on the table. Van der Vlught was designated for this task, but due to crisis and the sudden passing of this architect, the design was finished by Van den Broek in 1938. The entrance was replaced to the other side of the building. Ten years later, the hospital was in need of another expansion, which was executed in three phases by the same architecture firm. First, a new x-ray department was added between the building of Hooijkaas and the building from 1938. Secondly, in 1955, a house for the nurses was added and another new building, that looked very similar to the building of Van der Vlught and Van den Broek. In the third phase, the building for the nurses was expanded by Van den Broek and Bakema in 1967 and this building still exists on the site. In 1990, the main building was demolished due to the move of the hospital to another location in Spijkenisse. Originally, a fourth phase was planned, in which the pumping station in front of the hospital should be demolished, but this plan was never executed. The rehabilitation centre, that is located now on site, was built a few years later in 1993 and designed by Cannegieter and Kan.1 The site itself, still exudes a park-like character and in combination with the beautiful remains of the former hospital, it still can be interpreted as a ‘healthy’ and suitable place for a rehabilitation centre. By designing another healthcare facility, as in my case an asthma youth centre, the ongoing tradition of health care functions on this location will be continued.

1 Reumer & van Muijen 1996:5-14
Pictures of the historic development (f.t.t.b):
The hospital in 1890
New building by Hooijkaas built in 1904
Expansion by van der Vlught & van den Broek in 1938
Second phase in 1955 (www.pinterest.com)
Expanded nurses house by Bakema, built in 1967 (o.i.)
After the demolition in 1990
Rijndam centre as to be built in 1993
(All other pictures: Reumen & van Muijen 1996)
3. Urban characteristics of the site

On the site itself, the urban fabric is not easy to relate to. The surrounding buildings differ quite in size and height. On the one hand, beautiful independent houses from the late nineteenth century stand along both sides of the Westersingel, which contain mostly offices and a few dwellings. On the other hand, the site contains multiple larger buildings, such as the remaining buildings of the hospital, the Rijndam centre and two residential towers. Nowadays, the Bakema tower, which is the former nurses house, contains student apartments. The Rijndam rehabilitation centre will be demolished in the near future, because the institute will move elsewhere. Therefore this building will be disregarded for this site. The pumping station that has survived all the renovations and expansions of the hospital, looks a bit lost in between all these massive buildings blocks. The station used to be situated between other smaller buildings, where it functioned as part of a greater union. From an urbanistic point of view, the new asthma centre should heal this chaotic urban fabric by relating to the different heights as well as involving the station again in a larger entity. The pumping station could function as a monumental element inside a courtyard and contribute to its character or functions as an eye catcher and attract visitors to the site. The new centre should be more visible than the Rijndam centre is at the moment. This existing centre kind of hides behind the other buildings and does not play a lead role in concatenating the location.

The site is located next to a dike, the Westzeedijk, which causes height differences. The front of the site lies higher than the back and the main entrance to the area, by the Westersingel, lies on a ramp.

Interesting is the fact that the passer-by of the area on the dike has a very different point of view towards the location than the users of the centre. This difference in views can be emphasized by creating different experiences on different levels in the form of roof gardens or even routes on top of the building. This could also be a helpful tool to separate public from private routes and spaces or to create a new (public) route from the Westersingel to the museum park.

3.1 Creating a public route

At the back of the site, the Museum park is situated. At the moment, it is possible to enter the museum park from the Westersingel by crossing the site. However, the visitor does not experience it that way. When I visited the location with some colleagues, we all felt as if we were not allowed to enter this route, as it is hidden next to the Rijndam centre. The museum park is not visible from the Westersingel, which contributes to the non-functioning of the route. On top of that the site is, as mentioned before very quiet and has a lack of public functions. One will only enter the Westersingel to pass by, to go to the Rijndam centre or to go home.

Nevertheless, the idea of a public route between the singel and the Museum park is a good idea. In this way, the green character of the Westersingel can be connected with the green Museum park. The site will become more lively, as more visitors will pass by. In order to make such a public route work, it is important to make it clearly visible and attractive. A possible solution for this, is the implementation of a passage with public functions attached to it. In the case of the asthma center, this could be functions such as a café, a small shop or even a pharmacy. The city of Rotterdam is already familiar with the typology of a passage. Nearby the site, van Vollenhovenstraat, this typology is used to create an interesting space for events. Before the war, another passage was located closely to the site, namely the one on the Cool singel. This passage was a glass covered street with small shops, located between the Cool singel and the Korte Hoogstraat. Both of these passage are fine examples of a properly functioning public space, which are not only connections between streets but also places within themselves. However, this kind of passage should be offered in an outdoor way, as the site has very beautiful and green surroundings. This outdoor public route can easily be combined with courtyards or gardens, which can function also as meeting spaces for the surrounding neighbours. As stated in the regional vision of Rotterdam, there is a lack of meeting

[www.engelfriet.net]
Bird view of the location (www.bing.com)

pictures of the location (o.i.) (f.l.t.r.):
View on the Rijndam centre, 19th century houses
Museum park , The pumping station, View from the dike
View on ramp towards the dike
possibilities for these neighbours. This little contact between neighbours forms an issue in this neighbourhood. It influences the appreciation of the environment by its inhabitants in a negative way. Through courtyards the centre will not only offer indoor meeting spaces, such as a café, but also attractive outside areas. This fits well with the regional vision of the Hoboken area by the municipal of Rotterdam, which states that this area should offer space for body and mind, by forming a green buffer inside a busy city. At the same time this area, and especially the Museum park and the Westersingel, should form the outdoor cultural heart of the city with the Westersingel as a cultural route. However, at the moment the Westersingel does not offer any cultural activities. Enclose courtyards could also contribute as a solution for this problem, by implementing cultural elements in some of them, offering a comfortable outdoor residence for young and old. Regarding the function of an asthma centre, these elements should appeal to both asthmatic as non-asthmatic children. One could think of animal like figurines on which they can climb, such as the aardvark in the Bartokpark at Arnhem, or even interactive elements with which children can produce sounds or make drawings.

3 Gemeente Rotterdam A 2014:9,29
4 Gemeente Rotterdam 2009:16-21,58-59
4. Qualities and flaws of the site: as an ideal location for an asthma youth & lifestyle centre

4.1 The qualities of the site
Besides the beautiful green and calm surroundings, the site offers many social qualities, as the surrounding functions meet the programme of the asthma youth centre to a large extend:

1. Vicinity of healthcare functions
   The Erasmus MC, the Sophia children hospital and the Kinderhaven policlinic are all situated very near to the site. This contributes to the safety of the site, because when one of the children suddenly gets a heavy asthma attack that can no longer be controlled by the professionals inside the asthma centre, the child can quickly be brought to the hospital or the emergency room. It could also work the other way around. When a child is diagnosed with asthma, the hospital may refer the child to the centre. This is convenient for both the child as the parents, because the rehabilitation treatment can take place close to home. The envisioned centre should be comparable to treatment centre Salem in Ermelo. Salem is one of the few, that besides adults also treats children, that suffer from lung diseases. It focusses on the rehabilitation of the patient and teaches the patient to cope with the disease. The centre is an outpatient one and concentrates on patients in the surroundings of Ermelo. In the Randstad, such centres don’t exist. If a child is diagnosed with asthma or another lung disease, the child will be treated inside the hospital or by a general practitioner. If the asthma is not that severe, the child will just visit the doctor a few times a year. If the asthma is difficult to treat, the child will be referred to an inpatient rehabilitation centre, situated in the east of the country. One can imagine, that this last option can be quite frightening for a young child. The new centre should therefore function as an intermediary between these options for Rotterdam and, if possible, the Randstad, similar to the way Salem functions within Ermelo.

Pictures of asthma centre Salem, Ermelo (www.stjansdal.nl and www.destensor.nl)
2. Vicinity of childcare related functions
   Secondly, two kindergartens are present on the Westersingel. A kindergarten could form an appropriate addition to the program. In addition, the envisioned asthma centre could offer a safe outdoor playground, for the children of these kindergartens to play.

3. Vicinity of primary schools
   There are two primary schools at the Schiedamse vest, which is nearby the site of the new asthma youth & lifestyle centre. These schools share a large playground in front of the two buildings. Unfortunately, the playground is lacking green completely, with the exception of the few beautiful trees surrounding it. Across the street from the playground, the sports hall of these schools is situated, next to the Wallon church. Although, this seems very useful, the sports hall is too small dimensioned for two schools and not in great condition. This could offer a great change in regard to the envisioned asthma centre. On the one hand, a double use of space is possible. The rehabilitation of children with asthma or pulmonary problems, requires psychical exercise in order to improve the condition of the patient. This means, that the building should provide various sport facilities, both indoor and outdoor. By ensuring that the facilities are dimensioned large enough to facilitate not only the patients, but also the children of both primary schools. In this way, these schools are offered a suitable gym nearby. The lack of green can also be solved by double space use. The new asthma centre could offer school gardens or a sports facility inside a garden. It should be noted here, that these green spaces still need to be safe for asthmatic children, as great amount of these children also suffers from hay fever.
   On the other hand, the vicinity of schools offers a chance of bringing patient and non-patient together. Everybody wants to be ‘normal’, but children with asthma or any other chronic disease will feel different most of the time as they are confronted with limitations due to their disease. In this centre, children with asthma will not only be rehabilitated, but they will also be educated about their disease. By learning how to use their medicine, how to sport and how to live with asthma, they will be able to function well or at least better than before, despite their asthma. Meeting other children in a casual way, offers them the possibility to carry out their new taught lifestyle and discover similarities with the school children or children in the neighbourhood. In this way, the children can feel a bit more ‘normal’ again. The asthma centre should offer these meetings in the form of after school clubs, such as crafts or sports, in which both asthmatic and non-asthmatic children can participate. By doing so, it can be avoided, that the centre can be perceived by the school children or neighbourhood children as a place where children go that, in their eyes, are ‘not’ normal. Similar to when people refer to a mental hospital as the madhouse, just by the lack of knowledge. These school and neighbourhood children will have positive associations with the centre, as it will become the place where they sport, play and meet their friends (both asthmatic as non-asthmatic).

4.2 Flaws or possible difficulties of the site
   Besides the tough urban fabric, the site raises difficulties from another character. The site is located within a large city, Rotterdam, and this results in certain aspects that will need some extra attention in order to make the envisioned centre successful on this site.

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5 www.longfonds.nl
6 Deighton 2015: 5
7 I know this from my own experience as well as the many stories that can be found on forums, related to diseases, such as this one about lung diseases: www.longforum.nl
f.t.t.b.:  
Nearby healthcare functions (blue arrows) (o.i.)  
Nearby primary schools (blue arrows) (o.i.)  
Old and small sports hall at the Schiedamse vest (o.i.)
1. Air pollution and noise
Large cities are often associated by asthma patient with negative thoughts, as air pollution and busy roads. Air pollution can cause shortness of breath, coughing, pain on the chest and many other asthmatic symptoms. Due to exhaust gasses of cars, the air is even more polluted around busy traffic routes. These routes can also cause noise nuisance. This all doesn’t sound like ideal settings for an asthmatic youth & lifestyle centre. However, the site itself is very quiet, as mentioned before and the only somewhat busier road is situated on top of the Westzeedijk. Through the differences in height, the envisioned centre will not experience that much inconvenience from this road. In addition, the site is very green, which is very uncommon for a large city, and it always has been. It was envisioned as a suitable location for healthcare many years ago and even than they took care of lung diseases, such as tuberculosis, on this site. Although, realistically, the air will be more polluted than it used in that time, it will still be less polluted than other parts of the city.
Besides that, the new asthma centre has also the goal to educate children how to cope with their asthma in their every day life. Therefore, these children also need tool to deal with the situation as it is within a city. By placing the centre inside the city this can be achieved, rather than placing the children in an unrealistic environment, that differs a lot from their home situation.

2. Different ethnicities
In contrast to Ermelo, Rotterdam includes inhabitants from various ethnicities. The majority of the children in Rotterdam has a different ethnicity than Dutch (39% of the children are Dutch) as can be seen in the diagram. Most of these children are Moroccan (13%), Turkish (12%) or Surinamese (10%). As a result of this, the centre should appeal to children from all these different backgrounds. In order to do so, the centre could offer functions related to different cultures, such as a Turkish Hamman instead of just offering the usual wellness programme. This could easily be implemented as a part of the treatment of the asthma centre, as, against all odds, many asthma patients experience such functions as sauna’s as very relaxing, due to the dry and hot air.

3. Lack of liveliness
The lack of liveliness is mentioned before as a problem on a urban level, but this lack should also be solved from another point of view. In order for the children not to feel put away

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8 www.longfonds.nl
9 Reumer & van Muijen 1996:5-14
10 www.longforum.nl
11 Information in diagram from table in: Gemeente Rotterdam B 2014: 4
inside an institution, it is important that it is included in the city life. A public route and public courtyards, as described before will not only create more liveliness, but will also attract different user groups to the site besides the asthmatic children. In combination with the double use of space by schools, the children will not feel like they’re the ‘only one’ that need to go to this centre and they will feel less singled out.

5. Conclusion

The development of an asthma youth & lifestyle centre on this site will create great possibilities for both the centre as the surroundings. It offers rehabilitation for asthmatic children on a very lush and green location, in the Randstad, close to their homes. In addition, the asthma centre is able to upgrade this area by making it more active, while at the same time the direct surroundings contain a supporting program. The land of Hoboken, where the site is a part of, has been connected to health from the nineteenth century and this connection will be continued by the envisioned centre. The centre can be significant on an urban level, by healing the distorted urban fabric, consisting of buildings which differ a lot in height and size. A public route, with functions as a café or small shop, through or around the centre will connect the Westersingel to the Museumpark, making the site more lively. Enclosed courtyards are a great contribution to this route, as they offer meetings spaces for the neighbours, that are currently lacking. By placing cultural elements in these courtyards, the centre will not only be in line with the municipal vision for this area, but they could also offer appealing and activating places for children (both asthmatic as non-asthmatic).

A large benefit of this site is the vicinity of many related functions, such as healthcare, schools and kindergartens, which offers a safe and practical location. Besides that, the centre can offer the nearby schools an appropriate sports hall and possible school gardens by double use of space, while the schools offers the centre a social environment for the asthmatic children. In this way, the asthmatic children can feel ‘normal’ through the connection between patient and non-patient in different activities.

However, there are some difficulties that this side brings along, regarding the design of an asthma centre on this location. As Rotterdam is a large city, air pollution and noise could become a large problem. Although these problems should be taken into consideration, setting the centre on this site can offer similar circumstances as the living conditions of the asthmatic children and in this way fit in a programme that learns them to cope with asthma on a daily base. Added to that, this site is much greener and less dense than usual sites within a city. The second point, to keep in mind is that the envisioned centre should be able to appeal to different ethnicities, as the majority of children in Rotterdam isn’t from Dutch origin. Third, the deadness of the location could lead to associations with an institution or feeling singled out. Therefore, it is important that the centre becomes part of the city life through the public route, the courtyards and the double use of space. All in all, this site could offer great settings for an asthma youth & lifestyle centre, provided that the difficulties on this site are not only addressed on a urban level, but also on a environmental and social level.
6. References

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https://www.longfonds.nl/de-lucht-die-u-inademt (20-5-2015)

6.3 Illustrations

Page 1:
Fig. 1  Own illustration

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Fig. 1-3,6-7  Reumer, J. & B. van Muijen
1996  *Het Rijndamterrein Rotterdam: natuur, geschiedenis en huidig gebruik.* Rotterdam: Natuur Historisch Museum Rotterdam
Fig. 4  https://nl.pinterest.com/jkagenaarsr/rotterdam-vroeger-as-it-was/ (30-3-2015)
Fig. 5  Own illustration

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Fig. 1  http://www.bing.com/maps/?FORM=Z9LH3#Y3A9NTEuOTYTgxfjQuMzg4MDE1Jmx2bD0xMiZzdHk9YiZzc15cC5yaWpuZGFfnBnLjF+cmFkLjgw (30-3-2015)
Fig. 2-7  Own illustration

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Fig. 1  http://www.engelfriet.net/Alie/Aad/passagerotterdam.htm (30-3-2015)
Fig. 2  http://www.wht-rotterdam.nl/event-locatie (30-3-2015)
Fig. 3  Gemeente Rotterdam
2009 Gebiedsvisie Rotterdam Hoboken 2030: international topmilieu met ruimte voor lichaam en geest. Rotterdam: Gemeente Rotterdam

Fig. 4 http://www.nufoto.nl/fotos/397282/feestaardvarken-arnhem-officieel-geopend.html (20-5-2015)

Fig. 5 http://www.abt.eu/projecten/feestaardvarken-arnhem.aspx (20-5-2015)

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Fig.1-3 https://www.stjansdal.nl/behandelcentrum-salem (28-4-2015)
Fig.4 http://www.destentor.nl/regio/harderwijk/sport-spel-en-ontspanning-op-nieuw-zorgpark-bij-revalidatiekliniek-salem-1.3084122 (28-4-2015)

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Fig. 1-3 Own illustration