1.0 Introduction

The design location of the graduation studio Heritage and Architecture is situated in the inner city centre of Amsterdam. The Binnengasthuis is an area in the buffer zone of the UNESCO World Heritage Canal District. Although the studio that I have chosen is concerned with Heritage and Housing, my project focuses on the public space of this area, and in particular the Binnengasthuisstraat. The aim of this project is to design qualitative public space, by proposing small scale interventions on buildings, in the dense inner city of Amsterdam where there is a lot of external pressure of users of the city. The project shows how neglected public space and architectural tensions between buildings can be designed in such a way that it benefits both the buildings as the public space. The five buildings around the square serve as a specific test case for a generic idea of improving public space in neglected areas.

The reflection paper is a part of the graduation studio. The paper reflects on the final product of the studio, which is the design. The following aspects will be discussed:

- the relation between the theme of the graduation lab and the subject chosen by the student within this framework.
- the relationship between the project and the wider social context.
- the relation between research and design.

2.0 The relation between the theme of the graduation lab and the subject chosen by the student within this framework

The central theme of the studio Heritage and Housing is housing in the historic inner cities. The assignment is to design a housing project within the borders of the University of Amsterdam (UVA) inner city campus. The studio started with a set of topics, related to the buildings and public spaces on site on which the students could choose from. The topics: the 19th century institutional architecture, eighties architecture, renovated, transformed and re-used buildings and the urban situation of the Binnengasthuis site. Once the topic was chosen a research question was formulated to create an individual research. This resulted in diverse studies of each student about the site with different approaches. The topic I have chosen was the urban situation of the Binnengasthuis. Because the Binnengasthuis is a very unique place in the heart of the city centre, the public space of the area was what interested me the most. In the research I focused on the encounter of all the different users that can be found on site and in the inner city. Tourists, students, residents of the site, residents of the city, they all use the public space in their own way. What are the conditions of the Binnengasthuis’s public space to stimulate this encounter? In the research I have concluded on several conditions in the public space that stimulate encounter, and on the other hand conditions that discourage encounter. With this set of tools I want to improve the public space of the Binnengasthuis which is going to be the most important space for the whole area in the near future. Instead of designing housing, my approach and design strategy towards the project location is different than the theme suggested by the studio. But I was convinced that this was the problem I wanted to solve and the tutors allowed me to do so.

3.0 The relation between the project and the wider social context

The city of Amsterdam is one of the most attractive cities of the Netherlands. The demand for housing in the city increases every year. Many tourists want to see the beauty of the Amsterdam World Heritage Canal District with their own eyes. Others would like to live in the vibrant city. With the increasing pressure from the tourists but also the demand for more housing in the city centre, the public space is under pressure. Discussions about ‘who owns the city’
are ongoing in society. But why the question of who owns the city anyway? Why not all? Business, housing, tourists, they can all exist next to each other. The public space of a city is the reflection of a sustainable society and therefore a sustainable city.

The Binnengasthuis area is situated in the eye of the storm. Tourists, residents, students, they are all concentrated on the Binnengasthuisstraat. But the purpose and role of the public space in the inner city is vague. The design project shows that the public space in an area with a high density, contrasting functions and architectural languages can be improved in such a way that it enhances all different users of the area. By improving the imperfections of the surrounding buildings and at the same time emphasize the square and defining the borders I create a unity and thereby integrate building, user, and square.

The research and design approach is not only applicable for the Binnengasthuis terrain, but can be useful for all the neighbourhoods where there is a friction between the use of public space. Form, materialization, dimensions and connections to the buildings are site specific and have to be carefully designed in relation to the environment.

4.0 The relation between the methodical line of approach of the graduation lab and the method chosen by the student in this framework

The chair of Heritage and Architecture is focused on the transformation of cities and buildings. Preservation on the one hand and renewal of existing situations on the other hand. The interest of Heritage and Architecture is particularly in the upper division of (cultural and international) heritage. The challenges in the projects proposed by the chair are those in which the history and past of the site/building explicitly determines the future development. The approach of the department towards the chosen projects is
development-oriented. Preservation by development. The different aspects of Heritage and Architecture are structured in a triangle with three knowledge domains: Design, Cultural Value and Technology. Those three domains are the main assets of the department.

Within the studio of Heritage and Architecture, the studio Heritage and Housing aims to realise two ambitious goals. On the one hand the student will develop deep insight into the origins, history, contemporary situation and actual problems of both the Binnengasthuis and the inner city of Amsterdam. On the other hand the student will work on a design with innovative interventions that can offer the existing stock opportunities for a sustainable future in both a generic strategy and a site specific design.

In the first semester of the graduation studio the focus is on the research report. I defined a research question which was going to be a guiding theme throughout the graduation studio. The report consist research in a broader scale and also a part on the site-specific analysis. With the conclusions and answers found in the report the design for the site can be developed. During the design process additional studies are required in order to find the right answer to the research question in relation to cultural value, technology and context and therefore look at every aspect proposed by the chair of Heritage and Architecture.

With the input of the research and analysis made in the first semester, I chose a different path then the aim of the studio was, designing housing. My personal interest was very much on the public space and the surrounding context because of the focus in the research. The Binnengasthuysstraat became my design assignment. I worked on the urban scale of the Binnengasthuysstraat for an overall concept and worked on the architectural scale of the buildings simultaneously. In order to make this project about the monuments and not only about the square, I developed a concept for the square and the adjacent buildings so that I can apply the three knowledge domains of the chair of Heritage and Architecture and also meet the required subjects and products of the Architecture
mastertrack that can be found in the Graduation Manual (p.21) Despite that my design is not confirm the studio's approach the method of the Heritage and Architecture studio is still applicable on the project.

5.0 The relation between research and design

The research that is required in the first semester is not completely finished after the first semester. During the second phase of the project, research and design go hand in hand. During the research I was very much interested in the people on the site and the way they behave in relation to their environment. After the first semester of research, in the second semester I found out that I missed certain information about the buildings and especially about the facades facing the square that I wanted to intervene in. The information that I gained with this additional research could be directly applied into the design.

My personal fascination within this graduation studio was the public space of the Binnengasthuis area. This research is not looking at the physical aspect of housing, but is looking at the public space of the urban situation and the opportunities that are given to encounter the different users of the Binnengasthuis terrain. With the large number of tourists, the public familiarity of the resident in the neighbourhood is decreasing. By creating a pleasant environment around a residential area, the resident would feel more at home. This can be achieved by creating an environment where the repeated encounters can take place. It will give a sense of home and eventually it will contribute to the social cohesion of the neighbourhood.

“What are the spatial conditions within the public space in the encounters between the different users of the Binnengasthuis terrain?”

In the research I investigated the different conditions for public space to function well in relation to the city, and therefore encourage the encounter. In the site specific analysis I explored the conditions on the Binnengasthuisterrain that were present and the conditions that were missing. The final result of the report was an overview of the quality of the different public areas. In combination with the future plans of the university for this site and the results from the research report, I decided to focus on one specific public area that I wanted to improve for the future functioning of the site.

With the construction of the new University Library, the Binnengasthuisstraat is going to be a busy area with many students. But at the same time, there are also residents living there. The Binnengasthuisstraat is in the current situation divided into several parts and functioning in a way that it is not stimulating the encounter of the different users. In order to create harmony, stimulate encounter and not friction between the users and the use of the space, I designed a structure around the square that emphasizes the square as a unity and at the same time solve the problems of the adjacent buildings. By programmatic adjustments to the buildings within the same architectural language, I create an unity and integrate all buildings and programs around the square. Form, materialization, dimensions and connections to the buildings are site specific.

The coloms of the structure are dimensioned 200 x 500 mm to create a small and vertical elevation from the sight of the square and a depth of 500 mm to create a zone between the coloms. The height of the coloms are different relating to the buildings they are connected to. To emphasize the verticality of the structure, street lighting is integrated in the colomn. The lightstrip divides the already slender size of 200 mm into three parts.

In front of the housing, the structure creates a bufferzone for the residents of the building. This zone is defined by the structure and gives the opportunity for residents to spend time outside in a more private zone in front of their homes. In between the coloms, with a depth of 500 mm, there is a stairs, with multiple use, creating the transition zone of the public street and the private outside space of the house.
To create the opportunity of life on the edge of the square, people are more likely to use the space of the square more into the middle. The vrouwenverband had in the former situation an extended part on only ground floor level with small openings and bars in front of the window. In the future situation this building is going to be an office for the UVA with a few seminar rooms. Be replacing the seminar rooms adjacent to the square and by opening up the facade, their will be a connection between the inside activities and the outside. Seeing each other will be the encounter that is created with this intervention. Also within this intervention their are oppertunities to sit to create life at the edge of the square.

The demolation of the Theo Bosch part of the Administration building leaves a scar on the facade. Due to the demolation a new entrance had to be designed. The structure which passes along the facade creates a buffer zone between buildig and square in which the new entrance can be designed. In the future situation this building is the Information Center of the UVA for students. To emphasize the publicness of the function on the square the entrance is spaciously designed.

The already excisting cafe hidden in the First Clinic is a great oppertunity to add horeca to the square in order to create liveliness. The cafe is situated in basement of the West wing of the First Clinic and by creating an entrance on the square the cafe can play a role in the liveliness of the Binnengasthuisstraat. To solve the height difference and to design a defined terrace in front of the cafe, the space behind the structure is lowered, creating a stairs with multiple use, allowing the transition space to be a part of the facade of the First Clinic.

The Library is the most important and public building on the square and therefore the structure evolves into a gate of great height, creating a grand entrance into the building. In the structure on the first and second floor the inside space of the library penetrates through the facade on the square. Just like the intervention of the Vrouwenverband people can see one another.

There are five streets connected to the square. Three of them are going deeper into the Binnengasthuis area. Two of them connect the square with the inner city the of Amsterdam. The streets that go deeper into the area are defined with the structure, functioning as a physical border. The two streets which connect to the city are open entrances to make the threshold of going into this area as fluently as possible.