P4 Reflection Paper

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Graduation project: The ABC of Happiness

The relationship between Explore Lab methodology and my project.

Explore Lab is the only studio, which gives a unique opportunity to explore personal topic of fascination. It allows to choose between variety of research methods and implement the results in the design approach. When my topic of interest (a very broad term of happiness) emerged, I firstly specified a certain criteria (holistic understanding of education and health) and problems interrelated to further set my independent workflow.

My project focuses mostly on the social aspect, precisely on the relationship between immigrant and native Dutch children, as well as their families in order to bridge the gap between those groups.

Although, growing intolerance is a global issue, I decided to focus on Netherlands – particularly
on Rotterdam as my case study. The research was conducted in several steps, firstly concentrating on statistic data and chosen literature on Dutch children status and current health and educational system looking though the lenses of immigrants as a study. Observations were extended with on-site visits (Feijenoord), meetings and interviews with people engaged in the topic and conference attendance.

Secondly, certain literature references were analyzed to comprehend psychology of happiness, and relation of architecture and urban planning towards people’s condition. The outcomes were translated into the design strategy and specific program arrangement of the ‘center for comprehensive early childhood, primary education, health, nutrition, parent and community involvement services for children and their families’.

The relationship between Explore Lab theme and project’s case study.

After preliminary discoveries the scope of research was narrowed down to site-specific study: the Southern part of Rotterdam – Feijenoord district, with a location facing River Maas and city’s landmark Hefbrug. The choice of site was not accidental, it was based on the fact that Feijenoord is a melting pot of multicultural groups, and historically was a significant area linking both sides of the river. Nowadays Feijenoord lost its identity, lacks social interaction and a platform for communication.
In relation to Explore Lab curriculum, I could dedicate significant amount of time on research. Although, from the very beginning, I had a concrete research question set, I did not push myself to stop exploring soon after P2 deadline, but continued analyzing particular case studies while simultaneously preparing for designing steps. I took a longer glance at structuralists’ approach, especially buildings and public spaces by famous Dutch representatives (Aldo van Eyck and Herman Hertzberger) in order to translate the concept of polarities reconciliation and image of a building as a city into my urban-architectural merger.

The relationship between the project and the wider social context.

Nowadays Europe is facing rise in intolerance towards non-western and western immigrants. Crisis emerges between ethnic minorities and eastern European migrants. Immigrants and asylum seekers are facing increasing difficulties in the Dutch realm. Certain amounts of Dutch citizens tend to suffer from poverty and encounter obstacles in the labor market. Serious family related complications harm mostly the offspring. Hampered access to health services and education contributes to health complications among children and lowers their chances for a successful future. Discrimination and violence causes rejection from society, a feeling of seclusion, which affects children’s development on multiple levels.

In order to face current problems the project’s goal was set to mainly provide a platform for a dialogue. I target Dutch society as a whole, without a stigmatizing separation between ethnic minorities and indigenous citizens. I believe that my building would become a point of attraction in Rotterdam for many neighborhoods, where different social groups will be willing to interact and exchange the knowledge and experience.
The relationship between research and design.

Within the research process I managed to focus on a theoretical approach, as well as pragmatic solutions. The project is developed in order to raise awareness of growing intolerance in European Union countries. I want to indicate the consequences of discrimination behavior in nowadays society and what we can do to change it in the near future. Moreover, I want to underline the significance of recently developed off shoot of psychology, which steps away from treatment methodology into prevention, showing that every person can be responsible for their level of happiness, if only motivated and supported well. The building itself is deeply rooted in the city’s context. Except from providing proper educational and health care background the design brings the identity back to the neighborhood, links both sides of River Maas keeping in mind the historical values of the area. Ideally, the project tries to link social groups and city’s ‘elements’ into a new, homogeneous structure.