REPORT 2

Analysis of the existing situations

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Introduction

The manual states that “the second report is an analysis of the existing situations as regards the hierarchy of workspaces and meeting spaces”. In my opinion, looking at the interior layout of the building and the way people use the work space is not enough for understanding the working culture of a certain organisation. That is why in this report I want to include observations we have conducted during lunch breaks around the studied locations. I think that activities people engage in during their lunch break – whether they go outside or not – can correlate with the environment within the building or the work they are engaged in. It can also have an affect on their productivity and show the relation they have with their colleagues.

Unfortunately, we have studied two different buildings for Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment, which creates a certain difficulty with drawing conclusions. But I will try to draw certain assumptions by trying to compare these with the other situations studied.

Lunch observations

During lunch we have observed three different locations: former VROM building and surroundings, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ministry of Waterworks and Infrastructure. First I would like to shortly describe our observations and then I will draw the conclusions about people’s preferences and activities during lunch time.

Former VROM building is located right next to The Hague Central Station: at its south-west entrance. Many people pass through it on the way to the city centre or other office locations situated in the area around. A street Turfmarkt is a path which leads people from the central station to the shopping area of The Hague. It also has some retail and hospitality functions on it. When we have visited the area, the weather was very nice. Because of that people were occupying the benches outside and sitting on the terrace of a few cafes along the Turfmarkt Street. Many people were just passers-by, but there were also people who were leaving the office buildings to go for a walk, to a café for a bite or to the grocery shop nearby.
The passage under the building is mostly used to walk through. There is a cafe in the passage, but whenever I pass by it is barely full.

The passage exits onto Oranjebrugsingel: a rather open street with a canal, which lies in between the office buildings.

The back entrance of one of the office buildings is facing the canal (fig.4). It was a sunny day and, even though there are no real facilities, people were still sitting by the water having a bite and talking to each other (fig.5).

**Figure 2**  
**Figure 3**  
**Figure 4**  
**Figure 5**

Turfmarkt was very busy during lunch. We could see people leaving the office buildings to go outside (fig.6). Many of them took a seat in the cafes on the Turfmarkt and have lunch together with their colleagues (fig.7-9); others went to Albert Hein nearby to buy some food and later took a seat at the bench along the gates (fig.10-12).

**Figure 6**  
**Figure 7**  
**Figure 8**  
**Figure 9**  
**Figure 10**  
**Figure 11**  
**Figure 12**

Maybe it was to get away from the business of Turfmarkt, but people were also going to Muizenplein for their lunch. There is a nice cafe on the square which opens specially for lunch time, and on that nice and sunny day it was full with people both from offices and not (fig.13-16).

**Figure 13**
When we were walking through Turfmarkt we saw many people walked passed us: public servants taking a lunch break, walking from one location to another or just hanging out. They were all taking advantage of the good weather and public space. People were also occupying little squares, open spaces and sitting places along the Turfmarkt (fig.13-14). Even though Spuiplein is not the most loved public space, during that warm day people were really enjoying its openness and the way it was getting filled by the sunshine. They were sitting on the peculiar benches and on the stairs taking advantage of their lunch break (fig.15-16).

Ministry of Foreign affairs located at the north-east entrance of the central station: at the side, where the New Babylon complex has been built, which, as we found out later, plays an important role for the workers of the Ministry and other offices. During our observations quite a lot of people were going out during the lunch break. Mostly we saw people leaving in groups and going in the direction of New Babylon complex, central station or the area of Turfmarkt (fig.22-26).
As we have been told later by some of the civil servants of the ministry, they like to come to New Babylon to buy their lunch. On the ground floor there are a number of supermarkets (fig.27) where you can buy something and take it with you to eat outside in the park on next to the pond in the inner courtyard (fig.28-29); or sit down there in one of the cafes (fig.30).

When we visited the building of the Ministry of Waterworks and Infrastructure, we found ourselves in a different setting. The building is located outside the city centre and is surrounded by a lot of greenery: trees on the streets and a park. On one hand it makes the location less central, in comparison to the other two ministries, but on the other hand it creates a more serene atmosphere for (lunch) breaks. Here we also stayed and looked around for some time, observing what people do during the lunch break and whether they use the facilities around the building or maybe not.
Even though the weather was very nice and the surroundings are suitable for walking around and staying outside, it was not too busy outside. We did see quite a few people leaving and going for lunch somewhere else or just picking something up from the shop nearby and bringing it back to the office (fig.32-33), as it seemed, but not many people actually stayed outside. Although, the reason for it might also be that there are actually not so many places where one could have lunch outside. Here there were mostly just accommodations for short bites and coffee or cigarettes breaks (fig.33-38).

As mentioned earlier, the building lays is a really good location: the park is just around the corner. Many people mentioned that they enjoy taking a short break and going for a walk outside in the green. It helps them relax and forget about their work, even if it is just for a moment.

We observed several groups of people leaving the building and just walk around it together, enjoying the good weather (fig.39). Sometimes people take their lunch and go into the park (fig.40). And we even saw one of the workers go for a jog (fig.41), which is a very good way to take a break and to relax away from the computers and tables.

Observing people’s behaviour during lunch at three locations showed interesting results. The weather, in my opinion, plays an important role in this case, but in general people find it important to go outside and move after sitting the whole day. They also like to change the environment, which helps them recharge their mind. But, considering how many people work in the building and how many people we actually saw leaving the building, I can conclude that still most people prefer to stay inside during the lunch break. As we have been told and we could assume, it might be because they prefer to stay inside and eat at the canteen or at the working place as they have too much work to do and therefore no time to go outside during; or they live far from work and do not have time because of that. It can also be that the restaurant in the building has a nice environment where the workers can eat, chat and meet up with each other. But this we could find out better when looking at the interior situation of the ministry buildings.
Existing interior situations

In order to understand the working culture of ministries we have visited the following ministry buildings: building of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, building of Ministry of Waterworks and Infrastructure and former location of VROM. As VROM building is not in use anymore at the moment, it is difficult to see how certain spaces were used by the workers. That is why here I will talk about the two other interior environments.

There are actually two locations for the Ministry of Waterworks and Infrastructure. This time we have visited the one which is closer to The Hague Central Station.

The ministry building has a rather standard shape for office buildings: it has a rectangular layout, which makes the organisation of the building rather straightforward. In the centre the building has a technical core with sanitary functions, elevators and stairs. At the moment the building layout and working culture is a combination of flexible working and fixed working places. This mostly depends on the work people do.

The concept of flex working has been introduced in this building in order to cut the costs. As there are people in the organisation who work part time or are away on the meetings much, the occupancy of the building used to be only 40%. This means that the owner of the building pays for unused space. Keeping that in mind, they introduced a flexible working system which would give an opportunity to choose a work place according to activity and work they need to do. So, now the occupancy increased to 65%. In order to induce the concept of the flexible working environment, the company has introduced a clean desk policy. This makes it easier for people to move around and occupy available spots. The two floors that have been transformed to adapt this policy are floor seven and eleven.

As you can see from the plans presented in figure 43 and 44, the two floors have a number of different types of work places. Despict the flexible policy, there is still a number of fixed group working places (fig.47). Many other working places - both individual and shared - are mostly situated in closed rooms. It seems that the spatial requirements of the work places are kept to the minimum, especially when you look at the individual working places.
When it comes to meeting places, the distinction between the traditional ones - separate room - and new ones - open space - is more obvious (fig.45-46).

The figures 45-47 show the different working spaces:
- fig.45: closed flexible working space
- fig.46: open flexible working space
- fig.47: fixed group working space

The figures 50-52 show the different meeting spaces:
- fig.45: formal closed meeting space - this is a typical traditional meeting space behind closed doors.
- fig.46: informal meeting space (on the background: formal meeting space) - the informal meeting space is presented by two sofas facing each other. This meeting place is more for short time meetings or just recreational breaks and chatting with colleagues. On the background you can see a more formal meeting space: there is a large meeting table and a wall with different information.
- fig.47: formal/informal open meeting space - this is a less typical meeting space because the table is higher than usually. Because the table is not separated from the surroundings by walls or shelves, it is less formal. But it can still be used not only for short meetings and conversations with colleagues, but also for creative discussions in a larger group of colleagues.

Aside from the working and meeting spaces there are also other types of places and spaces within the building. On the top floor there is a company restaurant (fig.53) which has a great view to the surroundings, but still it is not being used any other time rather than lunch breaks. Maybe it has something to do with its whiteness and glossiness which makes it too bright and somehow maybe too clean and does not create a nice atmosphere for working.
Other informal meeting locations might include bar and coffee corner (fig.54, 55). Here it is where you can get a nice beverage and maybe a snack and enjoy in a friendly or business conversation with your colleague(s). At copy corner (fig.56) it is just easy to bump into each other and exchange some friendly messages. When people want to have a quiet time phoning someone without disturbing anyone or being disturbed, they might use the phone booth, even though we have been told that the telephone booths are not being used very often.

The overall idea of flexible working at the ministry is interesting, and some aspects show improvement. But we still noticed that sometimes people still occupy a certain working area with the whole team and do not leave there. They do it because they find it easier that way to be closer with the team, otherwise they have to search for each other. Also, with flexible concept it was the idea that the work place should be related to the type of work people do. But people do not always choose the place keeping that in mind. They prefer to choose the place which works the best for them and which feels more comfortable to them at the moment or all the time. It seems that it will either take time for people to adapt to the new flexible working environment, or the company would have to provide both fixed and flexible working places.

The building of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is nothing like the building of the Ministry of Waterworks and Infrastructure. The overall shape looks very layered and complicated. So does the floor plan (fig.60). It almost looks like an unfinished fractal. In the building there are both types of floor plan configurations: floors with traditional floor plans and the ones with new division for flexible working.

The traditional floor plan has a series of long corridors branching out of the central hall. These corridors lie in the middle of each “arm” of the building (fig.61). Because of the way the traditional layout was organised, there were not many informal meeting spaces on the floor. In this case the corridor was used as a common space for the people of the building (fig.62, 63). In some spots on the walls there would be notice boards where workers can place cards, photographs and notes to each other (fig.62). We also found a few coffee machines with a few sitting spots next to it (fig.63).
On either side of the corridor there are offices located behind the closed doors. The offices vary in size: some are private offices, others are offices for a small group of people and some are for a larger team.

As the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has a large collection of Dutch art, the corridors are used to present it (fig.64) as in this case it is seen by visitors also, rather than when it is hanging in a personal office.

Apart from narrow corridors there are also central points where corridors meet with the vertical circulation area. On certain floors and especially in the minister wing these areas are made to look representative (fig.65-67). They are rather spacious and are decorated accordingly: artwork, nice furniture, flags and plants.

On either side of the corridor there are offices located behind the closed doors. The offices vary in size: some are private offices, others are offices for a small group of people and some are for a larger team.

As the work places were private and people were not moving around, the work place has become a personal environment. Especially it is visible on the photos of Figure 71, 72 and 73. The offices are personalised with plants, photographs and, as it is a Ministry or Foreign Affairs and the employees have to travel much, there are also many artifacts and souvenirs brought from foreign countries.

fig.68: closed private office with an archive
fig.69-70: closed office for a group of people
fig.71-73: closed private office with a meeting table
The new layout of the floor plan (fig. 74) differs from the former traditional one. Here, the corridor is not a long and narrow space, but a space that does not have strict boarders. It does not only lead the way through the building, but it connects spaces with each other and becomes part of working and meeting environments within the building. This way the floor plan becomes lighter, more spacious and it seems that there is more air and less weight around (fig. 75). This has been achieved by tearing down most of the solid walls and substituting them with translucent ones for the meeting rooms (fig. 77), or creating the separation with the help of the furniture (fig. 76).

This intervention also affects the atmosphere of work and meeting places. Overall there was not such a big variety of open work places. These were mostly just a group of tables (2 to 10) placed in a semi-open space. As there was a culture of flexible working on the floor, there was not individual personalisation on the tables. There was a general interior personalisation throughout the floor: coloured walls, flowers, art work or special furniture elements (fig. 81).

As now with the flexible working concept the office has a clean desk policy, the workers have to tidy up their desk every day and move their personal belongings elsewhere. For these large clusters - walls - of lockers have been placed by to the core of the building (fig. 81). And because there is no opportunity to personalise their desk, the workers got an opportunity to personalise their lockers.
On the contrary to the variety of the working places, the variety of the meeting places was rather large (fig.82-86). Along the corridor there were plenty of formal meeting places situated behind the glass walls (fig.77). These meeting rooms were supposed to be reserved in advance to hold a meeting. But there were also plenty of informal meeting areas which could be used for a more informal meeting with your team (fig.82). Or rooms which could be used to leisure breaks and work discussions (fig.83, 85) but also to be able to engage in other types of activities (for e.g. foosball). Spaces like the one presented on figure 84 can be used both for informal team meetings, short breaks or short term work on a laptop. Places like coffee corners and copy places (fig.86) always serve as informal meeting areas.

One of the areas of the building with which the designers were really proud was the canteen (fig.87-89). The idea was that the place would not only serve as a place where people could eat during the lunch break, but it was also supposed to become a place where people could have informal meetings during or outside the lunch break. This was the reason why the furniture was diversified by lounge chairs and tables (fig.89).

Overall is seems that in Ministry of Foreign Affairs a very large attention has been paid to creating a good and comfortable working environment by using pleasant and distinctive interior elements. These elements are used not only to create a certain atmosphere but also to create a sense of space and help people identify with where they are. It is very important to create this kind of feeling for people as with flexible working they do not have their own working place anymore. So these elements help then to feel home and helps to understand where about in the building they are located, which helps them find their colleagues.

In order to make way-finding and locating colleagues and team mates easier a special system has been created (fig.90). It works as a check in system: whenever a worker logs in on a desktop computer within the building, the location of this PC turns green on the floor plan. Unfortunately this system does not work when a person is using a laptop, even if the official log-in is used. So, still, emailing or calling is a solution to arrange formal or informal meetings with colleagues.
Conclusion

It is visible that the two examples first of all differ by the working culture. This in turn affects the building where they work, the interior layout and elements. When we were visiting the buildings around lunch time, we saw that people around the Hague Central Station would go outside more than the workers of the Ministry of Waterworks and Infrastructure. Of course, it can be that the surroundings also have an influence on that: around VROM building and Central Station there are many more places to go to and things to do than around the Ministry of Waterworks and Infrastructure. Therefore it seems that the livelier the environment is the more willing people are to go outside and take part in that life.

I think also the willingness and opportunity to go outside depends much on the workload of the workers. When we talked to people who work at the Ministry of Waterworks and Infrastructure, I have gotten an impression that they do not have much time to take breaks during the day. This was most likely the reason why we did not see large crowds leaving the building during the lunch break.

This attitude towards the work that you do really relates to what kind of environment you want to have around you when you are busy working. The ministry buildings have a different shape: one is a tower typology and another is a complicated building with multiple wings. In his book “S,M,L,XL“ Rem Koolhaas talks about a typical floor plan as something that was characteristic for the office buildings of the 20th century America. The typical feature of this floor plan was a central of distinct core and a free floor plan around it. The building floor would therefore be of a rather deep rectangular shape. At the same time in Europe there was no such thing as a typical floor plan. The buildings had a more prolonged shape and had corridor layout where on either side there would be offices. Such difference in architecture existed because of different building regulations: natural lighting, view to the outside and thermal comfort. In our case the building of the Ministry of Infrastructure does not have such a deep floor plan, but the overall idea is very standard.

You can say that the building of the Ministry of Waterworks and Infrastructure is of a typical plan, just a less deep one. According to the architects of a Typical plan “[office building] does not demand a particular architecture, its only function is to let the occupants exist”\(^2\). Even though Koolhaas mentions that “Typical Plan is an architecture of the rectangle; any other shape makes it a-typical”\(^3\), I think the overall idea though does not only apply for the buildings of a Typical Plan type. It also applies to the buildings like the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but then before the renovation: even though the old office layout gave the opportunity for people to personalise their working place, it did not accommodate for any spontaneous meeting with colleagues: “typical plan is about exclusion, evacuation, non-event”\(^4\), it is “packed with the alarming assertions of millions of individual mini-ecologies”\(^5\). So, basically it was considered a place where people would just come to be as productive as they can and then leave home as soon as possible.

But according to Florian Idenburg\(^6\), apparently, this is not the way we want to work anymore. Because of the emerging technology nowadays, the way we interact with each other and how often we do it has affected our expectations for the work environment. Exactly because it is so easy to get hold of people through any of the social media websites, we do not have a need to have to be bound to a particular office space in order to be able to keep in touch with colleagues around you. I think this effortless way of communicating with people led to the fact that we started expecting the same from our physical environment: no walls, transparency and feeling of connection. According to Idenburg, “the work sphere has become one big social playground“ where leisure and work are merged together. For this reason we want to be able to work everywhere and anytime we want. Luckily the new technology allows for it and the employer is fine with it, as long as we do our job on time. This is exactly what the designers tried to achieve when reinventing the work environments in the two ministry buildings. Both buildings show a similar attempt to move from a traditional office layout and concept to something more flexible and connecting: an environment where people can work anywhere any time they want. In order to change people’s attitude towards their job and responsibilities, the whole office layout was re-thought. Both new layouts are much more open than the traditional descendants. From the observations that we have conducted in the buildings, it is hard to tell to what extend people are satisfied with the new environment and atmosphere, and, in general, what their view is upon the concept of flexible working. But in order to get some clear answers about that I will conduct interviews with employees of a company have moved from traditional to flexible way of working. The results and discussion will be presented in my next report.

\(^1\) Koolhaas 1995: 334-349  
\(^2\) idem: 337  
\(^3\) idem: 338  
\(^4\) idem: 346  
\(^5\) Idenburg 2013: 117  
\(^6\) idem
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fig. 42: http://www.boele.nl/projecten/koningskade-4-den-haag (03.01.2015)
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