

VERTICAL CAMPUS - Reconnecting the human to the built environment in the Hague Central Station District

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This paper contains research and analysis of the current urban fabric and the future development of The Hague Central Station district. As a result, a suitable and more comprehensible design brief will be created for a new urban development plan for the district, a vertical campus. This new public hub should contribute to enhancing the public domain and will be a point of departure for further improvement of the quality of public space within the district.

During my observations of The Hague Central Station district, three issues came to my attention. In the next three paragraphs, each problem will be explained to substantiate the design problem; *the public space within the Hague Central Station district has been neglected throughout the years, creating a separation between the human and the built environment within the district.*

Isolated architectural objects

The first problem is that the district has multiple buildings that are predominantly built as isolated, stand-alone objects. These projects do not contribute to the urban dynamics of the city, resulting in a separation within the city fabric between the human and the building.

For example 'the monkey rock' by D.C Apon, a brutalist building completed in 1985 intended as governmental office space for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and currently containing the House of Representatives has due to its design of the facade little interaction with the outside world. Another example is the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate designed by Gijsbert Friedhoff in 1962. As a representation of Dutch post-war architecture, the building is constructed around three courtyards, creating outdoor spaces that are only intended for the users of the building, not for the urban context.

The list of examples continues with the Palace of Justice by F. Sevenhuysen, the Hoftower by Kohn Pederson Fox Associates, the Royal Library by A.J. Hagoort, P.B.M. van der Meer en A.J. Trot, the VROM building by Jan Hoogstad renovated by OMA and the National Archive by Sjoerd Schamhart.

It is important to understand that the listed governmental office buildings, at the time of their construction, were not designed to interact with the public domain due to the nature of their program. This program is deemed as not public due to its significance to national politics and policymaking, also requiring extra security for the safety of its users.

As for the remaining isolated architectural objects, they were designed for post-war The Hague, which had a different perspective on urban dynamics and city fabric than the current day. With this changed perspective throughout the decades, the current inventory of isolated

architectural objects creates a field of urban nothingness where the buildings are floating side by side and the human connection is dissolved.

Designed for infrastructure

The second problem lies in the foundation of the district itself. During the reconstruction of the Hague after the Second World War, the car was deemed as the way of transport of the future, as described in plan Dudok in 1949 ("*W.M. Dudok en het Haagse stadsbeeld*", OASE, p. 31-40). Plan Dudok was the new masterplan by W.M. Dudok for the city of the Hague to help aid the reconstruction of the city after the Second World War, but also to solve the expected growth of the city in the future. The urban plan revolved around decentralisation, with green urban axes connecting different parts of the city. With the urban axes designed for the car, the city expected 850.000 residents in the mid 1970's. At that time, the city only counted 650.000 residents, resulting in an overcompensation for the car on the urban level ("*Plan Dudok*, Wikipedia).

With this perspective on the future of the city, the reconstruction process of the Hague Central Station district was orchestrated towards the car. By making most buildings accessible by car, the car became part of the urban fabric and public domain. When looking at the current situation, the car is still heavily involved in the urban fabric and public domain resulting in the pedestrian flows throughout the district still being inferior. For example, the Utrechtsebaan, divides the district into two, creating a separation between the Central Station and the neighbourhood of Bezuidenhout. Another example is the Prins Clauslaan, where three-lane traffic dominates the profile of the street.

With this changed perspective on the use of the car in the city of The Hague ("*Plannen voor omgeving Den Haag Centraal - Projecten - Den Haag.*"), the current organisation of the infrastructure within the district of the Hague Central Station can be put into question. Is it outdated? And does the current situation still meet the requirements for future developments?

Neglected public domain

As a result of the first two problems, a final concern about the district came to my attention during my observations, the lack of quality in the public spaces. This problem is interconnected with the problem of architectural objects, mentioned first in this chapter, and the problem of infrastructure, as mentioned in the second chapter.

In the few public spaces that are scattered around the district, the quality of these spaces is experienced as poor. An example of a public space is the Anna van Bueren Square, next to the Central Station. The tram tracks fly over the square, creating a division within the public space. Adjacent to this square are the National Archive, the New Babylon, the Central Station, and the AvB tower. Looking at these buildings, there is little coherence and accessibility on the plinth level, resulting in neglecting the human scale within the public domain.

This principle of neglecting public space can be found throughout the district while having opportunities to connect with the neighbouring green spaces of the Koekamp and the Hague Forest.

To release the plan of the municipality to make The Hague Central Station District a new Dutch Manhattan before 2050 (*"Plannen voor omgeving Den Haag Centraal - Projecten - Den Haag."*), these three issues should be taken into account and researched and analysed. This will allow future designs and -plans to transform, connect, and interact better with the public realm and re-establish the connection between humans and buildings that has been lost throughout the years.

Approach and methods

As a point of departure for the research about the Hague Central Station district, a first observation allowed me to experience the area on a first-hand basis. This first impression helped me raise questions about the area and quantify design problems that could be a starting point for further research. At the start of this paper, three issues are highlighted.

To understand the three issues raised in a more comprehensive way, further observation is key to understanding the social sphere of the district. What happens on a day-to-day basis? What is the current situation in the district? What is the current human interaction with the buildings? This will lead to the starting point of a qualitative literature study.

The qualitative literature study contains current and future plans of the different stakeholders within the district. Secondly, giving the definition to the word 'human' by creating personas will help to organise different points of view about the district. The following questions could help answer the design problem; *What do the Hague Central Station district stakeholders have in mind for the area's future development? What does the human connection with architecture entail? How does this contribute to the overall vision of the municipality of the Hague? How does the municipality expect to improve the quality of public space?* To further build on this qualitative literature study, a series of interviews with the stakeholders will allow to visualise the different perspectives fully.

A juxtaposition of the different stakeholders will help analyse the current design brief on the vertical campus.

Objective and larger discourse

Analysing the different perspectives of the stakeholders could alter the design brief to a more site-specific approach, contributing to a comprehensive design more suitable for the specific building site. This will result in a design of the vertical campus that contributes to the reconnection between humans and buildings within the Hague Central Station district, answering the main research question; *How can integrating a new vertical public hub contribute to the reconnection between humans and buildings in the Hague Central Station district?*

The objective of the project could be described as reconnecting humans with the built environment by implementing a new vertical public hub, as described in the syllabus of the graduation studio Public Building (*Public Building graduation studio, "The Vertical Campus: A Public Hub of the Future in the Hague."*). As elaborated earlier in this chapter, the connection between humans and buildings in the Hague Central Station District has been dissolved over the years, resulting in a field of urban nothingness where buildings are floating side-by-side, isolated from one another, with humans merely as guests. By re-establishing this connection, the district and the adjacent neighbourhoods will become more resilient and lively, resulting in a better functional and livable city of the Hague.

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