

REFLECTION REPORT ARCHITECTURE

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Introduction

The site of my graduation project is located in Belgium. It is a huge triangular building with a length of 91,000 square meters and a length of 200 meters, the National Bank of Belgium. The bank is in the northeast part of the city center and the middle of two commercial districts. The distance between the bank and the main station is about 500 meters. The bank is gradually losing its social value as a public service institution and becomes a giant closed building. There comes the challenge that how to maintain its social value for citizens. For the internal factors, because of the shrinking of the working population, the bank has many unused spaces currently. It provides the opportunity to redefine the spaces for the public. What kind of public space the bank can create to attain future's new value?

The answer is co-working space. This means different individuals or groups can share working space and co-working people can use this space to create

their communities and attract new members or customers. In Brussels, in the 1980s, lots of land in the city were distributed to officials and the residents were living the outside city. Currently, the government is trying to use co-working spaces and new residential projects to change the working environment and to let the citizens come back and live in the city again. So different people can work in the bank, while others can also visit here to meet people, enjoy exhibitions and join activities held by co-working groups. Also, the bank staff can use this space to communicate with different public and provide bank services. In that sense, the bank can reach the aim of engaging the public and build its connection with the commercial area and the colleges.

The working culture: mixture, sustainability and simplification

During the P1 we've done much research about the office spaces. It gives me the feeling that work is continuously changing through time. Firstly, we have the Larkin administration building in 1904, women sitting in the middle of bank clerks and working without privacy. Then we have National Social Insurance Board in 1932, where people have independent spaces with better privacy but low knowledge exchange. Later in the Osram building in 1965, all staff worked together in one open space with a free layout, making a landscape office. Then is the SAS headquarters in 1987, people were divided into several small groups and worked in independent rooms. Today, we have a new way of co-working. In my understanding, co-working cannot be classified, it does not have a prescribed form, it is always changing, and it is a work fashion that changes with people's lifestyles. The examples I mentioned above all serve more or less strict office hierarchies. Now, the workflow is flattened and the work organization becomes small and independent, then it makes the workspace does not have a fixed pattern. Through my research on co-working design cases, I found that almost all of them are renovations to spaces, instead of completely new designs from the ground up. This transformation process is like a plant that grows with the change of the space, which reflects an important feature of the co-working space -sustainability.

If we further discuss the spatial connection between co-working and other office modes, co-working is more like a combination of traditional office modes in the past, which is mixed and small-scale. What's more, I think it is a simplification, a simplification of the working style and working environment. Take a very simple example, when a person works in a fixed desk, he will have huge computer screens, personal calendars and notebooks, and other documents. Includes photos and other series of work accessories, which can cover your entire desk. When you work in a co-working space, you realize that everything is shared and you need to leave nothing before you go, so you need to simplify your things until they fit into a backpack. An individual work environment is destroyed, it is transformed into a shared value.

Through design the bank

Between P3 and P4, I transformed the entire bank with the understanding above. It is mainly divided into two aspects. The first aspect is the transformation of the public co-working space. My principle is to create more different types of workspaces in the bank hall so they are accessible and open. For this purpose, I designed units with independent entrances, fully open and semi-open workspaces, and separate individual work units with the new structure. Another part is for the bank itself, to create more open space to break the current single and closed connection and achieve better ventilation conditions.

During the tutorial, I got some feedback on how to define the quality of space, how to ensure the safety of the bank, and on the concept itself - a series of small instruments. Facing such a huge historical building, it was a bit hard for me to understand the quality of space. It's about materials, scale, and details. In the beginning, I thought about tearing down some of the parts, in order to create the space that I wanted to achieve in the future bank. It turned out that the parts I dismantled and attempted to create might not have the same language as the original space. Therefore, the starting point of the design should be from the street, the organization of pedestrians, and the familiarity with its existing appearance. This is also the meaning of collective work. The value of the final renovation should be to add an extra layer to the original building in the current architectural style.

The transformation of the bank is another embodiment of research. This is a good combination with the research in P1 stage. Previous research on office space has focused on a working system with a fixed frame, the same as a bank. Bank employees may not work like co-workers. It can be seen from the previous photos that they need similar space in the past and now, so what they need is not a flexible work environment but better conditions. Currently, bank offices are individual units crowded into narrow corridors, people often feel lost inside, and it is not well insulated and ventilated. Therefore, for banks themselves, these problems should be solved through new designs. The solution may not be a strong gesture, but a small intervention in different places.

Drawing with understanding

When intervening on the bank's façade, I tried to use the existing columns to exchange the space between indoors and outdoors, so as to create a new space entrance and interior environment. For me, I think this is a very practical idea because I can use similar means to transform other buildings in the future. In the process of making the drawings, I realized that this is not as simple as it

seems, I need to rethink the relationship between the inside and outside of the building, and more importantly, how to ensure that the continuous insulation and joints can be well connected. The process of producing the drawings gave me a clearer view of the current structure of the building. Drawing in-depth at the same time is a deeper understanding of the design, such as the proportions of windows, walls, and foundations, which parts can be protruded or recessed, and what effect it has on the façade and structure. I think it's not just an understanding of technology, but another expression of the understanding of the detail.

Before this project, I had no understanding of office culture. This project touches on two unfamiliar areas for me, European historic buildings and office space. At the design stage, I sometimes have a hard time imagining how people can work such a huge building while each of them only takes a little space. The bank itself has a really good view but it has the fewest people in it. This seems paradoxical and reflects architectural logic with which I am unfamiliar. I think I need more observations to understand it. As for office culture, this project has broadened my horizons and enriched my understanding of it. Like the method of changing the environment and create a new atmosphere for people in different roles. Through this design, I have also mastered many means of transforming old buildings, which can greatly help my future design practice.

At this stage, I think there are still many possibilities for the interior space of the building. Common spaces can have richer connections to individual units. I will do further research on the open space and shared space of the workspace in the next design process to provide further improvement to my design.