

Binnen en Buiten | Innen und Außen

A continuation of the original design by the architects P. Dijkema and A.Croonen

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The Urban Chair asked its students, to roam a city, adopt a building site and develop an urban architectural project. The project is located in the city of Nijmegen, a city that is known for its architecture ranging from Medieval ages, Pre-war, Post-war to present-day architecture. The city is also known for its bombardment during the Second World War. Nijmegen is a mid-size city that is located in the eastern of the Netherlands. The city is situated on the hills of the southern side of the Waal. The city was built on top of seven mountains. Nijmegen was after the war gravely damaged and was in great need of reconstruction. This was the start of Post-War architecture and the reconstructed city. The city of Nijmegen is the oldest in the Netherlands. The city is known for its tales, myths, legends and stories, for example, Mariken van Nieumeghen. The city has been with us for thousands of years and more. Even the most important roundabout is named after the king and emperor Charles the Great.

In the inner-city, one encounters various sites that have *not an explicit character*. These spaces still feel like *a collage, a collection, or a combination of various images*. For this reason the inner-city of Nijmegen is a quite complex urban artifact, it is a place where one could find both buildings that date from the medieval ages as well as buildings from the Post-War period. The city has throughout the years redeveloped and redefined its inner-city. The architectural conversations within the city frame became a multi-layered totality. The site offers architects the opportunity to engage with different architectural themes: encounters, adoptions, conversations, and characters. These architectural themes stand in relation to Post-war architecture and *the Reconstructed city*, the semester's overarching theme of the Urban Chair.

Architectural dimension

The specific site within the inner-city of Nijmegen that intrigued me at the beginning was the slightly hidden City Hall. The civic building has functioned throughout history as the core of the inner-city and underwent several architectural developments. The site is known for its various architectural expressions due to its reconstruction over time. The reconstruction period with no doubt led to a new typology of the urban ensemble. The current City Hall is positioned in the second layer of the urban pattern, this is in stark contrast to other City halls which are normally positioned in the prominent first layer. The expansion of the City Hall was a design by the architects P. Dijkema and A. Croonen. These architects were mostly inspired by recreating the urban Medieval tissue that disappeared right after the Second World War. The original city pattern was gravely damaged by the bombardment. The ambition of the architects was to redesign and recreate the urban pattern of Medieval cities. The original design was to engineer a city within a city. The used method, by the architects, throughout this design, was to understand the architectural meaning of inside and outside. Separate volumes were connected by an inner tissue that functioned as the public hall. These separate elements, the so-called pseudo-masses, functioned individually. However, these elements with their individuality were part of a bigger ensemble the building itself, The City Hall.

Urban dimension

The City Hall is located within a densely urban fabric that is enclosed by the following streets: Burchstraat, Marikenstraat, Koningstraat and Broerstraat. The enclosed ensemble creates a sense of a wall in the area around the City Hall. In the ensemble, one finds different openings and/or entrances to arrive at the City Hall. Seven entrances differ from one another in shape, form, typology and building age. The enormous City Hall is slightly hidden in the organic city pattern. Yet, irregularities

shown on the map of the site seem to be striking irregularities when seen on the ground. Due to this condition, the interior of the ensemble becomes quite a peculiar space. The interior of the urban ensemble is a neglected, harsh and unfriendly public space where buildings have turned their back towards the City Hall. The City Hall offers the possibility for one to step outside, but mostly in its own private exterior spaces. Therefore, there exists a tangible separation between public and private exterior spaces. The borders of the domain are of great importance for the City Hall.

In terms of accessibility, the movement to arrive at the interior of the ensemble, through the passages, and to finally enter the city hall, is quite a substantial undertaking. Both the City Hall as the building blocks around it could be seen as a closed wall ensemble, a labyrinth.

Social, Political and Cultural dimension

The inner-city of Nijmegen is well-known for its cultural, political and social diversity of its residents. Unlike any other city in the Netherlands, Nijmegen offers interesting fractions and classes. One could say that the residents are as fragmented as the architectural language in the city. Besides, the city has a history of leftist movements and subcultures. In spite of the many differences, the bigger part of the residents are catholic, which has to do with the opposition between the Protestants located in Holland and the Catholics located in the south-east part of the Netherlands.

For the program brief, it is significant to understand what a political space is. From the research perspective, Rossi stated that a function must always be defined in time and society. Society is changing at an unprecedented pace. Political spaces change too. Political spaces have been with us for many years from the traditional agora to the various forms the City Halls evolved in. Political buildings are centres where one could gather, work, collaborate, debate and meet. These civic buildings are excellent for formal occasions such as conferences and inaugurations. It is a space that offers the residents room for social interaction. In the context of the studio, with the focus on a highly diverse population these spaces offer the residents freedom in conversations, expressions and other possibilities. It is a space where one can be seen and heard.

01 Research framework

The specific fields of knowledge that intrigued me at the beginning of the project, both related to the research as the design, was the construction of the city over time (the architectural languages throughout history) and the city as a collage, as a product of its history (a multilingual city - accessible to the widest audience, past - present - future) with an overarching theme 'The construction of the city over time'.

A vast amount of literature has been written on constructions of the city over time. During the history thesis, students had been given the opportunity to read about various historians, critics and architects. Manfredo Tafuri (1935-1994) was an Italian architect, theoretician and an important architectural historian and critic of its time. For Tafuri, history wasn't linear but more continuous, meaning that history continues in the present. He also was a critic, with clear ideas on how to evaluate designs and how to connect modern architecture to the past. History has always been crucial to shaping architecture, either in *using* or *rejecting* it. Tafuri tries to convince architects to look critically upon the traditional ways of dealing with architecture and history, hopefully activating them to grow in their understanding of the ever-changing role of history in architecture and acting upon that.

Another much-cited Italian connoisseur, Aldo Rossi, devoted his study 'The architecture of the city' to the construction of the city over time. According to Rossi, one must remember that the past is partly being experienced now. Rossi stated on how to read a city the following: "Clearly to think of urban science as a historical science is a mistake, for in this case we would be obliged to speak only of urban history." (Rossi, 1984) Although he agrees that from the point of view of urban structure, urban history seems more useful than any other form of research of the city. However, an interesting aspect, is that Rossi also makes a comparison between historians and architects on how historians grasp a city in its totality, they provide a complete picture of the urban artifact. The view on how to read an urban artifact as a totality is something I endorse. (Avermaete et al., 2009)

The site suggests a wide scale that needs to be dealt with. This depth of knowledge could only be acquired by visiting the place; a toolset has to be created to understand both the urban, the architectural and the social, political and cultural dimension. The importance is to gather this knowledge as a totality. Thus, this research provides a platform to understand the site's complexity, it is separated into the following fields: the urban, the architectural and the social, political and cultural field.

The questions for the architectural theme are the following: *Where is room for improvement? What to keep? What to alter? What is the re-use proposal? And to what extent is it possible to alter the building?*

Urban theme: How to make the interior spaces of the ensemble part of the public domain in a design where the public is truly served?

In terms of the social, political and cultural field the following questions should be further explored: *What sort of relationship should there be between the municipality and the residents? Where do the residents come from? Where do the municipality and the residents interact with each other?*

02 Method

In order to achieve my aspirations, both buildings (Broerstraat 25 and The City Hall) have been unpacked in such a way that one naturally gets acquainted with their complexity. The used method was to unpack the buildings by collecting various data on the three different dimensions that have been mentioned previously: architectural, urban, social / political and cultural. The collected data also consists of various case studies (both references as scientific readings). This approach could be implemented for historical and contemporary case studies. The knowledge provided a suitable foundation throughout the design process. These significant findings also helped to confirm many design decisions. The collected data consists of elaborated research on the original design and the architectural position of the architects Dijkema&Croonen. A research plan that is integrated with a design exercise, could lead to a work where many references from literature are compiled. This could be helpful by comparing these significant references. This with no doubt will be a valuable experience in my self-development as a scientific writer. In brief, the data provided the direction and the shape of the design assignment.

03 Design assignment

Firstly, on behalf of the architectural dimension, the design exercise is a refurbishment and an expansion of the building Broerstraat 25, Nijmegen. This enormous building was a Van Der Borg warehouse and was built right after the war. By refurbishing and reorganizing this building, the political center of Nijmegen will be positioned on the first layer of the urban pattern. The refurbishment also provides an opportunity to reconnect the building by Dijkema&Croonen with the city through this renovated building. By refurbishing the building, the ensemble will become more open and accessible and the original design by Dijkema&Croonen will be restored to its original status.

Secondly, on behalf of the urban field, to rethink and redefine the interior spaces of the ensemble in such a way that the interior of the ensemble becomes part of the public domain. The aim is to create a design where the public is truly served. The assignment on behalf of the urban field is to separate the public interior into three different public spaces: a garden, a courtyard and a children's playground. The third ambition is derived from the social/political dimension, which is to design a building that offers tight incorporation between the municipality and the residents of the city. The residents of Nijmegen with their charming outspokenness need a political center where they could debate work, interact, meet, gather and share. The aim is to create a political center that can be seen "Literally and figuratively" by rethinking transparency in democracy as a conceptual design assignment. Therefore, an addition will be created on top of the Broerstraat 25 building that expresses the transparency of the political center of Nijmegen which is visible to everyone.

In the end, to combine the fields together to reconstruct the original pattern in the ensemble by recreating a public urbanity with the refurbishment of an additional building to restore the City Hall to its original status as the traditional inner core of the city.

04 Reflection

The Urban Chair studies medium-sized urban sites where the urban design can be fulfilled by an architectural solution. Both the topic of the master track Urban Architecture stands in relation to the master track Architecture while the ambitions for this project could only be achieved by a combined engagement of architectural and urban solutions. The project discusses important topics on how to design within inner cities where there is an enormous lack of building ground. Cities must densify throughout the years. To successfully achieve this, architects could expand on top of existing buildings. By building stories on top of existing buildings architects could extend the lifespan of buildings with a non-destructive approach. The relevance of the project is also of great importance while the urban ensemble must be redefined to serve the public domain. The project could offer a good foundation for how to interpret neglected urban ensembles. Due to reconstruction over time various sites within inner cities have become harsh, neglected and unused public spaces. It is therefore of importance to learn how to engineer these fragmented spaces. For this project, the approach was translated by preserving the essence of the historic pattern while using a modern architectural language. The ambition was to ultimately design a building by reconstructing from the past while using knowledge from the present to engineer a building with a sustainable impact on the environment.

It became apparent that, whoever interacts with a city of so much complexity, for a long time, will become captivated by it, which should sooner or later lead to a personal architectural position.

05 Literature

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