

DISCONTINUITY

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Slowing down in an accelerating world - project description

Amsterdam faces a problem common to many historical metropolises of Europe – how to maintain constant transformation of urban fabric in a changing world while preserving its heritage at the same time? Pushing new investments outside the borders of historical areas create a risk of transforming a living organism of a city into an artificial open-air museum with no relation to new districts that are becoming standalone cities on their own. In Amsterdam this process is visible especially in the south, where a new financial centre, Zuidas, is becoming an isolated island of international corporations, detached from the rest of the city and nearby Oud Zuid that, on the other hand, lacks public and cultural functions.

In my project I attempt to improve urban environment by creating connections over the borders and effectively breaking isolated clusters, maintaining continuity within the city and between the districts, as well as enhance life quality and environment between the buildings. The project is a landmark, a reference point in a new network of walkability that introduces a concept of a new typology of a public function for Amsterdam 2050 – a climate centre. Its aim is to multiply green area ratio and purify the air, effectively improving local climate as well as offering a new activity space for locals and an attraction for tourists outside their cluster within the central city.

The relationship between research and design.

This project started from an analysis of road traffic in Amsterdam as part of group assignment at the start of MSc3. Then, all students were free to find their interests and locations within predetermined parts of the city and the overarching topic of the studio – Amsterdam 2050. The studio ambition was to address not only the current situation, but to think of possible future challenges the city will have to face and solutions made for a longer period instead of a specific time frame. Analysis of current trends; globalisation visible especially in rapidly growing Zuidas, fascination of futuristic technologies becoming reality and constantly accelerating development in almost every aspect of our lives led me to a critical approach. Instead of coming up with new solutions to old problems I decided to make a step back – in a general trend of accelerationism to slow down.

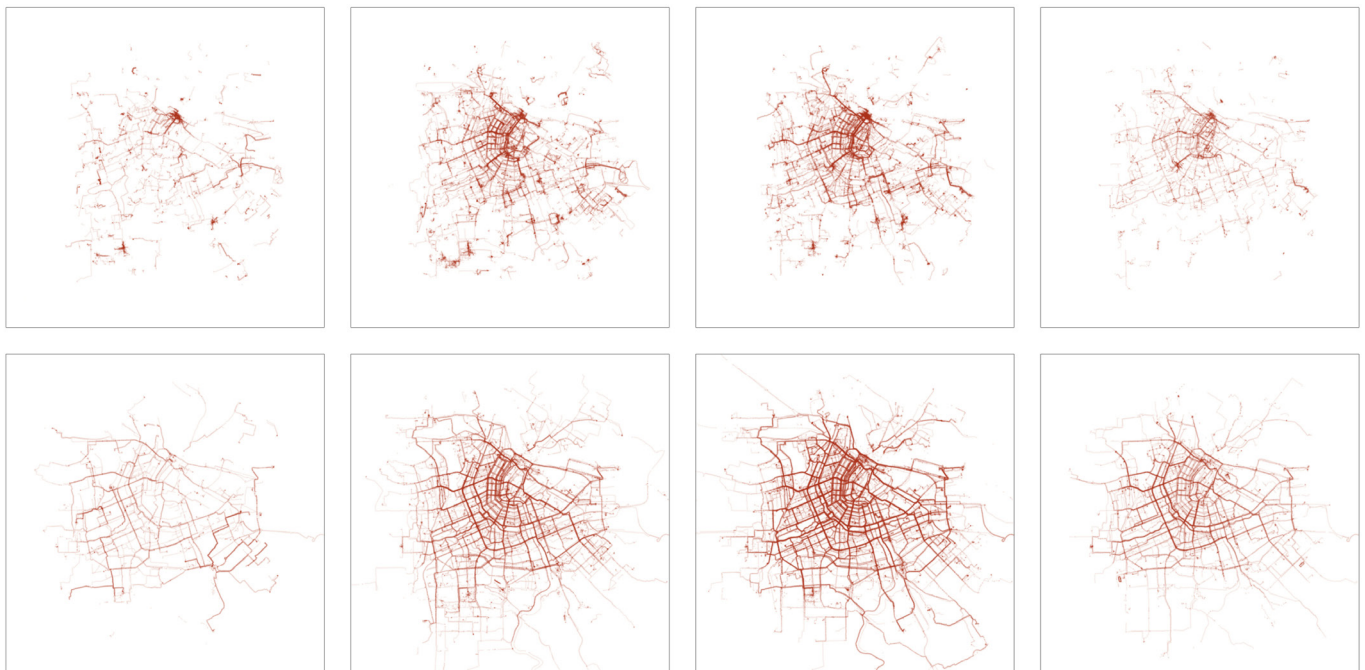
A valuable part of the research was that the Complex Projects studio worked in close cooperation with AMS Institute which work is strictly related to future of Amsterdam, development of new urban solutions and tackling challenges of the fu-

ture. Thanks to the institute's immense workload students were able to get much more in-depth information and data otherwise inaccessible and the cooperation gave another interesting value to the projects that could be used back by the institute as a significant amount of research and tested solution, often quite extreme.

Elaboration on research method and approach.

A thorough research on motion in Amsterdam became the basis of the project. Realising how important walking and cycling in the city is, being more than 60% of all daily commuting, was a foundation to argumentation that problem of discontinuity in the city, my focus in this project, could be solved without trying to transform Amsterdam into a different being. Picking what is arguably the essence of the city, a bicycle or, in broader term "slow motion" as we called it, and enhancing its qualities could be a way of making Amsterdam 2050 happen while preserving its true identity.

The first part, until the P1 presentation, was mainly about gathering information and analysis. A choice of the location was made, that suited best the con-





cept of creating connections over district borders and group strategy framework of taking Oud Zuid out of stagnation. I realised that the Hilton hotel, a massive building from the 50s, is in possibly a crucial place for the district and the original Plan Zuid made by H. P. Berlage. However, it stands in opposition to what was, in my opinion, the initial idea for the area and interest of the city itself, as it occupies a huge amount of space and blocks off what could and should be fully public.

The other half of the semester was to look for an alternative and a concept of re-development of the site to support my initial claims. The process ended up with P2 presentation and a design brief of a building being the answer to stated problems. The building was meant to have an impact on two levels – first was to contribute to the motion within the city and break boundaries and second, continuing the idea of slowing down, a contemplation space to improve quality of life between the buildings. For that purpose my design was defined as the climate centre, mentioned at the beginning of this text, a vertical garden bringing back the concept of Hortus Conclusus.

Elaboration on the relationship between the graduation project and the wider social, professional and scientific framework and potential applications.

While this project is a singular building on a specific site, it touches upon broader context of health of urban environment that, considering the world population will transfer towards the cities more and more in the future, will be an increasingly important issue of Amsterdam. It is a suggestion that in an accelerating world obsessed with technology and globalisation we should look for local values as well and not forget about very basic solutions – such as walking and access to fresh air. The new typology of the climate centre is a concept that living in a dense urban fabric and not having a private garden does not mean that people cannot have access to green areas which can be used as local public farms to grow some food for personal use. These centres located locally could provide small improvements and serve as local air purifiers, but with time (possibly until 2050?) in a city scale they would be a meaningful change to the quality of life.

Therefore, the presented architectural solution becomes almost a separate thing. It is an example of implementation the concept of climate centre, although it could not be treated as a model prototype. The uniqueness of the site adds a very specific character to the building. Moreover, in an attempt to make this project a somewhat manifest of necessity of a greener approach and transformation from a privatised function of Hilton Hotel towards public realm its impact needed to be explicit. Following my initial concept of a landmark maintaining continuity within the city I am in fact merely touching upon the typology of a climate centre, yet bringing it to life with a massive verti-

cal garden. I believe that this project contributes to growing consciousness of importance of greenery in architecture and urbanism, and how architects can actively influence urban climate, following projects such as Bosco Verticale in Milano or Caixa Forum in Madrid. In my mind the concept of a climate centre could be just as useful in any other scale, from a combination of many public function presented here in this project, to the point of a small intervention of a green roof, a wall or even a tiny patch of a public area, that all together changes Amsterdam 2050 into a green, healthy city of the future.

