

REFLECTION

THE SENSORY HEALING-SCAPE

Rutger Kok - 4781589

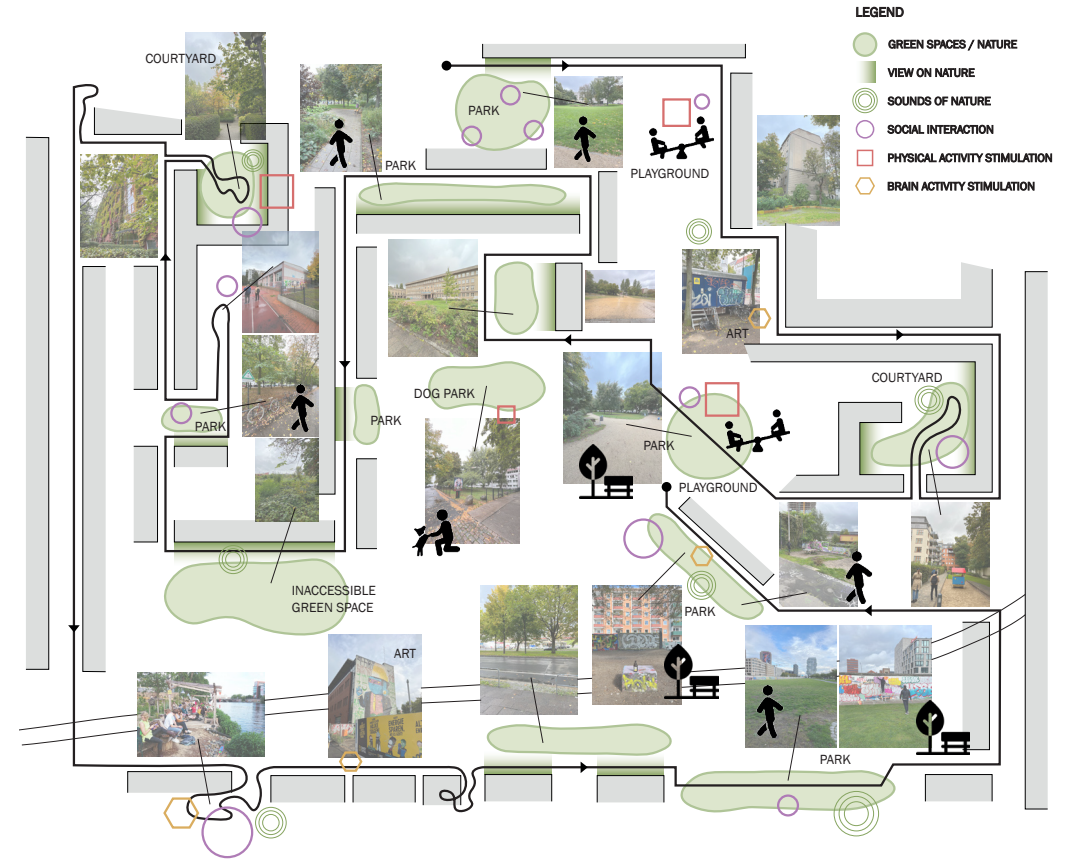
Public Building Graduation Studio
Public Condenser - Berlin

This reflection is written after designing a public condenser in Berlin, Friedrichshain. Creating a place where all kind of city-users can experience a well-being improving route. The design is based on multiplicity; a place with different facilities of inclusion and diversity. An healthy environment accessible for both short and long staying periods. This reflection tells about the design narrative, the used method and the design process.

1. DESIGN NARRATIVE

The development of the project started after visiting Friedrichshain, Berlin. While making a psychogeographical map for a Theory and Delineation assignment, I started forming the narrative of the project. My perception of the site area and surrounding environment was – based on observation and interviews – that the overall well-being of the residents and users of the space was not stimulating for improvement. The amount of green spaces in the area is lacking behind in comparison with surrounded districts of Berlin, and there is no community within the area of design. I did not find any social or communal activities or functions in the area. Residents of the neighborhood said that there is not that much space for the children to play, because of the low amount of playgrounds and activities around their house. Also, the children were not allowed to leave the surrounding area of the house because of safety. People generally do only know their direct neighbors.

To increase the overall well-being and health conditions of the users of the space, the new design should give the user an experience whereby all their senses will be touched. By creating atmospheres that triggers sensory experience, the buildings and the environment will have influence in how people feel, their behavior, the amount of physical activity, their creativity and so on. This creates a memorable place in the city where the physical and mental well-being of the user will be improved.



Psychogeographic map (own work, 2022)

2. RESEARCH METHOD - USE OF 'RESEARCH BY DESIGN'

Within this project, the 'Research by Design' approach is used to design spaces that are based on scientific research, experiencing, perceptions and memories. This method helps with experiencing the design. By designing and drawing, the space will become visible. From here, you can find what needs to be experienced in another way and what will happen if you change for example the angle of a wall or the amount of light. In my specific situation, I started designing and when I came to a point where scientific research was needed, I started to do research on how to tackle that for the best results. This research was based on literature, but also on making models, diagrams, mapping, collages and so on. By creating these products, you can see what is missing or what need to be changed within the design.

3. DESIGN PROCESS - RELATIONSHIP RESEARCH AND DESIGN

What I did in my process, was to use literature and scientific research to gain knowledge on how to create atmospheres (what is needed and which aspects should be taken into account to create these meaningful places), how to stimulate your senses and why these stimulations affect your physical or mental well-being.

In the period from the start till P2, I did learn a lot about different techniques of Research by Design. This shaped the narrative mentioned above. The weekly research consult helped me a lot to think about how the buildings should be experienced and how that infects the architecture. During the P2 period, the narrative was clear to me.

After P2, the Technical Building Design started with consults, where the Research consults stopped. During the P2, the feedback was to create its own atmosphere inside each building. I started with researching how the building shapes should be changed by thinking of the spatial conditions of each building. By creating accessible green roofs, the landscape will be shaped.

The proposal added another layer to the complexity of Berlin; the relationship with the existing buildings. The P2 presentation let me also think about the existing building on the site, which is the only left-over building of World War II on the site. It tells a story. Rather than demolishing the building for an easier space to design on, the building should be kept the way it is. Designing with this building was quite difficult. Via the research by design method, I tried to integrate the building in the new design, which was complex because of the missing floorplans and sections. At the end, the decision was made to left the builing as it is.

The Technical Building Design consults let me think of the technical details in the designed buildings and park. This resulted in technically fine details, but I lost the narrative formed for P2. The buildings does had their own spatial conditions, but the overall sensory experience was not there.

Since this point, I redesigned the project or parts of it several times, where I sometimes experienced a lot of stress because of the limited time. This did not help with making the right choices.

In the period between P3 and P4, I started redesigning the site, keeping the idea of using the waved roofs as landscape, and creating two layers: the ground level park and the underground level sensory experiencing route (a combination of the strong elements of P2 and P3).

This route should face all the buildings, where each building focusses on one or two senses. These are the dominant senses in the building, which creates hierarchy in the design. By following the route and entering each building, you finally will have a fully sensory experience.

4. FEEDBACK AND TRANSLATION

During the first semester, the feedback of the tutors was interesting, giving me new insights on the graduation topic which developed the narrative quite well. After finishing the conceptual design on P2, the feedback of the tutoring sessions became less helpful. The tutors were giving feedback based on the drawings and research I did. After each consult, I had the feeling everything was not going into the right direction and I changed my design again and again. 3/4 days in the week, I was working on changing the plans and 3D model, and that for a period of a few months. Week after week, I had new floorplans and sections and it did not improve. Because I did not updated the process documentation, I was not sure what was working and what was not. This led into a cycle of redesigning again and again, but never developing new elements.

After zooming out and thinking about the process, I picked out the things that were working in the last few designs, and started with my narrative and urban strategy again. This led into a story and explains why the route in the design is this specific and why the buildings are placed into that specific spot.

I learned a lot from this graduation project, especially on the design process. A design will not improve by only changing what is not working, but it is also about zooming in and out, thinking about what your overall ideas were and how the floorplan you are working on affects these ideas.



Urban strategy in which I kept designing new floorplans (own work, 2022)

5. STUDY PROCESS - RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GRADUATION TOPIC, STUDIO TOPIC AND MASTER PROGRAM

What fascinates me, is the how architecture can have influence on their users and the environment. Architects can designs spaces in such a way that in can affect the experience, behavior and health conditions of the user. Something I really tried to do in my design period.

During the Master period, I was always fascinated with designing for health. I followed multiple courses where health conditions of the user was important and did lots of research in how to improve these conditions in my designs. Firstly, I designed a shelter on Sint-Maarten where residents can grow their own food. I also did design a co-living concept for elderly that suffer from dementia and have physical movement problems. My theory thesis was about how to improve the health conditions of elderly people in the Netherlands. The reason I chose for the Public Building design studio was that I wanted to have variety in designing different kind of buildings during my study period. A public condenser was something I never designed and can work as a great influencer on the surrounding society. On these kind of buildings and in this case, landscape design, an architect can really have influence on the users and the surrounding environment.

6. GRADUATION PROJECT AND THE WIDER SOCIAL, PROFESSIONAL AND SCIENTIFIC FRAMEWORK

The project consist of research and design, problem statement and solution. It serves different scales and levels, from urban city level to detail level. Within these levels, the project dived into the city; urban strategy, environment and experience. The users; urban experience nowadays, perception, sensory experience, use of the space/functions and well-being. And the future: green (biophilic) design attracting new flora and fauna, reusing and recycling of materials, reduction of urban heat stress, lowering the energy usage.

Within these scales, (scientific) research is combined creating the experience needed to improve the users well-being and making the city 'future proof'. What could be better is the way this project can be retained in the future. The buildings are specifically designed for their current function and are not easily changeable into another function. Also, expansion of the buildings is hard, because of the surrounding designed spaces.

Although this design is specifically designed for this site and her conditions, the elements of designing for sensory experience to reach improvements in the users feelings, health conditions or behavior can be copied in other projects. Creating architecture in a way that people are willing to (and not forced) discover more of the building or project is a way to reach your goal; in this case improving the well-being of the users. The way of keeping (or even improving) the existing situation and creating new elements which does not contradict the existing can create meaningful places.

7. ETHICAL ISSUES AND DILEMMAS DURING RESEARCH AND DESIGN

The data used for the research of Andreasviertel was based on interviews and some general data research. The residents were questioned about daily life and the missing functions in the surrounded area, to create ideas of what kind of building should be built in this area or what kind of functions should be included. Within the interviews, no questions were asked about their health conditions or well-being and why people feel that way.

The observation of Andreasviertel was based on greenery, social communal activities and building functions. Later on, with the application of the Research by Design tools, the idea of designing for well-being was created. The observation could have been extended by noticing all sounds and smells, social interactions and sightlines on the site spot. Also, no good pictures were made of the used site, because when visiting the location we did not have a specific location in mind.

Within the designed proposal, I tried to keep the existing environment and situation as it is, but improving it from transforming a parking plot into a landscape. As an architect, I tried to design in such a way that the new buildings and route are integrated in the existing situation, and invite people to enter the lowered level by creating spots where people can see, hear and smell the designed experience partly. This attracts people to leave the city and enter the multi-sensory route; to forget the stressfull environment for a bit and improve the physical and mental well-being. Healthier people makes a healthier city!