

Selvplejecenter Reflection P4

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Introduction

The subject of this year's Public Building Graduation studio is the creation of a public condenser. This is a building which should bring people from all age groups and walks of life together. Having chosen Copenhagen as my location, the first main point of research was to find an overarching theme which fits within the specific social and physical context of the location. Through the performed research, "healthy living" surfaced as being a relevant and contextually appropriate topic.

As analysed by the Nordic Medico-Statistical Committee (2017), the death rates of Danish people are clearly higher than the death rates of people in other Nordic countries. The same analysis also showcases that people in Denmark smoke more, drink more alcohol and have a shorter life expectancy than citizens of other Nordic countries.

That Denmark has had a lacking progress in longevity relative to some other Nordic and western countries, has been the case for about 50 years. As Vallgård (2001) notes, this has prompted the Danish government to actively intervene in order to try and increase the awareness for healthy living. The lifestyle of the Danish people is the most important factor for this healthy living, according to the Danish Ministry of Health.

Since healthy living consists of both mental and physical health, the main research question since P2 became: 'How can architecture contribute to both mental and physical health?'

During the design process itself, a second question also became increasingly important. This second question is: 'How can the uniqueness of the Skydebanehaven be captured in the design?'

The Study plan approach (First research question)

The initial approach and its effectiveness

Given that there seemed to be a certain tension in the programmatic aspects of the chosen overarching theme, the initial approach set up in the study plan was to research stratification within architecture. In this research, stratification should not be seen in a negative light (of separating people), but as an organisational tool to form the building. The idea was by using stratification, the conditions of the different programmes could be maintained.

On top of this, the initial approach was also to further identify what both physical- and mental health mean. This precise definition of both aspects is a crucial step in figuring out how architecture can contribute to the topic.

The chosen approach did indeed work for the themes that were defined in the initial study plan. The research of stratification in architecture has led to many intriguing and useful reference projects and strategies, of which some could be employed in the design itself. By building up a sort of catalogue of different projects with several forms of “hallway architecture” and projects with separated programmes, an important principle of my own design was uncovered and developed.

This form of research was very reminiscent of research that was performed for P1 in the studio. By creating a sort of catalogue of relevant information for the design theme in question, it was possible to extract why certain principles work in their respective situation, and then use these findings in the design itself.

The performed research that defined mental and physical health was very useful and successful in setting up the general framework for the building. By further defining what both aspects mean in a medical sense, and then looking at what this could mean from a programmatic point of view was crucial in further developing the design.

Even though this research was very unlike the other research performed in the studio (in the sense that it was a purely scientific paper), it was the fitting research method for this topic. By gathering information about the academic backgrounds of both mental and physical health, it was possible to define what a healthy mind and a healthy body are, which in turn enabled a fitting programme for the design.

Initial shortcomings and additional focusses

Even though the research approach did work for the defined themes, there were some initial shortcomings in the design. The biggest shortcoming was the integration of the personally chosen overarching theme (healthy mind in a healthy body) with the studio theme (public condenser). This also became apparent in the feedback given during my P2 presentation. One of the main points of feedback was the human scale of the design. This included the spaces indoors as well as outdoors. The given feedback was focussed on what the actual spaces mean, how they look and how the ensemble of the building exactly works whilst using it.

These initial shortcomings were not because my research approach was faulty, but because I specified the research approach too much in the initial study plan. Initially, I failed

to identify the importance of the interaction between the inside and outside programme. This was something I could have identified as an important point during my study plan setup. Yet, after eventually having identified these aspects of the design, I added 3 main additional focus areas to the research. These focus areas are the precise meaning and relation of the different rooms within the building; the meaning and relation of the different outdoor spaces; and how these indoor and outdoor spaces interact with each other.

Until now, I have done in depth research on the meaning of relationships of the indoor spaces. This research did partially consist of the finding and analysis of reference projects and principles, but consisted much more of research by design. In order to truly find a well-working relationship between the different programmatic functions and principles, I created a lot of different designs and alternatives to test them. After creating an alternative, I would analyse it, determine what I found as not working in the alternative and create a new one.

This research by design approach was also part of the feedback I had received during my P2. I was advised to incorporate this design cycle more in the design process, and by doing so was able to “solve” one of my additional focus areas for the design. I have incorporated this way of design into my process ever since.

The Study plan approach (Second research question)

The initial approach and its effectiveness

The focus on this second research question mostly became clear after P3. This was due to the creation of (and focus on) a colonnade in the design. The idea was to create a distinctive, as well as very predictive and comprehensive element and rhythm as a framing element. This element should act as a structure-giving “backdrop” to the framed aspects of the Skydebanehaven itself, as well as a structure-giving element to the buildings.

In order to create an element like this, the approach was basically to create a sort of ruleset. This ruleset would be able to give the structure its rigidity, as well as its rhythm. Simultaneously, in having this very clear ruleset, it should be possible to change the physical form of the element, whilst still obeying the rules. In doing so, the element could become playful, yet keep its rigidity and rhythm.

The chosen approach did work quite well in order to create the desired element for the design. The ruleset allows the design to have a sort of “series of situations” within the ruleset, which allow a certain creativity and playfulness into the design.

Research of other architects and buildings that employ such rulesets and systems (for instance Chipperfield and Dom Hans van der Laan), was very helpful in identifying how these sort of systems can be set up, as well as to see how exceptions to the systems could be made. Research by design was also very important for this focus of the design. In order to create the eventual system and its application, many different iterations were tested and judged in order to get the system to a point where it worked for the entire design.

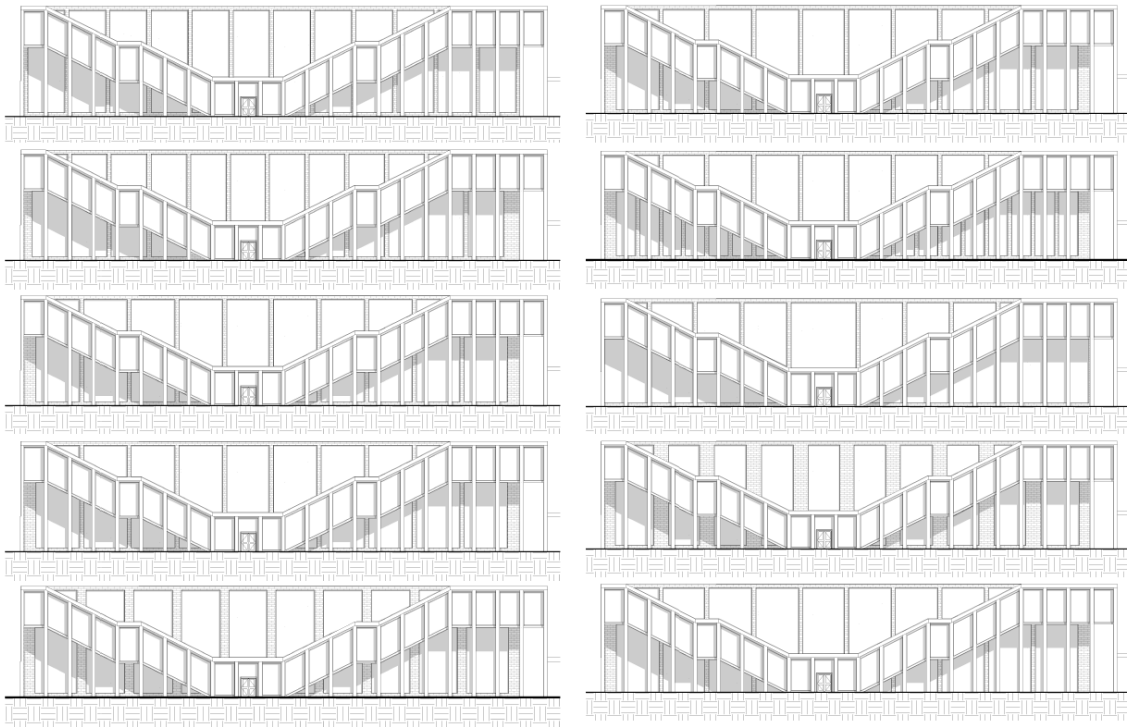


Figure 1: Example of some iterations of the relation of the tested system with the building. (Own drawings)

Initial shortcomings and additional focusses

Even though the research approach did work in creating the desired element, there were some initial shortcomings in the design. These shortcomings were mainly in the areas where there were “exception situations”. These situations include the places where the design changes from underground to above ground, as well as an additional element to the side of one of the buildings (which was not wrapped around the design as for the rest of the element).

These shortcomings were gradually solved one after the other, by discussing the situations with my mentor and further developing the possibilities of situations within the ruleset.

The additional element that was present in the design for a long time, was one of the most important initial shortcomings. This was not necessarily because it had a big impact on the design, but because it made me realise that I should add an additional focus for the element. After having discussed this specific case with my mentor, I realised that I should also focus on making the ruleset as clear as possible. In this way, the building and its purpose (as well as structure) would be more evident. By keeping this in mind, I was able to further strengthen my design.

General reflections

Lessons from my own work (and the feedback on it)

Until P2, I had the tendency to make a couple of alternatives, then choose the one that seemed the most promising and work it through as far as I could at that stage. Afterwards, I would analyse the project so far (as well as receiving feedback on it), and then going through the same process again with the adjusted design.

I was not intentionally doing this in the design process, but after having received feedback during P2 that this was the case I became more aware of it. I intentionally started to go through the previously mentioned design cycle in smaller increments, in order to apply the research by design principle more.

Personally, I believe that I integrated this feedback successfully into my workflow, which has allowed me to develop my design much further than I would have been able to otherwise. Yet, this is an aspect of the design process that I will keep in mind in the remainder of my design (and beyond), in order to assure a design that can reach its full potential.

After P3, the main lesson that I gathered from my own work and the feedback, was to create clarity in the design. This was not only the case for the previously mentioned ruleset, but also for its application and how this (consistently) interacts with the buildings.

By focusing on creating this clarity, I was able to strengthen the design and make it truly “land” in the context.

This process of creating clarity was not because the design was messy before. It was mainly initiated due to the designed ruleset, and its implications. Yet, by having this focus, it was possible to truly bring all elements of the design together to create one consistent intervention in the context.

The design in its broader context

Concerning the position of this specific design in relation to the educational track, the design of the public condenser could be seen as a relevant interpretation of society, wherein the personal overarching topic acts as the habit that people are interested in living out currently. The Master track Public Building gives (like the other master tracks) handholds to interpret and react to the current state of society. All master tracks together (AUBS) enable us to interpret society as a team, and create a built environment which reflects this society and reacts to its needs.

The project within its wider professional and scientific framework, adds to the base of available knowledge. Even though the project is not (and should not be) directly transferable to a different situation or context, the principles used in this project can. In this case, the project can serve as a case study of how to incorporate mental and physical health into the built environment, among other used principles.

The researched definitions of mental and physical health on the other hand, can be used in other projects, or even outside of the architectural framework. By creating a completely scientific research paper about this topic, it is possible to use the found knowledge and apply it in other situations. Therefore, the research on the overarching topic itself is a direct addition to the scientific body of knowledge.

A Look Ahead

After P4, the main design part of this project is completed. Yet, this does not mean that I will spend my time until P5 'merely' on creating nice images. The remaining period will serve as a period to further sharpen my design. This does not only mean in the sense of the physical design, yet also in the sense of the story with which to present the design.

Furthermore, creating truly compelling ways to showcase the design will be at the top of my list. This does not necessarily mean making images, but perhaps also looking at the way of portraying the design itself. In order to truly showcase the design, the way of showcasing it should also be in line with what I want to tell with the design. Therefore, testing different techniques and/or mediums to showcase the design will also be researched in the remaining time.

Even though the idea is to fine-tune the design until P5, in order to push it to its absolute limits, I will obviously also work on any feedback that I will receive during P4.