

Graduation Reflection

Shaping Public Consciousness: City Miniature of a Vertical Campus

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My project, titled "Shaping Public Consciousness; City Miniature of a Vertical Campus" is to create not only a building, but a place, where people and city streets connect by sharing and learning the knowledge and culture under its primary function as the campus. Spuiplein in Den Haag, the project site, has experienced drastic changes through continuous demolition to construct new high-rise towers with new characteristics. For an active city like Den Haag, the spaces between buildings are crucial for the quality of publicity as they form the social behavior and attention of the city. The project explores public spatial configuration by integrating research-by-design principles that prioritize sensory engagement, spatial fluidity, and human-centered design. This reflection elaborates on the graduation project process through relevant chapters.

1. The relation between the graduation project and the studio topic

The Public Building Graduation Studio focuses on blending vertical hybrid university buildings into Hague's fast-growing center. With the development of high-rise morphology, the center of the Hague started densifying with thin, vertical towers. However, these clusters of office buildings, housing blocks, and cultural institutions' high-rise spatial configurations are receiving harsh criticism of the architecture in the Netherlands. They have been commented on showing a lack of consideration of the city's character but just adding formative functions repetitively. The Mercure Hotel Den Haag, located on the Spuiplein, is also facing demolition planning as the building is no longer fitted with the surrounding buildings, which have been constructed newly. Despite the existing building's architectural insufficiency, it is already integrated into the urban landscape, complete with established structure and transportation links. Demolishing these structures would necessitate rebuilding this infrastructure from scratch, which is both unsustainable and time-consuming. Therefore, the project is repurposing and transforming the existing building, blending into the new vertical campus.

Concerning the master's program in Architecture, Urbanism, and Building Science of TU Delft, the project touches on those spectrums to provide concrete research and design for the thesis project.

The research and design strategies, with a basis of phenomenology architecture, expand the vertical campus into the urban context with shared programs and circulation. The project especially addresses the current urban challenges, including the empty void of Spuiplein square, disconnection to the surrounding plinth, and narrow pedestrian roads between the towers. These challenging points have been refined by creating an extensive slope for the main entrance, starting from Spuiplein, and establishing an extended public passage that connects surrounding buildings as a big part of the vertical campus. Furthermore, the architectural design principles were integrated to form spaces and flow inside and outside the project site. Additionally, an integrated structural system, technological innovation, and material investigations support the feasibility and sustainability of the project.

2. Research

In relation to the studio topic, the graduation project was eventually questioning what is "the Vertical Campus" for me and how "publicness" needs to be engaged and integrated into the new generation of the campus. For my project, the vertical campus can be understood as a "city miniature," encapsulating a city's essential elements and functions within a vertically integrated structure for diverse users. By incorporating hybridity and accessibility through emphasizing human-centered design, the vertical campus will embody the essence of a full-sized city in a miniature form inside and outside with an intimate relation to the host city.

The exploration of the project was developed through Theory and Delineation Research, which was structured in the studio. The Theory Research course was processed through lectures and readings about related literature on human-oriented architecture and consciousness architecture. As the project addressed several subtopics: phenomenology, verticality, campus, hybridity, and publicness, it was crucial to have a wider and narrower scope of literature studies and extract critical points from them. At the beginning of P1, I created a psychological map of the Hague with a group of 3. This map was made by only relying on our senses, such as sound and texture. This activity allowed me to interpret the site purely on human-oriented senses and view it with a new perspective. Towards P2, the Delineation Research course enabled experiments and studies with an abstract approach to have a broader scope of the research. A manifesto drawing was presented to express the current site situation and human-oriented sense with high-rise buildings. Particularly with the latter manifesto, I elaborated possible strategies for the new vertical campus: transparency, internal navigation, and vertical connectivity to trigger human consciousness and to be able to function as a public building. As a result of research, this interest in a city miniature of the vertical campus with phenomenology became one of the critical elements of my project design.

3. Design Process

The project is rooted in the philosophy of phenomenology, which prioritizes human consciousness and experience. This approach focuses on how individuals perceive and interact with their environment and how those experiences can be guided and controlled through architectural configuration. The project's design incorporates natural light, texture, and height to create an immersive environment, triggering a human-oriented sense. For instance, in the design of the vertical campus, the direction of sunlight plays a crucial role in placing openings and guiding the user's movement throughout the day. Those big openings naturally direct users through the building, using the interplay of light and shadow to enhance hybridity as a public campus building.

The vertical campus incorporates a wide range of programs typically found in a city, including educational facilities, commercial spaces, recreational amenities, and public services. This diverse functionality allows the campus to operate as a self-contained urban environment. Additionally, the orientation of the programs considered the different floor plan organizations between the existing building and the new vertical campus building. Note that the existing building used to be a hotel, with inflexible loaded walls for room division, and the programs, such as offices and meeting rooms, are varied. The new vertical campus is designed with an open floor plan with maximal flexibility; thus, creative, open studios and exhibition halls are located. Finally, the design ensures that all parts of the campus are easily accessible and well-connected by placing open staircases and bridges under consideration of program relations. Overall, the project emphasizes spaces that engage the senses and evoke emotional responses, and finally, the vertical campus becomes more than just a place of learning; it transforms into a lived experience.

4. The project within the wider social context

The graduation project explores new means of addressing streets, connections, people, and building programs by establishing fundamental elements based on a phenomenology perspective. Currently, public space literature contains an increasing body of research examining the spatial relationship between universities and cities' social aspects of public spaces. Nevertheless, there is still a relative lack of studies exploring how university campuses, as a place, contribute to the formation of publicness in the city based on human consciousness. This study aims to investigate how consciousness publicity forms in vertical university buildings under the tackling of phenomenology architecture and the role played by hybrid functions in university buildings in influencing the publicness of the city itself.