

Staging (the) MultipliCity

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Abstract

I want to design a public building that offers a space where everyone, no matter their background, has equal opportunity to discover their talent or interests. Therefore, my project will contain a mixture between high- and low cultural activities as defined by Ritzer (2012) to offer a moment for leisure. Coexistence, by the theory of coexistence from Loring (2016) and inclusiveness are major points in my design project because if these points are avoided there is a certain chance that there will arise clusters of specific population groups who have the feeling they are left out of the neighborhood. According to Barth (1956) and Cheshmehzangi (2012) it is important to create a collective identity within the neighborhood to establish mutual relationships with each other. Cheshmehzangi's research continues that the urban identity is defined by features such as elements and activities. Regarding the Melis Stokepark, it is clearly lacking of any real characteristic features which eventually leads to misuse of the public realm. Thus, my design project will establish a framework where a collective identity can be created.

The design approach can be divided into three different chapters. Firstly, my design project needs an informal character due to the diversity of its surrounding citizens. An informal character will emphasize the accessibility of the building. The covering shell will be firmly perforated to ensure the permeability of the building. The shell will create a folded roof that extends the public park to different height levels. This results in an interplay of in- and outdoor activities and routes.

Secondly, the collection of cultural activities will be staged as a theatrical display in an assembly of stages where the visitors become the actor in a dynamic play. Thus, the building masses become autonomous volumes that operate together as a whole. The whole represents the subtracted space that is created by the shell that is covering the singular volumes. The leftover space is used as a play zone that serves as the connective thread through the composition of volumes. An assembly of mass and space emerges. Every autonomous program needs its own atmosphere and identity. This helps the visitor to locate and distinguish the different programs with each other. Some specific affordances will be used in order to design this.

Third and final, the autonomous volumes will have their own and shared public realm. Therefore, the volumes should be able to augment and expend their spatial properties to adapt itself according to the desired activity. An important factor within this approach is the flexible structural elements. Thus, creating layers of multiplicity in an assembly of stages.

Keywords: *The Hague, coexistence, collective identity, informal character, architecture as theatre, interactive architecture, assemblage, affordances*

Introduction

There are two quotes that inspired me at the start of my design process. The first quote is from Immanuel Kant (1784): *"Out of the crooked timber of humanity, no straight thing was ever made"*. The second quote is from Richard Sennett (2006): *"The closed city can be designed and operated top-down; it is a city which belongs to the masters. The open city is a bottom-up place; it belongs to the people"* (p.14). These quotes are related to the planning of the city. Almost everything regarding the built environment is planned from a top-down perspective in the neighborhood Morgenstond. Uniform building blocks shape the cityscape and life itself is stacked in a vertical way within those stamps. A certain tension is needed between functions in order to create a mere city-like experience. The residents should have input in how they want to organize their living environment.

One of the characteristics of the demographical parameters of Morgenstond is that it exists of citizens with different ethnical backgrounds. A high percentage of these people are children and teenagers (Den Haag in Cijfers 2019). These percentages will eventually increase when the municipality of The Hague has built the planned 10.000 extra houses in Morgenstond and its surrounding neighborhoods (Kraaijeveld 2019). Thus, coexistence between all these targeted audiences is a key factor in my design.

The municipality of The Hague has categorized the site location as a park for play and recreation (Gemeente Den Haag 2019). Yet, the park has only a few play obstacles which give the park little to no character. Therefore, there is not enough place to have social interactions between the citizens of Morgenstond.

The municipality of The Hague has a set of guidelines prepared related to this increasement in demographical parameters. The Haagse Educatie Agenda 2018-2022 (Gemeente Den Haag 2019) is the one that inspired me the most. According to the research from independent institution SEO Economisch Onderzoek (2018), there is inequality regarding the education for ethnical minorities and underprivileged citizens in The Hague (p. 2-9). I think this problem can be approached within a wider perspective. Every citizen, no matter their background, should have equal opportunities regarding a healthy, sportive, educated and social life to find and enjoy their talent and interest. In the city district Escamp there are in total 29 sporting facilities which is a lot compared to the other districts, while the majority still lives an unhealthy lifestyle (AlleCijfers 2019). Thus, I want to avoid the traditional sports as much as possible in order to further emphasize the identity of the place and the fact that Generation Z becomes less interested in the traditional sports (Whistle 2018).

The multi-layered ethnical society requires an ambiguous public condenser in order to offer a wide variety of interpretations of their interests. Thus, when there is a change in requirements, it results in adaptation of the conditions in the concrete environment. I personally think that architecture and the built environment should be able to absorb these changes. Therefore, the public realm could adapt itself towards newer patterns in the demographical parameters.

Research question and goal

In summary, the main urban challenge that is addressed in my graduation project is how architecture can act as a physical shell that offers a spatial environment for the multi-layered ethnical society to contribute towards the equal rights regarding a healthy, sportive, educated and social life.

This paper assists me to orientate my view regarding this research topic for the graduation period. The answer to this urban challenge goes beyond the technical indexicality and is also related towards the discursive layers that are discussed throughout the course. It is important to make it relatable towards other projects in order to be consistent because this project is part of the architectural and public realm. Therefore, the thesis aids me how to communicate my design project in a narrative way using the different indexical themes.

Theoretical framework and challenges

In this chapter I want to establish some urban challenges and clashes as a theoretical framework.

Multi-layered ethnical society

According to Loring (2016, p. 154) the theory of coexistence, regarding the multi-layered ethnical society, is related to the limited similarity principle. This principle means that different groups of species cannot live together if they cannot do their desired activities. Thus, it is important for all the layers of society to be able to act in their interests.

In addition, Barth (1956) concludes from his research that it is of importance to create a mutual relationships between the diverse groups in order to coexist with each other. Coexistence between different species is best portrayed as a process of innovation and adaption since behaviour and cultural movement can change over time (Loring, 2016, p. 155). According to Nayak et. al (2014) conflict often emerges between social groups if there is inequity.

The activities that binds the multi-layered ethnical society together can be classified as high- and low cultural activities. The definitions regarding high- and low cultural activities by Ritzer (2012, p. 135-136) are maintained within this thesis. Usually, high cultural activities or products are produced by professionals and artists. These activities are often characterized by classical features. Low cultural activities are on the other hand associated with the masses of the people. These activities are often categorized by pop-cultural movements.

Social capital

According the conclusion from Barth's (1956) research, a mutual relationship is required. These relationships can be established by certain social organization that improves the society by social networks, norms and trusts. This is called social capital (Putnam et. al, 1993, p. 167).

According to Putnam (1993, p. 167), there are three forms of social capital. The first social capital, bounding through establishing relationships between homogeneous groups for instance by sport teams and clubs, is the most related to my design project. Sportive, educational, recreational and artistic activities are activities that connects with social capital because the participant will engage in social interactions throughout the act. These activities create social networks where the participants can bond with each other.

Collective memory and sites of memory

François (2001, p. 7) highlights that the social network is the frame where collective memories are created. Groll (2015, p. 4) complements to this statement that the individual is not able to develop memory when there is no social context. The individual memories cannot be interpreted without the frames of collective memory. Thus, within a community, collective memories are just as important as individual memories. The importance of memory is further explained by a study from Pierre Nora where he made a distinction between history and memory. According to Nora (1997, p. 12), memory evolves around life itself. It emerges and evolves throughout our lives. It is relevant and relates to the present. While history, on the other hand, is an event that happened long ago. It relates to the past.

Within this context of collective memory, another concept is highly related to provide a solid framework to allow mutual relationships to take place. And that is the site of memory. According to Konczal (2011, p. 18), the site of memory can be made of a material form as well as an immaterial event where specific groups of people are emotionally attached to. Thus, it makes it a crucial part of their social community. In summary, the collective memory and the sites of memory are essential components for the collective identity (Groll, 2015, p. 4). For my personal design project, it is important to design this framework as this kind of place collective identity will emerge within an urban context where it lacks characteristics.

Collective identity and placemaking

The urge to create a place and collective identity allowed me to investigate the meaning behind this word within this theoretical framework. As formerly discussed, collective identity can only occur within social context that is provided by social networks or site of memories (Groll, 2015, p. 4). According to Montgomery (1998, p. 93-116), the concept of place is complementary to the site of memory due to the material and immaterial properties. He continues that the sense of place is shaped by a combination of the the material form, the activity and the meaning behind it.

The identity of an urban environment is defined by the characteristic features such as; environmental elements and the activities that are held. The urban identity highlights the relationship between human behavior and the urban environment. These places are crucial in the development of personal- and collective identity (Cheshmehzangi 2012).

The lack of characteristic features leads to the ineffectively usage of the public realm. This can be related towards the site Melis Stokepark. Placemaking is therefore a possible strategy where meaningful and quality places are created in order to give a positive impulse in the usage of the public realm (Wyckoff 2014).

Informal character

My design project needs an informal character due to the diversity of the multi-layered ethnical society of Morgenstond. An informal character will emphasize the accessibility of the building. Yet, the informal sector explained by Caroline Moser (1978) resembles a culture of poverty. I personally think that the relation to the culture of poverty is too negative. On the other hand, it could set the ground principle for the informal character of my design project because the culture of poverty can also resemble the culture of the mass.

Subsequently, this corresponds to the idea of an everyday happening or resembling of the ordinary. Therefore, there are as less obstructions and barriers as possible in my design project in order to emphasize the accessibility and permeability of the building.

Relation to the thematic themes

After setting the base for the scientific framework I would like to relate my design project to the discussed thematic themes which are relevant for my design project.

Assemblage

The building masses that contains the larger multifunctional halls will be composed as an assemblage over a certain area of the park to create a spatial organization. According to Deleuze (1987), these individual building masses establishes links and dynamic interactions between the parts that creates the whole because “*there are not two multiplicities or two machines; one and the same machinic assemblage produces and distributes the whole*” (p. 34). This connection can be further elaborated by including people and things, subjects and objects in the dynamic interplay of human interaction and building mass (Dovey, 2015, p. 4).

Augment and extend

My design project will be able to extend and augments its spatial configurations to adapt itself to offer a wide variety of program for the diverse demands of the multi-layered ethnical society. Within this thesis I maintain the definition regarding this subject by Huber (2018, p. 124) about interactive architecture. This definition refers to the spatially, functionally adaptive, kinetic and intelligent capabilities within a static structure. Schmidt (2016, p. 25) goes further into detail about kinetic architecture that it contains the ability to change different scales of compartments and elements of the building.

Affordances

The third and final thematic theme that is applicable to my design project is the use of affordances to motivate and inspire the people to participate. According to Gibson, affordances are perceivable clues, good and bad, that are offered by the environment. These clues tell the perceiver how the environment can be used or to be avoided (Gibson, 2014, p. 119-120). Like Gibson, Brown and Maier (2015, p. 231) are referring to affordances in the design sector as opportunities for action provided by artifacts to the participants. There are similarities between the two descriptions about affordances. Thus, I will continue further to use both definitions of the term.

Conclusion

Now that the theoretical framework of this thesis is established and that the urban challenges are revealed, I want to conclude with how I approach these urban challenges in my design project.

The building in its urban setting

The surrounding park of my design project has as less barriers as possible in order to improve the accessibility for the informal character of my project. In the current situation the park is surrounded by ditches with in total four access points towards the core of the park. Therefore, the park is redesigned and the former waterbody from the surrounding will be relocated to create a larger body of water. According to the International Water Association (2015), people are attracted to water due to the positive psychological effects it has on the human mind. Thus, the larger waterbody will function as a quality center point of the park. The body of water and the architectural form will be adjusted to each other to create a coherent whole in the assembly of building and environment. This will create a meaningful quality place where, depending on the season, a wide variety of out- and indoor activities will happen.

The shape of the building can be summarized as a single and simple architectural move to reduce the stress on the natural environment of the park and to maintain an informal character. Yet, the architectural density will be sufficient to lay the base for the required collective identity. The most characterizable element of this architectural move is the shell of the roof. The plane covers the indoor activities and is folded to create in- and outdoor accessible points on different height levels. The folding of the roof plane will partly define the interior spatial properties. The roof is made of a thick slab so that it sends out the affordance that the roof is walk-able. Around the activity centers on the roof there are natural podia adjusted to the human scale to be sit-able in order to give the idea that something is watch-able.

The building itself and its interior are part of the public realm. Thus, the building is used as an urban element to anchor itself in the environment and becoming part of the everyday life and the ordinary. Subsequently, the interior- and exterior routes will merge at specific points on different height levels. This will enhance the permeability and accessibility of my design project. Eventually, this will lead to an interplay of out- and indoor activities. The folded roof and the accessible points on ground level creates a smooth transition between park and building. This results in a balance between architectural density and nature.

A collection of activities creates the Staging of the MultipliCity

The collection of all the activities can be resembled by theatrical play. The activities will become the stages. Whereas the visitors and participants are the actors in a dynamic theatrical play in the assembly of stages. In this way I share the same believe as Peter Cook. Cook also relates architecture to theatre in a way that architecture should have character and identity. As Cook (2016) puts it: *“architecture should be able to respond to the inhabitant or viewer and prepare itself for their presence, spatially; in other words, it should have that magic quality of theatre, with all its emphasis on performance, spectacle and delight”* (p. 10). The everyday and the ordinary thus becomes the theatre of life. The concept and title for my design project, Staging (the) MultipliCity, originates from this statement.

Thus, the life of the city is staged in a way where the low- and high cultural activities are played without interrupting each other. Although, the stages can present to one another to have an inviting character. The different layers of the society will be attracted to expand their interests and talents due to the theatrical display of the assembly of stages. The formerly distinguished activities have different spatial requirements. Thus, the program is distinguished in autonomous building masses as an assembly of stages with each their own identity. Each stage is adjusted to its desired individual shape and provides the space for the multifunctional halls. This will further emphasize placemaking by creating identity and character underneath the collective roof. The leftover space is used as the connective thread throughout the assembly of the multifunctional stages for unprogrammed activities and acts as the play stage. The play stage is indirectly the buffer zone for the multifunctional stages. Within this space the visitor can observe and participate in the different stages which they walk by. The route is shaped and designed as a playful atmosphere with colors and obstacles that offers the visitor to do physical movement. A space where ordinary and everyday objects are used in surprising ways.

The stages will have their own public realm to operate independently and in addition a shared public realm to operate as a whole. Therefore, it sets the target for augmentation an extension of space that depends on the kind of activities that are happening. This can be related to decors of the theatre that can change depending on the desired atmosphere. Although, according to Schmidt (2016, p. 25) interactive- and kinetic architecture usually has high-end characteristics and for my design project I need an informal character. Therefore, the adaptability of space can happen through curtains, foldable walls and the use of artificial lights to augment the space. Te ability to augment and extend spaces creates layers multiplicity throughout the assembly of stages.

Due to the combination of the architectural elements, activity and meaning a sense of place will be created that forms the foundation of the collective identity for the urban environment of Morgenstond. The park and the building will shape the framework for the site of memory. Eventually, the activities and relationships will create the desired emotional attachment between the people and environment.

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