

P4 Reflection

The Public Condenser, Spaces of Familiarity

Spaces of Familiarity is an architectural thesis which explores how a public condenser can be a mediator between (different) people and a modernist architecture in the South-West district in the Hague.

In the modernist Morgenstond, this thesis tries to find a new way of dealing with the deserted and monofunctional modern public spaces aiming to introduce new patterns of social and public life into these spaces. It also takes into account the fact that multi-cultural residents constitute 70 percent of the people in the neighbourhood which poses extra challenge to design an inclusive public space for people with different custom and cultural background.

Therefore, the project dismisses the current municipal way of dealing with these neighbourhoods (gentrification) and reflects on multi-cultural society in the area through the re-interpretation of the theme of *familiarity* as a catalyst of the project which will lead to a reinterpretation of the prime theme of the Studio (*Multiplicity*).

I. Research and Design

I.I. Familiarity

The research on familiarity is both theory and design based. Firstly, the project studies the theme based on Heidegger's definition. In his text, *being and time*, familiarity is determined through *involvement* and *understanding*.

For him, *involvement* encompasses, *being-in-the-world* or being there; "*there*" indicates to a "*world*"; the human way of being is its familiarity with a "*world*". A world in Heidegger's eyes is created by patterns and systems of practices, values, tools, and skills which is shared by and among individual's community.

Understanding or know-how, on the other side, implies individual's self-understandings which leads to knowing the world (*Welterkennen*). **It also includes the perception that an individual belongs to his or her world.** According to him, *understanding when is related to familiarity* is not necessarily cognitive, and doesn't need thinking, so it is not about thought and action, but it is achieved through people's daily routine and embedded in their activities¹.

As the project situated in a multi-cultural neighbourhood, familiarity in this case is re-interpreted in its context. Therefore, it is defined as various cultural activities and actions related to the residents of the neighbourhood. Yet, the challenge was how to enable casual encounters and daily routine to introduce these spaces to the users. This question led finally to introduce new building typology (*grid-based design*) encompassing spaces of familiarity in it.

¹ Heidegger, Marin, John Macquarie, and Edward Robinson. *Being and Time*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1962. Print.

I.II. The grid

In its sub-urban context, the grid attempts to encompass the different spaces of familiarity which the research has defined. It applies urban principles based on Jan Gehl notions of designing meaningful urban spaces, such as walkability, small public square, and the meaningful use of water and green². Finally, the grid enables both involvement (daily encounters through its narrow alleyways) and understanding (through its wide cultural and social programs) which is relevant for such a cultural project in a problematic neighbourhood. It is also flexible to meet the functional requirements of the design brief as well as future changes. Here, I can conclude that the design and research in their different tools support each other's to enable this concept.

II. Spaces of Familiarity and the Studio

Now and during the final phase of the project, I can say that the theme familiarity and its interpretation by a grid of blocks is very applicable to these kinds of public projects. This is achieved when all parts of the project (conceptual, architectural, structural, demographic, and climatic) support each other's and meet each other's in a point to enable this architectural concept and form one total project. When the previously mentioned parts are met in one point, a new interpretation and definition of the theme Multiplicity was reached. Thus, Multiplicity was not applied in the project but was the result and the combination of flexible layout, adaptable structure, demountable envelope, and finally wide range of cultural and social activities.

During the last phase of the tutorial sessions, both assistance and the critical questions of both main and second mentors pushed me to find new solutions for the climatic, energetic, and structural issues to support the final solution of the project. Their questions enable me to take serious steps to move the project from the theoretical and utopian vision to more practical and precise solution keeping the project and the concept as strong as it was during the conceptual phase.

III. Spaces of Familiarity and the wider social context

Regarding the wider social context, the project and its research have proven its relevance to its social context. Familiarity can be very helpful not only to be used for Morgenstond or South-West, but in other places since it was unveiled how complex and interesting the notion is. It can be used to solve different social and cultural problems, and it can be interpreted according to its social and architectural context.

² Gehl, Jan. *Life between Buildings: Using Public Space*. Sixth ed. Washington, DC: Island Press, 2011.

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