

Flowscape Graduation Studio

Reflection Paper

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Introduction

Built environment is considered to be an integration of different layers, land or landscape characters, public realm, building forms, program and trends and fashion (B.A Sandalack 2000). People move through the space and they experience the environment. When individuals or groups become familiar with a particular space and link it with their cultural values, social meanings and personal experiences, it becomes a place for them (Tuan 1977). The city, as a big environment interacting with the people in it, gradually forms its own unique identity, shows its genius loci and continues on its long term process. As Ellin said in 1999, "The city, ancient or modern, has some characteristics that define it forever: the street, the square,

the public buildings, the residences, have established between them, through a slow and uninterrupted process, laws of composition... If such compositional laws are forgotten, as in recent years, the City, deprived of measurement and proportion, corrupts the architectural components within it, creating a monstrous medley which can never be called a true City".

Amsterdam, a city on water, with marvelous history behind it should have a strong city image that enable everyone who lives here, visits here, studies here, passes here to feel the rich context and strong urban spirit. However, my experience in Amsterdam was quite disappointing. Trams, cars, crazy bicycles and thousands of tourists occupied the urban space, the beauty of Amsterdam was buried under the chaotic modern infrastructure and unorganized people,

sacrificed for the tourism economic. The city image was blurred. The public space which should be the Living Room of All Amsterdam Citizens was in a mess and as a result, the democracy of the city was vanishing. The capacity of limited urban space was reaching its peak. If we let this urban process go, the Amsterdam will lose its characteristics forever.

It is urgent that a project should be tested to find a new purpose of organizing urban flows in order to release the pressure of public space and a new idea of integrating landscape with urban context to reveal the city identity and as a result, to find back the livability and vitality. Looking back now, when I choose Amsterdam, I was questioning the role of a landscape architect under such a complicated urban system. My aim was to find a balance between crowds and limited city space to enable the city continue on its own process as a complex ensemble with different flow, different elements, and structuring different orders to reveal its beauty. The first thing came to my mind was the sponge city, the principle of which is to collect, absorb and divert water under a large amount of rainfall. This gave me the inspiration that now, the city was suffering a similar problem of capacity. Therefore, can I learn from the concept of sponge city to form a sustainable and dynamic cityscape by designing adaptive public space? Under this concept, can space work as a container for the interweaving of different flows and distribute and gather people efficiently? Do my design enable city to be sustainable in the aspects of environment, economic, society and culture, involving with legible sense of place, providing and collecting memory?

Relationship between research and design and methodical line of approach

Luckily my first site visit gave me motivation to choose this project and the experience provided a view in my research methodology. There are many flows happening in Amsterdam Center and as a landscape architect, my focus was changing Amsterdam back to a usable social and functional entity through emphasizing the order of spatial layout. As is elaborated by Kanellos in 2003 "It is the complex system of routes and connectors fixed in the physical fabric of the city that this dynamic negotiates and it is this spatial infrastructure that accommodates this dynamic 'in place' structuring movement and flow by scales and in the process, it is proposed, producing much of the character and social and functional qualities of places."

In my project, research and design were not irrelevant aims. Instead, research was arose form design. A research by design model was formed, achieving new knowledge about landscape design through the act of designing. More precisely, each work should be a mix of both research leading to design decisions, and design for theoretical re-evaluations. Under the research-by-design model, the research through different scales get to interesting conclusions important for design and it was important to verify the application of design in turn to select effective intervention.

The theoretical framework of my project w built based on the city image. Keeping the problems in Amsterdam in mind and considering what Balibrea argues in 2004:

the city image is important to draw because tourists require a coherent representation/meaning of the city, one that is easy and pleasant to consume in order to be oriented in a new map, to build clear and attractive city image, we as designers should reveal legibility to provide qualified orientation, evoke identity and sense of place which give imageability and finally, find back disappearing dynamic vitality. Besides, thanks to the case study and books about Barcelona urban evolution, I collected insights in Amsterdam future policy decision and design methods on similar urban issues.

From preliminary site observation, investigation and desk study, I have a grasp of basic information about Amsterdam. The core idea was to know where people go. By desk mapping and collecting tourism maps on site, I get to the answer: Amsterdam center is where conflicts most happen. Research from historical perspective help me to answer the question such as what is the characteristic of Amsterdam center. Amsterdam is a city on water, some streets, squares, buildings are all may be water in the past or had a closed relationship with water. This narrow down my further research and give me a scope of analysis.

In the next step, I did a comprehensive analysis of main layers in Amsterdam Center in terms of typology, spatial setting and function and drew the conclusion that the fundamental problem in this area is the assemble of public space. There is only one dominant axe and other public space is scattered with low connection and moreover, there

is a lack of information to evoke the identity and retain people. Defining the core problem made me understand what I needed to address in the design. Besides, through questionnaires, investigation and picture research, I made further detailed partition of Amsterdam Center to have a grasp of identity and potential people movement which help me to do the design.

All in all, the combination of methods lead me to find the possible solution in Amsterdam Center scale and choose the further intervention.

Dilemmas I face with

My initial idea to release the crowds' pressure was to defined five kinds of tourists and five kinds of residents in Amsterdam Centre., according to five modes of experience arose by Lengkeek (2001). These ten kinds of people with different intention are supposed to be attracted by different space, programs and atmosphere. Based on this, I thought I could distribute them by giving different design. However, when I made interview in Amsterdam, I found most of people thought they had overlapped intention. They were not only one kind of people, they would not only be interested in one thing. As a result, it is very hard to do the target design and achieve the goal that there are only a few kinds of people in one place.

Then I choose to start from the angle of the city. When I was in Amsterdam, I asked 43 people: "What attracts you to Amsterdam?" and from the results we can generally say people going to Amsterdam mostly have three purposes:

attracted by the culture and history, to experience the diverse social life or to enjoy the beautiful canal scenery. These three different demands would be the base of my further analysis and design.

We cannot say that in old city, there is no element about canal or social aspects. What we can see is that these three important aspects are overlapped all over the Amsterdam but in different area there is one dominant and this outstanding dominant give this area unique identity, differing it from others. Based on this, we are able to divide the city center into three part, the cultural part, social part and landscape part and this helped me strengthen the identity in each part to create a clear city image so that people can make choice easily along their experience routes and feel the charm of Amsterdam.

The relevance of the graduation project

One perspective of “the Flowscape” is regarding the landscape as a spatial-visual structure. “The visual form of the landscape is based on the sensorial experience that emerges only by movement and is affected by the position and intensity of light sources. The act of perceiving is linked with the sequential unfolding of information as our bodies pass through space.” It is regarded as a type of transportation infrastructure.

My project is fundamentally embedded in the flow of people, aiming at creating sense of place and revealing the identity through their experience. The topic of “Flowscape” is more like a way of research, viewing the movement of people as a flow, besides the flow of people, I also take the flow of traffic, the

flow of water into account.

From the review of previous landscape works, at the mention of cityscape design for people, most of us choose to design public space. However, the space is designed for what? Can this space help people read the city? The public space, as the important patches in the city, can it provide different sense of place according to different urban palimpsest? On the other hand, in what way do people perceive the landscape? How can we design a landscape that is able to capture people? As a landscape architect, the focus of my project is not only recovering the urban structure but also researching the delicate relationship between people and their surroundings. The visual perception as the basic principle of my project, I explore the role of vision in landscape design, elaborate the factors influencing people’s movement and the way people reacting to the landscape through design and put forward the importance of visually controlled design in the field of landscape architecture.

Facing with the problem of Amsterdam, my project starts from restructuring the city mainly in terms of infrastructure and function partition, then recovering cityscape in terms of the streets and squares. In this way, the crowds are able to be gathered and distributed in the city. The project contributes to the sustainability of society and the dynamic process of urban revolution. Although the project starts from the scope of a series of public space in Amsterdam and the specificity of my design proved a possibility for Amsterdam center, many other conclusions, methods and

principles have the potential to be applied to other similar location in metropolitan area which suffers the pressure of uneven distribution of crowds. Furthermore, the visually controlled movement is based on the clear image of the city and as a result, the intervention of my project also benefits the genius loci of cityscape which makes the city more readable.

From September of last year until now,

the logic and systematic design process provides me a great opportunity to dive into the research on complex flows in a city and gives me an insight in the relationship between people and built environment involving environmental psychology. This valuable experience lets me believe in the role of landscape architects in urban issues and helps me stand more practically on the side of landscape perceivers in the future.

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