'Binding' spaces in fragmented Bijlmermeer
creating defined and integrative public space for social activities in Bijlmerpark

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My greatest thanks are

To my life mate, Mahdi, for his unique supports and patience in all the years of togetherness

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This thesis presents the final results of my graduation project of urban design and planning, at the department of Architecture, Building and Planning at Eindhoven University of Technology.

The graduation studio ‘Habitat Reloaded’ started in Feb 2013 with the central topic of studying the ongoing transformations of urban habitat in its broadest sense. The studio involved studying the influence of the ongoing transformations on contemporary urban living forms and the role of urban and architectural design within this complex context. The main concern was the relation between the social and spatial aspects of housing or the relation between habitus and habitat. The study subjects were chosen between 4 residential areas in Amsterdam, all of which were examples of different urban and architectural paradigms in the 20th century.

Bijlmermeer, as one of the selected areas -like other nominated districts- has been the subject of previous attempts of urban renewal, and today is still undergoes the new processes of spatial, social and economic developments.

My project deals with the transformations of social spaces in Bijlmermeer in Amsterdam. The idea of making a ‘binding space’ came after the thorough analysis of the neighborhood and seeing how the fragmentations can change the use of public space. Bijlmermeer suffers from the lack of intimate social spaces, as the layout of the area was originally based on the segregation of functions, separation of infrastructural layers and high-rise dwelling architecture. In my project I offer binding spaces as the required type of social space in Bijlmermeer.

For me, designing a binding space was a process of looking and experiencing and presenting an idea. I got to know designing a space of togetherness is not going to have a mere answer, as there can be thousands of solutions. Indeed, it was a process in which did I not emphasized only on solving the problems but on exploring how the narration of a visitor can be formed and expressed by slight changes in the landscape.

Making a binding space for me was more like building up a story, with the joy of creating a fluent storyline and narration, and trying to imagine where the space can awake the joy of ‘togetherness’.

Samieh Alizadeh Ashrafi
January 2014
Artwork on the pavement, memorial of plane crash disaster in 1992 in Bijlmermeer.

However after the construction period was partly finished the failure of the first idealistic ideas were revealed. The failure of the Bijlmermeer was as a result of realization of only a short amount the neighbourhoods as well as the enormous ideological ambitions. Moreover, shortage of time caused insufficient financial calculations, which led to an enormous unforeseen reduction in building quality and increase in rent. The ideological ambitions resulted in a monotone building typologies, which did not appeal the intended inhabitants. Moreover, the high amount of public space led to many social uncontrollable spaces, something that will be elaborated later in this report. Additionally, the sense of identifications lacked. The idea was that this would not be made by the housing, but by the use of public space and the communal streets. However these communal streets were partly constructed due to budget costs. The monotonous housing type proved to be inadaptable to the housing market. Together with the high rents this added in the high vacancy. Although the mistakes could be explained due to the experimental character of the Bijlmer, several professionals at the time already pointed out problems. T. Hazewinkel for example wrote an article in which mentioned the bad exploitation calculations and the huge no man lands, which would occur which the huge public spaces.

In addition to this, the functionalist ideas were already heavily discussed. Kevin Lynch and Jane Jacobs already published their critics on modernism, which led to the downfall for some iconic modernist figures, like Robert Moses. Instead of a mono functional city, a re-appreciation of the complexity of the city emerged. Nevertheless the concept entangled the imagination. The designers and the municipality were eager to make an ambitious project, as they knew it would be last large scale social housing area. The ambition to achieve this objective, made them inconsiderate to organisational problems and external critiques of the professional world.

1.1. Bijlmermeer, the functional city

The Idea of building up a city like Bijlmermeer was shaped as the municipality of Amsterdam wanted to provide housing that were spatial, healthy and had excellent natural lightning conditions for the normal people. It was decided to be according to principles of the modernistic movement that was based on the ideas of the Functional City. After 1975 the principles became less radical and reverted back to the general principles of the AUP of Van Eesteren.

The ideas of the Functional city are demonstrated clearly in the Plan Voisin of 1928 by Le Corbusier, a plan which proposed to replace the whole historic city of Paris. The plan was designed from tabula rasa; in which the whole historic context was ignored. Additionally, the plan was an alternative for the complexity, chaotic, unhygienic circumstances of the industrial city. According to Le Corbusier, a better and healthier life could emerge in a city full of air, green and space. To keep the city orderly, all functions were separated and zoned. The car would play a new role in mobility between these zones.

Moreover, the infrastructure was elevated above the ground level, so the ground level would be kept safe from traffic. Resident would live in high-rise building, so it would possible to provide them with enormous grounds of green.

Like Bijlmermeer, the plan took the tabula rasa (starting from nothing) as a starting point. Moreover, the plan Voisin consisted of high-rise buildings as independent elements in a continual park, traversed with traffic flows which were separated from each other. Most important differences are the scale of the highrise and the form of the flat. Compared with the functional city Bijlmermeers’ linear flats destroyed the continuity of the parkscape.

In addition to this, the functionalist ideas were already heavily discussed. Kevin Lynch and Jane Jacobs already published their critics on modernism, which led to the downfall for some iconic modernist figures, like Robert Moses. Instead of a mono functional city, a re-appreciation of the complexity of the city emerged. Nevertheless the concept entangled the imagination. The designers and the municipality were eager to make an ambitious project, as they knew it would be last large scale social housing area. The ambition to achieve this objective, made them inconsiderate to organisational problems and external critiques of the professional world.
Spatial morphology, Bijlmermeer in 2010
1.2. The changing Habitat, the spatial transformations

observing the various critical periods for Bijlmermeer, we can notice different series of transformations in the spatial structure of the district.

The first period, (1964 to 1981), was Construction period of the Bijlmer according to the plan of Nassut and started with vacancy rates. This was due to bad infrastructural connection, no facilities and high rents. It also attracted mainly extravagant people. Although the vacancy was partly resolved in 1975, when Surinamese massively immigrated to the Bijlmer, some new kind of problems, including high criminal rates and high unemployment rates were emerged.

The next period, (1982 - 1992) was the time when the First city renewal process started by Projectgroep Hoogbouw Bijlmermeer and initiated by the municipality. Bijlmermeer suffered a lot of socio-economic problems at this time, including the high crime and unemployment rate. The shopping centres Ganzenhof and Kraaijenest got renovation at this time. Furthermore, The main shopping centre in the west of Bijlmermeer finally gets realised, that consisted of high density shopping area with mixture of functions.

During the Period 1992 - 2013 another set of renovations were realised. After the plane crash in 1992 in the highrise residential area, redevelopment of the Bijlmer started with huge investments. The district slowly became socially more diverse and economically stronger and Crime rates decreased to Amsterdam’s average. The aim of developments at this period was changing the social structure. This meant increased interest in the connection between public space, infrastructure and building block. Therefore, an effort was made to bring back the relation between infrastructures, green, built area. Thus, some roads got levelled to the ground level again and the new building development became visually related to these streets. Furthermore, a great variety of building typologies emerge, resulting the Bijlmer to be a patchwork.

figure 1.1. The highrise residential area beside a highway in Bijlmermeer in 1995

figure 1.2. The renovated residential area beside the same highway in Bijlmermeer in 2012
The fragments’ typology showing the Spatial structure of Bijlmermeer in 1993
The fragments' typology showing the Spatial structure of Bijlmermeer in 2010
1.3. Habitat and Habitus

Habitus is a concept developed by the late French philosopher, Pierre Bourdieu, as a ‘sense of one’s place, a sense of the other’s place’. It refers to our perceptions of space and place and how these perceptions affect our actions, not only in shaping the form of environments, but also in our experience and interaction with places.

The habitus is a way of framing the world or ‘field’ of social practice. It is a way of knowing social practice which both structures and is structured by it. Bourdieu defines a field as a social space which structures strategic action for control over resources. The field of Cultural production. Cambridge, Polity Press.

Bourdieu defines habitus as “systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures”; a set of values internalized by actors in processes of socialization. This brings us close to Bourdieu’s concept of habitus, as a non-concious system of dispositions which derive from the subject’s economic, cultural and symbolic capital. Habitus, for Bourdieu is a dynamic filed of behavior, of position taking where individuals inherit the parameters of a given situation, and modify them into a new situation. As Derek Robbins explains:” The habitus of every individual inscribes the inherited parameters of modification, of adjustment from situation to position which provides the legacy of a new situation.

Such an approach supposes an interaction between social behavior and a given objectified condition. It is here that we could perhaps locate the position of architecture in Bourdieu’s discourse. “Habitus is not the fate that some people read into it. Being the product of history, it is an open system of dispositions that is constantly subjected to experiences, and therefore constantly affected by them in a way that either reinforces or modifies its structures.”

Bijlemermeer’s social structure has changes...
1.4. The changing Habitus

“Habitus change constantly in response to new experiences”

In the societies with mixed ethnic groups the process of changing habitus occurs in a different way. As Friedmann declares in his article, Migrants’ adjustment of their habitus as a matter of survival or escaping one’s class habitus by choice through education are both individual achievements. The experience of social establishments in most of the big cities all over the world show that migrants and different ethnic groups seek to form their own organisations.

As it is reflected in a research about Habitus and migration and in transnational cities by John Friedmann, transnational migrants in Frankfurt (as indeed in all transnational cities) tend, at least initially, to cluster in what we may call affinity environments. As distinct from ghettos, affinity environments represent a voluntary clustering of migrants in certain districts that, by virtue of migrants’ proximity to each other, offer material and cultural support and eases the psychological pain of coping with the strains of surviving in a city where none of their familiar cultural cues are present.

‘Place’ and ‘place consciousness’, terms that have come into increasing use, tend to have positive connotation, just as ‘placeness’ is generally regarded as Gertrude Stein is supposed to have said about Oakland, California, ‘there is no there there.’ Friedmann follows the discussion with the notion of ‘home away from home’ the environment which the ‘Kabyles’ in Frankfurt made for themselves and was gained at the expense of the ‘affinity environment’ of the resident German population which they disrupted by setting into the neighborhood. It is this disruption of a finely tuned German working class habitus-turned-habitat, that many among the local German residents resent, and why they wish the foreigners would ‘go back to wherever they came from.’ A place so torn apart will have the character that it does, a wounded conflicted place, but it will never be able to think of itself politically as a place for itself.

To become that kind of place, to mobilize itself around common objectives, will require more than the hollow rhetoric of multiculturalism.

By staying close to each other in the foreign city, migrants hope to create an ‘affinity environment’ that would help ease the multiple shocks they experience in facing life in the foreign city.

Restructuring local governance in ways that will give presence and voice to the excluded population and get them actively to participate in programs for betterment of their own neighborhoods; and opportunities for inter-ethnic dialogue through joint sponsorship of collective neighborhood projects involving volunteer efforts, the voints celebration of festivals, and similar undertakings. None of these programmatic suggestions will be easy to implement, and outcomes are not guaranteed. But in principle helping to foster the local citizenship and pride in one’s place of residence can be a good step towards healing the social body.
1.5. Social spaces as places of togetherness

As it was discussed in the previous part, different ethnic groups and organization strive to form their own affinity spaces. These organizations and gatherings help to establish the groups’ identity and form the social capital. The beauty of being a migrant in a society can show itself in the embodiment of the ethnic culture in different festivals and celebrations that are brought to the new society.

Bijlmermeer as a city part with 85% non-Dutch residents in Amsterdam, is considered to be a multi-ethnic district, most of which are from Suriname and Netherlands Antilles. The necessity of having facilities for different social groups and organizations in a society like Bijlmermeer becomes more significant. As these spaces of togetherness is not a need only for the ethnic groups but for building up the changing habitus of the ethnicities.

As the program of massive renovations in Bijlmermeer started (in the second renovation period) that aimed to improve the social structure of the district, number of active social organizations in Bijlmermeer increased. Moreover the attention toward making more communal spaces for some of the renovating neighborhoods was reflected in the emergence of new housing typologies. These new changes show the development of the spatial structure with attention toward making better social spaces.

However, if we observe the current social organization in Bijlmermeer to see where the activities take place in the city, we may notice that there are very few public spaces that can facilitate the meetings and togetherness.

The map in the following page shows the locations for the activity of different social organization in Bijlmermeer.
"Resto van Harte" believes in the power of people. It brings local people together around the table and takes over their lives by social contacts outside the door. Wednesday evenings from 17:30 to 20:00

"Foundation Savo" is a social gathering of women. First hour educational moment, then slide relaxation - Gharba & dhanda dance or kundalini yoga or awareness, Tuesday afternoon from 14:00 to 16:00 hours

"Foundation Power Lady" is involved in Language Education & participation in organized activities, social contacts outside the door. 1-4 hour weekly, Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays

"Public Library South", in Library Bijlmer Center for social contacts outside the door and learning better reading, writing, arithmetic and internet. Fridays 13:00 to 16:00 pm

"Bijlmer Parktheater" Foundation, social experiment through dance, to create cohesive community

"NewBethel revival monastery, home for one of the religious organizations

"Church center de nieuw stad, center for religious activities (SPDCB)

"Seniors Group G-Area, for elderly people. On Thursday morning and Thursday afternoon

"Temporary drug user day care center

JeanetteNoel House, a group of anarchist catholics attached to the Catholic Worker Movement, who provide hospitable shelter for illegalized countrymen.
1.6. Space versus place

De Certeau draws the distinction between “place” (lieue) and “space” (espace). Space for de Certeau is a place which is meaningful, “awakened”, by practices that contextualize it.

“Space occurs as the effect produced by operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities. On this view, in relation to space, space is like the word when it is spoken, that is caught in a proximity of an actualization, transformed into a term dependent upon many different conventions, situated as an act of a present (or a time), and modified by the transformations caused by successive contexts. Space is a practiced place. Thus the street geometrically defined by urban planning is transformed into space by walkers”.

The city turns into a theater of actions, narratives of space, pedestrian speech acts: “It is a process of appropriation of the typological system on the part of the pedestrian (just as the speaker appropriates and takes on the language).”

It is about “tours” and not “maps”. If any “map” is achieved, it is not some abstract map, but an individualized “cognitive map”. In other words, it is borne of a strategic engagement with the city, and does not reside in the city itself as a collection of buildings.

“To walk is to lack a place. It is the indefinite process of being absent and in search of a proper”.

“To practice space is thus to repeat the joyful and silent experience of childhood: it is, in a place to be other and to move toward the other.”

What de Certeau articulates, then is a model for we can make sense of place through walking practices, and repeat those practices as a way of overcoming alienation.

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1. De Certeau 1984:117
2. De Certeau 1984:98
3. Leach, N. 2010:284
4. De Certeau 1984:103
6. Leach, N. 2009:284
1.7. Non-places in Bijlmermeer

Non-Places:

According to Marc Auge', distinction between places and non-places derives from the opposition of place and space. However, ‘Place’ in his view is not quite the place meant by Certeau opposes to space. It is place in the established and symbolized sense, anthropological place. If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place. He distinguishes non-places by their temporality and lack of meaning and identity. In this sense, most of the products of modern movement in urbanism which are mass spaces of circulation, consumption and transportation can be considered as non-places.

Bijlmermeer as a result of modernistic plan.
1.8. Identification with space: Architecture and Cultural Identity

Architecture is often linked to the questions of cultural identity. Architecture, in Bourdieu’s terms, can be understood as a type of “objectivated cultural capital”. Its value lies dormant and in permanent potential, but it has to be reactivated by social practices which will, as it were, “revive” it. In this respect, architecture belongs to the same category of other cultural objects.” Although objects such as books or pictures can be said to be repositories of objectivated cultural capital, they have no value unless they are activated strategically in the present by those seeking to modify their incorporated cultural capital.

In other words, what Bourdieu highlights is the need for praxis to “unlock” the meaning of and object. In a sense this comes close to the Wittgensteinian model wherein linguistic meaning is defined by use. Just as words can be understood by the manner in which they are used, so buildings can be grasped by the manner in which they are perceived by the narratives of use in which they are inscribed. 282

In order for architecture to be understood in terms of cultural identity, some kind of indetification with architecture must have been taken place. 2

There are three discreet theoretical models sketching out a schematic framework for identification with space. Starting with a theory of how we “territorialise” and makes sense of space through a process of “narrativisation”, it goes on to explore how a sense of belonging to that space is achieved through “performativities”, before finally suggesting how eventual identification with a particular space is forged through a series of “mirrorings”. 3

Identification

For identification to take place with an architectural environment we should look for and equivalent process of “mirrorings”. 4

The environment must therefore serve as a kind of “screen” on to which we would project our own meaning, and into which we would “read” ourselves. Identification with place could be therefore perceived as a mirroring between the subject and the environment over time. 5

Identity, as Freud once remarked, is like a graveyard of lost loves and former identifications. Among these identifications we could include architectural ones. Through a complex process of making sense of a place, developing a feeling of belonging and eventually identifying with that place, an identity may be forged against an architectural backdrop. As individuals identify with environment, so their identity comes to be constituted through that environment. This relates not only to individual identity, but also to group identities. Architecture therefore may facilitate a form of identification, and help engender a sense of belonging. 6

1-Leach,N 2010 : 282
2-Leach,N 2010 : 282
3-Leach,N 2010 : 283
4-Leach,N 2010 : 288
5-Leach,N 2010 : 290
6-Leach,N 2010 : 292
1.8. Identification with space:

1.8.1 Narrativisation
Michel de Certeau has developed a theory of territorisation through spatial tactics in his book “the practice of everyday life”. As he mentions, through habitual processes of movement, by covering and recouping the same paths and routes, we come to familiarise ourselves with a territory, and thereby find meaning in that territory.¹

1.8.2 Belonging
Judith Butler famously elaborated a vision of identity which is based on the notion of “performativity”. According to Butler, it is precisely our actions and behavior that constitute our identity and not our biological bodies. We may effectively rearticulate our identities and reinvent ourselves through performativities. It is important to note that identity is the effect of performance, and not vice versa.
“performativity is thus not a singular ‘act’, for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires and act-like status in the present, it conceals and dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition.”² “Sometimes ritualistic repetition, of these normalized codes makes material the belongings they purport to simply describe.”³
This suggests a way in which communities might colonise various territories through the literal “performances” - the actions, ritualistic behavior and so that are acted out within a given architectural stage, and through those performances achieve a certain attachment to place.

1-Certeau, Michel de 1984
2-Butler, J 1993 : 12
3-Bell, V 1999 : 286
1.8.3. Performativity

As Anne Marie Fortier observes, “Imagining a community is both that which is created as a common history, experience or culture of a group—a group’s belongings—and about how the imagined community is attached to places—the location of culture.” She also explores how through ritualized repetition of symbolic acts, often conducted within an overtly religious context, these imagined communities can “make material the belongings they purport to describe.” Crucially these acts are performed within specific architectural spaces.

What then happens through these stylized spatial practices is that these spaces are demarcated by certain groups by a kind of spatial appropriation. Through the repetition of these rituals the spaces are “remembered”, such that those participating re-inscribe themselves into the space, re-evoking corporeal memories of previous enactments.

“Belongings refer to both ‘possessions’ and appurtenance. That is, practices of group identity are about manufacturing cultural and historical belongings which mark out terrains of commonality that delineate the politics and social dynamics of ‘fitting in’.”

What is so suggestive about the concept of ‘belonging’ as a product of performativity is that it enables us to go beyond the limitations of simple narrative. It privileges the idea not of reading the environment, as though its meaning were simply there and waiting to be deciphered, but rather of giving meaning to the environment by collective or individual behavior.

“Belonging” to place can therefore be understood as an aspect of territorialisation, and out of that “belonging” a sense of identity might be forged. What Fortier is proposing is not some discourse of fixed “roots”, but rather more transitory and fluid discourse of territorialisation—in the Deleuzian sense—which provies a complex and ever renegotiable model of spatial “belongings.”

If we are to understand “belonging” as a product of performativity we may think about how this notion comes into operation. Then we may assume that sense of belonging can be a consequence of progressive territorialisation, without fully answering for this process of identification.

1-Fortier, A 1999: 41-46
2-Bell, V. 1999: 286
3-Bell, V 1999: 286
4-Bell, V 1999: 286
5-Bell, V. 1999: 286
1.9. Conclusion

According to the discussions in this chapter regarding the meaning of space and place and the need of formation of organised and defined public spaces, we can reach to the following conclusions:

- Bijlmermeer still suffers from the side effects of being planned in a functional way. Segregations of different functions like elevations of transportation system, on one hand can be considered as part of Bijlmermeer’s identity - and to help identification with space on in the city - and are the source of creating lots of marginal non-places on the other hand.
- There are few defined and organised public spaces for social gatherings in Bijlmermeer, and most of them are concentrated in the shopping district of Bijlmermeer.
- The renovations resulted in great improvements in the quality of public spaces (Bijlmerpark is a good example of successful redesign) and making a better image for Bijlmermeer. However, except some recently developed neighborhoods, there is a lack of enough communal spaces and public places of togetherness.

The following chapter will emphasize on extracting the most important problems of Bijlmermeer in the current situation with more attention to the importance of social spaces. The results will be used to organize the proposal of the project.
Problem definition

Shopping Centre in Bijlmer Arena,
An example of existing social spaces in Bijlmermeer
This chapter focuses on defining the main objectives of the project based on findings of the group research over Bijlmermeer. As it was mentioned before, Bijlmermeer, as a changing district, faces different layers of transformations, each of them exposing the society to new challenges. If we decide to make a list of all the problems and potentials of the neighborhood, there would be hundreds of possibilities based on our vision, whether we put our attention on the social or economic aspects of the study or confine it to the other layers like the morphological transformations of the neighborhood over time.

What is centered here as a determining vision in defining the main problems of the Bijlmermeer, is the specific attention to the notions regarding “meaning of space and place” (in the De Certeauian view), “changes of habitat and habitus” (based on Bourdeu’s notion) and “emersion of non-places” (according to Marc-Auge’s point of view). It does not mean that the mentioned notions have become the background pre-defined criteria in finding the objectives of the research. Indeed, keeping these notions in mind will help us to understand the main problems and lead us toward setting the principal lacking points in the complicatedly layered structure of Bijlmermeer. Another key point in setting the objectives of this study is the tendency toward exploring the social spaces in the Bijlmermeer.

Distinguishing the focal problems will result in defining new type of space as the main objective of the study. Therefore, the focal problems get noted as follows and the new type of space is introduced as “Binding Space”.

Due to modernistic plan of Bijlmermeer, which sets priority on separating functions, most of the residential neighborhoods lack the presence of intimate public spaces. This is not only about the segregation of dwellings and social spaces, but is also an issue which can be seen in new developments in the bigger scale. The most important and active social hubs in Bijlmermeer are confined to the Shopping area in Bijlmerplein and Kraaiennest (which is demolished to be developed).
Public facilities in Bijlmermeer,
Bijlmer Arena’s shopping area on west side of Bijlmermeer is considered to be the most important leisure and social space.
2.1 Focal Problems: Segregated facilities

Although in the recent years some renovated and new public spaces has been developed in Bijlmermeer, but as they still stand apart internally and offer segregated activities, efficient use becomes difficult. What is meant here by the word “segregated space” is the contrary to “integrated space”. Integrated space can be defined as a social space where facilitates the interactions of various activities.
Lack of defined spaces for social activities like group meetings, specific events and rituals result in lots of “undefined” and “temporarily used” spaces. Before discussing the importance of having specific spaces for celebrating togetherness, it is better to concentrate on the differentiation in the meaning of “space” and “place” and the process which causes a place to get sense of space.

2.1. Focal Problems: Non places

Lack of defined spaces for social activities like group meetings, specific events and rituals result in lots of “undefined” and “temporarily used” spaces. Before discussing the importance of having specific spaces for celebrating togetherness, it is better to concentrate on the differentiation in the meaning of “space” and “place” and the process which causes a place to get sense of space.
2.2 Binding space

Binding space:
Concluding the discussed issues, we can reach to series of demands and solutions for each of the mentioned problems

As it can be seen in the diagram, there is the demand to develop new public spaces in Bijlmer by changing/creating new spaces of togetherness, as I call them “Binding spaces”.

So the Binding spaces include the following characteristics:
- From non-places to places (spatially defined and frequently used places, toward evoking identity of place)
- From multiplicity to unity (Transformation of Multiple and separated meeting places to united spaces)
- From Segregation to Integration of internal activities (Mixed activities in public spaces, to maximize interactions)

So the main objective becomes exploring the possibilities to create Binding spaces in Bijlmermeer.

As it was declared in the previous chapter, in this phase of research the main struggle is confining the opaque meaning of binding space to defined location(s), so that it can be tested or improved.

Therefore, the assumption starts with exploring for places in Bijlmermeer that can function as “Binding Space”. If we refer to the analysis regarding the important places in Bijlmer for social activities we can locate Bijlmerpark as one of the most critical locations. With renovated and new function since its redesign and renovation in 2011,

The following chapter will try to specify the target by designating the context of the objective.
The most important and active social hubs in Bijlmermeer are confined to the shopping area in Bijlmerplein and Kraiennest (which is demolished to be developed).

Recently in Bijlmermeer, some good functions as renovated and new public spaces have been developed, but as they stand apart and offer segregated activities, they are not used efficiently.

Lack of defined spaces for social activities, which means group meetings, events, and other social activities take place in undefined and temporarily used places.

**Shortage of Social spaces**
- Need for developing new type of Social Spaces

**Segregated Facilities**
- Need for integration of activities (Integrated Social Spaces)

**Non-places**
- Need for defined and actively used places

There is the demand to develop new public spaces in Bijlmer by change/create the new places of togetherness, Let’s call them “Binding spaces”:
- From non-places to places; (defined and frequently used places)
- From multiplicity to Unity; (from multiple and separated meeting places to united places)
- From Segregation to integration; (Mixed activities in public space, To maximize interaction of separate activities in public spaces)
An undefined open space in Bijlmerpark
As it was declared in the previous chapter, in this phase of research the main struggle is confining the opaque meaning of binding space to defined location(s), so that it can be tested or improved. Therefore, the assumption starts with exploring for places in Bijlmermeer that can function as “Binding Space”. If we refer to the analysis regarding the important places in Bijlmer for social activities we can locate Bijlmerpark as one of the most critical locations. With renovated and new function since its redesign and renovation in 2011, Bijlmerpark is considered to be an important public space in the structure of Bijlmermeer. Can Bijlmerpark work as a binding space?

3. Context:

*Bijlmerpark as a Binding space?*
3.1. Bijlmerpark over time

The design
In 2001 the district government accepted the Final Plan of Conduct. This plan served as a framework for competing professional architects that were asked to draft artistic designs for the park. In 2003 the district council selected Mecanoo’s “Happy Place” out of three designs. This had to be further developed into an “Urban Development Program of Requirements”.

Early in 2005 the district council of Amsterdam Southeast decided it would proceed to implement this “Program of Requirements”.

After approximately ten years of planning, in 2008 the physical reconstruction of the BijlmerPark commenced and the park will be completed in 2012. The park will be “as big as the Vondelpark” and it will be connected to “broad esplanades, bike paths and footpaths”. At the east end and west end of the park, there will be situated a “neighborhood street” and new “housing.” These houses “look out onto the park, which is good for security reasons”.

Citizens of Amsterdam Southeast, especially those living at the fringes of the park, are protesting against the building of houses and the cutting of 8500 of the 9500 trees in the park. These people are organized as the Foundation to Keep Southeast Green.

Figure 3.1. map of Bijlmerpark’s plan before renovation, in 2003

Figure 3.2. renovation plan of Bijlmerpark to be executed until 2013

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1-stedebouwkundig Plan van Eisen
2-KEI-Centrum, 2008
3-Stadsdeel Zuidoost, 25 april 2007
4-Stichting Behoud Groen Zuidoost
3.2 Bijlmerpark analysis: Internal mobility

Analysis of the park is mainly based on the observations and field studies and archival research and is reflected in the following diagrams.

As it has been illustrated in the sketch of the internal traffic in the park, the routes for cyclists and pedestrians are planned so that almost all parts of the park facilities can be accessed easily in loops and intersections. Furthermore, the connection of opposite parts of the parks is also possible through semi-circular routes and via seven gates as entrances.
3.2 Bijlmerpark analysis; Access to the transport system

Access to entrances of Bijlmerpark is not only accessible through pedestrian and bikes, but the park structure is also linked to the external transport system. Yet, most of these car traffic roads stay apart as a reason of being elevated.
3.2 Bijlmerpark analysis; Connectors and barriers

The main physical connectors and barriers in the Bijlmerpark are in the form of infrastructural elements. As it can be seen in the illustration, the intersecting and elevated highways frame the structure of park and separate the Bijlmerpark from the residential neighborhoods. The two main cycling routes in the park are considered to be connective elements, which link two problematic neighborhoods of Haag en Veld on the West andKelbergen on the East side of park.

Figure 3.5. A frequently used route in Bijlmerpark

Diagram of connectors and barriers
3.2 Bijlmerpark analysis; Use of space

According to numerous observations, main Activities happening in Bijlmerpark can be summarized as:

Frequent activities:
- Scattered Sport activities in the sport fields by adults and sport
- Playing of children in playgrounds and the watching parents
- Indoor Cultural and educational activities inside Parktheater building
- Walking and cycling visitors through paths in the park

Occasional and temporal activities:
- Annual Celebration of Kwakoe Festival in an open field

Kwakoe is an annual summer festival that has been celebrated since 1975. It is originally a Surinames festival as a football tournament, organized by the Foundation for Youth Centre Kwakoe. But it has been an opportunity to be developed as a multi-cultural event (focusing more on Antilleans and Africans), in the recent years.

Figure 3.6. Occupied space for festival of Kwakoe, taken from the kwakoe festival in summer 2013
3.2 Bijlmerpark analysis; Green and blue network

Although the green and blue pattern in Bijlmerpark was changed after the new design, it still works well by offering lakes not only for the beatification of the landscape, but also functionally as places of water storage. Furthermore, these lakes are considered to be the habitat of some nature spices.

Figure 3.7. The view from a rout in Bijlmerpark

Diagram of green and blue network
3.2 Bijlmerpark analysis; Views

Bijlmerpark’s landscape several suitable points for getting the best views. The specific green blue pattern, Combination of scattered lakes and the greenery texture with variety of plantings, together with elevated and high points like watching tower, creates picturesque frames to be caught by walkers and visitors.

Figure 3.8. Photo taken from above the watching tower, Bijlmerpark

Diagram of views and visual qualities
The recently renovated park constitutes of several facilities including: Parktheater building, sport fields, public bathrooms, watching tower, skateboards and playgrounds and sporting installments and benches. These facilities seem to be sufficient for the living population in Bijlmermeer. However, if we consider the low frequency of use of segregated facilities in park, a necessity for an intervention becomes inevitable.

Figure 3.9. Playground, Bijlmerpark

Diagram of different facilities in Bijlmerpark
3.2 Bijlmerpark analysis; Sound pollution

As the elevated highway passes above the bijlmerpark, it can be considered as the main source of pollution.
Conclusion

Analysis indicates that although the park has good service and facilities but it suffers from the same problem of ‘segregation of activities’ and ‘undefined spaces’. The chosen location for building up binding space is an open field that is currently used on weekends and holidays for games (cricket) and occupied annually for the Kwakoe Festival in Bijlmermeer. During the festival some temporary installments are settled for a period of three weeks and then the field is left vacant.

The main reasons for the selection of this piece of land as the candidate of becoming a “binding space” are:

- According to observations, the site is confined by the most frequently used pedestrian and cycling routes, which add to the chance of being seen and used regularly.
- The site is located opposite the BijlmerparkTheater which is home to occasional cultural indoor activities. This also can be seen as a benefit of being proportionate social space next to the known parktheater and being identified easily.
- This location carries the memories of thousands of inhabitants who come together in the summertime to celebrate the virtue of being exotic and different. This open and mostly undefined field is the remembered place for the annual festival and gets the dress of a binding space for three weeks of summer.

So why not to facilitate it as make it a permanent Binding space?!
The open field that is used for celebration of Kwakoe festival, in Bijlmerpark
4. Program: the storyline set up

Setting up the story

Defining the main program for the introduced location, based on the notion of Binding spaces, is the aim of this chapter. To start setting a program for a platform cannot be executed unless the exact goals and conditions are clarified. Therefore, the first step would be determining the demands and expectations from a binding space in Bijlmerpark in terms of form and utility. Furthermore, setting the program for the site requires considering the activities in adjacent functions, so that the new network of the activities can be defined according to the previous pattern of activities. Another noteworthy aspect of a binding space is to be sensed as a place of belonging, place of memories of togetherness to be shaped. That is why we should look at the program not as settings of solid rules by a way of making a narration, just the way an author starts writing an storyline and the narration starts with the first inspirations.

Although we look at the program more in the sense of a storyline, having some guidelines in terms of utilities and form, will be helpful in the phase of design.
4.1. Utility as guideline

As it was mentioned before, we expect a binding space to integrate the scattered functions, which means involving various users and activities while keeping a network of relations to the neighboring facilities. So in terms of utility, what is important is not only being used actively by diverse range of users, but also the duration of activities which should not be limited to specific occasions and days of the week. As the defined binding space should embed the features of a good public space, it requires qualities to attract, activity hubs to be appealing and evoke sense of belonging.

4.2. Form as Guideline

In terms of form, there are several factors that should be considered from the current context of the landscape which can act as a helpful guide and starting point, to the confining factors like the required space for annual summer festival. Bijlmerpark has a fluent landscape that can be read by smooth slopes and pattern of pathways.

So, if we want to make any intervention for creating the desired space, it should speak with the same language of landscape, to be part of the continuity of the same pattern. This is to make sure that the binding space does not bother the fluency of the land, and is not felt apart and unconnected.

Another significant point is the considerations in terms of flexibility. As it was mentioned before, the chosen land for design is the ground that is occupied partly every year, for the sake of the multicultural festival of Kwakoe. So, the bonded space would have an important role in hosting the celebrations, which entails being open enough for the temporary installations, as well as facilitating other requirements of the festival, like offering its own permanent facilities.
The Diagram

Form
- fluent landscape
- not to stand out as a single building
- flexible
- possible for temporary installations
- partly open partly closed
- connective
- linking the neighborhoods
- interaction to the nearby functions

Utility
- diverse activities
- walking
- witting
- watching
- cycling
- learning
- gathering
- talking
- playing
- celebrating
- various users
- playing children
- young sporters
- elderly people
- different times
- everyday life
- events and occasions
4.3. Conclusion

Considering what we expect from the binding space in the specified location in the park, a program as the story line can be set, just like the chapters of the bound story as the binding space; to be space of narrativisations and performativeness, just as Michel de Certeau specifies the space to be territories by the feature of narration and identity.

So the fluid stops of a walking visitor can be suggested as follows:

Demanded spaces/the fluid chapters of the story:

Figure 4.1. A café: as the space of sitting, meeting, watching, eating and drinking together

Figure 4.2. A playground: as a space of meeting and playing for young children and adults

Figure 4.3. A courtyard of togetherness/performance courtyard: as an intimate space of meetings for outdoor performances

Figure 4.4. Exhibition walls: to stand for temporal outdoor exhibitions, to be places of representation of the art works of the Bijlmer artists

Figure 4.5. A watching platform: an elevated seating place for watching the games and events toward the spotting/playing field
An sketch model, on th way of experiencing design
Writing about the very moment of start of a design is not an easy job, as the design phase itself cannot be defined by clarified boundaries, to have regulated and exact answers. But, if we see the design as a formulated solution to problem(s), then the attitude might be totally different.

Designing a binding space is a process of looking and experiencing and presenting an idea. In this way, the design is not only a solution but a way of expression. Designing a space of togetherness is not going to have a mere answer, as there can be thousands of solutions. Indeed, it is a process which does not put the first steps on solving the problems but on how the narration of visitor can be formed and expressed. Moreover, there are lots of effective issues that can influence the way the story is formed, as inspirations.

Therefore, maybe the ‘joy’ is the answer; the joy of creating such a storyline, where the space can awake the joy of ‘togetherness’.

In the following pages some of the most inspiring and effecting issues in the process of design of Binding space are going to be discussed.
5.1. Concept:
5.1.1. Landscape pattern as the ruler

One of the most determining factors in how to shape the new landscape as binding space is attention to the current language of landscape. Bijlmerpark’s pattern of the current landscape can be a leading point for shaping the new pattern.

Binders and confiners:
Forms are definers of the landscape. It is important to know where the lines, the surfaces and volumes can link the parts of the landscape or to limit access and separate the elements. Rules of separation and linkage should be executed by forms, so that the whole space stays integrated and bounded inside while linked to the neighboring activities.

The flow of the new paths will also be determinant, as they can stand for linking the space physically and form the pattern of movements in the landscape. So, the challenge in this regard is how to activate the flows in a way that the integration and unity is accomplished at the same time.

Finally, the used forms in the design will also be characterized so that it doesn’t bother the fluency of the landscape. This means that keeping this point in mind, will lead us toward ways of embedding the functions in the landscape in an organic way, and induce using free forms insofar as they speak in the similar language of the bigger scale of landscape.

The following models show the process of testing different landscape patterns to create the expected architectonic qualities.

Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.2.

Figure 5.3.
5.1. Concept:

5.1.2. Sense of place

Now, it is the time for representing and symbolizing the ways of evoking ‘sense of place’ by design. It was discussed in the previous chapter about the necessities of the story as the program; in this phase architectonics of the planned space will be brought into discussion.
As it was pointed out in the definition of space, ‘space’ is a occupied and practiced place, A place that has acquired identity through narrativeness and performativity.(reference)

Narrativeness:
What makes a narration for a pedestrian in a binding space is the traces of order and combination of different activities in the mind of the person. Here the alternatives of order and combinations are shown in a pattern of possibilities for positioning the different functions in the site.

5.1.2. Sense of place

Performativity:
De Certeaues discusses ‘performativity’ as the ways that the space is utilized and occupied frequently. This becomes an important prerequisite in the process of obtaining identity for the space. Furthermore, we know that sense of belonging in the space is not gained unless there is a frequency and repetition in use. This means that the programmed functions should be placed in a condition that maximizes the capability to be seen repeatedly to perform the role of an identifying space.(to check the reference of content)
5.2. Material as unifier of elements

It is not only the compositions of the space which characterize the binding space, but also the details of exposition of the narration which make a difference. The combinations of the used materials which are exposed in the landscape will also play a significant role in unifying the space and characterizing each platform of activity. So, the ways of choosing materials will not be based on functionality of the space, but on how the space can be sensed through the utility of a specific material. Furthermore, the number of exposed materials matters, as the too much variety in using different exposed materials may disrupt the unity of the design, while invariability in showing materials may leave the site dull and monotonous.
5.3. Drawings of the story

The playground

The playground is organized as a place which is going to be used by adults and children. It is on the way of passing bikes and pedestrians so involves the passerby to get involved.

Designing a playground as a part of a binding space is inevitable as it involves different age range and liven up the space.

Figure 5.4.
The café in this design is positioned in a way that:
- it stays embedded in the landscape
- it takes the advantage of having view toward the sporting field from the southern windows which is the ground for many outdoor plays and activities, simultaneously; it looks toward the kids’ playground.
So the outdoor café can be established on the both sides.
- it is accessed from two sides, so that it shapes an active corridor inside, to link the both parts
- it becomes a frequently used social hub for the people of Bijlmermeer and as a shelter in the unfavorable weather conditions
Exhibition walls are placed on the edges of a path which starts from the highest point in the landscape beside the retaining walls of the watching platform and continues toward the walls of the courtyard. The exhibition walls are not sensed as particular place, but for characterizing and identifying the path and animate the space by attracting the eyes of visitor to traverse a specific path and shape a part of narration.

Figure 5.6.
The courtyard is confined by parts of the exhibition walls and is a space for small and intimate performances. It is situated in a lower level, that the surrounding surfaces and can be access via a ramp.

The Courtyard also
The Open playing field

Here is the open space which hosts the weekly plays of the young Bijlmermeer players and can be used for other outdoor events such as picnics and barbeques in addition to being open and flexible for the annual celebration of Kwakoe festival.

Figure 5.7.

Sketch of the cafe toward the playing field
The watching platform

The playing and sporting field requires places for the spectators to sit and watch the place in relief. The watching platform is designed.

Figure 5.8.

Sketch of watching platform
Plan with functions
Legend
- *gathering and meeting*
- *playing*
- *watching*
- *sitting*
- *walking*
- *circulation*
- *eating and drinking together*
Cafe Plan
scale 1:100
Playground
scale 1:200
Watching platform
scale 1:200
5.4. Testing the design
Conclusion

Bijlmermeer in Amsterdam, can be seen as a patchwork of transformations that has accepted different layers of change since construction; including renovations and developments. Although the new interventions in the urban context resulted in great improvements in the social structure of Bijlmermeer and healing the spatial fragments, Bijlmer still suffers from some complicatedly layered problems, such as lack of hierarchy from public to private space, lack of lively and small scale social spaces, segregation of functions as a result of modernistic planning, etc.

This project deals with finding solutions in the layered structure of Bijlmermeer to overcome the mentioned fragments. It starts with reviewing the previous analysis of Bijlmermeer’s transformations with the focus on the current social and public spaces and gets to identify three key problems. Each of these problems point out an aspect of fragments and lead us toward specific demands and necessities as guidelines. The research concludes that there is a demand to develop new public spaces in Bijlmer defined as the notion of ‘binding spaces.’

In this project ‘binding space’ is characterized as defined and frequently used public spaces that unite several meeting spaces with facilitating the mix of different activities and maximizing the interactions.

The next step is looking for opportunities to specify a location in Bijlmermeer and develop a binding space in the context, which frame the design process. Bijlmerpark is taken as a good example of a recently developed public space in Bijlmermeer that has the potentials to offer a binding space. The intervention is focused on a part of Bijlmerpark that hosts the annual festival of Kwakoe.

In my design, I deal with ways of changing the landscape to interact grounds of togetherness. This includes adding new functions like a Café, a playground, watching platform, exhibition walls and performance courtyard, beside the currently used open field for games. What is important about the relation of these functions is the integration plus fluency of change in the activities while keeping the whole space bound and united.
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