

JARDIN DE REPOS

Brussels
European 16
Rue de l' Ermitage 55

Despite the aged population increasing steadily over the past century, no major cultural shifts have been operated to better include senior citizens. Aged care is more often than not an ethical scandal. Overpriced and over-medicalised care homes completely disregard the personal development of their residents - not to mention their dignity. Without idealizing the narrative of respect due to elders, senior citizens have a right to meaningful care infrastructure. The CIVA building is repurposed into a neighbourhood day care service where older people can learn, socialize, exercise and have fun, as well as find essential services and amenities. The space is adapted to lowered mobility and impaired cognition. Can architecture accompany senior citizens in finding peace, meaning, joy, love?

MAKING SPACE FOR SENIOR CITIZENS

With retirement currently at 65 years and an average life span of 81, we nowadays spend around 20% of our lives as « old people ». As they age, many people disappear from public and social life as they feel increasingly out of touch with the world.

Open to all publics and fitted to all kinds of physical, cognitive or sensory diversity, this space is a neighborhood social condenser where older people are visible, honored and valued. All kinds of possible uses, activities and programs are accessible. There are many opportunities for friendly exchanges between users, and many intimate and secluded spaces for quiet and privacy.

The building also creates many opportunities for visual interaction with the exterior, both the green landscape of the reservoir and the urban landscape.

FORM IS NOT FUNCTION

The three existing zones of the building are each transformed following a different strategy based on the subtraction of excessive elements and the symbolic role of the space in relation to the mind, body and spirit. Each space is allotted a program that does not inherently match its form, and these shifts between form and function generate spatial surprises, a generosity which creates an entirely new identity for the building.

The 6 current levels of archives are reconnected by a generous atrium which is criss-crossed with oblique spaces. The ramps themselves are very wide and host various activities; they are not only used for circulation but rather blend and interconnect with the floors. This area is dedicated to cultural activities: learning, dancing, a nap club, cooking, a library, and many more activities dedicated to stimulating the mind.

The central exterior double spiral ramps accessible from the street level, in the center, lead to enclosed spaces of various sizes for physical activities: a swimming pool underground to squash and tennis courts on the roof, through fitness and yoga studios as well as a fully fitted changing room with a sauna. Some rooms are also dedicated to awakening the senses through sound, temperature and light.

The older building, which currently hosts the exhibition spaces, is open to the sky and transformed into an open-air garden. Responding to a deficit of public green areas in the densely built area, this space becomes a collective garden open to the neighborhood that fosters contemplation and a measure of passing time.

THE MIND WITHIN THE BODY AS THE BODY WITHIN THE SPACE

Ageing means very different things for different people at different stages in their lives and divergent life experiences. However, for all people, ageing is a challenging process where one's relationship to one's body changes. Health and cognitive issues may arise which can cause psychological suffering. Accepting these changes is part of a healthy ageing process.

The use of very smooth ramps and oblique spaces makes the entire building accessible while encouraging safe and fun mobility. The expression of the space is resolutely as

far away as possible from medicalized architecture. Rather, it aims at stimulating the senses, generating a sense of discovery and surprise while guaranteeing comfort and safety. Different spaces have different atmospheres - strong use of color, materials and remarkable elements - which ensure that users know their way around and recognize their whereabouts easily. The building is not a passive recipient of old bodies. It is an actor that engages the minds and bodies of its users, fostering constant positive interactions with their surroundings. Thus the relationship between the body and the space accompanies the ageing process with kindness.
