YourTube

Abstract

This dissertation summarizes the investigations, methods and processes that led to the formation of my project, YourTube, which aims to transform underground stations in Stockholm, with an extra focus on the T-Centralen station, into more public and entertaining spaces. It started out as a service oriented project, then developed into a more space-focused one, as a result of early stages end-user interviews and research originally conducted in order to understand the feelings and perceptions of the services currently offered by the metro system. The results of this initial phase, unexpectedly ended up pointing out existing problems and discomforts that were more related to the physical shape of the station, rather than its facilities. What became evident, was thus that users were suffering from the extreme and uncomfortable lightning system of the stations, together with the bad acoustic environment of the metro platform. Also, the more I researched on the theme of underground stations in Stockholm, from a foreigner point of view, the more I got involved with the social and political local dynamics, which led me to get in contact with Planka.nu, an association which fights for a free public transportation here on Stockholm. This opened up a discussion about the themes of segregation, immigration and law enforcement in the context of the metro station, and about what a public space is and what the word public does therefore mean. My background as an Italian citizen, a country where metro stations in big cities like Rome, Turin, Milan and Naples get opened during cold winter days to let homeless people sleep relatively comfortably, played a big role in this.

I therefore decided to pick a significant station to work on, T-centralen, characterised by this long tunnel which connects the metro to the train station and its big hall, both usually packed with rushing commuters, which, once reached their platform, are likely to be waiting standing for several minutes, far away from all the services they could instead be using, had they had the possibility to truly enjoy them. What YourTube aims to do is thus to open up these spaces in order for both commuters and just bystanders to enjoy them, giving the possibility to have a short rest in a pleasant, correctly enlightened and vibrant environment,
as well as a nice hangout for those who can’t afford the ticket, and to give back to the citizens the public space they own.

General Bibliography
1) Augé Marc, “In the Metro”, University of Minnesota Press, 2002
4) Satu Miettinen and Mikko Koivisto, “Designing services with innovative methods”, University of Art and Design, 2009

1. Where did it all start?

As mentioned before, this project started out with a very different outcome in mind. My first intention was to create a new kind of service which could better answer to the needs of today’s society: more specifically, I wanted to create a service which would combine the trend of online shopping, and the subsequent delivery of the goods to the customers, with a more convenient place, a place for the goods to be delivered which could be more easily reached than one's home.

1.1 Initial Concept

The idea initially rose from a personal interest in service design and its combination with interior design and architecture in order to connect the intangible potential of a service and the tangible experience of a space. On the other hand, being a young female adult in constant need of a wardrobe change myself, I began to analyse the patterns of my online shopping routine and started noticing its perks and flaws. Most clothing brands offer in general three purchase option: 1) direct purchase at the local store 2) buy online and get the item delivered in the store 3) online purchase and home delivery. Now, each of these methods have undoubtedly their plus, although, they all require the customer to be in a specific place at a given time that doesn’t really match with our modern lifestyles.

What I do know, though, is that I am obligated to take the metro everyday in order to get to all the places I am supposed to be at, making the metro station one of the spaces I spend most of my time at, and as me, many others are as well. Therefore, I wondered, why not
combining the two, the problem and the necessity, and give the people the option to get their delivery somewhere they are bound to go anyway? After all metro stations haven't really changed that much in time, while we have, a lot, since their invention.

1.2 Human centred design approach

Along the developments of these thoughts, I had begun informal interviews, or better, chitchats about the topic with various people, trying to get someone else's opinion on the subject and, surprisingly enough, we were all experiencing the same problems.

In order to keep my horizons open, though, I therefore decided to do a more serious investigation, the focus at the moment still being the service, which led me to learn more about human centred design and its investigation methods (Book 1,2 + service design tools.com).

So, what is human centred design? It is “[…] a process that starts with the people you’re designing for and ends with new solutions that are tailor made to suit their needs. It is all about building a deep empathy with the people you’re designing for; generating tons of ideas; building a bunch of prototypes; sharing what you’ve made with the people you’re designing for; and eventually putting your innovative new solution out in the world.”

Its implementation usually consists of three phases: an Inspiration Phase, where the designer learns directly from the people it’s designing for, an Ideational Phase, where the designer tries to make sense of what it has learnt, identify opportunities for design, and prototype possible solutions, and, finally, the Implementation Phase, where the solution comes to life.

What was important to me then, and still is now, was not only to make something new and different, but something that could really resonate with people, letting their voices and thoughts be heard and thus, I realised I could not let them, the people, the hypothetical customers, apart from the creative process.

2. Inspiration Phase

1IDEO.org - www.designkit.org/human-centered-design
The first step of this research involved mapping the space I was eventually going to be working with, and the habits of the people there: spent 2 hours observing people's behaviour, supposedly in order to decide if it was doable in such a space or if some other service would be more needed, but ended up focusing almost only on the space itself and its characteristics - bad and strong lighting, few seats despite the vast majority of users being elders in hours different than rush hours. While there, though, I figured I could start talking to someone, and thus conducted a first interview with the 5 whys method.

When looking to solve a problem, it helps to begin at the end result, reflect on what caused that, and question the answer five times. This approach promotes deep thinking through questioning, and helps to get to the core if a person’s beliefs and motivations. Most obviously and directly, the Five Whys technique relates to the principle of systematic problem-solving. Hence, there are three key elements to effective use of the Five Whys technique: accurate and complete statements of problems, honesty in answering the questions, and the determination of the interviewer to get to the bottom of problems and resolve them.²

The interviewee was a 20-something year old architecture student waiting for her train home who takes the train from Liljeholmen about once a week; when asked how she felt about the station she answered that the felt quite uncomfortable there, as she believes other passengers feel as well, citing the cold and almost aseptic lights as a probable cause of the distress that made her eager to leave as soon as possible. When asked about the service I had in mind she said that it probably would not have suited her, given her seldom use of the public transportation.

Once back to the studio, I tried to structure the interview in a more efficient way, so to begin the conversation with quite neutral questions in order to make the interviewee comfortable with me to then move into more thoughtful questions, that could arouse doubts in the interviewees themselves.

The second phase of the interviews involved people from different backgrounds, sexes and ages, so to get a more broad perspective as possible. What was really interesting though, was the fact that nevertheless, the answers given all resembled those of the first interview, citing the lightning and the lack of bad placement of the seats as distress factors.

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Of course, some positivities emerged as well, as for instance the massive presence of art pieces in each and every tube station, as, by law, 1% of the project budget, when dealing with public structures in Stockholm, has to be designated to art.\(^3\)

However, little interest was given to the original idea, in which I had started to lose faith myself: there seemed to be, and still are, more pressing issues that needed to be dealt with, and the idea of creating an additional function to a space that is already not functioning properly didn’t attract me, to say the least.

And that’s how YourTube really started.

2.1 Stockholm’s T-Banan

Before we move on to the development of the project, I believe it is fair to give you all a little insight to the reality of Stockholm’s T-banan - a.k.a. Underground system.

The first constructions of the system started in the early 30s, although it’s full development happened somewhere between the 40s and 70s, with some stations opening in 1985 and 1994 and new ones to be open in the upcoming years.

*Fun fact: because the first lines were built before the country changed its driving from left to right, to this day the trains still drive on the left, as changing the tracks would have been too expensive to afford. As this also applies to the underground trains, it’s easy to understand*

\(^3\) “Enprocentregrln”, Stockholm Konst
http://www.stockholmkonst.se/konsten/enprocentsregrln/enprocentsregrln/
the funny situations it causes to non-stockholmers the first few times they attempt to take the tube.

As mentioned before, because of the “enprocentregeln”, every metro station in Stockholm has its own art piece, ranging from simple screen-printed images on the ceramic walls of Telefonplan to the scenographic wall paintings of the mountain-craved stations of the blue line, thus making the Underground system the world's biggest open museum, as Stockholmers love to call it.

Unfortunately, in many stations, the bad lightning of the stations makes it difficult, and at times almost impossible, to fully appreciate the art pieces, which go often unnoticed.

On the other hand, when talking about the Tube here, one cannot forget about its recent years politicisation. One example could be the placing of racist advertisement by the Sverigedemokraterna party (Sweden democrats) - a party that has its roots in the white supremacy movements of the 80's 4- in some metro stations in 2015, which caused an uproar of the local population. 5 The adverts were targeted towards the tourists visiting the city and their aim was to criticise and discriminate against the local beggars, linking them to non-specified international criminal organisations.

SL, the organisation running all of the land based public transport systems in Stockholm County, commented saying that there were no policies in place that prevented such advertisement not be allowed, and thus left them in place.

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Also, in 2010 Stockholm adopted new gates for the metro stations, which ended up hurting many passengers, at times kids and pregnant women too.  This resulted in SL reducing the speed of the new gates. Nevertheless, the speed of the gates was increased again in 2015, as a precaution to avoid commuters not in possession of the SL-card to use the system.

In regards to these last changes, Planka.nu, a local organisation which fights for a single-payer public transport system with whom I came in contact during the development of this project, argues that the speed of the gates has now been set to close the gates faster in the suburbs of the city - where the population has a generally lower income and where many new immigrants live- and normally toward the centre - where residents with higher income and from usually swedish background live. This, according to them, is done in order to increase the already on-going segregation in the city.

So yes, even Stockholm has its problems.

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6 Åkerman, Mikaela. “Glasdörrarna i t-banan skadar fler”, Svenska Dagbladet, 29/02/2012 https://www.svd.se/glasdorrarna-i-t-banan-skadar-fler
2.2 Metro Stories

Now that the political and social context is - hopefully - clear to everyone, let’s move back to the real focus of this project: people.

During the interviews process we got to know more about how different people with different backgrounds experience the underground environment, but these people still all belong to the the same social group, or the mainstream. In order for an idea to be as complete as possible, in my opinion, it has to take in account the extremes as well.

Obviously, in the end, it most likely won't suit everyone, but at least they will have been considered.

In this case, the extremes were all the people that do not necessarily use the metro system, but that do inhabit the tube nevertheless: homeless people, beggars and people who cannot afford the SL-card in general, but who need to get outside anyway.

In order to learn how they experience the space, I found that observing, sketching and then writing down what was happening was a great tool to do just that, as the language, required for an interview, was always going to be a barrier too difficult to surpass.

This gave birth to what I decided to call “Metro Stories”, a quick storyboard, based on Telefonplan station’s life, that represent how the station gets used throughout the days: we find for example that a group of Romani that lives in the area, usually meets up for a shared dinner, in the evening, in a corner just by the entrance of the station, during winter times, whereas they tend to move to the adjacent square during spring, and are often joined by the station’s guards. Also, we learn that a couple of local homeless people usually spend the cold winter mornings sitting on the station’s indoor stairs, as there is no other place to just sit down, unless you move to the outdoor platform. Interestingly enough, I have never seen anyone removing them from their spot, even though they’d been just sitting there for hours.

While reflecting on these two particular points, I also started to notice something else: pretty much every station is designed to either get people to the platform or out, as quickly as possible, no inbetweens.

But, as with everything in life, it’s not always black or white.
Whenever people have to wait more than three minutes for their train, the station gets overcrowded with standing people that have little to no possibility to sit anywhere - that includes the elderly, pregnant women and invalids. There are of course some spots on the platform, but those are usually not enough or outdoors, where as there is virtually no possibility for people to rest at the entrance, where more services are provided. This not only affects those passing by the station, but those who work there as well. In fact, when I asked the local flower shop owner about the station, she stated that she believes it to be very boring, as people are just continuously only coming and going, never stopping. Although there have been some improvements in the past years, as the local Pressbyrån was subjected to some transformations, she still believes to be pretty “lifeless”.

All these informations combined, then became the basis for the development of a new concept, which aimed to transform underground stations in Stockholm into more public and entertaining spaces.

### 3. Ideational Phase

What do I mean with “more public” spaces exactly?

When we think about the binomial public and space, the first thing that pops up in our imagination would most likely be the image of a public square, followed by probably a school, a town hall and so on; it’s hard to imagine someone thinking first thing of an underground station. Yet, more often than not, it is, in Europe at least. So, my question is: why don’t we feel like it is ok to enter them for another purpose than to just reach our platform? It's not like that's the only thing a person could do there is it? In fact, stations
already host many multipurpose shops, whose products would require the customer to be comfortably sitting in order to fully appreciate them - take for example a coffee shop, or a bookstore. Stations are also where we decide to meet up with our friends, for then move to some more pleasant places, just like we act toward a square.

Moreover, in a country like Sweden, where winters are famously cold, the use of such places as an equivalent of squares, one would think it to be more encouraged than anywhere else, and, instead, it’s not.

What shocked me the most, as an italian, was the general dislike of homeless people sleeping, or trying to sleep inside the stations, or in any other public square, for the matter. I am in no way implying that Italy is some sort of heaven for the homeless, but we do open our stations for them in the cold winter nights⁹, when they would otherwise be left to freeze outside.

As these thoughts unraveled in my mind, it became obvious that finding a solution for each one of the 100 stations that are currently in Stockholm would be nearly impossible in the short time frame of the development of this project. For these reasons, I decided to reduce it to one station only, which has caught my attention from the very moment I stepped foot into it: T-Centralen; more exactly the entrance to the station from the Railway Station.

This station is in central Stockholm and has gone through some major changes in the past few years, although these renovations regarded more the entrance in Sergels Torg rather than the one I decided to work with. In fact, the difference is so remarkable at the moment that the first time I exited from that other entrance, I almost thought I had gotten to the wrong stop.

The tube station is connected to train station by a long underground tunnel, decorated on all sides by ceramic art, although its really low ceiling - only about 2.10 m high in some points - and the amount of people walking there during rush hours have granted it the name of “stress tunnel”. The station hall itself is quite huge, although the new high gates mark a sharp visual line, and force the passage of the commuters, so that parts of the space get left untouched most of the times.

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⁹ FQ. “Gelo a Roma, tre stazioni della metro aperte per i senzatetto. Si dorme a Vittorio, Flaminio e Piramide”, *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, 6/01/2017
3.1 A chat with Planka.nu

Set the placement, the question of what to do exactly, was quickly answered. It seemed only natural, in fact, that what the place needed the most were two things in particular: a complete redesigning of the lightning and the addition of seats throughout the whole hallway. The platforms were therefore not taken into account, as those are to be reserved to the passengers in immediate need of a train, and given their already scarce width, any addition to the place would only worsen its conditions. Also, as the point of this experiment is to open the station to those who do not necessarily have an SL-card, it would be quite pointless to work on a space where they have no interest in.

During the development of this project, I have been in contact with Planka.nu, whom in this phase they came in quite handy - and helpful!

When I discussed with them my concerns on the station hall and the seats placement, they were eager to help. We discussed together my initial thoughts about placing the seats in the tunnel itself, but, as only those who have been in a place more times that they can remember can tell, they were dubious about it. The tunnel, to the affectionates, seems already narrow enough without anything blocking the way, plus, every commuter that walk that path every working day apparently knows exactly where to step and would be traumatised if anything or anyone made any changes to their plan - or, at least, that’s the scenario more than one person presented to me whenever I explained my idea.

What they suggested, instead, was to focus on the hallway, where one of the local Pressbyrån is, and whose wideness makes it possible for the inevitable flow of people to easily move anyway. What also came from Planka, was the idea of taking away the gates and once again unify the whole space. For them, it would be more in line with their vision of a free system, for me, it would amplify the idea of continuity and availability of it, and removing the physical barrier would mean also to remove the idea of it, the concept of division between what is private and what is public.
Also, removing the gates, would also mean letting the commuters free of choosing their own way, thus hopefully revitalising the areas of the stations that are now left untouched.

3.2 The bench: inspiration

Until now, I’ve only referred to the seats as such, not defining them in any way. In fact, and idea of what they should look like had been developing for quite a while, as is visible through the sketches developed with Planka. The general idea was to create a sort of snake-like fluid bench that could be repeated many times, in order to adapt to various environments, and its initial colour was supposed to be very bright and strong, that to make a stark contrast to the soft and usually unified Stockholm’s landscape, were plain white reigns. My main references in this part of the projects were the works of the designer Karim Rashid and the architecture studio BIG, for very different reasons. Karim Rashid, and especially his projects in the new tube station of Naples (Italy), was mainly a visual inspiration, as his works usually have a really pop-ish vibe and are characterised by strong and vibrant colours, to which I’m personally attracted.
BIG, on the other hand, was a true inspiration in regards to the kind of approach they have when designing their projects in a scandinavian country, Denmark in his case. As Bjerke Ingels, founder and creative partner of BIG, himself explains in his episode in Netflix design-centred docu-series “Abstract: the art of design” and again in his book “Yes is more: An Archicomic on Architectural Evolution” (Bjerke Ingels, 2009, Copenhagen) : difference and disagreement in most scandinavian countries are seen as something almost to be ashamed of. This is tendency and mind set in the nordic culture is called “Law of Jante”, first described in Aksel Sandemose ’s A Fugitive Crosses His Tracks (En flyktning krysser sitt spor, 1933, English translation published in the USA in 1936), it is typical of Denmark, Norway and Sweden and is basically a celebration of the average.

What BIG does through its projects is breaking this concept, showing that difference can be positive.

Having lived first in Norway and now in Sweden, and having been in direct contact with the Janteloven mentality, I had begun to forget this.

Disclaimer: I am not in anyway trying to imply that the these countries are some sort of soviet-like states, as that would be ridiculous and just false. It is just a part of the culture that had an impact on me personally and on my way of working.

### 3.3 The bench: workshop

An important part in the development of the bench was also understanding how to shape it so that it would both encourage conversation among people sitting on it and still grant some privacy. In order to do this, I conducted a small workshop with 3 persons of different height, gender and size, and tested with them, with the help of chairs and a small sofa, various positions and habits.

It was important to avoid a straight line because that does not trigger interaction: a straight line forces in fact the user to look straight forward, and, unless there is someone facing the user, this automatically translates into staring into space. Now, if two people are sitting one next to each other and would like to engage in a conversation, they would have to twist toward each other, an action which the the straight line makes difficult and uncomfortable.

What would be ideal, is instead a curved shape, so that the users would be naturally facing each others.
Once the first curve was tested, we then realised that although it was ideal for conversation, it was not comfortable enough for single users, i.e. users that sit and want to sit by themselves. The curve, in fact, was too sharp, which also didn’t allow the space for purse to leave on the user’s side.

We therefore tried to open it up a bit, so that it would still feel easy to converseate and at the same time isolate oneself, if needed. This way, more space was added between each person, so to easily accommodate a purse or a rucksack.

The testers all agreed that this could be the ideal shape.

We then discussed about the material they were sitting on: the chairs were clad in polished wood, which at first felt very cold, but then soon adapted to the users’ body temperature, although it still felt quite flat.

We then tried to sit on a little sofa, which a bit shorter than the chairs and made of soft fabric.

Although it was very comfortable, it was a bit too comfortable, according to the testers, that is, “it would have been perfect for a home party, but not for a tube station, or a public space in general” [sic.]. Though at comfort, the user still want to be vigilant and ready in case anything occurred, or in case they were just taking a break before getting to the platform, and a too comfortable bench would have distracted them from this.

In regard to the height of the sofa, they agreed it was perhaps more suitable than the chair’s height, as they could now properly stretch their legs.

To summarize, the bench should have been around 50 cm high, should have had a soft curve, and it should have been made of a hard yet warm material.

I did not take pictures of this process as I did not want to put the testers on the spot, as I caught them while they were on a break, so I proceeded to summarize everything on my project diary instead.
3.4 The bench: development

Having decided its key features, it was then time to give it a shape of some kind.
As I was creating a vision of what the future of the station could be, I decided that it was time to break some norms.
One common thing to do when designing park benches, at least here in Sweden, is to add an armrest every now and then on the lengths, in order to discourage people from sleeping on them. What I wanted to do was therefore the exact opposite.
How do I make a bench that emphasizes the sleeping action, whilst avoiding to make too obvious and leaving the possibility to sit comfortably?
The answer, for me, was taking inspiration from the archetype of the chaise longue, more exactly Le Corbusier’s LC4 chaise longue. What I did, was then to take its measures and stretch and soften them, so not to have such a sharp curve, which would otherwise make the sitting action almost impossible - if one does not want to sit and roll over the person sitting below them, of course.
In the study of this, I worked with scale 1:10 cardboard models, which could be easily curved and reshaped, and cardboard puppets, through which i could simulate the interactions between the bench and the users.
A first model focused only on the shape of the chaise longue curve and the heights of the the whole bench. Although I was quite satisfied with the result, I had not considered the other curve.
The next two models focused on the integration of the two curves together.
The second one presented a very soft curve, which was still too similar to a straight line. The third and final cardboard model presented instead a more pronounced curve, making it more fluid and more adequate to its final purposes.

Despite being quite satisfied with the result, it occurred to me that such a shape would could not
be repeated several times, in order to fill the whole station, without looking monotonous, not to mention that as the space is not linear, they would have not fitted it well.

The solution was to make several modules with different purposes and shapes to best adapt to different architectural elements which could be assembled together in order to enliven the space and be easily adapted to different stations. superclear

3.5 Light sketches

The other aspect of this project was to work with the lightning system of the station. As mentioned before, the light in the stations does not do justice to the beautiful pieces of art that it houses, and not only that, but it also has an impact on the well being of the commuters. What was to be done was to therefore reshape it, so that it would me more welcoming and soft, and at the same time still grant a full enlightening of the whole space, for safety reasons.

The first thing that I wanted to get rid of, was the strong, white direct lightning that is used without any restraint in every station in Stockholm. Not only is the light extremely bad, also, the fitting body of the lights does not match the environment and is one of the main factors of the “lab-rat” feeling that the system emanates.

Focusing on the words welcoming, soft, comfort and home, it occurred to me that the key element would be to avoid a direct light, and instead work through reflecting the light against the white ceiling, which would secure a uniform illumination and avoid blinding the users who tried to look directly toward it. Decided on this matter, I then looked for references of previous projects which had a similar concept and purpose and came across Page at Reagan National Airport in Washington, a project made by ICrave10. In

http://www.archlighting.com/projects/page-reagan-national-airport_o
order to soften the colour temperature of the light and make it more pleasant to the eye, they mixed linear upright dynamic-white LEDs together with some amber ones, which makes it look almost natural.

Also, another interesting note of this project is the way they hid the light sources inside the architectural element.

As there are already some raceways integrated in the architecture of the stations, I decided to take advantage of them, and hide the sources therein, so to create the sensation of this almost ephemeral light, a light that you can perceive, but do not exactly know where it comes from.

Because there is also a number of columns in the station, and in the hallway in particular, I tried to work with them and their shape thinking again about the public square concept. “What do you mean?”, you are probably wondering.

Well, one key element in the public square is usually the presence of trees, so I tried to look at these columns as if they were the trees of my indoor square and tried to give them the movement of the leaves by decorating their tops with small point sources that gradually disappear.

At this point, I then translated these concept in quick light sketches, that helped me to better understand how all these elements could work together, and then became the base for further developments made through modelling- and rendering programs.

4. Implementation Phase

Well, we have now reached the final chapter of what has been a long and exciting journey. As, at the time this dissertation is being written, the implementation of each part of my project has not been yet completed, you shall excuse me if there are some discrepancy between what is written and what is shown.

So, here we go.
4.1 The bench

In all my initial sketches, the bench, in all its modules, had always looked as a uniform solid and, in my imagination, was of some stark colour ranging from shock pink to bordeaux.
Needless to say, in the end it looked nothing of the sort.
When first thinking about how the bench would have been realised, I tried to stay true to my sketches, looking for materials which would have granted their continuous and fluid aspects, like Corian or composite resin. The resin option was quickly discarded as it is toxic to some extents. When it came to Corian, though, the doubt were more concerning its suitability to the concept of the project: could plastic really be the right material for something that aimed to be inclusive and make people feel like they belonged? Probably not.
These doubts led me to reconsider my initial idea in order to adjust it to a material that I am more familiar and comfortable with, like wood. Wood is a warm material and is part of the swedish culture and something people are familiar with, so it seemed just the right material for it, but in order to be easily employed the structure couldn’t be as fluid as initially thought. Therefore, instead of a fluid one piece, I modified it to be made of a little more than one hundred 4 x 4 cm thick embedded beams, with a distance of 2 cm between each other.
This way, not only could the two curves be more easily managed, but the space in between the beams would allow to create more depth and a sense of playfulness in the station when combined with light.
Eventually, the beams became of 4 x 3 cm, as the wood employed, Scots pine, comes better in the size 22 x 3.8 cm, than its thicker version, which, because of the way it is cut, has more wood knots that make it harder to work with.
The biggest problem here was to solve the joint of the beams, so that no joinery would show on the final product. In order to do that, we tested a few options, concluding that the most suitable one was perhaps to take away 1 cm deep section on each side of both end of the standing beams to make almost a bed for the laying ones.
These cuts would also all be 3 cm long on the bottom part of the beams, whilst they would all be different from each other on the top part, in order to follow the curve.
Also, each beam would be sanded on its edge, to better the comfort of the user and, once finished, some feet would be added on the bottom of the bench, so to lift it from the ground and add stability to the whole structure.

As for the colour of the bench, none will be added on its visible sides; as per the non visible ones, more about that will come soon enough, just keep reading.

4.2 Lights

This was probably the trickiest part of my project.

Although I did know exactly how I wanted it to be, I did lack the time and the knowledge to employ the modelling programs at their best to give an as precise as possible view of what the final outcome would be like.

Therefore, what I decided to do, instead, was to keep working with sketches, as detailed as possible and provide more technical information about the systems employed.

As said before, the uniform lighting of the station will be granted by uplighters set on the length of the hall and the tunnel, with additional ones set to follow the already existing raceways. In order to guarantee energy efficiency, LEDs will be used, with lights colours ranging from cool white to amber tones. The fittings for the sets that will be placed in the hallway will have an about 75° opening angle, so to assure the light to reflect on an extensive portion of the flat ceiling, whereas in the tunnel it will be closer to 45°, as the arch-like ceiling present in the area requires. As per the columns, only a few of them are to be decorated, in order to avoid an over-stimulation of the viewer. The top part of the columns, which already has an inverted pyramid shape, will be covered with a fitting shield, so to make its edges less rough than what they currently are and to make the installation of the spot lights easier. The spotlights used in this case will be equipped with an anti-glare lens, so to enable the user to look directly at them without risking to go temporarily blind.
It’s now time to talk again about the colour of the bench.
Although not tested, one possibility would be to paint the parts of the bench not visible from the outside with bright red paint, so that when hit by light, it would reflect on the outside, creating a reddish glow around the whole bench. This would indeed require additional spot lights to be placed on the bottom part of the inside of the bench with an inclination of about 45°, so that the light could hit both the standing and lying parts of the bench.
In regards to the colour red, it wasn’t my first choice. As could be noticed in the early sketches, the bench was originally intended to be of some kind of shock pink, that in order to challenge the whiteness of Stockholm. In spite of that, though, I realised it to be too bright of a colour for the station and it would not have fit well with the surrounding environment.
While studying other colours, I came to realize that many bright colours are in fact used in scandinavian design, most of them though being of some kind of pastel or washed-out tones.
If I wanted to make a statement, I therefore needed to adopt some strong tones, and what is stronger than red?
Also, on a side note, Sigmund Freud’s studio had a prevalence of red, so it felt like the natural choice for a bench that could one day potentially host two friends confiding secrets and insecurities to each other in the chaos and anonymity of the station.

5. After thoughts

This, for me, was not only an interior project, it didn’t only revolve around finding the right light settings, the right placement or the right shape of the bench: it was first and foremost a way to understand better people, their needs and behaviours and to investigate what it our role as designers in respect of social issues and political themes. Does this project offer a definite solution to the problems of homelessness and the role of public spaces in our society? Of course not, nor was it ever intended to be one.
But it does rise some questions: if that’s not a solution, what could be it then? How do we deal with these issues? Do we, as designers, only consider the normal citizens, the mainstreams, or shall we also design for the outcast? And, most importantly, is it our job to shape an environment that suits them as well, or does society need to change as well, through political and social reforms, in order to relieve them from their position as outcasts?
These are of course big issues that I alone, or even designers alone cannot answer, not at the moment at least. What I believe, though is that we, as designers and thus creatives and intellectuals, have the power and the responsibility to offer, if not solutions, at least new ideas, methods and approaches to face these issues to those who do have the power and position to solve them.

Another question that arose during the development of this project concerns the role and nature of a public space. Is a public space just any place that is formally public, no matter the use or perception that one has of it, or does that imply a way of living the space, a sense of owning the space, by the public, i.e. us?

Well, in my opinion, it is a mix of both. Every formally public space has in fact the potential to be “truly” public, meaning that, when a person enter the space, he or she can immediately recognise it as a space he or she can somehow inhabit and call, partly, their own.

The way this can be achieved is for us designers to pay attention to the details of the planning and designing of the space, leaving room for an individual to take an active role in the life of the building, square, hallway or whatever public space we are working with, designing with different personas on our mind and realising that, especially when working on public spaces, no matter the commissioner of the project, we have to consider the wishes of all our end users, in particular those whose voices go often unnoticed.

Sometimes, it only takes a bench and the right light to transform a non-space into a square.

Thank you,

Alessandra Cislaghi