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I am interesting - Part 2[*]

Reflection P5-report
Marketing and project development

Student: S. Harmsen
Student nr: 4339363

Reflection

In this reflection, short substantiated explanation on account for the results of the research are provided by the topics research process, product, practical and scientific relevance,

Research process

The focusof the research has been quite stable during the process; namely, the aim to explore the relation between marketing and real estate development. However, mostly based on the fact that very little was known about this relation, the main question and sub questions have shifted several times. Furthermore, the personal process consisted of its ups and down. In the following paragraph based on the progress meetings (P1till P5) the research process and the personal process are set out.

Preparation

In the summer of 2016, before the start of the new study year, I went with the BOSS study trip to London, Vancouver and San Francisco. During the visit to Concord Pacific in Vancouver, I was surprised to see how much money Concord Pacific invested in the marketing of their real estate development projects. Their marketing offices costed approximately 3 million dollars and consisted of multiple, luxurious scale models, model houses, virtual reality visualisations and so on. This got me thinking about the way real estate developers in the Netherlands execute marketing strategies and about how little I have learned about this during my studies. Based on this question, I became motivated to base my graduation research on marketing and real estate development.

Towards P2

During the first weeks of the graduation process I registered for the Waterfront Developments lab, part of the UDM section. However, based on my personal motivation to focus on marketing in real estate developments I asked Erwin Heurkens to become my mentor and afterwards the P1 I did not longer participate in this graduation lab. Furthermore, the focus of my thesis was on project level and not on urban development management. I got in contact with professor Bram van den Bergh, who introduced me to marketing management and combined with Erwin Heurkens' knowledge about the role of the project developer and Sake Zijlstra's knowledge about the residential sector was the perfect combination for me to start with my research proposal e.g. the P2 report.

This period consisted of an iterative process, in which I was constantly searching for a relevant and manageable research objective and research problem. The research topic was found early in the process, however it took a lot of reading and thinking to be able to find a practical and scientific relevance. In articles, reports and master theses marketing was often related to demand-driven developments and the end-user. Therefore, at the P2-moment my focus was on the end-user participation, marketing tools and demand-driven developments. In hindsight, it might have been more convenient to graduate on a topic where the relevance had already partly been determined.

Towards P3

New research proposal

A lot of shifts have occurred since the P2. Firstly, in my personal life I had a major setback and as a result the graduation process had a break of 10 months. In November I continued with the P2 research proposal however I 'simplified' the research topic. By means of orientating interviews with Blauwhoed and VORM and literature reviews, the scope of the research became more manageable. During this period, I kept a 'study diary' in which I wrote all my thoughts and findings.

These two paragraphs set out how I described the graduation process on the 18th of December 2018.

> **The snail story**
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> ''It is like walking on the main path in a forest and you have just found 2 nice snails. These snails are in a little, animal-friendly jar and there is unfortunately no room for more snails. While walking, there are many side paths that attract your attention. On one of these side paths you see another snail and you study this snail for a few minutes. Then you decide not to take that snail and leave it for what it is. And with a few steps back you reach the main path again. Later there is another side path with the same kind of snail. So, of course, this side path attracts your attention and you even wonder if these snails are related to each other and if that would be interesting to research. Why not take this snail with you instead of one of the snails already in your jar? They both look interesting and kind. Then you look at your watch to see that it is 5 o'clock. You have to be home by 5.30, so you start walking. And when you get home and you still have all these unanswered questions. And 2 snails. That is how graduation feels.''

The relation between the snail story and the graduation research is based on the struggles I had with my research topic and with the choices I had to make in order to define my research.

> **The snail story related to the marketing**
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> ''It is as if I am walking in a marketing forest. With a problem analysis in my jar, which is well substantiated. But at one of the side paths of the forest I discover new information and based on this new information a part of my jar is no longer useful. This new information makes the marketing forest much more interesting and I wonder what I will find if I continue this side paths. Do I leave the 'old' information of my jar? And do I continue with the new part? Or do I make sure that I remember this interesting new information for another walker and do I make sure I keep walking, since I have got the be home at 5.30 o'clock.''

During this period, I came to the conclusion I knew very little about marketing in real estate developments (the main snails) and therefore I eliminated end-user participation and demand-driven developments (the new snails). This has led to a new main question, sub questions, case studies and adjustments in the literature review and provided me with new motivation to conduct the empirical part of the graduation research.

Conduction of the case studies
By means of personal contacts at VORM and Dura Vemeer most of the interviews were planned quite easily. With ERA-contour this was a bit more difficult, however thanks to Merel Putman I got in touch with the right person. This is also where the biggest gap in my research occurred; I did not manage to come into contact with the project developers of the standardized housing project and the complex housing project. The marketing manager of ERA-Contour has been responsible for the marketing activities of these projects and therefore a lot of information was obtained by this interview. However, details about the development processes of the two projects were not provided. Multiple times it has been tried to get in contact with these project developers, however this has not been successful. Due to personal circumstances, the marketing manager of ERA-contour became unreachable as well and after a while too much time was waisted. As this graduation research is bound by time and means, the decision was made to continue the empirical part of the research based on the other case studies.

Another flaw in the case study research is the lack of documentation. Not all project developers had marketing documentation. Moreover; only three of the 7 interviewees could provide me with documentation. After several attempts to obtain documentation, in which VORM addressed they simply had no documentation and ERA-

Contour did not respond, I used only documentation, such as articles and brochures to validate the outcomes of the interviews.

Towards P4

After the conduction of the empirical research it became clear what the research was going to look like and during the P3 and P4 moment a lot of work has been done to update the thesis. Literature needed to be rewritten or removed, the methodology was not sufficient anymore, and the research questions and design were updated. I think I underestimated the conduction of the analysis, transcribing the interviews and the contact with the companies. All these aspects costed a lot time, where I had planned this maybe a bit too optimistic (or I overestimated my writing capabilities).

Towards P5

Many students before me described the period between P4 and P5 as quite nice, since you already know you are going to graduate and, as a result, there is less pressure on the writing of the P5-report. However, I did not experience it this way. I was not satisfied with my P4-report and therefore I still felt a lot of pressure to do 'justice' to my research. In the sense of rewriting multiple chapters. There has been a constant tension between just adjusting the chapters or making them 'perfect'. This has also led to some minor personal setback, which also occurred during the P4 period.

Adjustment in the report:
- The main question is adjusted and the relation between the three business levels is added to the P4-report.
- Part 2; Practices has been upgraded. In which a lot of text is eliminated and figures have been added to clarify the text.
- The descriptions of the cases have been further expanded
- The conclusions have been shortened-down and clarified.
- Based on the rewriting of the conclusions, the recommendations have more depth and utility.

Supervision

I have experienced the contact moments with my mentors as very useful and pleasant. After the graduation break I used my 'progress sheet' to update my mentors about my personal and study progress. This sheet, see figure 1 became very important to me becomes it provided me a handle to not only be aware of the progress of research but also be conscious about my personal health. My mentors were very supportive about this and their feedback was constructive and encouraging.
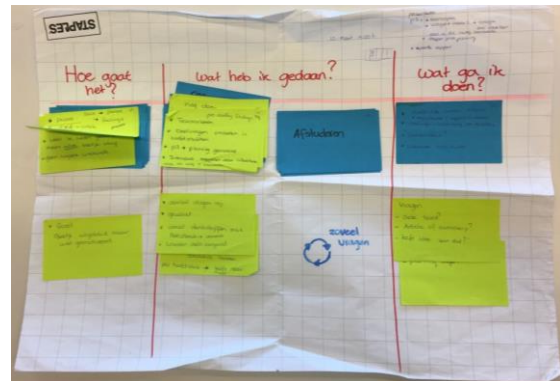

Figure 1; *Personal progress sheet*

Personal process

The whole graduation process, starting in September 2016 till now, was quite are struggle, but (thankfully) also had some highlights. During the process I have learned to set my boundaries, both in personal life as in in my research thesis. The topic marketing has provided me with a lot of motivation but also led to lots of insecurities. Mostly due to the fact that only after the empirical part of this research, I fully understood what I was doing. This does not mean that till the P3-moment, I was on the wrong track of wasting my time; it is just the process of research that does not comply with my personality. I prefer to know in advance where I am going, how I am going to get there and what the process would look like. And, of course, in the research process of a master

thesis, this is not the case. Still, this was very good learn experience and if I had to graduate again, I would probably be more specific during the P1 and P2, so that during the further process I would have set my boundaries already.

Product

Position within Urban Development Management

The core of Urban Development Management (UDM) is the management of decisions of the many stakeholders involved in urban area development towards a high-quality outcome. Within this graduation research it is explored in what ways the concept marketing is used in private sector-led development projects.. The relation between marketing on the three business levels are set out and this adds knowledge to decisions private developers make related to their residential development projects.

Literature review

The research topic marketing has been quite a struggle or how Sake Zijlstra mentioned it during one of the meetings ''Marketing is a monster.''. A lot of books, articles and reports have been written about marketing and there are even marketing bachelor and master studies. How I am going to tackle the topic marketing in 9 months? This is exectued by means of two books; 'Marketing management: de Essentie' by Kotler & Keller (2010) and 'Marketingcommunicatiestrategie' by Floor, van Raaij, & Bouwman, M. (2015).

Reliability and validity of the results

Triangulation entails using more than one method or source of data in the study of social phenomena (Bryman, 2012). The validity of the findings is increased by the use of different sources of data and research techniques. Furthermore, Bryman (2012) describes four aspects regarding reliability and validity of qualitative research:

External reliability, which relates to the replicability of the research.
Based on the research design and the theoretical framework, this thesis can be replicated by other research. An important side note is the context of the research. Bryman states '' It is a difficult criterion to meet in qualitative research, since, as LeCompte and Goetz recognize, it is impossible to 'freeze' a social setting and the circumstances of aninitial study to make it replicable''. By adopting a similar social role as the original researcher, this external reliability can be increased.
Therefore, it is assumed this thesis has a relative high external reliability.

Internal reliability, which relates to the degree to which members of a research team agree with each other about what they hear and see.
Since this 'research team' consists of one student, this is not relevant to this thesis.

Internal validity, by which they mean whether there is a good match between researchers' observations and the theoretical ideas they develop.
During the empirical part of the research, the findings have been compared to literature. The literature review has been very helpful and was recognized by the interviewees. However, it is recommended to conduct quantitative research, about to support the qualitative findings of this graduation research.

External validity, which relates to the possibility to generalize the findings across different settings. This type of validity is usually a problem for qualitative e research due to the tendency to employ case studies and small samples. This is difficult for this thesis since it is based on a case study design and it is important to keep in mind that case study is not a sample and therefore the results a depended on the context of the case studies. The findings of the type 1 projects can be generalized on some fragments,

however the type 2 projects are unique and therefore it is difficult to generalize the findings across different settings.

Practical relevance

In the current context the housing market is booming. With approximately 200,000 sale transactions in 2016, the market is at pre-crisis level. The current trend that the population is increasing the most in the Randstad, particularly in the four large cities, is being continued in the prognosis, which means that in some parts of the country there is increasing pressure, as well as increasing house surpluses in shrinkage areas. (Staat van de Woningmarkt, 2016). Within this changing market Putman (2017) still emphasises the importance of marketing communication. ''Knowing how to communicate with your end-user will give benefits when the market changes (M. Putman, personal communication, 6th of December 2017) (Floor et al., 2015). According to Pullen the building sector is still very traditional, ''The reflex is; we have survived the crisis and now we have to produce as much as possible. Once the building is finished, we continue with the next project. Knowledge about the end-user is required, otherwise there is a big chance 'unknown' parties, whom do have this knowledge, take over our potential projects.'' (Pullen, 2018)

According to Buehler ''As consumers become less predictable, psychographics – where real estate demand is mainly driven by consumer personality, values, opinions, attitudes, interests, and lifestyles - are the new demographics for determining real estate success. '' (M. Buehler, 2016). Nowadays, almost all parties are involving the end-users in a certain form but there is no knowledge and insight on how this is executed

Furthermore, within the master track Management in the Built Environment very little attention is paid on the relation between marketing and project development. Knowledge about marketing and the relation with the residential sector can provide new insights to the current education of MBE.

Scientific relevance

As mentioned above, marketing is used to understand the client to that extent that the offered product or service always suits the client and therefore 'sells' itself. Especially in a demand-driven context, in which project developers realize centralization of the end-user is needed, scientific knowledge about marketing is required. This more client-oriented focus, asks project developers to put more effort in to marketing. Putman (2010) indicates ''there is a future for project developers to enhance their marketing knowledge'' and according to Buskens (2015) ''developers should use marketing to create new opportunities and niches in the market''. Also, in the current context, which shows a backwards shift to a supply-driven market, marketing is indispensable. This because many actors active in the field are searching to re-establish their competitive place in the market. (Geesing, 2015)

Many graduates recommended to do more research on the relation between project developers and marketing, divided on different subjects such as innovation, sustainability and centralization of the end-user. (Hooghiemstra, 2010; Putman, 2010; Bogers, 2015; Buskens, 2015; Haak, 2015). This research aims to close a bit of this knowledge gap by relating literature about marketing to marketing in development practices in the residential sector.

Results

The choice has been made to conduct empirical research and as a result the conclusion consists of findings. In advance, a literature review has been executed and this literature reviews have set the theoretical framework for the empirical study. The empirical findings have been compared to the literature findings and this resulted in conclusions. Maybe it is a critical point of view, but I hoped to have been able to provide a result that was really new or would have made a big difference in the real estate sector. These findings are interesting, some are predictable and some remarkable, however it is not the invention of a difficult model or 'a spaceship'. That has been a bit of struggle for me, but currently I am pleased with the product I produced and all the work and effort it has caused.