

REFLECTION

The research conducted in 'Lost Palaces' explores the lost architectural approach to designing and constructing a large number of standardised homes, with a particular focus on the appearance of facades and urban space. Through its many ornaments and other facade elements, individual architects of the Amsterdam School created recognisable and distinctive parts of dwelling blocks that exhibited a grandeur reminiscent of a palace (Witman, 2023).

The main research question, 'How does the Amsterdam School use ornaments and other facade elements to partition dwelling blocks in Plan Zuid?' is answered by the identification of 12 design principles. The principles are defined by analysing and cataloguing the use and effect of various elements on the appearance of the facade and urban space. These principles collectively form a toolbox with techniques for incorporating more elements into contemporary architecture to revive a similar grandeur in residential housing. They offer practical methods for architects seeking to design future 'palaces' that resonate with human scale and communal identity. Ornaments are redefined from mere decorative elements to integral components of architectural design that structure facades, enhance their engaging features and contribute to the overall appeal of urban spaces.

The principles advocate for the reintroduction of several ornaments that are overshadowed by the modernistic approaches that dominated much of the 20th century. The shift toward functionalism and minimalism prioritised efficiency and standardisation, rejecting what was deemed 'unnecessary' decoration, aligned with the needs of industrialisation and economic constraints.

Future research could explore the economic implications or costs associated with implementing these elements and how these tools could be adapted to other architectural styles or regions with distinct historical, cultural, or environmental contexts. Since the diversity of elements within the Amsterdam School was guided by individual architects, further studies on additional building blocks would expand the catalogue of elements and could add more principles and different techniques. During the design phase it is examined how modern challenges, such as sustainability, environmental impact and current construction methods can be integrated with the principles outlined in the toolbox.

The design showcases how a prefabricated CLT-module (cross-laminated timber) with a steel joint could be used to create a residential building block and examines the effect that the module and other facade systems have on the overall appearance. In the end a 'dry' system is used allowing bricks to be stacked without the use of any mortar. New possibilities within both systems are being explored to reintroduce various elements of the research phase in ways that are less harmful to the environment compared to traditional methods.

Reflecting on the research and the design phase, it becomes evident that innovations in both construction systems and facade systems must be evaluated based on their ability to create a captivating appearance and environment within a specific context rather than focussing solely on fast construction, modularity, sustainability, or demountability. This principle is applied within the design and I believe it is the responsibility of architects and designers to continue pursuing this balance. Otherwise the approach in question, along with a sense of identity within larger building blocks, may be lost. I have come to understand that, at times, compromises in sustainability are necessary. Sustainability is receiving more attention, also in the architectural field for apparent reasons. However, overemphasising on sustainability would undervalue the broader scope of the discipline. The principles defined in this research aims to answer whether more can be done to create engaging features and appealing urban spaces in the design phase. While it is challenging to quantify “engaging” and “appealing,” the design’s value is assessed by exploring the restrictions and possibilities of certain systems.

In the final phase of graduation, a model is constructed to demonstrate the modular system, as well as a portion of the façade and the elements that were researched and integrated. Possibilities of integrating specific elements that contribute to the appearance of the facade or urban space but have not passed the revenue could be researched. Additionally, more visual support could be provided to better understand the integration of these elements and their impact.