

REFLECTION

AAFKE SIMONIDES
Heritage & Architecture
Delft University of Technology

PROJECT TITLE

SOUNDSCAPING THE FUTURE LIBRARY

SUB TITLE

Explorations of the auditory library experience

STUDIO

Heritage and Architecture MSc3/4_ Revitalising Heritage

COURSE CODE

AR3AHI15

NAME

Aafke Simonides

STUDENT NUMBER

5021138

EMAIL

A.E.Simonides@student.tudelft.nl

RESEARCH

Emeline Lin

DESIGN

Uta Pottgiesser

BUILDING TECHNOLOGY

Paddy Tommesen

INTRODUCTION

My graduation project focuses on the Royal Library (Koninklijke Bibliotheek, KB) in The Hague, the national library of the Netherlands. Since most of its original programme will disappear, the building faces a major transformation challenge. The KB aims to reposition itself as an open, welcoming and contemporary library. My project, "Soundscaping the Future Library: Explorations of the Auditory Library Experience", investigates how sound and atmosphere can contribute to this renewed identity.

My choice of topic stems from my fascination with the atmosphere of buildings. Atmosphere is the first thing I sense when entering a space, yet it is a complex and layered concept that involves all five senses. Because architecture is often dominated by visual considerations, I wanted to focus on the auditory dimension. The library typology, where silence and

sound are inherently significant, provided an ideal framework. By concentrating on soundscapes, I was able to make the abstract notion of atmosphere more tangible and measurable.

This topic fits well within my master track Heritage & Architecture, which focuses on the adaptation and reuse of existing buildings. My project explores how a 1980s building (outdated in function yet rich in potential) can be revitalised. It also aligns with the broader MSc Architecture, Urbanism and Building Sciences, which seeks to renew and improve the built environment.



Image 1: Entrance of the KB (own image)

APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

In the first quarter, I focused on defining my topic and establishing a research framework. Through extensive literature review and discussions with peers and tutors, I realised that concentrating on soundscapes was both academically relevant and feasible.

I then conducted comparative research on four libraries (Forum Groningen, DOK Open Delft, the TU Delft Library, and the British Library in London) using sound recordings and decibel measurements to analyse and compare spatial and acoustic qualities. At the KB site, I measured and recorded outdoor soundscapes to understand the influence of the surrounding urban noise from traffic and public transport.

One of my main sources of inspiration was R. Murray Schafer's *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*. His idea of the "soniferous garden" directly inspired the concept of a large interior courtyard in my design.

Although the expert interviews I conducted did not always yield straightforward answers to my questions, they provided valuable insights into the design of 'third places' and the role of sound in public buildings. During the third quarter, I began research through design, testing spatial variants and evaluating them in relation to their acoustic qualities and experiential impact. This relationship between research and design proved crucial (see image 3). The research guided the design process, while the act of designing generated new questions: for instance, how to create spaces that feel comfortable and inclusive for people with different backgrounds and sensitivities to sound?

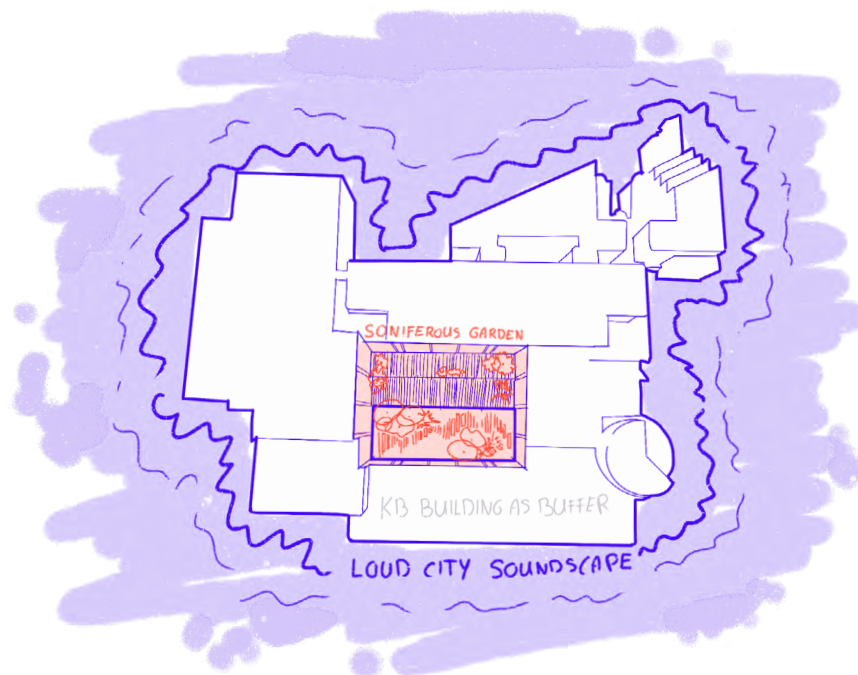


Image 2: Concept drawing (own image)

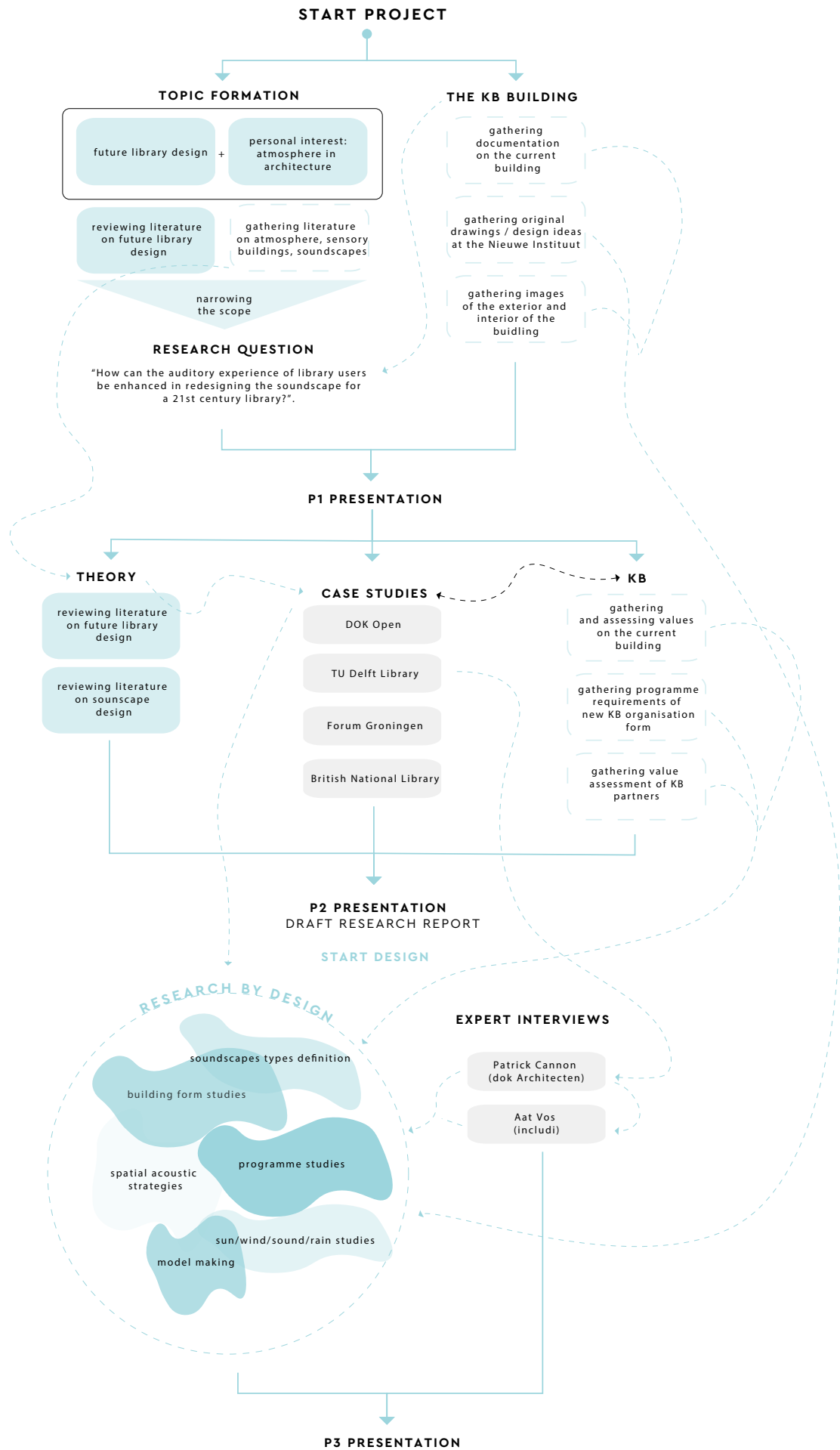


Image 3: Research and Design Diagram (own image)

FEEDBACK, SUPERVISION, AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Throughout the process, I benefited from the diverse perspectives of my mentors. My research mentor guided me in sharpening and deepening my topic; her suggestion to focus on soundscapes was decisive. My design mentor encouraged typological exploration (such as referencing the monastery typology for the courtyard) and urged me to critically reflect on the expression and atmosphere of my design. The building technology mentor emphasised sketching by hand, exploring materiality, and developing multiple design variants.

At times, I consciously decided not to follow every piece of advice. For instance, despite suggestions to prioritise other tasks, I chose to make a physical model of the existing building to understand its complex floor structure and voids. This model later became a valuable tool for both myself and my peers. I also experienced moments of conflicting feedback: while one mentor asked for technical precision, another encouraged exploratory hand sketches. Over time, I learned to navigate these differences and make independent choices based on my own design goals.

I discovered that the graduation process is more demanding than I had anticipated. Because I deeply care about the quality and impact of this project, I tend to set high expectations for myself, which occasionally causes stress. Nevertheless, I have developed a steady work rhythm: I work at the faculty every day, focusing on achievable daily goals. Studying alongside fellow students has been particularly motivating. I have also learned to embrace an iterative working style: not waiting for perfect ideas, but allowing design and thinking to evolve through sketching and making.

VALUE, CONTEXT, AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The ambition of my project is to raise awareness of the impact of sound in architectural design. Sound is often treated as a secondary or technical concern, yet it plays a fundamental role in how people experience space. By placing soundscapes at the centre of the design process, I aim to contribute to a broader discussion on sensory experience and well-being in architecture.

The societal relevance of the project lies in its sustainable and circular approach. By reusing the existing concrete structure and adapting it for new functions, the design minimises material waste. The redesigned building is more inclusive and accessible, with improved wayfinding, a recognisable entrance, and a programme that invites diverse forms of use and interaction.

Two ethical aspects have been central to my process: environmental impact and the treatment of heritage. Initially, I planned to demolish more of the existing structure. However, after receiving feedback during the P2 phase, I critically reconsidered this approach and decided instead to transform part of the building into housing. This decision reduced environmental impact and reinforced the building's continuity and social value. It was a key realisation that sustainability and heritage preservation are not opposites, but can mutually strengthen one another.

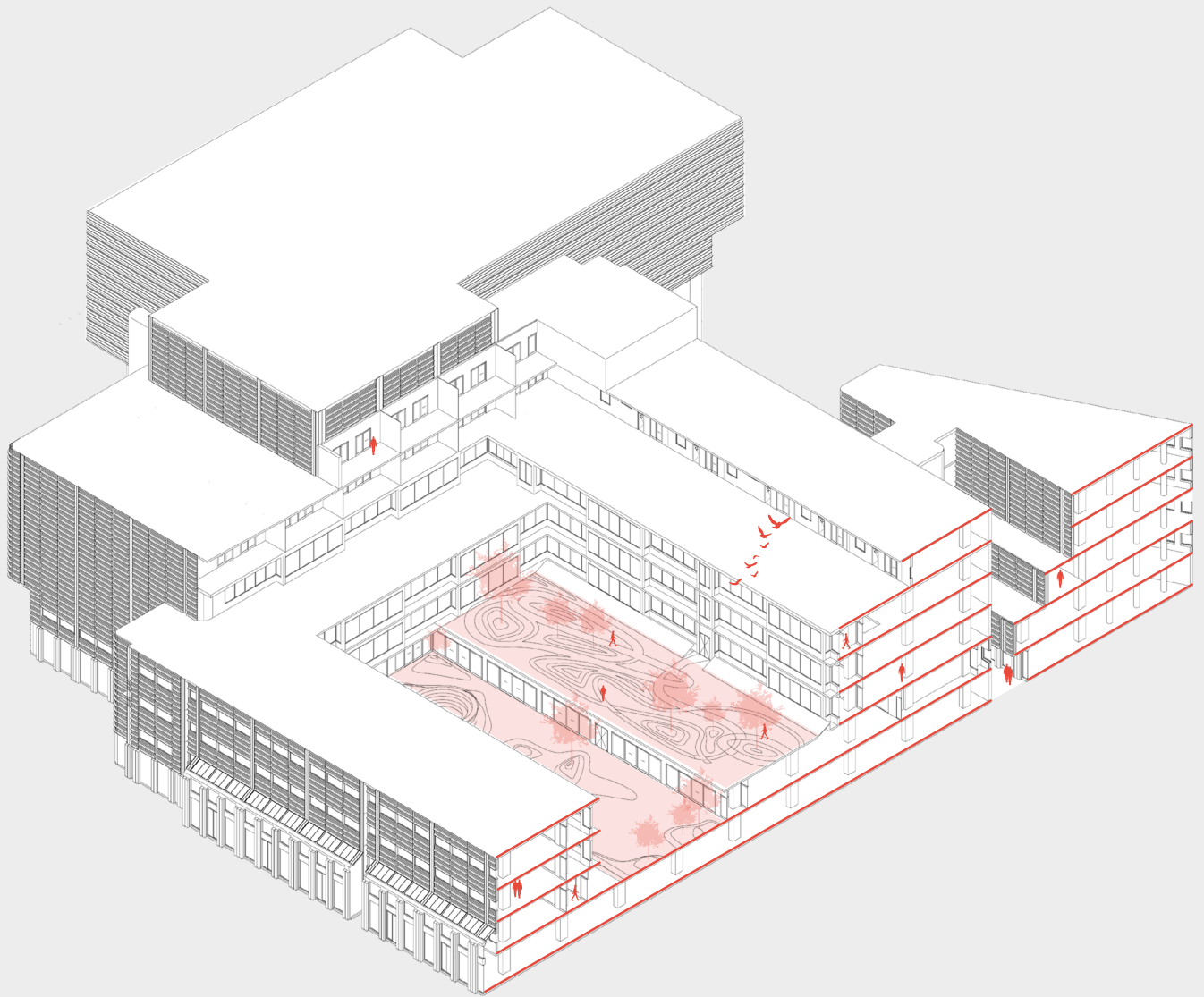
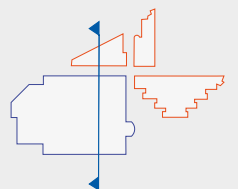


Image 4: Axonometric overview section of design (own image)



PERSONAL REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. If I were to conduct a new research project for this building, which theme would I choose, and how might it alter the perspective on the library of the future?

If I were to conduct a new research project for this building, I would still focus on atmosphere as a guiding principle, but I would give prominence to a different sense.

In my current project, the emphasis on the auditory dimension emerged naturally from the library typology and from the clear need to improve the existing soundscapes in and around the building. However, a building is never defined by sound alone. If I were to continue this line of inquiry, I would be highly interested in exploring the visual sense, specifically, the role of light and colour. This would include a deeper investigation into colour theory and a study of how natural light shapes atmosphere in libraries.

I believe that future libraries will increasingly function as places for pleasant, meaningful stay rather than solely as repositories of knowledge, as much of the latter continues to shift to digital platforms. Human beings remain physical creatures situated in a physical world, where spaces for concentration, social interaction, debate, and personal development retain profound importance. Atmospheric conditions, especially those created through light, will play a decisive role in shaping such experiences. A well-designed visual environment can attract users and encourage them to return, as it supports productive, enjoyable learning experiences.

Had I centred my research on light instead of sound, several design decisions would likely have differed. For instance, the inner garden might have become an atrium, where a glazed roof could have introduced abundant daylight into the heart of the building. I might also have adapted the existing façades more substantially in order to optimise the ingress of natural light. This alternate focus would have opened a distinct set of spatial strategies and led to a different interpretation of the future library.

2. How has this graduation process shaped my understanding of my role as an architect, and which aspects of my working method do I aim to develop further in future projects?

Throughout this graduation project, I have constantly navigated between architectural dreams and practical realities, and this process has fundamentally shaped my understanding of my role as an architect.

Through conversations with fellow students, friends, and tutors, I repeatedly realised how essential it is for architects to dare to imagine, to articulate ambitions that may initially appear costly, demanding, or drastic. Architects play a unique role in defending and advancing the quality of the built environment; few other professions are positioned, or even inclined, to advocate so strongly for spatial well-being. Embracing this responsibility has become an important part of how I now understand my professional identity.

This project has also profoundly changed my perception of the existing KB building. At the outset, I had little appreciation for its structure and quickly categorised it as a “typically unattractive 1980s building.” As I progressed, however, I developed a more nuanced understanding of its spatial logic, craftsmanship, and architectural intentions. I gained a deep respect for the original architect and came to recognise the building as a meaningful piece of architectural history. This shift in perspective strengthened my conviction that such buildings deserve to be valued and preserved, not only for their material qualities, but as markers of how architectural thought, human needs, and cultural ideals evolve over time.

This learning process has reshaped both my design attitude and my long-term vision of practice. Going forward, I aim to cultivate this balance between critical appreciation of the existing context and the courage to propose ambitious transformations, ensuring that my work contributes meaningfully to the ongoing development of architecture.

TRANSFERABILITY, FUTURE OUTLOOK, AND SELF-REFLECTION

The principles I developed (designing from an auditory perspective, introducing a quiet inner courtyard by using the building as a buffer towards the noisy city, and shaping soundscapes through spatial zoning and material choice) can be applied to many other projects. They offer a way for architects to engage with sound as a creative design tool rather than as a problem to be mitigated.

In the next phase, I aim to translate my conceptual ideas into detailed technical and visual representations. This includes developing CAD drawings, researching reference details and materials, and building a physical model that communicates the spatial and sensory essence of the project.

Looking ahead, I hope that my project, together with the work of my fellow students, can inspire the real architects involved in the actual renovation of the KB. My wish is that soundscapes will become an active consideration in their design decisions, that reuse will remain a priority, and that the future library will become a place where stillness and liveliness coexist.

Reflecting on this process so far, I realise that I have grown in critical thinking, and intuition. I now experience architecture differently: I try to listen to spaces as well as looking at them.

IMAGE SOURCES

Image 1: Photograph of KB entrance, image taken by author.

Image 2: Concept drawing, illustrated by author.

Image 3: Research and Design Diagram, made by author.

Image 4: Axonometric overview section of design, made by author.

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