

Graduation reflection

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A search towards creating an adaptive landscape that could adapt to urban influences as well as the threat of rising water levels. The initial goal of the project was ambitious but the framework was still rather vague. This slowly evolved into the question on how to integrate urban dynamics with contemporarily used climate change measures as the room for the river concept. In this final summary a reflection is made on how the design relates to the research and the research studio, and how it can contribute to the wider discussion on water safety in urban deltas.

Relation between research and design

As the project progressed the goal of the project shifted as well. One could say that by attempting to create something that is adaptive the way to get there will be adaptive as well. The initial setup of the research was in basis a linear process from problem statement towards theory onto site analyses and finally the design. The project however due to its start without a well-defined scope gained excess of input towards creating a design. This input consisted of research aimed at finding aspects that should be incorporated in an adaptive landscape.

It was only until later that the research that was done in search for the design had most of the answers in relation to urban influences that could be integrated into, or have an effect on, a room for the river type intervention. It was a natural occurrence of 'research by design' where the exploration for design parameters offered insights into the problematics that followed from the research question. The research also helped to redefine the research question to a more delineated task.

Relation between the design studio and the project

I was fascinated with the idea of an adaptive landscape in relation to the water on the one hand and towards the city on the other. Both of these dynamics are complex and the future has different ways in which these dynamics may present themselves.

This fascination would fit perfectly in the studio of Delta Interventions that was presented as having to goal to explore the effects of climate change in urbanized deltas and experiment by design in search for better water safety measures. With the goal of finding new spatial patterns or qualities that could not only benefit cities but promote a sustainable water landscape as well.

In the end my project was shifted more towards finding a sustainable way to live in a floodable area that was created as a means to improve safety of the entire region. Further development and elaboration was done on existing methodologies rather than reinventing the wheel again.

Graduation lab methodology and the used methodology

The studio has a strong emphasis on research by design. Drawings are a tool to understand different processes that present themselves in delta areas and using these drawings may inspire you to new ideas or find solutions to difficult design tasks.

As stated before initially the chosen methodology for this project may have been a method aspired by the studio but in practice it turned out that the need to keep drawing and exploring options did help towards attaining the end goal. Some drawings raised more questions but some provided answers as well.

Wider social context

Water safety is an issue that is pressed due to climate change to be a rapidly evolving problem to tackle as this design task is not only applicable to Dordrecht or the Netherlands. Climate change and therefore its water problematics are proving to become more and more threatening in delta areas all around the world. One could say that in the Netherlands we have the safest delta to live in due to our technical interventions along the seaside.

However now we are finding out that technical prowess is not as sustainable as we might think. New solutions are being sought and a general trend is to make way for the force of the water that is estimated to grow for the foreseeable future.

The room for the river methodology proved itself to be a fruitful approach towards alleviating water threats. This project however showed me that this methodology still had some shortcomings in its application in more urban settings. Having attempted to further progress in the room for the river methodology to battle water threats in river deltas gives new insights to how this methodology can be expanded towards more urbanized areas rather than only use the open landscape.

The found tools and exploration of the possible design options that are left in the use of mounds could serve a function not only in cases like the one presented in this project but as well as other water safety related building assignments. One could think of simply a safer and more sustainable way to build in outer dike areas or the redevelopment of harbors into residential areas.

As sea levels are rising and the discharge of rivers will come in more extreme highs and lows the search towards new ideas and solutions must continue because in the end, we are fighting to keep our cities habitable. This should not only be on a technical level but should be spatial pleasant as well.