

The artistic aspect of the distinctive element



Personal Information

Name	Koen Kroes
Student number	4682564
Place of residence	Delft

Studio information

Name of studio	Explore Lab
Design tutor	Anne Snijders
Research tutor	Lidy Meijers

Introduction

The word façade is a loanword from the French which also means face. A house needs a face, a distinctive face and just like a face façades have an expression, created by using different elements to construct and partition a recognisable dwelling. In detached houses and the Dutch terraced house which contain one social unit this is done plentyfull, however these social units provided from certain prosperity and/or property to create this distinctiveness. Which is well documented for example by Leliman in 1924 and by Wattjes in 1931. However in the beginning of the 20th century architects, critics and social reformists pushed for efficient and indistinctive architecture especially for the working-class in times of need. This instigated a larger movement whose effects are still discernible a century after; the multi-storied building with multiple social units have become one indistinctive and anonymous face with less expression for the anonymous people living in them.

1. Problem Statement and Relevance

1.1 Incitation in times of need

In the beginning of the 20th century there were miserable living conditions because of the industrial revolution, the housing shortage, the first world war (1914-1918) and the high rental fee that followed. In addition to these existing housing complications, construction materials, like clay bricks, were also getting more expensive because of the continuous demand and because of a shortage of skilled construction workers (Groenendijk et al., 1996). To ensure more, better and cheaper housing several housing acts were made. Acts like the First Housing and Health Act (1901), Rental Committee Act (1917), Rental Termination Act (1918), Housing Emergency Act (1918) and so on. Furthermore, experiments with different building methods with concrete were carried out because it was cheaper and it required less construction workers in comparison to building methods with clay bricks. At the building congress of february 1918 in Amsterdam H.P. Berlage also argued for normalisation and standardised floorplans. He pleaded for rediscovering the social unit and the collective to limit facilities and material needs, changing the way the social unit occurred before. The effect of these acts and methods were discernible around around 1921-1925 when forty thousand to fifty thousand new dwellings were built in comparison to the low point of six thousand in 1917 (Houben, 1989).

In the second world war (1940-1945) the housing shortage had risen again, but this time to such an amount the government and the construction industry declared it as the most dangerous threat to society, which could only be fought with industrialisation in the construction. This meant fast, efficient construction, where prefabricated systems are used on a large scale. The industrialisation of the construction is combined with the breakthrough of functionalism, the principles of 'het nieuwe bouwen' equivalent to the 'International Style' and the 'New Objectivity' are used: light, air and space. To improve the construction of these new modernist houses the government founded several associations, such as the Ministry of reconstruction and public housing in 1947 and the 'Bouwcentrum' to coordinate the reconstruction in 1948.



Figure 1: Bergpolderflat in Rotterdam by Van Tijen and Van der Vlugt in 1932

The modernist movement battled against recognisable, distinctive dwellings with a sheltered character, because the people of the modernist future did not need shelter (Montijn, 2006). The closed residential block, with representable façades of Berlage are replaced by an urban allotment principle where parallel rows are used, so called 'strokenbouw', where large windows at the unvarnished front- and backside allowed the sun to shine through the living room which was situated in the entire depth. Transparency became the new norm. The first high-rise following this modernist idea is the Bergpolderflat in Rotterdam by Van Tijen and Van der Vlugt in 1932 and is seen in figure 1 (Mumford, 2019). The urban plan for the expansion of Amsterdam, 'Algemeen Uitbreidingsplan' or AUP, which was made before the war in 1934 but largely executed after it, also followed these principles. Urbanists Cornelis van Eesteren en Ko Mulder played an important role within the AUP for the development of this allotment principle. Cornelis van Eesteren was chairman of a platform, 'Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne' also called CIAM, from 1930 which advocated this new functionalistic city. The last expansion of the AUP approached the 'ideal city' of functionalists like Le Corbusier:

only high-rise, strict division in residential, industry and leisure, honeygrade structure in a green environment.

Even when the 'ideal city' became a problematic city because of the social problems that arose in the high-rise project 'Bijlmermeer' in 1968 under the direction of Siegfried Nassuth, the functionalist idea of modernist design still perseveres. The 'Bijlmermeer' which was intended for the middle class eventually did not live there. The opportunistic of the middle class who did, took off because of the amenities that were left behind. The lack of diversity in dwelling types and the lack of amenities caused vacancy and it attracted outsiders who could not rent in the city centre from housing corporations. The typology that arose with more attention to the low-rise buildings is the 'woonerf' which advocated the street as a meetingplace, where the domain of the pedestrian and the car were separated. The majority of the 'woonerven' built in the seventies had lost this separation and multiple 'woonerven' were eventually called 'bloemkoolwijken' which translates to cauliflower because of their many cul-de-sacs. Both the woonerf as the successor called 'Vinex neighbourhood', showcased a deducted version of functionalism combined with traditional materials (Priemus, 2010 and Lorz et al., 2006). Still criticised for their monotony, dullness, predictability of the architecture and their low density (Hulsman, 2013). It can be concluded that in times of need, during the 20th century, fast, efficient construction was preferred and the modernist movement did fulfil this need. But failed to provide buildings with diversity in dwelling types, distinctive elements that creates expression and partitioning of a recognisable dwelling.

1.2 Opposition

In the past the previous problems have been recognised. For example in the earlier mentioned building congress of Berlage in 1918, leaders of trade unions complained about depersonalisation, prisons and a threat to artistic freedom of architects. Berlage justifies that people getting the same dwelling wouldn't be a problem because they can choose different interiors and that in the end the spiritual worth was more important than the physical. Berlage (1918) stated: *"The true man can not be depended on the dwelling he lives in"* (p.42). It might be that 'the true man' is not dependent on their dwelling but mankind is strongly affected by it. The dwelling affects the character, experience and the world of the inhabitants as much as they shape their own house (Bromfield, 1945). A home is more than a purely functional or architectural understanding of a house. Gaston Bachelard describes the home also as a repository of memories, dreams and emotions (Bachelard, 1958). In his view the house also serves as a psychological shelter that protects this repository, which also consists of a personal and intimate space in the home. Both Bachelard and Martin Heidegger (1951) are in line with sheltering and secure sense of a house, nonetheless it should maintain a connection with the larger context as it is not an isolated entity.

These views are in contrast to the people of the modernist future since they did not need shelter (Montijn, 2006), the produced architecture pushes the boundaries of the distinctive essence of 'house' and 'home' towards concerns such as estrangement, alienation, exile and homelessness (Vidler, 1992). In 1959 this alienation of men and his living environment caused the separation of committee X from the platform; Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne' also called CIAM. Eventually this separation and the discussion that followed caused the discontinuance of CIAM altogether. The committee, after the separation continued as Team X, advocated the relation and interaction in and of architecture rather than the principles of functionalism. One of the architectural movements developed from this is structuralism. Aldo van Eyck who was one of the first and most influential representatives abhorred the massiveness and monotony of the current reconstructions. Eyck was asked, together with Team X member Jacob Berend (Jaap) Bakema,

by 'Architectura et Amicitia' to form a new editorial team for the Dutch architecture magazine 'Forum'. In this magazine the editorial team proposed that structuralism was the solution for the large-scale, technocratic and modernistic reconstruction. Characteristics were a geometric building structure and a composition of repetitive smaller elements which were related to the human-scale.

Lefebvre described in 1991 the nostalgia both Bachelard (1945) and Heidegger (1951) expressed in their poetics of dwellings which represented the appalling urban actuality the 20th century had put in motion. It can be stated that during the 20th century the times of need battled with creating façades with distinctive elements that create expression and partitioning of recognisable dwelling. A dwelling where there is place for both physical and psychological shelter, but still remains connected to the outside. Without falling in the mistakes of modernist approaches that causes de-individualized, massive, monotonous and dull dwellings. J.J.P. Oud concluded the same in 1935, once one of the leaders of functionalism, who thought modern architecture was completed and should make way for something with more artistic dimensions (Taverne, 2001) and as we can conclude from the paragraph above he was not alone. The reverie of a felicitous, stable, sheltering home is a response to these unhomely homes produced during this 20th century (Vidler, 1992). The need for distinctive elements has been significantly undermined by the obsession with creating buildings that are reproducible.

2. The distinctive element

Façade elements create partitioning for a recognisable dwelling. They can also be used to express certain characteristics like openness, closeness, entrances, corridors, (de-)individualisation or even functions from the inside. These elements are distinctive and could appear as bay windows, dormer windows, coloured string courses, different forms of roofs, etc. The elements and their distinction, partitioning and expression are seen as the artistic dimension of the architect. Depending on how these elements are used and shaped they can express certain characteristics of the building or the building as a whole. For the modernists, the white dwelling blocks with long galleries and an endless reproduction of the exact same windows expressed a steamboat (Jurgenhake, 2013).

3. Methodology

To find the artistic dimension of the architect different buildings which showcase different façade elements should be analysed. The different façade elements should be categorised, what they express and how they partition the façade. Buildings are preferred from a period which was not as much affected by the modern movement or buildings that showcase certain admirable traits.

The focus will lay on building typologies with multiple floors and social units, since building in higher density is becoming more important and the architect plays a more prominent role in creating these distinctives elements in comparison to low-rise with one social unit where it is easier to express this distinctiveness from the public space through the personalisation of the owner (e.g., front garden, driveway, front door and windows) and the need to provide for distinctiveness in mid-rise does not only take place per plot but also per social units under one roof. On the next pages, see figure 2, the planned methodology is given for answering the research question; How can we design a sustainable and efficient multi-storied building with multiple different social units that has a distinctive and recognisable façade for each of their residents?

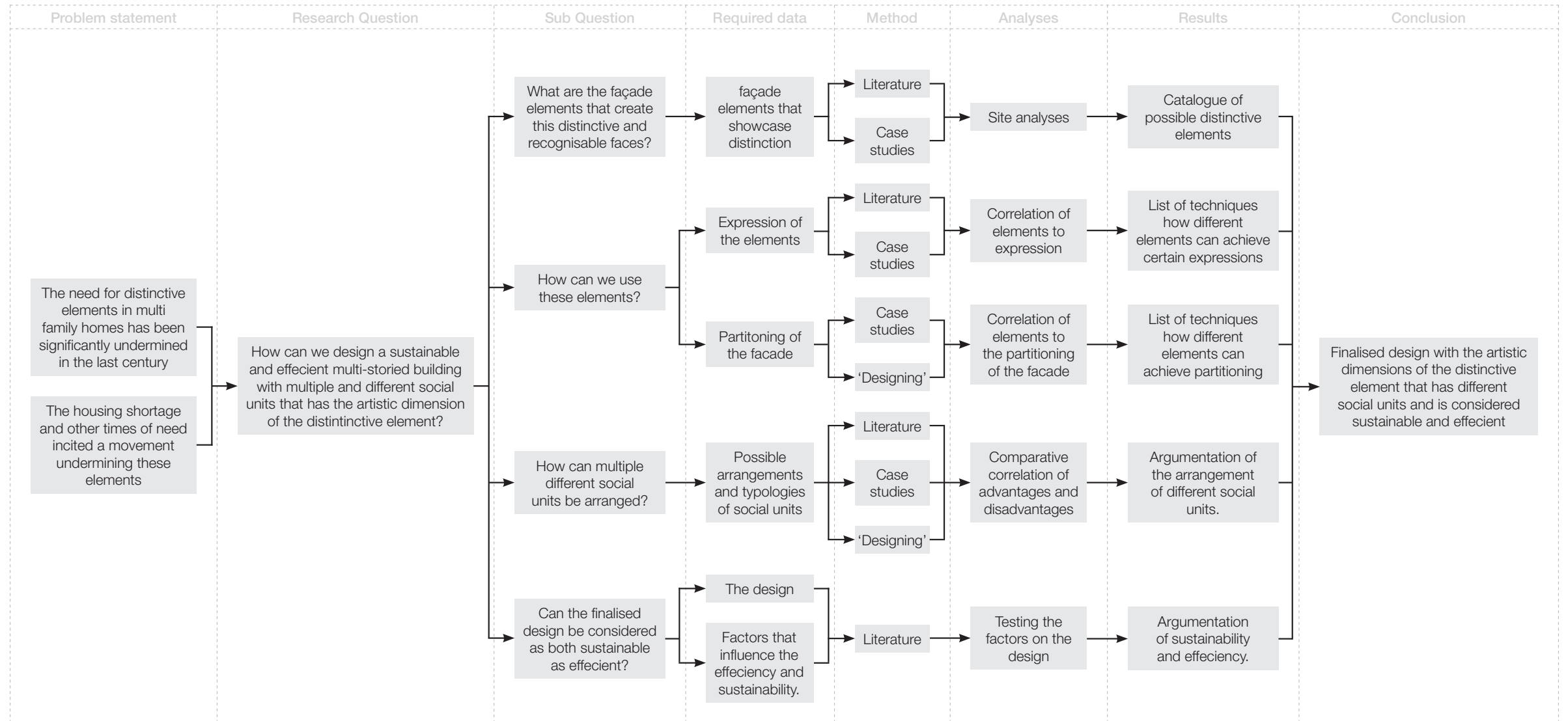


Figure 2: Methodology

4. Planning

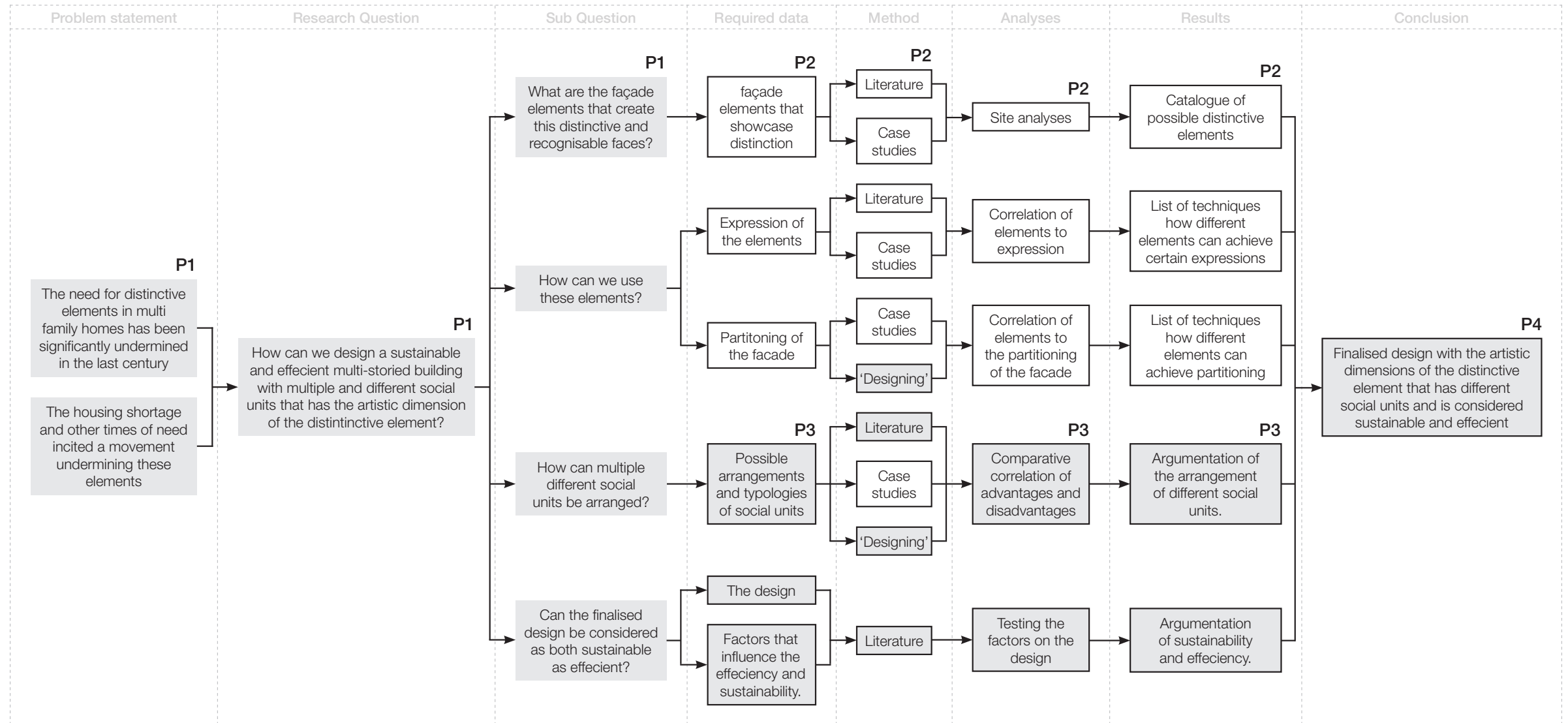


Figure 3: Planning

While approaching p2 the focus will be on the case studies and about answering the sub questions related to the distinctive element and how they can be implemented in the architectural design. The case studies will be selected in Amsterdam where many, more traditional elements are used in their expression. For example in Amsterdam Zuid where the architectural movement of the Amsterdam School became

more sober and the elements became more subtle and showed traditional elements again; the round and dynamic shapes became more rectangular and the gable roof with its triangular shape came back. The case studies will show expressive solutions in for example the arrangement of the different social units and their solutions in the corners.

Bibliography

- Bachelard, G. (1958). *The Poetics of Space*. Presses Universitaires de France. <https://sites.evergreen.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/88/2015/05/Gaston-Bachelard-the-Poetics-of-Space.pdf>
- Berlage, H. P. (1918). *Normalisatie in woningbouw: Voordracht gehouden door dr. H.P. Berlage*. W.L. & J. Brusse's uitgevers-Maatschappij. <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMKB02A:000031248:pdf>
- Bromfield, L. (1945). *Pleasant Valley*. Harper and Brothers. <https://ia801408.us.archive.org/25/items/in.ernet.dli.2015.42320/2015.42320.Pleasant-Valley.pdf>
- Groenendijk, P., Vollaard, P., & Rook, P. (1996). *Gids voor moderne architectuur in Amsterdam*. Uitgeverij 010. https://archive.org/details/gidsvoormodernea0000groe_m8o0/page/n3/mode/1up
- Heidegger, M. (1951). *Building Dwelling Thinking*. Harper Colophon Books.
- Houben, J.M.J.F. (1989). *Kwaliteitsbeleid voor de Nederlandse woningvoorraad*. Delwel Uitgeverij. <https://repository.tudelft.nl/islandora/object/uuid%3A3d6a588a-ba13-4634-8b38-aac1b5e2a24b>
- Hulsman, B. (2013). *Het rijtjeshuis: De geschiedenis van een oer-Hollands fenomeen*. Nieuw Amsterdam Uitgevers.
- Jurgenhake, B. (2013). *Signs and symbols of the domestic façade in the city: Changes, confusion or decline?* <https://repository.tudelft.nl/islandora/object/uuid%3A6341d2f4-e722-4878-b4b8-8b190a76a029>
- Lefebvre, H. (1991). *The Production of Space*. Basil Blackwell. https://monoskop.org/images/7/75/Lefebvre_Henri_The_Production_of_Space.pdf

- Leliman, J. H. W. (1924). *Het stadswoonhuis in Nederland: Gedurende de laatste 25 jaren*. In A. J. van der Steur (Red.), M. Nijhoff eBooks. Martinus Nijhoff. <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMKB02:000122102:pdf>
- Lörzing, H., Klemm, W., van Leeuwen, M., & Soekimin, S. (2006). *Vinex! Een Morfologische verkenning*. NAI Uitgevers. https://www.pbl.nl/sites/default/files/downloads/VINEX_Een_morfologische_verkenning.pdf
- Montijn, I. (2006). *De vergissing van Berlage. Herkenbaarheid en modernisme in de woningbouw*. Hollands Maandblad, jaargang 2006, 698-709. https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/_hol006200601_01/_hol006200601_01_0003.php
- Mumford, E. (2019). *CIAM and its outcomes*. Urban planning, 4(3), 291–298. <https://doi.org/10.17645/up.v4i3.2383>
- Priemus, H. (2010). *Hoe verder na Vinex en Nota Ruimte?* Rooilijn, 43(1). <https://core.ac.uk/reader/29245670#page=58>
- Taverne, E., Wagenaar, C. (Ed.), & de Vletter, M. (2001). *J.J.P. Oud: poëtisch functionalist 1890-1963 compleet werk*. NAI Publishers.
- Vidler, A. (1992). *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays on the Modern Unhomely*. Cambridge MIT Press.
- Wattjes, J. G. (1931). *Moderne Nederlandsche villa's en landhuizen in Holland*. Kosmos