

P4 & P5 GRADUATION REFLECTION

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P5 REFLECTION

I have included the P4 reflection in this document, since it still outlines the context of my graduation project. What I would like to add to the previous reflection is what I have learned from our discussions after the P4. Before this, I would like to notify that I have been struggling with a terrible flu over the break. This has unfortunately influenced the quality of my work and prevented me from creating the presentation I would have liked to have made. But I am still happy :)

The P4 presentation focused on demonstrating how my project took shape through a step-by-step process. Each design decision was a result of the design ambitions I established while researching and analyzing the context of the Lijnbaan. These included: attractive views, activating the back facade, creating different zones of staying, creating an open and lively place, and offering shelter for different weather conditions. Essentially, it was about CHOICE. After discussing my project during the time for questions, it became clear that the essence and beauty of my project is flexibility and scalability. These architectural concepts allow for CHOICE, to create a comfortable place for the residents, retailers and visitors.

Having a flexible construction provides the ability to service different functions in the same space. Allowing for a space to change and adapt according to the changing needs and wants of consumers keeps the place relevant and meaningful. For example, having a shop that can also be a cafe or gallery. This is my advice for the future shopping center. Through a flexible construction, the shopping center can gradually shape towards a space that is more fitting to the surroundings. Maybe in the beginning there will still be a lot of shops, but then they slowly transform into other functions without dealing with vacancy issues.

A flexible construction does not mean that it has to be temporary. In fact, flexibility allows for a space to be constantly in use, so why not keep it and make it part of the new heritage? The Lijnbaan is also made of prefabricated concrete elements, and has been untouched since 1953 when it was built. The benefit of it being a flexible construction, is that it allows for the building to be maintained easily. Frequently the concrete elements have been removed to repaint and later re-installed. Reducing the cost of maintenance is an important factor when looking at how future-proof a building is.

Another architectural element that I suggest is important for the future shopping center, is scalability. The current design proposal for the Lijnbaan respects the value of the "human-scale". However, we could be looking at a future where the city is growing vertically. The "friendship model" of the architect Van den Broek & Bakema will and is already starting to look different. Having a design that is scalable for the future, allows for the building to stay and adapt to how the city takes a different shape.

P4 REFLECTION

1. Relationship between the Graduation Studio and Graduation Project

What is the future of the Shopping Mall?

The Graduation Studio Heritage and Architecture focused on understanding the future of the shopping mall, as malls are progressively following into a state of disrepair or vacancy. These retail structures are struggling to keep up with the fast changing retail landscape that is continuously adapting to changing shifts in contemporary consumer demands. In addition to this, new national sustainability goals and the lack of available housing is pressuring municipalities to improve the existing building stock. Therefore, reevaluating the value of the shopping mall for the future is an important task to take on.

What does comfort mean for the future shopping mall?

In response to the context of the graduation studio, I started assessing the question: What is the value of the shopping mall for the modern consumer? While people are increasingly shopping online, 75% of purchases are still made at physical stores. This does not necessarily mean that people visit shopping malls to do their shopping. Throughout the years, malls have taken on different forms, meaning people could be buying their goods and services at shopping streets, centers, markets, outlets or malls. Nonetheless, people still visit retail spaces, demonstrating that it supports a certain aspect in someone's public life. This led to the interest of understanding how shopping areas function as a public space. Through the support of the book "Public Space" by Stephan Carr, the concept of comfort showed to be an important factor. Carr explains that there are five reasons to why an individual chooses to visit a public space. This includes, comfort, passive engagement, active engagement, relaxation and discovery. Investigating all five factors would be difficult to manage within the time frame of the graduation studio. My decision to focus on comfort, stems from the fact that Carr describes that comfort is one of the most important factors because it is a basic need (i.e food, drink, shelter & place of rest), acting as the foundation to the other needs in a public space. Without comfort, passive and active engagement with the environment, relaxation and discovery will be difficult to stimulate. The focus of the graduation project hence lies in understanding: What does comfort mean for the future shopping mall?

2. Reflecting on the Research Question, Methods and Results

Formulating the Research Question

After establishing the focus on comfort, several questions were formulated to understand what comfort means for the future shopping mall. These include:

1. What factors influence the comfort of a shopping mall?
2. How are these factors implemented in the design of the shopping mall?
3. How do users interact with the factors implemented in the space?

The factors that influence comfort were defined through the support of literature research. Later, these factors translated into the theoretical framework of the research. This is based on the theories by Carr in his book *Public Space*, and Jan Gehl in his book *Life Between Buildings*. To understand how these factors of comfort are implemented, a case study was needed to perform an analysis. The Dutch post-war shopping center The Lijnbaan was chosen as a case study.

Carr and Gehl mention factors, such as places to eat and drink, different zones of staying, choice and placement of seating etc. These factors are mapped out in the case study to see where and how these elements are implemented. The third question focused on understanding how the users respond and interact with these elements to evaluate their value for the comfort of space. This question required more research and therefore became the focus for my research paper. The research question to my research paper was: **How does the behavior of users demonstrate how comfort is experienced at a Dutch Post War Shopping Center?**

Methods used

The methods used to answer the research question were primarily through observational analysis. Different locations in the Lijnbaan were chosen to collect data that had different spatial features and hence different elements of comfort. In each location, pictures were taken to document where people are sitting, standing and walking, what they are doing while performing this action and with whom. Pictures were taken on different days with different weather conditions and at different hours in the day. It would have been better to have been more precise and consistent in choosing which hours in the day to document, as well as on which days. This would have provided a more valid understanding of how comfort is experienced through time. Another factor for improvement is having another case study. The conducted research is tied very specifically to the Lijnbaan. However, this does not mean that the knowledge received from this research cannot be applied to other malls. For further research, the conclusions could be tested on malls that have similar urban and architectural characteristics as the Lijnbaan.

In addition to the images taken of people's behavior, the method of tracing movements was used. By tracing how and where people are walking, sitting and standing in a space, the aim was to see how the different movements and intentions interact with each other in the same space. This can give an understanding of how different elements of comfort can support or clash with each other.

Gehl describes that comfort is also experienced differently by different types of users. Therefore, the last method used to answer the research question, was collecting numerical data on how many people are filling up the space according to their age, their group size (if they are alone or with a friend), as well as their mode of transportation (if they are carrying a bike or a stroller etc.).

Lastly, although this method was not part of the research paper, at the beginning of the graduation studio I conducted some interviews when I was in the process of formulating my research question. Looking back at the results of these interviews, they surprisingly were fitting to reuse again for my research. I did not consider the results of these interviews before, because they were based on a research topic and question that had changed over time during my research stage. Now they have found their way back.

The Results

The results ended up being a collection of behaviors tied to the spatial characteristics of the space, which led to the conclusion that comfort in the shopping mall is experienced from facade to street level. It is the assemblage of the design features of the facade, the function that can be viewed behind the facade, and the objects and natural elements decorating the public street connected to the facade that define the comfort of the space. The collection of behavioral patterns identified design qualities that influenced how comfort is experienced from facade to street level. For example, people were mostly walking along the facade instead of in the middle of the promenade of the Lijnbaan. The facade has a canopy to protect users from the sun or rain, but also large shop windows to look at. Additionally, in reference to Gehl, people tend to walk along the edge to have a protect view of the surrounding activities. The design qualities that can be identified here, are shelter from weather conditions, unobstructed views and openness.

What could not be answered through the results was which factors of comfort in the shopping mall are valued more or less by the users. The methods chosen relied heavily on an observational approach, which has the implication of leading to making assumptions. For example, I traced where people are walking, which showed that most people were walking next to the facade, but I did not interview the people to know if they are walking there to be out of the sun or to look at the shop windows or both. Another approach is needed to really gain more understanding of how they are aware of the elements of comfort available or not available in the space.

3. The relationship between the design and the research

The research helped formulate key design characteristics I wanted to implement in my design for the Lijnbaan of the future. This is summarized in the following list:

- Experience routing
- Different zones for staying and walking
- Protection from weather conditions
- Unobstructed views
- Choice of sitting, standing and walking places for different user intentions (to shop, to relax, to wait etc.), and user groups
- Room to walk and sit (prevent overcrowding)
- More green

These characteristics have been tested by creating different design interventions.

Such interventions include:

- Opening up the back facade of the shops to create new views between the front and backstreets of the shopping volumes.
- Creating more accessibility points, by removing shops to make space for new passages towards the backstreet.
- Have different types of stairs to reach the upper levels of the new building to support different experience routing
- Introduce a program that supports different zones of staying
- Activate the roof of the old shopping center for more green and views over the city and promenade
- Add a gallery to the back of the facade to allow new accessibility points to retailers that have their shop on the first floor.
- Introduce permanent and movable secondary and primary seating
- Introduce permanent and movable green features
- Connect the new retail spaces with protected zones of staying
- Remove parking and car accessibility on the backstreet to make room for walking, sitting and standing.

Before being able to implement these design interventions, it was also important to understand the architectural value and limits of the shopping center that has been chosen to propose a new design for. The Lijnbaan is a monumental building, therefore a thorough analysis was made to understand what makes this shopping center a monument. This led to more design ambitions that I did not necessarily research but still wanted to include in the design.

These are as followed:

- Flexibility
- Unity
- Openness and Lightness
- The Human Scale
- Accessibility for different transportation streams
- Pedestrian friendly
- Wide profile

These are characteristics that have been touched on but require more research to fully understand how they can be best implemented

4. Recommendation and advice for the future of the shopping mall

It is important to understand how the shopping mall functions as a public space to understand how the mall can change for the better. Is it by adding a new function, or just by adding green? This can only be understood if the context of the shopping mall has been analyzed. The studio text, which introduced the graduation topic, highlighted the issue of vacancy and disrepair. When I visited my case study, the Lijnbaan, I did not notice any signs of vacancy. Instead, it was well visited and quite lively at times. So what's the problem? Or is there a problem? This shows that shopping malls as a typology cannot be generalized.

The fact that the Lijnbaan was a relatively well visited place sparked my interest in understanding the future of shopping centers located in city centers in prime locations. For the city this is quite important because these streets act like the heart of the other clusters of other shopping streets connected to the peripheral area. Because of the Lijnbaan's central location, the footprint is relatively high compared to other areas. The neighboring streets benefit from this because, once people are at the Lijnbaan to shop and meet people, the chances of people lingering to the side streets that have more shops are relatively high. If you look at a map of the shopping streets in Rotterdam, you can see that all these streets are connected to the Lijnbaan. It is therefore extremely important to understand how a shopping center in city centers are still supporting needs of the public, because if neglected, it can influence the quality of the neighboring streets.

For owners and developers of the shopping mall, it is also important to understand why people come to visit the mall. In the Lijnbaan people shop, but people also just see the Lijnbaan as a meeting point or a safe passage from point A to B. As an owner and developer it would be interesting to understand how to stimulate more visitors to shop and lengthen their stay. Ensuring that the comfort of a space meets the demands of the modern consumer has been argued to be an important factor to why people visit a public space. This might mean that there should be fewer shops and more room for green spaces, or more space for shops to house different services, such as having a café in your shop. Understanding what comfort means in shopping malls is dependent on what is important by the users of that specific mall. Interviews are therefore very valuable, and I am aware I should have conducted more. Once the comfort of the shopping mall has been defined, further research could step into how it stimulated the other needs in public space: passive and active engagement with the environment, relaxation and discovery.

Next to uncovering the value of the shopping mall by the public, once choosing to intervene, it is important to also evaluate the state of the architecture. The Lijnbaan is a monumental building, hence it was important to understand why it is a monument. What can be touched or not touched, and how may I intervene? This also included looking at how the shopping mall transformed over time and what kind of renovations have taken place. This can be an indication of how flexible you can be in introducing interventions. In the case of a shopping mall that is not a Monument, it can be interesting to look at why it should be. Additionally, it could have also been interesting to see why the Lijnbaan should not be a monument. These are important questions to be considered for the future of the shopping mall.