

## REFLECTION

### TOPIC REFLECTION

In this research, I addressed the question: "What lessons can be learned from community involvement initiatives and their effect on the social attachment of residents in disadvantaged neighbourhoods in the Netherlands?" This topic is closely related to my master track, Management in the Built Environment (MBE), and my MSc program in Architecture, Urbanism, and Building Sciences (AUBS). MBE focuses on the social, economic, and managerial aspects of the built environment, and my research aligns with this by exploring how social attachment within neighbourhoods can be strengthened through community involvement. The concept of social attachment is integral to creating sustainable and cohesive communities, making this research highly relevant both academically and practically.

As mentioned in my introduction, significant efforts have been made to improve the liveability and safety of disadvantaged neighbourhoods in the Netherlands over the past few years. However, there has been less focus on enhancing the attachment of residents to their neighbourhood and neighbours, which is an important aspect of improving these areas. Increased attachment can lead to various positive outcomes for residents, such as better (mental) health, well-being, and social integration, as well as encouraging people to invest in their neighbourhood, both socially and financially. By focusing on social attachment, this research offers a potentially effective solution for enhancing neighbourhoods overall, making it highly relevant for both academic research and practical application.

At times, it was challenging to connect my research to what was happening in practice because not everyone was familiar with the concept of social attachment. This term is not commonly included in the policies of municipalities or other organizations. However, once I explained its relevance, people understood its importance and were able to provide useful input during interviews.

### PROCESS REFLECTION

Looking back on my thesis journey, it has been a bit of a rollercoaster. From the start, I encountered challenges, particularly in trying to grasp the vague terminology necessary for constructing a clear conceptual and theoretical framework. The frameworks and research questions seemed to shift constantly, leaving me feeling lost in the possibilities. Understanding the concept of "place attachment" turned out to be much more complex than I anticipated – figuring out what it meant and how to study it properly was challenging.

As I progressed, things started to fall into place. After completing the quantitative part of my research and arranging interviews, I gained a better understanding of what I needed to ask people to get the answers I was seeking. Along the way, I learned a lot about making vague terms clearer by operationalising them, writing cohesive literature reviews, and integrating quantitative and qualitative research methods. While the process was challenging, delving into the social aspects of 'Management in the Built Environment' has been incredibly rewarding. Discovering interesting initiatives, being present in the neighbourhood, meeting inspiring individuals, and witnessing progress within Overvecht has been truly fascinating.

At the beginning of this research process, I wanted to choose a topic that was different from more general ones, such as circularity and project management, and decided to focus on disadvantaged neighbourhoods and their issues. I wanted to research how people felt at home and explore 'volksbuurten'. Volksbuurten are faced with many issues in quantitative data, but residents also experience strong social bonds among residents; an interesting case for research. I found out that not much information was available on this topic and that 'feeling at home' is difficult to quantify. During my literature review, I came across research on place attachment in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, which was very close to the topic I wanted to explore, and decided to build on that. However, place attachment is not clearly defined and is even harder to quantify, due

to the variety of definitions used. I was fortunate to find one source that clearly defined the terminology and even quantified it, making it possible to build upon their conclusions.

The start of this research project was bumpy and slow, and by the time I reached my midterm, my research topic was still not finalized or correctly formulated, which caused some stress about the progress. I kept considering changing my research topic until after my retake P2, when everything finally started to fall into place, resulting in a loss of valuable time during those weeks. This resulted in less time to finish my P3 and P4. I decided to take some extra time to ensure everything was analysed correctly and thoroughly, which was a relief. Now, I can deliver a product that I am proud of, rather than a rushed version of my thesis.

After my P2, I gained confidence as I prepared to speak with people and hear their stories about the social attachment of residents in Overvecht. Attending resident meetings and getting feedback on my research has been motivating – it reminded me why I'm passionate about talking to people and hearing their perspectives on complex issues. These interviews were an opportunity for me to delve deeper into a topic I had dedicated months to studying. As I continued with my thesis, I was reminded that it's okay not to have all the answers right away. Each challenge I've faced has been a learning experience, reinforcing the importance of creating a coherent research narrative grounded in both theory and real-world insights.

#### REFLECTING ON THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

My decision not to join a graduation internship is one that I sometimes regret. Now that I can look back at the whole process, I realize that an internship would have been beneficial, as it can be an environment that will keep you inspired and motivated. I get motivated by working with people, discussing the topic, and learning new things. Starting this research journey on my own, with support from my mentors, made it difficult to figure out what I wanted to research and how to execute the research. Joining a company or the municipality, for example, could have helped me finalize my topic and research questions sooner, likely resulting in a smoother process.

However, not joining a company or institution also had its benefits for me: I could explore a topic that completely suited my interests, and the interviewees I selected are probably more diverse than I would have interviewed otherwise, resulting in less bias. The whole process took a little longer than I expected, but in the end, I am very proud of what I have delivered as an end result of months of hard work.

#### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it was a bumpy ride, but now that it's almost finished, I'm very proud of what I have delivered: a full thesis report with well-thought-out conclusions and recommendations for practice, on a socially relevant topic that aligns with my personal interests. I have learned a lot during the process – about framing research, preparing and conducting interviews, analysing large amounts of qualitative data, asking the right questions, managing time, and finding ways to stay motivated and inspired. These lessons will be very valuable in the rest of my career.