

REFLECTION

AN URBAN NARRATIVE

WINKELCENTRUM LEYWEG AS COMMUNITY EXPERIENCE



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GRADUATION STUDIO 2022-2023, ADAPTING 20TH CENTURY HERITAGE

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Reflection Paper

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Introduction

My graduation topic is connected to the main objective of the Heritage & Architecture studio theme, which is the revitalization of the mall, considered as new heritage. I am, therefore, addressing the impending matter of the post-war shopping center's re-design in its urban context, while reflecting not only on the past and current situation, but also on its potential future recognition as part of the urban heritage. Attention is given to its role as the heart of the district it refers to, its spatial significance and its social function.

After World War II, the shopping center was introduced as a core element in urban reconstruction and expansion plans; incorporated into the existing urban fabric and closely related to the human-scale. The principle governing Dutch post-war shopping centers was the creation of internal spatial cohesion within an urban area (Herman, 2001; Galema & van Hoogstraten, 2005). This principle constituted the starting point for the formulation and conduction of my research.

The purpose of the research was to create a framework to assist in the development of a re-design proposal. This framework focused on the spatial aspects of the mall's urban identity that influence the continuity with the urban fabric. The point at issue was whether there was a method to assess the spatial impact of a re-design intervention, examined also in relation to each specific context. Consequently, this consideration raised the question: Is it also possible to implement the same method in order to base decisions throughout the process of re-design on the findings, and thus, ensure the principle of urban spatial continuity even after the mall's adaptation?

Research approach

The research started with the definition of the notions of urban spatial identity and spatial continuity and their relation to the shopping center as an urban structure. Through the creation of a theoretical framework the spatial attributes that would be examined and assessed were determined, and also, the method of the assessment was established. The criteria that guided the assessment were deduced from the theoretical framework. The tools used for its conduction are associated with the space syntax method that analyzes spatial layouts, ideas and relations through axial, convex and isovist maps (Benedikt, 1979; Hillier & Hanson, 1984). This analysis of spatial patterns, following also the 'research by design' methodology (Ouwkerk & Rosemann, 2000), is then combined with observations in order to explain functional aspects, as the people's movement and use of space.

The research focused on the re-design of Hoog Catharijne in Utrecht, used as a case study. After historical and contextual analyses, sketches and observations, the current and former situation of the mall were examined and assessed, indicating the spatial impact of the intervention. The findings were interpreted in order to investigate and, finally, explain what caused the change. The outcome was the identification of re-design principles that were representative of the spatial alterations.

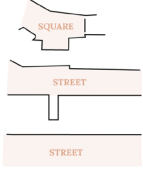

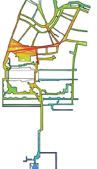
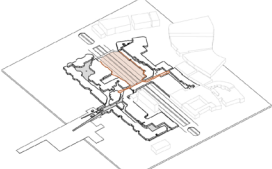
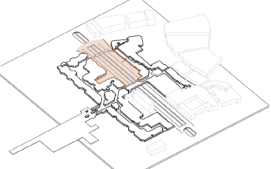
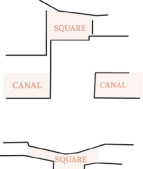


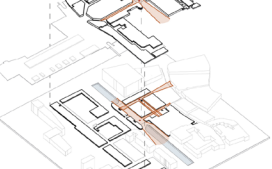
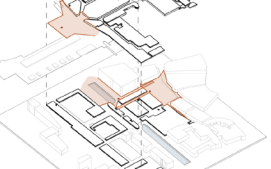
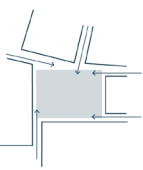


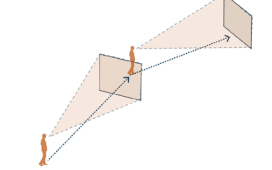
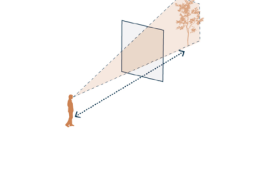
	LATERAL ENCLOSURE & EDGE CONTINUITY	LINKING SEQUENTIAL MOVEMENT	INTEGRATED BRIDGING	AXIS & PERSPECTIVE	INDOOR/OUTDOOR FUSION
BEFORE (t0)					
AFTER (t1)					
IMPACT	+	+	+	++	++
PRINCIPLE	DEFINED URBAN SETTING 	DIRECT LINKS 	FLUID UNINTERRUPTED MOVEMENT & DECOMPRESSION AREAS 	FRAMED ROUTE 	SEAMLESS TRANSITION 

Figure 1.

Research findings & ensuing spatial principles.

In-between research & re-design

However, Hoog Catharijne is an enclosed mall with pedestrian routes, from which the shopping center that I selected for the re-design differs in many aspects. The selected post-war shopping center is an open-air pedestrian mall within the city fabric and falls within the previously mentioned research framework. From a shopping street to a shopping center, Leyweg in Den Haag Zuidwest already underwent a transformation in the late 1990's. This transformation altered the spatial relation to its surroundings, as the continuity and coherence of the urban plan was ruptured with the introduction of new building volumes.

The main goal of the project is to develop a re-design proposal that would tackle the spatial problems identified on the scale of the district and the site. It also aims at accommodating the transition from single retail use to mixed-use with the introduction of new uses related to the social context. As spatial cohesion with the surroundings is a significant part of the proposal, the research findings could serve as a tool that would assist me during the initial phase of the re-design. But how could the research be applied to a different mall type?

The idea was to translate some of the principles that were extracted from the research and considered relevant to the spatial context in order to supplement the core values of the re-design proposal. The feedback that I received after my P2 presentation incited me to further develop this idea by testing and assessing the spatial impact of my proposal. However, some of the parameters that determined

the spatial impact of a re-design in an enclosed mall could not be employed in the case of an open-air mall, such as Leyweg, or needed adaptation. This led to the assessment of the specific parameters that could significantly influence the spatial relation to the surroundings. In the case of Leyweg, the results were promising, demonstrating that the recommended spatial organization results in a highly integrated and connected urban structure.

In more general terms, the outcome of the testing indicated that some of the principles can qualify as guidelines in a potential re-design proposal where a coherent spatial relation between the building and its context is a criterion of utmost importance. However, the methodology proposed by this research needs to be applied on multiple cases of post-war shopping centers in order for the findings to be interpreted into universal principles. Thus, I am wondering: Can the research method be modified to address all cases, or extended to involve other scales or different tools?

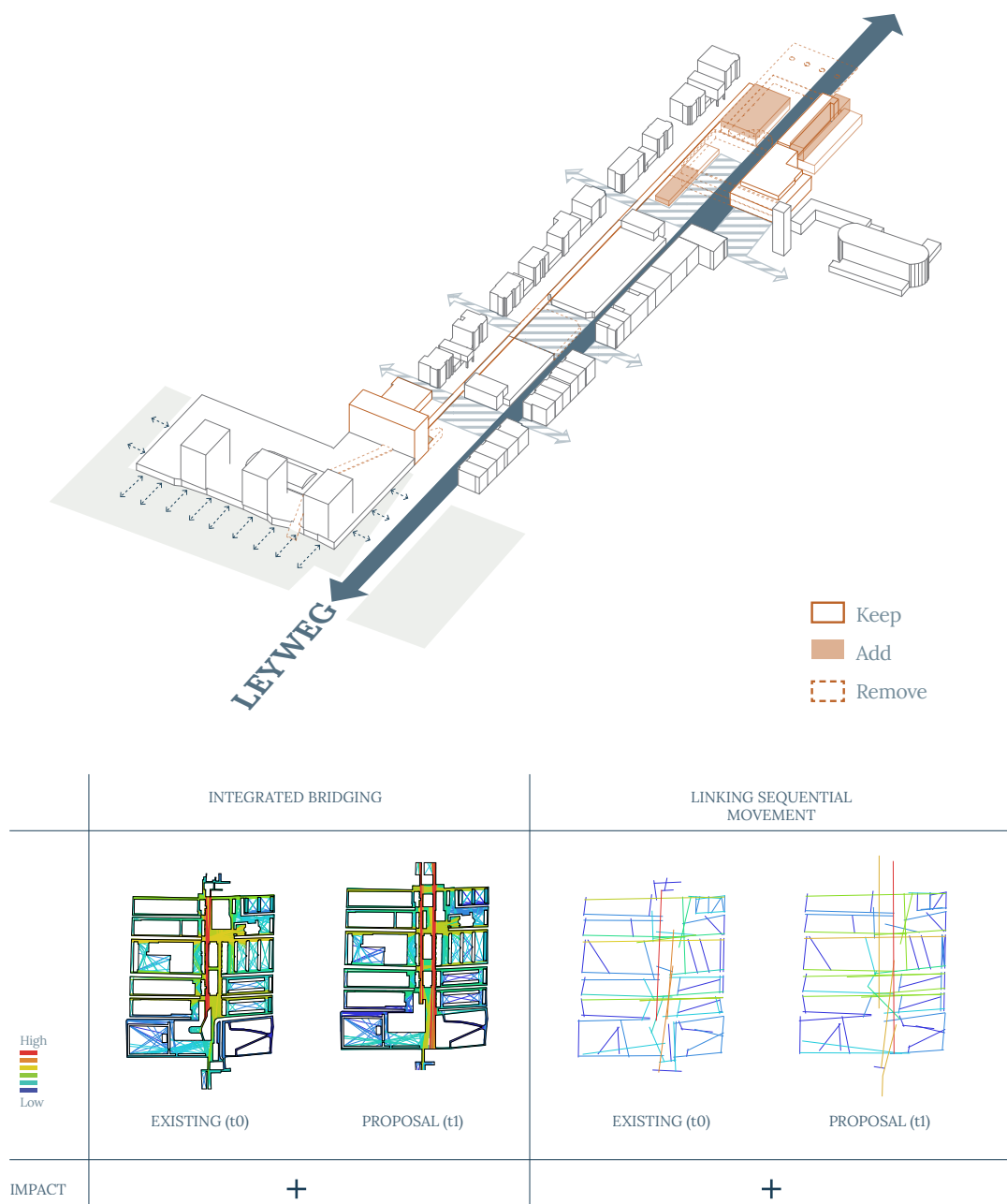


Figure 2.
The recommended spatial configuration and its assessment.

Aim of the project

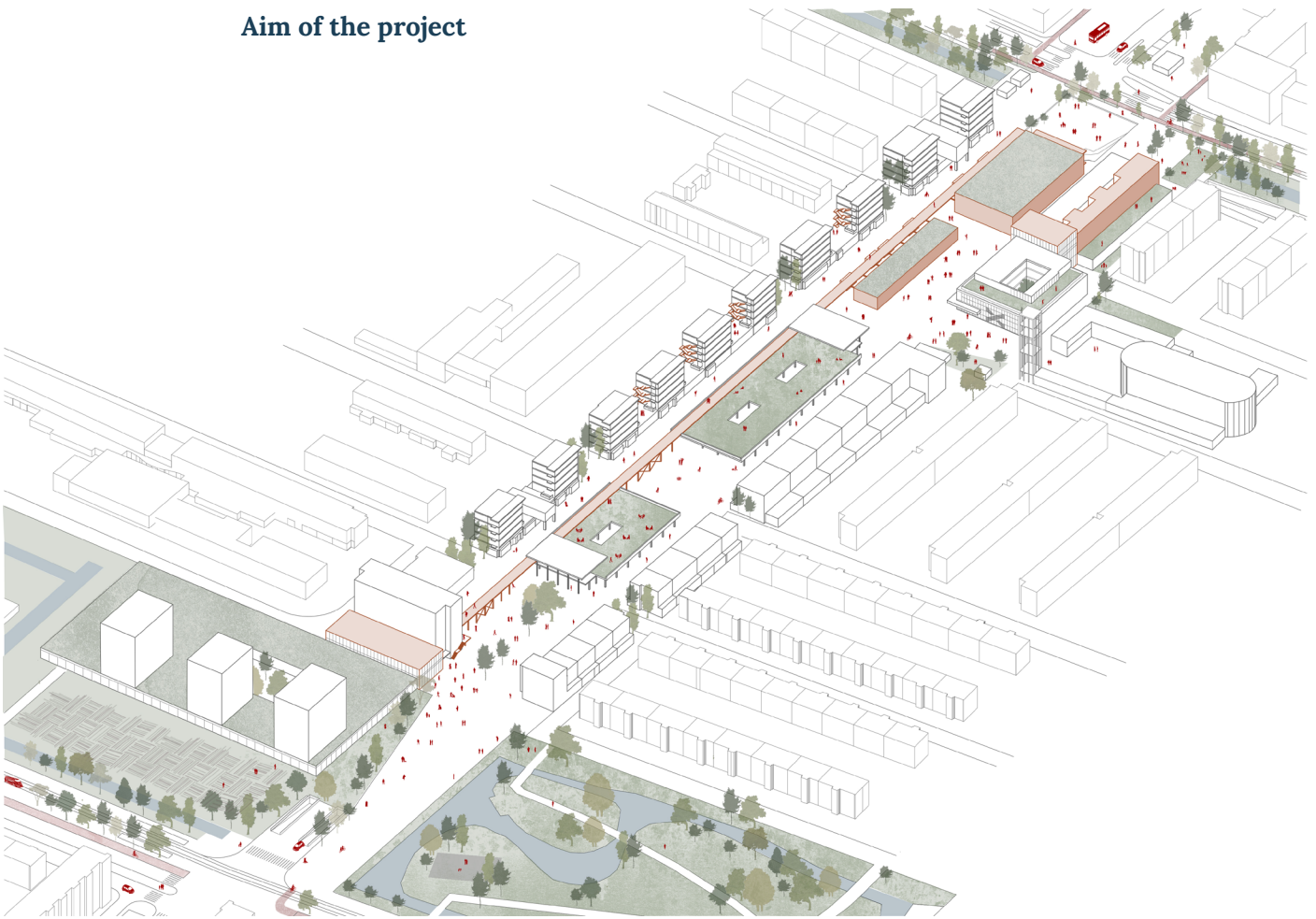


Figure 3.

Overview of the proposal. The former shopping center continues functioning as a cohesive whole.

As already mentioned, the elaboration of the design started with a proposal for the spatial configuration in order to restore, not only continuity within the urban fabric, but also a past city image that was lost; an image defining of Leyweg over the years. Then, the social aspect was introduced in order to combine the initial intentions for the spatial configuration of the re-design proposal with a relevant functional program. A program that would not disrupt the overall cohesion of the complex, but rather foster a system of interweaving spatial and social relations, with the aim to address local issues of unemployment, segregation and limited social cohesion.

This proposal for the shopping center was supplemented by a sustainable strategy to improve the urban climate of the neighborhood. This strategy entails adding greenery and water elements for natural cooling and for the reduction of heat exhaustion, harvesting rainwater and implementing renewable energy systems. Also, it involves creating a series of atriums in the larger building volumes in order to avoid compartmentalization and to allow for designing unified spaces with sufficient natural lighting and ventilation.

One of these volumes is the focus of the re-design, since it constitutes a representative part of the project regarding all aspects, and was, also, considered a landmark for Leyweg shopping street. More specifically, a former V&D department store with residences in the northern entrance of the shopping center was selected to be transformed into a community hub and a cooperative housing complex for artists and local residents from different cultural backgrounds. The goal is to strengthen social cohesion through art and cultural exchange. To that end, the building's re-design features the creation of an internal void to introduce a green atrium, to allow the visual connection between all levels and to activate the basement. Furthermore, it involves the addition of sustainable systems, and also, the restoration and upgrade of the original façades so that the building's relation to the surrounding public spaces is re-established.

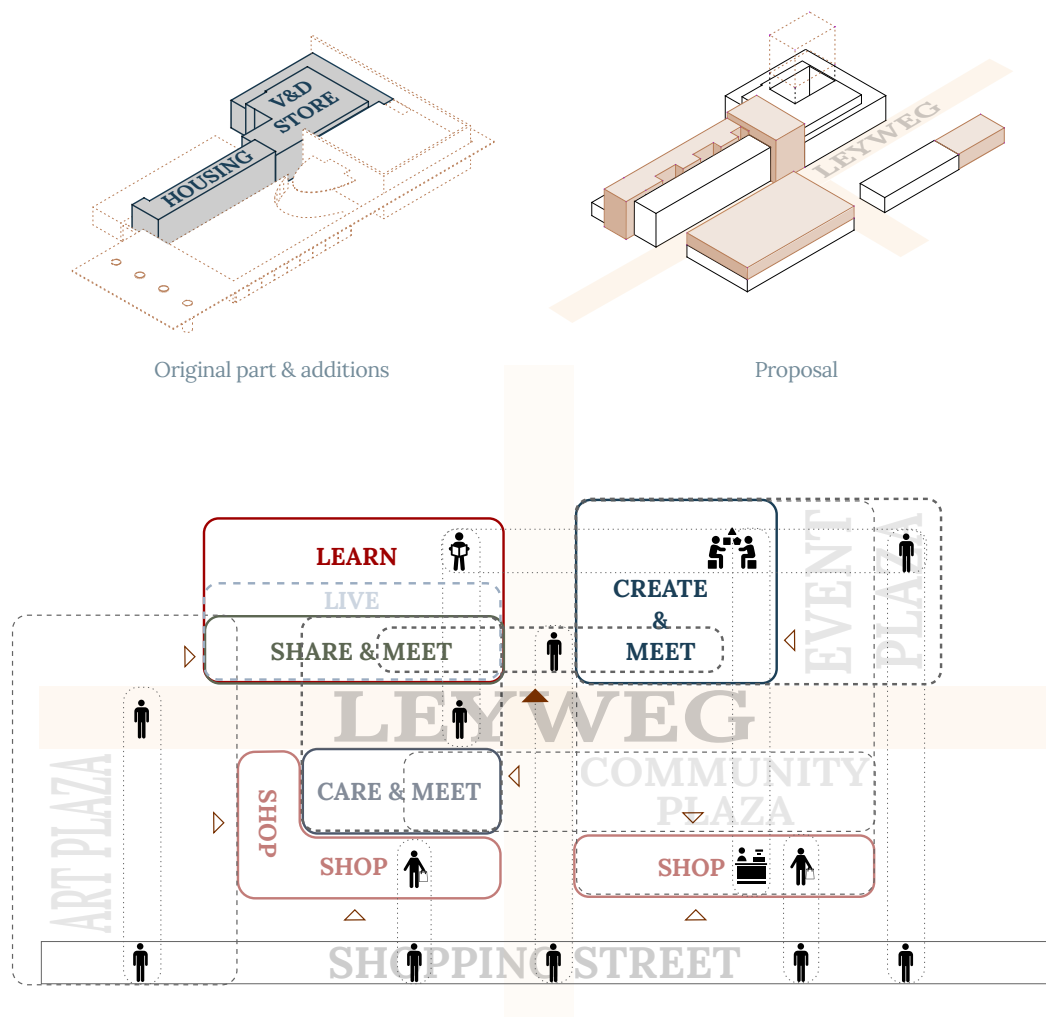


Figure 4.

The focus of the re-design and the proposed spatial organization fostering continuity and interaction through a system of relations.

Overall, through this proposal, the following Sustainable Development Goals (Labadi et al., 2021) are addressed: 4 (quality and education), 7 (affordable and clean energy), 8 (decent work and economic growth), 10 (reduced inequalities) and 11 (sustainable cities and communities).

The purpose of the project was to investigate a potential sustainable future for the shopping center that would be based on one of its heritage aspects. This aspect was the spatial coherence with its context; hence the design was concentrated on creating a system of spatial relations, legible and translatable to different scales, in such a way that the shopping mall could accommodate a change of function and yet maintain its consistency with the area it refers to. The question to be answered was: How can the shopping center adapt to new conditions, while remaining a vital and central part of a city or neighborhood? The project examines how a change of urban pattern that renders a design more integrated and connected can support a variety of functions by forming a cohesive whole, and also, how can all the distict parts complement this whole by creating a dialogue in the scale of the district, of the site, and of the building itself.

Evaluating the process



(MESURA , n.d.; archdaily, 2020; B-architecten, 2020; archdaily, 2016; archdaily, 2015; designboom, 2021)

Figure 5. The process of designing the interior atrium space using sketches and reference projects for the detection of materials, textures, colors, and construction details that could capture the intended spatial atmosphere.

Through the research and the re-design process that unfolded simultaneously, I practiced thinking on different scales while designing, as the elaboration of the proposal ranges from urban to structural ones. The master track Architecture sets the framework for such an exploration. Thus, I was given the opportunity to comprehend different levels of intervention and the challenges an architect may come across while making design decisions that have not only spatial, but also social, functional, technical, and environmental consequences. As promoted by the master program, the architect needs to be mindful of the totality of the design; a design not only integrated, but also feasible and sustainable.

The feedback was insightful on this matter, as it provided the base for reflecting upon the limitations of each decision and constituted the incentive to re-think and make changes in order to progress. Design is an ongoing process in which even the slightest change, for instance, in the type of structural connections, textures, or material thicknesses, can influence or supplement the overall impression and spatial quality of the project on multiple scales. In the end, everything needs to fit together and deliver on the desiderata originally set.

Evaluating the scope of the project

In the context of the growing recognition of post-war buildings, and specifically, shopping centers, as heritage, my graduation project fills in the academic gap linked to the analysis of the malls' integral spatial characteristics in relation to the urban fabric. As my graduation topic sets forth the spatial impact of shopping facilities' re-design on urban development, it can function as a stimulus and starting point for the composition of a practical toolkit able to assist the architect throughout the process of a mall's re-design directed at sustaining, restoring, or enhancing spatial continuity with the urban fabric.

Additionally, the proposed functional program and spatial configuration constitutes an exploration of the capacity of the Dutch shopping center to adapt and respond to societal changes without losing its spatial coherence with its urban context. Even though hypothetical, the project can inspire future developments. It is evident that malls are continuously being reformulated following contemporary shifts in consumer needs and in the retail market; yet they also need to be preserved as nodes of social activity and engagement, as stable points within the city for the community to refer to over the course of time, so as to find a sense of identity.

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Figure 5

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