

## Reflection – Msc Graduation

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### THE ASSIGNMENT

For this graduation studio in the department of Heritage and Architecture, the design case was the transformation of a modern mall. The renewal of existing buildings and areas is gaining importance, with sustainability goals as the main driver. As a result, the improvement of the existing stock is increasingly central to the work of architects. More and more often, architectural projects involve the redesign, adaptation, densification or transformation of existing structures. Starting from an existing building or area with all its characteristics, good and bad, requires the architect to relate to what is already there. As the focus of architectural practice shifts from new design to reuse, the knowledge about redesign is critical. Assessing values is a key process in the identification of heritage significance. However, the subsequent design process is often more intuitive and no longer structured in the way the value assessment is. In this studio, the student is expected to combine research and design in order to make substantiated interventions in the design case.

### LOOKING BACK

#### *Looking back on the research*

My approach to the research worked to some extent. As my research plan was not as good as I would have hoped, I quickly noticed that, in doing the actual research, I needed to deviate from the plan. This was not a problem in itself, as I believe the process of a research (or design) is always quite fluid. However, having a better research plan and being able to stick to it, would have definitely made the process easier. In the research plan, I wrote that I wanted to research many different architectural elements, in order to end up with an architectural atlas of some sort. I was urged by the research mentor that narrowing down the amount of elements was not only necessary because of time constraints, but it would also benefit the quality of the research. One of the things I also notice about my research plan when I read it now, is that I seemed to be looking for reasons to validate my research. For example, as the effects of architecture on human behaviour had already been researched – albeit in other ways – I felt it necessary to include the effects of daily-used technology in the research. Eventually, I did not research this, mostly due to time constraints. I also talk about categorising the elements, using the six layers as defined by Brand. However, I quickly noticed that this was simply irrelevant to the research. Overall, I think I had trouble understanding what the research plan was meant to be and what I was working towards in the research. Additionally, I think the fact that my topic was not directly related to heritage or even malls made it more difficult to relate the research to the design. I always accepted that my research would not form the base for a design, but elements from the research could be used in a later stage of the design phase. Nonetheless, the lack of relation between the research and the design made it more difficult to work on both parts simultaneously.

#### *Looking back on the design process*

As for the design, I quickly knew what I wanted to work towards, as I already knew the project from personal experience. Luckily, most of my ideas were supported by the research I did for the design, which consisted of municipal policies and ambitions for the area and interviews with residents and visitors of Woensel. The plans did evolve

over time, as is normal for any design process. I quickly realised that working out the entire plan for Winkelcentrum Woensel was not going to be possible, due to the size of the project, so I proposed to focus on a single section over the area. As the plan for the mall was to create a variety in functions for a variety of demographic groups, I wanted the section to represent this variety. Eventually, even the section turned out to be too large, so I decided to focus on an area that was on the section, hoping that it would still be a good representation of the whole area. However, during the process I still wanted to develop the urban plan of the whole mall- which took longer than I would have wished – so I sometimes had trouble limiting my attention to the focus area.

Another difficulty that I had with the design, was relating the new to the old. As my focus was on the design of a new building – with the intention of adding value to the existing – the renovation of the existing felt like a bit of an afterthought.

## LOOKING AHEAD:

### *Contribution to the Heritage department and Msc AUBS*

As I mentioned before, I sometimes struggled with the lack of connection between my research topic and the overarching theme of heritage. However, having done all the design studios in the master's programme within the heritage department, I have come to the realisation that for me personally, heritage is more of a circumstance, rather than the main focus. With the building stock getting larger every day, there is almost never a situation where we can design on a blank slate anymore. Heritage is always there, therefore designing with heritage is 'just' designing to me. My research might not be directly related to heritage, but it can provide instrumental information for architectural design in general, which is why I think it can be of value for my development in the master.

### *From research to design*

I never intended for my research to form a base for my design. Instead, results of the research could be used in a later stage of the design. As we are approaching the final weeks of the design, we are also going towards the stage in which I can start using my results from the research. For example: I have now defined what type of stairs I wish to implement, what the materialisation of the floors should be and whether I want to change the look of the canopies. During P2, I spoke of 'testing' the research results in the design, as a way of researching by design. However, as it turned out, this was not very realistic, as there is no way to see the results of these tests.

My method of observational research is something that, in my opinion, could be encouraged more in the education of architecture. Eventually, we are designing for people, so understanding how people react to certain design decisions could be a valuable asset for architecture students. Nevertheless, it is difficult to make concrete, as I have noticed during the research. Of course, this concretisation was partially what I was hoping to do in the research, but for some elements it turned out to be more difficult than I was hoping for.

### *Transferability of results*

Looking at the research through a larger scope, I think the added understanding of how architecture influences its users can create more people-driven (therefore better) designs. I would like to believe that the results of the research are quite transferable, as this was part of the goal of the research. Having a 'guide' with architectural

elements and the different executions and the results of these executions could be very useful to anyone in the architecture field. I know it is overly optimistic to think that this guide will be complete, but at least I have made a start.