Reflection

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Research

My choice for the Health studio as my graduation lab was not my first choice. My aim for my graduation project was to get more insight in how to design for specific users and how architecture can affect their lives in a better way. This is why I started my graduation research with the Veldacademie because I knew that I would get in touch with the users for whom I would design with the use of all contacts the Veldacademie has, and with that gaining a lot of insight in their lives so that I would have a strong research base for my design. But unfortunately, this turned out not to be as I expected, and I chose to jump to another studio before it would be too late to start a new research. I chose to do my research at the Health studio, where I conducted a research on elderly housing and how it could help elderly live longer independently and healthy. The Health studio gave me lots of contacts that helped me along the way, and excursions to elderly homes and hospitals gave me insight in how vulnerable people are now taking care of. I spoke to a few elderlies, because I did not feel comfortable with interviewing. Although I did not collect data from the interviews, I did get a very good picture about their habits and the problems they face. Beforehand I did a literature study that gave me the background information that helped me to get a picture of what the main topics and issues are with elderly housing today. Because I had two types of sources, literature and the elderlies themselves, I could distinguish facts from opinions from both the answers of the elderlies as well as the literature. Together with the whole studio group we made a documentary to explain the problem we wanted to design a solution for. In this way I was working as a journalist that helped me to put things into perspective, it helped me see things more objective because I was trying to explain things instead of seeking for a solution. I ended my research phase after the P2 presentation with a lot of insight in the users for whom I wanted to design, so I achieved my goal for the research. During the research phase my tutor gave me the advice to start thinking about a design and start sketching my preliminary ideas. I followed his advice that helped me to form my first ideas of what I actually wanted to design, because most of the time I spend on thinking about the "why" and "how", but now I was forced to also think about the "what".

Design

The design part as well started not as planned. After a few weeks in the MSc 4 my main tutor became ill and I had for some time no one I could talk to about my ideas. This happened also on a moment I was struggling with the decision for my assignment. First there was the opportunity to get a real-life assignment from a contact of my research tutor that worked for a housing company. But at the last moment the contact and I changed our mind, and I had to search for another assignment. My research tutor wanted me to do a real-life assignment because it could help me to get a clear base for my design and stay closer to reality, because without such an assignment my design could go anywhere and could be less realistic. But finally, I chose to follow a path of logical deduction to lead me to an assignment. This took some time especially without any tutor, because I needed some confirmation of my logic. My research was mainly focussed on elderlies living in Rotterdam because I started my research there with the Veldacademie and I knew the city very well. This was my starting point for the assignment, and from there on I tried to make logical steps towards an assignment. I did a research on the demographics of elderly in Rotterdam and found out, that in one neighbourhood especially, there would be a big increase in elderly in the coming years but at the same time lacked availability of affordable and suitable housing for elderly. In the research I did before I concluded that elderly could live independently for a longer amount of time when living in a familiar environment. So, my assignment would then be to create affordable and suitable homes for elderly from this neighbourhood. Another conclusion I drew from my previous research was that elderly homes should be mixed with other types of homes to keep people in a lively environment that helps them stay active and healthy. This meant that my assignment would be a mix of elderly homes and family homes because they share the most demands. The next step was to find a plot for the assignment that I found in a development vision from the municipality for a former business park next to the neighbourhood. In this vision they stated to create a mixed neighbourhood with offices and workshops but also residential areas for young urban professionals, families and elderlies. This was maybe not the best plot for my assignment according to my research, but it would give me more space to be experimental and design a neighbourhood from the ground up. So, I decided to go for this former business park as the location for my project. Just after I made the decision to work out a design on this location, I found my new tutor that would guide me with my design until the P5. From this moment I was delayed for almost two months on my schedule, so I had to make progress fast. With the help of my tutor I worked out my design in simple steps and with the help of my BT tutor I incorporated structure and climate early in the design. Until the P3 I only had a preliminary urban design and first ideas of the structure, but after the P3 I reconsidered some decisions to help me get a better design faster. I knew that if I would make the right decisions about my design on time I could catch up with my schedule. Because I had not much time, I could not go with the method of trial and error. My approach therefore was to create rules based upon little design researches I did beforehand and make a design according to these rules. This approach worked very well because I managed to filter out most of the issues early in the design process. I think the design would have looked a lot different if I had tried another approach. The design I ended up with is basically shaped by the time shortage I had. What I learned from this is that the amount of time you can spend on a design project really defines what the design will look like, more than I thought before. I see this project as an example of how the neighbourhood of the near future could look like, sustainable in a materialistic way and in a social way. In that sense this project could be usable as reference for professionals that are concerned with designing new neighbourhoods.