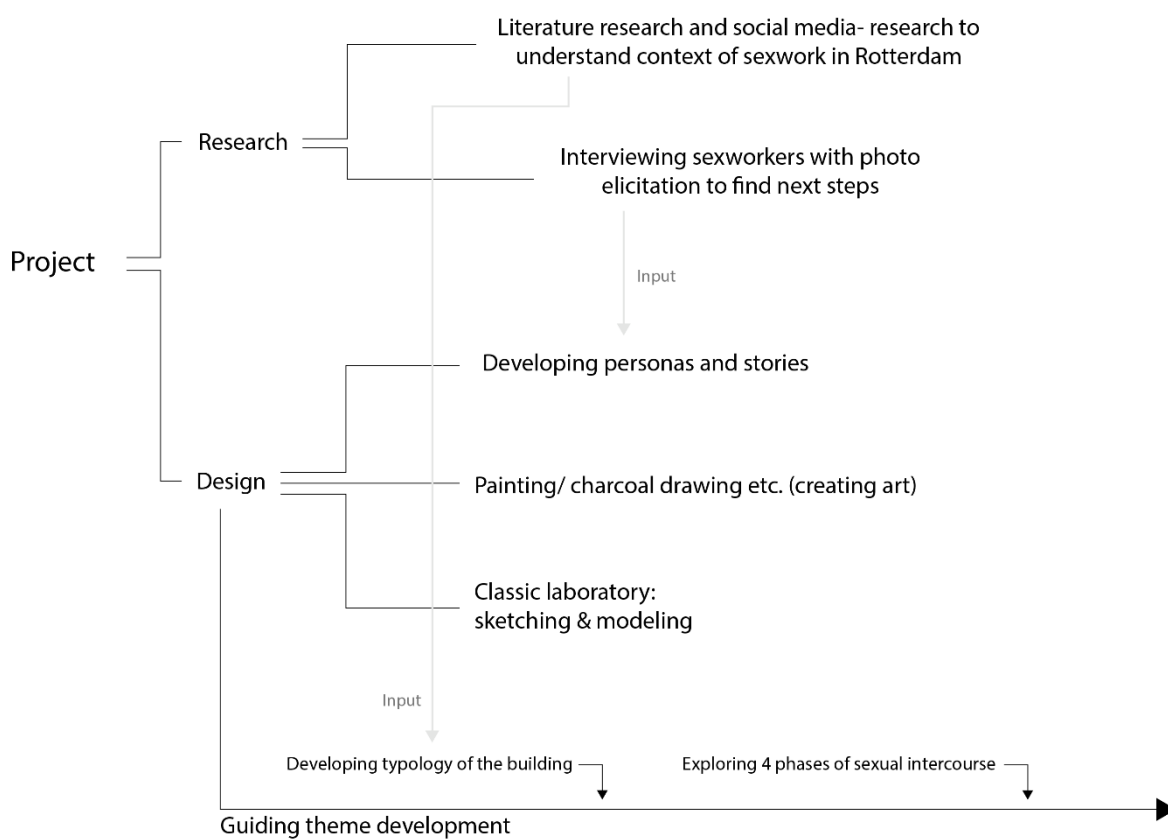


Reflection - Space for sex work – Lucy Aafjes

Project goal: To create a design that responds to the needs and challenges faced by sex workers, while also highlighting and strengthening their role in society.

Approach and methods

In this figure is a schematic overview of the research and design methods I used to come to a design.



Key moments

Every moment is visualised by a drawing from the design process.

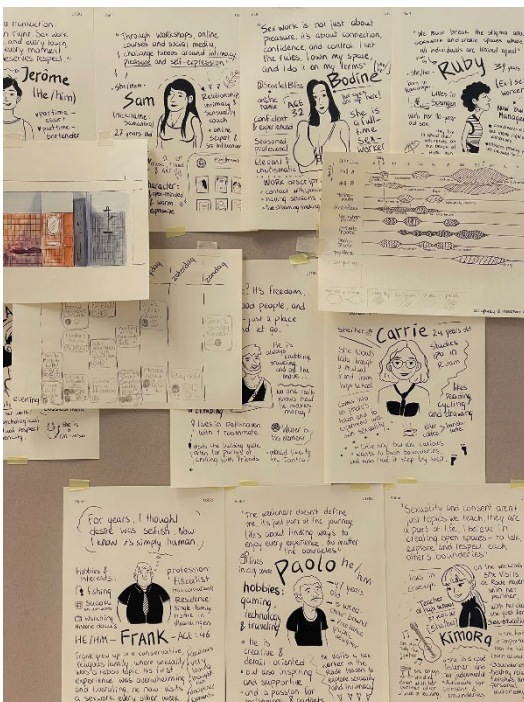
Moment 1: Realising the need for a physical presence in the city



Between the research and the start of the design phase, I realised that giving sex workers a voice is not just about representing them, it is also about literally giving them space in the city. Just like a stadium or a theatre takes up space and represents a part of life, a place for sex work should also be physically visible. That insight shifted my focus: I was not just designing a functional or supportive space anymore, but something that could stand on its own as a recognisable and meaningful typology.

This brought up the question of what that typology could look like. Not in terms of a fixed shape or material, but a recognisable form language for this kind of building. The design of the new structure partly refers to the arches found in the old bank building on the site. At the same time, it draws inspiration from the form and mass of churches or cathedrals. These buildings are known for their monumental use of space and material, where no effort or cost is spared. I wanted to give sex work the same level of recognition and appreciation in the city.

Moment 2: Building the story through personas and scenarios



To guide the design, I created personas both sex workers and visitors and imagined how they might move through the building during a typical week. The design evolved from a conceptual idea — one that aimed to challenge norms and broaden the perspectives of visitors — into a practical, usable building. In this building, sex workers have their own dedicated quarters, there are supportive spaces for their needs, and specific areas where sex work takes place.

It also allowed me to keep the design speculative and imaginative, instead of just problem-solving for the current environment.

Moment 3: Creating the four-phase structure



An essential theme in the design process came when I started working with the four phases *seduction, foreplay, climax, and aftercare*. These gave me a new way to think about atmosphere, emotion, and scale of the space. I shifted my focus from just safety and function to designing with atmosphere and emotional experience in mind. These phases now shape the mood, material choices, and lighting in the project, and give a flow through the building.

Value mapping

I am valuing this project in three ways: my way of working, the academic and societal value, and the value of transferability of my project results.

Working in this way, combining interviews with sex workers and other sources, and translating that input into personas, allowed me to design for an imaginary but plausible future. It helped me structure and support the choices behind my design vision.

The academic and societal relevance of this project lies in its exploration of how architecture, as a medium of storytelling, can shape public perceptions of sex work. By imagining a building that visibly and expressively accommodates a diversity of sex workers and services in this location, the project calls attention to the need for spatial and social inclusion of this often marginalized group.

The value of transferability in this project lies in offering a way for municipalities and communities to think about spatial solutions from the perspective of a marginalized group, while still working within the existing structures of the city. By connecting individual needs with the broader aim of destigmatising sex work, the project suggests a new kind of building typology, one that avoids both the limitations of current models and the clichés of overly sexualised designs. This way of working could be relevant in other situations where visibility and inclusion are important.

Feedback

I will briefly summarise some key feedback moments from the P2 presentation. One of the main points was that there was still a strong separation between the research and the design. This is something I am addressing now, by finalising the research report and developing the P4 presentation. I am working on making stronger connections between the design principles and how they are reflected in the building on different levels. In that process, the choice for this specific building and location is also more clearly explained.

Another comment was about the idea of “architecture of enjoyment” and how to communicate or market the building. This is partly addressed through the personas and the chosen typology. I am considering creating a website as an additional tool to communicate the concept, to give the building a clear identity and message.

Questions about whether this building would fit into society or be successful are more difficult to answer. That is something that can only really be seen once it is built. However, by combining different functions such as a club, brothel, exhibition space, bathing areas and a community centre, the design offers a broad and layered program. This mix allows different groups in society to find meaning in the building. It could help make sex work and sex-related services more accessible and more integrated into daily life, even for those who may not consider themselves visitors of such spaces.

During the P3, the core ideas of the project were there, about shape and character. After discussing the concept during the presentation, it became clear that some parts of the research were not visible in the design, like the safety and privacy of the sexworkers. This led to the development of moments two and three, which helped guide the direction of the project and connect the research with the design concept.

During the whole progress, the feedback I achieved was mostly inline with my own doubts and questions. I got positive feedback about the amount and variation of techniques and testing I did in the design process, so I kept on doing that.

From now to finish

In the final phase of the design, I want to focus on strengthening and making the four phases more tangible. I will explore how to refine the use of colour, texture, and form in each phase to enhance the spatial experience and make it more perceptible.

To connect the research with the design and show how the use of the building could evolve if the personas actually occupied it, I plan to create a cartoon or visual story. This will help illustrate how the space could function in practice and support the idea of transferability, not just for other designers, but also for local residents, by showing how a possible future might unfold in a relatable and imaginative way.