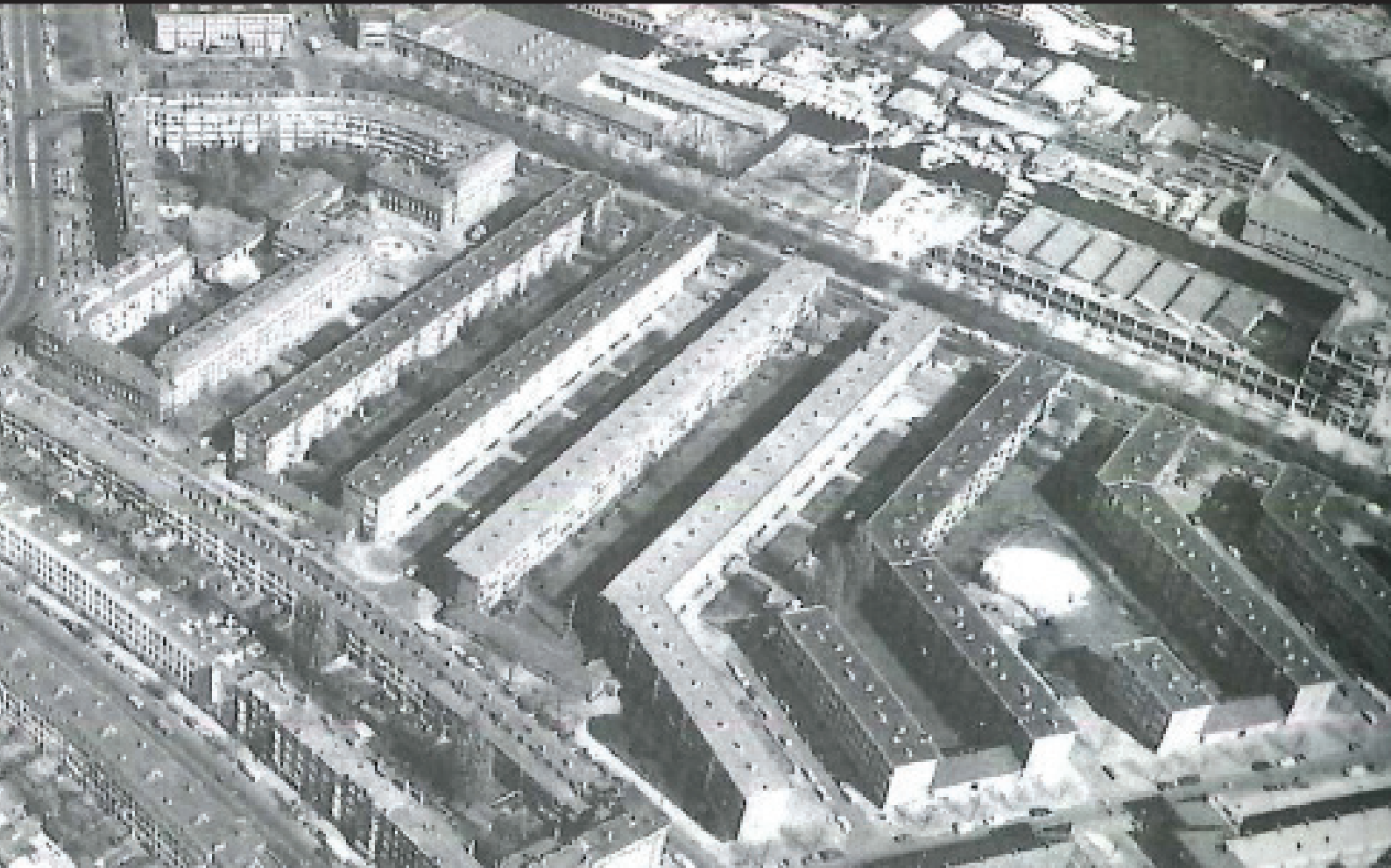




# REFLECTION REPORT

Graduation Studio: Heritage and Architecture  
Housing Heritage Amsterdam

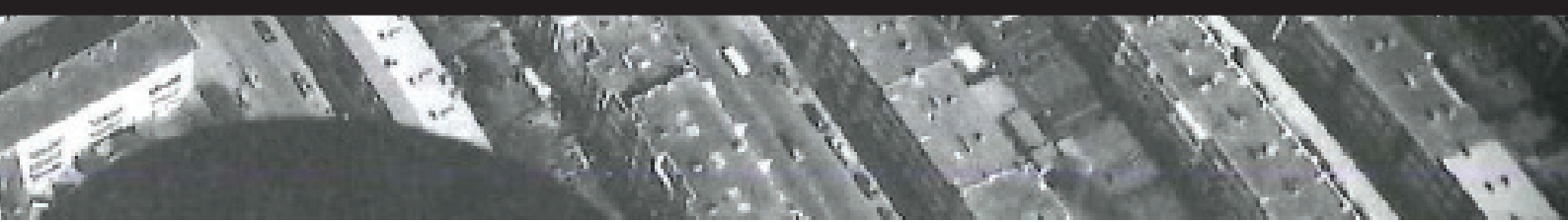
Tutors: Lidwine Spoormans  
Wido Quist



Title of the project: Amsterdam Plan 2040 in Merkelbach buildings  
Project location: Landlust, Amsterdam

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## INTRODUCTION

Last academic year I have been pursuing my graduation project within the studio Housing Heritage Amsterdam. The topic I have chosen is an implementation of the Amsterdam Vision 2040 into Landlust, which is a part of the West district of the city. The buildings I have been working on are currently local monuments, but a procedure to make them become national ones is in progress. The main focus of my graduation project is to activate the neighbourhood, make it attractive, improve safety and structurally connect Landlust more with the city centre. I achieved these goals through implementing public facilities on the ground floor of the buildings, which created a link to the busy main street Bos en Lommerweg. Even though my design is mostly based on re-programming, it follows the theme of the housing graduation studio. My project shows ways to improve standards of apartments in two building blocks and social interactions between residents. The design upgrades areas without making any harm to valuable heritage.

In this reflection report four aspects will be elaborated:

- The relation between the project and the wider social context
- The relation between the theme of the graduation lab and the subject chosen
- The relation between methodological line of approach of the graduation lab and the method chosen by the student
- The relation between research and design

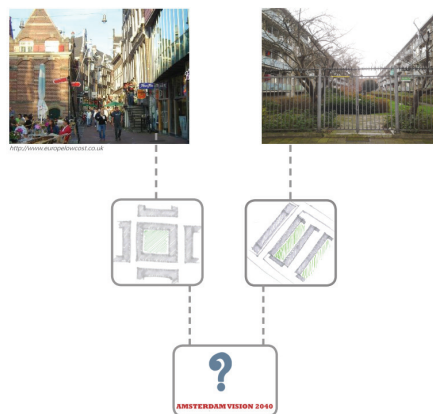


Figure 1. How to implement the Amsterdam Plan 2040?

## THE RELATION BETWEEN THE PROJECT AND THE WIDER SOCIAL CONTEXT

The Amsterdam Vision 2040, prepared by the Municipality, is ambitious regarding a size of development plans. It is a challenge to structurally connect with the centre all districts within the A10 ring, improve safety and a standard of flats in terms of sustainability. However, a better quality usually leads to higher costs, which consequence can be displacement of

former residents, who are not able to pay rents anymore, and, at the same time, an influx of middle-class or affluent people.<sup>1</sup> The process may not be perceived in a positive way by poorer residents who used social housing services. However, it could be extremely profitable for the city because of the higher rents and sales from new public facilities implemented in my design. For current residents who own apartments in Landlust, higher costs can be balanced with savings due to the improvement of sustainability of the building. For people who rent apartments, in the worst case, higher rents might mean the displacement. However, according to the research by Brian Doucet, the process does not have to be a punishment. Residents by moving together to a new location can stay within communities and environment they know and feel safe in. If they stayed, they could not fit in the changed area anymore.<sup>2</sup>

Amsterdam is a city where investors do not have to worry about flats staying vacant for a long time. However, the fact that numerous people, 47,459 in 2014, are in search of a flat in the city, does not mean that they would buy one in Landlust.<sup>3</sup> Hence, the aim of my project was to attract people, and encourage them to buy the flat in the neighbourhood. The tool for that was the implementation of various public facilities, like bars, cafes with work spaces, shops and start-up offices to make the area more vibrant and suitable for current and new residents. I want to offer different places than in the centre, which are calmer, more cosy with vibrant local atmosphere.

What was also essential, the complex in Landlust has one serious disadvantage in its current form, namely a small possibility of social interaction between residents. A garden between two Merkelbach blocks remains closed and almost nobody uses it due to a complicated and not pleasant access through a basement. During working on the graduation assignment, I tried to find ways of improving the social interaction, as well as safety in the area and how to combine the new public facilities with peaceful life of new but also former Landlust residents. Therefore, I decided to open up the garden and design entrances to apartments on that side. Through that, people from two blocks meet each other on the way to work or school. They do not have to know all neighbours, but they are familiar with each other, which might improve their safety feeling. To maintain the green courtyard the quiet side, but to make the district more lively, as planned in the Amsterdam Vision 2040, entrances to public facilities were placed on the street side, on Juliana van Stolbergstraat. By that new arrangement, it is possible to create a vibrant street, which connects the complex with the busy Bos en Lommerweg without disturbing the residents.

## THE RELATION BETWEEN THE THEME OF THE GRADUATION LAB AND THE SUBJECT CHOSEN

The main theme of the graduation lab was transformation and an improvement of the pre-war blocks of flats designed by Merkelbach and Karsten in 1937. The buildings are vital for the city because of their unusual urban layout, which was a step towards a better living. They represent the first example of a residential block, which was designed according to three principles of The New Architecture: air, light and space.<sup>4</sup> The apartments were bigger, luxurious and provided a lot more light than previously built tiny, dark flats in the city centre. However, they do not meet current needs and therefore have to be improved. Values of the site and the object were defined by each student individually, as well as research questions, which resulted in diverse design concepts.

Despite the studio was focused on housing, my interest took a different path. I got fascinated by the Amsterdam Plan 2040 and therefore my biggest focus was on the re-programming of the street plinth within the idea of the Municipality. However, apartments' qualities have been improved. I proposed relatively small, but spacious flats, which translate the New Architecture principles into modern standards. I designed bigger rooms, so that people have enough space for their everyday activities and diverse contemporary appliances. Next to rather small flats, of approximately 40-60 square meters, there are bigger apartments with private gardens, mostly suitable for families and handicapped people.

Through my project, I would like to show that flats and districts could evolve significantly by adding only small elements to a structure, without destroying and neglecting their values.

## THE RELATION BETWEEN METHODOLOGICAL LINE OF APPROACH OF THE GRADUATION LAB AND THE METHOD CHOSEN BY THE STUDENT

The graduation studio Heritage and Architecture is visualised by a triangle with three guiding aspects helping define a direction of a research and a project. The lab takes into consideration history of an object, as well as a contemporary aspects of housing. Moreover, it encompasses a focus on a broader, urban scale and a detailed one. The method of this project is divided into phases, which interweave

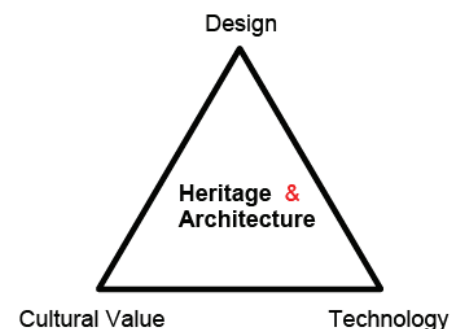


Figure 2. The triangle of the Heritage and Architecture,  
<http://www.bk.tudelft.nl/> [10/05/2016]

and are related to each other. It started with the interest of The Amsterdam Vision 2040. I was amazed by the scale and the ambition of the plan. The following step was analysing history of the Amsterdam urban planning to understand changes and why Merkelbach and Karsten buildings were designed as semi-open blocks. At the same time, I defined historic and cultural values on different levels, regarding the past and the current situation, as well as discovered problems of Landlust and the complex. These three factors led to the design question: How to successfully connect Landlust with the city centre of Amsterdam and increase the number of facilities in Landlust without causing any harm to buildings and historic urban layout? However, it was still unclear how to get there. Hence, the research question was needed to find out how architecture could change due to an implementation of various development plans to propose the best design. I used two case studies, Kreuzberg in Berlin and Kazimierz in Krakow and analysed how these areas evolved. All the steps led to the concept design. However, it was still difficult to establish the final design. Therefore, I used another case study - Storefront in New York by Steven Holl, because it plays a role of a connector of three different districts, as well as an eye-catcher and this is what I wanted to achieve in my design.

The research I conducted on how would the evolution of the neighbourhood character, due to the implementation of Amsterdam Plan 2040, influence architecture in Landlust, resulted in general recommendations and strategies for improving and activating the whole neighbourhood, but it had only a little in common with elaborating on an architectural concept. My design remained a vision and did not reach a detailed level for a long time. I could not find a link to the detailed design and that is why it took me more time to define it completely. I believe it could have helped me if I focused my research on individual buildings rather than on the whole districts. I did so on the later phase of the process and it has made the process smoother than it used to be. Analyses of works on plinths by Duggan Morris Architects, especially the plinth at Blossom Street in London, strongly defined the goal I wanted to achieve in the design. The office creates astonishing, but simple sculpture plinths. Therefore, the ground floor is designed in such a way. Another factor, which enhanced my design and established its expression is an inspiration of concrete buildings by Le Corbusier, The Chandigarh Legislative Assembly Building in particular. In my project I also looked for a heavy, but artistic expression he achieved there. Therefore, concrete was the best possible choice of a material for me.

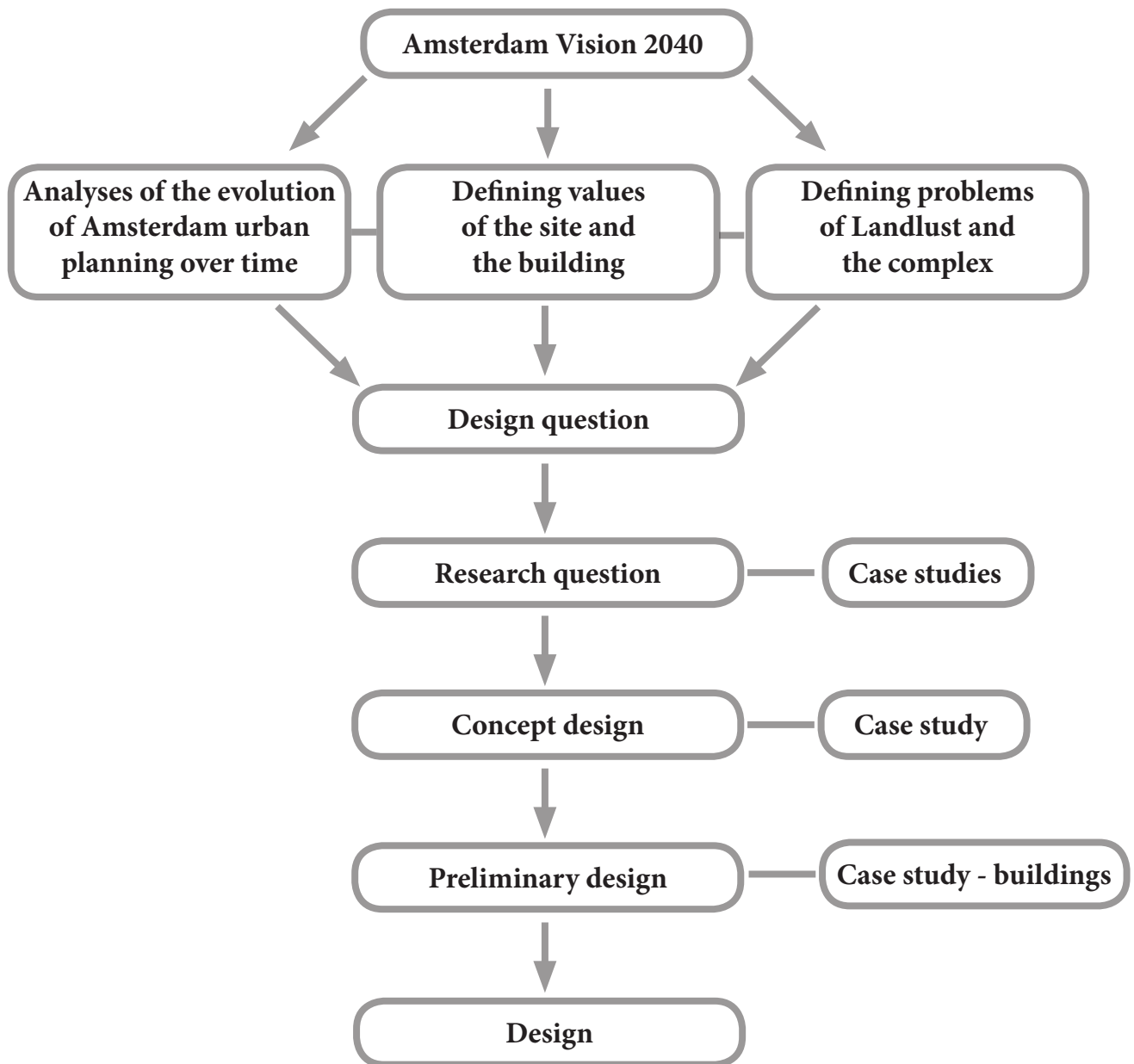


Figure 3. The personal graduation process

## THE RELATION BETWEEN THE RESEARCH AND THE DESIGN

My research question helped me answer the design one. Kreuzberg in Berlin and Kazimierz in Krakow have been used as case studies in that research. I chose these two places because of their close locations to city centres and former middle-class characters of districts. Both of them have evolved a lot after implementing various development plans. From rather poor areas, they have become trendy ones, which attract large numbers of people. However, those changes of a neighbourhood character always affect architecture in an area. What is the most important, a general appearance of a building might change, namely a layout of a facade, its colour

and materialization. Also, an organisation of an internal space can evolve and additional elements could be added to a structure because of a new, different purpose of it. Therefore, I investigated the following aspects of buildings in Kreuzberg and Kazimierz: a general layout, colours and materialisation, street art and additional elements and illustrated the results in the research report.

What I found out from the research is that the design of a street plinth is the most important part in these cases and the most of changes took place there. Hence, that part of the building had to be designed carefully in my project. New activities in gentrified areas have different needs than they had before. Functions change and that is why more open and flexible plinths are necessary. Characters of districts constantly evolve, so objects should be easily adjustable. Plinths in Landlust had to become more open also to attract people and make them feel encouraged to enter a place. Often a building can remain the same as it looked, but because of a vibrant plinth, an experience of the object might be positive, which it is to be observed in Kreuzberg. Plinths are essential parts of 'public realm', which has a broader meaning than 'public space'. It includes also facades of buildings, anything that can be seen from the eye level.<sup>5</sup>

The emergence of new public facilities in street plinths, but not only, has been always connected with additional elements added to facades of buildings, which had to be chosen carefully in my design not to make any harm to the building. Also, it is important to make the elements easy to disassemble.

Because of the research result, I have chosen the street plinth the most essential element of my design. That element of the building can change the way it is perceived. It helped me define what is needed in a transformed neighbourhood and take a step ahead in designing, so that people's activity due to the implementation of Amsterdam Plan 2040 does not make any harm to the historic structures.

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