

## **Reflection**

AR3AH115 Maritime Heritage

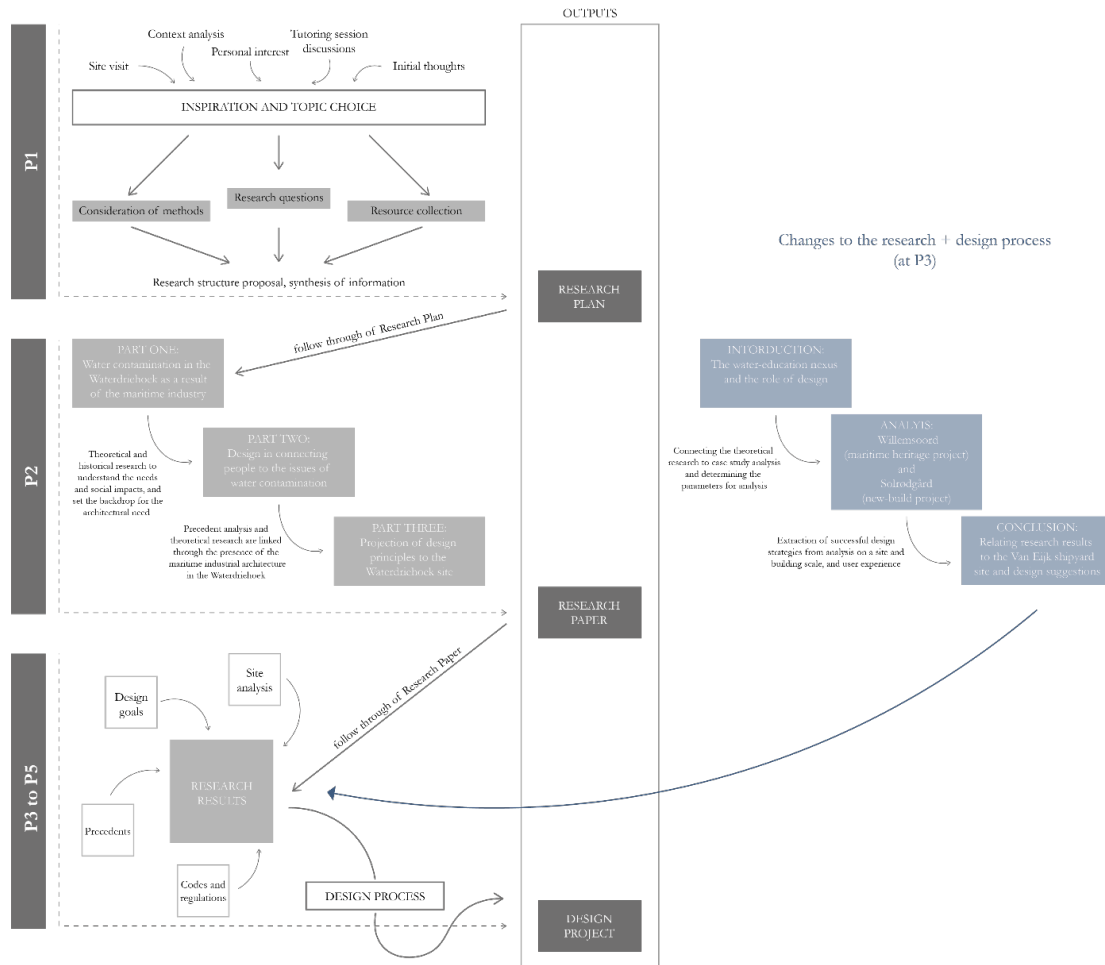
Sari Naito | 06 May 2025

### **1. Preliminary results of research and design**

My approach to the gradation studio was very organic, changing and adapting to the different phases of research and design. It was never fully conscious or designed in any particular way, but evolved with what each period demanded, drawing from my experiences of previous projects and weekly discussions with tutors and other students in the studio. Because I had never worked on a year-long project before, my usual process for a typical 10-/20-week design studio needed to adapt to the new demands, so each week was fruitful and cumulative, without losing the stamina required for such a long project.

The first quarter focused on collecting and organising information on the design area, where the method ranged from literature research to analysis through writing and redrawing. This allowed me to find my personal interest in the field, zooming into water contamination and the social and environmental consequences of it. Later on towards the P2, my desire to give a more architectural dimension to this topic led me to broaden my topic to the relationship between water and education, and the analysis of how design can be used to enhance this effect.

Looking back, my research submissions for P1 (the proposal), P2 (the research draft) and P3 (the final research paper) are vastly different, and in a way, I would have liked a smoother connection between them. My ideas evolved so much throughout the period, that most of the research I did in P1 was not included in my final paper, and a lot of the theoretical ideas I discussed in my draft submission were also cut down (Figure 1). However, I believe these changes allowed me to concentrate more on the core idea of water and education in my final product, and I hope that although some of the preliminary research was taken out, traces of these preliminary fascinations, understandings, and efforts are still visible in the paper. Through this process, I learned to be open to challenges and not be afraid to make big changes, even if it means questioning some of my own work. The feedback from my research mentor was always an encouragement, as it left me with enough ideas to consider, but also gave me confidence in the constantly changing directions I was taking my research.



**Figure 1:** Comparison of my research proposal at P1 (left, in black and white) with the changes as of P3 (right, in blue)

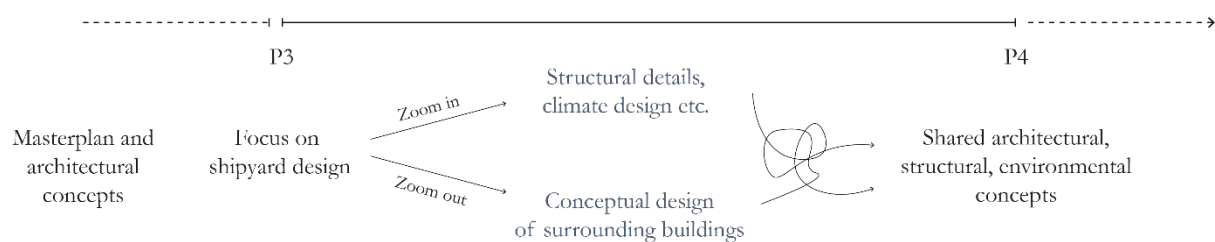
The development of my research (and later on, design) topic grew from my inherent interest in the topic of water and architecture, and I think this is what helped me propel my ideas forward quite rapidly. From the first weeks, I had an idea of what I wanted to focus on, and I could devote more time to finding the design connections and doing the actual research. Before the end of the first quarter, I knew what the function of my building was going to be, which allowed me to quickly draw up a programme and adjacency, as well as a preliminary masterplan.

The biggest challenge was trying to find a rational connection between my research and the function extracted from it, to the chosen site in Sliedrecht. While many of my peers' projects evolved from the economic or societal need of the site, mine developed from my research and personal interests and thus trying to create a realistic argument for why this water-education complex needed to be there instead of Rotterdam, for instance, was something I struggled with for many weeks. This approach to design stemmed from my previous education in the UK, where our projects were quite utopian and were rarely questioned on their practical consequences. Despite this, I enjoyed trying to find the missing link, which I ultimately formed through researching the economic vision of the town and the water-related goals set by the Netherlands. I appreciated the persistence of my tutors on this, not only because it helped better ground my project in the site context and give a realistic dimension to the project, but also because it helped me grow as a designer and understand the responsibilities of an architect in real-life projects.

In the design phase, I structured my process around the weekly tutoring sessions, where I would spend a few days afterwards taking in the feedback and making alterations, and the rest of the time producing drawings and models and collecting my ideas for the next discussion. Although I realise the 'production' of presentation material was not necessarily needed for these casual meetings, it helped me bring my thoughts together and find errors and improvements in my design that I would not have by simply drafting drawings or modelling digitally. Reflecting back on the feedback received through tutoring, I am truly grateful for the different directions my mentor pointed me to in terms of architectural and landscaping ideas, but also for reference projects and helping me balance the practical and conceptual aspects of my ideas. My ideas were sometimes very modest and other times too overbearing on the small town of Sliedrecht, and my tutor helped me bring these opposing ends together into a unified design that values the needs of the site while enhancing my own interest and research topic. As with any other design project, I sometimes struggled to establish which feedback I wanted to implement and which ones were less relevant or matched my intentions to a lesser extent, but knowing the length of the entire project allowed me to experiment with many different options without feeling the pressure to not 'waste' time testing ideas.

## 2. Next steps

Between P3 and P4, I have worked extensively on the detailed design of my building and reworked the masterplan so they address the programmatic goals and values defined at the beginning of the research phase (Figure 2).



**Figure 2:** Plan for the next steps until P4

The final part of the graduation will be a chance to refine the detailed atmosphere of my project, while strengthening the research-to-design connection from the first quarters. This will include designing the interior experience through elements such as furniture, lighting and further wall/floor finishes, and finding the ideal means to express these ideas. I would like to dedicate some time to experiment with the type of visual media that best captures the expression of the building, whether it be a render, collage, line drawings, or a combination of them. This also goes for model-making, and finding the right scale and material to represent each desired quality, such as the massing of the site or the interior tactility of a sectional model.

In this phase, it will also be important to structure my final presentation from an early stage and decide how exactly I will be telling the entire story from my research to final design in a short amount of time. All the conceptual ingredients will be there, and is a matter of organising it in a logical way, so that audiences who have no prior knowledge of my project will still be able to follow. I aim to start setting up my narrative as soon as possible based on the feedback from P4, so I can allocate my remaining time resourcefully.

### **3. Reflection questions**

#### **a. What is the relation between your graduation project topic, your master track (A, U, BT, LA, MBE), and your master programme (MSc AUBS)?**

My graduation topic is primarily an architecture project, focusing on how we can educate the public about the future sustainable management of water through the understanding of historical narratives. It questions how we can use design and user experience to communicate these ideas, and what the role of using a maritime heritage building is, as opposed to creating a new-build altogether. The primary focus is thus on the revitalisation of a heritage building and the structural and climatic considerations that come with it while showcasing an understanding of the site's history and societal relevance.

Because the project encompasses a large site, it also has some elements of urbanism and landscape architecture, for instance in the design of the intermediate spaces between the buildings. My research also had a slight incline towards these topics, and I have incorporated the results of the paper into my own design.

#### **b. How did your research influence your design/recommendations and how did the design/recommendations influence your research?**

The research played a key role in making some design decisions, such as when considering the entrance to the site and designing the approach. In my research, I learned the relevancy of the interstitial spaces in determining the holistic site experience and the importance of giving each small space a different identity. This is incorporated into my own design, where the landscaping acts as a connection between the individual buildings and the differences in paving and materials give interest to the vast site area.

My design process has also been simultaneously influenced by research, where the need for a more architectural dimension to the topic of water education led me to focus on two case studies. My initial sketches of the masterplan included the heritage building and some new structures steered me to find contrasting projects in these two realms which formed the basis of my paper later on.

#### **c. How do you assess the value of your way of working (your approach, your used methods, used methodology)?**

In all my projects, my approach and methods throughout the research/design process are something I have developed through my studies in architecture and are something I value very much. Through my Bachelor's degree and first year of Master's, I have come to understand what way of designing works for me, which has grown from the understanding of my own personality and work habits. At the same time, I also recognise the need for these methods to adapt to each studio project, and try to incorporate these differences and thereby expand my 'toolbox' of design methodologies. My design method of experimentation and testing through model-making is perhaps more time-consuming than others but is something I value for myself because it helps me think and better understand my own design.

#### **d. How do you assess the academic and societal value, scope and implication of your graduation project, including ethical aspects?**

My project started off with a strong academic aspect, such as the scientific research about water quality and its historical links to the maritime industry in the area. As the idea developed to the topic of 'water education', it gained a more social dimension, with the aim of the project being to make the environment and social implications of water contamination tangible to a public audience. In a world where protecting the environment is at the forefront of our humanitarian concerns, this graduation project has a high societal value, and is not unrealistic in terms of its sustainability visions and public outreach ambitions. It questions

the ethics of our anthropocentric mindset on the natural landscape, and makes it a more prominent part of our everyday lives, even in a small town such as Sliedrecht. It balances academic research with the needs of the human experience, using design to translate scientific knowledge into a language that is more commonly understood by the general public.

**e. How do you assess the value of the transferability of your project results?**

Because of this intersection between the academic and practical aspects, I think the results are transferable to a wide range of other projects. For instance, the theoretical research on the connection between water education and design also led me to do some reading on designing educational museums, which is a broader topic that can be applied in many other situations. At the same time, the design techniques developed through working with a heritage building, such as surveying and restoring the existing building, inserting an independent box construction, or reinforcing existing structures, are also things that can be translated to other design projects. This project also forced me to constantly zoom in and out of scale, from the overall masterplan to the construction details, so the skills developed as a heritage designer are valuable to any large or small scale project in the future.

**f. Develop 2 reflection questions yourself which relate to the content of your work**

**i. How does the project respond to future challenges, such as climate change, urbanization, or technological advancements?**

While being a direct response to the future challenges of climate change in terms of its function and programme, by utilising a heritage building and showcasing its historical layers, the project lowers its own environmental impacts. The stark contrast between the old building and the contemporary additions is a reflection of the environmental and technological challenges in the future, reminding visitors of their role in the education process. I strongly believe that the future of architecture is defined by our willingness to collaborate in an interdisciplinary way, similar to how researchers, educators and the public are given a platform to collaborate in this speculative design.

**ii. In what ways did collaboration shape the outcomes of your project?**

Although this project was done individually, there were many collaborative aspects that shaped my ideas. The research on the ecology of the project area in the first quarter was one of them, and our discussions were a key factor in my step towards researching water contamination. I was also lucky to have a few other students working on/around the same site, so we would often ask each other for information, go on site visits together, and discuss our ideas, which allowed me to speak about my design in a casual setting and hold confidence in my own work. I have been so engrossed in my own design since P2 that I had not taken the time to step back and consider our projects' mutual influences on each other, but at P3 and the most current reality check presentation, I recognised the traces of collaborative working in some projects and its value on forming meaningful projects.