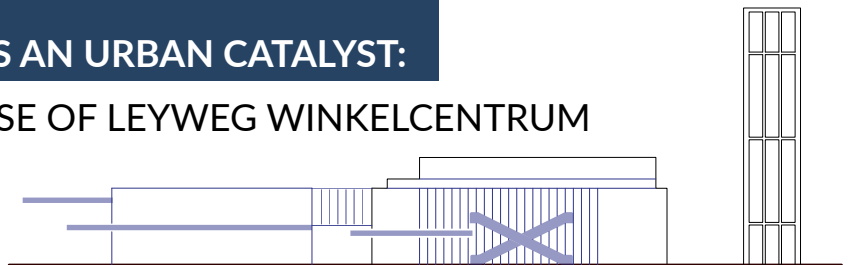


THE SHOPPING MALL AS AN URBAN CATALYST:

THE CASE OF LEYWEG WINKELCENTRUM



## REFLECTION

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## Prologue

The present thesis “The shopping mall as an urban catalyst” explores the idea of an urban structure where working, making, shopping, living, meeting, and learning are entangled. The aim of this exploration mainly lies in the creation of a “skill city”, where groups that have not yet been fully integrated can be the protagonists of a vibrant neighborhood, while the shopping mall from a place of buying is transformed into a place of production.

At the same time, this project is a continuous research on how an existing structure with its embedded values can become future-proof, ensuring that future generations will be able to both have a point of reference but also change it according to the shifting needs and demands. To conclude, the exploration of the new role that shopping malls could adopt in an ever-changing context as condensers of public life, its diverse aspects, and social groups, as hubs for social interaction and as cores of community life can be regarded as the motivation for the development of this project through the redesign of Leyweg Winkelcentrum.



Figure 1| Winkelcentrum Leyweg, Den Haag. Aerial view. (Google Earth, 2023)

## 1. Relation among graduation project, studio & master track

The main idea around which the graduation project revolves is the notion of adaptability –a core notion when it comes to dealing with heritage– researched on the urban scale since the Dutch post-war shopping malls constitute urban structures rather than single buildings. The Dutch post-war shopping mall, as a remnant of the 20th century, through my design proposal was attempted to be re-established as “the heart for the city”, a meeting point for the community, a creators’ hub that accelerates the process of integration of different social groups.

The approach of the studio focusing on the research by design and design by research offers the opportunity to experiment with different means and tools for the formation of the design proposal on different scales, each time taking into consideration different parameters and therefore, understanding the multiplicity of the architect’s role. That approach was attempted to be applied in the case of Leyweg Winkelcentrum, a post-war shopping mall of the 1950’s.

The most challenging part of this graduation project was the fact that the selected shopping mall was not vacant but decaying; a condition that resembles the real practice. This condition, however, made the project even more challenging since not only the overlapping historical layers and the heritage of the structure had to be taken into consideration but also the existing functions, the dynamics and connections with the adjacent urban area, as well as the financial feasibility.

The aim of the project was directed toward the reuse of Leyweg Winkelcentrum in the context of urban resilience; a direction that aligns not only with the Heritage & Architecture Studio but also with the overall Architecture Master Track. The ability of urban areas to adapt and grow over the stresses they may encounter has become more temporal than ever. The proposed program, developed in the framework of the studio, addresses social issues of the area with the aim of cultural, social, environmental, and economic sustainability in the long term but also the preservation of cultural values. More specifically, through the proposal the following Sustainable Development Goals (Labadi et al., 2021) are addressed: 4 (quality and education), 7 (affordable and clean energy), 8 (decent work and economic growth), 10 (reduced inequalities) and 11 (sustainable cities and communities).

To conclude through this graduation project the idea that heritage, if not dealt with as a hindrance, can be proven a valuable resource to make “cities and human settlements more inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable”; a key motto of the 2011 UNESCO Recommendation on the HUL and the UN Sustainable Development Goals, is attempted to be promoted.



## 2. Interaction between research & design

From the start of the academic year, it became evident that the graduation studio consists of two distinct parts that are entangled and continuously complement each other: research and design. Therefore, the method followed for the development of the graduation project was based on research by design for the first two quarters and subsequently, design by research. I found this approach rather interesting and challenging, since for me, research and design were two distinct aspects that could evolve at the same time.

As far as the research approach and process is concerned, it was divided into collective and individual research; focusing on redesign strategies applied to refurbished Dutch post-war shopping malls and on the shopping malls' spatial attributes related to urban adaptability respectively.

Regarding the group research, firstly, a literature review of existing redesign strategies and theories was conducted by groups of students so as to establish a solid theoretical basis. The second phase was the individual visit and group documentation of refurbished shopping malls in the Netherlands and the systematic research and presentation of these cases (research cases), so as to create a common basis of information that students can use for the purposes of their individual research. Model-making, as part of the process of grasping the essence of the mall, also contributed to a deeper understanding of the complexity of shopping malls and their networks as well as of their impact on adjacent urban areas. The principle of the essence model at this stage, was later used for the selected redesign case and even indicated the framework for the overall design.

After the group research on the research cases, my interest was mainly turned toward the interplay between continuity and change in an urban structure designed to change continuously -the shopping mall- that up to that point, I had not perceived as heritage. In this context, the individual research part focused at first on the notion of urban adaptability and its spatial aspects, consequently on the Dutch post-war shopping mall's common spatial attributes and the embedded in them values, and finally, the link between the two. The definition of the spatial elements that could ensure the continuity and future change of such a consistent urban structure could contribute towards reinstating it as "the heart of the city".

The individual research focused on Lijnbaan, as an iconic post-war shopping mall and Leyweg, focusing on the way the overlapping design strategies over the years affected the urban adaptability levels for each of the cases. The outcome of the comparison indicated design directions to be followed rather than specific design acts. The methodology proposed by this research could be the starting point for investigating the urban adaptability on other types of buildings of modern heritage that share common features.

The results from the research not only indicated the design case for my graduation project but also, provided the starting points for the design. The problematic areas detected during the research phase indicated the course of the design at first on an urban scale, and afterward on the building scale. In addition, the redesign strategies that proved to be successful in the research cases were reinterpreted in the context of the redesign case and incorporated into the proposal.

More specifically, the core values (Fig. 2 & 3) that derived from the research and were attempted to be addressed through the design (Fig. 5 & 6) so as to improve the urban adaptability were the following :

- The reinstatement of the Leyweg axis that has been interrupted
- The reestablishment of the connections with the adjust urban area, and
- The restoration of the urban green structure of Dudok's expansion plan.

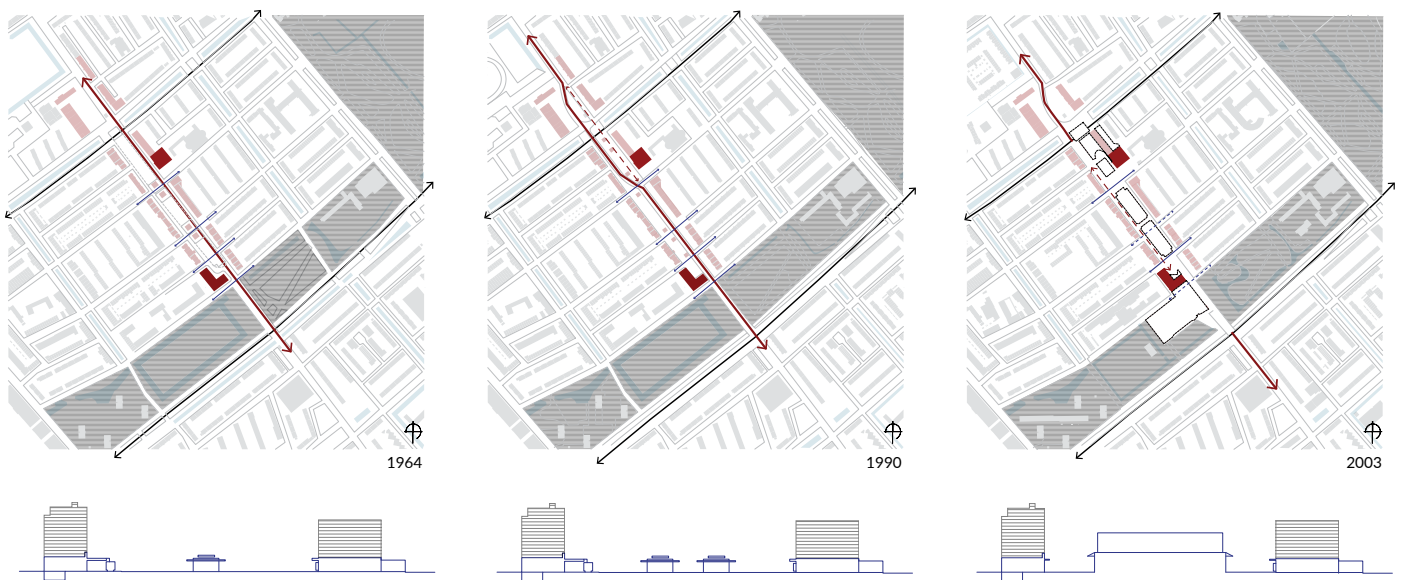


Figure 2| Winkelcentrum Leyweg, Den Haag. Historic evolution.

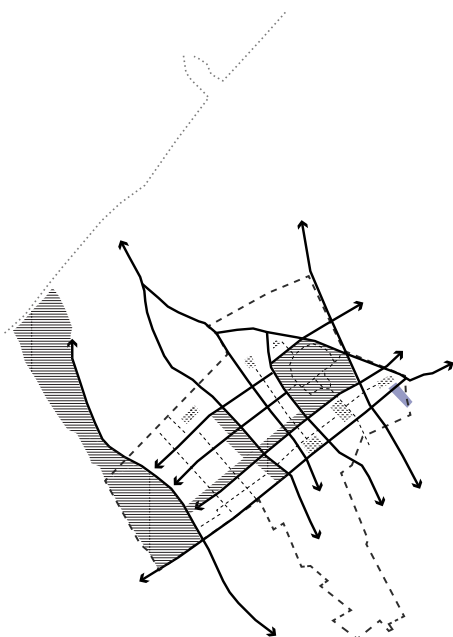


Figure 3| Main axes & urban green structure. Leyweg.

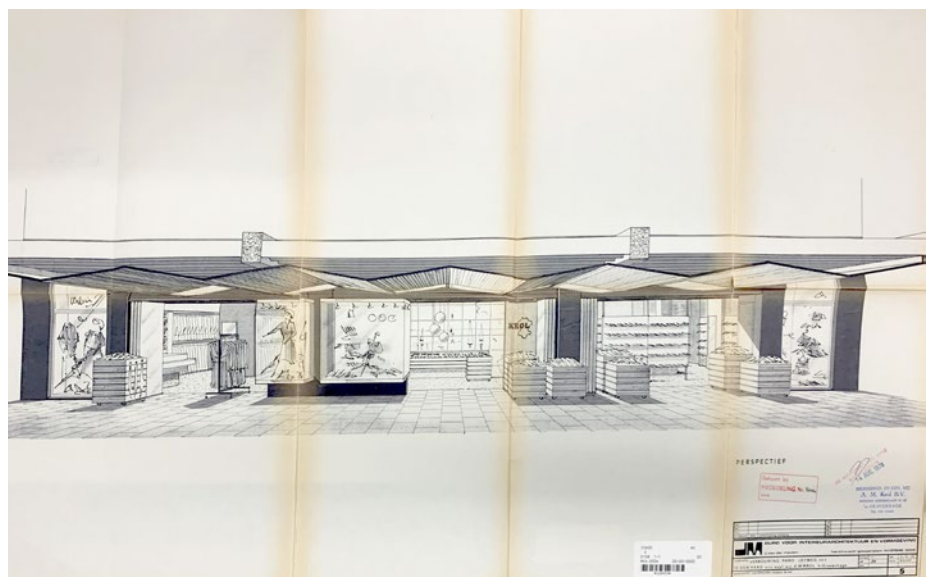


Figure 4| Perspective scheme of Leyweg Winkelcentrum's proposal. (Den Haag, Gemeentearchief).

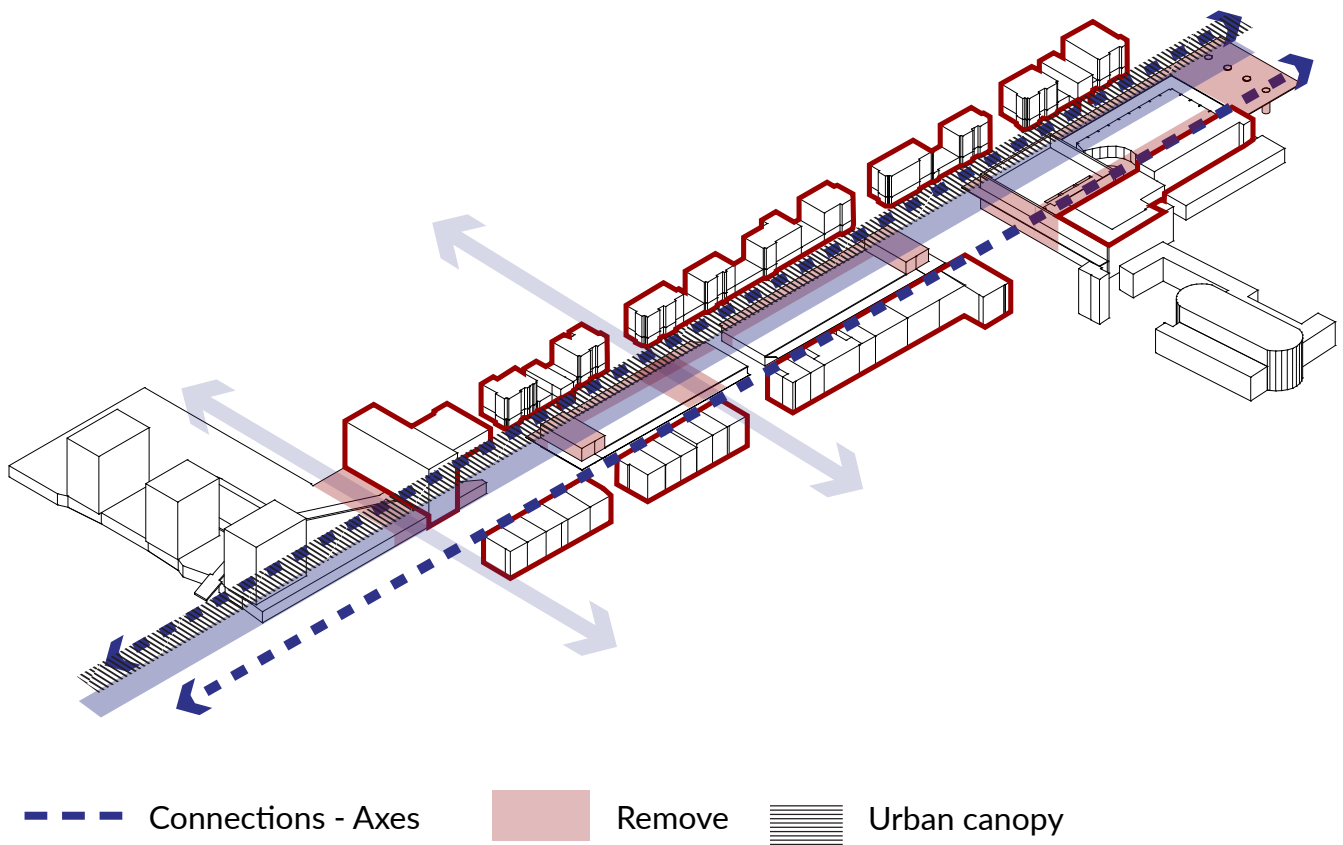


Figure 5| Design acts towards the restoration of the main core values.

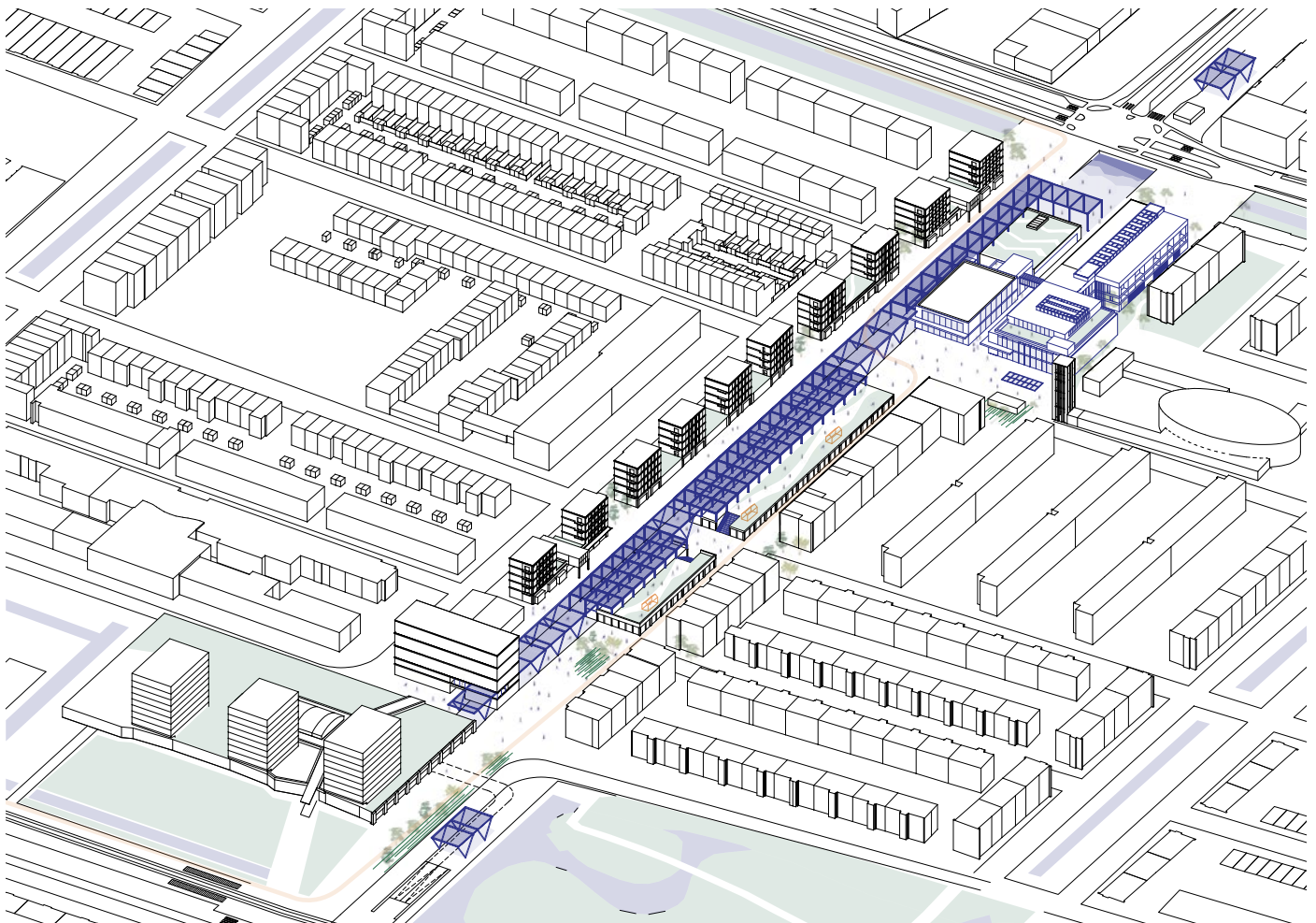


Figure 6| Overview of the proposal. The former shopping center is re-instated as a cohesive whole.

### 3. Reflection on methodology & process

As mentioned in the previous section, my main focus was centered around the notion of urban adaptability and continuity in the Dutch post-war shopping malls.

Lynch in his normative theory regarding the Good City Form defines four parameters that render an urban structure adaptable; namely, excess capacity, networks of communication and interference, reduction of interference between temporary and permanent structures and finally, the repetitive use of elements. The aforementioned criteria refer to the spatial adaptability, leaving out factors such as land ownership and temporal adaptability; factors that could also add an extra layer to the conducted research in the future.

From the comparative analysis of the two research cases-Lijnbaan and Leyweg Winkelcentrum-, it became clear that the impact of the interventions in Leyweg severely lowered its urban adaptability levels and therefore, it was selected as my redesign case, having as starting points the attributes that were most severely affected by the redesign strategies over the years (Fig. 7).

The design assignment was placed in the context of the Hague joining the 100 RCN (global Resilient Cities Network) and started from the results of the research, so as to improve the four spatial parameters.

At first, an urban proposal for the whole area of the Leyweg Winkelcentrum incorporating the “design principles” derived from the research was developed. Throughout the design, research complemented the process. The shopping center was attempted to be re-instated as a mixed-use complex where functions such as housing, workshops, spaces for craftsmanship and event spaces coexist with commercial spaces. The chosen program resulted from the social and demographic analysis of the region, which has high levels of segregation and low levels of education. Introducing workshops and craft centers that offer educational and professional opportunities in the region can motivate young people to find a professional orientation and achieve a higher degree of integration.

Spatially, the main axis and the connections of the shopping center with the adjacent urban area are re-instated, while flexible structures are added so as to accommodate various functions (Fig. 8 & 9). The whole complex is organized as a sequence of public spaces, unified through an urban canopy -a reinterpretation of the complex's original canopies- while the two entrances of the complex constitute the anchor points that initiate the movement in between. In addition to the spatial flexibility, ways of time and user flexibility were also explored so as to ensure the role of the new mixed-use complex as an active urban core not only for the locals but for the broader area.



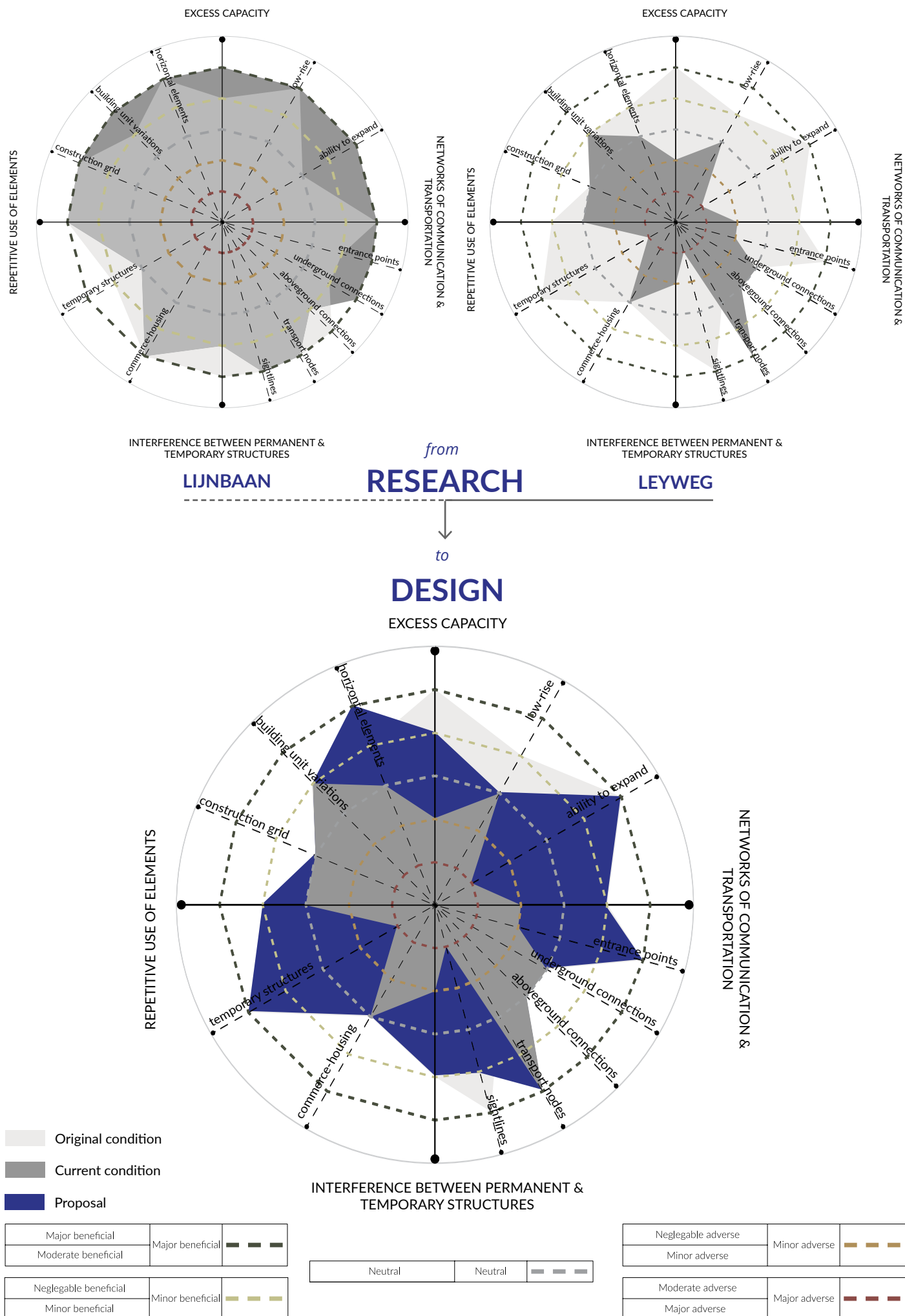


Figure 7 | From research results & findings to the proposal and its assessment in terms of urban adaptability levels.

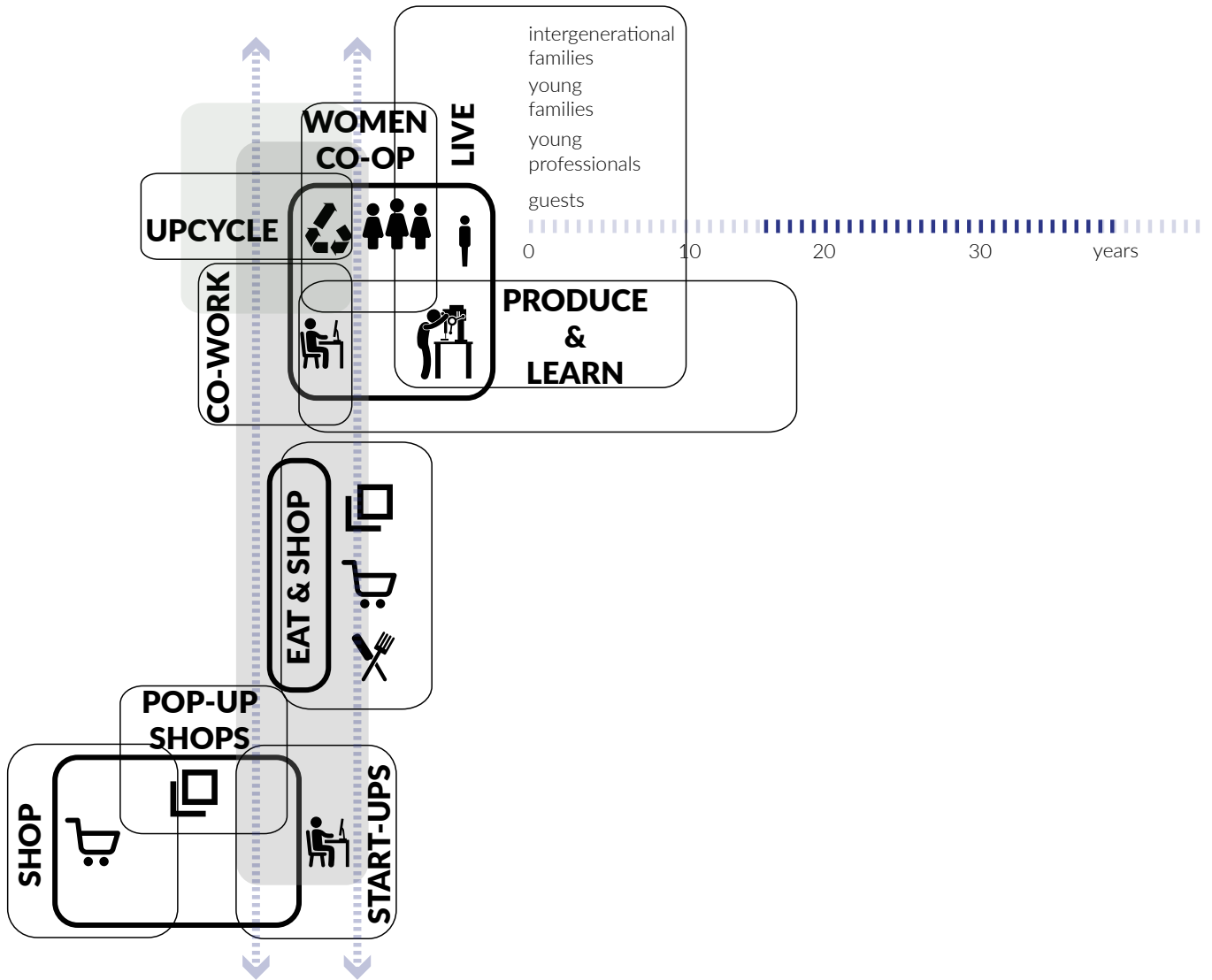


Figure 8| The programmatic configuration of the whole complex.

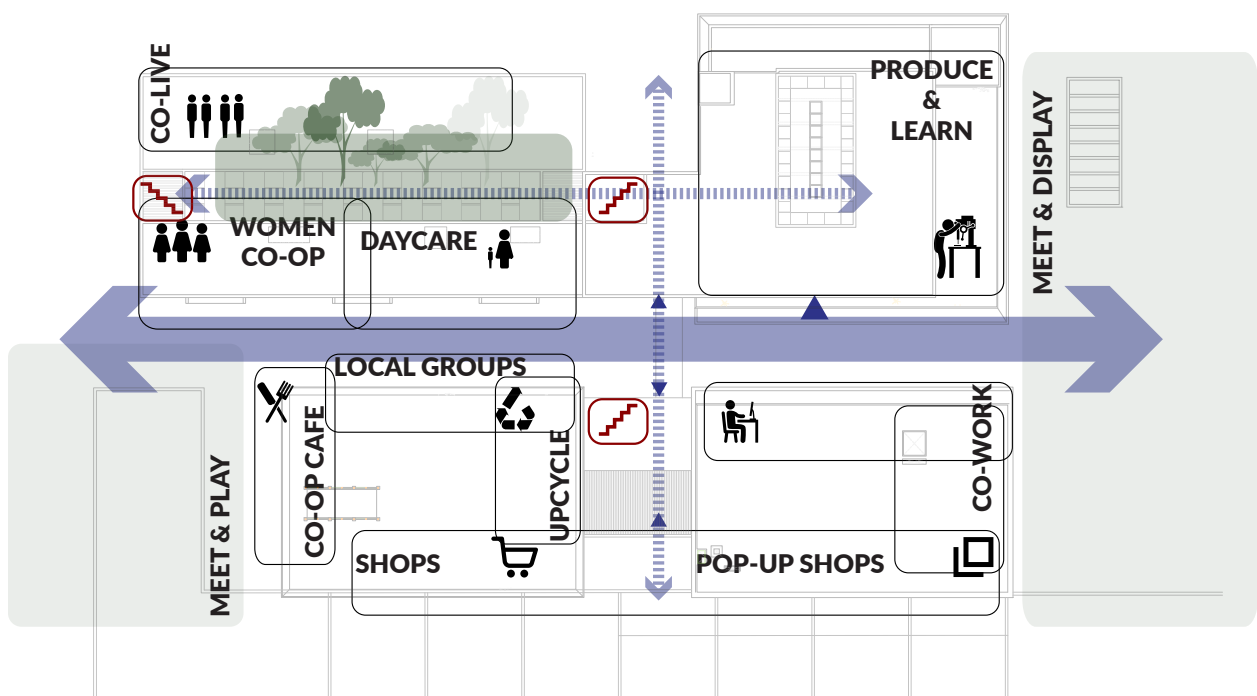


Figure 9| The programmatic configuration of the focus point of the proposal.



## 4. Academic & societal value, scope and implication of the project

Regarding the societal relevance of the present graduation project, a shift in the Dutch retail network toward the redesign of existing retail floor space can be noticed since 2008 (IVBN, 2016). This shift in combination with the demand for new multi-purpose urban centers and the changes in consumerism habits and patterns have rendered the Dutch shopping center an urban asset for redevelopment.

At the same time, the gradual acknowledgment of post-war architecture and its embedded values is a recurring reality that is expected to grow further in academic and professional circles. More specifically, shopping and its spatial manifestation during the post-war era in the Netherlands is a field that has started to be explored as proven by the Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed's publication (2005) and offers multiple directions and opportunities for research and reinterpretation.

Following this gradual shift of interest in both societal and academic terms, my graduation project focuses on the exploration of possible ways of adaptation of the Dutch post-war shopping mall in order to reinstate it as the "heart" of the city both for the present and the future, while preserving and accentuating the values embedded in the existing structure.

"The shopping mall as an urban catalyst" aims to create a mixed-use complex that repositions the role of craftsmanship and workshops in the center of the urban areas while offering affordable housing and community spaces for social groups that have not yet been fully integrated. In the urban proposal, the majority of the buildings are preserved and certain characteristics of the former spatial structure of the post-war shopping mall are brought back so as to ensure continuity in the built environment, providing an example of how decaying shopping malls can be reactivated, integrating sustainable practices that will allow them to serve successfully future generations.

## 5. Transferability of results & possibility of further application

As is evident, the redesign of Leyweg Winkelcentrum was based on the research by design approach by testing the design decisions and the expected impact on the urban adaptability levels through the proposed spiderwebs.

The methodology followed for the exploration of the notion "urban adaptability" could possibly be applied, also, in other types of buildings of modern heritage that share common features, however, there are certain limitations that should be considered:

- Firstly, the definition of adaptability focuses more on the spatial aspect, even though it can also be examined in terms of time boundaries and land ownership.

- In addition, adaptability in this framework is dealt with on the urban scale, rather than the building one.

- Finally, even though the research is based on a more general approach regarding the Dutch post-war shopping malls, it still is case-specific since the values embedded in each case may vary. Therefore, the results cannot and should not be generalized.

## 6. The design challenges & dilemmas

The identification of Leyweg's spatial attributes related to adaptability through the research and their subsequent re-interpretation so as to serve the present and future needs was one of the main challenges of the project.

The first dilemma is related to the implementation of the urban “canopy” as a unifying element, both spatially and temporally, on the urban scale (Fig. 10). There were certain challenges to be dealt with regarding this element; the connection with the existing structures, the scale and the materiality. Throughout the design process, the urban canopy was decided to also serve as an energy spine for the complex - solar panels for energy and rainwater harvesting-, but also as a structure to be easily modified in possible densification scenarios. The canopy was designed as a simple, easy-demountable structure that can accommodate more uses in the future by following the same pattern; providing an open structure for future change, while preserving the urban connections with the adjacent area. The alternation between two types of columns and the pavement materials indicates the change between the main pedestrian flow and the squares. The V-shaped columns used for the squares aims at preventing the loss of the connection with the surrounding area. Overall, even though the urban “canopy” can be considered as a challenge due to its scale, it will function as an activator of the public spaces and the rooftops of the complex as well as a unifying element that ensures adaptability while preserving the core values of the original shopping mall.

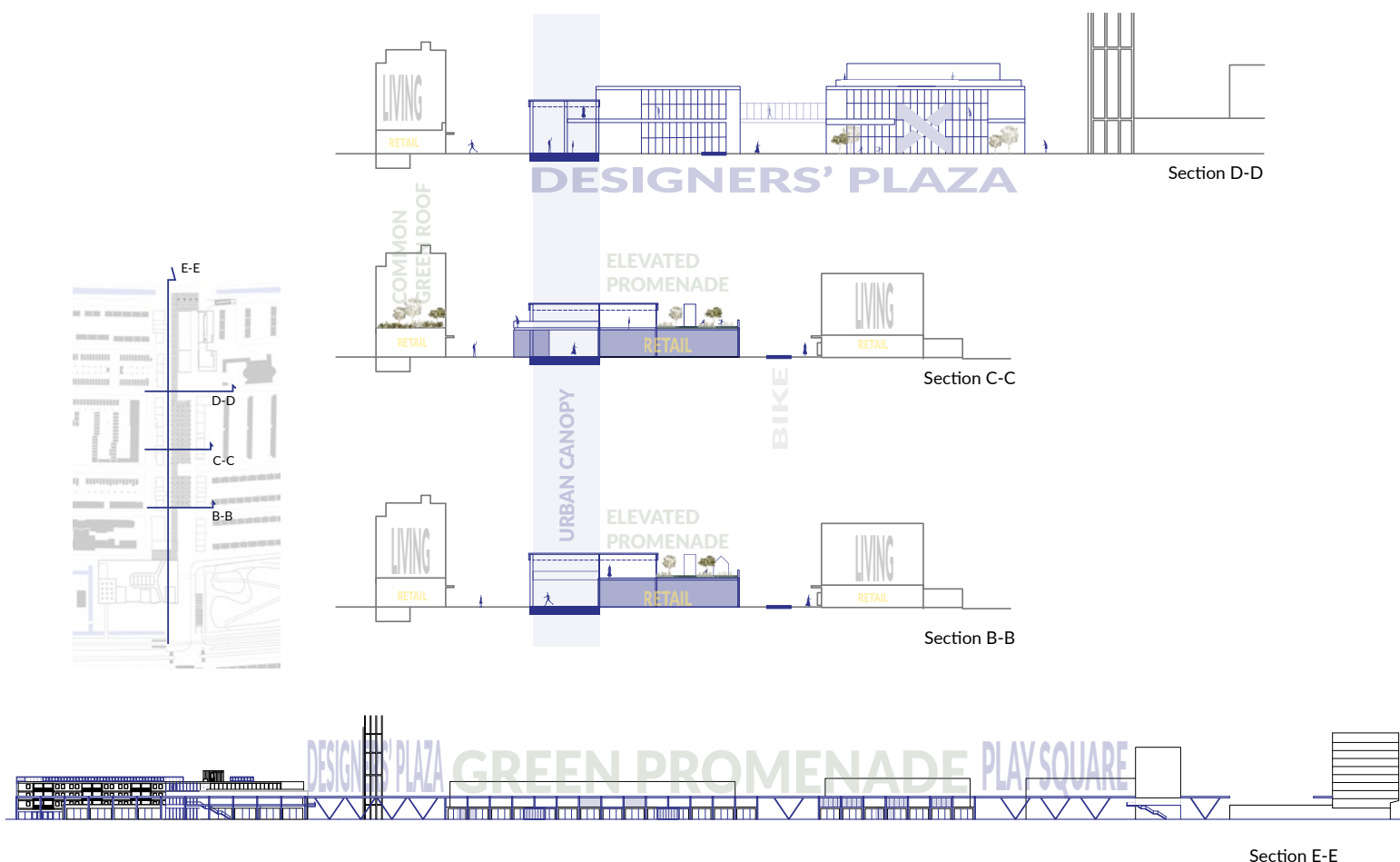


Figure 10| Urban sections for the Leyweg Winkelcentrum with the proposed urban canopy.

The second dilemma is related to the redesign of the former V&D building; the creation of an atrium could be considered as a devaluation of the existing building -in the sense of reduction of the floor area-. However, the fact that the atrium ensures that the natural lighting reaches the basement and provides the necessary conditions for it to be used as workshop area compensated for the reduction of the gross floor area.

Finally, the reinstatement of the former V&D original facades (Fig. 11) constituted the third dilemma regarding the design process. The question of the values embedded in the facade that was covered up and altered throughout the successive interventions rose up early in the design. Through the research, the fact that V&D functioned as a reference point with the emblematic stairs came up and resulted in the main's facade restoration and the reinterpretation of the west one (Fig. 12).



Figure 11| Winkelcentrum Leyweg, Den Haag. 1967. (Foto Haags Gemeentearchief)

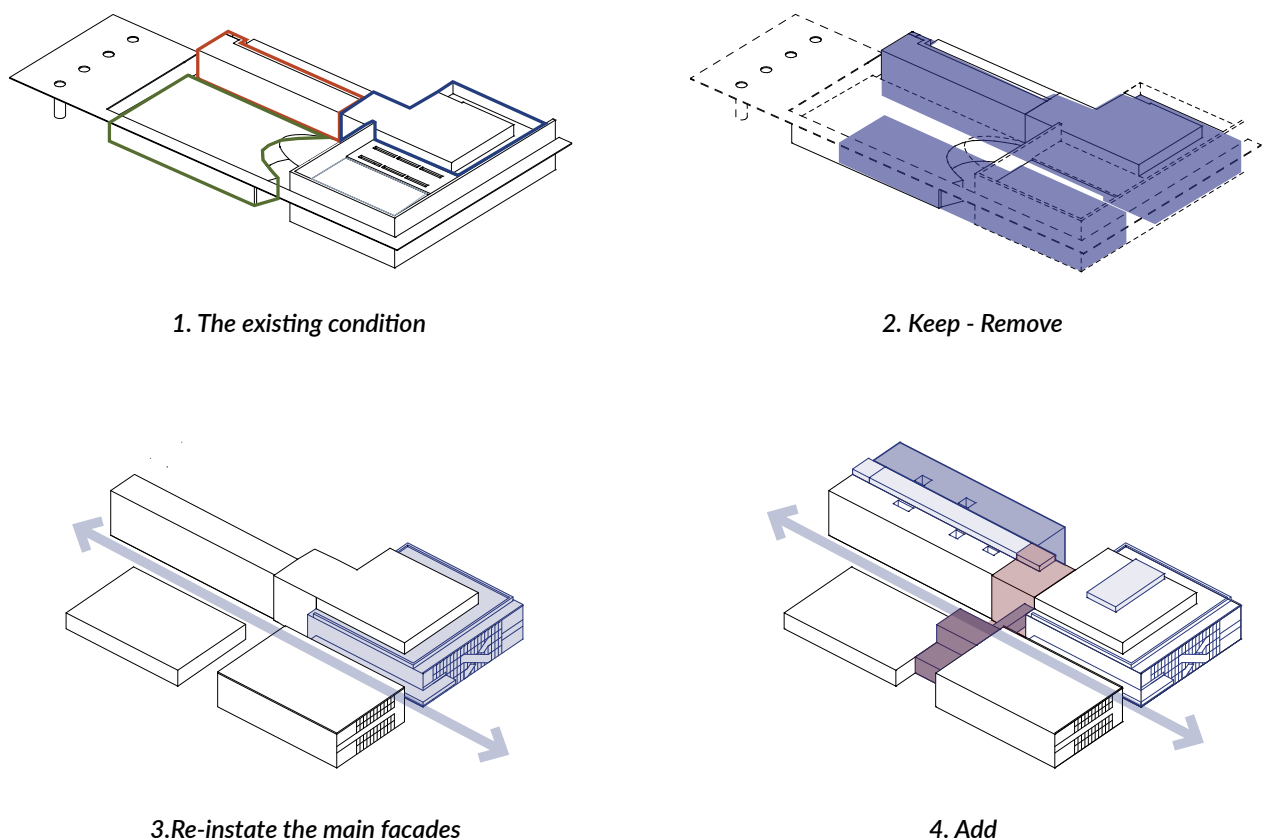


Figure 12| Design acts regarding the former V&D building.

## Conclusion

To conclude, the aim of the present graduation project was to explore the notion of urban adaptability by incorporating the concept of continuity in it, through the case of Leyweg Winkelcentrum. The concurrent development of the research on the urban scale and the re-design up to the level of the construction details throughout my graduation project gave me the opportunity to think and take into consideration different scales and aspects of the project at the same time, which was proved to be a challenge for the whole year.

In the context of the tense interrelationship between continuity and change in the contemporary context, adaptability could be redefined as the ability of a spatial system to generate, test, and facilitate new environmental and behavioral possibilities in regard to future change (Lynch et al, 1990), without the loss of continuity and basic structure. Overall, this redefinition can be seen as a step towards the reconciliation of continuity and change so as to ensure resilient future-proof management of heritage resources in general.



Figure 13| The proposal.

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