

## Reflection

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This text is written to reflect on the process of the research and design within the heritage studio 'the modern mall'. Firstly, the topic of the mall and the chosen approach is discussed. Second, the role of the research in relation to the design is discussed. Third, there are some recommendations for different parties in terms of different aspects. Lastly, my perspective on this topic and learning points are mentioned.

### The future of the shopping mall

Within the heritage studio, the future of the mall is questioned. Due to the change in consumer behaviour, online shopping has become increasingly popular, leading to vacancies within many malls. My starting point for the research was to look at the mall in a bigger picture, the neighbourhood. A. Bos (1946) addressed the function of a mall within the neighbourhood. His thoughts, summarised as the 'neighbourhood thoughts', are about the societal responsibility and coherence of a community which are coming together in the centre of a neighbourhood, in many cases the mall. Although the social aspect of the mall was important for Bos (1946), it isn't visible in the design of a lot of malls. Rather consumerism played a role in the design, by covering the mall and moving the storefronts from the outside to the inside. In the future, this new social function could be addressed in the design.

The future of the mall can still be this centre point of a neighbourhood, even though the main function is no longer shopping. By looking at other functions that bring people together (e.g. sport accommodations, restaurants, community hubs) the mall can be reshaped.

### Research and design

The research answered the question of how contemporary visitors assess the mall on its functional, identifiable, architectural and social aspects. Among other things, the visitors considered functional aspects, for example, 'grocery stores' and 'the fact that the mall is nearby', important at the mall. Within my research, I introduced the theory of Gehl (2011). He relates the occurrence of activities to the quality of a public space. If the quality of an environment is low, only necessary activities will take place. When the quality of an environment is high, also optional and social activities will occur. As an outcome of the research, necessary activities are mostly conducted at the mall.

What has not been answered by the research was how the design of the case study malls influenced the opinion of the visitors. For example, which spatial elements made them say that the mall is a 'nice place to walk around', or 'it has no atmosphere'? It could be investigated how the architecture of the mall is related to the visitors' opinion. The number and variety of optional activities at the mall could be mapped at malls with different levels of environmental quality. By using Gehl's overview of criteria of the quality of the environment these malls can be chosen.

The research serves as a starting point for the design. It gives cause to change the contemporary function of a shopping mall. The way people assess the mall gives a starting point to know how visitors assess the mall and how the mall is used.

The mall of Schalkwijk served as a case to test how the public space of a shopping mall could be transformed to shape conditions to include optional and social activities. Those conditions were formed by literature and testing from designing. A few examples of the improvement of the quality of the environment are the introduction of more green to the area, the creation of a mixed-use place and opportunities to enjoy positive climate aspects.

At the same time, the design explores how different functions - retail, residential, office and leisure - can coexist and even reinforce each other.

Still open for further research by design is the flexibility of spaces and buildings. A building is more likely to be re-used when it is easy to convert or flexible. In some aspects, I started to think about the possibilities in the future for my design but it could be elaborated further on. Another thing that could be explored further is how the typology of the Schalkwijk shopping centre could change if the shopping function disappears completely in the future.

## **Recommendations**

For the future of the shopping mall as a typology, I recommend looking at the strengths of the typology of the mall. For example, the strengths of a covered passage, something which occurs at a lot of malls, can still be of value for other functions and not necessarily for shopping.

The heritage aspect of the mall was sometimes hard to deal with. Although I saw the heritage aspect in the original concept of the mall, as a social place for society, it was sometimes hard to relate to the buildings itself. I think that is partly related to the fact that the social aspect of the function is (and was) sometimes not present at the mall. I do think that all buildings should be critically reviewed in terms of material value and that is something I would advise others and I could have done even more with more time. Since buildings are already present, you don't have to build anymore. Although the lifespan of constructions and buildings is something to look into, building parts need to be replaced in some cases. At the same time, this could be an opportunity to look at new materials which benefit the qualities of the present building and environment. In terms of resources and flexibility, materials could be introduced that can be in the lifecycle of the earth forever. Although this is something which should be done for all kinds of buildings.

The future of the mall of Schalkwijk is also something which can showcase a way of dealing with a building complex for other projects. The V&D is for example a building which is present at a lot of malls. This building has certain similar characteristics. By showing the opportunities of the building, it can be an example to others.

I would advise municipalities that are facing more and more vacant malls, to look into the building qualities of the mall and how new social functions can be integrated. Another really important factor is that buildings and cities need to be designed for the future. A future in which we are facing a lot of problems regarding climate change. The transformation of buildings which is necessary anyway, is a great opportunity to also incorporate natural design elements (green roofs, greening the area, providing more shade, more waterways and storage).

## **Personal perspective**

I learned a lot about heritage last year. The topic was new for me and it was interesting to look into this modern type of heritage. From an approach where I demolished almost everything at P2, my approach changed to one in which I saved a lot more of the existing situation. This change in approach was made by looking at the present (material) values of the typology of the mall. Something specific from the research that I was already a little aware of, but which became more apparent, was the difference between the architect's perspective and the user's perspective. I didn't find the outcome of my research interesting at the beginning because the answers seemed so general and 'normal', but the research still showed the visitors' perspective of the mall. There were also way more results and conclusions in the visitors' answers and insights than I originally thought. As an architect, you are shaping the users' context, but not necessarily the users would recognize and use it the intended way.