Revitalization of Nieuwstad and
a Transformation of the Baudartius College

Reflection paper

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Heritage & Architecture

Introduction

In September 2017, the graduation studio "Zutphen Sustainable City" started. This is an Architecture and Heritage graduation studio at the TU Delft, where fields of cultural history, technology and architectural design are brought together. The first part of the project took place in groups of students and the second part included individual research and design.

In this reflection paper, I will reflect on my chosen research method; how and why my approach did or did not work, and to what extent. Firstly, the theme of the graduation lab and the by me chosen case study will be explained and the relationship will be defined. Secondly, the relationship between the project and the wider social context will be explained. After this, the method of the studio and my own personal research method will be explained. The relationship of these two approaches and the relationship between research and design will be defined. At the end of this reflection, an conclusion is given, if this approach did or did not work, and to what extent.

Reviving Nieuwstad

The graduation studio "Zutphen Sustainable City" is about reviving the city in a sustainable way. Zutphen is a city in the east of the Netherlands, with a pretty historic city centre, where a lot of heritage is remained. However, some problems can be found at several aspects; demographically and architecturally.

High percentage eldery   No attraction young people   Upcomming vacancy   Focus on old city centre
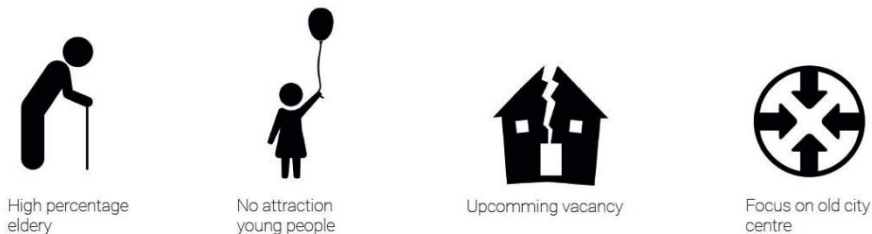
Firstly, the proportion of the population is out of balance; the amount of elderly is above the average of the Netherlands and the amount of young people is strongly below this average. The result is an one-sided programme, focused on a small range of people; the diversity is missing. A related problem can be found here; the city isn't attractive for young visitors and new inhabitants. Another problem is the high amount of vacancy in Zutphen, and especially in Nieuwstad. The municipality is looking for a new programme to fill in the vacancy. Furthermore, the touristic city centre is limited to only the old city centre. However, Nieuwstad, a centrally located neighbourhood has potential to become an attractive area as well.

In this projects the masterplan will focus on Nieuwstad. I have chosen to make a more detailed design for the Baudartius building, in the north of Nieuwstad. The Baudartius college is and post-war building which houses a high school at the moment. The school doesn't meet the needs of today anymore and is described as "in a bad condition" by the municipality. The building is labelled as "high priority" for the redevelopment of the neighbourhood. It's likely that the school will move to another location, leaving the building vacant.

I have chosen for the Baudartius building as subject, because of the potential of the building and its location. The school is located, close to the station and at the entrance of the city for visitors/ inhabitants by car. The surrounding is spacious and green, with a large surface of water which used to be the defence area. The building itself has some hidden values. The Baudartius building would be a great object to use as a kickstart for redeveloping the area. In this way, I've chosen an object with a lot of potential, which could contribute in an optimal way to the goal of this studio: revitalizing Nieuwstad.

In conclusion, my aim is to revitalize Zutphen and to transform the Baudartius building in order to attract visitors and new inhabitants and at the same time strengthen the cultural values. Which results into the next research question:

- Which reprogramming and spatial interventions could revitalize Nieuwstad and at the same time strengthen the cultural values of the area, and how could a transformation of the Baudartius building contribute to this goal?

The relevance of the subject

Both post-war architecture transformation projects and reviving cities are important tasks in architecture in the 21th century. Post-war architecture is often low valued in the Netherlands and doesn't meet the desired requirements of today and tomorrow. At the same time represents post-war architecture a period in the architectural history. Adapting this type of architecture has potential and it will help protecting this type of architecture for demolishment.

On top of that, young people are often moving to bigger cities in the Netherlands. The result is a decrease of population in smaller cities and especially de-balancing of the different age-groups. Revitalizing is a task for many smaller cities or areas.

In this way, this projects has a high relevance, since it can be seen as a case-study for many other cities, areas and buildings. The social value is high; redeveloping the Baudartius building and its surrounding will be beneficial for the entire neighbourhood and even city.

Research by design

The project started with two group analysis; the Urban analysis and the Baudartius building analysis. In order to research, different methods and tools are applied in order to inventory and analyse the building. Site visits and archive meetings were very important for retrieving information. During these site visits measure tools, camera's and sketches are used to retrieve and manage the data. Drawings of the architects, retrieved from the archive in Zutphen, are used for making 3d models and CAD plans. Chrono Mapping and literature research have been applied in order to obtain insight in the history of the building. This research was the base of information for the individual designing task. Also according the approach of the heritage and architecture studio, it's essential to research and understand the history of the location, in order to design the future.

My research and design method is based on a practice-based research methodology; practice and reflection are the key words (Lucas, 2016). The process starts with working out boundary conditions on a city, neighbourhood and building scale. A list of cultural values is an important part of these boundary conditions and should be defined. To come to this list of qualities a matrix in which the well-known Steward Brand and Alois Riegl definitions of properties of the built environment and values can be used. This matrix, explained in the book Designing from heritage by M. Kuipers en W. de Jonge, enables you to link values to building properties in the matrix (Kuipers & De Jonge, 2017). The research which has been done in groups in the first weeks, was an useful base for defining those values of the building. I integrated this matrix tool, which is handed by the studio heritage and architecture, in my research approach.

The right function need to be found by zooming in and out: what does the city or neighbourhood need? And which function would be suitable to implement in the building? By choosing the right function, reflection is necessary; after every option it should be questioned if the choice is right for all the scales; urban - neighbourhood – building. At the beginning of the project I was focused on the function Urban farm, since this matched with the location. But when I zoomed in into the building scale, I realized that this type of function was in conflict with the properties of the building. After reflecting many type of functions, I came to the conclusion that a language institute would be an appropriate function for all the scales.

After finding the right function, a list of requirements can be made. How much space does the function require and to what extent does the building needs to adopt? The interventions should be in line with the concept. During developing concepts, the boundary conditions function as guidelines. Concepts needs to be developed at different scales: a function organization concept, an spatial architectural concept and a master plan concept. By making models, different options can be compared. The next step is reflecting; monitor the boundary conditions at different scales and summarize the pro's and con's. In order to improve the concepts combinations, additions and totally new models can be made. After defining the concepts, more detailed drawings need to be made. New critical aspects will show up, and reflection is important again.

The research on different levels and scales is important in my approach. This is a recognisable aspect of the general approach which is taught at the heritage & architecture studios. National, urban, neighbourhood, surrounding, the site, de building and details, are important scales. Architectural design, cultural values and technology are important fields within the research.

Conclusion

The practise based research gave me insight in different design solutions. This made my choices in my design process more tangible and legitimate. However sometimes, I found it difficult to make a decision between different design solutions. I realize the importance of monitoring the different variables on a bigger scale. By zooming in too much on one aspect, the other aspects can be forgotten; a tunnel vision, which leads to an dead end can be the result.

Reflecting on my design process I had a dilemma between the cultural values of the existing building and the concept of the new extension, for example. Several cultural values were strengthened by emptying the courtyard and adding a transparent "ring" in the existing "ring". A snake kind of structure was the result. An new entrance was created, introducing the new function of the building. However, the main entrance hall had a high value, by the decorated stairs and stained glass window. This entrance wouldn't be the main entrance for the visitors anymore, which decreased the focus on those objects. I continued with this design, but when I reflected, I realized the contractionary impact of this design solution.
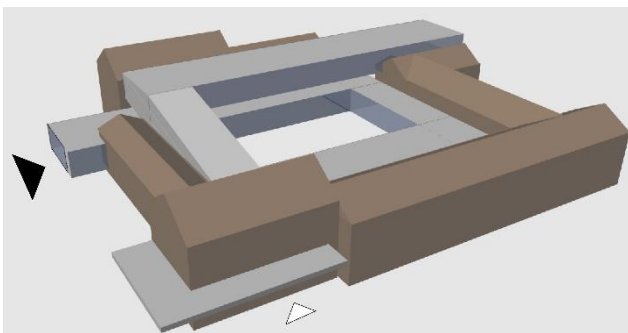
It is important to reflect after every step and monitor all the aspects. By continuing too long with the design without reflection, the dilemmas, or problems, can get stuck in the design.

Research and design are closely connected in the practice-based research; designing is a way to research. The reflection of the design results into new information.

Sources

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