Reflection Lynn van Calmthout

Now that my project is finished, it is useful to look back and reflect on the process behind my graduation research.

My products have not been clear from the beginning. Only recently have I come to an agreement and an understandig on what they should be in order for my project to make sense. Part of the products needed to be created in a very late stage. Because I postponed the decision making process about the intended products, some parts of my research and design have taken longer than originally planned. It would have been more productive and my research could have been more focused, had I clarified my end products earlier on.
Looking back now, I do believe the extra time has benefited my project in terms of coherence. I am more aware of the role the different products can play, and all the products truly fit together.

Social context
As for the social context, I have discovered throughout the past year how embedded my topic (the participatiesamenleving) is within the current discussions about politics, design and planning. The connection between the spatial and the organizational side of the concept has been made before, but neither as extensively or as designerly as I have done and will do. As such, I believe I have contributed not only to many discussions at symposiums I visited, but also introduced an explicit way of thinking about the participatiesamenleving policies: stop thinking it will go away, start discovering how we can deal with it to improve our lives in general and our built environment specifically.

Relation to the graduation lab and its methods
Complex Cities is a broad urbanism lab, in which almost anything is allowed. However, due to my extensive research into the area of Amsterdam Noord, I do feel I have achieved a certain level op complexity in my project which befits the lab title. I have worked throughout different scales, on different layers and within different contexts. The focus on planning which comes from the Complex cities lab has suited me well, allowing me to think abstractly and execute thorough literature research. However, due to the eternal need for more context, sharper definitions and stronger theories, the lab has not been able to protect me from the aforementioned tendencies. I should have been more aware of that pitfall, since it was quite predictable.

Relationship between research and design
The approach I chose was a rather complicated one. Because I started from an abstract notion (the participatiesamenleving) and headed towards spatial answers, I have spent many an hour figuring out the relation between the abstract and the concrete. As of right now, I do think I have an answer to address that issue, which will have to be sharpened over the upcoming weeks still. In that sense, knowing how I have struggled to get to a design before, it would have been better to choose a more design oriented methodology than I have. Research-by-design and mental mapping would be examples of methods which would have granted a designerly input from the very start of my project.

Recommendations for Further Research and Implementation
The research project would benefit from more systematic and broader feedback from local policy makers. For example, through presenting the proposal to the district council of Amsterdam Noord and getting some feedback, the set of policies could become more specific, realistic and useful to real world solutions. Implementation of the project needs to incorporate such feedback.

It should be kept in mind that the examplary designs shown before are fictional and based on possible outcomes. They are not based on the current inhabitants around the design location, but rather on the activities which could benefit the most people in a randomized environment.

For the specific case of Purmerplein, a design suggestion made by the people and/or through citizen participation would be very interesting, seen as the observations made about the problematic state of the square are very real indeed.

A more extensive research into the structure of succesful citizen initiatives could yield more information as well as detailed pointers to support upcoming new initiators. The project should be sensitive to this, for it could lead to small adjustments in the presented framework.Thus,policy makers could get a clearer, more trustworthy image of the benefits of such a framework.

This research has not been conclusive about whether or not poorer neighbourhoods benefit as positively from private investment as wealthy areas do. This needs to be researched further.