Reflection Pien Adank – P4 – 12-12-2024

Starting this year with my research, I can gladly say my approach worked, at least to some extent. Although research can almost always be more extensive, it gave me a nice foundation to base my further design on. Improvements in my research and its approach mainly focus on two things. First of all, I think the literature research that I did in MSc3 gives me a broad basis. This is good in essence but also gave a range of possible design solutions and decisions to be made. In the field of architecture, this is a good thing, I would argue, as the creativity and personal touch of the architecture make for more interesting designs. They make it personal. Especially with a subject like mine, when human and human experience play a central role, it is important to keep the design human-centred. Secondly, the ethnographic part of my research could be done with richer detail. The reason this was not done was simple: time. As most ethnographic research methods are time-consuming, there was not enough time during my graduation year as this was not my main research method. This was also partly due to matters outside my hands, as the first time I was able to visit an AZC was at the start of MSc 4, although I had been actively trying since the beginning of March. Bringing back a more personal touch within my literature research has been made possible through the feedback of my research mentor, Nico Tillie. His suggestions on the order of text and implementation of pictures throughout helped me to strengthen my research and give more of a human touch.

When the time came to 'switch' from research to design, I struggled a bit. The summer holiday gave me a much-needed break and some time to reflect on my project. The main thing I changed after the break was the configuration of my dwellings and the number of stories, although this also gave me some challenges. The single-storey houses I had previously created suddenly seemed too much in combination with my ecological ambitions. This gave me a new starting point, and I started to design enthusiastically. However, I slowly drowned in the options and my various ideas. My concept, straightforward at the start, slowly became a bit blurry. I was trying to combine different ideas, and the results were not always logical. I think the phrase 'kill your darlings' was not my strongest quality in this project. Therefore, prioritising qualities and guiding my project became very hard for me to do. Both my design mentors often helped me get back to the root, to help me see the essence of my project, and to suggest shifting my focus. This helped me move forward, as I was a bit stuck. This became particularly clear at my P3. I wanted to tell everything about my project but did not allow myself to have time to explain my concept clearly. The result was a messy story, which said a lot but didn't highlight my priorities. The combination of ideas was, for example, still clearly visible in my construction setup. I didn't make a choice and tried to combine everything, leading to blurry architecture. This was a real eye-opener for me and let me take the time to get my story straight. I hope you will be able to see the result in a week's time.

Apart from the content, I learned a lot about myself and myself as a designer during this project. I will try to keep it short by summarising the three most important below;

- My wish to consider everything has led me to be indecisive, something I would have previously never call myself. This was unhelpful for my project but also understandable as the subject I chose for this project means a great deal to me and deals with people and emotions. The AZC visits made a huge impact on me. I wish to make the people I met proud.
- I love to think either about concepts or go into full detail. It is wonderful that I can lose myself completely and give it my all, but more regular switching between the two would benefit a future project. Creating more hierarchy in my planning and therefore design is something to work on.

- I learned to ask for help. Previously, I would not ask my mentor, 'What do you mean by that?' or 'How do you think this could be beneficial to my project?' or 'In which form do you think this could be shown/come back in my project?'. I believe this led me to understand my feedback better and create more practical ways of starting an adaptation in approach or result.

Upon, hopefully, approaching the P5 the coming months, I would like to focus on the experience of space. Most of my time will go to making sure all details of my drawings are perfect together with making models. To be able to let my audience understand and feel how my design looks, I think a combination of 3D render drawings and models will be very fitting.

Finally, when looking at the overall reflection of my project and the coming period, my answer to the proposed questions and my own content questions would be as follows:

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

    I think the answer to this remains the same as in the graduation plan I handed in at the end of MSc 3. Thinking of inspiring architectural solutions for societal and environmental issues within the Architectural Engineering programme was the main goal for my graduation project. My project topic combines an urgent and relevant societal issue of resettlement housing with environmental issues. I believe, personally, that this is not only relevant but needed in the future. In a polarising world, it is essential to seek connection. Although my subject is also a political question, it is important to look at the impact of the architect on these problems. Taking a stance on societal issues allows you to come up with solutions. You design for a target group. That target group has needs and wishes and they differ from other target groups. A design cannot always serve all. A design must be specific. Architecture, in combination with the other tracks seen in the AUBS master, gives shape to a realistic and innovative world of tomorrow. I believe that by exchanging between the disciplines, a design can benefit.

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

    During my graduation, there was an (intended) clear separation between research and design so that I could base my design on research as much as possible. However, I started designing before conducting interviews and observations at AZC due to the troubles with setting up my ethnographical research. This was a blessing in disguise. This way, I was able to let the first considerations of my design shape the topics on which to focus. I could see what was missing in my design. The things I could only get by conducting interviews and observations.

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

    I believe my way of working is careful and focuses on the human scale. This may not always be the most efficient way, but it makes sure that a lot of aspects are thought through. The challenge is to convey this thought process to others. The combination of literature and ethnographical research was essential to do so. With more time, more interaction between design and research could have taken place by, for example, moving towards a participatory process. Within the scope of this project however, I believe that the distribution of time was necessary to ensure that the academic foundation was strong enough.

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

I believe the value of this project is high. This is not necessarily because the research is perfect or because the design meets every criterion head-on, but because it shows new ways of looking at resettlement architecture. The evaluation of biophilic solutions with the documentation of the COA hasn't been done previously as I believe. This gives new insights into how to combine these two. The results of the research are not shocking and mainly suggest some adaptation to biophilic tools, but they are nevertheless important. The need to focus on well-being in resettlement housing is very visible. Daily, articles on the problems faced in the facilities appear in the Dutch newspapers. This project's scope is limited because of the time and resources required. However, this project can serve as an inspiration when designing future AZCs. With its focus on the human experience and well-being, the project brings back the human aspect to refugee housing. The project aims to show the possibilities within the existing framework, which will, therefore, be beneficial for refugees, COA, and future AZC architects. If further research were to be conducted, ethical aspects would have to be closely monitored. As one is dealing with a vulnerable group, participatory approaches or interviews could be upsetting or give false hope. The question of, is the right thing to do, will undoubtedly always remain a politically fueled one. One can only act as one sees right, and for me, that was to see what I, as an architecture student, could do to make the dwellings of refugees better. I always asked myself the impossible question: would I be happy to live here if I ever had to flee for a war?

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

My research is more transferable than my design, but both have a very strong focus on the Netherlands. Within the Netherlands, I think architects can use my toolbox from my research as inspiration for their future resettlement design. The outcomes in design may however be very different as stated before due to the personal style of the architect and the environment in which they design.

6. *How did the limitations of the COA regulations hold me back in the design?*

I find this difficult to say. As is widely known, money is an obstacle in realising COA housing. I tried to take this into account as much as I could. However, I also wanted to create the most fitting design for the task I set myself. As the economic side of architecture is quite unfamiliar to me, I based my decisions on the amount of labour that I could cut back and the choice of materials. Combining this with demountable solutions ensures that, even if it is an investment, the reuse potential stays the highest. This benefits not only the costs but also the sustainability of the proposed design. Other aspects, such as the importance of safety, did not feel like restrictions but as themes that needed to be addressed in the design. The lack of harsh regulations, except for the program of requirements, left room for interpretation.

7. *Is the concept the best fitting concept as an answer to the design question that was proposed at the beginning of this project?*

I personally believe there are always multiple answers to design questions. For me, what I present is the best-fitting concept as of now. Elements that could have had a different design outcome with a different designer could be the shape of the building, building method, etc. However, I chose to prioritise flexibility with biophilic design, and I think that is what shaped my design the most. So, to conclude, I think you can't say it is objectively the best-fitting concept. I think that is impossible to say. But for me, with my argumentation, I think it is the best-fitting concept for my design question.