Enhancing the attraction of shopping malls
Developing a redesign toolkit for the enhancement of the attraction of 20th century Dutch shopping malls

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Retail, psychology and design

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1. Introduction

Following the increase in vacancy within the retail environment, which has only been emphasised by the COVID-19 pandemic, numerous shops have been forced to close their doors (Deloitte, n.d. -a). In a desperate attempt to keep the physical retail experience alive, many shopping malls within the Netherlands have been undergoing renovations and restructuring (Retail Bouw Nederland, n.d.; Gemeente Nissewaard, n.d.; Novicon, n.d.; Alphens.nl, 2022). Shopping malls are part of one of the fastest changing environments, making their ability to catch onto changes early on and frequently adapt to them critical for their survival (Nordbotten & Anderson, n.d.). These trends, such as the demand for environmentally and socially consciousness, are often heavily public dependant, making it of significant importance to take their perspective into consideration when redesigning and restructuring (Deloitte, n.d. -b). And with the continuous decline in the use of the physical retail realm, the redesigns must focus on enhancing the attraction of users to the shopping malls. Shopping malls in the Netherlands have, for many decades, served as a platform where not only the retail needs of society are fulfilled, but also the need for socialising, leisure and entertainment (Kooijman, 2002), making their ability to fulfil those needs a valuable tool for survival in these trying times. The shopping mall as we know it today has its roots in the early 20th century and has deeply integrated itself into our society as a necessity for a functioning community (Hashemi, 2019). With the oldest Dutch shopping mall being even older, namely the Den Haag Passage which was built in 1885 (Vos, 2020), it is understandable that they are often considered cultural heritage with a significant history. Their status as cultural heritage is also an important note to take into consideration, as in the past disregarding the existing heritage has led to rejection and protest from locals and existing users. In a case study on the historical shopping mall in Belfast it can be seen that failure to take cultural heritage into consideration can lead to more vacancy (Skoura, 2017). Meaning redesigns of historical shopping malls ought to be carefully thought through and considered from different angles.

To simplify the complicated process of redesigning, scholars in the architectural field have categorised redesigns into various design intervention methods, whereby enhancements on multiple scales are considered (Plevoets, 2019; Alkemade, 2020; Petzet, 2012). These methods and their application play a central role in the research conducted in this paper, as this research aims to conduct a design toolkit applicable to 20th century Dutch shopping malls with an ability to recognise trends, issues and points of improvement, to then suggest the most fitting intervention method that will aid to rejuvenate the malls and improve their attraction of visitors. Properly identifying and analysing the underlying cause of the decline in visitors in the general retail environment, as well as specific subject related issues are central to this research. The toolkit will consist out of methods applicable on multiple scales and account for multiple to be addressed issues. The research will exist out of two subjects within the field of architecture, namely design interventions and retail design, led by the theme heritage. Individually a lot of literature is written about these topics. Heritage, what it is and how it affects us is for example well covered by Howard (2003), Encharri & Brebbia (2018) and Harrison (2010). Design interventions and their link to heritage are amongst others discussed by Alkemade (2020), Petzet (2012) and Crimson (1995). Retail design is also subject that has a well-saturated field of literature (Petermans & Kent, 2016; Kent, 2007; Christiaans & Almendra, 2012). However, the individually well-rounded literature does not offer a way to gracefully weave the topics of heritage, retail design and design intervention methods together into a happy marriage. This gap offers a great opportunity to dive deeper into the proposed subjects, in order to collect more insight on the ever-changing retail environment, to then create an understanding of what it really is that attracts visitors to shopping malls and how this can be translated into effective design methods while considering the cultural heritage of these shopping malls.

2. Research questions

The goal of this paper is to set out a plan for the to be executed research that aims to answer the following main question:

How can design intervention methods be applied in existing 20th century Dutch shopping malls in order to successfully enhance the attraction of users?

This plan can be divided into three phases, wherein different forms of research and execution take place. Each phase will be supported by sub-questions, which form the base of the research (see Figure 1). The first phase exists out of 'research for design', whereby qualitative research is performed on the subject's retail design, heritage in the built environment and design interventions. Additionally, case studies are executed on the (re)design of various 20th century Dutch shopping malls. This phase will be led by the following sub-questions:

> *a.   What design methods are applied in retail design in order to attract users and how does that influence the psychology of a user?*
> *b.   How does cultural heritage play a role in the usage and value assessment of shopping malls?*
> *c.   What design intervention methods have been applied in 20th century Dutch shopping malls to enhance their attractiveness to users?'*

In phase two, 'research by design', the gained knowledge will be evaluated for which a matrix can be set up, that will be developed into a design toolkit. This toolkit will take various intervention methods into account and consider their success rate for multiple scenarios. The to be answered sub-question for this phase are as followed:

> *d.   What is the relation between design intervention methods applied in redesigns of 20th century Dutch shopping malls and the retail design methods applied in shopping malls in order to attract users?*
> *e.   Which design intervention methods are the most successful in enhancing the attractiveness of 20th century Dutch shopping malls?*

The last phase, the design phase, will exist out of the redesign of a 20th century Dutch shopping mall, whereby the toolkit is used to achieve the best success rate of attracting users. Using this design case, the main research question will be answered.

3. Methodology

This study will be conducted through the application of qualitative as well as quantitative research methods, which can be further categorised into retrieving theoretical information and testing through design (see Figure 2). These methods are applied on the subjects retail design and its psychological effect on users, design intervention methods and heritage in the built environment. The first phase will exist out of quantitative research methods, in the form of literature studies, which will form a theoretical base for the to be executed case studies, interviews and design. Literature study on retail design and its psychological effect on users will aid in discovering and understanding design methods that are applied in retail in order to attract users and promote use and sales. The study of retail design will be led by the question 'how?', while the psychological effect will be examined through the lens 'why?'. The latter will contribute to effectively applying design intervention methods in various scenarios, by understanding why a certain method will be more effective than another, when the desired result is known. The categorisation of design intervention methods into their psychological effect on users will aid in the selection of the correct methods and result in a more effective and theoretically grounded design toolkit. Heritage in the built environment will be a theme wherein the research on 20th century Dutch shopping malls is conducted. In the first phase literature studies on the subject are conducted to create an understanding of what heritage in the built environment is and how its value can be determined and measured. The subject of design intervention methods will be researched through literature studies, whereby the best fitting categorisation methods for this particular study are selected, as many categorisations on the subject exist. The application of these intervention methods will be further studied in various case studies on 20th century Dutch shopping malls, executed in a group of twenty-one students.

In the second phase the application of the formed theoretical framework will take place. A selection of the priorly executed case studies is made based on their size, user amount, success rate and the already applied intervention methods. As the design toolkit ought to be applicable to all 20th century Dutch shopping malls, the selection of case studies will have to cover varied types of shopping malls and intervention methods. The applied research methods in this phase are qualitative as well as quantitative in nature. For this selection of shopping malls interviews with users are conducted in order to evaluate the attraction points of the shopping mall, the success rate of the applied intervention methods and the significance of its heritage. These interviews will be informal, qualitative in nature and will have an open questionnaire form that will allow the interviewee to speak freely on the subjects. Due to the length and depth of the interviews, a small number of users will be selected per case study. Additionally, more research can be done through social media platforms, such as Instagram, whereby hashtags associated with the selected shopping malls can be collected and analysed. Other media platforms that offer comments and reviews, such as Google Reviews, can also be used. This data collection will form the base of the toolkit, whereby design interventions methods will be related to their psychological effect on the user and their success rate in attracting users to shopping malls.

In the last phase the design toolkit will be evaluated by briefly applying it to multiple scenarios and theoretically measuring the result. When the design toolkit is considered successful for these test subjects, a final design case can be selected whereby the toolkit can be used to redesign an existing 20th century Dutch shopping mall in high need of rejuvenation.
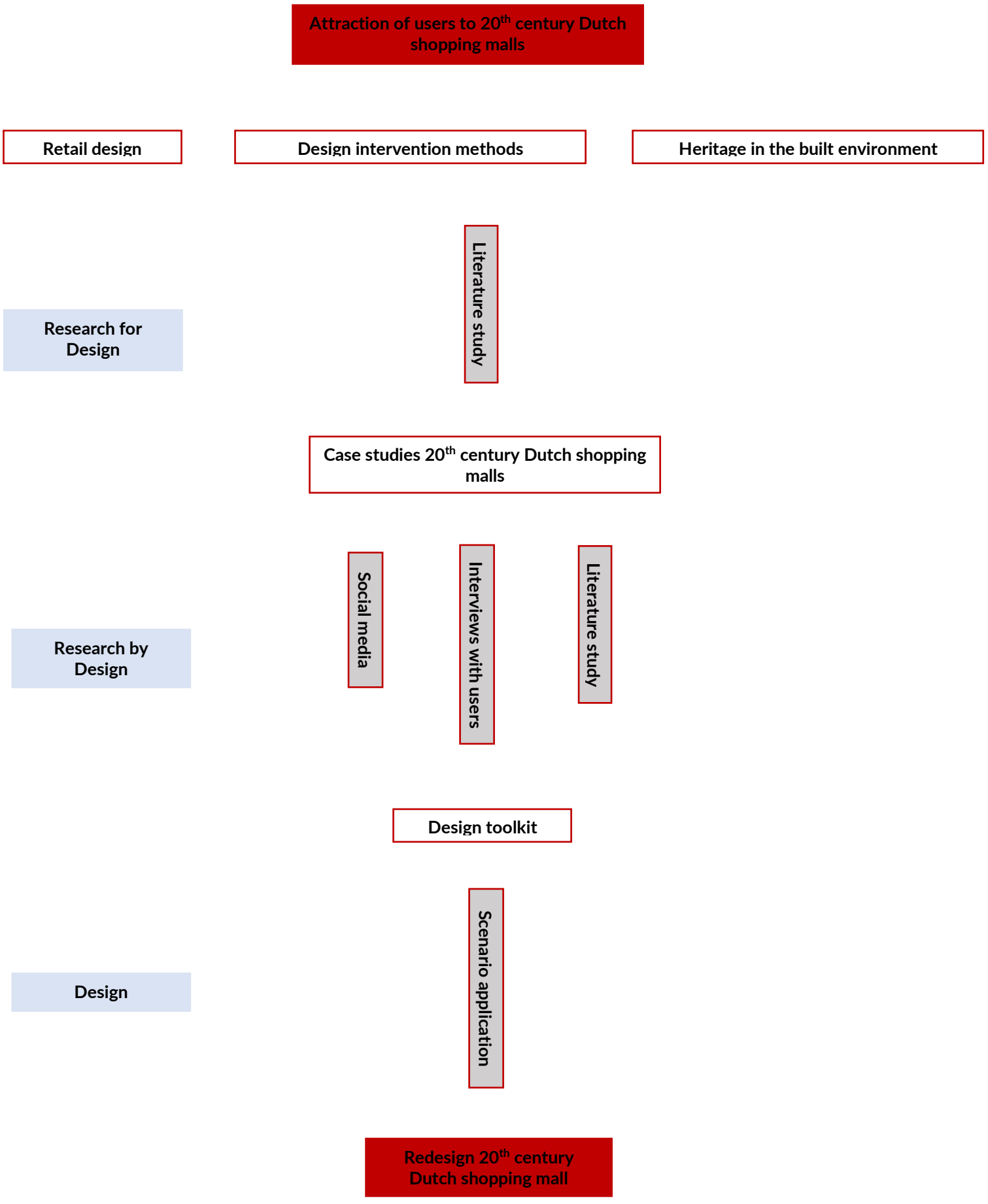
Attraction of users to 20th century Dutch shopping malls

Retail design

Design intervention methods

Heritage in the built environment

Research for Design

Literature study

Case studies 20th century Dutch shopping malls

Research by Design

Social media

Interviews with users

Literature study

Design toolkit

Design

Scenario application

Redesign 20th century Dutch shopping mall

Figure 1: Research plan. Source: author.

4.   Frame of Reference

For this research "Heritage" by Peter Howard (2003) offers a great philosophical perspective on what can be considered heritage and its value in society. This approach offers insight on the importance of various forms of heritage and will play a key role in conducting a 'public-focused' understanding of the meaning of heritage, instead of an 'expert-based' consideration. A book that offers a more objective and theoretical perspective and can be used to form a foundation for understanding heritage and how to design with it, is "Re-architecture: lifespan rehabilitation of built heritage" by Pereira Roders (2007). These theories will aid in answering the sub-question *"how does cultural heritage play a role in the usage and value assessment of shopping malls?"*.

The subject of retail design can be dissected into retail design methods and the psychological effect of retail design on the user. The book "The call of the mall" by Underhill (2005) elaborates on what attracts visitors to a mall, what encourages them to stay and what functions and facilities they are mostly using. This is further supplemented by the paper "Why we buy what we buy: a theory of consumption values" by Sheth, Newman and Gross (1991). The link between a user's psychology and retail design is made using the literature "Stimulating emotions as a strategy for an enhanced retail experience" by Kayina and Goel (2015). Retail design methods will be researched using the theories brought forward by Kantola (2016) in "Retail Success" and Kent (2007) in "Creative space: design and the retail environment". These theories will aid in answering the sub question *"what design methods are applied in retail design in order to attract users and how does that influence the psychology of a user?"*.

Design intervention methods on redesigned shopping malls will be researched in a group of twenty-one student in a collection of eleven case studies. The research in these case studies is driven by the questions 'what has been done?' and 'to what end?'. From these eleven case studies three will be selected to extensively research the prior underlying issues and the applied design interventions, categorising them into the design intervention methods, elaborated on in "Rewriting architecture" by Alkemade (2020), and the scales wherein these methods can be applied within the built environment, elaborated on in "How buildings learn" by Brand (1995). These categorisations will be applied to the case studies in order to answer the sub-question *"what design intervention methods have been applied in 20th century Dutch shopping malls to enhance their attractiveness to users?"*.

Once the theoretical framework has been rounded, the retrieved theories can be translated into a matrix using the categories design intervention methods, design scale, the psychological effects of the design methods on the user and the success rate of the design intervention methods. The leading sub-questions are *"what is the relation between design intervention methods applied in redesigns of 20th century Dutch shopping malls and the retail design methods applied in shopping malls in order to attract users?"* and *"what design intervention methods are the most successful in enhancing the attractiveness of 20th century Dutch shopping malls?"*.

5.   Relevance

The historical and cultural value of Dutch 20th century shopping malls play a significant role in the need to keep the physical retail realm alive. These malls often hold a significant history, which has had a massive influence on the evolution of society, the surrounding architecture and the development of modern culture (Fraczkiewicz, 2013). Even though e-commerce has a higher success rate of fulfilling the retail demand of its users by eliminating physical store limitations and understanding and tracking the target market with more efficiency (King, 2018), the need for a physical meeting point remains a strong motive for users to visit a shopping mall (Gaffuri, 2016). This research will be able to identify applicable design methods in order to successfully enhance the attraction of users to the physical retail realm and stimulate sales. The design toolkit will be able to shorten the research period of the necessary redesigns of the shopping malls and provide a fighting chance against vacancy and e-commerce.

The research into retail design and its psychological effect in combination with intervention methods will fill a gap in existing literature. Supplying a theoretically backed design tool that will not only be able to identify the optimal intervention method, but also provide an explanation onto how the intervention method will affect the user psychologically will have a significant value on the field of architecture, as well as in the academic field. In the academic field, this will open the opportunity to evaluate the design tool, perfect it or even expand it to other types of architecture.

6.   Literature

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