Shopping mall in a post-consumer era

Research Plan Msc3

Adapting 20th Century Heritage

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Summary

This research analyses post-war Dutch shopping malls with a focus on over-consumption for its relation to natural resource depletion and the connected social and cultural problems. The research will include case studies of Westfield mall of The Netherlands in Leidschendam and Hoog Catharijne in Utrecht. The shopping malls will be analyzed using Henri Lefebvre's (1992) spatial triad model as a framework. The research aims at finding the social values of Dutch post-war shopping malls and creating new economic values for a post-consumerist future.

Key words: Shopping mall, public space, social sustainability, post-consumerism, materialism

Introduction

In 1978, during an interview, Victor David Gruen (1903 – 1980), the father of shopping malls disregarded what shopping malls became (Peirce, 1978). Initially, a shopping mall was supposed to become a new type of post-war community gathering space, similar to the ancient Greek agora. However, because of increasing consumption and the developers' growing greed, the initial humane ideas were lost, and only profitable features were kept. Rather than serving the needs of the neighborhood and creating a meeting place for the community, developers constructed "a shopping machine" (Peirce, 1978). The shopping malls were designed in an appealing way to keep shoppers inside for a longer time, eventually leading to spontaneous purchases. (Hardwick, Gruen, 2004)

Today the negative side of mass consumerism is discussed more frequently in the academic field. It is acknowledged by scholars that excessive materialism and overconsumption lead to environmental and social problems [Seth, Sethia, Srinivas, 2010; Blühdorn, 2017]. Increasing consumption cause natural resource depletion. Today 80% of the world's resources are being used by countries characterized as consumerists (Cooper, 2022). Because consumerism encourages people to constantly buy new things, it also creates a massive amount of waste.

Consumption is essential for basic material needs (food, shelter). However, it also became a part of the "extended self" (Jackson, 2009, p. 98). People use material artifacts (for example, expensive cars or clothes) to communicate about their social status and to express their feelings through giving and receiving gifts. Jackson (2009) describes it as the "language of goods" or materialism. Many psychological studies have shown that materialism is usually associated with dissatisfaction and anxiety (Eckersley, 2005).

It is not that difficult to expose the "sins and the sinners" in the context of consumerism; however, the challenge is to point out the solution to the problem. According to Blühdorn (2017), several discourses have already emerged in the academic field, which may generate considerable hope for society. One of the proposed future scenarios [Soper, 2009; Jackson, 2009; Walker, 2010; Dahl, 2012] is the shift of social values beyond the consumer culture, described as post-consumerism.

Current trends are already showing a growing interest in post-consumerist ideas. Increasing numbers of people in Western countries are rejecting material self-interest (Eckersley, 2005) and investing in collaborative production like car sharing or clothing swaps. The rise of "horizontally distributed peer-production networks" generating "goods that are either completely free or which – being Open Source – have very limited commercial value" (Mason, 2015, p. 132) shows the move towards a post-consumerist future.

The question then is if society can find ways of living fulfilling lives without excessive consumption and where current shopping malls stand in this. In the context of this research, the focus will lie on the shopping malls in the Netherlands, a country in the EU with the second-highest shopping time (Fig. 1).
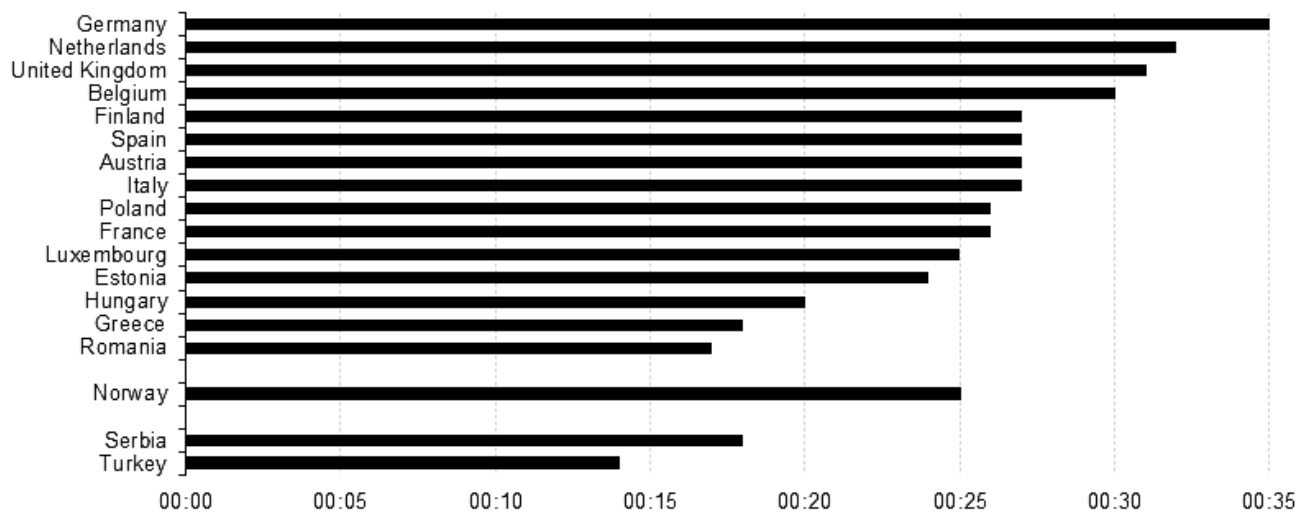

Fig. 1 Avarage time spent on shopping and services (per day) (Eurostat, 2018)

The research will focus on post-war Dutch shopping malls. The post-war period was a period of prolific economic growth and rapid urban change in the Netherlands. The exponentially growing demand for services and consumer goods in the 1960s caused the number of newly developed shopping spaces to double in comparison to the 1950s (Verlaan, 2017).

The research aims at answering **how heritage values of post-war Dutch shopping malls can be re-imagined in the post-consumer era,** along with these sub-questions (Fig. 2):

1.   How do users of Dutch shopping malls value shopping malls?

2.   What are the consumerist and non-consumerist attributes of a Dutch post-war shopping mall?

3.   What non-consumerist activities do people undertake in a shopping mall and its surroundings?

4.   How can architectural interventions influence consumerism in a shopping mall?

Fig. 2 Research question and sub-questions and their relation to theory (author's own diagram)

Theoretical framework

Shopping mall as public space

"Public space was once established as an urban center for exchanging ideas, for voicing views, for influencing opinions. Instead, through the series of events since the appearance of modern shopping, a commercial simulacrum has taken its place, where the only activities consistently allowed have been buying and amusement" (Chung, Inaba, Koolhaas, 2001, p. 518)

The development of public space within current technological and economic development is criticized in the essay called *Mr. Consumer* (Chung, Inaba, Koolhaas, 2001). It is explained how once natural and personally experienced public exchange now happens through the mediation of screens (television, internet, etc.). Shopping malls, accepted as access to public life, have played a role in flattening the public space. Shopping from being a practical task developed into a reenactment of social life (Chung et al, 2001). According to Debord (1992), our social life has been falsified by consumption as the accumulation of commodities became the main social need.

In the literature [Fred Van Raaij, 1993; Koojiman and Sierksma, 2007; Vallance, Perkins, and Dixon, 2011] the shift to shopping for the experience of public life is related to the growth of individualization and societal fragmentation in Western postmodern society. According to Koojiman and Sierksma (2007), in postmodernity people tend to shy away from an encounter with strangers and choose to stay in 'social envelopes' (gated communities, tight-knit clubs, age-oriented gatherings). Even though public space is meant to encourage spontaneous encounters, a shopping mall, as a public space, manages to create a needed feeling of safety. Strangers inside the shopping mall become more of an object to be navigated and maneuvered through, so there is no obligation for direct social interaction (Koojiman, Sierksma, 2007). Nevertheless, being inside the shopping mall can still be understood as participation in public life.

Social sustainability

Sustainability, as a conceptual framework, was first defined by the World Commission's report *Our Common Future* (Brundtland, 1987) (also known as the Brundtland report). The report described three pillars of sustainability: environmental, economic, and social. Social sustainability in Brundtland's report is limited to minimum requirements, focusing on basic needs such as food, water, health, and shelter for everyone (Bertlin, 2014).

Social sustainability is still a vague concept, and several articles highlight the incoherence in the definition of the term social sustainability [Littig and Grießler, 2005; Dempsey et al., 2009; Vallance et al., 2011]. Despite multiple interpretations, Woodcraft (2012) distinguishes a set of underlying themes: social capital (the quality of social networks and institutions), human capital, and well-being. However, little attention has been given to the definition of social sustainability in the built environment (Dempsey et al., 2009). In this research, the social objective of buildings is understood as a reflection of the community's current and future needs and as a support to the community's well-being (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2021).

This research aims at understanding how shopping malls affect a community's well-being, as studies show that consumerism often causes unhappiness and mental illnesses (Eckersley, 2005; Rogers et al., 2012). Relating social status to economic indicators causes a shift in values, making materialistic values more domi-

nant. Consumerism "fills a vacuum in the absence of any deeper meaning in life"(Dahl, 2012, para. 3). Materialistic values lead to over-consumption becoming socially acceptable (Rogers et al., 2012). So, this raises a question of how socially sustainable shopping mall as public space is now and how they could be developed in the future.

Post-consumerism

The future in this research is seen as a shift from self-centered materialism to liberation from consumerism. Several authors describe this major shift as inevitable [Soper, 2009; Walker, 2010; Dahl, 2012; Blühdorn, 2017] given the accelerating climate change and the unrestrained exploitation of natural resources. Some authors [Mason, 2015; Soper, 2007] see this shift already happening. This change in the current socioeconomic order is referred to as post-consumerism [Soper, 2009; Blühdorn, 2017; Walker, 2010].

Post-consumerism is often seen as a radical change and alternative to the capitalist market (Walker, 2010). Authors like Mason (2015) and Soper (2020) criticize capitalism and explore the alternative to the current economic system. According to Mason (2015), post-consumerism would mean the end of capitalism. The societal order that would succeed it, Mason (2015) suggests, would be no longer based on the logic of competition, profitability, and wealth accumulation but on new forms of non-market production and exchange, referred to as the concept of collaborative consumption. In addition, Soper (2020) proposes the change to capitalist consumer culture and rethinking the meaning of the "good life" disconnecting its meaning from a commodity. She recommends to engage "in intrinsically valuable activities that have no economic purpose, measure, or outcome"(Soper, 2020, p. 87).

According to Soper (2009), the utopian ideas of post-consumerism are to some degree problematic in their desires to represent the desires of others while carrying the "personal imprint of its dreamer" (Soper, 2009, p. 130). However, she believes it should be in the interests of the collective to share those ideas and connect them. It is especially important when at stake is the environment and social well-being.

Values and attributes

Another aspect of this research is values and attributes, which will be used to analyze collected data.

The value is a significant element of heritage. Value answers the question of why heritage is important. Figure 3 shows the categorization of primary and secondary values. The principal features and characteristics that contribute to the heritage value are described as attributes. It answers the question of what heritage is. The attributes are divided into tangible and intangible (Fig. 4).

ECOLOGICAL
SPIRITUAL
ESSENTIAL
EXISTENTIAL

SOCIAL
SPIRITUAL
EMOTIONAL (IND.)
EMOTIONAL (COL.)
ALLEGORICAL

ECONOMIC
USE
NON-USE
ENTERTAINMENT
ALLEGORICAL

AGE
WORKMANSHIP
EXISTENTIAL
MATURITY

POLITICAL
EDUCATIONAL
MANAGEMENT
ENTERTAINMENT
SYMBOLIC

SCIENTIFIC
WORKMANSHIP
TECHNOLOGICAL
CONCEPTUAL

AESTHETICAL
ARTISTIC
NOTABLE
CONCEPTUAL
EVIDENTIAL

HISTORIC
EDUCATIONAL
HISTORIC-ARTISTIC
HISTORIC-CONCEPTUAL
SYMBOLIC
ARCHAEOLOGICAL

Fig. 3 Values matrix (Tarrafa and Pereira Roders, 2011)

			name	short	Long description
		0	-	-	There is no attribute mentioned, or the attribute doesn't belong in any of the other attribute
Intangible	asset related	1	concept	period/style	The intangible attribute is the intended idea, norms, values, expression, style in arts or architecture and the development (phase, evolution) thereof. Often the attribute is related, or represented by, a tangible hertage asset.
		2	relation	relation object-object	The intangible attribute represents a relation with another connected element, location, place or environment. Often the attribute is related, or represented by, a tangible heritage asset.
		3	character	image	The intangible attribute represents defining features, or a specific nature or quality. This can be related to a specific design (e.g. typology, morphology, layout, composition, proportion) or atmosphere (e.g. tranquil, lively, urban, rural).
	societal	4	use	function	The intangible attribute represents a specific (typical, common, special) use or function of a place or environment.
		5	knowledge	traditions, practices or customs	The intangible attribute represents (local) practices, traditions, knowledge, or customs of a community or group. These can be phenomena associated with a place or the understanding of the world by a group of people, which are transmitted and/or repeated and experienced and/or practiced.
		6	association	Relation men-object	The intangible attribute represents human associations with a place, element, location or environment.
		7	community	Society, individuals and their identity	The intangible attribute represents a community or society itself (its members or specific individuals or groups) and/or their cultural identity or diversity.
	process	8	planned	management	The intangible attribute represents an action, change or process that is intentional and planned, determined by strategies and policies (bureaucracy). The attribute often is a more short or medium term process.
		9	unplanned	development or evolution	The intangible attribute represents an action, change or process that is piecemeal, unintentional, spontaneous and natural, without intervention of policies or strategies. The attribute is often a long-term, slow process.
Tangible	asset	10	building element	part of building	The tangible attribute represents elements or parts of a building. This element can be constructive, constitutive or decorative.
		11	building	whole building	The tangible attribute represents a whole building, structure, construction, edifice, or remains that host(ed) human activities, storage, shelter or other purpose.
		12	urban element	part in the urban landscape	The tangible attribute represents elements, parts, components or aspects of/in the urban landscape. This can be a construction, structure, or space, which is constructive, constitutive, or decorative.
		13	natural element	flora or fauna	The tangible attribute represents specific flora or fauna, like water elements of/in the historic landscape produced by nature. It can be natural or designed.
	area	14	ensemble	group of buildings	The tangible attribute represents a group of buildings or specific urban ensemble or configuration. The combination generates or represents specific history, coherence, variation, significance and has recognizable relations.
		15	context	setting	The tangible attribute represents the buildings or elements surrounding, supporting, or contextualizing the actual heritage. It is situating, adds understanding, often though not necessarily geographical proximity.
		16	area	District in the wider (urban) landscape	The tangible attribute represents a district in a wider (urban) landscape, or a specific combination of cultural and or natural elements.
	all	17	layering	stratigraphy	The tangible attribute represents a landscape illustrative of the evolution or development of human society and settlement over time, a diversity of manifestations of the interaction between humankind and its natural environment.
		18	landscape	everything based on significance	The tangible attribute represents the integrated whole, the wider (urban) cultural landscape including (indicated or located) elements, areas or attributes with various levels of significance.

Fig. 4 Extended attribute typology (Veldpaus, 2015)

Research methods

The qualitative research will be conducted using ethnographic methods of data collection, such as non-participant observation and semi-structured interviews, as well as case studies, including graphic field notes, and literature review. The goal of the research is to create a matrix of consumerist and non-consumerist values and attributes. This will lead to a toolbox and strategy for re-designing the shopping mall for post-consumerism while enhancing its current social values and creating new economic values, more aligned with non-consumerist ideas.

The analysis of consumerist space in a shopping mall is based on Henri Lefebvre's (1992) space production theory. The theory will help to decode the space of a shopping mall and gain a full understanding of how it is constructed. Lefebvre's theory divides the understanding of space into three concepts, which by overlapping form a "social space". The spatial triad helps to organize research in three ways of thinking about space and provides a basis for the choice of research methods (Fig. 5).
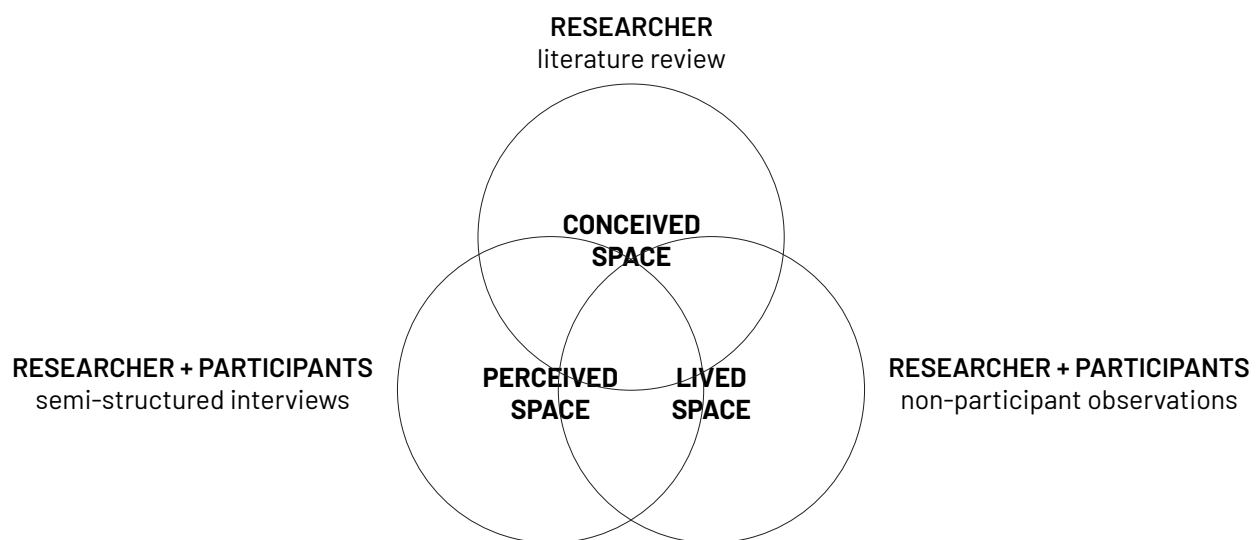

Fig. 5 Methods combined with H. Lefebvre's spatial triad (author's own diagram)

Lived space – non-participant observations

The lived space refers to the physical level of space, it is used and generated by members of society (Lefebvre, 1992). This research aim is to identify non-consumerist activities happening in the shopping mall and its surroundings. This would reveal existing non-consumerist social values of the shopping mall, which could then be enhanced in future design.

The lived space will be researched by observing people's behavior in shopping malls and selecting activities that do not include purchasing. The stance of a complete observer will be chosen, so the public would be unaware of the observation (Kawulich, 2005). Due to ethical concerns, the anonymity of the participants will be preserved (European Commission, 2021).

The activities people undertake in a shopping mall and its surroundings will be mapped on a floor plan, which will reveal how some spaces encourage or discourage certain social activities. This method will include case studies of Westfield mall of the Netherlands in Leidschendam and Hoog Catharijne in Utrecht due to their similar size, different locations in the city (Westfield – suburban; Hoog Catharijne - city center), and

multi-functionality. Observations will be carried out at different times of the day and week to end up with a wider spectrum of gathered information.

Perceived space – semi-structured interviews

The perceived space is produced through imagination and lived through associated images and symbols, so it can be considered both real and imagined (Lefebvre, 1992). Following this concept, the research aims at revealing the meaning behind the image of a shopping mall and which attributes people relate to the space for consumption. For such data gathering, semi-structured interviews will be used. Physical semi-structured interviews will happen at different times of the day and week to increase generalizability within the study. Due to the limited time for the research, the goal is to interview at least 15 people, including five different age groups representing different generations (Fig. 6). Different generations are chosen with the assumption that their perception of a shopping mall can be fundamentally different.
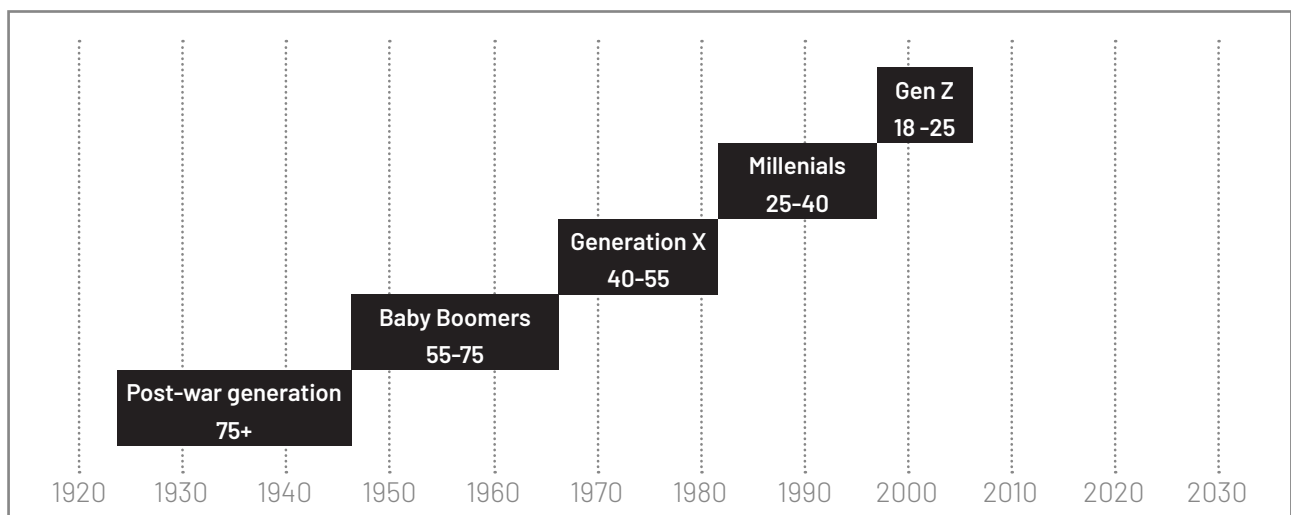

Fig. 6 Target groups for semi-structured interviews (author's own diagram)

Interview structure:

1. Do you think shopping mall is important to our society today? Why?

[socialization; consumption; contemplation; entertainment]

2. How would you describe the shopping mall?

Expected result: what attributes do people relate to the image of a shopping mall

3. Do you go to the shopping mall for other purposes than shopping? [If yes] Why?

Expected result: Tangible/intangible attributes that attract people to non-consumerist activities

4. What else do you do in a shopping mall when you are not purchasing anything?

Expected result: finding out the social values of the shopping mall and non-consumerist activities

5. What could be the future of the shopping mall if there were no shopping function inside it anymore?

Expected result: possible scenarios for future design

Collected data will be then transcribed and coded, looking for common themes. The value definitions by Tarrafa and Pereira Roders (2012) and attribute definitions by Veldpaus (2015) will be used as a framework for coding. Each interview will be analyzed looking for tangible/intangible attributes and values assigned to a shopping mall. The coded words will then be used in a values/attributes matrix, looking for common themes.

Concerning ethics, the participant will be informed about the nature of the research before the interview and will be asked to sign a permission to conduct the interview (European Commission, 2021). The participant will be also informed that the interview will be recorded. Published content will only include research analysis and will not contain any personal information.

Conceived space – literature review

Conceived space is a space created by "scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers" (Lefebvre, 1992, p. 38) who conceptualize space on an abstract level by means of knowledge, logic, maps, and mathematics. In terms of this research, conceived space relates to the physical level of space. This part of the research will mainly aim at understanding how architecture is used to increase consumerism. For this, the literature on shopping mall design principles will be studied to understand how the space to control consumers is produced. In the future design of shopping malls for post-consumerism, these findings could be used as a basis for the identification of consumerist or non-consumerist attributes.

Lived + Perceived + Conceived – case study

The final step of this research is to understand how architectural intervention strategies affect shopping malls. Previously collected data and created values/attributes matrix will be tested and used for assessing architectural interventions and their influence on consumerism in shopping malls.

One of the case studies will include the Westfield shopping mall and its surroundings. The Westfield shopping mall is picked as a case study assuming that its architectural interventions were made to directly target consumerist society (Fig. 7).

"Our multi-award-winning design for the Westfield Mall of the Netherlands works as a magical transformation of what was a dated, run-of-the-mill shopping center. We were asked to remodel the existing building in Leidschendam to make it an all-around contemporary urban leisure destination, expanding it from 70,000m2 to 200,000m2 in the process to become the Netherlands' largest mall" (MVSA, n.d.).
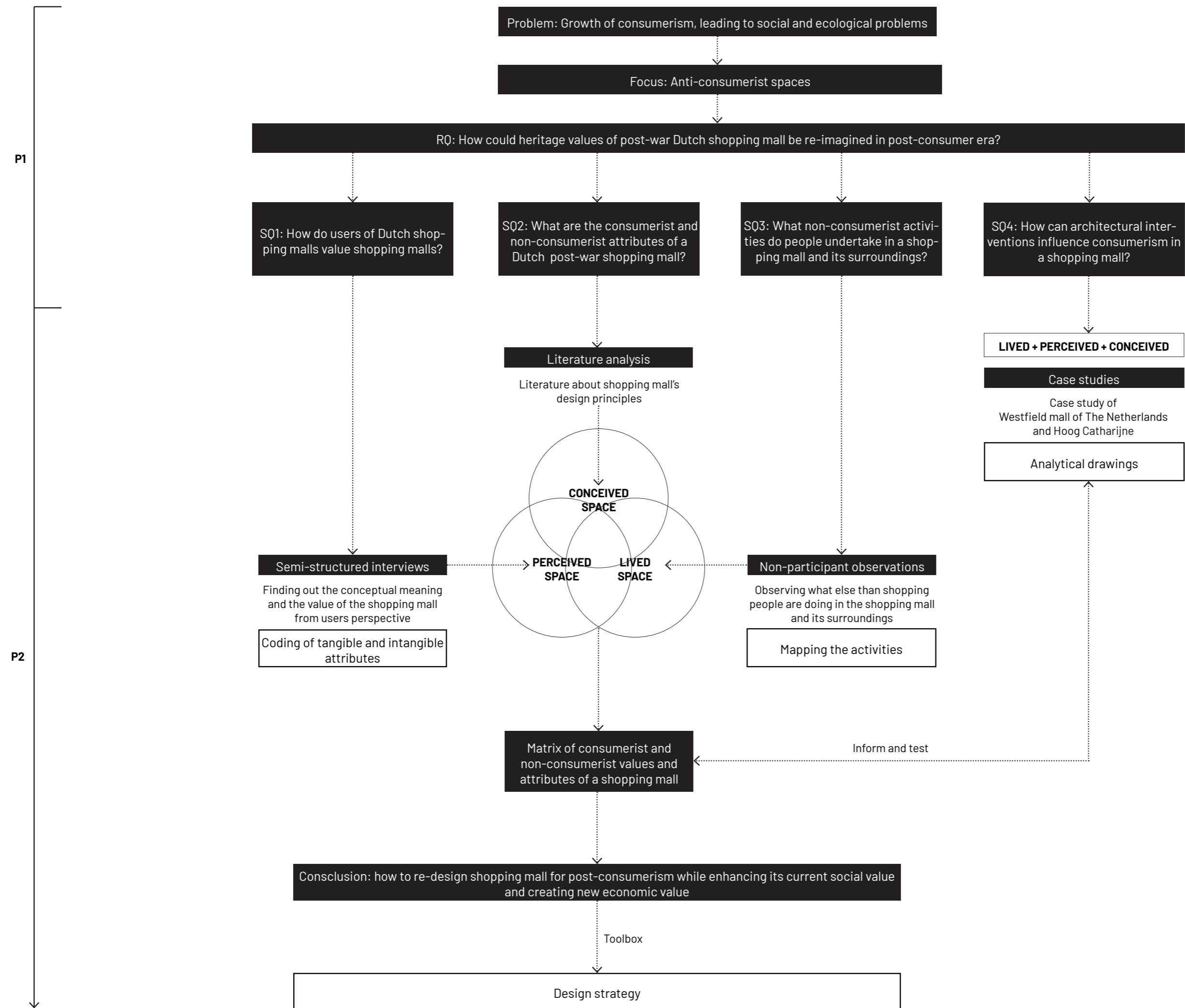
Another case study will include Hoog Catharijne in Utrecht. It was developed and constructed during the time when "most planners in the Western world agreed that the post-industrial economy, which was dominated by business, finance, and consumerism, had to find its place, and thrive in central urban areas" (Verlaan, 2017, p. 416). It was marketed as a social city and a place built for people "to shop, to live, to dine, to work, to drink, to stroll, to play, to sit, to read, to watch the world go by" (Verlaan, 2017, p. 429). Its recent renovation aimed at creating "favorite meeting places", which could be more than a collection of shops (Duic, 2012). Therefore, both malls share a similar vision of how to approach potential customers.

Fig. 7 Love us, Love us, Say that you love us (Westfield, author's own photo, 2022}

Conclusion

"Through successive waves of expansion shopping has methodically encroached on a widening spectrum of territories so that it is now, arguably, the defining activity of public life" (Chung, Inaba, Koolhaas, 2001, p. 128). However, due to environmental and social problems that consumerism causes, there is a need to redefine shopping malls' meaning in public life. With a focus on Dutch post-war shopping malls, the research aims at identifying not only the architectural qualities (tangible) of a post-war shopping mall but also its social values (intangible). Following the research findings, the goal of the design will be to build on the existing heritage values of chosen post-war shopping mall and create a socially sustainable public space for meaningful exchange.

P1

Problem: Growth of consumerism, leading to social and ecological problems

Focus: Anti-consumerist spaces

RQ: How could heritage values of post-war Dutch shopping mall be re-imagined in post-consumer era?

SQ1: How do users of Dutch shopping malls value shopping malls?

SQ2: What are the consumerist and non-consumerist attributes of a Dutch post-war shopping mall?

SQ3: What non-consumerist activities do people undertake in a shopping mall and its surroundings?

SQ4: How can architectural interventions influence consumerism in a shopping mall?

LIVED + PERCEIVED + CONCEIVED

Literature analysis

Literature about shopping mall's design principles

Case studies

Case study of Westfield mall of The Netherlands and Hoog Catharijne

Analytical drawings

CONCEIVED SPACE

PERCEIVED SPACE

LIVED SPACE

P2

Semi-structured interviews

Finding out the conceptual meaning and the value of the shopping mall from users perspective

Coding of tangible and intangible attributes

Non-participant observations

Observing what else than shopping people are doing in the shopping mall and its surroundings

Mapping the activities

Matrix of consumerist and non-consumerist values and attributes of a shopping mall

Inform and test

Consclusion: how to re-design shopping mall for post-consumerism while enhancing its current social value and creating new economic value

Toolbox

Design strategy

W 1.1	W 1.2	W 1.3	W 1.4	W 1.5	W 1.6	W 1.7	W 1.8	W 1.9 (2022.10.31 – 11.04)	W 1.10 (2022.11.07 – 11.11)
									P1 • Essence model • Reference cases • Potential design case • Final research plan

- LITERATURE STUDY
- REFERENCE CASE STUDY
- RESEARCH PLAN

W 2.1 (2022 11.14 – 11.20)	W 2.2 (2022 11.21 – 11.27)	W 2.3 (2022 11.28 – 12.04)	W 2.4 (2022 12.05 – 12.11)	W 2.5 (2022 12.12 – 12.18)	W 2.6 (2022 12.19 – 12.25)	W 2.7 (2023.01.09 – 01.15)	W 2.8 (2023.01.16 – 01.22)	W 2.9 (2023.01.23 – 01.29)	W 2.10 (2023.01.30 – 02.05)
								P2 • Graduation plan • Provisional research • Provisional design	P2 • Graduation plan • Provisional research • Provisional design

- SCENARIO TO CONCEPT
- SCENARIO DEVELOPMENT
- LITERATURE ANALYSIS
- SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS + TRANSCRIPTION
- DATA ANALYSIS
- NON-PARTICIPANT OBSERVATIONS
- DATA ANALYSIS
- CASE STUDIES

W 3.1	W 3.2	W 3.3	W 3.4	W 3.5	W 3.6	W 3.7	W 3.8	W 3.9	W 3.10 (2023.04.17 – 04.23)
									P3 Content and progress plan of graduation project, draft reflection

- TO BE PLANNED
- TO BE PLANNED

W 4.1	W 4.2	W 4.3	W 4.4 (2023.05.15 – 05.20)	W 4.5 (2023.05.21 – 05.28)	W 4.6 (2023.05.29 –06.04)	W 4.7	W 4.8	W 4.9 (2023.06.19 – 06.25)	W 4.10 (2023.06.26 – 07.02)
			P4 All graduation products / subjects, including the final reflection	P4 All graduation products / subjects, including the final reflection	P4 All graduation products / subjects, including the final reflection			P5	P5

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