ECOLOGY OF LIVING TOGETHER

REFLECTION PAPER

AR3AD100 - Advanced Housing Design
- Ecology of Inclusion
Alexander Hessels - 5002435
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Mentors: Anne Kockelkorn,
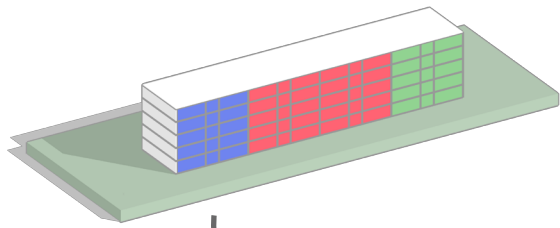Ferry Adema, Olv Klijn
Examiner: Frank Schnater

Positioning

Having a place for habitation for an adequate standard of living is a human right on an international level. But the "standard" differs for every person and household. This is where the advanced housing graduation studio comes into play. The studio gave the possibility to research and experiment within the architecture sphere into the possibility of different dwelling and household types in an existing structure. Whilst not thinking only of our present housing needs but also the future of our cities and sharing them with other species. Resulting in a graduation project that not only dives into the challenges of housing but also takes other aspects of our built environment into account.
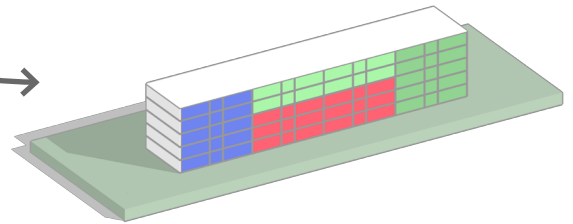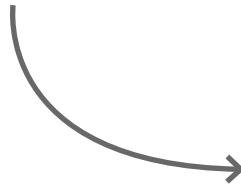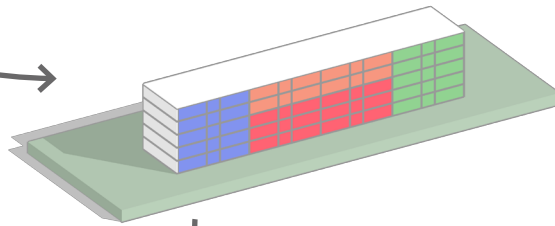
Interrelation between research and design

In the first quarter of the graduation the focus was placed on realising a master plan for the project location. Meaning that any vision for the individual plot was almost non existing. Alongside the establishment of this masterplan my research plan was taking form with a greatly preliminary hypothesis. A hypothesis that was based on early interest and gathered knowledge with the absence of a clear end goal for the graduation. Continuing towards P2 I used that same preliminary hypothesis to start up the individual design project. Meaning that my upcoming design idea lagged behind on the gathered knowledge of the research report. The research report obviously went through some changes as well, the research sub-questions were altered due to new theories and findings forming interim sub conclusions. Also receiving feedback every week ensured constant changes in the design process.

Leaving the P2 presentation the tables had turned and the design began to take the lead. Although the research report was not fully finished, most of the gathered knowledge already found its place in the design vision. The challenge now was to adapt this knowledge in my project and give every aspect the space they need to work as intended. All the work up to this moment can be seen as the creation of the puzzle pieces. Now began a long period of placing all the puzzle pieces into their correct spot. Slowly but steadily the frame of the puzzle was set and the design began to take shape. However this frame also gave me some room for other insights and options. I had the feeling that some of these puzzle pieces would benefit from some changes, so I changed them. At first the puzzle continued towards completion, but soon I understood that some of these changes also came with consequences in a later stage of the design. An example of this is the program that would fit into the design [01]. I started with three different households, added another one in the proces, while in the last few weeks even changing one of these household types. A change that would be interesting to have taken into account while doing research. This way maybe some of the altered puzzle pieces would have had a more snug fit with the rest of the puzzle.
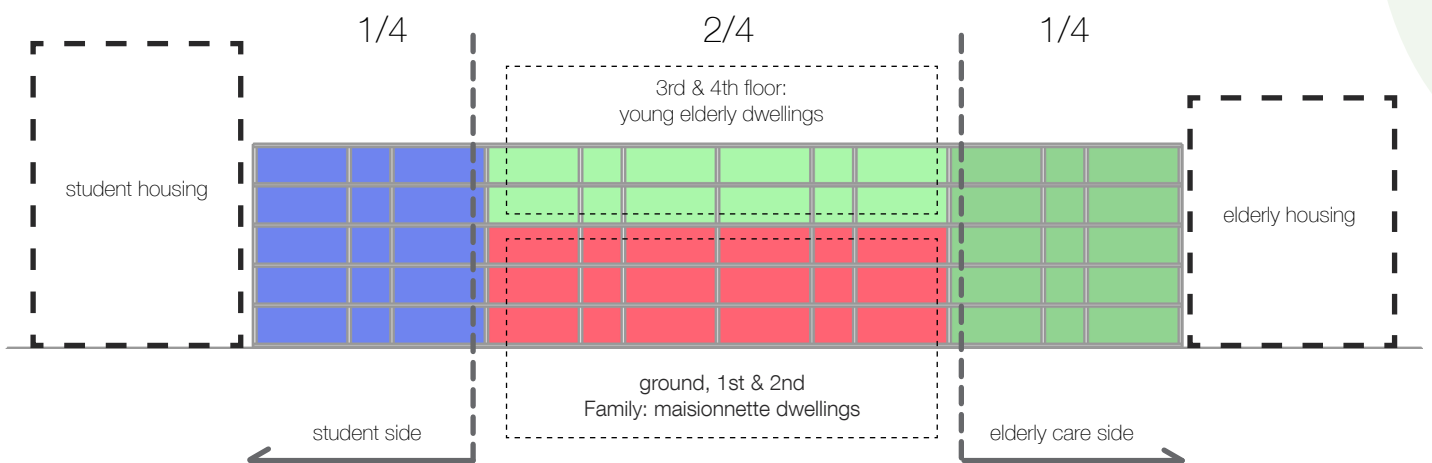
Nevertheless, the research focuses just on one aspect of the whole graduation process. As much as it did play an important part in the design process, its findings were not binding. There were many other possible puzzle pieces to work with to finish the puzzle, be it pure architectural interventions on a very detailed scale or building technology which would make this complex project possible in practise. Though it is interesting to mention that my search for a balanced habitat on a theoretical level took a very specific spatial form to which I held on to throughout the 3rd and 4th quarter [02].

Legend:
- ■ students
- ■ eldery
- ■ family
- ■ starters
- ■ young elderly

[01] Changing program

1/4	2/4	1/4

student housing

3rd & 4th floor:
young elderly dwellings

elderly housing

ground, 1st & 2nd
Family: maisionnette dwellings

student side

elderly care side

[02] A balanced division of the existing. A schematic representation of the spatial layout of the program.

Method and gained insight

The chosen research topics, provided by the graduation studio, could be interpreted in many ways. Designing for different household types and social groups is already a broad mix of different aspects, but adding species to the mix makes it even more complex. Even Though these topics piqued my interest, the question still was why should I even pursue such, to me mostly unknown, complexity let alone how would I ever begin this without specific wishes or any overarching theory or philosophy? This is where the theory by Swyngedouw about the urban cyborg comes into play. His theory may be broad and fairly theoretical without any real practical solutions, it did help me to find my own vision on the smaller scale of the project plot while also finding confidence for combining the two chosen topics.

The body of the research can be split into two different themes that influenced some of the design choices. The first one is the theoretical aspect in the form of the household types & species, meaning the fictional future users of the building. This provided a basis for forming a schematic plan of requirements, a goal to work towards. Though being theoretical, the understanding of the importance of this aspect was gained through some of the case studies. By fixating the sub-question towards the users as a whole in the form of a collective or neighbourhood, while keeping architecture in the background, it became clear to me how the program could work, why it's needed and how it could be applied into project design. Due to these early findings, the opportunity arose for more precise elaboration of the floor plans and the associated technical requirements that could be incorporated immediately. The second theme was mirrored to the first one, here architecture was put to the fore by analysing the case studies using criteria surrounding the research theme. Their eminently differing architecture served as a broad source of inspiration. Nevertheless, many of these different architectural interventions could be utilised in the design process . As a result, a certain vision in the field of design was formed through the typology transfer assignment, where the case studies were directly and very literally integrated into the project plot [03]. These important findings and interventions can be seen up to and including the final design.
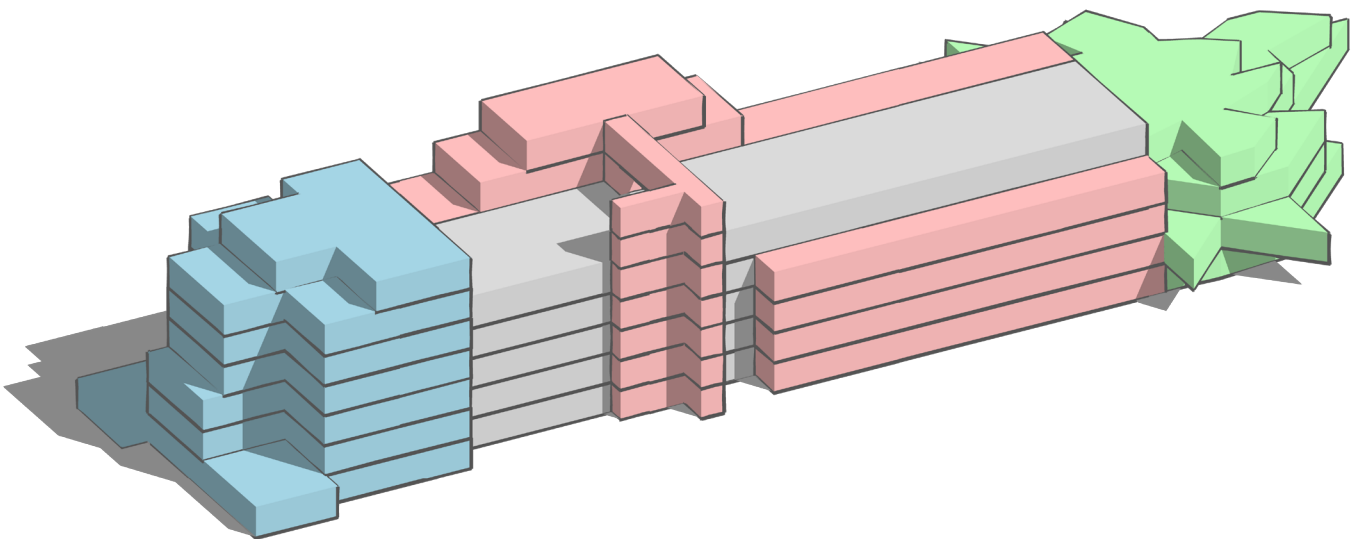
[03] The typology transfer assignment that gave life to the project's head, body and tail.

Relation to contemporary societal issues and challenge

The unfavourable state of the housing market in the Netherlands calls for strategies that efficiently accommodate different household types that come with their own differing wishes and needs for habitation. Making sure that specific dwellings are used for their intended user without e.g. unused m² or visa versa not enough m².   The endeavour of this graduation project was to form one of those possible strategies in creating habitation for the different household types, or even better to say household sizes. A strategy of transforming an existing monotonous building with repetitive dwellings into different units for specific household groups through architectural interventions and design options. While also trying to keep an equilibrium, both between each other on the scale of the whole building and within households that are in each other's vicinity. In the last few years, and especially during this graduation studio, it became clearer for me that architecture is much more than the final product in the form of a building. Architects do have some capability to positively influence our way of habitation. It will certainly not always work out the way you have in mind, but if it does, I can certainly imagine what a pleasure that must give.

This project not only tries to tackle the present social struggles we as humans have for habitation but also takes the environmental struggles of our time into consideration. The aspect of cohabitation with other species is also an integral part of Ecology of inclusion. In my view, the integration of species broadens an architect's workfield even more. In addition to social, financial and technical aspects, there is now also the biological aspect. It may still be very limited, but it won't surprise me if it becomes a must by municipalities to integrate species in a design, as if they are also part of the clientele. The other aspect is taking into account that our material resources are finite. Striving for re-use and efficiënt materialen application was a must in the design process. But for such a complex program transformation to work in an existing structure there was no escaping also building something new. Of Course re-use in its straightforward form is favourable. But if one wants to transform something simple into something more complex he/she shoulnt be afraid of also adding to make one complete whole. Maybe this kind of mindset also fits into Swyngedouw's theory on the urban cyborg?

Ethical issues and dilemmas

When designing a fictional (collective) housing project, you miss precise housing wishes and feedback along the process. This means that, for example, flexible, collective or shared spaces might not come into their own in reality. This back and forth dialogue between designer and future habitant is something that some of the researched projects used to fine-tune their design. The used fictional users are based on my opinion and experience that results in a bit of a prejudice towards how the future users could inhabit the project building.

The relative logical built and design strategy may need tweaks by specialists like constructors and contractors to make it more tangible. Nevertheless the core of the design project showed a possibility for changing an existing monotonous building into a contemporary design suited for different types of households and the modern housing mindset. The existing building in question is a modernist building type that can be found throughout the whole of the Netherlands and many countries in Europe, making this transformation design principle possible at other locations. The only important argument is that the existing building is of re-usable quality and does not require too much restoration work for the design to be rewarding.