

**Reflection P5**  
**Maxime Spapens**  
**4658310**

**Tutors:**

*Stephan Verkuijlen (mentor architecture)*

*Andy Jenkins (mentor research)*

*Paddy Tomesen (mentor building technology)*

*Marja Elsinga (external examiner)*

The topic of my graduation is mental health. The choice of this topic comes from an interest in how architecture can positively benefit the wellbeing of its users. This is an important subject especially in urban areas, which have high risks of mental health problems such as depression and anxiety. In this reflection paper, I want to reflect on the design, research, and my working method.

***The relationship between research and design***

For the research paper I investigated the research question: 'What strategies are needed for decreasing depression/anxiety levels and -risks in the urban context of Boerhaavewijk, with the focus on urban green infrastructures and the facilitation of passive and active care?' I developed a method of improving mental health in urban environments, by providing a system of internal and external interventions together with using the reflection of users. With these interventions I made an urban plan for Boerhaavewijk and found strategies that are important in relation to mental health in urban areas. These strategies are used as the guidelines of my design through all scales. In the research an important conclusion was that the design of an urban plan and its interventions is of considerable importance to its mental health outcomes. Therefore, the design is a reflection on the research conclusions and vice versa.

***The relationship between graduation topic, master track and - programme***

The Architectural Engineering studio stimulates working with your fascinations to find an answer to social problems, which can be explored in different studio topics My project is focussed on the topic of open building, by finding strategies on an urban and architectural scale in relation to mental health and how these can be facilitated throughout different scales (masterplan 1:1000 to details 1:5) within an existing neighbourhood and building. The graduation project relates to the master track of Architecture and the overall master programme because these have a focus on the building scale and its immediate surroundings, the wider urban context, and building engineering. All of these have an important aspect within my graduation project topic.

***Methodology and feedback***

Through my research I developed guidelines that helped me from the start to make design decisions. However, it also made some aspects more complex, such as by having to think about the affordability and impact of every decision. Sometimes a choice can be positive for mental health outcomes while being costly, which raises the question if it is a realistic option. However, it also made me look for answers to this. As an example, I looked a lot at priorities such as by finding solutions within what I am adding 'around the existing building', instead of making changes within the existing structure. Throughout my process

I do find myself getting stuck with decision making, even though I have a good base to reflect on. One of the reasons for this is that it takes time to figure out elements of the building in relation to mental health, while also having to think about the generic aspects of buildings that are needed within the design. I find myself getting overwhelmed with the things that need to be figured out and thereby getting stuck in the design process. What I have learned from this is that it is important to set priorities in what needs to be figured out and that it is not possible to have an answer to everything. Next to this I found the importance of taking time to assess different things on different scales, before making a decision. My teachers have helped me realise this and have given me tools on how to achieve this. They remind me throughout discussions to look at various aspects of the design and be critical of every step that I take. They help me stay within the main goal of my project and help me with figuring out problems that I come across. Most importantly, their positivity and knowledge inspire me to have fun in the project, exploring my fascinations and push me at times to go more extreme. For example, during the p3 we had a talk about what the relation is between different weather conditions, different positioning of greenery and social functions, in relation to the building and its usage. I found myself being stuck in what I was trying to achieve and how to get a design for the façade and form of the building. This inspired me to look at the design in a different way, such as exploring the possibility of the façade to capture greenery views and making a model where I tested different elements of my building having these questions in mind.

### **Academic and societal importance and transferability**

Regarding urban cities and mental health, a broad range of research already has been done. However, within this graduation project an essential element of finding strategies to facilitate better mental health within an existing urban context and building, could be a valuable addition and has a big societal importance. Even though there is a specific programme of requirements for the design assignment, the outcome can be used for other target groups and functions as well, because greenery and healthy environments have an important benefit for all people. The specific context of Boerhaavewijk as a testcase does not mean that it is only valuable for this site. The interventions and ranking found can be used for different contexts as well, taking the specifics of these contexts in mind. Furthermore, there are 847.000 post-war flats to be found in the Netherlands and therefore the outputs of this research and design can be used in a wide context.