

Overall reflection

This graduation project started in the Heritage studio “Adapting 20c Heritage”, where the projects deal with the renovation of young heritage sites and buildings. After the P2 it continued in the Explore Lab studio, where the approach and the goals for the design part became different from the Heritage studio. In the Heritage studio, this project was approached like a monumental piece which had to be conserved. Of course there would be a transformation, for the fact that at the time being it was empty and the goal was to give it a function again. However, this transformation would be done with the fact that the building has a certain of monumental quality, and with that, a transformation would have its limits. This limitation was good to set boundaries into my vision and design. On the other hand, it also held me back from ideas which I wanted to implement in my design but couldn’t, due to the fact it was considered a monumental building.

Changing the studio from Heritage to Explore Lab, the greatest change was that the building wasn’t considered a monumental piece anymore and with that, the idea of conserving it slightly disappeared from the design ideas and concept. There would be no limitations or boundaries in the new design. Although, with all the research and value-assessments done for the site as well as for the building, there was an emotional connection with the building made which couldn’t be thrown away like it was not ever there. And that – the emotional connection – did not only came from the research and the assessments. It also came from the interviews done at the site, where the majority of the inhabitants indicated that Smedinghuis as well as the location “Lelycentre” had an emotional value to them and that it were part of the young history of the place. Furthermore, there is a great desire from the municipality to keep the building alive by giving it a new function, instead of letting it empty and neglected behind.

From transforming a young heritage building with the slightest change to the building to a transformation where a demolition was possible, so to speak, for the research, the goals of the research remained the same, yet the approach changed. The goal of the research was ever to get to know the urban situation and the building. Both were done throughout analyzes of the original design concepts of the architect, original drawings of the building, talks with the inhabitants, with the people from the municipality and also with the architect himself, Rosdorff. However, the point of view of the research changed with the shift from one studio to another. For example, during both studios one of the focus points of the research was finding out the values of the urban situation as well as the building. For the Heritage studio, the historical value was preeminent. After changing the studio, this historical value along with other values which were connected to the history of the building and site, such as social value, were seen inferior to the value that became essential, and that essential value was the use-value of the site and the building. In other words, the goal of the research remained the same, yet the approach, i.e. the dominant focus point differed.

This chosen approach, was also in line with the feedback I got from the mentors, giving me the advice to forget about the Heritage part and see it as a new project, which can be based on the research and findings done in the Heritage studio. At first it was difficult to set a new course with a research that was done in terms of Heritage, however with time and ongoing research and new goals it eventually adapted in the project.

Another way of translating the feedback I got from my mentors onto my project and presentations was the use of Virtual Reality. Virtual Reality was for one thing a new way of designing for me, using Virtual Reality as a design tool. On the other hand was it a great communication tool towards the mentors during our feedback moments.

Aspect one

The relationship between research and design.

The relationship between research and design was correlative during the whole graduation project. From the Heritage studio perspective – the objective of transforming a young heritage building and giving it a new function – needed a thoroughly research of the urban site as well as the building self as a foundation for the new design proposal. Before starting with a concept for the new design of Smedinghuis, I – along with two fellow students – made a thoroughly analyze of the urban situation as well as the buildings involved. During our research we started with the bigger scale (province) to eventually zooming in to the smaller scale (building). The goal of our research was to get to know the buildings we were dealing with and the location those buildings were located. Adjoining to that, we also wanted to dig into the history of the making of the province of Lelystad and Lelystad as a city itself. To find out where the initial ideas got from and where it went wrong with the execution of the plans. During the research we made, gradually and eventually, the first design ideas and concepts came into existence. In the Heritage studio, the research consisted of analyzing the site, building, drawings from the archive and having talks with different people involved, from the architect to workers of the municipality to just visitors who were passing by. Which gave me an idea about the target group and the new function to implement in the area as well to the building.

From the moment of change of the studio a new research tool as well as a design tool became available. A great addition to my research and also design tool was the use of Virtual Reality. Before this, I only made use of sketches and (digital) drawings to present my ideas. However, changing the studio I also got the chance to work with Virtual Reality tools. For me this was a great addition to my project in terms of communicating it to the tutors, representing it during my presentations and also as a research and design tool which I used to make choices, for example choosing the material of a certain space in my design.

Aspect two

The relationship between the graduation topic, the studio topic, the master and the master programme.

Starting in the Heritage studio, the studio topic was clear, and with that also the graduation topic was set, due to the fact that the studio dealt with a specific topic such as young heritage. Alongside, also the project location and buildings were given. Nevertheless, this again changed with shifting from the heritage studio to Explore Lab. In Explore Lab there is not a certain topic which can define the studio. In Explore lab the student is free to choose a topic. For me, both in the Heritage studio as well as in Explore Lab one of the topics was renovation vacant (young heritage) office buildings. While the vacancy of former office buildings is slightly decreasing, there is still a sufficient amount that has to be giving a new function. For this I think the role of the architect can be critical in giving the vacant buildings use value again. And this is the role I took on myself during my graduation project, to take a underpopulated city such as Lelystad, where the vacancy problem is major. Adjoining to that, for my graduation topic I have also used a tool – Virtual Reality – as a new design tool, which at the moment is emerging and will be a prominent tool for architects in the future.

Aspect 3

Elaboration on research method and approach chosen in relation to the graduation studio methodical line of inquiry, reflecting thereby upon the scientific relevance of the work.

The studios which I have graduated in, hadn't a predefined research methodology which served as a ground rule for the research part of the graduation studio. This gave me the freedom to define my own research method during my graduation project. For becoming familiar with the urban situation and the buildings involved I had chosen a coarse method of research. This involved the gathering of as much information as possible through drawings, site visits, archives, interviews and history studies, to eventually pick out the valuable information which could be used for my graduation project. This coarse method of research was prominent for the period between P1 and P2. After the P2, when the actual designing began my research method can be described as an investigative method, i.e. research by design. One decisive tool for my research was again the Virtual Reality which has been used throughout the whole project starting from P2. The ideas and concepts I directly linked to the Virtual Reality, which directly gave me an impression of the design. Due to the fact this tool is rather advanced it was for me a learning by doing process.

Aspect four

Elaboration on the relationship between the graduation project and the wider social, professional and scientific framework, touching upon the transferability of the project results.

This graduation project deals with the vacancy of former office buildings which are in search for a new function in order to have it a use value again. Although the vacancy of former office buildings has been reduced in recent years, and this reduction is still ongoing, there are still underpopulated cities, such as Lelystad, where the vacancy is still a problem and where the search for a solution is still ongoing. However, the vacancy, wasn't the only problem that occurred in Lelystad. Likewise the city is dealing with an abundance of elderly people without suitable housing and on the other hand youngster who are fleeing the city. Alongside those target groups there are migrant workers who are only there for a timespan of maximum six months all spread over the neighborhoods which have no feeling of sense of place at all. From the research done, I came to the conclusion, that the elderly people problem stands out between the others and the focus mainly lies in giving them proper housing, forgetting the other two – equally important – groups. Therefor this graduation project is not only focusing on just giving the former office building a new function, but also helping the municipality with the other two groups. Alongside the architectural side of this project, the use of a modern tool is also predominant in this project, i.e. the use of Virtual Reality as a design tool. Adjacent to the traditional design tools, this futuristic tool – which I know for sure – will be a prominent tool in the future.

Aspect 5

The ethical issues and dilemmas encountered in doing the research, elaborating the design and potential applications of the results in practice.

Considering the change made from the Heritage studio to Explore Lab, I can say that the biggest ethical issue and dilemma that I have encountered was what to do with the research done in terms of the historical value and the fact that I was dealing with a monumental building. In the Heritage studio the fact that it was young heritage which what I was dealing with was preeminent. The idea that the urban site as well as the building was considered as young heritage and that it is not possible to just demolish everything was practically indoctrinated throughout the whole graduation project. Nonetheless, with moving from the Heritage studio to Explore lab, this "fact" that it was a young heritage project which what I was dealing with completely vanished – or better said – I had the option to completely erase it. This option was also made clear by the new tutors I started to work with after shifting between two graduation studios. Looking back at the process and the choice I made – to respect the urban site as well as the building as valuable young heritage, yet not completely setting limitations to my new design proposal – came from the high valued guidance of the tutors from the Heritage studio and the Explore Lab, which they all in their own way had convinced me of – in terms of the heritage part – to value the building and respect the fact that it is considered as young heritage, and in terms of starting in Explore lab, to forget about the heritage part and indulge myself to do whatever is possible with the building.