

# Final Reflection

AR3AD110 Dwelling Graduation Studio: Designing for Care in an Inclusive Environment 2024/25

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The approach of using phenomenology as a tool for students' mental well being did work, however the emphasis should be put on the word tool, as it merely served as a guide for the research and therefore also as a guide in the final design of the students' residences. This is because the guidelines are quantified findings which were found through comparing the phenomenological perspective with research and reference projects. As the project went on, I am of the opinion that the phenomenological element of the graduation project slowly faded away, as the implementation of the guidelines became very factual, implemented, yes or no, whereas the perspective that led to these guidelines became less relevant.

I think the choice of method did lead to some interesting results in the research and therefore also in the designed residential project, that would have otherwise have never been attained, had it not been for the phenomenological perspective. The comparison of a phenomenological perspective through its literature, together with empirical studies gave the research and overall graduation project a unique take on an already relevant topic. Had the phenomenological perspective been left out of the "how" the resulting guidelines would have been much more generic. An example of how this is not the case, can be seen in the design of the residential project, within the communal spaces and individual dwellings, the possibility to withdraw or enclose oneself through curtains, almost certainly, would have not been designed, had it not been influenced by the phenomenological perspective.

During the designing phase of the residential complex I think the feedback was useful, in practical terms, floorplans, details etc, however it was not as influential as the feedback given during my P3, where i had presented the basic drawings, but completely lacked a coherent story, of making the connection between my design and research, moreover, I only referred to the phenomenological chapters of my research, making it even more unclear what my project was truly aimed at achieving. During that feedback, I realised that the project should really be presented from the individual design choices that were made, inspired by the research and guidelines, rather than explaining the design and afterwards making the connection with the research. I think that was definitely a turning point in my graduation project.

In terms of the design from early on the student dwellings, each had a core with a bathroom and a little reflective space that could be closed off with a curtain, This little reflective space had different iterations throughout the project and is a nice example to reflect upon the feedback and show how it was translated in the project. Initially the feedback questioned the practicality of this reflective space, and whether it would not simply be used by students as a space for storage and items, because of its very hidden position within the dwelling. Therefore I moved this "reflective" space from its hidden position next to the bathroom to the facade, making it more appealing to sit within this space, as it had a view on the outside. Now the problem was that this space had not changed in its design, it was simply a box pushing out of the facade, which one could just barely sit in, and it could be closed off. Furthermore it did not have a strong connection with the research, which was stated in the feedback. After which I redesigned it into a sort of bay window which could hold the students' desks and could be closed off with a curtain if wanted.

What I want to show with this story, is how the integrated feedback helped shape the project from poorly designed ideas, into design elements of the residential project that are much better connected to the research.

From my own work I have learned again that design problems that initially seem impossible to solve, eventually can get solved through many different iterations and discussions. However, perhaps more importantly, I learned how an architectural project can also be a physical interpretation of research, up until this point I had never designed a project where research was integrated, let alone in the domain of well being. I think this project taught me how the somewhat subjective art of design can also be infused with research based elements. How architecture can really be a science and not just an art. I think this is definitely something I will make use of further in my architectural career.

For the final part of my graduation project, from now until P5 I would like to further design and look into the atmospheres which the student residences have, both on an urban scale and the interior level, perhaps through a physical model in which the individual dwellings are visible. I would like to really show how the student residences really reflect the topic of mental well being also through its given atmosphere.

The topic of students' mental wellbeing is related to the architecture master track, through the way it is approached, the project aims to take into account and improve the mental well being situation of students through their residential context, through the architecture in which they live. The train of thought being that the mental well being of the students is in large part also connected to their living environment. In terms of the entire master, this graduation topic therefore also applies in the domain of urbanism and building sciences, firstly at the urban level the same ideas apply, through the different rerouting of urban walkways and opening of urban blocks, students interact differently with each other and other residents, students' mental well-being is also relevant at the urban level. At the level of building sciences the same applies, the residential complex is designed such that the details and for example the ventilation, best suits the students' needs.

The research influenced the design through its guidelines and interviews, these two aspects are what eventually made the residential project into what it is now. For example, the interview part of the research heavily influenced the scale of the project, as students stated their ideal room sizes to benefit their mental well being. The other way around, the design influenced the research in the direction it took, as the design was developed further it became clear what aspects of the research were more of greater relevance.

I think the approach, and the methodology within this graduation project worked out well. The initial phenomenological perspective led to the creation of some interesting guidelines, which in turn then led to an interesting student residential complex, because of their implementation, one aspect which could have been done better is the quantity of guidelines. Had there been more guidelines, the project would have been slightly more unique and diverse, as now some of the guidelines have been used multiple times throughout the project.

On an academic and societal level, this graduation project can raise awareness of a very relevant and ongoing issue, for an even more relevant and vulnerable target group. Especially in the domain of architecture, this graduation project can serve as an example of how integrated design elements based on research can be used and implemented to approach the issue of mental health problems for students. One ethical concern that may arise in an architectural project based on this approach, is whether all students should be

perceived as being vulnerable to mental health issues, and whether it is not a simple generalisation, to the extent that some students might perceive it as them being treated as potential “patients”.

I think this graduation project can easily be studied and have its ideas be applied elsewhere. Especially the interviews that highlight the students' preferences. But also the architectural solutions made, based on the research, are elements that other people might use as a reference project, and can implement these within their project, one example of this might be the bay windows designed for desks, and the possibility to customise it by replacing the desk with a chair, and the possibility to attach a curtain and close it off into a space for reflection.

Reflection Question 1: To what extent does overgeneralization take place within this architectural project tackling the problem of mental well-being within the target group of students?

This is a very spot on question about this project as a whole, which I have thought about many times. The idea being that this project looks at mental well-being, but it doesn't address the specific solutions for it depending on the students' ethnicity, origin and context, it to some extent assumes a standardized version of a student that is susceptible to mental well-being issues as literature might suggest. Whilst this vulnerability might be true, this project tries to account for this, by offering the students with some customizability within their dorms and communal rooms, some spaces can be closed, opened or adjusted. This aims to take into account the fact that the students are each different in their needs and preferences, but even so, the question remains relevant.

Reflection Question 2: How do you know this architectural project is not just a silver bullet for the complex problem of students' mental well-being ?

This is also a very fair question, and the real answer is that, this project is simply an attempt at trying to solve the ongoing issue of mental well-being for students, but it is a research based and interview based attempt. So in reality if this project were to be built, the project would not solve any of the students' ongoing mental well-being problems or it would not stop them from being susceptible to it. What the project would likely help with, is to alleviate a part of these problems, and perhaps lower the susceptibility of students to these problems, it would lower the chance of the problem occurring rather than solving it.