

Reflection

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Studio / Theme: Urban Architecture / Gleaning

This reflection paper will elaborate on the graduation project until now and with the final part coming up. It is regarding to the research and design part of the graduation and will reflect on the approach of the design and research, on the feedback of the mentors, how feedback was translated and what has been learned from my own process. This is regarding to the relationship between research and design and the research method.

The design for the graduation is an arts and crafts school and a special primary school, both are designed in an existing paper factory building. The building was built in 1850s for the process of paper making. Currently the building is vacant. The research fits into the design, since it is about the experience of all special primary school users and their experiences in school buildings. With the results decisions can be made for the design of the school.

Design process

For the P2 presentation the program was fitted into the existing building, I wanted to check whether the program and building would be in the same size. This shows my thinking mode at that time; very practical. I started thinking about the functionality of the building before thinking about the architectural esthetics I wanted to create. This was pointed out by the teachers, and I started trying to do this differently.

After the P2 presentation the design process started with analyzing the existing building and its surroundings. Since the building is a monument, there is looked into the value of the building. For this, the archive in Maastricht was visited. However, not everything of the building is documented so some speculations have been made. With this analyzation the features of the building were found.

During the design process I found myself struggling with the fact that the building is monumental. The design was stuck between keeping a lot of the existing and changing too much, the right design decisions were hard to find. In addition to this the feedback of the teachers were not in one line. One stated I was not brave enough and told me to step out of my comfort zone. The other kept telling me to keep thinking about the existing state of the monument. This resulted in not knowing what to do and having a lot of trouble finding my architectural position towards the design project. Until the P3 I did not really have a concept or idea where I was working towards. With the pressure I felt for doing it perfectly and the time pressure of the P3 coming up, I started to just do it and not think about what I wanted to reach. This was again a very practical way of working. I lost the motivation for this project a bit.

The feedback from P3 was not very good. Comments were that I was going the right way, however the manner was not how it should be. This was a wakeup call, I really needed to take a step back. Some distance and starting from a concept. This concept was created with a good look at the existing building and drawing what are the qualities, that need to be kept. From this the concept of what to do with the existing, the design came forward. I saw the light and knew where I wanted to work towards during the rest of the graduation. The moment of this concept drawing was crucial in my process. The tutoring session showing this drawing was very positive. All teachers were happy to

see what I did, and stated I was going the right way. This positive feedback gave me new motivation to work harder and be more critical on myself.

The time after this all feedback of the tutors were positive. This gave me more confidence in my own strengths. This also reminded me how important your architectural position is towards the design. However, when the P4 started to come closer, I saw myself going back to my old habits. Which is working hard and 'solving' the problems in the design. Very pragmatic, while I need to think about the architectural image. This is a problem I want to work on the rest of the graduation.

Research process

Since the struggle was big with the design, the research stood still for some time. Furthermore, I underestimated the load of work that needed to be done for the research.

The conversations with special primary school users needed to be planned. It was hard to make appointments to interview the children at a school. I asked the director to have conversations with the children of the special primary school. At first, they were too busy. The director mentioned the pressure on the teachers nowadays, caused by the lack of teachers and the covid crisis which causes sickness from teachers. With this the may break was coming up. In the end I was allowed to do the interview with the children in one class, because this teacher really wanted to help my research. However, this caused interviewing children of only one school and one age category.

Since this primary school did not let me interview more adults in the school, except for the director, adults working in other special primary schools were needed for the conversations. Two conversations were hold before the P2, one with the teacher of the interviewed class. The others were found by contacts of people I know working in the primary school field. This helped a lot, because they all wanted to help my research. During the conversations they told me that they found it so nice that I was including the users in my design process.

The method of using narrative drawings worked out very well within this research. The drawings tell a lot about the experience of the drawer in the specific school they go to. This would have been harder to find out during conversations, since the drawings contain elements the drawer is not aware of. Not only what has (not) been drawn is important, also where everything is drawn tells a lot about the experience. These drawings were made by the adults and children during the conversations. While talking about the school, the interviewee was drawing the school. In these drawings the answers got form. The manner in which the method was applied has, changed by having the conversations for the research. The questions asked during the conversations got more focused over time. The conversations done before P2 were very long and contained a lot of talking about the whole day at the primary school. This was very interesting and gave insights on what happens in special primary schools. However, these long conversations were not possible with the other adults, because of time reasons. From asking everything about someone's day at school, the research went to wanting three drawings; the school, the class, and the play yard. This helped the questionnaires to understand what the research wanted from them and made the conversations shorter.

In the end there were less drawings than what was the idea in the beginning. However, analyzing them took more time then counted on in the first place. Which resulted in still gleaning the drawings at the moment, since every time new things stand out.

After all these conversations I realized that all the people working at special primary schools have various opinions on how schools and lay out of schools should work. For example, one person wants all closed walls for the concentration of the students, others want more glass so there is a good overview of the school and the classes. This made me realize I had to think about my own position towards what would work best for the children, this needed to be included in the design. I realize this position is now most originated from the supervisor viewpoint. I would like to include the children's viewpoint more in my position and include this in the design.

With this research the future users were allowed to give their ideas. This is something I would like to use in future projects as well, since in the end the building is completed by the users. I

also feel that including users in the design process is important for design projects of others. I think with the voice of all users the design will become more complete.

Research, design and more

From the start the goal was to include the research on how special primary school users experience their school buildings within the design of the special primary school. The planning of both went totally different than expected. The design was quite far when the results of the research came in. It caused to think again on how the design works and if that was how it was intended. With this came the opinions on the schools from the adults working there. Thinking about this and finding what is the goal for the new school caused the design to change as well.

For the end product the idea is to bring both even more together. The end product will be a drawing of the design of the school with the narrative maps from the research included, which results in a big narrative drawing of the design. For this to work out, the drawings of the questionnaires have to be further analyzed. This should be brought into the design of the school more during the final part of the graduation. Focusing on the interior, the facades and the experience of the building from a children's and adult viewpoint.

The studio theme of Urban Architecture is Gleaning, picking up things other left behind and reusing this in the same or new manners. In the research I gleaned the experiences of primary school users, which I integrated in various ways into the design. During this gleaning process I had to position myself on the ideas of special primary schools before I could use it in my design. Gleaning is not just picking of the ground, it is really a thinking process. This thinking before doing is a technique I want to integrate more into the final part of the design process of the graduation.

The research and design are relevant in a social and scientific framework nowadays. Currently there is a lack of teachers at primary schools and this shortage is growing fast. Hereby comes the work pressure of the teachers, which is already high, will rise. One short time solution is setting in subject teachers, like art, music, drama teachers. Hereby teachers will have time for meetings and other work. This makes my graduation project very relevant, since the art school and primary school can work together and help each other out, while still being able to stand on their own. The design gives a layout for this concept, the schools are separated, however from every floor there is the ability to go to the other school. Having classes in art, movement, drama and more given by the subject teachers will be of better quality. This all helps with creating a better development of the children, who already went through a lot. This fits into a wider social framework.

The world is struggling with creating green energy to lower the footprint on gas. Hereby comes that the prizes on gas and electricity are rising since the war in Ukraine. The design had to become smart by reducing the use of gas and electricity. Therefor the design will have a second skin façade with shaft boxes using single sided natural ventilation. The second skin will provide fresh air coming into the building, which will be partly warmed up before going into the building. In the shaft boxes the used air will be push upwards by the warmed-up air in the shaft. Within the second skin rotatable slats will be placed. This way the façade deals innovatively with ventilation, sun warmth and daylight. This connects to the innovative character of the monument, since the paper factory was inventive at the time it was built, with the innovative character of the new monument.