

Reflection

MSc3/4 graduation | A matter of scale

Introduction

For my graduation project, I focused on the redevelopment of a building situated on the threshold between a large-scale industrial zone and a small-scale residential neighborhood in Tallinn, Estonia. The ambition of the project was to reintegrate this abandoned and underused site into the everyday urban fabric. This was approached by introducing a program—or a combination of programs—that could attract and serve a broad and diverse group of users. It is essential to take time to reflect on the process, the approach, and the outcomes. Only through reflection can I fully understand what worked, what didn't, and why. This includes evaluating the methods used, the role of feedback, the evolution of ideas, and how the design and research informed each other. These insights are valuable not only for improving this particular project, but for informing my future way of working as a designer.

Reflection on methods

Early in the academic year, I worked a lot with diagrams that highlighted underlying principles of buildings. This resulted in a set of parameters that affect the experience of human scale. The resulting themes became the guide for themes that would recur in my building. At first, this worked nicely as a handhold, but later it also caused problems because there were 12 themes, which were many aspects to consider. In the end, it turned out to work better to choose a smaller number of themes that were most applicable to the project I was working on. I learned from this that sometimes it is better to choose a few aspects and work them out very well and apply them broadly than to mix all kinds of small principles together.

Later in the project, I started to analyze more precisely than at diagram level. I did first translate found principles back to a diagram which I then worked out at a detailed level for my building. So I went from building analysis to design principles in diagrams to a set of possibilities to achieve a goal in the project I had in mind. These possibilities worked against each other and against the intended goal to make considered decisions for the project. This method worked very nicely and clearly, incidentally it also made me feel stronger about my own choices.

Reflection on approach

Looking back at my process, I realize that my methods stayed quite consistent throughout the project. While this consistency provided a certain clarity and focus, and the methods I chose were definitely appropriate and effective for what I was trying to achieve, I also think there could have been value in experimenting a bit more along the way. Sticking closely to familiar tools made the process feel comfortable, but in hindsight, I think it limited the range of perspectives I might have uncovered. For example, it wasn't until later in the project that I started using research maquettes. When I finally did, they opened up new insights that I hadn't reached through drawing or diagramming alone. Working physically with scale and space gave me a much more intuitive understanding of certain spatial relationships—something I now wish I had explored earlier in the process. I think if I had introduced this method sooner, it could have helped me test ideas more quickly and iteratively, rather than keeping everything in my head or on paper.

This experience has taught me that while it's good to have a strong method from the start, it's also important to stay open to other tools and techniques as the project evolves. Being flexible in your process can lead to discoveries that otherwise remain hidden. In future projects, I want to leave more room for trial and error and make space for methods that push me out of my usual working mode—because that's often where new ideas start to form.

Reflection on research and design

As mentioned earlier, research has influenced my design in many ways. Analysing buildings to turn found knowledge into design principles in diagrams has been a major influence on my building development.

Conversely, design has also influenced my research. Several times during the design process, I encountered a knot in my building or a problem that needed more attention. Solving these challenges required focused (small-scale) research. Designing made me look differently at certain aspects of my previous research. An example of this is how a research that was initially about different characters turned out later in the project to say much more about the way different parts meet than about their characters this I then adjusted in my research.

Reflection on feedback

The design process was constantly subject to feedback, not only from tutors but also from peers. From this, the main thing that emerged initially was that the quality of my drawings could be improved by using line thicknesses and shading correctly. In response, I looked for other ways to elaborate my drawings. As a result, I switched to another drawing programme that is better at delivering architectural drawings. I am glad I made this choice because I can see how the quality of my drawings has improved over the course of the project.

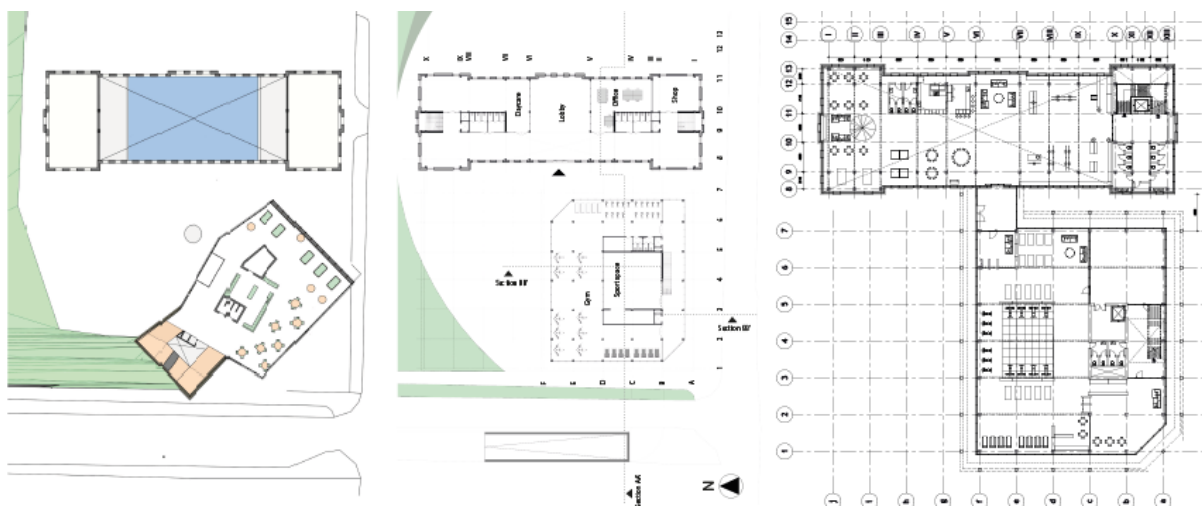


Figure 1) from left to right ground floor plans from P2, P3 and P4

Reflection on value

My project contributes to academic knowledge by bringing together a wide range of theory on human scale and merging it into one coherent and structured overview. This collection of ideas is not only brought together textually, but also visualised and translated into a set of design principles that directly relate to architectural elements. By doing this, the theoretical becomes tangible and applicable, which I believe is crucial in bridging the gap between abstract thinking and practical design. Through this project, I tried to challenge that by bringing human scale back to the forefront—both as a research topic and as a design tool.

The principles I developed are deliberately formulated in a general way, so they remain accessible and adaptable for a wide range of design contexts. They are not bound to a specific program or site, but instead aim to serve as a lens through which designers can test or enrich their own work. In that sense, I hope the work offers a kind of toolkit—grounded in theory, but usable in practice—that can contribute to both academic discussion and architectural design processes.

Reflection on personal growth

During the process, I found that I gained self-knowledge in addition to architectural knowledge. For instance, I was previously very hard on myself when I received comments or remarks about the work delivered. I took it very personally, despite knowing that I don't have to. Through weekly tutoring, I find that I can filter comments much better. A comment is not a bad thing, it's just the chance to make something

better than it is now. I think this positive attitude leads me to be much more open to taking chances in future projects as well.

Reflection on setting goals

Linked to the previous paragraph, I would also like to reflect on another aspect of personal growth. Usually, I set goals for myself very high. For example, this project had to be the best one I have made so far or this week I want to finish product A, B and C while the work necessary to achieve that goal can be very stressful. I have learned to work more pragmatically and effectively with the time I have. But also to give myself some rest sometimes. This produces better results in the longer term because I have breathing space to think about the things I am working on. Sometimes a little distance is good for oversight. Of course, I keep setting challenging goals for myself because I like to keep growing. I now see the value of being kind to yourself and trusting that everything is a process. The end of your studies is not the end of your growth, just the beginning.

Reflection on next steps

The next steps in my process will mainly focus on refining specific parts of my building in more detail, particularly when it comes to material choices, construction logic, and spatial connections. Up until now, the emphasis has been on the conceptual and spatial framework, but I now feel the need to strengthen the architectural expression by working through the physical aspects of the design more precisely. This includes exploring how different materials come together, how transitions are made between elements, and how these details influence the experience of the space as a whole.

A second focus will be to further develop the aesthetic qualities of the building. I want to raise the overall level of architectural resolution so that the project not only works well conceptually, but also resonates through its atmosphere, proportions, and materiality. To support this, I plan to study similar spaces in other built projects.

My aim is that this final phase of refinement will not only result in a well-worked-out project, but also in a design that offers a richer and more coherent architectural experience.