

# Research Plan

Investigating the community impact of Politiebureau Groningen Centrum's renovated facades and exploring opportunities for the upcoming redesign

Heritage & Architecture Graduation Studio

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<sup>1</sup> "Police department region Groningen,"  
[http://karelsevandermeer.nl/projecten/bureau\\_regiopolitie\\_groningen.html](http://karelsevandermeer.nl/projecten/bureau_regiopolitie_groningen.html).

# 1. Introduction

*'Memories are the key not to the past, but to the future'<sup>2</sup>*

This quote written by Corrie ten Boom, a Dutch writer, aroused my curiosity. I was wondering what memories could mean for the future. Memories are so common that everyone has, while so unique that no one has the same. They connect us with the past and shape us in the future. So for a building, memories, no matter sweet or abhorred, build up what it was, and imply what it could be.

As a carrier of memories, vacant heritage is addressed in the theme of Heritage & Architecture (HA) graduation studio. These years have seen a high vacancy rate of buildings caused by various crises. HA recognizes some of them as vacant heritages, identifying their values and putting forward sustainable solutions for their redevelopment. Dutch police real estate is one case of such condition. In the Netherlands, nearly 30% of police buildings are becoming vacant due to an organizational change within the Dutch police in 2013<sup>3</sup>. This year, invited by Atelier Politie Bouw Meester, we are researching ten given police buildings out of them and exploring opportunities for the upcoming redesign.

To research vacant heritage, Touch & Feel, one of the research directions in the studio, is of importance for its specialty in materiality. From the middle-nineteenth century after industrialization, available materials and technologies have been emerging, while heritage values in material attributes are still underestimated at large.<sup>4</sup> Thus Touch & Feel focuses on how materiality matters in value assessment and redesign options.<sup>5</sup> It values material attributes identified by both experts and nonexperts. Through this broader spectrum, a more considerable adaptive redesign strategy concerning materiality can be formulated and tested.

Politiebureau Groningen Centrum was proposed as one of the vacant heritages for its rich materiality. Though the building is only 51-year old, relatively young compared to other heritages, it went through an extension and a significant renovation, resulting in a rich collection of materials and elements on its facades. The building was initially built in 1970 with three wings by municipal architect Ele de Haas (1921-2010), and one year later, the fourth wing was completed.<sup>6</sup> In 1994-1996, the local architecture office Karelse Van der Meer (later renamed De Zwarte Hond) renovated its facades and interiors in order to change the perception of the building from bureaucratic to more inviting and approachable.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, the renovated facades have intertwined with the locals' memories and impacted the community, regardless of achieving the architect's intention or not. It is interesting to research such

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<sup>2</sup> Corrie Sherrill John L. Sherrill Elizabeth Ten Boom, *The hiding place* (Washington Depot, Conn.: Chosen Books : [Distributed by Revell], 1971).

<sup>3</sup> Heritage & Architecture – Studio: Vacant Heritage | | Bouwmeester  
MSc3/4 AR3AH105 – Fall 2021-2022 – STUDIO TEXT – Edition: 2021-08-27

<sup>4</sup> Heritage & Architecture – STUDIO TEXT – Edition: 2021-08-27

<sup>5</sup> The studio flyer, 2021

<sup>6</sup> "Het Politiebureau aan de Rademarkt in Groningen," 2015,  
[https://www.flickr.com/photos/hans\\_r\\_van\\_der\\_woude/37039801685/in/photostream/](https://www.flickr.com/photos/hans_r_van_der_woude/37039801685/in/photostream/).

<sup>7</sup> Jeroen de Willigen, Jurjen van der Meer, and Harm Tilman, *Hollandse realist : de Zwarte Hond, Karelse Van der Meer Architecten* (Rotterdam: NAI Uitgevers, 2005).

materiality regarding design intentions and community impact and how they could inform the upcoming redesign within the topic of Touch & Feel. To that end, the research questions are as follows:

*How did the architect renovate the facades of Politiebureau Groningen Centrum during 1994-1996 in terms of perception? How have the renovated facades impacted the community? What could it mean for the upcoming redesign?*

Sub-questions:

1. How did the architect do with the facades to change the perception of the building?
2. What does the building look like in locals' memories, and why?
3. What does the building mean for the community?
4. What are the relations between the intention and the result?
5. What can we learn from these perspectives?
6. How to position ourselves among different voices in the upcoming redesign?

The research plan will present the main aspects of the ongoing research. The second chapter will demonstrate the research methodology, explaining the interrelations between research and design and why specific methods were chosen or designed for the research. The third chapter will elaborate on the current progress of the research, presenting selected relevant data, analytical drawings, and written explanations, and introduce the schedule for the next phase of the research.

## 1.1 Definitions

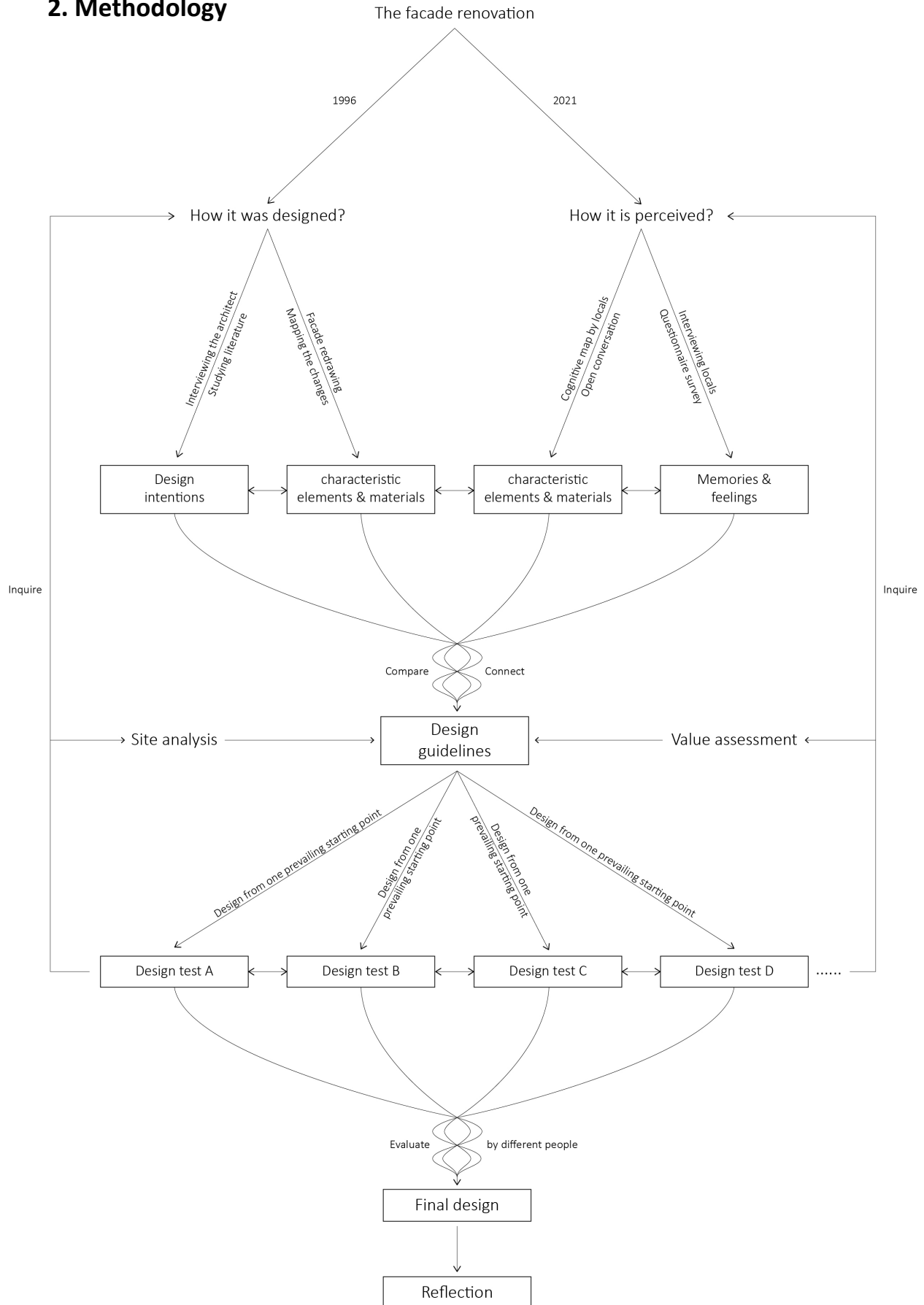
For clarity, I will describe a set of terms that the research revolves around in the domain of Heritage & Architecture. The notion of 'attributes' is 'the actual object of protection, conveying or creating value as a reason for protection.'<sup>8</sup> It consists of two independent sub-notions, 'tangible attributes' and 'intangible attributes,' for which heritage management should be different. The notion of 'values' adheres to Pereira Roders' definition of eight primary values: social, economic, political, historic, aesthetical, scientific, age, and ecological values.<sup>9</sup> These values are attached to attributes and recognized by both experts and nonexperts.

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<sup>8</sup> Loes Veldpaus and Ana Pereira Roders, "Learning from a Legacy: Venice to Valletta," *Change over Time* 4 (10/25 2014), <https://doi.org/10.1353/cot.2014.0022>.

<sup>9</sup> Ana Tarrafa Silva and Ana Pereira Roders, *Cultural Heritage Management and Heritage (Impact) Assessments* (2012).

## 2. Methodology



The research structure consists of three parts, i.e., case study, design test and evaluation, and final result and reflection. For the case study, Aiste and I have collectively worked on the data collection while we separately analyze the data concerning the individual research and design. Research and design will be tightly intertwined. On the one hand, the research on the case will inspire the design guidelines and serve as a basis for design testing. On the other hand, as the notion 'research by design,' the design will be involved in the research firstly as an inquiry for necessary data.<sup>10</sup> Secondly, design testing is also a research process, exploring possibilities of different design starting points and evaluating different design approaches. In the end, based on that knowledge, a final design and a final reflection will come onto the stage. For the outcomes required in Touch & Feel, a research report, a final design, and a final reflection will then be produced, as structured in the above methodology diagram.

Specifically, to research the architect's intention of the façade renovation in terms of perception, it is fundamental to study the primary literature in the first place. Hollandse Realist, an overall portfolio of the architecture office, De Zwarte Hond, provides crucial information about the project's intention as changing its perception. As a follow-up, Aiste and I contacted the office and received some written descriptions about the project. For more intimate knowledge, we have contacted the secretary and will interview the architect, Jurjen van de Meer, in a few weeks.

Redrawing the facades and mapping the changes are the methods to dig into the renovation project and discover which elements are vital for that intention. The method of redrawing the facades was inspired by the Dutch architect J. G. Wattjes. In his book *Constructie en Architectuur van Winkelpuilen*, he carefully studied the stores' facades by redrawing them.<sup>11</sup> Through the redrawing, some characters of the facades have been studied, such as the composition, the patterns, proportions, etc. The interesting method to analyze these drawings is overlapping them. When the initial facades and the renovated ones were overlapped in one drawing, what the architect added and removed and how he treated the old façade became easy to find out. This analysis, together with the interview and literature study on the design intentions, clearly shows the story of that renovation.

Investigating the community impact of the facades is one of the most exciting processes in the research. In the TU Delft pilot methods of identifying values and attributes in Almere and H-Buurt, two kinds of data collecting methods, open and specific, were introduced for different phases of the research.<sup>12</sup> Open methods such as open conversation are suitable in the initial phase of the research because they will not interfere with interviewees' thoughts. As a result, the data will be more objective and intuitive. Specific methods such as questionnaires and questions based on given images are suitable in the later research phase when the research subjects have already been determined, and accordingly, the data needs to be more specific about the subjects. According to this reflection on the pilot methods, I also chose two different

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<sup>10</sup> Rob Roggema, "Research by Design: Proposition for a Methodological Approach," *Urban Science* 1 (09/12 2016), <https://doi.org/10.3390/urbansci1010002>.

<sup>11</sup> J. G. Wattjes, *Constructie en architectuur van winkelpuilen : verzameling van ruim 50 goede voorbeelden van moderne winkelpuilen in Nederland* (Amsterdam: Kosmos, 1926).

<sup>12</sup> Martynas Sacevičius, "Juxtaposition of notions: Adaptable housing through circular transformation" (Master TU Delft, 2021), <http://resolver.tudelft.nl/uuid:8716e2a6-e3da-4ca1-93bb-cbb815a58116>.

methods to study the locals' memories and feelings about the facades. Firstly, open conversations were conducted to learn their first impression, thoughts, feelings, and memories of the building. During the conversation, I asked them to draw cognitive maps, namely what the building looks like in their memories. The method of the cognitive map was inspired by Kevin Lynch, who introduced mental mapping in his book *The Image of the City*. He asked interviewees to draw the city in their mind, by which their perception of the city emerged.<sup>13</sup> In a similar way but shifted to a smaller scale, after a few attempts, it has turned out successful that cognitive mapping helps learn the perception of the building. Through these methods, I have already determined several characteristic elements to investigate further. In the next phase, I will choose specific methods, i.e., questionnaire survey, to discover locals' memories in detail about those elements in terms of shape, material, color, rhythm, etc.

So far, two façade mappings respectively showing the architect's intentions and locals' perceptions have been produced. By comparing them together, design guidelines have been partly formulated and will develop further as more relevant data I get. The design guidelines will provide several starting points for design testing. Each design test will develop one design scheme based on one prevailing starting point. After that, different groups, including experts and nonexperts, will conduct comparisons and evaluations on the different design results. In the end, a final design based on the previous experiments will be formulated, and a reflection on the methodology and the design result will come out.

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<sup>13</sup> K. Lynch, *The image of the city* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1977).

### 3. Research Progress

#### 3.1.1 Redrawings of the facades



The redrawing of the initial front facade



The redrawing of the renovated front façade

#### 3.1.2 Mapping of the changes





### 3.1.3 The design intentions and corresponding elements



This drawing shows what the architect did to the facades and his intentions. The elements in yellow, namely the bay windows, the spacious entrance, and the new openings on the ground floor, were designed to show the changed relationship between the police and the public. The initial dull horizontal windows and closed entrance were considered bureaucratic from Jurjen's perspective. Therefore, he changed the composition of the facades and opened up the ground floor to make a gesture of inviting and approachable. Other intentions, such as improving connections with the urban square, giving the police building a characteristic appearance, improving the building physics, etc., all attach with the elements pointed out in color in this drawing.

#### 3.2.1 Cognitive maps and codings

Aiste and I had open conversations with eight locals about their memories and feelings of the building. Four of them drew cognitive maps to visualize their memories. The other four interviewees described their feelings in words.

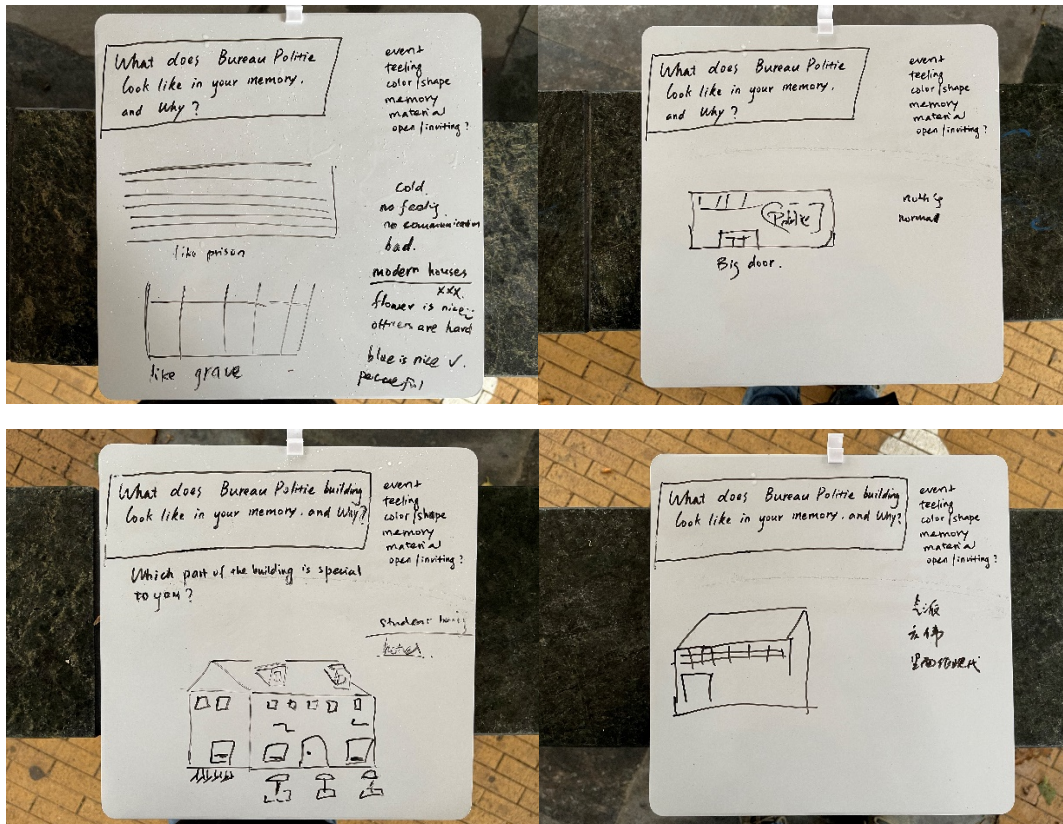
A 50-year old Dutch female drew the first cognitive map on the next page. She does not like modern-style buildings in the old town, She thinks the police building is cold, and there is no communication between the building and her, just as the cold police officers inside it. She has terrible memories with the police that the police refused to help her find her missing son, but in the end, she found that the son was imprisoned in this building. She regards the slattered sun shadings as a feature of prison, and the serpentine cladding on the ground floor reminds her of graves. She hardly went to the side facades, but she believed the blue surface was peaceful once she took a look.

An around 40-year old Dutch male drew the second cognitive map. He has no feeling of this building. It is just normal to him, but its big entrance, police logo, and horizontal windows gave him impressions.

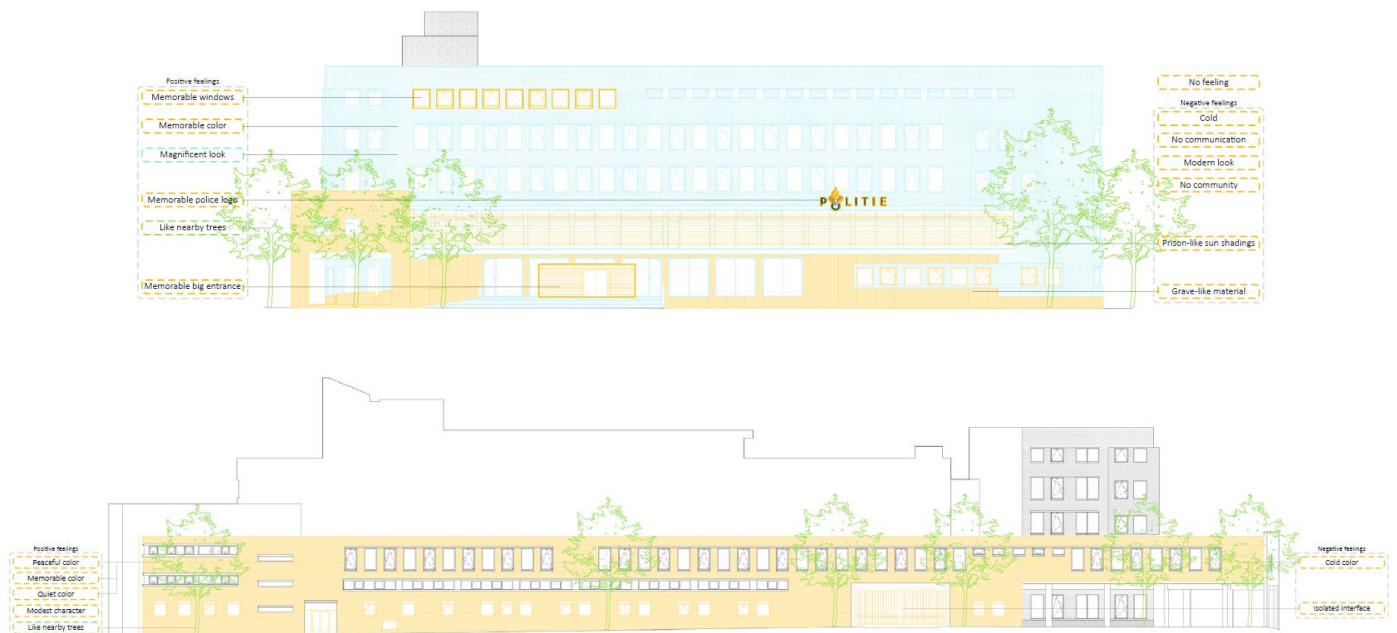
A middle-aged Australian resident living there for twenty years has no memory of what the building looks like, though he knows there is a police building out there. He drew what he envisioned the building, which was about big openings, active public space, and traditional pitched roofs.

Such conversations went on with the other five interviewees, and their feelings and memories were coded and mapped below.



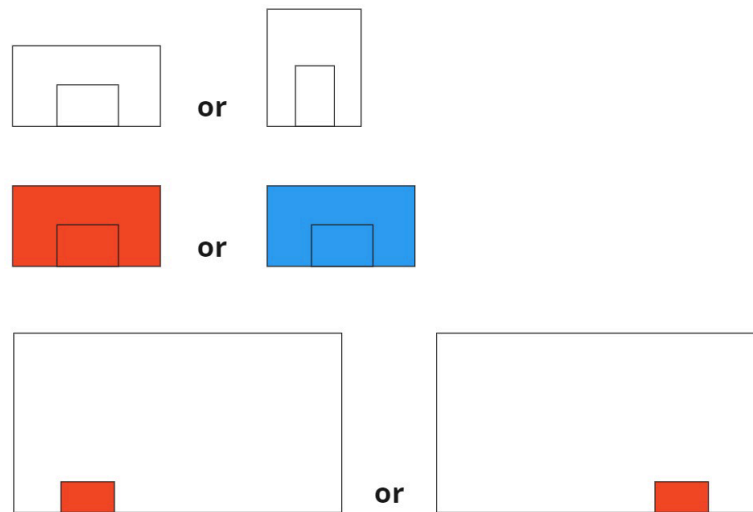


Cognitive maps by locals



Mappings of memories and feelings

### 3.2.2 Questionnaires



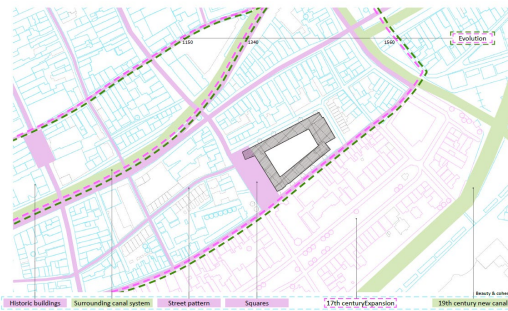
#### A questionnaire demo

Based on the first method of open conversation and cognitive mapping, I have located several elements embedded in locals' memories, for example, the big entrance. In order to refine the design guidelines on these elements, it is crucial to learn about what specific characteristics are in their memories. Therefore, currently, I am designing this questionnaire as a specific method to investigate details of their memory of the elements, i.e., color, shape, location, rhythm, etc.

### 3.3 Additional analysis for the design guidelines

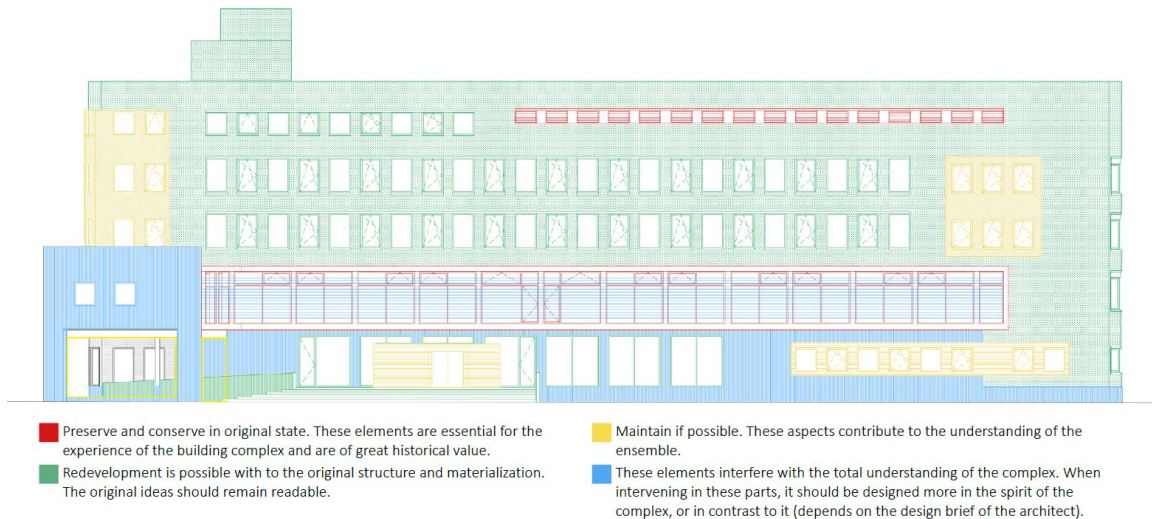


Site analysis: changes in the area



Site analysis: heritage values in the area

### 3.4 Design guidelines in progress



Through comparing and evaluating the design intentions and results, together with additional site analysis and values assessment, the current design guidelines are formulated as follows.

The horizontality of windows was remained by the architect and remembered by locals; therefore, this coherent character is suggested to maintain. The new entrance was designed to show the inviting gesture, and it is successfully embedded in locals' memories, thus supposed to remain or expand. The change of the facade represents an appreciated intention of changing the perception of the police, which, though, has little impact on locals' memories, can inspire the new design. Some isolated and cold interfaces are hated by locals and bring terrible memory, which should be changed, while the appreciated quiet atmosphere should be considered to call back.

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