



Houses are more than containers for Humans

The design brief with and within a cohousing group

Reflection

Since I was a little girl my father would take me on the bike to Amsterdam and look at building projects but especially the old heritage in the city. We still do this together now, and I have developed this fascination for old buildings. Especially places like the 'Westergasterrein' and 'de Hallen' have amazed me. Places with lots of heritage that are transformed to a new function and thereby the empty buildings are given back to the city. Now that I live in Rotterdam I took this habit to a new city and also here I found old and transformed buildings.

Mainly this love for the bike rides and the architecture in the city led me to the faculty of architecture in Delft. During these years of studying Architecture I have felt there was a lack of tutoring and knowledge on the user side of the Architecture, what do they want. Often an, as I call, 'Ego-Architect', designs a building as a high end fantastic design but doesn't take in mind who will use this building and what they need. During my master's degree I have tried to gain more knowledge on this user's side. Doing a board year at SHS Delft has given me a lot more knowledge on this subject by transforming former office and care facilities into student housing. Here, I redesigned an old psychiatric building into student housing and was able to follow the whole process of transformation while getting to know the user side of these other forms of living.

Those new forms of living have always fascinated me as well, students that live in harmony together and even elderly homes where they share certain facilities. Cohousing is something I became familiar with in my Bachelor and have always been thinking about this way of living and how it will be to live in such a project.

The relationship between the theme of Explore Lab and Cohousing in heritage

One could say the heritage fascination could also be taken to the field of Heritage, but in my opinion by combining the fascination for heritage with the interest in the user side of architecture and other forms of living, a unique design and research assignment is created. Because of this I think explore lab was the right studio to graduate in. Also because of my health issues, this was a suitable pick. In explore lab there is more time and acceptance to do your graduation on your own pace, and that is exactly what I needed.

Only in explore lab the research tools are free to pick, and thereby here it was possible for me to experience cocreation, cohousing and participation myself. Also since being interested in transforming an old building into a cohousing project, choosing my own site, which wouldn't have been possible in another studio was needed.

The research question I constructed was as follows:

How can we develop a method that helps the future residents and other involved parties of a cohousing group forming a design brief?

In my research I focused on cohousing, the design brief and participation methods. This was combined to form a new method to construct a design brief within such a group. I started by doing research in cohousing, mainly literature research. I also got the chance to attend two seminars on cohousing in Berlin and Amsterdam. In Stockholm I had the chance to get a tour through a cohousing project and even share dinner with the residents. This gave me an insight in what life would be in a cohousing project.

After doing research on the topic of cohousing I started looking into participation and the design brief. The design brief was something that in the bachelor was tutored a lot, but participation was quite new to me. Eventually with the help of some lectures at the faculty of Industrial Design I came across the suitable way of participation, context mapping.

Combining the knowledge of these three into a new method has led to a booklet. This booklet is design to be filled in by future residents of a cohousing project and then used in multiple workshops with the residents.

Evaluation of the method

The relationship between research and design.

As stated above, my research led to a new method to set up a design brief among future residents of a cohousing project. By applying this method in my own environment, I collected results that formed the starting point of my design. Even though the booklet was only given to 8 contestants and were mostly in the same usergroup, it gave me some insights in what future residents would want. Thereby the results of my research, the method, leads to an important part of my design. For example the facilities that are designed into the old school building are redirected from what came out of the filled in booklets.

Besides the direct use of the method also the knowledge of mainly cohousing has had a great impact on the design. For example the organization, the use of facilities and the organization of them are derived from the research into cohousing.

Relationship between the methodical line of approach of Explore Lab and the chosen methods.

Explore Lab has given me the opportunity to try out different research methods. Although the fact that I have been struggling with my health for most part of my graduation has also helped me to elaborate on multiple research methods. Looking back on the graduation I used the following research methods:

- Literature research
- Field visits
- Interviews
- Workshops

Looking back I think this mix of research, has given me a deeper research into the subjects. And because my graduation took longer than planned, I could also elaborate more on the outcomes, discuss them and even change my opinion on certain subjects. Since I started my research with a literature study, I could after extending my graduation use this knowledge in site visits, interviews and the workshop to sharpen my point of view and my direction of research.

The relationship considering the wider social, professional and scientific framework.

Since people in bigger cities are having trouble with finding a house, and since the growth of one-person households are extensive, cohousing is becoming more of a subject in our society. In the last few years it has become a common subject in our newspapers but also the 'geitenwollensokken' sphere that was connected to it, is slightly disappearing.

Combined with architecture becoming more user minded, in my opinion this is a very important subject. Creating methods to involve the users and using their opinion in the design is something that shouldn't be the exception but the normal way of designing.

Together with the amount of vacated architecture in the cities, especially schools, there is a large quest for transformation. In the 3 big cities in Holland around 14% of all the school buildings are empty, and because of our population becoming older this will be even higher in the future. Thereby transforming former school buildings, will be a common design assignment in the future.

