



Reflection

From node to place

A new livable and sustainable neighborhood in Amsterdam Sloterdijk

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Graduation Project
MSc. Urbanism

Colophon

From Node to Place:

A new livable and sustainable neighborhood in Amsterdam Sloterdijk

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Introduction

My graduation project "From Node to Place: A new sustainable and livable neighborhood in Amsterdam Sloterdijk" deals with the concept of Transit-Oriented Development and its spatial application in the case study of Amsterdam Sloterdijk, a major mobility hub and business district in Amsterdam West. With this project, and through the integration of a wide range of themes to the urban design aspect of TOD, I aimed in the creation of an overall spatial vision of the future TOD in the context of Amsterdam.

The project location, Amsterdam Sloterdijk, was selected for its importance as part of the mobility and employment network of Amsterdam and for its largely problematic function as a neglected part of the city. Amsterdam Sloterdijk proved to be a very promising location for this research as it is also part of a large transformation, the project of Havenstad, that is going to substantially increase spatial pressure on the area of Sloterdijk in the future.

The main points of focus for this graduation project were on density, program, public spaces, and sustainable mobility, bearing in mind the aspect of inclusivity of the different potential users, including both human and non-human populations. Analysis of the current urgencies the city of Amsterdam is facing, namely the housing and climate crisis, and the trend of substantial densification of the city, influenced the integration of climate adaptation and urban ecology as key elements of the design.

The project concludes with an overall vision for the area of Sloterdijk, which is transformed into an area where living and working and leisure coexist with the large mobility hub of the station. The urban fabric of which is transformed in such a way that is possible to adapt to current and future challenges and to eventually realize the potential of train station areas as places of great diversity, where social interaction is facilitated. At the same time qualities improving the livability and sustainability of the new neighborhood, are enhanced.

Relation to graduation studio

As mentioned before, this graduation project, draws the attention to the conflict between the two major crises that the Netherlands is currently facing, housing and climate. These two crises are interrelated, as the way in which the housing crisis is resolved, is going to play a major role in achieving a sustainable future for the Netherlands and vice versa. Therefore, this topic is directly linked to the urgencies that the field of Urbanism is dealing with.

In my approach to deal with these urgencies, the concepts of Transit-Oriented Development and density offer great potential. The complexity of the translation of these concepts into space requires a good understanding of space and context, therefore the integrated design and research approach of the studio Design of the Urban Fabric was a great match for my inquiry, as design is used as a method for research. Integrating design into the research process was highly beneficial in the way of simplifying the complexity of the area of Sloterdijk.

Furthermore, Design of the Urban Fabric studio puts the importance of place at the forefront of its approach, which allows for a deeper understanding of the urgencies and potentials of a given place. Starting directly with Sloterdijk as my project location allowed me to have a good understanding of the place from the early stages of my project.

Finally, within the current theme of the studio "Embracing Plurality-Growing porosity", my topic is strongly aligned with the studio's overall inquiry on the multiplicity of interactions within high-density urban areas in relation to both socio-economic and environmental issues.

Scientific and societal relevance

My graduation project started from a personal fascination regarding the concept of Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) and an overall academic interest on the matters of densification and sustainable mobility. This fascination led to the further refinement of my graduation project's topic, as a way to conceive the way TOD is a relevant concept that can be utilized to address and respond to ongoing urgencies. As a result, a more holistic approach was taken, also involving themes such as urban ecology and climate adaptation, both of which should be integral parts into the process of the spatial application of TOD. The complexity of the spatial translation of TOD in the case of Sloterdijk in relation to all the other themes addressed in this project, proves the necessity of a more holistic approach to the urban design of Train Station Areas. This is a valuable approach as literature on TOD is limited mostly to the mobility and functional perspectives of such developments.

In terms of the societal relevance, several concerns related to TOD and the process of densification, informed the project. Starting with developments around railway station areas, several realized projects resulted in the creation of exclusive urban districts. New developments around station areas are often market-oriented, primarily led by railway operators and developers, aiming in

the maximization of profits, with little regard to social and ecological positive contributions. To alleviate this process, active involvement of municipalities is imperative to ensure these contributions. This graduation project dealt primarily with spatial and design related aspects that are related to the creation of more inclusive TODs. This was accomplished by highlighting the importance of public spaces and the provision of places with different qualities. A wide variety of public spaces with different characteristics ensures that people can have control over their desired social interaction, meaning that some public spaces can have higher intensity of human activities promoting social interaction while others provide quiet places which are highly valued in high-density areas.

Furthermore, considering the pressing issue of the current housing crisis, development of a high number of residential units in the area of Sloterdijk has a positive contribution to society. Diversification of the building stock and provision of a substantial share of social housing, can ensure the inclusion of larger parts of the society into the new area.

Risks associated with climate change, on local and global scale, are also strongly relevant in the case of Sloterdijk. Design decisions were made bearing in mind the possibility of mitigating risks related to heat stress and flood mitigation, with the aim of creating a healthy and safe environment for both human and non-human populations.

Considering the concept of accessibility which has a positive effect on society, is addressed and enhanced on three different levels. Firstly, due to fact that area is developed around a major mobility hub, accessibility to other places is high. The second level is related to the provision and therefore access of people who live in the area to a wide range of services and facilities such as schools, restaurants, libraries etc. Last but not least, the aspect of accessibility related to users, in my project is addressed through the consideration of their needs and how they can possibly use of space.

Ethical considerations regarding my graduation project are related to conflicts that could potentially arise with the current stakeholders through its implementation. Stakeholders include the railway operators and businesses established in the vicinity of the station area. For that purpose, the importance of public spaces, walkability and enhancement of public transportation should be highlighted along with a more sensitive approach to the changing climate and to the ecosystems. This will ensure even in a smaller scale, a more gradual implementation of the principles used in the integrated design.

Methods

Throughout the graduation project, several methods were used. First and foremost, the method of "research by design" was adopted. This means that by conducting design iterations, research knowledge is produced. For my project, several themes were distinguished in order to conduct more in-depth research to each of these important elements of the overall design. These iterations revealed several conflicts or potentials that arise with the spatial translation of each idea into the site. This process was helpful in the evaluation of each iteration and to the selection of the most promising ones for the integrated design. At the same time, the process of creating this integrated design revealed again several conflicts or potential synergies between the different elements. As result, this back-and-forth approach resulted in the refinement of the design.

The method of research by design was used particularly after my P2 presentation, as a method to dive deeper into the spatial aspects of the location. In retrospect, with the experience gained in the last part of my graduation project through this process, I believe that it would be even more beneficial to implement this method in an earlier stage of my project to allow more time for some parts it to be more refined. Nevertheless, the insights and knowledge gained through this method were crucial for the development of my project and as a method of working in my professional career.

After P2, Riens insisted on diving deeper into the spatial aspects and qualities of the design as the direction of the project was still abstract and the vision not clearly defined, while Ulf's feedback helped me in creating a more value-driven approach again keeping spatial qualities in mind. After my P3 presentation, and through this process of spatial exploration, the project was clearly defined.

Finally, in terms of the other methods used, mapping was also an important method of inquiry, particularly in the first stages of my project. Sloterdijk can be seen as a catalyst for the city of Amsterdam from various perspectives. Understanding of the context, its importance in the transportation network, the pressure from new developments, and the climate risks, revealed the urgencies but also the potentials that stem from all these.

Transferability

This project dealt with the transformation of a train station area into a dense, livable, and sustainable neighborhood. Amsterdam Sloterdijk is a very important node in the city of Amsterdam, a city which attracts large amounts of people for living and working and with ambitions of placing itself high in the competition among global cities. Therefore, several solutions utilized in this project such as the building over the railway tracks, would not be feasible in most of the other railway stations in the Netherlands, even in large cities such as the Hague.

Regarding the concept of Transit-Oriented Development, its transferability is also questionable as its spatial translation should be highly contextual and not just the application of the principles defined by literature. Cultural preference of biking in the Netherlands for example, is directly enlarging the catchment area of a potential TOD.

Nevertheless, the main principles and values of the proposed design can be used in relevant future projects. As work is becoming is location-independent, the creation of monofunctional business districts becomes obsolete. Accessibility provided by the transportation network will be enhanced by accessibility on the local scale of the train station areas and for multiple users in an inclusive manner. Careful consideration, diversification, and prioritization of public spaces over mobility systems, will ensure the vitality of the area and facilitate social interaction. A balance between busy and quiet places will enhance livability on such areas, while ecology will be integrated in the design process from early stages of the design. Lastly, climate adaptation as a crucial component of a dense urban environment will ensure a healthy and safe environment for human and non-human populations around transportation nodes. All these principles and values directly transferable to other station areas in the Netherlands.