OPEN THE DOOR

Reflection

Architecture & Dwelling
Designing for Care – towards an Inclusive Living Environment
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Introduction

The unprecedented challenge of our demographics requires global actions to meet the changing needs of an ageing population, to provide the opportunity for older people to be fully-included, to live a long and healthy life. This ever-increasing attention reinforces the need of for a built environment that supports the inclusiveness especially for the elderly. **Designing for Care**, that is to say, this topic is devoted to thinking on the future of elderly housing.

Figure 1. Comfortable lounge for the elderly in the nursing home, Loenen.

Our way of living is changing: the character of elderly housing, which tends to reflect society, should also be entering a period of change. In my opinion, new inclusive design for the elderly may become the **norm**, where the built environment should be as inviting and accessible to older people as possible. That is the main reason for me to choose this topic at the first place: to find out what inclusive design really means for them.

The relationship between 'Open the Door' and studio topic

Life is first boredom, then fear.
Whether or not we use it, it goes,
And leaves what something hidden from us chose,
And age, and then the only end of age*.*

"Dockery and Son", by Philip Larkin

Figure 2. Intimate interactions with each other in Loenen

Ageing brings a higher risk of *social loneliness*, and limited access to affordable and high-quality living environment. And that is the reason why **'Open the Door'** becomes the topic of this project in the first place, which is devoted to thinking on the future of **'intimate'** housing and social connections for the elderly. And this research and design is highly related to the vision of the graduation studio.

Many hours of research time are spent in on-site observations and interviews with older inhabitants of the elderly home, which leads the author's interest to human-scale designs. It sets forth new and neglected issues based on actual users' behaviors and uses of space in housing for older people. Instead of traditional apartments, a closer co-living lifestyle is described by this project.

From research to design & approaches

Intrigued by the exercise of visual anthropology and one-week fieldwork in *'t Nieuwe Kampje*, an elderly home in Loenen, the research part of this project attempts to raise the question of what design strategies for reconciling social loneliness will be like, and to investigate forms that will support social connections. Since living environments including their homes and neighborhoods, are essential variations which can directly affect older people's physical and mental capacity, it is important to consider environmental and design approaches that ameliorate the losses associated with older age to improve their life quality.

Figure 3. Social networks matter more in Loenen

In order to explore design practice for the elderly more efficiently, the research questions are processed from different scales: a wider environment at the neighborhood level, and smaller scale within the building itself. And this is what mentors recommend, which eventually proves to be a logical framework to follow (see *Figure 4*). Further, this research relies on sufficient literature reviews and case studies, which provide a walk through the preceding in-depth design studies. In the conclusion chapter, this research identifies suited design principles and strategies for the graduation project, which later become a design manual for concept programming and design review.
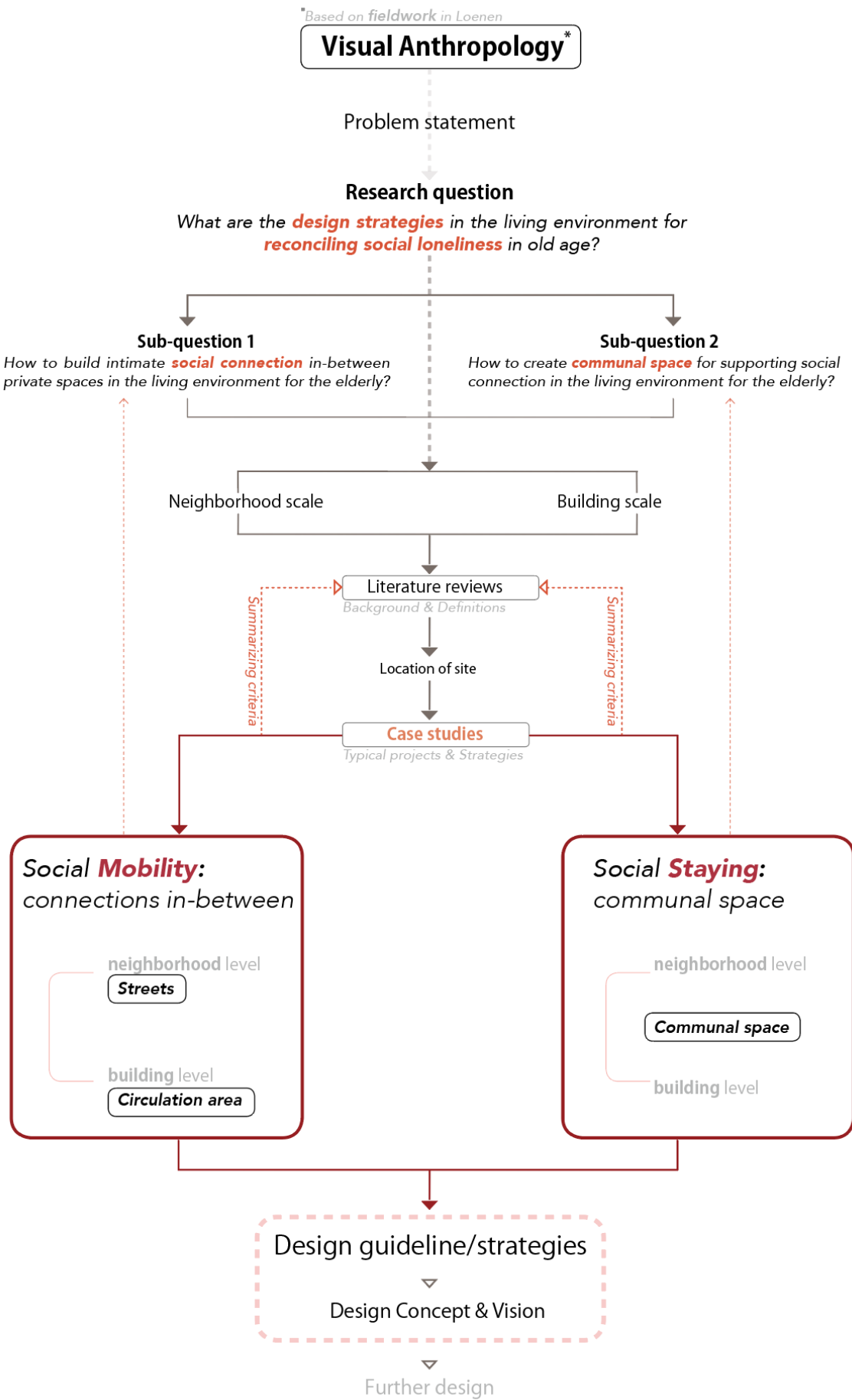
Visual Anthropology*

Problem statement

Research question

*What are the **design strategies** in the living environment for **reconciling social loneliness** in old age?*

Sub-question 1

*How to build intimate **social connection** in-between private spaces in the living environment for the elderly?*

Sub-question 2

*How to create **communal space** for supporting social connection in the living environment for the elderly?*

Neighborhood scale   Building scale

Literature reviews
Background & Definitions

Summarizing criteria

Summarizing criteria

Location of site

Case studies
Typical projects & Strategies

*Social **Mobility**:*
connections in-between

neighborhood level

Streets

building level

Circulation area

*Social **Staying**:*
communal space

neighborhood level

Communal space

building level

Design guideline/strategies

Design Concept & Vision

Further design

Figure 4. Program of the research and design process

Staying consistent with the research, the design assignment involves the design of a housing project and its immediate environment. The main focus is the negotiating process of making (design) decisions on an environment, in which elderly with care demands can live more closely together with others and will be part of the community. Based on the experience and criteria summarized in the research conclusion, this graduation design could address reasonable possibilities for more intimate living and gathering that arise when constructing spaces and programs for the elderly, especially those local residents in 110 Morgen (see *Figure 5*).
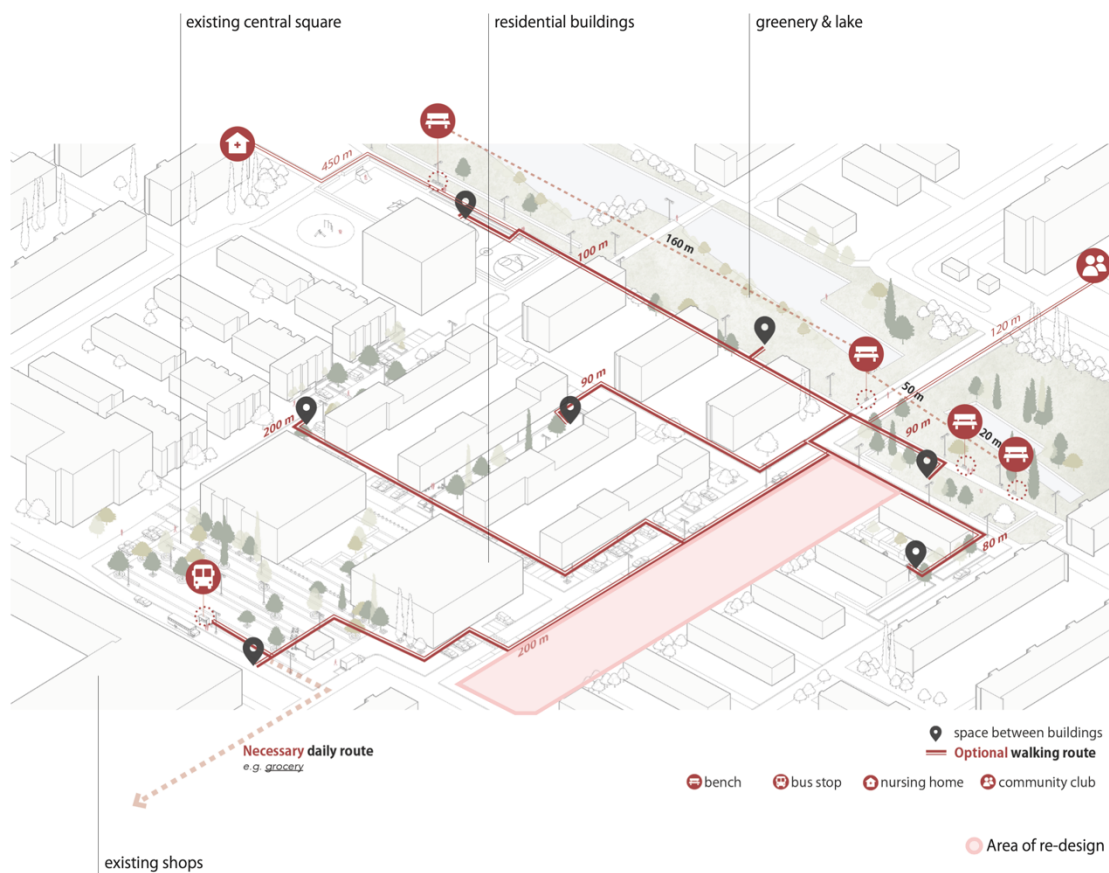
*Figure 5 Design site in the neighborhood 110 Morgen*

Thanks to the highly-relevant research and human-centered investigation, this design could be founded on a substantial knowledge about ageing locals, suggesting ways in which residential settings may better support daily life for this particular group. By taking the user-need issue into consideration at early design development stages, this time, the architectural design could be able to evaluate new spatial relationships for potential conflict with older people's needs and for innovative solutions, which may hopefully delight their daily life.

The challenges and difficulties

However, to achieve a real inclusive design is difficult: spaces should be barrier-free and as convenient to use as possible, and have the potential to make the elderly more energized as well. For example, the relationship between indoors and outdoor life is difficult to realize in the context of the existing multi-level housing. According to thorough research and site analysis, a reasonable decision of creating a living environment closer to ground level is made, which allows intimate social connections to exist more freely (see *Figure 6*). This sensitive attention and problem-oriented approach towards all design choices and actual use is one of the most beneficial experiences to the author.

The concept of extending **outdoor spaces** and grouping the buildings into **clusters** can make the edge softer and more permeable, creating the possibility of closer neighbors where more spaces are **mutually shared**.

Clear demarcation of the edge by independent, standalone buildings.

Terrace

'Corridor'

section

section

plan

plan
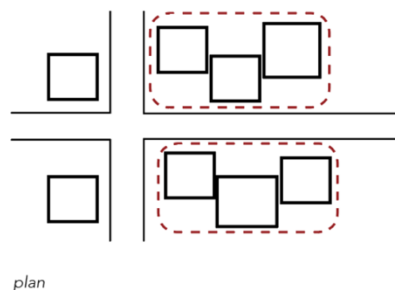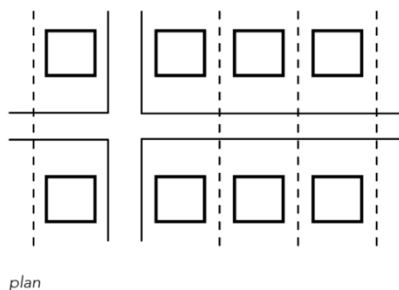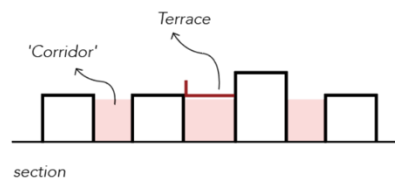
house ⟶ porch ⟶ garden ⟶ **wall**

house ⟶ 'corridor' ⟶ garden ⟶ **'inner street'**
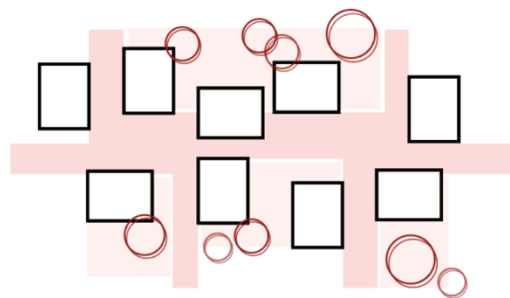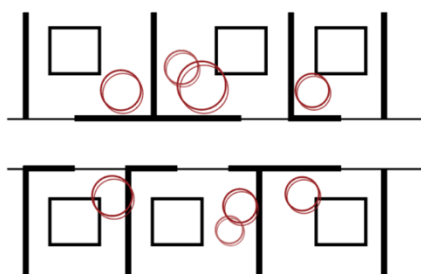
Figure 6 Design strategies for opening the door

The connection to a wider social context & personal reflection

The need to know more about inclusive housing design is consistent with the changing need of our ageing society, which requires adaptations to the way it is structured across all sectors. For example, health and social care, transportation, housing and urban planning. It is necessary to extend the discussion of architectural design into the realm of these factors. However, frankly, those subjects are not the major concern of the author, which yet absolutely cannot be ignored. Fuller discussion of future directions for collaborative work in designing should be expected.

Finally, during the last part of the graduation period, more thoughtful attentions will be paid to check and further improve their actual living experience and scenarios in this design project for the elderly: does the spatial definition in terms of walls, corners, windows, or circulation paths truly fits their habitability needs? What kind of interior style and furniture arrangements match their preference and behavioral patterns? How to describe the typical activities in the course of their days within this design project?

If looking back to the whole process, the sensitive and considerable attitude, and the human-centered design strategies open the author's minds in many ways:

Always go to the site;

Always put yourself in the elderly's shoes;

Always pair actual spaces with actual needs and uses.

Thanks to this special journey, all of the new experiences and skills around the **ageing** discussion could be helpful for the author's further development in the architectural field.