

Reflection

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My final research question is - *How to maintain or enhance a sense of community in post-war neighborhoods undergoing regeneration processes?*

Since starting this graduation project, I have been increasingly interested in the connection between architecture and society. In my perspective, the general problem is composed of two main aspects, architectural and sociological, since residential neighborhoods are the main topic of discussion.

During the research and the design process, I have doubted and questioned every part. Therefore the reflection is composed by the sub questions that arose during the process.

How to solve the housing crisis?

The current housing crisis in the Netherlands requires a comprehensive study on who is affected by it, what are its characteristics, and what are the possible solution strategies. I discovered that after World War II there was a great housing shortage which was solved with extensive urban sprawl. Today, the aim is not to reduce open areas, and therefore densifying existing cities is a prominent solution.

How to build a design manual?

Initially, I wanted to propose a design manual that would offer guidelines to densify post-war neighborhoods in the Netherlands. When I started composing the design manual and studying the

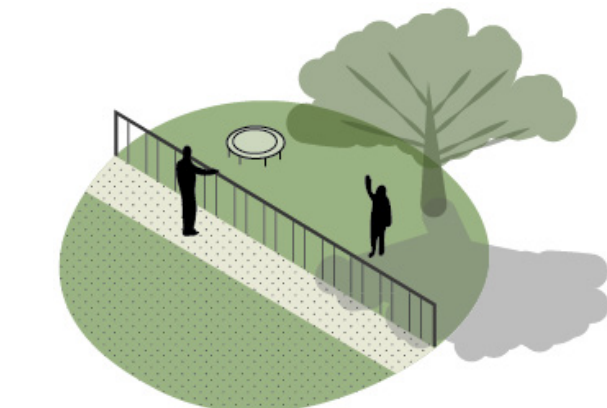


Figure 2 illustrations of a front yard [own photo]



Figure 1 illustrations of a communal garden [own photo]

context of post-war neighborhoods, I realized that this would be a difficult task to achieve, due to the enormous scope and factors needed to take into consideration. Post-war neighborhoods have a large range of construction styles and materials, and master plan shapes. Moreover, in every neighborhood the population configuration is different, therefore they have different desires and needs.

Who is the solution for?

One of the feedbacks I received was to focus on a target group. Planning for a specific end user helped me understand its desires and needs. I chose the largest age group that resides in Groot IJsselmonde, young adults. This decision helps achieve a wide utilization of the solution. In other neighborhoods, the most prominent age group can be different.

How to integrate new residents with current ones?

A design of an environment that promotes the use of shared spaces, gives the community a place to develop and evolve. In these spaces the residents are welcomed to change and modify the surrounding according to their view. The current community holds enormous importance in the integration of the new residents. If a community exists, it will shape the communal spaces quickly and efficiently according to what is already successful and proven. The ongoing change of a communal space and the manifestation of the residents characteristics attribute to the sense of community.



Figure 3 illustrations of a public park [own photo]

Why a sense of community?

As a young adult myself, I sense that I am directly impacted by the evolving changes in our built environment while simultaneously being a key influencer on the factors that shape it. When I think about my sense of community, I think about my neighborhood and how the connection with my neighbors contributes to my well-being. On a larger scale, I notice the missing sense of community beyond the street boundary and wish that this neighborly behavior would grow into a neighborhood-scale safety net where everyone would feel they belong and contribute.

During the research phase, I planned to conduct interviews and observations in Groot IJsselmonde regarding the existing community. I visited the area a couple of times, but encountered several obstacles, the biggest of which was the language barrier. I did most of the analysis of the existing community by observing the common areas. In these territories, it was possible to see an expression of a sense of community in some cases and the lack of it in others. For example, benches in the inner courtyard indicate a potential meeting between neighbors, but some of the courtyards are empty of sitting areas or play areas. This led to the design choices I made in the implementation part of the research.

How does a sense of community manifest itself in architecture?

Studying existing master plans and theories helped me understand that a sense of community usually reflects itself in shared spaces. The various studies examined different residential areas and identified

which elements influence the sense of community in a neighborhood. Consequently, I concluded the crucial role of physical spaces in hosting social interactions. For example, the walking path towards the entrance, the corridor, and shared outdoor spaces.

How to integrate new and old?

An important aspect of the design is the contextuality aspect of it, there is a risk that the renovation project will become unrelated to the rest of the neighborhood. Examining the existing environment proved that certain solutions are not achievable, for example replacing the entire facade, or adding extra floors on top.

Walking in the neighborhood and photographing it gave me a lot of information. I made a comparison between the original drawings of the buildings and the existing situation. It proved to me which elements have changed. For example, a front yard was turned into bicycle parking space, and an external structure with outdoor space was added to one of the buildings. These changes established my ambitions for change that I could implement in the project.

How to build sustainably?

Part of the design proposal is adding new construction of small residential units in the open space. I investigated current ongoing residential projects. Looking at popular building methods sheds light on the current developments of building technologies, achievable sustainability goals, materials, and housing configurations.

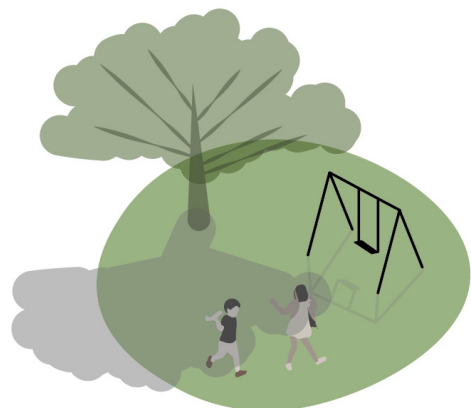


Figure 4 illustrations of a playground [own photo]

Conclusion

The planning of the regeneration transformation of Reyeroord in Groot IJsselmonde has been very interesting and challenging. The investigation part started with a visit to the Archive of Rotterdam, and photographing the original material. Analyzing and digitalizing the plans, sections, elevations, and details, has taught me a lot about the original construction method and layout of the apartments. It mostly highlighted the potential of the original structure to modifications and determined what can or can not be done, this had an influence on my design proposal. The research on how to maintain or enhance the sense of community in a residential neighborhood has brought three conclusions. First, the solution needs to integrate new and old construction in a way that will not overpower the rest of the neighborhood that might be renovated in different periods. Second, the importance of multiple types of housing solutions, in order to attract to the neighborhood a greater variation of target groups. Third, planning the shared spaces in three scales- urban, stamp, and building scale, in order to provide a well connected successful community. Although the design outcome is shown in the case study neighborhood-Groot IJsselmonde, I believe the research conclusions can be implemented in other neighborhoods with alterations.

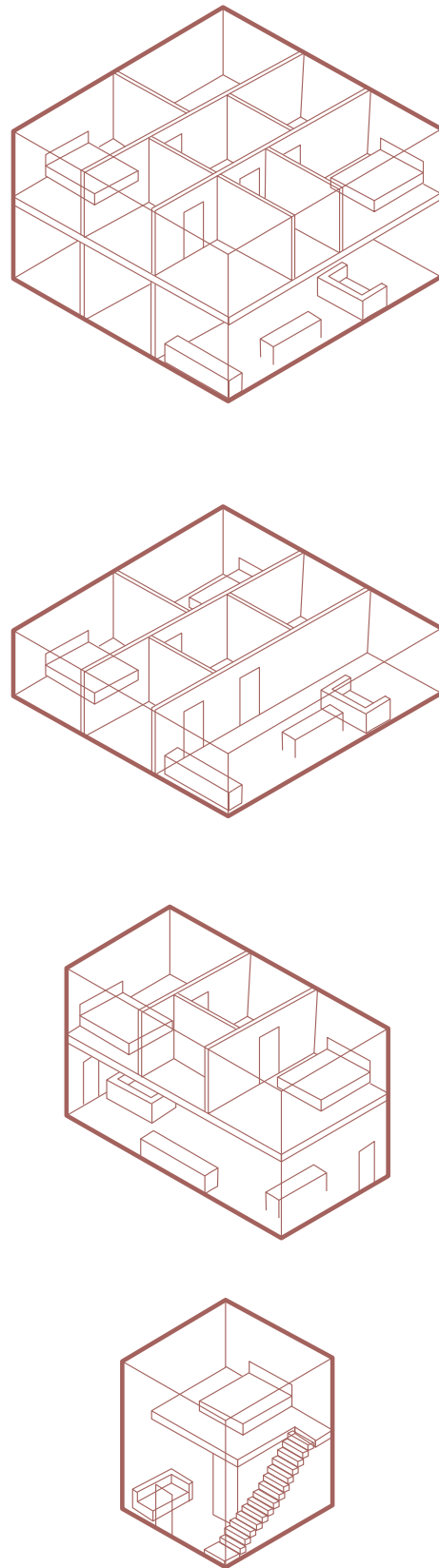


Figure 5 illustrations of various housing typologies [own photo]