

P4 Reflection – Nikki de Zeeuw

Working on my architecture graduation project has been an arduous yet immensely rewarding journey, allowing me to transform my passion for design into a tangible expression of creativity and innovation. As I look back on this past year, I am filled with a sense of personal growth. The project not only tested my technical skills but also challenged me to think critically, envision possibilities, and embrace the responsibility of shaping the built environment.

Throughout my academic years, I have been captivated by the power of architecture to shape the way in which we live, work, and interact with our surroundings. With this in mind I started my graduation project—an endeavour aimed at reimagining material use to enhance community engagement and sustainability. Inspired by the evolving needs of our modern society, I sought to push the boundaries of traditional design approaches and explore new possibilities for architectural intervention.

Aspect 1: Relationship between the graduation project and master track / program

Architecture has always been intricately connected to the needs and aspirations of society. As a graduation project, designing a Center for Resources presents a unique opportunity to explore the dynamic relationship between architecture and the diverse needs of communities. This project demands a deep understanding of the interplay between form and function, while addressing the broader social, environmental, and economic dimensions of resource management. It challenges the designer to create a space that not only fulfils practical requirements but also fosters a sense of connection, sustainability, and empowerment within the community it serves.

At its core, a Center for Resources serves as a hub for gathering, disseminating, and utilizing various resources. The architectural design of such a center becomes an essential tool in facilitating access, promoting collaboration, and nurturing innovation. The spatial layout, materials, and aesthetic choices should reflect the purpose and ethos of the center, creating an environment that encourages exploration, interaction, and knowledge exchange.

One of the fundamental challenges in designing a Center for Resources lies in achieving a harmonious balance between functionality and aesthetics. The architectural form should respond to the specific needs of the resources being offered while engaging the senses and stimulating curiosity. The spatial arrangement should enable efficient circulation, ease of navigation, and intuitive wayfinding, ensuring that visitors can seamlessly access the various resources available. Furthermore, the design should strive to create an atmosphere that inspires creativity, contemplation, and dialogue—an environment where individuals can feel inspired, empowered, and connected to their community.

Sustainability plays a crucial role in the design of a Center for Resources. Architecture has the power to integrate environmentally friendly features, reducing the ecological footprint of the building while promoting sustainable practices within the community. Moreover, the design should encourage resource conservation, waste reduction, and the adoption of sustainable behaviours among the center's users.

Beyond the physical aspects, a Center for Resources serves as a social and cultural catalyst, promoting inclusivity, diversity, and community engagement. The spaces should foster a sense of belonging and accommodate the diverse needs and preferences of the community. The center can provide gathering spaces, multipurpose rooms, and flexible configurations that can adapt to a variety of activities, empowering the community to shape the utilization and programming of the space.

A Center for Resources as a graduation project offered a rich and multifaceted opportunity for me to explore the intersection of design, functionality, and societal needs. It demands a holistic approach that considers not only the physical requirements but also the social, environmental, and cultural dimensions. By embracing sustainability and community engagement, the design for the Center for Resources hopes to create spaces that empower individuals, foster resourcefulness, and contribute to the betterment of society. The design of the Center for Resources becomes a testament to the transformative power of architecture, showcasing its ability to shape our world and enhance the quality of life for generations to come.

Aspect 2: Relationship between research and design

Through research on the gecekondü it became clear that these structures mostly reflect the resilience and resourcefulness of these communities. In my research I aimed to understand the characteristics, challenges, and potentials of gecekondü settlements, which helped me form a set of guidelines that addressed the unique needs of local communities.

The first element of gecekondü settlements that inspired me in my graduation project was their spatial arrangement. The adaptive strategies employed by gecekondü dwellers, such as compact and flexible living spaces, shared communal areas, and multi-purpose rooms provided an interesting starting point for the design, and by incorporating these principles into the Center for Resources' design I focused on maximizing the center's functionality. This approach enables the center to serve a wide range of activities, accommodating the diverse needs of the community it serves.

Secondly, research on gecekondü informed sustainable design strategies for the Center for Resources. The main elements that inspired me were the use of locally-sourced and recycled materials within the gecekondü. By embracing sustainable design principles, the center demonstrates the potential for environmentally responsible architecture while promoting resource efficiency, resilience, and a healthier built environment. I realised, as I was designing, that collaboration with the community to develop programs and initiatives would be paramount if this building was to truly be built. These programs and initiatives should focus on promoting sustainable practices such as waste management and environmental education especially.

Lastly, research on the gecekondü inspired me towards a more holistic approach, especially looking at the broader socio-economic context. Gecekondü often face social and economic disparities, limited access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities. These research findings informed the programming and services offered by the Center for Resources. For example, the center can provide vocational training, job placement services, and educational programs tailored to the needs of the community. By addressing these socio-economic challenges, the design of the Center for Resources can contribute to the empowerment and socio-economic mobility of the residents.

Aspect 3: Assessment of working methods

Due to linguistic and cultural barriers, obtaining first-hand explanations and answers were impossible during the short period of time that we were visiting Istanbul. As such, second-hand stories and existing research became invaluable for the project. While it may initially seem limiting, this approach holds significant value in understanding the characteristics, dynamics, and challenges of gecekondü settlements. By carefully analyzing and triangulating existing information, I gained valuable insights

that informed my architectural interventions. But while these sources offer valuable insights, it is important to acknowledge the potential shortcomings and biases associated with this approach.

One of the primary limitations of relying on second-hand stories is the potential for information distortion or misinterpretation. When information is passed through multiple individuals or sources, it is susceptible to alteration or loss of context. The reliability and accuracy of second-hand accounts can be questionable, as memories can be subjective, selective, or influenced by personal biases. As a result, this may inadvertently perpetuate inaccuracies or misconceptions about gecekondü settlements.

Another critical concern is the potential for the perpetuation of power imbalances and the marginalization of gecekondü communities. Existing research may have been conducted from external perspectives that fail to fully capture the lived experiences and aspirations of the residents. Relying solely on second-hand stories and existing research can inadvertently reinforce dominant narratives or stereotypes about informal settlements, further marginalizing the voices and agency of the communities themselves.

To be able to limit these inaccuracies and misinterpretation I incorporated research from as many different parties as possible, from local, to national, and even international researchers. However, if there was one thing I could change about the whole project it would be that I would do my research in Istanbul for an extended period of time, and look to have an interpreter with me as I navigate the gecekondü.

Aspect 4: Assessment of academic and societal value, including implications

Academically, the design of a Center for Resources allows for a comprehensive exploration of interdisciplinary perspectives. The project provides an opportunity to critically analyse the challenges and potentials of gecekondü settlements, integrating theories, research methodologies, and design strategies from multiple disciplines. By synthesizing this knowledge as well as practical considerations, I aimed to develop solutions that address the complex issues faced by these communities.

From a societal perspective, a center for resources has broad implications for the community. It serves as a platform for empowerment, social inclusion, and sustainable development. The center can provide essential resources and services tailored to the needs of these communities. By addressing the socio-economic challenges and inequalities faced by these communities, the center contributes to their upliftment, enhances their quality of life, and fosters socio-economic mobility.

The implications of designing a Center for Resources as a graduation project encompass practical improvements for gecekondü communities, empowerment and community building, local and regional development, academic contributions, challenging stereotypes, and ethical considerations. By embracing these implications, the project can contribute to positive change, foster inclusivity, and advocate for the rights and well-being of different local communities.

Aspect 5: Assessment of the value of the transferability of the graduation project

While the transferability of a Center for Resources may face challenges due to the unique characteristics of each informal settlement, the project's principles, approaches, and sustainability considerations can contribute to its applicability and adaptation in other contexts. By carefully

considering these factors, the project can serve as a valuable reference and inspiration for addressing the needs of marginalized communities worldwide. The uniqueness of each informal settlement implies that a direct copy-paste approach may not be feasible or effective. Instead, the focus should be on understanding the specific context of the target community and adapting the design principles accordingly.