

REFLECTION GRADUATION PROJECT

A Creative Hub as tool for reactivation

Annemieke Blaha | #1311174

The Veldacademie is part of the Explore Lab graduation studio of the TU Delft and is a collaboration between the municipalities of Rotterdam and the TU Delft. It is a relatively small studio in the field where students from different courses can individually and jointly work on issues related to the transformation of Rotterdam South. The Veldacademie is aimed at dealing with social issues based on the input of the current context of the area. In the course of my Master of Architecture I have chosen the Veldacademie as it gave me the possibilities to compose my personal graduation project. Another reason I choose for the Veldacademie is the focus the studio has on actual issues, which are translated in realistic assignments.

Today, vacancy has grown to be an immensely problematic issue which is present in many urban and rural settings worldwide. The large and constantly growing (the construction of new buildings is still the main fashion) amount of vacant buildings causes many social and economical problems to develop or grow. I firmly believe that in addition to its many problematic features, vacancy also brings forward new possibilities. In order to solve or decrease these issues a logical development would be to start with the transformation and re-use of existing vacant and/or derelict buildings instead of adding new ones to the stock. The process a building goes through during its lifetime fascinates me. Buildings have the ability to transform from factories to restaurants, from ministries to a workspace for freelancers, from offices to dwellings and so on. Not only does the building or area change because of these transformation processes and the new functions they facilitate, the urban context of the location is being reinterpreted as well.

Following this believe, I started looking for areas in the South of Rotterdam which faces many issues due to the presence of - and expected increase in the amount of - vacant buildings, but have a lot of potential for facilitating other functions. The area that I have chosen as the location for my graduation project (research and design) is the Sluisjesdijkpier, part of the Waalhaven in Rotterdam.

In my research I took the current issues of the Sluisjesdijkpier with vacancy, insecurity and isolation into consideration, and researched which function could be introduced in order to make it a more attractive area and - based on external demands and a set of criteria accompanying this function - which building could best be transformed to realize this. The research needed to provide general insights into the Sluisjesdijkpier's past, present and future situation and its issues and potentials. It needed to introduce a suitable function (including its target groups and an indication of the demand for this function) which is able to contribute to the (re-) activation of the Sluisjesdijkpier and counteract its current issues.

The chosen function was the result of intensive field and desk research into models which were applied to similar areas with comparable contexts. For this function to be designed, the research needed to indicate a vacant building which through transformation is able to accommodate this function. This selection process was done through the analysis of the present vacant building stock and by applying a brief according to the function. Furthermore I developed a set of criteria which indicated that the project was realistic and feasible. The outcomes of this research need to be represented in my final project design.

Image 1 shows the method that I had aligned for myself at the beginning of my graduation process.

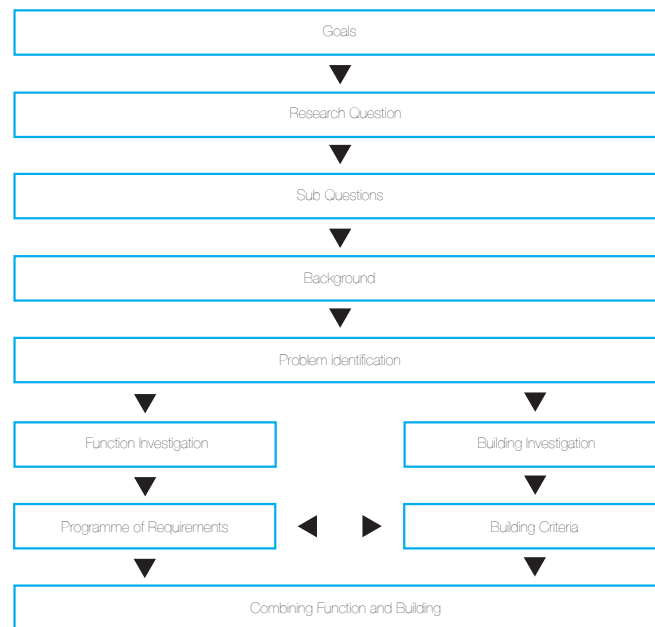
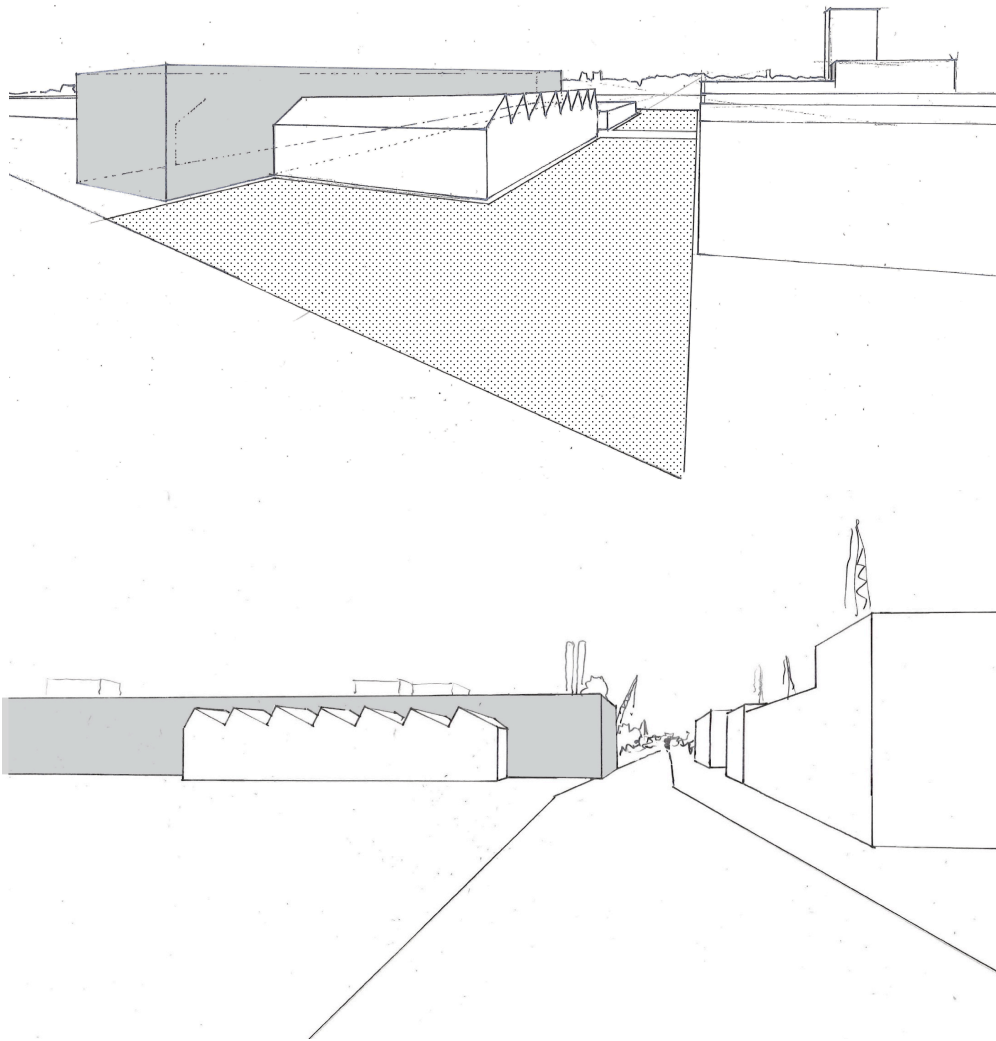


Image 1. Research plan

As an outcome to my research of models which (re-)activated areas with similar features and contexts (both history, current situation and future plans, issues and potential taken into consideration), it became clear that the introduction of a Creative Hub model would be a great step towards the development of the Sluisjesdijkpier in an effective and sustainable way, counteracting its issues and embracing its potentials and in attracting a wide variety of target groups to the area without using major investments. Furthermore, a Creative Hub could have a positive effect on the social climate of the area and facilitate the great demand of inexpensive working spaces in Rotterdam South.

The research and the design complement each other very well. In terms of planning, since my research findings involved some quite concrete guidelines for my final design, I was able to start with my design immediately after finishing my research.



Images 2 and 3. Like most designs, the initial design sketch varies quite a lot from the current design. However, the basic ideas, limitations and preconditions derived from my research formed a great basis in the overall design process and allowed me to move forward in the process quite quickly.

The complex on the Eekhoutstraat came out as most suitable for transformation after undergoing the following list of criteria I formulated: vacancy, amount of surface area, one story building, technical possibilities and financial feasibility. The findings of my research, which I used to select the appropriate building for my final design, turned out to be very valuable. The combination of the function of a creative hub and the chosen location (Eekhoutstraat 5 – 9) did not just prove to be a very good choice on paper, but as well in practice. Already in the early stages of my design I had multiple hands-on experiences and practical discoveries, which proved that the extensive research to find the right location had paid off. It is a great complex to serve as a model for the transformation of other industrial complexes. The buildings within the complex are very flexible when organizing floor plans as the spaces are large and rectangular. Another good asset is the fact that the complex is located in the heart of the Sluisjesdijkpier, allowing it to be a strategic point to give impulses for further transformation and development in the future towards both sides of the pier. Furthermore, the surrounding vacant buildings near the complex allow for possible future expansion of the creative hub.

For my design my main aim was to develop a model which could be used to transform other similar building complexes and area's. I wanted to reinterpret an industrial complex that is currently useless and abandoned and add new functions to the buildings in such a way that the industrial and raw atmosphere that the building breathes stays intact. I wanted to do this by applying small interventions. Interventions as adding openings to the now very closed off facades, placing small modular working units in the spaces, combining the interior of the buildings with the public space lying in and around the complex, integrating the green strip of the Sluisjesdijkpier into the public space. But also by facilitating the buildings with functions that attract people to the area as a restaurant and a terrace along the waterside or placing a boat stop along the complex to make the area more accessible. And so on.

Concluding this reflection, I am very glad that I succeeded in processing such an extensive process, to start with the research of an entire area and from there on continuously zooming in to the level of details in the final design.