Reflection - The Healthy Environment - Maaike van der Veer - 4097149

Introduction
This reflection is part of my graduation project ‘Crooswijk Cares’. It is a project of the graduation studio ‘The Healthy Environment’ of the Interiors chair. In this studio we have been working on the theme of non-hospital care and have been looking for ways to integrate this type of care in the urban setting of Rotterdam. The idea behind this is that the environment that someone is in, can have an influence on his or her state of health and wellbeing. The aim of the reflection is to look back and see to what extent the approach used during the graduation project worked. It will reflect on four important aspects: the relationship between the project and the social context, the relationship between the theme of the graduation lab and the case study, the relationship between research and design, and at last the relationship between the methodical line of approach of the chair and the methods used.

The relationship between the project and the wider social context
The theme of the healthy environment is a theme that currently gets a lot of attention. More and more designers are working on care projects as more people believe that space can really have an impact on someone’s state of health and wellbeing. In other words, the potential of architecture in cure and care is rediscovered and that is also the wider social context that this project can be placed in.

Next to that the project has a social relevance as it is deals with the changes that are currently taking place in the field of care and wellbeing in the Netherlands. This has to do with changes in the dutch welfare state system. Like in many other European welfare states, the welfare state system is being revised and is changing towards a system in which citizens are expected to participate and take more responsibility. In the field of care and wellbeing three important changes can be distinguished. To be able to create a graduation project that has a certain relevance in the current discussions, I wanted to take these changes as a starting point for my project.

First of all the regulations on healthcare and wellbeing have recently been revised. Since January 2015 the Exceptional Medical Expenses Act (AWBZ) is replaced by the Long-Term Care Act (WLZ). The most significant difference is that whereas before the AWBZ provided a right for care, the WMO is only awarded if the capacity of the person that is in need of care is not sufficient. Furthermore decentralisation has taken place and municipalities are now responsible for assisted living, day care, and the support of ‘Mantelzorgers’.

The second important change is that the Netherlands, like the majority of the developed countries in the world, has to deal with an ageing population. The number of inhabitants older than 75 years old is expected to rise from 1,2 million in 2010 to 2,6 million in 2040.

The third aspect is the fact that people themselves have changed and want to stay more independent. Since the 1980s a trend is set in motion, that people that are in need of care keep living at home for as long as possible. This effect is strengthened by the new indications for people in need of care (zorgzwaartepakketten) through which less people have access to institutional care.

To me the most important consequences are that people will keep living in their own houses for a longer time even in they are in need of care and that people are expected to take more responsibility in taking care of each other.

Municipalities have to make the transition possible and I believe that a spatial or architectural intervention can also help with this and that is what I tried to focus on with my graduation project.

To support these changes I formulated the following social ambitions:
- Make care a more integrated part of society and enable everyone to participate. Don’t isolate the people with care needs in a care institution like before, but people should have the feeling that they still contribute to society. A mix of generations and functions can help to support this.
- Enable or stimulate mutual support, as well between family members as between neighbours.
- Use the care facility to influence the neighbourhood as a whole and make the whole neighbourhood more suitable for people in need of care.

In the final project this is done by integrating housing, care and wellbeing. The projects contains housing for all generations and for people with and without care needs. Because it is a collective form of housing, informal care could become easier. Next to that because of the multigenerational aspect and mix of care homes and normal houses people providing informal care could live really close to the persons in need of care which can make Mantelzorg easier. The idea is that all apartments are accessible and could (in some cases) with small adaptations made suitable for someone to live in when their care needs increase. In the first place this is possible through the presence of care personnel and collective services that can support someone to keep living.
independent. Next to that the flexible structure and floor system with space for flexible installations make small adaptations possible. Next to housing the project contains a school, daycare centre, childcare and a community centre. These functions can bring the generations together again and offer services that can make it easier for people to keep living independent, like the meeting places, info desks with social organizations and the neighbourhood restaurant. The project departs from the shared needs between different generations. The urban strategy that the building is part of helps to influence the neighbourhood as whole. The network of squares and streets that is created in Oud-Crooswijk connects the centre of the neighbourhood with other important services at the border, it can help people to orient themselves and provides a moment of rest when going for a walk.

The relationship between the theme of the graduation lab and the case study
As stated before the graduation lab was organized around the theme the healthy environment. It was focussing on the theme of the guest house, or in other words, looking for new ways of living for people that are in need of care in the city. As our project is located in the city of Rotterdam, I wanted to focus on new ways of integrating care in the city without isolating the people that are in need of care.
To define my specific case study I studied documents of the municipality of Rotterdam to get an idea on how they are planning to deal with the current changes in the field of care and wellbeing. It turned out they have started two programs to organize this. The first one is the program ‘Langer Thuis’, which is looking for ways to support people in need of care to live at home for as long as possible. The four focus points of this program are: suitable housing, vital social networks, accessible neighbourhoods and clear information.

The other program the municipality of Rotterdam has started is ‘Woonservicegebieden’. A Woonservicegebied is a district or a neighbourhood with special attention for specific target groups like elderly people or the disabled. The neighbourhood should support them to live as independent as possible and to be part of society. It is about the integration of housing, wellbeing and care.

The location that was set for the studio consisted out of the neighborhoods Crooswijk and Rubroek. Together they also form one of the Woonservicegebieden pointed out by the municipality of Rotterdam. For this region the municipality formulated the wish to reinforce existing services of care and wellbeing and to make use of existing social networks. Therefore I selected a plot in Oud-Crooswijk that is containing housing, a community centre, a school and child care. So it is a place that already has a social function in the neighbourhood and offers the opportunity to connect wellbeing, care and housing. Next to that it is a plot that can be improved spatially and architecturally. On this plot I decided to re-use the program and add care facilities to this, but in newly designed buildings, so without reusing the existing buildings.

When I compare my project with the projects of other students in our graduation studio I believe that I focused more than others on the social aspect of care and on integrating care as if it is a normal part of life whereas others focused more on the care itself. My focus is more on the social structures in the neighborhood and on the urban setting, on mixing generations and integrating care with other social functions. Others in our group focused more on a specific target group especially on people with dementia and worked on ideal living environments for these people. Their research has also been more focused on dementia and care and therefor I think their designs are also more adapted to and probably more suitable for this specific target group.

Next to that most of the others are working with existing structures and also transforming parts of existing buildings, whereas I decided not to reuse the buildings that were on my selected plot but to demolish them and build up a new complex. This decision was already made early in the process as it was hard to match the existing structures with social and spatial ambitions of the project also because of the poor state and quality of most of the existing buildings on site. Therefore I decided to work on what the plot could look like in an ideal situation wherein the whole complex is new instead of transforming the existing. For a next project it would be interesting to look more deeply into the possibilities for reuse of the existing structure especially in a city like Rotterdam where many buildings have been demolished during the second world war and during city renewal afterwards.

The relationship between research and design
Especially during the first half of the graduation project research played a large role.
First of all research on care and wellbeing in the Netherlands and in Rotterdam was important to determine the social ambitions of the graduation project and to find the main direction for the design.
After a few weeks we started the research course related to the design. We did site specific research based on a self-chosen theme. I chose to investigate the role that the neighborhood can have in building and maintaining social networks and the supporting potential of social networks as I earlier found out that the social network is
expected to become more important for providing care and support. The research consisted of observations and interviews with inhabitants of the neighbourhood as well as social organizations that are present. Some of the conclusions of this research could be linked to the design. The research showed that in mixed neighbourhoods like Oud-Crooswijk the main goal should be to achieve public familiarity for which regular social interaction between neighbours is important. Spatial aspects turned out to play a role in this, like diverse walking routes and multifunctionality. These are things that have been incorporated in the design on the urban scale. During the research some places in the neighbourhood already seemed to play a large role in creating public familiarity. These places are incorporated in the network of streets and squares created in the urban strategy and through that also become attractive and accessible for the elderly people. The location of the public functions of the design are also adapted to the outcomes of the research on the areas that already play a significant role in creating familiarity. As such to give the community centre more presence it is located on the Marnixplein, as this square is already used a lot by diverse groups in the neighbourhood. The school entrance area seemed to be important for familiarity as the parents meet each other when picking up their children. Therefore in the design a new entrance square for the school is part of the project. On the building level transition zones between public and private, shared circulation and shared functions seemed to be important in stimulating interaction between neighbours and therefore these spaces are incorporated in the design and are designed more spacious and with more attention than in regular designs. So the site specific research did have an impact on the design, although I believe the impact of the research could have been larger if we would have started the research earlier on in the process. Now certain design decisions were already made before we started doing the research.

Next to this site specific research, references were studied. One important group of references is formed by the care homes. For this we also visited the dementia centre De Hogeweyk in Weesp and went on an excursion to visit care homes in Belgium. Some of the aspects that are found in these references had an influence on the design. For example the idea that it is important to add extra quality to the corridors and that they could play a role in the interaction between the inhabitants by adding some extra space for encounter. Also the role that outside spaces and gardens can play was learned during the excursions and reference studies. Furthermore the references showed how people could live together in different ways, for example by creating small living groups like in a normal house or having large corridors with individual rooms and living rooms shared by larger groups of people. Also the differences in the balance between private and individual spaces and collective spaces became clearer from the care references.

Other important references that where studied are the forms of collective housing, including multigenerational housing and the old Dutch example of ‘Het Hofje’. From this the main learning point was that the transition between the private space and the collective space is important for the feeling of collectivity. Furthermore the interesting aspect of the Hofje that was also important for the design was the proximity to nature in the urban setting and the formation of a protected collective living environment. Next to studying references a literature study was used to get more insight in the specific needs of people with dementia and on the way that elderly people experience space. For this also interviews with care professionals were helpful.

During the second half of the project I focused less on thematic research and literature research but more on research by design. Different design solutions were tested by making 3d models, as well computer models as some physical models.

The relationship between the methodical line of approach of the graduation lab and the methods used

One important aspect of the line of approach of the graduation lab is the focus on the user perspective and the user’s experience of space. The research course related to the graduation design is already an example of this. The research dealt with the relation between the space (the neighbourhood) and user behavior and experience related to social support and social networks. Through this site research the departure point for the design was the understanding of the existing situation.

Also working with 3d models on different scales and using pictures of these models helped to form an idea of how people would experience the designed spaces. The pictures are used to test materialization and to look at the effect it has on the atmosphere.

Another aspect characteristic for the graduation lab is according to me designing throughout the scales and working on different scales simultaneously, from the urban scale to the detailed scale. During the first part of the project my focus was mostly on the urban scale. Mass models were used to define the relation between the
building and the urban space. However when making the mass models I believe my process could be improved because now the interior lay-out was incorporated rather late in these masses. I think it would have been helpful to start thinking about the interior earlier, and also from the beginning try to think about the building’s organization. Also when zooming in and starting the design on the scale 1:200 it would have been better to work more intensively on the detail scale already. Now I started making models on the scale of 1:50 and 1:20 rather late in the process although I believe it would have been helpful to have the knowledge you gain from making these more detailed models already when you start thinking about the overall design. Because many people in our group have been working on large building complexes, it was harder to focus and to work on the detailed scale. Because of the size the overall building was a complex design already and took a lot of time to design the urban setting right. The next time I should decide earlier what parts of the building are most essential to be able to start working on the interiors of these parts in detail from early in the process.

Conclusion
The role that research has played was different in the various stages of the project. In the first place it was used as a background and to be able to relate the project to its wider social context. Because of this research I believe the project is strongly related to the wider social context. Later on the research became more specific and focused on important themes and on the location. In the future I would like to start earlier with the thematic research, because now some design decisions were already made that could have been different when the research would have been more elaborated already. Later on the research was more focused on the design and on testing different spatial layouts and materialization. I felt like working with 3d models during the design process was very helpful to get an idea of the experience of the users and also to get a feeling for proportion and materialization. However I do believe that in the future I should try to work more on different scales at the same time. Thinking about the interior in a really early stage and working on 1:20 models or on lay-outs in plan when still not having decided the urban mass could be helpful to be sure the relation between interior and the urban space is really well thought through.