REFLECTION ON THESIS PROJECT - P4

**Project data**

Studio: Architecture & Dwelling | At Home in the City: Amsterdam
AR3AD130-1

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Thesis project: Active IJburg: the closed building block revised
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**Project details**

Programme: Dwelling project - various typologies combined

Number of dwellings ensemble: 90
Number of dwellings total: +/- 200
Additional facilities: Supermarket, office space, café, restaurant, shops
Parking spaces ground floor: 20
Parking spaces underground garage: 353

**Fig 1:** Masterplan “Active IJburg: The closed building block revised” with highlighted ensemble
Description of Theme Research

Before the onset of modernism, the everyday dwelling was not considered a part of architecture, which only dealt with the monumental and extraordinary. Similarly, in the pre modern era, it was common practice for people to appropriate and adapt their own dwellings over the course of their life by themselves, without help of an architect.

In the research we have decided to study modern housing ensembles which were explicitly designed to be appropriated and adopted by their inhabitants, not only in the initial design stages, but also later on in time. This allows for a certain expression of individuality of an inhabitant within mass housing on one hand, but by having a certain flexibility in the basis of the building, it can be adopted to the needs or wishes desired over time without the necessity to change the structure of demolish and replace the building at all. Over all, a certain allowance of appropriation could extend the lifespan of a building (project).

In the chosen case studies the architects have adopted different strategies to deal with the question of responding to the spatial needs of the inhabitants, but the themes of support and infill and flexibility are still a point of reference in all of these projects. During the research, we have concentrated on comparing the specific architectonic conditioners which should trigger and enable appropriation of the dwellings by the people. In addition, we have decided to investigate the actual interventions that the people have made to their dwellings, in order to learn about the actual practice of appropriation and user intervention. Figure 2 shows the internal appropriation of one of Herman Hertzbergers Diagoonwoningen in Delft over time.

Relationship between (Location) Research and Design

The design location of this project, the Profeiland area on Steigereiland Noord in Amsterdam, the part of IJburg that is created first - the “proef” part in the name says it already. At the moment the Amsterdam municipality has arranged the area to be a park, as a facility for the main island.

The main island is characterized by a variation on the standard Dutch building block. (fig. 3)

The fundament of the typology is present; where the courtyard is completely closed off from the public realm, but also variations where the courtyard has a certain publicness. However, these openings are again closed off with fences. The border between the public and private space therefore gets another level in between: semi-public spaces.

This development (opening up closed building blocks) could improve the “emptiness” of the public space, as done at Molenvliet in Papendrecht (Frans van der Werff). However, the public space must have a clear connection and identity with the opened up courtyard. At Steigereiland this last named is missing.

As a reaction to this development of making a variation on the closed building block, my plan is to design building blocks on the Profeiland as well, but with different characters; a variation in publicness with a clear connection to make it a whole.

Fig 2: Internal appropriation - Diagoonwoningen Delft, H. Hertzberger

Fig 3: The closed building block + 4 variations present on the main Steigereiland
On the urban level I “went back” to the essence of the closed building block and revised it to four variations in the urban scheme. The blocks create four different dwelling environments and four different public spaces:

(A) The inside-out block: the front facade at the courtyard side, the back facade at the waterfront.

(B) The multishaped drop-down: at half of the block the ground floor is lowered into the water.

(C) The mini-block: the smallest closed block with an atrium.

(D) The birdseye block: this block only appears closed when looking from above.

Within the research on designed appropriation we concluded that certain aspects or design elements could “trigger” inhabitants to appropriate or actually restrain this. Combining some elements worked better than other, but overall it could be said that renting a property does not encourage possible appropriation. If appropriation has to take place for a dwelling to “work optimal”, the ownership should be privately owned. Low effort mostly combines with low possibilities (for example: the sliding walls flexible housing project by Duinker/vd Torre).

In the design project, I wanted to create a certain flexibility in the dwellings. However, climate and structural issues ask for expensive and complex solutions, which are not likely to be applied and/or used in everyday practice. Therefore, I “limited” the flexibility to a fixed zone and a service zone, where the service zone allows for flexibility. The fixed zone makes the building stable and strong (prefab concrete load bearing walls with precast plate flooring, whereas the service zone provides flexibility by using a Slimline+ floor with a lowered ceiling. In this zone pipes and wires come together to two shafts. In this way, the basic envelope of one dwelling allows for stacking this envelope into row houses, maisonettes or separate maisonettes. By also placing a steel lintel in the prefabricated load bearing walls, openings/passages can be made through the dwellings on horizontal level, allowing for horizontal linking. (fig. 5)

**Theme and Method in the studio**

The studio “At Home in the City: Amsterdam” researches (mass) housing architecture in the everyday environment. The theme research combined with the location research determines an architectural position and goal for the design, which is then translated into an elaboration of plans, sections and mass study.

By creating dwellings that allow for a personal and flexible use in a structured way, and creating different revised versions of a standard Dutch building block I tried to both connect to the existing buildings on the main island, but at the same time improve the public realm, and therefore address the topic of feeling at home in the city.