Reflection

The relation between research and design

The graduation project consists of two parts: research and design. The research is focused on the task of urban renewal of early postwar housing estates with the wijkgedachte as structuring principle. The emphasis lies on search for an urban strategy to increase the quality of the living environment. The research subject was framed by the following problem statement:
The increasing car-traffic on city and district entrance roads causes a barrier effect that disrupts the slow traffic-routes within the neighborhood. This has hindering effect on the accessibility and reachability public facilities.
Which strategy can be used to improve the hierarchical spatial structure of the neighborhood and to clarify the slow – and destination traffic?

From the results of further morphological analysis of the plan area and a thorough study of the theory of the generic foundation of the urban situation however could be concluded that urban task could not be described by this one-sighted problem statement. Thorough study of the problems appearing early postwar housing estate gave more insight in the complexity of task at hand. The initial problem statement was not incorrect but appeared merely a part of the problem. Further investigation lead to the following problem statement.

Outdated and unilateral housing stock, deficient social infrastructure, insufficient social diversity and the poor relation between public space and the surrounding buildings leads to spatial cluttering an the social-economic demise of early postwar housing estates.

Part of the problems can be traced to the original design and the concept according to which the design was conceived. Extensive study of the philosophy of the Wijkgedachte resulted into plausible leads for the re-design of Moerwijk. The layered setup and the use of several spatial motifs of the original design provide possibilities of a spatial renewal strategy. This conclusion leads to the following research question:

In which way can cultural historical values from the reconstruction be utilized to revitalize Den Haag Moerwijk?

In order find an answer to this question research has been conducted on the generic spatial aspects of early postwar housing estates. The focus lied on the search of a method to value these spatial elements. The results of theoretical survey were used as a starting point for the redesign of The Hague Moerwijk

Relation between theme of the studio and the chosen research subject

The work in the studio Hybrid Buildings is based on research by design. The research concentrates on the interrelationship between the transformation of urban morphology and changes in building typology. The focus is on urban transformations whereby large structures must be constructed with the capacity of accommodating complex uses. Architectural design acts as a means of exploring the possibilities for the transformation of urban areas. With this approach the disciplines of urbanism and architecture are intertwined. Although architectural measures implied in the design proposal for The Hague Moerwijk it does not include and urban intervention by means of a singular architectural object. The cause of this discrepancy between the theme of the studio and the subject of the graduation project is two-fold. The first reason is of an organizational nature. Due to administrative reasons a bifurcation has taken place between the track urbanism and architecture. The second reason is founded by results of literature research. From thorough study of the renewal task of early postwar housing estates the problems of these neighborhoods appeared to be complex combination of exogenous and endogenous factors of social-economic or spatial nature. This development supported the conviction that the task of urban renewal could not be tackled by an intervention with a single architectural object. Therefore another approach was chosen which deviates from the original goal of the studio. The project is elaborated into an integral urban plan with a set of spatial interventions instead of the elaboration of an approach of renewal into the design of a hybrid building.
Relation between the method of the studio and the chosen research method

Prior to the design phase a architectural task had to be determined. By means of analyses a problem-statement was formulated. The analyses involves a typo-morphological study of the planning zone, in which the relationship between the morphological structure of the town plan and the typology of the built development is identified, with particular concentration on processes of change and transformation of the urban area in response to architectural interventions.

In the research phase prior to the accrual design a theoretical framework had to be presented in the form of review paper. On the hand of previously stated problem description the research was conducted. As mentioned in the previous paragraph the problems statement has been changed in the course of the project. This is due to the fact that new insights were acquired from a study of morphological analyses and supporting literature. Because the problem statement was finalized the theoretical research was not concluded before the advancement to the design phase, in contradiction to the setup of the of the graduation studio.

The chosen method can be characterized by an interaction of theoretical input and spatial analyses of the plan area. Knowledge of design philosophies in the reconstruction period, the concept of the Wijkgedachte and the elaboration of this concept into different scale levels with specific design motives are mirrored to the original design of Moerwijk to gain a better understanding of the urban situation and the problematic social issues. The research was not limited to the specifics of the task of the renewal of Moerwijk but comprehended the generic aspects of the task. Subsequently the experience derived from this project can be used in an approach of similar design tasks.

Social relevance of the research subject

The national policy on spatial development is characterized by the renewal of early postwar housing estates. Most of these districts are subjected to social and economic demise and there is a growing dissatisfaction of the residential environment (Argiolu e.a 2008). The national government has selected 40 of these districts that are in need of urgent intervention. Moerwijk is considered to be a school example of early postwar urban design. Moerwijk is also known as one of the 40 problematic districts.

With the introduction of ‘cultural planning’ in the nation policy (OCW&VROM 1999) there is growing awareness of the potential of cultural historical qualities for urban renewal. In order to make use of the qualities and to address the issues at hand there is a need for a new and specific approach of urban renewal of these early postwar housing estates. In the approach for the renewal of Moerwijk physical interventions are related to socio-cultural and economic issues in order to formulate an integral approach for renewal. The design principles used in the approach of renewal of the district of The Hague Moerwijk can be used as starting point for the formulation of strategy for renewal of similar early postwar housing estates.