Reflection

The final part of this report is a reflection on the project’s outcome and on the proposed research and design methods. Among the themes discussed in this reflection are lessons that the author learned as a master student of landscape architecture. Moreover, this chapter includes a reflection on the methodology used during the different phases of the project as well as an elaboration on the project’s importance as a tool for further research on time-resistant structures in fragmented urban landscapes.
a. Reflection of design process

The way of approaching the research objective as a design outcome of this thesis is mainly through the research by design and design by research method. Due to the big scale of the area and the nature of the relations between the different landscapes the complexity of the project needs to be addressed in various ways. One of the most important decisions taken in the process is the simultaneous work and design in different scales and the deconstruction of the different layers of the landscape. Both of these actions helped dealing with the complexity of the project and proved to be a key factor during the whole process.

More specifically, the continuous change of scales helped at the full understanding and comprehension of the current situation and the advantages or disadvantages of not only the regional area but also of every smaller part in it. The analysis at the regional level concluded to the thought that the urban landscape needs to be penetrated in specific ways that are taking always into account the surroundings of the area and the borders appearing each time. It is particularly influenced by people’s mentality and need for identity that organizes the landscape according to separate roles and enhances the role of structures such as the one of Poldervaart. The deconstruction of the landscape in different layers, such as infrastructure, water network, open green spaces, building stock and more was extremely helpful in understanding its nature and conceive the reasons that it has developed in that specific way. Every small piece of the landscape has a story behind it and this approach made it possible to reveal it.

If it weren’t for the analysis at a more local level, more practical difficulties that need to be overcome in an urban landscape would not have come into light. The small scale analysis proved that there are various physical boundaries related with each urban fragment that restrict people’s perception and experience of the area as a meaningful whole and thus create a fragmented image. In the end, taking a step back and reflecting again on the regional scale is precisely as valuable, in the way that the project has to work and influence positively as a structure in both scales, as a part of a network of structures of similar importance regionally and as an autonomous one locally. The shifts in scale revealed each time different aspects that had to be considered, when designing in this fragmented urbanized landscape.

This realization implicitly forced the formulation of design principles, that would first deal with this time-resistant structure as a whole by strengthening its identity as a backbone of the landscape and then address more particular issues as the connections between the variant fragments or the revelation of the cultural landscape that lies underneath. The design by research
approach, as difficult and attractive it may be, offers an endless umbrella of design results under which the most advantageous solution will be found. By adapting these principles in every part of the project taking always into account the local characteristics will in the end articulate a design proposal that achieves both of the research objective’s goals; Poldervaart acting in a regional scale as a connector along the waterway and in a local scale as a generator of connections perpendicularly and in between the fragments.

b. The design proposal as a response to the research question.

One major question to be answered in the final reflection phase is whether the design proposal answered the initial research question and problematique or, in other words, whether important waterways are able to act as connectors and reanimate the fragmented urban landscape, always under the umbrella of time-resistant structures.

If we admit that our landscapes comprise a palimpsest that is constructed from multiple layers of former landscapes, then, time-resistant structures are a way to read through all those layers and reveal their importance and resilience. Time-resistant structures work like the core of our landscapes, like a primitive network that if we are sensitive enough to not conceal it, they can contain and diffuse the identity of each place creating in such a way distinguishable landscapes that reveal their own dynamism. This already offers us the involvement to a conceptual connecting experience and understanding of the landscape. Starting from this foundation and simultaneously transforming time-resistant structures to connecting elements of our landscapes that bring together different circumstances, territorial continuity and meaningful connections among our landscapes will be generated.

If we achieve this along our contemporary urban landscapes, especially the ones that suffer from fragmentation and disintegration then we have succeeded in transforming symbolic features of our landscapes into connecting structures and generators of vibrant public spaces that take the role of important crossings within the urbanized field.

Preserving, emphasizing and enhancing the role of time-resistant structures as places of meaningful encounters in our metropolitan landscapes by establishing connections along and within those has been the objective of this graduation project and by focusing on the case of Poldervaart, this goal has been achieved. This project could be a starting point for formulating strategies on a regional level and thus contributing to the general discussion of the future of our landscapes.
c. The relationship between the theme of the graduation studio and the subject.

This project was conducted as part of “Flowscapes”, the one-year graduation studio of the MSc Landscape Architecture. The Flowscapes studio views landscapes as facilitate and integral while water, green and transport infra-structures are flows that allow the development of social and ecological interactions. The present graduation project is strongly related to the theme of Flowscapes, as the urban landscape is seen as a complex flow of intertwined layers of social and environmental processes that form in the end a disrupted landscape due to the interruption of the aforementioned flows.

The posed solution of the research project is an integrated landscape of the South-wind of Holland, stressing the importance of valuing significant landscape structures and transforming them into structures-connectors acting like such, in different scales and extents. Interventions of different scales, importance and reasoning are taking place along the monumental axis of Poldervaart transforming the canal into a connecting zone not only lengthwise but also in a perpendicular to it direction. Finally, introducing conceptual beyond physical and visual connections, the unique identity of the landscape is revealed and contributes to the project’s intention of enhancing the sense of place.

The design proposal restores the flows in the landscape by working on different layers, not only physically but also conceptually and mentally. The continuity of the axis of Poldervaart is the major gesture of the design proposal as it restores the connections along its length and strengthens the relation of Midden Delflland and the river Maas. By creating new environmental, social and cultural connections, the project introduces new flows and boosts the existing ones.


d. The methodical line of approach

This graduation project is the outcome of a research by design and design by research approach. More precisely, the project is a blend of both research leading to design decisions, and design try-outs based on theoretical re-evaluations. The result of this constant dialogue between the two methods resulted in the final project and proposed research and design. More specifically the proposed methodology is based on three main steps; the theory, the research approach and the research design.
Starting with a fascination for theoretical research, I dove into multiple different theories around landscape urbanism, metropolitan areas, integrated landscapes, cities as landscapes and many more which contributed to the formation of my own theory, considering time-resistant structures in the landscape that promote permeability and generate physical, visual and conceptual connections among the different fragments promoting at the same time site-specificity and sensitivity for our surroundings. Then, I focused on defining more situated strategies and tools through a holistic understanding and careful reading of the landscape. Every landscape presents its own characteristics and features so the result of such an approach is going to be different for every project.

However, the analysis that has been conducted can work as an example on how to reveal these important features of the landscape in other cases as well. Especially through targeted historical research, as well as the method of deconstructing the landscape into the different layers that constitute it and communicate it through the practice of cartography or by focusing on smaller topological elements that mirror the sense of place, the reading of the landscape felt complete.

The method of working on three main different scales, the regional, the local and the micro or eye-level one, was very beneficial not only for the comprehension of this complex urban landscape but also for conducting design proposals on the correct direction. The shift along the different scales throughout the analysis and design phase as well as between different working methods (for example plan, section, physical model, perspective images etc.) offered impressive assets and inspiration along the project’s execution and helped me gaining iessential interest and skills, both required for the execution of the optimal design.

Moreover, the design experimentation, or the research by design phase was necessary during the whole process and proved very informative and at the same time influential for the graduation project. By searching for the best design solution for particular places, the experimentation through the aforementioned means is considered essential. During this phase as well, the shift of scales played a crucial role and informed the every time design by borrowing and adjusting design principles from the regional to the local scale and vice versa.
It has become clear so far that this graduation project wishes to give a new approach of dealing with fragmented urban landscapes. By proposing to transform time-resistant structure in the landscape in connecting elements between the different fragments, the landscape will appear as one integrated whole. A very important question after the completion of the graduation project would be whether this approach could be the answer to other disintegrated urban landscapes around the world. The flexibility of the proposed strategy lies on the fact that the elements and the ways connections are formed are not predetermined, but instead, are based entirely on the site’s specific characteristics and local qualities. Keeping always the focus on time-resistant structures, it would be important to identify those in any other cases we would like to apply this strategy. Beyond that, every particular landscape should be examined separately in order for it to be able to uncover its unique characteristics that carry its identity. In other urban landscapes, maybe height differences or infrastructure line show bigger potential in connecting disrupted urban landscapes and thus bigger importance should be given in highlighting such structures. And, undoubtedly, the success of every project will always lie on the emphasis of the fundamental structure and on the dialogue between the last and the smaller interventions along it that create coherence and connections with the urban fabric.

A crucial moral decision that was taken and influenced the execution of the design project in a great extent is the intention to always keep a sensitive approach concerning the existing structures in the landscape and intervene only when it is necessary. Thus, the proposal includes interventions of different scales and intensities depending on the needs of every area and the already underlying landscape. Moreover, the design principles regard also general guidelines for the surroundings but always leave space for exceptions, meaning that no existing establishments are going to be changed. Such guidelines refer mainly to future interventions in case areas along the proposed zones are freed.

Pursuing always conceptual connections with the landscape’s cultural and historical background, this project tries to avoid imposing elements on the existing landscape without considering what lies underneath. There is always space and emphasis given to topological and cultural context, interpreting them though in contemporary ways in order to reveal their sense of place.