REFLECTION
COMMON GROUND – BRIDGING POLARITIES IN THE RINGZONE AREA OF AMSTERDAM
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## 1. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RESEARCH AND DESIGN

This project used a framework that explains the form, operation and performance of the existing situation and the design result. This framework aimed to study the 'urban form' of the area, and how, which 'tools' will be used to transform this area in order to provide a desired performance, in this case, 'vitality'. Since I wanted to avoid a conflict with existing inhabitants, urban vitality included fit, which aims to study people's behavior in relation with the built environment. Possible tools were studied in relation to the transitioning city, which emphasizes the possibility of introducing new tools in urban development, e.g. city gaming, participatory design in order to generate a vital urban design by intervening on the urban form. Research consists studying the three components of FOP, tools studies, together with theory studies of urban vitality, and site studies. These studies resulted in a set of patterns, which didn't put enough emphasis on the 'people' component. The relation between research and design was like a spiral, steps were made backwards again in order to proceed forward. Thus, a second explorative phase started, by analyzing the user groups and possible conflicting requirements for the area. From this point, the research started to merge with design, and a second set of pa§tterns was developed, this time involving user groups and their differences in use of the space.

2. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE THEME OF THE GRADUATION LAB AND THE SUBJECT/CASE STUDY CHOSEN BY THE STUDENT WITHIN THIS FRAMEWORK (LOCATION/OBJECT)

The studio of the Design of the Urban Fabric aims to create a sustainable and vital environment, and relates to physical urban environment and its non-physical aspects. This overlaps in several ways with the theme of my research. My research studies the urban form in relation to urban transformation: the urban morphology and the existing built environment, which is the urban fabric. Then the social component comes in when different user groups and their needs are analyzed and put into picture in the design phase, while fostering economic activity by stimulating the development of local businesses, and strengthening social cohesion by increasing public life. In the end, the spatial transformation contributes to an improved vital environment.

3. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE METHODICAL LINE OF APPROACH OF THE GRADUATION LAB AND THE METHOD CHOSEN BY THE STUDENT IN THIS FRAMEWORK

The studio uses patterns and games with stakeholders as bridging methods between research and design. This research focused twice on patterns, trying to
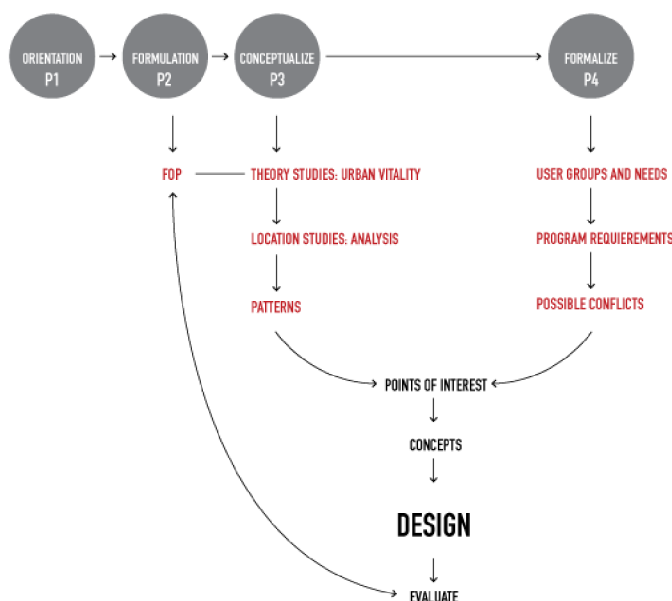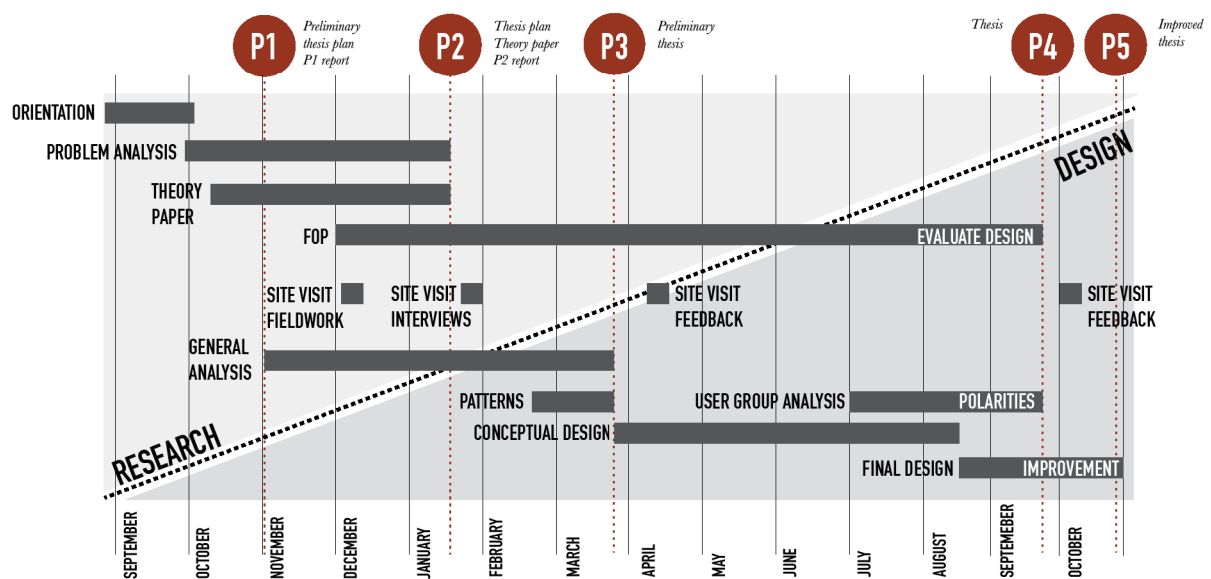

Essential stages of the process (own image)

bridge the outcome of analysis with the synthesis of the design product. Outcome of research were translated in little spatial solutions first, which then forms the basis of design. The first phase of application of this method gave much insight for the selection of locations of interventions in the area (form) and what to achieve for the area (urban vitality), and the second phase complemented the previous phase by providing a tool for the design, that is to say designing with polarities by analyzing user groups and uses of space (operation).

4. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE PROJECT AND THE WIDER SOCIAL CONTEXT

The purpose of my graduation project is to create a vital environment for a postwar neighborhood in the city of Amsterdam. The city aims to extend the city center to outside its boundaries to strengthen its economic position. In their structure vision, there is the lack of an answer to the 'how' question: how are we going to extend the city center to outside its boundaries, spatially? The designated areas are mainly post-war and socially vulnerable neighborhoods with a weak economic status, which could result in a conflict with local inhabitants. At the same time, the city is facing a transition, from a centralized to a localized way of urban planning and development. From the crisis years on, citizens themselves are taking initiatives to improve their living environment. The aim was to start from the perspective of the citizens; the user

groups of the design product first, and how additional program would affect the change of use of space. This method is proposed in order to ensure 'fit' between users and their environment, between different user groups, between the polarities of the urban and the suburban environment. Over all, to strengthen social cohesion by not regarding polarities as conflicts, but as complementary pairs with potential spatial alliances which brings different needs and requirements together.

Planning graduation (own image)

Network of 'stadsstraten' (urban corridors) in ringzone West (own image)

5. REFLECTION ON THE OUTCOME OF THE DESIGN

STADSSTRATEN NETWORK

As mentioned during analysis, the continuity of stadsstraten is lacking in the ringzone. Not only the continuinity of street fronts, but the continiuity of activities is also important. As mentioned in the pattern of the urban corridor, connection can be made through these urban corridors, connecting sloterplas with city center. In the proposal the aim was adding new program along this route, to gain a more gradual decline of program, instead of abrupt changes and division in compartments of the urban corridor. The main outcome is strengthening the neighbourhood, while integrate within the city structure, in that order.

NETWORK OF PUBLIC SPACES

As seen in the drawing, several types of public spaces are situated near or along the urban corridors, creating potential for this area to increase in activity and public life, and therefore the livability index. Social cohesion is an important factor regarding transforming socially vulnerable areas. Public spaces are a great tool to reinvest and support interaction. The network of public spaces encourage the flow of people. Coming from the center, but also going to the center. Which then encourage the distribution of people throughout the entire city, as a response to the problem of crowded center.

INTERVENTIONS
After the overall effects of this project is discussed, zoom in on each intervention.

Metrostation Postjesweg
Transport hub, connects to the metropolitan region, and a direct connection to the central station, connects to different transportation networks, train, Schiphol. Strengthening accessibility aspect of urban corridors, and together with pioneer's zone a new (small-scale) business hub arises in ringzone west.

August Allebesquare
The neighbourhood square transforms into a square which not only serve inhabitants, but also embeds in the city network along the urban corridor Postjesweg. Not facing with its back anymore, an integrated street-square situation, whereby the square becomes an extension of the street, and vice versa.
The square no longer faces with its back towards the urban corridor Postjesweg. It becomes part of the whole network of public spaces and facilities among the 'stadsstraten'.

Rembrandtpark
Rembrandtpark was planned on purpose to act like a barrier between the post-war garden city and the pre war congested urban area. Now the barrier only shows negative effects, as mentioned earlier in the Groenonderzoek of Amsterdam. Intervening on the whole park is not needed. The park itself is in a good state, it is the lack of connection with the street that strengthens the barrier effect. No clear entrance is provided, hidden from the street, on all three urban corridors (add drawing urban corridors along park – design park chapter) in the network we see vondelpark, erasmuspark and westerpark, (add westerpark in stadsstraten drawing), Rembrandtpark has great potential to become part of the public space network. A new entrance along the urban corridor creates an improved orientation towards the park for visitors. The central location of the island a logical choice, since it already forms a focal point because of the higher level of the bridge. The Rembrandtpark becomes a part of the network, with its new main entrance situated centrally along the urban corridor. This area is one of the places in the park where the landscape conditions allow for more activity and urban programming. Reffering to the effect of Westerpark with its cultural center and international exhibitions and programming, Rembrandtpark focuses more on city and neighbourhood level, to start within the Ringzone.

Tower and A10 underpasses
The A10 is more of a mental barrier than a physical one. Designing underpasses are of importance in removing mental barriers. The main underpass of the neighbourhood is also an entrance coming from the urban corridor. To strengthen continuity, additional programming along this route is desired, and a bigger development is allowed at this location, because of the existing scale of the tower series along the A10. A tower provides new flows of people coming in and out of the neighbourhood, while additional program in the plinth allows for visitors of the park to make use of the space. This isn't necessary an addition to the public space of the whole ringzone, it rather supports the public life on street level, and neighbourhood level.

RINGZONE

*Extension city centre municipal plan*

The main outcome of the vision of Amsterdam was to densify the ringzone in order to answer the city center's extension. This project didn't focus so much on densification in terms of increasing landuse, rather it focuses on increasing public life, and the change of use of space, by existing inhabitants, but also potential visitors or new inhabitants. This could be seen as an intermediate step in the phasing towards the extension of the city center, with improving the neighbourhood's socio-economic position as the first and prior goal. Densification can only happen without conflicts, when existing qualities and local needs are considered.

*Existing qualities of different neighbourhoods*

This is applicable for all the neighborhoods along the ringzone, along the northern bank of the Ij for example, this is different, as this area was a former harbour and industrial area, here the transformation processes are going faster than the rest of the ringzone. It is the transition zone between the harbour area and the residential neighbourhoods beyond, that should be considered when densifying. The conditions for each neighbourhood in the ringzone is different, in west it is characterized by a railway together with the A10, and the western garden cities overlapping with the ringzone. Also the network of urban corridor is more prominent in this area. So in this case, it had to deal with the relationship between public and private, and linear development regarding additional programming.

Answer to the extension plan

So an answer to the extension plan is given, by considering different neighbourhoods within different physical as well as social-economic conditions. And densification is not the main priority (yet), because a precondition is needed, wherein a balance between existing and addition is to be found.
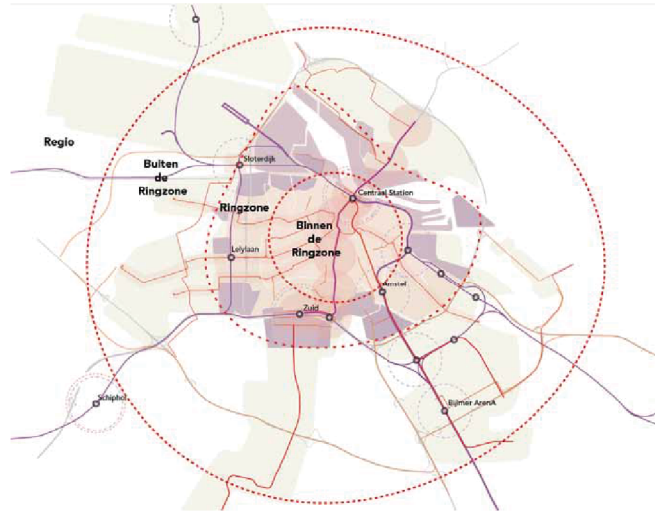
Distribution city of Amsterdam (DRO Amsterdam, 2012)
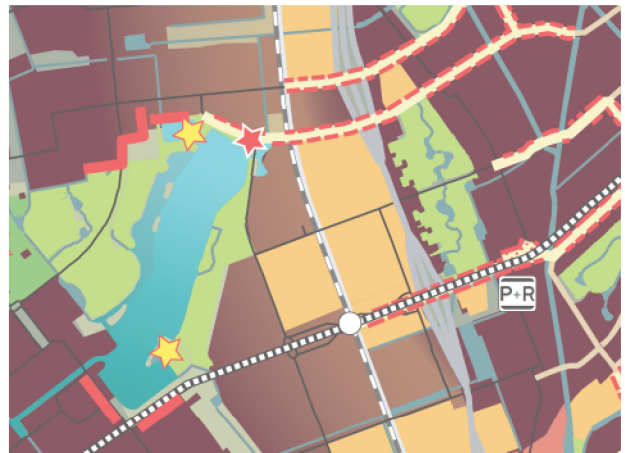
Overtoomse Veld in the Vision of Amsterdam 2040
(Gemeente Amsterdam, 2011)
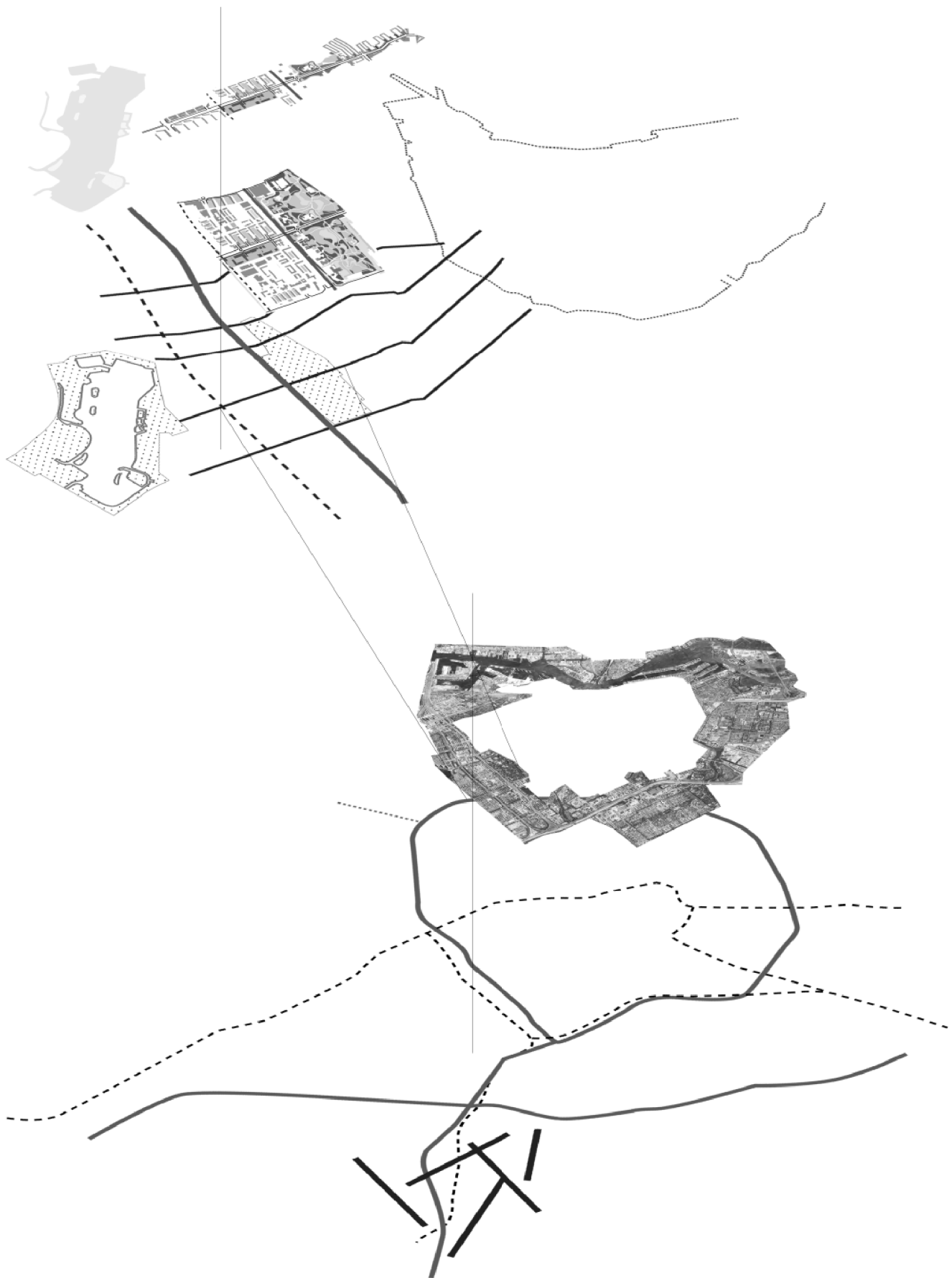
The position in different scales (own image)

POSITION IN CURRENT TRANSFORMATION PROCESSES

The transformation process of the neighbourhood of Overtoomse Veld is in full progress, also the rest of western garden cities. Mainly transformation of the postwar blocks, and densification on block scale. This project partly also focuses on transformation of the post-war block, with emphasis on the public space and public private relationship. Courtyards are changed in the way they are connected to the street and the block. Ownership and control are main purposes of the transformations. Both street and courtyard will be changed in the way they are used, mainly introducing public life and social interaction in both of them, and orientated on pedestrian movements, instead of car traffic.

Increasing public life was one of the main purposes in this neighbourhood, because of its position as a transition zone close to the city center. In other parts of the suburban post-war neighbourhoods, it is more likely to focus on the quality of housing in a green environment.

MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION

Which spatial transformations facilitate the development of urban vitality in enlarged city center areas of transitioning Amsterdam?

The question was divided into three parts according to the FOP framework, form, operation and performance. Form and performance had a rather steady appearance throughout the whole process, based on theory studies and analysis of the area. It was the operation that was more dynamic, and changed throughout the whole project.

Form
the spatial transformations refer to the spatial interventions of the design. The form of the area was analysed through the different scales of the typomorphology. The outcome of the analysis gave a direction in which scale and type of form the intervention could take place. For this project, interventions were made on scales of the block and the street, together with the public space, which then has effects on the network of urban corridors of the city.

Operation
The operation shifted from transition, towards the use of space. The focus remained the same: urban development can happen through alternative tools where user groups and stakeholders become the starting point. A closer look into current user groups as well as

future user groups gave an overview of different needs and program requirements. The outcome of this section resulted in the introduction of a new method of designing, 'designing with polarities'.

Performance
this section aimed to develop evaluation criteria for the outcome of this project. Many authors describe urban vitality in many different ways, it became clear that the overlap with the people component was the essential focus for the design interventions, including transactions and fit.

The answer to the main question therefore is:

spatial transformations that are based on the starting point from user groups, from the people component, which aims to improve current socio-economic status before densification, and aims to find a balance between different needs, the 'common ground' between polarities, instead of perceiving designing as 'solving problems'.

OPEN QUESTIONS – RECOMMENDATIONS

Some questions remain (partly) unanswered, and could be elaborated in further research.

Limitations of municipality
The interventions are mainly focused on public life in public spaces. The big question here is: Who pays? The economic position of the municipality of Amsterdam should be investigated. While many developments are in progress through the entire city, the majority of the projects were initiated already before the crisis years. New projects happen within the context of the transitioning city, with bottom up activities highly supported by the municipality. The role of housing corporations also shifted. Investments in public spaces should therefore involve private parties as well, which are mostly associated with gaining profit out of the development. This leads to densifying the area again, as originally planned. But as mentioned earlier, this could happen in phases, investing in public life firstly, and gaining economic profit secondly.

City in transition
The city in transition is not a stable state, it is the intermediate phase between two stable states. So what happens when the transition is over, and the new urban development tools become the standardized version of urban design and planning? Further investigation could be done in the form of scenarios, involving even newer trends, to gain knowledge about the adaptability of the proposed interventions, the

neighbourhood, the ringzone, and the city as a whole. Adaptability then will act as another performance to the FOP framework (and subsequently changing the form and the operation), introducing another approach for the whole project.

6. REFLECTION ON THE METHODOLOGY

It is essential to reflect on the proposed methodology in comparison with the actual process and used methods. Especially in this research, it was a continuous exploration of different methods.

FOP FRAMEWORK
The fop framework helped me to define the design assignment, as it allows the shift between synthesis and analysis. An understanding of the form was of importance, because the design area is a post-war neighbourhood, which includes an explicit language of form. Setting evaluation criteria was of importance, because it shapes the desired outcome and sets a clear goal for the design process. The operation, as mentioned earlier, had a dynamic character. This was also the most difficult component of the FOP framework. Difficult in the sense of how to determine and decide which operation fits best in the framework. The user component was already set to be important in an early stage, within the context of the transitioning city. But the 'use of space' became an essential part

in a much later stage, resulting in diverging research processes inbetween, see inbetween steps.

PATTERNS
The patterns were developed as a first step after the research of theory and analysis. The patterns were established through the mapping of existing qualities, existing problems, and potential additional program, in the context of urban vitality. This however didn't give a clear overview of the patterns. Also, the patterns didn't immediately lead to a design. It did give a focus of the desired outcome.

The choice for using patterns was made to serve as a preliminary set of rules for the originally planned gaming workshop. The gaming part was not part of the process anymore, and thus an other way had to be found to make the patterns relevant again. By putting the patterns into the criteria diagram of urban vitality, it was clear that the people component was missing.

POLARITIES
To bridge the gap between patterns and design, elaboration was needed on the people component, the analysis of user groups. While exploring user groups and their needs and desires, I focused on solving conflicts, and thus set up the desires and needs as polarities in relation to each other. Aiming at 'solviing' the conflicts. After meeting with my tutors, a new
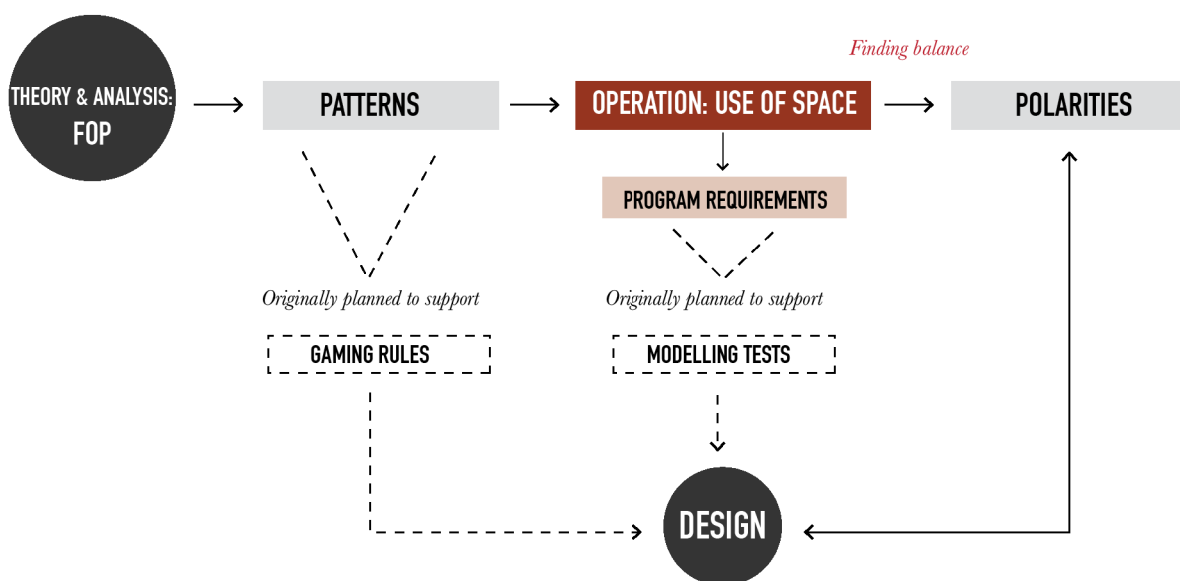
Actual process and methods (own image)

insight was given regarding polarities. An exploration in examples of polarities in the spatial environment provided a set of second 'patterns'. Polarities and conflicts could actually coexist, and the design assignment is finding the alliance, the inbetween, the third condition. These insights were developed during the design process, not before. Alongside designing, the notion of 'polarities' was always in the picture when making certain design choices, changing the perspective of designing. 'Solving' became 'balancing'.

## GAMING – ALTERNATIVE METHOD

Originally was planned city gaming session with stakeholders of the neighbourhood. Gaming is an effective negotiation tool for developing plans among stakeholders. The aim was to gain insights into program requirements in order to develop the design. Because of a shift of focus towards the needs and desires of user groups, rather than negotiation, the gaming was not the first option anymore. Emphasis was put on observation, some interviewing, and literature reviews.

MODELLING – ALTERNATIVE METHOD

Another alternative method used during the process was experimenting with masses in a model. This was introduced as a replacement for the gaming workshop which was withdrawn from the process, to maintain the 'fitting' process of additional program. The modelling process gave many insights in the 'form' , and not so much on the program of people component. It could be a matter of scale, but also the matter of lack of knowledge about user groups and possible conflicts.

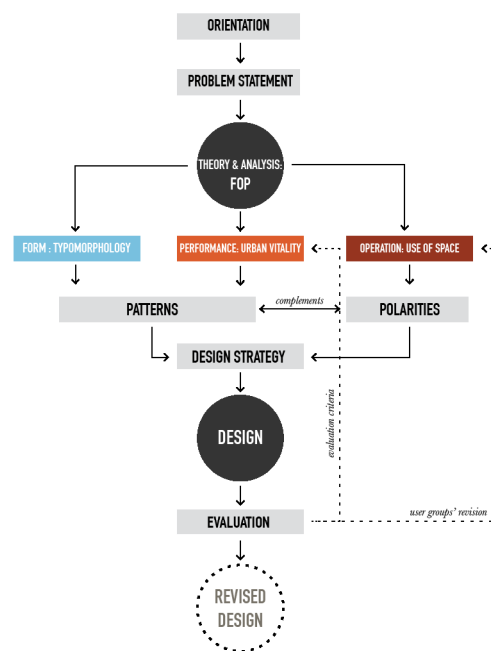## PATTERNS – POLARITIES – PRINCIPLES

In the end, the design was based on patterns, polarities and prinicples. Patterns were a direct result of research and analysis before design, polarities were observed during design, and principles were set after the design. Patterns are general statements that could be applicable in different contexts, while design principles are strongly related to one certain context.

research   synthesis   research   synthesis
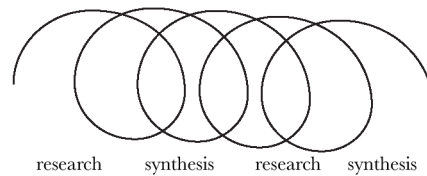
The spiral as a metaphor of the whole process (own image)
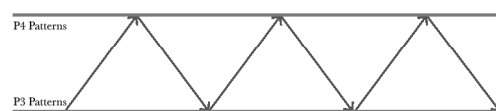
Interplay between patterns and polarities (own image)

Final process and methods (own image)