In the reflection I will look back on the results of the research and the design and reflect if the used approach worked. The reflection includes four aspects.

The relationship between the graduation lab and the chosen subject

The graduation project "Elderly living in the city" is part of the Graduation Lab Urban Transformation and Sustainability. Within this Graduation Lab, I worked within the research group "Design of the Urban Fabric". The goal for this research theme is to understand how we can contribute to make sustainable, attractive and vital urban design (Semesterbook Fall 2016).

In my graduation project I wanted to create a more suitable and pleasant urban living environment for elderly aging in place in The Hague. Hereby, the goal is to keep elderly physical active, healthy, vital and social active.

Sustainable has not only to do with energy and water problems. A sustainable environment should also support and maintain the health of people. Health is increasingly playing an important role in the design of public spaces. The concept of the healthy and liveable city, for example.

Therefore, a sustainable, attractive and vital urban design approach fits into my project.

The relationship between research and design

The aim of this research was to gain more insight in how to intervene in the urban environment in order to create neighbourhoods that keep elderly active and that facilitate the preference of the majority of older people to remain in their homes and community for as long as possible.

I started to do research from the beginning of the project in order to define the problem field and problem analysis. During this exploration I already found literature that was more specific and which discussed characteristics of the urban environment that facilitate elderly to stay active and to age in place in a pleasant way. This literature was used in the literature review and resulted in three themes. During the literature review I was so focused on
literature concerning elderly, that I reviewed little literature on urban design in general. I think that is a pity.

At the same time as the literature review, I made an urban analysis. In order to get a better understanding of the urban context and the role elderly played or could play in it. I started quite late to assess the area on the themes and criteria which derived from the literature review. Looking back, this could have saved me more time and doubts. Still, I think, the elaboration of the assessment of the area is not the most strong part of my research and project. However, the assessment showed to me what the spatial problems in the area are and what could become better.

Next to the methodologies literature review, urban analysis and observations, I used surveys and interviews to gain more information from the elderly themselves. The interviews on the street were not very productive. The surveys which I put in all mailboxes of the independent senior houses of Het Zamen and Jonker Frans, were more a success. Only ten responded, but I received nice answers and quite a lot of answers were consisted with the literature. If I had more time and if I knew it earlier, I would have liked to visit and participate in a debate of the urban elderly committee of The Hague. Perhaps they could have given me a lot of information and statistics. All the information I gained during the process, through literature, surveys, research and so on, were inputs for the final design.

I started quite late with designing. I often was too busy to get the story clear and to validate my thoughts. Maybe, I was also a bit afraid that the research and analysis would end up in nothing, in no potential design direction. I had more control over the research, so it was easier to get back to that and to postpone the design. If I could do the project over, I would create a better balance between design and research as a method; design by research and research by design. I noticed that the amount of research and the validation of my thoughts and story, blocked the creative part of me. However, this was a good learning process for me.

Application in other cities

A lot of research has been done on elderly from the perspective of gerontology, sociology and health. However these studies do not often explicit address how these outcomes can be applied in neighbourhood design. I tried to find my own way to cope with this. Even though I choose a specific neighbourhood in a particular city, the method I used can also be applied in other neighbourhoods and cities.

When designing for elderly, it is important to look first to the existing public space network. How are public spaces used and where are elderly and important facilities for elderly located? Is there a match or a mismatch? A match could be strengthened and become more attractive. A mismatch should be analysed further. Is it possible to expand public spaces near the facilities or to add facilities near the existing public spaces. Is it possible to build new elderly friendly houses near the facilities or to bring facilities to the place where many older people already live? Besides, note that the public spaces and facilities should serve different ages and people.

Moreover, you could look to a smaller pedestrian-friendly network within the bigger network of streets. It is desirable that this pedestrian-friendly network connects several public spaces and facilities. If this is not the case, you could look if it is possible to create a new pedestrian-friendly network that connects public spaces and facilities.