Additional reflection

The results and the methodology of the project have already been reflected in chapter fourteen of the thesis booklet, but not all four aspects of the reflection in appendix three of the graduation manual have been taken into account. Therefore this document contains some additional reflection, to complete the reflection in the report. The methodology, the relation between research and design and the relation between the project and the wider social context have already been elaborated in the thesis booklet. This additional reflection mainly emphasizes the relationship between the project and the graduation studio.

Aspect 1: The relationship between research and design

It was the intention on beforehand to use several different methods for analysis and design, also methods that I had never used before, to learn as much as possible before graduating. Working with Space Syntax and urban densities as scientific methods the measure and conclude things was of of my personal goals. This goal has been achieved, and the methods used for analytical purposes have proven to be very useful. Literature study and the constructing of the theoretical framework became a very integrated method, which has had its influence in every phase or layer of the project. This is especially visible in the second and third part of this booklet: First a certain theory or writing is explained, then a specific aspect is analyzed and mapped and conclusions are drawn. This systematic way of working has been very clear and productive. At first, the conclusions had been translated straight into design solutions, which were the starting principles of the design phase of the project. This can be seen as the methodology of ‘design by research’. When the design process continued, the way of working changed in several ways. It was in fact essential to change perspective on the problem area and merely try various design solutions by design. In an experimental way of working, many different design solutions have passed the drawing table. Some fitted in better than others. During this process, the design proposal has changed drastically more than once. This way of working can be seen as ‘research by design’. Therefore, both the methodologies is ‘design by research’, as well as ‘research by design’ have been essential.

Aspect 2: The relationship between the theme of the studio and the subject/case study chosen by the student within this framework (location/object)

This MSc thesis is part of the graduation studio Urban Regeneration. Regeneration, that is what the future of urban design will be in the coming decades, especially in the Netherlands and metropolitan areas like the Randstad. This is the main reason I chose to be in this graduation studio. My graduation project fits perfectly in the framework of this studio. The plan area is the railway zone in Gouda, which is a depraved railway station environment. I analyzed the extend to which the existing renegeration plans will improve the current situation; and I produced an alternative renewal plan as a final product of this thesis. The case studies have been on similar railway station environments. The railway station environment in ’s-Hertogenbosch has been renewed several years ago, which has had many positive effects. Research has been done on what can be learned from these renewal plans.

Aspect 3: The relationship between the methodical line of approach of the studio and the method chosen by the student in this framework

Many different tutors and guest speakers have given lectures as a part of the education in the studio. Some of them were in the line of my project, others were not. All of them have proven to be informative however. The line of approach in the studio was very broad in my opinion. The subjects of the various graduation projects differed a lot, but still one could learn from each other while working in the studio. However, there was no other graduation project in the studio that was concerning railway station environments. Essential knowledge for the methodology that has been used in my graduation project, which was again a wide range of methods, such as Space Syntax,
Spacematrix and the liveability analyses, was gained from my mentors; Akkelies van Nes and Birgit Hausleitner. The lectures in the studio functioned more as background information. The personal tutoring in the first weeks of the graduation track were the most useful for me, also for choosing a mentor team.

**Aspect 4: The relationship between the project and the wider social context**

A railway station is one of the most important elements of a city. The station is of vital importance to shops and other economic functions in the city centre because of the constant flow of people going in and out of the city. In the past decades this was often neglected. At present various cities are redeveloping their railway station environments. Since the recent developments and the so called renaissance of the railway, railway station environments are regaining their importance in the city. Currently many Dutch railway station environments are being redeveloped, also because of their regained importance. Most of these renewal plans are mainly focused on the regional accessibility of the railway station. A perfect example is the Stedenbaan concept, which tends to intensify the network between the railway stations in the southern wing of the Randstad. The last decade another aspect has gained importance concerning railway stations: The comfort of the user. Many research projects are currently going on in whole Europa, that are trying to find out how to improve the passenger comfort within railway stations and on public modes of transport.

An aspect that is often forgotten is the local accessibility of the railway station. Kusumo (2007) is one of the few people who did research on this subject. She has proved a a certain relationship between the location of a railway station within the urban fabric of the city and the distribution of retail shops in the city centre and the railway station environment. A relevant MSc thesis on the subject of railway station environments is ‘Fixing the link’, by Inoek Brouwer (2010). Her thesis emphasizes the importance of the link between Dutch railway stations and city centres. With my thesis, ‘Back on track’, I intended to go deeper into the local accessibility of railway stations within a city, during the analysis phase as well as the design phase of the project.

Another subject of this thesis has been the liveability in railway station environments. Where current railway station redevelopment project are about concentrating functions around railway stations to create multifunctional hubs, sometimes the liveability of the railway station environment has lost priority. The Zuid-as in Amsterdam is a perfect example of such a project (Wesselink, 2007), since this area is highly accessible on the regional and local scale, but it is not a pleasant place to be at all.

With this thesis I emphasised the liveability in railway station environments and tried to make this abstract concept measurable, so concrete interventions can be designed to improve the liveability. This has resulted in a tool that can be used to measure the liveability in railway station environments. The approach of Brouwer (2010) can be found back in the connection with the city centre, which is one of the four aspects of liveability in railway station environments in this thesis.

Both the local accessibility of railway stations, as in the integration of the station within the urban fabric of the city, and the liveability in railway station environments have been the core of this thesis, during the analysis phase and the design proposal. This is often not getting priority when developing renewal plans for railway station environments at present. With this thesis I intended to demonstrate the essence of both aspects.

The challenge for future renewal plans for railway station environments will be to solve the problems and increase liveability with only little financial means, since the end of the financial crisis is not yet in sight. In that case the focus will often be on improving the public space. Various methods can be used to analyze and test different design interventions. Many of those methods have been used and evaluated in this thesis.