Reflection Report

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Research and design

Graduation plan
Before starting the research I wrote the graduation plan where I stated the problems that I wanted to try to solve in my design. From my graduation plan it was clear that most of my research should be done by researching the current state of apartments and housing. This so I could get an insight on the problems, what the weaknesses of the current balconies in combination with their apartments are.

Research to design
The major shift from the research to design was that my first research was mostly a research about how I should make this new design. Later on it became much more interesting and important to focus on why I should make this design and why should it be done in such a way. I had to get very clear what I was doing and why I was doing this. Only after this I could successfully present my P2, when I was able to state a clear purpose of this case study.

Implementing research
The research made about techniques and an understanding of housing were implemented in the further development of my design. By understanding housing the functional flow of the apartments could be altered and improved and help in the search for possibilities of improvement. To find a way of constructing this the technical research gave an understanding of the technical possibilities and helped in the choices there needed to be made.

Techniques
When I started the project I first wanted to make a technique or catalogue that could be used to create better functioning balconies with existing buildings. After some research I found that the architectural ideas and problems where more interesting then a system, there already are enough systems that can be used to create such a plan. I decided that it would be useless to create a system specific for this use that wouldn’t really improve a lot compared to other existing techniques.
In my technical research I focused on the pros and cons there are when adding to an existing building, creating an added structure that would be easy to build by using elements like stability from the existing building.
Economics
Within the whole process of my design the economics was an integral aspect to me. The redesign that I am making is for social housing, I have the opinion that these houses should be improved in terms of their personal outside space. But because it is social housing the money is an important issue, all they would like to do is save money, and this improvement costs money. In the process I have tried to come up with solutions that would be as simple as possible using less material and time. It would be easy to create a complex big system solving a lot of problems, but I tried to stay focused and solve the big issues I state and find a solution for this.

Social aspects
Within the redesign and research the social aspects were a very important part. In the current state there are also balconies but I had to find out why people don’t use these balconies. More important was trying to understand if people would like and use the redesign that I would propose. Especially when in the current condition of the project it looked like there wasn’t really any healthy social activity, the neighborhood has a bad name. In my plan I also tried to think of the possibility why and how this redesign could improve those conditions.

Architectural design
With the focus shifting from the technique to more an architectural design I developed a slight different view on architecture. When I chose for the studio Architectural Engineering I did this because of the importance of engineering in architecture for me, you can’t design a (good) building design without knowing how you are going to do this. This worked well in the other projects of my master at the TU but here I had to learn more about why I should design what I design. First I needed to understand more about the way houses and apartments work, not doing my bachelor at the TU but at de Hogeschool Utrecht may be one of the main reasons for this. I knew why I did this project but at first I had big problems stating why the existing should be improved, and second why it should be improved in the way I suggested. I had to develop my own program, this was new for me, in the past the program was always present and I had to make a design from this program.

aE Studio Themes
Within the three locations given the location near the A-12 zone in Utrecht was for my approach the best location, the other locations were more in open space without the required buildings for my case. In the surrounding of the A-12 zone I searched for a building (complex) that had the most potential for my case study. The buildings that I required needed to be apartments with a poor personal outside space, a non-functioning balcony.
In my first approach of the projects I focused more on the engineering than the architecture, stating that I would make a system that could be applied to these types of buildings also in other places. But in time I realized that the architectural aspect was a more interesting aspect for me, why did these
existing balconies malfunction and how can this be improved with a redesign.

**Methods**
Within the first semester the beginning research was mainly focused on the techniques of the project. Finding what kind of techniques could be applied for my project and the impact they would have on the end result. Soon after starting on this research on techniques I also started to research existing apartments and houses, to get a better understanding of the difference in use and functionality of an apartment/balcony and a house/garden. These apartments supply in the demand of cheaper (social) housing but lack in my opinion an important quality, the personal outside space. By looking at the layout and context structure differences between houses and apartments I wanted to see if there could be a problem in this part of their design. This resulted in the realization that in a lot of the apartments the arrangement of functions wasn’t that logical. Private and less private areas were mixed in apartments, but in houses they are in sequence. When designing, these researches provided an understanding and toolbox to create a better alternative, giving an insight about what to do and what not to do.

**Projects in broader context**
From the start of the project I saw the problem of the non-functioning balconies. When looking around in the build environment there are a lot of apartments that confirm to the building requirements in outside space (balconies) but these spaces don’t function well at all. These balconies are added to the apartments, but it looks like they aren’t appreciated by the inhabitants, a great number isn’t used in any substantial way. In my approach of this project I always kept in mind that this is a study case showing potential and problems of this type of apartments. The resulting projects isn’t a projects on its own but could be placed in several other places where the same kind of apartments are found, creating a example on how we could think about apartments and their (personal) outside space. My opinion is that in current housing policies and ideas this personal outside space is understated and should get more attention. This was clear when for a short time the building requirements didn’t require an outside space, they thought that the market would solve this. But in result many new apartments were made without any outside space to save money, resulting in the reinstatement of the building requirements for the outside spaces.