

Reflection

1. What is the relation between your graduation (project) topic, the studio topic (if applicable), your master track (A,U,BT,LA,MBE), and your master programme (MSc AUBS)?

My graduation topic delves into the studio topic of general designing for health and care. In my graduation topic I decided I wanted to design a building for elderly to live using design principles that improve the health and care for these elderly. Health and care is a big and important topic in the field of architecture. Architecture is about more than the building itself. It is also about creating safe and healthy spaces for people to, amongst other things, live and work in. But at the same time this topic is not only about the buildings and their spaces but also about how the building is positioned in both the physical and social landscape surrounding us all. Therefore, this topic touches upon many other disciplines than only architecture on its own. It is about creating a healthy building where the elderly can live their life whilst maintaining good social contacts both within and outside of the building, with all of their needed facilities close by. And this all is placed in an existing structure within the urban fabric of a city in the Netherlands.

2. What is the relevance of your graduation work in the larger social, professional and scientific framework?

This project involves some of the major challenges in today's society, the housing crisis and the way we approach elderly healthcare. One of these problems is the fact that elderly people continue to keep living in their often way too big, family homes where they lived for the most part of their lives. At the same time, we see that space for creating new buildings to live in is running out in the Netherlands and therefore it is becoming ever more important to see what we can do with the buildings that are already there and how we can use them more efficiently when their existing function might not be needed anymore. This research will provide a solution by looking into how we can transform these existing buildings into elderly housing complexes where the elderly can continue having a meaningful and healthy life full of social connections. This could cause more elderly people to move out of their family homes, opening up spaces for other people to move in and at the same time improving their own quality of life.

At the same time, we can see a shift in the way elderly housing and elderly care is organized. Social connections between the elderly are essential for remaining healthy both physically and mentally. We can see that the elderly housing and care sector is developing new methods of housing elderly in a more social way to both save money and improve the quality of life for the elderly. This research and design project contributes to this development by proposing a new method of housing and a new way of integrating several design aspects to elderly housing into a single complex. Where previous housing complexes for elderly with a lower care demand are mainly focus on the private houses and some common rooms this new method focusses way more on the grey areas in between these two types of spaces, where social interactions can happen more spontaneously creating a deeper social connection besides the more organized interactions in dedicated common rooms.

3. How do you assess the value of your way of working (your approach, your used methods, used methodology)?

My research consisted of two researches, one about transformation of existing buildings into (elderly) housing and one about possible new social housing types for elderly people. Because these topics on their own are already quite large, combining them into one research caused me to be overwhelmed by the amount of literature that was to be found. However not all literature was as relevant and therefore it took me a long time to find the right literature for this specific topic whilst writing the research plan. Due to this I was not able to get fully acquainted with the literature that I did find and therefore heading into the fieldwork with less background knowledge than desired was a bit tough. Nevertheless, the fieldwork was very helpful in providing the background and basis for making some of the design choices later in the project.

After the P2 presentation and in the beginning of the actual design process I made another small mistake. I focused a bit too much on the transformation aspect of the project and the technical possibilities and limitations for transformation of the existing building. This restrained me from looking beyond the structure of the building and having the architectural freedom to make the concept work before making the technical aspects work. Luckily, I found out about this mistake, and I was able to fix this during the design process.

Overall, I think the way I approached this research was pretty good. Personally, I like to balance the edge between architectural design and technical design. It is important to make the building and the concept work architecturally, but whilst developing this architecture I also like to keep track of the technical aspect of the design to make sure that the architecture for the building is still reachable. At the same time, I also believe that certain technical elements can also provide some good architectural elements and therefore keeping a good eye on this is important for me. During the design process I might have tipped over to the technical side a couple of times, but in the end I think the project ended with some great results on both sides.

4. How do you assess the academic and societal value, scope and implication of your graduation project, including ethical aspects?

I think my graduation project was very relevant in the field of elderly housing. Due to this being a big topic in the Netherlands, a lot of research has already been done on this topic and a lot of literature can be found. Therefore, it is hard to assess the academic value of the project. However, nevertheless the research did result in some opportunities and found problems which were not found in that much literature. I think this is mostly because this project did not only consist of theoretical research but also of fieldwork. By experiencing how it is to live in an elderly housing complex and by talking directly to these elderly, some results were found that might not have popped up from literature research alone.

This project also holds value from societal point of view. Due to the rising average age of the Dutch inhabitants, our society needs to change its thoughts on how to care for the elderly. In this research a housing method is brought to light where informal care between residents is much higher on the agenda and better facilitated. At the same time this form of housing for the elderly can prevent loneliness amongst the elderly due to the social nature of this type of living, causing great health benefits for the elderly.

From an ethical point of view this project also holds value. Where nowadays often the housing associations oversee the management and organization of the housing complexes this project returns the power to the elderly by letting them decide on how to use their common areas and what to organize in their housing complex. However, research recommended taking this even one step further by involving the elderly in the creation of the complex as well, causing a form of

co-creation between the architect, the housing association and the future inhabitants of the complex. This last step was not included in this project since it is a student project and not an actual project being developed.

Overall, I think this project holds some great value both from an academic and societal perspective. Its research showed some new insights in transformation possibilities for elderly housing, which resulted in a good new concept for social elderly housing. Which was then developed architecturally and technically in an existing building.

5. How do you assess the value of the transferability of your project results?

Since this project consists of the transformation of an existing building transferability is not optimal. Building transformations require a lot of attention to what is already there and how to deal with that. Therefore, this project cannot be directly transferred to other locations. However, the ideas behind this project and the concepts resulting from this allow for a lot of freedom and are therefore very transferable. First, the research came up with a specific building type that would be suitable for transformation into housing. These buildings are often located in or near urban centers and becoming vacant due to the rising age in certain neighborhoods. The idea of transforming these buildings into housing for the elderly can be very well implemented in these locations due to the high demand for elderly housing in these neighborhoods. Finally, the research into elderly housing resulted in a design concept where perhaps the oldest form of elderly housing, the courtyard, is combined with more modern forms of housing the elderly. This concept is relatively schematic and therefore flexible in execution, making it very transferable to other projects as well.