

# Reflection

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## A summary of the thesis and findings

The thesis explored how contemporary community centers could be improved to better serve the needs of future generations of the elderly. The research was positioned by previous studies that elaborated on subjective values attached to space and the theory of aging-in-place. And therefore emphasized a role the community center could play in creating more social interaction for the elderly who aged-in-place. It highlighted the significance of social connections by addressing loneliness, which was a significant topic in relation to the elderly. The findings underscored the importance of tailored programs for the future generation of the elderly, adapted space for the elderly with dementia, and intergenerational involvement.

## Methods used in the thesis

The methods used for this thesis adopted a bottom-up approach, focusing on translating the subjective values expressed by the elderly into tangible design features for community centers. The main methodology employed was a combination of a survey and fieldwork. These approaches allowed for the collection of subjective insights and

perspectives, contributing to the understanding of the desired characteristics of the community center. To anticipate the needs of future elderly, the survey included individuals aged 50 and above. By including this age group, the research aimed to capture the perspectives and aspirations of those who would be transitioning into the elderly population in the coming years.

## Reflection

The following questions are integrated in the tekst:

- (1) What is the relation between your graduation project topic, your master track (Ar, Ur, BT, LA, MBE), and your master programme (MSc AUBS)?
- (2) How did your research influence your design/recommendations and how did the design/recommendations influence your research?
- (3) How do you assess the value of your way of working (your approach, your used methods, used methodology)?
- (4) How do you assess the academic and societal value, scope and implication of your graduation project, including ethical aspects?
- (5) How do you assess the value of the transferability of your project results?

 Bottom-up approach

subjective  
Attachment & Feeling

 Top-down approach

objective

## 1. Image P1

An image used during to P1 to demonstrate the different perspectives on the creation of a sufficient living environment for the elderly.

### Main process of the design and research

The design, as well as the thesis, is situated within the concept of age-friendly cities. In relation to the studio, this concept has been further developed towards the age-friendly city of the future (1). This means that the concept focuses mainly on the future elderly population and their values rather than just the current elderly. The research and design contribute to an interdisciplinary way of working (1) by translating urgent social and local issues (like the aging population) into architectural design features that can promote greater social inclusiveness for the elderly.

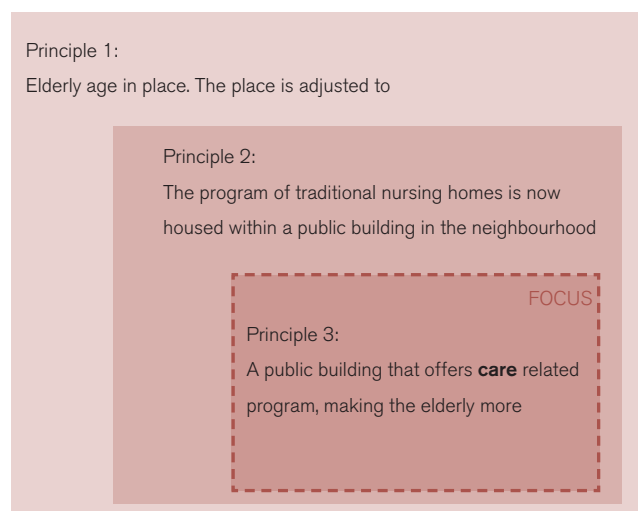
The architectural and urban issue of creating a suitable living environment for the elderly has been a broad starting point for the research. Extensive research has since been conducted, focusing on exploring *space* that had received limited attention in literature and showed potential for improvement. It became evident that certain aspects of aging-in-place and the age-friendly city had not been adequately explored in research, particularly in relation to subjective values (like social interaction). The importance of subjective values such as social interaction to the elderly was often named in relation to the build environment, but rarely followed by exemplar design features that could facilitate these values. These subjective values were nonetheless better explained and visualized in literature of environmental gerontology and environmental psychology. Which expanded the focus of research

to a broader and more interdisciplinary approach (1). For example, literature on loneliness is conducted, and explains what participation in activities in the neighborhood could mean, however, not too little research could be found on what space is needed to invite elderly to participate more in activities.

Consequently, the research tried to bridge the different disciplines into a translation of architectural improvements to facilitate social interconnection within the neighborhood, within the community center (2).

### 2. Image P2

An image used during P2 to demonstrate the new focus of research and design



important to acquire knowledge about the practical requirements for creating a secure environment for the elderly. By considering multiple perspectives, including that of the elderly, a well-thought-out building can be integrated into the built environment (4). Considering that this research focuses solely on one perspective, the elderly's, it is not sufficient to deem the building design as comprehensive (4).

It is important to acknowledge the potential and limitations of this research and design. The fieldwork was conducted at only one site, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. Therefore, the results should be seen as assumptions or subjective and incidental truths rather than universally applicable (5). Conducting more site visits in the future would be beneficial to validate and expand upon the results (5).

In addition, the survey consist of few findings from a convenience sample which was predominantly composed from personal relationships and their relationships and could therefore not form an umbrella to what is opiated by the population in general (5). Also the number of respondents could not suffice for drawing well considered conclusions. Therefore the results should be interpreted carefully. However, it is worth noting that many of the research outcomes align with findings in comparable fields of research like on day centers. This suggests that the results are likely to be consistent with what would be discovered if a more in depth research followed up (5).

In addition, it should be acknowledged that the design of the community center presented in this studio is costly and may not be feasible for a smaller city like Maassluis. However, it is worth considering that if architects working on large-scale projects of public buildings, such as Het Forum in Groningen, had a deeper understanding of the needs and perspectives regarding spaces for social interaction for the elderly, the design might have been slightly different. This reinforces the challenge architects face in incorporating all perspectives into their designs. I am fortunate to have gained knowledge

about the needs of the elderly, which I can carry forward into future designs.

### **Reflective questions**

*What were the advantages and disadvantages of starting with a very wide scope?*

Advantages: Starting with a relatively wide scope provided me with the opportunity to thoroughly investigate what aspect of the elderly living environment had received limited attention. It allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the subject, ensuring alignment with existing research and positioning the findings within the broader context. By considering the full scope, the topic could be better comprehended and contextualized.

Disadvantages: A significant amount of time was dedicated to writing and revising guidelines that are no longer relevant to this research and design. Consequently, there was limited time available to delve deeper into the specific subject. However, it is worth noting that this topic is complex, and even with more time, it would be challenging to be fully informed and aware of every aspect from the outset.

*What would i consider to be the next angle of research following the findings:*

The research findings suggest that the elderly would prefer to be integrated within community spaces rather than having spaces exclusively for their own generation. Therefore, it could be considered that instead of focusing solely on improving community centers specifically designed for the elderly, it is more important to adjust other facilities to meet their needs. For example, instead of adding sports activities to a community center, the existing sports centers themselves should be modified. This could include adding extra dressing rooms where partners or caregivers can assist with dressing, providing storage for chairs used in chair yoga, creating seating areas near sports rooms for resting before or after classes, ensuring accessibility with the absence of stairs or the use of elevators, and other adjustments that enhance the overall experience for elderly individuals.

During the visit to the community center, it became evident that the center predominantly attracted elderly aged 75 and above, and the number of participants had been declining over time. This observation prompted further exploration into the distinct needs and characteristics of the upcoming generation of elderly, emphasizing the significance of going beyond designing a forward-looking building for elderly in general and instead focusing on anticipating and addressing the specific requirements of this new generation (1) (2).

### **Other research that influenced the design**

Due to narrowing of the focus, some research findings initially intended for inclusion in the thesis were omitted (mainly due to feedback at the p.2, which was helpful to master a specific topic really well, that was able to generate meaningful findings and outcomes). However, these findings still had an impact on the design (2).

#### *Research on residential care facilities*

In the early stages of the research, I examined the programs and setups of various residential care facilities. It became evident that progressive examples had a more open and urban approach to their design. Meaning that it was rather visualized as an urban block, or street than a closed of building. Program of these facilities was to my surprise not really 'health' related, but moreover included spaces to meet and gather. It is mentioned by van Houten et al (2017). that these spaces of gathering have due to the extramuralization law been integrated into the neighborhoods as community centers or day centers. As a result, the design approach began to take shape as an urban environment, with specialized dwellings for the elderly located near a community center. I referred to this concept as a "torn apart" version of the nursing home, also mentioned as the urban nursing home in P2.2.

The most progressive examples of residential care facilities I found emphasized the importance of welcoming other generations to the building to

promote social interaction and participation. However, in my opinion, these examples did not provide enough incentives for other generations to enter the buildings, which presented an opportunity for the social design aspect of this master graduation project (2).

#### *Conversations in the fieldwork*

In conversations with the community center manager and nurses from thuiszorg companies, it became clear that involving specialists was crucial (2). Adding a physiotherapy space to the building seemed like a good fit. The manager emphasized the importance of having professionals (physiotherapists) lead the exercise programs for the elderly. The survey also highlighted the desire for exercise sessions with physiotherapists. Additionally, having an office space or central hub for thuiszorg nurses was deemed important in an elderly neighborhood. Since most elderly individuals require some form of care, it is practical to have thuiszorg services located nearby.

### **Value assessment of the research and design**

The primary focus of this research, particularly since P2.2 has been to translate the perspective of the elderly into physical space. I consider this approach of prioritizing the needs expressed by the elderly to be crucial, as their perspective is often overlooked when budget constraints or practical considerations related to caregiving come into play (3). Furthermore, literature on the living environment of the elderly barely touches upon the new generation of elderly. Although it is acknowledged that this new generation exists and holds different opinions and values compared to the current and previous generations of elderly. Therefore, it is crucial to consider the needs of this generation when designing for the elderly (3) (see scope survey).

Understanding the perspective of the elderly is crucial for architects, as their role involves translating the needs of the users of space. Therefore, I think it is valuable to make an effort to understand the needs of the future generation of elderly, which I believe has not been adequately explored (4). However, it is equally