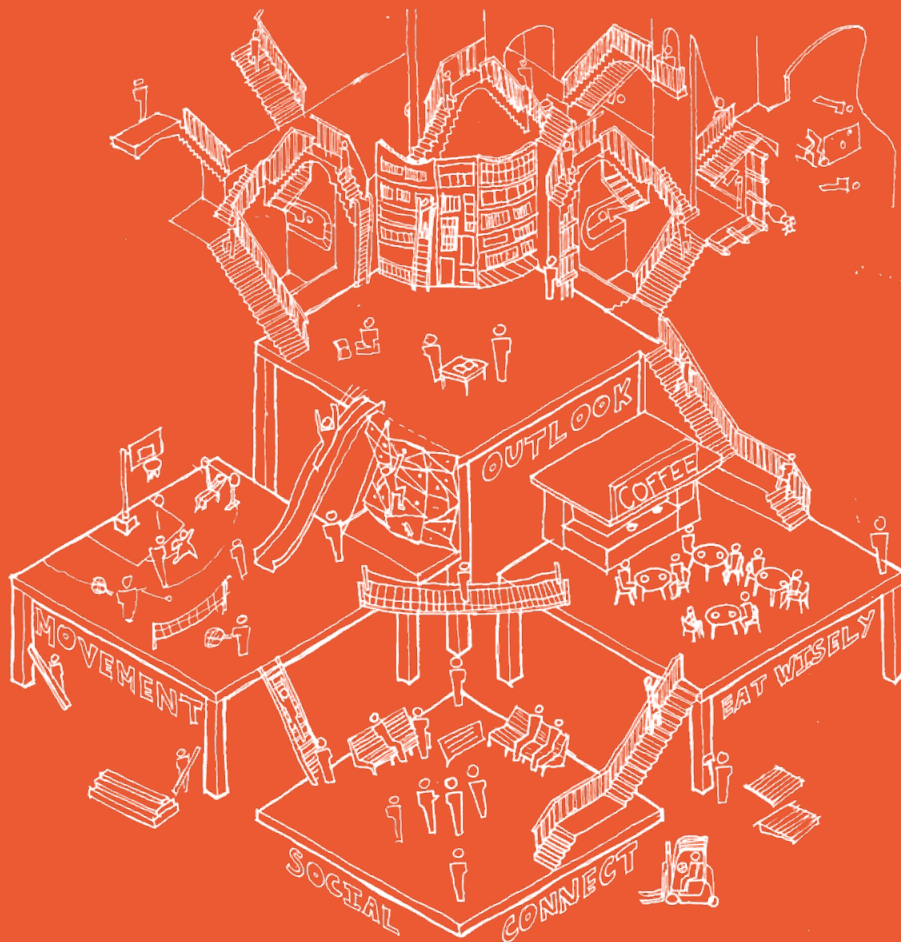


BETTER TOGETHER.

Reflection: Closing Thoughts On The Graduation Project



Graduation Reflection

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7.3 Reflection

Critical Reflection and Thoughts On The Graduation Project

What is the relation between your graduation project topic, your master track (Architecture), and your master programme (MSc AUBS)?

The graduation project topic, which aims to address the research question 'How can the architectural design of elderly independent living environments enhance well-being by promoting social connections amongst the elderly?', explores the relationship between elderly well-being and architectural design. Specifically, it explores how architecture can leverage its ability to create spaces for social connection and therefore activate it as a catalyst for the promotion of well-being. The relationship that this has with Architecture, Urbanism and Building Sciences is the contribution of a vision where the built environment is able to support continued healthy independent living by creating dwelling environments that position elderlies within a community that has a strong sense of social connection.

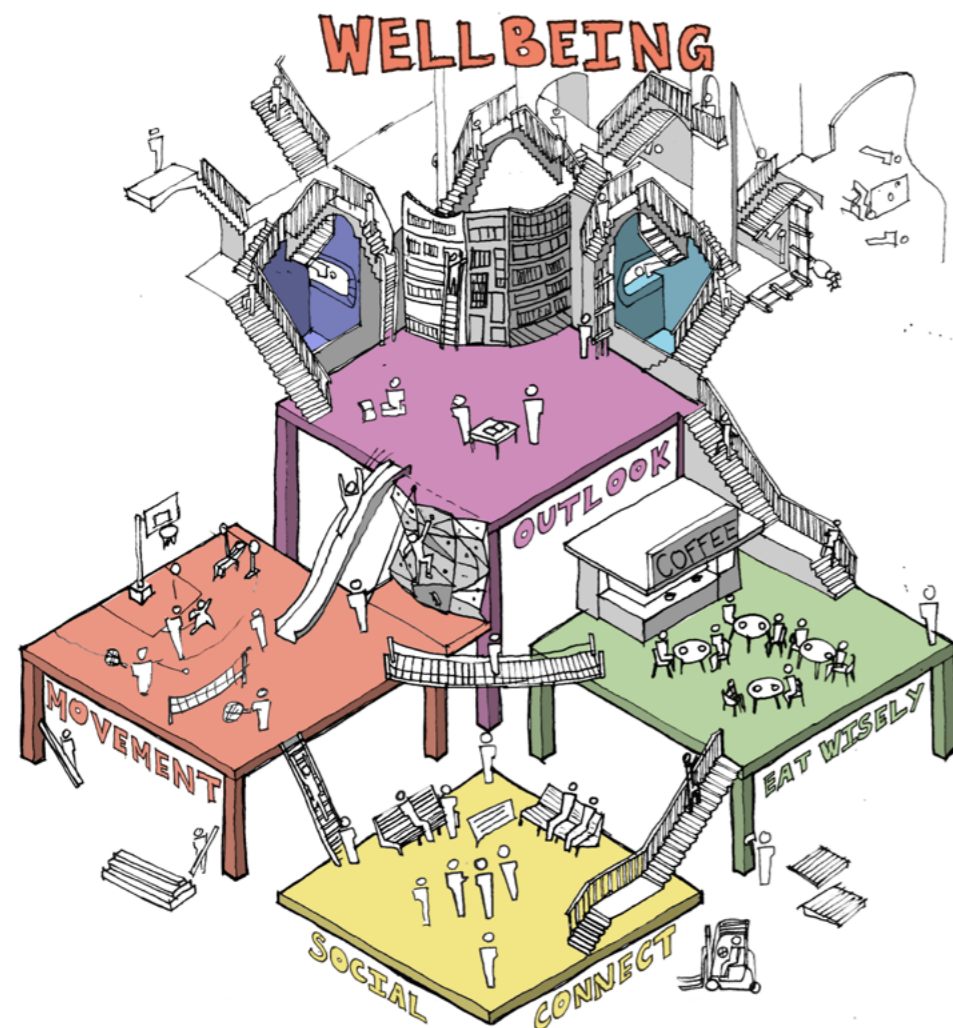


Fig. 1: Concept Drawing - 'Architecture supporting Social Connection as a Catalyst Towards Well-being' by Author

How did your research influence your design/recommendations and how did the design/recommendations influence your research?

The research, titled 'Better Together' was designed specifically to be a companion handbook for future designers seeking to leverage social connection as a catalyst for promoting wellbeing for the occupants of a dwelling environment. The outcome was a set of holistic design guidelines that aim to promote social connection and healthy living organized in to different scales to ensure that the research conclusions were implemented at every level of the building. The guidelines are summarized in succinct and simple headings. Doing so would encourage the user of the handbook to create their own interpretations for creative responses to the given research guidelines. In the case of my project, it helped me structure my design thinking and the way that I wanted to approach the site, masterplan, and building. Through every step of the design process, I would refer back to my little handbook and ask myself, how am I applying this specific guideline and how does it contribute to the manifestation of an answer to the original research question? Overall, the handbook became a companion that I would return to often during the design process to remind myself of my goals, as well as ensuring that my design decisions were aligned with the concrete conclusions derived from my research.

As I developed my design, I found myself critically evaluating the research guidelines as I tried applying them. I noticed that there was a clear hierarchy with regards to which design guidelines popped up in to my head as I was trying to create ingenious solutions to manifest my vision. When I look at my building, I notice that a lot of the creative ingenuity came through the ways in which I interpreted the guidelines that are positioned in 'Scale B - Communal'. This feels obvious, as the research is all about social connection, but in hindsight it might be helpful for the research to place a little more emphasis on this, while showing that the other scales are there to support the main idea.

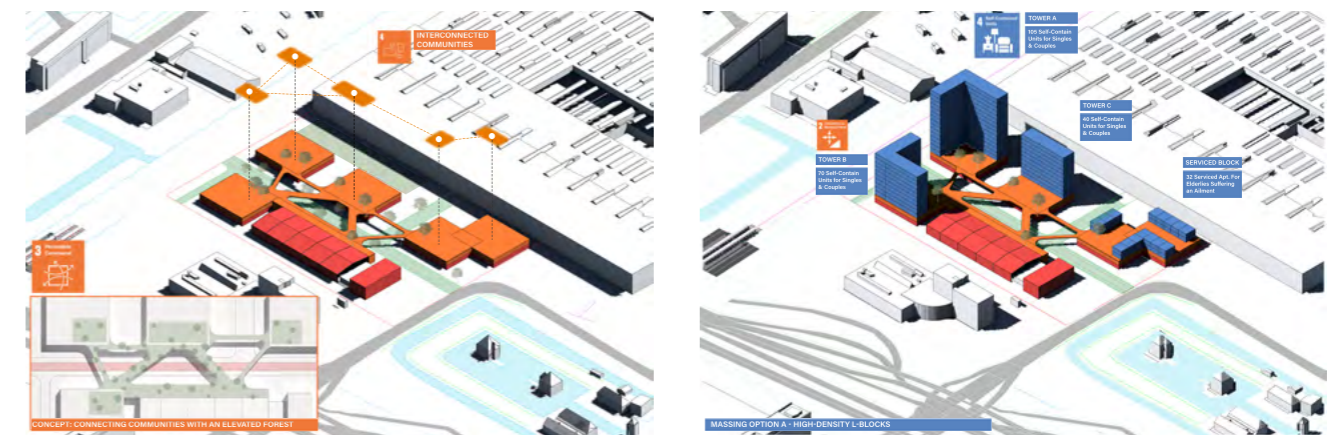


Fig. 2: Early Masterplan Massings Developed Using The Application of Design Guidelines for the P2 Presentation.

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

With the research, I made it clear that I wanted to employ a hybrid approach that critically balances the results from the primary research and the secondary research done on case studies and literature. Both of these methods have their own disadvantages and the hope was by being clear about the hybrid approach, I would be able to counteract it. I think that overall this was quite effective, and made the research booklet structured in a way that was quite easy to understand for people. However, taking this approach did mean that the overall structure was a bit 'rigid' and quite organized. In hindsight, this might have potentially stifled the research reports potential to stand out and be more 'special' and ingenious. Nevertheless, utility and understandability takes priority on my goal towards a handbook that is readable by all, so this is a loss I can accept.

In the case of design, I found myself jumping between scales a lot throughout the process. Seeking to come up with solutions and design features on the human scale and then jumping out to the overall program and seeing how that would fit etc. At the same time, I was always checking to make sure that I was not straying away from

the original research goal and applying the design guidelines I made for myself. This way of working allowed me to come up with detailed, complex, and ingenuitive designs throughout the building.

However! It also meant that the structure in my head when it came to the lineage of design thinking was highly complex. Having spent months thinking about the building and it's various design features, my head was filled with all of these ideas that I had applied in the design and I wanted to really show that. What I realized, was that this made it very difficult for me to clearly communicate my idea to people who knew nothing about project, and sometimes even my own tutors! There was a lack of hierarchy when it came to what I talked about when presenting.

Looking back, I would have given myself time in between these deep working sessions to take a moment and separate myself from the design and see the bigger picture, the red thread. This would have allowed me to consider the corpus of work that I have done over a period of time, and highlight to myself the most important topics for discussions when presenting the project.



Fig. 3: Jumping between the Observations, Masterplanning, Technical Design and the Interiors throughout the design stage

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

I believe that the academic and societal value of my graduation project is highly relevant to the issues of today and will only continue to be relevant as our population ages. I believe that the research methods employed in the research report should be more prevalent in architectural academia, particularly the primary research component and how it allows a student to understand the user of the building on a human level.

Reflecting on the scope and implications of my graduation project, I recall a conversation I had with my research tutor. Being the ambitious person that I am, I was a bit disappointed when my research proposal received a grade of 8 at the end of quarter 1. The following day, during a tutorial session with my tutor I asked him, 'why not a 10?'. He responded by saying that although the work that I had done so far was strong, it did not necessarily break any new ground within the field of architecture, and it is works like these that are deserving of a '10'. I spent some time thinking about this and concluded that he was indeed right. The research, as strong as it is, builds upon the massive work that has already been done on social interaction and architecture, and therefore perhaps the contribution it provides is not incredibly impactful. Nevertheless, I believe that the contribution to this particular area of architecture is necessary to enforce and highlight our ability as architects to make a positive difference to the lives of the people who use our buildings. To conclude, I embrace this perceived lack of originality in my pursuit of contributing to more human-centered architectural thinking.

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

I find the project results to be highly transferable. In fact, I would go as far as saying with confidence that when confronted with any project related to housing or elderly housing in the future, I will again return to the work that I have done here during my final year at TU Delft. The graduation project is a testament towards the applicability of the research results in to innovative design and in general, the importance of evidence-based design and linking design decisions to research. To reflect on my interpretation of the role of the architect, I believe that our job is to

make built environments that contribute positively to the people who use it, and this graduation thesis serves as a capstone in my portfolio that embodies this principle!

Conclusion

As I reflect on my overall experience at my final year in TU Delft, I am quite grateful to be participating in a studio that is closely aligned to my personal approach to architecture. Developing this project has allowed me to greatly sharpen my skills as an architectural designer, presenter and researcher.

With regards to design, experience and challenge of translating a structured and deep research report in to a moving vision for elderly housing was difficult, but well worth the journey. It gave me the conviction I needed to make the right decisions in my design thinking process and inspired confidence in my position as an architect on the matter.

I would also like to highlight the great benefits of designing in a city that you are able to physically visit and feel (In my case Delft). I lived just a 10 min bike ride away from my chosen site in Schieweg, and this meant that whenever I felt out of touch from the place, I could always go back and use my senses to get back in touch with the physical properties of the site and actually feel it, something that is often missing in academic projects. Secondly, with my discussions with my Technology tutor, I realized the incredible value of learning from the everyday buildings around you, rather than the pretty ones that you see on your screen off some architectural design website, as many awards as they may have. Through my discussions with my technology tutor, I realized that every building around me was an exemplar of technical integration in architectural design. Through the observation and scrutinization of the technical elements that I saw in the facade, the interior and the construction of typical Delft buildings, I would be able to learn so much about how technical aspects could be integrated in the design.

To conclude, I learned a lot about architecture, technical design, research and even myself and the way I think on this journey. I am excited to present the 'Orange Zone' in my upcoming examination and my public defense on June 18th.



Fig. 4: Early Visualization of the 'Orange Zone'

The Inspiration.

This decision to choose the 'Designing for Health & Care' studio is deeply inspired by a former project, The Penarth Respite Center. This project was done as part of the undergraduate program at the Welsh School of Architecture and was formative in creating a philosophy that clearly placed the user at the heart of the design process.

A 'Respite Center' is a place that provides a well-deserved space to rest for caregivers of a child or adults dealing with a severe illness or condition. The project required a deep understanding of the caregiver as a user and their unique needs. This became the ethos of all architectural elements from the overall program, choice of material and the relationship the building has with the surrounding context.

The end result was not only a finalised building project, but a vital contribution to my personal philosophy as a student of architecture. A philosophy that aims to ensure that every building's ultimate goal is to have a net positive contribution to the lives of those that use it. A philosophy that I am excited to continue exploring as part of my graduation studio to cap off my Master's degree in Architecture.

I hope that the lessons extracted from the design of the Penarth Respite Center continue to be of utility in this research towards a better elderly living environment.

