

DISCLOSING THE MILITARY CITY

Between sense and attachment:
MEANINGS OF NARRATIVE AND AGING IN BEATO

REFLECTION PAPER

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AUTHOR

Monika Byra 4520424

MENTORS

Architecture Design: Job Roos
Building Technology: Wido Quist
Cultural Value: Marieke Kuipers

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Birds eye view of the MMC

Address: Manutenção Militar, Rua do Grilo 109, 1950 Lisbon
GPS coordinates: 38°43'54.4"N
9°06'24.2"W

INTRODUCTION

MANUTENÇÃO MILITAR COMPLEX , LISBON

The military complex is situated on the northern bank of Taju river in Lisbon. On the one side, the border of Manutenção Militar Complex is marked by the industrial harbour and on the other we have Beato neighbourhood and the Bairro de Madre Deus - a purely residential settlement. The whole complex can be divided into three parts which in total give us 80 thousand square meter area. Our subject is located

in the south area. Several buildings dating from various times used to be responsible for confection and distribution of food to the Portuguese army. The termination of the industry left the place empty and purposeless. The task of the studio is to find a new sustainable solution for the site and its buildings.

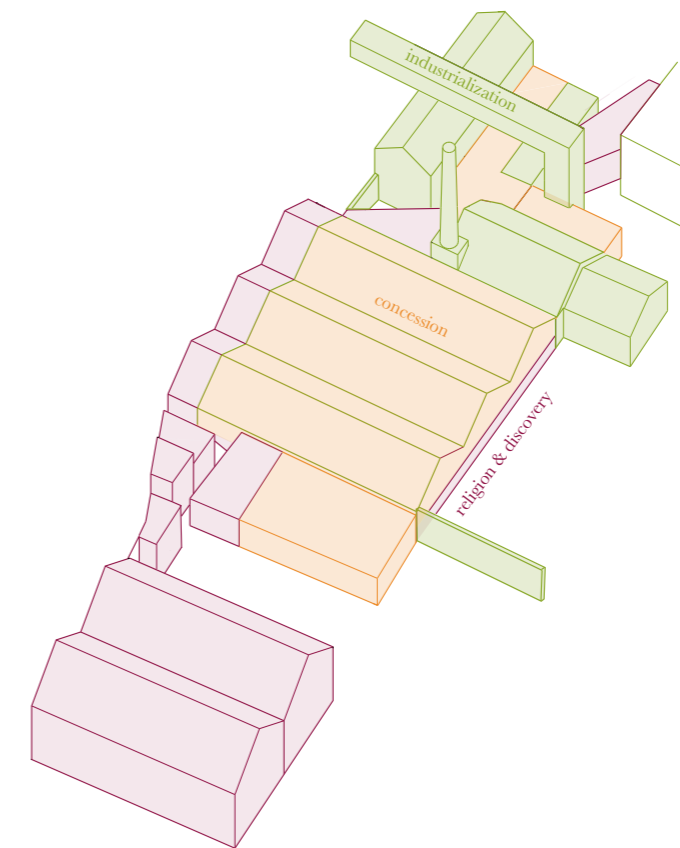
Aspect I

[the relationship between the theme of the graduation lab and the subject/case study chosen by the student within this framework (location/object)]

Disclosing the military city – the theme of Lisbon Heritage studio is, as I later discovered, quite ambiguous. When one starts to explore MMC, one can discover that there is much more to the complex than its military history. To fully understand all the architectural and historical aspects of the place, we need to look at MMC not only as the place of food fabrication for the army, but also as a multi-layered entity filled with traces of different historic times. There are some buildings which were built for other users and different functions in mind, namely the so-called Supermarket and Convent. There are both part of the longer story of Beato district and therefore the whole complex must be considered in this context.

During the primary research on the complex I was fascinated by the clear

narrative which could be discovered in the buildings. The complex (or rather some of the still standing structures) existed almost from the very beginning of Beato's history and we can relate the story of the neighbourhood to the analysis of MMC transformations. I have explored this theme in the architectural and culture value reports. With my colleagues, I have established three main periods for Beato and therefore for MMC itself. The first one is associated with the era of Portuguese overseas journeys and discoveries. It is considered as time of prosperity. Simultaneously, religion was playing a very important role. The area was dominated by the convents. The foundations of one of them are a first step in the path leading towards the present-day MMC.



Tools used in the report: time-layering

The sections show the fictional vision of Beato. It is striking how much the historical events have changed the look of Tagus' coastline. Industrialisation was driven by the Portuguese Civil War and it could be said that the real Military City started in this period. The majority of the structures within MMC were reared up during the first half of XX century. The golden time of the complex lasted till 1960s when the Portuguese Army was reduced to barely 20 thousand active soldiers.

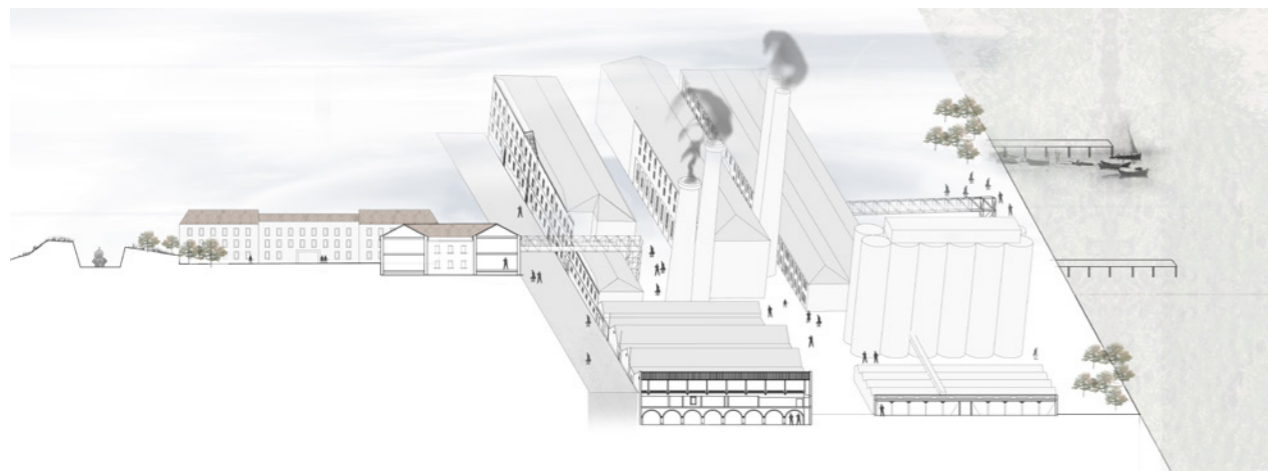
This third era, which we have named Concession, is mostly characterised by the slow decline of the employment and population in Beato and therefore the gradual decay of the area. Whereas it's easy to establish what kind of identity complex had before (religious, industrial etc.), I refuse to recognize the downfall of Beato as a new status. In my opinion, the new period is mostly characterized by the lack of character (identity). Everything is empty and function-less: the structures are vacant

and the whole complex is disconnected from the urban fabric of Beato. It lacks the sense of place. At the same time the context of MMC has changed. The significant aging process concerns not only the buildings but also the population itself. There is almost three times more elderly than children in the district. The unemployment is high and living conditions of most of the people are quiet disturbing.

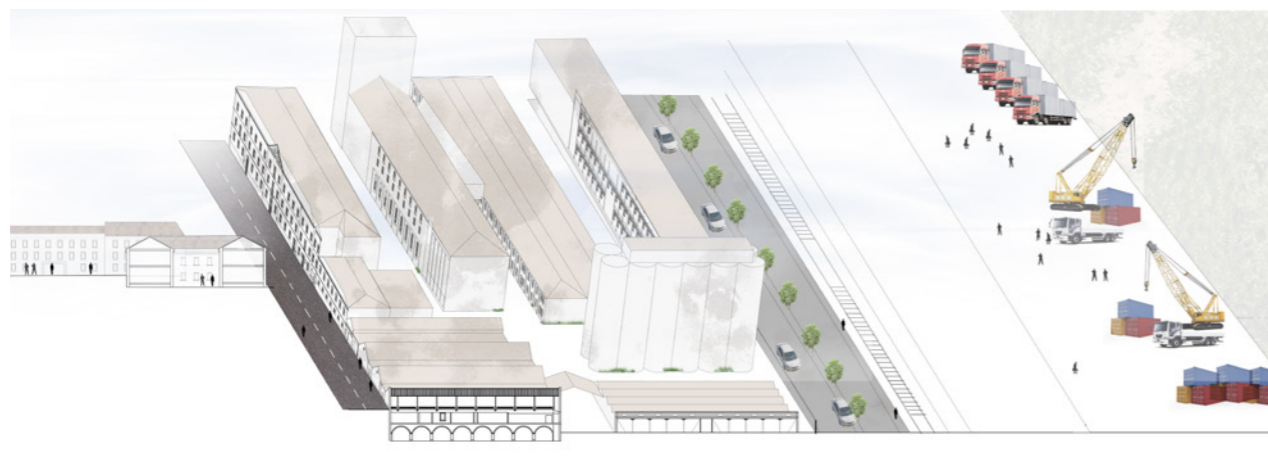
We cannot ignore these factors in the new narrative. There is a huge need to work with the elements we have found Beato instead of replacing them with the new ones (it is the characteristic process for the typical gentrification of the neighbourhood). That is why I have put such a big pressure on the aging factor and I have tried to find the new identity of the place by exploring it. The story of Beato and MMC should continue in a spirit which is beneficial first and foremost for people who already exists there.



RELIGION & DISCOVERY (XV- XVIII century)



INDUSTRIALISATION (1850 - 1970)



CONCESSION (1970 - now)

Aspect II

[the relationship between the methodical line of approach of the graduation lab and the method chosen by the student in this framework]

The studio approach clearly distinguishes the research and design phase within the project. The main conclusion of the research are always present during the design phase and they help you evaluate each step you make when developing the project. The extensive research phase should be concluded in value assessment which is later one of the main ingredients of the transformation framework.

During the architectural and technological analysis, a quiet specific approach was used by my group and, as it turned out later, it has become quite invaluable for my independent research. It was decided to focus and explore particular periods of time present in the MMC. We have recognized and defined time layers in the structures and their surroundings: from the oldest ones from XVI century to the most recent

ones. Each period could be described by the unique features and each of them had different impact on the buildings. In the end, MMC is a collage consisting all these time layers. By recognising them and separating from the rest, it was possible to establish their value within the whole picture. We have called this process time-layering and together with the Riegl – Brand matrix it has helped me to create the coherent value assessment.

The Riegl – Brand matrix became the invaluable tool in analysing the qualities of the complex from various angles. The matrix has also proved how important are themes which fascinated me from the very beginning of the project. The story of the place and the social aspects are connected through the nostalgia value. Nowadays, when the complex lacks the basic economic

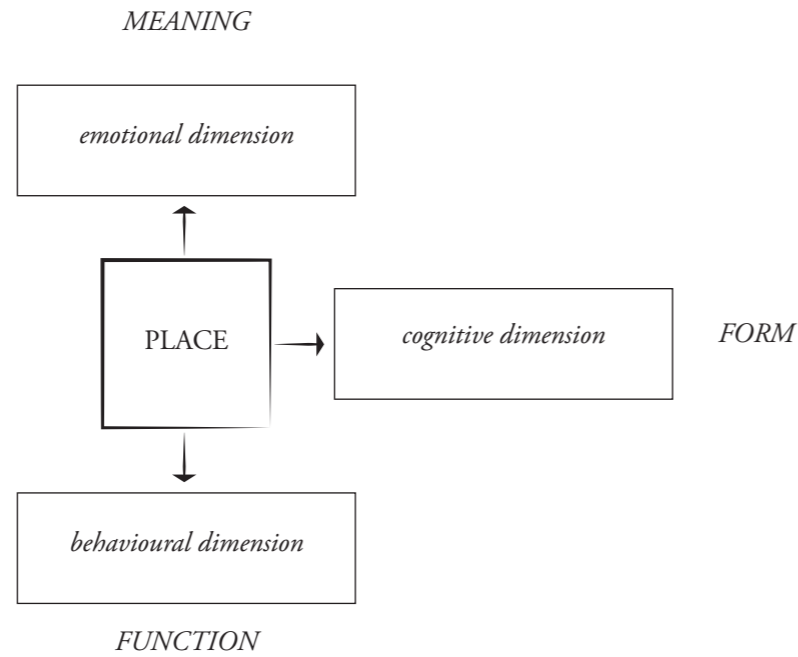
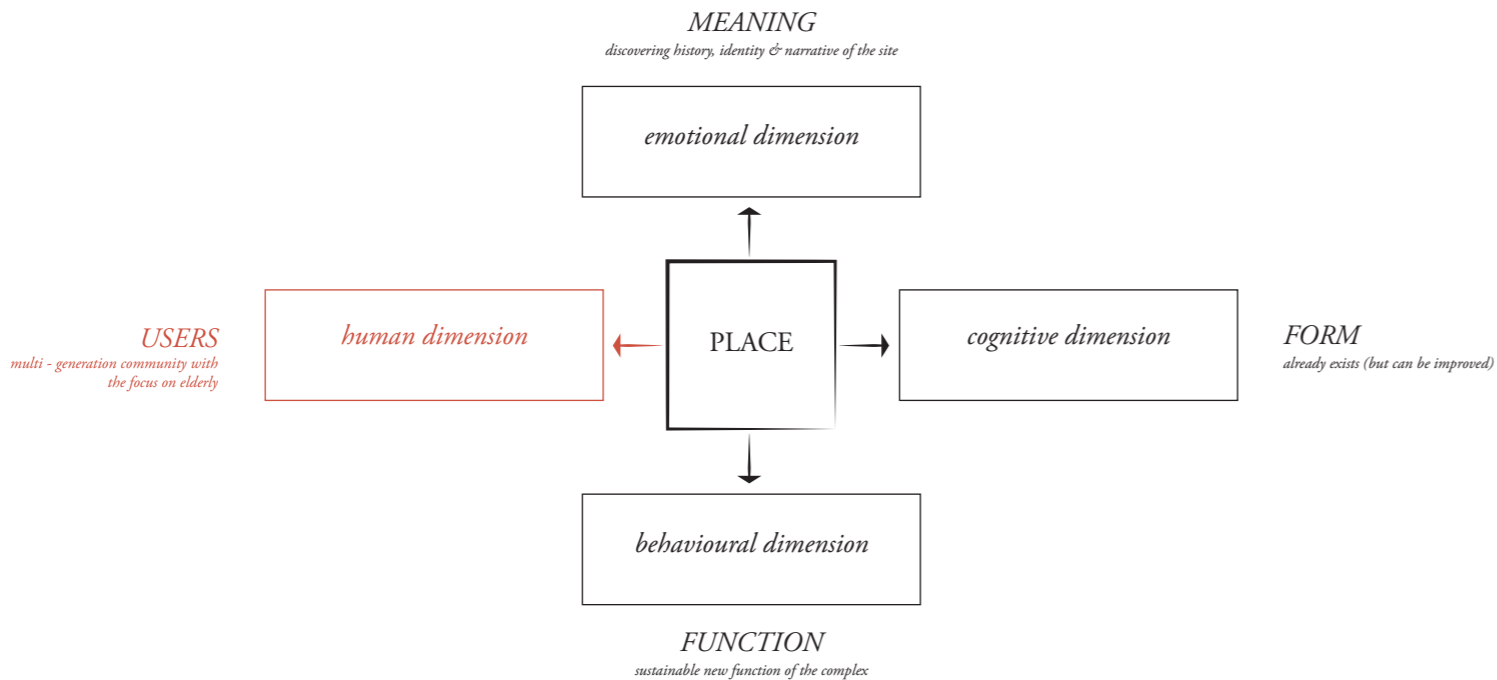
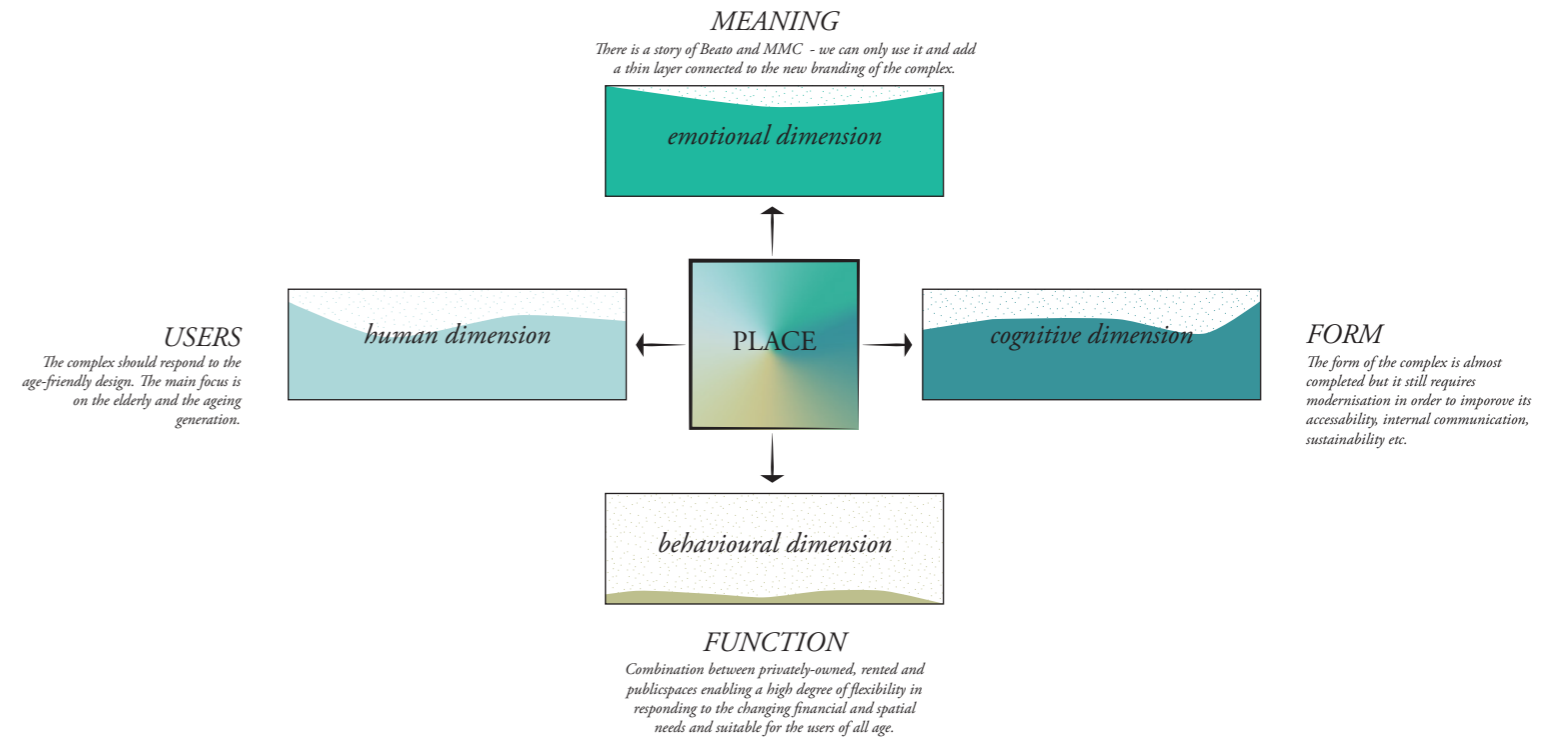


Fig. 1 Dimensions of place creation (Jorgensen, 2001; Canter, 1977)



Places (...) are also interpreted, narrated, perceived, felt, understood, and imagined. (Soja, 1996 quoted in Gieryn, 2000)

qualities, people tend to crave for better times.

The tools offered by the studio designate the clear path we need to follow in our project but at the same time they are vague enough to allow us adjusting them and exploring the themes we find more interesting. The value assessment, which I have started to describe above, led me to the question about the meaning of identity of the place within the urban regeneration. How attachment to the place can be created? Or even more importantly, how people who already live in Beato can be a part of the new MMC? Trying to answer these questions, I have started to explore the notion of place-making.

The diagram proposed by Bradley Jorgensen almost fully grasped all the aspects I was concerned about in the new development. Within it I could easily find all the information I already had about MMC and, at the same time, it showed

me all the blank spaces waiting to be filled in. Architectural and technical analysis together with the culture value report helped me define the cognitive dimension (form, geometry and orientation of the space) and emotional dimension (the previous meaning and identity of MMC). Within existing situation there is no behavioural dimension to talk about – the complex is empty and function-less. I have added the human dimension because I truly believe that users are involved and substantial element of place making.

The combination of the personal value assessment, studio manual, my own observations and explorations, I have managed to identify the components of the diagram for MMC. Potential values combined with tangible elements of the site should be prioritized and that led me to creation the transformation framework which is beyond helpful during the design process.

Aspect III

[the relationship between research and design]

If one walk around Beato, one will meet the empty and slightly decayed streets with some random elderly people passing by. Beato is a residential district with decreasing population mostly affecting younger people. The level of unemployment is high and there is almost three times more elderly than children. The common problems are lack of health care, terrible living conditions and loneliness of the people. All these factors make Beato and MMC the perfect place for urban regeneration.

I have established that the starting point of my design should be focused on the local community. However, without some additional factors, it is impossible to improve the situation of Beato in a balanced and sustainable way.

As I have mentioned earlier, the majority of Beato's population is elderly therefore

I have directed my research on the age – friendly design. It is a well-known fact that populations are growing and ageing. People also tend to be much longer active in the mainstream society. The new demographic group – the *so-called* Active Third Age (Young Seniors) is changing the social and economic conditions of life. The group can be a missing element in Beato's regeneration. Merging the interests of locals and Young Seniors could be beneficial for the district and MMC. By creating an age – friendly health and well-being centre combined with local community facilities and housing, the conditions of the local residents are improved and, at the same time, the attractive new destination for the Young Seniors is created. The aim is to have a place where people can live more permanently and they can create



strong relationship with the area and their inhabitants. At the same time, the neighbourhood where the healthy lifestyle is promoted will have a major impact for the entire population, especially with dealing with issues as obesity, mental health & social isolation.. The new facilities will provide the work places for the locals, hence their economic situation will improve. The attractive public space and combination of social and private housing allow creation of the strong community network and sustainability of the development and it will prevent the undesirable gentrification. The research led me to believe that one of the first functions which should be introduced to the age – friendly MMC should be a school targeting elderly. One of the major problems affecting Beato's ageing population is inability to support themselves. They need to continue working but often they lack necessary education or they just simply need help with finding the adequate job. Some of them need to re-train themselves or move into different work sector which is more suitable for their age and lifestyle. There is also a large amount of people who find learning as part of

enjoyable life. In the school, they can learn new activities or maybe teach themselves. The school can be a place where one can learn how to cook, speak English, use computer or how to do bookkeeping. It can also be a place to meet and gain the support you need: either with starting your own business or maybe with learning about your health. It will blur the boundaries between work, education and leisure. It will give purpose and employment to those seeking to learn or teach either for enjoyment or out of the necessity.

The affordability of the school can be solved by introducing the beauty centre in a proximity. The new target group – the Active Third Age also should enter this combination. Hence, the proposal of the housing designed specifically for elderly is part of my design assignment.

The research I have conducted about the aging gave me the means to solve the users and function issue in MMC. The facts I have learned combined with the place-making study led me to the design which, I believe, is very suitable for the complex' redevelopment.

Aspect IV

[the relationship between the project and the wider social context]

The urban regeneration in the typical understanding is a process of transforming the places within their social and cultural settings. Hence the significance of the emotional attachment of the users which the transformation will evoke. In the era of globalization and the raising problem of rapid aging of the population, there is a need to rethink the notions of place-making and adjust them to the new context. *Places (...) are also interpreted, narrated, perceived, felt, understood, and imagined* claims sociologist Thomas Gieryn in 2000 in his paper. The MMC has to be remade in a spirit of the notions which will bring the attachment and the new identity into the place. What are the key ingredients one has to use to achieve the best results in Beato where the decay and aging process are so advanced?

The conviction that ageing must be first and foremost addressed within the city was demonstrated by WHO's introduction of the Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities, whose requisite set of commitments have already been welcomed by number of municipalities. The concept of *Age-friendly City* was formulated endorsing new spatial

and social guidelines. Age - friendly city is defined as policy to develop supportive urban environments as a way of encouraging *active ageing by optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age* (WHO, 2007). The change of the structure of society, combined with the growth of population, means that architects will have to face the new challenges. The change of the structure of society, combined with the growth of population, means that architects will have to face the new challenges.

The MMC site in Lisbon is perfect example of the situation where it can be proved that the more age-inclusive design can be a solution for creating more sustainable spatial and social relationships.

At the same time MMC is a great representative of industrial style and modern heritage. Typically, adaptation of these kind of spaces are directed to much younger groups of people. To test how the structures of MMC will respond to different target groups is another great challenge which hopefully will be achieved.



photo by Floor Hoogenboezem, 2016

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All photos and diagrams are made by Monika Byra (2016) unless stated otherwise.