

Collective memory as a design tool for sense of place in the adaptive reuse of vacant heritage.

The former department store V&D Leiden as case study.

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“The memory remains” is the working title of my graduation process within the Vacant Heritage studio of Heritage and Architecture. This quote came from the last paragraph of the written tribute to the Vroom & Dreesman by Hondelink (2016). As Hondelink (2016) expressed: *“The name Vroom & Dreesmann is embedded and will live on in the collective memory of generations of Dutchmen”*. This quote was leading in my first attempt to get grip on my individual research about what memory is, and how memory is constructed in relation to the studio topic of the former V&D department stores as vacant heritage. This reflection document is an overview of the reflection highlights during my graduation year, covering both the design and the research part, and the link between them.

INDIVIDUAL RESEARCH TOPIC - SCIENTIFIC FRAMEWORK

In the context of the topic of the Heritage & Architecture lab, ‘Adapting 20th century Heritage’, the focus point is the development of sustainable heritage, because of the increasing importance of adaptive re-use projects. The role of heritage is an essential driver en enabler” of **sustainable development**, since it contributes to improvements to the (social) well-being of society and its environment on a sustainable, long-term basis (Labadi et al., 2021). Heritage conservation, in which **adaptive reuse** is part of a collection of linked activities of heritage conservation, deals with the act of *“understanding and reflecting a heritage building and communicating its history and meaning in order to best sustain its heritage values for present and future generations”* (Labadi et al., 2021). In order to *“create, acknowledge and contest heritage”* (Pottgiesser et al., 2019), it is important to assess the cultural significance of heritage by defining the aggregate of attributes and values attached to it. In the practice of a (re-)design, the adaptive reuse of heritage buildings, sustaining and creating **a sense of place** has proven to be one of the main goals of design (Najifi et al, 2011). The concept of sense of place encompasses “all meanings that people perceive and decode based on their roles, experiences, expectations and motivations” (Najifi et al, 2011). These meanings and experiences of places, held by people, are constructed in a social and cultural context. This sense of place can be linked to the heritage building values, which “shape communities and identities as **collective memory**” (Ekim, 2017). Therefore, the legacy of these inherited values and attributes – our cultural heritage – form part of the collective memory. The significance of cultural heritage includes, on the one hand, tangible values, and on the other hand, intangible values. Therefore, the scope of heritage is not limited to the physical environment with historic monuments, but it includes the entire built environment related to social and cultural aspects.

The individual research on the notions of ‘collective memory’ and ‘sense of place’ is in line with the more inclusive approach on heritage management, which gained a lot more recognition during recent times, which can add to a new understanding of recognizing and assessing values of cultural heritage to broaden, extend and support opportunities of a redesign of a heritage building. To reflect on the individual research in relation to the scientific framework in the field of heritage and design, the results have shown that knowledge about the collective memory of a place can help to sustain meaningful bonds attached to a place in order to create new ones when designing a specific place. In this context, urban planners, (urban) designers, and administrative authorities (such as the Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed) should acknowledge the importance of collective memory and its role in creating a sense of place, and even implement these notions in their approach to heritage management regarding sustainable development. With a view to the activities of heritage conservation, such as adaptive reuse, planners and designers should take advantage of this existing

sense of place in order to create meaningful places by sustaining these individual and cultural associations attached to these places.

COLLECTIVE RESEARCH METHOD - GRADUATION STUDIO

The chosen case study was the former V&D building in Leiden in the Netherlands. After the bankruptcy of the department store chain on December 31 in 2015 (NOS, 2015), these large buildings with clear corporate identities became vacant. Many of them were designated as national monuments, such as the former V&D building in Leiden (monument number 515119), even before they became vacant (Rijksdienst voor Cultureel Erfgoed, 2020). Located at the core of commercial activity in the inner historic cities, these heritage buildings are in urgent need of transformation to ensure sustainable development.

The first step in the research process was in line with the graduation studio methodical line of inquiry, part of the chair of Heritage and Values, in which the chair focuses on understanding the values that define heritage. To understand these values, the designation of the case study as a national monument was the starting point to assess its cultural significance by collectively conducting a value and condition assessment. To reflect on my personal experience and knowledge with heritage, which was very limited at the start of my graduation process, this approach seemed somewhat ambiguous to conduct. Because the heritage building was appointed as a national monument and therefore, already part of the cultural heritage. Also, the written RCE statement on its significance and the condition report of the case study of ASR Vastgoed company were providing a rich overview of the case study. However, heading towards the final part of my graduation process, I understand why the RCE statement is used as a starting point to get familiar with the method of content-coding to identify attributes and values attached to it. This method is based on the attribute framework of Veldpauze and Pereira Roders (2014) and the value framework (Pereira Roders (2007) and Tarrafa & Pereira Roders (2012), which is an important research tool in not only the H&A Lab, but also in the more general field of heritage management. Also, this method is very helpful and effective to indicate attributes, to sometimes notice links between different attributes, and, to understand these attributes in relation to the case study. However, the approach of applying this method on the RCE statement is somewhat more difficult in terms of defining values, because the 'why-question: *why is this case study be defined as heritage, or, why are these attributes of value*' is often neglected, because the emphasis of these kind of documents is primarily on the physical and tangible aspects, addressing the more traditional 'what-question: *what is to be defined as heritage?*'.

INDIVIDUAL RESEARCH METHODS - A REFLECTION

In order to reflect on the different individual methods used, they are listed below.

Historical analysis of the case study

The used method was conducted by the same approach of the attribute and value framework, as described above. The 'research'-tool was very effective, because of the physical nature of the data, which were mainly plans, sections, and elevations from different time periods in order to analyze and indicate transformations and developments over time. To look back at the results of this historical analysis, the research would have been even more complete if the social-historical component had been included, such as economic progress and setbacks of the chain, or the social relevance of certain time periods in relation to the function of a department store.

The literature review on the notion of sense of place

This research method was conducted in order to build the theoretical framework on the notion of sense of place, and use this framework for the main part of the research of content analysis of social media. The theory of Montgomery (1998) was extremely important to define these dimensions on the notion.

The content analysis of social media

The data source for this research method was one of the leading social media platforms Instagram. This platform was successful to give relevant information about the phenomenon of digitally sharing individual memories, which resulted in a shift from individual memories to collective ones, in which people comment on similarities about a collective 'sense of place'. To reflect, Instagram can definitely be seen as a repository of collective memory, as described in my research paper.

To reflect on the research procedure, first, a more efficient tool has to be developed in order not to have to enter everything manually and to minimize errors. Second, the theory of Montgomery (1998) about the notion of sense of place, should have been adapted into a table with different indicators in which the codes could be more precisely labeled.

The results of the content analysis have shown that the notion of sense of place is extremely important to investigate in relation to a heritage building. As partly expected, but not to that extent, these intangible attributes were defining the largest share in the three dimensions of the notion of sense of place. Also, a lot of tangible attributes were related to, or represented by, tangible heritage assets, that were connected to social and cultural constructions and dimensions. This strongly implies the importance of the social and cultural dimension of heritage, in which intangible attributes and values attached to it are part of this and also define and determine the cultural significance of a heritage building to a large extent.

RESEARCH - DESIGN

The results from the different research methods all had an impact in the design phase. The program of the design project is related to a place where collective memory is simultaneously created, sustained, and diffused; a community center, a social and cultural center. The first component of 'created' is defined by the program of the community center. The research has shown that commonly shared activities, experiences, and memories of people, defining the sense of place, were created in relation to the program of a department store. In order to create new collective memories a social and cultural construct in terms of design-programming has to be developed.

The second component of 'sustained' is, on the one hand, defined by the tangible attributes that are sustained in the building or urban elements or aspects, which define the sense of place of the heritage building. Heritage places, such as the case study of the V&D Leiden, also "*symbolize shared memories, customs and traditions, which leads us to consider the role of meaning or image in place making*" (Montgomery, 1998). Besides this, the intangible attributes, that are connected to the sense of place, are reinterpreted, such as the view on the city, in which the new design make greater use of that space. Also, the 'living room', as one of the references to the cafes at the V&D buildings, is reintroduced. The feeling of being welcome is translated into the building for (almost) everybody: children (day nursery and after-school care), students or scholars, office people, visitors, cafe or restaurant guests, and which is open daily from 7.30 - 00.00 (16,5 hours).

The third component 'diffused' is about the collective memory of the 'publicness' of the V&D buildings, even when it was a 'private' department store chain. The public events, activities and experiences are supported by. The connection with the ground floor is extremely important and linked to the openness of the shop windows. The reinterpretation of the old shop windows and the extension of the open market is to diffuse this public space, in which the definitions of exterior and interior are not that relevant anymore. The building becomes part of the public domain, which relates to the common feeling that people attach to the former V&D buildings.

INDIVIDUAL RESEARCH APPROACH - MASTER TRACK ARCHITECTURE

During the bachelor program (Bouwkunde) and master program (Architecture) at the Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment, the analysis of buildings or urban sites is predominantly used as a tool to explore and better understand the case study in order to use this knowledge as a leading point for the design. Although these analyses are not always necessarily presented and seen as a research project on its own, but rather be seen as a starting point for the design, it can be observed that such findings can be seen as important attributes and values of a building or a site, that a student

in the function of designer finds important to take into account for the further development of the research.

To reflect on this, it can be noticed that these analyses are mainly based on the physical elements and dimensions of a building, such as the (urban) context, building aspects (construction, materials, aesthetics) and historical transformations. There, the social and cultural context of a building or a site are often neglected. Therefore, these social and cultural constructions and dimensions within a place (such as place identity, place attachment, sense of place, the meaning of the place) could also enrich, answer, or even define a research or design brief, instead of only taking into account the physical dimension of our built environment.