

Personal information	
Name	Thomas Misset
Student number	

Studio		
Name / Theme	Architectural Engineering Graduation Studio	
Main mentor	Anne Snijders	Architectural engineering + Technology
Second mentor	Craig Martin	User-centred design, climate & environmental design

Reflection on the process

This project set out to connect sustainable infrastructure within the context of post-war neighbourhoods, Moerwijk specifically, to the needs of different scales (global, regional, local), with a focus on re-inserting the soft qualities of such infrastructures on the local and neighbourhood scale.

One of the main research elements entailed an immersion in the social context of the given neighbourhood, using the four stages of empathy in design (Kouprie, Visser, 2009)¹. The goal of this was to gain a more sensitive understanding of the local user needs. In the end, I spent ten days in Moerwijk, participating in community activities, having conversations and making observations.

I consider this part successful, as I engaged with more than 50 different persons, visited 10+ organisations and found myself immersed in the local community. This allowed me to better understand the attitudes, needs and challenges of the local community. Besides, I was able to identify and observe public functions in the neighbourhood with urban and programmatic potential to pick up in further my design elaboration.

However, the strategy of immersion also brought challenges to me as a designer. At the end of the research phase, I found myself paralysed to draw plans and think in a visionary way that ascends the daily experience of the people I felt connected to. I concluded that more emphasis should be placed on the disconnection phase, where I step out of the community in order to synthesize my conclusions so I would be able to produce a design proposal.

After this period, I made a conscious decision to dilute the contact and direct connection with the neighbourhood, aside from a few community council meetings. This helped me to regain my design drive, and to see less obstacles in drawing lines on various scales in the neighbourhood. This connection also brought me a moral dilemma that I still feel partly today. By discontinuing contact with the local community, I got the feeling that I abandoned them someway.

What I learned from this, is that as a designer, immersion is a strong tool to gain sensitive insights in a given context or case, however there is a limit to the amount of involvement one can have in order to make successful proposals. How to balance both is a fine act of distance and proximity. Next time, I would plan a few more moments to do feedback loops with the local community after the initial immersion and disconnection stages.

¹ Kouprie, M., & Visser, F. S. (2009). A framework for empathy in design: stepping into and out of the user's life. *Journal of Engineering Design*, 20(5), 437–448. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09544820902875033>

Formed by the research, sensitivity and simplicity remained important themes in my design process. They were helpful tools, as they allowed me to reconcile the larger plans with the local community. Having these themes allowed me to assess and iterate my plans by them and find a balance between big impact interventions and local sensitivity.

During this process, I gained more insights into the balancing act of stakes, scales, expectations and found a way to maintain a sense of sensitivity throughout it all. As an architect, I think it important to be the middle man balancing and connecting all these facets. This allows the designer to create synergies, answer to differing needs and scales and to create sensitive proposals with a large and diverse impact.

Reflection on the relation between the project and the larger programme

My project focusses on connecting sustainable technology, and its needed infrastructural transformations in the built environment with people and their needs within the context of the post-war neighbourhood. This relates to the studio in terms of its focus on technology and one of the studio's topics: transformation of post-war neighbourhoods.

The project relates to the Msc AUBS master programme because it is exploring an innovative integral approach to develop a spatial and programmatic master-plan for the neighbourhood that fits within the larger need for sustainable transformations and user-sensitive design in the built environment and post-war neighbourhoods in specific. Additionally, an architectural form and language is developed to facilitate the formulated programmatic requirements and to relate the added spatial elements together and to their context. A selection of these elements are elaborated in more detail, showing how they are built and taking into account sustainability, functionality and architectural expression. To sum up, the project addresses different scales of spatial innovation related to technology, infrastructure and programmatic requirements in the built environment, creating an elaborated urban and architectural design proposal.

Reflection on relevance

My graduation project aims to expand the boundaries of the architectural profession by expanding the skill set of the architect/designer in the social field, with the aim to better and more sensitively answer to the needs and aspirations of users. This is in line with the ambition stated in TU Delft's strategic priorities 2022-2024, striving to deliver socially responsible engineers. In times of political polarization, growing socio-economic inequalities and complex global challenges, I think the connection between the human and global scale, between the social and technological world is paramount to create true societal and equally distributed value and to grow the support base for much-required and top-down agendas such as the battle against climate change.

The scope of this project is the strategic and integral sustainable transformation of a typical post-war neighbourhood. These neighbourhoods often show similarities in their spatial layout, public space, building stock, socio-economic challenges and therefore have similar potentials and weaknesses. They are abundant in Western-Europe: The Netherlands alone counts 1800 post-war neighbourhoods. Before 2030, there are huge challenges to bring down carbon emissions in the built environment and there are big improvements possible in these districts.

My proposal is set up as an elaboration of a strategy that could be repeated and provide quality for public spaces and programmes in these areas

Whereas the final form of the spatial additions is context-specific, the infrastructure, with nodes of soft interventions ending at activated public programmes using typical public spaces of such neighbourhoods can be repeated using the same architectural and material strategies. The most direct transference of the project would be possible in the other neighbourhoods of The Hague Southwest of which Moerwijk is the starting point.