

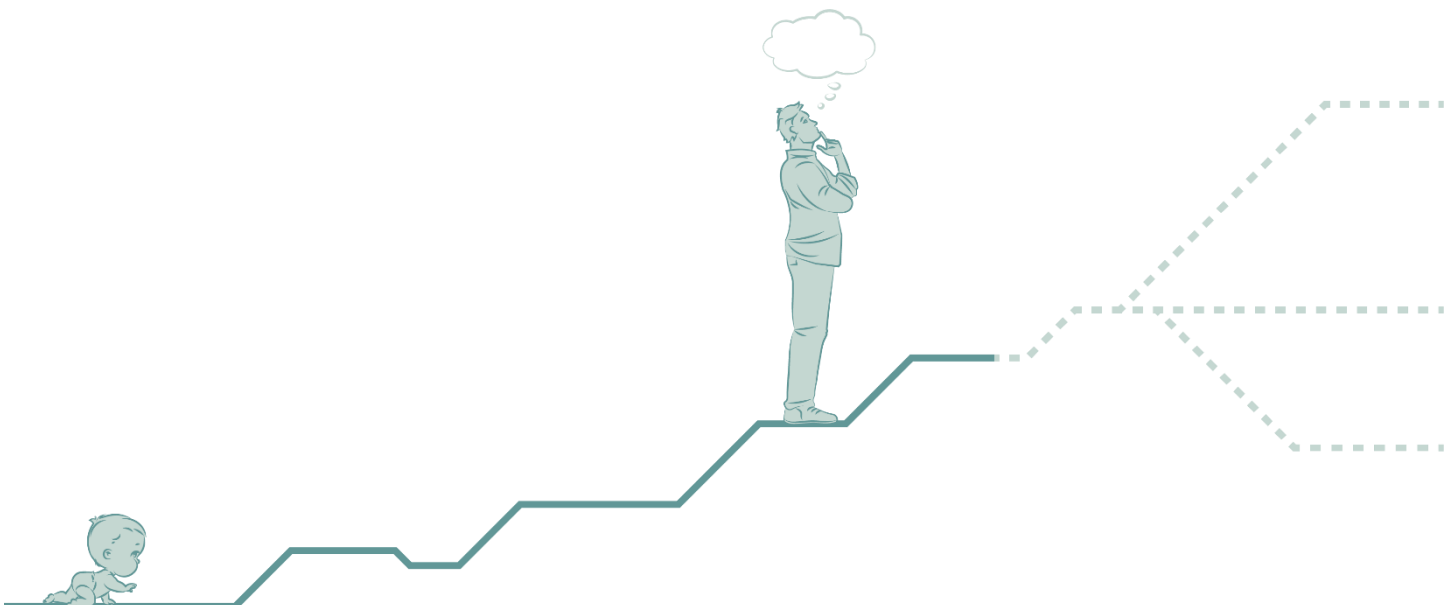
Reflection paper

Graduation studio:

AR3AD110 Dwelling Studio: Designing for Care
in an Inclusive Environment (2021/22 Q1).

Stigma and the Built Environment

Growing old in an inclusive environment



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Reflection

Introduction

The master track AR3AD110 Dwelling studio: Designing for Care in an Inclusive Environment (2021/22 Q1) is a course that focusses on the inclusiveness for elderly in an area. This is done by researching the influence of design on the social requirements and needs of the elderly and how to include them in a society structure.

During my studies I focused on Architectural Engineering and complex projects, which focusses more on the techniques and materiality and large projects. I have chosen this course because I never got taught the social aspect of architecture and I expected by choosing this graduation studio to learn more about the spatial elements of architecture that influences the social structure of society.

At first, I wanted to research the topic dementia, because of my own experience and the ignorance my grandmother and her family had to go through because of the disease. During our stay at [Habion's](#) elderly complex [Hoeverstaete](#), I experienced and found out a bigger problem, namely stigma and the assumptions people face being older adults.

This topic however was more difficult and complex to research than I at first anticipated. It gave me a lot of challenges, especially while designing.

In this reflection paper I will go through:

- The relationship between research and design
- The relationship between the graduation topic and the master program.
- The scientific relevance.
- The social relevance.
- The ethical issues I experienced.
- And lastly my own growth

My own experience
with stigmatization of older adults.

I already experienced that the elderly met
with discrimination, ignorance, and
stereotyping.

My first interaction with stigma was the way
my grandma was mistreated and excluded
because of her disease. People who did not
want to see her because they did not
understand what was happening to her, the
way she was ignored because she was
different from before. This broke her but also
my heart.

Of course, she was different because of the
disease, she forgot many things and could not
recognize people, even me, but she still was
the same person who I loved and know. She
was only in a different state of her life. While
she was in the nursing home, I visited her
regularly and loved to talk and walk with her
as much as possible. The elderly at the nursing
home were friendly, and I helped the staff
with tasks if needed.

The course started with a field trip to an
elderly home. I assumed that during my week
at the elderly home [Hoeverstate](#) I would help
elderly just like I did at the nursing home of
my grandma.

I assumed the elderly required help, but those
I met were independent and did not require or
wanted any kind of assistance. During
interviews we learned that those who
required care preferred not to leave their
appartement and felt uncomfortable to attend
activities downstairs.

This brought up the questions: [“Does society
treat elderly different because of
assumptions?”](#) [“How does the environment
influence the way elderly are perceived”](#) and
[“Does their environment influence how the
elderly perceive themselves?”](#)

This sparked the interest in the topic stigma.

1. The relationship between research and design

The research was the base for the design process. It started with anthological research at [Hoeverstate](#) in Alkmaar. Here we were introduced with the elderly, the different lifestyles each person has and the desires and needs each individual had.

This approach of meeting the target group is in my opinion the most important step a designer can make, as we design for people and their needs. This study focusses on the needs of the elderly and the fieldwork put emphasis on the individuality inside this social group to not generalize the term elderly. It does however focus on elderly who require care, giving us a limited, stereotypic view of the target group, as my research found out the elderly who require care is just a small fraction of the elderly.

Because of this I wanted my project to be [a representation of the elderly](#), to create awareness for who truly this social group is and to decrease the stigma.

Stigma

To understand stigma, I did a theoretical framework on what stigma is and how it is influenced. During my fieldwork and pre-research, I found out that much of the care, design and perception of elderly is based on assumptions and stigma that are incorrect. This also is influenced by the context and the architecture in which the elderly resides.

Researching the history of elderly housing it was noted that elderly have been a stigmatized group since the beginning. Grouped together with the poor, sick and/or criminals, creating a negative attitude towards the elderly. This influenced perception on their living situation, with nursing homes being designed with the focus on care, not on the elderly that were residing inside.

My focus of the research was how to decrease stigma using the built environment. I researched topics and case studies that dealt

with stigma in diverse ways. The diversity of techniques and cases thought me that there are a lot of stigmas and multiple ways to fight against them. This brought forth different elements required to decrease stigma and the first starting points for the design.

Choosing the location

One of the most important aspects was by creating a residential setting instead of an institutional setting that was the most common situation for elderly housing in the past. Of the three locations, [Driebergen Rijsenburg](#) was the project containing an institutional building excluded from the neighborhood. Already having two key factors of being a stigmatizing location.

Because of this I had chosen this location to transform it into a place that would be more residential and create a situation for all members of society that is as close as possible to societal norms as the normalization principle suggests.

Design goal

This translated my goal of the project to be: [“a representation of the elderly that is as close as possible to societal norms and open for everybody.”](#)

I had a tough time to translate the theoretical information into the practical field. This is mostly because I found out that people aged 65 or older are no differently than other members of society.

And while my approached worked to find out the key-elements to decrease stigma, the problem was by making the goal of the project a representation of the elderly and by using universal design elements I prioritized a group of people. Creating a stigmatizing environment.

Until the P5 I will try to adapt my design to show better the atmosphere of the design and make slight changes that hopefully help destigmatize the area.

2. The graduation studio and the master track.

The master Program AUBS of TU Delft addresses technical, social, and spatial challenges. The master track in Architecture focusses on the design of innovative building projects that deal with these technical, social, and spatial challenges.

The graduation studio: Design for care towards an inclusive living environment focuses on the social aspect of architecture, mainly on the users and their needs. While most studios focus on the analytical part of research, Designing for Care brings the students in direct contact with the users.

This is particularly important for the education of architects as we should not forget for who we are designing. We are not designing buildings, we are designing a living environment for the users, for society.

I find this very appropriate as sometimes the focus is placed too much on the spatial and technical part of the building, and the users are being forgotten. Especially with stigmatized groups like elderly, who are forgotten, isolated or not considered because elderly housing is too expensive.

My graduation subject focuses on one of the social challenges that many times is overlooked inside the building sector, stigma.

3. Scientific relevance:

The research methodology of the studio is to go from anthropology to architecture. From observations and interviews to architectural solutions. The methodical line is human centered research, for this I participated in the life of elderly, observed diverse groups of people, and used a survey to learn how society thinks about the elderly and growing old.

All these research methods proved how diverse the elderly is and how strange it is that we, as a society, view elderly as one distinctive group. Generalizing and stereotyping a group of people that have just a small number of corresponding characteristics.

When researching elderly there should be a concrete description of what is considered being part of the elderly as this broad group of people can give assumptions to the reader and researcher in many ways.

4. Graduation project

and the social framework:

The studio focusses on how we can involve the elderly in society, but it should also consider *why the elderly are not part of society anymore?*”

Many people forget that society influences the perception about elderly and how it influences their surroundings and our own perception as well. Architects design for the people and in a way shape society. Their idea of who their target group is influences their designs.

It is important for architects to learn who they are designing for and not generalize a person, or a group, based on a specific description or assumptions.

My graduation project tries to indicate that the elderly is not only the people in a nursing home, but also others that are overlooked when talking about elderly. The elderly who lives independently, those who require no care at all and the ones close to us, our grandparents, parents, and friends.

5. Ethical issues:

My entire research focused on the ethical issue of societies assumptions about elderly. What I discovered is that the term elderly is very stereotypic, as it not only assuming someone's age but also their health or functionality.

As people are growing older and stay longer fit, society should rethink the term elderly and its meaning. Instead of people 65+ and older, maybe we should consider people above another age. Or loose the term in general and focus on a person's ability instead of the years they lived.

Personal reflection

If I look back to the entire process and with the added information I gained, I would have chosen a different topic or worked out the project in a different way. Instead of creating a new neighborhood, transforming an existing one would have been a better option.

While I was quite confident in my first design concept my mentors pointed out it lacked in a certain part. To investigate these aspects further I created multiple scenarios in which each concept has a different focus point.

As my mentors said I can't keep changing and need to choose at some point. I did in the end choose one concept, but I'm not certain if the choice I made was the right one.

I got multiple times stuck in designing, found new ways to adapt and learned that my way of working is to go from extreme to extreme, to analyze how different situations could work, this tactic however requires time and a lot of changes during the design process.

The graduation process was a difficult one full of new experiences. I learned my own strengths and weaknesses. My strengths are in the technical part of architecture and by analyzing and creating different scenarios.

My weaknesses are in the spatial and social aspect of architecture as I am focus more on functionality and detailing instead of the emotional and social side of architecture. Sadly, my expectations of what I would have learned from this studio didn't come true, but I became better aware of my own design process, of myself and what I want to focus on in the future.