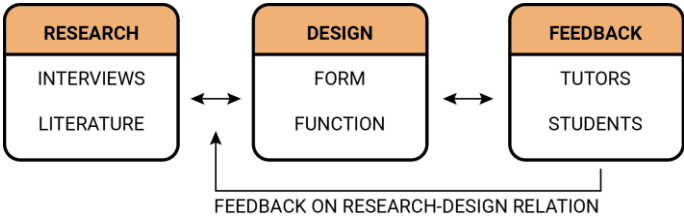# Reflection – The Social Identity of a Three-Hundred Meter Long Building

Turning the midrise building on the street of Hoptille into a building that offers its users a pleasant social environment has been the main goal of my research and design process. Several social issues on the street of Hoptille were pointed out during the collective research phase. Since these issues formed a substantial part of the collective research outcome, my research has also been geared towards these social issues. However, architecture and other forms of rearranging the built environment can only be a part of the solution of social issues. Therefore it becomes difficult to assess preliminary designs. In order to confirm if a design will indeed help to solve the given social issues, it was vital to go back and forth between the research and the design. By revising the literature used in the research plan, personal assessments could be made which helped shaping the design. As a designer it is inevitable that you will become accustomed to the design that you are working on. Because of this the feedback of tutors and peer-assessment becomes increasingly more valuable as time goes on. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic this has been made more difficult as physical meetings were limited greatly.

During the process of taking an environmental position regarding the project, the process of going back and forth between research and design is more linear when compared to the process for the social issues. Feedback on what will and what will not work for technical solutions is simply more rigid. Turning an environmental position into something that is integrated within the spatial proposition has been a valuable lesson that emerged from the feedback sessions with the tutors. By being requested to turn technical solutions into architectural elements the back and forth process between research and design got stimulated. This process has definitely pushed the design into a more cohesive project and simultaneously provided the lesson that designers should always try and look for a type of relation between research and design. This type of relation has proven itself to provide valuable moments of feedback for the project, within the process as well as in feedback sessions with tutors.

RESEARCH	DESIGN	FEEDBACK
INTERVIEWS	FORM	TUTORS
LITERATURE	FUNCTION	STUDENTS

FEEDBACK ON RESEARCH-DESIGN RELATION

The New Heritage studio is a contradicting studio within the field of heritage as it deals with projects that could potentially be seen as heritage rather than that this is a given. I have determined that the building I am working on possesses certain historical, architectural, rarity and use values. Nevertheless, I have noticed that this does not always play a present role in my personal research and design process. However, as the building in its current state is not valued to such a great extent compared to more traditional heritage buildings, this is not necessarily problematic. By working with a building like this, the design studio teaches how to respond to existing values that are not necessarily high but that are still present. The building that was investigated in this project processes clear architectural elements that indicate that it was built in the 80's. Circular and rounded elements mark the intended front facade of the building that has become the backside of the building due to built solutions to crime-related problems in the building. Since the building has become more two-sided in the design process new circular elements were added on the current front side of the building. At the same time, more circular and rounded elements were added on the original front side of the building. In a design question for a more traditional heritage project choices like these would be hard to justify, however, since the midrise building of Hoptille might even be up for demolition the situation is much different. The adding of elements emphasize the distinct aesthetical qualities of the current building.

The combination of the climate crisis and the housing shortages asks for a good understanding on how to go about repurposing buildings that may have historical values. The act of repurposing buildings in itself is an environmentally preferred method over demolishing a building in order to build a completely new building. Reason being the embodied energy that existing buildings possess that would go to waste when torn down. The New Heritage studio offers various research methods and it stimulated students to find the best suited methods for the specific questions that came up during the process. Redrawing and critically assessing the building in question allowed me to start a process of research by design. By designing on top of redrawn plans and sections I gained the ability to move, add, demolish, or change parts of the building without losing track of the process. At the same time, the method of drawing the existing building as simplified blocks allowed for a quick and less restricted way of handling the design process. This combination of working with multiple types of drawings has proven to be both successful as time consuming because this method does require a lot of redrawing multiple design solutions in one cohesive drawing. The reason I find this working method successful is that it gave me a balanced view at the established values of the building.

The process of determining the set values of the building of Hoptille was a personal but also a collective effort. Discussing with other students what parts of the building hold which values made sure that we stayed critical at our own points of view. As values are always up for debate, there are no fixed guidelines that determine whether something holds value or not. This New Heritage studio encourages having these debates with the other students as well as with the tutors. The design decisions you have to make in projects like these heavily rely on these set values which makes it all the more important to be sure what these set values are. It became apparent that having these kinds of debates about values were best conducted in person. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic these in-person meetings were limited. I noticed that it took me, and many other students, a long time to get a strong grip on these values as they were often critiqued after longer periods of time of not being able to meet with the other students and tutors in person. Having the ability of meeting via digital means of communication made sure we could still continue the process but having quick back-and-forth discussions are much more difficult to have digitally.

The part that has been most challenging in my design process has been the inclusion of the bigger urban scale but also the smaller detail scale. The main focus in the process has been on the building scale when it comes to both the social as the environmental issues that guide the project. There is a possibility to take these exact issues to different scales and do research as well as designing on these scales. As a designer, making the switch to a different scale within a project can be a difficult one to make. This switch can create the feeling of starting from scratch. I have started making this step relatively late in the process due to being afraid it would slow down the process on the building scale that I have been focussing on. In the latest feedback sessions I did realize however that working simultaneously on these different scales actually helps with the process. Therefore, I will be trying to do so during the last phase of the graduation studio in order to make the final products of the project more cohesive.

Housing shortage is a big social issue that caused me to have several ethical dilemmas. One of the major values of the street of Hoptille is, according to my research, the small scale identity of the street and the shape of the mid-rise building that protects this small scale identity. Topping up the mid-rise building to create more housing units simply did not line up with the values that I had previously defined. To add to this problem, I had decided that an inner street needed to be excavated out of the existing volume of the building block. By adding volumes strategically on both sides of the building I managed to return dwelling space back to the block while improving the liveability of the public space. I could however not justify densification within the building block which, in a way, goes against the social ambition to do so. Using the last period of the graduation process there will still be an attempt to see where a possible densification could be made without going against the determined values of the existing buildings on the street of Hoptille.

Another social dilemma is how to design for the existing users of the building. During the interviews that were done we found that people are afraid that they will have to move out of the building to a different location. While changing the design of the building I rearranged the housing configurations which means that the inhabitants will have to move to different parts of the building. Another change that was made was that specific apartments were changed in such a way that they have become more suitable for private rent or even for sale. Since I have not yet decided on adding dwellings this would mean people will have to move out of the area. While this is not preferred it is the result of means to improve the liveability and social cohesion of the block as a whole. Trying to find the right balance in these dilemmas can be difficult due to the personal stories that were told by people during the street interviews.

What I noticed was that my take on the assignment was somewhat different from the students that already followed a Heritage Master track before. In the design studios I previously attended during my Master study programme, existing buildings always played a role but their historical nor their architectural values were neglectable. This meant that I had to make adaptations in my workflow to incorporate these values of the building on the street of Hoptille in my process. On the other hand, students that were more used to working with heritage projects had to learn to let go of some of their more strict heritage workflows. I believe that this variety in the students benefitted the discussions between the students greatly as it provided me with helpful insights.

After the P4 presentation the visualisation of the project will be most important. 3D impressions demonstrate how the newly configured public and semi-public spaces in the building block will improve the social situation of the building. 3D impressions also help drastically with the readability of the project for the people that are not used to reading floorplans, sections and elevations. Apart from the 3D visualisations, a booklet will be made that will show the full graduation process. I will aim to further address the previously discussed dilemmas on housing shortages, moving of the inhabitants and other elements that might be questioned at the P4 presentation.