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REFLECTION

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In this chapter I will reflect on the work I did during my Advanced Housing Design graduation studio, part of the Architecture track of the Msc Architecture, Urbanism & Building Sciences at the TU Delft. Both the approaches in the research and design process will be reflected on, using the following questions as a base:

• What is the relation between the graduation project topic, the master track (Architecture), and the master programme (MSc Architecture, Urbanism and Building Sciences)?
• How did the research influence the design and how did the design influence the research?
• How do you assess your way of working (your approach, your used methods, used methodology)?
• How do you assess the academic and societal value, scope and implication of your graduation project, including ethical aspects and transferability?

What is the relation between the graduation project topic, the master track (Architecture), and the master programme (MSc Architecture, Urbanism and Building Sciences)?

This graduation project is part of the MSc Architecture, Urbanism and Building Sciences at Delft University of Technology. This Msc programme has a focus on the exploration of innovative ways to create sustainable solutions in the built environment. More specifically this graduation project is part of the Architecture Track within this Msc programme. This track has the goal to encourage students to develop creative and innovative building projects that use design as a means to deal with the technical, social and spatial challenges encountered in the built environment. These social and spatial challenges in the built environment were central in the Advanced Housing Design Studio, where this graduation project is part of. This studio namely focussed on finding solutions for the housing shortage the Netherlands is currently dealing with, by using densification strategies. Next to that, densification strategies and housing design might help to (re)invigorate existing neighbourhoods, and create sustainable, social, diverse neighbourhoods. Within this challenge, students were allowed to find their own specific subject for their graduation project, which is also something the Architecture Track aims at. In this track students are given the opportunity to create projects in the specialty of their own choice and interests.

In my case the choice of the Advanced Housing Design studio already was in line with my own interests. The fact that the housing shortage is such a socially relevant problem has made me choose this studio. I want to use the knowledge I gained in recent years during my Architecture studies at Delft University of Technology to help find solutions to these current problems. What is the best way to build additional housing, with the interests of the residents at the core? This interest of the residents is an very important aspect to me. Housing is a fundamental right; everyone has the right to have

a home. The fact that I can influence as an architect how people live and how the built environment can affect people's well-being is something I find incredibly beautiful. Within architecture, this aspect of (social) well-being has always been a fascination of mine. This fascination has also ensured that I was triggered by the specific problem within this housing crisis of a shortage of suitable housing for the elderly, a vulnerable group in society. The combination of a growing aging population in the Netherlands, and transformations in long term care, lead to the fact that elderly people need to live longer independent at home, with less possibilities to receive professional care. However, currently homes elderly live in are often not suitable for living independent at home, so alternatives are needed. Furthermore, due to the transformation in long term care elderly become more reliant on informal care, which could be a task neighbours could provide more. That is why my research was focussing on the question: ""What design strategy can be used to design independent livings for elderly with a light need of care, integrated into an existing neighbourhood, in such a way that it stimulates neighbours to provide informal care?" By answering this question I wanted to find a solution on the societal problem of both the housing shortage, and the 'informal care shortage', hoping to in the end be able to design a sustainable neighbourhood suitable for elderly to live independently, with a focus on social cohesion and caring for each other. I believe that the built environment can play a large role in the solutions for these societal problems.

How did the research influence the design and how did the design influence the research?

The first subquestion of my research was: 'How has elderly housing developed through the history and what can we learn from it?' This provided insight into how elderly housing and the position of the elderly in society has developed over the years. From this I was able to learn what has not worked in the past, but also what has been done in the past that we can learn from again today. I was able to use these findings of what does and does not work in my design.

The second sub-question was: 'What do elderly with a light need of care need on the scale of dwelling and the scale of the neighbourhood, to live longer independently at home?' This lead to a whole list of elements that are important to the elderly on the scale of the neighbourhood and the scale of the dwelling, at the physical, functional and social level. All of these elements formed part of the input for my design as 'conditions' that should be present in my design.

The third sub-question was about: What informal care can be provided by neighbours and what could stimulate neighbours to provide informal care? This question provided insight into what would stimulate neighbours to provide informal care. Very important for this turned out to be social cohesion and knowing/seeing your neighbours. This prompted an investigation of how design can contribute to strengthening social cohesion and looking out for one another, with the final sub-question: How can design stimulate social integration and therefore stimulate informal care? By analyzing existing projects designed with social cohesion and looking out for each other in mind, I was able to make a link between theory and practice. From this, design elements emerged that I in turn was able to translate into my design in my own way.

All in all, answering all the sub-questions, and thus the main question, contributed to a list of elements, both 'dry ingredients' and design elements that formed a design strategy that I in turn was able to use as a basis for my design. I was able to apply the knowledge gained

during my research into my design, but to translate it in my own way.

While designing, I sometimes found that in some areas my research did not yet answer specifically enough the question of what, for example, older people need in the home. As a result, designing helped to make my research more complete and specific. For example, in my research things like 'a passage should be wide enough for a wheelchair' would come up, and while designing I would think: how wide is that? I could then incorporate the answers to those kinds of more specific questions into my research. Thus the research laid the foundation for my design choices, but the designing helped make my research more complete, illustrated in figure 1 on the next page.

How do you assess your way of working (your approach, your used methods, used methodology)?

I tried to make use of different methods in order to be able to give the most versatile answer to the main question and also link the research directly to my design location. I found it interesting to delve into the history of senior housing, and I think the method of making it a timeline helped to get a good idea of developments in history. By further analyzing certain projects from history that we might learn from today through case studies, I was able to spatialize certain aspects, which made it easier to use them as input for my design.

For the question of needs and wishes of the elderly, I mainly did literature research because this is a topic that has been researched quite a bit in recent years. This literature review helped to divide needs and wishes into certain scales and categories, namely: the scale of the neighbourhood and of the dwelling, containing a breakdown into physical, functional and social aspects.

By sticking to these scales and categories, I was able to create a comprehensive and, in my opinion, complete overview of the needs and wishes of the elderly with a light need of care at different scales. By visualizing the wishes that came from literature research, they formed an even better basis for my design, because that made them more design elements instead of 'dry ingredients'. To supplement the literature research, I wanted to do interviews in Groot-IJsselmonde, the design location, to see if the needs and wishes that came from the literature research corresponded to the needs and wishes of older people in Groot-IJsselmonde, and if there would be any additions. As an interview method I used semi-structured interviews, by going out into the streets of Groot-IJsselmonde and talking to people and asking them about their experiences. With hindsight, I might have approached doing these interviews differently. When you talk to people on the street it is difficult to ask extensive questions and really go into the subject in depth. Some aspects did emerge that were useful for my research, and mainly confirmed the findings from the literature, but I might have gotten more out of the interviews if I had spent more time with the interviewees by actually visiting them, for example.

To answer the question of what might encourage neighbours to provide informal care, I first did a literature review which gave me insights I could build on. The literature review revealed that knowing/seeing/feeling connected to your neighbours, and thus social cohesion, is a very important aspect when it comes to helping neighbours. From the literature review emerged as a form of social cohesion 'everyday attentiveness', in which "people signal whether another person needs a helping hand, then offer it or at least make sure that someone else offers it.", and this included aspects that could enhance this 'everyday attentiveness'. This already gave useful insights for my design. To get a better understanding of what motivates people to offer
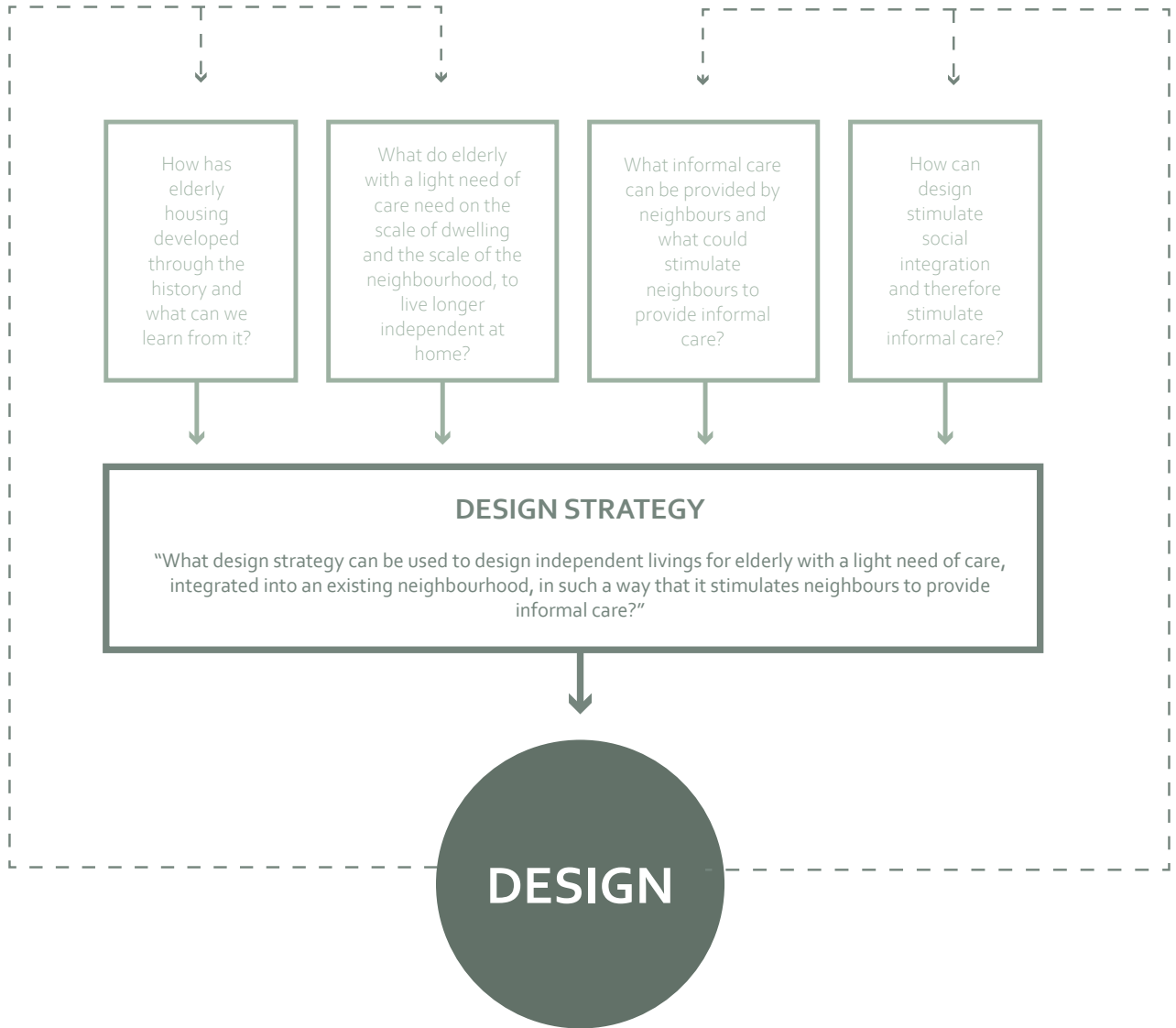
The boxes, left to right, read:

- How has elderly housing developed through the history and what can we learn from it?
- What do elderly with a light need of care need on the scale of dwelling and the scale of the neighbourhood, to live longer independent at home?
- What informal care can be provided by neighbours and what could stimulate neighbours to provide informal care?
- How can design stimulate social integration and therefore stimulate informal care?

DESIGN STRATEGY

"What design strategy can be used to design independent livings for elderly with a light need of care, integrated into an existing neighbourhood, in such a way that it stimulates neighbours to provide informal care?"

DESIGN

Figure 1: Relation research and design (made by author)

help to their neighbours I wanted to do semi-structured interviews again to see if this was in line with the findings from literature and if there would be additions. For this too, I went to Groot-IJsselmonde, but soon encountered the problem that the target group I wanted to interview was very reluctant to talk to me. For too long I held on to the idea that the interviews had to be conducted in Groot-IJsselmonde, because that is my design location. But in retrospect, I should have let go of that earlier and interviewed people more generally about what might stimulate them to help. In the end, I did do this, and it did confirm the findings from literature review, but if I had done this earlier I might have gained more new insights. As a final method, I used doing case studies. By analyzing projects designed with the idea of social cohesion and looking out for fellow residents, I was able to translate the aspect of social cohesion into spatial design elements. These design elements ended up being very important in developing a design strategy that I was able to apply back into my design. Although the case studies have been very useful to me, perhaps I should have also done a case study closer to home. Both of the case studies I did were located abroad, which prevented me from visiting them and really seeing how these buildings were used. If I had also done a case study of a project in the Netherlands, I could have done more field research and seen how residents used the building. Then I could have discovered even better whether applied design elements with the idea of enhancing social cohesion actually increase social cohesion and residents actually look out for each other and lend a helping hand.

All in all, despite the fact that I might have done some things differently in hindsight, I think the different methods did lead to a complete research which formed a good basis for my design.

When it comes to my design process, I had quite a few different moments where I felt like I was stuck. I think

that initially it was because I focused on the research for quite a long time, thinking that I necessarily needed this input to start working on the design. In retrospect, I found out that during designing I came back to parts that I could add to my research, so I should not have seen it as two separate parts that followed each other, but two parts that could reinforce each other simultaneously. The same principle actually applied to the different scales and aspects of my design. I wanted to try too much to first complete one element, for example the configuration of the residential buildings on a more urban scale, and then move on to the next element, for example the housing itself. This sometimes made me feel that I finally had a solution for one scale, which then turned out not to work in combination with the other scale. This then felt like a setback that made me feel stuck. If I had focused more on developing my design simultaneously at all the different scales from the beginning, perhaps an interaction and cohesion between the different design scales would have occurred sooner, making it feel more like a gradual process. Despite these moments when I thought I was getting stuck, thankfully I always managed to pick up the thread which ultimately allowed me to create what I feel is a cohesive design.

How do you assess the academic and societal value, scope and implication of your graduation project, including ethical aspects and transferability?

I think my graduation project answers a relevant issue that is going on within the design world today. The transformations in long term care require a different solution in housing the elderly. The findings from my research form a design strategy that can be used as a basis in designing suitable housing for the elderly integrated into an existing neighbourhood. In doing so, my project hopes to contribute to the change from an

individualistic society to a 'participation society' and looking out for each other. This has been an important item on the government agenda in recent years. Insights into how the built environment can contribute to this, which my project offers, can serve as inspiration for other projects.

However, I am aware that it is difficult to find "the" solution to housing the elderly. Whereas in my research I have tried to keep the necessities for the elderly to live independently at home for longer as general as possible, and I myself do believe that these necessities apply to a large part of the target group of elderly people with a light form of care, the target group of elderly people obviously remains very diverse. I therefore think it is always important to engage in dialogue with residents at the project location itself, to see if the results of this research also apply to that specific location and neighbourhood.

Besides, this research focuses on the engagement of neighbours in providing informal care. While I believe that the built environment can really play a role in stimulating social cohesion and looking out for each other, which is also evident from my project, in practice you remain, of course, dependent on the will of people. It is not a given that when applying the elements that came out of this research people will actually help each other. This will also vary by location and neighbourhood. Also when it comes to the target group of "neighbours as caregivers," I think it is important to engage in conversation at the specific location. Firstly to make people aware that their help is needed, secondly to ask what specifically would help those residents to 'provide care'.

Lastly, this graduation project focused on densification within an existing residential neighbourhood. First, to create additional housing to combat the housing shortage, second, in this particular case, to revitalize Groot-IJsselmonde and strengthen social cohesion. With this type of project, it is very important to keep the interests of the people already living there in mind. It is important that the current residents also see how the existing situation is improved by densification and the introduction of new residents. A densification project can be so well designed and fantastic for new residents, if the old residents do not agree with it, it probably will not have the desired effect.

All in all, I think my project contains many aspects that can be applied in other similar projects, or at least translated in a different way, and in this way my project can provide a basis and inspiration for other projects. However, some design choices are specific to my design location: Groot-IJsselmonde, and they are not directly applicable to other locations. So it is important to make a distinction between location-specific elements, and more general elements, and always talk to residents to verify whether aspects from my graduation project are also applicable to that specific design location.

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