

5 reflection

This chapter is a reflection on the graduation project for the preliminary results of the research and design. The first part is a conclusion of this project, trying to give answer to the research question. The second part is a discussion about extending and extrapolating design approach in a broader context. The end part is a personal review on the whole project: how the research question is proposed, how the research and the design exploration is processed.



5.1 conclusion

The purpose of this design project is to explore the opportunity and possibility of adaptive reuse of agricultural heritage for economic development and social vitality while gaining preservation for itself. Through small scale design, I tested how rebuilding of landscape heritage (landscape elements and vernacular buildings) can create an elderly-friendly neighborhood. Agricultural functions of farming and living is restored on the care farm and a countryside lifestyle is established, while at the same time the care farm has easy access to basic living infrastructure in the village, so it's an ideal option for retired life. Meanwhile, agro-ecological functions of the landscape elements are enhanced and at the same time tangible and visible, showing an extra educational function of agricultural production.

If the idea of elderly neighborhood is pushed forward to all neighborhoods, since different age groups have different definitions and pursue living quality, the functions and services of landscape elements, or in this project standard orchard, are thus varied. An ideal community should benefit residents of all ages and all needs. The construction of community orchards is one of the methods to restore the elements of agricultural heritage, which proves its social, ecological and economic value in the community. In a regional scale, methods like building community orchards can make landscape heritage as a tangible local character to reinforce local spirits and specialize tourism brands, developing regional

tourism economy, and to form large-scale, systematic, local and dynamic landscape heritage preservation methods, preventing fragmented management.

The strengthening and disclosing of historical entities can serve as a catalyst and ensure that the villages and settlements in rural areas will be unique once more, and that an intriguing symbiosis will be created through past, present and future. New initiatives and adaptive reuse such as green care farms are essential and should not only have a supportive or additional function, but most of all be an innovative inspiration for the future.

Under the methodologies of landscape as process and landscape as infrastructure, I tried to understand how flows of material, energy, organisms shape landscape through motion, and in turn flows of landscape shape material and energy through boundary, pattern and territory. These processes are accumulation of time. Another important core methodology is research by design. Although design might seem to be anticipation with uncertainty and idealized, this prediction and vision is based on fact research and reasonable extrapolation. As far as this project is concerned, I think I've done quite much desk analyses and research, and there's never an end in doing research. When certain background knowledge is obtained, design should begin as another way of researching.

5.2 discussion

From the perspective of agriculture heritage, this project only discussed the possibility of small scale agriculture, not focusing on massive production. Currently Limburg Province is having a movement towards nature-inclusive agriculture; practicality and economic adaptability are two vital prerequisites. Traditional orchards cannot serve as the primary source of income for the agricultural economy. Strategies proposed in this project are mainly aimed at small-scale spatial structure in rural areas. But one possibility of extrapolating the idea of adaptive reuse of traditional farmhouses can be developing farming community in the future. With 17 million inhabitants of the Netherlands all connected in some way to the farming, distance between people's daily life and food production can be shortened and agricultural tradition can be transformed into one that makes a positive contribution to humanity and natural ecosystem.

Appropriate use can preserve and emphasize cultural significance of the heritage, especially rebuilding its original use which can reduce the impact on the heritage as little as possible. Despite the transforming concept of heritage protection from historical monuments towards historical context together with the monuments' physical and cultural environment, strategies and measures about landscape heritage are still on the way of improving. In this project, the monument and its surrounding are studied as a whole and discussed in the background of contemporary

society and culture. As tangible heritage, landscape elements will form an intangible social bond among inhabitants. Social links create a positive sense of identity which can influence the atmosphere and productivity of a whole city. The task for landscape architects, to put it in a simple way, is to suggest solutions to the problems and to help make this world into a better place. By understanding the history of the site, we can connect what is here and now with what is still lacking in order to meet people's needs and wants, now and in the future, and to rebuild or strengthen human-environment relations (Matthias, 2014). In this case, history is not just for the sake of history, but with an eye to the present and future, it's the authentic, recognizable, beautiful and rich landscape around us that, in ecological and social aspects, has specific functions.

In a shrinking area that is seeking for new economic chances in post-industrial era, preservation and reuse of heritage should take local landscape capacity and economic capacity into account. Are private owners willing to keep the historical buildings and go back to historical agricultural form? The main reason for rapid decrease in high-stemmed orchards in 1950s was that these standard orchards were less profitable than low-stemmed ones. Development of traditional landscape heritage can indeed attract tourists and investment and boost healthy economic circulation, but there's also a concern of over-tourism. With the progressing technology, impact

of agriculture activities and social activities in rural area, including constructing and destructing impact, on surrounding natural space is increasing rapidly, and so is the counterforce from nature. Before 19th century, both eastern and western cities and villages were founded based on agricultural civilization. On one hand, the relationship between human and nature was mainly reflected in the simple ecological concept formed under the instinct of adhering to nature and primitive worship of nature; on the other, human had limited power to change nature. Yet since 19th century, the industrial revolution has made a qualitative leap in the social productive forces, greatly improved the ability of human making use of nature and fundamentally changed our attitude towards nature (Shan, 2009). Agricultural heritage focuses on the survival of human as well as the future of human. However, human-oriented design concept is not to emphasize the intrinsic value of human but to recognize our status in the natural world. In Parkstad that is studied in Harvest lab, people are more and more fully aware of the importance of respecting nature and the urgent problems of ecological environment and social economy. Harvest doesn't mean how much resource we can get from natural environment that seems to be sufficient, but rather a harmony of symbiosis of human and nature.

At the beginning of this graduate project, I wanted to focus on the problem of aging society in Parkstad for the reasons that, to a larger extent, aging society is a global problem and to a smaller extent, I was thinking what I can do as a landscape architect for my aging grandparents and about-to-retire parents. This January, I went back home for the Spring Festival but only stayed for one week before I returned to the Netherlands. The biggest reason was the wide-spread COVID-19; it was even worse when my grandma was in hospital for an early sign of dementia and my mother had to take care of her. Indeed, the year of 2020 is so special because of the virus. It began to spread in the Netherlands in more or less March. From the news it's such a sorrow to learn that nursing homes have been suffering greatly from the attack which then provoked thoughts about home care and precautionary care of old people and 'ironically' made my topic be more fitted into the

contemporary social context, thinking about how to improve a healthy lifestyle together with the natural ecosystem.

This outbreak of virus is somehow epochal. For every single person, we've got a chance to slow down our living pace and think about what should be cherished in our lives; we've got more time for family and friends in the quarantine; we're again putting emphasis on future living quality, rethinking about the relationship of human and nature. For landscape architects, fieldtrips and site visits are restricted, all conversation has to be taken place online, all work should be done on our own, which put higher requirement for our personal comprehensive ability. It's really a unique experience, and all efforts from the government and the university are sincerely appreciated to keep the system functioning on the basis of everyone's wellness.

