

Msc3+4 The Modern Mall, adapting 20th century Heritage

Reflection paper

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The problem with modern malls in the Netherlands

Modern Malls in the Netherlands are dealing the past decade more and more with vacancy and the competition of online shopping. Instinctively, this is something most people experience and realize. But the question about what caused this change in shopping behaviour and the typology of a mall was personally something unknown. Studying the typology of a mall has shown a trend of doing shopping in a new way. Just a shopping before that was done in a different way. Studying the history of shopping showed that trends in the way shopping is done are common. Before the Modern Malls there were the shopping streets and present days we see the rise of online retail. This made me realise that shopping is not some rigid form but has, is, and continue to will be done in different ways. The part that we can work with is making the buildings possible to adapt to changes in shopping behaviour. The buildings can be make suited for housing, offices at home, or other functions that are wanted nowadays. The problems of the mall typology that now it is focused on mainly one function, shopping, this can be changed to multifunctional areas, that can adapt to current and future needs. These first observations and studies made me realize that multifunctional spaces and creating different atmospheres in an area can be a guideline for redesigning these mall types.

The mall of the Bogaard, located in Rijswijk is the topic of the graduation project. This mall is dealing with vacancy and due to alteration resulted in a closed structure. Understanding what the Mall meant when it was build was important to make a decision for the interventions. The mall was made in the 1960s to provide a new shopping experience for not only Rijswijk, but also Delft and The Hague. Now, the mall serves as a local shopping centre but in size it doesn't relate to this. This made it clear for me that the problem with this mall was not only the vacancy but also the size. Together with the ideas from the municipality of Rijswijk this lead to making an urban plan for this area, with varying functions but a downsize in shopping. When intervening in a Mall type that is situated it became more and more clear that the context both theoretical and physical were important aspects when creating the plan.

Analysing the Malls and innovating an intervention strategy

What was the research method and approach?

The approach and research started with making an inventory of intervention strategies from suggested literature by the studio. Mostly focused around adding, subtracting, replacing, transforming or similar terminology. Simultaneously, the research fascination started to form and the problems of the mall reminded me of a similar problem I studied about before. The book of Richard Sennett, *Building and Dwelling*¹ addresses a disconnection between a city and its inhabitants, and this phenomena was something I recognized with the Modern Mall. In his book, the suggested solution lies in the application of the so called open forms, to open up the city. Interested in this approach I tried to adapt this theory and translate it to the scale and character of the mall. At first this idea was presented at P1 and the potential of adapting this method was there. The only thing is that the method was mainly theoretical and lacked clear physical elements.

To make it my own, I tried finding build forms as examples and schematize the open forms to make it better communicable. This was a first step to better get a grasp on the method. Although this method was used to study opening up a city, it wasn't helping yet with the Modern Mall. With picking a case study that had undergone several interventions the open forms could be studied in the context of a Mall. This helped forming the research towards opening up a Mall. The case study together with adjacent literature regarding the Modern Malls helped pinpointing more clearly where the aim of my research was going. One of the open forms, the Membrane, focussing on borders and transitions came up as one of the prominent elements. This focus on the Membrane helped me to identify the location of where my project should focus on within the Mall of the Bogaard in Rijswijk. One block in particular showed problems relating to the Membrane. The studies methods of the open forms were tested in varying ways to experiment with using this type of intervention method.

Relationship between research and Design

What is the relationship between the research and design, how were the two elements working together throughout the graduation year?

Unravelling intervention methods was the start of this graduation studio. This helped in gaining a better understanding in what types of interventions are there and how they can be used. The next step, choosing an intervention method or methods and innovating them in a way was the following step. This part started shaping the research and personal topic within field of the Modern Mall. The research started to take shape and looking forward to a possible project was the following part. Here the research started to relate with the design, or at least the design case. At P2 the research was presented and initial ideas for the project case were introduced. However after the P2, shifting from research into design seemed quite hard. Not a lot of progress was made in the first weeks of the second semester. This changed after the Reality check where input was given and motivation for designing got triggered. Sketching by hand, thinking through different layers of scale, and trying over and over seemed the way to get the design rolling. The period between the reality check and the P3 was a period where a concept was developed. This concept regarding creating patios in a part of the old shopping mall was altered and related back to the research on the topic of borders and boundaries. This element started to become one of the main elements of the design. At P3 this idea was presented and after feedback the concept stayed the same, but alteration once again were in need. While developing the research the ideas were taking a better shape in the design after P3. At P4 the latest alteration of the concept of patios and boundaries will be presented.

¹ Sennet, R. (2019), *Building and Dwelling, Ethics for the city*. Milton Keynes. Penguin Books.

Summarizing, the project started with research and the transition was off to a rough start. This changed after the reality check where a concept started to develop where the research could give input to. The main concept of the design remained the same, but the physical development took lots of alterations throughout the second semester. More and more the design relates to the research through different scale levels.

Looking back, the challenging part was to make a start after the P2. Allowing yourself to explore different possibilities. What in the end helped for me, was to start with making simple sketches and sketch models to get the first ideas out of your head and make them tangible, this was the moment where the concept was starting to take shape. The research can be let go for a while during this part and be brought back in the following period after this exploration.

Opening up the mall and the architecture track

What is the relationship between the graduation topic, heritage studio, and the master track of architecture?

The architecture master track of the TU Delft has a broad spectrum of specialties that can be chosen to specialize in. The amount of researching, developing concepts, making models, varies in each of these studios, but the overall aim is for students to develop an independent and academic attitude and to develop a project of choice that functions well for its users and its given context. The heritage studio adds on top of this the main challenge of dealing with existing building stock. What can, or should even, be re used in the project. But even within Heritage there is a wide scope from designing with special monumental buildings to dealing with the 'ordinary' maybe not described as heritage in the eyes of some. But in here lies the challenge I think for this graduation studio. Sustainability, adaptability and heritage are coming together in this studio especially, making this studio exciting. The Modern Mall is made up from elements that play a role in the perception of the space of a mall. What elements are valued high enough that they need to stay, and what parts can make space for something new. New spaces that enhance the functioning of the mall, introducing new functions for example. The graduation topic of the modern mall teaches a new way of looking at the existing building stock that may not have the highest value from the first look, but after looking into the history of malls, the changes it has made through time, shows us that these buildings have shown to be able to adapt. Given in some places better than others, yes, but still. These buildings have shown to be able to adapt and in this time of a high level awareness of sustainability and a high demand for housing, this studio gives the chance to combine all these factors into a challenging yet exciting design brief.

The future of the Modern Mall and likeminded building types

What is the relationship between the graduation project, wider social and scientific scope?

The method I tried to develop is starting from the research brief that encouraged to come up with an innovative research method using existing literature on interventions and adapt it to fit the research into malls. This method of adapting a theory and making it applicable to a new situation is a start which could continue with different building types dealing maybe with similar problems. For my research I adopted a theory of opening up a city and recognized starting points that were similar to the starting points of the Mall. This research might be a kick off for following studies trying to deal with similar problems of a disconnected building/area with its users or needs/demands. In a way that opening up the Mall shows that it is possible to be creative with existing methods and adjust them to a situation that fits the assignment. In the future this research can be used as input of dealing with other closed character structures in the built environment, for example the Vinex neighbourhoods.

The intervention made in the Modern Mall in my project focuses on opening up the mall for its users and to its surroundings, aiming to have the existing structures integrate better with its context. The Modern Mall consists of different building blocks forming the structure of a mall together. Although the number of buildings can be downsized and the functions can change, the Modern Mall type can react to the changing needs when designed carefully. The structures can have a future and can become places of meeting, working, living and of course shopping.

Personal reflection question

What is something you've experienced during this studio that you will take with you after graduation?

The first thing I've experienced during this studio is drawing by hand. Stimulated by tutors I started drawing by hand and kept doing so until P4. This way allowed for quick changes, lots of sketches and ideas to be shown and a good understanding of the building that was worked on. By drawing by hand I was forced to think about every line I drew and this helped from developing conceptual ideas to detailing and finding out how certain elements of construction are made and fitted together. The second thing I will take with me from this studio is working together and giving feedback to others. In the second semester a few of the group started working together at the faculty and being able to share your ideas and discuss them with others, helped bringing the design to a higher level. Lastly, allowing for your concept to change and grow. I started out with an idea regarding patios. This idea developed even after p3 quite drastically to allow for more daylight and a better circulation and quality of the different levels of public spaces. It was at times a bit nervous to make changes constantly, but in the end the concept stayed the same, but the physical design became stronger. This was only possible by allowing for a concept to change and grow even in later stages of the process.