

# **GRADUATION REFLECTION**

*Architectural Engineering Graduation Studio - May 2024*

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*This document is a personal reflection on the graduation process, including the research phase and the design phase of it. It aims to collect thoughts, experiences and learning points encountered throughout the academic year, assess the appropriateness of methods chosen and the relevance of the resulting products.*

## **STUDIO & PROJECT THEME, MASTER TRACK & PROGRAMME**

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

My graduation project, "Framing Identity," is connected to my master's track in Architecture and the broader MSc Architecture, Urbanism, and Building Sciences program, primarily because both the research and design phases address the issue of existing building stock, which is inherently tied to the built environment. Specifically, the project involves the redesign of a post-war housing site in Haarlem, Netherlands, requiring careful urban, architectural, and technical consideration due to the site's existing users, habits, functions, and history.

To ensure the quality of the design, my project requires making decisions at various scales (from infrastructural schemes to detailing building components), making it unavoidably tied to broader considerations touching both the fields of Urbanism and Building Sciences.

The theme of Architectural Identity is concerned with the theoretical, ideological branch of the architectural discipline. When tied to the practical and technical side that is a transformation design, we deal with the almost full spectrum of the architectural discipline. Additionally, the theme of transformation for post-war housing touches upon some of the most pressing issues in the built environment: the housing crisis, existing building stock and climate adaptation.

## **RESEARCH OUTPUTS & DESIGN APPLICABILITY**

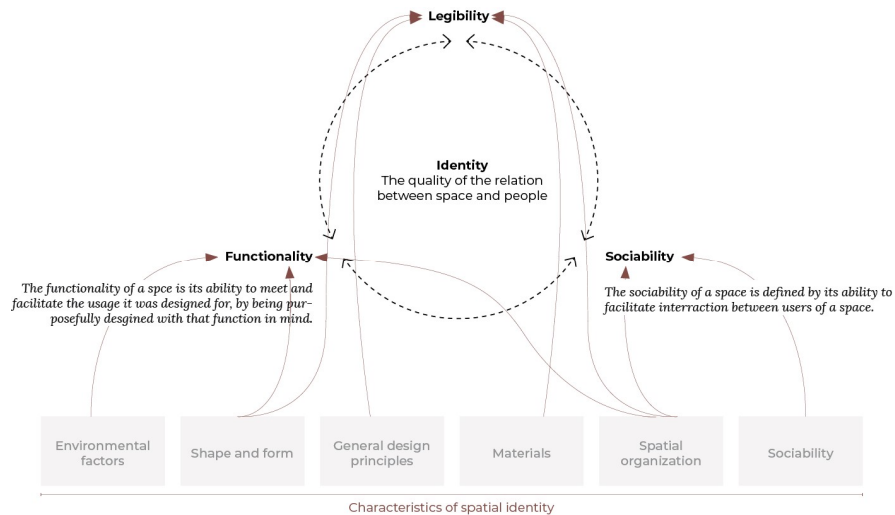
*How did your research influence your design/recommendations and how did the design/recommendations influence your research?*

Three distinct "products" emerged from my research: first, I developed a theoretical framework that pragmatically defines and serves the analysis of identity in architecture. Secondly, I applied this framework to a case study (which later became my project site in Haarlem) and proposed strategies for enhancing its identity. Lastly, I focused on urban biodiversity to explore synergies between strategies for improving identity and those for enhancing urban biodiversity.

When I began the design phase, I realized that the essence of my research was getting diluted by the complexity and number of different themes I was addressing: transformation, identity, and biodiversity. Ultimately, I decided to shift my focus from urban biodiversity to the primary reason why post-war buildings need transformation: their insufficient energy performance.

The most important takeaways from my research were the first two products: the analytical framework of identity and the analysis resulting from applying this framework to my project site. It is worth mentioning that the outcomes of the analysis were general recommendations rather than providing a concrete initial concept for my design. Instead, the framework and the analysis guided my design decisions at all scales and throughout the design phase.

The research was valuable for the procedure it followed rather than its specific content. In hindsight, focusing on "energetic improvement" instead of "urban biodiversity" would have been more useful to my project and would have made the method easier replicable onto other projects as well.



## APPROACH & METHODS

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

My way of working has been highly methodological, making sure that I align with the precepts of my research at every scale level of the design. The framework of Identity was very useful as it guided my decision-making and allowed me to question the architectural theory within a pragmatic design context.

Did the approach work? Yes, it did—primarily in its structure rather than its contents. The structured methodology offered clarity and direction, ensuring that every decision was anchored in a well-defined concept. However, this approach sometimes felt confusing or limiting, as it required every decision to relate back to my framework. This occasionally obstructed the natural, organic design process, especially since the research organized decisions by scale, while in practice, all scales are interconnected and necessitate a constant back-and-forth.

## SOCIETAL RELEVANCE

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

Restoration is a topic of growing importance, especially concerning post-war heritage. This project focuses on redesigning a post-war housing site consisting of three gallery flat blocks. Given the ubiquity of such structures and their ongoing degradation, this topic is increasingly relevant: post-war buildings generally no longer meet social or technical standards, yet demolishing them would not make sense in the context of the global housing shortage.

Post-war heritage preservation trends are gaining momentum among professionals, despite the general public's lukewarm reception due to these buildings' perceived lack of identity. This issue of identity is not exclusive to post-war residential housing; it is also evident in modern skyscrapers and other new buildings that often lack local style or recognizable features, leading to a generic architectural landscape. Therefore, discussing the topic of identity in a context that seemingly has none, and additionally requires restoration, holds significant potential.

Moreover, the socio-cultural implications are a significant aspect of this project, as it deals with existing building stock that has its own history, function, and resident communities.

## ASSESSMENT ON TRANSFERABILITY

*How do you assess the value of the transferability of your project results?*

The task of transforming post-war residential areas and buildings extends beyond mere structural improvements; it holds the potential to breathe new life into these neighbourhoods, transforming them into spaces that are more socially vibrant and environmentally sustainable. The widespread presence of these housing blocks across Europe and their common characteristics imply that successful renewal strategies could be replicated on a large scale.

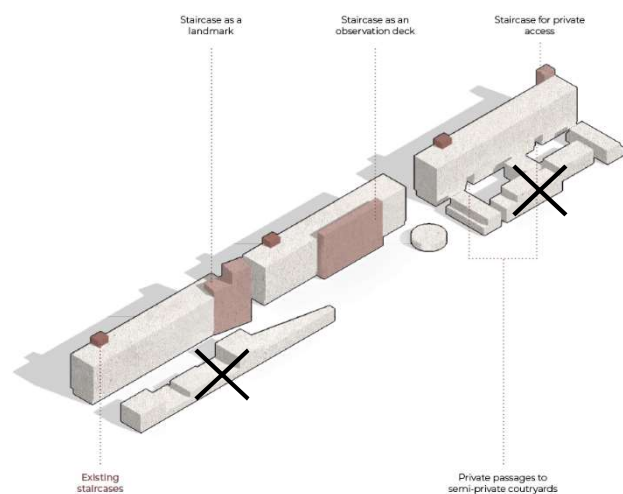
The process followed for the redesign of Boerhaavewijk could therefore be applied to other sites that aim to prioritize identity as the social focus of their transformation. The positive impact of transformation strategies could be further amplified by seeking synergies between social and technical areas of improvement, as demonstrated in my research with identity and biodiversity. While the research might have been more beneficial if it had focused on energetic improvement rather than biodiversity, the procedure followed could be applied in other contexts as well.

Lastly, the framework for identity can be used to create more socially engaging buildings, regardless of whether or not they are transformation projects. This replication could facilitate widespread adoption, significantly amplifying the positive impact of such transformations across many communities.

## PRODUCTS & PLANNING

*What were challenges encountered during the graduation process and what conclusions did those lead to?*

I did not have a chance to convey the playfulness I had hoped for in the design. The project could have been much more interesting if I had also designed the other buildings. The aspect of densification is not well-developed, meaning that the urban scale interaction and activity are not sufficiently conveyed. This also means that I missed the chance to elaborate a design that could make use of the waste material from the transformed buildings.



It is essential for me to have everything figured out before I can confidently present my work. Displaying more confidence is crucial to making the most out of my feedback sessions and improving my presentations.

## **FUTURE PROSPECTS**

*What aspects of the graduation research and project will most likely inform the first steps into the professional field?*

The project has given me insight into various architectural theories and thoughts of notorious professionals in the field, such as Herman Hertzberger, and Kevin Lynch, amongst others. I have also learned about trends and aspects to consider when dealing with post-war heritage. Finally, I do believe that the framework of identity is a useful analytical tool which I believe I will use in the future for evaluating the quality of my design decisions.