

REFLECTION PAPER

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Heritage & Architecture: Sustainable Zutphen

Introduction

This reflection paper is part of my graduation project within the department of Heritage & Architecture. The graduation studio, called 'Sustainable Zutphen', has a main focus on the revitalisation of heritage structures within the city of Zutphen. Within this project there was a special aim towards the heritage structures that are a part of the medieval city, called Nieuwstad. Therefore, the project was not only about the heritage context of an existing building, but also about the heritage context of Nieuwstad and Zutphen in its entirety.

The object of choice for my graduation design was the Baudartius college; a school situated on top of the former fortifications at the northern part of Nieuwstad. The choice for this post Second World War school building was for one reason because it would become vacant in the coming years, and my project could potentially contribute in the plan making of the municipality. Furthermore, because of its location at the former fortifications between the two northern gateways, the school is situated at an important historical urban node. Nowadays, this urban node is not as visible anymore due to the destruction of the gate, the construction of a motorway and the Baudartius college that has expanded into a gated enclave at the corner of the Vogelpark.

My research question was based on a fascination for this urban node and was therefore:

How can the transformation of the Baudartius college re-establish the identity of the Vogelpark as former gateway to the city, which serves as a spatial and social connecting point?



Image 1: Urban node at the Baudartius college (own image)

Design by research

As a basic framework for the design, two types of researches were conducted; an urban analysis of Nieuwstad and a building analysis of the Baudartius college. These researches were based on literature studies into the historical context and mapping/drawing and photographing the current situation. As a conclusion of these analyses a cultural value statement was made in which the different valuable aspects of the building and its surroundings were named and categorized. For the categorization of these values I used 7 main categories (based on the categories of Alois Riegl); Age value, Historical value, Intentional commemorative value, Unintentional commemorative value, Aesthetical value, and Social value. Later in the project it appeared to be of great importance to have labeled the different cultural values in order to understand on which aspect a certain design decision would have an influence.

In addition to the cultural value statement, I developed a design framework in which not only the existing values and the preservation of them would form the basis, but also the opportunities and obligations towards the improvement of values or the introduction of new ones. The design framework was used during the design process to test my ideas against my own conclusions of the analysis.

Research by Design

One of my main aims within the project was to reconnect the Baudartius college with its surroundings and to create a place of gathering within the complex. Because of the disappearance of the courtyard as the central space within the Baudartius, the idea developed to reintroduce the courtyard as a gathering space in an otherwise corridor like building complex. In addition to that, I felt like connecting this gathering space in the courtyard with a public route through the complex. In this way the enclave like complex would literally be opened up and also relate to a courtyard typology building block, which adds a second layer in the urban network and is a prevailing typology in Zutphen. With these starting points certain design and cultural value dilemma's were inevitable.

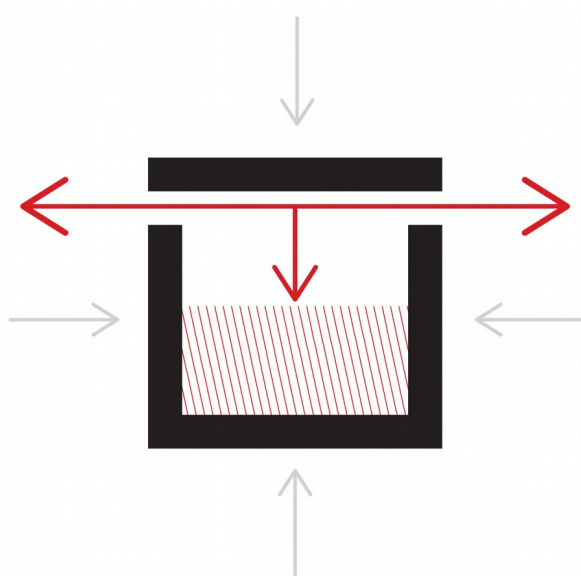


Image 2: Concept (own image)

Urban vs building

Because of the disappearance of the urban node at the Baudartius college, which has a historical value, I felt in the beginning (between P2-P3) that the threshold between the in and outside of the complex should be marked with a physical element such as a colonnade. In this way the new intervention in the courtyard would already be marked on the outside, creating an attracting vantage point from the Nieuwstad street. However, between the P3 and P4 I came to the realization that the urban advantages of this approach were overshadowing the cultural values of the complex. Especially the facade expression of the existing and in particular the articulation of the volumes on the outer ring of the complex, which I valued highly as an aesthetic value, was overshadowed by the introduction of this large colonnade element in combination with the atrium in the courtyard. With this realization is decided to get rid of the colonnade and introduce more subtle ways such as patterns in the street and the improvement of connecting routes to connect the courtyard of the complex with its surroundings.

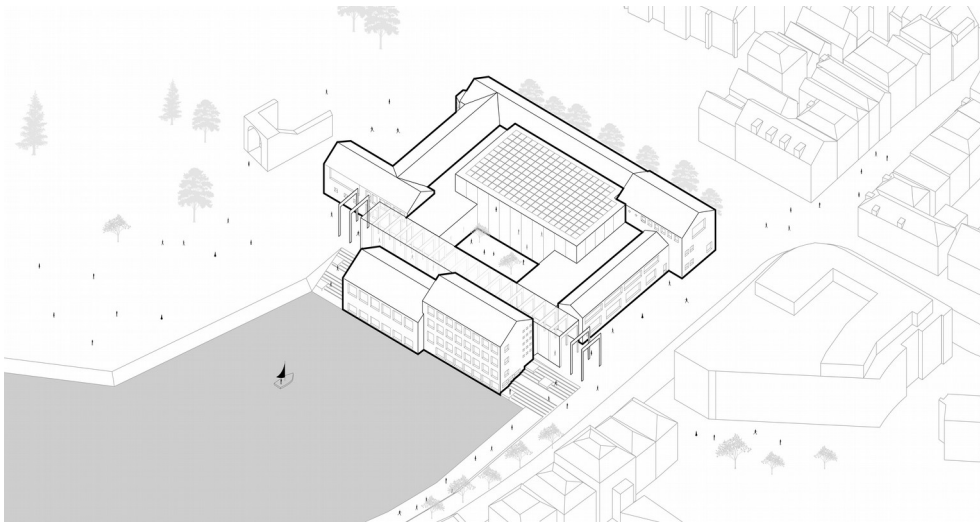


Image 3: P3 design with the colonnade (own image)

Stained glass window vs volume

After the decision to 'kill my darling' (aka colonnade) I noticed more things about my new intervention that were not in line with my cultural value statement. My atrium in the courtyard was still quite a large volume that was sort of 'competing' with the existing volumes. I then decided to simplify the volume of the atrium by extruding the old courtyard of the complex and pushing the volume back in line with the existing building. In this way, the new volume would be shaped by the existing, following the lines of the asymmetrical instead of being a self standing symmetrical object.

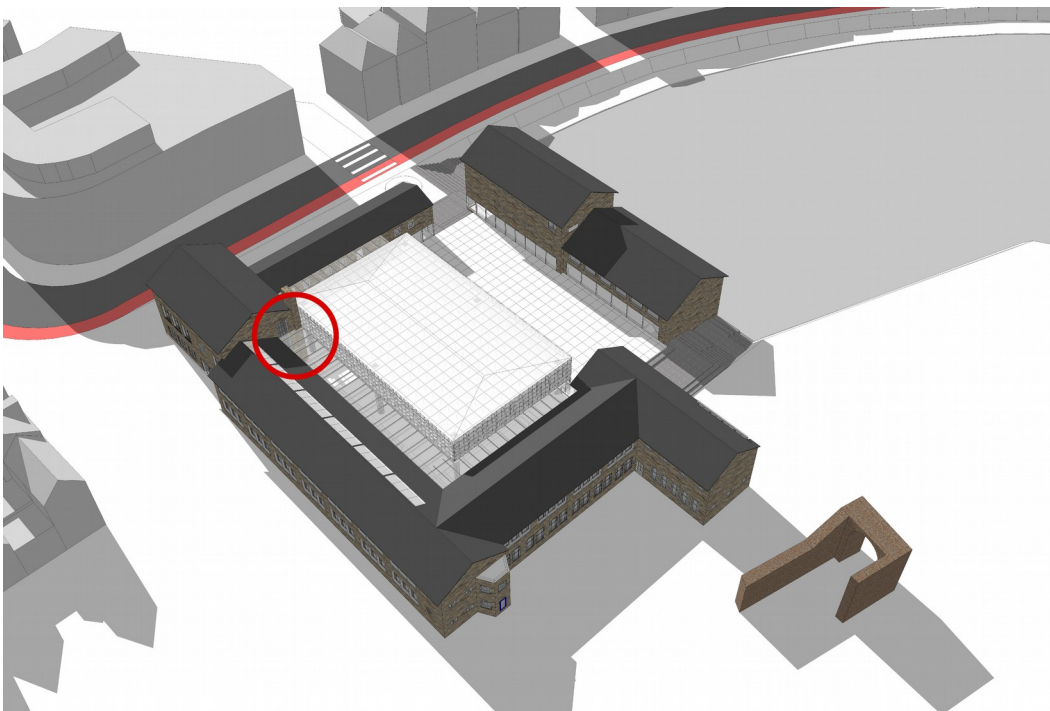


Image 4: Pushed back volume & connection window (own image)

However, because of this decision to push back my new structure another valued element was compromised: the stained glass window. In Sketchup I modelled several possible solutions, going from creating a small patio near the window, making the atrium higher, to removing the window take it along to the new school building. This last option was a big possibility for some time. Because of the intentional commemorative value of it being a war monument it would make sense to take it along,

since it tells a story about the Baudartius from before this school building. By the removal of the window it would then also be possible to use the staircase from the main hall. However, I realized that the window not only has a commemorative value, but also a high aesthetic value; especially in combination with the main staircase. In the end I decided to keep the window in place and to keep the volume of the new structure low at the place of the window, respecting the value of the volumes. The window would then be connected with a minimal intervention to the glass roof. In this way the courtyard space would not be fragmented by a patio and light would still fall through the window.

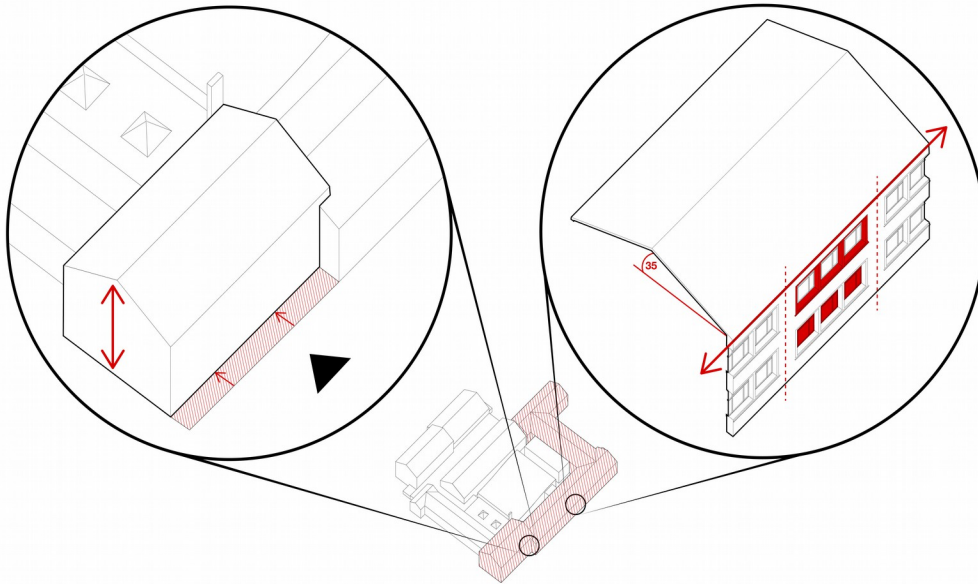


Image 5: post-war facade & volume expression (own image)

Conclusion

In conclusion, one could say that the research by design between P2-P4 has played a large role in my understanding of the conclusions of the analysis. Where my main focus with the research question initially was more urban focused, the projects gravitation point has shifted more towards a balance between the urban values and the building values. I believe that the outcome of the process that I've gone through with the Baudartius college and its place in city, can be of importance for the development of the complex by the municipality. Especially, the consideration of the complex as a valuable refined example of post war architecture which is an addition to the layers of time in Nieuwstad.