

REFLECTION PAPER

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Introduction

As part of the graduation process, it is required to write a paper in which the student reflects on its own project. This paper accounts for the preliminary results of the research and design in the graduation phase. The goal is to look back and see whether the chosen approach worked and to understand the choice of method (how) and the argumentation (why). How and why did the approach work (or not) and to what extent? That is the question that needs an answer in this paper.

The chair that I am graduating in is 'Heritage and Architecture' and the subject of my graduation studio is 'Rotterdam Harbour Heritage'. This studio touches upon the question of what happens to the abandoned warehouses and other complexes in the old harbour area of Rotterdam. The building that I chose to make a design proposal for is the warehouse Santos in Katendrecht, in the southern area of the city.

Firstly, this paper will reflect on the relation between research and design. Afterwards, I will continue with the relationship between the theme of the graduation lab and the subject/case study chosen by me within this framework. Furthermore, the relation between the methodical line of approach of the graduation lab and the method chosen by me will be exploited. This paper will end with a general reflection on the preliminary results of the research and design in the graduation phase.

1. Research and design

This first quarter of this year was filled with doing a very extended analysis on the warehouse Santos. In a group of seven people, we investigated the past, present and future plans of the warehouse. In the end we produced an analytical report of a historical warehouse that was focused on the urban surroundings, architecture, building technology and cultural value. In this report, we analysed the building in these different aspects and came up with conclusions. Furthermore, a very important part of the analysis was the part where we discussed and determined the cultural value of the building via a matrix. We used multiple sources that wrote about how to value heritage and from that and bits of our own interpretation, we made the framework. This framework helped me to choose in what direction I wanted my design to go. How to value the building? What to keep and what can go? What is the essence of the building?

This analysis determined a lot of my choices for the chosen approach towards my concept and the resulting design itself. For example, knowing what will be build next to it in the future, resulted in a different approach to the context, then I would have with the current surroundings. Knowing that there will be loads of residential highrise buildings next to Santos, instead of the couple of small buildings that are next to it now, made me consider a different program than I had before. Also, the research we did that ended up in the cultural value essay, was very useful for designing. In the field of heritage and architecture, we always have to consider the layers of history that make up the building itself. Only when you fully understand these layers, you can make decisions that are thought through.

Furthermore, we were inclined to write an essay for the course 'Research Methods and Analysis' in the first semester of the year. I ended up writing this paper about the changeability of deep structures (a.k.a. heritage buildings). Here I positioned myself in the context of writers that have written about what to do with heritage buildings. My position is that objects of heritage that lost their function, should have a chance to adapt itself to the current society and they should have a chance to be of use. These unchanging deep structures must find a way to change, to avoid becoming a never-changing, static building. After all, they are still not dead yet. This way of looking at the build environment, I carried through in the starting points of my design. I was not afraid to take away parts of the building and change it, because what I am changing is to make it useful for a new program and a new use. It is just like the previous times Santos changed, a new layer. I now am changing this '(un)changing deep structure'.

2. Theme

The theme of my graduation lab is 'Rotterdam harbour heritage'. As I mentioned before, my case study is about the warehouse Santos in Rotterdam. It is an abandoned warehouse that has no function at the moment. To keep it from deterioration, the old and historical warehouse Santos needs to be redeveloped into something that preserves the important cultural values of the building and at the same time can mean something for its neighbourhood. Also, Santos used to be one of the largest buildings in its direct surroundings, however, in the near future, it will become overshadowed by large apartment blocks surrounding it. From this problem statement, my research question was created: 'How can a characteristically introvert building respond to its new 'show-off' surroundings, while keeping its identity and value for its location in and on itself?'. It all has to do with heritage and how to deal with a building that cannot serve its purpose anymore. It needs change; however, it also holds a piece of history. How do those two come together?

Thus, the relation between my graduation lab and the subject I chose is that I try to find a way to deal with the heritage of the harbour and in the way that it responds to its surroundings. So, the graduation lab and my subject are very closely intertwined.

3. Methodology

The methodical line of approach of 'Heritage and Architecture' will always start with the existing building and its surroundings. It first starts with the analysis and subsequently a cultural value assessment. There were multiple methods that I used to make this analysis and assessments, like I described in the graduation plan. Firstly, we went to visit the site multiple times to take photos and sketch the building, its surroundings and with that the atmosphere inside. In the first visit I took the site in and tried to really feel the atmosphere in the building. The times after that, I mostly took a lot of photos of the building to get to know how it was really put together (as the drawings we had were very old, and a lot of the times not correct). As I touched on before, to redevelop a building that has such deep roots in Rotterdam, there needs to be good understanding of the building and where its values lie. Thus, I read the literature on Santos, on the Rotterdam harbour and on harbour related heritage projects (among other literature). This helped with the analysis and research and subsequently also with designing in the further stages of this graduation process. Lastly, I made some working models to test out designs and I made small studies to help the design process and to make important design decisions. See images 1 – 4 for an example of a design study made during this year.





Image 1-4: Design studies on possible entrances. Own illustration.

General reflection

'How and why did the approach work or not and to what extent?'; that seems to be the central question in this paper. In the field of Heritage and Architecture, there actually is already a part of the 'why' present. Because there already is a building (which is, in our case, vacant), there is already a 'why'. The argumentation behind this is that the building has cultural value (in the most extended meaning of the word) and that is why it needs to be conserved/preserved/redeveloped. So, Santos is vacant, and it would be a shame to let it go to waist. The methods that I choose (research, site visits, making working models and small studies) worked in the sense that it got me to this point. I researched all there was to research about the building and I experimented a lot with different design solutions. For me, the analysis and research part were quite linear processes that had a beginning and an end. And as a contrast to that, designing is always a circular process that can continue on and on. I think I could always keep on designing and never truly be happy about it. Taking that in consideration, I am satisfied with the design right now, so, I can say that the approach that I used worked out.