

Movement in the shopping mall

Reflection Paper - Stephan Koeckhoven

the future of the shopping mall

In general, the Dutch shopping mall does not appear to have a bright future. Last year we did a group research on 4 different shopping malls, exploring the functionality, architecture and heritage value. In an individual research I added one more shopping mall (winkelcentrum Schalkwijk) and visited a few more. During these studies and visits, the high amount of vacancy and empty corridors/shopping streets was shocking. And this was visible in almost all the researched malls with only a few exceptions, those were the high end malls situated in well connected areas or larger cities. The other malls are specifically designed as center of city expansions and mostly serve the surrounding neighborhoods.

With the large increase in online shopping and the covid pandemic, the consumer became more aware of the benefits of ordering products from home. Most of these neighborhood malls, like for example Schalkwijk, became more and more irrelevant in the past 20 years. There are already examples of shopping malls that are perishing step by step. In many cases to make way for residential buildings. This is happening in de Bogaard and Schalkwijk for example.

Thus there really is a need for change. For some malls it is an option to transform into a luxurious high end mall, but for many of the neighborhood malls this is undoable. There is no budget for such a transformation, and in many cases the demographics of the surrounding neighborhoods will point out that there won't be any more profit expected.

My design is a study to create a mix of functions and different zones to revitalize the shopping mall. With only one function of shopping the consumer can also stay at home. But with a wider variety of functions the mall will attract not only store visitors but also people who are seeking for entertainment, leisure, sports or all! So, what is the future of the shopping mall? No more endless corridors of different stores, the future shopping mall is more of an activity center where perhaps only half of the area is shopping mall, but for the most part it will be a mix of functions that stimulate people to leave the comfort of their home.

Movement patterns in the shopping mall (research)

2-what were/are answers of the defined research question and what hasn't been /couldn't be answered yet? The part that hasn't been answered can be (part) a future research.

In the research I looked at the movement behavior of the visitors of the mall, how this changed from its original concept to the current situation and how in future scenarios movement can be stimulated more. The two case studies for this research were de Bogaard and Schalkwijk. The results of the research shows that the movement behavior in both malls changed over time in a similar way. Both malls worked with the concept of having several anchor stores which would spread out the visitors evenly over the mall. In both malls some of the anchor stores became vacant and new establishments were added. In the current situation it is visible that now fast food stores and supermarkets can be considered as the new anchor stores. These are located next to each other in both case studies and the public is not interested in the remaining parts of the mall. It could however require more research

on how the original concept of both shopping malls worked out. This is now an assumption based on literature from 1970. Perhaps with visitor counting documents from around 1970 we could really know how the visitors were distributed in the mall.

The future part of the stimulation of movement is an interesting but large topic on its own. During the research the visitors were asked what would stimulate them to move to certain areas in the mall, but this was not enough to give a clear answer on this part of the research. There is much literature written on active design and how people can be stimulated in urban areas or buildings. This subject in combination with the shopping mall could require further research and could be seen as separate from the first part of my research 'movement patterns in the shopping mall'

Design case

In the design the focus was to transform the shopping mall into an active center where movement is stimulated and several sports can be practiced. The added functions are an attempt to revitalize the shopping mall. The design for the masterplan looks at two aspects of the mall: the transformation of the anchor stores and the multi use of the service court yards. In the Anchor stores are new functions added that are not shop functions but mostly sport related functions. The added functions are: A sports hall, multiple small dance/exercise rooms, flex work spaces, cafe, day care center, greenhouse cafe, a boxing school. With these new functions the anchor stores will have more to offer than just shopping and bring visitors in for additional reasons. This is an attempt to bring back the function of the anchor store. And create a lot of footfall at more than one spot in the mall.

The second part that is tested are the service courtyards. Those areas are currently only used for the delivering of goods and are empty for the rest of the day. It's a large hidden empty courtyard with some trash containers. These areas do have a lot of potential and are now unused. The goods are nowadays delivered in smaller amounts and smaller trucks so therefore this area is suitable for some changes. In the masterplan there are 3 of these service courtyards. Those will be transformed into 3 different themes: play, climb, and skate. In the final lay out of these courtyards it is important that all functions are still possible. There is enough room for the trucks, the containers will have locations, and the floor will be transformed in a playful element with different routes, and the climb, or skate functions are on locations that do not interfere with turning circles of the trucks.

In my design I selected a smaller area to test these transformations. Picking one anchor store and one courtyard to transform. I selected the former V&D and the allocating courtyard that will be transformed into a climbing area. In the V&D are several sports spaces added, flex work spaces, daycare and a rooftop cafe. On the ground floor the shop functions will remain.

I now only worked on 1 of the anchor stores and 1 of the courtyards, in further research by design the remaining 2 anchor stores and 2 courtyards could be investigated. Furthermore I looked at the reuse of elements in the old shopping mall which are in some cases very modular and suitable for reuse. I did however not reuse them as much as I initially wanted; this could also be something that could require further research.

Relation Research and design

The overall theme is movement. The movement patterns in the original concept have been a major guideline for the setup of the masterplan. The anchor stores were meant to distribute the visitors over the mall, since the anchor stores don't work like that anymore, the design attempts to bring these anchor stores back by adding the new popular functions in these locations. In the second part of my research there is looked at a guidelines on how to create active design. This can be done by for example ny making interesting routes and visible sports. This has become the main focus of my design. To make the sports spaces visible and accessible for the visitors and surrounding neighborhoods.

Recommendations

The recommendations I have when it comes to the design of a new shopping mall depends strongly on the location and the expected visitors. But in general I would say that especially in the Netherlands the shopping mall would not be the right term to use anymore. It should be considered more as a lively entertainment area where shops can be located and profit from the non shopping functions in the area. The concept of working with anchor stores is still working very well. The only thing is that now the anchor stores have changed from fashion stores to supermarkets or fast food restaurants. It is therefore essential to define what the new anchor stores will be and what they will bring to the 'mall'.

And then there is the decision on the future heritage of Dutch shopping malls. In many cases the public would not define a 80s shopping mall as heritage, they would rather have it demolished. But when the malls are further analyzed there can be found a lot of quality in the different elements of the mall. Many of the structures are overdimensioned and have a strong repetition that allows some building parts to be transformed into almost anything. In my design for example I fitted a large basketball court in the grid of a former department store.

Also with the many different owners and stakeholders in shopping malls, i would recommend to first look at certain building parts with high potential instead of demolishing the entire mall.

Personal perspective

Every studio at the faculty of architecture has a different setup and that is very noticeable also in the way we research and design. This studio really challenged me academically. Doing good research, or writing a paper, connecting the dots and making a story, that is something that I struggled with also during this studio. In this studio I learned how a guiding theme is essential for the process.

Another thing that was important during the studio is the academic foundation for all the steps we had to make during research and design. Everything should be explainable and resonated. I sometimes tend to design from fascination and the danger is that then good reasons for design steps are missing.

This is a way of thinking that is constantly evolving and probably never finished but my tutors during this studio helped me a lot with these struggles.