

“What do you have against nostalgia, eh? It is the only entertainment we have left for those who are wary of the future. The only one! Without rain, August is ending, September does not begin, and I am so ordinary.”

Romano’s Monologue, *The Great Beauty*, Paolo Sorrentino, 2014

Today, in the age of polycrisis, the urgent rethinking of the living patterns of our cities provokes in us a particular feeling of nostalgia. It is not so much the past that provokes it, but rather the future. The idea of a designable and tangible future is mixed with a past in which everything seemed possible, in which city models were functional and one was not afraid to design new ones. Instead of translating this feeling into distrust, we thought we would take it as a basis for proposing a nostalgic, but not arrier-garde model of the future, in a healthy balance between the needs of the present and the functioning of the existing.

Future cities and the nostalgia for sustainability

Etten-Leur is located within the North Brabant region, in a system marked by fragments of delta landscape with islands of greenery, alternating with a more agricultural landscape structured by the human hand given by land reclamation. The first aspect at the spatial scale level was to try to emphasize the connection and proximity to the river and the delta.

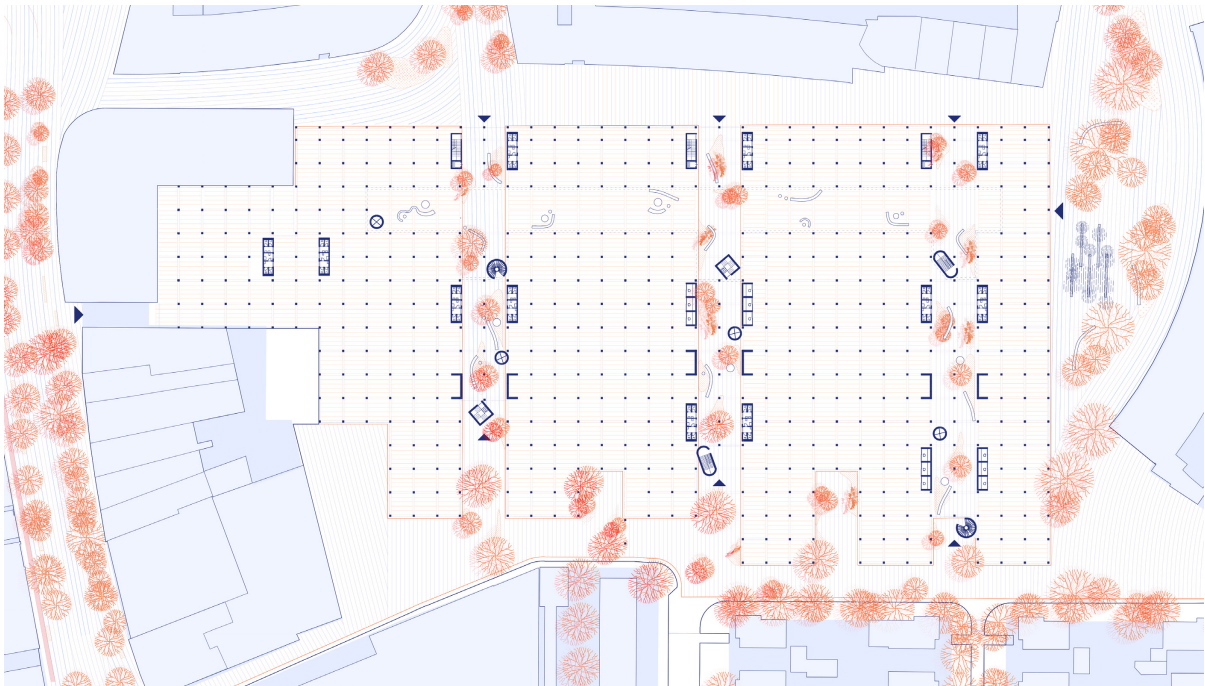
On the reflection-site we have developed an argument aimed at transforming the area into a superblock that functions as a fragment of the city of

the age of future nostalgia. What does this future nostalgia translate into? In a strategy that leads to a gradual elimination of cars and parking within the reflection site through planned densification and a strengthening of soft mobility.

The size and nature of the surrounding street loop, together with the areas it intercepts, make it a perfect cluster for our strategic intervention. On the left, the historic street, with a wide road section, is already quite defined, but we have tried to rethink its road section as a large continuous public space. Conversely, the other side of the loop is a much less dense and more residential area, and for it we tried to turn it into a large green public infrastructure. Closing the loop are the station street and the street in the Winkelcentrum area, our project site.

For densification and point interventions, we identified potential areas of urban void to be transformed. The first was to identify a series of ground parking lots to be transformed into multi-story building-parks, so as to regain public space in their place and construct a building that, as the need for cars is gradually overcome, can then be rethought as forms of collective housing and hybrid living and working space. The strategies develops in three approaches “on top”, “in between” and “on void”. The first prototype of “on top” densification is our project at the Winkelcentrum shopping center, where large commercial structures are reused and, through the intervention of an addition, activated as hybrid infrastructure suitable for housing and community spaces. The second “on void” approach, on the other hand, reclaims the huge parking lots; the first step is to reactivate them through a hybrid urban design that does not relegate them





only to parking spaces, but also makes them usable as playgrounds, and public spaces and urban green spaces. The next step is to introduce flexible structures that can first provide the necessary parking and later be used as a framework for housing. The final “in-between” approach is to break up large private courtyards by retrofitting and fragmenting gardens into smaller human spaces. The size and nature of the surrounding street loop, together with the areas it intercepts, make it a perfect cluster for our strategic intervention. On the left, the historic street, with a wide road section, is already quite defined, but we have tried to rethink its road section as a large continuous public space, structured and organized landscaping echoes the agricultural genius loci of Etten Leur’s surroundings. Conversely, the other side of the loop is a much less dense and more residential area, and for it we tried to turn it into a large green public infrastructure. Reminiscent of the green of the Delta forest, we have created functional public annexes to the main road. Closing the loop are the station street and the street in the Winkelcentrum area, our project site. The latter is what was then explored further for the project site that envisioned the future of Winkelcentrum.

From L to S: a tale of nostalgic future cities

The current shopping center is located in a strategic area for our intervention, yet it nevertheless manifests itself in the forms of large urban fill that does not create a real form of urbanity in its presence. The initial guiding idea was to transform the large Winkelcentrum lot into a real fragment of the city

of Etten-Leur, taking up its characteristic morphologies and breaking up its large volume with a series of uncovered interior streets. The stiffer, fuller front is accompanied by a back in which the volumes created in elevation follow a variable pattern and reconnect with the minute fabric at the back. Similarly, the density of life lived in the building mirrors the morphological trend, with the collective functions mainly leaning against the main street and the more private ones toward the outside.

The volume was broken up with a series of open interior streets in which to make the natural development of the city continue, which could then continue in the covered spaces in the form of a gallery. Similarly, on the upper floor, the open spaces follow the logic of the traditional street as a meeting



place and lived life. The volume was also excavated at various points creating small squares that would ensure the penetration of the natural element within the project lot, creating tree-lined urban spaces for the city. At the environmental level, the openness of the building and the inclusion of vegetation is a key element in mitigating the formation of Urban Heat Island as well as ensuring greater livability of the lot.

As for the superelevation, it was decided to carry out a structural consolidation on the existing mesh of reinforced concrete pillars, unified in its entirety to the 5.5 x 5.5 m module. In addition to reinforcing subfoundations, it was planned to add coated steel capitals to support the upper structure that grafts onto the existing building. The upper structure is a simple lightweight steel and modular frame, allowing for progressive and adaptable construction. This dichotomy is also clearly visible in the treatment of materials: while the ground level block to the outside is more massive, the interior facades are already only connoted by pillars and glazing, while the upper block is integrally connoted by a light and vibrant structure.

Future commerce: the nostalgia of flexibility

The rethinking of the mall's commercial spaces started, as mentioned, from the idea of transforming commerce again into an experience of strolling and meeting and not just shopping: from man understood as a pure consumer to man as a social animal.

The structure of the ground floor is thought of as an isotropic grid of pillars connoted by a series of fixed elements, namely: the roof openings, i.e., the open space; the location of the rising bodies, i.e., stairs and elevators; and the location of service cores such

as bathrooms and warehouses. Beyond this fixed structure opens up a world of possibilities according to which to organize the internal partitions of the stores for which we have proposed three different solutions.

Option number 1 is more regular and traditional, with a typical partition between small-scale, medium-scale and large-scale stores, following the gait of pillars and commercial open space. The second option is the confetti plan, in which stores are dispersed in the isotropic grid space each with its own store of different morphologies and sizes. Finally, the third option, that of the blob, as a total example of flexibility that does not follow the dictates of the grid and superimposes itself on it, proposing differentiated retail elements. All three solutions respect the required reduction of retail space in the range of 20-30%.

This continuous flexibility is the element that makes it possible to find the right match between urban scale and the continually evolving needs of contemporary society. The permanent element of the city does not clash with the proposed changing functional and living needs, but is the matrix on which the various social and collective changes are grafted.

Future living: nostalgia of living together

The elevation built above the existing shopping center is intended primarily for living and semi-public spaces, which are reached through the collective spaces on the upper first floor and those on the gallery. The living spaces were all conceived based on a basic service core that included the main bathroom and kitchen plant installations. From them, in an interplay of modular recombination, the different housing types were determined,





distinguished into single dwellings, realized in the transverse elements, and co-housing, realized in the long longitudinal linear building together with the urban condenser that provides the collective spaces on the upper floor, intensifying the life lived along the outer edge of the lot.

The T1 typology is mainly designed intended for singles, with limited living space needs, being composed of living and sleeping areas. The T2 typology, either in its simple variant or in its duplex variant is mainly designed for young couples, with or without a child, who may need those extra living spaces in their daily life. The T3 typology is mainly aimed, both in its simple variant and in its duplex variant, at large families who need large spaces. Finally, co-housing, concerns more forms of people who need housing of a more temporary nature, but still want a collective and shared life: young workers, students, singles. The great strength of the system is the complete modularity of the intervention, ergo the possibility of deciding the distribution of housing according to the demands of the citizenry, depending on the needs that evolve over time. In our case, however, a potential combination was proposed that would provide about 223 housing units (121 T1, 37 T2, 29 T3, 36 COHOUSING) within the indication of 200-300 request.

The varied section of the dwellings is the result of the potential total modularity, thus producing a strong difference in sectional elevations, thus opening up the presence of public spaces even at the level of large shared and collective terraces. The common spaces on the upper floor are seen as a continuation of urban life that continues on the upper floors as well, producing interaction both in

the public spaces between the two slats of dwellings, in the terraces within the individual element, and in the collective spaces conceived in the urban condenser.

Finally, the strength of this system is the potential to realize it in phases, depending on the needs and possibilities of the client. In the proposed scheme, it is planned to first carry out the structural retrofit in the outermost part, facing the street front of the lot, and then continue in a second phase in the innermost area. Once the rethinking of the commercial space is completed, we can proceed with the elevation, which in our idea will begin with the main longitudinal element and will be followed by the series of transverse elements, which can be realized in sequence from time to time according to the variable needs of the client.

