

Delft University of Technology
MSc Architecture, Urbanism and Building Sciences
Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment

Connecting the Dots

Regulating circulation to strengthen local identity and foster social cohesion

Public Building Graduation Studio

Student: Francini Laufer Schuh | 6048900

Supervisors: Henk Bultstra and ir. Sien van Dam

Contents

PART 1 Introduction	8
Problem statement.....	8
Relevance	8
Objective and motivation.....	9
Research and Design questions	9
Scope	10
PART 2 Approach	11
Methods	11
Theoretical framework.....	11
PART 3 Results	13
Contextual analysis.....	13
Design results	15
PART 4 Conclusions and discussion	41
Conclusion	41
Implications and recommendations.....	42
Reflections	42
References	44

Foreword

The Province of Groningen, located to the north of the Netherlands, is shaped by a rich history of agriculture, trade, interaction with water, and more recently, energy extraction. For decades, the discovery and exploitation of natural gas defined Groningen's economic trajectory, contributing significantly to national prosperity while deeply influencing the region's spatial, social, and economic structures. But this history has also left important challenges. Demographic pressures, uneven economic development and seismic activity associated with gas extraction, have affected trust, wellbeing, and prospects for many communities across the province.

A recent annual update of the regional Broad Prosperity Monitor (regionale Monitor Brede Welvaart - rMBW), from Statistics Netherlands – CBS, revealed that broad prosperity in Groningen remains below the national average in all municipalities, despite an improvement on many indicators. Material prosperity is the aspect with lowest score, potentially due to lower disposable income, increase in households with problematic debt and a poverty rate that is higher than average. The province also stays behind in terms of health: self-perceived health is decreasing, obesity is more common and more people have long-term conditions¹. Simultaneously, Groningen faces a demographic challenge. Figure 1 shows that the percentage of young people is decreasing, while that of older people is increasing. The aging and declining population puts pressure on amenities, labour market and healthcare².

Ontgroening en vergrijzing in Groningen, 2014-2024

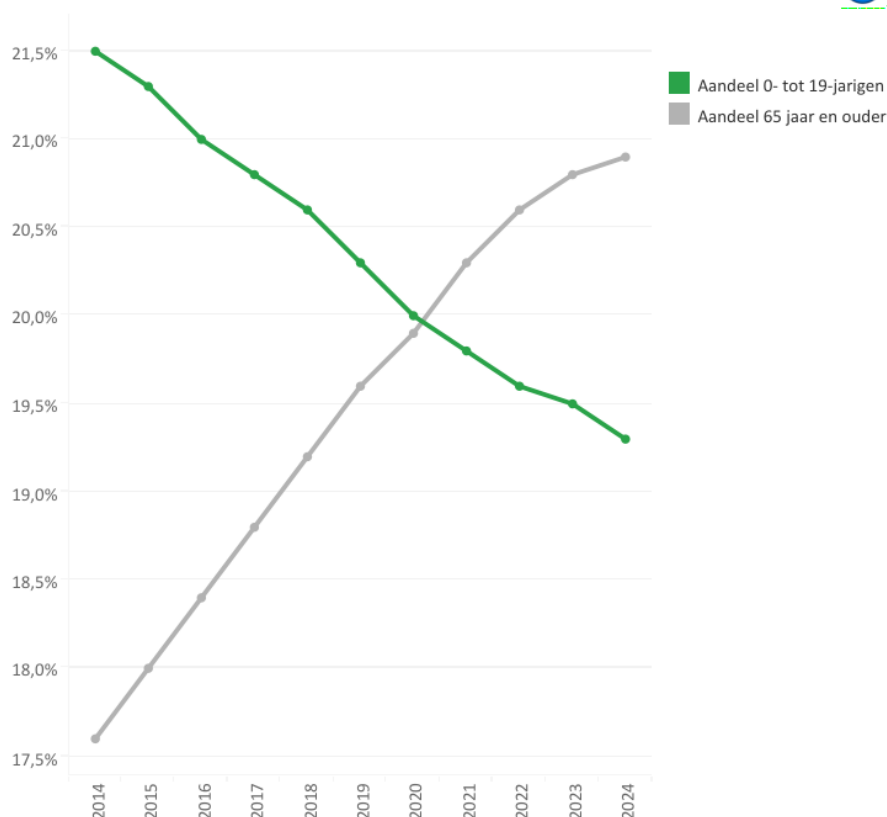


Figure 1 | Groningen's demographic trends 2014-2024 (Sociaal Planbureau Groningen, 2025)

Since the discovery of the Slochteren gas field in 1959, Groningen's economy and landscape were dominated for decades by gas extraction, which played an important role in the Dutch welfare state and European energy supply but also caused social and environmental consequences, including more than one thousand earthquakes, physical damage to buildings, stress and health problems for residents³. Figure 2 illustrates the impact caused by this practice. In 1993, the publication of a report by Begeleidingscommissie Onderzoek Aardbevingen (BOA), in which they concluded that earthquakes can be induced by gas extraction⁴, the awareness of the impacts of this action grew and led to gradual reduction of production until permanent closure of the gas field in 2024⁵.

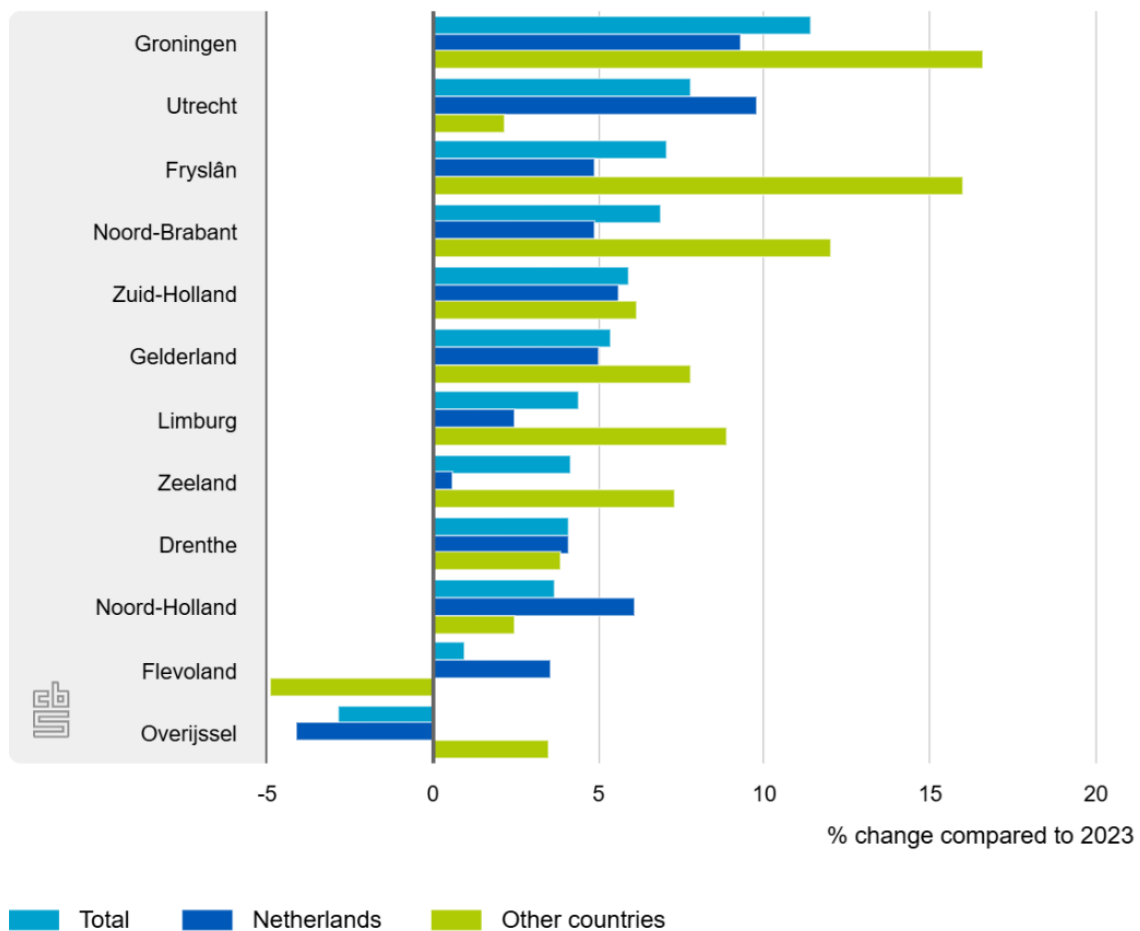


Figure 2 | The damage caused by gas extraction in Groningen (Parlementaire Enquêtecommissie Aardgawinning Groningen, 2024)

Today, Groningen is at an important turning point. As gas extraction comes to an end, the region is redefining its identity and economic foundations. This transition is not only technical or economic, but profoundly social: it concerns health, quality of life, opportunities for younger generations, and the long-term resilience of local communities. In this context came to life *Nij Begun*: a multi-decade response of the Dutch government to the impact of gas extraction, aiming to address the physical, social and economic consequences experienced by the region of Groningen and North Drenthe, framing their future as a 'new beginning'. The program is structured around agendas that encompass relevant actions seeking, above all, to regenerate this community in multiple areas by 2056, including health and quality of life, opportunities for new generations, and energy transition^{6, 7, 8, 9}.

Based on recent data showing that the province is attracting a growing number of visitors (Figure 3), both national and international, the program also invests on tourism and leisure as catalysts for strong economic development and lasting social cohesion. In 2024, the province had 900.000 overnight visitors, an increase of 11% compared to 2023, and the largest provincial growth in the country¹⁰. This growth is expected to continue, also because of the strong support from policies, such as the strategic vision for 2021-2030¹¹, the planned investments in infrastructure¹² and the attention given to the leisure economy (*vrijtijdseconomie*) on the Nij Begun program.

Holiday guests in the Netherlands, 2024*



* provisional figures

Figure 3 | Holiday guests in the Netherlands in 2024 (CBS, 2025)

This graduation project, therefore, departs from this agenda to initiate the conversations about the future of tourism in Groningen which, together with the other goals of the program, will revitalize the economy and strengthen social cohesion in the region.

Reading guide

This report is structured in three parts. It begins with an introductory section, establishing the problem addressed, the relevance of the subject and the goals to be achieved. In addition, this section defines the scope of the design and the research questions to be answered on the last part. The second part refers to the approach, describing the methods applied on the research process and the theoretical framework that supports it. The third and last part clarifies the results obtained and the conclusions drawn from them, with additional recommendations and reflections on the research process.

Abstract

Following the closing of its gas field, which induced earthquakes that caused harm to people and buildings over the years, the province of Groningen, through the program *Nij Begun*, is at a turning point, investing on tourism as a way of revitalizing its social and economic welfare. This new beginning (as *Nij Begun* suggests) requires a balance between increasing tourism and local community needs. Therefore, this project aims to propose the design of an activity center in the village of Winsum that uses tourism as a driver for socio-economic healing and social cohesion and that strengthens the local identity.

By means of a Research-by-design approach that combines theoretical studies and design experimentations through analytical, comparative, and representational tools, the project works upon hybridity, multiplicity, circulation and regionalist architecture to achieve its goals. In exploring an architecture of regionalism, the design departs from the specific characteristics of the building terrain, resulting on four buildings that frame different visuals of the landscape and, in some cases, reinterpret historical landscape formations. In the same respect, the design incorporates local and bio-based materials. A terracotta pathway connects the different buildings, creating a journey throughout the landscape that promotes the overlapping of paths of tourists and locals, generating spontaneous interactions between them.

Ultimately, the design demonstrates how architecture can go beyond merely accommodating functions, being in fact a powerful tool to strengthen economy and identity in vulnerable communities. It proves that contemporary regionalism can honour a landscape without replicating historical styles and that careful orchestration of circulation can foster social cohesion.

PART 1 | Introduction

Problem statement

The province of Groningen is at a turning point in its economic and social structure, following the closing of its gas field, which induced earthquakes that caused harm to people and buildings over the years. Under the government's program *Nij Begun*, a significant focus is being placed on tourism as a way of revitalizing the region's social welfare state, aiming to attract 1.5 million more visitors annually compared to 2025 and to double the length of stay in the region. Seeking to strengthen its identity and economy, the province looks for ways of elevating the touristic experience in the region.

However, Groningen's tourism potential is currently hindered by a lack of amenities and an overall negative image drawn by the induced earthquakes, often related to poverty and loss. While featuring varied and distinctive landscapes, with its coast lying along UNESCO's World Heritage Wadden Sea, and having its history well-preserved in regional museums, these places are currently fragmented, and the region lacks sufficient supporting amenities to ensure a cohesive and engaging tourist experience, such as overnight accommodation, dining options, and points for information and guidance.

Thus, the challenge lies in tying sites across the region into an attractive touristic experience, while unifying local community and tourists, creating a space that not only serves visitors, but also provides for the needs of Groningen's people, empowering their economic and social development, and bringing back pride over their place.

Relevance

This project is relevant because it questions three important dualities nowadays and how they can be unified. The first is the local community of Groningen which is under pressure in several aspects – both social and economic, as well as physical and psychological – and its search for hope of a better future. Believing in tourism as the driver for this new future, the project addresses the relationship between the leisure economy and the revitalization of local communities.

The touristic development of a region immediately raises another duality: the interaction between local community and tourists. Taking the public building as the connector and mediator between these two groups, the project addresses the role of hybrid and multifunctional spaces in social cohesion among users.

The third duality stems directly from the second: the interaction between users and places and how they experience the local culture. Groningen has landscapes of significant value, which besides their attractiveness for tourism, represent the identity of the region and demand preservation. Thus, the project explores how architecture can be rooted in its context, preserving its historical structures and cultures, and how users can be connected to this local richness.

In short, the project questions the role of the built environment as a connector of points: (re)connecting a community with its native province, connecting different users to each other, and connecting users with the surrounding environment.

Objective and motivation

This project aims to conceive a public building in the province of Groningen that strengthens economically and socially the local community through tourism. Reimagining public buildings as multifunctional spaces where locals and visitors interact all year round, this project aims to become a place for the use of the local community and for services and attractions for tourists which, in turn, generate new job opportunities in the leisure sector and revenue for local entrepreneurs. In this way, the project aims to act as an activator that elevates the local community and retains local talents, while attracting tourists from inside and outside the Netherlands.

In addition, the project seeks to explore how architecture can help strengthen the identity of a place and a people and foster deeper connections among individuals and of individuals with the surrounding landscape. Simultaneously, the design should embrace sustainability aspects as much as possible, that will act upon reducing its environmental impact and carbon footprint.

I have a special interest in this subject because exploring the possibilities of a multifunctional public building that empowers locals while serving external visitors is an important challenge to embrace nowadays, especially in a context of increasing tourism worldwide and, particularly in Groningen, in this context of vulnerability and shifting in the economy in a post-gas reality. In this rapidly changing society that increasingly pressures the environment and people's health, designing public spaces that promote deeper connections between people and nature offers a new perspective towards what architecture can represent in a contemporary world, promoting well-being and positive social impact.

Research and Design questions

Main design question:

How can we design a public building that promotes social cohesion between local community and tourists, while strengthening local identity and economy?

Sub questions:

How can a public building hybridize functions for locals and tourists?

How can local community and visitors interact?

How can a public building act upon the local identity of a place?

How can a public building promote economic regeneration?

Scope

The project takes place in Winsum, a village located 13km north of the city of Groningen and 10km south of the Wadden Sea (both on a straight-line distance). Its location between the capital and the sensitive coastal area shows great potential to become a subtle entry point for tourists to the more fragile northern landscape, and a hub for activities in the surrounding landscape. Winsum currently attracts several visitors because of its historical monuments, its wide connection to water and for being on the route of the Pieterpad, the most famous and iconic hiking trail in the Netherlands. Its connection by public transport and roads with the capital Groningen, the port of Eemshaven and the Lauwersmeer National Park also facilitate its access by tourists from within and outside the Netherlands.

The building site, an existing recreation park known as Marenland, currently hosts most of the village's visitors at its installations, offering amenities such as camping site, restaurant, cabins and outdoor recreational activities. Its position along the Winsumerdiep canal favors water-related activities and its location between the historical city center and wide-open grass fields offers stunning views of the landscape. In addition, the place also benefits from its strategic position within the Pieterpad route, which is a tourism magnet that already attracts most of the visitors.

These characteristics make this a unique place to house an Activity Hub where tourists and local communities belong together, providing facilities for both publics. The center has tourist information point, hotel, camp site, small local shops, workshop and meeting rooms, a small library with study and workspaces, exhibition spaces and event halls, in addition to restaurants, cafés and outdoor recreational activities.

PART 2 | Approach

Methods

The project applies a Research-by-design approach, which combines theoretical studies and design experimentations through analytical, comparative, and representational tools. It involves individual and collective assignments that progress into phases that overlap and inform one another. The combination of analogue and digital techniques helps investigating the nature of the contemporary public building, understood as a mediator between space and program, image and materials, people and environment.

The first phase focuses on contextual research on the province of Groningen, its history with gas extraction and the socio-economic challenges addressed by the Nij Begun agenda. This research informs the definition of the project's programmatic direction. In parallel, a group analysis of Winsum and its surroundings observes aspects such as Accessibility, Adaptability, Ecology, Memory, Past, present and future, and the tourist profile in the region, resulting in a collectively produced 3D tourist map identifying the village's qualities and potentials as a touristic hub. This analysis is complemented by a site visit to Winsum, resulting in spatial observations documented in videos, photos, and interviews with local stakeholders. Additional individual research on the region's landscape and its historical development helps understanding its current physical characteristics, resulting on a vision for tourism in the region and for Winsum as a touristic hub.

The second phase consists of the elaboration of the design, guided by hybridity and multiplicity. Hybridity allows programmatic and formal reinterpretations of public buildings, while multiplicity ensures the interconnection of elements such as aesthetics, program, construction and technology on the same process. Furthermore, circulation and architecture of regionalism are taken as guides for the design, exploring how these concepts can act upon local identity and social cohesion. Theories, case studies and references are studied throughout the design process, and all observations and conclusions of all phases are documented on a Research-by-design booklet, an inventory of the resulting analytical maps, diagrams, technical drawings, and digital and physical modelling.

Theoretical framework

Groningen is on a vulnerable and transitional phase, dealing with the consequences of the induced earthquakes. In a context of lack of perspective and negative images associated with the gas extraction legacy, local identity and pride are directly affected. Counteracting this reality, the activity center in Winsum comes as a strengthener of Groningen's local identity, which is intimately linked to its historical landscape and people's interaction with it. In 'Ten points of an architecture of regionalism: a provisional polemic', Kenneth Frampton¹³ argues that a regionalist architecture should not copy traditional styles, but use elements such as the terrain, the climate, the culture and local materials to create contemporary architecture that is rooted in its context. According to him, good architecture dialogues with the terrain/landscape and does not ignore it. Therefore, the building in Winsum responds to the terrain in Marenland, either in zoning as well as form and materialization, responding to the geography of the terrain

and views of the surroundings, and using locally sourced materials, thus strengthening local identity.

Building upon hybridity in architecture, hybrid buildings are characterized by the integration of different uses on the same project, but the concept goes beyond the mere allocation of multiple functions under the same structure, it refers also to the integration of different users, different management and different developers, creating an ensemble of distinct users, schedules and programs¹⁴. Hybrid buildings are also said to intentionally wave programs together to make individuals cross paths and share energy¹⁵. Thus, this project explores this intertwining of distinct users and programs not only by allocating multiple functions into the same space, but by organizing them in ways that paths taken by different users overlap, creating moments of unexpected encounter and spontaneous interaction.

To elaborate on the concept of circulation, the project builds upon the theory of the *Promenade Architecturale*, created by Le Corbusier in the 1920s, which addresses the experience of moving through the built environment through a journey that would offer multiple perspectives of the building and, sometimes, take them from the entrance on the ground floor to a roof garden, as exemplified by his designs of the Villa La Roche (1925) and Villa Savoye (1929)¹⁶. In the present design, a journey is created across the terrain by connecting buildings that house distinct programmatic functions. This journey between buildings and the circulation inside them create a sequence of spaces that offer a multiplicity of perspectives of the terrain and the landscape around it. The entire circulation provides for the framing of views or the visual and physical connection between spaces that create the totality of the experience.

These concepts provide the backbone for the design of the Activity Hub in Winsum, which is further elaborated and explained on the following section.

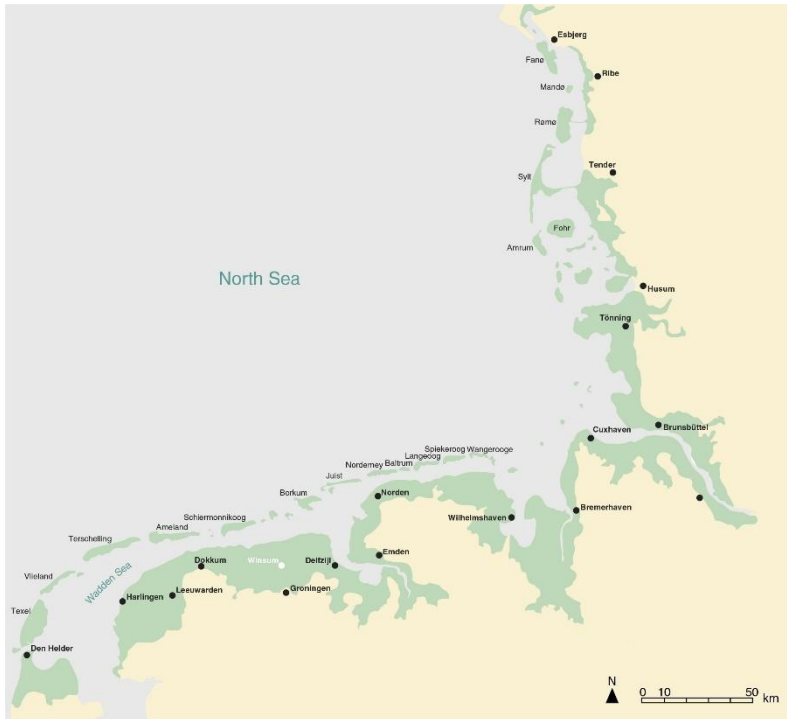


Figure 6: Wadden Sea Region Map. Adapted from *Waddenzee - Waddenland: historische verkenningen rond de geografische identiteit en begrenzing van het internationale waddengebied* (p. 23), by M. Schroor, 2008, Raad voor de Wadden [Reproduced by author].

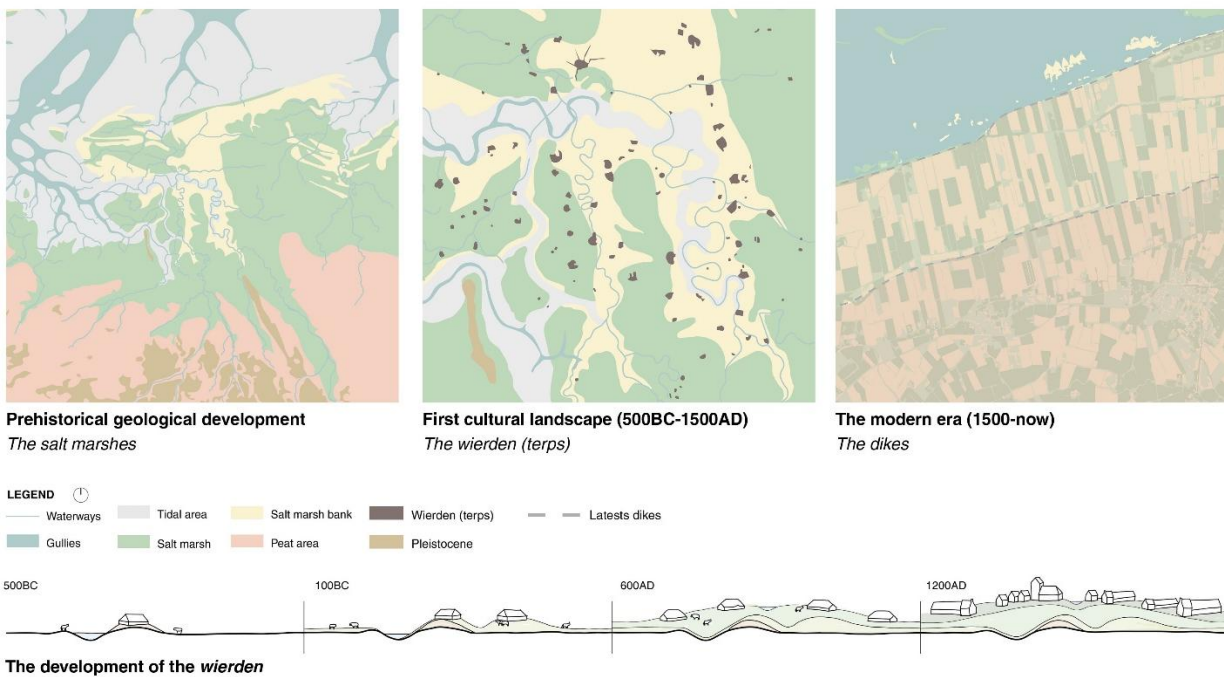


Figure 7: historical development of the landscape in northern Groningen

Design results

The main goal of this project of strengthening local identity departs from one of the principles of a regionalist architecture advocated by Kenneth Frampton: to never ignore the terrain. Therefore, the building site at Marenland is explored as a whole, where each zone is considered carefully when allocating the programmatic functions (Figure 8). Water, greenery,

sun, views, accesses and existing buildings are taken into consideration when allocating the program and deriving forms.

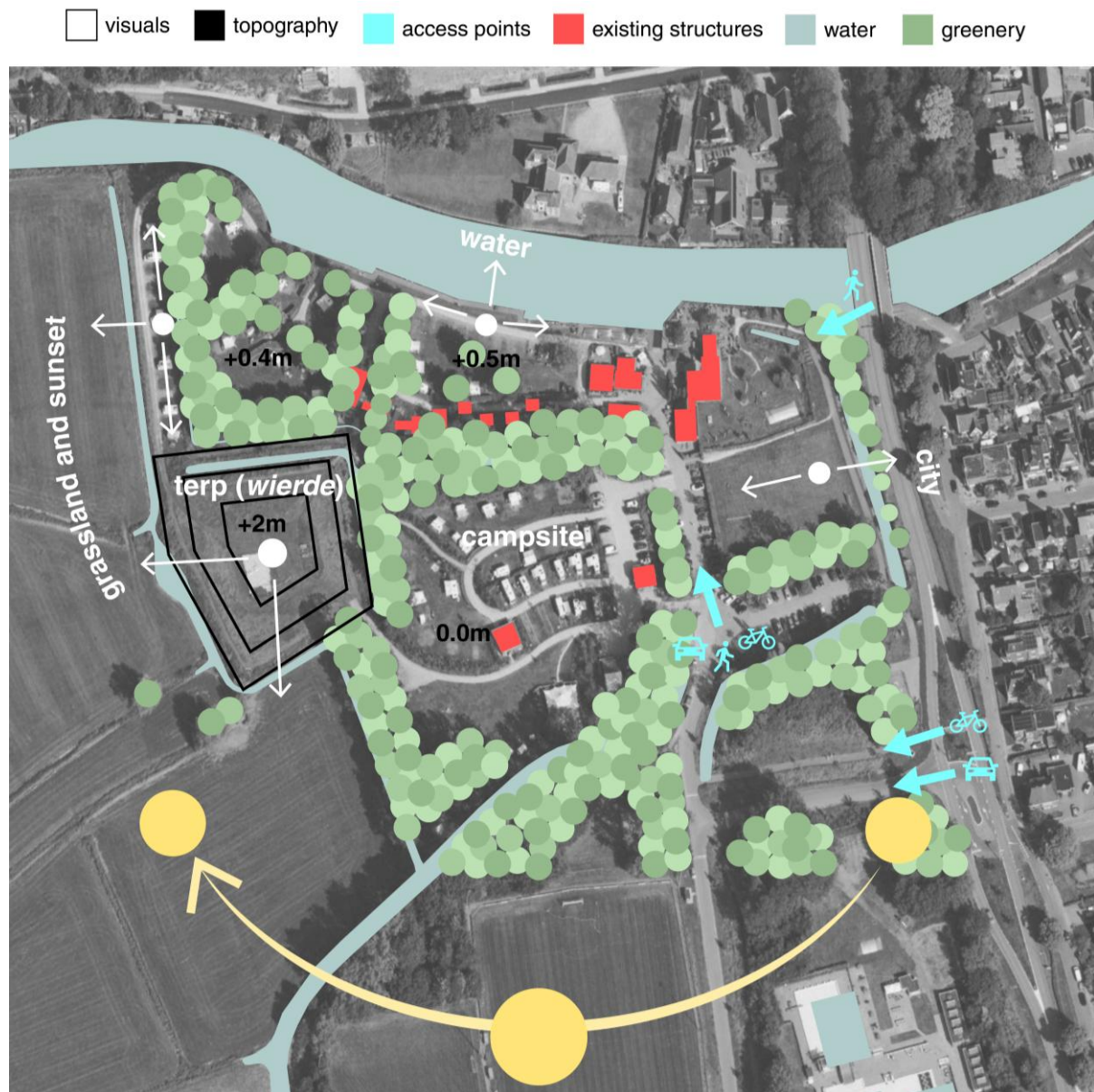


Figure 8: Overview of the terrain

Marenland Activity Center

Building upon the concept of hybrid buildings as entities where not only different functions are placed together, but as spaces where multiple users with multiple schedules cross paths, the program is spread across the site in four different locations (Figure 9), intertwining audiences outside when transitioning from one place to the other and inside of the buildings when using the services.

First, there is the arrival zone that connects to the main pedestrian and vehicle entrances. This zone also connects to the main existing buildings of the site. This building is intended to be a small hub of useful services for people entering the park, either coming from the Pieterpad route or coming by car. There they find tourist information point, public toilets, souvenir and outdoor wear shops and a small grocery shop. Besides the value that these amenities have for the visitor experience, this is where the building acts in favour of the local economy, generating jobs and new business opportunities.

The second zone is the campsite where an observation tower is located. Besides its scenic purpose of providing views of the surrounding landscape from above, this tower also accommodates toilets and showers that support the camp site around. By placing it in the middle of the camp, every individual climbing the tower is brought closer to the people on the camping.

The third zone is where the activity center is located. This is the main building of the entire complex and it houses a wide variety of functions. Event and lecture halls, workshop and meeting rooms, a small library with work and study spaces, exhibition rooms, a large restaurant and an outdoor activities hub ensure that local community and tourists have opportunities for leisure and personal development, while fostering social cohesion between groups that are encouraged to interact all year round.

The fourth zone houses a small hotel that adds a different form of accommodation to Marenland, which already offers cabins and camping spots. Besides the hotel rooms, this zone has collective areas with picnic tables that encourage mingling and a cafe that is open to everyone. Between the first and the fourth zones, extending along the Winsumerdiep, there is a large marina with an extensive wooden deck (Figure 10).

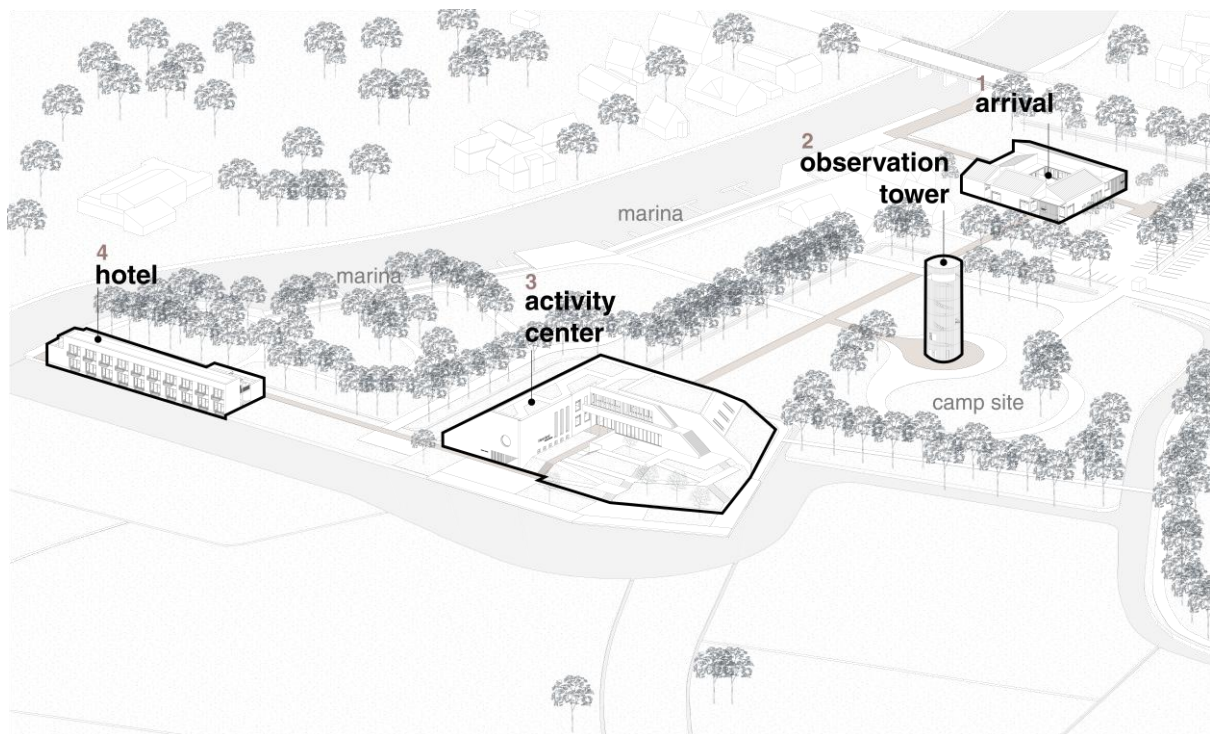


Figure 9: Axonometric view of the terrain with the four zones/buildings



Figure 10: Site plan | 1:550

As in the well-known game Connect the Dots, the four zones are connected by a pathway that creates a sensorial journey across the site offering multiple perspectives of the landscape and opportunities of interaction among individuals. Referring to the idea of the *promenade architecturale* of LeCorbusier, this journey involves not only the circulation between buildings, but also inside them, where the routing guides into spaces that connect to each other and provide multiple perspectives of outdoors and indoors. To accentuate the experience of the journey connecting the buildings, the pathway is paved with red/terracotta clay bricks, a very local material that reinforces the identity of Groningen (Figures 11 and 12). To create the continuity of the path inside the buildings but still differentiate between inside and outside, the inner floors are covered with a red/terracotta tinted micro cement.

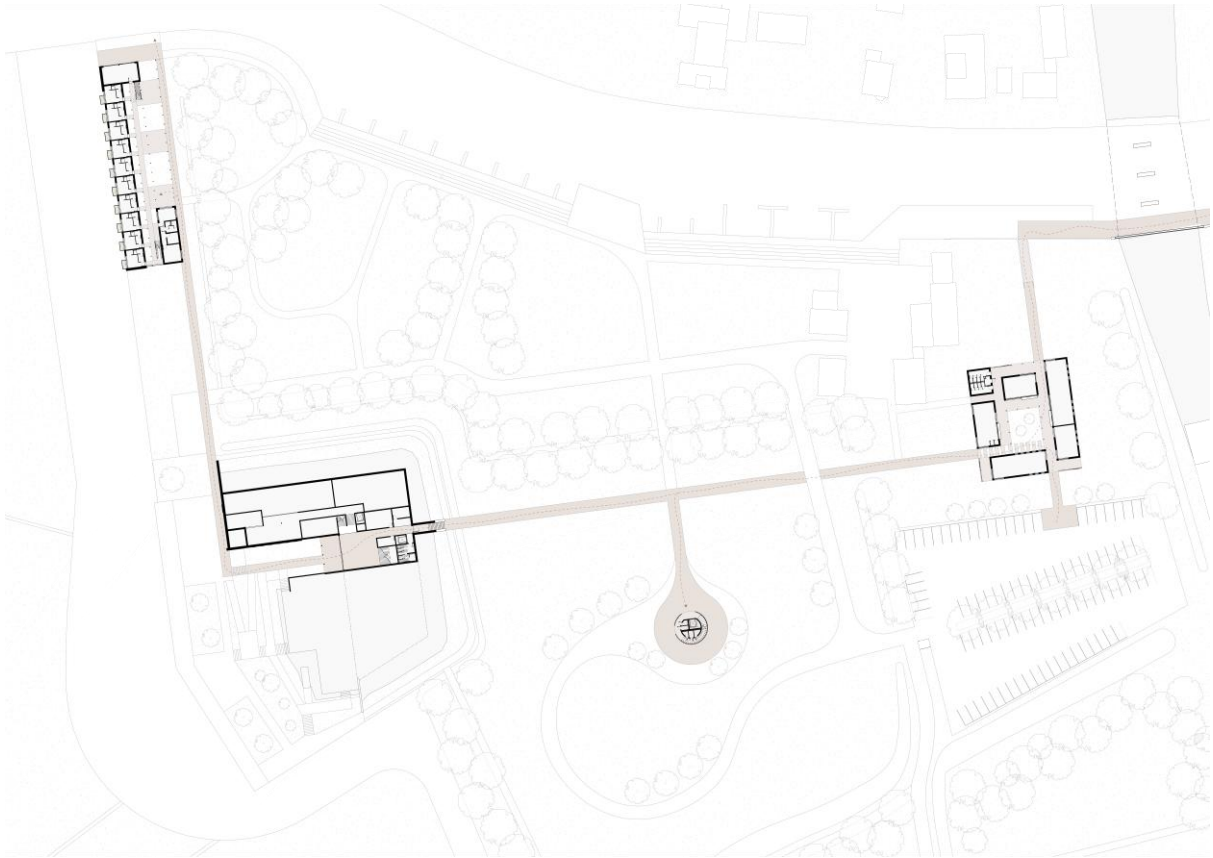


Figure 11: The red pathway extends through the buildings with the same shade of pavement



Figure 12: The pathway going from the entrance to the activity center

Every building also has a specific design, considering the zone where they are located, the experiences they should create and the way individuals are supposed to move through them. In terms of materiality, the choice is for using as much local materials as possible, rooting the buildings to the location and representing the identity of the region. Material choices are also influenced by sustainability ambitions, aiming to reduce carbon footprint. Overall, the choice is made for a timber structure of glulam columns and beams and CLT floor, wrapped on insulating hemp blocks (grown and produced locally). Since hempcrete requires protection from water, facades are clad with fraké wooden slats, varying between burned wood, natural oil treated wood or pre-weathered wood. The building that houses the activity center has a roof made of reed, which is a common material in the Netherlands and is grown locally.

The arrival

This building is conceived as a small-scale reception hub with services organized around a courtyard. Each part of the program is placed into a single-pitched roof block, and all five blocks are connected by a covered walkway that surrounds the courtyard. The entrances (of which there are three) are marked by shifting some of the blocks, creating recesses that are also covered by the roof of the walkway. The pathways coming from outside (village center, parking lot or camping) extend directly into the courtyard. Figures 13 to 18 illustrate the building.

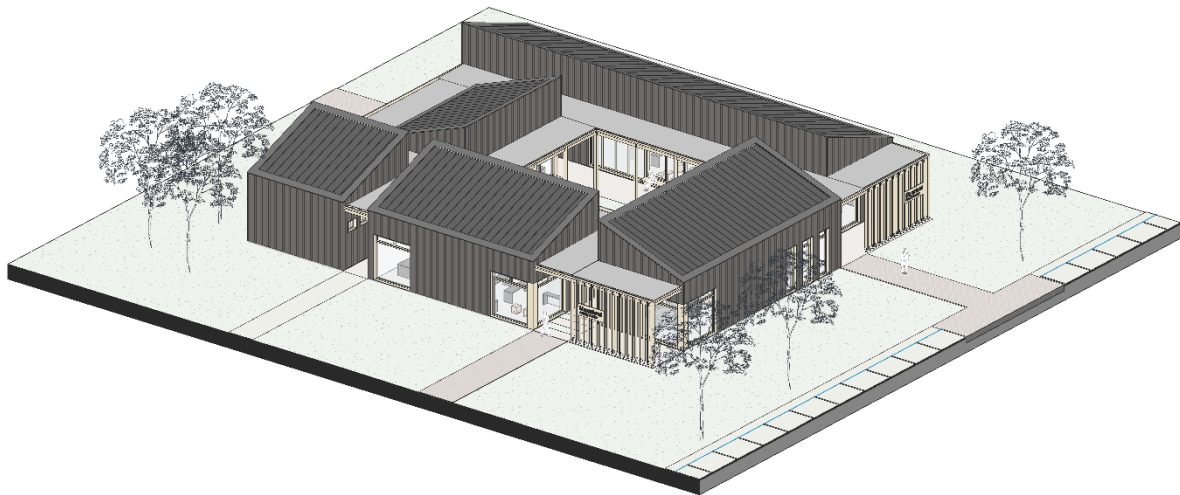


Figure 13: Axonometric view



Figure 14: Elevation | 1:200



Figure 15: Section B1_1 | 1:200

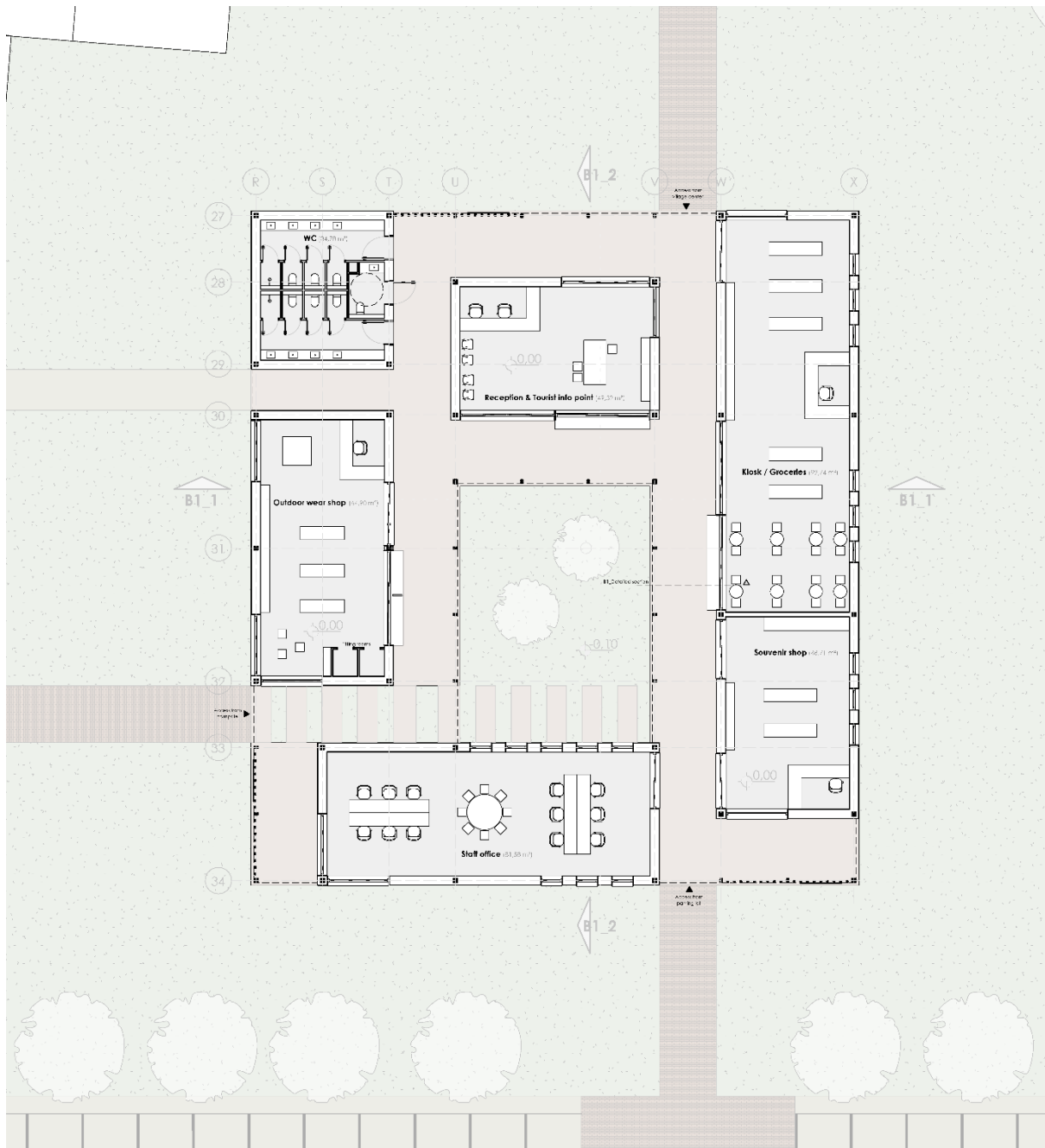


Figure 16: Ground floor plan | 1:200



Figure 17: Impression of the building when coming from the village center



Figure 18: Impression of the inner courtyard

The tower

The observation tower, seen in figures 19 to 24, is designed as a cylinder with spiral staircases leading to the top floor (5th level) where the wide grass fields and the village can be seen from above. The building has a concrete core with an elevator for accessibility, and this core holds part of the steel structure that supports the stairs and the wooden lamellas of the outer facade.

The outer facade is open, clad with wooden lamellas that provide full connection with the exterior along the route. Yet, every level offers a stop where an opening on the facade frames a specific angle of the site.

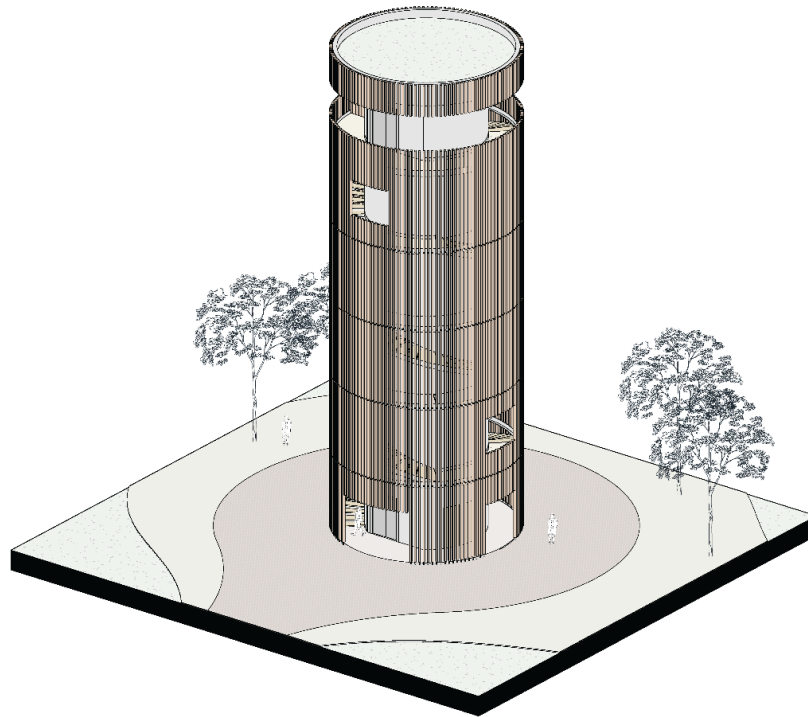


Figure 19: Axonometric view

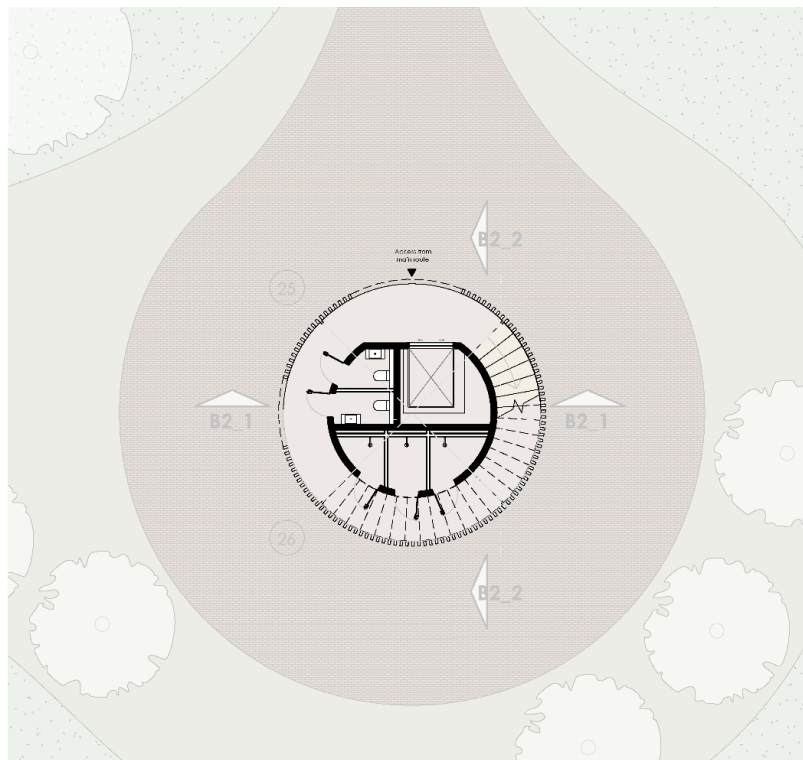


Figure 20 Ground floor plan | 1:200

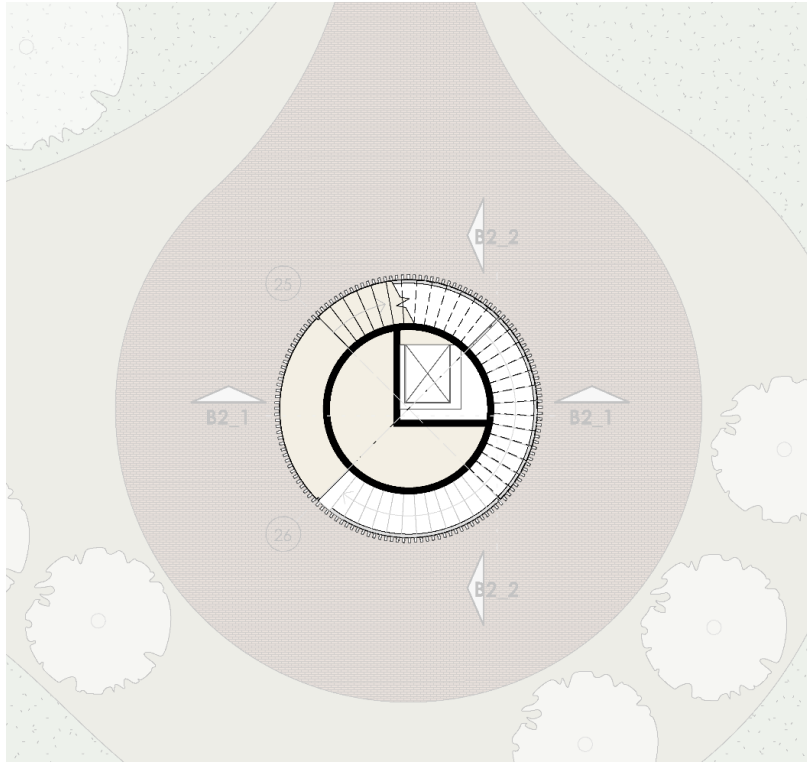


Figure 21: Level 1 floor plan (same in floors above) | 1:200

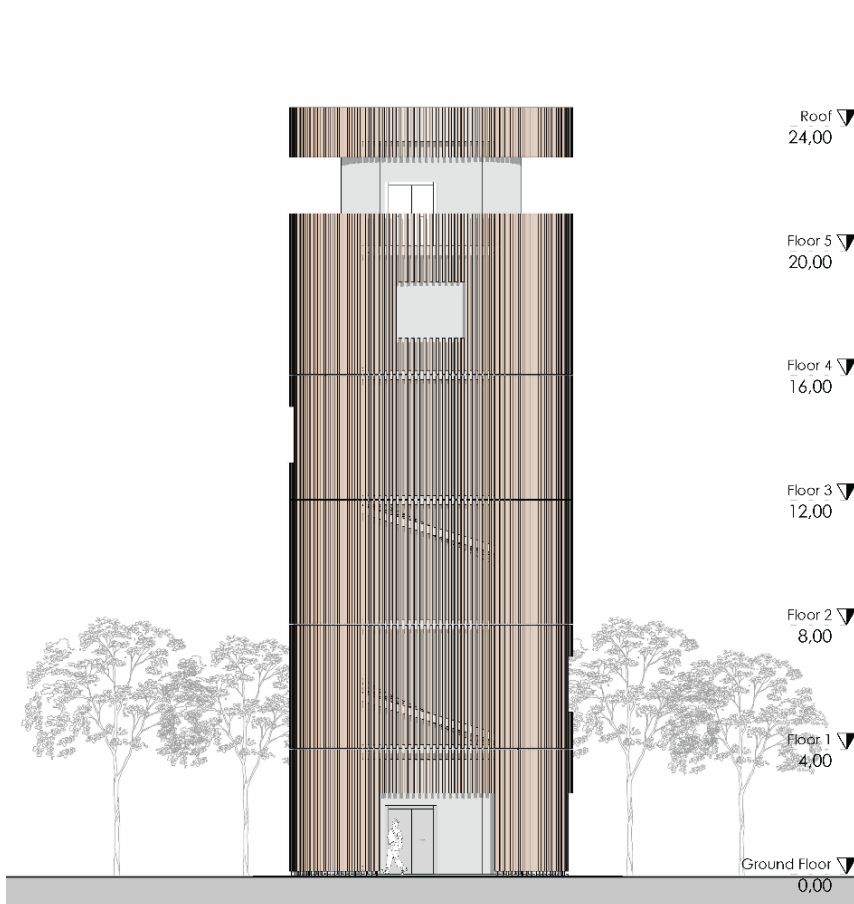


Figure 22: Elevation | 1:200

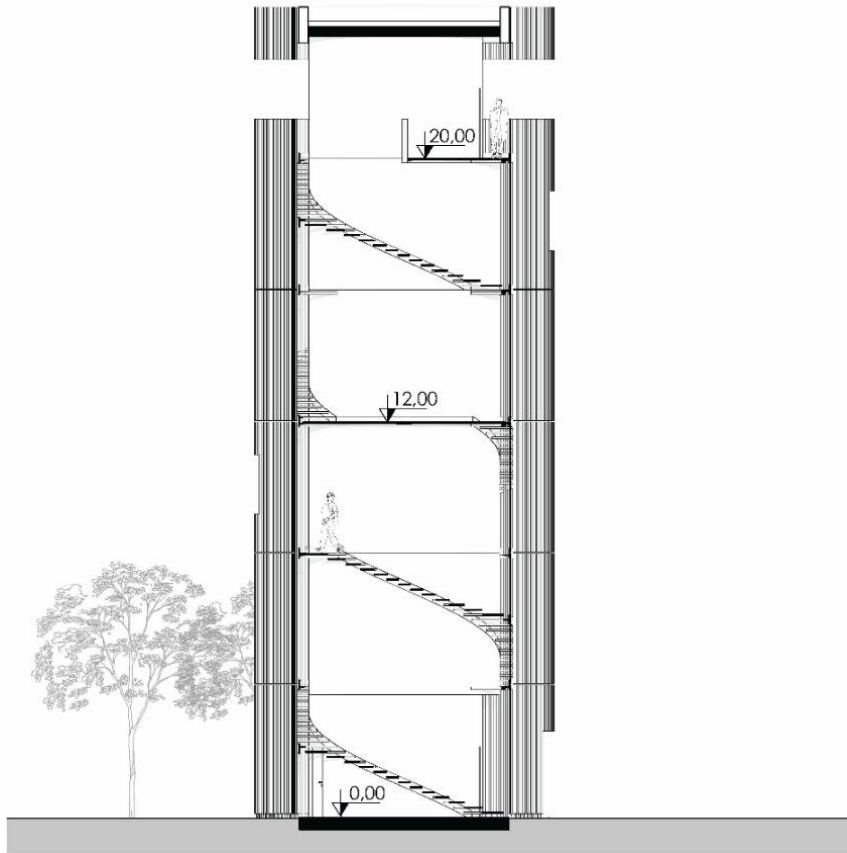


Figure 23: Section B2_2 | 1:200



Figure 24: Impression of the observation tower

The center

The activity center is based on the principle of re-creating a traditional *terp* (*wierde*), mounds that were raised so that people would have a dry place to live and work. Here, the building is conceived as if it were growing from within the hill. From this building inside a hill, two slices are cut out: one to open the building up to the vast flat landscape in front and create this public square that connects with the canal that has been widened. Another slice is cut out to make way for the main route connecting the zones to continue towards the *Winsumerdiep* (Figure 25).

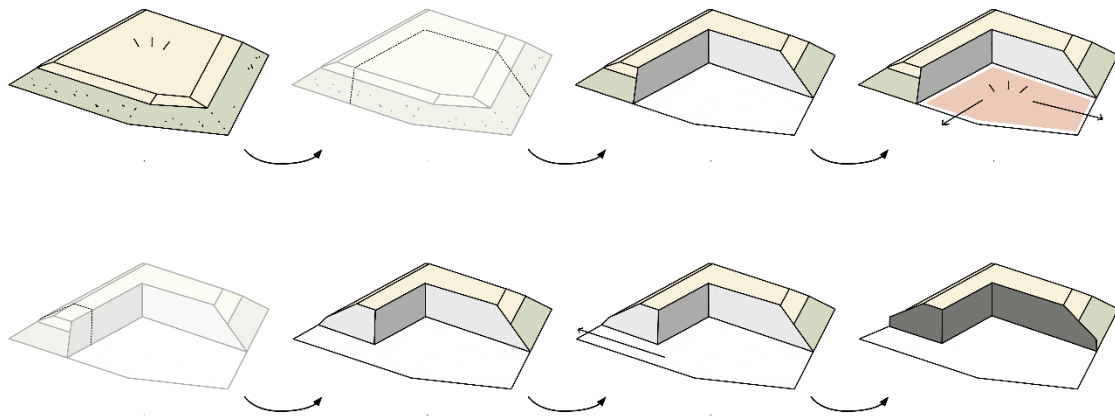


Figure 25: The volumetric composition of the center

Like on a hill that we gradually climb to the top, the interior of the building and the front landscaping are designed to create a route that gradually leads from the ground floor to the rooftop through plateaus (internal and external).

The first plateau, two meters higher than ground floor is where the entrance is located and where the main hall of the center takes shape, towards which several other rooms face and open. The second plateau grows another two meters, where the restaurant is located. From this level, the route continues along the facade in wooden volumes that protrude from it, referring to the irregularity of the shape of a hill. The internal route also leads to this external facade circulation, giving continuity to the rooftop. The sequence of diagrams in Figure 26 illustrates this composition. The final building is illustrated from Figures 27 to 38.

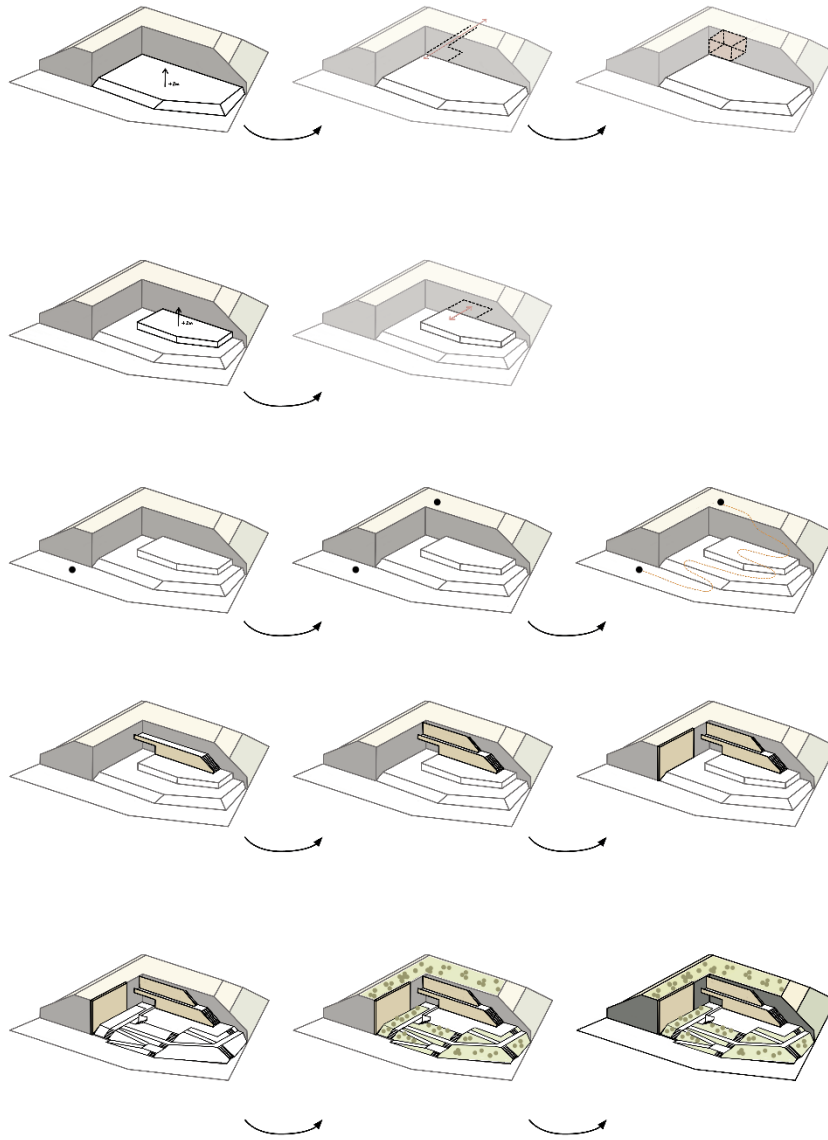


Figure 26: The sculpting of the facade and front garden

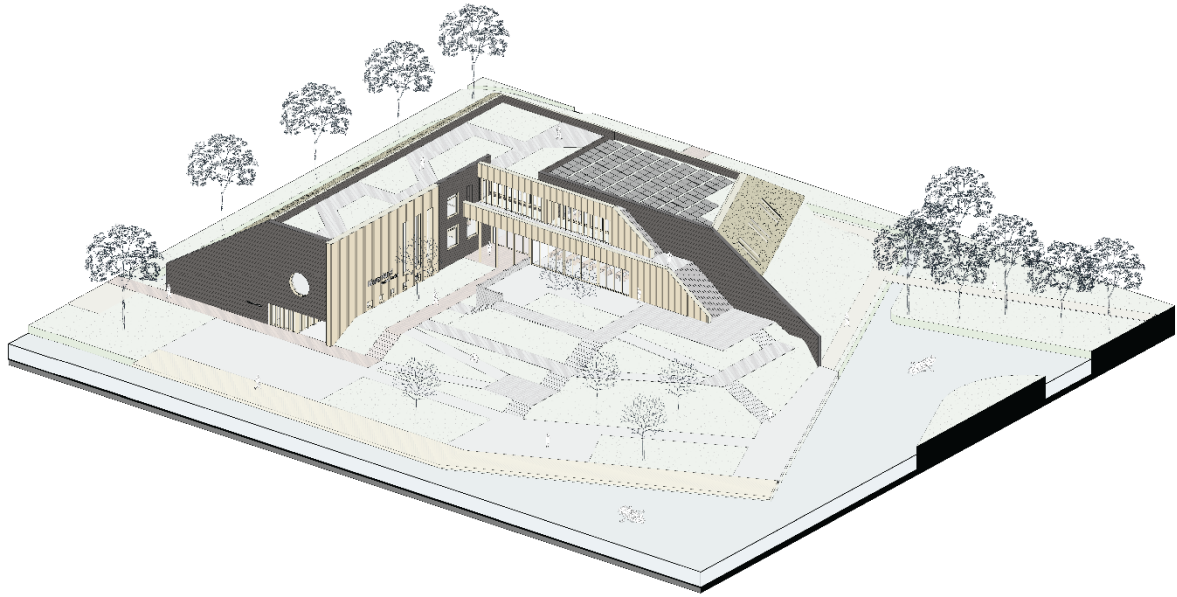


Figure 27: Axonometric view

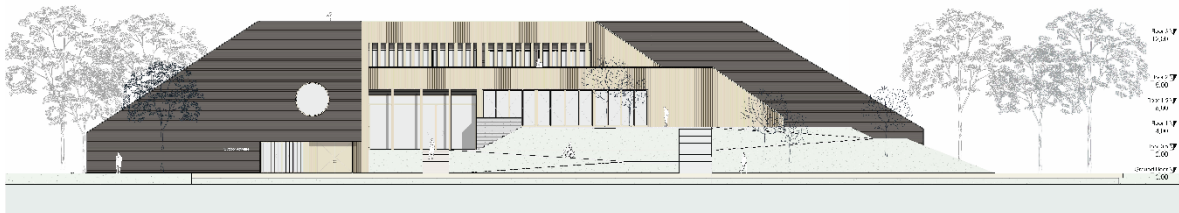


Figure 28: Elevation 1 | 1:200

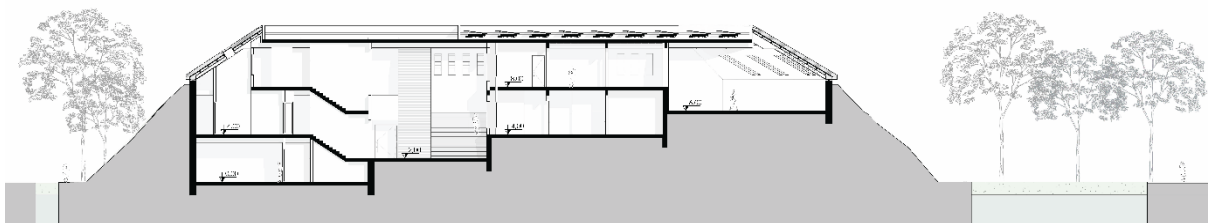


Figure 29: Section B3_2 | 1:200



Figure 30: Elevation 2 | 1:200

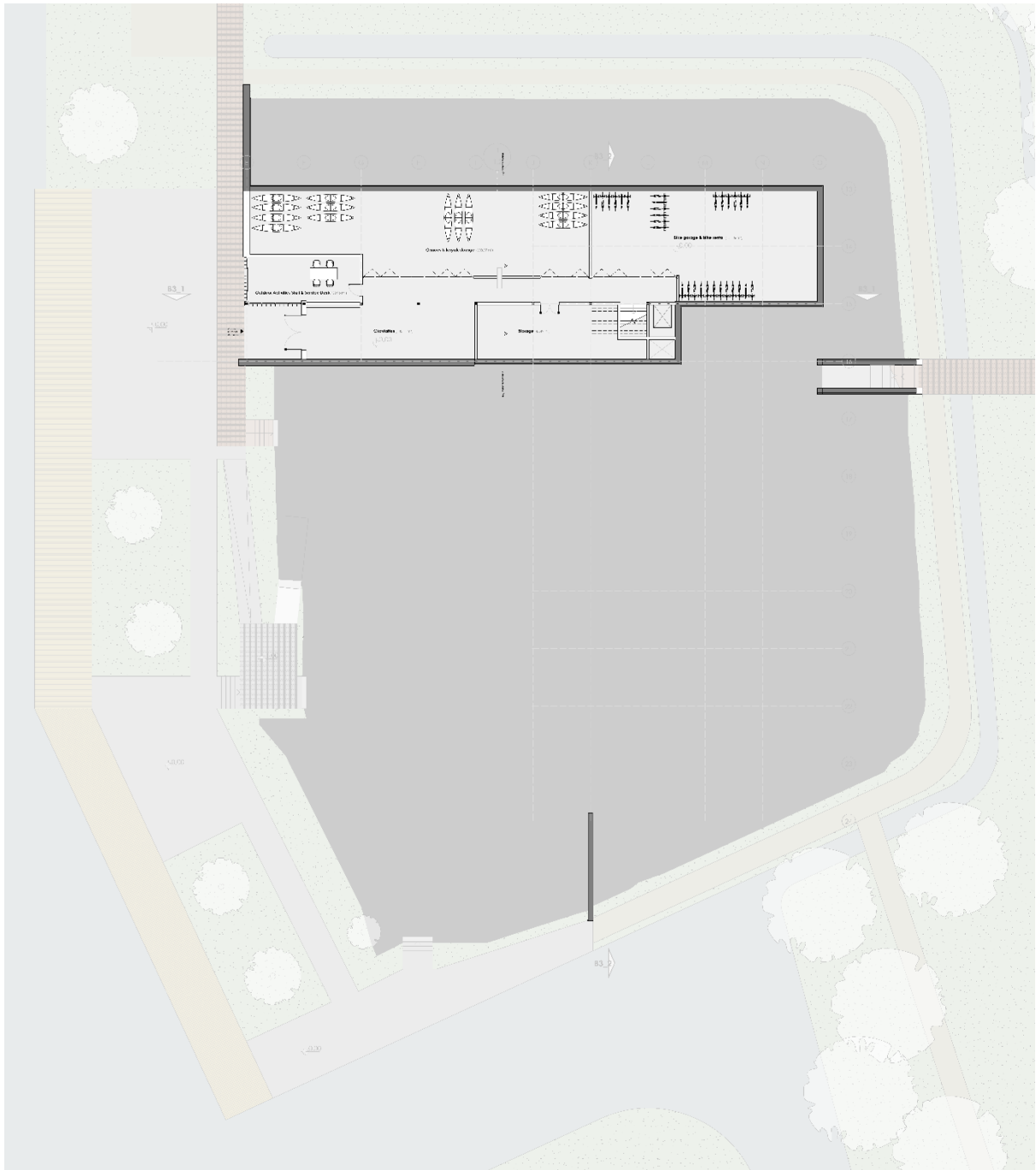


Figure 31: Ground floor plan | 1:200

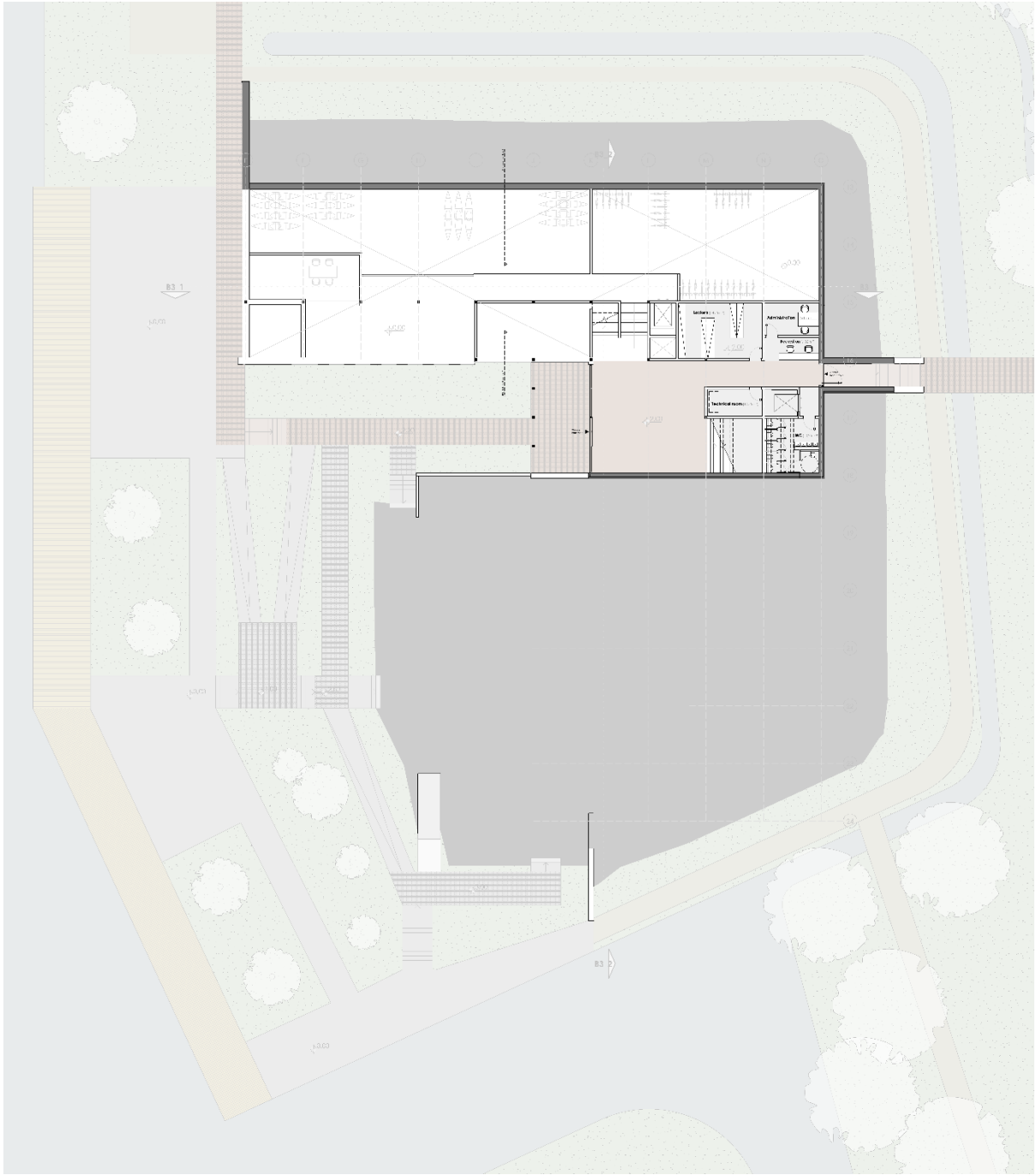


Figure 32: Level 0.5 floor plan | 1:200

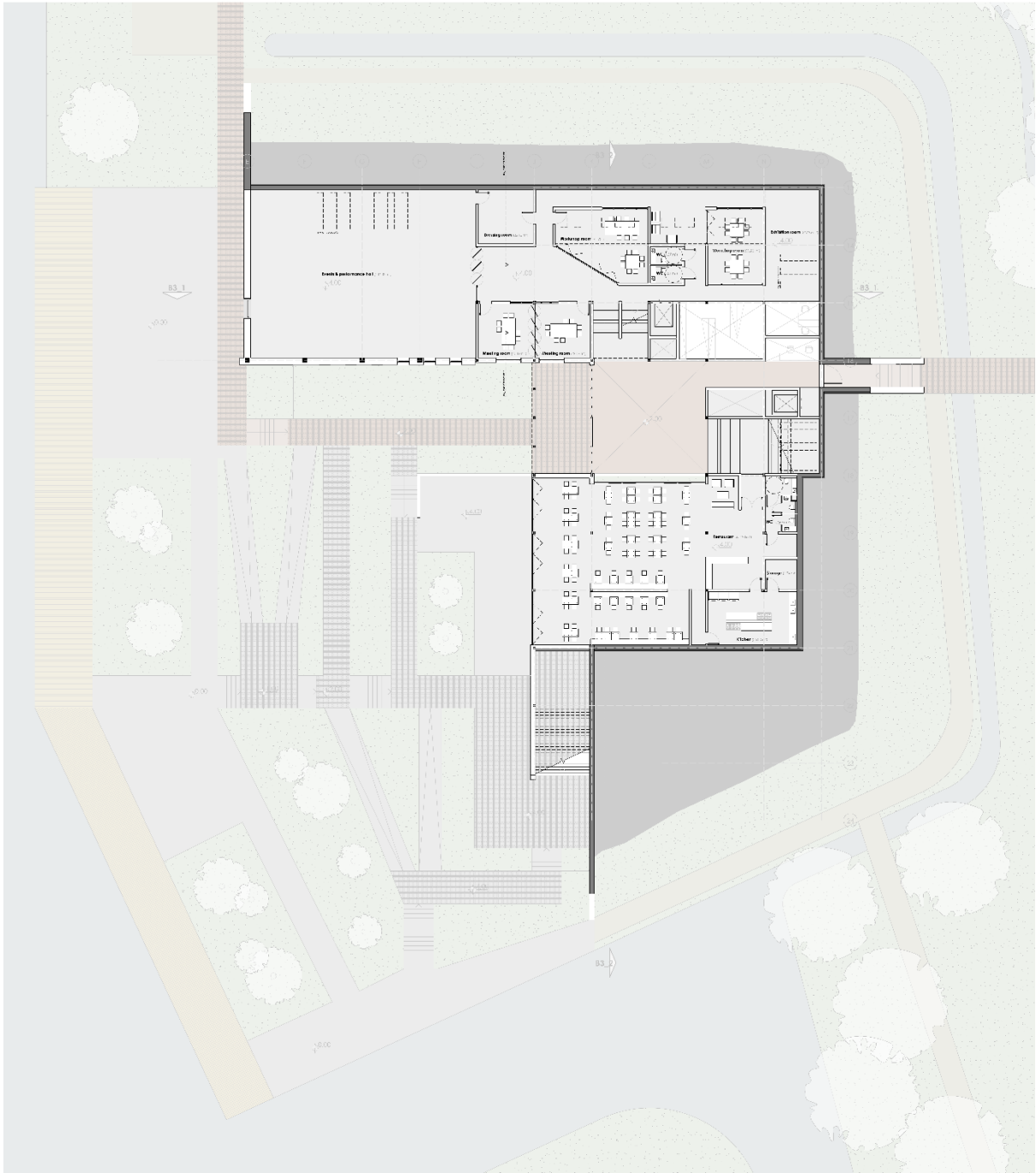


Figure 33: Level 1 floor plan | 1:200

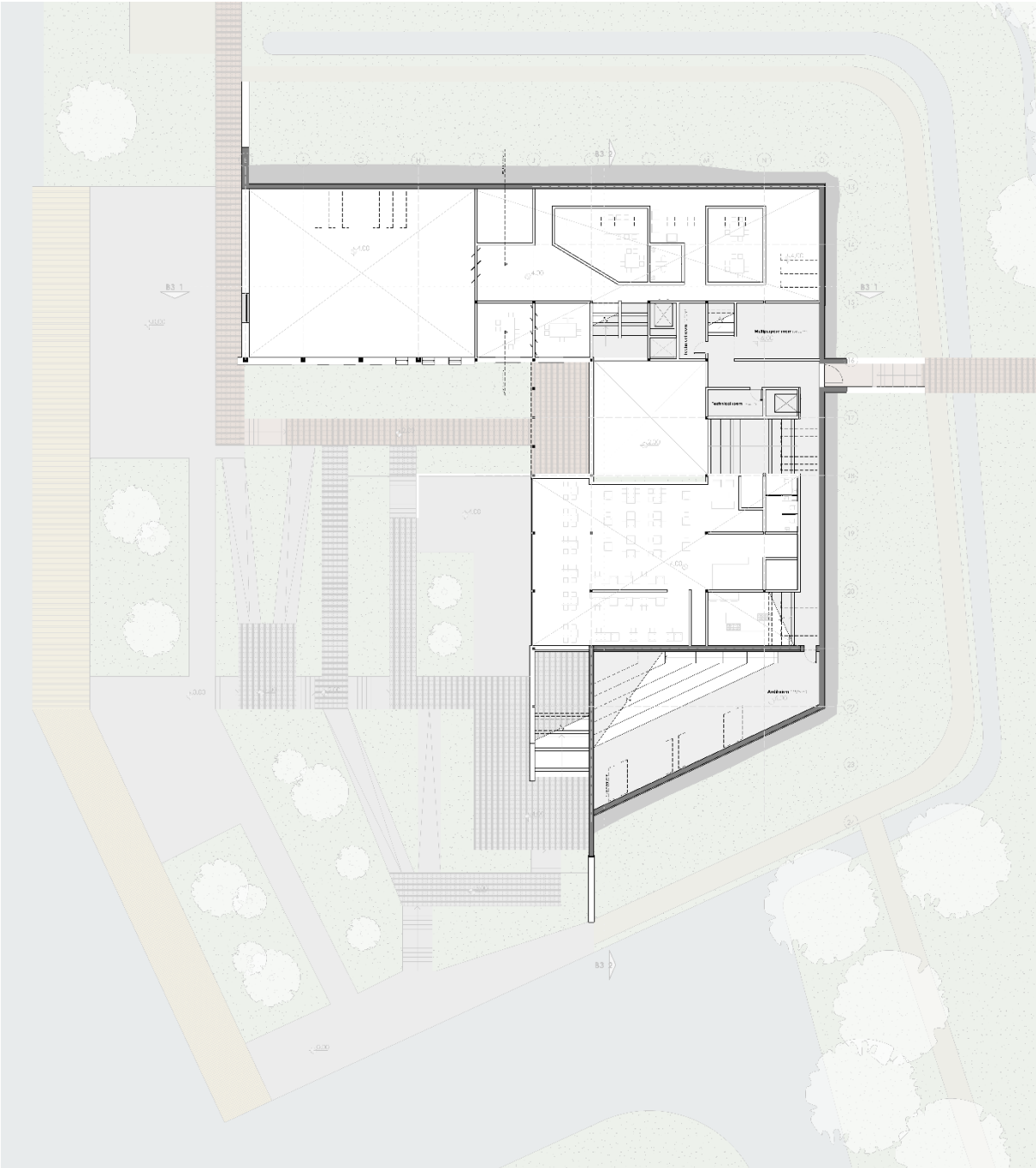


Figure 34: Level 1.5 floor plan | 1:200

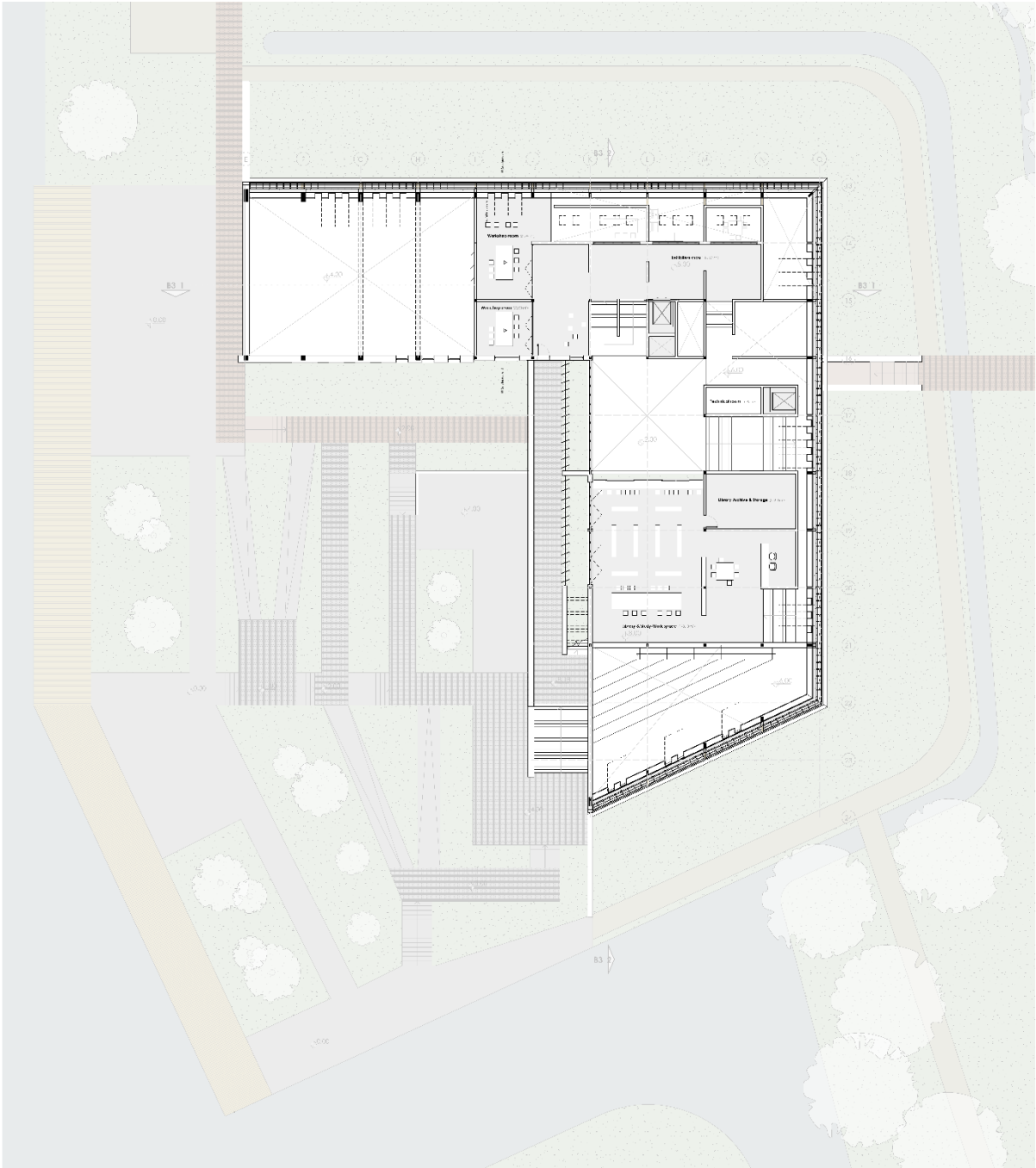


Figure 35: Level 2 floor plan | 1:200



Figure 36: Impression of the public square in front of the building



Figure 37: Impression of the building seen from the water



Figure 38: Impression of the main hall

The hotel

The hotel follows the narrow and long shape of this part of the terrain where it is located, between the trees and the water. It extends along the edge of the new canal, with all rooms on the two floors facing the water and the green fields in front. The entrance of the building extends along the main red path and houses communal open living rooms with picnic tables under a wooden roof, promoting moments of connection and interaction between users. The roof connects the reception block with the main block of rooms which also contains a cafe that opens to the pier in the Winsumerdiep. Figures 39 to 45 illustrate how the hotel looks like.

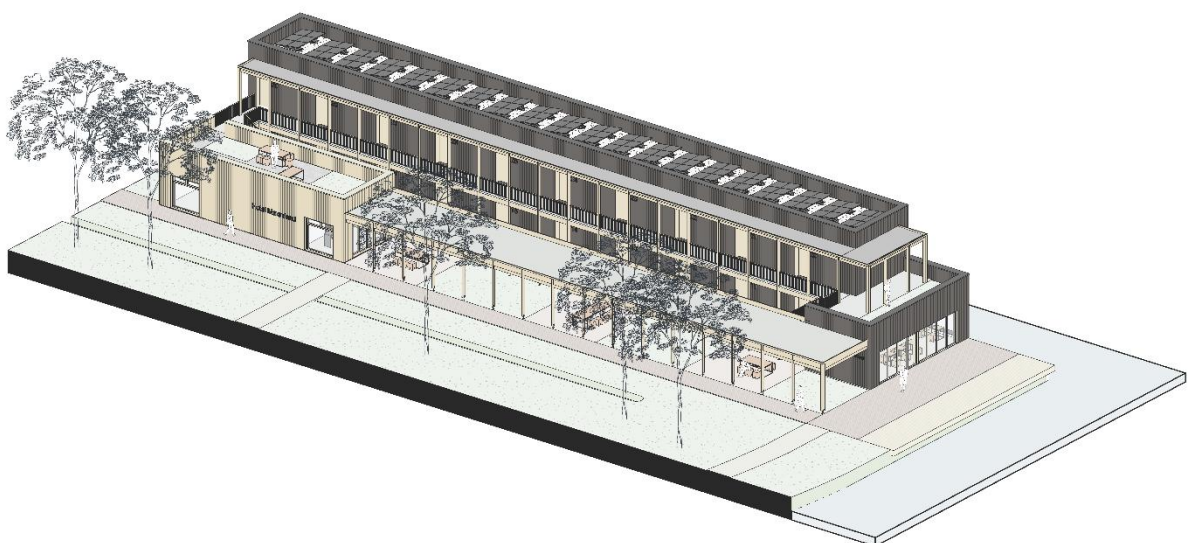


Figure 39: Axonometric view



Figure 40: Elevation 1 | 1:200

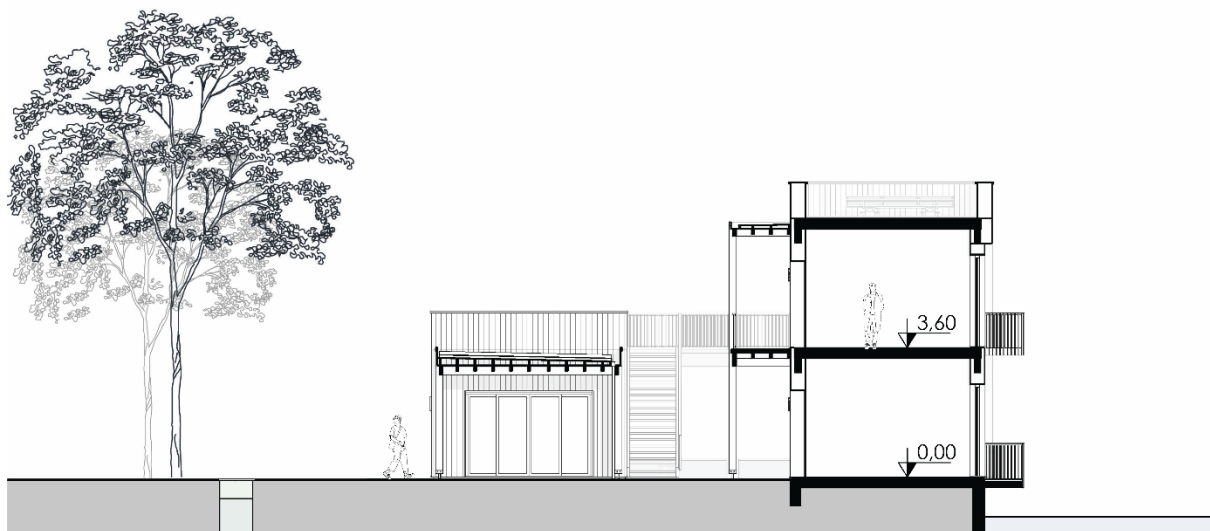


Figure 41: Section B4_1 | 1:200



Figure 42: Elevation 2

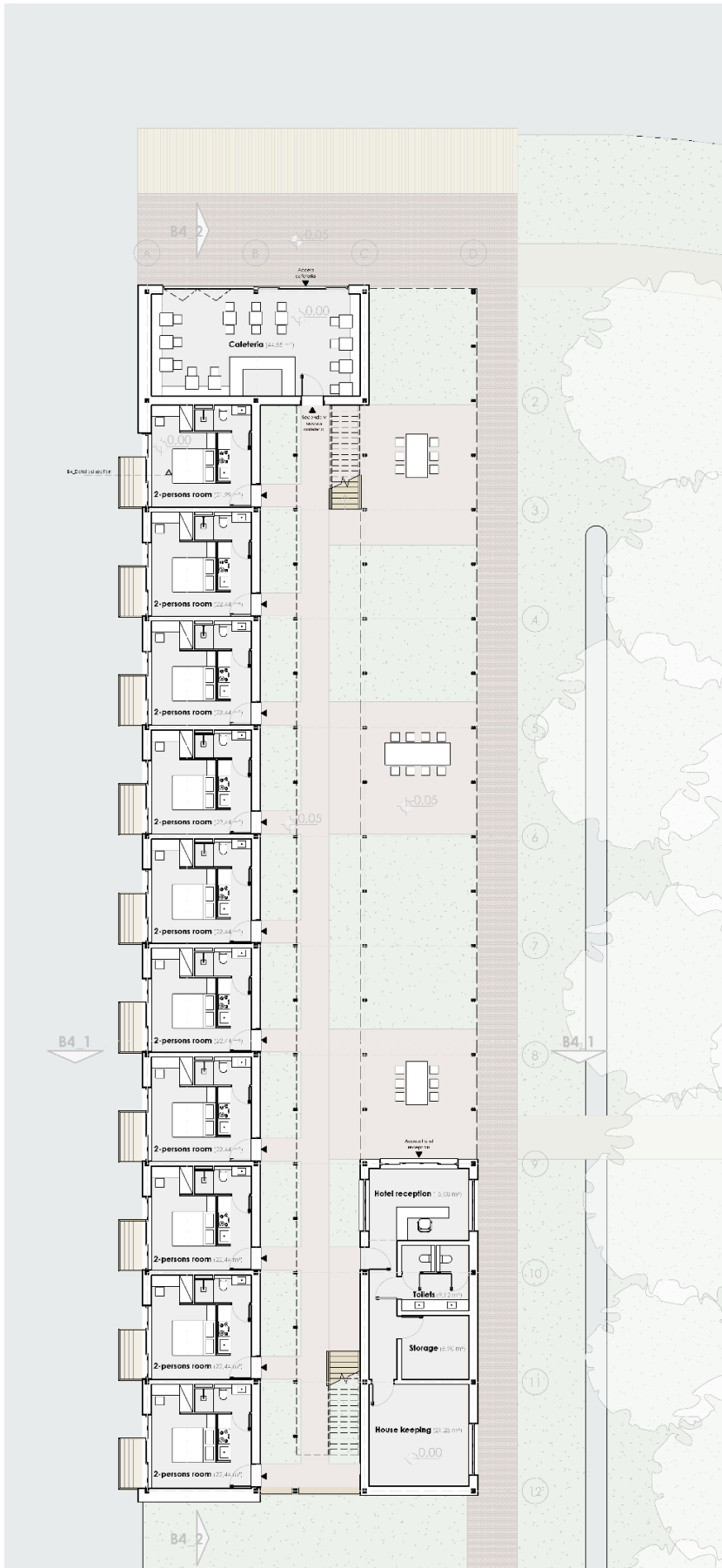


Figure 43: Ground floor plan | 1:200

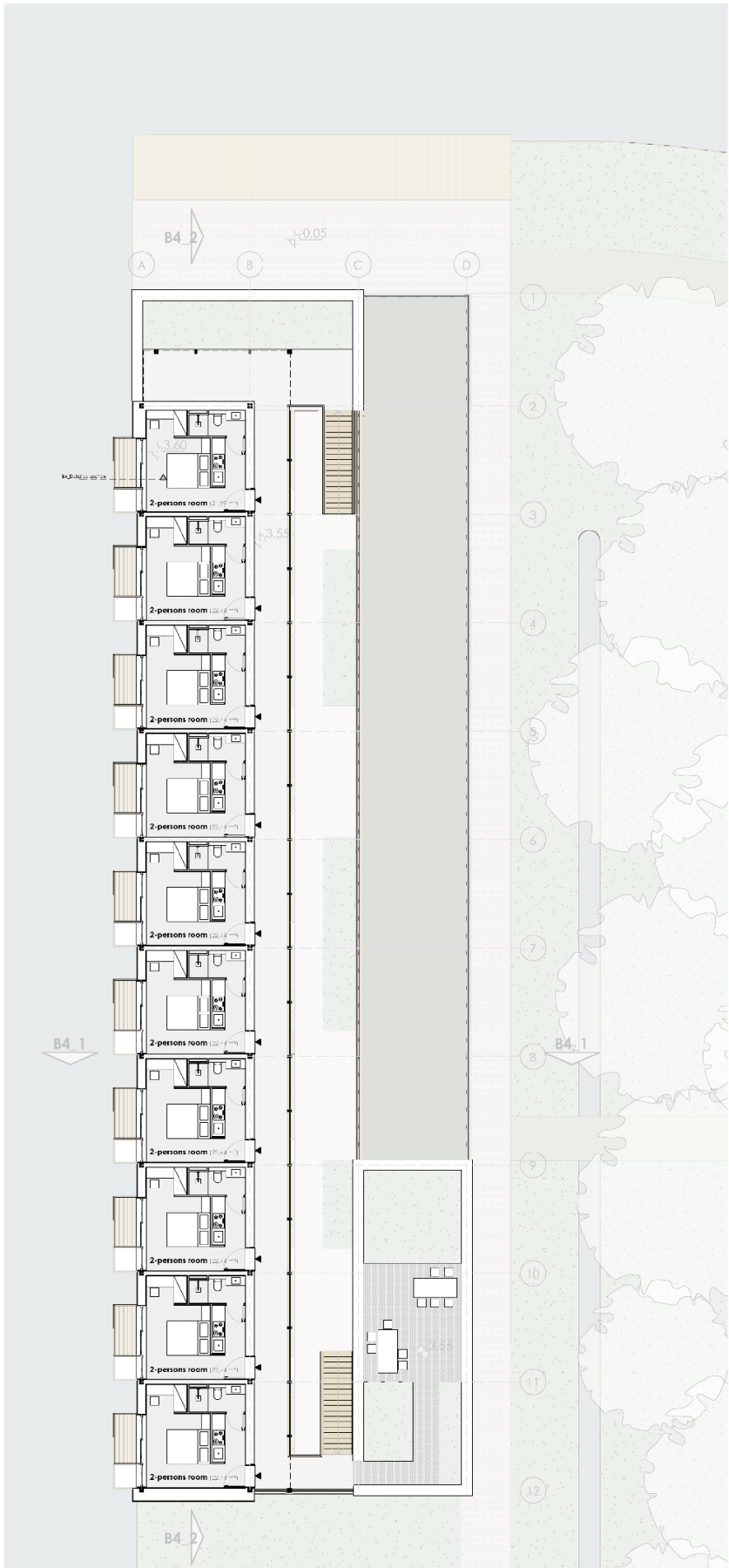


Figure 44: Level 1 floor plan | 1:200



Figure 45: Impression of the hotel seen from the Winsumerdiep canal

PART 4 | Conclusions and discussion

Conclusion

The final design successfully reaches the primary objective of strengthening socially and economically the community in Winsum through tourism by creating a hybrid activity center that caters to both tourists and the local community. By housing amenities that enrich the regional tourist experience, such as a hotel, restaurant, shops, exhibition spaces, and outdoor activities, the center becomes an important generator of revenue for entrepreneurs and creates jobs in the leisure sector. In addition to strengthening and regenerating the local economy, these opportunities in the tourism sector broaden the prospects for residents, who are in search of a better future in their home province. The spaces designed for the use of the community, such as event rooms, workshop and meeting spaces, and the library, also contribute to the social strengthening of the community, who benefits from this infrastructure for their personal development and interaction with each other.

By proposing a hybrid center where programs of diverse nature are mixed, the project acts directly on the relationship between locals and tourists. The ambition to strengthen social cohesion is also achieved through the route that connects the programmatic zones, causing different users to constantly cross paths, encouraging coexistence and socialization. The route, marked by a terracotta colored pathway that extends across the entire terrain and inside the buildings, fulfills the architectural ambition of using circulation to create a journey of sensorial experiences, directing users to specific points of the terrain where particular views are framed. This intentional orchestration of circulation, shaping sensory experiences, also promotes a greater connection between people and the space they inhabit, causing them to value and respect it even more, contributing to the strengthening of local identity and the protection of the ecosystem.

In addition to the curated circulation, the project achieves its goal of strengthening the local identity through the lens of regionalist architecture, first by taking the terrain as the main character to which the design responds. The answer to the terrain happens when the program is distributed in different zones of the park and when buildings are designed according to the specific characteristics and visuals of each zone. Most notable in this respect is the modelling of the Activity Center after a traditional terp (wierde), becoming a contemporary reinterpretation of a historical landscape element, which relates deeply to the history and identity of the place. Secondly, the use of local materials, such as wood, hemp, reed and clay bricks, adds another layer to the regionalist approach, rooting the buildings to their location and celebrating what the region has to offer. This material selection also addresses the technical and environmental ambitions of reducing carbon footprint.

Finally, the Activity Center in Winsum presents itself as an architectural solution that blends social cohesion, economic revitalization, and protection of local culture and environment. By integrating amenities for tourists with infrastructure for the local community, guiding users on a journey through different spatial experiences, and grounding the design on the historical identity of the region, the project goes beyond its programmatic functions, becoming a landmark of local pride and of the prosperity of the population of Groningen.

Implications and recommendations

The project demonstrates that architecture can act as a valuable tool for socio-economic healing in regions recovering from a trauma, such as Groningen and the earthquakes caused by gas extraction. Tourism alone would not be powerful enough to revitalize the regional economy, but its combination with sensitive and regional architecture is capable of significant transformations. Through the design of infrastructures that provide for the demands of visitors and, at the same time, elevate the local community, the tourism sector finds a foundation for its development and growth as a long-term economic base.

Thus, this project challenges the profession to rethink the concept of hybridization, demonstrating, in first instance, that the merging of programs for tourists and for locals can bring valuable results for both, but that the concept goes far beyond simply allocating different functions under the same structure. It is necessary to consider the movement and usage patterns users and arrange circulations that intentionally make them cross paths, creating intersections that promote peaceful coexistence and spontaneous encounters.

Architects working in ecologically sensitive areas, such as the Wadden Sea region, should consider curated routes, not only to enhance the spatial and sensory experience, but also to manage user flows and protect the environment from the pressure caused by increasing tourism.

Ultimately, the project also demonstrates that architects can honour the identity of a place through contemporary interpretations of local characteristics, such as the landscape, the terrain to be built on, the climate, and the local materials, without needing to copy traditional styles. Analysing the location and valuing what exists there are key to an architecture that is grounded in its context and values its past and future.

Reflections

Designing a public building for a small community, integrating amenities for tourists, was no easy task. Finding a guiding concept was very complex for me, as many directions are possible in such a broad assignment. Although the Research-by-design method gave me a lot of freedom to go back and forth with my iterations, ambitions, and design choices, it often left me confused – perhaps due to a lack of organization on my part as well, I must admit. But now, looking back and reflecting on the process to arrive at this structured report, I see that that is indeed the main objective: to reflect, study, decide, rethink, study again. I expected to have a clear concept from the first stages, one that would guide me clearly and easily throughout the entire process, but architecture is not like that. Architecture involves time, reflection, trial and error, and this method certainly encourages this dynamic of changing approaches.

The collective analytical work was satisfactory, as it immediately showed that the region's strength was its landscape and that agritourism had great potential. This helped me have an initial vision of where I should go in the research and the project. Making the 3D map collectively also contributed to broadening my understanding and perspectives on the region, as the discussions we had as a group always brought to light something new that I hadn't thought of. Translating the findings and interpretations into an illustration helped to better see the characteristics and potentials to be explored in the design.

Visiting the building site and the village of Winsum was extremely valuable, helping me to understand the space, its potentials and limitations. The visit was on a cold and rainy winter day, very different from the images I found on the internet during the initial research, and this made me understand that the dynamics of use of the building site change drastically in different seasons of the year. The conversation with the administrators of the Marenland recreation park also helped me better understand the dynamics of the place. I was surprised to hear from them that the relationship between the villagers and tourists became marked by tensions as tourism increased dramatically after the announcement of the award as the most beautiful village in the Netherlands in 2020. These issues of the reality of local life can only be understood through visits and conversations like this, proving how much the final result benefits from desktop research complemented by field research.

Developing the design from the perspective of a circulation that makes tourists and locals cross paths was not always easy. Initially, I remained focused on a single linear path that connected the different zones of the site, but it proved to be too restrictive, controlling, and limiting, which was not the intention of the project. Therefore, I began to consider secondary routes made with other materials, relieving the rigidity of circulation in the space, but still maintaining the visible importance of the primary route.

In short, dealing with the multiplicity of the architectural design process was the great challenge of this research, and what brought me the most self-knowledge and learning. There are so many variables to consider, so many aspects to balance and integrate, and this sometimes brought me a lot of anxiety. The desire to design an attractive, innovative, sustainable, sensitive, coherent, beautiful and technically feasible space, all at the same time, left me desperate at certain moments, but showed me that it is necessary to define priorities and, above all, give time to time, executing one task at a time. So, I conclude this project with much more maturity than when I started it, and I am sure that this experience will reflect positively on the next steps of my career.

References

Bibliographic

- ¹ Sociaal Planbureau Groningen. (2025, December 15). *Brede welvaart in Groningen: positieve trends, maar structurele achterstanden blijven*.
<https://sociaalplanbureaugroningen.nl/brede-welvaart-in-groningen-positieve-trends-maar-structurele-achterstanden-blijven/>
- ² Sociaal Planbureau Groningen. (2025, May 13). *Bevolking – Brede welvaart*.
<https://sociaalplanbureaugroningen.nl/brede-welvaart/bevolking/>
- ³ Parlementaire Enquêtecommissie Aardgaswinning Groningen (2024). *Groningers boven gas — Boek 1: Conclusies en aanbevelingen* [PDF].
<https://www.nijbegun.nl/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Groningers-Boven-Gas-deel-1.pdf>
- ⁴ Begeleidingscommissie Onderzoek Aardbevingen (1993). *Eindrapport: Multidisciplinair onderzoek naar de relatie tussen gaswinning en aardbevingen in Noord-Nederland* (KNMI Publication). Koninklijk Nederlands Meteorologisch Instituut (KNMI).
https://cdn.knmi.nl/knmi/pdf/bibliotheek/knmipubDIV/Eindrapport_BOA_relatie_aardbevingen_en_gaswinning_NNL1993.pdf
- ⁵ Meijer, B. (2024, April 16). *Dutch Senate approves law to permanently close Groningen gas field*. Reuters.
<https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/dutch-senate-approves-law-permanently-close-groningen-gas-field-2024-04-16/>
- ⁶ Nij Begun (2025, April 2). *Sociale agenda* (Version January 2025) [PDF].
<https://www.nijbegun.nl/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Sociale-Agenda-Nij-Begun-digitaal.pdf>
- ⁷ Nij Begun (2025, June 13). *Economische agenda: Groningen en Noord-Drenthe* [PDF].
<https://www.nijbegun.nl/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Economische-Agenda.pdf?v=jun>
- ⁸ Nij Begun (2025, November). *Een Agenda voor Herstel: samenwerken als één overheid* [PDF].
<https://www.nijbegun.nl/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Nij-Begun-Een-Agenda-voor-Herstel-samenwerken-als-1-overheid.pdf>
- ⁹ Nij Begun (2025, June 3). *Subsidieregeling Nij Begun isolatie: Publieksversie 2025* [PDF].
<https://www.nijbegun.nl/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Subsidieregeling-Nij-Begun-isolatie-publieksversie-2025.pdf>
- ¹⁰ Statistics Netherlands (CBS) (2025, March 6). *Over 50 million holiday guests in 2024*.
<https://www.cbs.nl/en-gb/news/2025/10/over-50-million-holiday-guests-in-2024>
- ¹¹ Provincie Groningen (2021). *Strategische visie vrijetijdseconomie provincie Groningen 2021-2030* [PDF].
https://www.provinciegroningen.nl/fileadmin/user_upload/Documenten/Downloads/Downloads_s_2021/Strategische_Visie_Vrijetijdseconomie_provincie_Groningen_2021-2030.pdf
- ¹² Provincie Groningen & Ginder (2025, February). *Onderzoek vrijetijdseconomie provincie Groningen* [PDF].

https://www.provinciegroningen.nl/fileadmin/user_upload/Documenten/Beleid_en_documenten/Documentenzoeker/Werken_en_ondernemen/Toerisme/Rapportage_Onderzoek_Vrijetijd_seconomie_provincie_Groningen__februari_2025__WCAG.pdf

¹³ Frampton, K. (2007). Ten points on an architecture of regionalism: A provisional polemic. In V. B. Canizaro (Ed.), *Architectural regionalism: Collected writings on place, identity, modernity, and tradition* (pp. 374–385). Princeton Architectural Press. (Original work published 1987)

¹⁴ Fernández Per, A. (n.d.). Hybrid versus social condenser. In *This is Hybrid*. a+t architecture publishers. Retrieved June 1, 2026, from urbanNext: <https://urbannext.net/hybrid-versus-social-condenser/>

¹⁵ Haddadi, S. (2020). The hybrid building concept. Topological characterisation as a project resource. *Cuadernos de Proyectos Arquitectónicos*, (10), 110-113.

¹⁶ Ghisleni, C. (2025, January 22). *Promenade architecturale: How the modernist concept continues to inspire contemporary architecture*. ArchDaily. <https://www.archdaily.com/1025951/promenade-architecturale-how-the-modernist-concept-continues-to-inspire-contemporary-architecture>

Figures

Figure 1

Sociaal Planbureau Groningen. (2025, May 13). *Bevolking – Brede welvaart*. <https://sociaalplanbureaugroningen.nl/brede-welvaart/bevolking/>

Figure 2

Parlementaire Enquêtecommissie Aardgaswinning Groningen (2024). *Groningers boven gas — Boek 1: Conclusies en aanbevelingen* [PDF]. <https://www.nijbegun.nl/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Groningers-Boven-Gas-deel-1.pdf>

Figure 3

Statistics Netherlands (CBS) (2025, March 6). *Over 50 million holiday guests in 2024*. <https://www.cbs.nl/en-gb/news/2025/10/over-50-million-holiday-guests-in-2024>

Figure 6

Schroor, M. (2008). *Waddenzee - Waddenland: historische verkenningen rond de geografische identiteit en begrenzing van het internationale waddengebied*. Raad voor de Wadden.