

Gathering Commons | Reflection | P5

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In the graduation phase of my project Gathering Commons, I pursued a research-by-design methodology aimed at bridging theoretical exploration with spatial intervention. Both the design proposal and the written report are grounded in a central argument: that hybrid third places—when embedded in the landscape and tied to local identity, can function as inclusive social infrastructure for suburban communities. From the start, the process was a continuous dialogue between research and design. Decisions were tested spatially and supported through theoretical frameworks, allowing the project to remain grounded while open to new discoveries. By reviewing multiple options and comparing them against literature and precedents, I was able to develop a project that is both robust and responsive.

The methodology combined literature review, stakeholder analysis, field research, and iterative drawing. This blend allowed me to move fluidly between theory and practice. The design needed to reflect the real conditions of the polder landscape, infrastructure, and social fabric, while the research had to remain open to insights that emerged through drawing and design exploration. This back-and-forth became a critical part of the working method.

Throughout the process, I received valuable feedback from my mentors. Early critiques pushed me to sharpen the framing of hybridity, not only in function, but in users. This shifted my perspective; instead of focusing on layering uses alone, I began to explore how different people might experience the space differently throughout the day or week. This was especially relevant for a landscape that includes golf; a use that can easily become exclusionary. One of the most important reflections for me was on how golf is perceived in the Netherlands. It is often seen as elitist or inaccessible. I had to be careful not to design a space where “others are allowed in,” but rather one that starts from openness, where golf is one part of a shared social landscape.

I also learned from my own tendencies. My passion for both urbanism and golf sometimes pulled me toward over-defending certain design ideas. Being able to step back, view the project critically, and embrace alternate perspectives ultimately made the design stronger. For example, the halfway house only became a key spatial and social feature after I tested various circulation patterns and overlaps on-site, it wasn’t something I could have planned through theory alone.

Relation to Master Track and MSc AUBS Programme

This project is rooted in the Urbanism (U) track, which addresses complex urban challenges through spatial design. It also draws on principles from Landscape Architecture, particularly in

relation to planting strategies, biodiversity, and spatial layering. Together, these perspectives reflect the interdisciplinary nature of the MSc Architecture, Urbanism and Building Sciences (AUBS) programme, which encourages context-sensitive and integrative thinking. Gathering Commons embodies this by exploring how landscape and urban design can come together to create inclusive, multifunctional places.

Interaction Between Research and Design

Research and design developed in parallel, constantly informing one another. Early research on third place theory, youth social needs, and ecological green space set the tone for the design direction. These insights led to key interventions such as soft thresholds between neighborhoods and landscape, and the integration of different social nodes within the park. At the same time, spatial testing raised new questions, for example, how different groups would move through or share the same space, and sent me back to refine my understanding of hybridity and affordance. This iterative cycle gave the project both intellectual depth and spatial clarity.

Assessment of Methods and Approach

The approach I used, research by design, was highly valuable. It allowed me to maintain flexibility while staying rigorous. The combination of stakeholder mapping, precedent studies, field visits, and iterative design drawing helped me explore possibilities without losing sight of the real constraints and opportunities of the site. I appreciated how this method let me operate at different scales, from detailed spatial sequences to broader infrastructural strategies. Looking back, I believe the strength of the approach was that it allowed me to work conceptually, but never in isolation from the material and social realities of the landscape.

Academic, Societal, and Ethical Implications

From an academic perspective, the project contributes to evolving conversations around publicness, shared space, and urban-nature integration. It proposes that third places don't have to be coffee bars or plazas, they can also be layered landscapes that support different kinds of presence and interaction over time. Societally, the project tackles several real-world challenges: the social isolation of young adults, underused suburban green spaces, and the perception of golf as an exclusive activity. Ethically, I believe the project takes a strong position: it reframes private, single-use land as part of a shared commons—ecologically resilient, socially open, and spatially inclusive.

Transferability of Project Results

While the polder landscape is specific, the principles behind Gathering Commons are broadly applicable. Many suburban regions in the Netherlands, and elsewhere, grapple with underutilized green infrastructure, fragmented access, and a lack of inclusive third places. The strategies explored in this project, layered accessibility, hybrid spatial logic, and public-private overlap, can serve as a model for similar sites. It also suggests a broader rethinking of golf landscapes: not as static, fenced-off zones, but as potential platforms for social, ecological, and recreational innovation.

How can large-scale recreational landscapes be reimagined as socially inclusive infrastructures without compromising their original function?

This question stayed with me throughout the project. I learned that inclusion doesn't always mean redesigning everything, it can come from layering uses and designing edges and moments of encounter.

In what ways can unstructured social interaction be supported through spatial design, rather than programming alone?

The more I drew and analyzed spaces, the more I realized that design decisions like sightlines, thresholds, and seating arrangements can invite informal connection just as much as an event or schedule.