

Technical University of Delft

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Public Building: Re-start the North

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The Mediator

Connecting polarities to frame a cultural ecosystem

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1. Foreword | Abstract

This Graduation Report investigates how architecture can support the ambition of the Nij Begun agenda by positioning tourism as a means of regeneration for the province of Groningen. For decades, the province of Groningen contributed substantially to national wealth through gas extraction (De Vries et al., 2025, p.11). At the same time, this process caused long-term physical, social and economic damage within the province. In response, the Nij Begun agenda identifies tourism as one of the instruments for supporting regional recovery (De Vries et al., 2025b, p. 12).

Located in Winsum, the project proposes a tourist hub near the Marenland campsite. Within a decentralised setting, the design acts as a regional interface, gathering visitor flows and redirecting them towards Groningen's landscape, agricultural production, and local culture. Rather than concentrating activities in a single location, it distributes tourists across the wider region and supports local economic structures.

The design is structured by the concept of cycles, which implies that the hub at Marenland serves as a point of arrival, return, and departure. Tourism is therefore understood not as a single act of consumption, but as an ongoing engagement with the region. By offering multiple spatial and programmatic entry points into Groningen's cultural ecosystem, the project encourages longer stays and deeper involvement with the local qualities.

2. Problem statement

This chapter frames tourism as both an opportunity and a challenge for Groningen. While tourism can contribute to the local economy and increase visibility, it also places pressure on social life and public spaces. Recent protests in tourist destinations worldwide, show how rising visitor numbers can affect infrastructure, local communities, and the shared public realm.

2.1. Global Scale

Richard Sennett describes the public realm as a space where strangers encounter one another. Public space is thus a space of “anonymity and impersonality” (Sennett, 2008, p.2), for both tourists and locals. As tourism continues to grow, these spaces are increasingly shaped by visitor flows. Just last year, tourist arrivals reached a peak of 1.4 billion worldwide (UN Tourism, 2026). Destinations are attracting so many tourists that the quality of life for locals is deteriorating (World Tourism Organization, 2018). The resulting consequences range from dissatisfaction and protests (Rößler, 2025) to the displacement of local communities (Venessia.com, 2022).

At the same time, stays are becoming shorter (Architekturzentrum Wien, 2024), which limits the local economy's ability to generate benefits. Furthermore, existing tourism infrastructure prioritises efficiency and consumption over longer engagement with a region and its specific qualities. Architecture can therefore play a more active role: it can attract visitors, but it can also shape the conditions under which social and economic benefits are distributed more evenly across a region.

2.2. Netherlands

One local example is Amsterdam, which is well known for tourism. Increasing visitor numbers have contributed to growing tensions between tourists and locals. Data shows that tourists are taking shorter trips, particularly in the Netherlands (Eurostat, 2024). This is an important factor, as longer stays would be more profitable for the destination due to the higher added value per guest (Schmücker et al., 2025, p.41). These developments challenge architecture beyond its traditional role of providing accommodation and leisure facilities. Instead, it can create a spatial condition that encourages visitors to stay longer, explore a wider territory, and engage more closely with a region's local character.

2.3. Groningen

In the province of Groningen, decades of gas extraction, which once provided wealth to the Netherlands, are now causing earthquakes. The resulting damage is physical, social, and economic. For this reason, the province is pursuing a new strategy, titled “Nij Begun,” with a clear commitment to sustainable tourism. Tourism is seen as one of the means through which economically and socially depressed areas can be regenerated. According to the agenda, this approach is expected to promote “cultural identification, a sense of belonging, positive attention, economic vitality and new jobs” (De Vries et al., 2025, p.11).

The province aims to increase its tourist numbers from 900,000 to 1.5 million (Boshuizen, 2025) and plans to invest €200 million in the tourism sector (De Vries et al., 2025, p.15). However, without careful architectural design, tourism on the one hand risks becoming a form of exploitation rather than a source of long-term regional benefits (Ginder, 2025). Architecture is therefore relevant not only because it can attract visitors, but also because it can shape how those visitors come into contact with the province. In this research, Groningen's local identity is discussed through the notion of a cultural ecosystem: a relationship between the landscape, agricultural heritage and public culture with the city of Groningen (Sustainability Directory, 2026).

3. Relevance

As Nij Begun positions tourism as a driver for the regional regeneration (De Vries et al., 2025b, p. 12), architectural ideas become increasingly relevant. The Mediator explores how a public building can connect visitors to Groningen's cultural ecosystem and guide them beyond a single point of arrival. Rather than intensifying pressure in one location, the project redistributes visitor flows across the region and links tourism more directly to existing local structures.

The design is therefore relevant on two levels. On the one hand, it addresses a regional question: how can tourism contribute to Groningen without reproducing the extractive logic that has shaped the province in the past? On the other hand, it examines a broader architectural question: how can a public building mediate between movement, orientation, and regional identity? The Mediator is conceived as a framework for this mediation through information, exhibitions, workshops, and routes that connect visitors to landscape, agriculture, and public culture.

4. Objective | Motivation

This chapter explores, through the study of architecture and design experience, the role a public building can play in making a region's cultural ecosystem visible and accessible to visitors.

4.1. Why Public Buildings?

My previous studies focused primarily on residential buildings and, therefore, remained more in the private sphere. This project shifts towards public architecture, which addresses a broader audience and offers the scale, visibility, and character to respond to social, cultural, and regional questions. Within the context of the graduation project, a public building provides the appropriate typology for investigating the relationship between tourism and Groningen's local identity.

4.2. Tourism

The media repeatedly show that tourist flows can place additional pressure on public spaces and local communities (Rainsford, 2026). At the same time, tourism offers the opportunity to encounter a region and contribute to its economy and visibility. In this sense, tourism must be understood as both a challenge and a potential instrument of regeneration.

4.3. Local Identity

Each region has a distinct identity, shaped by the cultural traditions, landscapes, and economic practices. In Groningen, this identity is deeply connected to its agricultural heritage, village structures, and open landscapes. Together, they frame what this research refers to as a cultural ecosystem: the interwoven relationship between human activity and the environment (Sustainability Directory, 2026). This ecosystem matters because it distinguishes Groningen from other destinations and provides the basis for a tourism model grounded in its regional specificity rather than generic attraction.

5. Research question

How can a public building translate Groningen's cultural ecosystem into an architectural design strategy for tourists?

Through an examination of the collected material, this research investigates how architecture can make Groningen's cultural ecosystem visible and accessible to visitors. Rather than creating an autonomous attraction, the design explores how existing local qualities can be revealed and activated as part of the visitor experience. The project aims to encourage meaningful engagement with these qualities while supporting Groningen's regional regeneration.

5.1. Sub questions

1. What elements define the identity of Groningen's cultural ecosystem?

This sub question examines the cultural, spatial, historical, and environmental elements that shape Groningen's cultural ecosystem, including agricultural heritage, village structures, open landscape, local traditions, and the relationship between human settlement and the environment.

2. What architectural design tools can encourage visitors to engage with the cultural ecosystem?

This sub question investigates how architectural design tools, including routing, programme, and materiality, can guide visitors' perception and interaction with Groningen's cultural ecosystem.

6. Scope

During the coronavirus pandemic, the Marenland campsite has already experienced a temporary overload of tourist arrivals. This indicates that tourism can also lead to tensions in Winsum (R. van Barneveld, personal communication, 2025). Winsum is a small village located outside the city of Groningen, between natural landscape and agricultural land. This decentralised location offers the opportunity to avoid concentrating tourists in the city and instead distribute tourism flows across the wider region.

By redirecting visitor flows away from the city, tourist densities can be reduced in heavily visited areas and create opportunities for local businesses, farmers, and communities. Located near the Marenland campsite, the building introduces visitors to Groningen's cultural ecosystem. As The Mediator, it serves as a point of orientation between agricultural, landscape and the city. In this research, these three fields are described as agriscape, landscape, and cityscape.

The concept of cycles structures the design. Not only is The Mediator a point of departure, but it acts as a point of arrival and return. Programmes and routes are organised around this recurring movement, encouraging visitors to explore qualities beyond Winsum and to return with new knowledge, experience, and products from the region.

7. Methodology

The project began with a literature review that established the theoretical framework for tourism, local identity, and the architectural role of a public building. This phase provided the conceptual vocabulary, relevant data and design principles needed to frame the research.

Additionally, the literature study was complemented by a site analysis and a site visit. The aim is to capture the genius loci of the location and to examine the themes by the subgroups. The site analysis brought together multiple perspectives on the location, which were further deepened through several lectures by professionals and professors. A collective map summarised these observations visually.

In addition, case studies of villages, visitor centres, tourism infrastructure, and public buildings were analysed to identify relevant typologies, programmes, spatial organisation, and precedents that could inform the design proposal. These references helped to evaluate directions rather than to provide a fixed solution.

Furthermore, the research-by-design approach formed the core of the project. Through sketching, mapping and modelling, different design directions were examined in relation to typology, programme, movement, materiality, composition, and construction (S. van Dam, personal communication, 2025). This design process translated theoretical concepts into architectural intervention and allowed the proposal to be projected and evaluated in relation to the Marenland campsite and Groningen's cultural ecosystem.

The A1 presentation marked the first project milestone and focused on concepts, research, and testing of initial design directions. The second milestone, A2, deepened the design proposal through further spatial refinement. The final milestone, A3, placed additional emphasis on construction to architecturally detail the proposal.

8. Theoretical Framework: The cultural ecosystem

This chapter examines how tourism can contribute to long-term local benefits when grounded in a region's cultural ecosystem. Research from Austria and Germany suggests that tourism should not be understood solely as a leisure economy but should be closely tied to local conditions and identities (Fitz et al., 2024, p. 159). Consequently, tourism can create lasting value only when visitors engage with what makes a place distinct.

In the research, the region's identity is defined by the interwoven relationships among people, landscape, settlements, and agriculture. Collectively, they shape a place's character and distinguish it from others. In Groningen, the cultural ecosystem is analysed through three cycles: the cityscape, the landscape, and the agriscape. Together, these cycles form the theoretical foundation of the design and provide a framework for translating regional identity into architectural and programmatic strategies.

8.1. Cityscape cycle: Visibility and Information

The cityscape cycle considers tourism in relation to visibility and information. Visibility can attract visitors and generate economic value, but it can also put pressure on a place when visitor numbers exceed its capacity. A well-known example is Hallstatt, where social media visibility has increased tourist numbers, but it has also contributed to "crowds, traffic chaos and loss of quiet periods". In addition, rising property and restaurant costs have affected the local community. This led to a decline in the local population (Statistik Austria, 2021) and "the destruction of the village structure and the loss of local life" (Fitz et al., 2024, p. 92).

This example shows that visibility can attract visitors, but without spatial mediation, it can also damage the local context it makes visible. For Winsum, the question is therefore not simply how to attract attention, but how to frame access to Groningen's cultural ecosystem. The Mediator introduces visitors to this ecosystem by making the first route towards the city of Groningen legible. As the largest city in the north of the Netherlands (Porte, 2026), Groningen embodies public life and cultural institutions. Within the cycle, the cityscape functions as the point at which information and visibility open the region to the visitor.

8.2. Landscape cycle: Tourism and the value of the landscape

The landscape cycle highlights the landscape as a primary tourist destination. A landscape attracts visitors through its natural, cultural, and recreational qualities. However, several Austrian examples demonstrate that landscapes are often consumed for free, while tourists do not support their maintenance (Fitz et al., 2024, p.169). In Austria, the countermovement called "Schule der Alm" (*Schule der Alm*, 2026), responds to this problem by offering visitors

a more meaningful and sustainable experience. Its courses are intended not only to educate but also to help preserve the cultural landscape (Fitz et al., 2024, p. 167).

The German Wadden Sea region provides another example. There, information centres, events, and educational programmes make the landscape visible while distributing visitors across the wider territory. The region gains visibility, but the infrastructure also encourages exploration and helps prevent overcrowding at a single site.

While Groningen has the same landscape heritage as the Wadden Sea in Germany, they promote it differently. The relative absence of information centres reveals a practical problem: many tourists pass through the province without being drawn into its landscape or invited to understand their value. In Winsum, this condition becomes particularly evident. Although the village occupies a strategic position within the cultural ecosystem, limited information and orientation reduce its visibility as a place to arrive and explore. Existing visitors, including Pieterpad hikers, often continued their journey without staying, which shortens visits and limits economic and social benefit.

This comparison suggests that the challenge is not the region's lack of attraction but the absence of an architectural framework that makes existing qualities legible. That observation forms the basis of *The Mediator*. The project treats the landscape not only as something to look at, but as a medium of engagement. For Winsum, this cycle therefore points to need for spaces of orientation, learning and reflection, combined with routes for hiking and cycling that lead visitors deeper into the surrounding landscape. This observation forms the basis for "The Mediator", which introduces visitors to Groningen's cultural identity. Where the landscape attracts tourists but simultaneously encourages engagement with it.

8.3. Agriscape cycle: Agriculture and regional value

The agriscape cycle highlights agriculture as an important aspect of the local identity. In Austria, culinary culture and food tourism play an important role in making the local identity tangible (Fitz et al., 2024, p. 164). For instance, the alpine farm Gampe Thaya, which relies on regional products and local production processes, creates an authentic visitor experience. (Prantl & Prantl, 2026). Visitors gain a clearer understanding of the relationship between landscape, food production, and local identity.

This example shows that agriculture can be used as a tool for visitors to engage with the region's cultural ecosystem. The agriscape cycle suggests strengthening existing agricultural structures and creating opportunities for visitors to understand and participate in regional food cultures. In Groningen, this is particularly relevant because agricultural use has shaped the regional food cultures. The challenge lies less in the absence of agriculture than in the limited number of ways visitors can engage with it.

A third route is therefore proposed that connects visitors to Groningen's agricultural heritage. Through visits to local farms, encounters with traditional farmhouses such as the head-neck-body typology and participation in local production processes, visitors can develop a more

direct understanding of Groningen's agricultural character. Regional products such as beer, cheese, fruit, and vegetables become expressions of the fertile landscape and of the province's productive culture.

8.4. Relevance for Winsum

The examples from Austria and Germany show that tourism depends on the ability to connect visitors to a region's cultural ecosystem. The cityscape highlights the importance of visibility and information, while the landscape and agriscap cycle point towards forms of engagement in which visitors move, learn, and reflect. Together, these cycles suggest that the hub in Winsum should not be understood as a new attraction in itself. Its role is to strengthen and organise existing regional qualities.

Against this background, The Mediator functions as a point of arrival, departure, and return. From this central position, visitors can be introduced to Groningen's city, landscape, and agricultural land through a sequence of routes and programmes that connect the region rather than isolate individual destinations.

9. Research and Design Results

The research and design phase investigates how architecture can activate visitors to connect to the cultural ecosystem of Groningen. Based on the theoretical framework, the cityscape, landscape, and agriscap cycles are translated into an architectural proposal that encourages visitors to engage with the region through movement and programme.

9.1. Research Observation | Site Analysis

The site analysis revealed a spatial separation between the Marenland campsite and Groningen's cultural ecosystem. However, Marenland already attracts visitors, but it remains a transit point. It remains disconnected from the wider regional network, and a high traffic road cuts through it, reinforcing this disconnection rather than engaging with it.

This condition offers The Mediator an opportunity to establish a symbiotic relationship with the existing Marenland campsite. Due to its strategic position next to the Marenland campsite and along the Pieterpad hiking route, the proposal builds upon existing tourist flows. At the same time, it creates new reasons to stop, orient, and continue into the region with greater awareness. Marenland provides accommodation, hospitality, and recreational facilities, including bicycle and canoe rentals. The Mediator complements these functions by giving them a regional framework.

Furthermore, the site's current accessibility encourages movement through Winsum rather than engagement. The proposal therefore restructures access and circulation for visitors, creating a clear and attractive stop for arriving, departing, and returning to Winsum. In addition, these routes help organise and structure the overall composition of the design, establishing a stronger relationship between the Mediator, Marenland and Winsum.

9.2. Design ambition: Connecting Polarities

The design ambition is to connect the three cycles without eliminating their differences. Rather than merging contrasting conditions into a single uniform experience, the project embraces these differences. The Mediator translates the cycles into distinct architectural programmes and, through polarities, expresses the diversity of Groningen's cultural ecosystem.

On a regional scale, the design mediates between the landscape, agriscap, and cityscape, connecting visitors to Groningen's local identity. On an architectural scale, the design is shaped through polarities such as introverted and extroverted, traditional and contemporary, heavy and light. These oppositions are not resolved into a single image. They are used instead to enrich the architectural experience and to register the variety already present in the region.

9.3. Cycles translated into Programme

The three conceptual cycles, cityscape, landscape, and agriscap, are translated into distinct programs that structure the visitor's engagement with the region. Together, they support a continuous sequence of arrival, departure, and return, with The Mediator acting as the central knot through which Groningen can be entered, explored, and understood.

The cityscape cycle focuses on cultural exchange by including event and exhibition areas that represent Groningen's culture. These spaces provide orientation and inform visitors about museums, institutions, and events in the city of Groningen. In this way, the spaces allow visitors to learn about Groningen's culture and upcoming events.

The landscape cycle emphasises active engagement with the natural environment. Through guided tours, excursions, and painting workshops, visitors are invited to experience and reflect on their impressions of the landscape. The Pieterpad offers physical access to this environment, while further destinations, such as the National Park Lauwersmeer, reveal how human intervention and natural processes meet in dikes and terps.

The agriscap cycle centres on Groningen's agricultural identity through a cooking workshop, a local market, and a restaurant serving regional products. These functions provide direct access to the region's agricultural landscape, which can be further explored by visiting local farms and understanding their craft working with the fertile soil of Groningen. Buying, preparing, and consuming regional products becomes a way of understanding the relationship between humans, agriculture, and landscape.

When brought together, the three cycles turn the building into a hybrid public building offering multiple opportunities to explore the region. Each programme possesses a distinct character while remaining part of a larger system. In this way, the building moves from a conventional tourist attraction and instead uses Groningen's cultural ecosystem as the basis for sustainable engagement.

9.4. Zoom-in: The Mediator

By zooming into The Mediator, the relationship between the cycles and their programmes becomes visible. The organisation of the building is driven by orientation, visibility, and the relationship between the interior and the exterior.

The square is designed to be open, accessible, and to allow visual connection from the inside to the outside and vice versa. The local market, the exhibition space and the information centre all occupy this space. Together, they form a shared threshold where the three cycles are introduced and communicated. The local market, located to the north, serves the restaurant, the cooking workshop, and locals, strengthening the relationship between local farmers, visitors, and the Marenland campsite. The exhibition space showcases the outcome of the different cycles, displaying artworks and knowledge generated through the activities in the cooking and painting workshop. The information centre provides orientation and makes the region's range of experiences legible at the moment of arrival.

In contrast, the event and cooking workshops are more introverted in character. Here, the activity itself becomes the focus, and the enclosure supports this. The project, therefore, stages a visual and spatial exchange between extroverted and introverted conditions, allowing users to experience Groningen's regional qualities within the building itself.

The strategy of using similar materials further strengthens the relationship between The Mediator and the existing Marenland campsite. By reinterpreting the two timber cladding systems: natural and dark-stained timber, the building establishes a deeper dialogue with the existing context, thereby embedding it.

The structure is a flexible framework with generic floor plans that can respond to changing demands over time. While primarily designed to support tourists during the summer season, the building can accommodate alternative uses during winter, such as education facilities, like a public library or co-working spaces. This adaptability is relevant not only in Winsum but also for the wider region. The design can be understood as a prototype that could make other regional qualities visible and accessible elsewhere in Groningen.

The overall architectural form is a reinterpretation of the region's traditional pitched roof typology. By combining contemporary construction methods with the regional roof shape, the design mediates between tradition and contemporality. These tensions are not decorative; they are part of how the project gives spatial expression to the differences within Groningen's cultural ecosystem.

9.5. Zoom-in: Accommodation

The next design intervention close to The Mediator is the accommodation. The two interventions complement one another. While The Mediator introduces the visitor to the three cycles, the hotels provide a space to withdraw and extend a visitor's stay. Together, they support a longer and more continuous engagement with the region.

The organisation of the hotels introduces another spatial polarity. Whereas The Mediator is conceived as a horizontal slab, the hotels are designed as individual solitaires scattered throughout the landscape. This arrangement strengthens the relationship between accommodation and the surrounding environment.

In contrast to The Mediator, the hotels also work with distinction. The public functions, such as the shared kitchen a living room, serving spaces such as bicycle rental, and a washing room are located on the ground floor, where they remain accessible. In contrast, the private spaces, such as the accommodations, are located on the first floor, providing privacy and views towards the surrounding environment in Winsum.

Beyond providing accommodation, the hotels enhance the overall proposal's adaptability. Its modular typology allows additional units to be added during seasonal peaks. Meanwhile, The Mediator continues to organise and distribute the visitor flows.

10. Summary

This graduation project investigates how a public building can translate the local qualities of Groningen into an architectural design proposal to attract tourists to the region. The Mediator treats tourism as an encounter with landscape, agriculture, public culture, and local communities. It does not propose a new leisure activity detached from its context; instead, it works with qualities that are already present in the province.

The research defines Groningen's local identity through three interconnected cycles: landscape, agriscap, and cityscape. Together, these cycles form the region's cultural ecosystem and provide the narrative and organisational basis of the architectural design proposal.

The Mediator is positioned between the Marenland campsite, the Pieterpad and the village of Winsum. Through information, exhibition, workshops, and routes, it introduces visitors to the region and encourages them to move beyond passive consumption. The building structures a sequence of arrival, orientation, exploration, and return, and, in doing so, mediates between different regional qualities while making Groningen's diversity more legible.

11. Conclusion

The project answers the research question by demonstrating how architecture can make a cultural ecosystem tangible through a local, participatory visitor experience. Its central argument is that Groningen does not require a new disconnected attraction. The regions existing landscape, agriculture, settlements, and public life already provide the material for tourism. Architecture becomes relevant when it makes these qualities visible and accessible.

The research shows that tourism can only create long-term benefits for both the local economy and local communities when it is closely tied to regional identity. Examples from Austria and Germany illustrate that tourism based primarily on consumption can place

pressure on communities, landscapes, and villages. At the same time, they show that tourism can become more meaningful when visitors are encouraged to explore the region while supporting cultural, social, and environmental values.

In the context of Groningen, the cultural ecosystem is defined through three cycles: the landscape, the agriscap, and the cityscape. The landscape represents the region's natural and recreational qualities, while the agriscap introduces visitors to agriculture and local food production. Lastly, the cityscape, with the city of Groningen as its main attraction, introducing public life and urban culture. Together, these cycles form the foundation of the region's identity and provide the basis for the architectural proposal.

The Mediator translates these regional qualities into an architectural design language through a combination of programmes related to information, cultural exchange, landscape experience, and regional food production. Movement and programme are the main instruments through which visitors encounter the relation between landscape, agriculture, settlements, and local communities. The project therefore frames tourism not as an isolated act of leisure but as a sequence of spatial encounters within a region

The design also demonstrates how architecture can mediate between the diverse characteristics of a region. This is expressed through a series of spatial polarities, such as introverted and extroverted, traditional and contemporary, public and private, heavy and light. These contrasts are not resolved into a single uniform expression; instead, they are used to celebrate the diversity and complexity of Groningen's cultural ecosystem within one coherent design proposal.

In conclusion, contemporary tourist attractions are primarily based on consumption. Meanwhile, The Mediator shifts the focus towards a participatory process of discovery. It helps visitors develop a deeper understanding of the region and creates opportunities for local businesses, such as farmers and regional producers. In this way, the project positions architecture as an instrument for strengthening local communities and making existing regional qualities visible. Rather than replacing them with a new, disconnected attraction.

11.1. The Plug-In Hub

The Mediator is designed as a Plug-In Hub that connects visitors to Groningen's cultural ecosystem. Winsum, the campsite, and the Pieterpad hiking trail offer a perfect opportunity to serve as a central point for distributing tourist flows into the region.

The programmes are based on the three cycles, which are inserted into a flexible architectural framework. In this sense, The Mediator is less a fixed object than a structure through which different cultural ecosystems can be made tangible. Due to this flexibility and open floor plan, the design can be placed throughout the region, enabling the concept to be applied elsewhere in Groningen, where other local identities might be introduced through the same framework.

In combination with the hotel cluster, The Mediator supports longer stays in the region and offers a practical response to periods of tourist overflow in Winsum. Additional accommodation units can be introduced, when necessary, while the hub continues to orient and distribute visitors. Together, the two interventions form a system that encourages visitors not only to arrive and depart but also to remain engaged with Groningen over time. While enabling quick action on tourist overflows in Winsum, where hotels can be added quickly. Together, they form a duo that encourages visitors not only to arrive and depart, but also to remain engaged with Groningen for longer.

11.2. Contribution to Nij Begun

The design contributes to Nij Begun's ambition by proposing an idea that strengthens Groningen's local character rather than depending on a newly manufactured attraction. It builds on existing qualities: landscape, agricultural land, local culture, regional routes and the network of villages and the city.

The concept of The Mediator refers to its role as a connector and distributor of tourist flows within the cultural ecosystem. By its strategic location in Winsum, visitor flows can be directed to different destinations, thereby reducing visitor density at a single location. This approach directly responds to the research findings, which showed that tourist densities can put pressure on local communities and infrastructure.

In this sense, the proposal aligns with the Nij Begun agenda linking tourism to local identity. At the same time, it supports local businesses and agricultural producers by encouraging visitors to engage with the region's existing qualities. Tourism is therefore not treated as a purely consumptive activity, but as a potential catalyst for regional regeneration that can improve the quality of life for locals while generating long-term economic benefits for the province of Groningen.

11.3. Reflection

The project began with the intention of establishing a spatial connection between residents and tourists. However, through the site visit, mapping and conversations with professionals, this focus shifted. The research showed that the primary challenge in Groningen is not simply the coexistence of different user groups, but the absence of a clear architectural framework that connects visitors to the region's cultural ecosystem in a meaningful way.

Winsum initially appeared as a transit point. However, its decentralised position within the province suggested a different potential: rather than functioning as a destination, it can operate as a point of orientation within a wider regional network. Its value lies less in its isolated qualities than in its relationship to the surrounding landscapes, agricultural structures, and cultural destinations. This shift in perspective was decisive for the development of the Mediator.

At the same time, the project raises several critical questions. While the design proposes routes and programmes that encourage longer stays and deeper engagement, the actual

effectiveness of these strategies depends on factors beyond architecture, including mobility patterns and seasonal tourism dynamics.

A second point of reflection concerns the balance between mediation and intervention. While The Mediator deliberately avoids creating a new iconic attraction, there is a risk that the project will remain too dependent on existing structures, failing to sufficiently transform them.

Finally, the project engages with the concept of local identity, yet this notion itself is not fixed. By translating the cultural ecosystem into an architectural framework, the design inevitably selects and frames certain aspects of the region while leaving others aside.

Despite these open questions, the project contributes to a more differentiated understanding of tourism in Groningen. It proposes an alternative to models based solely on consumption. In this sense, The Mediator is not conceived as an object but as an organisational device that structures relationships among visitors, places, and the region.

The project opens several directions for future research, for example, the idea of The Mediator being a transferable framework across Groningen. Further investigation could explore how this design proposal would need to adapt to different local contexts.

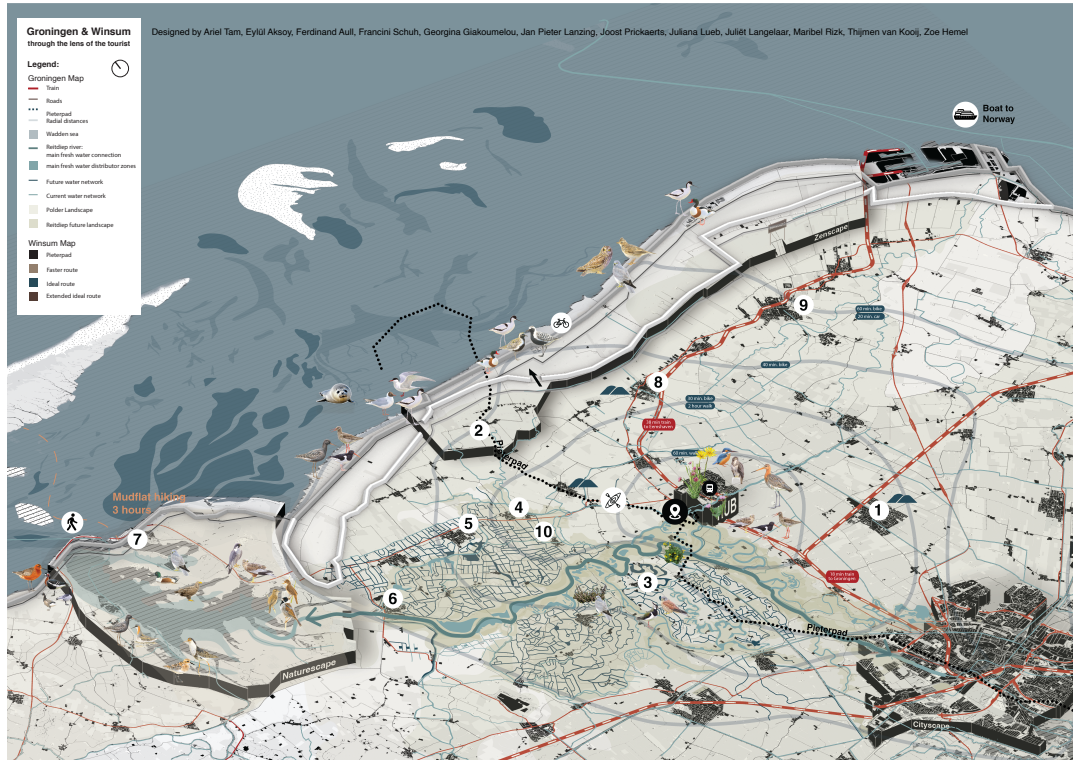


Figure 1: Cultural ecosystem of Groningen

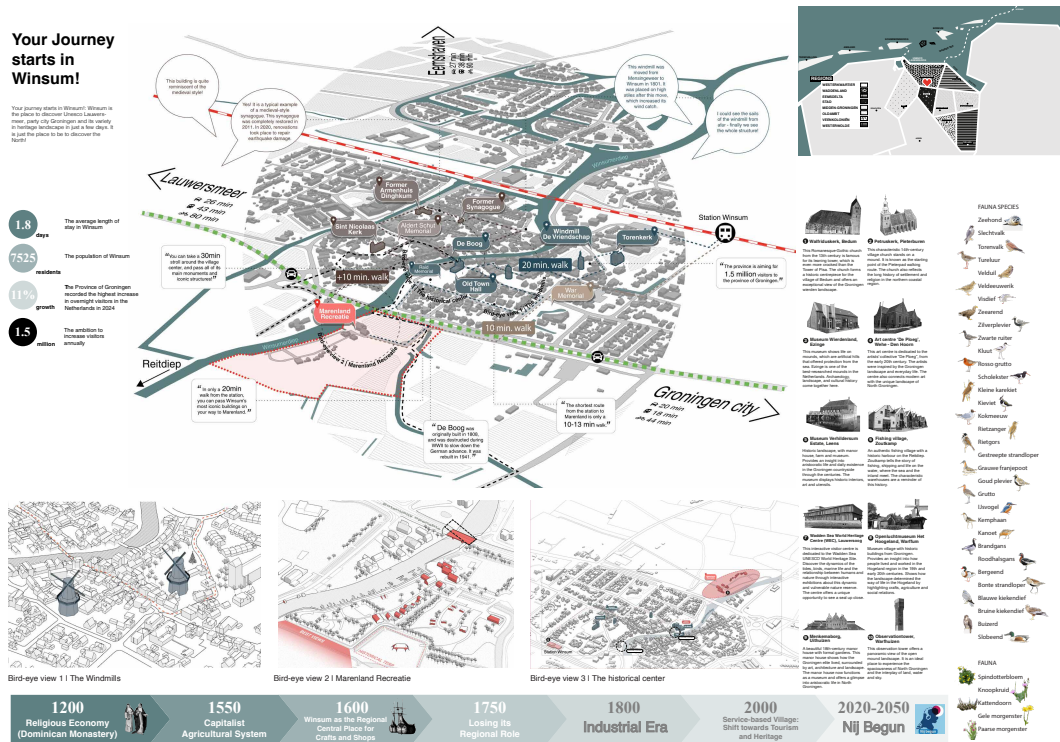


Figure 2: Isolation from Winsum



Figure 6: Winsum decentralised

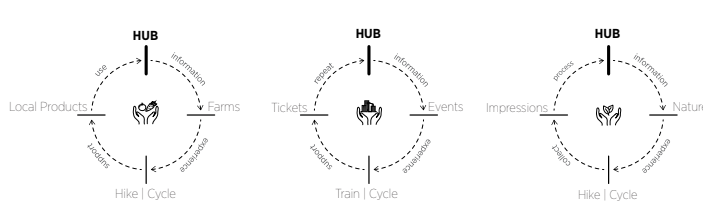


Figure 5: Three cycles framing the cultural ecosystem

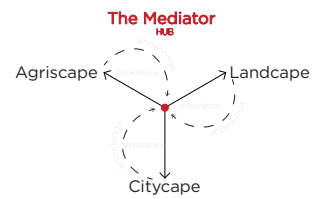


Figure 4: Arrival, Departure and Return

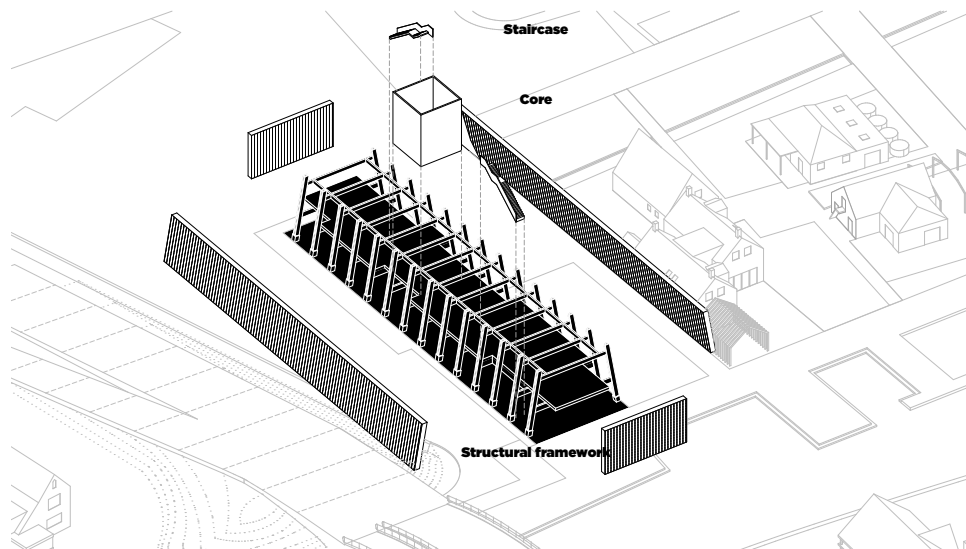


Figure 3: Structural Framework

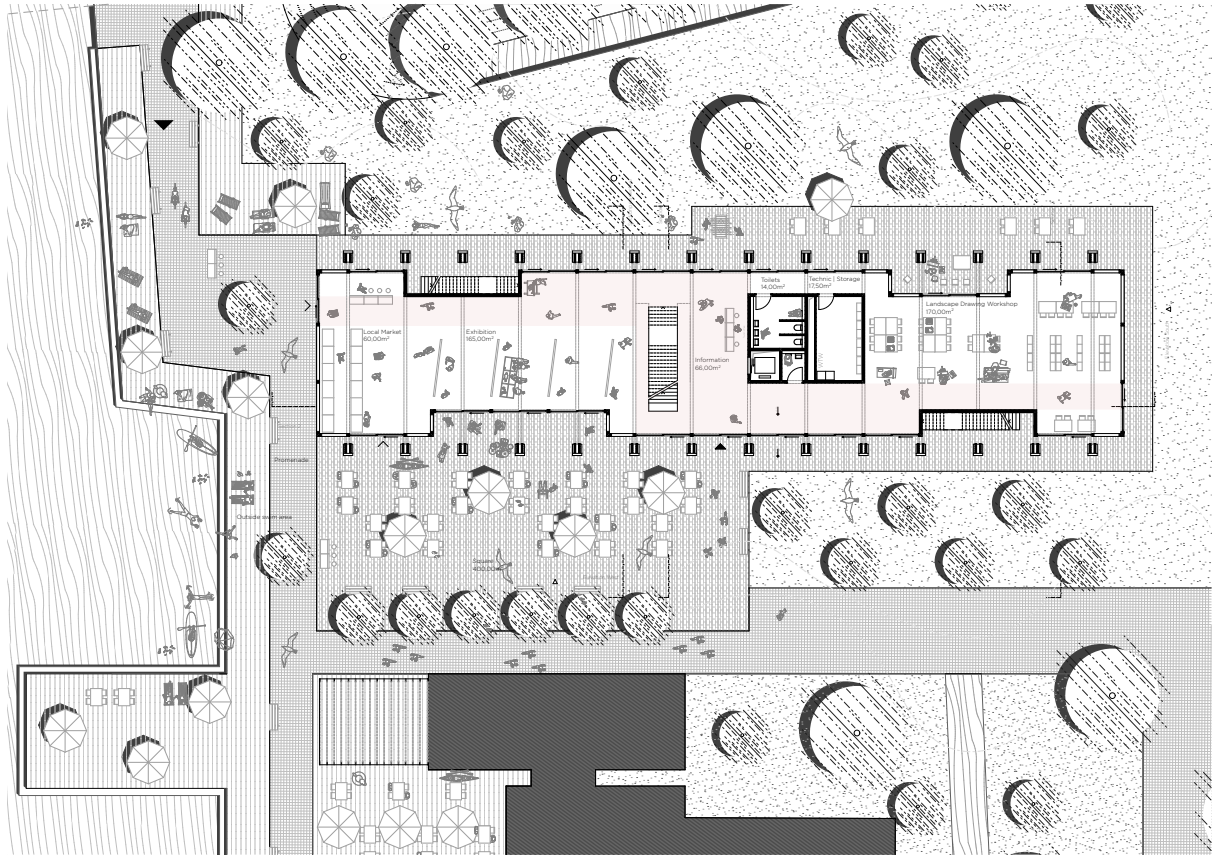


Figure 7: Extroverted character

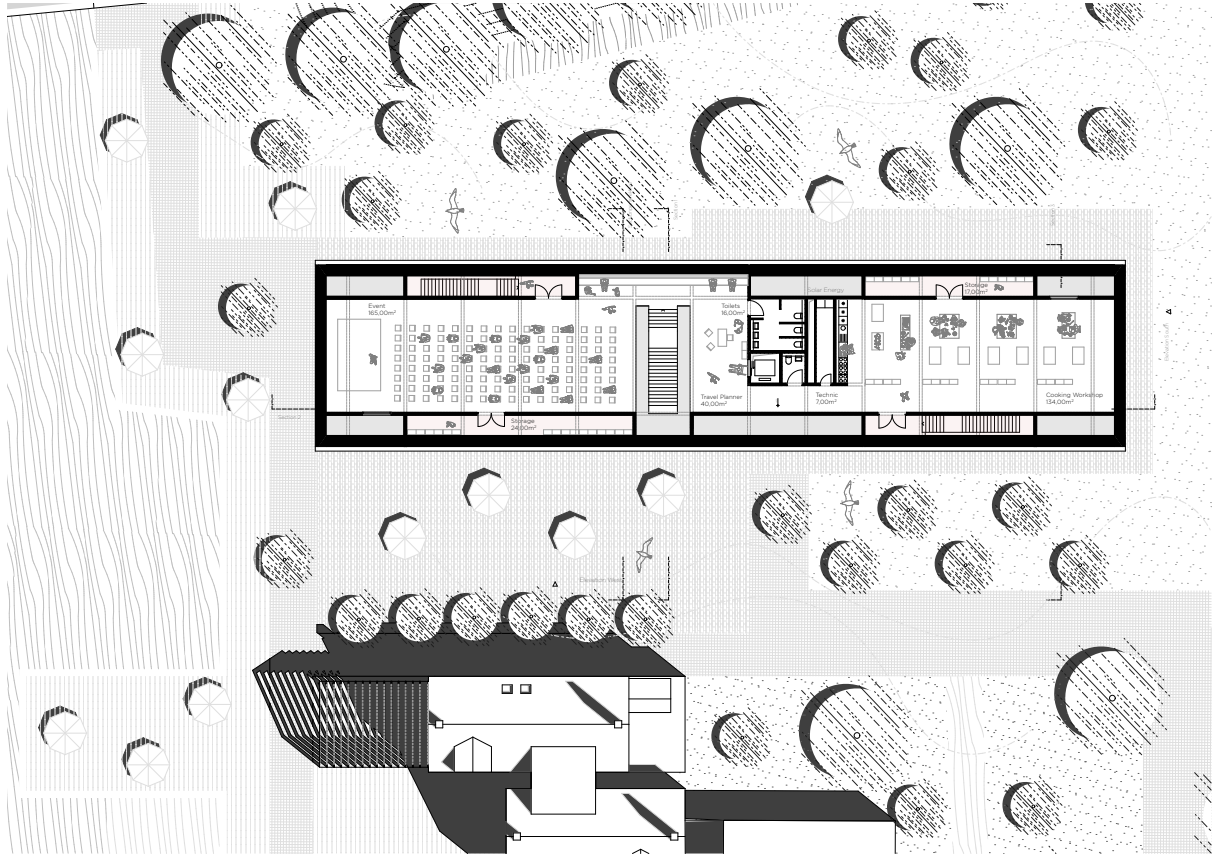


Figure 8: Introverted character

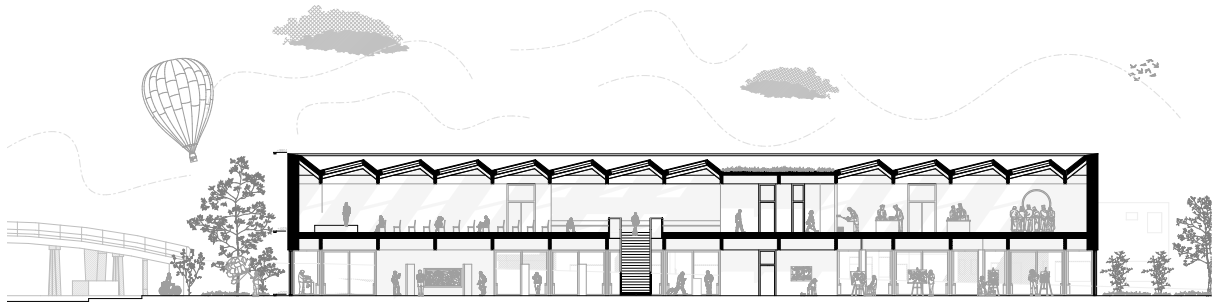


Figure 9: Hybrid framework



Figure 10: The Mediator as a Prototype for the region

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