

# Reflection Graduation Project

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### Why

This project has come forth from my personal fascination, in its turn formed by my student career with personal choices and preferences. The graduation studio Explore Lab allowed me to find out what exactly fascinated me and what I wanted to find out about it. In this sense it is also a way of profiling myself for my further career. My long lasting interest in getaway architecture, that I initially saw separate from my subconscious yearning of nature in my surroundings came together in researching how this getaway architecture stimulates the valuation of landscapes in Norway. This was of course a defined and maybe limited case, but my connections in Norway allowed me to create a personal and thorough as well as broad research that fitted the topic. Following from this was my design, where my personal discomfort of living in the Randstad and observation of a decreasing interest and valuation of Dutch landscapes, especially in my close surroundings, was explored and tested.

In this sense the project is strongly embedded in a much wider social context. Both Norway and the Netherlands deal with their landscape on a political level, although both in different ways. While Norway deals with an increased wealth which is causing a change in the originally modest cabin culture, the Netherlands is dealing with increasing urbanisation and its corresponding transition of landscape. As a small and dense man-made country political debates about the organization of land is inevitable. The fact that most of the landscape is man-made allows for a lot of possibilities, but there is also an ethical question of what to develop and what to preserve. Moreover, building in a landscape and in the first place opening up a piece of cultured nature to the public in order to make people value it can be seen as quite paradoxical. The design project deals with this, as it aims to partly transform the currently agricultural land into a place where people can revalue the typically Dutch landscape by experiencing and understanding it through routes, activities and architecture. The revitalization of the historical mill sites contributes to an understanding of the history and layering of the landscape, next to the fact that it is simply opened up to the public and does not remain unseen and trapped within private plots.

There is a balance between making the plot accessible and letting nature live as unharmed as possible. The contemplated goal of the valuation of landscape is the most important, this means there will be inevitable compromises, but a good design incorporates all interests as good as possible.

Seeing this project in its professional framework one can say that it spans across a few scales or specific fields of study within the area defined by the faculty of architecture and the built environment at the TU Delft. My tutors, each from quite different fields of study within this faculty definitely contributed to this. The studio Explorelab is also probably the only opportunity to produce such a project. The conclusions of the research paper are fairly general and answer the research question. Moreover, these strategies or guidelines can act as a good starting point for a design. However, the research also poses several other important questions that allow for further investigation. The design project can be seen as an example of one of these answers, but needless to say, there are many different answers possible that can create a similar valuation of landscape.

## Product

A few products can be defined within the topics research and design. The research paper I wrote called: *The Revaluation of Landscape through Sensory Experience: Learning from the Norwegian Way of Living* combined findings within design theory, literature and qualitative interviews into a conclusion that spans across scales of landscape, near surroundings and architecture. As part II. of the graduation project a literature research about the Dutch way of living was conducted as a way of translating the fairly general conclusions of part I. into suitable design guidelines for the Dutch situation. Part II. comprised an extensive site analysis. Part IV. consisted of a landscape design, where the chosen area was analysed and redesigned on a fairly large scale and an architectural design, where the holiday home located on an old mill site is embedded into the landscape.

## Planning

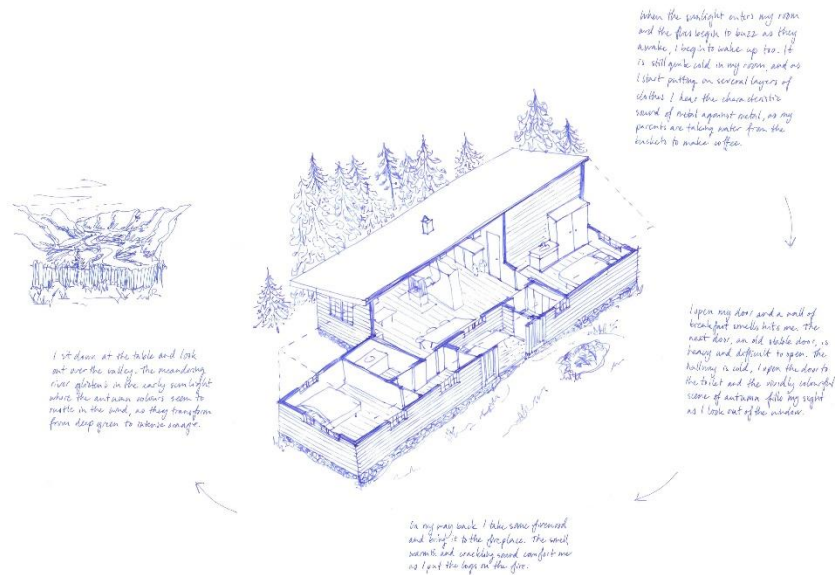
The planning was generally followed, although doing research took more time than expected. The results from the interviews were of large quantity, which meant it took a lot of time firstly documenting these and then drawing conclusions from it. Since there was no hypothesis, there was some thought needed on what to analyse and how to present/visualize this. The literature studies were broad and extensive, which had to be condensed into a fairly short piece of coherent text, where not all consulted sources could be involved. Drawing a conclusion from all these different results might have been underestimated. Also, the structure of the paper had to be altered in order to form and later strengthen the conclusion. Although the design process had already started when the conclusion was not formed yet, the choice of the design location was not as fixed as intended, but in this case this might have been good. By allowing space and time for finding a good location, I stumbled upon a historically interesting and valid area within the larger location I had already chosen and substantiated for. The P2 was passed and the research paper was well on its way. The P3 might have taken place a bit too early in the process, the design wasn't where it should have been. After a short try for the P4 I realized the project wasn't as far as I would have wanted it to be. Sadly, or maybe luckily, I decided to not only aim for personal improvement in my studies, but also in other organizations, which allowed for a very fruitful but also extremely busy year. This caused me to postpone my P4 to September which gave me a bit more space to create a project with the quality I intended.

## Process (& how)

Note: The process was in a general sense not linear. Although the parts are in chronological order, the process in producing them is not.

The first part of the process was the most uncertain one, where a fairly wide fascination had to be converged into a specific research question. By means of creating geographical limitations and using existing connections the fascination focused on Norway in an early stage. The intention to span across multiple scale levels was preserved and the research content was slowly divided into three more specific subjects. By firstly choosing qualitative interviews in combination with analytical drawings as the desired method, the other two research directions grew accordingly. As a means of argumentation and contextualizing design theory and location

specific historical and cultural literature research were undertaken, involving the interview results throughout the chapters describing this context. Creating conclusions from these results, coming from fairly diverse backgrounds and using quite different methods for this was challenging, but succeeded as a set of guidelines was created. These different fields of interest made it easier to keep a fair level of interest in order to ensure an efficient process and workflow, although the translation of the results of the qualitative interviews took longer than expected.



Whilst converting results into conclusions, a translation from the Norwegian to the Dutch situation was taking place. A challenging translation that needed argumentation and contextualization. A similar literature research to that of the Norwegian situation was undertaken in this light. In first instance this was part of the research paper, but I later decided it was not specifically necessary for answering the research question. Understanding the Norwegian background was enough to generalize the results of the interviews. However, the understanding of the Dutch situation was necessary for choosing a design location and producing a design for it on multiple scales.

The choice for a design location had to naturally follow from the research paper. The decision to translate the learned to the situation of the Netherlands was already decided upon fairly quickly. An argumentation for where that would be exactly was not as quickly decided upon. The general area was chosen because of its ruralness and closeness to the “Randstad”, as well as the opportunity for visitors to reach the beach and thus its accompanying series of Dutch landscapes by bike (15-20 km). The design goal in this sense was very important: To make Dutch people value their landscape. Who have the weakest connection to the Dutch landscape in the Netherlands? Citizens of the Randstad. Accessibility in this sense also played a role. Also citizens without a car should be able to reach the plot, by bike would probably even be the best way of transportation.

Through a site visit the larger area was chosen, but the exact location of the envisioned architecture was only chosen on a provisional basis. The next site visits were more directed to certain spots of exploration, by bike but also by foot. And as it mostly seems in hindsight, I quite accidentally found a mill ruin, which gave me a welcome starting point. From this decision on, the analysis process as well as the design process started moving. Another site visit with the goal of analysing routes towards and from the ruin created necessary insights in how routes should be shaped which was all documented on a big drawing combined with printed photo's. As another part of the analysis, I read future visions of and plans for the bigger area in order to get an insight in what would be feasible within these plans or what would be an extension of these plans. The designs itself started with defining these routes and the exact perimeters of the plot. It also comprised choosing three building locations, which

were derived from the historical mill locations, each having their own meaning. Rough programs for each of these locations were formed, with taking seasons into account. This was done through model studies on different scales (1:2000, 1:500, 1:200). This way of working was new to me, and although it was quite time-consuming it did help me in the design process. Moreover, these models did not only clarify the connection and meaning of the three-unity for myself, but also explained the area, terrain and connection and meaning to my tutors.

This part of the process was really interesting, but also felt quite slow, as I was working on multiple things simultaneously but didn't feel like I was producing something concrete. Looking back now, the tricky part was the conversion from a bigger scale, on which the conclusions from the research paper were mostly acting, to a smaller scale, where an actual building would be designed. From this experience I learned that sometimes you just have to continue zooming in, even though you don't feel like you have made enough decisions on a bigger scale. These decisions will naturally form, while zooming in you will find more arguments than you could have expected beforehand. However, the exploring aspect of this part of the process was very exciting and unexpected findings kept the process interesting.

The next step was choosing one location in order to fully design a building and its embedment into the existing landscape. The chosen location was one half of the historical mill pair, of which the ruin was the only built remain. The other mill location was a lot less clear, especially for laypeople. The slight hill that used to form the basis of the mill and the accompanying structure were the only relics. A holiday home was decided for as future use, a good comparison with the cabins analysed in the research.

After a quick 1:50 scale model adventure and realizing this was not what I wanted to design, I started again on 1:200 by defining the main composition and orientation of the building. Although it definitely wasn't easy combining all desired aspects on different scales – history, heritage, culture, functionality, routing, materials, landscape, ecology, sustainability, etc. - into one composition, it worked. The structure that I had come up with was fairly simple and rigid, which allowed a quite fast elaboration of the lay-out. As I focused more on the lay-out of the architecture and its materials the structure might have become a bit too comfortable. As my tutors pointed out, I had to let go of the structure sometimes, especially when designing the courtyard and how it positioned itself in the landscape. This was done, but step by step. In retrospect, I should have tried to let go of

### Recreating three places

The historical places of the "ondermolen" and "bovenmolen" will be recreated through positioning groups of architectural and landscape elements on the dike, which defines the border between two types of historical polders.

The "bovenmolen" is a node in the structure of reintroduced routes through the landscape.

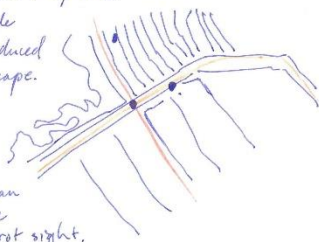
It exists of a watchtower in the ruins of the old poldermill and an according small tower.

From this point, visitors can get a clear overview of the stratification of the, at first sight, boring and simple polder landscape.

The main route runs perpendicular to the dike, offering visitors an experience of both polder types, while the secondary route runs alongside the dike, offering a comparison of both polder structures.

The "ondermolen" lies on this secondary route and offers visitors a more private surrounding to experience the landscape by means of a family holiday home referring to the stories of the specific place.

The third place is of a sort different kind. It lies along the main route and lies in a flat plane in between a structure of historically defined waterways. This place provides a group accommodation that relates to the recreational use of the lake "de Plas". Its character is both public and private where its architecture is organised accordingly.



The project relates to Dutch landscape and the culture that deals with it. The goal is a (re)valuation of the Dutch polder landscape by an ever growing number of Rotterdam citizens. While these citizens mostly live closer to these cultural landscapes than they think, they are mostly not valued enough in order to make it worth a visit. As these landscapes embody Dutch history and culture, which can in most cases only be understood and experienced in order to value them, they need to be opened and made accessible and attractive for the public. A closer and more intimate <sup>relation</sup> to the landscape can however be only established through a longer private experience.

The cabin, the most private form in the project, needs to be designed in relation to the landscape by using the sensory experience of the inhabitants and the architectural reaction to the seasons as guiding themes.

On a bigger scale, the route towards and from the cabin needs to establish a certain feeling of detachment for the visitors. Also, space for activities in the landscape needs to be created while balancing public and private interventions.

is structure a bit earlier and allow for more experimenting in this phase. The fact that I acted the way I did was probably a reaction on the earlier “slow” and uncertain phase.

Moreover, while elaborating on how the building was composed or how it is going to be built, I sometimes lost track of the intended sensory experience throughout the seasons. In the process I had to be careful to keep an eye on this major aspect, as well as keeping the whole story of the valuation of the landscape in mind. One way of doing this was writing the story down and visualizing it in sketches.

In general I was happy about the process, it was diverse and an actual exploration, also of my own capabilities. I for instance realized that writing might well be one of my capabilities, something I didn't think beforehand. About the design project, I might have slightly underestimated the complexity of the project, and thus the time it would take to incorporate all aspects on all scale levels. However, I did find the combination of research and design a very interesting and inspiring combination and will try to strive for this in my future occupations. For now, the design has almost crystallized and the next step is translating it all into transferable modes of representation. A bonus that I might want to incorporate still is the tower in the old mill ruin, it would complete the design on even more scale levels than it does now. My wish is that people start wondering about their own relationship to the landscape surrounding them and value it for how it is now, but also how it came to be.

