

Room for the New Collective:

Towards Thresholds of Presence



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Abstract

In recent decades, public architecture has increasingly been called upon to play a role in social, economic, and environmental change. In regions impacted by industrial extraction, exploitation, and political neglect, public buildings must exist not as mere civic objects, but rather as spaces where belonging, access, and collective identity are fostered. Such areas often tend to contribute disproportionately to national prosperity, yet remain marginal and peripheral when it comes to public investment, representation, and spatial quality. Several by-products of such processes include the physical deterioration of the built environment, social fragmentation, demographic decline, and a weakened sense of belonging within communities.

The northern region of Groningen is one such case, which has, for decades, been affected by processes of extraction. While gas extraction in the area has generated national economic benefit, it has left local communities with enduring social, spatial and psychological consequences, such as seismic damage, a loss of trust in the government, and a weakened sense of identity.

In response to these issues, the Dutch government has recently proposed *Nij Begun*, a long-term, 30-year agenda with the aim of rebuilding the future of Groningen and North Drenthe. This proposal serves as a point of departure for the project. *Nij Begun* addresses regions that, for decades, have been impacted by gas extraction and as a consequence, also by multiple earthquakes. In turn, this has caused serious damage to buildings, as well as economical and psychological issues to inhabitants.

This project departs from the *Nij Begun* agenda and its key principles such as addressing mental health and wellbeing, improving health and liveability, increasing participation, and fostering community spirit and pride. It aims to provide an environment of *wellbeing*. Through strengthening the relationship of the site with water, and creating public spaces and buildings which foster *connection* to others, and to nature, the project aims to generate a sense of identity, belonging, and *community* for the locals, while also attracting visitors to the region.

Healing: *In the context of this project, “healing” will be understood as a state of psychological and spiritual wellbeing, inner peace, and the improvement of one’s mental state.*

Part 1 Introduction

1.1 Problem statement

The relationship between the waterway, and the rest of the site within Marenland, is lacking. A pavement runs along the waterfront, creating a harsh boundary between land and water – there is a clear potential for the integration of the Winsumerdiep into daily life. Much like Winsum itself, Marenland has difficulties in attracting visitors all throughout the year, with summer being its busiest season. On average, visitors stay here for 1.8 days – the site functions more as an overnight stop, as opposed to a destination with potential for longer stays. Reasons for this include a lack of clear identity, as well as a physical and mental disconnect from the village center.

The municipality of Het Hogeland, within which Winsum is situated, as well as nearby regions, are formed largely by those *seeking peace and quiet*, as well as *connection seekers*.¹ These groups also make up a large share of potential visitors to the area. Het Hogeland is also among the regions with the highest percentage of individuals aged 65 and older within the Netherlands. For the first time, individuals aged 65 and over now outnumber those aged under 20 in the Netherlands.² This trend is expected to continue – over the coming decades, the elderly population is expected to grow more rapidly compared to the younger population.³ Hence, the amount of individuals seeking *peace and quiet*, as well as *connection*, will also continue to grow.

A wider issue in the field, which remains a crucial and relevant topic of discussion, is the question of whether a space is *truly* public. Oftentimes in contemporary contexts, public spaces are declared to be accessible to all, yet practically remain exclusive. Intangible barriers are present in the form of social codes, socio-economic hierarchies, or exclusively tourist-oriented intentions.

¹ MarketResponse, “Leefstijlvinder,” 2026, <https://leefstijlvinder.nl/>.

² Statistics Netherlands (CBS), “Population Forecast: More Elderly Than Young People,” 16 December 2025, <https://www.cbs.nl/en-gb/news/2025/51/population-forecast-more-elderly-than-young-people>.

³ Statistics Netherlands (CBS), “Population Outlook 2050: an older and better educated population,” 13 June 2024, <https://www.cbs.nl/en-gb/news/2024/26/population-outlook-2050-an-older-and-better-educated-population>.

1.2 Relevance

The project is situated within the increasingly relevant discourse on how public architecture can foster a sense of belonging, identity, and community. It explores how the physical conditions of a site, such as a waterway, can be better integrated into daily life, in a manner which enhances its spatial and societal value. It investigates the role of both physical, and social thresholds in architecture, seeing them as spatial devices which can connect different programmes, systems, and people. The proposal aligns with the goals of *Nij Begun*, through addressing quality of life, social cohesion, and sustainable tourism. The project responds to the rising demand for spaces of tranquility, spaces of connection, spaces which provide psychological wellbeing, pause, and reflection, with travelling for wellness and health purposes being at an all time high.

Today, many public spaces are symbolically *open*, yet remain socially *closed*. This can greatly impact who feels welcome or entitled to enter, occupy, and linger in these spaces. In areas undergoing regeneration with a focus on drawing tourism, this issue becomes all the more apparent, as public space is often designed to cater to visitors as opposed to locals and residents, leaving communities peripheral in their own everyday places. The project aims to tackle this issue.

1.3 Objective and Motivation

One of the main objectives of the project, has been to introduce a sense of *identity* to the site, in order to create a sense of *belonging* and *community* for the locals. Through enriching local daily life, the proposal argues that it can attract the *traveler* as opposed to the tourist – respectful, sustainable visitors who wish to stay longer and fully engage with a place and its community. Therefore, the proposal targets those seeking *connection*, as well as *peace and quiet*.

Strengthening the relationship between the Winsumerdiep and the site itself, as well as with public space, is another main goal, which goes hand in hand with creating a sense of identity, as well as belonging. Through raising awareness of the region, the aim is to attract visitors all year round, for longer stays, and from further away.

Another key goal is to benefit the local community both economically, through job opportunities and income, but also socially, through improving public space, and introducing facilities. Through addressing those *seeking peace and quiet*, as well as *connection seekers*, the project also addresses the current demographic trends, which showcase an ageing population. The aim has been to create spaces of both retreat and gathering, reflection and connection.

Architecturally, the aim is to translate this through the use of scale, lighting, as well as the negotiation and coexistence of private versus public space. One of the main goals is to explore the threshold between land and water, through the experimentation of building on land, over the water, and *in between*. The aim is to achieve this through low-carbon, sustainable materials.

1.4 Research and Design Questions

The project begins from the generic research questions of, “How can public buildings, through typological innovation and programmatic experimentation, affect the everyday life of local communities by promoting social cohesion and participation?”

“What design strategies can be implemented to combine those ambitions with the need for hospitality and visitor facilities?”

It then continues on to a set of more specific research questions such as the following:

- In what ways can the Winsumerdiep be better integrated into **daily life**, fostering a sense of **identity and belonging**, and how can the **threshold** between land and water become a place for pause, lingering, and reflection?
- How can **thresholds** be utilised as **spatial devices** in the creation of **in-between** spaces, allowing different programmes, spaces, users and rhythms to **coexist**?
- How can **multisensory, human-scaled** spaces contribute to **psychological wellbeing, and presence**?
- In what ways can public space generate **social and spatial repair, reclaiming common space** for locals, while welcoming travellers – and how can design mediate between these groups in order to foster a shared **sense of belonging**?

1.5 Scope

The project focuses on rethinking the existing campsite of Marenland within Winsum. It aims to strengthen the relationship of the water and the land, through both public spaces, and public buildings. In better integrating the Winsumerdiep into the daily lives of Winsumers, the proposal aims to establish a sense of *identity, belonging, and community* among the locals.

Those seeking *peace and quiet*, as well as *connection* seekers, form some of the largest groups of both potential visitors to the area, and those who reside in the region. The proposal addresses locals and travellers who are looking for a *tranquil, relaxed* experience, as well as *connection* and socialising.

The proposal provides a gradient of different spatial qualities, ranging from spaces that are dedicated to *solitude, rest and reflection*, to spaces which aim to generate *social interactions, encounters, and collective* activities. *Thresholds* are utilised as spatial devices which create meaningful coexistences.

Psychological healing is experienced in a multitude of ways, including:

- *Psychological healing* through spaces which provide a connection to the water and nature, and programmes of solitude, such as a reading room, or a sauna
- *Psychological healing* through spaces which provide social encounters and interactions, both with one's peers, but also through intergenerational exchange
- *Psychological healing* through spaces which provide access to counselling, workshops, activities such as yoga and canoeing, and informative lectures

Thresholds as Places: The Physical

In ecology, *ecotones* are boundary zones which often possess a greater biodiversity and productivity than either ecosystem on its own. The project aims to investigate the ways in which the connection between the water and the site can be strengthened – how this threshold can become a *place for people and wildlife*, where people can linger, sit, and spend more time, as opposed to a mere harbour or storage space for boats.

Thresholds as Places: The Social

The understanding of thresholds as transitional zones in architecture, is delved into in further detail in Part 2.2 (theoretical framework). The notion of the threshold presents the coexistence of different spaces as an opportunity for increased richness – different programmes have the opportunity to benefit from one another, and what happens *in between* them is equally important, serving great potential. *Thresholds* can exist in built form, but they can also be connections and pathways – places which allow for spontaneous encounters.

Part 2 Approach

2.1 Methods

Through the approach of *Research by Design*, *research* and *design* continuously inform one another. Research not only consists of preparation and description, but also of projection and speculation. Research is seen as a form of design, and design a form of research. Design work itself is seen as a special form of research – as a medium to explore the relationships of form, programme, composition, materiality, construction, and representation.

Both theoretical, and operative, *Research by Design* delves into typological reinterpretations, comparative studies, formal readings, explorations on hybrids, advanced mapping, involving loops, variants, reiterations, intersections, and impressions – all of which form a continuous process. The ultimate goal is to define what a public building is, materialising the endless types of relationships between space, programme, people, materials, and the environment.

Hybridity and multiplicity are some of the key methods which the design project utilises. The traditional idea of public building is reimagined through the lens of hybridity, both programatically, and formally, by combining different activities and design strategies into one composite architectural ensemble. The aesthetic, programmatic, construction, and technological aspects of design are be considered as interconnected parts of a whole, through the concept of multiplicity.

The research has encompassed a multitude of methods, techniques, and tools, including a site visit and its documentation in the forms of photography and sound recordings, as well as meetings with stakeholders of the *Nij Begun* initiative. Additionally, research and data have been analysed through mapping, diagrams, and drawings. The background and history of the context of Groningen has been studied, along with the initiatives of *Nij Begun*, and the agenda proposed by the municipality. Research has been conducted into both the physical and social conditions of the site, at a large, medium, and small scale. For instance, at the large scale, the physical research has explored the qualities of the site, such as its proximity to the Wadden Sea, and the calming characteristics of the landscape. This data has been mapped, informing certain design

decisions, which have consequently informed further research. The physical research at the medium scale concerned with the village of Winsum, and its characteristics such as its historical and cultural center, and connectivity. At the small scale, the physical research focused on the site of Marenland, highlighting both its shortcomings, as well as its strengths. From the site visit, several qualities of the site were analysed, such as land and water relationships, the experience of sound, light, wind and views, as well as movement and moments of pause. Socially, aspects such as the demographics of the site at all three scales, as well as potential visitor profiles, were studied, revealing information such as a high number of peace and quiet seekers, as well as connection seekers in the region. Again, the information found was visually analysed, informing design development, which fuelled further research.

Case studies served as references for various typological aspects of design, such as the relationship between indoor/outdoor, public/private, transparency/opacity, programme distribution, routes, and connections. These case studies included both public buildings, and also public space. Several precedents which deal with the connection between land and water, were studied. While case studies such as the Maggie Centers were used as references for the way in which they create human-scaled spaces for spiritual wellbeing, buildings such as the Geneva Wellness Center, and the Therme Vals, have been studied for the way in which they engage with multiple senses. Additionally, case studies such as the Piushaven Harbour Pavilion, and the Sea Organ in Croatia, have been analysed for the way in which they merge public functions with water.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

Various notions from works of theory and literature have been referenced, informing several of the project’s core principles. Christopher Alexander claims that humans possess a yearning for great bodies of water.⁴ The author argues therefore, that waterfronts should remain accessible to the public, through shared land. This project builds on this narrative, further arguing that the thresholds between bodies of water and land, greatly influence the perceived experience of such a place. Hence, not only should these transitional zones be open to the public, but they should play a role in activating and enriching collective life. Jan Gehl notes that optional activities increase when a public space is attractive, and that people are drawn to edges, transitions, and places to pause.⁵ He also states that human-scaled places encourage lingering and interaction, and are perceived as being more intimate. The proposal takes these notions as a point of departure, aiming to create spaces which will draw people in, fostering a community spirit. Yi-Fu Tuan claims that space becomes place through experience and attachment.⁶ The project seeks to create a sense of attachment and familiarity for the community, enriching local life, and thus attracting the *traveler* who wishes to stay longer, connecting with others and nature.

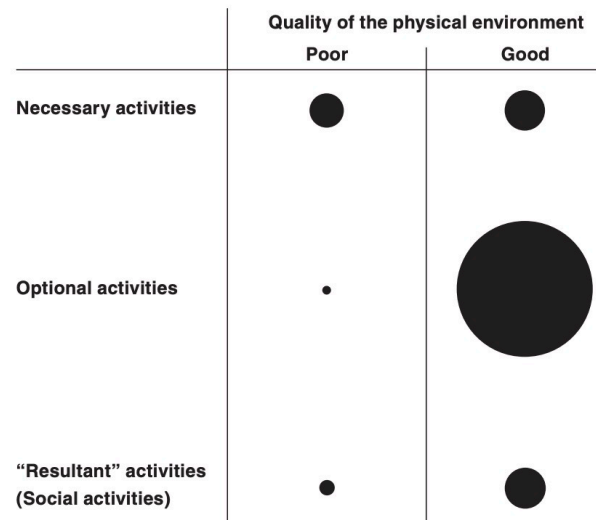


Fig. 1. Representation of the relationship between the quality of outdoor spaces and the rate of occurrence of outdoor activities, from Jan Gehl’s, *Life Between Buildings: Using Public Space*. When the quality of outdoor areas are good, optional activities occur with increased frequency. As levels of optional activity rise, the number of social activities often increases substantially.

Bernard Siegert’s view on thresholds are utilised in order to explore the relationship between land and water, as well as between different spaces and user groups.⁷ Henri Lefebvre’s notion of “right to the city” is an important reference for the project, raising questions on the residents’ agency in shaping and inhabiting

⁴ Christopher Alexander, Sara Ishikawa, and Murray Silverstein, *A Pattern Language: Towns, Buildings, Construction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 135.

⁵ Jan Gehl, *Life Between Buildings: Using Public Space* (Washington, Covelo, London: Island Press, 2011), 11.

⁶ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 136.

⁷ Bernard Siegert, *Cultural Techniques: Grids, Filters, Doors, and Other Articulations of the Real* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015).



Fig. 2. Collage by author exploring the potential connection to water of the site, and public spaces for lingering — composed of photographs taken during site visit to Marenland, as well as the Sea Organ in Croatia.

their own public spaces.⁸ Doreen Massey rejects the idea of places being static entities, and rather sees them as dynamic constellations of relations.⁹ This perspective is utilised to highlight the dynamic environment of Winsum, shaped by the interactions between visitors and locals, and well as infrastructures and landscapes. Gehl’s human-scaled approach to public space relates to comfort, encounter and duration of stay, while Richard Sennett’s work on shared practices and cooperation frames public architecture as an agent of daily social rituals.¹⁰

On Thresholds and the In-Between

Thresholds can be understood in a multitude of different ways. In architectural and urban theory, the idea of the threshold has evolved from a mere physical state, into spatial conditions which negotiate between environments, bodies, and social practices. The threshold is increasingly recognised as a *transitional zone*, where various users and meanings intersect. Such notions become specifically relevant when dealing with public spaces, and environments of wellbeing.

From an ecological standpoint, an *ecotone* is an example of a threshold found in the natural environment, such as that between land and water. An ecotone is a boundary between two ecosystems, with heightened

⁸ Henri Lefebvre, ‘The Production of Space’ (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 38-46.

⁹ Doreen Massey, ‘Space, Place, and Gender’ (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), 146–156.

¹⁰ Jan Gehl, *Life Between Buildings: Using Public Space* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2011), 19-21.

interaction and biodiversity relative to either one of the ecosystems alone, since species from both ecosystems can exist within it, along with more which appear only in this overlap.¹¹ Not only is this relevant for architecture when working with the physical context of a given site, but it also translates into spatial thinking – the richness of a place is often amplified not from separation, but from incremental transition, interweaving, and overlap. This can be changes in light, sound, movement, texture and temperature, but also programme, publicness or privacy.

Bernard Siegart's notion of cultural techniques, positions thresholds not as neutral elements, but as operative tools, with the power to influence social interactions, agency, and belonging. A threshold is viewed as being neither *inside* or *outside*, but rather as a zone of negotiation, holding both possibilities simultaneously. It is not a boundary, but rather a *permeable membrane*, much like that of a cell. Crossing a threshold can often signify a shift – one enters another condition – both physically and psychologically. This is a crucial notion when dealing with public spaces which coexist with spaces of seclusion. Here, thresholds play the role of in-between spaces which connect different systems, programmes and people. These can appear as both built form, and collective, inclusive spaces, but also as pathways and connections – places for simultaneous encounters. Such thresholds allow individuals to choose how exposed or protected they wish to be. Places of connection, psychological healing and recovery, also call for sensitive interventions and thresholds.

It is important to note that openness does not necessarily equal inclusion. In Franz Kafka's *Before the Law*, the gate is physically open, yet it is *closed* – access is denied. This notion is frequently reflected in the contemporary built environment – oftentimes, public spaces are *symbolically* and *theoretically* open, yet remain *socially* closed in reality. Such situations shape who feels welcome to enter, occupy, and stay in these places. This is all the more emphasised in areas where tourism coexists with local, everyday life, where residents can often feel displaced from their own region. Lefebvre's *Right to the City* links directly to this, arguing that there should be no tolerance for such intangible barriers.

¹¹ "Ecotone," *Cambridge Dictionary*, Cambridge University Press, accessed 2026, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/ecotone>.



Fig. 3. Collage by author exploring the potential connection to water of the site, and public spaces for lingering — composed of photographs taken during site visit to Marenland, as well as the Yangshuo Sugar House Hotel in China, and the Barbican Estate in London.



Figs. 4 & 5. Collages by author exploring the potential connection to water of the site (above), and multiplicity in design through the seasons (below).



Fig. 6. Collage by author exploring the potential sense of space proposal aims to evoke — human-scaled, multi-sensory places for psychological wellbeing, rest, and reflection.

Part 3 Results

In order to manifest the aforementioned ambitions in built form, research was conducted into both the site, and into case studies. Analysing the plot at the medium scale, and taking into account the main access routes surrounding the site, as well as major pedestrian pathways, including the Pieterpad, two main axes were implemented. Since one of the main aims of the proposal is to create spaces of connection for the local community, the approach from the village to the site was of utmost importance. Hence, one of the main pedestrian paths to the proposal was established as a continuation of the pathway towards the site from under the bridge on the east. The other main pedestrian axis was located along the south-north of the site, forming a connection from the station. Both of the two main axes implemented act as extensions of the Pieterpad. They lead the visitor to a central location within the site towards the waterfront.



Fig. 7. Plan by author depicting the proposal within the village fabric, with major pedestrian routes indicated.

Following this analysis, and the introduction of the two main walking routes, it became clear that the zone where these two paths intersect would become a naturally dense node within the site, possessing the heaviest circulation flow. Hence, this zone of intersection evolved into a public square. The placement, orientation, configuration, and form of the massing on the site, was guided by several notions regarding the site. One of these notions was the creation of a point of density – the public square. Another guiding principle was the distinction between the more quiet, calmer part of the site towards the open field on the west, and the more active part of the site towards the east with the existing entrance, facing the road bridge. With these characteristics of the site in mind, several iterations were explored. In multiple iterations, radial

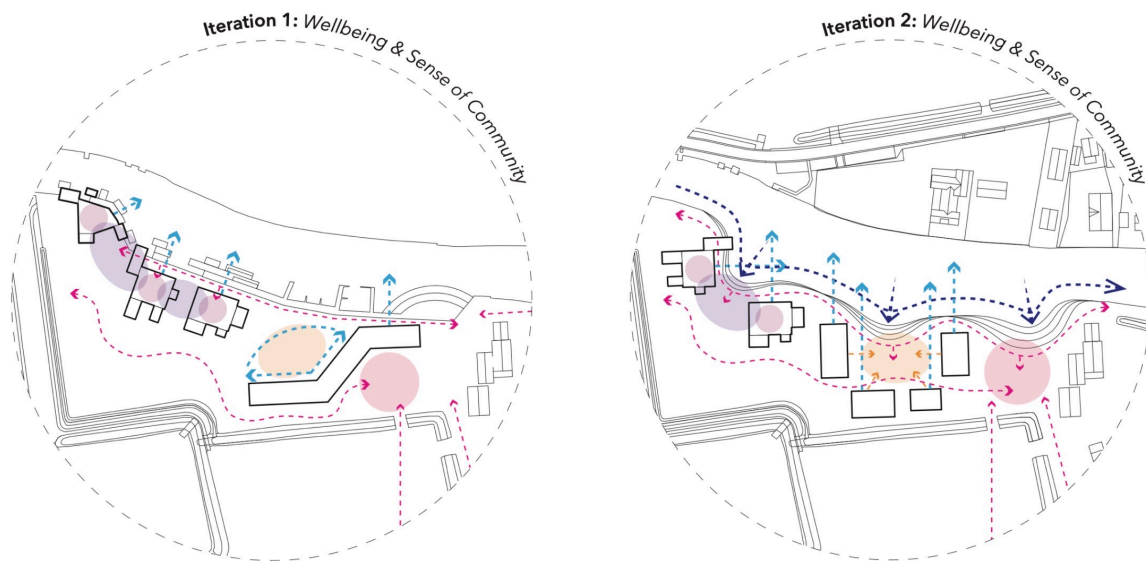


Fig. 8. Diagrams of configurational iterations by author, highlighting the relationship between masses, the waterway, and the site.

grids were drawn, creating outward ‘ripples’ from nodes such as the public square. These radial grids could then also superimpose, creating ‘interference’. The grids then guided the placement of the massing.

At the forefront of these formal experiments, were the notions of creating spaces for wellbeing, generating a sense of community, and creating a strong connection with the waterway. Hence, blocks often faced one another, while each simultaneously maintaining a view towards the water. As well as investigating various different building typologies, the adaptation of the threshold between land and water was delved into. Here, the aim was to move away from the harsh, abrupt transition the existing site possessed, towards a transition between land and water which would cultivate interaction, opportunities for meeting and gathering, and would speak to the human scale, providing spaces meant for people, and not simply a harbour for boats. Throughout these formal studies, the threshold and built forms were in a constant dialogue, with the boundary between land and water following the form of the buildings.

Additionally, the introduction of new and different types of waterways was considered. The aim was to explore the extent of possibilities offered by different typologies of water bodies. The Winsumerdiep is itself a very specific type of waterway – a manmade *diep* which resembles a river, due to its meandering nature. It is a large, non-tidal, flowing body of water. In the context of this project, typologies of water bodies have been considered not in isolation, but in unison with the type of spatial condition they offer. A large, long body of water such as a river provides a very different kind of threshold with land in comparison to a small, landlocked body of water, for example.

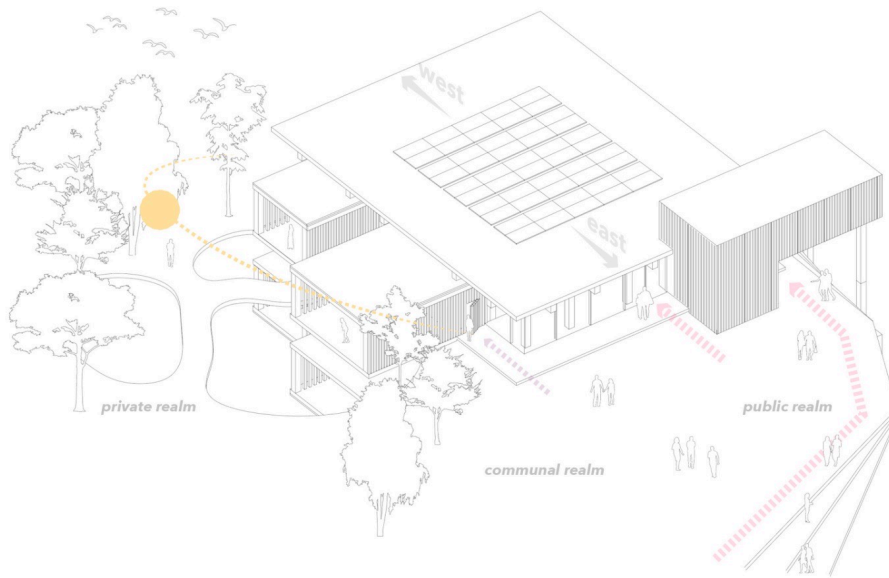


Fig. 9. Drawing of initial cluster design by author, depicting the various realms offered by the cluster typology, and their specific relationships to the different types of water bodies.

After iterating with several different water typologies, such as canals, ditches, and pools, the proposal moved forward with the typology of the pond. This allowed for a variation in the way built form deals with water throughout the site. While the masses facing the river result in a more manmade, public edge with the water, the forms facing the ponds possess a softer edge, creating a more private, calm, and natural atmosphere, with overgrown, aquatic wetland vegetation such as cattails and water lilies.

The preliminary results from these studies, was a configuration where built form and water bodies merge into one another, through superimposition, overlap and extension. The two main building typologies of the project consisted of a larger building, meandering with the waterway, and smaller clusters of buildings which interact both with the river towards the north, and the ponds towards the south. In plan, the larger block is composed of two parallel rectangular blocks, joined by a diagonal block. This building responds to its context in a very specific manner. Its east wing faces the pedestrian path from the village, with a void created on the ground floor in

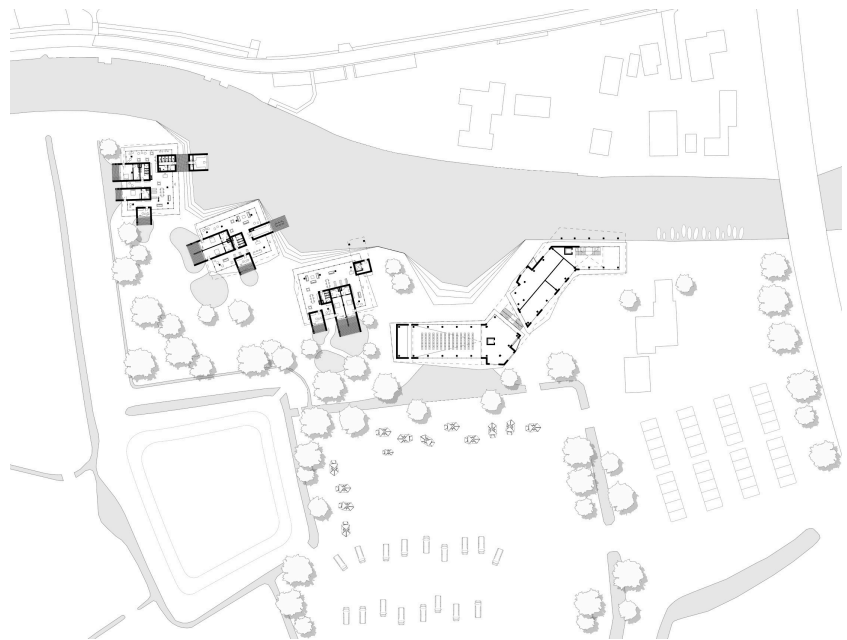


Fig. 10. Ground floor plan of final proposal by author.

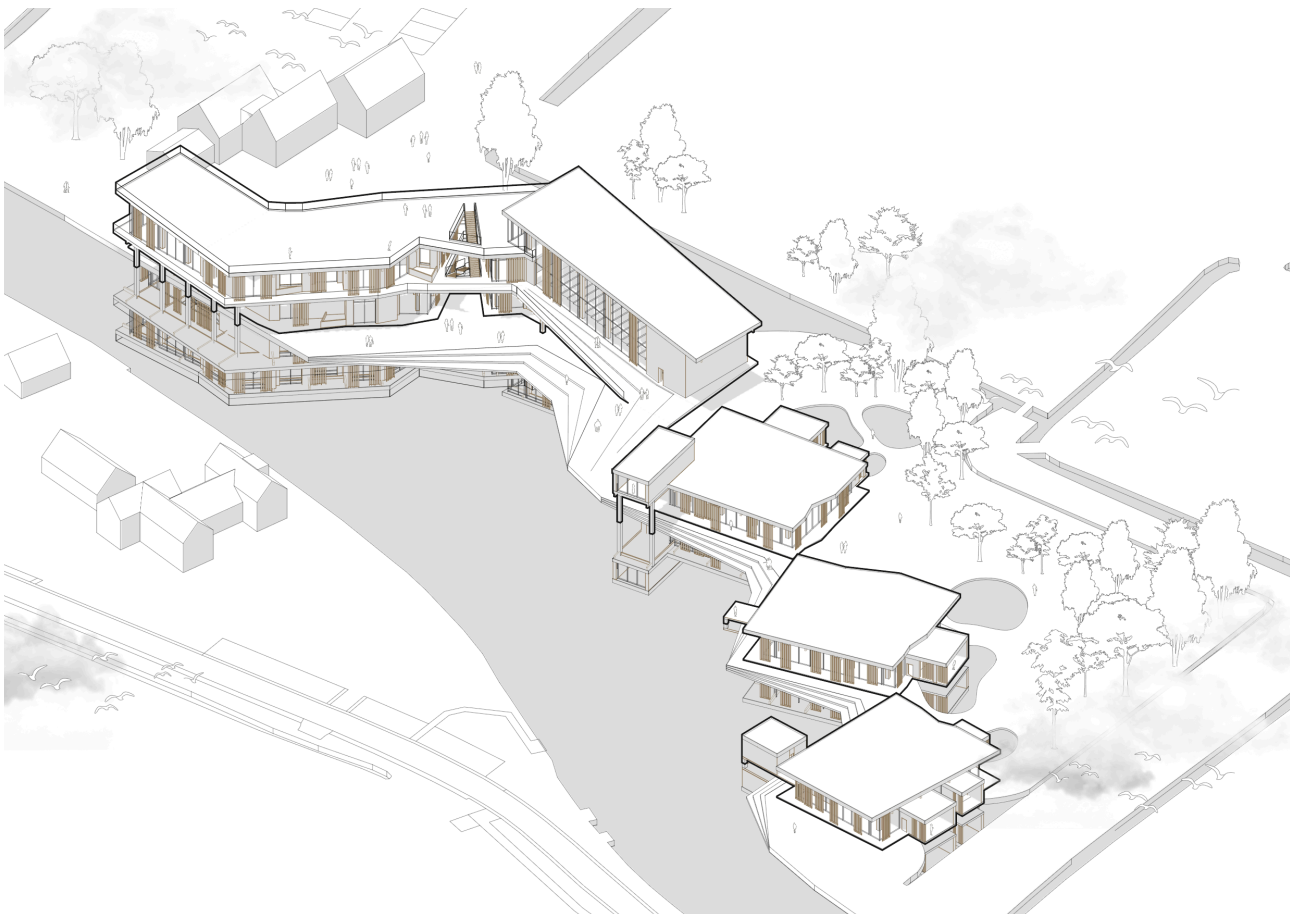


Fig. 11. Axonometric of final proposal by author.

order to allow for the continuity of the walkway on the waterfront. With a large, public staircase visible through its glazed facade, it encourages locals and visitors alike to approach the site. The south facade of this wing, together with the east facade of the diagonal section of the building, define the public square. On the other hand, the west wing of the building extends towards the west of the site, defining a public space along the waterway. Here, public steps lower down towards the water, creating opportunities to stroll, linger, and rest along the waterfront, as well as meet and connect with others.

This large building serves as the more active public building of the proposal, creating a first impression for the visitor, and housing regular community activities for the locals, such as weekly workshops. The side of the building facing the public square includes programmes such as a local market and kiosk – functions which would usually be found surrounding a public square – with an aim to integrate the project into the village fabric. The facade facing the north features a café and restaurant, for extended meals and conversations by the waterside. The west wing of the building slopes towards the ground, housing an auditorium for lectures and events, with a glazed facade and views towards the water. The ramp of the auditorium extends to the exterior of the building, allowing for visitors to walk up towards public terraces

above, serving as a vantage point for views of the natural surroundings. This exterior part of the ramp possesses a stepped form, acting as a continuation of the steps lowering down to the water in front.

The smaller clusters of buildings towards the west of the site emphasise the attention given by the proposal to the human scale. Each cluster is composed of blocks of varying dimensions, with those facing the north interacting with the river, and those facing the south interacting with the ponds. These smaller blocks are then brought together with a glazed, *in-between* medium. Here, the aim was to create a more public realm along the waterfront, and a more private, domestic and natural realm towards the ponds, with the connecting spaces in between serving as a transitional, communal, and collective realm. While the blocks towards the ponds are comprised of programmes such as accommodations, and quiet reading nooks, the spaces in between house collective functions reminiscent to those found in the home, such as a collective kitchen and a living room. The blocks facing the waterfront include programmes such as counselling rooms, activity rooms, and saunas, immersing the experiences in the water.



Fig. 12. View by the author, depicting the south-east facade of main building.

In terms of the materiality of the proposal, wood is used as the primary choice for both the structure, and the exterior cladding of the buildings, along with glazed facades. While the natural material is a low-carbon and sustainable option, it also aids the creation of an earthy, psychologically healing community environment. Overhangs and wooden sliders provide climate control, allowing users to open and close them according to their need.

Throughout the project, there is a constant operation of *clustering* and *de-clustering*. In the larger building, *de-clustering* allows for differentiation in form and experience throughout the building. For example, the operations of *carving* or *shifting*, create a facade that moves back and forth, with smaller pockets of spaces in between. This creates a more human-scaled, community-oriented approach which encourages encounters. In certain areas, such as the accommodation, it can also provide better separation and privacy between individual units.



Fig. 13. View by the author, depicting the relationship of a terrace within a cluster to the water, and the experience created.

In the small clusters, *clustering* allows for different programmes to develop a relationship with one another, as well as a variation in spatiality and experience. It also allows for the creation of smaller pockets of spaces, and nooks, which provide more intimate spaces for retreat and relaxation. The quiet reading nooks are an example of this, and can be found throughout the small clusters, allowing for small moments of solitude with a book, and a view towards the water. While the clusters have relationships between volumes *within* themselves, the three buildings also have relationships with *one another*. This is amplified through the subtle carving of buildings towards one another, creating a sense of space, and opportunities for encounters in between each cluster.

Part 4 Conclusion and Discussion

4.1 Conclusion

The project responds to the research and design questions proposed in the introduction in several ways. The overarching questions posed, asked how public buildings, through typological innovation and programmatic experimentation, could impact the daily lives of local communities, by promoting social cohesion and participation. They also questioned what design strategies could be implemented in order to combine these ambitions with the need for hospitality and visitor facilities. An additional set of questions pondered the role of thresholds, and how the integration of the Winsumerdiep into everyday life could foster a sense of identity and belonging for locals, while simultaneously attracting the *traveler* who is seeking to *connect* with both others, and nature, as opposed to the tourist.

Architecturally, this is achieved in a multitude of ways. To begin with, the proposal takes into account the natural pedestrian routes, as well as the Pieterpad trail, positioning itself in a way which creates a new public square at the junction of these axes. The main building around this square directly faces the village towards the east, encouraging locals to approach the site. On its ground floor, visitors can find functions typical for a public square, such as markets and shops, while the facade facing the water houses functions where one would want to linger. The relationship between the water and the site is strengthened via a new, irregular walking path, with large steps promoting lingering, pause, and encounters. While this pathway connects the various buildings of the proposal, it can also simply serve as a route taken by a local passing by while walking their dog, for example. The ambition here was to enrich the experience at the threshold between land and water.

While the larger building hosts regular, community-oriented activities, such as weekly workshops, the smaller clusters allow for moments of solitude, reflection and pause, offering socialising at a slower pace, in a domestic setting and atmosphere. While the main building focuses more on *connection to others*, the clusters offer *connection to nature*. Hence, the proposal responds to the ambition of attracting connection, as well as peace and quiet seekers, who make up the largest percentage of potential visitors to the region. Such visitors are often *travellers*, as opposed to mere tourists – those who wish to not only briefly

experience a setting, but to be fully immersed in it for a longer period of time. Hence, the proposal responds to the initial research and design questions of how daily local life can be enriched, while simultaneously catering to the hospitality needs of the region, through attracting a specific type of visitor. The strengthening of the relationship between the water and the site, is utilised as a means of achieving these goals.

4.2 Implications and Recommendations

In the broader context of the architectural profession, the project demonstrates the ways in which an ambition to provide for the local community, can coexist with the need to attract individuals to a region, by prioritising shared values. Through selecting a target group which forms a large portion of potential visitors to an area, while making sure that the visitor profile is desirable and cooperative, both aims can be achieved without the need for significant compromise. Today, there are many cases across the globe where the built environment is shaped primarily and solely with touristic and economic intensions, leaving local communities feeling marginalised within their own environments. This project proposes an alternative, arguing that the natural resources of a given site, such as a scenic landscape, or a significant waterway, can benefit both the locals, and also visitors who wish to experience it respectfully and sustainably.

There are a number of approaches the project utilises to achieve these ambitions, which can be applied to other design and research contexts. One of the initial and main ambitions of the proposal, was to better integrate a major body of water into the daily lives of the locals. This was achieved through exploring potential developments of the threshold between land and water, together with the specific functions and forms of the proposed buildings. Special attention was given to providing a solution which turned the waterside into a *place*, and not simply a transitional path, with opportunities to walk down towards, and sit alongside, the water. At the same time, this route acts as a vital circulation route to the different parts of the project. At times the built forms hang or extend over this path, without interrupting it, creating a dialogue between public building and public space. Additionally, a new type of water body, the pond, was introduced in specific areas of the site. Hence, the proposal endorses amplifying what the site already has to offer, and introducing new vocabulary, while using the same language.

Another significant approach taken by the proposal, was prioritising and extending the main pedestrian routes leading up to the site, integrating them with public spaces, and public buildings. The project argues that an architectural proposal which wishes to truly become part of an urban context, should explore designing not only buildings, but spatial conditions at the urban or village scale, such as a public square. This way, the site can begin to feel more like a part of a place at the larger scale, as if it has always been there, and not simply something that has been placed there without being specific to that particular context.

4.3 Reflection

Throughout the process of developing the project, a variety of design and research methods, tools and techniques were used. The overarching method of *Research by Design*, meant that research and design both continuously informed one another. Primary research was conducted in a multitude of ways, including a visit to the site, its documentation through photography and sound recordings, meetings with stakeholders such as delegations of the *Nij Begun* initiative, as well as conversations with locals. Secondary research included studying the historical, physical and social characteristics of the site, at the large, medium, and small scale. Additionally, case studies were referenced with regards to their programmatic and configurational organisations, as well as their relationships to a given context, their forms, and materiality. Together, the various research and design methods allowed for a holistic understanding of the context, as well as the broad range of potential design operations.

Engaging directly with representatives from *Nij Begun*, allowed for a deeper understanding the agenda's main aims. Introducing a new narrative for the local community was stated as an important goal. The representatives also stressed the benefits of utilising the core strength of the region, referencing its peaceful, quiet, picturesque characteristic. They believed that this is in fact what makes the region unique and attractive. This was very much in line with the personal experience throughout the site visit in and around the region, and was one of the major starting points of the project – Winsum's position within an open landscape of nothingness.

Collected research and data was analysed through mapping, diagramming, and drawing. The visualisation of information aided the development of a design position, conveying and communicating the starting point of the project. This guided the initial design iterations and explorations on the site, which in turn paved the way for further research and documentation, followed by further design studies, and so forth. This way of working ensured that research and design truly and continuously informed one another, as opposed to the perhaps more traditional method of research simply preceding design.

Reviewing case studies and literature allowed for an understating of existent approaches to similar contexts, or similar ambitions. This clarified how and why certain design decisions work in a given site. While precedent research initially guided the configuration and setup within the site, as the process progressed, built exemplars were referenced for spatiality and materiality.

Overall, the research and design techniques used, allowed for an in-depth understanding of what the site already had to offer. It then became about exploring how these qualities could best be strengthened and directed towards improving the physical and social conditions of the place. Through creating a dialogue between land and water, and creating spaces for both community-oriented connection, and bonding with nature, the project aims to contribute to the ongoing conversation about how the North can truly be reactivated, while remaining rooted in the qualities that make it unique.

Appendix A

Demographics

Tabel 3.5a Herkomst van bezoekers

	Herkomst dagbezoeker	Herkomst verblijfsbezoeker
1.	Eigen provincie (38%)	Overig Nederland (50%)
2.	Drenthe (21%)	Duitsland (22%)
3.	Overig Nederland (18%)	Eigen provincie (9%)
4.	Friesland (12%)	Drenthe (7%)
5.	Duitsland (9%)	Friesland (6%)
6.	Anders (2%)	België (3%)
7.	België (0%)	Anders (3%)

Tabel 3.5b Leeftijd van bezoekers

Leeftijd	Gewogen provincie Groningen	Gewogen Ommelanden
Jonger dan 20 jaar	2%	2%
20-29 jaar	11%	7%
30-39 jaar	14%	14%
40-49 jaar	13%	14%
50-59 jaar	18%	19%
60-69 jaar	24%	25%
70 jaar of ouder	18%	20%

Tabel 3.5c Reisgezelschap van bezoekers

Gezelschap	Gewogen provincie Groningen	Gewogen Ommelanden
Alleen	15%	18%
Partner	49%	40%
Familie	21%	28%
Vrienden	12%	13%
Collega's	1%	1%

ONDERZOEK VRIJETIJDSECONOMIE PROVINCIE GRONINGEN

Tabel 3.5d Verblifduur van bezoekers in dagen

Verblifduur per gemeente	1 dag	Meerdere dagen
Gemeente Eemsdelta	30%	70%
Gemeente Groningen	60%	40%
Gemeente Het Hogeland	27%	73%
Gemeente Midden-Groningen	39%	61%
Gemeente Oldambt	50%	50%
Gemeente Pekela	65%	35%
Gemeente Stadskanaal	68%	32%
Gemeente Veendam	67%	33%
Gemeente Westerkwartier	67%	33%
Gemeente Westerwolde	45%	55%
Provincie Groningen	51%	49%
Ommelanden	47%	53%

Tabel 3.5e Verblifduur van bezoekers in uren

Gemiddelde verblifduur per gemeente	In uren	In nachten
Gemeente Eemsdelta	4,2	4,3
Gemeente Groningen	5,2	4,7
Gemeente Het Hogeland	4,0	6,0
Gemeente Midden-Groningen	4,2	5,9
Gemeente Oldambt	5,9	5,4
Gemeente Pekela	3,4	4,8
Gemeente Stadskanaal	3,1	5,5
Gemeente Veendam	4,1	4,0
Gemeente Westerkwartier	4,1	4,8
Gemeente Westerwolde	4,0	5,4
Provincie Groningen	4,6	5,1
Ommelanden	4,2	5,2

ONDERZOEK VRIJETIJDSECONOMIE PROVINCIE GRONINGEN

Tabel 3.5f Vervoersmiddelen van bezoekers

Vervoersmiddel	Naar locatie	Tijdens verblijf
Auto	60%	56%
Fiets	2%	11%
Camper	23%	10%
Openbaar vervoer	8%	10%
Boot	2%	1%
Overig	4%	12%

Figure A.1. Research findings showcasing the demographics of visitors in the province of Groningen, as well as how long they stay, and the most popular modes of transport. From 'Rapportage Onderzoek Vrijtijdseconomie provincie Groningen' (Groningen: Provincie Groningen, February 2025), accessed via Provincie Groningen, https://www.provinciegroningen.nl/fileadmin/user_upload/Documenten/Beleid_en_documenten/Documentenzoeker/Werken_en_ondernemen/Toerisme/Rapportage_Onderzoek_Vrijtijdseconomie_provincie_Groningen_februari_2025_WCAG.pdf.

Appendix C

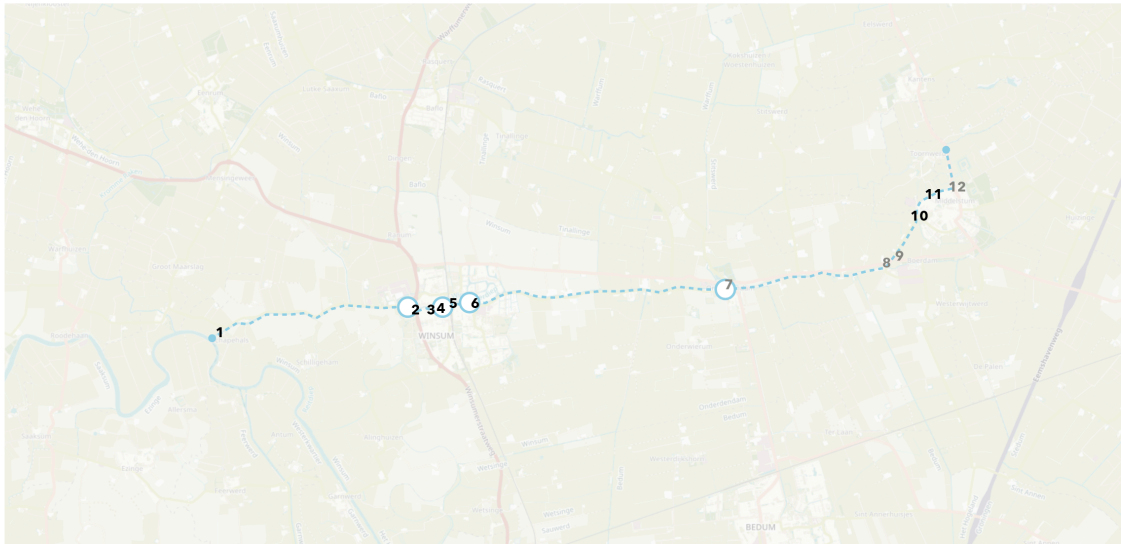
Site Visit



Figure C.1. Photographs taken by author during site visit, highlighting the potential areas of improvements in and around the site.

Appendix D

Mapping



- 1 Height: 3.2 m, Schaphalterzijf brug, fixed
- 2 Height: 3.13 m, Width: 6.75 m, Winsum brug in de N-361, fixed
- 3 Height: 3.65 m, Width: 11.40 m, De Boog, fixed
- 4 Height: 3.30 m, Width: 11.40 m, Jeneverbrug, fixed
- 5 Height: 3.10 m, Width: 8.25 m, Winsum spoorbrug, fixed
- 6 Height: 3.24 m, De Ploeg, fixed
- 7 Height: 1.40 m, Width: 7.05 m, Zylvesterbrug, opening
- 8 Height: 1.40 m, Width: 7.08 m, Fraamtijl, opening
- 9 Height: 1.15 m, T.A. Musschengabrug, opening
- 10 Height: 3.22 m, Width: 9.50 m, Nieuwe Til, fixed
- 11 Height: 3.15 m, Width: 9.40 m, 1 Balije voetbrug, fixed
- 12 Height: 1.25 m, Width: 6.15 m, Brug Middelstum, opening

○ Marinas

CAMPING BOAT

Behold our newest addition, a camping boat!

It is a robust 6-metre aluminium sloop. Equipped with a 4-season tent for 2 people to spend the night on the water! In a special way. The tent can be set up and folded within 5 minutes.

It is also equipped with prop poles to anchor your camping boat to the bottom in a quiet, shallow and recreational spot. This way, you can easily find your own quiet spot in the Groningen or Frisian landscape.

Sail off into the sunset and enjoy life.

The camping boat is also suitable for day rental max 10 people. Please enquire about availability.

BOOK CAMPING BOAT

Welcome aboard the Camping Boat

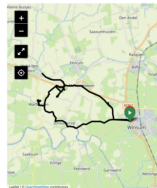


MEANDERING THROUGH WADDENLAND

14 km Download route



Sailing across the maars, you'll travel at a walking pace through a tranquil landscape of water and expansive fields. Along the way, you'll pass places worth stopping for a break and a stop. Stroll through picturesque villages, to an abandoned cemetery, and experience the charm of Abeitsta, a forest with a turbulent history and a unique viewpoint, if you see the sails of the Mensingerwer windmill turning, it's definitely worth stopping and visiting the miller.

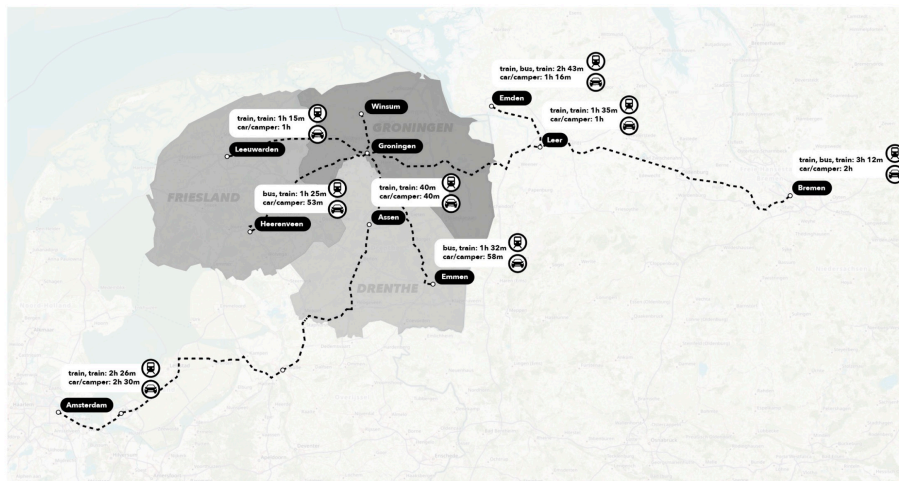


Save Print

Figures D.1.–D.2. Map by author highlighting the bridges along the Winsumerdiep, with their dimensions, as well as the marinas (above), and online advertisements of camping boats, as well as day-trips on the water departing from Marenland (below). <https://www.visitwadden.nl/nl/bezoeken/routes/3943436963/meanderen-door-waddenland>.

Appendix E

Mapping

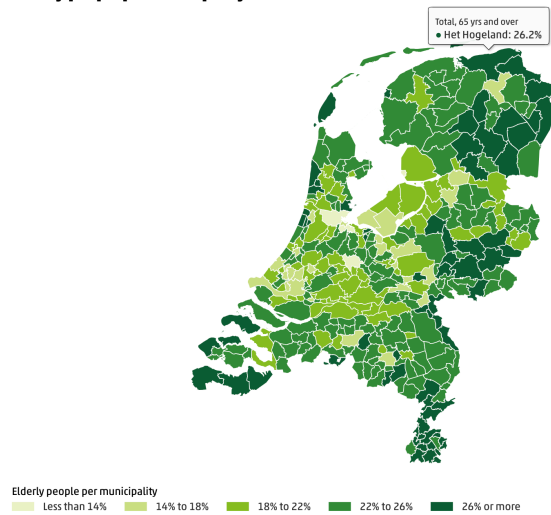


Figures E.1.–E.2. Map by author depicting the journeys taken from the most common departure points of visitors to Winsum, as well as potential modes of transport and time taken (above), and map highlighting the sensory experience during the site visit to Marenland, showing the spaces where the pace of walking increases, as well as points of lingering and pause (below).

Appendix F

Demographics

Elderly people per municipality, 2025



Elderly people per municipality, 2025

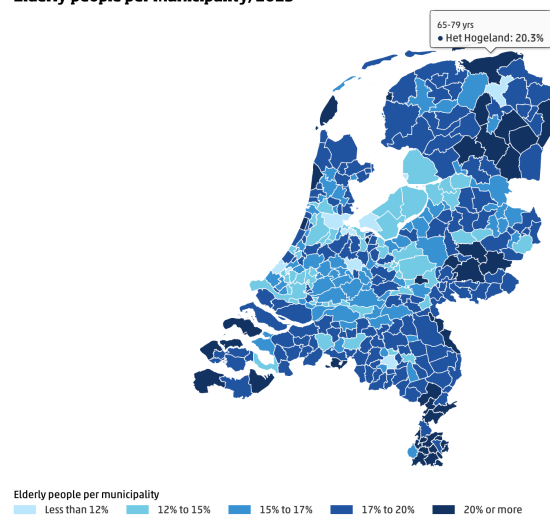


Figure F.1. Research data depicting Het Hogeland, the region within which Winsum is situated, as having some of the highest number of individuals aged 65 and older (26.2%), as well as between 65 and 79 years old (20.3%), in the Netherlands. <https://www.cbs.nl/en-gb/visualisations/dashboard-population/age/elderly-people>.

Appendix G

Mapping

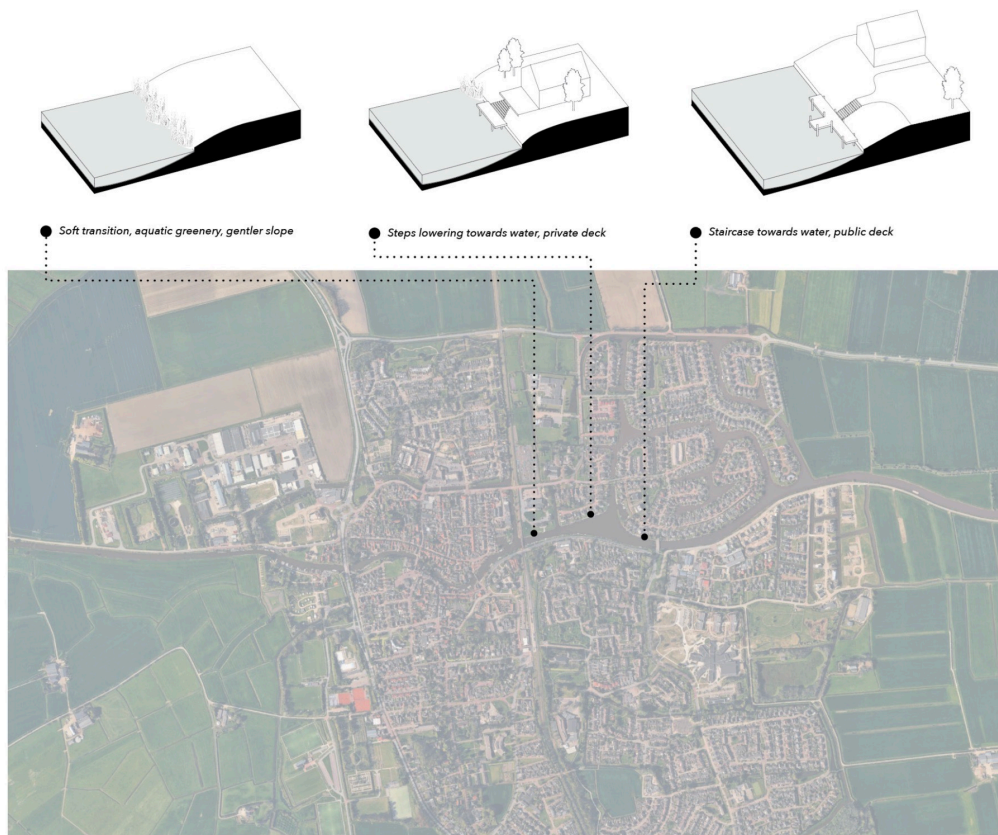


Figure G.1. Map and drawings by author depicting the various thresholds and existent and edge conditions along the Winsummerdiep.

Appendix H

Demographics

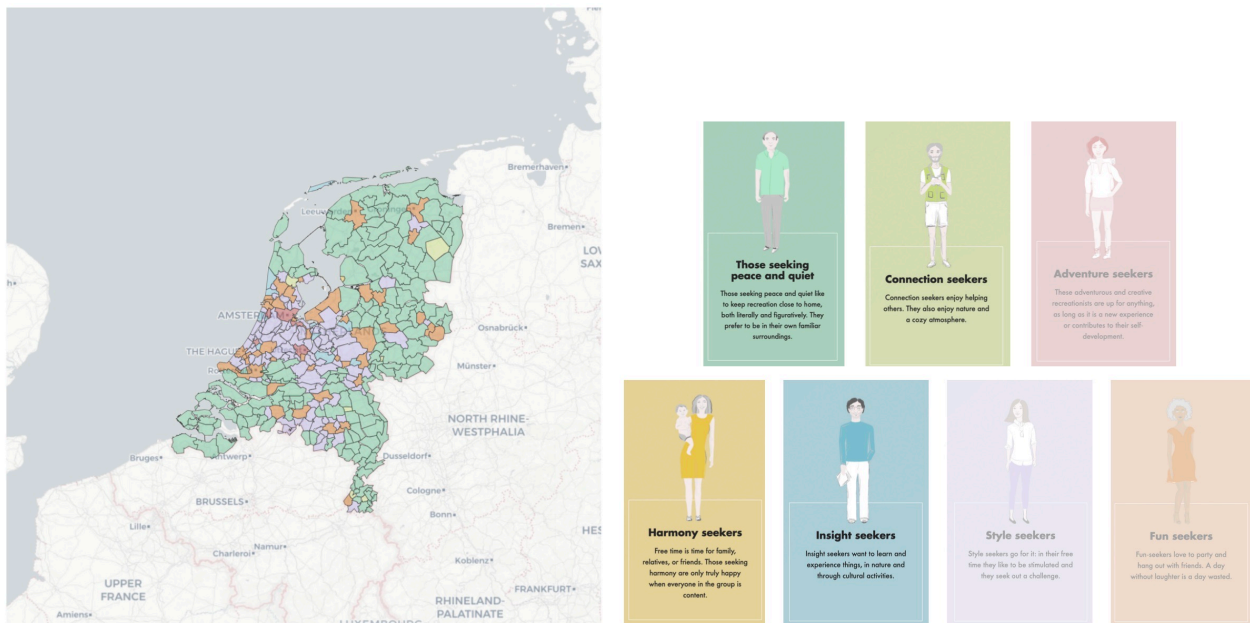


Figure H.1. Research findings showcasing the interests of the majority of individuals in a certain region. <https://leefstijlvinder.nl/>.

Data Management Checklist

Section A. General considerations	yes	no
<p>1. Is the graduation project conducted as part of an internship (at a company), or as part of a research project at TU Delft?</p> <p>If a student's graduation project is conducted at a company or as part of a research project at the university, questions of data ownership and intellectual property rights need to be addressed in a written graduation or internship agreement before the project begins. Students and their supervisor should consult the Intellectual Property Rights of Students webpage. Additional information can also be found in the Extended Personal Research Data Workflow.</p>		✓
<p>2. Does the project involve conducting (part of) the research outside the Netherlands?</p> <p>Students who intend to travel abroad (even to other EU countries) for study, exchange, research, internship, or graduation project purposes need to follow the Travel Safety Protocol. This includes attending a mandatory Travel Safety Training Session: see the Disclaimer.</p>		✓
<p>3. Will the research involve processing data from humans, such as running a survey, conducting interviews or workshops, collecting data through social media or internet forums, or re-using existing datasets about humans provided by a third party? (If 'yes', see follow-up questions 4 to 13 in Checklist B.)</p> <p>Students who work with data from human participants must complete the next section and apply for and receive ethical approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) before conducting the research.</p>		✓

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