Gathering Commons

Hybridized Third Spaces
for Social Engagement
of Young Adults

Tijmen Boot
5010039
26-6-2025

Gathering Commons; *Hybridized Third Spaces for Social Engagement of Young Adults*

Faculty of Architecture and the Built Enrovirment
MSc Architecture, Urbanism and Building Sciences

26-06-2025

Name: Tijmen Boot
Student nr.: 5010039

First mentor: Dr.ir. M.G.A.D. Harteveld
Second mentor: Dr.ir. G.A. Verschuure-Stuip

Preface

This thesis is the result of a passion for urbanism an ongoing fascination with the layered functions of cities, where every day can unfold in a new and unexpected way. It is also rooted in a personal appreciation for golf, an activity I believe is often undervalued by much of society, yet one that offers extraordinary spatial, social, and emotional qualities.

Throughout this process, golf has not only inspired my thinking but also grounded me. It became my counterbalance, a space of calm and clarity amid the busyness of daily life. On the course, surrounded by natural landscapes and good company, I've found moments of quiet, reflection, and connection. Qualities I believe are essential in today's increasingly blurred boundaries between work and life.

I'm convinced that we need places of escape. Spaces that are not only recreational, but that also foster a sense of community, identity, and belonging. In my experience, golf can offer exactly that. I see it not only in my own life, but in the people I play with. These shared moments reveal the potential of golf environments as contemporary third places; hybrid spaces that bring people together across backgrounds and generations.

This project is a way of sharing that belief. It explores how such qualities can be integrated into the urban fabric, particularly in suburban and peri-urban areas that often lack meaningful public space. More broadly, I sense we are on the brink of a new wave in the golfing world. In its evolving forms and expressions, golf has the potential to become a more prominent, inclusive, and valuable part of today's social and spatial landscape.

I want to thank my mentors, Maurice Harteveld and Gerdy Verschuure-Stuip, for their generous support and sharp insights throughout this journey. I'm also grateful for my friends and family for giving me the freedom and encouragement to explore this path.

I hope this thesis not only presents a spatial proposal, but also contributes to a larger conversation; about how we live, gather, and design for the future.

Tijmen Boot
20-06-2025
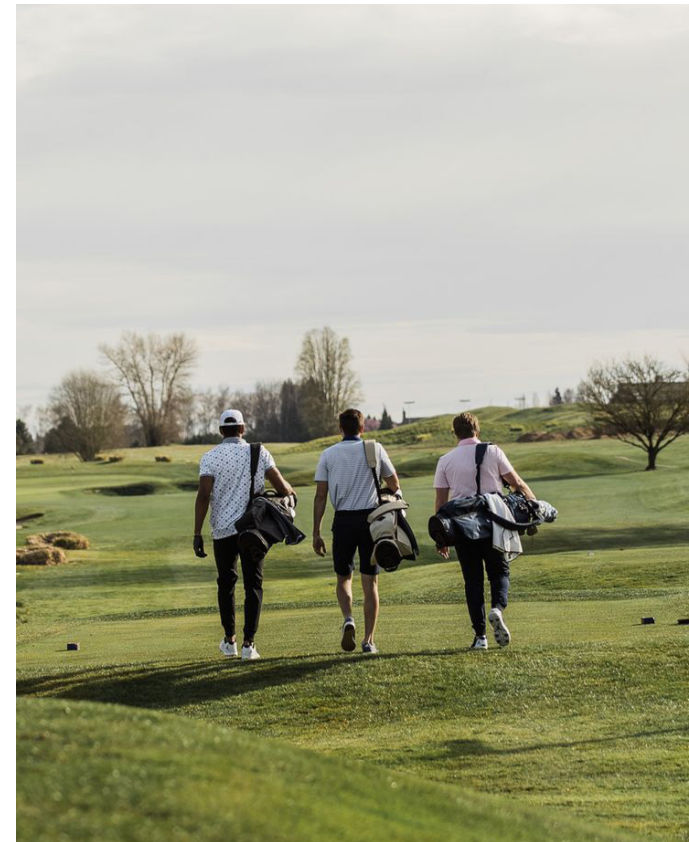
Abstract

This thesis investigates how hybrid public spaces can serve as contemporary third places to foster social engagement among young adults in suburban and peri-urban contexts. In response to increasing social isolation and the erosion of informal meeting spaces, the study proposes an integrated design strategy that blurs the boundaries between first, second, and third places. Grounded in theories of place, publicness, and multifunctional landscapes, the project reimagines a polder landscape between Rotterdam and Berkel en Rodenrijs as a "Gathering Commons"; a spatial framework that accommodates recreation, remote work, and community life. The design draws from landscape typologies, historical land-use patterns, and contemporary social needs to generate a layered public realm that remains active throughout the day. Through spatial synthesis and pattern-based analysis, the thesis demonstrates how the hybridization of program and form can create inclusive environments while acknowledging potential challenges in governance, safety, and stewardship. The project offers a replicable model for enhancing social cohesion and spatial quality in the transitional zones of modern metropolitan regions.

Table of Contents

Conclusion and relfection

1. Introduction

This paper explores the evolving concept of third places in the Netherlands, focusing on the potential of transitional spaces as contemporary third spaces in urban and suburban environments. Since Ray Oldenburg first introduced the theory of the "third place" in the 1980s, these spaces, distinct from home (first place) and work (second place), have been relatively easy to identify. However, the increasing digitalization of everyday life has blurred the boundaries between these places. Homes are increasingly used as workspaces, reducing the separation between personal and professional environments. As this overlap intensifies, third places become even more crucial for providing a balance and offering spaces for community engagement and personal well-being.

Oldenburg (1982) defined third places as informal public spaces where individuals can gather, socialize, and foster a sense of community. These places, whether cafés, pubs, bakeries, or parks, play a critical role in sustaining social ties and providing comfort, familiarity, and a sense of belonging. Importantly, third places are neutral grounds where social hierarchies dissolve, and people can connect with one another on equal footing (Oldenburg, 1997). Such spaces are vital for mental well-being, offering necessary interruption from the demands of both home and work. In today's urban context, third places are essential spaces for individuals to establish meaningful relationships, regain energy, and maintain mental health (Lee & Houston, 2024).

As the digital realm increasingly affects human interactions, physical spaces for socialization and engagement become more significant. While traditional third places like coffee shops, libraries, and bars still serve their roles in larger cities, the impact of remote working has necessitated a shift in our approach to public space (Di Marino & Lapintie, 2020). Remote work, particularly in suburban contexts, has created an environment where the home, the workspace, and the third place blur together. As a result, the demand for spaces that allow for in-person connection, interaction, and community-building has become more urgent (Oldenburg, 1997).

This paper aims to explore how third places can adapt to serve contemporary needs, particularly in suburban towns in the Netherlands, where access to such spaces is often limited. As cities become more densely populated and digital interaction continues to grow, how can physical spaces still serve as essential hubs for community and well-being? The research investigates the potential for non-traditional spaces to fulfill these roles. One underexplored option is the hybridized use of golf courses. Traditionally perceived as exclusive, single-purpose spaces, golf courses possess vital qualities; access to nature, open space, and opportunities for social interaction, that make them well-positioned to serve as multifunctional third places for both golfers and non-golfers (Jensen, Caspersen, Jensen & Strandberg (2017).

1.1 Problem Statement

In suburban towns there is a notable ***deficit of third places particularly for young adults*** between the ages of 20 and 40. This age group faces increasing ***social isolation*** as living and working environments converge, leaving ***little room for spontaneous, unstructured social interaction.***

Without third spaces that foster community and enhance social wellbeing, suburban communities risk diminished social cohesion, reduced mental wellbeing, and a decline in opportunities for societal participation.

1.2 Research Questions

In what ways can third places be designed as contemporary public spaces for young adults in suburban towns to enhance social engagement and inclusivity?

What urban design characteristics in terms of use and experience define effective third places particularly for young adults (ages 20-40) meeting their social and psychological needs?

What kind of such use and experience in third spaces are generally available and unavailable in Dutch suburban environments?

What kind of use and experience in third spaces are currently unavailable in the particular urban design of the Dutch suburban environment Noordrand Rotterdam, yet desired to meet the social and psychological needs of young adults (ages 20-40)?

To what extend may such third spaces with designated purposes in Noordrand Rotterdam encourage both structured and unstructured social interactions, and introduce environmental affordance for other social groups too?

Relevance

Public Places

Gehl, J. (2011). Life Between Buildings: Using Public Space.
Gehl's work focuses on how urban spaces can be designed to foster human interaction and community.

Relph, E. (1976). Place and Placelessness.
This is a key text on the concept of placelessness, which argues that modern urban development often leads to spaces that lack a sense of identity or belonging.

Chiesura, A. (2004). The Role of Urban Parks for the Sustainable City.
This article discusses the psychological, social, and ecological benefits of urban parks, emphasizing their role as essential green spaces for well-being and social interaction.

Social Engagement

The unfortunate, ongoing disappearance of 'third places' (Devika Rao, 2024)

There are many public spaces - but not for young people (Blue News, 2024)

'Third places' are good for your wellbeing and wallet. Here is how to find yours (Anna Chisholm, 2024)

In solostad Amsterdam is het voor generatie Z zoeken naar die échte connectie: 'Het voelt alsof ik nergens bij hoor'

Health

More than half of young adults reported experiencing mental health problems (Rijksinstituut V&M, 2024)

Young adults are in a mental health crisis. Why is little being done?

(Oakman et al. 2020). Remote work by young adults can effect their health significantly. Physical spaces to create connections are crucial.

Christiansen, J., et al. (2021). Associations of loneliness and social isolation with physical and mental health among adolescents and young adults.

1.3 Methodology

The research uses a mixed-method approach centered around literature review and site-specific analysis. The literature review addresses the key themes of third places, suburban living, mental well-being among young adults, urban biodiversity, and the spatial characteristics of golf courses. Given the spatial and ecological potential of these landscapes, special attention is paid to how golf courses may be adapted to meet broader social goals. Due to the limited academic literature specifically addressing Dutch golf courses as public spaces, additional empirical research is necessary. This includes observational fieldwork and landscape analysis of selected sites to uncover their social, ecological, and spatial elements. These insights will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how golf courses might be repurposed or hybridized to function as inclusive, contemporary third places.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 The Evolution of Third Places

The concept of third places, as introduced by Oldenburg in the 1980s, was rooted in the understanding that modern life was becoming more compartmentalized. People lived in one place, worked in another, and sought relaxation and community in yet another. However, as society evolved, so too did the notion of third places. Oldenburg's initial vision of these spaces was primarily focused on physical environments; public cafés, bars, libraries, and parks, where people could come together and engage with each other informally.

However, in the past few decades, the definition and role of third places have shifted. Soja (1998), two decades after Oldenburg, introduced a cultural layer to the definition, suggesting that third places are not only about social interaction but also about cultural production and the intersection of lived experiences. This expanded perspective underscores the importance of third places as hubs for cultural exchange and personal growth. Crick (2011) furthered the discussion by emphasizing that contemporary society has a different view on third places. They need more flexibility and excitement, and businesses are already taking advantage of combining third places. Klinenberg (2018) extended this notion, arguing that third places serve as social infrastructure essential for community resilience and well-being, particularly in times of crisis.

While the theoretical frameworks surrounding third places have evolved, the physical spaces associated with them have also changed (Crick, 2011). Initially, third places were typified by neighborhood cafés, public parks, and local pubs. These spaces allowed for spontaneous social interactions and informal gatherings, fostering a sense of community. Yet, with the rise of remote working and digital communication, the need for physical spaces that promote social
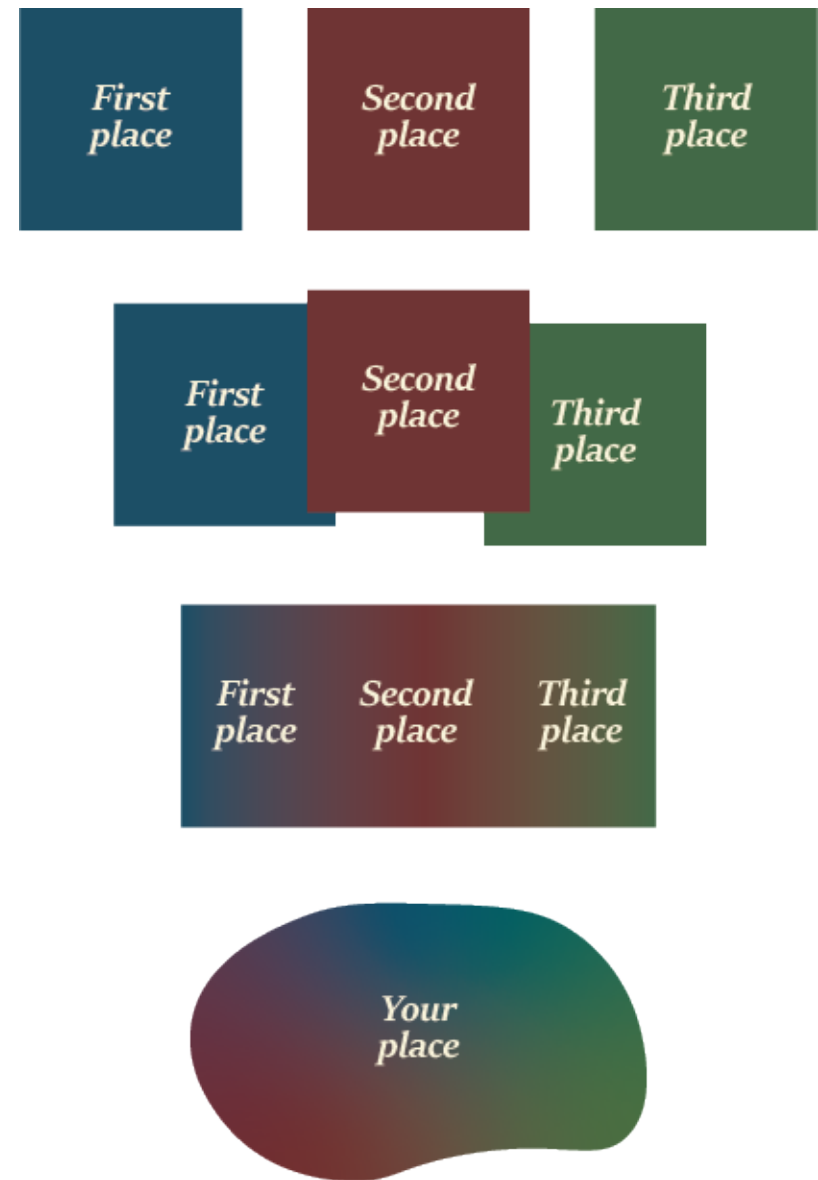
cohesion and interaction has grown even more critical (Oakman et al. 2020). Traditional third places, such as cafés and libraries, still play a role, but increasingly, the lines between home, work, and third place are becoming blurred.

The growing prominence of remote work has altered the way people perceive and use their environments. Remote workers no longer need to be physically present in an office, and many choose to work from home or from flexible workspaces such as coffee shops or co-working spaces. These spaces often serve a dual function, providing not just workspaces but also an informal environment for social interaction (Di Marino & Lapintie, 2020). The shift toward flexible workspaces and hybrid working models has prompted the need for more adaptable spaces in the urban and suburban fabric, spaces that can function as workspaces, social hubs, and community centers simultaneously. In this context, traditional third places have to be reimagined and repurposed to meet the diverse needs of contemporary society (Crick, 2011).
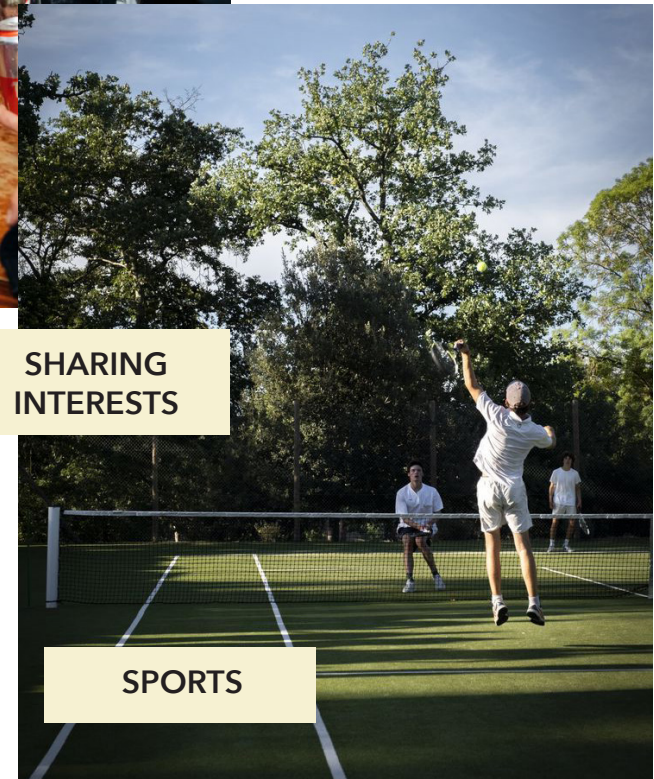

PUBLIC SPACES

COM
GRO
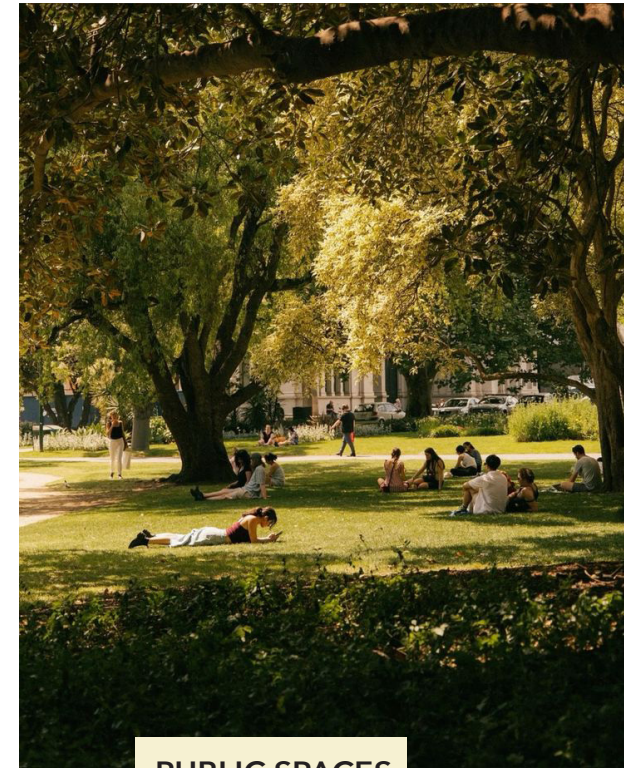
Third Places

SOCIALIZING

GATHERING

SURROUNDED BY OTHERS

SHARING INTERESTS

SPORTS

café
Indigo & Cloth

2.2 Third Places in Suburban Context

Suburban environments, while often characterized by calmness and residential appeal, frequently lack an adequate number of "third places", informal public spaces that facilitate social interaction beyond the realms of home and work. This deficiency is particularly impactful for young adults, who may find limited opportunities for casual social engagement in such settings (Kepkowicz, Lipińska, & Mantey, 2019). In contrast, urban centers like Rotterdam, The Hague, and Utrecht boast a diverse array of third places, including cafés, libraries, parks, co-working spaces, gyms, and event venues, which collectively foster both structured and spontaneous social interactions.

Oldenburg (1999) emphasizes that for third places to effectively enhance community ties, they must be perceived as local and easily accessible. In urban contexts, the proximity and variety of these spaces encourage frequent use and facilitate informal interactions. Conversely, suburban residents often rely on private vehicles or public transportation to access such venues, which can impede spontaneous engagement and diminish the social vibrancy of these areas (Butler & Diaz, 2016).

Empirical studies confirm the scarcity of third places in suburban settings. For instance, research indicates that while local sports clubs may serve as social hubs, they often cater to specific demographics and do not inherently promote intergroup interaction, thereby limiting opportunities for broader community engagement (Oldenburg, 1999; Butler & Diaz, 2016).

Despite these challenges, suburban areas possess unique opportunities for reimagining third places. The availability of open spaces—such as agricultural land, underutilized plots, and natural landscapes—presents potential for developing hybridized third spaces that combine social, recreational, and ecological functions. Engaging with urban nature has been shown to yield mental and

physical health benefits, further supporting the integration of natural landscapes into strategies for enhancing social infrastructure (Shanahan et al., 2015).

While suburban areas may currently lack the density and diversity of third places found in urban centers, strategic development of accessible and multifunctional spaces can foster social cohesion and enhance the quality of life for residents.
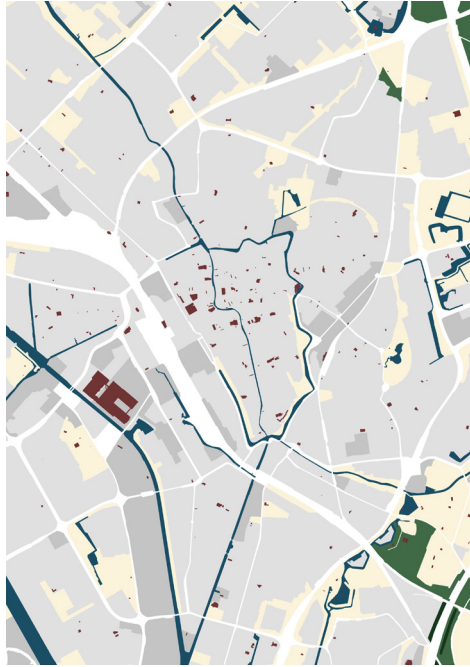
City

Rotterdam

Utrecht

Den Haag

Town

Berkel en Rodenrijs

IJsselstein

Nootdorp

2.3 Hybridized Third Places

In response to the increasingly blurred boundaries between the traditionally separation of home and work, third places are also evolving toward hybridized forms. This study explores the potential for third places to integrate multiple functions within a single spatial environment, enabling leisure and work, exercise and socialization, solitude and vibrancy to coexist. Such multifunctional environments are particularly relevant in suburban areas where land is still available, and where traditional third places may be limited in numbers.

This hybridization aligns with broader architectural and urban design trends, where buildings and public spaces are no longer designed with a singular function in mind. Instead, adaptability and multifunctionality have become essential characteristics across sectors, accommodating the diverse and shifting needs of contemporary users (Dovey & Pafka, 2017). By facilitating different types of use throughout the day and week, hybrid third places can serve a wider demographic and foster social encounters between people of varying backgrounds, ages, and interests.

An essential feature of successful hybridized third places is their responsiveness to temporal dynamics in user behavior. Different groups make use of the same space at different times of day—early mornings may attract joggers or remote workers seeking a quiet environment, while afternoons invite families, students, or retirees, and evenings may draw in young adults for social or cultural activities. These spaces not only support sequential use but also moments of overlap, where different groups come into contact, creating opportunities for informal interaction and community building. This layered pattern of use allows hybrid third places to remain active and relevant throughout the day, maximizing their social and spatial value (Gehl, 2011).

3. *Young Adults in Transition*

The convergence of home, work, and leisure is not only a theoretical shift discussed in literature on third places, it is a lived reality, particularly for young adults. As domestic environments increasingly accommodate both professional tasks and moments of rest, the boundaries between daily activities begin to dissolve. While this multifunctionality offers flexibility and autonomy, allowing individuals to structure their own time and space, it also carries a significant risk: social isolation and separation. For young adults, who are still in the process of establishing routines, communities, and professional identities, the lack of structured, shared environments can be particularly destabilizing. Remote working has its benefits, but it must be experienced in the right context, spaces that are not only adaptable, but also socially enriching and part of supportive environments.

3.1 Effects of Converging Home, Work, and Leisure

While remote working offers flexibility, it also presents significant challenges, particularly for young adults (Oakman et al, 2024). Mental health issues among young adults have been on the rise, exacerbated by the shift toward remote working and the isolation that often accompanies it. Many young adults find themselves working from home or in other solitary environments, where opportunities for social interaction and peer engagement are limited. The lack of spontaneous social encounters that were once common in traditional office environments or public spaces has led to increased feelings of loneliness, isolation, and disconnection (Hickman, 2019).

This phenomenon is particularly prevalent in suburban areas of the Netherlands, where housing affordability issues have resulted in many young adults living with their parents longer than previous generations (CBS, 2023). The lack of independence and the sense of social isolation contribute to a diminished sense of well-being among young adults. The absence of accessible third places in
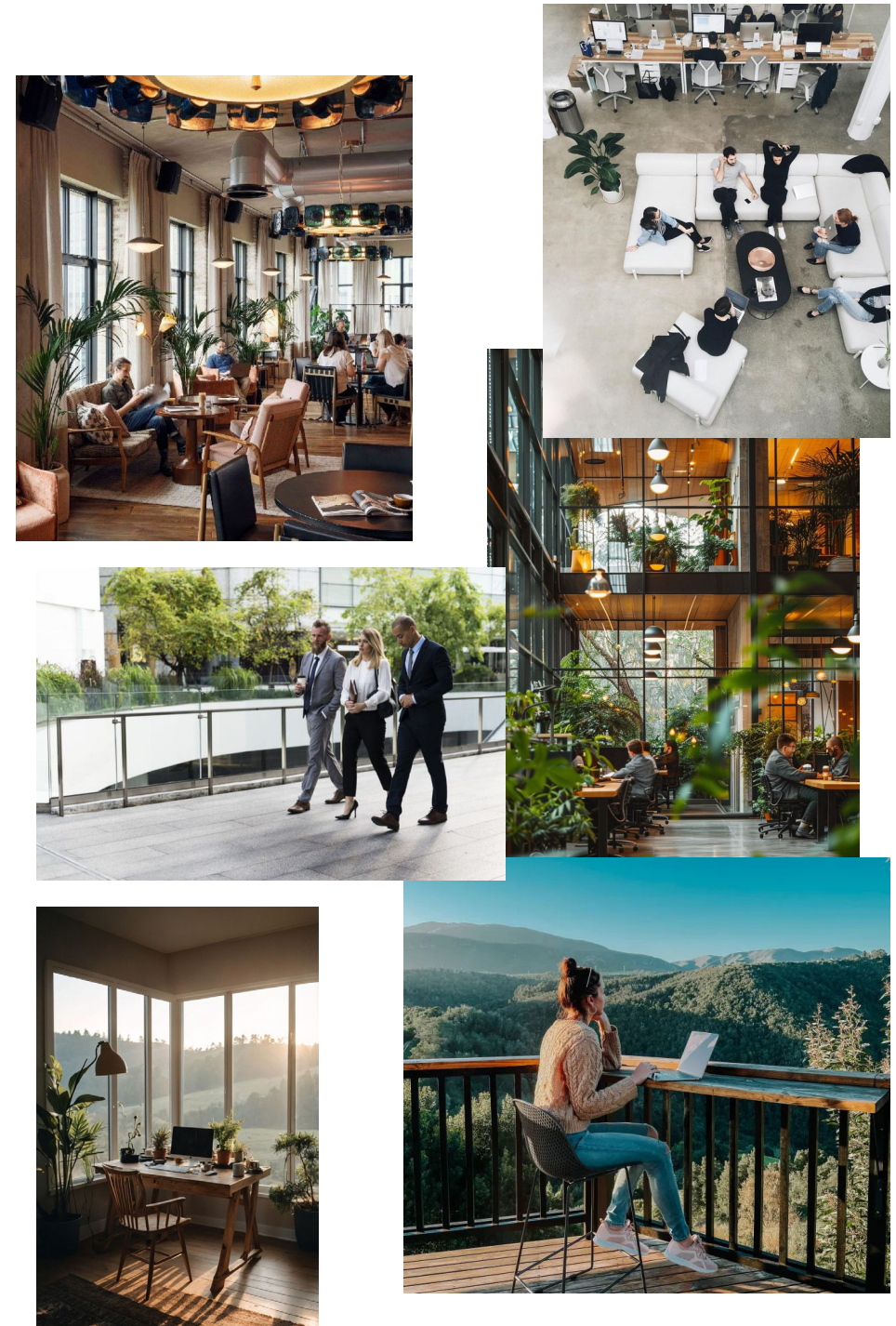
these suburban areas compounds this issue, making it difficult for young people to engage with their peers and build social networks outside of their home and work environments (Kepkowicz, Lipińska & Mantey, 2019).

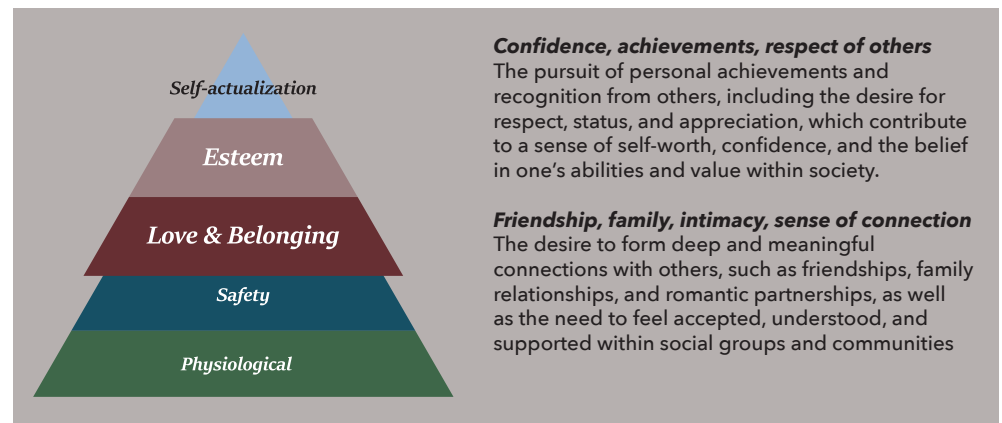## 3.2 Psychosocial Needs of 20–40 Year Olds

Although classified as adults, individuals in the 20-40 age group are still navigating a forming period marked by identity development, career establishment, and relationship building. Arnett (2000) refers to this life stage as "emerging adulthood," a phase characterized by exploration, instability, and a heightened sensitivity to social belonging and validation. While many young adults take on adult responsibilities, they often lack the stable social structures that traditionally accompany adulthood, such as long-term employment, home ownership, or family formation. These rather large changes intensify the importance of community support and access to environments that affirm their identity and facilitate meaningful connection.

Suburban areas, however, frequently fail to meet the psychosocial needs of this group. With few accessible third places and limited opportunities for spontaneous social engagement, many young adults in these settings struggle to form new relationships outside of predefined circles, such as work or family. The absence of "social infrastructures", defined by Klinenberg (2018) as physical places that shape the way people interact, can thus directly impact the social and emotional wellbeing of this age group.

3.2.1 Desire for Spontaneous Social Interaction

Young adults have a particular need for informal social interaction, which often plays a vital role in forming lasting bonds and reducing feelings of isolation. Unlike planned events or formal networks, spontaneous encounters foster a sense of spontaneity, freedom, and authenticity that is often absent in structured environments.

In suburban environments, where car dependency and zoning limit cross interaction, these types of unplanned meetings are much rarer. As a result, young adults often find it difficult to encounter peers outside of orchestrated settings, which can limit both their social network diversity and their sense of community attachment (Mehta & Bosson, 2010). Creating environments that support casual interaction, such as multifunctional public spaces, flexible-use parks, and hybridized third places, could help meet this psychological and developmental need.

Confidence, achievements, respect of others
The pursuit of personal achievements and recognition from others, including the desire for respect, status, and appreciation, which contribute to a sense of self-worth, confidence, and the belief in one's abilities and value within society.

Friendship, family, intimacy, sense of connection
The desire to form deep and meaningful connections with others, such as friendships, family relationships, and romantic partnerships, as well as the need to feel accepted, understood, and supported within social groups and communities

Social and psychological needs

SOCIAL INTERACTION

COMMUNITY BUILDING

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

PEERS

PRESENCE OF GREEN SPACES
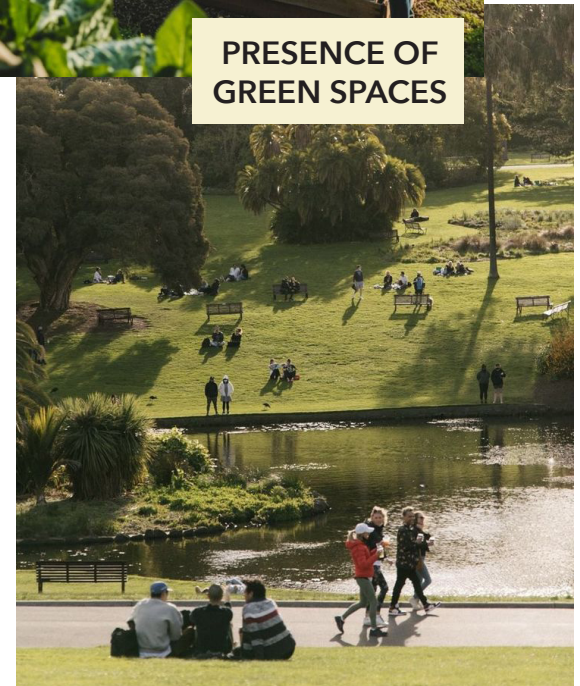
BEING PART OF A GROUP

4. Nature as a Social Catalyst

As cities expand and densify, the role of natural landscapes becomes increasingly vital, not just for ecological balance, but as essential infrastructure for health, social life, and identity. Urban living often intensifies psychological, physical, and social stressors. In this context, access to green and open spaces provides not only ecological value but also restorative and communal functions. From small parks to ecological corridors and multifunctional landscapes, nature in the urban fabric is no longer a luxury; it is a critical condition for livability (van den Bosch & Sang, 2017).

Nature contributes to more than just aesthetics or recreation. It supports public health, promotes informal social interaction, and anchors a sense of place. Green spaces, when integrated well into neighborhoods and regional systems, foster multifunctionality; providing room for movement, ecological resilience, and social gathering all at once. In the context of this project, green spaces become a stage where the first, second, and third places can blur and overlap. It becomes a shared environment for walking, talking, meeting, and being part of a landscape in motion.

4.1 Living in the Landscape

Traditionally, the link between nature and housing has been pursued through private gardens and suburban green buffers. This model emerged in the 20th century as an effort to bring the countryside into the city, inspired by movements such as the Garden City. However, it often results in spatial fragmentation and social isolation (Gehl, 2011).

In the city of the future, nature must be reimagined as shared, accessible, and deeply embedded in daily life, not tucked away behind fences. This project integrates residential neighborhoods not around but within the landscape, where public green spaces become everyday extensions of the home. Rather than each household maintaining a private lawn, residents share meadows, and landscape edges as collective front and backyards.

These in-between spaces, between home and landscape, become places for strolling, relaxig, gardening, or informal play. Designed with visual and physical permeability, they foster chance encounters and a sense of shared stewardship, reinforcing social cohesion (Peters, Elands, & Buijs, 2010).
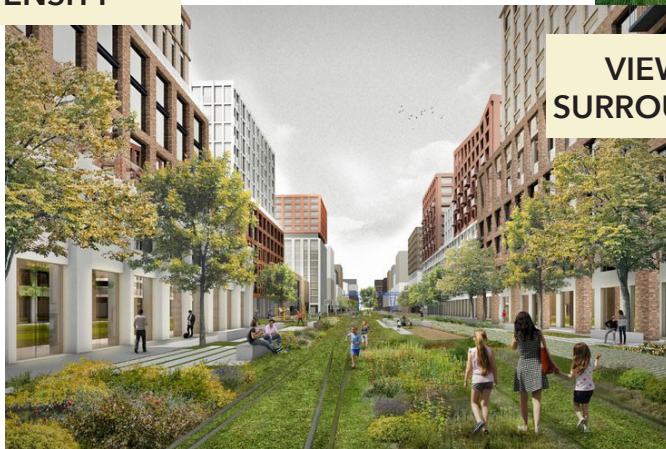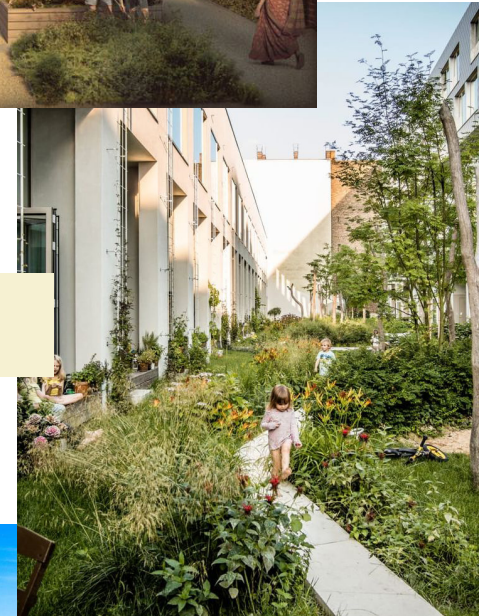
MULTI-FUNCTIONAL

GREEN REACHING

HIGHER DENSITY

VIEWS OF SURROUNDINGS

PART OF THE COMMUNITY

29

4.2 Health and Well-being in Green Environments

Studies have shown that proximity to green spaces is positively associated with physical and mental health. Green environments reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease, improve immune function, and promote physical activity (Maas et al., 2006).

On a mental level, time spent in nature is linked to lower stress levels, improved mood, and cognitive restoration. This effect is attributed to the calming senses found in natural environments and the opportunity to disconnect from overstimulating digital surroundings (Bratman et al., 2019).

In suburban contexts, green infrastructure can shift the health trajectory of communities. Benches, scenic overlooks, and shaded areas provide moments for pause, mindfulness, and observation, enhancing well-being without requiring people to make special efforts or travel far.

4.3 Biodiversity as an Urban Strategy

Healthy green space is more than open grass or ornamental planting. It is biologically rich and ecologically layered. Biodiversity contributes to urban resilience by supporting pollination, improving air quality, regulating microclimates, and reducing the risk of flooding (Beatley, 2016).

In the Gathering Commons, ecological design principles inform the layout and planting strategy. These not only provide habitats for birds, pollinators, and small mammals, but also enhance the visual and sensory quality of the public realm. Seasonal variation in color, sound, and scent adds dynamism to everyday routines and reinforces the identity of place.

Moreover, biodiversity is framed not as a constraint but as an opportunity to educate, inspire, and connect. Signage, guided walks, and community monitoring programs can empower residents and visitors to actively engage with the ecological richness of the area (Sandifer, Sutton-Grier, & Ward, 2015).

Benefits of nature

LOWERS TEMPERATURE
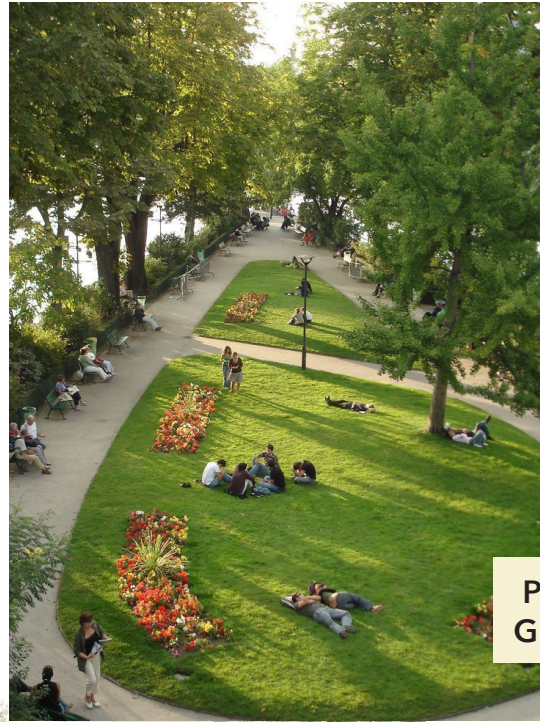
PRESENCE OF GREEN SPACES

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

SUSTAINABILITY

ENRICHES BIODIVERSITY

4.3.1 Native species

The landscape of the project is part of a centuries-old system of reclaimed land: the Dutch polder. Defined by its flat terrain, long lines, and carefully engineered relationship between water and land, 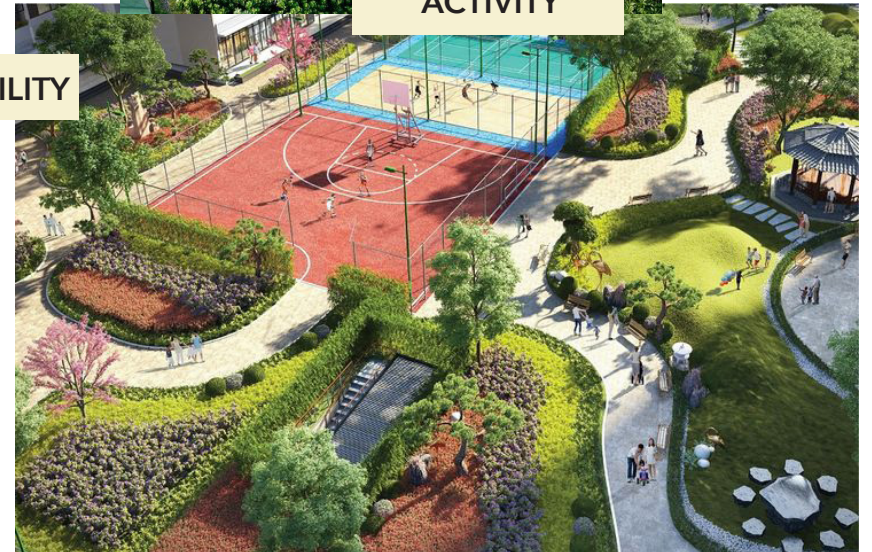this environment presents a unique ecological and cultural context. The soil here, moist and nutrient-rich, often a mixture of sandy loam, clay, and earthed peat, has shaped the vegetation that naturally thrives in it. Using native plant species is not only a visual or ecological gesture, but a foundational part of the landscape identity.

Native species are particularly important in this setting because they are adapted to local conditions. They know the rhythm of the seasons, the structure of the soil, and the behaviour of wind and water. Their resilience reduces the need for artificial irrigation, fertilization, or maintenance, supporting a more sustainable and climate-adaptive landscape. But their value is more than practical. These species form the ecological base for the wider habitat. They support pollinators, birds, and small mammals, and contribute to a landscape that feels alive, layered, and responsive.

Using native vegetation also strengthens the sense of place. Many of these plants have long been part of the Dutch countryside, particularly in moist grasslands and hay meadows. Their presence recalls a cultural memory of land shaped through care and coexistence, rather than domination. By incorporating native species the landscape does not imitate nature—it collaborates with it.

In this project, native planting is used to reinforce the different spatial characters of the site: open polder fields with swaying grasses, enclosed park rooms with seasonal blooms, and planted edges where the neighbourhood blends into the commons. This layered ecological design is not just beautiful, but functional. It invites users to see the landscape not as background, but as an active, breathing element of their daily lives—shaped by centuries of Hollands cultural landscapes.

Native species

Meadow cranesbill

Rough hawk's-beard & Oxeye daisy

Oxeye daisy, Meadow buttercup & Red campion

Cuckoo-flower

Star of Bethlehem

Sjef Jansen, TU Delft, 2022

4.4 *The Corridor: Connecting Ecologies and Communities*

The landscape between Rotterdam and Berkel & Rodenrijs functions as a narrow yet vital ecological corridor within the larger green-blue network of South Holland. This east-west connection supports regional biodiversity by facilitating species migration and genetic flow between fragmented habitats.

At its most constrained, the corridor narrows to just under 200 meters, yet it remains essential for migratory birds, meadow species, and small mammals that travel between the coastal zones and inland polders.

By reinforcing this green space, it strengthens this corridor through both ecological and social strategies. Simultaneously, paths, platforms, and bridges allow people to traverse and engage with the corridor without disturbing its ecological functions. These shared spaces support cohabitation between human and non-human residents, reinforcing both ecological and cultural connectivity.

In doing so, the project not only preserves but activates the corridor, turning it into a living interface between communities, species, and landscapes.

Ecological corridor

Agriculture	
Built environment	
Recreation	
Nature	
Water	
Infrastructure	

1:150.000

1:150.000
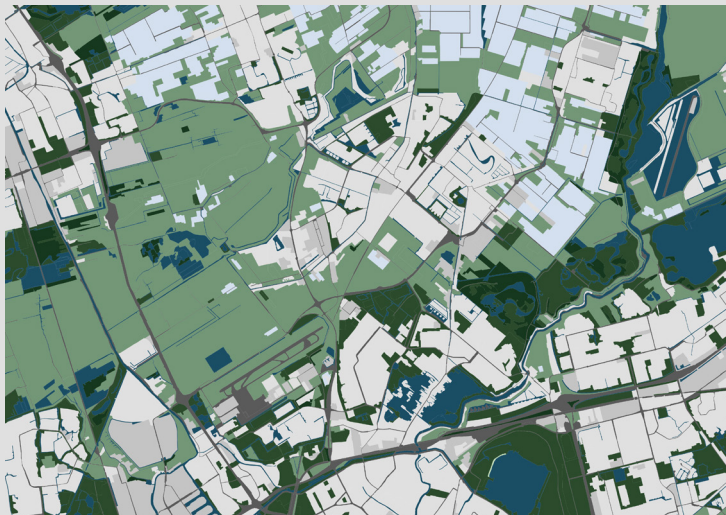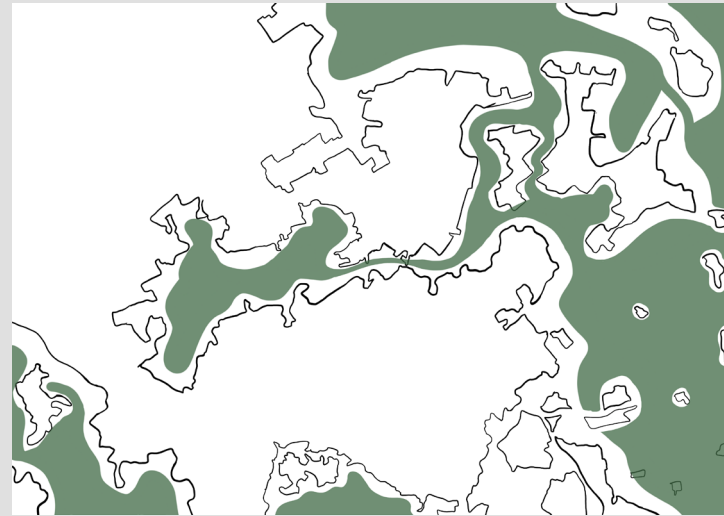
1:50.000
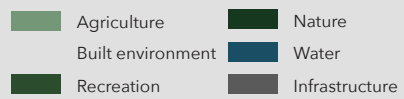
Agriculture   Nature

Built environment   Water

Recreation   Infrastructure

At a small scale, they support daily movements such as foraging, pollination, and shelter-seeking within local habitats.

At a medium scale, corridors enable movement between nearby habitat patches, promoting genetic exchange and population stability.

At a large scale, they form vital connections across regions, allowing species to migrate, adapt to seasonal changes, and maintain viable populations.

Natuurgebied Zuidpolder

Schiebroekse park

Lage Bergse Bos
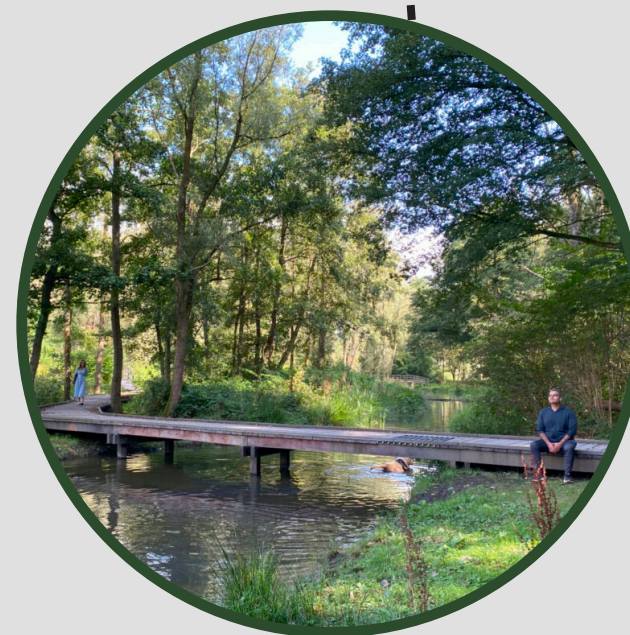
5. Tracing Golf's Recreational Legacy

Golf courses, despite their traditional associations with exclusivity, offer several key qualities that make them well-suited to serve as third places in suburban environments. These spaces typically feature large, open areas with access to nature, creating an inviting environment for social interaction and community engagement (Jensen, Caspersen, Jensen & Strandberg (2017). The expansive nature of golf courses offers opportunities for various activities; such as walking, jogging, sports, and even cultural events. In this way, golf courses have the potential to be transformed from a single-purpose recreational facility into a multifunctional space that caters to the diverse needs of the community (Eriksson, Eriksson, & Ignatieva, 2015).

The accessibility of golf courses is another factor that could make them a valuable third place in suburban areas. In many cases, green spaces are located on the outskirts of cities, making them more accessible to residents of suburban neighborhoods. By reimagining these spaces as community hubs and recreational spaces, they could provide young adults and other groups with opportunities for social engagement without the need to travel long distances to city centers (Eriksson, Eriksson, & Ignatieva, 2015). With the proper design and community engagement, golf courses could serve as inclusive spaces where people from various walks of life can come together, regardless of their background (Jensen, Caspersen, Jensen & Strandberg (2017).

Furthermore, golf courses can serve as spaces where people can engage with nature and the outdoors (Eriksson, Eriksson, & Ignatieva, 2015). In urban areas, the need for access to natural elements is often heightened, as many residents may feel disconnected from the natural world due to the dense urbanization of cities (Shanahan et al, 2015). Golf courses, with their vast green spaces and tranquil surroundings, offer a perfect opportunity for residents to reconnect with nature, which is a key component of well-being.

5.1 A brief history of golf

Contrary to modern societal believe, golfs historical origins are rooted in inclusivity and urban proximity. Long before golf evolved into its current form in Scotland, a Dutch game called kolf (or colf) was widely played across the Netherlands as early as the 13th century. This game involved striking a ball with a curved stick toward a target, often played on frozen canals, town streets, or open fields near urban centers (Stokvis, 1992). Variants of kolf spread throughout Europe and gave rise to games like pall mall in France and England, eventually influencing the development of Scottish golf. By the 15th century, golf as we know it began to take shape in Scotland, where it was not initially reserved for the elite but enjoyed by a wide range of society, including artisans, merchants, and even soldiers (McHardy & Imrie, 2005).

The urban and inclusive nature of early golf stands in stark contrast to the way many contemporary courses are perceived—often as remote, fenced-off, and expensive. Yet, the historical connection between golf and cities suggests that the sport has long been tied to accessible and multifunctional public spaces. By reimagining golf within or adjacent to residential neighborhoods and as part of shared green spaces, this project seeks to return to those roots. The aim is to offer recreational and social value for a broader public, rather than a select few, by designing golf-inspired landscapes that welcome both golfers and non-golfers.

Kolf

**13th Century
in the Netherlands**

Pall Mall

Colf

Golf

Dutch ancestors of golf courses;

Malieveld (Den Haag)
De Baen (Haarlem)

43

5.2 *The Cultural Landscape of Golf*

Golf courses are not merely recreational grounds but deeply expressive cultural landscapes. They represent a unique fusion of sport, nature, and place-making, shaped by centuries of landscape tradition and regional adaptation. The design of a golf course is never neutral; it reflects and amplifies the qualities of the terrain it inhabits. Whether nestled against dramatic cliffs, embedded in coastal dunes, or framed by pine forests, each course becomes a dialogue between human activity and the natural environment. Courses like Old Head Golf Links on the cliffs of Ireland or Lofoten Links in Norway's fjords do not just borrow from the landscape—they elevate it, transforming rugged topographies into spaces of movement, reflection, and aesthetic appreciation.

Throughout history, the evolution of golf has been closely tied to geography. The game originated in the Scottish links, where sandy soils, sea winds, and undulating grounds offered both a challenge and a canvas. This early connection to untamed, in-between landscapes laid the foundation for what golf would become: a sport that thrives in edge conditions. As the game spread, new environments were embraced and interpreted through course design—such as the sand-belt of Surrey, the red-rock deserts of the American Southwest, or the pine forests of North Carolina. In each context, the landscape is not simply a backdrop but an active character in the spatial experience.

This embeddedness in local ecologies gives golf courses a unique power as cultural expressions. They are places where landscape identity is preserved, interpreted, and sometimes mythologized. Fairmont Banff Springs, for example, stages the game within the sublime vastness of Canada's Rockies, while Cypress Point Club dramatizes the intersection of land and ocean on the Pacific coast. These courses become iconic not just for their playability but for the emotions they evoke—serenity, awe, challenge, and wonder. They are sites of memory and ritual, where design, tradition, and nature converge.

Recognizing golf courses as cultural landscapes reframes their potential within contemporary spatial practice. In a time when cities grapple with the need for open space, ecological resilience, and social gathering, golf's heritage offers lessons in how landscapes can be both functional and poetic. If hybridized with new uses and users—without losing their spatial and scenic logic—golf courses can evolve into a new typology of the commons: one rooted in cultural memory, yet open to future narratives.

Golf courses as cultural landscape
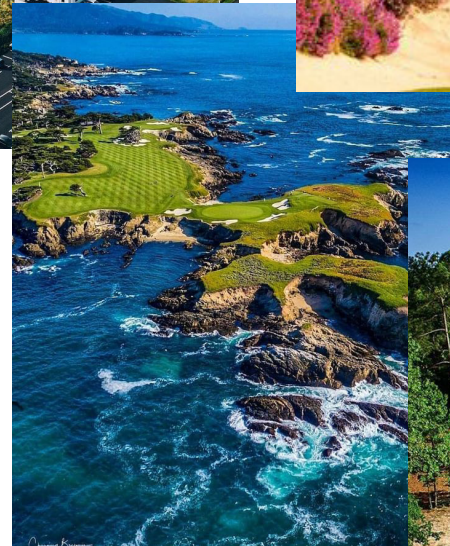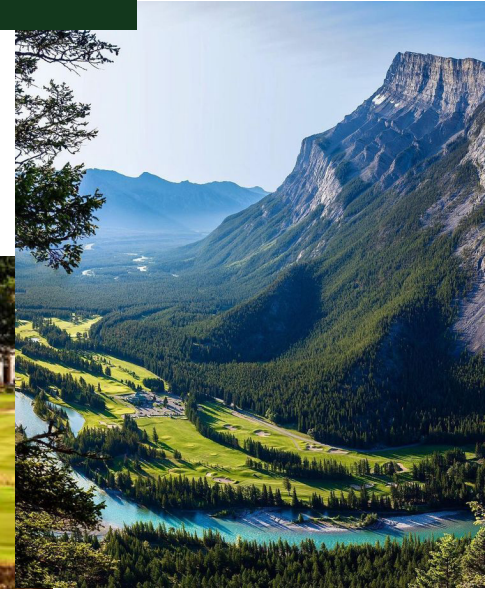
Turnberry Golf Course,
in the links of Scotland

Sunningdale,
on the Surrey/
Berkshire sand-belt

Fairmont Banff Springs,
in the mountains of
Canada's Banff national park

Old Head Golf Course,
on the cliffs of Ireland

Cypress Point Club,
where land meets the Pacific

Lofoten Links,
in the fjords of Norway

Pinehurst No. 2,
carved out from the
North Carolinian pines

45

5.2.1 Holland Cultural Landscape

While golf courses around the world reflect diverse terrains; from coastal dunes in Scotland to desert courses in Arizona, what unites them is their capacity to respond to and amplify the character of the surrounding landscape. In the Netherlands, this relationship is particularly distinct. The polder landscape, with its linear plots, dikes, canals, and horizon-wide openness, presents not only spatial constraints but also possibilities for designing golf courses that are deeply rooted in place.

Unlike dramatic topographies that invite sculptural fairways and panoramic elevation changes, the Dutch polder calls for subtlety. Here, the landscape must be read in its horizontality. The experience of space is shaped by rhythm, repetition, and layered perspective: long views over meadows, the interplay of wind, water, and reed, and the quiet drama of sky meeting land. Golf courses in this setting must adapt by embracing linearity, working with the logic of water management, and finding expression through planting, routing, and micro-topography rather than drastic form.

Moreover, Dutch golf courses often share the land with agriculture. This has led to a more integrated, multifunctional approach—one where golf does not dominate but weaves itself into the broader cultural landscape. For instance, hedgerows and water canals often double as boundaries between holes, while existing tree rows and field patterns guide the routing. A successful course in this context becomes not an isolated enclave, but a continuation of the landscape narrative.

The Gathering Commons builds on this idea. Its routing respects the rhythm of the historical polder grid and uses the existing dikes and waterways as spatial organizers. The fairways are not imposed but discovered, following the natural logic of the land and coexisting with other users. In doing so, the project echoes the Dutch tradition of adaptation and layered land use. Golf becomes not just a sport, but a way to experience the land slowly, attentively, and in relation to others.

This sensitivity to context not only strengthens the ecological and spatial coherence of the course, but also reclaims golf's potential as a cultural landscape form. One that, when designed with care, can resonate with the everyday Dutch environment and contribute meaningfully to its evolving identity.

Holland cultural landscape

47
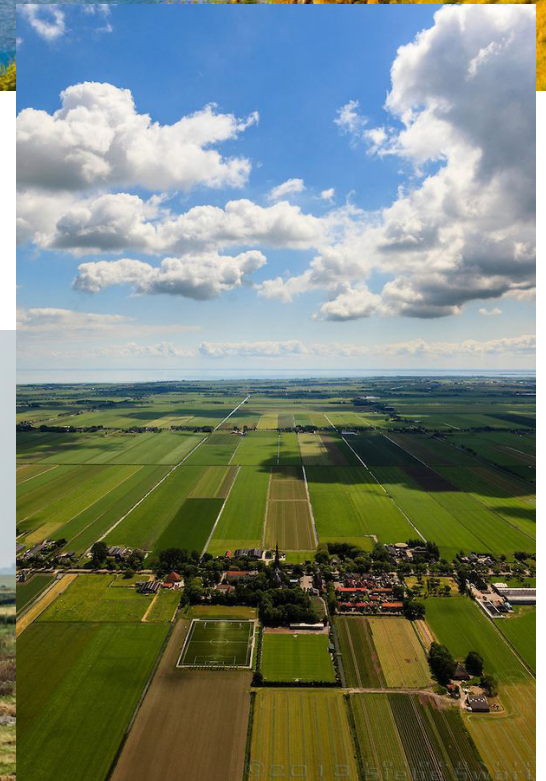
5.3 Golf as a Social and Spatial Framework

Recent research and practice-based examples reveal the potential of golf courses as multifunctional spaces that can foster social engagement and community wellbeing. Several key spatial and social elements make golf courses uniquely suited to support this role.

First, golf courses tend to be expansive and incorporate diverse landscape types, open meadows, wooded areas, and water bodies, which offer scenic walking environments, opportunities for biodiversity, and psychological restoration (Strandberg & Hedlund, 2018). Their park-like design allows them to serve as green space escapes in otherwise dense or uniform suburban environments, especially where other public parks are lacking.

Second, many golf courses are already integrating additional public functions, making them accessible to non-golfers. For example, several golf facilities have implemented public walking paths, nature education trails, and outdoor classrooms that invite interaction across different user groups (European Golf Association, 2019). In the Netherlands, one golf club created a footpath around its course, encouraging residents to enjoy the surrounding nature without needing to play golf (GEO Foundation for Sustainable Golf, 2023).

Third, golf courses have shown potential to become platforms for social inclusion and intergenerational engagement. Projects like "Golf It!" in Glasgow and the Rio Olympic Golf Course have been repurposed to support community outreach, education, and family-oriented activities (GEO Foundation for Sustainable Golf, 2023). These examples demonstrate how golf environments can host structured and unstructured social interactions, acting as contemporary third places that are active at different times of the day and serve overlapping user groups.

Finally, multifunctional use of golf spaces aligns with broader trends in spatial planning, where single-use zoning is being replaced by adaptive, shared-use environments. Golf courses can host jogging, dog-walking, markets, and outdoor performances, all without significantly interfering with their primary sporting function (GEO Foundation for Sustainable Golf, 2021).

By leveraging these spatial and social features, golf courses– especially in suburban settings with limited third places–have the potential to evolve into inclusive social landscapes that serve not only golfers, but the wider public as well.

Golf as a third place

SOCIALIZING

SURROUNDED BY OTHERS

COMMON GROUND

SHARING INTERESTS

GATHERING

NATURAL SURROUNDINGS

SPORTS

5.4 Health Benefits of Golf courses

Golf courses are often viewed merely as recreational spaces, yet they offer a range of health benefits that go beyond the sport itself . In the context of urban planning and third places, these health benefits can further emphasize the value of golf courses as multifunctional spaces that contribute to the well-being of communities (Eriksson, Eriksson, & Ignatieva, 2015).

Firstly, playing golf itself provides both physical and mental health benefits. The game is a low-impact exercise, suitable for people of all ages. In fact, studies have shown that walking an 18-hole course can result in walking up to 10,000 steps, making it a highly effective form of physical activity that is gentle on the joints compared to higher-impact sports. All whilst enjoying the company of likeminded people and natural surroundings.

Furthermore, golf has been linked to mental health improvements. The social interactions that occur on the course, whether through casual conversation or structured competition, help reduce feelings of isolation and foster a sense of belonging (Eriksson, Eriksson, & Ignatieva, 2015). Golfers often form close-knit communities, and these interactions can play a significant role in mitigating stress

and promoting overall mental well-being. For people in suburban or urban areas, particularly those struggling with social isolation or mental health challenges, the golf course can serve as an accessible and non-intimidating space for both physical exercise and social engagement.

Beyond the game itself, the very presence of golf courses can offer health benefits for those who do not play. The expansive green spaces, the presence of nature, and the calming atmosphere provided by golf courses can promote mental well-being even for non-golfers. Urban parks have long been recognized for their ability to reduce stress, improve mood, and encourage physical activity. Golf courses, with their carefully designed landscapes and abundant green space, have similar effects (Petrosillo et al, 2019). Their vast expanses of grass, trees, and water provide an opportunity for people to disconnect from the stresses of everyday life, even if they are just walking or enjoying the scenery rather than actively participating in the game.

5.4.1 Biodiversity of Golf courses

In addition to promoting human health, golf courses can also play an important role in biodiversity and environmental sustainability. The carefully maintained landscapes of golf courses are often rich with diverse plant and animal life, offering a habitat for a variety of species (Jensen, Caspersen, Jensen & Strandberg 2017). While golf courses have traditionally been designed for human recreation, they also contribute to the natural environment in ways that are often overlooked.

One of the key benefits of golf courses in this regard is the green space they provide. Unlike the monocultural lawns that dominate much of urban development, golf courses are typically designed with a range of habitats, including trees, wetlands, and grasslands. This diversity of habitats supports a wide range of wildlife. Birds, small mammals, insects, and amphibians often find refuge in golf courses, which can serve as important corridors for biodiversity in urban or suburban areas (Petrosillo et al, 2019).

Additionally, many golf courses have taken steps to integrate sustainable practices into their management. This includes reducing pesticide and fertilizer use, planting native species, and using water resources more efficiently. Some courses even engage in conservation efforts, such as creating wildlife reserves or participating in programs aimed at preserving local ecosystems (Petrosillo et al, 2019). By incorporating these practices, golf courses can help support biodiversity while providing spaces for recreation and social interaction.

In suburban areas, where natural habitats are often fragmented by development, golf courses can act as important green spaces that help preserve local flora and fauna. These spaces, when designed and managed thoughtfully, can provide a buffer against urban sprawl and contribute to the overall ecological health of the region (Jensen, Caspersen, Jensen & Strandberg 2017). As part of the urban landscape, golf courses have the potential to serve both people and nature, promoting environmental sustainability and contributing to the ecological resilience of suburban areas (Petrosillo et al, 2019).

5.5 Golf courses; defining elements

Unlike many recreational spaces that are imposed onto a site, golf courses are often shaped by the landscape itself. Rather than being "placed" into an area, they emerge from the terrain, following natural contours, elevation changes, and existing ecological features. This creates a dynamic spatial experience, where movement through the course reveals a sequence of diverse atmospheres and vistas. The routing of golf holes, typically in a looped pattern, promotes continuous exploration and offers users a sense of rhythm and progression, akin to the experience of walking through a carefully designed park landscape.

Natural elements play a crucial role in defining the structure of a golf course. Instead of rigid fencing or artificial separations, holes are typically divided by tree lines, ditches, grassy mounds, water bodies, or hedgerows. These features serve multiple purposes: they ensure safety between fairways, create visual diversity, and support habitat connectivity for flora and fauna (Strandberg & Hedlund, 2018). The integration of such "soft boundaries" enhances the ecological function of the space while maintaining a sense of openness.

Accessibility varies across golf courses, but an increasing number, particularly in Northern and Western Europe, are embracing more inclusive strategies. Public walking paths, bridleways, and cycling routes are sometimes incorporated along the periphery or even within parts of the course (GEO Foundation for Sustainable Golf, 2023). This allows the site to function as a green corridor for surrounding neighborhoods, even for those not interested in golf. In this way, the golf course becomes a shared landscape, one that invites both structured use (sport) and unstructured use (wandering, dog walking, birdwatching).

Finally, the design experience itself fosters attentiveness and slowness. Like English landscape gardens, golf courses are curated to produce sequential encounters with scenery; open fairways, shaded tree groves, reflective water, and gentle undulations. These qualities do not just benefit players; they also make the space valuable for passive recreation and contemplation, contributing to psychological restoration and a stronger sense of place.

Together, these spatial, ecological, and experiential features give golf courses the potential to function far beyond their original purpose. When thoughtfully designed or retrofitted, they can become layered environments—green infrastructure that serves ecological, social, and recreational functions simultaneously.

6. Gathering Commons

From Polder to Place

The convergence of theory and design culminates in the spatial proposal for Gathering Commons, a hybrid landscape that embodies the ambitions of the third place in the city of the future. This chapter translates the insights from urban theory, landscape architecture, and social spatiality into a tangible, site-specific vision. The project seeks to create a place where daily routines, working, living, socializing, can dissolve into one another. It is not a single destination, but a layered landscape that can be inhabited in different ways throughout the day and by a diverse set of users.

Gathering Commons is a public space that brings together elements of first, second, and third places; homes, workplaces, and spaces of informal sociability, into one integrated landscape. It is not defined by function but by flexibility; not shaped around individual use, but collective potential. The design operates within a specific geographic and cultural context, but aspires to address broader societal shifts: toward hybrid lifestyles, spatial fragmentation, and the growing need for meaningful social interaction in everyday environments.

## 6.1 Site Analysis: The Landscape Between Rotterdam & Berkel

The site lies within the transitional zone between the urban edge of Rotterdam and the suburban town of Berkel en Rodenrijs. What once was a broad agricultural belt has, through urban expansion and infrastructure development, become a narrowing corridor of open space. While it still serves as a physical buffer between city and suburb, this area is part of a larger ecological and recreational network that connects the western and eastern parts of South Holland.

Historically, the landscape is shaped by centuries-old polder structures and later the peat reclamation. These systems of dikes, canals, and long, linear plots have imposed a strong spatial rhythm on the land. Although much of the area is still used for agriculture, its function has been shifting in recent decades. Increasingly, it is seen as potential public space. However, in practice, it remains underutilized—access is limited, and apart from a single bike path running through the area, the terrain is difficult to reach and not inviting for daily use.

This tension, between a landscape rich in spatial and ecological potential and its current state of inaccessibility, forms the starting point for the design of the Gathering Commons. The ambition is to transform this overlooked corridor into a multifunctional, hybrid public space that respects its historical layers, enhances its ecological value, and invites diverse groups of people to inhabit and care for it.

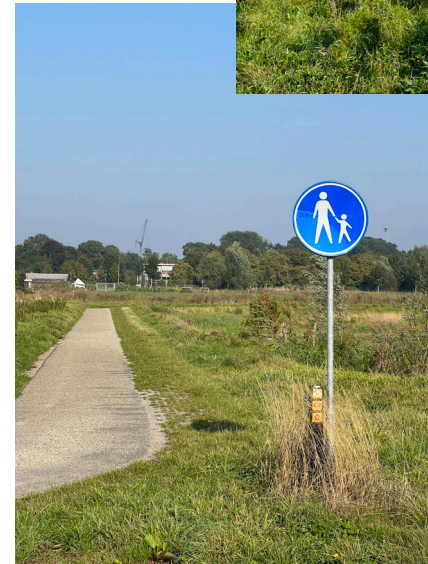# *Throughout the years*
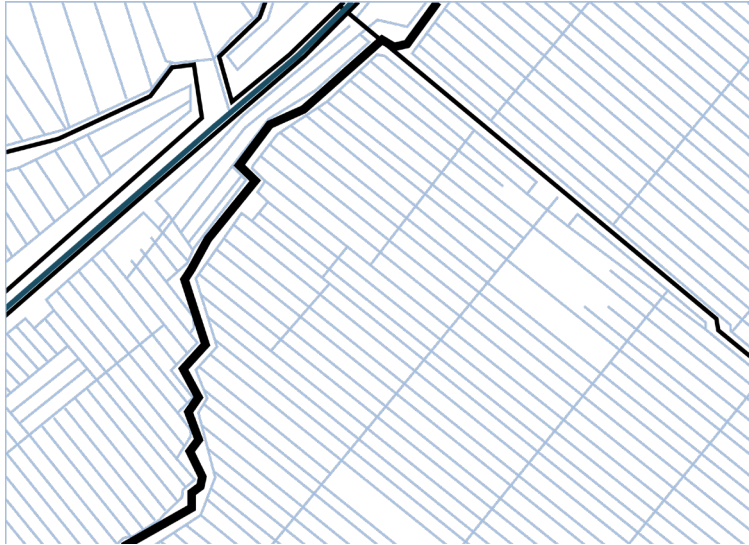
1850
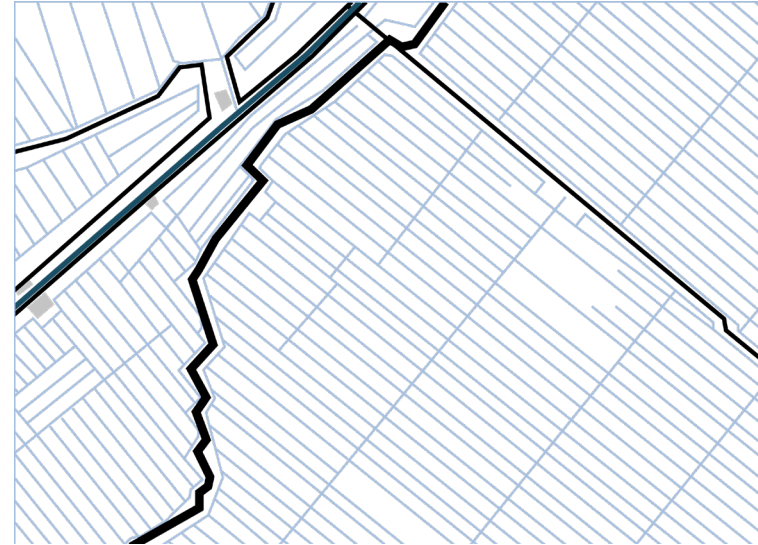
1900

1950

2000

Current situation

Legend:
- Agriculture
- Built environment
- Forest
- Infrastructure
- Water

1:7.500
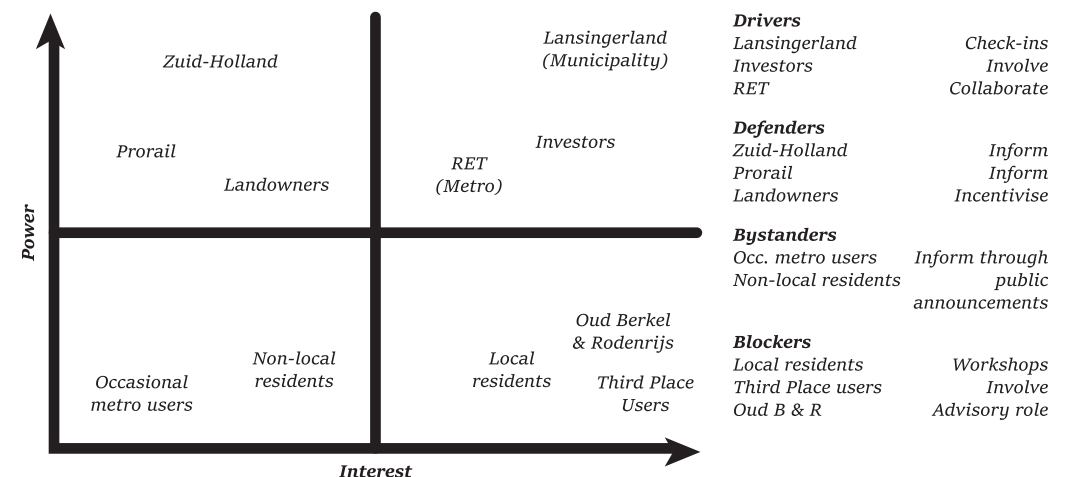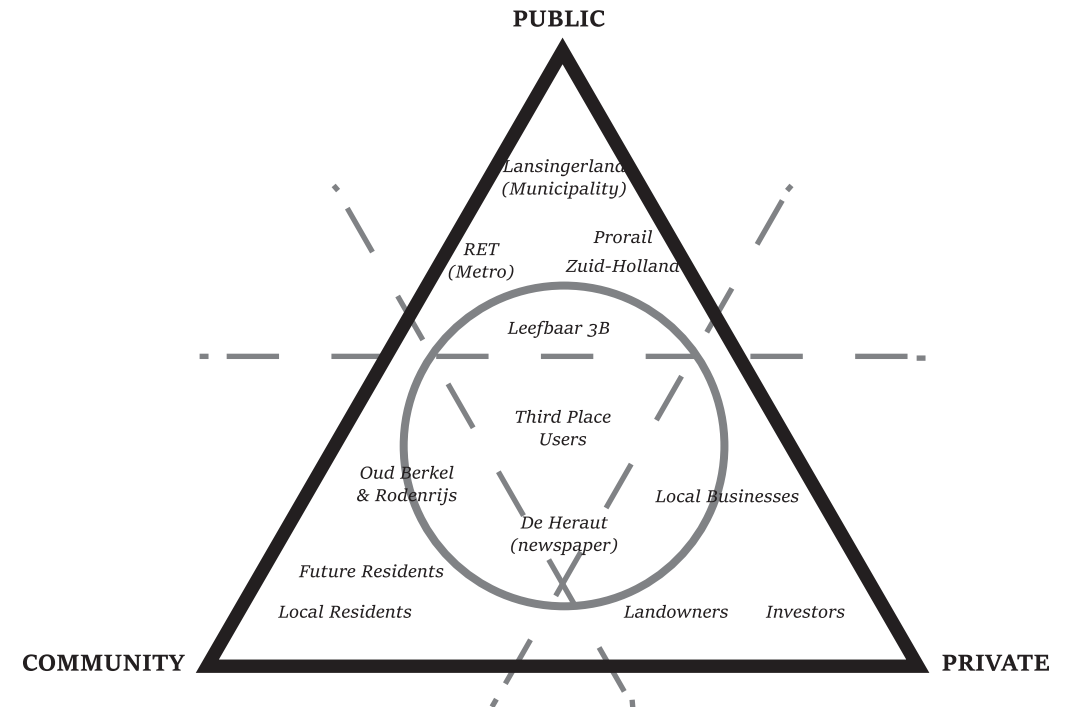
Location
Schiebroekse Polder

6.2 Stakeholder Insights and Local Needs

To ensure the spatial design aligns with the aspirations of its users, a multi-scalar stakeholder analysis was conducted, focusing on the socio-demographic profile of the area and the current patterns of land use. The site lies between the city of Rotterdam and the expanding suburban town of Berkel en Rodenrijs. This fringe condition gives rise to complex, and sometimes conflicting, needs.

Remote workers seek environments that blend focus and inspiration; young adults and families desire spaces for spontaneous leisure and structured recreation; and long-term residents who value ecological continuity and local identity. These needs are not mutually exclusive, on the contrary, their overlap forms the core challenge and opportunity of the site.

The spatial solution is not to design for one group at the expense of another, but to design spaces that are open-ended enough to allow different users to find their own rhythms and attachments. As such, the project aligns with current thinking in inclusive urbanism, where flexible, layered environments replace mono-functional zones (Gehl, 2010).

PUBLIC

Lansingerland (Municipality)

Prorail
Zuid-Holland

RET (Metro)

Leefbaar 3B

Third Place Users

Oud Berkel & Rodenrijs

Local Businesses

De Heraut (newspaper)

Future Residents

Local Residents

Landowners   Investors

COMMUNITY   PRIVATE

Power

Interest

Zuid-Holland

Lansingerland (Municipality)

Prorail

Investors

Landowners

RET (Metro)

Occasional metro users

Non-local residents

Local residents

Oud Berkel & Rodenrijs

Third Place Users

Drivers
Lansingerland	Check-ins
Investors	Involve
RET	Collaborate

Defenders
Zuid-Holland	Inform
Prorail	Inform
Landowners	Incentivise

Bystanders
| Occ. metro users | Inform through |
| Non-local residents | public announcements |

Blockers
Local residents	Workshops
Third Place users	Involve
Oud B & R	Advisory role

6.3 Program and Spatial Strategy

The core spatial gesture is the integration of a golf course not as an exclusive enclave, but as a structuring device within a broader public landscape. Inspired by the logic of English landscape parks, the golf course becomes a foundational geometry around which other programs are arranged. Rather than being fenced off or oriented inward, the course is permeable; crossed by walking trails, viewed from pavilions, and interwoven with places for gathering.

The polder logic of the site, its dikes, canals, and long linear fields, is not erased, but reinterpreted. These historical traces become the framework for new uses: co-working hubs along old canal edges, sport fields in reclaimed plots, and polders that double as biodiversity buffers and spatial separators. The ecological structure is thus preserved and made legible through design.

A series of hubs punctuate the landscape, each offering a different spatial and social experience. Some function as cafés and terraces overlooking greens; others offer indoor-outdoor co-working spaces, or sports facilities. Their design reflects both local vernaculars and contemporary typologies. Their placement ensures connectivity; each is within walking distance of a metro stop or a residential cluster, turning the Gathering Commons into a networked landscape of everyday rituals.

6.3.1 Not Just a New Golf Course

Gathering Commons is not a golf course with public space around it; it is a public space in which golf happens to be one of the uses. The golf course is not the dominant identity, but one of the many roles the landscape can take on. Fairways are designed to function as linear parks on non-golf days, and tee boxes become seating terraces. Golf is present, but not exclusive. It coexists with other forms of movement, gathering, and contemplation.

This coexistence is crucial to the project's goal: to return golf to its roots as a social sport practiced near cities and shared landscapes. In Dutch history, the predecessor of golf, kolf, was played in village centers and public courts, accessible to all social classes. Over time, the sport moved to more exclusive settings, losing its urban character and civic value. Gathering Commons reclaims this lineage by reintegrating golf into the daily rhythms of the city and offering it as one among many shared uses.

Programme in the activity grid

Following the lines of the existing landscape to create a grid filled with contemporary programme.
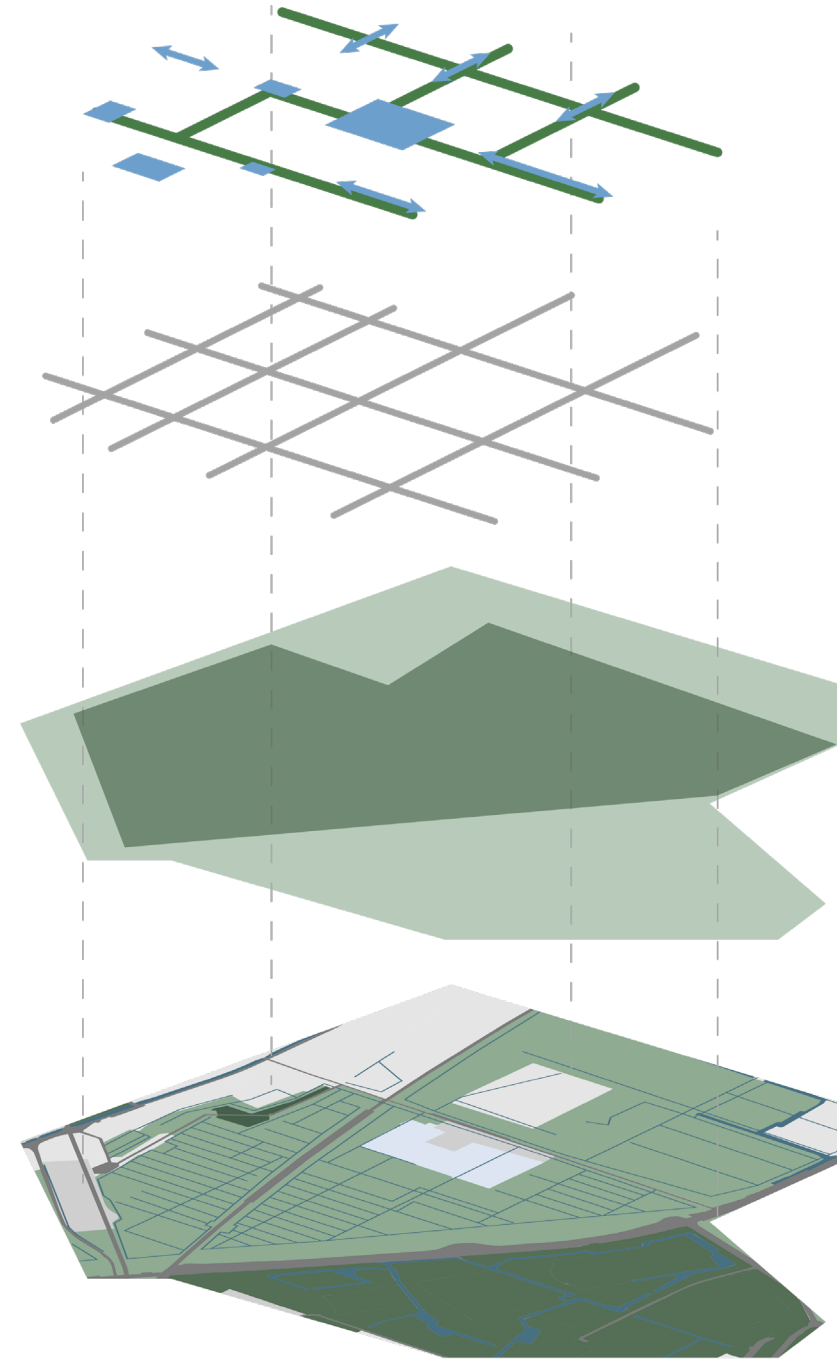
6.4 Designing the Hybrid Third Place

At the heart of the design is the ambition to create a truly hybrid third place, one that is not limited by category, function, or formality. Drawing on Oldenburg's (1982) definition of third places as informal gathering spaces crucial to community life, this project takes the concept further by embedding it within a multifunctional and ecologically resilient landscape.

Spatial hybridity is achieved through flexibility and ambiguity. Spaces are designed to be interpreted and reinterpreted by different users. A bench may serve golfers in the morning, picnickers in the afternoon, and festival-goers at night. A lawn may host yoga, birdwatching, or a local market depending on the day and season. This openness encourages appropriation, a key principle in creating beloved, lasting public spaces (Whyte, 1980).

Designing such spaces also requires careful calibration of visibility, accessibility, and identity. The landscape is never entirely open nor closed, it offers moments of enclosure and intimacy alongside openness and flow. Sightlines are preserved for both aesthetic and safety reasons, while vegetation supports biodiversity without obscuring social visibility. The result is a mosaic of atmospheres: vibrant edges, quiet interiors, shaded paths, and sunlit openings.

The Plan

1:7.500

6.4.1 The Use of the Landscape

The site currently functions as a residual space; a gap in the urban fabric shaped by infrastructural constraints. Dammed in by a high-speed rail line and a highway, it is physically connected yet experientially isolated. Paradoxically, this isolation offers opportunity. The land is underused, but not without value. It has history, ecological richness, and strategic location near both city and suburb.

Rather than fill the land with housing—a common pressure in the Dutch Randstad; the project proposes a mixed-use green landscape. One that strengthens the ecological corridor running east-west through South Holland, while also activating the site as a destination and passage. It bridges infrastructural barriers, turning them into edges rather than walls.

The programme of the Gathering Commons causes that people have both reasons to visit and reasons to stay. The connection to the existing sports cluster south of the A16 further activates the site, creating a corridor of active leisure and social life that connects Berkel en Rodenrijs and Rotterdam through shared use, rather than separation.

Primary route
Secondary route
Hotspot
Sports facility
Urban area
Golf course character

Green urban neighbourhood

Open lawn

Green residential neighbourhood

Scenic park route

Main square/entrance

Polder

Biodiverse meadow

Waterside stroll

Park

Sports facility

Central meeting space

Elevated entrances

Sports facility

6.5 Vegetation of the Gathering Commons
High layer - Trees

Common Ash

Ecology: Light-canopy tree that improves soil and supports woodland structure.

Biodiversity: Host to 1,000+ species including birds, bats, and lichens.

Design use: Brings openness and ecological depth near activity zones

Birch

Ecology: Pioneer tree suited to moist, peaty soils.

Biodiversity: Attracts insects, birds, and fungi.

Design use: Light, graceful tree for soft transitions and seasonal effect.

Oak

Ecology: Long-lived, structure-giving species in wetter zones.

Biodiversity: Supports more species than any other native tree.

Design use: Landmark tree for hubs; strong identity and deep ecology.

Black Alder

Ecology: Thrives in wet soils; fixes nitrogen and stabilizes banks.

Biodiversity: Shelter for amphibians, birds, and water insects.

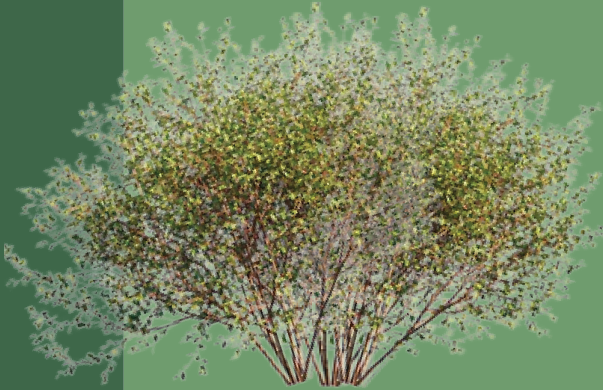Design use: Planted along ditches and wetlands for function and habitat.

Poplar

Ecology: Fast-growing, floodplain tree; wind-tolerant and soil-stabilizing.

Biodiversity: Rare species supporting birds and insects.

Design use: Frames views and reintroduces a threatened native icon

Midstory layer - Shrubs

Alder Buckthorn

Ecology: Grows well on moist, peaty or loamy soils.

Biodiversity: Host plant for the brimstone butterfly; berries for birds.

Design use: Subtle shrub for wet edges and ecological layering.

Common Dogwood

Ecology: Thrives on nutrient-rich, moist soils.

Biodiversity: Supports moth larvae, pollinators, and provides bird cover.

Design use: Dense shrub for structure, seasonal color, and wildlife shelter

Guelder Rose

Ecology: Prefers streambanks and moist thickets.

Biodiversity: Offers nectar-rich flowers and red winter berries.

Design use: Visually striking; adds seasonal interest and food for fauna

Ground layer - Grasses & Flowers

Yellow Iris

Ecology: Grows in shallow water and wet soils; helps filter nutrients.

Biodiversity: Attracts pollinators and provides cover for amphibians.

Design use: Bold, sculptural accent along water edges; seasonal color

Soft Rush

Ecology: Prefers moist, compacted soils; helps with water infiltration.

Biodiversity: Shelter for small invertebrates and amphibians.

Design use: Adds fine texture and structure in wet, informal plantings

Lesser Pond Sedge

Ecology: Dense-forming sedge for marshy soils; stabilizes saturated ground.

Biodiversity: Valuable nesting and hiding spot for birds and insects.

Design use: Great for naturalistic planting in low, wet areas.

Common Reed

Ecology: Dominant grass in marshes and wet ditches; stabilizes banks and filters water.

Biodiversity: Provides habitat for birds (e.g., reed warblers), insects, and amphibians.

Design use: Ideal for natural edges, visual softening, and wetland ecology enhancement.

Purple Loosestrife

Ecology: Thrives in wet meadows and marshes; tolerant of flooding.

Biodiversity: Excellent nectar source for bees and butterflies.

Design use: Adds vertical color and texture to biodiverse wetland zones.

Meadowsweet

Ecology: Found in moist meadows and ditch edges; thrives on rich soils.

Biodiversity: Attracts bees, hoverflies, and supports moth larvae.

Design use: Light, frothy flower heads add softness and seasonal variety

Vegetation of the Gathering Commons

Layer	Height	Design function		Seasonal role
Canopy layer Trees	7,5 - 20 meters	- Creates a "green ceiling" that filters light and defines large spaces - Adds vertical structure while keeping sightlines open below	- Acts as a screen for objects in the distance, does not reveil everything at once - Steers sightlines in a certain direction	Canopy transforms light, shade, and atmosphere.
Midstory layer Shrubs	1-5 meters	- Forms spatial rhythm and soft transitions - Offers informal screening without blocking views	- Provides seasonal interest (flowers, berries) - Enriches human-scale experience	Accents with flowers, berries, and branching form.
Ground layer Grasses & Flowers	0,1 - 1 meters	- Activates the ground with movement, texture, and bloom - Frames paths and wetland edges	- Maintains open views and spatial transparency - Signals ecological character	Bloom, color shifts express seasonality.

Landscape Typologies

1.

Golf Course
Short, intensively maintained turf for playability.

2.

Grassland
Taller, less-manicured grass typical of rough zones and edges.
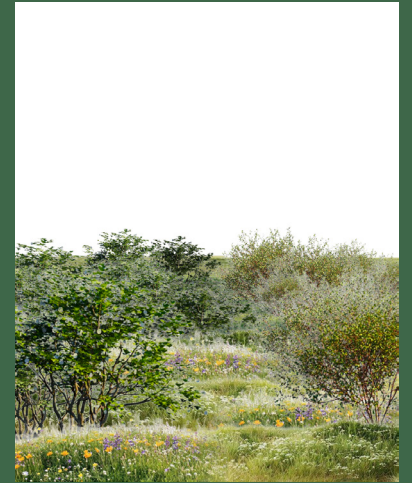

3.

Flowering Meadow
Species-rich low vegetation with seasonal color and biodiversity

4.

Shrubs landscape
A natural buffer with mixed-height shrubs and taller ground cover.

5.

Open Woodland Meadow
Grassy meadow scattered with trees and understory planting.

6.

Dense Woodland Meadow
Denser tree grouping with layered vegetation and filtered light

7.

Parkland
Regularly spaced trees with mown grass, offering openness and shade

	Golf course		Open woodland
	Grassland		Dense woodland
	Flowering meadow		Parkland
	Shrubs		

6.6 Building Typologies and Architectural Character

A variety of building types forms the architectural fabric of the project, balancing urban liveliness with the landscape-oriented character of the site. In a context where urban life merges with the openness of a polder landscape and a hybrid park-golf space, the design of the built environment is not only about functional enclosure, but also about framing views, shaping public life, and reflecting a layered sense of place. To ensure consistency while allowing flexibility, four distinct building types were defined: High Street Spine, Landscape Hubs, Main Street Dwellings, and Garden Quarters. Each typology responds to its specific spatial, social, and programmatic setting, while together they form a legible and cohesive whole.

High Street Spine

The high street typology forms the spine of the urban area. These buildings are positioned along the most public axis of the neighborhood—where commercial, social, and residential life intersect. Rising up to six stories, they adopt a compact, vertical rhythm with narrow frontages and strong brick façades, inspired by traditional Dutch urbanism. The architectural style is robust, repetitive yet varied in detail, with a strong focus on material depth, expressive entrances, and vertical articulation. Ground floors are designed with active plinths to accommodate shops, studios, co-working spaces, or hospitality, creating a dynamic street life. The rhythm of façades, variety in window detailing, and the consistent use of warm brick materials give this typology a timeless yet lively character, promoting human-scale urbanity and supporting the mix of uses that a "third place" environment demands.

Landscape Hubs

Landscape Hubs serve as landmarks and anchors within the urban layout. Strategically placed at prominent corners, public nodes, or transitions between neighborhood and open space, they are more expressive in form and slightly taller, up to 6 stories, without breaking the overall massing coherence. These buildings are designed to be recognizable and inviting: places where people gather, work, meet, or dwell. Their architecture blends with the surrounding traditional language but allows for greater articulation, layered programs, and occasional softer edges, such as colonnades, arcades, or setbacks to provide civic gestures. The materials remain rooted in brick and natural tones but may be paired with contrasting elements like metal detailing, green façades, or generous glazing. Functionally, Landscape Hubs are often hybrids; housing community functions, cultural spaces, or mobility hubs alongside living or working units. Their character is extroverted and legible: buildings that signify a sense of arrival or centrality within the neighborhood.

Main Street Dwellings

Positioned closer to the Main Street and public corridors, they provide residential density while retaining a clear domestic identity. These buildings range from two to four stories and are arranged in relatively compact blocks or rows, with small gardens, shared inner courtyards, or mews-like passages. The style is distinctly traditional: pitched roofs, masonry façades, vertical window proportions, and detailed front doors create a welcoming and familiar streetscape. The materials remain consistent with the main street typology—brick in warm earth tones—but executed at a softer, more intimate scale. The character of these buildings is calm yet urban, offering a comfortable residential typology that supports the active center of the neighborhood without dominating it. Transitions between public and private are carefully managed through stoops, low fences, or planting strips.

Garden Quarters

The green neighbourhood buildings are located on the quieter edges of the plan, where the built environment blends into open parkland, informal paths, or nature-inclusive zones. The architecture here is more open and playful. Buildings are lower, typically two to three stories, and more horizontally oriented. Private gardens, shared greens, and small courtyards are key features of this typology. Rooflines may be broken or staggered; façades combine brick with softer materials like wood or plaster to evoke a rural or garden-like feel. Here, the character is slower and greener: a typology that prioritizes informal social interaction, biodiversity, and visual openness to the landscape. These homes embrace the rhythm of outdoor life and support the slower pace associated with the fringes of the golf-park hybrid. Despite the difference in tone, they remain stylistically coherent with the overall architectural language.

Together, these four typologies articulate a layered urban ensemble; one that adapts to context, enhances identity, and contributes to the creation of a neighborhood that balances the vibrancy of urban living with the spaciousness and calm of the polder landscape. They not only define spatial structure but also embody the social ambition of the project: to create an inclusive and human-scaled environment that fosters both everyday life and exceptional moments.

Building type	Height	Style & Material	Main use	Plinth use	Character & Placement
High Street Spine	Up to 6 floors	Robust brick façades with vertical rhythm and classic detailing, forming an urban streetscape of up to six stories with active ground floors. Traditional yet metropolitan, these buildings anchor the main street with a strong architectural language and a lively plinth	Mixed use; housing, retail, work space, sport, meeting space	Active, poreus plinth	Spine of the project, vibrant area with open, inviting character
Landscape Hubs	4-6 floors	Architectural landmarks that blend into their context through warm materials, brick or natural stone, articulated volumes and layered façades. Slightly taller, they maintain harmony with their surroundings through craftsmanship and material continuity	Mix use; housing, cafe, meeting space	Community functions	Visual and spatial focal point of neighbourhoods. Encourage interactions
Main Street Dwellings	2-4 floors	Row houses and small apartment buildings in traditional brickwork, pitched roofs, and detailed entrances — dense yet domestic in expression. A classic, fine-grained style rooted in Dutch townscapes, reinforcing a walkable and familiar feel.	Residential	Residential	Close to main street; slightly urban. More private spaces
Garden Quarters	2-3 floors	Low-rise homes with brick or soft-toned facades, garden edges, and natural materials — modest and airy, with a village-like atmosphere." The architecture feels relaxed and tactile, fitting seamlessly into a verdant, residential setting	Residential	Residential	Quieter, green spaces, public greenery and soft transitions

High street spine

Landscape Hubs

Main Street dwellings

Garden Quarters

7. *Moments in the Landscape*

The Gathering Commons brings together landscape, architecture, and social programming into a coherent spatial vision that reimagines how a hybrid third place can function within a suburban context. This chapter presents the key spatial strategies and design components that underpin the project, each contributing to a landscape that is open, flexible, and grounded in the everyday.

At its core, the design prioritizes accessibility, physically, socially, and mentally. The site is embedded within a well-connected public transport network and integrated with local walking and cycling infrastructure, making it approachable for a wide range of users and travel modes. Yet beyond access, the strength of the design lies in its hybridity; not just through overlapping functions, but through the coexistence of multiple user types, residents, workers, visitors, and golfers, each able to engage with the landscape in their own way and time.

The spatial character of the Gatering Commons unfolds through three primary landscape typologies: the open rhythm of the polder, the softness of the park, and the intimacy of green neighborhood edges. These layers offer contrast and continuity, creating an experience that feels both expansive and personal. Movement through the site is structured around changing atmospheres, framed viewpoints,

and distributed programming, drawing from the tradition of the designed landscape to keep the experience dynamic and engaging.

Anchoring these experiences are two key social nodes: the clubhouse, located at the main entrance square, and the halfway house, a modest intervention at a point where users' paths naturally cross. Together, they support both structured and spontaneous forms of gathering.

Finally, the edges of the site play a crucial role. Rather than serving as hard boundaries, they are soft, active thresholds where daily life and the Commons overlap; inviting residents to step in, linger, and shape the space as part of their everyday routines.

In the following sections, these six dimensions; accessibility, hybridity, character, experience, social nodes, and edge interactions, are unpacked to reveal how the Gathering Commons operates not only as a functional park or golf course, but as a living, shared public landscape for a new generation of suburban life.

7.1 Accessibility

Traditional golf courses are often difficult to reach without a car, typically located on the fringes of cities with little connection to public transport or pedestrian routes. This contributes to their exclusivity and limits integration into the daily routines of nearby communities. For young adults, many of whom rely on cycling, walking, or public transit, such inaccessibility is a significant barrier to regular use.

In contrast, the Gathering Commons is designed around multimodal accessibility. Located between Rotterdam and Berkel en Rodenrijs, the site is directly served by the RandstadRail metro line and several regional bus routes, connecting it to urban and suburban areas alike. Cycling infrastructure feeds into the site from all directions, while walkable entry points are placed at key thresholds between the landscape and surrounding neighborhoods.

This layered approach to access directly aligns with the lifestyle patterns of young adults, who value flexible, sustainable mobility options. Whether arriving by bike for a morning walk, by metro for remote work, or on foot for a social gathering, users encounter a site that is open, legible, and easy to enter. Rather than being a distant destination, the Gathering Commons becomes a space embedded in everyday life–repositioning the golf landscape as a shared, inclusive, and socially integrated commons.
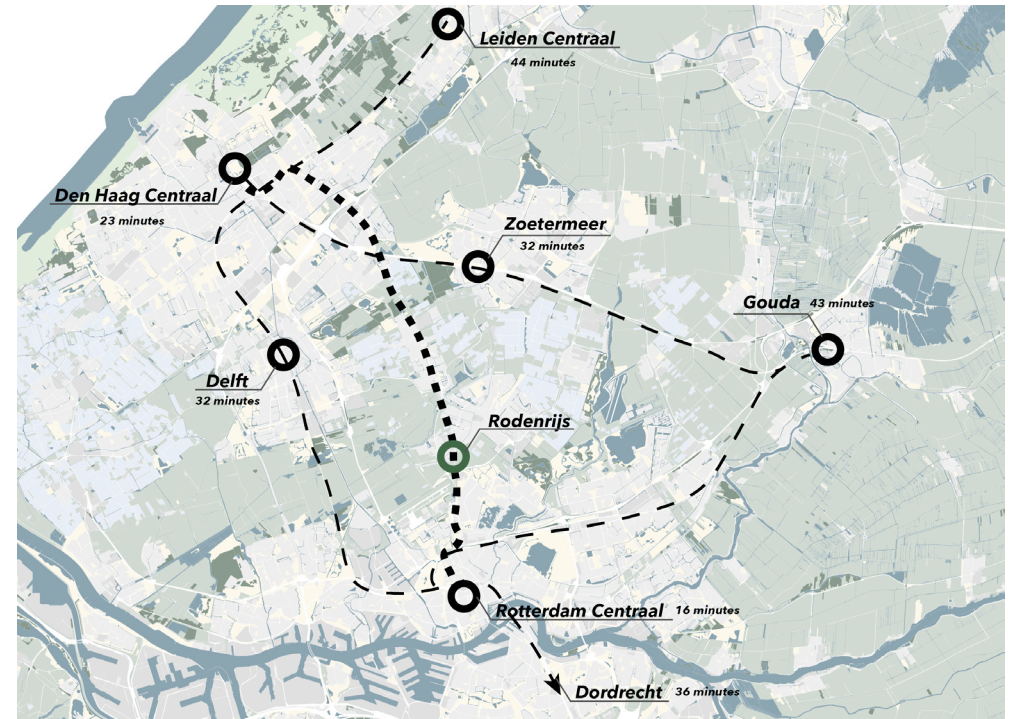
Access within

Access towards

Leiden

Den Haag

Zoetermeer

A12

Gouda

Delft

Rodenrijs

Rotterdam

Dordrecht
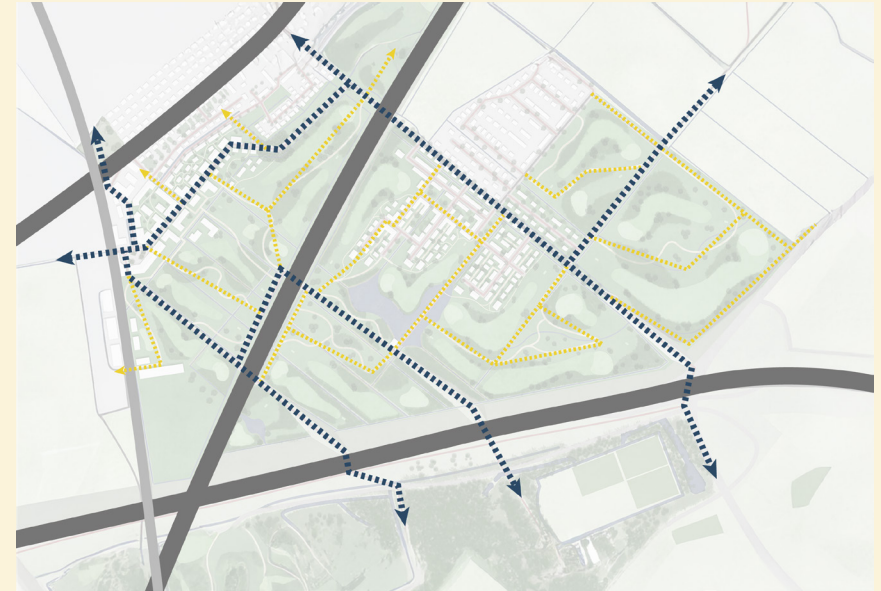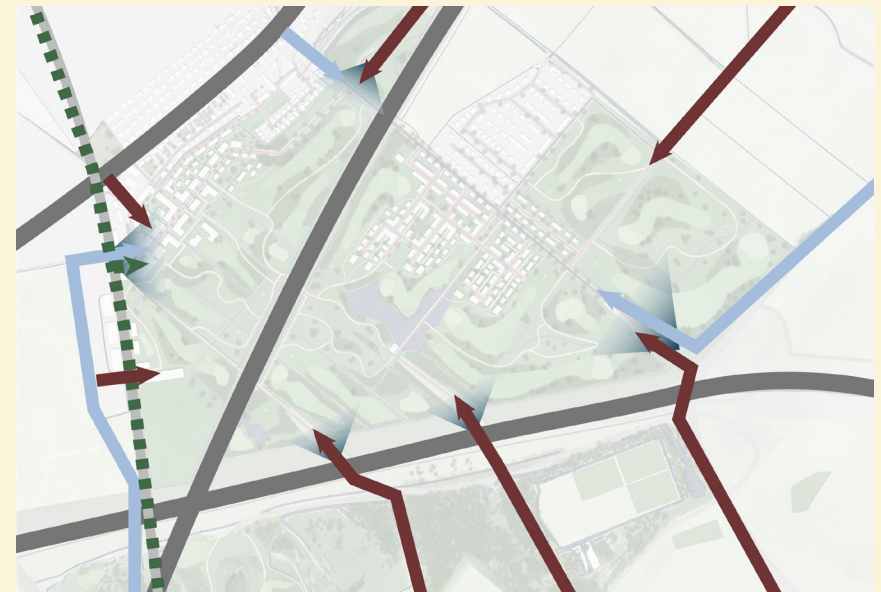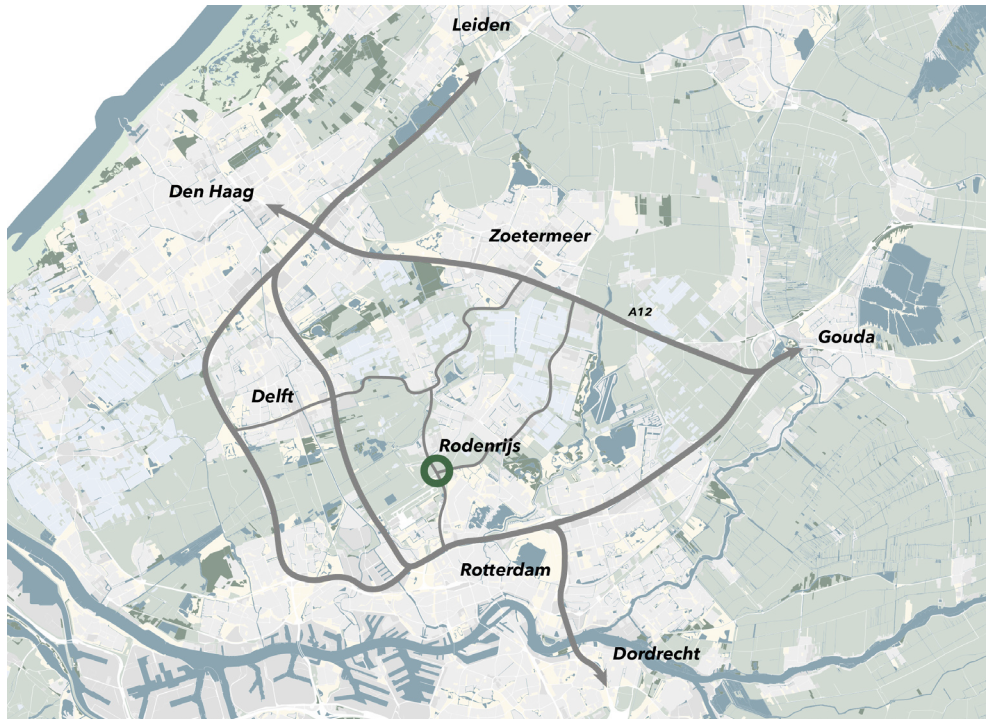
Rodenrijs is well connected through the road network to surrounding places. The N471 en N209 run right past the Schiebroekse Polder

1:150.000

Leiden Centraal
44 minutes

Den Haag Centraal
23 minutes

Zoetermeer
32 minutes

Gouda 43 minutes

Delft
32 minutes

Rodenrijs

Rotterdam Centraal 16 minutes

Dordrecht 36 minutes

Rodenrijs has a strong public transport connection. It can be reached within 45 minutes from all the surrounding cities.

1:150.000

7.2 Hybridity in its users

The concept of hybridity within the Gathering Commons does not arise solely from overlapping functions or programmed uses. Instead, it is rooted in the diversity of its users and the flexibility of the space to accommodate their different rhythms, needs, and identities. While many urban designs focus on multifunctionality in terms of use—combining playgrounds with cafés, sports with events—this project emphasizes the idea that hybridity is also social and temporal. The same bench, path, or pavilion may serve different purposes to different people over the course of a day or week, not through rigid zoning, but through open-ended design that allows for layered appropriation.

Rather than targeting a singular user group, the Gathering Commons is designed as a shared landscape for a wide spectrum of people. While this thesis focuses particularly on young adults, it acknowledges that individuals rarely fit neatly into one category. A local resident might visit the site for a solitary morning walk, return in the afternoon to work remotely at a pavilion café, and then play a round of golf in the evening with friends. A day visitor might arrive as a cyclist exploring the region but engage with the site as a leisure-seeker, café guest, or even a curious observer of the sport. These shifts in identity and use are not exceptional, they are fundamental to how people navigate contemporary urban space.

The project's spatial structure supports this multiplicity. Hubs are distributed across the landscape to allow moments of interaction, rest, productivity, and recreation. Some users may come with intention; remote workers seeking a quiet yet stimulating workspace; golfers following a familiar route, while others arrive without a fixed plan, discovering the Commons as a place to pause, explore, or connect. There is no designated "third place zone"; rather, the entire landscape offers potential for third-place experiences depending on context and mindset.

This approach also recognizes that hybridity is not just a matter of accommodating different groups, but enabling the same people to use the space in different ways over time. It avoids a static categorization of users and instead supports a dynamic choreography of everyday life. In this way, hybridity becomes an inclusive design principle; inviting users to find their own place within the Commons, rather than prescribing it for them.

The result is a resilient public space, capable of adapting not only to different types of use, but to the evolving lifestyles, preferences, and identities of its users. It reflects the reality that contemporary life is fluid and interconnected, and that truly public spaces must be able to host this complexity without forcing it into rigid boundaries.

7.2.1 Main square

At the heart of the Gathering Commons lies the main square, where the clubhouse and metro station form a vibrant arrival point. This space acts as both a gateway and a gathering place, where commuters, remote workers, golfers, and day visitors converge. The proximity of transit infrastructure ensures easy access, while the clubhouse provides a social anchor: part café, part coworking hub, and part community living room. It's where planned meetings blend with chance encounters, and the transition from city to landscape becomes seamless.
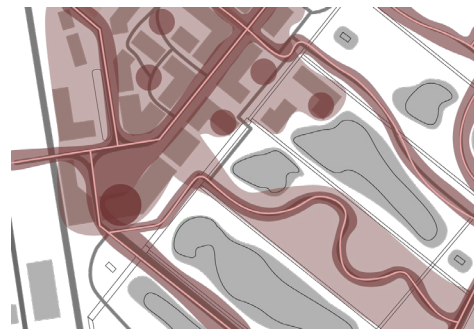
Local

00:00   06:00   12:00   18:00   23:59

Golfer

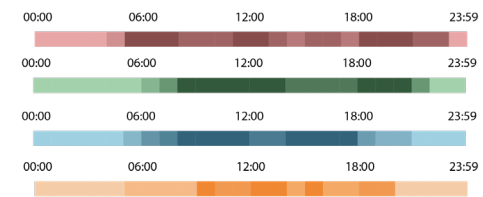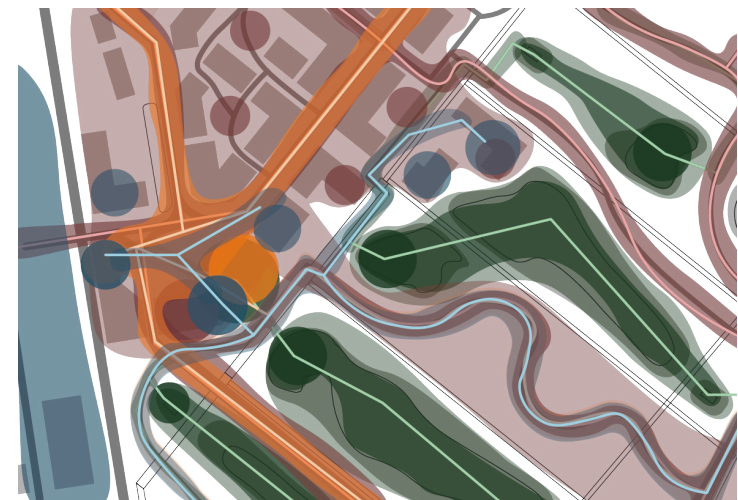00:00   06:00   12:00   18:00   23:59
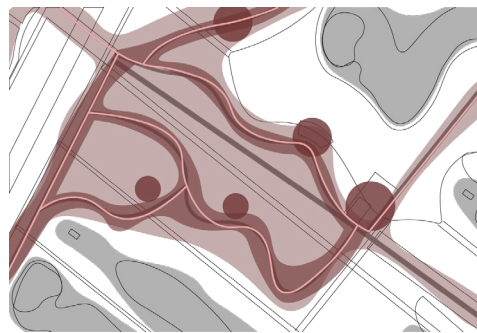
Day tripper

00:00   06:00   12:00   18:00   23:59

Worker
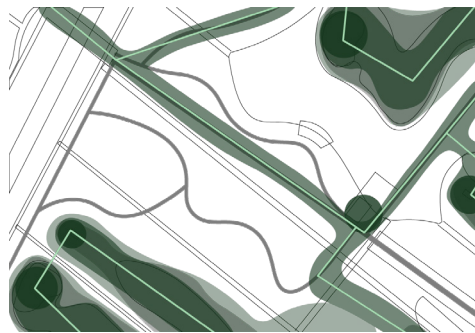
00:00   06:00   12:00   18:00   23:59

Combined

00:00   06:00   12:00   18:00   23:59

00:00   06:00   12:00   18:00   23:59

00:00   06:00   12:00   18:00   23:59

00:00   06:00   12:00   18:00   23:59

7.2.2 *Halfway house*

Positioned along the golf route and intersecting with walking and cycling paths, the halfway house is a deliberate crossing point of different user flows. More than a rest stop, it is a place of spatial overlap; where locals walking their dogs, cyclists passing through, and golfers mid-round briefly share space and time. Its informal atmosphere, modest scale, and layered seating options make it ideal for casual exchange or a quiet pause. It embodies the project's principle of spontaneous social contact through spatial design.
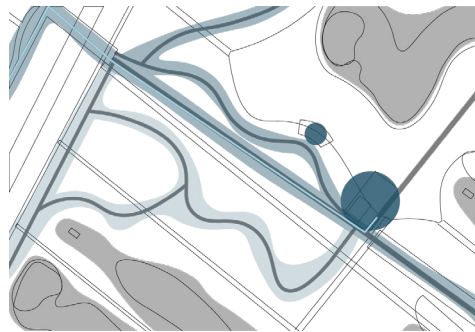

Local

00:00　06:00　12:00　18:00　23:59
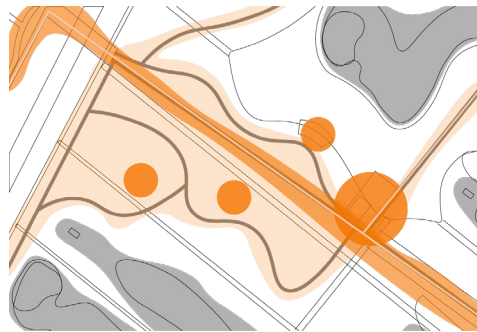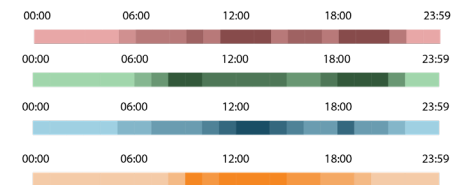

Golfer

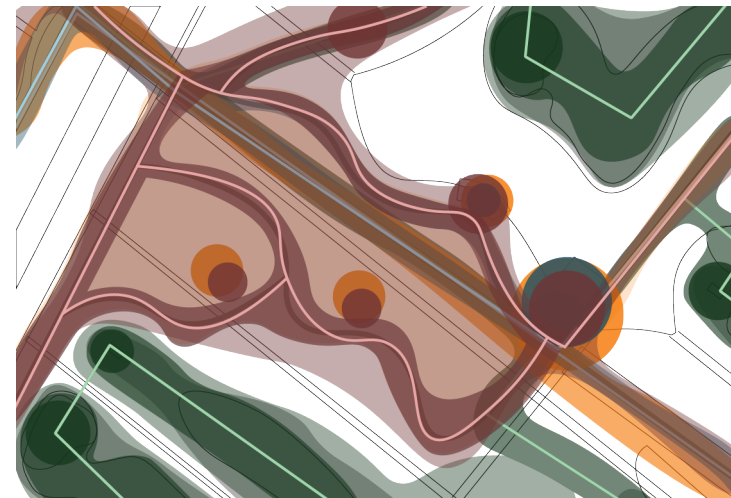00:00　06:00　12:00　18:00　23:59

Day tripper

00:00　06:00　12:00　18:00　23:59

Worker

00:00　06:00　12:00　18:00　23:59

Combined

00:00　06:00　12:00　18:00　23:59
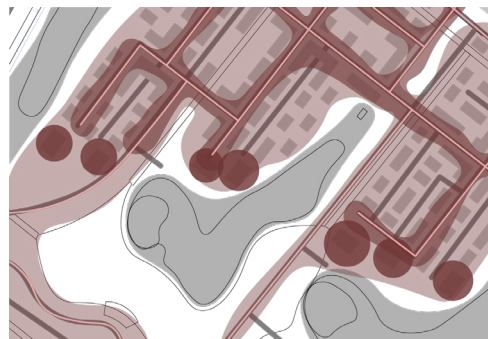
00:00　06:00　12:00　18:00　23:59

00:00　06:00　12:00　18:00　23:59

00:00　06:00　12:00　18:00　23:59

7.2.3 *Neighbourhood*

Where the park meets the surrounding neighborhoods, soft edges dissolve the boundary between private life and public realm. It creates zones of informal interaction. These edge conditions are not backdoors to the landscape, they are vital social interfaces. Residents step into the Commons directly from their homes, and the spatial gradient invites both lingering and movement. This continuous edge activity helps weave the Gathering Commons into the everyday life of the community.

Local

00:00   06:00   12:00   18:00   23:59

Golfer

00:00   06:00   12:00   18:00   23:59
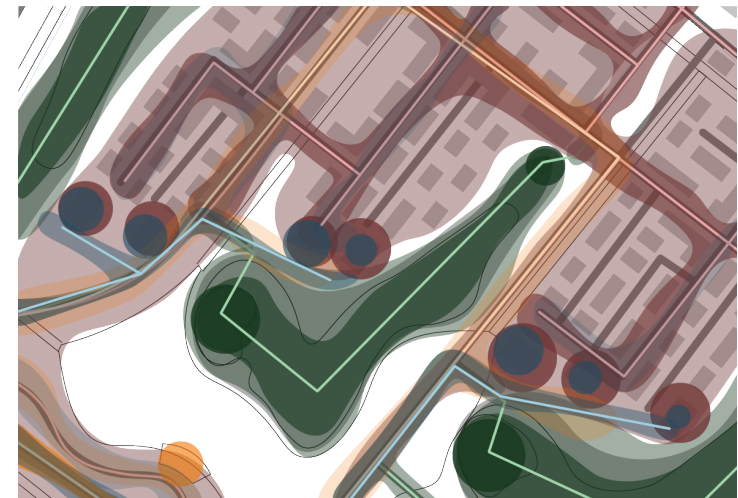
Day tripper

00:00   06:00   12:00   18:00   23:59

Worker

00:00   06:00   12:00   18:00   23:59

Combined

00:00   06:00   12:00   18:00   23:59

00:00   06:00   12:00   18:00   23:59

00:00   06:00   12:00   18:00   23:59

00:00   06:00   12:00   18:00   23:59

00:00   06:00   12:00   18:00   23:59

7.3 Character

A defining quality of the Gathering Commons lies in its spatial diversity. Rather than presenting a single, uniform landscape, the site offers a sequence of distinct yet connected spatial characters. Users, whether residents, visitors, or golfers, encounter a range of environments as they move through the Commons. This layered landscape experience ensures that the place remains engaging, legible, and continuously open to reinterpretation.

At the core is the polder landscape, a historical and infrastructural foundation. Its long, linear canals and open fields give structure to the site and ground it in Dutch land-making traditions. The openness of this space evokes calm and perspective; it allows for expansive views and quiet reflection. The golf course route and walking paths flow through this framework, engaging directly with its rhythm and spatial discipline.

In contrast, the park landscape introduces softness and informality. Here, the space is more enclosed and varied: meadows curve around water bodies, trees create shaded spots for rest, and programmatic elements like playgrounds, pavilions, and gardens bring moments of activity. This part of the Commons invites loitering and wandering, it is where everyday leisure takes place, and where chance encounters are most likely to occur.

Finally, the green neighborhood edges serve as transitional zones. These are the spaces where residential life blends into the public landscape. Paths slip between houses and hedges, leading into the Commons as if it were an extension of one's backyard. Community gardens, benches, and small squares soften the boundary between private and public, encouraging residents to step outside and engage with the broader site.

Together, these three characters create a dynamic landscape experience. One is never quite sure what lies beyond the next tree line or corner, whether it's a view across open polder fields, a quiet park bench, or a gathering in a neighborhood square. This variety enhances the richness of the Commons and supports its hybrid social function. Rather than dictating how to use the space, the landscape offers a series of invitations, each with its own atmosphere, tempo, and possibilities.
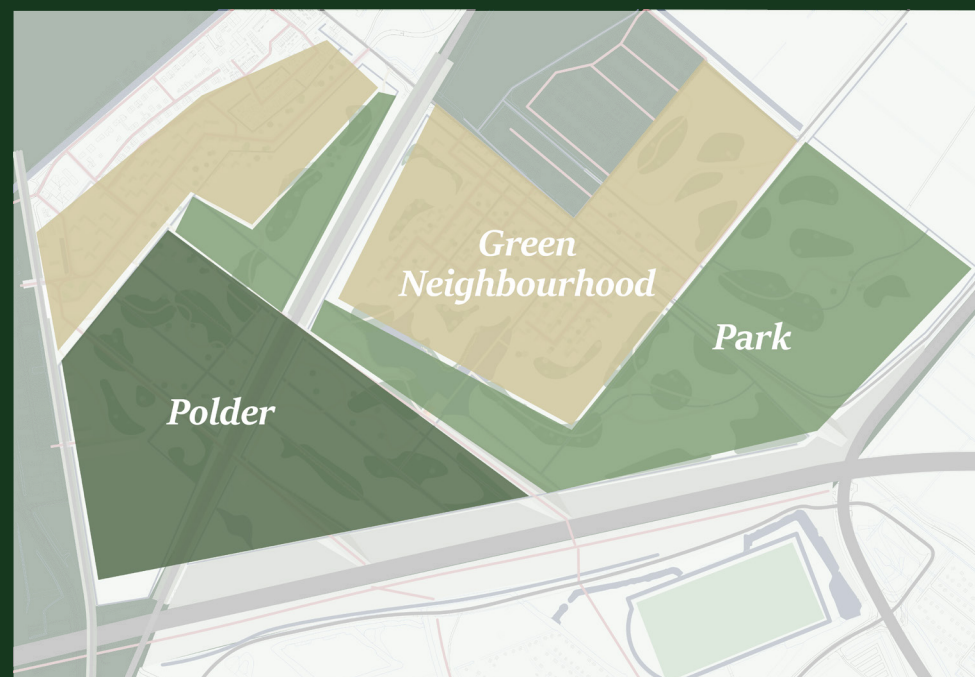
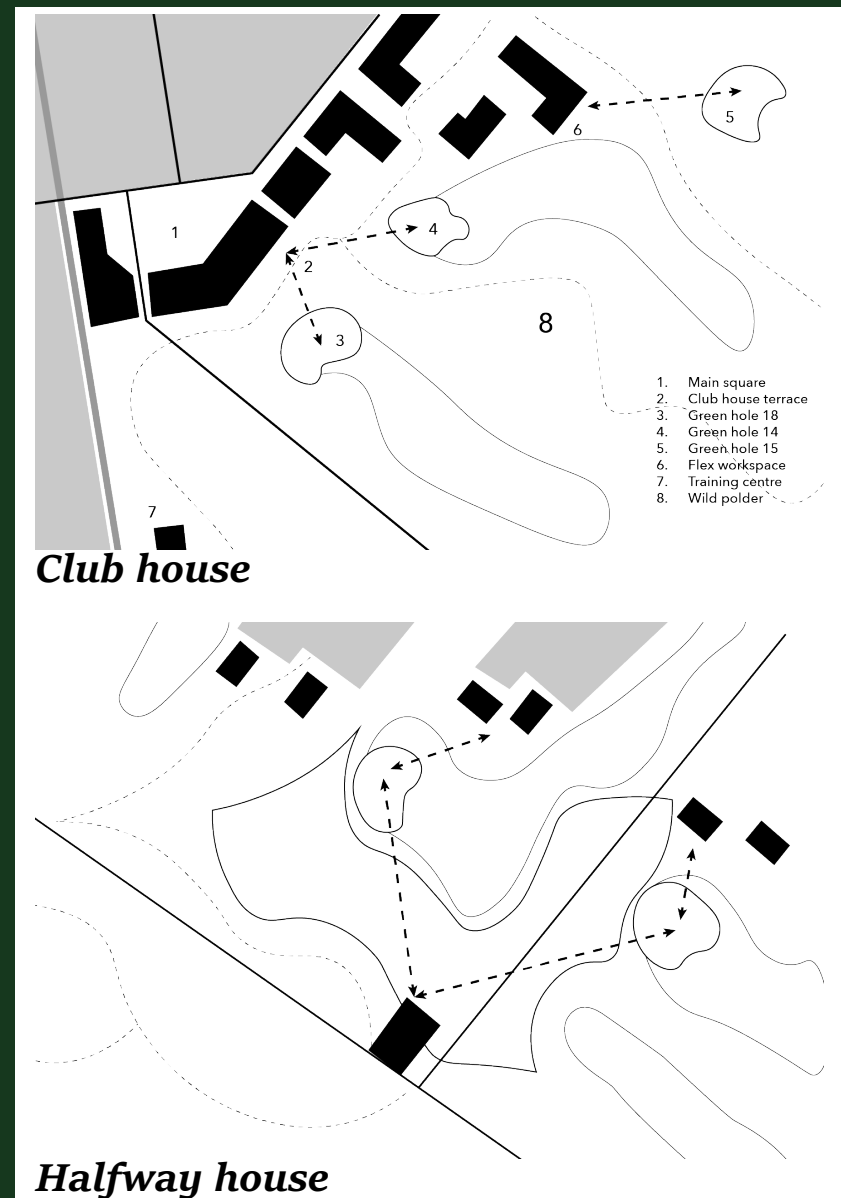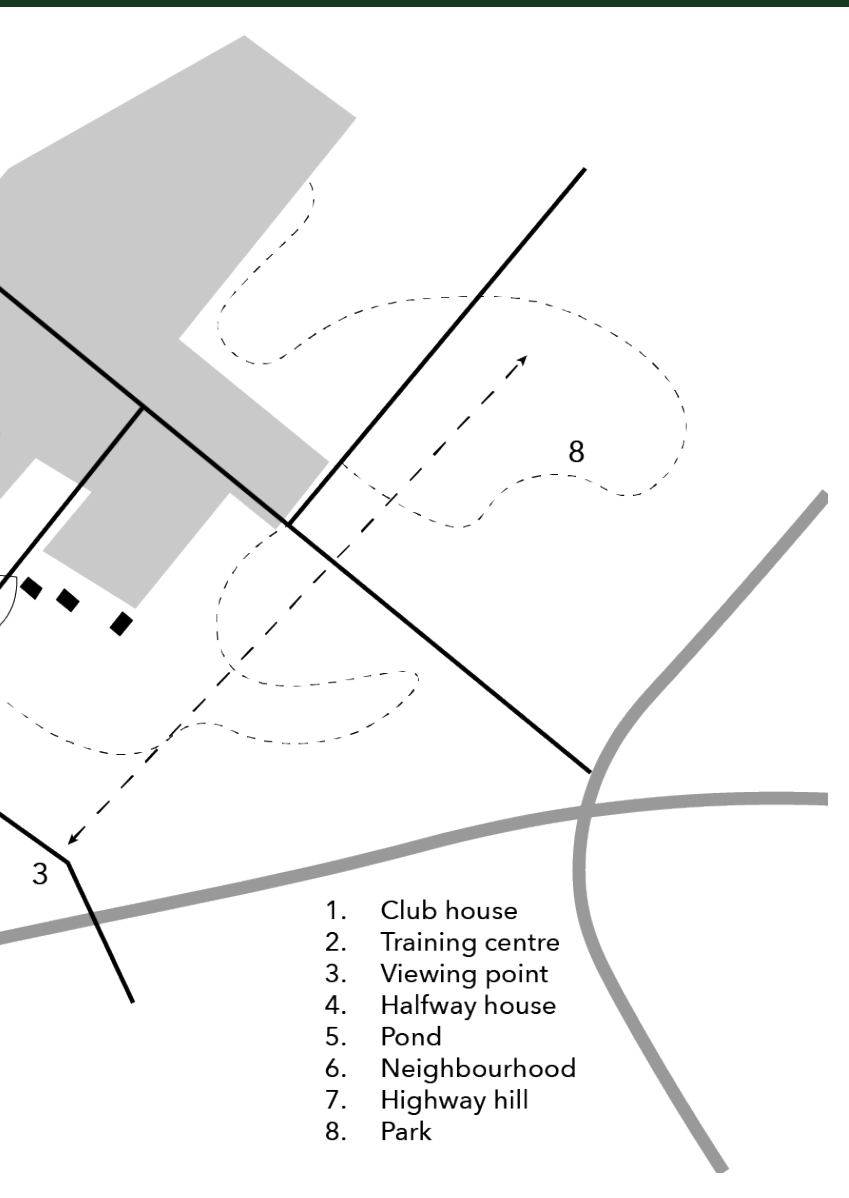*Polder*

Park

Green neighbourhood

7.4 *Experiencing*

Inspired by the principles described in Arcadia en Metropolis (1995), the design of the Gathering Commons approaches the landscape as a guided experience, where movement, perspective, and atmosphere shape how people engage with space. Rather than functioning as a neutral backdrop, the Commons is designed as a garden-like sequence of spatial rooms, each offering its own mood and moment.

Paths through the site are not only connectors, but curated routes. Like in historical estate landscapes, visitors are led through changing environments; open polder views, intimate park clearings, active neighborhood edges, each designed to reveal or conceal what comes next. This sense of anticipation keeps the landscape engaging and makes every visit slightly different.

Viewing points play a key role in this experience. Positioned at turns in the path or slightly elevated spots, they offer framed views of key moments: a long fairway, the clubhouse square, a group gathering near the halfway house. These visual anchors reinforce the site's openness and help visitors feel both oriented and connected across the space.

The program is intentionally spread across the landscape in clusters. The main square with the clubhouse acts as a civic hub; the halfway house becomes a central crossing point; and the park edges support informal, everyday uses like play and rest. This distribution avoids over-programming, leaving space for unplanned encounters, quiet reflection, and personal discovery; core to the third place experience.

8

1. Club house
2. Training centre
3. Viewing point
4. Halfway house
5. Pond
6. Neighbourhood
7. Highway hill
8. Park

1. Main square
2. Club house terrace
3. Green hole 18
4. Green hole 14
5. Green hole 15
6. Flex workspace
7. Training centre
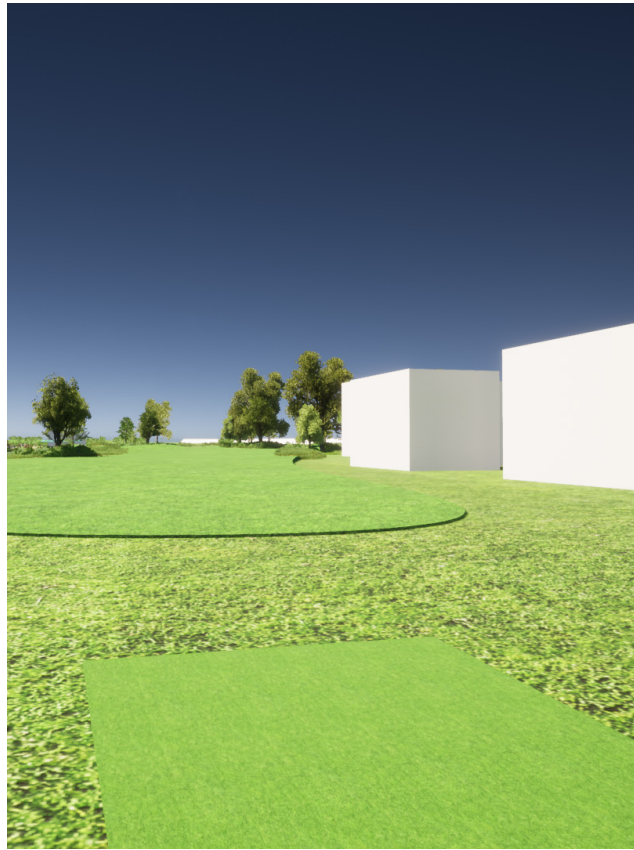8. Wild polder

Club house

Halfway house

Experience on the paths

Experience on the lawns

7.5 Social Nodes

In any successful public landscape, social nodes; places to land, linger, and connect, are essential. They provide structure to open space, offering points where movement slows and presence takes root. These are the spaces where people settle with a coffee, run into a neighbor, wait for a friend, or observe the rhythms of the landscape. Especially in hybrid environments like the Gathering Commons, where a diverse group of users move through at different times and with different intentions, such nodes play a vital role in creating continuity, identity, and social life. They are the moments in the landscape where solitary paths converge into shared experience, anchoring the Commons not just physically, but socially.

Within this landscape, two primary nodes support this function: the clubhouse and the halfway house. Each operates at a different scale and rhythm, yet both are designed to support interaction, rest, and overlap across users and programs.

Clubhouse

The clubhouse, located at the main square near the metro station, functions as the civic heart of the Commons. Unlike traditional golf clubhouses that are closed and exclusive, this one is designed as an open, multifunctional space for all. Inside, users find a café, shared workspaces, meeting rooms, and a welcoming foyer that flows seamlessly into the outdoor terrace and square. This mix of uses attracts a range of people: remote workers in the morning, residents on a lunch break, golfers coming in from the course, and day trippers arriving by public transport. The building becomes a natural threshold between city and landscape–a third place that is both structured and informal, where people can land, connect, and return to over time.
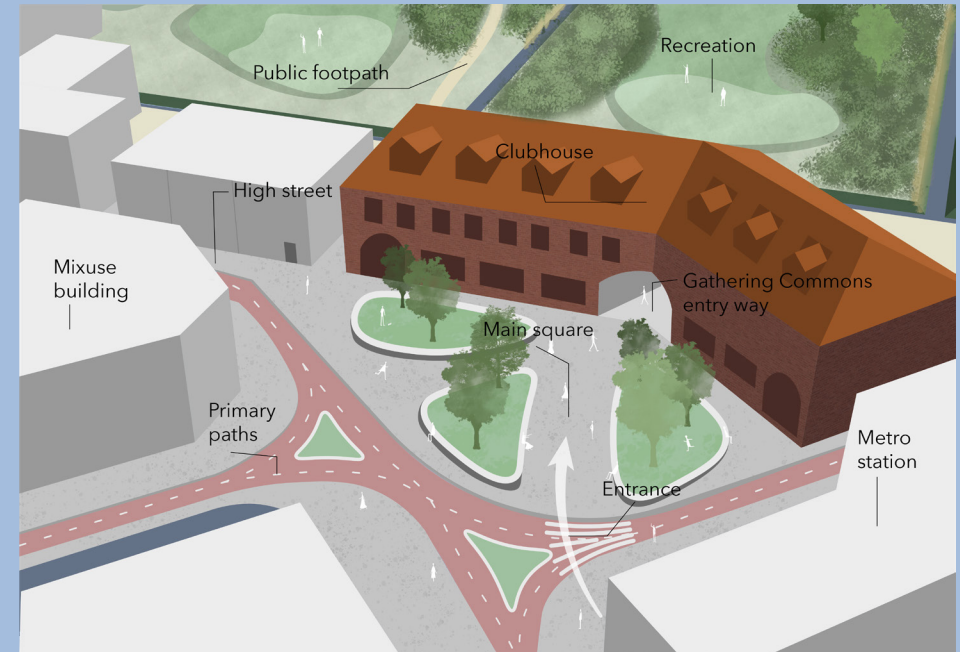
Halfway House

The halfway house offers a quieter, more dispersed social function. Located at a crossroads deep within the Commons, it sits at the intersection of walking paths, the golf route, and cycling trails. Its scale is modest—more shelter than structure—but its spatial role is significant. It invites pause and mingling: a moment of shared stillness in a moving landscape. Here, different user flows intersect; golfers resting mid-round, families on a weekend walk, or cyclists on a longer route. By enabling these different rhythms to briefly overlap, the halfway house fosters the possibility of informal social encounters without programming them directly. It is a node of proximity, not obligation.
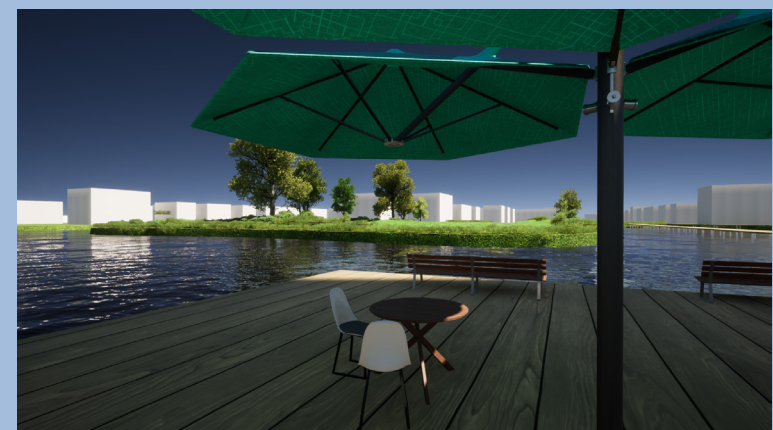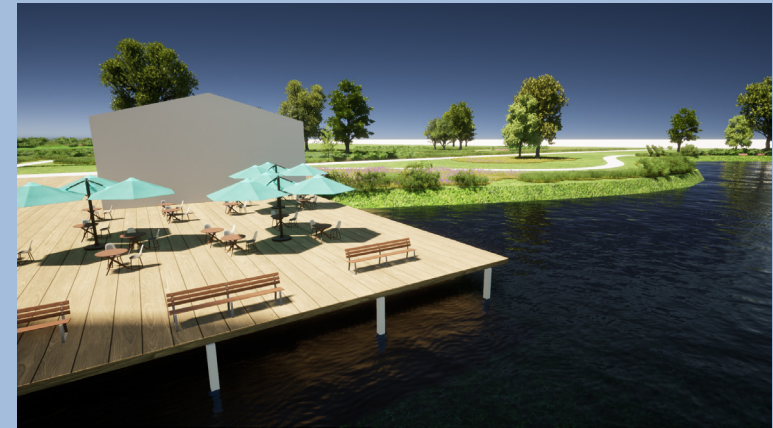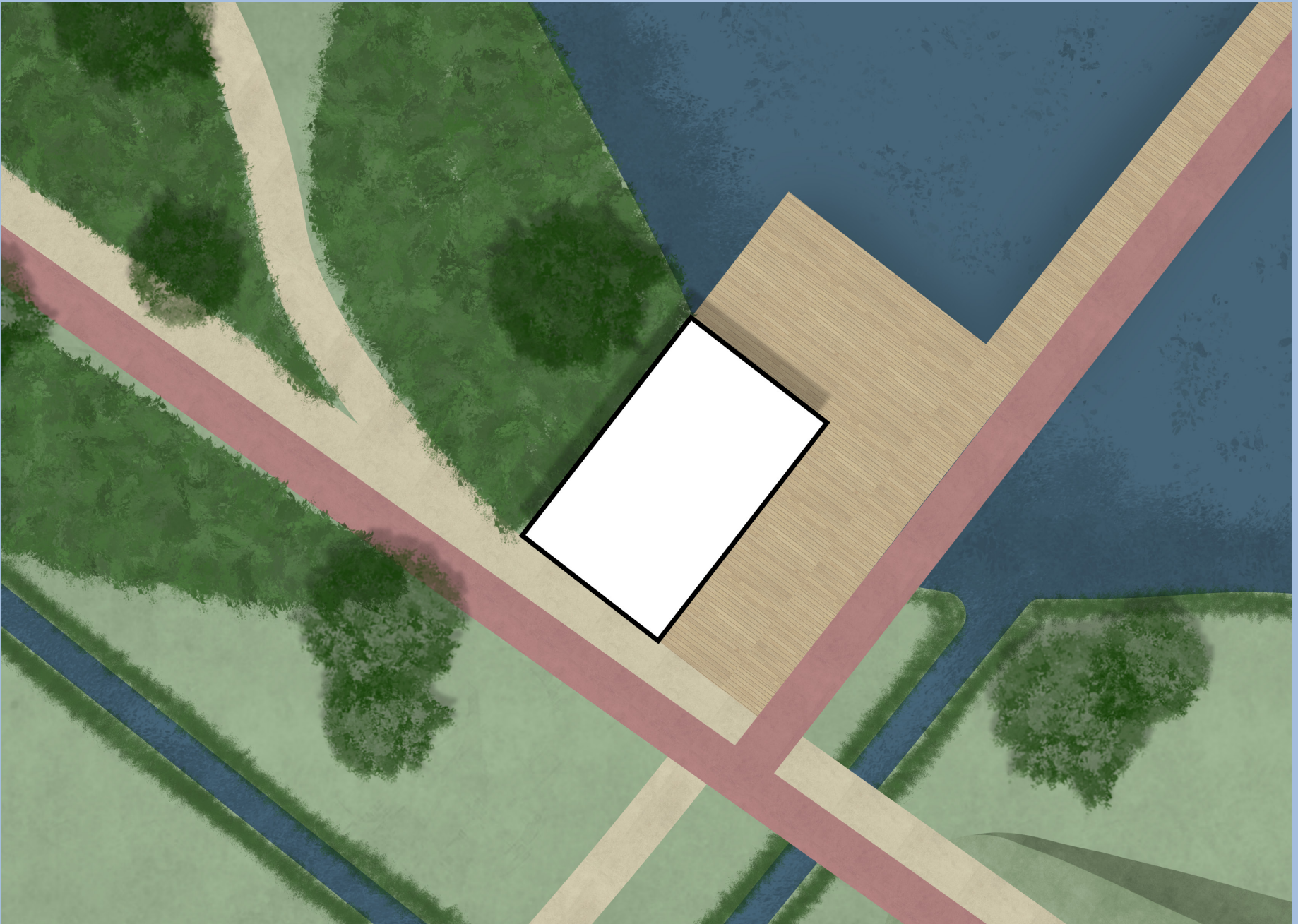
7.6 Edges and Interactions

The edges of the Gathering Commons are not designed as boundaries but as interfaces—zones where the rhythms of daily life spill into the landscape and the Commons flows gently back into the neighborhoods. Unlike traditional park perimeters, which often mark a clear separation between public and private, these edges are soft, porous, and intentionally activated. They act as thresholds between living and leisure, enabling the landscape to become an extension of home, habit, and community.

At various points along the perimeter, residential streets lead directly into small squares, planted buffers, or walking paths that branch into the Commons. These neighbourhood entrances are scaled for daily use: a quick dog walk, a shortcut to the metro, a child's bike ride to the playground. The transition is gradual; hedges, shared gardens, or community benches dissolve the line between individual property and collective space. This design encourages both spontaneous use and informal surveillance, fostering a sense of safety, familiarity, and shared ownership.

Recreational focal point

Workspace

Ecological buffer

Public lawn/ golf course

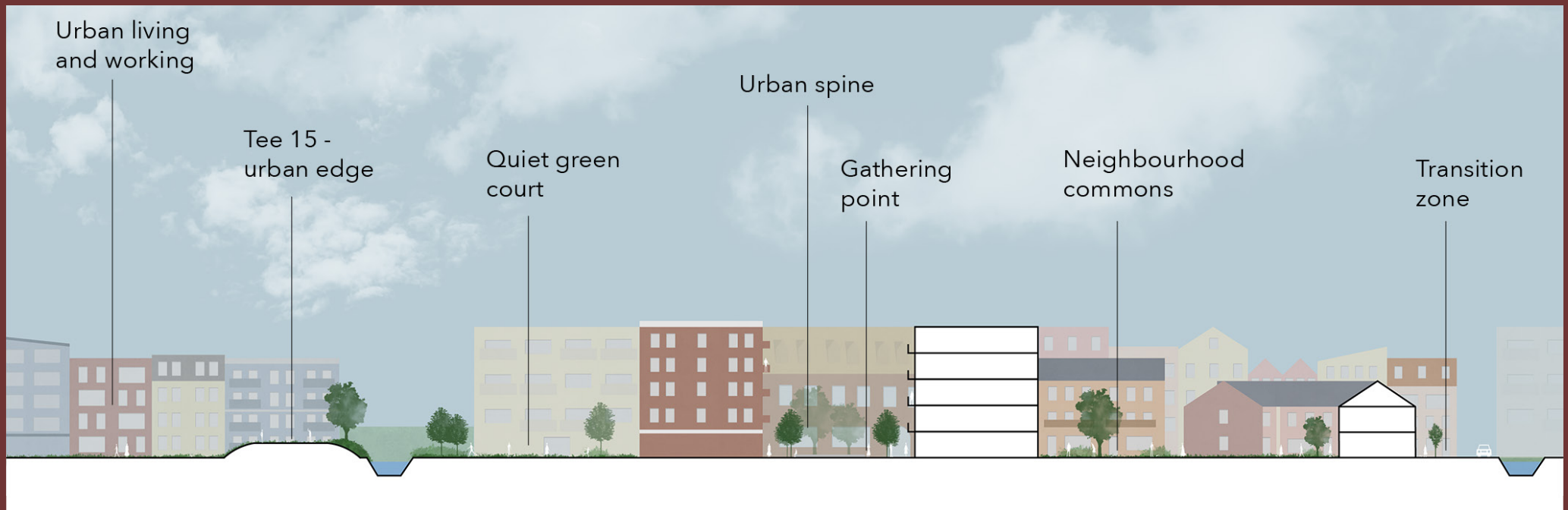Neighbourhood fabric

Public pathway

Soft edge

Importantly, these edges support layered activity. While one person may walk their dog along a path, another stops for a short break under a tree, while children play nearby. Small interventions, like benches, vegetable beds, or sport corners, create micro-destinations along the edge, giving residents a reason to pause and engage. These spaces aren't programmed with fixed functions, but instead enable a diversity of light, everyday activities that build a relationship between people and place over time. By activating the park from the edges inward, the Gathering Commons avoids becoming an isolated green void. Instead, it becomes a woven part of the suburban fabric—an accessible landscape where social life begins not in the middle, but at the margins. These soft thresholds invite people to take ownership, not only by entering, but by shaping and caring for the Commons in their own way. In this, the neighbourhood edge becomes more than a boundary, it becomes a space of encounter, continuity, and belonging.
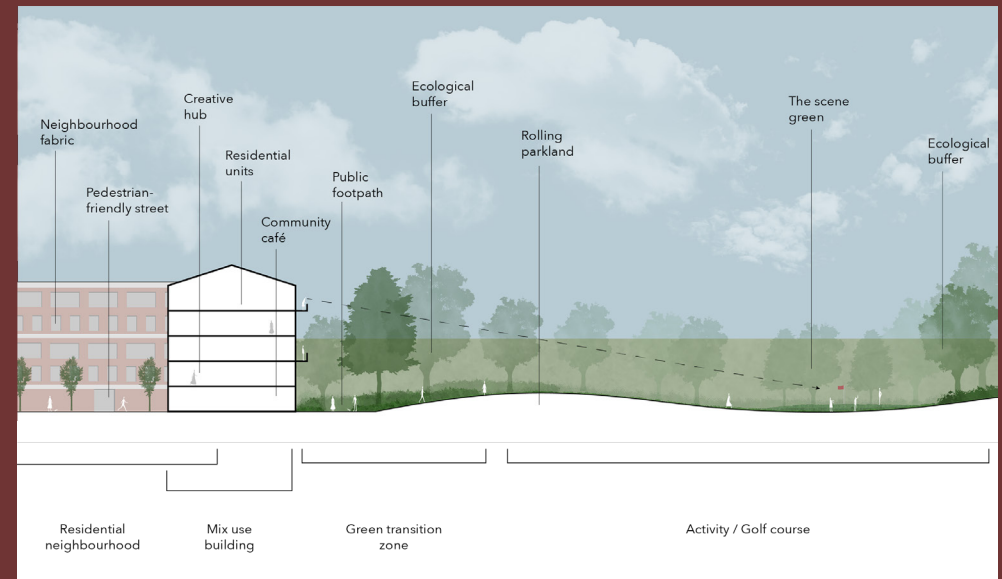
7.6.1 Urban Spine

The main street, or urban spine, plays a pivotal role as the connective backbone of the neighborhood—a spatial seam where daily urban life meets the recreational and open character of the hybrid golf-park landscape. Positioned between residential clusters and the landscape zones, this corridor is more than just a place of movement; it is a place of interaction and transition. On one side, buildings rise in a rhythmic cadence of brick façades and active plinths, offering spaces for living, working, shopping, and social engagement. On the other, the spatial sequence gradually opens toward green courts, gathering points, and visual connections to the golf course, inviting the sport and leisure landscape into the heart of the urban fabric. The street is not a boundary, but a bridge—where the tempo of the city slows down into a more open, shared rhythm. This spatial gradient fosters both spontaneity and routine: residents might grab a coffee, meet a neighbor, or step directly into the park for a walk or a round of golf. As such, the urban spine becomes the embodiment of the project's core ambition—blending first, second, and third places into a cohesive and inclusive public realm

Urban living and working

Tee 15 - urban edge

Quiet green court

Urban spine

Gathering point

Neighbourhood commons

Transition zone

# 8. Third Places in the City of the Future

The design of Gathering Commons is rooted in the specific landscape, demographics, and infrastructural conditions of its site. However, its underlying principles–designing with the landscape, for multifunctionality, and in service of social hybridity–are transferable. This chapter reflects on how these ideas can inform a broader vision for third places in the city of the future, especially in contexts that are currently underperforming or underutilized. Rather than treating these places as blank canvases or problems to solve, they are viewed as latent commons–spaces full of potential, awaiting reinterpretation.

8.1 Design with the Landscape

In an era where urban expansion often comes at the cost of ecological and cultural continuity, designing with the landscape becomes an ethical and spatial imperative. The success of Gathering Commons lies not in imposing a new form, but in amplifying the character of the existing polder: its long lines, its water systems, its sense of openness and rhythm. These qualities form the foundation of a place-based experience, one that is not generic, but deeply rooted in site.

In future cities, third places must be grounded in the genius loci, the unique spirit of a place. This means respecting historical layers, ecological logics, and spatial textures. When the landscape is not just a backdrop but an active participant in shaping human interaction, third places gain depth, identity, and resonance.
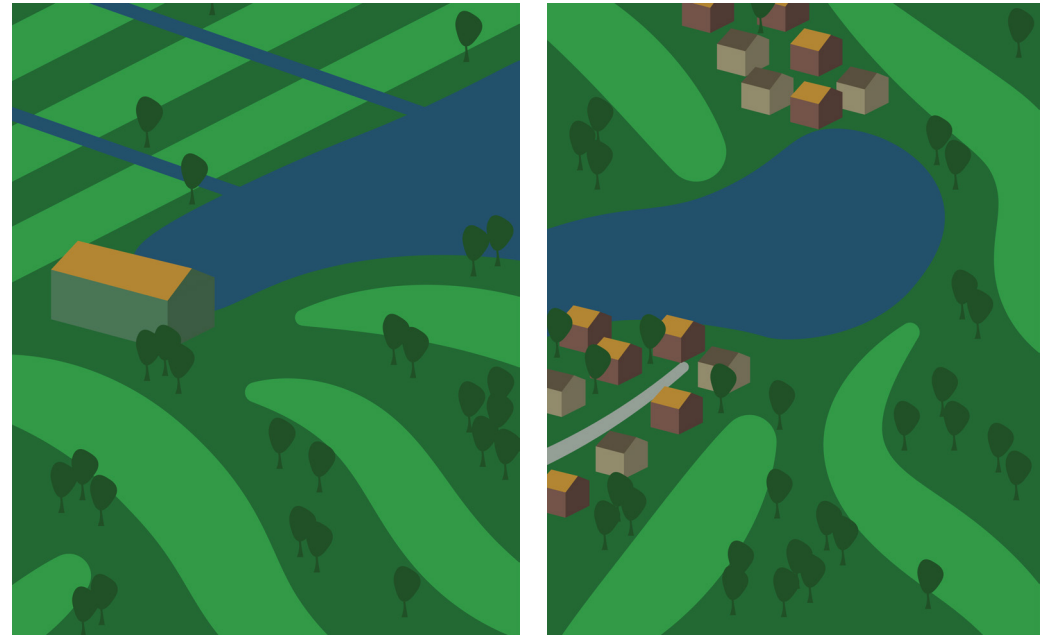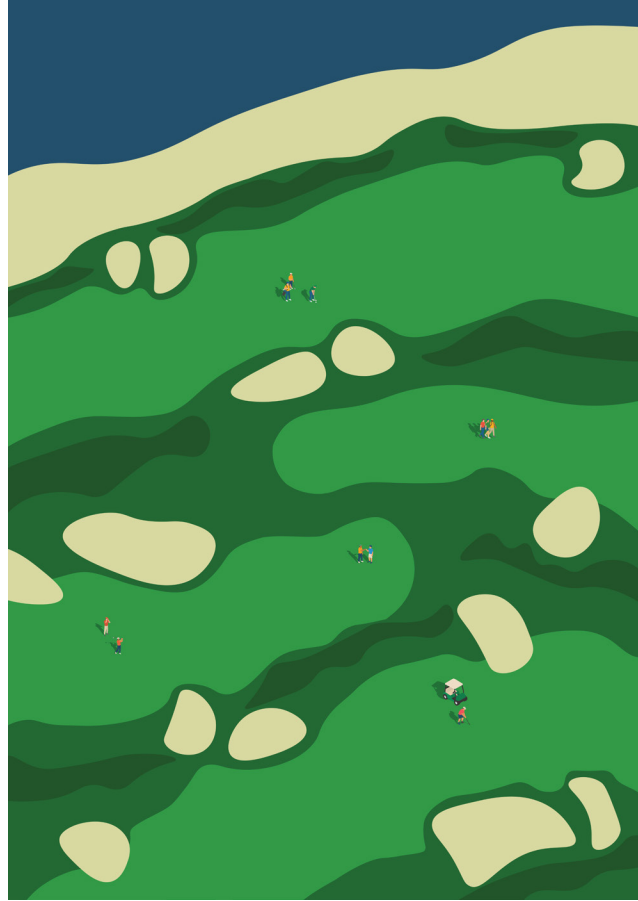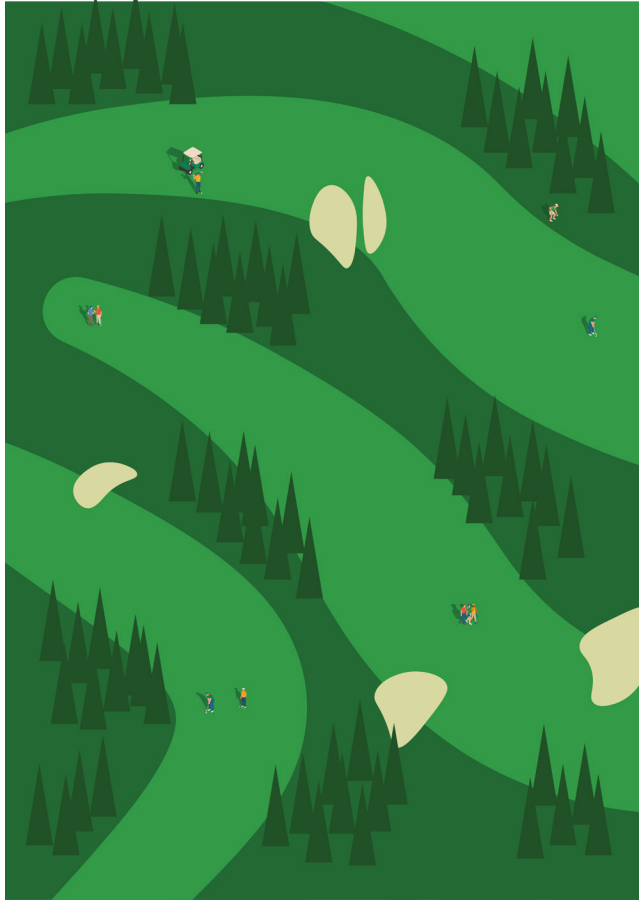
8.2 Beyond Single-Use: The Necessity of Multifunctionality

As land becomes scarcer and lifestyles more fluid, public spaces can no longer afford to be mono-functional. Parks cannot serve only as recreational escapes; they must also host work, learning, exchange, and care. Gathering Commons demonstrates how a green landscape can support not only sport and ecology, but also informal gathering, digital work, and intergenerational leisure.

This multifunctionality is not about cramming more functions into space, but about designing spaces that can shift meaning and use throughout the day and week. A lawn may serve as a fairway in the morning, a walking route in the afternoon, and a concert ground in the evening. This temporal layering creates richer spatial narratives and supports a broader demographic.

In the city of the future, third places will thrive when they are intentionally ambiguous, inviting diverse interpretations and inclusive use.

8.3 Rethinking Golf Courses as Social Landscapes

There are over 200 golf courses in the Netherlands, many of them tucked into suburban and peri-urban areas, often enclosed, private, and underutilized. These spaces represent a vast latent resource: large green fields, rich in ecology, topography, and spatial structure. If we shift the perception of golf courses from exclusive sports infrastructure to potential civic landscapes, new futures emerge.

Clubhouses, often vacant for much of the week, can become coworking hubs, community cafés, or event spaces. Pathways can invite walkers, joggers, and birdwatchers alongside golfers. Edges of fairways can host picnic lawns, play zones, or seasonal installations. Rather than removing golf, we add layers of social use, increasing the landscape's meaning and reach.

By reframing golf courses as third places, cities can unlock inclusive public value without erasing sport or landscape heritage.

8.4 From Underperformance to Opportunity

The origin of Gathering Commons lies in a residual landscape, one shaped by infrastructure but lacking in meaning and public use. By adding programmatic density and ecological value, the site is transformed from a non-place into a destination. This approach can be applied to similar in-between spaces: infrastructural buffers, leftover fields, edges of suburbia.

Transformation does not mean erasure. Rather, it involves reading the existing condition for what it can become. New pathways can reinterpret old dike lines. Hubs can be placed where buildings once stood. The key is to keep the memory of the place alive, while offering it a new civic function.

This palimpsest approach allows the past, present, and future to co-exist in the same space. It aligns with broader calls in urbanism to move from "tabula rasa" development to adaptive reuse, slow transformation, and situated design.

8.5 Toward a New Typology of the Third Place

In sum, the city of the future will need third places that are:
- Ecologically grounded – reinforcing landscape continuity and biodiversity.
- Programmatically layered – welcoming diverse use patterns over time.
- Culturally embedded – reflecting local identity and spatial memory.
- Open yet structured – providing freedom without losing legibility.

These third places will not always be squares or cafés. They may be former golf courses, forgotten park edges, or spaces between neighborhoods. But if designed well, they can become vital anchors of urban life—where the rituals of everyday living gain meaning through shared presence and layered experience.

Gathering Commons is a prototype for this new typology. Not a fixed blueprint, but a proof of concept: that hybrid, inclusive, landscape-first third places are both possible and necessary in the cities of tomorrow.

Recommendations

The Gathering Commons design presents a bold proposition: to reimagine golf landscapes as open, hybrid, and inclusive environments that can serve as contemporary third places. While the spatial concept is rich in potential, it also opens up critical areas where further research is essential to support long-term success, resilience, and replicability.

First, the issue of safety in large-scale open public spaces requires more in-depth investigation. The design's permeability and openness are key to fostering encounters and shared use, but these qualities can also lead to unintended vulnerabilities. Future research should explore how perceived and actual safety can be maintained across diverse times of day and seasons, especially in spaces that blur the boundaries between leisure, nature, and urbanity. Questions around passive surveillance, lighting strategies, landscape legibility, and informal social regulation should be addressed through both empirical studies and design experimentation.

Second, there is a need to better understand the ideal spatial and social conditions for remote working in outdoor, semi-public environments, particularly for young adults. While the concept of working from third places has grown in popularity, evidence on how to support focus, comfort, connectivity, and sociability in such spaces remains limited. Future research could investigate what amenities, acoustics, infrastructure, or microclimatic conditions are most conducive to productive outdoor work. Likewise, understanding how young adults balance solitude and connection in hybrid settings would inform more tailored spatial typologies.

Finally, a promising and underexplored area is the potential of existing golf courses to adapt and transition into multifunctional public landscapes. Many courses, particularly those in peri-urban or suburban areas, face declining membership and underuse. Research should explore how such sites can be spatially reconfigured or reprogrammed to support broader public benefit, without losing their cultural identity or landscape quality. This includes studying governance models that accommodate new user groups, analyzing ecological impacts of increased access, and testing pilot projects that blend traditional golf with community use, nature education, or informal recreation.

In short, while the Gathering Commons offers a compelling design vision, its full realization depends on addressing unresolved questions at the intersection of safety, social infrastructure, and spatial transformation. Future research, both academic and practice-based, can help fill these gaps and guide similar efforts to reimagine underutilized landscapes as shared, multifunctional, and inclusive spaces.

Reflection

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

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

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

106

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

Relation to Master Track and MSc AUBS Programme

This project is rooted in the Urbanism (U) track, which addresses complex urban challenges through spatial design. It also draws on principles from Landscape Architecture, particularly in relation to planting strategies, biodiversity, and spatial layering. Together, these perspectives reflect the interdisciplinary nature of the MSc Architecture, Urbanism and Building Sciences (AUBS) programme, which encourages context-sensitive and integrative thinking. Gathering Commons embodies this by exploring how landscape and urban design can come together to create inclusive, multifunctional places.

Interaction Between Research and Design

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

Assessment of Methods and Approach

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

Academic, Societal, and Ethical Implications

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

Transferability of Project Results

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

How can large-scale recreational landscapes be reimagined as socially inclusive infrastructures without compromising their original function?
This question stayed with me throughout the project. I learned that inclusion doesn't always mean redesigning everything, it can come from layering uses and designing edges and moments of encounter.

In what ways can unstructured social interaction be supported through spatial design, rather than programming alone?
The more I drew and analyzed spaces, the more I realized that design decisions like sightlines, thresholds, and seating arrangements can invite informal connection just as much as an event or schedule.

References

Arnett, J. J. (2000). Emerging adulthood. American Psychologist, 55(5), 469–480. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.5.469

Beatley, T. (2016). Handbook of Biophilic City Planning & Design. Washington, DC: Island Press.

Bratman, G. N., Anderson, C. B., Berman, M. G., Cochran, B., de Vries, S., Flanders, J., ... & Daily, G. C. (2019). Nature and mental health: An ecosystem service perspective. Science Advances, 5(7). https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.aax0903

Butler, S. M., & Diaz, C. (2016, September 14). "Third places" as community builders. Brookings. https://www.brookings.edu/articles/third-places-as-community-builders/

CBS. (2023). Jongvolwassenen wonen vaker bij ouders dan 20 jaar geleden.

Crick, A. P. (2011). New third places: Opportunities and challenges. Tourism sensemaking: Strategies to give meaning to experience, 63-77.

Dahl Jensen, A. M., Caspersen, O. H., Jensen, F. S., & Strandberg, M. (2017). Multifunctional Golf Facilities as a Resource of Important Ecosystem Services in a Changing Urban Environment: Nordic Case Studies. International Turfgrass Society Research Journal, 13(1), 236-239.

Di Marino, M., & Lapintie, K. (2020). Exploring multi-local working: challenges and opportunities for contemporary cities. International Planning Studies.

Dovey, K., & Pafka, E. (2017). What is functional mix? An assemblage approach. Planning Theory & Practice, 18(2), 249–267. https://doi.org/10.1080/14649357.2017.1281996

Eriksson, F., Eriksson, T., & Ignatieva, M. (2015, January). Golf courses as a part of urban green infrastructure: social aspects of golf courses and extensively managed turfgrass areas from Nordic perspective. In 52nd World Congress of International Fedration of Landscape Architect.

European Golf Association. (2019). Societal benefits of multifunctional golf facilities. https://www.ega-golf.ch/best-practice/societal-benefits-multifunctional-golf-facilities

Gehl, J. (2010). Cities for people. Island Press.

Gehl, J. (2011). Life Between Buildings: Using Public Space. Island Press.

GEO Foundation for Sustainable Golf. (2021). An multifunctional course for the whole family. https://sustainable.golf/highlights/an-multifunctional-course-for-the-whole-family

GEO Foundation for Sustainable Golf. (2023). Benefitting the community: A public footpath around the golf course. https://sustainable.golf/highlights/benefitting-the-community-a-public-footpath-around-the-golf-course

GEO Foundation for Sustainable Golf. (2023). Developing community connections. https://sustainable.golf/news/articles/developing-community-connections

Golf Geschiedenis. (2024). De Baen te Haarlem 1783

Hickman, A. (2019). Workplace isolation occurring in remote workers (Doctoral dissertation, Walden University).

Jensen, A. M. D., Caspersen, O. H., Jensen, F. S., & Strandberg, M. T. (2017). Multifunctional golf facilities as a resource of important ecosystem services in a changing urban environment: Nordic case studies. International Turfgrass Society Research Journal, 13, 236–239.

Johnson, B. (2024). The History of Golf. Historic UK

Joshi, U. V., & Nagarsheth, S. (2024). People, Places, and Perceptions: Assessing Spatial Quality Attributes of Urban Third-place With Projective Survey. Journal of Contemporary Urban Affairs, 8(2), 509-528.

Kepkowicz, A., Lipińska, H., & Mantey, D. (2019, February). Suburbs vs Third Places?. In IOP Conference Series: Materials Science and Engineering (Vol. 471, No. 9, p. 092078). IOP Publishing.

Klinenberg, E. (2018). Palaces for the people: How social infrastructure can help fight inequality, polarization, and the decline of civic life. Crown.

Lee, N., & Houston, D. (2024). The perceived psychological benefits of third places for university students before and after COVID-19 lockdowns. Cities, 153, 105299.

Maas, J., Verheij, R. A., Groenewegen, P. P., de Vries, S., & Spreeuwenberg, P. (2006). Green space, urbanity, and health: how strong is the relation? Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health, 60(7), 587–592. https://doi.org/10.1136/jech.2005.043125

McHardy, C., & Imrie, M. (2005). Golf and the Scots: The story of golf in Scotland. Mainstream Publishing.

Mehta, V., & Bosson, J. K. (2010). Third places and the social life of streets. Environment and Behavior, 42(6), 779–805. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013916509344677

Oakman, J., Kinsman, N., Stuckey, R., Graham, M., & Weale, V. (2020). A rapid review of mental and physical health effects of working at home: how do we optimise health?. BMC public health, 20, 1-13.

Oldenburg, R., & Brissett, D. (1982). The third place. Qualitative sociology, 5(4), 265-284.

Oldenburg, R. (1997). Our vanishing third places. Planning commissioners journal, 25(4), 6-10.

Oldenburg, R. (1999). The Great Good Place: Cafés, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community. Marlowe & Company.

Palmboom, F. (1987). Rotterdam, verstedelijkt landschap. OASE, (17), 60–64

Peters, K., Elands, B., & Buijs, A. (2010). Social interactions in urban parks: Stimulating social cohesion? Urban Forestry & Urban Greening, 9(2), 93–100. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ufug.2009.11.003

Petrosillo, I., Valente, D., Pasimeni, M. R., Aretano, R., Semeraro, T., & Zurlini, G. (2019). Can a golf course support biodiversity and ecosystem services? The landscape context matter. Landscape Ecology, 34, 2213-2228.

Reh, W. (1995). Arcadia en Metropolis: Het landschapsexperiment van de Verlichting. Delft: Publikatieburo Bouwkunde.

Sandifer, P. A., Sutton-Grier, A. E., & Ward, B. P. (2015). Exploring connections among nature, biodiversity, ecosystem services, and human health and well-being: Opportunities to enhance health and biodiversity conservation. Ecosystem Services, 12, 1–15.

Shanahan, D. F., Fuller, R. A., Bush, R., Lin, B. B., & Gaston, K. J. (2015). The health benefits of urban nature: how much do we need?. BioScience, 65(5), 476-485.

Soja, E. W. (1998). Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and other real-and-imagined places. Capital & Class, 22(1), 137-139.

Stokvis, R. (1992). Sport in the Netherlands: Its emergence and development. In E. Dunning & N. Elias (Eds.), Sport and Leisure in the Civilizing Process (pp. 154–171). Basil Blackwell.

Strandberg, M., & Hedlund, B. (2018). Golf facilities: An underutilized resource. Golf Course Management. https://gcmonline.com/course/environment/news/multifunctional-golf-facilities

van den Bosch, M., & Sang, Å. O. (2017). Urban natural environments as nature-based solutions for improved public health – A systematic review of reviews. Environmental Research, 158, 373–384. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envres.2017.05.040

Whyte, W. H. (1980). The social life of small urban spaces. Project for Public Spaces.