

## A SPACE OF INSPIRATION

REVITALIZING ARCHITECTURE  
IN THE NETHERLANDS

## **Introduction of Research**

Explore Lab Graduation Studio | TU Delft

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## Preface

My greatest passion next to architecture is breakdance. Since the overlap in creativity I often compare the two with each other. When I was younger I had this interesting talk with my breakdance teacher. He asked me how I would feel if someone used a dance move that I had invented in his own dance performance. I answered that I wouldn't really appreciate that, because he would basically 'steal' my dance move, one I might have spent a lot of time to come up with. He then explained to me this once happened to him. A quite famous dancer had seen one of his self-invented dance moves and used it later in one of his own performances. At first, my teacher was a bit annoyed. But after a while he realized how cool it actually is he inspired a dancer on a much higher level. He then grew up to be one of the most famous breakdancers in Netherlands. He made me realise how much energy it can give to inspire others through creativity.

In recent years, when asked about my post-graduation aspirations in architecture, my answer has consistently been straightforward: I want to create architecture that inspires. The specific typology is secondary; my primary goal is to influence people's perception of architecture and offer them novel perspectives.

With my graduation project, I've chosen a topic that lies very close to my own interests: **a space of inspiration**. A place where architecture firms come together sharing tools and knowledge while experimenting with projects to inspire the world of architecture.

The design for this space itself aims to be an inspiring piece of architecture. By integrating my own ideas and position on circularity and adaptability, I aspire to present a fresh approach to architectural exhibition.

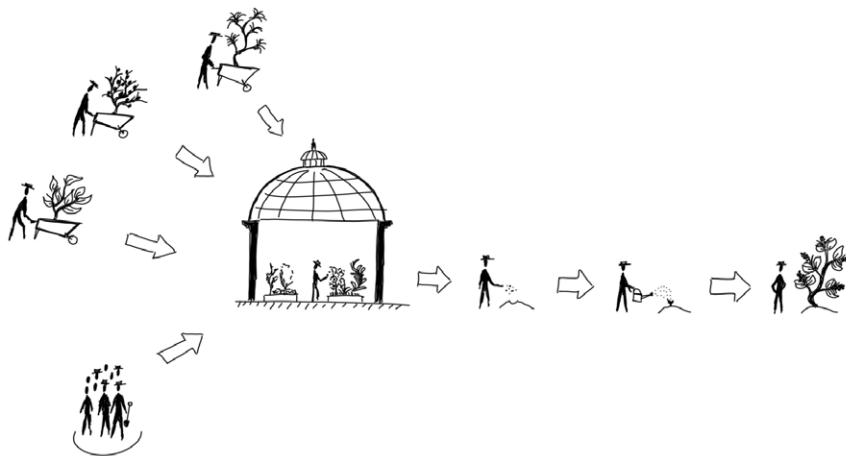
## Introduction

This project aims to create a space of inspiration. I have two primary fascinations that I believe can be synthesized into the basis of my research. This chapter first explores these two fascinations individually and then discusses how I envision them merging into a single project.

### First fascination: Biennials

In 2021 I had my first visit to the Biennale Architettura in Venice. It opened my eyes to how many inspiring projects from around the world were gathered in one place. To me it felt somehow like a botanical garden, where gardeners from all over the world plant their exotic plants. Other gardeners can look around and grab the seeds from the plants they think are most interesting to plant then in their own garden. The seeds can be interpreted as ideas and the plants as architectural projects. Like new plants can be developed by mixing the seeds, new interpretations of architecture can be developed by mixing the ideas presented at the Biennale.

Large-scale architectural exhibition events, like a biennial, have the ability to exert a big influence upon the architectural world. They offer space for experimentation, in which architects can push boundaries and showcase their unique vision, creating an open source of inspiration. Furthermore, these events provide a platform to connect with other architects, designers, clients, and other potential collaborators. And by exhibiting their work, architecture firms gain visibility and enhance their reputation.



### Second fascination: Ise Jingu

The city Ise, Japan, is home to the one of the oldest traditions in the architecture. Since the year 690 the village community rebuilds the Ise Jingu complex every 20 years. This temple complex is piece by piece demounted and then reconstructed with new materials in the exact same way. The 20 years between the reconstruction ceremonies are filled with various preparation stages: from collecting and preparing lumber to manufacturing the temple parts. By periodically reconstructing the complex as an tradition, it seeks **perpetuity** (the quality or state of lasting forever) and **ephemerality** (the quality or state of lasting only for a short time). Perpetuity, because the tradition and memory are enduring the centuries. The perpetuity is not linked to architecture as a physical, but to architecture as an idea. Ephemerality, because it brings this piece of architecture with recurring fresh materials. The degradation of the construction materials evokes the cycle of life and death. And the beautiful thing it includes, is the way they circulate all the involved materials, just like their believe in reincarnation. For every tree they cut, a new one is planted, providing wood for the next phase (this explains the specific cycle of 20 years). The trees are moved via the river, from which river stones are collected to be stacked on each other to line the new Jingu's terrain. After deconstruction the materials are transported to other villages to be integrated in their temple complexes, giving them a second life.

### Synthesis of fascinations

The Ise Jingu presents a beautiful example of timeless design, one that seeks quality of lasting forever as well as for a short period of time. To create a place that serves as an inspiration source for architecture, like a large-scale exhibition event, it is of importance that it seeks perpetuity and ephemerality as well in its design. Perhaps not a structure that is timeless, but a concept that is timeless. Just like memory and tradition become eternal through the ruin and demolition of the old temple and the construction of the new one, a biennial exhibition could form the tradition that revives the complex bringing perpetuity. At the same time, structures can be added or altered to the existing structure every biennial, giving a new character to the complex, matching the zeitgeist of that period. These structures could serve as exhibition spaces while being part of the exhibition itself as well. Structures that are not of use anymore can be demounted and get a second life as exhibition attribute or furniture.





## Problem statement

Architecture, as a reflection of societal needs, is constantly evolving. Architects are tasked with responding to these shifting demands, while simultaneously facing rigorous scrutiny. This is particularly evident in the Netherlands, a country which had its major shifts in the architectural history. The recent publication of Aaron Betsky's article, "Architecture in the Netherlands has become notably boring" (2023), reignited a much-discussed topic. In this piece, the former director of the Netherlands Architecture Institute (2001-2006) critiques the current state of Dutch architecture, contrasting it with the Superdutch era that produced some of the most striking, innovative and experimental architecture in the world. He states the new-build architecture to have become 'boring', mainly existing out of 'boxes'. While Betsky perhaps exaggerated a bit, and might have a bias opinion regarding his role as director of the NAI in the peak of the Superdutch era, his article did spark a discussion.

The Superdutch era started in 1991, when the Ministerie voor Volkshuisvesting, Ruimtelijke Ordening en Milieubeheer published the policy document *Ruimte voor Architectuur*, the first architectural policy from a government in the world. This policy institutionalized Dutch architecture at the national level and encouraged its development (Stegmeijer et al., 2012). Partly due to this institutionalisation, the Netherlands Architectuurstudie, now Het Nieuwe Instituut, was centralised in 1993 in a new building in Rotterdam. Through the establishment of this institute, funds were provided to starting architectural firms, and competitions were organized, with the help of the Dutch government. As a consequence, architecture firms were able to experiment more and develop outstanding architecture that captivated the world.

As a result of the 2008 financial crisis and right-wing-dominated politics, cost-cutting measures have eroded generous subsidies. On top of that, many regulations, both financial and in terms of codes, have become more restrictive, making it increasingly harder for younger firms to participate in the market (Archined, 2005). While the more experienced firms are given less competition, the younger firms are excluded from projects, having less opportunity for experimentation. These firms may have less expertise and manpower to handle larger projects, but they are generally more agile and better attuned to contemporary societal problems (Tontini, 2024). More importantly, they bring fresh perspectives to the field of architecture.

On November 8th of this year, Marjolein van Eig, a Dutch architect and regular columnist on Dutch architecture, urged the Netherlands to prioritize potential and talent over expertise and status when awarding architectural tenders. She argued that it's absurd for the Kröller-Müller

Museum to seek out a starchitect like Tadao Ando for an extension, while disregarding the wealth of talent within our own country.

Van Eig also presented a diagram illustrating the imminent shift towards bio-based materials in architecture, a transformation driven by climate change. This shift mirrors historical transitions, such as the shift from wood to stone after city fires and the shift from bricks to concrete after World War II. To effectively navigate this material transition, we must embrace more experimental architecture. This necessitates the involvement of younger, innovative firms. We need an avant-garde movement again, a movement to put architecture in the Netherlands back on the map.

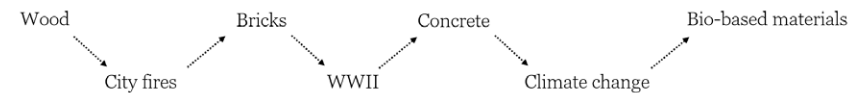


Diagram of material shifts of the last centuries in the Netherlands. Diagram by Marjolein van Eig (translated to English).

2024

To conclude, the architectural market in the Netherlands has become too restraining in the last two decades and there is little of openness to experimentation that the Dutch government and clients at various levels used to display. The younger architecture firms are affected the most and are essentially excluded from the more 'experimental' architecture. To create more interesting architecture while coping with the complex questions in the future, it is crucial to increase the involvement of the younger architecture firms in this 'experimental' architecture.

## Research goal

This research seeks to explore the potential of spaces that bring new ideas into the world. The goal is to identify key factors and strategies that can be applied to design a place where younger architectural practices get the opportunity to experiment and exhibit work, in order to revitalize architecture in the Netherlands. This design aims to respond to the scale of the city all the way down to the scale of the human, anchoring its existence for a longer period of time.

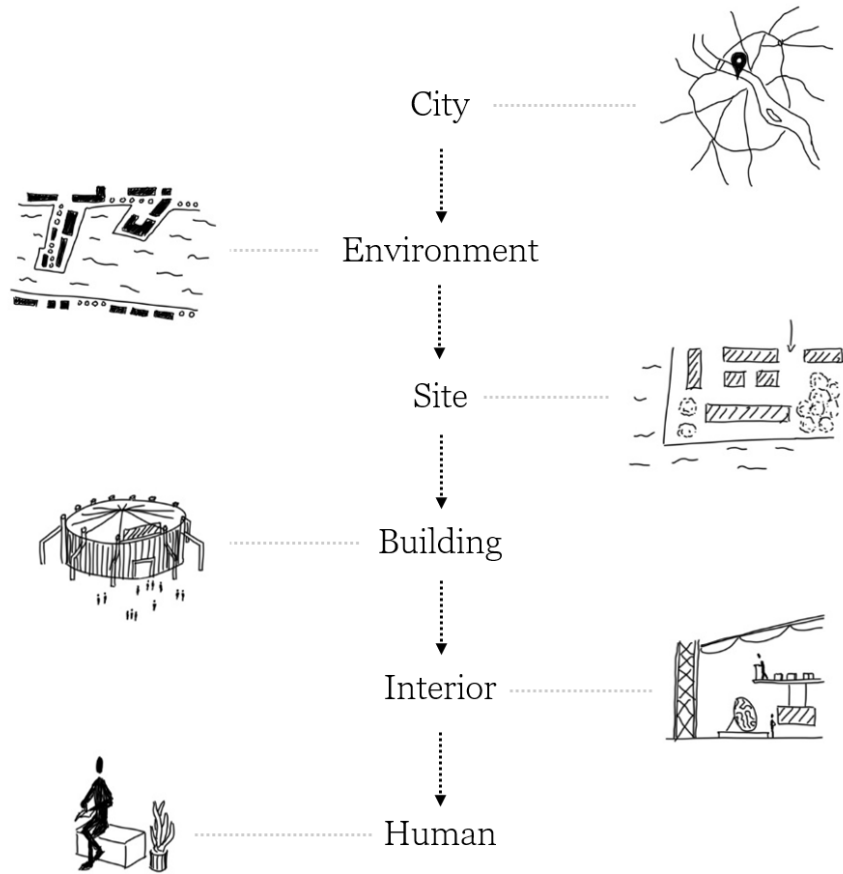


Diagram of the different scales the design aims to respond to. Diagram by author. 2024



## Research questions

This research goal leads to the following research question:

**What are the conditions and strategies to create a space for revitalizing architecture in the Netherlands, while providing opportunities for younger architectural practices?**

With the sub-questions:

1. What examples of spaces such spaces exist?
2. What can we learn from these spaces, in terms of scale & context, spatial configuration & movement, atmosphere, adaptability & flexibility, user involvement, and threats?
3. What are the conditions for a suitable urban site for the new design?

This research goal leads to the following research question:

**What kind of creative space can help to revitalise Dutch architecture, in relation to scale & context, spatial configuration & movement, atmosphere, adaptability & flexibility, user involvement, and threats?**

## **Method description**

This research employs a mixed-methods approach combining case study analysis with artistic practice. Six case studies are analysed on their goals, context, design approach and impact. Each case is documented through a 'soft atlas' to capture experiential and qualitative data. Additionally, an artistic research component involves the creation of a physical object for each case study, representing its core essence. These objects serve as a bridge, translating research findings into tangible forms that can be used as starting point in the design phase.

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