

# Reflective Paper

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The following paper is a reflection on my graduation project titled “Grey Lines in the Sand”, it follows the master programme, architecture track, Transitional Territories studio theme; Landscapes of Co-Existence and has been developed through a research by design heuristic approach. The research and ultimately the design is developed as a result of ongoing feedback from mentors, literature review and cartography. A method to elaborate and examine the project’s relationship to a wider framework and its potential transferability.

## *Research and design*

The graduation project explores the notion of balance between *nature* and *culture* within the framework of the North Sea commons, and its wider territorial impact on the surrounding seven North Sea countries. The research examines the repercussions separate decision-makers in each Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) are having on the composition of the North Sea commons, altering its outlook for future generations. Pre-1992 the North Sea was largely undefined in jurisdiction and sovereignty, resulting in the composition of a “grey zone”, blurring the rules and responsibility for those interacting in the space. In 1992, seven EEZ were established to give clarity in jurisdiction and sovereignty to each of the seven North Sea countries. At present, an unintended consequence of this decision has led to the North Sea developing into a realm of permission, profit and passage, whereby interests are no longer aligned with fellow nation states, conflicts are arising on a territorial scale, the “grey zone” is now here.

Taking the theme of the studio, the research framework is developed through a trans-scaler method; (a) territory - North Sea, (b) spatial - Dogger Bank, (c) tectonic - the island, the act of enclosing a state of exception and (d) typology - the architecture, the space for gathering, the North Sea Parliament. In a broad way, the linking theme between each scale is interaction; the performance in the way we gather, converse and decision make. A part of my research was to produce a catalogue of building species, it sought to analyse archetypes, present decision making spaces and seek future alternative ones. Its role was to consider different types of conversation spaces to maintain a sense of collectivity, productivity and sociability by promoting a stronger sense of ownership of the North Sea environment. The research shows that different meeting and conversation spaces are more appropriate than others, people need interaction, a space to gather, to feel a stronger sense of community, that they are a part of achieving something. As such, architects such as Simon Caspersen of Space10 believes “a good working environment stimulates productivity and face-to-face conversation sparks innovation (Hitti, 2019). In essence, the research is composed of two themes; the realm of conversation and the actors involved (the North Sea commons and the six claim’s or departments of interaction - extraction, energy, ecology, logistics, migration and protein) and the assembling of these claims into different spaces of conversation, communication and decision-making.

The role of architecture will seek to congregate the different actors into one shared space, a state of exception on Dogger Bank, where no nation-state has jurisdiction or sovereignty, self-interest will transfer from the nation state to the interest of the territory and its six claims will compose the parties of the decision making.

## *Academic relationship*

The graduation studio Transitional Territories: Landscape of Co-Existence approaches the architecture track with an interdisciplinary frame of mind - architecture, urbanism, landscape architecture and water management. Each track has the opportunity to benefit from the others specialised knowledge and approach to the brief. In the studio it was initially cultivated by a

collective Atlas on “New Geographies” and future scenarios on the North Sea. This framed four projected altered natures; biotope, climate, flows and geology in response to climate change and the impact of a rising sea-level on the North Sea and its surrounding seven nations. The success of the Atlas was a result of the interaction between each disciplinary sharing and collaborating towards the final output.

My graduation project identifies with the studio’s overall theme; “Landscapes of Co-Existence”, analysing the point of concern at the territorial scale and seeking to find a realm for co-existence between the decision-makers at the heart of the North Sea, addressing their relationship between each of the claims (which will be composed transnationally) rather than the individual nation states. The North Sea is subject to dense marine activity (human and non-human) which is projected to radically alter within a climate change model of a 2-4 degree rise in water temperature and subsequent rise in sea level in the current century. The North Sea region is covered with thousands of inhabited coastal zones, with a large share of it in low-lying areas. These areas are very vulnerable to flooding and many of these inhabitants rely on the activity in and around the North Sea to sustain their daily lives. Communication and relationships are increasingly important in today’s society, technology such as emails has enabled us to communicate faster with each other but hasn’t enabled effective, innovative and creative solutions like a face-to-face conversation, which ultimately would have a greater positive impact on our built environment.

As an architecture track student at TU Delft we are encouraged to draw on the rich architecture culture and develop innovative building projects that use design to tackle technical, social and spatial challenges we encounter in our built environment, with a different focus from conceptual (research) to concrete (design) or from building to territorial scales. For the graduation studio and my project, the research becomes the link between the design and wider context.

#### *Research methodology and scientific relevance*

During my graduation project a number of research methods were implemented to address the different scales of concern. Cartography was imperative to analyse the territorial scale and envisage the impact different variables have on one another. It is an efficient tool to present different types of information in a consistent way. For the project, the North Sea commons was best analysed using maps and an image; either collage or an art reference helped to visualise it in the environment. Literature review in philosophy and geopolitics formalised and complemented this process. A method to discuss the relationship between the commons, cosmopolitan commons, borders and jurisdiction and sovereignty. All culminating to the core theme of the project; communication, conversation and the relationship between nature and culture, land and sea. The data collected on the North Sea informed the site location for the project, Dogger Bank. The former land bridge, it is a prevalent example of a civilisation lost to rising sea level, a land once perceived to be fertile, accessible to water, rich in food and flat – a utopia, a garden of Eden for the hunter gatherer. However, a series of unfortunate events; the storegga slide, isostatic subsidence and the earth warming by 1-2°C (warmer than today). The story of the Mesolithic people and their home now becomes a cautionary tale of the consequences of a rapidly rising sea level. Glacial melt forced the Mesolithic people out of their homes, like the fabled Atlantis, this island of the North Sea is now lost and was nearly forgotten by current civilisation. It’s only evidence of its past life, was decayed artefacts and fossils of its people found by the fisherman that now fish above it. The impossibility of a site visit meant that I relied on data published by governments, private companies or universities as a method to image the human and non-human activity in this area.

However, with no rational context for the architecture to respond to a catalogue of building species relating to the culture of gathering, performance and conversation spaces was cultivated. A scaled comparison of plans of notable spaces in time, architectural precedents and new theories on “speaking architecture” analysed and attained information of a cultural context for me to design from, where my site context lacked. As a result, the project’s architecture structurally responds to the site context but spatially responds to the cultural context.

### *Relevant relationships and transferability*

The graduation project draws on two lines of research, the impact of climate change will have on the North Sea (human and non-human) and how space has the ability to promote conversation, decision making and innovative thinking to encourage the collective thinking rather than individual. In the eyes of today's society, the current prospects and approaches to addressing sea level rise has remained insufficient. Recently one of the most striking group of people in voicing their opinion and denying the situation is the protest amongst school children across the world. Initiated by a Swedish student, Greta Thunberg, a fifteen-year-old who has been missing lessons every Friday (since September 2018) to protest outside the Swedish parliament against climate change. It has sparked response by others, in the UK a school walk-out strike in protest at the political inaction over the crisis was held on Friday 15th February 2019 (Matthew Taylor 2019). Young people aren't apathetic, but are passionate about their future and they see it is time for the decision-makers (politicians) to use their influence and power to change their approach. It is their future, and the actions of today will ultimately affect them more than those making them in the present. They are the ones actively communicating and congregating different nationals into one space, then why can't the adults reciprocate this notion?

The activities on the North Sea impact millions on people on a daily basis, the concern is how this may alter in the future when effects of climate change are no longer a projected scenario but a reality. We need to start to engage with our environment differently, awareness, conversation and the relationships between the spatial orders of the North Sea may help shift the outcome by introducing an alternative approach. Historically the role of a Parliament was to structure society around the the relationship derived from the holding of land and dictate laws (1000), a general meaning of "an occasion for speaking" and to raise money (1200). Today, decisions are made miles away from the point of concern, a North Sea nation's parliament or the European Union parliament has little direct interaction with the space. The architectural aspect of the graduation project presents an image of an alternative future scenario to gather decision makers in such a way that they experience, react and learn from the environment they are deciding on. One could argue the extreme nature of the symbolic project in placing it in the sea then on land- which we traditionally have - translates to the severity to the point of concern. As such, the architectural response is therefore an appropriate one.

### *Ethical issues, dilemmas and potential application*

There are four big ethical issues or dilemmas in my project, firstly the idea of loss of control politically or from territory each North Sea nation would have release. Man has always been known to territorialise the earth for the benefit of itself or its people (power). We typically do not like to release our authority or to share with other nations or people, we do not always see every individual equal (cosmopolitanism). Second, the changing political relationship between the United Kingdom and European Union has become unpredictable recently, the parliament could have the potential to become a "sea-bridge" between these decision makers in the North Sea. Third, construction of an artificial island on an unpredictable territory (aside from an oil rig platform design) has not been done before and would be very costly, financially and in the amount of scarce resources needed to construct the island. This would not equate to a traditional land valuation, for example the Maasvlakte in Rotterdam cost €2.9 billion for its expansion built using the same material and has a predicted turnover of €676.9 million. Though considering this is only for the financial benefit of one country compared to the Parliament which would decide on the future of the North Sea which will benefit seven countries and the outcome of such decisions could translate to billions in deals and potential revenue for all countries. Lastly, the new island has the potential to alter its surrounding environment, changing current flows and may cause additional sand accumulation or degradation on different areas on the newly created island.

On an architectural scale application, the research into spaces in office design has become very relevant today, when we have the ability to work anywhere why choose to work in a designated space? Research has led to linking a good healthy work environment can lead to better results in decision making and productive work. The design investigates culturally specific design arrangements for each of the conversation spaces. A method to encourage attendants to come to the new island rather than congregate in their nations (which we do today).

The graduation project encourages its attendants to actively participate and engage in the performance of leaving their nation state and entering the North Sea Parliament (state of exception), to read and interpret this uncertain, unpredictable and irrational fluid, in a new and unorthodox manner. If not, our currently dry feet - on land - will soon be submerged, it has happened before and will happen again.

HITTI, N. 2019. "Get rid of the open-plan office" says Space10 co-founder Simon Caspersen. *Dezeen*.

MATTHEW TAYLOR, S. L., AMY WALKER, POPPY NOOR AND JON HENLEY. 2019. School pupils call for radical climate action in UK-wide strike. *The Guardian*