

Reflection

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Reflection

One of the reasons for choosing the “Water landscapes of crisis and hope” graduation lab led by Laura Cipriani was my personal fascination with the landscape, fascination with its vulnerabilities and opportunities. Participating in the lab has allowed me to grow as an individual and professional, as I believe it was a great opportunity to strengthen my landscape research and design skills.

Research and Analysis

One of the first challenges I faced during the beginning of my thesis is navigating myself through the vast data and information regarding Wadden Sea and refining my project topic. The Theory and Methodology elective that went hand in hand with the thesis production at the beginning of the academic year has allowed me to be more specific and selective about what I can achieve and how. “Theory in Landscape Architecture” edited and compiled by Simon Swaffield was of immense help in beginning to understand the variety of theoretical approaches in landscape architecture. The beginning of the academic year has also involved a GIS training workshop as part of the Visualisation elective, which allowed me to better navigate myself in the Dutch and European GIS data resources. The electives became a stepping stone in my thesis's research process and development. As I further refined my research topic, Friesland's ruralities sparked the most interest and curiosity. Frisian ruralities have been largely politicized with the governmental desire to reduce CO₂ and Nitrogen emissions, especially near Natura 2000 areas, and to tackle the immense impacts the agricultural industry brings to the table. Friesland's social, environmental, cultural, and climatic vulnerabilities in the context of past, present and future have been at the core of my research analysis, during which the threats and opportunities of agriculture have been explored.

Research and Design

As I have determined to focus on the peatlands of Friesland for the design assignment, one of the most climatically sensitive areas in the province and Wadden coast, shifting from research to design became another challenge. The “Water Landscapes of Crisis and Hope” highly values and pushes its participants for a site-specific approach, involving communication with the local stakeholders and understanding the local context, intricacies and nuances. The graduation lab incentivizes and pushes the participants to design for a specific site. I have decided to focus my design on the peatland heart of Friesland, an area enclosed by four Natura 2000 areas De Deelen, Alde Feanen, Van Oordt's Mersken, and Sneekermeergebied and announced to transition in nitrogen reductions. The area contains a clay soil belt that concentrates most of the historical traces and heavily subsidizes and oxidizes peatlands. Severe water and soil management in the area in favor of the current dairy and monoculture farming create multiple conflicts and raise political tension. Part of the design process is to communicate different scenario outcomes in 100 years during which different possibilities regarding agriculture are explored: no peat scenario in which the current trends continue with no change that results in severe water shortages in the future, complete abolishment of the current productive properties of the landscape in which

water acceptance will have an impact on the existing urban fabrics and a middle ground scenario, in which the water, soil, and nature are carefully managed in preparation for the future climatic changes. Development of 3 types of nature (carbon banks, paludiculture productive belts, and people nature) by 2035 to change the direction in which the ruralities of Friesland are heading to transition the peatscapes into becoming more resilient. Creating ecological water corridors, peat restoration buffer zones, and a water purifying network while strengthening the region's ecological and cultural values is the design's primary goal for the future resilience of the Frisian peat ruralities.

Relation between graduation topic, studio topic, and master track

The graduation project is part of the "Water Landscapes of Crisis and Hope" led by Laura Cipriani, focusing on the Wadden Sea Regional landscape. It is part of the Landscape architecture track Flowscapes graduation studio. The graduation lab aims to envision an alternative future for the region, facing great uncertainty despite the UNESCO world heritage recognition (Laura Cipriani, 2022). The Flowscapes Studio "explores spatial, societal, and environmental issues by design research and research by design" (Flowscapes guide, 2022). My thesis project, focusing on the Frisian peat ruralities, aims to tackle the Peatscape vulnerabilities highly impacted by unsustainable agricultural practices and envision an alternative future for the agriscape of Friesland. As landscape architecture is a study of nurturing natural and built environments, the graduation project envisions a new future in which productive landscape properties not only mitigate and adapt to climatic changes but bring new ecoservices and support the development of natural (carbon) banks over time contributing towards regional resilience.

Project and the wider social, professional, and scientific framework

I see the graduation project as a site-specific reflection of the peat restoration and preservation in Friesland, Netherlands, in close relation to climate change. As the former UN secretary general Ban Ki Moon said (2015) that we are the last generation that can end climate change, I believe that as a society, we have the responsibility to change the way we live and exist for the preservation of our vulnerable natural environment and ecosystems for our future generations. The graduation project aims to tackle the productive landscape's environmental, social, cultural, and climatic vulnerabilities for its resilient future.

Ethical Issues and Dilemmas

Despite the attempt to re-envision the future of agricultural landscape in Frisian peatscapes and its focus on natural processes such as soil subsidence and peat oxidation, the graduation project only touches very lightly other climatic impacts that the Wadden Sea is likely to face over time: sea level rise and salinization, which also have a significant impact on productive agricultural properties of the landscape. While the graduation project envisions the future of agriculture on multiple scales, it does not cover the scope of all agriculture-related climatic

issues. Therefore, it provides a significantly more focused view of the issues of peatlands and leaves the rest for a generic interpretation and imagination. The decision to bring such focus onto the graduation project came due to increasing time pressure and a desire to fulfill the design assignment. Another ethical dilemma I see in the graduation project is the question of whether I have fully considered farmers' views in my proposal as the local stakeholders that were involved in the project were all of the managerial positions, and despite being very empathetic of farmers' struggles majorly leaned towards to what is deemed a more sustainable future, which involves major changes in the current farming model. The stakeholders that contribute to the design decisions should be chosen carefully.

Feedback and Response

I have noticed within myself and how this graduation project was driven that I have a greater sense of social issues and often use the social aspect to find motivation and inspiration behind my design. I have especially struggled to refine the topic and direction that my thesis should go to, however, with the great support of Laura Cipriani and Diego Sepulveda, who have kindly guided me through the research and design processes, I have found a better narrative for my thesis. The feedback has also actively encouraged me to pursue a site-specific approach, in which site-driven solutions and inspirations were taken.

Limitations, lessons, and recommendations

My graduation project underwent great changes from a singularly cultural approach in which I've attempted to find inspiration in the shift in agriculture and focus on climate change and peatlands. The past 8 months have been quite a journey in so many ways. If I had attempted the project once again, I would have tried to focus on a narrative and storyline from the very beginning as it is a base for moving down the scale and ensuring that goals and strategies in the project all follow the same storyline.

Final thoughts

The past 8 months have been one of the most academically challenging times of my education career. It has been a huge learning curve in my academic journey. This is my first time doing a project over such a large time frame and relying solely on my motivation and inspiration for completing this assignment versus the usual design studios, during which group projects and teamwork are of a very high value. I am very grateful, especially to Laura Cipriani and Diego Sepulveda, for supporting me during my graduation project and providing me with their immense assistance, guidance, and support. Their generous help throughout this journey, especially during the year of uncertainty, has allowed me to feel more confident and navigate myself through such an important part of an architects' education career - graduation thesis.