

**HET PLATTE LAND - REFLECTION**  
**1.2.2018**

**Graduation Committee**

**Robbert Nottrot, department of Architecture**  
**Jan van de Voort, departement of Building Technology**  
**Jeroen van de Laar, department of Form & Modeling**  
**Daan Vitner, external examiner**

**Explore Lab 23**  
**Tiemen Anema**  
**4096312**

In this reflection I will take a look back on my graduation. To start I will briefly introduce my graduation project. Afterwards I will reflect on the relation between my project and the graduation studio Explore Lab, followed by positioning my graduation project in a wider (social) context. Thereafter I will explain my insights that I gained during my graduation on the relation between design and research. This reflection will end with a brief conclusion.

My graduation explores the relation between architecture and landscape. As a casus I took the rural landscape of north Groningen (NL), because it is in a cultural decay. The research focused on the geographical, cultural and social history of the landscape and on the spatial qualities of the same landscape. The design brief is an agricultural research institute, which combines a laboratory and a large scale farm with storage. The objective of my graduation is to put this large scale agricultural institute in dialogue with the landscape.

### Explore Lab

Explore lab offers the possibility to explore an own fascination in a own way. It therefore offers a certain amount of freedom to do your own project. For me it was an opportunity to explore the qualities of the changing rural landscape of Groningen. Almost all other graduation studio's focus on a mid-size (public) building in a large urban area. Because Explore lab - of course - has no clear theme, it was nice to find other students who were exploring the sort of same topic. It widened my scope and helped to develop my project.

The freedom Explore lab offers comes with the risk of wanting to much. Thereby graduation comes with the pressure to do it good. Combining both can lead to a dangerous cocktail. Along the way I found it difficult to frame my project in a clear and structured way. Sometimes I had too much loose ends, which made it hard to focus on the essence of the project. Later on I started, under guidance of my mentors, to simplify my project. By doing so I could develop my project in a more adequate way and it therefore gained more meaning.

I learned it is important to do only one thing in one project. By concentrating on solely one thing, it is possible to deepen this one thing, through which a project can gain substance. I do not plea for simple projects, but I think a project should gain complexity by meaning. Not by making a project complex by quantity. Also the story of a project and the way of presenting it becomes more clear when the complexity of a project can be described in a simple manner.

### Wider context

I started my graduation with positioning my project in a social context of a changing countryside. Demographic shrinkage, increasing earthquakes in the region and the upscaling of farms are trends that have their influence in the area. However I found it hard to relate - especially the first two trends - to my own fascination; the relation between architecture and the landscape.

During my graduation I had a talk with Carola Hein, professor of History of Architecture and Urban Planning at the TU Delft, who asked me 'What if your research concludes that architecture is not the solution for your project?'. This question confirmed my thoughts to reposition my project.

The essence of my design project concentrates on the relation between the landscape and big mono functional volumes. These volumes hardly have a functional relation with its context and what happens inside these buildings is therefore not relevant to its surroundings. It is the form and perimeter of the building that counts. The design of the form and perimeter of a building is a classic architectural assignment, and therefore architecture was clearly needed in this case.

So in my eyes the project gained a certain architectural relevance. The problem - the relation of big mono functional volumes and the landscape - proved a pure architectural one, not a social one. For me it was an insight that it is important that the project has a certain architectural relevance, instead of forcing myself to solve world problems.

#### Research and design

The approach of the research was two-sided. At one side I did a 'hard' historic geographical research where I investigated the multiple actors that formed the landscape from its origin to now and thereby predicted possible future scenarios.



*Fig. 1 A map showing the making of polders in Groningen.  
Resembling the 'hard' historic geographical research.*

At the other side I did a 'soft' research to the qualities of the landscape. Through research-by-doing I observed the landscape and translated these observations into physical objects. By making these objects I reflected upon and developed these observations. In this way I could distill spatial qualities, clarify why they are a quality and how they can be of use for a spatial design.



*Fig. 2 A collage made of the landscape of Groningen.  
Resembling the 'soft' research to spatial qualities.*

My objective for the project was to establish a dialogue between architecture and the landscape. Especially the softer qualities formed important starting points for my later design. At the same time the historical-geographical research gave me a deeper understanding of these spatial qualities. In this way both approaches complemented each other.

However it was also hard to combine both ways of working, because of the different approaches. Whereas the historical-geographical is more formal and therefore easier to explain in a scientific way, the research-by-doing is more an artistic approach. In my report I found an intuitive way to tell both stories at the same time, however in presentations it often felt forced. Therefore I decided later to accept the differences and present both researches apart.

During my graduation I started to question the relevance of strictly scientific research in architecture, due to my bilateral approach. In architecture we do not rationally clarify natural phenomena or apply laws of nature to elements we already know as for example in physics or mathematics. Within design - and thus architecture - we often know what we want (desired qualities), but don't know which elements or methods to use. Of course we can base our own ideas on theories of others and develop a certain position, but it is my belief that by designing (or doing, or experimenting) innovative architectural ideas can arise. Therefore I think within architectural education research-by-design (or research-by-doing) should gain a more prominent role.

So in my view the notions of research and design are almost equal. However what is different is the design project and the research project. For instance I used the notion of design (or doing) during my research. To exemplify I researched the use of left-over masonry by exploring possibilities to combine it with concrete. At this point the research had not (yet) a direct relation with my design project, but made use of 'designing'. So it is very important to separate both parts, but the way of working can be equal.

During the graduation I experienced difficulties with the transition from the research project to the design project. For me it was unclear where the research project ended and the design project started, which could be a consequence of the research-by-design approach. Thereby I wanted the conclusions of the research to form the direct points of departure for my design project. Both reasons made the beginning of my design project too heavy for a smooth start.

Later when the research report was finished and I approached the design project as any other project, I had a more convenient start. Also the advice of my main mentor to just make a functional design, throw it away and start over on the basis of my research was very helpful. By doing so I found out in which aspects of the design the research could have an influence and where there was room to make a difference.

## Epilogue

In my graduation plan I stated that "I see it as important to not only develop a own project during your graduation, but also to explore yourself and therefore an own way of working". Reflecting upon this statement I think I succeseed in taking a more clear position in architecture - and it's relation to research. The bilateral approach of my research was for me a good experiment to test how I would like to work.

I also have the idea it has an positive influence on my design. For me it was important to react on cultural means in a contemporary way. As I stated above, I think it is important to be innovate in an architectural context. For me, my design is going in that direction, which amplifies to always work from your own ideas and fascinations.