

Rebuilding Heritage:  
Brandevoort as a “fake” historic town



Figure 0. Streets of Brandevoort (Hanssen, n.d.-a)

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## Abstract

In the 1900s the BAUHAUS movement played a significant role in inspiring decades worth of modernist architecture. Fast forward to the mid-1990s, the last phase of the construction of large-scale suburban neighbourhoods started and were known as VINEX housing estates. These developments aimed to expand urban regions to prevent urban sprawl, among which is Brandevoort, Helmond.

Brandevoort shows a renewed interest in traditional architecture and is branded as a traditional Dutch town by stakeholder like the real estate developer (Nieuwbouw Helmond, 2025). However, this history thesis researches whether the architectural experience is coherent with how it is branded. The following research question will be answered: *how does Brandevoort employ architectural historicism and place-branding strategies to construct a form of “fake” heritage and what does this mean for future urban development?*

The research will be informed by literature, analysis and a series of interviews and surveys. I will look at how Brandevoort has been marketed and how this relates to the experience of visitors.

The research concludes that the historical aesthetics have been successfully implemented and create a historically convincing appearance. Yet, the urban design lacks the historical intricacy of older Dutch cities, due to contemporary needs for larger plots and wider streets. This creates a mismatch with the perception and experience of Brandevoort.

Nevertheless, Brandevoort's use of historical elements evokes a feeling of nostalgia because people recognize it and identify with it. This is a solid foundation for creating a sense of community. This is also where the place-branding of Brandevoort has been successful.

For the historic perception to align with the experience, the urban structure must be designed according to how historic cities were designed in the past. Therefore, designing a new “historic” town must not only reintroduce historical elements, but it must design the space, like it was used in history. This means designing intricate small streets solely meant for pedestrians and small narrow housing on small plots.

In combination with the creation of community, developments like Brandevoort will be successful in creating a new “historic” town, because the experience feels as historical as the space is perceived.

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Figure 1. Van Nelle factory in Rotterdam (De Jong, n.d.)



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Figure 5. Render of Weespersluis housing (Adriaan van Erk Group, 2023)

## Introduction

Emerging in 1900s in the context of the BAUHAUS movement (Casciato et al., 2019) modern design has dominated in Dutch architecture, albeit its origins being in Germany. The modern design ethos embraces simple geometry, clean horizontal lines and no ornaments. Take for example the Van Nelle Factory in Rotterdam (see figure 1) or the Eye Film museum in Amsterdam (see figure 2).

Van Nelle was built in 1931 and designed in a Dutch interpretation of modernism called “Het Nieuwe Bouwen” (Van Esch, 2019). It is characterized by straight lines, geometric and abstract form, lightweight construction and large windows to create open spaces. The Eye Film museum is a continuation of Dutch modernism and is “conceived as a highly tense and dynamic geometric solid” (Eye Filmmuseum, 2025). The museum was finalised seventy years later than the Van Nelle factory in 2011. This shows that modernist design has become a widespread practice in Dutch architecture and in 2026, is approaching a hundred years of modern design practice.

The factory and the museum both show that modernism is a stark contrast from Dutch traditional design like the old “grachtenpanden” along the Amsterdam canals. Where façades are designed with ornaments representing Dutch craftsmanship, culture and historical identity (see figure 3).

Although modernism is still a widespread practice, new developments like Brandevoort (see figure 4) or Weespersluis (see figure 5) evoke a feeling of nostalgia. These towns are new developments but designed as if they have existed for centuries. They have adopted a style that some might call new traditionalism (Dettingmeijer, 2004).

Brandevoort has been in development from 1996 (CKSA, n.d.) and is now slowly wrapping up construction. This new town is an expansion on Helmond to prevent urban sprawl in the region Eindhoven. Brandevoort is designed as a traditional Brabant design (Nieuwbouw Helmond, 2025). Specifically, Northern Brabant. The masterplan contains five neighbourhoods: Brand, Schutsboom, Stepekol, Hazenwinkel, Liverdonk and De Veste.

In total, Brandevoort houses 11 705 residents spread out among 4147 homes on a total 499 hectares of land (Kadastrale kaart, 2024a). With the heart of Brandevoort: De Veste, taking up 41 hectares of land with 2885 residents across 1277 homes (Kadastrale kaart, 2024b).

Like most housing developments, the project has been marketed to sell the homes long before the houses are finished with construction. Brandevoort is described and marketed as a traditional Brabant design and therefore the connection to Dutch heritage is reinforced (Hanssen, n.d.-b). Meaning, Brandevoort’s design consists of historical aesthetics and elements visible in the Brabant region, specifically Northern Brabant.

In this history research thesis, I will focus on Brandevoort’s architecture and urban design. Furthermore, I will research if the marketing of the town aligns with the architectural experience of its visitors. Specifically, I aim to understand whether Brandevoort is experienced as “fake heritage” or viewed as a desirable start of a new urban design approach.

Therefore, I ask:

*How does Brandevoort employ architectural historicism and place-branding strategies to construct a form of “fake” heritage and what does this mean for future urban development?*

In addition I will also look into:

- which broader Dutch planning trends shaped the development of Brandevoort;
- how Brandevoort translates historical aesthetic place-branding strategies into its urban design and architecture;
- how visitors perceive the historical aesthetics of Brandevoort (authentic, staged, original);
- what Brandevoort reveals about the future role of historic aesthetics in Dutch urban design.

## Methodology

To do this I will rely on existing literature and will conduct interviews with practicing urban designers with experience in similar projects as Brandevoort. Furthermore, I will analyse the architecture of Brandevoort and the architecture of historical Dutch cities. The historical Dutch cities are ‘s-Hertogenbosch, Heusden and Breda.

I chose these cities because they are historical Northern Brabant cities, which is the region after which Brandevoort has been designed. From each city I will analyse three buildings (listed monuments) along the most historical streets: the Hinthamerstraat in ‘s-Hertogenbosch, the Botermarkt in Heusden and the Ginnekenstraat in Breda.

## Chapter 1: Influence of Dutch planning trends on Brandevoort

Additionally, I will analyse Brandevoort's architecture like I will Brabant's architecture. This analysis takes the five neighbourhoods of Brandevoort: Brand, Schutsboom, Steppekolk, Hazenwinkel, Liverdonk and De Veste. I will select a building along the main road from each neighbourhood to be analysed. This analysis can then be compared to the analysis of Brabant's architecture.

Both analyses will be based on four categories: typology and composition, fenestration, roof and ornamentation and style.

My research aims to obtain a perspective on the experience and/or impressions of Brandevoort's visitors.

### Hypothesis

In informal discussions with other MSc Architecture students I have had the opportunity to inquire about visitors' opinions of Brandevoort. These discussions gave me the impression that Brandevoort has left a positive impact on them. This leads me to a hypothesis that states that Brandevoort has accurately branded the town as traditional, which could mean that Dutch planning trends are shifting from modern urban design back towards traditionalism. This would create "new" traditional towns emulating Dutch heritage without the feeling that these towns are "fake" heritage.

From the 1900s onward, the Netherlands has seen many design movements driven by the economy and ideology, paving the way for where we are at today. Starting with two laws that were introduced in 1901 due to deteriorating health conditions caused by the rapidly expanding cities: the health act and the public housing act (Wagenaar, 2016). The health act introduced the assembly of committees with urban planners, architects and medical staff. Their job was to assess the effects that urban expansion plans will bring to the people's health.

The public housing act which regulated new housing construction and forced communities that were growing at an excellent pace, to make general plans for expansion. These acts were the beginning of government involvement in the quality of housing and urban planning, paving the way for future urban development like Brandevoort.

Around the 1920s and 30s after the first world war, the focus shifted towards housing for the workers. The Amsterdamse School style was introduced in Amsterdam which aimed at creating expressionistic homes made with craftsmanship for the lower income working class. While in Rotterdam the city embraced modern design with W. G. Witteveen's 1927 General Expansion Plan.

In the second half of the 20th century, the car became more accessible to people (Wagenaar, 2016), which disturbed expansion plans like those of Witteveen, because infrastructure was either designed for pedestrians or railway traffic. Instead, car-oriented urban design emerged in the form of the so-called International Style in the 1950s. Low-density development would promote single-family homes in the form of row housing, flats and an extensive infrastructure network to accommodate the growing car ownership. The style introduced urban planning with the focus on efficient and low-cost mass housing and car mobility. The growth in car ownership was deemed one of the key factors of the success of the Welfare State.

However, the welfare state had its downsides, mostly due to the consequences of car-centric design. Plans for city centres to make them more accessible by car were implanted and historic urban fabric was disrupted. The plans calling for demolition attracted criticism. This critique then, was aimed at the modern design movement, which influenced a pivot towards designing with the human-scale in mind.

Europe's largest movement for modern design, CIAM (*Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne*), convened in the Netherlands in 1959, which eventually marked the end of CIAM. Dutch architect Jaap Bakema and Aldo van Eyck took over the leadership of the Dutch Forum-Group<sup>1</sup>, which emphasized human-scale design. They stopped designing for the car and instead allocated the car into the smaller infrastructure of a cul-de-sac.

The International Style and its welfare state embraced the "clean-slate" approach, however after CIAM was disbanded, respect and consideration of existing urban fabric re-emerged. "*Inner cities should no longer be sacrificed to the car*" (Wagenaar, p.31, 2016) and this is crucial for the design of Brandevoort.

In the mid-1990s, the last phase of the construction of large-scale suburban neighbourhoods started and were known as the Fourth Policy Document on Spatial Planning Extra in 1991 (van der Wouden, 2016), also called VINEX housing estates. These developments aimed to expand urban regions to prevent urban sprawl. Brandevoort is one of these VINEX housing estates.

The task of designing Brandevoort was not immediately entrusted to Rob Krier and Christoph Kohl. According to architect and professor Ettore Maria Mazzola<sup>2</sup>, the extension of Helmond was at first entrusted to Dutch "starchitects". However, when their design for Brandevoort was revealed within the local government, the reaction was dissatisfaction and unhappiness (Simmetria magazine, 2013). Afterwards, a prestigious Italian firm was invited to design Brandevoort which resulted in the same reaction. The previous designers and their proposals were never publicly shared thus neither can I. However, based on the words of Mazzola and the realized design of Brandevoort, I can assume that previous proposals had adopted a modernist design approach for Brandevoort's masterplan.

Eventually, the design of Brandevoort was entrusted to "new-town traditionalists" Rob Krier and Christoph Kohl.

This shows that previous (most likely modern) urban design approaches were not accepted during the planning process, yet Krier and Kohl's design was. Their masterplan focusses on historical architectural and urban design.

<sup>1</sup> The Forum-Group emerged from the journal *Forum voor Architectuur en Daarmee Verbonden Kunsten* (Merino del Rio, 2019).

<sup>2</sup> Ettore Maria Mazzola is an architect and professor at the University of Notre Dame School of Architecture. He and his students were asked to develop a design to show what could be done for the design of Brandevoort. They design block 18 and 22 of De Veste and block 18 is actually realized (Simmetria magazine, 2013).

## Chapter 2: Translation of historical aesthetic place-branding strategies

### Place-branding

Place-branding is a form of marketing in which the goal is to market the identity of the product or, in the case of Brandevoort, the place. This is achieved by integrating different resources with local or regional social, economic or cultural value connected with the character of the place. Or the character that the branding hopes to communicate towards people (Taha & Abdelfattah, 2023, as cited in Banerjee, 2007). So, to specify, according to Taha & Abdelfattah “*place-branding is a strategy that establishes deeply rooted connections, embraces the target community’s perception and heritage* (Taha & Abdelfattah, p. 339-340, 2023).”

### Defining Northern Brabant historical aesthetics

In order to know what the key-characteristics of place-branding are when using historical aesthetics, I will look at the historical aesthetics of Brabant.

When designing for Brandevoort the goal was to create a historic Dutch town inspired by Noord-Brabant’s architectural aesthetics (Hanssen, n.d.-b), the province in which Brandevoort is situated. This means that in order to know the key-characteristics of Brandevoort’s historical aesthetics, I need to know those of Northern-Brabant.

I will look at the Hinthamerstraat in ‘s-Hertogenbosch, the Botermarkt in Heusden and the Ginnekenstraat in Breda. The oldest streets in the most typical Brabant cities.

Per city, I have chosen three buildings which are listed as monuments. So, a total of nine typical Brabant buildings. These are all analysed based on four categories: typology and composition, fenestration, roof and ornamentation and style (See full analysis in appendix 3).

The typology and composition of the buildings or often divided into three to four horizontal bays and one to two vertical bays as shown in figure 6 and 7. Within these bays the composition of the narrow brick façade is often symmetrical with the use of vertically strong windows.

These windows, with the sliding sash window most commonly used, will likely have a rectangular shape (see figure 9) with the occasional arched frame at the top (see figure 8 and 13), with a vertical brick lintel above the window. Furthermore, windows are segmented to break up the glass panes.

Oftentimes, the roof will be gabled/stepped/pitched behind a parapet with either a profiled wooden cornice as a finish or, in case of a stepped or gabled parapet, a stone coping finish (see figure 6, 10 - 13). Additionally, the roof is likely to have one or two dormers placed symmetrically within vertical bays combined with the presence of a chimney.

All buildings are fundamentally designed in a neo-renaissance style<sup>1</sup>, with use of a plinth in either natural stone or a different type of brick. These are also the materials used most often. To conclude, ornamentation is usually translated into façade anchors, beautifully shaped parapets and horizontal banding (either with brick or stone) using stone accents, string courses or plinths (see figure 6 - 13).

Like mentioned before, Brandevoort’s identity has been branded as an “old” Dutch Brabant-style town. To successfully communicate this identity towards residents and visitors, the application of the aforementioned characteristics is crucial. Which is why these are the key characteristics of Brandevoort’s place-branding. And to know if the place-branding has been successfully implemented, I analysed Brandevoort’s architecture like I did with Brabant’s architecture. This analysis takes the five neighbourhoods of Brandevoort: Brand, Schutsboom, Steppekolk, Hazenwinkel, Liverdonk and De Veste (see figure 14). I selected a building along the main road from each neighbourhood to be analysed. This analysis can then be compared to the analysis of Brabant’s architecture.

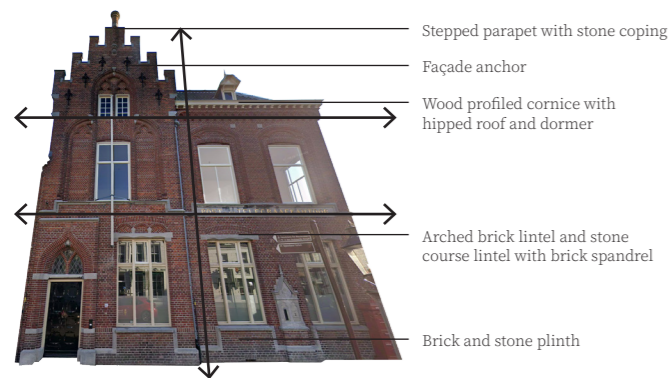


Figure 6. Botermarkt 2 Heusden, showing three horizontal bays and two vertical bays (Google earth, 2026a, Heusden)

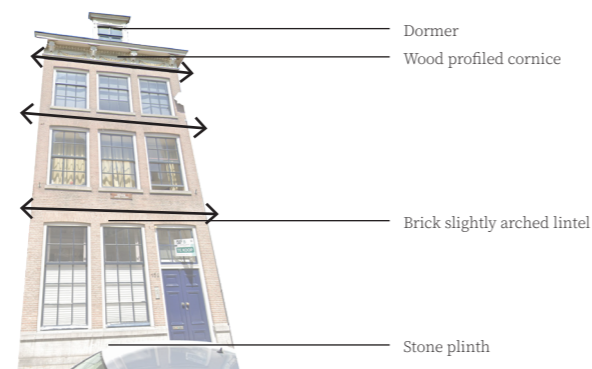


Figure 7. Hinthamerstraat 156 ‘s-Hertogenbosch, showing four horizontal bays and one vertical bay (Google earth, 2026a, ‘s-Hertogenbosch)

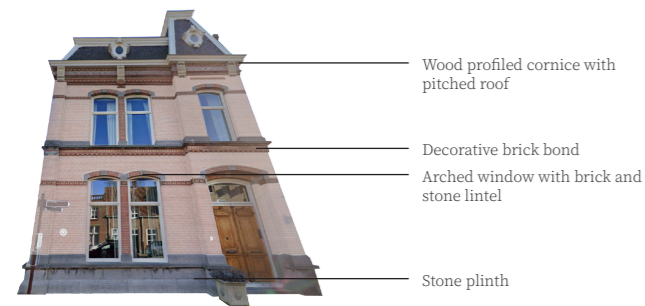


Figure 8. Hoogstraat 22 Heusden, showing arched windows with brick and stone decorative lintels plus wood profiled cornice with pitched roof (Google earth, 2026b, Heusden)



Figure 9. Botermarkt 22 Heusden, showing rectangular sash windows, façade anchors, dormers, wood profiled cornice and gabled roof (Google earth, 2026c, Heusden)

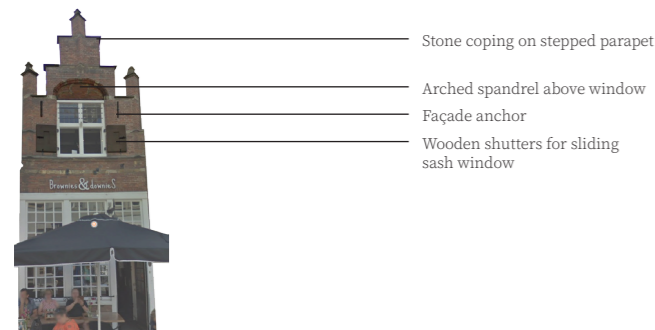


Figure 10. Hinthamerstraat 57 ‘s-Hertogenbosch, showing a stepped parapet with stone coping and arched spandrel above sliding sash window with shutters (Google earth, 2026b, ‘s-Hertogenbosch)

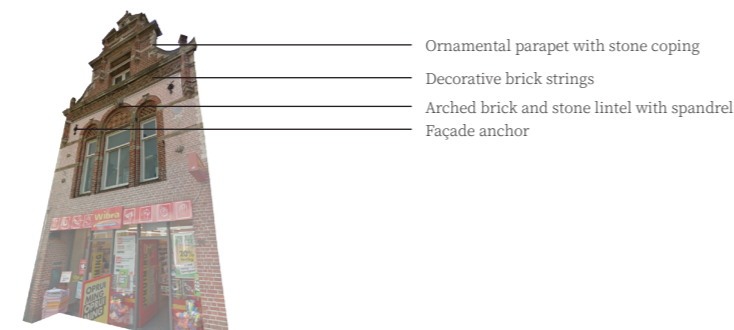


Figure 11. Ginnekenstraat 92 Breda, showing an ornamental parapet with stone coping and arched spandrel above sliding sash windows and façade anchors (Google earth, 2026a, Breda)

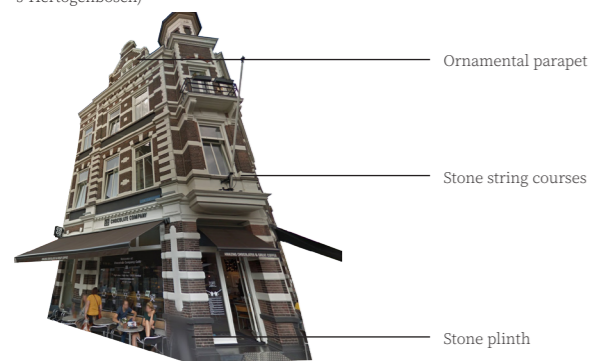


Figure 12. Ginnekenstraat 153 Breda, showing ornamental decorations (Google earth, 2026b, Breda)

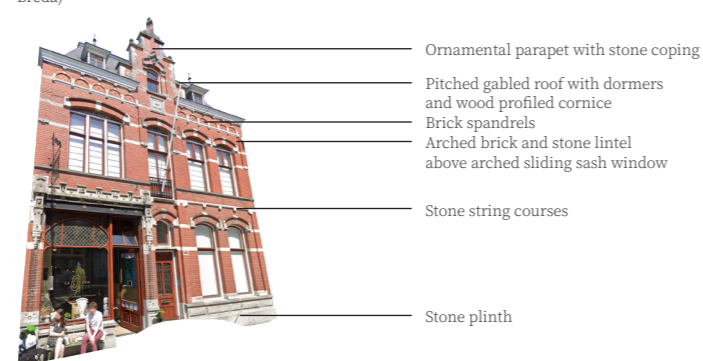


Figure 13. Hinthamerstraat 192 ‘s-Hertogenbosch, showing ornamental decorations (Google earth, 2026c, ‘s-Hertogenbosch)

<sup>1</sup> Neo-Renaissance is a Renaissance Revival architecture, which emerged in the 19th century. It drew inspiration from the Italian Renaissance and aimed at emulating the classical elements and principles from this movement (Thearchspace, 2024).



Figure 14. Neighbourhoods of Brandevoort (Wij Bouwen Brandevoort, n.d.)

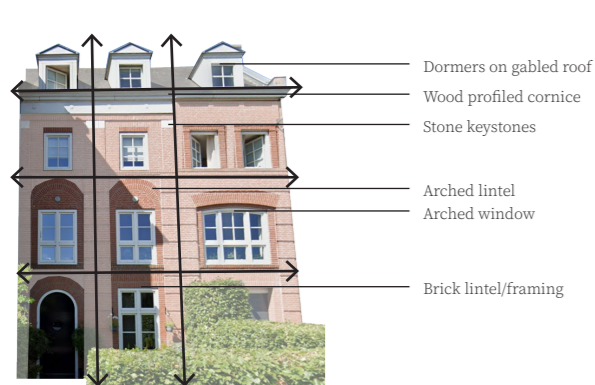


Figure 15. De Vestepoort 1 Brandevoort, showing four horizontal bays and three vertical bays (Google earth, 2026a, Brandevoort)



Figure 16. Spoomakerserf 51 and 53 Brandevoort, showing three horizontal bays and one vertical bay (Google earth, 2026b, Brandevoort)

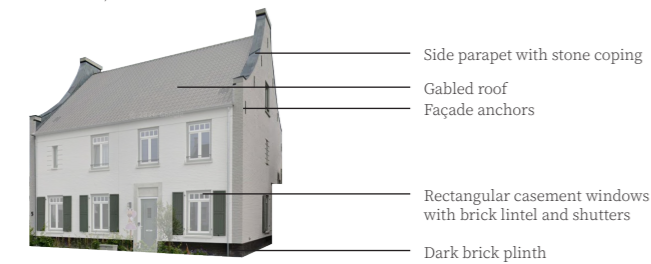


Figure 17. Engelbrechthoek 5 Brandevoort, showing side parapet, anchors and plinth (Google earth, 2026c, Brandevoort)

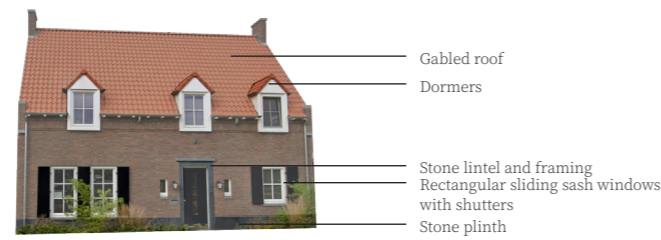


Figure 18. Laathoeve 30 Brandevoort (Google earth, 2026d, Brandevoort)



Figure 19. Abendonk 34 Brandevoort, showing dormers, side parapet and stone lintel and framing (Google earth, 2026e, Brandevoort)

### Defining Brandevoort's historical aesthetics

The analysis of Brabant compared to the analysis of Brandevoort shows many similarities. The analysis shows that historical aesthetics in Brandevoort consist of the similar or the same characteristics as those of Brabant (see full analysis in appendix 4).

The typology and composition of the buildings, like in Brabant, or often divided into three to four horizontal bays and two to three vertical bays (see figure 15 and 16). The vertical bays do not only create narrow façades but also façades with a wider span compared to those in other Brabant cities. Within these bays the composition of the brick façade is often symmetrical with the use of vertically strong windows.

These (most commonly used) casement windows will likely have a rectangular shape with the occasional arched frame at the top and a vertical brick or natural stone lintel above the window (see figure 15 and 19). Furthermore, windows are segmented to break up the glass panes. And shutters appear occasionally.

Oftentimes, the roof will be gabled and connected to a stepped or ornamentally shaped side parapet with stone coping as shown figure 17 and 19. The connection between the front façade and the roof will be lined with a profiled wooden cornice. Additionally, the roof is likely to have one or two dormers placed symmetrically within vertical bays combined.

Brandevoort in its entirety is designed in a new-urbanist/new-traditionalist design<sup>2</sup>, with use of a plinth in either natural stone or a different type of brick. Brick is the primary material with the addition of stone accents or plinths and the occasional wood cladding. To conclude, ornamentation is usually translated into façade anchors, ornamentally shaped (side) parapets, the occasional façade anchor, lintels, sills and sometimes arched brick bonds.

The analyses show a number of similarities. This means that the architectural aesthetics used in Brandevoort are those that are used in Northern Brabant.

<sup>2</sup> New-Traditionalism, like Neo-Renaissance, seeks to revive traditional architecture whilst still adhering to modern needs. New-Traditionalism draws from historical architecture through time and adapts it for contemporary use (Dettingmeijer, 2004).

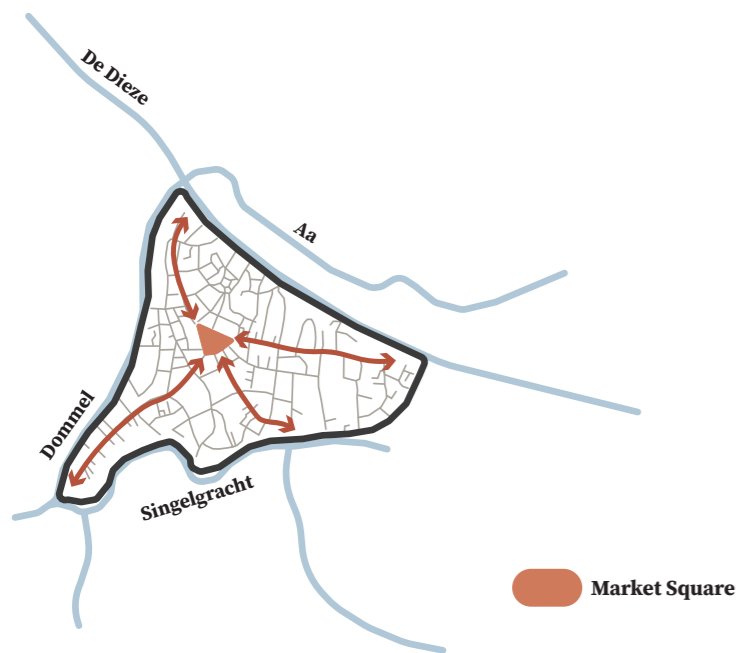


Figure 20. Urban analysis 's-Hertogenbosch. Own work.



Figure 21. Urban analysis Breda. Own work.

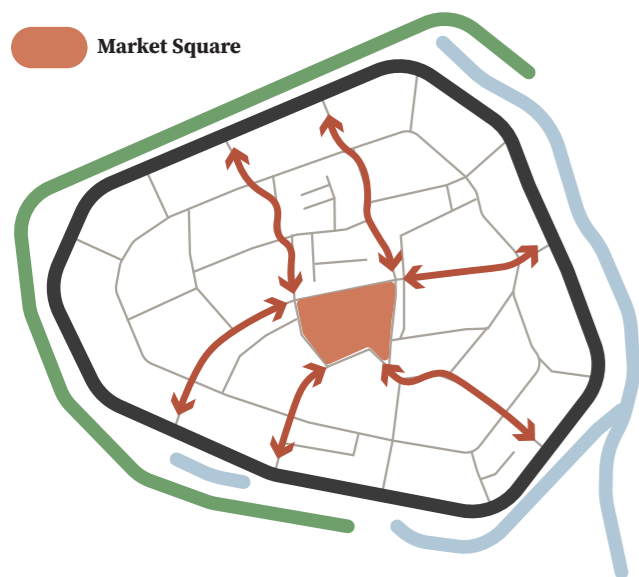


Figure 22. Urban analysis Brandevoort. Own work.

### Urban design

Historical aesthetics are not only used in architectural design, but urban design also plays a key role. To know how historical aesthetic place-branding strategies are translated into Brandevoort's urban design, I will compare Brandevoort's urban structure with 's-Hertogenbosch and Breda; the two larger cities in Northern Brabant.

's-Hertogenbosch (also called Den Bosch) is founded along the Dieze a river that made trade possible and thus the founding of a new establishment. Den Bosch's historic city centre is surrounded by waterways: the Dommel, the Dieze, the Aa and the Singelgracht (see figure 20). The historic city centre consists of narrow buildings on long narrow plots with the rear oriented towards an inner courtyard (Ijsselstein, 2011), creating perimeter blocks, and the front always directed towards the street. The streets are alleys meant for pedestrians that lead you to either the water or the central square: the Markt. The water shows that the Den Bosch used to be a fortified city. And regarding all the aforementioned aspects, the exact same can be said for Breda (see figure 21), this historic city used to be a moat as well surrounded by the Mark.

Brandevoort embodies the same principles. Although it is not founded along a river for aiding trade. Its centre: De Veste is modelled after the same fortified towns of 's-Hertogenbosch and Breda (see figure 22). De Veste's streets are lined with new "historic" façades with the rear facing the inner courtyard of the perimeter block. These streets lead to the outer rim of De Veste or the market square in the centre of De Veste. These alleys are designed to fit cars but are mostly used for slow traffic like cyclers and pedestrians. This is because the main roads go around the centre of Brandevoort (see figure 22).

De Veste has a fortified town structure due to the water and the greenery between De Veste and the other neighbourhoods of Brandevoort as shown in figure 22. Furthermore, housing is accommodated in a perimeter block design. The perimeter blocks on the outer rim of De Veste consists of towers and arched ways to embody the look of a fortified "wall" around the centre.

Brandevoort is built in the current societal climate wherein car ownership is not only common, but also essential. Therefore the alleys, meant mostly for pedestrians and cyclers, need to be spacious enough for car traffic and thus are designed to look significantly more straightened out compared to the organic alleys of Breda or Den Bosch. Also, the plots, while some are narrow as well, in comparison are much larger than the historic Brabant standard, resulting in larger perimeter blocks.

All aspects combined creates similar Brabant-style urban design, but with more square footage for housing and larger inner courtyards for private outdoor space. The other Brandevoort neighbourhoods are meant for residential use, therefore the infrastructure is not necessarily directed towards a square or other facilities. This is reserved for De Veste.



Figure 23. De Veste is surrounded by water and greenery to create an urban structure like a historical fortified city (Reiling, 2026a)

### Chapter 3: Perception of historical aesthetics in Brandevoort

The previous chapter was focussed on analysing Brandevoort's historical aesthetics and how these aesthetics are used to brand Brandevoort as a historic Brabant town. The analyses show that the historical aesthetics of Northern Brabant are successfully implemented in Brandevoort, however the question of the user's perception remains. This chapter discusses the results off an online questionnaire (see appendix 5) in which participants are asked questions about their architectural experience of Brandevoort (see appendix 1).

#### Online questionnaire

Because the target audience is dependent on having seen Brandevoort in person, the questionnaire obtained six answers, with ages ranging from 18 to 54 years old. Exact results can be seen in appendix 5 and 6.

To know the depth of the participant's experience in Brandevoort the questionnaire asks how often the participant spends time in Brandevoort. Most answer they rarely visit with the except for one, who visits monthly.

When asked how to describe Brandevoort's architectural style, the majority answered with "Modern with traditional elements", others answered with "artificial/themed" and with "historic/classic" (see appendix 5 and 6).

The majority also thinks that the historical aesthetics of Brandevoort are "mostly or completely staged", with the exception of two participant answering with "mostly authentic". However, all participants do agree that the designers have made a considerable effort to make Brandevoort appear historical.

The aspects that contribute most to this historic appearance and feel, according to most participants, is the street layout and the façade ornamentation as seen in figure 25. However, one describes that they do not think Brandevoort feels historic, rather "*like a filmset décor giving an impression of tradition.*"

Furthermore, half of the participants think Brandevoort's image projected onto visitors comes across as authentic, with one thinking the image feels "staged," one saying the image feels "nostalgic" and another one saying the projection is "*neither staged nor authentic because Brandevoort has its own style: new urbanism.*"

When discussing tourism in Brandevoort, opinion on the attraction of tourism is divided with one half thinking it does attract tourists and other half thinking it does not.

The experience of Brandevoort is mostly described as "charming and immersive" except for one participant saying their experience of Brandevoort is "artificial and ugly".

Also, when asked if participants have noticed differences between Brandevoort and older historic Dutch towns, answers range from "yes, many differences" to "no differences".

To conclude to questionnaire, participants are asked to give their opinion about the importance of historical aesthetics and whether they would like to see future Dutch developments designed in a similar style. Once again, the answers are quite different. The importance of the aesthetics ranges from "very important" all the way to "not important". And when asked if the participants would like to see similar developments in the future, half says "no" and the other half says "yes".

A dominant opinion is clear throughout the questionnaire, which is that most think Brandevoort comes across as "mostly or completely staged", with only two describing Brandevoort as "mostly authentic". This shows that while there is a common perception, a slight variation is present. In this variation contradicting answers occur, because while the perception is mostly experienced as staged, every participant does recognize the effort for Brandevoort to appear historical. Additionally, participants also identify historic references such as the street layout and the ornamental façades. Lastly, participants' overall experience is mostly described as "charming and immersive", except for one. This means that even when the town is perceived as staged, the experience can still feel charming and immersive.

The results of the online questionnaire show that perceptions are mixed, leaning towards staged and inauthentic, yet the effort to appear historic is recognized.



Figure 24. View of the marketplace in the centre of De Veste, Brandevoort (Reiling, 2026b)



Figure 25. View of ornamental façades in the centre of De Veste, Brandevoort (Reiling, 2026c)

## Chapter 4: Future role of historic aesthetics in Dutch urban design

This thesis focusses on new traditionalism in Brandevoort, but what does this town mean for the development of architectural design and urban planning? The questionnaire with visitors as well as with a practicing urban designers, can give insights on the future role of historic aesthetics in Dutch urban design.

To interview urban designers, I reached out to Nikè Ruijter and Gertjan Reil; co-owners of Cittanova bureau for urban planning (see interview questions in appendix 2). Both have been practicing for more than 25 years and have experience in urban design like Brandevoort.

### Online questionnaire

The questionnaire concluded with two questions regarding the future of new traditionalism (as shown in appendix 1). The participants were asked how important they think historical aesthetics are in shaping Dutch neighbourhoods, to which each participant gave a different answer. Although all answers were different, only one thinks historical aesthetics are not important. The other participants all agree historical aesthetics are important to some degree.

The second concluding question asked participants if they would like to see future Dutch developments designed in a similar “historic” style. Half of the answers were “no” and the other half “yes”.

These results show that the attitude towards the use of historical aesthetics in future developments is mostly positive, however at present, a unanimous desire is absent.

### Interview Nikè de Ruijter and Gertjan Reil

I, myself work at Cittanova as a project assistant and I asked my colleagues for a sit-down interview about their perspective on Brandevoort’s architecture and urban design. I knew from past conversations that they have a lot of experience with urban design and have worked on projects like Brandevoort.

Before her time at Cittanova, Nikè Ruijter has worked at the municipality of Zandvoort and Lelystad. And Gertjan Reil is an urban designer and real estate and construction manager who previously worked at Royal HaskoningDHV and Planterra.

Both Ruijter and Reil have worked on projects like Brandevoort in the past. Ruijter worked on Bataviahaven in Lelystad and Reil worked on Kattenbroek in Amersfoort.

Upon starting our conversation, immediately Ruijter and Reil both acknowledge Brandevoort as a reaction to modernism. Additionally, Ruijter thinks that Brandevoort is a reaction to the individualism of today’s society. And we started talking about Brandevoort as a VINEX development and how according to Ruijter, past VINEX projects have been large and impersonal. However, she thinks Brandevoort does not seem to be as impersonal or as large as a standard VINEX project. Instead, it aims to create a historic atmosphere through its architecture. Which, according to Ruijter and Reil, has been successful. Yet, Brandevoort’s urban design still feels like a regular VINEX housing estate. The romantic and organic streets, alleys and squares lack the character of a true historic Dutch town. Ruijter assumed this is because the urban structure had already been designed and agreed upon. This results in a carefully thought-out urban design with straight, wide and neatly placed streets (see figure 26) and alleys. This does not evoke the same feeling as the old alleys and streets in historic Dutch towns. Thus, to achieve a certain atmosphere, the urban design and architecture both need the same level of detailing.

Reil goes on and compares Brandevoort with the Efteling, a Dutch theme park. Stating that both create a themed and almost artificial environment, instead of a coherent urban design with thoroughly integrated historic elements. He calls it “*coulisse architectuur*”<sup>1</sup>. According to Reil, Brandevoort is a standard VINEX housing estate that *happens* to have historic architectural elements. It is *these* elements that create the atmosphere of a traditional Dutch town. Ultimately using the feeling of nostalgia to attract people to Brandevoort.

In some respects, this approach has been applied too literal, according to Reil. For example, the designing of gates in the outer streets of De Veste as shown in figure 27. These gates are a hint towards historic architecture of cities that used to have a city wall. Back then, these gates had a function. However, today the gates do not necessarily have a function other than architectural aesthetics. Instead, Reil suggests when implementing certain historical aesthetics, not to take them too literal. Rather to redesign these elements to fit contemporary needs.

To conclude my conversation with Reil and Ruijter, I asked if they see a future of using historical aesthetics in Dutch urban design. Reil and Ruijter agree that they see a future in revival architecture like Brandevoort. However, not strictly in the sense of using historical aesthetics to create a new “historic” town, but to create

<sup>1</sup> Refers to the coulisse in theaters.



Figure 26. View of straight and wide street in De Veste, Brandevoort (Wissing, n.d.)



Figure 27. View housing along the outer rim of De Veste, designed to look like a gate (Reiling, 2026d)

a community. Reil states that a specific type of architecture marks a place, creating a community within. Not only does Brandevoort create a community based on its specific architecture, but it also employs different historical elements for different façades. This results in a sense of individuality within the community.

The answers given in the questionnaire align with the perspective of Ruijter and Reil. My conversation with them, fills in the gaps of the answers given in the questionnaire.

The results of the questionnaire revealed both enthusiasm and indifference for the use of historical aesthetics in future development. It shows that people appreciate the use of historical aesthetics but in the case of Brandevoort, these aesthetics are not fully convincing. A number of participants state that Brandevoort feels themed and/or inauthentic. Furthermore, results show that half of the participants would like to see future developments like Brandevoort and the other half does not. According to Ruijter and Reil this is because the historical aesthetics are successfully designed for the architecture but are missing in the urban design. This is due to contemporary needs and regulations, creating larger plots and broader streets compared to historic Dutch cities.

This mismatch in architecture and urban design results in an incoherent experience of Brandevoort's "historic" architecture.

Furthermore, Ruijter and Reil suggest redesigning historical aesthetics that no longer have a function in today's urban environment. When redesigning historical elements a new function can be introduced. This will result in historical elements that fit contemporary needs. This way historicism is applied in the design and avoids the impression of inauthenticity or imitation.

Additionally, Brandevoort is successful in creating a sense of community through its historic architecture. The town has set itself apart from the regular urban expansion, with the use of historic aesthetics with each building having its own design and historical detailing. This creates a feeling of belonging to a place, a community.

To conclude, the reason Brandevoort is not fully experienced as a historic city is because the architecture is more historically convincing than the urban design. The architecture has been successful. It attracts people because they recognize it; they understand it. However, the use of historical aesthetics can be seen as a tool to create a sense of belonging (community and nostalgia). When using a tool, the implementation is crucial. This tool would be better implemented in the future when it is used to not only design the architecture, but the urban fabric as a whole. Then, in the future, the use of historical aesthetics will result in increased demand of new "historic" urban development.

The foundation is already present; people are already attracted to historic architecture. This attraction would be even greater when historicism is echoed throughout the whole town.

With this reinterpretation, historical aesthetics will persist, but in a reinterpreted, integrated and socially driven form. Historic aesthetics will have a role in the future. However, not as a direct replication of historical elements but rather as a social tool to create a successful urban environment.

## Conclusion

*How does Brandevoort employ architectural historicism and place-branding strategies to construct a form of "fake" heritage and what does this mean for future urban development?* To answer this question, I will use the information gathered in the previous chapters. Starting with the design elements of Brandevoort compared with historic Dutch cities Breda and 's-Hertogenbosch. The analysis showed a clear relation between historical aesthetics and elements used in Breda and 's-Hertogenbosch and the aesthetics used in Brandevoort. Architecturally speaking, historic elements are successfully implemented.

Taha & Abdelfattah explain that "*place-branding is a strategy that establishes deeply rooted connections, embraces the target community's perception and heritage*" (p. 339-340, 2023). In this case, according to Ruijter and Reil, Brandevoort establishes a deeply rooted connection through the historical elements used in Brandevoort's architecture. This creates a feeling of nostalgia because people recognize and identify with these elements. It is what attaches people to Brandevoort and it is how Brandevoort uses place-branding.

Place-branding in the case of Brandevoort is tied to perception. This is where the online questionnaire introduces irregularities between the architectural elements and the experience of Brandevoort as a whole. Brandevoort is most often described as "mostly staged" or "artificial", however participants *do* think the designers made a considerable and visible effort to design Brandevoort as a historic town. Additionally, half of the participants say they would like to see more of new "historic" development like Brandevoort. This ties in with the perception of "fake" heritage. Users view the architecture as historic, acknowledging the architecture is designed as historic heritage, yet the experience of Brandevoort does not feel that way to them.

The incoherence in perception and experience is caused by the urban layout of Brandevoort. Like Breda and 's-Hertogenbosch, Brandevoort is designed like a fortified city. Water plays a key role in urban design for the Brabant cities. In Brandevoort, greenery is used to create a similar effect. Furthermore, all streets either lead to the outer rim, where residential architecture is designed to give the impression of a city wall, or to the centre of the town: the market square.

However, the intricacy of small streets and alleys in historic cities are missing in Brandevoort. Although similar street patterns are visible in its urban design. Brandevoort misses the intricacy of a historical Dutch town due to the contemporary needs for the space for cars and the minimum square footages of a home. This results in broader streets, larger plots, with façades that are not as narrow as the ones visible in historic Northern Brabant.

Furthermore, Ruijter and Reil recognize Brandevoort as a reaction to modernism as is mentioned by Cor Wagenaar (2016). Yet, Brandevoort remains a VINEX housing estate, where the urban form is created based on the needs for more housing and more space for the car. These needs are contrasting with the implementation of historical aesthetics, creating a mismatch between architecture and urban planning.

Currently, Brandevoort shows that planners mostly focus on the architecture to create a sense of historicism. In the future, to further create this historic atmosphere, planners must fully integrate the historical aesthetics. This means that the urban structure must also have the intricacy of a historic Dutch town. But most of all, the potential lies with creating a sense of community. Brandevoort has already shown it is different from other VINEX projects. It is already smaller and focused on creating a pleasant atmosphere that connects with people.

Most historic cities have a large number of streets solely meant for pedestrians. In the future the pedestrian needs to be accommodated more and the focus on slow traffic must be reintroduced. Do not just reintroduce the architecture of historic Dutch cities but look at how people use these cities. This way, instead of having new "historic" towns appear inauthentic or fake, it will be a place where people do not realize it was built only twenty years ago. Fakeness is in the eye of the beholder.

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## Appendix 1: Survey Questions

### Section 1: Background Information (for context)

#### How long have you lived in Brandevoort?

- Less than 1 year
- 1–5 years
- 6–10 years
- More than 10 years
- I don't live here, I visit occasionally

#### What is your age group?

- 18–24
- 25–34
- 35–44
- 45–54
- 55+

#### How often do you spend time in Brandevoort (living, walking, shopping, leisure, visiting family etc.)?

- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Rarely

### Section 2: Perception of Historical Aesthetics

#### How would you describe the architectural style of Brandevoort?

- Traditional Dutch
- Historic/classic
- Modern with traditional elements
- Modern
- Neo-traditional (new but designed to look old)
- Artificial/Themed

#### To what extent do you feel the historical aesthetics in Brandevoort are authentic?

- Completely authentic
- Mostly authentic
- Neutral
- Mostly staged
- Completely staged

#### Do you notice any deliberate efforts to make Brandevoort appear “historical” or traditional?

- Yes, very obvious
- Yes, somewhat
- Not really
- No

#### Which aspects contribute most to the historical feel? (select all that apply)

- Street layout
- Building materials
- Façade ornamentation
- Public squares and parks
- Signage and shopfronts
- Other (please specify)

### Section 3: Place-Branding and Image

#### How would you describe the “image” Brandevoort projects to visitors? (open-ended)

- Authentic
- Staged
- Original
- Nostalgic
- Fake

## Appendix 2: Interview questions Nikè Ruijter and Gertjan Reil

### Do you think Brandevoort's design encourages tourism or community engagement?

Strongly agree  
Agree  
Neutral  
Disagree  
Strongly disagree

### Do you feel the town's identity is marketed or constructed deliberately?

Yes, very much  
Yes, somewhat  
Not sure  
No

### Section 4: Experience & Everyday Life

#### Which of the following best describes your experience with the town's design?

Charming and immersive  
Fun but artificial  
Neutral  
Confusing or unnatural

### Have you noticed any differences between Brandevoort and older historic Dutch towns?

Yes, many differences  
Some differences  
Hardly any differences  
No differences

### Section 5: Broader Dutch Planning Context

#### Do you feel Brandevoort reflects broader trends in Dutch urban planning?

Yes (please elaborate)  
No (please elaborate)

### How important do you think historical aesthetics are in shaping new Dutch neighbourhoods?

Very important  
Important  
Neutral  
Slightly important  
Not important

### Would you like to see future Dutch developments designed in a similar historical style?

Yes, definitely  
Yes, maybe  
Not sure  
No

### Optional Section 6: Additional Feedback

Do you have any other comments on Brandevoort's design, atmosphere, or historical feel? (open-ended)

### Background and Experience

- Could you briefly describe your professional background and your experience with municipal urban design projects?
- Have you worked on projects similar to Brandevoort, where historic architectural styles are intentionally incorporated into new developments?

### Perception of Brandevoort

- How would you describe the architectural and urban design approach used in Brandevoort?
- In your opinion, how successful is Brandevoort in creating the atmosphere of a traditional Dutch town?
- From a design perspective, what elements contribute most to this perception (street layout, building typology, public spaces)?

### Experience and Functionality

- Do you think the historic-inspired design of Brandevoort influences how residents and visitors experience the place? If so, how?
- Are there any advantages or disadvantages to designing new neighborhoods using historic architectural references?

### Planning and Policy Perspective

- Why do you think municipalities choose historic or traditional aesthetics for new developments like Brandevoort?
- From a planning perspective, how do such design approaches fit within current Dutch urban development priorities (e.g., housing demand, sustainability, density)?

### Future of Historic Aesthetics in Planning

- What does the example of Brandevoort reveal about the role of historic aesthetics in contemporary Dutch urban planning?
- Do you think similar design approaches will continue to be used in future developments? Why or why not?
- In your opinion, how should planners balance historic references with innovation and contemporary urban needs?

### Reflection

- Looking back, is there anything about Brandevoort's design approach that you think planners would do differently today?
- What lessons can urban planners learn from Brandevoort when designing new neighbourhoods?

## Appendix 3: Architecture Analysis Brabant

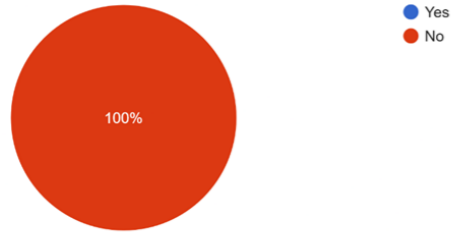
	Hinhuenerstraat 192, 's Herenganbosch	Hinhuenerstraat 156, 's Herenganbosch	Hinhuenerstraat 57, 's Herenganbosch	Buternwijk 22, Heusden	Hogstrat 22, Heusden	Boternwijk 2, Heusden	Gimkestraat 134, Breda	Gimkestraat 90, Breda	Gimkestraat 153, Breda
<b>Typology and composition</b>									
Facade typology	Cornice facade with stepped gable-late crowning	Narrow urban townhouse	Narrow stepped-gable facade	Cornice facade with hipped roof	Monumental symmetrical	Civic scale building	Corner landmark building	Narrow stepped-gable	Corner building with layered facade
Facade composition	Symmetrical around central axis	Symmetrical around central axis	Symmetrical around central axis, dual exposure	Symmetrical around central axis, dual exposure	Vertically asymmetrical	Asymmetrical massing	Vertical emphasis due dominant tower element	Symmetrical around central axis	Strong vertical forms with strong horizontal ornamentation
Bay division	Three primary bays horizontally	Three primary bays horizontally	Two primary bays horizontally	Two primary bays horizontally	Vertically asymmetrical, two bays	Vertically asymmetrical, two bays	Four horizontal bays	Three primary bays horizontally	Multiple
Horizontal banding	Stone string courses and banded masonry	Window sills and plinth	Stone string courses and banded masonry	Roof cornice	Stone string courses and banded masonry	Stone string courses and banded masonry	Stone string courses and banded masonry	Stone string courses and banded masonry	Stone string courses and banded masonry
<b> fenestration</b>									
Window typology	Sliding sash windows with division	Sliding sash windows with division	Curtainwall plinth, casement window with division	Sash windows with division	Segmented arched sash windows with division	Vertical rectangular windows with division	Tall casement windows with division	Segmental arched windows with division	Arched tilt windows with division
Window framing	Brickwork	Brickwork	Brickwork	Brickwork	Stone keystones, impost blocks	Arched brickwork	Brickwork	Brickwork and natural stone accents	Stone keystones an brickwork
Lintel/Relieving arch	Brickwork lintels	Brickwork lintels	Brick arches above windows	Brickwork lintels	Brick arches above windows	Stone sills and lintels	Brickwork lintels	brick filled spandrels	brick arches with stone accents
Shutters	None	None	Present	None	None	None	None	None	None
<b>Roof(s) edge</b>									
Roof type	Pitched gable roof behind stepped decorative parapet facade	Pitched gable roof behind facade	Stepped parapet gable with stone coping	Hipped roof	Pitched roof	Stepped parapet with stone coping and hipped roof	Turret with steep spire	Stepped parapet with behind a gable roof	Possible gable behind decorative stepped parapet with warch tower
Roof material	Slate roofing	Slate roofing (expected, not visible)	Slate roofing (expected, not visible)	Slate roofing	Slate roofing	Slate roofing	Slate roofing	Slate roofing	Slate roofing
Dormers	Two symmetrical placed	One centrally placed	None present	One dormer aligned with secondary facade	Three present, two symmetrical	One central in second vertical bay	None	None	None
Cornice	Profilled wooden cornice	Wooden profilled cornice	None	Profilled wooden cornice	Ornamental wooden cornice	Profilled wooden cornice	None	Stone ornamental cornice	Profilled wooden cornice
Chimneys	Stepped parapet with stone coping	None	Stepped gable with stone coping	None	Ornamental wooden cornice	Wooden cornice	None (visible)	Stepped parapet with stone coping	Brick parapet with stone coping
<b>Ornamentation and style</b>									
Architectural style	Neo-renaissance	Neo-classical	Neo-renaissance	Neo-renaissance	Neo-renaissance	Neo-gothic elements within eclectical-inspired facade	Neo-renaissance	Neo-renaissance	Pitched gable roof behind stepped decorative parapet facade
Ornamentation	Arches and stone detailing	Minimally, roof's cornice	Arches and stone detailing	Ankers as functional but decorative	Stone, brick and wooden cornices	Brick pointed arches, stone detailing, wooden cornice	Stone string courses, stone ornamentation, coping ornamentation	Arches, spandrels, cornices, impost blocks, facade plaque	String courses, keystones, impost blocks, facade plaque
Stone detailing	String courses, keystones, impost blocks, facade plaque	String courses, keystones, impost blocks, facade plaque	String courses, keystones, impost blocks, facade plaque	None	Stone string courses and keystones	Stone lintel, stone sills stone coping	Stone string courses, ornamental coping, plinth	String courses, keystones, impost blocks, facade plaque	String courses, keystones, impost blocks, facade plaque
Decorative brick bonds	Present, arches	Lintels	Present, arches	None	Differing brick bonds	Differing brick bonds with arches	None	Arches, spandrels	Arched lintels
Relief/Sculpture	Arches	Lintels	Arches	None	None	Present	Present	Small stone sculptures within brickwork	None
Cartouches	Present, arches	None	None	None	None	Present	None	None	None
Plinth	Present, natural stone	Public plinth with curtain wall	Public plinth with curtain wall	None	Present, natural stone	Brick plinth with stone coping	Public plinth	Public plinth	Brick plinth with stone coping

## Appendix 4: Architecture Analysis Brandevoort

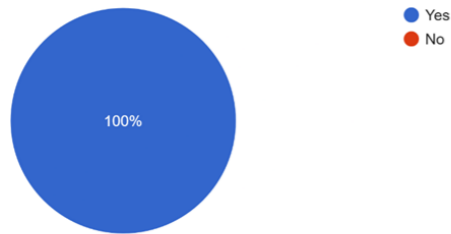
	Steppelkolk-Oost, Brand, Brandevoort	Spoormakerserv 51, Schutsboom, Brandevoort	Laathoeve 30, Steppekliek, Brandevoort	Engelbrechthoek 7, Hazenwink, Brandevoort	Abendonk 34, Liverdonk, Brandevoort	De Vesteport 1, De Veste, Brandevoort
<b>Typology and composition</b>						
Facade typology	Narrow facades across multiple bays with gable roof	Wide facades with multiple bays with gable roof	Independent home with all facades exposed with gable roof	Duplex home with all facades exposed with gabled side parapets	Independent home with all facades exposed with gabled side parapets	Townhouse facade with gabled roof
Facade composition	Asymmetrical across differing bays horizontally and vertically	Asymmetrical but with repeated elements	Repeated elements throughout, asymmetrical	Repeated elements throughout, asymmetrical	Repeated elements	Repeated elements
Bay division	Three horizontal bays with two vertical bays	Three horizontal bays with two vertical bays	Two horizontal bays with two vertical bays	Three horizontal bays with two vertical bays	Two horizontal bays with two vertical bays	Three horizontal bays with four vertical bays
Horizontal banding	Wood cladding + wooden cornices	Wooden cornices	Brick and stone lintels, sills, banded masonry, plinth	Banded masonry, Lintels, lintels, plinth	Banded masonry, stone lintels	Banded masonry, cornices, stone keystones
<b>Fenestration</b>						
Window typology	Rectangular sash windows with division	Rectangular casement windows with division + circular window in side facade	Rectangular casement windows with division + circular window in side facade	Rectangular casement windows with division	Tall rectangular casment/tilt windows	Segmented arched and rectangular casement windows with division
Window framing	Profilled wooden cornices above windows	Profilled wooden cornices and frames	Wooden frame, doors framed with stone	Wooden frame, doors framed with stone	Frames and door framed with stone	Framing
Lintel/Relieving arch	Cornice	Lintel	Brick and stone Lintel	Brick lintels and stone sill	Stone lintels	Brick relieving arch with brick spandrels and lintels
Shutters	None	None	Present	Present	Present	None
<b>Roof(s) edge</b>						
Roof type	Gable roof	Gable roof	Gable roof	Gable roof	Gable roof	Goble roof
Roof material	Terracotta roof tiling	Terracotta roof tiling	Terracotta roof tiling	Terracotta roof tiling	Terracotta roof tiling	Terracotta roof tiling
Dormers	Present across different bays	Subtly dormers, connection between facade and roof	Present	None	Present with zinc cladding	Present symmetrical within vertical bays
Cornice	Wood profilled cornices along facade and window frames	Wood profilled cornices along facade and window frames	None	None	None	Stone crowning side parapet

# Appendix 5: Results online questionnaire in English

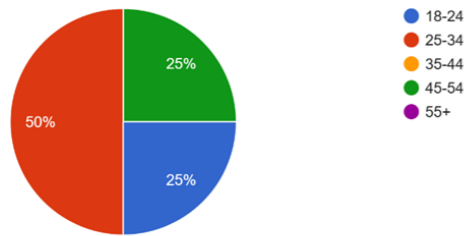
Do you or have you lived in Brandevoort?  
4 antwoorden



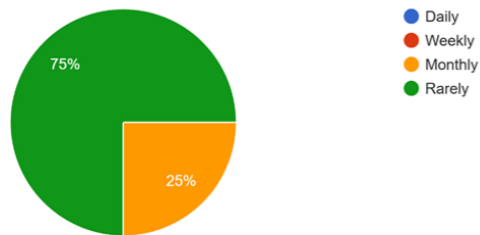
Have you ever visited Brandevoort?  
4 antwoorden



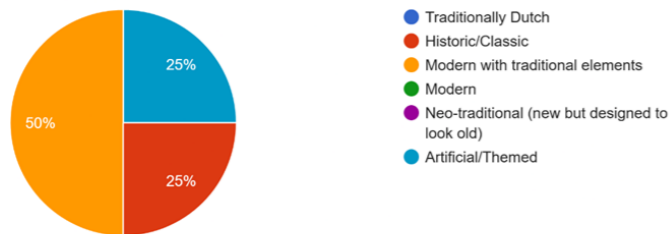
What is your age group?  
4 antwoorden



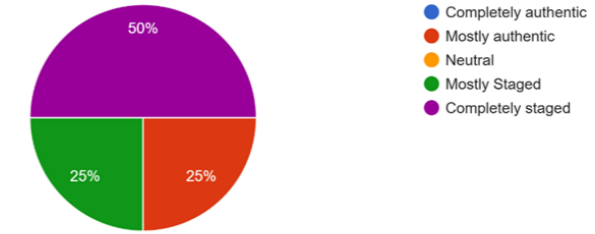
How often do you spend time in Brandevoort (living, visiting, leisure etc.)?  
4 antwoorden



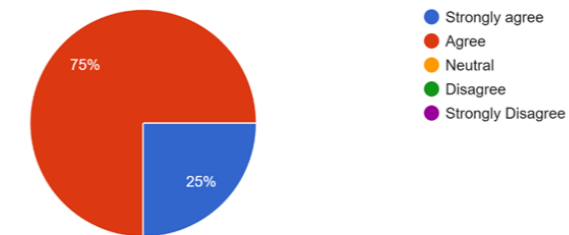
How would you describe Brandevoort's architectural style?  
4 antwoorden



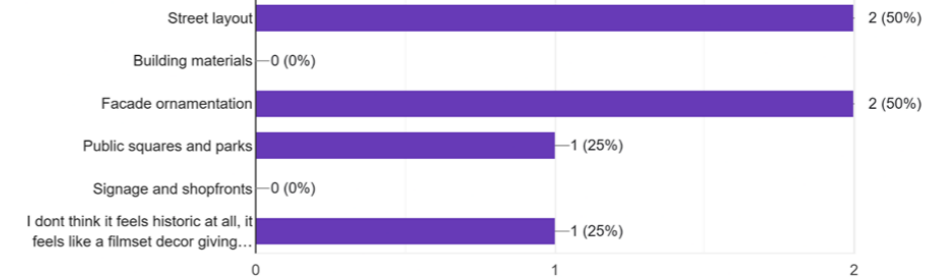
To what extent do you feel the historical aesthetics of Brandevoort are authentic?  
4 antwoorden



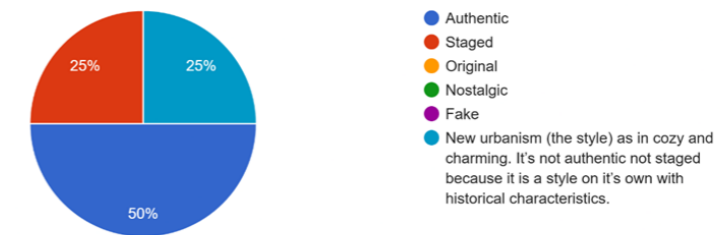
Do you agree with the following statement: "The designers has made a considerable effort to make Brandevoort appear historical."  
4 antwoorden



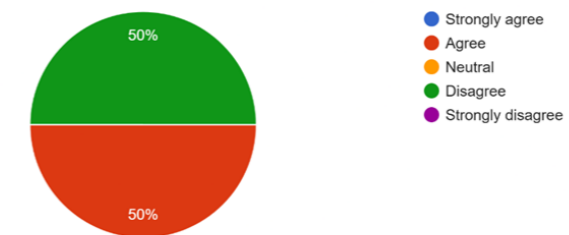
Which aspects contribute most to the historic feel? (select all that apply)  
4 antwoorden



How would you describe the image Brandevoort projects to visitors?  
4 antwoorden

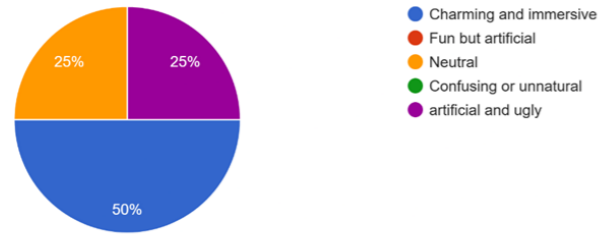


Do you think Brandevoort's design encourages tourism or community engagement?  
4 antwoorden

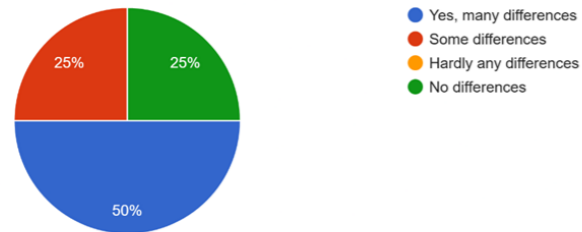


## Appendix 6: Results online questionnaire in Dutch

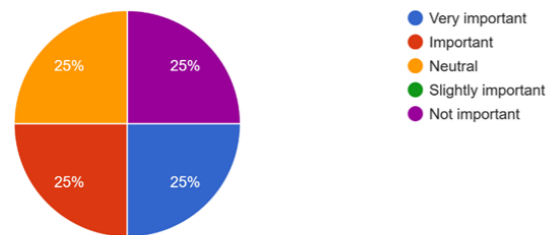
Which of the following best describes your experience with the town's design?  
4 antwoorden



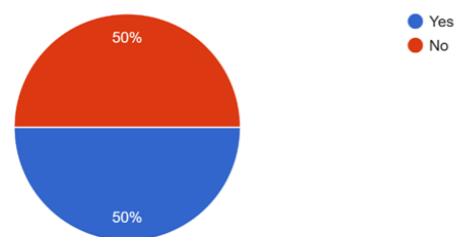
Have you noticed any differences between Brandevoort and older historic Dutch towns?  
4 antwoorden



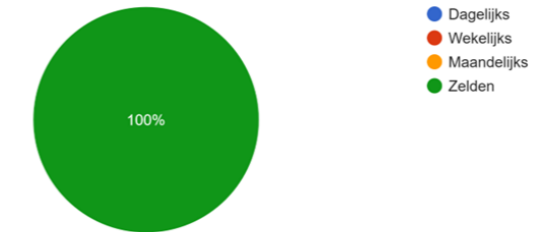
How important do you think historical aesthetics are in shaping Dutch neighbourhoods?  
4 antwoorden



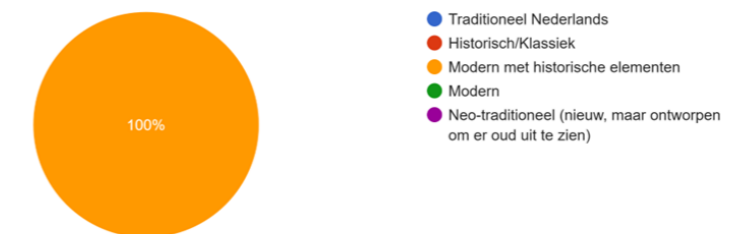
Would you like to see future Dutch developments designed in a similar "historical" style?  
4 antwoorden



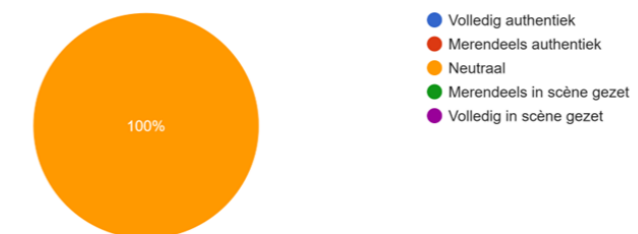
Hoe vaak bezoek je Brandevoort  
1 antwoord



Hoe zou jij Brandevoorts architectonische stijl omschrijven?  
1 antwoord



In hoeverre vind jij dat Brandevoorts historische elementen authentiek zijn?  
1 antwoord

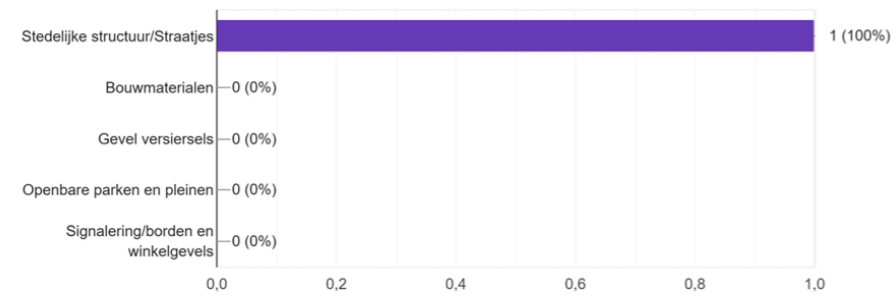


Ben jij het eens met de volgende uitspraak: "De ontwerpers hebben zichtbaar moeite gedaan om Brandevoort te laten overkomen als een historisch stadsdeel."  
1 antwoord



Welke elementen dragen het meest bij aan de historische impressie van Brandevoort?

1 antwoord



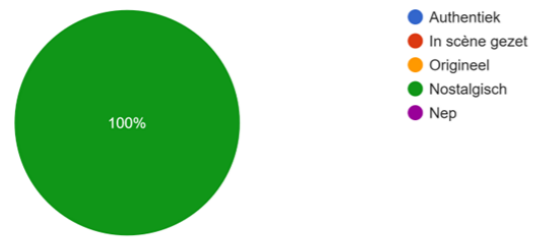
Hoe belangrijk denk jij dat historische elementen zijn in het vormgeven van Nederlandse wijken?

1 antwoord



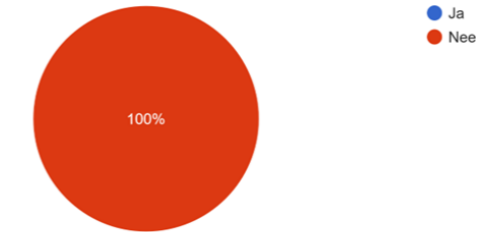
Hoe zou jij het beeld van Brandevoort richting haar bezoekers omschrijven?

1 antwoord



Zou jij graag toekomstige stedelijke uitbreiding in een vergelijkbare stijl zien?

1 antwoord



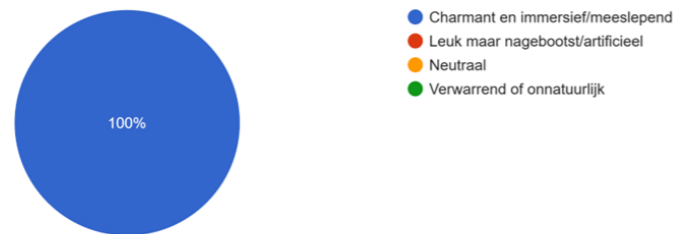
Denk jij dat het ontwerp van Brandevoort toerisme aantrekt of gemeenschapsvorming stimuleert?

1 antwoord



Welke van de volgende omschrijving past het best bij jouw ervaring van Brandevoort?

1 antwoord



Merk jij een verschil tussen Brandevoort en andere oudere steden in Nederland?

1 antwoord

