

# **[Re]formation of maritime dystopias**

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**“We are all utopians, so soon as we wish for something different.”**  
**Henri Lefebvre**

Cover fig. Scully, S. R. (2018, June 5). STALKER (1979) Proves you don't need an amazing budget to make an amazing film. Medium. <https://medium.com/applaudience/stalker-1979-proves-you-don-t-need-an-amazing-budget-to-make-an-amazing-film-a276e-2fa2173>

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## i. Introduction

The vast area of Waterdriehoek is full of remnants or still active maritime industrial sites. Today's perception is more of neglected and abandoned buildings, remainders of a vibrant industrial era, questioning their purpose and existence in the post-industrial era we are currently living in. The need for reuse is more present than ever. Cities are morphing, needs are changing and societies are evolving. As a result, the site should also be changed in order to be in line with the needs of the city and its inhabitants. The site in focus is located in Sliedrecht and encompasses the industrial area surrounding the current Rotterdam Steel Works factory. The industrial site, which was previously a shipyard, was named in reference to the van Eijk family, who were the landowners and proprietors of the business, that now functions as his name declares with steel<sup>1</sup>. The core material remains the same, what about the vibrance of this space though? After the first visiting in the area many questions aroused regarding this gigantic longitudinal industrial space which is in absolute proximity with the residential area around it. Questions like the relation of the building and the community around, about the feeling of the people, and an interest to want to dive into the history of that maritime remnant. Leading to one broader question: What it means in reality and through the years to be a maritime industrial space?

The industrial spaces were typically presented as utopian places<sup>2</sup>, symbolizing progress and prosperity for the surrounding communities. However, it is pertinent to question whether these spaces truly embodied the utopian ideals they were purported to represent, and to define what it is that constitutes a utopian place. Furthermore, it is worth questioning why these spaces were defined as utopian and what impact this had on the people who owned them, worked in

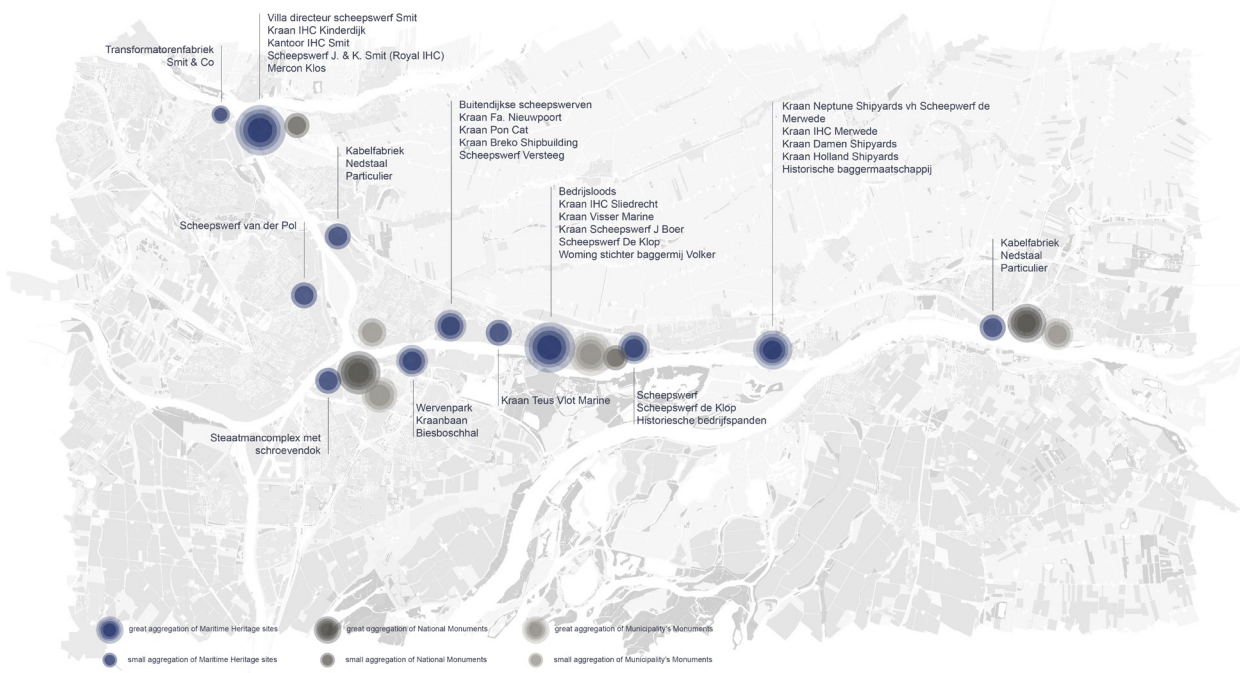
them or lived around them. Given their current appearance and utilization, the former shipyards are perceived more as dystopian sites, which is diametrically opposed to their initial objective. Furthermore, the emphasis on the conservation of maritime heritage in the wider Waterdriehoek region is a relatively recent development<sup>3</sup>. A comprehensive examination of the area revealed that the majority of listed monuments are not related to the maritime industry (fig. 1). This renders these structures and the values they embody susceptible to the encroachment of possible gentrification in the area. Despite the existence of publications that emphasize the significance of maritime heritage<sup>4</sup>, there is a paucity of literature that specifically addresses the south-eastern region of Waterdriehoek. In conclusion, this research aims to elucidate the distinctive characteristics of the sites, thereby facilitating a harmonious adaptation to the prevailing circumstances, both current and future. To address the questions arising from the problematization of the meaning and characteristics of maritime industrial sites, the following research question was formulated.

1. The selected site will adopt the designation "former Van Eijk Shipyard."

2. Zimmermann, 2013, pp. 235–262

3. Voornemen Herijking Programma Erfgoedlijnen, 2024

4. Hein, 2020



**fig.1 | Maritime heritage configuration in Waterdriehoek**

This map made by the author during the group site analysis of the area depicts the possible maritime heritage sites that remain unlisted.

**R.Q.: What are the “utopian / dystopian” features of the past of the maritime industrial site of former Van Eijk Shipyard in Sliedrecht, that a designer can use to reshape its future?**

[big scale] Were the industrial sites utopias or dystopias, or both?

[medium scale] What were/are the main spatial characteristics of these spaces and who were the lead characters?

Can we describe / depict the connection of those sites to the society in the past and in the present?

[small scale] How those sites altered the area near them? Was that a beneficial impact or maybe not?

Why it is important to re-form the maritime sites? How we will achieve this?

In order to address the primary research questions, a series of sub-questions have been formulated in alignment with the overarching aim of exploring the nuances of theoretical perspectives on space with a view to developing a design approach tailored to the specific site. The central concept is to initially determine whether industrial spaces can be classified as belonging to the spectrum of specific utopian and dystopian spaces, and to what extent this is reflected in the spatial configuration of the site and the society. The concept of utopia is not alien to Dutch culture. Constant Nieuwenhuys presented his approach to utopian design and lifestyle in his project New Babylon<sup>5</sup>. It is evident that the term ‘utopia’ possesses a dual meaning, at times connoting a positive concept and at other times a negative one. Similarly, the concept of industry is also sometimes regarded as a positive entity and at other times as a negative one. It is my considered opinion that for a society to flourish, a certain degree of both is necessary. Although the theme of utopia/dystopia is relatively broad and eternal, it can be clarified through various research themes. In this study, the spatial parameter of these themes is selected through the most essential dualities, which will be depicted in section drawings in proximity to the urban tissue in the design area of the former Van Eijk Shipyard and some selected case studies. This approach will be explained in the following chapters.

5. Wigley, 1998

fig.2



fig. 2 & 3 | The area of interest and its functions (blue industry, orange residential)

fig. 4 & 5 | The site of interest inside and outside

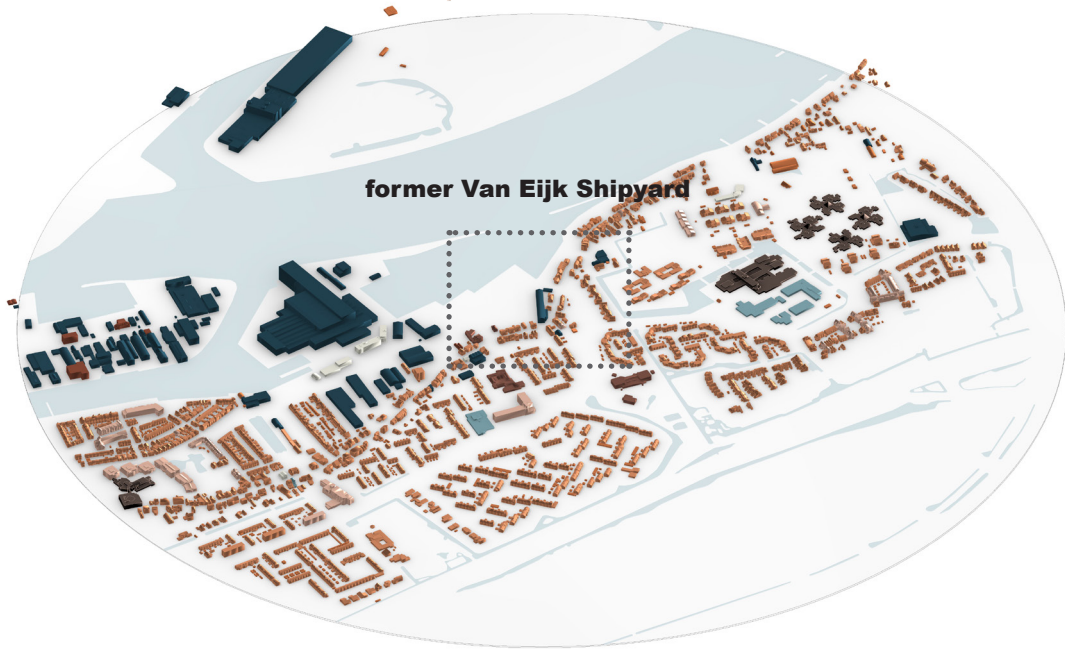


fig.3

fig.4

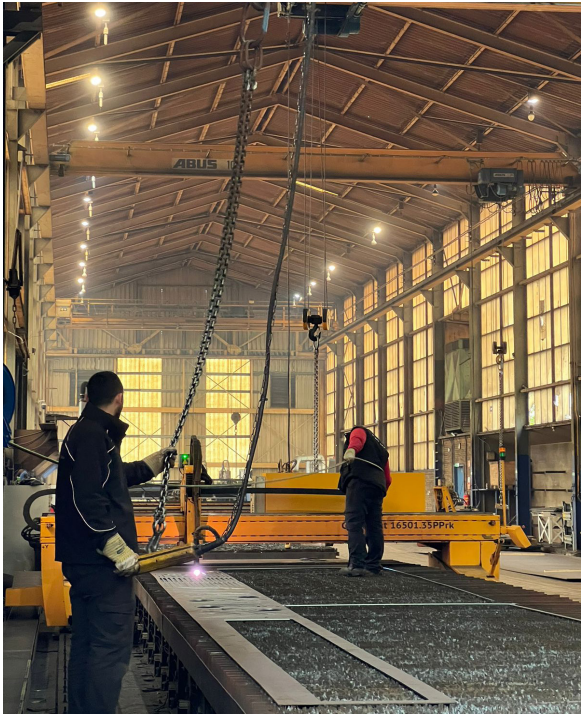


fig.5



## ii. Defining terminology

Prior to any further discussion, it is of significant importance to define the terminology that will be used throughout this research project and to establish how these terms will be referred to. The initial objective is to define the terms 'utopia' and 'dystopia'. The Dictionary of Cambridge defines utopia as "a perfect society in which people work well with each other and are happy," while it describes dystopia as "a very bad or unfair society in which there is a lot of suffering, especially an imaginary society in the future, after something terrible has happened." It is evident that when discussing utopia or dystopia, we are referring to archetypal duality. In investigating these terms, it is preferable in our case to focus on how they are used to describe a place and moreover their expression as dualities. The concept of industrial cities and industries as symbols of rapid evolution and progress emerged as a prominent theme in urban utopian models, as exemplified by the Charter of Athens<sup>6</sup> (1933) proposed by the CIAM group. This notion was a key element in post-war urbanism and reconstruction efforts, with the aim of optimizing living conditions for residents through Europe and the Netherlands. This radical transformation was not initially welcomed by the society undergoing it. As Judith Thissen describes in the chapter of the book "*Industrial Cities*"<sup>7</sup>, the merchant elite in Rotterdam demonstrated considerable resistance to the transformation of their former rural utopia into an urban one, a transformation which they were ultimately forced to accept by the Dutch government.

In a later period, the Italian architectural historian and theorist Manfredo Tafuri<sup>8</sup> expressed his critical thinking about utopianism and the capacity of architecture to shape society, regardless of the requirements of capitalism. His objective was to encourage architects to abandon their pursuit of an idealized urban form and instead consider the practical

realities of the situation, incorporating these into their designs. In attempting to translate his work, he asserts that utopia is an unattainable ideal in the context of modernist aspirations. Nevertheless, the desire to create utopias persists. The article "Spaces of Utopia and Dystopia: Landscaping the Contemporary City" by Gordon MacLeod and Kevin Ward<sup>9</sup> provides an in-depth examination of the intertwined concepts of utopia and dystopia. The text describes utopian and dystopian places in contemporary cities. Utopias are characterized by a controlled and exclusive environment, with a strong emphasis on fortification and purification. In contrast, dystopias are often associated with low-income communities, and which are perceived as being isolated, dark, and abandoned, with a high presence of decay. It is worthy of note that former industrial spaces are frequently perceived as dystopian in the concept of contemporary city.

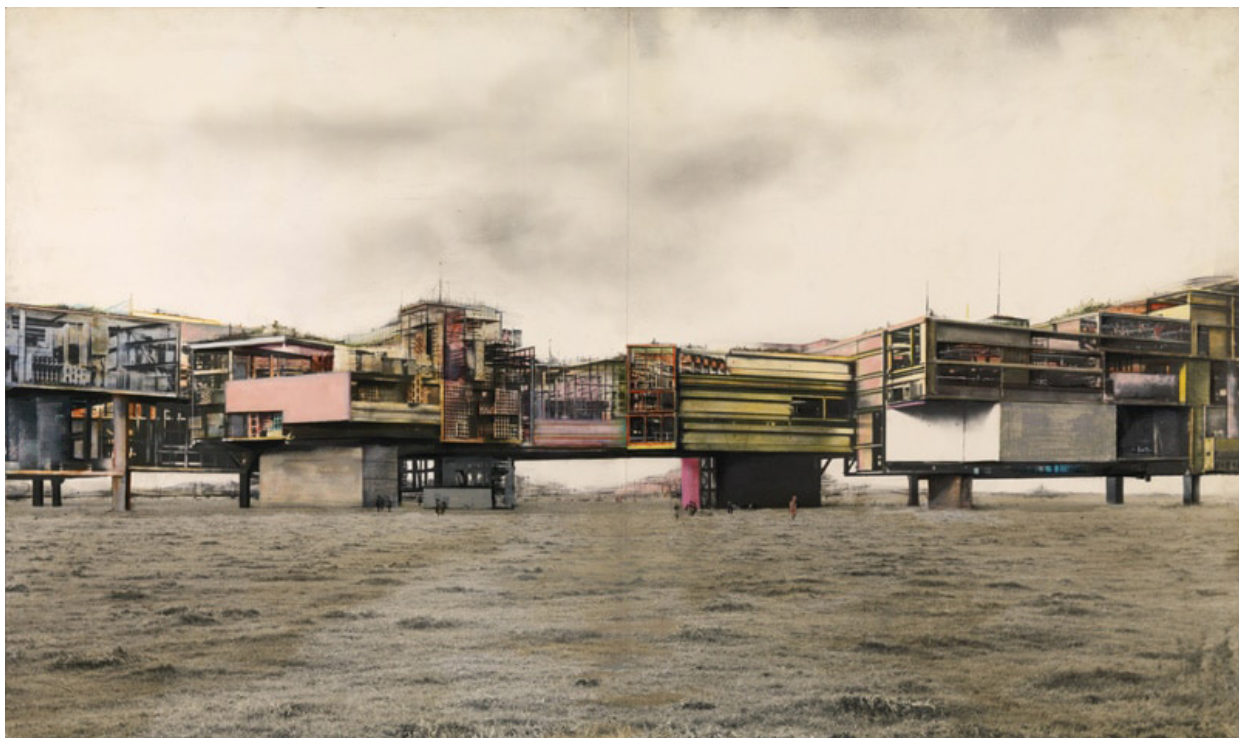
The zoning policies that were previously implemented with the intention of creating an ideal cityscape have now been shown to result in the formation of two distinct types of urban environments. However, it should be noted that one individual's perception of a utopia might be regarded as a dystopia by another. This suggests that fortified and exclusive areas may ultimately restrict the freedom of individual expression. To maintain a concise examination of this research, only the types of utopias/dystopias connected with industrial spaces will be considered. Given the theme of this year's examination, which is maritime industrial heritage, it is essential to focus on the utopias/dystopias that include it to ensure the research is relevant. Furthermore, this duality operates in pairs; the objective is not to eliminate one or the other, but to ascertain the proportion in which each must be present to maintain societal equilibrium.

6. Le Corbusier, 1973

7. Zimmermann, 2013, pp. 307–324

8. Tafuri, M., & La Penta, B. L., 1976

9. MacLeod, G., & Ward, K., 2002



Van Hilten, F. (2019, September 5). We leven allemaal in Constants New Babylon. Cultural Press. <https://cultureelpersbureau.nl/en/2016/05/we-live-all-constants-new-babylon/>

### fig. 5 | New Babylon, Constant Nieuwenhuys, 1959

The images demonstrate the architectural vision of Constant Nieuwenhuys utopia, as he himself stated: *“The project of New Babylon only intends to give the minimum conditions for a behavior that must remain as free as possible. Any restriction of the freedom of movement, any limitation with regard to the creation of mood and atmosphere, has to be avoided. Everything has to remain possible; all is to happen, the environment has to be created by the activity of life, and not inversely.”* (Constant, *The Decomposition of the Artist: Five Texts by Constant*, The Drawing Center, New York, 1999, a12). Do we all agree that what is depicted is perceived as utopia? Or perhaps, for someone, it could be a dystopia?

### iii. Methodology/ Process

As previously outlined, this research begins with a comprehensive examination of the various utopias and dystopias that exist within the specified area of interest. The principal method that will be employed is the identification of spatial dualities based on the archetypal dual of utopia/dystopia, with the main design tool being section drawings of the site. The identification is primarily based on a synthesis of existing literature and the collective analysis conducted during the P1 session with the entire group. The subsequent phase of the research process entails the creation of a matrix that delineates the specific spatial dualities and their defining characteristics. Subsequently, a more detailed examination of the specified site is conducted, in this case the former Van Eijk Shipyard area and the surrounding region. At this juncture, it is necessary to conduct archival, literature, and photographic research in order to ascertain the epistemological sections that occurred in

the area (forces leading to change), the temporality of these events, the rationale behind them, and the individuals involved. Furthermore, physical observation and photographic documentation of the area in its present state are essential. The anticipated outcomes are firstly a timeline of the changes, which will provide a framework for understanding the historical and societal context. However, most importantly, a series of sections will be created to illustrate the spatial dualities, such as massive-light, open-closed, water-no water, free-blocked, etc., that present the key theme of utopia/dystopia in relation to this area. These spatial characteristics will aid in creating a list of criteria for selecting section locations to illustrate the findings. Ideally, I aim to present a past-present comparison to demonstrate the transformation that has taken place.

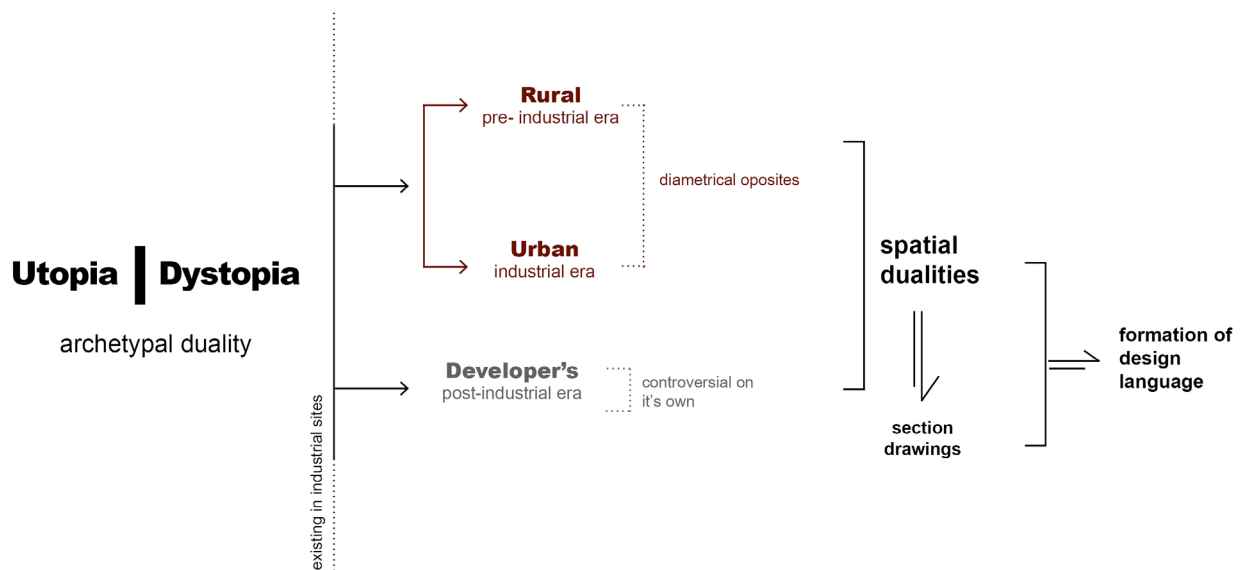


fig. 6 | Method diagram

In light of these observations and identifications, it would be beneficial to conduct a study on realized reuse of industrial heritage projects. Once more, employing the section drawings as the principal instrument, the dualities will be illustrated with a view to formulating a matrix of design languages. The case studies will be selected based on spatial characteristics that are similar to those of the area of intervention on Waterdriehoek. It is essential that the selected sites are situated in close proximity to the water and that they have previously been used for industrial purposes, with a particular focus on maritime activities, prior to their transformation. The location of the case studies preferably will be in Europe, although this may be subject to change depending on the examples found and their alignment with the established standards. Additionally, the realized projects will be undertaken by a firm that is part of the star architects' team, such as Herzog & de Meuron, who have extensive experience in heritage projects and a highly distinctive design language.

Following the matrix, timeline and sections, it is time to reflect on and conclude on the dualities that are beneficial, have a significant impact or have been lost, yet are crucial to revive. This will inform the formulation of an accurate and beneficial design strategy for the site and the society that it serves. The objective of this research is to ascertain the optimal proportion of utopian and dystopian elements that will facilitate the successful revitalization of the maritime heritage of the area.

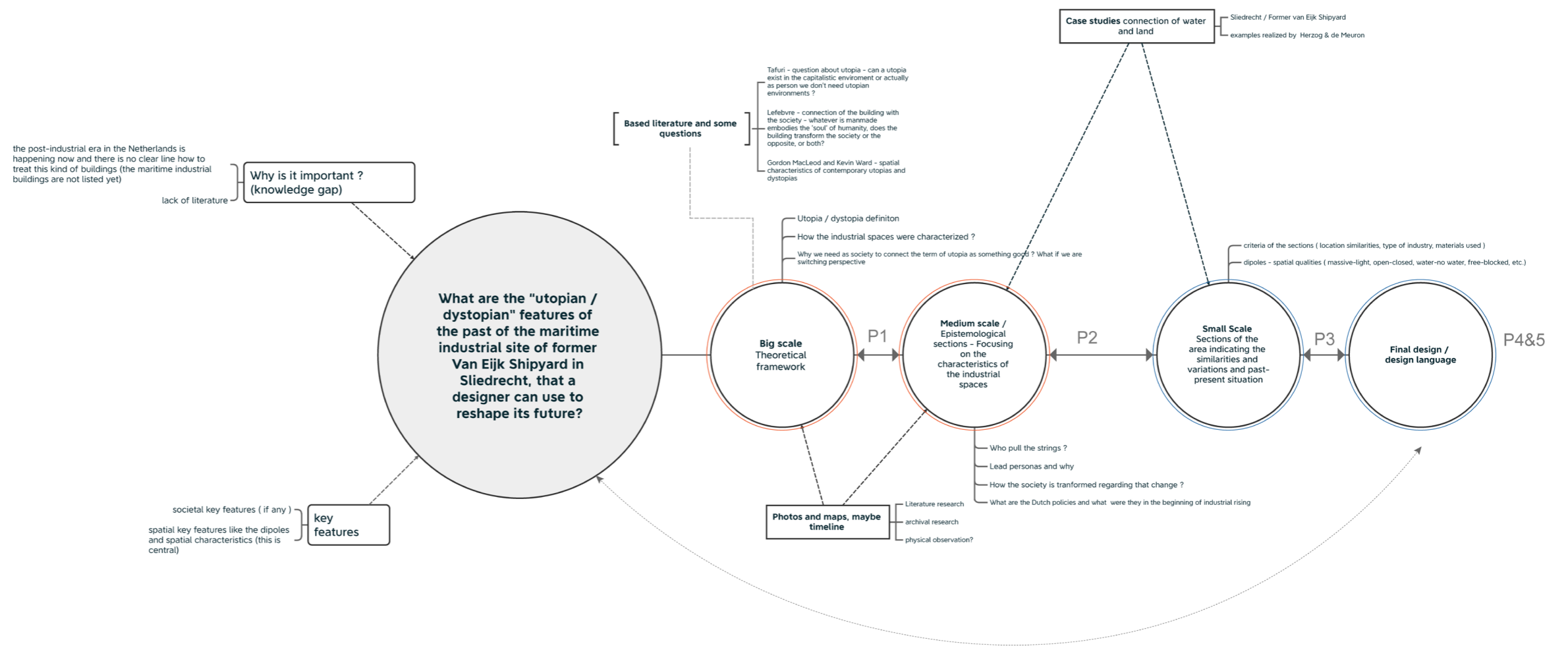


fig. 7 | Research structure timeline

## iv. Case studies

Site of interest

### Former Van Eijk Shipyard

Sliedrecht, the Netherlands, 1894-2014



© Gemeente Sliedrecht  
<https://historie-fotoarchiefsliedrecht.nl/Bestanden/SW-van-Eijk.jpg>

- Strong relation water- land
- In proximity with the urban tissue
- Used to be vibrant, now it is neglected (still operating but not in full vibrance)

Possible case studies

### Küppersmühle Museum Herzog & de Meuron

Duisburg, Germany, 1999



© Herzog & de Meuron  
<https://www.herzogdemeuron.com/projects/151-kuppersmuhle-museum-grothe-collection/>

- Strong relation water- land (position to the harbor)
- Former use: industrial warehouse with silos
- In proximity with the urban tissue
- Active landmark to the area

## The Tate Modern Project

Herzog & de Meuron

London, UK, 2016



© Herzog & de Meuron  
<https://www.herzogdemeuron.com/projects/263-the-tate-modern-project/>

- Strong relation water- land
- Former use:  
power station
- In proximity with the urban tissue
- Active landmark to the area

## Elbphilharmonie Hamburg

Herzog & de Meuron

Hamburg, Germany, 2016



© Herzog & de Meuron  
<https://www.herzogdemeuron.com/projects/230-elbphilharmonie-hamburg/>

- Strong relation water- land  
(position to the harbor)
- Former use:  
maritime warehouse
- In proximity with the urban tissue  
(in a gentrified area)
- Active landmark to the area

## v. Bibliography and literature review

### [big scale] About Utopia/ Dystopia

Le Corbusier. (1973). *The Athens Charter* (J. L. Sert, Ed.; A. Eardley, Trans.). Grossman Publishers. <https://www.scribd.com/doc/216944688/The-Athens-Charter>  
Aim: Define the spatial characteristics of utopian and dystopian spaces.

Lefebvre, H., & Nicholson-Smith, D. (2009). *The production of space* ([Nachdr.]). Blackwell.  
Question: Connection between buildings and society—does architecture embody human ‘soul,’ and does it influence society, or vice versa?

MacLeod, G., & Ward, K. (2002). Spaces of utopia and dystopia: Landscaping the contemporary city. *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography*, 84(3–4), 153–170. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0435-3684.2002.00121.x>  
Aim: Define the spatial characteristics of utopian and dystopian spaces.

Tafuri, M., & La Penta, B. L. (1976). *Architecture and utopia: Design and capitalist development*. MIT Press.  
Question: Can utopias exist within a capitalistic environment, or do individuals not require utopian settings?

Vogt, K. C. (2016). The post-industrial society: From utopia to ideology. *Work, Employment and Society*, 30(2), 366–376. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017015577911>

Zimmermann, C. (2013). *Industrial cities: history and future*. Campus Verlag. (Only specific chapters based on the theme of perceiving the industrial places as utopian or not)  
Aim: Define the spatial characteristics of utopian and dystopian spaces

## [medium & small scale] Focus on the Waterdriehoek and Sliedrecht

Hein, C. (2020). *Adaptive strategies for water heritage: Past, present and future*. Springer Open. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-00268-8>  
Aim: Explore Sliedrecht's maritime heritage, past and present.

Locher, J. L., Constant, & Haags Gemeentemuseum. (1974). *New Babylon*. [s.n.].  
Wigley, M. (1998). *Constant's New Babylon*. Google Books. [https://books.google.nl/books?id=L7P\\_IXPxt98C&pg=PA194&source=gbs\\_selected\\_pages&cad=1#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.nl/books?id=L7P_IXPxt98C&pg=PA194&source=gbs_selected_pages&cad=1#v=onepage&q&f=false)  
Aim: Gain insight into Dutch perspectives on utopia.

Stenvert, R., Rommes, R. N. J., & Nederlands Rijksdienst voor de Monumentenzorg. (2004). *Monumenten in Nederland. Zuid-Holland*. Rijksdienst voor de Monumentenzorg; Waanders.  
Aim: Identify key figures and monuments in Sliedrecht.

*Voorname herijking programma erfgoedlijnen*. (2024, June 18). Provincie Zuid-Holland. <https://www.zuid-holland.nl/politiek-bestuur/bestuur-zh/gedeputeerde-staten/besluiten/besluit/voornemen-herijking-programma-erfgoedlijnen>

Wagenaar, C. (2015). *Town planning in the Netherlands since 1800: Responses to enlightenment ideas and geopolitical realities* (2nd ed.). nai010 Publishers.  
Aim: Understand Dutch urban policy in relation to utopian and dystopian themes.

## Other means of research:

Nieuwe Instituut  
Aim: Archival research for maps and photos, requires site visit.

Municipalities archives  
Aim: Search for maps and photos relevant to Sliedrecht.

Sliedrecht. (2024b, April 30). *Monumenten*. Gemeente Sliedrecht. [https://www.sliedrecht.nl/Wonen\\_omgeving/Omgeving/Vergunningen\\_meldingen\\_en\\_ontheffingen/Bouwen\\_en\\_verbouwen/Monumenten:Zv-CyY8tqRTucQ7nz0IJOmA](https://www.sliedrecht.nl/Wonen_omgeving/Omgeving/Vergunningen_meldingen_en_ontheffingen/Bouwen_en_verbouwen/Monumenten:Zv-CyY8tqRTucQ7nz0IJOmA)  
Aim: Insights on the area of interest in Sliedrecht.

Archief. (n.d.). *Historie Sliedrecht*. <https://www.historie-sliedrecht.nl/archief>  
Aim: To find historical photos of the area of interest.

Historische Vereniging Sliedrecht. (2016, August 14). *Van Eijk scheepsbouw* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kRfyn4VGELs>  
Aim: To learn about the historical evolution of former Van Eijk shipyard in Sliedrecht.

Topotijdreis: 200 jaar topografische kaarten. (n.d.). Topotijdreis. <https://www.topotijdreis.nl/>  
Aim: Observe historical maps for insights on spatial changes in Sliedrecht.