

Graduation Reflection 2024 – 2025 “Revitalizing Maritime Heritage”

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1. What is the relation between your graduation project topic, your master track (A, U, BT, LA, MBE), and your master programme (MSc AUBS)?

My graduation proposes an adaptive reuse program for the former Nedstaal steel factory in Alblaserdam, The Netherlands. This complex used to produce high-quality steel in a closed cycle and was originally established as a second branch of the Kabel Factory in Delft. The steel of Nedstaal was first implemented for the electrification of the maritime industry but soon outgrew that demand and began supplying local and international maritime and industrial enterprises with various steel products. Therefore, the choice of this location directly aligns with the topic of my graduation studio “Revitalizing Maritime Heritage” where students work with former industrial maritime sites in heritage regions in The Netherlands. The proposal of an architectural adaptive reuse program directly relates to my master track – Architecture and my master’s program.

2. How did your research influence your design/recommendations and how did the design/recommendations influence your research?

The selected site – Nedstaal Fabriek is both the site for my architectural proposal and a research subject in a separate research paper, titled “The time shelter Nedstaal: personal narratives from Alblaserdam’s maritime industrial past”. From the very beginning of my graduation, I suspected that, given the size of this complex and economic significance for Alblaserdam and the region, the socio-cultural impact of the factory must have been evident. Based on this initial assumption and subsequent gathered

information, I constructed my research paper around the personal narratives of former Nedstaal workers and other members of the public. More specifically, I implemented the oral history method (in the form of six direct oral interviews) to collect and analyze the individually perceived maritime industrial values of the complex. This was done in hopes of highlighting those tangible and intangible heritage components, that would subsequently form a strong, socially significant and heritage sensitive basis for the conceptualization and detailing of a new adaptive reuse design. The interviews featured three former factory workers, the present property developer and two other members of the public, that grew up in Alblaserdam during the active years of the complex. The results of this research methodology directly influenced the urban and architectural proposal of my graduation. In particular, two main outcomes emerged. First, the oral history method highlighted the importance of atmosphere and community sense as those intangible values that former workers deemed foundational for their perception and experience of Nedstaal. These values were also actively fostered by the management which created a deeply developed sense of belonging and togetherness. Furthermore, the process of steel making, that took place in an organized, strict manner in the various factory buildings, was also heavily valued, both during the oral interviews and in the supporting literature. These intangible research results signaled to me the importance of careful curation of functions and zoning for the adaptive reuse process. Once Nedstaal was entirely dictated by the steel making process. The latter meant that different parts of the factory housed different functions, hence the atmosphere in them was different and somewhat distinct. Therefore, in the future design, the functions I selected are generally grouped in clusters, integrated within the former facilities and machineries that remained after the factory went bankrupt. These clusters can be roughly divided in 4 categories – startup campus of the regional maritime business, practical and theoretical educational campus for yacht building and other maritime industrial activity, category 3 industrial zone (packaging and storage of various industrial goods) and category 4 industrial zone (recycling center). Figure 1, page 3 illustrates them. The new functionality, although different, still predisposes for the formation of various zones. These also entail different atmospheres, thus respecting the heterogenous character of the original site.

In terms of tangible values, the direct oral interviews highlighted the importance of the Nedstaal objects. I use this term to refer to various physical components from the landscape, architecture and general spatial configuration of the complex: lifting cranes, the crane tracks, the machines and installations used for the steel production. As already established, the process of making was highly regarded as one of the most significant heritage values. Therefore, the narrators, featured in my research, seem to have valued the objects involved in that steel making process much more than the architectural and spatial setting in which the former took place. Something more – these objects became the tangible recipient and present-day representative of Nedstaal's socio-cultural legacy. As a result, the architectural design and landscape revival feature these objects and use them to denote the spaces of the new design, and to identify the site as a former steel production facility.

In terms of urban development, the large scale of the complex (with a ground floor area larger than 27 000 square meters) entails the need for its proper design as the future functionality designates the site as a business and public recreational zone. Inspired by the direct oral interviews, particularly that of Ayhan Osmanoglou, where he shared how to better orient himself in the vast landscape, he mentally started dividing it into different zones, I drafted a new plan where several axes, perpendicular to the waterfront, cut through the buildings (figure 2, page 4). Those axes, therefore, also compartmentalize the plot and enable its future users to commute through it and understand it.

Finally, the research allowed me to select a specific building from the complex for further architectural development. The interviews featured the annealing department factory as one of the most recognizable ones of the whole terrain (due to its proximity to the "Bridge over the North"). Since the largest part of the terrain, that used to be occupied by the smelter furnace, is now demolished and stands open, focusing on the annealing department became not only logical, but also necessary. The latter can be understood as the public face of Nedstaal – it represents the complex and it was also featured in almost every oral account and literature source I investigated.

At last, based on my research, both as a part of the research paper, via the interview with the current project developer for the site: Maron Rietveld

and also through additional literature, I concluded that, if the former Nedstaal terrain was to remain financially viable in the future, the new functionality has to ensure its economic feasibility. The plot is part of 4 industrial estates in the municipality of Alblasterdam, which in turn are part of a bigger network of maritime industrial zones in the Drechtsteden region. In the future, there will be a significant need for an innovative working environment, with appropriate space for practical education, research, development and prototyping spaces for companies and startups. The current grounds of Nedstaal are an appropriate location for such program and its built area provides the sufficient blueprint for it.

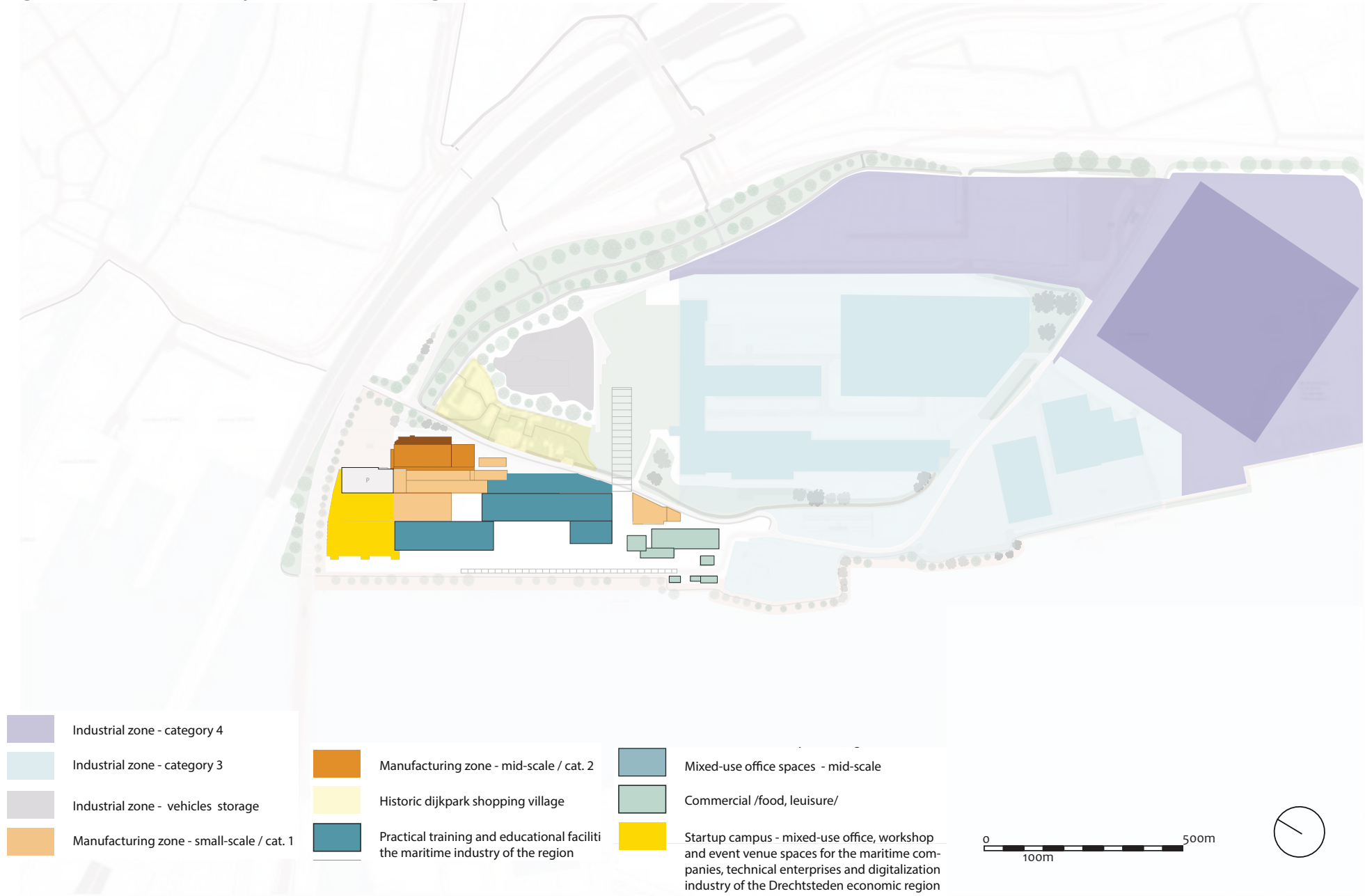
3. How do you assess the value of your way of working (your approach, your used methods, used methodology)?

My method of working is comprised of socially sensitive and culturally aware research and the resultant from it: architectural development, strongly based on that analysis. The oral history research enabled me to uncover tangible and intangible values that would have otherwise stayed hidden if I only relied on literature sources. The latter rarely featured any personal experiences or perceptions regarding Nedstaal. Given its size, impact and significance, understanding and analyzing the social dimensions and effects of the complex becomes a mandatory component for a successful adaptive reuse proposal. Understanding the value of the steelmaking, not only as a static, but also as dynamic, continuous process directly influenced my functional zoning and architectural approach. This is where the value of my method is hidden: through the direct oral interviews, I understood the importance of the lived human experience in memory formation and heritage value perception. As a result, I deem them as inextricable components of the revitalization of post-industrial landscape.

4. How do you assess the academic and societal value, scope and implication of your graduation project, including ethical aspects?

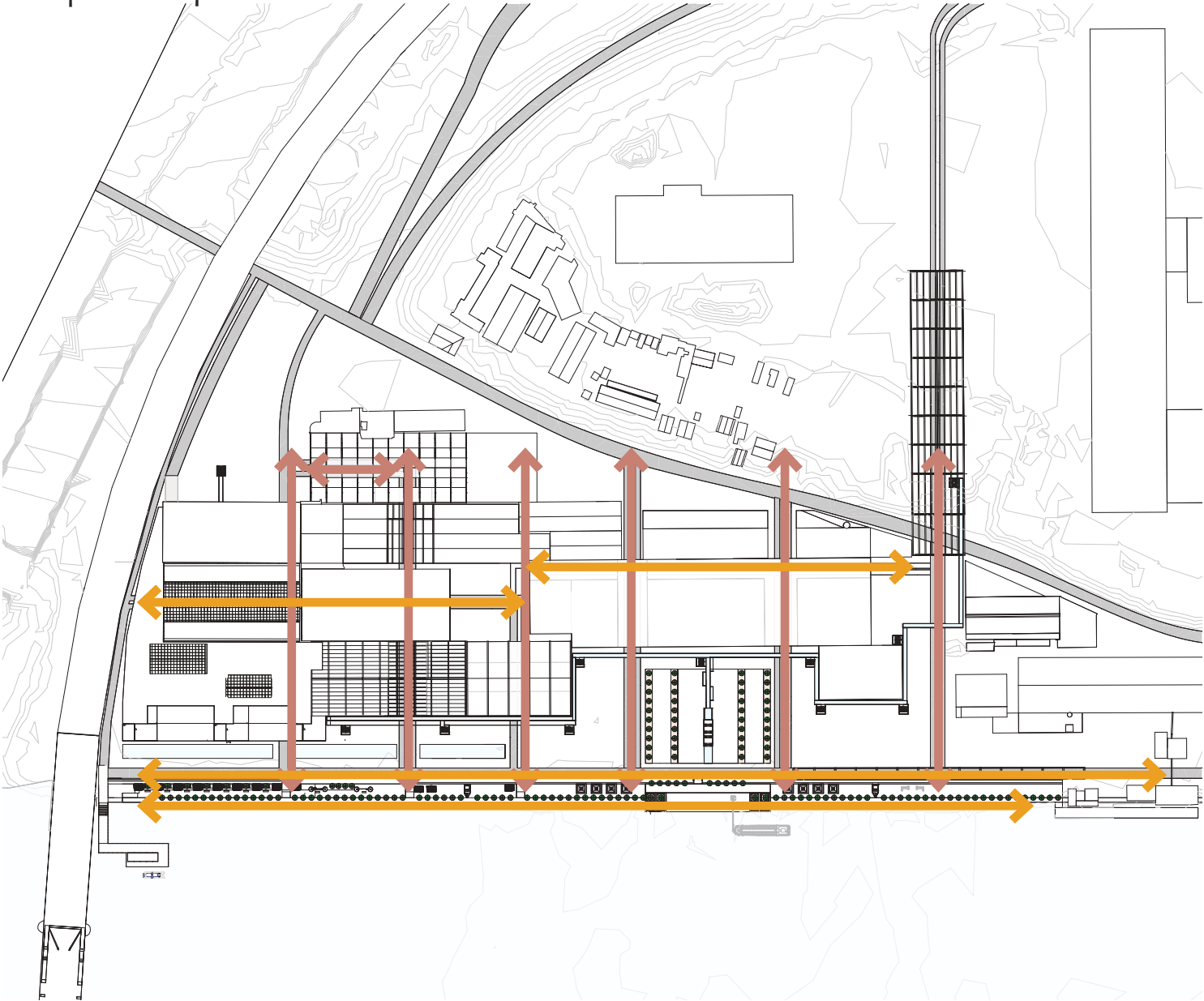
The societal value of my methodology and the architectural proposal emerged from it is based on the direct correlation between oral history research and the derivation of design proposal. Through the interview pro-

Figure 1: “De Kabel” | Function zoning

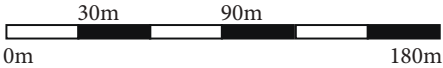


source: (Marinova, 2025)

Figure 2: “De Kabel” | Landscape Axes



source: (Marinova, 2025)



cess, supporting literature and archival documentation, it became clear that Nedstaal is not just a steel factory – it is among the main reasons for the present-day socio-economic and cultural fabric of Alblaserdam, and to a large extent the region. Therefore, the neglect of such sites is disappointing in the context of heritage revitalization as it omits their complex history and legacy. Working on Nedstaal brings a high societal value because it proposes a culturally sensitive, narrative informed methodology of redesigning and reviving formed industrial landscapes, properly equipping them for contemporary demands and future needs. the supporting it literature and archival documentation, it became clear that Nedstaal is not just a steel factory – it is among the main reasons for the present-day socio-economic and cultural dna of Alblaserdam, and to a large extent the region. Therefore, the neglect of such sites is disappointing in the context oh heritage revitalization as it omits their complex history and legacy. Working on Nedstaal brings a high societal value because it proposes a culturally sensitive, narrative informed methodology of redesigning and reviving formed industrial landscapes, properly equipping them for the contemporary demands and future needs.

5. How do you assess the value of the transferability of your project results?

Since the very beginning of my graduation process, I purposefully restricted myself to working as realistically – and to some extent practically- as possible. My goal was to simulate a real-life design process, as if I was in an actual architectural studio, and explore what are the possibilities for culturally sensitive adaptive reuse when real-life constrains are applied. Therefore, my proposed program is based on a realistic functional research and future needs analysis for the site. I took into strict consideration the existing zoning plan, future demands, municipality development framework and the requirements of the local industrial representatives in order to ensure economically feasible adaptive reuse proposal. At the same time, I implemented that new functional program within the historically important components, that emerged as part of my research methodology. My results, therefore, are transferable to other post-industrial heritage sites where contemporary industrial interest has to find a manner of coex-

isting with the historically and culturally significant former factories.

We also expect you to develop 2 reflection question yourself which relate to the content of your work.

How do I ensure the coherency of the whole site, considering its vast sizes?

Is there a room for more boldness in the architectural proposal that would still me economically feasible, as opposed to my practical approach?