

A Threshold for Discovery

New architecture for touristic journeys

Marko Lojanica

Graduation Report | Public Building Graduation Studio | mentors: Ir. Stefan Witteman, dr. Stefano Corbo | date: 25.6.2026.

Research statement

Ter Apel is the largest village in the municipality of Westerwolde, situated in the province of Groningen, the Netherlands. It is located in the far south of the Westerwolde region and lies on the Ruiten Aa river, close to the border with Germany. It represents a unique village of architectural and medieval heritage and protected ecological reserves. At the east of this village lies the Monastery of Ter Apel, founded in 1464. As the only remaining rural monastery in north-western Europe and a 'top '100' monuments¹ in the Netherlands approved by UNESCO², it stands as a singular survivor of the Reformation in Groningen. The monastery remains in a recognizable, original state, nestled within the Kloosterenclave—a 200-hectare forest that serves as both a spiritual and recreational area. Today, it functions as a registered museum and a botanical sanctuary, housing over 200 plant species.

Another village's unique architectural landmark is the Standerdmolen (post mill) and its single rotary wooden trunk. This structure represents the oldest and most original form of windmill construction in the region. Complementing the mill on the south lies a school the "Schoolgebouw" on Oudeweg, built in 1924. Designed by G. Westerhout for the Rijks Hogere Burger School, it is one of Groningen's earliest examples of Amsterdam School architecture. Similarly, the Ol Graitje hand-powered cable car is the first of its kind in the Netherlands and connects the banks of the Ruiten Aa water canal, serving as a vital link for long-distance hikers. Walking and hiking are popular activities in the municipality of Westerwolde as a whole, but are particularly prominent in Ter Apel. Specifically, in the natural landscape on the east side of the village that is equally exceptional. The Monastery Woods, dating back to 800 AD, are home to massive, centuries-old oaks and beeches and multiple rare animal species. As a protected nature zone registered within the national network of reserves, it is the only site in the Netherlands where the rare "stone bramble" (steenbraam) grows wild, in addition to the other 970 identified plant species in the forest. (Roelevink, 2018) Furthermore, the area is a sanctuary for the Middle-Spotted Woodpecker, a species found nowhere else in Groningen region.

Additionally to the historical and natural landmarks, Ter Apel maintains a characteristic cultural life expressed through a range of distinctive annual events. These include the "Choral Concert", traditional "Carbid Shooting", and the "De Maten Annual Market", a large-scale event featuring approximately 120 market stalls alongside old-timer tractors and live music. The village also hosts Carnival ("Steekje Los"), renamed Kloosterwieke, the largest carnival in northern Netherlands, characterized by an large scale parade and tent celebrations. Furthermore, Ter Apel

¹ <https://www.visitholland.nl/index.php/history/689-top-100-heritage-sites-in-the-netherlands>

² https://gropedia.com/page/top_100_dutch_heritage_sites

is home to the "Medieval Ter Apel" festival, regarded as the most authentic medieval festival in the Netherlands, featuring 14th-century re-enactors, historical battles, and period markets.

Despite the remarkable concentration of cultural, architectural, and natural assets, Ter Apel remains relatively underrepresented in broader touristic narratives and regional promotion. Many of its landmarks, while historically significant and ecologically rare, are not fully integrated into a cohesive identity or celebrated to their full potential. This disconnect between the village's richness and its visibility raises questions about how Ter Apel's identity is perceived, communicated, and experienced by future visitors and local residents alike.

Generally speaking, tourism plays an important role in the economy of the Netherlands, accounting for approximately 4.0% of the national GDP, according to the Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek (CBS). In 2024, a total of 51.7 million guests stayed at hotels, campsites, and holiday parks in the Netherlands. Out of this number, more than 20 million were international visitors. Almost 30% of these international tourists came from Germany, followed by Belgium and United Kingdom. (Statistics Netherlands [CBS], 2025) Within this context, the province of Groningen recorded the largest increase in overnight tourist stays of any Dutch province in 2024. A total of 900 thousand guests stayed there, an increase of 11 percent compared to 2023. In 2024, around 21 000 people visited Ter Apel, primarily to see the Monastery Museum, to camp, and to attend the village's annual events. (Museum Klooster Ter Apel, 2024) However, the majority of these visitors stayed for less than a day and did not spend the night.

The entire current accommodation offer in Ter Apel is divided between only 12 locations, that include eight B&B's, three camp sites, and only one hotel. The Moekesgat camping area and the Kloosterhoeve campground allow a stay of up to around 340 guests between them, the Boschhuis hotel next to the monastery can accommodate a maximum of 16 guests, while each of the B&B's are available for only 2 guests. This makes the village's total bed capacity to approximately 400, which is relatively small, especially considering that most of this capacity is concentrated in the camping sector. The resulting lack of sufficient visitor infrastructure presents a major obstacle to the perception of tourism in Ter Apel. Furthermore, the imbalance among accommodation types directly affects the variety of visitors the village can attract. Campsites primarily serve groups and families who travel with specific equipment, the hotel mainly hosts business-related guests, and B&Bs are mostly oriented toward couples. As a result, other visitor groups, as well as solo travelers, lack appropriate accommodation options in Ter Apel.

Moreover, the visitor economy of the region is constrained by a prevailing "short-stay" dynamic, with visits typically limited to a single night. (Ginder, 2025) Ter Apel lacks the hospitality infrastructure needed to encourage tourists to extend their stay beyond a day trip, further limiting the village's ability to convert its assets into appropriate tourism locations.

Furthermore, Ter Apel is often misrepresented in wider media narratives because coverage is dominated by stories about the refugee reception center and associated problems. In Dutch and international reporting, the name "Ter Apel" has become almost synonymous with overcrowding, safety concerns, fines against the asylum agency, and systemic asylum-processing issues, rather than the Ter Apel's community and the village itself. (DutchNews, 2024) News about the reception center frequently highlights overcapacity, legal actions against the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA), and warnings from government inspectors about unacceptable risks of poor conditions, with the Inspectorate for Justice and Security calling the situation "severe" and highlighting prolonged stays well beyond the intended registration period. (NL Times, 2025) In one report the center was described as "very serious" with rising numbers and overcrowded conditions that inspectors say should be resolved urgently. (DutchNews, 2024) Another account noted legal disputes tied to exceeding the agreed capacity limit. (Inspectie

Justitie en Veiligheid, 2024) These stories, while important for asylum policy and rights, indirectly define the public perception of the village. By continually associating “Ter Apel” mainly with COA difficulties, the media narrative overshadows Ter Apel's unique features and keeps misrepresenting the village's identity.

Additionally, the accessibility conditions of transport to Ter Apel from the other parts of the region or the Netherlands are very limited. The village can only be reached by public transport with a bus, and it doesn't have train connection. Four bus lines pass through Ter Apel: line 42, making a direct connection with Emmen, line 72 (going between Emmen and Winschoten), and lines 73 and 173 (Emmen–Stadskanaal). According to Qbuzz timetables³, lines 42, 72, and 73 operate only once per hour, although on weekdays, line 73 runs only at night, while lines 42 and 72 aren't available after six o'clock. The line 72, which provides the only public transport connection between Ter Apel and Bourtange, has a limiting capacity of only eight people, additionally contributing to the village's weak visibility within regional tourism network. Differently to the other routes, line 173 runs only three times per day, offering a very restricted service. A direct bus travel from Groningen city to Ter Apel does not exist. Travelers must first transfer in Stadskanaal, Emmen, or Winschoten before continuing to Ter Apel, resulting in relatively long travel times. A trip from Emmen or Stadskanaal takes about 25 minutes, but reaching Ter Apel from Groningen requires an additional 45 to 60 minutes due to transfer and waiting times. These conditions significantly reduce the attractiveness and perception of Ter Apel as a convenient destination for day-trippers and tourists, limiting spontaneous visits and further isolating the village.

Consequently, the misperception of Ter Apel's identity is not due to a lack of valuable assets, but to infrastructural, and narrative constraints. Insufficient and unbalanced accommodation, poor transport accessibility, short-stay tourism patterns, disregarded landmarks, and a media image massively dominated by the refugee reception center all restrict the village's touristic potential. These factors prevent Ter Apel from forming and promoting a unique and captivating destination identity. Addressing these issues is crucial for revitalising the village, developing its visitor economy, and allowing its cultural, historical, and natural features to be appropriately recognized and experienced.

This project explores how architecture can promote this unique identity. Specifically, the influence of architecture in facilitating the cultural tourism that promotes the rich touristic landmarks and events of Ter Apel in order to revitalize and re-identify it as a prominent tourist destination in Westervolde and as a touristic hotspot of the Groningen province. The study investigates how a public building can synthesize and catalyze the regional identity of Ter Apel that honors and celebrates its rich history and exceptional natural landscape by promoting cultural tourism. A type of tourism activity, that can be defined by the visitor's essential motivation to learn, discover, experience and consume the tangible and intangible cultural attractions/products in a tourism destination. The research further questions how touristic walking and sightseeing can be understood as a ritual, specifically how movements guided by architecture can subsequently form different special atmospheres and produce immersive touristic ambiances.

³ <https://busgd.nl/>

Research Aim

This project aims to explore how public architecture can actively promote cultural tourism and reframe a place identity as a distinctive tourism destination. It inspects a touristic journey as an activity initialized, captivated, and guided by architecture. It explores how architectural design can synthesize segregated cultural, historical, and natural assets into a cohesive spatial narrative. The research further aims to change and reframe the misperceived image of Ter Apel, consequently assigning it a new identity, amplifying its visibility, stimulating new visits, and extending visitor stays.

Moreover, the project should initially propose a plan of a network of architectural interventions that target specific landmarks and features in Ter Apel and compile them into a connected system. In this sense, the interventions would aim to amplify the landmarks that already exist, in a way comparable to urban acupuncture. Manuel de Solà-Morales, in *The Matter of Things*, describes urban acupuncture as the manipulation of the power that is held within the city skin. In the similar manner, the proposed network would recognize the potential of landmarks in Ter Apel and approach the sites with attentive and cautious intention to their richness, both the existing richness and more importantly, the potential richness. Secondly, the designed public building will be positioned as the main node of the network, serving as an initiator and a starting point of the touristic journey to Ter Apel and the region.

On the broader scale, by analyzing the potential specific features of a destination, organizing them into a conceivable whole, and developing a public building in a form of a tourist hub, this project proposes a framework of how architecture can contribute to a touristic image and potential of a destination. In that sense, the framework has a potential to further be applied in different contexts and environments other than Ter Apel in order to achieve similar effects.

Research questions

Main research question:

How can public architecture promote cultural tourism, by accommodating experiences, rituals, and cultural spatialities that stimulate and enhance the perception of Ter Apel's identity?

Possible sub-questions:

1. How can the architecture of a public building serve as a protective and celebratory catalyst that honors the local culture and history through a designed spatial narrative, while dictating the beginning and progression of a tourist's journey?
2. In what ways can architectural interventions act as "sensory lenses," filtering, focusing and connecting specific fragmented landmarks into a single, cohesive network?
3. Can the choreography of movement through a building indicate and interpret historical pilgrimage routes, effectively preserving intangible heritage through physical action?
4. Can cultural tourism be manifested as an activity defined by the visitor's motivation to learn, discover and experience the tangible and intangible cultural attractions in a tourism destination?

Methodology

This project utilizes a mix of qualitative methods based on the research by design approach, the systematic selection, review, and comparison of literature, case studies, and spatial mapping. The review of literature includes sources such as: academic publications, journal articles, books, essays, and recent reports, with a focus on works that mainly address how architecture preserves cultural features, how public buildings accommodate tourism or how spaces can influence movement. Additionally, mapping is used as an analytical tool to synthesize the findings and compare relations on a local and regional scale. In parallel, relevant architectural and urban case studies are selected based on comparable scale, function, and spatial challenges, allowing strategies and design principles to be critically compared across different projects. The case studies are analyzed through drawings and diagrams in order to identify possible conveyable spatial concepts. Furthermore, within the research by design framework, theory and practice, as well as analysis and imagination, are treated as inseparable components of architectural inquiry, positioning design itself as a form of research. Rather than focusing solely on describing existing conditions, research is understood as a projective and speculative act that supports the exploration of unknown spatial possibilities and unexpected design directions. Ultimately, this study anticipates research and design as symbiotic and iterative, and uses sketching, diagramming, and modeling as active tools to test, develop, and refine ideas throughout the process.

Results

Form-finding process

In order to create an architectural proposal and contribute to the current and future contexts of Ter Apel and the broader region, this project begins with an attempt to respond and coincide with the area's rural surroundings, both spatially and historically. This response is primarily achieved through two concepts that draw from the existing landscape morphology and resonate with the historical architectural identity of the region. Firstly, the form of the building is inspired by the characteristic agricultural plots of the area, translating their linear pattern into a composition of shifted, merged, and elongated volumes. These volumes keep the scale of the surrounding fields, allowing the building to sit within the landscape, while breaking down its overall mass into a segmented composition. Secondly, the design references the sloped roof typology of traditional Groningen farmhouses, a salient and recognizable feature of the province's rural architecture. In reinterpreting this feature, on a larger scale, the project responds and connects to present and past contexts. Moreover, beyond its symbolic role, the sloped roof also holds key purposes for the project's construction principles, program organization, future flexibility, and climate design.

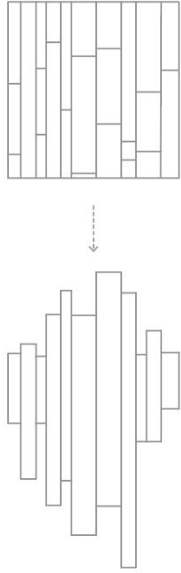
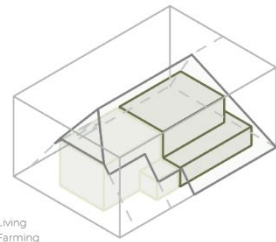
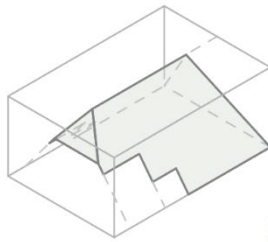
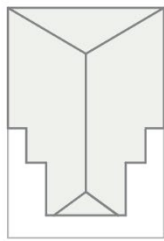
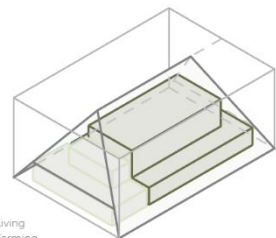
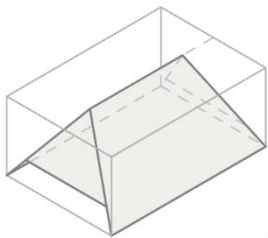
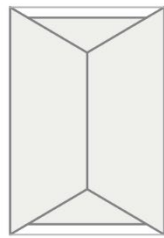


Figure 2 Landscape pattern diagram



Living
Farming



Living
Farming

Figure 1 Farm roof diagram

Programme

The project merges and combines a variety of different functions into a hybridized space that houses: a train station, restaurant, hotel, offices, temporary exhibition space, the journey room, an event hall, two cinema/theatre rooms, toilets, shops, local businesses, bike service, and bike parking. The functions are organized on the ground and first level around the central circulation space of the station, according to different degrees of publicness. Functions such as the hotel rooms or the hotel lobby are located farther away from the central circulation space, while the event hall and the temporary exhibition are positioned directly adjacent to it. In this way, the level of publicness gradually fades from the central axis outward. In addition to this sequencing, the dedicated functions that require access to natural light and ventilation, such as the hotel, offices, local business, shops, the restaurant, and the temporary exhibition space, are positioned on the building outskirts, with the contact to the facade.

The hotel comprises of a lobby space, luggage storage, a shared toilet with the restaurant and 10 separate hotel rooms. The rooms have a direct connection to the restaurant, and are of mixed capacity, the smallest having 20m², the medium 25m², and the large 35m², in order to accommodate a wide range of tourist groups. Four two-person rooms are located at the ground floor, forming a connection to the outside with small separate gardens, while the other six units, three single and two three-person rooms, are located at the first floor.

The event hall is placed within the building volume without contact to the facade and surrounded by circulation hallways from three sides in order to allow large quantities of people to enter and exit it. Additionally, it is placed next to the theater and cinema rooms which allows them to be used independently and in unison depending on the occasion. The bigger cinema room can accommodate 100 people, while the capacity of the smaller one is 24. Both spaces can be used as small theater scenes, as there are storage spaces around the halls. Both rooms have a separate lobby and wardrobe spaces, which allows them to function independently in a scenario of double screening, or maintenance.

The most unique function of the project is the journey room, which presents a permanent exhibition space pointing out an exhibiting of all the curated tangible heritage landmarks in Ter Apel. It consists of a ground floor and first floor spaces on either side of the main hall that are connected with a bridge on the first floor. The bridge marks the main exhibition space and it stretches above the main interior plaza, exposing the exhibition to the bypassing tourists and visitors underneath.

The journey room is divided into 3 segments. The introduction segment where the general history and development of Ter Apel are displayed, followed by the main bridge exhibition showing all of the village's landmarks. The third and final segment, located at the north of the building, is displaying and elaborating in detail the two of the most prominent sites in Ter Apel, The Monastery and The Woods. With this sequencing, the tourists arriving to the station, are presented with an introduction, and initial overview of landmarks. Through the integration of this space and the visual exposure of exhibition elements within circulation paths, the building reenvision initial touristic transit as an immersive introduction to the region. In this sense, it facilitates a ritual of arrival, orientation, and discovery.

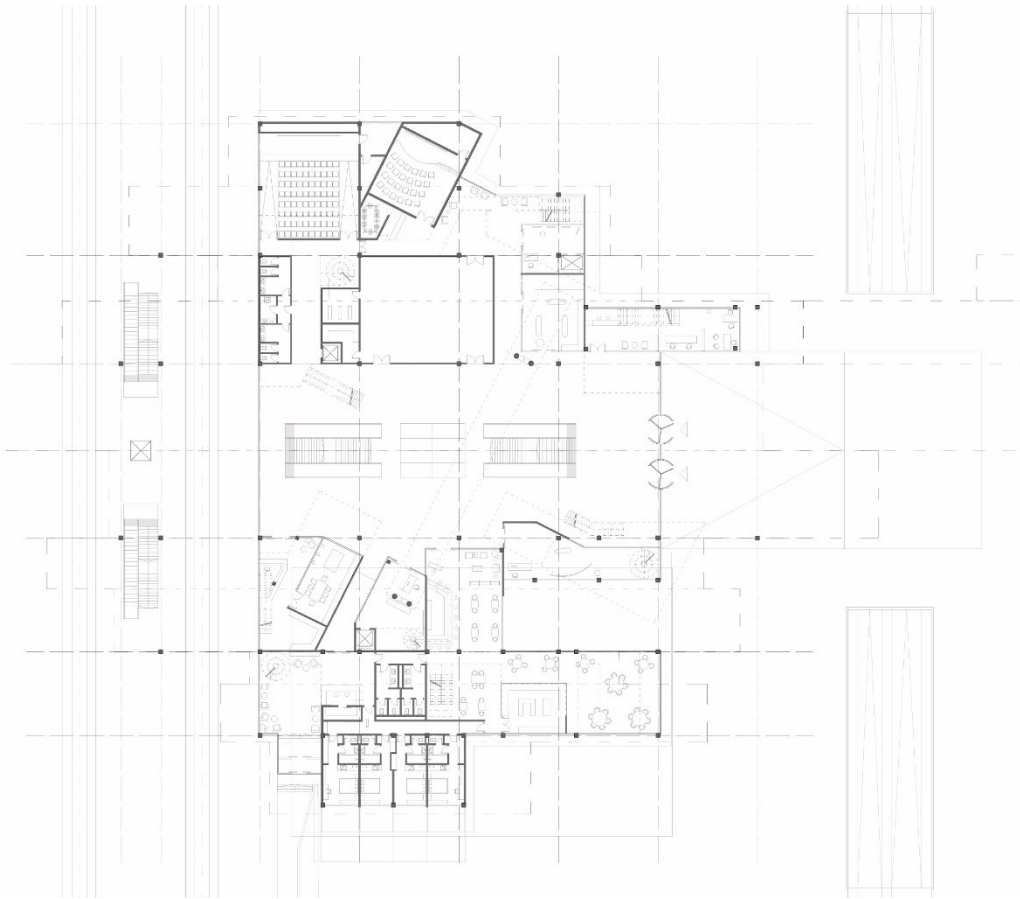


Figure 3 Ground floor

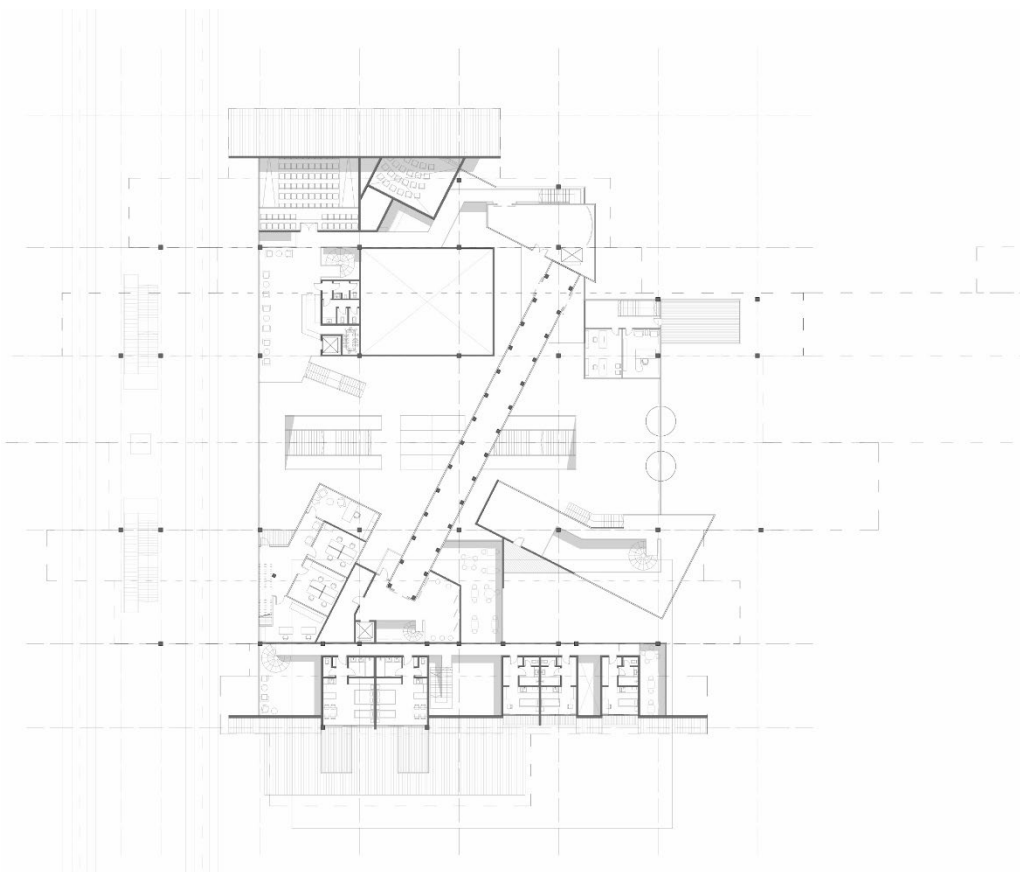


Figure 4 First floor

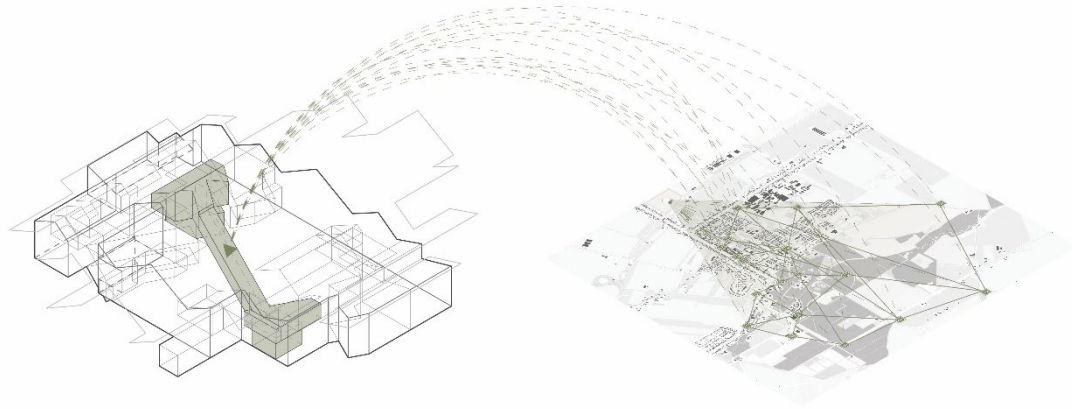


Figure 5 Journey room position

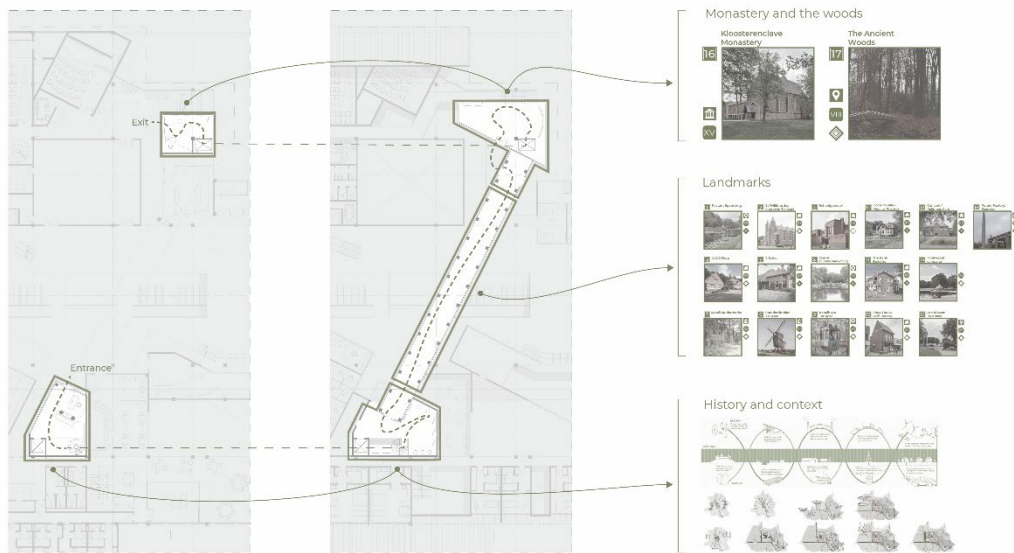


Figure 6 Journey room segments

Circulation

The project's circulation can be observed as 3 interconnected wholes: the underground circulation and access, ground and first floor horizontal circulation, and the scattered vertical circulation.

The central hall of the station presents the main circulation space of the building. It synthesizes all the other flows within the station or serves as a starting point for them. Four escalators connect the interior plaza with the underground level, two towards the west and two towards the east. Two mirrored staircases are also located within the space of the central hall: one leading to the first floor of the temporary exhibition, orientated towards the south-east of the building, and the other to the lounge area for the cinema rooms on the first floor pointing the north-west direction. On both sides of the central hall, there are two additional parallel side hallways per side of the building. The horizontal circulation from the main hall to the other functions as well as the

side hallways is provided through four narrow triple height passages. On the south side, the side hallways connect the hotel rooms with the hotel lobby and the restaurant, while on the north side, the side hallway connects the two cinemas and the event hall on the ground floor, and provides access to the first floor gallery of the big cinema room.

There are three elevators inside the building, one on each side of the journey room, and one for the cinema lounge space on the first floor, while the only external elevator is connecting the train station platforms with the underground passage. Furthermore, vertical circulation is also scattered around the side hallways in the form of spiral staircases forming small triple height voids around them that pass the light from the roof windows to the center of the building illuminating the surrounding hallways and functions.

Accessibility

The building is envisioned to be accessible primarily in two ways: through the ground floor and through the underground level. On the ground floor, there are two pedestrian entrances—one on the east side and one on the south side of the building, while the underground level is accessed from three separate points. Stretching along the main axis of the building, the underground level is connected with the train platforms on the west, the main interior plaza in the center, and the underground drop-off area on the east of the building.

The pedestrian entrance on the east side is the main central entrance for the building. This entrance marks the primary pedestrian connection with the plaza in front of the station and is composed of two revolving doors, allowing for efficient movement of people while maintaining a separation between outside and inside. This entrance plaza is partly covered by the overhanging station roof and presents a semi-open space that can be used to host a weekly Ter Apel market, or other events like gatherings or concerts. The second pedestrian entrance is located on the south façade and is a semi-public entrance envisioned primarily for hotel guests using the access path to the canal.

The underground level accommodates arrivals and departures by vehicle. The underground passage for cars, bikes, and buses is located beneath the external main entrance plaza and features a one-directional lane for buses and cars, including a split lane for a bus stop, as well as a two-way bike lane. When arriving by train, on the other hand, the building is accessed from the west side using the underground connection, allowing passengers to bypass the tracks. By making the connection to the train station underground, the building's facade on the west is completely closed, maintaining only a visual connection between the station and the interior while blocking the dust, debris, and noise from the trains.

Construction

The main concept behind the construction of the station is based on creating smaller volumes under a large roof, independent of the roof structure. In this way, the building remains flexible for potential future programme changes, because the roof is a separate element from the volumes.

The roof structure consists of GLT columns with a side width of 40 cm and a sloped, double GLT beam sy stem forming portal frames which span varies between approximately 8m, at the area

above the hotel and 17.5 meters above the main hall. These portals have a height of 2.5 meters, with each beam measuring 60 cm in height. On top of this primary structure, GLT ribs span in the opposite, perpendicular direction at intervals of 2 meters. These ribs have a height of 50 cm and span across 10 meters. Located beneath this roof structure are the different constructions for the other volumes with a first floor with the height of 5 meters, consisting of 30×30 cm GLT columns and beams supporting 20 cm thick CLT panels.

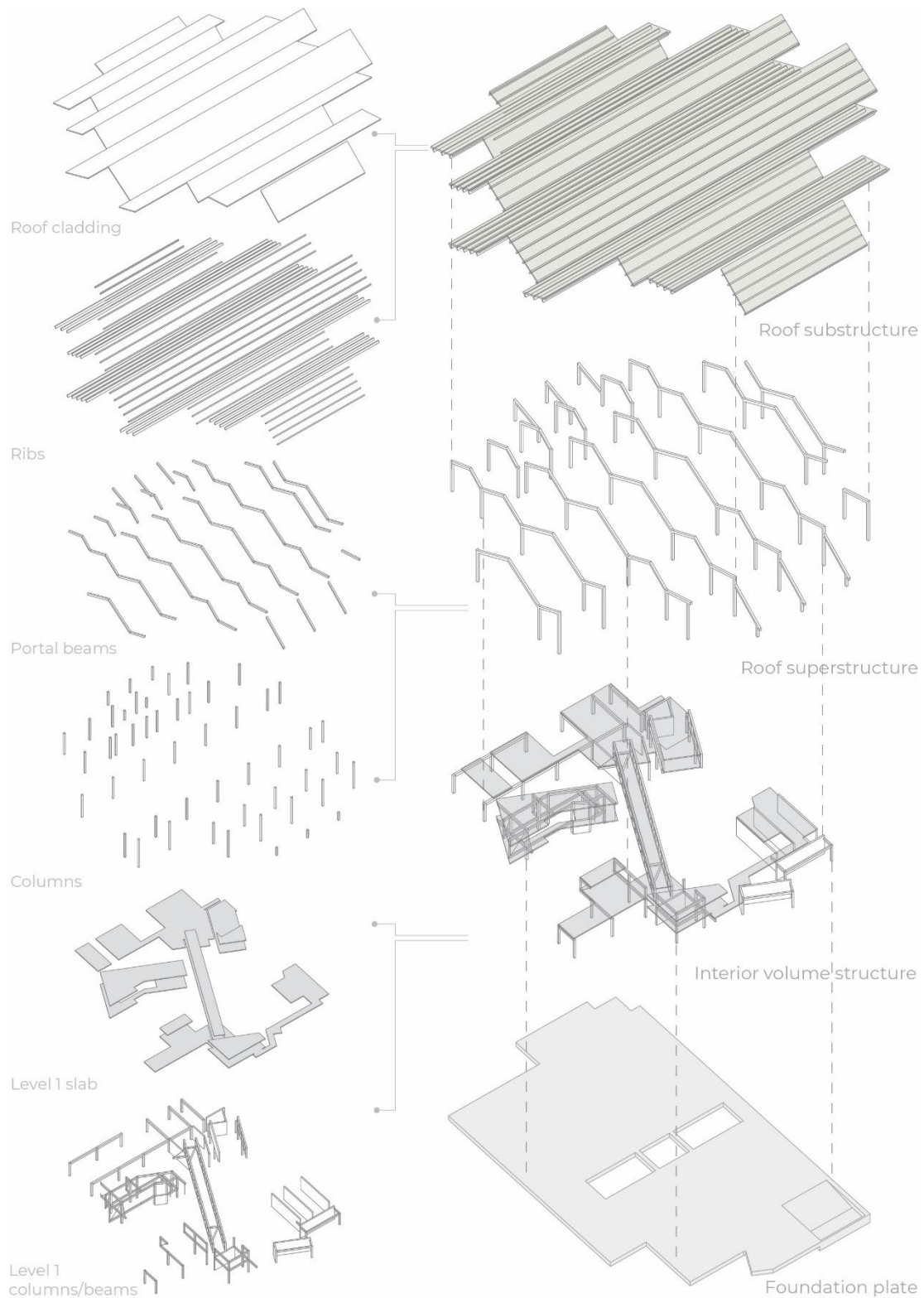


Figure 7 Structure diagram

Climate control / Performance / Energy efficiency

The climate design of the station focuses on ventilation, insolation, zone heating, water management and power generation. The main hall together with the two surrounding smaller circulation halls connect the east and west facades and act as corridors for natural ventilation. The main hall is also separated from the functions on the north and south, which forms a different non-heated zone, significantly decreasing the volume load for heating.

The roof of the building also provides multiple integrated functions in regards to climate. The sides of the roof that are sloped toward the south at 30 degrees are covered with 1800 solar panels in total, in order to maximize the yearly energy yield. This configuration of panels bring the solar irradiance average to 3.2 kWh/m² per day, which equals to around to 354,000 kWh of electricity yearly. The roof also acts as a water collection area, channeling water to toilet locations within the building. Additionally, the roof cantilevers from the facade of the station outwards in order to shade the building, and prevent overheating in the summer periods.

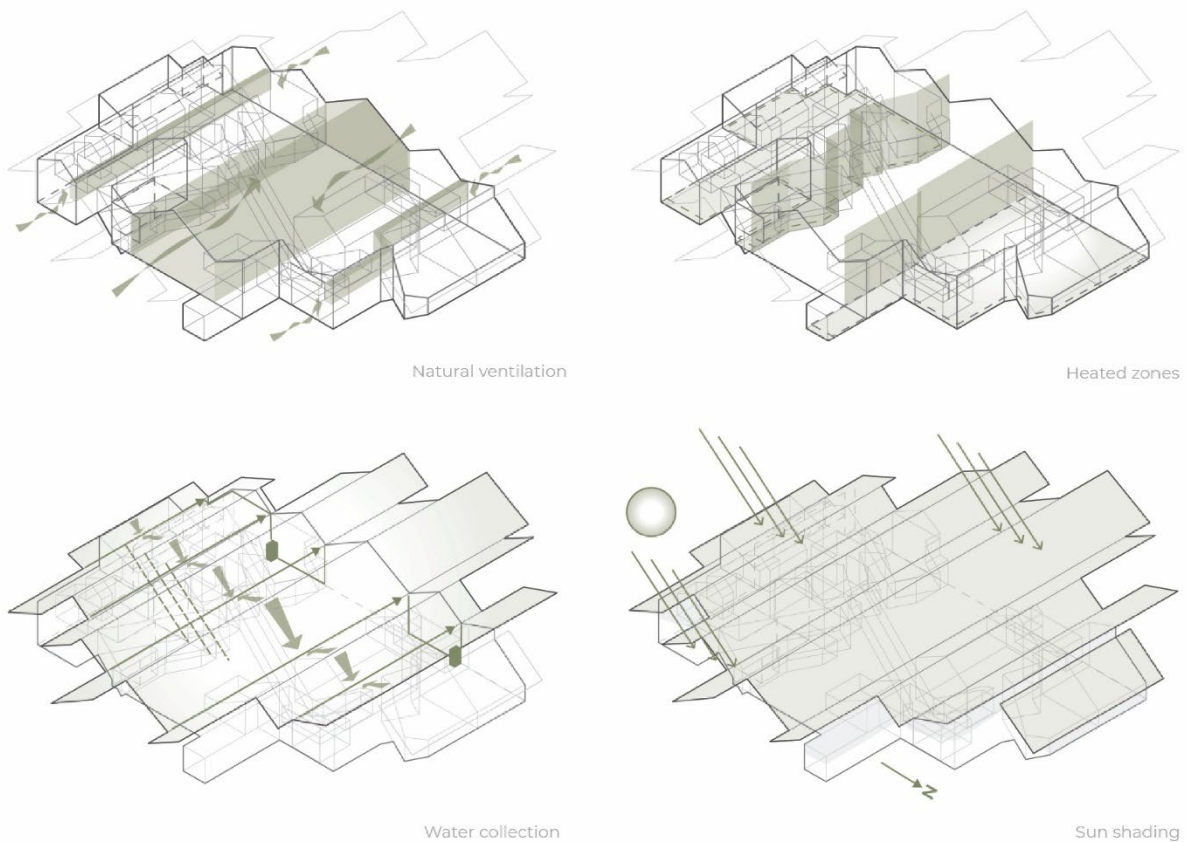


Figure 8 Sustainability Diagrams

Impact

Conclusion

Ultimately, this project's main goal was to scrutinize and investigate how public architecture can promote cultural tourism by shaping experiences, rituals, and spatial narratives that enhance the perception of place identity. In response to the identified challenges in Ter Apel, primarily its fragmented identity, limited tourism infrastructure, and misrepresentation in broader narratives, the final design proposes a hybrid public building functioning as both a transport hub and a cultural instigator. The project demonstrates that architecture can have an influence and act an active agent in reframing and amplifying local identity.

The design primarily addresses the main research question by choreographing movement as a spatial and experiential sequence. The central hall, conceived as an interior plaza, becomes the starting point of a curated journey through Ter Apel's cultural and natural assets. Through the integration of the "journey room" and the visual exposure of exhibition elements within circulation paths, the building reenvisioning initial touristic transit as an immersive introduction to the region. In this sense, architecture facilitates a ritual of arrival, orientation, and discovery, aligning with the concept of tourism as a culturally motivated experience.

The project also responds to the posed sub-questions by functioning simultaneously as a protective and celebratory structure. The architectural appearance, that is derived from agricultural plot patterns and regional farm roof typologies, references the building within its rural context while reinterpreting it at an infrastructural scale. This establishes a dialogue between past and present, reinforcing local identity without resorting to literal direct historicism. Furthermore, the network strategy of smaller interventions across Ter Apel positions the building as a central node, acting as a "sensory lens" that connects and intensifies dispersed landmarks.

Technically, the project meets its ambitions through a flexible structural system and climate-responsive design. The separation between the roof and internal volumes ensures adaptability over time, while passive ventilation, solar integration, and zoning strategies support the efficient energy performance of the building.

Ultimately, the project concludes that public architecture can meaningfully contribute to reshaping tourism dynamics and local identity. By synthesizing culture, civic values, history, and infrastructure, the design offers a model for transforming a damaged identity and short-stay visitation into longer, more engaged encounters. In doing so, it repositions Ter Apel not as a misrepresented location, consequently peripheral and marginalized, but as a coherent and resourceful destination within the regional and national context.

Implications

The implications of this project extend beyond the specific context of Ter Apel, offering broader insights into the role of architecture within the tourism sector and the shaping of place identity. At its core, the project argues that architecture can operate as a strategic tool in redefining how destinations are perceived, experienced, and inhabited. Rather than relying solely on marketing or policy-driven approaches, the design demonstrates how spatial interventions can actively construct narratives and influence visitor behavior.

As the subtitle states "New architecture for touristic journeys", it's suggesting a shift toward a more integrative and interdisciplinary role. Architecture and architects are positioned not only as designers of buildings, and buildings, but as curators of experiences and mediators between cultural heritage, infrastructure, and contemporary use. The project highlights the potential of hybrid typologies, such as the combination of a train station, cultural hub, and hospitality program, to address multiple challenges simultaneously. This approach is particularly relevant in smaller or underrepresented contexts, where limited resources require multifunctional and adaptable solutions.

The concept of a network of interventions, inspired by urban acupuncture, also presents a valuable framework. Rather than large-scale, singular developments, targeted and context-sensitive interventions can collectively produce significant spatial and perceptual impact. This strategy encourages a more incremental approach to development, respecting existing cultural and ecological systems amplifying their visibility and accessibility.

From a tourism pattern perspective, the project emphasizes the importance of extending visitor engagement beyond short stays. By integrating accommodation, cultural programming, and mobility infrastructure within a single architectural system, the design creates conditions that encourage longer visits and more direct interaction with the destination. This has economic implications, as extended stays typically result in increased local spending and more stable tourism patterns.

However, the project also raises critical considerations. The introduction of new infrastructure and increased tourism must be carefully balanced with the preservation of local character and ecological sensitivity. Overexposure or overdevelopment could undermine the very qualities that make places like Ter Apel unique. Therefore, future applications of this framework can potentially incorporate participatory processes, ensuring that local communities remain active stakeholders in shaping development.

Reflection

The design and research process of this project was inherently iterative, reflecting the principles of the research-by-design methodology. Throughout the project, analysis and design were not treated as separate phases but as interconnected processes that continuously informed one another. This approach allowed for a gradual refinement of both the conceptual framework and the architectural proposal, while also accommodating unexpected insights and shifts in direction.

One of the key strengths of the process was the use of mapping and diagramming as analytical tools. By visualizing relationships between landmarks, movement patterns, and infrastructural

constraints, it became possible to understand Ter Apel not as a collection of isolated elements but as a system. These mappings directly informed the concept of the intervention network and the positioning of the main building as a central node. Similarly, case study analysis provided valuable references for understanding how architecture can guide movement, frame experiences, and engage with cultural narratives.

The design development relied heavily on iterative massing, composing, and drawing. These tools enabled the exploration of spatial sequences, volumetric compositions, and structural strategies in parallel. In particular, the translation of landscape patterns into architectural form required multiple iterations to balance abstraction with contextual readability. The decision to separate the roof structure from the internal volumes also emerged through this iterative testing.

However, the speculative nature of the project means that some aspects economic feasibility, and long-term impact, remain hypothetical. While the design proposes a convincing spatial narrative, its effectiveness in reshaping tourism patterns would require further validation through stakeholder engagement and real-world implications.

In retrospect, on a methodological level, the project embraced and valued a little uncertainty within the design process. Rather than seeking definitive answers from the outset, the research-by-design approach allowed questions to evolve alongside the project. This openness allowed for more creative and exploratory results, but it also required attentive incremental evaluation to keep direction and focus. Consequently, the project proved that architectural design can be used as a means of knowledge generation as well as a method of inquiry. The tools and techniques employed, that include: mapping, diagramming, drawing, modeling, and narrative construction, proved effective in addressing complex spatial and cultural questions, influencing the design problem, the design intention, and the final design outcome.

Literature:

- De Sola Morales, M. (2008) *A Matter of Things*, Rotterdam, NAi Publishers. p11.
- DutchNews. (2024, August 2). Council heads back to court over refugee centre overcrowding. <https://www.dutchnews.nl/2024/08/council-heads-back-to-court-over-refugee-centre-overcrowding/>
- DutchNews. (2024, June 19). Safety situation at Ter Apel refugee centre is “very serious”. <https://www.dutchnews.nl/2024/06/safety-situation-at-ter-apel-refugee-centre-is-very-serious>
- Ginder. (2025, February). ONDERZOEK VRIJETIJDSECONOMIE PROVINCIE GRONINGEN: In opdracht van de provincie Groningen en de tien gemeenten die de provincie rijk is. https://www.provinciegroningen.nl/fileadmin/user_upload/Documenten/Beleid_en_documenten/Documentenzoeker/Werken_en_ondernemen/Toerisme/Rapportage_Onderzoek_Vrijetijdseconomie_provincie_Groningen_februari_2025_WCAG.pdf
- Hartman, S., Parra, C., De Roo, G. (2019). Framing strategic storytelling in the context of transition management to stimulate tourism destination development. *Tourism Management*, 75, pp. 90-98. DOI: 10.1016/j.tourman.2019.04.014.
- Herneoja, A., Mäkinen, M., Rantala, O., Hakkarainen, M. (2014). Inscrutable nature-based spatial experience. *Proceedings of the 6th Annual Architectural Research Symposium, Finland 2014*.
- Inspectie Justitie en Veiligheid. (2024, June 19). Zeer ernstige veiligheidssituatie AZC Ter Apel voor bewoners en medewerkers. <https://www.inspectiejenv.nl/actueel/nieuws/2024/06/19/zeer-ernstige-veiligheidssituatie-azc-ter-apel-voor-bewoners-en-medewerkers>
- Museum Klooster Ter Apel. (2024). *Beleidsplan 2024–2028*. <https://kloosterterapel.nl/website/wpcontent/uploads/2024/03/MuseumKloosterTerApel-Beleidsplan-2024-2028.pdf>
- NL Times. (2025, January 15). Inspectorate says the situation at asylum seekers centre in Ter Apel is still unsafe. <https://nltimes.nl/2025/01/15/inspectorate-says-situation-asylum-seekers-center-ter-apel-still-unsafe>
- Roelevink, B. H. (2018). *De flora van Westerwolde: Het voorkomen en de verspreiding van planten binnen de ecologische hoofdstructuur van Westerwolde, FLORON*.
- Statistics Netherlands (CBS). (2025, March 6). Over 50 million holiday guests in 2024. <https://www.cbs.nl/en-gb/news/2025/10/over-50-million-holiday-guests-in-2024>
- UNWTO. (2017). *Tourism and culture*. Accessed 21 December 2026 from <https://www.unwto.org/tourism-and-culture>.
- Wielenga, B, Hartman, S. & Heslinga, J.H. (2022) “Architourism in nature areas: the Bilbao-effect in the bush?”. In: Novelli, M., Cheer, G.M, Dolezal, C., Jones, A. & Milano, C. (Eds.) *Handbook of Niche Tourism*. (pp.25-36). Cheltenham: E