

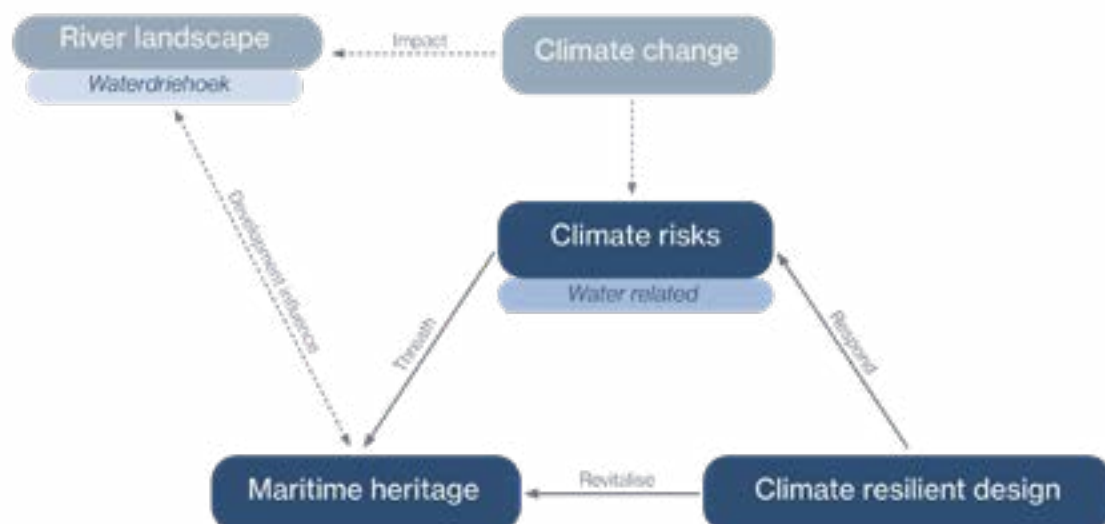
Reflection on graduation project

Roos Boerma

This graduation project was developed within the Revitalising Maritime Heritage studio, which focuses on the connection between land and water and the transformation of maritime heritage in the Waterdriehoek region. In this area, the relationship between land and water is undeniably strong and deeply rooted in its history. The economic activity in the region has always been closely linked to the water, shaping its development over centuries. This connection is visible in the maritime heritage that now asks to be reactivated with a new function. While doing so, the historical value of the architecture and its original functions cannot be ignored. The challenge lies in how to transform these sites while respecting and carefully selecting which historical elements to retain or reinterpret.

As part of the Heritage Studios, I conducted a value assessment to support and justify the decisions made in my design. The project not only considers the building itself, but also the surrounding landscape, which has shaped and been shaped by the region's history. This relationship between landscape and built form required an integrated design approach – central to the MSc AUBS programme. The disciplines of landscape, urbanism, architecture, and technology are all interwoven in this project. Because my master track is Architecture, the architectural aspect was the primary focus, especially given the limited time for the project.

The project site is located on a floodplain along the edge of the Dutch Delta, making the land–water relationship highly present. This theme has always fascinated me. The evolution of the Dutch landscape and river systems has played a major role in shaping the country's architecture. That is why my research focused on how this development unfolded in the Waterdriehoek and how people historically dealt with the threat of water – not as a purely negative force, but as one that can also be harnessed to shape resilient and meaningful places.



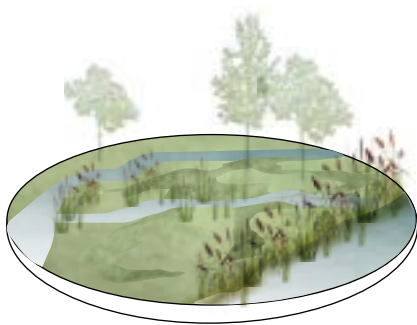
The research revealed the strength of the local, integrated approach: over time, people adapted both the landscape and architecture to the constant presence of water. This provided key insights into what strategies should be considered when designing in water-threatened areas. These findings directly influenced my design. In the masterplan, flood protection is integrated into urban form — streets are elevated, doubling as flood barriers. Water can be stored and released in green spaces, preserving the river's dynamic character. Houses along the floodplain's edge are built on stilts. In larger buildings, ground floors accommodate less critical functions.

Transforming the historic shipyard building proved more complex due to its existing structure. Here, interior functions are raised by half a meter, and all new additions are built at a higher level. The selected new function — a spa and swimming facility — embraces the building's water-related past. Materials are chosen for water resilience, and the design invites users to reconnect with the landscape and the river, reinforcing the heritage value. This approach helps reintroduce a sense of place and history, allowing visitors to experience Sliedrecht's heritage in a renewed way.

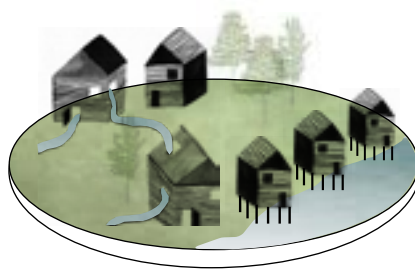
SPACE FOR WATER

RESILIENT BUILDINGS

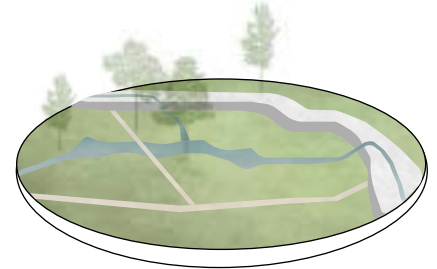
STREETSCAPE



- bringing back Gantel
- soft embankments
- blue green strips
- respecting floodplain character



- room for river through buildings
- houses on poles
- water resistant base with light construction



- elevating main roads
- water drainage in roads to green strips
- limiting hard surfaces

Research outcomes for design (own image)

The methods used during research included literature review, archival studies, and historical map analysis. Initially, I planned to focus mainly on maps, but this proved difficult to link directly to the architectural outcomes. I therefore shifted towards literature — particularly historical texts — which describe how people used to cope with the water threat. This was supported by historical maps and landscape development studies linked to maritime industry growth. Archival images provided visual context. I found the research process fascinating, though also somewhat frustrating due to the constraints of how big the research could be and time limits. In this way the research had to remain relatively broad, while I would have liked to go deeper, especially to better understand the connection between landscape evolution and architecture. It was also difficult to find very specific historical data for this area. I suspect archives hold much more than I was able to explore in the available time.

The academic value of this project lies in its integrative approach. All disciplines are connected and inform one another. The design is based on specific research, encouraging an iterative process between analysis and design. The topic — flood risk and water adaptation — is increasingly relevant due to climate change. This has made me more aware of the importance of water in future architectural thinking. The project also touches on the issue of vacant heritage buildings along rivers. These buildings are at risk, and this raises questions about preservation and adaptive reuse. Socially, the project is relevant not only because it addresses safety and property protection, but also because historic buildings carry emotional and cultural significance for many people.

During the design process, I greatly benefited from the prior research I had conducted. Up until now, there hadn't really been much time during my studies to combine in-depth research with design work, so starting a project this way felt like a new and refreshing approach. I really enjoyed it, especially because doing research is something I naturally like. However, I sometimes found it challenging to consistently maintain a clear link between the research and the design. While designing, it's easy to drift into your own creative process and gradually lose sight of the research. At times, I had to steer myself back — reconnecting with the research and asking myself what I truly wanted to achieve with the design. This helped me remain critical and prevented me from drifting too far off track, although that is not always easy to do.

It was also sometimes difficult to stay motivated over the course of an entire year. Although the topic continued to fascinate me and I was eager to explore it fully, working on a single project for such a long time could occasionally feel like a grind — especially because, in the end, it was mostly up to me to keep myself going. Weekly meetings with all the supervisors helped a lot, providing a sense of structure and accountability, even if that meant sometimes being pushed forward or needing to take a few steps back. It was also really helpful to have your fellow students who were going through the same process — supporting and motivating each other along the way and to not give up.

The results of my project hopefully provide a strong foundation for future students in this studio. The challenges seen in the Waterdriehoek are not limited to this area; similar questions arise across the Netherlands and beyond. I hope my findings will help others either go deeper into the topic or explore it on a broader scale. For me, it was a very valuable learning experience, a fascinating topic, and above all, it gave me a lot of freedom to explore everything I wanted. A great project to conclude my studies with!