The (Re)valuation of Landscape through Architecture

III. Site Choice and Analysis

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0. Introduction

This site choice and analysis booklet is part of the explorelab graduation project dealing with the (re)valuation of landscape through architecture. After shaping the transition from the research in Norway to the Netherlands by an elaboration on the Dutch way of living in part II., a design site had to be chosen as a logical part of the complete project. The process involving this choice and analysis is divided in parts and described as chronological as possible, but please note that this document is only a representation of the process, in practice it is far more integral and implicit.
1. Site Choice

After it was decided upon to choose a site within the Netherlands in order to strive for a (re)valuation of the Dutch landscape, a more precise physical location had to be chosen. As, in general, valuation of the surrounding landscape is weaker in urban areas, the most urban area of the Netherlands: The Randstad is zoomed in upon. karres+brands introduces the Seven New Netherlands with an accompanying new administrative system of seven new regions, each with its own character and its own power based on natural conditions and economic relations (karres+brands, 2016). The Randstad is named Deltastad, which defines this area as an urban area (stad) that deals with water connecting to the sea (delta). The original and current name Randstad describes the cities Amsterdam, Den Haag, Rotterdam, Utrecht and all inbetween lying cities as one metropolitan ring. The centre of this ring is the Groene Hart or green heart which is kept as unurbanised as possible. The opportunity of this area is big potential of (re)valuation of a typical Dutch cultural landscape: the polder. Citizens of the Randstad are often closer to this landscape than they think they are, and the strong bike tradition that characterises the Netherlands strengthens this potential.

While zooming in on this green heart, a few interesting locations appeared. One was situated just above Zoetermeer and showed a collection of two polder types which were clearly divided by a dike. Apart from the fact that this area was within biking distance from for example Den Haag en Leiden, it was also within biking distance of the beach, which made an even bigger array of landscape types accessible to visitors.
2. Explorations

2.1 Regional Development Plans

After visiting the area and experiencing its spatial and sensory qualities in real life, national, regional, and local planning documents were consulted. This quote is a good summary of the collection of documents that were consulted:

*The landscape of Zoeterwoude has large cultural historical values and can be considered as one of the best preserved Dutch low peat areas. The unity of ribbon development, peat meadows, and reclamation polder with their typical parcelling is retained in many places and has not been affected by land consolidation or typical city edge clutter.*

(Adviesburea RBOI, 2008, p. 15)

And while the well preserved ribbon-shaped villages like Weipoort and Gelderswoude with the open well-preserved polders in between are celebrated, the dike that divides the two polder types is not clearly indicated as possible route with places to stay. The idea of providing new connections to the area from the west, crossing the Noord Aa are present, but are not elaborated.

The routing in the area is based on the historical structure. Since waterways historically not only shaped the land in order to make it usable, the also provided the traffic structure. Other ways of transportation were mainly by foot or bike, which is still visible in the importance of the historical *Kerkpaden* that were used for villagers to go to church. In this area it is quite clear that cars were a late addition to this structure. The road in the typical ribbon-shaped village Weipoort is a dead-end road and is just wide enough for one car. Today, waterways in this area function as leisure structure. The inaccessibility of the design site shows how intact the historical structure is, which gives the area a certain sense of a hidden gem, inaccessible but interesting.

Another topic that is touched upon in several documents is the role of tourism. Recently, a parking lot right next to the highway exit has been constructed accompanied by a café/restaurant. Its goal is to provide day visitors a place to start their walk or bike ride from, without them littering their cars throughout the area. Moreover, the rise of the retired babyboomers is clearly indicated as a pressuring factor on this area: A bigger number of people is looking for day recreation in their relatively close surrounding for a bigger number of days a year. The Zoeterwoude area is a perfect fit.

The municipality of Zoeterwoude is currently working on a new vision for the area, which might include plans for more qualitative stops in a cycle and walk structure that is connected better.
2.2 Physical Explorations

The second physical exploration of the area that was done was executed with a certain goal. After research on polder landscapes and what characterises them it appeared that there is usually a big contrast between the (ribbon-shaped) villages and the open polder meadows. However, there are some exceptions in the shape of pestbosjes or geriefbosjes, small groups of trees that were respectively used for dumping sick animals and producing wood for a variety of (farm) uses. With this in mind an exploration by bike and foot was undertaken through the earlier chosen area. From a far, a cluster of trees was spotted on a dike, so the exploration was carried on by foot, climbing several fences and making a way through herds of sheep and cows. Since it was winter or early spring and there were no leaves on the three big trees that were landmarking the spot, from a certain distance a silhouette started to appear behind the trees. Upon closer inspection it was concluded it clearly was a watermill ruin.

The next exploration focussed on the analysis of the routes towards and from this ruin. Also, in the meantime, looking at historical maps had shown there used to be three mills in total, two working together in a so called ‘molengang’, of which the upper one (bovenmolen) was still there as ruin. The lower mill (ondermolen) was demolished since it was not necessary anymore as an electricity driven mill in the upper one did the job.
3. Site Analysis

3.1 Historical Maps and Pictures

On the Beeldbank Cultureel Erfgoed website historical pictures and maps of the area could be found. As the map below shows, two mills used to work together to pump the water out of the droogmakerij (reclaimed land). The size of the water wheel limited the vertical distance water could travel through a mill, that is the reason mills were often placed in so called molengangen (row of mills) to make sure lower lying lands were kept dry.

The historical pictures show how the mills were not just solitary objects in the open landscape, they formed a well defined and sheltered place on the dike accompanied by sheds, barns and different types of trees and shrubs. Although the mills were very functional, they also were a home to a family that spent their everyday life there.
6. Gelderswoudsche Bovenmolen (Upper Mill)

7. Gelderswoudsche Ondermolen (Lower Mill)
3.2 Mapping routes

A photographic analysis was done to map the experience of the routes towards and from the mill ruin as node in a leisure structure, as well as the qualities of that location as a place on the dike. Moreover, the views from the ruin itself were explored.
3.3 Route A
3.4 Route B
3.5 Route C
3.6 Route D
3.7 Place E

Mill place as landmark

Mill as a place to stay
3.8 Place F

Bump on dike

Brick foundation still present
4. Conclusion

4.1 Layering

A few conclusions can be made from this historical and photographic analysis.

1. The dike is a central element in the landscape that shows its layering in mostly two ways:
   a. the route perpendicular to the dike it shows the height difference that is very strong in experience (see 4.2)
   b. parallel to the dike it shows the difference in structure of both landscape types (see 4.3)

2. The historical mill locations and ruins are already uncovering part of the history and shaping of the landscape. The potential of these locations is large.

3. Water is the structuring element of this landscape, all developments and its arguments can be lead back to the role and power of water.
4.2 Perpendicular to Dike
4.3 Parallel to Dike
## References

### Literature

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### Images

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