

Un(der)told voices on the waterfront, heard once more.
Highlighting historical workers' communities of Dutch industrial waterfronts
Research Plan | Ruben Bernard Pieter Bremer | 4482972 | 03.11.23



Fig.1 A riveter, part of the historical workers community of the Kloos Industrial Waterfront. Image: D.Boele (1968)

Table of contents

	Title
	Abstract
1.	Introduction
2.	Problem statement
3.	Question
4.	Theoretical framewrok
5.	Methodology
6.	Conclusion
7.	References
	Appendix I: Research Diagram
	Appendix II: Glossary

“Architecture is the printing press which gives a history to the state of society of all ages.”

LADY MORGAN

Abstract

This research plan contains the intended approach of my graduation thesis of my Master of Architecture at the TU Delft. It outlines the subject, problem statement, research questions, and relevance of said research. The methodology and research process are provided and structured in four steps. A conclusion to the research plan gives a summary and future predictions towards the research. Key theoretical references and sources are indicated, as well as a research diagram.

1. Introduction

“Steel and water bend for one another. The bow wave and the expansion, a waltz in three quarters. Was the young riveter at the warf – 30 cents an hour, 10 hours a day – thinking of his girl, creation closeby? His muscle lives in the belly of the ship. Her name etched in steel.”



Fig.2 Poem by Monica Boschman (2020), originally in Dutch, about a young riveter and the shipwarfs. (By: Author, 2023)

A poem written by Monica Boschman (2020), etched on a steel pedestal along the dike in Alblasserdam, serves as an example of the many stories of industrial workers' communities within the Waterdriehoek, which is a unique area within The Netherlands. It contains the 'Drecht cities'¹, the nature of the Bieschbosch, the polder and large industrial sites and shipwarfs, all connected by the Lek and Noord river. This has created a unique and economically prosperous area within the Netherlands throughout its history. (RCE, 2023).

The Waterdriehoek also contains the industrial waterfront landscape typology. Though not unique to the Netherlands, this landscape is typical for the Waterdriehoek, and are listed as European Industrial Heritage (ERIH, 2023). The industrial waterfronts are part of Dutch industrial and cultural heritage, as they represent the 'Iron Century' (A.van der Zee (2023), a period of industrial expansion within the Netherlands. Dutch Industrial waterfronts tend to create a sense of pride among locals, who tend to feel connected to these sites, as concluded by Arie den Boer (2020). Industrial waterfronts also contain many historical narratives of industrials, products and accomplishments, but most importantly of the historical workers' communities that facilitated these works (, with their offspring often still living nearby). These industrial workers' communities have their own narratives, both positive and negative (J.Korteweg, 2023), though all are connected to the industrial waterfront landscape type.

¹ The cities are commercial hubs surrounding the Lek and Noord rivers, containing the word '-drecht' (Sliedrecht, Papendrecht, Dordrecht, Zwijndrecht)

2. Problem statement

The industrial and cultural Heritage (and thus the narratives of historical industrial communities) of the Dutch industrial waterfronts are under threat². This is due to industrial works being outsourced (S.Tulug OK, 2011, M.J.Mol, 2005) leading to the abandonment and subsequent redevelopment of these sites, This threat might lead to a loss of industrial and cultural heritage within this landscape type.



Fig.3 Nedstaal Alblasterdam, declared bankrupt in 2014 and abandoned, open for redevelopment. (Geschiedenis van Zuid-Holland.nl)

The redevelopment of abandoned industrial waterfronts can bring both opportunities and threats towards the heritage of these sites. Redevelopment during a housing crisis however, can lead to careless design approaches and land use, as the need for creating more dwellings can supersede other needs such as heritage preservation (H.Heynen, 2015, J.Heslop, E.Ormerod, 2019). This can lead to the permanent loss of a site's heritage, including the narratives of historical workers' communities.



Fig.4 Kloos & Zn. Terrain in Alblasterdam, around 1950. Notice the large industrial halls, cranes, etc. Image: D.Boele (1968)

An example of redeveloping an abandoned industrial waterfront that is leading to the loss of cultural heritage - including the narratives of historical workers communities - , is the Mercon Kloos project in Alblasterdam. Located on the waterfront along the West Kinderdijk at the edge of Alblasterdam, the large, abandoned industrial halls will be replaced with 270 new dwellings (stepforward.nl, 2023).

² The threat of climate change (B.Marzeion, A.Levermann, 2014) increases the risk of flooding but this will not be included within this research



Fig.5 current design proposal for Kloos: Existing steel structures retained, dwellings with an 'industrial look' & cays made from existing stelcon plates which will depict historical images. Image: Van Aken Architecten, 2022

This redevelopment is not necessarily an issue, but the current design approach pays lip service to the site's historic workers' community. There are some attempts to retain industrial heritage within the current proposal, as historic pictures of Kloos & Zn will be printed on Stelcon plates (Bosch-Slabbers, 2023), some original steel structures will remain, and 50% of the dwellings are designed with an 'industrial look' (Van Aken, 2023). However, the zoning plan only creates parking spaces and dwellings, with no further connection to the industrial and cultural heritage of the waterfront. In summary, few 'links between the practices of the past to present' (Carola Hein, 2020, p.20) are established through the current design approach, something that is necessary to highlight its heritage. This means that the narratives of the industrial worker community of Kloos & Zn. could remain untold and could be forgotten in time.

The potential loss of these narratives is an issue, as "For an intelligent viewpoint on where we're going, it is valuable to understand and realize where we've been" (W.Caragata, 1979, p.9). This statement applies to Dutch industrial waterfronts and their surroundings too. A loss of cultural heritage, represented in part by these narratives, would create a disconnect and a loss of future guidance concerning these sites and their surroundings. The issue of "which story we consider important" (C.Hein, 2020, p.417) needs to be addressed as well. Is it the flashy narrative of engineering and directors? Or is it the narrative of the common folk, their poverty, hardship and struggles? Or both?



Fig.1 A riveter, part of the historical workers community of the Kloos Industrial Waterfront. Image: D.Boele (1968)

E.Burton (2023) argues to highlight the untold stories of historical communities, of the common folk, because “Only by recognising the importance to our communities... can we tell a deeper, wider story...”. It remains important to be reminded of these historical communities and their stories, due to the possibility of learning from their past experiences. Learning from past experiences such as poor working conditions, child labour, the historically patriarchal role of companies, the fight for workers rights, etc (J.Korteweg, 2023), helps with understanding the past, present and future of a location. This creates a common ground between our current society and the communities that lived before us. It might also remind people today that some aspects of their lives should not be taken for granted, even if they are uneasy to remember. It therefore remains important that these un(der)told narratives are highlighted when possible, not just the sides of heritage that society tends to be more proud of.

In regard to industrial heritage and water heritage, a lot of research has already been done by C.Hein (2020), I.Nevzsgodin (2016) for example. The industrial waterfront as a landscape typology is getting increased interest as concluded by *Arie den Boer (2020)*. The importance of highlighting un(der)told heritage is also something that has been argued before (W.Caragata, 1979, E.Burton 2022, C.Hein, 2020). However, coming up with an approach on how to highlight the cultural heritage left by historic workers’ communities in a Dutch industrial waterfront landscape type, is not yet available. This research will attempt to fill that gap.

Research goal

Redevelopments of industrial waterfronts should not result in a loss of untold heritage, and they shouldn't be a threat to the narratives of common folk. It should become an opportunity to highlight them. This research should aid in changing future reuse projects of industrial waterfronts, making them more inclusive towards the narratives of their workers’ communities.

The goal of this research therefore, is to create an insight into the un(der)told narratives of historical workers’ communities of Dutch industrial waterfronts (both positive and negative) and to figure out design approaches that would highlight those undertold narratives in future redevelopment projects.

3. Research Questions

The goal of this research, leads to the following research questions:

How can the untold narratives of historic workers communities of Dutch industrial waterfronts be highlighted?

Subquestions;

1. *Which narratives are connected with the industrial waterfront landscape type?*
2. *Which narratives of historical workers communities are un(der)told and shouldn't be?*
3. *Which design approaches exist that have highlighted industrial and cultural heritage in other designs?*
4. *Which design approaches would fit the industrial waterfront typology and the undertold narratives of their historical workers communities?*

4. Methodology

The methodology for answering the research questions, aims to create a toolbox that can be used as a guideline for highlighting un(der)told heritage in future projects of industrial waterfronts. The methodology can be split in 4 different steps: Data collection, data analysis, approach collection, and implementation. To limit the scope of the research, only the abandoned industrial waterfront of the Mercon Kloos site in Alblasterdam will be researched, to link the research directly with graduation project.

1. Data collection – collecting heritage narratives

The first step is to collect the different heritage narratives of the different locations. The collection of data will be done by working from big to small, from objective to subjective. **Literary research** is done to find out what information is already available (mostly secondary sources) concerning the subject. **Archival research** will aid in discovering the locations' more objective narratives, by providing more primary sources on the subject, such as booklets, biographies, news journals, etc.

Conducting interviews and visits to historical societies will fill in the knowledge gaps left from literary and archive research. Local historical societies might include narratives from the historic worker communities, which will aid in collecting un(der)told narratives about life from a workers' perspective. Conducting interviews with local residents/actors who were involved with the locations, will add more personal stories connected the locations. Site visits and site analyses are used to find tangible remains of possible narratives discovered through earlier research.

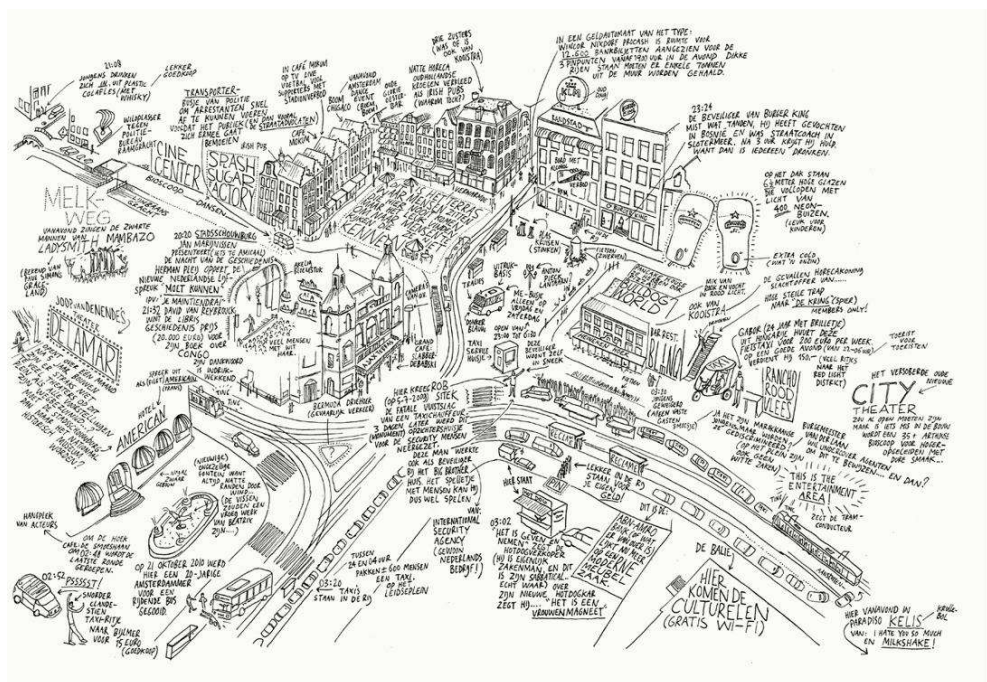


Fig.6 Landscape biography about the RDM terrain – made by a student of Verschuure-Stuip (n.d.) Image by Verschuure-Stuip, (2023)

These methods should create a broad picture of different events and narratives that are part of the selected locations' industrial and cultural heritage. Creating a *soft map* of the locations, based on the method of *Jan Rothuizen (2014)* (see fig.6) might aid in depicting the different narratives present.

II. Data analysis – defining undertold narratives

Analysis of the collected data will be done by making a ‘*landscape biography*’, based on the methods of Kolen et al (2015). The analysis approach of Gerdy Verschuure-Stuip (2019) will also be integrated into that landscape biography. This combination of analysis methods (see fig.7) will help deduce which actors and specifically which narratives are over- and underrepresented, depending on the available data, collected during Step I.



Fig.7 Landscape biography concept for this research, combining the methods of both van Kolen et al. (2015) And Verschuure-Stuip (2019). Image: By author

III. Data collection – collecting design approaches

Through **cases study analysis** of existing reuse projects of industrial heritage sites, existing design approaches are found that can highlight industrial and cultural heritage. It is unknown how many different design approaches exist and are feasible, so to limit the research scope, 10 different projects/case studies will be considered, out of which (hopefully) 10 different design approaches will be collected.

The following sources, which provide design approaches of industrial heritage reuse projects, will be consulted: C.Radapoulou (2018), P.Meurs, (2016), M.Petzet (2012), M. Kuipers (2017), H.Ibelings (2018), N.Chilingaryan (2020), and I.Nevsgodin (2016). This list will be expanded during the research as other sources will be discovered over time.

An example could be the approach mentioned by C.Radapoulou (2018, p.?)

IV. Implementation – pairing design approaches with undertold narratives

Finally, the 10 different design approaches found in step III are tested in their ability to highlight un(der)told narratives, established in step II. There will be two types of determination: **Case study analysis**, where design approaches are paired with similar narratives (of historical worker communities), and **research by design**, as mentioned by J.Hauberg, (2011). This is done by pairing narratives with different design approaches, creating different variants. By analysing these variants, a suitable approach can be chosen (see fig.5). This will result in a toolbox where undertold narratives are paired with suitable design approaches, concluding the research.

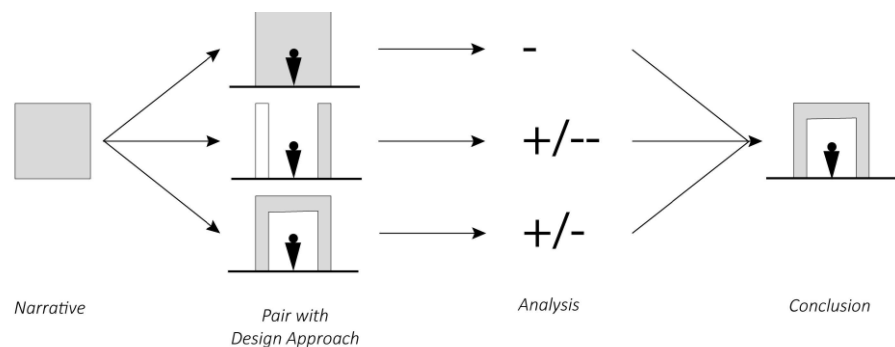


Fig.8 Research by Design framework. Image: by author

5. Theoretical framework

Overall, waterfronts have been covered extensively for they are seen as contemporary and relevant topics, which can be seen in several works of Carola Hein. Hein mentions that Industrial riverbanks are quite common, however Dutch waterfronts are a bit more unique, considering that the hinterland and the river defence create boundaries within the landscape. *In Adaptive Strategies for water heritage* (2020), Hein provides great examples of heritage redevelopments within water heritage. The paper, as the title suggests, provide a large-scale overview of strategies. In *Water Management and Cultural Heritage* (2021, p.145), Hein provides the waterwheel methodology, which can be used in this research to define which cultural heritage in relation to water is to be highlighted.

Design approaches and context are covered by Arie den Boer (2020). He focuses on the Dutch waterfronts and what is happening/should happen with them. Den Boer praises the renewed interest and suggests civil participation to lead the redevelopment of these areas (highlighting the relevance of the subject).

In an effort to deduce which narratives and authors are out there, a type of analysis of the landscape is necessary. The Landscape biography of Kolen et al. (2015) creates a timeline where trends, changes in the landscape and the actors responsible can be represented. The method of Gerdi Verschuure-Stuip (2019) divides the landscape analysis into the mental, socio-economical and physical aspects of a landscape in an effort to determine how a landscape is experienced over time, by different actors and authors.

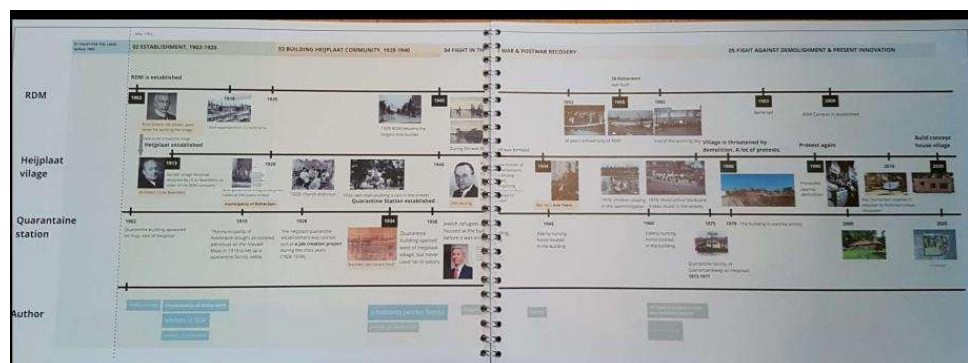


Fig.9 Landscape biography about the RDM terrain – made by a student of Verschuure-Stuip (n.d.) Image found in a lecture of G. Verschuure-Stuip, 2023

Naira Chilingaryan (2020), Chatzi Radapoulou (2018) and Ivan Nevsgodin (2016) give examples of design approaches for industrial heritage. The design approaches given are applicable to generic industrial heritage, whereas this research focuses on the 'un(der)told' cultural heritage of historical workers communities, and the industrial waterfront landscape typology.

To conclude the following in regard to the theoretical framework: Design approaches for un(der)told cultural heritage exist, reuse projects exist for industrial heritage, but the exact combination for the industrial waterfront landscape typology seems less researched.

6. Conclusion

In summary: The cultural heritage of Dutch industrial waterfronts is threatened due to careless redevelopments. This can lead to a loss of heritage, including that of the historical workers' communities that worked and lived there. This would be a waste, as these waterfronts would lose their connection with their past as well as its surrounding population. The goal of this research is to find a way to define and highlight the untold narratives of the historic workers communities of industrial waterfronts, duringn future reuse projects. The chosen methodology to achieve this goal will provide a means of finding and selecting narratives that are undertold, and finding design approaches from other reuse projects that could highlight those narratives. By combining design approaches with the untold narratives (through research by design), pairings of narratives and design approaches can be made. These can aid similar projects in the future.

It is expected that the narratives of workers communities will turn out to be undertold compared to narratives of engineering, directors and works, fitting the premise of the research. Either way, this research is expected to aid my own design of the industrial waterfront of Kloos & Zn. Hopefully the results of this research will lead to more appreciation of the narratives of workers' communities, as the beautiful poem written by Monica Boschman (2020) tries to do.

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Appendix I Research Diagram

	Subquestion	Theme	Methods Used	Output
How can the untold narratives of historic workers communities of Dutch industrial waterfronts be highlighted?	Which narratives are connected with the industrial waterfront landscape type?	NARRATIVE COLLECTION	- Architectural Theory - Literary Research - Data collection: Archival Research - Site visit, interviews	- clear definitions - glossary - Soft Atlas - value assessment method - landscape analysis method - collection of heritage values
	Which narratives of historical workers communities are un(der)told and shouldn't be?	SELECTION	- Data Analysis, - Landscape biography (Kolen et al, 2015) - (Verschuuren, 2019)	- Landscape Biographies - selection of untold narratives to highlight
	Which design approaches exist that have highlighted industrial and cultural heritage in other designs?	APPROACH COLLECTION	- Literary review - Casestudy Analysis	- design approaches that can highlight untold heritage
	Which design approaches would fit the industrial waterfront typology and the un(der)told narratives of their historical workers' communities?	IMPLEMENTATION	- Casestudy Analysis - Research by Design	- Toolbox: pairs of narratives and design approaches that highlight them best
	DESIGN PHASE			

Appendix II Glossary

- Landscape typology
- Industrial heritage
- Cultural heritage
- Industrial waterfront
- Iron Century

- Narratives
- Tangible, intangible