

Voices Uncovered

Stories of the Alblasserwaard's industrial past



Research Paper

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1. *Ad, pointing to a friend of his, working on a bridge made by Kloos.* Image: By Author

Abstract

The abandoned Kloos & Zonen industrial waterfront in Alblasserdam creates a tangible link to its former workers community, embodying a rich blend of industrial and cultural heritage. Despite these heritage values present, the workers community is slowly disappearing and with them their cultural heritage and narratives. While the industrial heritage often takes precedence, numerous cultural narratives often remain untold, despite shaping local culture. This research aims to uncover these untold stories and cultural themes connected to the former workers community of the Kloos Industrial waterfront.

Keywords:

Waterdriehoek, industrial waterfront, oral history, narratives, cultural heritage

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“For an intelligent viewpoint on where we are going, it is valuable to understand and realize where we’ve been”

-

W.Caragata, 1979

Introduction

Envision your grandfather. Think of the stories he told you of his youth, his silly jokes he told at the dinner table, his pictures on the wall. If you've known your grandfather, then you possess memories of him. He might even be (in)directly responsible for how you were raised. His life, culture and experiences, thus echo through your being.¹

Expanding this idea to a broader, local context, communities of a bygone era can be viewed as the architects of the present local community. A shared cultural heritage handed down from one generation to the next, cultivates a common local culture, flourishing within a landscape that serves as the canvas or stage for this cultural narrative. These landscapes thus don't exist in isolation, but are interwoven with human experience.²

This interwovenness also applies to the historical workers communities of the Alblasserwaard industrial waterfronts. These waterfronts became important industrial hubs during the 19th century and played a part of the 'Iron Century'.³ These waterfronts hosted shipyards and other industrial activities,

and served as the primary source of employment for the surrounding towns. Subsequently, these waterfronts created a distinct local culture among its workers and their families.

Among these industrial waterfronts stands the Kloos & Zonen company site, located along the Kinderdijk in Alblasserdam. Founded in 1843 by Floris Kloos, the company started with the construction of a saw mill.⁴ Over time, the company grew and their products came to include ships, bridges, railways and sluice gates meant for the Dutch Deltaworks. Kloos employed up to 500 workers – approximately 20% of the workers' population of Alblasserdam.⁵ Kloos maintained a significant workers community, accompanied by its own own local culture. After economical downturn in the 70's, the Kloos company ceased to exist due to mergers with neighboring companies. Since the late 90's, the site lays abandoned, and the workers community has since ceased to exist.



2. Kloos & Zn industrial waterfront in Alblasserdam, around 1910. Image: Historical Society West-Alblasserwaard, 2023, <https://www.hvwa.nl/beeldbank-en-klaroenen/beeldbank/>

1. Aalyia Feroz Ali Sadruddin et al., "How Do Grandparents Influence Child Health and Development? A Systematic Review," *Social Science & Medicine* 239 (October 1, 2019): 112476, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2019.112476>.

2. F. Kurin and Wendy Naus, "Because It Can Help Preserve Cultural Heritage Important for Understanding and Social Benefit — Why Social Science?," *Why Social Science?*, May 20, 2022, <https://www.whysocialscience.com/blog/2022/2/22/because-it-can-help-preserve-cultural-heritage-important-for-understanding-and-social-benefit>.

3. Hans Goedkoop et al., *De IJzeren Eeuw: het begin van het moderne Nederland*, 2015.

4. Joke Kramer, "Het Verhaal Van Mercon Kloos," *Erfgoedhuis Zuid-Holland*, July 15, 2021, <https://geschiedenisvanzuidholland.nl/verhalen/verhalen/het-verhaal-van-kloos/>.

5. Will Huijgen, Interview by Author, Alblasserdam, 01-12-2023

The abandonment of the site and the ceasure of its workers communnity poses a threat to the cultural heritage connected to the site, as the members of the historical workers community are now slowly dwindling. They are aging, passing away and/or moving to different locations.⁵ Their narratives (and thus their cultural heritage) are left to fade away, being lost forever.

The impending loss of these narratives are at the heart of the issue, determining “which stories we consider important.”⁶ So far, the stories of engineering achievements and directors, have been preferred by academics when documenting the location’s past. But where does that leave the stories of the common workers, who left a larger mark on local culture? So far, they’ve remained untold.



E.Burton argues for highlighting these untold stories of historical communities, of the working class, because “Only by recognizing the importance to our communities...can we tell a deeper, wider story...”⁷ It remains important to be reminded of these historical communities and their narrativess, as they create the possibility of learning from their past experiences.

The narratives of these historical communities serve as a cornerstone of local culture, making the potential loss of cultural heritage all the more important to the surrounding area.⁸ These worker narratives facilitate the establishment of creating ‘links between the practices of the past to the present,’⁹ which is an important pillar in heritage conservation.



3. Kloos & Zn. Terrain in Alblasterdam, around 1950. Image from D.Boele, 125 jaar Kloos 1968, 12

4. Kloosterrein now. Notice the removal of cranes, jacks and other industrial elements, etc. Source: Koster, Peter. “Brandgevaarlijke Mercon Kloos-hallen,” AD, 27-08-2020, <https://www.ad.nl/dordrecht/alblasterdammer-over-brandgevaarlijke-mercon-kloos-hallen-gevaarlijkste-deel-kan-al-gesloopt-worden~a353e275/>

When looking at future threats such as climate change and flooding, its also important to see what we can learn from the past, and how it should influence our decisionmaking. “For an intelligent viewpoint on where we’re going, it is valuable to understand and realize where we’ve been.”¹⁰

5. Ad Donk, Interview by Author, Alblasterdam, 2023

6. Hein, Carola., Adaptive Strategies for Water Heritage : Past, Present and Future, 2019, 417. <https://library.oupen.org/bitstream/20.500.12657/22917/1/1007244.pdf>

7. Edson Burton, “Why We Need to Tell Untold Stories,” The National Lottery Heritage Fund, September 27, 2022, <https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/blogs/why-we-need-tell-untold-stories>.

8. William Lowell Randall, The Stories We Are: An Essay on Self-Creation, Second Edition, 1st ed. (University of Toronto Press, 2013).

9. Hein, Adaptive Strategies, 2019, 20.

10. W. Caragata, 1979, 9. “Alberta Labour.” Google Books. 1979. https://books.google.nl/books?hl=nl&lr=&id=b-sedCccUAEC&oi=fnd&pg=PR8&dq=untold+heritage&ots=00u17A4V2L&sig=vJoiQUVRDu_mgpG0iSMHuKnZiHA&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=untold%20heritage&f=false.

Goal and Research Question

In summary, the abandonment of the site and the company, results in the community disappearing, and with them the narratives and cultural heritage that built the current local culture. Considering that a lot of the narratives of those workers have remained undocumented/untold, this thesis shall focus on uncovering those, in the hope of discovering what caused local culture to be the way it is now.

The goal of this research is thus to create an insight into the untold narratives of the historical workers' community of the Kloos & Zonen industrial waterfronts, in an effort to deduce the local culture that is interwoven with the Kloos site and reintroduce said culture in a future intervention. For this reason, the thesis will investigate the following research questions:

Research Questions:

What are the narratives of the historic workers community of the Kloos industrial waterfront?

And from which cultural themes do these narratives originate?

Methodology

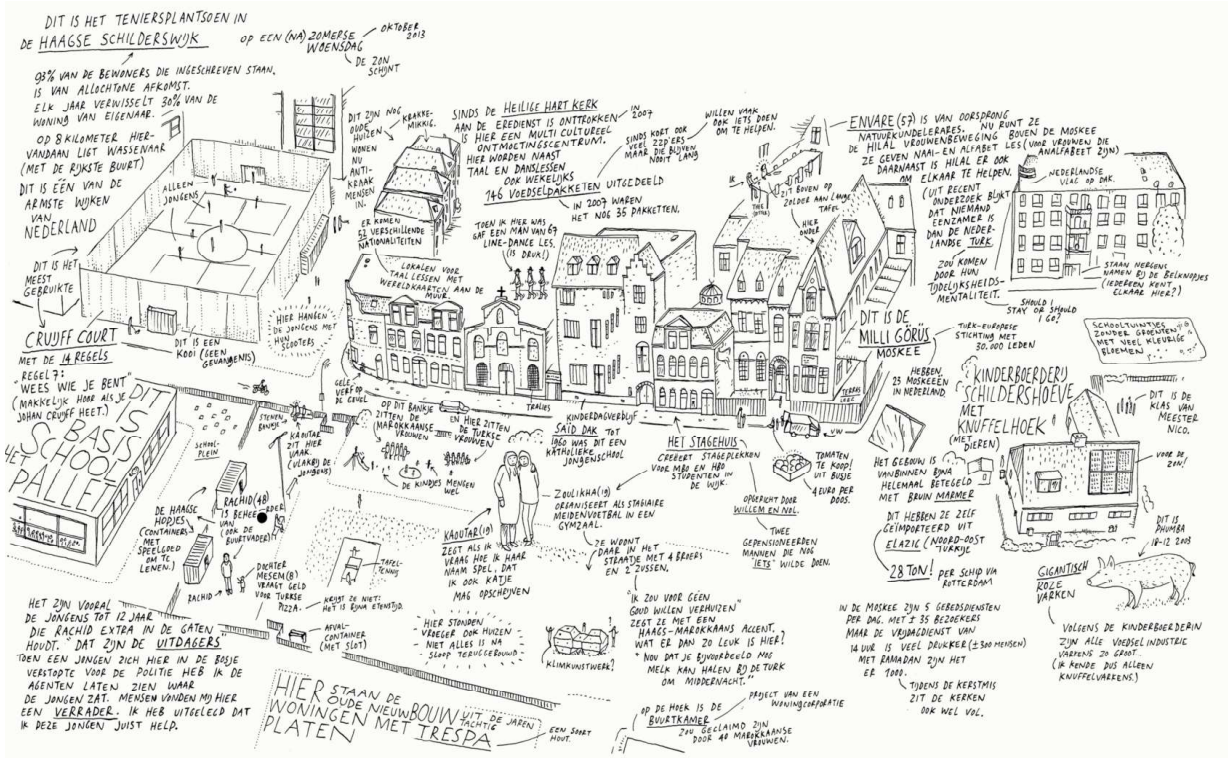
The methodology of answering the research question, aims to create a universal method of analyzing local cultural heritage connected to a landscape. This research is limited to the industrial waterfront of Kloos & Zonen in Alblasterdam, due to its relation with the Revitalizing Heritage graduation studio topic. The research consists of 3 phases: Collection, Comparison and Conclusion.

The first phase, 'narrative collection', provides background information on the Kloos site, to see which narratives are already out there. This is done through literary review, visits to local archives, site visits and following lectures related to the Kloos site.

Secondly, oral histories of former Kloos employees are made. Oral histories are studies of events of people through conducting interviews, based on the method of Perks and Thompson.¹¹ Oral histories allow for the inclusion of the perspectives, opinions and views of the interviewee, giving a more subjective take on historical events.

The narratives found through the different research methods will then be compared. Critical analysis of the different sources explains why workers narratives have remained untold. In an effort to connect the different narratives to the Kloos landscape, a historical soft map of the location was created based on the visualization method of Jan Rothuizen (see fig.5).¹² Its use will be addressed at the end of the paper.

Lastly, the oral histories are then validated and compared by creating a matrix, from which the cultural themes connected to the landscape can be concluded.



5. Soft Atlas made of the Schilderswijk, Den Haag. Image from Jan Rothuizen, 2023, <https://janrothuizen.nl/en/drawing/schilderswijk-den-haag/>.

11. Perks, Robert, and Alistair Thomson. 2006. 116. The Oral History Reader. <http://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA78642983>.
 12. Rothuizen, Jan. "Schilderswijk Den Haag - Tekening Op 'De Zachte Atlas.'" The Soft Atlas, September 8, 2023. <https://janrothuizen.nl/en/drawing/schilderswijk-den-haag/>.

Initial Narrative Collection

When looking at the existing literature, most sources provide a broad perspective on the Alblasserwaard, but don't focus on Kloos or their workers.^{13,14,15} Only some sources mention Kloos, even within these sources, the workers community isn't really mentioned all that often, and give little insight into their local culture.^{16,17,18}

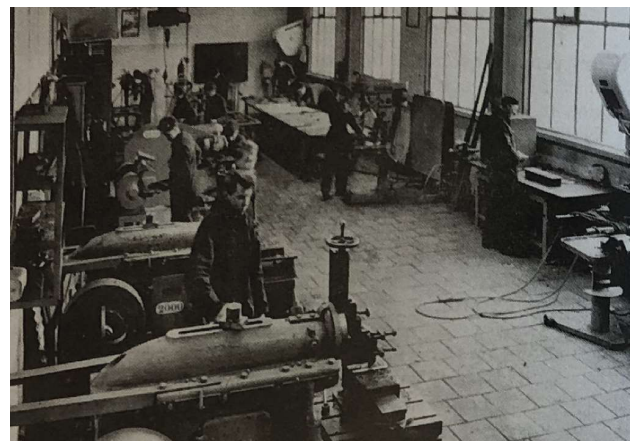
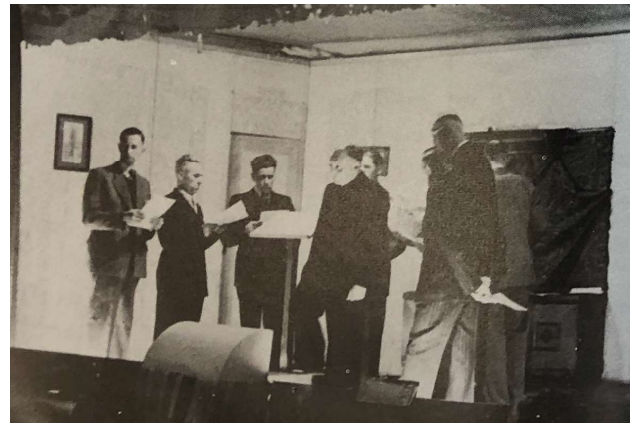
D.Boele displays some of the altruistic deeds of the Kloos company, but his writing seems biased, as his book was made in celebration of the Kloos company, not to depict actual local narratives.

Archive visits (see Appendix II, III) did uncover some new information. Layoffs and strikes in the 80's were rarely mentioned. Yet, without background information, they tell us little in regards to how the workers community saw these events. Perhaps the oral histories give more info.

Within the literature, Kloos, let alone the workers communities in general were barely mentioned. This focus on the industrial achievements of the region might also be due to the age and agenda of the sources.

The subject matter seems to have changed in recent times J.Kramer includes an interview with former Kloos worker Will Huijgen, and J.Korteweg also touches upon the lives of workers of the Alblasserwaard in her lecture. Korteweg mentions general developments, such as jobs being kind of 'hereditary', the presence of alcohol abuse, illiteracy and poverty among the workers during this time. There also existed a type of 'tribalism' between the neighboring villages and their companies. Korteweg also mentioned that many industrials aided in combatting these circumstances – not out of altruism but out of efficiency and retaining their workforce.

To conclude, little cultural narratives were found through the existing sources. The focus remained on the stories that induced local pride.



6, 7, 8, 9: .images of the different benefits the Kloos company provided to their workers.

L to R; Retirees (middle row, fourth to the right might be A-M's grandfather), , Leisure play groups, First Aid Courses, A small crafting school. Image from D.Boele, 125 jaar Kloos, 1968, 17, 22, 23, 48

13. Joke Kramer, De Merwedezone in bedrijf: speurtochten langs industrieel erfgoed, 2008

14. Cees Van Homoet, "Kloos [Scheepsbouw Alblasserdam]," Vergane Glorie, 2019, <https://www.scheepsbouw-alblasserdam.nl/kloos.html>.

15. J. Korteweg, "Between Rivers – The 'West-Alblasserwaard in Historical Perspective.'" lecture, TU Delft, The Netherlands, 10-10-2023. 231010 Joke Korteweg - West-Alblasserwaard - AR3AH115 Graduation Studio Revitalising Heritage (2023/24 Q1) (tudelft.nl)

16. D.Boele, 125 jaar Kloos: 1843-1968, 1968

17. Joke Kramer, "Het Verhaal Van Mercon Kloos," Erfgoedhuis Zuid-Holland, July 15, 2021, <https://geschiedenisvanzuidholland.nl/verhalen/verhalen/het-verhaal-van-kloos/>.

18. Ad Korpel, "Floriss Kloos als molenbouwer," Nieuwsblad Historische Vereniging Ameide-Tienhoven 1, no. 1 (March 2012): 18. https://ameide-tienhoven.nl/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Nieuwsblad-HVAT-2012-1_Deel1.pdf.

Oral Histories

Armed with a bunch of background information on Kloos and its workers, oral histories were created through interviewing respondents who were related to Kloos. The 'Life Story' collection method was used and interpreted to the circumstances.¹⁹ This method encourages the interviewer to leave questions 'open ended, that is, not to indicate in the phrasing of the question the answer you expected to get."²⁰

Four people were willing to talk about their life in relation to the Kloos site. Two are former workers at Kloos & Zn. Another worked at Smit Kinderdijk, a similar company located on an industrial waterfront nearby. The last respondent is the child of a director of Kloos. Out of these conversations, narratives were concluded in regards to their lives in and the Kloos site.

It has to be noted that a lot of former workers were not willing to be interviewed as many of them were laid off during the mergers with Hollandia B.V, about which they didn't have a very positive memory.²¹ Perhaps they did not want to share their negative views on past events.

What follows is a short summary on the lives of workers that were interviewed. For the extended oral history transcripts, see appendix IV.

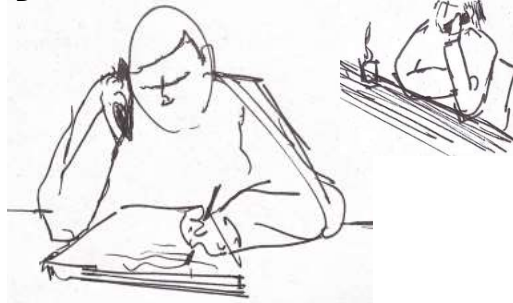
Will Huijgen



'Ad'



'D'



'A-M'



10, 11, 12, 13.: Talks with the different interviewees; W.Huijgen, Ad, 'D', and 'A-M'. Image by author

19. Ad Donk, Interview with Author, Alblasterdam, 2023

20. Perks, Thomson, Oral History Reader, 2003, 116

21. Perks, Thomson, Oral History Reader, 2003, 109

Will Huijgen



14. Talking with Will about Kloos over coffee and homemade 'speculaas', the Kinderdijk mills on the horizon. Image by author

The first interview was with Will Huijgen. Born in Alblasterdam, he is a former worker of Kloos and later Mercon B.V. He started as a draftsman and later switched to offsite assembly of steel structures. He eventually became a director at Mercon, the successor of Kloos, until his retirement. He now lives across the Kloos site, where I interviewed him over coffee, with the Kinderdijk mills in the window view.

After finishing the MTS (technical school) he started an internship at Kloos and started working for Kloos soon after as a draftsman. He was allowed to explore which jobs he enjoyed and in the end chose assembly. Here he was tasked to assemble works of Kloos all over the Netherlands.

Why did you choose to work for Kloos?

"I didn't think much of it at the time. You just went to work at the places that were available in your vicinity. My grandfathers both worked there and enjoyed their time, so why not?"
"Also, Kloos had a reputation of caring for its workers."

How did Kloos care for its workers?

"In many ways! Kloos provided housing, education, first aid courses, leisure activities. Kloos provided loans, insurance, it even bought potatoes and coal for their workers during the winter! People felt supported by the company, they behaved in a similar way to Philips come to think of it."

"Kloos even employed the locally disabled, where some would be deployed as cigarette vendors on the factory floor. Another type of local charity, it seemed."



15. Example of an offsite assembly crew. Image from D.Boele, 125 jaar Kloos, 1968, 20

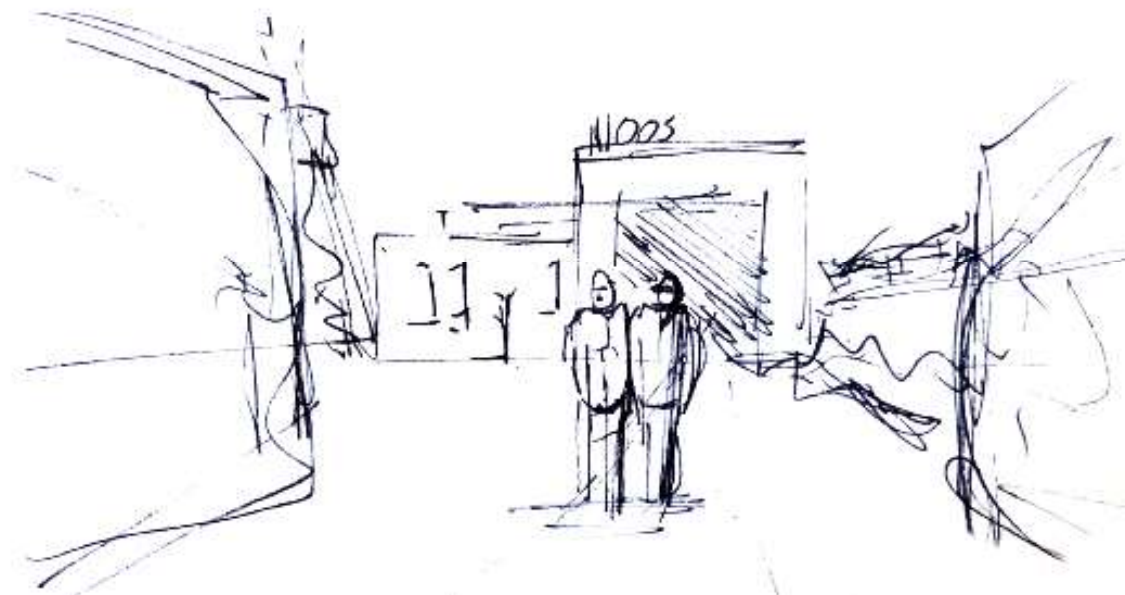
What else did you like about working there?

“Everything felt quite safe and comfortable at the time. I enjoyed my colleagues, as well as the leisure activities organized by the company. My work enabled me to travel and meet new people when assembling new projects all over the Netherlands. Its an element of my work that I enjoyed immensely.”

After the fusion of Kloos with Mercon (and Kloos selling its assets), Will struck a deal where he could buy the plot opposite the Kloos site, which contained the bicycle parking. Here he built his own house, in which he still lives today together with his wife. He retired over a decade ago, and he remains an active member of the village and is eager to share information on Kloos and his life.

What about your grandfathers? You mentioned in an article²² that they got injured. Did that affect you?

“You’ve done your homework! One lost an eye while working as a nail heater in 1927. The other, while working on a new building for Smit Kinderdijk, fell from the scaffolding to his death in 1952. In response to this, he “didn’t think much of it. Accidents happened, you just got on with life it seems”. Mr. Huijgen didn’t think any less of the company either way.



16. Sketch of Will and his grandfather on the Kloos site. He's only known his grandfather with a glass eye. Image by author

22. Joke Kramer, “Het Verhaal Van Kloos,” , 2021



17. sifting through pictures with Ad during a visit to the historical society. Image by author



18. Ad, pointing to a friend of his, working on a bridge made by Kloos. Image by Author

Ad was born and raised in Alblasserdam. He worked for Kloos between 1962-1965. He finished the MULO and started in sales straight afterwards at Kloos. After his military service he went back to Kloos, only to leave again and work in sales at Verkade. He stayed in Alblasserdam and became a member of the local Historical society. That's how I met him, during a lecture given in Alblasserdam, and he was eager to share. After that we met three more times in 2023, Ad proving to be an energetic and unwavering man.

So why did you leave Kloos again?

“Working as an army constructor kind of ‘freed’ me. The working culture at Kloos was quite stiff, and it didn’t fit me anymore. I left to work in sales at Verkade.”

When discovering a picture of his boss;

“I remember him, director Ir. Van Aalst: He could look straight through you! As if you weren’t there. The man spoke with a potato in his throat, he clearly wasn’t from here...truth be told, he scared me!”



19. Ir. Van Aalst, director at the time of Ad working t Kloos. Image from D.Boele, 125 jaar Kloos, 1968, 4

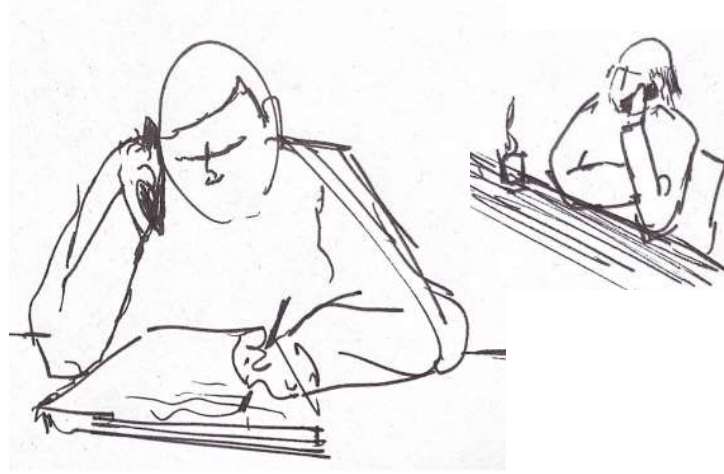
Ad describes a ‘stiff’ working culture, looking back. “People dressed sober, management always wore suits. In hindsight, it felt too ‘Christian’ - Nothing wrong with that, it just wasn’t for me anymore”, Ad reminisced.

Ad still knows a lot of former workers of Kloos – something which exemplifies the good bond people had while working for Kloos. Through an exhibit, made possible by the Historical Society West-Alblasserwaard, he got in touch with a lot of the former workers and he chats with some of them still.

When stumbling upon a picture of two workers, he stops. “Ah, that's one of my friends, Piet Roomer! He passed recently. I will take this picture and give it to his brother, he lives down the street.”



20. Kloos sales office, where Ad used to work. North side of the waterfront. Image from D.Boele, 125 jaar Kloos, 1968, 38



21. Talking with D on the phone in december, 2023. D could only call at night on weekdays, as he was usually preoccupied with his grandchildren. Image by author

Born in Papendrecht, D finished the LTS after which he started as a lathe worker at Smit Kinderdijk shipyard. I ran into him during a lecture from Arie van Dijk in Alblasterdam. We had a long conversation on the phone the week after. D mentioned that Smit and Kloos were comparable companies in how their workers lived and were cared for.

“I transferred to sales after working as a lathe worker for two years. While working at sales, I started studying Maritime Engineering during the night – a study provided by the company. Smit also provided housing when I moved to Kinderdijk with my wife in 1964.”

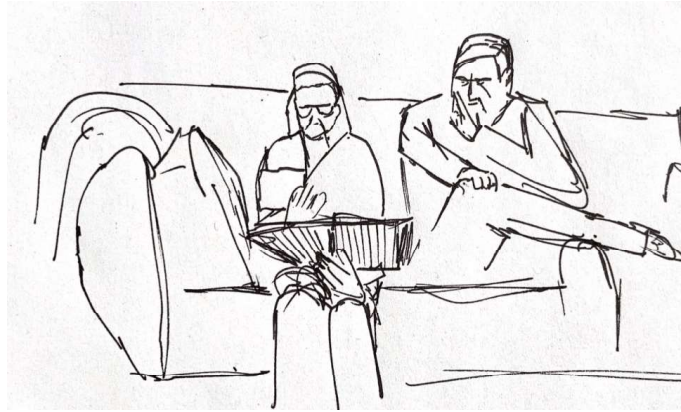
“I remember Smit providing transport busses which would ferry workers to and from the shipyard. I lived closeby so I went by bike though.”

What did you enjoy at Smit?

“I was allowed to travel abroad while in sales, something he enjoyed, because he got in touch with other cultures. I also immensely enjoyed the work at the site itself, especially the design of new ships.”

“Working at a family business, I felt at home and appreciated, and the company allowed me to flourish on a professional level, for which I am very grateful.”

During the strikes of ‘86 and ‘87, he was let go, during which he worked at the Feijenoord Shipyard in Rotterdam. After this period, he returned. When the company merged to form IHC in 2003, he lost confidence in both the financial side as well as the changing atmosphere. In 2005 he left. He remains in Kinderdijk.



22. Talking over tea in January 2024, A-M is seen pointing to a picture of her father in an old booklet about Alblasserdam. Image by author

A-M was Born in Alblasserdam. She is the daughter of Jo van Herk, co-director of Kloos & Zonen from 1956 to 1960. A-M was 16 when her father suddenly passed away, after which she and her family moved to Zwijndrecht. There, her connection to Alblasserdam ends. Considering that not a lot of people knew about her past in Alblasserdam, this interview felt like an opportunity for her to tell her story. For this research, her story provides a unique perspective; that of a child growing up in Alblasserdam. A family friend, we talked on the couch over tea on a cold night in January.

Could you tell me about your dad?

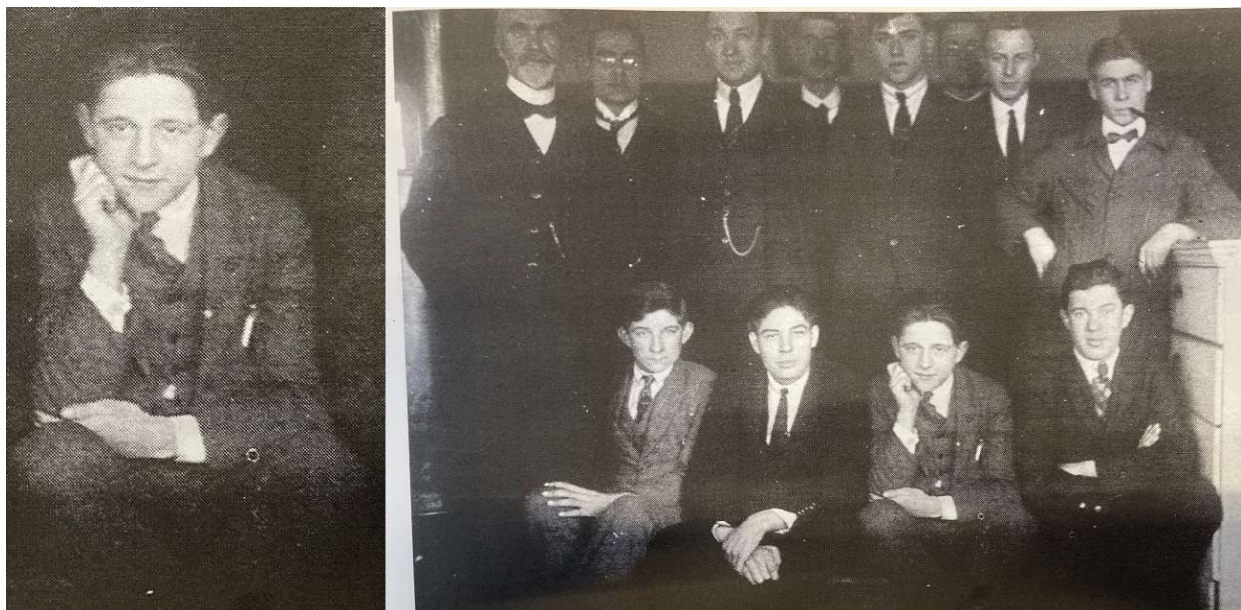
“I only remember him from my childhood and only as my dad. The rest of his life has all been a bit secondary to me, of course. But I remember the impression of relevance my dad had. He was part of the employers association within Alblasserdam. Through this, he knew different notables, such as the mayor, Mr. L.Looij.”

“They were friends of my parents, and I referred to him as ‘Uncle Rens’...As you can tell, these directors formed this clique of ‘notables’, who took care of each other within the area.”

Could you tell me about your dad in relation to Kloos?

“Dad (1907-1960) had worked for Kloos his entire life. His father (her grandfather) also worked for Kloos as a ‘Baas’ (section manager). My grandfather, being very ambitious, arranged different courses and studies for my father to attend, enabling him to climb within the company, eventually ending up as co-director, next to Ir. Van Aalst (mentioned by ‘Ad’ as well).”

She even showed an old picture, probably made in 1923, upon which her father is seen, working as a draftsman for Kloos (see fig. 23).



23. Photograph depicts the draftsmen department of Kloos in 1923. A-M’s father being at the bottom, second to the right. Image: Anonimous, Kent u ze nog... De Alblasserdammers, 1973

“Though not being very strictly religious myself, I remember living side by side with the stricter religious groups. For example, for my eleventh birthday, I received a bike which I decided to try out. This being on a Sunday, My bike was stopped between the legs of an angry church goer. I was sent home by angry churchgoers and I was forced to apologize that afternoon for ‘disturbing the Lord’s day’. Other than that, people were generally quite tolerant of each other. Alblasserdam was on the edge of the biblebelt, but we had a lot of migrant workers, and they were tolerated as well. I sometimes went to church with my more religious friends, and I went to school with all of them.”

What happened when your dad passed?

“Well, I was sad of course, but everything was also very odd, in hindsight. I didn’t seem to get a lot of time to mourn. Friends of my parents stepped in and did the best they could to distract me from the loss. I remember being invited by the town’s Notary to play Black Piet a week after my father’s death, as a distraction. Also, the first day of school, none of my classmates talked to me about my dad. Perhaps they were scared, and didn’t know how to react. But it made me feel alone.”

“Saying this, I do realize that people were absolutely trying to support us. Every Monday, friends would come over. A friend of my father (who was a tutor at my school) transferred himself to my Dutch class, in an effort to support me at school, to have a familiar face closeby.”

“In hindsight, perhaps no one really was equipped to handle loss. A lot of people had suffered loss throughout World War 2 and weren’t handling loss themselves. Also because mental care wasn’t as developed as it is today.”

Her dad tried to create constant, stable pensions for the workers of Kloos. This would lead to a massive financial leap for former Kloos workers, who were quite grateful for this. Knowing that her father achieved this, makes her still proud to this day.



24. Jo van Herk as co-director of Kloos.
Image from D.Boele, 125 jaar Kloos, 1968, 12



25. An old picture of the primary school A-M attended as a little girl. Image made in the 1930’s. Image: Anonimous, Kent u ze nog... De Alblasserdammers, 1973

Comparing methods

When looking at existing literature it is clear that industrial achievements and pride have been deemed more valuable information to preserve, compared to local culture. Literature and lectures only describe the accomplishments of the businesses, while leaving out the effects of the companies on its workers and families.

For example, D.Boele grants 'only' 12 pages to the lives of the Kloos workers.²³ The rest of the book mainly depicts the altruistic achievements of the company. Little mention is made in regards to local history, or the impact of these companies on the residents. If mentioned at all, the workers' lives are portrayed in a rosy picture. Newspaper snippets and the Oral Histories on the other hand, also show the negative effects of these companies. When Kloos Constructie B.V. closed down, 138 were left jobless, an event that must've had a massive impact on the local community of Alblasserdam²⁴

It seems that at the time of Kloos being relevant, writing about the lives of workers wasn't very fashionable. Ordinary lives remained too ordinary to document. This is arguably still the case today.

The Oral Histories on the other hand, provide a very personal perspective. It gives insight into the lives and narratives of a different generation and local culture associated with the Kloos site. The interviewees did not live for the company and its accomplishments, it was just 'a part' of their life. Their perspectives contribute to this significant difference between research results.



26. Frontpage of local newspaper De Klaroen depicting the Mercon B.V. Layoffs, 30-09-1987. source: De Klaroen, 1987

23. D.Boele, 125 jaar Kloos, 1968, 15-26

24. Anonimous, "Kloos Constructie plotseling dicht: 138 man ontslagen," De Klaroen, September 30, 1987. <http://deklaroen.hwaa.nl/>

Visualizing the Narratives

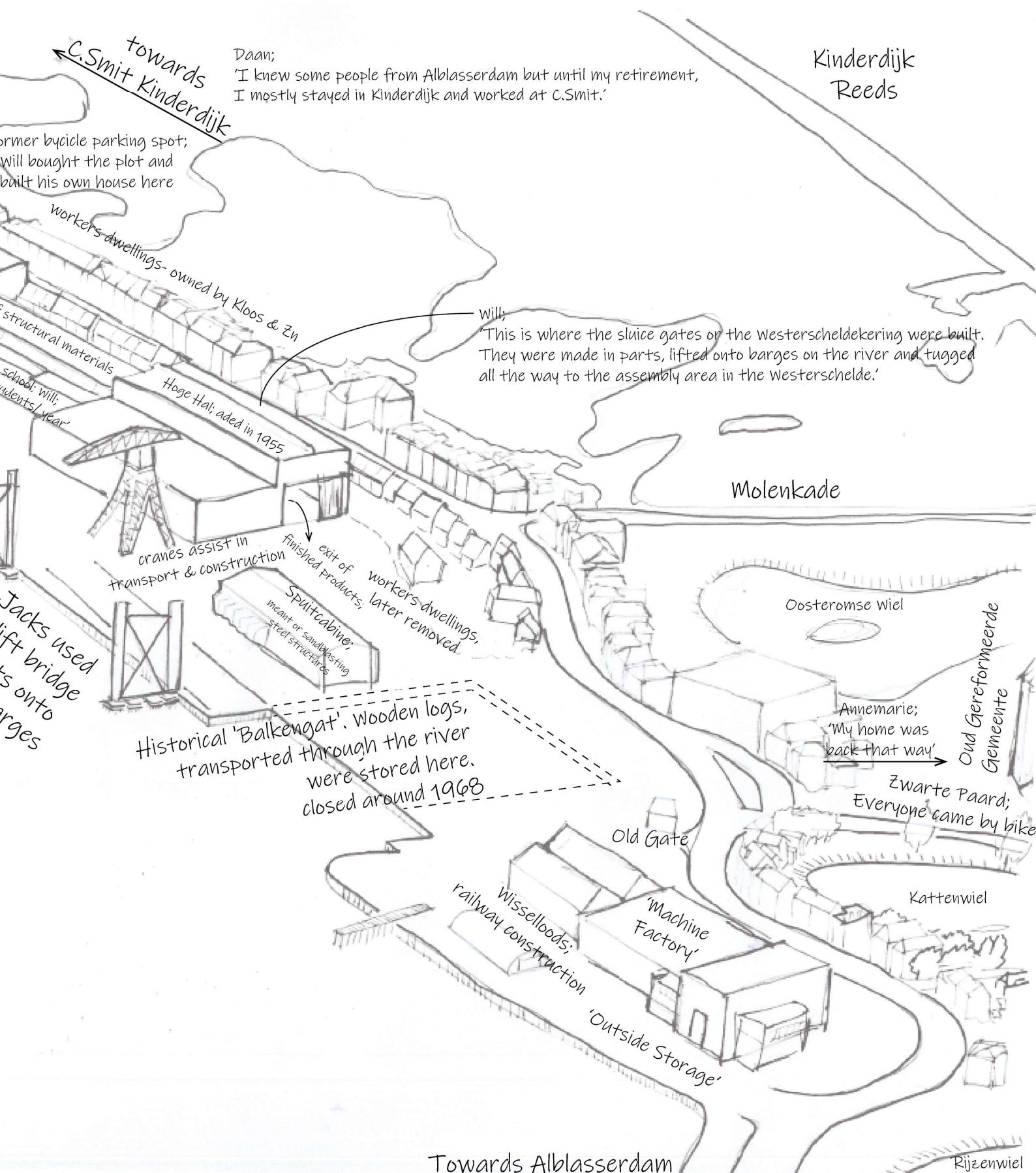
Perks & Thomson, recommends to use ‘visual techniques’, to better portray the histories and better connect the found narratives to the site.²⁵ To accomplish this, a ‘historical’ soft map was made, based on the visualization method of Jan Rothuizen.²⁶

The anecdotes visible on the map clearly depict the interwovenness of the site with human experiences.²⁷ between the site and its stories. The location to which these stories are connected, create possible design opportunities, considering the depiction of the site’s industrial and cultural heritage.

25. Perks and Thompson, Oral History Reader, 2003, 120

26. Rothuizen, Jan. ‘De Zachte Atlas’, 2023

27. F. Kurin and Wendy Naus, Why Social Science?, 2022



towards
C.Smit Kinderdijk

Daan;
'I knew some people from Alblasterdam but until my retirement,
I mostly stayed in Kinderdijk and worked at C.Smit.'

Kinderdijk
Reeds

former bicycle parking spot;
will bought the plot and
built his own house here

workers-dwellings- owned by Kloos & Zn

will;
'This is where the sluice gates of the westerscheldekering were built.
They were made in parts, lifted onto barges on the river and tugged
all the way to the assembly area in the westerschelde.'

structural materials
school; will;
students/year

Hoge Hal; aded in 1955

Molenkade

cranes assist in
transport & construction
finished products,
exit of workers dwellings,
later removed

Oosteromse Wiel

Jacks used
lift bridge
onto
barges

Sputcabine;
meant of sandblasting
steel structures

Historical 'Balkengat'. Wooden logs,
transported through the river
were stored here.
closed around 1968

Annemarie;
'My home was
back that way'

Oud Gereformeerde
Gemeente

Zwarte Paard;
Everyone came by bike

Old Gate

Kattenwiel

Wisselloods;
railway construction
'Machine
Factory'
'Outside Storage'

Towards Alblasterdam

Rijzenwiel

27. historical softmap of the Kloos site in Alblasterdam, made by depicting the interviewees' stories connected to the Kloos site.
Image: by Author

Concluding cultural themes

In order to validate and connect the oral histories, a matrix was made (see Appendix V).²⁸ This aided in concluding the following cultural themes concerning the historic workers community of Kloos & Zonen.

Christian community

Alblasserdam started out as a conservative Christian community. Sober lives, quiet Sundays. Though not all residents adhered to the strictest type of belief (as is seen with the interviewees), its presence was clearly felt regardless. Christian culture still permeate the village of Alblasserdam to this day, although to a lesser extent.



Mindset & post-war reconstruction

The interviewees as well as the literary review describe the impact of World War Two to be a major factor. A lot of suffering and grief happened during this time, which left a mark on Dutch culture, and survivors desired to move on. This attitude resulted in people not dwelling too long on adversity, as people wanted to continue moving forward. A negative effect, was the fact that if adversity was encountered, people were not really equipped (or supposed) to grief.



Determined work ethos

Connected to both Christian culture and the period of Post-War reconstruction, there was a certain ethos of working hard, not complaining and getting on with it, a spirit of moving forward and upward. When looking at injuries for example, the attitude tended to be to shrug it off and get on with it. It was part of your lot in life.

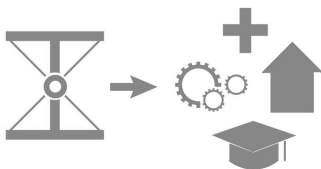


28. Symbols representing the local cultural themes of former Kloos workers. Image by author



Sense of community

Being a small, isolated village, residents turned towards one another in times of need. Everyone 'knew' each other and tried to take care of each other during hard times, the local companies included. Examples of aiding people financially, distracting each other from grief and working together to achieve great things are mentioned frequently throughout the oral histories.



The company provides

Tied in with the sense of community, is the fact that Kloos & Zn. provided the village with essential needs. Kloos provided not only jobs, but also career opportunities, housing, education, healthcare, pensions, loans, insurance, food and leisure. The company was a true pillar of the community. These provisions faded and were never truly replaced on a local level, and are fondly looked back on.



Pride and Gratitude

Looking back, all respondents feel a sense of pride for being involved with the accomplishments of the companies of the Alblasserwaard. The business in the area, the sense of community, the way the companies provided for their workers and the industrial achievements, leave the interviewees with a sense of nostalgia and pride in connection to the site.

Conclusion

The abandoned waterfront of Kloos is under threat of cultural heritage loss due to its former workers community aging, and their narratives (and thus culture) disappearing. This problem resulted in the research question; What are the narratives of the historic workers community of the Kloos industrial waterfront?

Literary review shows that most of the literature mentioned little about the workers community of Kloos. The Oral Histories, made through interviewing former workers, gives an insight into the lives and narratives of a different generation and local culture associated with the Klooswaterfront.

From the oral histories, a local culture attached to the waterfront can be concluded, which seems influenced by the post-war reconstruction period and a conservative Christian environment. Other information – On how the company used to provide for its workers, created a sense of community and invoked pride, are also very relevant themes.

In short, if you have the chance, go talk with your elders and write down what they tell you. The world in which they lived might be lost, but their narratives should live on.

Critical Reflection

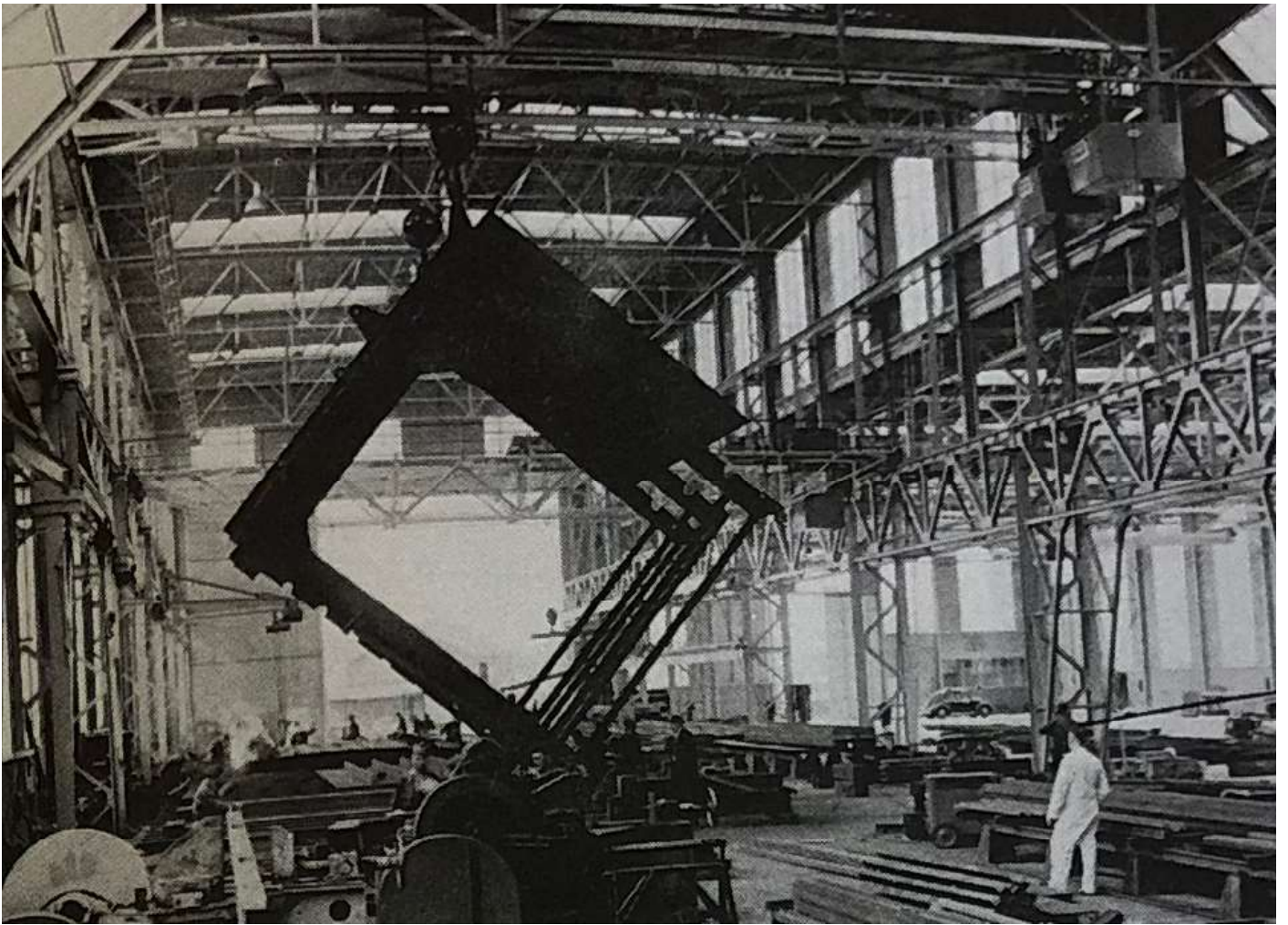
The utilization of oral histories to determine local cultural themes connected to a landscape proved effective. However, an issue might arise from interviewing only a small and homogenous group of respondents, as their answers can be quite homogenous too. This was not by design, as the small number of aging respondents underscore the urgency of capturing their narratives before they disappear.

Allowing more (diverse) respondents to actively add their own notes on a historical soft map (instead of concluding them through the oral histories) creates a more participatory dynamic, and perhaps a more truthful result in regards to a depiction of historical local culture.

***“To know more, is to see more.
That’s the fun of these old stories - at least to me!”²⁹***

-

Ruben Kuyper



30. *Work being done on a bridge compartment inside the Hoge Hal.* Image from D.Boele, 125 jaar Kloos, 1968, 47

From Research to Design

Concluding the findings made during this research phase, the design phase concerns the application of these findings onto a design project concerning the Kloos waterfront.

As has been established during the research, the Kloos waterfront contains a rich industrial and cultural heritage. Yet, due to the long-term abandonment of the site and the aging of the workers community, this heritage is set to disappear in time. A design intervention is necessary to prevent permanent cultural heritage loss.

The goal of the design phase is therefore to bring back the narratives and cultural themes that were once connected to the Kloos waterfront, bringing back what the site once provided: A sense of community, pride, and opportunity.

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