

Open the interspace is our advice. We could have added 'in the meantime', because that is exactly where we are now. It is a time of great changes. I will start with a few quotes that served as a guideline for our submission:

'Today's dreamers are those who claim that yesterday's reality will return tomorrow' (Wouter Hoogland)

*"Where there is nothing, everything is possible. Where there is architecture, nothing else can occur."*¹ (Rem Koolhaas)

'He who claims he can predict the future is a liar, even if he is right' (Lucien Kroll)

'A system becomes stronger with increasing complexity' (Louis le Roy)

Open the interspace

Let me take you on a journey through time and the interspace in the Northern Netherlands.

At the moment, several networks of resident initiatives are developing. These social and community networks seem to arise spontaneously as a response to real and actual questions in the region. It concerns bottom up initiatives that are both exciting and indispensable in times of shrinkage. In our opinion these initiatives form a fundamental part of a powerful structure (that is, everything one wishes to preserve in a region that is struggling with shrinkage). Based on the idea that a system becomes stronger with increasing complexity (Louis le Roy), it seems appropriate to intensify the layered structure of the network. In addition to the existing layers, new programmatic, organizational and/or economical layers could be set up in the region. **The more complex the physical, formal and informal network, the bigger the decisiveness of the residents and the resilience of the region as a whole.** Active support is needed to create space for local initiatives, to interconnect these initiatives and develop them to new practice. Yesterdays' dreamers became the realists of tomorrow.

There is a need for a physical and virtual knowledge- and development lab that enables to share insights and that meanwhile serves as a collective memory. Experiments with the preservation and development of promising initiatives in order to increase identity can become part of everyday life.

This way, the north can become a shining example of a new and sustainable socio-economic order. An order that is able to keep pace with national and international developments, only this time the stable and independent region forms the starting point.

Interspace

The interspace is a gray area; it concerns places independent of spatial claims. Vacant space that lost its function in today's society. Places that remind us of times that have passed. There are, for example, the abandoned industrial sites, historic farmhouses, retail units that are no longer in use and deserted schools. Empty and seemingly useless. All threatened by either demolition or collapse.

Speaking of collapse; the present times are characterized by confusion, dysfunctional systems and insecurity. The construction sector has come to a standstill, and economically, we are facing an uncertain future. Social achievements are under pressure, social facilities lose their value, resources are

¹ (source translation: <http://thekojonnamdishow.org/shows/2014-01-30/shaping-city-architecture-and-empty-spaces>)

running out, and the region struggles with local demographic decline and an aging population. It is quite likely that all this is causing both local administrators and residents sleepless nights.

Although these issues occur internationally, they are not new to the northern region. Indeed, we are quite familiar with such times of adversity. Some examples of these issues in the past include agricultural slump, the decline of the cardboard industry and the disappearance of the shipbuilding industry. Despite the presence and exploitation of rich resources, the Northern Netherlands are entirely dependent on the support of the Netherlands and Europe. Population decline is not uncommon in the north. However, history also shows that the North has a certain inner strength to overcome such times of adversity.

There is a wish to collectively find a way to come to a higher level in our current socio-economic situation. The figure in the upper-right illustrates the transition shift. On the left side, it shows the situation of a system after its period of greatest prosperity and productivity. This requires a fundamentally different approach to the urgent issues! We will have to take up the challenge and further develop it in order to preserve the quality of life and to create new perspectives. This is illustrated by the helical shape in the figure. Sustainable spatial development of the three Northern provinces cannot be designed, but we can create the circumstances in which sustainable spatial and social developments can grow into a powerful system.

Let me give you an example that illustrates the power of the interspace.

Unused interspace

We take you to a site called Oud Bocum. It concerns a monumental farmhouse located at the edge of the province. The residence is largely in its original condition, with characteristic historical details. Also the construction of the shed is in its original historical state. The roof trusses make you feel like you are entering a cathedral. This building and this site are unique; however, vacant farmhouses like this are far from uncommon. The current owner bought the building without an immediate destination or programmatic infill in mind. In the coming years, substantial investments are needed to preserve the airframe. Besides, the residential area of the farm has to be fully renovated and adjusted to contemporary needs and the 2.000m² asbestos cement roof should be replaced as soon as possible.

What are the options?

The vacant farm shed is an excellent example of a covered outdoor space with a lot of possibilities. On the assumption that the exterior of the building keeps out the rain, the sun and the wind, construction volumes with new functions can be placed underneath. Efficient spaces provided with all necessary functionality and comfort, climatized and well finished. These could be prefab volumes that, after production, are placed underneath the roof and assembled into living quarters and/or work spaces. This way, an unnamed space will arise between these volumes and the exterior of the farm shed, waiting for a destination and providing room for any unplanned future programs. This working method has several important advantages over the conventional manner of developing, designing, building and utilization. First of all, there are the before mentioned advantages of stepwise construction. Because the first step is relatively inexpensive, there is no great financial risk at the start. Secondly, both construction and renovation can be carried out quickly. Prefab units can easily be placed and connected. Thirdly, the method offers a high degree of future flexibility. New units can be added, moved underneath the roof or even to another location, if desired. As the farm yard and the farm become part of a growing number of networks, chances increase the complex will grow into an exploitable whole with the ability to respond accurately to new programmatic questions.

Sheet 4 new function

The most obvious and at the same time the most observed options with regard to new functions are a residence, an office or work space, possibly complemented with a Bed and Breakfast. Investing the plus 300.000 euros that are needed to make the farm suitable for these new functions is a risky business, since it is not exactly easy to earn back the invested money. This makes the business case unstable and vulnerable to external influences. We suggest a multi-programmatic approach by offering space to existing or promising initiatives. Subsequently, these initiatives should be interconnected to form a strong network. I will continue by showing you several existing and possible initiatives.

hogeland hotel

The Hogeland-hotel is a new tourist and recreational phenomenon in the landscape. It concerns a network hotel, consisting of multiple existing buildings, instead of just one central building. The management of the hotel is in the hands of a private entrepreneur, who may or may not be supported by an organization or an external operator. This has both economic and practical advantages, for the clustering of the rooms at different locations makes use for educational purposes, (temporary) studios, team building sessions for companies and health care possible.

cottage farms

In the rural area, small, one person companies working from home are increasingly common. The space and tranquility of the landscape, the low property values and a fast Internet connection create a pleasant working environment. However, not everyone can afford a workspace at home. For others, working from home all alone is just not appealing. The next logical step is to explore the possibilities of bringing the individual, one person companies together under a single roof. This way, a new type of business complex is created, for example under the roof of a farm shed. We will call it the cottage farm. Each company has its own unit in the shed, and, depending on the wishes of the various participants, shared facilities can be placed in the remaining interspace. Apart from the benefits of each other's proximity and the possibility to share facilities, the before mentioned spatial design with mobile units under a roof allows the building to grow or shrink with the business. In this way, the 'interspace' under the roof provides the building with a new function. Because of the modular methodology, it is even possible to exchange units between cottage farms.

residential care network

Farms and other buildings that lost their former function, are used for experiments regarding the housing for the elderly, such as residential care zones or assisted living communities. They will be assigned with a residential care function or they will function as a care support center for a more extended area. This allows the elderly to live on familiar grounds for a longer time. Similar to the Hogeland Hotel, the organization is centralized and the accommodation decentralized.

local food production

The agricultural sector in the Northern Netherlands follows the trend of scale enlargement and intensification. The benefits are highly dependent on the global market, leading to an undesired dependence that can no longer be compensated by means of subsidy funds. The necessary investments are not within the reach of every agricultural entrepreneur. Regional sale of local products and services is an attractive option when it comes to revitalization of the agricultural sector. Connections to other initiatives such as local providers of sustainable energy, residential care networks and Hogeland Hotel will create good prospects for agricultural businesses, not so much as extra income but as a fully operational business.

hogeland restaurant

Part of the regional products can be directly processed and consumed in the Hogeland restaurant. Similar to the temporary live music venues that are part of the jazz-bicycle tour, the regional dinners can be enjoyed at varying locations.

cooperative finance

Every initiative needs funding for realization, but also for exploitation. Usually, every initiative arranges its own funding, whether it concerns a building site or the expansion of an existing business. The risk-analysis used by conventional credit providers do not allow to take the synergy between the initiatives and social cost and benefits into account when generating the financing arrangement. Here, there are chances and possibilities for cooperative finance, crowd funding and other creative forms of financing. A regional fund provides an opportunity for promising initiatives, with the other parties involved as stakeholders directly controlling it, ...

construction service

Small general contractors and local construction workers unite in a network of craftsmen offering their expertise to organize building projects between the different initiatives in the area. This way, private client or collective private commissions will have a financial benefit (purchase discount), while the builders can start projects where the advantages of traditional construction methods are combined with that of prefabrication and serial production.

coupled energy supply

In the future, energy will be generated by exploitation of sustainable sources such as windmills, solar power, geothermal energy, biomass, etc. It concerns a field of rapid technological development, aiming at large scale solutions and ditto investments. The field is dominated by the major players on the energy market. Nevertheless, there are more and more private parties and businesses starting small cooperations to generate their own sustainable energy. Often, it concerns grid-connected solar panels of which the surplus is redelivered to the existing network. It is both conceivable and desirable to create a powerful system in which the locally generated energy is locally distributed as well. By coupling of the different local initiatives to a cooperative energy company, the cost of power supply can be reduced, because there is no need for a large scale infrastructure. Furthermore, the parties involved and those in their direct vicinity will be apt to use the energy from the available resources more efficiently. Besides, the local initiatives can serve as the driving force of a development fund that supports similar initiatives that are not yet cost effective.

opened interspace

To be able to effectively shape the sustainable development of the North, we need to break the trend. This is now more important than ever. It is only logical that the existing systems will defend themselves against these changes. Consequently, actual changes in the established order will not necessarily be found. Companies have been working on this innovation paradox for quite some time; they found that only 25 percent of the innovation includes technical issues, and that the remaining 75 percent is determined by people and organization. Thus, an actual change requires more, namely social innovation and developmental power of enterprising people in businesses, governments, knowledge institutions and among citizens. Cooperation and joining of forces will produce its effects. We need both physical and mental space to achieve real innovation in everyday life. To make progress, we need innovation, with social innovation as the driving force of technological innovation. Within the context of the region, we can state that actual innovation can take place if and only if the 'inner strength' of the inhabitants is used and

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Opmerking [1]: Hier is de zin afgebroken in het origineel.

interconnected. This way, private initiatives can be connected to collective action and vice versa.

DAADkracht

We have already started. DAADkracht is an initiative of several advisers/designers that started working on actual projects regarding innovative initiatives in disused buildings or locations.

We help to make the step from idea to initiative. We apply knowledge acquired in one project in another and we would like to share this cycle of knowledge with others.

For example, we are working on the following repurposing projects:

- Oud Bocum farm
- Den Horn school
- Outside the region, but nevertheless a bottom-up project: housing construction for new households in the municipality of Zeewolde

Are you looking for connections and do you have an initiative? We will gladly assist you and offer our expertise.