Amersfoort (NL)

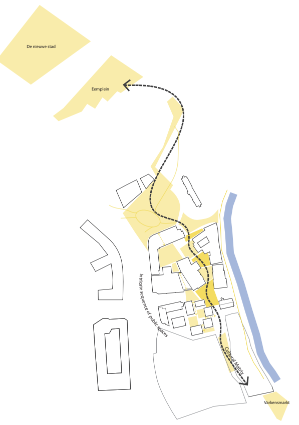
Onze Lieve Boogie Woogie

A new cultural district for Amersfoort, where art meets the city

Architecture is a social act and the material theater of human activity.
– Spiro Kostof

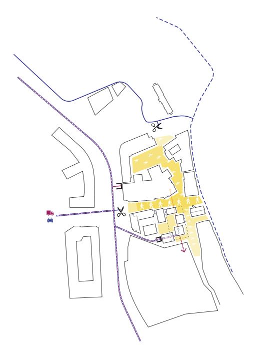
Introduction

Taking inspiration from Amersfoort's 15th century landmark Onze Lieve Vrouwentoren, and native modernist pioneer Piet Mondrian's painting Broadway Boogie Woogie (1943), the OLBW cultural district celebrates the city's love for the arts as a communal and dynamic achievement. The brand-new theatre and film complexes are incorporated into the existing urban fabric combined with the adaptive reuse of existing buildings, and the addition of a Citizen's Hub to the brief for cultural and communal activities. OLBW turns to the social condition of the city as a setting of spaces made for the people, by the people. Similar to the construction of a cathedral, not just a 'Gesamtkunstwerk' of different artists, artisans, and specialists, but a communal undertaking where all layers of society came together, committed, and cooperated by sharing common cultural and natural resources. In terms of form, the district is shaped as a picturesque Townscape, where everyone is welcome, creativity can flourish, and each person and activity can find their "stage". This versatility extends in space as well as time. The second point of departure, Mondrian's painting, is significant for its vivid variations in rhythm, tone, and mood. It signaled fine art's turn to a larger and more varied audience, referencing at the same time the community-rooted Boogie Woogie music. In a parallel manner, the new cultural district is rendered accessible to the public and a wide array of uses by establishing a dynamic timeline, capable of accommodating changing usage of facilities in terms of scale, style, type, spontaneous or programmed occurrence. OLBW is thus, a paired creative and social process to form the cultural heart of Amersfoort, with historic values and contemporary standards. An experiential journey bringing people together where the city takes the theatrical stage and carries its historical identity with excitement towards a new, adaptable future.
Responding to Europan 18's topic of "Resourcing" we turn to social dynamics and grassroot forces as the main drivers for the cultivation, maintenance, and perseverance of a resilient urban ecosystem. Central to this is the idea of a cultural incubator in the form of a Citizen's Hub in the southern part of the site, acting as a bridge between the city's cultural complex, civic heritage, and the public sphere of the city life. Following the approach of Citizen Science which involves communities in the processes of knowledge production and policy change, the Hub invites the active participation of residents, students, artists, researchers, municipal agencies, and visitors. It supports a collective investment in urban, cultural, and environmental matters—framing artistic production as a shared, accessible everyday concern. with a sense of place-making and civic engagement.



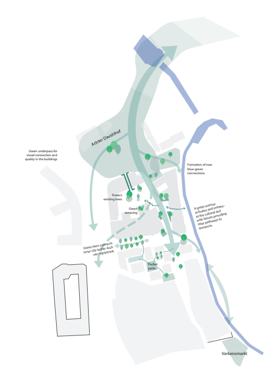
Cultural matrix

Describing the notion of Townscape Gordon Cullen wrote about the "value of the incident in a street" and the "art of relationships" in the urban setting. Following this line of thought, the design acts as a stepping stone in a larger urban and cultural landscape. From North to South, OLBW connects the Nieuwe Stad towards the old Varkensmarkt neighborhood through a walkable, car-free passage that starts with the Achter Davidshof park – enriched with artistic installations– and into the New Stadhuisplein, in-between the main Theatre & Cinema Complex, and across Molenstraat to the urban courtyards of the Citizen's Hub that mirrors the urban setting of the street markets behind it. Along the way, the finely stitched sequence of public spaces invites movement.



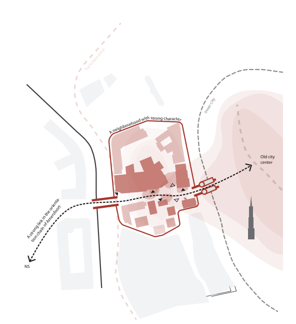
A podium for car-free interactions

To prioritize pedestrians and strengthen ties to the historic city center, vehicle access is redirected away from Molenstraat. By creating a car-free area, a finely interwoven network of specific public spaces invites to move through, interact and explore, breaking the barrier between the spectator and the spectacle. Architecturally, this axis synchronizes with its surroundings by following the grain size of the urban blocks around it while maintaining its design integrity through a playful but convincing skyline. Most importantly, it binds culture and citizen by providing a pleasant place for interaction.



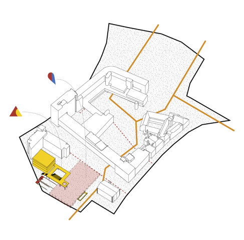
Green corridor

To prioritize pedestrians and strengthen ties to the historic city center, vehicle access is redirected away from Molenstraat. Theatre logistics enter via Stadsring, connecting to underground service levels and the main stage. Parking and deliveries reroute to Torenstraat, which already functions logistically, freeing Molenstraat and the southern site from traffic. A dedicated 50-spot garage near Torenstraat will serve the theatre, later linking directly to the foyer. This strategy fosters a pedestrian-friendly environment where cars are occasional guests, preserving the site's human scale.



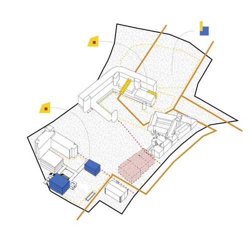
Orientation avenue

The East to West axis is approached more formally, providing orientation through sightlines, tree rows, and height accents, easing the transition between the traffic-oriented Central Station area and the historic city center, contextualizing the new additions along this route. The new development reflects and supports the intimate scale of its surroundings while accommodating powerful new functions and inviting users to participate. On a higher level, a contemporary curvilinear roofscape is added to unify the various buildings of the new development, referencing a dominant characteristic element of the city of Amersfoort, and maintaining its humane scale and aesthetics.



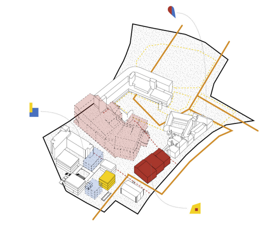
Phasing 1 - Placemaking and Social Resourcing

The project begins with the reuse of the western volume along Torenstraat into temporary residences, the rest of the Hellestraat 24 complex will be demolished. The logistics of the Sint Jorisplein shopping center will be rerouted through the Torenstraat to make a pedestrian friendly Molenstraat. During this phase the theater underground parking will be constructed south of Molenstraat. On top, at the heart of this site, flexible wooden structures emerge, forming the Citizen's Hub core of a performing arts podium, that signals the start of the resourcing process. Temporary programs on the north side support this activation through events and workshops in the park connecting to the Stadsring.



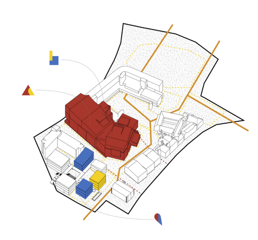
Phase 2a - Theatre, Film and Adaptive Reuse

After two years the municipality moves into their new residence therefore allowing the transformation of the Stadhuis. To begin: an expo hall, horeca, ateliers, and artist residencies take shape within the former Stadhuis. Minimal surgical interventions to the existing Stadhuis allow its transformation. A new passage towards the Achter Davidshof park and a new entrance towards the Westsingel will create a flawless integration into the city's pedestrian network.



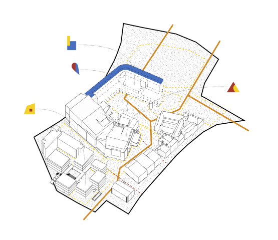
Phase 2b - Theatre, Film and Adaptive Reuse

The Pi de Bruin building and the annex of the Stadhuis are demolished to start the construction of the film house, first, then the theater. The pedestrian bridge of the Stadhuis will be preserved and repurposed as part of the new theater.



Phase 3 - Cultural District & Network

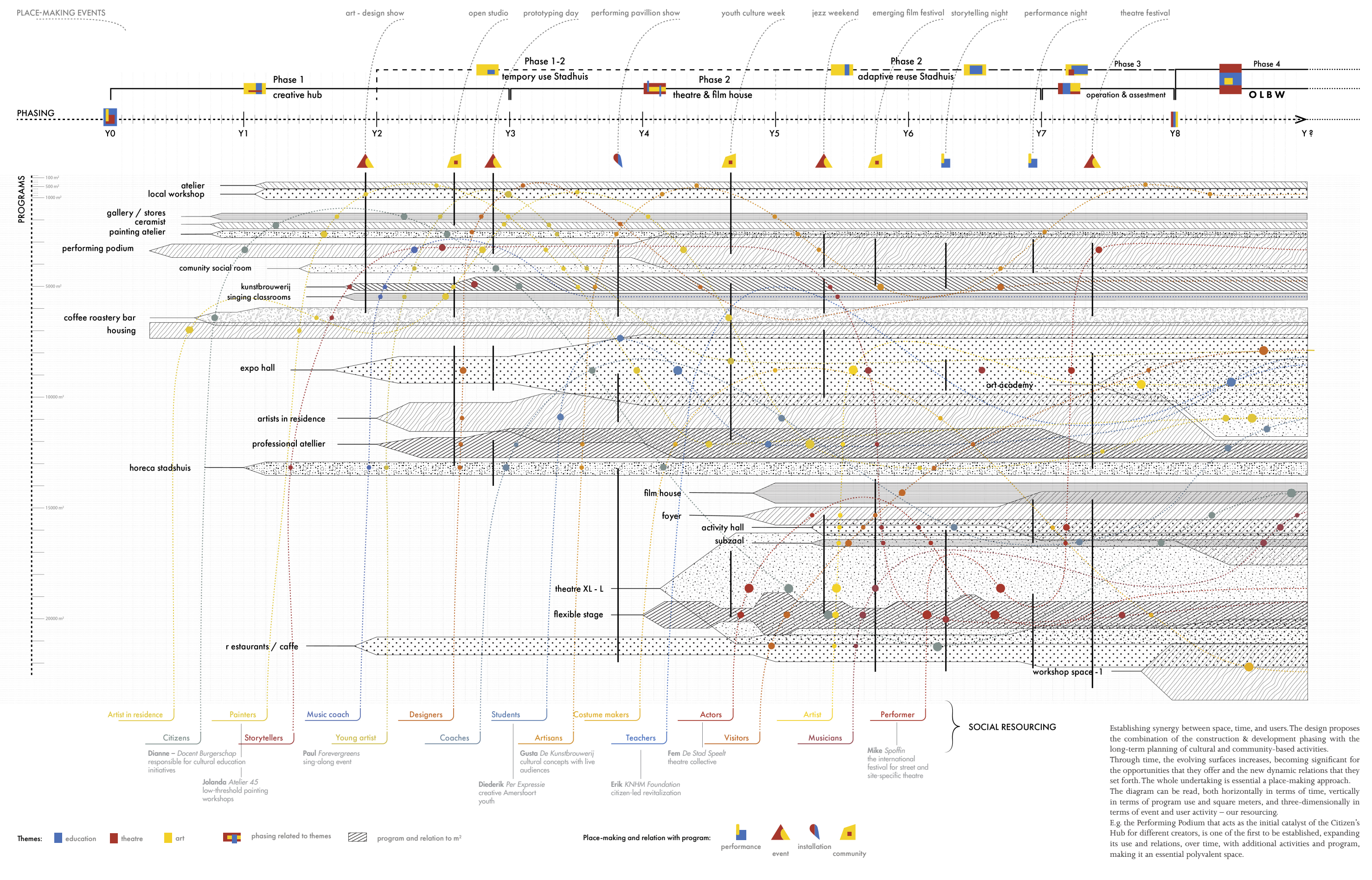
After seven years all major construction has been completed, and the cultural district has come to its glory. The cultural activities of the Citizen Hub, artists in residence, theater and cinema have formed a resilient socio-cultural network within the city center of Amersfoort, linking the cultural industry with public engagement. Here, the planned temporary use for the Stadhuis (as described within the brief) ends. This is a moment to assess its future.



Phase 4 - Vision for the Future

We believe that it is the best-case scenario to bring all the locally resourced culture into permanence. To keep this resilient locally rooted cultural district alive, so it will keep being able to crowd source productions, foster movements, and incubate artists, startup companies, and organizations. We believe that the architecture and the character of the Stadhuis is significant and therefore important to be preserved in the long term. In an ideal future scenario, we envision the Cultural Hub and the artists in residence to evolve also into an academy of arts, to guarantee the permanent long term cultural future for the Stadhuis. We foresee that in need of increased capacity the Stadhuis can be topped up, while the entire underground level can be integrated with logistical and technical facilities.

Social Re-sourcing, Time - Space - Users



Establishing synergy between space, time, and users. The design proposes the combination of the construction & development phasing with the long-term planning of cultural and community-based activities.
Through time, the evolving surfaces increases, becoming significant for the opportunities that they offer and the new dynamic relations that they set forth. The whole undertaking is essential a place-making approach.
The diagram can be read, both horizontally in terms of time, vertically in terms of program use and square meters, and three-dimensionally in terms of event and user activity – our resourcing.
E.g. the Performing Podium that acts as the initial catalyst of the Citizen's Hub for different creators, is one of the first to be established, expanding its use and relations, over time, with additional activities and program, making it an essential polyvalent space.

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Westsingel: Entrance to the communal art spaces viewed through the renewed green Achter Davidshof

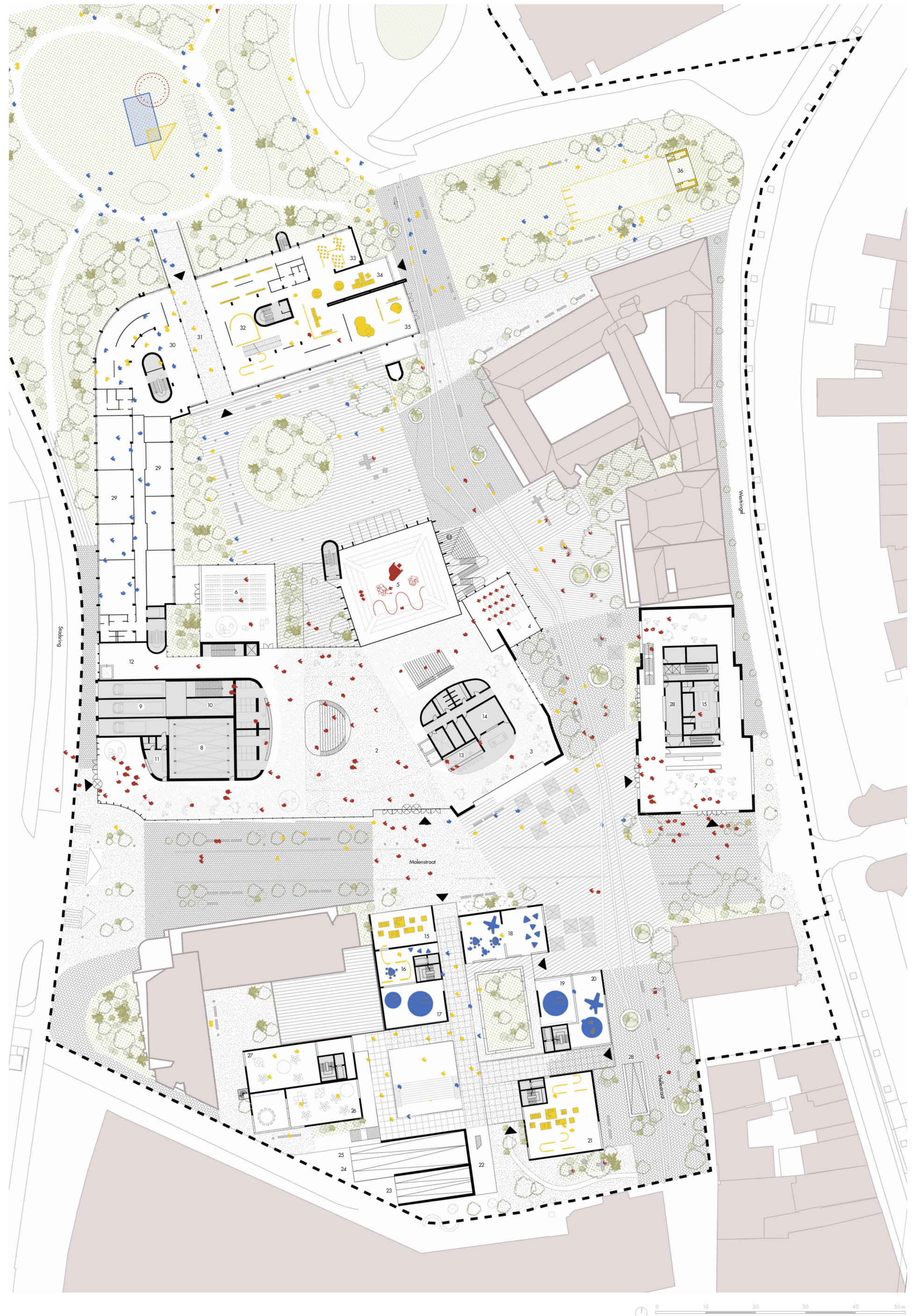
Stadhuisplein: the activity of the flat floor hall spill out onto the square, activated roofs are accessible through the public loop

Molenstraat from the Stadsring: the theater becomes a landmark from the station that draws the perspective into the gate of te city center

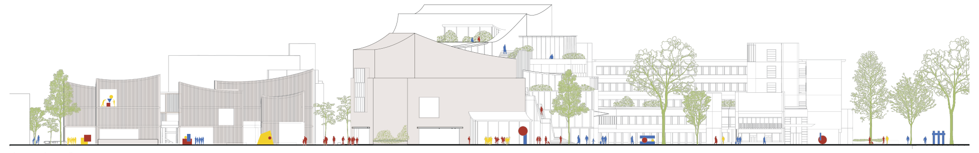
Hellestraat: historical view onto the Observanten cloister

Multi-use theater hall: view onto Onze Lieve Vrouwentoren, bringing the landmark of Amersfoort onto the stage

Culture Hub: incubator for the culture cluster, resourcing local cultural activities on multiple levels



1 entrance lounge
2 foyer theater
3 restaurant
4 activities room
5 flat floor theater hall (flexible)
6 theater sub room
7 cafe
8 understage / stage lift
9 theater (un)loading docks
10 main stage elevator
11 cloak room
12 artist entrance
13 bar
14 kitchen
15 community music room
16 kunst brouwerij (art brewery)
17 community dance studio
18 community room (flexible)
19 community art space
20 local workshop
21 ceramics workshop
22 cafe city roastery
23 Q-park parking entrance
24 truck entrance shopping center
25 theater parking entrance
26 atelier artist in residence
27 atelier artist in residence
28 entrance bike parking
29 artist workshops
30 art gallery
31 art passage (new addition)
32 community exhibition spaces
33 community art space (flexible)
34 entrance box (new addition)
35 community art space (flexible)
36 open air stage / theatrum continuum

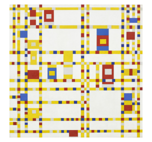


Elevation along Hellestraat

Historical Connections, New Commons

The project extends within a protected historic cityscape, surrounded by listed monuments and layered urban histories. At the core of the Townscape concept is the restoration of key viewpoints. This is achieved through the faming windows that break down the facades and volumes of the large Theatre and Film complexes. They are oriented towards historical points of interest, most notably toward the Onze Lieve Vrouwetoren, the Observant Cloister, and the canal bridge & gate to the medieval centre. Even while enjoying a theatre play, or going up the stairs to a movie theatre, the new buildings offer sightings toward the existing urban context on new stand points. The design proposal also connects the dense urban fabric of the city with the clarity and modularity of contemporary urban developments through the hierarchy and sequencing of spaces as public events. The historic direction of the Hellestraat is re-established as an urban pedestrian promenade, reinforced by breaking down large volumes into smaller architectural elements, pavilions, canopies, art installations, and urban furniture. The theatre and cinema volumes anchor its passage, re-articulating the contours of Westsingel. The Stadhuisplein becomes a new reference point in this urban ecology, attracting activities as the center of an artistic neighbourhood on the grounds of the former municipal complex. Lastly, the reused Stadhuis itself is transformed with ateliers and common spaces that assign an urban scenery to its interior. A new pedestrian passage towards the Achter Davidshof park, evoking relations to Amersfoort's city gates.

The OLBW cultural district is conceived as an urban theatre where the passer-by is rendered a flâneur in a vibrant townscape, becoming both observer and performer. Architecture acts not as backdrop for city life but an active urban force, inviting curiosity, participation, and shared experience. More than a cluster of cultural buildings, OLBW is a spatial promise where the city's own rhythms are taken into account and imprinted into the new design, and where creative art and life takes common root and grow. Architecture expands into the public realm, embedding history and culture into the fabric of everyday life as something to be lived, and shared openly.



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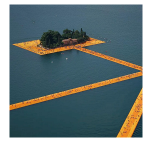

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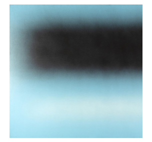

8

1- Mondrian – Broadway Boogie-Woogie – *an unexpected syncopation of dancing and rhythm. The creation of hidden surprises, anticipations, reveals, within a porous organized system of activities.*

2- Noli map – *The discovery and unfold of the public spaces. The publics domains blends within the buildings, threshold blurry in a continuum flow of people.*

3- Christo – The Floating Piers – *The creation of art or performance it is the place in itself, building, installation, spaces... it is just the means of the end. Borders blurs, blending the relation between spectator and spectacle.*

4- Edward Hopper – Office in a Small City – *The building frames the surrounding, blurring the threshold between inside-outside. The city takes its theatrical stage within the ensemble.*

5- De Lieve Vrouwen Toren – PW van de Weijer / JC Loman – *The historical Hellestraat is the resourcing from the memory of the past shaping the future. Landmarks become anchor points for the experience of the place.*

6- Rome – Pantheon – *"I'm a passionate spectator, with immense joy to set up house in the hearth of the multitude. I'm a Flaneur, I create my journey by discovering places without a destination."*

7- Robert Irwin The – Varese Portal Room – *An opening is not just a void on a surface, it is a frame toward the urban fabric, became a place to be. It brings the real world right to the viewer, close enough to almost touch it. The city becomes the canvas, the building a frame.*

8- Hans Hartung – T1982-H31 – *Boundaries blurry, distinction between inside and outside fades, you are free to observe. "Am I looking at a performance or I am myself the performer?"*

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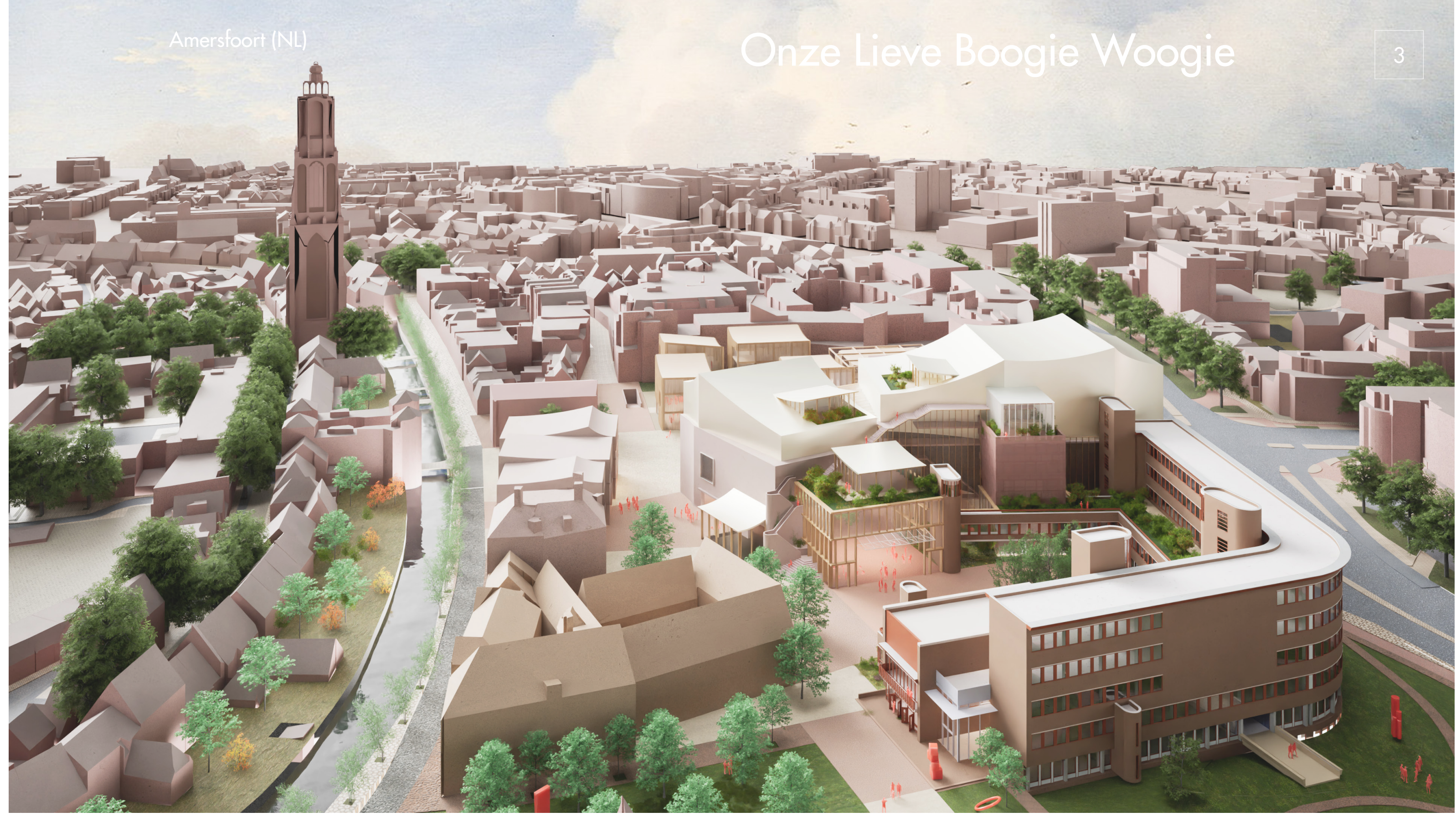
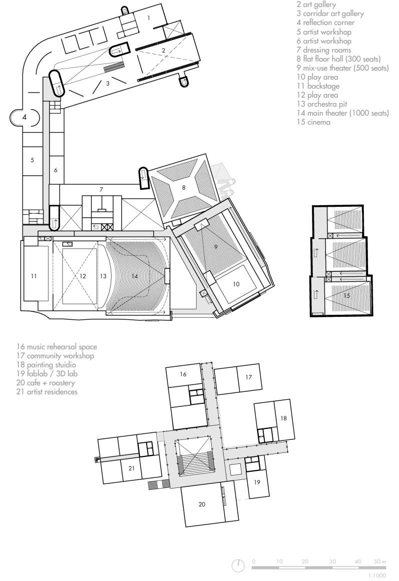


First floor +1



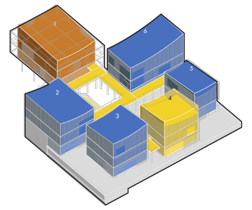
1 Digital exhibition
2 art gallery
3 corridor art gallery
4 reflection corner
5 artist workshop
6 artist workshop
7 dressing rooms
8 flat floor hall (300 seats)
9 mix-use theater (500 seats)
10 play area
11 backstage
12 play area
13 orchestra pit
14 main theater (1000 seats)
15 cinema

16 music rehearsal space
17 community workshop
18 painting stuidio
19 fablab / 3D lab
20 cafe + roastery
21 artist residences

The Citizen's Hub

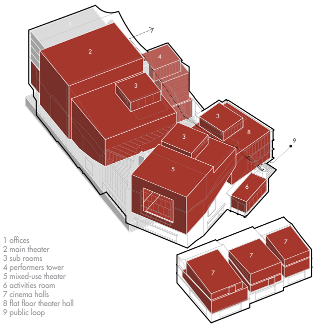
The Citizen's Hub forms a small urban district with clusters of free-standing buildings in an intimate setting, built on circular and biobased design principles. Their compact footprint and robust first-floor promenade with shared cores enable flexible, phased construction and adaptation. Each unit operates autonomously, allowing tailored soundproofing and lighting for diverse cultural uses like music, dance, photography, and cinema; as well as scale: from individual to collective studios and learning spaces. Intertwining streets create multifunctional "in-between" spaces that gradually expose activities from private to public. A central open auditorium serves as both gathering space and main circulation. The reused Torenstraat building anchors the ensemble, visually linked by a timber grid-frame and adapted for workspaces and housing.

1 artists in residence
2 community cafe + roastery
3 craftsmanship hub
4 art hub
5 community hub
6 music hub

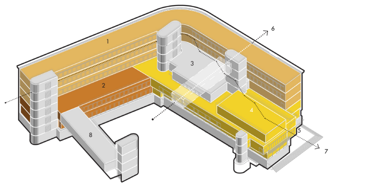


Theater + Film House Complex

Given the programmatic requirements, phasing, and limited plot size, the design for the Theatre Complex turns into an ambitious spatial challenge. Nevertheless, the project commits to the Dutch tradition of theatres as integral parts of the city. To secure maximum interaction with the city the dedicated theatre halls are raised on the first floor freeing up the ground floor for the foyer, restaurant and café, as well as a free flowing halls, an activity-room adjacent to pedestrian walkway, and a flat-floor hall with an openable façade to the Stadhuisplein, literally extending their activities to the public. With these spaces designed as indoor public rooms of reciprocal exchange people are not only drawn to the Theatre to see a play, but to meet and interact with each other.
In order not to obstruct the view and connection from Hellenstraat to the Stadhuisplein, the Film House is designed separate from the Theatre Compex. An independent building for film and discussion housing six screening rooms in is upper floors, above a spacious lobby and a lively ground-floor cafe.



1 offices
2 main theater
3 sub rooms
4 performers tower
5 mixed-use theater
6 activities room
7 cinema halls
8 flat floor theater hall
9 public loop

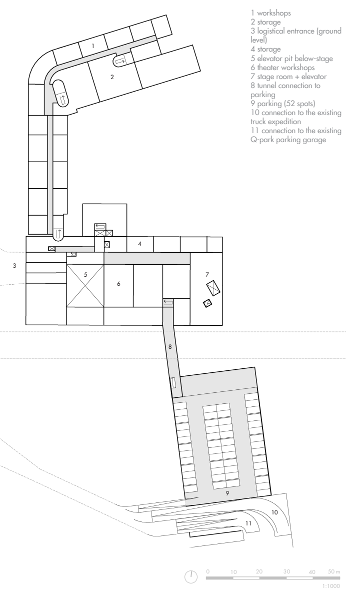


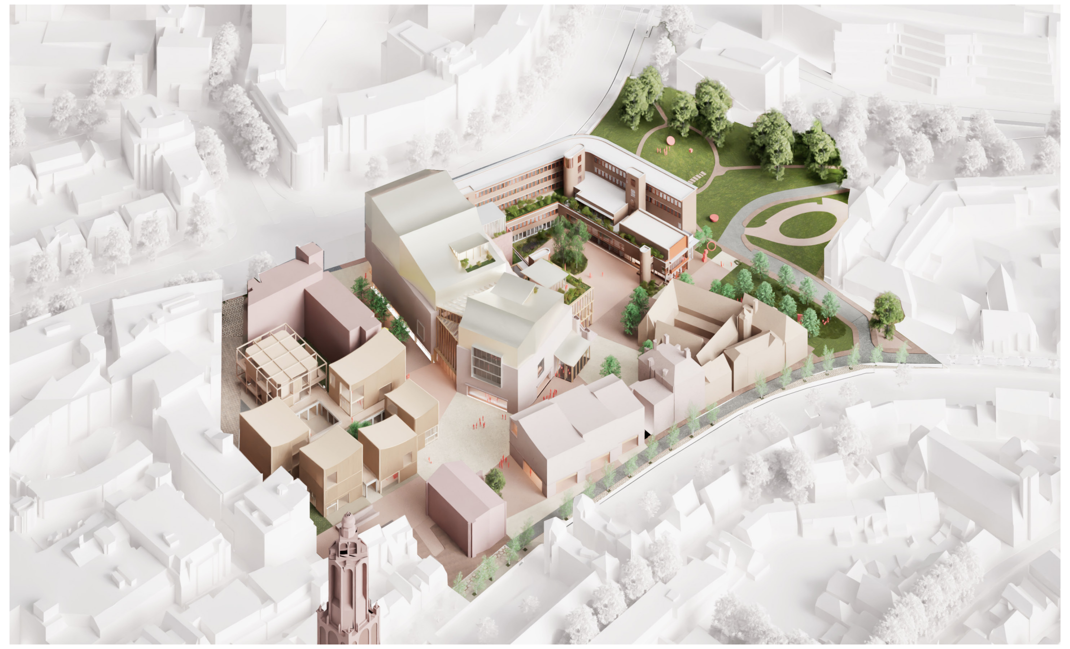
1 artists in residence
2 artist workshops
3 cafe / restaurant
4 exhibition spaces
5 entrance box (new addition)
6 passage (new addition)
7 public loop
8 theater dressing rooms

Adaptive Re-use: Stadhuis

The 1970s Stadhuis by Van Kranendonk holds a distinctive civic presence, shaped by fortress-like geometry, sloped walls, and brick façades articulated with embrasure-like openings. Its stepped form and vertical circulation cores evoke historical fortifications, while enclosing a central courtyard as an introverted urban room. The proposal preserves most of the structure, removing only the southern volume to make space for the new theatre. Interior interventions remain minimal: lightweight partitions are reconfigured to accommodate exhibitions, workshops, horeca, and artist studios. A new public corridortracing the historical axis of Hellestraat cuts through the ground floor and is doubled as an art passage, transforming circulation into a curatorial experience. At its northern edge, a wooden bridge connects to the park, reinforcing the north–south urban spine and repositioning the Stadhuis as a contemporary city gate. New architectural elements including an entrance box and art passage insertions materialized in stainless steel and glass, offering a restrained and surgical contrast to the original brown brick and timber. These subtle additions reflect the strategy of precise, reversible transformation. This reuse phase becomes a catalyst, drawing users into the district and anchoring a new cultural ecosystem. The building's future remains open adaptable to evolving needs, whether as an arts institute, cultural hub, or hybrid platform. Its adaptable strategy prioritizes time, flexibility, and feedback recasting Stadhuis' heritage into a living civic framework.

Basement -1



1 workshops
2 storage
3 logistical entrance (ground level)
4 storage
5 elevator pit below-stage
6 theater workshops
7 stage room + elevator
8 tunnel connection to parking
9 parking (52 spots)
10 connection to the existing truck expedition
11 connection to the existing Q-park parking garage