

Fragments of history - threads of community

The identity of the new cultural district of Amersfoort is based on the layers of history of the area. It seeks to merge seamlessly into the urban fabric on a hinge location surfing on the tensions between the big and the small, the modernity and the traditions, the motorized and the pedestrian, the park and the city.

What if in one point of space all layers of time co-exist side by side?

Introduction

What if time had no other nature than the three spatial dimensions, and at any given point in space, all layers of time co-exist side by side?

Mathematically, that's the case: at one point in space, every layer of time overlaps. Philosophically, if all eras stand on the same level, it invites us to question our position — we, as a social fabric — in relation to both the past, the present and the future. It also challenges our ideas of progress and how, through history, we oversaw the old traditions for innovation, leading to question the dehumanizing value of pragmatism pushed at its limits.

Taking a reflective step back, this project intertwines the new cultural center of Amersfoort with its fragmented, layered context and the pulse of today's society. While looking forward to the coming climate change, it turns romantic gestures into functional and meaningful assets.

Thoughtful steps towards a renewed and anchored urban form

Situated at the meeting point of old and new Amersfoort, between infrastructure and historic city, business towers and small medieval streets, the site reveals traces of time layered upon each other. Probably once a meadow landscape forged by wind and ice, the site went through history to host the old Hellestraat — a road to the medieval cemetery — a romantic 19th-century park, and a city hall extension built in the late 20th century. Our aim was to capture the essence of these different periods and bring it to life through the new cultural quarter, which will add a contemporary layer and recompose the whole area - because we believe that these links to history continue to weave the fabric of our community today.

The Amersfoort of today is emerging as a vibrant hub, harnessing urban dynamics to energise the city. At its core, an ambitious cultural programme serves as an incubator for artistic and social initiatives. Alongside the theatre and cinema offerings, space is intentionally left open for the indeterminate and the spontaneous — allowing experimental projects to take shape, with the potential to be expanded or adapted in other areas undergoing renewal, such as Flint and Amicitia.

To give the site a new breath, the initial step is to bring interactions back to a human scale and open up the ground floors, allowing public spaces to breathe again and weave themselves back into the fabric of the city. Our proposal begins by removing the late 20th extension of the Stadhuis which currently closes the urban block with a long, out-of-scale volume facing a

car-dominated road, to restore a human scale, reopen perspectives and reweave connections in the urban fabric.

The program is redistributed across the three remaining built-up areas (the Stadhuis, the central Stadhuis wing and the Torenstraat building), while carefully balancing the functions and spaces within them.

Each of the three parts is approached in a distinct way. In the main body of the Stadhuis, most interventions focus on the interior, preserving the existing façades. The Stadhuis wing is embraced by a new structure that forms the central reception building, while the Torenstraat building is replaced by a larger, more adaptable volume that integrates material reuse strategies.

These architectural pieces would not come together without a seamless link between the different parts of the program. That thread is an underground gallery, opening generously within the central entrance building, and symbolically tracing the historic path of the Hellestraat. This internal street flows through the heart of the complex, offering a shared, intuitive space where visitors naturally converge. Between the cinema and the theater, the gallery transforms into a vibrant cultural corridor—an open stage for art exhibitions that echo and enrich the life of the quarter.

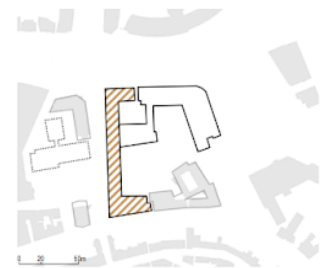
Finally, with the removal of the late 20th extension and the transformation of Molenstraat into a pedestrian street, three distinct public spaces are opened up around the central building : one that opens towards the ring, one towards the canal and an introverted space between the stadhuis and the new building. The spaces are invaded by a green ribbon from the ring symbolically recreating the romantic park and by the canal with renaturing the slope of the canal.

A cultural hub made of fragments of the past for a bright future

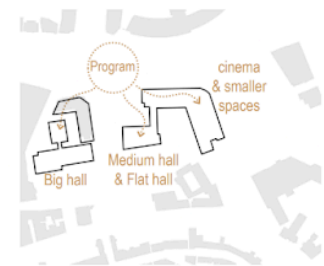
At an architectural level, the distribution of the surfaces and the functions is performed to create 3 logical parts in terms of program but also phasing, and make it match consistently with the existing structures. Reusing parts of the late 20th extension would be desirable, and a careful diagnostic should guide how this could be achieved within our project (for example by reusing the facade elements from the late 20th extension in fragments to create a terrazzo-effect floor, or more practically, by recovering equipment).

The Stadhuis will be home of the office spaces, the small performance rooms and the catering functions. It indeed already offers a structure that can easily host these functions and a smart renovation/management of the building could limit the heating

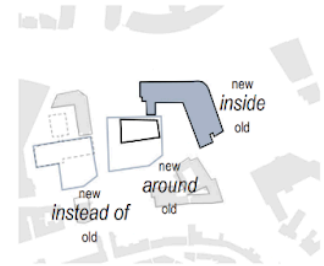
1 - Deconstruction of the stadhuis extension to open the urban block



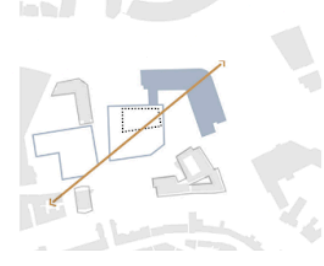
2 - Split the program in 3 zones to descale it to the cityfabric scale, while creating functional and phasing split



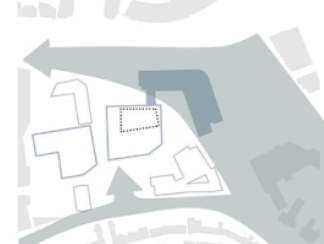
3 - Dealing with the existing in 3 different ways



4 - Underground street reviving the old hellestraat



5 - Weave public spaces with a green/blue ribbon



power and heated areas. To limit intervention costs and preserve traces of the building's past uses, several spaces retain a similar function—whether they are high-quality spaces (such as the congress hall, the university chamber with balconies, or the mezzanine overlooking the central hall) or more functional ones (offices, restrooms, staircases, etc.).

Cinema rooms are added to the program, requiring more substantial structural interventions. A new structure is introduced to support the central columns from the upper floors. Given the volume needed for the theaters, an extension is created across the underground and ground levels. This allows for a bright, open circulation space below ground and fosters visual and physical connections with the Stadhuisplein. The extension remains discreet, interpreting the existing volumes in a minimalist way—with wooden columns, glazing, and a flat roof that can double as an open-air stage. The largest cinema hall is created beneath the square on the ring side, taking advantage of the excavation from the demolition of the late 20th extension to reduce costs.

The wing of the stadhuis will be the center of the complex. It will distribute the public flows and host the foyer for the public as well as the artists spaces. The existing internal partitioning will be totally removed to accommodate the foyer on the ground floor and the artists will be on the first floor, allowing them to move easily between the different buildings with their own circulation spaces separated from the public. The façade of the Stadhuis plays an active role in shaping the interior atmosphere. The brick walls are left exposed, while the openings are variously treated—some left empty, others glazed, and some closed off with a recessed layer of brick.

The rest of the program consists of the flat and the medium halls, as well as the entrance and the circulation spaces for the public. A central staircase connects the ground floor (entrance and foyer) to the upper halls and to the third building via the underground gallery that follows the path of the former Hellestraat. On the facade, the new building adopts a contemporary style while reinterpreting the Stadhuis's column structure to give rhythm to its elevation.

Finally, the last piece of the puzzle is **the big hall**. Given the structural limitations of the existing Torenstraat building and the constraints of the urban site, we made the decision to demolish the current structure to make space for this major addition. The new building echoes the design language of the central structure, though in a more minimalist manner: each volume appears as a monolith, clad in one of the tactile materials used in the central building—such as rammed earth panels or wooden tiles.

A landscape to foster community cohesion and climate resilience

At a landscape level, the compact building approach and the urban composition opens up three comfortable public spaces with different qualities.

At first, the extraverted **forecourt** opens up the cultural district to the ring. It gives a face to the cultural district towards the new city and the passers-by. It also acts as a logistic hub and busy plaza, where people make appointments and where big events take place thanks to its open and paved layout.

Then, the rich landscape of the **watergardens** brings freshness and a touch of nature in the city, while infiltrating rainwater in a natural way in the ground. The watergardens are composed of a fountain piazza, a sloping landscape to the canal and terraces under a tree

canopy. These elements provide freshness and a calm atmosphere with a view of the old city center.

The last of the three public spaces is an introverted piazza sheltered from the wind between the Stadhuis and the new central building. This intimate public space provides a place to gather and to discuss with friends. The open plaza allows for private events and late night drinks under string lights.

Finally, the rest of the urban public space is shaped by the two axis of the Molenstraat and the Hellestraat, with their new tree alignments and green patches; and the park in itself is extended while becoming part of the larger urban shape of the blue/green ribbon along the stadsring. All these landscaping features must indeed be integrated into a broader strategy to green the city, enhance its climate resilience, and foster community cohesion.

Phasing as if the park initiated a cultural movement towards the city

Splitting the program in three buildings looks reasonable from a phasing point of view.

Since the relocation of the Stadhuis activities is imminent, the viability of the cultural programming and the café can already be tested during the design phase through temporary and community-led uses, as well as artistic initiatives that transform the building slated for demolition into a canvas for creative expression. - *Phase 1*

The program hosted in the stadhuis (office, small performances spaces, restaurants) could work independently from the rest and would have a quick return on the investment by the specific nature of the catering program and if the cinema company has already its public in the area. Its renovation would therefore be next. *Phase 2*

Then, the two smaller performance halls would be a good first step in terms of investment. They can operate independently and generate revenue while the public space is still being developed and the big hall is either awaiting approval or under construction – *Phase 3 and 4*

This last phase is closely linked to an ambitious redesign of the Stadsring, aimed at improving access to the shopping center's parking and, more importantly, extending the "blue and green ribbon" around the historic center. – *Phase 5 and +*

A story of community

While it requires difficult decisions for the city of Amersfoort, this new cultural district opens up a world of possibilities. Our project seeks to seize this opportunity by steering the vision towards an identity rooted in authentic local stories — seamlessly weaving together fragments of the past to honour the diverse communities that have inhabited this place over time, while projecting our society towards a sustainable future.

As if we had always lived alongside both our ancestors and future generations, we hope this project — as much through its cultural program as through its physical presence — will serve as a catalyst for community cohesion and strengthen resilience for the years to come.