

Exploring design practices that share a commonality with
journalism inspires hope to create a better future.
This second issue of the journal explores contemporary
architectural practice in the era of post-truth.

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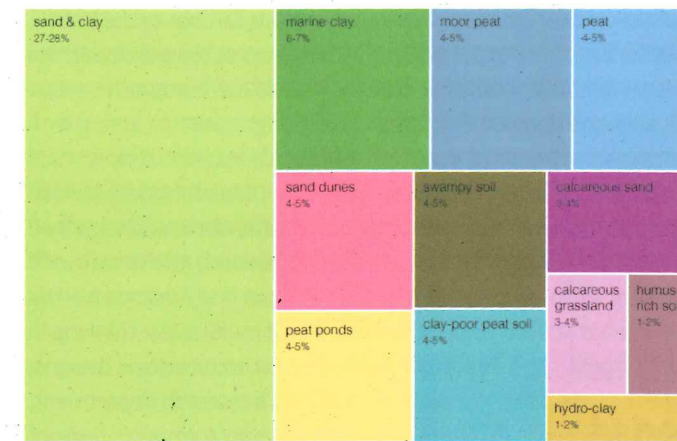
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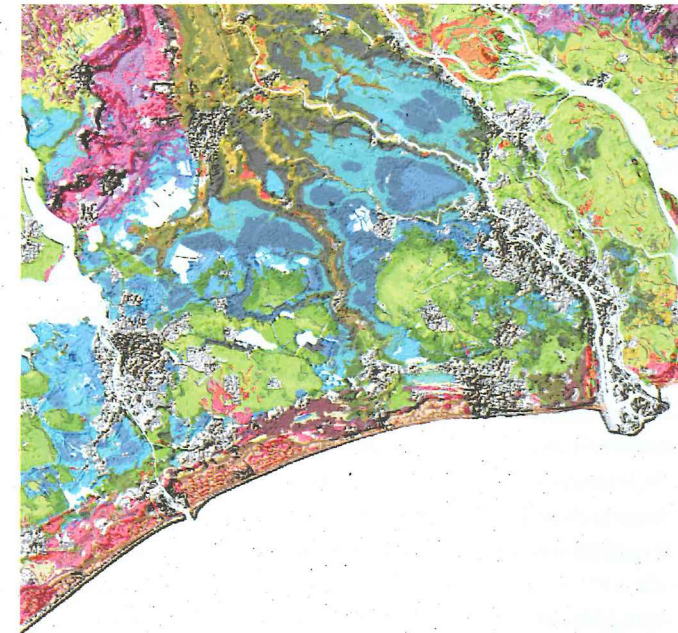
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'Despite our grounded belief in the importance of architectural design and urban planning, their critical role in welding a strong social, cultural and environmental contract is currently overlooked by our political leaders. If this continues, the role of architects and urbanists is at risk of being limited to calculating forms of utility and percentages of available square metres and building stock', Aikaterina Myserli told me as I interviewed her and Henk Hartzema about Land of Hope and Studio Hartzema's current approach.

Studio Hartzema was founded in 2005 by the Dutch architect and urban planner Henk Hartzema, and is made up of a highly motivated and well-trained team of architects, urban planners and researchers. Myserli is an architect-engineer and



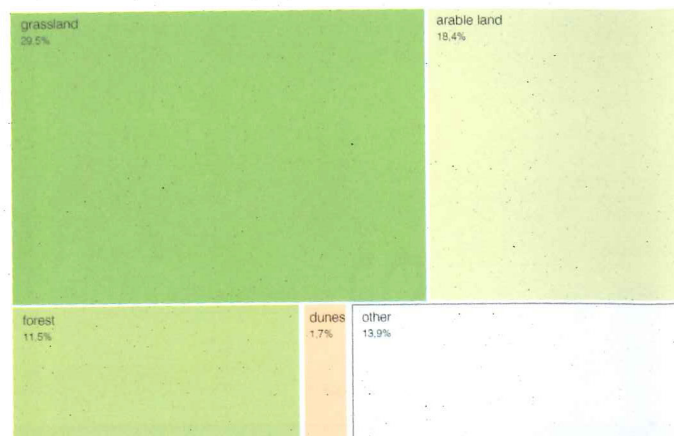
75%
Unbuilt's land soil index



Hartzema is an Architect/Urban Planner and the Director of Studio Hartzema & FRESH Research. Myserli is an Architect-Engineer/Urban Planner at Studio Hartzema and a Researcher at the Delft University of Technology.

land of hope

Aikaterina Myserli & Henk Hartzema 38/108



75%
Unbuilt land crop index



urban planner at Studio Hartzema, and researcher at the Delft University of Technology. 'Early in our practice, we developed the vision to deliver authentic designs that do not compromise on quality and essence. We foreground design research with the intention of breaking down complex problems into simple solutions through context analysis, data collection, stakeholder participation, development of spatial frameworks and step-by-step supervision', she and Hartzema explained. As the scale of current socio-economic and environmental problems grows, the studio has started to pursue questions of multi-scalar thinking in both major interventions and the smallest architectural designs.

In 2019, the practice launched a research department, FRESH Research. This explores landscape transformation, resilient strategies and sustainable development. 'We are now committed to using FRESH as a research vehicle to examine, reflect on and respond to urgent systemic and/or spatial issues of an ecological, economic or social nature,' said Hartzema. Myserli added that 'the complexity of current issues like climate change and COVID-19, or the urgency of the Black Lives Matter movement, among others, requires us to go beyond our business-as-usual model. We don't want to demonise the market or corporate interests, but we are certainly working towards a socially inclusive and politically motivated design'. FRESH serves as a platform to ask questions fearlessly and delve into knowledge, problems in different disciplines and nature, whether these are social, political, economic or environmental.

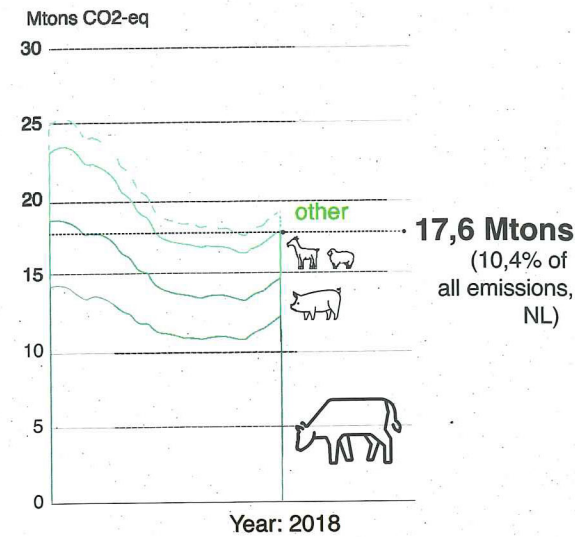
Most people do not know that FRESH stands for Free Research Studio Hartzema. 'And as the name suggests, we expect it to free us from everyday conventions and lay the foundation for promoting experiments and stimulating analysis and reflection'. FRESH allows the practice to take a step away from everyday planning and return to reality with a critical and refreshed approach. 'This has been very satisfying as it enables us to dream big and look outside of our mere existence and professional routine.' Since 2019, Myserli has co-led FRESH Research with Hartzema.

The activities of FRESH have included examining funding instruments and mechanisms as well as forming consortiums with other organisations and businesses. Myserli pointed to the fact that 'by the end of next year, FRESH will be completely autonomous in terms of funding and will have the capacity to grow and form its parallel agenda to the office projects'. Before 2019, research had an auxiliary role within the Rotterdam-based practice. Now, they proactively propose projects that are financed by interested institutions and/or their own allocated funds.

Architectural research usually exists in two different contexts: the academy and practice. Myserli explained that 'academics have often argued that practices conducted their research in a market-oriented manner, whereas practitioners have traditionally disregarded academic research as out of touch and inward-looking. Although there might have been a shred of truth in both sides, we see that bridging this gap is the only way to achieve both innovative results as well as rigorous dissemination of outcomes in the future'.

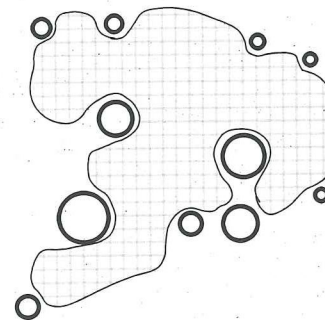
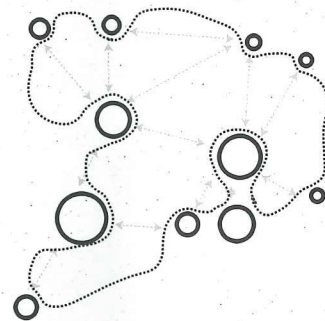
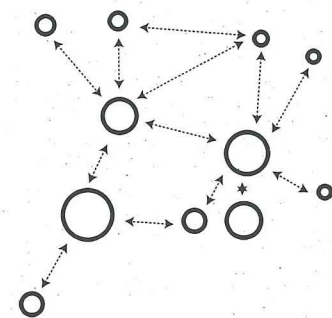
Climate change, energy transition and social inclusion are urgent challenges across multiple scales and contexts. 'We are delighted to see that both academics and professionals within current design practice are starting to understand the required tools with which to embrace today's world of hybridity', said Myserli. 'Among these tools is a new way of communicating and establishing a middle ground between the two contexts, capable of establishing the basis for more efficient, collaborative and cross-sectoral architectural research. It is also why we are happy to see more offices, especially in Northern Europe, forming relationships with research institutions,' she added.

Studio Hartzema/FRESH Research have an ongoing fascination with the Randstad. This is a megalopolis in the central-



western Netherlands consisting primarily of the four largest Dutch cities—Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht—and their surrounding areas. Myserli explained that in 1989, the architect and co-founder of Neutelings Riedijk Architecten, Willem Jan Neutelings, 'described the Randstad as a heterogeneous field where the contradiction between city and landscape is abolished'.

The Randstad started as a ring of compact cities around a green heart that evolved into an sprawling, diffuse city. Hartzema said that 'its landscape is not perceived any more as something outside of the city, but as an entity that lies within the metropolis, mainly occupied by agricultural land and grasslands. Predominantly used for milk and meat production, these lands have recently started to lose their economic base due to their heavy environmental impact—and with that, the only substantial reason for safeguarding their empty expanse', he added. It 'made us



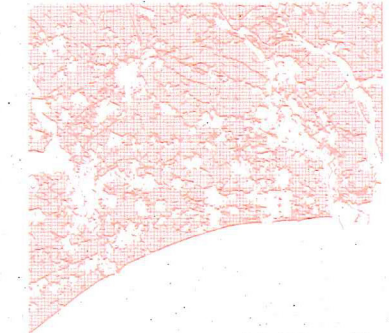
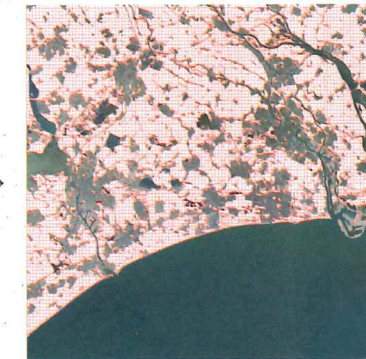
understand that, as the complexity of urgent socio-economic and environmental problems increases, we need to think outside of conventional scales and frameworks. These were the main drivers for separating Studio Hartzema's research and creating FRESH.'

In a way, this fascination materialised into the Land of Hope project, which started as a lecture that Hartzema gave to the Dutch Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management in November 2019. The project is now led by Myserli, with Hartzema in charge of the concept. The team includes designer Sába Schramkó, assistant designer Pieter Scholten and junior architect Sara Gholizadeh.

'Taking a 100x100km snapshot of the Randstad as a case study, Studio Hartzema and FRESH estimated that 75% of the land is unbuilt—and the majority of this is grassland.' Their team, supported by the Creative Industries Fund NL, aims to verify the capability of the unbuilt space to accommodate sustainable development. They will do this by examining this 100x100km frame as a fictional open lab for testing, experimenting and restructuring. The piece of land is examined both as a shared object between collaborating urban centres and a collective resource for projective scenarios: reforestation, energy production and new land uses.

Myserli also explained the challenges that FRESH are facing due to the pandemic: 'one of our original objectives was to receive feedback from as many stakeholders as possible, including farmers, planners, local businesses and researchers.' She said that 'the lockdown imposed by the pandemic didn't allow for extensive field research. Instead, 'we spent a lot of time acquiring data, interviewing experts in the fields of planning, sustainability assessment and policy. We also analysed the various ecological, social and economic aspects of the territory. This marked a pivotal point for rethinking our productive landscapes, especially in the context of the recent pandemic, and its effects on the supply chain.'

'Contrary to conclusive studies which aim at one final solution for an existing problem, we want Land of Hope to lay the groundwork for future studies and to remain open to critical reflection. Collecting, analysing and comparing data and statistics from scientific reports, research institutes and environmental agencies enabled us to catalogue and quantify the components of unbuilt space'.



75%



FRESH spent several months extracting spatial data on GIS and reviewing environmental reports on carbon capturing, afforestation and blue-green infrastructures. Myserli pointed out that 'this process revealed the need to contact experts who provided us with valuable input and enriched the content of our research.'

In the future, FRESH is planning to organise a series of public events—workshops, installations, exhibitions, together with their partners, to develop the relationship between unbuilt space and sustainable development in the Netherlands. 'Also, as Henk always says, "nothing beats a book", which means that you will probably see us working on a printed publication about our research in 2021. In general, we aspire to see our visuals reaching the wider public, becoming a unifying narrative in people's everyday lives and inspiring them to understand climate change and co-exist with radical visions of sustainable development. Who knows, maybe we will even see segments of our visuals implemented, such as arrays of solar panels and wind turbines in proximity to traditional Dutch villages. Our goal is not to provide standardised solutions but to envision possible futures, provide insights and allow people to feel included and become partakers in the unfolding of change.'

Images / (P38) 100x100km snapshot of the Randstad on the North Sea coast; (P39) Soil relief index and map; (P40) Green infrastructure and crops index and map; (P42 top) CO2 emissions from grasslands and the dairy sector; (P42 bottom) Unbuilt land as collective resource between cities; (P43) Percentage of Randstad's unbuilt land; (Top left) Visual experiment over Gouda's surroundings; (Bottom left) Visual experiment over Nieuw Vennep's surroundings; (Opposite page) Afforestation in Durgerdam, 2050; © Studio Hartzema

