

Coastal connections



Exploring the historical coastal landscape at Bømlo to enhance development, foster community, connections, strengthen identity, and create versatile recreational spaces for residents and visitors.

”How can I as a landscape architect effectively incorporate the rich history of Bømlo, Norway, spanning from the Stone Age to modern fisheries and industry, into contemporary sustainable landscape design to support the coastal community’ development?”

Bømlo

Ca. 37 km



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Abstract – Coastal connections

Exploring the historical coastal landscape to enhance development, foster community, connections, strengthen identity, and create versatile recreational spaces for residents and visitors.

Integrating coastal heritage and new development.

How can I as a landscape architect effectively incorporate the rich history of Bømlo, Norway, spanning from the Stone Age to modern fisheries and industry, into contemporary sustainable landscape design to support the coastal community's development?

Facilitating sustainable utilization of a historical landscape.

”Our coastal landscapes, once vibrant for centuries, have undergone transformations. Many small towns and fish processing centers have been abandoned or demolished to make way for different types of development. However, for some, and for our history, many of these places are significant—important to preserve and allow for a kind of development that can be appreciated centuries into the future. These places don't always need large structures, massive football fields, or organized playgrounds to function as a thriving community. How can I contribute to enhancing such places, like Bømlo, where I spent much of my childhood? There are alternative ways to utilize the historical landscape beyond building big and sprawling. In my thesis, I aim to explore possibilities for improving such sites, like Bømlo, by employing different methods. I aspire to use elements from history to forge stronger connections while creating spaces for relaxation, recreation, and social interaction. Enhancing Bømlo's identity, its current relationship with the sea, and what it once signified.”

In this research, I will delve into the local history, discuss the challenges the community is currently confronting, and outline the issues that I aim to address.



Introduction

On the west coast of Southern Hordaland lies Bømlo, an archipelago of 1000 islands. It's a place with a profound and enduring connection to the sea, marked by significant historical imprints that shape Bømlo's present and future. Personally tied to this island, I see immense potential in its landscape. As we enter a new era emphasizing freedom, where many draw inspiration from the past for their future lifestyles, the allure of spacious, nature-bound living becomes increasingly appealing.

A typical "Bømbling"

A typical inhabitant of Bømlo is knowledgeable about value creation, industrious, and possesses a straightforward mindset. They have aspirations, uphold honesty, and exhibit expertise in their field. Above all, they are solution-oriented, creative, and grounded individuals. A Bømbling is deeply rooted, loyal, inclusive, and perhaps a bit peculiar. Most importantly, a Bømbling holds a profound affection for their place, cherishes the community, and believes that Bømlo is a free and excellent environment to grow up in.

Slåtterøy fyr

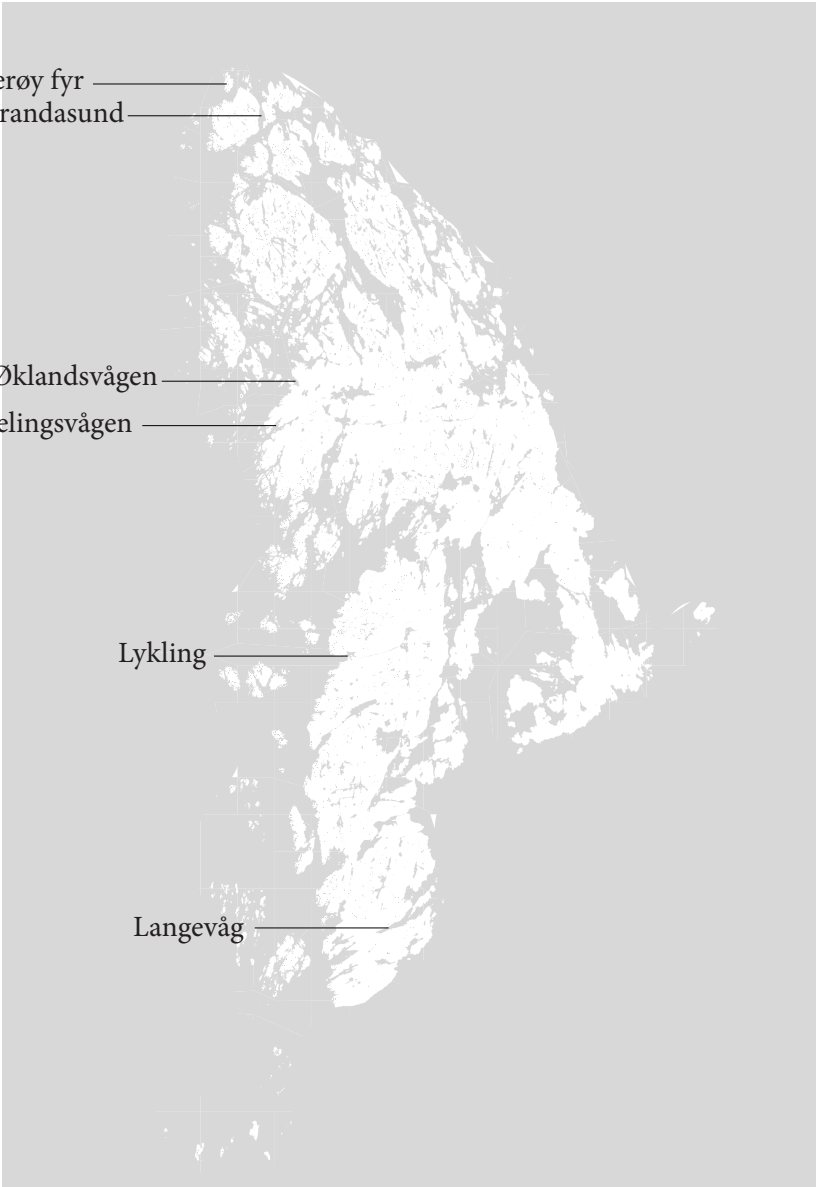
Brandasund

Øklandsvågen

Melingsvågen

Lykling

Langevåg



Slåtterøy fyr

Located at the northern tip of Bømlo, Slåtterøy Fyr has been a maritime beacon since 1859, guiding vessels into Selbjørnsfjorden and onward towards Bergen. During the 19th century, it held particular significance for fishermen who ventured to the southern fields for their ocean harvest. This historic lighthouse has played a pivotal role in maritime navigation for decades, safely shepherding ships through the challenging waters of the North Sea. Today, it stands as a vital symbol of the maritime heritage in the region.

Situated on a rugged and picturesque coastline, Slåtterøy Fyr is renowned for its striking white tower with a red roof, which was notably constructed at Bærums Verk, becoming the second cast-iron lighthouse in Hordaland. Over time, a lighthouse keeper's residence and an outbuilding were added, and on the southern side of the lighthouse, a boathouse was constructed in a small, natural harbor.





This lighthouse has a rich history. In 1899, the light in the tower was converted into a flashing signal, and another residence was built on-site. During World War II, the lighthouse was occupied by the Germans, and it came under attack from Allied aircraft, resulting in the tragic loss of a lighthouse keeper's daughter. In 1958, Slåtterøy Fyr was electrified and boasted the most powerful light in the entire country. The lighthouse also strategically overlooks the former trading post of Brandasund on the neighboring southern island.

In 2003, many years after its decommissioning, the "Friends of Slåtterøy Fyr" association was established. They lease the lighthouse from the Norwegian Coastal Administration to ensure its maintenance. The site now offers sleeping accommodations, guided tours, and the opportunity to host various events. Slåtterøy Fyr is an integral part of Bømlo's coastline, contributing to the area's strong identity and establishing new connections with the past and the future.

Brandasund

On Gisøya, situated on the western side of Brandasundet, lies the historically significant village of Brandasund, dating back to the 17th century as a trading and inn-keeping center, with the North Sea as its nearest neighbor. In a picturesque natural setting, one can discover a serene harbor adorned with charming houses and structures reflecting the traditional Norwegian coastal architecture.

Brandasund earned its reputation as a well-known port for the so-called "Hansaskip," en route to Bergen, a fact documented on maps from Holland in 1624, now displayed at the Maritime Museum in Bergen. This historical record underscores the significance of Brandasundet as a trading post for the exchange of goods and services.

During the 18th and 19th centuries, particularly during the vital herring period, Brandasundet flourished as a thriving hub, boasting a public telegraph station, a cannery, and fish products renowned for their exceptional quality. In 1917, the island established its own electricity plant, featuring a dam that provided sufficient hydropower to operate the machinery at the cannery and provide illumination to all the households.



The village still maintains a tightly knit architectural ensemble, featuring structures like the main building from the early 19th century, the "moses-loftet" dating back to the 18th century, a servants' quarters, a bakery, a lodge house, a granary, a forge, a shop, a fish factory, boathouses, and more, preserving its historical and cultural heritage.

Today, Brandasundet retains its tranquility and serves as a symbol of Bømlo's rich maritime legacy, where coastal culture has left an indelible mark over generations. The village, once a thriving center, can be explored through its history, culture, various events, boat trips, and through small businesses that continue to thrive, such as E. Johnsen & Sønner general store, the "Fabrikk-loftet" café, "Skjeret Landhandel," and "Nillo på skjeret."

Brandasundet is a gem on Bømlo, where history and nature harmonize to create a serene and culturally significant coastal village.



Øklandsvågen

The aquaculture industry holds a significant role in Bømlo. For an archipelago comprising a thousand islands and islets, the sea has always been of paramount importance. In the Sunnhordland municipality, salmon farming is a treasured resource. At present, there are three operational salmon processing facilities, spanning from the southern to northern regions, all strategically situated along the western coast facing the North Sea. Several tons of salmon are exported to the rest of the world each year. Throughout history, fishing has been exceptionally vital for the local farming community, with the adage "The farm had no other livelihood but crops and fishing" underscoring the centrality of fishing to the island's way of life. The inhabitants of Øklandsfolk were, in essence, traditional fishing farmers. Øklandsvågen served as one of the earliest trading posts on Bømlo. As far back as the 16th century, the bay was renowned as a loading point for foreign vessels that purchased lobster. Lobster was a reliable and well-compensated commodity.

The headquarters of Bremnes Seashore can be found in Øklandsvågen. Olav Svendsen, CEO of Bremnes Seashore, grew up in Øklandsvågen and, at the age of 14, assumed responsibility for receiving wild salmon and lobster, which had been the foundation of the operations in the old trading town of Øklandsvågen for several centuries. This business had been initially run by his grandfather, then his father, and eventually by Olav Svendsen. Thus, fishing in Øklandsvågen has been passed down through three generations.



In the 1950s, the era of the catfish began for Bremnes Fryseri, as it was known at the time, lasting for three decades. Alongside salmon, catfish played a pivotal role in the development and success of the company. During this period, it operated the world's largest catfish reception facility. Concurrent with the catfish venture, they attempted trout hatching. The hatching of roe on Goddo and the production of juvenile fish were successful, especially in the 1960s. This laid the groundwork for further growth. They now engaged in both fish farming and fish reception. Olav Svendsen Sr. was one of the early pioneers in aquaculture. They recognized the opportunities and used by-products from the fish reception as feed for the fish. What began as a modest venture has grown into Bremnes Fryseri, one of the largest privately-owned aquaculture companies in the country today. In the 1980s, the fish reception facility was closed, and more significant investments were made in fish farming. In the 1990s, Olav Svendsen, who is now CEO, was involved in the development of what we know as Salma salmon. Bremnes equals Salma. In 2006 the Salma was to be seen on the market as we know it today. The Salma brand is well-known to nearly everyone and has also gained recognition internationally. Large trailers transport Salma salmon from Bømlo and export it out of the country nearly every day.



Melingsvågen

In Melingsvågen, the buildings on the quay have stood for 105 years. Over this time, the quay has been a hub of activity, hosting a barrel factory, a ferry station, a fish reception center, and a general store. The owners at that time were also pioneers in Norwegian salmon farming, with their own slaughterhouse and packaging facilities. The trade in Melingsvågen, which went by the name "Vinsen," was initiated in 1918 and ceased its operations in 1992.

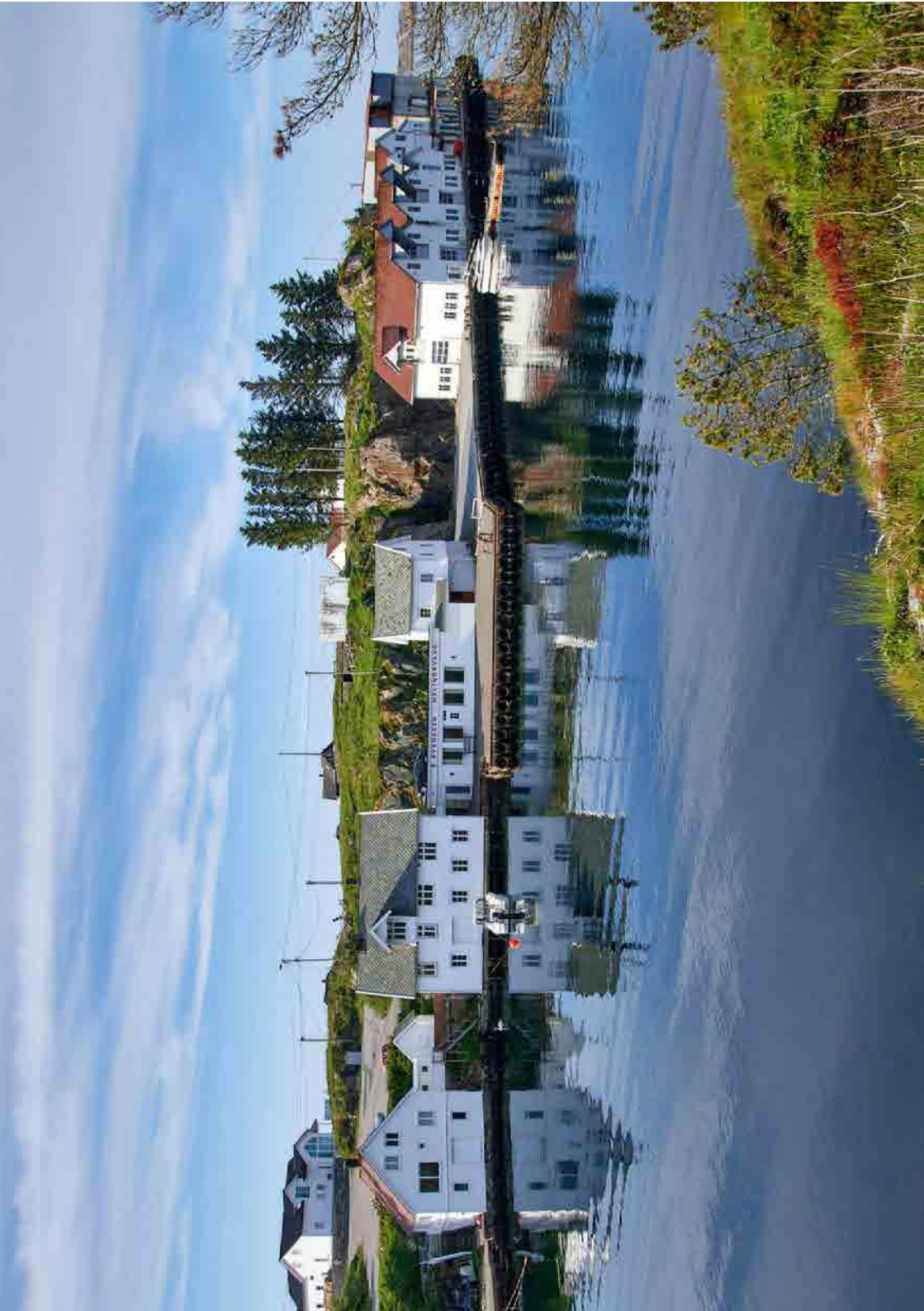
During the 1960s and 1970s, the fish reception center in Melingsvågen served as a relatively large and significant workplace for women. Countless tons of fish roe and shrimp were diligently processed by skilled hands over the years. Melingsvågen also offered opportunities for young people seeking both summer and year-round employment. It provided them with valuable work experience, and the social aspects were equally enriching.

The general store on the quay was a veritable emporium, offering everything from fishing gear to knitting supplies and milk. Sailors from the city frequented this little, exotic, and picturesque haven. If they were fortunate, they could help themselves to the just-arrived sea crayfish. For many years, Melingsvågen had fallen silent, and all signs of life had disappeared. However, there is hope that life may gradually return and flourish once more for the current generation.



In 2018, "Bømlo Fersk Fisk" commenced fish reception and sales operations in Melingsvågen. This initiative breathed new life into Melingsvågen, with 25 local fishermen supplying fish to the newly established local fish reception center. Two women, Astrid and Eva, stand ready on the quay to receive the fish. They predominantly sell shrimp and cod, but also occasionally handle less common species such as octopus, wolffish, crayfish, and ling. The people of Bømlo appreciate such endeavors, and there is hope that the reception center may expand not only in Melingsvågen but also in Brandasund.

In 2022, Melingsvågen saw another new addition as a couple residing in Stavanger acquired the old "Vinsen." With their purchase, they inherited a crucial piece of coastal history and culture. The house had been in the same family for generations until now, carrying with it the responsibility and respect for the history embedded in its walls. They aspire to make Vinsen in Melingsvågen their future home. Already, a concert has been hosted, and they have several plans for the future.



Lykling

Engaging in salmon farming on Bømlo today can be likened to striking gold, although this is not the island's sole historical treasure. The Gold Mines at Lykling drew prospectors seeking riches between 1884 and 1910, during which approximately 200 kilograms of gold were extracted, a bounty that, in today's gold prices, would be valued at around 138 million. Presently, these once-vibrant mines, now part of UNESCO's cultural heritage, serve as poignant reminders of a bygone era.

The year 1884 witnessed a wave of optimism as reports of gold discoveries captured the imagination, gracing the pages of numerous Norwegian newspapers and even the esteemed American publication, *The Times*. Within the quartz veins that fracture the gray rock, descending towards the shoreline, lay larger nuggets and veins of gold than many had ever witnessed in the quartz seams of California or Australia's goldfields. The foundational walls of large structures, the bases for railways, dams for water reservoirs, quay facilities for shipping, and numerous mines of varying sizes are clear traces of what unfolded here.

Looking forward, the nearby communities and landowners aspire to harness the UNESCO status to their advantage and expand their horizons toward increased tourism. Already, one of the landowners has ventured into opening two "glamping" cabins,





Langevåg

Langevåg, located further south on Bømlo, is a small inlet with a rich historical legacy. Archaeological evidence suggests that approximately 12,000 years ago, during the retreat of the Ice Age, people began to settle along the coastal regions, marking the dawn of the Stone Age in Norway.

In the late 1800s, a local farmer named Johan Larsen Vespestad stumbled upon an unusual stone on his field "Sokkamyrø", which was later identified as man-made greenstone. Haakon Shetelig, one of Norway's foremost archaeologists, became intrigued by this discovery and journeyed to Bømlo to investigate further. It was revealed that Langevåg had played a central role in a stone industry dating back to the Stone Age. Greenstone, a valuable resource, was utilized in tool production, including the renowned "Vespestad Axe." It took several years before Shetelig traced the origin of this greenstone. An afternoon in a rowboat led them to discover an extensive quarry on Hespriholmen in the Nordøyene islands, above Espevær. This quarry proved to be the primary source of the raw material. Remarkably, this quarry is the oldest known in Norway, and it is believed that greenstone was transported continuously by boat from this site to Langevåg through what was once Eidesvika, contributing to the region's historical development.

The sea has been a vital resource throughout history, drawing people to the island and shaping them into resilient and seafaring individuals. Dependence on the sea, coupled with residing in the open sea expanse of Langevåg, presented challenges as the maritime environment is constantly changing. Adapting to these shifting conditions necessitated innovative thinking, contributing to the development of a distinctive mindset and way of life.





Life at the sea was demanding and perilous, but for the inhabitants of Langevåg, it was the only life they knew. The men of Langevåg were primarily fishermen, sustaining themselves through the bounties of the ocean.

Two brothers, Lauritz and Kristian Eidesvik, became seasoned mariners from a young age. In 1965, they joined forces with fellow villagers to establish a joint shipping company and purchased the vessel Bømmeløy. They operated the business for many years before eventually taking full control and commencing the construction of a new and more modern Bømmeløy. At the time, this vessel became the world's largest seiner, standing as the premier asset within the Norwegian fishing fleet, and Kristian gained recognition as Norway's most accomplished fishing skipper. Langevåg played a pivotal role in the fishing industry, both within Norway and on the international stage.

However, in 1997, a division arose between the two brothers, resulting in the separation of the shipping company into two entities. Kristian relocated to Haugesund and continued with his investment firm, while Lauritz remained in Langevåg and further ventured into the oil sector from his hometown.

Today, these two brothers are the founders of two major conglomerates that have generated numerous employment opportunities, with Eidesvik being the largest and most significant employer in Langevåg. These two influential entities, stemming from the same origin and shared family history in fishing, serve as a testament to the enduring legacy of Langevåg's maritime heritage.

”Langevåg utvikling”

Lauritz Eidesvik, hailing from Langevåg, left an indelible mark not only as a shipowner but also through his deep passion and love for his hometown, Langevåg, and the island of Bømlo. He was truly devoted to his local community, and in the 1990s, challenges started to emerge. Other cities became more accessible, higher education became a significant factor, diverse employment opportunities took precedence, and the population began to decline. To safeguard the town’s development, Lauritz and his son initiated the organization ”Langevåg utvikling.” It commenced with the establishment of a communal cultural center called ”Kåså,” which later evolved into “Langevåg bygdetun” completed in 2005. The concept was to create a shared space where the community could come together to shape a brighter future for Langevåg and Bømlo.



A shifting generation

We are currently facing a new generational shift characterized by a different knowledge base than the preceding generation. New technology and flexibility in work and education have opened up new avenues, and we care more for our freedom and the ability to create things ourselves. These factors could contribute to a renaissance in rural Norway, particularly in places like Bømlo. Lauritz Eidesvik lived for unity and engagement, cherishing the place where he grew up and dedicated his life to. Fortunately, many others on Bømlo continue to carry this torch—a spirit built on the same principles that Lauritz upheld. This devotion to one's hometown is a vital tool in the development of rural Norway and, most importantly, Bømlo.



Progress does not materialize on its own; it necessitates the efforts of dedicated individuals. The question is, "What can you do for your community?" rather than "What can your community do for you?" The new "Langevåg bygdetun" played a role in reversing the declining trend in population, serving as a focal point for the community. Langevåg and other villages on Bømlo have made ongoing efforts to create a better society for one another. Initiatives such as hiking trails, communal spaces, volunteer work, events, playgrounds, and cultural centers are essential for the development of such locales. History has shown us that these places were bustling with life and activity just a few decades ago, and the question now is, "What is required to keep them thriving?"

What often occurs in places like these is a lack of population and excessive development. As construction unfolds, it often leads to dispersed settlements, vast distances, and the utilization of substantial areas for purposes that do not contribute to the attractiveness of communal spaces. Planning stages may not always align with the desired outcomes due to limited expertise and resources, often resulting in less vibrant and unilateral town centers and amenities that hinder the community's well-being.

Solving a situation?

Some argue that our history could be seen as an impediment to modern development. Certain areas and sites might be protected in some way, possibly as part of UNESCO. Stokkamyro in Langevåg serves as a prime example, a centrally located open protected meadow. Many see this as a positive aspect, while others consider it a major obstacle to progress. Frequently, we fail to recognize the value of such places, leading to a loss of roots and identity when everything is evaluated from the perspective of efficiency and development potential. It's not the physical characteristics of these locations that are most interesting, but rather their historical significance.

Often, the history in places like Bømlo is poorly communicated, not only to the local population but also to others. It may not be easy to take ownership of these stories and understand their significance.

For my thesis, I strive to incorporate existing elements while introducing new ones. These elements are envisioned as alternatives to structures attempting to encompass everything and nothing, addressing the expansive spaces generated as unintended consequences. Simultaneously, I aim to enhance the connection to the sea and fortify the relationship with history, making it more accessible for everyday life. "My goal is for Bømlo not to die out from its own renewal."



Can we leverage history as a tool for development? How can it be utilized and experienced? The possibilities are there, whether for the local population, tourists, or nature itself. History is crucial for shaping identity, both for individual small communities and for the entirety of Bømlo and Norway. From a landscape architect's perspective, can we use the past to mold the future? It should be viewed as an opportunity rather than an obstacle. Throughout history, people have been compelled to adapt, think innovatively, and find swift solutions for various reasons. By maintaining this mindset, can we proactively prepare for development and adapt before being forced to do so? Can our communities withstand the test of time? This island, along with its communities and the sense of unity it embodies, is worth preserving, deserving of extra effort, and perhaps even an extra push forward.



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