During the seventeenth and eighteenth century, country life in the Republic was a cultural phenomenon that attracted attention both from within the Republic and from abroad. The great number of country houses inhabited by townspeople did have its effect on the countryside, especially in the coastal provinces. The country houses owned by inhabitants of Amsterdam, such as those along the Vecht river, and in the Kennemerland and Gooi regions, are still of interest today due to their value as inheritance of a glorious and prosperous past. As a contrast, the country dwelling culture in Zeeland is far well less known. There was a time when the island of Walcheren was the centre of that culture. The trading cities of Middelburg and Flushing were the cradle of a culture of country living that had townspeople moving into the countryside for part of the year. Their country houses ranged from small cottages along the city’s town moats to larger manor houses at a longer distance from the cities. Nowadays, very little remains of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries’ culture of country dwellings in the Walcheren landscape. These days, this culture’s flourishing only can be seen in the great number of very fine drawings that were made at the time.

The main question of this research was: which motives and functions were connected with the rise, growth and decline of the country living culture on Walcheren during the period of 1600-1820, and in what ways did they both – in mutual connection – determine the manner in which these country houses were built and shaped?

We set off finding an answer to this question by exploring the landscape, which was soon followed by the question of the proportion of profit to leisure, and the changes that took place in regard to this. Next, the question was addressed as to whether a country house could be used to demonstrate one’s power and standing. Finally, we studied the connection between the functions that were pointed out and the shape the country houses were given.

Walcheren’s country houses’ landscape: a long-term development

In the course of the seventeenth century, so many country houses were built on the island of Walcheren that we may well speak of a ‘country houses’ landscape’. During
the seventeenth century, the cities and their elites dominated the layout of Walcheren’s countryside to such an extent that the term ‘urbanized countryside’ is in order. Not only did the townspeople own much of the land, but the city councils also largely controlled the boards of many countryside authorities, such as the dike and polder authorities. Furthermore, the cities of Middelburg and Flushing owned a large number of the Lordships of the Manor on the island. When Middelburg sold practically all its lordships in 1679, these were without exception taken over by the city’s citizens. As a result, the power over the countryside moved from the cities themselves to prominent inhabitants of these same cities. Yet, although the cities had firm control over the countryside, at first the country houses were built in the near vicinity of those cities. Apparently, the townspeople were reluctant to move into the countryside further removed from the cities. Along the main roads leading from Middelburg and Flushing, a number of country houses were built even before 1600. Around the city of Veere this was also the case, though there the number was considerably smaller. Further away from the cities, there were manors that mostly belonged to members of the city and province councils. These were not just used as a summer home, but also as a winter home when the owner stayed there in order to go hunting.

For inhabitants of the cities on Walcheren, country life was a mainly semi-urban affair, so the majority of country houses were in the vicinity of the towns. This was even more the case on the other islands. In the seventeenth century (and less so in the eighteenth century), there were some inhabitants of the cities on Walcheren who owned country houses away from the island itself, although this was never more than a small minority. As an example, halfway through the seventeenth century a number of country manors in the western part of Flanders of the States were owned by magistrates form Middelburg and Flushing. A smaller number of country houses owned by citizens of the Walcheren cities were also found on North and South Beveland. The problem of accessibility of the islands however limited the spread of Walcheren’s country living culture to other parts of the province. Even on Walcheren itself, the country houses were mainly concentrated on certain parts of the island. This was mainly due to the lack of lands that remained dry during summer and winter, and to the accessibility of these lands by road or water. Streambanks between the cities and the main villages, a number of late medieval polders, and the lands along the bottom of the dunes at the northwest side of the island were the areas most suitable for building country houses. However, on those locations these premises had to compete with other properties aimed primarily at agriculture.

As of 1680 there are signs of a certain growth in the number of country houses on Walcheren. This growth was strongest in the zone directly outside the cities, such as around Flushing, where round 1700 more than thirty manors are documented, a number that supposedly was considerably larger still. In the countryside there also was an increase in the number of country houses, especially in the northern half of the island.

A great number of the homesteads that were used as a country house around 1650 lost that function again in the next hundred years. In the countryside a lim-
ited number of country houses remained, whereas the number closer to the cities decreased as well. Between 1730 and 1760, there were at least nine of these country houses around West-Souburg, although this number was supposedly larger. Along the town moats the number of recreational gardens decreased somewhat, partly because smaller ones were joined together to create larger leisure gardens. This development went hand in hand with a certain view that had arisen around the middle of the eighteenth century, namely that a country house was the pre-eminent form of countryside leisure house. A homestead was seen as too uncomfortable and old-fashioned. Canalside leisure gardens on the other hand remained undiminishedly popular, especially with the urban middle class.

As of halfway through the eighteenth century, demolition caused a gradually growing number of country houses to disappear from the landscape. At first this was a steady process without noticeable peaks, although clearly the merchants were the first to give up their houses in the countryside, whereas those belonging to members of the city council mostly remained intact. Where demolition took place, there were usually demographic reasons, such as the lack of an adult heir, or the fact that the property passed on to an heir living away from the island or outside of Zeeland. It also occurred that a country house was inherited by an offspring who already owned one and who sold the inherited property.

At the same time as this decline took place, the first ten years of the nineteenth century saw a revival of countryside living with the building of small villas along the roads into and from Middelburg. Although there were just a dozen of these, it is a striking development in view of the decreasing number of older country houses that had been going on for decades by then.

A very different development from the one in Middelburg was seen in Flushing. There, most of the small country houses along the canal had disappeared due to demolition during the second half of the eighteenth century. The few that remained disappeared after 1807, when Flushing was annexed by France as a result of the French occupation of the Netherlands. In 1811, when the building of new fortifications was started, land and buildings around the city were expropriated, and what was not expropriated had to be removed in order to create a free field of fire from the fortifications.

**Profit and leisure in three zones**

The question as to the purpose of all these country houses comes mainly down to a combination of profit and leisure. This turns out to be especially the case when we look at a longer period of time. Again and again these two notions turn up as the country houses’ dominant functions. That is not to say that the balance between the two did not shift in the course of the two centuries we studied. Leisure was the main motive to maintain a house outside the city both in the practice of country living and in the view of the city’s inhabitants. Right from the beginning dur-
ing the seventeenth century, country houses were intended for recreation. Apart from that, a country house could yield money when a farm or other business was attached to it.

In order to get an exact picture of the balance between profit and leisure regarding Walcheren’s country houses, I distinguished between three different zones around the cities. The first one are the town moats, in which I included gardens on the inside of the city walls as well. The second area I called the urban fringe-belt zone, which extended to 2 to 2.5 miles around the city. The areas further out, that is the actual countryside, at any rate extended into the rest of the island, but also included other islands, wherever city-dwellers from Walcheren had country houses.

During the first half of the seventeenth century, grounds along the town moats were used to lay out leisure gardens (at the time called ‘speelhof’ in Dutch), that had a purely recreational function. In these gardens small cottages were built, offering the possibility of a short stay. Often, fruit trees were planted there as well, which points to the existence of fruit nurseries.

In due course, changing entertainment fashions meant higher demands were made of these small country houses. In the first half of the eighteenth century in the leisure gardens along the town moats buildings began to appear that were called ‘mansions’. The complex of a mansion and the surrounding garden of no more than a few hundred square yard took up the function of a country house. Whenever profitable elements such as a market garden or fruit farm were attached, these were placed on separate lots. In due course, a small number of these mansions along the town moats had a larger garden added to them. In the end, the link with means of production such as orchards or vegetable gardens disappeared altogether. As a result, the country houses along the town moats retained only their leisure function after the middle of the eighteenth century.

In the urban fringe-belt zone, country houses were built as early as at the start of the seventeenth century. Initially these were leisure gardens with or without a small cottage for the owner, and usually connected to a farm. The grounds belonging to it were used as a market garden, an orchard or grasslands for beef cattle. The products were sold in the nearby city. Mostly this type of smaller country houses were owned by merchants or ship’s captains and had an economic purpose. The market gardens, orchards and grasslands generated income while at the same time they represented a safe investment. Furthermore, a manor was an indication of creditworthiness and could be used as a security for a loan. So for this group of owners a manor stood primarily for a profitable investment. Any leisure garden or country house that was laid out or built should not come at the expense of this economic function.

Apart from this however there were also manors that were larger and more richly decorated. As a rule these were in possession of councilmembers of the city or province. Until long into the seventeenth century these were named ‘court’ (or
house) of pleasure’ (‘hof van plaisantie’), a name derived from the country dwelling culture of the Southern Netherlands that says exactly what the main purpose was: leisure and entertainment. This group of owners too invested in land and farms, but these formed less explicitly part of their country houses. Pleasure came first, and the very fact that these persons were able to spend so much time and money on this, contributed to the demonstration of standing and prosperity which made them stand out in their urban community.

During the last quarter of the seventeenth century, a number of country houses emerged in the urban fringe-belt zone, that were surrounded by parks with avenues, ornamental gardens, and woods. Practically without exception these were founded by members of the city council or of the boards of the large trading companies. At the time they were regarded as the most prominent citizens of the cities. During the period from around 1680 to 1720, in the area around Middelburg and Flushing there were some twenty of these country houses. They were not very expansive, but still larger than those along the town moats. They were explicitly built for recreation, although some had a farm as well. The owners possessed some agricultural land in the direct vicinity too. During the second and third quarters of the eighteenth century the country houses in the urban fringe-belt zone remained in possession of the urban administrative elite. However, most smaller leisure gardens came into the possession of local farmers. In the area round Flushing this probably was the case with over half the number of leisure gardens still in existence around 1720 AD. Also, some of these leisure gardens became inns. The last of the homesteads with a leisure garden or room for the owner disappeared from the urban fringe-belt zone during the third quarter of the eighteenth century. By then only smaller country houses remained in this area as main type of country dwellings. Towards the end of the eighteenth century most of these were taken down. Only one of the fifteen country houses round Flushing was left standing. In the area around Middelburg, 17 were left round 1820 AD of the more than 35 that were still there in 1750.

In the countryside outside the urban fringe-belt zone, country houses were in evidence as early as the last quarter of the sixteenth century. However, the majority of the country houses that were there in 1650 were built during the second quarter of the seventeenth century. These were farms that had separate living quarters for the owners, usually a room in the farm house or a small cottage on the premises. As indicated by the size of the land belonging to the homesteads, profit was the main function, just as was the case with those in the urban fringe-belt zone. Because of Walcheren’s dense population however it was hard for townspeople to acquire sizeable areas of land. Large estates such as those that existed in the eastern part of the Republic especially, could not be realized on the rather urbanized island of Walcheren. Still, some owners succeeded in acquiring a sufficient amount of land to lay out a large park with avenues and woods. These came mainly into existence during the period from 1680 to 1720, when the area at the bottom of the dunes be-
between Domburg and Vrouwenpolder (the so-called Manteling) enjoyed special fav-
our with the Middelburg magistrates. During this period, the country houses 
they owned in this region developed into sizeable country manors. Besides recre-
ation, profit also was still a major function, as large parts of the grounds were cov-
ered with rising trees and copses, from which among other things osier was won 
that was used to reinforce the coast. The profit gained from the country manors 
came mainly from agricultural products: vegetables, fruit and wood. In addition, a 
country house could serve as a security for loans, and lend the owner creditworthi-
ness. The country house as such did not function as an investment, but the land did, 
though usually that concerned its use as agricultural land, not as a country dwell-
ing place.

In the course of the eighteenth century the balance between leisure and prof-
it shifted towards the recreational character. Although wood was still grown to be 
sold on yearly auctions, the revenues served more to cover the maintenance costs, 
and not so much as an independent source of income. Eventually the agricultural 
activities disappeared altogether, leaving only small-scale cattle breeding or vegetable 
growing for recreation.

Country houses built near the cities had close functional ties to the city through-
out the seventeenth century. This was partly caused by the fact that they included 
fruit growing businesses or orchards, but also because they served as an investment 
or security for loans. In the countryside the country houses were also used for 
wood production. During the eighteenth century these economic activities became 
less important, and eventually leisure remained as their primary function.

Power

We saw how the country houses served the purpose of leisure and profit, but did 
they have a function as demonstration of power as well? This question I asked in 
each chapter in turn, especially looking for a connection with the administrative 
power townspeople who held a Lordship of the Manor exercised in the country-
side. Towards the end of the seventeenth century, it indeed turns out that towns-
people who owned these Lordships had country houses built in order to make their 
administrative and juridical powers felt. This was the case in about a third of Wal-
cheren’s lordships, although they were not necessarily large manors, but in some 
cases just homesteads. All of these concerned lordships with villages that lay along 
the main traffic routes on the island. Lands that had no village or lay on the periph-
ery were not used to build a country house or manor on. Most of these country 
houses built by Lords of the Manor, were founded during the final two decades of 
the seventeenth century, after the city of Middelburg had sold most of its Lordships 
to its citizens in 1679. These activities were closely connected to the new Lords of 
the Manor’s loss of power they had suffered in Middelburg during recent quar-
rels in the city. In this period they had lost there position of power within the city,
which they compensated by buying these Lordships, through which their power in the countryside increased. During the second half of the eighteenth century, the link between lordship and country house weakened. Indeed, early nineteenth century there were no longer any Lords of the Manor who still owned a country house on his premises at all. This is partly due to the widespread demolition of country houses in the previous period, but also to the abolition of the rights exercised by the Lords of the Manor, as a result of which these lords lost any real power they had.

Another question regarded persons who exercised political power in the cities. Did they use country houses as a demonstration of the power they held? We learned that this was hardly ever the case. As a sign of political power within the city or province a country house had a secondary function at best. Members from the most powerful families of magistrates did indeed own country houses of considerable standing, but usually this was a result of their high social position rather than its basis. No connection with their political power in the city that would also affect their country houses’ character, location or design, was found.

Standing

One of the townspeople’s motives to maintain a country house, was to demonstrate their high standing. In what way were these two connected, and what function could a country house have as an expression of the high regard its owner enjoyed?

In the seventeenth century personal prestige was the main issue: a merchant recently come into his wealth or a new city council member might use his country house to stress his high standing. It was not just the possession that counted, but also its location and type of use: most of the Walcheren country houses that were built in the Golden Age stood along a main road into Middelburg or Flushing, were anyone could see them. A country house used as a hunting lodge or location for art collection contributed to its owner’s prestige as well. During this period, there were also some who wanted to stress a (supposed) noble descent, and we may assume they acquired country houses to express their nobility. Remarkably, did this not mean they necessarily wanted to own a medieval former castle or monastery. The fact is that this type of building did not enjoy more prestige because of their history than newly built country houses. Towards the end of the seventeenth century this notion did arise, but even then a building’s age was hardly ever expressed in its design.

The fact that a country house could not just be an expression of an individual person’s prestige, but also of a certain group identity, was a development that manifested itself on Walcheren during the first decades of the eighteenth century. This was connected to the fierce political struggle in the Zeeland capital that took place after the sudden demise of the king-stadtholder William III in 1702, although the complex causes of the conflict were already in evidence before his death. After the
rival ruling parties sealed their mutual relationships in a ‘Contract of Harmony’ in 1715, the overt conflict over power was officially ended, but it also resulted in a closing of the ranks against the urban administrative elite. Remarkably, practically during the same period all prominent members of the two main factions owned country houses that they mostly had bought or built themselves. The fact that after this period these country houses were mostly passed on as an inheritance, underlines how closed this group of urban elites was, as well as the significance the country houses had regarding the expression of their social position. This administrative elite secured the continuation of the country living culture. They set the tone concerning the design and embellishment of country houses. Round 1750 AD, when Walcheren had over 130 country houses, the large majority of these were in possession of the administrative elite from Middelburg, and to a lesser degree from Flushing. Practically all of the houses were in possession of the most wealthy among them. Although a larger group of townspeople imitated the country living culture, this does not necessarily mean that all rich persons owned a country house. Even some of the most wealthy members of the administrative elite did not. In the meantime, it has to be said that those of the rich elite who held the highest positions in the administration of city or province were the ones for whom possession of a country house was most closely connected to the prestige the enjoyed.

In the second half of the eighteenth century, when a great number of country houses were taken down, practically all that were left were owned by the administrative elite. These houses were explicitly seen as a family possession as well. So, as a part of a family’s history, they had to be maintained. This goal of keeping possession of a country house for the generations to come distinguished the members of the old elite from a rising new elite of scholars, who as a group started to ‘go out into the country’ as well from early nineteenth century. The latter did own country houses too, but these had more to do with civil standing than with the old elite’s dynastic notions. This way, the descendants of the old administrative elite retained a leading role as carriers of the country living culture in the first part of the nineteenth century, though in this regard they formed one part of a larger elite of dignitaries, in which a number of elites were interwoven with one another. All of these used country houses as a means of showing wealth and standing, although from varying motives and background.

Design

In what ways did the country houses’ functions we determined – leisure, profit, and symbol of power or standing – find expression in the design they were given? In the past, three different causes were often pointed out to explain changes in country house and garden architecture: development in the area of aesthetic views abroad and at home, spread of knowledge thereof through drawings and traveling, or co-operation between client and designer. Our study however has shown that
the country house’s existence sprang from a combination of different motives. This fact alone indicates that the design of houses and gardens were subject to more factors than just the aesthetic. This was seen already in connection to the homestead manors that merchants and magistrates built around the cities in the seventeenth century; in these cases, business and pleasure were involved on an equal footing. This type of ‘country house’ was more simple, usually a room in a farmhouse or a pavilion-like structure in a farmyard or leisure garden. The more well-to-do had a somewhat larger, separate mansion built, decorated with stone embellishments, a sculptured entrance or sometimes a small tower. A recreational garden, if there was one, was usually planted with fruit trees. In some cases, an ornamental garden with flowerbeds and small statues was added as well, but these appear to be limited to country houses belonging to members of the city council. During most of the seventeenth century, the motive of profit seems to have been foremost with regard to country houses round the cities and in the countryside. This indicates the townpeople’s business-like approach of country life. Still, a small minority used a profit aimed country house to stress their high standing. These were citizens who supposed themselves or pretended to be of noble descent. Of old, possession of land and living off its products was seen as a sign of stature, a notion these citizens used to show their high-born position.

As of 1670, the first geometric parks appeared round the country houses on Walcheren, their designs being adapted to those of the houses. Strikingly, their appearance coincides with the rise of stadtholder William III, and most of them were laid out at country houses belonging to members of the city and province administrations. This way, they could demonstrate their allegiance to the stadtholder and show that they belonged to this elite. While the straight avenues and patches of trees had a very practical function as suppliers of wood, these geometric parks should mainly be understood as a form of demonstration of the owner’s power. This is further underlined by the fact that round 1700 drawings of these gardens started to appear.

The introduction of geometric parks led to a great number of imitations on the grounds round smaller country houses. This is clear among other things from the number of detours of roads and waterways that were needed to create space for laying out larger, regularly designed parks. An especially important means of showing an owner’s wealth were the drives leading from the public roads to the houses, which meant the house was seen from a certain distance from the road.

As of 1730, the country houses on Walcheren received a new impetus through the quickly increasing popularity of French architecture. Especially the Antwerp architect Johan Pieter van Baurscheit the Younger was assigned by the richest of the rich in Middelburg and Flushing. Along with the Middelburg city architect Jan de Munck, he delivered designs for new manors and parks in the French style. For their clients a show of good taste was a way to distinguish themselves among the urban elite. Architectural knowledge was part of that. Van Baurscheit was involved in the lay out or reconstruction of at least four larger country houses. Furthermore,
he delivered garden statues and fences to several others, as well as decorations for the fronts and interiors of their city houses. After 1750 his popularity fell, but for a time Antwerp remained popular among Walcheren’s population as a supplier of interior pieces and luxuries.

In the second half of the eighteenth century, any changes that took place in the design of Walcheren’s country houses were mainly seen in the gardens. Winding paths, so called ‘English copses’ with ‘natural’ plants, and exotic garden houses started to appear. This was the period of Rococo, a decorative style that had its influence on garden design and art as well. The development that started in the seventeenth century was now complete: the separation of leisure and profit regarding the country house. Even though the wood from the parks was still periodically cut to be sold, these revenues could certainly not have been higher than the maintenance costs of the ornamental gardens and parks. Recreation had become the country houses’ primary purpose. The garden’s playful Rococo style was an expression of the fact that the separation of leisure and profit had been completed in the last half of the eighteenth century.

During the last decade of the eighteenth and the first of the nineteenth century, a number of Walcheren’s country house owners started to – totally, partly, or gradually - reshape their geometric parks according to the so-called ‘landscape style’. This style imitated the agricultural or picturesque countryside, but without any real agricultural activities. Around 1800, at least five large estates were completely laid out in this style. In the next two decades, practically all gardens and parks belonging to the still existing country houses underwent a similar change. By then, the landscape style had even become the rule for leisure gardens and gardens round the new villas in the urban fringe-belt zone. Any profitable elements that supplied production for the market, such as copses for wood production or orchards, were now missing. Some space was still reserved for the collection and cultivation of special species of plants, both flowers and vegetables and fruits. Gardening as a form of recreation was especially popular among the new elite of urban dignitaries, who resided at small country houses close to the city. By then, the larger country houses on a longer distance form the city had become far less numerous than half a century before. The remaining estates had become integrated in the green countryside for which Walcheren was famous during the nineteenth century.

Country living culture

Finally, taking all that we wrote in consideration, it is now time to answer the central question we asked: which motives and functions were connected with the rise, growth and decline of the country living culture on Walcheren during the period of 1600-1820, and in what ways did these determine the construction and design of the country houses that were built? To start with, the motives and functions connected to the country living culture may be divided into two different categories:
first, the relationship between city and countryside, and second, the expression of the standing of country house owners.

The first group of motives are to be seen in the context of the relationship between city and countryside. In order to do so, I distinguish between theory and practice of this relationship. The theoretical relationship between city and countryside concerns the image that city-dwellers held when they thought of the countryside. Of old, life in the countryside was praised and presented as the opposite of life in the city. Outside the city, life was quiet and healthy, and the people were honest and simple. In contrast, the city was crowded and degenerate. This contrast had its roots in literature, but was still used to justify the move into the countryside. In poetry, life in the country was praised for its entertaining value as well as its virtuous and healthy character. This view was closely connected to life in a country house. Early eighteenth century, this ideal broadened as the countryside itself became popular among city people as well as a place to be entertained. It was during this period that country houses received a certain touristy value, as is evidenced by the popularity of driving tours and topographical drawings.

The practical side of the relation between city and countryside that affected the country living culture had to do with agriculture. The first country houses that came into existence during the seventeenth century were generally close to the city, and were often linked to fruit or vegetable growing for the local market. Country houses further removed from the city were usually linked to arable farming. To inhabitants of the cities, commercial fruit growing, market gardening and arable farming were an investment and at times seen as an additional source of income. Large-scale landownership in Zeeland was rather fragmented however: there were no manors that functioned as a centre for a large single piece of land. This also means that country houses could not develop into centres of large estates, when agriculture became the main economic force in the province in the second half of the eighteenth century. Even though there were several members of the urban elite who probably took a substantial part of their income from the possession of land round the start of the nineteenth century, their involvement in land possession and agriculture bore no relationship to the ownership of country houses, nor to the design or use of those houses.

The second group of motives that had its influence on the country living culture was the demonstration of standing by the city people. Throughout our period of research this function was the most striking one. This provided merchants with a way of showing their wealth. It also had its value in proving their creditworthiness. Before 1670, on Walcheren this mainly concerned small, simple homesteads close to the cities. From the end of the seventeenth century the cities witnessed the rise of an elite who started to specialize in an administrative role and had no longer any direct involvement in trade. The new country houses they built became the standard for the country living culture on the island. The way these country houses were used went hand in hand with the rise of an oligarchy of an urban administrative
elite. Ownership of country houses became linked to this group. Although during
the main part of the seventeenth century, manors and country houses were a way
to express the owner’s personal standing, this was linked more to the owner’s person
than to his family. As the urban elite gradually became a single, closed group from
the end of the seventeenth century, more and more their country houses became a
means to determine the mutual relationships within their own group. In addition,
as of this period the elites started specializing in administrative positions, depend-
ing less on the economic conditions.

Not only possession of a country house was important, but also location, size
and quality of the design began to count. In the course of the eighteenth centu-
ry, country houses became a form of demonstrative consumption used to under-
line their owners’ social standing. At the end of the seventeenth century, this use of
country houses to express standing began to affect the urban middle class – consist-
ing of ship captains, entrepreneurs and vicars - as well. The fact that they owned a
country house – however modest – was a sign of being well off as well as an expres-
son of their ability to afford owning a non-productive dwelling outside the city.
Usually, their (small) country houses were located close to the city, along a canal
or on the urban fringe-belt. Strikingly, these country houses still often were linked
to some economic activity, such as fruit growing, market gardening or an industrial
building, for instance a mill. During the second half of the eighteenth century, these
country houses started to gradually disappear, mostly as a result of decline of the
trading business. In fact, round 1800 AD these mercantile country houses rapidly
disappeared. At the same time small country houses in the urban fringe-belt zone
became popular as an expression of wealth, but now this especially involved an elite
of scholarly persons. Their country houses only had small gardens used for recrea-
tional purposes. This group, joined with the descendants of the old elites, formed a
new elite of dignitaries, who were to shape and maintain the country living culture
during the greater part of the nineteenth century.

In his study Hoven van plaisantie (‘pleasure gardens’), Roland Baetens amply
showed that the Antwerp country living culture of the sixteenth and seventeenth
century was closely connected to developments within the city, but just as closely
to those in the countryside. My study shows that the same could be said of the de-
velopments on the island of Walcheren. The level of contact between Zeeland and
the Southern Netherlands in the fields of economics, politics and culture clearly af-
fected the use of country houses as well.

The collection Buitenplaatsen in de Gouden Eeuw (‘country houses in the Gold-
en Age’), edited by Yme Kuiper and Ben Olde Meierink, connects a great number
of aspects of the rich country life in the Republic during the seventeenth century to
one another. The trails this study puts forth, I followed on the island of Walcheren,
to which I have been able to add some data.

At the outset of this study I directed attention to the proposition put forth by
Paul Brusse and Wijnand Mijnhardt in their essay Towards a New Template for
Dutch History, namely that country houses in the Republic only served to impress the owner’s fellow citizens. In this view, they had no economic purpose and were kept solely for entertainment.

In the preceding chapters I tried to show that their proposition may not be wrong as such, but does need a great deal of nuancing. For one, country houses served a number of different purposes, the balance between which changed with the owner’s motives to possess a country house. Enjoying possession of a country house and using it to demonstrate one’s standing certainly are constant factors, but we must not forget that many country houses just as certainly were part of the economic system, especially during the seventeenth century. Furthermore, citizens possessing a Lordship of the Manor could use the ownership of a country house as an expression of the powers their lordship brought along.

Apart from this, the relationship between the different functions was all but static. When seen over a longer period, research clearly shows the shifts that took place, though the functions of entertainment and standing turn out to be a constant. Another differentiation of Brusse and Mijnhardt’s proposition I tried to point out by distinguishing three zones round the city, determining the motives and functions connected to Walcheren’s country living culture for each of these zones separately.

I have chosen the Zeeland island of Walcheren as a study case, because the main cities of the province were on the island, and because the island knew a sizeable and characteristic country living culture throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Furthermore, a rich body of sources abounds, both in archives as well as in drawings. This country living culture’s manifestations and the changes it went through are closely connected to the regional context, as was demonstrated in this study. Even in this limited region the rich and varied character of the country living culture in the whole Dutch Republic clearly shows. It was not just the very wealthy and powerful among the urban elite who were drawn to the countryside, but other social groups joined in as well to enjoy this culture of staying in the country. Agricultural and industrial business were a part of this culture as much as the desire for prestige.

On Walcheren, once called the ‘summer house of Zeeland’, a rich country living culture manifested itself for centuries, a culture that was open to many different outside influences, a culture that because of the island’s geographical location and social networks more than the other provinces in the Republic formed a link with the country living culture of the Southern Netherlands, that flourished there as early as the sixteenth century. The large variety of Zeeland’s country living culture as a part of that of the Republic provided it with a certain dynamic during the Golden Age, and with glory and wealth after that, right into the eighteenth century.