

DESIGNING VIA 'DIRECT DEMOCRACY'

LOCAL RESIDENTS, ARCHITECTS AND THE DESIGN
OF URBAN RENEWAL IN AMSTERDAM, 1970-1990

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Around 1970, residents of Amsterdam felt the urge to become unofficial urban designers. The city's planning policy was geared to monofunctional *cityvorming*, which meant that in and around the city centre administrators and officials privileged traffic, office

space and shopping venues over the existing residential function.¹ Residents responded not just by protesting, but also by initiating a process for designing 'neighbourhood plans' outside the regular planning framework. These plans prioritized affordable housing and minimal disruption of the existing social and urban structure and involved a young generation of architects not afraid to break with prevailing traditions.² They spontaneously offered architectural assistance to the residents' campaigns, or responded to ads

▲ 1. A neighbourhood meeting on Bickerseiland in Amsterdam, early 1970s; in the foreground local resident Joop Beaux, to his right architects Paul De Ley and Jouke van den Bout, (photo Pieter Boersma, Collection Het Nieuwe Instituut)

placed in newspapers and professional journals by residents' groups looking for a local architect rather than putting themselves at the mercy of the city council or affluent private developers (fig. 1).

From the mid-1970s urban renewal in Amsterdam was carried out on the basis of neighbourhood plans. Yet in the historiography of urban renewal the focus is on politics and policy.³ While this provided insight into the conflict between administrators, developers and protest groups regarding post-war urban redevelopment agendas, it also generated the impression that urban renewal was the product of municipal policy. At the same time, writings on the architectural and spatial quality – or perceived lack thereof – of urban renewal nearly always took the form of harsh architectural criticism.⁴ This article examines the design process and the ideas or reasoning underpinning urban renewal architecture. Accordingly, the focus here is on the scene of action and the actors involved in the design process: the meeting rooms and the residents in the old neighbourhoods. Taking the example of urban renewal in the Dapperbuurt district, it charts how residents and architects together shaped the renewal of their neighbourhood. Although that collaboration evolved differently in each neighbourhood and led to different architectural outcomes, Dapperbuurt serves as an exemplary case study. Here, as in many other Amsterdam urban renewal neighbourhoods, social involvement was so broad-based that the residential development acquired the character of collective private commissioning: instead of entering the picture at the end of the construction process as consumers, a group of citizens appeared at the very start as initiators.⁵ In so doing they gained greater autonomy, control and freedom of choice, and the housing was required to satisfy their needs and housing preferences.

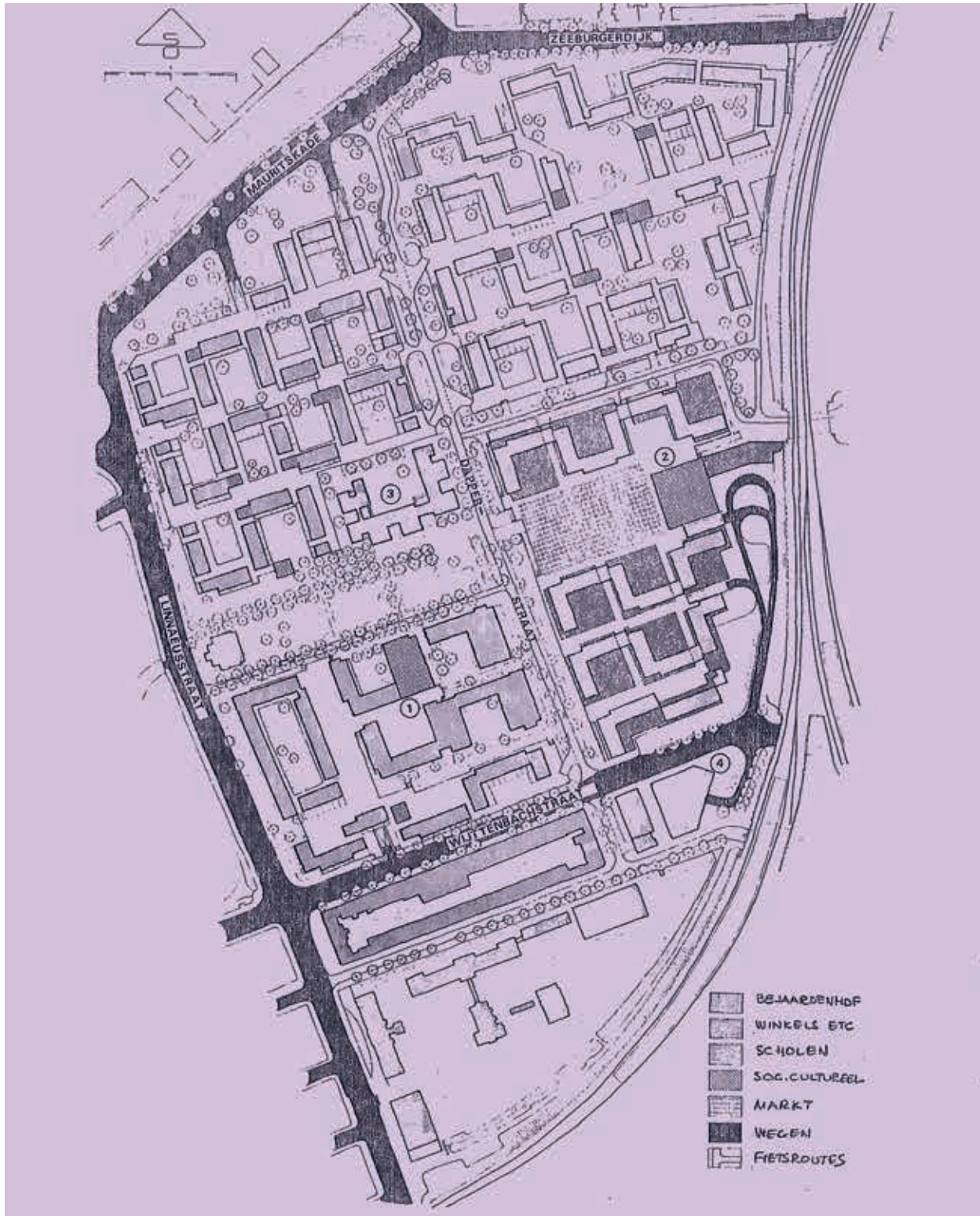
The alliances between local residents and architects are referred to in this article as 'creative pro-housing coalitions' (*creatieve wooncoalities*), a term that expands on findings in the literature and offers a new perspective on urban renewal. Urban historian Tim Verlaan characterizes the public-private alliances forged between developers and administrators in the 1950s and '60s for the implementation of large-scale reconstruction plans as 'pro-growth coalitions'.⁶ In line with his findings, this study shows that in the 1970s similar alliances emerged between citizens and architects. The architects supplied the expertise, the local residents provided creativity and spontaneous initiatives, and together they explored innovative solutions. For while they were opposed to the city council's redevelopment plans, they were in favour of an increase in the inner-city housing stock. Thus, the idea of creative pro-housing coalitions expresses both their

main objective and their greatest strength. It also shows who initiated the urban renewal housing projects and how grass-roots initiatives were ultimately turned into policy.

This study draws on various types of discussion documents arising from the collaboration between local residents and architects: minutes of neighbourhood meetings, design team reports, accounts of excursions, correspondence, notes, architectural design briefs, spatial planning maps, scenario sketches for neighbourhood meetings, comments on designs, and narrative drawings intended to visualize residents' ideas.⁷ The documents relating to Dapperbuurt can be found in the district's own archives, and in the archives of the Oost district, De Sterke Arm action group, architect Hans Borkent and local resident Ireen van Ditschuyzen.⁸ Together the various archival sources provide insight into the interaction between urban renewal and its societal context. For insight into the backgrounds and context, contemporary professional journals were also consulted, even though these were mainly concerned with the architectural debate whereas this article focuses on practice at the neighbourhood scale.

FROM TABULA RASA TO CREATIVE CORRECTION

After the Second World War, Amsterdam planning policy initially focused on urban growth and a scaling up of the city centre. Starting in the late 1960s, the city council also turned its attention to conditions in the nineteenth-century neighbourhoods.⁹ The first urban renewal memorandum (*Nota Stadsvernieuwing*) in 1969 observed that these neighbourhoods were in a dilapidated state and needed to be rendered 'habitable by modern standards'.¹⁰ In the most rundown neighbourhoods this meant 'comprehensive demolition of the existing, followed by redevelopment' – hardly surprising, since the memorandum defined urban renewal as 'rebuilding a city in the city'. This approach corresponded with the ideas of the Public Works Department's urban planning office (Stadsontwikkeling), which regarded the nineteenth-century neighbourhoods as inferior and as an obstacle for the modern city.¹¹ In that same year Dapperbuurt was accorded the highest priority after a structural engineering inspection revealed that the housing stock had foundation problems and that the degree of dilapidation was a cause for concern.¹² In January 1971, the architect Piet Blom (1934-1991) offered his experimental Kasbah plan to Amsterdam's urban renewal programme: 'Look, when you redevelop it's not difficult to turn an old neighbourhood into a fine piece of city if you have lots of money at your disposal. But you won't find that in an area like Dapperbuurt. You have to make something for the people who already live there (have always



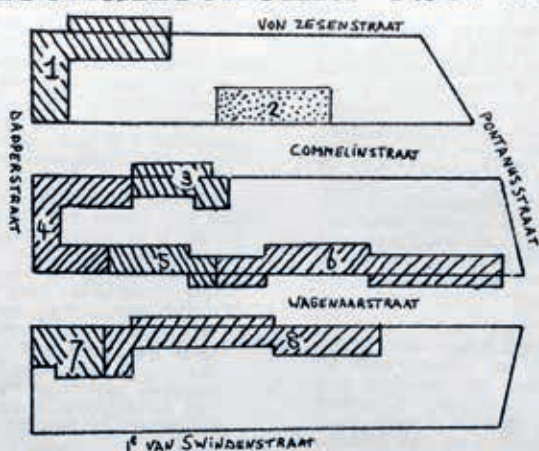
2. Plan-Duyff as presented for inspection by the public; reconstruction plan for Dapperbuurt, 1970-1972 (Stadsarchief Amsterdam)

lived there) and who also have to be able to afford it.¹³ Local residents were enthusiastic, but Stadsontwikkeling was already preparing other plans.

In March 1972, Stadsontwikkeling presented its reconstruction scheme for Dapperbuurt. This in-house plan by Willem Duyff appeared to have been designed on a blank slate: the existing perimeter blocks had

been replaced by a meandering, half-open courtyard subdivision aimed at maximizing daylight penetration. This slashed the housing density in half while the predominantly small dwellings were to be replaced by four or five-room maisonettes aimed at affluent average families (fig. 2).¹⁴ Instead of the daily street market there would be an indoor shopping centre. Yet families

Doorschuifschema N.O.-hoek



Blok 2: is het omstreden blokje dat Nieuwenweg wilde aanschrijven.

Najaar 1976 - bewoners van 6 naar 8
 Winter 1977 - bewoners van 1 en 4 (misschien 7) naar 5 en 3
 Zomer 1978 - oplevering van 7 (nog niet zeker dat dat gebeurt)
 winter 1979 - oplevering van 1, verzorgingstehuis voor bejaarden
 zomer 1979 - oplevering van 4 en 6

Het moet nog definitief worden vastgesteld uit welke (slechte) panden de toekomstige bewoners van 4, 6 en misschien 7 moeten komen.

In ieder geval zullen het buurtbewoners zijn.

(ZIE BLADZIDE 4)

3. Staggered relocation schedule from old to new dwellings in the Noordoosthoek, c. October 1975 (International Institute of Social History)

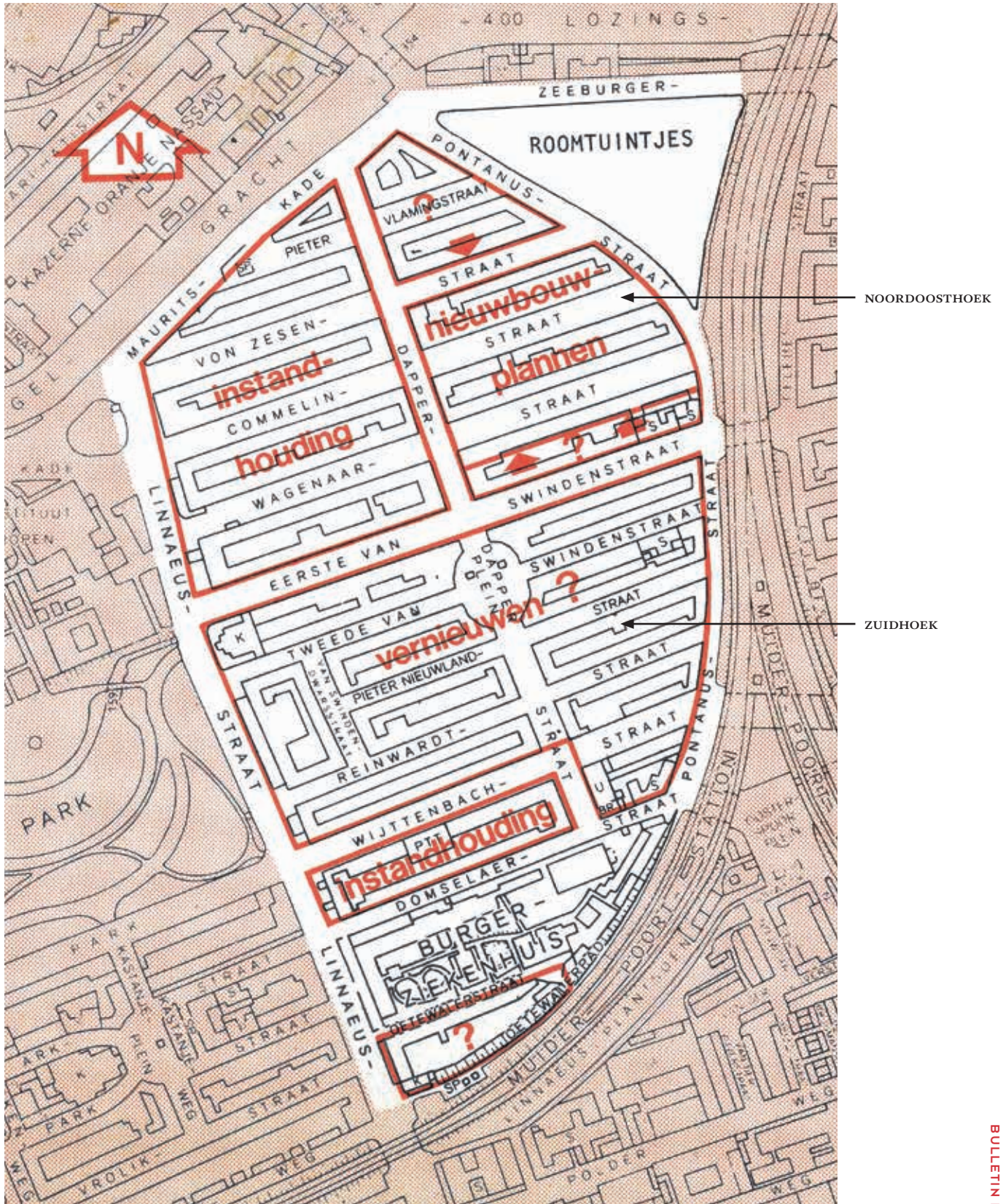
who could afford to do so were already relocating to the post-war suburbs, while young people and immigrants were moving in.¹⁵ The Dapperbuurt area was increasingly populated by those of modest means: the elderly, students, guest workers, the unemployed, singles and small businesses.¹⁶ Were 'Plan-Duyff' to be realized, all sitting tenants would have no option but to leave their neighbourhood.

An information session on the forthcoming demolition in late 1970 had prompted several residents to organize themselves into an action group: De Sterke Arm.¹⁷ They started with demonstrations, but after the presentation of Plan-Duyff they changed their tactics: 'Hard actions don't help. The only thing that does help is actual construction.'¹⁸ This step was to determine the course of urban renewal. In May 1972, the group submitted a notice of objection to the city council, complete with a review of the relevant literature and suggestions for an alternative approach.¹⁹ They demanded decision-making by local residents, phased demolition and redevelopment, retention of the existing street plan and affordable rehousing options in their own neighbourhood by means of an inventive relocation schedule (fig. 3). The activists also proposed

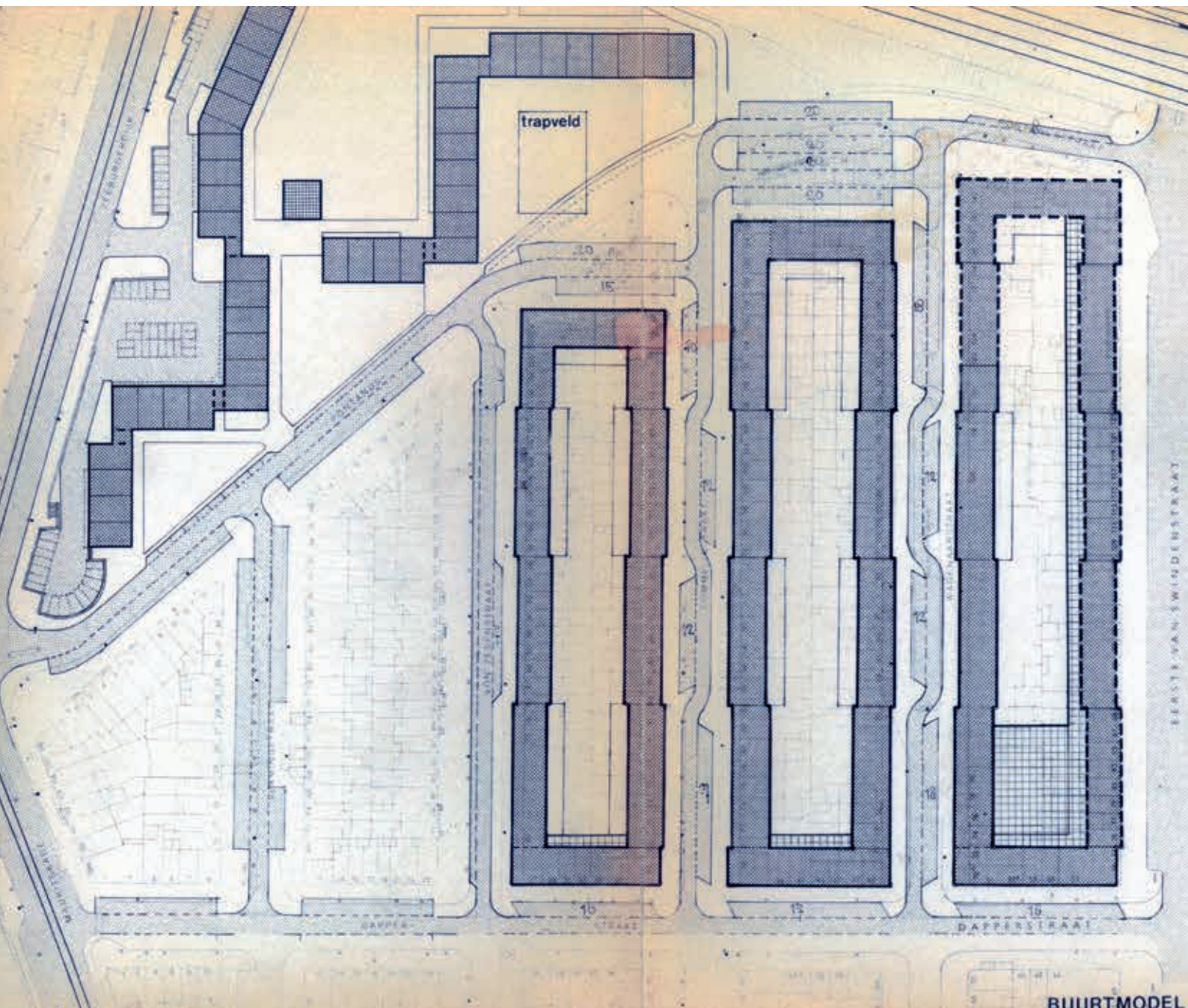
a planning practice with 'development teams' in which local residents, independent architects and civil servants would work together and with as much 'direct democracy' as possible on the renewal of the neighbourhood. Theirs was not the only formal objection to express approval for the neighbourhood's existing character.²⁰ The urban planning advisory board (Raad voor de Stedenbouw), for example, was sceptical about Plan-Duyff: 'why are they no longer designing genuine streets like those that still characterize Oud-Zuid [...] the design doesn't differ in form from Buitenveldert or other new districts, whereas when it was built the old Dapperstraat did indeed have a distinct identity.'²¹

Notwithstanding the many objections, construction of the first part of Plan-Duyff could no longer be prevented, but in late September 1972 alderman Han Lammers did decide to reconsider the plan.²² Subsequently, in June 1973, the council passed an general land-use plan in which the existing street plan was preserved. This decision, according to the memoirs of the civil servant Max van den Berg, was 'an anathema for Stadsontwikkeling'.²³ A special provision stipulated that the plan was to be elaborated in close collaboration with the local population. This was to take place in a collaborative partnership between officials and representatives of neighbourhood groups involved in the urban renewal process, all meetings were to be open to the public, and all attendees were to be given the opportunity to make their wishes and opinions known.²⁴ Without mentioning them by name, the council was in effect adopting De Sterke Arm's proposal. Coordination of neighbourhood discussions fell to the project group that had been established in August 1972. This consisted of officials from various municipal departments and was tasked with supervising urban renewal.²⁵ For the management of the land-use plan the neighbourhood was divided into sub-areas. This study follows the available archival material pertaining to two areas: the northeast corner (Noordoosthoek) and the south corner (Zuidhoek) (fig. 4).

At the end of 1973, the project group organized three meetings with the aim of allowing the residents to choose from three ready-made scenarios for the Noordoosthoek.²⁶ For this purpose Stadsontwikkeling had drawn up a subdivision study with variants of their original meandering structure.²⁷ But the minutes of these meetings reveal that De Sterke Arm did not agree with this procedure.²⁸ At the action group's insistence 'housing groups', in which residents could work out their own ideas, were formed for each street. In March 1974 this culminated in a joint neighbourhood plan.²⁹ This proposed a 'creative correction' of the perimeter blocks by means of slightly staggered building lines and communal courtyards (fig. 5).³⁰ Res-



4. Dapperbuurt zoning, published in the local paper *De Dapperklapper*, November 1974 (International Institute of Social History)



5. Neighbourhood plan, subdivision for the Noordoosthoek based on residents' preferences, March 1974 (International Institute of Social History)

idents also demanded far-reaching control over the rest of the design process, including having control over the choice of architect. Despite resistance from Stadsontwikkeling the city council largely accepted their demands, but in anticipation of this decision residents had already started looking for a neighbourhood architect in May 1974.³¹ The minutes of one neighbourhood meeting contain a statement of their chief selection criterium: a willingness to work closely with residents and to accept them as the commissioning party.³² After visiting similar projects in the

Kinkerbuurt and Oosterparkbuurt districts, and conversations with a number of architects, they opted to collaborate with Hans Borkent (1938-2013).³³ Borkent won their trust by bringing along his colleagues Jan Koning and Rob Blom van Assendelft, by displaying an understanding of the urban renewal issues, and by behaving as an equal conversation partner rather than an omniscient expert.³⁴ At the next neighbourhood meeting the residents also made the acquaintance of the architect Hein de Haan (1943-2015). They decided to enter into a coalition with Borkent, Blom

van Assendelft and De Haan and to recommend them to the housing association for the first building project in the Noordoosthoek.³⁵

NOORDOOSTHOEK

The establishment in late 1973 of separate residents' groups for three Noordoosthoek streets – Von Zesenstraat, Commelinstraat and Wagenaarstraat – gave rise to an intensive participatory practice. Every week, twelve to twenty residents per street met to discuss how their living environment should be redeveloped and to confer the design of the new buildings. Every two weeks the three groups gathered in a general neighbourhood meeting that was regularly attended by over a hundred people. The project group, too, held regular meetings and representatives of the residents were present at every meeting. In addition, once the creative pro-housing coalition had been established there were regular architect consultation sessions and design team meetings in the neighbourhood.³⁶ The design team for the Noordoosthoek consisted of members of the housing association that the Amsterdam Federation of Housing Associations had designated for this area, civil servants, the chosen architects, and representatives of the residents' groups. As a resident of Commelinstraat and a prominent member of De Sterke Arm, Ireen van Ditschuyzen played a key role. More generally, it is clear from the minutes and attendance lists that women were at the fore in the design teams and converted their ideas into architectural design, while men like Joop Beaux, Tjebbe van Tijen and Auke Bijlsma made a name for themselves as activists in Amsterdam. The upshot of all this, apart from masses of meeting minutes, was a streetscape that reflected the creative potential of grass-roots participation. But before this was achieved, architects had to manoeuvre between resident participation, strict building regulations and opposition from Stadsontwikkeling.

The day after the housing association agreed to the choice of architect and decided to commission Borkent, Blom van Assendelft and De Haan, a conversation took place between the architects and Stadsontwikkeling.³⁷ Stadsontwikkeling ordered them to design several models of 'the entirety of the neighbourhood' and the 'streetscape'.³⁸ Yet according to the residents' groups they were the commissioning parties and Stadsontwikkeling's role was limited to technicalities.³⁹ The architects decided to fulfil the council's instructions by elaborating the neighbourhood plan and to be guided by the associated terms of reference that the residents had drawn up in May and early June 1974.⁴⁰ By explicitly drawing on the neighbourhood plans they were not only confirming their coalition with local residents, but also resisting political

decision-making in favour of financially powerful parties. The neighbourhood plan evinced a clear social vision that would nowadays be seen as an argument for an inclusive neighbourhood: 'The writers aspire to a society in which power, knowledge and income is more fairly distributed. The ideal society will not be attained in Dapperbuurt, but the hope is that exploiting the permitted scope for participation will prove to be a step in the right direction.'⁴¹

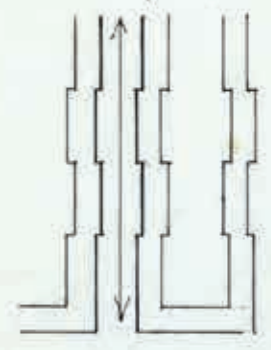
The main premise of the neighbourhood plan was 'Dapperbuurt for Dapperbuurters'.⁴² Those Dapperbuurters were generally poor, meaning that they were in need of low rents – which in turn required low construction costs – and a living space appropriate to their household. But the residents not only wished to stay in their neighbourhood; they also wanted to hold on to their everyday routines and that meant retention of the daily market, shops, walking routes and cafés. So the same principle underpinned the choice of perimeter blocks: to facilitate Dapperbuurters to move into new housing in the same area while also retaining the fine-grained and mixed-use character. This was specified in finer details in the neighbourhood plan: 'The streets are to be narrower, about 19 metres and the courtyards wider, about 25 metres. The roadway has several deflections aimed at reducing speed. The elevation is offset approx. 1 to 2 metres every 40 to 50 metres. This means the courtyards vary in width. The building height is also varied, for example 3 levels on top of a basement and 4 levels without basement. The houses are to have pitched tiled roofs.'⁴³

The architectural terms of reference provided a more detailed account of the design of the first construction project. The new building was to fill 'a gap on the even-numbered side of Wagenaarstraat' and meet the housing requirements of local residents: no access decks and no lifts; colour and type of facade and roof materials to blend in with existing surroundings; a balcony or 'outdoor room' for every dwelling; enclosed kitchens; small upstairs dwellings for young people; large dwellings for migrant workers, ground-floor dwellings for the elderly and infirm; storage areas that do not 'mar' the facade; hoisting beams to facilitate furniture removal; no refuse chutes; space reserved for market stall storage and craft workshops; and communal courtyards.⁴⁴ In July 1974, the three architects studied the corresponding streetscape and concluded that the stipulated offsets in the building line would provide 'a kind of mitigation of the hard wall'.⁴⁵ But they doubted whether it would serve to slow the traffic and were keen to do more to enliven the streetscape: 'If we aspire to a lively neighbourhood and are aware that many of the things that exist today will disappear, we'll have to do all we can to make the surroundings as varied as possible. One obvious aspect is

STRAATBEELD

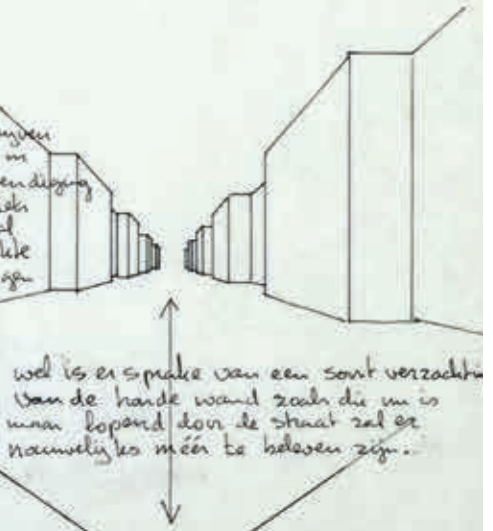
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1. reactie op het buurt model.

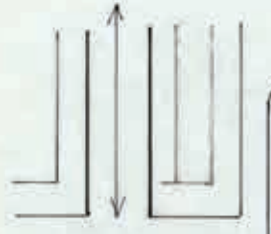


de vraag is of we door het voorschuiven van spouwen in de randen van 2 m een garantie hebben van een verlevendiging van de straat die ook weerkelke als betekent. De straat blijft overal even breed, en er zijn geen directe aanleidingen voor verbygtonderingen van gebruik en beleving.

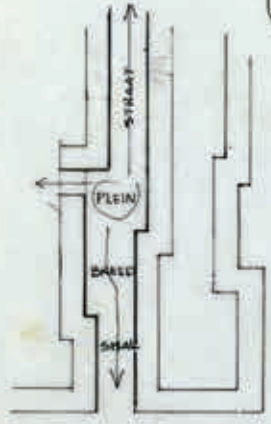
De enige feitelijke winst die gemaakt wordt is de differentiatie in de maken (en daardoor misschien ook in het gebruik) van het bin van terrein. Hoewel ook hier een verlevendiging van totaal 4 m marginaal is.



wel is er sprake van een soort verzachting van de harde wand zoals die nu is maar lopend door de straat zal er nauwelijks méér te beleven zijn.



Wanneer we een levendige buurt willen en ons realiseren dat veel van de dingen die nu nog aanwezig zijn, zullen verdwijnen, dan zullen we alles moeten gebruiken om de omgeving zo gevarieerd mogelijk te maken. En een over de hand liggend aspect is de beleving in het gebruik van de buiten ruimte.

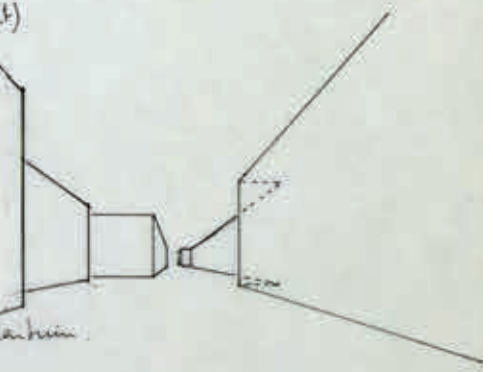


Variatie in lang en smal (straat) tot kort en breed (plein)

een smalle straat geeft andere mogelijkheden dan een brede en een plein vormig knispunt is weer iets anders.

lopend van oost naar west is de verspelbaarheid van wat verder ligt minder groot.

een gedifferentieerd gebruik en beleving van straat en binnenruimte.



2 nieuwe spelregels



Wanneer dit beeld kan worden gezien als een juiste interpretatie van wat in het rapport onder, uitgangspunten staat genoemd, dan is het nodig dat er nieuwe spelregels worden opgesteld, met name de over de marge waarin gebouwd mag worden; daarmee samenhangend de oplossing van verkeer, parkeer en de inpassing van te handhaven, bestaande bebouwing.

We zouden kunnen onderzoeken wat het betekent van de bebouwing (bestand en nieuw), het verkeer en het gebruik van de buitenruimte wanneer we uitgaan van een marge die in het inspelan op de bestaande bebouwing, mogelijke maakt, en meer inhoud geeft aan minimum en maximum maten.



6. Hans Borkent, Jan Koning and Rob Blom van Assendelft, elaboration of the neighbourhood model in a streetscape, narrative drawing as discussion document, July 1974 (Stadsarchief Amsterdam)

the perception and the use of the outdoor space.⁴⁶ In a narrative drawing they proposed a single six to ten metre projection in the building line of every elevation, and a variation in the street width aimed at breaking up the length of the street and increasing the usability (fig. 6).

The minutes of the design team meetings held in late 1974 reveal that the representatives of the resident groups, the housing association, Stadsontwikkeling and the municipal department of housing (Volks-huisvesting) agreed without major objections to the architects' proposals.⁴⁷ At the same time residents were making decisions about the design of the new dwellings during consultations with the architects.⁴⁸ Borkent has spoken in interviews about the complications they encountered during the design process. There was for instance a difference of opinion regarding the windows: whereas the residents wanted one big window for ease of cleaning, Borkent suggested a window with mullion: 'I was fixated on a streetscape in which vertical lines would dominate. As they did in the old blocks. Large openings with a horizontal form did not fit into that picture.'⁴⁹ This indicates that Borkent was using the historical city as his frame of reference. Despite this, he allowed the residents' preferences to prevail over his own stylistic ideas: 'It's not me, but you who have to live there. [...] What matters is that you the residents really have a voice, and can see the effect of that.'⁵⁰

The central mullions disappeared from the drawings, but as Borkent explained in an interview in *Intermediair* many aspects had already been determined before architects and local residents entered into a dialogue. The strict building regulations were still based on public housing in the post-war urban extensions, or in Borkent's words: 'the relative simplicity of a so-called greenfield plan'.⁵¹ The architects were bound by building regulations that allowed little scope for creativity. According to Borkent that meant that the reality of participatory planning equalled the persuasiveness of the architects on the one hand, and on the other their ingenuity in producing a more dynamic design within constraints imposed. For all that, on 1 May 1975 the first pile was sunk on Wagenaarstraat for a walk-up apartment block of fifty-six dwellings to a design that resonates with the voices of local residents (fig. 7): pitched tiled roofs; variation in building height; basement storage; a communal courtyard; a staggered street front in brown brick; and every forty to fifty metres white corbelled and elevated trapezoidal bay windows above the entrances.⁵²

While the design process for this first complex on Wagenaarstraat was progressing, the project group had already started organizing neighbourhood meetings about subsequent projects. To involve as many

Dapperbuurters as possible in the design process, they canvassed door to door. Perhaps trust was still lacking, for during the first meeting about the second project in September 1974 the main question was: 'Who are these houses for?'⁵³ In late 1974, the residents and design team agreed to handle the second project as an extension of the first.⁵⁴ This meant the same design team could continue to work with the same terms of reference, in what was effectively a continuation of the commission to the same architect and same contractor. The next site was the vacant lot in the perimeter block between Wagenaarstraat and Commelinstraat and a duplication of the design resulted in a complex of fifty dwellings on both sides of the block.⁵⁵ In the Wagenaarstraat the street front is offset halfway along. Visual differences compared with the earlier complex are the trapezoidal open outdoor rooms instead of enclosed bay windows, pronounced hoisting beams, and the entrance to the basement storage area perpendicular to the elevation. In Commelinstraat almost the entire complex is offset from the building line and the street front has vertical accents consisting of bay windows that at ground level contain the entrance doors in the oblique section (fig. 8).

In early 1977 the first project on Wagenaarstraat was completed, in the spring of 1978 the second.⁵⁶ Meanwhile, those involved had developed a routine in dealing with the design process: the archives no longer contain reports of heated discussions or political manifestos posing as architectural terms of reference, but professional-looking information booklets about the projects explaining the interaction between resident groups, architects and the municipal project group. Both the third project, in which three complexes were designed simultaneously, and the fourth continued to employ the formal repertoire of the first project on Wagenaarstraat. Differentiation was achieved mainly by varying in the design and the rhythm of the bay windows. With the completion of the third and fourth projects, the entire block between Wagenaarstraat, Commelinstraat, Dapperstraat and Pontanusstraat and the short end of the block between Commelinstraat and Von Zesenstraat had been rebuilt to a design by Hans Borkent's architectural firm and the resident groups (fig. 9). Local resident Cor Rugaart was proud of the result: 'And what really pleases me is that people now stop at the corner of Dapperstraat to have a look. You can see them thinking, how is it possible, did that really used to be the old Wagenaarstraat, that dump? And it feels like a compliment to the participation and collaboration with the architects and the officials.'⁵⁷

7. Staggered street elevation of the first urban renewal project bordering Wagenaarstraat, 1974-1977 (Stadsarchief Amsterdam)



8. Staggered street elevation of the second urban renewal project bordering Commelinstraat, 1974-1978 (Stadsarchief Amsterdam)



▼ 9. View of Wagenaarstraat from the intersection with Dapperstraat, looking towards Pontanusstraat: right the first project, left, on the corner, the fourth project, behind that the second project, and the second street-front deviation is part of the third project, 1974-1982, March 1985 (photo Martin Alberts, Stadsarchief Amsterdam)



ZUIDHOEK

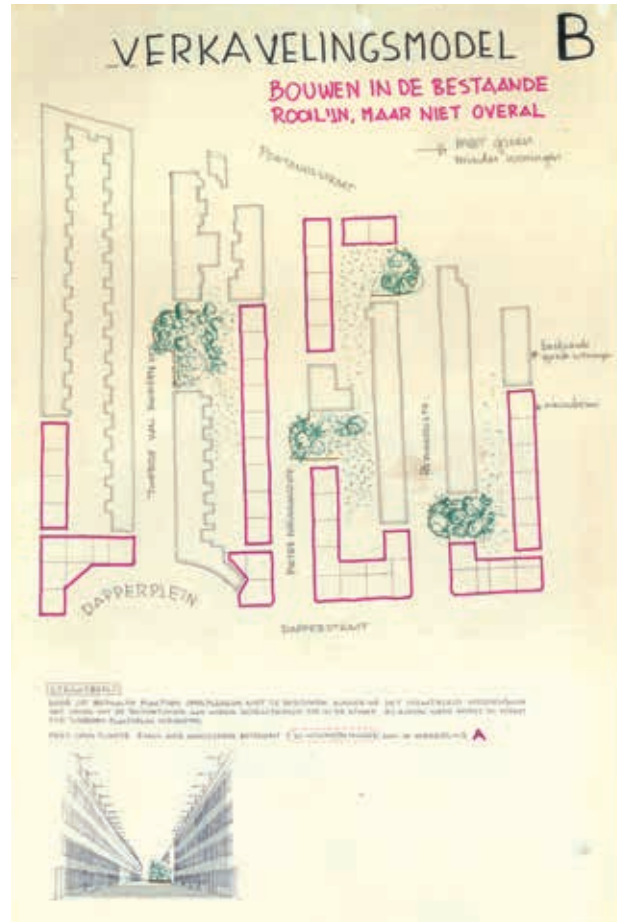
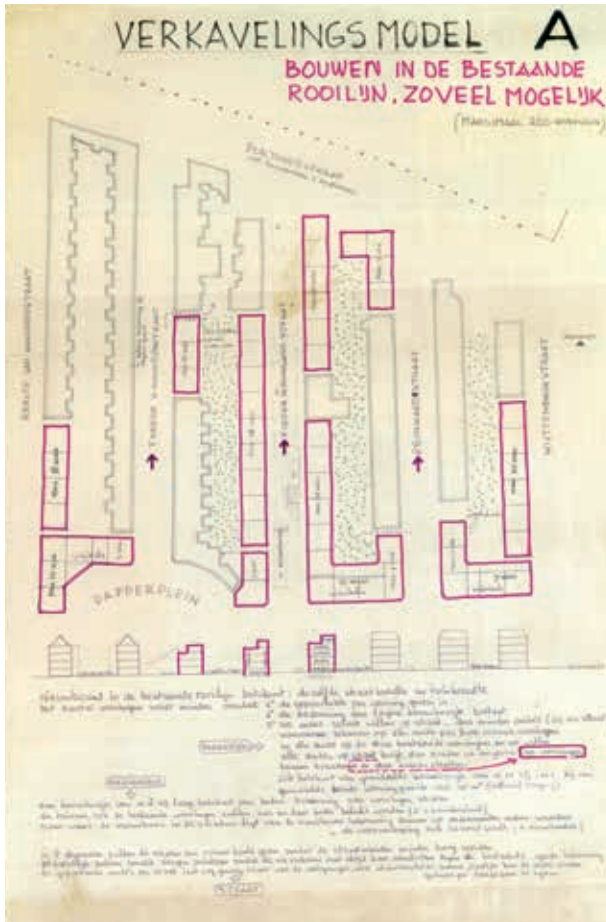
In October 1974, the project group organized two meetings to broaden the redevelopment to other parts of Dapperbuurt, for residents of, respectively, the areas northwest and south of Eerste Van Swindenstraat.⁵⁸ With respect to the northwest corner (Noordwesthoek) it had been decided to renovate as much of the existing buildings as possible and for this reason that area is beyond the scope of this study. In the Zuidhoek, by contrast, demolition in preceding years had resulted in vacant lots that required development.⁵⁹ Here the project group reversed its approach: rather than taking a series of Stadsontwikkeling proposals as its starting point, the officials wanted to begin by developing proposals together with the residents and then present these to Stadsontwikkeling. During the first meeting, residents decided that they needed the help of an architect for this, and they were determined to choose one for themselves; their preference was for someone who had already learned the ropes in the Noordoosthoek.⁶⁰ A conversation with Hein de Haan and Hans Borkent led to the first offering his assistance on a voluntary basis, and the second being appointed urban designer.⁶¹

The Zuidhoek resident group initially focused on the urban design. In April 1975, aided by the architects and following the example of the Noordoosthoek, the residents produced a plan setting out the subdivision principles. Many of these principles coincided with those of the Noordoosthoek neighbourhood plan. Here, too, the maxim was 'Dapperbuurt for Dapperbuurters' and the aim was to have far-reaching control over the design process.⁶² There was, however, an additional problem with respect to the subdivision: the existing streets and blocks were considerably narrower than those in the Noordoosthoek. While the residents wanted the new dwellings to benefit from more natural light, they were also adamant that 'as many good new dwellings as possible should be built'.⁶³ The participatory process resulted in a flexible street plan with three options that could be implemented separately or in combination (figs. 10a, 10b, 10c): building within the existing perimeters while reducing building heights (A); building within the existing perimeters with breaks in the street elevations in the form of cross streets or opening up the courtyards (B); and building with staggered street elevations in the interests of wider courtyards (C). Residents also wanted to retain Dapperstraat as the central shopping street with daily market and the square, Dapperplein, both of which they regarded as essential to the neighbourhood.⁶⁴

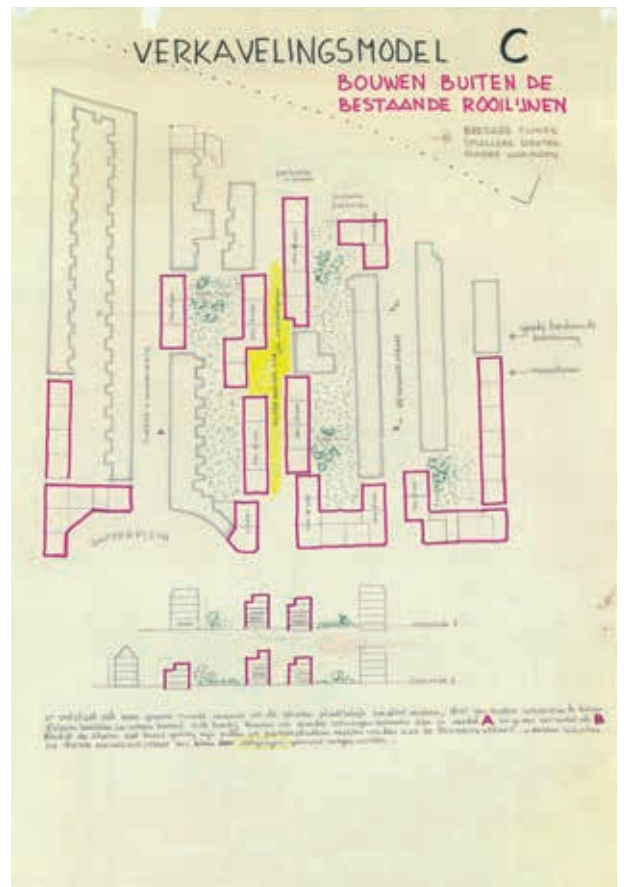
Stadsontwikkeling was of the opinion that the residents' report offered 'too little certainty' as regards the final result to serve as the basis for further elaboration.⁶⁵ Civil servants suggested working with the resi-

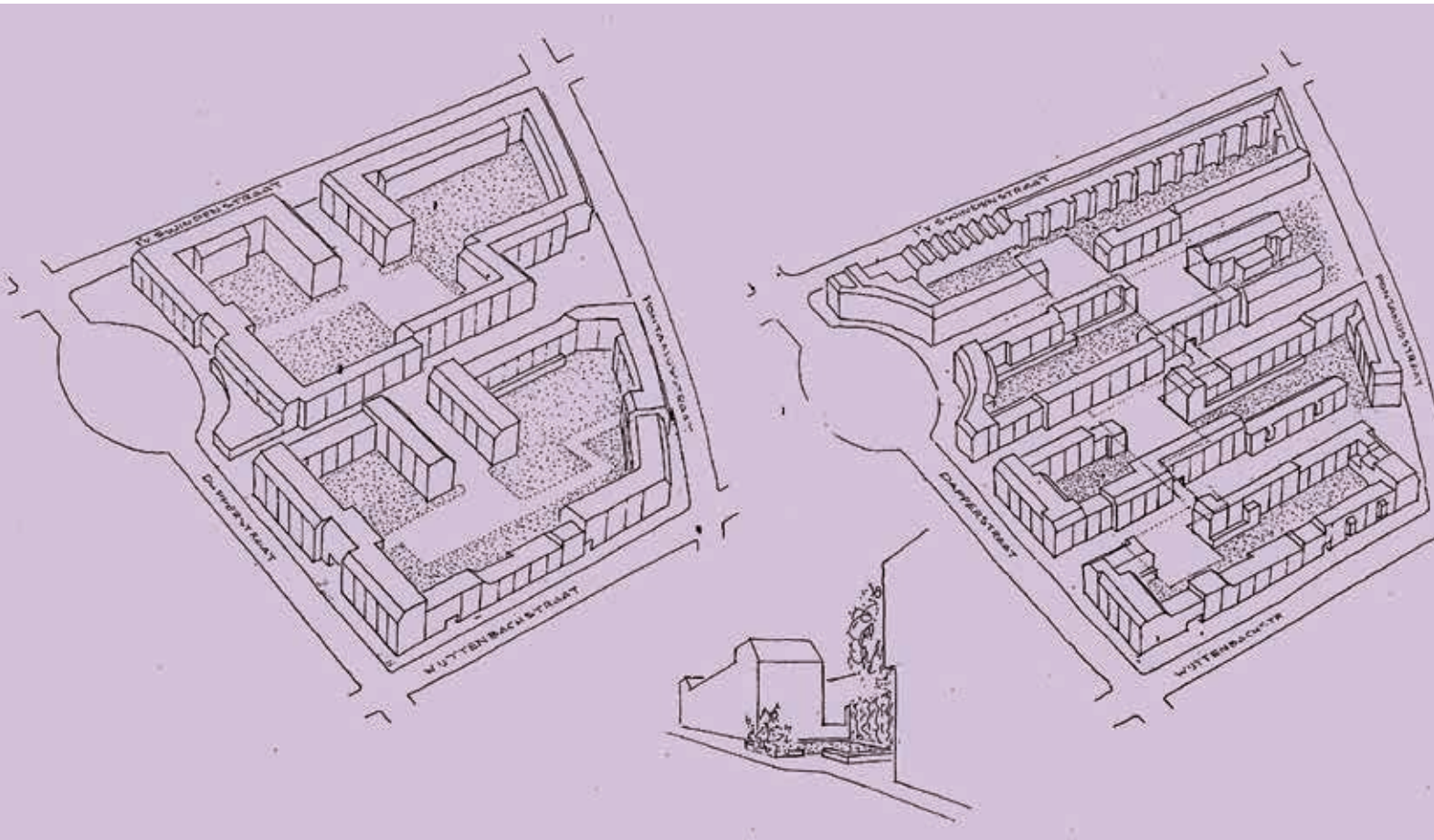
dent group to specify the principles in an overall design. Thereupon Stadsontwikkeling worked out several scenarios for the street plan, which were then discussed with representatives of the resident group.⁶⁶ During these meetings local residents and their architects noticed that Stadsontwikkeling was once again contemplating variations on the meandering courtyard subdivision. But they came to a crucial conclusion: 'we are in agreement with many of s.o.'s [Stadsontwikkeling's] ideas (privacy, peace and quiet, sun in street and home), but in our view these can be incorporated in a way that is more respectful of the character of the neighbourhood and the quality of every renewal phase'.⁶⁷ Here the residents were formulating the basis for the synthesis that was to characterize urban renewal architecture: the modern comforts of the post-war estates, creatively adapted to the morphology of the historical city. During the discussions, the difference in point of departure once again manifested itself when it came to the question of who these new dwellings were for: for current residents or for a different residential profile? Stadsontwikkeling had the latter in mind, while Borkent took the sitting residents as his starting point. He and the housing department architect Martin Wijnen argued that: 'What makes this unique is [...] being able to build with active input from the people for whom you are building'.⁶⁸

At the meetings held to discuss the options, the parties failed to reach agreement on the urban design.⁶⁹ As a result, two competing plans were conceived: a proposal from Stadsontwikkeling in which large-scale housing blocks replaced the narrow streets, and a proposal from the resident group in which the streets were preserved and openings were made in the narrow perimeter blocks (fig. 11).⁷⁰ In early 1976, the project group organized an exhibition in which both proposals were displayed and visitors could express their preference by voting. Although over ninety per cent voted for the neighbourhood proposal, the relevant alderman championed his own department's plan.⁷¹ The residents did not give up, as evidenced by the fully detailed plan they proceeded to develop with Borkent and in which they checked their proposals against Stadsontwikkeling's standards and demonstrated that several of the department's calculations were incorrect, whereas the neighbourhood plan did meet those standards.⁷² They had also managed to generate privacy without widening the streets, by varying the different housing types so that windows were not located opposite one another, preventing direct overlooking of one dwelling by another.⁷³ In late June 1977, the conflict was resolved by the Raadscommissie voor Stadsontwikkeling in favour of the neighbourhood plan, with an urgent appeal to expedite implementation.⁷⁴



10. Three subdivision models accompanying the report of the Zuid participation group, April 1975 (Stadsarchief Amsterdam)





11. Two competing plans for the Zuidoothoek: left the Stadsontwikkeling plan, right the neighbourhood plan, 1976 (Stadsarchief Amsterdam)

With their urban plan approved, the resident group could start to draw up construction plans.⁷⁵ Before long a full-blown construction boom was under way. In June 1978, the project group announced that the first project on Wijtenbachstraat was expected to be completed by October that year, at which point construction of the second project on Pieter Nieuwlandstraat started. Meanwhile a further four projects, on Dapperstraat, Wijtenbachstraat and Van Swindendwarsstraat, were in the pipeline.⁷⁶ Preparation of another seven projects scattered across the district occurred over the course of 1979, so that the results of urban renewal were visible in large parts of Dapperbuurt by the early 1980s.⁷⁷ Although the emphasis had shifted from redevelopment to renovation in the course of that decade, social housing continued to be built on the basis of the neighbourhood plan and to a design by architects chosen by the local residents until the end of the 1980s. Via a participatory practice of 'neighbourhood construction teams' and regular 'neighbourhood construction participation', residents remained involved in the design process. At the end of 1983, the project group wrote that the city council had ordered them 'to ensure that urban renewal plans

were drawn up in proper consultation with the neighbourhood. Every time they [the officials] submit a proposal to the city council they must report what local residents think of it.'⁷⁸ The neighbourhood plan was fairly faithfully implemented, at most modified in light of the experience of the already completed projects. For example, a cross street was inserted, and breaks were introduced in the street frontage of three housing blocks (fig. 12).⁷⁹

Given that the first projects had been in preparation since 1975, the design process can be followed via the minutes of the resident meetings. However, the archives used for this study contain no documentation on the design process after the 1970s. Given the continued existence of an intensive participation structure, it seems likely that continuation of the process put in place with the first project became more routine.⁸⁰ For the first project on Wijtenbachstraat, the terms of reference were discussed at a residents' meeting and the residents and Borkent talked to several architects, after which Hein van Meer was chosen.⁸¹ Van Meer designed several versions, with access and location of storage emerging as the main topics of discussion with the resident group.⁸² The group had a marked



12. Street front with 'street garden' break Pieter Nieuwlandstraat east of Dapperstraat, designed by the Zuidhoek participation group and Hans Borkent, 1975-1988 (photo author)

preference for staircase-accessed dwellings because it was cheaper, yielded more dwellings, located the bedrooms at the rear, and provided greater privacy.⁸³ Residents also preferred front and rear balconies.

In 1978, a housing complex was built on Wijtenbachstraat with a fairly solid façade and an elongated trapezoidal roof line in brown brick. For the second project on Pieter Nieuwlandstraat the resident group settled on Jan Koning as architect. Paul De Ley had also been considered but then rejected because his proposals were already too detailed to be readily adapted to the neighbourhood plan.⁸⁴ Koning designed a complex in sand-coloured brick, with projecting entrance stairs perpendicular to the elevation, glazed bays, blue balconies and dwellings at street level. Other architects who produced designs for the Zuidhoek included Hein de Haan, Jef Reintjens and Martin Wijnen. In 1984, Borkent designed the short end of the block between Pieter Nieuwlandstraat and Reinwardtstraat, on the west side of Dapperstraat (fig. 13).⁸⁵ The complex has a stuccoed exterior, shops at street level and a top floor with curved bay windows. Finally, in 1988, he designed the turquoise quarter of

the Dapperplein frontage (fig. 14).⁸⁶ In the information booklet for future residents, Borkent wrote that the design had been extensively discussed over the course of twelve design team meetings, concluding: 'Nevertheless, the plan as it is now being tendered [...] conforms in broad lines and often also in detail to the conclusions reached in the meetings, so that here, too, participation has proven its worth.'⁸⁷

According to Borkent, a level of standardization was already visible in urban renewal architecture by around 1980; the urban renewal design approach had been formalized in policy. While this resulted in an acceleration of building production, the design became more restrained, and less attention was paid to integrating the projects with the historical urban structure. Borkent noted that in the early phase the action groups and young architects had had to fight for a new approach to urban renewal in the face of prevailing political and professional agendas. As their ideas became accepted and the number of completed projects increased, he discerned a growing tendency to resort 'to the greater efficiency of those architectural firms that had learned long ago to wield the blunt in-



13. Housing with shops at street level on the short end of the perimeter block on Dapperstraat, between Pieter Nieuwlandstraat and Reinwardstraat to a design by Hans Borkent, 1984-1987 (Stadsarchief Amsterdam)

14. Housing with street-level shops on Dapperplein to a design by the Zuidhoek participation group and Hans Borkent, 1988-1990 (photo author)



strument of housing production. Admittedly, in situations where it cannot do too much damage, but surgeons they will never be.⁸⁸ Borkent appears to be ascribing to himself the surgical finesse evidently lacking in others, but his observations do help to explain the differences between the 1970s projects and those from the 1980s.

CITIZEN DEVELOPERS

Over the course of fifteen years, a series of social housing schemes were built in Dapperbuurt; while differing in form and volume, they had one thing in common: the buildings were literally bristling with balconies and bay windows. Whether curved, trapezoidal or rectangular, white or brightly coloured, accentuating a corner or masking the junction between two buildings, they were all a defining feature of the streetscape. In this article the design process and the ideas underpinning urban renewal architecture have been examined, based on numerous documents generated by the collaboration between local residents and architects. These demonstrate that the residents had a decisive role in the renewal of their neighbourhood; they designed via 'direct democracy', always endeavouring to create a lively streetscape and to preserve and strengthen social cohesion in the neighbourhood. They wanted to live 'on' the street, they wanted shared outdoor spaces, they wanted privacy but without screening themselves off, and they could only realize these aims within the constraints imposed by building regulations and financial means. The balconies were thus not intended primarily as private spaces, but as social spaces from which to chat to neighbours and passers-by, while the bay windows afforded a view of street life. Both were designed so as to contribute to a lively streetscape and social contact.

Although the collaborative partnerships between residents and architects developed differently in each Amsterdam urban renewal neighbourhood and led to different architectural outcomes, the Dapperbuurt example demonstrates that they were highly effective coalitions. Together they explored creative ways of reconciling the seeming contradiction between the historical city and modern architecture and urban planning. And, with their neighbourhood plans, they fought together for an alternative design approach

that challenged the prevailing political and planning agenda. Around 1970, they initiated an informal and at the time unconventional design process involving extensive participatory practices. Instead of taking a clean-slate approach, they started from the qualities of the existing environment and the interests and objectives of residents. This resulted in preservation of the existing morphology and functional diversity. However, the new housing schemes were on a significantly larger scale than the individual premises of which the neighbourhood had previously consisted. On the face of it, their volume was at odds with the vocabulary and campaign rhetoric of the residents who protested against comprehensive redevelopment. However, while unwilling to abandon their everyday surroundings, they did want to enjoy the conveniences of modern living. This study demonstrates that the new construction was required to combine the best of both, with the result that small-scale premises were sacrificed to affordability. In an effort to mitigate the large-scale impression, elevations were vertically articulated, and their height delimited by way of balconies, bay windows, hoisting beams, roof overhangs, and staggered building lines. Together with the construction materials, these elements adopted from pre-war practice were intended to ensure integration with the historical context without falling into historicizing replication. Thus, both contrast with and sensitivity to the context are relevant criteria for evaluating urban renewal architecture.

Critics have usually decried urban renewal for an alleged lack of urban planning and poor design.⁸⁹ However, this study illuminates that the authors of urban renewal, the creative pro-housing coalitions, did develop urban plans. These neighbourhood plans served as the blueprint for the eventual renewal of the entire district. It is also apparent that an essential merit of urban renewal was its function, namely facilitating affordable housing on central locations with high land values. The architecture is an expression of that function. As such, this young heritage is worthy of our attention, especially since many of these social housing units are currently being sold off without any price control mechanisms in place. In effect, this spells the end of everything that local residents and architects fought so hard for back in the 1970s.

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DESIGNING WITH 'DIRECT DEMOCRACY' LOCAL RESIDENTS, ARCHITECTS AND THE DESIGN OF URBAN RENEWAL IN AMSTERDAM, 1970–1990

AIMÉE ALBERS

In the 1970s and '80s residents and architects in Amsterdam worked together to shape the renewal of their neighbourhood. Working outside traditional planning constraints they initiated a process for designing 'neighbourhood plans' that gave priority to affordable housing and minimized disruption to the existing social and urban design structure. Although these neighbourhood plans stood in stark contrast to prevailing political and urban planning ideas, they formed the basis on which urban renewal was realized from the middle of the 1970s. While the focus in the historiography of urban renewal is usually on politics and policy, this article provides insight into the design process itself and the ideas behind urban renewal architecture based on numerous consultation documents generated by the collaboration between local residents and architects. The Dapperbuurt area serves as an exemplary case study.

The example of the Dapperbuurt shows that locals and architects formed energetic and effective coalitions. After the residents of the Dapperbuurt had won far-reaching control over the design process, including a say in the choice of architect, they entered into a collaboration with the architects Hans Borkent, Rob Blom van Assendelft and Hein de Haan. During the extensive consultation process the architects acted as equal discussion partners rather than all-knowing experts, while local residents provided creativity and spontaneous initiatives and had the final say. Together they designed with 'direct democracy'. In this article those collaborative arrangements are referred to as 'creative housing coalitions'. This term expresses both their

main aim and their greatest strength. It also shows who initiated the urban renewal housing projects and how grass-roots initiatives were ultimately translated into policy.

In the course of the design process, local residents and their architects sought creative ways of reconciling the apparent antithesis between the historically evolved city and modern architecture and urban design. Instead of taking a blank slate as their starting point, they proceeded on the basis of the qualities of the existing environment and the interests and wishes of the residents. This resulted in the retention of the existing morphology and functional diversity. However, the housing projects were on a much larger scale than the individual buildings that had previously made up the neighbourhood, because while the local residents were unwilling to give up their familiar living environment, they did want modern home comforts. This study has revealed that the replacement construction was required to combine the best of both worlds. In order to suggest a smaller scale, the external walls were vertically articulated, and their height demarcated by means of balconies, bay windows, hoisting beams, eaves and staggered building lines. So both contrast to and compatibility with the context are relevant criteria for evaluating urban renewal architecture. In addition, it turns out that a key merit of this urban renewal was its function, namely to deliver affordable and comfortable housing on centrally located sites with high land values. The architecture gives expression to that function.