‘DOING TOGETHER WHAT CAN BE DONE TOGETHER’

THE INTERRUPTED HISTORY OF CO-HOUSING IN THE NETHERLANDS

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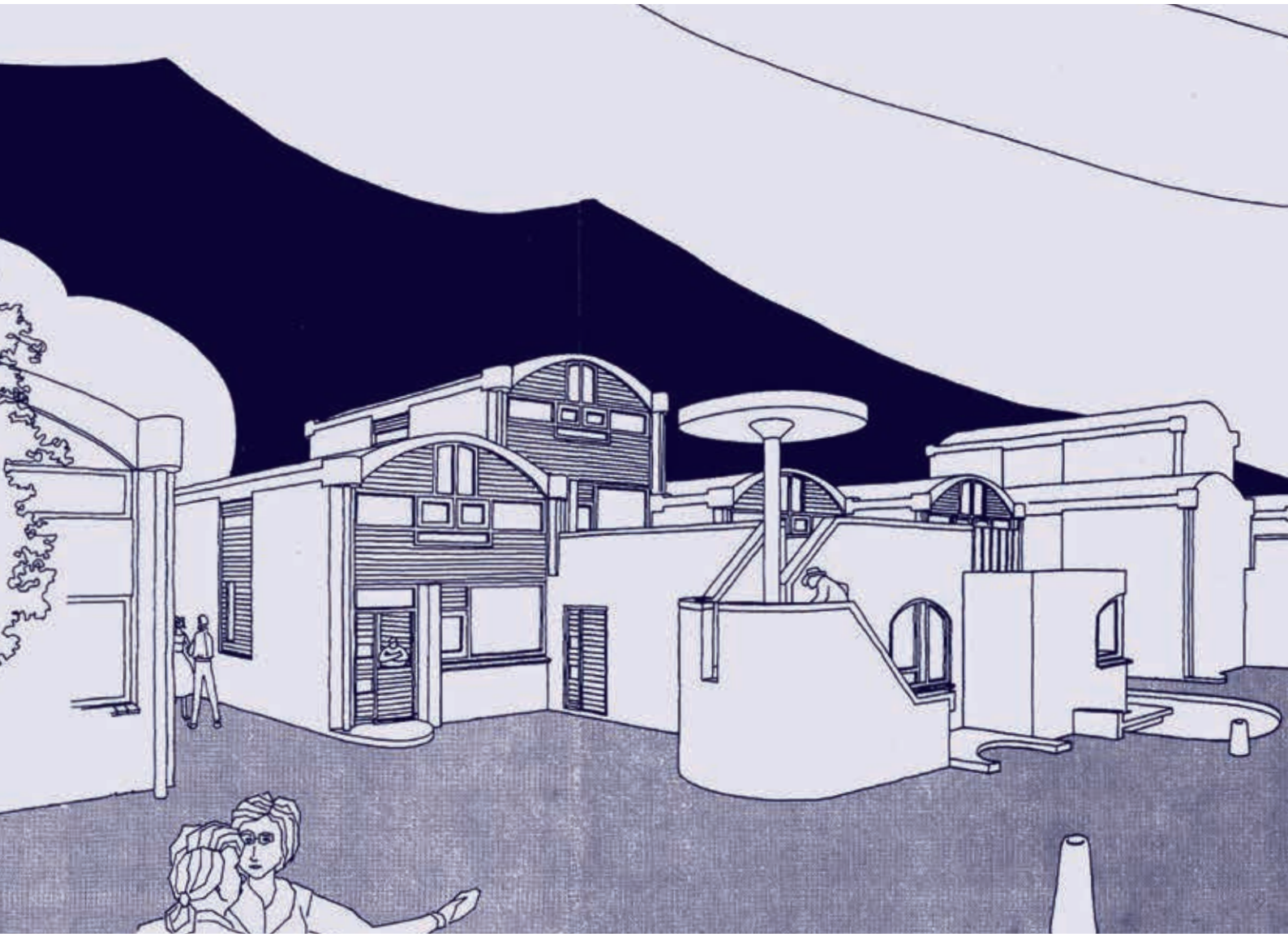


‘Doing together what can be done together, because that’s when you enjoy it most.’ This catchphrase typifies the co-housing concept that emerged in the Netherlands in the 1970s and gave rise to over sixty projects between 1977 and 1991 (fig. 1).[1] Centraal Wonen (as co-housing was known in the Netherlands) is an intentional shared living arrangement in which each household has a self-contained house or residential unit while sharing communal facilities and spaces with other households.[2] The Centraal Wonen housing schemes were intended for a varied group of some 15 to 120 residents and most were realized as new-build projects. The initiators believed that this housing concept offered solutions to social issues like the inferior position of women and increasing loneliness that were not well served by the prevailing one-sided production of single-family houses and apartments. According to the co-housing philosophy, shared facilities would

▲ 1. Leo de Jonge and Pieter Weeda, Wandelmeent in Hilversum (*Bouw* 28 [1973] 49, 1474)

2. Computer room with wall hanging, in Centraal Wonen De Banier in Rotterdam (photo author 2021)

bolster the sense of community and the emancipation of deprived groups. Such idealism was in keeping with the mood for change that had emerged in the 1960s and continued to develop in the 1970s.

By the 1990s the Centraal Wonen as 'brand name' had faded into oblivion and was to all intents and purposes an episode in Dutch housing history that could be regarded as having run its course. However, alternative and shared living arrangements are currently enjoying an upsurge in interest, which puts the Centraal Wonen concept, so typical of the Post 65 period, in a different perspective. This article looks at the period in which Centraal Wonen emerged, the circumstances that gave rise to the concept, and the fully worked out manifestations of this living arrangement. It also investigates the nature of the alternative this new form of living sought to offer and how that was rendered in the first Centraal Wonen project. Lastly, it takes a brief look at the diminishing implementation of Centraal Wonen ideals in the 1980s.

THE NEW DYNAMISM OF THE POST-WAR GENERATION

The breeding ground for Centraal Wonen lay in the post-war period. The regeneration of large parts of the cities, the construction of a hundred thousand dwellings per year, and increasing automobility brought about drastic changes in the physical living environment of many Dutch citizens. The post-war reconstruction period saw the introduction of highly systematized building methods and a centrally coordinated housing policy. But the large-scale modernization of urban design and architecture and the industrialization of construction had their downside. In many cases, system building's repetitive modules and the modernist repetition of spatial design patterns resulted in an impoverished spatial quality. The new residential areas felt impersonal and unwelcoming; they were often too spread out and too monofunctional. But it was the demolition of large swathes of the existing urban fabric in the course of modernizing run-down inner city areas that provoked the greatest outrage. Canals were filled in, historical streets and neighbourhoods were demolished, and new thoroughfares were driven through centuries-old structures in the interests of traffic flow. This approach was promptly seen as a demonstration of the 'high-handedness of city authorities and the influence wielded by big business'.[3]

In *Een onvoltooid project* (An unfinished project) Michelle Provoost argued that: 'While planners in the 1960s set out the lines along which the Netherlands was supposed to develop with utter certainty, from

the perspective of the street society appeared to be anything but certain.'[4] A post-war generation that had grown up in the context of rising prosperity and secularization thought that individual development, emancipation and democratization were more important than conforming to society's traditional role patterns and unwavering articles of faith. Suddenly all manner of subcultures and socio-critical movements sprang up, populated by left-wing activists, as well as by 'hedonists and drop-outs'.[5] From their stance of social resistance they campaigned against empty properties, decay, demolition and speculation in the older city districts and neighbourhoods, and demanded a greater say in the planning process.[6] This call was answered by 'Keerpunt 1972' (Turning Point 1972), the joint election programme of three centre left political parties (PvdA, D'66 and PPR), and by the subsequent progressive Den Uyl government (1973-1977). Under the motto 'Distribution of knowledge, power and income' important core values were formulated, aimed at the post-war socially engaged generation.[7] The main political focus extended beyond the basic necessities of life and material prosperity to include emancipation, participation and democratization.[8] It was assumed that these social values would filter through into all facets of society.

ALTERNATIVES OFFERED BY THE ARCHITECTURAL PROFESSION

While politicians were busy exploring new social values in the 1970s, designers were pondering an architecture and urban design that would be better aligned with the needs of human beings.[9]

In 1959, Jaap Bakema and Aldo van Eyck had taken over the editorship of the architecture magazine *Forum*. Together with a few like-minded architects they criticized the sterile, bureaucratic version of functionalism and advocated merging architecture and urban planning in an integrated living environment geared to the welfare of human beings. Jaap Bakema wrote about architecture's function as a medium of identity – an aspect he felt was being overlooked in the bleak mass housing projects. For Van Eyck the chief problem was the absence of any direct contact between architect and end users. John Habraken came up with a way of bridging the gulf between the ideas of the architect and the needs of the occupants in his book *Supports: an Alternative to Mass Housing* (1961). He distinguished between the shell (the support) and the interior (the infill), in other words an architect-designed framework that the user could fill in for themselves.[10] The Stichting Architecten Research (SAR), co-founded by Habraken in 1964, explored this principle and the new responsibilities it entailed for the end user. Many architects at that time believed that involving future residents in the design process would result in greater freedom and flexibility and a more sustainable living environment, and that the resulting dwellings would be more in tune with the range of lifestyles, ages and preferences.

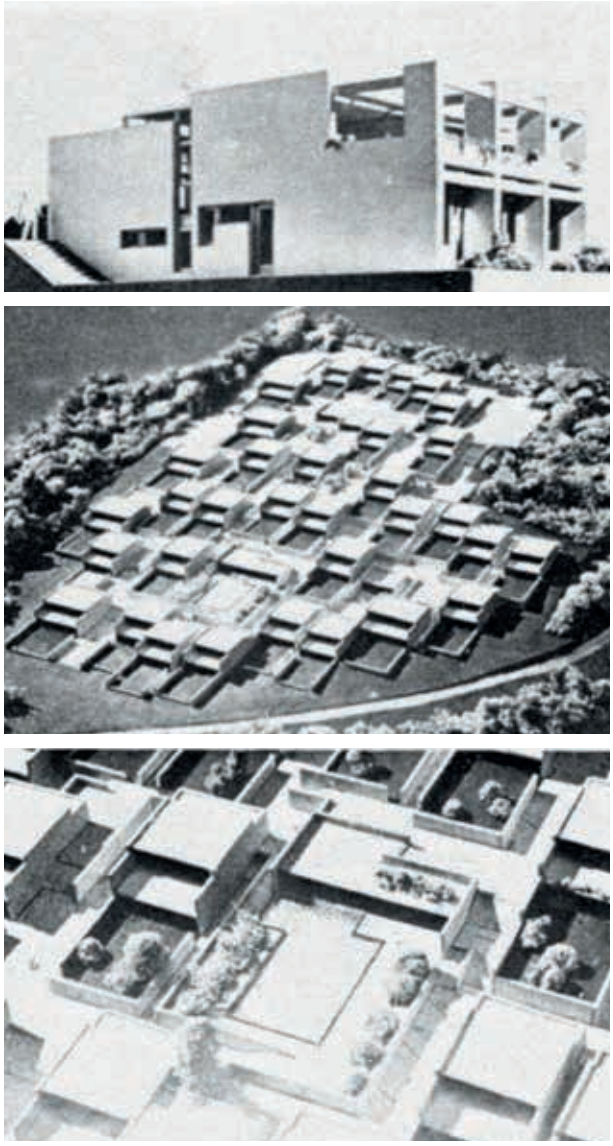
The ideas of the *Forum* group filtered into the built environment via the magazine and architectural courses without coalescing into a single common style. Early designs still featured a modern formal idiom but were more mindful of 'spontaneous encounters' and spatial hierarchies. In Dutch housing construction in the 1970s there was no shortage of experimental designs geared to promoting congeniality, introducing complexity into the streetscape and involving residents via consultation procedures.[11] In experimental housing we see recurrent themes like homeliness, contact and community achieved by way of (multi-level) low-rise, home zones and decked housing.

One of the directions taken by architecture and urban design would later come to be known as the 'small is beautiful movement'.[12] Districts were usually divided up into small neighbourhoods in which blocks of houses were variously arranged around home zones, traffic-calmed streets, courts and public green space. Staggered building lines, front gardens that merged with street spaces and small-scale greenery created in-between areas for casual encounters among residents. The architecture defined the streetscape and was characterized by brick-built dwellings with pitched roofs and an individual expression (fig. 1).

LONGING FOR A COMMUNITY

Meanwhile there was another development under way in which residents took matters into their own hands. In the Netherlands and other parts of northern Europe the ideal of a community beyond the traditional nuclear family was in vogue. One radical manifestation was the commune, a form of collective living that turns up in all cultures and all ages, but which in Europe experienced an upsurge in the wake of post-war reconstruction.[13] A post-war generation of young people rebelled against their parents' (middle-class) generation and against established social patterns, striving instead for change, participation and emancipation.[14] Inspired by themes like sustainability, spirituality and equality, they wanted to live together in a way that differed from existing family structures. Owing to the tight and lopsided housing market most embarked on their alternative form of living in existing buildings, where they experimented with the division of private and shared spaces.

From the 1970s onwards communes preferred to see themselves as 'residential groups'.[15] Interest in communes had waned, their networks had weakened and



3. Model of Skråplanet in Jonstrup in Denmark (M. Zeestraten, *Bouwfonds Informatiemap Centraal Wonen*, Bouwfonds Nederlandse Gemeenten, 1976)

it became increasingly difficult to make these kinds of projects viable.[16] New members sometimes had different ideas about the counterculture and communal living, fuelled in part by the negative perception of radical collectivization.[17] Communes experimented with sharing one another's partners and with an anti-authoritarian upbringing, and there was no taboo on drug use. In opposition to this were new insights into the importance of authority in raising children and in relations between the group and the individual. The internal disintegration of the commune movement sparked by a 'generational divide' and disagreement about the future direction of activism, resulted in a shift from 'outmoded' communes to other forms of shared living.[18]

Alongside the relatively unstructured relationships of the communes and residential groups living in converted (inner-city) buildings, communal housing projects of a more organized nature started to emerge. They arose from a desire to retain the family unit while 'opening' it up to a larger neighbourhood-wide social network and participating within the residential community, sometimes at neighbourhood or district level. Building from scratch made it possible to realize innovative shared housing ideas in buildings designed specifically for that purpose. In northern Europe in particular a number of communal housing projects with a social objective were built under a variety of names. The Danish *bofællesskab* ('living community') kick-started a movement that would later come to be known as 'co-housing' in the United States.[19] The Danish living communities also influenced the Dutch Centraal Wonen concept, in particular Skråplanet in Jonstrup (1963-1973) by the architect Jan Gudmand-Høyer (1946-2017), author of the 1968 manifesto 'The missing link between utopia and the dated one-family house' (fig. 3).[20] There was a lot of interest in his ideas on the 'integrated housing collective' where as well as a central community house, there were semi-private in-between spaces for use by small sub-groups.

CENTRAAL WONEN

In 1969 35-year-old Lies van den Donk-van Dooremaal of Nijmegen put a notice in the progressive news magazine *De Nieuwe Linie*: 'Who will design a housing collective, envisaged four to ten kilometres from a big city, with a central kitchen and dining room, a central laundry, a day nursery, study area, shared guest rooms and above or around them small private units for each family: a living room, a few bedrooms, a kitchenette, a shower and toilet?'[21] This advertisement marked the beginning of Centraal Wonen and was the impetus for ten design meetings in which the concept was worked out in greater detail. The idea eventually evolved into a wider vision for social reform.

Centraal Wonen's aims went beyond the creation of a strongly integrated group of residents. Its goals were several: it would reinforce the sense of community by restoring lost functions; increase citizens' influence over their immediate living environment; promote individual development; provide a stronger social safety net and mutual solidarity; promote female and male emancipation; and broaden and support the environment of the growing child. There were substantial spatial planning ambitions as well. Centraal Wonen would lead to greater variety in the urban landscape, ensure good facilities at neighbourhood level, enable greater housing density, make outdoor areas less of a 'no man's land' and align building and living with human cohabitation more than ever before. This last, it was explained, served to: '... relativize the supremacy of business principles on the one hand and

architectural-aesthetic principles on the other. What typifies human forms of cohabitation is their processual nature: the composition of a household changes, the people change, the relations between people change and with that the needs also change. Accordingly, a variety of possibilities for change are built in, not just in the communal areas and in the CW complex as a whole but in the individual dwellings as well.'[22]

In 1971, the interested parties set up the Landelijke Vereniging Centraal Wonen (National Centraal Wonen Association, LVCW). They received a grant to design an actual shared housing development via the Experimentele Woningbouw scheme of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, Recreation and Social Work (CRM) and were supported by sociologists and welfare workers, who also assessed the feasibility of the design.[23] Centraal Wonen was loath to restrict itself to a single design, but the group of initiators felt that this was a realistic alternative to standard housing. In the event it was many years before the first housing complex was built, by which time the Dutch societal context was no longer the same.

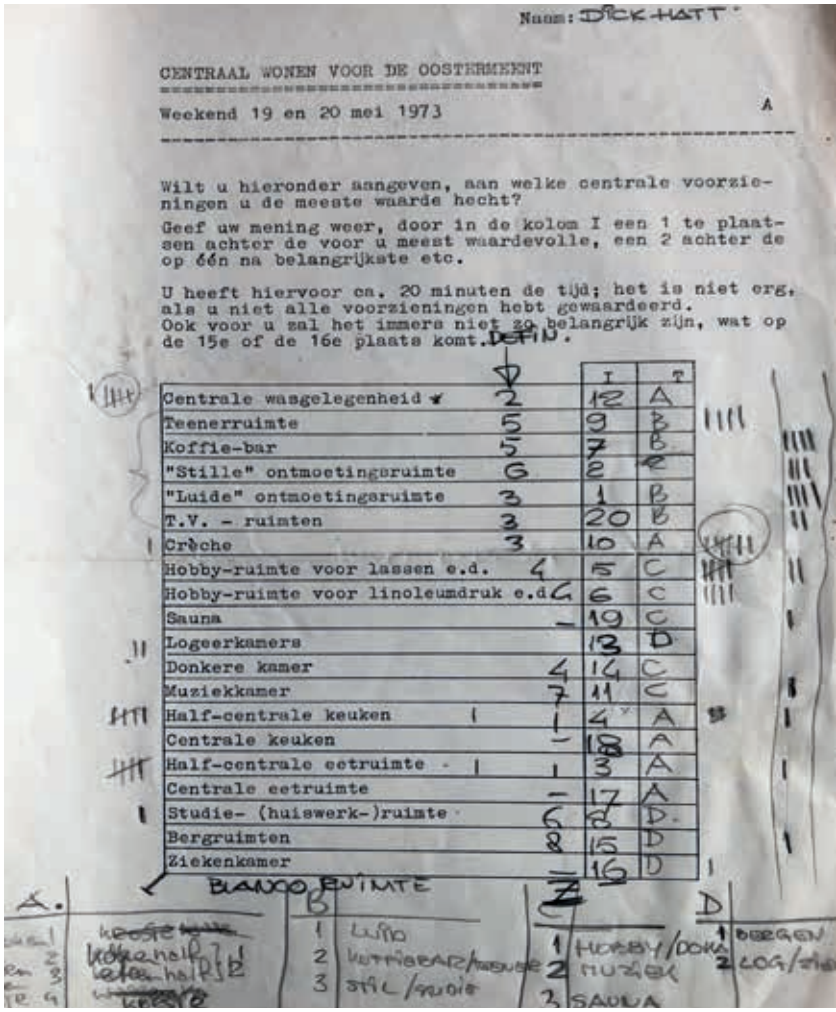
THE WANDELMEENT

The Wandelmeent in Hilversum is a key project for the Centraal Wonen movement because it represented the first attempt to give concrete form to their ideas. The first meeting about the Wandelmeent took place in 1973 and the project was completed in 1977. It began with an information evening in the Ons Huis community centre in Hilversum. Under the motto 'Doing together what can be done together', over sixty interested individuals united in the Vereniging Centraal Wonen Ooster Meent, worked to refine the details of the project. Later on there was a call for people 'who want to collaborate on … a form of living together that transcends the confines of the family'.[24] When it came to transcending those confines, residents were united on one point: it would not be a commune but rather a diverse and independent group of residents, including people normally shut out of the housing market. In the Wandelmeent every household would have a dwelling with their own kitchen, bathroom and front and back doors to ensure their privacy. Only then, it was thought, could residents be expected to make a voluntary contribution to the group.

Marian Verweij, who has lived in the Wandelmeent since the very beginning, stresses that there was no overarching ideology as there often was with communes. 'Residents are independent, have a sense of community that develops over the years, instead of there being a single idea and that people have to embrace that idea.'[25] But in reality the communal aspect was worked out well in advance of construction. Residents wanted a say in the selection of new residents and in the management of the communal spaces, and control over everyday decisions and joint activities.[26] The future residents of the Wandelmeent clearly had a social agenda: to set up a social living environment for a varied group of people, in effect a mini society.

The project architect was Pieter Weeda, a member of Leo de Jonge's architectural practice and a social housing specialist. During meetings and working weekends in youth hostels or on camping sites he catalogued people's housing preferences and ideals. In numerous surveys people were asked about the desired number of square metres per housing type, the optimal rent, what they were or were not willing to share, the layout of the kitchen and the evaluation of the group process (fig. 4). The design was made easier to understand by means of a large model consisting of relocatable blocks of wood (fig. 5). This visualization and communication of design choices and response to residents' criticisms was crucial to achieving agreement about the plan.[27]

4. Resident survey for the Wandelmeent in Hilversum, 1973 (Wandelmeent Archive)



Naam: DICK HATT

CENTRAAL WONEN VOOR DE OOSTERMEENT

Weekend 19 en 20 mei 1973 A

Wilt u hieronder aangeven, aan welke centrale voorzieningen u de meeste waarde hecht?
Geef uw mening weer, door in de kolom I een 1 te plaatsen achter de voor u meest waardevolle, een 2 achter de op één na belangrijkste etc.

U heeft hiervoor ca. 20 minuten de tijd; het is niet erg, als u niet alle voorzieningen hebt gewaardeerd.
Ook voor u zal het immers niet zo belangrijk zijn, wat op de 15e of de 16e plaats komt. DANK U.

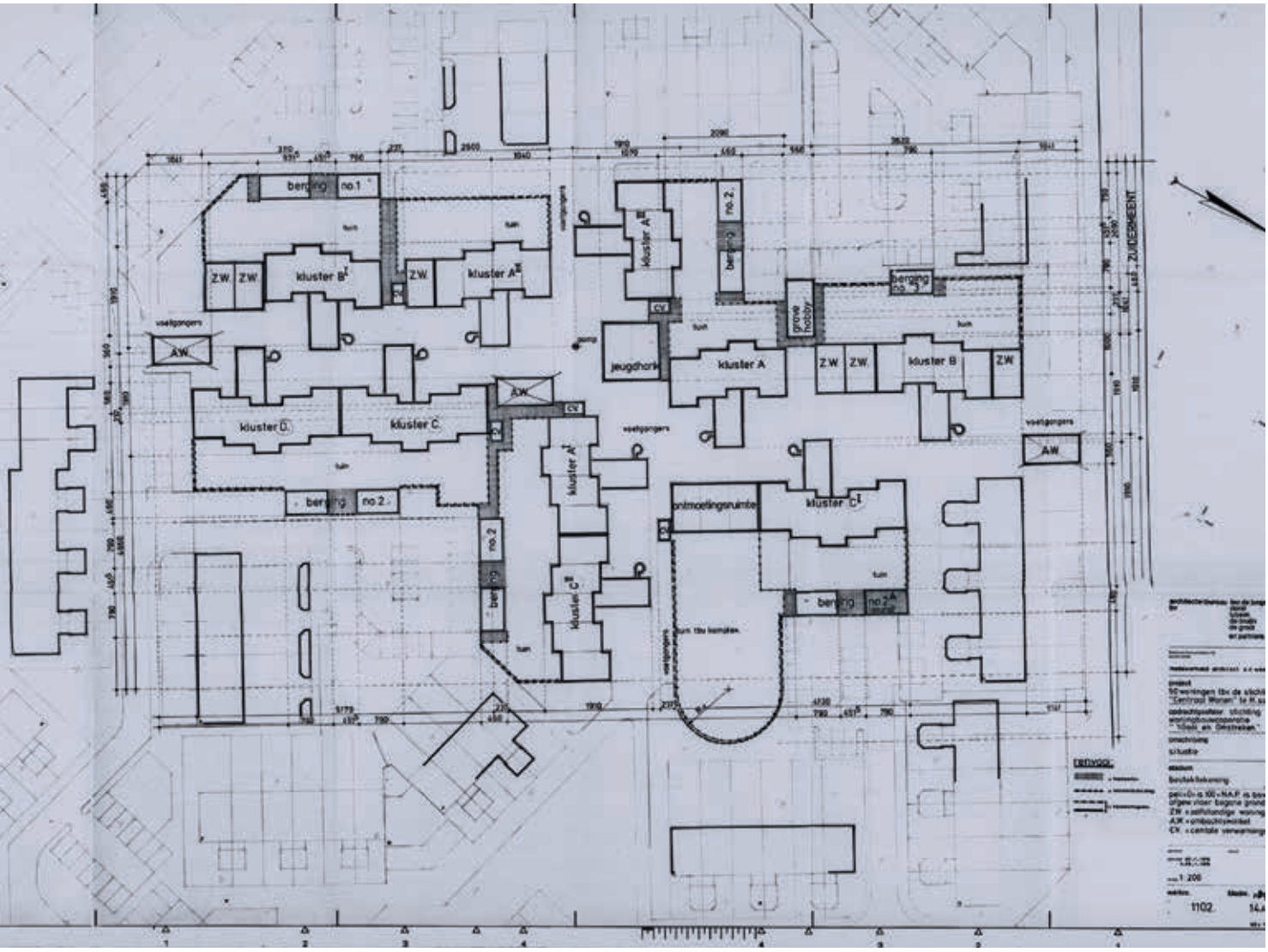
		I	II
Centrale wasgelegenheid	2	12	A
Teenerruimte	5	9	B
Koffie-bar	5	7	B
"Stille" ontmoetingsruimte	6	2	B
"Luide" ontmoetingsruimte	3	1	B
T.V. - ruimten	3	20	B
Crèche	3	10	A
Hobby-ruimte voor lassen e.d.	4	5	C
Hobby-ruimte voor linoleumdruk e.d.	6	6	C
Sauna	-	19	C
Logeerkamers		13	D
Donkere kamer	4	14	C
Muziekkamer	7	11	C
Half-centrale keuken	1	4	A
Centrale keuken	-	18	A
Half-centrale eetruimte	1	3	A
Centrale eetruimte	-	17	A
Studie- (huiswerk-)ruimte	6	8	D
Bergruimten	8	15	D
Ziekenkamer	-	16	D

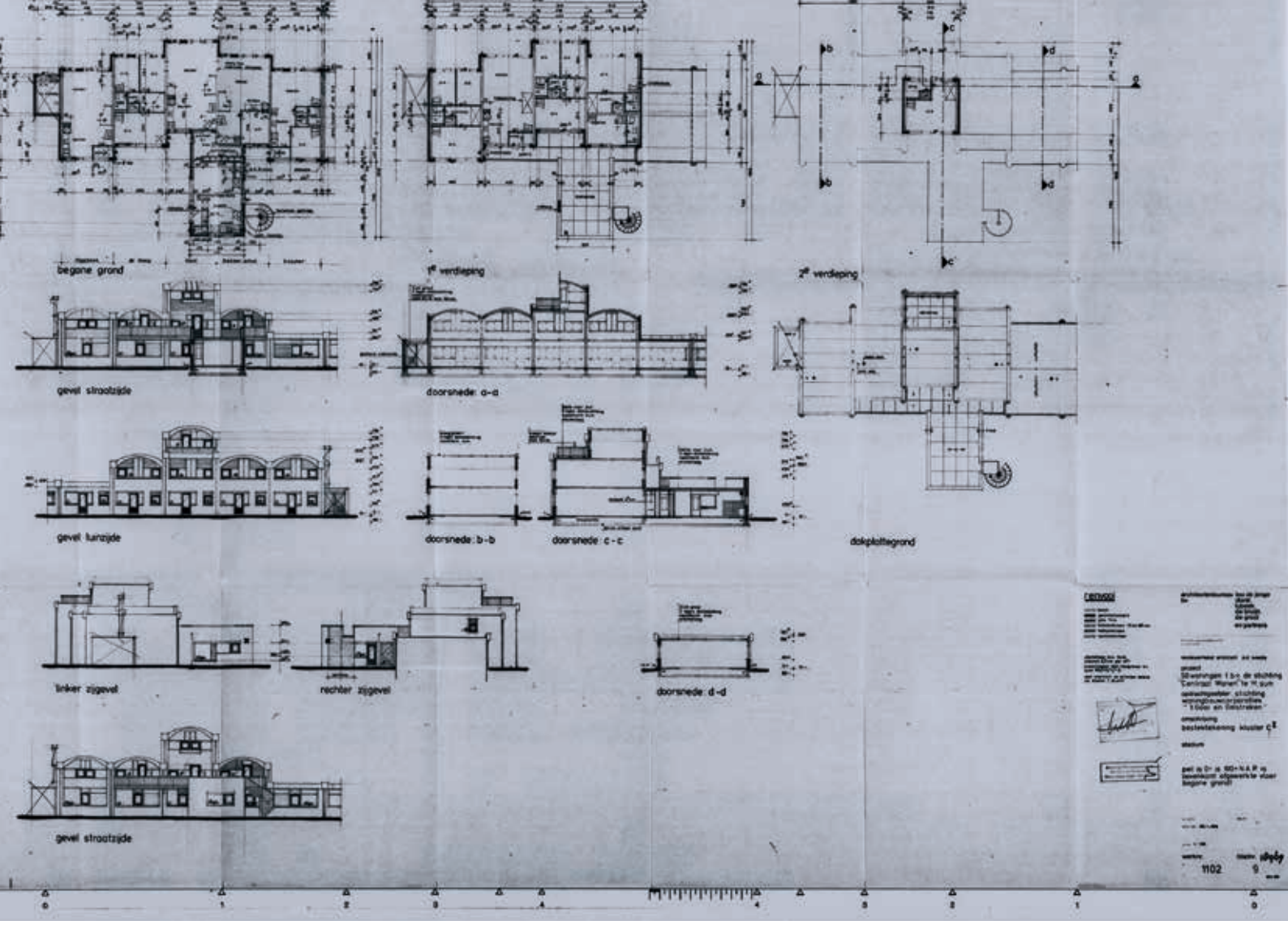
BLANCO RUIMTE

5. Group consultation for the Wandelmeent in Hilversum using movable blocks of wood, c. 1973-1977 (B. de Vries, 'Uit een oude doos', *Gewoon Anders* 32 [2009] 105)

Initially, no housing association was prepared to build and operate the Wandelmeent. But after Weeda had produced a design on a no-cure-no-pay basis, the St. Jozef housing association headed by Nico Schiltmans came on board as client. Also essential for the plan's implementation was the grant from the Experimentele Woningbouw scheme. Thanks to the 'experimental' label, the project secured a bigger grant and exemption from certain building regulations. When the grant turned out to be insufficient to cover all the additional costs, houses were reduced in size and the project received an additional grant so that it could be built within the social housing sector.[28] The Wandelmeent was regarded as an experiment on several fronts: as the first concrete elaboration of the 'Centraal Wonen' idea, because of the residential community's position vis-à-vis the wider district, because of the residents' say over the use and layout of the dwellings, and because of the architect's advisory role.[29] The City of Hilversum designated a site and

6. Leo de Jonge and Pieter Weeda, Wandelmeent in Hilversum, site drawing, 1976 (Gooi & Vecht Historisch)





7. Leo de Jonge and Pieter Weeda, Wandelmeent in Hilversum, plan of a cluster, 1976 (Gooi & Vecht Historisch)

agreed to the allocation of dwellings on the recommendation of the clusters, thus allowing Wandelmeent residents to choose their own neighbours.[30] Wandelmeent was also exempt from the income threshold for social housing.

After a three-year design and development phase and just one year of construction, Wandelmeent was delivered in 1977. In its initial conception the project consisted of fifty dwellings for some 130 residents, a central meeting space, a youth centre, a hobby room, a craft shop, several kitchens linked to the dwellings, shared gardens, storage spaces and roof terraces. In his design Weeda had endeavoured to make the scheme stand out from the surrounding housing without isolating it from the district. The scheme was intended to be village-like – secure, coherent and small-scale – and to convey the impression of a different way of living. To that end, Weeda had designed two intersecting pedestrian streets with a square in the middle, which was also supposed to encourage local residents to wander through the Wandelmeent. The streets were lined by fifty two- to three-storey dwellings topped by a curved roof. The dwellings were offset from one another in position and height. Communal kitchens were set further forward than the dwellings, resulting in a street with multiple enticing corners (fig. 6).

Owing to the combination of various shared amenities with housing, the Wandelmeent is more complex than regular housing. There is a private–cluster–communal hierarchy that was intended to promote a sense of community and social contact among residents. Clustering involved arranging a number of dwellings around a shared space for use by a relatively small group. The dwellings in the Wandelmeent are divided among ten clusters of four to five dwellings; the large windows of the projecting cluster-kitchen allow people on the street to see what is going on inside (fig. 7). The front doors of the dwellings are oriented towards this kitchen to which there is covered access from all the dwellings in the cluster. Each cluster determines how they want their arrange and use their kitchen.

When designing the private spaces, Weeda took account of different household types. There are dwell-

8. Leo de Jonge and Pieter Weeda, Wandelmeent in Hilversum (photo author 2021)

ings in a range of types and sizes, from studios to family dwellings, and the floor plans were easy to adapt to suit different user preferences. Alterations for future residents were also factored in by including punch-through options in structural outer walls, enabling sections of the dwellings to be joined together.[31]

Through its distinctive design the architecture conveys that this is a unique experimental and hierarchically complex project. The individuality of the dwellings is expressed by the unusual roof shapes. The shared facilities have blue doors. The streets are lent visual unity by the materialization of brick, bright red timber facade panels and pale grey edges (fig. 8). The generous street design features spiral stairs with integrated street light, play areas defined by low brick walls, greenery and even their own bus shelter with rounded roof.

These design decisions show that a lot of thought was given to how the architecture would be experienced. The spatial design and architecture of the Wandelmeent are in keeping with the ideals of the small-scale movement, whose proponents strove to capture the essence of the domestic environment. The project was designed with enormous care in consultation with the residents. It is a coherent and simultaneously varied whole and the appropriation of in-between spaces by residents attests to the pleasure of living here.

A DIFFERENT ERA

Centraal Wonen's ideology and concept stemmed from the emancipatory and socio-critical movements of the 1960s and '70s. Yet the vast majority of its projects were realized in the following decade. In the second half of the 1970s there was an economic recession that continued into the 1980s. Government spending was slashed, including on housing, urban planning and architecture. In 1980 the Experimentele Woningbouw scheme was scrapped, while Centraal Wonen's desire to build largely within the social housing sector meant that there was little money for architectural extras.

That a number of Centraal Wonen projects did get built is due in part to changes in government policy. The policy documents 'Bouwstenen voor Woongroepen' (Building blocks for Residential Groups, 1980) and 'Wonen in groepsverband' (Communal Living, 1984) removed some of the obstacles to group housing.[32] In addition, the original demand that the houses be designed in such a way that they could be converted into 'regular' housing (*terugbouwbaarheidseis*) was dropped. Nonetheless, there was no boom in Centraal Wonen projects.

Architecturally, they also suffered a degree of impoverishment. From the late 1970s the architectural fraternity was increasingly critical of the small-scale movement and what the architect Carel Weeber dubbed the 'New Frumpishness'.[33] It was rather unceremoniously dismissed and replaced by neo-rationalism, which was based on clear spatial planning lines, geometric figures, long straight streets, no-nonsense row housing subdivisions, and architecture devoid of ornament. The fact that this type of urban planning

and architecture was considerably cheaper contributed to its success in the 1980s.

We find this turn of events reflected in a great many Centraal Wonen projects. Spatially they continued to display variations on blocks of buildings that together formed a court or home zone, or more urban blocks with an inner courtyard. But architecturally they were rather lacklustre. The distinctive roofs were reduced in height or disappeared altogether, elevations became flatter and materials cheaper, as demonstrated by Centraal Wonen Gerestraat in Leiden and Centraal Wonen Houtwijk in The Hague (figs. 9, 10). In Centraal Wonen Spijkenisse shades of grey and cold materials predominated, in combination with closed facades and shared entrances – not exactly hallmarks of a congenial living environment. The 1970s ideals regarding residents' engagement with one another and their living environment did not readily find expression in the 1980s.

IN CONCLUSION

As a movement within Dutch housing construction Centraal Wonen was the embodiment of what was going on in society and social housing at the time: from criticism of the one-sided building policy in the 1960s, to residents who took matters into their own hands and founded communes and residential groups. At the beginning of the 1970s Centraal Wonen had the wind in its sails. Architects were committed to a

9. A. Canoy, EGM architecten, Centraal Wonen Gerestraat, Leiden, 1987 (Erfgoed Leiden en Omstreken)

10. Andries van Wijngaarden, Architectengroep Van Wijngaarden Strötbaum Benneheij, Centraal Wonen Houtwijk, The Hague, photo Milan Konvalinka 1984 (The Hague City Archives)

humane architecture and urban design, and the new principles conceived by *Forum* in the 1960s were being applied in experimental designs. With the advent of the Den Uyl government the focus shifted to values like emancipation, participation and democratization.

The Centraal Wonen design meetings are an illustration of citizen empowerment in the 1970s. They engaged in idealistic discussions about how the process towards communal living should unfold and how greater resident engagement with the living environment and one another could be achieved.

Centraal Wonen appeared at the hinge point between two eras. While the ideology and concept of this form of living derived from the emancipatory and socio-critical movements of the early 1970s, the majority of the projects were not built until the rationalist 1980s. Centraal Wonen comprised elements of both eras and strove to strike a balance between 'doing together what can be done together' and the independence of the individual. Spatially this resulted in self-contained dwellings and shared spaces, socially in groups of residents who were engaged with one another and their living environment and who reached agreements on maintenance and change.

Although the later Centraal Wonen projects still subscribed to the ideals of the 1970s, in the wider society those ideals were already waning. That there were still many people prepared to live according to Centraal Wonen ideas, and to realize a project within the constraints imposed by the withdrawal of grants and the subsequent impoverishment of the architecture and spatial design, is due to other government policies that specifically stimulated this form of living. Centraal Wonen produced some unique projects, in part because of the considerable influence exercised by the residents. However, it seems that the spatial layout and architecture owed much to prevailing trends in the architectural profession and less to the effect of consultation and communality.

The real inventiveness and quality of Centraal Wonen lay not in the individual elements of consultation, spatial layout, facade design or floor plans, but in combining attention to all these elements within a single project and a shared vision of how life should be lived there. Ideally, the housing projects were intended to become intimate biotopes for a diverse group of residents. This resulted in a great variety of housing projects that were delivered in a very short period of time. For this reason it is difficult to make definitive statements about 'the architecture of Centraal Wonen' or about the success or otherwise of the projects. A project cannot be counted a success because a single family loves living there, and their house can be easily adapted to their preferences; it must cater to the lifestyles and wishes of dozens of residents. Moreover, the architecture may be sober, while the spatial layout delivers a quality that gives the project as a whole its quality.

Although Centraal Wonen was relatively short-lived, communal and alternative forms of living are once again the subject of keen interest. The motto 'doing together what can be done together' appears to resonate in the present day. As such, I prefer like to see the buildings from the early period of Centraal Wonen as a mere comma in the ongoing story of communal forms of living. The concept and the projects are a source of knowledge and inspiration for future communal housing projects – they show what works well and what could be improved.

NOTEN

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'DOING TOGETHER WHAT CAN BE DONE TOGETHER'

THE INTERRUPTED HISTORY OF CO-HOUSING IN THE NETHERLANDS

SANNE VAN DRENTH

Centraal Wonen was a form of co-housing that arose in the Netherlands in the 1970s. It involved several households sharing a variety of communal amenities within the same residential development. The housing complexes were intended to accommodate a diverse group of residents of up to 250 individuals and were usually designed in consultation with the prospective residents.

The initiators of Centraal Wonen believed that this type of living arrangement offered a solution to various social issues, including the inferior status of women, increasing loneliness and a housing stock biased in favour of single-family houses and apartments. The alternative to Centraal Wonen were residential developments in which a fine-grained mix of dwellings and communal amenities created the conditions for the spontaneous emergence of a tight-knit community. It is estimated that between 1977 and 1991 over sixty Centraal Wonen projects were built, after which co-housing faded into oblivion.

Centraal Wonen emerged at a hinge point between two eras, and this is reflected in both the concept and its manifestation. The ideological underpinning was perfectly in tune with the emancipatory and socio-critical movements of the early 1970s, whereas the majority of the projects were not built until the more pragmatic 1980s. Centraal Wonen included elements of both eras: 'doing together what can be done together', but not at the expense of the individual's independence. The very first project, the Wandelmeent, was exemplary of the small-scale movement whose adherents strove to capture the essence of a recognizable and homely living environment with a varied streetscape. The vast majority of projects were built in the 1980s, by which time the architectural expression was starting to look a bit lacklustre. Moreover, the design of Centraal Wonen projects was based more on architectural trends and the architect's choices and less on the results of consultation and communality.

The real inventiveness and quality of Centraal Wonen lay not in individual components, such as the consultation process, the design and the floor plan, but in uniting concern for all those components within a single project, guided by a shared vision of how to live.

Although Centraal Wonen proved to be relatively short-lived, communal and alternative forms of living have once again been attracting keen interest in recent years. It seems that the motto 'do together what can be done together' resonates in today's world. The Centraal Wonen projects constitute a valuable source for new communal housing projects and as such should not be forgotten.