



PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION

THE EXAMPLE OF NIEUWEGEIN

EVELIEN VAN ES, SARAH GRESNIGT AND LARA VOERMAN

▲ 1. The centre of Nieuwegein seen from the west; in the centre Cityplaza (photo Gemeente Nieuwegein)



The history of architecture and art is one of perspectives: the relationship between object and observer is constantly changing. The way we evaluate heritage is equally susceptible to change. The Verkenning Post 65 survey conducted by the Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed (RCE, Dutch Cultural Heritage Agency) has significantly boosted interest in and appreciation for immovable heritage from the period 1965-1990.¹ Now that these buildings are entering the protection and

preservation phase, the question of the most appropriate evaluation instruments arises.

The current evaluation framework for built heritage, which was developed by the RCE, comprises a number of criteria that allow the heritage values of a building or a complex to be determined in a consistent manner.² Although this standard is theoretically applicable to all immovable heritage regardless of period, the RCE asked us to assess the extent to which the evalua-

tion framework is applicable to Post 65 heritage. Does it require a different approach and different evaluation criteria? Perhaps even more important was the underlying issue of the division of roles when determining heritage values. This relates to the Council of Europe's Faro Convention, which emphasizes the right of every person to engage with cultural heritage and to attach their own meanings to it.³ In a fact-finding survey conducted in the autumn of 2020, two of us – Evelien van Es and Lara Voerman – held open discussions with professionals from the heritage field and related study areas, such as the design disciplines and the humanities (history, philosophy, cultural studies). This enabled us to view the nature of Post 65 heritage and the relation between citizen opinion and expert opinion from a range of perspectives. One of our interviewees was Sarah Gresnigt, research intern with the City of Utrecht. Not long after the completion of our survey, she was appointed heritage policy adviser for the Jonge Monumenten (recent heritage) project launched by the municipality of Nieuwegein. Nieuwegein is one of the few municipalities that evaluates and selects heritage objects in consultation with its residents. After months of theorizing and analysing, we were curious to discover how this works out in practice.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

The evaluation criteria standard has evolved over the course of the past 120 years. Its basis lay in the evaluation of a building's significance for national history and art. The first Monuments Act (1961) talked of beauty, scientific significance and folkloric value. In the 1988 Monuments Act folkloric value was replaced by cultural value. In 1991 a handbook on the methodology of inventorying and evaluation was formulated for the Monuments Inventory Project (MIP) and the Monuments Selection Project (MSP) 1850-1940.⁴ It was the first time that such guidelines had been formally laid down. The legal criteria were written out in detail and included attention to the historical-geographical and socio-economic context, which is particularly relevant for the period when the Netherlands was industrializing. In 2007, for the registration of buildings from the post-war reconstruction period (1940-1958), these criteria were expanded with two sub-criteria: construction history value and memory value. This was also the first time that a distinction was drawn between *evaluating* buildings based on established [specific] criteria and *selecting* buildings for listed status. The result was a framework of scientific, objective criteria that could in principle be applied to all built heritage, from ancient to postmodern.⁵

THE DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF POST 65 ARCHITECTURE

The period 1965-1990 was a time of major social, socio-economic and spatial developments which had a profound effect on the living environment. Chronologically, this period falls between two big government-led construction programmes: post-war reconstruction and the Vinex urban expansion scheme. These twenty-five years were characterized by a relatively high degree of municipal involvement whereby local politicians set their stamp on spatial policy. Experiments in concept, form and resident participation were aimed at improving the quality of the housing environment and the amenity value of the built environment. Democratization, emancipation movements, new forms of cohabitation and increasing individualism resulted in an architecture based on identity and human scale. In the 1970s the designs produced by architects and urban planners were driven by a particular social ideology. Their desire to create residential environments that would foster a sense of community gave rise to home zone neighbourhoods, urban renewal projects and multifunctional buildings. Sociological and behavioural research changed ideas about the quality of the living environment: in the city designers endeavoured to create a lively streetscape and prioritized pedestrians and cyclists. Nature and cultural-historical landscapes were 'discovered' as a source of inspiration for urban design schemes. Greenery was scaled down, interwoven with other urban elements and located closer to dwellings. These trends continued into the 1980s, sparking a renewed interest in architectural tradition and the cultural significance of the design.⁶ A quarter of today's housing stock was built in the years 1965-1990. That Post 65 heritage is facing an urgent sustainability retrofit that will have a big impact on the architecture. While one of its main values is of a conceptual nature, that value finds expression in a specific formal idiom, use of colour and materialization, the value of which is not always recognized.

HISTORY OF USE AND LIVED EXPERIENCE

Not everyone is convinced of the historical value of Post 65 heritage. The closer an object is to the present day, the more difficult it is to determine its historical significance. Government Architect Floris Alkemade concluded in 2018 that the value of modern heritage can only be recognized if it is explained to people: 'There is a vast domain of heritage buildings that are beyond all doubt. Experts and citizens alike recognize their value and the need to protect their qualities. [...] But there is another vast domain of buildings that are too recent for us to readily establish a recognizable heritage value. This is where those guided by intuition



2. Pietro Hammel, water dwellings in the Doorslag district of Nieuwegein (photo Daphne Luijters)

and the experts often differ, opening an interesting space for debate.¹⁷

Because it is relatively young, Post 65 heritage offers the possibility of recording lived experiences and translating these into cultural-historical values: first-hand personal stories, often gathered from still living designers, first generation residents and pioneers. Their knowledge and expertise will lend added weight to the application of the criterion of cultural-historical value to the evaluation of this heritage. Yet this criterion is often overlooked. The history of use is not always mentioned even though the use of building for a purpose other than the one for which it was designed may enhance its cultural-historical value. A case in point is the multi-storey Kempering car park in Amsterdam-Zuidoost that was subsequently used as a place of worship by the African Pentecostal Church. The nature of Post 65 heritage calls for a readjustment of the evaluation toolkit. Shifts in emphasis and/or a different appraisal method are required for a broader understanding of the cultural-historical value of this heritage and of the sources that can be drawn on for recognizing and naming those values.

HERITAGE PARTICIPATION IN NIEUWEGEIN

The issue of whether the evaluation framework should be adjusted to accommodate Post 65 heritage touches on bigger themes and trends, such as citizen participation, the democratization of heritage preservation and

the changing role of the heritage professional. According to Verkenning Post 65, growing interest in the social and community-building value of heritage has changed the task for the heritage discipline. In a survey held during the Monumentencongres in 2018, participants indicated that citizens as well as experts should play a role in the selection of objects for heritage listing.⁸ Some municipalities, such as Almere and Nieuwegein, are a step ahead in this respect and are already protecting places and buildings nominated by citizens. Our study had just wrapped up when Nieuwegein seized on its fiftieth anniversary to launch a project to inventory recent heritage and to investigate whether any of these objects qualified for listed status. Nieuwegein arose in 1971 out of the amalgamation of two villages – Jutphaas and Vreeswijk – to the south of Utrecht. Simultaneously designated an urban over-spill ‘growth area’, it underwent rapid development in the ensuing decades. Nieuwegein’s Post 65 architecture is quite diverse and includes outstanding home zone neighbourhoods like Verhoevenwijk in Doorslag, with its shared gardens and pedestrian-friendly atmosphere. During the Jonge Monumenten inventory project, the city council was open to input from its residents. They could vote online on the objects and structures the council had already selected, but they were also able to nominate objects that were not on the list. One such nomination, of the Cityplaza shopping centre, revealed that residents had a different perspec-



3. The young clientele of this pavement café in Cityplaza Nieuwegein will evaluate the shopping centre differently from heritage experts (photo Gemeente Nieuwegein)

tive from experts regarding the value of recent heritage. The experts had dismissed the 1980s complex by the architect Jan Hoogstad because of subsequent radical alterations, but for the residents the shopping centre symbolized the growth of the young city. In this 'interesting space for debate' the roles appeared to be reversed; those who followed their intuition needed to explain the nature of Cityplaza's value to the experts in order for the latter to be able to recognize it. The inventory was followed by evaluation and selection, during which the council and residents once again worked together. It turned out that the traditional evaluation framework is of limited applicability to the Post 65 heritage in Nieuwegein. The feedback from residents resulted in different perceptions and raised questions. Discussions on the heritage values of two home zone neighbourhoods were not about the built fabric, but about places of significance and social values: the village-like character, the sense of belonging and the conviviality of the home zone. There are of course spa-

tial aspects that contribute to this, but to talk exclusively about their architectural-historical and spatial design values is to deny expression to the lived experience of these neighbourhoods. The quest for criteria that would allow home zones and Cityplaza to be heritage-protected is not about their built fabric, but about their values as experienced by the residents.

PARTICIPATE BY HELPING TO DECIDE

The process the city of Nieuwegein went through in this project shows how important it is in the case of relatively recent buildings to interpret the aim of evaluation more broadly than simply establishing the heritage value. The give and take between expert opinion and citizen opinion is crucial to increasing public support. With major transformation and sustainability programmes on the horizon it is important to have a widely accepted heritage evaluation system in place. In traditional practice, heritage professionals act independently and make a value assessment based on their expertise. The process by which they arrive at that assessment is not explained and is consequently not always clear, with the result that such assessments are sometimes viewed as arbitrary. Evaluating and selecting in a broader context (project-based, thematic or with a designation programme) and including stakeholders in the various steps will make the process more transparent. Allowing stakeholders to take an active part in the process will also make it more democratic. The process is important. 'Such a value assessment sheds light on the richness and diversity of the heritage, while also recognizing a wide range of stakeholders,' argues Veerle Meul, head of collections at the Middelheim Museum in Antwerp.⁹ It is also in the spirit of the Faro Convention, shortly to be ratified by the Netherlands. By adopting this approach, heritage could have more of a function for society than is currently the case. For it is not just the historical place, the object and the tradition that are important, but also their different meanings and uses.¹⁰

NOTEN

1 Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed, *Post 65. Nieuwe perspectieven tussen welvaart en weerstand* (Rapportage Verkenning Post 65), Amersfoort 2019.

2 Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed, *Waarderingscriteria bouwkunst*. Richtlijn 01-01-2019.

3 www.cultureelerfgoed.nl/onderwerpen/erfgoedparticipatie-faro/verdrag-van-faro (accessed 28 April 2023).

4 Rijksdienst voor de Monumentenzorg, *Handleiding selectie en registratie jongere stedenbouw en bouwkunst*

(1850-1940), Zeist 1991.

5 Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed, *Eenheid en verscheidenheid. Een zoektocht naar een integrale cultuurhistorische waardstelling van het materiële erfgoed. Achtergronddocument*, Amersfoort 2014.

6 Dirk Baalman, *Nederland aan het eind van een millennium. Bouwen en ordenen 1965-2000* (Heemschutserie), Amsterdam 2018.

7 Floris Alkemade, 'Vox Populi' [lecture delivered at the international conference Citizens Involved: Participatory Governance of Built Heritage], Amersfoort 3-4 October 2018.

8 The theme of the Nationaal Monumentencongres held on 8 November 2018 in Amersfoort was the social significance of heritage. Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed 2019 (note 1), 30.

9 Conversation with Veerle Meul, head of collections at the Middelheim Museum in Antwerp, 2 October 2020.

10 www.cultureelerfgoed.nl/onderwerpen/erfgoedparticipatie-faro/verdrag-van-faro (accessed 28 April 2023).

E. VAN ES MA studied architectural history at the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam. She has been a curator with the Netherlands Architecture Institute in Rotterdam and visiting lecturer in the Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment at TU Delft. She is currently an adviser to the Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed and, with the practice she established in 2003, is engaged in research into architecture with an emphasis on the Post 65 period.

S. GRESNIGT MA obtained a bachelor's degree in Archaeology from the University of York in England in 2014. After several years in the field, in 2018 she embarked on the Master's programme in Heritage Studies at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, which she completed two years later. Her master's thesis brought together the topics of Post 65 heritage, the Environmental Act and municipal policy.

L. VOERMAN MA is an architectural historian. Taking history as her starting point she advises local authorities, developers and design practices on the future of a landscape, a district or a building. Objects from the Post 65 period recently investigated by Voerman are Rotterdam's De Schie penitentiary, Amsterdam's Amstelpark and the University of Twente campus in Enschede.

Evelien van Es and Lara Voerman adapted the research report they wrote in 2020. Sarah Gresnigt provided the contribution on Nieuwegein.

PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION

THE EXAMPLE OF NIEUWEGEIN

EVELIEN VAN ES, SARAH GRESNIGT AND LARA VOERMAN

The standard of evaluation criteria for built heritage has evolved to such an extent over the past 120 years that it can theoretically be applied to every period. However, the survey of Post 65 architecture conducted by the Netherlands Cultural Heritage Agency (RCE) suggests that the nature of built heritage from the years 1965-1990 differs from that of previous periods and might require a different approach to these evaluation criteria. For example, the relatively young age and the social context of this heritage provides opportunities for recording people's lived experience of the architecture first hand and for involving citizens as well as experts in the selection and evaluation process.

Now, with the phase of protection and preservation

of Post 65 heritage fast approaching, it is time to take another look at the evaluation framework. In light of the EU's Faro Convention, which puts the main focus on society and people and their relationship with heritage, this study explicitly incorporates the role of citizens.

The designated growth centre of Nieuwegein serves as example. During this municipality's Modern Monuments project residents submitted suggestions for protecting heritage and identified the values they attached to it. There were substantial differences of opinion between residents and heritage experts, which ultimately resulted in a richer and more diverse evaluation of modern heritage.