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UTRECHT BOUWT 1945-1975

Utrecht (Uitgeverij Matrijs), 2019, 184 pp.,
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In 2023 Hoog Catharine – the ‘shopping heart of the Netherlands’ – celebrated its fiftieth anniversary. This American-style shopping mall was built in the middle of the Post 65 period. As the authors of *Utrecht bouwt 1945-1975* explain, the beginning of the 1970s saw the dawn of a new era. The 1965 Spatial Planning Act had made it obligatory to draw up a zoning scheme for every spatial planning intervention, including organizing public consultation sessions and administrative appeals procedures. At that point the massive Hoog Catharine project was too far advanced to be rolled back; permission to fill in a section of Utrecht’s historic defensive canal had already been granted and demolition for the construction of the shopping centre and a new railway station had commenced. In the following years, however, many components of the



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POST 65 – EEN TURBULENTE TIJD ARCHITECTUUR EN STEDENBOUW IN DEN HAAG 1965-1995

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original plans were modified, thanks in part to the input of action groups and citizens’ committees – symptomatic of the changing times.

The Hoog Catharine case concludes *Utrecht bouwt 1945-1975*, a highly readable publication by Arjan den Boer, Bettina van Santen and Ronald Willemsen. The book considers the post-war construction and expansion of Utrecht. Like many other Dutch cities, Utrecht initially had to contend with a shortage of housing, but by the 1950s it had started to develop into a modern, ‘optimistic’ city. The guiding principle of this development was the ‘neighbourhood’ concept, whereby the redevelopment of both the city and society was tackled on three levels of scale: city, district and neighbourhood. Each of these was provided with the ‘appropriate’ amenities and infrastructure. Neighbourhoods



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EXPERIMENTELE WONINGBOUW IN NEDERLAND 1968-1980

64 GEREALISEERDE WOONBELOFTEN

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 € 37.95

were made up of housing and small-scale amenities like a kindergarden, a baker or a grocer. Several neighbourhoods together formed a district, clustered around a district core containing a primary school, a church and a library. The districts then conglomerated at the level of the city where administrative buildings, offices, a university, businesses or a theatre were located. All these organizing principles and levels of scale, along with a great variety of typologies, residents/users and clients, are dealt with in eleven chronologically ordered chapters. Each chapter focuses on a single district. The headings sum up the innovations in these districts, such as 'Halve Maan. For the better-off worker', 'Tolsteeg-Hoograven. A cluster of recognizable neighbourhoods' and 'De Uithof and Rijnsweerd. University campus with stockbroker belt'. Main texts

on urban planning, landscaping, architecture and art are supplemented with box texts on specific buildings and architects. Alongside well-known names like Gerrit Rietveld and Piet Elling, one name in particular stands out, that of Helene Hulst-Alexander, at that time one of the few women architects and the designer of a block of flats for single – working – women (1958). The initiative for this building came from an action committee, the Nederlandse Bond voor Maatschappelijk Werkers (Dutch Union of Social Workers), whose members included other modern-minded women, among them Truus Schröder-Schröder.

New experiments that started to impact housing construction from the 1960s onwards are discussed in the chapter on Overvecht, a district more likely to evoke an image of monotonous, modernist open-row housing and high-rise. But in this instance the neighbourhood concept merged seamlessly into sector plans, standard dwelling plans and organized consultation. The result can be seen in experimental apartment buildings with flexible floor plans and a large communal space on every floor, which even made it into the pages of the popular women's magazines *Libelle* and *Magriet* in 1971. *Utrecht bouwt 1945-1975* shows that it was not so much architecture as the socio-political and societal context that was on the cusp of a period of great change. In Utrecht this was most evident in the historical city centre where modernization in the form of the Hoog Catharijne project had the unanticipated effect of boosting the preservation of and concern for the historical city.

Post 65 – een turbulente tijd. Architectuur en stedenbouw in Den Haag 1965-1995 (Post 65 – a turbulent period. Architecture and urban planning in The Hague 1965-1995) by Judith van Hoogdalem and Botine Koopmans also begins after the Second World War, with W.M. Dudok's (unrealized) *Structuurplan Groot 's-Gravenhage* (structural plan for the Hague agglomeration) from 1946. In the following decades various new versions of the plan (renamed *Ontwerp-Structuurplan*) were published, as well as a plethora of policy, redevelopment, traffic and transport memoranda that would come to characterize this 'turbulent' period in the city's history. Initially, the city was slow to abandon monofunctional development ideas. The regeneration and redevelopment of the city centre and the construction of new districts had after all provided a solution to the housing shortage and a much-needed overhaul of outdated and poorly maintained working-class districts like Schilderswijk, Kortenbos or Spuikwartier. But in the face of mounting dissatisfaction among the population and active resistance from local residents, action groups, committees and working groups, the focus gradually shifted to living in the city centre, live-

ability, the human scale and the preservation of the qualities of the historical areas of the city.

The authors give repeated and lengthy consideration to sundry variations and versions of policy plans and consultation procedures, which does not always make for easy reading. We do, however, get a clear idea of the important role played by district representatives, action committees and groups of (young) architects – such as Dooievaar – in the decision-making processes and projects, and of the city council's increasing efforts to organize consultation effectively and to involve local residents in plans for their district. One resident and ex-activist was moved to complain about the incessant 'stupid consultation group meetings'; it didn't leave him any time for demonstrating!

The book's organization is somewhat confusing. While the main focus is on housing, with developments between 1965 and 1995 discussed in relation to various districts, the main text is divided into seven chapters with disparate themes and titles. Some relate to particular districts, others to urban renewal, green and public space, or the 'from brown to white' interior. Interspersed between the chapters are interviews with leading architects from this turbulent period. Because the book lacks a general map of the city and its districts, readers who are not familiar with The Hague will find it rather difficult to follow.

One chapter is devoted to the stylistic characteristics of the period 1965-1995. The authors identify an early Post 65 architecture, which still bears a strong resemblance to the modernist post-war reconstruction style, such as the Leyenburg Ziekenhuis by the architect K.L. Sijmons and the office building next to the Den Haag CS station by the architects K. van der Gaast and J. Bak. The 1970s style is encapsulated with the catchphrase 'bevelled and brown', as seen in various brick housing schemes with bevelled corners and white concrete bands and balconies. The 1980s usher in an architecture of 'taut design, extensive glazing, glass blocks and plastic', evident in the many buildings clad with plastic (Trespa) facade panels and also known as 'drawing-pin architecture' on account of the numerous visible rivets. Several government offices, including Arie Hagoort's Koninklijke Bibliotheek (National Library of the Netherlands) complex, clearly date from this period. When it comes to late Post 65 architecture the authors reference alderman Adri Duivesteyn's 1985 campaign, *Stadsvernieuwing als Culturele Activiteit* (Urban renewal as cultural activity), which drew well-known Dutch and foreign architects of the likes of Jo Coenen, Aldo Rossi and Álvaro Siza to The Hague to supercharge the (in his view disappointing) quality of urban renewal. These stylistic indicators may well help readers to recognize Hague architecture realized between 1965 and 1995, and even outside The Hague

'bevelled and brown' and 'taut, glass and plastic' will strike a familiar chord. On the whole, however, a stylistic history does not do full justice to the character of Post 65 architecture. The books on Utrecht and The Hague present a detailed picture of the second half of the twentieth century in these cities and can serve as useful reference works for further research, but they do not indicate a direction for such research to follow.

That absence is made good in *Experimentele woningbouw in Nederland 1968-1980. 64 gerealiseerde woonbeloften* (Experimental housing in the Netherlands 1968-1980. 64 realized housing promises) by Marcel Barzilay, Ruben Ferwerda and Anita Blom. This book describes the background, plans, construction, development and evaluation of the Programma Experimentele Woningbouw (experimental housing programme), as well as addressing questions concerning the current values, necessary interventions and future possibilities and challenges of the projects. In his foreword, former Government Architect Floris Alkemade rightly describes the book as a superb overview and a source of inspiration for current designers.

Set up in 1968 by the Minister of Housing and Spatial Planning, W.F. Schut, the Programma Experimentele Woningbouw ran until 1980. A special financial arrangement provided for the realization of 64 experimental housing projects that offered good quality alternatives to the monotonous post-war reconstruction architecture. A map at the front of the book shows the distribution of these experiments across the Netherlands. They were concentrated in the west and middle of the country; the far north, south and Zeeland were sparsely endowed. After a general chapter on the background, phasing, development, completion and evaluation of the programme, the 64 projects are considered in six comprehensive chapters covering the outer suburbs, the existing city, the dwelling, multi-level construction, specific target groups, and experiments with consultation and adaptability. This arrangement covers a wide range of aspects that cropped up in experimental housing and that subsequently became synonymous with the 1970s: home zone and cauliflower street plan, flexible floor plans and building systems, collective or conversely individual living arrangements, resident participation, child-friendliness, and alternative materials and construction methods. Some felt that these experiments went too far, however. The architect Carel Weeber coined the term 'New Frumpishness' to anathematize this architecture.

Even though it is confined to projects officially designated 'experimental', some of which, like Piet Blom's cube houses, were not widely imitated, the book is a real nostalgia fest. Similar 'meeting squares', decked

housing, pedestrianized streets, terrace dwellings, residential communities, patio dwellings and creatively staggered housing blocks sprang up all over the Netherlands during this period. The wealth of visual material is certain to evoke memories for many Dutch readers because it presents an almost identical version of their own living environment. It also shows how attractive the dwellings and how leafy the neighbourhoods have become, although one can't help noticing a certain lack of design quality in the glass-roofed stairwells, the idiosyncratic storage sheds, the dark doorways and steep staircases.

The authors discuss the specific characteristics that made the projects so experimental and innovative. The condensed accompanying texts contain a lot of information about the realization, architects, spatial layout, housing density, floor plans, access strategies, and changes up to the present day. These explanatory notes are, together with the photographs, indispensable. Take the Sterrenbuurt in Berkel en Rodenrijs, which is described as one of the better examples of experimental housing and which attracted a lot of attention from the very outset. In 1972 one newspaper noted that 'housewives flock to have a look, profes-

sionals from all over the place, directors of public works and architects ensure a constant flow of visitors'. The neighbourhood is still in fine condition and according to the notes there are no signs of the initially feared degradation. The aesthetically photographed decks and dark passageways reveal nothing of the use or the liveability of neighbourhood. In this respect the text and images are out of sync. True, we see parked cars, wheelie bins and the odd bicycle, but there is scarcely a human being to be seen. This is a missed opportunity, because when people are in shot, we learn more about the way the architecture really functioned. A 1974 black and white photo of the experimental apartment building in the Utrecht district of Overvecht shows in a single glance the flexible layout of the apartment and the use of the bar (complete with bar stools). The same photo appears in *Utrecht bouwt 1945-1975*. Its caption in that book would be hard to beat for pithiness: 'Sliding doors could connect the bedrooms to the living room, while the "bar-kitchen" was all the rage in 1974.'

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