

# ARCHITECTUUR

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# LOKAAL

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The documentation for this congress lists me as 'founder and managing director' of Architectuur Lokaal. Before I talk about Dutch experience with 'Governance for Urban Change' I must tell you a little about my organisation and about Dutch architecture policy, of which we are part.

It's ten years since the Dutch government started to formulate architecture policy at national level. At the time, the 'infrastructure' of architecture policy was also strengthened. The founding of Architectuur Lokaal forms part of this policy. To explain, let me take you back in time.

In the decades after World War II Dutch building policy was a matter of quantity. The construction of vast numbers of dwellings was a national priority. We can see that in the architecture and urban design of that period too. Construction was sober and rational. But the tide started to turn around 1970. There was increasing criticism of the huge scale of post-war building production and the monotony of districts that were built. Experiments in architecture were carried out to create more diversity and individuality. Heated debate on building methods was not confined to professionals. Interest in architecture among the public started to grow, as we see from the media attention and success of exhibitions. When in 1990 the ministers for culture and housing first took the initiative to formulate a national architecture policy, it was against the background of this strong growth in interest for architecture within Dutch society. But no matter how innovative policy was, it was not a trend-setter but a trend-follower.

Elements of the new Dutch policy were the exemplary role of central government and the strengthening of the infrastructure for architectural policy. The exemplary role of central government means that the state aims to act as an exemplary client when commissioning building development. We can see this in the construction of ministry buildings and other accommodation for the central government. In that context the government architect plays an important role. This, too, can be considered 'governance'. I should also point out that we are not only talking about urban development. City and countryside can no longer be seen as separate entities in the small and densely populated Netherlands.

Policy infrastructure is geared to stimulating other clients to devote sufficient attention to cultural aspects when commissioning building development. This stimulating of clients is a core task for our organisation, Architectuur Lokaal. There is also a state prize for excellence in commissioning development. The prize is expressly awarded, not to the architect but to the client. A central idea behind Dutch policy over the last ten years is that clients play a crucial role when it comes to architectural quality.

Architectuur Lokaal is the independent information centre for building clients. Its most important function is to inform and inspire clients. We primarily target municipal authorities and private-sector parties at local and regional level. The aim is to enable clients to give substance to the cultural dimension of their role in the process of building development. What that means can be explained by an Architectuur Lokaal project on the social and cultural transformation of post-war neighbourhoods. The project devotes considerable attention to the role of clients. This is not self-evident. We normally talk about the 'the neighbourhood by Van Eesteren', by Dudok or by Granpré Molière. These designers did, of course, design the neighbourhoods. But the way in which that happened was in part determined by the clients, aldermen, and heads of departments and housing associations that the architects worked with.

The unique character of these neighbourhoods stems from the position and role of clients in the reconstruction period that followed World War II. A hallmark of building production at that time was the tight central control. The central government decided in detail the number of dwellings that were built, the cost of the dwellings, and the functional requirements they had to meet. On the basis of these criteria the municipalities developed the plans. The municipalities therefore acted as clients for the new city-expansion districts built to solve the post-war housing shortage. The Social-Democratic or Christian-Democratic make-up of municipal councils was reflected in the plans. Towns governed by socialists favoured a more modernist approach, while more romantic designers were given opportunities in Christian strongholds.

Formally, the clients for individual housing complexes were not part of the government apparatus. They were typical Dutch 'housing associations', independent public initiatives that were, however, strongly reliant on government for funding. Their real autonomy was limited at the time. In practice the municipality not only decided the urban design, it also played a major role in selecting the architect and elaborating housing schemes.

The relationship between housing associations and government has changed drastically, especially since 1990. Housing associations have grown to become big, professionally organised corporations that are financially independent to a large extent. Conversely, in the bigger cities we see a tendency to create smaller local councils (or boroughs) that are in closer contact with local residents. The increasing professionalism of housing associations is also expressed in their role as client. Some housing associations develop their own architecture policy on the basis of social, cultural and financial considerations. The big housing associations not only manage many thousands of dwellings, they also initiate much new development. 'Social' project developers were set up specifically for that purpose. Clients like these didn't exist in 1945, or in 1975. Because of their expertise and financial position, the social project developers are mature discussion partners for the municipality. Previously, the housing associations adopted a much more subordinate role. The conclusion: while government and municipality decided matters during the post-war years, the current redevelopment of neighbourhoods built in that period is much more a matter of negotiation. For needless to say, residents don't stay the same either. Law-abiding subjects have been replaced by critical citizens with highly diverse cultural backgrounds.

Just like the construction of neighbourhoods from the post-war period, their redevelopment is an interactive game between clients and designers. But the playing field and players have changed drastically. The current generation has to sort out the legacy of the last 40 years. That is a design task, but first of all a challenge to clients to

develop their own vision. The question is how do they deal with the cultural value that these neighbourhoods represent. What 'governance' are clients developing for this? Let us look at four Dutch neighbourhoods.

The neighbourhoods from the 1950s and 60s look similar – just like the people born at the time, you might say. But if you look around Amsterdam, The Hague, Breda and Groningen and speak to those involved, you will discover that there are big individual differences between them. Just as there are differences between the people from that period.

The similarity is partly the result of the original design, partly the result of the comparable histories that neighbourhoods have gone through.

Changes in use over time spawned tension between form and function. These neighbourhoods also lag behind districts built later. But despite the relative decline, there is still much of value. Time has strengthened some of the original qualities. The unique character of these neighbourhoods is due in part to plenty of green and the combination of green and blue but mainly due to the combination of green and red.

This picture of the Vinkhuizen neighbourhood in Groningen illustrates one of the possible results of redevelopment: a combination of old and new that does justice to both.

My time is limited, but I want to give you an impression of the four visited neighbourhoods and the way in which redevelopment is taking place.

In the Western Garden Suburbs of **Amsterdam** I want to look at an area in Osdorp called the south-western quadrant.

The local council and housing associations have agreed on the principles for redevelopment formulated by Endry van Velzen. Respect for the original urban design by Van Eesteren was the starting point.

Here you see a picture of the typical architecture with porch-access dwellings arranged in rows. This brings us to one of the problems with the redevelopment. The characteristic plot layout is based on open areas and green space between the residential blocks. But the use and management of this space has become a problem over the past 40 years because of changes in society and in housing culture that I cannot go into here. But the problem exists, both in Osdorp and in the other neighbourhoods I will discuss. In Osdorp people are starting to fence off areas, as we see on the left of the picture. The very same fence appears in various places in the area. Here we see that the character of the space changes when it is cordoned off.

Whether this is a good solution or not is open to discussion. The fact remains that the fence clearly illustrates a general dilemma in post-war neighbourhoods: how can we preserve the characteristic green areas between building blocks in light of the housing culture of the 21st century?

Of course much more is happening in Osdorp. The previous photos not only illustrate the new direction in public space but also give an impression of the sweeping renovation of existing blocks, where a floor is occasionally added on top.

In addition, there is plenty of attention for public space, which must be suitable for youths and smaller children.

And also the addition of new buildings that reflect the ambition for the area.

I cannot go into the difficulties that confront clients in projects like these. Let me just give you an impression of the result.

Now to **The Hague** South-West.

You can see that The Hague South-West also has characteristic green zones between building blocks. But I'm showing this neighbourhood to illustrate another dilemma. The

issue is always whether you should work on the basis of separate projects or a total plan for the entire area. Because the post-war districts are laid out as one entity and were completed in a short space of time, it is desirable that the changes carried out today display coherency.

But it is not always possible to delay alterations until agreement on a total plan has been reached. There is then the risk that everyone ends up waiting for everyone else.

An official vision on the redevelopment of South-West and the four neighbourhoods was completely only recently. But actual redevelopment has been underway for much longer.

Three examples

1) The issue in these neighbourhoods is essentially dwellings, but also changes in the function of buildings. In this case a Catholic Church is turned into a health centre and social-services centre.

2) A school of fashion once stood on this site. When the site came up for redevelopment, the municipality held a development competition and appointed BAM developers to develop the site. Client and architect sought to set up a contrast with the surroundings by avoiding the use of brickwork. Yet the scheme connects very precisely with the surrounding urban design.

New and spacious owner-occupied dwellings were built which, despite the steep price, are proving popular among local residents from minority groups.

3) The third example from The Hague concerns the redevelopment of and alterations to flats for older residents in the project Nuts8.

We already saw an image in which old and new were combined. Here on the left are thoroughly renovated flats. At the top is new development. A successful project that is already a few years old and dates from before the recent neighbourhood visions.

Client and architect deliberately opted for a relatively luxurious entrance that the residents of the renovated flats can profit from. Here they have succeeded in giving substance to a sense of pride in the residential environment.

Here, too, the decision has been made to fence off the collective space between the blocks.

All these examples from The Hague took shape before agreement on how to approach the entire area had been reached. This has occasionally led to the criticism of the arbitrary nature of the changes. That impression is inaccurate, say some of those involved, because consensus among clients on the desirability of a respectful approach to existing structures was reached.

Then to the north of the Netherlands. **Groningen** Vinkhuizen.

Vinkhuizen is the most recent of the four neighbourhoods, as the taller gallery-access blocks illustrate. Vinkhuizen highlights the dilemma of whether to increase or decrease density. The spacious layout of post-war neighbourhoods sometimes creates the impression that buildings can easily be added. Raising density benefits commerce, since shopkeepers suffer from the decline in the number of people per dwelling. But new construction can affect the spatial structure of the neighbourhood. It was decided to reduce development density in Vinkhuizen, which will probably become more of a garden suburb than it was 40 years ago.

Lowering density in Vinkhuizen is more than a matter of demolition. These residential blocks on Siersteenlaan are the subject of a daring transformation. This photo is close to the original situation. Originally there was one long block here, but it is now cut through in places. Some people think that the urban design has been improved as a result. And at the back we can see that there have been substantial alterations to the architecture. New dwellings have been added below, and that meant changing the means of access in the original flats.

As we can see, a daring transformation, but one that is faithful to the urban-design structure.

In this way the client meets the wishes of older flat dwellers to continue living here, opposite the shopping centre.

And so I come to the oldest of the four neighbourhoods. Heuvel in **Breda**:

These images show that Heuvel is the oldest of the four visited neighbourhoods. Heuvel offers a striking illustration of the tension between unique historical value and future user potential. And between the short-term views of residents and the approach of professional landlords.

The landlord envisages that stairs like these create problems, definitely in the future and definitely as residents get older. But this man still comes to pick up his post. Sometimes the residents don't see things as the experts do.

They have become accustomed and have learnt to exploit the access possibilities in a creative manner.

Such a difference in experience can lead to conflict, in Heuvel too. But it would be incorrect to focus on that alone. The good news is that Heuvel is the place where a positive climate has been created in which municipality, housing associations and residents are working together for a better future.

This is a neighbourhood of great interest to historians because the legacy of contrasting architectural movements is visible in one small area. Here, for example, is the square and church by the Dutch architect Granpré Molière.

Despite the cultural-historical significance, however, the area is very forward-looking.

At the instigation of resident groups, education plays an important role here. After 40 years, people want to make the neighbourhood a good launching pad for the youth.

The Brede School must acquire a place on the square that I just showed. The elaboration of this scheme will not be easy for clients and architects, but the starting point is a shared vision. To Architectuur Lokaal an important step has thus been taken.

I have shown you four Dutch neighbourhoods and sketched the discussions taking place there. What lessons can we learn from them? In my opinion, the following lessons should certainly surface in a discussion on 'governance for urban change'.

- *Respect through transformation*

Respect for heritage doesn't simply mean preserving the historical situation.

Transformation is inevitable; the discussion is always about how to transform.

- *Quality can be organised*

To ensure a precise approach, quality assurance must be well organised. It is essential that clients have sufficient expertise, in cultural aspects too.

- *It's about culture and psychology*

The cultural aspect of commissioning development is clear in projects of this sort. It's about the cultural capital we all share. Financial considerations alone mustn't determine owners' choices.

It's also important to create optimism in the future. Residents and others will have faith in the neighbourhood if the municipality and housing associations set aside enough time and money. If that happens, there's good reason to believe in a positive outcome over the next 40 years.