

# Participating in the community centre from beginning to end



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**Research on the influence of user participation in the design of community centres in Rotterdam, 1960-1990**

**History Thesis**

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# Abstract

This thesis researches the influence of user participation on design. It focusses specifically on user participation in the design of community centres in Rotterdam, 1960-1990. First, a literature investigation has been conducted to establish context and theory on user participation in architecture. Secondly, research on three study cases has been executed; Two similar community centres: De Klimmende Bever and De Larenkamp; and separately Pier 80. The researched focussed on three aspects possibly influenced by user participation: functions, floorplan design and aesthetics. This was done by a combination of archival research, research in historical newspapers and analysis.

It was found that during the 60s and 70s, the role of the architect was questioned with the increasing critiques on Modernism. De Carlo was one of the first architects to argue the importance of user participation in design and define different types of participation. Meanwhile, in the Netherlands a similar movement begun. The municipalities in the Netherlands were shifting their focus from growth and scaling to urban renewal. The community centre was a key element in the new and renewed neighbourhoods.

From the case studies, it became clear that user participation and the relation between architect and user can influence the design significantly. The biggest influence was found on the functions of the building. Moreover, aesthetics and floorplan design can also be influenced. Although it must be considered that this is also heavily dependent on the approach of the designer. Municipal architect Bister, who designed De Klimmende Bever and De Larenkamp, took a Modernist approach designing a shell with open floorplan, which could be placed in multiple neighbourhoods or anywhere else. Consequently, the buildings are not unique and adjusted to the surroundings, except for the functions. Pier 80 however, showed how a design can be influenced by a lot of user participation and be adjusted to its surroundings.

The relation between user and architect is always changing and will always change. We, as designers, have to question our role in design to achieve the best results.

# Table of contents

<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2. Context on user participation in architecture</b>	<b>7</b>
2.1 Context of user participation in the design process between 1960 and 1990	
2.2 De Carlo and user participation in the architectural process	
2.3 Different types of user participation	
2.4 Conclusion	
<b>3. User participation and developing community centers in Rotterdam</b>	<b>11</b>
3.1 User participation in the Netherlands	
3.2 User participation in the Dapperbuurt in Amsterdam	
3.3 The ideal neighbourhood in Rotterdam	
3.4 Formal development process of community centres in Rotterdam	
3.5 Conclusion	
<b>4. Case studies: De Klimmende Bever and De Larenkamp</b>	<b>16</b>
4.1 History of the development of De Klimmende Bever en De Larenkamp	
4.2 Analysis of functions	
4.3 Analysis of the floorplans design	
4.4 Analysis of the aesthetics	
4.5 Participation in the design	
4.6 Conclusion	
<b>5. Case study: Pier 80</b>	<b>23</b>
5.1 History of the development of Pier 80	
5.2 Analysis of functions	
5.3 Analysis of the floorplans design	
5.4 Analysis of the aesthetics	
5.5 Participation in the design	
5.6 Conclusion	
<b>6. Conclusion &amp; discussion</b>	<b>30</b>
6.1 Summary	
6.2 Conclusion	
6.3 Discussion	
<b>7. Sources</b>	<b>32</b>
7.1 Literature	
7.2 Archival material	
7.3 Newsarticles	



Community centre De Klimmende Bever (Bulthuis, 1986, 75).

# 1. Introduction



After the Second World War, the municipality of Rotterdam had to rebuild and expand large parts of the city. Key part of the redevelopment were community centres. The municipality commissioned municipal architect J. Bister to design the community centres for the new neighbourhoods Zuidwijk, IJsselmonde and Ommoord. Although to be built in different neighbourhoods, the buildings were very similar; Bister used the same base for the design of the three buildings. In other neighbourhoods a different design approach was used. An example is Pier 80 in Bospolder/Tussendijken designed by M. Schravenande, finished in 1984. The design is more catered to the specific place and demands by the residents, represented by workgroups in the design process. This relation, between the architect and the user – in this case the residents of the neighbourhood – has continuously changed throughout history and is different from project to project. After the Second World War, in the 1970's, a movement for participation of the user in architecture rose. This also included a new view on the position of architects in society. However, in the 1980's, this reverted to a process where the architect had almost no public engagement (Kuhk et al., 2019). Nowadays, this relation is still changing and the role of the Architect will continuously change. In the field of Architecture, user participation in the design process gets more and more important to achieve a succesful result (De Carlo, 1980).

However, there is still debate about the role of the architect in the design process. The shifting from the architect as dictator in the design process to the architect as guide. This also often results in different architecture. This can also be seen in the differences between community centres. As Multi-Functional Building (MFB), community centres are built to cater the needs of a neighbourhood. It can be argued that this building should fit the specific needs of a neighbourhood. Despite this, the community centres De Larenkamp and De Klimmende Bever were almost completely the same. In contrast, Pier 80 is developed in a more back and forth process between the end users (the residents), the municipality and the designers. The main goal of this historical research is to determine how this difference in the development process influences the

design choices made by the architects in the period of 1970-1990. For this, the main question of this research is:

*How did community involvement influence the design of community centres in 1960-1990?*

This research focusses specifically on the community centres previously mentioned. It will mainly consist of two parts. The first part will be literature research about the history of the relation between the architect and the user and the development process of community centres in Rotterdam. This will also explore the goal of the community centre and place these two things in relation with each other. The second part will go more in-depth on the differences in design. The difference between Pier 80 and the Klimmende Bever & Larenkamp will be demonstrated with two separate methods. The first method will be using literature of the period relevant to the case studies. This includes news articles, research papers, municipal documents, municipal reports. The second method will use the architectural drawings and images of the buildings. These will be analysed on different aspects: functions, floorplan design and aesthetics. Finally, a conclusion and discussion will be given.



## 2. Context on user participation in architecture

As the title states, in this chapter the context of the relation between architect and user in design is discussed to establish a definition of participation. The chapter focusses on the user as resident of a certain neighbourhood. After the Second World War, a new idea about the position of the architect begun to take shape. Giancarlo de Carlo proposed that the architect should choose the side of the user in the design process. (Kuhk et al., 2019). This directly influences the role of the user in the design process. This contradicted the common position of the architect with him or her being the dictators in the design process.

To explore this topic, literature has been used from the period it focusses on. Firstly, a general view on user participation will be set out to provide context. Secondly, the different actors will be explored more in-depth. Finally, the user participation in the formal development process of community centres in Rotterdam will be elaborated.

### **2.1 Context of user participation in the design process between 1960 and 1990**

As mentioned in the introduction of the chapter, after the Second World War, a new idea about the position of the architect begun. The Italian architect Giancarlo de Carlo proposed in 1969 that the architect should not be a dictator in the design process. Instead, the architect should side with the user. This idea was supported by several other architects, like John Turner, Walter Segal and more. Architect Lucien Kroll designed the first building using a user participation-oriented design process. However, there were also a lot of architects against this new idea. Architects Tzoni and Lefaivre wrote a paper in 1976, arguing that the new movement was supporting capitalism. This was argued from a Neo-Marxist perspective. Other architects against the proposal by de Carlo simply disagreed not from a political perspective, but from an aesthetical point of view. They argued that the architecture resulting from user participation-oriented design processes was not innovative enough. This can also be caused by the way user participation was organized in the design process. Next to this, user participation did not always lead to the wanted fundamental ideas to design (Kuhk

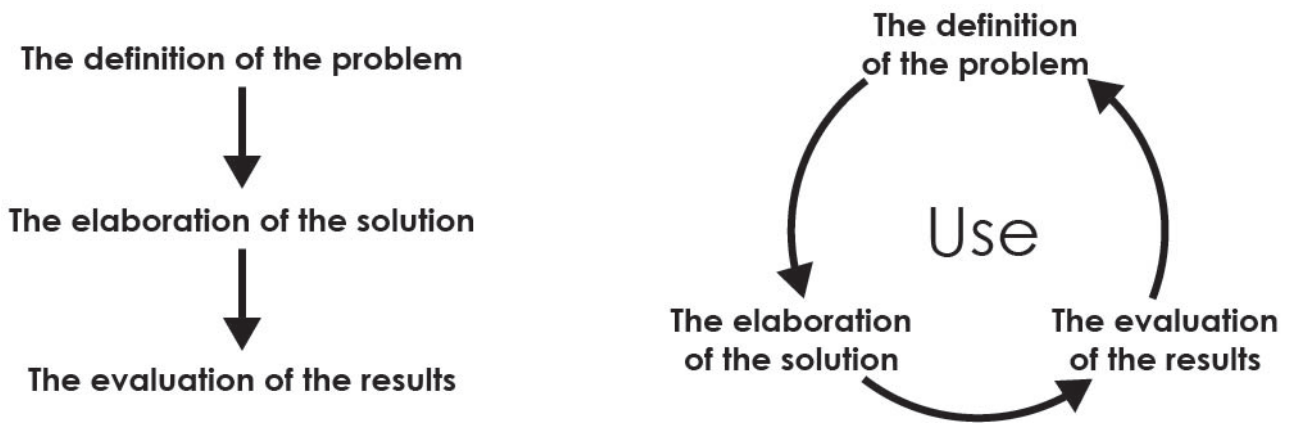
et al., 2019). Next to this, De Carlo argues that most architects are against the participation because of a possible shift in power between the architect and the user, removing privileges of specialization from the designer and reveals the professional secret. (De Carlo, 1980). However, a study by Lawrence (1982) showed that the designer must have an extra set of skills to be able to provide alternate solutions that cater to the requirements. These requirements can possibly change in the future as well.

### **2.2 De Carlo and user participation in the architectural process**

The main idea de Carlo proposed was that the common way of designing was separated by what the users want. In other words, architects acted in a certain way on how to do it, instead of why. He especially criticized the Modern Movement. De Carlo argued that the Modern Movement lost contact with the context in which it wanted to act, lost in the idea of form and function. This often gave a result that differs from what was envisioned. So why is this connection lost according to De Carlo? De Carlo explains that the traditional architectural process consists of three phases: the definition of the problem, the elaboration of the solution and the evaluation of the results. At the end of this sequence, the process is considered to be done. The first phase - the definition of the problem - is inaccurate and unsystematic, often misguided by the intuition of the researcher, who in this case is the designer. The wishes of the user are overthrown or ignored, in favour of models and visions suited to the promotor or designer. The second phase - the elaboration of the solution - describes the time between the start of the design to completion of the building. The design might be altered or, in the worst case, rejected, in which case it will be replaced. Once the building is done, the building is assigned to the user. Its use is not included in the design process. De Carlo considers this the final phase, the evaluation of the results. De Carlo specifically emphasizes that the building is often considered successful when it is not altered much after completion, during its use (De Carlo, 1980).

De Carlo proposes that the use of the building is included in all three phases. This means that





**Figure 2.1.** Left, the traditional architectural process right what it should be to include user participation as described by De Carlo.

the designer does not provide finished and unalterable solutions. Instead, the designer extracts ideas from confrontations with those who will use the building. The designer provides a building that facilitates continues alteration by the user. Finally, the evaluation is done by the use of the building. This might imply new changes. This changes the process in an ongoing process, as seen in figure 2.1. It must be mentioned that a design process where the user participates takes more time than a traditional process, because conversation and discussion take extra time. The three phases in the architectural process each influences each other, creating an ongoing process (De Carlo, 1980).

### 2.3 Different types of user participation

De Carlo identified to main types of participation: direct participation and indirect participation. With direct participation, De Carlo means having direct contact with the user by conversations and confrontations; de user is directly concerned in the design process. A more indirect way of participation comes from observations from the architect. By indirect participation, the observer – the designer – uses noticeable influences from the users in the design. This means knowing who the user is, what culture they have, what characteristics they have and more (Zucchi, De Carlo, 1992).

There is also another way of defining different participation types. Wulz (1986) defined different types. These types in order of increased participation by the user are:

**Representation** The architect interprets the wishes and personal needs of the client.

**Questionary** The public administrator acts as the client for the architect. This is a more scientific method to determine the needs of the clients.

**Regionalism** The representative participation makes place for research on the local architecture. Residents can be questioned as well, but the focus is on local architecture and heritage.

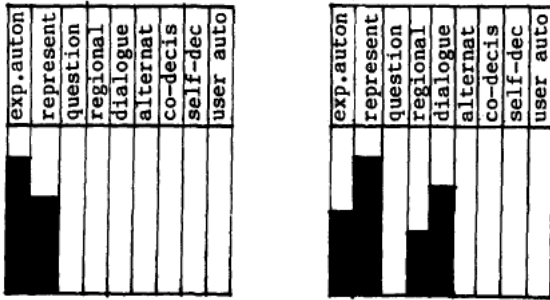
**Dialogue** This form is based on informal conversations between the users and the architects. The user only participates in the early stages of the design process.

**Alternative** Very close to co-decision, the user can choose from several, clear and concrete alternatives provided by the architect.

**Co-decision** The user is included in the process from beginning to end and there is a balanced decision situation, with the user actively participating.

**Self-decision** The architect has authority in choosing the site, structure and service system. Most other decisions are made by the user. This is often in self-build projects.

The types created by Wulz can be used to create a diagram, which can be used to create a classification of participation of architects as seen in figure 2.2. This could also be done for specific design projects. By using these two systems of classifying different participation types, aspects of the involvement of participation in the design process can be identified.



**Figure 2.2.** Example of the diagrams used to classify architects and the degree they involve participation in the design process (Wulz, 1986, 161).

## 2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, the context of participation in architecture is provided. The beginning of a movement supporting participation of the user in the design process. De Carlo is one of the most important architects in this beginning of this movement in the 70s. He argues the loss of connection between design and how the design process should be changed to include participation. Next to this, he defines two types of participation, direct participation by direct contact between user and designer and indirect participation, observing influences of the user by the designer. Seven types, defined by Wulz, are also discussed and can be used to make diagrams of the participation in projects.

UITNODIGING voor de officiële doop van wijk

Invitation to the opening of community centre Pier 80  
(Instituut Opbouwwerk Rotterdam, 1983, 76).



het wijkgebeuren, 1983

the AMAZING STROOPWAFELS Kindertheater  
en Jan van der Voort en de band BOEMFRANG **ZONDAG**

**MAANDAG** Om 8 uur 's avonds: bewonerspresentatie

het ASOSJAAL ORKEST **DINSDAG** Om

om 6 uur FIETSCROSS en na half 8: deuren

Kezelen, Dierden, TURNEN en schaken

Kindermiddag met ondermeer the

WONDS om 8 uur: vele DAN

**DONNERDAG**

PROGRAMMA

### 3. User participation and developing community centers in Rotterdam

In comparison to the previous chapter, this chapter will focus on the involvement of participation in with a focus on Rotterdam, the Netherlands. Next to this, the chapter will go in-depth on user participation in the development and design process of community centres. To be able to elaborate on community centres, the building type will also be explored.

### **3.1 User participation in the Netherlands**

Jan Oostenbrug (1980) describes the relation between the architect and user as ever changing. After the Second World War, the municipalities were the main driving force for building many new neighbourhoods and dwellings because of the special economic situation, caused by the war and crisis (Oostenbrug, 1980). However, in the 1970s this is changing because of the upcoming free market. This also coincides with increasing critiques on the newly built neighbourhoods. The innovative architecture almost completely disappeared after the Second World War, because of the focus on scaling and growth. The wishes of the user are almost completely neglected (van Eldonk, 1989). The newly built neighbourhoods are stale compared to the old neighbourhoods. Although it should not be ignored that the old neighbourhoods have lower qualities, for example in neighbourhood accommodations. This movement supported renovations of old neighbourhoods (Oostenbrug, 1980).

A new question for unique designs comes to the market. Together with the acceptance of the wishes of the user in the design process, the architecture changes back to more individual buildings (van Eldonk, 1989). A clear example of a neighbourhood which is developed together with the users - the residents - is the Dapperbuurt in Amsterdam.

### **3.2 User participation in the design of the Dapperbuurt in Amsterdam**

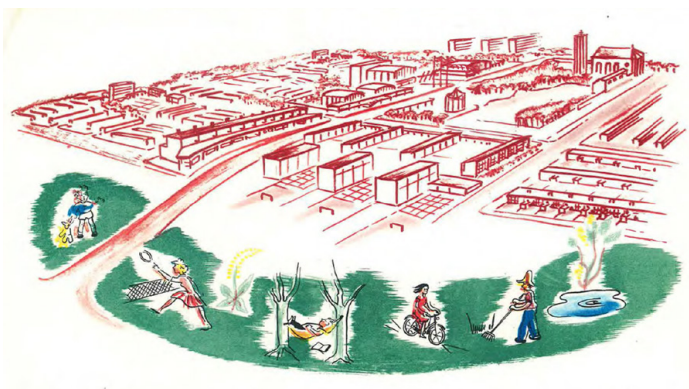
In Amsterdam 1970, a special situation occurs in the Dapperbuurt. Residents were involved in the design process from the beginning, instead of the usual of the design being a product of municipal policy (Albers, 2021). Having a similar situation as Rotterdam, the municipality of Amsterdam shifted its focus

from growth and scaling to improvement of existing neighbourhoods. Dapperbuurt, after an inspection showed that the foundation had problems, was a neighbourhood that had to be rebuilt. In 1972, the first part of the original plan by Piet Blom commissioned by the municipality could not be prevented to be executed (Albers, 2021).

The early post-war neighbourhoods were considered unable to fit the new architecture. (Blom et al., 2004). Therefore the plan proposed by Piet Blom focussed on new buildings, halving the number of dwellings. Blom's plan was aimed at what the municipality could sell, instead of facilitating the residents. Meanwhile, the critiques on new neighbourhoods were rising. This caused residents to form an action group, objecting to the plan, complete with an alternate plan and relevant literature. This made the municipality reconsider the plan and approved the action group. Together with the architect, the action group held three meetings where residents could choose three alternatives in 1973. Discussions lasted until 1978, when the first building was constructed from the residents' plan and over the course of 15 years, more buildings were constructed (Albers, 2021).

The plans in the Dapperbuurt resulted in a neighbourhood more catered towards the users, through a combination of new design and its function: facilitating the residents. In this process, the participation is close to co-decision between user and designer, being involved from start to finish. By involving the user, the design process is a cycle, including the use, as De Carlo (1980) later proposed. The Dapperbuurt is an example of such a process and the involving user participation in design.





**Figure 3.1.** The ideal neighbourhood as described by Jan Gehl, illustrated by Sia Bakema-van Brossum Waalkes (1947, 18).

### 3.3 The ideal neighbourhood in Rotterdam

Meanwhile in Rotterdam, the municipality had a focus on rebuilding, growth and scaling after the Second World War. Central to this idea was the “Wijkgedachte” or the neighbourhood idea. The neighbourhood was equal to the city, not subordinate. Often, the neighbourhoods were designed with a central area, where the facilities for the neighbourhood are located (Blom et al., 2004). This idea stays important during the 70s, when a shift from growth and scaling to improving quality in old neighbourhoods also plays an important role. It is important to note that this idea is mainly a top-down strategy,

not including residents in the design process. Already in 1947, architect Jan Gehl is an important influence in this area. In his book “Wij en de Wijkgedachte” he describes what the neighbourhood would look like. In figure 3.1, his idea about the neighbourhood is shown. Jan Gehl visualizes the neighbourhood as a group of districts with a central core, with daily amenities and the community centre (Gehl, 1947).

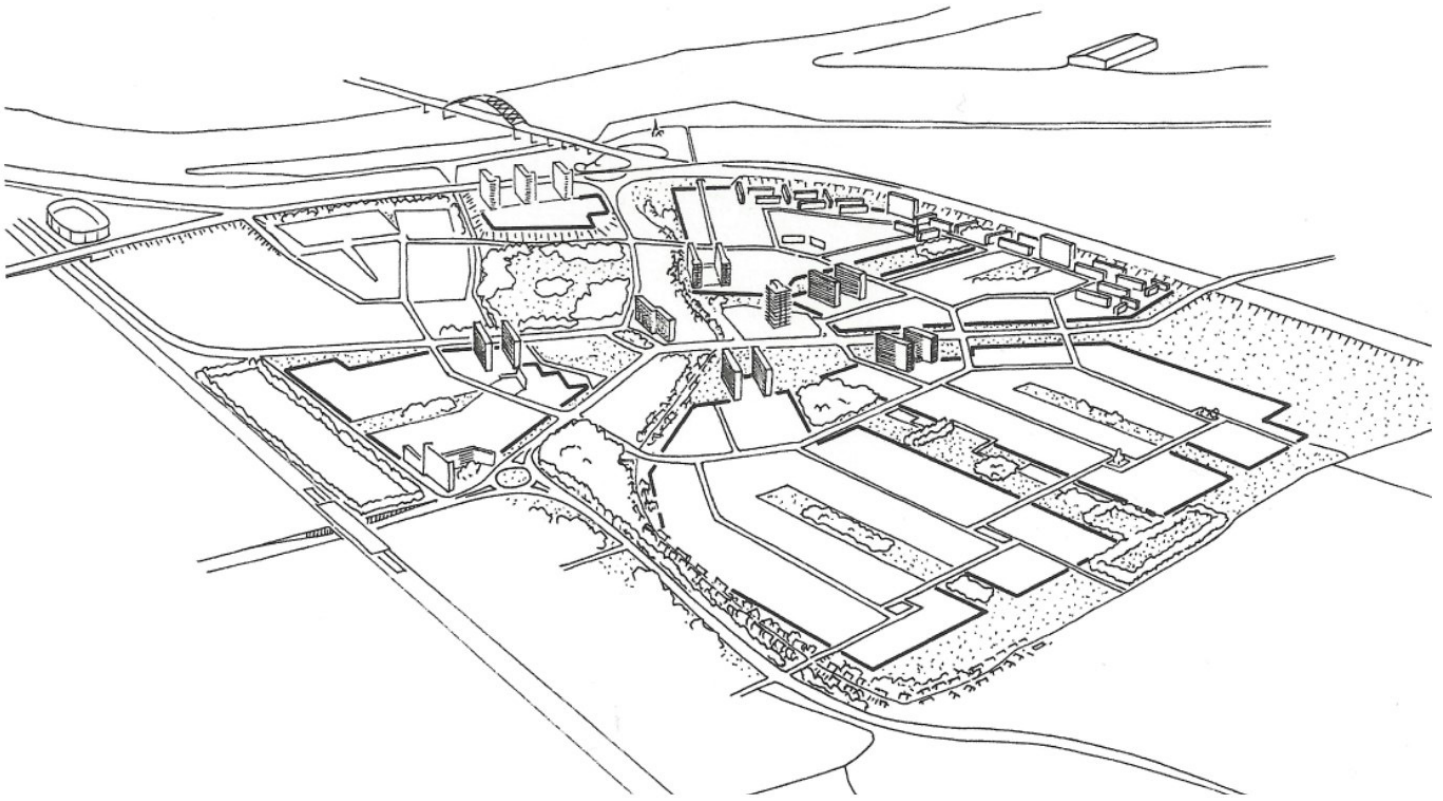
The community centre accommodates multiple functions, making it a Multi-Functional Building (MFB). According to Gehl, the community centre facilitates the individual and the communal leisure, like a “living room”, a cinema, library, health facilities and more. It should also facilitate a part of the municipality and have space for multiple functions, like weddings (Gehl, 1947). In figure 3.2, an illustration of this idea is shown.

The vision by Gehl was often realized in Rotterdam. Neighbourhoods with a central core were built, with districts fanning out. The idea in the design of these neighbourhoods was the garden city, with lots of green to get away from the busy city. The neighbourhoods in Rotterdam built according to this idea are Pendrecht, Zuidwijk, Lombardijen and Groot-IJsselmonde (European 15).



**Figure 3.2.** The ideal community centre as described by Jan Gehl, illustrated by Sia Bakema-van Brossum Waalkes (1947, 19).





**Figure 3.3.** Birdseye drawing of Groot IJsselmonde (Hage et al., 2005).

In figure 3.3, the original plan for Groot IJsselmonde can be seen. Visible is the central core and the green big green open spaces in the neighbourhood. A core can be seen, with the neighbourhoods fanning out. In Groot-IJsselmonde, De Klimmende Bever was the newly built community centre, which will be discussed in chapter 4.

### 3.4 Formal development process of community centres in Rotterdam

Already during the 50s, the demand for certain community centres is changing. The small community centres do not fit the wishes from residents anymore. Pleads for an integrated approach to this problem are present, but cooperation between the organizations dealing with community centres is missing (Bulthuis, 1986). A lack of space in the community centres causes the centres to be used only for meetings and small gatherings. However, the goal is to have more functions like sports and libraries in the community centres. The buildings need to be transformed into multi-functional buildings to cater the needs of the neighbourhoods. Bulthuis also describes a lack of initiative from the residents, causing slow progress in the development of the community centre (1986).

In the 70s, frustration by the residents living in the old neighbourhoods grows. These neighbourhoods are not a priority for the municipality since there are severe cutbacks in budget. In figure 3.4, a newspaper article about protest is shown. The protestors wanted more community centres. This is one of the many actions by residents. A lot of residents start action groups to represent the renewal of neighbourhoods and shortage of social services, including buildings (Instituut Opbouwwerk Rotterdam, 1983).



**Figure 3.4.** Youth occupy De Larenkamp, in protest to the lack of community centers in Rotterdam (Bulthuis, 1986, 27).

However, when J.G. van der Ploeg becomes alderman in 1967 there is a change. Van der Ploeg sees the “Wijkgedachte” as a vision, not possible to realize without decentralizing the organizational aspects and services. He reacts to the action groups and makes agreements with the groups about the renewal of neighbourhoods (Van Veenen, 2021). This also means decentralizing health services, municipal facilities and cross unions. During this period, decentralization becomes the focus of the municipality of Rotterdam, giving more power to the residents (Van de Goor, 1989). A problem that occurs is that the community centres are not economically profitable, causing confrontations between the municipality and residents (Bulthuis, 1986).

For Pier 80 and the square respectively, a meeting was organized, hosted by the famous Dutch comedian André van Duin. Residents could provide feedback on the plans for the square and community centre. In Rotterdam, every community centre should have a certain percentage of art. This art, can often be chosen in conversation with the residents, often represented by a workgroup (Bulthuis, 1986).

Meanwhile, the RGW (Raad Gemeentelijke Wijkaccomodaties, Council for municipal community centres) is formed in 1971 and manages 42 community centres in Rotterdam (Bulthuis, 1986). With the decentralization, the community centres each are managed by a commission consisting of residents, each having a project manager. Figure 3.5 shows an example organogram of the management of a community centre, based on the organogram from the RGW (Dienst Sport en Recreatie Rotterdam, 1982a, Stadsarchief Rotterdam). This is the organogram of Pier 80, in the neighbourhood Bospolder-Tussendijken. This neighbourhood was listed for renewal after a long and hard fight by the residents. However, after this, the residents had their own representation in changes for the neighbourhood (Instituut Opbouwwerk Rotterdam, 1983).

It must be noted that in 1986, new budget cuts by the municipality were coming. This made the future of community centres uncertain. Pol van den Dorpel notes that Community



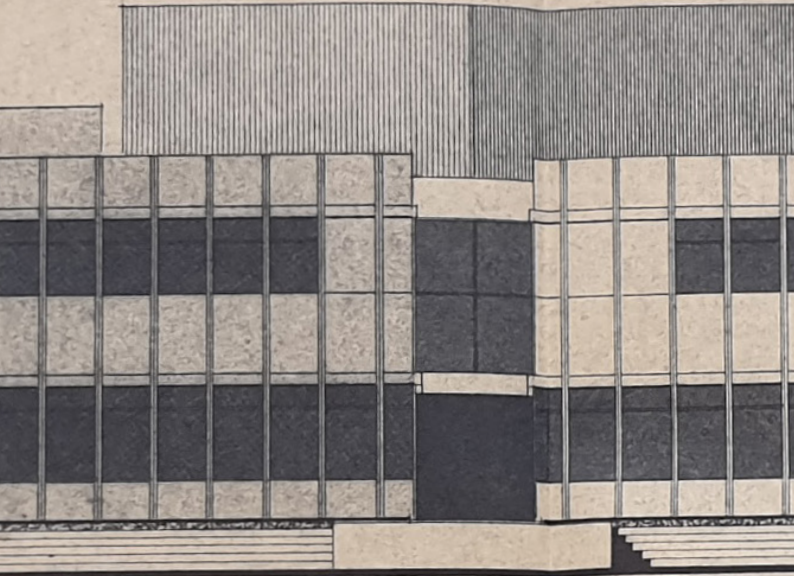
**Figure 3.5.** Organogram of the community centre Groot Visserijkade (Pier 80), based on the Organograms found in the city archives of Rotterdam.

centres do not make profit, so maybe another income is needed to keep the buildings (Het vrije volk: democratisch-socialistisch dagblad editorial, 1986).

### 3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, an overview of the participation of residents in the development of neighbourhoods and community centres is given. In the Netherlands, the same international trend considering participation is noticeable. After the Second World War, the focus of municipalities was growth and scaling. This happened from a top-down approach, with new neighbourhoods being constructed with the “Wijkgedachte”. However, during the 1970s, this changes. Frustration in the old neighbourhoods rises because of shortage of social services. Meanwhile, the role of the architect in the design process is questioned. Slowly and with a lot of resistance, residents get more and more influence in the decisions about their neighbourhood. In 1974, decentralization and the representation of residents by action- and workgroups involves the resident in their neighbourhood.



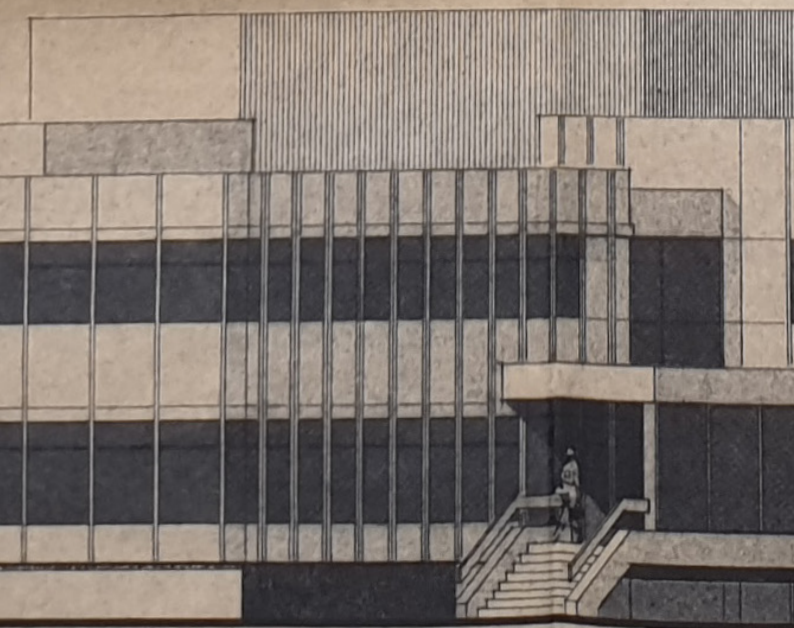


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#### 4. Case studies: De Klimmende Bever and De Larenkamp

In this chapter, De Larenkamp (Zuidwijk) and De Klimmende Bever (Groot-IJsselmonde) will be analysed. Municipal architect Jacques Bister designed the two buildings, based on the principle of the Meerpaal in Dronten (Het vrije volk: democratisch-socialistisch dagblad editorial, 1968). There was also a third, similar community centre planned for Ommoord, but it was never built.

The chapter will first elaborate on the history of the community centres. After this, the buildings will be analysed on functions, floorplan design and aesthetics. Finally, the user participation will be briefly discussed.

#### 4.1 History of the development of De Larenkamp en De Klimmende Bever

Both De Larenkamp and De Klimmende Bever were built in new neighbourhoods, giving the architect Bister a clean sheet. Bister uses the principle of the community centre De Meerpaal designed by van Klingeren. He

designed a Modernistic building with open floorplan, which could be used in multiple neighbourhoods: De Klimmende Bever in IJsselmonde, De Larenkamp in Zuidwijk and a third centre in Ommoord. The community centre in Ommoord was never built, the style did not fit the wishes anymore by the time it was going to be built (Bulthuis, 1986). Using the design multiple times was more cost effective and time efficient. The exterior was the same for all three buildings, residents were able to co-decide about the interior. The 1% obligated art in community centres was also "customizable" in a sense. There were open meetings, where residents were able to help choose (Bulthuis, 1986). Because the buildings were so similar, their development processes were quite similar and designed around the same time. In the following timeline, the development process of both community centres.

#### Timeline of the development of De Larenkamp and De Klimmende Bever

**15th June 1966**

By initiative of 1803 youngsters, a request for a community centre was given to the municipality, starting the conversation with the aldermen. (Het vrije volk: democratisch-socialistisch dagblad editorial, 1966).

**31st March 1967**

The neighbourhood council sees a first plan for a community centre, the demand for a community centre was already there for a couple of years. (Het vrije volk: democratisch-socialistisch dagblad editorial, 1967b).

**1st October 1968**

The news article describes the plans for big community centres in Ommoord, IJsselmonde and Zuidwijk. Noticeable is that the principle of the Meerpaal from Dronten will be copied. The idea is an open community centre with a big entrance, a library, youth centre, neighbourhood council room and several other specialized rooms. (Het vrije volk: democratisch-socialistisch dagblad editorial, 1968).

**25th March 1967**

There are plans for different community centres, along which one in Groot-IJsselmonde and one in Zuidwijk. These are presented by the municipality to the residents. (Het vrije volk: democratisch-socialistisch dagblad editorial, 1967a).

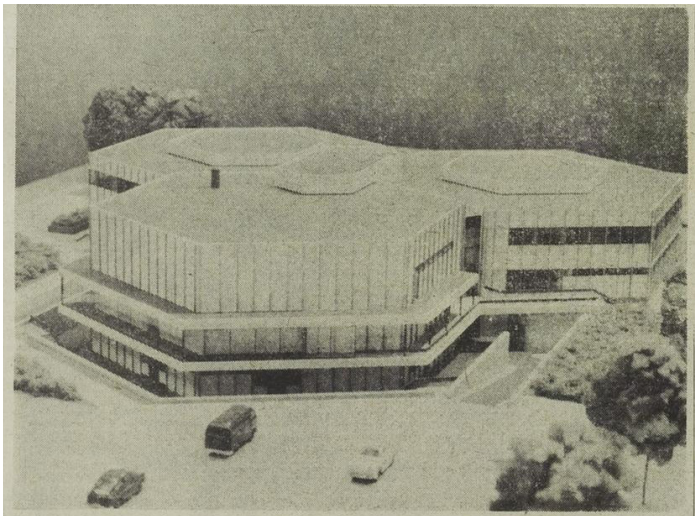
**24th October 1967**

There is a discussion about what function of the central community centre. The municipality wants to place smaller community buildings in the neighbourhoods as well. (Het vrije volk: democratisch-socialistisch dagblad editorial, 1967c).

**1970**

Development of the community centres really begun. Municipal architect Jacques Bister starts designing the building, using the Meerpaal in Dronten as example.





**Figure 4.1.** Model of the design of the community centres. (*Het vrije volk: democratisch-socialistisch dagblad editorial, 1971*).

**2nd February 1971**

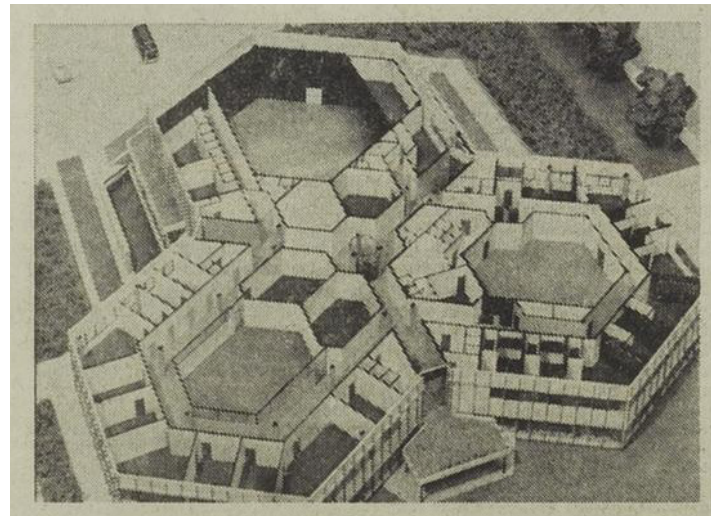
The model for the new community centres for Ommoord and was showed to the residents. It is the same model as used for Zuidwijk, where the Larenkamp is going to be built. The design will be altered for the different neighbourhoods slightly, even the same scale model is used! The scale model is shown in figures 4.1 and 4.2. (*Het vrije volk: democratisch-socialistisch dagblad editorial, 1971*).

**18th September 1971**

Ommoord still has a temporary community centre because the renewal of old neighbourhoods gets a priority, the community centre as designed in earlier plans will never be built. The plans for Zuidwijk and IJsselmonde are approved. (*NRC handelsblad editorial, 1971*).



**Figure 4.4.** The Mayor at the opening of De Klimmende Bever (*Groeneveld, 1973a*).



**Figure 4.2.** Model of the design of the community centres. (*Het vrije volk: democratisch-socialistisch dagblad editorial, 1971*).



In Zuidwijk is gisteren het hoogste punt bereikt van de nieuwbouw van het wijkgebouw Larenkamp. Drs. J. Zwakhals, voorzitter van de deelgemeenteraad Charlois, en de heer J. H. Dalm, voorzitter van de wijkraad voor IJsselmonde, hesen vlaggen in top. Het centrum krijgt het karakter van een ontmoetingsplaats voor de wijkbewoners. Er zullen onder meer een dienstencentrum, een bibliotheek, een kindercrèche en een grote zaal komen.

**Figure 4.3.** The Larenkamp is almost finished. (*NRC handelsblad editorial, 1973a*).

**8th February 1973**

As seen in figure 4.3, De Larenkamp is almost finished. (*NRC handelsblad editorial, 1973a*).

**2nd March 1973**

De Klimmende Bever is officially opened. As seen in figure 4.4, the Mayor joins the festivities.



**10th November 2013**

De Larenkamp is officially opened by the mayor, see figure 4.5.

**10th July 1973**

There is discussion about the art that will be chosen for the community centre in IJsselmonde. (Het vrije volk: democratisch-socialistisch dagblad editorial, 1973b).

**25th February 1976**

Problems with financing maintaining De Klimmende Bever. It is feared that the building will be used less and less. (Het vrije volk: democratisch-socialistisch dagblad editorial, 1976).

In the timeline, it can be seen that the development period of the community centres is relatively short. Within one year, the building was designed and two years later, they were both finished. In 2017, the demolition of De Larenkamp begun. De Klimmende Bever was already demolished in 2005 (Stichting Vitaal Pendrecht, 2017).

#### 4.2 Analysis of the functions

As multi-functional buildings, the buildings are more than just community centres. Having an open floorplan and open structure, the hexagonal shapes proved lots of options for interior design and different functions. Both community centres have:

- Library
- Office Spaces
- Ballet hall
- Administrative spaces
- Classrooms
- Small flexible spaces
- Rooms for handcrafting

Functions in De Klimmende Bever:

- Theater (with fixed seats)
- Dance hall
- Rooms for handcrafting

Functions in De Larenkamp:

- Theater (open floor)
- Kindergarten
- Elderly room
- Pedicurist
- Reading spaces
- Administrative spaces

Immediately noticeable is that De Larenkamp houses more specific functions, while De Klimmende Bever reserves more space



**Figure 4.5.** The Mayor at the opening of De Larenkamp (Groeneveld, 1973a).

for flexible spaces. This shows that the buildings were able to adjust functions to the neighbourhood because of the open floorplan design. However, one big difference is that De Klimmende Bever has a fixed tribune with seats in the Theater, making it less useful for other events than shows. This proved a real problem for using the building (Dienst Sport en Recreatie Rotterdam, 1982b. Stadsarchief Rotterdam).

#### 4.3 Analysis of the floorplan design

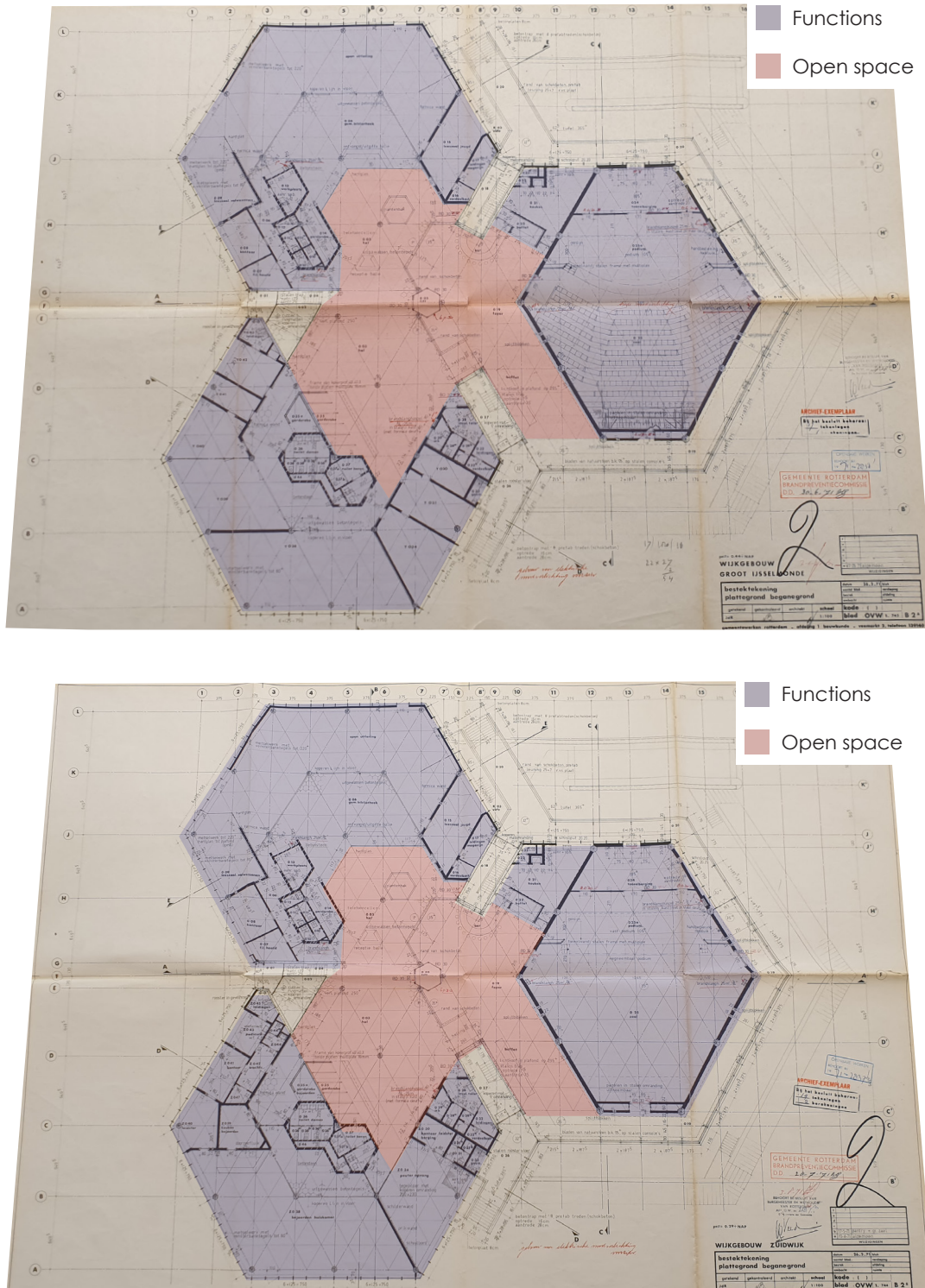
To see how the design adjusts to the neighbourhood, the floorplans must be understood. Jacques Bister was inspired by De Meerpaal. In the Meerpaal, van Klingeren used an open floorplan, to be able to adjust to different social needs. The open floorplan and mix of functions is clearly visible in figure 4.6.



**Figure 4.6.** De Meerpaal, Dronten (Versnel, 1962-1966. Het Nieuwe Instituut).

In De Larenkamp and De Klimmende Bever, the same approach can be seen. Bister places all of the functions around an open area, often with a glass border between the central space and the function. In figure 4.7 the comparison between the ground floor of De Klimmende Bever and De Larenkamp can be seen. Instead of the building being

adjusted completely to the wishes and needs of the user, the building is designed in such a way that changing interior can easily be done. It must be noted, that this does not lead to a completely different design. In figure 4.7 can be seen that the two realized designs only differ slightly.



**Figure 4.7.** Floorplan analysis of the spaces with functions and the central open space. Both De Klimmende Bever (above) and De Larenkamp (below) are shown. The idea of having a central open space can be seen clearly (Bister, 1971a, Stadsarchief Rotterdam. Bister, 1971b, Stadsarchief rotterdam).



#### 4.4 Analysis of aesthetics

In appearance, both De Klimmende Bever and De Larenkamp are identical, while located in very different situations, as can be seen in figures 4.8 and 4.9. The buildings are oriented the same and have the same facades. The design has a Modernist style, being built in post-World War neighbourhoods.

One important aspect of the community centers that is different, is the 1% art. This has to be chosen by the residents and there is a standard process for this (Bulthuis, 1986). In De Larenkamp, special glass and plastics form figures. However, due to changing interiors, this has lost its original meaning (Bulthuis, 1986). For De Klimmende Bever, artist Geert Lebbing designed a special exterior space, based on the hexagonal shape of the building itself. This can be used for children to play or people to sit. In figure 4.10, De Klimmende Bever can be seen, with the special shaped outside space in front of the building.

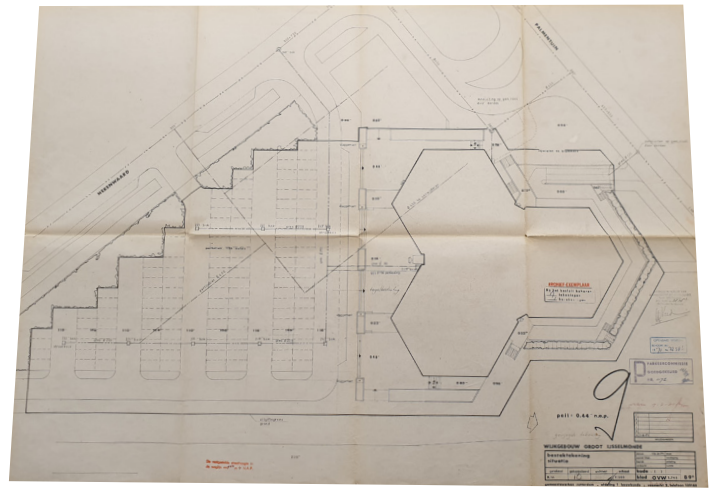
#### 4.5 Participation in the design

In the design process, the residents have little influence on the outcome. Bister designed a general building, which could be placed anywhere and slightly adjusted. In reference to De Carlo (1980) as discussed in chapter 2, the residents have no indirect participation. Bister takes no indirect influence from the neighbourhoods. This also connects to the definitions by Wulz (1986), regionalism is almost non-existent in the design as it was designed to be placed in multiple locations.

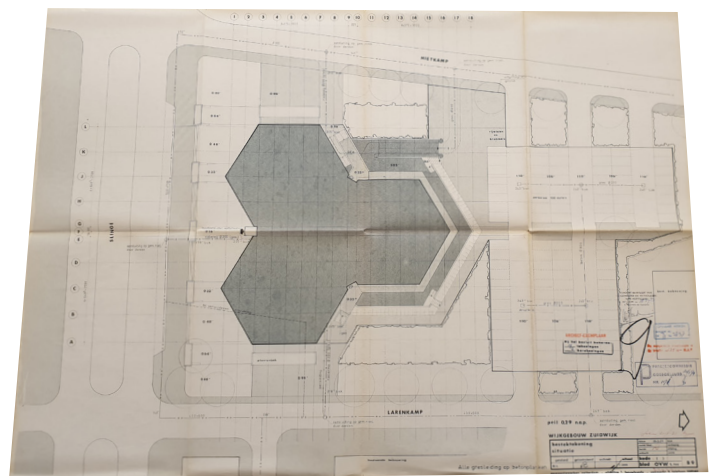
The biggest changes the residents were able to participate in is the functions and the art used in the community centre. This is done through questionnaire participation. Through meetings with the municipality, the residents were able to voice their opinions.

#### 4.6 Conclusion

De Klimmende Bever and De Larenkamp are two almost identical buildings, developed in commission of the municipality. Quickly developed in a year, the design was shown to residents. The design by Bister could be placed in different neighbourhoods, giving it a Modernist style. The open floorplan provides some modifications in functions and interior design. The residents could influence



**Figure 4.8.** Situation plan of De Klimmende Bever (Bister, 1971a, Stadsarchief Rotterdam).

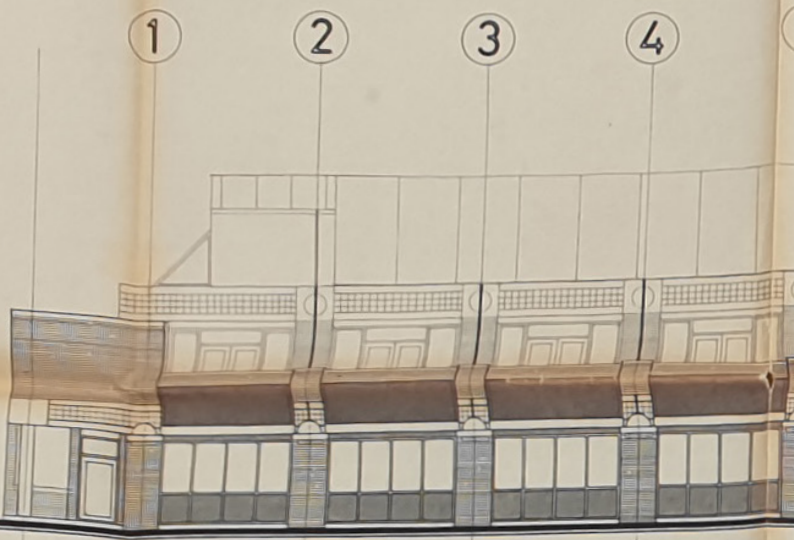


**Figure 4.9.** Situation plan of De Larenkamp (Bister, 1971b, Stadsarchief Rotterdam).

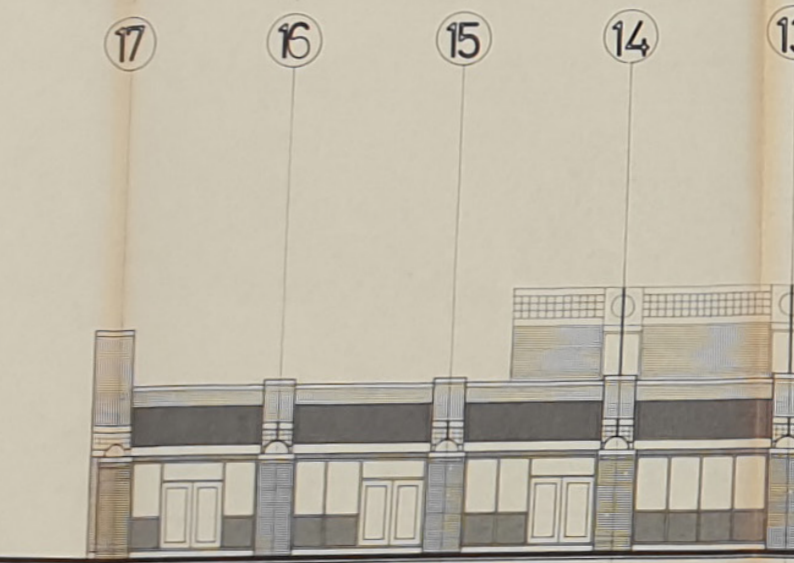


**Figure 4.10.** Photo of De Klimmende Bever. The specially designed outside space is visible in front of the entrance. (Groeneveld, 1973b, Stadsarchief Rotterdam).

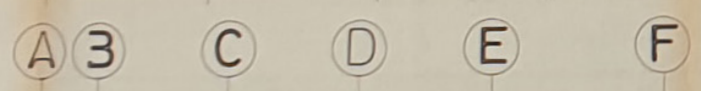
this slightly by questionnaire participation. The flexible spaces in the floorplan can be used for multiple functions. However, in De Klimmende Bever, the fixed tribune reduces the possibilities severely. Something that is not a problem in De Larenkamp. In conclusion, residents were able to influence the design only slightly.



gevel visserijplein



gevel rösenerma



gevel visserijstraat

5. Case study:  
Pier 80



Similar to the previous chapter a case study will be analysed. Pier 80 in Bospolder-Tussendijken is a community centre, opened in 1983. Residents had to be persistent to convince the municipality to approve the start of a community building. The idea and plan for a community centre in the neighbourhood received a lot of because of budget costs. In the end, because of this active attitude from the residents in the development of the building lead to a high participation in the design process. In fact, architect Martien Schravessande lives in the neighbourhood and proposed her own design to the municipality after a more expensive proposal was denied (Het vrije volk: democratisch-socialistisch dagblad editorial, 1983a).

Firstly, the history of the development and design will be discussed in-depth. Secondly, the building will be analysed on the following aspects: Functions, Floorplan design and aesthetics. User participation will also be discussed briefly.

## 5.1 History of the development of Pier 80

Compared to De Klimmende Bever and De Larenkamp, the development of Pier 80 was very different. This is also caused by the fact that Bospolder-Tussendijken was an older neighbourhood, waiting to be renewed, this caused growing frustration (Instituut Opbouwwerk Rotterdam, 1983). Residents were not waiting for the municipality to act. Instead, they started action groups. From the beginning of the development process to the end, residents have always had influence. In contrast to the designs by Bister, resident and architect Martien Schravessande designed a building unique to the location, outfitted for the neighbourhood. In the following timeline, the different important moments in the development process are shown. The timeline is based on newspaper articles and municipal documents (Dienst Sport en Recreatie Rotterdam, 1980, Stadsarchief Rotterdam).

### Timeline of the development of Pier 80

#### 15th June 1972

There are two big matters that need to be resolved in Bospolder-Tussendijken: 1. The Bospolderplein needs to be refurbished and 2. The neighbourhood wants a new community centre. The neighbourhood community services are now located in the local football club. The municipality plans to place temporary structures to accommodate a community centre. Figure 5.1 shows the newspaper article, discussing the future of Bospolder-Tussendijken. (Het vrije volk: democratisch-socialistisch dagblad editorial, 1972a).

#### July 1972

First letter to municipality with the proposal for a community centre.

#### 12th October 1972

Discussion about what needs to be located on the Visserijplein: a sports hall, a market square or supermarket? The current plan is uncertain, since demand for space for facilities is bigger than the square itself. (Het vrije volk: democratisch-socialistisch dagblad editorial, 1972b).



Figure 5.1. Newspaper articles about the future of Bospolder-Tussendijken (Het vrije volk: democratisch-socialistisch dagblad editorial, 1972a).

### **31st July 1973**

The municipal department of urban development proposes a community centre on the Visserijplein. The neighbourhood council wants the smaller districts in the neighbourhood meet and discuss their ideas. There should be a project group that represents the smaller districts. (Het vrije volk: democratisch-socialistisch dagblad editorial, 1973c).

### **August 1974**

Municipal financial committee takes preparations for a building.

### **October 1974**

First meeting between residents and officials.

### **2nd November 1977**

Action groups from Bospolder, Tussendijken, Middelland and Nieuwe Westen want to be included in the design of the plans of the neighbourhoods. They want their neighbourhoods to be refurbished and improved. Note that the residents have an active attitude to participating in the design. (Het vrije volk: democratisch-socialistisch dagblad editorial, 1977a).

### **December 1977**

The municipality disapproves the inclusion of a library.

### **July 1978**

The financial costs of the building turn out to be higher than the budget.

### **9th September 1978**

A sports facility is ruled out for the community centre because it is too expensive. However, a library is now a possibility again. (Het vrije volk: democratisch-socialistisch dagblad editorial, 1978b).

### **January 1979**

Appointment of the new architect, Martien Schravessande from Architectencoöperatie Gouda. He is a resident in Bospolder-Tussenwijken.

### **24th August 1973**

The refurbishment of the Bospolderplein is almost completed. There will be a square officer, supported by a local work group. (Het vrije volk: democratisch-socialistisch dagblad editorial, 1973d).

### **8th January 1974**

There is frustration in Bospolder-Tussendijken, the development for a service and community centre are not yet started. It is a discussion with alderman Van der Pols. A lack of communication between municipality and residents is also apparent. (Het vrije volk: democratisch-socialistisch dagblad editorial, 1974).

### **8th November 1977**

The municipality removed plans for a library in the community centre at the Visserijplein. However, the neighbourhood council disagrees with this and argues that the old library is decayed and does not fit its service anymore. Previous plans by the neighbourhood were not yet consulted. (Het vrije volk: democratisch-socialistisch dagblad editorial, 1977b).

### **2nd January 1978**

The neighbourhood Bospolder-Tussendijken is slowly decaying. However, renewal will not happen soon because of budget cuts by the municipality. Residents disagree (Het vrije volk: democratisch-socialistisch dagblad editorial, 1978a).

### **9th December 1978**

There is frustration in the neighbourhood about the quarter million Gulden provided by the municipality to refurbish the old library. The residents want a new library in the community centre. The old library is impractical, out of the centre of the neighbourhood. The 22nd of December 1977 a motion was accepted by the municipality to build a community centre at the Visserijplein. (Het vrije volk: democratisch-socialistisch dagblad editorial, 1978c).

### January 1979

Appointment of the new architect, Martien Schravessande from Architectencoöperatie Gouda. He is a resident in Bospolder-Tussenwijken.

### December 1979

The municipality agrees to include a library in the building.

### April 1980

A building committee is set up consisting of future users and the neighbourhood council under supervision of Bureau Wijkaccommodatie.

### December 1981

Construction has begun.

### 16th September 1983

Frustration is rising again when the municipality does not tackle certain problems in the neighbourhood. But Pier 80 will be opened officially on September 17th by the Mayor. Especially the new kite ceiling (vliegerplafond) is a subject of conversation, as seen in figure 5.2. The artwork designed by Rotterdam artist Geert Lebbing is a highlight of the multifunctional hall in the building. (Het vrije volk: democratisch-socialistisch dagblad editorial, 1983b).

### 19th September 1983

Finally, Pier 80 is opened officially. This has been done by a lot of perseverance by the residents. Moreover, the sports hall has literally been built by residents from the structure. The building is fitted with new solar panels with highlight the sports hall. (Het vrije volk: democratisch-socialistisch dagblad editorial, 1983c).

As shown in the timeline, it has taken the residents around 12 years to finally get the community centre they wanted. This has not been without struggle. However, this gave the residents an important role in the development process. This is also because of the active attitude of residents.

## 5.2 Analysis of functions

The residents had a lot of saying on the functions, sometimes through form action groups. The library was canceled and added to the functions during the development phases. Residents had some influence on

### 25th October 1979

The municipality provides 1 million Gulden to build a clubhouse, a community centre and library at the Visserijplein. The community centre is already designed and ready to be built in May 1980. The library has to be added to the plan. Interestingly, there is now also money to renew parts of the neighbourhood. (Het vrije volk: democratisch-socialistisch dagblad editorial, 1979).

### September 1980

Presentation of the design in combination with the neighbourhood park.

### 28th May 1983

Finally, the community centre Pier 80 opens partly. The sports hall cannot be used yet, since the government doubts to pay the higher rent. This is also the case for some other services. Even more interesting, a more expensive plan for the community centre was first denied by the municipality. (Het vrije volk: democratisch-socialistisch dagblad editorial, 1983a).



**Figure 5.2.** The special kite ceiling in the sports hall. (Bulthuis, 1986, 53).

the functions. The same goes for the multifunctional hall. In the end, the Pier 80 got the following functions (Bouwcommissie Wijkgebouw Visserijplein, 1980. Stadsarchief Rotterdam):

- The neighbourhood shop
- School doctor service
- Social work organization
- Council workspace
- Library



- Open meetingspace
- Meeting and activity spaces
- Creative space
- Darkroom
- A multi-functional hall, for sports, plays, meetings and festivities.
- Adjacent is the football club, being one architectural ensemble with the community centre.

### 5.3 Analysis of the floorplans design

The functions are integrated in the floorplan with a very different strategy than Bister used in De Klimmende Bever and De Larenkamp. Instead of an open central space, Pier 80 has a core, where smaller rooms are located on the East and Western parts of the building. In figure 5.3 this is shown. A consequence of this rigid floorplan is harder to modify than the open floorplan of De Klimmende Bever. However, this is also a consequence of one of the main goals of the floorplan design. This goal is giving every function its own space. In addition, the spaces are catered towards the needs of the neighbourhood. This is also true for the positioning of the building. Entrances and



**Figure 5.3.** Floorplan analysis of the spaces with functions of Pier 80. Schravessande designed a core (red) and on the sides the library and multi-functional spaces (blue). (Architectencoöperatie Gouda, 1981. Stadsarchief Rotterdam).

functions match the location of surrounding functions. The site plan in figure 5.4 shows how the building is slightly rotated. The entrances connect to the adjacent streets. The building is also oriented to provide the best angle for the solar panels, although this might be a coincidence. The library, located on the North-West side of the building, opens to the Park. The facade here is more open so the library is visible from the outside. On the South facade it connects to the Visserijplein, a square where the market takes its place, shown in figure 5.5. The building is also oriented to provide the best angle for the solar panels, although this might be a coincidence.

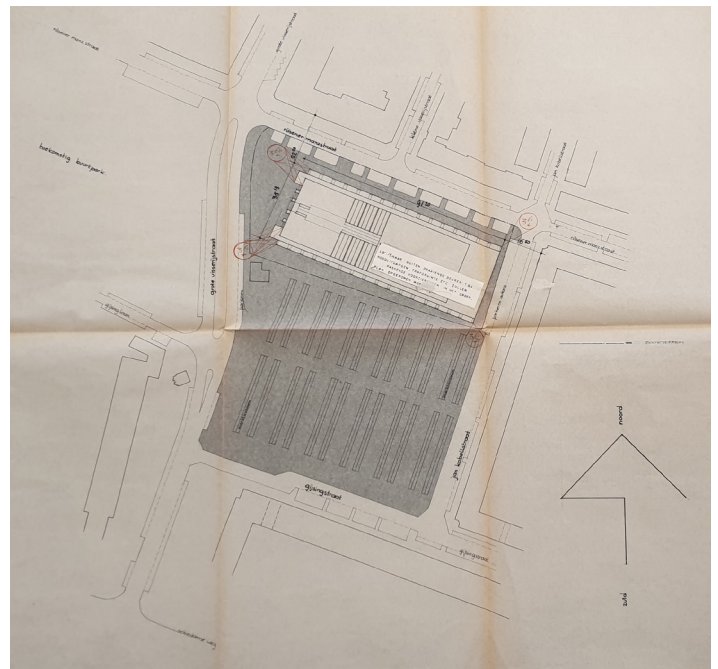
#### 5.4 Analysis of the aesthetics

In contrast to De Klimmende Bever and De Larenkamp, the building is designed to fit in its specific environment. The building is much more sober and not in the Modernist style. For example the small roofs on the South facade as seen in figure 5.5 are created so the building fits in with the market. On the other side, the scale of the roof is bigger, to match the surroundings. The football club is also integrated in the facades to make sure the ensemble looks like one piece. (Bulthuis, 1986). As discussed, the kite ceiling is an important aspect in the interior design.

#### 5.5 Participation in the design

The residents of Bospolder-Tussendijken have been involved in the development process from the moment they asked for a community centre. The active attitude was an important factor in this process. Once the original design for the building was turned down by the municipality, an architect who is also a resident stepped in. The residents and the architect themselves provided the design to the municipality. This is immediately visible in the design. The facades respond to the environment, taking influence from the local architecture. The indirect participation is very much visible in the aesthetics. This is also apparent in the floorplan design. The different functions are located to the corresponding functions in the surroundings. Next to this, the residents convinced the municipality to provide budget for certain functions, like the library and the sportshall.

There are multiple types of participation



**Figure 5.4.** Situation plan of Pier 80. (Architectencoöperatie Gouda, 1981. Stadsarchief Rotterdam).



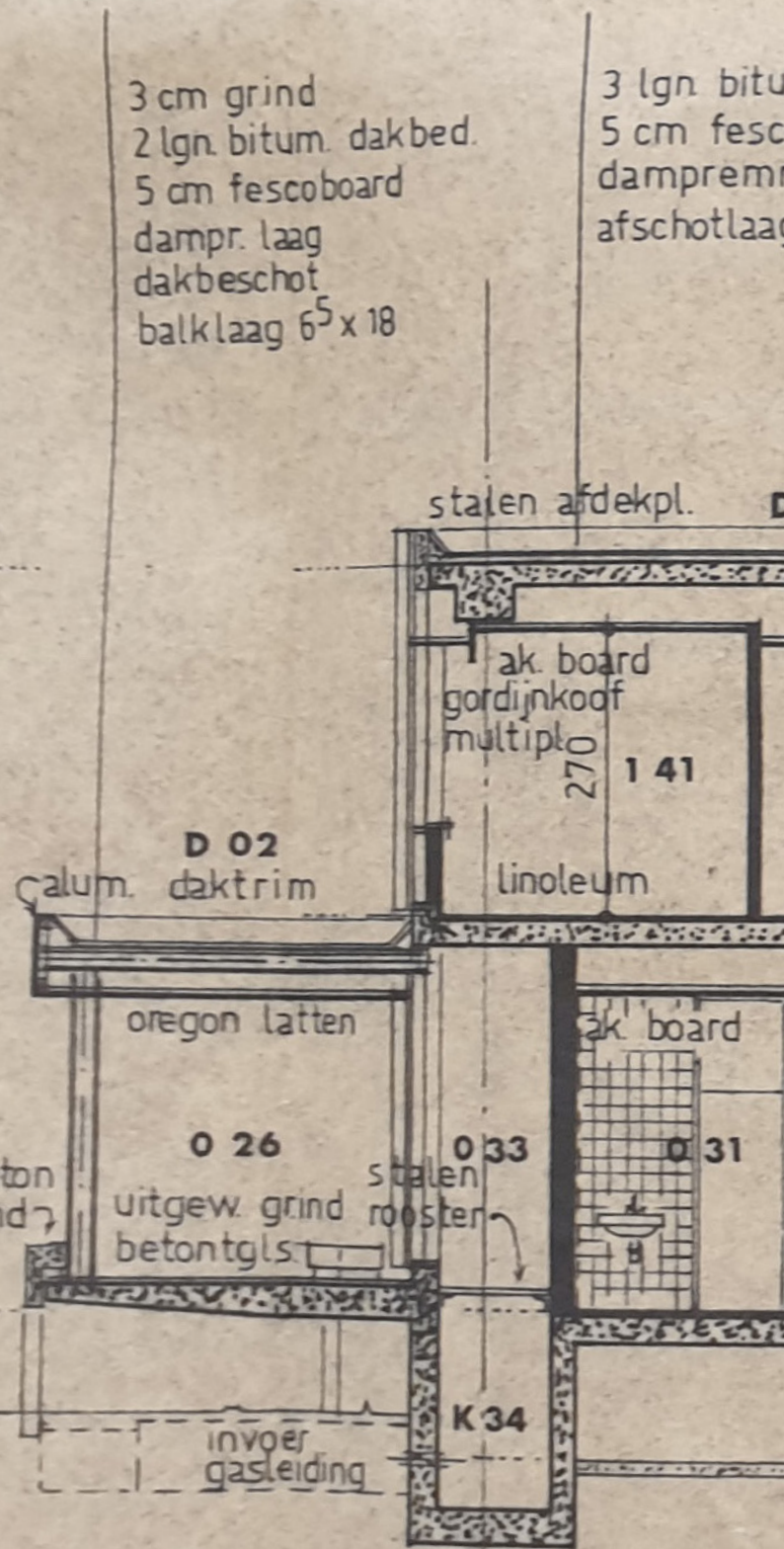
**Figure 5.5.** Pier 80, South facade connected to the square. (Bulthuis, 1986).

noticeable in this project. First of all, there is indirect participation as mentioned above. This is in the type of regionalism. Secondly, there is a large influence by direct participation. Through informal and formal conversation the design was made. The participation types that would match in this project would be questionnaire, where conversations with the municipality play a big role. Another type would be dialogue. Considering the architect is a resident in the neighbourhood she was closely related to the user.



## **5.6 Conclusion**

Unlike De Klimmende Bever and De Larenkamp, the design process of Pier 80 showed a lot more user participation. The residents had a lot of influence on the plans for the community center. This includes its functions and indirectly its aesthetics. The kind of functions were determined by the residents, through the municipality. This was not without setbacks, with the main problem being budget cuts and a lack of communication from the municipality. The facades are connected to the neighbourhood as a consequence of indirect participation. The place specific design and the relation between the architect and the neighbourhood, the design was approached very differently compared to the open floorplan idea and gave every function its own space.



## 6. Conclusion & Discussion

## 6.1 Summary

This thesis focusses on the influence of user participation in architecture, with a main focus on community centres in Rotterdam. It was found that during the 1960s the role of the architect started to change. A movement, first started by architect De Carlo was taking shape. Instead of the architect as dictator in the design process, the importance of user participation for a good design was deemed important by this group of architects.

In the Netherlands a similar trend was appearing. The Dapperbuurt in Amsterdam was one of the first neighbourhoods in the 1970s to be designed in cooperation with the residents. Meanwhile, the municipalities shifted their focus from growth and scaling to improving the city. The neighbourhood idea, supported by architects like Jan Gehl, proved an important goal in the design postwar neighbourhoods. The idea for the community centre was also important for urban renewal. Frustration in prewar neighbourhoods was growing because of a lack of renewal. To shift power more to the citizens, the municipality of Rotterdam started to decentralize.

By three case studies, De Klimmende Bever, De Larenkamp and Pier 80, the influence of user participation in the design process was researched. The first of the two community centres being developed in the early 1970s from a more top-down approach. Pier 80 however, was designed with closer cooperation with the residents.

## 6.2 Conclusion

The main goal of the research was to see how user participation influences the design of community centres. With the theoretical framework from De Carlo and the context in Rotterdam and the Netherlands as tools, research was done on three case studies. Two of which are almost identical.

The case studies showed that a close relationship between the architect and the user gives a more place specific design, catered more towards the user. This was the case for Pier 80. Here indirect and direct user participation played a major role. However, when the architect mainly takes his own experience and emotion, a more general

design can be found. Albeit adjustable in floorplan. This was the the matter with De Klimmende Bever and De Larenkamp. There was almost no indirect participation through regionalism.

Three main aspects were researched: functions, floorplans and aesthetics. The study shows that the residents have the most direct influence on the kind of functions in the community centres. The floorplans depend mainly on the design approach by the architect. This also goes for the aesthetics. Although this can be improved by close cooperation with residents and knowledge of local architecture and heritage.

## 6.3 Discussion

This thesis discusses the background on user participation and by three case studies researches the influence of user participation on the design. One thing that could be more interesting to do more research on would be to see if there are actual sketches of the conversations between the architects and the user. Documents show that there were conversations and meetings between user and architect. If more sketches are available, a similar approach could be done as is done in the research on the Dapperbuurt in Amsterdam (Albers, 2021).

Another interesting subject would be to create a system to show the scales of user participation more clear. Although the design process with user participation is quite complex.

The relation between user and architect is ever changing (Oostenbrug, 1980) and it still is changing, now more than ever. It is interesting to see how our role, as designers, will change in the future.



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