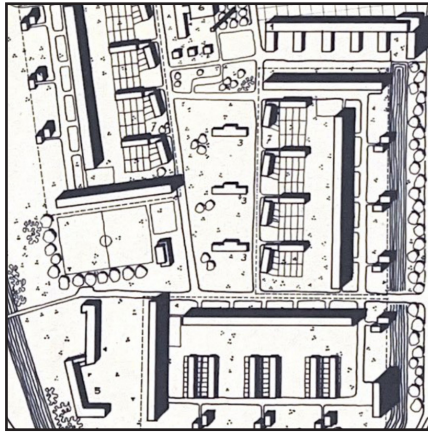


Reflection Report



The transience of society:

Through the lens of a post-war
neighbourhood in The Netherlands

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14 May 2024

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Through the lens of a post-war neighbourhood in
The Netherlands

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It is only natural for me to begin this reflection with immense gratitude to my tutors Robbert Guis, Stephan Verkaujlen and Alejandro Campos, who have all had a big impact on the outcome of this research. This studio has by far, in my many years of architecture education, stood out as the most comprehensive, providing valuable feedback at every step of the way. A special mention for Lidewij Tummers is must, who went out of her way to show me with great enthusiasm, her valuable archives, without which much of the information would have remained undiscovered. Finally a sincere thanks to Victor Loop and Aaltje Smit, 2 wonderful new friends I made this year who were the best team mates to have worked with throughout this project, their kind friendship and their patience in walking me through many hurdles that stemmed from a language and cultural barrier as an international student.

The graduation studio 'Ecologies of inclusion' created a well balanced framework between the tangible constructed architecture and the nuances of society that profoundly impact this physical form. The studio encouraged me to look at housing challenges that Netherlands faces, from 2 diametrically opposite viewpoints- first that of nature, landscape and the water systems of Midden Delfland and secondly, the new and ever evolving society which demands affordable housing for a wide array lifestyles in this diverse country.

The analysis of Midden delfland, its history, its current challenges and future plans for the landscape by the Redesign Deltas Project, provided a strong understanding of the water systems of the netherlands, and the pressure that it faces due to large scale construction projects. While we recognize the need to preserve the pristine landscapes of the country and reduce the widespread pumping of water from the polders, there is a parallel and paramount challenge that the country faces- that of the housing crisis. What emerged through background and historical research as the most sustainable way to tackle both these challenges was the densification of existing neighbourhoods that flank Midden Delfland, particularly, post-war neighbourhoods.

The post-war building stock, reminiscent of one of the most significant periods in the housing sector, have for many decades been the victims of untimely demolitions. How can the new developments that aim to replace these, promise to serve a better purpose than their predecessors?

Through literature study, historic case studies and site analysis, it brought forward the need to think of housing developments in a new light, as not just standardised units to tick off on a tender report, but as the crucial nodes of society and a happy community. Low-rise high-density developments in the past have proven to be some of the most successful and long surviving housing developments across the world. Such a planning strategy creates intimacy in the neighbourhood, while allowing for densification, unlike the widespread high-rise typology.

A positive synergy between architecture, nature and society becomes vital to resident's satisfaction as well as to a sustainable way of building. The hierarchical use of spaces, from the private to the urban collective, while defining one's own thresholds, grants residents the freedom of choice in the way they wish to live. This research forms the backbone of the planning strategy for the design development of my project, which pays very close attention to the developments of a series of 'in-between' spaces with varying degrees of privacy. Individual units are each designed to have a private open space which in turn opens to a parochial neighbourhood courtyard. By virtue of its modular grid construction, individual houses can extend their homes on the upper storeys, combine with multiple units on the ground of upper floors, and even shrink their houses to only ground storey. These configurations cater to the needs of a great diversity of residents- singles, couples, families, the elderly or multigenerational families. The living area starts from 30 sqm units which can grow upto 250 sqm by combining 2 units or even higher areas based on number of units combined. A simple timber frame construction with modular wall components makes it possible for residents to carry out

future extensions and changes to their homes without the need for professional assistance. The aim behind such a planning strategy is to create a neighbourhood that fosters relationships amongst the people you live in close proximity to, unlike the stranger living across from you in the sterile corridors of a highrise development. Communal open spaces allow for chance interactions, organised events, safe spaces for children to play and even economic opportunities for residents to hold workshops, monetize their hobbies and much more. The degrees of privacy further ensure that while the general public is allowed to be a part of the neighbourhood, they are restricted to the more 'public' corridor of the development.

This development strategy, not only creates a lively new neighbourhood, but also situates itself within the unutilized land of the existing post-war neighbourhood of Westwijk, Vlaardingen, enriching the lived experience of other residents. By virtue of its repetitive construction grid, the development can be as small as a cluster of 4 homes, or grow to much larger numbers, spreading like an amoebic development, in the crevices of existing neighbourhoods. A proposal to integrate the existing neighbourhood with the new development, enliven the immediate surrounding of a post-war building while hosting an array of community functions and small studio apartments on its previously unused ground floor space.

The study of post war buildings led not only to find spatial solutions, but also innovation in material sustainability.. The Dura-coignet buildings, which are a large part of Westwijk, hold the potential to provide a large stock of material for new constructions. The modular system construction of these buildings sowed the seed for a possibility of disassembly of the individual components of the building, and be used in a new capacity. Liddewij Tummers, with her office Tussen Ruimtje in 2007 experimented with this possibility to re-use the Dura-Coignet panels and create a folly for an exposition in Heijplaat. As an experiment for architectural application of this possibility, I propose

the use of these structurally stable solid concrete panels to form the foundation walls for the project, and allow the new construction to be built entirely free of new concrete. While it was beyond the scope of this project, by scientifically testing the strength of these panels, it may be determined whether or not they can be used to make entire structural components for new constructions. If this possibility is explored, the colossal volume of material that can be recovered from the demolished post-war buildings can significantly reduce the carbon footprint of several decades of building construction.

Through a combination of thorough research-based solutions and some experimental approaches, this low rise, medium density housing proposal in Westwijk, Vlaardingen hopes to tackle some of the shortcomings that the neighbourhood currently faces. This development, while being of a noticeably different design language, blends into the neighbourhood with ease by virtue of its open space planning. It also creates a poetic language of the clash of 'old' and 'new' with its material language, where the harsh concrete of the old post-war building is seen standing in a radically different context.

As an international student, this graduation year has significantly broadened my understanding of the Dutch approaches to construction, their ways of working, and learning. Starting as a stranger in the first quarter to what exactly a 'boezem' is, to now learning the intricacies of how the Netherlands has managed its water and land for centuries has been truly fascinating. With this particular project I've gained invaluable knowledge of the rich history of the post war reconstruction period, revolutionary technologies and works of some of the most influential architects of the 20th century. I trust that through the discoveries of this research and continued efforts in this field, the housing industry's future will be secure, inclusive, affordable, and, above all, a source of joy for everyone residing within it.