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COMMON GROUND



THE HOUSING MARKET

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The housing market in Amsterdam represents the backbone of the country's socialist agenda. Generic subsidies and income-based subsidies are provided by the government, along with widespread rent controls and assistance programs. Although this socialist housing is provided by some new construction, the majority of these projects derived from existing private companies that were overtaken by the government and transformed into non-profit housing corporations. A culture of social activism, including a popular squatting movement, has aggressively responded to housing shortages since the 1980's. This activism has brought about great change; today rents are set freely by the landlord only within a certain range, and 22% of all households in Amsterdam receive some sort of rent assistance from the government. (City of Amsterdam)

ownership support two conclusions; that the social housing provided by the government is both accessible and affordable, and that the cost of home ownership is unreachable for the majority of Amsterdammers. (City of Amsterdam)

Owner-occupied units in Amsterdam are rare, consisting of between 8 and 25 percent of the housing market. Higher rates of home ownership exist in newer neighborhoods. This dearth of home



NEIGHBORHOOD	SURINAMESE	ANTILLEAN	TOTAL ETHNIC		POPULATION
			TURKISH	MOROCCON	
Binnenstad	2981	746	676	1331	18.40%
Westpoort		6			12.50%
Westerpark	2919	430	1046	3103	36.20%
Oud-west	1711	341	856	1599	25.90%
Zeeburg	4523	494	3050	4968	48.90%
Bos en Iommer	2244	292	4934	6595	57.60%
De baarsjes	2475	337	3376	4091	42.30%
Amsterdam-noord	7451	1044	3843	5591	31.90%
Guezenveld/slotermeer	3179	390	5060	7137	50.10%
Osdorp	3426	430	3148	5509	39.20%
Slotervaart/overtoomse veld	3760	400	2837	5643	39.80%
Zuidoost	26421	5498	863	1342	62.90%
Oost/watergraafsmeer	5238	562	2968	5314	35.90%
Amsterdam oud-zuid	3811	735	1918	3751	23.50%
Zuideramstel	1735	333	493	1053	17.60%
Amsterdam Total	71941	12033	35074	57093	36.70%

The growth of the Dutch economy in the 1950's led to labor shortages in the industrial sectors. Temporary guest workers were encouraged to emigrate, and Amsterdam's ethnic population swelled. In 1947, 104,000 foreigners lived in the Netherlands (almost all of European descent) comprising of 1.1 percent of the population. Ethnic groups came from Suriname and other Dutch colonies, in addition to

standard asylum seekers and refugees. Major cultural groups include Yugoslavia, USSR, Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Ghana, Turkey and Morocco. By 1970, 235,000 immigrants lived in the Netherlands. As can be expected, many of these emigrants worked to get their family members to join them, and neighborhoods gained new ethnic diversity according to these changes. Cer-

tain neighborhoods gained a majority of a single ethnic group; Ghana residents, for instance, are primarily in the City-district of Zuidoost. In 2001, the Netherlands had a total of 15,987,075 immigrants, and Amsterdam was home to nearly half that number, with 734,540 residents. (City of Amsterdam)



MANIFESTO

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ACTIVE CITIZENS MAKE HEALTHY CITIES on the development of successful cities

In this age of swanky architecture and slick new technologies, in the midst of relentless globalization and the reckless speed of new growth, the city dweller has been relegated to the periphery of urban development concerns. While cities provide a framework for human interaction, the quality of this experience is wholly dependent upon the social texture housed within. Strong communities provide the foundation of a functional city; good citizens build strong cities.

The characteristics of a healthy city can be linked directly to active residents. A vibrant social texture, as well as a sense of civic identity and cultural distinction stem from community involvement, rather than constructs of the built environment. Cities that develop over time and in relation to the needs of the community reflect the values of that population. This shared civic identity sustains communities with a camaraderie rooted in

history, engagement and interaction. In cities where public participation is integrated, livable spaces naturally result. These towns model a concern for environmental and economic sustainability, a genuine character and a meaningful connection to the landscape. Cities created with input from residents tend to feature open public spaces, pedestrian friendly corridors, community-based supports, and solutions that really work. Residents know their needs, and in contributing to design, create vibrant cityscapes.

When the client dictates the design and building process, solutions develop organically. Although less efficient than a standardized approach, this method of development responds directly to the needs of the residents. These unplanned cities have a form driven out of necessity, and therefore address the site-specific issues of geography, climate, circulation patterns, infrastructure and cultural norms.

To attempt to sanctify one single set

of parameters for urban development would be to deny the importance of community involvement in cities today. To argue that one way is the right way, or to believe that the vocabulary of a city is not entrenched in site specific nuances, is akin to settling for Le Corbusier's banal towers. Instead, the specific language and expectations for city building must be derived from the people who will reside there.

Only the residents of a particular city will know it well enough to devise solutions that are both pertinent and plausible. Their familiarity with their location, as well as with their own needs, insures a higher degree of relevance. Because of the diversity of both people and place, each city must respond to a specific set of unique conditions.

However, some general guidelines serve to reestablish the city dweller as an important factor for any new development.

1. Activate all citizens. Integrate the needs and expectations of residents in planned developments, empower them to participate in the design process.
2. Initiate site-specific designs. Respond to geographic and climatic conditions.
3. Design changes must be culture-driven. A city should serve to bolster existing cultural norms, rather than attempt to re-make social patterns.
4. Emphasize healthy products and healthy solutions. Natural materials and processes will invigorate the public sphere.
5. Improve the environment; a non-toxic city will provide a place for people to thrive. New development must strive to make the existing conditions good, rather than just less bad.
6. City planning must take into consideration a variety of different user groups, and impart some responsibility in making decisions. This will ensure the support of the public while lending a sense of legitimacy to the design process.

Community building must occur at a neighborhood scale. The spatial segregation that has recently emerged in many of Amsterdam's neighborhoods can be directly linked to a homogeneous housing structure fueled by the lack of interaction between different groups. Under the socialized housing system in the Netherlands, pockets of ethnic minorities have developed in localized areas, creating unique micro-cultural centers. These clusters of distinct minority groups incite increasing racism and cultural clashes. Minorities have trouble integrating into Dutch society, and because of the stigma attached to these groups, the Dutch are becoming ever-insulated. Mixed-income, multi-cultural opportunities for positive engagement must be established within these housing developments to alleviate this problem.

One way to counter racism is to bring different groups together over a common cause. It is not enough to have people inte-

grate simply by living and working together in the same city; they need to join forces to work and play together. This interaction allows individuals to learn about each other from each other, in order to unravel the misconceptions and negative stigma attached to each population. A physical design for mediating these social ills must incorporate the following intangible effects:

1. More interactions.
2. Regular, even daily, interactions.
3. A common cause, or shared set of goals.
4. Clear acceptance and preservation of ethnic individuality: this should not be an exercise in changing cultural identity.
5. Celebration of diversity.
6. Engaged groups of a variety of ages and incomes.

Designing the built environment to accommodate these outcomes involves assessing potential places for common ground at a neighborhood scale. By focusing

on the shared outdoor realm, equal access and legibility can be highlighted. It is important to develop a variety of flexible solutions, formatted in a kind of toolbox, to adapt to the wide variety of outdoor spaces.

The goal for these spaces is to reclaim the public sphere by inserting community building potential in the leftover space of the public realm. These developments can be a series of parks, gardens, squares or simply benches. These open outdoor offer areas where children can play, while other people can practice tai chi, play chess, or garden. They become zippers between distinct neighborhoods, bridging already established striations in social, class and cultural spheres.

Because these insertions are formed with leftover land parcels, sidewalks, and parking areas, they must be flexible enough to accommodate a wide variety of types of spaces. These reclaimed spaces can be distilled into common con-

ditions, and designed for each of those possible cases. For instance, several will be formed in the medians where canals once existed. Many of the streets don't have a lot of extra space, so the emphasis needs to be on creating lots of different slivers that can be inserted in various places easily, like building blocks. Although large scale parks already exist; these don't provide the ripe opportunities for human interaction that can be found in smaller spaces.

These outdoor places must be non-commercial, so that they are open to all classes and have a right to exist, regardless of the fluctuations of the market economy. These spaces will be outside, in the public realm, but may feature covered areas for an indoor/outdoor experience. They will be maintained throughout the year by the City of Amsterdam, and will be geared for year-round consistent use.

Conditions that would allow these insertions are outlined as follows.

POCKET PARK

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The pocket park can be inserted into small parcels of leftover land, including parking areas and the space between buildings and the street. Playground elements can be designed so that they can be added to the parks to fill available space. For instance, one area might be large enough only for a set of bars, while another might feature a skateboard park, set of bars, jungle gym, and swing set.



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MEDIAN STRIP

Canals that once existed in Amsterdam and have since been filled in have left their memory upon the civic outdoor realm. These canals have typically become medians, flanked by streets on each side, and featuring a green grass anti-environment. They offer quick, open, available land with good access and visibility to the public. Because they are flanked by streets, it might not make sense to put playground elements here. Instead, these strips provide ideal space for community gardens.



THE DOG PARK

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Amsterdammers with dogs need large-scale available parks with enclosures so that their pet can run free. Using existing large-scale public lands, dog parks will be fenced in to provide this service.

The enclosure required by the dog park will inherently pull dog owners into a social environment. While their pets run free, owners can connect and socialize.



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THE SQUARE

Squares have not been traditional gathering places for Amsterdammers, and certainly don't need to be carved out of the existing city structure. However, tiny squares can be inserted into surface parking areas, or in the wide medians that once housed canals. While this project generally avoids consumer related public space, it is recognizes that café overflow, and open markets do lend important qualities to the outdoor fabric of the city.

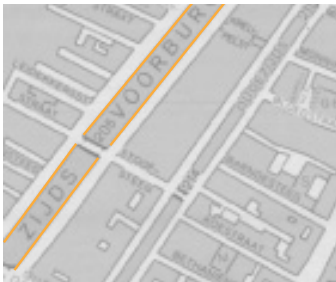


THE CANAL SIDE

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Along the canals, Amsterdam has a rich shoreline that has mostly been developed. However, the forgotten swaths of canal front land will be reclaimed, with tiny pocket parks, benches, or other community uses. Because these canals are such an important part of Amsterdam's civic character, they must be exploited for public use.



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FLOATING DECKS



Amsterdam's canals are home to houseboats and traffic, as well as a host of natural creatures. To take advantage of this unique available open space, and to encourage the public to make a connection with these places, floating public spaces will be incorporated into canals. These stationary boats can be pulled into place and anchored, but remain inherently mobile. Thus, they can be placed according to the changing needs of the public and the varied land use. These boats might feature a top deck for the public realm, while the lower portion can be a nighttime sleeping space for the homeless. Transparency and openness will be key features of these floating "decks."



THE SIDEWALK

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Benches will be placed along sidewalks where space allows, and the conditions of the location merit seating. These benches can be placed to encourage interaction by their placement, or they can simply provide a comfortable stopping point on the street where neighbors can meet. Covered benches might provide a respite from foul weather.



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BIKE RACKS

Bikes are popular in Amsterdam, and a great deal of the public civic space has been established as bicycle parking. While many of these parking areas have emerged from direct user needs, many of them have not been thoughtfully planned. By incorporating a more efficient system of vertical bike parking against the unused sides of buildings, the original bike rack space- especially primo public space- can be allotted to more important functions.

