

# Rethinking the Absorption Capacity of Urban Space

## How to better organise migration in the city?

This thesis project examined theories and practices of migration in Dutch urban space and observed that two tensions can be recognised. First, there is the tension between the dynamic nature of migration – migration as ongoing flow - and the rigid institutional and governmental practices offered as solutions. Second, a tension can be noticed between migration as a constant phenomenon in the current city, and the temporary, quick-fix housing options developed for migrants. The diverse flows of migrants to the Netherlands are primarily taken as temporary housing problems. This leads to exclusion and missed opportunities and results in a monoculture that can be considered negative for urban space. Consequently, if refugees, asylum-seekers and other migrants have to be really integrated in our cities and societies a more diverse, long-term, urban approach is needed. In other words, migration is a complex and pressing *spatial* urban challenge.

The former prison complex *Bijlmerbajes* and the surrounding WPM area have been taken as a case study to investigate practices and elaborate guidelines for an alternative development strategy that can build up a diverse, porous and resilient urban space. This strategy consists of orchestrated small-scale investments, grassroots initiatives and diverse programmes based on a governmental investment in public space as an organised and designed grid related to three scales.

The strategy leads to in an imaginary, future scenario for the WPM area, inspired by the 1970s ideal of the Bijlmerbajes. The project proposes to (re)open the former prison complex and to (re)create a *Hotel City*, where newcomers and temporary inhabitants can be received and prepare their integration into society. The ‘empty’ area next to the former prison complex is transformed into an *experimental area* with a lot of freedom where companies, institutions and individuals can rent, lease and develop space. The two zones (prison and empty area) are connected by a **grid structure of public space** and can together function as free-zone for experiments with new social and economic policies and practices. In this way, a place is carved out where newcomers, temporary inhabitants and more permanent residents of Amsterdam can together and actively become part of urban space. The intervention of a grid public space connects temporary stay and use with more long-term developments and permanent structures.

On the one hand, this thesis can be seen as a visionary project, inspired by the fundamental ideal of the Bijlmerbajes aiming to foster integration and transition of migrants into city and society and vice versa. On the other hand, the proposal offers a series of *realistic* and *pragmatic* design ideas and suggestions based on existing European policies, that can be used as a quick-start for debate to reconsider migration in today’s political atmosphere.

The most important insight of this research and design project is the idea that *temporariness* and *permanence* need an organised public space to manage demographic fluctuations and change. The three-scaled grid provides a flexible structure. Even though people come and go and might only stay for a short time, they need to be accommodated in a complex and diverse public space, which as such contributes to the city as a whole and long term creation. Thus, *temporariness* presupposes stability, and the other way around.