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## Circle of Embrace

### A Community Repairing Through Green Development

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ABSTRACT BOOK

# **ACSA 113<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting: Repair**

March 20-22, 2025 | New Orleans, LA

## **ABSTRACT BOOK**

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## **Circle of Embrace: A Community Repairing Through Green Development**

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Kring Brasa—the “Circle of Embrace” in Surinamese—is a non-profit community organization, formed by residents of Amsterdam’s Bijlmermeer neighborhood, in the Southeast side of the city. Their purpose is to repair—through a focus on green development and green education—the urban wound created in their neighborhood by Highway A9. A9 was part of the modernist urban plan for Bijlmermeer, designed to connect effortlessly the residents of the area to their offices in the center of the city. Despite the visionary intentions behind the masterplan implemented in the early 70s (Fig. 1), Bijlmermeer never attracted the middle-class residents it was intended for. The high cost of the apartments and the lack of public facilities led instead to big vacancies. The municipality ended up housing Surinamese immigrants in the neighborhood, ultimately creating a ghetto. To repair some of the social inequalities that ensued, Kring Brasa has been working towards the creation of the Brasa Park on top of the A9 Highway—part of which has now been moved underground (Fig 2). The Brasa Park is meant to connect Bijlmermeer with the adjacent neighborhoods, giving residents access to a shared green area which they can develop according to their cultural and social needs. Our recent master level course, “Designing with Others,” collaborated with the community towards this future. The students designed and built a light green structure in the Brasa Park, to serve as the meeting point for the community. The course was designed in close collaboration with the community, over multiple meetings, in which hopes, aspirations, and concerns were exchanged. Recent community-design scholarship (A. Becker, et al., 2020; B. Mackay-Lyons, 2014; J. Simonsen & T. Robertson, 2013) offered an overall theoretical framework. The community was actively involved in the weekly studio meetings, following the students who investigated the area and developed their personal designs (Fig. 3). The midterms took place at a local museum, where everyone from the neighborhood was invited to see the students’ proposals and express their preferences through voting (Fig. 4). Thereupon the students worked collectively to develop one common design from the scale of the site plan to that of 1:1 built elements. For the finals, the students along with the locals, built the light-structure on Brasa Park (Fig. 5). In the process they experienced first-hand how community leaders, inhabitants, builders, local actors and local authorities are responsible for co-creating the built environment—a premise on which the course is built. This paper will begin with a presentation of Bijlmermeer’s urban history (interconnected with its international, cultural, and sociopolitical aspects), will focus on the Brasa Park and its engaged community, and will showcase the process—with its successes and shortcomings—of designing and building the light structure. Grounding the conversation on community design discourse, the paper will draw conclusions on the capacity of architectural education to prepare socially responsible designers, capable of developing and implementing tactics of care and repair in their engagement with others, addressing harsh urban realities, like segregation, in our often, broken world.