



All for one, or one for all?

Who wants densification and what does it mean for the existing condition?

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Architecture & Dwelling: Dutch Housing

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Relationship between Graduation Lab and Subject

Theme :

How to increase the density of an existing neighbourhood to provide at least twice as many dwelling units as currently exist?

The concern of the Dutch Housing graduation studio is investigating how the design of contemporary dwellings responds to the current and future needs of residents and the city. In the case of this specific project, a densification and transformation project for the Kattenburg Estate in Amsterdam, a more potent question to ask is – if the density of the existing neighbourhood is doubled who will the new residents be? Beyond numbers how will the new residents integrate with the old inhabitants, and how will they all live side-by-side despite their varying financial standings?

Relationship between Research and Design

The first and second quarters were predominantly focused on research. This consisted of two parts, firstly site research to comprehend the Kattenburg site in Amsterdam, and secondly the thematic research, which investigated the issues associated with the renewal of council housing.

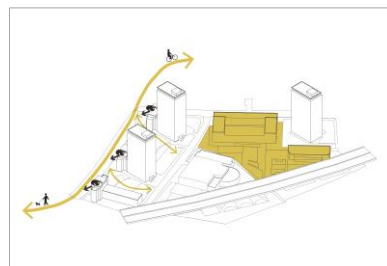


Figure 2: Connections in Warwick

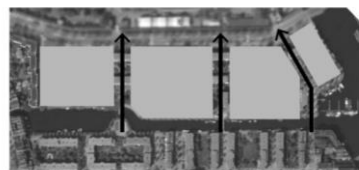


Figure 1: Connections in Kattenburg

The Thematic research of the graduation project focused on the transformation of Trelick tower, in the United Kingdom. In this research we found that the ambiguous nature of the articulation between private, collective and public space, combined with the isolating tendency of housing estates and High modernist/Brutalist architecture in part accommodated anti-social behaviour and crime. The concentration of affordable dwellings within estates, along with their easily-identifiable architecture resulted in residents feeling highlighted, isolated and confined to their estates because of their lesser financial standings. Efforts through transformation of such estates in the United Kingdom aimed to amend the definition of these spaces, either by focusing upon the entrance sequence to the building or, in the case of the comparative study, the Warwick Estate, redefining and activating public space by introducing additional dwellings. From these studies it became clear that adding new dwellings and new residents can justify a re-interrogation of circulation spaces within existing buildings, and the nature of the streetscapes and public spaces surrounding the existing condition, allowing these estates to once again reconnect with their surrounding contexts.

Through the masterplan phase these were key concerns, with the urban plan focusing on breaking down the isolating wall of dwellings along Kattenburgerstraat, allowing defined public routes across the site and restricting the pseudo-collective courtyard spaces to be truly collective residential streets.

Within the architectural proposal the spatial sequence that leads from the street to the dwelling has been reconsidered. In keeping with the findings from the thematic research entrance lobbies with additional storage, bike stores and refuse rooms have been added.

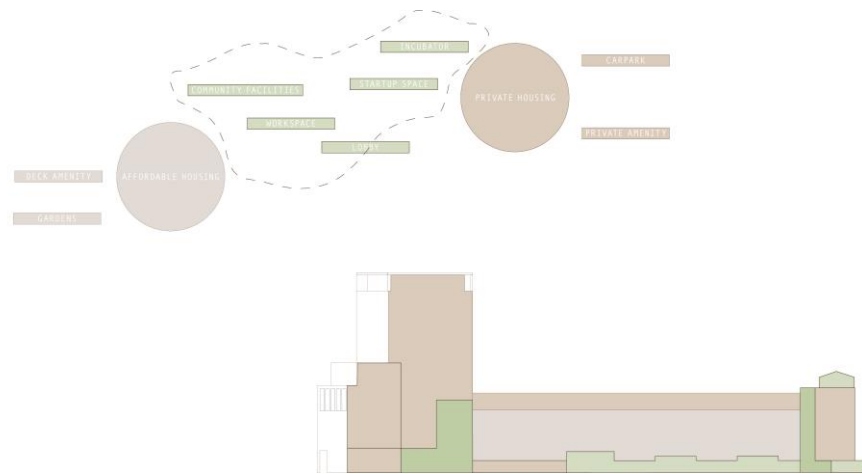


Figure 3: Opportunities for mutual benefit and interactions between residents within the design

Breaking down the barrier between affordable dwellings and market housing, whilst providing opportunities for residents in affordable housing to better their financial position was a key conclusion from the research report and as such has formed the backbone of the design proposal. The entire ground floor, which currently prevents any form of connection to the surrounding streets, has been transformed into a hybrid community and start-up centre, providing for low-income residents and more affluent and entrepreneurial individuals. The key aim of such spaces is to facilitate interaction between differing target groups, a clash, but one within a neutral setting where neither person feels intimidated of the other and indeed both can mutually benefit from knowing and conversing with each other.

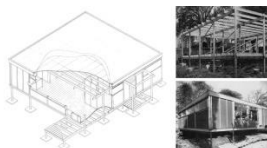


Figure 4: Walter Segal – Kit of parts

The efforts to densify the site may also facilitate and finance potential Ad-hoc improvements to existing dwellings in time by individual residents. The research report found that one of the barriers to successful regeneration was the complexity of ownership with individual residents owning their dwelling within a much larger building. In the first instance the mere retention of the existing dwellings ensures affordability, however in time it will be necessary for these dwellings to be adapted to meet changing needs. Within the design proposal this process of adaptation will be led by the individual resident, overseen by the land-trust whose guidance is determined during the design of the building. Such a model was first pioneered by Walter Segal, whose self-build houses were a system of lightweight timber frame constructions, which was cheap, fast, used dry construction techniques and crucially could be undertaken by unprofessional labour, the residents of the dwellings. Segal as the architect created a kit of options which residents could then choose from and construct their housing using Segal's components. In the case of this graduation project, the design suggestions range in severity from slightly altering internal partition walls, to full remodelling of the interior, with new more open facades and additional balcony spaces added to the front and rear of the units.

Relationship between the Methodical Line of Approach of the Graduation Lab

Within the chair of dwelling each project commences with the urban plan (1:10000), then building design (1:10) and finally detailing and materialisation (1:5). The emphasis is continuity on the quality of place that is being proposed and an interrogation of how desirable it really is to live in such an intended design. In many ways design decisions are informed by model making and reflections which predominantly occur at 1:100 and 1:20 scale, with decisions on issues such as structural bay widths, floor-to-floor heights and travel distances, along with internal and architectural atmospheric considerations influencing all scales of design.

The design process itself is informed by reflections upon the research reports undertaken in the first two quarters of the year. From the outset the ambition of the project has been to understand and develop a more sensitive approach to regeneration that integrates new, more affluent target groups onto the site whilst retaining existing residents and affordable dwellings. As such the research report investigating the transformation of Trellick Tower and the Warwick Estate in London showed how the notion of Post-war housing has become synonymous with poverty, deprivation and crime, irrespective of whether or not that is actually the case. From the transformation of these estates it became clear that beyond the mere provision of more dwellings the regeneration of Kattenburg should in some way overcome the stigmatisms associated with council housing, both in terms of reappraising its architecture and cultivating positive opportunities for residents and newcomers alike, both spatially and socially.

Relationship between the project and the wider social context.

The image shows a screenshot of the DutchNews.nl website. At the top, there is a banner for 'BEACON GLOBAL ADVISERS' and 'U.S. FATCA COMPLIANT INVESTMENTS' with a 'WEDNESDAY 25th May' date and a '19:00 - 21:00' time slot. The main header features the 'DutchNews.nl' logo, a weather icon showing 23°C, and the date 'Friday 06 May 2016'. Below the header is a navigation bar with categories like 'Home', 'Politics', 'Business', 'Society', 'Sport', 'Education', 'Health', 'Tech & Media', 'International', and 'Europe'. The main content area is dominated by an article titled 'Foreign investors eye up Dutch rental housing market' dated January 13, 2016. The article includes a photo of a modern apartment building and text stating that foreign investors, primarily American, British, and German, are likely to invest €3bn in Dutch rental properties this year. A 'Daily newsletter' sign-up box and a search bar are also visible on the right side of the page.

Figure 5: Affordability under treat (Jan 2016)

State-provided mass housing across the Western World is reaching the end of its useful life and is in need of investment to ensure the provision of affordable inner-city dwellings into the future. The political motivation for this has however waned substantially as societies move away from Welfare state provision to more neo-liberal, market-led models. Currently the Netherlands is forecast to attract substantial foreign investment into its housing market, the very impetus which has been responsible for the extensive gentrification and loss of affordability in cities such as London in the past. The core question is thus how to renew a declining council estate area despite the transition from a generous, welfare state model of provision to a neoliberal market and retain the existing residents and affordability of living in the city?

This graduation project, through the scenario of a community land trust and re-adaptation of existing buildings, reflects upon this socio-political condition and synthesises the multiple factors into a design proposal. As such it resonates beyond the site itself into a much larger discussion concerning urban renewal, gentrification and affordability

