

The Elevated Streets of Plan van Gool

In the north of Amsterdam, in the Buikslotermeer neighbourhood, is a residential complex called Plan van Gool, named after its architect, Frans van Gool (1922 – 2015). The building complex, also known as Het Breed, consists of 1138 apartments and was completed in 1972. The project consists of 11 residential blocks, each spanning five storeys, featuring a rhythmic and repetitive facade of concrete columns and glass. But the most eye-catching design feature is the elevated street, situated on the third floor of each identical housing block. These elevated streets not only serve as entrances to the apartments on the third floor but also provide access to the second and fourth floors via a spiral staircase. Between the residential blocks are 9 avio-bridges, tubelike covered walkways in bright colours, similar to the ones used in airports, to let passengers board planes. The avio-bridges connect multiple elevated streets, resulting in more than 2 kilometres of elevated street.



2 The elevated living street (2024)

When reading about Plan van Gool – for example in the Amsterdam Historical City Guide – always the social aspect 'so fitting of the optimistic sixties' is mentioned.¹ On the elevated street it is likely that you run into your neighbours, and going for a coffee is hardly an effort due to the avio-bridges. Furthermore there is the widely available common green space, surrounding the building, where one could meet others. It could be said that Plan van Gool is purposely designed to endorse social interactions and have an active sense of community.



1 Two building blocks connected by an avio-bridge. After renovation in 2013 the glass additions were added on the stairwell (2021)



3 The eleven orthogonal blocks, connected by 9 avio-bridges to create two strings of interconnected buildings (1966)

Yet in other literature, like Colenbrander's bibliography bout van Gool, these ideas about socialising the neighbourhood are rejected. Living in Plan van Gool is described as '*delightfully anonymous*.'² And residents even describe enjoying the privacy of the building blocks.³ The elevated streets are presented as a very social design application, yet people praise the anonymity of the project. This poses an interesting contradiction: What purpose does the elevated street fulfil, and how does it impact the sense of community within this neighbourhood? Therefore, this question serves as the starting point for this article: *How was Plan van Gool designed, in regards to the elevated street and the sense of community*?

The research consists of literature and archival research: they will be compared to each other to uncover the subtle nuances within this story. To get a comprehensive overview, not only the design itself is analysed, but also the circumstances that led up to the design competition for this project. Article reviews together with reference projects that served as inspiration – like the Spangen block in Rotterdam and Le Havre from Perret – provide architectural context. This article is structured in a roughly chronological order; starting with the design competition, followed by an explanation of the winning design and finished with the perception of the plan in the years after completion.

Tabula Rasa!

'I hereby confirm the commission to the architects J.B. Bakema, A.E. van Eyck and F.J. van Gool to design a plan for the indicated section of the Buikslotermeer expansion plan with an equal or greater number of dwellings than the intended 1450. The plan should be designed on the basis of your existing insights and/or ideas with regard to a present and a future way of living.' This was written by J.F.A Alozerij, director of municipal housing service of Amsterdam, and sent to three architecture firms in 1962.⁴ It marks the beginning of the housing project in Buikslotermeer. Van Gool, along with Bakema and Van Eyck, were invited to collaborate on a design project that offered him nearly unlimited creative freedom. He referred to it as 'Tabula rasa!', there were few constraints or conditions set.⁵ While there was a desire to keep things sensible, experimental housing designs were definitely encouraged. Even the total number of homes was subject to change: 'The specified number of 1450 cannot be reduced for economic reasons,' emphasised Alozerij.⁶ Despite this, only 1138 homes were eventually completed, further confirming the architects' freedom.

4 Jaap Bakema, 48 (1962)



5 Aldo van Eyck, 44 (1962)



6 Frans van Gool, 40 (1962)





7 299 identical sawtooth homes designed by Van Gool in the neighbourhood of Slotervaart, Amsterdam (1960)

Such an opportunity was quite something for the rather young Van Gool. He, along with Hein Stolle and Arnold Oyevaar, founded their architectural firm in Amsterdam in 1957. That same year, he applied for a four-year contract with the municipal housing authority, seeking a role in designing residences as part of the General Extension Plan of Amsterdam. At that time, the director of the municipal housing authority was J.F.A. Alozerij. Leveraging his experience, possibly gained from his work at the Lijnbaan, Van Gool successfully secured the position.⁷ Under this contract, he undertook several notable projects. He designed 165 homes adjacent to the Klein Dantzig allotment complex in Watergraafsmeer, as well as 299 identical sawtooth homes in Slotervaart. In addition to these, he contributed significantly to Osdorp with the design of five large gallery flats, comprising a total of 900 residences. Alozerij expressed satisfaction with Van Gool's work and promised to consider him for future projects upon the completion of his contract in 1959. True to his word, in 1962, Van Gool received a call from Alozerij, marking the beginning of another significant collaboration.⁸

The Lijnbaan

It wasn't the first time that these three architects had met each other. Aldo van Eyck and Jaap Bakema were prominents of the architects association De 8 en Opbouw, and Frans van Gool had worked at the office from Jo van den Broek, even before Bakema joined in to create Broek and Bakema. Bakema thus became Van Gool's superior in the 8 years he worked there.⁹ During those last years Van Gool worked on the design of the Lijnbaan, a major shopping street in Rotterdam, but it didn't go without any problems. 'The persistent rumour is that F.J. van Gool is the true inspiration behind Rotterdam's Lijnbaan project,' he later stated in 1980, as if Broek and Bakema wanted to keep him out of the spotlight.¹⁰ Moreover, Van Gool had many other conflicts with Bakema, like the design of the facade of the expedition street. On a stressful Saturday Van Gool created a neutral and calm facade, which Van den Broek seemed to like: 'You are right, your solution is the nicest.' But when the weekend passed Bakema's more outspoken and busy alternative was pussed through, and that is how it was built in the end.¹¹



8 The expedition street of the Lijnbaan, eventually the more busy and outspoken facade option from Bakema was realised (2008)



9 A perspective drawing of the Lijnbaan, all drawings and specifications of the Lijnbaan were created by the young Van Gool (1951)

In 1980 Van Gool denied the persistent rumours over authorship: 'I drew a lot on Lijnbaan, and I know I am very opinionated, but it is not that I would have copyright on Lijnbaan.'¹² But after the completion of the Lijnbaan in 1954, he was let go at the office of Broek and Bakema and that was it.¹³ Thus these men – Bakema and Van Gool in particular – had a pre-existing hierarchy, where Bakema was the more superior and powerful architect.

In Section Style of Thinking

In the decade that followed, Van Gool and Bakema went on to do their own thing. Van Gool went to start his own architecture office and Bakema designed the Hansaviertel Tower in Berlin, which would later become one of his inspirations for the housing project in Buikslotermeer. This tower, completed in 1960 in the Hansaviertel district, consists of 72 dwellings, and is built as a *split-level* design.¹⁴ The term split-level becomes apparent when looking at the tower in cross section; a tower is vertically split into two halves, where one of the halves is then moved upward by half a level.¹⁵

Two thirds of the apartments within the tower are designed as maisonettes, where residents can ascend or descend (half) a flight of stairs, functionally eliminating the need for a corridor on every floor. Corridors only appear every 2.5 floors, connecting to twelve apartments each,



10 The tower in section is split in half.



11 One part is moved up by half a story.



12 One corridor to access 3 apartments.

of which four are completely accessible without stairs.¹⁶ Broek en Bakema are praised for this complex solution by Harvard Academic Roger Sherwood, claiming that this 'is one of the most significant realisations of the late 1950s,' and stating that this wouldn't have been possible without their decade long 'planning in section style of thinking.' The reason for this overly complex, but acclaimed, method of arranging apartments becomes clear when we take the public-to-private hierarchy into consideration: 'Starting from the corridor, the door opens to a small hall and to the first flight of stairs. Any undesired viewing into the living area is blocked thanks to the stairs, thus increasing privacy. Then, from the living area onwards, the second flight of stairs leads to the bedrooms, the most intimate areas, all isolated and well protected from noise and sight.' 17

The clear delimitation between different parts of the house is also carried through to the corridors within the tower. When going up the stairs or elevator to one of the 7 main corridors in the tower, you arrive in a 4 metre high elevator lobby, considered by Broek en Bakema as a *square*. This square, similar to a square within an urban landscape, functions as a meeting place for the residents of the building. From here they can enter the 2,4 metre high corridor, or *city street*, on which all the front doors are located. Finally the corridor opens up into a 4 metre high logia, a public outside space that can be used by all



14 Isometric drawing of the three different apartments (1957)



15 The corridor from the Hansaviertel tower represents the urban fabric of a city: the elevator lobby is a square, the hall-way is a city street, and the balcony a public loggia.

residents of the corridor. The 7 loggias – just like the avio-bridges in Plan van Gool – are uniquely colour-coded so residents can easily recognize their part of the building. By playing with different ceiling heights and different functions, an otherwise mundane corridor is transformed into a hierarchical urban landscape where people can enjoy the space and meet their neighbours.¹⁸

13 The Hansaviertel tower, the public loggias are recognisable from afar by their red, yellow and blue banner (2018)



Three stubborn men

3 years after the completion of the Hansaviertel tower – and with a decade of experience with the split-level design – Bakema joined the other two architects to start with the design for the Buikslotermeer. In 1962 preliminary discussions were held, where Van Gool and Van Eyck came in with a blank slate, enjoying the privilege 'of not knowing anything just yet.' Bakema, on the other hand, arrived with dozens of square metres already designed, in his beloved split-level typology. By doing so he further affirmed his superior status as elder man in the room. But eventually he realised that the design had to be a collaborative effort among the three of them.

When the three men started to come up with ideas together, the idea of a central access to the dwelling became the main theme, and with it came Brinkman's Spangen block built in Rotterdam in 1922, as a main source of inspiration. 'In that example we, as three stubborn men, could find common ground' summarised Van Gool.¹⁹ Ironically enough their central inspiration was still a project Bakema was most comfortable with. Two years prior, in 1960, Bakema, along with Herman Hertzberger, had already written about the Spangen block in the architectural journal The Forum, where he praised the project.²⁰ Additionally the office of Michiel Brinkman was later acquired by Jo van den Broek, making the Spangen block part of Broek and Bakema's architectural heritage.

A Village within a City

The Spangen block, also known as the Justus van Effenblok, is a building complex with originally 264 working-class houses, designed by Michiel Brinkman in 1922. The homes are located on the edges of the building blocks, creating 3 enclosed public courtyards, where all front doors are located. From the ground floor you can enter a single story apartment with access to a private garden, and from a small stairway you can enter another single story apartment on the first floor with a balcony. Above the apartments are two story maisonettes with loggias, which are accessed by the most notable feature of the building complex: the elevated living street.

'The gallery is so wide that children play and a bakery cart can drive around there,'Bakema writes together with Herman Hertzberger in the Forum magazine.²¹ They claim the widened gallery – or living street as it was called - was quite an experiment at the time, as the project now features an intermediate zone between public and private. On this semi public living street people can meet others in a comfortable way, creating a connected community within this housing block. Furthermore is the grouping of various residential units responsible for the sense of community, claims Hertzberger. Different kinds of typologies are perfectly mixed together. Single story apartments on the ground floor can be for the elderly, the upper apartments can be for singles or couples, and the maisonettes are perfect for



16 The Spangen block, designed by Brinkman in 1922, with on the second floor the elevated living street, after renovation (2013)



17 A street vendor and children playing on the living street of the Spangen block, retrieved from Bakema's archive (ca. 1930)

families. This mixing of typologies, concludes Hertzberger, will create village-like communities within a big anonymous city like Rotterdam.

'It is to be hoped that many architecture students and sociologists will study Spangen residential centres before the beauty of the Netherlands is completely parcelled out,' continues Bakema. Ironically enough it is Bakema who later flat-out ignores a major design aspect of the Spangen block, and proposes a design where – against Hertzberger's ideals – all demographics are separated.

A Competition

However, soon after the brief agreement on the Spangen block, the three architects developed different ideas. Bakema was 'philosophically and conceptually' convinced that the plan should incorporate various heights: towers, long gallery blocks with maisonettes, patio homes, and so on. On the other hand, Van Gool argued that he had seen enough of that in Amsterdam and wanted homes all of equal height, where residents couldn't look down on others from high-rise buildings.²² Ten years after the dispute about the Lijnbaan, Bakema and Van Gool were in conflict again, only this time it was handled more professionally, as it was quickly decided that the two men would pursue their own designs. Van Eyck - claiming to have 'no understanding of housing *construction'* – sided with Bakema.

The municipal housing service did not really consider this a problem: 'The service did not specify any division of roles among the three of us. We were asked to create a joint plan, but if we



18 The Spangen block, a village-like community within the anonymous city of Rotterdam, after renovation (2013)

decided to come up with separate plans, that was also acceptable, although we would then have to accept that a choice would be made among them.' So, two versions of the design for Buikslotermeer emerged: Plan van Bakema and Plan van Gool. Eventually, the service would have to choose a plan, turning the assignment into a competition.²³

Plan van Bakema

Ultimately Bakema was given free rein to develop his own ideas, a plan with different heights and separated demographics to achieve a 'a diverse experience of urban planning.' The development called for 'a design where the access for residents and suppliers doesn't disrupt the intimacy of the living environment beyond the front door.' Hence he advocates for a suspended living street, just like the Spangen block, and also reintroduces his privacy-focused split-level typology.²⁴



19 An isometric sketch from Bakema showing how the split-level would work, from the elevated street apartments above and below can be reached (1962)

9

20 Model of Plan van Bakema with towers, long gallery blocks with maisonettes, patio homes of different heights (1962)

The split-level typology was not commonly used in the Netherlands in the 1960s. This is why in 1966 engineer H. Priemus conducted a small study, which was published in the architecture magazine *Goed Wonen*.²⁵ He notes several advantages, such an easily distinguishable differentiation the residential block. More importantly, kitchens and bedrooms don't have to directly adjoin the gallery, so these spaces aren't bothered by other residents. His research also includes a survey of all female residents of a split-level housing project. They are asked questions about their appreciation of the raised residential street compared to a normal gallery, their experiences with the many stairs in their homes, whether their children often play on the gallery, and if they experience noise disturbance from the gallery street. Residents find it tiring to constantly climb stairs, and the spatial effect of the split-level escapes them. However, they are positive about the residential street, appreciating its covered nature, the safety it provides for children to play, and the absence of bedrooms adjacent to it. Yet, no mention is made of any social aspects.

21 A perspective drawing showing the spatial effect of the a split-level, the stairs offer privacy from the elevated street (1962)





22 How the the elevated street was supposed to have looked in the Buikslotermeer (1962)



23 The Hengelose Es neighbourhood. The elevated street, facade and layout look almost identical to how it was supposed to be built in the Buikslotermeer (2017)

However, Priemus concludes that the split-level concept can certainly be further explored and, on a small scale, can be responsibly applied. However, he does not believe that this typology will replace the regular gallery and portico flats due to the small positive quality improvement compared to the larger economic impact. It remains exclusive. This exclusivity is also the downfall of a split-level plan in Buikslotermeer, because Bakema's design was never built here. In 1964 the municipal housing service chose van Gool's plan, most likely due to economic reasons, Van Gool believes.²⁶ Nevertheless Bakema didn't give up on his plans yet. 4 years later he designed an almost identical copy in a neighbourhood in the city of Hengelo, only for it to be partially demolished in 2016. Local news outlets even called it a 'ghetto' due to the apartment's poor state of maintenance.²⁷

An undisturbed Soil Surface

Plan van Gool, on the other hand, still looks good. To understand the fundamental qualities of the design for the Buikslotermeer, one has to start looking down. Because the way Van Gool approaches the pre-existing plot of land – or *soil surface* as he calls it – is quite particular. However, before the 17th century, there had been no exposed soil here; this area used to be called the *Lake of Buiksloot*. According to the poldermap of W.H. Hoekwater, the Lake of Buiksloot was drained in 1628, leaving a polder that is 3 metres lower than the surrounding parts of Amsterdam.²⁸ This has remained the case for 330 years, unlike other polders in the surrounding area. The surface level of the Banne Buiksloot neighbourhood, for example, was raised with 1 metre of sand, removing all farmhouses and trees and any trace of grasslands and ditches.²⁹

24 Poldermap showing: Polder Waterland z.p. -1,30 and 1628 Buikslotermeer polder z.p. -4,48m (1910)





25 The General Contemplation of Architecture written by Van Gool. First in discontinued a series of three (1954)



26 The playfully placed building blocks meandering through the undisturbed soil surface. The two 18-story towers are not part of Plan van Gool, but are designed by his colleague Arnold Oyevaar (1972)

Van Gool actually appreciates the existing landscape, as explained in his *General Contemplation of Architecture* back in 1957. He wrote: *..so that the soil surface is not only preserved but also emphasised as a fundamental, universal aspect. In other words, it is not always necessary to visibly divide or control the ground; we can also leave it be and share it collectively.*' The soil surface should remain undisturbed, he claimed, which could be achieved by placing a building on *'thin columns at a certain height above and parallel to the ground level.*'³⁰ Ten years later, his ideology was realised in practice. The building blocks of Plan van Gool now meander autonomously through the Buikslotermeerpolder, appearing detached through a proportional grid of small columns.³¹ Additionally, he sought to limit functions in public spaces, like backyards, thus making the soil surface now accessible for everyone to share.

It becomes apparent that his ideas about an undisturbed soil surface are closely related to the equality among residents. And unlike Bakema's plan – who incorporates high towers, gallery blocks and patio homes all for different demographics – all blocks in Plan van Gool appear to remain equal. Equality turns out to be a recurring theme.

27 The building block appears to be floating due to the use of columns and the shadow effect of the set-back ground floor (2016)



Urban and Architectural Equality

Yet equality was not always fully present afther the Second World War in Amsterdam. As early as 1956, it became clear that there was a need for more housing due to the extreme post-war population growth and changing preferences towards fewer people in larger homes.³² Originally the General Extension Plan of Amsterdam from 1935 was intended as a long-term vision, aiming to cater all expansion until the year 2000. But it focused exclusively on the South. Therefore, in 1958, Structure Plan North was introduced, indicating the need for additional housing in the North as well. Initially, there was reluctance to build in the North due to poor connections, but after the construction of a bridge near Schellingwoude (1957), the Coentunnel (1966), and the IJ-tunnel (1968), the situation improved significantly.33

With Structure Plan North also came the expansion into the Buikslotermeer, further enabling urban equality for the residents of Amsterdam. The fact that at the time Van Gool was given a Tabula Rasa to work with – *'The Municipal Housing Service approved everything'* ³⁴ – may be explained by the urgent need for housing and the service's intention to build many homes quickly without dwelling too long on all design choices.

Nonetheless it enabled Van Gool to further enhance his ideas about architectural equality,



28 Distribution of pamphlets on the housing shortage (1956)

which manifested itself in the facade. He does so by making a facade entirely of glass, further highlighting the relationship between the apartments and the surface soil. This ensures that every resident has equal visibility of the greenery. *'Starting from there,'* Van Gool mentions, *'you must then address what is wrong with that decision.'* Due to the glass, the homes from inside appear like tunnels with an opening only at the end. Here, the proportional grid of narrow columns serves a new purpose, subtly delineating the space. The two columns in front of the glass, along with a strip of translucent glass, provide the residents with privacy from the soil surface.³⁵



29 Structure Plan North, the revision on the General Extension Plan of Amsterdam, Plan van Gool is marked with an arrow (1956)





30 Almost all of the 1138 apartments within Plan van Gool have on of the these four floorplans (1966)

Behind the homogeneous facade, the theme of equality is further extended, though it might lead one astray. The uniform facade suggests only identical homes, but nothing could be further from the truth. Van Gool draws a striking comparison with Plan van Bakema: 'Bakema's plan visually depicted demographic variation by essentially breaking down the programme and making each part visible separately. It must have been striking that my plan, in a single cross-section spanning hundreds of metres, encompassed the complete differentiation of all imaginable types of *housing.*^{' 36} What Van Gool means by this can be explained by investigating his floorplans. On the ground floor and 3rd floor, there are single-level homes (type C and D), accessible from street level or the elevated street, suitable for the elderly or those with limited mobility. From street level or the elevated street, stairs lead to the homes on the 1st, 2nd, and 4th floors (type A and B), which are more suitable for young families. Moreover, there is accommodation for varying family sizes as there are homes available with 1, 2, or 3 rooms.³⁷ The theme of equality lies in the perfect homogeneous distribution of all types of homes and residents.

A true sense of community can be achieved by perfectly mixing demographics, Hertzberger claimed earlier about the Spangen block. Yet it was Bakema – with his segregated building typologies of different heights – who failed to apply this core concept, while Van Gool's perfect homogeneous distribution flourished due to Hertzbergers ideals. Nevertheless the alignment of these two mens ideas appear to be only coincidental on this specific aspect, as Van Gool later in his design process starts to shift away from their beloved Spangen block.



31 Every type of apartment is represented in a single section. Directly from the galleries type C and D can be reached, and via a spiral staircase type A and B are accessible (1966)

A Shift in Direction

To understand Van Gool's shift in direction, one must delve deeper into his design process. Two iterations of Plan van Gool can be distinguished: *the preliminary design*, which won him the competition in 1964, and *the final design*, of which building began in 1966. In the preliminary design the elevated living street still gets the full attention, as they are shown on the only two perspective drawings, along with quite some text: *The gallery building at Spangen is still an inspiring starting point because of the clarity of its design. A "real" elevated street, also accessible to light traffic. This street or gallery is therefore more than a narrow pedestrian gutter suspended from the facade.*^{' 38}

Although it already shows signs of a distancing to the social aspect of the elevated street, as he only lists practical positives like: less noise disturbance, no bedrooms adjacent to the gallery and fewer galleries in general. And the avio-bridges mostly function as a way to reduce the amount of stairwells, as Van Gool inherently dislikes them.³⁹ And yet it would appear that the idea of the elevated living streets would perfectly align with Van Gool's theme of architectural equality. These would have been almost socialist principles that seamlessly complement each other: socialisation and equality. But elevated streets are village-like – claimed Hertzberger earlier – meant as a place where people can come together, get to know each other and form a community. This was also Bakema's design principle, which he applied in his Hansaviertel Complex and tried to implement in his version of the plan for the Buikslotermeer.

However, in Van Gool's final design two years later, he completely distances himself from Hertzberger's ideas: 'My appreciation for anonymity rests on what I believe to be true urbanity. In doing so, I was directly opposed to the beliefs of Hertzberger and his view on housing.' Van Gool isn't interested in the village-like character, especially given that the plan is situated in Amsterdam, the largest city in The Netherlands. Van Gool best describes his shift in thinking himself: 'It focused on the idea of the elevated street, but above all, there was the idea of expressing anonymity. I could never have thought of that without Perret's work in Le Havre.'⁴⁰ **33** Building blocks within Le Havre, designed by Auguste Perret, and listed by UNESCO in 2005 as world heritage (2023)



32 One of the two perspectives in the preliminary design, focusing on the elevated streets, while facades remain undetailed (1964)



Luxe pour tous

Van Gool describes the French city on the Normandy coast as 'true urbanity.' Others might be shocked by the 10.000 almost identical dwellings in repeated residential blocks and towers made entirely - and including the facades - of reinforced concrete, erected on the Le Havre coast shortly after the Second World War. But between 1945 and 1964, Auguste Perret, commissioned by the Ministry of Reconstruction and Urban Planning, transformed Le Havre into France's most modern city of its time.⁴¹ And it is this modernity that intrigued Van Gool. Due to the devastation during the war, the city had to be quickly rebuilt, leading to the creation of a rational orthogonal city plan. The situation is somewhat similar to that of Amsterdam, not because it was destroyed, but precisely because of the enormous housing shortage after the war.



34 Although the building blocks appear megalomaniacal, Perret pays great attention to the human scale, such as a lively small-scale plinth and many concrete embellishments (2016)

When Perret's Le Havre and Plan van Gool are further compared, the similarities become clear. The use of concrete as the main construction material is apparent in both projects, Perret uses concrete slabs in the facade, decorated with manual finishes. Van Gool turns to concrete columns, of which not all are even structurally necessary.⁴² And both plans feature a facade designed as a rhythmic and well-proportioned



35 The floor plan allows flexible partitioning, fixed rooms such as the bathroom (salle de bain) and kitchen (cuisine) are placed out of the way against the outer walls (2014)

grid. Behind the facade the similarities continue. Perrets Le havre was 'a global project: the urban design, each building, the interior spaces and their layout all obeyed a higher ideal, that of creating a 'luxury for all" or 'Luxe pour tous' in French. 'Even the decoration, previously preserved for a luxury elite, was democratised and made available for all.' Although all 10.000 apartments - 100m² each - were mass produced, they were not identical. Perret designed them to be suitable for flexible partitioning; fixed elements like kitchens and bathrooms were positioned next to the separating walls, so residents could easily customise the layout within their apartment. 'The majority preferred a kitchen separated from the living room' which would not result in a room without daylight as there were plentiful high windows.⁴³

Van Gool appreciates the true urbanity of Le Havre, as according to him, Perret expresses the concept of anonymity itself. The anonymity arises from the relation between the facade and the floorplans. The flexible partitioning allows



36 Within repetitive facades sees Van Gool true urbanity (2023)

for all kinds of demographics to reside within the apartments, which are all placed behind an identical facade. The facade should be representative for all kinds of people – and not for one kind of demographic – and should therefore not be too expressive. '*Neutrality'* is how Van Gool describes this. 'I believe in positive, professed neutrality, and the more manifold that form of neutrality is, the better architecture works.' That's why ten years later Van Gool designed 1138 apartments in Amsterdam, consisting of only 4 different kinds of floor plans, all behind an identical and neutral facade. All people were allowed to live in Plan van Gool: 'above all, I think architecture should not be in charge of conditioning demographics.'⁴⁴



37 A neutral facade leads to equality for residents (1972)

In the end of the design process the ideals of Peret seemed to be omnipresent within Plan van Gool. And the elevated street was only a remnant of when the three architects were still working together on this project. Initially these three stubborn men felt so inspired by the concept, but now Van Gool remains indifferent. *'I might as well have made those anonymous facades in combination with a different access principle. The gallery was originally narrower.'*⁴⁵ Now, he even calls the elevated residential street simply a gallery.

A Red Herring

After the (partial) completion of the project in 1970 journal articles contain critiques on the elevated street as well, agreeing with Van Gool that it should just be called a gallery. 'Despite the surprising width of the galleries, the visitor or



38 The elevated street described as a windy passageway (1972)

resident cannot escape the idea, which commonly exists concerning galleries: a narrow, usually windy passageway,' observes drs. A. Schimmel.⁴⁶ The monotonous guidance of pillars and the dull identical layout of windows, facade and barred railings – she continues – gives the visitor the feeling of being pushed in one direction. Her conclusion is uncompromising: 'The repeated vertical and horizontal elements further emphasise the linear element, making the perspective view of the gallery suggest an obligatory walkway, an endless, dead-end road.' The author also mentions points of improvement, so one can create an 'ideal elevated living street.' A pedestrian, like on a normal

39 The galleries are always on the northern or western shadow side, critiques drs. Schimmel (1972)



17

street, should be able to go in all directions: he can choose different directions and turn corners, allowing for variety, surprises and participation in everyday life. Drs. Schimmel advises for the inclusion of *'side roads, intersections and squares,'* almost identical to how Bakema applied his social urban corridors in Berlin 10 years earlier.

It appears that when people imagine elevated streets, they think of what Bakema had in mind: accesses within building blocks that feel like the normal urban fabric of a city. This is why these people are disappointed with Van Gool's elevated street. 'But we do think that this is based too much on the assumption that making an elevated living street (and with the accent on 'street') was the main design goal,' replies Van Gool to these disappointing critiques.⁴⁷ As shown earlier Van Gool's most important design goal was expressing anonymity and not creating a social elevated street. The constant focus on the elevated street can be considered as a *red herring*. The streets are the most pronounced and visible aspect of the plan but - like a red herring - they mislead and distract from the less obvious strengths of Plan van Gool.

40 Seating area of the Heikoops family. Against the wall, a work table for the wife. The reddish purple that predominates here, in curtains and upholstery, can even be found under the plants in the planter (1970/1971)



39 Residents created their own vegetable garden (1972)

Homes with Future Value

When looking past the obvious widened galleries and avio-bridges you can see, what drs. H. Schenk describes as 'homes with future value.'⁴⁸ According to him the popularity of Plan van Gool was due to a number of circumstances. In the beginning popularity was caused by a sense of 'pioneering'; all kinds of progressives moved to unattractive Amsterdam North. Artists, academics, socialites and incomplete families.³⁹ Especially in the early stages these people have built up a thriving community and have given life to a hefty social infrastructure, continues Schenk. 'Ranging from crèches to societies, from yoga courses to production of a neighbourhood newspaper, from cinema





to a working group for greenery.'⁵⁰ Two residents from the very beginning – Miep van Berkenstijn and Addy Bloem – describe their neighbourhood at the time as very social.⁵¹ 'I really liked the flat. Very cosy, with that separate dining room. And very bright thanks to the windows. I immediately felt at home.' There were lots of different kinds of people there, 'all people who really wanted to do something, so soon there was a thriving social life in the neighbourhood.' They claim that it was easy to socialise with others, much easier than an upstairs flat in Amsterdam East. Never do these women mention the living street though, but they describe the building blocks as beautiful,

42 'Palmpasen' parade of primary school Wespennest (1972)



41 Boezewinkel family seating area with low bookcases that form one unit with the seating. White-painted wood with yellow plastic cushions, the bookcases also function as tables, creating a kind of seating tub (1970/1971)

sociable and light. It isn't hard to imagine that in a place these people enjoy living and care about, a sense of community will follow automatically.

The initial popularity was caused by the original progressive residents, who built a hefty social infrastructure, but starting from the 80s this group started to thin out. But Plan van Gool remains popular, reassures Schenk: 'As a result, Plan van Gool is slowly but surely acquiring a social construction closer to the ideas of the original municipal plans.' The demographics shift and 'regular Amsterdam people' start to move in, but that is in no way an unforeseen prospect: 'the built environment remains and it has remained attractive; affordable housing with future value certainly seems to have been provided' concludes Schenk.⁵² Plan van Gool has known a lot of residents: from socialites and progressives to regular Amsterdam people, later mixed with people from an immigration background.⁵³ But the shifts do not matter, as everyone is allowed to happily live within the anonymous building blocks, since Van Gool inherently believes that good architecture should in no way be allowed to condition a demographic.

Monumental — in Conclusion

This article started with the following question: *How was Plan van Gool designed, in regards to the elevated street and the sense of community?* Well, as it turns out, the elevated streets and the sense of community have nothing to do with each other. The elevated streets in Plan van Gool are simply widened galleries, nothing more than to serve practical purposes. Yet the idea of a social elevated street keeps turning up in literature, in part because Van Gool used Brinkman's living streets as an inspiration during his earlier design process. But this is only a remnant of when Bakema and Van Eyck were still working on this project, as the social living street was Bakema's beloved design principle

Though the project's real strength came from a later inspiration; in Le Havre designed Perret 10.000 mass-produced dwellings, behind articulated but monotonous facades. Perret created 'true urbanity,' in which Van Gool highly valued the anonymity he saw within the building blocks. In his own design in de Buikslotermeer he expressed this anonymity on the facade. All eleven building blocks are designed with a glass facade hidden behind a proportional grid of columns to provide the residents with privacy. Furthermore, anonymity is reinforced by neutrality. Behind one identical facade exist four different floor plans, able to house a plethora of different kinds of people. Therefore a facade needs to be neutral, so different demographics can all equally relate to their home. Finally neutrality in turn is responsible for the theme of equality within the project. Building blocks are placed playfully on the soil surface, seemingly unattached to it due to the use of columns. As there are no private gardens, or clear demarcations of other use, everyone is equally able to enjoy the soil surface in whichever way they want.

Plan van Gool thrives by a 'delightful anonymity.' Yet residents like Miep and Addy showed us that when people are happy and comfortable in their own private spaces, and care about the neighbourhood they live in, a strong sense of community will automatically follow. Even nowadays the project is still beloved and appreciated, as the municipality of Amsterdam – instigated by the current residents – gave the project the monumental status of 'protected cityscape' in 2022.⁵⁴ What Plan van Gool, devoutly named after the architect himself, has proven, is that anonymity and sociability can complement each other and harmoniously work together.

44 The anonymous facades of Plan van Gool (2021)



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Notes

- ¹ Vermeer et al. 2010, p666
- ² Colenbrander 2005, p73
- ³ Hanserlaar 2013
- ⁴ Stadsuitbreiding Buikslotermeer, Amsterdam 1962
- ⁵ Kleijne 2013
- Stadsuitbreiding Buikslotermeer, Amsterdam 1962

- ⁷ Colenbrander 2005, p31
- ⁸ Kleijne 2013
- ° Colenbrander 2005, p22
- ¹⁰ Haan et al. 1980
- ¹¹ Colenbrander 2005, p13
- ¹² Haan et al. 1980
- ¹³ Colenbrander 2005, p13

- ¹⁴ Bartningallee 7 2018
- ¹⁵ Fernández & Meraz 2020
- ¹⁶ Bartningallee 7 2018
- ¹⁷ Fernández & Meraz 2020
- ¹⁸ Fernández & Meraz 2020
- ¹⁹ Colenbrander 2005, p72
- ²⁰ Hertzberger & Bakema 1960
- The Elevated Streets of Plan van Gool

²¹ Hertzberger & Bakema 1960

- ²² Colenbrander 2005, p73
- ²³ Colenbrander 2005, p73
- 24 Stadsuitbreiding Buikslotermeer, Amsterdam 1962
- ²⁵ Stadsuitbr. Buikslotermeer, (Van Eyck, Van Gool, Laddé, B&B) Amsterdam 1962
- ²⁶ Colenbrander 2005, p75
- 27 'Ghetto' in Hengelo gaat tegen de grond 2016
- ²⁸ Hoekwater 1910
- ²⁹ Visser 1970
- ³⁰ Van Gool 1957, pp. 11–14
- ³¹ Colenbrander 2005, p88

- 32 Schuyt en Taverne 2000, p198
- ³³ Gramsbergen et al. 2019, p113
- 34 Kleijne 2013
- ³⁵ Colenbrander 2005, p76
- ³⁶ Colenbrander 2005, p75
- ³⁷ Kleijne 2013
- ³⁸ Experimentele woningbouw Amsterdam 1963
- ³⁹ Hanserlaar 2013
- ⁴⁰ Colenbrander 2005, p73
- ⁴¹ Chauvin & Gencey 2007
- ⁴² Colenbrander 2005, p76
- 43 Chauvin & Gencey 2007

- ⁴⁴ Colenbrander 2005, p76
- ⁴⁵ Colenbrander 2005, p73
- 46 Schimmel 1970
- ⁴⁷ Schimmel 1970
- 48 Schenk 1983
- 49 Kleijne 2013
- 50 Schenk 1983
- ⁵¹ Kleijne 2013
- 52 Schenk 1983
- 53 Kleijne 2013
- 54 Weessies 2022

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