

This study investigates whether a prescribed urban colour plan can foster a sense of belonging among residents, using the Regenboogbuurt (Rainbow Neighbourhood) in Almere, the Netherlands, as a case study. Designed with a comprehensive colour scheme to prevent urban monotony, the neighbourhood draws inspiration from German architect Bruno Taut's colourful social housing projects in Berlin.

The research evaluates the transition from 'plan' to 'place,' focusing on the interaction between urban guidelines and architectural execution, specifically through Liesbeth van der Pol's 'Rooie Donders.' Furthermore, the study combines written documentation about the design with interviews with residents and site visits to reveal the daily lived experience.

Findings suggest that residents subconsciously identify with the neighbourhood's character, often mirroring its external façade colours in their home interiors. However, the study also identifies a growing threat to the area's cohesive identity, due to unauthorised individual modifications and a lack of municipal supervision. The thesis concludes that a colour strategy can foster a sense of belonging, when is supported by active community engagement and formal legal protections, such as a protected townscape status.

Rooie Donders, Regenboogbuurt, Almere
By: Liesbeth van der Pol



The Rainbow Neighbourhood

An investigation into the relationship between an urban colour plan and the sense of belonging of the residents

Pien Zagt



Site plan 1:5000



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AR2A011 Architectural History Thesis

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The Rainbow Neighbourhood

An investigation into the relationship between an urban colour plan and the sense of belonging of the residents



A typical Dutch polder landscape. Cows graze in the seemingly uninterrupted grassland, which is intersected by high-voltage pylons that bring rhythm to the endless sky. A boat travels down the canal, and cyclists ride through the landscape. But it is those three red buildings that catch the eye, invading the serenity of the image. Their striking red colour creates a sharp contrast with the colour palette of the Dutch landscape. This architectural ensemble of three residential towers is called the 'Rooie Donders' (Red Dare Devils) and was designed by Liesbeth van der Pol in 1994. They are part of the most colourful neighbourhood in the Netherlands, the 'Regenboogbuurt' (Rainbow Neighbourhood) in Almere.

Almere is a city in the Netherlands that was developed from scratch on reclaimed land in the 1970s.¹ The Regenboogbuurt is one of the many neighbourhoods in Almere that had to be designed without context to rely on. The main design principle chosen for this neighbourhood was colour, to prevent monotony.²

A comprehensive colour scheme was designed for the Regenboogbuurt, specifying the obligatory colours for each housing block and providing additional design guidelines in the form of a 'plot passport'.³ The work of the German architect and urbanist Bruno Taut (1880-1938) in Berlin served as the inspiration for this project.⁴

The original colour plan from colour expert Floor van Dusseldorp for one of the architectural projects, the Rooie Donders, was a polychromatic scheme incorporating red, green, and blue, as depicted in the watercolour sketch in F. 2 and F. 4. However, the architect van der Pol did not agree on these colours. She suggested other options, such as patterns, different colours, and white. Once she wore a red Kenzo suit to the opening of another project in the neighbourhood (F. 3), she knew it: they had to be a monochromatic, fierce red.⁵

All involved developers and architects were assigned to different parts of the neighbourhood.⁶ Nevertheless, the project achieved a cohesive identity with a balance of architectural variety and vibrant colours.

The anecdote about the Kenzo suit highlights the influence of the architects in shaping a neighbourhood's identity. However, it also raises the question of whether such top-down aesthetic decisions resonate with the daily lived experience of the residents.

Literature can be found on the topic of colour as a fundamental part of urban and architectural design. Nevertheless, the impact of such rigid colour schemes on the social fabric remains under-researched. What positive or negative effects can a designed colour scheme for façades have on the residents living behind them?

This essay will investigate the role of prescribing colours in urban design for residential areas, and whether it contributes to a sense of belonging or identification among residents. First, Almere and the Regenboogbuurt plan will be introduced, after which the neighbourhood will be compared to a historical precedent. Next, the plans and development of the Regenboogbuurt design will be explained, in which the connection between the urban plan and the individual architects' outcomes will be demonstrated. The Rooie Donders project will serve as a case study. Finally, the residents' perspective will be introduced. Two interviews with residents serve as a primary source to reveal how the plans translate into the daily experience. The conclusion will attempt to answer the question of whether a colour strategy in an urban plan can foster a sense of belonging among residents.

F.2



F.3



F.4



¹ K.E. Nawijn, *Almere, hoe het begon: Achtergronden, herinneringen en feiten uit de eerste ontwikkelingsjaren van Almere* (Rijksdienst voor de IJsselmerpolders, 1988).

² Margriet Pflug and Marc A. Visser, *Stedebouw en kleur: Voorbeeldproject Regenboogbuurt Almere* (Uitgeverij Thoth, 1995).

³ Diana van Diepen, interview by author, Almere, March 5, 2026.

⁴ Nadia Abdelkawi, guest, "KLEUR; dragen van bouwvormen," virtual symposium, KEIM Nederland, Stichting Kleurenvisie, and Museum het Schip, October 29, 2020, <https://www.online-broadcast.com/kleur>.

⁵ Liesbeth van der Pol, guest, "KLEUR; dragen van bouwvormen."

F.2 De Rooie Donders, Almere, painted by Liesbeth van der Pol with watercolour during the design phase. Liesbeth van der Pol and Kunstlinie, *Met karakter! : getekend, Lies* (Kunstlinie, 2023). 48.

F.3 Photograph with Liesbeth van der Pol, where she shows her Red kenzo suit to reveal her planned colours for the Rooie Donders. Liesbeth van der Pol, guest, "KLEUR; dragen van bouwvormen" at 28:27.

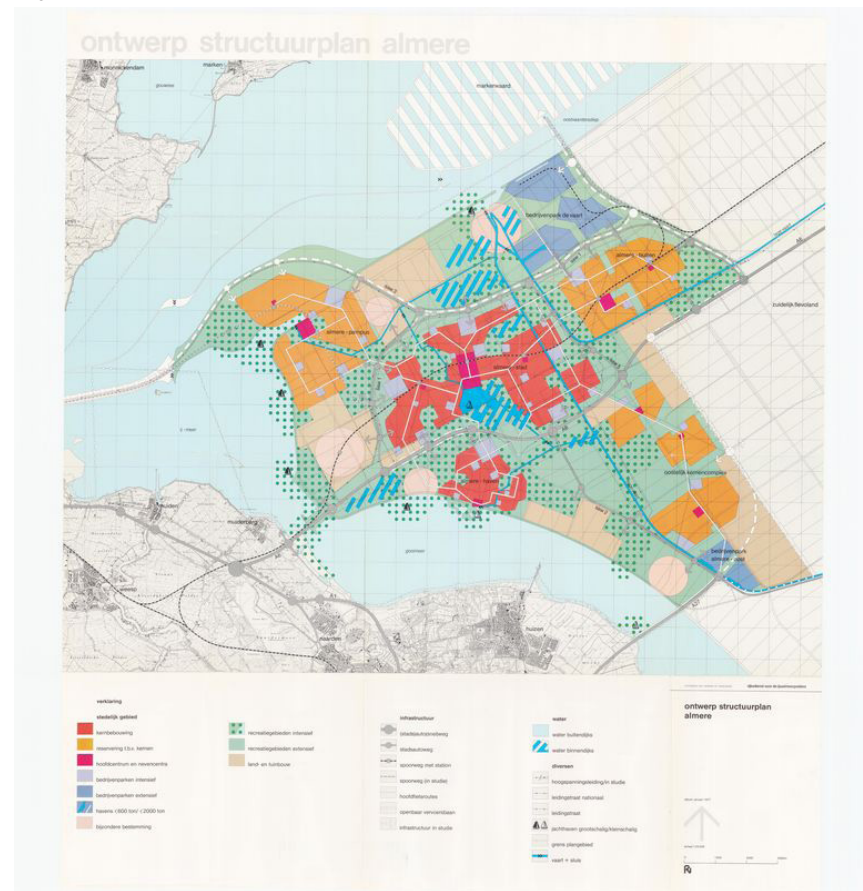
F.4 De Rooie Donders, Almere, painted by Liesbeth van der Pol with watercolour during the design phase. Liesbeth van der Pol and Kunstlinie, *Met karakter! : getekend, Lies* (Kunstlinie, 2023). 49.

⁶ Pflug and Visser, *Stedebouw en Kleur*.

Due to his concerns, Laumanns decided that colour could be the solution to break up the monotony of the houses in Almere-Buiten.¹⁶ The new development phase, Buiten-Midden, began with the 'Kleurenbuurt' (Colour Neighbourhood)¹⁷ in 1993. The aim was to set an example amidst all the boring, monotonous developments of how

to use colour to create an appealing living environment.¹⁸ This neighbourhood is currently named the 'Regenboogbuurt' (Rainbow Neighbourhood). The design principles and the use of colour were derived from research into the work of the German architect, urban planner, and artist, Bruno Taut.¹⁹

F.6



F.6 Map with design structure diagram for Almere. Stadsarchief Almere, Plankaart ontwerp structuurschema, map, Stadsarchief Almere, 1967, accessed on April 5, 2026, <https://stadsarchief.almere.nl/publicaties/rapporten-tijdlijn-almere#c75191>.

¹⁴ ¹⁵ Nawijn, Almere, hoe het begon.

¹⁶ Van der Pol, guest, "KLEUR; dragen van bouwvormen" at 24:10.

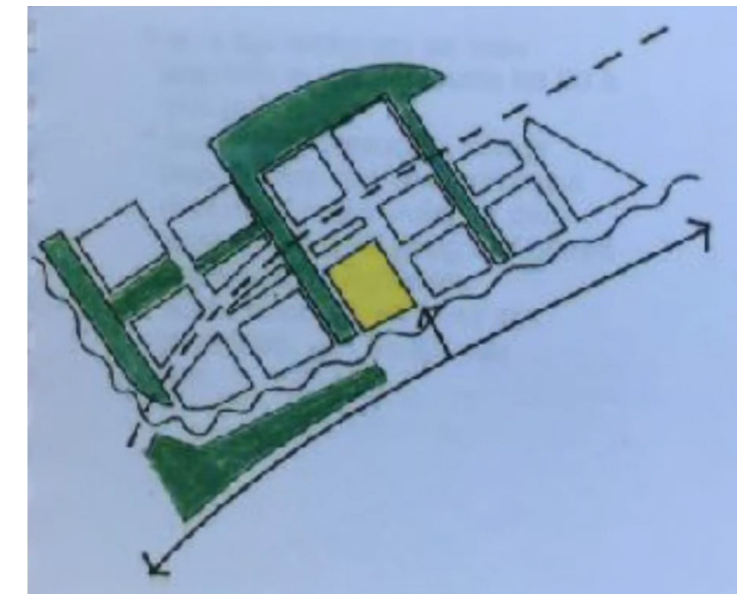
¹⁷ Van der Pol, guest, "KLEUR; dragen van bouwvormen" at 24:35.

¹⁸ Pflug and Visser, Stedebouw en Kleur.

F.7



F.8

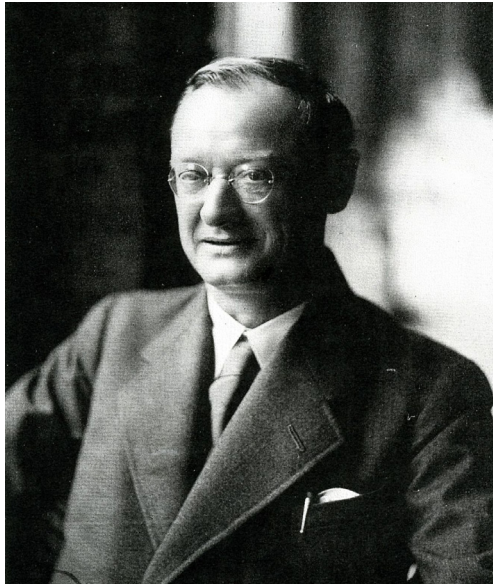


F.7 Map showing the polynuclear identity of Almere, with the six city cores and their phasing. Figure made by author, 2026.

F.8 Sketch of urban and landscape layout of Almere Buiten, Regenboogbuurt highlighted in yellow. René van der Velde, "Vele Kleuren Groen," Youtube video, Regenboogbuurt Almere, posted January 27, 2022, 1 min, 16 sec, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FD8AOVZGzAs&t=1472s>

¹⁹ Abdelkawi, guest, "KLEUR; dragen van bouwvormen."

F.9



F.10



F.11



Bruno Taut, the inspiration for the Regenboogbuurt

Bruno Taut (1880-1938) built around 10,000 houses in the 1920s and 1930s. Most of them were social housing, in high demand after the First World War. He therefore constructed small, suitable, and standardised dwellings. His designs focused on the human being and their needs. He combined aesthetic and moral standards with a clear vision and practical realisation ideas. This made his work successful.²⁰

As his brief was to design social housing, the budget was limited. Therefore, he had to find an inexpensive way of creating high-quality neighbourhoods. Around 1900, the effect of colour and light on human wellbeing was recognised. This influenced Taut to create colourful buildings and compositions.²¹ He saw it as an assignment to bring colour into people's lives, and approached it not only as an aesthetic, but also as an ethical task:

The point is that we should also give the residents of the most hideous tenements and dreary slums a little bit of joy in life. Besides, the fact is that with colour, we can significantly improve almost any house, no matter how ugly it may be. (...) In short, even with limited resources, it is often possible to give such places a completely new look.²²

Taut was the first architect to experiment with colour.²³ Colour became an elementary component and a fundamental building material in all his projects. He made use of the range of luminescence of the colours and

the different effects that each colour has.²⁴ Taut saw an inevitable connection between colour and light, stating that "Those who find joy in light, also find joy in colour."²⁵ He had strict guidelines for using colour. The colours had to be clear and powerful. Therefore, he preferred primary colours: blue, red, and yellow. Green was also possible, but it had to be used carefully. Mixing colours weakens them, causing them to lose their intensity through weathering. Using these pure and intense colours, ensures that surfaces capture the sun's light even on dark days.²⁶

Onkel Toms Hütte

One of Taut's most notable projects is the Waldsiedlung Onkel Toms Hütte (Uncle Tom's Cabin), in Berlin. This neighbourhood is fully immersed in the Zehlendorf Wald landscape.²⁷ The GEHAG housing association acquired the area and developed it, together with landscape architect Leberecht Migge and architects Hugo Häring, Otto Rudolf Salvisberg and Bruno Taut. In total, 1,915 living units and 809 single-family row houses were built. Taut designed 1,106 of the living units and 486 of the single-family row houses, between 1926 and 1932. The area was divided into project areas and assigned to the architects (F. 10).²⁸

Taut only used two housing types and basic design methods, incorporating subtle urban solutions to avoid monotony. The colours he used were so strong and contrasting that the neighbourhood is also known as the 'parrot settlement' (F. 11).²⁹

F.9 Bruno Taut, master of colourful architecture. Author unknown, Portrait of Bruno Taut, photograph, Architectuul, last modified January 7, 2020, <https://architectuul.com/architect/bruno-taut>

F.10 Overview of project area and assigned blocks per architect. Berliner Forum für Geschichte und Gegenwart e.V., Overview of construction phases I-VII, map, berliner-moderne, accessed on April 5, 2026, <https://welterbe-siedlungen-berlin.de/onkel-toms-huette/>.

F.11 Collage of images, showing different façades of Onkel Toms Hütte. Brenne, Bruno Taut, 125-126.

²⁰ Winfried Brenne, Bruno Taut, Master of colourful architecture in Berlin (Braun Publishing AG, 2013).

²¹ Brenne, Bruno Taut.

²² Jan de Heer (red.), Kleur en Architectuur (Uitgeverij 010, 1986), 61.

²³ De Heer, Kleur en Architectuur.

²⁴ Brenne, Bruno Taut.

²⁵ De Heer, Kleur en Architectuur, 57.

^{26,27} De Heer, Kleur en Architectuur.

^{28,29} Brenne, Bruno Taut, 120-125.

Of all the neighbourhoods designed by Taut, Onkel Toms Hütte is the only one for which the reason behind his choice of colours is known. Colours were chosen based on the sun orientation. Cooler colours, such as yellow, green and white, were used on the east side, where the morning sun shines. Warmer tints, such as red and pink, complement the evening sun on the west side (F. 12).³⁰ If he wanted to create a contrasting accent, he used a different colour.³¹

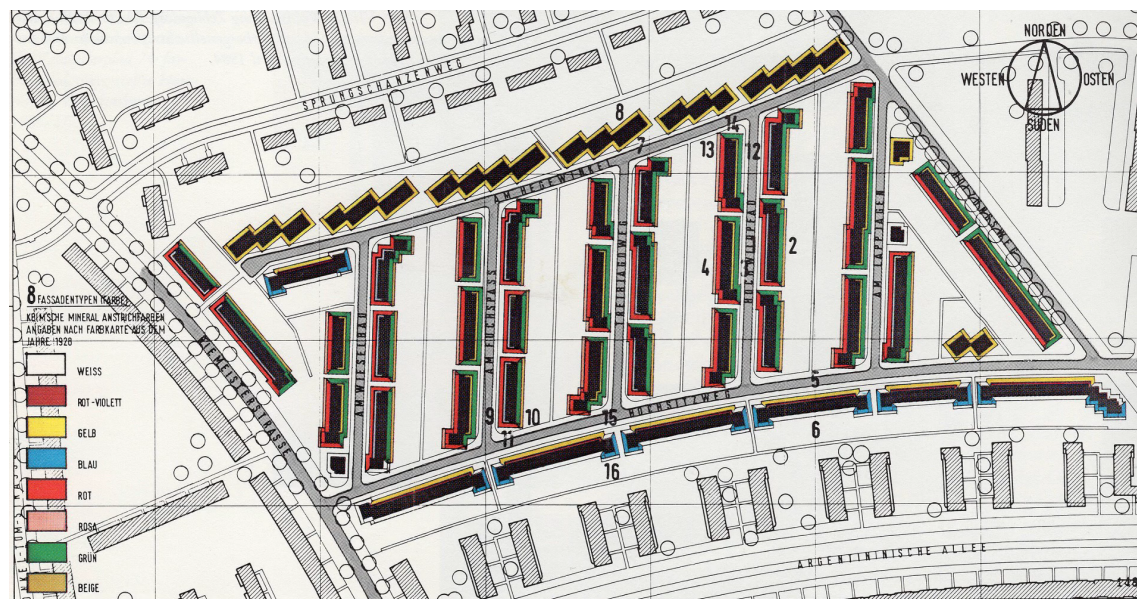
In 1968, Helge Pitz, a German architect, moved into one of Taut's row houses in Onkel Toms Hütte. He once quoted a saying by the Frenchman Vaudoyer about the residence: "The houses are of a very simple modernity, above all, very cheerful. Each street has its own face and color behind

*its curtain of pine trees. Of course, such houses are no guarantee of happiness. But at least they do invite one to be happy.*³²

This resembles Taut's principles of designing a garden city that is integrated with the landscape and shows how something bland can be given joie de vivre with a touch of colour.

Taut wanted to encourage other architects and urban planners to incorporate colour into their projects. In 1919, he published a manifesto called 'Der Regenbogen, Aufruf zum farbigen Bauen', in which he advocated for colour to be used as a fundamental design element.³³

F. 12



F. 12 Colour plan of the Onkel Toms Hütte. Bruno Taut, *Farbenplan Onkel Toms Hütte, map, "KLEUR: drager van bouwvormen,"* at 16:46.

³⁰ Abdelkawi, guest, "KLEUR; dragen van bouwvormen," at 16:10.

³¹ Pflug and Visser, *Stedebouw en kleur*.

³² Brenne, Bruno Taut, 31.

³³ Brenne, Bruno Taut, 24.

F. 13



F. 15



F. 13 Impression of Onkel Toms Hütte. Frank Dietze, *Colour system at its best, modernism in architecture,* accessed on April 4, 2026, <https://modernism-in-architecture.org/buildings/uncle-toms-cabin-onkel-toms-hutte/>.

F. 14 Impression of Onkel Toms Hütte. Dietze, *Riemeisterstrasse*

F. 15 Impression of Onkel Toms Hütte. Dietze, *Colours*

F. 16 Impression of Onkel Toms Hütte. Brenne Architekten, *Fassadenansicht Wilksstraße nach der Sanierung, Bauteil Bruno Taut,* Brenne Architekten, accessed on April 5, 2026, <https://www.brenne-architekten.de/waldsiedlung-onkel-toms-huette/>

F. 14



F. 16



F.17



F.18

Client	Grondbedrijf Almere, Municipality of Almere
Project Manager	Hans Laumanns, Jack Laddé
Urban Planner (External)	Henk de Boer (supervisor)
Urban Planner (Internal)	Gerrit Eenkhoorn
Colour Advisor / Expert	Floor van Dusseldorp
Landscape Architect	Alle Hosper, René van der Velde
Landscape Architect (Internal)	Reinier Nijland
Architects	26 Architects, e.g. van Eyck, van der Pol, Geurst, Duinker, van der Torre
Developers	19 Developers

F.17 Aerial image of a part of the Vijverkwartier, Regenboogbuurt. Maarten van de Biezen, *Almere Regenboogbuurt omgeving Jadeplantsoen*, Photograph, Holland Luchtfoto, 2015, edu.nl/x9d9d.

F.18 Information chart about the Regenboogbuurt project organisation. Figure made by author, 2026, based on van der Velde, "Vele Kleuren Groen," at 2:59.

The Regenboogbuurt: a profound collaboration project

One person inspired by Taut was Hans Laumanns, the project manager for the Regenboogbuurt. In an attempt to avoid the monotony that was threatening to define Almere, he recalled the colourful neighbourhoods of Taut that he had visited during his studies in Berlin.³⁴

F. 18 provides an overview of the people involved in this project. Laumanns, de Boer, and van Dusseldorp led the development of the initial ideas to the final product.³⁵ Hosper and van der Velde were responsible for the landscape design, which was equally important as the urban design.³⁶

The project areas, each consisting of around seventy houses, were divided into urban ensembles. Each area was planned according to its own set of guidelines and specifications regarding the use of colours and other design aspects. These restrictions, as well as the price range of the plot, were included in the invitation to developers and architects.³⁷ This is a very important part of the Regenboogbuurt project organisation. By accepting the invitation to participate in the project, the developers and architects were required to commit to the established guidelines. Cooperation was required, with little room for discussion about these guidelines. However, the architects were given freedom in other elements of the design, such as the shape.³⁸ The architects were chosen based on their affinity with colour and how well their style suited the location.³⁹

The division into project areas resulted in a team of 19 developers and 26 architects. In addition to the commissioned plots, 84 were sold for self-build projects. It typically presents a challenge to impose the required architectural style on private plots. In this case, however, all the owners received a 'Plot Passport', containing requirements to ensure their designs fit in with the overall urban plan, similar to those for the project areas.⁴⁰

In order to achieve a good, coherent overall design, a well thought-through urban plan and colour scheme were created beforehand. A set of principles for both architecture and landscaping was developed through research and design. A clear overlapping principle is the use of colour as a structural design element.

Urban plan principles

Before it was given a name, the Regenboogbuurt site was called '3.J Almere Buiten'.⁴¹ The transition from empty land to an urban context is challenging. The layout plan of Almere Buiten Midden is typical of a garden city, similar to Taut's neighbourhoods. The area has an outdoor character, and the aim is to create a diverse range of housing: from simple, inexpensive tenements to expensive, privately owned apartments.

Henk de Boer and Gerrit Eenkhoorn designed the main layout of 3.J based on the concept of homogeneous neighbourhoods within a heterogeneous district. Therefore,

³⁴ Hans Laumanns, guest, "Regenboogbuurt is geen omgevallen kleuroos: Hans Laumanns," YouTube video, Omroep Flevoland, December 21, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5QGgSpTKzaE&t=121s>

³⁵ Floor van Dusseldorp, interview by author, Zunderdorp, conducted on March 20, 2026.

³⁶ René van der Velde, "Vele Kleuren Groen," Youtube video, Regenboogbuurt Almere, posted January 27, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FD8AOVZGzAs&t=1472s>

³⁷ Pflug and Visser. *Stedebouw en Kleur*.

³⁸ Van Dusseldorp, interview.

³⁹ Laumanns, "Regenboogbuurt."

they divided the neighbourhood into four quadrants, with a central axis dividing the area into two. This green wedge opens up to the polder. A central pond was added on both sides of the axis. The urban layout can be seen on F. 21 and F. 22.

Each quadrant has its own character, due to its different urban model. This creates an urban context that forms the basis for subsequent developments. The 74-hectare area consists of 2.087 dwellings and is home to around 5.000 people, at a density of 36 houses per hectare. In line with the city guidelines, 82% of the buildings are low-rise. The dwellings are built in six different price categories, with 64% of residents owning their homes and 37% renting.⁴²

Colour plan

Floor van Dusseldorp is an urbanist. In his work, he actively promotes the use of colour in urbanism and educates students, professionals, and interested individuals about it. This advocacy led to him being invited to programme the use of colour

in the Regenboogbuurt, as the colour expert.⁴³ In the urban context created by de Boer and Eenkhoorn, van Dusseldorp developed the structure and evolution of the Regenboogbuurt further.

He found inspiration for the plan in two things. One of these is the children of the Regenboogbuurt. He identified important places for the younger generation, such as the schools, daycare centres, and playgrounds. By investigating how these children walk to school, he aimed to create a colour sequence to help them find their way to and from school. Highlighting street openings of colour, helps with this wayfinding.

The other lead relates to the lack of context at the site. The site had been filled with soil and sand, with no sign of landscaping. Against this grey and colourless backdrop, the bright yellow train travelling along Almere stood out (F. 20). This made an unforgettable impression on van Dusseldorp, who recognised the power of colour to transform a context.⁴⁴

F. 19

Regenboogbuurt facts	
Number of projects	27
Number of dwellings	2.087
Net density	36 dwellings per ha
Low-rise	1708 (82%)
High-rise /stacked	379 (18%)
Rental properties	759 (36%)
Owner-occupied properties	1328 (64%)

F. 19 Information chart with numerical facts of the Regenboogbuurt. Figure made by author, 2025, based on Pflug and Visser, *Stedenbouw en Kleur*, 45.

⁴⁰ Van Diepen, interview.

⁴¹ Van der Velde, "Vele Kleuren Groen".

⁴² Pflug and Visser, *Stedenbouw en Kleur*.

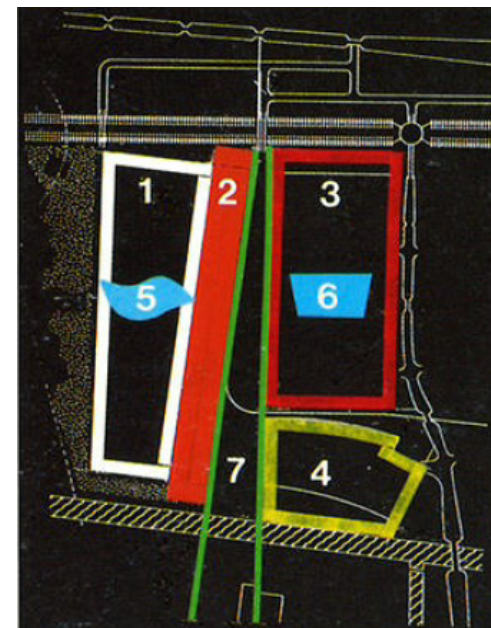
⁴³ Van Dusseldorp, Interview.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

F. 20



F. 21



F. 22

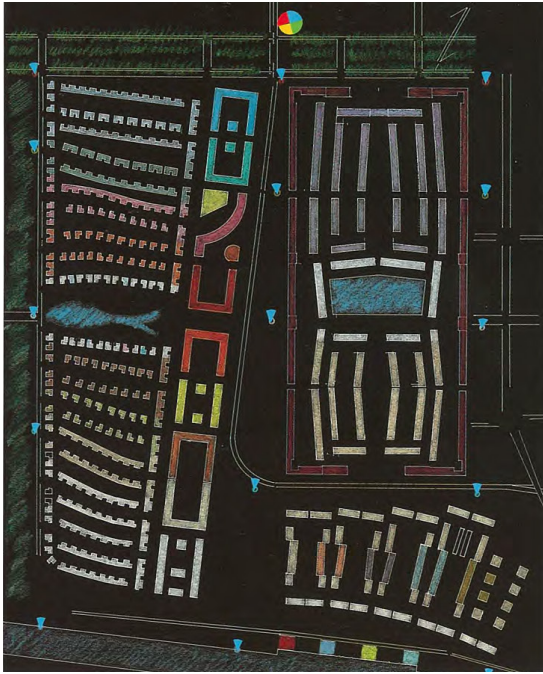


F. 20 Yellow train travelling along the Regenboogbuurt site in 1997. The inspiration for van Dusseldorp to work with fierce colours. Laumanns, "Regenboogbuurt", at 2:02.

F. 21 Urban layout. Villapark (1), Middenrif (2), Vijverkwartier (3), Lage Vaartse Front (4), Romantische vijver (5), For-mele vijver (6), Kier (7). Pflug and Visser, *Stedenbouw en Kleur*, 28.

F. 22 Urban layout projected on the current status. Figure made by author, 2026, with a base image from Google Earth Pro (2026).

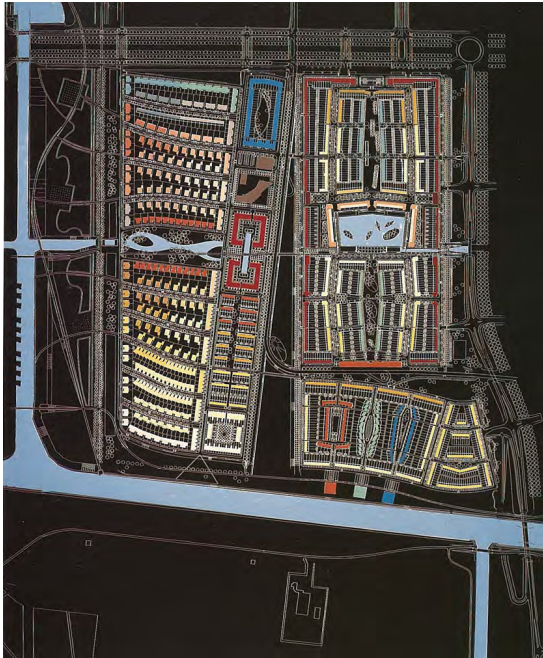
F. 23



F. 24



F. 25



F. 26



Throughout the development of the colour design, various colour schemes were created and considered. The overall concept was clear from the outset: a gradient from north to south, stronger colours in the Middenrif (2), a contrast between the enclosing wall and the centre of the Vijverkwartier (3), and the incorporation of colour accents.

Five iterations of the scheme were required to develop the colour plan. Changes to the scheme resulted from the use of different materials, financial considerations, and differing opinions about how intense the colours should be. During the process, it became clear that the proposed colour variety could not be achieved using coloured bricks (F. 23). Therefore, the same technique was used as in Berlin, involving mineral paint (F. 24).

To gain a better understanding of how the colour should be applied, the architects undertook a fieldwork trip to Onkel Toms Hütte in Berlin. They visited the neighbourhood on a grey day and were surprised by how attractive it was, even in bad weather. This convinced them to use the same bold colours as Taut, since the Netherlands experiences similar grey days.

The colour scheme underwent many changes, but the final version was completed in 1995 (F. 25). However, adjustments were still possible during construction. This was anticipated, as it is important to see how the colour works in real life. This freedom with colours resulted in good designs.⁴⁵ F. 26 shows the colour scheme of the current situation.

Landscape principles

The landscape design was made by Alle Hosper and René van der Velde. The urban division into the four quadrants, split by the green wedge and two ponds, forms the basis of the landscape design. The aim was not only to incorporate greenery into the area, but also to apply vegetation consciously and with good reasoning, bearing in mind its relationship with the colours of the built environment.

As each of the four quadrants has its own urban model, it also has its own landscape plan. A unique and important feature of vegetation is that it changes in shape and colour throughout the season. This has been taken into account in the choice of vegetation.

The landscape design can be summarised in a set of clear design principles. The first design principle is to create a simple, neutral ground level. Using tints of grey and some accents offers a blank canvas for buildings and vegetation. Private yards and the public street are separated by a low black steel frame. This standardised concept is used everywhere to control public space.

The choice of vegetation in relation to the architecture was made each time from one of these three options: contrasting, complementary, or copying. The colour wheel shows which colours complement or contrast each other.⁴⁶

F. 23 First colour scheme, end of 1992. Using coloured brick. *Pflug and Visser, Stedenbouw en Kleur*, 48.

F. 24 Second colour scheme, december 1993. Using mineral paint. *Pflug and Visser, Stedenbouw en Kleur*, 49.

F. 25 Final colour scheme, april 1995. Last drawn scheme. *Pflug and Visser, Stedenbouw en Kleur*, 52.

F. 26 Present-day colour scheme, april 1995. Last drawn scheme. "Kleurenstaten Regenboogbuurt," Gemeente Almere, last modified end of 2025, <https://www.almere.nl/wonen/stadsdelen/almere-buiten/regenboogbuurt/kleurenstaten-regenboogbuurt>

⁴⁵ *Pflug and Visser, Stedenbouw en kleur*.

⁴⁶ *Van der Velde, "Vele Kleuren Groen"*.

Architectural execution

The urban plan served as a base plan for the context, and the colour scheme provided strict guidelines for the architectural designs. It is not clear from the available literature how detailed the guidelines for the architects were. However, multiple architects have written about or spoken on the subject of the process from the urban plan to their architectural design.

Liesbeth van der Pol was commissioned for two project areas (F. 27): 72 dwellings called 'Klein India' (Little India), in the Middenrif (2),⁴⁷ and three (in early plans four) apartment blocks called 'de Rooie Donders' (the Red Dare Devils), each with 30 dwellings, in the Lage Vaartse Front (4).⁴⁸ Klein India was completed in 1993⁴⁹ and the Rooie Donders in 1998.⁵⁰

The Rooie Donders are located on the border of the neighbourhood, along the water and across the polder. Architecturally, they differ from the neighbourhood's general style. The low-rise neighbourhood of simple, similar block-shaped buildings transitions to the polder with these nine-floor high-rise buildings, which refer to industrial grain silos.⁵¹

The colour schemes on page 24 reveal the intention to create a distinct building typology for these three buildings along the canal. They also demonstrate the application of three different colours, which are consistent with the inner layer of the Lage Vaartse Front. However, the current Rooie Donders are, as their name suggests,

completely red. This is the result of van der Pol's design process.

Starting with the guidelines provided by the project managers and van Dusseldorp, she developed her design. The polder was an important source of inspiration, leading to the concept of grain silos. Liesbeth believes that colour is important in design and uses it as a tool to evoke emotion. She did not think this could be achieved with the colours originally intended for the Donders. The colours were obstacles in designing a good project. She experimented with different colours, but was forbidden to use white. At the completion event of Klein India, she wore a red suit, and knew that red should be the colour for the Rooie Donders. Following lengthy discussions with van Dusseldorp, de Boer, and Laumanns, they agreed to this change.⁵²

This anecdote reveals the complexity of designing a neighbourhood in accordance with strict urban guidelines, together with architects who mostly focus on their individual success. While the strong guidance and direction from the managers resulted in a successful project, it also made the project more challenging than a standard one. The proposed colour scheme was therefore not strict, but rather a range of colours within which the architects could vary.⁵³ Strict guidelines could limit architectural freedom and could have resulted in missed opportunities. The homogenous feeling that the neighbourhood currently has was not an obvious result from the outset.⁵⁴



F. 27



F. 28



F. 29

⁴⁷ Pflug en Visser, *Stedebouw en Kleur*, 64.

⁴⁸ Pflug en Visser, *Stedebouw en Kleur*, 79.

⁴⁹ "Klein India, Almere," *Dok Architecten*, accessed April 3, 2026, <https://dokarchitecten.nl/project/klein-india-almere>.

⁵⁰ "Rooie Donders, Almere," *Dok Architecten*, accessed April 3, 2026, <https://dokarchitecten.nl/project/rooie-donders-almere>.

⁵¹ *Dok Architecten*, "Rooie Donders."

⁵² Van der Pol, guest, "KLEUR; dragen van bouwvormen" from 22:47.

⁵³ Van Dusseldorp, interview.

F. 27 Site plan Regenboogbuurt 1:7500, Projects by van der Pol, Klein India and Rooie Donders, are highlighted. Figure made by author, 2026.

F. 28 Photograph taken in the courtyard of Klein India. Arjen Schmitz, *Klein India, Almere*, photograph, Dok Architecten, n.d., <https://dokarchitecten.nl/project/klein-india-almere>.

F. 29 Front façade of one of the Rooie Donders. Rob 't Hart, *Rooie Donders, Almere - Dukdalf*, photograph, Dok Architecten, n.d., <https://dokarchitecten.nl/project/rooie-donders-almere>.

F. 30



F. 31



F. 32



F. 33



F. 30 Photograph taken from playground Siennastraat. Pien Zagt, *Site visit 1 Regenboogbuurt*, January 31, 2026, photograph.

F. 31 Photograph taken in Zwavelgeelstraat. Zagt, *Site visit 1*.

F. 32 Photograph taken in Mintplantsoen. Pien Zagt, *Site visit 2 Regenboogbuurt*, March 5, 2026, photograph.

F. 33 Photograph taken in Prismastraat, showing Siennastraat. Zagt, *Site visit 2*.

One design

The urban, landscape, and architectural design all come together in a harmonious design. The use of colour emerged as a structuring principle, fostering collaboration throughout the project's various phases.⁵⁵ Four images showcase four different parts of the neighbourhood, each of which was designed by different architect(s). These images demonstrate the implementation of the design principles of the urban, architectural, and landscape plans.

The Rooie Donders eventually turned out as three fierce, red, steel buildings, one of which can be seen in F. 31. Everything, from the cladding to the balcony railing, is red. However, this red colour is never the same. The light during the day, from a cool morning sun to a warm, low evening sun, constantly changes the way we perceive the colours. That is why this red colour, comes in endless variants.⁵⁶ The high-rise building forms a striking contrast with the low-rise neighbourhood and marks the end of the neighbourhood, which can be seen from far away.

Van Dusseldorp designed the colours to serve as a wayfinding for children in the neighbourhood. As can be seen in F.30, behind the playground, the corner buildings at the intersection of the two streets are highlighted in blue and yellow, with a setback in the volume. This change in colour not only explains the urban layout but also makes the other colours stand out, enhancing their visual impact.⁵⁷

F.32 shows a building block in the Vijverkwartier with a green area filled with birch trees in front of it. During winter, the white trunks complement the vertical character of the buildings, when only their trunks are in colour.⁵⁸ The choice of trees has been carefully considered to make good use of the characteristics of each season.

Similarities with Onkel Toms Hütte can be seen in many places, for example when comparing F.33 with F. 14 and F. 15 on page 19. Firstly, the use of colour in the strong mineral paint is noticeable. In the detailing of the façade, multiple similarities can be identified. These include the choice of unpainted brick for the separation line between dwellings and the plinth. The window frames are polychrome, with an inner and outer colour. The inner colour complements the façade colour while the outer colour contrasts with it. One difference from Onkel Toms Hütte is the use of steel frame fences as a standardised fence type.

These four images demonstrate the variety in design while adhering to consistent design guidelines and a uniform layout. The Rooie Donders are a notable exception to the area's typically low-rise architecture, and serve as landmarks for navigating the neighbourhood.

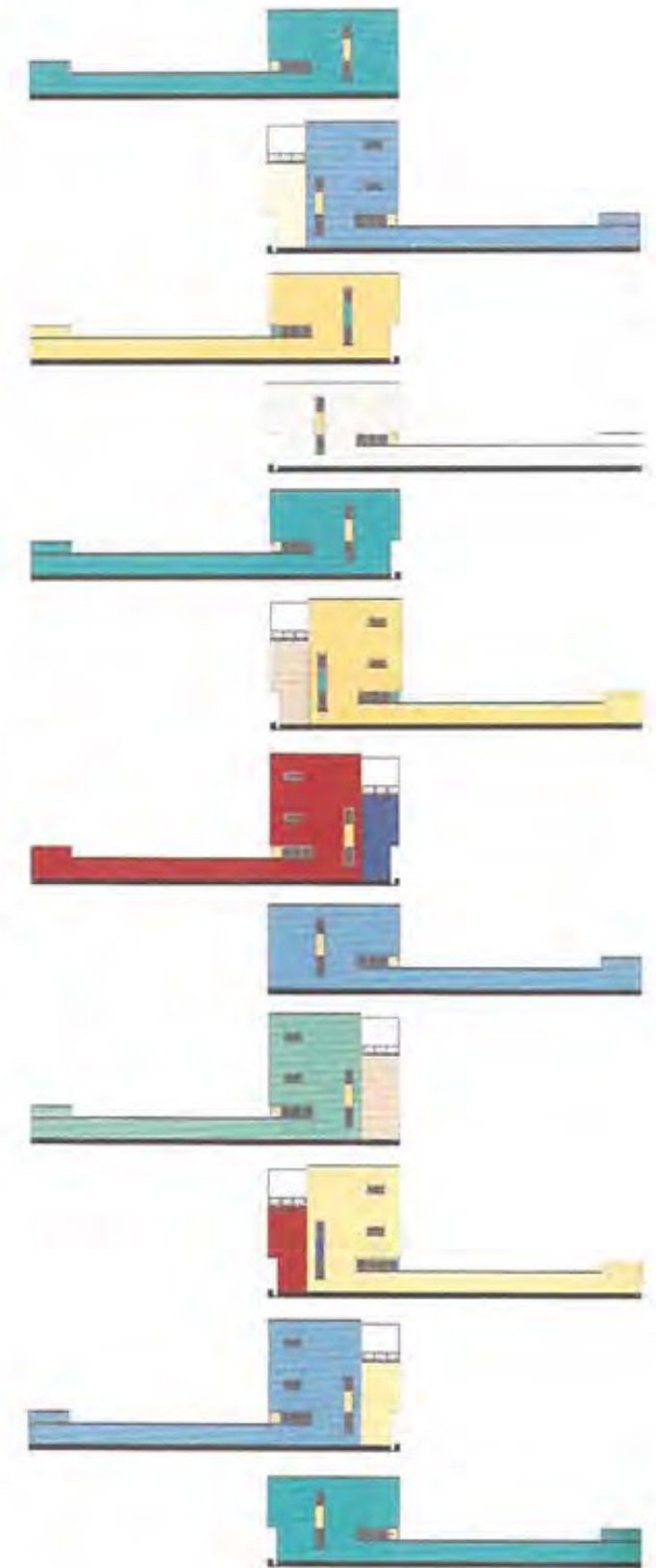
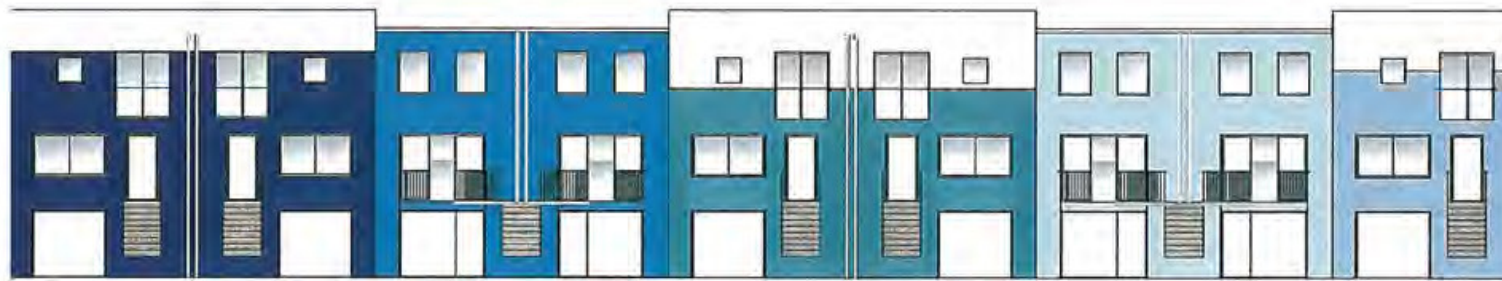
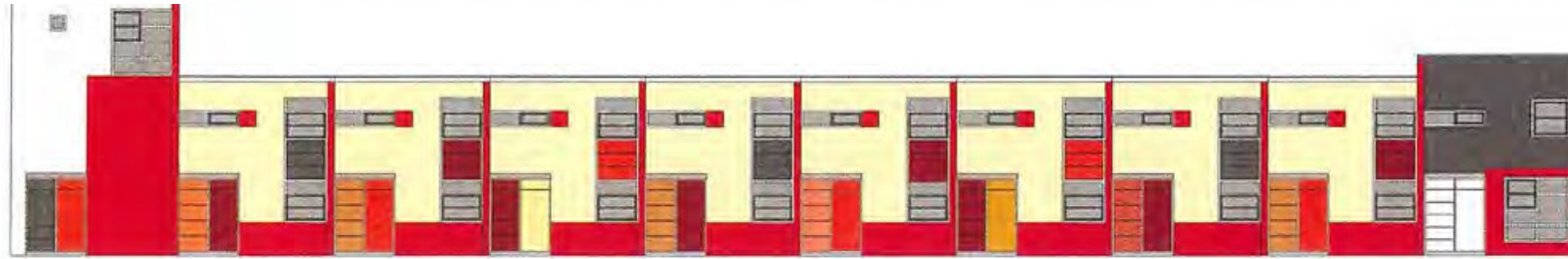
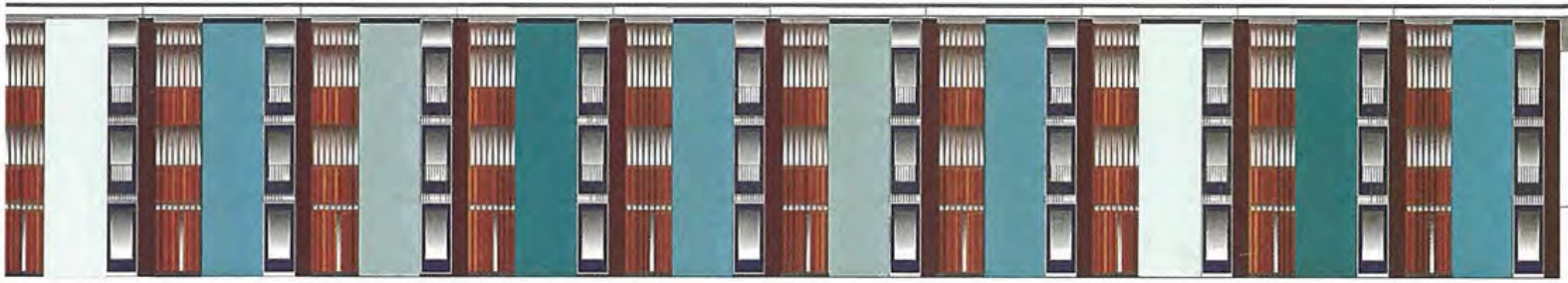
⁵⁵ Pflug and Visser, *Stedebouw en Kleur*.

⁵⁶ Van Dusseldorp, *interview*.

⁵⁷ Van Dusseldorp, *interview*.

⁵⁸ Floor van Dusseldorp, guest, "Regenboogbuurt Almere is geen omgevallen kleordoos: Floor van Dusseldorp," YouTube video, *Omroep Flevoland*, December 23, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uxYZITwE2vQ>

⁵⁹ Van Diepen, *interview*.



Living in the Regenboogbuurt: from plan to place

F. 35



F. 36



F. 37



F. 38



Motives to move in

Once construction was finished, the architects left and the residents moved in. The transition from 'plan' to 'lived place' began. While 36% of the 2.087 houses were available to rent, 64% were designated to private ownership, offering more properties for sale than in other parts of Almere. The price range has a different balance as well, offering more middle-class dwellings.⁶⁰ During the sale process of the Regenboogbuurt, house prices in larger cities around Almere, such as Amsterdam, were high. In comparison, the houses in the Regenboogbuurt were affordable, making it an attractive alternative. At the same time, the location of the area is ideal in terms of regional accessibility, due to the immediate access road to the A6 and A27.⁶¹ These affordability and accessibility factors can be seen as the primary motivation to move to the Regenboogbuurt.

From interviews with two residents — Diana van Diepen, who lives in the Terracottastraat, and Annie Jansen,⁶² who lives in the Rooie Donders — the colour of the buildings they chose to move in seems to be a minor but positive matter. The colour, and respectively the character of the neighbourhood, was a secondary but positive factor in their decision to move to the Regenboogbuurt.^{63 64}

Van Diepen is a resident from the very beginning. When she and her husband moved in, their block was still unpainted. During buyer's meetings, the soon-to-

be residents of their block asked if it was possible not to paint the façades. They were concerned about the amount of maintenance work involved (and perhaps also about the bright colours). The developers declined.⁶⁵

Exterior in the interior

The neighbourhood's colourful character seems not to be the deciding factor for moving in. However, both Jansen and van Diepen have, consciously or unconsciously, incorporated the colour of their façade into the interior.

Jansen and the previous residents of her apartment used a wine red, instead of the fiery red of the façade, throughout the interior in various ways, such as for the curtains, fridge and even flower pots, as can be seen on the left page. The window frames that are part of the façade are also red on the inside. Some residents chose to paint these in a different colour. However, Jansen and her husband chose to leave them red. There is a functional reason for this: red is a very difficult colour to paint over.⁶⁶

Van Diepen's kitchen, hallway, stairs, and living room feature flooring, wall paint, and cabinets in a terracotta colour. Residents of the Hennahof, one of van der Pol's two projects, also chose their kitchen or bathroom tiles to match those of their dwelling.⁶⁷ An interview with a ground-floor resident of the Rooie Donders reveals red cushions and a red playset for her daughter, in an otherwise rather monochrome interior.⁶⁸

F. 34, previous page: Collection of façade drawings of the Regenboogbuurt. Pflug and Visser, *Stedebouw en kleur*, 54, 62, 68, 70-72.

F. 35 Kitchen interior in the Rooie Donders. Annie Jansen, direct mail attachment to author, March 18, 2026.

F. 36 Balcony with a polder view in the Rooie Donders. Jansen, mail.

F. 37 Red details and curtains in the Rooie Donders. Jansen, mail.

F. 38 Red vase and window frames in the Rooie Donders. Jansen, mail.

⁶⁰ Pflug and Visser, *Stedebouw en kleur*.

⁶¹ Van Diepen, interview.

⁶² For privacy reasons, the last name of Annie has been pseudonymised.

⁶³ Van Diepen, interview.

^{64 65} Annie Jansen, interview by author, phone call, conducted on March 18, 2026.

^{66 67} Van Diepen, interview.

⁶⁸ Kirsten Thuis-Woudenberg, "Zo woon ik: Wonen in de Rooie Donders," *Almere deze Week*, May 9, 2023, <https://www.almeredezeweek.nl/nieuws/wonen/56298/zo-woon-ik-wonen-in-de-rooie-donders>.

Intentionally or not, these interior design choices connect the residents' indoor and outdoor living experiences, both physically and mentally. They show a subconscious identification with the building and neighbourhood.

Quality of the outdoor space

The outdoor private spaces, such as the façades and gardens, tell a different story when it comes to the residents' relationship with the colour scheme. More than 25 years after its completion, changes to the original design can be seen in a visit to the Regenboogbuurt. These changes lie in the minor details, such as replaced or wrongly repainted doors and window frames, or other additions to the façade, as can be seen on the right page. These adaptations are mostly visible in the privately owned dwellings, since the housing corporations follow a more organised maintenance plan and places greater value on maintaining their properties in a good state (F. 40).⁶⁹

What stands out in general is the maintained quality of the larger surfaces: the mineral paint of the brick façades. Due to the high quality of this paint, it has not been necessary to repaint. However, a danger lurks, that private owners will repaint their façade in a slightly different colour, once maintenance is necessary. However, this danger is mitigated by a preservation plan.

Preservation of the quality

Early on in the project, the question of how to preserve the developed quality of the Regenboogbuurt became a key point of attention. Two methods were developed

and implemented: publicity and regulation. An extensive campaign programme was intended to generate public support. The idea was that raising awareness among residents of their responsibility would help to preserve the neighbourhood's character.⁷⁰

The second method of ensuring preservation is regulation. The colour scheme is regulated through both public and private law. In addition to the 'Globale Bestemmingsplan,' the general zoning plan for Almere, an explanatory document has been created, the 'Uitwerkingsplan.' This implementation plan sets out guidelines for the neighbourhood, such as maximum building heights and the colour scheme. This allows the guidelines to be monitored. The 'Bouwbesluit' also regulates permitted changes, such as the maximum building height of fences and hedges.⁷¹

All 2.087 houses have a purchase deed, in accordance with the template for Almere. Due to this standardisation, the deeds do not specify how owners should maintain the exterior colours. However, all of these deeds contain a perpetual clause, informing owners that the exterior colours must remain as they were when the house was completed, and must be passed on to each new buyer. An additional document, which is stapled to the deed, specifies which colours your house should be painted and details the relevant rules.⁷²

However, the number of residents living in the Regenboogbuurt from the very beginning is declining. New residents have less connection with the neighbourhood. The extensive campaign that took place during

F. 39



F. 40



F. 41



F. 42



F. 39 Photograph taken in Scharlakenstraat. Zagt, Site visit 2.

F. 40 Photograph taken in Caramelstraat. Zagt, Site visit 2.

F. 41 Photograph taken in Maisgeelstraat. Zagt, Site visit 2.

F. 42 Photograph taken in Sepiastraat. Zagt, Site visit 2.

⁶⁹ Van Diepen, interview.

⁷⁰ Pflug and Visser, *Stedebouw en kleur*.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Van Diepen, interview.

the development phase is no longer running. Currently, the only ongoing preservation method done by the municipality is regulation.

The Uitwerkingsplan and the clause with the additional document specifying the colours enable the municipality to monitor and prevent any unauthorised changes made by residents. However, it turns out that this supervision is not a priority. When new residents move into their home, they want to make a fresh start. Window frames and doors are repainted or replaced with plastic ones. Colours are being changed, because everyone has a different taste in colours. House owners are either unaware of the importance of choosing the right colour or simply do not care, preferring the cheapest option from the hardware store. Without supervision or maintenance from the municipality, residents can do this without facing any consequences. Properties managed by housing associations demonstrate a different maintenance trajectory due to the presence of centralised institutional care.⁷³

One might ask whether it is problematic if the colours of the secondary elements change as long as the main feature that gives the neighbourhood its coherence, the wall colour, remains the same. A similar situation occurred in Onkel Toms Hütte.

In 1968, Helge Pitz, a German Architect, moved into one of Taut's row-houses in Onkel Toms Hütte. The development was completed in 1931, over 35 years before Pitz moved in. Pitz claims that, during the

1970s, the project has 'lots its face.' Wooden windows were replaced with plastic ones and colours disappeared or changed. The strong quality that the project had upon completion was downgraded due to the inhabitants' interventions. Pitz began an attempt to hinder the changes and restore the site to its original state. He produced a document with a study of the original state of the establishment and suggestions for preserving the site. He also suggested registering the project as a protected building area. This resulted in a movement to protect and restore Taut's developments.⁷⁴ Onkel Toms Hütte is not one of the four entities of Taut on the UNESCO World Heritage List. It differs too much from the original design.⁷⁵

A comparable situation is unfolding in the Regenboogbuurt. More than 25 years after its completion, changes to the original design are becoming increasingly visible. There is a risk of the neighbourhood losing its identity, if this decay continues. Therefore, in 2017, a small group of committed residents set up the foundation 'Stichting Regenboogbuurt Almere.'

The goal of the foundation is to preserve and protect the neighbourhood, especially the colour schemes.⁷⁶ They have restarted the campaign program for preservation, by informing the residents about the neighbourhood's history and design, and actively involving them with activities. They also advocate for the Regenboogbuurt to be given the label as 'Beschermd Stadsgezicht' (protected townscape), which would give it government protection.⁷⁷ Any changes

made within a protected townscape must be assessed against the Omgevingsplan (or Uitwerkingsplan in the case of the Regenboogbuurt), to safeguard the historical identity.⁷⁸

The foundation is actively lobbying within the municipality and has already succeeded in gaining recognition for the Regenboogbuurt as a "young cultural heritage" site. By educating residents about the colour schemes and the project's unique design history, while simultaneously pursuing official protected status, the foundation aims to create a deeper sense of individual responsibility among homeowners. Acknowledging the neighbourhood's character develops an awareness that each dwelling is part of a larger, collective context. This realisation, in return, encourages residents to take greater responsibility for the preservation and state of their home's exterior. Additionally, this can result in a greater sense of belonging to the neighbourhood.

Creating a sense of community

Taut used the colour to improve the worst tenements and bring joy, believing that those who can find joy in light, can also find joy in colour.⁷⁹ Laumanns and van Dusseldorp wanted to apply this concept to avoid endless residential fields and give character to the neighbourhood. Do these design choices improve the living environment and the sense of belonging for the residents?

The colours certainly bring joy to the area. In both good and bad weather, the walls reflect the luminescence of the vibrant colours. Everyone interviewed agreed that colour

brings joy to the eye, whether you are a fan or not. Children who live in the neighbourhood reportedly feel disappointed when they visit a holiday resort that is less colourful than their own neighbourhood.⁸⁰

To what extent can urban design directly facilitate a connection with the neighbourhood? More factors are important for forming a connection. For example, a meeting place or somewhere to gather. The Regenboogbuurt does not have a community centre or other places where people can come together, apart from the children's playground. Stichting Regenboogbuurt organises events throughout the year, such as the yearly cherry blossom festival (see photographs on the next page) to bring neighbours together and create a sense of community. However, the growing trend of individualisation is evident, for example in the transformation of backyard hedges into two-metre high fences that isolate people from their neighbours.⁸¹

⁷³ Stichting Regenboogbuurt Almere, "Manifest: Regenboogbuurt Almere-Buiten: cultureel erfgoed!," October 2025, <https://regenboogbuurt.nl/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/2024-25-MEI-manifest-tekst-origineel-pdf.pdf>.

⁷⁴ Brenne, Taut, 31.

⁷⁵ Van Diepen, interview.

⁷⁶ "Over Stichting Regenboogbuurt," Stichting Regenboogbuurt Almere, accessed March 3, 2026, <https://regenboogbuurt.nl/overons/>.

⁷⁷ Stichting, "Manifest."

⁷⁸ "Beschermd stads- en dorpsgezichten," Rijksdienst voor het cultureel erfgoed, accessed on March 3, 2026, <https://www.cultureelerfgoed.nl/onderwerpen/b/beschermd-stads-en-dorpsgezichten>.

⁷⁹ De Heer, Kleur en architectuur.

⁸⁰ Van Diepen, interview.

F. 43



F. 44



F. 45



F. 43 Cherry blossom in the Sepiastraat. *Robert de Vries, De kersenbloesem van de Regenboogbuurt is ook vanuit de lucht prachtig*, photograph, Almere deze week, March 23, 2022, <https://www.almeredezeweek.nl/nieuws/algemeen/52057/dronebeelden-kerenbloemen-regenboogbuurt>.

F. 44 Cherry blossom festival. *Pauli Langbein, Kersenbloesemfoto*, photograph, Stadsarchief Almere, 2019, <https://stadsarchief.almere.nl/ontdek/kerenbloesem-fotos>.

F. 45 Cherry blossom with the Rooie Donders. *Unknown author, Binnenkort staan de kersenbomen in de Regenboogbuurt weer in bloei*, photograph, Almere deze week, March 1, 2022, <https://www.almeredezeweek.nl/nieuws/algemeen/51703/activiteiten-in-kader-van-kerenbloesemfeest-almere>.

Conclusion

This study is based on the research question of whether a colour strategy in an urban plan can foster a sense of belonging among the residents. The Regenboogbuurt is used as a case study. In this project, colour is used as a fundamental element in the design of the urban plan. This is not a common approach in urban planning projects, making the Regenboogbuurt unique in the Netherlands. However, there are other successful examples, particularly the Siedlungen of Taut in Berlin. This is why Onkel Toms Hütte was such an inspiration for the Regenboogbuurt.

The Regenboogbuurt is unique in its magnificent use of colour throughout all scales and elements of the project. The urban planners, landscape architects, architects and colour advisor collaborated intensively to create a coherent plan, from trees to window frames. However, the designers' intentions for the lived experience remain unseen.

Research into the lived experience, conducted through interviews and desk research, showcases a fragile connection between the coloured neighbourhood and the level of connection among residents. Nevertheless, the mirroring of the façade colours in the interior suggests a (perhaps unconscious) connection with the urban plan. A small group of committed residents who run the foundation are highly connected, because they see the Regenboogbuurt as a heritage that is worth fighting for.

Overall, a lack of responsibility among the general population is evident, with individual changes to the façades becoming increasingly apparent. The details reveal the deteriorating cohesion. Granting the neighbourhood protected townscape status would increase its value and the sense of responsibility felt by residents. Their homes would be placed within a larger context and become part of something precious. The Regenboogbuurt proves that a colour plan can foster a sense of belonging, but only if it is supported by active community engagement and legal protection, to turn the prescribed colours into a shared feeling.

Acknowledgements

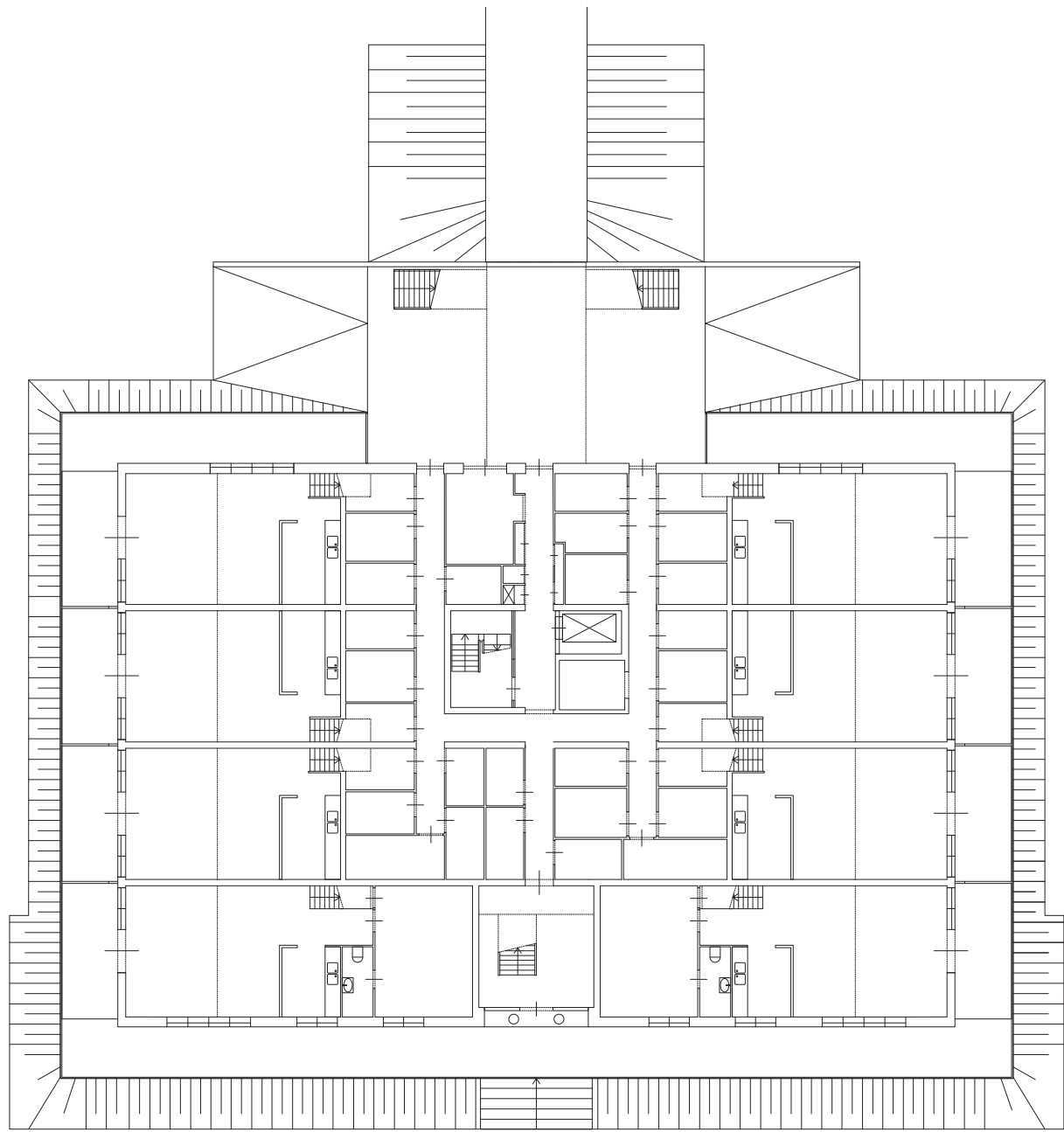
This project would not have been possible without the generous contributions of Diana van Diepen, Floor van Dusseldorp and Annie Jansen. Their willingness to be interviewed demonstrates the engagement of both current residents and those involved in the development of this neighbourhood, which makes this a unique project. Their participation illustrates the collective spirit of the Regenboogbuurt, by those who are aware of the area's history. Thank you all.

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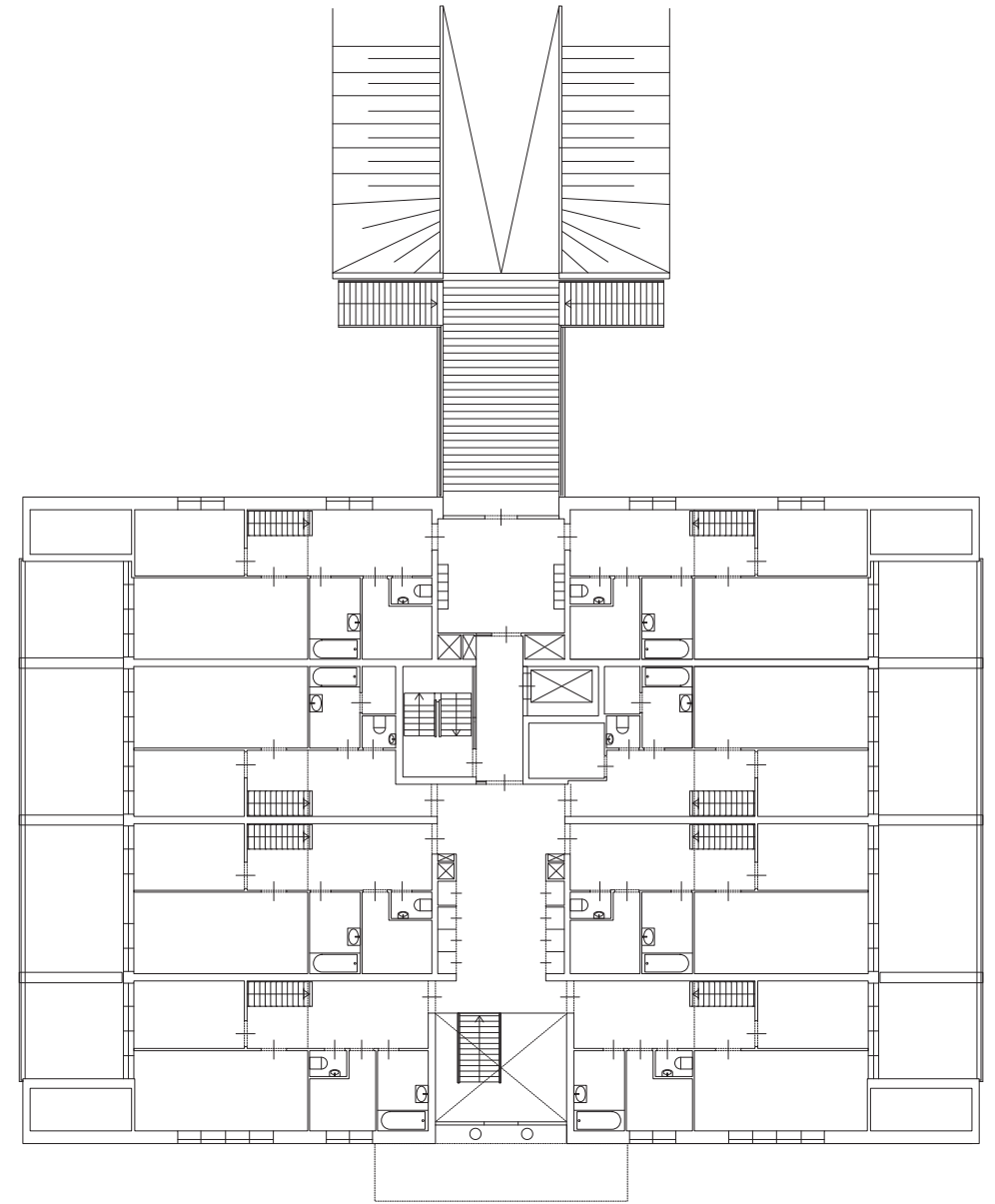
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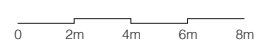
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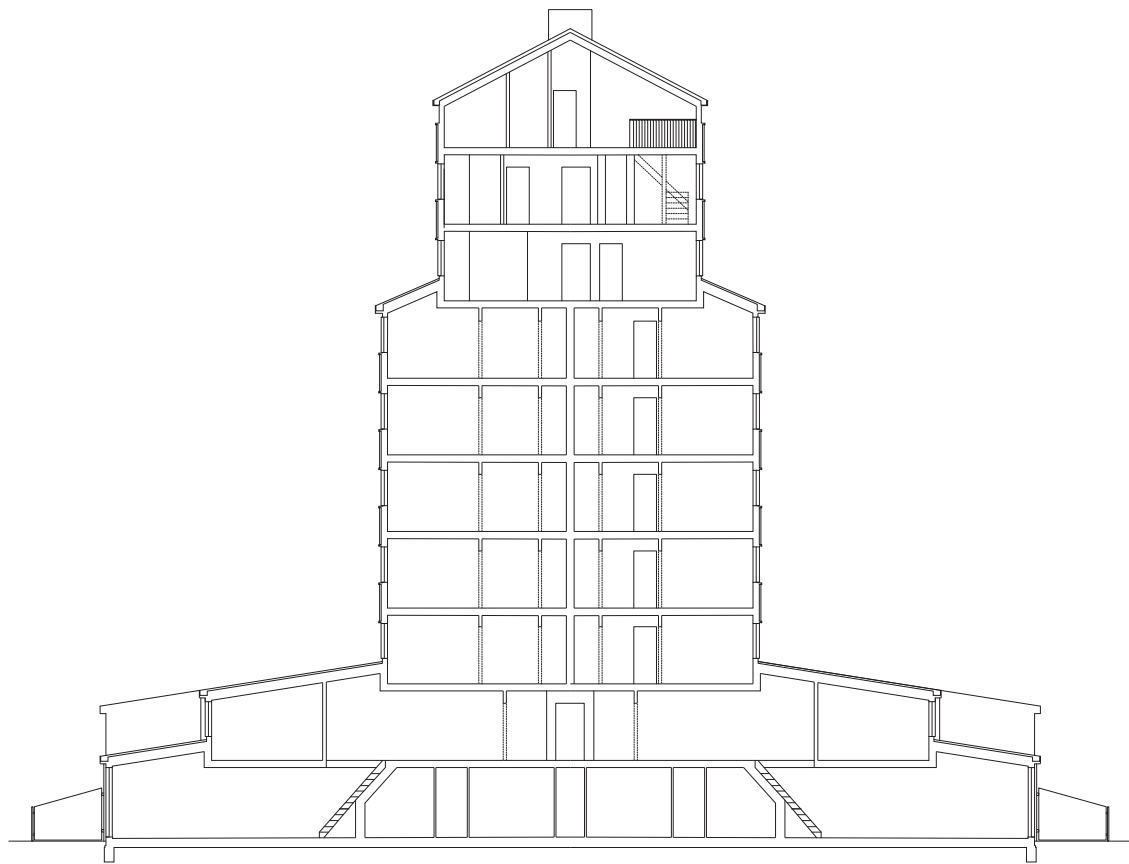


Ground Floor 1:200 (scaled 75%)

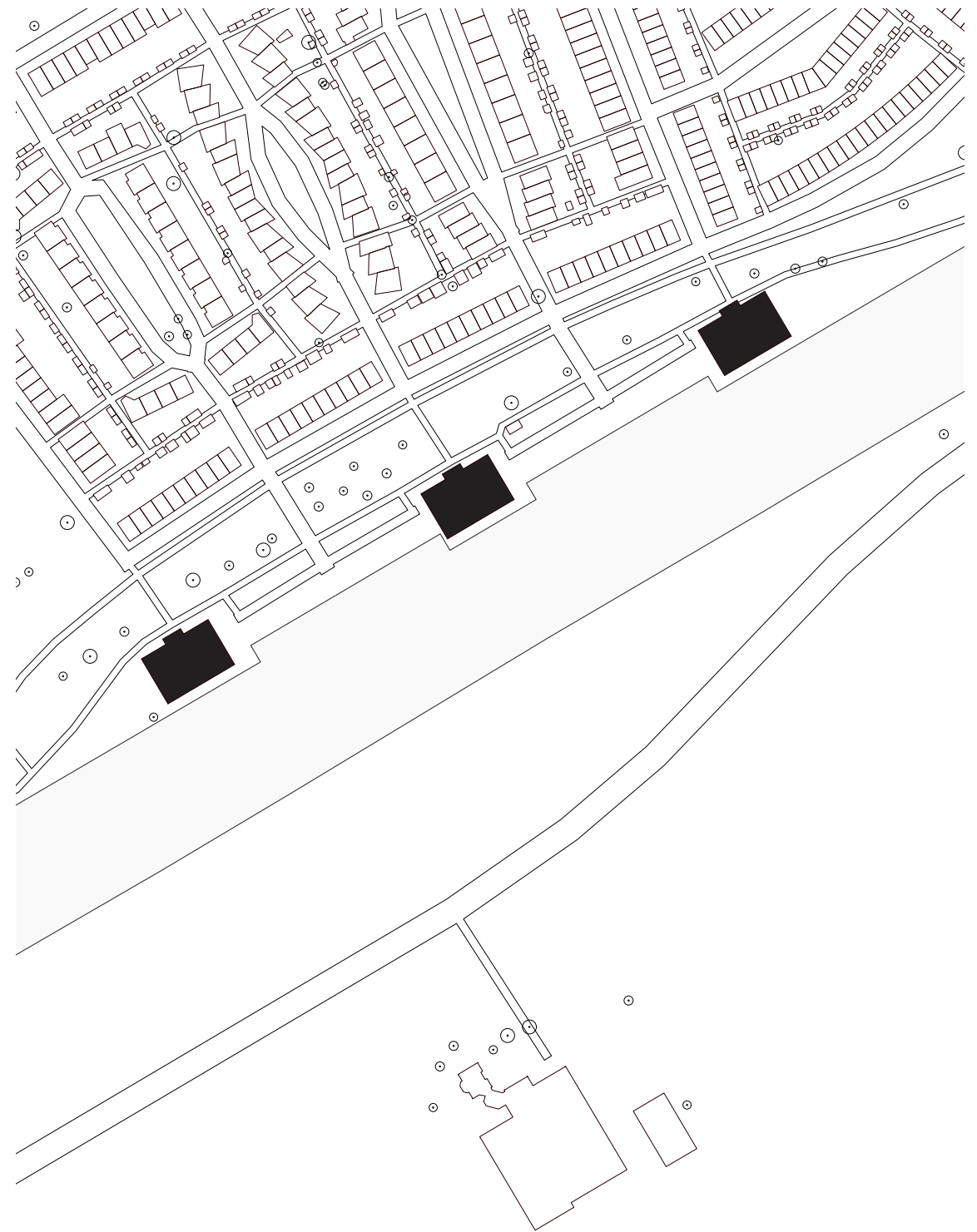
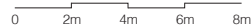


First Floor 1:200 (scaled 75%)





Cross Section 1:200 (scaled 75%)



Site Plan 1:2000 (scaled 75%)

