

Postwar Reconstruction of Dutch School Buildings

History Thesis

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Abstract

The design of school buildings in the Netherlands during the 1950s and 1960s played a crucial role in reflecting the social and democratic ideals of postwar reconstruction. Rooted in modernist architectural principles of simplicity, functionality, and adaptability, these schools were designed to support educational reform, social equality, and modernization. Notable examples, such as J.J.P. Oud's Tweede Vrijzinnig Christelijk Lyceum and J.J. Hornstra's Haags Montessori Lyceum, demonstrate how architecture was used to create inclusive, community-oriented learning environments. Centralized communal spaces and specialized departments encouraged collaboration, accessibility, and personalized education. By integrating democratic values into their design, these schools functioned not only as places of learning but also as symbols of broader societal progress in the postwar Netherlands.

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Introduction

After World War II, the Netherlands faced not only the immense challenge of rebuilding its war-torn cities and towns but also the opportunity to shape a new society. The reconstruction period was driven by a strong commitment to democratic and social ideals (Mellink, 2013), with modernization at its core. The government played an active role in this transformation, not only through policies that stimulated economic growth and social stability but also by influencing the design of public spaces and buildings (Het Schoolblad, 1956).

Within this broader reconstruction effort, a distinct architectural style emerged, heavily influenced by modernism and gaining prominence in the 1950s and 1960s (Reinders, 2016). Characterized by simplicity, functionality, and the use of modern materials such as concrete, steel, and glass, this style was more than just an aesthetic choice, it reflected the values of efficiency, progress, and collaboration that defined the era.

At the same time, the Dutch education system underwent significant reforms (Schuyt et al., 2000). Education came to be seen as a powerful tool for social equality and personal development, and school buildings were designed to embody this new vision (Hertzberger, 2008). Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, schools were adapted to accommodate a more diverse student population and to promote equal access to education. This shift was reflected in practical architectural choices, such as open and flexible spaces, the incorporation of natural light, and designs that encouraged collaboration and a sense of community.

To explore these developments further, this study will examine specific examples of secondary school buildings from the 1950s and 1960s. Through an analysis of floor plans, layouts, and architectural details, the research will investigate how ideals of social equality, modernization, and educational reform were expressed in the physical space of secondary schools. By linking broader societal and architectural contexts with specific design choices, this study will demonstrate that these buildings were more than mere structures, they reflected a changing society.

The central research question guiding this work is: How did the design of school buildings in the Netherlands in the 1950s and 1960s reflect the social and democratic ideals of postwar reconstruction, particularly in terms of social equality, modernization, and educational reform?

To address this question, the study explores themes such as modernist architecture, functionalism, social progress, and educational reform. It draws on theoretical perspectives that examine the role of architecture in shaping public life, the impact of education on democracy, and the broader relationship between built environments and societal values.

This research builds on previous studies of postwar reconstruction (Mellink, 2013), modernist architecture in the Netherlands (Reinders, 2016), and educational reform (Schuyt et al., 2000; Hertzberger, 2008). While existing literature has explored the influence of modernist architecture on public buildings, little attention has been given to how school buildings, in particular, embodied social ideals. This study aims to bridge that gap by connecting architectural choices with broader educational and democratic reforms, offering a more integrated perspective on the role of school architecture in postwar Dutch society.

Methodology

This is a historical and architectural study that relies on literature review and case study analysis. It is not a personal or theoretical exploration but an empirical investigation of how architectural design reflected broader social and political values. Primary and secondary sources including architectural plans, policy documents, and existing historical interpretations form the basis of this research. By focusing on two specific secondary schools, the study aims to illustrate wider trends in school architecture and educational philosophy.

Structure of the thesis

1. Introduction
Provides an in-depth explanation of the research topic, outlines the methodology, reviews existing literature, and highlights gaps in the research.
2. Social and Democratic Ideals of Postwar Reconstruction
Explores the values that shaped postwar Dutch society, including democracy, social equality, and modernization, and examines their influence on urban planning and public architecture.
3. Architectural Features
Identifies the defining characteristics of postwar architectural styles, particularly modernism, and discusses how principles like simplicity, functionality, and the use of modern materials reflected broader societal ideals.
4. Educational Reform
Investigates the educational transformations of the 1950s and 1960s, focusing on their impact on school building design, particularly in terms of accessibility and equality.
5. Case Studies
Analyzes het Tweede Vrijzinnig Christelijk Lyceum and Haags Montessori Lyceum, linking their architectural features to the themes explored in earlier chapters through floorplans and layouts.
6. Conclusion
Summarizes key findings and presents the broader implications of this research.

Social and Democratic Ideals of Postwar Reconstruction

The aftermath of World War II marked a crucial moment for the Netherlands as the country embarked on an ambitious process of modernization and reconstruction. In the face of widespread destruction, urban planners, architects, and policymakers sought to reshape cities and society through rational design, technological advancement, and democratic values. This era of rebuilding was driven by the belief that modernization could encourage economic growth, social harmony, and a more equitable future.

Modernization and Urban Planning

Modernization played a crucial role in postwar reconstruction, profoundly influencing urban planning and infrastructure development. The government adopted rationalist and functionalist approaches, aiming to create efficient, well-organized cities that supported economic growth and social cohesion. The reconstruction of Rotterdam, which had been almost entirely destroyed during the war, became a symbol of this modernization drive. The city's redesign emphasized accessibility, modern transport networks, and high-quality public spaces, reflecting a vision of progress and collective well-being.

The postwar era introduced a new approach to urban planning, shaped by the ideals of the modernist movement, as seen in the Congrès International d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM) and the Bauhaus school. Across Europe and beyond, new cities and neighborhoods were designed based on principles of efficiency, functionality, and social harmony. The Netherlands embraced these ideas in its postwar housing and urban development projects. The new urban landscapes reflected the belief that a well-designed physical environment could transform societal structures and promote a more equitable way of life. Similar to the grand ensembles in France, the new towns in Britain, and the Sputnik settlements in the Soviet Union, Dutch postwar urban expansion aimed to create orderly and healthy living conditions, countering the perceived chaos of pre-war urbanization (Reinders, 2016).

Le Corbusier, one of the leading figures of modernist architecture, envisioned cities as precisely planned entities designed for efficiency and social order. He saw the chaotic nineteenth-century city as a problem to be solved through architectural intervention. His concept of the "Radiant City" embodied a utopian vision in which large populations could live harmoniously within a structured environment, away from the disorder and overcrowding of traditional urban centers. In the Netherlands, these ideas influenced the planning of postwar housing developments, which prioritized spacious layouts, green spaces, and standardized, functionalist architecture.

Public Buildings as Expressions of Democratic and Social Values

The concept of the 'Open Society,' popularized by philosopher Karl Popper in his 1945 book *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, deeply influenced post-war architecture. Architects like Alison and Peter Smithson, part of Team 10, believed that an open society needed an open city one that facilitated freedom of movement and interaction, both within public and private spaces. This idea became a response to the political climate of the time, particularly against the Communist East, and reflected democratic, humanist ideals (Van Den Heuvel, 2014).

In the Netherlands, postwar public architecture embodied these ideals through transparency and inclusivity. Government buildings, schools, and housing projects incorporated open-plan designs and public spaces to encourage civic engagement and reflect democratic values. Architects such as Michiel Brinkman and Cornelis van Eesteren sought to create environments that balanced collective identity with individual freedom. However, the tension between inclusivity and state control created contradictions in realizing these ideals. Ultimately, post-war architecture was not just about function but also symbolized a commitment to freedom, mobility, and egalitarianism in the evolving democratic societies of Europe. (Van Den Heuvel, 2014).

The Political and Social Climate of Postwar Reconstruction

The optimism surrounding postwar reconstruction extended beyond architecture. There was a widespread belief that democracy, social equality, and modernization would shape the Netherlands' future. This sentiment was reflected in the political discourse following the war. As H.M. van Randwijk proclaimed on May 9, 1945, "*Amsterdammers, we are free!*" His speech, delivered on the Dam, encapsulated the collective hope for a new society built on peace, freedom, and solidarity. However, as the initial euphoria faded, tensions arose between those who had remained in occupied Netherlands and those returning from exile in London or the liberated south. The postwar political landscape was marked by both high expectations and disillusionment.

The establishment of the Schermerhorn-Drees cabinet in 1945 embodied the drive for social renewal. The government prioritized reconstruction efforts, addressing urgent issues such as housing shortages, industrial recovery, education reform, and social security. However, despite aspirations for political reform, traditional party structures remained dominant. The 1946 elections demonstrated the resilience of prewar political alignments, as voters largely supported the established parties, reinforcing continuity rather than radical change. Nevertheless, the postwar coalition between the Catholic People's Party (KVP) and the Labour Party (PvdA) reflected a pragmatic approach to governance, recognizing that national rebuilding required broad political cooperation (Schuyt et al., 2000).

One of the defining aspects of Dutch society in the 1950s was its structure as a pluralistic collection of minorities, often referred to as 'pillarization' (*verzuiling*). This system, in which various religious and ideological groups maintained their own social institutions, shaped both political and social life. Each of these communities, Catholic, Protestant, and Socialist, had distinct interpretations of concepts like 'community' and 'authority.' In Catholic circles, community was seen as a theologically and socially integrated whole, bound by religious teachings and papal encyclicals. Protestants, on the other hand, viewed society through the lens of 'sovereignty in its own circle,' advocating for a decentralized state that respected individual responsibilities. Socialists, influenced by personalism and wartime solidarity, emphasized collective support but were less institutionally unified than the religious pillars. Despite these differences, all groups recognized the overarching Dutch society as a common framework, allowing for cooperation in governance while maintaining their distinct identities.

Conclusion

The postwar reconstruction of the Netherlands was a defining period that reshaped the nation's cities, institutions, and political landscape. Modernization efforts in urban planning, architecture, and governance aimed to create a more efficient, equitable, and democratic society. The influence of modernist ideals fostered a vision of progress, while the persistence of traditional political structures and social divisions highlighted the challenges of transformation. Despite tensions and setbacks, the reconstruction period laid the foundation for a modern Netherlands that balanced innovation with historical continuity, shaping the country's development for decades to come

Characteristics of Postwar Dutch Architecture

The postwar period in the Netherlands marked a significant shift in architectural design, reflecting the need for rapid reconstruction and the embrace of modernist principles. Architects sought to create structures that were not only functional and efficient but also symbolized a progressive and democratic society. Modernism, with its emphasis on simplicity, functionality, and the use of modern materials, became the dominant style in postwar architecture. This chapter explores the key characteristics of postwar Dutch architectural styles.

Simplicity and Minimalism

One of the defining traits of postwar architecture in the Netherlands was simplicity. Influenced by the De Stijl movement and functionalist ideals, buildings were designed with clean lines, geometric forms, and little to no ornamentation. This minimalist approach was not just an aesthetic choice but also a response to the economic constraints of reconstruction. Architects focused on practicality, creating buildings that were easy to construct and maintain. Social housing projects, schools, and public buildings exemplified this style, providing cost-effective yet aesthetically cohesive solutions for a rapidly growing urban population (White, 2003).

Functionality and Efficiency

Functionality played a crucial role in postwar Dutch architecture. With a country devastated by war, the need for efficient and adaptable structures was crucial. Inspired by the principles of modernist movements such as the International Style and the ideas of the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM), Dutch architects prioritized utility over decoration. Buildings were designed with a focus on open spaces, modular layouts, and accessibility. The goal was to create structures that not only served their intended purpose but also improved the quality of life for residents (Reinders, 2016).

A notable example of this emphasis on functionality is the Lijnbaan in Rotterdam. As Europe's first car-free shopping street, the Lijnbaan was a groundbreaking example of modernist commercial architecture. Designed to facilitate pedestrian movement, it reflected the modernist ideals of efficiency and accessibility. The Lijnbaan became a model for shopping centers worldwide, demonstrating how modernist principles could be applied to urban commercial spaces (Taverne, 1990).

Use of Modern Materials

The postwar period saw the widespread adoption of modern materials such as concrete, steel, and glass. These materials allowed for rapid construction and the development of innovative architectural forms. Prefabrication became a common practice, enabling large-scale housing developments to be built quickly and efficiently (Abrahamse & Rutte, 2020). Glass was used extensively to create transparent and open spaces, fostering a sense of connection between the interior and exterior environments. This use of modern materials reflected a forward-looking approach, symbolizing technological progress and the rebuilding of a resilient nation (Reinders, 2016).

Conclusion

Postwar Dutch architecture was defined by its embrace of modernist principles, emphasizing simplicity, functionality, and the use of modern materials. These architectural

features were not just aesthetic choices but reflected broader societal ideals, including efficiency, democracy, and social welfare. As the Netherlands continued to develop, these principles laid the foundation for subsequent architectural movements, transitioning from strict modernism to more experimental and human-centered designs. Ultimately, the architectural legacy of the postwar period remains evident in the Dutch urban landscape, shaping the way cities and communities function today.

Educational reform

The postwar period in the Netherlands brought significant educational reforms aimed at rebuilding society and ensuring equal opportunities for all. During the 1950s and 1960s, the Dutch government implemented policies to expand access to education, improve school facilities, and promote inclusivity. These reforms had a profound impact on school architecture, shaping designs that prioritized functionality, accessibility, and adaptability. This chapter explores the key changes in the Dutch education system during this period and their influence on the built environment of schools (Verstegen, 1996).

Expansion of Public Education

The post-war baby boom led to rapid population growth, creating an urgent need for new schools (Schuyt, 2000). In response, the Dutch government significantly increased funding for public education and fast-tracked school construction projects. The introduction of the Primary Education Act standardized basic education, ensuring that all children had access to free schooling. This shift reduced the dominance of religious and private institutions and emphasized the expansion of state-funded education. As noted by Luijkx & De Heus (2008), *"Compulsory education up to the age of 16, and therefore also primary education, is free of charge."* This policy marked a turning point in the Dutch educational system, making education more accessible and equitable.

Functional and Modernist Design

The design of schools during this period was greatly influenced by modernist architectural principles, which focused on simplicity, functionality, and adaptability to accommodate the growing student population. The new school buildings were designed with open-plan classrooms that allowed for more flexible teaching methods and better use of space. Additionally, standardized, prefabricated buildings were used as a solution to the urgent need for new schools, offering a cost-effective and efficient way to construct educational facilities. Modernist architects emphasized clean lines, minimal decoration, and practical layouts, all of which were aimed at meeting the educational demands of the time while also creating functional and adaptable learning environments (Verstegen, 1996).

As architect F. van Dillen observed, *"The educational reforms, which had taken off so rapidly after the Second World War, were, at the level of school buildings, limited to a focus on the organization of space, while neglecting attention to their architectural expression"*. This suggests that, despite the innovative approaches to spatial organization, there was a lack of attention to the architectural expression and aesthetic quality of school buildings during this transformative period (Verstegen, 1996).

Focus on Equality and Accessibility

A central goal of the educational reforms during this period was to create a more inclusive and equitable education system. School designs began to reflect this goal by prioritizing accessibility for all students. For example, many new schools were designed with single-story structures or ramps to ensure that children with physical disabilities could access classrooms and other areas without difficulty. The design of standardized classrooms was another measure taken to ensure that all students had access to similar learning environments, regardless of where they lived. Moreover, communal spaces were integrated into school designs to foster interaction and cooperation among students from diverse backgrounds, promoting social inclusion and community building within the educational environment (Verstegen, 1996).

Challenges and Criticisms of Educational Reform

Despite the progressive goals behind the educational reforms, their implementation faced several challenges. Many educators and parents were resistant to adopting the new teaching methodologies and school layouts. The move away from traditional, compartmentalized classrooms to more flexible, open spaces was met with skepticism by those accustomed to older, more conventional educational structures. Additionally, financial constraints hindered some municipalities from building state-of-the-art schools, leading to disparities in the quality of school facilities across different regions (Hertzberger, 2008). Furthermore, the drive for standardization, while intended to promote equality, sometimes resulted in a lack of consideration for regional and cultural differences in educational needs, leading to a one-size-fits-all approach that did not always suit local contexts (Schuyt, 2000).

Conclusion

The educational reforms of the 1950s and 1960s in the Netherlands had a profound impact on school building design, aligning architecture with the principles of equality and accessibility. The shift from rigid, traditional classrooms to more flexible and inclusive learning environments reflected broader societal changes aimed at reducing educational disparities. Although the reforms faced challenges in terms of implementation and uniformity, their long-term influence is still visible in the design of contemporary Dutch schools. This transformative period laid the groundwork for an education system that continues to prioritize inclusivity and adaptability in both teaching methods and school infrastructure.

Case studies

Het Tweede Vrijzinnig Christelijk Lyceum (1956) by J.J.P. Oud

Overview of the School Building

The Tweede Vrijzinnig Christelijk Lyceum, designed by renowned Dutch architect J.J.P. Oud and completed in 1956, is one of the most significant buildings in Dutch architectural history. This project marks a pivotal moment in Oud's career, as it represents his return to a modernist style closely linked to his pre-war work, after a period in which he had explored monumental and decorative architecture. The building is particularly notable for its design as a secondary school, reflecting the educational and social values of the time. As the rector stated in *Haags West Nieuws* (2004), *"this building is characteristic of the post-war reconstruction of The Hague after the Second World War."* It focuses on functionality, integration with the surrounding urban environment, and the incorporation of artistic elements, which together form a cohesive and forward-thinking design (Verstegen, 1996). As the school board expressed at the time, *"The school board entrusted the architect, Dr. J.J.P. Oud, with the task of giving elegant form to their many wishes. They believe he succeeded remarkably well. The result was a light and colorful building with a harmonious balance of its elements, in which it is a joy to work."* (Haags Gemeentearchief. 2025).

Architectural Design and Features

The school is composed of four distinct sections: the aula (auditorium), the wing with subject classrooms, the staff areas, and the gymnasium wing. These sections converge at a central hall, creating a clear and organized spatial flow. This arrangement allows for smooth integration into the surrounding urban plan, particularly in terms of height and scale, which aligns with the nearby residential blocks. The school's position relative to the busy street to the north is particularly important: the aula, gymnasiums, and classrooms form a continuous façade, presenting a strong architectural presence. On the opposite side, the school opens up to a natural schoolyard, emphasized by the placement of a concierge residence. The building's design is defined by distinct expressions in each section, contributing to an overall sense of coherence. The classroom areas feature large windows, promoting natural light, while the auditorium and gymnasium areas present a more solid, monumental appearance. The use of vertical and horizontal lines in the facades, along with the arrangement of columns, contributes to the architectural rhythm, creating a balanced and orderly design despite its simplicity (Haags Gemeentearchief. 2025).

Relation to Social and Democratic Ideals

The design of the school reflects the democratic and social values central to the period. The building promotes equality and accessibility, emphasizing the importance of inclusive spaces. Wide corridors, ample daylight, and well-proportioned classrooms ensure a pleasant and egalitarian environment for students. The layout of the school encourages collaborative learning, creating a space where students and teachers interact freely. The school's design also emphasizes community integration, with the building's connection to the surrounding residential areas. Oud understood that educational institutions play a vital role in fostering relationships and social cohesion within neighborhoods, and this awareness is reflected in the thoughtful planning and positioning of the school.

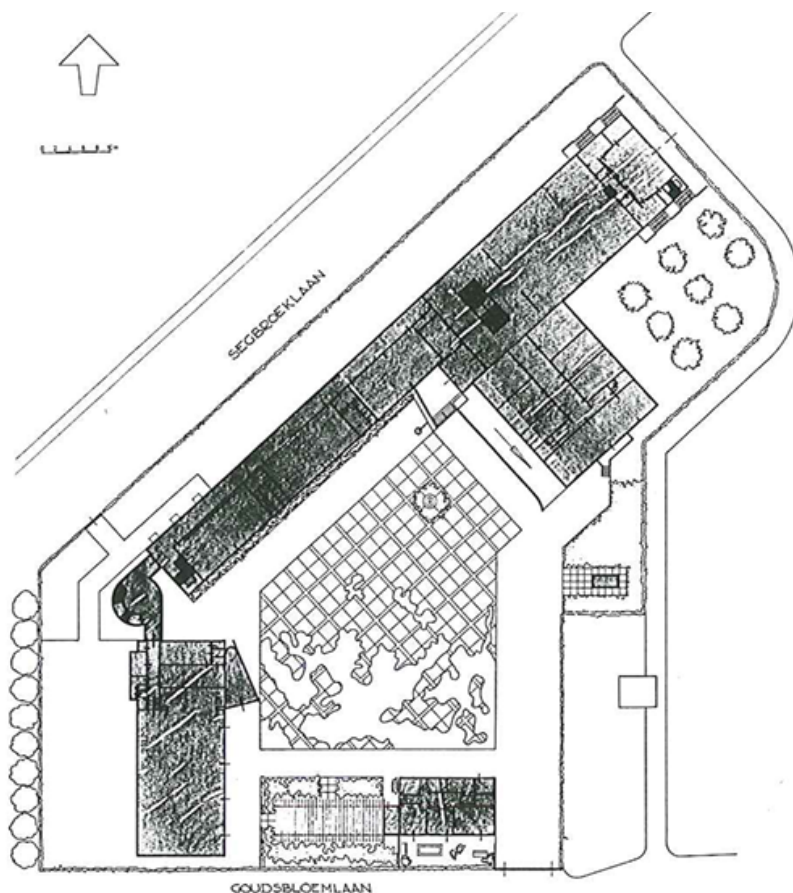
Educational reform

The layout and functionality of the school support the educational reforms of the 1950s

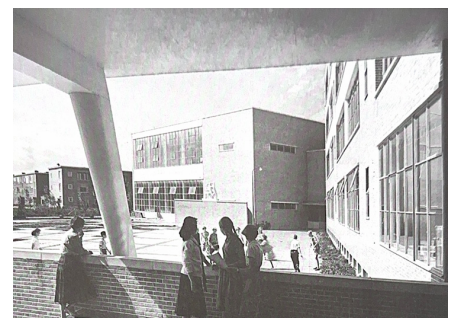
and 1960s, which aimed to create more flexible, adaptable, and accessible school environments. The classrooms are well-lit with natural light, and the use of glass walls between corridors and adjacent spaces ensures visual continuity, reinforcing a sense of openness and interaction within the school. The gymnasium and auditorium sections are not only designed for physical education but also serve as venues for cultural and social activities, further enhancing the school's role as a community hub. These spaces are a testament to Oud's forward-thinking approach to education, providing students with a variety of learning experiences.

Conclusion

The Tweede Vrijzinnig Christelijk Lyceum by J.J.P. Oud is a prime example of postwar Dutch architecture that blends modernist principles with social and democratic ideals. Through its thoughtful and innovative design, the building reflects the era's focus on equality, functionality, and community integration. The school serves not only as a space for education but also as a cultural and social landmark in its environment. Oud's work demonstrates how architecture can serve both aesthetic and functional purposes, while also contributing to social progress and community development. The building remains an exemplary model of how architecture can embody progressive educational and social values.



1. Floorplan Het Tweede Vrijzinnig Christelijk Lyceum (1956) by J.J.P. Oud



2. Outside space J.J.P. Oud



3. Stairs J.J.P. Oud

Haags Montessori Lyceum by Architect J.J. Hornstra

Overview of the School Building

The Haags Montessori Lyceum, designed by architect J.J. Hornstra around 1955, is located on the grounds of the former Haagse Dierentuin (The Hague Zoo), giving it a unique place in the city's architectural landscape. The building is centered around a central hall, which serves as the core of the school, aimed at creating unity and promoting interaction among students and staff. This versatile space supports a variety of communal and educational activities, playing an essential role in strengthening the school's sense of community (Bouw, 1955).

Architectural Design and Features

The central hall is strategically placed at the heart of the building, linking the two primary wings of the school. This space serves multiple functions, such as hosting school-wide events and housing the library, a central resource for the students. The hall is designed to be adaptable, able to transform into a performance space for theater productions, with a simple stage setup. The rolling bookshelves in the library can be moved, allowing the hall to be easily reconfigured for various activities.

The school is organized into two main sections: the classroom wing on the south side and the specialized subject wing on the north. The classroom block consists of 21 classrooms spread over three floors, providing ample space for students. The specialized subject block contains various classrooms, including those for art, crafts, physics, chemistry, biology, geography, and even gymnasiums. This layout allows the school to offer a diverse and highly functional curriculum within a spatially efficient environment.

On the southeast side of the building, adjacent to the classroom wing, is a dedicated music department, reinforcing the school's commitment to offering a well-rounded education. Additionally, a concierge residence is attached to the specialized subject wing, aiding in the building's upkeep and operations.

The building's spatial organization is key to its functionality. The central hall, as the focal point, connects both wings of the school. The classroom wing provides a quieter, more traditional environment for study, while the specialized subject block caters to more dynamic and hands-on activities. Along the classroom wing's corridors, there are smaller workspaces, called loges, designed for individual or small-group activities. These areas can also be used as additional seating during events in the hall, enhancing the building's versatility.

Relation to Social and Democratic Ideals

The design of the Haags Montessori Lyceum aligns with the core social and democratic values that were central to postwar educational reforms in the Netherlands. A fundamental principle of Montessori education is equality, aiming to create an environment that is accessible to all students, regardless of their background or abilities. The central hall, shared by the entire school community, symbolizes unity and inclusivity. Its flexible design ensures that it can serve multiple functions, from social gatherings to educational activities, encouraging collective participation among students and staff.

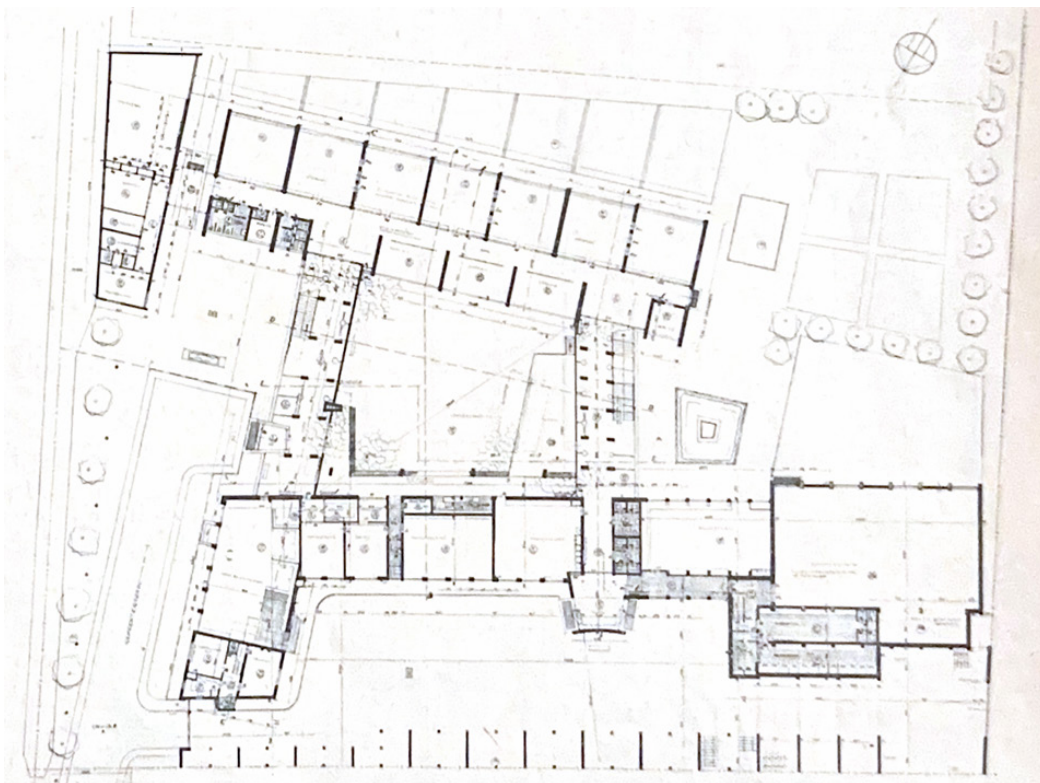
The school's layout also emphasizes democratic principles through its spatial organization. The loges and smaller workspaces provide opportunities for independent learning and personalized education while maintaining access to communal areas. This approach reflects the democratic ideal that all students should have equal access to the resources and spaces that best support their individual learning needs and development.

Educational Reform

The design of the Haags Montessori Lyceum is deeply rooted in Montessori educational principles, which emphasize independent learning, freedom of choice, and community involvement in education. The central hall, with its flexible, multi-functional design, promotes collaboration and a shared sense of purpose. The loges, on the other hand, offer quiet spaces for individual or small-group work, aligning with the Montessori method of personalized learning.

Conclusion

The Haags Montessori Lyceum, designed by J.J. Hornstra, is a perfect example of how architectural design can support and enhance educational philosophies. With its central hall at the heart of the school, its well-planned wings for specific educational purposes, and its integration of spaces for both group activities and individual work, the building embodies the core Montessori ideals of independence, community, and creativity. The building's flexibility, combined with its commitment to specialized education, makes it an exemplary space for the Montessori educational model. Additionally, its incorporation of democratic and social ideals, such as equality, resource accessibility, and community integration, further strengthens the school's role as an inclusive, community-oriented institution.



4. Floorplan Haags Montessori Lyceum by Architect J.J. Hornstra

Conclusion

The design of school buildings in the Netherlands during the 1950s and 1960s played a key role in reflecting the social and democratic ideals of postwar reconstruction. These designs not only embodied the modernist architectural principles of simplicity, functionality, and adaptability but also aligned closely with the era's commitment to social equality, modernization, and educational reform.

Architectural projects like the Tweede Vrijzinnig Christelijk Lyceum by J.J.P. Oud and the Haags Montessori Lyceum by J.J. Hornstra exemplify how schools became spaces that supported progressive educational philosophies and promoted a sense of community and inclusivity. Both buildings feature centralized communal spaces the aula in Oud's design and the central hall in Hornstra's serving as flexible, multifunctional areas that encouraged interaction, collaboration, and a sense of unity among students and staff. These spaces symbolized the democratic values of shared purpose and equality, where all students, regardless of background or ability, could benefit from the resources and opportunities offered by the school.

While these ideals are clearly reflected in the architecture, it is important to consider who actually initiated them. In the case of the Tweede Vrijzinnig Christelijk Lyceum, it was primarily the school board who articulated these social and democratic aspirations. They entrusted architect J.J.P. Oud with the task of translating these goals into a meaningful architectural design, and praised his success in creating a building that was not only functional, but also a joyful and balanced environment (Haags Gemeentearchief. 2025). In contrast, at the Haags Montessori Lyceum, the ideals were deeply embedded in the Montessori educational philosophy itself, emphasizing individuality, creativity, and equality. Here, architect J.J. Hornstra worked closely within this pedagogical framework, shaping a school environment that facilitated personalized learning and community engagement (Bouw, 1955).

The layout and functionality of these schools prioritized accessibility and adaptability to accommodate a rapidly growing, diverse student body. Elements like open-plan classrooms, well-lit spaces, and the careful organization of areas for quiet individual work and larger group activities reflected the evolving educational demands of the time (Verstegen, 1996). Specialized departments, such as music, arts, and sciences, in schools like the Haags Montessori Lyceum, further supported a well-rounded, modern education that emphasized personalized learning, independence, and creativity—key aspects of the Montessori philosophy. (Bouw, 1955).

Furthermore, these school buildings were designed to support educational reforms aimed at creating more inclusive and equitable learning environments. The integration of standardized classrooms and communal spaces ensured that all students had equal access to education, regardless of physical ability or social background. The focus on equality and inclusivity reflected broader societal shifts toward creating a more egalitarian and modern society after the war.

The design of Dutch school buildings in the 1950s and 1960s went beyond mere functionality, symbolizing the democratic ideals central to the postwar reconstruction of the Netherlands. The architectural decisions of this period were deeply intertwined with

the goals of social equality, modernization, and educational reform, creating spaces that were accessible, flexible, and inclusive. These buildings not only served as educational institutions but also as community hubs that contributed to the democratic and social progress of the nation.

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