The Battle for Nieuwmarkt: Urban Renewal, Squatter Resistance, and Architectural Compromise in Amsterdam (1960s–1980s)

AR2A011 Architectural History Thesis

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Riots at the violent evacuation in the Nieuwmarktbuurt for the construction of the metro, Amsterdam Image Bank, unknown photographer

Introduction

Background and Context

The postwar period in Amsterdam was marked by ambitious urban renewal projects aimed at modernizing the city's infrastructure and housing stock. By the late 1960s the municipal government had proposed a large-scale redevelopment plan for Amsterdam and for the Nieuwmarkt neighborhood, envisioning a modern business district with new office spaces, improved infrastructure, and metro expansion *(Wagenaar, 2004*). However, these plans faced significant opposition from local residents and the kraakbeweging (squatter movement), who wanted to preserve the neighborhood's social fabric and historic buildings *(Seelen & Duivenvoorden, 1996)*. Parallel to this growing local resistance, architects Theo Bosch and Aldo van Eyck were commissioned to develop an urban and architectural plan, which eventually sought to balance the municipality's visions with a focus on preservation and community-oriented principles *(Clarke, 2016)*. This thesis examines the complex interactions between these three forces—the municipality, squatters, and architects—to assess the practical impact of the kraakbeweging on Nieuwmarkt's final redevelopment.

Research Problem and Justification

Existing literature on urban renewal in Amsterdam has largely focused on municipal planning strategies *(Wagenaar, 2004)* and the squatter movement as a form of social resistance *(Pruijt, 2012)*. However, little research has examined how these conflicting forces interacted to shape the final redevelopment plan of Nieuwmarkt. Did the kraakbeweging succeed in influencing the planning process, or were their efforts ultimately disregarded during the final decision-making? This study bridges the gap by evaluating how municipal policies, grassroots activism, and architectural interventions influenced Nieuwmarkt's transformation. By situating this case study within broader debates on participatory urbanism, it provides insight into the role of resistance movements in shaping city planning policies *(Uitermark, 2004)*.

Research Question

This thesis investigates the following main research question:

To what extent did the kraakbeweging influence the final urban renewal plans for Nieuwmarkt (late 1960s–early 1980s)?

Sub-questions:

What were the main objectives of the municipality's urban renewal plan for Nieuwmarkt, and how did these evolve over time?

What were the demands and actions of the kraakbeweging, and how did they challenge or attempt to reshape urban policy?

How did Bosch and Van Eyck's architectural interventions reflect, resist, or mediate between these conflicting visions?

What elements of squatter activism, if any, were incorporated into the final redevelopment of Nieuwmarkt?

What long-term impacts did these conflicts have on urban renewal policies in Amsterdam?

Research Methodology

This study employs a comparative historical analysis through archival research, primary documents, and secondary literature. The primary sources include:

- Municipal planning documents from the Stadsarchief Amsterdam and Het Nieuwe Instituut, detailing the government's urban renewal proposals and subsequent modifications.
- Squatter declarations, eviction records, and protest materials from Het Nieuwe Instituut and the Amsterdam Archive, which provide insight into the resistance movement's strategies and demands.
- Architectural drawings and planning reports from Het Nieuwe Instituut, which document Bosch and Van Eyck's designs and their negotiation with municipal authorities.
- A comparative analysis will be conducted to evaluate the changes between the original municipal vision, the squatter movement's demands, and the final implemented plan.

Literature Review

Numerous studies have examined Amsterdam's postwar urban policies and housing struggles. Wagenaar *(2016)* provides a detailed overview of town planning in the Netherlands, while Clarke *(2016)* discusses efforts to preserve modernist urban ensembles. Pruijt *(2012)* analyzes squatting as a form of resistance to urban renewal, emphasizing its impact on housing policy. However, while these studies discuss either municipal governance or squatter activism, they often fail to connect both aspects to architectural planning. This thesis contributes to the field by analyzing how Nieuwmarkt's redevelopment was negotiated among government planners, squatters, and architects, evaluating the extent to which grassroots activism influenced the final outcome.

Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is structured into six chapters, each addressing different aspects of Nieuwmarkt's transformation:

Introduction – Provides background on Nieuwmarkt's redevelopment, the research problem, methodology, literature review, and research questions.

The Municipality's Vision for Nieuwmarkt – Examines the original urban renewal plan, its goals, and how it changed over time.

The Kraakbeweging and its Resistance – Analyzes the squatter movement's objectives, protests, and impact on public perception of urban renewal.

Theo Bosch & Aldo van Eyck's Role in Nieuwmarkt's Renewal – Investigates their architectural interventions and their mediation between squatters and policymakers.

The Final Urban Plan & the Kraakbeweging's Influence – Compares the municipal plan, squatter demands, and the implemented design to assess whether resistance translated into tangible urban changes.

Conclusion – Summarizes key findings, reflecting on whether Nieuwmarkt's redevelopment was shaped by activism or institutional power, and discusses broader implications for participatory

urbanism.

Overview of Primary Sources

This thesis relies on several key archival sources:

- Stadsarchief Amsterdam – Government meeting minutes, urban planning reports, and policy changes related to Nieuwmarkt.
- Het Nieuwe Instituut – Architectural records, including Bosch & Van Eyck's proposed and finalized plans.
- Amsterdam Image Bank & Archival Photographs – Visual documentation of Nieuwmarkt's urban transformation.

Conclusion

Nieuwmarkt's redevelopment was not simply a battle between municipal authorities and squatters; it was a process of negotiation involving multiple urban actors. This thesis examines whether grassroots activism resulted in substantive urban policy changes or if institutional frameworks ultimately dictated Nieuwmarkt's final form. By analyzing how the kraakbeweging, government planners, and architects interacted, this study contributes to broader discussions on urban resistance, architectural mediation, and the evolution of participatory planning in Amsterdam.

2. The Municipality's Vision for Nieuwmarkt

2.1. The Wederopbouwplan Nieuwmarkt (1953): Post-War Reconstruction and Initial Vision

Figure 1. Wederopbouwplan-Nieuwmarkt 1953. From Amstedam Stadsarchief

After World War II left parts of Amsterdam in ruins, the city launched a bold reconstruction effort. One key piece of this was the 1953 Wederopbouwplan Nieuwmarkt — a modernist vision for rebuilding the city, especially areas like Nieuwmarkt, which had long been a densely packed, working-class neighborhood (Figure 1). City planners, inspired by the era's modernist ideals, aimed to sweep away the so-called slums and outdated housing, replacing them with sleek commercial and residential buildings, wider roads, and an overall more efficient urban layout *(Schoonenberg, 2013)*.

At the heart of this vision was a push to accommodate the rise of car traffic and make the city centre more accessible. Like many post-war cities in Europe, Amsterdam looked to international trends that favoured big infrastructure over the preservation of history. The plan included widening streets, building new apartment blocks, and introducing a rigid, hierarchical street pattern based on CIAM principles *(Wagenaar, 2004)*. But this modernist ideal soon came into conflict with the realities — and emotional ties — of those who lived in these old neighbourhoods.

One of the earliest and most vocal critics of the Wederopbouwplan was Geurt Brinkgreve. A passionate preservationist, Brinkgreve warned that the city was sacrificing its soul — Nieuwmarkt's historic charm and tightly knit social fabric — in the name of car traffic and speculative redevelopment *(Schoonenberg, 2013)*. Rather than demolishing everything, he and other early preservationists called for a more thoughtful approach: one that would restore what already existed instead of wiping it out. Their early resistance sparked a broader movement, laying the foundation for the fierce activism and alternative planning ideas that would take root in the 1970s.

2.2. Shifts in Urban Renewal Strategies (1960s–1970s): The Push for Modernization

By the 1960s, Amsterdam's municipal government began refining its urban renewal approach, transitioning towards large-scale infrastructural projects. The Nieuwmarkt area, located within Amsterdam's medieval core, became a focal point for modernization efforts. The city's ambition mirrored broader European trends of urban expansion, particularly the integration of public transport and the facilitation of automobile traffic *(Clarke, 2016)*. This shift was evident in the plans for an extensive metro system, which included demolishing several blocks in Nieuwmarkt to accommodate the new underground network *(Stichting Raad voor het Maatschappelijk Welzijn, 1971)*.

Municipal documents from the Stadsarchief Amsterdam reveal that urban planners saw Nieuwmarkt as an opportunity to enhance commercial viability and create a more navigable city center (*Bewonersraad Nieuwmarkt, 1976)*. These plans were met with resistance from local communities, particularly from tenant organizations and early activist groups, such as the Nieuwmarkt Residents' Council, who actively opposed the large-scale demolitions and fought to preserve the

neighborhood's social and architectural character *(Schoonenberg, 2013)*. The construction of the Stopera in the early 1980s, just a short distance from Nieuwmarkt, became another flashpoint in the city's top-down planning approach. Like the metro project, it sparked public outcry over the destruction of historical fabric and the exclusion of residents from decision-making, further fuelling the activist movements that had taken root in Nieuwmarkt *(Van der Leeuw, 1984).*

2.3. The Impact of the Metro Development: Initial Resistance

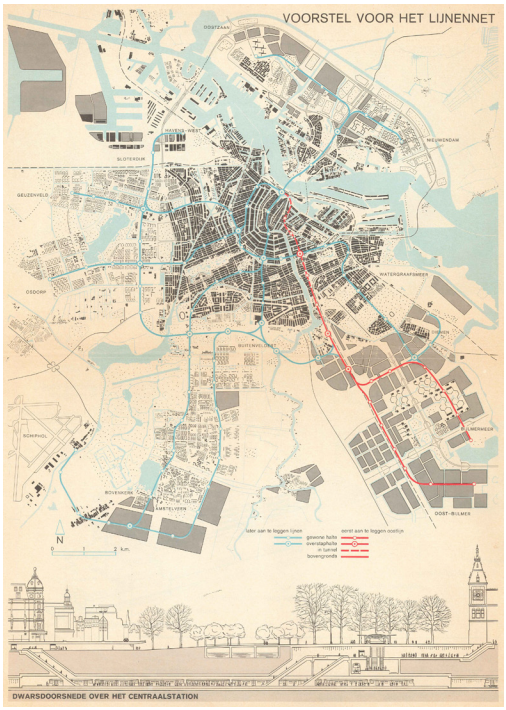


Figure 2. Amsterdam Metroplan 1968. From Amsterdam Stadsarchief.

The 1968 decision to construct the East Line of the Amsterdam Metro had a profound effect on the Nieuwmarkt neighborhood *(Figure 2)*. The metro plan required the clearance of several buildings, leading to significant displacement of residents. Protest movements emerged, arguing that the demolition was unnecessary and detrimental to the area's cultural heritage. The Nieuwmarkt Residents' Council stated in 1976: ""Homes, like land, should not be a profit object, but for real control by residents over their homes and their surroundings, different societal developments and relationships are needed.",emphasizing the residents' demand for control over their own living environment *(Nieuwmarkt Residents' Council, 1976)*. The municipal stance at the time reflected a strong commitment to modernization, with policymakers viewing the metro as an essential investment in Amsterdam's future economic growth *(Verstraete, 2013)*.

2.4. The Meervoudige Opdracht for Architects: A Search for Alternatives

In response to growing tensions, the municipality launched the Meervoudige Opdracht in March 1970, inviting multiple architects to propose alternative visions for Nieuwmarkt's redevelopment. This phase represented a shift in urban planning, recognizing the need for a balance between modernization and preservation. The competition was officially commissioned by the College van Burgemeester en Wethouders on March 12, 1970, assigning Dick Apon, Herman Hertzberger, and Aldo van Eyck to develop an alternative design for the revision of the Wederopbouwplan Nieuwmarkt while integrating the newly planned metro infrastructure. The assignment included maintaining the metro alignment, a north-south road connection, and an underground parking facility for approximately 1,000 cars. The plans were officially submitted to the Gemeente Amsterdam on October 5, 1970 *(Bosch & Van Eyck, 1974)*.

Dick Apon's, Herman Hertzberger's, and Aldo van Eyck's proposals each speak to a particular vision through their schematic figures. Apon's plan is offered through figures underlining linear, forceful reconfiguration of urban elements—distinctly marking metro alignment and axes of traffic to forge a strong, geometric structure with the priority given to circulation efficiency and legibility. *(Figure 3*) Conversely, Hertzberger's drawings depict more fluid geometry with interlocking, mesh-like spaces that foster a decentralization of public spaces; his figures promote flexible spatial sequences and numerous nodes to foster community interaction and more diverse urban rhythm. *(Figure 4)* And van Eyck's proposal (with T. Bosch, G. Knemeijer, P. de Ley, and D. Tuijnman) is outlined through expressive, layered drawings that describe a thoughtful redevelopment of the historic street layout with preservationist sensitivity; their figures graphically overlay subtle spatial transitions to show how contemporary elements can be incorporated harmoniously into the urban system rather than overriding it. *(Figure 5) (FORUM, 1970)*

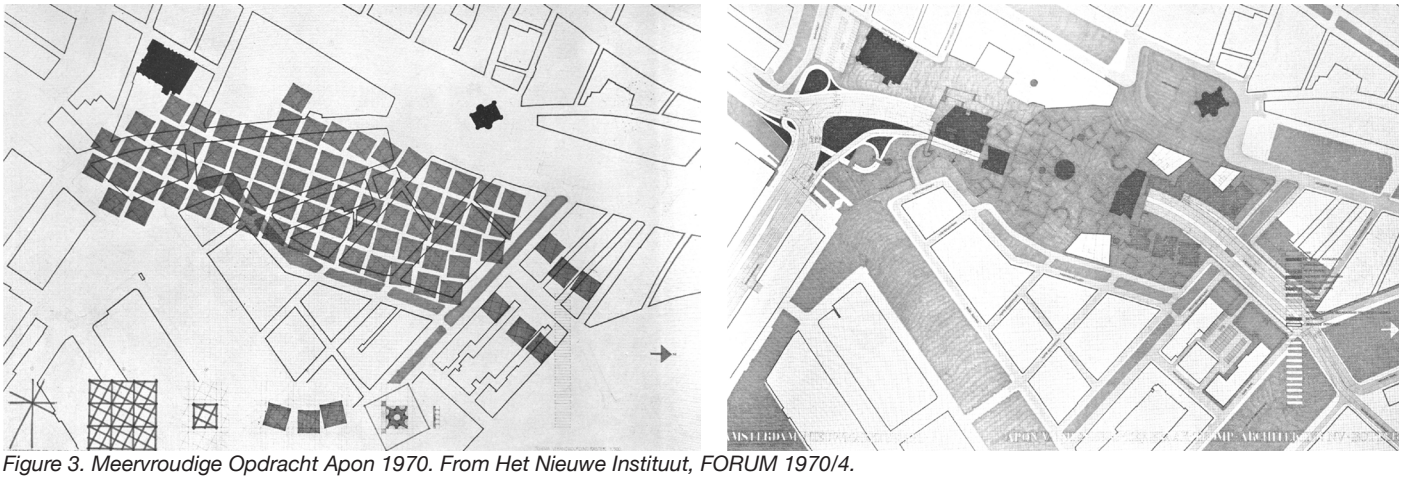


Figure 3. Meervroudige Opdracht Apon 1970. From Het Nieuwe Instituut, FORUM 1970/4.

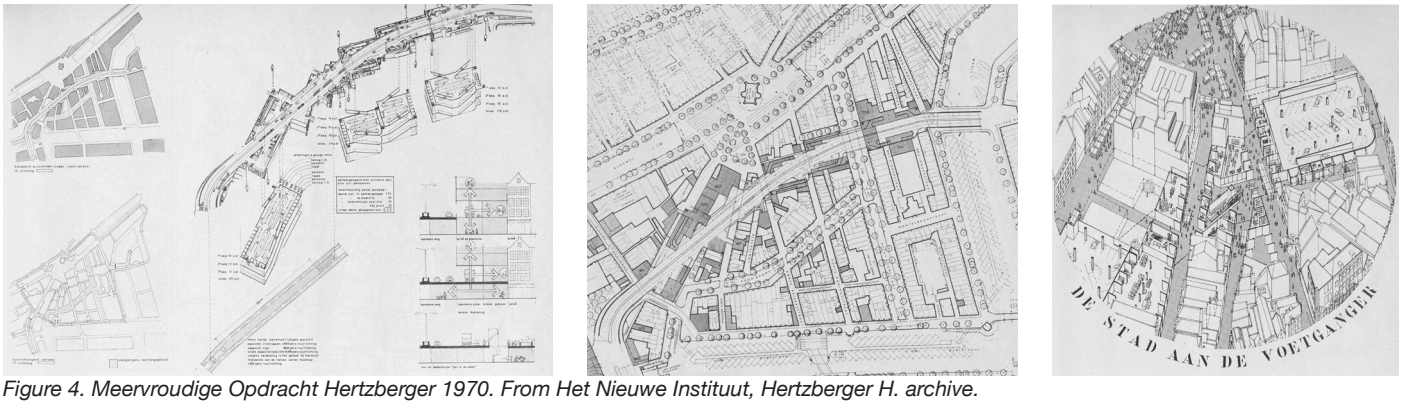


Figure 4. Meervroudige Opdracht Hertzberger 1970. From Het Nieuwe Instituut, Hertzberger H. archive.

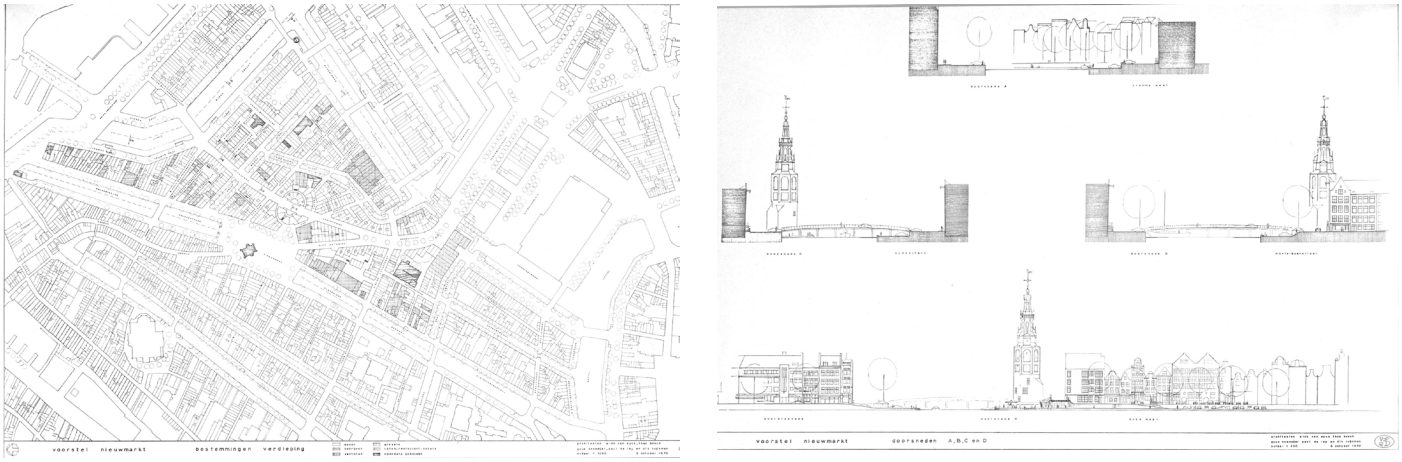


Figure 5. Meervoudige Opdracht Van Eyck 1970. From Het Nieuwe Instituut, Bosch, T. Archive.

Initially, Bosch was not part of the original competition; however, his design proposal later received widespread approval due to its exceptional sensitivity to the existing urban fabric and its responsiveness to the community's needs. In 1974, he and Aldo van Eyck were officially appointed as "conditionerend architect" for the Nieuwmarkt neighborhood *(FORUM, 1970).* His approach not only preserved the historical character of the Nieuwmarkt area but also offered a more integrated strategy for urban renewal in contrast to the large-scale demolitions that characterized earlier redevelopment plans. This alignment with a more respectful, community-driven vision for the neighbourhood convinced municipal decision-makers that Bosch's expertise and perspective were essential for overseeing the broader urban renewal strategy, which ultimately led to his appointment in 1974 *(Bosch & Van Eyck, 1974).*

3. The Kraakbeweging and its Resistance

3.1 Squatters' Demands in Nieuwmarkt

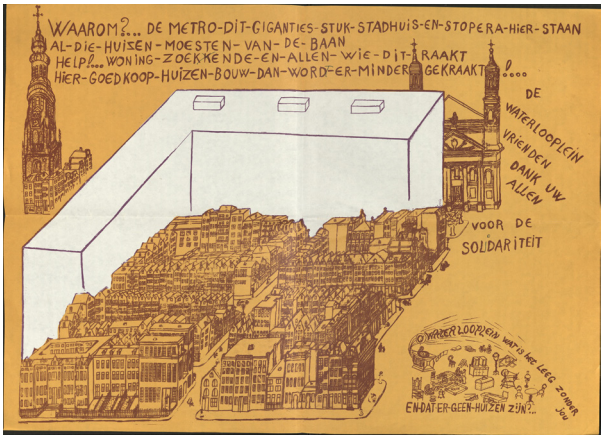


Figure 6. Squatters Flyer About the Metro. From Het Nieuwe Instituut.

From the very beginning, activists in the Nieuwmarkt-buurt formulated clear demands in response to Amsterdam's urban renewal plans. First and foremost was stopping the demolitions that were set to clear out large blocks of the centuries-old neighborhood. In 1968, a collaboration of organizations, including the Dutch Architects' Association, petitioned the city to suspend all of the planned "slum" clearance. "The most important demand was to postpone the demolitions" *(Schoonenberg, 2013)* and under pressure the municipality temporarily agreed to stop demolishing historic buildings to make way for the urban renewal plans. The residents insisted that any redevelopment must serve the community rather than commercial interests. As one squatters' manifesto defiantly put it, "We will not yield to financial interests; whatever happens, we will stay! Squatting continues!!" *(Amsterdam Stadsarchief, 1991)*. A central demand was no "cityvorming" projects, in particular, blocking the planned four-lane highway and the metro line that was initially set to cut through Nieuwmarkt. The neighborhood action groups vigorously opposed these schemes as destructive and elitist. In a 1974 report, the Nieuwmarkt activist committee concluded that "the metro is an instrument of the propertied class, for the sake of greater profit, power and exploitation" *(Aktiegroep Nieuwmarkt, 1974)*. Consequently, resistance to the metro was viewed as a part of the fight against the capitalist system. *(Figure 6)*. At the same time, Nieuwmarkt residents demanded affordable housing and preservation in place of offices and speculation. Their slogan became "bouwen voor de buurt" – build for the neighborhood, not for profit *(Schoonenberg, 2013)* .They called for new social housing on the cleared sites so that the locals that were forced to displace could return after construction. Indeed, after years of action this demand was officially embraced and instead of large office buildings the plan had a shift towards social housing *(Bosch & Van Eyck, 1974)*. In short, Nieuwmarkt activists explicitly fought to stop demolition, cancel the highway and metro, and ensure any rebuilding was on a human scale, with primarily social housing for existing residents.

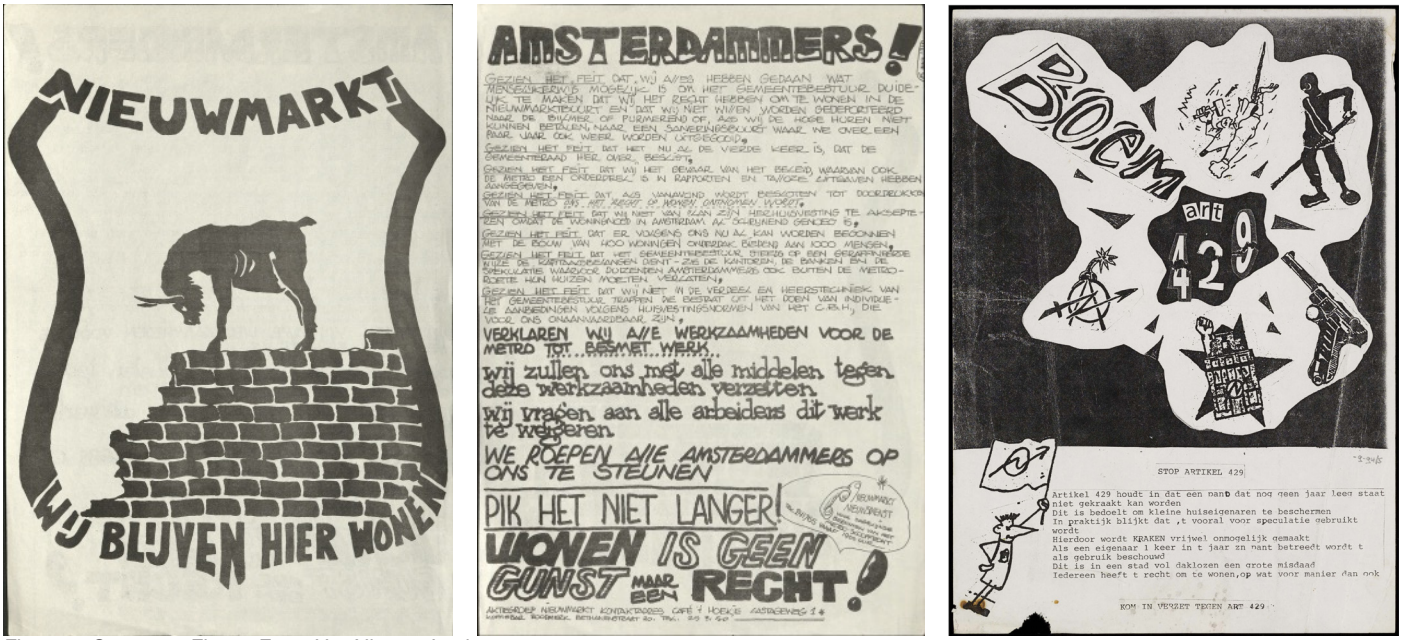


Figure 7. Squatters Flyers. From Het Nieuwe Instituut.

3.2 Tactics and Methods of Resistance

To achieve these aims, the Nieuwmarkt squatters and their followers addopted a range of confrontational, creative and, for the time, significant tactics. Throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s, they occupied empty buildings meant for clearance, turning them into strong bases for the community. Such kraakacties (squatting actions) proved highly effective: along with courtroom injunctions and political lobbying, squatting actions and legal procedures by the residents, help up progress of the redevelopment plans. Squatting empty houses both met immediate housing needs and physically prevented developers from demolishing properties – a strategy later termed "conservational squatting." In fact, there was "large-scale conservational squatting in Amsterdam from 1969–75 as part of efforts to prevent the building of the subway across the Nieuwmarktbuurt" *(Pruijt, 2004)*. Every building left vacant for the highway or metro became an opportunity for the movement to assert control and keep the "wrecking crews" at bay. In addition, activists paired these direct actions with organized counter-planning and advocacy. Under intense community pressure and facing significantly growing public sympathy the city was forced to consider alternatives. As early as 1970 the municipal government, "onder druk van de buurt," invited community-supported architects to draft a new plan for the area, still including a highway and metro *(FORUM, 1970)*. At a later stage, architects Aldo van Eyck and Theo Bosch, working closely with residents' committees, proposed human-scaled designs that respected the existing street grid and architecture *(Bosch & Van Eyck, 1974)*. This "Plan Nieuwmarkt" split the planned highway and adjusted new buildings to the old neighborhood layout, demonstrating that modernization does not mean total destruction. Although the city's development office initially ignored these ideas, the exercise shocked the community – showing that expertise and grassroots action could be used as a tool to resist Municipal schemes. As one meeting memo recorded, residents began requesting technical help for "kontra-expertise" (independent structural surveys) and DIY renovation plans to counter municipal claims of an "unsafe" neighborhood *(Stichting Raad voor het Maatschappelijk Welzijn, 1971*) . In this way, resistance methods ranged from squatting and street protest to intelligent use of the legal system and collaborative urban design.

3.3 Conflicts with Municipal Authorities

Figure 8. Eviction of Squatters. From Amsterdam Stadzsarchief Image Bank

Unsurprisingly, these tactics led to frequent clashes with authorities. Police and city contractors regularly attempted to evict squatters and continue demolitions, but met determined opposition on the ground. Tensions built over years, as demolition crews razed buildings under armed guard and residents protested. By the mid-1970s, large sections of the Nieuwmarkt looked like a war zone. "The demolitions resumed; the devastation caused from 1968–1975 was enormous. It looked as if the city had been bombed" *(Schoonenberg, 2013).* This literal devastation of their neighborhood set the stage for an explosive confrontation in the spring of 1975. On March 24, 1975, the conflict reached its peak. That day, city authorities moved to evict the last remaining buildings held by squatters in the path of the metro. *(Figure 8)*. The result was open street combat between police and protesters. Contemporary reports described a "violent clearing of the last buildings" that sparked the legendary "Slag om de Nieuwmarkt" – the Battle of Nieuwmarkt *(Pruijt, 2004)*. As riot police with bulldozers advanced, hundreds of activists and sympathetic residents fought back to save the remaining handful of historic buildings still standing *(Figure 9)*. They took barricades out of building materials and rubble, determined to block further demolition. Famously, while a construction foreman and his guard dogs holed up in-

Figure 9. Nieuwmarkt Street Riots. From Amsterdam Stadsarchief Image Bank.

side the monument Huis De Pinto (a 17th-century house whose restoration was nearly complete), “actievoerders uit het steigermateriaal barricaden op straat” – “activists built barricades in the street from the scaffolding material” *(Schoonenberg, 2013)* surrounding that house. What ensued were pitched battles in the winding streets of Nieuwmarkt. Stones, roofing tiles, and even Molotov cocktails rained down on the advancing wreckers, and police responded with tear gas and brute force. *(Figure 9).* Observers likened the scene to urban warfare – “ “the heavy fights that broke out in the streets had much of an ‘urban guerrilla’” *(Bosch & Van Eyck, 1974).* Throughout the smoke and chaos, protesters chanted “Geen metro!” as they clashed with riot squads. Dozens were injured in the race, and over 100 arrests were made, but the eviction ultimately failed to break the community’s resolve.

Figure 10. Nieuwmarkt Street Riots. From Amsterdam Stadsarchief Image Bank.

For the municipal authorities, these events were shocking. Additional confrontations followed (another eruption occurred on April 8, 1975, when demolitions briefly resumed), fueling public criticism of the city’s approach *(Schoonenberg, 2013)*. The Nieuwmarkt riots became front-page news and a symbol of citizen revolt against technocratic planning. City officials, who had expected to push through the metro at any cost, suddenly faced a full-blown legitimacy crisis. One police commander reportedly admitted that he hadn’t seen such intense street fighting in Amsterdam since World War II, underscoring how far the situation had spiraled out of control. The conflict between squatters and the city had turned physical and very public – a dramatic showdown between residents defending their homes and bulldozers backed by city hall and the state *(Figure 10)*.

4. Theo Bosch & Aldo van Eyck's Role in Nieuwmarkt's Renewal

4.1 Municipal Master Plan vs. Community Opposition

As aforementioned, in the late 1960s, Amsterdam's municipal authorities advanced an aggressive master plan for the Nieuwmarkt area. This plan aimed to transform the small-scale inner-city neighborhood into a modern central business district, complete with large office complexes, a shopping center, a four-lane highway, an underground metro line, and parking for about one thousand cars. The existing residents were to be relocated to new growth towns on the city's periphery (the "overloop" policy) *(Van Gameren, D., Van den Heuvel, D., Klijn, O., Mooij, H., & Van der Putt, P., 2009)*. Such drastic plans provoked fierce arguments between the city council and residents. This confrontation between Nieuwmarkt residents and the municipal planning department was one of the first major showdowns of Amsterdam's newly provoked grassroot movement. Under this evolving pressure from the neighborhood, the city invited a select group of architects to propose alternative renewal plans (Meervoudige Opdracht), however, the invitation still required the inclusion of the metro line and highway, reflecting the municipality's resistance to fully abandoning its original aims. In May 1970, Van Eyck (with Bosch, Paul de Ley, and Guus Knemeijer) submitted a counterproposal to the plan that dramatically diverged from the city's vision *(Figure 11)*. Instead of a monolithic and dramatic plan, they split the planned road into two small-scale streets and matched new buildings to the old street grid and highly focused on designing in human scale. This design approach aimed to preserve as much as possible of the neighborhood's character, retaining existing building lines and the traditional street pattern while still accommodating the metro infrastructure. Theo Bosch was much for the preservation of the old, as can clearly be seen in his carefully designed drawings, with human figures and atmosphere as a key element *(Figure 12)*. Simultaneously to this, Aldo van Eyck issued a manifesto titled "De stadskern als donor" ("The City Center as Donor"), arguing that historic inner-city areas must be protected at all costs from "city formation" that would turn them into purely commercial zones. *(FORUM Magazine, 1970)* Since it was practically impossible to create lively, diverse urban environments in the new suburbs, Van Eyck wrote, the old city must remain a living center – not be sacrificed for traffic and offices. The Van Eyck/Bosch proposal gathered broad support among professionals and locals. The architectural press praised it, and neighborhood residents approved of its human-scale philosophy. Importantly, Bosch and

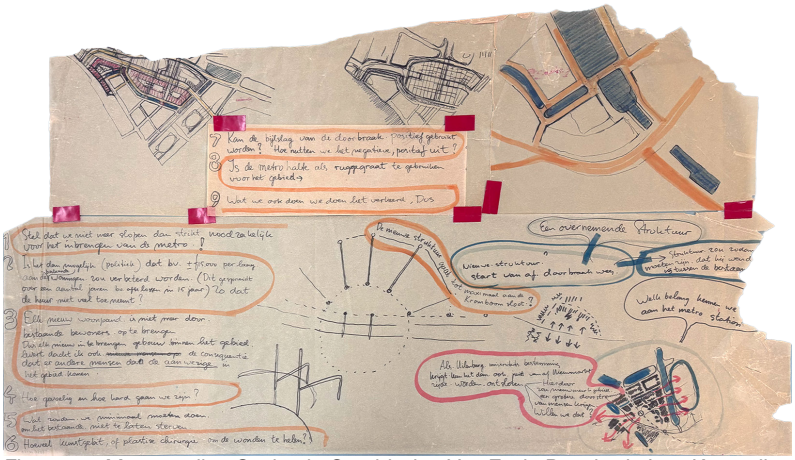


Figure 11. Meervoudige Opdracht Sumbission Van Eyck, Bosch, de Ley, Knemeijer, 1970. From Het Nieuwe Instituut, Bosch, T. Archive.

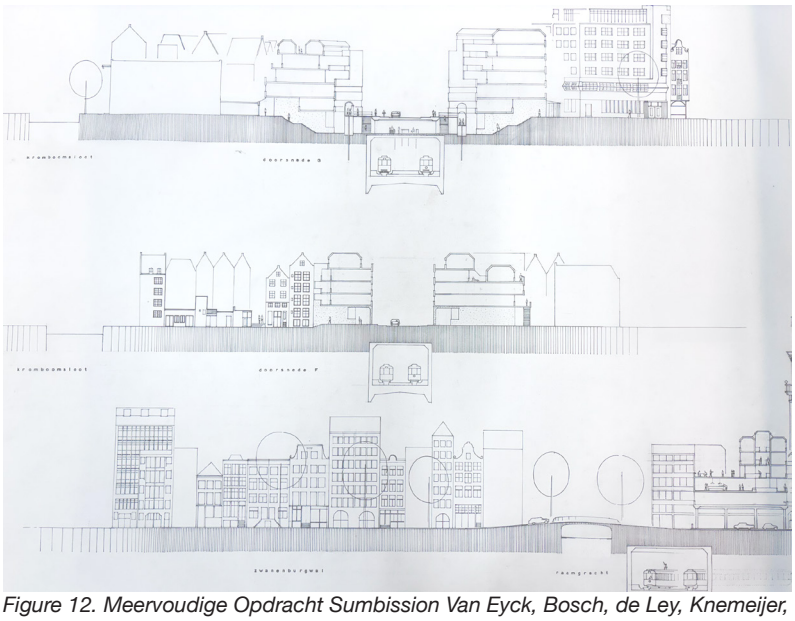


Figure 12. Meervoudige Opdracht Sumbission Van Eyck, Bosch, de Ley, Knemeijer, 1970. From Het Nieuwe Instituut, Bosch, T. Archive.

Van Eyck's team openly opposed the policy of moving inner-city residents to further towns; in fact, in 1974 they refused a major housing commission in the new town of Almere as a statement of solidarity with Amsterdam's inner-city communities *(Bosch, T., 1974)*. Despite the positive reception, however, the city government was slow to formally adopt the plan. Tensions persisted as the municipality hesitated to tone down the highway element of its plan. Notably, even after the Amsterdam city council passed a motion on 5 January 1972 forbidding any four-lane road through Nieuwmarkt and insisting that existing streets and building blocks be preserved, the municipal department of public works continued to push for a broader roadway *(Bosch, T., 1974)*. This created a conflict between the architects (supported by residents) and the city planners who were "stubbornly attached" to the highway plan. By 1974 the situation was even further elevated: the metro construction was underway, dozens of buildings had been evacuated for demolition, yet the overarching renewal plan was unresolved – city officials still leaned toward offices and wide roads, while residents and their architects strove for the maintenance of the inner city feeling *(Bosch, T., 1974).*

4.2 Architects Align with Residents and Squatters

From the beginning, Theo Bosch and Aldo van Eyck aligned themselves with the residents' wants. Bosch, born and raised in Amsterdam's inner city, almost had a personal stake in preserving neighborhoods like Nieuwmarkt.He emerged as a "socially engaged bouwer voor de buurt" – literally, a "builder for the neighborhood" – a new kind of architect who rebelled against bureaucratic postwar housing policies. Van Eyck, the elder partner known for his humanist design philosophy, provided conceptual vision, while Bosch became the hands-on advocate working daily with local activists. One of their first built projects together– a housing scheme in Zwolle – was won on the strength of their Nieuwmarkt proposal and showed how closely they worked with future residents and city officials to achieve a "masterful fill" on a traditional street *(Bosch, T., 1974).* This experience prepared them for the "great battlefield" of Nieuwmarkt, where Bosch especially developed a very strong personal involvement in the community's struggles. By late 1974, relations between the community and city hall had deteriorated even more, and the architects eventually found themselves on the side of the residents – including the squatters who had begun occupying empty homes slated for demolition. In a letter sent to the mayor that month, the residents' council explicitly backed Van Eyck and Bosch. "The residents have put themselves behind the plans of architects Van Eyck/Bosch to create at most a narrow 'city street' through the neighborhood. We will not allow them the architects to be sidelined in any way," the residents wrote emphatically. This letter also judged the city government for reneging on promises: "We are getting sick and tired of having to constantly remind the municipality to keep its promises to the neighborhood", it read, calling on the council to honor the 1972 decision against a highway *(Residents of Nieuwmarktbuurt, 1974)*. The residents even accused the municipal executive of doing everything possible "to frustrate the restoration and renewal of the Nieuwmarktbuurt" *(Bosch, T., 1974) (Residents of Nieuwmarktbuurt, 1974*). Such strong words underscore how closely the architects and community were united in late 1974 – essentially tightly together against the city establishment. During this period, squatters played a pivotal role in supporting the architects' vision. From 1969 to 1975, large-scale conservational squatting took place in Nieuwmarkt specifically to stop the metro and highway project. This ground-up resistance created facts on the ground that the city could not ignore. The squatters, many of them also neighborhood residents or students, boosted the position of Bosch and Van Eyck by highlighting the human cost of the city's plan. As historian Hans Pruijt notes, these actions made squatting "very relevant to preservation efforts" in Nieuwmarkt *(Pruijt, 2004)*. In practice, the squatters' physical presence and confrontations pressured the municipality to look for compromises and strengthened the architects' negotiating hand. For example, when the last remaining houses in the path of the metro were scheduled for eviction in March 1975, squatters barricaded themselves inside, sparking intense clashes – the Nieuwmarkt riots" *(Pruijt, 2004)*. The public outrage and media attention surrounding these events significantly raised the political stakes. It became increasingly clear that the city needed Bosch

and Van Eyck as mediators to help soothe the chaos and channel the community's demands into a constructive plan.

4.3 Mediation, Compromise, and Participatory Planning

Throughout 1974–1975, Theo Bosch and Aldo van Eyck walked a fine line as mediators between the community and the municipal authorities. On one hand, they were trusted by the residents and squatters, who saw them as allies. On the other hand, they still worked within the system to try to convince the city to adopt a more humane plan. In mid-1974 the city finally took a step toward compromise: it appointed the Van Eyck/Bosch office as "conditionerend architect" (conditioning or coordinating architect) for the Nieuwmarkt renewal *(Bosch T., 1974)*. This official designation meant that Bosch and Van Eyck were tasked with overseeing the urban design cohesion of all new building projects in the area, in consultation with the city's Department of City Development. In essence, the architects were being empowered to mediate the implementation of renewal plans – a clear acknowledgment by the municipality that community-aligned architects were needed to restore trust. Theo Bosch took on this coordinating role with great tenacity and would continue to fulfil it well into the 1980s. Still, conflicts persisted, especially over the metro line. Bosch and Van Eyck considered the metro's route through the medieval fabric of Nieuwmarkt a grave mistake – Bosch called it "an absurd business in such a delicate urban structure" *(Bosch T., 1974)*. They fought the metro plans until the last moment, proposing alternative routes and staging objections. Bosch later recounted that their office "kept coming up with alternatives and even publicly threatened to resign" from the project to pressure the city *(Bosch T., 1974)*. As the eviction deadline for the final cluster of buildings approached in March 1975, the architects stood with the neighborhood in urging a halt. Bosch noted bitterly that despite a year of work on plans together with a city working group (that even included some Public Works officials), a completely contrary traffic scheme was suddenly tacked on by bureaucrats and rushed to an alderman's decision "It's ridiculous that you don't even get to explain why you propose something," he complained of the city's top-down changes *(Bosch T., 1974)*. The breaking point came on 19 March 1975, when the Amsterdam council narrowly voted to proceed with completing the metro. Five days later, on 24 March, police and construction crews violently cleared out the last occupied houses on Nieuwmarkt, an event remembered as the "Battle of Nieuwmarkt". After these traumatic events, Bosch and Van Eyck reluctantly accepted the metro as fait accompli. They did not, however, abandon the community. On the contrary, Theo Bosch famously declared that because the metro was going ahead, "it is more necessary for us to stay, to minimize the consequences as much as possible" *(Bosch T., 1974)*. This statement encapsulates the architects' self-assigned role as protectors of the neighborhood's interests in the face of an inevitable project. Bosch and Van Eyck's continued commitment helped turn the situation toward a collaborative renewal process after 1975. Recognizing the residents' fury and their legit of their demands, the municipal government finally backed down from its most extreme plans. As an official at the time later observed, the making of the Nieuwmarkt redevelopment plan became "an excellent example" of how not to proceed without citizen input *(Van Eyck, A., Bosch, T, 1977)*. By mid-1975, the city agreed to a new, participatory planning structure: on 22 May and 5 June 1975, it was established that an open bewonersvergadering (open residents' assembly) and the elected Bewonersraad (Residents' Council) would serve as the central consultative body with the city for Nieuwmarkt's rebuilding. In April 1976, a detailed procedure was adopted that required all key decisions – from the program of requirements and architect selection to preliminary and final designs – to be made in agreement with the residents' council *(Bewonersraad Nieuwmarkt, 1976)*. Bosch and Van Eyck strongly supported this grassroots involvement. In fact, Bosch often spoke on behalf of the neighborhood, using his platform to simplify resident and squatter concerns. In a 1974 interview, he explained that he gave media interviews "to ensure the residents aren't left alone to face what's hanging over their heads". He even questioned whether the city's public works leaders and Alderman Lammers were trying to drive the Van Eyck/Bosch team to quit "because we are inconvenient people with strange ideas" – but Bosch concluded that "we are after the interest of

the neighborhood as part of the city. In that sense we cannot be considered troublesome" *(Bewonersraad Nieuwmarkt, 1976)*. This underscores how Bosch saw his role: not as a worker of the city for its own sake, but as a principled advocate ensuring the community's voice was heard in the planning process. Through their mediation and design revisions, Theo Bosch and Aldo van Eyck helped create a historic compromise: the city got its metro, but the neighborhood would be rebuilt on community terms. By late 1976, even housing alderman Jan de Cloe acknowledged the residents' key principles – affordable new homes for displaced locals, preservation of scale and character, and genuine resident control over plans – and agreed to them in principle *(Bewonersraad Nieuwmarkt, 1976).* The result was a new Nieuwmarkt renewal plan that all three actors – the municipality, the squatters/residents, and the architects – could tentatively embrace. The process had been bitter and hard-fought, but it set a precedent for participatory urban renewal in Amsterdam. As the architects had insisted, trust was only restored once the city showed it took the community's demands seriously. The collaborative approach adopted in Nieuwmarkt's rebuilding can be seen as a direct outcome of the intense interaction between the municipality, the squatters, and architects like Bosch and Van Eyck who served as intermediaries and champions of a shared vision.

5. The Final Urban Plan & the Kraakbeweging's Influence

5.1 From Master Plan to Community Plan: A Comparison

The evolution of Nieuwmarkt's renewal from the municipality's original vision to the final implemented project is a story of radical change, driven largely by squatter and resident resistance. The original municipal plans of the late 1960s envisioned a clean sweep of the neighborhood: virtually all old housing would be demolished to make way for modern development. Under this scheme, the Nieuwmarktbuurt would become part of a new commercial core with office towers and a shopping complex, a major traffic artery and massive infrastructure including the metro and parking garages *(Van Gameren, D., Van den Heuvel, D., Klijn, O., Mooij, H., & Van der Putt, P. ,2009)*. The traditional mixed-use character of the area – its narrow streets, small businesses, and working-class housing – was to be replaced by a single-use business district. In practice, this meant forcing out the community: thousands of residents were expected to leave. Indeed, city policy at the time treated the old inner-city population as surplus to be relocated to new satellite towns through the "Overloop" program *(Bewonersraad Nieuwmarkt, 1976).* In short, the municipal master plan prioritized cars and commerce over people. Had it been fully realized, Nieuwmarkt would have lost its residential function entirely, becoming an appendage of Amsterdam's expanding office center – "the inner city reduced solely to a commercial function," as Aldo van Eyck warned *(Bosch & Van Eyck, 1974)*. The final urban renewal project that materialized by the early 1980s was almost the mirror opposite of those original plans. Thanks to years of protest and negotiation, the Nieuwmarkt area was rebuilt as a residential neighborhood with a human scale, not a corporate enclave. The most dramatic shift was the cancellation of the four-lane highway. After the 1975 unrest, the idea of driving a broad expressway through the area became politically untenable – a previously passed council motion against it was finally honored Instead, the main street was executed as a modest two-way city street (a "stadsstraat") consistent with the existing street widths *(Bosch, T., 1974)* ***(Figure 13)***. This meant the new metro viaduct and tunnel did not create a massive car corridor; once construction was over, surface-level traffic

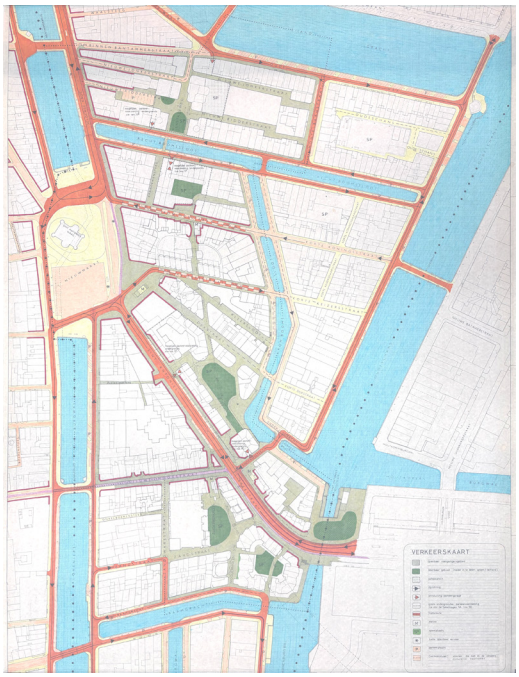
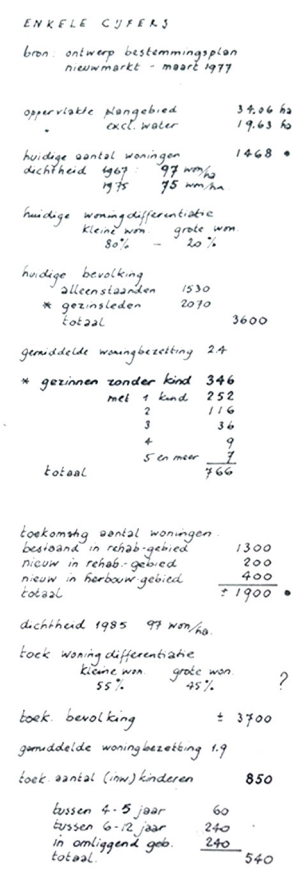


Figure 13. Final Plans Bosch & Van Eyck. From Het Nieuwe Instituut, Bosch, T. Archive.


ENKELE CIJFERS

bron: ontwerp bestemmingsplan nieuwmarkt - maart 1977

oppervlakte plangebied 34,06 ha
excl. water 19,63 ha

huidige aantal woningen 1468 •
dichtheid 1967 97 won/ha
1975 75 won/ha

huidige woningdifferentiatie
kleine won. grote won.
80% – 20%

huidige bevolking
alleenstaanden 1530
* gezinsleden 2070
totaal 3600

gemiddelde woningbezetting 2.4

* gezinnen zonder kind 346
met 1 kind 252
2 116
3 36
4 9
5 en meer 7
totaal 766

toekomstig aantal woningen
bestaand in rehab-gebied 1300
nieuw in rehab-gebied 200
nieuw in herbouw-gebied 400
totaal ± 1900 •

dichtheid 1985 97 won/ha.

toek. woningdifferentiatie
kleine won. grote won.
55% 45% ?

toek. bevolking ± 3700

gemiddelde woningbezetting 1.9

toek. aantal (inw.) kinderen 850

tussen 4-5 jaar 60
tussen 6-12 jaar 240
in omliggend geb. 240
totaal 540

Figure 14. Numbers on Bosch & Van Eyck's Plan. From Het Nieuwe Instituut, Bosch, T. Archive.

through Nieuwmarkt remained calm and limited *(Figure 13)*. Furthermore, the row of buildings fronting the metro line was restored. The infamous oversized gap of the Jodenbreestraat – which had sat as a barren expanse next to the modern ****Maupoleum (the gray office block built earlier) – was filled in with new social housing. As Theo Bosch and Aldo van Eyck had advocated, a continuous street façade was recreated so that the very wide Jodenbreestraat "could be provided with housing" along its length, effectively reconstructing the destroyed Sint Antoniesbreestraat in front of the Maupoleum *(Bosch, T., 1974)*. According to the final plan (approved after 1975), the original lot lines and street grid were maintained as much as possible on the cleared metro blocks *(Figure 13)*. The city agreed that the original building lines would be preserved to the greatest extent when rebuilding the metro route, essentially respecting the old layout of the neighborhood. Crucially, the final project put housing for people first, rather than offices. It was decided that all new construction on the former clearance sites would be predominantly social housing, with some integrated commercial or workshop space at ground level *(Bosch & Van Eyck, 1974).* This was a direct answer to the residents' and squatters' demands for the right to stay in their neighborhood. In fact, one of the explicit goals formulated by the Nieuwmarkt Bewonersraad was that "those who had to leave the neighborhood and want to return" should be given priority in the new housing, as well as "those in the neighborhood who most urgently need a home," all in the form of affordable dwellings *(Bewonersraad Nieuwmarkt, 1976)*. The outcome was that hundreds of displaced residents could indeed return to Nieuwmarkt in the newly built apartments, rather than being permanently moved. By 1985, the renewal program had planned to produce nearly 600 new housing units and several dozen business spaces across eight different sites in the Nieuwmarkt area *(Bosch & Van Eyck, 1974)* ***(Figure 14)***. These included modern apartment blocks that nonetheless conformed to the scale of the 17th-century street pattern, often with creative design features to maximize light and liveability. The crowning piece was a small shopping center known as "Het Pentagon," completed in 1983, which provided local shops and services in the heart of the neighborhood In effect, Nieuwmarkt remained a lived-in neighborhood, not a through way or office park – a victory unimaginable under the original plan *(Van Gameren, D., Van den Heuvel, D., Klijn, O., Mooij, H., & Van der Putt, P. ,2009)*.

5.2 Achievements of the Squatters' Struggle

Many of the core demands of the squatters and residents were met in the final renewal, testament to the success of their resistance. First and foremost, the neighborhood was saved from wholesale demolition. While some blocks were lost to the metro construction, the activists managed to halt the further expansion of demolition for the highway and office projects. The planned office towers and luxury flats never materialized; apart from the already-built Maupoleum and a few pre-existing projects, Nieuwmarkt did not become a CBD full of glass high-rises. "We feared office development and through traffic," the residents had written in 1974 *(Bosch, T., 1974)* – but thanks to their fight, those fears were not realized. Instead, the social function of the area was restored: shops, a community center, and normal city life returned. The squatters' insistence on "wonen" (living) as the priority was reflected in the rebuilt housing. As noted, the city formally agreed that the renewal would be carried out "for the benefit of those who need housing the most," not for investors *(Bewonersraad Nieuwmarkt, 1976)*. This was a major victory for the ideals of social housing and inclusive urban policy in Amsterdam. Another critical achievement was the prevention of the highway. The squatters and the residents forced the city to definitively cancel the four-lane road that would have split the district. The importance of this cannot be overstated: it meant Nieuwmarkt remained merged into the fabric of the old city. The narrow streets and

alleys were preserved, and the new traffic pattern did not cut the neighborhood into pieces. One contemporary noted that if the broad road had gone through, “the future of the Nieuwmarktbuurt as an inner-city area would be finished” *(Bosch, T. 1974)*. By stopping it, the activists ensured Nieuwmarkt kept its identity as a pedestrian-friendly, intimate quarter. Today, the St. Antoniesbreestraat and Jodenbreestraat are busy with cyclists, market stalls, and residents – a direct legacy of the protest movement’s success in shaping the urban form. The squatters’ movement also succeeded in forcing a new mode of urban planning. Their resistance led to the establishment of the open planning process described earlier, where residents had real input on design and development. This was quite revolutionary at the time. Typically, city plans were drawn up behind closed doors. In Nieuwmarkt, however, from 1975 onward the community sat at the table for decisions on architecture and land use *(Bewonersraad Nieuwmarkt, 1976)*. The squatters – many of whom participated in residents’ meetings – thus helped pioneer participatory urban renewal. This model was later copied in other Amsterdam neighborhoods. In short, a major structural success of the Nieuwmarkt struggle was to demonstrate that citizen activism can fundamentally change how cities rebuild neighborhoods, making the process more democratic and interactive. Finally, the squatters achieved a symbolic victory: they proved that determined grassroots action could check the power of developers and officials. The Battle of Nieuwmarkt in 1975 became legendary – it showed that ordinary people were willing to put their bodies on the line for their homes and community. In the aftermath, there was a sense of municipal guilt. That guilt translated into tangible actions: the city poured funds into Nieuwmarkt’s rebuilding as compensation, and officials more readily listened to community input to avoid future conflict. The squatters, many of them young and idealistic, also drew attention to the broader issues of housing shortage and speculative vacancy in Amsterdam. Their actions in Nieuwmarkt fed into the growing national squatters’ movement, which by the late 1970s was a social force pushing for affordable housing and against urban displacement *(Amsterdam Stadsarchief, 1991).* In essence, the Nieuwmarkt squatters kick-started a decade of housing activism that would leave a lasting mark on Amsterdam’s housing policies.

5.3 Remaining Unresolved Issues and Unintended Consequences

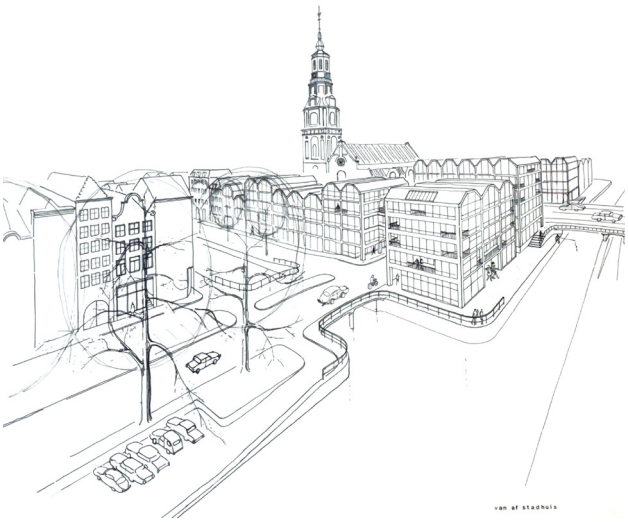


Figure 15. Sketches Final Proposal. From Het Nieuwe Instituut, Bosch, T. Archive.

Not all the squatters’ aspirations were fulfilled, and some consequences of the conflict were unforeseen. One clear demand that was not met was the halting of the metro line. Despite years of protest, the metro was built. This caused the loss of dozens of historic buildings and permanently altered the physical landscape along the subway’s path. Many activists viewed the metro as a betrayal, and even Theo Bosch viewed it as a grievous error in an old city *(Bosch, T., 1974)* The completed metro (the East Line) did eventually open in 1980, and while it improved public transit, it left a legacy of trauma from the evictions. Another partially unmet goal was the full preservation of existing housing. By the time the protests subsided, some parts of Nieuwmarkt were already gone – for example, entire rows on Rechtboomssloot and around the Nieuwmarkt square had been cleared earlier and could not be restored. The new buildings, though sympathetic in design, were still new – meaning the authentic old fabric was in places replaced by modern constructions. *(Figure 15)* Some long-time residents never returned, either because they had settled elsewhere or because the new units, though affordable, were allocated through waiting lists that didn’t perfectly reinstate the old community. In the 1976 address to the council, the Bewonersraad warned that planning is “useless if it’s not expressly established that plans

benefit those who need housing most" *(Bewonersraad Nieuwmarkt, 1976)*. This principle was largely adopted, but implementation was challenging and not everyone benefitted equally. There were also unintended consequences of the squatter victory. One was that the Nieuwmarkt became, in the long run, a very attractive place to live – so much so that by the 1990s and 2000s, property values soared, and gentrification set in. The very success in creating a quaint, livable neighborhood in the city center meant that eventually wealthier individuals moved in, and some social housing units got converted to private rentals or condos. In the immediate aftermath, however, Nieuwmarkt's renewal was considered a model of equitable urban redevelopment. It showcased that a compromise was possible between modernization and preservation. Another outcome was that the squatter movement gained confidence city-wide. Flush with the perceived win at Nieuwmarkt, squatters became bolder in other battles – notably in places like the Vondelstraat (1980) and Nemo (1980), and numerous smaller squats. This sometimes led to more confrontations with authorities. By the early 1980s, the Dutch government responded by tightening laws and curtailing squatters' rights *(Amsterdam Stadsarchief, 1991).* In a sense, the Nieuwmarkt fight taught both activists and officials valuable lessons: activists learned they could influence big projects, and officials learned that they had to engage with the local communities. The legacy of Nieuwmarkt thus cuts both ways – it is remembered as a victory for citizen activism, but it also ushered in a new era of more sophisticated city management of protests. Overall, the success of the squatter resistance in Nieuwmarkt is evident in the neighborhood's outcome: the area remained fundamentally residential, historic, and community-oriented, in line with the protesters' demands. The original municipal blueprint was completely transformed. As one scholar succinctly put it, the hard work of urban social movements "reverberated in the proposals Van Eyck and Bosch made for the Nieuwmarkt area," and the current Nieuwmarkt neighborhood is the result *(Layla Gijsen & Mokum Kraakt, 2024)*. In concrete terms, almost every demand the squatters had on their banners in the 1970s – Geen sloop, geen metro, geen vierbaansweg ("no demolition, no metro, no four-lane road") – was addressed: demolition was limited and followed by reconstruction, the four-lane road was canceled, and although the metro was built, its destructive impact was mitigated and partially compensated by the social housing and restoration that followed. The Nieuwmarkt renewal stands as a landmark in Amsterdam's history, showing how citizen activism can steer the destiny of a neighborhood, turning a top-down development scheme into a more inclusive and humane urban reality.

Conclusion

The story of Nieuwmarkt's redevelopment stands as a powerful reminder of how grassroots resistance can truly reshape the course of urban policy. This thesis set out to explore just how much influence the kraakbeweging—the squatter movement—had on the neighborhood's final transformation between the late 1960s and early 1980s. Along the way, it uncovered a dynamic tug-of-war between city planners pushing for modernization, a community fighting to protect its home, and architects who stepped in to bridge the divide.

What emerged was a dramatic shift in direction. The city's original vision—an office-heavy, car-centric district—was upended by the determined efforts of local residents, squatters, and architects who championed preservation and people-first design. Through occupations, protests, and counterproposals, these groups halted the most destructive elements of the plan, including the much-criticized four-lane highway. In its place, Nieuwmarkt evolved into a neighborhood built on human scale, community needs, and historical continuity.

Architects Theo Bosch and Aldo van Eyck played a crucial role in this transformation. With a deep sense of social responsibility, they listened to the community and used their design expertise to offer real alternatives. Their work helped shift the conversation from top-down planning to something more collaborative and values-driven. They showed that thoughtful architecture could be a tool for social change, not just aesthetics.

But even with this success, the project came with trade-offs. The metro, despite efforts to reroute and soften its impact, left lasting marks on the area—both physical and emotional. And in the decades that followed, Nieuwmarkt's charm and success ironically led to gentrification, gradually making it less accessible to the very people who fought to save it. These tensions underscore that while participatory planning can build fairer cities, the work doesn't stop with the final blueprint. Ongoing attention is needed to address new pressures as they arise.

In the end, Nieuwmarkt is both a triumph and a cautionary tale. It proves that when people organize, speak up, and take action, they can reshape the future of their city. At the same time, it reminds us that true progress means staying vigilant—continuously working to protect the spirit and inclusivity of historic neighborhoods as cities inevitably evolve.

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