



(Van den Bosch, C., 1980)

The Architecture of Dutch Primary Schools (1970-1990) Reflecting Social and Educational Ideals

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Daphne Bohemen

Dolf Broekhuizen

TU Delft

Abstract

This thesis examines how Dutch primary school architecture between 1970 and 1990 reflected evolving educational and social ideals. By analyzing multifunctional school buildings, it highlights the interplay between education, urban planning, and community development.

Keywords

Multifunctional schools, neighbourhood, primary schools

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1. Introduction

Schools are not just places for learning; they serve as cultural and social hubs that reflect the broader values of their time.¹ As educational policies evolved, so did school architecture, reflecting shifting pedagogical, urban, and societal ideals.

After World War II, educational reforms in the Netherlands led to modernized school architecture. Instead of traditional long corridors lined with classrooms, new designs prioritized movement, flexibility, and communal interaction. In the 1970s, the concept of a central shared space, such as an auditorium or open learning center, became popular. Inspired by developments in England and Denmark, the concept of the school as a small community emerged, in which social functions played an important role in addition to classical education.²

Their architecture embodies changes in educational philosophies, urban planning, and societal ideals. Between 1970 and 1990, Dutch society underwent significant transformations that directly influenced the design of school buildings. Educational reforms introduced new pedagogical approaches, economic shifts reshaped public infrastructure, and a growing emphasis on community-oriented spaces led to innovative architectural solutions. Schools were increasingly designed as multifunctional spaces, integrating various social functions such as neighborhood activities and religious services, turning them into essential community centers rather than merely educational institutions.³

Existing Research

Much of the existing literature on school architecture focuses on practical and visual aspects, such as layout, materials, and style, while the broader social, political, and cultural meanings of these buildings receive less attention. Important studies like *Bouwen voor school en buurt* (1980) and *Nederland naar school: Twee eeuwen bouwen voor een veranderend onderwijs* (Verstegen, 1996) highlight how school buildings have changed over time in response to new educational methods. Similarly, works by Broekhuizen et al. (2009) and Van den Bosch (1980) provide overviews of trends in Dutch school architecture, often emphasizing technical innovation, spatial efficiency, and pedagogical reform. However, these studies tend to underexplore how school buildings also reflect broader societal ideals, such as ideas about equality, community, integration, or citizenship. They often treat architecture as a response to functional needs, rather than as a cultural product that can carry symbolic meaning. As a result, there is room for a more critical approach that sees school architecture not just as a background to social change, but as a visible expression of it.

This thesis aims to fill that gap by studying school buildings as reflections of changing social values in the Netherlands during the 1970–1990 period. It builds on existing architectural and educational research, but adds a perspective informed by cultural history and urban sociology. In doing so, it treats

¹ Broekhuizen, D., Bijlsma, L., Schreurs, E., Groenendijk, P., & Verstegen, T. (2009). *Een traditie van verandering: De architectuur van het hedendaagse schoolgebouw*. NAI uitgevers. P. 9

² Verstegen, T. (1996). *Nederland naar school: Twee eeuwen bouwen voor een veranderend onderwijs* (Tj. Boersma, Red.). Nai010 Uitgevers. P. 178

³ Van der Hout, M. (1985). *Multifunctionele accommodaties in Rotterdam: Scholen als stimuleringspunten in woonwijken*. In *Multifunctional Accommodations*, p. 45

school buildings not only as spaces for learning, but also as indicators of how society viewed education, community, and the role of the school in daily life.

Method

Central to this research is the question: ***How does the architecture of primary schools built during the period (1970-1990) in the Netherlands show the social and educational ideals of that time?***

To answer this, the study investigates the influence of educational reforms on primary school design, the role of schools as social centers, and the ways in which they integrated other communal functions. A case study approach provides insight into specific examples of school buildings that exemplify these themes. The selected case studies were chosen because they exemplify key architectural responses to the social and educational transformations of that period. Each represents a different facet of multifunctional school architecture: Open Hof school and church in Zevenkamp, a district in Rotterdam highlights the integration of religion and education, Multifunctional school in Holendrecht embodies the rise of shared community spaces, and Multifunctional school Crooswijk showcases the blending of educational and cultural functions in urban environments.

Through archival research, primary literature analysis, and secondary sources, this study explores how primary school buildings not only responded to functional needs but also expressed deeper cultural and ideological trends. An analysis of these case studies highlights patterns and key differences, offering a understanding of how architecture shaped and was shaped by broader societal transformations.

Structure of thesis

This thesis is structured to first provide a theoretical and historical context, situating Dutch primary school architecture within wider educational and urban planning developments. The case studies then serve as focal points for analyzing how schools functioned within their communities. A broader discussion will follow, exploring how multifunctional school buildings influenced urban life. In the conclusion, the key insights will be brought together to highlight how architecture reflects and shapes societal change.

By examining the intersection of architecture, education, and social ideals, this research contributes to the field of architectural history by demonstrating how school buildings function not just as spaces of learning, but as powerful reflections of the cultural and political landscapes in which they were built.

2. Theoretical and historical context of school architecture in the Netherlands

The architecture of school buildings in the Netherlands has changed significantly in recent decades. This is due to developments in education, urban planning and social ideals. Schools are no longer just places of learning, but now fulfill a broader function in society. They provide space for child care, community activities and cultural services.⁴

The constant change in Dutch primary school architecture

Dutch school buildings continuously adapt to new teaching methods, urban growth, and social developments. After World War II, schools needed to be built quickly and efficiently, leading to standardized buildings constructed from modular or prefabricated elements, with functionality and cost efficiency as key priorities. In the 1960s and 1970s, education changed, requiring more flexible classrooms and open learning environments. Primary school designs evolved to feature more open spaces and fewer fixed classrooms. By the late 20th century, schools had taken on a broader role, becoming social and cultural hubs. Three main developments contributed to this transformation: educational innovations, shifting from classroom-based to student-centered learning, which required flexible school designs; urban planning, where schools were integrated into residential areas rather than standing alone; and economic and social factors, where schools combined with other facilities such as childcare and community centers. These trends led to the rise of multifunctional schools, a key theme in Dutch school architecture.⁵

The 'neighborhood thought' concept and school designs

One of the most influential ideas in Dutch school architecture is the “neighborhood thought.” Originating in America, this concept envisions self-sufficient neighborhoods with their own schools, shops, and amenities. After the war, Dutch urban planners adopted this model, placing schools at the heart of residential areas rather than as isolated buildings.⁶

From the 1970s onward, schools began serving multiple purposes. The government report *Building for School and Neighborhood* (1980) emphasized the importance of schools as shared public spaces. As a result, schools were increasingly used as libraries and study areas, childcare and social service centers, and venues for sports and recreational activities. This multifunctionality improved efficiency, strengthened schools’ role in society, and encouraged innovative architectural solutions.⁷

⁴ Verstegen, T. (1996). *Nederland naar school: Twee eeuwen bouwen voor een veranderend onderwijs* (Tj. Boersma, Red.). Nai010 Uitgevers. P. 180 - 182

⁵ Van den Bosch, C. (1980) *Onderwijs en schoolgebouw*. ICS, Stichting Informatiecentrum voor Scholenbouw (Rotterdam) p. 9

⁶ Broekhuizen, D., Bijlsma, L., Schreurs, E., Groenendijk, P., & Verstegen, T. (2009). *Een traditie van verandering: De architectuur van het hedendaagse schoolgebouw*. NAI uitgevers. P. 18 - 19

⁷ Treurniet, J.G. (1994) *Ontwikkelingen in de architectuur*. Digibron.nl

The development of school designs

From the 1950s onward, new teaching methods led to significant changes in school buildings. More flexible learning environments replaced traditional classroom layouts. Key adaptations included the introduction of multiple light sources to create an open and dynamic atmosphere, the replacement of standard classrooms with workspaces for individual and group learning, and the integration of technology, including media rooms, flexible study areas, and digital learning tools.⁸

The school as the center of the neighborhood

Since the 1990s, schools have played an even greater social role, becoming neighborhood centers that offer childcare, cultural activities, and social services alongside education. This shift, known as "school socialization," reflects the idea that schools contribute not only to learning but also to social development and community building.

A major innovation in this regard was the emergence of the "broad school" concept. These schools function not only as educational institutions but also as gathering places for the community. Broad schools provide childcare, sports, and cultural programs, feature shared spaces accessible to students, parents, and local residents, and organize after-school activities and events.

The evolution of Dutch school buildings demonstrates how schools continuously adapt to new teaching methods, urban planning, and social needs. They have transformed from stand-alone educational institutions into multifunctional community centers. This process is characterized by the integration of schools into residential neighborhoods, following the neighborhood thought; the adoption of flexible designs that accommodate changing educational practices; and the development of multifunctional buildings that combine educational, social, and cultural functions. As a result, Dutch school buildings play an increasingly significant role in both education and community life.⁹

Conclusion

The evolution of Dutch school buildings demonstrates their continuous adaptation to changing educational methods, urban needs, and societal trends. This transformation into multifunctional spaces is driven by the integration of schools within residential neighborhoods, following the 'neighborhood concept,' the shift towards flexible designs that accommodate pedagogical innovations, and the development of buildings that combine educational, social, and cultural functions. As a result, Dutch school buildings today play an increasingly significant role in both education and community development.

⁸ Broekhuizen, D., Bijlsma, L., Schreurs, E., Groenendijk, P., & Verstegen, T. (2009). *Een traditie van verandering: De architectuur van het hedendaagse schoolgebouw*. NAI uitgevers. P. 18 - 19

⁹ 'idem, (noot 8)'

3. Case study analysis

This chapter explores how the ideals behind multifunctional school buildings were put into practice through three key examples from the 1970s and 1980s. These cases reflect broader shifts in education, urban planning, and community development, showing how architecture responded to changing societal needs. Presented in chronological order, Holendrecht (1976), Open Hof in Zevenkamp (1982), and Crooswijk (1983), each case highlights a different approach to multifunctionality. The analysis focuses on the building's design, its intended functions, and how it operated within its neighborhood context. Together, these case studies offer insight into how multifunctional schools aimed to connect education with everyday community life.

3.1 Multifunctional center Holendrecht, Amsterdam (1976)

The Multifunctional Center (MFC) Holendrecht in Amsterdam Southeast was a groundbreaking project in Dutch school architecture, reflecting the progressive ideals of the 1970s and 1980s. Designed by architect Stuurman, the center brought together educational, social, and cultural functions under one roof. This approach aligned with broader societal developments in which multifunctionality and community-oriented design became increasingly important.¹⁰ According to C. van den Bosch, MFC Holendrecht was even described as a "sheep with five legs," acknowledging the versatile function the center had to fulfill.¹¹

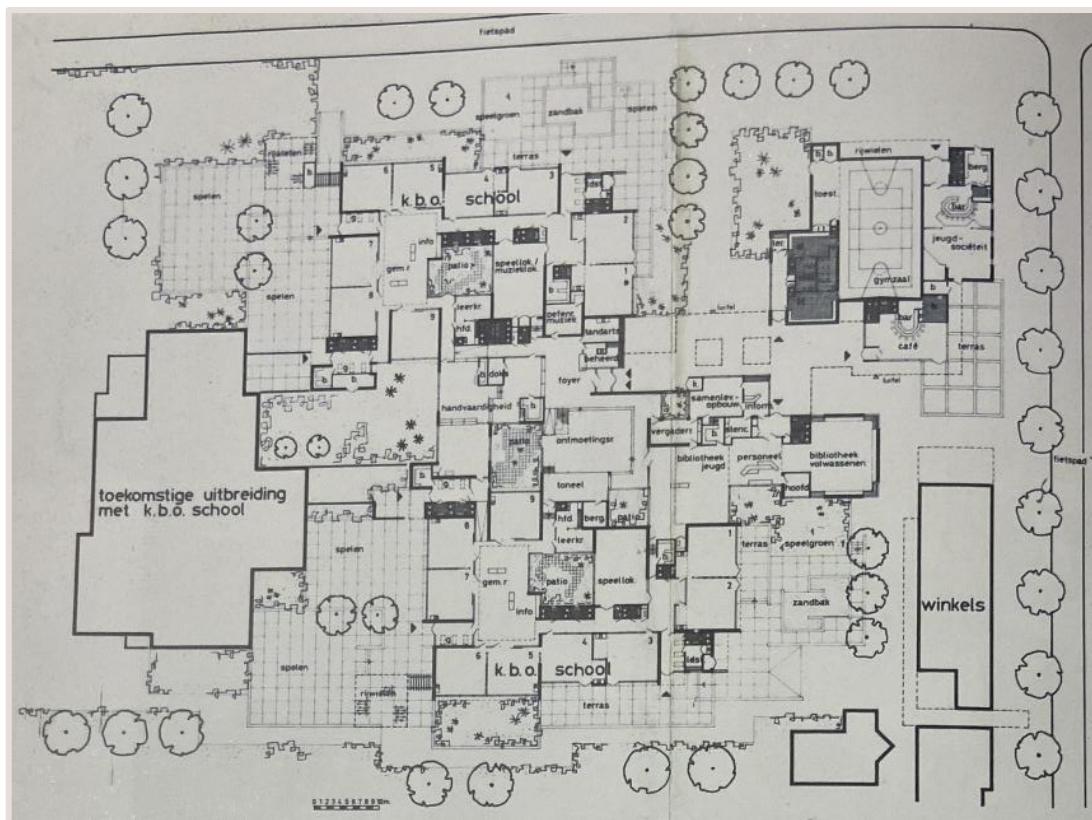


Figure 1: floorplan MFC Holendrecht (*Traditie van verandering*, 2009)

¹⁰ Broekhuizen, D., Bijlsma, L., Schreurs, E., Groenendijk, P., & Verstegen, T. (2009). *Een traditie van verandering: De architectuur van het hedendaagse schoolgebouw*. NAI uitgevers. P. 53

¹¹ Van den Bosch, C. (1980) *Onderwijs en schoolgebouw*. ICS, Stichting Informatiecentrum voor Scholenbouw (Rotterdam) p. 106

Architecture and function

The design of MFC Holendrecht aimed to strengthen social cohesion and make efficient use of financial resources. A 1975 report explicitly emphasized this vision: "*In a time when concepts such as cooperation, integration, and budget cuts are gaining significance, we must stop building with a single purpose*"¹²

In line with this idea, MFC Holendrecht was opened in 1976 as part of a national pilot project by the National School Building Foundation. The initiative sought to combine educational and community functions, making socio-cultural activities more financially viable by integrating them into structured educational programs. The integration of schools with neighborhood facilities was not unique to Holendrecht but reflected a broader trend in which schools were increasingly seen as community centers.¹³

The design of MFC Holendrecht was not only focused on education but also aimed to create a vibrant meeting place for the neighborhood. Architects envisioned hallways and shared spaces as natural extensions of classrooms, fostering both dynamic learning and social interaction. The complex, a low-rise structure, housed two primary schools, an ecumenical school, a public library, and various community facilities. Crucially, the building included spaces that were specifically designed to bring together different user groups from the neighborhood. These were not simply extra rooms repurposed for evening use, but integral parts of the original design, intended to promote interaction, flexibility, and shared ownership. The goal was not just to accommodate these functions within the same building but to encourage close collaboration between them.¹⁴ The integration of functions allowed children to access information and books directly from the library, while various spaces were designed for multifunctional use. For instance, the preschool's playroom could also serve as a space for adult activities in the evenings.¹⁵

The building included a gymnasium, a youth center, a neighborhood café, and spaces for music, creative expression, and social work, fostering synergy between different functions.

A journalist at the time described how "*children will soon get their information and books directly from the library, while their parents might have a cup of coffee there during the break*"¹⁶

Challenges and Lessons

Despite its innovative setup, MFC Holendrecht faced significant challenges. Critics noted that the integration of functions was less seamless in practice than anticipated. Instead of a smooth merging of functions, the various components remained separate, limiting interaction between user groups.¹⁷ Additionally, tensions arose between architects and local residents. While the idea of multifunctionality appeared attractive in theory, its practical implications raised skepticism. Financial obstacles were particularly problematic. On the very day of the official opening, the center had to temporarily close

¹² Van den Bosch, C. (1980) *Onderwijs en schoolgebouw*. ICS, Stichting Informatiecentrum voor Scholenbouw (Rotterdam) p. 106

¹³ Broekhuizen, D., Bijlsma, L., Schreurs, E., Groenendijk, P., & Verstegen, T. (2009). *Een traditie van verandering: De architectuur van het hedendaagse schoolgebouw*. NAI uitgevers. P. 53

¹⁴ Gnjirrep, Y. (1976) *Holendrecht dat wordt wel wat. Scholen, buurtcentrum en bibliotheek in een complex*. De waarheid p. 7

¹⁵ 'idem, (noot 14)'

¹⁶ Broekhuizen, D., Bijlsma, L., Schreurs, E., Groenendijk, P., & Verstegen, T. (2009). *Een traditie van verandering: De architectuur van het hedendaagse schoolgebouw*. NAI uitgevers. P. 53

¹⁷ Van den Bosch, C. (1980) *Onderwijs en schoolgebouw*. ICS, Stichting Informatiecentrum voor Scholenbouw (Rotterdam) p. 107

due to the Ministry of Culture, Recreation, and Social Work (CRM) withdrawing financial support for the socio-cultural component of the project at the last moment. As reported in *De Waarheid*, "The multifunctional complex in Holendrecht had to close again on the day of its 'opening' because CRM at the last moment refused to provide funding for the operation of the socio-cultural part of the complex. Only after strong action from the community did the center fully open." This situation underscored the structural difficulties of integrating education and social services within a single facility.¹⁸ The financial and logistical struggles at Holendrecht reflected broader concerns about multifunctional education centers. The debate was not limited to funding but also extended to the core mission of schools. A report from the 1980s already warned that "*education is increasingly being burdened with social tasks for which it was not originally intended.*"¹⁹ This echoed concerns raised during the planning of a similar project in the Kinkerbuurt, where local officials expressed fears that integration might delay the urgently needed construction of a new school.²⁰

Despite these setbacks, MFC Holendrecht played a crucial role in shaping the evolution of multifunctional school architecture. The integration of education and community services at Holendrecht served as a precursor to the "broad school" model, which gained momentum in the 1990s. In this approach, education, childcare, sports, and cultural activities were increasingly housed within a single facility. This trend also extended into secondary education, where schools collaborated more closely with businesses and social organizations.

The financial difficulties in Holendrecht were further confirmed in Heddema's (1976) report, which highlighted the lack of operational funding for evening activities:

*"The Ministry of CRM has no funds to finance evening operations, and therefore the doors of the youth center, the event hall, and the meeting rooms must remain closed for the time being. Neighborhood residents can only look through the windows at the beautiful carpeting inside."*²¹

Holendrecht was an ambitious experiment that embodied the social ideals of the 1970s and 1980s. While it demonstrated the potential benefits of integrating educational and community services, it also highlighted challenges related to execution, funding, and functional cohesion. Despite its difficulties, Holendrecht influenced later developments in multifunctional school design, offering valuable lessons on the intersection of education, social services, and urban planning.

¹⁸ G.P. (1977). *Scholen*. De Waarheid.

¹⁹ Broekhuizen, D., Bijlsma, L., Schreurs, E., Groenendijk, P., & Verstegen, T. (2009). *Een traditie van verandering: De architectuur van het hedendaagse schoolgebouw*. NAI uitgevers. P. 25 - 26

²⁰ G.P. (1977). *Scholen*. De Waarheid.

²¹ Heddema, F (1976). "Holendrecht wacht op metro." Het Parool, p. 7

3.2 Open Hof, Zevenkamp (1982)

The multifunctional school-church building Open Hof in Zevenkamp, Rotterdam, is an example of integrating education and religion within a single architectural concept. This project reflects the social ideals of the 1970s, focusing on community building and efficient space usage. Combining a primary school and a church under one roof was an innovative solution that saved costs while strengthening social cohesion in the neighborhood.²²

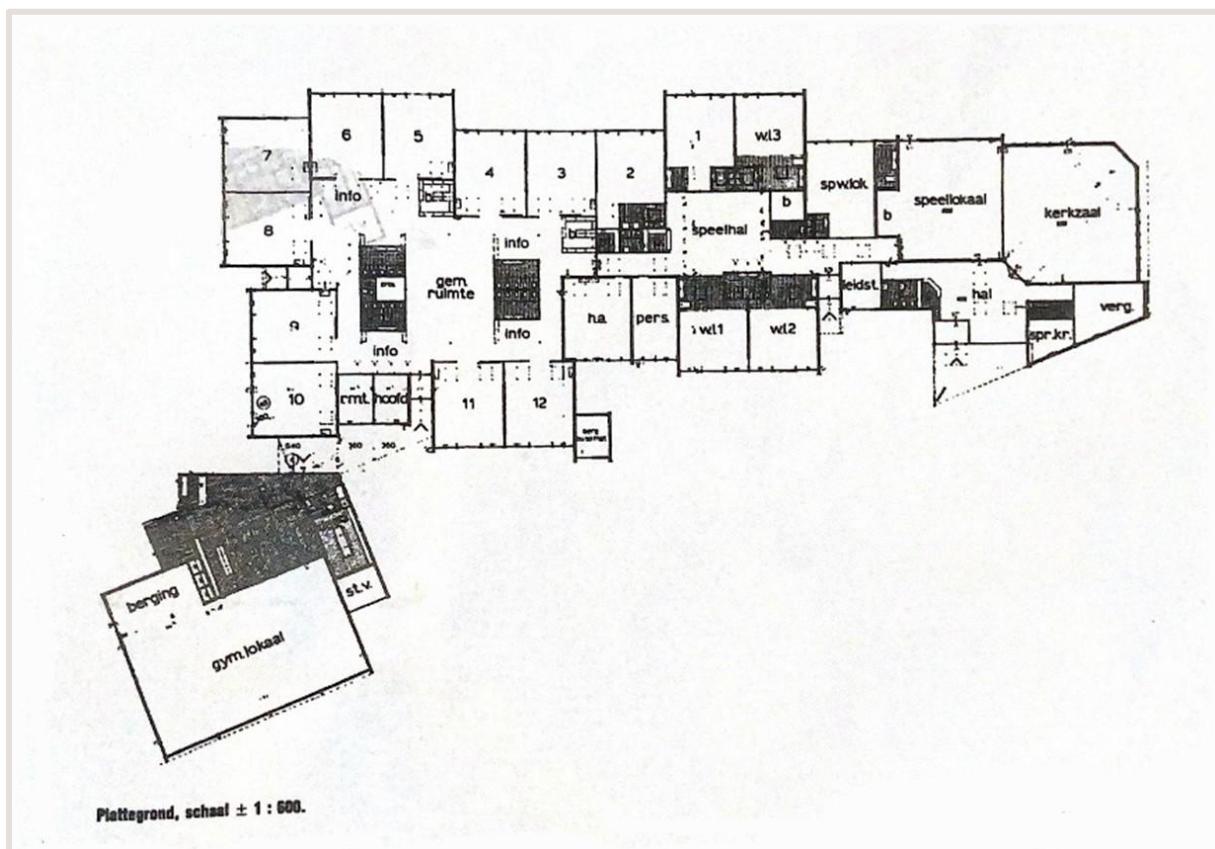


Figure 2: floorplan school-church Zevenkamp (Van der Hout, 1985)

Architectural concept and functionality

Open Hof was developed through a collaboration between the Rotterdam Protestant Christian Primary Education Foundation and the Reformed Churches Administration. Both organizations sought a shared facility that could accommodate educational and religious activities. A preliminary study confirmed that this combination was feasible within Zevenkamp's urban plan and budget. Joint construction enabled efficient space usage and cost reduction.²³

The decision to integrate a school and a church aligned with Dutch urban planning trends favoring multifunctional buildings. Zevenkamp's urban design included a mix of low-, mid-, and high-rise buildings, and Open Hof's location served as a transition between these structures. The architect chose a low-rise school to create harmony between single-family homes and taller residential blocks.²⁴

²² Van der Hout, M. (1985). *Multifunctionele accommodaties in Rotterdam: Scholen als stimuleringspunten in woonwijken*. In *Multifunctional Accommodations*, p. 41

²³ 'idem, (noot 22)'

²⁴ Open Hof Nieuws (1981). *Besluitvorming en gemeenschapsopbouw in Zevenkamp en Ommoord*. Open Hof, januari/februari 1981.

Beyond its function as a school and church, Open Hof was designed as a community hub. The involved churches emphasized that the building should serve not only as a place of worship but also as a meeting point for the neighborhood. As stated: “*Open Hof wants to be more than just a church building. The churches want it to contribute to what is needed in the neighborhood: an open court, a meeting place, a center.*”²⁵

The design features a modular layout, allowing classrooms and church halls to be used flexibly. A key element of the building was the open meeting area, accessible to both the school and the church. Through strategic use of shared spaces, a multifunctional and efficient structure was created.²⁶²⁷

Impact and social integration

Open Hof was part of a broader trend in Dutch school architecture in the 1970s and 1980s, where schools increasingly served multiple functions. The primary school also housed the municipal library, reinforcing its role as a neighborhood hub. The building was designed to integrate seamlessly with nearby shopping facilities.

The integration of schools and churches was both practical and ideological. It reduced costs and optimized space while promoting the idea that schools were part of the community. This trend continued into the 1990s when schools were designed with open learning environments and flexible educational spaces.

The Open Hof school-church complex in Zevenkamp illustrates how educational buildings evolved into multifunctional centers. No longer just places of learning, schools became social hubs where education, faith, and community engagement intersected. Open Hof exemplified efficient spatial planning while fostering social cohesion. By integrating a school, church, and community space, it provided an innovative response to spatial and financial challenges, becoming a vital part of Zevenkamp’s social infrastructure.²⁸

²⁵ **Open Hof Nieuws (1981).** *Besluitvorming en gemeenschapsopbouw in Zevenkamp en Ommoord.* Open Hof, januari/februari 1981.

²⁶ **Van der Hout, M. (1985).** *Multifunctionele accommodaties in Rotterdam: Scholen als stimuleringspunten in woonwijken.* In *Multifunctional Accommodations*, p. 42

²⁷ **n.a. (1984)** *Multifunctioneel gebouw voor kerk en school.* Nederlands Dagblad.

²⁸ **Open Hof Nieuws (1981).** *Besluitvorming en gemeenschapsopbouw in Zevenkamp en Ommoord.* Open Hof, januari/februari 1981.

3.3 Multifunctional building, Crooswijk (1983)

The Multifunctional Building Crooswijk was designed as a combination of a primary school, community center, and gymnasium, a concept that became increasingly common in the 1970s and 1980s. This project reflects the broader development in which schools took on a growing social and educational role within their neighborhoods.²⁹

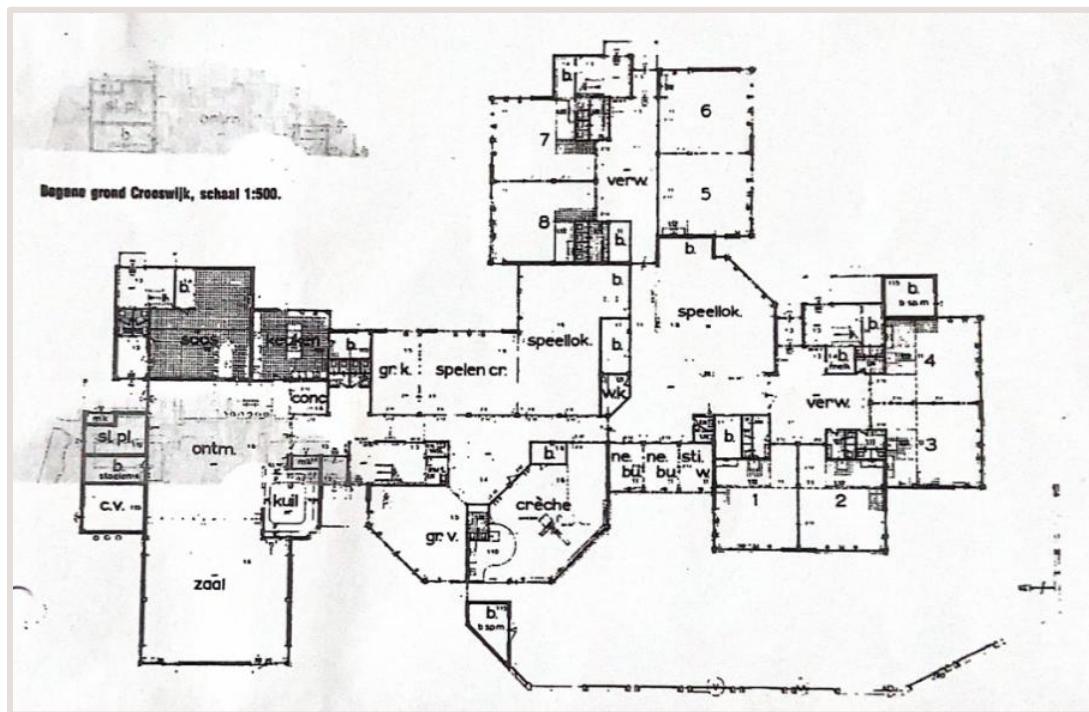


Figure 3: Floorplan Crooswijk (Van der Hout, M.)

Urban context and Design

Urban renewal in Crooswijk was instrumental in making this complex possible. When the Heineken Brewery was demolished, it created room for new development and disrupted the original pattern of enclosed building blocks. With limited space available, the architects opted for a multi-story design. Positioned as a freestanding volume, the building features a closed façade along Isaac Hubertstraat, helping to maintain a sense of continuity within the surrounding neighborhood. Inside the plot, the space was reserved for a playground and greenery, contributing to a safe and child-friendly environment.³⁰

The building integrated education, social, and cultural activities through collaboration between the school, community center, and sports hall. Many spaces had dual purposes: the school used them during the day, and the community center took over in the evening. Rooms like the handicraft and expression areas were shared, while an electronic locking system enabled controlled access to different zones.³¹

²⁹ Van der Hout, M. (1985). *Multifunctionele accommodaties in Rotterdam: Scholen als stimuleringspunten in woonwijken*. In *Multifunctional Accommodations*, p. 44

³⁰ 'idem, (noot 29)'

³¹ Van der Hout, M. (1985). *Multifunctionele accommodaties in Rotterdam: Scholen als stimuleringspunten in woonwijken*. In *Multifunctional Accommodations*, p. 45

The building provided not only education but also supplementary education, such as language lessons for non-native speakers and community activities. This approach reflected the broader trend of multifunctional schools playing an expanded role in local areas.³²

Multifunctionality and social Impact

The design emphasized flexibility and openness. Classrooms featured natural light on two sides, leading to the selection of lightweight desk roofs. Galla panels covered the roof, supported by laminated wooden beams and prefabricated concrete columns. The insulated façades with large glass sections ensured energy efficiency and transparency.³³

The ground level had a lightweight system floor, while an in-situ poured concrete floor was chosen for the upper level. The material selection balanced sustainability and function, with open spaces enhancing accessibility and interaction.³⁴

The Crooswijk complex demonstrated how multifunctional accommodations fostered social cohesion. By combining functions, the building became a meeting point for different community groups. The gymnasium was accessible to both the school and local residents, promoting interaction.³⁵

Multifunctionality was not a new concept, but Crooswijk advanced its integration. Previously, schools and community centers were built separately, limiting their interaction. Crooswijk intentionally encouraged collaboration among different stakeholders, leading to a more efficient use of space and resources.³⁶

The idea of schools as community centers emerged after World War II and was further developed in the Netherlands by the Stichting Bouw. This shift was based on the recognition that schools could serve as more than just educational institutions. Urban planners and educators emphasized their role as neighborhood hubs, integrating education, culture, and social engagement.³⁷

A report from the time noted: *"The school as a community institution is an idea that has taken root internationally and has been adapted to the Dutch context through the initiatives of Stichting Bouw"*³⁸ By the 1970s and 1980s, this idea had evolved into structured multifunctional accommodations like Crooswijk. The integration of educational and social services allowed for dynamic interaction between user groups, reinforcing the growing role of schools as community centers.³⁹

³² **Van den Bosch, C. (1980)** *Onderwijs en schoolgebouw*. ICS, Stichting Informatiecentrum voor Scholenbouw (Rotterdam) p. 106

³³ **Van der Hout, M. (1985)**. *Multifunctionele accommodaties in Rotterdam: Scholen als stimuleringspunten in woonwijken*. In *Multifunctional Accommodations*, p. 45

³⁴ **Van den Bosch, C. (1980)** *Onderwijs en schoolgebouw*. ICS, Stichting Informatiecentrum voor Scholenbouw (Rotterdam) p. 106

³⁵ **Van der Hout, M. (1985)**. *Multifunctionele accommodaties in Rotterdam: Scholen als stimuleringspunten in woonwijken*. In *Multifunctional Accommodations*, p. 45

³⁶ **Van den Bosch, C. (1980)** *Onderwijs en schoolgebouw*. ICS, Stichting Informatiecentrum voor Scholenbouw (Rotterdam) p. 107

³⁷ **Verstegen, T. (1996)**. *Nederland naar school: Twee eeuwen bouwen voor een veranderend onderwijs* (Tj. Boersma, Red.). Nai010 Uitgevers p. 192 - 198

³⁸ 'idem, (noot 37)'

³⁹ **Van den Bosch, C. (1980)** *Onderwijs en schoolgebouw*. ICS, Stichting Informatiecentrum voor Scholenbouw (Rotterdam) p. 107

4. Multifunctionality of School Buildings and Their Impact on the Community

Multifunctional school buildings played a significant role in linking education, architecture, and community development. Between 1970 and 1990, Dutch school buildings increasingly served as multifunctional centers, integrating education, social services, and community activities. This chapter examines how this multifunctionality was expressed in the three case studies (Zevenkamp, Holendrecht, and Crooswijk) and evaluates their social and architectural implications.

Comparison of the Case Studies

A key similarity among the three school buildings is their flexible use of space, as all were designed for multiple purposes. In Zevenkamp, this resulted in a combined structure where the church and school operated separately but within the same building, while Holendrecht had a more open layout, allowing educational and social activities to mix, though this sometimes led to organizational challenges. Crooswijk was one of the first to fully integrate community services into a school, setting an example for future multifunctional buildings.

Beyond their architectural features, the social impact of multifunctional school buildings is particularly noteworthy, as in all three cases, the school building became an important social hub within the neighborhood. In Zevenkamp, the church served not only as a place of worship but also as a community meeting space, while in Holendrecht, the multifunctional design led to intensive use of facilities by neighborhood residents, although some functions did not integrate as seamlessly as expected. In contrast, Crooswijk successfully achieved close cooperation between education and social functions, further strengthening community engagement.

A primary source illustrates how Holendrecht was designed to provide a wide range of facilities from the very beginning, stating: *"The public kindergarten and primary school have already moved into their new building. [...] The school in Holendrecht is part of an entire (low-rise) complex, which also houses the ecumenical school, the public library, and the neighborhood center."*⁴⁰ This highlights how efficiency in multifunctional school buildings was a key motivation for their development, as combining educational and social functions allowed resources to be utilized more effectively. This was particularly relevant in Holendrecht, where collaboration between schools and neighborhood institutions proved financially advantageous. However, shared spaces also introduced challenges, sometimes leading to conflicts over usage and management, as both Holendrecht and Crooswijk faced difficulties in coordinating different user groups within shared spaces.

Effectiveness of Multifunctionality

While multifunctional buildings allowed for more efficient use of resources, their implementation proved challenging, as Holendrecht, for example, struggled with coordinating different user groups, which resulted in some spaces being underutilized. In contrast, Crooswijk was more successful in fostering school-community interaction, yet concerns about the sustainability of funding for social functions remained. In some cases, the multifunctional approach faced resistance, as shared spaces occasionally led to conflicts between different user groups, particularly when management and ownership structures were unclear. These difficulties were further compounded by shifting political and economic conditions, which influenced the financing and long-term viability of multifunctional projects.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Elias, T. (1976). *Cahier 'school moet buurthuis zijn'*. NRC Handelsblad. P. 2

⁴¹ Van den Bosch, C. (1980) *Onderwijs en schoolgebouw*. ICS, Stichting Informatiecentrum voor Scholenbouw (Rotterdam) p. 13

Additionally, Holendrecht provided a unique insight into how multifunctionality was experienced by residents, as described in a primary source, which states: *"Jannetje, six years old, sees her mother in the library at eleven o'clock. They can pick out a book together, and her mother might have a cup of coffee during the break."*⁴² This description illustrates how multifunctional buildings not only served educational purposes but also played a vital role in everyday community life, fostering interaction between students, parents, and neighborhood residents.

Architectural Implications

From an architectural perspective, multifunctional buildings offered both opportunities and limitations. Open and flexible designs facilitated community engagement, but they also occasionally led to a loss of identity for schools, as they no longer had clearly defined educational spaces. This issue was particularly evident in Holendrecht, where the mix of social and educational functions created logistical challenges, making it difficult to maintain a strong educational focus. In contrast, Zevenkamp demonstrated that a more segmented approach, where the school and church operated as distinct units, could preserve the identity of individual functions while still promoting collaboration.

The integration of different functions made these buildings more dynamic and central to their neighborhoods. This was particularly visible in Crooswijk, where the school was combined with a community center and sports facilities. The success of this model highlighted the potential of multifunctional schools to contribute to social cohesion but also underscored the need for careful architectural planning.⁴³

Financial and Policy Challenges

Another recurring theme is the financial sustainability of multifunctional accommodations. While the concept was often attractive in theory, financing shared facilities proved problematic in practice. In Holendrecht, for instance, it became clear that while the government supported the construction of the center, there was no long-term financial plan for the maintenance and operation of non-educational functions. This resulted in temporary closures and restructuring, undermining the effectiveness of the concept.

Additionally, policy priorities shifted over time, affecting the continuity of multifunctional projects. In some cases, this meant that schools had to reduce or eliminate their additional functions due to budget constraints or changing educational policies. This indicates that, despite the benefits of multifunctionality, a stable financial and policy framework was necessary to ensure long-term success.

Learning from the past

The analysis of the multifunctional school buildings in Zevenkamp, Holendrecht, and Crooswijk demonstrates their crucial role in the social and spatial developments of their time. While multifunctionality contributed to efficiency and community building, it also introduced challenges in terms of management and institutional identity. These insights are relevant to contemporary debates on the role of schools as social hubs in urban areas.

Lessons from this period highlight the importance of a careful balance between flexibility, funding, and community involvement in the successful implementation of multifunctional school buildings. The discussion in this chapter lays the groundwork for broader reflections on the evolution of school architecture, particularly the broad school concept of the 1990s, which sought to refine and expand upon the multifunctional principles established in earlier decades.

⁴² Elias, T. (1976). *Cahier 'school moet buurthuis zijn'*. NRC Handelsblad. P. 2

⁴³ Van der Hout, M. (1985). *Multifunctionele accommodaties in Rotterdam: Scholen als stimuleringspunten in woonwijken*. In *Multifunctional Accommodations*, p. 44

The experiences of Zevenkamp, Holendrecht, and Crooswijk highlight the need for strategic planning, stable funding models, and well-defined governance structures to ensure the long-term success of multifunctional educational spaces.

6. Conclusion

This study explored how the architecture of Dutch primary schools between 1970 and 1990 reflected both social and educational ideals. The central research question was: *How does the architecture of primary schools built in the Netherlands between 1970 and 1990 reflect the social and educational ideals of that time?*

Social ideals

The schools studied in this thesis were not merely educational institutions, they were envisioned as neighborhood anchors. Projects like *Open Hof* in Zevenkamp brought together religious and educational functions within a single building, designed to foster local interaction and cohesion.⁴⁴ Similarly, *Holendrecht* served as a bold attempt to combine schools, a library, and community services under one roof, aligning with national ambitions for integrated public facilities.⁴⁵ Despite these aspirations, financial and administrative difficulties often challenged these ideals. *Holendrecht*, for example, had to close its social spaces shortly after opening due to budget shortfalls.⁴⁶

Educational innovations

The architecture of these schools also responded to new pedagogical approaches. In contrast to the rigid classroom models of the past, these buildings were designed for openness, flexibility, and collaboration. In Crooswijk, for instance, classrooms were combined with cultural and recreational areas, supporting more holistic learning. In Zevenkamp, the inclusion of a public library within the school reflected the ideal of life-long and accessible education.⁴⁷ These designs embodied a shift toward student-centered learning.

Contemporary commentary

Though praised for innovation, multifunctional schools also raised concerns. Critics feared that education was becoming overloaded with social responsibilities.⁴⁸ Media reports from the time noted that the architectural ambition of such projects often exceeded the available financial and institutional support.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Van der Hout, M. (1985). *Multifunctionele accommodaties in Rotterdam: Scholen als stimuleringspunten in woonwijken*. In *Multifunctional Accommodations*, p. 41

⁴⁵ Van den Bosch, C. (1980) *Onderwijs en schoolgebouw*. ICS, Stichting Informatiecentrum voor Scholenbouw (Rotterdam) p. 106

⁴⁶ G.P. (1977). *Scholen*. De Waarheid.

⁴⁷ Open Hof Nieuws (1981). *Besluitvorming en gemeenschapsopbouw in Zevenkamp en Ommoord*. Open Hof, januari/februari 1981.

⁴⁸ Van den Bosch, C. (1980) *Onderwijs en schoolgebouw*. ICS, Stichting Informatiecentrum voor Scholenbouw (Rotterdam) p. 13

⁴⁹ Elias, T. (1976). *Cahier 'school moet buurthuis zijn'*. NRC Handelsblad. P. 2

Reflection

The period between 1970 and 1990 reveals that well-designed school buildings can express societal values, but only when backed by clear governance and structural funding. The legacy of these schools can be seen in today's *brede scholen* and integrated child centers, which continue to balance education with broader community services.⁵⁰

Architecture, as shown in these examples, is not neutral: it can support or hinder the implementation of educational and social ideals. Applying these lessons today requires not only creative design, but also sustained investment and collaboration between institutions and the communities they serve. This research shows that architecture can function as both a mirror and a motor of societal change.

⁵⁰ Verstegen, T. (1996). *Nederland naar school: Twee eeuwen bouwen voor een veranderend onderwijs* (Tj. Boersma, Red.). Nai010 Uitgevers p. 192 - 198

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Bouwtekeningen Crooswijk