



Embedded in Social Greenery

How the green landscape of Overvecht is determinant for its
social development

AR2A011 Delft Architectural History Thesis
Msc2, Technical University of Delft

Daan Kok

4716744

20/01/2022

Supervisor: Marie-Thérèse van Thoor

Contents

Introduction

Chapter 1: Historical context of the design of Overvecht

- 1.1 Context of the post World-War housing crisis
- 1.2 Context of the municipality of Utrecht and Overvecht
- 1.3 Landscape design of Overvecht

Chapter 2: The use and interpretation of green and public space

- 2.1 The changing demographic composition of Overvecht
- 2.2 The deterioration of green and public space
- 2.3 Vision of Overvecht
- 2.4 Troubling architecture

Chapter 3: Climate adaptivity

- 3.1 Spatial program of Overvecht
- 3.2 Site visit
- 3.3 Social ecological thinking

Conclusion

Sources

Appendix

Introduction

Ever since the Covid-19 pandemic started people began to reevaluate green space within the city (Wiel, D. 2021). When locked down in a house, access to nature suddenly became a much bigger priority. In addition, the pandemic amplified human impact on the environment. Air pollution declined and certain species of animals returned to their habitats as a result of human inactivity, temporarily restoring a balance within the ecosystem (Soga m., 2021). During this period society showed its vulnerability towards external disturbances and stresses. *“When disturbances hit us, whether pandemic, climate-related or socio-economic, they remind us that we need to think considerably more on how to nurture resilience, or a ‘buffering capacity’, to deal with unknown and known disruptions in constructive ways”* (J. Colding, 2019, page 2). Therefore a change in attitude towards nature and demanding its presence in our environment is especially relevant today, where society has to deal with the consequences of climate change. It is vital to adapt our existing and future cities to become resilient to face further disruptions. In addition, the Netherlands is dealing with a housing shortage. This has to be resolved by building or transforming approximately 75.000 houses a year and will evidently result in an expansion of the build environment (NEO Observatory, 2019).

The urge of cities to expand and become more green and healthier is not a new challenge. In the Dutch post-war period (1945-1960) a similar trend occurred. During this period a housing crisis ravaged Dutch cities. Houses were damaged as a result of the war and the sudden growth of the birth rate contributed to a dire shortage of housing. The government consulted the ministry of housing and created plans to build housing projects outside of the city. These houses would contrast the bad living conditions of the cramped inner cities (Van der Valk, A., 2002). Instead of densely populated and heavily built neighbourhoods, planners designed spacious building blocks embedded in green space. This was as legislation prescribed in the *Eerste* and *Tweede Nota Ruimtelijke Ordening* by the *Rijks Planologische Dienst* in 1967. Quality of life was the most important factor of the post-World War housing projects. The connection with green was an essential part of improving that quality. As a result, new urban areas arose around the existing cities stimulating a shift from inner city to the new, spacious and green areas creating a more balanced social-ecological system.

The neighbourhood of Overvecht, situated Northwest of the municipality of Utrecht, is a good example of a post-war housing project where the social-ecological system plays an important role. The neighbourhood was built between 1960 and 1971. Significant attention was given in the design towards green space and recreational areas where social interaction could take place. However, trends over the years point out the degradation of the neighbourhood, in which the public space plays a crucial part. By studying the neighbourhood of Overvecht and comparing it to challenges we as a society are facing today, this thesis seeks to answer the following question: how is the deterioration of Overvecht related to the social circumstances of the neighbourhood?

Other questions that have arisen in this research are: Why could the history of Overvecht play a role in sustainable area development? What is the vision and intent behind the design of Overvecht? What is the importance of a social-ecological system? To answer these questions the following methods are applied: literature study, by consulting the city archive of the municipality of Utrecht for photographic material, plans and building policies. Undertaking a site visit to experience the neighbourhood will help to place and interpret findings and experience the site as it is at present. Furthermore, interviewing Jeroen Schenkels, biologist and works as a sustainability consultant for the municipality of Utrecht in the social-ecological development of Overvecht.

Chapter 1: Historical context of the design of Overvecht

1.1 Context of the post World-War housing crisis

During the period after the second World War 1945-1960 the Netherlands faced a housing crisis. Between 1945 and 1960 the Dutch population grew from 9,2 million to 11,2 million people. This rapid increase in birth-rate and damaged housing due to the war resulted in a grand demand of housing. What is more, is that the war had caused big shortages of material like iron and steel, making it harder and more expensive to build. To deal with this crisis the Dutch Government decided to distribute the available material and financial assets. Municipalities were told how many houses they could build and they could increase this amount by building efficiently. These new housing projects contrasted the bare living conditions of the inner city, where large amounts of people lived in overpopulated and/or dense slum housing. To improve the quality of life new houses were situated in spacious green landscaping with social and recreational services. Extra attention was given to the public space, especially towards young families.

The municipality of Utrecht was restricted in expanding its housing stock by borders of surrounding municipalities. However, in 1954 these borders were changed consequently, more than doubling the size of Utrecht (Meurs, P.,2006) . This addition of land enabled new housing projects on a large scale. In anticipation of a potential expansion plans were made starting from 1920 where Berlage proposed an additional neighbourhood North East of Utrecht. In later expansion plans attention was given to multiple areas surrounding the inner city, eventually resulting in the neighbourhoods as they still are today. Because of the large amount of gained land and the still oppressive housing market, Utrecht was challenged with designating the newly available land for housing. In 1960 the municipality started off with two projects: Kanaleneiland and Tuindorp. During the build of these neighbourhoods the design for Overvecht was made. Because of the limited capacity of urbanists the elaboration of the design of Overvecht was assigned in 1958 to architects W. Wissing (1920-2008) and K.F.G. Spruit (1921-2018) (P. Meurs, 2006). Wissing began his architecture studies at the Technical School of Delft in 1939. His studying was interrupted by the second World War where he was transported into the German camp of Nienburg. After the war ended he graduated and started working at *Rotterdamse bureau van Van Tijen*. His focus was on public housing and reconstruction. Wissing gained experience in this type of project since he was one of the architects that designed the expansion plan for Zuidwijk in Rotterdam. In 1948 he joined *Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne* (CIAM) where he was an active member. In 1955 Wissing started his own architecture and urbanism firm and two years later he joined *Team X* where he was a designer for the project of Nagele. Spruit graduated in 1949 from the engineering school of Delft. In 1955 he started his own architecture firm. During the period of 1958 and 1966 he was a director of the *Academie van Bouwkunst Amsterdam*.

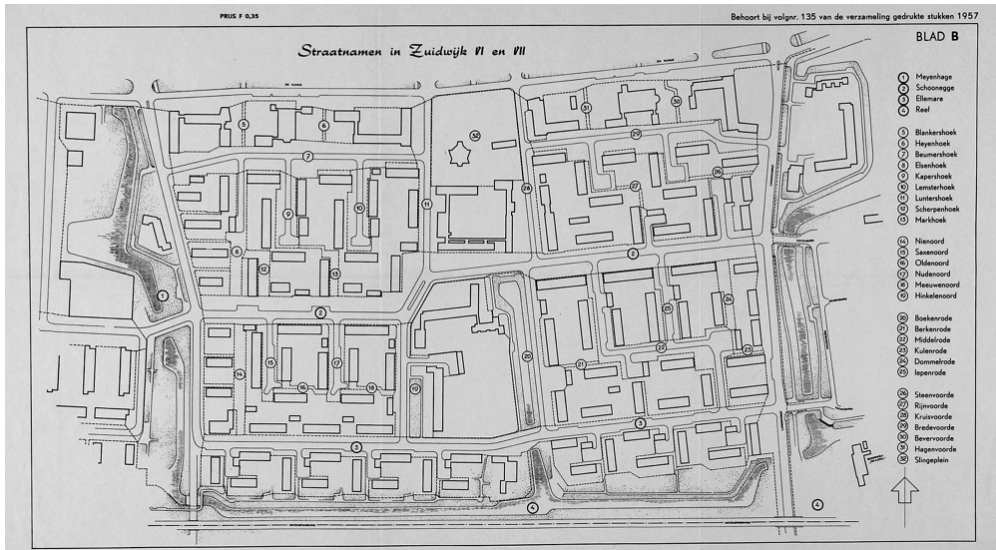


Figure 1: Map of the neighborhood 'Zuidwijk' in Rotterdam; The map shows the lay out of the buildings with according street namens. What characteristic is the spaciousness and the attention to water and greenery. Date: 1957 / Gemeente Rotterdam [4001]

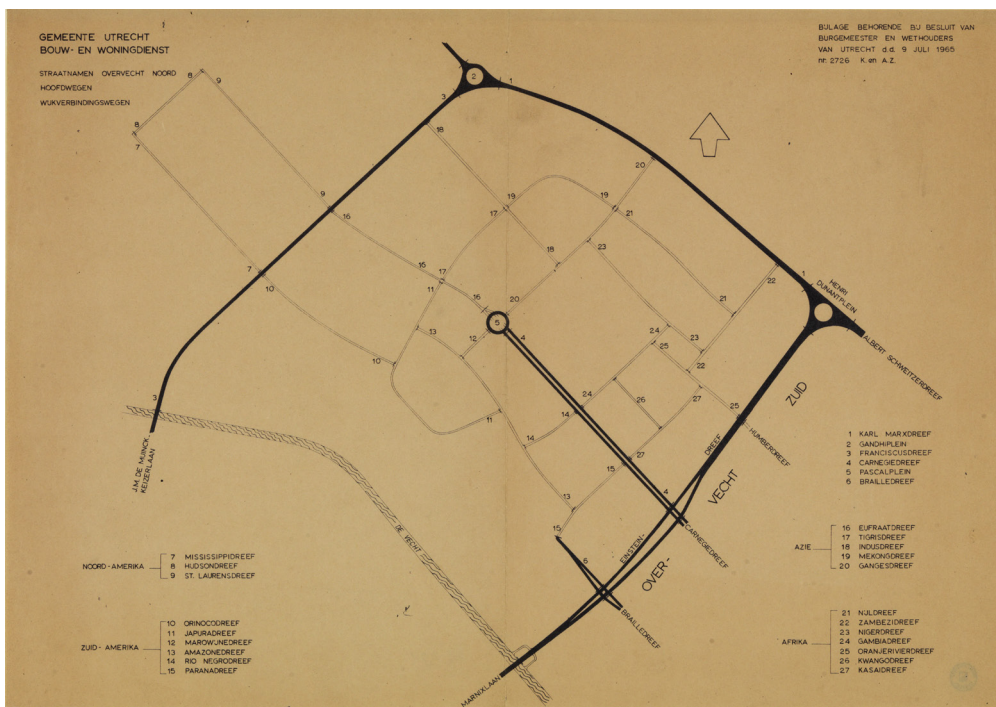


Figure 2: Map of the neighborhood 'Overvecht Zuid' in Utrecht; The map shows the lay out of the main infrastructure with according street namens. Date: 1965 / Collectie Het Utrechts Archief [214197]

1.2 Context of the municipality of Utrecht and Overvecht

Because of the delayed annexation of the municipality of Utrecht, the city was late in its housing development compared to other Dutch cities. However, prior experience of the appointed architects stimulated a quick development. In the layout of Overvecht, for example, similarities are apparent to the neighbourhood of Zuidwijk Rotterdam (figure 1, 2). There is a great attention to green and spaciousness between the building blocks. Also the presence of water and infrastructure surrounded by green are aspects that have translated in the design of Overvecht. Connections in their sketch design the borders of the river De Vecht and the infrastructure plans were maintained. These borders were accentuated by implanting green lay-outs. Within these green boundaries a variety of plots were assigned for housing (figure 3). Between these plots there was space for infrastructure in combination with greenery and recreational spaces. So the infrastructure would form green veins throughout the neighbourhood that would provide residents with a quick connection between the recreational spaces and parks. One of these parks situated in Overvecht-Zuid was named *Het Watertorenpark*. The park was designed by the architects and further developed by D.H. Werner, led by J.P. van Alff (1914-1997, head of the municipal department of landscape gardening between 1956-1976). Green space in Overvecht had to provide a social environment where people could go out for a stroll and children could play and safely go around. This attention to public space was constructed around orthogonal building blocks. The pictures show a spacious layout of the public space just after realisation (figure 4-7). Trees are planted, marking the borders of the green space and several recreational facilities for children and adolescents. The water tower in the back marks the centre of the Watertoren park. Over a period of time the plants and trees matured to their full potential, as is seen in figure 8 and 9.

1.3 Landscape design of Overvecht

Between 1954 and 1964, Van Alff worked closely together with Landscape gardener Bram Galjaard (1924-2021). Both gardeners were actively writing in the trade magazine *De Boomkwekerij* and had a thought out vision on landscaping in relation with people. After the annexation of the city both Van Alff and Galjaard were appointed as heads of the landscape department. With Galjaard as designer and van Alff as director they were confronted by a new scale of designing. Where they used to do small projects in the inner city, they now had responsibility for entire neighbourhoods. The municipality strived for the new urban areas to become like modern cities (P. Meurs, 2006). With influences of CIAM and the International Federation of Landscape Architects (IFLA, founded in 1948), landscaping became one of the prime aspects of urban design. This collaboration between architects and landscapers allowed landscapers to express their vision more clearly in their design. In figure 12, for example, the vision of Van Alff and Galjaard on urban landscaping is clearly portrayed. In the centre are young families which were the main target group since the sharply increased birth rate created a lot of young families. In their neighbourhood, a radius of 400 metres, they have to have access to a



Figure 3: Map of the neighborhood 'Overvecht Zuid' in Utrecht; the terrain between the Albert Schweitzerdreef / spoorweg Utrecht-Amersfoort / Vecht / Einsteindreef. The map shows the lay out of the main roads, green spaces and build areas. Date: 15/08/1961 / Collectie Het Utrechts Archief [214196]



Figure 4: View towards the playground on 'La Bohèmedreef' in Utrecht; on the right the highrise building along the 'Faustdreef' and in the background the Overvecht watertoren. Date: 1971 / Collectie Het Utrechts Archief [805298]



Figure 6: Picture taken from the south, facing the watertoren Overvecht with surrounding buildings next to the Neckardreef in Utrecht. Date: 1973 / Collectie Het Utrechts Archief [80189]



Figure 5: View facing the playground next to the 'La Bohèmedreef' in Utrecht; in de background the shopping centre of Overvecht is visible. Date: 1971 / Collectie Het Utrechts Archief [77257]



Figure 7: View facing the playground next to the 'La Bohèmedreef' in Utrecht; in de background the shopping centre of Overvecht is visible. Date: 1971 / Collectie Het Utrechts Archief [77257]



Figure 8: Aerial photo of part of Overvecht-Zuid in Utrecht (Neckerdreef). In the centre the watertower Overvecht, The plants and trees are maturing and starting to form a more clear image of the design. Date: 1981 / Collectie Het Utrechts Archief [118532]



Figure 10: Picture by J.P. Van Alff, sandy playground next to the tiberdreef in Utrecht. In the background Overvecht train station. Date: 1968 / Collectie Het Utrechts Archief [821586]



Figure 9: Aerial photo of part of Overvecht-Zuid in Utrecht (Neckerdreef). Plants and trees are matured and mark the borders between green and infrastructural space. Date: 29/05/2009 / Collectie Het Utrechts Archief [802215]



Figure 11: Picture taken facing the gallery of the elderly home of the foundation of elderly at the Vulcanusdreef in Utrecht. From left to right, Caretakers Antoon Goedhart and Jan Vermeulen, the residents J. Sperna and mev. Sperna-Weiland and H. van de Wiel of the project gecoördineerd bejaardenwerk Overvecht. Date: 26/03/1985 / Collectie Het Utrechts Archief [400910]

playground and recreational green space. On a quarter scale with a radius of one kilometre families had access to larger playing facilities and services like a public pool or -garden. In their district, within a 4000 metre radius, facilities had to be available, such as: sporting fields, a petting zoo and a city park.

This preliminary approach was later applied to the design of Overvecht. Each plot has access to playgrounds and green space. The central park allowed surrounding plots to have access to larger green space and room for playing facilities. The outskirts of Overvecht towards the railroad were used for large playing fields and other public facilities (figure 10). Not only families were accounted for in the design, as Galjaard explains in “*Ruimte voor Recreatie*” (1963, pages 17-18):

*“Al is het voor een groot deel van de bevolking niet meer zo moeilijk om op vrije dagen de natuur in de verre omtrek terug te vinden, er blijft toch een grote groep, zonder vervoermiddel, gebonden aan de directe woonomgeving. We denken aan de moeders met kleine kinderen, de bejaarden, de invaliden. (...) Aangezien zij niet zijn georganiseerd, in tegenstelling bijvoorbeeld tot beoefenaars van sport, merkt men weinig van hun wensen in dit opzicht. Bij het verdelen van de beschikbare ruimte in de stad moet ervoor worden gezorgd dat zij niet in de verdrukking raken” **

This quote shows that Galjaard was aware of the composition of society. He, together with van Alff, envisioned green public space to provide a place for residents to relax and to interact with nature. This point of view arose from the so-called *wijkgedachte* which was elaborated on, shortly after the second World War. A. Bos was one of the advocates of the *wijkgedachte*. In his book, *De stad der toekomst, de toekomst der stad* (1946, pages 62-67), he argued that the growth of the individual households were coherent to societal development. Therefore, a supportive role of society was necessary in a neighbourhood to create an inclusive living environment (figure 11). This vision of the *wijkgedachte* was shared amongst the landscape department of the municipality of Utrecht and amongst others developed in the design of Overvecht.

**Translation: “Even if it is not that hard anymore for a large part of the population to find nature in the wide surrounding, there still remains a big group, without the means of transport and constrained to their direct living environment. We could think of mothers with small children, elderly, disabled persons. (...) Since they are not unionised, unlike people who practise sports, they will not notice their wishes in this aspect. In dividing the available space in the city, they must be accounted for so that they will not be repressed.”*

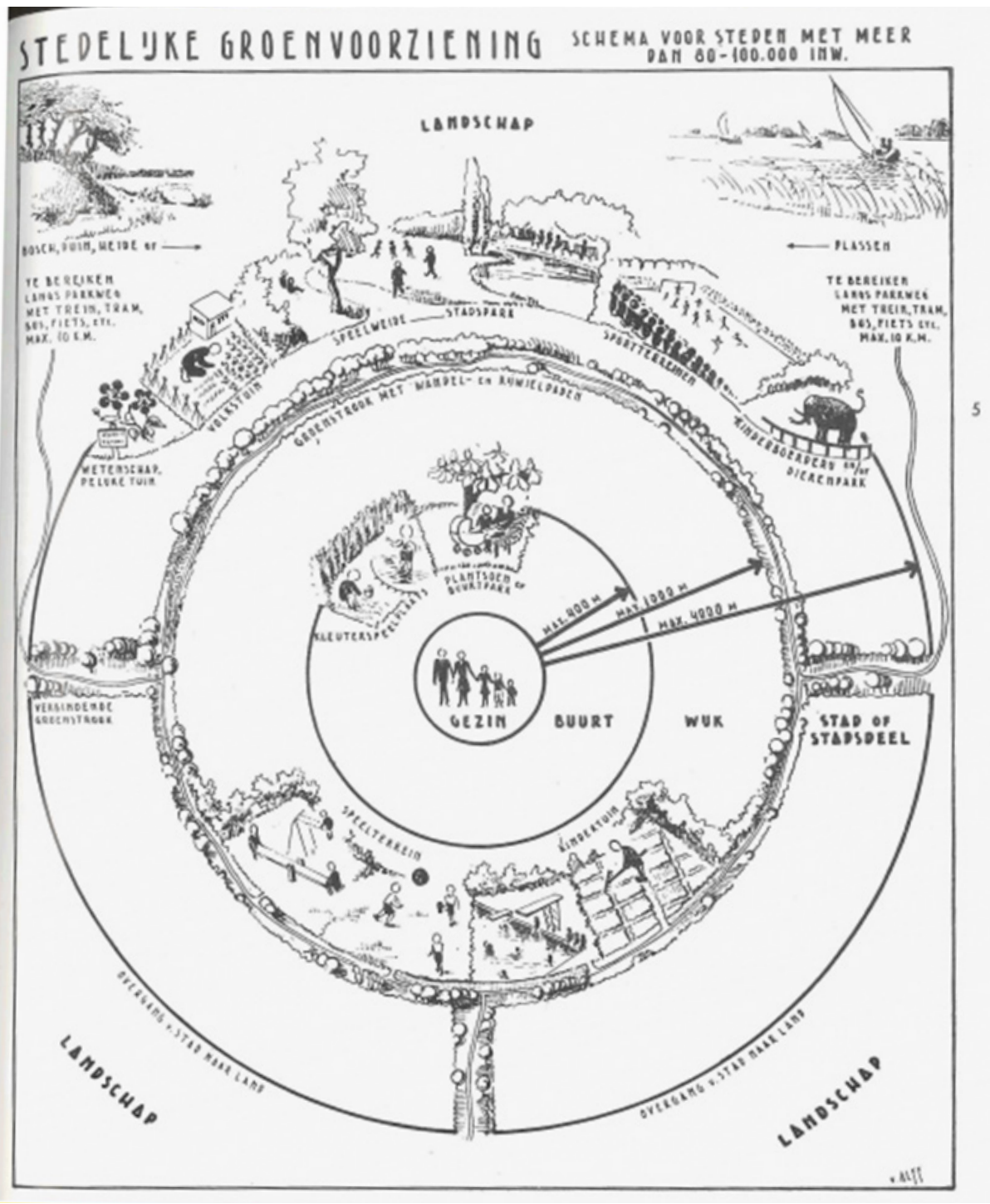


Figure 12: Scheme of Galjaard and Van Alff about the ideal lay out of urban green space, including radius distances and recreational services. Source: Galjaard, "Ruimte voor Recreatie", 5

Chapter 2: The use and interpretation of green and public space

2.1 The changing demographic composition of Overvecht

After completion of the build of Overvecht, the neighbourhood existed mainly out of families and elderly with a Dutch background (CBS, 2011). Since the migration of guest workers in the seventies and eighties the formation of the neighbourhood changed significantly (figure 13). In expectation of the municipality of Utrecht, and also nationally, guest workers would stay for a small period of time and would then go back to their own countries. However, this did not happen. Guest workers mainly from Morocco and Turkey were due to stay and start families (Böcker, 1994). Legislation and policies of municipalities did not anticipate this, making it hard for migration communities to adapt and participate in society (Prins, K. S. (1996)). Moreover, the municipality of Utrecht neglected communicating with these communities which resulted in dissatisfaction of the migrant communities (Algemeen Dagblad, pag. 5, 1975). Legislation to stop foreign workers coming to the Netherlands caused a rise of illegal immigrants and trouble reuniting guest workers' families. This legislation is also what led to deterioration of the already mediocre living conditions of migrant households. In general guest workers were housed in pensions and outskirts of the city where rents were low. In Overvecht most migrant families were housed in gallery apartments or flats (figure 16), often shared with others due to their illegal status. In other words they did not have similar equality as Dutch citizens had. Multiple demonstrations were held nationally to fight for equal rights and to voice their dissatisfaction of their living conditions and the often poorly composed laws and legislation regarding guest working (figure 14, 15) (Algemeen Dagblad, pag. 17, 1978).

2.2 The deterioration of green and public space

The public space in Overvecht plays a significant role in the deterioration of the neighbourhood. In 1973 the varying cultural backgrounds of the migrant communities living in Overvecht formed over half the population and resulted in another way of interacting and valuing public space and greenery. These spaces were initially made for Dutch households of the sixties/seventies, as Jeroen Schenkels explained (interview, 13-03-2022). The use of the recreational space declined over the years and the public space fell prey to neglect. As utilisation decreases, the value of the green space decreases. Eventually leading to a scarification of public green space to, for example, parking lots. However, this is not the only cause of the deterioration. Design flaws and badly executed maintenance contributed to the decay and accessibility of greenery and recreational services. Schenkels described that trees that were planted temporarily were not taken down causing troubles with their roots and blocking views of gallery flats. As well as the execution of planting the greenery caused a monotone image and did not add much to biodiversity. Moreover, the placement of the green structure next to the main access routes, recreational use of the space was restrained (A. Harbers 2009).

Overzicht vreemdelingen/gastarbeiders stad Utrecht







	1962	1973	1980	1990	2000	2010	2015	2020
 Italianen	336	543	604	472	610	1248	1495	2251
 Spanjaarden	83	1256	843	644	745	1188	1598	2046
 Grieken	33	1100	1122	1008	1130	1386	1639	2113
 Joegoslaven	7	199	346	490	1407	1919	2105	2289
 Turken	0	1761	4972	7483	11.011	13.408	13.770	14.208
 Marokkanen	1	3139	5591	12.251	20.262	27.067	29.620	31.438
Totaal	460	7998	13.478	22.348	35.165	46.216	46.216	54.345

Figure 13: Periodic scheme of guest workers in Utrecht.
Date: 2021 / Gemeente Utrecht



Figure 14: Picture of a demonstration of sixty Morrocans for better housing conditions at the Stadhuisbrug in Utrecht. Date: 29/05/1978 / Collectie Het Utrechts Archief [402780]



Figure 15: Picture of a demonstration of guest workers against the Wet Arbeid Buitenlandse Werknemers at Vredenburg in Utrecht. Date: 23/03/1980 / Collectie Het Utrechts Archief [402780]

Due to the defunding of the landscaping department, starting from 1977, was one of the main causes of the degradation of the green space and was taken on mainly during the economic crisis of the eighties and nineties (S. Dupont, 2019). By narrowing down the budget, maintenance decreased resulting in a more monotone selection of vegetation as it was cheaper to manage. The defunding also caused recreational facilities to be in bad shape and becoming outdated. The decline of these facilities was coherent to the image of the neighbourhood, as the green and public space formed the identity of Overvecht. The abolished facilities attracted young adolescents who would use them to hang out. This was also due to their small gallery apartments that encouraged the use of the surrounding public space, since they had no other place to meet up. This then resulted in an environment where young adolescents occupied the public space making it less attractive for other residents. With the lack of supervision by other residents the security of the neighbourhood was decreasing and a rise of criminal activity was developing (Algemeen Dagblad, pag. 5, 1988). Since this trend occurred the reputation of the neighbourhood declined dramatically. The image of the green, spacious neighbourhood changed into a dangerous area with a lot of criminal activity revolving around drugs and weapons (De Volkskrant, pag. 6, 1994). Due to the circumstances of the housing of migrant communities, young adolescents were exposed to the criminal circuit. The deterioration of the greenery and public facilities went hand in hand with the decreasing safety in the neighbourhood. This trend countered the original intent for a family orientated living environment.

2.3 The Vision of Overvecht

In 2003 a vision was developed to suggest improvement and restoration of the green and public space. The publication of the vision was put into operation in 2005. It acknowledges the problems of the neighbourhood concerning safety, liveability, social cohesion and consolidation of green and public space (Gemeente Utrecht, 2005). In the report great emphasis is laid upon restoring and consolidating the green structure of Overvecht and the accessibility of it to the residents. In 2005 Overvecht qualified for a European grant to enhance biodiversity. Consequently leading to an intervention of the Watertoren park. New non-hardened paving was added and the vegetation was diversified and roughened to provide protection for animals, seen in figure 17 (Dupont, 2019). Also the disruption of the green structure by infrastructure was addressed in the vision. The public space was too monotone in its use of vegetation and lacked a human scale contributing to a misanthropic feeling. Schenkels, who contributed as environmental and ecologist advisor to this report, made the comparison between Overvecht and the Parisian neighbourhood Banlieue where the large-scale green structure was doomed to fail. Both neighbourhoods coped with similar problems which was the absence of human scale and level of detail that made the space feel anonymous. Intervening in the space was essential to prevent further deterioration.



*Figure 16: View facing the playground in between the flats in Overvecht, showing a contrast between the human scale playground and the large scale flats surrounding it.
Date: 1969 / Collectie Het Utrechts Archief [831033]*



*Figure 17: View facing the green structure aligned with the Watertoren. This image shows the added non paved walkway next to the Marnedreef. On the right the Watertoren Park begins.
Date: 04/2022*

2.4 Troubling architecture

The architecture in Overvecht sought to relate to the surrounding greenery. Buildings were orientated towards the parks and surrounding vegetation. However, Schenkels emphasised, the connection between inside and outside was problematic. Storages situated on the ground floor and entrances facing large pavements obstructed the connection with the outside that was intended (figure 18, 19). Moreover, the storages at the ground floor are more problematic since they detract eyes from the street. This results, like Banlieue, in an anonymous atmosphere in which the building contributes to a less safe environment, where contact between the building and the street on ground level was absent. When there is no contact or interaction between greenery and the building the space loses its value causing further deterioration. To combat this interventions were made, opening up the entrances and the plinth of flats towards the courtyards (between buildings) and parks. Also locating public functions and housing in the plinth were planned for more social control on the street (figure 20).

Schenkels stresses the importance of participation of the residents when planning an intervention. Residents and others closely involved in the neighbourhood have different interpretations and demands than stakeholders, such as developers and the municipality. Making the locals participate will contribute to a more valuable invention which contributes to their demands. This then will lead to the actual usage and improvement of the space and social cohesion. In this process communication is a key factor. This, however, was not an easy task. Since a large number of residents were segregated from society and were treated as such. Communicating was difficult as not all residents could be contacted. Schenkels explains that residents were hesitant to participate and were not used to communicating their demands. He also adds that this vision report was only a guideline and did not have the impact it sought out to have.



Figure 18: View facing the green structure of the Oberondreef. This image shows the troubling architecture of the plinth. Contrasting to the green structure this part has a lot of paved surface. The anonymous feeling is amplified by the cold meeting of the storage spaces at the ground floor. Date: 04/2022



Figure 19: Opposite view from the Oberondreef facing the Tannhäuserdreef. The contrast between green and paved space is striking, as parking takes up quite a lot of space. Date: 04/2022



Figure 20: Perspective taken from the Ebrodreef. The building on the left shows a transformation of the ground floor. From storage space to living space. This creates "eyes on the street". It shows awareness of the shortcomings of the original architecture. Date: 04/2022

Chapter 3: Climate adaptivity

3.1 Spatial program of Overvecht

Recently the municipality of Utrecht presented another plan for Overvecht: the *Omgevingsprogramma Overvecht* (Februari 2022). This plan is in line with the previous vision of 2003 but has a bigger emphasis on execution, tackling inequality and improving the public health of the area. Notable is the attention for climate adaptation and social cohesion as means of contributing towards a healthier and more sustainable neighbourhood. Schenkels, who again contributed to this plan, argues that it is necessary to develop the area from a social-ecological perspective. This thinking will contribute to biodiversity, resilience and stimulate a social environment. Consequently changing the perspective of a mainly (social)economic perspective. It also means that we, as a society, have to value living with nature instead of next to it (C. Holling, 1977). The plans indicate a readaptation of the *wijkgedachte*. Using nature based solutions as a contribution towards an inclusive society.

3.2 Site visit

During a site visit the contrast between the green structure and the paved area was quite apparent. Green lanes were connected by the Watertorenpark and functioned as the main axis for slow traffic. Surrounding these axes were a variation of low, medium and high rise building blocks. The higher buildings are located mostly on the outer parts of the building blocks enclosing the lower houses. What stood out were the recently planted trees and flowerbeds. Also recently serviced non-paved walkways along the main axis of the Marnedreef provided a pleasant setting. These paths were added between 2003 and 2005 according to the vision of Overvecht (figure 17, 23). The flowerbeds were, during the visit, maintained by the gardeners of the municipality, showing a contrast to the situation during the eighties and nineties. However, there are still spaces that appear troublesome. Such as the closed plinths with storages and garages at ground level still create an anonymous feel, although at some locations these have been transformed (figure 18-20). This gives the suggestion that there is awareness of the necessity of eyes on the street as is mentioned in *Omgevingsprogramma Overvecht*.

The attention to recreational facilities was apparent, as the vision of Van Alff and Galjaard was strongly recognisable. Playgrounds were frequently dispersed within the green structure and are also situated within building blocks. In larger spaces like *Het Watertorenpark* larger playing and sport facilities were located and had easy accessibility. Furthermore, great presents of schools create a rather lively environment during the day, where children are playing and elderly stroll by with or without an accompanying dog. In the area around these schools some initiatives were placed such as school gardens, a petting zoo and 'Tiny Forest' (figure 21, 22). These are all places intended for children to interact with and learn from nature. For children experiencing and relating to nature is necessary to impact future sustainable decision making (J. Colding, 2020).



Figure 21: Tiny forest next to the Van Brammendreef. Example of the interventions concerning climate adaptivity. Involving children in interacting with nature. Date: 04/2022



Figure 22: Comunal Garden of the Pouwer College Overvecht. Example of the interventions concerning climate adaptivity. Involving children in interacting with nature. Date: 04/2022

3.3 Social ecological thinking

Affinity with nature is part of social ecological thinking as Schenkels explains. This way of thinking enables nature to form a vital role in the development of the neighbourhood. Accordingly, climate adaptation is used as a resource to create interaction between humans and nature. So form wadi in combination with wooden playing elements, an attractive space where children can play and where excessive water can be stored temporarily. Also additional trees to prevent urban heat island effect and retaining groundwater, contribute to the wellbeing of people (J. Colding, 2020). Climate adaptation is also key in achieving urban resilience. Urban Resilience is the ability of the urban area to adapt swiftly to disturbances (J.P. Newel, 2017). As climate change results in an increased amount of disturbances, such as floods and extreme weather conditions, a resilient urban environment is indispensable (Bush, J., & Doyon, A. 2019).



*Figure 23: Perspective from the Marnedreef facing a high rise building alongside the Watertorenpark. It shows the attention to green space after the intervention in 2005 where waterfronts were dense and diversified.
Date: 04/2022*

Conclusion

The housing crisis after the Second World War resulted in an expansion of the build environment. Overvecht being one of the latest neighbourhoods built in the period. The design of Overvecht-Zuid van led by architect W. Wissing and K.F.G. Spruit. Building blocks embedded in a green structure was the intent of the design, whereas, Van Alff and Galjaard were responsible for landscaping. This was new at the time as both architecture and landscaping were given equal attention. The landscape of the green structure was designed as an inclusive space in which families were the main focus. Attention to the green space and the frequently placed public facilities are characteristic for the neighbourhood. The municipality as well as the landscape department aimed for a so-called *Wijkgedachte* in the design of Overvecht. However, when the blend of the population changed the green and public space did not seem to be adapting properly. Guest workers, mainly from Morocco and Turkey settled in the neighbourhood. Due to legislation and questionable housing conditions, integration and adaptation of these migrant communities was impeded. Because of this the cultural composition of the area changed. This resulted in a changed attitude and utilisation of the public space. The existing green structure did not comply with these changes. Facilities deteriorated and, in combination with execution faults and a defunding of the gardening department, green space became worsened and more monotone.

The deterioration of the public space then led to the residents not valuing the space which made it fall prey for further neglect and substitution for other functions, such as parking. The deterioration went hand in hand with the decreasing sense of security and social backlog of the neighbourhood. The architecture also played a significant part in this. In the medium and high-rise building the ground floor was dedicated for storage, garages and entrances. The lack of eyes on the ground floor enhanced the unsecure feeling. Even though the original intentions of both the architects and the landscapers were to establish an inclusive green neighbourhood according to the *Wijkgedachte*, executing and implementation fell short.

After a period of budget cuts and deterioration, the municipality of Utrecht saw a motive to stimulate redevelopment of the neighbourhood. The spatial vision of Overvecht, composed during 2003-2005, aimed to encourage progress concerning safety, liveability, social cohesion and consolidation of green and public space. Participation of residents was a key element to improve social cohesion. However, communication was difficult as large parts of the population were segregated and hesitant to participate. Although some intervention occurred in the space and initiatives were realised, the vision fell short in terms of execution. In the recent *Omgevingsprogramma Overvecht* of the municipality of Utrecht, more concrete plans aim to create a guideline for

the development of Overvecht through social ecological thinking. Nature then is utilised as a connective element to stimulate resilience and social cohesion of the neighbourhood. Using climate adaptive solutions to combat disturbances make for better wellbeing of residents. The role of the municipality is to involve nature and residents into their decision making. Participation of the population is vital for these developments. it will encourage people to value the public space and nature, as Schenkels emphasised. Thus, establishing an inclusive ecosystem in which people and nature thrive is necessary to counter the problems Overvecht is facing today.

Sources

BNA-Archief. (2018, februari). Spruit, Karl Frank Gottfried. Het Nieuwe Instituut. Geraadpleegd op 12 maart 2022, van <https://www.jhk.nl>

Böcker, A. (1994). Op weg naar een beter bestaan: De ontwikkeling van de maatschappelijke positie van Turken in Nederland. In: H. Vermeulen & R. Penninx (Red.), *Het democratisch ongeduld: De emancipatie en integratie van zes doelgroepen van het minderhedenbeleid* (pp.145-176). Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis.

Bos A., (1946). *De stad van de toekomst* (1ste editie). Blauwdruk.

Bush, J., & Doyon, A. (2019). Building urban resilience with nature-based solutions: How can urban planning contribute? *Cities*, 95, 102483. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2019.102483>

Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek. (2011). *Gemeente Op Maat Utrecht*. Inlichtingen. <https://www.cbs.nl/-/media/imported/documents/2011/44/utrecht.pdf>

Colding, J., Giusti, M., Haga, A., Wallhagen, M., & Barthel, S. (2020). Enabling Relationships with Nature in Cities. *Sustainability*, 12(11), 4394. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12114394>

Dupon, S. (2019, mei). *Park de Watertoren Cultuurhistorische Verkenning*.

Dupon, S. (2019b, juli). *Het groen tussen de stenen: de Utrechtse plantsoenendienst 1854–1968*.

Galea, S., & Vlahov, D. (2005). URBANHEALTH: Evidence, Challenges, and Directions. *Annual Review of Public Health*, 26(1), 341–365. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.publhealth.26.021304.144708>

Galjaard, B.J. (1963) “Ruimte voor recreatie”. *De Schakel* 17-49: 1-5.

Gemeente Utrecht. (2005, november). *Ruimtelijke visie Overvecht 2004–2020* (Nr. 2). https://omgevingsvisie.utrecht.nl/fileadmin/uploads/documenten/zz-omgevingsvisie/gebiedsbeleid/_overvecht/2005-11-ruimtelijke-visie-overvecht-2004-2020.pdf

Harbers, A. (2009). De stedenbouwkundige kwaliteiten van de Nederlandse probleemwijken (Jaargang 1, nummer 1). https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Arjan-Harbers/publication/304570888_De_stedenbouwkundige_kwaliteiten_van_de_Nederlandse_probleemwijken/links/57739d2908ae1b18a7de00b4/De-stedenbouwkundige-kwaliteiten-van-de-Nederlandse-probleemwijken.pdf

Meerow, S., Newell, J. P., & Stults, M. (2016). Defining urban resilience: A review. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 147, 38–49. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landurbplan.2015.11.011>

Meurs, P., & Steenhuis, M. (2006, juni). *Cultuurhistorisch onderzoek en ruimtelijke analyse Utrecht NaOorlogse Wijken: OVERVECHT*. Urban Fabric | Steenhuis stedenbouw/landschap.

NEO Observatory, Manshanden, W., & Koops, O. (2019, november). *Prognoses woningbouw 2019–2024*. <https://www.neo-observatory.nl/site/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/PDF-153.pdf>

Prins, K. S. (1996). Van ‘gastarbeider’ tot ‘Nederlander’: adaptatie van Marokkanen en Turken in Nederland. s.n.

Rijks Planologische Dienst. (1967, september). *Het onderzoek ten behoeve van de tweede nota over de ruimtelijke ordening in Nederland*. Stedebouw en Volkshuisvesting.

Soga, M., Evans, M. J., Cox, D. T. C., & Gaston, K. J. (2021). Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on human–nature interactions: Pathways, evidence and implications. *People and Nature*, 3(3), 518–527. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pan3.10201>

Van der Schaar J., Groei en bloei van het Nederlandse volkshuisvestingsbeleid (Delftse Universitaire Pers 1987)

Van der Valk, A. (2002). The Dutch planning experience. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 58(2–4), 201–210. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0169-2046\(01\)00221-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0169-2046(01)00221-3)

Wiel, D. V. H. P., Stobbelaar, D. J., & Steeghs, M. (2021, 1 maart). De natuur als toevluchtsoord : onze veranderende kijk op de natuur als gevolg van de COVID-19-epidemie. *Greeni.nl*. Geraadpleegd op 24 februari 2022, van <https://www.narcis.nl/publication/RecordID/oai:hbokennisbank.nl:samhao%3A%3A%3Awww.greeni.nl%3AVBS%3A2%3A147954>

Newspaper articles

MAROKKANEN GAAN DOOR. “Algemeen Dagblad” pag. 5. Rotterdam, 29-11-1975. Geraadpleegd op Delpher op 07-04-2022, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=KBPERS01:003448025:mpeg21:p00005>

„Gastarbeiders het slechtst gehuisvest ” pag. 17. “Algemeen Dagblad”. Rotterdam, 29-11-1978. Geraadpleegd op Delpher op 07-04-2022, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=KBPERS01:002939025:mpeg21:p00017>

Aanpak vandalisme loont. “Algemeen Dagblad”. Rotterdam, 21-12-1988. Geraadpleegd op Delpher op 11-04-2022, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=KBPERS01:003073018:mpeg21:p00005>

Hulpverleners en politie proberen Utrechtse probleemjongeren met busproject te bereiken Mobilele soosruimte zoekt rondhangende jeugd. “De Volkskrant”. ‘s-Hertogenbosch, 02-09-1994. Geraadpleegd op Delpher op 11-04-2022, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ABCDDD:010866510:mpeg21:p008>

Appendix

Summary Interview Jeroen Schenkels

Jeroen Schenkels is sinds 2000 actief betrokken bij het advies voor het groene beleid voor de gemeente Utrecht. Daarna is hij in 2003 bijdrager geweest aan het groene omgevingsprogramma. Dit was uitgevoerd in Overvecht in 2005 om het groen te verbeteren.

Het groen in Overvecht werd niet gebruikt en was verloederd, ook de faciliteiten zoals speeltuinen waren verouderd en in slechte staat. Veel groen maakte ook plaats voor parkeergelegenheden wat het gebruik ervan verslechterde. Net zoals de Parijse wijk Paris Banlieue werd het grootschalige groen gedoemd te mislukken. Grootschaligheid van de opgave leidde tot wegvallen menselijke schaal en detail.

Opzet architectuur Overvecht was om men zo veel mogelijk te laten genieten van het groen. Zo zijn gebouwen naar het groen georiënteerd. Echter was de connectie met het groen slecht. De begane grond diende alleen voor berging en vormde blokkades in de wijk. Een werkelijke connectie met de woning en het groen beperkte zich alleen tot zicht op groen. Doormiddel van slecht onderhoud verloederde het groen. Zo werden er fouten gemaakt in het planten en kappen van bomen, zogenoemde wijkers en blijvers.

Door de veranderde samenstelling van de wijk, van de jaren 60 gezinnen naar geïmmigreerde gastarbeiders. Deze verandering in de samenstelling van culturen in de wijk resulteerde in een veranderde houding ten opzichte van het groen en de recreatieve functies. Hiermee moet op sociaal niveau worden omgegaan. Bewoners betrekken bij het transformeren en opknappen van het groen en de voorzieningen is cruciaal bij het duurzaam ontwikkelen van de wijk. Door het begrijpen van en communiceren met bewoners worden eigen initiatieven en gepaste ontwerpen mogelijk. Ook het waarderen van de publieke ruimte en het groen is van belang bij duurzame gebiedsontwikkeling. Zo waarderen direct betrokkenen de wijk en het groen anders dan een stakeholder van buitenaf. Het gevaar hierbij is het verliezen van contact met de lokale gemeenschap en hun waarden door zogenaamd plattegrond-denken.

Gezondheid wordt bij de gemeente als maatstaf gebruikt om gebiedsontwikkeling te stimuleren. Bij die ontwikkeling is het streven om vanuit een sociaal ecologisch systeem te denken. Daarbij dient het ecosysteem als verbindend element waarbij diensten als houtwinning, bestuiving en natuurhistorisch erfgoed (recreatiegebied/bezienswaardigheid).

Tijdens de corona pandemie werd kwam er een groeiende behoefte meer tijd in de natuur te spenderen. Wandelen en buitenspelen werden hoger op de prioriteiten lijst gezet.

Klimaatadaptatie wordt ingezet om de gemeente veerkrachtig te maken. Dit wordt onder andere gedaan doormiddel van waterberging in wadi's, planten van bomen die tevens grondwater vasthouden en verkoelen in de zomer. Ook speelt het overgaan op een circulaire economie in op het sociaal ecologisch denken. Mens en natuur meer zien als een systeem en daarmee ook ontwerpen voor beiden.



Picture of the visit of Prins Ben I with his carnavalsvereniging De Jokers to the shoppingcenter Overvecht (Roelantdreef) in Utrecht. in Utrecht. Date: 24/01/1974 / Collectie Het Utrechts Archief [127291]



Worker of the landscaping department in Utrecht, planting vegetation. Date: 1964 / Collectie Het Utrechts Archief [824490]

