Faking Diversity

Neo-traditionalist Housing in the Netherlands

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MSc Architecture, Delft University of Technology

Danil Oort
4586433

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Sabina Tanovic

Abstract

The increase in neo-traditional style construction in the Dutch housing market has resulted in a preference for this style, with research showing a 15% price premium on average for this type of housing. However, this preference is not shared by most designers and critics, who see neo-traditionalism as a form of regression. Neo-traditional architecture is an attempt to bring back diversity in architecture, which has been lost with the standardization and industrialization of the building process. This paper explores the history of Dutch residential architecture through imitation, repetition, and diversity, and discusses two case studies: Molenvliet, a social housing project with diversity as the core principle, and Brandevoort, a project developed for the market that utilizes the illusion of past greatness to differentiate its products. The paper concludes by arguing that the commodification of the house and focus on housing value over quality is a direct result of the current housing market situation and that political changes are necessary to address this issue.

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Introduction

In the current housing market in the Netherlands, there has been an increase in the construction of housing in a neo-traditional style, which results in newly constructed housing that looks like it has been constructed a hundred or more years ago. Recent research into the influence of building styles on housing prices concluded that dwellings built in a neo-traditional style have a price premium of on average 15%, which shows that this style of building is preferred by the Dutch consumer when compared to non-traditional architecture (Buitelaar & Schilder, 2016). This preference however is in stark contrast to the general opinion in the architecture discipline, where most designers and critics scornfully look down upon neo-traditionalism, seeing it as a manifestation of regression (Hulsman & Kramer, 2013; Denslagen & Gardner, 2009).

Neo-traditional architecture refers back to a time when cities expanded slowly and unplanned, and where every newly constructed building was designed and built by a different architect and constructor, to the needs of a specific client. At the same time, architecture was way more limited in expression when compared to now in terms of materials and building techniques. The result was a large amount of diversification within the unifying framework of one architectural language, as is the case in canal housing in Amsterdam. Since the standardization and industrialization of the residential building process, the opposite can be observed, where large-scale housing blocks with one unifying expression and repeated floorplans result in less diversity, as is the case in recent housing construction in Amsterdam, such as the KNSM island. Neo-traditional architecture tries to recreate the image of historical streetscapes by reintroducing a diversity in architecture on a small scale (as a counter-movement to the modernist architecture of large-scale repetition). But what constitutes the diversity in the architecture of the neo-traditional neighborhoods exactly? And does the application of neo-traditionalism in residential neighborhoods increase architectural quality?

The construction of neo-traditional architecture is a fairly recent phenomenon in the Netherlands, with many of these neighborhoods, like Brandevoort, Gouden Griffelbuurt, and Op Buuren, being constructed in the last 20 years. In the literature discussing the history of neo-traditional Dutch residential architecture, a concise overview of the surge in popularity is missing. This paper will start with an overview of the history of Dutch residential architecture through the lens of imitation, repetition, and diversity. It will explore the reasons behind the recent increase of neo-traditional housing in the Netherlands.

Although a lot has been written about the intentions and ideals of the architects involved in neo-traditional designs, such as Leon Krier's Choice or Fate (1998) and Peter Katz's The New Urbanism (1994), little research has gone into exploring the spatial outcomes. The second part of this paper will look into the case study of a recent neo-traditional housing project in the Netherlands called Brandevoort to see what quality is achieved in these types of neighborhoods. To be able to compare themes like diversity and architectural quality, a second case will be researched, Molenvliet in Papendrecht. This 'Open Bouwen' project had diversification as the core principle behind the design.

Imitation, Repetition, and Diversity in Dutch Residential Architecture

Imitation, reconstruction, and revival of historical architecture are global phenomena of all ages. All vernacular architecture is built on the imitation of what history proved to be well-functioning precedents, same as much of the architecture that has been built throughout the world without ever having an architect involved. The architectural style developed during the Roman and Greek empires has seen multiple waves of revival and has been used as a political tool for expressing power in countless regimes. Many examples can also be found in religious buildings, ranging from Gothic churches to Japanese temples. For a long period, architects were taught the profession by the preceding generation, starting with precariously imitating the work of their teachers and only after fully mastering it starting to develop an expression of their own. Since the modern movement, the position of the architect has changed and has become that of a creative individual forming ideas through his creativity (Denslagen & Gutschow, 2005).

In Dutch residential architecture, imitation, and repetition are contextualized within a history of diversity. Dutch housing is historically characterized by a large range of diversity, while still maintaining unity in architectural expression. Even the lowest classes of society had their own private house, unique in floorplans and façades, creating a strong sense of individuality in residential architecture. Around the 10th century, the canal house typology was developed, with each house having its own character by diversifying in detailing and floorplans, while still maintaining harmony with the streetscape. Imitation was used in the copying of building techniques and fundamental concepts, such as façade composition and circulation principles within the building (Jurgenhake, 2016).

Around the beginning of the 19th century, industrialization caused cities to rapidly grow and at the same time caused the emergence of a large working class in society. To meet the demand for a large quantity of cheap new housing, residential buildings were split up to house multiple families in separate rooms. When the splitting up of existing buildings turned out to be insufficient, the first large-scale apartment blocks were constructed housing multiple families in the same building and changing the individuality of housing radically (Jurgenhake, 2016).

The end of the 19th century introduced a change in how the architecture profession viewed imitation. This is illustrated by historian of architecture James Fergusson in his book A History of the Modern Styles in Architecture, (1862) where he states that imitative work can never appeal to our higher intellectual faculties. He argues that architects should stop imitating past styles and should try to develop something new. William Morris was also a big contributor to the change in thought about imitation. He blamed the whole 19th century, calling it 'that degenerate century with its pedantic imitations of classical architecture of the most revolting ugliness' (Thompson, 1977, p. 90). While there was a short increase in the construction of historicized architecture caused by the popularity of historicism, around the turn of the century it was quickly suppressed by Modernism. For the architects of the Modern Movement, there was no space for imitation in architecture, arguing that art and therefore architecture is supposed to originate in the individual imagination.
Despite a strong belief in the Modern Movement within the architecture profession, it took some time for the general public to fully embrace this new style of building. During the interwar period in Europe, there was a widespread fondness for traditionalist architecture, which may have been influenced by the destruction caused by the First World War and the fear of modernism. However, this fear quickly dissipated after the Second World War, as traditionalist architecture became associated with the Blut und Boden culture of the Third Reich. Modernism, on the other hand, was seen as a fresh and uncorrupted reflection of the transparent and democratic societies emerging in Western Europe (Diefendorf, 1990).

During the interwar period, improving the quality of housing was a key topic among Modernist architects. The average person's available homes at that time were plagued by poor floor plans, inadequate natural light, and subpar technical quality. These houses were considered culturally and technically inferior, and architects believed that outdated housing types needed to be abandoned in favor of developing something new. To improve low-cost housing, architects drew inspiration from the efficient building techniques of cars and airplanes. They aspired to create the minimum existence house, which maximized space and resources while still

meeting the Modernist ideals of providing ample natural light, fresh air, and access to green space. Numerous housing prototypes were developed during the interwar period, primarily through building exhibitions organized by the International Congresses of Modern Architecture (CIAM), which invited architects from all over the world to experiment with new types of dwellings (Fassbinder et al., 1989).

The devastation caused by World War II led to a pressing demand for housing throughout Europe. To reduce construction costs, standardization and rationalization of the building process became necessary. In the Netherlands, the government imposed regulations that defined minimum sizes of spaces in dwellings. However, these regulations resulted in a decrease in housing variation, as standard floorplans, exemplified by the 'doorzonwoning', were developed based on the minimum dimensions (Fassbinder et al., 1989). The functionalist ideal, which originally prioritized the user's exact dwelling needs in design, shifted to a focus on functional housing production processes. This period marked a significant change in the use of imitation and repetition in architecture. While the modernist movement initially broke from tradition and emphasized originality, subsequent architecture suffered from an endless repetition of standardized floorplans and housing types.

At the beginning of the 1960s, the architectural profession saw a rise in criticism towards aesthetic and functional uniformity. Architects like Aldo van Eyck and Herman Hertzberger voiced the ambition to create architecture with the human scale in mind as a reaction to industrialized mass-production housing. This sentiment gave way to the emergence of new styles, like the structuralist movement, which gained ground in the 1970s. Repetition was still used in structuralism but applied differently. For example, a set of base shapes are repeated multiple times, but through the complexity of these shapes, and through different ways of combining, diversity can emerge in a design (Vandewall, 2007).

In 1968, the experimental housing scheme was initiated by the Ministry of Spatial Planning to promote diverse residential development. As a result, numerous innovative dwelling designs were created, which not only enhanced the housing environment but also placed Dutch architecture at the forefront of global conversations about the future of housing (Vandewall, 2007).

In the early 1990s, the Dutch housing market underwent a significant transformation. As part of a broader liberalization of the economy, the government withdrew its involvement in the housing market, which included cutting off funding to housing corporations that were previously the driving force behind new construction. Consequently, developers took over the task of building new housing, with the main objective of generating profits. As a result, the housing market underwent commercialization, and architects' experimentation to enhance dwelling designs became a risky investment. Developers began researching the commercial preferences of housing consumers to boost the value of their products. It was discovered that neo-traditional architecture was in demand among the Dutch housing consumer, who was willing to pay more for a house built in this style (Buitelaar & Schilder, 2016). Since the turn of the century, there have been many instances of new housing in the Netherlands with a traditional architectural expression (Hulsman, 2013).

To understand why the flight to an architectural language of the past is preferable to the Dutch housing customer, the concepts of neo-traditionalism, theming, and nostalgia will be explored.

Neo-traditionalism

Traditionalism is a movement that values 'tradition' over modernity, with the main goal of protecting the authenticity of culture that provides values to guide society. In Dutch architecture, this is exemplified by the traditional school, popular between 1900 and 1945, which revived the use of visible brickwork and pitched roofs (Ibelings, 2004). On the other hand, neo-traditionalism is often viewed as an individual or collective strategy aimed at returning to what is considered 'tradition' after a period of disruption to rediscover the temporarily lost roots of culture. In the case of neo-traditional architecture, the period of disruption refers to modernism becoming the dominant style. Both traditionalism and neo-traditionalism may be regarded as ideologies used in situations where a choice or competition exists between established, past-rooted values and ways of life of a community and an alternative that is defined as 'modern,' promoting change and founded on cultural values and symbols (István et al., 2020).

If we relate this general definition to the field of architecture we can see the clear parallels between the 'period of disruption' and how theorists in the field of neo-traditional architecture view the modernist movement in the built environment.
Leon Krier, one of the main architects that lead the neo-traditional movement called New Urbanism, clearly illustrates this in his book Choice or Fate:

"We all come from somewhere, and we all feel the need to belong. If that desire is not fulfilled it turns to pain. That is the literal meaning of nostalgia – the longing to return, the pain of being severed. Our ideal of a beautiful city, of a beautiful house, of beautiful architecture, is not utopian; nor is it a fantasy or an impossibility. We have all experienced the reality of it and it works strongly inside us. We have found there an unimaginable feeling of freedom, a possibility of happiness, a dream of well-being. … A beautiful village, a beautiful house, a beautiful city can become a home for all, a universal home. But if we lose this aim, we build our own exile here on Earth." (Krier, 1998, p. 189)

Nostalgia

In interviews, residents of neo-traditional neighborhoods mention the feeling of nostalgia it evokes as a strong argument for why they decided to move there (Meier & Reijndorp, 2010). Nostalgia is a complex emotion that has been defined in various ways by different scholars. According to marketing professor M.B. Holbrook, nostalgia refers to a positive attitude or liking towards objects, people, or places that were more common, popular, or fashionable during one's younger years (whether it be in childhood, adolescence, early adulthood, or even before birth). Holbrook's definition sets a clear boundary for the objects of the past that evoke nostalgia, but it does not include the ambivalence of feelings such as melancholy or loss, as described by other researchers like Rieter (2018). Moreover, it excludes objects that never existed but can still evoke nostalgic feelings. In contrast, Boym's definition of nostalgia emphasizes a longing for a home that no longer exists or never existed. Whether the objects of nostalgia exist, have ceased to exist, or are imaginary is up for debate, especially in the case of the built environment where objects could be demolished or an abstraction or idealized version of an object (Boym, 2001).

Theming

Neo-traditional architecture can be viewed as a prime example of theming in architecture, where the aesthetic and design of a building or community are based on historical or traditional architectural styles. Theming in architecture is a common approach. Le Corbusier called the house a machine, and in a way themed the house as a functional and efficient machine to dwell in. The Vinex expansion neighborhoods in the Netherlands also featured themes like living next to the water and interweaving nature in urban areas (Lörzing et. al, 2006).

The modernist housing blocks and Vinex expansion neighborhoods were constructed with little variety, as the same theme was applied repeatedly. These projects were marketed based on their superior quality compared to other housing on the market. However, in the current housing market, theming is used more as a means of distinguishing newly built projects from one another, with the narrative created by the theme serving as a selling point. The progressive housing principles of the modernist and Vinex housing have since been incorporated in newly constructed housing, and thus have seized to be a differentiating factor.

Urban sociologist Mark Gottdiener (1997) notes that since the Second World War, western economies have transitioned from valuing the objective function of a product to valuing its symbolism. The feeling a product evokes, such as a sense of belonging to a group or a sense of nostalgia, has grown to have more impact on the consumer, and themed products are a response to this. Consumers are enticed through theming to consume something that they were not planning to consume and that was too expensive for them. The illusion is presented to them that the consumption is not restricted to just the use of the product, but stretches out to the experience that it encompasses.

The processes Gottdiener describes apply to the housing market as well. The house is an important symbol through which the resident can differentiate themselves from or associate themselves with a group in society. It has a direct connection to status and reputation (Bourdieu, 1984). Marketers and project developers apply this notion to newly constructed projects through the creation of themed neighborhoods. The theme alludes to a certain type of dwelling where the resident would ideally like to live in. In the case of neo-traditional housing, this often results in projects that refer to housing that is only available to the social and economical upper class, such as Amsterdam canal housing or the typical 1930s housing as seen for instance in Hilversum (Meier & Reijndorp, 2010).

Case Study

In this chapter two case studies will be explored and compared, a project in the neo-traditional neighborhood Brandevoort situated in Helmond and an Open Building project called Molenvliet in Papendrecht.

Project Introduction Brandevoort

Brandevoort is situated in Helmond, a city located in the province of North Brabant, close to Eindhoven. It has a rich history in the metal and textile industry, which was the driving factor in the growth of the city starting around the time of industrialization.

Around the 1980s, much of the industry in Helmond moved away, because the industry in Helmond could not compete with lower-wage countries, leaving the city with an overall wealth decrease, and as a result, the living conditions lowered dramatically. With low average incomes, high unemployment, and a high criminality rate, the more prosperous population moved to surround municipalities.

With the Vierde Note Extra voor Ruimtelijke Ordening, or Vinex for short, Helmond got the objective to build 6000 new dwellings west of the existing urban fabric. Project developers had acquired the land quickly after the Vinex plans were released and by doing so also acquired the building rights for the area. The main objective for the project developers was to differentiate the new extension of Helmond from the surrounding Vinex extension neighborhoods to attract potential new residents (Hoekstra & Milikowski, 2013).

In the years before, Helmond had booked success with a newly constructed neighborhood Dierdonk, which featured free-standing houses in a 1930s style. Although this resulted in critique from the architectural community, the houses were generally loved by the residents and did well in the housing market. With the new Vinex location the project developers looked to replicate the success of Dierdonk, but the main challenge was to meet the dwelling density numbers set by the Ministry of Spatial Planning (Hoekstra & Milikowski, 2013). With the freestanding houses in the 1930s style, 6000 new dwellings would not be possible, so row housing and apartment blocks had to be the main resource. The project developers decided to organize the new neighborhood based on the principles of a fortified city, closely referencing

Fig. 1 *- Brandevoort*

Heusden, a fortified village in Noord-Brabant. Around this high-density center, lower-density areas were realized, which referenced surrounding villages like Hilvarenbeek and Oirschot. The entire project got the name Brandevoort. The design for the master plan of the project was done in 1995 by the office of Krier and Kohl Architects (Rieter, 2018).

Brandevoort is one of the main examples of neo-traditional residential development in the Netherlands and thus an interesting case to explore the topics of this paper. To be able to analyze the project further, this paper will zoom into one specific project in the area De Veste, which embodies 90 newly constructed dwellings. The project was chosen because the resources needed for a case study are publicly available. These dwellings are divided into two identical clusters, so for this case study, one of these clusters will be explored. The project is called 'Thuis in de Veste', developed by van Wanrooij together with Weusten Liedenbaum Architecten and LSWA Architecten.

Project Introduction Molenvliet

The project Molenvliet originated from a competition held in 1969 for an extension of 2400 houses in Papendrecht, a municipality of South Holland. The competition was won by Frank van der Werf, based on the ideas of Open Building, developed by Stichting Architecten Research (SAR) around the end of the 1960s. The core principles were based on two main observations about the housing market at the time. First of all, the available housing was in many cases standardized, which resulted in the repetition of the same houses and offered little diversity for different dwelling needs. The second observation was the lack of participation of future residents in the design phase. The SAR argued that more participation would maximize the usefulness of the house for the resident. (Kapteijns et. al, 1978)

The design by van der Werf for the competition was presented to the housing corporation in Papendrecht, which proposed to test whether the SAR principles worked in practice by building a test project in the neighborhood of Molenvliet. The project received the status of 'experimental housing', which meant that it received extra funding from the Ministry of Spatial Planning and made the project financially sustainable. The test project was going to entail 80 two-bedroom apartments, but the architect argued that offering diversity in the sizes of the dwellings would attract a more diverse group of residents. The outcome was a project of 123 housing units with as many as 67 different dwellings, with sizes differing from 37m2 to 116m2. (Bonal & Van Den Heuvel, 2022)

The project is selected as a case study because of the focus on diversification of housing in the design. It can therefore serve as a tool to compare and evaluate the diversification in the Brandevoort project.

Fig. 2 *- Molenvliet*

Urban Structure Brandevoort

The urban structure of the Brandevoort project follows the classical closed building block typology, which we can find in almost all building blocks before the Second World War in the Netherlands (Hulsman, 2013). This creates a difference in character between the two sides of the building block, with a public façade facing the street and a private façade facing the inner courtyard. In this case, the inner courtyard is used as car parking for the surrounding dwellings, minimizing the parking space needed on the front façade, but reducing the quality of the shared inner courtyard space significantly. The density of the block is quite high at 70 dwellings per hectare of land.

The dwellings all feature a front door at the street. The inner courtyard has back entrances to the gardens but is fenced off all around, so the transition between private and public happens around the perimeter of the block. The private gardens have a storage unit at the back and are fenced off, which means that the transition between shared private and private is once again harsh.

The dwellings are almost all situated with the façades to the north and south. Because of this orientation, half of the dwellings have a garden with sunlight during most of the year, while the other half has significantly less sun caused by the shadow of the housing. Almost all of the buildings feature the same height of 3 layers, except for a few dwelling types on part of the north façade, which is probably because of the shadow these higher buildings would cause if placed on the south side.

The use of the traditional Dutch typology of the closed dwelling block can be seen as an element of theming. It refers back to housing like the Amsterdam canal housing, but in Amsterdam the housing has way deeper private gardens in the courtyard, which offers way more spatial quality.

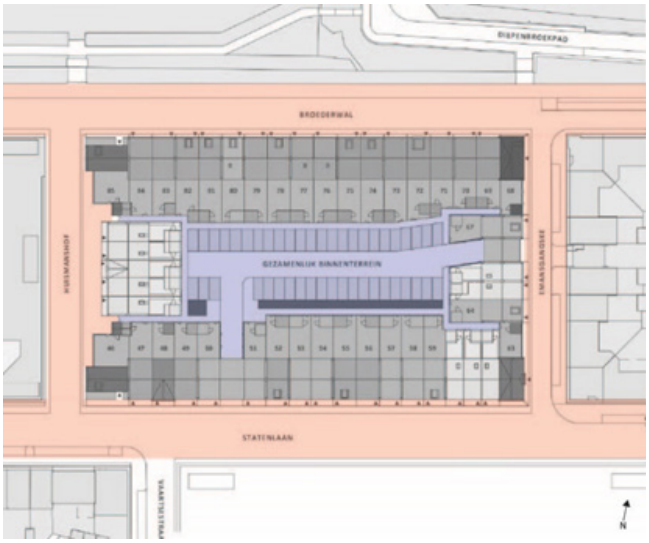

Fig. 3 *- Private and Public Space Brandevoort*

Fig. 4x *- Section Courtyard Brandevoort*

Urban Structure Molenvliet

The urban structure of Molenvliet is based on the inner courtyard, but the project transforms this urban typology by introducing two different types of courtyards. The courtyard on the left, the garden courtyard, refers more to a standard closed block structure with entrances on the public streetside. Because this space does not have to be used as circulation space, it offers a small greenspace shared by the surrounding inhabitants. The courtyard on the right, the entry courtyard, features an inverse of the former principle, where the main entrances of the dwellings are placed on the side of the courtyard. This offers space around the public side of the block to place gardens. Connected by an alleyway, both courtyards offer diversity by creating different types of spaces between the dwellings. The courtyards are publicly available, but the narrow entrances from the public street offer a certain threshold between public and semi-private.

The density of the Molenvliet project is higher than the Brandevoort project, at 93 dwellings per hectare.

Entrances to the dwellings are organized in multiple ways with a combination of front doors at the ground level and deck access which is accessible through shared external staircases.

The dwellings of Molenvliet are mainly east-west orientated, although this does change in some cases. To take the sunlight into account, at the garden courtyard, the buildings are limited to two building layers on the south side of the block. This lets more sunlight into the shared and private gardens that are situated here. At the entry courtyard, the buildings do reach 3 layers on the south side, but one could argue that this is less of a problem, because its main circulation which is situated here.

Parking is not solved within the parameter of the blocks, so a street with a wide profile situated to the long side of the block holds the necessary parking sports, which limits the quality of this wider street. This decision does however make a clear distinction between the flows of pedestrians and bikes on the one side, and cars on the other, offering a car-free space within the blocks.

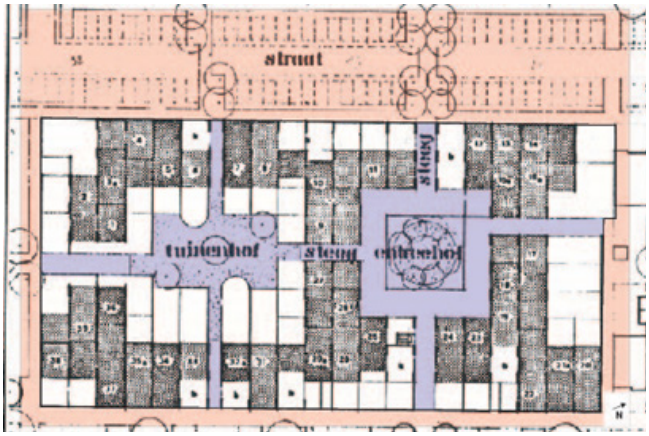

Fig. 5 *- Private and Public Space Molenvliet*

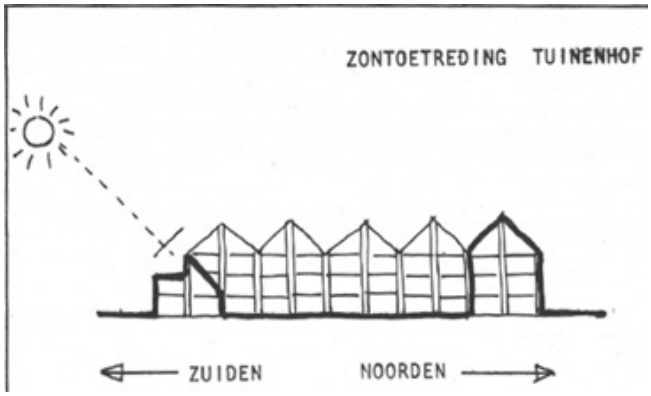

Fig. 6 *- Section Courtyard Molenvliet*

Fig. 7 *- Facades Brandevoort*

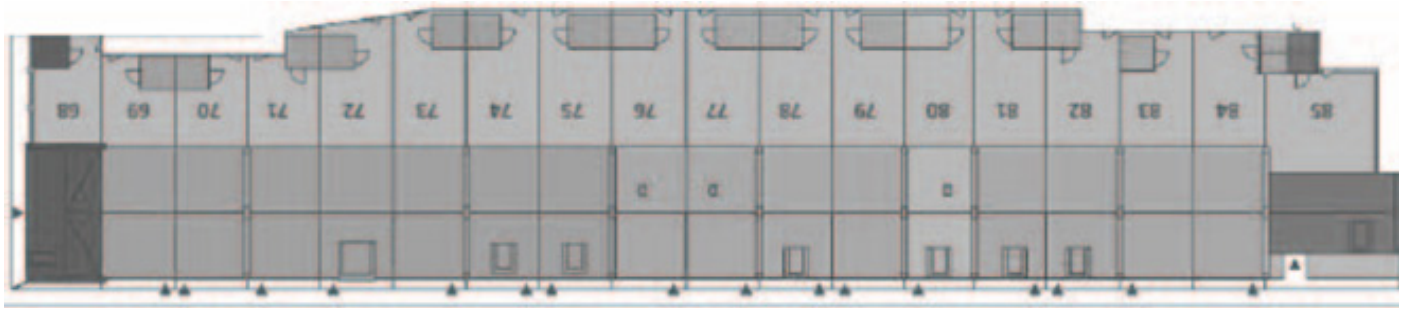

Fig. 8 *- Floorplans Brandevoort*

Façades and Architectural Expression Brandevoort

The façades of the Brandevoort project are made from traditional building materials. The closed façade elements are mainly made of brick in multiple colors. Roofs are all pitched and covered with roof tiles, which are all in the same dark grey material. Window frames are made of wood, painted white in most cases, with artificial divisions in the windows.

Through the use of different materials, different façade openings, and divisions, a diverse range of architectural expressions is achieved. When comparing the housing plots to the façade, one can see that the outer façades don't reflect the inner structure. All the inner housing units have the same width, but in the façades, multiple units are combined to create the image of larger units. Although this housing block is built all at the same time, the rooflines don't line up. This is an aesthetical choice to artificially suggest the slow growth of the urban fabric through time.

In an interview, one of the project architects explained that Brandevoort is not directly referencing a specific architectural style, but instead a romanticised idea of how the past could have looked like (Meier & Reijndorp, 2010), which is closely related to Boym's nostalgia definition where one longs for a home that has never existed. The expression of the façades is therefore a clear example of theming, designed to evoke feelings of nostalgia in the housing consumer.

Façades and Architectural Expression Molenvliet

The façades of Molenvliet make use of a combination of traditional and non-traditional materials. The façades are mainly made of brick, with the same type of brick used throughout the project. In some parts of the façades, pre-fab concrete elements are visible. The roofs are made of orange roof tiles and are mainly pitched, although there are exceptions where the roof is partly flat or completely flat. The window frames are made of wood with glass in open parts and cement board with a shiny coating in closed parts.

The core shape of Molenvliet is repeated multiple times to make up the main part of the project, with some exceptions the edges. Differentiation in the façade is visible in the infill of the window frames. The future inhabitants were included in the design process and could choose their window divisions and the coloring of the frames. The repetition of the core shape creates a certain unity in the project while showing the diversification of the dwellings through the individual expression of the façade infill.

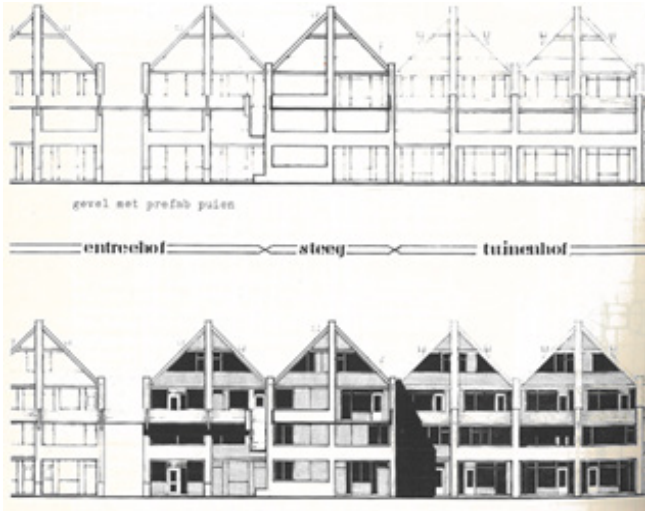

Fig. 9 *- Facades Molenvliet*

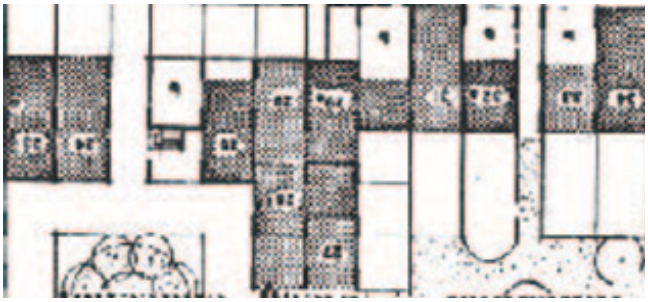

Fig. 10 *- Floorplans Molenvliet*

Dwelling Types Brandevoort

The project in Brandevoort offers 7 different dwelling types, 3 of which are corners of the block and 1 having a taller front façade making the roof take up less volume, causing the second floor to be more spacious. On closer examination of the remaining three types, which make up most of the project, type M/O/S/T turns out to be a mirrored version of type E, and type Q is type E with one extra floor, where the first floor is repeated. This reduces the project to one core dwelling type, the type E dwelling, which will be further explored.

The standard floorplan of the type E dwelling has around 125m2 of floorspace featuring a combined kitchen living room, three bedrooms, and an attic that can be transformed into a fourth bedroom. This type of floorplan is seen in many newly constructed dwellings and is catered to the needs of an average small household. The floorplans on the right show the different options a future resident has to change the floorplans. On the ground floor, the living room can be extended by 1.2 meters, and the doors can be replaced with sliding doors on the back side of the dwelling. On the first floor, removing one wall can create one large bedroom instead of 2 smaller rooms. On the second floor, a dormer window can be added on the back façade.

The internal changes that can be made are quite limited and can't fundamentally change any functions in the house. Because of two load-bearing walls on both sides of the dwelling, individual units can't be combined if any change might be wanted in the future. The limitation of flexibility means that the dwellings are suited to the current needs of a specific target group, which excludes a large range of groups in the housing market. If the needs of this target group might change in the future, the structure does not allow any adaptation to stay up to date.

Architects of the New Urbanism movement have criticized modernism as a period of disruption in architecture, but the lack of diversity in the dwelling types of Brandevoort shows that at its core, the project uses the same repetition of standardized floorplans that modernism has been criticized for.

Fig. 11 *- Dwelling types Brandevoort*

Fig. 12 *- Floorplans type E variant 1 Brandevoort*

Fig. 13 *- Floorplans type E variant 2 Brandevoort*

Dwelling Types Molenvliet

Molenvliet offers 67 different empty dwelling types, which were completed using an infill system that was not connected to the load-bearing structure. This offered the possibility of developing the floorplans with the participation of future residents, causing every floorplan to be different after construction. The sizes of the units are between 37m2 to 116m2, which offer space for a large range of different dwelling groups.
Because of the large differentiation and complexity of the dwellings, it is challenging to make general remarks about the dwellings without discussing every single built unit. For this case study the possible subvariants between 7 base variants on the ground floor are discussed, because these alone offer a good understanding of the entire project. Every floor has its own set of bases and subvariants, which should give an impression of the range of variation possible within the system.

The housing variants show how the functions in the floor plan can be shifted in multiple ways to create a large range of living environments. Because the housing is catered to the specific needs of residents, future new residents might not be satisfied with the layout of the housing. Through the placement or erasure of non-loadbearing walls, the housing types can be adapted if needed, but while this is presented as an easy solution to long-term flexibility through the use of a standardized infill system, many of these systems are no longer available, making adaptation a more costly and complicated affair.

Fig. 14 *- Dwelling types Molenvliet*

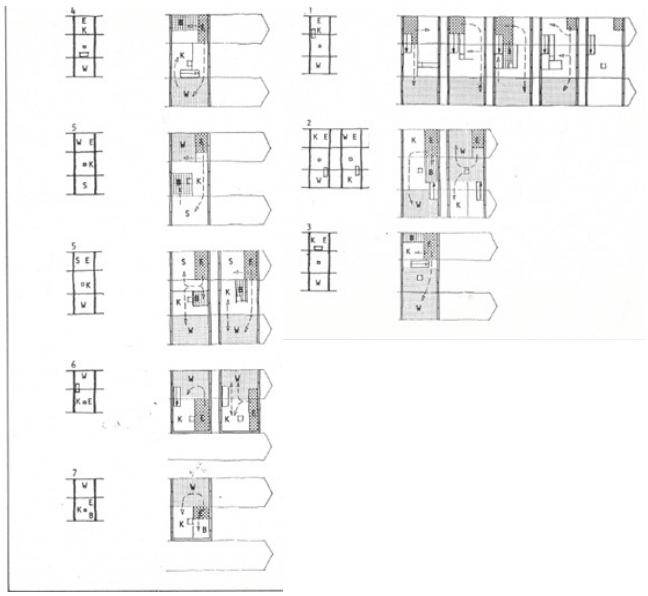

Fig. 15 *- Floorplans Subvariants Molenvliet*

Conclusions Case Study

When comparing the quality of the dwellings of Brandevoort to Molenvliet, it becomes apparent that the focus of the project went into developing a diverse range of façades as opposed to the development of innovative floorplans or design solutions on the urban scale.

The inner courtyard could have been a high-quality shared space or could have offered space for larger back gardens when more was invested in a parking solution. The parking problem could have been solved by an underground parking garage, or placing a parking facility elsewhere in the urban structure, both of which are more costly. Molenvliet offers higher-quality shared space in one of the courtyards, with the second one being more of a circulation space.

Brandevoort does have a preferable entrance solution, with every dwelling having its own front door. But with the possibility of reaching a dwelling directly from the private parking spaces, in many cases residents will use the back entrance, reducing moments of social interaction in the neighborhood.

In terms of orientation, Brandevoort lacks a proper solution for the north-orientated back gardens. These gardens could either have been extended to offer more sunlight, or other outside space could have been designed at the south façade.

The biggest difference between both projects is in the architectural expression and the spatial organization. Brandevoort alludes to an architecture of the past where every plot was developed independently from each other and thereby suggests a certain variety in the dwellings. When looking at the floorplans, this turns out not to be the case, with the same standardized floorplan repeated throughout the project. In Molenvliet the unity in the architectural expression clearly shows that the houses are part of the same project, but there is diversification in the infill window frames. In this case, the diversity is reflected in the floorplans, with a large range of different internal spatial organizations.

Brandevoort used the theme of past greatness by referring to an romanticized past architecture, but the quality is limited to individualised character of each facade. The architectural expression taps into feelings of nostalgia to better market the project.

Conclusion

This paper discussed two very contrasting projects. The fundamental difference in the case studies lies in the type of market they are built for. Molenvliet is a social housing project built by a housing corporation. The main objective of the corporation was to offer the highest quality housing for their residents within their budget. The market value of the housing was irrelevant, as all of the houses would be rented out at a fixed price. In the case of Brandevoort, the housing was realized by project developers, with the main goal of making a high profit by selling high-value units on the housing market. In the current market, the quality of housing and the market value are not linked. Location is of great importance, and as discussed before, theming can increase value while not objectively increasing the quality of living (Meier & Reijndorp, 2010).

The process of design also shows a great difference between the two projects. In Molenvliet, the housing corporation could select future residents from a waiting list. With the resident already decided, participation in the design process was an option. In Brandevoort, the housing is built for the market, which means that the design is already done when the future resident gets involved. In many cases, this means that standardized floorplans are a practical solution, as they are more likely to be satisfactory to an average household and are therefore a safe investment for project developers.

The internal conflict in the Brandevoort project is the clash between what the architectural expression suggests versus the actual spatial quality. A mediocre newly constructed housing block hides behind façades that suggest diversity and architectural quality. The same case can be made for other neo-traditional housing projects, like Gouden Griffelbuurt and Op Buuren, where developers use the illusion of past greatness to differentiate their projects from others and to sell their housing products more easily. Molenvliet on the other hand shows the potential quality that can be achieved in a housing project if the right choices are made.

The fundamental underlying problem lies in a housing market where profit has become the main driver of newly constructed housing. The commodification of the house and focus on housing value as opposed to realizing quality housing is a direct result of the market situation. With the current housing crisis and the need for a million new housing in the next decade, one can hope for a change in the political view on housing. If realizing high-quality housing becomes a government task, as was the case during most of the 20th century, Dutch architects could seize the enormous housing challenge to become a frontrunner in the development of innovative high-quality residential architecture.

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