

# Exposing a Corroded Treasure: Historical Analysis of Corrosia in Almere

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MSc Architecture, Urbanism and Building Sciences

AR2A011 Architectural History Thesis

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Supervised by Dolf Broekhuizen

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Cover photo by Gert Schutte (1980)

## ABSTRACT

This paper investigates Corrosia's significance in Dutch architectural history and Almere-Haven's formative years. Utilizing a qualitative approach and primary sources, it delves into Corrosia's historical context, architectural design, and community impact. Designed by Rob Blom van Assendelft and Jan Koning, Corrosia reflects Dutch Structuralism principles through visible construction elements and user interaction opportunities. Despite mixed community perceptions, Corrosia emerged as a prominent urban artifact, gaining cult status in Almere. It signifies architectural innovation and communal development, enriching Dutch architectural history. Access to additional design materials could further illuminate the project's development process.

## PREFACE

This thesis is being conducted as part of the Architecture master's program at TU Delft. Being a native of Almere, I've noticed the negative associations with Almere and its architecture. Through this thesis, my aim is to contribute to the ongoing discussion on the significance of Almere's architecture.

I would like to extend my gratitude to Dolf Broekhuizen for his guidance, and to the Almere City Archives for their assistance and hospitality.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the February 11th, 2024 broadcast of Nieuwsuur (NOS, 2024), a news segment highlighted monuments in Almere, particularly focusing on Almere-Haven. Veerle Leijnse, a municipal worker, was featured walking through the centre of Almere-Haven, the first developed district in the city. Leijnse described the area as akin to an open-air museum of 1970s architecture, with significant buildings in close proximity, including the first building by OMA, a 1970s structuralist building by Herman Hertzberger, and a church which recently gained monumental status. The broadcast also featured architect Sjoerd Soeters, who expressed less enthusiasm for the surrounding architecture. He remarked, "Everything built after the Second World War, or even after 1900, is for an important part very ugly. Very, very ugly." Soeters questions the decision to designate buildings in the area as architectural monuments.

This thesis aims to explore the significance of Corrosia, a multifunctional social cultural building located along the market square in Almere-Haven's centre. The study specifically focuses on the original design by Blom van Assendelft and Jan Koning, excluding subsequent alterations and renovations. Research on the reception and community impact will be limited to the first twenty years of the building's existence.

Despite its architectural importance, Corrosia is underreported in both online sources and architectural publications, with limited information beyond basic facts.

## Research questions

The main research question guiding this thesis is:

*- How does Corrosia contribute to the narrative of Dutch architectural history and the formative years of Almere-Haven?*

The sub-questions are:

*- What is the historical context of the Roestbak in Almere-Haven?*

*- Intentions of the Architects of the Roestbak: What were the goals of Rob Blom van Assendelft and Jan Koning in designing the Roestbak?*

*- What are the distinctive architectural features of the Roestbak?*

*- How was the Roestbak received by the public in Almere-Haven?*

## Methodology

Methodologically, this thesis adopts a qualitative approach, centred on a comprehensive literature review. Primary sources include city archives, newspaper publications, and documents from the Rijksdienst voor de IJsselmeerpolders (RIJP). However, due to constraints such as limited access to insights from the architects, the available literature is relatively shallow. Nevertheless, all information presented is meticulously sourced from publicly available materials to ensure the reliability and credibility of the findings.

It's worth noting that at the time of this paper's publication, two significant renovations have occurred. These renovations have substantially altered both the volume of the building and the façade, particularly on the ground floor. They fall out of the scope of the research topic.

The thesis is structured into four chapters. The first provides historical context, elucidating the rationale behind the building's existence. The second chapter delves into the backgrounds of the architects. The third chapter examines the design elements of Corrosia. Finally, the fourth chapter investigates its reception and impact on the community.

## I: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Rijksdienst voor de IJsselmeer Polders (RIJP) was a pivotal Dutch governmental body tasked with managing the development of reclaimed land in the IJsselmeer region. Established in 1962, it played a central role in allocating land and planning the spatial layout of Eastern and Southern Flevoland. In Eastern Flevoland, plans included the creation of one city, Lelystad, alongside three villages: Dronten, Swifterbant, and Biddinghuizen. Meanwhile, the Projektburo Almere (Almere Project Office), a division of the RIJP located in Lelystad, focused on the spatial planning of Almere. Initially intended primarily for agricultural use, the IJsselmeer Polders took on a new significance after World War II, as it became clear that the rapidly growing population, especially in Amsterdam, required accommodation elsewhere. This led to the design of two cities within the Eastern and Southern Flevoland polders: Lelystad and Almere, respectively. Construction of Almere commenced in 1975, with the first homes completed by November 1976. The development program mandated by the government prioritized social housing, comprising 70 to 80 percent of the new city's construction. To oversee this endeavour, the Stichting Woningbouw Almere (Almere Housing Foundation) was established as part of the RIJP. (Dissel, 1991)

Almere-Haven was designed as a suburban area primarily consisting of low-rise neighbourhoods. The urban plan for the centre refers to the traditional Dutch city with characteristic urban elements such as canals, canal houses, and narrow street profiles. (Spoormans et al., 2022)

Corrosia stands as one of Almere's inaugural structures, embodying a blend of modernist architecture crafted from weathered iron and concrete, affectionately dubbed the "rust bucket." Originally designated as the residence for the RIJP, it was envisioned to evolve into the vibrant hub of Almere-Haven's socio-cultural life. D. H. Frieling, the deputy director of RIJP, articulated the rationale, explaining: "We assumed that the oldest part of a city should be its centre,. That's a psychological fact. In the centre, public space is more important than private space—it's like the living room of the city. That means you also have to be able to accept conflicts. They are

inevitable, so we have, in a way, integrated them into the urban design concept. Therefore, very deliberately, we densely built this centre, in contrast to Lelystad, with the idea: let the discussion between all these different destinations and interests unfold." "We tried to find out what people find attractive. And it turns out that people in a centre always seek coziness, a sense of intimacy. Old values seem to be inseparably linked to old forms. That's why we said: we don't want nostalgic design, but we do want to achieve a certain hospitality, a place where people feel at home." This building was envisioned as a hub for socio-cultural activities, intended to house a variety of functions such as meeting rooms, a youth centre, spaces for the elderly, exhibition areas, and more. To streamline the process and expedite construction while ensuring tangible outcomes, an exchange office for RIJP officials was proposed. This decision not only addressed the RIJP's need for office space in Almere but also provided a temporary solution for other functions. However, translating this concept into a cohesive design posed significant challenges. The design had to facilitate seamless coexistence of diverse functions, allow for independent management, and incorporate flexibility for future needs. Complicating matters further, the available space for construction was severely constrained, bordered by water on two sides. (Hulst & Van de Pol, 1980)

One of the RIJP individuals who contributed significantly to Corrosia was Thijs Gerretsen: "Corrosia was supposed to be an exchange office, a RIJP office with even floating floors that could later be removed to create hall spaces. The building had to be built quickly, but because it had to accommodate both the elderly and the youth, it took a lot of time for the necessary consultations. But a very specific building was rolled out. In terms of time, it took longer than expected, as it sat with the management for six months without a decision being made." The name Corrosia derives from the façade material use: a special type of steel (corten steel) that rusts quickly due to a certain treatment, forming a fully sealing layer, thus requiring no further maintenance. (Nawijn, K. E., 1988)

Corrosia opened in 1979 when there were only a few thousand residents, and soon the facilities started operating as well. First, the space for the elderly was filled, then the theatre-cinema hall, and finally a youth centre. For several years, the music school was also housed there, and space

was rented out to numerous associations, clubs, and institutions. As expected, the building posed many management problems, precisely because of the intended multitude of sometimes conflicting functions next to, above, and below each other in a relatively small building. Upon the relocation of RIJP officials to accommodate municipal services, the ownership of the building was transferred to the municipality.

In summary, Corrosia was a vital element in the formative years of the Flevoland polder and Almere. It served as the home of the significant RIJP and symbolized the emerging vibrancy of the city. With its versatile design and array of amenities, Corrosia encapsulated the pioneering ethos that characterized Almere's early growth, reflecting the essence of the city's identity.

## II: THE ARCHITECTS

The architects responsible for the design of the building are Rob Blom van Assendelft and Jan Koning. While limited public information exists regarding the architects themselves, occasional references shed light on their professional connections. Notably, Blom van Assendelft appears to have had associations with renowned architects of his era, including Aldo van Eyck, Piet Blom, and Herman Hertzberger.

In an interview with Brans Stassen (former urbanist for the RIJP), he mentions that Blom van Assendelft had been a student under Aldo van Eyck. (van Veggel, A. M., 2008)

In 1965, Rob Blom van Assendelft, in collaboration with Piet Blom and other partners, established an architectural firm named "Werkplaats voor Publieke Werken" (Workshop for Public Works). However, in 1967, the firm faced bankruptcy. Nevertheless, Rob Blom van Assendelft persevered and continued his involvement in the ongoing Bastille project in Enschede alongside Piet Blom until the conclusion in 1969. (Roos, 1977)



*Bastille project in Enschede (Mei architects and planners. n.d.)*

Between 1970 and 1973, Blom van Assendelft served as a project manager under the tutelage of Herman Hertzberger. During this period, he contributed to the realization of the office building for Centraal Beheer in Apeldoorn. (Rijksdienst voor de IJselmeerpolders & R. Blom van Assendelft en J.

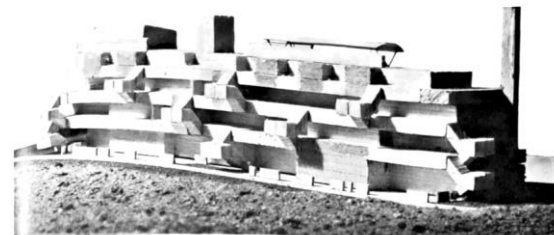
Koning Architecten, 1974-1983).



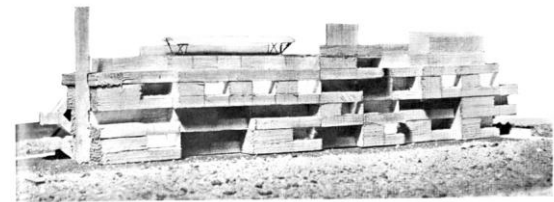
*Centraal Beheer in Apeldoorn (Punt, W., 1972)*

These architects—Aldo van Eyck, Piet Blom, and Herman Hertzberger—are widely regarded as the foremost figures within the realm of Dutch Structuralism architecture.

Connections to structuralism extend further than just that. A school project of Jan Koning was published in Forum magazine, a platform closely associated with structuralist thought. This project vividly demonstrates Koning's keen interest in structuralism. (Forum: maandblad voor architectuur en gebonden kunsten, 1961)



**Vorming woongemeenschap. Motto: mens. J. Koning**



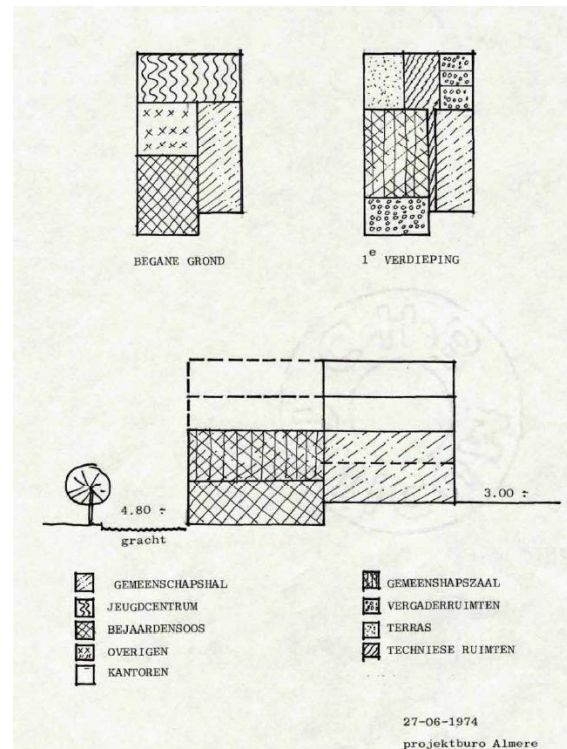
*Jan Koning's published school project (Forum: maandblad voor architectuur en gebonden kunsten, 1961)*

### III: THE DESIGN

Given the unavailability of direct communication with the architect to procure insights into the design, the analysis must rely on extrapolating design intentions from official documentation and journalistic sources. This necessitates an investigation into the requirements posited by the RIJP and the corresponding architect's objectives.

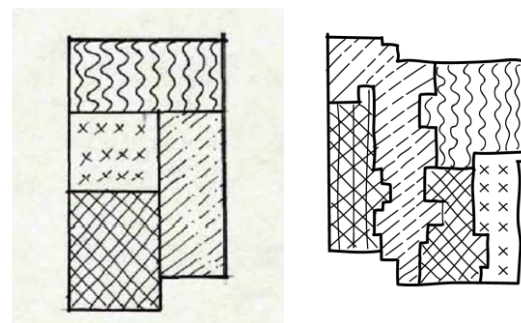
According to the design specifications provided by Projektburo Almere, the requested requirements include:

- The layout of the building should allow for a flexible arrangement and/or usage to be easily realized.
- Both the youth centre and the seniors' meeting place should be accessible from both the community hall and from outside.
- The community hall should be convertible into office space.
- Simultaneous variable use of the community hall should be possible, such as sitting, standing, viewing exhibitions, reading noticeboards, and consuming refreshments, etc.
- The appearance of the building should harmonize with the surrounding small-scale residential/commercial buildings and be visually appealing.
- The character of the building should be open and inviting.
- When choosing materials, consideration should be given to the surrounding brick buildings and paving. No grey building.

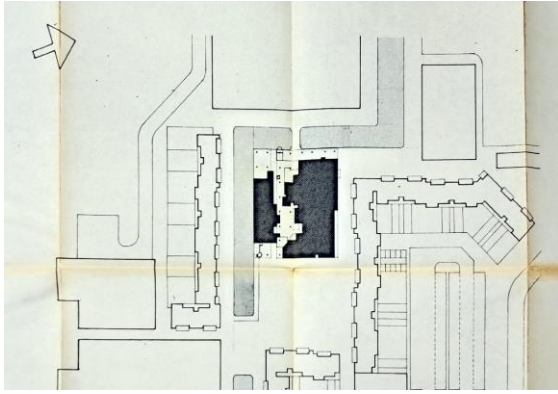


*Programme proposition Corrosia (Rijksdienst voor de IJsselmeerpolders & R. Blom van Assendelft en J. Koning Architecten, 1974-1983)*

Illustrated above is the proposed programme by Projectburo Almere from 1974. When juxtaposed with the final drawings for the construction permit, we see just how much more interwoven the programme became after Blom van Assendelft and Koning made the design. As a visual tool for comparing these two different plans, the style of the 1974 proposition has been recreated for the ground floor drawing, as illustrated below. Whereas the communal hall was originally proposed to be a separate entity in the building, it has instead been made into the inner street, connecting the separate programmatic functions.



*Comparison proposed layout versus the completed building*



*Situation drawing Corrosia (R. Blom van Assendelft en J. Koning Architecten , 1977)*

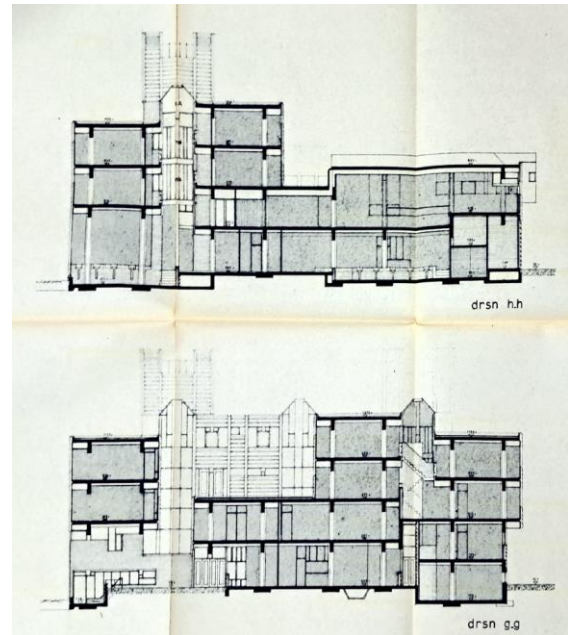
The most illustrative depiction of the building's layout is perhaps the situation drawing, showed above. It diverges from typical renditions by showcasing the publicly accessible inner street, distinguished by its depiction in the drawing. The areas not accessible to the public are distinctly marked in black. This inner street is pivotal as it connects to a rear entrance that was initially intended to link up with the proposed city hall. However, due to a shift in plans to construct the city hall in Almere-Stad, the bridge over the canal was never realized (Visit Almere, n.d.).



*The interior street of Corrosia (Schutte, G., 1982)*

The building features three straight voids extending to the roof, allowing natural light in through skylights. These voids also serve as passages for the stairs and elevator. Their straight alignment stands

in stark contrast to the ground floor's inner street, characterized by its jagged and irregular layout.



*Cross sections of Corrosia (R. Blom van Assendelft en J. Koning Architecten , 1977)*

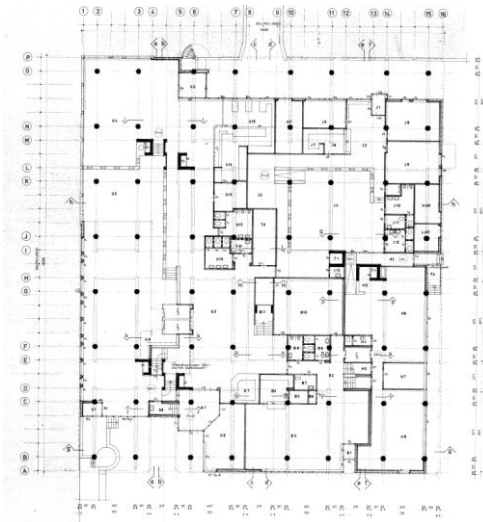
### *Structuralism*

This part of the research delves into the influences of Blom van Assendelft's connection with significant Dutch structuralist architects and whether we can discern any of these influences reflected in Corrosia. In the book "Structuralism in Dutch Architecture" (Van Heuvel, 1992) by several distinctive features of such architecture are identified. By comparing these features with findings from the archive, we aim to gain insights into how Blom van Assendelft's collaboration with prominent Dutch structuralist architects may have shaped Corrosia's architectural style and design principles. Through this examination, we seek to identify any correlations or adaptations present in Corrosia's architectural language that can be attributed to this historical connection.

Though Corrosia may not exhibit traditional structuralist elements like repeating patterns or exposed concrete, it could still be argued as a structuralist building. As Herman Hertzberger noted, anything emphasizing construction can fall under the structuralist umbrella. However, structuralism transcends mere visual tropes; it encompasses a philosophy where the construction becomes more than just support, but a visible part of the design, revealing its inner workings to users. (Van Heuvel, 1992)



In structuralism, the construction serves a purpose beyond mere support for efficiently assembling a design only to conceal it afterward. By revealing its skeleton, a building demonstrates to its users the process of its creation. This particular building follows a consistent grid pattern, with measurements of 6 by 4.5 meters and a total of 8 rows across and vertically. While this grid remains consistent on the ground floor, the building's volume occasionally deviates from this standard in specific areas.



Ground floor plan of Corrosia (R. Blom van Assendelft en J. Koning Architecten, 1977)



Interior Corrosia showing the revealed construction (Jongerius, J., 1993)

In structuralism, a visible construction offers users deeper insights into actual dimensions, while creating a recognizable rhythm that signifies the overall number of repetitions. Growth and cohesion necessitate straightforward expandability and opportunities for interchangeability. Hence, the loadbearing construction of structuralist buildings can be relatively easily expanded, as exemplified in Corrosia itself. A substantial volume was later added atop the existing structure. Although no

documented evidence exists, a site visit uncovered that no visible additional construction was employed to support this new addition.

In the 1980s, the imperative for energy conservation prompted a re-evaluation of the principle of maintaining visible construction in outer walls, as they create significant thermal bridges. Consequently, the primary portion of the construction was nestled within the thermal layer.

People play a central role in Dutch structuralism, with a focus on fostering mutual encounters and exploring the patterns of relations between users and the built environment. At a micro level, buildings or elements within them often feature facilities designed to encourage interpersonal interactions. The concept of the "inner street," which was prevalent in structuralism at the time, is employed to facilitate this dynamic.

In structuralism, significant importance is placed on the individual recognizability of one's living or working space. It is precisely within the transitional area between the interior and exterior where individual contributions are deemed possible. For instance, in the Centraal Beheer office building, where Blom van Assendelft was also involved, the interiors deliberately lack finishing, encouraging users to personalize the space. Similarly, in Corrosia, the inner walls of the inner street were left unfinished, providing users with the opportunity to shape the environment according to their needs and preferences.



Interior street showing the materiality (Jongerius, J. 1983)

In summary, the comparison between the proposed program and the finalized construction permits sheds light on the architect's deliberate intentions, especially concerning the seamless integration of the inner street. Additionally, it becomes evident that Corrosia's design principles align with structuralist philosophies, evident through the visible construction elements and the incorporation of opportunities for user interaction and customization. Corrosia not only represents architectural innovation but also stands as a testament to the intricate relationship between design intentions, historical influences, and evolving functional needs.

## IV: RECEPTION AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

This chapter delves into the reception and community impact of Corrosia during the nascent stages of Almere-Haven. Within a report on Socio-cultural neighbourhood and district facilities in Almere by T.C. Noordhoek (1982), insights emerge regarding the community's response to Corrosia.

The pattern of facilities in Almere-Haven shows clear signs of deliberate planning of accommodations and their distribution. The norms and principles used in establishing the facilities in Almere-Haven differ significantly from those which were employed for Almere-Stad, the planned city centre of Almere. This is due to the differing urban planning situation of Almere-Haven, which formed the basis for determining the service areas of the various facilities.

In Almere-Haven, facilities were distinguished at two levels: neighbourhood and district levels; the latter is not comparable to the urban level of other districts. Indeed, for larger urban facilities, Almere-Haven would in the future depend on Almere-Stad. Due to its population size, Almere-Haven could be considered at the neighbourhood level, although there is more than in a neighbourhood a self-contained, more or less complete package of facilities.

Financially the building of Corrosia was considered a success, given that the investment costs were

considerably lower because the accommodations had been built by the RIJP and taken over by the municipality at relatively low costs.

In conversations with residents of Almere, few found that community centres occupy a central place in their leisure activities. However, a small group of people make very intensive use of the community centre. This is not a typical phenomenon unique to Almere. It occurs everywhere. In discussions with residents, it is almost never reported that they see community centres or Corrosia as a possibility for making contacts. They do not consciously choose to establish social contacts through these means. (T.C. Noordhoek, 1982)

The building was originally designed as an urban artifact and gradually was given equal dominance in the centre as is attributed to historic centres with churches. In the first years, the building was occupied by the RIJP, later the function of the building was regulated through participation. The building has since gained cult status in Almere. (van Veggel, A. M., 2008)

In conclusion, it becomes apparent that while Corrosia was financially successful and gained cult status in Almere, its role as a central hub for social interaction was not widely recognized by residents. Nonetheless, its emergence as a prominent urban artifact underscores its significance within the evolving landscape of Almere-Haven, reflecting the deliberate planning and distribution of facilities tailored to the unique needs of the neighbourhood.

## CONCLUSION

The exploration into Corrosia's significance within Dutch architectural history and its impact on the formative years of Almere-Haven has yielded valuable insights, ultimately addressing the main research question: How does Corrosia contribute to the narrative of Dutch architectural history and the formative years of Almere-Haven?

Corrosia emerges as a symbol of both architectural innovation and communal development in Almere-Haven. Designed as a multifunctional space, it embodied the pioneering ethos of the city's early growth, reflecting the essence of its identity. The intentional integration of diverse functions within a constrained space exemplifies the city planners' vision to create a vibrant, communal space. Despite facing challenges in management and public reception, Corrosia endured as a central urban artifact, eventually gaining cult status in Almere.

Through an examination of historical context, architectural design, and community impact, it becomes evident that Corrosia played a pivotal role in shaping the socio-cultural landscape of Almere-Haven. While its function as a hub for social interaction may not have been widely recognized by residents, its architectural significance and contribution to the neighbourhood's identity remain undeniable.

In conclusion, Corrosia stands as a testament to the intricate interplay between architectural innovation, community planning, and historical context. Its story enriches the narrative of Dutch architectural history, highlighting the dynamic evolution of urban spaces and the enduring legacy of pioneering architectural endeavours.

## DISCUSSION

A more intriguing approach would involve gaining access to information regarding the design process, such as earlier design proposals and sketches. These materials could shed light on the architect's intentions, providing valuable insights into the project's development.

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