

A Brief Urban History, for Understanding the Take Away Amsterdam

Amsterdam's urban history is a good case of European Modernisation, with the Industrial Revolution, Housing Act, Berlage and Amsterdam School, Post-war developments, and further. The story I will tell you here is a reading of the city in continuous modernisation, socio-political events leading to each other and transforming the city, which then provides us with another reading of the 4 school buildings we are looking at, from an urban 'evolutionary' perspective on history, as Adorno would refer to. Consider my story here complementary to Tymen Peverelli's, where he looks at the city like a palimpsest. As Peverelli focuses on each school building and "peels off their layers," I will approach Amsterdam and the context of these 4 schools as a continuous totality. Of note here that while Leonardo Da Vinci School is in Oud West, the other 3 schools are in Oud Zuid; thus, I will focus more on the urbanism of these two districts. You could find much of the information in disciplinary architecture and urbanism books on Amsterdam, here re-told from my own perspective to hopefully prepare us for Suat Ögüt's installation in this very space.

Émile Zola's *L'Assommoir*, *Germinal*, *Travail* all tell us about everyday Paris at the end of the 19th century. Everyday Amsterdam was not much different then. Migrants to Amsterdam, who came to work in the harbour, shops, workshops, were living in numbers of 2 to 3, in one room in shifts in workers' districts of Amsterdam such as Jordaan. All household activities were happening in the same room, without enough space or fresh air, which led to unhealthy and dangerous living conditions. Jordaan was one the districts built for the new migrant workers, shifting the centuries old borders of the city. This extension was a planned class segregation, where the three canals were built for the rich (for instance Keizersgracht), and the Jordaan area (as well as others) built for the poorer workers and industries. The city expanded for more workers in the years after, according to the 1866 plan by Niftrik, and 1876 Plan-Kalff. Leonardo Da Vinci School (1891) was built in Oud West under Plan-Kalff.



17th century depiction of Amsterdam



The 1876 Plan-Kalff

Continuous fires swift spreading in wooden buildings, narrow streets, and different epidemics across these workers' districts lead to the Housing Act in 1901, regulating especially the health conditions. Berlage's Plan (1915) for the Oud Zuid embraced the major modernist ideals of the day, i.e. healthy city, functional city, social city, translating the Housing Act to an urban plan. The First Open Air School (1929) is especially a good representation of these ideals. Large avenues planned for pedestrians and bicycles were lined with the family houses of the Amsterdam School style. This plan was also for the first time a street plan and the architecture of the lots and buildings represented a synthesis of public planning policy and art in Amsterdam. Public gardens, houses with gardens and balconies, sports facilities, other public buildings in the middle of large peripheral housing blocks were significantly present in this plan. Both British Dalton School in Apollobuurt (1930) and the Nicolaas Maes Public Elementary School in Museum Kwartier (1916) are good cases of this synthesis. The Housing Act that lead to Berlage's Plan for Amsterdam, also enabled housing cooperatives, which build public housing, to take up the role of self-developer, landlord and ongoing maintainer of public housing stock. Tracts of land with development restrictions and guaranteed low-cost loans were made available to the cooperatives for the construction of improved-and still segregated public housing for the workers and the poor.



Berlage's Plan Zuid (1915)

Post-World War II period brought further migration. This time people were arriving as migrant workers from Morocco and Turkey, and from former colonies such as Indonesia and Suriname. Following this transformation of political climate, Oud Zuid witnessed a further modernist extension. In 1960s and 1970s last part of Oud Zuid and Bijlmermeer were planned with the ideals of CIAM, where zoning as planning terminology replaced segregation. Factory work, office work, residential functions, and recreational functions were translated to different zones in the city, where higher built densities can sustain the comfort conditions and privacy especially for housing. These districts were built with incompatible public spaces, detaching the new migrants from the ground in modernist blocks, as well as from the city in segregated districts.

In early 1990s ABN Amro established its new headquarters near Amsterdam Zuid station. This was Amsterdam in times of Reagan and Thatcher. Zuidas, a new district by Amsterdam Zuid station, was adopted in planning by the City Council in 1998. The masterplan aimed to achieve a healthy balance between living, working, and amenities. It formed the foundation for the current and future development for Zuidas district, which has grown to a new part of Amsterdam since then, with high concentration of businesses, public institutions, and housing. The plan is to have 7000 homes "between studio apartments, student housing, mid-price and social housing, and penthouses with panoramic views" by 2030. Oud Zuid was a part of Amsterdam until 2010, when it was transferred to the new Amsterdam-South district together with Zuidas.



Structural Vision Amsterdam 2040

Oud Zuid has clear segregation lines based on class and identity, as well as between Oud Zuid and Zuidas. Highest income Dutch nationals live in the central part of Oud Zuid, De Pijp is lower income comparatively, and the eastern-most part is the lowest income parts of the district with residents with (im)migrant background. Through the urban renovation and gentrification processes since the 1980s, Oud Zuid has become one of the most expensive residential areas in the whole of Amsterdam, which means that even dwellings owned by housing cooperatives are occupied by higher income people. The new business district around the Amsterdam Zuid Station, and educational institutions are highly attractive to the new expat migrants to the city. This also explains the 1980s renovation to Nicolaas Maes School. Zuidas represents the tendencies of globalisation starting in 1980s, and this is where most future developments in Amsterdam is expected to happen in the upcoming years, and these have an inevitable influence on Oud Zuid, as well.

Amsterdam's story is one of continuous modernisation, but also a story of migration, urbanisation, and segregation and displacement within modernity. Oud Zuid and Zuidas reflect the modern future of Amsterdam, i.w. how the city has/will be shaped and evolve under the urban redevelopment pressure in a rapidly transforming political and economic context. Especially the UNESCO status will stagnate the centre of Amsterdam into an open-air spectacle, Oud Zuid with its heritage characteristics and ownership structure will become immobile, socially and architecturally as well. Oud Zuid while being at the border of the old city centre, will not connect to the periphery in socio-spatial terms, while the fast developing Zuidas will increase the contrast between historical centre and the peripheries. The (im)migrants will be pushed further out of the city, resulting from the segregation of planning decisions, and gentrification processes. Bijlmermeer, Nieuwe West, and Amsterdam Noord will evolve this way, where accessibility to cultural centres and public space reduce, more urban isolation will occur. This means increased social fragmentation, and the lessening of the overall social sustainability of Amsterdam, in future.