

English Translation by Tony Koers

## **UNESCO & the Amsterdam School Period of Architecture (Amsterdam School)**

*In search of a showcase for social housing*

### **Foreword**

Dutch social housing has created much great developments: a socio-political movement led to phenomenal urban planning, architecture, crafts and industrial arts. One can find many examples of this in city district West, of which “Het Schip” in the “Spaarndammer” neighbourhood can be counted as one of the highlights. City district West cherishes that heritage. A lot of money was invested in the refurbishment of neighbourhoods, such as the “Staatslieden” neighbourhood, the “Spaarndammer”- and “Zeehelden” neighbourhood, the “Mercatorplein”, the “Witte de Withstraat” in “De Baarsjes” and recently “Koningsvrouwen” in “Landlust”; one by one neighbourhoods with examples from the early days of social housing, of the Amsterdam School and of innovative urban planning with open building corridors. One can find excellent examples in the public space of the crafts and decorative arts which were used to express the new ideals.

In line with this concern about the stewardship of its heritage, district West organized this expert meeting. Together with the museum “Het Schip”. For, credit where credit is due; it is the museum that has put Dutch social housing on the agenda of the commission which advises the national government on nominations for the Unesco World Heritage List. On March 3, 2014, forty experts discussed the question how the beginning of Dutch social housing, roughly between 1910 and 1930, and the idealism and creative force of the Amsterdam School can be promoted to Unesco world heritage status. Four inspiring introductions, and the discussion that followed, have given perspective to this unique period in the history of Amsterdam. The results of this period in thought, word and action belong to the top of the cultural achievements of mankind. These experts believe that attention and protection through Unesco world heritage status would be very appropriate. Even more so because its organizational surroundings (museums, housing societies, property owners) offer the right conditions for sustainable and qualitative management of this heritage.

Such conditions do not fall from the sky. Fortunately the Amsterdam School is loved by laymen and professionals alike. A love that is worthy to strive for international recognition.

### **Gerolf Bouwmeester**

Chairman, Management Commission West

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## 1. Introduction

The building “Het Schip” from 1921 has high international accreditation among architects, and the complex is widely regarded as the undisputed icon of social housing in the style of the Amsterdam School. In 2011, museum Het Schip made an effort to get on the Dutch Provisional List of World Heritage – the entrance portal to candidacy for the status of Unesco World Heritage. The nomination proposal did not make it that time, but the Governmental Commission did see possibilities to search for ‘a showcase of Dutch social housing’, in which Het Schip and the Amsterdam School could possibly play an key role. In particular, the social movement behind the blossoming of Dutch social housing could perhaps be a powerful perspective for a Unesco candidacy. The commission recommended therefore to develop the aforementioned showcase over the coming years, in such a way that it can participate in the next round (2020) as the Dutch nomination for Unesco world heritage.

### **Expert Meeting**

#### **‘In search for a model for social housing’**

**Location: “Het Sieraad”, Amsterdam West**

**Date: March 3, 2014**

It is hard to find a better location for an expert meeting such as this.

“Het Sieraad” was built in the 1920s to house the Fourth Vocational School. The particular building is built in the style of the Amsterdam School, including fine sculpture work by city sculptor Hildo Krop, and was declared a National Monument in 2003.

On March 3, 2014 forty experts gathered from the entire country. One of the participants was flown in from the US.

The program for the meeting consisted of the following components:

- Welcome, by city district councillor Godfried Lambrieux
- Unesco world heritage – principles, introduction and procedures, by Dré van Marrewijk, National Cultural Heritage Service (RCE)
- Amsterdam School – contemporary significance from international cultural perspective, by Aaron Betsky, managing director Cincinatti Museum of Arts
- Dutch social housing – from international political and artistic perspective, by Cor Wagenaar, Delft University of Technology
- Amsterdam, the Mecca of Social Housing – political, architectural and social overview, by Vladimir Stissi, University of Amsterdam
- Panel Discussion with audience. In search of arguments for (and perhaps against) a candidacy for Unesco
- Conclusions and outlook. Substantive demarcations, further research, support building and carriers for the ongoing process

## **Expert meeting and focus**

That slumbering enthusiasm by the commission was also found with the present Minister of Education, Culture and Science. Minister Jet Bussemaker, on her own initiative even, came to personally take account at “Het Schip” in Amsterdam. Amsterdam district West and museum Het Schip then took the initiative in the beginning of 2014 to organize the expert meeting about the question of what would be the best focus for a promising new candidature. For instance, should the focus be on:

- Het Schip (as exemplary object)?
- The Spaarndammer neighbourhood<sup>1</sup> (as an example neighbourhood)?
- The Amsterdam School (as urban planning period, or as socio-artistic movement)?
- The blossoming beginning of Dutch social housing (as international theme)?

In other words, the question is whether, and if so how, the candidature must be limited to place, time, object or theme. The expert meeting was therefore designed in such a way that these limits could all be explored. We will see in this report that this objective has delivered a valuable harvest of arguments, perspectives and building blocks for candidacy.

## **Gift from city district**

The expert meeting was, in practical-organizational terms, a ‘farewell gift’ from city district Amsterdam West to Museum Het Schip. In 2014 the seven city districts will cease to exist in their present form, and the parting district management thought it a nice gesture to present this as a gift.

Museum Het Schip is extremely happy with this gesture. The museum is on the verge to expand and broaden to a Museum of the Amsterdam School in 2015. A successful start on the road to a new (and hopefully successful) Unesco candidacy can push this metamorphosis forward and is a helping hand with the recruiting of funds and sponsors. The district is in turn benefited by a successful museum in this part of the city. With this initiative the organizers want to prevent that everyone waits for everyone else. Only after the question about the focus is answered (and therefore is this meeting not more than a beginning) can the question about ownership be posed: who takes the best care of this heritage?

Museum Het Schip has the ambition to play a role in each of the afore mentioned scenarios.

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<sup>1</sup> According to architecture historians, the Spaarndammer neighbourhood is considered as a ‘laboratory’ for the Amsterdam School, in which considerable experimentation took place with building styles, city garden-like solutions, and block designs. The more extensive “Plan South” by Berlage would later freely build upon these experiments.

## 2. Unesco World Heritage

By Dré van Marrewijk

“According to many the World Heritage List is totally skewed, with many objects and places in the United States and European inner cities. That is why Unesco views the origin of the proposal increasingly critical .....”

The United Nations Unesco program has been in existence since 1978. It defines ‘world heritage’ as cultural and natural heritage that is considered irreplaceable, unique, valuable to the entire world, and of which it is considered to be of great importance to be preserved. The world heritage list is compiled by an international commission, based on proposals from member countries. Meanwhile, almost one thousand heritage sites are on the list from 153 countries, including 9 from the Netherlands.

Placement on the world heritage list of a monument, place or phenomenon otherwise does not generate money. However, there is an international world heritage fund that can help in cases of urgent threats. The designation ‘World Heritage’ is highly coveted, because from an international perspective it confers special status.

However, it is good to know that in the first place the status raises obligations for the careful stewardship of the heritage. Unesco actively monitors whether such obligations are met.

### **The 10 Unesco criteria for ‘outstanding universal value’**

Since 2005, Unesco has used a set of ten criteria for world heritage, of which the candidate must satisfy a minimum of one criterion:

1. to represent a masterpiece of human creative genius;
2. to exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design;
3. to bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared;
4. to be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history;
5. to be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change;
6. to be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance. (The Committee considers that this criterion should preferably be used in conjunction with other criteria);
7. to contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance;
8. to be outstanding examples representing major stages of earth's history, including the record of life, significant on-going geological processes in the development of landforms, or significant geomorphic or physiographic features;

9. to be outstanding examples representing significant on-going ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, fresh water, coastal and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals;
10. to contain the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation.

### **Unesco criteria**

The World Heritage List contains primarily exceptional buildings and artifacts, cultural landscapes and nature, archaeological discoveries and industrial monuments. Unesco uses 10 official criteria (see box) to have a chance to get on the list. In practice however, the key concept of 'universal value' is used, or these three key words:

1. Authenticity
2. Integrity (can also be interpreted as undisturbed)
3. Uniqueness

### **Political considerations**

The selections of the Unesco World Heritage commission are partly political choices, in which two important considerations play a role. The first is a growing realization that the status of world heritage will suffer from inflation if the list continues to grow at the same pace, leading to thousands of world heritage sites. New submissions are thus being viewed more critically. The second consideration stems from the observation that proportionally more heritage sites originate from the United States and Europe, through which especially European historic inner cities are highly represented. Unesco therefore views the origin of the submissions ever more critically.

We see the same mechanism within the Dutch National Service for Cultural Heritage. This office is aware that relatively many national monuments and heritage sites exist in the 'Randstad', leading to continuing neglect of other regions. For this reason the government is now more receptive to heritage candidates from regions outside the 'Randstad'.

### **Recommendations from an insider**

Speaker Dré van Marrewijk knows the inner workings of the National Service for Cultural Heritage and is a specialist of the Unesco process. He offered a number of concrete recommendations during the expert meeting:

- Choose as candidates material objects with future value;
- Determine which Unesco criteria are met by the proposal;
- Make sure that, between now and ten years from now, you end up on the Dutch Provisional List;
- Build up the candidature with arguments and comparative analyses, and show convincingly the exceptional value for the Netherlands and for the entire world community;
- Consider the candidature of a cluster of objects and places of which a portion can be found outside the 'Randstad';

- Be ready for revisions to the 'Provisional List'.

### 3. Amsterdam School in International Perspective

By Aaron Betsky.

“Dutch social housing in the time of the Amsterdam School is an absolutely rare world-wide phenomenon in its beauty and idealism.”

The Amsterdam School as architectural phenomenon will not easily lead to world heritage nomination. However beautiful a building as Het Schip may be, the Amsterdam School is more an urban planning and socio-political phenomenon than a collection of individual architectural highlights. In the great collection of worldwide architectural wonders, the Amsterdam School only takes a modest place. Probably since the Amsterdam School reflects the typical Dutch quality of ‘shaping the ordinary’ and giving attention and beauty to those without power. That is a reality we must face. Unesco also is known for their special sensitivity to the monumentally imposing, or the nostalgia of the ancient and picturesque. None of these qualifications convincingly apply to the Amsterdam School. Still, Betsky believes that a case can be made for the specific quality of the Amsterdam School as a showcase for Dutch social housing.

#### **Urban planning for common people**

Traditionally, European inner cities were of mainly organic and small scale character; a colourful blend of small shacks and large buildings, unsightly alleys, canals, streets and squares. When Europe experienced a period of unprecedented expansion, growth and prosperity at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, most European capitals underwent a radical transformation. In Paris, Vienna, Berlin, London and Madrid whole blue collar neighbourhoods were flattened *à la* Haussmann, to make room for monumental grandeur for the rapidly rising middle class. The boulevards in Paris and Madrid, and the Ring of Vienna, are some of the well-known highlights of this. The outbreak of the First World War in 1914 brought an end to the *belle époque*, but also in the roaring twenties building in the great metropolises distinguished itself for often extravagant urban planning and architecture.

Amsterdam went a different route during this period. Here also, the period of economic growth translated into rapid growth of the city and the realization of places with a certain – but modest – grandeur. It is remarkable however, that Amsterdam stayed mainly focussed on the blue collar class. In contrast to the extensive garden cities and suburbs elsewhere, the choice here was explicitly for the city. The increased prosperity translated here into a utopian ideal to ‘raise’ the blue collar class in all respects, not in the least by building public, affordable but yet attractive homes everywhere in the city. The public housing of the Amsterdam School is a unique and unequalled highlight in the social and architectural history.



## **About Het Schip**

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the 'Spaarndammer' neighbourhood was established as a blue collar neighbourhood, close to the new harbour. The 'Spaarndammer' park was created in 1913 as a kind of green oasis in a sea of brick. Construction of the surrounding buildings was left to the young and ambitious contractor Klaas Hille. His architect, Michel De Klerk, did not provide the then usual designs of long rows of small homes, but designed grand and monumental workers' palaces, in brick with striking colours. The First World War had stopped the development of the park for several years. In 1917, De Klerk was commissioned by the housing society 'Eigen Haard' to design the third block next to the Spaarndammer park, which would later be known as 'Het Schip'. In the end the entire 'yellow block' was built under commission from 'Eigen Haard'.

Het Schip is a spectacular example of 20<sup>th</sup> century Dutch social housing. De Klerk was able to use the impossible triangular parcel of land to mold the wildest shapes into an unforgettable and world renowned ensemble of blue color homes with school, 'Eigen Haard' society building and a post office. With the bright colours and extravagant designs, it more resembles a work of expressionist art than traditional public housing. The building led to fierce discussions, but the block was finished in its full eccentricity. The building was completed in 1921 and soon gained international fame of a monument to social housing, a 'workers' palace'.

Since 2001, the former post office, a model apartment at Hembrugstraat 248, and a replica of a slum dwelling have been part of Museum Het Schip. The museum will soon be expanded with the school building. That intention is not only a good moment to raise funds for a high value restoration of the whole block, but it enhances the chances for Het Schip to obtain World Heritage status, with or without connection with other highlights of Dutch social housing.

## **Social housing unique in style and magnitude**

The phenomenon of social housing on its own is of course not unique. From the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century we already know the seas of workers' dwellings, which were built close to factories by 'enlightened industrialists', as a result of well thought out human resource management. After that, many tenement barracks were erected in the large metropolises, which were true to their name. Later this approach was stepped up a notch with the 'Sovietbuilding' of monotonous and badly built worker apartments at the edge of cities, such as we still see in Eastern Europe and China, and in which there has been no visible effort to do something with crafts, tradition, beauty, care for the environment, comfort and respect for the human scale.

Dutch social housing of the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is a shining example of how this could have turned out differently. Aaron Betsky even calls the social housing in the style of the Amsterdam School the road not taken in the rest of the world: outside of the Netherlands it was viewed as valued as the utopian ideal. The Amsterdam School was fortunate that it knew how to connect with the Arts and Crafts movement from the beginning of the century, which displayed a strong leaning to trade works,

small is beautiful and the concept that the city should exist as a collection of villages. The Amsterdam School is characterized by a certain small scale approach and craftsmanship, with expressive facades, ornamentation and love of detail. In Betsky's words: "Nowhere in the world do you find such beautiful social housing in each other's' vicinity as in Plan South and the Spaarndammer neighbourhood of Amsterdam."

#### 4. Dutch social housing in the interwar years

By Cor Wagenaar

Utopia never realized makes the Amsterdam School a showcase of universal historical tendencies, documented in a cultural monument of absolute unique value.

There is something exceptional about the Amsterdam School. Who studies the backgrounds will find that this movement represents a body of thought, that as such, does not exist anymore and appears to have been virtually forgotten. A first indication is the special fact that the home building at the time in Amsterdam was almost exclusively meant for the working class. Cor Wagenaar, of Delft University of Technology, shows the context in which this took place.

##### **Inevitable progress**

The Amsterdam School marks a break with the 19<sup>th</sup> century. From the middle of that century Charles Darwin dominated thought. His theory of evolution not only explained the origin and gradual transformation of plant and animal species, but also the course of history, because it also would be defined by fixed patterns. Karl Marx was himself heavily inspired by this. As evolution is a historic law, he reasoned, then this historic law would eventually, 'in its own right', also bring the blue collar class to government. This outcome was a certainty and could not be slowed nor accelerated. Influential theorists claimed that the development of arts and culture would also follow in accordance to a comparable evolutionary law. Only architecture, music and art painting, that emerged from what preceded it was of significance; products of individual originality, however virtuoso, were not. Camillo Sitte, author of a famous manual on urban planning, was an influential supporter of these views; over his piano were not only busts of Beethoven and Wagner, but also of Darwin.

The confidence in progress, implicit behind this dialectic materialism, was understandable. The beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was characterized by tempestuous progress in science, industrial development and mass production, which made many things accessible to ordinary people. Technology, labor and science were undisputed winners. Marxists believed that arts and architecture also had to be subservient to this triumph. In any case there was talk about an intimate entanglement between technology, craftsmanship and (vernacular) art. The then emerging concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk* points to that symbiotic relationship and we recognize this as well in movements like the Amsterdam School.

##### **From evolution to activism**

The first World War and the sudden collapse of European states and conventions, place a significant side note to this thinking according to evolutionary laws. Lenin found that one could definitely accelerate this historical process: evolution became revolution. Also, architectural critics such as Siegfried Giedion no longer believed in a gradual change of architecture and urban planning, but advocated for activism: the future does not unfold spontaneously, one must fight for it.

In the Netherlands, H.P. Berlage and followers were strongly influenced by this thought process. Well behaving, traditional subjects made room for an activist, evolution propelling architecture. Fortunately

this type of architecture found fertile ground in Amsterdam. In the 1920s and 30s the city was enriched with at the time exceptionally strange, expressionistic buildings in an otherwise mostly traditional 19<sup>th</sup> century street pattern. It radiates self-awareness. Until the national government closed the money tap in the middle of the 1920s, many of the new housing neighbourhoods in Amsterdam were built by housing societies.

### **Competition from other European cities?**

In the late 1920s beautifully designed and socially engaged ‘workers’ palaces’ were built at various sites in Europe. In that respect, Het Schip and the Amsterdam School do not stand alone. Thus Berlin became the stage for the imaginative *Siedlungen* Siemenstadt, Onkel Toms Hütte and the Hufeisensiedlung. Possibly even more impressive are the workers *Höfe* in Vienna, with among others the George Washington Hof and the famous Karl Marx Hof. The latter complex is at 1,100 meters, one of the longest buildings in the world. When it was commissioned in 1930, the complex included 1,400 apartments, laundries, a large garden with playgrounds, pools, shops, a clinic, a pharmacy and a post office.

The question is, are these impressive workers’ palaces and settlements serious competition for the candidacy of the Amsterdam School/Het Schip for Unesco world heritage status? If we look at the scale and reputation of these urban planning and architectural wonders, yes may be. But they appear in a somewhat different light when we realize that these architects probably drew their inspiration partly from examples of the Amsterdam School; they certainly came to look in Amsterdam during the 1920s. In addition, the structure and reason for existence of, for example, Karl Marx Hof is fundamentally different. They rather breathe an almost intimidating atmosphere of a large housing barracks, however interesting the design and concept of these courts may be. Furthermore, these complexes were implemented top-down by the government, probably as a kind of appeasement for the potentially rebellious population. That was the difference with the Amsterdam School. These complexes have a much more human scale and are developed essentially bottom-up from the community through trade unions and (workers) housing societies, with financial support from the government.

### **Cultural monuments of a utopia**

This activism also distinguishes the Amsterdam School from foreign counterparts from the same period. The Amsterdam School was not a premeditated attempt at appeasement, which the workers complexes in *Das Rote Wien* really were, nor did the Amsterdam School identify with the movement that wanted to place workers in cozy garden cities far outside the city. On the contrary, the creators of the Amsterdam School lofted emphatic praise on the densified city of the future, as only that could be the foundation of the labour movement, and a testing ground for the society of tomorrow.

That society of tomorrow as envisaged by the Amsterdam School did not materialize, even though today’s lowest classes are more prosperous than ever and would have rarely suffered so little from

oppression and deprivation as now. The utopia that was never realized makes the Amsterdam School a model of universal historical trends, documented in a cultural monument of absolute unique value.

## 5. The politics of the Amsterdam School

By Vladimir Stissi

This involves much more than the much praised *Plan Zuid*. Look also at the jewels in *Plan West* or the garden villages in *Amsterdam Noord*. The meaning of the Amsterdam School is found all over the city. That is why we must blind ourselves with a single building or block ...

The Amsterdam School is in sharp contrast to the neo-classical architecture of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as seen in Amsterdam neighbourhoods like *De Pijp*, *Oud West* and *Oud Zuid*. Most architects from the Amsterdam School had little appreciation for those neighbourhoods and were not even very enthusiastic about the medieval inner city either. Vladimir Stissi, professor at the University of Amsterdam, summarizes for us the internal 'politics' behind Amsterdam as 'Mecca of Social Housing'.

### Collective Beauty

Their design philosophy actually showed more similarities with that of the later architect Le Corbusier, especially his collective designs from the 1940s (*Unite d'Habitation*) and 50s (Chandigarh), albeit with different shapes and materials. That desire for collective qualities is strikingly apparent in the following quote from poet and contemporary Roland Holst: 'The tendency of the proletariat is to search for aesthetic pleasure and gratification, less in shabby embellishment of the individual home than in the communal possession and use of beautiful buildings and objects.'

This collective approach was also envisaged in the design (by Berlage) of *Plan Zuid*. The attempt to shape the city as powerful and beautiful – urban planning-wise, for everybody – is clearly visible, and not so much by the ornamentation of the individual ownership, with buildings full of ornamentation which competed with each other in sometimes blatant fashion. Berlage, as trailblazer for the Amsterdam School, did not want anything to do with that. Perhaps he became more known for his beautiful Gesamtkunstwerk designs of the *Beurs van Berlage*, hunting castle Sint Hubertus or 'De Burcht'<sup>2</sup>, but he actually stood for a sober and almost Spartan architectural concept. Berlage concentrated on the totality, to create a democratic collective cityscape. In it the worker had an important part, but not more important than any other random brick in the building of society.

### Workers' palaces

The Amsterdam School architects themselves were significantly less rigid in the theory and happily experimented with baroque forms and uncommon use of materials. Michel de Klerk, designer of the urban block Het Schip, belonged to that flexible group of architects. For as much as the budget allowed he gladly took to expressionist forms and thus created true 'workers palaces'. Such designs were seen in that period as exceptionally provocative, also by his colleagues. By others it was even considered ideologically threatening, because the workers should not feel over-privileged in such palaces.

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<sup>2</sup> <sup>3</sup>Trade Union Building at the Henri Polaklaan

At this point it is good to make a side note. Contrary to the picture painted in the foregoing passages, not all Amsterdam School architects had a Marxist orientation. There were also socially inspired architects (such as Van der Pek, Van der Meij, Van Gendt) who equally strove for the 'raising of the working class', but then from a progressive-liberal conviction.

### **Accidental synergy**

Historically, great successes are often due to the synergy between a number of key players; a winning team. The success of the Amsterdam School is no exception. It is likely that the Amsterdam School architects could not have done as much without the strong support from politicians and sponsors of the day. In the period between 1910 and 1940 matters were controlled by a group of social-democratic city councillors and housing corporations, with support from the national government as the (initially) generous money lender. Amsterdam socialist aldermen such as Wibaut and De Miranda, the liberal-democratic mayor Tellegen and the managing director of the municipal housing service Keppeler were in favour of the Amsterdam School. That was also true for the rich and 'enlightened bourgeois', who commissioned the building of offices and villas. In this climate these architects could indulge in their talents for years.

### **City takes control**

Initially, the initiative for building in the style of the Amsterdam School was vested in the housing societies and developers. When government subsidies were drying up and the ambitions of the housing corporations did not have a chance for success anymore, the municipality gained control. The municipality continued to use its power as landowner (the site was conditionally leased) to keep the now private builders on the 'right track'. In the development of *Plan Zuid* (to a design by Berlage) the municipality put a large number of urban design conditions to housing corporations and private developers. These conditions varied from the building silhouette and street and façade appearance, to standards for washroom window shapes for instance. In hindsight it is remarkable that these design standards were applied so consistently and for so long. As a result *Plan Zuid* obtained that unique character, which is still referred to with great admiration one century later. However, we would deprive the Amsterdam School of its significance tremendously if we only directed our attention to *Plan Zuid*. Jewels exist also in *Plan West* (1922) and the garden villages of *Amsterdam Noord*. Here we find not only jewel like buildings, but also equally beautiful streets, squares, courtyards and urban blocks.

## 6. Four perspectives for Unesco: the discussion

It is a practical fact that candidates for world heritage must have strong endurance to make it to the table at the Unesco selection commission. That can take ten years easily. As a first step candidates have to qualify for the Provisional List of the Netherlands. This Provisional List is an inventory of all important monuments which the country wants to nominate for Unesco. Next the country will assemble a nomination dossier with as much information on each monument as possible. This dossier must contain as a minimum:

- The detailed description of the heritage (the object or objects, the places, the phenomenon) which we wish to nominate, including the manner in which the heritage is managed;
- An essay in which the supposed unique value of the monument is demonstrated. What can help is a comparative analysis (benchmark) of similar monuments elsewhere in the Netherlands and the world. It is important to realize that in such analyses Unesco is not interested in the question whether a candidate 'is representative' of a certain movement or phenomenon. Unesco is only interested in the question whether the candidate places in the top on its own and globally appeals to the imagination. Thus, do not make it a story of 'Dutch Glory', but demonstrate why this will appeal to people all over the world.
- Beside that a good analysis of the context is essential. When we look at something like Het Schip and the Amsterdam School, it would be interesting to present here a reflection of architecture and urban planning, a story about Dutch social housing and other ideologically compelling arguments.

The Netherlands then sends the dossier to the supporting bureau of the Commission for World Heritage. If the bureau finds the dossier complete, then it is presented to two advisory bodies: ICOMOS for cultural heritage and IUCN for natural heritage.

Considering the Amsterdam School and the above summarized dossier requirements, there are probably four important perspectives for a Unesco nomination: the presentation of a unique object, and a background story about the artistic, ideological and social housing importance.

### **Perspective 1: the object**

However fantastic the complex Het Schip van Michel de Klerk is, there is doubt that a new nomination of only this object shall reach Unesco. A convincing background story with the presentation will certainly help, but it may be smart to combine Het Schip with some 'master pieces' from Plan South in one presentation, as a series of architectural highlights from the period 1910-1930.

The grouping to a weightier nomination can take on still greater proportions. Perhaps the presentation has a higher chance with the Dutch Provisional List if Amsterdam highlights of the Amsterdam School are combined with similar buildings outside the Randstad. Thinking further in this manner it would even be an interesting thought process to group the Dutch presentation on a European level with Hofe and Siedlungen from the same building period in Vienna and Berlin. Then the nomination has grown to a strong European candidate, representative of a unique and inspiring historical movement.



## **Perspective 2: social housing**

The Amsterdam School also represents the absolute zenith of social housing, not only in the Netherlands, but also outside. Social housing in itself is not uniquely Dutch, and even the phenomenon of the housing corporation is actually a British invention. But we can state with confidence that nowhere in the world did such broadly rooted and prolonged social housing exist as here, which actually started already with the 17<sup>th</sup> century courtyards. Here the typically Dutch institutional sub-layer is of importance: water boards, pillars (**zuilen**), corporations, government control and polder model. Also the quality of social housing is unequalled. The material impact and highlights of this phenomenon we find especially in the Spaarndammer neighbourhood, Plan South and other Amsterdam locations which were developed in the interwar period. Also from a social housing point of view, these places deserve a place on the world heritage list. We must not underestimate the influence of social housing on the Amsterdam School. In the 1920s managers and architects from all over Europe came to the Netherlands to be inspired by that. The famous Hofe and Siedlungen in Vienna or Berlin would not have been there without the Amsterdam School.

## **Perspective 3: the arts**

The Amsterdam School is much more than a beautiful building or example of social housing. For that we only need to look at the sculptures, door handles and lamps, books and typography, paintings and stained glass art, industrial design, ceramics, landscape design and even educational beliefs that were prevalent at that time. Berlage did not claim in vain that the city had to be designed as a whole entity; from the street plan to the balconies, from the bridge abutments and washroom windows to gables and housing floor plans. As far as that is concerned we may still consider Het Schip as the finest hour of the Amsterdam School.

## **Perspective 4: the ideology**

It is not inconceivable that the Unesco is becoming increasingly sensitive to the idealistic backgrounds of new nominations. With some thousand world heritages on the list, it is conceivable that the commission will look at more criteria than beauty and rarity alone. On idealistic grounds the Amsterdam School offers three promising perspectives for a Unesco nomination:

- Raising of the underclass: the social housing of the Amsterdam School was aimed at offering ordinary workers an affordable beautiful home in the centre of the city, with respect for human values, beauty and small scale craftsmanship. At least this would have created the physical conditions for the raising<sup>3</sup> of the working underclass and society as a whole. That theme resonates with actual worldwide developments, in which the majority of humankind lives in difficult conditions in cities and in which an escalating battle is being waged between a movement that

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<sup>3</sup> <sup>4</sup>Enlightenment, Aufklärung, emancipation.

strives for the culture of a modern self-conscious world citizen and a counter movement which wants to return to tribal and ultra-conservative conditions.

- Liberal and progressive bourgeoisie: there are many examples of objects that came about thanks to the influence of principals from the bourgeoisie. In numbers these objects even surpass the 'workers' palaces'. The synergy between individuals from different social backgrounds is always still interesting and topical. To mind come the office buildings, villas, studios, private mass housing, objects of art and crafts, such as furniture, glass, silver and textiles that were accomplished by them;
- Cooperative relationships: The United Nations proclaimed 2012 the year of the cooperatives. Obviously they did not do that lightly. Citizens worldwide have a need to an alternative to the cynical every-man-for-himself mentality on the one hand and the submission to anonymous systems, such as governments and multi-nationals, which insufficiently play to the dormant feelings of dissatisfaction of the middle class on the other hand. In past years people across the world looked for each other to pursue a common goal in a cooperative fashion. For that the 'polder model' of Dutch social housing in the days of the Amsterdam School serves as a valuable source of inspiration. It was indeed an exceptional situation that housing societies (renters were initially even co-owners) came from the bottom up with splendid social construction initiatives, which the government generously made possible from the top down with money and direction. Jan Rotmans, professor at the Erasmus University, would probably applaud this historical situation as a school model of transitory thinking, in which bottom-up and top-down grab each other as two hands that together drive on a sustainable development.

These four perspectives together illustrate a complete picture. In addition, the nomination must emphasize the Amsterdam School, which, as an expression of Dutch social housing, has a unique place in the world, more than the concept of 'social housing' alone. The suggestion to also emphasize the ideological perspective of a nomination originates partly from pragmatic considerations. Viewed monumentally, many objects of the Amsterdam School in the course of their existence have been renovated unknowingly to ruin, refurbished and then again lovingly restored. With that it cannot be said with certainty anymore to what extent all parts of the buildings may still be labelled 'authentic'. A pure object-oriented nomination could therefore be risky.

## **7. What next**

The cornerstone of this small booklet is the question ‘what next?’ Who takes responsibility to lead the long march to Unesco, who runs with it and which steps do we now have to take. This question during the expert meeting gave rise to a lively discussion.

Museum Het Schip let it be known immediately that it would gladly play an active role, but only if there is participation from a broad coalition of parties. There is great temptation to look immediately at all kinds of theoretically conceivable parties, but that was correctly rebuffed. It is more logical to first define the fundamental perspective and delineation of a Unesco nomination. Based on the perspective it is then easier to find real stakeholders who can shoulder the task.

### **Academic phase**

The fundamental delineation and deepening of a Unesco nomination lends itself ideally to a first phase of research. There should be ample opportunities to interest doctoral candidates, researchers, authors and university and academy students in further study around the Amsterdam School theme, with the perspective on for instance heritage analysis, city sociology, social housing, urban planning and architecture. In this early phase it is wise to look at many perspectives, because it may be opportune later in the Unesco heritage path to change perspective, and then the fundamental basis for that has already been established.

### **Role for housing corporations**

Housing corporations obviously deserve a prominent place in the coalition, initially as registrar and supervisor of the aforementioned studies. Later in the presentation there will come a phase where their interests in social housing and management of the Amsterdam School will stand out ever more prominently. The contacts with the corporations are good and their interest for the cultural value of their proprietorship is great. They will be important partners in the ongoing path.

### **City Council as anchor**

The City of Amsterdam will likely feel partly responsible for a successful Unesco candidature of the Amsterdam School. The already existing World Heritage Office of the city (housed at the Office of Monuments & Archeology) already let it be known that it will welcome the trajectory enthusiastically and to support it to the extent of its ability. OMA will develop ideas on how it can also warm city council to the candidature, for example by putting a target point on the horizon in due time that would span at least three council terms. When council expresses its commitment there will indeed also be a substantial administrative function, or anchoring, for the whole adventure. Beside the analysis of heritage values, the advancement of these in the implementation of tangible projects can become anchored in a management plan. The (long) period of preparation can be used to shape such a plan via interaction between the aforementioned academic phase and the commitment of corporations and city (quarter).

### **Support in city and country**

Beside an political commitment it is important to keep feeding and expanding the love for the Amsterdam School. Initiatives aimed at public opinion and the vocational world are very important for this. Though should be given to information, education, public campaigns for fund raising for the expansion of the museum of the Amsterdam School, as well as the use of digital media such as the [Platform Wendingen](#).

### **Passionate and involved experts**

In conclusion there is the equally valued and distinguished assembly at this expert meeting in the Jewel of Amsterdam. This assembly let it be clearly known that it wants to remain involved with the fortunes of the coming Unesco track. In roughly a year they will be invited to meet again, to act as a sounding board for advice, critical reflection and moral support.

“Without effort nothing .....” Hildo Krop, Sculptor (1923)

## **Invited Experts**

Etc.

## ***Colophon***

### **Production:**

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#### **Remaining Photos:**

**This document can be downloaded from:**

[WENDINGEN](#), platform for the Amsterdam School,

A website of Museum [Het Schip](#)