

THE EXPORTATION OF DUTCH SOCIAL HOUSING

H. HERTZBERGER IN THE INTERNATIONALE BAUAUSSTELLUNG (IBA), BERLIN

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Introduction

The International Building Exhibition (Internationale Bausstellung, or IBA) was begun in 1979 as a government sponsored initiative to demonstrate to Western Germany and to the world, the potential quality of housing in the inner city. Based on the theme "The Inner City as a Place to Live," over 170 different projects have been constructed. These are predominantly housing, but all address the physical quality of life issues that contribute to complex and dense urban living conditions.

Dutch Social housing has had a substantial influence in the latter half of the twentieth century, particularly in northern Europe. Herman Hertzberger's LiMa housing project in the IBA, is an example of the exportation of a social housing approach under the operation of a governmental/ political policy.

The authorized governmental body of the IBA, Bauausstellung Berlin, set its primary mission to build back the portions of the city that had either never been rebuilt after the second world war or to invigorate sectors in decline. This was a bold governmental initiative that proved not only successful but prophetic. No where in the later half of the twentieth century had so many architects attempted to rediscover/redefine urban housing. Or what Joseph Kliehues refers to as "Critical Reconstruction."

The greatest emphasis of the IBA was on the urban planning concerns, not on the individual buildings. For the profession, it is an opportunity for study at both scales. There are projects that are evidence of clear disregard for the inhabitants and users as well as examples of excellence. For a government to undertake a project of this scale and encourage the international design community to participate is a profound lesson in the role of government. The "new building" aspect of the IBA was dissolved in 1987 but the future of Berlin is forever shaped by the eight years of urban renewal and inner city housing.

The Historical Context of the Site

The IBA program was divided into six separate zones within the then divided city. These are the Tegel, Prager Platz, South Tiegarten area, South Friedrichstadt, Luisenstadt and the Kreuzberg SO. Each of these areas

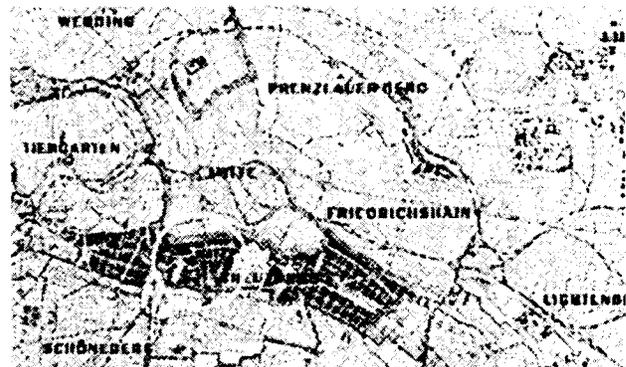


Fig. 1. South Friedrichstadt zone, Berlin. Dark grey indicates areas of the IBA. Map from *International Bauausstellung Berlin 1987, Project Report*.

have their own unique characteristics and subsequently urban planning objectives. Hertzberger's LiMa Rousing complex is located in the South Friedrichstadt zone which was almost completely destroyed at the conclusion of the Second World War in 1945. However, remnants of three successive evolutions of the area, including the old imperial capital, the extension of the medieval city and the baroque city center could still be found.

The IBA summarized its urban planning objectives as:

General aims and the revised role of South Friedrichstadt in the context of the city were laid down by the Senate: its guidelines saw the district as an inner city area with mixed use, with balanced proportions of residence, work, culture and recreation, offering a high quality of urban life.⁷

In this one zone, 2,500 living units were completed, eight elderly housing projects, two primary schools for 924 students, one special school for the speech handicaps, four child care centers, sports fields, nine playgrounds, and two local parks. Not to mention a museum addition and major road improvements. This is a brief look at the planning and architectural achievements that form the site context of Hertzberger's project.



Fig. 2. 17th-century architecture of Amsterdam. Photo by author.



Fig. 3. Amsterdam Stock Exchange by H. P. Berlage, 1929. Photo by author.

The Historical Context of Influence

Lets step back for a moment and look briefly at the historical context of influence. This too is only an introduction to a few of the issues that have contributed to a rich, successful development of some of the best social housing in the world. Any combination of these issues or the architects could be a paper in themselves. Dutch social housing dates formally back to the 1880s, but its beginnings date back 400 years prior to that. The nature of social housing is inevitably tied to the government that is financing and authorizing it. There are many motivations a government would have for housing just as there are motivations of architects in their design. The Dutch motivations come from a sense of equity and tolerance for diversity of its inhabitants and the desire to house the people in limited land area leaving land for farming and general control of the sea.

The Netherlands was born from seven of an original 17 provinces. These seven rose up against the tyranny of Spain who controlled them for over 80 years. Spain represented everything the Dutch have grown to hate; central government, coercion and intolerance. The Netherlands was in fact formed with no central government, no king, no emperor or titled head of state. Tolerance was born from a group resistance to the power of the sea and a generalized agreement that conflicts were to take place within a certain framework. Absolutely no individualistic demands were to affect unity in times of group need. From earliest time, tolerance was a question of survival.

Tolerance, not just as an ideology but an operational concept has permeated the Dutch way of life for over 500 years. Desiderius Erasmus (1469-1536) wrote of his advocacy of mildness, goodwill and moderation. A Dutch historian wrote that:

"there was a deep Erasmian spirit which permeated the class of municipal magistrates, who before long were to set the tone and to give leadership in the established republic. Probably no other aristocracy has ever governed a state so well and with so little coercion. During the seventeenth century the republic provided the foreigner with a much-

admired example of institutions born of prosperity, care for the poor and social discipline. Credit for this must be given to the social patriarchy in which the voice of the Erasmian spirit of social responsibility can be heard."

An attitude about Dutch architecture emerged in 1645 when Jacob van Campen was commissioned to design an Amsterdam Town Hall. The design was both impressive and monumental, suitable to hold its own with other European masterpieces. However the Dutch of Amsterdam could not relate to its ostentatiousness and relinquished the property and never returned to it. The building was not in keeping with the moderation of Erasmus and the ideal of justice for all. Centralism and monumentality are two concepts that don't fit the country of Erasmus. The Dutch still have no interest in a show of military power or parades, state ceremonies or personal glorification, including statues.

Dutch architecture freed itself from the historicism and eclecticism of the nineteenth century and opened its way to 20th century architecture through the medium of H.P. Berlage's rationalist philosophy.

Social housing reached an early height in the work of H.P. Berlage. Prior to Berlage, the most noted architect was P.H. Cuypers. His work was primarily imitations of 18th and 19th century styles. Berlage went in of his own way of working.

He is well regarded as having set in motion a new era in town planning and social housing. Until then architects saw themselves above social housing. His projects exhibit balconies and roof terraces and parks. The edges of his buildings responded to light, differentiation and a sensitivity for public-private issues.

Berlage was the teacher of three young architects who became what is now known as The Amsterdam School. These architects, P. Kramer, M. de Klerk and J.M. van der Meij introduced into the Dutch architecture, following the intentions of their teacher Berlage, an "architectural truth." This truth was revealed in the interior spatial divisions which must be perceptible on the building's exterior, and materials must be joined carefully and made clear and comprehensible visually.

Amsterdam School architects gave a prominent place to curved wall masses, stoops, hoists and multi-paneled windows. Simultaneous with this movement was the emphasis of an artist, Theo van Doesburg and his magazine *DE STIJL*. Along with the furniture designer and architect, Gerrit Rietveld and the artist Piet Mondrian, clear rational, spatial, concepts emerged. These brought architectural space to the forefront of the culture.

Development of Concepts and Principles

It was during this time that several physical characteristics were developed. These were more along the lines of concerns, not recipe archetypes and can be summarized as:

1. Advocacy planning and construction ... participation by the users
2. *Front door mechanism* connection to street, a sense of identity and individuality within the group
3. 2 sides daylight, providing a sense of transparency
4. Balconies, roof terraces, semiprivate connection to the world
5. Entries or inner court for activity and security.
6. Animated edge, building as giving something to the life of the street.

Beginning with the generation educated under Berlage, it was in the 1920s that the expressionist architect's School of Amsterdam and functionalists' De Opbouw group in Rotterdam were formed. Eventually, both went into CIAM; while the strongly traditionalist, conservative Delft School remained an important force in the country. After the second World war, Dutch architecture set about the task of reconstruction committed to the ideals of modernism. But the departure of Team X from CIAM in 1953 determined the subsequent direction of architecture in Holland; and it was from this context that there emerged the architects Aldo Van Eyck, Jacob Bakema and Herman Hertzberger. In 1959 they worked out a new orientation through their collaboration on the magazine *Forum*, which Hertzberger joined immediately after graduating from the Technical University of Delft at the invitation of Van Eyck. Hertzberger was never a student of Van Eyck's but rather a close colleague.

Their practical concepts of residence, identification, individuality and modularity were in clear opposition to the CIAM Athens Charter. Van Eyck and Hertzberger formulated critical concerns that became the foundations of an indigenous theory of architectural structuralism. Looking to Berlage's principles of structural rationalism, functionality of materials and simplicity of design, Hertzberger draws from the wellspring of Dutch modernism. Kenneth Frampton writes of van Eyck:

Van Eyck's thoughts are the underlying assumption that the modern world can only be endured if it is constantly challenged and that this existential critique is in itself a creative act. For Van Eyck and Hertzberger alike the critical intellectual is a militant who is engaged in a perpetual struggle against the perennial positivism of industrialized society ... Van Eyck strove to combine Levi-Strauss' structural anthropology with Sartre's existentialism in so doing to posit an anthropologically oriented architecture



Fig. 4. Housing by M. de Klerk. Amsterdam 1921. Photo by author.



Fig. 5. 1920s Amsterdam Housing entry. Photo by author.

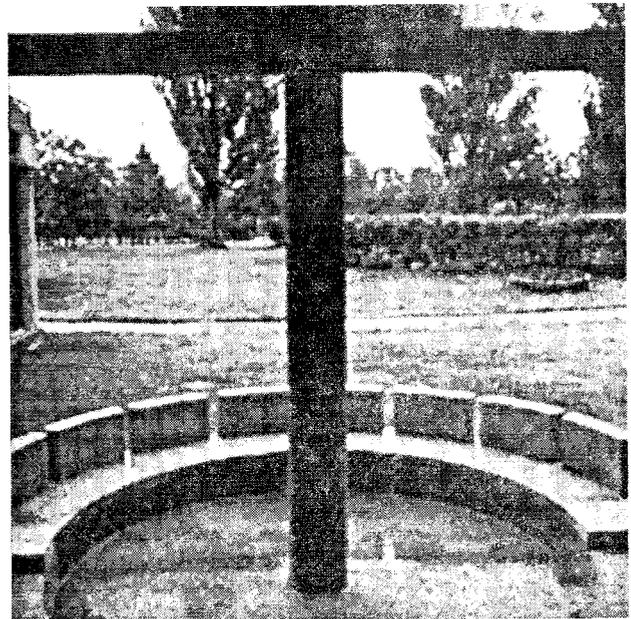


Fig. 6. Weeshuis Orphanage by Aldo Van Eyck, 1960. Photo by author.

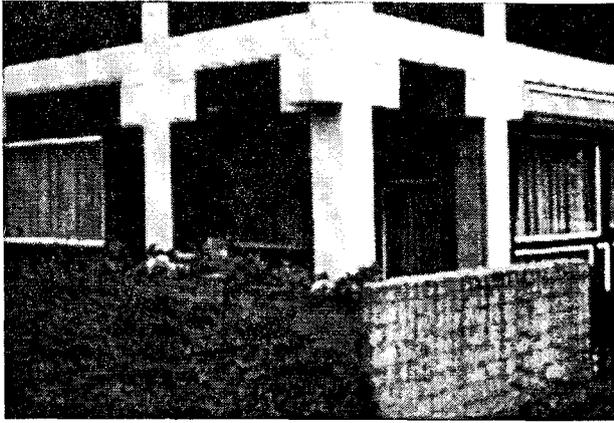


Fig. 7. *de Overloop Elderly Housing* by Herman Hertzberger. Photo by author.

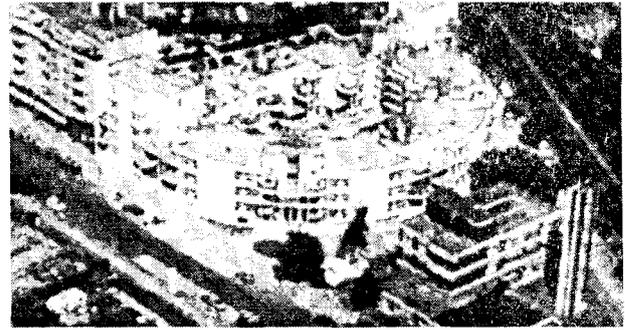


Fig. 8. *The LiMa Housing Complex*. Photo from: *International Bauausstellung Berlin 1987, Project Report*, p. 181.

... Van Eyck committed himself implicitly to the necessity of 'place-creation' in all architecture and in so doing espoused the belief that a place-oriented environment has to be structured in terms of "twin-phenomena."⁴

Van Eyck states that the two contradictory principles governing human nature are "the individual and the collective." These should not be viewed as antagonistic opposites but rather as "ambivalent and together form a twin-phenomena." He extended this thought in an almost political manner, "Today the architect is the ally of every man or no man."⁹ Van Eyck further discusses details of the critical concerns mentioned earlier:

I have been busy for some years now reevaluating the notion of transparency in the light of that other notion—enclosure—... Response through mimicry is fainthearted and in every way futile. That is why the "typology" addicts of today are such a liability ... Entry takes place where old and new meet ... By reducing the floor area upwards from floor to floor, i.e. stepping back the volume, sun and air penetrate deep into the building, while loggias and roof terraces result. Buildings in general (those along an urban street no less) should be populated externally, so that nobody feels tucked away behind walls and windows, cut off from the world outside... A glass roofed internal "street" feeds the five children's departments from above, bringing extra light into the rooms. After dark, parents watching from above see movement along it.⁹

Those quotes succinctly summarize, not comprehensively, but rather selectively, essential elements of van Eyck's structuralist philosophy, Hertzberger further expands these practical concepts by emphasizing the responsibility that users can exert love and care on public areas of their dwellings, and consequently the investment will payoff. Therefore, *the users become the inhabitants*.⁵ At LiMa housing, the inhabitants hung signs off their balconies exclaiming their pride of ownership. This ownership issue is further explained as a powerful concept

that affects the design at all scales.

Houses and streets are complementary. If the houses are private domains, then the street is the public domain. ... If you enter a place gradually, the front door is divested of its significance as a single and abrupt moment: it is extended, as it were to form a step-by-step sequence of areas which are not yet explicitly inside but also less explicitly public. ... Just as important as the disposition of the residential units vis a vis each other is the fenestration, the placement of bay windows, corner windows to view in two directions, balconies, terraces, landings, doorsteps, porches—whether they have the correct proportions and how they are spatially organized—all to gain ownership of and responsibility for the public realm, the street. It is always a question of finding the right balance to enable the residents to withdraw into privacy when they want to but also to seek contact with others.⁵

De Overloop elderly housing complex (1980-84) in Amsterdam South, is an excellent example of these issues. In addition, Kenneth Frampton says his intrinsic ties to Dutch tradition and the Amsterdam School and Prewar Dutch Constructivism are shown in his concrete skeletons, detailing of metal stairs and canopies all similar to the work of Johannes Duiker in the open air school built in Amsterdam in 1930. Hertzberger is further regarded as regional because:

[H]is clear relationship to the long standing Dutch collective tradition, of their capacity, as a people to act in unison to an equal degree against the rapacious invasions of the sea and the acquisitive proclivities of men.⁴

In 1989, Herman Hertzberger won the Berliner Architekturpreis for the 48 unit LiMa housing project. This project is located at one end of a triangular plot, adjacent to a church. The form, shown above, creates a courtyard and its own neighborhood. The courtyard is radically different than the depressing traditional Berlin courtyard and is conceived as a public space with six pedestrian access routes, including connections with both the street and the neighboring courtyard.⁵ The

center of the courtyard is marked by a segmented sand-pit play area which was decorated with mosaics along the curved sides by the resident families.

The LiMa housing estate features the following elements, most previously mentioned:

1. Advocacy planning and construction ... participation by the users
2. *Front door mechanism* connection to street
3. 2 sides of daylight per unit increasing transparency
4. Balconies, roof terraces with semiprivate connection to the world. Hertzberger writes with regard to this:

using elementary principles of spatial organization it is possible to introduce a great many gradations of seclusion and openness. The degree of seclusion, like the degree of openness, must be very carefully dosed, so that the conditions are created for a great variety of contacts ranging from ignoring those around you to wanting to be together, so that people can, in spatial terms anyway, place themselves vis a vis others as they choose. Also the individuality of all must of course be respected as much as possible, and we must indeed see to it that the constructed environment never imposes social contact, but at the same time we must never impose the absence of social contact either.

5. Entries or inner court for activity and security.
6. Animated edge, building as giving something to the life of the street.

LiMa housing is an excellent example of the exportation of structural regionalism and the influence of traditional Dutch social housing illustrated both conceptually and physically. It has rejuvenated Berlin housing as an urban planning participant, rather than a silent occupier of

space. This case study reflects the political, historical and consequential influences that bind together governmental actions, international influence, and architectural consequence.

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