New Urban Squares

Documentation for 10 urban squares recently designed in the Netherlands.

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An optional thesis about urban squares in contemporary Dutch cities

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Preface

Dutch cities are aiming to improve their image by investing in public squares. Precisely these open spaces give the built environment their meaning, function and character. They provide a breathing space within the structure of a city. Squares are also the most important element of city design. In the Netherlands, designing new squares or redesigning existing ones is one of the most delightful tasks in design for architects, urban planners and landscape architects.

However, as a foreigner student at the School of Landscape Architecture at Wageningen University, I am interested in studying and describing the contemporary Dutch experience in designing urban squares. My interest began during International Studio, an introductory course about the Dutch landscape and urban design at the regional and local levels. As a result of this class, I began to wonder what the design characteristic of contemporary Dutch urban squares designs was. Therefore, I decided to do an optional thesis about Dutch urban squares in the form of a documentation thesis.

This study is a result of 5 months' work in which I documented 10 urban squares in the Netherlands and the Dutch way of thinking about these urban spaces. As a result of visiting, observing, photographing and drawing these public squares, I have described the role and new form of public spaces in contemporary Dutch urban life.

I started my research in the Publishing House 'Schip van Blauw". For one month, I read the 'Jaarboek Commissie' entries for the years 1995 to 2003. These entries gave me a broad overview of the Dutch practice of landscape architecture. The 'Jaarboek Commissie' entries are collected and classified every three years and to published in the 'Landscape architecture and town planning in the Netherlands' book. Next, I collected the relevant literature and publications about Dutch urban squares. Then I interviewed the relevant designers and experts. However, I feel it is important to mention that reading the Dutch text was an obstacle, but, needless to say, I gained deep insight into each case study through the literature. I gathered also information via phone calls, letters and emails that were sent to the offices which designed the selected squares.

During my thesis, I was helped by a number of people whom I would like to thank for their support. First of all I would like to thank Frank de Josseling de Jong, the master's study advisor who guided me and introduced me to 'Schip van Blauw' Publishing House. Secondly, I am grateful to Harry Harsema and Mark Hendriks who hosted me in Schip van Blauw and gave me access to all the 'Jaarboek Commissie' entries and Blauwe Kamer publications and even their own library. Furthermore Thanks also go to all offices that responded to my requests and gave the material I requested. Finally, I would like to thank my thesis advisor Sanda Lenzholzer whom I consider my true study supervisor during my master's study in the landscape architecture program.

13 December 2005
Shady Attia

Summary:

New squares in the Netherlands

It is claimed that Dutch squares have no symbolic meaning or characteristics like in southern Europe. In the Netherlands, urban squares are only used for functional activities. Until the beginning of the 1980s and before the introduction of café terraces or the 'terrasje' culture, the urban squares were only used as 'marktpleinen' or market squares. However, this study concludes that almost all the design strategies tried to introduce spacious empty squares. In each example, the design of the squares attempted to allow several activities, accentuate the dynamics of squares and stimulate an active urban life. However, despite the high quality of materials and objects and the effort shown in creating an attractive image of squares, many Dutch urban squares are missing a sense of place and meaning and therefore remain empty.

The main aim of this thesis was to provide a simple overview that describes the trends applied during the design of Dutch urban squares in the last 10 years. The first selection criterion for the urban square was based on their location in cities and attachment to pedestrian areas which mean consequently laying in city centres. Secondly, the classification of the case studies was based on their architectural and social identity. As mentioned before, the object of this thesis was to present selected examples of public spaces designs as well as projects illustrating developments in the area of public space architecture. The material presented here was compiled during the years 1995-2003. This study was divided into four parts: (1) Theoretical Orientation, (2) Development of urban squares in the Netherlands, (3) 10 public spaces: Examples of recently designed Dutch urban squares, (4) Conclusion.

In the first chapter, the theoretical orientation of the research was introduced. The research structure was discussed including the research objectives and limitations. The research methodology and way of analysing the selected squares was also illustrated.

Chapter 2 basically describes the history of Dutch squares, functions, evolution, and the difference between the squares in the Netherlands and countries like France, Spain or Italy.

In chapter 3, different analytical method of (1) the square's use and activities, (2) form and proportion, (3) access and context, (4) volume and space, (5) symbolism, (6) greenery and furniture were illustrated through studies of 10 square designs in 10 cities. For each of the squares selected, first a plan of the space was drawn in a scale of 1:1,000. Maps were also drawn showing the city and the surrounding areas in comparable scales. Secondly, each square was described based on its architectural and social identity. Finally each square was criticized using the *Project for Public Spaces* evaluation criteria.

The concluding chapter summarizes problems facing the squares designers in the Netherlands. Problems include the architectural context, greenery, street furniture, materials, and most importantly the 'Void' concept. The prognosis that Dutch cities will raise the density of the built environment will make it necessary to adopt renewal and improvement policies. These policies should achieve a coherence of the square's visual quality and above all improve the sense of place, the sense of meaning and consider squares as places for the people.

Content

Introduction:

What would a town be without squares? It is precisely these open spaces which give the built environment its meaning, function and character. Squares provide a breathing space within the structure of the city. They are the stage for urban actors, the heart of the political and social life of an urban community. Open air and multifunctional squares are always unique and more strongly defined by their surroundings than buildings.

In the Netherlands, many Old Dutch squares find their origin in the middle ages and at the time take gradually their form. Squares developed in a more or less organic way. The physical context plays in it a large role. Soil conditions, roads, rivers and dykes beside the existing major buildings[1]. Before they were architecturally designed, they had already existed as a result of the grown infrastructure. Or else they evolved because other functions had becomes meaningless. Many Dutch squares were gaps in the road or street network and gave the visitors the feeling of spatial closeness. The square attracted many people due to markets, parades, executions and other events which took place in squares and grew up to be the centre of the city and the urban life.

After World War II, many cities were occupied by rebuilding themselves. Over 70 per cent of the built environment has come about since the Second World War[2] but still there was no concern about public spaces. Later the traffic load was so present so that the children couldn't play on streets. Above all, people had free time which raised the demand and importance of open spaces. In the time of renewing of cities in short time grew the need for green and recreational chanced or opportunities. This implied that in many places new squares were created or old squares were renewed. Public space architecture has been under constant development ever since and a very great number of new or renovated public spaces were created in the last quarter of the 20th century. Now the 1990s building boom is over. The recently designed squares needs to be studied closely especially that the Netherlands is aiming to densely compress the built environment during the coming years. A new development in designing public squares should grow to face the busy city centres train station areas.

The object of this thesis is to present selected examples of public spaces designs as well as projects illustrating developments in the area of public space architecture. The material presented here was compiled during the years 1995-2003. This study is divided into four parts: (1) Theoretical Orientation, (2) Historical development of urban squares in the Netherlands, (3) 10 public spaces: Examples of recently designed Dutch urban squares, (4) Discussion.

This study presents the most attractive squares which have been recently designed in the Netherlands. It contains examples of Rotterdam, Den Haag, Amsterdam and other Dutch cities. The documentation of ten plans for urban squares in the Netherlands does not only give an impression of the plans but also reveals a change in the way we are thinking about urban spaces.

1. Theoretical Orientation
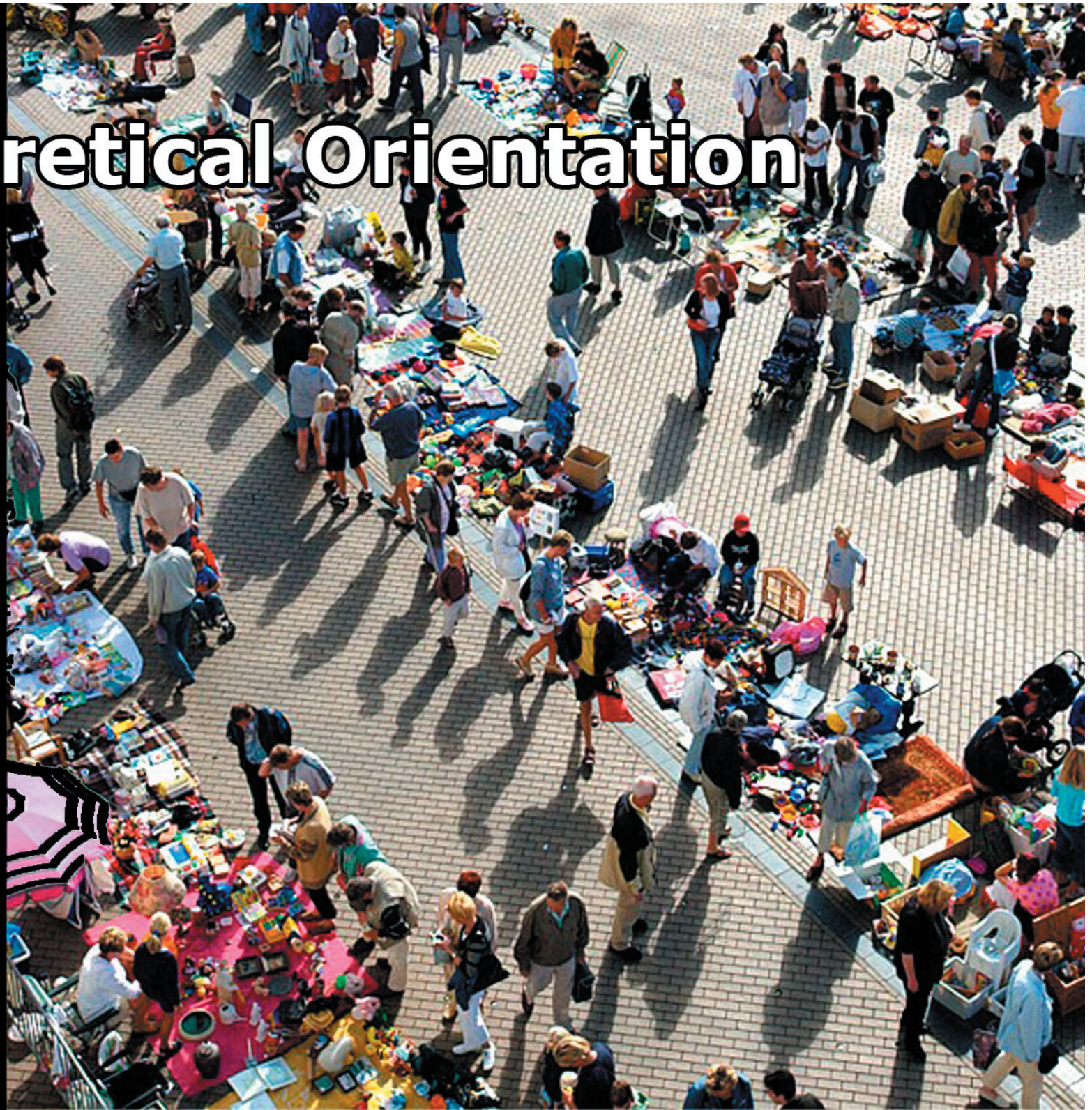
Chapter 1: Theoretical Orientation

1.1 The aim of scientific research

Some views see a thesis as a piece of scholarly enquiry, deliberately limited in scope, but perfectly executed. The other view of a thesis is that it is a worthwhile learning experience. These two views might be better regarded as two extremes of a scale, and that in reality a thesis will often exhibits characteristic of both models. In either case a thesis is seen as a training programme which is designed to demonstrate competence as a researcher within a limited field. [3]

1.2 Research topic

Public space and public life in Dutch cities has been under constant development and a very great number of new renovated public spaces were created in the last 15 years. The research topic of this study is to present selected examples of urban squares strategies as well as projects illustrating developments in the area of public squares.

1.3 Research questions & objective

The general objective of this study is to develop as full as possible an understanding of 'Dutch Squares Design Tendencies' by documenting and analyzing ten urban squares in detail. In order to guide the research a main general research question need to be answered:

- What are the characteristics of the designed urban squares?

The following more specified question will steer the research on a more detailed level:

- What are the functions and uses of the selected squares?
- In which shapes, forms and sizes are the designs?
- What is the relation between the squares and their surroundings?
- How are the hardscapes and Plants designed?
- What are the problems of the squares?

1.4 Case Studies selection Criteria

Before viewing the entries of the 'Jaarboek Commissie' and 'Blauwe Kamer' I tried to figure out the selection for criteria for these projects. Later on I discovered that the selection criterion was simply based on the quality of the designs. Fons Asselbergs, the chairman of the foundation of the book of Landscape architecture and town planning in the Netherlands, was repeating Alle Hosper's saying during the selection of the projects of the last five books. Alle Hosper, who presented the first book, was looking for projects that fulfil the meaning of the following sentence:' *de vakbeoefening moet op een hoger plan gebracht worden*' [4] which means that the practice of the profession must be brought up to a higher level.

After the determination of the *Jaarboek's* criteria I decided to draw up my own criteria. First of all, the urban square should be a case that I could learn from. Secondly, it should be recently designed, which means in the range of the last years. Then, the project should be located in a city and with a relatively large number of visitors. Next, the square should be as possible attached to pedestrian area which means consequently laying in the centre and it would be preferred that the square has been referred to in literature. However, the project should not be a 'Stationplein' or train station square and should not be located in residential or industrial areas. Finally the squares which met the criteria were listed as shown in table 1.1.

Table 1.1 including the selected squares.

Name	Location	Designer
Heuvelplein	Tilburg	Dieder en Dirrix
Schouwburgplein	Rotterdam	West 8
Statenplein	Dordrecht	MTD
Grote Markt	Almere	B+B
Neude	Utrecht	West 8
Marktplein	Appeldorn	B+B
Marktplein	Hengelo	Juurlink en Geluk
Museum plein	Amsterdam	Sven-Ingvar Andersson
Van Heek plein	Enschede	Okra
Spuiplein	Den Haag	Juan Bosquets, **Ingenieursbureau DH**

1.5 Research limits

As mentioned before, the research objective is aiming to document a large number of urban squares in order to achieve a wide view of the existing squares design. This study is not aiming to evaluate the case studies. As a foreigner researcher I focused on the variety and diversity of the designs. Therefore the research is generating a 'horizontal' or broad knowledge overview, which means that two major aspects will be beyond the research limits.

The first aspect is historical. That includes tracing the historical development of the square chronological, for example, the meaning of the square's name or the functions of the square in the past and even the development of the surrounding buildings.

The second aspect is social, including the sociability and identity of the squares. It is meant here to conduct detailed investigations about the visitor's visual and physiological perception or the meaning and attractiveness of the square.

The above mentioned aspects were not totally neglected during the research, but they were not in the research focus. I interviewed several visitors in all case studies, collected information on the historical development of the square and even checked for other aspects like the thermal comfort or safety. But in order to achieve the research objective these aspects had less priority during the research.

1.6 Research Methodology

This case study was focusing on analysing individual cases. All data relevant to the cases was gathered and organized. A detailed analysis was overlooking for many specific details. The work was carried out in the stages following five steps:
1. Literature Review
2. Study visits and description
3. Analysis
4. Interviews
5. Criticism

1.1.1. Literature Review
As a first step for the research and after selecting the squares, an extensive research through magazines and books on the subject and on each square was conducted.

1.6.2 Study visit and description
The study trips were the basic source to describe the squares. Each square was described by two ways, visually and by text. The visual description is based on Drawings (plans, and sections) and photographs.

While the text description was focusing on two aspects: (1) the architectural identity and (2) the social identity. The description started by a short background for each square and was followed by an architectural description and was ended with social description. Each square description followed the points shown in table 1.2.

Table 1.2 including architectural and social description aspects.

Background	
Location	
Former history	
Architectural identity	**Social identity**
Area	Function and activities
Zucker's classification	Market-festival-kermes-visitors
Form, edges and composition	Street surroundings
Settings, organization and spatial unity	Symbolism
Garage and pavement	Landmark
Furniture- benches– trees- lighting	
Surroundings and façade style	
Height and roof line	
Proportions	
Landmark	

1.6.3 Analysis

In order to study the selected squares it was important to follow an analytical method. Previous studies were carried out in landscape architecture following an analytical method, e.g., *The Image of the City* by Kevin Lynch[5] and *The View from the Road* by Donald Appelyard[6] and Kevin Lynch. But I was influenced by the recently developed method developed by Lodwijk Baljon. Lodwijk Baljon's[7] method analysed fifty urban park designs submitted for the '*Concourse International: Parc de la Villette'*. His analysis consists of four successive decompositions: firstly, the decomposition of the park as a graphic composition; secondly, the decomposition of the layout and the spatial coherence of the park; thirdly, the decomposition of the design principles; and, fourthly, the analysis of the styling of the design. All the samples are originally submitted for the competition of the Parc de la Villette, which are designed on the same site and based on the same assignment.

Despite the large differences between Baljon's parc analysis and this case study, I found a point of reference in his second phase of the decomposition, which focuses on the layout and the spatial coherence. Like Baljon's analytical method I layered each square into 6 maps: (1) the square's use and activities, (2) its form and proportion, (3) access and context, (4) volume and space, (5) symbolism, (6) greenery and furniture.

Use and activity
Activities in any square are important for its vitality. The multi functions of the square and its success of being currently used by people confirms its social role. Squares are primary considered as places for meeting people. By observing the uses and activities taking place on squares an indication about the squares characteristic and features is shown.

Form and proportion
The form and proportion of the square are one of the basic concepts for analysing squares. The different forms of the square and the proportion between the dimensions of rectangles, triangles or even trapezes create the visual image of the square. The surrounding building and the setting of the square determine the squares form and proportion on a three dimensional level.

Access and context
Accessibility is one of the most important issues in the square design. It shows the relation of the square and its surrounding. Linkage is important in creating a functional coherence and spatial connection between the inside and outside.
Moreover, the spatial context could be studied by recognizing the prominent points, lines and edges which improves sense of orientation and perception in the square.

Volume and space
Volume and space are important qualities for a square. They give different experiences and create the identity of the space[8]. Spatiality is based on the visibility of the square as a room. The space of the square is combined of volumes and voids. Volumes and voids are sharply contrasted and are different to read from the ground- plan.

Symbolism
Architecture as the conveyer of meaning is related to the coherence of images, atmospheres and meaning. The perception of the form

also contains the possibility of assigning meaning and of symbolism. The associative meaning of form and materials fulfils an important function in landscape architecture, for this determines to a considerable extent what people are able to imagine in a square and what a designer seek to convey with square.

Greenery and furniture
It is meant by furniture, pavement, water works, art objects, seats and even lighting elements. Greenery and square furniture are basic if not the most important design elements of squares. By examining these elements based on their use, functionality and meaning, a detailed analysis and better understanding will be achieved.

1.6.4 Interview
Because people see and interpret things differently, interviewing is an important tool to confirm opinions. In this study interviews were conducted to know the people's opinion about the squares during the study trips. (see appendix I)

1.6.5 Criticism
In order to criticize the ten selected squares I referred to the *Project for Public Spaces* evaluation criteria. Project for Public Spaces (PPS) is a non-profit organization dedicated to creating public places that build communities. Based on their criteria they found four key qualities to evaluate squares. The Place Diagram helps to judge any place. (Figure 1.1)

The evaluation of the square has been made is according to four criteria in the orange ring. In the ring outside these main criteria are a number of qualitative aspects by which to judge a square; the next outer ring shows the quantitative aspects that can be measured by statistics or research.

In this phase of the research and because this study is not focusing on squares evaluation, I just used the qualitative aspects of (PPS) evaluation criteria as a guide to draw my criticism. The following aspect guided me during the criticism phase.

Fig 1.1, The (PPS) evaluation criteria.

1. **User and activities**
Flexibility, formal and informal qualities
2. **Access and linkage**
Sense of entry, connectivity and accessibility
3. **Comfort and image**
Cleanness, walk ability, safety, appearance and image ability, cleanliness and maintenance, things to look at, surroundings, art, attractiveness, thermal comfort, shade and trees.
4. **Sociability**
Seating, friendly and welcoming
5. **Design innovation and quality**

1.7 Research Map

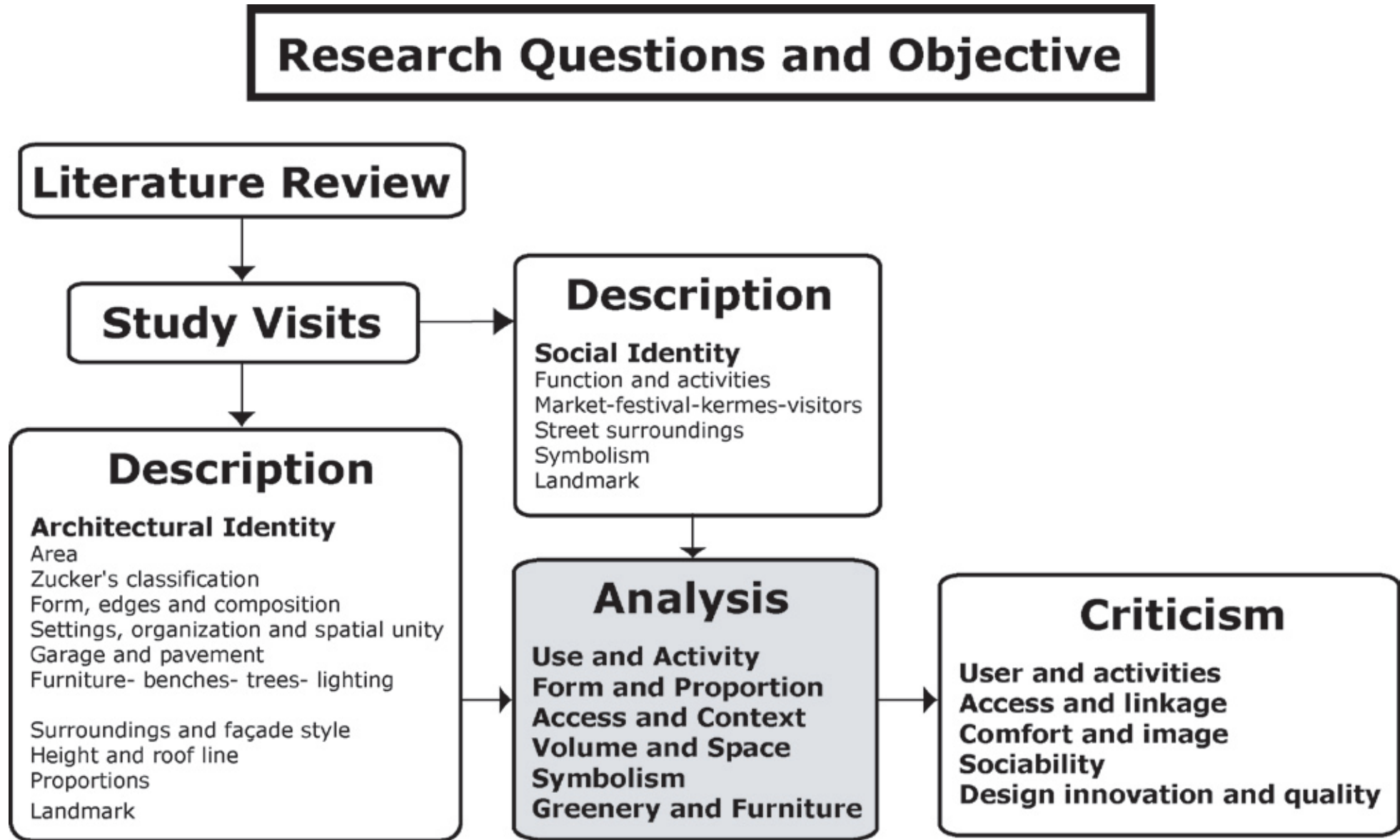The research was carried out in stages following the shown frame work.(Fig. 1.2)

Research Questions and Objective

Literature Review

Study Visits

Description

Social Identity
Function and activities
Market-festival-kermes-visitors
Street surroundings
Symbolism
Landmark

Description

Architectural Identity
Area
Zucker's classification
Form, edges and composition
Settings, organization and spatial unity
Garage and pavement
Furniture- benches- trees- lighting

Surroundings and façade style
Height and roof line
Proportions
Landmark

Analysis

Use and Activity
Form and Proportion
Access and Context
Volume and Space
Symbolism
Greenery and Furniture

Criticism

User and activities
Access and linkage
Comfort and image
Sociability
Design innovation and quality

Fig. 1.2 showing the research methodology.

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Chapter 1: References

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(5) Appleyard, D. ; Lynch, K. ; Myer, J.R., **The View From the Road**, 1964, Cambridge.

(6) Lynch, K., **The image of the city,** 1960, Cambridge, Mass.

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2. Development of Squares

Chapter 2: Development of Squares

2.1. Definition of Square:

Squares are the most important element of city design[1]. They are grounds for confrontation between people and people's ideas. Squares are concentration points of social life where people come together and meet and meet and amuse and entertain. The word 'square' brings to mind, social, traditional and philosophical considerations. The word 'square' or 'piazza' had always different terms during historical periods, e.g, *forum, raum, antrum, kortos* and *platea*. In literature squares were differently, the list below include some definitions:

Kevin Lynch (1981): "The plaza is intended as an activity focus, at the heart of some intensive urban area. Typically, it will be paved, enclosed by high-density structures, and surrounded by streets, or in contact with them. It contains features meant to attract groups of people and to facilitate meetings…'[2]

Clare Cooper Marcus (1990): "A plaza is a mostly hard-surfaced, outdoor public space from which cares are excluded. Its main function is as place for strolling, sitting, eating and watching the world go by. Unlike a side walk, it is a place in its own right rather than a space to pass through. Although there, we have defined the square may be trees, flowers, or ground cover in evidence, the predominant ground surface is hard; if grass and planted areas exceed the amount of hard surface, we have defined the space as a park rather than a plaza."[3]

Cliff Moughtin (1992): "Square or plaza is both an area framed by buildings and an area designed to exhibit its buildings to the greatest advantage."[4]

Whatever the differences between the previous definitions, the square will stay a place where people meet and amuse and feel that they belong to. The square is a place that has functional uses and also it is a place that has a social meaning.

2.2 Uses and Types of Squares:

Dutch squares were used for different uses during history, but they have been always used as meeting place, market place and traffic space. There have been a number of attempts to classify the squares. One of the oldest Dutch classifications was made by Peteri.[5] Peteri divided the Old Dutch squares into three typologies:

- Squares as market places
- Squares as resting places
- Squares as traffic places

The classification was restricted only to the Netherlands, as he claimed and was based on the function of the squares.
Another influential classification theory was outlined by Zucker.[6] The classification was based on the form of the square. Zucker described the theory in his book "Town and Square" in 1959. The classification divided squares into the following types:

- The enclosed square where the space is self contained.
- The dominated square where the space is directed towards the main building.
- The nuclear square where the space is formed around a centre.
- The grouped square where spatial units are combined to form larger compositions.
- The amorphous square where the space is unlimited.

Rob Krier classified also the squares forms in his book 'Stadtraum in Theorie and Praxis' [7]. His study was based on analysing the squares forms in order to design squares in five steps related to the spatial context. (Fig. 2.1)
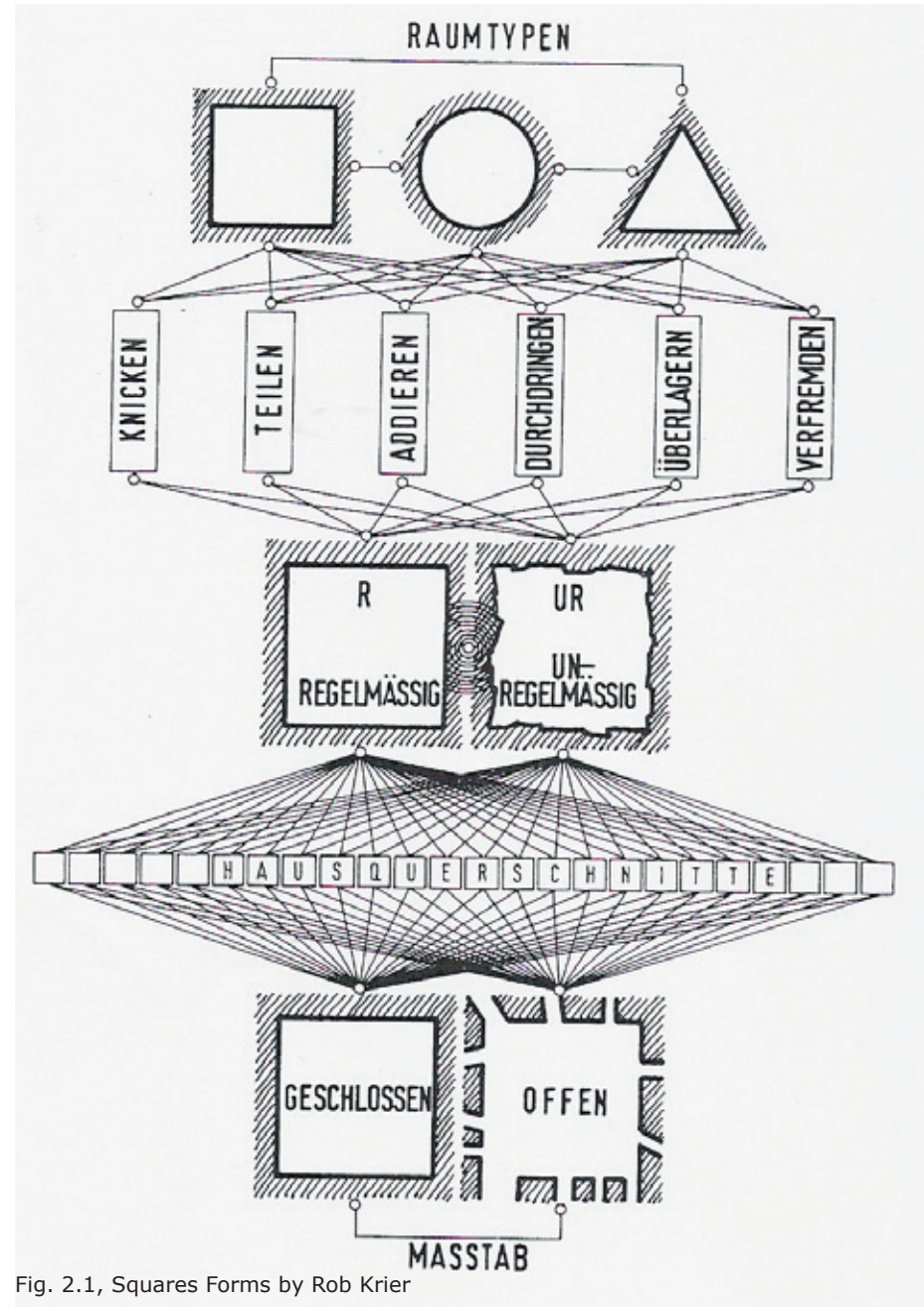
Fig. 2.1, Squares Forms by Rob Krier

2.3 Historical Background of Dutch Squares

Squares are to be found in every time. They had a function the several ages, varying from being a stage, market place, commemoration place, religious and political meeting place till being a parking place and terraces place. Squares were always places were people cross each other, meet each other and amuse.

Originally the first squares that were created took place outside the city walls. These were crossing points were common people meet each other and trade activities takes place. About 1200 – 800 before Jesus' birth, the first square in the city state *Polis* was named *Agora*, a place for gathering and consultation. Over the *Agora* came free people altogether to discuss politics. These were intensively visited public spaces in the heart of *Polis*. (Fig. 2.2)
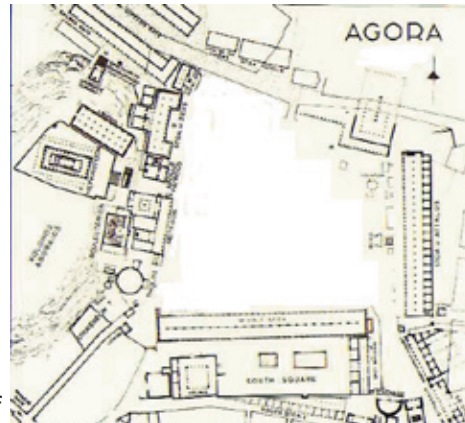
Fig. 2.2, Agora during Hellenistic Period

The *Agoras* were not specially designed, but they got their form in a process of expansion, renovation and reconstruction. As an imitation to the Greek, the Romans laid in their cities also such squares and called them *Forum* of which Rome's *Forum Romanum* is the most famous square. (Fig. 2.3)

Many Dutch squares square find their origin in the middle ages and at that time they took gradually their form, where the physical context played a major role. Many Dutch squares were gaps in the street or roads network and gave the visitors the feeling of spatial closeness. After the reformation *De Reformatie*, a big number of former
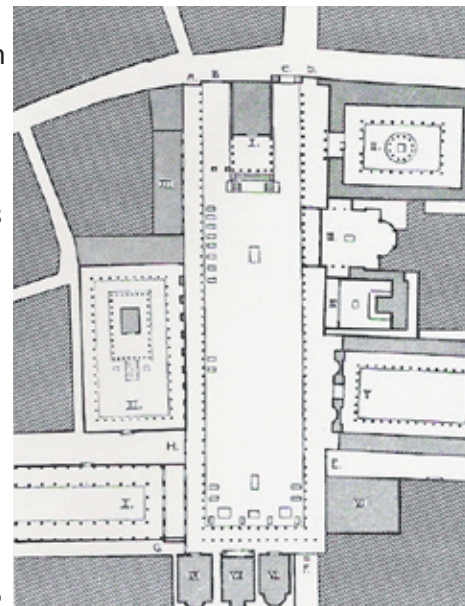
Fig. 2.3, Pompeii: The Forum. Before 79 A.D.

monasteries near city centres were deconstructed and the ground became free. The squares attracted many people due to activities like markets, parades, executions and other events which lead that the squares grew up to be centres for city life.[8]

During the Italian Renaissance squares were seen as crucial design element for the *Citta Ideale*. This means that squares were continuously and deliberately designed. The form of the square was no more determined by the physical environment but through aesthetic principals. The special square form of the middle age was modified during the Renaissance to an open square surrounded by formal buildings along side the edges while a statue or fountain is standing in the centre of the squares. These new architectonic and urbanistic ideas were hardly allowed in the Netherlands. In comparison to southern Europe, the Dutch squares had an informal character of settings. (Fig. 2.4)
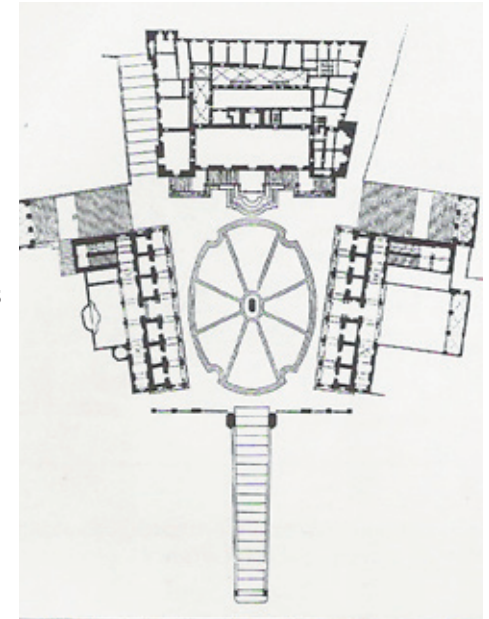
Fig. 2.4, The Campiodoglio Plan.

This had to do with the sober trade oriented Dutch mentality, during the time of the Republic of the seven united Dutch states. The wealthy economy wanted market squares and not aesthetical squares. The market located closely to water developed quickly as markets. The delivered goods were down loaded and weight before being sold. One of the four walls surrounding the square needed to be freed to achieve connectivity with water. This is one of the reasons that made Dutch squares less formal than south European squares. Facades also were made of wood which meant that facades will be changed in later ages with restyled stone facades.[9]

Even the *Place Royale* square type, developed during the French Renaissance, did not affect the Dutch history of square design, despite being spread over Europe and especially England. The monumental square which reached in France its peak was not known in the 17th and 18th century in the Netherlands. This square was marked by a geometric ground, monumental image and strong unity. It was surrounded like Italian squares by formal buildings with a fountain or statue in the centre. In the first half of the 17th century, when the Room Catholic church fell, the absolute monarchy broke up in the Netherlands which lead to a decreased importance for royal representative squares.[10] (Fig 2.5)
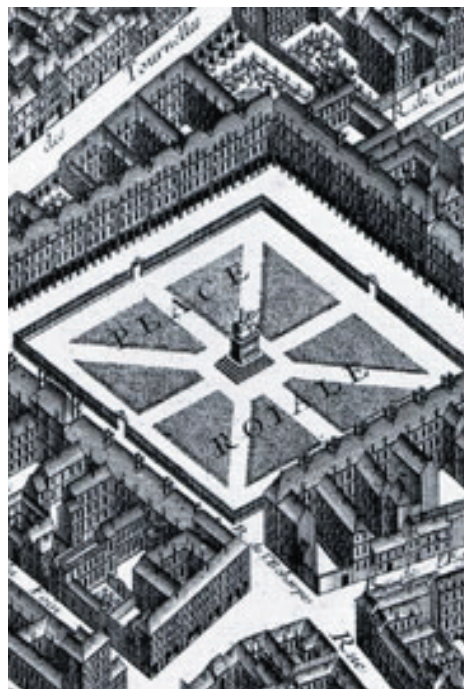
Fig. 2.5, La Place Royale, La Place des Vosges

Around the 18th century, squares were placed to improve the urban structure of cities by freeing the structure in European cities. The population growth and industrial revolution and urban expansion lead to the construction of many new urban squares as open spaces to get people out of their dense built environment. Later on the 20th century the Netherlands started to catch up. In the best cases parks were laid out in places occupied by city walls, which became useless after the 1874 *Vestignwet* law.[11]

In 1901 the housing regulation's position was strengthened. There was an explicit self awareness about the influence of polluted air on the health. The city expansion went more in a planned way and this squares obtained more central role to make cities more free and lively. The style and vision of the designers went to determine the form of squares. This was during the time period of the Garden cities in which squares and spatial and social spaces were created joining the built environment. Just the modernism broke radically this tradition. The *Congres Interantionaux d'Architecture Modern*

(CIAM) of 1928 declared: Openness, functions separation, urban cores, clustering of uses and the rationalising of construction process. Consequently Dutch designers focused on functionality, strong forms, absence of central focal point and the restrained use of materials.[12] This new paradigm hit all the big middle cities till Second World War.

After the Second World War many cities were occupied by rebuilding themselves. Still there was no concern about open spaces. Many squares were neglected for a long time and other were used as parking places or traffic points. In later years, when the number of running cars in Dutch cities increased, an enormous demand occurred for open space. Above all, people had free time, which raised the demand and importance of open spaces. In the time of renewing cities, in short time grew the need for green and recreational facilities. This implies that in many places new squares were created or old squares where enlarged.

From the end of the 70th many architects were concerned with post-modernism in the Netherlands. Many designs imitated this trend. Early examples could be seen in Almere and Houten, where we see again squares which are enclosed by buildings. A recent example is the Muzenplein in The Hague. (Fig. 2.6)

Fig. 2.6, Muzenplein, The Hague

The characters of the squares were changed and not anymore conceived as a surrounded space, while the impression of the surroundings and protection or security is often an essentiality for a good functioning square. Another feature showed in the increasing scale of the buildings surrounding the squares, which dominated the square and changed the image for the visitor.

Despite of being typical modern Dutch, the post modern influence on Dutch squares could be recognized. This is to be seen as an example of the restyling of squares in the 1990s."Commercial firms and institutions wanted to publicize their logo and municipalities also wanted to put over an attractive image" as Meto Vroom noted.[13]

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In the end of the 20th century, Dutch cities initiated new policies to push cars back and give urban life better conditions. Municipalities converted motorised traffic in city centres to traffic free city space for pedestrians. The surface of the streets and squares has been replaced with fine stone materials, and street lighting and furniture have been refined as well.

Nowadays, in the Dutch society, the daily life takes place in a private sphere, in private homes, at private computers, in private cars, at private workplaces and in strictly controlled and privatised shopping centres. There are clear signs that the city and city squares have been given a new influential role as public space and forum. In contrast to the many indirect communications and the many widespread and private spaces, the opportunity for people to use their senses and interact directly with their surroundings is becoming extremely attractive. The information society is providing new meaning and significance to the city squares as meeting place.

Chapter 2: References

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3. Dutch Urban Squares

Chapter 3: Dutch Urban Squares

This chapter contains 10 examples of urban squares. Together they give a good impression of the ideas and expressions that characterise urban squares in the Netherlands during the last years. The square were selected based on a specific selection criteria (see Chapter 1), to show various urban situations, various types of public spaces and differences in architectural expressions.

Each of the examples selected is shown in a plan in the scale 1:1000, as well 2 simplified maps showing the building context and describing the area in which the project is featured. The location of the space in the city structure is indicated in a satellite map of the city on a scale that varies with the size of the city. The background, location and history of each project are described in the key words.

De Nieuwe Heuvel, Tilburg

Marktplein, Apeldoorn

Schouwburgplein, Rotterdam

Marktplein, Hengelo

Statenplein, Dordrecht

Museumplein, Amsterdam

Grote Markt, Almere

Van Heekplein, Enschede

Neude plein, Utrecht

Spuiplein, Den Haag

De Nieuwe Heuvel, Tilburg

Location
Tilburg, the Netherlands
Design
Dirrix van Wylick
architecture office
Commissioned by
City of Tilburg
Area
10 000m²
Design Period
1996

51 10', 5 05'

Fig. 3.01, Willem II Statue, Heuvel Plein Tilburg
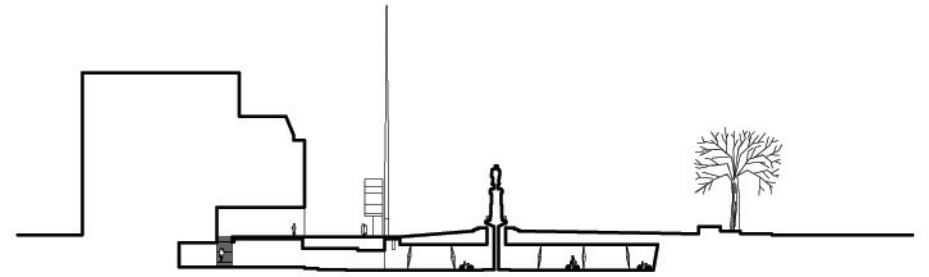
Tilburg

De Nieuwe Heuvel

De Nieuwe Heuvel
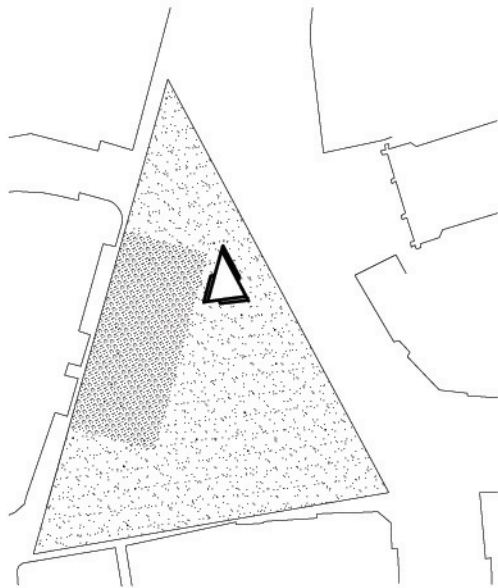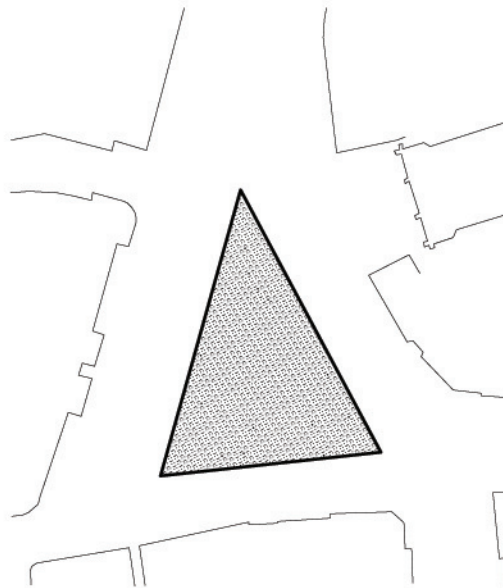
N   10   20   30 meters

1:1000

Use and Activity

Form and Proportion

Access and Context

Volume and Space

Symbolism

Trees and Furniture

21
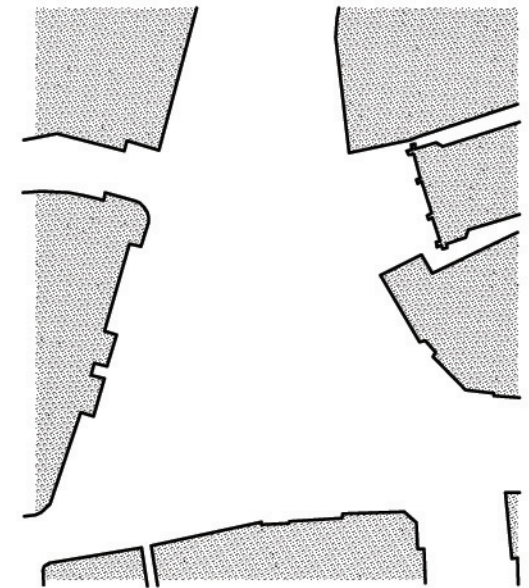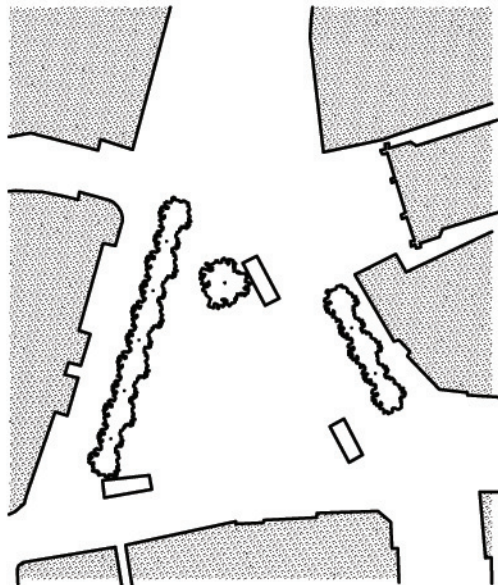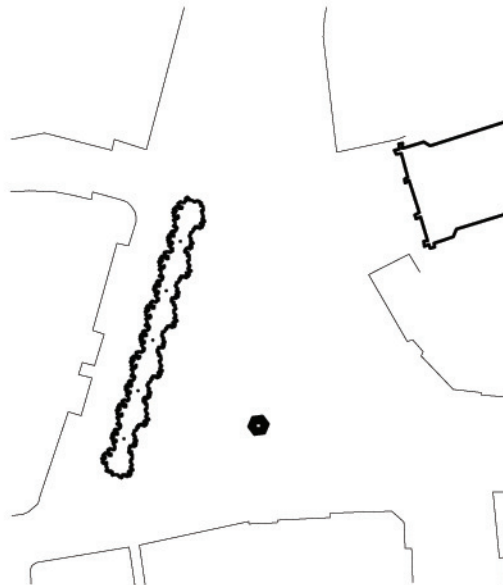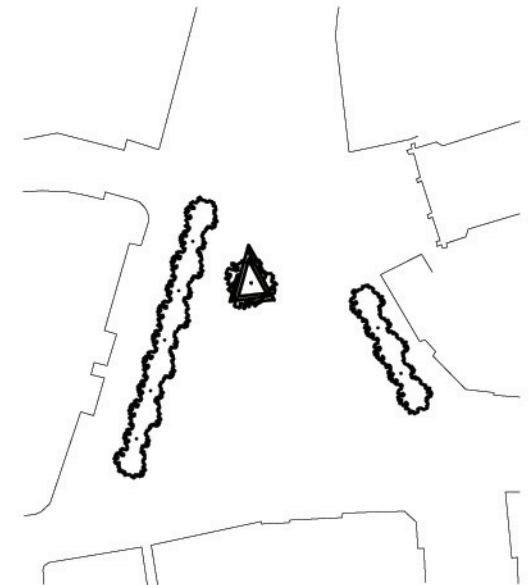
Fig. 3.02, De Heuvelse Kerk, Tilburg

Fig. 3.03, De Heuvelplein, Tilburg

De Heuvel came out in Tilburg, a middle sized industrial city in the south of the Netherlands. The name of the De Heuvel (the hill) refers to its origin in historical descriptions of the city of Tilburg as a system of ' *linten* ' and the so called
'*heerdgang*' , a triangular public space at the crossroads of various roads. The ring road, which was built in the 1960s crossing the city center, cut the triangular square from the east. Consequently the squares intimacy was affected by the new road, which turned the square to a heavy traffic place[1].

De Heuvel lays in the urban centre of a city and is still symbolizing the historical authenticity of the city.

Architectural identity:
The new square is classified as a nuclear square. The nucleus of the square is "a strong monument which is charging the space around with a tension that keeps the whole together", as Zuckers[2] defines it. The monument is a statue of Willem II, watches over the triangular formed square. (Fig. 3.02, 3.03)

The southern side of the triangle is recognized as a shopping promenade. Together with the shopping passage called H*euvelport* forms the southern side of the square the beginning of the inner city shopping circle in Tilburg. The shopping flow is intensified by a ramp connecting the shopping passage with the underground bicycle parking. The parking lies under the central triangular shape of the square. The latter is indicated by an escalator, stairs and a steel beam shed covered with strips of glass. It also connects the shopping areas on the edges of the square. The ramp doubles the square's use: above and below ground[3]. (Fig. 3.04)

Next, the east side of the triangular square has a free bus lane. A red asphalt area with blue accent is positioned for vehicles access in the triangular figure. The separation between the square and the driving lane is marked through a grove in the square where the bicycle entrance is recognized by a ramp leading down in the bicycles garage. (Fig. 3.05) Whereas the west side of the square is dominated by an exclusive terrace area with a Lime tree hedge supported by a horizontal light structure. The hedge keeps the centre of the square free of traffic. So the central triangle is kept permanently free of use.

22

The scheme reinforces the proportions of the triangular elegant square with granite paving 10 x 10 cm of diamonds flags crossing the existing cobbles. In the north angle of the square stands a Lime tree surrounded by three wood benches forming a small triangular seating place.

The square is surrounded by 18th century buildings. Classical and Dutch renaissance facades of 4 and 5 floors houses are adding to the squares a historical value. In addition to the 79 high *Heuvelse Kerk* which adds a dramatic event to the square when its gothic façade gets lighted at night. (Fig. 3.02)

Right in the centre of the triangular square the statue of Willem II, lifted on column, is a visual symbolic focal point. The statue marks the twin functions of the square above and below ground. Transparent glass stone is holding the base of the statue, and indicates the space underneath it. At night the square is lit through spots fixed on high masts .The statue of Willem II is lit by a spotlight fixed on the Heuvel Church.(Fig 3.01) In addition, the light spread over the square form the bicycle garage through the glass base beneath the statue.(Fig. 3.06)

Social Identity:
Still the Heuvel is succeeding in symbolizing the historical authenticity of the city in the quality of a prominent public space. This square plays a role as a gathering place; this confirms the historical remembrance more than the actual urban experience. New order of place and use: Sitting, walking, driving through and storing under. The statue of Willem II, an early Dutch prince, is over this essential emptiness and the bordering historical lime trees motive with benches is creating a sense of authenticity and intimacy.

Fig. 3.04, Steel beam shed

23

Criticism:
The design of the Heuvel square succeeded to hold several functions and activities despite of not being a market square. Dirrix van Wylick succeeded to create a safe place for visitors and especially bicycle user under the square. The visitors can cross the square easily and park there bikes by taking the escalators downstairs. Over each entrance of the bicycle garage stands a steel pergola to define the entrances and border the square and clearly separated from the traffic. Meanwhile the eastern side of the square, supported with the lime trees hedge, gave the terraces and cafes a backbone to invite the visitors and attract them to stay in the square. (Fig. 3.07)

The most significant feature of this design is the attractive image created by the designer. The Heuvel has a double identity. The square represents the old city and the modern industrial city. This is expressed through the use of classical red brick (*rode klinker*) of the walking path combined with concrete and steel in a elegant way. The statue also plays an important role in adding a meaning to the square. Despite of the fact that many people do not know who the statute refer to, they feel more unified and attracted to the squares. This remark was made during the study trips and the interview with the squares visitors. The style and proportions of church and the surrounding buildings are also unifying the square and contributing to the charisma of the square. Similarly act the Lime trees as a unifying element in the square design.
Considering the sociability of the square, the square could be described as a social place despite of being a commercially oriented. The terraces which are overwhelming the square are busy during day and night and attract many people. De Heuvel is safe at night and is well lit, but there is a lack of enough seats in addition to the lack of greenery. Based on the peoples request the municipality added later to the square some extra plants fixed in movable concrete blocks.

Finally, De Heuvel Square could be described as one of the most successful designs of the ten studied squares. The designer succeeded to create a place for the people which have a sense of place. Maybe the success stems from the square's pre conditions and existing potentials like the church or architecture or statue. Despite the lack of greenery and furniture the design provided a meaningful and people related visual image.

Fig. 3.05, Red asphalt bus lane

Fig. 3.06, Bicycle garage and the statue column

Fig. 3.07, Lime trees hedge and terraces

Schouwburgplein, Rotterdam

Location
Rotterdam, the Netherlands
Design
West 8
Commissioned by
City of Rotterdam
Area
13 000 m²
Design Period
1997

51°54', 4°29'

Rotterdam

Schouwbrgplein
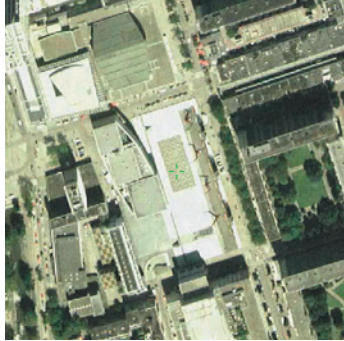
Schouwbrgplein
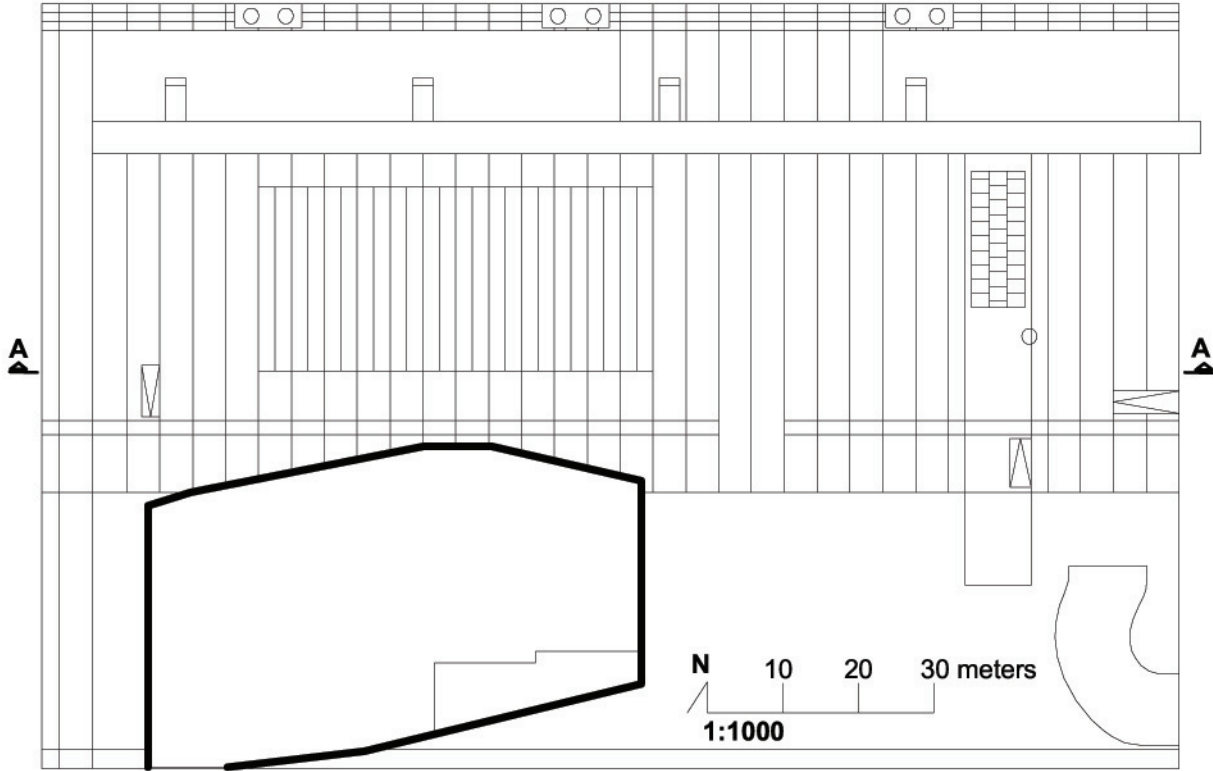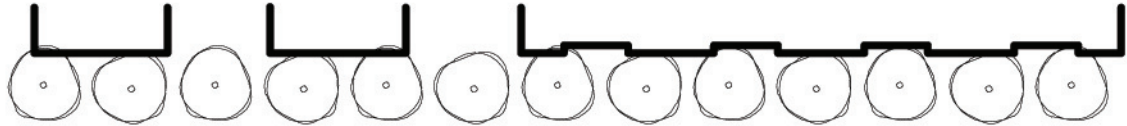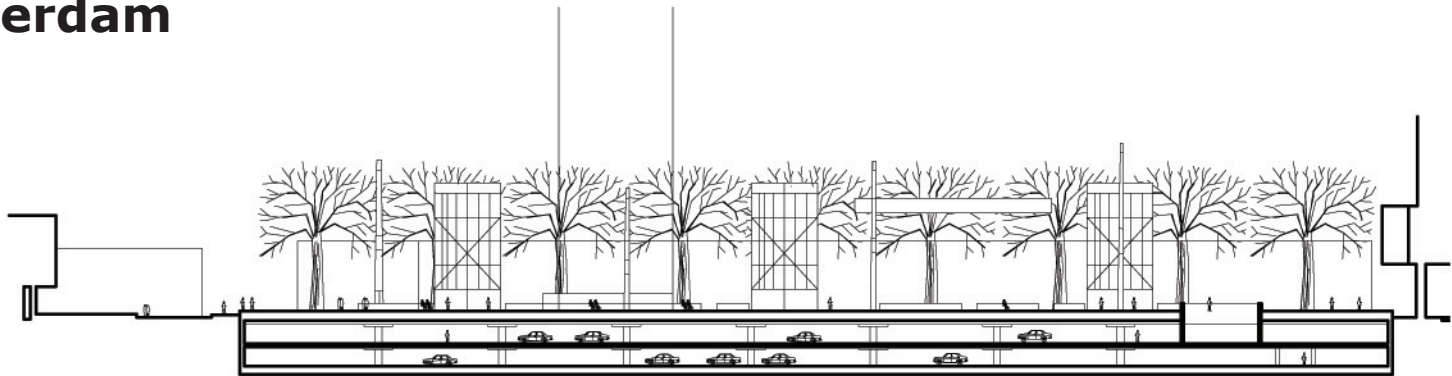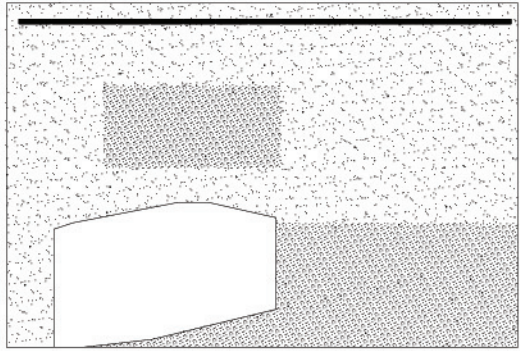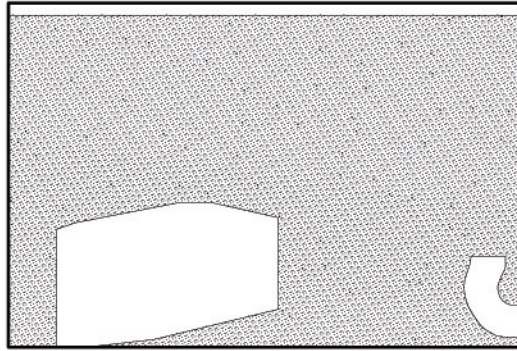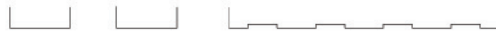
N   10   20   30 meters
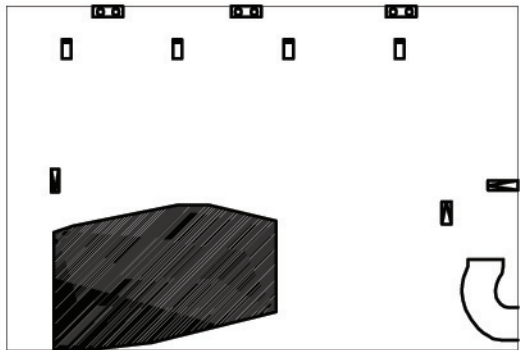
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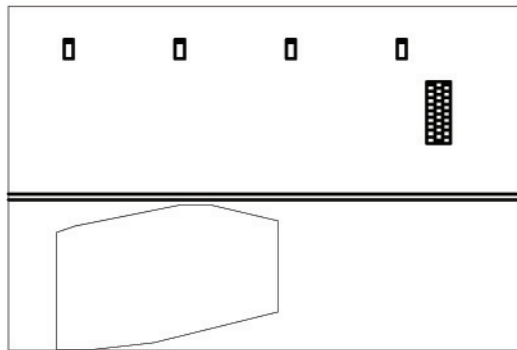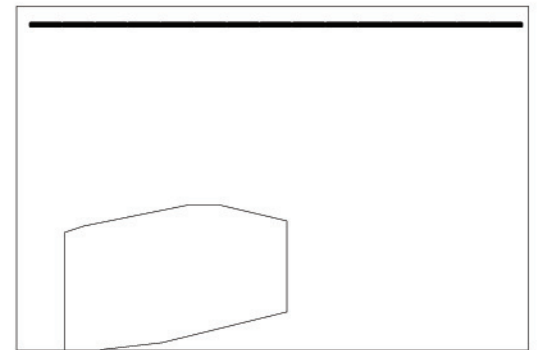**Use and Activity**

Form and Proportion

Access and Context

Volume and Space

Symbolism

Trees and Furniture

27
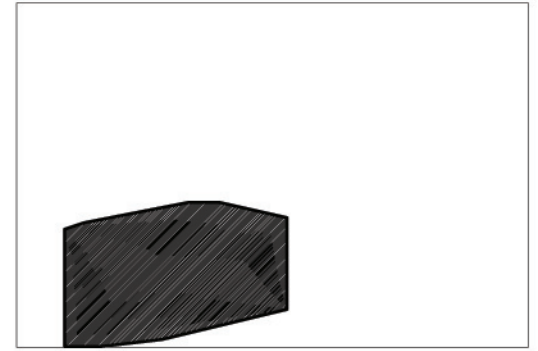
Fig. 3.08, Triangular glass prism for garage exit, Schouwburgplein

Fig. 3.09, Schouwburg plein and Cinema Building

Rotterdam city centre was completely rebuilt in the modernist style after the end of Second World War. Due to its position, Rotterdam became a harbor city and the pillar of Dutch economy. In parallel a new open space policy was developed in the late 1980 that renewed many places in town. The Schouwburgplein, which a few steps away from the railway station, was newly constructed when a competition in 1993 was announced proposing the idea of building a multiplex cinema on the site of the square while enhancing the site visually[4]. The office West 8, lead by Adrian Geuze, won the first prize and was commissioned by the municipality to design the new square.

Architectural identity:
The area of the square is 13 000 meter^2 and the square is classified as a closed square. The project underlines the place as an empty rectangular open space. The floor of the square is elevated 35 cm creating a sort of podium. Along the right side of the square, stands three tall ventilation pits or towers for the underground car park protected by grids they constitute an eastern border around the space. People can walk also directly from the underground parking car through two triangular glass prisms located in the square. (Fig. 3.08)The pavement is in linear bands of wood, perforated steel panels and epoxy resign coated concrete. The floor has a wooden walkway on the eastern side and a wooden rectangle in the centre. In addition, temporary anchorages may be fastened to the steel floor to permit tents and other lager constructions to be raised. Moreover, various elements for sitting and leaning are mounted in a linear zone along the sunny side of the square. Towards the east, a group of specially designed long wooden benches are edging the podium[5]. (Fig. 3.09, Fig. 3.10, Fig 3.11,)

By night the place looks completely different: the proposes ultra-light flooring of neon lights installed under the perforated parts of the flooring transform Schouwburgplein into a surprising green expanse. The hydraulic and electrical connections under the floors allow also the square to host temporary exhibitions on a large scale. Further, the square is lit by day, for the metal panels reflect the sunlight in good weather; when it is cloudy, the grey floor and slightly glossy white façade of the cinema, bordering the eastern edge of the square, create an enigmatic atmosphere of immobility.

The Schouwburgplein is surrounded by cohesive modern buildings. The buildings are varying in heights and functions, from the west a huge white façade of a cinema building and from the south De Doelen concert hall. On the east side the square is bordered by a residential block, terraces, cafes and a row of Plane trees, while the city's theatre's called Schouwburg, is towards the south.

An important element in the square is four gigantic hydraulic poles, 35 m tall, with reflectors, which people may position as they like by inserting a coin, so that spontaneous events may take place in the square even at night.

Social Identity:
The Schouwburgplein is only busy when organised events take place. Concerts, dancing events and even football games take place and attract many people. The majority of users are young people that gather around night due to the special lighting facilities. The square is in the middle of cultural institutions and commercial activities and provides a number of entrances to various amusements and side walk cafes.
The square resembles the harbours environments because it has an industrial feature, which were emphasised by clearly industrial language like the red painted hydraulic poles and the use of untraditional materials and constructions.

Fig. 3.10, Garage entrance

Fig. 3.11, Wooden bench

29
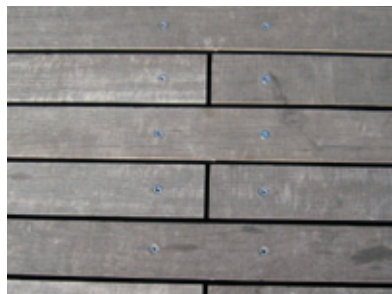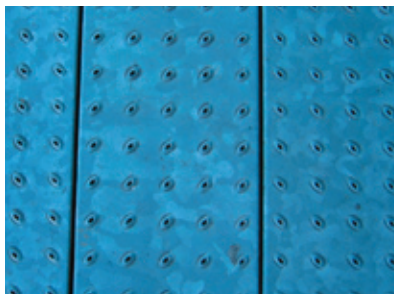
Criticism:
Schouwburgplein is by far the most famous Dutch square built in the last 10 years. A number of local and international magazines and books reported about the Schouwurgplein but the most interesting phenomena I realized lately was the increasing criticism for this square in several publications.

Adrian Geuze claimed that he wanted to make the place '' where all kinds of people meet: the customers of the surrounding shops, the employees of the nearby offices, young people, children, the residents of the district and the people going to the movies" [6]. To achieve his objective West 8 designed the square as a "Void". He adds, "In the designs for the public space there is a fascination for the void, the unprogrammed space in which the citizen can open out with a degree of freedom and where the climate and seasons can play a part" [7]. But in reality the design is not suitable for direct physical encounters between visitors. The square is much rather a place for emptiness or of movement in empty space. Only during organised events in the summer the square attracts people and especially the youth. Activities like the Chinese Market, brake dancing and football tournaments take place on square podium and attract young, non European minorities.

Despite of, being in the heart of Rotterdam, being surrounded by many shops and cafes, being served by a parking and being surrounded by theatres the square failed to attract the Rotterdamers.

From the beginning of the design West 8 and the municipality seek to create a perfect image in order to propagate the city's aesthetic quality. The result was an over designed and purely decorative space image. The industrial features and untraditional materials and installations succeeded to create a virtual image that could be marketed but because the design purpose was to create an image the square is facing now an aging process. (Fig. 3.12)

However, the physical requirement of the square was not fulfilled. For example, the raised wooden podium above the pedestrian level, which needs to be replaced every four years, did not serve as a seat or a stage. The furnishing did not invite people to linger and the slippery perforated steel pavement caused several injuries to the youth. Nevertheless, the cost of the pavement exceeded the cost of the new concert hall, in addition to the running maintenance cost[8]. During the study visit to Schouwburgplein, some people complained about the safety, the lack of greenery and non working hydraulic poles, others suggested turning the benches towards the cafes.

Finally, it is important to mention that the design strategy of West 8 in Schouwburgplein influenced many contemporary Dutch designers. Many offices went together with municipalities in branding Dutch cities by creating beautiful images of public spaces. These images had no relation to the physical reality and the people's needs[9]. The Schouwburgplein succeeded so fast to produce the largest number of images for an empty stage which became in a certain sense meaningless[10].
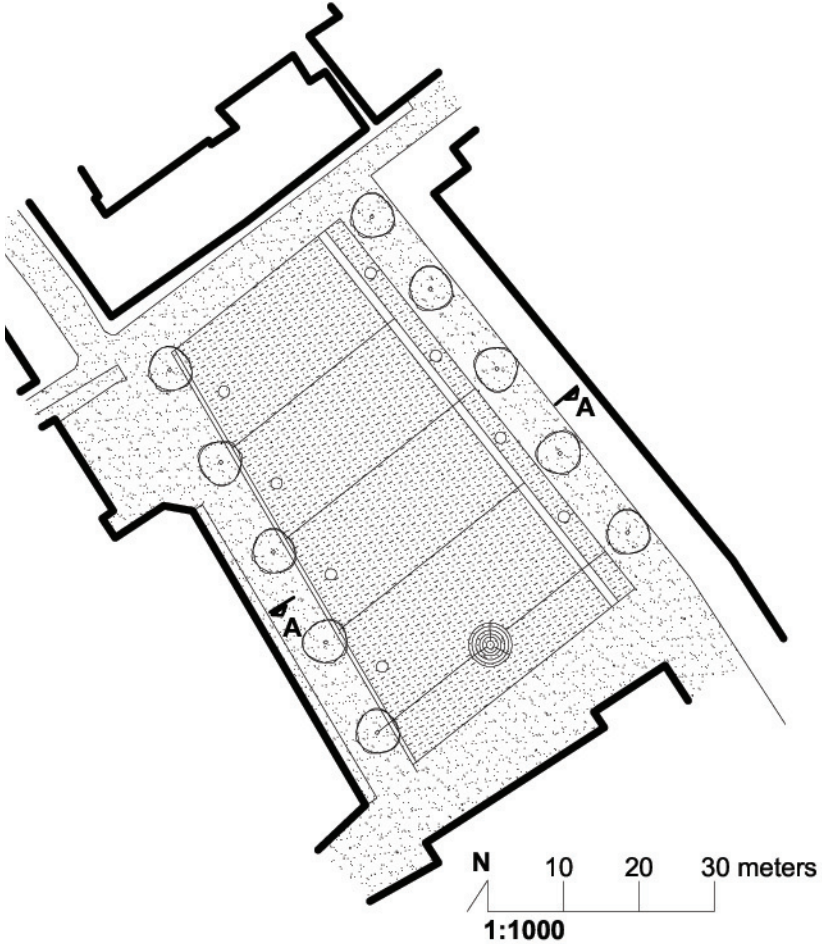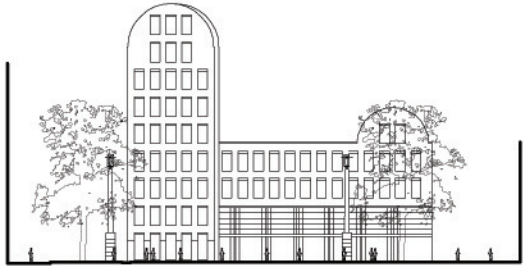

Fig. 3.12, The "Void" , Schouwburg

Statenplein, Dordrecht

Location
Dordrecht, the Netherlands
Design
MTD Landscape Architecture office
Commissioned by
City of Dordrecht
Area
3000 m²
Design Period
1997

51°30', 4°22'

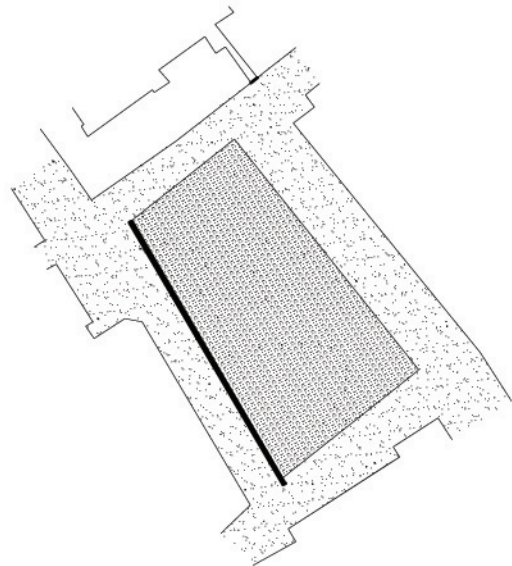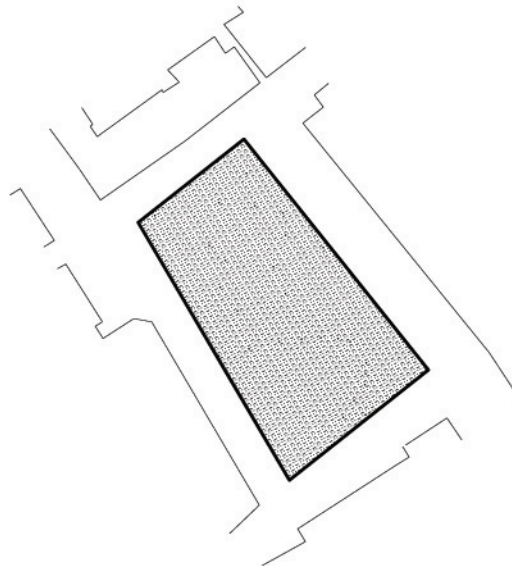Fig. 3.13, Aerial View, Statenplein, Dordrecht

Dordrecht

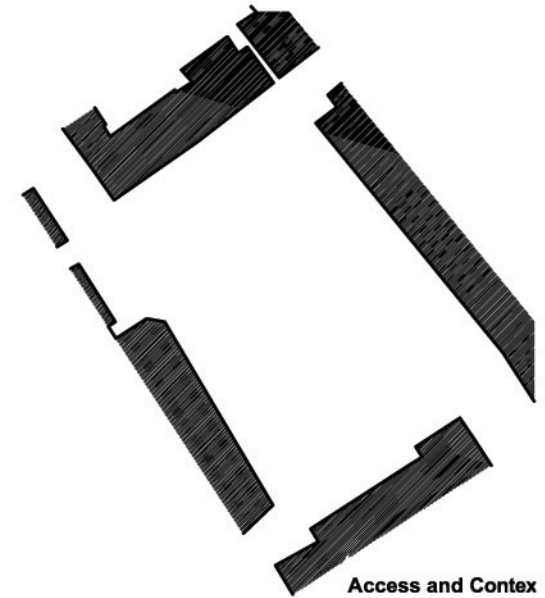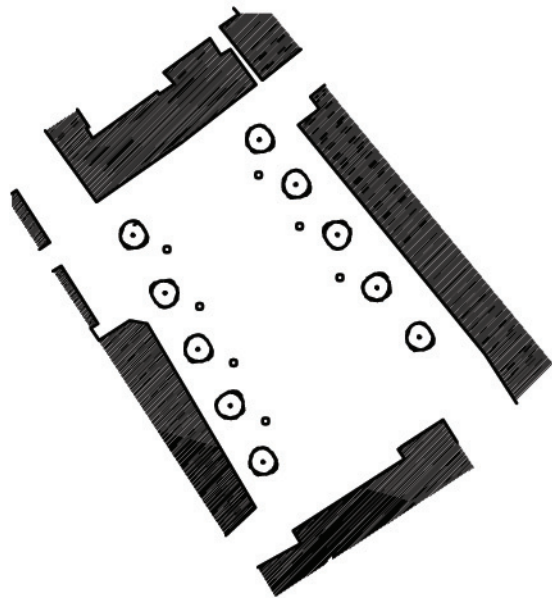Statenplein
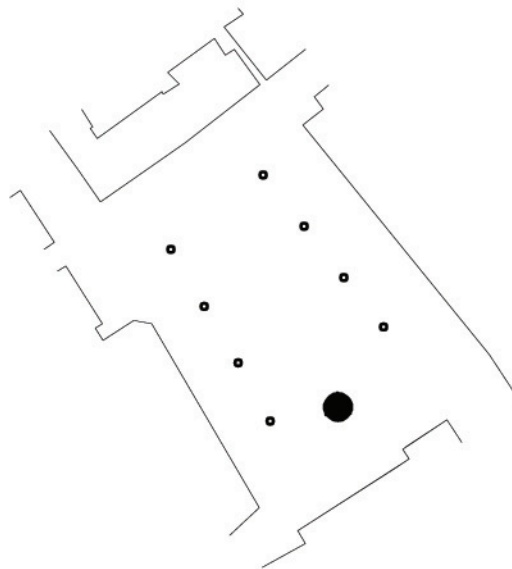

Statenplein

N   10   20   30 meters

1:1000

Use and Activity

Form and Proportion

Access and Contex

Volume and Space

Symbolism

Trees and Furniture

33
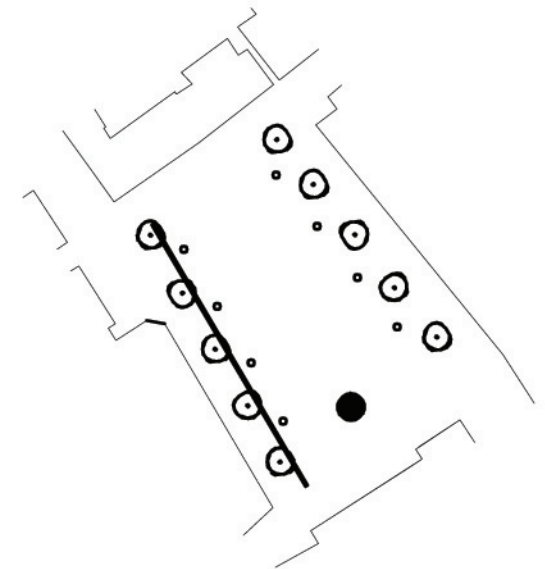
Fig. 3.14, V&D Building, Statenplein

Fig. 3.15, The fountain of Statenpplein

Dordrecht is one of the oldest trade cities in the Netherlands. The medieval fortified city which is located on open water became with time, due to trade, to a real patched provincial city.

Dordrecht's Municipality started in 1995 to focus on the improvement for the inner city image and in particular Statenplein which was used as a parking place. In order to stimulate a new economical flowering in the center, new buildings of high quality shops and housing around the square were achieved. Even the Belgian Architect Charles van den Hove was invited to the upgrading of the V&D building and the refurbishment of the buildings surrounding the square[11]. While MTD Landscape Architects office where involved in the formulation of a new urban design and were commissioned to realize their design for the Statenplein. (Fig. 3.13)

Architectural identity:
A basic principal of MTD's design was to keep the rectangular formed square open and empty as possible. The actual area of the square is 2500 m^2 surrounded by for lanes which could be used partially and increase the used area to more than 3000 m^2. Due to Zuckers classification the Statenplein is a closed square. The Statenplein is self contained between 4 newly built or refurbished facades.
The square space is specified through two rows of the Valse Vhristdoorn Tree (gleditsia triancanthos) and 8 classical granite lighting columns of a height of 11 meters. The square has a light sloping floor of grey 20 x 30 cm Chinese granite tiles, framed by red brick paved floor. The western side of the square is paved by a heavy natural stone strip. The step is marked through approximately a 60 meter chopped wooden bench. (Fig. 3.14, Fig. 3.19)
An extra element in the pavement can be found in the south side or mainly the entrance of the square. It is a new round fountain which is spouting water all the time on different levels except on market days. (Fig. 3.15)

The Statenplein is surrounded by modern buildings except the east side. The 3 floor Dutch renaissance residence buildings are facing on the other side of the square the new long facades of the V&D and its building block. This building block is 10 floors high and stands on the head of Statenplein with modern faced of red brick with a round dome. (Fig. 3.14)

Social Identity:

While the ground floor of all the surrounding buildings are busy with retail and food activities, the north west corner of the square is occupied by sitting tables of the terraces. (Fig. 3.16) The Statenplein is not only used as a 2 days weekly market but also many sport and musical activities take place during the whole year. Furthermore, many young people use the open square as a racing ground for 4 wheels motor cycles. Around the water fountain, visitors are always playing; especially children in summer time, while others enjoy watching the square from the sitting benches. (Fig. 3.17, 3.18)

Criticism:

The Statenplein has a simple design addressing functionality. The empty square surface, which is freed from any obstacles, is flexible and allows the place to sustain many activities. MTD's aim to introduce the square as a focal point fro many activities has been achieved. However the square is easily accessible and the sense of entry is well determined from the 20 meters wide 'Sarigang' in which the valse christdoorn tree is centralized in the street profile.

Also the Statenplein has a clean and walk able surface and at night it is quite safe. While the fountain is forming a point of attractiveness, especially for children, many complains were made because of the fountain. The smelly water is left for long times without being changed and one time that water over flood the square. Furthermore the classical light columns, which are supposed to carry a symbolic meaning, are saying nothing except that they are made in China from Chinese granite. But above all, the space is lacking greenery. This is because the small valse christdoorn trees are transparent and too small.

In fact the selection of Statenplein in may 2003 as the best market square in the Netherlands reflects its success to provide people and merchants with facilities. But also based on the interviewed visitors, the square is perceived as friendly and welcoming. First of all because of the 30 meters long wood bench, made by Frank Meijer for 70 000 euro, succeeded to attract people and formed an excellent place to watch over the square. Because its location facing the direct sun rays many people prefer to sit on it than sitting in the adjacent terraces. Secondly because of the water fountain this creates a diverse

changeable image and adds an extra use for the square.

In short the Statenplein is to be considered as fancy design with minimal intervention. The urban space is not monumentalized but rather conceived as a backdrop to urban life.

Fig. 3.16, The north-west corner is occupied by terraces and wind screens

Fig. 3.17, North elevation

Fig. 3.18, South elevation

Fig. 3.19, The wooden bench and concrete column

Grote Markt, Almere

Location
Almere, the Netherlands
Design
Bureau B+B Stedebouw en Landschapsarchitectuure
Michael van Gessel
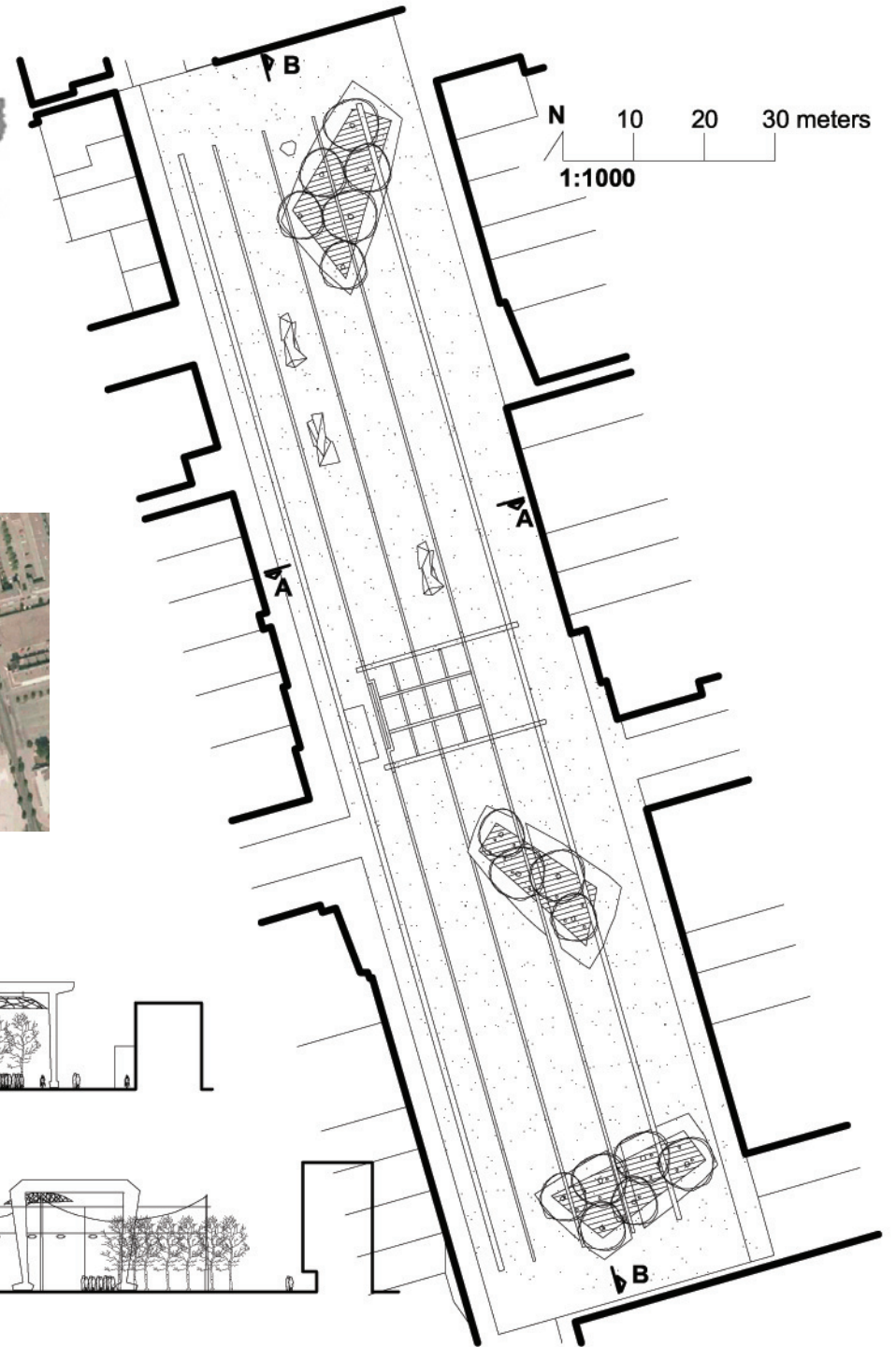Stage and seating element design: Jerry van Eyck
Commissioned by
Municipality of Almere, Centrum product office
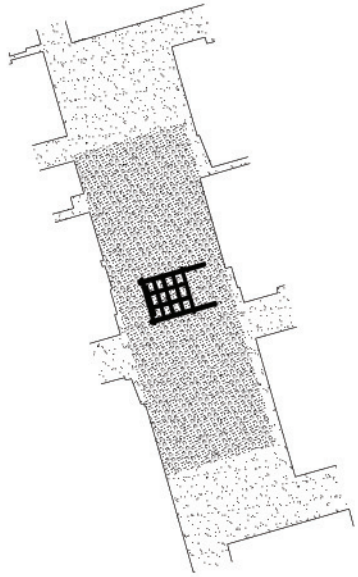**Area** 10000 m²
Design Period
1996

52°22', 5°60'

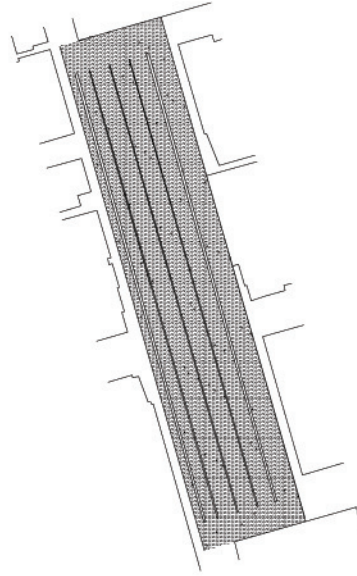N   10   20   30 meters

1:1000

Almere

Grote Markt

Grote Markt

36

Use and Activity

Form and Proportion

Access and Context

Volume and Space

Symbolism

Trees and Furniture

37
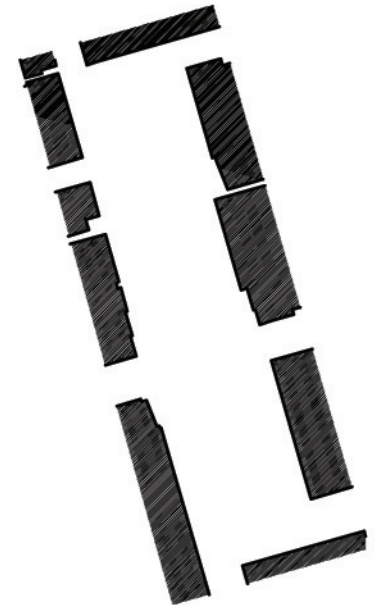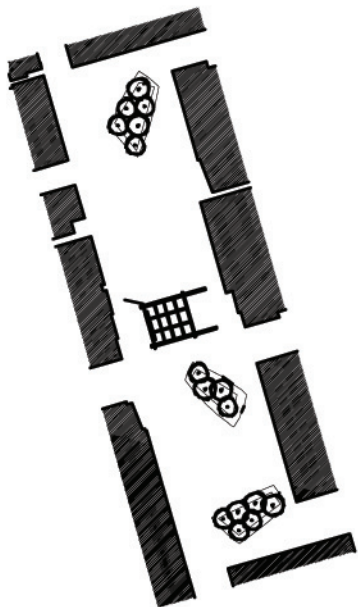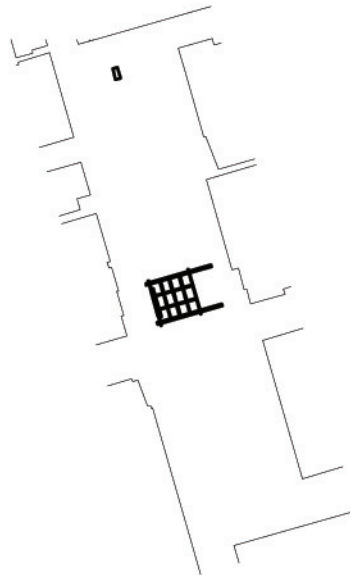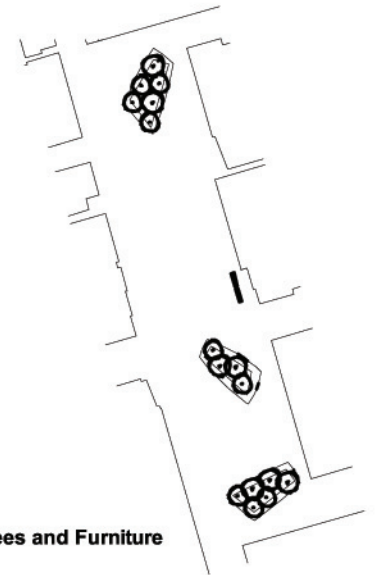
Fig. 3.20, The moving stage by Jerry van Eyck

Fig. 3.21, The surrounding building types and terraces.

Almere is a Dutch city founded in 1974 and located 30 kilometers north east Amsterdam on the South Flevoland Polder, a tract of lowland reclaimed from Lake Ijsselmeer in 1968. It is intended to become one of the ten largest cities in the Netherlands.

The identity of the centre of Almere was earlier determined for shopping and stores. An outgoing centre wasn't it except of some cafes on the Grote Markt which was used a car parking place for residents.

Architectural identity:
The idea of Michael van Gessel was based on closing the square for traffic and creating a place as a setting for various activities. Before the redesigning, the square was fragmented into three sections with a regular grid of trees. Now it is a rectangular single space, 50 x 200 meter, classified as a closed square referring to Zuckers classification. The square's length is emphasized by the parallel lines of rails of a mobile stage, which could be moved on tracks from one end to the other end. The openness of the square is confirmed and consolidated by three solid groups of pruned chestnut trees.
The paving forms a wall to wall carpet, in which the sluices, the stage rails and the Corten steel surfaces in which the trees are set are incorporated as integral components. To overcome Almere's unsettled ground, a choice was made of sand-blasted, anthracite-couloured terrazzo in a long and narrow format.[12]
The stage is forming a movable landmark in the square in addition to the shining traffic sets made of stainless steel. Further three thousand steel sets of star shaped apertures sheet metal, lit by installed spotlights, are situated in the paving below the chestnut trees. Where the visual appearance in supported by lighting masts, suspended lights and spotlights set on the edges of the square.

The surrounding buildings are built in the eighties and are characterizing different architecture, façade organization and colours. The building height varies from one floor in the south east up to five floors for some residential buildings. It is also visible that the buildings, on both sides of the square, are transforming slowly their functions from residence to extensively occupied cafes and terraces. Jerry van Eyck is introducing the movable stage as a landmark which is changing the visual appearance of the square. The stage has a 16 meter high stage portal and a foot print 15 x 15 meter. (Fig. 3.21, Fig.3.22, Fig. 3.23)

Social Identity:
The two main sides of the Grote Markt square are occupied by restaurant and cafes terraces. Only in the south of the square some retail activities are taking place. That is mainly due to the adjacency to the pedestrian zone south of the square. Daily the square is crossed diagonally by people who come from the central station area seeking the inner city. Even the benches, which are mainly used for waiting or resting, confirm the transit usage of the square except the people who are aiming the terraces.

On Wednesdays and Saturdays the square is used as Almere's main market. The big movable stage is an eye catching landmark at night where a number of successful events such as yearly Heineken, Jazz Below and sea festival are taking place on this portable square podium. (Fig. 3.20, Fig. 3.24)

Criticism:
The Grote Markt in Almere is a clear continuation of a tradition that West 8 initiated in for their plan in Rotterdam's Schouwburgplein. The design is adopting an experimental approach to traditional elements found in a square. They take a keen interest in the effects of materials and constructions[13]. In Michael van Gessel's design there is a strong awareness about the use and activities of square and how to keep it as an open space without having any centralized points. The square is simply accessible and readable. But these are the only qualities of the Gote Markt.

The space is an uncomfortable place to sit in. This is reflected in poor maintained wood benches and the unclean square floor. But even B+B bureau hesitated before providing me with the necessary information about the square. B+B bureau claims that the unpleasant look of the square is the municipality's responsibility based on their mistakes during the implementation and in the maintaining process.
Actually the square is saying nothing and is missing a feeling of unity. The word 'groot schalig ' which means large scaled , was repeated during the interviews several time by users. In my opinion the 200 x 50 meters open and empty area of the square makes users feel like lost in the space. This point was highlighted when people were complaining about the lack of trees, and were referring to the old square which was including a grid of trees. Moreover the meaningless huge movable stage was described by several interviewed user's as

Fig. 3.22, The Grote Markt Sqaure

Fig. 3.23, The Grote Markt Sqaure

Fig. 3.24, The square during festivals

'*lelijk*' or ugly in Dutch.

Next, the stage makes you feel as if you are in a working place, despite its success as a podium for many festival events. The huge machine is visually dominant and is creating an industrial atmosphere which nobody likes in the square.

The sociability is present in the square at night. This is confirmed by young people during festivals or by ordinary people in market days. But despite these events or activities the square lacks the sense of cosiness and romanticism. Some user described the square as 'cold'. That refers mainly to the missing sense of unity and centrality in addition to the over scaled proportion and openness of the square.

Generally speaking the square seems to be a fancy expensive design but after almost 10 years of implementation, it is missing a lot on the ground. It is actually a renewal project which succeeded to hold multifunctional activities. However it is missing an identity and character, something the city of Almere is keeping looking for.

Neude plein, Utrecht

Location
Utrecht, the Netherlands
Design
West 8
Commissioned by
City of Utrecht
Area
2000 m²
Design Period
1998

52°12', 6°53'

Fig. 3.25, Aerial View, Neude Sqaure
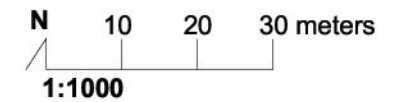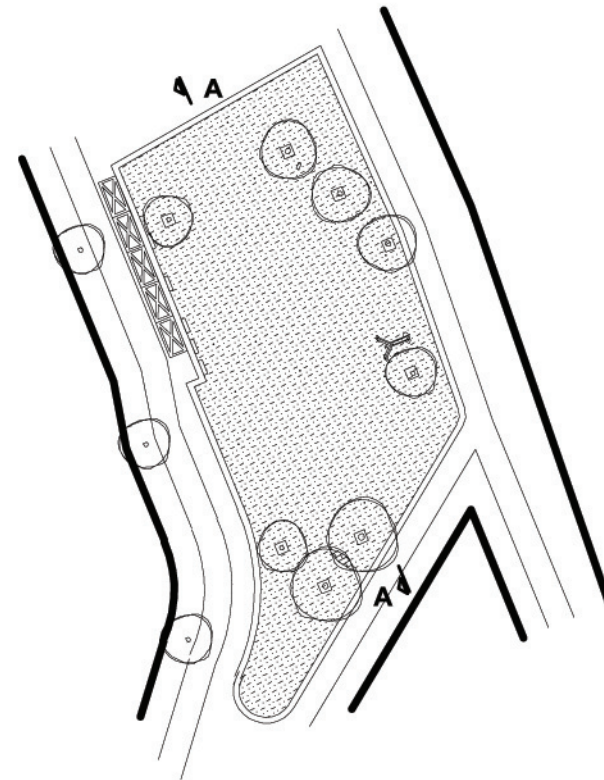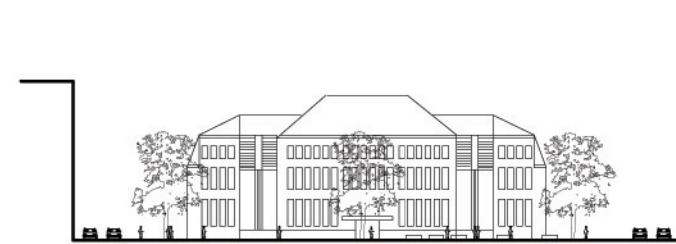
Utrecht

Neude

Neude
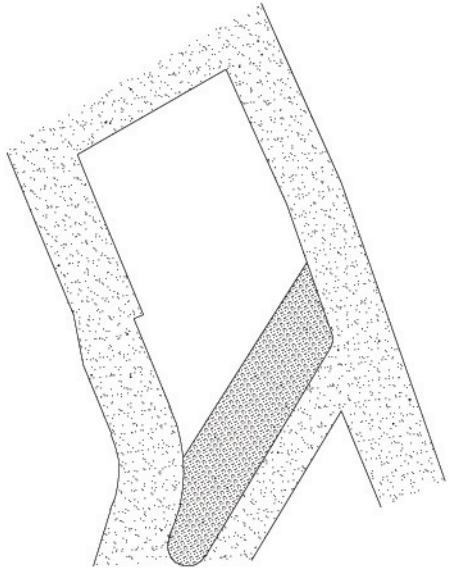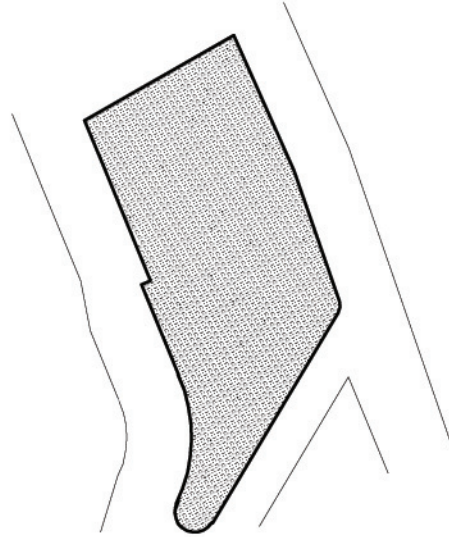
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A

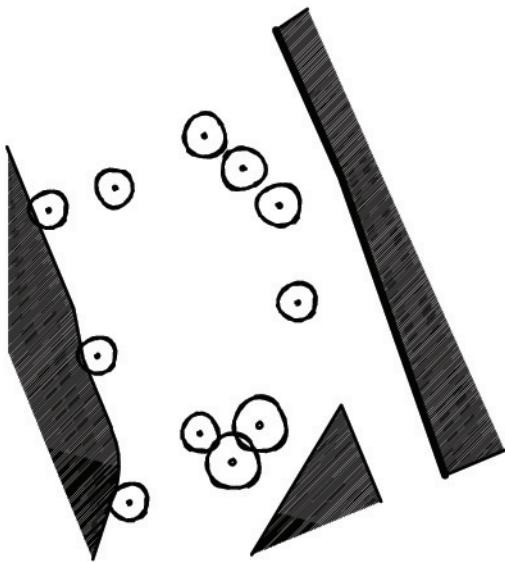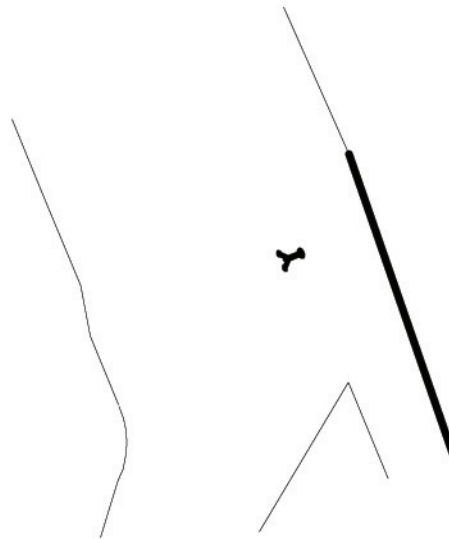N   10   20   30 meters

1:1000

Use and Activity

Form and Proportion

Access and Contex

Volume and Space

Symbolism

Trees and Furniture

43
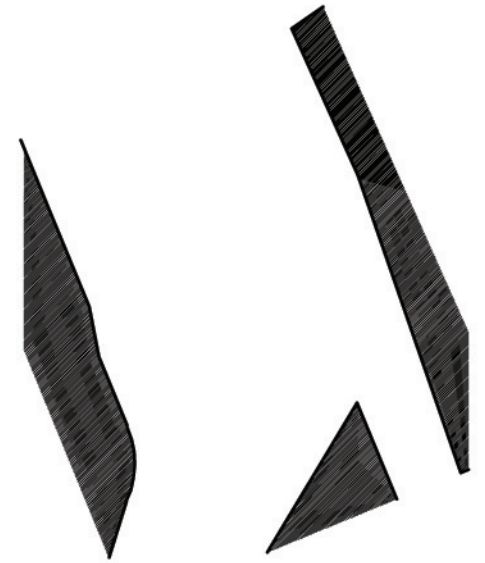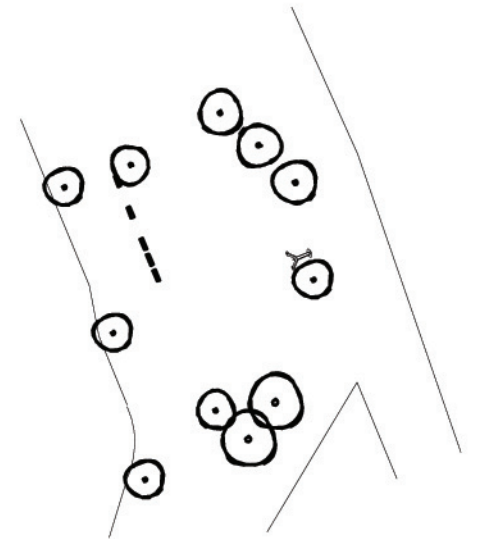
Fig. 3.26, The terraces and the Landmark

Fig. 3.27, The concrete blocks painted and used as seats

The Neude is one of the oldest squares in Utrecht. Just a five minutes walk, in the North West direction from Utrecht's cathedral, make you reach square which is bordering the old city walls. The historical square was used for executions, body identification of the World War II victims for long time as a parking place.

Recently the municipality decided to transform the square to a large terrace area and commissioned West 8 office to design the new layout of the square. West 8 suggested that a 'Londense leeuw', or a London lion be placed in the square. But the Utrecht's advice commissions for fine arts choose a 1998 a statue for an enormous hare, while both suggestions were not realized. [14]

Architectural identity:
The Neudeplein has an area of approximately 2000 m^2. The rectangular shaped square is skewed towards the south west and is considered as a closed square, due to Zucker's classification. The square is one open space bordered from the east by line of trees. While in the North West corners a solid group of chestnut trees .The proportion of the square is 2:3 and is simply paved by typical grey Dutch brick. Despite some white painted concrete blocks located to west, could be considered without furniture. The square has no lighting facilities not even the bordering streets. Only the facades are self lit at night.

The square is surrounded by buildings from three sides. Only the north side is opened to a street. On the west side of the square stands a large façade of the post building, a 6 floors building following the 'amsterdamse school' style. On the opposite stand 6 floor office classic building occupied by ABN Amro bank. The other buildings are 4 floors typical Dutch renaissance housings.

Furthermore, West 8 located a landmark as usual in every square they design. A long mast, toped by Utrecht's flag, is standing on a three legged red steel structure.   (Fig. 3.25, 3.27, 3.28, 2.29)

Social Identity:
The Neudeplein could be described as terraces square. The square is without market or events and visitors choose the edges to pass the square. The emptiness of the square is only broken through daily commercial activities of the visitors. The located landmark does not carry a symbolic meaning but it carries Utrecht's flag. (Fig. 3.26)

Criticism:
The Neudeplein has a large empty open space which could be used as markets or special events but the only activity that is happening is sitting on the terraces which are occupying the square.
I agree with Arend Ode who wrote in the 'Utrecht's binnekrant' newspaper that the square was planned only for commercial reasons.[15] The Square is accessible and is set in an optimal location. It has also a good appearance and image due to the coherent surroundings and human proportions. Moreover many visitors find the Neudeplein as an attractive place. The design of West 8 this time is sober but it seems that the municipality's brief was commercially oriented. This could be reflected to the small number and bad quality of benches which replaced West 8's wood benches. I found the square friendly and welcoming despite being empty. This square has the potential to be a social meeting point.

Finally, I am wondering why West 8 doesn't introduce a strong idea or image as usual. It seems that the municipality of Utrecht neutralized the influence of West 8 and succeeded to introduce a project for the people, but again with a commercial taste.

Fig. 3.28, Terraces and the Post Kantoor in the background

Fig. 3.29, The Neude square and the trees

45

Marktplein, Apeldoorn

Location
Dordrecht, the Netherlands
Design
Bureau B+B Stedebouw en Landschapsarchitectuure
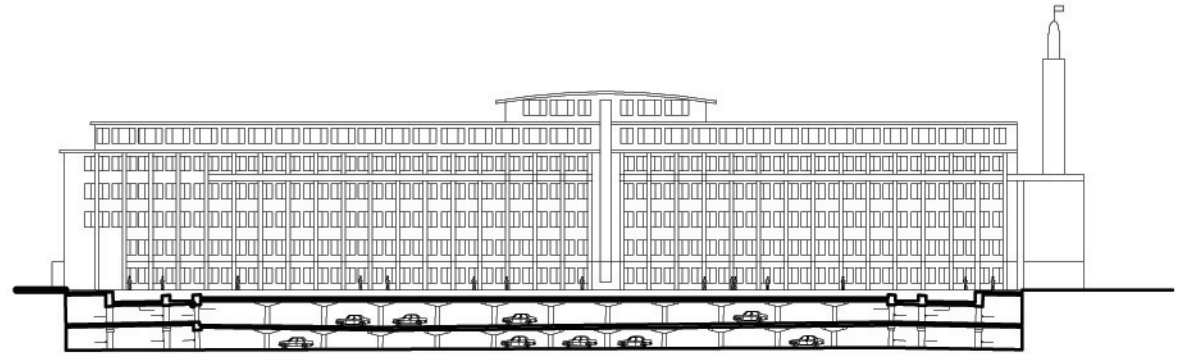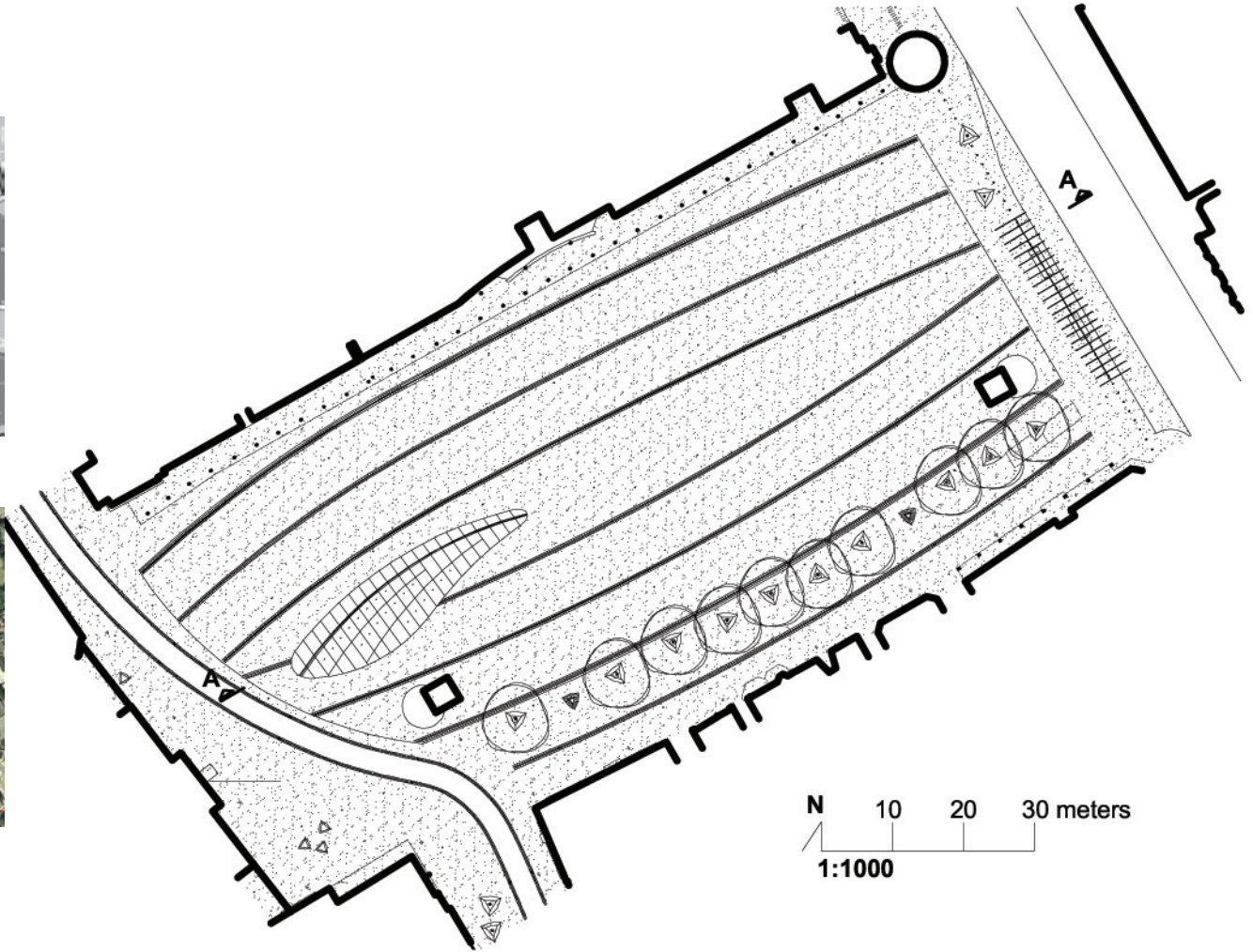**Commissioned by**
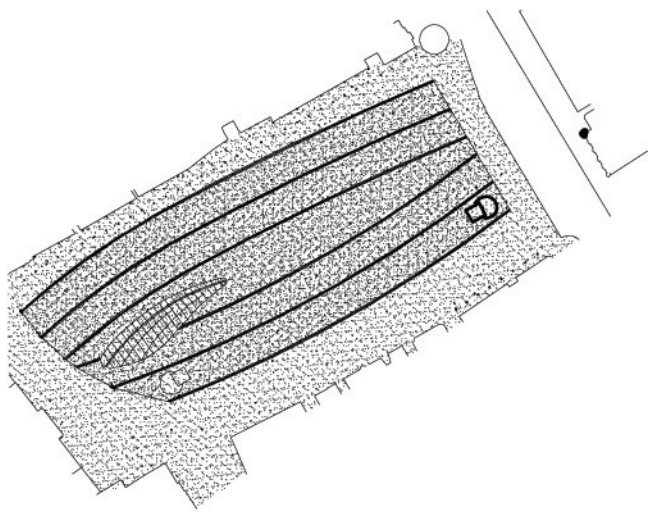City of Apeldoorn
Area
10 000 m²
Design Period
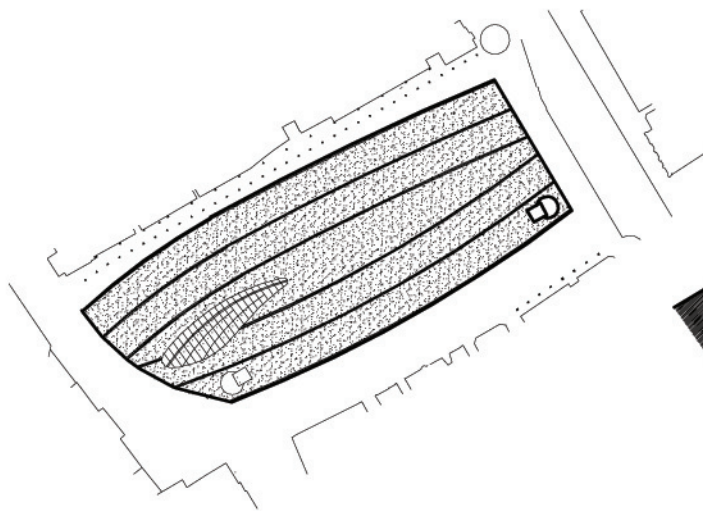1999

52°50', 5°42'

Apeldoorn

Marktplein

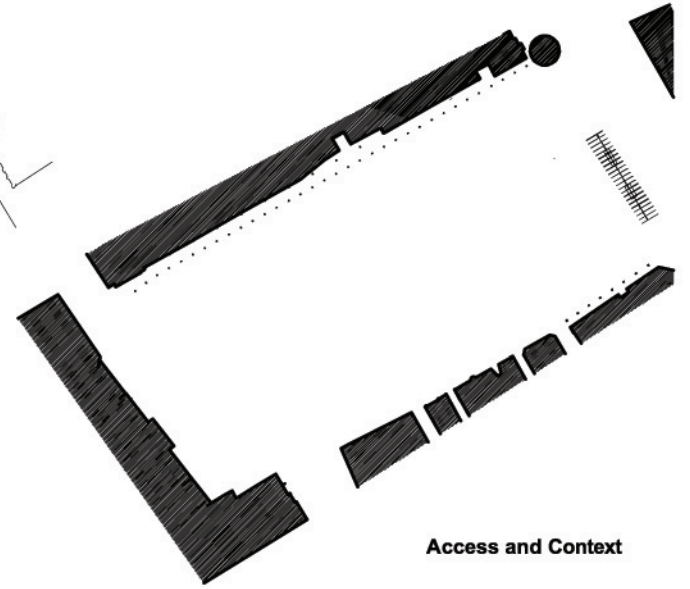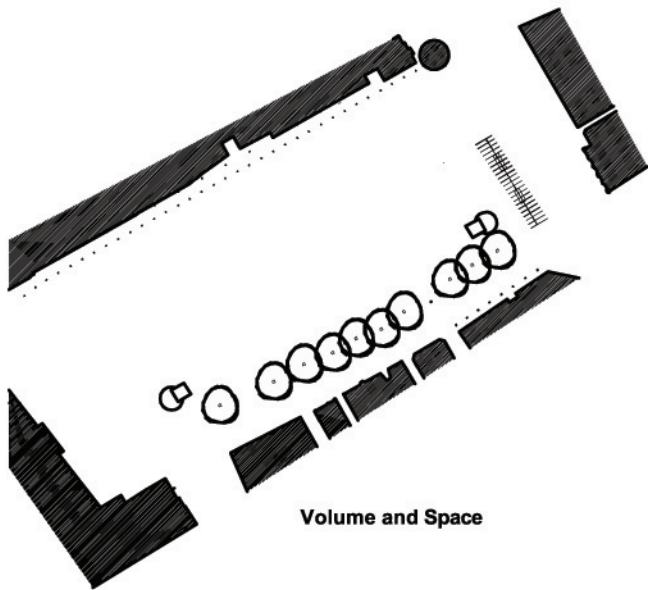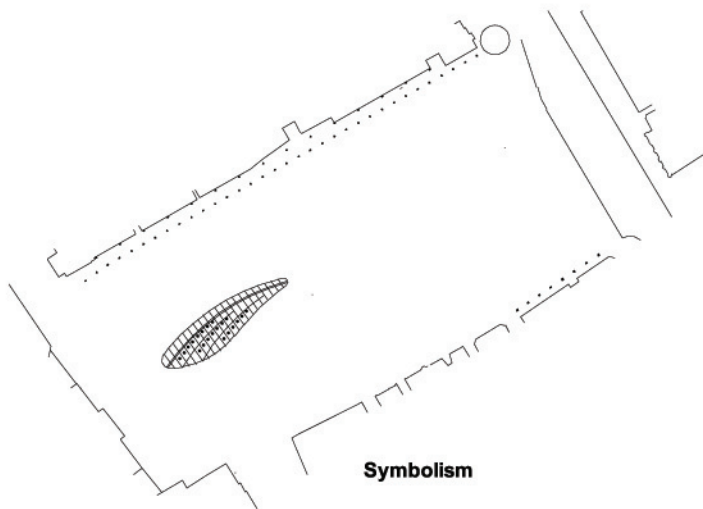Marktplein

N   10   20   30 meters
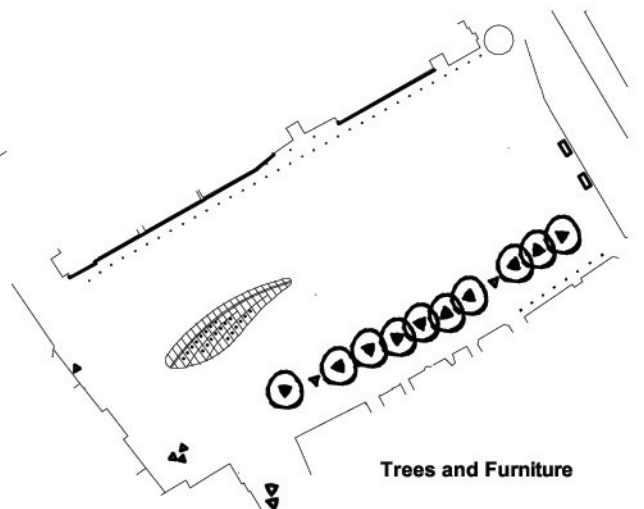1:1000

Use and Activity

Form and Proportion

Access and Context

Volume and Space

Symbolism

Trees and Furniture

Fig. 3.30, The Municipality building and the fountain

Fig. 3.31, Apeldorn Marktplein at night

Appeldorn is a Dutch city, located in centre of the Veluwe, a forested land in the heart of the Netherlands. With 155.000 inhabitants, Appeldorn is one of the largest 10 cities in the Netherlands. The municipality of Apeldoorn called for a new design of the Marktplein as part of the city inner refurbishment project. The construction of a new municipality building and a new garage below the square went parallel with the construction of the Marktplein.

Architectural identity:
Apeldoorn's Marktplein has a large rectangular area about 10 000 m2. The 145 x 65 meter space is classified as closed square due to Zucker. The square is an open empty space bordered from the east by a row of trees. Also two Kiosks, located in the northeast corner and south east, are used as vertical entrances for the car parking beneath the square. The 660 car parking is located under the square and could be reached also from new Municipality on the west side of the square. The square pavement is dividing the place into six curved lanes, parallel to the longest side of the square. Each lane is paved with typical Dutch yellow brick clinker and separated from each side by black granite tiles steel grills for water drainage. While the east lane is shaded by a row of Plane trees two large masts are located between the trees for lighting. Around each trees a triangular wood benches is placed.

The square is surrounded from the south and west with two municipality buildings. The 136 meter long and 24 meter high facade represents the new municipally building designed by 'De architectengroep LRRH and H.J.M. Ruijssenaars', forms an impressive edge for the squares. On the opposite exists a row of renewed commercial and residential buildings almost invisible because the row of trees. While on the north side of the square a bus station is located. (Fig. 3.30, 3.31)

Social Identity:
The square is used mainly as a market place. The huge space of the square makes it a suitable place for festivals, kermes eves and even international goods market. The Marktplein is connected to the main pedestrian shopping gallery of Appledorn. In the middle of the square a fountain, surrounded by basalt tiles, creates an attraction point. Moreover, the large white municipality façade with its symbolic tower and flag serves as a landmark for the square. (Fig. 3.32, 3.33)

48

Criticism:
In this design B+B tried to minimize their interference in the square. They emptied the place from any obstacles and prepared it to hold several activities. B+B decided to design the square as a platform for the new municipality building. In fact, the square is well connected to its surroundings and could be described as the end destination for the pedestrian shopping gallery. The garage also made it easy to visit the square by car and the design combined the square with the municipality building very strongly.

This time, B+B focused on creating a clear simple image. The materials used are typical Dutch tiles and a simple plane tree wall has been located along the south side of the Marktplein. The seating under the plane trees are not enough but are compensated by the row of seating fixed on the opposite side facade of the municipality building. People did not complain much about the square and found it at night unsafe. The 145 long square encouraged the youth to organise at night racing competitions with 4 wheels motorcycles. Moreover, the fountain attracts many people and children in summer days.

Finally, B+B avoided much criticism by creating a simple functional basic design. The plane tree wall succeeded to unify the fragmented southern facades, and the opposite side was left empty to represent the squares character from municipality building façade.

Fig. 3.32, Apeldoorn Marktplein's flee market

Fig. 3.33, Apeldoorn Marktplein on Saturday

Marktplein, Hengelo

Location
Hengelo, the Netherlands
Design
Juurlink en Geluk,
Landscape Architecture
office
Commissioned by
City of Hengelo
Area
1700 m²
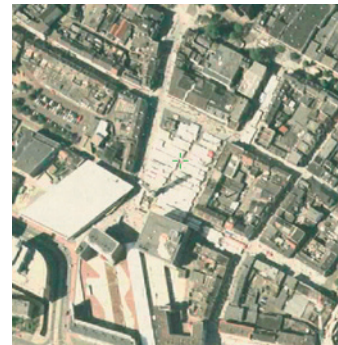**Design Period**
1999

52°15', 6°48'

Fig. 3.34, Marktplein Hengelo and the clock tower

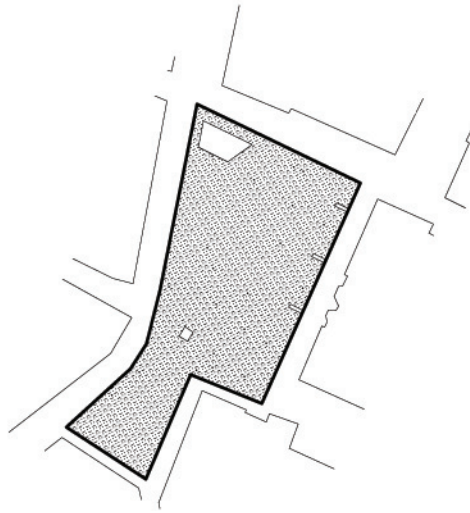Hengelo

Marktplein

Marktplein

N   10   20   30 meters
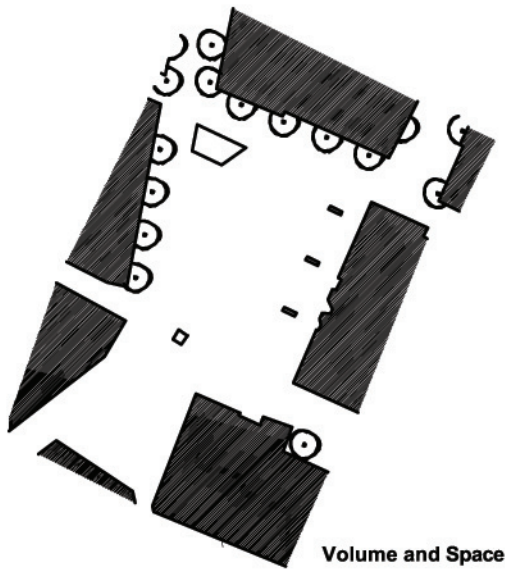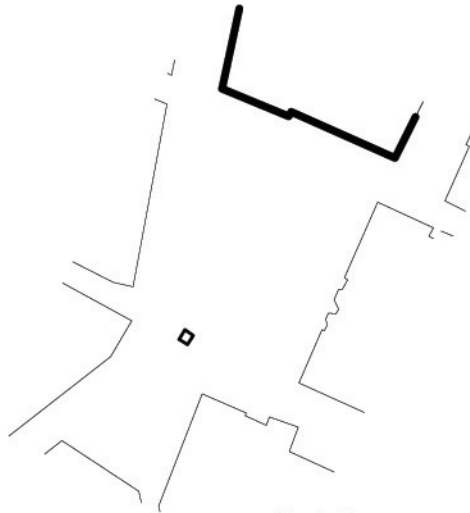
1:1000
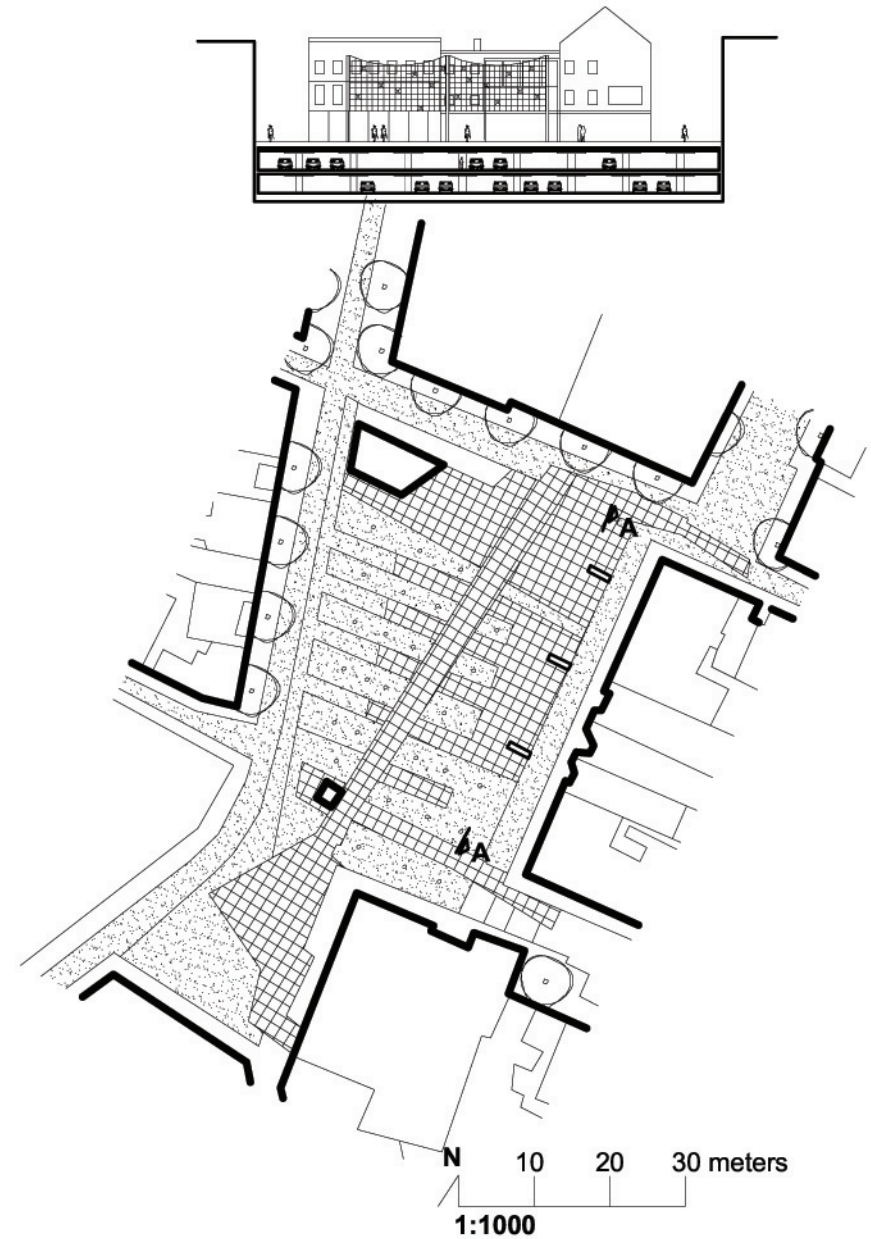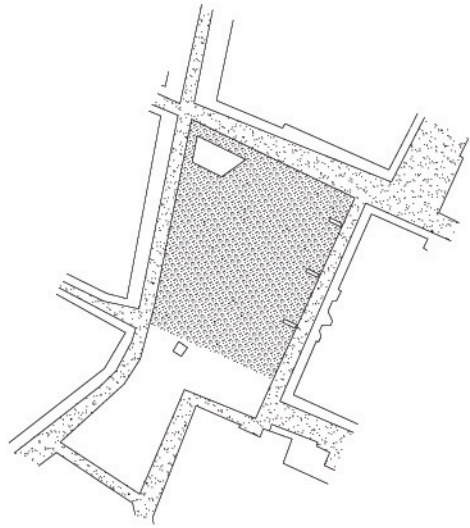
Use and Activity
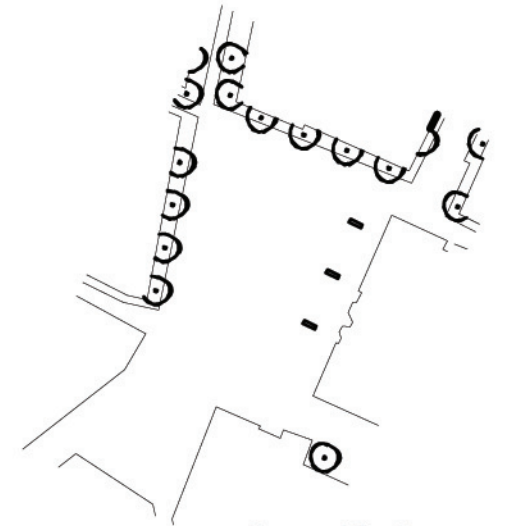

Form and Proportion

Access and Cont

Volume and Space

Symbolism

Trees and Furniture

51

Fig. 3.35, Terraces protected by wind screens

Fig. 3.36, The west façade and greenery

Hengelo is a small Dutch town near the German border and just a village at a crossroads until the railway came through in the nineteenth century. It then grew as a seat of industry. The weak town centre tried to focus on a market place, but by the 1990s this had been given over mostly to use as a car park. Opportunity for change came with the liberation of the site between market place and railway station due to the demolition of one of Hengelo's largest and oldest factories. In 1995 a competition was help to repair and retrieve the town centre.[16]

Architectural identity:
The Marktplein 1700 squared meters, are classified as a closed square despite being linked to the station by a new pedestrian arcade. The trapezium shaped new square is combined to the old square in the south. The square is horizontally striped by lanes of two different pavements, while being crossed by a diagonal virtual way. The square is spatially designed as one open space. Also the square has a huge underground car parking beneath the floor which keeps the square closed for traffic. Juurlink en Geluk's design starting point was determined by the previous described grid of pavement. A floor of grey slithery terrazzo tiles combined with typical Dutch grey tiles (*baksteen*) are mainly connecting the square to the station beside setting a setting for the arrangement of the weekly market activities. (Fig. 3.34, 3.42)

Nevertheless the square's original scheme did not include any sort of trees or greenery, until two tree lines were recently added to the north and west side. Further, many bicycle racks and some wood benches are spread on the edges of the square. More importantly, three massive light columns come out of the floor waved terrazzo and are connected horizontally by a net of spotlight. The 1000 LED galvanized spotlight points are forming are operated by computer and forms a light show at night. (Fig. 3.37, 3.38)

The square is surrounded mainly with commercial elements, including a large department store, shops, offices and some housing. In the south-east corner a square six-storey building built in the 1960s with an exposed frame and recessed top floor, used as shops and flats.[17] The north and west facades were left as two floor houses with some cafes. Further the west side of the square has a newly placed C&A department store, a deliberately shed-like large-scale building with horizontal facade and big overhanging roof. (Fig. 3.35, 3.36)

Juurlink en Geluk has added also a kind of campanile as a landmark. The campanile is in the form of a modern clock tower standing exactly on the boundary between new square and small old. It has a large digital clock at the top and glazed kiosk at the bottom to be used as an information and display point. (Fig. 3.39, 3.40)

Social Identity:
The Marktplein is the centre of activities of Heneglo. The square is holding all regular weekly market in addition to the major events like the Kermis, army parades, city lottery and the night of Hengelo. Due to the introduced LED light wall and lighted facades, the square usage is extended to evenings and late nights. Also the pedestrian arcade connects the station and the mark and certainly works to draw people through, and offers shopping on a truly public route.

The designers aimed to create a sense of place by integrating the new square with the new architecture and the character of the 1960s block. Also the LED light wall and the rhetorical clock tower, with its large attached screen, are a source of presenting changeable images and information as a way of interaction with the squares' visitors. (Fig.3.41)

Fig. 3.38, LED spotlights wall

Fig. 3.39, Clock tower
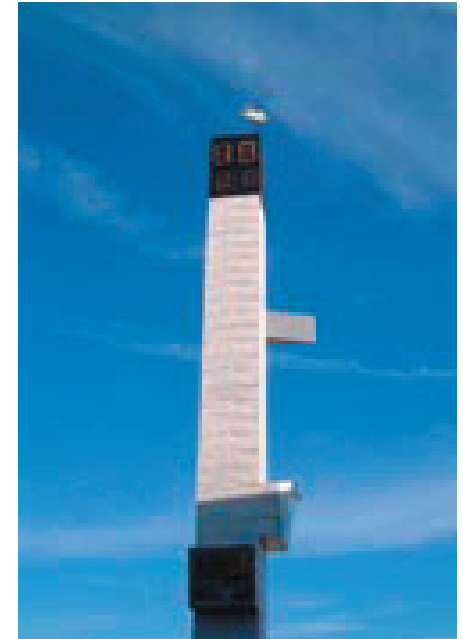

Fig. 3.37, Virtual image before the construction of the square

Fig. 3.40, Parking entrance

Fig. 3.41, Marktplein, Hengelo

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Criticism:

Juurlink Geluk's design is a stylistic work which is trying to attract the attention of the visitors. The design succeeded to set up a flexible open space which could be holding many functions and activities. The clock tower succeeded to create a sense of orientation and entry for the square through its punctuation of the relatively horizontal roofs cape. The well designed arcade is connecting the square with the main stream coming from the south in addition; to the deliberate pavement set up which makes the visitors easily get through the square.

Despite that the square has a clean and clear image, it is missing the *'uitstraling'* or charisma as several interviewed visitors described. Even the *'Christen Democratisch Appèl'* (CDA), which is the biggest political party in the Netherlands, mentioned to the lack of atmosphere in the session of 29 September 2005. This could be related to the surroundings of the square. The different modern facades and the artificial lighting wall are adding to the meaningless of the square. The clock tower did not succeed to add a symbolic meaning to the square. Even the CDA is going to ask a number of artists to add a fountain or an art work. Greenery is also missed in the square. In a large open space like the Marktplein in Hengelo trees are needed especially that the square is windy and many cafes integrated special wind screens to accommodate their customers.

Addressing the sociability, the square is not welcoming many people except on special events days. Only the youth find it an attractive at night in addition to visitors who cross the square during their shopping. The openness of the square, and the small number of benches, make it an empty space.

Finally, the design of the Marktplein in Hengelo focused on creating an image. The exaggeration in using fancy pavement and the LED screen contributed to a marketable image. The clock tower could be a nice symbolic gesture but cladding it with concrete panels carved with the word 'De Brink' turned it to be an unpleasant commercial tower.

Fig. 3.42, The square from the south leading to the train station

55
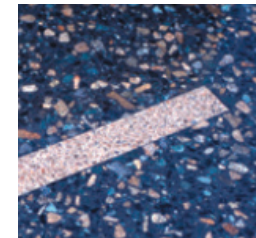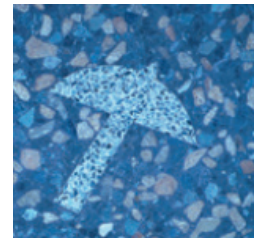
Museumplein, Amsterdam

Location
Amsterdam, the Netherlands
Design
Sven-Ingvar Andersson with Stefan Gall, Atelier Quadrat
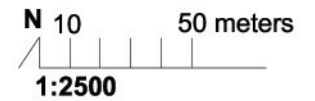**Commissioned by**
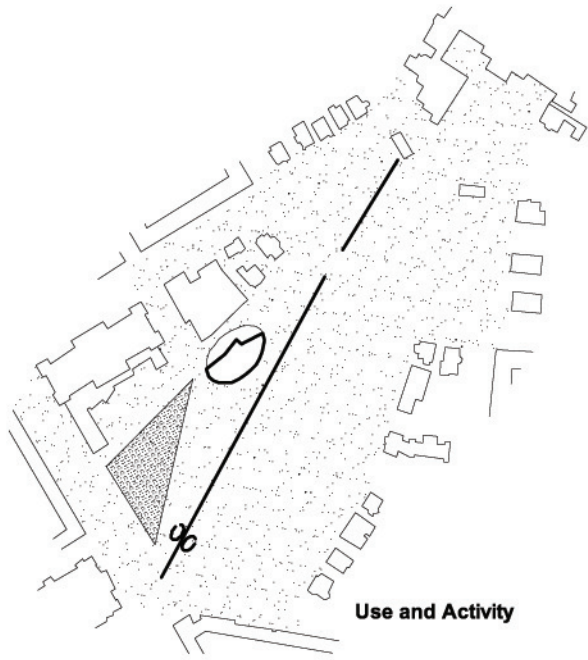City of Amsterdam
Area
12 000 m²
Design Period
1995

52°10', 4°55'

Amsterdam

Museumplein

Museumplein
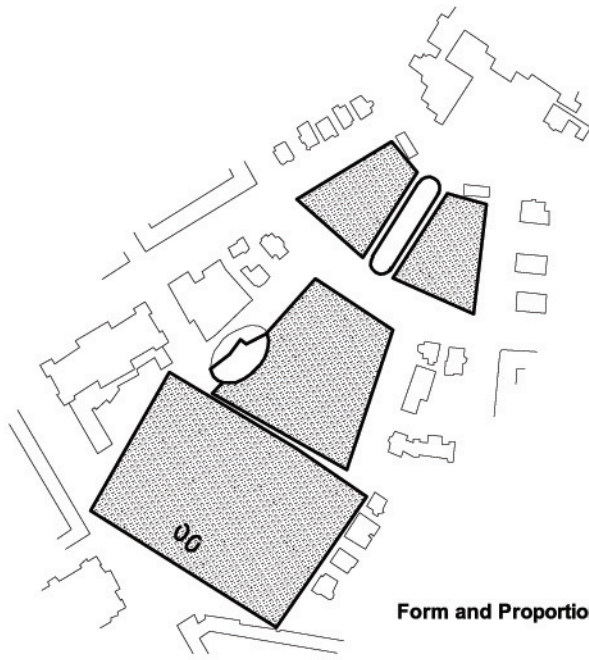
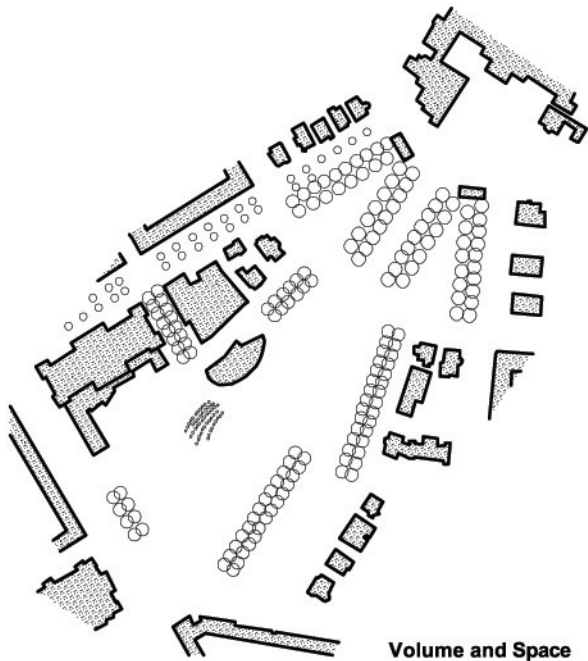N 10   50 meters

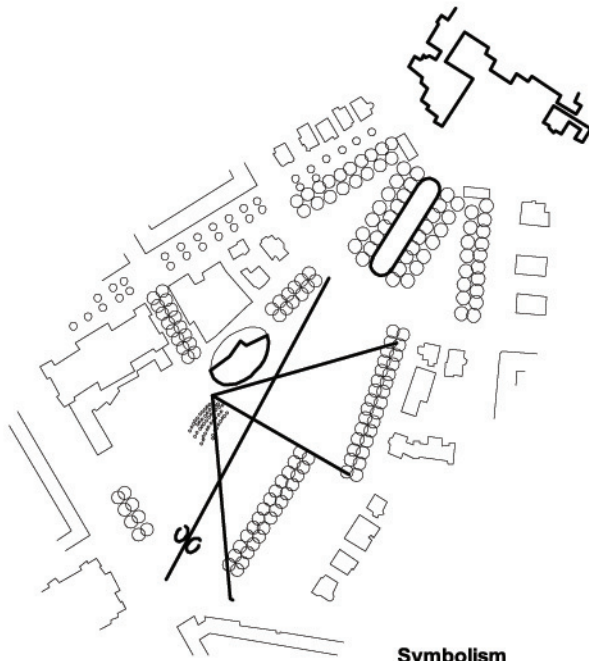1:2500

Use and Activity
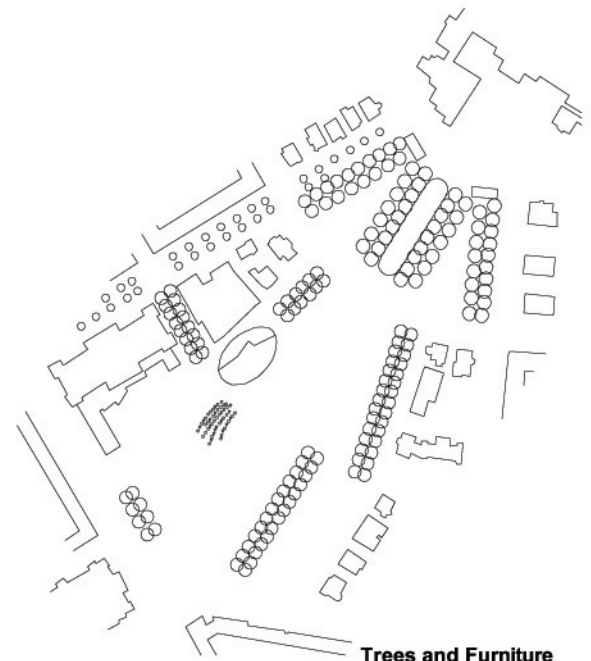
Form and Proportion

Access and Context

Volume and Space

Symbolism

Trees and Furniture

57
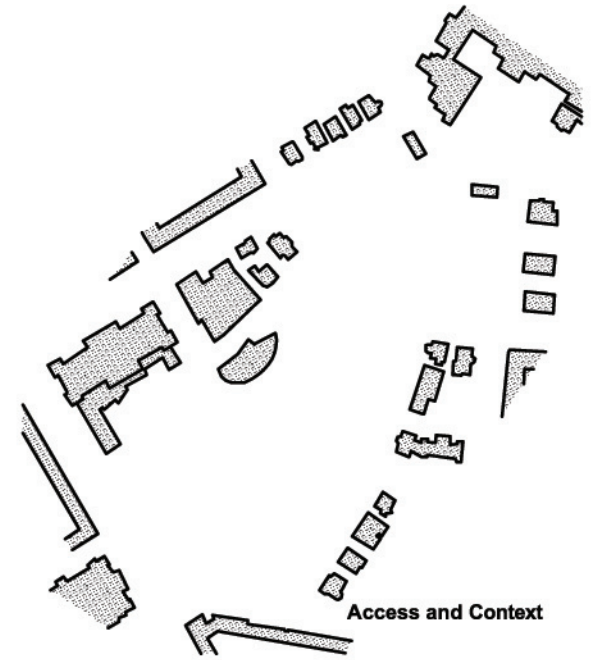
Fig. 3.43. The Rijksmuseum and the water pond

Fig. 3.44, Two steel ellipses in the green lawn

Fig. 3.45, The triangular sloped area

In 1992 the municipality of Amsterdam decided to redesign the Museumplein area. The renovation of Van Gogh museum and the Stedelijk Museum lead to the redesign of the Museumplein and transformed the square, which was a parking lot for hundreds of parked tourist buses, to a car free zone by removing the Museumstraat out from the square. The Swedish-Danish landscape architect Sven-Ingvar Andersson, joined by Dutch urban designer Stefan Gall, was commissioned to draw a plan for redesigning the Museumplein[18].

Architectural identity:
The square has a huge area reaching 12 hectares. The square is classified as a dominated square. When architect Cuypers was asked to design the Rijksmuseum, before World War One, he designed the museum garden in a symmetrical form with long axis oriented towards the Rijksmuseum building. In the new design of Anderson the Rijksmuseum is no longer dominating the area, even though the façade is still a visual centre. The new design is a green pedestrian open square. The Museumplein comprises two parts. One part is a paved square in front the Rijksmuseum and consists of four symmetrical rows pollarded of plane trees and a central pond along the axis through the Museum. The Paved square is winged with the museum shop and a café, which the visitors of the Museum face when they leave the museum. The other part of the square is an open expanse of grass which contains avenues of lime trees, a flower garden, diagonal and cross paths, monument, large grass field and the new extension building of Van Gogh Museum. Between the two parts a bus terminal and underground storage space are located. (Fig. 3.43, 3.44, 3.48)

Moreover, a car garage has been built under the Museumplein. The entrance to the garage was designed as a grassed, sloped triangle. Furthermore, the ground and paths of the square are almost paved by the Dutch bricks, while some laid strips are paved with natural stones sets. The terrace of the Museum provides visitors with a number of sitting, while parallel to the paths are red coloured benches made of thin folded steel designed by Anderson.[19] The path borders the eastern edge of the garage and the Van Gogh Museum is illuminated by red lamps from the Van Baerlestraat in the north to the fountain in the square in front of the Rijksmuseum. (Fig. 3.46)

The Museumplein was an open space on the edge of the city serving the surrounding residential neighbourhood. Since the five floors Rijksmuseum was built all the surrounding buildings were residential, until the new Van Gogh museum and the Stedelijk museum were constructed. The huge area of the square creates a contrast with the dense built environment and makes the visitors hardly recognize the facades facing them. The metallic façade of the new Van Gogh museum extension could be recognized as landmark in the middle of the square. Needless to say, that the classification of square makes it dominated by the Rijksmuseum façade. (Fig. 3.47)

Social Identity:
The Museumplein could be considered as a park due to the large green area covering its ground. Several activities take place in the square especially celebrations and festivals like the *Konigendag or* Queen Day and many other parties. On the west side a playground is used almost all the time by young people. The visitors of the Reijkmuseum leave the museum and face the square, which makes the square crossed by the museums visitors. Locating also a bus station in the middle of the square and providing a bicycle path adds to the live ness of the square. One of the most successful objects of the square is the fountain, the grass, the water pond, and some water play works spread all over the square. The children are always playing around these elements and people find themselves sitting on the ground especially on the triangular sloped area. The tree mass joined by benches attracts many visitors across the square. (Fig. 3.45, 3.49, 3.50)

Criticism:
Amsterdam's Museumplein was never actually a square. I selected the redesigned site as a showcase for Dutch contemporary landscape architecture practice. When it was announced that the landscape architect Sven-Ingvar Andersson will be commissioned to plan the Museumplein, some voices complained that it was unfair that no design from the Netherlands had been chosen, but considering the lack of square culture of the Dutch, nobody dared to stop Andersson.[20] A place surrounded with such number of important public buildings should be designed long time ago. In an interview the director of the Rijksmuseum once complained about the lack of grand royal gestures in the Dutch tradition. He compared the importance of Museumplein with importance of *Place des Vosges* or *Place de la*

Fig. 3.46, The square furniture the Museum's Kiosk

Fig. 3.47, The Stedelijk museum

Concorde in Paris.[21] In Dutch history functionality played all the time a major role and the representative squares had no function. This is due to the lack of squares but due to the lack of monumentality in comparison to France and England, seen from the often bad condition and the deformity in the form of the old Museumplein design conditions, which was neglected for a long time and used as parking place and traffic point.[22]

However, Andersson's design succeeds to create a meaningful place, a place where many functions and activities take place. Many interviewed people described the square as large playing space. The square is a platform where many people enjoy lying or sitting. On hot days the pond is providing cool water and fun on the ice when it freezes. In addition, the platforms hold many cultural events. The square is accessible from behind the Rijksmuseum facing on either side two glass and steel pavilions, a kiosk and a café plus restaurant. On the south is another access from the Van Baerlestraat where the sloped triangle is over the entrance to a supermarket and the underground.

The square with its overwhelming lawn is creating a relaxing image with a French flair. People can sit down in shade of the plane trees on the purple and pink benches of perforated steel plate which makes the square sociable and friendly. The wide stone pathway for pedestrians and cyclist separates the west side of the square from the lawns. The major focus of the square is the sloped triangular garage entrance. The sloping plane is rising up into the air and serving as an open-air platform.

Despite being negatively criticized in *Blauwe Kamer* and *de Architect* Andersson succeeded to create an open space that people like to visit.[23] The square has a character and invites people to stay and enjoy. The major achievement of this design lies in it ability to connect and unify the surrounding buildings and create an identity to the Museumplein.

Fig. 3.48, Plane trees area group

Fig. 3.49, The fountain

Fig. 3.50, The playground

Van Heekplein, Enschede

Location
Enschede, the Netherlands
Design
Okra Landschapsarchitecten, Utrecht
Commissioned by
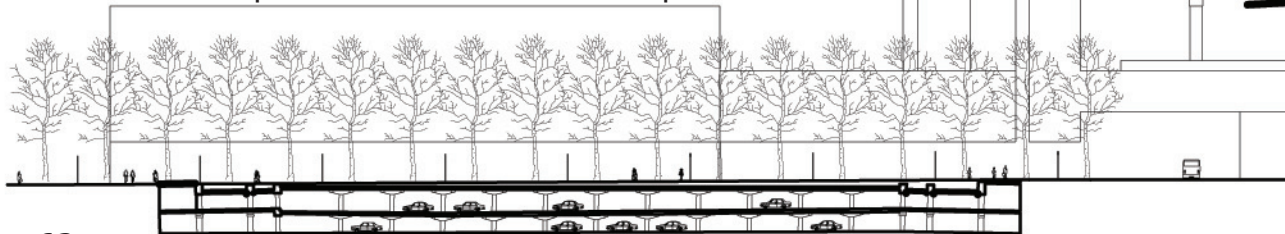Municipality of Enschede, Enschede
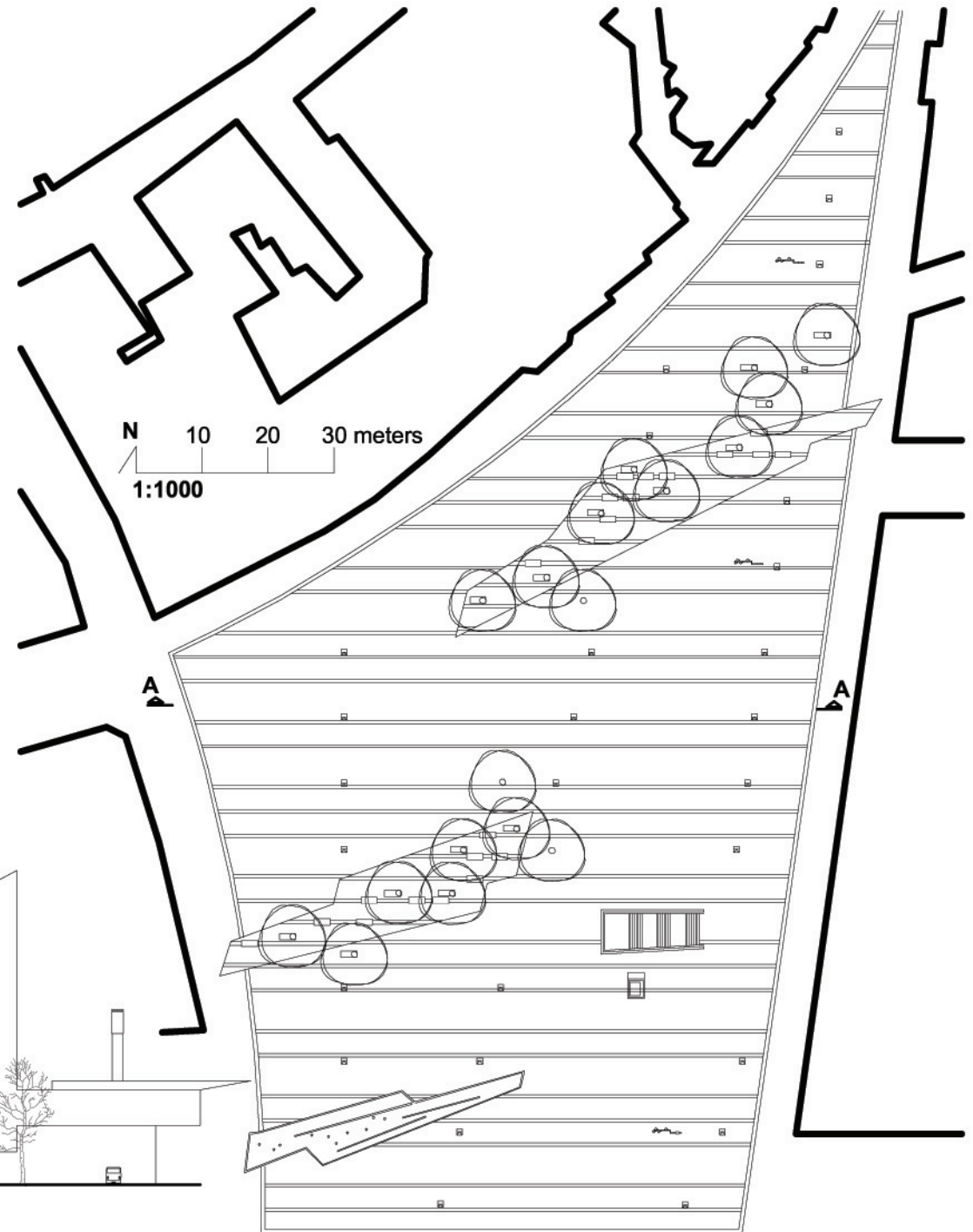**Area**
20.000m^2
Design Period
1999-2001

52°12', 6°53'

Enschede

Van Heekplein

Van Heekplein

N   10   20   30 meters

1:1000

A   A

Use and Activity

Form and Proportion

Access and Context

Volume and Space

Symbolism
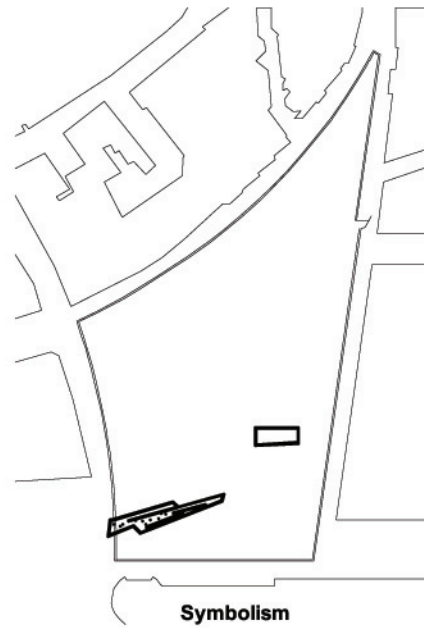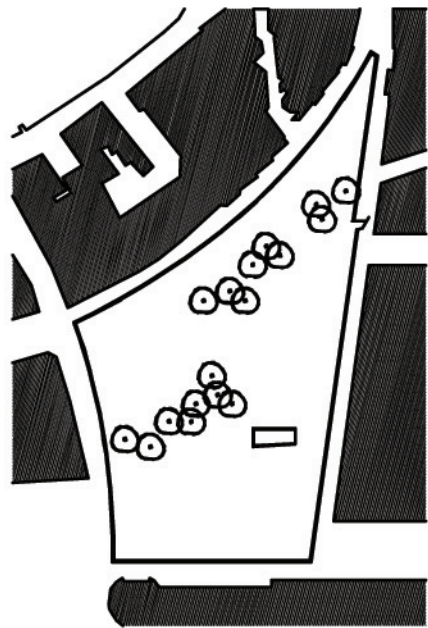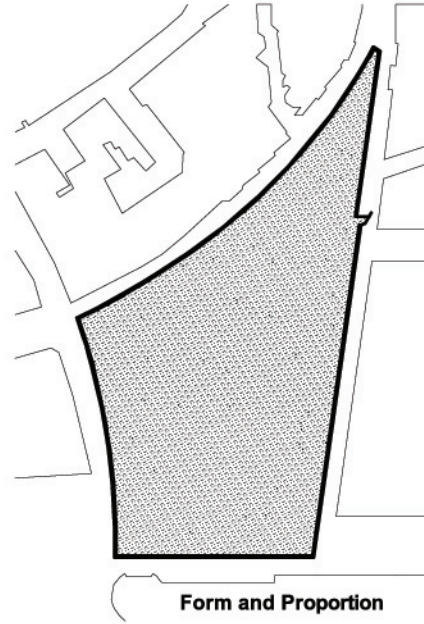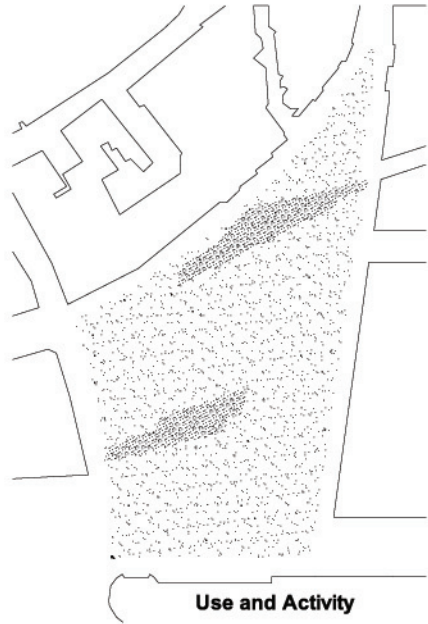

Trees and Furniture

63
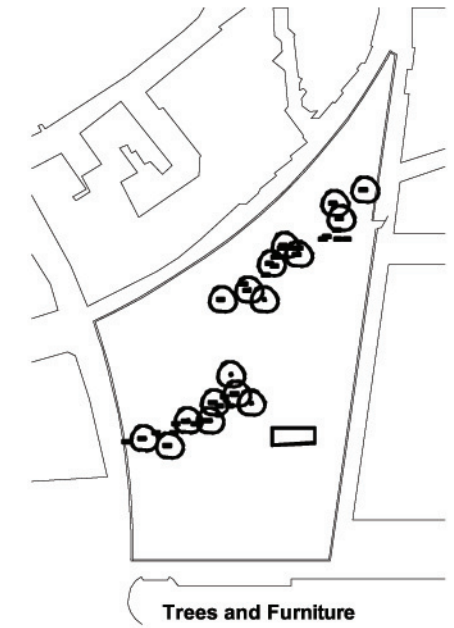
Fig. 3.51, The garage entrance and the V&D building

Fig. 3.52, The ' Plein object'

Fig. 3.53, The 'bloemenkraam'

The Van Heekplein square is a key project in the development of the southern part of the city center of Enschede, which has undergone considerable redevelopment with new commercial and office buildings and rerouting of traffic.

Van Heekplein was a big open square on the southern outskirt of the elliptical form of the old city of Enschede. The square, which was almost occupied by cars, was forming a barrier between the south passing 1945 Boulevard and the so called 'Ei' or inner city of Enschede.

Architectural identity:
Okra's new design expanded the old plan from 8000 m^2 to 12000^2. Due to Zuckers classification, Van Heekplein is a closed square. The square has a rectangular form subtracted from the north by an ellipse. The project underlines the square as a huge empty open space segmented by three distinct patches. Two patches are intermingled with tree groups (plane) and benches where one patch is for the fish market. The fish market patch is actually in the southern part, on the top of the recently 1700 car parking garage, and is including three lines of water pipes working as mist fountains. The square is paved with grey granite, in the east west direction, and is striped with linear bands of dark grey granite. Furthermore, the hidden hydraulic and electrical connections under the floors allow the square to host the weekly market activities

The square surroundings are almost new, either surrounded by fragmented, renewed or recently built buildings. The south side of the square was occupied by V&D warehouse before being renewed. While the west side is bordered by Bijenkorf's new shopping complex, a new housing project called 'De Klanderij' is located in the east. The architecture of the surrounding buildings is missing the feeling of similarity and unity. Also the low roof lines of the buildings are contributing to the unpleasant proportions of the square.
In the southern part of the square a sculpture, or the so called 'plein object', is designed as a Landmark. The Landmark is made out of steel tubes and is covering the stairs of the garage entrance. (Fig. 3.51, 3.52)

Social Identity:
Van Heekplein is market square surrounded by commercial day functions, small scaled shop units and cafes. The recently renewed

shopping streets, including Hollands Casino, are adding an important quality impulse for the inner city because the radiation of such functions are making people travel or cross the square. Also the new housing project adjacent the square is making the number of users increasing.
The new market square creates a flexible space that emphasises the constantly changing dynamic of use. On market days the square is bustling and full of the vibrancy as a regional market. On other days the square is quieter and the seating and fountain attracts the movers. But it is obvious that the large space of the square and the missed human scale and proportions are reducing the feeling of intimacy. (Fig. 3.53, 3.54, 3.55)

Fig. 3.54, The middle patch

65

Criticism:
Van Heek plein is an example of a really large square. MTD succeed to set up the square as place for market activities and functional uses. The car garage under the square and the clear zoning of the square's activities facilitated the utilization of the square.
However, MTD's design solution adopted the "Void" idea, which affected the image of square negatively. Due to the large space, the square needed a reduction in order to achieve a more pleasant proportion. Visitors feel lost in the square and prefer to walk on the edge of the square to avoid crossing this large emptiness. Moreover, the facades style and surroundings are dissimilar and needed a unifying element to achieve a minimum of unity. "The imported pavement, together with the tree patches, created an artificial feeling and decorative impression", as Frank de Josselin de Jong claims.[24] Another problem of this square, is the lack of meaning and identity. West 8's steel tubes Landmark could not transmit any symbolic message in the large fragmented square. While MTD's pavement and tree patches just created a temporary prestigious image.

The square is still considered as a social place due to the number of users during market days and holiday. The benches and trees that invite people to sit and enjoy in addition, to the fountain, which creates changing atmosphere in the square, are the main reason for being social.

Finally, MTD is one of many offices that applied the idea of the designing a square as a 'Void'. Due to the large area of the square the 'Void' idea failed extremely and created an empty meaningless place that people even fear to cross. The main purpose of such a square should be meeting people and creating a sense of place. Van Heek plein is one of many other examples where the image of the square has been widely marketed without achieving the main design purpose.

Fig. 3.55, The misty fountain

67
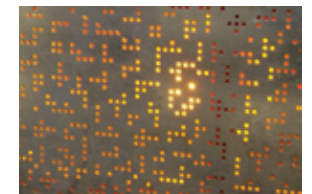
Spuiplein, The Hague

Location
The Hague, the Netherlands
Design
Joan Busquets, Barcelona i.s.m
Ingenieursbureau Den Haag
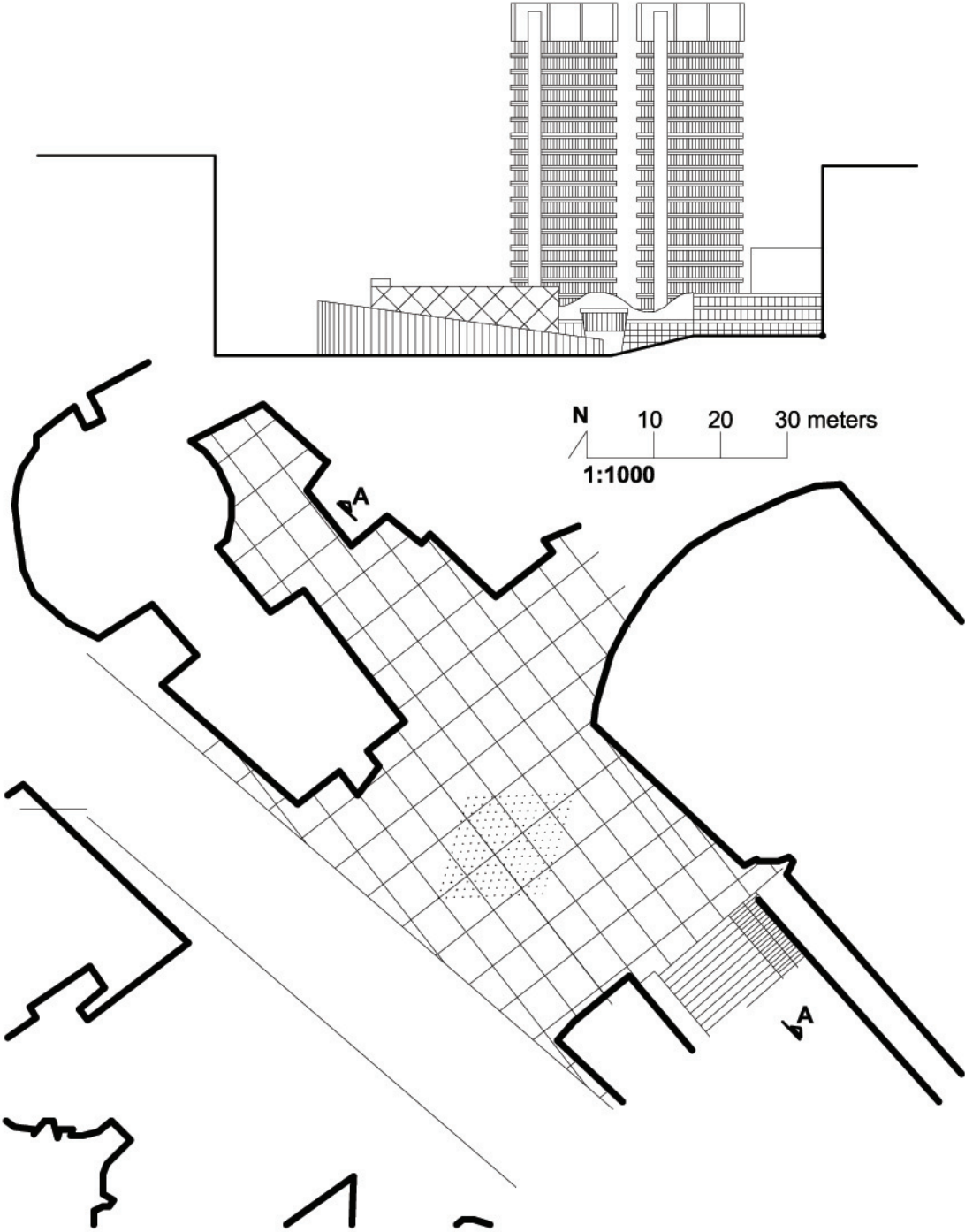**Commissioned by**
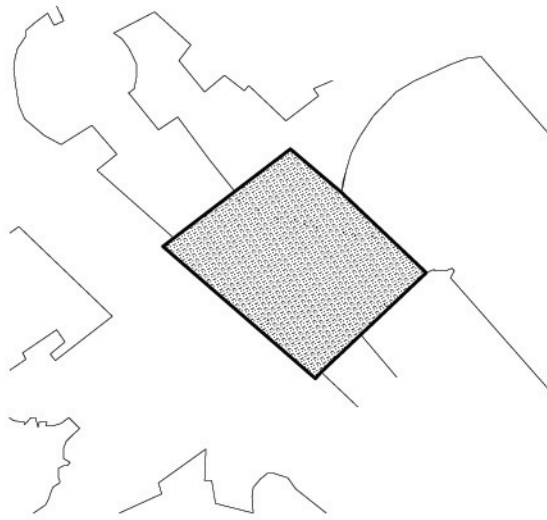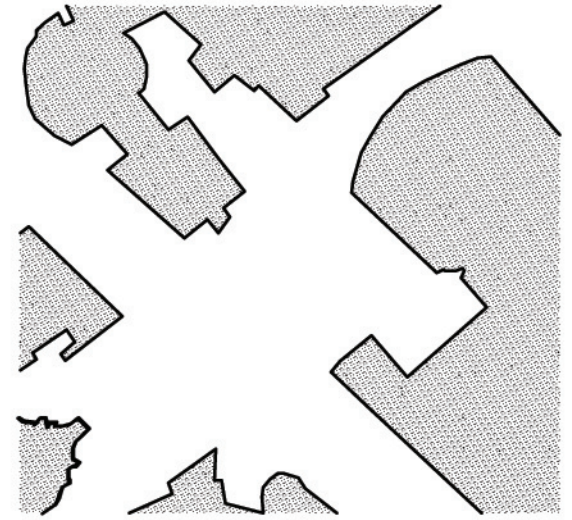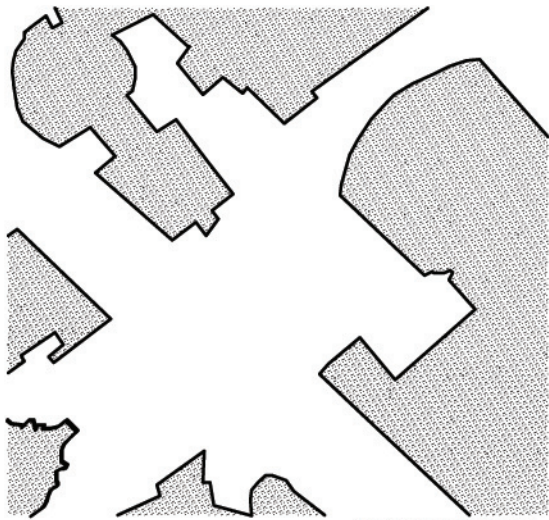Municipality of Den Haag
Area
12.000m²
Design Period
1995

52°40', 4°19'

N 10 20 30 meters
1:1000

Use and Activity
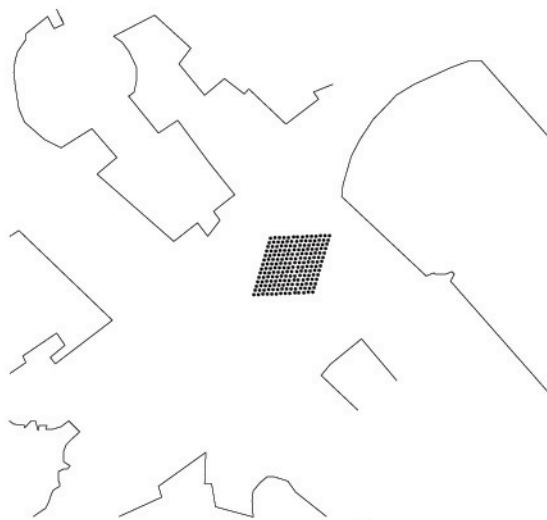
Form and Proportion
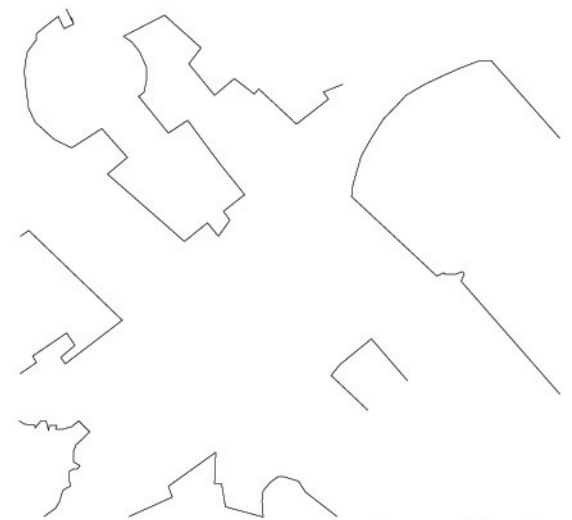
Access and Contex

Volume and Space

Symbolism

Trees and Furniture

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Fig. 3.56, Spuiplein and the city hall of The Hague

Fig. 3.57, The pavement and fountain

The Healthy Heart plan (1988) is a plan suggested by Alle Hosper in which research into open spaces, traffic, parking and planting questions were combined.[25] This plan lead to extensive redevelopment The Hague's city centre. The renewal reached the Dance Theatre, the new offices of the environment ministry, Richard Meier's New Town Hall complex and the New Parliament building.[26] The Healthy Heart plan coordinated the design and the implementation work for the outdoor areas. Under this plan the Catalan urban designer Joan Busquets has been commissioned to design the route from the entrance to Central Station to the Nieuwe Kerk.

Architectural Identity:
Joan Bosquets designed the 12 000 m^2 square as open empty space. The Spuiplein has a rectangular form while being a part of a pedestrian route. The square is classified as a closed square. The designer paved the empty space with blue Belgian limestone. The selection of this historical material was emphasized by the adjustment of the tiles dimension to the Dutch traditional dimensions 30 x 30 centimetres. The pavement is also highlighted by a pattern of ribbed limestone and stainless steel strips laid in the joints. The direction of the pavement and its pattern come from the City Hall. The street furniture is restricted to the rare terraces existing in the edge of the square.

The square is facing the white, 15 floors high facade of the City Hall. From the east side stands the Dance theatre façade and from the south the library complex. While the west side is open to the tram line street. Next, a fountain was designed by Peter Struycken, which consists of a diamond shaped grid of fourteen spouts set into small holes in the limestone. The most attractive element in the square is computer-controlled by pumps control which creates a water organ with changing rays, ranging in height between 10 and 140 cm. At night fibreglass lighting leads the square to a colourful play. (Fig. 3.56, 3.57, 3.59)

Social Identity:
The square is used informally by passers, skaters and playing kids. In summer some events take place on the square and the Library's stairs attract the many people to sit and hang around. Moreover, the fountain attracts a number of people while turned on. Despite the rare terraces, the square is an empty open space. (Fig. 3.58)

Criticism:
Despite the high quality of materials used in the design of the Spuiplein, Joan Bosquet created a meaningless empty place. The existing functions and activities of the square are little and not contributing much to the vividness of the square. The rare terraces are regretting and the use of the square is limited to pedestrian and cyclists crossing.

The square is well connected and easily accessible from the west as well from the east, but this is not enough for a good design. The designer created an empty flexible place without even providing the place with street furniture or greenery.
The only attractive element of the square is the fountain and lighting system. The design succeeded to glorify the City Hall and Dance theatre but it could not create a cohesive unified square. Before starting my study, I could not recognize this windy and empty open space as a square. The west side of the square was left empty facing the tram line, without even locating a line of trees to enclose the square or enhance the visual quality.

Actually the square is anti social in every sense. Trees and seats are missing in addition to the absence of functions in the square. Finally, I would say that the square got a new look, but paving the square with expensive materials was not enough.

Fig. 3.58, The pedestrian street leading to train station

Fig. 3.59, The eastern side of Spuiplein

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4. Conclusions

Chapter 4: Conclusions

The Documentation of the ten selected urban squares revealed many founding about the design of contemporary Dutch squares. Holland is like an experimental garden for public space architecture where a thousand flowers can bloom as Bart Lootsma claimes.[1] In all fairness, however, one has to admit that in number of the case studies, the Dutch experimental approach led to a superficial and commercial disharmony of styles and superficial show. Designers and municipalities ran into the cities branding competitions by creating fancy design images without focusing on the real aim of public squares. Some of the designs included successful strategies that need to be reinforced in the future. Other designs included many problems that to be avoided.

The study showed that designers succeeded to control and organise the squares activities, perhaps because functionality is deeply rooted in the Dutch modern design tradition. 'The functional design assignment', as Frank de Josselin de Jong[2] call it, was successfully accomplished. Each design had a strategy to layer the complexity of the urban situation without appearing chaotic. The horizontal connection between the squares and surrounding pedestrian shopping promenades contributed to making the squares dynamic. The vertical connection to the under ground parking for cars and sometimes for bicycles, helped to establish a better use and function of the squares.

However, I found that street furniture was another problem of Dutch urban squares. In most of the cases, designers avoided street furniture despite its importance as an element that supports the original function of the square, which is meeting people. The problem of street furniture was

Fig. 4.01, Grey is dominating the squares

related also to the design and the material used for square furniture. The lack of sufficient and durable seats in many squares forced people to not stay at the places. Sometimes, due to planned commerce, the designers meant to reduce the seating in cases such like the Neude Square. Designers limited the street furniture to materials such as stainless steel iron like for special lighting armatures, cycle racks, waste bins and gratings. The use of these newly designed elements

was reminiscent of southern European design approaches. The grey cool image they created did not fit in the Dutch context. (Fig. 4.01) Another material used for street furniture, was wood. In the beginning, the use of wood succeeded as a warm material in most squares, but after a certain time wood benches and even wood pavement, which needs to be renewed every 4 years like in Schouwburgplein, became inappropriate to use. In a place like Grote Markt in Almere the municipality did not maintain the wooden benches, which kept people away from sitting. (Fig. 4.02, 4.03)
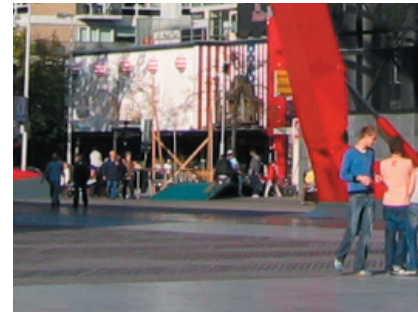

Fig. 4.02, Schouwburg's wood podium

Fig. 4.03, Wood bench in Grote Markt

Landmarks in squares were another problem in the design of Dutch urban squares. Locating art objects, statues, fountains, special installations and lighting elements in squares showed a specific trouble. The role of these objects was based on inviting and stimulating people to interact and communicate in squares.[3] People were supposed to be attracted by these objects and unified with the place. These objects are elements that can help in creating a sense of place and identity, which many squares were lacking of. On the other hand, the exaggeration in using huge steel objects, like West 8 did in Schouwburgplein, Neude and Van Heekplein and like B+B did in the Grote Markt, creates a negative repulsive image.[4] (Fig. 4.04, 4.05, 4.06, 4.07)

Fig. 4.04, Enschede

Fig. 4.05, Almere

Fig. 4.06, Rotterdam

Fig. 4.07, Utrecht

Including the above two problems, 'emptiness' arises as a disadvantage of the designed squares. The Dutch people claim that the emptiness of their landscape is something they love[5], but the idea of 'Emptiness' should not be transferred to the design of public squares. Adrian Geuze of West 8 says: '*In the designs for public space there is a fascination for the void, the unprogramed space in which the citizen can open out with a degree of freedom and where the climate and seasons can play a part*.' [6]Adrian's remark influenced many designers like MTD and B+B, and made them choose 'Emptiness' as way for shaping their designed squares. Consequently, a negative spatial image was created in many squares and made people feel uncomfortable. At night or on Sundays, urban squares suddenly expand because of the closing of daily activities. The enlarged open space makes people feel insecure and give squares an impression of being deserted [7]. Instead of reducing and reshaping the scale of squares to human proportions, designer preferred to create an open empty space under the claim of practicality and multi functional use. In squares such as Van Heekplein , Schouwburgplein and the Grote Markt in Almere the 'Emptiness' and 'Void' resulted to meaningless places.
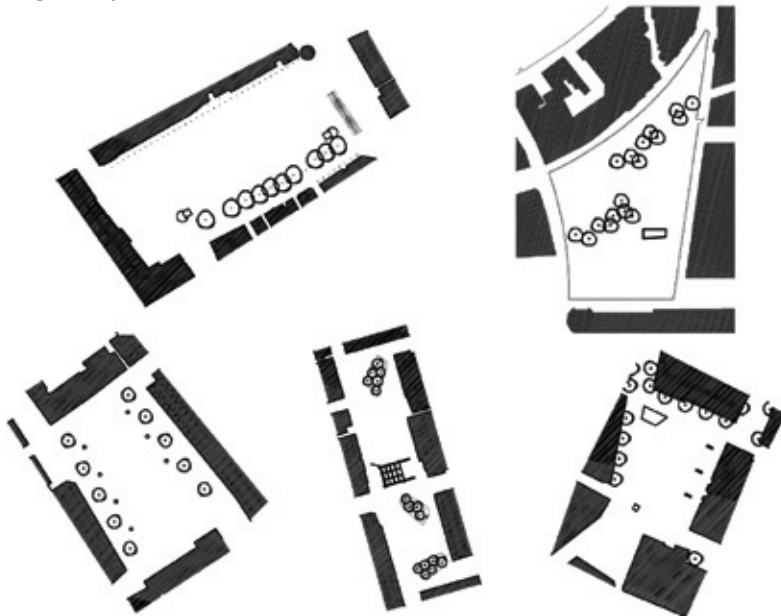

Fig. 4.08, Adrian Geuze influenced many designer with the 'Emptiness' idea

Furthermore, the trees and greenery were neglected in the design of many squares. Designing open spaces for ultimate multi-functionality does not mean to avoid plants. Based on the peoples complains municipalities were forced to add green elements to squares after being constructed. (Heuvelplein and Schouwburgplein)

Fig. 4.09, plants added by municipality in de Heuvel

Neglecting plants in the designs of urban squares raised major problems later on. In reality, trees could be used to reduce the large space or to improve a square's proportions like in Spuiplein and the Grote Markt in Almere. Trees could be used to unify the dissimilar styles of façades by hiding them in the Statenplein and Van Heekplein. They could also be used to enhance the thermal comfort by controlling the wind flows and creating shadowed or sheltered areas in a place like the Marktplein in Henegelo. More importantly, trees could solve the lack of '*uitstraling*' or atmosphere, which many visitors complained about in the squares. Planting elm or lime trees that have a symbolic meaning in the Dutch mind could strengthen a square's identity and to face such problem but in the majority of plans no attention was given to greenery and trees .[8]

Next, the material choices for public squares have shown recently an important attention. In all case studies, the designer gave special attention to the squares pavements. Thecoulkd be a result of three aspects. Firstly, the influence of the Barcelona projects, secondly, the economical boom of the 1990s, which enabled cities to buy luxurious materials,[9] and finally the 'Emptiness' or 'Void' idea, adopted by many designers in their plans, which needed to be reinforced by stretching an extraordinary pavement pattern. (Heuvelplein, Schouwburgplein, Grote Markt Almere and Van Heekplein) The Globalisation could also be also another aspect that facilitated the selection and purchase of materials from all over the world and lead consequently to a larger problem, mainly, the loss of regional identity in many Dutch cities as well in other European cities. [10] For example, we can hardly differentiate, nowadays, between public spaces in Amsterdam,

Maastricht or Frankfurt. However, the material selection for pavement should be selected and designed in a way that strengthens and enhances the identity of the squares. Typical Dutch brick tiles, produced from river clay, and Belgian natural mine stones should be more used than imported materials.

Another problem that appeared was related to the urban architectural context of the squares. In many squares, the urban context was strongly fragmented, due to the different facades styles, heights and colours; or to the urban fragmentation of the surroundings. The design concept of the public space should not be separated from the spatial urban and architectural context, but in the 10 case studies, unifying the urban context of the square's surrounding did not receive the appropriate attention from the designers and municipalities. From the beginning, the public space renewal policies should targeted the improvement and coherence of the visual quality of the surrounding facades as part of the square design.

Finally, I want to point to the progressive reductivity of urban aesthetics to a practice of pure marketing in the Netherlands. What irritates the eye is the fact that squares were always over-designed and therefore became obviously graphic and decorative. Actually, the main goal of municipalities should be achieving an overall improvement to the quality of the public space. Perhaps, the designers improved the square's physical quality by focusing mainly on producing a new visual image but their designs did not give the cities a much stronger sense of place. In the 10 case studies I was looking for successful places that succeeded to confirm the sense of place and the sense of meaning. Perhaps, De Heuvel in Tilburg was a successful example that has the power to attract people. However, the renovation and design of many Dutch urban squares during in the last ten years can be called 'exterior design', a matter of pavement and styling. These stylistic gestures attracted attention in just the right sort of way to do their visual work efficiently but they did seem somewhat theatrical and will date out quickly. It will be fascinating to see the status of these places over the next twenty years and whether designs given by (West8, B+B, MTD etc…) served as a catalyst to develop the sense of place.

Fig. 4.10, the façade of Statenplein

Fig. 4.11, the façade of Grote Markt

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Appendix I

This questionnaire is one of the methodologies used to document the Dutch urban squares. As a part of the evaluation of the selected case studies this questionnaire was conducted with square users during the visits to the squares. The questionnaire is based on the Project for Public spaces (PPS) organization's questionnaire[1]: "What makes a successful place?"

The questionnaire is investigating four key qualities:
- Uses and activities
- Access and Linkage
- Comfort and Image
- Sociability

The PPS developed a diagram and questionnaire as a tool in judging any place, good or bad. The inner circle of the diagram has main criteria concerning a number of qualitative aspects where the outer ring shows the quantitative aspects that can be measures by statistics. (Fig. a)

Fig a, The (PPS) evaluation criteria.

Due to the short study time the following questionnaire focused the inner ring criteria. The interviews where almost conducted in Dutch with some users in each square in shiny working days. However I didn't go through all questionnaire's queries, a few questions were selected and asked depending on the each squares situation.

Questions to consider on Uses & Activities:

- Are people using the space or is it empty?
- Is it used by people of different ages?
- Are people in groups?
- How many different types of activities are occurring - people walking, eating, playing baseball, chess, relaxing, reading?
- Which parts of the space are used and which are not?
- Are there choices of things to do?
- Is there a management presence, or can you identify anyone is in charge of the space?

Questions to consider on Access & Linkages:

- Can you see the space from a distance? Is its interior visible from the outside?
- Is there a good connection between the space and the adjacent buildings, or is it surrounded by blank walls? Do occupants of adjacent buildings use the space?
- Can people easily walk to the place? For example, do they have to dart between moving cars to get to the place?
- Do sidewalks lead to and from the adjacent areas?
- Does the space function for people with special needs?
- Do the roads and paths through the space take people where they actually want to go?
- Can people use a variety of transportation options - bus train, car, bicycle, etc. - to reach the place?
- Are transit stops conveniently located next to destinations such as libraries, post offices, park entrances, etc.?

Questions to consider on Comfort & Image:

- Does the place make a good first impression?
- Are there more women than men?
- Are there enough places to sit? Are seats conveniently located? Do people have is a choice of places to sit, either in the sun or shade?
- Are spaces are clean and free of litter? Who is responsible for maintenance? What do they do? When?
- Does the area feel safe? Is there a security presence? If so, what do these people do? When are they on duty?
- Are people taking pictures? Are there many photo opportunities available?
- Do vehicles dominate pedestrian use of the space, or prevent them from easily getting to the space?

Questions to consider on Sociability:

- Is this a place where you would choose to meet your friends? Are others meeting friends here or running into them?
- Are people in groups? Are they talking with one another?
- Do people seem to know each other by face or by name?
- Do people bring their friends and relatives to see the place or do they point to one of its features with pride?
- Are people smiling? Do people make eye contact with each other?
- Do people use the place regularly and by choice?
- Does a mix of ages and ethnic groups that generally reflect the community at large?
- Do people tend to pick up litter when they see it?

1. Project for Public spaces organization (PPS) http://www.pps.org/topics/gps/gr_place_feat?referrer=gps_sidebar 01112005

Illustrations