

## Building Together

### Citizens' participation in the urban renewal of The Hague (Netherlands) in the 1980s

Mota, Nelson

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Cátedra UNESCO de  
Comunicación y Cultura de Paz  
Universidad de Lima  
Lima, Perú

# COMUNICACIÓN, CIUDAD Y ESPACIO PÚBLICO

CÁTEDRA UNESCO EN COMUNICACIÓN Y CULTURA DE PAZ

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FONDO EDITORIAL | CONGRESO INTERNACIONAL

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# COMUNICACIÓN, CIUDAD Y ESPACIO PÚBLICO

CÁTEDRA UNESCO EN COMUNICACIÓN Y CULTURA DE PAZ

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BUILDING TOGETHER. CITIZENS'  
PARTICIPATION  
IN THE URBAN RENEWAL  
OF THE HAGUE (NETHERLANDS)  
IN THE 1980s

Construyendo juntos.  
Participación ciudadana  
en la renovación urbana  
de La Haya (Países Bajos)  
en la década de 1980

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This article examines the design decisionmaking process for the urban renewal of The Hague (The Netherlands), developed in the 1980s. The article investigates in particular the process related with the development of a plan (*deelgebied 5*) and a project (*Punt en Komma*), designed by the Portuguese architect Álvaro Siza. Using this case study, the article discusses the role of the architect as a social mediator, and its particular relevance in housing processes developed with citizens' participation. Drawing on an intellectual framework defined by the concept of "open work" (Umberto Eco) and the dialectical relation between modernity and ambivalence (Zigmunt Bauman), this article suggests that meaningful communication between authors and addressees does not entail a complete elimination of the power of expertise. Instead, this article contends that stimulating the users' confrontation with the ambiguities and contradictions of the design process is an import feature to enhance the quality of citizens' participatory in design decision-making processes.

#### KEYWORDS

Housing, Urban Renewal, Citizens'  
Participation, Architecture, The Netherlands,  
Álvaro Siza

## RESUMEN

En este artículo analizaremos el proceso de toma de decisiones sobre diseño, desarrollado en los ochenta, para renovar la ciudad de La Haya. Investigaremos en especial el proceso relacionado con el desarrollo de un plan (*deelgebied 5*) y de un proyecto (*Punt en Komma*), diseñados por el arquitecto portugués Álvaro Siza. Basándonos en este caso de estudio, examinaremos el papel del arquitecto como mediador social y su especial pertinencia en procesos de viviendas desarrollados con la participación de los ciudadanos. Inspirados en un marco intelectual definido por el concepto "obra abierta" (Umberto Eco) y la relación dialéctica entre modernidad y ambivalencia (Zigmunt Bauman), sugerimos en este trabajo que la comunicación significativa entre autores y destinatarios no implica la erradicación del poder de los conocimientos. Por el contrario, sostenemos que estimular la confrontación de los usuarios con las ambigüedades y las contradicciones del proceso de diseño es un factor importante que sirve para mejorar la calidad de participación ciudadana en los procesos de toma de decisiones sobre diseño.

### PALABRAS CLAVE

vivienda, renovación urbana, participación de los ciudadanos, arquitectura, Países Bajos, Álvaro Siza



One of the targets in the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals highlights the importance of citizen's participation to develop inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities. By 2030, target 11.3 aims at, "enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries" (UN, 2015). This target explicitly relates the development of inclusive cities with processes of co-creation and meaningful communication. Indeed, to build the millions of new housing complexes needed to accommodate the rapid urbanisation of the global South we need to critically rethink the system of interrelations woven in design decisionmaking. In this context, to cope with this major societal challenge, there are lessons from the past that can be useful to accomplish a more sustainable urban development. In particular, the urban renewal movement developed in Europe from the 1960s until the 1980s can contribute important guidelines to tackle the urbanization challenges of the coming decades.

In the late 1960s, there was a widespread drive to create meaningful communication between social groups that lived in opposite sides of the political and economic spectrum. Grassroots movements for the empowerment of ordinary citizens gained momentum and would underpin the growing acceptance of citizens' participation in design decision-making processes. In the 1970s, the visibility of this phenomenon increased in Western Europe with the emergence of urban renewal as an alternative to the welfare state mass housing policies employed hitherto. A common token of the new urban renewal policies was challenging the post-war emphasis on central planning, standardization, and serial mass housing production. Instead, these new policies championed a more situated approach, attempting to re-connect housing policies with its social significance, going beyond a mere productive and regulatory approach. This political agenda was designed to overcome the conflicting relations between the collective and the singular, and thus it has influenced the relation between the planner/designer and the citizen/user. This relation became more interweaved, and triggered a reconceptualization of the role of the architect in design decision-making processes.

In this context, thus, what was the contribution of aesthetic communication in the reassessment of the nexus between author and addressee in the design disciplines? What was the extent to which architectural expertise contributed to bridge the gap between the universal visual order of the architecture sponsored by the welfare state and the subjectivity of emancipated citizens?

To contribute possible answers for these questions, this paper will discuss the importance of communication in Álvaro Siza's approach to design decision-making with citizens' participation. I will focus in particular in the design process of the *Punt en Komma* housing complex, a project developed from 1984 until 1988 as part of the urban renewal of the Schilderswijk district, a multicultural neighbourhood in the Dutch city of The Hague. The paper will be divided in two parts. In the first part I will discuss the intellectual background against which citizens' participation in design decision-making emerged as a counter proposal to the power relations consolidated during the 1950s and 1960s. The idea



of open work, as defined by Umberto Eco (Eco, *Opera Aperta*, 1962), will be examined in detail. It will be discussed as a strategy of aesthetic communication that attempts to reconcile the author with the addressee, a key aspect to mediate the relations between the expert (the designer) and the user (the dweller).

In the second part of the paper, I will examine in detail Álvaro Siza's project for the urban renewal of the Schilderswijk district, with an emphasis on the design decision-making processes of *deelgebied 5's* plan and the dwelling layout of the *Punt en Komma* housing blocks. To illustrate the background against which these processes ensued, I will discuss the most relevant urban and demographic challenges of the district, in particular the tense social relations between the different ethnic groups living in the area. The fundamental aspects of Siza's plan for the neighbourhood will then be presented and the contribution of citizens' participation in the process will be discussed. The relevance of the Spatial Development Laboratory (*Ruimtelijk Ontwikkelings Laboratorium*, ROL, a system to develop full scale models of the typical dwelling units), will be further accounted as a novel method to involve residents in housing design decision-making processes.

Finally, the conclusion will highlight the importance of citizens' participation in accommodating the social and cultural differences of the future residents and create conditions for multiculturalism and interculturalism in the city. Citizens' participation will be conceptually framed as a medium for a process of communication between the architect as encoder-producer and the user as decoder-receiver.

## **PART I ARCHITECTURE, COMMUNICATION, AND THE POETICS OF THE OPEN WORK**

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### **The Poetics of the Open Work**

In the 1970s, the capacity of the design expert to perform as a social mediator was contested. Fighting the figure of the design expert became a common trend in the 1970s, especially for a group of architects that Tzonis and Lefaivre called the populist movement. Although very diverse and unstructured in its ideological framework, this movement actively pursued a paradigm shift where the focus shifted from an ideal of 'order' and 'expertise' to one of 'freedom' and 'pluralism' (Tzonis & Lefaivre, 1976, p. 28). "While [Welfare State] architects saw the designed environment as a well-ordered regiment", Tzonis and Lefaivre argued, "populists envisaged it as a well serviced supermarket" (Tzonis, Lefaivre, 1976, p. 29). In this context, the expert's ability to engage in meaningful communication with the ordinary man on the street became a flagship for a new disciplinary approach in the design disciplines. The envisioned position of the designer-expert brought about a flagrant contradiction, though. While driven by an approach of liberation for the user, the populist movement fell prey to what Barry Schwartz called "the



paradox of choice” (Schwartz, 2016). As Schwartz aptly demonstrated, too much choice does not always resonate with an increased autonomy, freedom or self-determination. It often means exactly the opposite. In this context, it is worthwhile to review briefly the relation between standards, norms, and openness in design decision-making.

While the critique to the Welfare State architecture gained momentum in the 1970s, there were earlier attempts to reconfigure the role of the architect in design decision-making. One of the earlier critiques to the standards and norms of Welfare State architecture emerged in the late 1950s and it was supported by the notion of open form and open work<sup>1</sup>. In the 1960s, open form and open architecture became notable examples of a critique to the mass housing architecture championed by the welfare state<sup>2</sup>. Throughout the 1960s, open form gained momentum as a strategy to promote meaningful aesthetic communication between the designer and the user, where the earlier neither dictates the needs of the later, nor is subjugated by them.

This attempt to reconceptualise the design agency of architects would gain a strong intellectual support with the publication, in 1962 of Umberto Eco’s *Opera Aperta* (Open Work)<sup>3</sup>. Among the essays collected in *Open Work*, “The poetics of the Open Work” could be singled out as a major contribution to discuss the role of the individual addressee in the reception of the work of art (Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts*, 1984)<sup>4</sup>. In this essay, Eco highlights the notion of open work as a rejection of definite messages. He emphasizes the initiative of the individual addressee in giving aesthetic validity to a work of art introducing his particular perspective (Eco, *The Poetics of the Open Work*, 1989, p. 4). However, Eco brings about a subtle yet meaningful variation to the concept of openness, defining a work of art as a closed form and open product. Closed in its uniqueness and wholeness and open in its predisposition to be interpreted in infinite forms while preserving its specificity. He concludes, then, “every reception of a work of art is both an interpretation and a performance of it, because in every reception the work takes on a fresh perspective for itself”. For Eco, the reception of the work of art is an act of freedom and, as such, an imposition of a single sense at the very outset of the receptive process should be prevented. To open up the possibilities for interpretation and performance, Eco champions the ideas of suggestiveness. He goes on contending “an artistic work that suggests is also one that can be performed with the full emotional and imaginative resources of the interpreter” (Eco, *The Poetics of the Open Work*, 1989, p. 9).

Suggestiveness thus embodies a certain amount of ambiguity and ambivalence, which become important qualities to challenge dogmatic directional centres (Eco, *The Poetics of the Open Work*, 1989, p.11)<sup>5</sup>. Ambiguity and ambivalence would become the key characteristics of “works in movement”, a sub-group of open works where the collaboration of the addressee in making the work of art is vital, because they are structurally unplanned or physically incomplete, such as Calder’s mobiles or Mallarme’s *Livre*. Eco suggests incorporating indeterminacy as part of the poetics of the open work. “As in the



Einsteinian universe”, Eco argues, “in the ‘work in movement’ we may well deny that there is a single prescribed point of view” (Eco, *The Poetics of the Open Work*, 1989, p. 19). Eco’s poetics of the open work is based on an organizing rule that allows numerous different personal interventions, resisting, however, indiscriminate participation (Eco, *The Poetics of the Open Work*, 1989, p. 19). In this article, I will explore the ambivalent character of Eco’s notion of open work to define the intellectual background for a discussion on the interplay between architectural expertise and citizens’ participation in design decision-making processes. The potential and the shortcomings of the idea of open work will be used to examine the extent to which the designer qua author and the user qua addressee can negotiate sovereignty in the design process, without falling prey to the perils of authoritarianism or populism.

### **The Power of Expertise**

The ambivalence in Eco’s poetics of the open work offers a possibility to reconcile the conflicting relation between order and chaos, authority and individual expression, design and contingency. These relations are particularly relevant in the context of design processes with citizens’ participation, where the power relations between author and addressee acquire a prominent status. In this context, design experts can play a key role in supporting social inclusion and mediation, circumventing the anxiety, discomfort and tension, that threaten the everydayness of ordinary people in the face of ambivalence and contingency.

The entwined relation between ambivalence, contingency and the role of the expert was insightfully explored by Zigmunt Bauman, in his *Modernity and Ambivalence*, published in 1993. In this book, Bauman argues that in modernity’s battle of order against chaos in worldly affairs, its project of a rational-universal world would know of no contingency and no ambivalence (Til, 2009)<sup>6</sup>. In fact, he goes on stating, “the residents of the house of modernity had been continuously trained to feel at home under conditions of necessity and to feel unhappy at the face of contingency”. Bauman further stresses that contingency “was that state of discomfort and anxiety from which one needed to escape by making oneself into a binding norm and thus doing away with difference” (Bauman, 1993, p. 233).

Despite the strong ideological apparatus that supported the project of modernity, it failed to eradicate ambivalence and contingency. It promoted, however, a noticeable displacement of ambivalence from the public realm to the private sphere. In fact, as Bauman puts it, with modernity’s drive to transfer ambivalence from the public to the private realm, experts became key figures in the mediation between the social and the personal. To overcome the anxiety caused on the individual by ambivalence, the expert becomes someone on whom we could truly trust, “one that combined the person’s capacity to understand with the power of science to make the right decisions” (Bauman, 1993, p. 199). The importance of the expert, as Bauman claims, is not so much related with his or her actual qualities or skills but how they are perceived by the recipients of the services. “The expert is, so to speak, a condensation of the diffuse need of trustworthy — because supra-individual — sanction of individuality”. And he goes on pointing out that



"As an interpreter and mediator, the expert spans the otherwise distant worlds of the objective and the subjective. He bridges the gap between guarantees of being in the right (which can only be social) and making the choices that one wants (which can only be personal). In the ambivalence of his skills he is, so to speak, resonant with the ambivalent condition of his client". (Bauman, 1993, p. 199)

Writing in the early 1990s, Bauman brings about a fundamental reconceptualization of the expert as someone that performs a liberating role. Bauman's work is, I would contend, essential to create a new intellectual framework for a reassessment of the experiences with citizens' participation in design processes developed in the 1970s and 1980s.

In the next section of this article, I will discuss further the role of the architect in the design decision-making process. I will examine the plan for the *deelgebied 5* and the project of the *Punt en Komma* housing complex, both part of the urban renewal of the Schilderswijk district in the Dutch city of The Hague, as a case study to explore the extent to which meaningful communication can help the architect to perform as a social mediator.

## PART 2

### THE URBAN RENEWAL OF THE HAGUE IN THE 1980's

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#### Housing Beyond Standards

The Schilderswijk district was created in the second half of the nineteenth century as a result of a speculative development to accommodate the flux of rural migration to The Hague, the political capital of The Netherlands. Since then, the area evolved to become a densely populated melting pot of people arriving from different parts of the country, where the street was the only space for social interaction. All these factors, however, fostered a strong social cohesion and an inescapable social control. In the mid-1960s, urban design strategies inspired by the principles of the functional city and by welfare state policies, both by then pervasive in the Western world, were used in the urban renewal plan for the Schilderswijk district. The plan *Van Gris naar Groen* (From Grey to Green), an epitome of what Tzonis and Lefaivre considered the architecture of the welfare state, was designed to rebuild the area with high-rise slabs and an urban layout inspired in the principles of the Athens Charter. The population, however, opposed the modernist plan, and a period of uncertainty unfolded, with the policy makers avoiding negotiations for an alternative urban renewal strategy. The latent conflict between the dwellers and the politicians triggered a process of dilapidation of the neighbourhood. Consequently, a great deal of the residents ran away, moving to other areas. They were replaced by different streams of foreign migrant influx. In the 1970s, the houses left vacant by the older residents were mainly occupied by migrant workers from southern Europe, Turkey and Morocco, and by Surinamese who fled the former Dutch colony after its independence in 1975. This sudden change in the demographics of the neighbourhood contributed to a noticeable transformation in its social relations, creating a progressive loss of mutual



contact and social control. As a social worker engaged with the Schilderswijk's community put it, "because of the different languages and cultures mutual contacts were limited. Because there was no understanding of each way of life, there was less social control" (Boasson, 1988, p. 19)<sup>7</sup>.

While the district kept its pre-World War II character as a melting pot of newly arrived working class residents, a fundamental change happened. Now, emerged a cultural mix, which hindered the blossoming of spontaneous social interaction. From the mid-1970s until the early 1980s, this conjuncture created a process of fragmentation of the district's social cohesion, and fostered social unrest.

The urban renewal of the district became thus a political priority for the municipality of The Hague. To cope with the growing social unrest created by the urban renewal policies, the Municipality appointed in 1980 Adri Duivesteijn, a young social activist against the urban renewal policies of the 1960s and 1970s, as alderman for spatial planning and urban renewal. After four years of many political successes and some drawbacks in his new capacity, Duivesteijn keenly promoted citizens' participation in the urban renewal of the Schilderswijk, the most problematic district of The Hague. He invested a great deal of the material and human resources of his department in preparing the bureaucratic apparatus to support the participatory process. He realised, however, that he was still missing an important element in the process: the designer. It was then, when in April 1984 he visited the Portuguese city of Porto, that he met the architect Álvaro Siza. In Porto, Duivesteijn visited Siza's social housing projects developed in the mid-1970s, which had been developed with citizens' participation in the design process. His appraisal of Siza's work, personal and disciplinary approach triggered him to invite the Portuguese architect to develop a plan for the *deelgebied 5*, an area included in the urban renewal of the Schilderswijk district. Siza eventually accepted Duivesteijn's invitation.

When Siza arrived at the Schilderswijk district, in July 1984, the urban renewal of the district was already in motion, with some new housing ensembles already under development. He could still see and experience, however, the district's distinct nineteenth century urban fabric and how it generated a particular spatial system and atmosphere. When Siza first visited the Schilderswijk, in 1984, the urban morphology of the district was still characterized by a very dense fabric of long streets delimited by continuous façades, chiefly made of the speculative housing type developed in the late nineteenth century. This experience would eventually be influential for the further development of his plan and projects for the area.

Over the next months, Siza revised an existing plan for the area designed by city's urban design department. His revision of the plan was fundamentally nurtured by his sensibility to the urban morphology of the Schilderswijk neighbourhood, first and foremost in the role played by the street profile to define the area's character and atmosphere. Siza was critical about some options of the preliminary plan for the *deelgebied 5* designed by the municipality's technicians, especially the widespread demolitions planned and the disregard for the morphological characteristics of the existing urban fabric.



In effect, Siza had already criticized this typical token of the architecture of the welfare state in previous urban renewal projects, where he showed his opposition to the *tabula rasa* approach (Mota, 2014, pp. 779–808)<sup>8</sup>. In The Hague, he confirmed this, arguing “I do not believe one should break down everything just because you think that you can create something better”. And he went on arguing that “it is important to have references, the old is also the support for what you create anew. If we want to deliver something with high quality, we cannot start from the zero”. Moreover, he went further contending, “if we tear down everything, we throw away the physical identification of the district’s soul” (Boasson, 1988, p. 25). Following these lines, Siza revised the municipality plan to maintain as many buildings as possible. Siza showed also a keen interest in preserving some of the districts vernacular social and spatial practices, as well as building techniques and materialization<sup>9</sup>. Curiously enough, the residents, the developer, and even some technicians involved in the process, disregarded widely the preservation of existing buildings and vernacular references. This was seen as a reactionary attitude, an old-fashioned approach, and a conservative outlook<sup>10</sup>.

Siza’s initial exchanges with the stakeholders involved in the urban renewal of the Schilderswijk were contentious. He visited the houses of local residents, and met with several technicians, social workers, and representatives of the local housing corporation. Despite some initial resistance to his ideas and an intense negotiation, Siza managed to show to all the stakeholders his genuine interest in the upgrading of the district’s living conditions. Eventually the plan for the *deelgebied 5* was approved. However, the participatory process during the development of the plan did not engage most of the residents. This would change radically when the discussions moved to the scale of the building, and especially to the discussions on the dwellings’ floor plan layout. Duivesteijn and the municipality of The Hague were aware of the importance of the spatial organisation of the dwelling unit for a successful urban renewal operation. Considering the difficulties experienced by laymen in understanding technical drawings, many urban renewal operations in the Netherlands during the 1980s adopted an efficient instrument to promote meaningful communication between technicians and the dwellers in housing design: The Spatial Development Laboratory (*Ruimtelijk Ontwikkelings Laboratorium*, ROL).

### **A Laboratory for Meaningful Communication in Design Decision-Making**

The history of the use of the ROL in design decision-making processes is inextricably linked with the paradigm shift in urban renewal programmes in the Netherlands. Following the shortcomings of the welfare state architecture in the late 1960s, the Dutch governmental and municipal authorities decided to involve the population in the debate on housing. Inspired by this new approach to housing policies, in the early 1970s a group of architects decided to plan an exhibition of the new housing estates to be built in Amsterdam, showing 1:1 models of the “houses of the future”<sup>11</sup>. This exhibition was meant to become the background against which a permanent debate on housing would ensue. Though the



exhibition was never implemented, Amsterdam's municipal office for housing took advantage of the idea of creating a system to build quickly and inexpensively full-scale models of the apartments designed for their new social housing estates.

The system was based on plywood modular components with chipboard frame. The modular system used components varying in series of 10 cm from the 10 x 10x 10 cm basic unit to the 60 x 40 x 20 cm main unit. The system was assembled with plastic pipes inserted in the holes opened on the top and bottom of the wooden modules. The models built with this system could integrate window frames and doors, as well as furniture and household appliances to create a more realistic experience of the tested dwelling unit, and an objective feedback from the future dwellers on its characteristics. The ROL became a success among the institutional stakeholders interested in social housing.

Soon most of the major cities in The Netherlands would have their own ROL and use it to involve the residents in the design decision-making process (Dinesen, 1982, p. 306). As the Danish scholar Cort Ross Dinesen put it, the models built in the ROLs served two purposes: as a simulation of the dwelling and as a method of communication with users" (Dinesen, 1982, p. 307). Using this system, the architect's design becomes more tangible and thus enhances residents' feedback grounded on a concrete spatial experience, with an open attitude where everybody can express their outlook and opinion on the layout of the dwellings, and contribute to fine-tune the project.

Following the lead of Amsterdam, the department of urban renewal at The Hague's municipality also created a ROL which eventually was used to discuss and develop the layout of the dwellings for the two housing blocks that Siza was commissioned to design in the *deelgebied 5*, which eventually became known as *Punt en Komma*.

### **Accommodating Differences**

On 24 January 1985, Álvaro Siza and several technicians involved in the *Punt en Komma* project travelled to the ROL to meet with the group *Bouwen in 5*, an association of residents in Schilderwijk's *deelgebied 5*. The goal of the working day at the ROL was to assess the qualities and problems of a floor plan for a housing complex located in the Rembrandtstraat, elsewhere in the Schilderswijk district, developed earlier by the housing corporation's-*Gravenhage*, the client of *Punt en Komma*.

In the introduction to the meeting, Siza highlighted the need to understand the way people live as the basis for a research aimed at improving it. Considering the demographics of the neighbourhood, Siza duly noted the absence of foreign residents in the meeting, and stressed the importance of receiving contributions from all the different groups of residents in the *deelgebied 5*. "The aim is to develop a plan that can be suitable for both Dutch and foreign residents," Siza claimed<sup>12</sup>. Many critiques and suggestions



were made after experiencing the full-scale mock-up of the dwelling unit. The accessibility to the kitchen, the rigidity of the partitions, the mix of sleeping and living areas, and the area and structure of the distribution areas were the most noticed remarks.

After this working session at the ROL, the participants made a summary of requirements, to be taken into account by Siza in the development of the project. Then, using his own critical assessment of the residents' review on the unit tested at the ROL workshop, Siza developed a layout proposal for the *Punt en Komma* dwellings. There were conspicuous changes to the initial layout tested at the ROL, first and foremost the introduction of a clear distribution area and a better differentiation between the public areas (kitchen and living room) and the private areas (bedrooms and toilet). The layout developed by Siza placed on the street side a larger living room with a semi-open kitchen next to it, while the bedrooms were placed facing the courtyard of the building. These two main areas were articulated by a system of double distribution in U shape, divided by a closet, and connecting all partitions.

Following up on these initial contacts, in March 1985, the group *Bouwen in 5* issued a list of principles they believed essential for a smooth relation between the different stakeholders<sup>13</sup>. Among these principles, the issue of the communication between the architect and the residents was also addressed. They suggested "the architects should, as far as possible, use spatial methods of representation: isometrics, perspective drawings, models, photomontages and so on"<sup>14</sup>. In effect, on 22 April 1985, the same group, together with other associations of *deelgebied 5* residents, distributed a document with the title *Bewonersparticipatie: Nu en in de toekomst* (Residents' participation: Now and in the future), where they presented several requirements for an effective and fruitful participation of the residents in the design decision-making process. Among these requirements, the ROL workshops were considered an important component of a design process aimed at "building a home and not just a house"<sup>15</sup>.

Hence, over the following months several working days were organized at the ROL to discuss the floor plan of the dwellings. On 11 July 1985, a working day with eleven Turkish residents was held in the ROL housed in the Faculty of Architecture at Delft University of Technology<sup>16</sup>. In the meeting's introduction delivered by Jacques Poot, the residents' expert, he emphasized the importance of having the foreign residents involved in the process, as they represent approximately half of the population living in the *deelgebied 5*. However, as Siza had remarked some months earlier, Poot also contended that it "must be kept in mind that the houses should be suitable for all populations, and not specifically for foreign residents"<sup>17</sup>. The report of the assessment made by the Turkish residents underlines their good acceptance of the dwelling layout, especially the flexibility of the plan, and the clear separation between living and sleeping areas, as well as their position in the building: the living room on the street side and the bedrooms on the courtyard side. The surface area of some partitions was criticized as well as the location of the kitchen and bathroom appliances. In the written account of this working day at the ROL, the author of the report noted it was remarkable the detailed appraisals to the plan made by the Turkish



residents. Despite this process was something completely new to them, the report stated they showed interest as if it was their own home already. The importance of having a full-scale model instead of drawings was seen as instrumental, and the conclusion was thus clear: “working in this way is therefore very valuable”.

On 6 September, 1985, the members of the project’s *bouwteam* (construction team) visited The Hague’s municipal ROL, in Scheveningen, and changed on the spot some parts of the model of the typical ground floor dwelling of the *Punt en Komma* buildings, which had been discussed in the *bouwteam*’s meeting held on the previous day. On the next day, 7 September, the neighbourhood office *de Hoefseiser* (The Horseshoe) organized a visit to the ROL with residents of the *deelgebied 5* to experience and discuss the full-scale mock-up of the dwelling. About thirty residents were present, among which half were immigrants, all male, and mostly of Turkish origin. This was a fundamental test to check the extent to which Siza’s initial goal of designing a dwelling able to accommodate different cultural backgrounds had been successfully accomplished or not.

There was a broad appraisal on the general layout of the dwelling but the participants in the workshop also made critical remarks. The group of immigrant residents, predominantly Muslims, suggested the living room and the entrance hallway should be bigger. The sliding door to the master bedroom was criticized and they proposed the toilet should be placed closer to the entrance and distant from the living room. The review of the group of native Dutch residents mentioned mostly the same, except the criticism on the sliding door to the master bedroom. The critique on the position of the balconies was also unanimous. Both groups agreed that it would be better to have the balcony facing the street next to the living room or next to the kitchen/dining room. Siza agreed to review the plan in order to increase the area of the living room and the entrance hallway but argued the position of the balconies facing the courtyard side was a better solution. To support the latter decision Siza argued that the balconies facing the courtyard would yield more privacy, less noise, odours, and nuisances and would offer the possibility to dry the laundry and even prepare food<sup>18</sup>. Eventually, whenever structurally possible and conceptually plausible, the final layout of the dwellings accommodated most of the feedback of the residents. According to Dorien Boasson, “this way of working gave residents the opportunity to think actively about the plan, and to make reasoned changes to it.” Further, she argues, with this initiative “the involvement in the construction plan has significantly increased” (Boasson, 1988)<sup>19</sup>.

In fact, as mentioned above, the final version of the dwelling’s layout designed by Siza, would be noticeably based on the decisions made in the ROL workshop with the participants. An important development was the introduction of sliding doors to allow several possibilities of spatial articulation between the kitchen, the living room and the hallway. This flexibility was instrumental to create a layout that could accommodate the different lifestyles of the future users, as well as their diverse cultural, religious and even ethnic background. To be sure, Siza contends that he struggled to avoid a culture-



specific solution in the design of the dwellings, as that would increase the latent ethnic tension. The Schilderswijk, Siza claimed, “is a very interesting, fascinating milieu. But there are here and there signs of racism. It’s just difficult that all these people blend together so suddenly. It takes time to emerge from it a great community. Hence, conflicts are inevitable” (Franke & Wensch, 1990, p. 1490). Siza identifies in this potential conflictive setting a major disciplinary challenge: How to design houses that are suitable for families with such different cultural backgrounds and diverse lifestyles? From his experience with participatory meetings in the Schilderswijk, Siza reports:

When I talked with the Dutch, they said: ‘Muslims are terrible, they hang curtains on the windows. One thinks about that, and then you hear: ‘Dutch families are terrible, they have such small bathrooms, and facing directly to the hall; we want large bathrooms in the bedroom area.’ For them it is (a religious) tradition, to withdraw for washing. The whole point was to design apartments where all of them could meet these requirements. This led to lengthy discussions with stake-holders; (...) We ended up with innovative dwellings; well, not innovative, but the special thing about them is that there is a double distribution, which can be divided by sliding doors, and give greater privacy from the bedroom area to the living room (Franke & Wensch, 1990, p. 1490).

In 1994, six years after finishing the construction of the *Punt en Komma* buildings, Siza gave an interview to Ruud Ridderhof where he pointed out his design strategy to tackle the problem of accommodating cultural heterogeneity. In *Punt en Komma* “we had expressly tried not to build special homes (for that was one of the ideas: to build special homes for Muslims)” (Ridderhof, 1994, pp. 40-41) However, Siza understood this discrimination would not work. “It was a very bad idea; the houses had to be the same, we had to find a house that satisfied everyone”, he declared. This strategy proved to be fruitful. “Ultimately,” Siza explains, “the consequence was that the elements added to the interior — such as the extra central space with sliding doors — were very well accepted by Dutch families”.

## **Encoding, Decoding**

The working sessions at the ROL workshops contributed significantly for the successful outcome of the *Punt en Komma*’s design decision-making process. This working method created a medium for meaningful communication between designers and users. This was instrumental to avoid the alienating factor of using jargon in discussions on aesthetic principles, technical constraints, political agendas, and cultural idiosyncrasies. In effect, as Stuart Hall points out in his 1980 essay *Encoding, decoding*, “if no ‘meaning’ is taken, there can be no ‘consumption’” (Hall, 2007, p. 91)<sup>20</sup>. The participation of the stakeholders in the development of the layout for the dwelling of *Punt en Komma* reveals, then, a practice that goes beyond a mere empowerment of the users in design decision-making processes. It creates a platform where aesthetic communication can be conveyed through an actual spatial experience where the disciplinary codes can have a meaningful decoding as social practices. This process, however, is not linear. In the design process, there are different stages and moments with relative autonomy that,



nevertheless, reproduce structures of power. Hall's essay offers a sound theoretical framework to analyse the production and dissemination of messages, which can be valuable to discuss the case of citizens' participation in design decision-making processes.

According to Stuart Hall, there are four linked but distinctive moments in the process of communication: production, circulation, distribution / consumption, and reproduction. Consumption, for Hall, is an indissoluble moment of the production process, and "the message-form is the necessary form of appearance of the event in its passage from source to receiver" (Hall, 2007, p. 92). He thus contends that "before this message can have an 'effect' (however defined), satisfy a 'need' or be put to a 'use', it must first be appropriated as a meaningful discourse and be meaningfully decoded" (Hall, 2007, p. 93).

I would thus suggest the working sessions at the ROL workshops, illustrates a successful attempt to translate the codes of the architecture discipline to the decoder-receiver. The communicative exchange is reciprocal, though not symmetrical. There is reciprocity, for example, in the way the architect, as an encoder-producer, benefits from the receiver's understanding of the message; it constitutes a source for his continuous production, which eventually contributes to improve the process of consumption/reception. However, the positions at each end of the process, in this case the architect and the dweller, are not symmetrical or equivalent. As Stuart Hall highlights, there is no code with a transparent, or "natural" representation of the real. Hence, this inevitably sparks misunderstandings, or distorted communication, which creates discrepancies in the relation between encoder and decoder, thus resulting in three positions: the dominant-hegemonic, the negotiated, and the oppositional<sup>21</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

The design decision-making process in *deelgebied 5's* plan and *Punt en Komma's* project resonates with Stuart Hall's definition of the negotiated code. "Decoding within the negotiated version", Hall claims, "contains a mixture of adaptive and oppositional elements: it acknowledges the legitimacy of the hegemonic definitions to make the grand significations (abstract), while, at a more restricted, situational (situated) level, it makes its own ground rules — it operates with exceptions to the rule" (Hall, 2007, p. 102). Siza's engagement in the urban renewal of the *Schilderswijk* district epitomizes the challenges brought about to the design disciplines and their relation with managerial strategies, including citizens' participation. In effect, Siza himself addresses these challenges in his reflections on the experience of designing *deelgebied 5's* plan. He contends, "the participation of residents, technicians and politicians should signify an open process, not simply appeasing or conformist, nor of a local and fragmentary nature, and not merely conducive to the adoption of models around which a consensus is easily reached"<sup>22</sup>.

Siza criticizes the dominant-hegemonic approach and advocates a negotiated code to create an open design decision-making process. This is an essential feature of a disciplinary approach able to tackle the



challenges of urban renewal policies in an holistic way, from the urban scale to the dwelling unit; from the definition of the urban image and collective spaces to the detailing of the sliding door in the apartments; from the definition of the building's materialization to the solution of acoustic problems; dealing with the agenda of policy makers and the idiosyncrasies of the residents.

In the design decision-making process of the plan for *deelgebied 5* and the project for the *Punt en Komma* buildings the conflicts and tensions brought about in citizens' participation became part and parcel of the creative process. As Siza put it, designers and the other stakeholders involved in housing design should reject a simplistic approach that sees "participation of residents simply as a pacifying element, so often reductive, refusing by prudence or calculation, the creative leap which qualifies it as an integral part of design" (Siza, 1987).

This case study is useful to discuss the role of the expert in this day and age, and the extent to which experts can still play a role as social mediators in the complex challenges related with the future development of inclusive, resilient cities. According to Zigmunt Bauman, "expertise promises the individuals means and abilities to escape uncertainty and ambivalence and thus to control their own life-world. It presents the dependency on the experts as the liberation of the individual; heteronomy as autonomy" (Bauman, 1993, p. 223). Bauman plainly asserts the emancipatory role of the expert as both a mediator and interpreter, bridging the gap between the objective and the subjective worlds. While doing this, he seems to deem ambivalence as an undesirable condition. However, the case study discussed in this (Bauman)article suggests something different.

Siza's approach in the design decision-making process for the *deelgebied 5* plan, and the *Punt en Komma* buildings challenges Bauman's idea of the expert as a proxy for individual escape from uncertainty and ambivalence. Rather, the power of ambivalence in Siza's design approach is, I would contend, liberating the individual through stimulating his confrontation with the ambiguities and contradictions of the design process. In this context, the nexus between the author and the addressee is conveyed by a negotiated code that accommodates the universal and the situated, order and chaos, standards and contingency, modernity and the vernacular; in other words, autonomy and heteronomy.

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