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**DOI**

[10.17645/up.v4i3.2120](https://doi.org/10.17645/up.v4i3.2120)

**Publication date**

2019

**Document Version**

Final published version

**Published in**

Urban Planning

**Citation (APA)**

Mota, N. (2019). Álvaro Siza's Negotiated Code: Housing with Citizens' Participation in the Urban Renewal of The Hague in the 1980s. *Urban Planning*, 4(3), 250-264. <https://doi.org/10.17645/up.v4i3.2120>

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Article

## Álvaro Siza's Negotiated Code: Housing with Citizens' Participation in the Urban Renewal of The Hague in the 1980s

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Submitted: 28 March 2019 | Accepted: 13 August 2019 | Published: 30 September 2019

### Abstract

In the 1970s, the participation of citizens in processes of urban renewal was championed by several North-European municipalities as an attempt to re-connect housing policies with their social significance. The main goal was to bring together the city and its citizens, collective interests and individual aspirations. Citizens' participation was used as an instrument to bridge the gap between the planner/designer and the citizen/user. This article examines a case that illustrates the threats and opportunities brought about by this new paradigm in design decision-making. The article discusses the design process of the Punt en Komma housing complex, a project designed by Portuguese architect Álvaro Siza, developed between 1984 and 1988 as part of the urban renewal of the Schilderswijk district, a neighbourhood in the Dutch city of The Hague. The article is divided into two parts. The first part examines Siza's plan for Schilderswijk's sub-area 5 (*deelgebied 5*) and establishes the background against which citizens' participation played a role in the urban renewal of the district. In the second part, the article examines Álvaro Siza's project for the Punt en Komma housing blocks in detail, focusing particularly on the participatory design of the layout for the dwelling units. Using Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model of communication, this article concludes by highlighting the importance of using a negotiated code to enable meaningful communication in citizens' participation.

### Keywords

Álvaro Siza; architecture; citizens' participation; housing; The Hague; urban renewal

### Issue

This article is part of the issue "Housing Builds Cities", edited by Luca Ortelli (École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne, Switzerland), Chiara Monterumisi (École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne, Switzerland) and Alessandro Porotto (École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne, Switzerland).

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### 1. Introduction

Nine decades ago, the organisers of the second CIAM (Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne) congress, organised in Frankfurt in October 1929, chose the *Wohnung für das Existenzminimum* (the dwelling for minimal existence) as the theme around which that time's leading modern urbanists and architects were gathered (Mumford, 2000, pp. 27–43). Most of the scholarship dedicated to CIAM 2 focused on the group's concern with the definition of minimum living standards. While the focus on standardisation and rationalisation has endured as the dominant contribution of this congress to the interwar production of affordable housing, there

were also social aspects that deserve further acknowledgement. Some of the leading figures in that congress, with Ernst May at its head, were committed to promoting new approaches to improve the living conditions of the working class. Indeed, the changing role of the family in an era when the state would replace many of its social functions was addressed by several CIAM members (Mumford, 2000, pp. 35–38). During the interwar period, CIAM's research on the ideal "minimum dwelling" would be instrumental to explore new typological and technological solutions all over the world (Teige, 2002). In the aftermath of World War II, the interest in researching the relationship between social structures and typological innovation in housing design would be resumed in the CIAM

congresses, though with a subtle, yet meaningful shift. Particularly after the CIAM 9, held in Aix-en-Provence in 1953, the concepts of “housing” or “dwelling” were gradually replaced by the notion of “habitat”, increasing the concern with environmental and human factors in the CIAM discourse (Welter, 2001). The participants in the last CIAM congress, held in Otterlo in 1959, could witness the emergence of another theme, the idea of open form in architecture, which has since then occupied a central position in housing design (Hansen, 1964).

The concept of open form also triggered a renewed interest in citizens’ participation in design decision-making. In the late 1960s, there was a widespread interest in improving the communication between social groups that lived on opposite sides of the political and economic spectrum. As Sherry Arnstein (1969, p. 216) wittingly put it, “the idea of citizens’ participation is a little like eating spinach: no one is against it in principle because it is good for you”. Indeed, from the 1970s on, grassroots movements for the empowerment of ordinary citizens gained momentum and would underpin the widespread acceptance of citizens’ participation in design decision-making processes (Hughes & Sadler, 2000).

### 1.1. Citizens’ Participation and Urban Renewal

In the 1970s, citizens’ participation in architecture and urban planning would be spread across Western Europe with the emergence of urban renewal programs, promoted 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, standardisation, and serial mass housing production. The “urban renewal order” as Christopher Klemek called it in his *The Transatlantic Collapse of Urban Renewal* (2012) brought together a wide array of stakeholders (policymakers, planners, designers, scholars, citizens) that were committed to re-making the social and physical fabric of North American and Western European cities (Klemek, 2012). These policies were particularly important to address the post-war housing crisis, though not necessarily to cater to the needs of the ill-housed urbanites and low-income families. In fact, as Marcuse and Madden (2016, pp. 69–71) point out, the agendas of the real estate and finance industries played a crucial role in making prime urban land available (mostly through processes of slum clearance) to be redeveloped for residential purposes. Moreover, Marcuse and Madden (2016, p. 71) claim, “urban renewal facilitated real estate capital’s goals, but it also included a strong role for the state as planner and coordinator”. To conciliate the diverse agendas at stake, these policies championed the creation of housing policies based on negotiation and consensus (Richardson & Connely, 2005). Some scholars described this process as a populist movement (Tzonis & Lefavre, 2005).

Esra Akcan’s *Open Architecture* (Akcan, 2018) contributes an insightful account to the IBA-Berlin

(Internationale Bauausstellung Berlin [International Building Exhibition Berlin]), one of the most prominent post-war urban renewal operations developed in Europe. In West Berlin, as in many other western cities living under the remnants of the welfare state system, there was a general attempt to re-connect housing policies with their social significance, going beyond a mere productive and regulatory approach (Kaminer, 2011). This political agenda was designed to overcome the conflicting relations that threatened the stability of the relationship between policymakers and citizens during the 1960s. This paradigm shift would also influence the relation between the planner/designer and the citizen/user. This relation became more interwoven and triggered a reconceptualisation of the role of the architect in design decision-making processes. It introduced the concept of social architecture (Hatch, 1984). Recent scholarship highlights the return of the participatory trend of the 1970s–1980s in contemporary architecture and urbanism (Krivy & Kaminer, 2013). Indeed, since the turn of 21st century, architects and urban planners have embraced participatory processes to circumvent the centralisation of power. Participation has been promoted as a new form of sovereignty and an ideal of freedom from the state, top-down power structures and institutions (Krivy & Kaminer, 2013, p. 1). However, while participatory processes are commonly associated with radical political movements, planning bureaucracies have also incorporated some of the traits of citizens’ participation in their protocols. Improving communication between the different stakeholders in the process became one of its crucial aspects.

### 1.2. Aesthetic Communication: Encoding and Decoding

Communication played a key role in the politics of participation in the 1980s. It would contribute to the emergence of what French curator and art critic Nicolas Bourriaud called “relational aesthetics” (Bourriaud, 2009). In architecture and urban planning, as in artistic practices, aesthetic communication would influence the spatial configuration of many new urban spaces. In particular, it would influence the design of new residential neighbourhoods developed under the auspices of urban renewal programs undergoing in many European cities. The process of (aesthetic) communication is multidimensional, though. As Stuart Hall contends in his article “Encoding, Decoding” (originally developed in 1973), there are four linked but distinctive moments in this process: production, circulation, distribution/consumption, and reproduction (Hall, 2007). Despite a growing interest in academia (Maudlin & Vellinga, 2014), scholarship on how design decisions are encoded and decoded remains scarce. In other words, there are still few theoretical contributions that address the systems of communication between designers (qua authors) and what Giancarlo de Carlo (2005) called “architecture’s public” (qua addressees). In the field of residential architecture, this

topic is particularly important, as the stakes for the addressee are particularly high. In this article, I will examine the contribution of aesthetic communication for the reassessment of the relationship between author and addressee in architecture and urban design approaches during the urban renewal programmes of the 1980s. Using a theoretical framework inspired by Stuart Hall’s encoding/decoding model of communication, I will discuss the relationship between the production of architectural meaning and its consumption.

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). He 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). The code of communication between, for example, the architect and the user, is essential to define the nature of the relation between production and reception. However, as Hall highlights, there is no code with a transparent or “natural” representation of reality. Hence, this inevitably sparks misunderstandings, or distorted communication, which creates discrepancies in the relation between encoder and decoder. This relation can assume three different positions: the dominant-hegemonic, the negotiated, and the oppositional. An example of the dominant-hegemonic position is the use of professional codes that reify and reproduce hegemonic definitions. The negotiated position resonates with situations when hegemonic defini-

tions are acknowledged and legitimised as an abstract level but nevertheless recoded to particular or situated logics. The oppositional position occurs when the message is decoded and deliberately recoded in an alternative framework of reference.

Drawing on Hall’s characterisation of the different types of relationship between encoder and decoder, this article will discuss the importance of aesthetic communication in Álvaro Siza’s approach to design decision-making with citizens’ participation. Using archival material from Álvaro Siza’s collection and interviews with some of the stakeholders involved in the process, this article will examine Álvaro Siza’s project for the urban renewal of the Schilderswijk district in detail. Focusing primarily on the design decision-making processes of Schilderswijk’s sub-area 5 (*deelgebied 5*) plan and the dwelling layout of the Punt en Komma housing blocks, developed between 1984 and 1988, this article will attempt to establish the extent to which Siza’s approach resonates with Stuart Hall’s negotiated code.

## 2. Álvaro Siza and the Urban Renewal of Schilderswijk, The Hague

Schilderswijk is a district of The Hague (The Netherlands) created in the second half of the 19th century as a result of speculative development to accommodate the flux of rural migration to the city (Figure 1). Since then, the area has evolved to become a densely-populated area, accommodating people arriving from different parts of the country. Through the years, despite their diverse origins,



**Figure 1.** The location of *deelgebied 5* (white circle) in the city of The Hague. Note: The colours indicate the extension of the urban renewal operation in Schilderswijk in the 1980s (blue tones adjacent to the highlighted area). Source: Spaan & Waag Society (n.d.).

the residents of the Schilderswijk developed a strong social cohesion where the street was the main space for social interaction. However, in the 1960s, the district's sanitary conditions and the structure of the urban fabric was considered unsuitable to the aspirations of modernity promoted by the policymakers of The Hague. In the mid-1960s, the municipality developed an urban plan inspired by the principles of the functional city and by welfare state policies to design an urban renewal plan for the Schilderswijk district. The plan was called *Van Gris naar Groen* (From Grey to Green; Freijser, 1991, pp. 164–166).

### 2.1. From Grey to Green

The plan *Van Gris naar Groen* illustrates what scholars have described as the architecture of the welfare state (Tzonis & Lefaivre, 2005; Swenarton, Avermaete, & Heuvel, 2014). It was designed to rebuild the area with high-rise slabs and an urban layout inspired by the principles of the Athens Charter. The population, however, opposed the modernist plan. A period of uncertainty unfolded, with policymakers avoiding negotiations for an alternative urban renewal strategy. The underlying conflict between the dwellers and the policymakers triggered a process of dilapidation of the neighbourhood, due to lack of maintenance of buildings and public spaces. Consequently, a great deal of the residents moved away 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 coming from southern Europe, Turkey and Morocco, and by Surinamese citizens 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 cohesion. 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, 1988b, p. 19). While the district kept its pre-World War II character as a destination for newly arrived working-class residents, a fundamental change took place. The different cultural backgrounds and everyday practices of the new residents reduced the occasions for spontaneous social interactions. From the mid-1970s until the early 1980s, this state of affairs created a process of fragmentation of the district's social cohesion. This process resonates with similar events happening in other major Dutch cities. The contemporary urban renewal of Rotterdam, for example, has been recently reviewed by Florian Urban's in his *The New Tenement* (Urban, 2017, pp. 131–157).

To avoid further dissemination of social unrest, the urban renewal of Schilderswijk became a political priority for the municipality of The Hague. To cope with the challenges created by urban renewal policies, the

Municipality appointed Adri Duivesteijn as alderman for spatial planning and urban renewal in 1980. Duivesteijn, a young social activist, fought against the urban renewal policies of the municipality during the 1960s and 1970s (Kleinegris, 1991). Now, invested in his new role as a policymaker, Duivesteijn keenly promoted citizens' participation in the urban renewal of the Schilderswijk, arguably the most problematic district of The Hague. He invested a great deal of the material and human resources of his department preparing the bureaucratic apparatus to support the implementation of participatory processes. He realised, however, that he was still missing an important element in the process: the architect. This would be solved in April 1984, when he visited the Portuguese city of Porto and met Álvaro Siza.

### 2.2. Álvaro Siza and Housing

Álvaro Siza was born in 1933 in Matosinhos, a port and fishing town in the suburb of Porto. He was educated at the Porto School of Fine Arts during the 1950s, and worked for a few years (1955–1958), with one of the most influential teachers at the Porto School, Fernando Távora. From 1958 on, he developed his solo architectural practice, designing and building mainly single-family houses for Porto's middle-class, and small to medium-sized public facilities (shops, swimming pools and restaurants). He had had thus far little experience with social housing commissions. Despite this, he became involved in the famous SAAL program, a housing initiative launched in Portugal in 1974 by the provisional government that replaced the dictatorship that had ruled the country since 1926 (Bandeirinha, 2011; Nunes & Serra, 2006). The SAAL program, masterminded in the aftermath of the 25 April 1974 revolution by architects Nuno Portas and Nuno Teotónio Pereira, was a strategy to cope with the country's housing shortage. It was designed to support initiatives promoting decent housing for the ill-housed urbanites, stopping widespread squatting movements, and public demonstrations demanding the citizens' right to the city (Bandeirinha, 2010; Sardo, 2014). The SAAL process was commonly described as an initiative to reverse a situation where there were so many people without houses and so many houses without people (Mota, 2019).

From 1974 until 1977, Siza coordinated two SAAL projects developed for rundown urban areas in Porto, São Victor and Bouça (Alves Costa, Costa, & Fernandez, 2019). Both projects were developed using citizens' participation in the design decision-making process. Shortly thereafter, these projects received international praise in the international architecture media (David, 1976; Marconi, 1976; Nicolin, 1975). They revealed Siza's particular approach to participatory processes, sustaining "the line of action of the technician as a technician" focused more on promoting the best possible result rather than just giving "what people want" (Mota, 2014b, pp. 252–260).

Siza's sudden fame and prestige would be instrumental to get commissions for projects outside Portugal. The first invitation for an international competition came in 1979, from West-Berlin. After a few entries for competitions promoted by IBA-Berlin, Siza won a project in 1980 to develop a plan and several projects for buildings in Block 121, in Berlin's Kreuzberg district (Akcan, 2011; Mota, 2014a). Eventually, in 1984, he would be invited to develop a plan and project for The Hague, a social and political context with different characteristics from those he had experienced in Porto and Berlin.

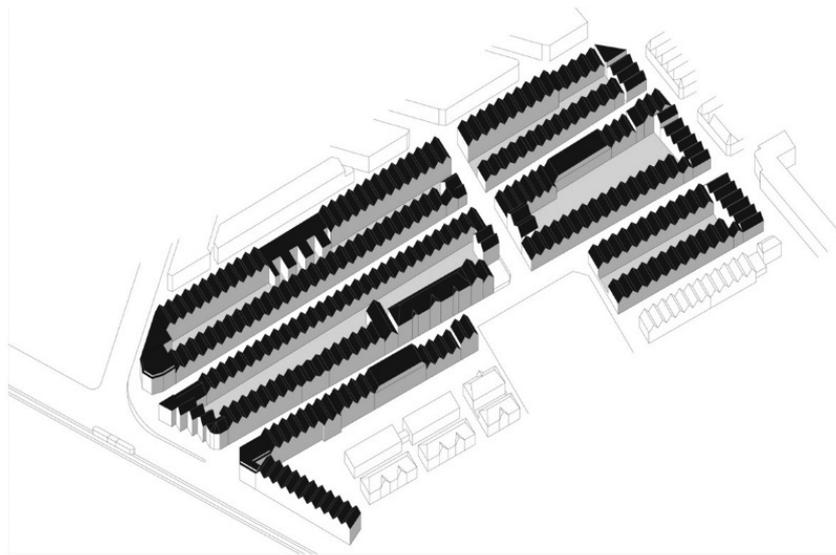
Siza's housing projects for the SAAL program, IBA-Berlin and The Hague have been recently reviewed in different venues: a doctoral dissertation (Mota, 2014b), an exhibition in The Hague, The Netherlands ("Ángela Ferreira: Revolutionary Traces", organised by Stroom Den Haag, and held from 7 December 2014 to 15 March 2015), an exhibition in Montreal, Canada ("Corner, Block, Neighbourhood, Cities. Álvaro Siza in Berlin and The Hague", organised by the Canadian Centre for Architecture, and held from 24 September 2015 to 22 May 2016), and the Portuguese Pavilion in the 2016 Venice Biennale ("Neighbourhood: Where Alvaro Meets Aldo", curated by Nuno Grande e Roberto Cremascoli and held from 28 May 2016 to 27 November 2016). The latter included a series of documentaries showing the return of Siza, more than 30 years later, to the neighbourhoods he designed in the 1970s and 1980s (Figure 2).

### 2.3. Álvaro Siza's Plan for Deelgebied 5

During his trip to Portugal in April 1984, Duivesteijn visited Siza's SAAL projects that had been developed in the mid-1970s. Duivesteijn's appraisal of Siza's work, as well as his personal and disciplinary approach, convinced 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 accepted Duivesteijn's invitation but, when he arrived at the Schilderswijk district in July of 1984, the plans for the urban renewal of the area were already set in motion, with some new housing complexes being developed. He could still see and experience, however, the district's distinct nineteenth-century urban fabric and how it generated a particular spatial system and urban atmosphere. The district's morphology was still characterised by a very dense fabric of long streets delimited by continuous facades, chiefly made of the speculative housing type developed in the late 19th century (Figure 3). This experience would be influential for the further development of his plan and projects for the area, creating what J. D. Besch (1987, p. 5) described as a design solution relying on the "functional relationship between private and public space, on the social-spatial quality within the dwellings, on the differentiation between the characteristics of street life and of the block's courtyards".



**Figure 2.** Álvaro Siza visiting a Turkish family living in the Schilderswijk neighbourhood, The Hague. The visit was organised as part of the preparations for the Portuguese pavilion at the 2016 Venice Biennale. Photographed by the author.

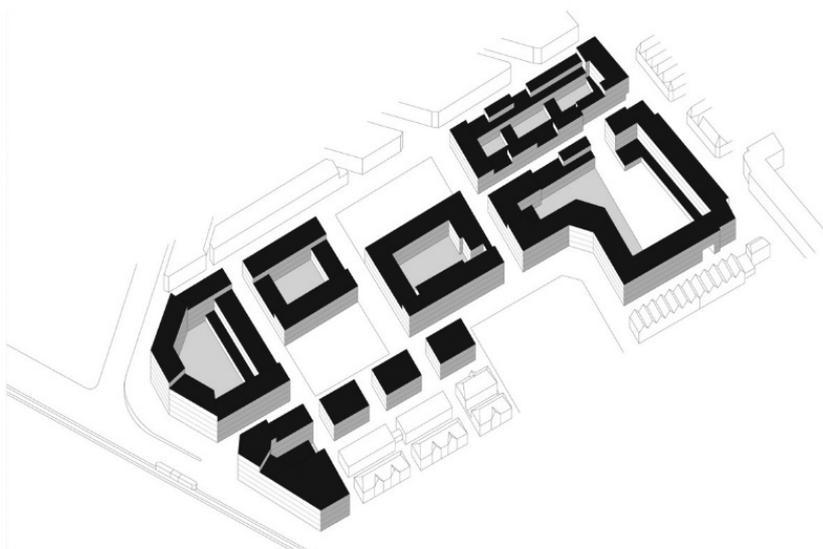


**Figure 3.** *Deelgebied 5* (Schilderswijk, The Hague). The situation in the late 1970s. Author's drawing.

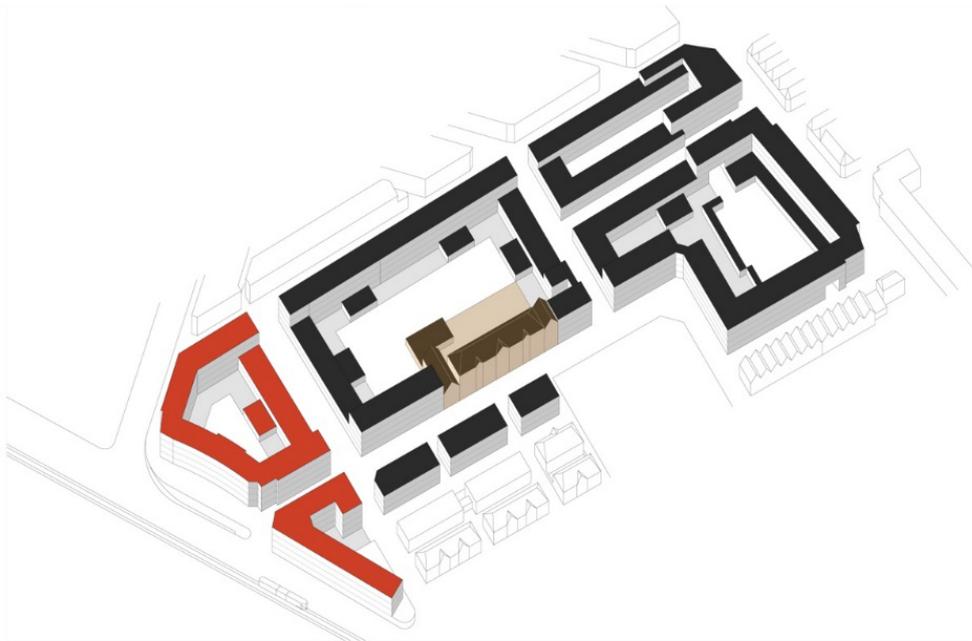
Over the following months, Siza revised an existing plan for the area developed by the municipality's DSO. Siza was critical about some of the options defined in the preliminary plan for the *deelgebied 5* designed by the DSO, especially the widespread demolitions planned and the disregard for the morphological characteristics of the existing urban fabric (Figure 4). In effect, Siza had already criticised this typical token of the architecture of the welfare state in previous urban renewal projects, especially in his project for an urban block in Berlin's Kreuzberg district, where he showed his opposition to the tabula rasa approach (Mota, 2014a). 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". He went on contending that "it is im-

portant 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 zero". Moreover, he went further asserting, "if we tear down everything, we throw away the physical identification of the district's soul" (as cited in Boasson, 1988b, p. 25) Following these lines, Siza revised the municipality's plan, with a drive to preserve as many buildings as possible. Eventually, however, only the school building was kept (Figure 5).

During the development of the plan for *deelgebied 5*, Siza showed a keen interest in keeping some of the districts' vernacular social and spatial practices, as well as the area's prevailing building techniques and materials. Curiously enough, the residents, the developer, and even some technicians involved in the process widely disre-



**Figure 4.** *Deelgebied 5* (Schilderswijk, The Hague). The plan proposed by the Service of Urban Design (*Dienst Stadsontwikkeling* [DSO]) of the Municipality of The Hague, 1984. Author's drawing.



**Figure 5.** *Deelgebied 5* (Schiedamschenhoek, The Hague). The revised plan proposed in 1984 by Álvaro Siza. The school building that was to be preserved is highlighted in brown and the Punt en Komma blocks are highlighted in red. Author's drawing.

garded the preservation of existing buildings and vernacular references. In an interview with the author, Álvaro Siza reported that, on the one hand, the developer and the technicians of the municipality were keen to demolish all the buildings in the area. They wanted new buildings with modern facilities and amenities. On the other hand, even for local architecture critics and observers, Siza's willingness to recover traditional materials and typological systems were often seen as a reactionary attitude, an old-fashioned approach, and a conservative outlook. In effect, Siza's compositional elements in this project were described by *The Architectural Review's* critic Peter Buchanan (1990, p. 50) as "outrageously arbitrary, yet somehow also seem just right".

Siza's initial exchanges with the stakeholders involved in the urban renewal of the Schiedamschenhoek were all but contentious. He visited the houses of local residents and participated in meetings with several technicians, social workers, and representatives of the local housing corporation. Despite some resistance to his initial ideas, Siza started a process of negotiation and managed to show to all the stakeholders his genuine interest in upgrading the district's living conditions while, at the same time, preserving the collective memory of the place (Boasson, 1988a). Following Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding theory of communication, I would argue that this can be seen as the first step in the establishment of a negotiated code. Indeed, Siza's engagement with the local community resonates with a situation when hegemonic definitions are acknowledged and legitimised as an abstract level (e.g., collective memory) but nevertheless recoded to particular or situated logics (i.e., the Schiedamschenhoek's multicultural identity).

Despite some fruitful exchanges between the different stakeholders in the urban renewal process of *deelgebied 5*, the participatory process during the development of the plan did not engage most of the residents. It was still mostly a discussion among technicians and policymakers. The processes of encoding and decoding were not yet as critical as they would be after the plan for the *deelgebied 5* was approved. Indeed, the relevance of meaningful communication in design decision-making became much more relevant when, in 1985, the process moved from the design of the plan to the development of the projects for the housing blocks, and especially to the discussions on the dwellings' floor plan layout.

### 3. ROL: A Laboratory for Citizens' Participation

Adri Duivesteijn and the municipality of The Hague were aware of the importance of having the future residents involved in the decisions regarding the spatial organisation of the dwelling units. However, in these processes, there was often a problem of communication. Ordinary citizens had a hard time understanding technical drawings. To overcome this challenge, during the 1980s, many urban renewal operations in the Netherlands adopted a new mechanism to promote meaningful communication between technicians and the dwellers in housing design: it was called Spatial Development Laboratory (*Ruimtelijk Ontwikkelings Laboratorium* [ROL]).

The history of the use of the ROL in design decision-making processes is intimately connected with the paradigm shift in urban renewal programmes developed in the Netherlands. Following the shortcomings of the urban developments promoted under the auspices of wel-

fare state regimes 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” (Dinesen, 1982, p. 306). This exhibition was meant to become the background against which a permanent debate on housing would ensue. Though the exhibition never took place, Amsterdam’s municipal office for housing further explored a system to quickly and inexpensively build full-scale models of the apartments designed for their new social housing estates.

The system was based on plywood modular components with a chipboard frame. The modular system used components varying in series of 10 cm from the 10 × 10 × 10 cm basic unit to the 60 × 40 × 20 cm main unit (Figure 6). The system was assembled with plastic pipes inserted in the holes opened on the top and bottom of the wooden modules. The full-scale 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 dwelling unit and gather more objective feedback about its characteristics from the future dwellers. The ROL became a success among the Dutch 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. As the Danish architect Dinesen (1982, p. 307) 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”. Using this system, the architect’s design becomes more tangible and thus enhances residents’ feed-

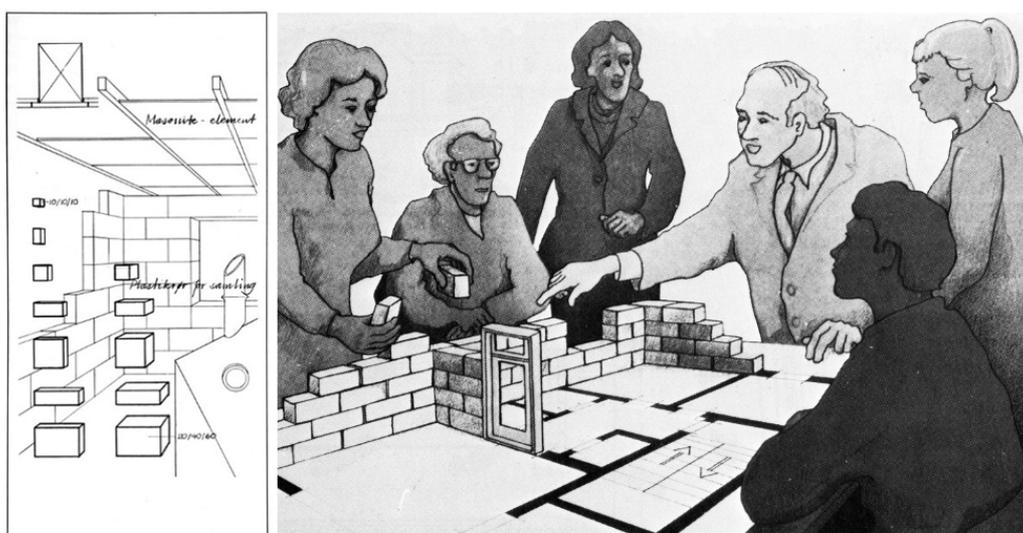
back grounded on concrete spatial experience, with an open attitude where everybody can express their outlook and opinion on the layout of the dwellings and contribute to fine-tuning the project.

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 *deelgebied 5*. These housing blocks would become known as Punt en Komma (Full-Stop and Comma), named after the shape of the general floor plan.

### 3.1. Álvaro Siza in the Laboratory

On 24 January 1985, Álvaro Siza and several other technicians involved in the Punt en Komma project travelled to the ROL to meet the group *Bouwen in 5 (Living 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, which had been developed earlier by ‘s-Gravenhage, the housing corporation that commissioned Punt en Komma.

In the introduction to the meeting, Siza highlighted the need to understand the way people live as the basis for 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*. In the report of the working day at the ROL, kept in Álvaro Siza’s private collection, it was stated his claim that “the aim is to develop a plan that can be suitable for both Dutch and foreign residents”.



**Figure 6.** Building full-scale models at the ROL. From right to left: Schematic diagram of the elements for building full-scale models at the ROL; Image from the booklet *Residents in the Design Team*, published by Amsterdam’s Municipal Housing Department. Source: Dinesen (1982, pp. 306–307).

After this working session at the ROL, experiencing the full-scale mock-up of the dwelling unit, the participants made a summary of requirements, to be taken into account by the architect in the development of the project. The accessibility to the kitchen, the rigid layout of the partitions, the mix of sleeping and living areas, and the area and structure of the distribution areas were the most noticed remarks. Then, using his own critical assessment of the residents' review on the unit tested at the ROL workshop, Siza developed an initial layout proposal for the Punt en Komma dwellings. There were noticeable changes to the initial layout tested at the ROL, first and foremost the introduction of a clear distribution area and better differentiation between the public areas (kitchen and living room) and the private areas (bedrooms and toilet). The new layout developed by Siza was meant to be more open and flexible to accommodate different dwelling practices. Siza's design placed a larger living room on the street side, 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 a U shape, divided by a closet, and connecting all partitions.

Following up on the initial contacts, in March 1985, the group Bouwen in 5 issued a list of principles they believed essential for a smooth relationship between the different stakeholders. Among these principles, the issue of 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" (retrieved from a provisional proposal for the working method, held in Siza's private collection). 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" (document retrieved from Siza's private collection).

Hence, over the following months, several working days were organised at the ROL to discuss the floor plan of the dwellings. On 11 July 1985, a working day with eleven Turkish residents—mostly male—was held in the ROL housed in the Faculty of Architecture at Delft University of Technology. In the meeting's introduction delivered by Jacques Poot, the *Bewonersdeskundige* (residents' expert), he emphasised 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 remarked some months earlier, Poot also contended that it "must be kept in mind that the houses should be suitable for all inhabitants and not specifically for foreign residents" (from the report

of the working day at the ROL, retrieved from Siza's private collection). 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 criticised, 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 emphasised the detailed appraisal of the plan made by the Turkish residents. Despite the novelty of the process, the report stated that this community 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 some parts of the model of the typical ground floor dwelling of the Punt en Komma buildings on the spot, which had been discussed in the *bouwteam's* meeting that had been held on the previous day. On the next day, 7 September, the neighbourhood office *de Hoefeiser* (The Horseshoe) organised a visit to the ROL with residents of the *deelgebied 5* in order to experience and discuss the full-scale mock-up of the dwelling unit. About thirty residents were present, among which half were immigrants, all-male, and mostly of Turkish origin (Figure 7).

### 3.2. Accommodating Differences

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 criticised 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. In a report of the excursion to the ROL in Scheveningen (retrieved from Siza's private collection), Siza argued that the balconies facing the courtyard would yield more privacy, less noise, smells, and nuisances and would offer the possibility to dry the laundry and even prepare food. Otherwise, whenever structurally possible and conceptually plausible, the final lay-



Figure 7. Álvaro Siza speaking with residents at the ROL in 1985. Photograph courtesy of Fred van der Burg.

out of the dwellings accommodated most of the feedback of the residents.

According to Dorien Boasson (1988b), “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, 1988b, p. 36). In their reflection on the process, the community workers Ad Fousert and Frans van der Vaart and the residents’ expert Jacques Poot, noted that the meetings to decide on the dwelling plan between Siza and the residents (both the Dutch and the so-called foreigners) were a success. According to them, the residents felt that they could have room for self-determination in the decisions concerned with the dwellings they would eventually inhabit (in Boasson, 1988b, pp. 31–32).

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 (Figure 8). 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. In fact, Siza contended 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 for a great community to emerge from it. Hence, conflicts are inevitable. (Franke & Wensch, 1990, p. 1490)

Siza highlighted the disciplinary challenges brought about by these kinds of conflicts. The question of how to design houses that are suitable for families with such different cultural backgrounds and diverse lifestyles became a key goal in this project. For Siza, accommodating the cultural heterogeneity of the residents should be the approach to cope with this challenge.

In 1994, six years after finishing the construction of the Punt en Komma buildings, Siza gave an interview to Ruud Ridderhof where he explained how his design strategy tackled this challenge. 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, p. 40). 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 in that interview (Ridderhof, 1994, pp. 40–41). This strategy proved effective. “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” (Ridderhof, 1994, p. 41).

Thirty years after its completion, the changes in Schilderswijk’s *deelgebied 5* can be perceived in different dimensions. While the streets preserve the same



**Figure 8.** Evolution of the layout of the floorplan for the apartments in the Punt en Komma blocks. Author’s drawings.

character as in the mid-1980s, visiting the apartments, one can discover a landscape of multiplicities created by the dweller’s customisation of their living environment (Figure 9).

The generic floor plan agreed to after the ROL workshops was adapted to diverse variations triggered by the buildings’ morphological characteristics and by each family’s particular culture of domesticity. The extent of the process of customisation was, however, controlled by ownership constraints. As the apartments in Punt en Komma are owned by a local housing association, there is a high rotation of dwellers occupying

the houses. Furthermore, as tenants, the dwellers are not allowed to make any structural change to the layout of the apartment. According to the rental contract with the housing association, when the tenants leave the apartment or move to another one, they have to deliver it as they found it. Moreover, the co-existence of Dutch and migrant families in the mid-1980s gave way to an urban neighbourhood that is currently inhabited almost exclusively by first and second-generation migrants. The documentary prepared in the Schilderswijk for the Portuguese pavilion in the 2016 Venice Biennale shows how this social transformation affected contem-



**Figure 9.** Álvaro Siza with Adri Duivenstijn visiting the Schilderswijk neighbourhood, The Hague. Photographed by the author.

porary everyday life in the neighbourhood (Grande & Cremascoli, 2017). Hidden behind the facades of Punt en Komma and the other buildings designed by Siza to the Schilderswijk, one can discover how the floor plan established after the ROL workshops was creatively adapted to cater to the patterns of inhabitation of families with cultural backgrounds that have roots in Turkey, Suriname, Angola or Morocco, to name but a few.

The working sessions at the ROL workshops contributed significantly to the 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 Hall points out, "if no 'meaning' is taken, there can be no 'consumption'" (Hall, 2007, p. 91). 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 the 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 meaningful decoding as social practices.

#### 4. Conclusions

The working sessions at the ROL workshops illustrate a successful attempt to translate the codes of the architecture discipline to the decoder-receiver. The commu-

nicative 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. The results of the ROL workshops constituted a source for Siza's continuous production, which eventually contributed to improving the process of consumption/reception. However, it must be emphasised that the positions at each end of the process, in this case the architect and the dweller, are not levelled out and equivalent. As Stuart Hall highlights, the encoder/decoder system of communication is not necessarily a transparent representation of reality. Hence, this inevitably creates discrepancies in the relation between encoder and decoder, that, as mentioned above, Hall classified in three categories: the dominant-hegemonic, the negotiated, and the oppositional. I would thus argue that the design decision-making process in *deelgebied 5's* plan and Punt en Komma's project resonates with 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). In other words, the negotiated code does not obliterate or blend the specific language mastered by the author or the addressees. Instead, it creates the conditions to enable meaningful communication between them.

Siza's engagement in the urban renewal of the *Schilderswijk* district epitomises 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" (retrieved from Siza's private collection). In this sense, Siza's work in The Hague resonates with his previous experiences in the SAAL process and in the IBA-Berlin. In each of these, the open process was facilitated by Siza's use of the architectural project as a key vehicle to enable meaningful communication between the planner/designer and the citizen/user. The social, political and economic conditions in post-revolutionary Portugal (during the development of the SAAL projects), or in divided Berlin during the Cold War (through the development of the project for IBA-Berlin) were very different from those in The Hague. These different conditions determined diverse types of approaches to citizens' participation in the design decision-making process. One thing remained, however. In every case, Siza was keen on criticising both dominant-hegemonic or populist approaches, advocating instead a negotiated code to create an open design decision-making process.

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 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 the design" (retrieved from Siza's private collection). Reviving this case study is relevant to discuss the role of the designer in contemporary residential architecture and urban planning practices. It is also important for a critical reflection on participatory processes in housing design. As this case illustrates, design experts can still play a role as social mediators in the complex challenges related to the development of inclusive, resilient cities. Creating "negotiated codes" depends, however, on expanding the methods and processes to enable meaningful aesthetic communication between all the stakeholders involved in the design process. The case of the ROL workshops used in the design decision-making process of the Punt en Komma project can be a useful reference for a new generation of urban renewal programs interested in creating conditions for social sustainability and inclusion.

### Acknowledgments

This article expands on a paper presented in May 2018 at UNESCO's International Symposium on Communication,

City and Public Space, University of Lima, Peru. I would like to express my gratitude to Álvaro Siza for his authorisation to conduct research in his personal archive, as well as for the opportunity to interview him on two different occasions. I would like to thank Dick van Gameren, José António Banderinha and Dirk van den Heuvel for their supervision during the initial stage of the development of this research, Max Risselada for his inputs regarding the urban renewal of The Hague in the early 1980s, and the four anonymous reviewers for their insightful feedback and suggestions. I would also like to thank Francien Van Westrenen and Fred van der Burg for the pictures showing Siza's visit to the ROL in The Hague.

### Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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