**Urbanism**

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Our current housing crisis is often reduced by quantifying dwellings to numbers and financial figures, which nullifies its complexity, importance ánd possible chances immensely. It is a system symptom that has mostly degenerated homes to just mere bricks-and-mortar and capital gain. Financial yield and individual responsibility are the dominant adages of the era. An integral approach is needed to deal with its numerous shortcomings.

Decades of Neo-Liberal policy combined with globalization, individualization/ontzuiling, major demographic shifts, and commodification of almost everything, even public space, have left us in a dire, fragile situation. Even the people we turn to in times of need, such as former Minister of Wonen en Rijksdienst Stef Blok, oppose the much-needed change by practically abolishing Volkshuisvesting and its significance as a whole. The increasing distance between builders and decision-makers on the one hand and users on the other has led to a situation where the human scale often seems to vanish. This has been the situation for too long now.

Viewing the living environment as a whole should be the focus of this housing crisis. Otherwise, more troubles will follow. Building enough homes is part of the issue, but building communities is even more pressing. Many environmental and health-related issues can be traced back to our living environments, from individual loneliness to floodings to broad societal polarization. Solutions are everywhere, but willpower is lacking with those in power. Society requires an integral approach for this challenge. Radical political decisions are a necessity on this scale. Among them are reinstating Volkshuisvesting, organizing building projects locally, using collectives in its many appearances, and, above all, social and community design. We have to step down from the idea that solutions can be standardized with just a few methods and think differently. Exploring non-conventional living arrangements, such as forms of collective living, will reduce the individual footprint in the city – creating space for more houses – and it can also accommodate the growing group of single households and diversification in lifestyles in a much needed different way. Exploring integral approaches can meet the quantitative demands in housing and increase social and community value.

All disciplines involved with the built environment have to work together. We have to respect each other. We have to acknowledge each other’s expertise and value equally. The status and influence of architects and urban designers have faded, while this gap is primarily filled in with those with mainly financial interests. There is a problematic disbalance since their interests often overshadow creating societal capital. It is simply not their responsibility. It is perfectly explainable: investment costs are higher, and obligatory building requirements to meet current needs are lacking. Creating social capital enjoys limited significance today, while its importance is indisputable.

We have started to accept this neglect as a standard as a society. It does not serve us well. Including community value in building plans is not a nice extra, it is one of the significant elements in our living environment, and we have to treat it that way. If we accept this change, designing societal value gains weight in decision making, which will give more freedom to explore new, more appropriate solutions. Urban designers and architects have this expertise and can help guide us on this new path, away from the housing crisis.

We build for people, for communities, and the future. By embracing this as the primary building philosophy widely and supporting it properly, everybody can and will benefit in the end.

A rebalance is needed if we want to avoid a situation where everybody has to live in the way J.J. Slauerhoff describes in the following two verse lines: “Alleen in mijn gedichten kan ik wonen, nooit vond ik ergens anders onderdak” - J.J.Slauerhoff \*.

Not all value can be directly measured in numbers. Social capital is the currency we pay for our future living environment. We have to remember that and treat it with care.

\* Woningloze in: Serenade, 1930

Translation: My poems are my only place to live. Nothing else has ever offered shelter