

# BUILD BACK BETTER

A historical research on  
the 'Wederopbouw' and  
what has not been built

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## **Abstract**

The reconstruction of Rotterdam after the bombing in World War II is a well discussed subject. The literature and the public opinion are positive and negative on the outcome of the reconstruction of Rotterdam, although it seems to lean more toward a negative narrative. Both plans, Plan Witteveen and the executed Basisplan are discussed and compared a lot. Nevertheless, the research on if Rotterdam would be a better city if the first plan was executed has not been done. In this thesis the answer is tried to find on what Rotterdam would look like if Plan Witteveen was executed and if the city would have had a more human scale. It turns out that Rotterdam would be a greener city, with more water, space for pedestrians, human-scale architecture, something that is tried to accomplish by urbanists in current times.

## **Keywords**

Reconstruction – Rotterdam – Modernism – Urbanism – Human-scale

## Introduction

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of May the German attack of the second World War begins in the Netherlands. For five days there are fights in Rotterdam continuously. To make the Netherlands surrender, Germany bombs the city centre of Rotterdam on the 14<sup>th</sup> of May at 13:27. The bombs hit the centre and the districts Kralingen, Crooswijk, Oude Noorden and the Agniesebuurt. At least 800 people die and 80.000 people lose their homes. 25000 Dwellings and 11000 other buildings are destroyed (figure 1).<sup>1</sup>



*Figure 1. Rotterdam after the bombing with the Laenskerk in the background. May 1940. Stadsarchief Rotterdam*

After the bombing, Rotterdam began quickly with cleaning up the debris. On May 18, City architect Willem Gerrit Witteveen was instructed by the city council to design a new plan to rebuild the city and to lead the debris cleaning. The first week more than 20.000 unemployed people started cleaning the debris. Because cleaning the debris was tackled rigorously, Witteveen had to decide quickly which buildings should be kept. A list was made by the Bouwpolitie (building police) with 144 historic buildings that could have been preserved.<sup>2</sup> The secretary general of the Department of Education, Arts and Science wrote to the mayor of Rotterdam, Pieter Jacobus Oud, ‘that it is impossible to keep some buildings in the middle of those ruins and that there has to come a new city, where the new urbanist does not have to think of the existing buildings’. And so it happened, almost every building, what was left of it, was demolished. This meant that the debris cleaners cleaned almost every building, also buildings that could have been restored. The authorities chose to empty the city for a total

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Brandgrens’, accessed 16 April 2023, <https://www.brandgrens.nl/bombardement-en-brandgrens>.

rebuild. Only the Laurenskerk, Het Witte Huis, de Beurs, het Postkantoor, het Raadhuis en het Schielandshuis were kept (figure 2).<sup>2</sup>



Figure 2. Rotterdam after cleaning the debris, only some buildings were preserved. 1946. Stadsarchief Rotterdam

In July 1940 Witteveen had finished the plan globally and in 1941 the plan was official (figure 3). After Witteveen left overworked and disillusioned on sick leave, Cornelis van Traa was directed to make a new plan on April 1944. Van Traa, who was the right hand of Witteveen, came up, influenced by more modernistic ideas by Club Rotterdam and OPRO (Opbouw Rotterdam), with a radical functional plan and barely any ideas of Witteveen's plan are visible in the city (figure 4).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> 'Wederafbraak', accessed 16 April 2023, <https://wederopbouwrotterdam.nl/artikelen/wederafbraak>.

<sup>3</sup> P. van (Paul) Schilfgaarde planoloog, 1934- and R.M. (Ruud M.) Kathmann, *De wederopbouw van Rotterdam : stedelijke herverking in de praktijk* ('s-Gravenhage: VUGA, 1987), 9-16.



Figure 4. Plan Witteveen, 1941. Stadsarchief Rotterdam.

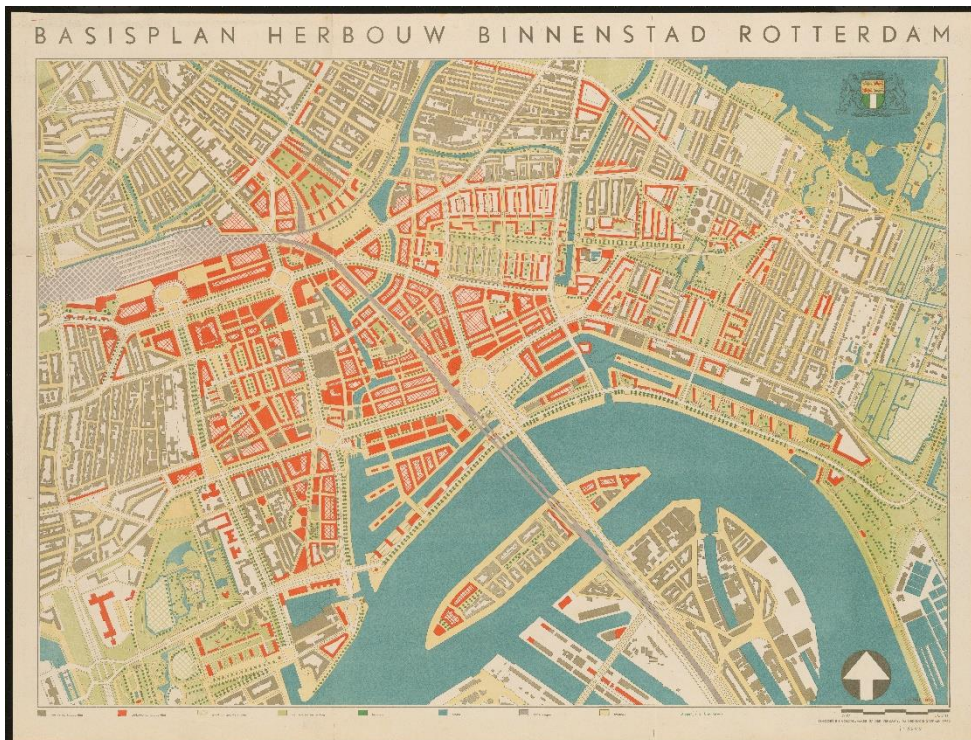


Figure 3. Het Basisplan by Van Traa. 1946. Stadsarchief Rotterdam.

The public opinion on the demolition of the monumental buildings and the reconstruction is not all positive. “What a barbaric balderdash” historian E. Roelofsz states in his book about the blind demolition of all the monumental buildings that could have been preserved.<sup>4</sup> Also, urbanist of Rotterdam in the 1950’s and 1960’s Wim van Es is sceptical about the new developments in Rotterdam and the sales pitch of the ‘modern city’ people use to justify the choices that are made. He takes an example in Het Groothandelsgebouw (figure 5), on the left of Rotterdam Centraal and on the right the Nationale Nederlanden building, now called Delfse Poort, referring to the past (figure 6). The second one he calls a skeleton with an empty glass façade and the Groothandelsgebouw a sturdy and functional post-war building.<sup>5</sup> Combined with multiple personal experiences on the opinion on Rotterdam; An empty concrete city, with no human scale, a hypothesis can be made that the rigorous cleaning of the city without preserving some iconic buildings contributed to this opinion. The physical memory to the bombing and the historical city are erased with the cleaning.



Figure 5. Groothandelsgebouw (1953) by Maaskant and van Tijen. NRC, 2014.



Figure 6. Delfse Poort Nationale Nederlanden building. TOP010.nl, 2014.

Rotterdam before 1940 was already one of the biggest cities of the Netherlands. It chased Amsterdam, a phenomenon that is still going on. In 1910 Rotterdam broke the boundary of 450.000 inhabitants. Rotterdam grew from a village built along de river Rotte to a city that would be become the biggest Port City of Europe. Rotterdam was a city with distinguished

<sup>4</sup> E. Roelofsz and Stichting historische publicaties Roterodamum., *De frustratie van een droom: de wederopbouw van de in mei 1940 verwoeste delen van de binnenstad, Kralingen en het Noordereiland van Rotterdam, 1940-1950*, Grote reeks / Stichting historische publicaties Roterodamum 36 (Rotterdam: Stichting Historische Publikaties Roterodamum, 1989), 16.

<sup>5</sup> Hans Horsten, ‘Een schone lei Rotterdam vijftig jaar trots op de Wederopbouw’, de Volkskrant, 28 June 1995, <https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuws-achtergrond/een-schone-lei-rotterdam-vijftig-jaar-trots-op-de-wederopbouw~b2d44b76/>.

merchant houses and multiple harbours in the city centre. The city had narrow streets with lots of people and animals. Due to the bad living circumstances there were lots of epidemics and high infant mortality. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the municipality realised that these problems has to change and put effort to clean the city and use modern medical science. The neighbouring cities became neighbourhoods of Rotterdam and on the other side of the river new neighbourhoods were built, like Feyenoord.<sup>6</sup>

The question arises if Rotterdam before the bombing was a city with a more human scale or a more Dutch city centre like Amsterdam, Utrecht or Delft. A lot has been written on the reconstruction of the ‘modern city’ of Rotterdam. The focus on this literature is more on the events and decision making, than reviewing what different plans and a more careful approach could have meant for Rotterdam. Therefore, this thesis will focus on what Rotterdam could have been with a more careful approach to the reconstruction with the use of historic research and examples.

So the main question is as follows: *What would have been different to Rotterdam if the majority of Witteveen’s plan was built in combination with the preservation of 3 historic buildings: Dancing Pschorr, Station Hofplein and the Grootte Schouwburg? Would this mean that Rotterdam is a city with a more human scale?* To answer this question the first part focuses on what the two plans were like and how the plans evolved. Then the plans are analysed and compared on a smaller scale. From this comparison in a particular area, the findings will lead to a choice of buildings that are historically important which could have been preserved. Then there will be some examples of projects with historical and new architecture. In combination with the last two sections there will be an attempt to find an answer on why these choices were made and what the influence was on these choices. At last the main question is answered followed by a discussion.

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<sup>6</sup> ‘Hoe Rotterdam Ontstond: Tijdlijn – Historisch Genootschap Roterodamum’, accessed 16 April 2023, <https://www.roterodamum.nl/over-roterodamum/onstaansgeschiedenis/>.

## The first plan: Plan Witteveen

Before the war, director of the Municipal Technical Services, Willem Gerrit Witteveen already had several plans for the centre of Rotterdam. The 'stadsdriehoek' (figure 7) (city triangle, the original centre of Rotterdam, bordered by the Coolvest, Goudsevest and the Maas) never changed drastically in the years Rotterdam grew to a big industrial port city. This meant that the infrastructure and the building environment never adapted to the changes in traffic, living and industry. Therefore Witteveen made plans to solve multiple traffic problems, but it was until then not possible to intervene in the city on such a scale.<sup>7</sup>



Figure 7. 'Stadsdriehoek' Rotterdam between 1623 and 1652.  
Stadsarchief Rotterdam, 1660.

On the 18th of May, four days after the bombing, the city council of Rotterdam appointed Witteveen to design a plan for the reconstruction of the city centre. The state official he worked with the most was hydraulics engineer Johannes Aleidis Ringers. Ringers expropriated the whole city centre, including all the pipe and electrical infrastructure and piles. Thus, Witteveen had the free reign to design the plan that he envisioned. After a few weeks, a rough sketch of the plan was finished. Because he was already working for the technical services for years and he already made plans, this was not surprising.<sup>8</sup> Also the Dutch people in charge at that time, including Witteveen, felt a rush to come up with the new plan as quickly as possible. The Germans wanted to have gradually more influence on the plan, because they imagined Rotterdam as one of the biggest port cities (Hafenstadt in German) of the Third Reich. In June

<sup>7</sup> Schilfgaard van, "De wederopbouw van Rotterdam : stedelijke herverkaveling in de praktijk ", 9.

<sup>8</sup> Schilfgaard and Kathmann.



1940 commissioner of the occupied Dutch area Arthur Seyss-Inquart and his delegation visited Rotterdam where Witteveen presented the first plans (figure 8).



*Figure 8. W.G. Witteveen presents his plans to German and Dutch officials, including mayor P.J. Oud and Seyss-Inquart in June 1940. Stadsarchief Rotterdam, June 1940.*

The German delegation insisted Witteveen to continue. In the end of 1940 the Diwero (Dienst Wederopbouw Rotterdam) was founded. They were responsible for a smooth progress of the reconstruction. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of January the ASRO (Adviesbureau voor het Stadsplan Rotterdam) was founded. Here the most important officials of the Municipal Technical Service gathered. The ASRO was functioning under supervision of Witteveen and his secretary Cornelis van Traa (figure 9).<sup>9</sup>



*Figure 9. The ASRO and DIWERO working in the municipal library. Stadsarchief Rotterdam, 1940-1942.*

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<sup>9</sup> Paul van de Laar, *Stad van formaat: geschiedenis van Rotterdam in de negentiende en twintigste eeuw.*, 2e dr (Zwolle: Waanders, 2007), 415-417.

## The plan

As said, the plan needed to get shape quickly, before the Germans could influence their plan with the grotesque, nazi architecture. This fact had clearly some disadvantages. No real research was done and there was no discussion with the victims of the bombing, who would use the land that was being designed. The plan of Witteveen was related to the old city triangle. He wanted to build a new, modern city, with as much similarities to the old structure and solving the traffic problems. This led to a romantic cityscape, with continuity and sightlines as main principles (figure 10). Witteveen distinguished three main problems, which were the railroads, flood protection and the river connection of north and south. In figure 10 some places are marked with numbers that refer to the text to make in more clear.

Station Maas(1) was a blockade for the development of the city. NS (National Railroads) wanted a direct railroad from Gouda to Delftse Poort. To solve this, Station Maas was abandoned and a new line between Nieuwerkerk via Kralingse Bos and river the Rotte to station Delftse Poort was designed. Station Delftse Poort would be Rotterdam central station as a junction of three lines; Dordrecht, The Hague and Gouda. One important notice is that Station Hofplein was untouched until further developments.

The second problem was flooding. Rijkswaterstaat demanded for a rise of the dikes by 2m, so they would be 5,5m+ NAP. It was necessary to plan the dike directly near the river, so there would be no part of the city that flooded anymore. Flood doors would make sure that the ports were still reachable(2).

The third problem was the connection of the shores over the river(3). The railroad traffic was held back by the opening times of the bridge on the Koningshaven. Decided was to lift the bridge 2 meters higher so shipping can go underneath. The Willemsbrug(3) would be placed on the same level, which meant that it had to rise 3.5m. It would be replaced with a bigger, wider bridge. Due to the increase of the height the road will not arrive at Boompjes but at Beursplein.<sup>10</sup>

The main target was to remain the old character of the old centre. For example, the Schiedamsewijk would keep its old character. The centre would have place for modern shops,

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<sup>10</sup> Schilfgaarde and Kathmann, 11-12.

banks and offices. Polluting industry was placed outside the centre. Also, only 10.000 of the 25.000 lost dwellings would return to the centre.



Figure 10. Plan Witteveen, October 1941. Original edited by author.

The cityscape was a really important factor for Witteveen's decisions. He believed that his design really contributed to the embellishment of Rotterdam's cityscape. A way to shape the cityscape of Rotterdam was to implement 'parkways'. These parkways are roads which exclude heavy traffic, with large areas of green surrounding them. These parkways would still look modern in contemporary designs.

Hofplein was an important junction in Witteveen's plan(4). As much as seven roads arrived at the Hofplein. Witteveen saw the Hofplein as the centre of the city and wanted to build the 'City of Rotterdam' in between the main roads. Hofplein would be the centre of the city, where traffic from different directions came and where cafés, restaurants and cinemas would make the area also a cultural hotspot. He wished for 80 metre high skyscrapers as industry, cultural and congress centres. In the end, Witteveen made three designs for the area. Architect Jacobus Johannes Pieter Oud was instructed to design the area around the Coolsingel and later Hofplein, which resulted in a conflicting situation with Witteveen. Witteveen did not want to give in on his ideas. Something Witteveen became well known for.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Laar, *Stad van formaat*, 417-418.

In October 1941 the exposition ‘Nederland bouwt in Baksteen’(the Netherlands build with bricks) showed the reconstruction plan of Witteveen in Museum Boymans (figure 11). With maps, tables and even a model. The exhibition was a big success. The inhabitants and also the press was positive about the plan (figure 12). There was one common complaint: The model was placed too high, so the people could not see the plan very well (figure 13). According to Witteveen, this was on purpose. In this way the people could really see the three dimensional designs with the width and other dimensions of the street pattern, the spatial composition and following the sightlines. In ‘Het Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad’ the plan was discussed very positively (figure 14). A ‘powerful traffic circuit’ and ‘... to make Rotterdam bigger and more beautiful than before the disaster, a harmonious city, where living and working are a joy’ are some of the positive critics. An important notice is the positive attitude in the plans of restoring the Laurenskerk and make the surroundings of middle ages allure. This shows that the nostalgia to the old city was still living in the people minds.



Figure 11. Newspaper article on the exhibition of Plan Witteveen in Museum Boymans. *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 25th October 1941

# Maquette van Nieuw Rotterdam

## Opgesteld in Museum Boymans

**H**OE wordt het nieuwe Rotterdam? De beantwoording van deze brandende vraag is van een zoo groot complex van factoren afhankelijk, dat het nog steeds niet mogelijk is tot in finesse af te dalen, maar al zal aan het stadsplan worden gewerkt tot de laatste steen voor den opbouw is gelegd, toch kan nu reeds worden vastgesteld, dat ir. Witteveen gunstige voorwaarden heeft geschapen om Rotterdam groeter en mooier te maken dan de stad voor de ramp is geweest, een harmonieuse stad, waarin werken en wonen een vreugde zijn, een unieke stad zonder verkeersstremmingen, een Nederlandsche stad met een eigen karakter, typisch Rotterdamsch. — Met groote vreugde zal de tijd worden vernomen, dat de St. Laurenskerk met den machtigen toren in hun oorspronkelijken staat worden teruggebracht en de omgeving bij deze monumenten van cultuurhistorische waarde zal worden aangepast. Om de kerk beter tot haar recht te laten komen, wordt het oorspronkelijke Kerkplein belangrijk vergroot, en zal de bebouwing langs dit plein een wand van middeleeuwsche allure te zien geven. — De unieke grondvorm van de middeleeuwsche stad is niet aangetaast en het gebied der oude binnenhavens is eveneens behouden. De winkel- en kantorenwijken worden begrensd door Blaak, Coolingsingel, Hofplein, Goudschesingel en de doorbraak naar de Nieuwe Haven, de industrieën worden uit de binnenstad geweerd en voor een groot deel overgebracht naar den Spaanschedolder, het gebied tusschen Westersingel en Coolingsingel zal overwegend winkelbuurt worden en het terrein tusschen Goudschesingel en Goudscherweg is bestemd tot zuiwere woonwijk voor den kleinen middenstand en beter gestuurde arbeiders. Een grootsche parkgordel strekt zich van den Pompenburgsingel uit tot het Krallingsche Bosch.

Op de groote lijnen en verscheiden onderdeelen van het door den bekwamen stedebooukundige, die ir. W. G. Witteveen is, ontworpen stadsplan, heeft het Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad sedert den 14den Mei 1940 reeds vele berichten gepubliceerd, zoodat onze lezers zich eenig idee hebben kunnen vormen van het Nieuwe Rotterdam. Op een enkele uitzondering na, hebben bij deze beschrijvingen teekeningen ontbroken, maar sedert vandaag is in museum Boymans een groote maquette van het stadsplan te bezichtigen en er zijn talrijke teekeningen aanwezig, welke verschilderen de facetten van de vele problemen van den opbouw belichten, met behulp waarvan men zich kan oriënteren en vergelijkingen kan treffen tusschen den oude toestand en de nieuwe situatie. Toch zal men behoefte voelen aan een uitgebreider toelichting dan het getoonde materiaal biedt en aanzien slechts een enkele maal p. week de bezoekers van Boymans door een van ir. Witteveen's me-

Figure 14. Press is positive on Plan Witteveen. Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad, 25<sup>th</sup> October 1941.

### ROTTERDAM NA ZIJN OPBOUW

Van de 25.000 verwoeste woningen worden er slechts 10.000 in de binnenstad herbouwd; de overigen komen in de randgemeenten. — Hofplein wordt centrum van groot-Rotterdam. — Spoor- en waterwegen verbeterd. — Bouw eener nieuwe Willembrug.

#### NIEUWE PARKAANLEG

(Van onzen correspondent)

ROTTERDAM, 24 October. In museum Boymans worden een maquette en plattegronden tentoongesteld, die de mogelijkheid schiepen zich een duidelijk beeld te vormen van de stad Rotterdam na haar wederopbouw. Deze belangwekkende expositie wordt weldra voor het publiek geopend. Ruim een jaar zijn ir. Witteveen en zijn staf reeds bezig met de uitwerking van de plannen, die zich thans in een vergevorderd stadium bevinden. De ontwerper van de nieuwe binnenstad, ir. Witteveen, heeft ons gistermiddag, aan de hand van de maquette en van deze plattegronden, uiteengezet hoe de Maasstad weder zal worden opgebouwd.

Toen wij ons spoedig na de ramp, aldus ir. Witteveen, voorbereiden den wederopbouw ter hand te nemen, stond a priori vast, dat de komende tien jaren een bloeiperiode van de beurtvaart te verwachten.

In verband met de wijzigingen van het stadsplan zal niet kunnen worden volstaan met verbreding van den bestaanden vaarweg, doch zal het gedeelte, dat de Rotte met de Delfsche vaart verbindt, in zuidelijke richting moeten worden verlegd. De geheele vaarweg zal een breedte van ten minste 20 m verkrijgen, van vele en ruime losgelegenheden voorzien.

In plaats van de Vlasmarktsluis zal een nieuwe sluis moeten worden gebouwd, in de verlegde waterkeering ter plaatse van de oude zeevischmarkt.

#### Het nieuwe stadsplan.

Wat het nieuwe stadsplan betreft, aldus de heer Witteveen, moesten wij allereerst nagaan of de Willembrug kon blijven bestaan. Zooda reeds bij de behandeling van het spoorwagenvraagstuk is opgemerkt, zal de spoorbrug over de Maas 2 m hooger komen te liggen. Wij deze maatregel effect sorteren, dan moet de Willembrug eveneens worden opgehoogd en wel zooda, dat de doorvaarthoogte onder beide bruggen dezelfde wordt. Aangezien de Willembrug 1,5 m lager ligt dan de spoorbrug, zal op een verhooging van 3,5 m moeten worden gerekend. Let men er bovendien op, dat de Willembrug veel te smal is en de pijlers niet zwaarder mogen belast, dan volgt hieruit, dat aan den bouw van een nieuwe brug niet valt te ontkomen.

(Zie verder Laatste Berichten.)

#### Nederlandse Spoorwegen geopend, dat zeer spoedig tot het gewenschte resultaat heeft geleid.

#### Spoorlijnen in het Oosten.

In het door den Algemeen Gemachtigde voor den Wederopbouw inmiddels vastgestelde project zal de spoorweg van Gouda bij Nieuwerkerk van den bestaanden spoorweg in westelijke richting afbuigen naar de noordelijke begrenzing van het Bosch- en Parkplan en vandaar in vrijwel rechte lijn — langs de Rotte — in verbanding worden gebracht met het D.P. station. Deze nieuwe spoorweg zal, voor zoover door de stad ontworpen, als viaduct worden gebouwd. Zooda deze spoorweg tot stand zal zijn gekomen, is er een ideale toestand, wat het spoorwegverkeer betreft, ontstaan, omdat van het D.P. station, dat als Centraal station werkelijk midden in de stad is gelegen, drie spoorlijnen naar buiten stralen, de eene in westelijke richting (Schiedam

Figure 14. Newspaper article on the success of Plan Witteveen. Algemeen Handelsblad, 1st January 1942.



Figure 14. Model of Plan Witteveen visited by lots of interested people. October 1941. Stadsarchief Rotterdam

The inhabitants of Rotterdam did not protest against a plan that resembles the old city, but with a modern and better built environment. They were quite positive and were longing for a recognizable city. Witteveen tried to do this by making the classical looking façades with a modern structure and plan. He wanted Rotterdam to not be like an American city, with a straight grid and buildings like the new Beurs should not be the standard. The German leader of the reconstruction Dr. C.L.F. Völckers agreed with the plans. Völckers: ‘The mill, the town hall, the post office and the Laurenskerk will stay. The city will be built around it, so the city will be Rotterdam again.’ Although there was a lot of praise from the public, there was a lot of criticism.<sup>12</sup>

## **Resistance**

With Witteveen really striving for the three dimensional plan with every building worked out in the plan, he let the appointed architects not have the freedom they wanted. The architects, under which J.J.P Oud were majorly classic architects. Modern architects like Jo van den Broek and Willem van Tijen were not accountants as important architects. It was clear that Witteveen did not want to have a city centre with the focus on ‘het nieuwe bouwen’ or ‘nieuwe zakelijkheid’ (new business like building). ‘Het nieuwe bouwen’ meant building in steel, glass and concrete, with austerity and functionality. The creativity of architects was limited by the detailed plans of Witteveen. Director of Van Nelle, Cees van der Leeuw explained it ‘with drawing only the windows of a building’.<sup>13</sup>

Together with the in previous paragraph mentioned architects, the Kleine Kring, the daily board of the Club Rotterdam, had a lot of criticism on the plan too. In the Kleine Kring, the most important business men of Rotterdam were gathered, such as Van der Leeuw, Herman Carel Lintzen(R. Mees & Zn), Jan Backx(Thomsen’s Havenbedrijf) and J.A. de Monchy, chairman of the Architects Committee. Van der Leeuw wanted more influence on the plans. Therefore, he worked on a new plan for the city. The separations on functions was a simple, but modern change he made. The job of the urbanist, according to Van der Leeuw, was making a two dimensional plan, the architecture belongs to the architects. During that time, the war changed drastically. It was not sure whether Witteveen could finish the reconstruction

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<sup>12</sup> J. L. van der Pauw, *Rotterdam in de Tweede Wereldoorlog*, 3e druk 2011, Reeks van de Stichting Historische publicaties Roterodamum, 1380-7404, nr. 161 (Amsterdam: Boom, 2006), 293-305; Laar, *Stad van formaat*, 417-419.

<sup>13</sup> Laar, 418; Pauw, *Rotterdam in de Tweede Wereldoorlog* 302-305.

anymore. There was a big shift to a more modern thinking in Rotterdam. Influenced by the thoughts of the CIAM (Congres International des Architects Modernes), The Club Rotterdam and the in 1944 founded OPRO (Opbouw Rotterdam), which replaced the ASRO, were heading more towards a modern approach. Witteveen resigned on the 1<sup>st</sup> January 1945, but already stopped on sick leave in April the year before. He was not able to handle all the critics, while still trying to convince the people of the quality of its own plan. In the end, his stubbornness made that he had to resign.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Laar, 417-420; Pauw, *Rotterdam in de Tweede Wereldoorlog* 302-305; Schilfgaarde and Kathmann, 11-15.

## Het Basisplan Van Traa

After Witteveen's leave, Van Traa was assigned to design the plan, although he was more of a manager than a designer. Because some parts of Witteveen's plan, like the canal between the Rotte and Delftsevaart and the building Wereldhaven at the Goudsesingel, were already realised, Van Traa had to continue on some aspects of Witteveen's plan. He increased the area of the plan; there was more space needed for industry and shops. The main idea of the Basisplan was to make a blueprint for the city, instead of designing a complete city. It was a zoning plan with the four themes traffic, working, living and recreation, all separated (figure 12), all according to the modern thoughts of the CIAM.<sup>15</sup>



Figure 15: Het Basisplan with zoning. 1946. Stadsarchief Rotterdam

Although the main junctions stayed the same, the road structure changed drastically. There was a raster of straight roads, it almost feels like an American city. At the Westersingel, the green and the water will be cancelled away. The main roads will be a tramline with on both sides three roadways, a bicycle lane, parking area and a raised pavement. The smaller squares

<sup>15</sup> Schilfgaard and Kathmann, 14-17.



would not be for traffic flow, but for parking. They will not be living city squares with cultural activities and cafés. The cultural and central function of Hofplein turned into just a traffic junction. The Coolingsingel was changed in width from 44 metres to 80 metres, a real boulevard. The city council rejected this plan, because this meant that hotel Atlanta and the office of Robaver would be demolished, which in the end still happened in 1954 for the build of the new Bijenkorf. At the place of the current Churchillplein, the Van Hogendorpplein was planned, van Traa wanted to continue the Coolingsingel to have a ‘Venster op de rivier’(View on the river). This meant that the old Bijenkorf building by Dudok (figure 16) had to be demolished, which they did eventually did in 1957. This was not received well by the public. It was seen as one of the most iconic modern buildings by the famous Dudok. Especially because a part of the building survived and was used until 1957 it was almost unnecessary to demolish. Also, a plan was made to make Blaak a new big traffic intersection. After the war, several designs and maquettes were made (figure 17).<sup>16</sup> Fortunately this traffic intersection in the middle of the city was never built. Would you imagine the Kleinpolderplein in the middle of the city (figure 17)? This would have meant another enormous traffic intersection in the city.

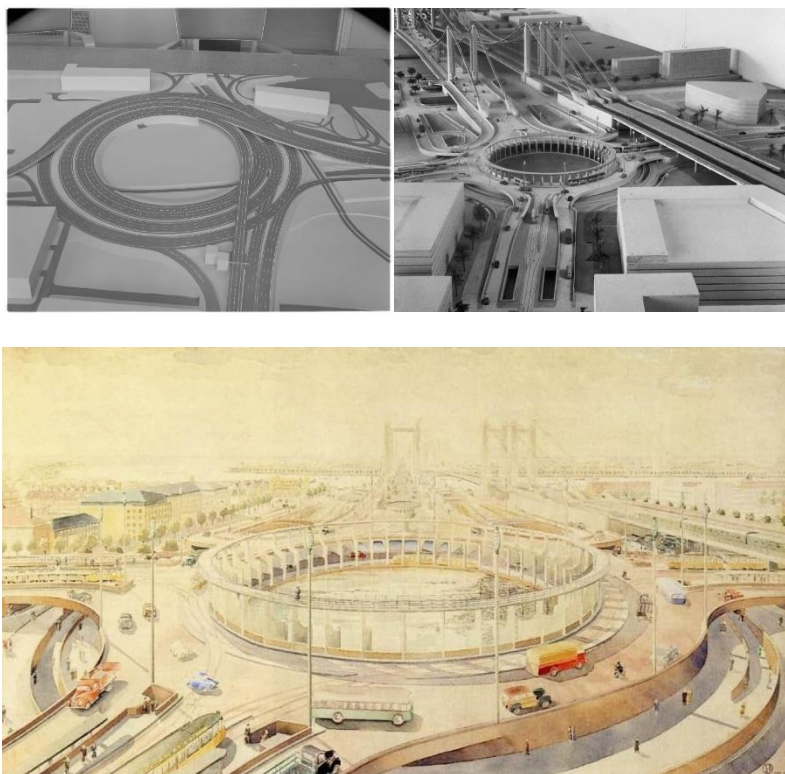


Figure 16. Three designs for the traffic intersection on Blaak, 1950-1960. Stadsarchief Rotterdam.

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<sup>16</sup> ‘Verkeersplein’, accessed 15 April 2023, <https://wederopbouwrotterdam.nl/artikelen/verkeersplein.>; Laar, *Stad van formaat*.



*Figure 17. Kleinpolderplein. Wegenwiki.nl*

The railroads were researched so many times, so Van Traa used the plan of Witteveen. Because the newly designed line to Utrecht station Hofplein would be kept and needed a new building. This new station was finished in 1956 and designed by architect Sybold van Ravesteyn, who also designed the other train stations in Rotterdam (figure 18).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Schilfgaard and Kathmann, 15-17.



Figure 18. Station Hofplein by van Ravensteyn, 1956. Stadsarchief Rotterdam, April 1957.

### Comments on Het Basisplan

Plan Witteveen was not the only plan that was negatively commented on. Also Het Basisplan was not free of criticism. According to several writings on the plan it was way too extreme. Examples as demolishing de Bijenkorf, the disappearance of the old cityscape, filling up the old ports and the discarding the green and the water of the Westersingel were too extreme and not necessary. Van Traa and his team even considered moving or demolishing the monument Het Schielandhuis (figure 18). It did not fit the shopping area, so it could go somewhere else. This shows the functional thinking about the plans and the history and the lack of historical awareness, or care. Luckily there were some people defending the importance of the building.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Laar, *Stad van formaat*, 463.



Figure 19. Schielandhuis, 1966. Stadsarchief Rotterdam.

### The two plans compared

Artist Gyz La Rivière (Rotterdam, 1976) says in the voice-over of his movie *Rotterdam 2040*: “When the city centre was kind of finished, the Luftwaffe came”.<sup>19</sup> He claims that after the bombing, the real problems began. He mentions that the bombing was a terrible event, but what came after was worse for the inhabitants of Rotterdam (Rotterdammers). La Rivière: “Rotterdam is, after the ideological fascism, bombed again by ideological modernism.” He critiques the influence of the member of Club Rotterdam on the city council during the war and the making of the reconstruction plan. As mentioned before, the Club Rotterdam chose a modernistic approach and chose to discard the detailed and picturesque plan Witteveen. The result of this was Het Basisplan of van Traa. This led to changing the characteristic street plan and making way for the car. Due to the separation of building functions and the focus on car traffic, the building density and dwellings density in the centre decreased. He writes: “Due to the tremendous drive for renewal the reconstruction totally discarded the past. This city should look for her own history and bring back her successes. The time for neo-neo-classicism has come”(translated from Dutch). He suggests rebuilding of classical building based on the

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<sup>19</sup> ROTTERDAM 2040, 2014, <https://vimeo.com/90262477>.

'List of 144', also introduced in the introduction. He mentions the Glass Palace, the old Bijenkorf of Dudok, the Grootte Schouwburg and the Delftsche Poort, which are discussed later. *Where La Rivière calls out for rebuilding these building in current times, this section will try to place those buildings in the two plans and find out what that meant for the plan(s).*

To get a better grasp of the plans and their differences, a certain area of Rotterdam is analysed. On both maps a rectangular area is marked to zoom into (figure 20). This area is then enlarged and placed on one page. The one on top is Plan Witteveen and the coloured map below is Het Basisplan. The differences are not hard to find, but to make it easier to compare parts of the plans are highlighted and numbered to discuss. Those are then divided in roadmaps, building(blocks) and open spaces to make sure the maps are still readable. A remark is that the two maps are drawn in different styles. Plan Witteveen is more detailed and the roads are probably more on scale, while Het Basisplan is more conceptual and the roads are drawn as lines.

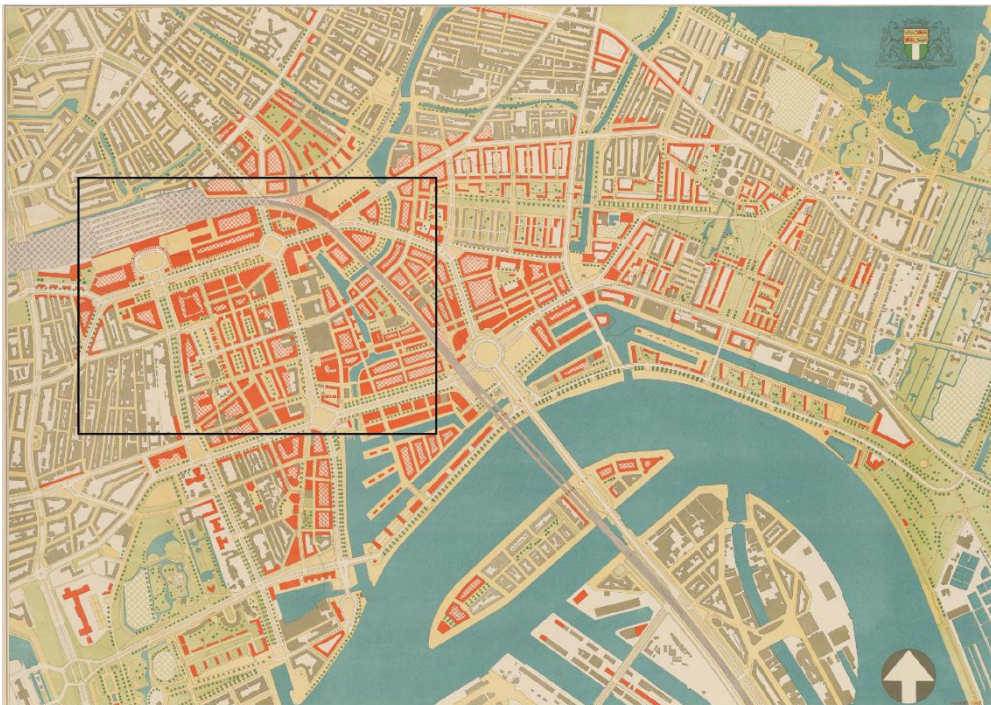


Figure 20. Plan Witteveen(top) and Het Basisplan(below). Original edited by author.

## Road network

The main guiding principle for the reconstruction plan was the road network. Prior to the war, Rotterdam was already facing traffic problems in the old city centre. The use of cars and trucks increased in a way that the old city centre, which was designed for walking, horse and carriages and shipping through the canals, could not handle it. Before Witteveen was assigned to lead the reconstruction he already made plans for the new road network before the war, which was aimed to solve the congestions on busy junctions. Despite the terrible impact of the bombing, the empty space allowed for the realisation of Witteveen's plan.<sup>20</sup>

To compare both plans the main road structure of each map are projected on the other map (figure 21) and the remarkable differences are numbered. The first main difference is the roundabout at Hofplein(1). In Witteveen's plan 5 roads join into one big traffic square. Close to the square small side streets are connected to the main roads, while in Het Basisplan only four straight roads come together. The roads are drawn as 2 separate one way roads. In Plan Witteveen the buildings follow the shape of the buildings more and it looks like there is more space for green and terraces. The second major difference is the road structure at Central Station(2). Where the roads shape like a roundabout at Het Basisplan, the road in Plan Witteveen feels like an exit and a ramp from and to the main road, parallel to the main road. The structure perpendicular to the railways(Station square) differs in road structure, but also in public space. Plan Witteveen draws the station square as a big green park, probably for pedestrians, which continues to other streets in the south. These were meant as the 'parkways' mentioned before. In Het Basisplan the car gets more space to the south from the station. There are also some trees drawn, but it looks more like a few trees or bushes in between big car-oriented roads. Where Witteveen's plan tried to follow as much as the old street pattern as possible, the structure in Het Basisplan totally abandoned the original structure, with straight roads where possible(3). All to make sure the car traffic had as little as possible resistance. The last major difference(4) is the junction at Beurs. Het Basisplan made a new big roundabout, similar to Hofplein(1) that connects to another roundabout at Blaak to the east. In the previous section it is shown what the possible plans were for this traffic intersection(figure 16). The junction in Plan Witteveen follows the old street pattern more with lots of side streets.

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<sup>20</sup> Schilfgaard and Kathmann, *De wederopbouw van Rotterdam : stedelijke herverkaveling in de praktijk*.

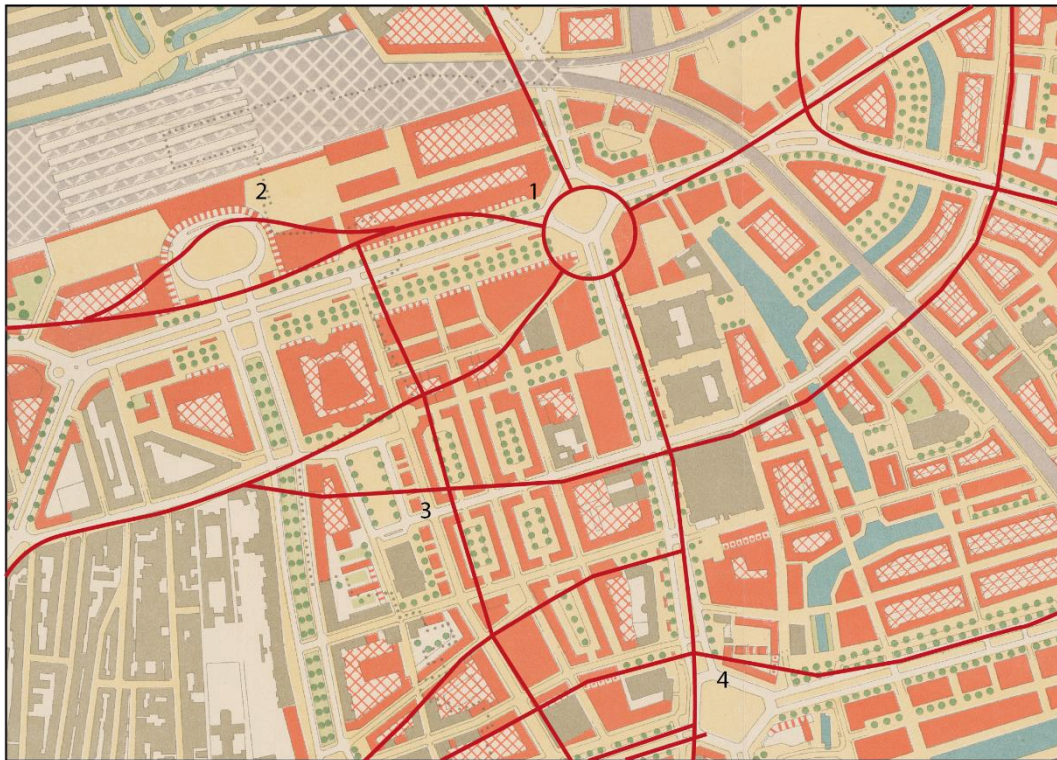
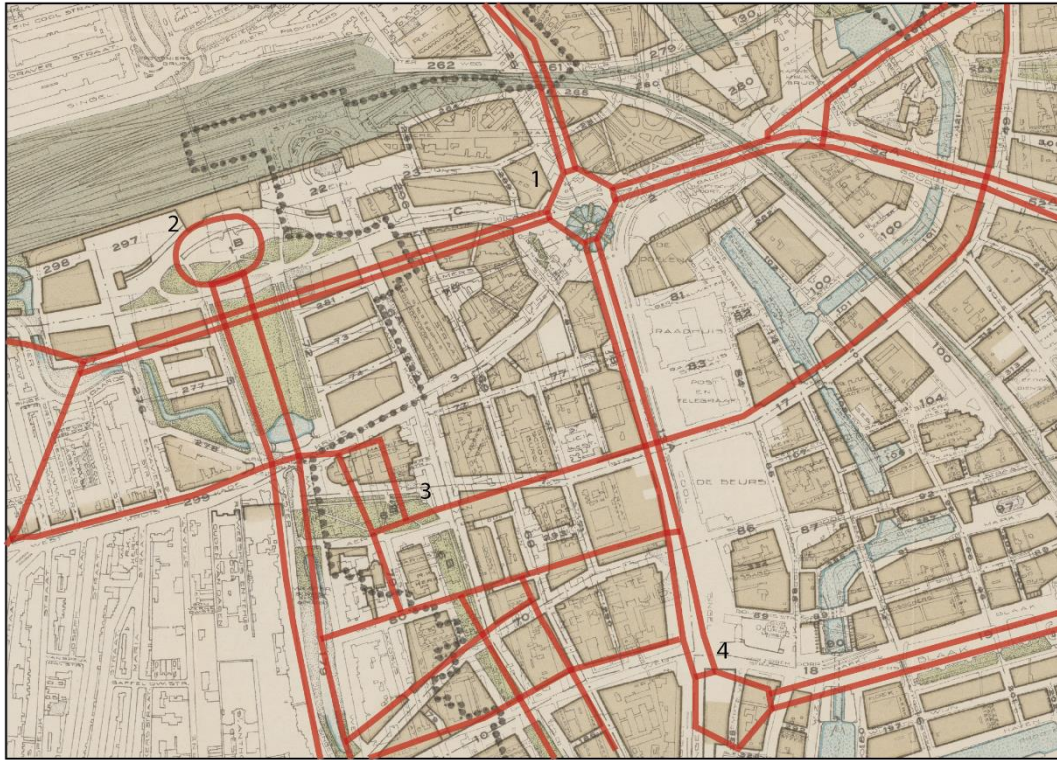


Figure 21. Comparison of the road network. Original edited by author.



While Witteveen's plan followed the old city centre as much as possible, with more space for the car, Het Basisplan was totally car oriented. This was fully in line with the principles of the modernist of the CIAM. While Rotterdam is now well known as a 'autostad'<sup>21</sup>, Plan Witteveen probably would have made the city more friendly for cyclist and pedestrians. With the large boulevards and car traffic oriented streets it is sometimes hard to cross the streets in Rotterdam.

With the 'Rotterdamse Mobiliteitsaanpak' from 2020 it seems that Rotterdam, and urbanist in general, are focussing on greener traffic and less cars. They focus on green public transport, heavy traffic will be banned from the centre and lots of space for the cyclist and pedestrian.<sup>22</sup> This really contrasts with the ideas of Het Basisplan. Of course, the urgency to change the climate is a big factor in these choices, but car centred cities such as Rotterdam are really questioning how to change the city to a more walking-friendly and green place?<sup>23</sup> Therefore it can be concluded that the focus on the car has changed to a more sustainable option. Not only sustainable for the environment, but also sustainable for the cityscape.<sup>24</sup>

With the current longing for more green, water and sustainable transport it can be concluded that Plan Witteveen would have been a better base for such plans. The streets were narrower, there were less blockades from enormous building blocks and a lot of water would still be there. Of course, the plan would have been changed over time to meet the standards of current times, but it seems that Rotterdam is now totally switching to plans that resembles Witteveen's or even pre-war plans.

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<sup>21</sup> 'Waarom Rotterdammers minder fietsen', De Groene Amsterdammer, 5 August 2020, <https://www.groene.nl/artikel/gebouwd-om-doorheen-te-rijden>.

<sup>22</sup> 'Mobiliteitsaanpak', Gemeente Rotterdam, accessed 20 April 2023, <https://www.rotterdam.nl/mobiliteitsaanpak>.

<sup>23</sup> 'Waarom Rotterdammers minder fietsen'.

<sup>24</sup> Paulo R. C. Dalpian, Teniza da Silveira, and Carlos A. V. Rossi, "'One Less Car': The Collective Initiative Toward Sustainability", *Journal of Macromarketing* 35, no. 1 (1 March 2015): 99–110, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0276146714552904>.

## Buildings

The same principle of laying the structure of the one map on top of the other map is done for the buildings (figure 23). The choice is made to just show some building blocks, which is enough to see the differences. Obviously the line (rooilijn) follows the street shapes. This means that Plan Witteveen has more rounded and natural shaped building blocks and Het Basisplan more rectangular. The buildings blocks in Het Basisplan are larger and more closed off. In Witteveen's plan it seems like you can walk through all small streets and everything is connected. The buildings marked 5 and 6 are typical for Witteveen's approach. They are detailed and have organic, round shapes. Witteveen also drew some façades of building blocks (figure 22), which corresponds to the detailed drawing of the plan.

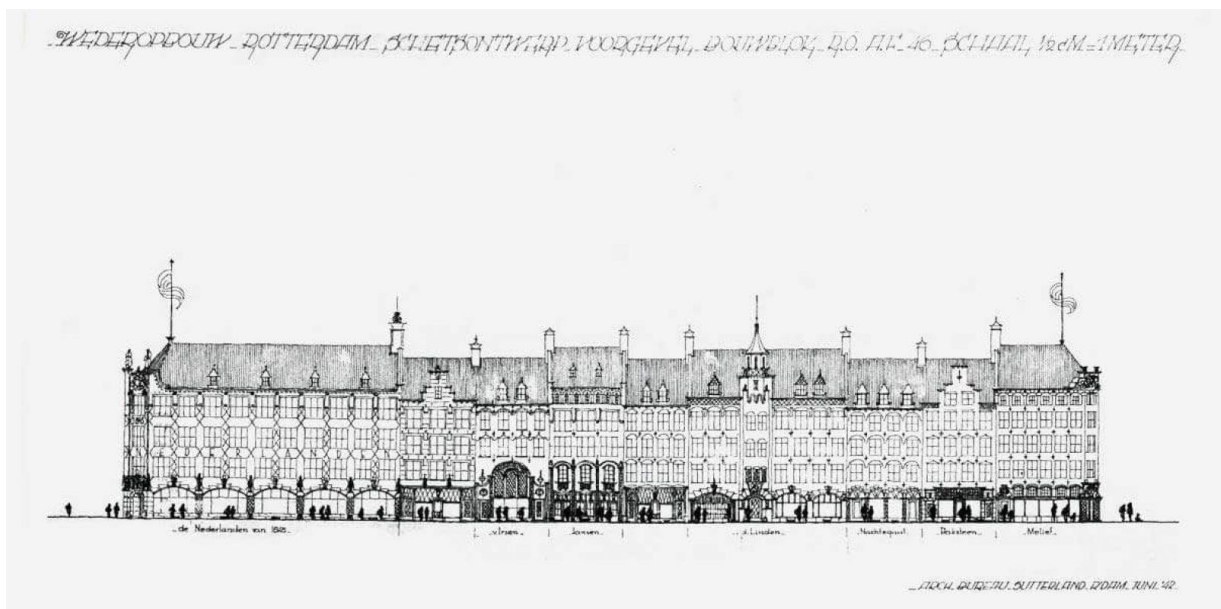


Figure 22. Drawing of a building block on the Westewagenstraat by architect Sutterland, 1942.

Remarkable is that in both plans the new temporary theatre is drawn (7). This is one of the few elements Van Traa used from Plan Witteveen. The square in front of the theatre is differently in the plans. Witteveen continues his green belt from the station to the theatre and there is more space around the square. This in combination with building 5 make that the museum square probably was meant to have a classical appearance. This square in Het Basisplan has two straight roads with a rectangular square and straight façades, this is what will be Het Schouwburgplein.

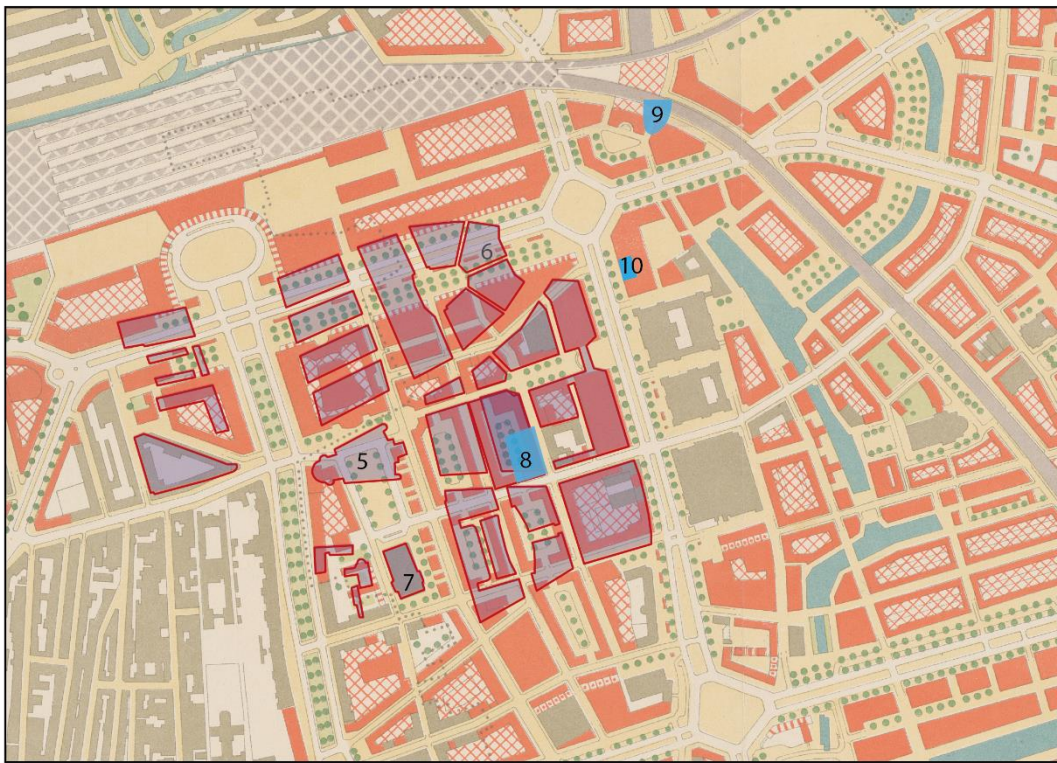


Figure 23. Comparison of the road network. Original edited by author.

## Het Schouwburgplein

One of the buildings that was damaged during and demolished after the bombing is the original theatre the Groote Schouwburg (figure 24). The architect of the theatre, Johannes Verheul Dirkszoon, stated that he was convinced that the theatre could have been restored, because the façade, heavy inner walls and the stone floors and stairs were still in reasonable shape to rebuild the building (figure 25). On 24<sup>th</sup> of September Verheul read, nevertheless, in the papers that the building will be demolished (figure 26).<sup>25</sup>



*Figure 24. De Groote Schouwburg by J. Verheul, 1887. Stadsarchief Rotterdam.*

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<sup>25</sup> Stadsarchief Rotterdam, 'De Groote Schouwburg', webpagina, Stadsarchief Rotterdam, accessed 15 April 2023, <https://www.stadsarchief.rotterdam.nl/zoek-en-ontdek/themas/j-verheul-dzn/de-groote-schouwburg/index.xml>.



Figure 26. The Groote Schouwburg after the bombing on May 14th 1940. Stadsarchief Rotterdam.

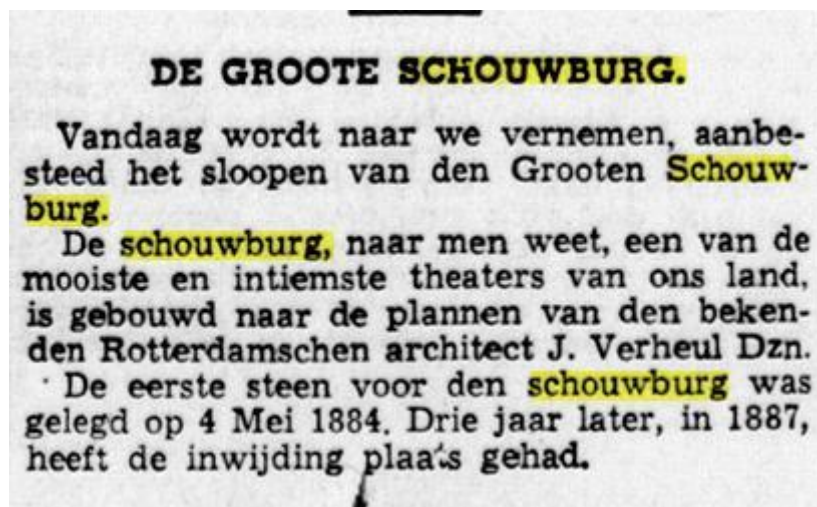


Figure 25. Newspaper article on the demolision of De Groote Schouwburg. *Het Vaderland : Staat- En Letterkundig Nieuwsblad*, 24 September 1940.

The new (temporary) theatre (figure 27) is placed two blocks to the west of the position of the Groote Schouwburg (8). The construction began in 1941 and the building was finished in 1947. This building and the square is a perfect example of the ongoing discussion about the reconstruction plans and how to fill in the empty spaces that the bombing in Rotterdam left. It

is the most written and talked about piece of reconstruction of Rotterdam.<sup>26</sup> Even now the discussion about the square (Schouwburgplein) is starting again, because there are plans to rebuild the square again.<sup>27</sup> When visiting Rotterdam, it is likely that people will visit or walk through the Schouwburgplein. What they most of the time will see is an empty square without people and lots of concrete. The wood layer is now covered with artificial grass, which is a problem for the wood, because it stays wet after rain. Also the whole square will have not intended puddles after rain, because the water cannot go anywhere (figure 28). After rain it almost looks like the first built of the square after the war, where fountains were placed and mothers with children regularly used the square on a sunny day (figure 29).



Figure 27. The temporary theatre, 1947-1984. Stadsarchief Rotterdam.

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<sup>26</sup> 'Schouwburgplein', accessed 16 April 2023, <https://wederopbouwrotterdam.nl/artikelen/schouwburgplein>.

<sup>27</sup> 'Het geplaagde Rotterdamse Schouwburgplein gaat (weer) op de schop', NRC, 28 May 2020, <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2020/05/28/het-blijft-maar-tobben-met-het-schouwburgplein-a4001014>.



Figure 28. Schouwburgplein, 2014. Flickr.com



*Figure 29. Ponds are used at Schouwburgplein. Stadsarchief Rotterdam, 1969.*

As analysed, this square was designed in both plans and was meant to be a square between the temporary theatre and a new theatre and music building, which became De Doelen (figure 30). Before De Doelen was finished in 1966, the square was still an empty terrain like a lot of places in Rotterdam after the war. It was used as parking. The parking was then designed as an underground parking, which was finished in 1966. For the design of the new square, Van Traa, in his last years of working, made a design with green, pavilions, kiosks, sculptures and trees. It turned out that the roof of the parking was not strong enough to carry the load. The new design, by Van Traa's successor Bernard Fokkinga was a simple plan, with straight lines, flowerbeds, book kiosks, lots of benches and even a pond. Urbanists feared that the square would be an empty big space. A maquette was made and showed so people could come up with ideas. The design was changed a bit and on the 23th of May in 1969 it was finished. Still there were a lot of open spaces and almost no green, but the ponds were popular for mothers with children. There was life on this square (figure 29), although only with good weather. Nevertheless it is seen as a symbol for what has gone wrong with the reconstruction of



Rotterdam; an empty, stone-like square without the human scale. In the 1970's a lot of new designs were made (figure 31). Architect Herman Hertzberger made two plans, one which filled the square with buildings, so there were two squares and a new theatre. The press and the city council were positive, but the RKS (Rotterdam Art foundation) discarded the plan, because it was too small in scale, gnarly and pale. The second one also did not make it along with a lot of other designs during the 1970's and the 1980's.<sup>28</sup>



Figure 30. *De Doelen*, 1966. Stadsarchief Rotterdam.

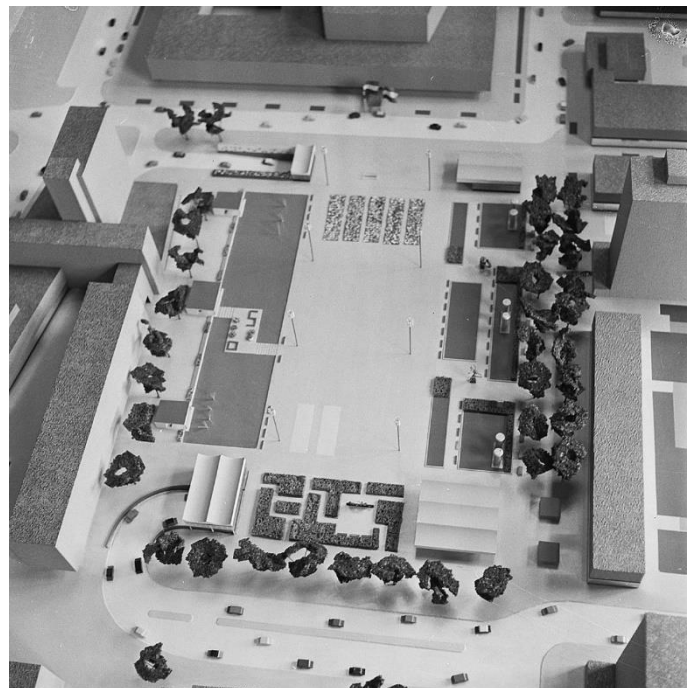


Figure 31. *Maquette of Schouwburgplein*, 31 May 1966. Het Nationaal Archief

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<sup>28</sup> 'Schouwburgplein'; Laar, *Stad van formaat*.

Finally, in 1983 architect Wim Quist designs a new building block with the new theatre, dwellings, shops and offices (figure 31). This came on the place of the old theatre. Quite quickly the theatre got the name 'De kist van Quist' (The box of Quist), because it is a concrete, modernistic building, made for the function, without details (figure 33). In 1993, after a closed tender, the design of architect Adriaan Geuze is chosen for the Schouwburgplein. This is the square as it is now.



Figure 32. Newspaper article about the opening of 'The box of Quist', *Het Vrije Volk*, 16 April 1988.



*Figure 33. The new Schouwburg by Quist, 1988, Stadsarchief Rotterdam.*

As it can be seen and almost be felt when walking over the square now, it is an empty square, without green and almost no people are using it as a square, only as a transit place. The square was used more when the ponds and cafés were there.

As said, this piece of history is a perfect example of the discussion of the reconstruction. The demolition of the temporary theatre and designing an open, almost not usable square and a concrete theatre is characteristic for the modernistic movement of Rotterdam. The urge to renew was a felt more than to rebuild. That the temporary theatre was built so quickly during and after the war shows the importance of the culture sector. But could this been done differently? The temporary theatre was a logical choice, there was not a lot of money or resources, so they built it with materials left from the bombing. What they could have done is using the leftovers of the Grootte Schouwburg and built in somewhere else, or even on the same place. Because there was nothing left of it after cleaning, there was no urge for Witteveen anymore to use the places of the old, characteristic buildings. Also, it was possible to rebuild the Grootte Schouwburg as a replacement of the temporary theatre. Then, the

Schouwburgplein had gotten back some historical value. This historical reminder is what makes some places in Rotterdam have its value. Two examples of are Hotel New York at the Wilhelminapier, in between all the skyscrapers and the former Unilever building on top of an old factory. This is making use of the old, to make the new worth even more. These examples will be discussed later.

### **Dancing Pschorr**

Another building that was probably on the List of 144 was Dancing Pschorr (figure 34).<sup>29</sup> Dancing Pschorr was a café restaurant built in 1922 at the Coolsingel (10). The dance club was extremely popular and after the dancing got an lighted glass floor, it became even more popular. It featured international acts, such as Louis Armstrong and Joe Appleton.



Figure 34. Dancing Pschorr, 1922. Top010.nl

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<sup>29</sup> 'Lijst van 144 gesloopte gebouwen Rotterdam 1940', *Nieuwbouw Architectuur Rotterdam* (blog), 2 September 2022, <https://nieuws.top010.nl/144-gesloopte-gebouwen-rotterdam-1940>.

Pschorr is designed by architect Willem Kromhout. It was placed between the Delfsche Poort and the Stadhuis(city hall). When looking at the façade it is clearly a building that fits in the buildings at the Coolingsingel. It was majestic, symmetrical, detailed, but importantly it had an active plinth, where the restaurant and bar was. This building, together with Café Loos, gave Rotterdam, and the Coolingsingel a boost to the great and modern living city it needed. There was life at the Coolingsingel. The interior was also spectacular, with the glass floor, a big stained glass dome and lots of details(figure 35). In 1939 a big renovation was finished, designed by architect Anton Hamaker.

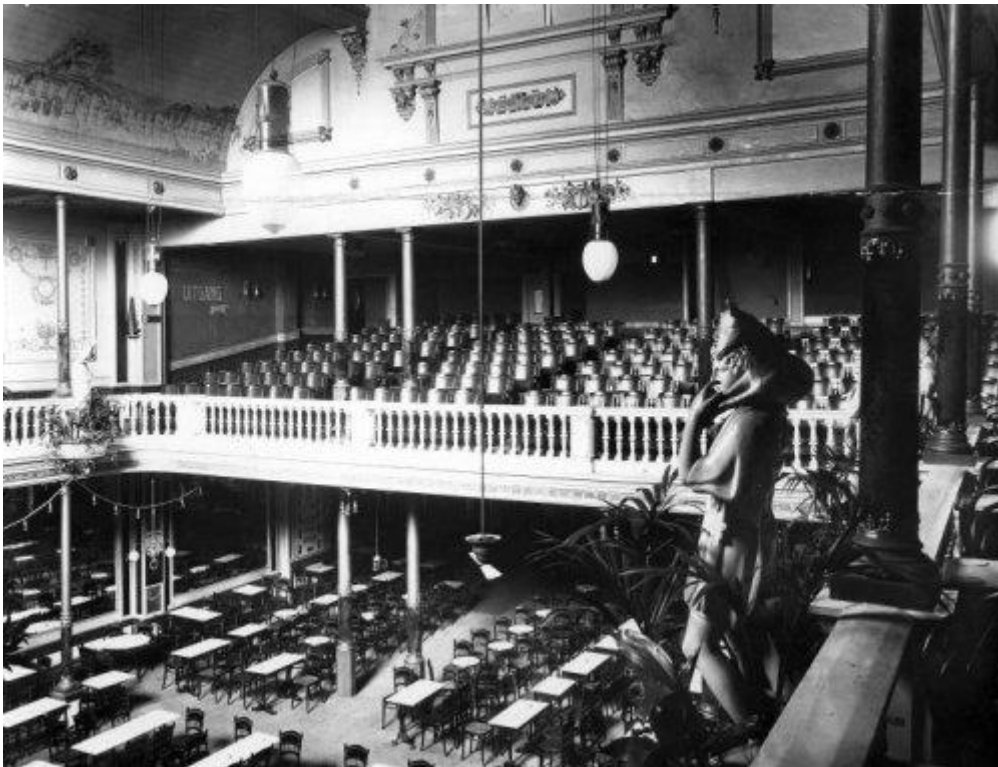


Figure 35. Interior of Pschorr. Top010.nl

The reason that the choice is made to discuss Pschorr as a building that should have been rebuilt is that the placing of the building perfectly fitted both plans, so the building did not hold back any infrastructure plans. The façade was still standing, so the building could have been rebuild or partially rebuild with a different building behind the façade(figure 36). At the location of Pschorr, two large glass buildings are built(figure 37). There are some cafés and a nightclub in the new building, but it is not as inviting as before. Now a reflective glass façade is topping up the cafès, where Pschorr would have been a reminder of Rotterdam before the war and it would fit perfectly near the city hall. Even if there was need for more offices or dwellings, they could have done a design like the Unilever building on top of the old Blue Band factory. A place where old meets new. Both buildings are contributing to each other and

giving value to each other. Imagine Dancing Pschorr surrounding and topped with the current building.

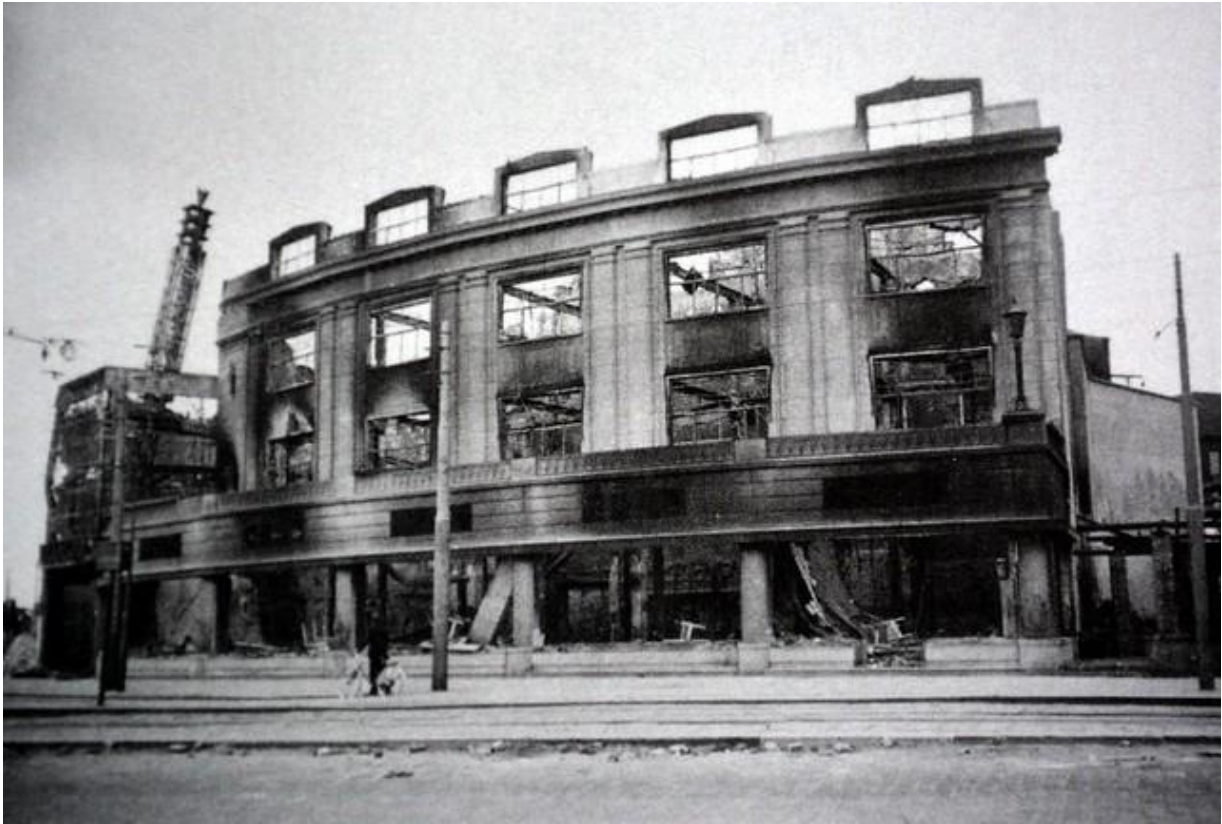


Figure 37. Pschorr after the bombing, May 1940. Stadsarchief Rotterdam.



Figure 36. New building on the place of Pschorr, Coolsingel. Schaub & Partners, 2017.

### **Station Hofplein with café Loos**

The third and last building that will be discussed is the old Station Hofplein with Café Loos in it (figure 38). Café Loos was mentioned before as one of the important places in Rotterdam's nightlife, together with Pschorr. The Coolingsingel at that time was the entertainment district. Station Hofplein was built in 1908 and designed by Jacob Pieter Stok, which was an important architect of Rotterdam before the war. It was the end station of the (electrical) train line between Rotterdam and Scheveningen.<sup>30</sup> The façade faced Hofplein and had a circular shape. The structure had a modern concrete design and the façade was made of white stone and Jugendstil decorations. Together with Het Witte Huis (figure 39) it was the introduction of Jugendstil or Art Nouveau in the Netherlands. Again, this building was damaged by the bombing, but the main structure and lots of façade elements survived (figure 40). Still it was decided to clean and demolish all of it to make the new Rotterdam.<sup>31</sup> Another reason that the station could have been rebuilt was that the new station came on the exact same location, finished in 1956 and designed by Sybold van Ravesteyn (figure 19). Years later, in 2006, the last train stopped at Station Hofplein and the station was demolished. Station Hofplein at that time was a meeting place for drug addicts and criminality.<sup>32</sup> The overpass of the railroads still exist and are on the list of national monuments. The arches are now repurposed and used by restaurants and jazz club Bird (figure 41). A perfect example of on how to handle such monumental buildings with a new function.

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<sup>30</sup> Jan van Helleman, 'Station Hofplein - Cafe restaurant Loos', *Nieuwbouw Architectuur Rotterdam* (blog), 6 December 2012, <https://nieuws.top010.nl/station-hofplein-cafe-restaurant-loos.htm>.

<sup>31</sup> 'Hollandsch Beton En Jugendstil. De Decoraties van Het Verdwenen Station Rotterdam Hofplein', accessed 16 April 2023, <http://retours.eu/nl/08-decoraties-hofpleinstation-rotterdam/>.

<sup>32</sup> Job Halkes, 'Hier wilde je tien jaar terug niet zijn in Rotterdam', *Metronieuws.nl*, 14 August 2015, <https://www.metronieuws.nl/in-het-nieuws/binnenland/2015/08/hier-wilde-je-tien-jaar-terug-niet-zijn-in-rotterdam/>.



Figure 38. Station Hofplein, 1930. Nederlandse Spoorwegen.



Figure 39. Het Witte Huis, Arjen de Boer, 2013.





Figure 40. Station Hofplein after the bombing, May 1940.



Figure 41. Jazz Podium Bird, HTSPT, 2017.

The demolition of the old Station Hofplein, the construction of the new Station Hofplein and the demolition of this building again is again typical for the reconstruction of Rotterdam. As La Rivière said: “Rotterdam is bombed multiple times. By the fascists, modernism and the Stadsvernieuwing(city renewal).”<sup>33</sup>

In the 60’s, the critics on the reconstruction and what Rotterdam has and will become increased. The Rotterdammers felt that the city centre was not ‘gezellig’ anymore. The typical untranslatable term which can be described as a combination of cosiness and social interaction. For a city this means there is no life on the street, no markets, no full terrasses and so on. In 1960, the English journalist Jan Morris called Rotterdam ‘soulless, a Bauhaus-city, a functional city with a German appearance.’ From the 60’s and mostly the 70’s this critical voice got louder. There were increasingly more protest against more motorways, demolition of old working-class neighbourhoods such as Crooswijk and there was the call for keeping (socially) valuable buildings and neighbourhoods.<sup>34</sup>

### **Modernism and stadvernieuwing as problem**

Of course, all these decisions and examples of demolished buildings are in a way a cause for the city of Rotterdam as we know now. However, it is not the only cause. As Rivière mentioned multiple times in his film passionately, after the war, Rotterdam continued breaking the ties with history with all the demolishing. Paul Groenendijk, an architecture expert, mentions this in his book ‘RotterdamWederopbouw Stad’ as ‘wederafbraak’ which can be freely translated as re-deconstruction. Groenendijk meant with this term the demolition of reconstruction buildings.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> ROTTERDAM 2040.

<sup>34</sup> Laar, *Stad van formaat*: 541-542.

<sup>35</sup> P. Groenendijk and M. Lageweg, *Rotterdam: Wederopbouw Stad* (nai010 uitgevers, 2022).

There was a renewal drive that influenced the decision makers for a long time. This led to the ‘Stadsvernieuwing’ (city renewal) from the 1970s.<sup>36</sup> A period where the municipality bought neglected houses to build better dwellings back. In this period, 70.000 dwellings were replaced, three times more than in the reconstruction. Also, in this period, lots of modern buildings built in or after the war were demolished and replaced by architectural irrelevant buildings. Even the famous Lijnbaan (figure 42), the shopping area which was one of the most important examples of the reconstruction, was on the list for demolishing, but luckily it was placed on the monument list just in time. In figure 43 some of these examples of La Revière and Groenendijk are shown with their replacement next to it. The municipality wanted offices in the warehouses on the Wijnhaven, designed by Cornelis Elffers in 1946, so a new glass façade was needed (figure 44). In the end, the warehouses were demolished in 1987 and were replaced by a white concrete 80’s office building. These are examples of the fact that not everything that is bad now in Rotterdam is because of the reconstruction and Het Basisplan, but also because of policies and the renewal drift from the 70’s and on. Het Basisplan provided a lot of buildings with architectural value and maybe even historical if you look back at it, but even those buildings are taken down. Therefore it can be argued that Rotterdam has to value all the architecture over time, let it be present and be a physical reminder of other times.



Figure 42. Lijnbaan, 1960's, Wederopbouw Rotterdam.

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<sup>36</sup> Ben Maandag, *Stadsvernieuwing in Rotterdam: vijftig jaar bouwen in de buurt*, ed. Marianne Lahr (Rotterdam: nai010 uitgevers, 2019).



Figure 43. Top: Rottekade, bottom: Merchant houses, 2012. Rotterdam 2040

## How?

So, what is the alternative and how does that turn out? Even in Rotterdam there are some excellent examples of new building with respecting the old and the context it is placed in. La Rivière gives some examples where it is done right. Because the new buildings are places near or even on top of the historical building, both buildings and their neighbourhoods got more added value. The Wilhelminapier with buildings as De Rotterdam and Montevideo has a rich history of the old port. If they had demolished everything and built all the skyscrapers, there was nothing left that reminded of the rich history. Luckily they decided to keep the old Hotel New York (1901-1917) building in the middle of the Wilhelminapier, which was the office building of the Holland-Amerika Lijn. This building in the middle of all the famous skyscrapers give context to the area and increases value to the area (figure 44).

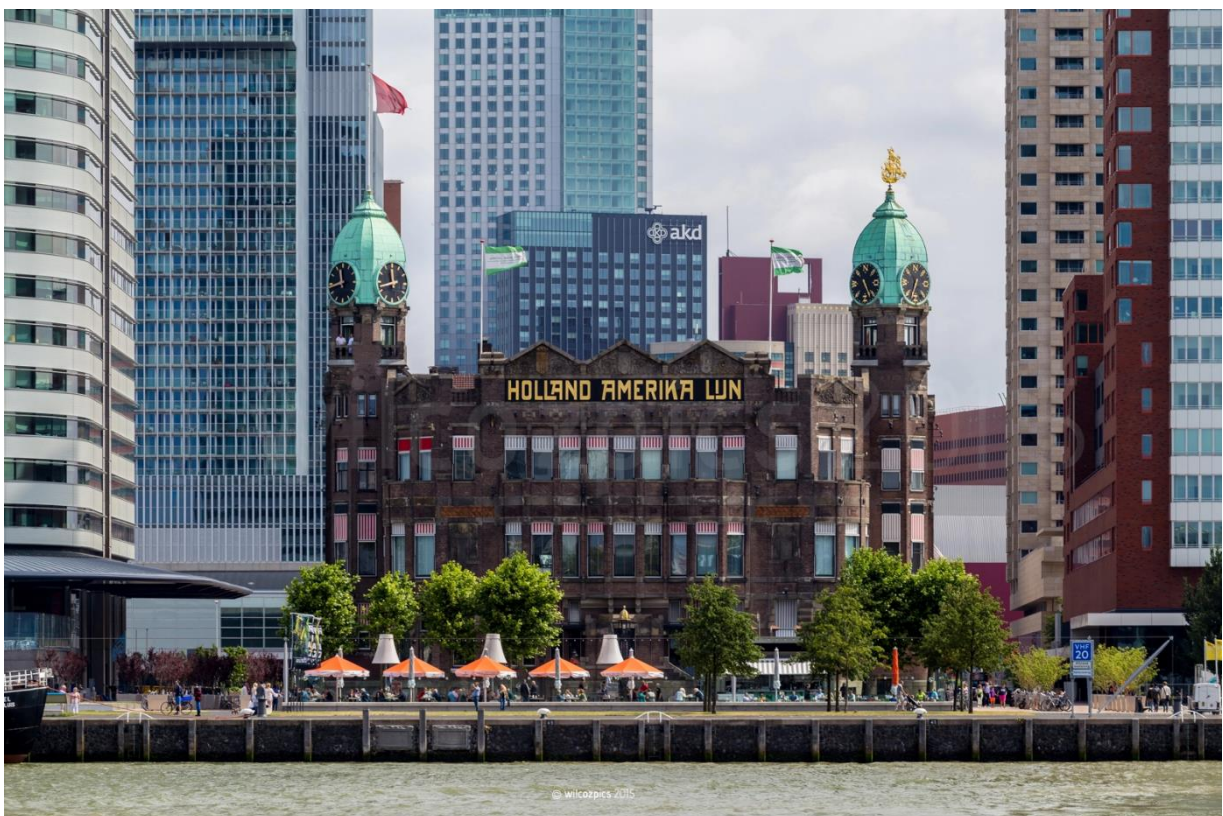


Figure 44. Building New York on Wilhelminapier, Wilco'z Pics, 2018.

Another example is the former Unilever building, de Brug by JHK Architecten in 2008, that is placed over the old Blue Band factory (figure 45). The building on its own would probably not have a lot of value, just a rectangular, steel and glass modern building. But because it is placed on top of the old factory it has created new value to the area and the new building got more value due to the history of the surroundings.



Figure 45. De Brug, Triflex.nl, 2019.

### **Not too late**

Even when buildings are destroyed, there are possibilities to preserve them in a way or keep the collective memory alive. In Rotterdam, some of these projects are successfully fulfilled already. It looks like Rotterdam is turning their view on heritage and value history more than before. The merchant houses near Het Witte Huis had to be demolished for the tunnel of the railroads. After they finished the tunnel they completely rebuild the merchant houses. (figure 46). The 'de Stijl' building of Café the Unie from 1925 is relocated and rebuilt in 1985 on the Mauritsweg, where it is placed in between old buildings (figure 47). This makes it an unique building in a historical street. Another building that has been rebuilt, brick by brick, is the enormous building at the Maternesplein (figure 48). Where this area was seen as a bad neighbourhood and compared to the Beirut of that time, it is these rebuilding or even keeping this important architecture which makes a neighbourhood liveable and something to be proud of (figure 49).



Figure 46. Rebuild merchant houses, Top010.nl, 2013.



Figure 47. Café de Unie, Coolsingel 1925(left) and Mauritsweg 2017(right), Stadsarchief Rotterdam; Museum Rotterdam.



Figure 48. Building at the Mathenesserplein, completely rebuild, 2003, Leyten.



Figure 49. Pavilions at Mathenesserplein neglected and with graffiti, around 1980. Frank Hanswijk.



Keeping the collective memory of a city does maybe not mean that there is need for a hundred percent identical rebuild or perseverance. What is needed is something physical that reminds people, from every generation, to the past of a city. History makes a city. A city is not just buildings and streets, but what happened and how it happened. These stories makes a city a living organism, but there is need for something to remind to other times. Levenson gives an example in his paper on monumentality in the 9/11 monument in New York.<sup>37</sup> It did not matter what was placed there, as long as there is something that reminds people to the event that happened. Because it was built on the same position of the Twin Towers, the collective memory was there and thus the monumental value, but also the need for such a monument.

An example of this theory that can be found in Rotterdam is the ‘rebuild’ of the Delftsche Poort. In 1995, they placed a steel frame copy of the Delftse Poort on the place where it was located. They did not rebuild the building as a usable building, but they build a reminder of multiple historic matters. It reminds of the old Rotterdam before the war, the war and the bombing and it shows what the reconstruction of Rotterdam meant for the cityscape by placing the contours of the Delftsche Poort in the middle of the skyscrapers. It gives a possibility to imagine the old city. Something that after all this research and opinions on the Rotterdam how it is now seems important for the Rotterdammers and their common shared history. It is almost cynical that the building had to be demolished for the reconstruction plans, but it turns out that the building, now standing on its original position, had space enough (figure 50).

As Gys de Rivière emphasize in ‘Rotterdam 2040’: ‘Je moet als stad koesteren wat je hebt, en nog hebt.’ (As a city, you have to cherish what you have and still have).<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Felix Levenson, ‘Monuments and Monumentality - Different Perspectives’, in *Size Matters - Understanding Monumentality Across Ancient Civilizations*, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839445389-003>.

<sup>38</sup> ROTTERDAM 2040.



*Figure 50. De Nieuwe Delftse Poort by Artist Cor Kraat, 1995, BKOR.*

## Conclusion

The reconstruction of Rotterdam after the bombing in World War II is something that has been written about extensively. Still a research on what Rotterdam could have looked like when the first plan, Plan Witteveen was the main design for the reconstruction has not been done.

Opinions from literature and other public opinions on Rotterdam are a lot of times not positive. Rotterdam is described as a city without a soul, empty, a transit city. In this thesis the hypothesis was made that with cleaning the city after the bombing, Rotterdam also cleaned his past and the important collective memory. Therefore, the research question was as follows:

*What would have been different to Rotterdam if the majority of Witteveen's plan was built in combination with the preservation of 3 historic buildings: Dancing Pschorr, Station Hofplein and the Grootte Schouwburg? Would this mean that Rotterdam is a city with a more human scale?*

The most important factor about the decision making about the reconstruction plans is that the biggest businesses got a major role in this. The Club Rotterdam made its mark, together with the modern architects, which were selling the modernistic ideas of the CIAM. This is something that can be seen in Het Basisplan and years after the war. For the built environment it meant wide streets, with lots of room for the car, separated from cyclists and pedestrians, buildings made out of modern materials such as glass, concrete and steel. Most of the buildings in the centre were offices, without a plinth. The dwellings were meant for outside the centre.

All these factors together make the centre of Rotterdam an empty, soul less city, meant for transport. The Coolingsingel lost its life and the city squares became parking lots. Luckily, with harsh public opinions, from the 70's until now, Rotterdam is changing. There will be more space for green, water, cyclist and pedestrians. The car is not the drive for the city planners anymore. This shows that a city can learn, learn from its mistakes and solve them.

Nevertheless, it feels a bit cynical. Rotterdam is trying to make Rotterdam a sustainable city of a more human scale, with reminders of the past. The measures they want to implement or already do look like a step back. Not a step back in improving the city, but the plans are similar to the plans and reasoning of Witteveen's plan. If Plan Witteveen was continued Rotterdam would have narrower streets, more space for pedestrians, more green and water, architecture and a street structure that Rotterdamers could recognize. Rotterdam would be the city they are now trying to be, or at least try some of these factors to be. The three

buildings that were chosen; de Groote Schouwburg, Dancing Pschorr and Station Hofplein would have given Rotterdam its life back on the Coolsingel and Hofplein. Also with the parkways, going through the Schouwburgplein the centre would be a better place to be, instead of just a transition centre.

Of course, Rotterdam would not be the same metropolis-like city they try to be when Plan Witteveen was fully executed. The modern, irrespective of beauty, architecture gives Rotterdam its character and prominence. Therefore, the restriction of some monumental buildings that needed to stay could have been a perfect combination of combining the old with the new, just like the examples discussed. A complete execution of Plan Witteveen would lose the character of Rotterdam. Thus, a combination of both plans would have been an interesting outcome. In the end, the stubbornness of Witteveen caused for the exact opposite he wanted.

## **Discussion**

So, Rotterdam would have been a city with narrower streets, more green and water and less cars. In the views of current times, a liveable city. This thesis fill the gap of all the existing research on the decision making, comparison and how Rotterdam could have looked like.

It combines primary sources, secondary sources and even films to make the point stronger and clear. The visual answer to what Rotterdam would look like if Witteveen's Plan was built is not really answered. This would, with the time given, be out of the scope of this thesis. It would be interesting to combine this thesis and outcome to theories on urbanism, heritage and the collective memory. Even more interesting would be to make a visual representation of (some of) Witteveen's ideas into Rotterdam as we know. Although this is interesting, it would be something to do for a graduation (design) studio or even PHD.

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