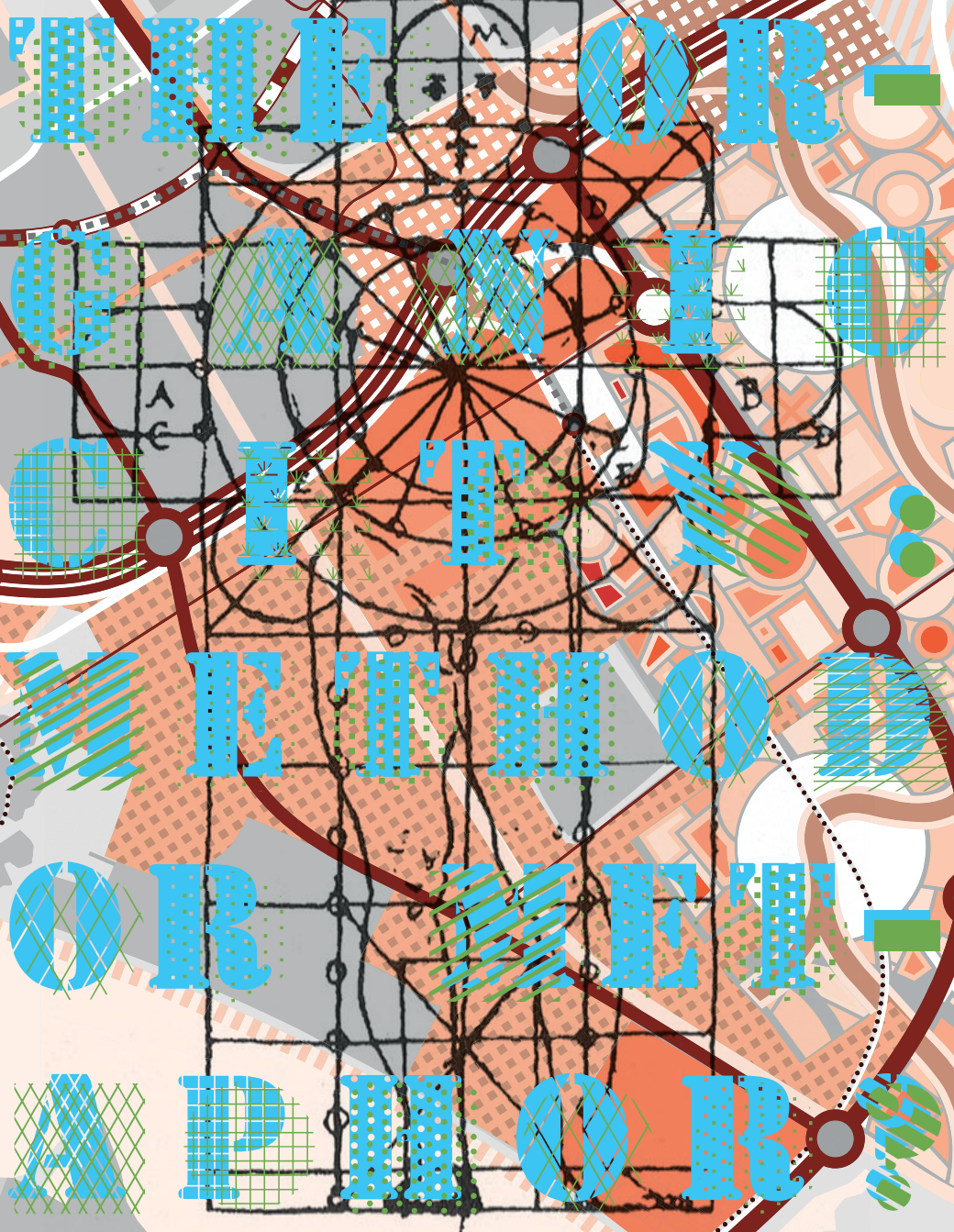# The Organic City: Method or Metaphor?

The Meaning of 'Organic' in Architecture and Urban Planning

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An essay by Petra Schilders

The Organic City: Method or Metaphor?

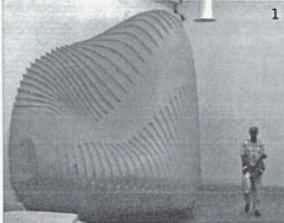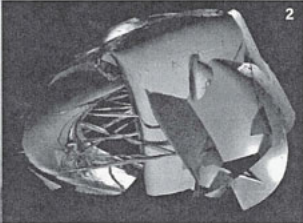## The Meaning of 'Organic' in Architecture and Urban Planning

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1. Introduction

Almere is currently standing at the brink of a major expansion, with its eastern flank (the future district of Oosterwold) having been designated for 'organic' development. In this context, the term 'organic urban development' would seem to suggest that both the passing of time and the new residents are (f)actors influencing the future design of the district. It is a strategy departing from that of the overarching master plan ('top-down planning'), allows freedom for private commissioning and constitutes the next step in resident participation. Here, however, it pertains not just to residents' own parcels of land, but to the layout of the entire district. In the case of Almere Oosterwold, this signifies a gradual transformation from the large-scale, open polder landscape to 'a small-scale landscape with room for residents, urban agriculture and recreation.' This expansion, of which the low-density rural lifestyle counterbalances the western flank's high-rise urban development, has been purposefully left free of pre-determined end results and planning. Construction will take place in stages, according to the needs of the private parties. Within established limits, residents determine the design of their own lots and can choose from a range of 'street profiles'. They are free to decide on the shape, size and programming of the land to be built on, provided that a 'buffer zone' remains around the property that is free of construction. In this way, a city district is manufactured by the residents themselves.[1]

Municipality of Almere and MVRDV (2009), 248-257

org 466

● ★ **organism**

[MG] See 'genetics of form.'
Organistical rather than organic.

[co] Whilst technology is taking us into the realms of virtual reality, architecture on the other hand, is becoming more corporeal. It is the merging of the body and architecture brought about by electronic media. A radical change in perspective is blurring the distinction between the organic and mechanic, and the artificial logic of the computer and the natural logic of man are fusing together.
ANTONINO SAGGIO

1. Greg LYNN, *Embryological House*, 2001, prototype.
2. Marcos NOVAK, *Data-Driven Forms*, 1997-98.

'Organism' according to The Metapolis Dictionary of Advanced Architecture, 2003

The Almere usage of the term 'organic' relates to the process by which a neighbourhood or city comes into being, forming gradually and with influence from the residents. However, the concept of organicism in relation to architecture or urban development carries many more connotations – it can refer to buildings' appearance or image, for example. Many contemporary office buildings (such as those designed by Alberts & Van Huut) can be said to embody an organic design, or one that harks back to nature. 'Organic' can also express a certain normal or self-evident presence of an object, 'natural' in the sense that instead of seeking contrast, harmony is created with the surrounding environment. Further definitions of 'organic' include 'good for the environment' or 'sustainable'. So what does organic actually mean? What is for certain is that it calls up a wealth of associations, and that many people use the term but that there is little consensus on the definition.

A quick review of current architecture literature reveals (among other things) that in the view of research collective NOT DONE (2005), organic development is 'a form of planning that allows for changes during the process and accommodates bottom-up development.'[2] This interpretation is close to the one used in Almere. Daan Fröger, manager of city and country marketing agency SMLXL, places a slightly different emphasis, one which links the concept of organicism with the blossoming of a creative city: 'a city where talent, tolerance and technology go hand in hand and grow in a different way, into a creative city. (…) The question is whether it is possible to plan a city of this kind on a drawing board. (…). Creative people are nomadic, with little tendency to become attached. (…) It is for this reason that creative cities develop organically, sometimes

Proposal for the 'organic growth' of the village of Serooskerke in Zeeland, 2008

spontaneously.'[3] Lastly, the Metapolis Dictionary of Advanced Architecture (2003) provides yet another, vastly different definition of 'organic'/'organistic', one that speaks of an amalgam between architecture and the body: 'Whilst technology is taking us into the realms of virtual reality, architecture on the other hand, is becoming more corporeal. It is the merging of the body and architecture brought about by electronic media. A radical change in perspective is blurring the distinction between the organic and mechanic, and the artificial logic of the computer and the natural logic of man are fusing together".[4]

According to architects, project developers and policymakers, further examples of organic urban development outside of Almere can also be found in Nijmegen, Zwolle and the town of Serooskerke in Zeeland (among other places). The plans for the Nijmegen Waalsprong and the expansion of Serooskerke speak of a design strategy that is 'based on the development history of the city/town and the identity of the landscape, and which aims to ensure that spatial developments are more in line with these.'[5] The architect of a small VINEX residential development area in Stadshagen, Zwolle uses the term 'organic' in relation to the design of 'an open, organic network of public and private places, where homes form part of a green oasis located in the centre of a district full of stone'.[6] During the Free Spaces: Zuidas Artists In Residence project (4th edition 2010), five artists will make a plea for 'humour and organic growth' in the Amsterdam Zuidas area. They believe that the development could be made more exciting, less 'well-behaved': 'It's all straight lines, urban construction does nothing to provide curves, twists or surprises.'[7] Designer Frank Havermans sees the city as an organism

Fröger, www.smlxl.nl/pdf/
De_Creatieve_Stad.pdf
(in Dutch)
Gauca, 466
Goossen, 3; see also
Municipality of Nijmegen,
14
www.feekesencolijn.nl
www.virtueel-museum.nl/
nl/pleidooi-voor-humor-
en-organische-groei/

The Corporality of Structure, Francesco di Giorgio Martini, 1492
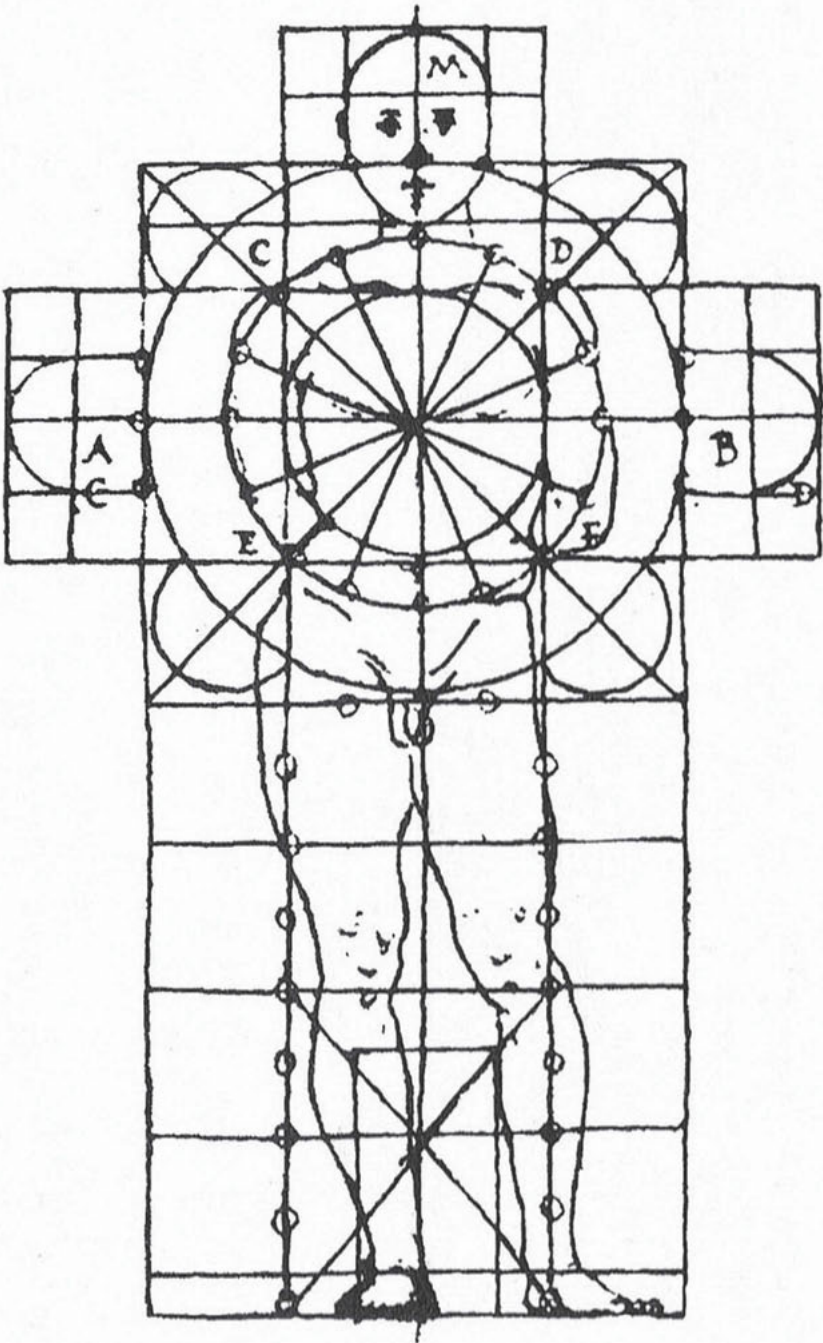
made up of jumbles of high-rise buildings and roads that grow endlessly and form links with the environment.

What do the confused meanings of this term mean for an urban project such as that in Almere? In case we have created the impression that 'organicism' is a superficial concept: nothing could be further from the truth. Organicism, an umbrella term for the collection of ideas concerning the relationship between art/architecture and nature, has a long history. It goes as far back as classical antiquity, when nature constituted a relevant and unmistakable architectural model. 'The foundations of classical architecture lie in the mythical corporality of the structure: buildings are harmonious whenever the various sections exhibit the same proportions as those in the human body,'[8] says Dat is Architectuur: sleutelteksten uit de twintigste eeuw (That's Architecture: Key texts from the twentieth century) (2004). The beauty of architecture was a reflection of beauty in nature. Since then, the concept of 'organicism' has broadened and narrowed again as time passed. Throughout the centuries the term has evolved, even been separated from its origins by some users, only to suddenly disappear or fall into disuse and return once again from nowhere. It would seem useful for us to refresh the memory of organicism, i.e. of all movements that make (or have made) use of an interpretation of 'the organic'. This essay therefore provides a tour of the rich history of the concept, and will return later to the current situation in Almere.

Heynen e.a., 736

2. The Multiple Faces of Organicism

Architecture and urban development exhibit an ever-renewing interest in 'the organic'. Although organicism has been an objective of various persons and/or groups at different points in history, it can certainly not be interpreted as a single, independent movement or methodology. Most trends within organicism in the current pluralistic age also continue to live on as a reference, although contemporary agencies may not always be aware of their organicist roots.

Classical Organicism, or Architecture Imitating Nature

The proposition that organicism has undergone radical changes in meaning over the course of time is supported, among others, by architectural historian Caroline van Eck. Her dissertation Organicism in nineteenth-century architecture (1994)[9] is an important starting point for understanding the multiple faces of organicism. Organicism in architecture is an intangible phenomenon, but one that is very widespread and, moreover, one that has been the subject of very little research, according to Van Eck. To the extent that organicism has been the subject of architectural study, it has been primarily described from a modernistic perspective. In the nineteenth-century scope of ideas regarding organicism, architecture critics and historians Peter Collins, Bruno Zevi and Siegfried Giedion saw only the emphasis on functionality by precursors of the twentieth-century.

Van Eck, I

Architecture following nature: 'The Primitive Hut', Marc Antoine Laugier, 1753

Van Eck demonstrates that the roots of organicism lie within the classicistic tradition based on Vitruvius and Alberti. From classical antiquity up until the end of the nineteenth century, people were convinced that architecture (or art in general) was supposed to imitate nature. Instead of creating a perfect imitation, however, this reference pertained much more to creating the illusion of life. People spoke about architecture as though it was a part of living nature. Classical columns, for example, were equated to the human body: 'the Doric order should approximate the proportions of the male body, the Ionic those of a mature female body, and the Corinthian those of a young girl'.[10] The imitation of natural processes was actually based on a much more fundamental concept: the realisation of the divine uniformity that existed as the highest law within all works of nature. From Alberti's De re aedificatoria (1452) we can derive that, in their buildings, architects strove to achieve this uniformity, in which the proportions of the various sections to one another and to the whole were pre-determined according to a logical concept.[11]

In the nineteenth century, organicism was used as a strategy to solve the problem of style. Faced with the theoretical vacuum created by the fall of the monopoly of the classical style, people went in search of new ways to justify their stylistic choices. Regardless of whether one subscribed to neoclassicism, Neo-Gothic or some other movement, nature was always seen as a relevant model. Arguments were accompanied by references to the patterns and metaphysical cohesion present in nature. Organicism was not a single, established, cut-and-dried philosophy of the meaning of architecture, but it

Heynen e.a., 736

Van Eck, 1-3, 245-246

did serve as the basis for assigning meaning to architecture. For example, in his texts and work Karl Friedrich Schinkel made use of 'extensive metaphors of organic growth and form in order to give not only a vivid representation of the mechanical processes at work in a building, but above all to convey the sense of life and movement Gothic architecture conveyed', according to Van Eck.[12] Organicism was originally fuelled by strong religious convictions, such as John Ruskin's, who believed that nature was the artwork of God, and that gothic architecture was the ultimate medium for religious experience. The rise of the natural sciences had a radical effect on society and architecture alike. Under the influence of discourse in biology (which inspired figures such as Viollet-le-Duc and John Wellborn Root), people became further and further removed from the religious, philosophical character of the organicist interpretation of nature. The more scientific concept of nature by the end of the nineteenth century ultimately led to a reformulation of the central concept of organicism, and as a result to the end of the tradition of organicism inherited from classical ideals. The objective of organic unity became redefined in terms of functionality – every element in a building had its own function, but worked only as part of the whole, just as in a living organism. Architect William Richard Lethaby stated in 1912: 'All building details should first be functional, and of the nature of bearing blocks, sheltering projections etc.; and then each must be made suitable for its special purpose by special thought; it would become highly original and organic work.'[13] The design approach became more process-oriented. Observing the methods of nature meant reflecting the function and structure of the building in the form, bringing us to the well-known adage of 'form follows function'. Not only did the character of organicism change, but the context within which it manifested (the nineteenth-century preoccupation with style and the dominance of the classical tradition) had changed as well. The search by a new generation of architects for a fundamentally different architectural language rejected the usage of previous styles, stripping organicism of its power.[14]

The trend of classicist organicism did not die out completely in the twentieth century, nor it is dead now. Dutch architecture firm Neutelings Riedijk demonstrates a neo-academic design process (i.e. in the tradition of the nineteenth-century Beaux-Arts school) that searches for the internal logic within a design by first working from an analysis of the programme. The cohesion within the spatial organisation functions as a basis for the design, and a 'skin' is then created to house the concept. This method represents a strategy that can be used to analyse complex functional and technical programmes, and which ultimately enables an aesthetic choice to be made. Willem-Jan Neutelings and Michiel Riedijk are, of course, not striving for a unity bestowed by God, however the desire for harmony, for an organic cohesion in their designs (which constitutes their response to the disorganised, unplanned city) is no less present in their work.[15]

Van Eck, 1,93, 247

Quoted by Van Eck, 162

Van Eck, 6-7, 248, 154, 249

Neutelings Riedijk Architecten, 5-8, 10, 34; Vanstiphout, 44-45, 186-192

Heynen e.a., 25

'Form follows function', Guaranty building Buffalo NY, Louis Sullivan 1894-95

## Functional Organicism, or Form Follows Function

The relationship between the organic and the functional is what lies at the basis of functionalist architectural thought. Although it is common for functionalism to be directly associated with technology and mechanical metaphors, it is important to realise that one of the fundamental principles, that of 'form follows function', has its origins in nature. As has been revealed, the father of this phrase, Louis Sullivan, came from a long tradition whose highest ideal was the imitation of the uniformity in nature. In The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered (1896), a contribution to the American debate surrounding the legitimacy and design of skyscrapers, Sullivan speaks of 'the pervading law of all things organic and inorganic (…), that life is recognisable in its expression, that form ever follows function'.[16] Despite these organicist roots, a movement quickly became evident towards the technical paradigm, more specifically to the avant-garde faith in machinery. It is a subtle shift from nature as a starting point, as a relevant model for architecture, to a synthesis of nature and technology, in which (however paradoxical it may seem) machines came to represent nature. Frank Lloyd Wright, for example, did not interpret machines as technology, but as nature, as 'organic growth': 'this thing we call the Machine […] is no more or less than the principle of organic growth working irresistibly the Will of Life through the medium of Man.'[17] Functionalism attempted to decipher the principles at work in nature. The machine made visible the mathematical order that lay at the foundations of nature, in a certain sense enabling it to transcend nature's own unpredictable character. Le Corbusier regarded the machine in a similar fashion: 'the creations

Heynen e.a., 46

Heynen e.a., 127, 750
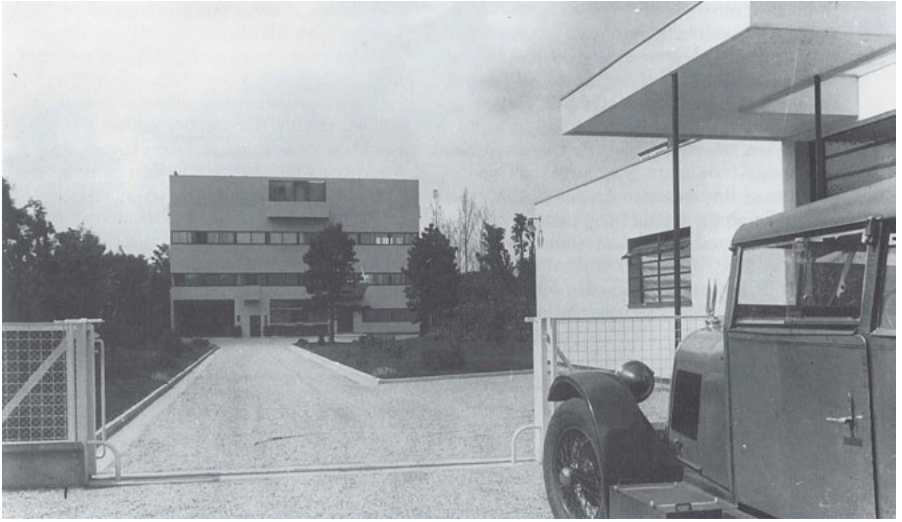
'Une maison est une machine à habiter', Villa Stein – de Monzie, Garches, Le Corbusier 1926-28

of mechanical engineering are organisms that approach perfection and obey the same evolutionary laws as the creations in nature that arouse our admiration. The harmony [of nature] is present in the works that emerge from the studio or factory.'[18]

In addition to the fact that, to functionalists, the machine represented the perfect treatment of the organic[19], people ascribed the power of emancipation to machines. In Frank Lloyd Wright's manifesto The Art and Craft of the Machine (1901), the industrial revolution was coupled with the idea that mankind had been freed of heavy physical labour, and was free to pursue intellectual development. Architecture too (Le Corbusier called homes 'machines à habiter') was a means of effecting social changes and allowing civilisations to advance,[20] which was also a characteristic element of the functionalism of the 1920s and 30s. Alderman Adri Duivesteijn's plans for Almere demonstrate a return of the same concept of the emancipation of citizens. In his view, organic urban development is the ideal way to transform residents from the consumers into the manufacturers of their own living environment, ultimately making their role and significance in the planning process socially acceptable.

In 1923, Adolf Behne defined the architectural purpose of functionalism not only as the improvement of living conditions, but also as the creation of a new type of man. However, he did believe that opting for the human community did imply a certain conflict with the sense of uniformity with nature, given that humans occupy a position in between nature and society.[21] Behne was also one of the few who associated the ideas of functionalism with the actual application of organic design. In so doing he aimed to make use of round and irregular shapes, such as those he observed in the work of

Wording by Adolf Behne, see Heynen e.a., 748

Heynen e.a., 747-751

Heynen e.a., 122-123, 700

Jones, 19, 85

Van Rossem (1992), 12

House Almere "Hard Glass", Benthem Crouwel Architects, Almere 1982-84

Hugo Häring and Hans Scharoun. It is worth noting here, however, that in The Organic versus the Geometric (1929), Häring himself interpreted functionalism as the creation of architecture that grew organically from the inside outwards, in close connection with the location and the programme, and did not fundamentally subscribe to a specific aesthetic.[22]

With the rise of modernism, functional and technical principles (and ultimately also the introduction of a social programme) replaced the original metaphysical foundation of organicism as a source of uniformity, and it was in this manner that the understanding of the concept changed significantly in the first half of the twentieth century. Jan Benthem and Mels Crouwel are two examples of modern-day architects who take technical functionalism as the starting point for their designs, thereby placing them essentially within the tradition of functionalistic organicism. Their firm, which was founded in 1979, keeps the principle of 'form follows function' alive in a contemporary fashion. Vincent van Rossem, author of the first monograph on their work, believes that Benthem Crouwel 'sets more store in the purity and logic of the design process than in the aesthetic result.'[23] This strictly utilitarian philosophy is clearly evident in their initial designs for homes and customs yards.

Metabolic Organicism, or Architecture as an Extension of the Body

The late 1960s saw a movement in architecture that took and developed Le Corbusier's machine à habiter in a literal, avant-garde fashion, proponents of which include the Japanese metabolists. Kisho Kurokawa, as a response to the urbanised, individualistic information
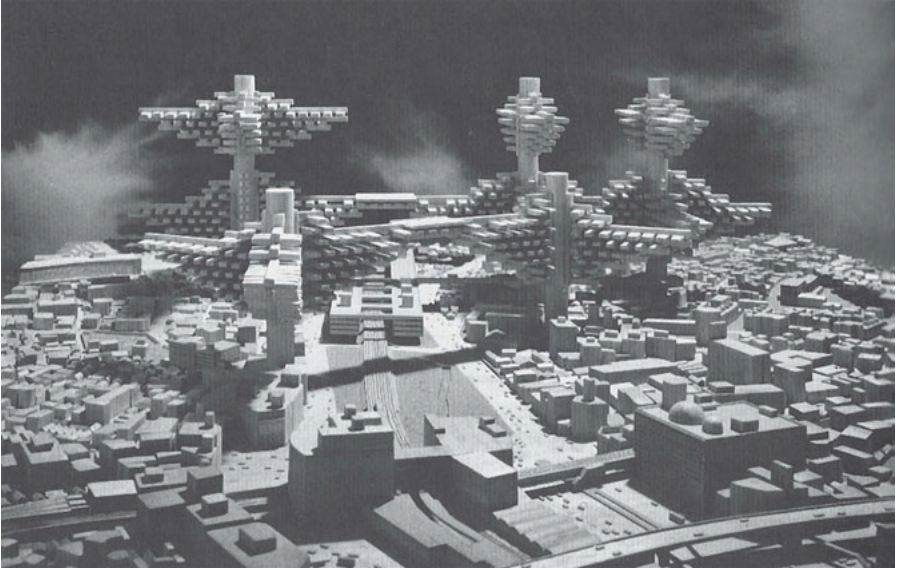
Scheme for a modern city, Metabolist Group (Arata Isozaki et al), Japan 1962

society, developed the 'capsule': a fully self-contained mobile living cell functioning as the most basic element for an infinitely growing megastructure. Capsule (or 'cyborg') architecture was the 'ideal fusion of machine and organism' – people, machines and spaces together formed a new organic body.[24] Architecture functioned as a synthetic extension of the body, as an additional organ that offered protection through means such as filtering information. Architect Hans Hollein went one step further. In his view, architecture lost its material nature and included everything present between humans and their environment. Architecture was regarded as a means of communication, as an extension of the senses. Hollein seemed to have been influenced by the media theory formulated by Marshall McLuhan at the start of the decade, in which he defined all technical media as extensions of the human body. In a passage on architecture (specifically housing), McLuhan noted: '…shelter is an extension of our bodily heat-control mechanisms – collective skin or garment. Cities are an even further extension of bodily organs to accommodate the needs of large groups'.[25]

The link between architecture as a machine and the body/organism was a recurring one. Over thirty years later, in his text Absent Bodies (1997), architecture historian Ignasi de Solà-Morales analysed the fact that the distinction between the organic and the mechanical had become increasingly vague throughout history. According to De Solà-Morales, in the tradition of functionalism the body of an 'organic entity' had been transformed into a fragmented body under the influence of the emphasis on ergonomic requirements. This process was irreversible. The machine as a prosthesis for the body – or in other words, architecture as a permanent extension of the

Heynen e.a., 754, 666

Vlaskamp (11 May

Mieren worden ze genoemd, hoogopgeleide Chinese jongeren die zich samenpakken aan de rafelranden van de stad. Een universitair diploma is niet meer de magische sleutel die toegang biedt tot de bevoorrechte klasse. Er moet geploeterd worden, op de vierkante meter.

Een 'woning' in Tangjialing. „Als je goed leert, schop je het verder dan je ouders" – met die uitspraak zijn de 'mieren' grootgebracht.   FOTO STEFANIE YANG

Leven als een mier

"Living like an ant", House of a Chinese student, Tangjialing 2010

fragmented body – remained the main reference for architecture in the twenty-first century. This summary of his words was presented in Dat is Architectuur: sleutelteksten uit de twintigste eeuw (That's Architecture: Key texts from the twentieth century) (2004).[26] The current problem of Chinese students living in so-called 'ant colonies' on the jumbled outskirts of megacities, packed together three or six to a capsule of no more than ten square metres in size, with their only need (and recourse to the outside world) being the internet, we see De Solà-Morales' vision becoming reality.[27]

Formalistic Organicism, or what is commonly known as 'Organic Architecture'

Although the aforementioned organicistic views of architecture attempted to embody a type of internal coherence analogous to nature or derived from its laws and processes, this endeavour did not always result by definition in architecture with an organic design. However, there was one architectural view, based on the anthroposophical-organic ideas of German philosopher and architect Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925), that took root in the 1970s and did include an organic architectural language. Steiner worked from the conviction that buildings should maintain harmony with human nature and the natural and spiritual contexts in which they live. Living nature and humans as spiritual beings were therefore both important considerations in the design process. The spiritual dimension was expressed by creating an environment of which the colours and shapes complemented the spiritual content of the activities taking place within the space. Although Steiner believed

2010), 24

Van der Ree, 7-9, 41-63

Van der Ree, 7, 38, 39,

Das Goetheanum, Rudolf Steiner, Dornach 1913

form to be the result of various influences on the design process, his buildings were characterised by organic, sculptural shapes derived from the surrounding landscape, as well as by colourful interiors. The 'Goetheanum' near Basel was his most famous work. One contemporary firm that draws inspiration from organic-anthroposophical theory is Albert & Van Huut. The same design principles as in the Goetheanum can be seen in the ING headquarters in Amsterdam and the Gasunie building in Groningen (1988-1994), both works by this firm.[28]

The Organic Architecture exhibition (Organische Architectuur, Amsterdam 2004) was an attempt to demonstrate a historical organic architectural movement, whose roots (according to the curators) went back to the early twentieth century. From this perspective it was not only Steiner, but also Frank Lloyd Wright, Henry van de Velde, Louis Sullivan, Antoni Gaudí and Hugo Häring who were pioneers from around the same period and who wished to express their ideas concerning organicism through the design of their buildings. Although they all referred to principles derived from nature, individually they stressed different aspects. Organic architecture experienced a revival during the post-war modernist era, 'proof' of which consists in the fact that architects such as Le Corbusier, Alvar Aalto and Hans Scharoun abandoned the purely abstract, geometric design philosophy (which had dominated modernism until that time), and adopted an organic, more natural style. One example from the Organic Architecture catalogue by Pieter van der Ree was Le Corbusier's 1954 Chapelle Notre Dame du Haut in Ronchamp.[29]

65, 66, 79, 213

Van der Ree, 79-80, 213;
De Vletter, 116

Van der Ree, 231-233,

Gasunie Groningen, Alberts & Van Huut, 1994

The resurgence of anthroposophy in the 1970s gave a new boost to organic construction, a particularly fitting embodiment of the pedagogical ideals of the increasingly popular Waldorf schools. Architects looked for ways to convert Steiner's ideas into contemporary designs for child-friendly school buildings. The creation of other anthroposophic institutions also contributed to the dissemination of this type of 'organic architecture'. For example, the Centre for Anthroposofy by architect Johan Risseeuw in Driebergen (1976-78), with its octagonal rooms clustered around a central meeting hall, was intended for national anthroposophical conferences and the activities of the Bernard Lievegoed College for Liberal Arts (Vrije Hogeschool) in Driebergen. Although since then formalistic organicism has been an undercurrent in the postmodern era, Van der Ree claims that it can be seen the world over.[30]

It is an interesting fact that Van der Ree also lists the intensive participation of future occupants during the design process as a characteristic of contemporary organic architecture. He also describes an ideal construction process, in which the design emerges naturally as a response to imagining oneself within the context of the building (future use, occupants, location, atmosphere, etc.), as though the form slowly 'grows' out of a dialogue between the conscious and subconscious mind.[31]

## The Organic City, or the Unification of City and Nature

One discipline whose theoretical evolution has always had nature play an important part is the field of urban development. In late nineteenth/early twentieth-century America and Germany, plans and
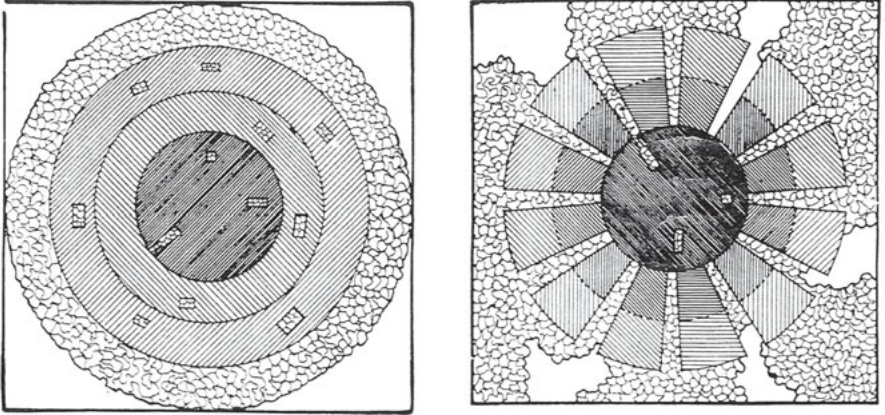
Concentric vs. Radial expansion of Berlin, Rudolf Eberstadt, Bruno Möhring & Richard Petersen, 1910

competitions for the metropolises of New York and 'Gross-Stadt' Berlin had provided new insights into the intertwining of rural and urban landscapes by means of parkways and green areas, which captured the interest of Dutch urban planners. During the annual congress of The International Federation for Town and Country Planning and Garden Cities, held in Amsterdam in 1924, ideas were exchanged and the subject was incorporated into Dutch practice. In the Amsterdam General Expansion Plan (Algemeen Uitbreidingsplan, AUP) of 1934, architect Cornelis van Eesteren made the cohesion between urban areas and the surrounding countryside into an especially high priority. The beauty of nature and the surrounding landscapes was seen as a spatial extension of the residential areas, essential for recreation. The objective was to eliminate the contrast between city and country that had emerged during the nineteenth century.[32]

As head of the urban planning office in Rotterdam, Willem Gerrit Witteveen was responsible for an expansion plan for the city. He, too, derived inspiration from the 'parkways' concept. In his dissertation, architectural historian Cor Wagenaar emphasised that Witteveen's primary motivation was to shape the city in such a way as to engender both visual and functional unity. In true Dutch tradition up until that time, he created a 'well-considered city landscape, with carefully shaped streets and squares and an excellent network of parks and public gardens'.[33] In his design, wedges of green penetrated right through to the city centre, producing visible cohesion. The main objective of the organic metaphor of a city that includes nature as an integral part of itself was to create a visual expression of urban uniformity, of the greatest possible cohesion.

Heynen e.a., 266

From F.L. Wright, An

Organic Architecture.

The Architecture of
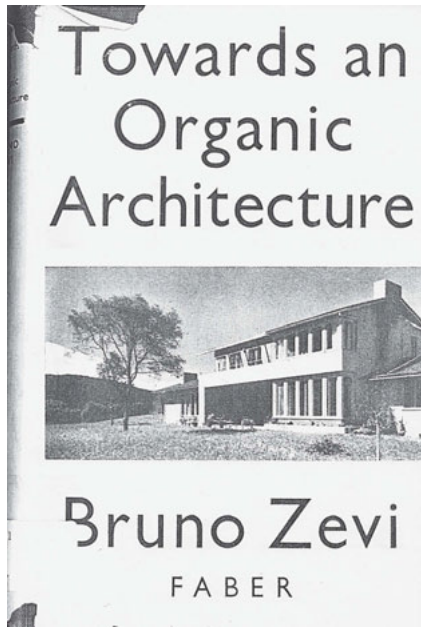
"Towards an organic architecture", Bruno Zevi 1950
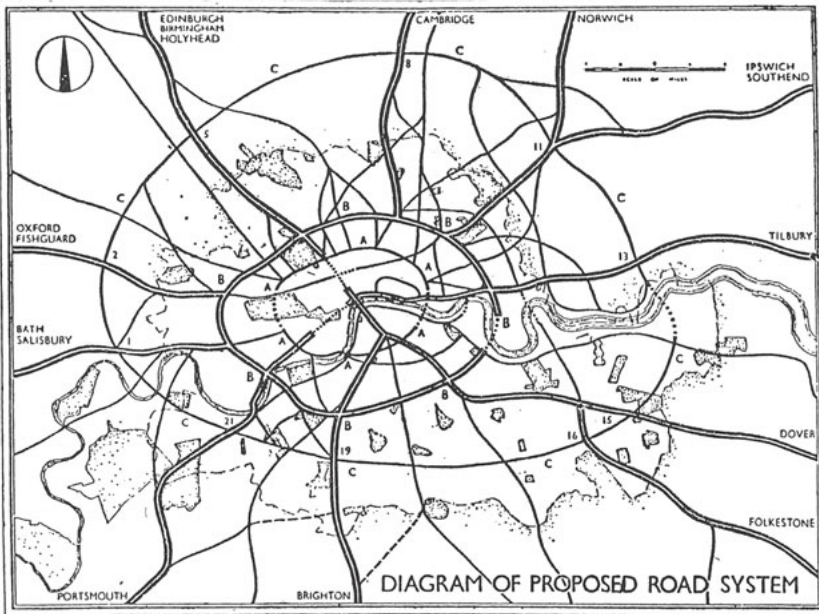
Social Organicism, or Planning for Human Happiness

Following the Second World War, Italian architect Bruno Zevi
began to exhibit an organicist interpretation of urban planning and
architecture (his theory covers both disciplines) based completely
on a social concept and no longer concerning nature or its imitation.
Zevi was the instigator of the Association for Organic Architecture
(APAO), which fought against the Italian global and national political
backdrop, and for a free egalitarian society following the defeat of
fascism. The APAO's 1945 declaration of intent includes a clear
definition of this type of social organicism: 'Organic architecture
is a simultaneously social, technical and artistic endeavour that
aims to create a climate for a new democratic civilisation. Organic
architecture means human architecture, designed according to
human proportions and the spiritual, psychological and material
needs associated with mankind.'[34] All traces of monumental
character or neoclassicism in architecture and urban planning (as was
the trend in Italian rationalism) were resolutely rejected. The APAO
urged a critical reassessment of modern architecture, using Frank
Lloyd Wright's organicist theory (as the origin of functionalism) as
a starting point. In his texts, Wright had actually established the link
between organic architecture and democracy: 'What we call organic
architecture is no mere aesthetic nor cult nor fashion, but an actual
movement based upon a profound idea of a new integrity of human
life wherein art, science, religion are one: Form and Function seen as
One, of such is Democracy'.[35]

In 1950 Zevi published Towards an Organic Architecture, a quest
through architectural history to identify the meaning and scope of the

Democracy (1939), p. 47,
quoted in C. van Eck, 160

Mumford, 198-200; Zevi,
72-76, 138-142

Zevi also saw this humane
trend represented in the

DIAGRAM OF PROPOSED ROAD SYSTEM

'Social organicism', County plan for London, J.H. Forshaw & P. Abercrombie, 1943

term 'organic', which resulted in the conclusion that the concept was a matter of the spatial organisation of homes and cities, 'planned for human happiness', and not of aesthetics. One example of an organic approach to urban planning was reflected in Abercrombie and Forshaw's 1943 County Plan for London, which divided the city into manageable social units with an individual character, and which also included space for pedestrians. Zevi also dispensed with biological and physiological connotations of organicism, thereby freeing himself from the essence of the organicistic tradition, i.e. the connection with nature.[36]

Zevi and the APAO represented a branch of Italian modernism that used organicism as a part of their opposition to the rationalistic trends within modernism. During the 1949 CIAM 7 congress in Bergamo, Zevi used his personal theories to criticise the lack of historical and contemporary attention to organic, more humane trends.[37] Although CIAM did not see any benefit in calling their own history into question, the subsequent CIAM 8 congress in Hoddesdon in 1951 did strike a more human note, with the theme of 'The Heart of the City'. In addition to the four functions (living, working, traffic and recreation) the aspect of 'Core' was introduced as a binding element within a community. In his foreword to the congress book, Le Corbusier made an express comparison with living beings: 'An essential characteristic of all functioning organisms is the material heart or nucleus, which we have named the Core. For a community of people is a self-aware organism – not only are the members dependent on one another, but they are all also fully aware of this dependency.'[38] CIAM saw it as its responsibility to create a design for the organic Core, fulfilling its social mission in doing so. Expansions

'New Empiricism' of J.M. Richards

Van der Woud, 92

Heynen e.a., 319-324, 775-776

Vinke e.a., 8, 9, 26, 30, 40, 44
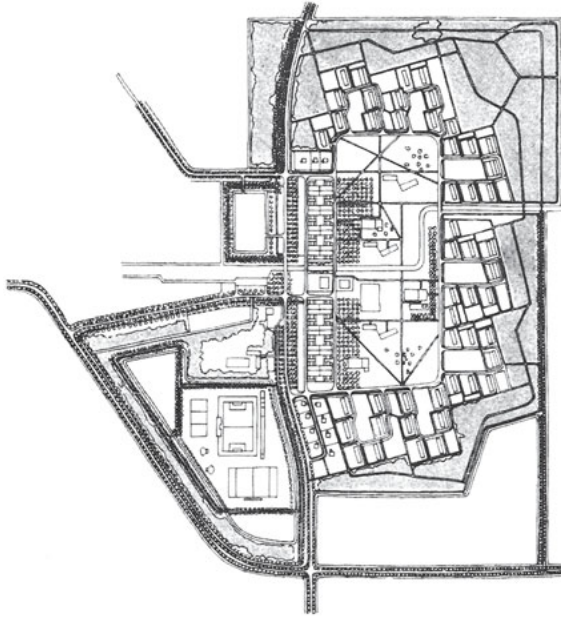
'Core', study for a Village in the Noordoostpolder (Nagele), by Dutch CIAM group 'De 8', exhibited at CIAM VIII 'The Heart of The City', Hoddesdon 1951

following this 'neighbourhood concept' were developed and designed until well into the second half of the twentieth century.

In 1957 John Summerson, one of the English CIAM members who had introduced the idea of the Core, conducted research into twentieth-century attempts to furnish contemporary architecture with a theoretical basis. Summerson effectively supported Zevi's criticism by making a distinction between two historical approaches, i.e. rationalism and organicism. Other prominent advocates of the desire for organicism besides Wright and Zevi also included artist and Bauhaus professor László Moholy-Nagy. Summerson, however, had no affinity with the elevation of biology and psychology as a higher power (as Moholy-Nagy propagated in 1929), he did subscribe though to the bottom line of Zevi's organic view of architecture, from which he distilled the new principle of modern architecture. According to Summerson, the 'source of uniformity' lay within the social context (i.e. in the programme), which took the needs of humans as a starting point.[39]

## Process Organicism, or Flexible Planning for Gradually Growing Cities

The late twentieth century has seen the emergence of a trend that links the term 'organic' to the urban processes of growth and construction. In the report 'NOT DONE – research into instruments for organic development and bottom-up planning' (2005) the collective made up of Annet Ritsema, Vincent Kompier, Rogier van den Berg, Jeannette de Waard and Jannie Vinke proposed that current planning procedures are ill-equipped to deal with dynamic,

Lengkeek, Kuenzli, 14
Lengkeek, Kuenzli, 22
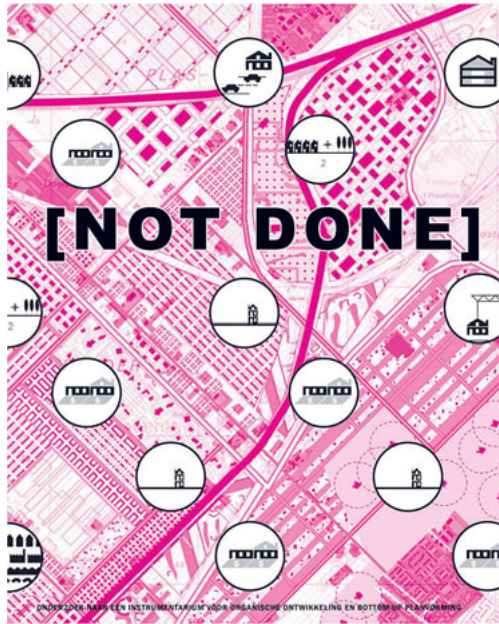
'Process organicism', Report 'Not Done – Research into instruments for organic development and bottom-up planning', Vinke, J. et al, 2005

fast-changing social and economic conditions, and that they thereby focus too much on the end result. This in turn requires a redefinition of the designers' attitude into one that is better suited to a strategy of gradual development and bottom-up planning. Instead of fulfilling a pure design function, contemporary architects should increasingly function as organisers or 'directors'. Commissions will start to consist more of creating designs and plans that are also subject to long-term development and that allow modifications and spontaneous, informal developments during the process, or 'the unplanned'. However, a point to consider will be that of how to guarantee space for so-called 'low-level functions' without the need to specify everything in great detail.[40] Whereas the anthroposophic idea of an organic growth process still had the production of a design as its main goal, in its application within an urban planning context this idea has been freely modified into a vision that largely ignores the final result and is concerned only with the process, as part of which flexibility and users constitute a high priority.

A similar vision regarding urban development has been described in the manifest-type publication Urban Jazz (2004) by Arie Lengkeek and Peter Kuenzli, which makes a plea for self-built cities. Lengkeek and Kuenzli believe that the manner in which the current construction process is organised is fundamentally unsuited to allow the emergence of a self-built city. Although traditional top-down planning methods are filtering consumers out of the planning process, new opportunities to turn the process upside-down are emerging. One such opportunity is that of private commissioning, which the authors in the prologue describe as 'a fantastical improvisation, the final result of which is not known at the outset (…) and which
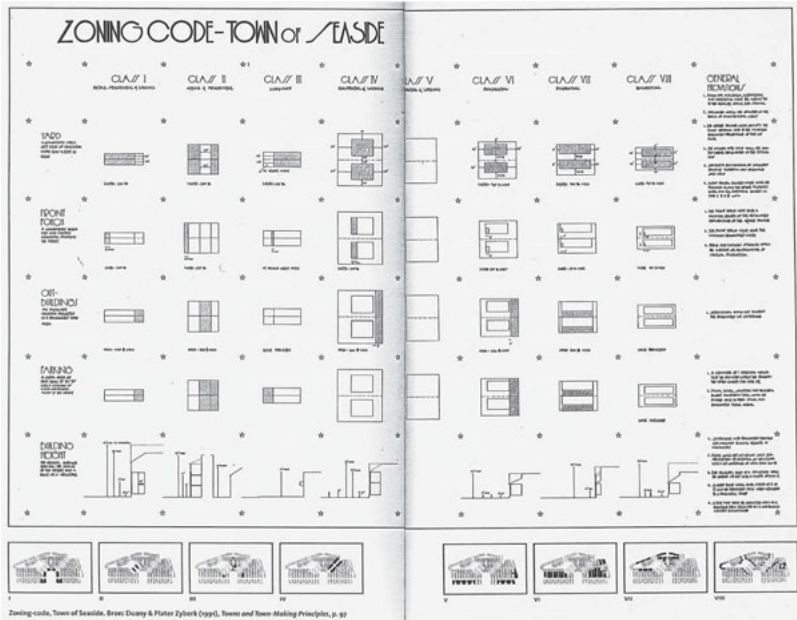
Zoning code of Town of Seaside, illustration in 'Urban Jazz', Arie Lengkeek & Peter Kuenzli, Rotterdam 2004

creates a new form of urbanism.'[41] We can also infer from Urban Jazz that it is a plea for 'organically-produced diversity'. Space as a value in use shall once again become a focal point. This does not mean the production of space as a logical result of the market, but a specific kind of space that corresponds to the needs of the individual residents, as a result of the interaction among users. This type of usage is never predictable, permits alternative functions and is characterised by diversity 'that reflects the diversity of the users, and requires an openness that can effortlessly accommodate changes in usage. That is what allows this diversity to be characterised as organic.'[42]

Since 2000, as head of the Roombeek Reconstruction Project Office (Projectbureau Wederopbouw Roombeek) in Enschede and in collaboration with Pi de Bruijn, Kuenzli had been able to implement his ideas on the organic, self-building city as part of the plans to rebuild the neighbourhood affected by the fireworks tragedy. The opinions of over three thousand residents were collected and used to formulate the objectives for the new neighbourhood. Four hundred private individuals were ultimately given the freedom to create their own homes, which produced a diverse area with a highly mottled functional spread, 'designed at the kitchen table'. Private commissioning was expressly used as an instrument in Roombeek to regain the trust that had been lost in the government.[43]

Recent years have also seen various attempts worldwide to allow the organic growth of diversity. Since the late 1980s, American architects and urban planners have come together in the Congress for the New Urbanism, in which they plead for programmatically mixed, pedestrian-friendly neighbourhoods as a response to the

Lengkeek, Kuenzli,
127-130
Koolhaas, 974

Seaside, Florida. A Masterplanned Community, designed according to New Urbanist principles by Andrés Duany & Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, 1978

monotony and soulless nature of the suburbs. The most significant protagonist of the New Urbanism was the design duo Andrés Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, whose strategy was to introduce planning codes: preconditions primarily concerned with the transition between public and private, within which consumers had the individual freedom to realise their designs. Although the movement has endured academic criticism in terms of the final result (i.e. the forcing of historicising forms and the production of middle-class American enclaves), the original objective was that of allowing the growth of a social community through a controlled process.[44]

Rem Koolhaas' Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA) took precisely the opposite approach with its competition design for the ville nouvelle Melun-Sénart (1987), one of the last cities around Paris to be built from scratch. Instead of determining the preconditions and the usual programmatic framework for a New Town, the OMA established the things that were not allowed, and the places where people could *not* build. In S,M,L,XL (1995) Koolhaas posited that it would be ridiculous to believe that urbanism and construction could still be planned and managed at the end of the twentieth century: 'Too many architects' "visions" have bitten the dust to propose new additions to this chimerical battalion. Today, consensus builds around avoidance; our most profound adhesion is to the non-event.'[45]

Effecting a turnaround and eliminating space from the landscape created a figure of empty space that could be protected against the 'contamination' of the city. The remaining space (the urban residue) was to be surrendered to the chaotic process of uncontrolled growth, producing a sublime contrast with the emptiness.[46]

Process organicism seems to be a far cry from the objective of

Koolhaas, 973-984

Vlaskamp (18 May 2010), 10

Feddes, 39

Feddes, 39

'The Bands', competition design for the New Town of Melun-Sénart, OMA 1987

creating unbroken cohesion, the widely accepted ideal of classical organicism. Organic growth, with an emphasis on the process, has gotten the upper hand. In general, the 'orgware' (organisationware, i.e. all administrative, political and policy factors that have an effect prior to the formation of a plan) seems to be gaining in importance. Is it not true that an architect working as a project director runs the risk of merely observing from the wings and being reduced to a consultant or strategist? Perhaps we need to let go of the reins, and move towards the self-regenerating organic cities as defined by John Körmeling and his Chinese partner Su Yunsheng in their description of the Happy Street Project at the Shanghai World Expo in May 2010: 'Cities grow in their own way. Do not prune and pot them like bonsai trees. Let them become ugly, or sick if need be. Cities heal themselves.'[47]

3. Almere: An Organic City

What does this range of organicist trends mean today for the plans to expand Almere? Let us now take a closer look at the municipality's aims for allowing the city to develop organically, in order to discover how these plans are related to the city's short history and to the layered sense of the term 'organic'.

People make the City

Within the context of the plans to expand Almere's eastern flank, the concept of organic urban development here also refers to the process. The administration is using nature as a metaphor by saying that it wishes to have its city grow in an organic, natural manner: i.e. a gradual development of the space at a non-predetermined rate. Instead of blueprints that dictate how the space is to be filled, the plans set out the rules that explain how the future development is to find direction. In this way, time also becomes a factor in the design process, and can accommodate unexpected trends. This new strategic course is in line with the Almere Principles of 'anticipating change' and 'empowering people to make the city'. With the aim of doubling both surface area and population, the municipality presented this manifesto in 2008 which redefined its basic principles as guidelines for the creation of 'Almere 2.0'. The principle of organic urban development goes hand in hand with another management mission, namely that of empowering people to make the city. '(…) citizens are the driving force in creating, keeping and sustaining the city, we facilitate their possibilities for them to pursue their unique potential, with spirit and dignity,'[48] says the document. People are the

Berg, 3

Almere in 2030, Structuurvisie (Structural Vision) Almere 2.0, 2009

2015

2020

2025

2030

Four possible phases in the development of Almere-East, Almere 2.0

most important actors in an organic city. 'People "make" the city in both a spatial and social sense: individually, yes, but especially also as a group, and they must be given the fundamental right to do so as they see fit.'[49] Alderman Spatial Planning and Housing Adri Duivesteijn believes that private commissioning is the logical next step in the emancipation of citizens, who can exert influence on their immediate living environment and are called to account on taking their own initiative and responsibility. 'People have the right to the authorship of their own environment,'[50] says Duivesteijn. For Duivesteijn, this is a deeply-rooted conviction developed throughout his social and political career. As a community worker in the poor Schilderswijk district in The Haque, he experienced first-hand the gruelling initial stages of the urban renovation during the 1970s, and realised how important it was for citizens to secure a position that would allow them to exert their influence. After having held various posts in architecture and spatial planning, since his nomination to the post of alderman in Almere in 2006, Duivesteijn has had the resources to realise his dream of bottom-up urban planning.

As early as 2001, the city was already experimenting with resident participation regarding the layout of homes. The building exhibition Het (ge)Wilde Wonen for the Eilandenbuurt district of Almere Buiten gave six hundred households the opportunity to put together their own future homes by choosing from a selection of construction packages. The objective was to create greater resident participation whilst also retaining a degree of cohesion within the district. The ikbouwmijnhuisinalmere project (buildyourownhomeinalmere), which commenced in 2006 under the direction of Duivesteijn, represented the relaunch of this mission to allow residents to

Different gradations of private initiative in house building, Almere, Homeruskwartier, 2006

construct their own homes. For example, three different gradations in private initiative were offered in the Homeruskwartier district of Almere-Poort: private commissioning, collective commissioning and joint commissioning. Among other things, residents were given their own choice of which developer they wished to work with on the construction of their home. Normally in the Netherlands, citizens are only allowed to take on the role of consumer when it comes to their personal living environment, however Duivesteijn however believes that 'in principle, everything that people can do themselves and everything to which they can bring meaning and individuality should not be taken over by institutions. This therefore also applies to managing certain public areas, such as streets and parks.'[51] Ultimately the expectation is that people who are co-manufacturers of their own environment will become more attached to it, and feel a closer connection to their neighbourhoods and the cities. Duivesteijn's aim is to 'once again establish people, citizens, as both the starting and finishing point of the process.'[52] End users will once again become the commissioning parties.

However, the organic city represents the highest degree of the freedom that cities once offered residents within the realm of private commissioning. Organic urban planning goes a step further, by creating the perfect conditions for giving space back to citizens both literally and physically. Duivesteijn believes that governments must be able to step back if a collective of citizens wishes to create their own community. Almere is a major land owner, putting it in the fortunate position of being able to designate areas without being subject to any higher-level management. 'Development based on an end result is no longer possible, because whenever a city emerges from a large

number of separate initiatives it is impossible to predict how it will look in several years' time.'[53] Organic urban planning is therefore about eliminating the disadvantages of the planned city, which represents 'too much of a single idea, a single system, a snapshot which is too inflexible and predictable'. Duivesteijn believes that the fully-planned modernist city constitutes the greatest planning fiasco of the twentieth century.[54]

It is a conscious departure from the modernistic planning ideal, in which the goal of public housing was to create a large number of homes quickly for anonymous residents, with the only consideration being the end result. Since the very first plans for New Town Almere, policy has been aimed at production, fuelled by the need to combat the housing shortage. Following economic recession, the 1980s were characterised by a receding government. Market forces were to be stimulated through less control and fewer regulations. Housing corporations were privatised on a large scale. Although a new playing field emerged containing a more prominent role for project developers, the focus on the market also resulted in the 'quick and profitable development and marketing of newly built residential areas on a large scale and with specific designs'.[55] The top-down urban planning approach of these VINEX residential areas allowed little room for contributions by future residents. In its description of these developments, the Municipality of Almere found that social cohesion was often lacking.[56]

The town authorities agreed that large-scale project construction in the twenty-first century had become outdated, and that the housing market should be driven more by demand than by supply. Nor can we simply assume any longer that growth will be unlimited. A recent study published in the Municipalities Atlas (Atlas van Gemeenten) revealed the possibility that cities such as Almere may experience population shrinkage. Duivesteijn's response to the reports was that cities are not dependent on prescribed growth, but that they can expand organically, i.e. gradually. Organic urban planning is even a solution in cases where growth is not a factor.[57] The current economic crisis has revealed that, although housing construction has suffered considerably, the demand in private commissioning has dropped but it did not stop. It would seem that the sector is less sensitive to the effects of a recession – a relevant finding.

Calls are being heard not only in the Netherlands, but from several western-European countries to abolish rigid legislation and to introduce residents and entrepreneurs as actors into the planning process. Particularly noteworthy is the major interest in international urban planning discourse in informal, unplanned cities. The principles and conditions of slums/'favelas'/spontaneous cities are being embraced. Although it is interesting to analyse which informal planning mechanisms could be incorporated into formal planning procedures (e.g. allowing more agencies), the focus in some cases is directed towards the romanticising of slums and self-built cities. The flipside is a trend involving urban planning and architecture that produces an organic-looking result that suggests freedom, but in which everything is actually fully planned and built

Working Group for Organic Urban Developoment (Werkgroep Organische Stadsontwikkeling), 1

Municipality of Almere (2008), 2

www.almere.nl/ de_stad/actueel/ content/_rp_kolom1-1_ elementId/1_1330604

International New Town Institute, 10

Provoost, Taverne

Municipality of Almere,

Do-It-Yourself urban development, Bogotà 2006

by professionals. This is visible in the widespread appreciation of historic cities that have grown 'organically', and as a counterpart to this trend, in the master plans for new residential areas that resemble old-world towns with the same variation in façades. For example, the Homeruskwartier district in Almere calls up associations of the form and structure of the canal belt in Amsterdam, of which more examples can be found. But appearances can be deceiving, for instead of being a genuine product of the market in which several parties are given the opportunity to build, many plans are ultimately merely the result of a project developed or initiated by one or a few parties. 'Fundamental changes in land policy, the construction economy and the way the construction sector is organised are necessary before the Netherlands can be home to 'organic' or 'informal' cities,' (from the introduction of the congress publication 'New Towns for the 21st century, The Planned vs. the Unplanned city', 2010).[58]
Organic urban planning demands a new division of roles among the government, developers, citizens and other parties. The Almere town authorities have stated that they will need to concentrate on creating clear frameworks and monitoring spatial quality. The question is: How? This requires another working method in terms of legislation and enforcement, or perhaps the definition of 'monitoring' needs to be re-examined. What is needed in any case is a fresh, more flexible mentality from the planners. An organic city is not something which should be developed as a fixed image, but rather something that is made possible by laws and guidelines (orgware). This in turn requires a completely new attitude and mentality from the municipal organisations, a switch from controlling and regulation to facilitation

"Green Footprint", one of four scenarios for the organic development of Almere Hout,
MaO - emmeazaro Studio d'Architettura, 2007

and acceptance – no mean feat, especially in a new town like Almere
that has been oriented towards production, quantity and control
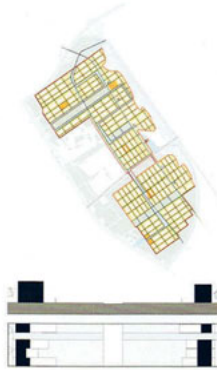since its very beginnings.

Physical and Social Sustainability

The municipality of Almere is aware that knowledge of guidelines
and principles of organic urban development may not necessarily
be available. The 'People make the city' sector debate, organised
in 2007, constituted an initial exploration of Almere on the path to
the realisation of organic urban development. Four design agencies
(MVRDV, Neutelings Riedijk Architects, MaO - emmeazero and
MUST stedebouw in collaboration with Michael Sorkin) were asked
to provide their views, targeting the development in Almere Hout,
which neighboured the future Oosterwold district. The debate
generated principles for urban development for the municipal
Organic Urban Development working group (Werkgroep Organische
Stadsontwikkeling) that served as points of reference for discussion
on the new planning process. One of these was the importance of a
'robust urban planning scheme', i.e. a structure of such strength and
clarity that it will remain serviceable for centuries, and which can
easily accommodate changes in usage. Indeed, the municipality made
reference to the seventeenth-century Amsterdam canal belt, famous
for its mixture of functions and its diversity (including in appearance),
but also to the Plan Zuid for Amsterdam by architect H.P. Berlage.
Both are hierarchical structures which, according to Duivesteijn,
'permit organic growth along pre-determined lines and constitute the
result of a beautiful synthesis of collective planning at the global level,
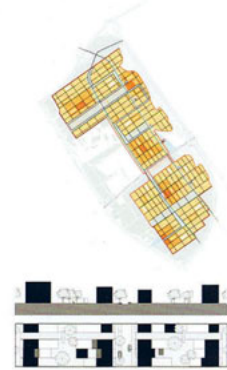and individual completion at the detailed level.' He calls the canal

pioneer town   grid city   compact city

Scenario for the organic development of Almere Hout, MUST Urbanism, 2007

plan an 'icon of the private right of self-determination within a public context.'[59]

The geometrically partitioned polder structure of Almere Hout was, for three of the four agencies, reason to choose a grid as an underlying structure, whose block pattern seemed to lend itself well to phased transformation. Neutelings Riedijk Architects pointed out the significance of the grid, that had proven its worth for centuries. The polder unit (a quadrangle of around 500 x 800 metres) became the basic unit of the city grid, which was further subdivided into smaller blocks. According to the agency, it is a compositorically neutral system – every change alters the character without threatening the cohesion.[60] The plan can be put on automatic pilot: the blocks fill themselves, however the municipal authorities can also provide direction if necessary (in terms of building height, etc.). MVRDV made a link between the 'wood' (hout) in the name of the district and organic growth by proposing to first plant forests – literally allowing the structure of organic material to grow naturally – and then to 'cut' its building land out of the forest whenever necessary. 'As long as there is no building going on, the forest will continue to grow, perhaps forever.'[61] This is also a tradition in Almere, where during the 1970s future city zones were planted with forests pending further construction. The Italian agency MaO/ emmeazero presented a similar idea, but referred to the comparison of the 'green footprint' (a structure of planted green areas) as a living organism with green 'fingers' intended to create uniformity within the district. Homes were grouped together in small subcentres, separated by the green corridors but without losing the sense of cohesion. This proposal is evidence of the sudden reappearance of
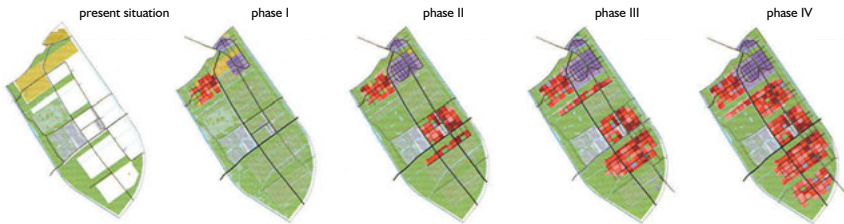
Tellinga, Voest, 18

Berg, 3-4

Municipality of Almere,

MVRDV, 37

MVRDV

present situation	phase I	phase II	phase III	phase IV

Scenario for the organic development of Almere Hout, MVRDV, 2007

the classical organicistic principle of creating intrinsic harmony by taking nature as a model for architecture.

The studies presented also contain ideas for an organic development process and private commissioning in Almere Hout. For example, Neutelings Riedijk proposed replacing the 'obligation to build' (bouwplicht) with a 'right to build' (bouwrecht), reminiscent of the situation in Belgium in which private individuals buy a piece of land, whilst in practice they do not start building for several years. Until that time, the plot lies empty. In this way streets are filled in with buildings gradually, showing diversity in typology and appearance. It is also common for private individuals to submit a plot division plan containing preconditions for future builders.[62] Neutelings Riedijk solves this problem by means of a plot and planning database, giving the municipality the option to retain control. Nonetheless, it would seem that for the time being there will still be tensions between legislation and individual freedom. Jaap Jan Berg was right to comment in the Blauwe Kamer that 'all of the designs submitted illustrate that effective urban planning remains based and dependent on direction, structure and regulations. The designs clearly show that the greatest danger to the mission of 'buildyourownhomeinalmere' lies perhaps not in a lack of public interest, but in the early erosion of the original concept. The insistent and symptomatic recourse to top-down management undermines the concept of bottom-up urban planning before it has ever even been implemented.'[63]

For the time being, Structure Vision 2.0 gives no reason to suspect that too much is being imposed from the top down. The details of the approach will be determined this summer by the project agencies. Nor is there currently any clear-cut structure planned for

Municipality of Almere (2008), 3-6; Municipality of

Scenario for the organic development of Almere Hout, MVRDV, 2007

Almere Oosterwold – after another two years in the brainstorming process, the municipality seems to have abandoned the idea. 'A limited number of infrastructure frameworks and central green structure will be established at the site of the historical bed of the River Eem. The development process will then concentrate on the historical patterns of organic urban development',[64] reads a section of the vision document. The 'patterns' referred to here are those of organic growth, i.e. of a neighbourhood that expands naturally, one without any predetermined end result and which allows other 'agencies', such as residents and entrepreneurs, to take part in the development process.

One subject that has gradually become intertwined with that of the organic city is social sustainability. Although the definition of this concept is not yet clear-cut, the municipal policy document 'Towards a socially sustainable neighbourhood; the ideological principles' (Naar een sociaal duurzame wijk; de ideologische uitgangspunten, 2008) allows us to conclude that it covers neighbourhoods that are dynamic, diverse, open and accessible, and which can also cope with changing times. Social and spatial planning are not unrelated fields – the role assigned to the government here should also be a modest one, with the focus on resident participation. The underlying reasoning is that people who are more attached to their area (e.g. by having helped create it) also feel more responsible for the social cohesion within the area. The town authorities are aiming for the principle of the 'self-regulating neighbourhood'. Independent citizens (sometimes in consultation with professionals) are perfectly able to make decisions regarding the management of their neighbourhoods and to solve social problems. The belief is that in this manner,

Almere, MVRDV, 95

Municipality of Almere

Participation strategy by Housing corporation Ymere for the development of Almere Hout, 2008

districts are created that do not degenerate into problem areas after several decades, but which possess the intrinsic strength to remain liveable for generations.[65]

In 2008, the Almere town authorities held a competition among housing associations, with the aim of creating a socially sustainable neighbourhood from proposals for future developments in Almere Hout North. Ymere was the winning association, who believed that citizens' spirit of enterprise and responsibility is best expressed in a collective (rather than an individual) mentality. The 'Participation Organisation', an independently organised network body comprised of residents and entrepreneurs, is the familiar structure that activates and provides financial and other support to resident initiatives of this type. Generally, the municipality concluded that the results were somewhat disappointing in terms of a vision for gradual, organic growth; Ymere's plan for Almere Hout North was ultimately fully developed by Adriaan Geuze (West 8) and Francien Houben (Mecanoo). 'Once the district has been fully designed, organic growth can take over,'[66] says Ymere. 'Corporations rely on fast construction. They do not expect plots to remain unused for long periods, let alone include them deliberately in a strategic plan for organic growth.' It is true that organic growth is difficult to implement in the current planological climate, however the Assessment Committee concluded that 'it would be advisable to try to release some tension and seek flexibility within the planning mechanism.'[67]
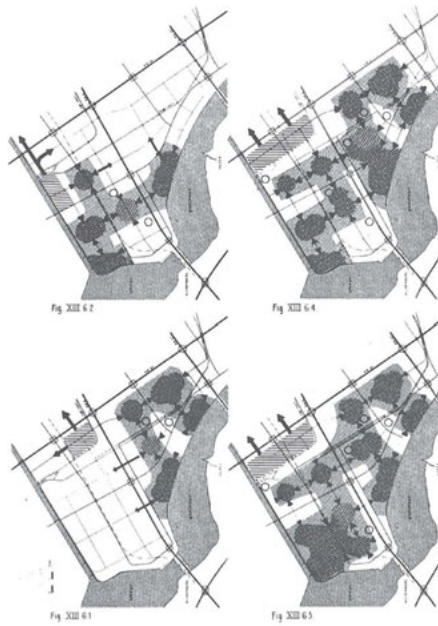
Organic Growth versus Uniformity

The metaphor of organic growth is nothing new in the Almere vocabulary. For his Almere Principles manifesto, Fred Feddes went

(2009), 112

Ibidem

Feddes, 50

Feddes, 65

Provoost, Taverne

Two scenarios for the polynuclear development of Almere, National service for the planning of the IJsselmeerpolders, 1970

in search of the principles governing the new town, and found out about the Wageningen directors of the IJsselmeerpolders Development Authority (Rijksdienst voor de Ijsselmeerpolders, RIJP), agricultural engineers W.M. Otto and R.H.A. van Duin. In 1970 they had anticipated future change by widely spacing the various town 'cores' within green areas (which they regarded as the urban support base), and to develop them over 'a calculated succession of time' to ensure sufficient flexibility to accommodate any surprises. Feddes argues that these pioneers approached urban planning as a form of agriculture: 'an important quality during these initial years of development in Almere (the late 1960s) was the ability to view urban construction as a matter of patient work, as a long-term process of planting, growth and maturation in which immaturity is not a problem, but a necessary stage. Cities are not constructed, they are set up and then grow as a landscape in which many changes can still take place.'[68]

Viewed in this manner, organic growth formed the guiding principle for development in Almere from the very start. It concerned the realisation of multiple, independent residential concentrations with the possibility of 'maintaining openness for the development of a more complex urban fabric.'[69] For example, an empty space had been reserved for urban expansion in the city centre for a long time, and was recently filled in by the master plan by OMA. The polynuclear setup essentially laid the foundations for a structure that provided for uniformity at the city level, whilst allowing for diversification among the various centres. The polynuclear layout also ensured that organic growth was possible at the largest scale – new cores could be added as soon as the need arose. The plans

for the expansion are proof that there is still plenty of flexibility left in the model. Municipal executive member Duivesteijn is therefore against the idea that 'we in Almere must return to the classical urban model, in which urbanity is conceived of almost automatically from the centre outwards', and champions the notion of 'treating the original urban planning model for Almere – separate cores in which people live as close to the surrounding countryside as possible – as gospel.'[70] The current structure guarantees that there will always be a functional and logistic cohesion within the city, whilst allowing the various districts to display individual differences.

Up until now, the separate cores had been based on a blueprint, i.e. good, old-fashioned top-down planning. For Almere's eastern flank, the objective formulated in Structure Vision 2.0 marks the start of the experiment to create a core within the polynuclear model that is built primarily from the bottom up, and letting it expand gradually without a predetermined end result. The Almere case once again proves the hypothesis that organicism is capable of sustaining multiple simultaneous interpretations. Organic growth and striving for uniformity in development are not necessarily mutually exclusive – these concepts each find expression at different levels. At the highest level (i.e. the city as a whole) we continue to require uniformity, whereas at neighbourhood/district level we aim for the process of organic, natural growth.

However, the most important questions concerning Almere East relate to how a district can be planned that aims for gradual growth, a smaller role for planners and the rise of other actors (residents and entrepreneurs) as manufacturers of the city.

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