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Unconventional Affordable Housing!

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RECOMMENDATIONS

BOOKLET / DESIGN STUDIOS
AMSTERDAM / BIJENKORF PARKING

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Unconventional Affordable Housing!

Booklet / Design studios

TU Delft — Delft University of Technology

1. The project's framework

The housing market has become very scarce in recent years. Especially in and around the big cities, it is increasingly difficult to find affordable, good quality housing. Existing residential areas are being transformed and densified wherever possible. And new locations are being sought where housing can be built; vacant port areas, old industrial sites or new land is being created. This requires ingenuity; because how do you create fine residential neighbourhoods in such seemingly inhospitable areas? In transformation, you don't design on a clean slate, but puzzle in an existing context. That can lead to creative solutions, discoveries you wouldn't make if you were starting from scratch. In the ON4 studio Type Tetterode, we explore the chances and possibilities of making housing in existing buildings that previously had a different function. We follow up on an open letter by Floris van Alkemade (former government architect) that seeks the solution to the current housing issue mainly in the existing building stock. Not only does this starting point help in a more sustainable use of materials, energy and earth's surface. It also helps to enrich the social and cultural stratification of our living environment. Our starting point is "the immediacy of experience" – living and housing is a process that is experienced very directly and personally by everyone.

This studio is about a building to be transformed in Amsterdam: the Bijenkorf car park (1980). They are all buildings that did not originally have a residential function, that are embedded in an existing urban context, where other functions are conceivable in addition to housing and that can accommodate larger numbers of dwellings in terms of size. They have different sizes, functions and varying construction years. Some are empty, others have a temporary function or are being redeveloped.

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While unconventional and affordable housing practices can take many shapes and emerge from a diversity of household situations, the lack of an adequate offer by social and public housing policies reflects the inadequacies, dissatisfaction with or inaccessibility of conventional housing offers. A key hypothesis underlying the research is therefore that unconventional solutions can be strategies to cope with such inadequacies and a lack of affordability, better responding to changing or intensifying demands. The intersection between the two levels, affordability and unconventionality, has yet to be explored in-depth and can provide valuable insights for a reflection on existing housing (design).

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The design for the residential building is elaborated and presented in a series of three scale levels ("circles").

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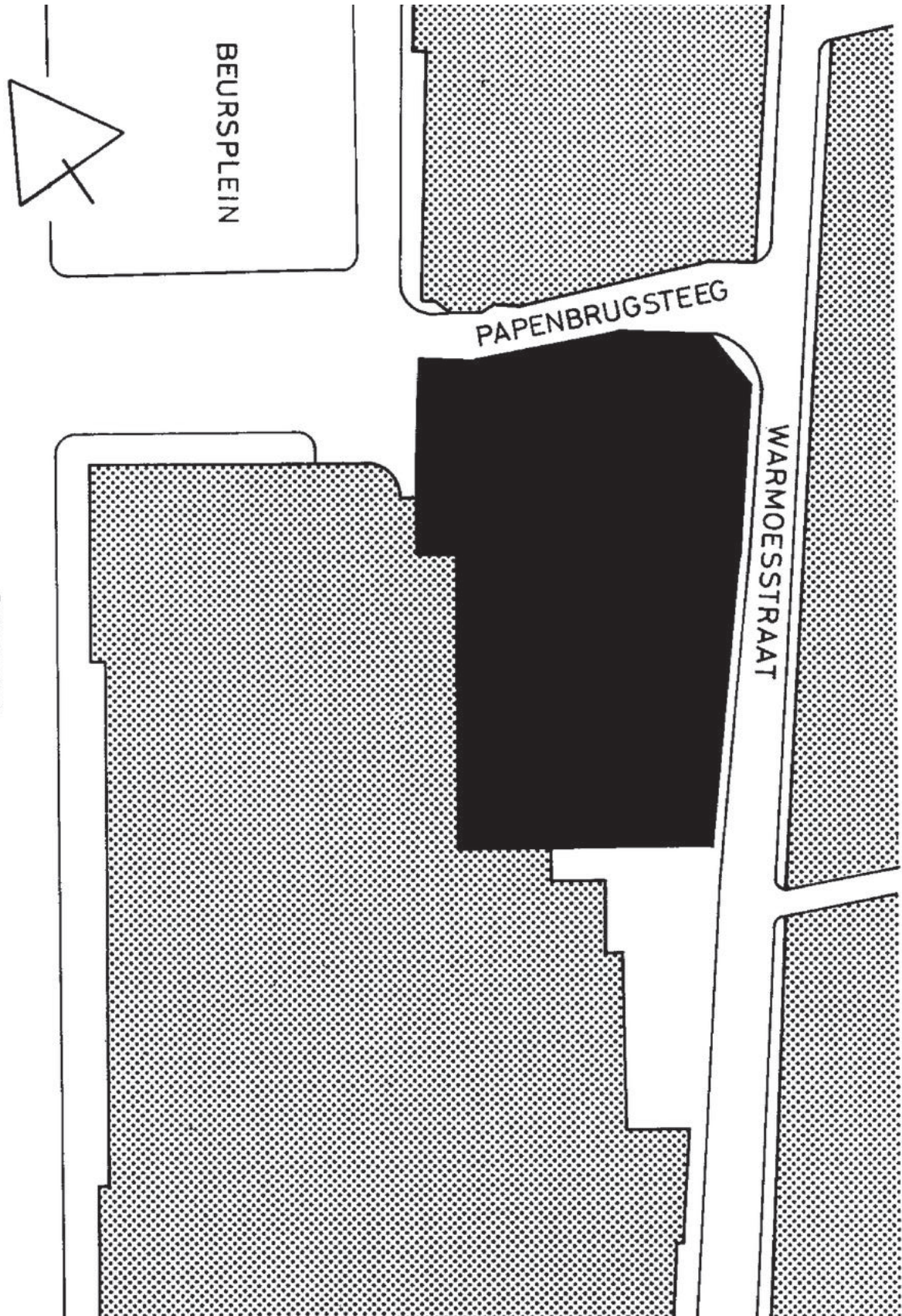Housing!

Parking Bijenkorf Amsterdam

The Bijenkorf Parking (1980) is one of the extensions of the existing department store De Bijenkorf (1912) in the centre of Amsterdam. Where medieval streets and the neoclassicism of the Beursplein meet, architect Van Gool carefully positioned this split-level parking garage with space for 500 cars. The balanced prefab concrete facades reflect both the historical charm and the stately character of the adjacent De Bijenkorf and Stock Exchange.
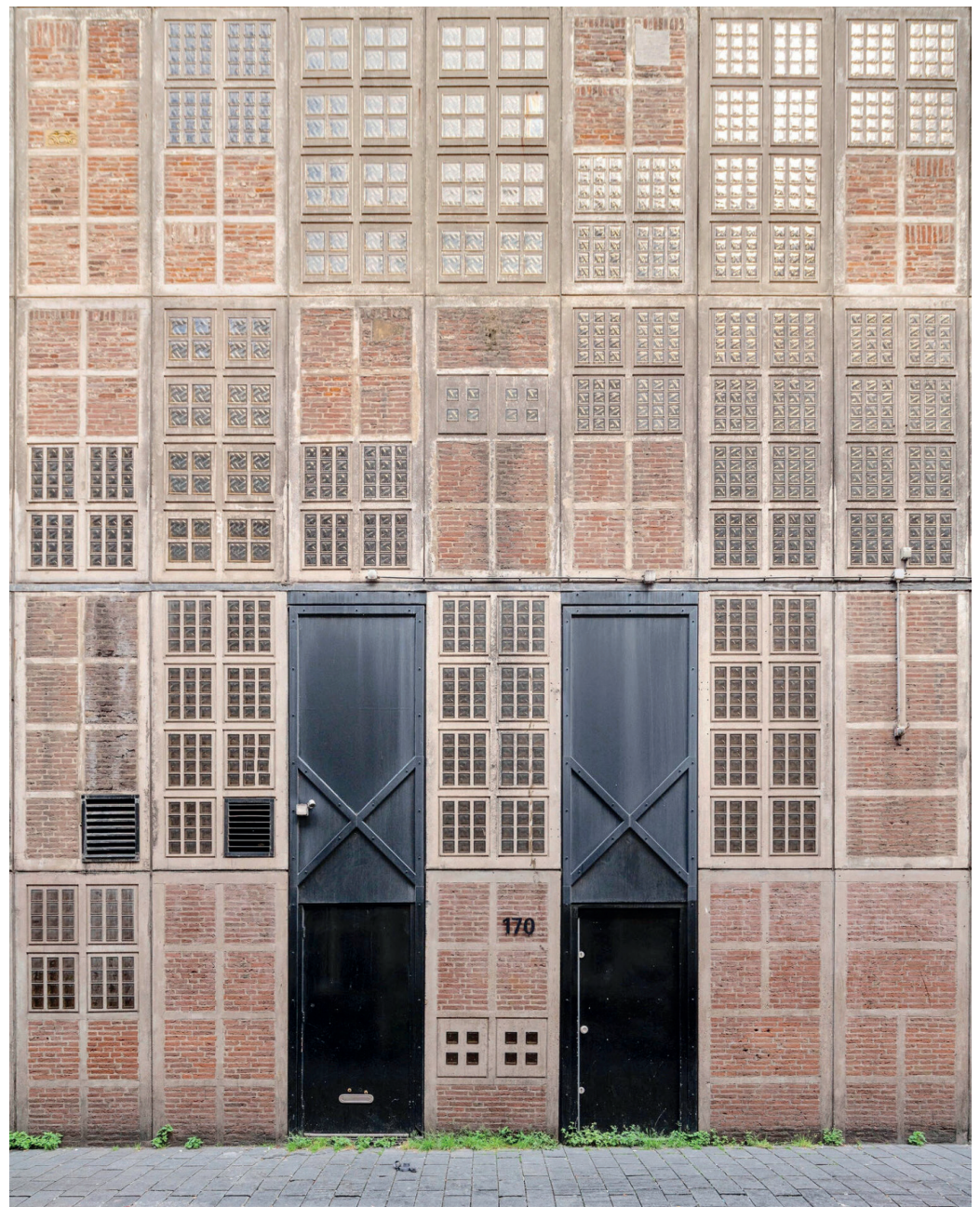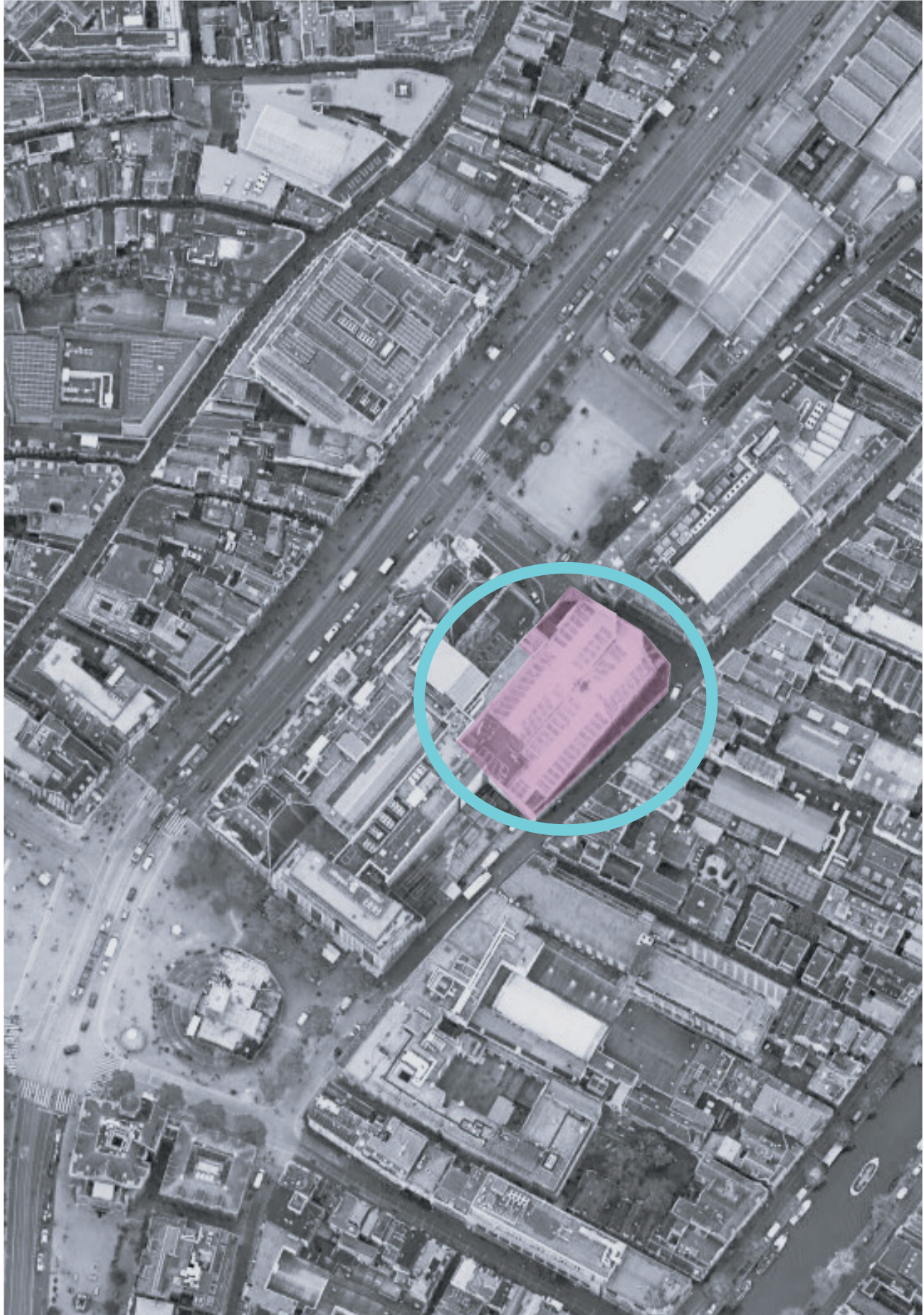

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2. The site: Parking Bijenkorf Amsterdam

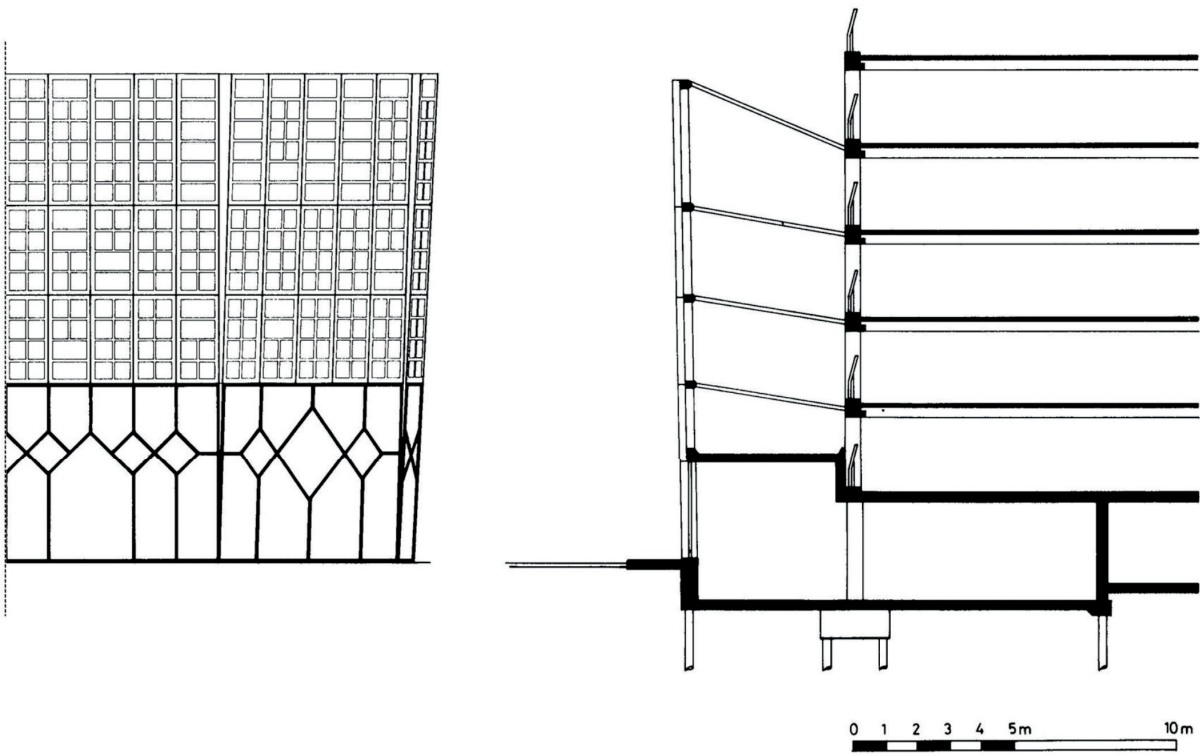BEURSPLEIN

PAPENBRUGSTEEG

WARMOESSTRAAT

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2. The site: Parking Bijenkorf Amsterdam

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Amsterdam

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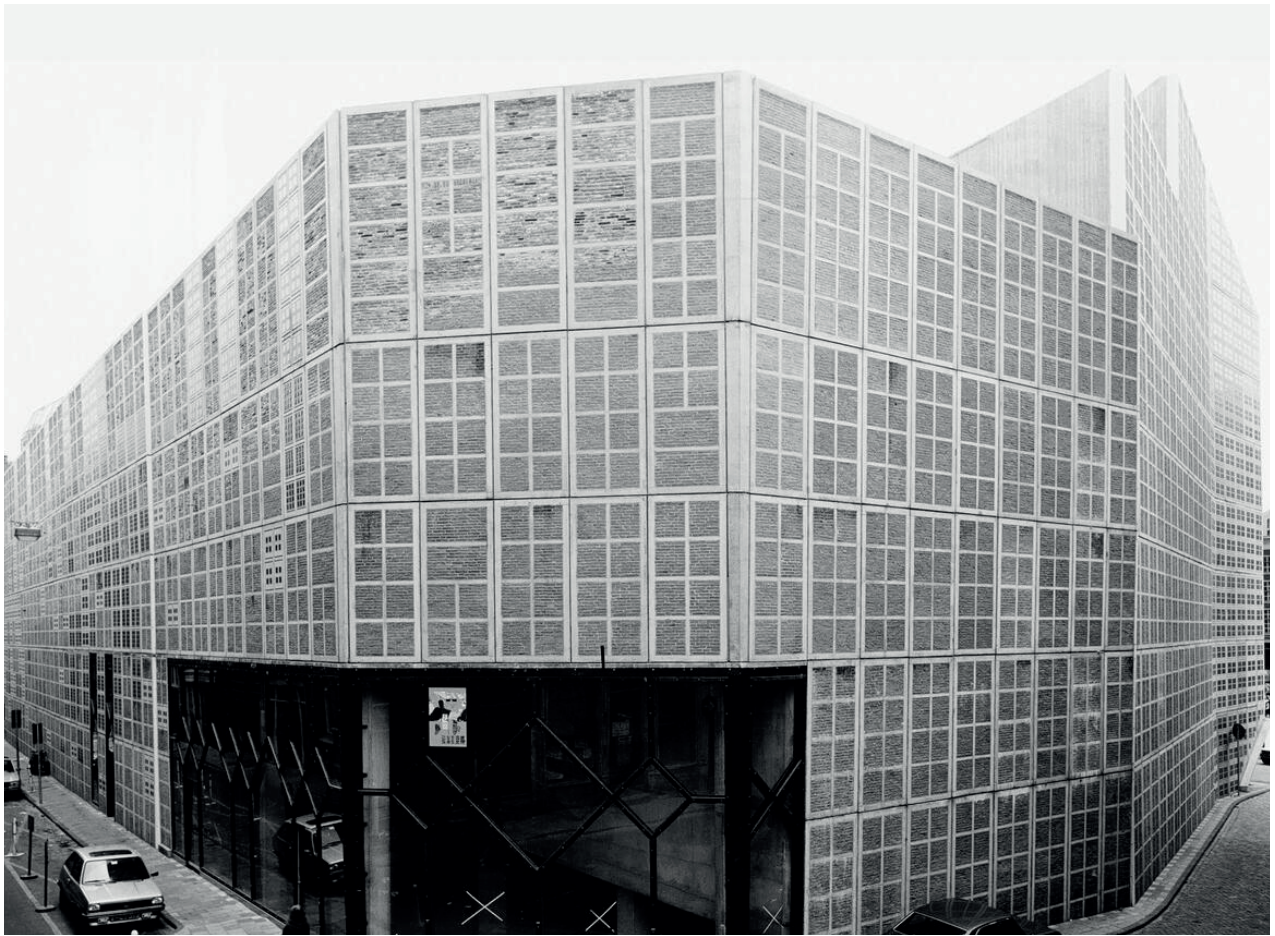
3. References

UAH! collects references, projects, readings, exhibitions in order to frame the broad background of the research topic. Here is a selection that we consider relevant to approach the topic.

> READINGS AND RESEARCHES

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Located in the heart of De Pijp, one of Amsterdam's most vibrant and diverse neighborhoods, Afrikahuis—now home to Casa Migrante—is a building with a rich social history and a meaningful presence in the local urban fabric. De Pijp, originally developed in the late 19th century as a working-class district, has evolved into a dense, multicultural area known for its eclectic mix of residents, independent shops, markets, and community initiatives. This neighborhood offers a complex layering of cultures, generations, and everyday life—an environment that has long provided fertile ground for inclusion, solidarity, and social mobility.

Situated at Van Ostadestraat 268, Afrikahuis is embedded within a classic Amsterdam building block, facing the street on one side and opening up to a quieter inner courtyard at the back. The immediate surroundings include schools, churches, local cafes, housing cooperatives, and cultural centers—creating a context that is deeply communal and human-scaled. The building is easily accessible by bike and public transport, while still offering a degree of seclusion and calm thanks to the courtyard structure.

Afrikahuis was constructed in the mid-20th century, a period marked by post-war pragmatism and a focus on functionality in design. Its architectural language is modest and modernist, with a rational layout and clean horizontal lines that define its facade. The building is characterized by its simple geometry, practical floor plans, and a sense of order that reflects its original institutional use.

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2. The site: Afrikahuis, Amsterdam

Over the years, the building has hosted a variety of social and educational functions, eventually becoming known as Casa Migrante—a center that plays a vital role in supporting Spanish-speaking migrants in the Netherlands. The organization provides a wide range of services, including language lessons, legal aid, community meals, cultural programming, and pastoral support, mainly for people from Latin America, Spain, and other Spanish-speaking regions. More than just a service point, Casa Migrante has become a space of belonging, where newcomers can connect, learn, and feel welcomed.

The building's continued use for migrant support is deeply tied to its location. De Pijp itself is a gateway neighborhood—a first home for many migrants and students, shaped by its proximity to both the city center and key educational institutions. The presence of schools and learning centers nearby reinforces the role of Casa Migrante as a place of growth and integration.

In this way, Afrikahuis is not only a building with a social mission—it is also a piece of Amsterdam's urban story. Quiet in appearance, but rich in meaning, it reflects the city's ongoing commitment to openness, care, and inclusion.

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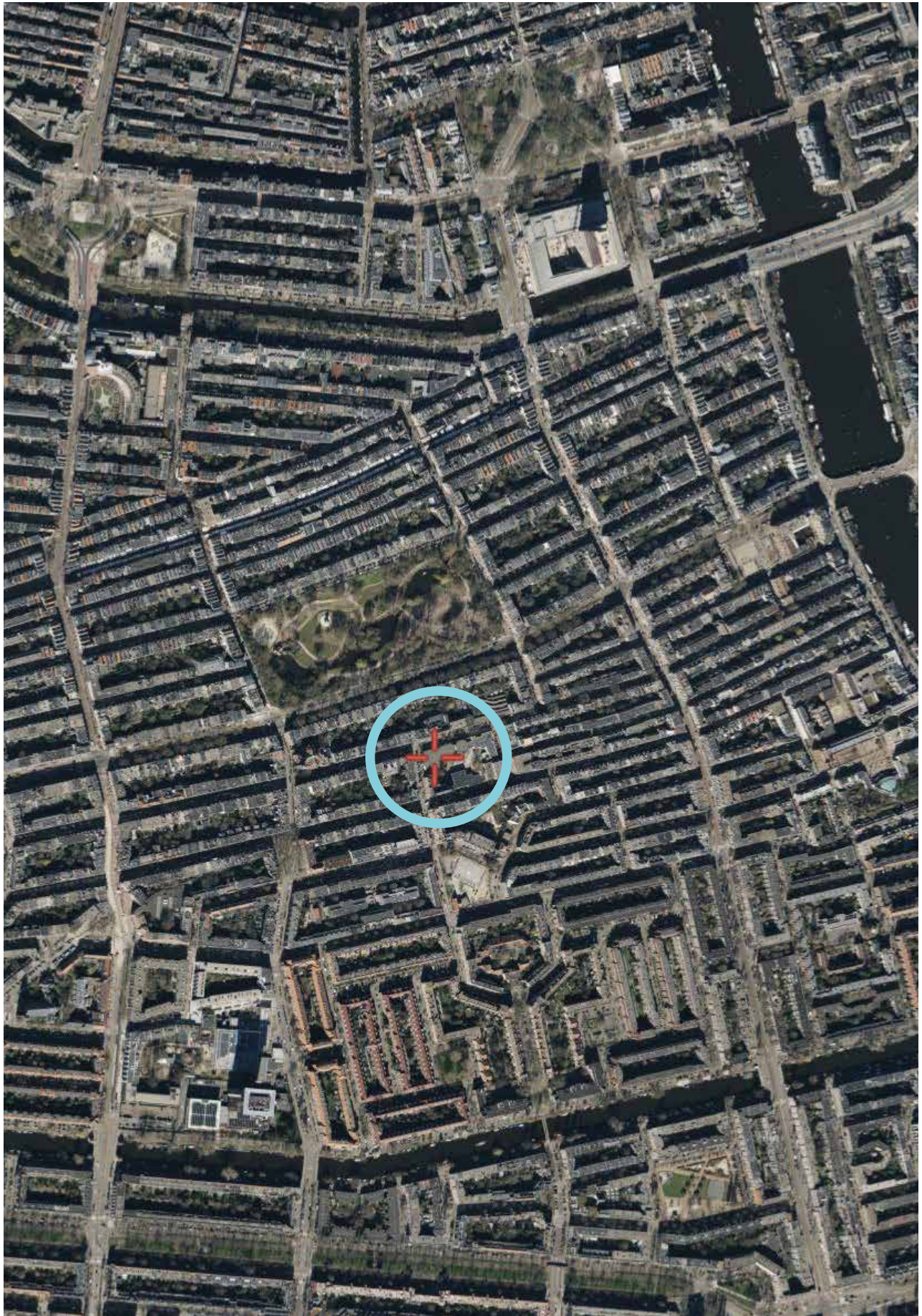
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View from inside

3. Stakeholders' perspectives

While we did not carry out direct consultations or interviews with stakeholders, our understanding of the building and its context was shaped by a basic level of background research. This included reading about Casa Migrante's public activities, its mission, and the broader urban and social conditions of Amsterdam's De Pijp neighborhood. Although not extensive or academic in nature, this research helped us identify some of the key themes and needs that informed our proposal.

Casa Migrante operates as a cultural and support center for Spanish-speaking migrants—many of whom arrive in the Netherlands alone or with their families, seeking stability, connection, and orientation in a new society. We learned that the building currently offers services such as language lessons, legal advice, spiritual guidance, and communal meals, and serves as an entry point into Dutch society for many of its users. These observations made it clear that the building is not just a facility—it is a space where people connect, adapt, and begin to rebuild their lives.

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3. Stakeholders' perspectives

In parallel, we looked into the broader housing challenges in Amsterdam, especially in De Pijp, where gentrification and high rent pressures make it increasingly difficult for low-income and migrant communities to find accessible housing. While the neighborhood is well-connected and rich in resources— such as schools, public transport, and cultural institutions—it is also marked by growing inequality and spatial exclusion. These dynamics underscored the importance of creating housing that supports short- to mid-term stays, especially for people who are still in a transitional phase and not yet ready for long-term settlement.

4. Design/Unpacking methodology

Although our research was modest, it provided a valuable lens through which to approach the project. It highlighted the importance of combining private living with collective and public spaces, and of designing housing that reflects everyday routines, cultural diversity, and flexible use. Rather than developing a purely residential model, we aimed to create a space that mirrors the social role Casa Migrante already plays, while offering an architectural response that supports integration, care, and community life.

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