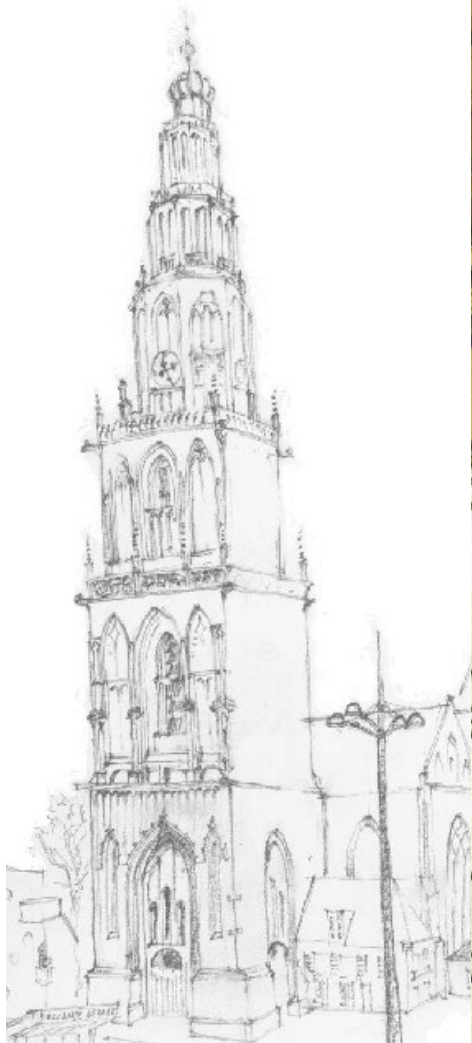


Historic Conservation in the Netherlands Frameworks, Strategies and Impacts



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2004

In research association with
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Acknowledgements

I express my gratitude to all those without whom this work could not have been accomplished. First, I am indebted to Prof. Christopher Silver, Department of Urban and Regional Planning, University of Illinois Urbana Champaign for making this research possible. I thank Prof. Gregory J. Ashworth, Faculty of Spatial Sciences, Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, Netherlands. His vast knowledge on heritage issues and concise but provocative discussions helped structure my research. Prof. Amita Sinha, Department of Landscape Architecture, University of Illinois Urbana Champaign provided constant guidance and encouragement, smoothing the many obstacles I faced. Without her support this report, in its current form, would have been impossible. All the errors and omissions remaining in this work are mine.

I thank all my interviewees in the Netherlands. Without them, a deep understanding of conservation issues would not have been possible. I especially thank those who spent many patient hours with me and treated me to tea and chocolates. I also extend my gratitude to the friends in Groningen that made research there all the more worth it. And, of course, I thank Saket, a constant source of support and inspiration.

Summary

My project is an attempt to understand historic conservation practices from a planning standpoint in the Netherlands and particularly the city of Groningen. I focus on policy framework, institutional goals and practices and their consequences on the urban built environment keeping in mind the planning issues of place identity, cultural capital and functional cities. I address the viability and sustenance of the field in the face of rapid development and change, and in so doing reassess possibilities of success in preserving the historic built environment.

In the Netherlands, historic conservation started as a cultural movement at the turn of the 19th century, an era that witnessed rapid changes in the urban fabric. It was the agency of small pressure groups that convinced the state to act and resulted in a delayed but strong and effective conservation legislation of *Monumentenwet 1961*. Legislative intent works through establishment of national, provincial and local institutional frameworks alongside sustained and active voluntary involvement in the field. The influence of regional European conservation networks is immense and has led to development of concrete policy instruments and paradigms in preservation of the historic built environment.

Groningen is a 1000 year old city in the north of Netherlands with many historic assets in a multi-functional city center, which is a declared Urban Conservation Area with many listed monuments. The development plan for the center since the 1970's strengthened historic spatial identity and quality using conservation as a strategy that promoted *behoud door ontwikkeling* or conservation through development. As a key political and social agenda it became the focus of urban renewal and revitalization and used pragmatic approaches in urban design and conservation planning with a range of impacts on the local built environment and the community of people. The case study highlights some concerns but also provides valuable lessons for success in the field of historic conservation.

Introduction

1.0 why preserve the historic in the built environment?

A query as is the case with all queries is to able the question why do we preserve or need to preserve the historic built environment? The inquiry may yield different answers as each context and its current imperatives differ but historic built environment much like cultural traditions and lifestyles of the past is an invaluable source of knowledge; a heritage that helps understand the past and links the past with the present, maintaining continuity in spatial environments. Its value therefore for spatial, individual and community identity, particularly in fast changing times of rampant development and destruction is indisputable. Investing in preserving a sense of community and culture may not be the choice available to a large part of the world but the argument to preserve is relevant even in the domain of economics and not just social gain. In a homogenized world qualitative aspects of spatial and cultural rendition of the past are a source of immense curiosity and encourage tourism, whose advantages and disadvantages are arguable though not in the scope of the current study.

The historic and cultural environment is also crucial for planners who are constantly struggling with the issue of creating place identity, cultural capital and functional cities when spaces faster than ever before outlive their functional use.

1.1 scope of the research

My research intention is to investigate the meaning of historic conservation in the urban landscape of Netherlands - its broad goals, policies and frameworks in a country unique in its historic character and circumstances though one that shares much in common with West Europe.

I scrutinize how urban conservation works, particularly as a planning strategy using Groningen, Netherlands as a case study. The attempt will be to contextualize interpretation and implementation at the local level with a focus on implication and impact of conserving the historic urban environment.

1.2 caveats

My first caveat is that some of the referred documents are in Dutch, which I translated to the best of my understanding and may not convey the meaning as originally intended.

The second is that words ‘preservation’ and ‘conservation’ are used interchangeably in concerned literature though there are practical differences that I discuss in the next chapter. I tend to restrict my usage to the word conservation for two reasons: one, that the Dutch literature I refer in my research is inclined to use the word more frequently than the other and second, because of the subtle difference between the words it only seems more appropriate to use it in the context of the study.

1.3 research methodology

I do general literature review on historic conservation and its related fields in the Netherlands, with reference to the west European context. I do a case study of Groningen, Netherlands with a review of local documents and previous research substantiated through semi-structured interviews and field observations. People interviewed include researchers, academic professors, municipal employees, volunteers of heritage organizations and Groningen city residents in the categories of young university student, middle-aged and senior residents.



Figure 1: Map of Netherlands with the far north location of case-study Groningen

Historic conservation in the Netherlands

The Netherlands is a geographically small, dense and fairly homogenous country. Its struggle with water and flooding has given it the distinctive nomenclature of the low country. Land reclamation meant characteristic polders, dykes, navigable canals, trade and grand mercantile and modest sailor architecture. The built heritage includes what is referred to as typically Dutch architecture and urban spaces such as plazas, church squares, concentric canals and their embankments in all cities of the Netherlands. A few of the canals were filled to make way for vehicular traffic though most are still in use for navigation and boat houses.

Netherlands plays a significant role in Europe and in turn is greatly influenced by prevailing trends in other European countries. Consequently, historic conservation in the country also shares much in influence and character with other European instances, right from the initial concern with historic built environments well into the current era of issues that surround the obsessive engagement with the movement.

This chapter is a broad understating of the development of the conservation movement in the Netherlands - its legal, organizational and institutional background, frameworks of development and change in conservation practice and finally changing conservation policies and paradigms over the last few decades.

2.0 conservation movement: pressure group and individual agency to state agency

It was the age of enlightenment that instilled interest in archaeological and architectural conservation in the 17th and 18th century in Europe. Industrialization further aroused concern for the built environment with the eminent threat of rapid destruction of the historic cityscape and disruption in continuity of the urban fabric. A numerically small but socially influential group of enthusiastic amateurs in this era initiated artistic and historical societies. The Dutch *Koninklijk Instituut voor Wetenschappen and Letteren en Schone Kunsten* (Royal Dutch Institute for

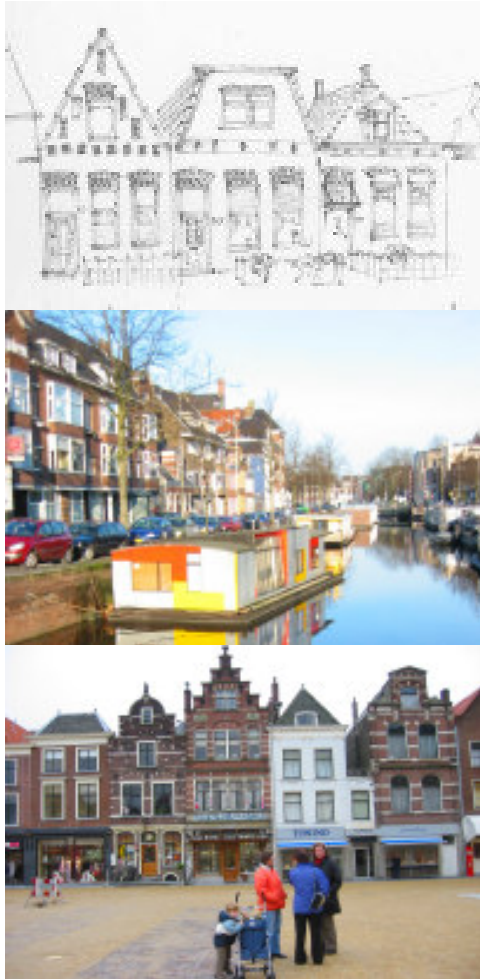


Figure 2: Urban landscape of traditional sailor houses, canals and plazas with typical Dutch architecture in Groningen

Science and Letter and fine Arts) founded in 1808 was a typical example (Ashworth, 1999). Many others were established well into the 20th century; some were private and under royal patronage like *Koninklijke Nederlandse Oudheidkundige Bond* (Royal Dutch Antiquities Society) 1899 and the *Heemschut* (Society for Protection of Cultural Monuments) while others were established with specific interest in building restoration, military architecture, castles, windmills and bell towers or more recently in industrial buildings (Ashworth, 1991). These societies acted as pressure groups and were instrumental in stimulating interest in antiquity and influencing a positive attitude towards surviving relics of the past.

A liberal Prime Minister of the Netherlands declared in mid 19th century that art is not the business of government - 'the government is not the arbiter in matters of art or science'. This was however not to be, because the many pressure groups alongside individual voices garnered much popular support and instigated initiatives from the state. Enthusiasts like Victor de Stuers, a civil servant in 1875 openly attacked the governments' passive position on the destruction of the past. His initiative for inventorization marks the first effort at 'organized conservation' and led to a number of buildings being itemized and documented. It influenced initiatives for restoration and preservation of monumental historic buildings, triggered schools of thought and debates such as the one between J. VerLoren and Victor de Stuers (Denslagen, 1994). The former in contrast to the latter was from an anti-restoration camp, against style imitation that created an original which had never existed. In practice it led to measures of historicity, style and authenticity with development of the profession of conservation architect and to a lesser degree of the art historian. Architect P.J.H. Cuypers at the time emerged the Viollet-le-Duc in the Netherlands with enormous influence on medieval church restoration.

In Europe, during this time political nationalism led to a growing realization that works of art lent prestige to a city and by extension to the prevailing powers, therefore by the end of 19th century a substantial and vocal minority had convinced the governments to act. The government in turn, coping with a newly enfranchised population wanted to define an idea of 'nation' and saw advantage in propagating a 'national heritage' (Phelps et al, 2002).

These developments meant an endorsement of Victor Hugo's idea that 'the use of a monument is

the owner's but the beauty belongs to us all' (Ashworth, 1991) but it was in direct conflict with prevailing state ideologies - private property did not include any obligations to its ownership, even those of heritage value and the government moreover was reluctant to divert public resources or include management of conservation activities within its responsibilities. As a result, effective conservation was postponed until the post World War II era when attitudes and ideologies of the state drastically changed.

2.1 conservation legislation

The conservation movement was successful in generating an early political debate. One such instance is the debate in parliament about the roof of the Ridderzaal (knights hall) in Binnenhof, The Hague. The wooden roof of the hall was replaced with a neo-gothic iron construction in 1861. The ensuing arguments ensured the restoration of the original structure in 1904 (Denslaken, 1994). This conservation sentiment was slow to manifest in legislation in spite of the fact that legal conditions were initiated as far back as 1814 by Napoleon. It is however clear that preservation for long was arbitrary and destruction was legally possible as the early legislations were neither enforced nor enforceable (Burtenshaw et al, 1991).

Political involvement in the Netherlands came with the establishment of a department for the care of monuments. *Rijkscommissie* of 1875, subsequently the *Rijksbureau* of 1918 and then *Rijksdienst voor de Monumentenzorg* (RDMZ, Nederlands Department for Conservation) in 1946 was initially established to make an inventory of national architectural monuments (Ashworth, 2002b). The agenda was primarily inventorization but it was inevitable that it led to establishment of criteria and thus to national inspection systems. The approach at the time was considered a one-time effort of monument inventorization. In retrospect it was only the beginning of a continuous process. The department completed the first national list in 1908 but efforts at designating legal protection status were stalled until more general land-use planning principles and public interest notions in conservation were politically acceptable. Therefore the Monument Conservation Act failed ratification in the years 1910, 1921 and 1955 (Ashworth, 1991). The gap between drawing up of lists and designation of effective protection however did create minimal public support in early twentieth century. It also saw creation of the designation *Rijksmonument* or state monument (Ashworth, 2002b).

2.1.1 monumentenwet 1961: monumentenzorg to stadsbescherming

In the 1960's it was recognized that a new and broader approach to conservation was needed. Rapid post-war reconstruction wrecked havoc on the historic fabric of European cities in a short time and led to the consensus that government intervention for collective goals is instrumental to public planning in the era of increased pressure on the built environment.

In the Netherlands the first legislative initiative was taken with the Monumentenwet (Monument Act) 1961. The Monument Act was a three-pronged approach. First, confer protection through establishment of a national list of statutorily defined monuments (*beschermde monumenten* or protected monuments) together with procedures and criteria for such listing. An inclusion meant restrictions on use and thereby on rights of ownership (Ashworth, 1984). Second, is to insure active protection with increased possibility of government subsidy for restoration. Third, is to recognize the importance of 'ensembles' or conservation areas that extended protection from *monumentenzorg* to *stadsbescherming*, meaning from monuments to urban settings. This notion is inscribed in the Act as *beschermde stads(dorps)gezicht* (protection of urban/village scenes or literally facades) that add to overall aesthetic values and further contribute to the buildings, streets and waterways in the urbanscape (Ashworth, 2002b).

The 1961 legislation was comprehensive in intent and required no amendments in over two decades. Its success is judged from the fact that it aroused intense activity in the field of conservation¹. The concern for *stadsbescherming* and the *public good* stance on conservation within wider concerns of planning cities brought into sharp focus compatibility of form and functioning of buildings, areas or districts and even entire cities. Consequently, conservation developed as a broad philosophy of general planning rather than a reaction to exceptional cases involving piecemeal actions. It is the core reason for conservation of central districts of Dutch cities as no urban motorways and out of town shopping centers were ever built in The Netherlands (Ashworth, 2002b).

2.1.2 historic buildings and ancient monuments act of 1988: towards decentralization

Local bodies, responsible for putting together building protection lists prior to approval by

central agencies for inclusion in the national lists were central to local conservation implementation since the Act of 1961. A growth in popular awareness of the value of historic built environment, conflictual notions of local and national significance instigated local authorities to institute their own monument protection policies, designation of *Gemeente monumenten* (local monuments) and *beeldbepalend panden* ('scene-determining buildings', which are not historic though integral and significant to the urban scene) (Ashworth, 2002b).

The revised Act of 1988 did not restructure the ideals embedded in the Act of 1961 but rather recognized and endorsed an inevitable role shift in favor of local authorities. The move was both for economic reasons and to implement the idea of 'subsidiarity' in decision-making whereby competence, in this case over heritage is exercised at the lowest level where citizen involvement is possible to maximize flexibility and discretion (Graham et al, 2000). Furthermore, since active listing was restricted to very old buildings in spite of an Act² that stated otherwise, the emphasis on the not so old buildings was reiterated and a national inventory of 'Young Monuments' less than 100 years old was initiated. The new inventory included many art nouveau (*jugendstijl*) and interwar - the so-called *Amsterdamse* and *Delftse School* buildings (Ashworth, 2002b).

2.2 organizational and institutional frameworks

Netherlands in recent history has set a tradition for strong centralized government initiative with emphasis on social equality and popular acceptance of intervention in public interest areas such as spatial planning, water management and conservation (Phelps et al, 2002). The political will for conservation works through a tripartite system and derives from the corresponding administrative structure that has a centralized structure but devolved somewhat with the Act of 1988. It includes a hierarchy that emanates from the center outwards and incorporates national, provincial and *gemeente* (municipal) authorities. Netherlands wider framework of conservation comes from the European community, which is also a key source of international initiative in the field.

2.2.1 international and european frameworks

The heritage of the built environment is increasingly viewed as a national and an international legacy with a growing movement to protect it from harm. The Charter of Athens in 1931 was the

first to initiate and develop an international movement for the preservation and restoration of cultural property. Charter of Venice in 1964 expanded the notion to include not only monuments but also sites of historical and archaeological value and led to the foundation of International Council on Monuments and Sites, also called ICOMOS.

ICOMOS is an international non-governmental organization of professionals, dedicated to the conservation of the world's historic monuments and sites. It acts as a forum for professional dialogue and a vehicle for the collection, evaluation, and dissemination of information on conservation principles, techniques, and policies. It adopts charters, holds events, documents and has numerous international scientific and national advisory committees, the latter is an ICOMOS forum of discussion at the country level and helps implement local programs. Netherlands does not have a national committee but heads international committees on Shared built Heritage and Historic Gardens - Cultural Landscapes (ICOMOS website).

UNESCO is another international organization with a World Heritage mission as a result of the convention of 1972. It plays a significant role in developing international commitment through conventions and designating World Heritage Sites. The Netherlands has 7 listed monuments in the World Heritage List with the first one incorporated in 1995 (UNESCO website).

A more potent influence for Netherlands in the field of conservation comes from Europe. There are two major organizations - the Council of Europe and the European Union with the former much more active in heritage terms. The Council of Europe is the oldest and most expansive organization at the European level with a membership of 45 countries. The European Cultural Convention of 1954 is the framework within which the Council focuses in the area of culture and heritage. Subsequent best-practice publications, conventions, charters and designated years of celebration³ have been its instruments to promote cultural cooperation, understanding, expert networking and development of a common cultural heritage in Europe. Netherlands as a founding member is active in the Council and the Netherlands Department for Conservation is partner to The European Heritage Network set up as a permanent information system to keep authorities, professionals, researchers and training specialists in touch with heritage developments in other countries (European Heritage Program website).

Europa Nostra is an outcome of the Council's initiatives established since 1963. It is a non-profit, pan-European umbrella organization consisting of more than 200 heritage NGO's, 100 local and regional authorities and many more individual members. It influences public opinion and the policy of international and national authorities through organization of conferences, awards, restoration funds, forums, workshops, scientific studies, publications and study tours. Netherlands houses an important administrative branch of the Nostra in The Hague (Europa Nostra website).

The European Union on the other hand demonstrates only sporadic interest in heritage, which does not fit comfortably into its present structure. Consequently it takes no policy stands but includes general exhortations in the field. The constraints align with the fact that countries are in pursuit of commercialization of the 'heritage industry' for national benefit (Ashworth et al, 1999).

2.2.2 national, provincial and *gemeente* level

The tripartite framework of the national (*rijk*), provincial (*provincie*) and local (*gemeente*) levels of governance is proclaimed as the one reason for appropriate stimulation and implementation of conservation in the Netherlands. The structure has the capability to implement urban conservation legislation with public acceptance and is instrumental in determining the nature and effectiveness of conservation, rendering success more likely (Ashworth, 1984). The various levels in practice are interlinked and coordinate back and forth.

national level

National role in historic conservation evolved from one of reluctance to absolute involvement by not only setting primary goals, broad strategies but also taking active responsibility in final selection, designation and subsidy for restoration of conserved historic buildings and areas. In addition national bodies advise *gemeentes* on permissions to change and demolish monuments.

In the central government two ministries share the responsibility for conservation, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (WVC) and Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and Environment (VROM) (Pickard, 2001). The former is primary in issues that concern cultural

heritage with the tasks of selection, designation and subsidy. The latter is significant to issues of rehabilitation, particularly when it concerns housing in historic designated buildings or areas. However since 1975, the ministries cooperate (Dun, 2003) and together undertake site designation upon recommendations from concerned bodies and the Council of Culture, which acts in an advisory capacity to the Ministry on all aspects of conservation.

national institutions

The role of the central government commenced with systematic description of historic buildings that led to protection listing. In 1903 a National Committee replaced the department headed by the well-known restoration architect P.J.H Cuypers and ultimately led to establishment of the Netherlands Department of Conservation (RDMZ) in 1946. The department today sits directly under WVC and from an initial mandate of inventorization has grown to a central point for advice, research and know-how in the field. It maintains all national protection records in the official Register of Protected Monuments and is tasked for protection and conservation of both historic buildings and historical environments (Pickard, 2001). In short it is responsible for implementing the 1988 Act⁴ and the regulations governing subsidies.

A state sponsored service *Monumentenwacht* (Federation Monument Watch) was established to monitor and report on the physical condition of monuments, which is available to both public and private property owners of monuments. They also offer owners on subscription an annual check-up of the building and the furnished reports are recognized by the Department of Conservation as technical proof for grants (Pickard, 2001). Others, like the *Stichting Nationaal Restauratiefonds* was established by the WVC as a channel of financial subsidy from the central government to individuals and offers low interest loans. The *ANWB Koninklijke Nederlandse Toeristenbond* with interest in tourism promotion is often consulted on issues of conservation particularly on questions of use (Ashworth, 1991).

provincial level

The province has a Provincial Council and Provincial Executive, which respectively act as decision-making and implementing bodies (NSPA, 1996) They primarily play an advisory role in designation of *beschermdde stads(drop)gezichten* or protection of the urban/village scene,

designation and change in status for national monuments with a sharper focus on regional implication and meaning of conservation (Ashworth, 1991). The province shoulders responsibility of preserving the built environment in their role as final approvers of the *bestimmingsplan* - the only legally binding local municipal land-use plan.

Monument designation in the Netherlands is described in three categories of significance national, provincial and local. The least number of monuments fall into the provincial category but provinces designate these monuments inside their territory and sometimes undertake special projects or give direct subsidy indicative of the significance of the intermediate framework for maintaining a regional balance in conservation of historic buildings and environments (Pickard, 2001).

local level

The role of the local municipal government is justifiably most important for aspects of initiative, innovation and management of conservation within broader functioning of the city and its resources. The 1988 Act imposes more tasks and powers on local municipalities towards the same purpose. The local government similar to its provincial counterpart has an elected Municipal (City or Town) Council and Municipal Executive, which carries out the responsibilities with assistance from local bodies and private consultants (NSPA, 1996). Also, most Dutch towns have a heritage ordinance through which an advisory committee on heritage is appointed (Pickard, 2001).

The task of registering protected buildings and sites has remained with the central government but is initiated at the local level. In response to a national call for inventorization, the councils select objects, which they find of national importance in counsel with the province (most recent being building selections from 1850-1940 A.D.) Their proposal is sent to RDMZ, where it is submitted to the Minister for agreement who ratifies on advice from all concerned - the local council, province and the Council of Culture (Pickard, 2001).

Other tasks and responsibilities include incorporation of conservational aims and policies in general land-use planning, granting of planning and buildings permissions and establishment of a

restoration budget as a basis for subsidies from the center. They also coordinate and advise other local private agencies in the field, playing an important role in informing and influencing public opinion through celebration of annual open *Monumentendag* or Monuments Day, on which certain private historic buildings are opened to public (Ashworth, 1991).

local institutions

Ruimtelijke Ordening en Economische Affairs or Spatial Planning and Economic Affairs is the municipal institution that deals with monument protection and area conservation. Historic conservation is also related to tourism and inner city entrepreneurship with most conserved sites concentrated in city centers, therefore some awareness and promotional activity is also the responsibility of institutions such as Provincial VVV (tourism promotion) and private organizations of city center entrepreneurs like Groningen City Promotion (Kozma et al, 1993).

The *Stadsherstel* is a small scale institution occasionally instated by local authorities to provide revolving funds for purchases, renovation and resale of historic property, their rolling program helps reach out to many otherwise ignored (Ashworth, 1991).

2.2.3 other active frameworks

Historic building conservation in the Netherlands since its inception has been supported by numerous small and large organizations, communities of people and individuals apart from the active role played by international and government authorities at various levels.

peoples' voice

“In Netherlands 61% of the population felt involved in urban conservation and 30% claimed they would personally react to a threat to it in their neighborhood” (Burtenshaw et al, 1991, 155)

In the process of selection and designation the public is not directly consulted, nor have they any rights to redress (Pickard, 2001). Although actual conservation plans and proposals are presented to the people and they have the right to object within a limited time period, there is acknowledgment of the lacunae of people's participation in decision-making, which is debated as a concern for direct democracy as against a representative democracy in light of falling voter

turnouts (Referendum website).

private organizations

People and professionals have organized themselves into private forums and pressure groups that directly work with the government and people. The *Stichting Nationale Contactcommissie Monumentenbescherming* or National Contact Monuments (NCM) is one such organization founded in 1972. It is a coordinating agency for 340 private non-governmental institutions involved in building preservation and restoration. Its tasks include the collection and dissemination of ideas and practices, influencing public opinion and advising relevant government departments.

There is increasing participation from local private companies that find prestige value in association with conservation activity. It is ironic that in the 1970's public authorities were concerned to counter what was regarded as the speculative interest of the private sector in conservation areas but today it is the reverse with a concern to attract such interest within a stagnant property market (Ashworth, 1984).

2.3 conservation policy and instruments

Since the war conservation policy in principle is guided by the general social and spatial concerns of the state, local initiative and European ethics such as 'integration' and 'subsidiarity' in the current coordination and decentralization policy of the state.

2.3.1 conservation area principle

The policy shift from *monumentenzorg* to *beschermde stadsgezicht* as implicit in the legal framework had implication for conservation practice that moved from the architectural to the planning domain. Local councils are required by law to produce within 12 months of designation of a conservation area a land-use plan called *bestemmingsplan*. This 'zoning plan' instrument is generally a building-by-building plan of morphological and land use characteristics including building heights, plot densities and permissible categories of use (Ashworth, 1984). In consequence three distinct trends are noticeable - the shift in focus from large and spectacular to

small and mundane buildings with a high percentage of domestic houses in the protected lists, development of a professional practice wherein conservation is a routine consideration of urban design and development, intrinsically linked to land-use planning and lastly a growing emphasis on rehabilitation and adaptive re-use, which also means selective destruction of buildings.

2.3.2 integration policy

‘Integrated Conservation’ as introduced by the Council of Europe incorporates principles of protection and management of historical and cultural heritage within all decision-making processes, especially in the context of urban planning (Grenada Convention 1985). In the Netherlands it meant a rethink of the conservation approach with its comprehensive integration into urban and regional policy and a broad inclusion into cultural and economic policy (Francesca et al, 1996).

This key concept at the national level has meant coordinated visions and planning strategies as evidenced with the pervasive significance of heritage in the combined report of the ministries of culture, planning, transport and agriculture on the future of urban landscape conservation in the recent Belvedere Report of 1999 (Phelps et al, 2002). The substance of the report is much debated but the fact is that an overarching policy to conserve both the built and the natural heritage is underway.

At the local level integration strengthened structural improvement alongside functional development and promulgated departmental coordination as discussed later in the case study.

2.3.3 urban programs

City center areas in the Netherlands are the crux of the historic built environments and directly influenced by the government’s urban policy, which has revamped twice over the past 40 years. In the beginning of the 1970s, the policy of ‘urban reconstruction’ gave way to ‘urban renewal’ and the latter gave way to ‘urban revitalization’ in the period 1986–1992 and somewhat continues to this day (Vermeijden, 2001)

Prior to the 1970’s the accent was on the expansion of the function of the larger cities as

economic centers and expansion of the historic inner city proceeded at the expense of its residential function. Old parts of the city that were not considered necessary for the expansion of the city center as an economic entity also described by Dun (2003) as ‘economic ghettos’ were slated for selective demolition. Later the main goal was just the opposite, the attention turned to quantitative and qualitative reinforcement of the urban residential function of the city, including the historic centers over and above the economic function and accessibility of the city. The ‘city for its residents’ approach was a social stratagem to ‘conserve communities’ and slow down out-movement to the suburbs. It placed importance on housing rehabilitation for the ‘sitting’ residents, while attracting more to the inner core areas. It is however important to note that this historic housing stock though significant is only a very small segment of the total (Ashworth, 1984) but the incorporation of conservation into the urban renewal policy by government advisory is an apt example of how urban programs integrated with conservation of the historic built environment (refer fig.3).

In the course of the nineties, this so-called classic urban renewal approach was displaced by urban revitalization. The new approach placed the accent on strengthening the competitive position of cities as locations for promising economic sectors and households with higher incomes (Vermeijden, 2001). Market forces since have come to play a much broader role in conservation of the inner core areas. ‘Compact city’ as a spatial strategy to discourage suburbanization implies that multiple values continue to be attached to the historic centers including marketing heritage for tourism gains.



Figure 3: Urban Renewal components

2.3.4 decentralization policy

The most definite policy change is the one endorsed by the 1988 Act towards decentralization. It is described as a thinly disguised economic measure of the central government to cut its burden of direct subsidies and tax concessions for conservation (Ashworth, 1991). It meant local capacity building for both financial investment and effective decision-making in the field of historic conservation of the urban landscape.

Local authorities moved beyond earlier methods of city marketing and urban renewal to create productive partnerships with a new focus and value for public-private partnerships (PPP’s) in

which both local authorities and local firms carry out cultural heritage conservation projects and share risks and responsibility for implementation and management (Francesca et al, 1996)

City Center Management in 1990's developed as a core strategy for dialogue and commitment between various concerned parties to address conflict and facilitate decision-making in the conserved city center areas. A practical definition of the structure is expressed as:

“a structural organizational framework for public and private parties to cooperate in reorganizing and managing the inner city and its activities”. (Dinteren, 1992)

Overall, devolution of responsibility to local authorities has particular implication for what Ashworth calls the ‘second wave’ conservation cities like Groningen (Ashworth, 1984) that had a late start compared to western cities of Netherlands. It leaves them at a financial disadvantage, though they welcome decentralization of decision-making.

how it works: permits, grants, subsidies and coercion

The central government uses the legal instruments of 1988 Act, Urban and Village Renewal Act and the Town and Country Planning Act for conservation rulings. The owners of protected monuments require permits from the municipality to restore, reconstruct or demolish. Municipalities issue these after recommendation from RDMZ, the Netherlands Department for Conservation. Subsequent to which the owner requires a permit under the Housing Act to be issued by the municipality again. On receiving both the permits the owner can use them only after a gap of 6 weeks, a time given to lodge objections. All permits are given according to the usage of the building. In practice it implies that a building that has lost its original function can be reused in another way. It is therefore possible in the Netherlands to reuse and convert a church into an apartment building (Pickard, 2001).

Grant assistance is provided to subsidize restoration and on rare occasions maintenance of buildings. In 1997 a new regulation for restoration grants came into operation under which a grant can be given for restoration projects that are listed in a municipal or provincial restoration program. Every four years municipalities are requested to list the technical need for future

restorations, which are then used by the department to calculate budget for each town. Towns that have 100 or more protected monuments and a heritage ordinance have responsibility for their own budget. The budget for towns with fewer monuments is put together at the provincial level though the towns make a list of priorities and the province takes it into consideration. This facilitates the distribution of money to certain objects that would otherwise never receive enough financial assistance.

Individual grant requests are first put up to the Town Council that calculates costs and forwards it to RDMZ. In case of smaller towns, application is sent to the province, which after verification is forwarded to the department. When a decision is made in the positive, the *Nationaal Restauratiefonds* arranges the payment. These grants usually vary from 20-70% and can be also in the form of low interest loans. Maintenance grants do not exceed 50% of the costs and is intended for objects, which have an unfavorable economic value and are difficult to maintain after restoration.

Tax concessions are used as an incentive to promote conservation activity. These include income tax deductions if costs of maintenance surpass a certain sum, a corporate tax exemption for certain institutions in the field of restoration and housing, and a conveyance tax exemption for foundations for the benefit of restoration.

Coercive measures are also used to discourage anti-conservation building activity with the possibility of police use, penalization with a prison sentence of one year, a fine of maximum 50,000 euros and in the extreme an offender may be asked to restore the building at his or her own cost (Pickard, 2001).

2.4 paradigm shifts: building preservation to heritage management

In a century of activity, historic conservation in the Netherlands and for that matter in Europe has seen a distinct shift in philosophies with implication for strategies and outcomes in the field. Explicitly stated as two paradigms of ‘preservation’ and ‘heritage’, a chronological intermediate ‘conservation’ paradigm is identifiable and ascribed in literature (Ashworth, 1997). It is

significant to recognize it in contrast to the American thought, where conservation is synonymous to preservation. Although in general all three terms are used very loosely and even interchangeably sometimes.

Preservation has had primacy since the value attached to historic nature of buildings in the 18th and 19th century. It developed as a philosophy of building preservation with a focus on large significant buildings, valued for intrinsic qualities. The notion has undergone some fundamental change, in the past it meant restoration ideas as conceived by a few ‘taste leaders’ that really aimed at erasing any restoration history from a building and returned it to the design from the era of its origins. In contrast the growing consensus today is that of *conservative repair*, which means consolidating and undertaking only those actions necessary to ‘protect from harm’ and halt further degradation of the building (Pickard, 2001).

Conservation as a paradigm is the offshoot of the 1961 Act, enacted in many other European countries in the same decade. It adopted the historical townscape as the focus of attention, for no longer was it sufficient to preserve monuments, now areas had to be planned for conservation. The concept of conservation planning strengthened in time to emphasize land-use regulation with the existing historic urban pattern being reused and revitalized. The decision-making passed into the hands of professionals and politicians as the conservation imperative for these areas demanded accommodation of new functions in old forms, one that is captured by Burke’s philosophy of ‘preserving purposefully’ (Ashworth, 1991).

Heritage on the other hand is a significant paradigm shift though frequently used to describe everything associated with the past. It occurred in the 1990’s when conservation activity expanded beyond government capacity in the backdrop of a rapidly growing heritage tourism industry. The focus was on an ‘urban product’, while the reclassification of urban morphology as ‘heritage’ implied the existence of a market. Development of heritage planning and management therefore has become a means to address the limitations to the notion of preservation for its own sake and an end that increasingly supports tourism based consumer-commodification ideologies. The essential dilemma that has risen in any European historic city is to determine whether the beneficiary of such inheritance is the tourist, inner-city resident, gentrifier, entrepreneur or

commercial investor (Burtenshaw et al, 1991).

Endnotes:

¹ By the middle of 1970's 55,000 buildings were listed, either definitively or provisionally, a figure between 'overlisted' Britain and 'underlisted' France. 50,000 of these were domestic buildings (Ashworth, 1984)

² As per the Monument Act - Heritage monuments are: "Objects constructed at least fifty years ago, which are of public interest because of their beauty, scientific significance or cultural and historic value".

Heritage site is: "...a group of immovable objects, which are of public interest because of their beauty, spatial and structural relationship or their cultural and historical value and which includes at least one monument. This does not have to be a protected one. Public as well as private property can be part of the protected site." There are about 48,474 protected monuments and 340 protected sites in the Netherlands (Pickard, Robert eds. 2001)

³ The Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe (Granada, 1985) set the framework for a consistent approach for conservation law and policy within Europe but early efforts such as the declaration of 1975 European Architectural Year made significant contribution with every European country making the effort towards public awareness of the irreplaceable cultural, social and economic values represented by historic monuments, groups of old buildings and interesting sites in both town and country. It was also the year when the Council adopted the European Charter of the Architectural Heritage (http://www.icomos.org/docs/euroch_e.html. and Council of Europe website).

⁴ Archaeological monuments are also controlled by the 1988 Act but are under the purview of the Department for Archaeological Research.

Groningen - a case study

3.0 introduction to Groningen and its heritage

What has been erected here over the years, has also over the years, been demolished. But this spot has always expressed the spirit of Groningen city and region, which still as we weigh the old with the new, will be maintained for future generations whenever there structures have gone (poem written by J.P Rawie, translated by G.J. Ashworth, 2002a p.87)

Groningen city was established in 1040 A.D. It is currently a typical medium-sized multifunctional city with a population of 170,000. In the agricultural north of Netherlands, it is a primary urban center in the region and most importantly home to *Rijksuniversiteit Groningen*, the University of Groningen and also Hanzehogeschool, which together account for a 36,000 strong student population in the city. The university is one of the larger employers along with *Gasunie*, a semi-private company in the field of natural gas mining located in the city. Although not characteristically a heritage city when compared to the likes of medium-sized Norwich in the west European geography, its historic resources are considered significant to the city's image, character and future.



Figure 4: Map walled city of Groningen, 1870's

The *Centrum*, the city center often referred to as the 'Heart of Groningen' lies within the *grachten*, the inner canal and a little beyond. The walled city limits (fig.4) until the 1870's, was one of the primary reasons¹ that even by comparable European standards the city center of Groningen is remarkably compact and distinctive in character. One of the most recognizable features is the main square *Grote Markt*, with the neo-classical 19th century Town Hall *Stadshuis* to the west, the renaissance Gold Office *Goudkantoor* building behind the Hall and the 15th century tower *Martinitoren* on the north-east corner attached to a church (fig.5). The lively square is peopled with vendors and buyers by day, 3 times a week while the city's young population keeps it awake each night with bars, cafes and pubs concentrated around the square and linking streets like *Peolstraat*. The bars and cafes on the south side of the square are housed in beautiful 17th and 18th century Dutch buildings. The main square itself converts

to a veritable living room with spill over open terraces and live music when the weather is good in summer. Shopping is mostly concentrated in the *Herestraat* leading south while catering and cultural facilities are spread out in the city center.

To the north of the Martini tower is the *Martinikerkhof* area with remains of a graveyard surrounded by a number of interesting buildings such as the neo-renaissance Provincial Government administration. The Prince Gardens to the north-east of the tower is a quiet place in the busy city center.

Grote Markt links on the west to the *Vis Markt*, a rectangular open space that literally translates as the fish market and even today caters to the meat-grocery needs of the city and the city-region, vending thrice a week. At the end of its long axis is the Corn Exchange building *De Korenbeurs*, designed with a cast-iron skeleton in the tradition of the Crystal Palace and behind it is the *Aa-kerk*, a church rebuilt in the 15th century in the Gothic style. Together with varying building scales and historic Dutch architecture around the Vis Markt there is much visual excitement. The University of Groningen is housed in the 19th century *Academiegebouw* and also occupies 'Harmonie' and other numerous 17th century buildings from the golden age on the north and north-west of the city center. In addition there are about 30 almshouses converted into apartment units with shared inner courtyards and 200 warehouses or *pakhuis* along the canal - some like Libau and the Hoge der A 5 date to the 14th-15th century when the city was a trading post though most are from the last two centuries. A glance at the city monument concentration map (fig.6) confirms that though the city has expanded, most listed buildings are concentrated in the city center including major symbolic buildings of culture, the arts, the university and other significant structures from the city's built heritage. It is important to realize that in this restricted area is also most of the retailing, city and provincial administrations and entertainment facilities that serve the greater city region of around half a million inhabitants and a resident population of around 10,000 people, mostly in small households (Ashworth, forthcoming).

The city website proclaims it a 'city of culture, knowledge and growth'. These themes are the primary drivers in approaches to planning and management of Groningen, which compete, co-exist and strengthen the historic repertoire of the city. In this study of historic conservation and



Figure 5: Vis Markt from Aa kerk tower, Korenbeurs and a plaza view with people. Grote Markt with music, open terraces, market in front of Stadshuis and Martini

planning the focus of my investigations is the city center with reference to the city beyond, since city is a cohesive entity and planning activity has cause and effect relationship to the whole city and the region.

3.1 conservation legislation: local meaning & implication

The three pronged approach of the national conservation legislation - protected lists, subsidies and *beschermd stadsgezicht* primarily guide the city's conservation approach. Its non-specific nature, responsive to local realities is instructive to local legislative interpretation and has implication for the historic built environment. Groningen's peripheral location in the national consciousness and its regional status play a pivotal role - on one hand, the city receives a lion's share of national support being significant to the northern region, on the other conservation policies developed in the 1960's reached cities like Groningen in the 'second wave'. It meant loss of initial financial support and raised a range of new issues in a different economic, political and urban climate (Ashworth, 1984).

3.1.1 monument protection lists

In Europe, categories of protected monuments are created in line with the legislative intent to define significance and priority. In the Netherlands categorization is based on geographic domains, which create various levels of restriction and also financial means available for renovation and maintenance. The national or *rijksmonumenten* (RM) were inventoried in the post legislative era of the Monument Act 1961 and dated from the period before 1850 A.D. The act left the *gemeente* or local municipality initiative to produce its own list of protected buildings and also publish a policy note for conservation, a *beleidsnota* (Ashworth, 1984). The nature of the initiative was voluntary thus provincial and local or *gemeentemonumenten* (GM) established much later. In Groningen the latter was established through a Municipal *Nota*² in 1984. These categories are not under the direct ruling of the 1988 Act, and are based on a municipal or provincial ordinance, which in practice follows regulations of the 1988 Act (Pickard, 2001). In comparison to cities like Amsterdam with close to 7000 national monuments the number of protected monuments in Groningen is small as seen in Table 1. In 1983 the city council believed that as many as 1700 more buildings can be accorded protected status in Groningen under the existing criteria.



Figure 6: Maps of city center zones (city center, university, Martini, casino, singels & museum quarter) and monument concentration in the center of Groningen

In the 1980's a lack of information on architecture and urban design of buildings from the period 1850-1940 and their need for protection was recognized. A 1986 national initiative resulted in inventorization of buildings from the era since building age seems the favored starting point followed by evaluative architectural, cultural-historic and urban values. 165,000 objects were identified for protection in the Netherlands but only 12,000 so called younger RM were added to the previous 44,000 national and 25,000 provincial or local monuments. In Groningen an additional 289 RM from the period 1850-1940 were listed with scope for future expansion since the actual legislation embeds a 50 year-old building age criteria.

Table 1: Groningen Monument List

Monumenten	1994	2000
<i>Rijksmonumenten</i> / National Monuments	347	636
<i>Gemeentemonumenten</i> / Local Monuments	139	139
Total	486	775

Note: Taken from the Bureau Statistics DIA, Groningen

The listing of monuments has meant studies in aesthetic and cultural-historic value of historic buildings with emphasis on restoration. Likewise in Groningen the *Monumenten Nota* 1972 highlighted these needs and initiated study into architectural quality of its historic monuments in 1978, followed in 1983 with formulation of tasks in the field of information, protection and restoration (Monumenten Nota, 1995). The expansion of list of monuments is a trend that will not abate in the near future though it may initiate scaling of qualitative merits of buildings to ascertain entitlement to protection. It is so not only because of the 50 years age criteria but also due to a growing inclination to protect recent histories including the modern and post-modern, and the belief of many particularly voluntary heritage groups (Pamphlets, Heemschut 2004) that some monument worthy buildings are left out and those listed threatened. The city furthermore believes in staying ahead of national trends, as an interviewee³ claimed - 'we can't wait for national initiative' with need to think ahead of problems and solutions. Thus the pro-active city is only the third to have undertaken to inventorize buildings from the period 1940-70.



Figure 7: Other built heritage in Groningen - Academicgebouw, Pakhuis Libau and warehouses converted into owner residences along Hoge Dera canal

3.1.2 *beschermde stadsgezicht* and urban conservation areas (UCA)

Beschermde Stadsgezicht or protected urban scene as a legislative measure of the 1961 Act resulted in the designation of Urban Conservation Areas⁴ in the Netherlands. The concept of UCA acts as a guarantee that the area's history and the presence of spatial qualities at the moment of designation play a vital role in the realization of the vision of the future which in practice means the following (Kuipers, 2002)⁵:

The protection aims at the distinction of characteristic structure and the spatial quality of the area, which is closely related to the historic development, as being of great importance in the further developments within that area.

The zone of the once walled city of Groningen or rather the city center within the inner canal, the 17th century 'new town' in the north and part of the approach roads to the historical city to the west and south were declared an Urban Conservation Area in 1991. Chosen for its distinctive appearance and one that evoked the past on the basis of its buildings and spatial layout it was recognized as an ensemble and landscape endowed with significant values that were to be considered in future development processes.



Figure 8: Zones of protection in the City Center - 'A' being most stringent, 'B' less and 'C' least

This extensive area of residence, retail, commerce and administration was further divided into three zones (fig.8) of successively less stringent protection. Zone A, where alteration is unlikely to be favored, was not as might be expected from the example of most European cities in the center but composed of buildings facing the ring canal, reflecting the affluent trading history of the city. Zone B where some change might be permitted includes most of the rest of central area, including the whole of the *Grote Markt* district. Finally, Zone C is regarded as a peripheral setting within which some change is considered. In all three zones there were buildings not listed but nevertheless important to the street scene. The concept of *beeldbepalend* or 'scene-creating' was applied to 1400 buildings that were conferred a special degree of protection and although city's monuments with individual protection were mostly within the UCA, they were only a small proportion (Ashworth, 1984).

UCA complements the protective listing of buildings, restricted until recently to the pre-1850 era

with the requirement of one or more national monuments within such areas. It is little wonder then that in Groningen the city center became the UCA. The new inventory of historic buildings completed in 1999 from the period 1850-1940 identified 650 new conservation areas in the country, 165 of them were designated and added to the existing 300 UCA's. In Groningen, Korreweg district (fig.9) was the new addition. It is a complete district of the town from the 1920's and 30's with a well preserved, clear and coherent architectural and space design (Gemeentee Groningen 1998 in Kuipers, 2002)

A Development Plan is a legal requirement of designating a UCA that reflects the town councils vision of the future of the area. The designation itself does not prescribe what that vision should look like and based on local inclination can vary from being *reconstructive*, *conservative* to *dynamic*. The development plan instrument describes the limits of change and lays out what may or may not happen in the designated area with a prohibition to demolish or alter buildings entirely and in part, without permissions from the city. All buildings protected or unprotected within the precincts of the UCA face the practical consequence of the need to obtain permissions for alterations as an obligation to check degradation of the UCA, as they are considered a part of a larger whole and not an independent unit. The surrender of property rights, though contested in the early phase of the conservation movement seems reconciled today though sometimes over a year can pass in obtaining permissions. The owner also has opportunity to raise objections and with decentralization, unlike in the past, permission is now prepared by the local municipalities while the central ministry reviews and endorses their intentions.

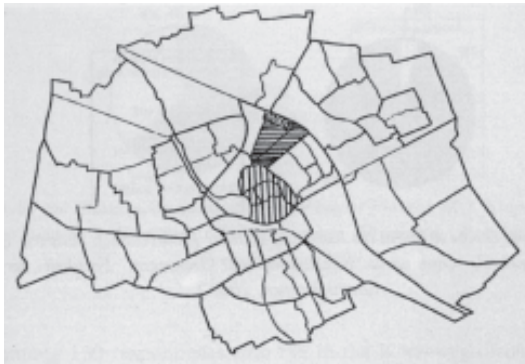


Figure 9: Map of Groningen demarcating the UCA's of the City Center and the Korreweg District to its N-E

The idea of *beschermede stadsgezicht* extended the notion of protection of historic buildings to historic environments with acknowledgement of the aesthetic and cultural-historic value of both the grand and small individual buildings in Urban Conservation Areas. The term *stadsgezicht* or 'urban scene' is short on clarification of intent in the legislation and open to local interpretation within wider conservative to somewhat dynamic visions of UCA's in Groningen. In a debate that vacillates between value of 'morphology of space' versus 'facadism' in the Netherlands, Groningen distinctly believes in the former with emphasis on street patterns, squares, canals etc. The reasons vary from notions of significance of spatial quality discussed below, a long standing development prerogative to build and portray an image of post-modern urban lifestyle and also

the lack of surviving continuous traditional facades⁶ coupled with reluctance (unlike other European cities) to reconstruct them.

3.1.3 local values and its influence on *monumentenzorg*

In the background of lists and UCA's it is important to understand local city conservation as a reflection of various guiding principles and values inscribed in its *Monumenten Nota*. It endorses trends interlinked to various organizational influences and yet is independent in its interpretation of meaning with implication for Groningen's historic built environment.

The word *monumentenzorg* means policy for the care of monuments, which itself leaves scope for imagining how care and concern manifests in contrast to words like preservation that have come to mean prescription to a predictable set of actions. At the same time it achieves coherence and integration with related policy fields of spatial planning, housing and public policy that are influenced and in turn influence monuments and their environs. It also broadens the value of objects and historic ensembles as a weighing factor in all city interventions, taking monument care beyond the mere mandate of protection and maintenance of protected monuments. While, monument protection itself has advanced owing much to emphasis on restoration methods, documentation and archival databases (Kuipers presentation, 2003) in the process creating a reliable and authentic resource of information for owners and other concerned agencies.

'Cultural-historic' value is the prime conservation criteria in Groningen. In a recent city document on inventORIZATION it is described as an expression of cultural, socio-economic, social and scientific development or one that is of emotional value in the perception of the occupants of the city or district. This value for both buildings and conservation areas is linked to contribution of each time period such as the 1930's in the Korreweg district, recently declared an UCA. A distinct possibility of future designation is the Paddepoel area in north Groningen from 1960-70's with its urban design blocks and distinctive architecture since it contributes in a strong way to SPATIAL QUALITY of the city and district.

'Architectural-historical' value emphasizes aesthetics and coherence in architectural design style ascribed to a period or works of an architect, designer or building expert. It recognizes the

history of architecture in the city and its innovativeness over time (Overbeek, unknown). The definitions of cultural-historic and architectural-historic mark a shift in trend from the significance of architectural characteristics to distinctive architectural design and spatial structure as relevant to the historic development of culture and urban design. Increasingly defined in terms - characteristic, particularity, atmosphere (Kuipers, 2002) historicity leads urban development in the spirit of continuity and enhanced rootedness in living environments that contribute to a sense of SPATIAL IDENTITY in the city and district.

The 'genius of city building' and 'flawlessness' as criteria further expand value because of location and spatial relations of buildings, and conserve that which is representative in character as a part of the whole. Lastly, the 'scarcity' criteria ascertain value in the context of a typology, technique or even functional scarcity. All of these criteria help continuously define spatial quality and identity of the city but more significantly are open to debate in the process of endorsing *behoud door ontwikkeling* or *conservation through development* as we further discuss conservation within the precincts of city policy and strategies in the last few decades.

3.2 conservation a planning tool: agendas and instruments since 1970's

It is difficult to reconcile the contradictory goals of town and country planning and *monumentenzorg*- the policy for care of monuments (Kuipers presentation, 2003). It is so because change is a desired outcome of planning and future development while conservation is believed to stagnate. Reconciliation between planning and conservation goals in Groningen is improvised through development, using means such as urban design, conflict management and marketing that simultaneously address planning priorities and strengthen historic conservation.

In WWII Groningen was devastated on the north, east and the west side of the *Grote Markt*, the main plaza at the center of the city. With the need for rebuilding as soon as possible, devastation served as an opportunity to accommodate the 'car', while the modernist style was chosen for redevelopment. Subsequent thinking and practices in urban design and planning affect a series of growth oriented plans particularly for the inner city, which include the Structure Plan 1969, the Traffic Plan and the Parking Plan 1970-75. The traffic plan adapted the existing radial

road system into a ‘tangent system’ and stressed the need to place the ‘stream tangents’ (trunk roads) as close to the inner city ring canal for smooth traffic flow, such that it eventually cut through the historical urban fabric, causing destruction of a large amount of building (Tsubohara, 2003:302). The Parking Plan ordained the construction of a parking garage under the *Vismarkt*, the other significant open space in the vicinity of the main plaza but a political turnaround shelved the plan until a similar one was considered for *Grote Markt* in 2000.

3.2.1 conservation a political and social agenda

The catalyst for take over by the new political left (PvdA); critical of both modernist urban development and the incumbents, was the concert hall ‘Harmonie’. Built in 1855 it had been the seat of the Northern Philharmonic Orchestra but sold to the University in 1963, which in agreement with the municipality and the municipal council wished to demolish the ‘Harmonie’ for university facilities when the new concert hall just outside the ring canal was built at Oosterport. Opposition came from architects and cultural groups joined in by the students who proclaimed that ‘art must be placed with everyday activities in the middle of the city’.



Figure 10: A 1968 view - Grote Markt with the regional bus stand on the right and the 120 car park in the Vis Markt reduced the area to a vehicular traffic island

The obsolete views of the PvdA incumbents and the municipal bureaucrats on the matter meant that some young new leftists, mostly students from the university took over as *Wethouders* in the administrative B&W⁷ in 1970. The new B&W moved away from a political consensus model to a *meerderheidscollege*⁸ organization, which meant 4 of 6 wethouders were from the left group. In this scenario of ‘polarization’ they further advocated ‘politicization’, which meant taking back the power for policy making from the municipal bureaucrats. It led to the rejection of all but the *Structuurplan*⁹ 1969 - a basic instrument which is a city-wide plan sketch of future urban growth aspiration. Their Objectives Document on the other hand promulgated a new planning principle for the inner city:

- free encounter with urban activities, both passive and active in a way that residents of the city and the region can experience this individually and as a group
- in favor of accessibility to the center, priority must be given to the extension of public transport and construction of bicycle routes to the center and
- the behavior of visitors as pedestrians is decisive for traffic relationships with the center

The polarization and politicization of the times according to Tsubohara (2003) is the scenario in which the new left commits to an ideology of urban reconstruction and rehabilitation as against redevelopment and expansion (Ashworth, 1984). Conservation of the city center is central to the ideology of reclaiming the city for its people that overrides modernist emphasis on efficiency and technology. The Traffic Circulation Plan 1977 (*Verkeerscirculatieplan, VCP*) and the Broad Local Land Use Plan for the inner city 1976 (*Global Bestimmingsplan Binnenstad Groningen, GBP*) are instruments used to uphold these ideas and establish what my interviewee¹⁰ calls ‘the tradition of changing the city under the political influence of social democrats (PvdA) that believe in making society’, which establishes historic conservation as a means of physical reconstruction and social rehabilitation with long term consequences.

3.2.2 urban reconstruction to renewal: conservation in management of urban change

The Vismarkt and the Grote Markt at the city center in the 1970’s were testimony to urban degeneration, the former dominated by 120 car parking spaces and the latter next to the regional bus terminal, surrounded by traffic lanes is reduced only to a traffic island (fig.10). The VCP as a move to reclaim the degenerate historic urban center foresees a car free zone but with opposition from mostly the Chamber of Commerce finally a ‘car scarce’ sectoral traffic plan is realized (fig.11). The GBP based on an urban design plan with the primary social theme as mentioned above to ‘strengthen free encounter’ reconstructs qualitative insights into the ‘use concept’, ‘spatial concept’ and ‘traffic concept’.



Figure 12. "Inner city divided into 4 separate sectors (Binnenstad verdeeld in 4 afzonderlijke sectoren)" (Nieuwstad, August 29th, 1971)

Figure 11: Inner city is divided into 4 sectors - to move from one sector to the other vehicles exit to the ring road and enter again, discouraging overall traffic and through traffic in particular

The ‘use concept’ favors intensive land use versus spatial expansions in urban structure and although the emphasis is on retail, catering, cultural activities and service, the demand is also to strengthen residential and communal function in the center. The ‘spatial concept’ favors *herbergzaamheid*, which considers effect of space forming by streets as influenced by width of buildings, spatial differentiation, spatial closure, difference in scale of buildings, variety of roof forms and orientation (Tsubohara, 2003:303). In order to further strengthen the spatial concept, perspective of towers (Martini, A-Kerk & Nieuwe Kerk) and its visual influence area is taken into account for subsequent building design and construction (Appendix C). While, the traffic concept advocates the same as put forth by the VCP. In essence, the city center and its historic

repertoire become the basis for restructuring of the city for its people. Although, historic buildings and their environs seem incidental to the process, they nonetheless are instrumental in forging the urban reconstruction strategy.

The VCP rigorously excluded all through traffic from the central area in favor of foot, bicycle and bus traffic. It also confined car parking to the periphery of the central area, improving dramatically the value of the residential amenity of the central area at the cost of its accessibility to the region (Ashworth, 1984). The conservation also helped arrest ‘flight’ from the city center and reinstated the lost social and human dimension in development. The *Martinikerkhof* area (fig.12) underwent extensive and detailed restoration with effective reconstruction of many of its buildings to their mid-17th century architectural condition, pedestrianization, removal of discordant street furniture, expensive stone surfacing and the reintroduction of gas lighting. However this spectacle of city center conservation with its cluster of major monuments around the largest open green space is quite separate from the main commercial and entertainment districts of the inner city and unlike most European heritage cities it is not the focus of leisure and economic activity. Further the city’s imperative for a multifunctional center ensures that it continues to house residential and administrative functions.

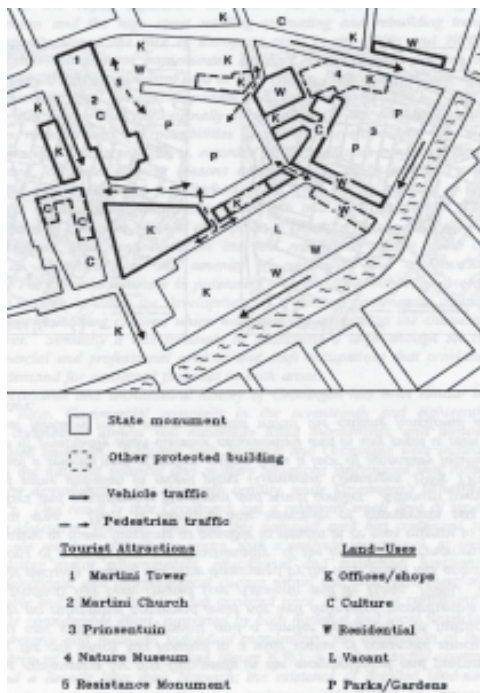


Figure 12: Martinikerkhof is the largest city center open space surrounded by historic Martini tower & church, Provincial offices, Prinsentuin and other residential buildings

In 1986, the national agenda promoted urban renewal or *stadsvernieuwing* in recognition of future urban growth and expansion with the need to contain it through structural improvement. This scenario focused attention on the historic building stock of the inner cities more fervently, that became recipients of huge urban renewal funds available to cities like Groningen. Active from 1986-92 it is in particular synonymous with conservation for it created incentives in the historic city center to preserve the built environment with extensive restorations that accommodated new needs and encouraged new functions for rehabilitation. The long-term benefits of the policy is gauged in the words of my interviewee¹¹ who thinks it ‘stopped deterioration’ and helped old, largely private buildings to be upgraded. His house built in 1920 was renovated in 1990 through a subsidy of 40000 guilders (or 20000 euros), equivalent to 25% of the total price of the house at the time. Such incentives were a lure for most people, even private owners who participated to refurbish the old building stock.

In Groningen with reconstruction instruments like VCP, GBP and subsequent urban renewal investments in its historic past the city addressed conflict in form and function as the former continues to live beyond its intended function. Functional difficulties and changing technologies are a common reason for historic conservation not given precedence in urban planning and development. In Groningen however it acquires significance in the urban management debate and creates ground for the phenomenon of *urban conservation planning* with a view to accommodate change in the existing urban fabric.

3.2.3 urban revitalization and the heritage bandwagon

In the early 1990's and somewhat to this day urban renewal gave way to a policy of urban revitalization. The new policy framework pursued at the national level in the spirit of globalization placed each city within Netherlands (a trend in most of west Europe) in the global market with the onus to strengthen its competitive position. Economic gains and more-market and less-government (Vermeijden, 2001) became prime movers of local policy and planning initiative. Directly affected by such a notion the historic built environment became not only a means to restructure the city but was restructured to better suite the 'City Marketing' philosophy. The redefined conservation policy advocated heritage¹², a paradigm based on market oriented use of the historic to impart a unique identity and a selling point for economic gains.

A spin off from the initiatives of the 1970's was the significance attached to the unique historic character of the city center in Groningen. Subsequently, it emphasized a supply side improvement of heritage which makes for a direct contribution to the making of the city. The idea with reinterpretation, recreation and reclaiming the past was firstly, to reposition Groningen in the Dutch and European consciousness by forging a distinctive identity of its own and secondly, use it as a marketing tool.

The GBP regulated conservation planning in the inner city and was the sole legal instrument when the city center was declared an UCA in 1991. The first comprehensive revision to it was after a span of almost 20 years in 1995. The new document employed the means of a future 'image' (*beeld*) of a coherent spatial structure which aims at the quality of urban design, and 'implementation' (*uitvoering*), which anticipates a set of future decisions. The *beeld* stresses

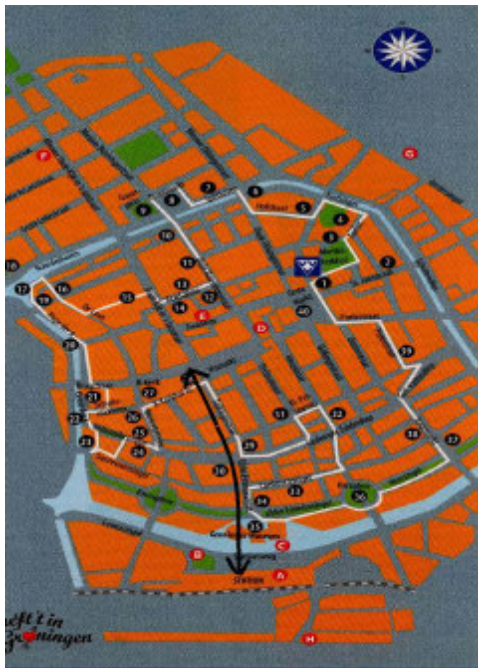


Figure 13: Urban design axis to city center heritage proclaims it 'heart of the city' - from Hoofdstation across the new canal bridge at the Museum and folkingsstraat to Vis Markt

significance of the historical characteristics of the center and the cautious use of elements of the past, acknowledging inner city as par excellence the ‘protected cityscape’ (*beschermde stadsgezicht*) in which the historic must be emphasized in the context of a strong multifunctional residential, commercial and cultural character to truly create a *space for urban life* (Bestemmingsplan Binnenstad, 1995).

The *Bestemmingsplan Binnenstad* for the inner city Groningen along with the *Structuurplan Groningen* act as the umbrella that continue to feed other policy initiatives in the inner city. *Plan van Aanpak* 1989 is one such policy for integrated public open space in the inner city followed and strengthened by *Ruimte voor Ruimte*. The *Binnenstad Beter* 1993 as a continuing policy is wide ranging in its scope and aims to improve the inner city - making it car free, pedestrian friendly, improving parking facilities etc. A number of other policies tackle aspects such as the catering industry (*Horecabeleid*), retail (*Detailhandelsbeleid*), also providing guides to the protection of the cityscape (*aanwijzing tot beschermd stadsgezicht*). The aggregate of such policies within the strategy of urban revitalization moved in the direction of setting forth a strategic heritage agenda of having a ‘hand on the heart’, even proclaiming ‘a new heart for Groningen’ giving the center a clear functional importance and making it a symbolic representation of aspirations and identity of the city, its people and to some extent the region¹³. In short, socio-economic, cultural and physical revitalization of the historic center is believed to have the potential to endorse the new vision of the city.

3.2.4 urban design a pragmatic approach to reinterpret, recreate and reclaim the past

In the above stratagem, it is apparent that the city center of Groningen could not simply rely on its existing historic assets¹⁴ and it is urban design in general that undertook to reclaim, recreate and reinterpret the past with a view to revitalize through a series of projects. The past as heritage in Groningen is evoked much in essence, for it reinterprets and recreates it mostly in the language of structures and designs of the present and sparingly reclaims it as it were.

One of the first initiatives was to *reinterpret* the medieval image of a city wall enclosure, marked by its entrance gates. Art is used as the bastion to interpret the seven historic gates of the walled

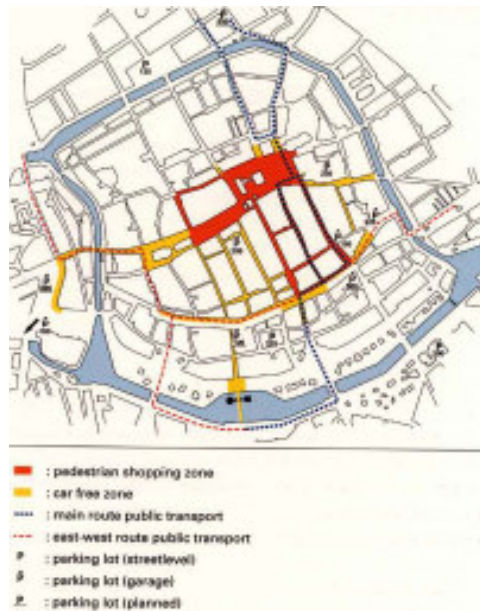


Figure 14: Urban Design plan for the city center in a nutshell with pedestrianization, car free zones, public transport, street level and garage parking

city of Groningen, marking its current city boundaries with art-works. Daniel Liebeskind was chosen for his international fame to endorse a new urban identity and image for the city in this 1991 project. In addition to the project a unified design schema for public open space, roads, street furniture, place name and directional marking was introduced in the city center to *recreate* an imaged past. The renown of the popular ‘yellow brick roads’ and the cobbled stone of the Vis Markt resonates with many and is regarded as a positive step by an interviewee¹⁵ who calls it ‘not a restoration of the original but a rendition of the past’, justified because post WWII construction was a reflection of poor times. Ashworth calls it ‘invented vernacularization’ of the streetscape with a view to invoke the past and strengthen local distinctiveness (2002a).

The city center is declared an UCA about the same time in Groningen. The selective interpretation of heritage is evident in its choice of the 17th century ‘vermeer image’ attaching significance to its mercantile architecture of the *Pakhuis*¹⁶ along the ring canal, declared Zone A category protection. This bias in historicity is in keeping with the need to use architectural heritage as a means to an end. In fact the city invests in dramatic and experimental architecture with the same end, using eclectic evocation of selected aspects of the past whether imagined or not (Ashworth, 2002a). They include the Public Library at *Oude Boteringestraat* by Grassi in 1992 and especially the Groningen Museum by Mendini in 1994. The latter built on an artificial island in a canal between the railway station *Hoofdstation* to the south (its main building built in 1896 and restored in 1998) and the city center, *reclaims* symbolically and literally the center as the heart of the city organism. The new bridge, the rejuvenating *Folkingastraat* street create a lively axis along nodes of the museum, the main railway station building and the center that alters the whole pedestrian and bicycle circulation pattern to announce the city center as the socio-economic, cultural and aesthetic destination to the entrant in the city (fig.13).

Waagstraat Complex

The project is the perfect culmination of the ideas set forth by the city politicians and bureaucrats but more importantly it perpetuates the past through a language of a conservative present and may be the future as with the Coenen Plan discussed later, that reinforces a temporal continuum in the built environment which people themselves endorse.



Figure 15: ‘Reinterpret’ and ‘reclaim’ the past, clockwise - Grassi’s library, Folkingstraat, Poelstraat open terrace, yellow brick streets, cobbled Vis Markt & model Groninger Museum



Figure 16: Waagstraat - life around the complex and Natalini's original sketch

Grote Markt, as proclaimed earlier has operated as 'the living room of the city' for a thousand years. At one edge it is joined by the traditional route into the city from the south and which is still the main retailing street of the city center, *Herestraat*. This street extended along the west side of the main plaza in a short commercial street, the *Waagstraat*. The 1945 battle in Groningen resulted in the loss of *waagstraaat* for the opportunity was taken to open vistas and access to the car. The need for change in the 1990's was a city consensus and four architects were invited to make urban design proposals for the west side of the main plaza. Natalini's revitalization plan, chosen by the public from the four proposals is the only one categorized as 'traditional' in its choice of red brick, a height of 4-5 floors similar to the neighboring buildings and the inner city in general with creation of smaller, intimate public spaces. It involved demolition of the box modernist local authority offices built in 1962, the recreation of *Waagstraat*, a pre-1945 street and creation of *Waagplein*, a new public open space that replaced office functions with street level shops, cafes and upper level housing. The popular voice proclaimed that it 'fitted' with the historic buildings in the vicinity such as *Goudkantoor*, City Hall and the *Martinitoren*; also 'the plan has atmosphere' and 'warmth' (Ashworth, 2002a) a Dutch word for it being *gezellig* - an association that many have with the aesthetic aspects of historic architecture and environment. The people's rejection of the city experts' choice expressed heritage sensibility as an element of new judgment.

An academic critique of the trend that is apparent in this process is that 'cities and towns want to be older – look older than they are'. However when favored by people themselves it raises a wider question and one probably has to understand it in the context of the city as a living entity that uses heritage in essence to harmonize and restore human scale in the environment that brings together various users of urban space. The symbolic meaning, individual and communal association, continuity (that selectively wipes out the interim period) and livability emanates from the past but importantly in the service of a new future.

Coenen Plan

The Coenen Plan was a logical next step in the revitalization process with rebuilding and restructuring of the north side of the *Grote Markt*, which was built rapidly after the war in the now unpleasant modernist functional style with excessive commercial space that created a jumble

of chaotic loading bays, storage areas and parking in the area. The growing dissatisfaction with form and function resulted into a proposal for change though an interviewee¹⁷ posed the relevant question - 'is it allowed that one generation can make so many changes that it changes the whole city'? Justified more so when it reflected government arrogance such that users were left with more doubts than possibility of solutions to the problems.

A political initiative not uncommon in Groningen, the Coenen Plan for redevelopment on the north side with new public spaces, shopping and access was however a compromise with the demands of private investors ABN Amro and Vendex International for an underground parking below the Grote Markt to offset their costs through what they believed increased clientele (Ashworth, 2002c). An array of reactions to the plan is quoted below:

*'distances are so small why should they be with a car under the Grote Markt'*¹⁸
*'a difficult underground parking structure and since water came through at Ossen Market'*¹⁹. *I was skeptical of the 'whole' plan for the north'*²⁰
*'it was small and difficult to reach this garage, not in line with city policy of parking garages around the city center and then walk'*²¹
*'a danger for the church and tower'*²²



Figure 17: 'No Hole in the Grote Markt' poster. Note the underground car park and leaning Martini tower

Lack of consultation and communication created many above doubts among the people that were also aesthetic in nature, expressing issues with the disruption caused with the construction time as interviewees' quoted varying requirements of 2 to 6 years but most were skeptical of the underground parking. The latter became the central issue that united the opposition against the project as people came to believe that it will shake the foundations of the Martini Tower in the vicinity and bring down the one beloved symbol of the city as reflected in the poster punch line 'no hole in the Grote Markt' (fig.17). The truth of people's doubts is pointless to weigh but for the first time in an unprecedented referendum people reproached the city government for faulty judgement and in messing with their heritage.

This incident in conservation represents further deepening of concern than the overwhelming agreement of the 84% who chose Natalini's Waagstraat proposal in favor of the 'real', the old

and the endangered *Martinitoren* or Martini Tower. In contrast some believe it a ‘big misunderstanding’ and ‘a missed chance’, while others believe it leads into an era where heritage has taken a backseat on the city’s agenda since its critical role in the 1990’s. Overall, the general acknowledgement that ‘Maritini is the only symbol that people would come together for’ gives reason for skepticism of peoples’ activism for historic conservation in the future. While, a favorable reconsideration of the historicist post-war reconstruction plan of Grandpré Molière, rejected in the immediate post-war period 50 years ago as being too old fashioned and imitative of traditional styles (Ashworth, forthcoming); and an on going city proposal to reclaim the Zuiderdiep canal, which was filled-in to make way for road traffic in the 1970’s (fig.18) leaves the future open ended. Though it is without doubt that people and private finance, that both played a vital role in the outcome of the Coenen Plan will continue to be decisive elements in future conservation planning.

3.3 the various roles of principal actors of conservation

The concern at the beginning of the conservation movement was preservation of grand old buildings against all odds. Individuals and cultural groups with interest in unique and historic architecture were the motivated protagonists. *Bescherming stadsgezicht* and the significance of cultural-historic value in the built environment let conservation be recognized as an active planner’s tool and a city management ethic, representing not discouragement of development but rather promulgating the same conceived in ever innovative terms in Groningen. The principals at the local level accordingly include a wide spectrum of volunteers who actively preserve, architects as conservationists and innovators, planners of the socio-cultural, economic and physical environs, managers, developers, residents and politicians as partners, whose interests do conflict and the final decision is an outcome of complex and differential influences.

Consensus model in decision-making

It is important to delve into the Consensus Model of decision-making in Netherlands to better grasp the role of each actor. The capability to carve a different outcome in conservation as in all planning according to Ashworth (forthcoming) is a combination of one of the following - politicization, communication (i.e. planning as a form of two way communication between those who plan and those who are planned for), responsibility (i.e. a redefinition of goals and actors

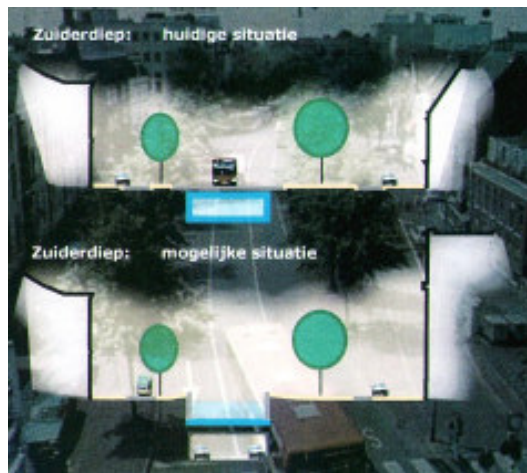


Figure 18: Proposed reclamation of the Zuiderdiep canal, which was filled-in to make way for road traffic in the 1970’s

such as the idea of stake-holders), collaboration or negotiation (i.e. planning as a continuous process of negotiating balances between interest groups, goals and possibilities). The choice varies as is clear from the implementation of Waagstraat and the Groningen Museum projects, the latter did not involve public collaboration and those whose view was obstructed by its construction went to court. Political and administrative motivation is a prime source of initiative, though all decision-making strikes for consensus, even if in a representative government the scope is limited sometimes to reactive negotiation.

3.3.1 political and administrative actors

The role of the new social democrats in the 1970's and all politicians since have contributed to the way conservation planning is practiced in Groningen with differences in sectoral priorities such as housing for the Christian Democrats (CDA) and transport for the Social Democrats (PvdA). The failure of the Coenen Plan raised some doubts, but the fact is that 'politics has the last word' and though heritage is an important element of discussion 'there can be arguments against it and look beyond it'.

Through all changes in the last few decades with successive politicization and communication the city administrative Department of Spatial Planning and Economic Affairs, *Ruimtelijke Ordening en Economische Zaken* (ROEZ) have remained principle actors in conservation. Its three primary branches (see Appendix A) are City Management, *stadsbeheer*; Project Development, *project-ontwikkeling* and Spatial Development, *ruimtelijke ontwikkeling* which further coordinate with the Support and Organization departments. The support department includes geo-information, legal, archival documentation and financial services, while the organization department assists with policy formulation and town-district co-ordination.

The Department of Building, Residence Control and Monuments or *Bouw - Woningtoezicht & Monumneten* (BWM) is responsible for monuments and sits under City Management. Its situational advantage seems that with a mandate for management and an active role in building controls through license and permit regulation the department more directly affects conservation implementation in the city.

At BWM action and knowledge come together as an interviewee²³ describes it a source of co-

ordination, archaeological evaluation, investigative discovery, building history, construction methods, technical building inspections and licenses. An important aspect of its working is involvement at an early stage in initiatives of planning and project development at ROEZ and subsequent co-ordination with all concerned departments. With the use of visual aids supportive of spatial planning, particularly maps for communication, the BWM endorses a vision of a historic landscape through a cultural-historic quality map (*Cultuurhistorische Kwaliteitskaart*) of the area considered for future planning and development (fig.19). The map is the base layer, which is then overlaid with development plans. It therefore takes the notion of conservation beyond the limits of the historic city center to elements of the wider landscape including archaeological values.

The department is also the prime mover of funds in building conservation and as city managers it prioritizes conservation actions, taking pride in the fact that ‘Groningen is usually a step further than the State’. A good example is the Kanjer Plan 1996 - where buildings from 1850-1940 that had lost their original function were given priority in the rehabilitation plan. In the project the department involved extensively with investors, developers and corporations and ensured that new functions ‘suit’ the historic value of rehabilitated buildings. It has also undertaken the initiative of a historic building inventory from the period 1940-70 and with decentralization has responsibility for evaluation of historic renovation plans in the city unlike in the past when it was done by the central ministry. More recently, it took the decision to curb direct subsidy from the center for historic *rijks* monuments with provision only for tax benefits so as to spread available funds and redirect them to the cash starved *gementee* monuments since it was realized that the list of monuments is expanding but money streams are few.

The department’s work is also prohibitive in nature with power to stop illegal construction activity at historic sites. This is derived not from the Monument Act but the Housing Act (*Woningwet*) and can even include a penalty to recreate ‘an old new floor’ at the cost to the violator, though such legal support is found lacking in the perception of the department.

A keen, alert and continued historic conservation input significantly depends on the level of activity the incredibly small staffed department chooses to engage in, made apparent in the words



Figure 19: Cultuurhistorische Kwaliteitskaart or a cultural-historic quality map for a proposed development site

‘good heritage and planning combines in Groningen but is better now than 10 years back because of quality of people in the department’, ‘we are a real team now and take the challenge’²⁴. The word ‘challenge’ emphasizes the importance of self initiative and voices the reality of conflict in planning and conservation ideas. The department believes Groningen is a progressive city and does not subscribe to an all-out conservation approach.

3.3.2 the people and voluntary organizations

‘People have a short-term vision’ is a revealing bureaucratic statement²⁵ for it delves into how worthy as actors are they viewed in the structural framework of decision-making and at the same time how they themselves view their roles in this case on issues of historic conservation. The lack of enthusiasm unless it’s a Martini tower echoes in the following statements:

‘People don’t react much here, unless their own house threatened’²⁶

‘Many people did not like the Stationplein proposal but did not write letters’²⁷

‘I am concerned but not very active’²⁸

‘I perceive a threat to the entrance of the old hospital, am not actively involved but it should be preserved’²⁹

Did peoples’ decisive role in the Coenen Plan alter the perception of their own effectiveness is open to question. The return of complacency is as much debated as the possibility of an irrevocable change that posed the question - whose city? who should make the plans? On the other hand, a protagonist of the plan went to the extent of blaming the imbalanced student population for the failure of the plan - ‘they are here for 4-5 years but projects are for the next 20 years and every student voted against it’³⁰.

The lack of people participation is surprising in the evolving Dutch society where individualism is accompanied with the rise in the idea of ‘I like to have an opinion of my own’. Individual opinion perpetuates into insignificant direct action nonetheless ‘they like to be concerned’, therefore support conservation as active or financial contributors to an interest group. The Dutch society is assumed to be divided into entities representing interest groups that are incorporated into decision-making through recognized bodies (Ashworth, forthcoming). They range from the

somewhat weak neighborhood residential associations, *Fietsersbond* the bicycle union, ROVER the association of public transport passengers to Groningen City Club composed of the inner city shopkeepers and heritage oriented organizations like *Vrienden Van de Stad* (VVS) the Friends of the City, *Heemschut* a national organization with local presence and *Groninger Kerken* the Groningen Churches. Heritage organizations are part of a dozen voluntary groups in the province of Groningen, a number that jumps five fold in provinces with cities like Amsterdam. With the noticeable rise in ad hoc and single interest activism (Ashworth, forthcoming) the boost to such groups is inevitable, especially in a society based on consensual agreement where they are the voice and mediators on behalf of the people.

The interviews with the three heritage organizations mentioned above are used to investigate the structure of such voluntary organizations and elaborate their conservation missions, ideologies, actions and significance as actors in the field. Other non-heritage organizations are equally significant in the city as in the defeat of the Coenen Plan, when people united against the city government proposal that threatened heritage and commitment to public transport in the ‘bicycle capital of Europe’ but are beyond the scope of the current study.

Origins and Missions

‘Government not right, so a group to comment on their policies and building plans’³¹
‘Cultural Heritage: Valuable but defenseless’ (Pamphlet, Heemschut 2004)

The origin of heritage organizations as quoted is with a view to protect the vulnerability of the old and the cultural-historic. The Groninger Kerken established in 1969 responded to the ‘gap’ created by a societal shift in religious values and the consequent need to save church buildings falling into disrepair. It obtained ownership to most churches under its care at the cost of only a single Dutch currency, the guilder. The VVS, an aggressive critique of city governments policies and plans, is the outcome of an architects concern for historic restoration in Groningen two decades ago, while Heemschut is a century old national organization initiated at the turn of the 19th century when modern buildings displaced the old and canals filled up to make way for the automobile rendering the urban landscape at risk of rapid changes.



Figure 20: Impressive information brochures and magazines of voluntary heritage organizations

The agenda ranges from a monument specific to a general concern for the cityscape, with a constant critique of how the new and the old sit together. The organizations do not consider the Monument Act a lean instrument nevertheless their brochures express the concern that it is no guarantee for the monument with a threat of neglect, lack of maintenance, numerous buildings not yet listed and the fact that the ‘municipality is far too inclined towards the new’. They also actively support heritage education through participation in the ‘Open Monument’ day and publication of awareness material, which includes medieval games, music and story telling. A noteworthy example of the latter is a book about a medieval boy who takes a journey through Groningen, which is in high demand in local schools.

Ideology

*‘We support the increasing list of monuments. We dare not, not support it’*³²
*‘Reconstruction or restoration of the north side possible but NO!’*³³

‘Heemschut gives the impression of being against change and stands at the right extreme with a commitment to preserve against all odds. The VVS as moderates argue that ‘every time makes its own history’ and you may preserve but development is inevitable for change is a historical tradition. Not supportive of a copy of history, VVS prefers new in the style of the times, however in scale with the original as if to respect the past though continue to move forward. Groninger Kerken is ideologically committed to preservation as advocates of authentic restoration of historic churches but progressive (and in the view of some even blasphemous) to emphasize contemporary use as a matter of need and belief, corroborating exhibitions, parties and as someone commented discotheques in church space.

The organizations in the last few decades have been critical but supportive of the city’s initiatives and actions as it is widely believed that ‘change happens here and that new and the old together’ affect the total environment of the city center compared to Leeuwarden - the nearest city to the west where facadism is the norm with the outside left intact on a new building.

Organizational structure and finances

The organizational structure of the heritage organizations is simple with a working board that

overlooks the daily and long term functions, while general members engage on intermittent and need based occasions. In most cases retired intellectuals volunteer their time on the board - VVS for one have an ex-juror, financial accountant, historian, physical planners and a cultural policy maker. The Groningen Commission of Heemschut has an architect, who in the past contributed to solution based proactive initiatives of the organization, which also has the advantage of access to its provincial general board and the national head office at Amsterdam. The boards and general members meet a few times a year, with room for excursions and promotional concerts. Heemschut organizes such events at monument locations such as the newly renovated historic locomotive site in Nieuweschans (fig.21).

The financial support to heritage organizations can be both from the government and concerned people at large. Interestingly, Heemschut criticized as those who ‘make much noise’ have much financial support on a work basis from RDMZ - the central government conservation department. Groninger Kerken too has support from the local *Monumentenzorg* or BWM. Annual membership contributions and personal will donations add significantly to the assets. Heemschut with 10,000 members all over Netherlands has only 300 in Groningen alluded to the fact that ‘buildings not so threatened here’³⁴. The Kerken has 6000 members in the Groningen province and VVS 375 in the city. A small annual payment of about 20 euros contributes significantly to organizational costs considering no expense of even an office space. It also contributes in general to to people’s sense of involvement.

Actions and significance to conservation

‘The government looks after the monument but we look after government initiatives’³⁵

‘Different from government; long term, short term and piecemeal’³⁶

‘Moreover others tend to hear’³⁷

Heemschut is a proactive organization that calls itself *waakhond* or the watch dog. It actively identifies neglect and voices concern at the city hall. VVS is however reactive, though both believe that the local government is ‘not bad rather good’. In Groningen a free local newspaper *Gezinbode* is published twice a week - the *stadsberichten* or city information segment makes public all proposals, building plans and permissions with a special monument section that is the



Figure 21: Advertises Heemschut’s fund raiser, educational and music event at Nieuweschans, Groningen

prime source of information. In particular when the city undertakes a new spatial planning policy or proposal initiative, which may or may not be a breach of conservation, the organizations involve in writing evaluative newspaper articles and submit written objections to the government since the overarching idea is to contribute to a good view of the city.

The *Stationplein Plan*, a proposal for the foreground of the main station of Groningen received much criticism in recent times. Individual objections were few though it is believed that not many liked the plan. The city proposed a *stadsbalkon* - literally a city-balcony, raised to accommodate an enormous underground bike park that creates space for pedestrians on the surface and removes the current open bike parking facility that dominates the front vista of the station. VVS and Heemschut jointly favor a small-scale plaza in their newspaper article (fig.22). They argue that the big city-balcony is not conducive to aesthetics of the historic station building, while the underground bike park will create a safety issue which is avoidable since there is space behind and next to the station to accommodate surface parking of bikes. In their view the city proposal leaves the area empty and covered in yellow stone like a desert. In case of such a spatial plan where no historic building is directly affected, the task of heritage organizations becomes even more difficult and they take strong recourse to influence people's awareness and opinion while trying to inspire further thinking by the city through proposals of their own.

*'they know us' (in reference to the local government)*³⁸

*'role of mediators'*³⁹

*'we can change the mentality of people'*⁴⁰



Figure 22: Newspaper article on *Stationplein* proposal

Organizational significance is related to the fact that individual active members are known to the municipal government, they mediate without inhibitions and also influence people's attitudes. Individual members are sometimes invited for comment on city proposals, a cordiality strengthened with the independent, committed and non-affiliated status of VVS and since all work constructively with the city and 'don't say no to everything' it does. Mediation is as important a role in particular the one played between government agencies. *Monumentenzorg* or BWM did not like the Burger King billboard at the main station building but to pressure another government agency is inconvenient. In a similar vain clashes between the monument and project

development departments of the government is inevitable and Heemschut believes it gives voice and support to people in government who look after monuments. Overall, it campaigns to influence people's awareness and involvement in conservation of the cultural-historic and works in the interest of their future. The concept of '*rechtspersoon*' or the right to make objections limits action to the one directly affected in their street and neighborhood but such organizations have the advantage to represent the whole city. In a scenario where local government is quite powerful, their active voice and mediation, however small, keeps the city government focused on conservation. A small highlight of their achievement is the removal of the obtrusive billboard advertisement at Korenbeurs, the cast-iron building at Vis-Markt, converted for adaptive reuse by Albert Heijn departmental stores.

In the strategic and sectoral planning scenario of Groningen, conservation is one of the values linked to the future growth and image of the city that owes much to each of its actors though an imbalance is plausible. Onus on BWM is way above the rest with a future possibility of increase in conflict as monument lists and areas expand though funding avenues taper. Politics too seems to have lost touch with people and appears flexible on earlier stands established as the norm since the 1970's and it becomes imperative that space and incentive is created for people to play a larger role, expanding their cultural and historical commitment to the city. The absence of the zones of inner city such as shopping, entertainment in the view of an interviewee⁴¹ speaks volumes of the 'need for other actors', particularly involvement of users and people at large for as a government you can't plan and implement it all. The introduction of the City Center Management model for dialogue involving all actors and stakeholders seems to be a step in the right direction but is in fledging stages in Groningen.

Endnotes:

¹ The other reason is that the city expansion is moderate owing to its far north location in the Netherlands, away from the *Randstad* area, which comprises cities of Amsterdam, The Hague, Rotterdam and Utrecht.

² NOTA is a policy note, in this case a Monument Note by the municipal government.

³ Interview with a municipal employee from Monumentenzorg dated 7th April 2004.

⁴ By definition of the Monuments Law 1988 (subsequent to 1961 Act), urban and rural conservation areas are groups of real estate which are of general importance because of their beauty, mutual spatial or structural cohesion and scientific or cultural-historical value in which one or more national monuments is found.

- ⁵ Kuipers references R. Berends *Monumentenwijzer*, Zeist: Rijksdienst voor de Monumentenzorg, 1995 p.29
- ⁶ The Battle of Groningen (13-16 April 1945) in WWII destroyed the whole of the northern and eastern sides of the *Grote Markt*, in the heart of the city.
- ⁷ B&W is composed of *Burgemeester* or the Mayor and the *Wethouders*; the latter are political executives chosen from the Municipal Council (until 2002), and together are responsible for preparing proposals for the city and conducting daily administration.
- ⁸ The B&W can be a political consensus model *afspiegelingscollege*, which reflects political composition of the Council with *wethouders* chosen from left to right wing parties. While *meerderheidscollege* is formed by political parties that agree on a policy and together occupy major seats in the Council.
- ⁹ meaning Structure Plan, one of the first such document for Groningen dates to the 1950's
- ¹⁰ Interview with an academic professor at RijksUniversiteit dated 5th April 2004.
- ¹¹ Interview with a middle-aged Groningen resident dated 7th April 2004.
- ¹² Heritage here should be understood to include not just preserved monumental buildings and conserved areas but a conscious use of past association and references according to G. J Ashworth.
- ¹³ This is more true in Netherlands where planning practices have prevented the development of peripheral urban zones with the inner city remaining the focus of retail, services and entertainment. It is more significant in Groningen with its demographically young population.
- ¹⁴ The physical conditions are blamed on the historic Battle of Groningen (see endnote 5) that destroyed the whole of the northern and eastern sides of the *Grote Markt* and was followed by modernist style reconstruction.
- ¹⁵ Interview with a heritage organization volunteer dated 6th April 2004.
- ¹⁶ Pakhuis refers to the warehouses mostly dating to Groningen's mercantile golden era of the 17th century.
- ¹⁷ Interview with an academic professor at RijksUniversiteit dated 5th April 2004.
- ¹⁸ Interview with a middle-aged Groningen resident dated 7th April 2004.
- ¹⁹ Ossen Market is a plaza just outside the inner city canal surrounded by rich houses, where underground parking was built in the 1990's.
- ²⁰ Interview with a heritage organization volunteer dated 7th April 2004.
- ²¹ Interview with a municipal employee from ROEZ dated 6th April 2004.
- ²² Interview with a heritage organization volunteer dated 7th April 2004.
- ²³ Interview with a municipal employee from Monumentenzorg dated 7th April 2004.
- ²⁴ *ibid*
- ²⁵ Interview with a municipal employee from ROEZ dated 6th April 2004.
- ²⁶ Interview with a heritage organization volunteer dated 7th April 2004.
- ²⁷ *ibid*
- ²⁸ Interview with a middle-aged Groningen resident dated 7th April 2004.
- ²⁹ Interview with a Groningen resident, who resides on the periphery of the inner city dated 31st March 2004.
- ³⁰ Interview with an inner city real estate agent dated 1st April 2004.

³¹ Interview with a heritage organization volunteer dated 6th April 2004.

³² Interview with a heritage organization volunteer dated 7th April 2004.

³³ Interview with a heritage organization volunteer dated 6th April 2004.

³⁴ Interview with a heritage organization volunteer dated 7th April 2004.

³⁵ *ibid*

³⁶ *ibid*

³⁷ *ibid*

³⁸ Interview with a heritage organization volunteer dated 6th April 2004.

³⁹ Interview with a heritage organization volunteer dated 7th April 2004.

⁴⁰ *ibid*

⁴¹ Interview with an academic professor at Rijksuniversiteit dated 5th April 2004.

Conclusions

In Netherlands and particularly in Groningen historic conservation is a success in preservation of historic patterns and aesthetics in built-form that impart a distinct urban historic identity embedded in practices of adaptive reuse, effective organizational capacity and integration of economics, social development and urban and regional planning policies in conservation strategy. This research provides an insight into the practice of historic conservation in the Netherlands with specific exploration of a local context such as the city of Groningen. In conclusion the idea is to raise general concerns, assess specific impact for the case study area and interpret lessons for other historic places from a somewhat unique and yet typical west European perspective, where historic conservation is a pragmatic planning approach that emphasizes creation of harmonious living environments linking the past, present and the future.

4.1 some general concerns

General concern for historic conservation in the Netherlands stems from definition limitations of its legislation, the concentration of decision-making in the hands of a few that leaves out various affected stakeholders and the issue of excessive monument and site listing. The range of pertinent questions at this juncture relate to inability of cities and economies to evolve being consumed with preserving the past and effects of conservation strategies on the cultural and aesthetic entity of the city as a whole.

Rethinking the conservation legislation

The success in preserving the urban cultural-historic landscape in the Netherlands is increasingly critiqued with failings in a wider European and global perspective of the subject, articulating a need to rethink its definition of heritage monuments and sites. The law places a monument designation criterion of 50 years, which is problematic for younger significant buildings that may need protection. Groningen Museum, though not currently under threat is an example of how recent buildings with symbolic meaning for city residents cannot receive protection as a monument for another 40 years. Further, the protection of areas whose significance is based on

combined cultural and natural values does not fit into the legal criteria easily. It is a source of concern in the context of ongoing high degree of urbanization and agricultural changes for it leaves the natural environment, particularly rural vernacular architecture vulnerable (Netherlands ICOMOS website).

Need for inclusive decision-making

*'one person at RDMZ, Rob de Jong made the decision'*¹

*'ministerial influence included Heidi Dancona's advise that Zanastral Building be on the tentative list' - in reference to how world heritage sites were chosen in the Netherlands*²

The need for more inclusive decision-making is evident in the Netherlands. In rest of Europe people actively lobby to enlist local assets as world heritage sites, in Wadden Islands, Netherlands they vehemently opposed the idea since they were unsure of the consequences. The problem was made acute with the limited scope for dialogue and communication between various actors and stakeholders (Aa et al, 2004).

A problem of excess

The expanding list of monuments and sites is a cause for concern because on one hand financial resources are thinning and on the other hand there is tendency to neglect with excess heritage listing. The current approach of ongoing management averts the crisis with a combination of pragmatic methodology, evaluation and prioritization programs such as the Kanjer Plan for functional rehabilitation of historic buildings but one is skeptical of the future.

Is conservation inhibiting the future?

On the whole there is brewing frustration with the growing obsession with historic conservation and the inability of cities and economies to evolve. The question today is, how the capacity to change itself must be preserved (Ashworth, 1991). The concern is exacerbated as conservation policy did not come to fulfill general planning goals as highlighted in Table 2, though a planning methodology to conservation was adopted. It provides scope for future conflict in the face of rapid change and development.

Table 2: Stated objectives of conservation plans in the Netherlands

Objective	% of Plans
"Preserve character of area"	94
"Sustain inner city functions"	44
"Maintain the housing function"	40
"Regulate traffic and parking"	40
"Improve housing quality"	32
"Develop recreational facilities"	20

Note: Taken from Ashworth, G.J 1991: Heritage Planning: Conservation as the management of urban change

What of the city as an entity?

The last few decades of intensive conservation of the city's inner core areas raises the need to rethink the city as a holistic socio-cultural and aesthetic entity. In transition from the core outwards what does the visual and morphological differentiation mean for the city and its residents? How can isolated segments of heritage beyond the center fit into the city fabric? In Groningen these questions are valid and require further investigation.

In conclusion, the general issue in the Netherlands is a case of balance of interests between law and practice, preservation and change, designated heritage and others, local and central official jurisdictions and also between public and private interest captured in essence by this statement:

“The struggle for the preservation of the past has been won; the struggle now is with the consequences of that victory” (Ashworth, 2002b)

4.2 an assessment of local implication and impact

Groningen gives an insight into the implication of local conservation strategies and its impact on the city and its residents. The transformation of the historic city center into a unique mall experience creates spatial community value, at the same time it creates social imbalances and issues of residential livability. The financial limitations of the city imply that it needs to aggressively face the challenge of reuse of historic buildings and expand public and private interest to sustain

conservation activity.

Integration at the local level between urban spatial policy, housing, public policy has ensured a living culture in the historic environs of the Groningen city center, which is not the case in most commercialized heritage cities of Europe tourism wiping out multifunctional and more specifically residential use. In Groningen the trade off between a living historic environment and tourism benefits will be at the forefront of debate in the future, evident in the observation of an interviewee³ that a mere 5% of the target audience is tourists. There is need and scope to expand this target group for profit than is the case at the moment. In such circumstances undoubtedly cohesion and balance between social, economic and spatial values will be significant for a sustainable cultural-historic environment of Groningen city center.

Transformation to a unique mall and its community value

The aim of conservation planning is the economic revitalization of the city center, which ensured to keep out the 'doughnut' effect of development sprawl in Groningen. Although national regulations have relaxed in recent times with freedom for Malls to locate outside, cities like Groningen continue restriction on location of shopping and related activity to suburban areas. The special status of the city center therefore is a combination of entertainment and shopping attractions like theater, music, an opera in the *Grote Markt*, vending, cafes, open terraces and selling of specialty goods and brands, which creates an *unique mall* experience. An incredible 60% of shopping in the city and the city-region is carried out at the center (DIA, 2004). The suburban location of some of the city center activities is inevitable in the future and a choice perhaps is retention through selective specialization, a concept in direct conflict with the current multifunctional approach.

The transformation to a unique urban outdoor mall from a community perspective asserts a positive use of space. In contrast to exclusive enclosed malls, this space of individual and shared experience is accessible to all age and income groups and makes for a lively city center 24 hours. A concern is people with disabilities, for cobbled squares and brick pavements make independent access difficult, and access ramps are rare. It is only with the help of friends and relatives that the disabled citizens avail community association and use value of the center.

Livability and residential value

*'4 minute walk to the office, 1 minute to the supermarket, 3 minute to the railways'*⁴

*'possibility of doing things in the evening'*⁵

*'I would like to live in a monument'*⁶

The ten thousand people who live in the historic center favor its central access, liveliness, historic monuments and its environs in general. This aspect of livability hinges on more than some of the above mentioned conveniences and choices. A flip side of the emphasis on entertainment, shopping and special tourism promotion activities such as the flower show (fig.23) in the interest of the city-region and international tourism is that locals avoided the city center on the day of the show.



Further, an objective view reveals a precarious compromise hinged on the large hearted ideal of regular city center users and residents for whom threat of loud cafes, a drunk breaking a window is viewed in terms of 'you take it for granted' and 'it happened once in 14 years'⁷. It is true that 'different sorts of people choose different' but social balance and sociability of the city center is not given serious thought. A strong student population and their growing residential demand are problematic to social balances. It means more noisy cafes and *studentized gentrification* since it is believed that one who resides in the city center has 'made it'⁸ as student residence in the center is possible only through invitation, which needs social clout. It is difficult to make a value judgment but there is cause to believe that an increase in demand of student housing hinders housing rehabilitation at the center. In all probability it does not offset costs to the owner who makes accommodative changes to the old logic of plans. The resultant continued property vacancies are reason for some insecurity in the living environment, although the center is in no way unsafe.

*'living quarters have no room for bikes' and 'visitors cannot park'*⁹

*'I will not live in Waagstraat personally, cafes too loud'*¹⁰



Figure 23: Flower Show crowds from the region and across the German border in the Vis and Grote Markt, Groningen March 2004

The sentiment of other social groups in the center express above concerns, though connoisseurs (Ennen, 2000) of the historic center fight all odds, some prefer the convenience of locations

peripheral to the center with a good access to it, palpable in the words 'it is even more advantageous since no bad things - inner city loud at night, we sleep easily at 10 'o' clock, the car is also a bit easier to keep and use'¹¹. In such a scenario livability and residential values need to be reexamined, otherwise there will be further alienation like in most of Europe, with catering to the profit motive of the tourism industry.

Reuse the single largest challenge

'no logical plan of historic buildings -they are narrow, deep and have lots of stairs'¹²

'franchises look for square metres, it doesn't matter if a historic building or not, and it is difficult to find square metres in the city center'¹³

'only smaller exclusive shops can afford historic buildings and need it for presentation'¹⁴

Old buildings in the city center with a narrow frontage, deep plans and two to four floors were designed to accommodate shops on the first floor and interconnected living quarters and storage above. The simple logic of earlier times is reason for a current vacancy rate of more than 50% above the shops at street level, which also leads to the fear of museumization of parts of an otherwise living city center. Lack of private access is a more acute drawback when housing is the most common adaptive reuse of the top floors. In addition, prohibitive costs and time required for permissions dampen plans for remodeling buildings, while space and affordability is also an issue. One can acquire a room in 500 euros in the center for the same price of a house outside. In any case families with children prefer a suburban location, as there is a notion that 'inner city is not a place for children to grow up'¹⁵.

In Groningen the desire for historic environs of central city space outweighs the desire of inhabiting its old buildings. City center residents widely hold the view 'I did not want maintenance so not an old historic house' and for other stores and franchises it is 'primary to move into the inner city' but only a small group likes historic buildings since rebuilding to needs is impossible, too expensive or restrictive. An appreciation of the environment is highlighted in the recent move to the center of ICT - a computer firm at *Janstraat* that wanted to give its young employees, mostly DINKS¹⁶ a flavor of the city center's atmosphere. Living and working in its historic backdrop with cafes and open terraces is an attraction but availability of space is a

constraint. High rent paying franchises constantly demand more space, which is a rare commodity in the center. The Albert Heijn departmental store (fig.24) maintains the narrow exterior facades as interiors are completely remodeled to integrate various buildings into one space. It is a rare example though much needed to stimulate reuse.

Local government receives a good share of the blame as according to a source ‘they do not stimulate reuse, are slow to process permissions and their steps are not concrete enough’¹⁷. The problem of space use according to the interviewee is further jeopardized, as it requires talking to many owners and the tradition of little or no participation in local governance makes it a daunting task. The Kanjer Plan success of compatible reuse of old schools and industrial sites conceivably owes much to the fact it dealt with large structures unlike the dominance of small modest buildings in the center that are expensive to maintain, difficult to adapt and located in vehicle inaccessible areas. The imperative of adaptive reuse is hand in glove with the need to promote maintenance. The latter is a parallel challenge, accentuated in view of lack of subsidies, which leaves the city little power to force owners to maintain property.

Expanding lists of monuments and limited finances

‘Realize more monuments less money’¹⁸

‘Groningen special rule – no money for monuments but tax benefits only and so people can have difficulties as everywhere else you get money on priority’¹⁹



Figure 24: An example of adaptive reuse where three contiguous buildings were remodeled to integrate the interiors and accommodate an Albert Heijn departmental store

Groningen in the last decade doubled national monuments to 636 and in addition to the city center Korreweg district was declared an urban conservation area. In future at least 80 buildings will be listed for protection from the period 1940-1970 and there is fragmented discussion of the need to protect Groningen Museum built only a decade ago. It implies an increase in ad hoc planning and management at the local level replacing olympian visions that motivated national conservation laws (Burtenshaw et al, 1991) and is cause for concern since big money streams have gone dry. One places the blame for the current situation to an extent on the initial excess and money speculation in the field. Now the strategy is to encourage stringent use and distribution of resources.

In Groningen restoration of national monuments is no longer a direct subsidy as in other cities and provides merely a tax benefit. It has helped create funds to mitigate the worsening condition of local monuments, which have no monetary support unlike the national monuments.

The city tax structure being restricted to property tax alone with no sales tax is a probable cause of limited local capital for conservation. In the past it ensured that the historic fabric is not compromised with no incentive for the city to accommodate a big box IKEA but today there is a need to rethink to reduce dependence on national and corporate funds. The time is right for the overall strategy to include active contribution of people, who continue to show financial reluctance as evident in the research study of the newly designated urban conservation area of Korreweg (Kuipers, 2002).

Need for more actors

Local decision-making as evidenced earlier, is in the hands of politicians and bureaucrats, while people at large have little or no direct role. The lack of public participation without doubt is unfavorable to the planning process and ownership of the plan-components. The failure of Coenen Plan and zoning²⁰ in the city center according to an academician underscores the desperate need, as otherwise plan implementation is impossible.

Ownership of historic buildings is predominantly in private hands. It is therefore vital to develop and sustain private interest, awareness and initiative. The inability to involve various stakeholders only hinders the desire of all to build 'top class development in and around Grote Markt'. In recent times to facilitate wider participation of interest groups and communication in decision-making, a City Center Management (CCM) organizational structure was established in Groningen. Its status is unclear, though in the Dutch experience lack of participation from residential associations is a significant shortcoming of CCM and it ends up as no more than a formal consultation between the city council and inner city retailers (Ennen et al, 1996).

4.3 what lessons are there for others to learn?

The Netherlands and Groningen in particular impart valuable lessons for others working and struggling in the field of historic conservation. The emphasis on ‘historic’ as a public good is a key element that is established through comprehensive legal measures, financial support and integration into urban design and planning. Decentralization and conflict resolution approaches further strengthens the cause, as it helps build capacity to realistically tackle issues in conservation. While, a gamut of methods and tools in documentation and monitoring, communication, checks and balances, and aesthetics in renovation and adaptive reuse qualitatively enhances historic conservation making it work as a contemporary strategy of urban development and sustainability.

The ‘historic’ as a public good

The historic conservation movement being part of a cultural movement advocates primacy of the past in the interest of the present and the future. In the case of Netherlands such beginnings established immense value of the past for its aesthetics, knowledge and identity aspects and established the ‘historic’ as a *public good*. The concept of public good helped overcome the dominance of private property rights that were in conflict with protection of heritage and concretized the idea of beauty in the living environment, influencing worth of the past in the minds of the people and initiating government action.

Comprehensive legal measures

The nature of legal measures is instrumental to the outcome for conservation and the Dutch Monuments Act 1961 comprehensively tackled the issue. It provided for monument protection listing and the means to ensure the same through financial assistance and institutional support of agencies such as RDMZ, which from an initial mandate of historic building inventorization is today the central point for advice, research and know-how in the field. It also extended protection to historic ensembles, shifting focus from the spectacular to small structures that are representative of a wide community culture, architecture and historic values which otherwise would have easily given way to development prerogatives. In such a scenario historic conservation became commonplace in the mindset of people and helped preserve entire old city centers, establishing continuity and a sense of place in the urban landscape.

At the center of urban design and planning

The fact that conservation of the historic built environment sits at the intersection of architectural conservation, urban design and planning is of eminent consequence. It gives prominence to aesthetics and unity of design in the urban landscape, an incentive for investment in the refurbishment of the past with continuous evaluation of spatial quality and functional land-use as appropriate to contemporary human environments. The *conservation through development* paradigm as highlighted in the urban design projects of Groningen has built coherence in the living environment, reinforcing spatial quality and identity. A significant achievement is the innovation in vocabulary for conservation restoration and design. In the area of harmonious aesthetic agreement of the new with the old I feel that much has been successful (fig.25&26). Restoration architects have continuously improved the methods of repair and renovation creating an information base for *conservative repair* following the overarching principle of authenticity and integrity in architectural conservation practice.

A wide and active framework of influence is an asset

The nature, interaction and coordination of policy and implementation agencies in the case of Netherlands is shaped by vast access to innovative thinking, research, know-how and possibilities of exchange and learning. Europe is a think-tank for historic conservation and of utmost significance for the Netherlands. It is an immense resource that promotes historic conservation through awards, competitions and influential performance events such as declaration of 1975 as a 'heritage year'.

In the Netherlands, national ministerial agencies involved in historic conservation include Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and also Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and Environment. Together, their pervasive subject matter permeates cultural-historic value issues and facilitates interface of historic environments with evolving spatial needs. The domain of spatial planning moreover is an established tradition for over half a century and using it as a means to tackle conservation favorably addressed inherent conflicts in the field.

The provincial agencies in an advisory capacity maintain a balance in the region with resource distribution to cover monuments in small villages while keeping watch on city conservation efforts



Figure 25: Building a vocabulary of aesthetic harmony between old and new architecture

through approval of local land-use plans. The city agencies, both political and the bureaucratic Department of Spatial Planning and Economic Affairs find support for conservation from organizational hierarchies but embrace strong localized interpretations, methodologies and priorities. The aim is to strengthen identity and respond to local needs. In doing so heritage realistically identifies with local aims, aspirations and limitations.

In short, historic conservation has the advantage of being in the middle of cultural, spatial and economic agendas of local, regional, national and European networks. It alleviates the isolation evident elsewhere and helps set growth priorities, incorporating conservation principles in all affairs pertaining to physical and economic change and development.

Integration a key element

Integration is the coordination of visions and strategies at all organizational levels with heritage as a factor of weighing in development and growth intervention. It means historic conservation is comprehensively included in all urban and regional policy and is broadly sketched into cultural and economic policy at all levels. The inherent problem solving approach is imperative in the context of the Netherlands, where land is a precious commodity and rehabilitation of the old building stock is very relevant. It is also an asset in the context of current limitations of energy resources and growing world populations.

Consensus and conflict resolution

Polder Model is the term used to refer to the world famous Dutch model of consensus in which dialogue and conflict resolution are key to all decision-making. In bringing various stakeholders with conflicting interests to find a solution it assists in a less prejudiced communication of issues in historic conservation, although people's voice is somewhat weak and needs substantiation.

Decentralization builds efficiency and local capacity

The case of Groningen, Netherlands underlines the significance of decentralization, as it is invaluable in building bureaucratic efficiency and a culture of care for the historic fabric. It cuts into plan permission delays and inculcates a responsive culture of local decision-making building local capacity to tackle long term issues in the arena of historic conservation. The decentralized



Figure 26: Juxtaposition of old and new architectural elements in interior and exterior space

efforts reflect values that people support and are likely to actively involve and sustain, which is consequential in the finance strapped environment of the present.

Adaptive reuse is an essential strategy

Buildings continue to live past their functional use and infrastructure suitability. In the interest of conserving cultural aesthetics and building knowledge of the past it is important to aid adaptive reuse to ensure the building structure a continued life in the contemporary environs. The domain of remodeling and restoration has a daunting task of maintaining a balance between the old and the new with development of infrastructure and an aesthetic vocabulary that does not compromise cultural-historic values. Lichfield (1997) is of the opinion that if a solution can be found to maintain asset value with acceptable adaptive reuse, we can see conservation as a socio-economic process adding to urban sustainability. The loss of historic cultural use of space is a casualty that we may contend with though it is important to stress, at least in informational terms as one accepts the reality that stagnation of space is unnatural in the context of cultural and societal changes.

A system of checks

The local agencies are independent in initiative and interpretation of historic conservation though exchange between national and local ideologies and effort is evident. In such a scenario and with increasing decentralization a system of checks to monitor activity is important. The provincial approval of local plans and state sponsorship of Heemschut are some of the means chosen. Ironically, Heemschut is one of the staunch voluntary heritage agencies, calling itself the 'watchdog'. It is often criticized for being noisy and vehemently pro-conservation but it most definitely helps build opinion and encourages a system of comprehensive checks as it has presence in all regions and cities.

Documentation research and monitoring

The documentation of a historic discovery, remodeling and restoration is integral to information creation and research in Groningen conservation and there is increased stress on standardization, which assists with simpler local fund allocation procedures. The physical condition of protected monuments is monitored through *Monumentenwacht* (Monument Watch) - a national institution

whose service is available to public and private monument owners alike and its appraisal is taken as proof in application for public restoration funds. In essence continuous documentation research and monitoring are the two arms of conservation and plans are afoot to enhance sharing of networks of research, know-how and documentation by building transparent and accessible digital resources of local and national archival databases.

Visual communication support

To the use of visual instruments of mapping, geo-information and graphic presentation is ascribed some of the success of communication and implementation in conservation. The planning and monument departments produce extensive illustrative information in innumerable reports, presentations and pamphlets (see Appendix B). Access to these and other general literature on the city is easily possible at the Municipal and VVV tourism offices, which in Groningen is in the heart of the city center.

Terminology has the potential to facilitate a positive attitude

The use of specific terminology is important. The word *conservation* to me seems a favorable expression that facilitates communication. It conveys flexibility in the face of real world issues of rapid development. While its inherent, less rigid inclination promotes negotiation between various stakeholders. The word *monumentenzorg* or the care of monuments again is an all-embracing term and integrative in approach, for it gauges the historic environment through a human perspective of care.

Financial and other support systems

Innovative and proficient financial and procedural systems have a far-reaching effect. In Groningen procedures, alleged to be time consuming are continuously simplified with standardization of building check-ups, renovation permissions etc. However decentralization seems to bring some hope of efficiency. Grants, tax subsidies, revolving loans are among the various available streams of financial support that encourage historic restoration and maintenance. *Stadsherstel* is an example of an innovative promotional idea that helps conservation through purchase, renovation and resale of historic property.

The Cultural Factor

The overwhelming influence of cultural attitudes cannot be discounted. Whether inherent or cultivated over time, it makes a huge difference to the whole idea of historic conservation. It is a positive force in the same vein as the fact that Groningen is the 'bicycle city of Europe' and each resident loves to ride and takes it as a matter of pride. The cultural heritage and historic environs too find initiative and support in the love of the people for high densities of the historic city center, a love of open space in plazas and terraces, and the propensity to live in spite of various deterrents such as student raucous, begging and a drunk breaking a window. Issues such as these are sidelined by resident interviewees as part and parcel of life and its various aspects.

Endnotes:

¹ Interview with an academic researcher at RijksUniversiteit dated 9th March 2004.

² *ibid.*

³ Interview with a municipal employee from ROEZ dated 8th April 2004.

⁴ Interview with a municipal employee from ROEZ dated 6th April 2004.

⁵ *ibid*

⁶ Interview with a heritage organization volunteer dated 7th April 2004.

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ Interview with a student at Rijksuniversiteit dated 10th April 2004.

⁹ Interview with a heritage organization volunteer dated 7th April 2004.

¹⁰ Interview with a municipal employee from ROEZ dated 6th April 2004.

¹¹ Interview with Groningen resident living on the periphery of the inner city dated 31st March 2004.

¹² Interview with an inner city real estate agent dated 1st April 2004.

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ *ibid*

¹⁵ *ibid*

¹⁶ Double income no kids

¹⁷ Interview with an inner city real estate agent dated 1st April 2004.

¹⁸ Interview with a municipal employee from Monumentenzorg dated 7th April 2004.

¹⁹ Interview with a heritage organization volunteer dated 7th April 2004.

²⁰ City center segmented into six zones: shopping, university, entertainment, residential, recreation and Martini.

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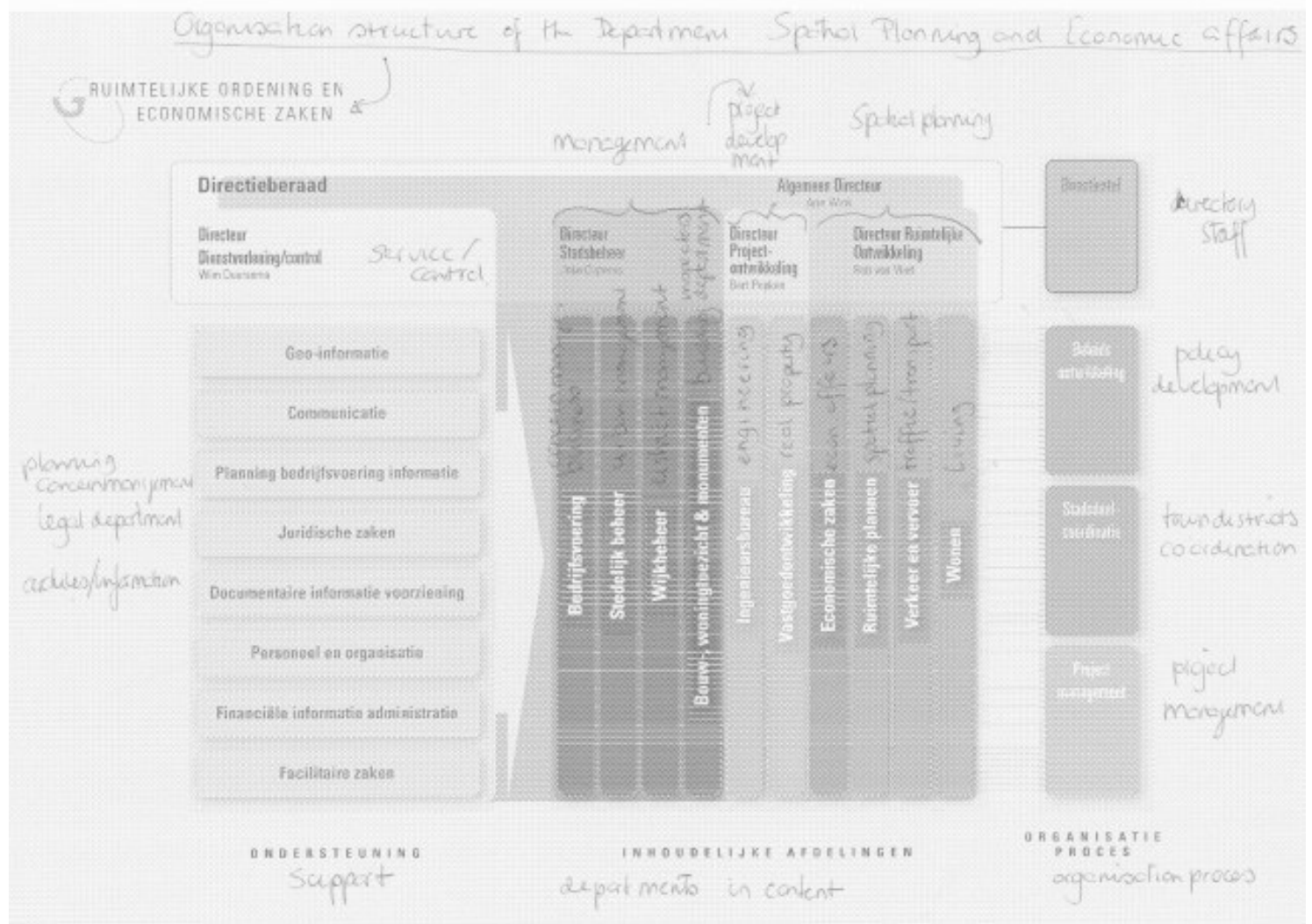
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Appendices

Appendix A: Structure of the municipal Department of Spatial Planning and Economic Affairs



Appendix B: Examples of the innumerable reports and pamphlets generated by Groningen city



Appendix D: Parking Plan for the city center, Groningen

