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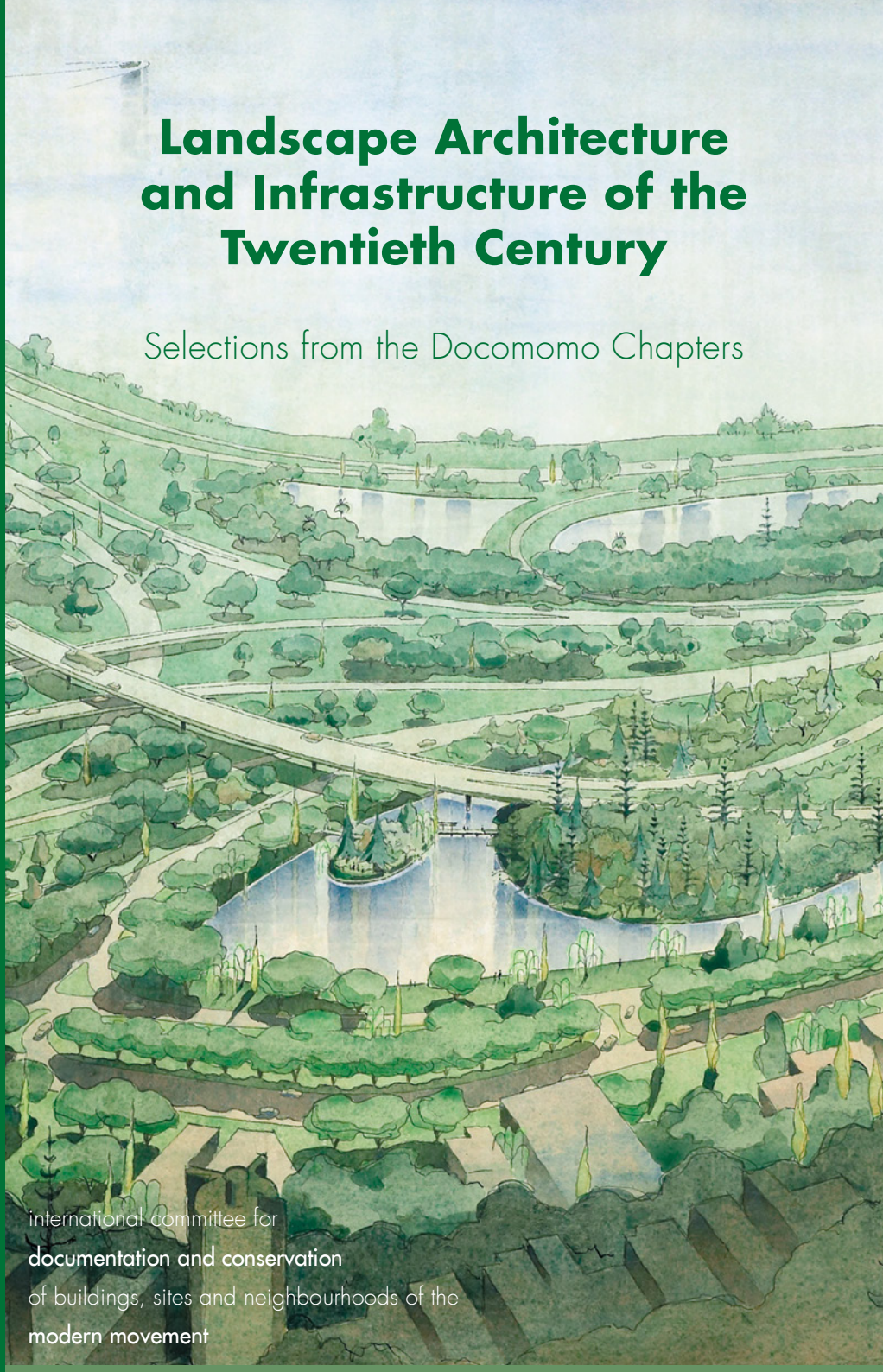
Landscape Architecture and Infrastructure of the Twentieth Century

Selections from the Docomomo Chapters



international committee for
documentation and conservation
of buildings, sites and neighbourhoods of the
modern movement

editors: Jan Haenraets, Andrew Saniga, Gulnur Cengiz

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Jan Haenraets
Andrew Saniga
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(editors)

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Editors: Jan Haenraets, Andrew Saniga, Gulnur Cengiz

Editorial assistance: Miles Glendinning, Katti Williams

Coordination: Jan Haenraets

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Delft University of Technology – Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment
P.O. Box 5043 | NL - 2600 GA Delft
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Jan Haenraets *is a landscape architect and teaches at the Preservation Studies Program at Boston University. He is a co-founder of Atelier Anonymous-Global Landscape Foundation, Vancouver, BC. His current research explores global approaches to historic landscape preservation, ecological sustainability, preservation of twentieth-century designed landscapes, and Mughal landscape heritage in Kashmir. He was a Fellow at Dumbarton Oaks, Harvard University, and the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture at MIT, and Head of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of the National Trust for Scotland. He is a member of the Docomomo International Specialist Committee on Urbanism and Landscape.*

Andrew Saniga *is Associate Professor of Landscape Architecture, Planning and Urbanism at The University of Melbourne, and teaches landscape design, history and heritage. His current research includes a national study of the modern campus in Australia, migrant contributions to Australian landscape design, and ongoing research into the history of landscape architecture in Australia. He is a Registered Landscape Architect (AILA) and a member of the Docomomo International Specialist Committee on Urbanism and Landscape.*

Gulnur Cengiz *is an architect with a master's degree in Preservation Studies from Boston University. Her research interests centre around reevaluating the existing conventions for heritage conservation in light of new experimental preservation concepts. She is undertaking her doctoral studies at the School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape of Newcastle University, United Kingdom, on the wider subject of preservation and planning.*

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GIJSBRECHT VAN AEMSTELPARK, THE NETHERLANDS

Van Nijenrodeweg, Amsterdam
1959–73

Wim Boer (original design, 1959–62), Hans Petri (redesign of central plaza, 1971)
Rosalie Begeer and Ferry Theunisse (renovation, 2010–12)
Public park

Keywords: functionalism, clean lines

The twenty-seven-hectare Gijsbrecht van Aemstelpark is the green core of Buitenveldert, a spacious neighbourhood dating from the 1950s that was developed according to guidelines laid down in the famous 1934 Amsterdam Urban Extension Plan. The approximately two-kilometre-long green strip, which is only 100 to 150 metres wide, connects the Amsterdamse Bos and the wedge of the river Amstel. Landscape architect Wim Boer (1922–2000) designed the winning entry for a competition held by the Netherlands Association of Landscape Architects and the municipality of Amsterdam from 1959 to 1962. It was constructed from 1966 to 1973. It is a highlight of Dutch modernist park architecture from the post-World War II period.

Wim Boer was averse to landscape style clichés and romanticism. His park did not represent a sublimated 'false' nature. It was related to a broader urban vision and paid attention to functional uses: playing, walking, sitting, and sunbathing. His park was undeniably urban.

The main north–south thoroughfares through the district divided the park into different parts, which were held together by the heavily planted Van Nijenrodeweg on the south side. The central part consisted of three rectangular islands surrounded by a rectangular water feature: an open play area, a tree-lined central square, and a flower garden with square flower beds and a tea garden. Rhythmically placed benches designed by Aldo van Eyck, an elevated platform, a sculpture and a kiosk were supposed to activate the central square as a meeting place. The orthogonal path pattern connected the islands with the rectangular street pattern of the neighbourhood.

The clean lines and functionalist design were also represented in the park's materialization. The application of concrete and asphalt was a complete novelty at the time. Main roads such as the Van Nijenrodeweg and the meeting square were planted with plane trees. Poplars were used for the play areas and sunbathing field. Ash and willows were used as informal planting along the edges of the park.

Deviating from mainstream naturalistic parks, its rectangular forms were controversial. The park was praised by some, and criticized by many others. In the first years, when the trees were still young, the park looked very open and somewhat bare. As a result, the open and rectangular layout was already adapted in the 1970s, with the addition of bushes for more intimacy and a redesign by Hans Petri (1919–96) of the central square. More changes further weakened the original design, and in combination with a lack of maintenance, the park and its use declined. A redesign was made in 2007 to improve the network of footpaths and cycle paths, reduce the greenery for the sake of visibility and social safety, and increase the park's

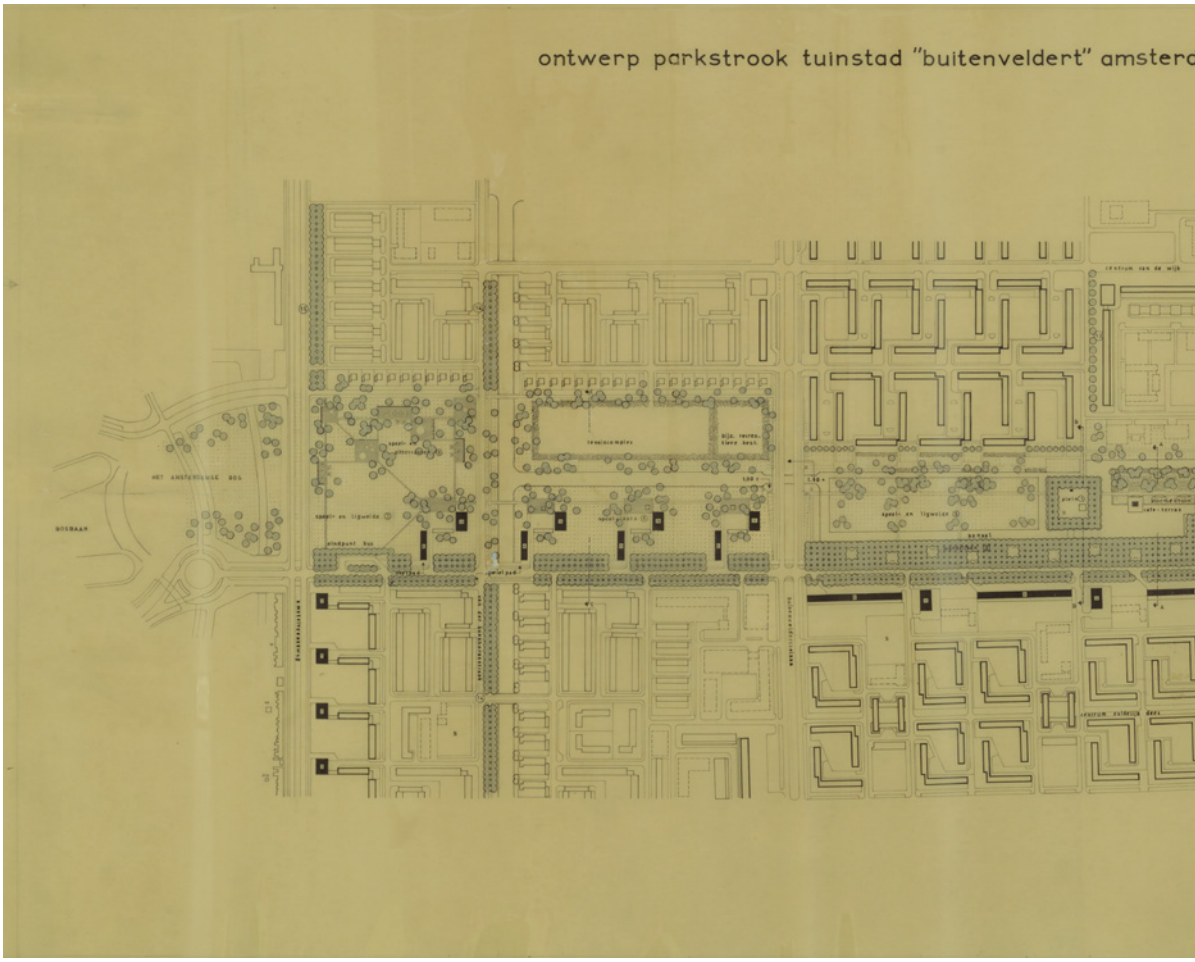

Figure 59
The winning design for the Gijsbrecht van Aemstelpark by Wim Boer, c. 1965. The central part is executed according to his plans; the other parts came from the Department of Public Works of the municipality.
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options for use. However, the park was nominated as a National Monument and it became clear that the redesign was not in line with the original design, particularly in regard to the meeting square. In close consultation with the park's neighbours, the designers of the municipality made a renovation plan in 2012 for the square that paid as much respect as possible to Wim Boer's original plan from 1959. The park has been a National Monument since 2015.

Author: Marlies Brinkhuijsen

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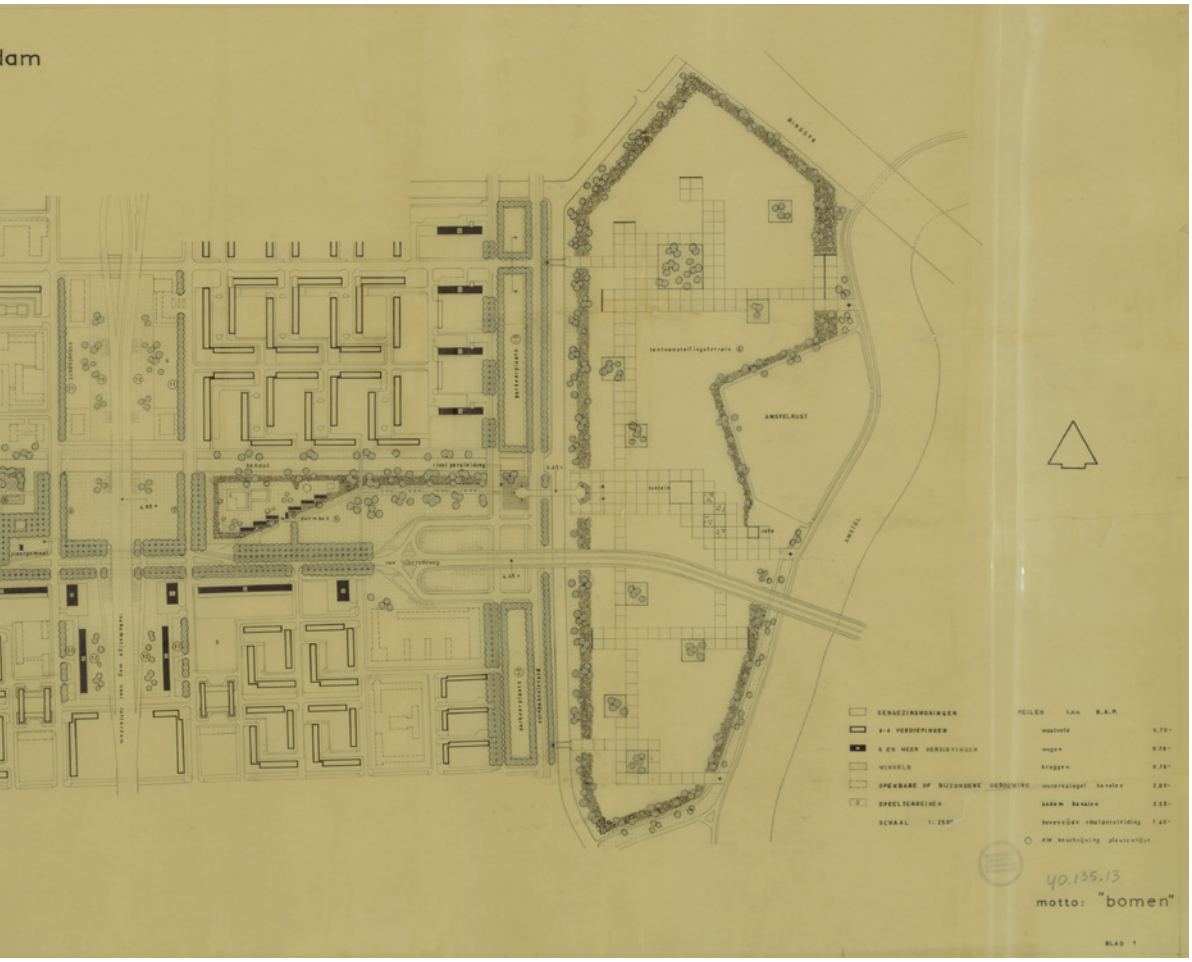

Figure 60
View of the Flower Island, Gijsbrecht van Aemstelpark.
© Beeldbank van de Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed, 555.182, 20535253, Chris Booms, 2010.

This book presents a wide range of landscapes that have been integral to the Modern Movement era. It aims to raise awareness of their design significance and to broaden understanding of their diversity. It demonstrates the breadth of roles that landscape architects and affiliated designers have played in response to the demands wrought by social, political and environmental change, particularly in the post-World War II years. In this sense it draws attention to people and places that previously may have been marginally understood—'invisible' or 'dislocated'—thus enabling them to be appreciated in new ways and to be considered more carefully in comparative analyses into the future.

Included in this book are eighty-six landscapes spanning the twentieth century and representing the following thirty-eight countries: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cuba, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Ghana, Greece, Guatemala, India, Iran, Israel, Italy, Japan, Lebanon, Lithuania, Mexico, Portugal, Puerto Rico, Romania, Scotland, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Syria, Thailand, the Netherlands, Turkey, United States of America, and Venezuela.

The contributors to this monograph are largely representatives of the International Committee for Documentation and Conservation of Buildings, Sites and Neighbourhoods of the Modern Movement, otherwise known as Docomomo International. Docomomo is made up of a wide range of people representing an array of cultures, expertise and interests, the distinctive 'voices' of which permeate this book.

Jan Haenraets is a landscape architect and Professor of the Practice at the Preservation Studies Program of Boston University with international project experiences in landscape research, history, design and stewardship.

Andrew Saniga is Associate Professor in Landscape Architecture, Planning and Urbanism at The University of Melbourne. His research into the history of landscape architecture of the post-World War II years includes designers, designed landscapes and the development of the profession.

Gulnur Cengiz is an architect with a master's degree in Preservation Studies from Boston University and is pursuing her Ph.D. at Newcastle University, UK. Her research focuses on challenging traditional heritage conventions in conservation and explores experimental concepts, bridging theory and practice.

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