

# A Clash between Citizenship Projects at Utrecht's Houtplein in the 1970s

Jasper Bongers

TSEG 20 (3): 81–106

DOI: 10.52024/tseg.11257

## Abstract

This article explores the clashing of two citizenship projects at Utrecht's Houtplein, a re-education facility for so-called asocial families. On the one hand, there was a citizenship project led by the Public Housing Association, which existed between 1924 and 1975. This organization's view was that inhabitants of the Houtplein could be developed into full members of the community if they learned to adhere to the norms of neatness and orderliness. On the other hand, there was the Action Committee Pijlsweerd, a left-leaning organization consisting of students and other inhabitants of the Pijlsweerd neighborhood, which challenged the Public Housing Association's project in the 1970s. Although their goals were very different, the Action Committee pursued a citizenship project as well. Their aim was to encourage the inhabitants of the Houtplein to claim citizenship in a direct manner, by standing up against the Housing Association's alleged paternalism. Analyzing the interactions, as well as the ultimate clash, between these two projects provides insight into how citizenship was contested, both at the Houtplein and beyond.

## Introduction

Between 1925 and 1978, 70 small houses stood on the edge of Utrecht's Pijlsweerd neighborhood, accompanied by a bathhouse for hygienic improvement and a clubhouse for 'useful' relaxation. Together, these buildings constituted a re-educational complex known as the Houtplein, where the *Stichting Volkswoningen* (Public Housing

Association, PHA) attempted to lift up a group of 'asocials', people who were deemed unable or unwilling to live up to social norms.<sup>1</sup>

The PHA's project at the Houtplein can be regarded as an 'extra' intervention within the broader project of the civilizing mission ('*burgerlijk beschavingsoffensief*'), which stretches from the late eighteenth to the twentieth century. The general idea underlying this mission was that members of the working class could be lifted up by introducing them to a middle-class lifestyle (with nutritious food, hygiene, reading, punctuality, etc.).<sup>2</sup> While the general Dutch civilizing mission was aimed at a much larger group of people (potentially everyone), the Houtplein was a more specific subproject: some people were picked out of the general population and given additional attention.

While Houtplein-like projects were rare from an international perspective, they were not uncommon in the Netherlands.<sup>3</sup> In the first half of the twentieth century, re-educational facilities dealing with urban misfits were also built, for example, in Amsterdam (Zeeburgerdorp, 1918) and The Hague (Zomerhof, 1921). In the academic literature that has appeared discussing the development of such facilities, authors like sociologist Frits van Wel and historians Adrienne Dercksen and Loes Verplanke have shown how the outlook of these facilities changed over time, moving from a focus on helping people to gain the capacity to run a proper household (in the early twentieth century) to aiding them with 'socio-psychiatric disorders' (in the later period of its existence).<sup>4</sup>

The zenith of the PHA's project at the Houtplein came after the Second World War. It was generally understood that Europe needed to be rebuilt, not only physically but also in a moral sense, and institutions like the Houtplein were well-positioned to play a leading role in this rebuilding.<sup>5</sup> Soon after reaching its peak in terms of ambition, cost, and

1 The official name of the complex was 'Kerkwegcomplex'. The clubhouse opened slightly later, in 1927.

2 For more about the civilizing mission: Bernard Kruithof, 'De deugdzame natie', *Symposion, Tijdschrift voor maatschappijwetenschap* 1:2 (1980) 22-37. For later examples, see: Christianne Smit, *De volksverheffers. Sociaal hervormers in Nederland en de wereld, 1870-1914* (Hilversum 2015).

3 Discussed in, for example: Frits van Wel, 'A century of families under supervision in the Netherlands', *The British Journal of Social Work* 22:2 (1992) 147-166.

4 For more on changes in re-educational policies, see: Van Wel, 'A century of families', 162; Frits van Wel, 'Gezinnen onder toezicht. De Stichting Volkswoningen te Utrecht, 1924-1975' (PhD Thesis Utrecht 1988); Adrienne Dercksen and Loes Verplanke, *Geschiedenis van de onmaatschappelijkheidsbestrijding in Nederland 1914-1970* (Amsterdam 2000). For an international perspective, see: John Welshman, *Underclass: a history of the excluded, 1880-2000* (London 2007).

5 Hansje Galesloot and Margreet Schrevel, *In fatsoen hersteld: Zedelijkheid en wederopbouw na de*

professionalism, however, the PHA was disbanded and the houses at the Houtplein were torn down, as also happened with other re-educational organizations and facilities in the 1960s and '70s. The explanation that authors like Van Wel (the leading author on the Houtplein), Dercksen, and Verplanke provide for the ultimate end of PHA-like organizations has to do with a paradigm shift in academic and policy-making circles. Rather than isolating 'asocials', it was increasingly thought better to spread 'deprived' families (as they were now called) over the neighborhood. Paternalistic organizations like the PHA seemed outdated in this view, as did 'concentrated' re-educational facilities like the Houtplein.<sup>6</sup>

Although I agree with these authors that changing opinions in academic and policy-making circles provide an important reason for the demise of PHA-like organizations, it is only one part of the story, the top-down part. There is another (bottom-up) part to the story, which can be found in the local situations in which the re-education facilities operated. The feeling that re-educational facilities were paternalistic and outdated was not only expressed by scholars and policy experts at universities and in government but also in regular neighborhoods by ordinary people. Though there has been little attention in the existing literature for the local situations in which re-educational facilities operated, I maintain that studying these situations can reveal much about the demise of these facilities.<sup>7</sup>

In Utrecht's Pijlsweerd neighborhood, the anti-paternalistic feeling regarding the PHA was embodied by the *Aktiecomité Pijlsweerd* (Action Committee Pijlsweerd, ACP). This group, consisting of students and (other) inhabitants of the Pijlsweerd neighborhood, was committed to liberating *Houtpleiners* (inhabitants of the Houtplein) from the paternalism of the PHA and used actions like squatting and road blockages to achieve their goals.<sup>8</sup>

*oorlog* (Amsterdam 1987); Dercksen and Verplanke, *Geschiedenis van de onmaatschappelijkheidsbestrijding*, 90-106.

6 *Ibid.*; Van Wel, *Gezinnen onder toezicht*. The protests of people in the neighborhood is mentioned, yet as an afterthought, not as a core part of the story (respectively on pages 239 and 165); Dercksen and Verplanke take the names others gave to the 'anti-social' people as a guideline (p.8). Van Wel uses a more complicated term in 'problem figurations', but the parallels between his analysis and that of Dercksen and Verplanke are hard to miss. Van Wel notes that 'theorists do not always take the lead', but they do play an important role in his 'figurations' (p. 13, 14, 221).

7 Van Wel does point to the question of how 'involved families' thought about their own situation. But cases in which their actions (and those of their neighbours) did not fit with what may be expected on the basis of 'problem figurations' largely stays out of view. See: Van Wel, *Gezinnen onder toezicht*, 13.

8 Not all of the student-members of the ACP lived in Pijlsweerd. I have not been able to find a percentage.

Whereas the PHA can be seen as representative of the civilizing mission in the Netherlands, the ACP represents an anti-authoritarian trend in Dutch history, which came to fruition throughout the 1960s and '70s.<sup>9</sup> Thanks to growing levels of emancipation and education, it was increasingly thought important not to blindly conform to others' ideas about vice and virtue, but rather to assert one's own moral judgement. Young people pushed back against old understandings of authority – defined by Robert Wolff as the 'right to command, and correlatively, the right to be obeyed'.<sup>10</sup> Providing an alternative to the old authority structures, a new 'alternative' circuit of (semi-)public institutions was constructed, including, for example, the JAC (*Jongeren Advies Centrum*, an organization committed to advising and aiding youths, often without involving their parents). As we shall see, neighborhood organizations like the ACP can be understood in the light of this alternative circuit of institutions.<sup>11</sup>

Although the ACP can provide an important piece of the puzzle of how and why organizations like the PHA disbanded, the current lack of attention given to the ACP is understandable within the context of the literature on re-educational facilities. Dominant concepts in this literature, like re-educating and elevating, are not applicable to the ACP's anti-paternalistic project, which leads historians and sociologists like Dercksen, Verplanke, and Van Wel to focus their narratives on the internal shifts within the projects of PHA-like organizations. Still, in my view, the ACP deserves to be more than an afterthought – if only because its goals were in many ways similar to those of the PHA.

The conceptual key to bringing the ACP into the conversation on the Houtplein can be found in citizenship studies. Moving away from a view of citizenship as a legal status, historians and political theorists have increasingly come to approach the root definition of 'citizen' (*member of a political community*) in an open manner, looking at who can manifest themselves as full members of the community in practice and at how they can do so.<sup>12</sup> This 'anthropological' perspective helps us to see that whereas citizenship in the Netherlands was more or less

9 This happened throughout Europe: Martin Klimke and Joachim Scharloth, *1968 in Europe. A history of protest and activism, 1956-1977* (New York 2008).

10 Robert Wolff, *In Defense of Anarchism* (Oxford 1970) Section 1.

11 Ard Sprinkhuizen, 'Jongeren Advies Centrum (JAC)', in: *Canon Social Work*, [https://www.canonsociaalwerk.eu/nl\\_jz/details.php?cps=24&canon\\_id=259](https://www.canonsociaalwerk.eu/nl_jz/details.php?cps=24&canon_id=259) (last visited on: 23 October 2022).

12 Building on the anthropological approach to citizenship, for examples: Ayse Caglar, 'Citizenship, anthropology of', *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* (2015); Anne McNevin, 'Political belonging in a neoliberal era. The struggle of the sans-papiers', *Citizenship Studies* (2006) 135-151.

universal on paper since 1919, citizenship was far from universal in practice. Some people were seen as less equal than others. This was certainly true for the people who lived at the Houtplein. As we will see, the inhabitants of the Houtplein were often shunned by other people living in the neighborhood and generally seen as less than full members of the community.

In my understanding, the gap between *Houtpleiners'* citizenship on paper and their exclusion in practice was what both the PHA and ACP tried to bridge, albeit in diametrically opposite ways. In this article, I interpret the activities of both organizations as a citizenship project, defined as an attempt to develop people into full(er) members of the community, carried out over an extended period of time.

Although the literature on citizenship projects tends to focus on contemporary projects, like the neoliberal projects described by Sian Lazar and Jean Michel Montsion, this approach does not mean that the concept is not applicable to historical cases.<sup>13</sup> In fact, the phenomenon of citizenship projects is often discussed in Dutch historiography, albeit without using the term. Christianne Smit, for instance, essentially analyzes a citizenship project (or a series thereof) in her book *De Volksverheffers*, on a network of social reformers aiming to uplift the working class. Tellingly, Smit writes that “where suffrage was the formal capstone in the creation of citizenship for the members of the working class [*arbeiders*], civilisation through social work [as done by her *volksverheffers*] was the practical fulfilment of citizenship [...]”<sup>14</sup>

While the PHA's and ACP's views were different as night and day, helping *Houtpleiners* to become (fuller) citizens was ultimately the goal for both organizations, as well as the bone of contention in the clash between them. For the PHA, ideal members of the community were self-sufficient individuals (and families) who did not cause trouble for others; and, in their view, the way to make the ‘asocial’ inhabitants of the Houtplein into such proper citizens was strictly supervising and disciplining how they went about their daily lives. For the ACP, the ideal community members were active, outspoken, and not afraid of claiming their rights; and they tried to inspire inhabitants of the Houtplein to be this way through leading by example.

13 This is not a very extensive literature. Sian Lazar, ‘Education for credit. Development as citizenship project in Bolivia’, *Critique of Anthropology* 24:3 (2004) 301-319; Jean Michel Montsion, ‘When talent meets mobility. Un/desirability in Singapore's new citizenship project’, *Citizenship Studies* 16:3-4 (2012) 469-482.

14 Smit, *De volksverheffers*, 392, see also: 15 and 176. All translations are my own.

Analyzing the interactions between the PHA and ACP from the perspective of citizenship projects enables me to compare the PHA and ACP on equal terms. Doing so brings to light the bottom-up criticism that has hitherto remained out of sight. As will be discussed in the next section, though, studying the clash between the PHA and ACP also offers two additional advantages. First, studying the interactions between the two citizenship projects and the ways in which they interact can contribute to our understanding of the 1970s as a period of contested authority and citizenship. Second, this exercise also offers a contribution to citizenship studies in a more general sense, by adding to our knowledge of how citizenship projects take shape.

In the following section, I will elaborate on the concept of citizenship projects and the ways in which we can learn from interpreting the activities of the PHA and the ACP as citizenship projects. Then I build on archival sources found at Het Utrechts Archief, the International Institute for Social History, the Volksbuurtmuseum, and the personal archive of Bert van Velzen (who worked in the ACP) to explore how the PHA and ACP operated and clashed in the 1970s. In the conclusion, I reflect on the lessons that we can draw from the interactions between these two citizenship projects.

## Learning from citizenship projects in the 1970s

The traditional image of the '70s as a “period of great dullness” has been rectified. Duco Hellema, for instance, convincingly positions the 1970s as an extension of the 1960s, rather than as its antithesis. The clash at the Houtplein was part of a larger cultural conflict taking shape in these times, also relating to, for instance, students’ rights (versus the educator’s authority), children’s rights (versus the parent’s authority), the war in Vietnam (versus America’s moral authority as a ‘shining city on a hill’), and the patients’ rights (versus the authority of doctors and psychiatrists). All these clashes were, at least in part, about questioning one party’s authority to determine what the other party should do.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> The dullness quote comes from journalist Henk Hofland, cited in Duco Hellema, *Nederland en de jaren zeventig* (Amsterdam 2012) 11. For a broad perspective on post-war developments, see: Jan Willem Duyvendak, *De planning van ontplooiing. Wetenschap, politiek en de maakbare samenleving* (Den Haag 1999). For examples of such conflicts, see: Evelien Tonkens, *Het zelfontplooiingsregime. De actualiteit van Dennendal en de jaren zestig* (Amsterdam 1999); Gemma Blok, *Baas in eigen brein. 'Antipsychiatrie' in Nederland, 1965-1985* (Amsterdam 2004).

This cultural conflict has often been interpreted as a conflict between a younger and an older generation, with the new generation sweeping away the old authority (the position associated with historian Hans Righart) or alternatively as old elites being so willing to accommodate newness and modernity that they gave their authority away (a position associated with James Kennedy).<sup>16</sup> Historian Bram Mellink posits a more nuanced view on the cultural conflict of the 1960s and '70s. He states that “the crisis of authority of the 1960s was [...] not a struggle between young and old, but was part of a collective quest to recalibrate (*'herijken'*) authority.” Although there is often talk of a breakdown of authority in the 1960s and '70s (be it due to the strength of the new generation or the accommodating nature of the old elites), it is better understood as a period of collectively seeking new grounds and sources for authority. In Mellink's case, which concerns education, this 'new' authority was found in guiding pupils towards an 'internalized' sense of responsibility.<sup>17</sup>

The notion of recalibrating is also applicable to the Houtplein case. Rather than that the new (the ACP) simply swept away the old (the PHA), the clash between the 'old' and the 'new' had a back-and-forth dynamic, and both parties adapted to each other's strategies. Authority was not the only thing that was at stake at the Houtplein, however. The notion of citizenship allows us to take the analysis of the 1970s as a period of recalibration a step further: whereas the concept of authority concerns the extent to which people have a say over themselves and other members of the community, the notion of citizenship helps us to question whether people were considered full members of the community in the first place.

Studying how the PHA and ACP strove to make *Houtpleiners* into citizens and how their projects interacted with and adapted to one another can contribute to our understanding of the 1970s. Moreover, it adds to our understanding of citizenship projects in a more general sense. Studying the PHA and ACP side by side fills a void in the literature regarding how citizenship projects can adapt to and learn from one another. Currently, citizenship projects are often studied in isolation – looking at a specific project and its results – which can range

16 Hans Righart, *De eindeloze jaren zestig* (Amsterdam 1995); James C. Kennedy, *Nieuw Babylon in aanbouw* (Amsterdam 1995).

17 This view is not incompatible with the views of Righart and (especially) Kennedy, but Mellink does add a useful nuance. Bram Mellink, *Worden zoals wij. Onderwijs en de opkomst van de geïndividualiseerde samenleving sinds 1945* (Amsterdam 2014) 124, 127.



Illustration 1 The Houtplein seen from the bathhouse.

(Source: J.P. Tiegels, *Gezicht op het Houtplein te Utrecht, 1976, Het Utrechts Archief, catalogue no.601335.*)

from very specific projects, such as Joana Cruz et. al.'s study on the effects of specific educational techniques in citizenship building, to Engin Isin's broad overview of the effects of attempts to "deorientalize" citizenship.<sup>18</sup> Yet while some studies do deal with various visions on citizenship, especially in education studies – like Van Rees' recent article *Burgerschapsvorming in meervoud* or Wim de Jong's book *Van wie is de burger?* (with a far broader scope) – too little attention has been paid to the concrete level of actual interactions and clashes between citizenship projects.<sup>19</sup>

18 Joana P. Cruz et al., 'The use of theatre of the oppressed in the classroom. Engaging students in a critical active European citizenship project', in: *The Educational Forum*, 83 (2019) 365-382; Engin F. Isin, 'Citizenship after orientalism. An unfinished project', *Citizenship Studies* 16:5-6 (2012) 563-572.

19 Neither uses the concept of citizenship projects. Wim de Jong, *Van wie is de burger? Omstreden democratie in Nederland, 1945-1985* (Selfpublished 2014); Pieter van Rees, 'Burgerschapsvorming in meervoud. Democratische vorming op de scholen van Teachers College New York (1917-1947)', *Pedagogische Studiën* 98:3 (2021) 185-203. Concrete contestation over citizenship does, however, have an established place in the broader (not project-related) literature: Ingrid Brühwiler, 'Contested citizenship. Public schooling and political changes in early nineteenth century Switzerland', *Journal of Educational Media, Memory, and Society* 9:2 (2017) 15-39; Gaja Maestri and Sarah M. Hughes, 'Contested spaces of citizenship', *Citizenship Studies* 21:6 (2017) 625-639.

As a site, the Houtplein is well-suited for a study of citizenship projects in the 1970s. In the first place, this suitability is because of the people selected to live at the Houtplein: on the one hand, they were socially excluded to a far greater extent than the students studied in educational studies of citizenship; on the other hand, both the PHA and ACP saw them as having potential for citizenship. *Houtpleiners* were not yet full citizens, but they could well become so. Second, the Houtplein case helps to bring issues of hygiene into focus, a crucial but often overlooked domain in the cultural conflict of the 1960s and '70s.<sup>20</sup> Since the nineteenth century, improving hygiene had been a central component of the civilizing mission, materializing in, among other things, the PHA's bathhouse. As we will see, the PHA's striving for hygiene was turned on its head by the ACP, by squatting the bathhouse in 1975. A third reason for studying the Houtplein is its compactness. The small scale of a single facility makes it possible to zoom in deeply on how the PHA and ACP interacted in practice. A last reason, the Houtplein's longevity sets it apart from other re-educational facilities. Because the Houtplein was founded in the 1920s, its roots in the civilizing mission are more obvious than those of most other re-educational facilities, which were opened in later years. And because the Houtplein lasted until deep into the 1970s, this facility also allows for an analysis of how the ACP functioned over an extended period of time – most facilities were terminated or reformed in earlier years.<sup>21</sup>

## The PHA's citizenship project

In the early twentieth century, Utrecht's population grew spectacularly, from 30,000 inhabitants in the year 1800, to 100,000 in 1900, and 140,000 in 1920. As happened in many cities experiencing similar growth, the municipal government and the housing associations (*woningbouwcorporaties*) increased their efforts to build houses in order to cope with the rising number of inhabitants. In doing so, they were increasingly confronted with a group of people that they considered to be dirty, unsociable, and generally undesirable as renters.<sup>22</sup>

20 There are exceptions, for instance: Marcel Martel, "They smell bad, have diseases, and are lazy". RCMP officers reporting on hippies in the late sixties', *Canadian Historical Review* 90:2 (2009) 215-245.

21 Dercksen and Verplanke, *Geschiedenis van de onmaatschappelijkheidsbestrijding*, 239.

22 Discussed in, for example: Dercksen and Verplanke, *Geschiedenis van de onmaatschappelijkheidsbestrijding*, 18-21.

In an attempt to uplift this group of ‘inadmissibles’ (*ontoelaatbaren*), the Public Housing Association was founded in Utrecht, in 1924. At the Houtplein, the first facility opened by the PHA, its goal was to provide inhabitants with good houses, as well as with moral and material elevation (*‘zedelijke en (of) materiële verheffing’*).<sup>23</sup> The link between bad citizens and bad housing was thought to go both ways. Having clean and good houses was seen as a condition that strengthened people’s chances to behave according to societal norms, but it was simultaneously acknowledged that good houses did not stay good for long with a certain type of renters. In 1928, the *Tijdschrift voor Volkshuisvesting en Stedenbouw* succinctly summarized the matter: “bad housing makes bad people, but conversely, bad people also make bad housing”.<sup>24</sup>

The PHA functioned as the capstone on Utrecht’s housing policy: after a couple of years of re-education at the Houtplein, people could supposedly re-integrate into ‘normal’ society and move on to rent ‘normal’ houses. Alderman Smulders, who played a leading role in founding the PHA, argued that the Houtplein was an answer to the question of how to help people “who have sunk so low that they sometimes no longer seem worthy of the name of human beings.” Like many of his contemporaries, Smulders had great belief in the civilizing potential of facilities like the Houtplein. According to him, the “sunken” people could greatly benefit from spending time at the Houtplein; they could become people “who are not only capable of living in a house but are also capable of discharging their duty to be proper social beings.”<sup>25</sup>

At the Houtplein, the inhabitants lived relatively isolated lives, with railway tracks on one side of the complex, battery factory Herberhold on another, and two rows of normal ‘workingman’s’ houses on the last side. Daily affairs at the Houtplein were placed in the hands of a ‘neat’ married couple. This couple would have both a disciplinary (correcting inhabitants when they strayed from the norms) and an elevating role (showing how to live, by example). The recruitment of a husband and wife contrasts with many other re-education facilities

23 HUA, 1007-1 gemeentebestuur Utrecht, 247 *verslag gemeenteraad, aanvaarding stichtingsbrief*, 3rd of November, 1924. Later, they would also open other facilities, see: Van Wel, ‘Gezinnen onder toezicht’.

24 C. Delhez, ‘De huisvesting van ontoelaatbare gezinnen’, *Tijdschrift voor Volkshuisvesting en Stedebouw* 10 (1928) 26. Also discussed in: Van Wel, ‘Gezinnen onder toezicht’.

25 HUA, 1007-1 gemeentebestuur, *Verslag gemeenteraad 1924*, 970. Also: Van Wel, ‘Gezinnen onder toezicht’, 38.

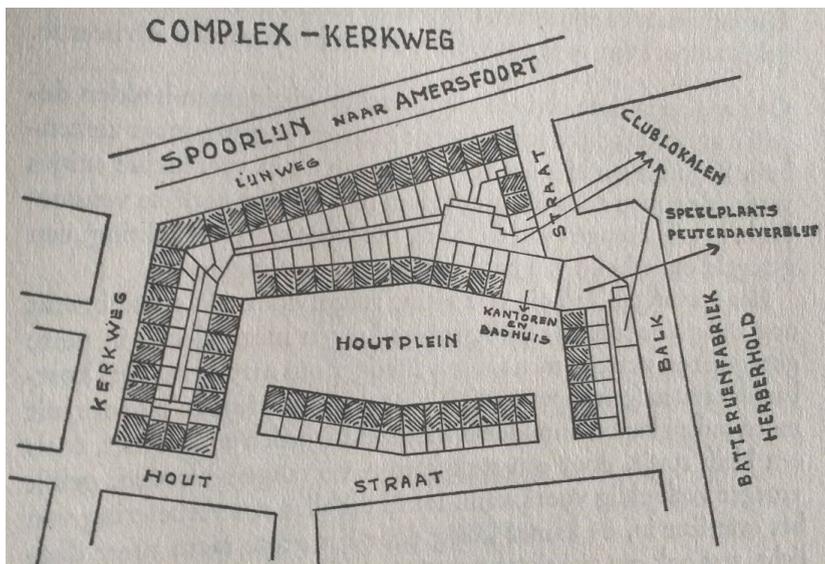


Illustration 2 A map of the Houtplein.

(Source: G. Duitemeijer, *Het sociaal-achtergebleven gezin* (Wageningen 1962) 215.)

in the Netherlands, where female superintendents were in charge.<sup>26</sup> Most of the couple's responsibilities at the Houtplein were placed in the hands of the husband, but the wife could also play an important role by "helping the women to become good housewives".<sup>27</sup>

The male superintendent (later called director) played a key role in selecting new inhabitants. Whether potential inhabitants were ultimately admitted depended on whether the superintendent and the board (which consisted of representatives of many civil society organizations and the directors of the Municipal Housing Services and the Municipal Health Services) considered them capable of being uplifted. If they saw no room for improvement (either because they were too 'good' or too 'bad'), they were not accepted as inhabitants. Many inhabitants had underlying problems, like bad drinking habits or psychological issues. Yet the *Houtpleiners* were all considered 'suitable' for improvement.<sup>28</sup> Exactly where the superintendents put the bar for

<sup>26</sup> Dercksen and Verplanke, *Geschiedenis van de onmaatschappelijkheidsbestrijding*, 18.

<sup>27</sup> HUA, 803, *Instructie voor den opzichter-badmeester en zijne echtgenoot*, 4 February 1925. Also discussed in: Pollie de Ridder-Polderman and Arjen Stekelenburg, *Huisvesting en normalisering. Geschiedenis van de stichting volkswoningen Utrecht 1924-1975* (PhD thesis Utrecht 1983).

<sup>28</sup> For more on the selection of new inhabitants, see: Van Wel, *Gezinnen onder toezicht*, 169.

admittance is unclear, and it was probably dependent on the ebb and flow in the number of people wanting to live at the Houtplein, caused by the state of the housing market and of the economy in general. If aspiring inhabitants were not accepted, they often had to rely on a poor relief association, or, in the worst case, live on the streets.<sup>29</sup>

In many cases, the (material) living conditions at the Houtplein were much better than in the houses where the inhabitants came from. The yearly reports of the superintendents show that many people used to live in houses that were, for example, full of mold, or where people relieved themselves on newspapers.<sup>30</sup> Although all inhabitants of the Houtplein came there voluntarily, some nudges were involved in convincing them to live at the facility. Tempting people with low rents was the most important technique in that respect.

When the vicar Duitemeijer was appointed as director of the PHA in 1957, after a clerical career in Limburg and Indonesia, the newspaper *Limburgsch Dagblad* wrote that the PHA was “not involved with housing, but with [...] the care [...] for asocial and socially unstable families.”<sup>31</sup> This description points to a general awareness of the tension between the neutral name that the foundation had on paper and the rather more normative goals that it pursued in practice. In correspondence, Duitemeijer admitted that the name *Public Housing Association* was a bit of a codename. He stated that “it doesn’t say too much, but also not too little”. One of the functions of the association was indeed to be “the capstone on the municipal housing policies”, but, according to Duitemeijer, the name did not contribute to the stigmatization and discrimination of the inhabitants, as would happen if the true purpose of the association was spelled out.<sup>32</sup>

The general citizenship project undertaken by the PHA remained relatively consistent: the vision that ideal members of the community adhere to the norms of cleanliness and orderliness remained the same; disciplining inhabitants in those domains was continually seen as the way to make *Houtpleiners* into citizens. However, every director gave this project his (his, because role of the female superintendents quickly diminished) own twist. Duitemeijer viewed the Houtplein in

29 Van Wel mentions the *Tehuis voor onbehuisten* in: Van Wel, *Gezinnen onder toezicht*, 39.

30 HUA, 803 Volkswoningen, 70 *jaarverslagen van de opzichter*, 1941

31 HUA, 803 Stichting Volkswoningen, 11 *krantenknipsels*. *Limburgsch dagblad* 13 October 1956

32 HUA, 1007-3, 22686-a *Wijziging statuten VW*, letter from Duitemeijer, probably late June or early July 1962. The foundation was first called *de Stichting voor het beheer en de exploitatie van kleine woningen*.



*Illustration 3 The bathhouse.*

*(Source: Archive Volksbuurtmuseum, photographer unknown, 1927.)*

more scientific terms than his predecessors did. For him, the PHA was a social hospital and the *Houtpleiners* socially ill. His job was to make them better, to rid them of vice, and to turn them into proper citizens.<sup>33</sup> In pursuing this mission, Duitemeijer could build on the expertise of a growing staff. Though previous directors had practically led the Houtplein by themselves, Duitemeijer came to supervise a large team that included social workers, administrators, bathhouse personnel, a psychiatrist, and even sociologists.<sup>34</sup> Together, this team helped Duitemeijer to uphold three crucial pillars in the PHA's citizenship project: increasing hygiene, improving orderliness, and teaching respectable and useful skills.

One of the most important aspects of the inhabitants' re-education was hygienic. In an attempt not to let inhabitants' houses slip (back)

<sup>33</sup> Van Wel, *Gezinnen onder toezicht*, 170. Duitemeijer did not always call the Houtplein a social hospital, but often he did. The language of 'illness' and the contagiousness of unsociability can also be found in his book. see: Duitemeijer, *Het sociaal-achtergebleven gezin*, 231.

<sup>34</sup> Professionalization started under supervisor Linschoten, Van Wel, *Gezinnen onder toezicht*, 76.

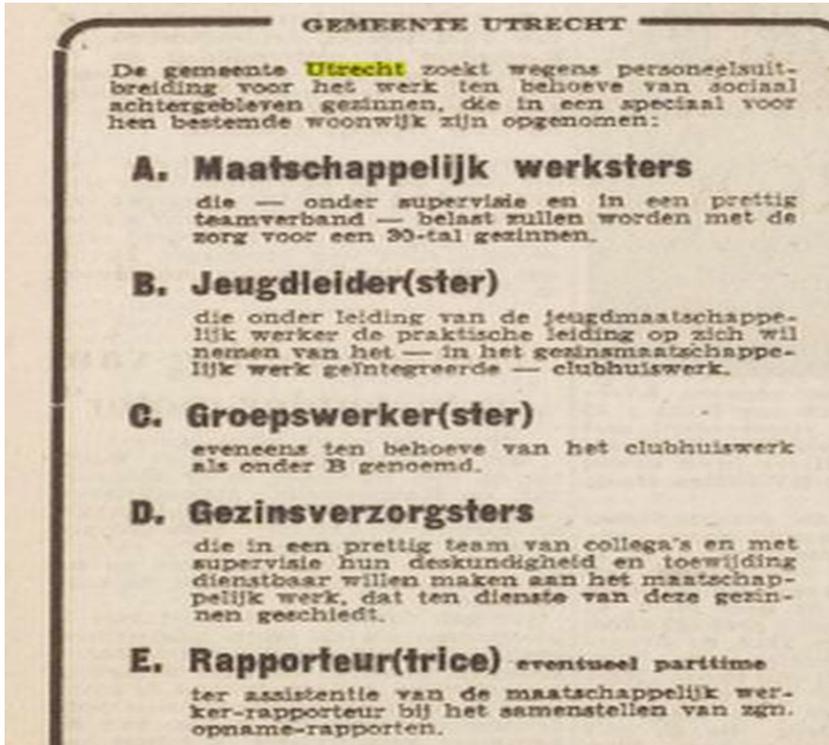


Illustration 4 Job openings at the PHA in 1961.

(Source: Het Vrije Volk. Democratisch-socialistisch dagblad 30 September 1961, from the digital historical newspaper archive Delpher in November 2020.)

into deplorable conditions, the dwellings of the people living at the Houtplein were regularly visited and checked by the superintendent and his staff – visits which the inhabitants were not allowed to refuse, according to the statutory house rules.<sup>35</sup> Even more important than these house visits, however, were the baths which could (and should) be taken in the bathhouse under the supervision of bath ladies. Bathing was mandatory for children and highly advised for adults.<sup>36</sup>

Orderliness was closely related to hygiene and was enforced through numerous rules regulating life at the Houtplein. It was, for example, forbidden to “clean rugs or mats on balconies or inside the house”; it was forbidden to keep “poultry or four-legged animals, except for cats”, because animals would spread dirt, and the inhabitants were not thought to be up to the responsibility; also, inhabitants were not

<sup>35</sup> De Ridder-Polderman and Stekelenburg, *Huisvesting en normalisering*.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

allowed “to sleep in the living room” and to “re-decorate the sleeping rooms” (dark-colored decorations would make it easier to conceal dirt).<sup>37</sup> Together, such measures were thought to create an orderly and neat atmosphere in which inhabitants could learn the value of restraint and neatness.

In terms of their skill set, the inhabitants were considered to be in need of education, too. There was a multitude of ‘proper’ activities that were taught at the Houtplein’s clubhouses. Through classes and seminars, on skills as sewing, mending, needlework, flute playing and singing, the inhabitants were shown how to be social and self-sufficient. In 1927, the PHA argued that “the educational power” of these courses “is not small”. This was because these courses, in addition to the regular teachings, “bring us in touch with the inhabitants taking the classes and allow us to get to know them and their peculiarities.”<sup>38</sup> In later years, too, the clubhouse would be an important place for the supervisors and their staff to meet the *Houtpleiners* in a relatively informal setting and to steer their behavior in the direction that they deemed right.

By showing how to live hygienically (keeping a clean house, washing oneself), neatly (the strict house rules would lead to good and restrained habits), and self-sufficiently (through work, and useful activities like mending and knitting), the PHA tried to make ‘asocials’ into citizens. The guiding thought seemed to be that if only the inhabitants could approximate the lifestyle of the respected members of the community, they, too, could become proper citizens.

Still, however ambitious the PHA’s goals may have been, the results were less positive than was hoped for, in terms of reintegration. Few inhabitants moved back into normal society, and many stayed at the Houtplein for multiple generations.<sup>39</sup> The PHA, however, failed not only on its own terms (because of lacking re-integration), but it also failed on the terms of others. In his 1961 dissertation, sociologist Herman Milikowski leveled criticism at the outlook of PHA-like organizations when he complained: “The question of unsociability (*onmaatschappelijkheid*) is still regarded from the perspective of the established (*gezetten*) citizen, who sees society as his society and his

37 *Ibid.*, 29.

38 HUA, 803, *Jaarverslag Stichting over 1927*.

39 HUA, 1007-3 Utrecht, 26355 *Onderzoek betreffende Houtplein*, 1954, 56-57), confidential letter from the foundation’s board to Major and Aldermen, 22 March 1954; HUA, 83, 71 stukken betreffende een onderzoek [...] naar de (resultaten van de) werkzaamheden van de Stichting; For a discussion of a report in 1969, see: Frits van Wel, ‘Asociale gezinnen’, *Jeugd en samenleving* March (1990) 145.

vision as the vision.”<sup>40</sup> Some authors have called Milikowski’s work the ‘death blow’ to dominant ways of thinking about re-education because it exerted such a strong criticism of the paternalism implicit in re-education.<sup>41</sup> I partially agree but would argue for an important nuance: academic critiques like Milikowski’s needed translators on the ground to bridge the gap between academic insight and social action.

## The ACP and its citizenship project

At the Houtplein, it was the Action Committee Pijlsweerd, a left-wing organization consisting of students and other people living in the Pijlsweerd neighborhood, that fulfilled this role of translating abstract criticisms to the local level.<sup>42</sup>

Although the ACP also involved itself with international issues, like the war in Vietnam, the ACP was a thoroughly local organization. It lobbied for playing areas for children, demonstrated against raising rents, and had its Bureau for Complaints, where inhabitants of Pijlsweerd could stop by to complain about what concerned them in Pijlsweerd.<sup>43</sup> Everyone in the neighborhood was asked to join and to visit their ‘large meetings’ – even the inhabitants of the Houtplein were invited. The committee tried to inspire *Houtpleiners* to join their efforts, because “only if the whole neighborhood unites we have a chance of success”. Success, here, meant ‘beating’ landlords, and the PHA was also seen as a landlord.<sup>44</sup>

The ACP communicated through the *Pijlsweerdkrant*, a small local newspaper (around 500 papers were printed for each edition). In the *Pijlsweerdkrant*, the Action Committee stated that its mission was “solidarity with the people in their struggle with landlords and the municipal government”, as well as to “represent the interests of the entire neighborhood”. This local mission was put in the perspective of the larger struggle of “standing up for the working class against the

40 Herman Milikowski, *Sociale aanpassing, niet-aangepastheid, onmaatschappelijkheid* (PhD thesis Amsterdam 1961) 187.

41 For example, Van Wel, ‘A century of families under supervision’, 131. In other work, Van Wel is more nuanced.

42 The participants represented less of a mix in ethnic perspective: ACP, *Wie, wat, hoe in Pijlsweerd* 18. For more on the internal divisions and discussions, see: International Institute for Social History (IISG), *Archive of the Communistische Eenheidspartij (107-117)*.

43 ACP, *Wie, wat, hoe*, 6.

44 *Pijlsweerdkrant* November (1972) 2. Later, inhabitants of the Houtplein also joined the ACP; see the biographical novel *Ilse*, written by Fred Penninga (Nieuwegein 1985), found in HUA: PK:iiiF77.



Illustration 5 A general invitation to attend a large neighborhood meeting in 1972.

(Source: Poster for a huge neighborhood meeting in Pijlsweerd, 1972. International Institute of Social History, <https://search.iisg.amsterdam/Record/845660>, last accessed in November 2021.)

interests of capital!"<sup>45</sup> In pursuing its goals, the ACP worked closely with other left-leaning organizations based in Utrecht, like *Rood Front*, underground publications like the *Muurkrant*, and with neighborhood organizations operating in adjacent neighborhoods.<sup>46</sup>

Although the ACP was anti-authoritarian, it also had an image of the ideal citizen in mind – although they rarely used the term ‘citizen’ (*burger*) explicitly. Their ideal citizens were assertive and capable of

45 *Pijlsweerdkrant* September (1972). Editions of the *Pijlsweerdkrant* are found in the personal archives of Van Velzen and at the International Institute for Social History (IISG), *Archive of the Communistische Eenheidspartij* (107-117).

46 Ibid. For more on such ‘activist organizations’ in Utrecht, see: Tim Verlaan, “De in beton gegoten onwrikbaarheid van Hoog Catharijne”. *Burgers, bestuurders en een projectontwikkelaar in Utrecht 1962-1973*, *Stadsgeschiedenis* 7:2 (2012).

claiming their worth vis-à-vis the government. By engaging with the *Houtpleiners*, the ACP tried to encourage them to act accordingly. The activities of the ACP show that attempts to make *Houtpleiners* into citizens did not end in the 1970s. On the contrary, they gained new momentum.<sup>47</sup>

Contacts between inhabitants of the Houtplein and other inhabitants of the neighborhood had not always been friendly. In an interview in the 1990s, H. de Jong, a leading member of the ACP and long-time resident of Pijlsweerd, explains how their relations softened. It was through a questionnaire on housing conducted by the ACP in the early 1970s that she came into contact with the *Houtpleiners*. De Jong tells how “in the beginning, I was quite scared to come there. [...] As someone raised in this neighbourhood, I had always been told that these people [the *Houtpleiners*] were bad”. Through her contact with the inhabitants of the Houtplein, though, her attitude changed.<sup>48</sup> De Jong’s experiences seem representative; the whole ACP warmed to the *Houtpleiners* and gradually came to see the Houtplein as part of what their organization was fighting against: paternalism and authoritarianism.<sup>49</sup>

While the personal contacts softened, the ACP’s opinion of living conditions at the Houtplein hardened. The results of the 1972 questionnaire shocked them: 60 percent of the inhabitants complained about their houses, 75 percent wanted a personal shower (instead of using the shared bathhouse), and 68 percent considered not paying the (recently raised) rents.<sup>50</sup>

The actions that were undertaken by the committee built on the action repertoire of their times, which included rougher measures like organizing protest marches, setting up blockades, and squatting. Yet more low-key actions were used, too, like community work and helping to build a playground in the neighborhood, near the Stroomstraat.<sup>51</sup>

47 A similar point has been made in: J.W. Duyvendak and J.L. Uitermark, ‘De opbouwwerker als architect van de publieke sfeer’, *B en M: Tijdschrift voor Beleid, Politiek en Maatschappij* 32 (2005); Duyvendak, *De planning van ontplooiing*.

48 Archive of the *Volksbuurtmuseum*, Box 8 (Van Wel), interview conducted by Van der Putte and Pilon.

49 The ACP’s *Wie, wat, hoe* booklet indicates that this happened in 1974. On the basis of editions of the *Pijlsweerdkrant* from 1972 and the interview with De Jong, 1972 seems more likely.

50 IISG, *Archive of the Communistische Eenheidspartij (107-117)*, *Report on the Houtplein; Pijlsweerdkrant* November (1972). It is very likely, but not 100 percent certain, that this was the same questionnaire that H. de Jong was working on.

51 Reckman inspired this repertoire: Piet Reckman, *Naar een strategie en metodieke voor social aktie*

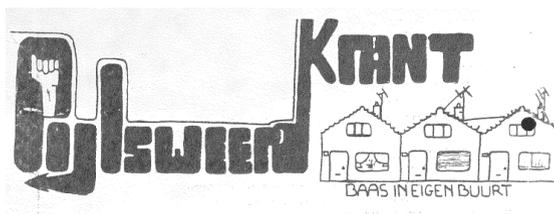


Illustration 6 Logo of the Pijlsweerdkrant.

(Source: ACP, *Wie, wat, hoe*, 58.)

The *Pijlsweerdkrant* reports that the people living in the neighborhood were very happy with the Committee's work on the playground, and that the ACP received 10 bundles of chrysanthemums as a thank-you.<sup>52</sup> Still, even such a 'sweet' action as building a playground could quickly become contentious. The *Pijlsweerdkrant* wrote that "he [Duitemeijer] wants to prevent that children [living at the Houtplein] play at the playground near the Stroomstraat. Despite [the fact] that this playground is meant for *all* of Pijlsweerd, also for the Houtplein."<sup>53</sup>

The positions were clear. Duitemeijer wanted to keep the *Houtpleiners* in the Houtplein. The ACP, on the other hand, wanted to pull the *Houtpleiners* out of their isolation and show that the PHA did not own the inhabitants of the Houtplein. Sarcastically, De Jong described Duitemeijer as the "emperor" of the Houtplein, supremely ruling over "his" inhabitants.<sup>54</sup>

On 12 October 1972, a family called E. asked the ACP to help them in squatting an empty house at the Houtplein. It seemed like an excellent opportunity for the ACP, which immediately declared its solidarity. The circumstances seemed ripe for such an approach, because many *Houtpleiners* had shown their discontent with the state of affairs at the Houtplein through the questionnaire.<sup>55</sup> And although squatting was legally dubious, it was firmly part of the action repertoire of the time.<sup>56</sup>

However, the squatting turned out to be a disaster. The ACP did not know that the house was promised to the family G., previously

(Utrecht 1971).

52 *Pijlsweerdkrant* November (1972) 1

53 *Pijlsweerdkrant* November (1972) 2.

54 Interview with H. de Jong.

55 *Pijlsweerdkrant* October (1972). In addition, poor relief made them less reliant on the PHA than in the days of the Houtplein's founding.

56 Hans Pruijt, 'Kraken in Europa', *Kritiek. Jaarboek voor Socialistische Discussie en Analyse* 2:1 (2009) 78-107.

living at the Blokstraat, close by. The family G. had the right to live at the Houtplein, wanted to live there, and was generally thought to be deserving of doing so by the people living in the area.<sup>57</sup> The Committee seems to have misread the situation at the Houtplein and apparently failed to get much backing for their action.

Inhabitants of the Blokstraat were angry with the Action Committee, and the general atmosphere turned against the ACP.<sup>58</sup> The *Pijlsweerdkrant* tried to save the situation by calling on people to take action against the government instead: “Don’t fall into the trap! Don’t direct your anger at one another but at the municipality!” It was argued that the government and the PHA should take care of *both* the families E. and G., and the *Pijlsweerdkrant* lashed out at the PHA: “Who is asocial here, the people of the Houtplein [...] or Duitemeijer, willing to kick the [E.] family out?”<sup>59</sup>

Duitemeijer’s strategic response was two-pronged: he not only proclaimed that representatives of the ACP were no longer allowed to attend meetings with inhabitants of the Houtplein, but also chose to incorporate some of its tactics. Duitemeijer invited inhabitants to meet and talk, and was suddenly very open to hearing their desires. He even instituted ‘residents meetings’ to provide an infrastructure for these talks. The *Pijlsweerdkrant* argued that Duitemeijer’s maneuvering was a ‘divide and conquer’ operation. The *Pijlsweerdkrant* complained that, through this strategy, Duitemeijer would supposedly divert the attention away from the real problems, like small houses, bad maintenance, and lacking showers.<sup>60</sup>

Duitemeijer’s maneuvering was successful, in the sense that the ACP seemed to back away from the Houtplein for a while after the squatting failed.<sup>61</sup> This squatting affair shows that, like the PHA’s citizenship project, the ACP’s project was not always effective, either. The ‘new’ citizenship project did not simply sweep away the ‘old’.

In an immediate sense, the ACP had failed to mobilize the *Houtpleiners*, but that failure was only temporary. Duitemeijer not only faced competition from the local ACP, national policy also changed in a way that was unfavorable for facilities like the Houtplein.<sup>62</sup> Isolation

57 I do not know the underlying reasons for this feeling.

58 *Pijlsweerdkrant* October (1972).

59 *Ibid.*

60 *Pijlsweerdkrant* November (1972).

61 Probably until 1974, combining the material derived from the *Pijlsweerdkrant* and *Wie, wat, hoe* (p. 6).

62 Dercksen and Verplanke, *Geschiedenis van de onmaatschappelijkheidsbestrijding*, 200, 234-239.

and (explicit) paternalistic authority were increasingly unpopular, while support for local and integrated approaches grew. Under the name Building Work in Special Situations (*Opbouwwerk Bijzondere Situaties*, OBS) a new national policy was initiated to deal with people who could not (or would not) live according to social norms. The focus was now on situations, rather than on people. As also happened in, for example, psychiatry (under the labels of ‘*vermaatschappelijking*’ and ‘de-institutionalization’) OBS-policy moved away from the old ‘artificial concentration.’<sup>63</sup> The PHA’s Houtplein was hard to fit into the new model.<sup>64</sup> Besides, the PHA’s project had become expensive and was not popular in government circles anymore.

The OBS-line in government policy should not be seen in isolation from the situations in the neighborhoods in which it intervened. Change came both from above (policy) and from below (protest). Some people combined the ‘below’ and ‘above’ in their very person, like the previously mentioned H. de Jong, who was a leading member of the ACP before joining the OBS-project Stichting Buurtwerk Pijlsweerd as a paid employee.<sup>65</sup> In a similar vein, several ‘volunteers’ connected to the ACP were appointed to the board of the Stichting Buurtwerk Pijlsweerd.<sup>66</sup> And, in a more general sense, there is also a connection between the goals of the ACP and the OBS-program, as both were against isolating ‘asocials’ and were in favor of focusing on the neighborhood.

In 1974, the municipal council decided to abolish the PHA.<sup>67</sup> Local newspaper *Utrechts Nieuwsblad* wrote that the board of the foundation had increasingly realized that “the time had come to relinquish the idea that families had to be housed in special complexes”. Various members of the municipal council were harsher in speaking out against the isolating practices of the PHA, and some even spoke of ‘ghettoization’.<sup>68</sup>

63 Loes Verplanke and Jan Willem Duyvendak, *Onder de mensen? Over het zelfstandig wonen van psychiatrische patiënten en mensen met een verstandelijke beperking* (Amsterdam 2010). For more about OBS and the end of re-educational facilities, see: Dercksen and Verplanke, *Geschiedenis van de onmaatschappelijkheidsbestrijding*, 238.

64 PHA was also briefly an OBS-project, until the Stichting Buurtwerk Pijlsweerd took over. See: ACP, *Wie, wat, hoe*, 50.

65 Although this does not necessarily apply to De Jong, the trends of protest and social work also come together in: Herman Vuijsje, *Nieuwe vrijgestelden: De opkomst van het spijkerpakkenproletariaat* (Amsterdam 1977).

66 ACP, *Wie, wat, hoe*, 51.

67 This was late, compared to other facilities, Dercksen and Verplanke, *Geschiedenis van de onmaatschappelijkheidsbestrijding*.

68 *Utrechts Nieuwsblad* 17 August (1974) 2. Cited in De Ridder and Polderman, *Huisvesting en normalisering*, 60.

The end of the PHA was, however, not the end of citizenship projects at the Houtplein. In the period between decision to terminate the PHA and the demolition of the buildings, the ACP stepped up, in tandem with the Stichting Buurtwerk Pijlsweerd. The committee members successfully inspired inhabitants of the Houtplein to protest at Utrecht's city hall, so as to get their houses at the Houtplein renovated. And, together, *Houtpleiners* and committee members undertook an 'Aktion' on the Amsterdamsestraatweg, blocking the busy road with furniture to create awareness of the conditions at the Houtplein. As a consequence of such actions, the Houtplein was frequently under police surveillance during this period. Even so, the ACP remained undaunted and kept inspiring *Houtpleiners* to partake in provocative protests.<sup>69</sup>

The symbolic highlight of the actions came in the summer of 1975, when the inhabitants squatted the Houtplein's bathhouse. The bath lady had fallen ill, so people couldn't wash themselves for a couple of days. In the photo- and memoirsbook *Akties en feesten rondom het Houtplein*, made by inhabitants of Pijlsweerd, it is recalled that "many inhabitants of the Houtplein wouldn't accept this, and squatted the bathhouse to exploit it themselves. They could wash their own children, without a bath lady."<sup>70</sup> In squatting the bathhouse, the PHA's hygienic mission was symbolically turned on its head: the *Houtpleiners* took their cleanliness into their own hands.<sup>71</sup>

In 1977, the houses at the Houtplein were finally demolished. The former inhabitants had high hopes that they would "finally [...] have a good house, with a shower, we won't be dependent on anyone to be able to wash."<sup>72</sup> Yet things turned out slightly differently. The new buildings on the Houtplein's site were unaffordable for many former inhabitants. As a consequence, many of the former *Houtpleiners* moved away, spreading over the entire country.<sup>73</sup>

Although the OBS program spelled the end of the Houtplein, ideas about 'artificial separation' kept resurfacing in the Netherlands. In 2011, right-wing politician Geert Wilders presented the idea of *tuigdorpen*, where *tuig* (riff raff) would be isolated from the rest of society, so as to cause less harm. More recently, 'Skaeve Huse' were introduced, small

69 See: Photobook 'Akties en feesten rondom het houtplein', (hibofa, 1985); Marja van der Werf, *Bouwen in je buurt* (Utrecht 1980), found in: HUA: PK:XC52, p. 41; *Utrechts Nieuwsblad* 4 May (1977) 3.

70 *Ibid.*

71 See also: Fred Penninga, *Ilse*.

72 *Ibid.*

73 Some former Houtpleiners were moved to new houses, see: Van der Werf, *Bouwen in je buurt*.



*Illustration 7 Squatting the bathhouse.*

*(Source: 'Akties en feesten rondom het houtplein'.)*

and sober houses, built after Danish example, where people considered to be 'mis-fits' could be sent to live in relative isolation from the rest of the community. These projects did not display the paternalism of the PHA (at least not in such an extreme form) but are clearly a form of 'artificial' isolation, indicating that part of the spirit of the Houtplein lives on to this very day.

## Concluding remarks

The concept of citizenship projects has helped to make the activities of the PHA and the ACP comparable. Although the anti-authoritarian ACP wanted something very different than the paternalistic PHA, both based their citizenship projects on an implicit blueprint of who the ideal members of the community were and of how to turn people into proper citizens. The story of these clashing citizenship projects helps us to see that the '70s were not only about recalibrating the authority that people had over themselves and over others but also about how membership of the community was contested.

Although citizenship projects are often studied in isolation, the case of the Houtplein shows that citizenship projects can exist side-by-side and even learn from one another. Under the director Duitemeijer,

the PHA incorporated some of the political techniques used by the ACP in its dealings with the *Houtpleiners*, like forming an inhabitants' association. Duitemeijer seems to have outmaneuvered the ACP at first. Yet when new policies were implemented by the national government, under the name *Opbouwwerk Bijzondere Situaties*, the PHA was terminated, and the ACP stepped in after all. This story of the end of the PHA can, however, not be told as the simple narrative of top-down change, as OBS (top-down) and ACP (bottom-up) were thoroughly related, both in terms of goals and personnel.

Besides the top-down or bottom-up direction of change at the Houtplein, the change itself is also somewhat ambiguous. This is clear when looking at the squatting of the bathhouse: on the one hand, the squatting shows that the ACP could motivate *Houtpleiners* to be assertive and claim what they desired; but, on the other hand, the *Houtpleiners'* hygienic desire to wash themselves was very much in line with the PHA's goals. One could argue that the inhabitants of the Houtplein had internalized hygienic norms to such an extent that supervision over bathing was no longer needed.

My case study on the Houtplein does not offer an unambiguous interpretation of the demise of the PHA and similar organizations. Rather, it shows how re-educational facilities were perceived and contested on the local level in the later years of their existence. In the case of the Houtplein, this local contestation may be more obvious than regarding most other re-educational facilities with similar aims. A simple reason for this is that the Houtplein existed for such an extraordinarily long period of time, so that the ACP had the opportunity to make its mark in the 1970s – whereas some comparable re-educational facilities were already terminated by that time. Nevertheless, it is likely that 'the neighborhood' was also a factor in the demise of other re-educational facilities. The isolation of urban re-educational facilities was never complete, making it probable that interactions with other inhabitants of the neighborhoods also played a role elsewhere.

Ultimately, it is important to recognize that the case of the Houtplein is only that: a single case. In order to draw deeper lessons about the end of re-educational facilities and the broader cultural conflict of the 1960s and '70s, more small-scale research is needed. It is only by placing other episodes in the cultural clash of the period next to the one at the Houtplein that we can find out whether the interactions between the PHA and the ACP were as representative as they may seem.

In such future research, the concept of citizenship projects can guide our way, because the questions that this notion draws out (what defines a citizen? who are the ideal members of the community? how do you get people to become such ideal members?) bring us to the heart of what matters in socio-political history. What could be more interesting than studying these projects?

## About the author

**Jasper Bongers** (1991) studied political science at the University of Amsterdam and history at Utrecht University before starting his PhD research on citizenship and public health in Utrecht (1866-2001) at the Open University of the Netherlands.

E-mail: [jasper.bongers@ou.nl](mailto:jasper.bongers@ou.nl)

