

MOMO IN NOBO: AN OVERIJSEL PROGRAMME

Post-War MoMo architecture and city planning was engendered by either war-damage or the necessity to accommodate a growing population. In the war-damage category there was damage resulting from enemy bombardment, the action of combatants and even from 'friendly fire' when, for example, allied pilots mistook Dutch towns for German cities. In a regional, rather rural area like the province of Overijssel one may still see the results of serious damage in a city like Deventer, because the bombing of road and rail bridges also destroyed fairly large built up areas. Allied bombers also attacked the cities of Hengelo and Enschede, which subsequently had to rebuild large parts of their centres.

Dirk Baalman

In the post-war period the respect for architecture and the city planning was usually not very deep. The general public associates this period with rigidly planned town-quarters, poor details and boring architecture. While pre-war architecture (the 30s) is cherished and copied (the work of our grand-fathers), post-war production is considered to be easily replaceable (though nobody wants to tell his father this). Housing corporations, municipalities and private developers seem to share this deprecation, demolishing much from this period without hesitation.

As a consultant to planning committees and the provinces of Overijssel and Flevoland, 'Het Overzicht' sought a different approach and found a partner and sponsor in the Overijssel administration: the NoBO-programme was born. NoBO stands for 'Naoorlogs Bouwen in Overijssel' (post-war building in Overijssel) and focuses on housing estates, churches and works of applied art. It seeks to provide knowledge / expertise about these areas, to obtain support for their preservation and development and to educate pupils, students and those responsible for decisions on the future of post-war MoMo. NoBO was also the name of a well-known sweet treat enjoyed by many families on Saturday nights in the 1950s.



The areas of attention were chosen with an eye to urgency. Works of applied art, for instance, are under threat and may disappear without anyone noticing that they ever existed, let alone appreciating their meaning or importance. Sheer listing, documenting and publishing this category has brought its richness and variety to the attention and awareness of many people. The churches became an object of attention not only because of the rich variety of their architecture, but also because churches were important pawns in the chess-play of town planning. Almost every housing quarter had to have three churches for the three main denominations of Dutch Christianity. In the large areas covered with housing they were placed at important nodes and used as accents and points of orientation. Thus the demolition of a church very often results in the destruction of part of a city-planning concept. Should demolition be unavoidable, tribute should be paid to this role in the town-plan by the formulation of special requirements for the building that might replace it.

But the re-use and redevelopment of such churches is preferable and, owing to the nature of post-war architecture, is very often feasible. The NoBO programme can profit from the experience that was developed in Overijssel with a similar programme for the 're-animation' of industrial heritage, a programme activated and sponsored by the same provincial administration, with 'Het Overzicht' as its consultant. Industrial heritage has also suffered from a long period of disrespect and deprecation, but is now at the heart of many a successful real-estate development operation. It provides such developments with an air of identity, individuality and historic reference. This position was attained through the historic narrative and by the nature of the buildings themselves. This nature is one that is unspecific, over-spacious and flexible. Often, this unspecific nature is a characteristic that the industrial heritage shares with religious architecture of the post-war period. The latter differs from the industrial example however, in the lack of narrative: these churches do not yet adhere to the memory of those passing by and, often not even to that of their owners or users. Many a post-war church is sacrificed by its parish after a fusion with adjoining parishes, often with a certain joy deriving from the gain in the real-estate value and with little emotion relating to the building left behind.

The NoBO programme pays much attention to education. It publishes books on housing quarters, churches and art. It helps people to relate to their neighbourhood by means of lectures, walks and guided tours, and by letting them document it in photographs, which, for example, become part of exhibitions. GPS- and PDA-guided tours have been developed. These enable people walking in an area to extract information on the spot from a handheld computer. Usually reactions are very positive: 'we never realised that we lived in such an interesting area'. Preservation and careful redevelopment start with appreciation of the subject matter, and therefore this is a very basic part of the programme.

A subtle, but very clear example of the re-use of a Roman Catholic Church building is found in the town of Bant, in the province of Flevoland. The church was transferred to a Protestant parish, a rather unique event, since Catholics generally consider their churches to be sacred buildings, which should therefore be demolished when no longer required by the Catholic congregation. The church at Bant (a designated monument) could have



been used in its original state, however it was necessary to add a balcony. This was done in accordance with a well-known typology and with great respect for the architecture. It was agreed that the objects of art in the church could either be used elsewhere, or remain in the building in places where they would not interfere with Protestant services. Only the crucifix on the former altar was a problem: Catholics have a crucifix with the body of Christ on it while Protestants use a bare cross. The compromise made was that on Christian feast days such as those at Easter or Christmas, the body of Christ would be covered by a suitable cloth. This example shows that even theological disputes do not have to hinder the creativity needed for the preservation, re-use and development of post-war religious MoMo-architecture.

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top
Former Elin Chapel

bottom right
Zwolle, Resurrection Church, '60
Boxman (to be demolished?)

bottom left
Sint Jans klooster, gereformeerde kerk
Nicolai, 1965