



**NEDERLANDSCHE DOK EN SCHEEPSBOUW COMPANY (NDSM)  
AMSTERDAM (the Netherlands)**

A critical evaluation of the role of strategic spatial planning in its development

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European Master of Urbanism 2017-18 Semester I

Regional Strategies and Territorial Governance

## NEDERLANDSCHE DOK EN SCHEEPSBOUW MAATSCHAPPIJ (NDSM)

NDSM stands for Nederlandsche Dok en Scheepsbouw Maatschappij (Dutch Docks and Shipbuilding Company). These initials are also how its former shipyard in the IJ waterfront in Amsterdam is known.

This piece of land (around 90 ha) has experienced very important changes throughout its history, being part of wider and global processes beyond its location in the city. This text will try to recall these changes and, by putting them together, understand a little of the complexity of the leading forces behind them.

NDSM was the result of the merging in 1946 of the companies NDM and NSM. It was once one of the largest shipyards in the world. Its development was very much linked to the economic

growth and industrialization process experienced in Europe after the Second World War. 84 years after the foundation of NSM, the last ship was built in 1978. After the oil crises in 1973 and 1978, the company was bankrupt in 1984, abandoning its facilities at the IJ waterfront in Amsterdam North.

This document is organized in three chapters, corresponding each of them to a different moment in the history of NDSM. In the first one, I talk about the situation of the IJ waterfront after the decline of the company in the 1980's in relation to Amsterdam 1985 Structure Plan. In the second chapter I talk about the artistic and cultural movement that was developed in the area, since its occupation in the 1990s by groups of squatters and artists. I also mention the appear-

ance of different cultural foundations that operate nowadays in the area and the beginning of the gentrification process that is currently ongoing. The last chapter tries to understand the relation between the current situation of NDSM and the planning policy of Amsterdam Municipality, by looking at 'Koers 2025' plan, published by the Municipality in 2016. In this plan, it is proposed to build 1,400 new housing units in the area.

Finally, in the last part of the text I pose some questions that try to connect the three parts.





## AMSTERDAM 1985 STRUCTURE PLAN

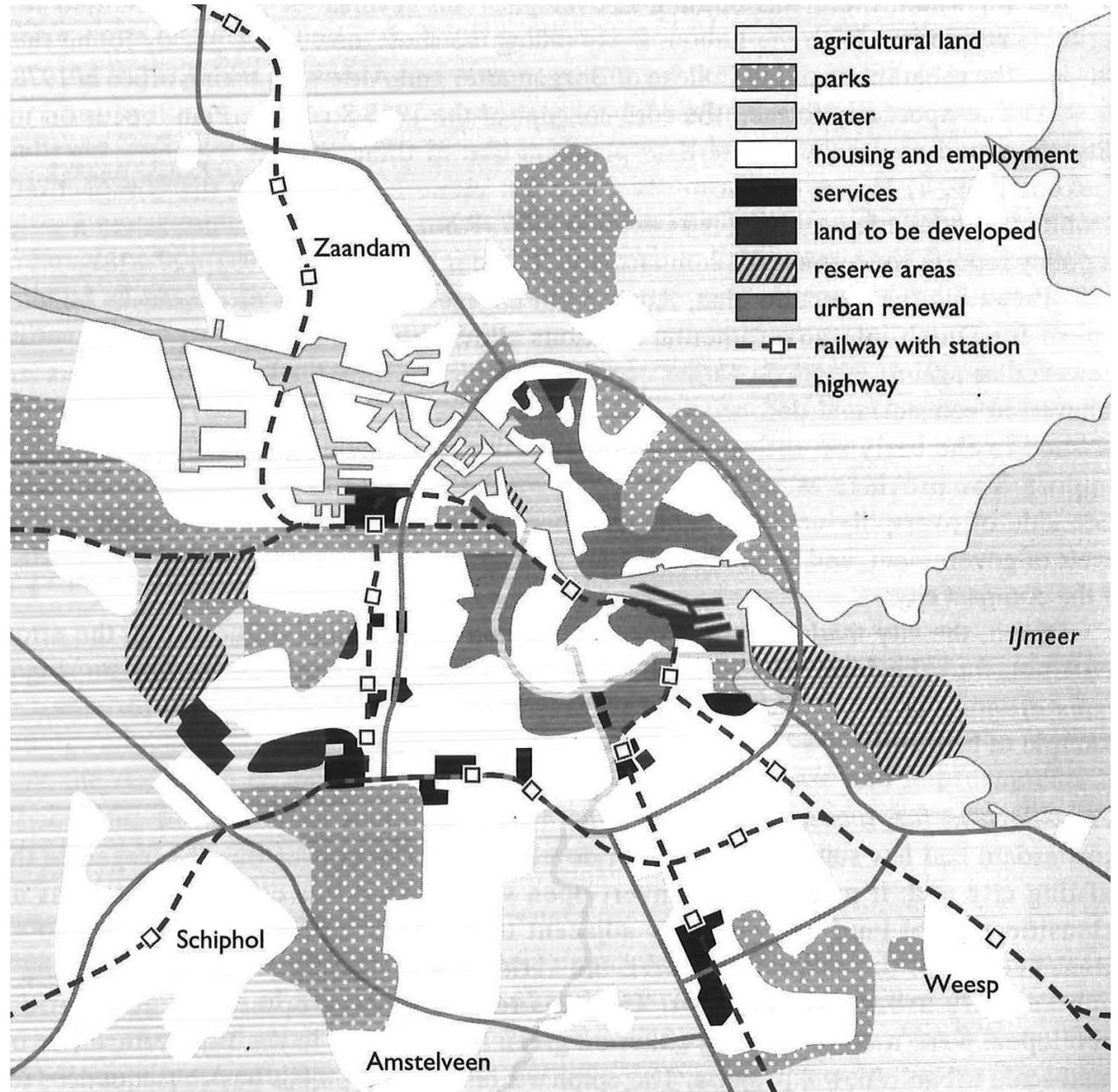
During the 1980s, the spatial policy changed in the Netherlands. Urban areas should no longer grow through suburbanization and “concentrated deconcentration”, as it was encouraged by the Second Policy Document of Spatial Planning (1966) (Schuyt & Taverne, 2004). These concepts were replaced by the compact city, along with concentric growth and urban renewal strategies.

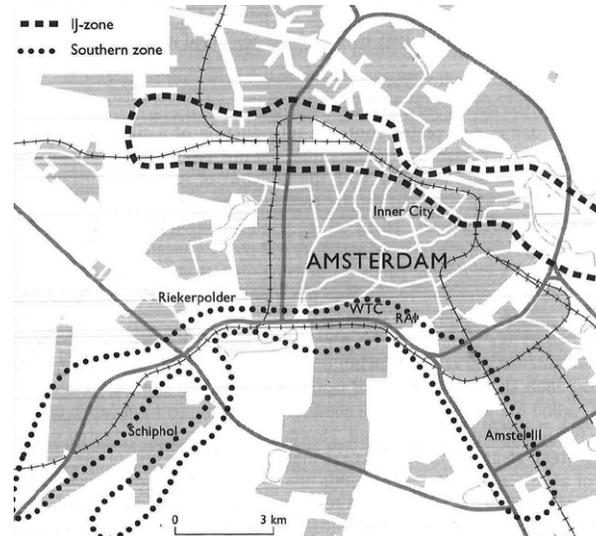
Amsterdam 1985 Structure Plan was aligned with these principles. Its main objectives were intensification of land use, stimulation of private investment in housing and roads and zoning of land in and around the city for offices and high tech industry (Faludi & van der Valk, 1994).

Europe was suffering a deindustrialization process, experienced after the oil crises of the 1970s. The city of Amsterdam was losing population and jobs at the time and there were big extensions of land available for renewal on the IJ water banks, such as the NDSM former shipyard.

The plan proposed two strategic projects: The development of the southern axis towards Schiphol airport, and the development of the IJ waterfront, along all the old dock sites. This last strategy had already started in 1981 with a commission to build 1,400 houses in the North bank.

However, the big goal of this project was never accomplished. The plan proposed to develop high-quality offices and shopping centers under a public-private partnership. It was the first





time something like this was suggested in The Netherlands. In 1991, the Amsterdam Waterfront Company was formed, but it only lasted two years. The conditions were not yet there for this kind of development. The bank that was lending the money for the operation didn't see enough profits in the long term and withdrew. The Amsterdam Waterfront Company changed the focus of the project: It wanted to multiply by ten the floor area proposed under the 1985 plan, banned subsidized housing, wanted to concentrate half of the office space in high rise buildings close to the station and decreased the share of public facilities from 40% to 13%.

In 1993 the company was disbanded and the municipality assumed its traditional role as developer (Faludi & van der Valk, 1994). The city had to wait for several years until the devel-

opments were carried out. Never the less, the NDSM was not included in the IJ waterfront axis of the project. It focused on the Southern river bank, which was easier to develop because of its direct connection to the city center.

On the contrary, the buildings in the NDSM area stayed empty for several years after the company went bankrupt. The Southern bank was developed under the premises of the 1985 plan during the following years while a different strategy was developed for the Northern waterfront.

## A CULTURAL HUB IN THE NDSM

After the ship building company left the shipyard, the warehouses and buildings of the NDSM remained empty for several years. The land was mainly leasehold by the Municipality, but there were also some areas which were privately owned. For some years, the Municipality tried to buy most of the land, succeeding in some cases, but not completely.

In the beginning of the 1990s, the first squatters and artists arrived to the area. Some of them formalized their situation and rented the spaces to the administrators and others remained as squatters. The NDSM started to become a very active cultural center of Amsterdam.

During the XXth century, squatting movements and collectives had been a counterbalance in many urban projects and policies in the city of Amsterdam (Pruijt, 2013). In many cases, this power shifted the position of planners from negotiators to mediators (Forester, 1987). But, by the end of the 1990s, the tide was already turning and squatting movements had become weaker. Since 1985 Structure Plan, planning had become more market-oriented and Amsterdam Municipality had different plans for NDSM.

In 1998, ten old warehouses were threatened with eviction and some 1,000 artists lost their workstations. Short after, in 2000, the Stadsdeel Noord (Amsterdam North district) organized a competition for the temporary implementation of the eastern part of the NDSM site (84,000 m<sup>2</sup>).

Eva de Klerk, a bottom-up project booster, along

## SQUATTING AND PROVO MOVEMENT

Amsterdam has been a city with a strong tradition of squatting groups. Squatting without breaking the law was possible between 1971 and 2010.

From 1965 to 1967 the anarchist movement PROVO had a big impact on the city. The political wing of the movement won a seat in Amsterdam city council, from where they proposed the White Plans. The White Bicycle plan proposed to close off central Amsterdam to private traffic, implementing a bicycle sharing system and improving the public transport system.

The White Housing plan proposed to make public a list of all the empty houses in the city, painting their doorjambes in white, so people that needed a home could squat them.

Other White Plans were the White Chimney plan, White Chicken plan or the White Car plan. Even if most of these plans were never officially approved, they influenced later policies.

Squatting groups grew bigger after the PROVO movement, during the 1970s. The 1980s were the heyday of the squatting movement in the city. By the end of the 90s, 50,000 people had lived in squats in one way or another (Pruijt, 2013) and different squatting groups



had been very influential in many urban decisions and projects, such as the Nieuwmarkt neighborhood. A ring road and a subway line were planned to cut through the neighborhood. The squatting groups, along with conservational activists, managed to influence in the development of several housing projects and stopped the construction of a subway line (Pruijt, 2013: 36).

During the 1990s and the beginning of the XXIst century, squatting movements lost strength, many groups were “officialized” and others lost support. On the 1st of October 2010, squatting became illegal in the Netherlands.

with artists from the NDSM, won the competition and the Kinetisch Noord Foundation was born. It managed, along with the Municipality, the scheepsbouwloods, a big space for artists and culture entrepreneurs. They built the NDSM Kunst-stad (art city) in 2007, organized the IJ Festival, implemented a skate park, a monthly flea-market, etc. Thus, the culture hub of NDSM was “officialized”.

The Kinetisch Noord Foundation is still managing the place and being subsidized by the Municipality. The connection between the two institutions is strong. Lyangelo Vasquez, present director of the foundation, was head of the city’s northern district during the construction of the kunst-stad.

Amsterdam Municipality was aware that many artists’ workspaces that started in squatted buildings created a good and attractive artistic atmosphere. The process that started with the Stadsdeel Noord competition was a proof of this. Compared to earlier decades, the position of the Municipality towards NDSM seemed never the less to had shifted. It became more active in the process.

Several decisions were taken by the local government after the competition, including the implementation of a free ferry line that connected NDSM wharf with Amsterdam central station (still in service). This tried to work on one of the weak spots of the area: its accessibility. Due to the need of free water crossing on the IJ, construction through land was very difficult and this ferry line was a first step to connecting the area



Picture: X-Slope at NDSM today (the author)



with the center of the city.

Moreover, the area was considered as a socio-cultural facility in the land-use map of the Municipality. Another foundation was also created to promote the area: the NDSM-Wharf foundation.

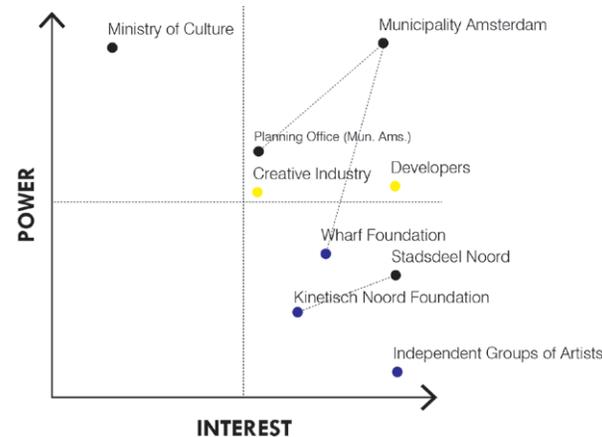
After a few years, the cultural and vibrant atmosphere attracted also the creative industry to Amsterdam North. MTV moved to the district in 2007. Hilton bought the Double Tree hotel at the Wharf of NDSM. Sony and Red Bull also moved to the area a few years later. The Blackstone group built a shopping mall and housing condominiums were constructed in the surrounding areas of the NDSM.

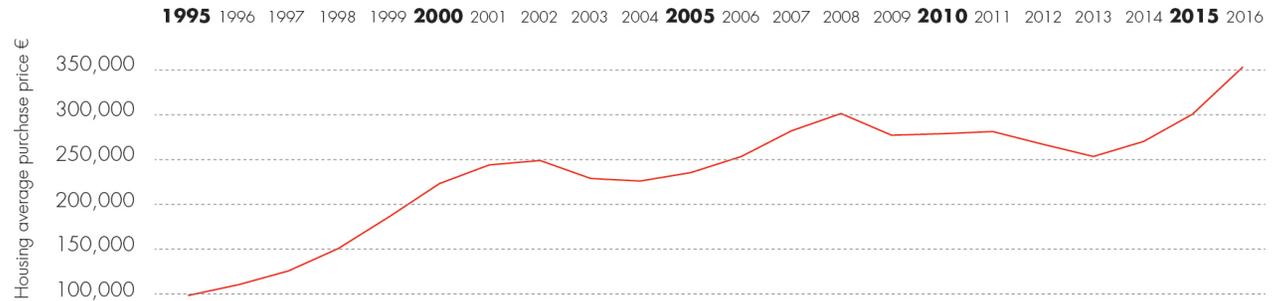
During those years, some of the buildings in the NDSM wharf were classified as monuments. First, they were protected by the Municipality (2004), and then as national monuments (2007). The Kinetisch Foundation became owner of the Scheepsbouwlouids in leasehold for 50 years in 2014 and in 2017, the X-Slope, another building that hosts independent artists' studios, was



protected as a cultural 'free space' by the city council in 2017.

The creative industry, attracted by the cultural breeding ground that NDSM offered, was never the less able to pay higher rent costs, replacing some of the artists that initially moved to the area. The high-end functions were expelling local neighbors (Sassen, 2014), and the gentrification process was experienced in different areas of Amsterdam North.





The average housing cost of Amsterdam since the 1990s had risen from 98,000€ to 358,000€ in 2016 (CBS, 2017). The home prices in Amsterdam North rose 26% between 2015 and 2016, twice as fast as the rest of the city as a whole (Fahmy & Van Der Schoot, 2016). Differently from the situation in 1991, when the Amsterdam Waterfront Company was created, Amsterdam North is today much more attractive to land developers.

The rise in housing costs has created a reaction in the local community at NDSM, but this reaction is not connected to other groups of Amsterdam population. These changes affect the whole Amsterdam North, and still there is no coordination between different communities and neighborhoods in the district.

Besides the cultural hub, the NDSM wharf has not changed much spatially. There are however many stakeholders with different interests in the area (see diagram in p. 8), embodying different visions of its future and that of the city of Amsterdam. While private developers demand space to carry out high cost housing projects

in Amsterdam North, including NDSM, there is also demand by the local community for mixed-use and cultural areas that could be affordable to a wider range of population, including the existing neighbors. The cultural foundations also have their own interest in preserving their position. The Municipality and its planning office are in between, but anyway responsible for the development of the area.

I will develop a little further the role of the Municipality and the planning office through the 'Koers 2025' Amsterdam plan in the following chapter.

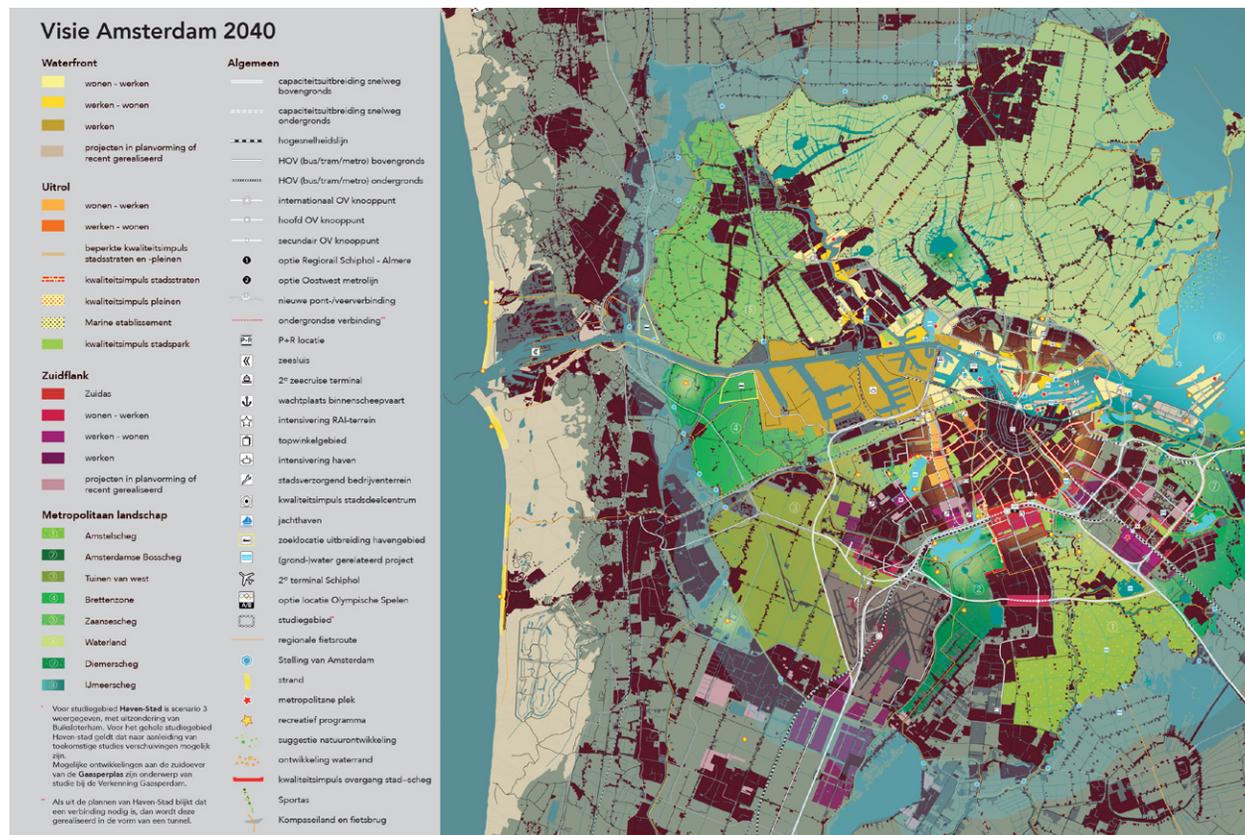


## AMSTERDAM 'KOERS 2025' PLAN

As it was mentioned in the previous chapter, beside the cultural hub, no big scale developments have been carried out at NDSM wharf yet. To some extent due to its influence, the surrounding areas in Amsterdam Nord are however under deep transformations.

The ideas under which these changes align are developed both in the Municipality Vision for Amsterdam 2040 (2011) and the Amsterdam plan "Koers 2025" (towards 2025) (2016).

"Koers 2025" plan picks up the approach of 1985 Structure Plan and proposes two big strategic projects. On one hand, the transformation of the IJ waterfront, this time to a bigger extent, including big parts of transformed industrial land on the West docks and the Northern bank. On the other hand, it proposes the Haven-stad. Both projects affect the NDSM area. As in 1985 plan, these big projects are to be carried out as public private partnerships. Now, both the market conditions and the more flexible regulations





seem to favor this type of development, contrary to what happened in 1991 with the Amsterdam Waterfront Company.

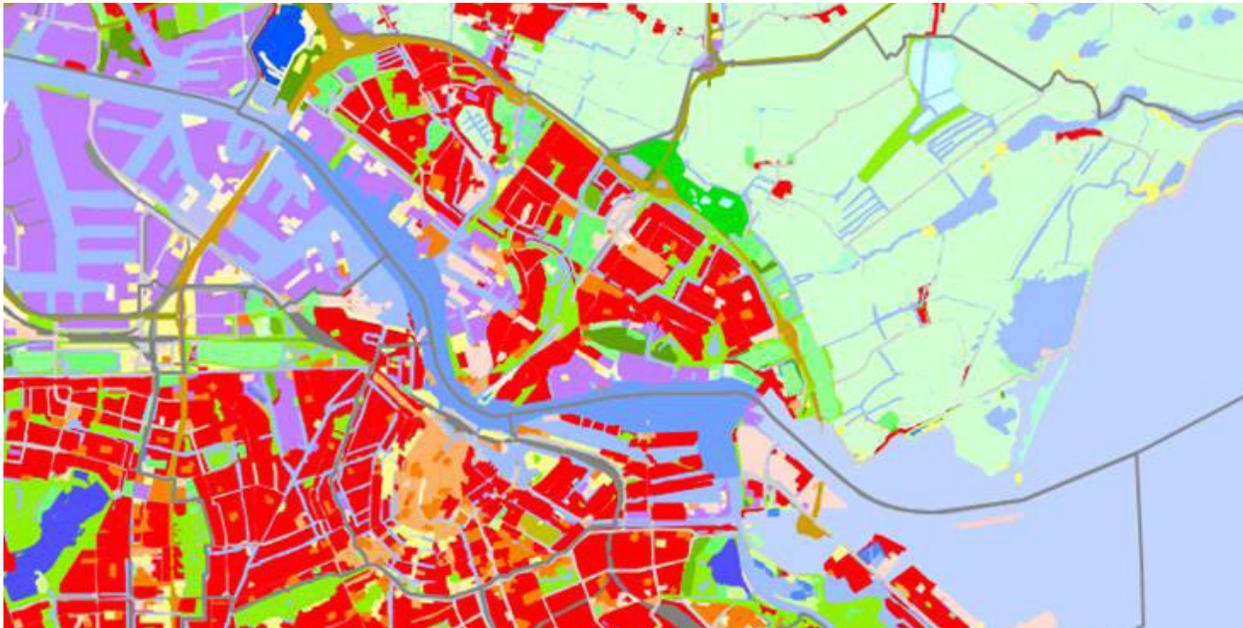
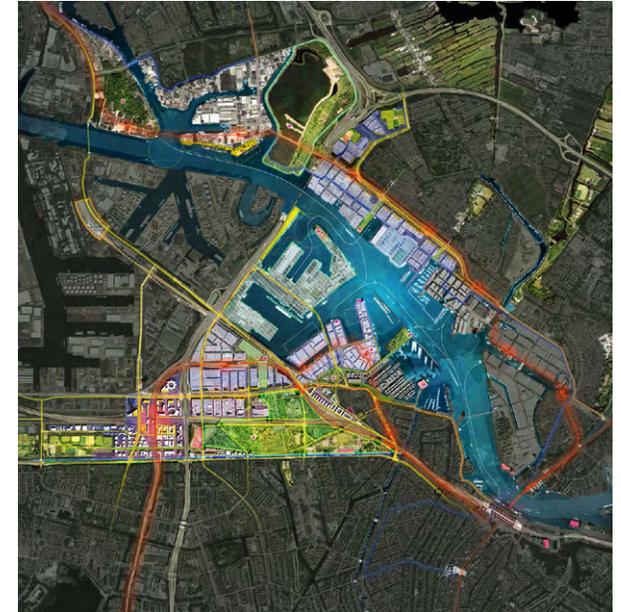
A recurring statement in the plan is the need to build between 40,000 to 70,000 new housing units by 2025 due to an increasing housing demand in the city. 1,400 new homes are proposed to be built in NDSM.

The connections between Northern and Southern IJ banks are reinforced by the construction of a subway line. In Amsterdam vision for 2040, a new bridge is also proposed.

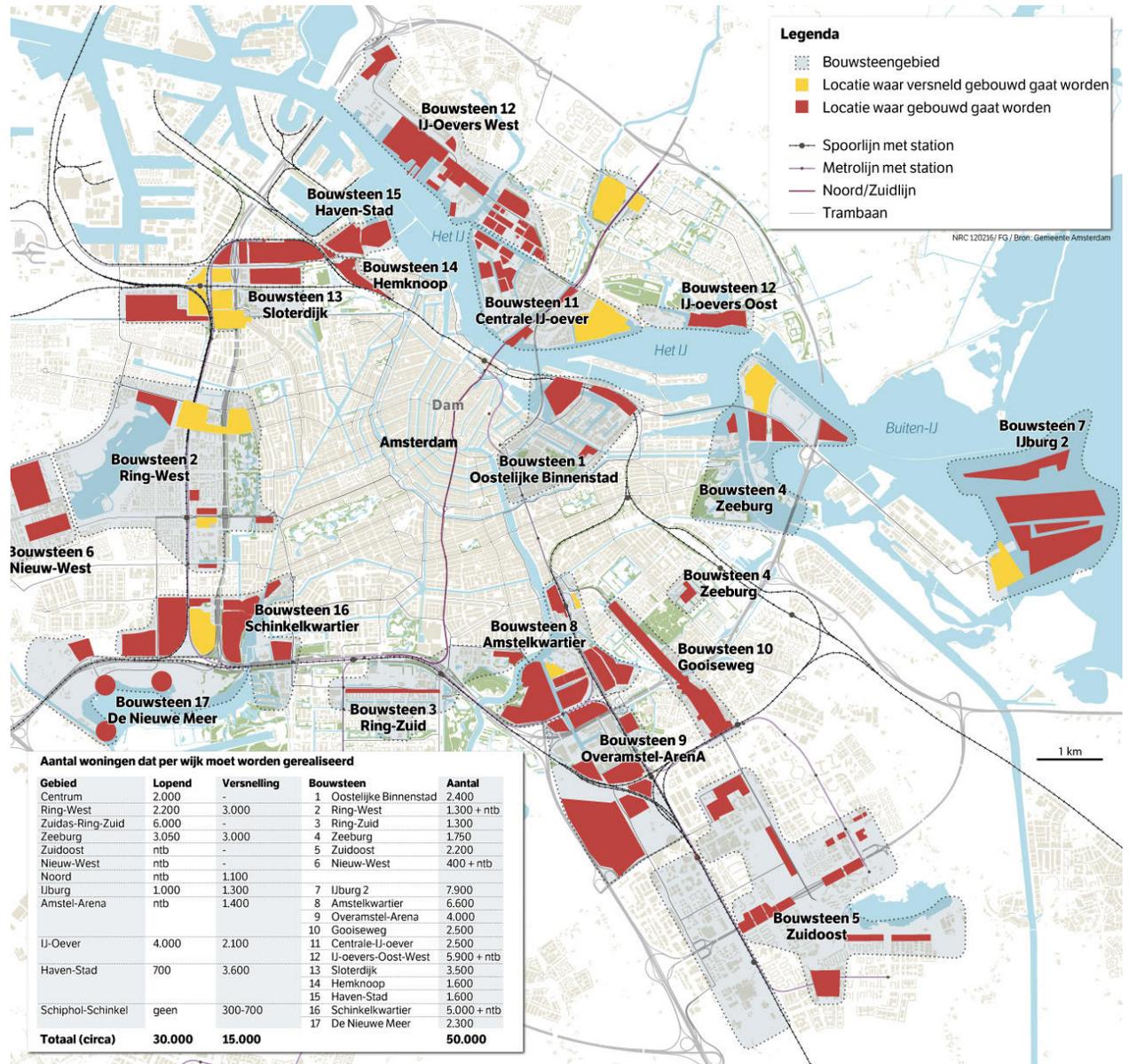
Opposed to the current land use map (in this page), many industrial land (purple) is transformed into residential areas.

Seeing current and previous housing developments, such as the ones carried out in the Southern bank (Java, Borneo, IJ Dock, etc.), the new housing areas are to a certain extent “monofunctional” and, except for the share of social housing, high cost.

Redevelopment of existing areas and urban renewal are still ongoing trends in planning since the 1980s, but these concepts have changed a lot since then. In words of Andreas Faludi and Arnold van der Valk (already in 1994) “the concept (of compact city) has since undergone a metamorphosis. Planning is now more concerned with the economy. The compact city policy is now more about attracting businesses, hotels, shopping and high-class residential de-



velopment.” We see also this kind of development along the river banks of the IJ in Amsterdam. To some extent, it seems the plan is there to find the most suitable locations for these developments, trying to accommodate their impact in the city by creating the conditions and mitigating them at the same time.



## NDSM: A PLACE OF CONFLICT

As Forester (1987) states: “in the face of local land use conflicts, (...) planners mediate between conflicting parties and at the same time negotiate as interested parties themselves.”

NDSM (especially the area of the wharf) is a very interesting case because the conflict between the two different parties is very evident. In many gentrification processes, the line between who wins and who loses might get a bit blurred in some cases. Some neighbors may be happy to sell their property for a big sum even if they are forced to move to a different neighborhood, for example. Having better living conditions, such as public safety, is always positive. The problem is not being able to afford living in such an area. In the case of NDSM, the local community is made up of artists and creators who rent a space in the area and benefit from being close to each other. Therefore, most of them see their position threatened by the new type of developments implemented along the waterfront.

The area will transform, there is no doubt about that. The question is whether this transformation will be able to consider a variety of uses and neighbors, including the current inhabitants of NDSM and/or Amsterdam Nord, or it will exclude them, transforming the area into a high-end “monofunctional” neighborhood.

As far as I have been able to understand in the current plan and urban policies of Amsterdam Municipality, aside from preserving small areas as they currently are (see page 8), planning is not taking a very active role in mediating between parties. As Forester continues (1987)

“politically, mediated-negotiation strategies need not simply perpetuate power imbalances.” Are municipal interests in this case aligned with those of private developers? What are the interests of planners in NDSM? Do planners want to confront the existing power imbalance? Are they able? Are those small preserved areas enough? Will they be able to become a counter balance in themselves?

Planning has played an important role in the ongoing transformations of the area. From the Stadsdeel Noord competition and the Kinetisch Foundation to the already developed land for housing in the surroundings of NDSM, all has been part of a plan. Had planners any agency in this plan or was it only politically-led?

If most of the decisions are taken by politicians with an economic approach (e.g. private developments are the way to finance public accessible services), what is the role of planning in the future of NDSM?



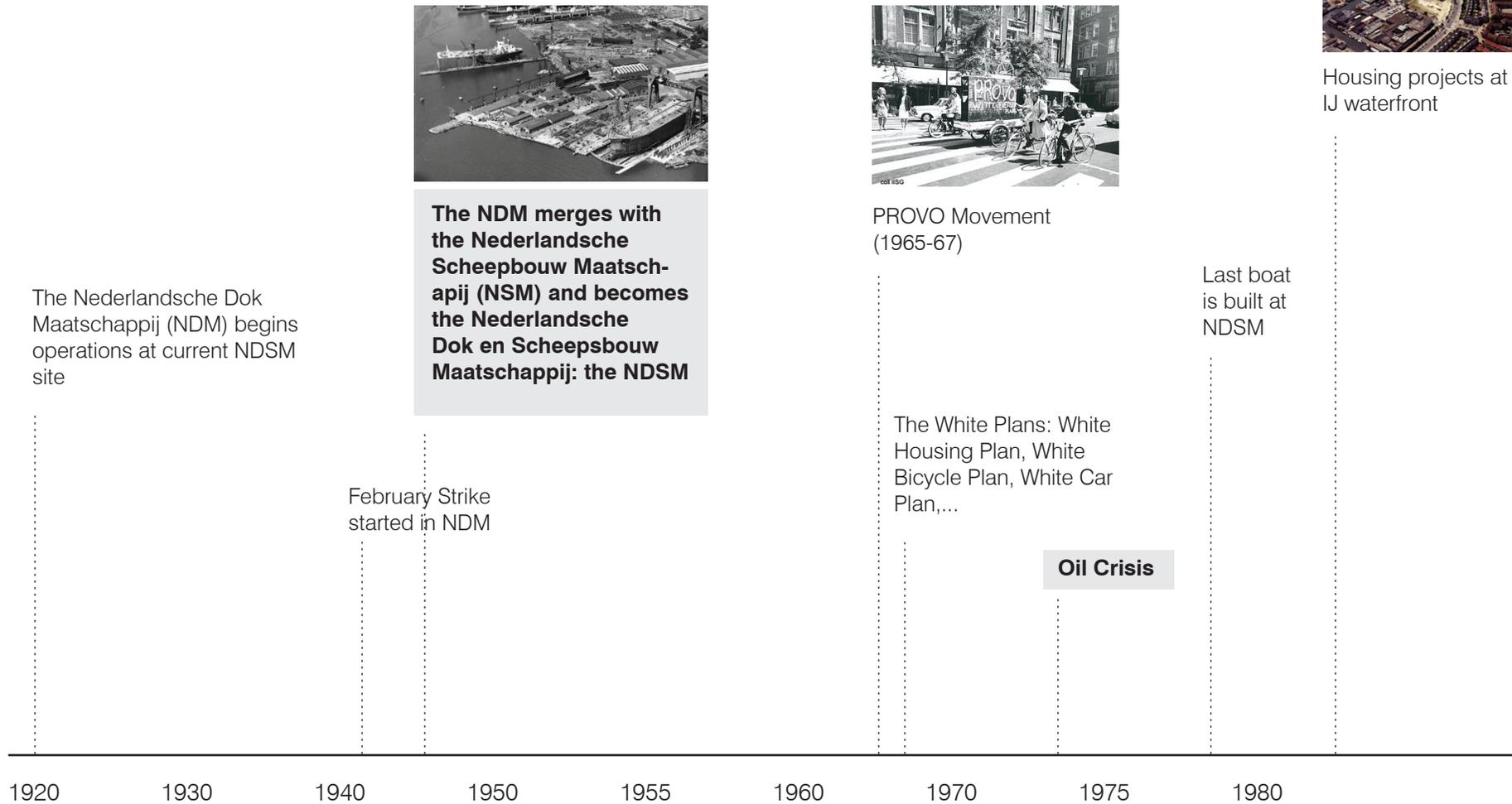


VERVAKO  
SHIPYARD  
AMSTERDAM BV

Pfizer

NDSM

## NDSM TIMELINE





**Amsterdam  
1985 Structure  
Plan**

**After years of fi-  
nancial problems,  
NDSM closes its  
doors**

**Squatters and  
artists arrive  
to NDSM**

Amsterdam Waterfront  
Company is created  
(1991-93)

Massive evic-  
tion of artists at  
NDSM

**Stadsdeel Noord  
competition: Ki-  
netisch Noord Foun-  
dation is born**

Amsterdam  
Noord Master  
Plan

Some buildings  
of the NDSM are  
declared National  
Monuments

The Kunststad  
(Art City) opens its  
doors

MTV arrives to Am-  
sterdam Nord

2010 Squatting ban

Amsterdam  
Structure  
Vision



**Amsterdam 'Koers  
2025' plan: 1,400  
housing units are to  
be built at NDSM**



1985

1990

1995

2000

2005

2010

2015

2017

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I also want to thank Klaar van der Lippe and Bart Stuart (Burospelen) for showing me NDSM, as well as for all the conversations and all the information provided about it.