

University College London  
The Bartlett School of Planning

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**Public Participation in Planning  
The Open Plan Process  
of the Wibautas**

*A Case Study*

Sagit Porat

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You can't expect a government to show common sense  
Unless it is forced to by public opinion.  
Left to itself, government will always be silly.

**Bertrand Russel**

## Acknowledgements

It is only recently that I have started reading acknowledgement and forward lists with appreciation that replaced of my natural cynical attitude. Since I owe so many thanks, truly and from the bottom of my heart, for the production of this modest piece of writing, it occurred to me that more substantial creations must have more help and support to be thankful for. I didn't think they actually meant it. Now I know better.

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## Abstract

Contemporary planners and planning literature are engaged in debate about the future of planning as a democratic enterprise, and the form it should take regarding the involvement of public in the planning of the environment. The Netherlands' planning system has firmly established mechanisms of citizen participation in the planning process, but those are criticised for being expensive and ineffective. The Dutch *inspraak* procedure is reactive in nature -- after a plan has been drafted the public is invited to comment on it. This only allows for minor alterations of details, but rarely enables conceptual changes in the making of the plan. Strong opposition to plans presented recently in Amsterdam resulted in bitter defeat of the local government in two referenda. The municipality realised a modification was required to the legally compulsory participatory measures, and the Open Plan Process was introduced.

This is a study of a specific Open Plan Process. Inhabitant, workers and users of the vicinity of the *Wibautas*, a major traffic route in Amsterdam, were invited to participate in the making on the plan: not merely suggest changes to a draft, but actually assume the role of the visionary-planners; to point out the problems they see in their neighbourhood and the best way to correct them. Although other plans are being drawn-up in a similar way in Amsterdam, this one was unique for its wide scope and the significance of the area in question -- particularly its importance to the Amsterdam traffic system. For this reason it is in the heart of the main political dispute in the city today.

The paper discusses the origins of the process, its development, and the problems that arose during it progression. It attempts to examine the new 'rules of the game' it necessitates from members of the public, planners and civil servants, and politicians in the quest for new means of achieving an equilibrium between democracy and 'the perfect plan'.

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## Introduction

This paper studies the **Open Plan Process** [*open planproces* in Dutch], an experimental process examining new means of public participation in planning, as it was carried out on the *Wibautas* [or *Wibaut* axis] project in Amsterdam. The report is the outcome of my three months work placement at the *dienst Ruimtelijke Ordening* [Physical Planning Department] Amsterdam. When the possibility of going 'abroad' from my studies in London (for London, too, is 'abroad' to me) presented itself for these purposes, the Netherlands was, quite obviously to me, my preferable destination. Such was also the advice given to me by some of my professors and fellow planning-students.

Much like my native Israel, the Netherlands is small in size and over-populated, with a high population density in the main urban core (Radzi, 1999). Both countries share a long tradition of urban planning, although these two traditions have developed under entirely different conditions, embedded in drastically different cultures and historical contexts (Alexander, 1988). While the Netherlands is often referred to as "the most planned country in Europe" (Newman and Thornley, 1996), Israel seems to produce a great variety of unplanned (or rather badly planned?) projects which alter its environment in a significant way.

However, it seems the attitude to planning as well as physical planning itself, are slowly changing face in Israel. The new government talks of major reform of the Planning Authority, including its removal from the hospice of the Ministry of the Interior. But even before these most recent developments, changes were apparent. Major amendments were introduced to the Planning and Building Law; the public is more active and reactive to issues concerning the built environment; the new Israel Master-plan has been drawn up with a variety of considerations, perspectives and scenarios, and – this is where the connection is obvious – with great reliance on Dutch experts and expertise.

The following Methodology chapter discusses relevant issues of comparative study and its effectiveness, especially concerning the topic of this report: Public Participation in the Planning Process. It outlines the method of work and explains the thought behind the structure of the paper. The chapter about participation attempts to place the case study of the *Wibautas* in the context of contemporary experiences and literature. The Dutch situation is then outlined, to approach this case study within its unique national framework. The view is narrowed down further to discuss Amsterdam and its specific political-planning history, which illuminates the course the **Open Plan Process** took, from design to actual conduct. The historical development of the *Wibautas* is summarised to give an understanding of the physical perspectives of the *Wibautas Open Plan Process*. Then the process itself is described, pointing out involved agents/parties, difficulties that arose, amendments and modifications that were made in an attempt to correct some of the problems, and outstanding issues.

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The pictures accompanying this paper were taken by me along the *Wibautas*, unless mentioned otherwise.

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The *Wibautas* is a main artery in the Amsterdam traffic system, connecting the Centre with the city's south-east. It is composed of several streets in continuation, beginning at the *newMetropolis* Technology Museum, situated on 'reclaimed land' in the main harbour, and the exit point of the IJ Tunnel connecting Central and North Amsterdam; through *Valkenburgerstraat* to the *Mr. Visserplein* and the *Waterlooplein* Metro station; along the *Jonas Daniel Meijerplein*, with *the Portuguese Synagogue* and the *Joods Historisch Museum*; down *Weesperstraat* through the old Jewish neighbourhood towards *Weesperplein*, with another metro station, and *Rhijnspoorplein*; via the *Wibautstraat* which contributes the name of the axis, with several higher-education institutes and the buildings of some of the major Dutch newspapers; under the railway



-- which crosses the *Wibautstraat* on a bridge; ending at the *Rembrandttoren*, by the *Amstel Station*.

The *Wibautas* is known as "the Ugliest Street in Holland", and, indeed, its characteristic wide streets, massive buildings and open spaces are far less attractive than Amsterdam's typical quiet, narrow canals and calm atmosphere. Groups of residents of the area have voiced their discontent with their close environment, and thus introduced the possibility of planning the route in a different way, with more involvement of the interested public. Their letters have stuck a chord at the *Stadhuis* [City Hall], and it was decided to use the planning of the *Wibautas* master-plan as an experiment in new ways of introducing public participation.

Amsterdam has a history of active, even violent public activities and demonstrations in cases of disagreement with decisions taken at the political level. Recent failures, which might also be described as serious defeat, of the local government played a role. An overwhelming majority said "No" to suggestions of administration-structural reform and the IJburg building project at two referenda. It was apparent that although the Netherlands is quite advanced in matters relating to public involvement and democratic procedures, new steps had to be taken to avoid similar disgrace in the future and to improve the relationship between the political level and the public it is supposed to represent. The ideas thought of seem to echo, both in concept and in certain dilemmas they present, experiences and literature concerning public participation from other countries.

While the Dutch planning system has a well-developed establishment of public participation in the planning process, it is reactive in nature, whereby the public is called to comment on plans being presented. The recent experience has taught the administrators a bitter lesson, when plans produced at great expense with expectations of implementation have been turned down. The need to involve the public at an earlier

stage – before the plan is produced – became apparent. And so the **Open Plan Process** was introduced. Rather than commenting on an existing plan, citizens were invited to comment on what they saw as the problems in their environment, and how those should be corrected. The definition of the public was rather broad, and the mechanism of involving this immense crowd encountered obstacles and questions.

In this study of the **Open Plan Process** of the *Wibautas* I try to account for the different agents involved, the interactions and influences of these agents, the framework within which they function, and the unsolved issues confronted. I hope this study will shed some light on the difficulties of this project, and thus assist to improve future undertakings of a similar nature.

## Methodology

Alexander (1988) gives two criteria by which the usefulness of comparative analysis is to be judged. The first is the possibility of gaining a better perspective for self-understanding, via "an outside view and a larger frame of reference". The second is the potential for learning from the other's experiences, and thus improving on their achievements: knowing the weak points they can be avoided or corrected. Alexander concludes that the unusually supportive interaction of Dutch planning with its social, political and cultural environment, make it rather a useless study in terms of the above criteria. It is too unique.

While this is not exactly a comparative study, but focuses on one case study, in one planning system – the Dutch, it needs to answer to the same criteria. First, since the writer is not Dutch, and therefore offers an outsider's perspective on the events. Hopefully, this allows me not only to shed a fresh light on Dutch ways, but will also enable to apply the lessons learnt in future practice. Second, since this is a paper for a course on European Property Development and Planning, and in that respect assumes it is not entirely disconnected from other European experiences. And third, since it begins with literature on similar issues from elsewhere, and if those are to be relevant to this case study, it should hopefully work the other way around as well. Faludi and van der Valk's definition of the Dutch Planning Doctrine (1994) includes "synthesis of plans": following the achievements of international planning translated to local reality. Of course, I hope this study could also be useful for my hosts at the *dRO* [*dienst Ruimtelijke Ordening*, spatial/physical planning department] Amsterdam, and others still experimenting, or working – beyond the experimental stage – on processes derived from ideas similar to this within the Netherlands.

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It is quite possible that the reason I find Alexander's criteria answered by this study, is its focus on the more 'social' issue of public participation, rather than on physical, legal or other aspects of the planning system<sup>1</sup>. But the socio-political context of the project is

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<sup>1</sup> The participation in this process was unrelated to the *inspraak* procedure (see page 21) required by law.

uniquely Dutch, too. Nevertheless, it is a democratic process that has been at work, and as such, surely has a potential of serving an example to other democratic societies, however different the circumstances in them might be. As for getting a better 'perspective for self-understanding', there is no doubt the Dutch and Israelis differ a great deal, and the Dutch have distinct characteristics differentiating them from other Europeans as well. But as Israel is embarking on projects of public participation, and other European countries continue in attempts to find the right path to do just that, reflecting back, each to ourselves, on how our experiences might compare to this one, might give the very 'frame of reference' Alexander mentioned.

When coming to focus on a more particular subject for my work, I was faced with severe limitations: those of language. Although I have been taking Dutch lessons throughout the year, my language skills are not quite good enough to comprehend written academic material. Being "the most planned country in Europe", as mentioned, assures the Netherlands an honourable place in planning literature in the English language, but a study of a more particular, local project proves to be more difficult. The solution suggested by Frans Dubbeldam and supported by Maurits de Hoog at the *OntwerpTeam Stad (OTS)* [City Design Team] *dRO*, was appealing in more than one way. The core of this study is the result of a series of seven interviews held with professionals involved with the *Wibautas* project. This allowed me not only the access to first hand information about the progression of the process, rather than editing other written sources, but also the involved persons' impressions, both positive and negative. Attached to this paper is a diskette containing transcripts of the interviews conducted.

An exciting aspect was the prospect of dealing with a recent, on-going project. What is more, producing conclusions that might be read by the executors of the project

themselves, gives this paper the opportunity of having some – however minor – influence on plans made in the future in Amsterdam.

There are three introductory chapters in this work, before the Open Plan Process in itself is described. It begins with a short review of literature dealing with public participation in planning. It is far from being a comprehensive review – the scope of this paper cannot as much as attempt such an ambitious project. It merely points out a few elements from international literature that might be reflected in this particular project. The planning system in the Netherlands is reviewed next. Yet again, the meaning is only to give the reader the context in which this project was developed, and not a full account of the ins and outs of the system. The esteem given to the Dutch system guarantees it is described and discussed in many thorough works. This chapter carries on to outline the developments within Amsterdam that brought about the crucial need for this process.

The other stream, or line of developments leading to the project of the *Wibautas*, is the physical one. The next chapter briefly explains the historical development of the route to its current setting. The information in this chapter relies mostly on material produced by the *dRO*, partly an information book on planning in Amsterdam, produced in English, and partly on the *Atlas Wibautas*, produced to supply this very information to the participants of the project.

The body of the paper, describing the process and the complications associated with it, is based, as mentioned, on interviews held during July and August 1999. I relied on occasion on some informal talks I had with planners at the *dRO*, and a meeting held at *OTS* in which I summarised my conclusions and heard comments from members of the team.

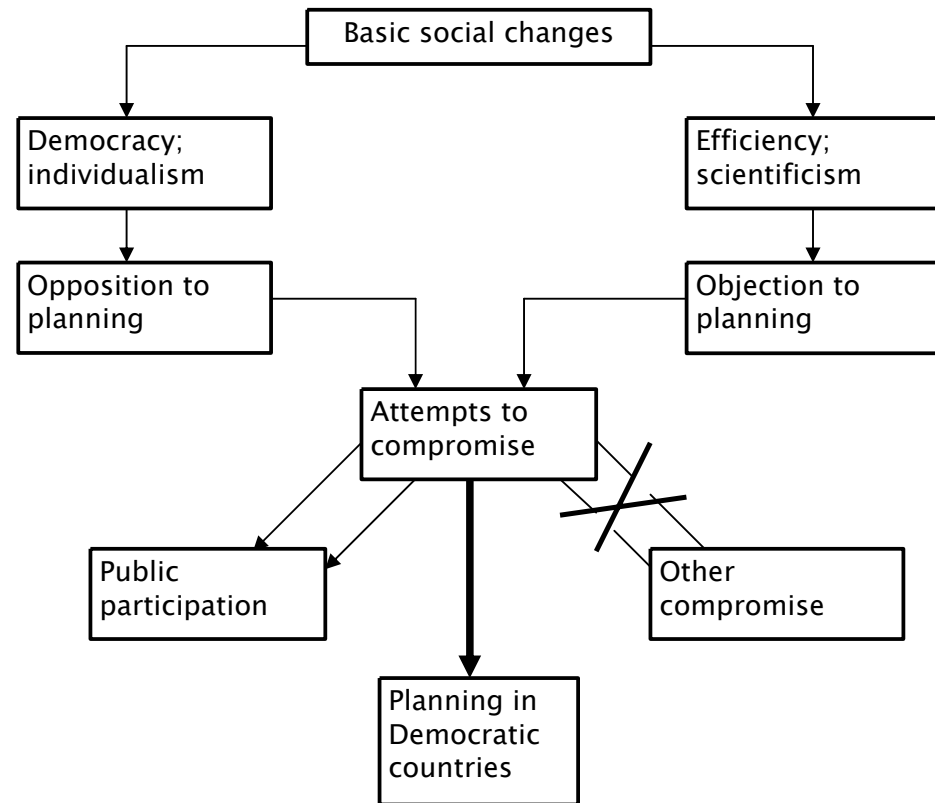


Fig. 1 The value basis for public planning in democratic societies, Translated from Vranesky *et al* (1986) p.10

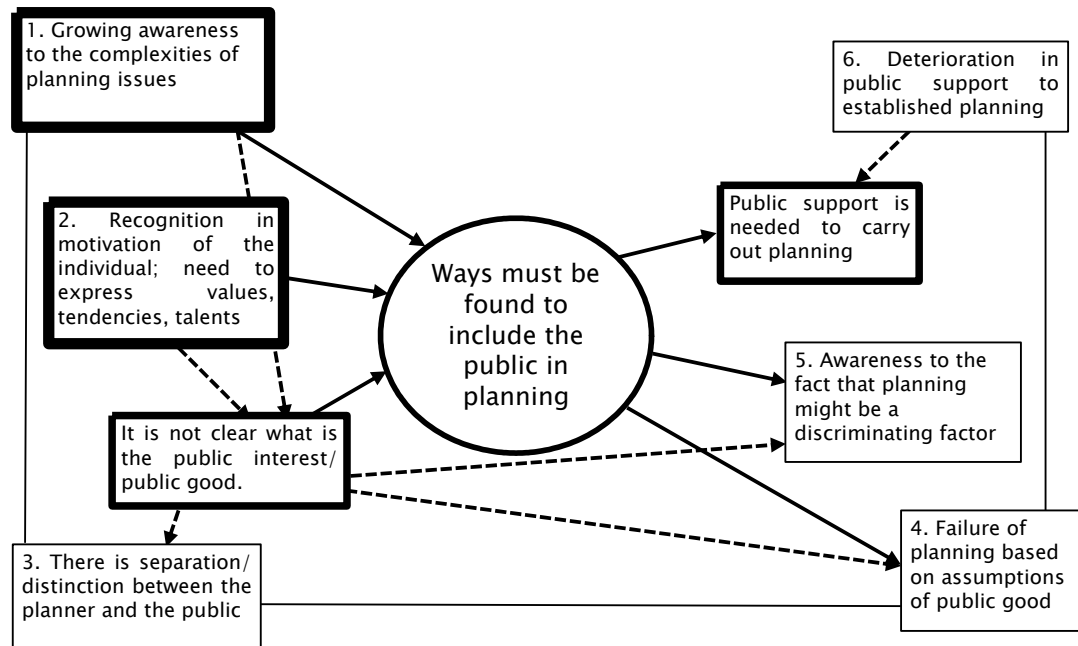
## Public Participation in Planning

Definitions of social relations tend to change according to the environment in which they are formed. While the idea of a "community" suggests intimate 'natural' surroundings, in the city we are likely to talk about more amorphous relations of "society" (Cullen, 1990). City life and the urban setting have brought to a break from traditional social structures, as part of a process of 'modernity' and progress. Enlightenment brought with it notions of democracy and of scientification of knowledge. Democracy makes the individual a participant in governance, and gives him/her rights to decent living standards and a qualitative environment. Scientific knowledge claims to have the answers to how these qualities could be achieved.

While planning laws were made, historically, to protect the interests of property owners, they have developed into what might be considered a mechanism to achieve social justice (Simpson, 1997) by finding the balance between private and public needs. According to Healey (1992, 1997), Planning is a democratic enterprise, and a problem lies in the tension between democracy and science. The scientific aspects of planning include assumptions of what is 'good/bad', 'right/wrong', while individuals might view this differently. Therefore ways must be found, through democratic action, to get citizens to act together and manage their collective concerns, regarding the time and space that they share. The process of planning should be interactive rather than technical.

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*The value basis for public planning in democratic societies* as seen by Vranesky *et al* (1986), can be viewed in fig. 1. They claim that the public must be included in planning, since there is a growing gap between the people who plan, and the people for the benefit of whom planning is being done and whose future it will affect. The significance to the implementation of public participation lies in several characteristic factors of planning. Changes to the built environment are irreversible. Participation shall not only make these changes more suitable to the needs and wants of the public, but could also make acceptability higher, even when the results are problematic -



**Legend**

- Causes to appearance of public participation in planning
- Major causes
- Mediating factors
- Principal connection between factors
- Direct influence
- - - - - Indirect influence

**Fig. 2** Layout of arguments in favour of public participation in planning  
Translated from Vranesky *et al*/(1986) p.9



public that was involved in planning will have higher willingness to deal with those problems. In cases of conflicts of interests between different parties, participation could minimise the harm done and assure satisfactory compensations. The interdisciplinary nature of planning promises a profit can be gained from participation through feedback, balance and criticism, to find suitable solutions to problems, and involve the best experts for the built environment – those who find it directly relevant to their lives. Vranesky, Alterman and Churchman's arguments in favour of public participation in planning can be seen in fig. 2.

In England, the Skeffington Committee produced a report in 1969 "to bring people into the planning process". Around Europe municipalities began to develop policies on participation in the 1970s. These policies are evolving and adjusted to meet local needs, and after a hesitant start they are increasingly achieving institutional form (Nelissen, 1982). Experiments, projects and legislation relating to public participation in planning have become common practice. They are influenced by post-modernist ideas of challenging systemised reason (Healey, 1992) and are introduced earlier and earlier in the process of planning.

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However, the introduction of community involvement at very early stages of the planning process is not new. Planning practice and literature have long been involved in 'open' planning, mostly of basic infrastructure, especially in traditional societies at developing countries of the 'Third World'. When local governments are weak and fail to supply and/or maintain basic amenities, alternatives are sought to organise communities and practice 'self-help' (Rakodi, 1990). Although these are often problematic, they (at least in theory) empower the people and give them opportunities to participate in decision making. The changes sought are not merely environmental ones, but social as well. Alternatives leadership might emerge based on such democratic enterprise, to challenge the traditional one (Hasan, 1990).

Back in Western Europe, we can hardly discuss traditional communities (Duffy and Hutchinson). Healey bases her "communicative planning" idea on Giddens and his concept of cultural communities, but the complexity of these poses a problem. Since each individual is a member of several such communities that shape his/her thoughts and values, there is no one clear set of values shared by all. Essays and case study reports refer to a weakness of participatory projects, which is the unrepresentative representation in them (Duffy and Hutchinson, 1997; Murtagh, 1999; Baum, 1998). While advocating broad participation, planning leaders often find they have involved a relatively narrow group of people, not unlike themselves in terms of socio-economic levels.

Other issues that arise are those of time and effort such processes require. Since there is a call for compromise it might induce lack of innovation, but a bigger body of thinkers makes a greater variety of solutions possible. Unfulfilled expectations on behalf of the participants might cause disappointment, and future problems (Vranesky *et al*, 1986). This could also be connected with potential abuse of participatory processes by the political level. Vranesky, Alterman and Churchman mention tokenism - symbolic, apparent participation, and co-optation - preventive recruitment meant to avoid formal objections.

## Dutch Planning

Centuries of 'practice' have made the Netherlands "the most planned country in Europe" (Newman and Thornley, 1996). The institutionalisation of planning took place in the 19th century, but it relied on older traditions. The Dutch have always seen a need for planning (Morris, 1985), and it is no wonder. Their habit of reclaiming land from the sea, or from marshes bordering with it, necessitated planned and co-ordinated communal action. This was also needed in order to create urban settlement (Alexander, 1988). This unique interaction with the physical environment creates a special relationship between society and planning. It is "the best conceivable adjustment of space and society to each other" (Shetter quoted in Needham, 1989).

The planning system has three tiers: national, provincial and municipal, with a high degree of consultation between them. There is vertical and horizontal co-ordination between and within the levels, and participation opportunities at all levels. National Planning Key Decisions – statements of national planning policy – are open to public discussion, and the *inspraak* procedure (which will be dealt with shortly) regulates participation regarding the *structuurplan*, the non-obligatory structure plan, and the legally binding *bestemmingsplan* – development plan. Citizens can also protest against a plan by appealing to the crown, and collect signatures to force their local government to hold a referendum regarding a plan in dispute.

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Dutt and Costa (1985) define this as "evidence of healthy democratic process of debate and compromise". It relies on the pluralistic nature of Dutch politics (Hamnet, 1985). However the high degree of 'consensus building' is very time consuming, making the planning process long and drawn-out, and in cases raises questions about its usefulness (Faludi and de Ruijter, 1985; Needham, 1989).

Planners raise doubt about the usefulness not of planning, but of the *inspraak* procedure. There is no direct translation of this term to English (Niesco Dubbelboer interview, 18.8.99). The *Prisma* dictionary (1993) translates this as: "voice, say,

participation". Literally, it can be translated as: in speech, but perhaps use of the complementary verb might be a better indication to its meaning: hearing. A great effort is being made by municipalities to inform the public of their plans, and once a new plan has been drafted citizens are invited to comment on it to the responsible municipal alderman at the *inspraak*. These comments are to be taken into consideration by the political level and public servants, and lead to alterations and revisions of the plans until its final version is produced. It seems that there is a dwindling attendance of members of the public in such meetings. Planners find that their outcome is not too productive, if it is to be considered a tool of involving local residents, but rather, at best, it provides a stage for various pressure groups to voice their points of view about relevant issues, although such that are not necessarily related to a specific plan.

So, while the Dutch, compared with many other European planning systems, has significant space and legal apparatus for involvement of the public in the planning of its built environment, it does not yet indicate to a real democratic process in progress. It offers the possibility of minor changes to a proposed plan, but can hardly bring about serious, significant changes to the basic concepts it was based on. Furthermore, especially in the city of Amsterdam, it was found to be an insufficient tool for adjustment between the people's view of the development of the city and plans that were being made to facilitate such developments.

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### Amsterdam

In the foreword to "A City in Progress", a book published by the *dRO* describing physical planning in the city, Amsterdam is described as having a "combination of dynamism and soberness" and "harmony and anarchy, order and chaos" (Pistor *et al*, 1994, pp.7–8). The people of Amsterdam have built themselves a reputation for voicing their opinions about changes to their city.

In the 1960s plans were made to introduce an underground subway system to the city. When construction began in 1974, objections to the metro and the major redevelopment needed for its construction led to violent opposition including not only street fights but also bombings. Since the plans involved a great deal of investments, they were not cancelled, but changed to include public housing projects (ter-Borg and Dijkink, 1994). The fierce controversy around the construction of the metro resulted in a public transport system that at least the Dutch consider to be outdated (Pistor *et al*, 1994)<sup>2</sup>.

The 1970s and 80s were characterised by urban renewal projects, the results of which further increased the gap between the citizens and their elected representatives. The solution was sought through the decentralisation of the municipality into 16 smaller administrative units – the *stadsdelen*: boroughs or city districts. Besides the main municipal council each *stadsdeel* has an elected council, which in turn elects an executive committee of *wethouders* or aldermen. The *Binnenstad*, the central-most zone of Amsterdam has no district council, or *gemeenteraad*, and is governed centrally (Pistor *et al*, 1994).

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Further reform was later decided upon, through the intended creation of the Regional Organ Amsterdam (ROA), which was meant to turn Amsterdam from a mere municipality to a region, together with some smaller, neighbouring municipal entities. It was thought this would enable better means to handle the problems the city is faced with. However the people of Amsterdam did not favour this solution. They preferred the independent municipal status, and 92% of them voted "no" in a referendum held in 1994, which proved to be an overwhelming defeat to the local government. The reform was transformed into more minor changes in the municipal structure, including merges between some of the *stadsdelen*.

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<sup>2</sup> But at a level I believe many other cities are still to reach.

A second referendum around the question of the planned development of *IJburg* (in North Amsterdam) ended with similarly negative results to the city's suggestions. Ideas long thought of and planned at great expense were totally rejected. The city government had a problem. It was heavily criticised for not discussing such momentous possibilities before actually drawing up the plans. A system of participation at earlier stages was required to eliminate the rise of such fundamental problems at such a late stage. The political level initiated the establishment of a committee to discuss alternative forms of participation, to improve the relationship between politicians and citizens; allow for local residents to voice their wishes with regard to their built environment, and thus increase the democratic level in planning procedures. This committee was searching for an appropriate project to implement the Open Plan Process.

Known as "the ugliest street in Holland", the *Wibautas* is a four kilometre long road, that has evolved with the development of the city through time, to form a major traffic artery. The traffic function of the axis, and the streets it is composed of, dictates its features. Axes not very unlike the *Wibautas* are characteristic of major cities in Europe and around the world, but in Amsterdam it stands in clear contrast to the calm, narrow streets and red-brick canal houses so typical of the Netherlands' capital city.

Medieval Amsterdam is the core of the semi-circle that forms the centre of the city. The concentric canal network is crossed by radial roads, converging at the heart of the city. One of these radials is the *Weesprestraat*, continuing with the *Wibautstraat*. Through this axis runs a logical continuation of the historical development of the city.

In the 16th century several building sites could be found outside the city wall, as a result of housing shortage, military purposes and other considerations. Jewish refugees of the Spanish inquisition settled and built the Portuguese Synagogue at the *Jonas Daniel Meijerplein*. In 1662 an enlargement plan was drawn to include the new Eastern harbours within the fort. This plan created the system of radials, where the *Weesper* radial heads towards Utrecht along the Amstel River. It ran through the *Meijerplein*, which formed part of the network of squares created at this time, connected to each other.

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The mid-19th century saw a fast development of the city, with high investment in infrastructure. The terminus of the Amsterdam-Utrecht railway line was built at Rhijnspoorplein in 1842. Twenty years later was the Sarphati plan for the transformation of the area around the city wall into the boulevard, which today is the *Sarphatistraat*. In 1870 the character of the area changed by building a clinic/hospital and creating a tram parking area, at the site of today's university building. This was also

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<sup>3</sup> The information in this chapter was taken from the Atlas *Wibautas*, 1998 and Pistor *et al* (1994) *A City in Progress..*

a time of economic prosperity, which was accompanied by a population growth and great demand for new housing. New neighbourhoods had to be added to the city. In 1921 the municipality of *Watergraafsmeer* was included in Amsterdam. A plan for it was made in 1935 by van Eesteren, focusing on infrastructure for car traffic. In 1939 the Amstel Station was built, making the Rhijnspoorstation redundant, and therefore demolished.

After the Second World War the city was facing two major problems: the rebuilding of areas damaged during the war, and the traffic situation. In 1950 the Reconstruction Act gave the large municipalities greater power to take action in the city centres. In Amsterdam four plans were adopted under this act. The run-down areas went through total reconstruction, which was necessary to improve traffic flow. These included the *Jodenbreestraat* – arriving at *Mr. Visserplein* – and *Weesperstraat*, in the former Jewish district, which were significantly widened. In the late 50s construction of the IJ Tunnel started, and it was opened for traffic in 1968. The same streets serve as approach routes to the tunnel. The land alongside the main roads was to be used for 'city functions', with offices along the *Weesperstraat*, as part of a zoning policy, separating working areas from residential ones.

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'City Forming' was carried out outside the *Singelgracht* (the outer concentric canal). The area cleared of the *Rhijnspoorstation* was intended for big office buildings and a broad road to reach the *Amstelstation*. On the *Wibautstraat* plans were made for housing, school, cinema, bus station and shops, but were not all implemented. In 1964 the area intended for the cinema was housed by the *Parool* newspaper, and across the street the competing *Volkskrant* was located rather than housing. By 1965 the *Wibauthuis* was built on the site allocated for the bus station, and no shops were allowed.

In the 1970 the metro was introduced, with its route running underneath the *Wibautas*.



It was the time of 'city renewal', focused on the revitalisation of old housing stock. Housing thus became the focus of planners' attention, with an emphasis on social housing and public spaces last on the list of priorities, partly as a result from the political clashes surrounding the construction of the metro. The area around the *Waterlooplein* station has gone through significant changes, including the building of the dRO at the corner of the *Jodenbreestraat*, meeting at *Mr. Visserplein* the *Valkenburgerstraat* with its new housing developments and the film academy building still under construction. The *Rembrandttoren* [tower] was built in the south of the axis in 1995, and the *newMetropolis* museum was constructed at the north of the *Wibautas* and opened in 1997. *Mr. Visserplein* remains an empty square amidst a busy crossroads – being the meeting point of roads from eight different directions – but its future remains unclear. It awaits the construction of the North–South metro line and related decisions pending regarding the development of traffic routes that run through it.

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Commuter traffic continues to grow in Amsterdam, as in most cities. In 1993 a Regional Traffic and Transport Plan was produced to control and reduce the traffic. It aimed to decrease the density of traffic in the city centre and the space it occupies by more than a third between the years 1994–2005. The main political controversy in the city today is the future of traffic. While, as a generalisation, the more Left Wing parties support green traffic calming, the Right Wing claim such policies will harm the business life of the city. Any decisions taken will potentially affect the width necessary for routes such as the *Wibautas*. This issue became crucial during discussions about the future of the *Wibautas* at the Open Plan Process.

**The concept**

The *Wibautas* stretches across the border between the *Binnenstad*, or the borough of Central Amsterdam, and *stadsdeel Oost/Watergraafsmeer*. Being a major traffic route, it is important for the central municipal administration of Amsterdam. There are several plans for development along the route, but those are fragmented and lack a comprehensive theme, partly as a result of the administrative fragmentation. Significant problems of the *Wibautas* are mostly associated with its traffic function: road safety, security at underground stations, the barrier it forms between east and west, and its visual unpleasantness.

Discussions about the future of the *Wibautas* were in progress in the *dRO* since February 1998. In March 1998 elections were held in Amsterdam, and new aldermen were in office by April. The proposals to create an over-all master plan were accepted by the alderman responsible for traffic, a member of the *Groenlinks* [Green Left] party. Aldermen from *stadsdeel Oost/Watergraafsmeer* of the same party supported it as well, as did the responsible alderwoman of the *Binnenstad*. By May of the same year it was clear the project is soon to be underway. Then a suggestion came from the *Stadhuis* [City Hall], to combine this project with ideas being considered by a special committee, to create a more interactive planning process. This seemed particularly relevant since letters have been received at city hall from citizens discontent with their environment and the plans made for it. The possibility also fitted in with ideas in the *dIVV* (*dienst Infrastructuur Verkeer Vervoer* - department of Infrastructure, Traffic and Transport) regarding citizen participation in their plans. A special executive committee (*stuurgroep* - steering group) for the *Wibautas Masterplan* was formed, headed by *Wethouder* [Alderman] Frank Köhler, with members from the different municipal levels, which are all Left Wing politicians (Heleen van Bommel interview, 28.7.99). A parallel project group of administrators was formed, headed by Maurits de Hoog from the *dRO*, and a sum of one million guilders was allocated for the creation of the master plan, including the Open Plan Process.

The introduction of such a process so close after the elections, implied there would be sufficient time to carry on with it, and produce results before any expected change in political positions. Although the 'open' stage was to take up a significant amount of time, it was assumed that it would inevitably eliminate the need of a lengthy *inspraak* procedure and the adjustments it might require to make in the plan produced. The procedure is still required by law, but it is assumed there will be less comments and objections to the plans considering the participatory nature of the process of planning (Maurits de Hoog interview, 28.7.99). In terms of the physical condition of the streets time was also available, since the street is in good repair and no work will need to be done there in the near future (Dirk Jan Huisman interview, 10.8.99).

Although 'open' planning is already at work in Amsterdam *stadsdelen* concerning local *bestemmingsplannen*, this was considered an exception, and an experiment by those involved in it. The scale of this project was quite unusual. It crossed borough-boundaries and involved a major traffic route (although it was decided not to include the discussion about the future of traffic in the route to the process). Traffic being the subject of the main political controversy in Amsterdam today, discussion concerning one of the main arteries in the city was bound to draw attention. Of course such attention could be utilised to promote information and publication of the democratic process at work.

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As mentioned, citizen groups have written to the city council about the need for change at the *Wibautas*. An opportunity was to be given to them not only to complain, but to suggest how in fact things could be improved to suit their needs and wants: to outline the concept they see fit for their close environment. Rather than commenting on plans drawn up by planners, the public was invited to devise the ideas behind the plan to be drawn up; rather than textbook solutions to estimated problems, the real problems will be phrased as seen through the eyes of users, rather than planners. The final decisions about the plans were still to be taken at the political level, but the

involvement of citizens was thought to improve their acceptance of decisions that will be taken.

### **"Process architecture"**

A large sum of money was allocated for the budget of this project from various funds to encourage democratisation and participatory projects, as well as from the municipality and from the *stadsdeel*. Its unique status necessitated close involvement of the communication and public relations department. Other bodies involved were, of course, the *Binnenstad*, *stadsdeel Oost/Watergraafsmeer*, *ROIB - bestuurdienst* [advisory department to governing bodies on spatial issues], the *dRO - dienst Ruimtelijke Ordening*, *dIVV - dienst Infrastructuur Verkeer Vervoer* [department of Infrastructure, Traffic and Transport], and the *GVB - Gemeentelijk Vervoer Bedrijf* [Community Transport Company: tram, bus and metro].

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Personal letters sent to their homes, businesses and offices (some 17,000 letters were sent) approached residents and workers of the area. The projects aroused attention of the local media and thus further publication was given to encourage potential participants. Those who replied to the letters, were sent an information sheet titled "*denk mee over de toekomst van de wibautas*" [think with me about the future of the Wibautas]<sup>4</sup>. It included a schedule of events to take place on "the week of the Wibautas", in September 1998. These began with a walk through the route on a Sunday, and included several evening talks on issues related to the street, such as its history and architecture. Workshops were to begin in late September and continue until November 1998. This was to allow for summations and a public debate in February 1999, and for a decision to be rendered by the political level by May.

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<sup>4</sup> See attached.

The opening of the events, a walk through the streets, was accompanied by a questionnaire meant to get people's thoughts about the problematic points along the axis. It was decided to have three parallel workshops of participants. Each workshop was given a title suggesting to the proposed character the route is about to take: *Stadstraat* [city street], *Boulevard*, or *Grootstedelijke as* [major urban axis], but the real content was to be given by participants, not planners. The translation from ideas into plans was to be done by the professionals at a later stage.

### Arising problems

#### **traffic, politics and defining the agenda**

The main problem, which became apparent very early in the process and remained a crucial issue throughout the process, was the discussion about traffic. Or rather the supposed non-discussion: it was made clear to participants that the function of the route as a major traffic thoroughfare was not to be changed. However, this was the most bothersome feature of the *Wibautas* for most participants, and discussion continued nevertheless. A similar but less critical problem was regarding the function of the Amstel Station, which was not included in the definition of the axis.

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This disagreement caused some confusion. Some thought the rules were not clear enough, and the leaders of the workshops could not quite cope with the demand to stay away from the traffic issue when the people demanded it. This further developed to general criticism of the problematic rules of the process, suggesting it was started too quickly, without sufficient thought to eliminate any such vagueness (Germaine Princen interview, 26.7.99). Others found that since traffic was mentioned to be off the agenda at the beginning of the process, the fact that the issue came up repeatedly could only have positive results. The people obviously needed a platform to claim their discontent, it was clear to them it was probably not going to be changed, however it presented an unprecedented opportunity to influence the way policy makers thought about the issue (Heleen van Loenen interview, 9.8.99; Pieter Jannink interview, 16.8.99).

And yet, things got more complicated still. During the progression of the workshop series a group of participants has decided to withdraw from the process, based on these rules. They have demanded to undertake an independent, alternative study of the flow of traffic and the possibilities of narrowing the street, since the Open Plan Process did not give them the opportunity to suggest it. Their demand was not turned down, and they were given a separate, additional budget of FI 45,000 for this purpose.

It can be assumed that the great sensitivity around traffic issues is the result of the political climate. Although citizens were invited to plan their neighbourhood, controversial traffic decisions were to remain in the hands of politicians and experts. It could be claimed that the reason for leaving traffic off the agenda was its implication and ramifications on the entire city, beyond the scope of the residents of the immediate area, and therefore this was the wrong constellation for such a discussion. However, there was an attempt to involve users of the road, bicycle routes and metro in discussions, although this was unsuccessful. Despite the move of 'bringing politics closer to the people', some things were obviously meant to remain in higher levels. But once there was a serious challenge to that assumption, and a call to change the political decision, it was accepted that an alternative could be presented and the system began dealing with the findings of traffic counter-expertise. While this might have prevented – or rather deferred – a small political crisis, it brings to question the attitude in the political system towards the Open Plan Process, which was not meant to deal with traffic questions, and its ground rules were not amended after the withdrawal of this group. Was allowing them to operate in parallel not, in a way, admitting to the failure of the process? (Germaine Princen interview, 26.7.99).

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### **mistrust of citizens and conduct of professionals**

The conduct of the group withdrawing from the process introduces another issue, besides merely that of disagreement and changing of the ground rules. There seems to have been a great amount of mistrust and suspicion on behalf of the participants

towards the civil servants employed in the project. This specific group obviously did not trust their point of view to be introduced. But difficulties were reported on other incidents as well. Participants of one workshop were amazed to find that they could not recognise their ideas in the drawings, since they were discarded by the designers who were supposed to draw them up in favour of different ideas which appealed more to the 'professional eye'. The trust was difficult to regain.

It was a challenge to the planners to have to explain their professional axioms, which they do not bother to do on a daily basis, working with others who have had similar education. Suddenly things had to be explained, whereas they could formerly be taken for granted, or immediately understood to be either required or impossible by other professionals through code words. This necessitated that planners and designers think again about the realities behind their working hypotheses (Dirk Jan Huisman interview, 10.8.99). They were reminded that they were working for the public.

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This might be the part the planners and designers found most difficult. Their position as the creators of ideas, as experts who have the right answers is jeopardised. They change – perhaps, in their eyes demoted – to the position of mediators and technical players. Their professionalism is questioned, and along with it their professional egos. It might not be surprising that younger professionals approached the participatory mechanism as rather obvious, while older ones were constantly discussing the need for it and the ideas behind it (Niesco Dubbelboer interview, 18.8.99). They have gained more of a professional standing, higher positions and therefore had more to lose in these terms. It should be mentioned that all planners commented they have learned a lot from listening to the users of the *Wibautas*, whether in workshops or through the separate interviews held, and this valuable information is bound to affect the plans made.

It was not only planners who found the new situation difficult. Citizens took time to

adjust to the new 'game'. They need not criticise what planners have made, but create something on their own, explain how things could be corrected for their own benefit. At first they were reluctant to take such an active part, which satisfied somewhat those who were hesitant to take this course of action, but with time they have also adjusted to their new role (Niesco Dubbelboer interview, 18.8.99).

### **participation and representation**

#### business factors and institutions

The thought behind the project was, on reflection, somewhat idealistic. It was suggested that not only residents of the area would arrive to discuss the future plans, but people working, studying or passing through the area will also take part. Quite early it was made clear that things were different. Although, in total, around 1,000 people responded to the letters sent to their homes, only 40 people took part in the first walking tour through the *Wibautas*, which started off the project. Reasons for this might include not only that people feel they are already familiar enough with the area, but also the fact that it took place on a Sunday morning – perhaps too early (Heleen van Loenen interview, 9.8.99).

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More people showed up at the next meetings, and the coverage by local newspapers and television further increased the number of interested people. The computer system held 1,200 registrations of people interested, and around 100 of them participated actively on a regular basis. However, all of the participants were residents of the area, and despite attempts to involve businesses, such as Philips, the university and other higher-education institutions, and the major newspapers located on the axis, they were reluctant to join in the process. It was suggested that they could not be asked to spend time on meetings with their neighbouring residents since the discussion was simply at a different level (Heleen van Loenen interview, 9.8.99). While they were not available at the workshops, some were willing to present their ideas in a different format than was done throughout the project. Lectures were given by one of the schools to introduce



their concept of the future of the *Wibautas*. This included only a frontal presentation, without interaction with participants and the possibility to exchange thoughts.

Time was of course an important factor. Meetings were held after office hours, to suit the needs of residents of the area. Businesses could not spend the necessary time resources to attend the workshops, whether they were during or after office hours (Pieter Jannink interview, 16.8.99). Random workers obviously do not attribute as high a level of importance to their work environment, as people do to their home surroundings. Another consideration is the direct contacts important businesses have with the political level. There is no need to discuss plans and future prospects with mere citizens, if a telephone call to the alderman in charge might have more of an impact and assure things go in a desirable direction (Niesco Dubbelboer interview, 18.8.99). This is especially problematic considering the biggest changes to the built environment might come from developers and businesses (Heleen van Bommel interview, 28.7.99).

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#### immigrants and minority groups

But there were questions of representation within the group of participating residents. A profile could be made of the participant - white, medium socio-economic level, who had enough time to spare on the time-consuming Open Plan Process. Education levels of participants varied, and so some came from a highly professional background, which influenced, of course, the input they had at the workshops. Similar 'profiles' have been reported at other participatory projects (Baum, 1998).

The problem was that this could not be determined as the profile of an average resident of the surrounding of the *Wibautas*. Inhabitants of parts closer to the city centre, around the old Jewish Quarter are indeed white, and immigrants residing here are mostly from industrialised countries. But further east, there are larger communities of immigrants, most notably from Morocco and Turkey. No members of these groups attended the

workshops, and their perspectives were absent.

Efforts were made to translate some of the relevant material to them, but it seems to be more complex than that. Participation in planning – and any political processes for that matter – are so imbedded in Dutch culture, that it is sometimes easy to forget that not all cultures share the same phenomenon. The combination of a lack of understanding of the language, let alone the possibility of speaking and conducting fluent interactions with 'locals', and a culture which does not take participation for granted stand in the way of real, equal participation of immigrants. Lack of confidence for public speaking might also deter others from joining such a process. Added to that are also considerations of limited resources. Those preoccupied with financial problems, domestic difficulties or the need to care for young children will find it more difficult and far less important to discuss the quality of public space (Baum, 1998 and several interviews), although the importance of its function is at least as important to them as to others who can afford to participate.

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Another significant group that was missing was that of students, who use the area on a daily basis. Despite attempts to draw their attention and encourage their participation, they remained uncooperative.

#### Balances

The drawbacks and missing factors from the participation process were apparent to its directors, and steps were taken in attempt to create necessary balances. Interviews were held with business leaders, meetings arranged with traders' organisations; at mosques as cultural centres of Muslim immigrant communities; and schools, including a week of workshops with children at a local high-school. Certain new, unique elements were introduced through these interviews and meetings, such as suggestions by shopkeepers about the reorganisation of shops, and the Muslim interest in Islamic facilities such as schools and homes for the elderly (Maurits de Hoog interview, 28.7.99). Although

these were reported back to the workshop participants, they do not seem to have made a significance impact on the plans drawn up, besides mentioning the possibility of a multi-cultural centre, in place of the Muslim institutes.

Another mechanism was introduced, by means of a questionnaire at the end of the process, asking about preferred ideas from the three alternatives achieved at by the workshops<sup>5</sup>. The questionnaire was distributed to all target groups mentioned before: passengers on the road and through the underground, workers, students, residents, including immigrants for whom the questions were translated. An emphasis was placed on the groups with weaker representation in the process. The questionnaires were especially marked to enable identifying a member of which target group answered them. The results of this survey were still lacking in terms of representation. It was suggested that the questions were too difficult, and therefore proved to be problematic for all potential participants, rather than solving a problem of specific groups among them.

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It was a surprise, however, for those involved in the process, to learn that about half of the residents have not heard about the project of the Open Plan Process at all. This was the result of a survey conducted by the research and statistics bureau of Amsterdam (de Boer and Scholten, 1999). All agreed that despite the various problems that arose, the communication aspect of things was carried out well, and thought that anyone with a slight interest in things around them would have to make a special effort in order not to be aware it was going on. Other comments from the same report implied there was an expectation for more activities to be held as part of the process.

#### **collaborative-communicative process?**

While there attempt to correct problems in the level of representativeness of participants in the process, as mentioned above, other features of the Open Plan

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<sup>5</sup> See example attached.

Process of the *Wibautas* pose more ideological – rather than technical – dilemmas. Again, the idea was to bring all interested parties into the process. But once there, they were divided into groups, based on their vision of the plan-to-be. So each of the concepts was thought of, formulated, refined, but there was no discussion or attempt for understanding between the different parties, holding different views. The virtual conflict point was between the planners-leaders of the workshops and the participants in their discussion of details, rather than between groups holding different views on the future of their mutual environment.

Thus there was no attempt to understand each other's point of view in order to reach an agreed solution that will serve all parties' needs and wants. This was never a goal of the process. What is more, when two of the working groups have started discussing possible negotiations and compromise between their two perspectives to create one joint idea, they were stopped by the organisers. It was stated at the beginning that all perspectives would be put before the political level to make a decision, enabling political flexibility in decision making, or 'the political game', and it is most probable that ideas will be taken from all three perspectives, rather than one of them followed through to a create a coherent plan. It was suggested that an attempt to reach such thorough agreement and understanding would result in a mediocre, uncreative plan, rather than a problem-solving one.

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This in turn strengthens the underlying concept of this process – it was not a decision making process. That remained in the hands of politicians. It was rather a procedure designed to create greater understanding of decision-making, by confronting the various constrains during the design of a plan-perspective. In that case, a cynical viewer might consider this to be co-optation: scorched by unfavourable referenda results, the municipality of Amsterdam pretends to involve its citizens in a process, while decisions are finally made in the same way as was done before. Oddly enough, the main argument to suggest otherwise is the attentive way in which the group that withdrew

from the process was handled. In a roundabout way, public participation actually managed to stir changes in policy-making.

The workshop proceedings were submitted to the politicians to study and decide on a chosen concept (or combination of concepts) for the drafting of a final plan. Comments and information gained at interviews and other sideline meetings were added, but considering the way this information was gathered, it was far more fragmented than the workshop results, and its presentation alluded to secondary importance.

### **political games**

This is the stage that was considered most problematic: the wait for a political decision. Actually, criticism of the involvement of politicians was not lacking in earlier stages. Although the process, its concept and its budget were decided upon by politicians, it was felt by the civil servants that the political level was not actively involved in it, and at times this was translated as doubt in its success. This was strengthened when the retiring group was supported by a separate budget. But the biggest dissatisfaction arose when decision-making time arrived. After hearing the suggestions, the politicians did not comment. The deadline set for decision was May, before the summer vacation period, but this was continuously deferred. The studies initiated to examine the traffic situation and the possibility of narrowing the street provided an excuse for this. This proved to be, indeed, an intricate political decision.

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The civil servants involved in the process, especially those who were in contact with the participants, felt unease. The citizens expected the process to result in a better plan (de Boer and Scholten, 1999) but they have heard nothing of its progress for months, were losing interest and doubting the process. They felt they had to excuse themselves for something that was 'stuck' at the political level, which they could not necessarily explain. I have heard comments that "Amsterdam politicians are known for their inability to make fast decisions", or at least have been in the past. Politicians were

also referred to mentioning: "they have no guts to say what they think". The indecision indicates, again, that the process was of secondary relevance to political decision making. The participants were expected to keep a tight, busy schedule of workshops, despite requests for more time they felt was necessary. An open process was required of them, but the politicians failed to live up to the same standard, and did not openly react to the ideas presented before them. Unlike the civil servants, who were confronted by a new position implied by this process, the politicians seem to have avoided facing any such conclusion. Here again, perhaps, their ego plays a part. If the process is done with the involvement of citizens themselves, the status of the politicians elected to represent them in decision making is questioned.

A decision was finally made by the responsible alderman on 2 September 1999. A compromise was taken: part of the axis will be narrowed to two traffic lanes, while four will run through the other part. The decision still needs to be approved by municipal committees and the *gemeenteraad* [city council] at the various municipal levels, before a final plan is actually drafted.

The **Open Plan Process** of the *Wibautas* is not yet finished. Indeed, the first experimental participatory phase which this paper deals with has concluded some time ago, but it is still awaits a final decision and plan. The perspective of time and the final result to the participatory process are missing, both for the interviewees in their reports and for myself when coming to conclude. However, plans are still being made and better methods for participation are being sought after, regardless of this waiting period, and those could perhaps benefit from learning of experiences gained here.

This paper is based on interviews I held with people who were involved in the execution of the Open Plan Process of the *Wibautas*. Despite the fact that all those interviewed spoke English remarkably well, surely the ability to communicate in their native language might have improved the accuracy of the meanings of points they wanted to make, or my understanding of them. I regret the fact that I failed to include interviews with members of the public, participants in the project, and also the possibility of adding views of actors from the political level. It occurred to me I was doing what this process came to correct – assuming what would be best for people without knowing what it is they really want. I would, of course, have been most curious to attend the meetings and workshops, but I was too late for that.

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Perhaps my most significant handicap is where my strength used to be. I have been involved in the Israeli political system and can certainly appreciate the importance of political nuances, intrigues and 'games', and their influence on planning. I would have liked to be able to approach this study with a similar understanding of local political conflicts and manners.

The interviews were not only a way of overcoming my limitations of language in this study. I have learned much more from them than I could possibly include in the limited scope of this paper. The transcripts of the interviews are enclosed in an attached diskette.

In the interview I held with Niesco Dubbelboer, the independent process director of the *Wibautas* [*onafhankelijk procesbegeleider Wibautas*], he suggested that open planning was the next step in democratic progression, after decades of a status quo: the participation of citizens in governance. The literature sees participation as a democratic, ideological and ethical mode of planning (Baum, 1998). In a way, it is a shift from an emphasis on the result – the plan itself, to the process of planning. According to Habermas, if the process is made through undistorted communication, it creates understanding, and therefore new realities, which in turn are more important than the outcome (Healey, 1997).

Several typical Dutch features are combined to allow for this project. While it might seem contradictory to some, legal and conformist traits as well as diversity and tolerance are embedded in Dutch society and culture (Alexander, 1988). The people value their environment, and are concerned with the quality of public space (Needham, 1989). They seem to like to voice their opinions and debate (White and Boucke, 1993), and all together these are integrated well to form fertile ground for an experimental participatory planning process.

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Discussions about the future of the *Wibaut* axis are interwoven with weighty political arguments about the future of traffic flow in the city. This implies both advantages and unfavourable circumstances for an open process. On the one hand, it means great media attention, which if nothing else, promotes participation by informing more people about the process. On the other hand, if conclusions to be reached have a wider sphere than the neighbourhood environment, it would be easier for politicians to disregard real outcomes of the process, and so the media coverage becomes nothing more than a public relations stunt.

As was described, the Open Plan Process that was introduced at the *Wibautas* was not without fault. Attempts were made to correct some of these faults, especially those



Concerning defined target groups that failed to be represented. So far no real solution was offered to change the inherent problems as to the lack of participation of minority and immigrant groups, nor that of the disregard of business factors to citizen participation. However, alternative ways are sought presently in other project at work in Amsterdam. Parkstad, a project of the Western Garden Cities of Amsterdam pays special attention to immigrant communities. The material is translated both to Arabic (Moroccan) and to Turkish. Members of both major communities are employed in the project team. In North Amsterdam a process was originally designed in two stages, to allow for separate inputs from the major institutions–stakeholders. Assuming direct interaction cannot be coerced on any of the parties, at least their thoughts and ideas are collected independently.

When I was asked to conclude my impressions of the process at the *OTS* meeting, I was asked: should we do it again? I was at a loss for words to answer Maurits de Hoog's – the project leader – question. It seems to me that since it started, there is no real way back, but the way forward is not completely clear. The *inspraak* procedure is not held with high esteem among planners, and they admitted it was very educational for them to get first hand impressions of the needs of everyday users. Relationships need to be redefined between citizens, civil servants and politicians, and that should take some time. Those holding positions of power undoubtedly do not easily give it up in favour of the power gained by 'mere' citizens.

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It is important to bear in mind that considered an experiment, this project has gained substantial funds and publicity. Those might very well not be available for future undertakings, which it turn could significantly affect levels of participation (which were not extremely high as it is). But projects on a smaller scale, creating less political dispute, might be done on a calmer note, with fewer upheavals and more 'satisfied customers'.

I asked my interviewees if they thought it was worth it. There was not one definite answer to that, partly because the result is not yet clear. The main goal of the project had various definitions. While Niesco Dubbelboer, the director, was convinced it was about advancing democracy, most others found that to be merely a secondary goal to the physical aspects of the intended plan. Whether the plan will be more qualitative we have still to find out. As for the success of the process, a good indication might be the number of those claiming to have initiated it. It was not an easy venture, and perhaps the best summary is in the words of Germaine Princen when she answered my question: "If I was a student, looking to this process, I could say yes, because it is an experience you can build on. But as a worker for this project I think no". I must, however, add, that she was the biggest critic of the process I have interviewed, and others thought of it far more favourably.

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**Interviews**

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Dubbelboer, Niesco, *onafhankelijke procesbegeleider ‘Open Plan Proces’* [independent process director], 18 August 1999. 75

de Hoog, Maurits, *OTS teamleider* [team leader = head of section], *projectleider* [project manager], 28 July 1999.

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URLs

[www.dro.amsterdam.nl/wibautas](http://www.dro.amsterdam.nl/wibautas)

**Relevant Dutch Vocabulary**

*as* – axis

*bestemmingsplan* – development plan (plural: *bestemmingsplannen*)

*bestuurdienst* – advisory department to governing bodies

*Binnenstad* – borough of Central Amsterdam

*dIVV, dienst Infrastructuur Verkeer Vervoer* – department of Infrastructure, Traffic and Transport

*dRO, dienst Ruimtelijke Ordening* – department of physical/spatial planning

*gemeenteraad* – local council

*gracht* – canal

*Groenlinks* – Green Left, political party

*grootstedelijke as* – major urban axis, one of the tree workshop scenarios

*GVB, Gemeentelijk Vervoer Bedrijf* – Community Transport Company: tram, bus and metro

*inspraak* – hearing (?), participatory procedure, see pp. 21

*onafhankelijke procesbegeleider* – Independent process director

*oost* – east

*OTS, OntwerpTeam Stad* – City Design Team, at dRO

*plein* – square

*ROA, Regionale Organ Amsterdam* – Intention to change the administrative structure of Amsterdam from city to region

*Stadhuis* – City hall

*stadsdeel* – borough, district, city part (plural: *stadsdelen*)

*stadstraat* – city street, one of the tree workshop scenarios

*stedebouwkundige* – town planner

*straat* – street

*structuurplan* – structure plan

*stuurgroep* – steering group

*wetouder* – alderman

*Wibautas* – Wibaut axis



### Introduction to interviews

The attached floppy disk contains transcripts of seven interviews held in Amsterdam in July and August 1999, with professionals involved in the project of the *Wibautas* Open Plan Process. Following is the list of questions I prepared for the interviews. Evidently, I have not exactly followed this list as it is in my meetings with the interviewees, but it served me more as guidance. Not all questions were relevant to in every case, and mostly the conversation progressed farther than the reach of the pre-drawn list. The list was based on the partial knowledge I had of the Open Plan Process, with the help of Frans Dubbeldam from *OTS*. I have also used a list of criteria used by Nelissen (1982) in his evaluation of participatory processes in European municipalities.

I have learned a great deal from these interviews, and although not all of the information and discussions in them found their way to the final draft of this study, I am sure I will use this knowledge in the future. 81

The interviews are numbered in chronological order.

#### **List of interviews**

Interview 1 – **Germaine Princen**, Co-ordinator for politicians and civil servants in the project, *Stadsdeel Oost/Watergraafsmeer*, 26 July 1999.

Interview 2 – **Maurits de Hoog**, *Projectleider Wibautas* [Project leader], *OntwerpTeam Stad teamleider* [Head of City Design Team], *dRO – dienst Ruimtelijke Ordening* [Department of Physical Planning], 28 July 1999.

Interview 3 – **Heleen van Bommel**, *beleidsmedewerker – Bestuurdienst* [political assistant, advisory department to governing bodies], 28 July 1999.

Interview 4 – **Heleen van Loenen**, *dRO Publieksvoorlichting & Public Relations* [Publicity and Public Relations, dRO], 9 August 1999.

Interview 5 – **Dirk-Jan Huisman**, *beleidsmedewerker – dIVV (dienst Infrastructuur Verkeer Vervoer)* [political assistant, department of Infrastructure, Traffic and Transport], 10 August 1999.

Interview 6 – **Pieter Jannink**, *Stedebouwkundige* [town planner], Workshop leader, 16 august 1999.

Interview 7 – **Niesco Dubbelboer**, *onafhankelijke procesbegeleider 'Open Plan Proces'* [Independent Process Director], AGORA Europa, 18 August 1999.

### ***Wibautas* – Questions to be answered**

#### Background

- How is the project area represented in the *Strukturplan/betemmingsplan*? (Is there any reference?)
- (Ownership of the land)

#### process

- Who decided a change was needed? Why? (planning problems from subjective points of view – defining the problem)
- Who initiated the open-plan-process? Why was it decided on? Motives/background/intentions
- What are the differences between this and the 'normal' participation process?
- How were the goals defined? (Planning/political goals)
- Who were the target groups? (local residents? Businesses, other functions/users)
- Means of publicising. How? Was it effective? Main problems? (addressing different cultures)

- (Organisation - who organised and what effect does that have on the process - involvement of participants)
- How was advice directed? (bias of advice-givers)
- Methods of participation - workshops, interviews etc., (problems of lack of interaction between players)
- Costs - time and money

#### Evaluation

- So far - have the goals been achieved?
- The open-plan-process: is it better? / does it work?
- What should be done differently?
- Role of planners/politicians etc. - is this a major change?
- Future prospects

... Holand is the world's ideal of paradise. Every country would love to be like it, so peaceful, so democratic, tolerant, prosperous and orderly, but also so uniform, provincial and dull – although that seems to be changing a bit in the last few years.

**Harry Mulisch, "The Discovery of Heaven"**

**Interview 1**

**Germaine Princen**

Co-ordinator for politicians and civil servants in the project

*Stadsdeel Oost/Watergraafsmeer*

26 July 1999.

**Q - *How was the area described in the plans before the decision to start with the Open Plan Process?***

A - We are trying to make a master-plan. It is different, we are not making a *bestemmingsplan*. It is not legally binding. There are several *bestemmingsplannen* for the street, and the problem for the politicians and the people was the differences between all the plans. It is one large street in Amsterdam, and every part of it is different - the buildings, the height, everything. So the politicians said: 'Ok, we will make one plan, not in details but an outline, and we made appointments how to get the street better'.

**Q - *Was there anything in particular that pushed towards the decision to make this plan?***

A - The street is known as the ugliest street of Holland. And there are a lot of car accidents - 'slow traffic' and 'fast traffic' in Dutch - and that is the main reason. The east part and the west part of the street - it is very difficult to go from one part of the town to the other part because of the street and the main traffic road. The combination of all things together - reports about the traffic, citizens who were angry.

**Q - *At what political level was the decision made?***

A - Here (*Stadsdeel*) and the central politicians.

**Q - *And who decided to make it an open plan process?***

A - Central politicians, through the *Bestuurdienst*. Part of the central and de-central responsibility. But the main street is the responsibility of the central politicians. And that is the most important decision if you want to change. So we try to be equal [partners] in the process, we are, but we have to be realistic - when the traffic is the main responsibility of the central politics, it is the most powerful decision: what are you going to do with the traffic. And they decided to pay for an Open-Plan-Process. And this part followed, the *Stadsdeel*.

Q - *They decided to pay... so, the money was the biggest issue?*

A - Well, it was very expensive.... Not really [the biggest issue]. In the central political level, there was already a discussion going on: how to change the participation of the people, and they had several projects with citizens and central... to make phone calls, to have city talks and so on, and this was a logical next step. It was a big project, different issues, I think that is the main reason they chose this project to try the Open-Plan-Process.

Q - *You said about the Stadsdeel "we followed". Did you mean we followed enthusiastically or we followed... so-so?*

A - So-so. Public servants as well as the politicians.

Q - *Why?*

A - Because it was not very clear what it meant when the project started.

Q - *And when it was clear?*

A - It was already busy, going on. Because of the misty start I am still convinced that it was not ok. The mist is because of the rules - there were no rules in the beginning. They came in the middle of the process. So the people who were participating were confused.

Q - *Why were there organisational problems..?*

A - I'm not the project leader of the central city, and I came in when it was already started, to handle it for the *Stadsdeel*. I can only guess. I think the start was made too quickly, they were not ready yet. It is a big project - it is one million guilders - we had to start so... many public servants were involved. They had to make a lot of steps to start the project, it is true. I

think they did not realise the consequences of a misty start of such a big project, it is a new way of participation. If you do not make the rules very clear before the start it makes it misty all the time. It is not finished yet, but when it will be finished in the year 2,000, I think many citizens will not be very pleased with the results.

**Q - *And the planners?***

A - They will say, I think, well... stupid citizens, they had an Open-Plan-Process, they had a chance, and now they are still not pleased. There were appointments [borders?] - you go from one street in the Centre up to the Amstel station, and that is it. People wanted to talk and to give ideas, and they say: 'Oh, go to hell with these rules. We want to talk about the Amstel Station; we want to talk about more'. And it was not clear if it was allowed, and when it was allowed it was not clear what the politicians are going to do with it. And it is still not clear. It is obvious, when people want to talk about more you cannot refuse. In this country. So, they did it, so you have to write it down. Then you have to write down for the politicians: 'The people talked about this but we said you should only talk about that, so we advise you to do that'. And you can make another move or you can stick to you policy, but it is not very clear. One public servant - a very public servant [type] - said: 'You have to stick to your policy, even though...'. I think it is just a problem of how you deal with the practice. If you want to take the participation seriously, I think you have to move to what the people want.

**Q - *To what extent were the 'professional planners' who lead the workshops directing the participants and do you think they should - more or less?***

A - I will try to tell you something about the process in total, and then something that happened which was just what you asked. I think you must make a lot of appointments before you start, with the citizens, with the politicians, with the public servants, which make it very clear how you handle things during the process. And you can be more or less leading - it does not matter to me - you have to make strict appointments and rules. Because it is not possible to make everybody happy afterwards. There will always be somebody who is angry and... but you have to avoid that they can say to you: 'But this was an Open-Plan-Process, and you didn't take me seriously'. And I think that is happening now. That is what was happening in the process - there were workshops, and there were many planners. And in one workshop especially there was a public servant, a planner, who was hired to draw what the people want. And in one week he came back and the people were 'whaaa': 'We do not recognise anything from what we said'. I was there that evening and I was thinking: what is going on? I think he did not know the rules, or it was not clear to him. He is professional. If people have an idea he will always try to tell them: 'Well, that is not ok, you can better do this, you should better do that. That is what he did inside of his own room, I think. He had to work in a different way but they did not tell him, or he was not used to it so he was not able to, I don't know. Because it is very

difficult to change your attitude. And when he came back people were so angry, and he was only defending himself, and so it was getting worse and worse and worse. It was very hard for him to stand out to 30 people screaming... and he was very tiny. So that went wrong and they had to start all over again, and then it was ok, but it was also an example that you have to inform your own people very well what you have to do. It is a different way of working. You have to put out your own brains and only be the hands of the people, and you do not have to judge the ideas. Not at that moment. And you see that people got so angry, it was very difficult to start with trust again.

**Q - *Do you think it calls for redefining the planner's job?***

A - For everybody in this process, because it is so different. The public servant is not used to go to the public and say: well, I have no plan, you tell me. The politicians do not like it. They have to present a plan, and it is very difficult because there are a lot of stupid people outside....

**Q - *But it was the politicians' idea...***

A - Yes, that's what makes it so difficult. On one hand they say - ok, we'll give it a try, and on the other hand they are not ready for it.

**Q - *Were the goals defined in physical terms or political ideals?***

A - It was more about the street itself. To get a better street, more safe, and very important that the main stream of traffic had to go on. Also the quality of public space. But still it was going very slowly, because we had a document to start, a very small document. After it already started, it was not approved by the politicians, so we were already working without their approval. That is why the rules were misty. And when they gave their approval, then we had to make a document to say in short lines - this is after the workshops - the workshops said this and now we advise you to do that. We are still in the middle of that process, and we are already one year ahead. After the approval of that we can go on to make the plan. I think it takes another year, because many things are very technical, very difficult.

**Q - *In terms of the composition of the group of participants - was that done the right way, do you think?***



A - I think it was not.... There was only one questionnaire that was going to all the people living in the neighbourhood and to the people driving in the car. I think it was the most difficult question list you could make. There was a professor at the university who was involved in making the question list. I think it was very difficult.

**Q - *The people who finally arrived - did they represent the people using the route?***

A - It was only 10 or 11% [of questionnaire forms circulated that were returned], it was not much.

**Q - *Do you think they represented the local population?***

A - No. But I think they did enough. They tried hard enough. The leader of the project [Maurits de Hoog] had a feeling that some organisations were left out or did not react, and he went to them. Also to the mosques, well, there are no churches over there, but schools and everything. They tried hard enough. I think [another] big political mistake was made in the open plan process. One group living in the Eastern part (most live in the Central part) were very active in their own neighbourhood, they were participating in the workshops and they got angry, and they did not want to work any further. And when the workshop was finished and there was a report they said: 'Well, we do not recognise our opinion, and we are angry', and just the same as usual. And they sent a letter to the aldermen, and asked for fl 45,000 to make their own alternative, besides the three alternatives that were already made in the workshops. So you have a legal Open-Plan-Process, they could participate [in], but they stepped out, angry, and they sent a letter, and they got fl 45,000.

**Q - *They got the money?***

A - Yes

**Q - *And they submitted their alternative proposal/plan already?***

A - No, it is very difficult, they have made their own report with their own theory. It is very difficult. So now they have to make another move. Contra-expertise is necessary. It is all because of the traffic. The big issue is: can you reduce the traffic. Public servants of the central and over here [the *Stadsdee*] also say: no you cannot, it is too risky for the main route. The other people who are angry say: yes it is possible, and they have made their own investigation. So you have two totally different reports.

**Q - *So their alternative is focused on the possibility of less traffic?***

A - Hmm. So the political move makes another misty cloud. I can imagine that you - as politicians - want to take them seriously, because when the process is finished they will stand up and say: 'We...'. So you can better keep their voice down, and give them the money to make another report. But now they have a problem. Of course officially they were involved in the Open-Plan-Process, and they say it did not go well, so we wanted another chance, and the politicians said ok. So they admit that the Open-Plan-Process is not ok.

**Q - *Are the politicians afraid that they will prove to be a strong opposition for the next elections or something like that?***

A - They have to make short term and long term decisions. Because on the short term these angry people shut up, but in the long term when you have prepared all the reports, and the other people who have participated hear the opposition group got another lot of money, got their own Open-Plan-Process, made their own report. If I was one of those participants I should be very angry, because it is not ok. So that is the Open-Plan-Process. I think: what the hell is this. So it is moving around. It is not clear what you want with the people. And it is very interesting that two aldermen - one Central-City alderman lives in the Eastern part of Amsterdam from the Green Left Party. Another alderman from the *Stadsdeel* from the Green Left lives in the East part. The opposition group lives in the East part. So there is a political game going on, that makes the mist. And the alderman from the Centre is responsible for the traffic. And now we have ... other party. They are involved in the political level here and the Centre. The party's alderman knows the opposition people very well in the *Stadsdeel*, so they are playing a double game.

**Q - *Are the members of this party politically oriented?***

A - A few people from the group are squatters and some of them are from the Green Party (not Green-Left). I can not explain it systematically - you have the process, the civil servants and how you take it seriously and how you organise the process. I think that was not going very good until now, they promised to change. Of course I am involved in the process and I am always making trouble about that. I do not feel it is ok, and you have the political responsibility. And it sounds very official, but I am convinced you have to start the process very clear so you can advise your political people better, and you can make it clear to them when they make their decisions one way or the other, what the effects could be. But when the process is going: short term - oh, we have to do this, oh, we have to do that.

***Q - If they would have made the plan the 'normal way', do you think it would be better? Do you think it was worth it in spite of all the difficulties?***

A - No. All the money - no. If I was the planner, or if I was a student, looking at this process, I could say yes, because it is an experience you can build on. But as a worker for this project I think: no. You have to do it in a different way, or you have to leave it. You are making a big balloon filled with air. And one day, I think it will be around Christmas, it will burst - bang. That is when they are supposed to make the decisions between the alternatives.

***Q - I am not sure it is possible to answer this next question. Do you think the end result, the alternative suggestions that were made, are they significantly different to what might have been the plan if the process was done differently, without this kind of participation?***

A - I want to say no, but I am thinking for a moment if it is true. No, I do not think so. Because the public servants who were involved in the project made their input and you could see it coming out. It is not so very difficult because you cannot change the world, in that street, so you have some possibilities. We started with a walk through the street. And at several points we stood still and he was talking: 'You can think about this, change this'. He did not say it was ugly, he did not say it was better, but he only gave ideas. In the end you see all the ideas are coming back.

***Q - Can you compare the outcomes of this plan to any other master-plans... that was drawn up in the 'normal planning process'?***

A - It is very difficult to compare it.... I was in politics before, so I have some ideas. There are always people who are angry; there are always people who do not agree with the end result. So I think... I am afraid of an anti-climax, a very big one. Because there was another problem during the process. When the workshops where held, public servants from the central as well as the Stadsdeel were invited to come to the workshops, of course. They have to listen to what was going on. But there were no rules. So there were public servants in the workshops, there were citizens, there were architects just there to get a job or use their influence. There were landscape designers, so there were professionals and non-professionals together. I did not follow all the workshops - there were 3 of them, but I heard some complaints from inside. There were public servants from here, sitting in the workshops, who shut their mouths and let the people do the talking, and in another workshop there was an architect: 'Blah blah blah blah... So it is also... it is not very clear who made the input and there were

no rules for that, or not very clear rules. And the other question is: is it possible to let people talk about things like technical possibility for traffic, or for the buildings.

**Q - *You mentioned before that the people who did not come to the workshops were interviewed separately. Besides those community groups, business factors in the area, who have more of a financial-influence over the street, over the politicians, over what is going on, they also did not take part in the workshops themselves. Do you think this might also be a reason for agitation to the people who did participate? The fact that business people were interviewed separately and their ideas were viewed in a different way.***

A - I did not notice until now. There was only one essential meeting with a higher-education school from Amsterdam, it was a 30-minute presentation, and it was very strange. Why a high-school would have their own moments to show their own ideas about the school, and others are not allowed. So then you get a taste of - who is most important. When you want to change the participation you have to fight against.... But I do not think the way they do it now makes things better.

**Q - *So when the next project comes along you will recommend to do it 'the old way' rather than this way?***

A - No, but to make strict rules, for all the participants.

**Q - *Do you feel that the criticism is used to build a better system?***

A - It makes me cynical. I worked for 10 years in politics in the other side of town and the Central City... I saw things.... No, I don't believe it. Some people are taking this very seriously and decide to make things different. But a political colleague from years ago told me that there was a meeting for the politicians last month to talk about their work and how they are connected with the citizens. And she told me, and I was convinced (?) by somebody else that they were sitting down: 'Oh, everything is ok, everything is just fine, we have no problems...'.  
*Q - "We did such a good thing with the open-plan-process".*

A - Oh, not especially that. It is the way they... I stopped [working there] for that reason.

**Q - *And the public servants work differently? Is it a different system?***

A - Yes, there is a change coming. Also here inside. My colleague works on that part of the neighbourhood [shows a map]... Small streets, dark... I was there on the first evening when the project started, as the interviewer. Eighty to a hundred people came. It is a big part of the town. I had to tell the people: 'We are here but we have no plan'. It sounds really weird and the people were looking: oh no, it cannot be true. It takes a lot of time.

**Q - *Do you think in a more defined area like this [last example] it could work better than the big route of the Wibautas, with so many influences?***

A - Maybe. For everybody it is the same when you talk about your neighbourhood because you are involved. And in a big street you have... people are talking about their own situation, and they do not want to have the traffic anymore. But they are not... they do not care if the cars go into the neighbourhood next... it is very difficult to make a plan with so many different groups and different wishes. That is why I think an Open-Plan-Process is ok for a project like this, but I think it was not born yet before the project started.

**Q - *Do you think the project was too big for the Open-Plan-Process? If they started somewhere else rather than the Wibautas it might have been better?***

A - Maybe. I don't know... I don't work in the communication department, but when I think logically, I can imagine it is possible to make an Open-Plan-Process with the Wibautas, when you start to build the Open-Plan-Process and make the rules before you start the project. Ok, and then you can make mistakes and then you can learn from that, and then you make for another project to start again, and you learn your lessons. There were many people involved. That is why I am always getting nervous when so many people are coming, they want to talk about it and take it serious... and I do not have the feeling that the public servants and the politicians take the people just as seriously. So, it is scary. When I was the interviewer for this plan process we started now, until half past ten in the evening - it started at 7:30 - the people were very gentle and friendly, and... I said: I have a problem. And the politicians said: 'Is there a problem here?' And the public servants also, and the people who rent the houses, they also said there was a problem. But all the people: 'Oh, yes, it is a good neighbourhood, no, there are no problems'. We could stop. It took a long time and at the end one person stood-up and said: 'I live in a terrible house, and my landlord is sitting here tonight, he is not talking', and then many people started.... So, I think, that is the same scary feeling. Many people came, it took two hours, finally they started talking, they were angry, they were cynical, they did not trust the organisation, they made a lot of promises from here and the house-owners to start a project, make a project

team, to do it together... everything. And now it is the summer holidays. I think it takes two months or three months before the people get an answer: what is going on with their own house. I think you have to give the answers immediately. When they know what is going on with their own house they want to talk about their neighbourhood, and not the other way around. If they are angry or disappointed in their own situation they do not want to give energy to the neighbourhood.

**Q - *You can take that a step further, if we get back to the Wibautas. If you consider who would come to the workshops - people who would have less problems with their homes, their immediate surrounding, and can make the next step to go and decide what should happen with a big route. So the people who are poorer, or immigrants...***

A - There are a lot of immigrants living near the *Wibautstraat*.

**Q - *Yes, but they did not come.***

A - No, but they are not very happy I think. The people who came, they understood... most people who came to participate in the Open-Plan-Process are active people already for a long time, they know how it works. They know the politicians; they know the public servant.... I think there were some people who were new, who just came to live there. But they were all Dutch, well-spoken, people who are working, taking the car inside-outside the city, so it is different... a different way. But when you want to reach the people who you want to reach, I think it is ridiculous that you have to go to their home, ring the doorbell and say: hi, what is wrong?

**Q - *So the division of the group of participants between the workshops, the different alternatives that were suggested - was that also done according to people who already knew what they wanted, who already knew each other? The group you mentioned that left the Process - they were a formed group...?***

A - Two or three people in that group started, and they made a stream that other people followed.

**Q - *So how was the allocation, or direction to the different alternatives?***

A - The title was given by the civil servants - and you could fill that in. If you want to talk about the Main Street, City Street, you can fill it in yourself. If you want to have more a combination of a city street with squares, or if you want more of a village road, you could sit over there....

**Q - *You mentioned the input of the planner, which could be seen materialised in the plans. Do you think that could or should be done differently? Do planners need specific education?***

A - It's more that I saw it happening... There is one thing that comes up: oh, god, those people are such sheep, they are walking behind everybody. And maybe it is too difficult to think as a non-professional about the city in a new way. Maybe it is impossible. For me - I cannot see objectively anymore, because I was not walking with the group and... And sometimes it happens to me, when I think: I am the important one here, and I get some input of myself, extra, and then I think I... it was all my idea, but somebody put it in there. It is like commercial repetition, we are eating it. But I think it is very difficult on that level to think about the city. I trust people very much in their opinion about the street. No, that is not completely true. There are some awful public spaces on try-out here, many houses in a renewal scheme, people were allowed to talk about the street. I don't know how the civil servants react or how the politicians... I did not follow that specific participation. Anyhow, I went there with some colleagues... my god, whose idea was this? Red and pistachio green... beautiful houses, new, very good architecture, and then.... Well, the people talked about this and... it is terrible. I think, that is my opinion. And this is short-term participation, I think. Because the people who live there now... and that is the difficulty. Say in ten years the people have moved - who love pistachio colour - and then in 20-30 years they are going to change.... And another problem - is it possible in ten years to have enough green stones to fix the street when it's broken? I don't like this, but, ok. And so I said who did this, and then somebody said - it is participation of the people, we like it. So you have the feeling you have to shut your mouth. It is ridiculous. So I am always asking how far do you go. I think it is not necessary to give everything free. You can make rules - again, rules - strict rules. You can say we have policy, we use this material. And you can choose between three colours, or five, and you can explain why. Because... just because you want to have a city look. The inner circle of the city have their own profile for the *grachten* [canals]. I think it is normal, if you want to keep the entire city, you have to make appointments of how you use the street or how you mark the street. I can talk for hours about this. Sometimes participation goes too far. I think it is very clear that when people have trouble inside the houses, they are not coming to talk about the outside, and you cannot change that with participation. But I have family in Indonesia, and years ago I was involved with street profiles, and I was ashamed to tell them what I was doing. It is ridiculous for someone who is fighting against dictatorship. It is a luxury if you see the problems in the world, but for here it is not a luxury. I think it is good when people talk about their environment. They have ideas. Some better ideas than we can have. Who am I? I am

sitting here inside.... Then I stand up for participation, the Open-Plan-Process.... It is better than how we handle this. And when people will get angry at the end - I can imagine, absolutely. I do not agree with all their criticism but...

**Q - Did people have ideas that were not being accepted, or considered irrelevant?**

A - A part of the problem was that the planner had to explain why he left things out. If you don't explain, or ask if it is ok. They learn, they made improvements during the process. There were a lot of questions and they made a report with answers. Some questions were left out, and that is the most stupid thing you can do. Because the person who had the question looks at the report and says: where is my question? Do that one time, and you have an evening with angry people. They do not feel they were taken seriously. And maybe that is not the reason why it was left out, it is very important for the civil servant to understand how it works. So you participate, ask a question, and it is very important to you. And somebody else might say: it does not belong here, or: we can do it in another part, or: no, it is not important. You cannot do that. You have to mark the question and to give the answer and to explain. And then they can be angry afterwards, that is ok, but you have to do it very carefully and seriously. But I think it is the most difficult part between people.

I am not very happy with the Open-Plan-Process. And I do not know how you can do this any better. Because many years ago we started with the *inspraak* - legal formal way of informing the people. But it is changed when you have a plan for a street. Only three people came and they said: 'No, I want something for my little baby in the street, or I want flowers'. Then they went home and we had a report: 'All the participants said they want something for their baby in the street and they want many flowers'. It is ridiculous, hundreds of people live on the street and three people come and they make the street, so it is gone wrong now. And then I think it is a better way. But it is developing and you have to make... you need process managers, who can find in both positions. Because the one who has to plan the street - he does not like it when somebody says I want flowers, I want a hundred litters (?), he is involved, and the participants are also involved. You need someone who can make a good process, and set the rules, very straight and strict.

I am very curious about what Maurits [de Hoog] would say. He is the most responsible for this project. We are together in the project group, and I am a very difficult person in the way of talking about the process. But we never talked very long about the Open-Plan-Process together. I have a feeling that it is not done, but it is no use, because it is very important for the politicians. A lot of people are waiting for the communication reports. People make studies, University papers about participation. I can make a war if I want, but I leave it. Because I was always cynical about the motivation of the politicians of how to involve the people. And many times it is just for the good feeling for themselves, and not really because of the people. And I do not like that attitude. I prefer people who say: you can say what you want, I decide. That is clear. It is better. Or you say: you can talk, I listen, I decide and then I tell you why I chose this or that. It is clear. But now it is: 'Oh,



yes, we love you so'. Well, you are talking to someone who is an ex-politician, so that is why I am cynical. And now I am working on the other side, as a civil servant, and I see things are the way I thought they were, at least some people. I have many good colleagues, but some people don't like changes.

I am very curious about what are the idea about the Open-Plan-Process in the *Stadhuis*. I don't know what the report is to the politicians.

**Q - *There was not any common brain-storming?***

A - The communication departments steps-in and steps-out of the process. They have their own responsibilities. They will be - maybe already are - making a report/evaluation. Maybe it will go together with the master-plan to the politicians.

**Q - *And they don't ask you to include your opinions in their evaluations?***

A - Not especially. Just in the central group. But the meetings of the project group are always very quick and there are many things to discuss. You never take an hour or two hours to talk - just for talking. And in the mean time we have to deal with the politicians here, who sometimes act as if they are not responsible for the Open-Plan-Process. In the beginning they said yes, we don't like it either. And I would say: you are responsible, you have to act responsible. Until now I was more busy with taking the Open-Plan-Process serious for my work and my co-ordination work for the politicians here, in the project group there, and now is the time to think, well, what do I think of it myself.

**Interview 2**  
**Maurits de Hoog**  
Projectleider Wibautas  
Project leader  
Ontwerp Team Stad teamleider  
Head of City Design Team  
*dRO - dienst Ruimtelijke Ordening*  
Department of Physical Planning  
28 July 1999

**Q - ...She told me she was unhappy with the process as it was. Are you happy?**

A - With the process? Well, it was an experiment.

**Q - A good one or a bad one?**

A - A good one. We learned a lot. We are working on... it is different and bigger, but the plan for *Amsterdam Noord* [North] we are working on now has the same sort of structure, the process. But it is discussed in ten, twenty platforms or groups, and other people talk about it: how to operate, how to work, the role of politicians, the role of the more scientific knowledge. It is defined better than the **Wibautas**.

The city had very bad experiences with 2 referenda two years ago. The North-South new metro line, and there was a big discussion about *IJburg*. *IJburg* was the first, and after that there was a referendum for the North-South line as well, and in both cases a lot of people were against it and criticised the municipality for not discussing other possibilities or strategies before making a plan. The municipality made a plan scheme for *IJburg*, for 20,000-18,000 houses, and one could only say yes or no. An answer - would it not be better if we built those houses on the *IJ* banks in the North part of the city...

**Q - And that was the reason for the Open-Plan-Process?**

A - Yes. A lot of people discussed these referenda, and the conclusion was: we should experiment with more interactive processes before making plans. And we were discussing the future of the *Wibautstraat*, *Weesperstraat*, since the beginning of... February 1998. There were elections in March, and the new aldermen in April, and the traffic alderman, is from the *Groenlinks* [Green Left] party, and then he wanted... this project he was interested in. I initiated it and he supported it. That was in April/May, and in *Oost* [East] there was also an alderman of the *Stadsdeel* of the same party, he wanted it as well, and the inner city, the responsible alderman, is the former alderman of public space, and she wanted this project too. There were a lot of discussions ten years ago about the traffic here, in front of the building [dRO building at the *Mr. Visserplein*]. And the conclusion was diminishing the [width] of the road here, now it is a big road, with 2 lanes in each direction, it will be one lane in both directions. That was the conclusion. And the square - people said - we do not know what will happen, let us first make the North-South underground and afterwards we can see what we will do. So when I initiated this project, we had a preparation time of 4-5 years. It seemed to be enough time to get a new perspective, a new plan scheme for the whole area, and the discussion about the square which only concludes what the most pleasant way of making the square when we have a solution for traffic further on. This project was... in May they said ok, and then I met Magrit [at City Hall], and she said: can we match ideas for the more interactive process and making a plan scheme for the whole area? It seemed to me a good idea, because when I initiated this project, I could initiate it because I heard from a lot of people living in the area. They wrote a letter to the aldermen, they asked: 'couldn't there be more unity in the things going on?' And the reason that they asked the Central City, was because they were not very enthusiastic about what people in *Oost* did. So they went to the central alderman and they asked for a more comprehensive scheme. And the people who asked for it, were people I could ask to be part of the interactive process. A lot of inhabitant, a few schools and the University... Then we had to make the plan, to design the process two months in summer. What could be interesting? How shall we do it? There was no experience with it, so we asked a guy who worked at the town hall - Niesco Dubbelboer - he was the one who did the presentation, and he was the... in every discussion he introduced the theme, and the people who were involved, and he designed the process. He talked with me and Magrit about what we should do. He worked in the town hall, and now he has his own firm. And he is involved in a lot of interactive processes around the country. And he knows a lot about policy in Holland, and differences in experiments. He was the Chairman [director]. We had, I think 20 discussions, and he led them. He is involved in a lot of debates. Am I happy with the process? In half a year, September until January, we had a lot of discussions and a lot of ideas were born. I am mostly unhappy with politicians. We try the conclusion on what kind of plan we should make. First we proposed to have this discussion in May [3months after the end of the participatory process], before the summer began, and the aldermen, the politicians were... there was not one line or one strategy. A lot of departments... the traffic department, the planning department, they were against the conclusion of the process. They did not like the proposals for diminishing traffic.

Q - *Germaine [Princen] said the guideline was that traffic volume will stay the same...*

A - No, the function of the street as a main route in the traffic system should be kept. But the quantity of the traffic will diminish, and the discussion is to... something further with it, or can we slow down traffic so there is more capacity on the roads, and these departments, also the economic department were against diminishing further than the 30% intensity will diminish. There will still be more traffic on this road. The intensity now... the traffic department made a projection for 2010, how many cars.... And it will diminish by 30% all around the city. The parking policy - you will have to pay a lot for a parking place - in order to encourage people to come into the city by bike and leave their cars outside the city. But you can diminish all streets by 30%, or you can say: 'Let us keep that one as a main street, it is an important road with a lot of offices...'. They made a point of it. These politicians, including the leftist aldermen, are being careful how to operate. They were supposed to go to the *gemeenteraad* [local council] in June, and now it is foreseen in November. And we have some extra negotiations to do to convince people that you can come with your car in the city, otherwise you can convince people that it is possible to slow down traffic, and that it will be more safe, and that you can easily cross the road. And tonight - or this afternoon - the report will be sent by fax from an external office, and they will ask to look at our investigations and criticise the proposals that were made, and do an investigation that was made by a committee of inhabitants of this area. And in the whole poker game, these leftist aldermen chose against the economic department, and traffic department and planning department etc., and say there should be traffic on the road. The inhabitants of this area said: well, away with the traffic. And in these discussions the aldermen chose an investigation by the inhabitants. And so there is a report which says: it is easy to diminish traffic, and there are a lot of possibilities to do that. Now they can ask an external office in a lot of investigations what is true, and what is the most elegant way to operate. That is the next step, so before I go on holiday I have to write a proposal for the alderman what to do now. And this is the next step. An elegant proposal to have the good things from both. To have the traffic slower, and more capacity, and safe and those kind of things. We discussed in the period between September until January we discussed a lot of things. The traffic problem - everybody focused on it. And that is one of the things I am not very happy with. Because the design of the public space, or the trees, or what kind of schools are around it, are there cafés.... We made a little booklet, now they decide what kind of plan we are going to use. We had 22-23 points where they should decide - this way, that way. On 21 points everybody agreed with each other what to do, but the two points: the traffic and the garages - that is the other discussion - everybody focuses on these two points. And meanwhile the future of the area... people agreed. Thinking about finding the trick to avoid such a focus on the traffic, for the next discussions in the local parliament and the... I think it is a better way to talk about a lot of aspects of it, how people can live around it. The main problem... we asked a lot of people what is the biggest problem, and the traffic problem was the main problem for most people, so we have to find a solution for the problem. So, lets try next weekend, or tonight or tomorrow.

The politicians and the focus on traffic - those are the two things I am not happy with.

**Q - What were the different plans for the route before the Open-Plan-Process project?**

A - For the area next to the [dRO] office, there was new housing over there. That is the area where the plan scheme was made... it was a discussion for 10 years almost - 1980 on. In 1975 they made the Eastern metro line. At that time there was a lot of discussion what to do with this area. The area over there, there is a little tower... there are a lot of new buildings on the metro line. There was a plan to make a road over here, and offices and all kind of things on this place, part of the university. We made this in September - documentation for the people... different images(?) and the plans that were made. In the 50s there was a station... in the 1970s onward there were a lot of ideas about how to renew this area. A lot of things were developed, a lot of terrible buildings. The university building [which stood where the dRO building stands today] was really awful, and every top-10 [list] of ugly buildings in the city had that one in it. And everybody wanted it to be demolished.... The plan schemes from '99, the new housings and the film academy. And then it was proposed to build on the [Mr. Visserplein] square, and then there were many discussions about a built/open square. And this was made... And the moment that it started, it was after there were big riots... when the metro underground was made... a lot of squatters lived here in this area, and there was a real clash.... Well, and afterwards a lot of plans were made for parts, all fragmentary schemes for this area, or one building, or.... And the aim was to make a scheme for the whole area, not this kind of... [quoting from the booklet] "The ugliest street of the Netherlands - the *Wibautstraat*".

**Q - Do you think it is true [the quote]?**

A - Yeah... People who live there live around these streets, and also the schools. They saw a lot of these things....

**Q - So after the riots, and the metro line, the Open-Plan-process was meant to pacify the people? 'Now we have asked you, you should be happy'?**

A - Nee, the aim is to use it as a means to have a plan with more quality. 'A perfect plan'. I can make a plan for it, I can make a lot of plans, but I think this could be a better plan. We walked around here, talked to a lot of people. I met around 600 people, and they say, here, you should look... they have the idea to do it this way.

**Q - Do you think that these are bright new ideas that if it would have been done 'the old way', the planners would not have thought of them?**

A - No. And also a lot of the discussions were not allowed - diminishing the traffic. If I tried to make such a scheme, well.... And now it is part of the agenda, it is something to talk about and to find solutions. The solution will be a lot of traffic, but safe

and... there are three points: the amount of traffic, safety and the possibility to get from the one side to the other. It will be a compromise.

**Q - So, tell me the difference between the 'normal' planning process and the Open-Plan-Process.**

A - 'Normal', it would be to make a start notice. And then we have a discussion with some other departments, what part of it can you help with, and other people can do it with us... And then we have the design process, how to make a plan, the cost of it, what kind of investigations should be done, what kind of materials... and make some different designs, three or four. And then other departments look at it, and then you go to the aldermen... and they will choose two of these plan schemes. Then they will go to the parliament [city council] and they will discuss what is the best, and they will point out what is the best, and there will be a lot of: 'That is not good, this could be better'. Then we change our models, make new proposals. Then the aldermen have a hearing - listen to the inhabitants of the area. Represent the plan scheme, and they can say what they like. And the politicians of the local parliament will decide - lets do it that way. The last few steps will be done three or four times. I think the design quality of it, the first step of it, will be.... A lot of changes are made in these schemes by all this discussion, and finally you choose one and say - well, let's do this. No one is enthusiastic about the result. What I hope is that we can have the discussion now: where it goes, and what the main decisions are. Then afterwards we can say to a landscape architect or an artist: 'these are the main points, make two models', and then we can discuss the meaning of parts, or the big knots in it, the quality of a proposal. There will be qualitative arguments, no longer arguments, I hope, in fact.... I like something else, I like another policy. I hope that in November the results, the goals, but also the main points will be in agreement between the politicians, inhabitants, departments: that is the sort of street we want to make. And then we can really make a better plan. And better also, we know much better how people use this area. As a planner, in a more traditional way you say - I use this area often. A Lot of designers use an area like this once a month, and not in the weekends, and not at night, and they do not know how people use it. And I know it by heart now. I know a lot of people living there, how they use the area, where they go, which times it is busy, which times it is empty and dangerous, when traffic is not safe. That is much better than in the more traditional way. So I think we can make a better plan that facilitates urban life and people in this area. Then, there had been periods in Dutch planning.... The *inspraak*... people can talk about plan schemes. I think this is more appropriate, in the first phase talk to people to find out what the problem is, and not only find the solutions. And avoid the main points. When they discussed the solution for the square here: the main discussion is how much traffic will be there. That is one way of the quality of plans. And then there are a lot of new areas here on this axis.... So called supervisors: architect, urbanist [town-planner], sees all the plan schemes that are made and can change things, proposals, discuss things with architects, planners.... He is independent, mostly, he reports to the aldermen, so he has a lot of power. And that, in new areas, I think is an appropriate sort of quality. But it is a whole circus. I worked on the *IJ* banks, there was a supervisor team: three supervisors, and for *IJburg* - I think 5 or 6 people, quality team, it is called. It is a bit

too heavy.... Professors... there is a book in Holland... they go to these meetings, not always very inspiring. But [for] new areas it is difficult to find the people who will live there. I have been working in the Eastern Harbours as well, and a lot of building complexes are renovated. People who live in these buildings discuss the future of the area with architects and... mostly squatters. *IJburg* - there are meetings twice a year, a whole day or a whole weekend 'an *IJburg* weekend', and people can talk who are interested to live there, or discuss the complete plans, or....

**Q - *And back to the Wibautas - how do you pick the people who are invited to participate in this process? Is it a certain radius around the street?***

A - Ask Heleen [van Loenen]. 17,000 people who live around there were invited. Around 1,000 send back a card. During the whole period a similar number of people took part. I think around 1,000.

**Q - *Do you think the people who came to the meetings - were they a representative group of the people who live in the area, in terms of age, gender, colour, culture...?***

A - Not at all. They were high educated, white....

**Q - *Do you think it is a problem?***

A - Yeah... somewhat. So halfway we chose to... and they were [all] inhabitants. No workers, no schools....

**Q - *Did you approach workers?***

A - Yes, we did, and we did it afterwards again. So I made a complete tour. I went to 3 mosques, and I went to schools, and I went to... have meetings with people who have their offices in the area. We discussed the same things there as we did in the workshops. To hear what their problems or solution proposals were. And that was very good to do. What really was a problem, was that they were mostly not too convinced to take part in the process. A one night talk with me - that is ok, but....

**Q - *Do you think it is a problem in terms of the other people who did come to the workshops, when you meet some other people and need to combine these things together... how do you do that?***

A - I told [the participants] what I experienced.

**Q - *But that is a one-way route of information, and you do not get a discussion, you do not get agreement.***

A - That is one of the main points to learn. In the North we will do it in two steps: first step is the same sort of open discussion. And the second step is called expeditions, around a team or project, people are asked to take part who could have a specific view, or a specific... stake in the area, because they have a lot of money or they know much about it, or have the grounds or.... For example the University, which is a big player in this area, would not take part in the discussions, and they made a proposal. They presented it, there was a discussion about it, but they would not take part in the groups. In North, what we can do now, is first talk with this or discuss with the other in the first phase, but in the second step, around the project... Shell [company, has property in *Amsterdam Noord*]... it will be restructured. There are plans for new incubator buildings, or little offices, little workshops with firms around Shell.... Same sustainability theme, but that we can ask the university to send the 2 or 3 people who are mostly involved in this sort of problems, to help.

**Q - *What about the students, here, at the Wibautas.***

A - We tried to get some schools involved, there are a few elementary schools for children between the ages 4-12, and there were a few elders [?] who took part in the discussion.

**Q - *Did the children themselves have a say?***

A - There is a high-school as well, and they worked a week, and I went with them, we made some proposals for... there were some good proposals. Students? That was the biggest problem. That is the main group who uses the area, apart from the inhabitants, and there was a new big school opened in September, and we tried to get people from there to take part in the process - no one reacted....

We discussed sometimes with some students, but they were on a personal platform.

**Q - *Do you think there is any way of overcoming that problem?***

A - We tried, before the discussion in January, a questionnaire. We made 20,000 questionnaires, we distributed them to schools and students, workers, inhabitants, traffic users, bikers.... And 10% reacted. It was hardly very representative - it was too difficult. The questions were too difficult. From the students there came around 8% of the few hundred we distributed around the institutes. That is a way of hearing something of what they would like.



**Q - *What about immigrants? It seems to be a serious problem...?***

A - There is a big difference between the inner city and the East. In this area the immigrants... a lot of Jewish people lived here, and a few are still in this area, but other immigrants here in this area are mostly from industrialised countries: United States, England, Sweden. And in East there are a lot of people from Morocco, Turkey, not so many from Suriname. I went to a lot of these... to Mosques and organisations. People from Suriname are hardly organised, you could not find them, or it is very difficult. People from Morocco, Turkey, you can find them more or less through these organisations, mosques, and from.... There were three big meetings with, I think, in total, 120-130 people whom I met, and I presented the procedure, and I talked to them. From these people there was one man who participated in the final debate. It is not much. In the local immigrant organisations - Turkish people were there, and they have their network in these areas, and we asked them to help people to fill in the questionnaire, and we translated it, but there was no one.

**Q - *Do you think they would have had a different perception of what should be done than the people who participated in workshops?***

A - People I met asked things from their own point of view. People in the shops were interested in how these shops will rent. And it could be interesting. It gives you new elements - what kind of shops, discussion with the organisation of shop-keepers. I spoke with 2 organisations. They give a lot of new arguments to diminish traffic, to reshuffle shops, to make new shops at the *Wibautstraat*. That was interesting and useful for the discussion as well. And a lot of the 2 talks at the Mosque, the main topic there was Islamic centres for shopping, schools, homes for the elderly - it was one item, or one theme. When I presented that in the discussions there was no one to defend this point of view. So it was always a problem. There were new buildings built for all groups. A more multi-cultural market, for example, that was one of the proposals. I think it is a little bit difficult, there is no way of dealing with ethnic points of view.

**Q - *Are there important businesses that could have a significant impact? Like Philips...***

A - We asked Philips to take part. There was a new PR manager, a former journalist in one of the main newspapers in Holland. And I asked him the first week - in September we had some lectures as well - to give his view on the way Philips could take part in the development of this zone, what their plans were. And the day before he was supposed to give this lecture he resigned.

**Q - *So they ended up not being a part of it at all?***

A - No, they found it not interesting, they told me later, they were no interested.

**Q - *Are there other significant bodies located there?***

A - The Newspapers. It is the same sort of story. The chief editor of the newspaper told us that he wants to take part, but his board of directors wanted another discussion. At the time it was not clear if the newspapers should stay in that area or not, or if they should move. Now they will stay. But journalists working there, they will not stay in this area. So they were very: 'no discussion'. The only discussion with the newspaper-firm was the editor who talked with the board of directors about their plans. And that is the only contact. And it is not easy. We tried to avoid this in North - the 2 phases, so we can ask Shell to take part.

**Q - *But then still, you never actually have the integration, you never have a discussion where they understand each other...***

A - No.

**Q - *In terms of the planners who led the workshops, how much, do you think, their own personal perspective, their experience and their professional knowledge of 'good planning' came out...?***

A - Always, but I think most of them tried to do it in 'an open way'.

**Q - *Do you think planners should somehow be educated for this sort of thing?***

A - No, to present plans but not discuss about plans with people. The man on the street... no.... They tried. You learn about it. The first night at a big discussion they said - it is impossible... a few times I heard this criticism. That he is not allowed to say that... that we discuss this only with the professionals. But I think it is very important that the chairman... he or she should make clear what the discussion is about.

**Q - *Can they stay clear saying what the discussion is about without directing the results?***

A - They should listen to the people who are participating. A professional, it is impossible... he should only give arguments, or pros and contras, or something like that. What we will do in North, is that the day after discussions, the chairman and the professionals who are part of this group will discuss what is going on, and what the questions are, and the results. And when

we think there is a reason to give more information, then the chairman... we can give the chairman that kind of information and he can decide whether he is going to discuss it or not.

**Q - Do you think in terms of the plans, the results are extremely different if you do it 'the old way' or the new way?**

A - Yes, I think so. There was a proposal to restructure the Amstel Station. I have been thinking about that in the last year. And with the Railway Company - I spoke with them.... A lot of people found it an attractive idea, and wrote it through, and what it could mean. It will be not in the *Wibautas* [plan], but it will be an important theme for discussion about train traffic around the city, next year. And no one knows that still - the people who took part in this discussion - but it is a new point of view, or new perspective, on how this area could function. And I would not dare to say that it is too difficult, or too far.

**Q - So generally you think it was successful. You did a good thing.**

A - I like this sort of experiments. I will be.... We are not that far... it should be a sort of push for making it better.

**Q - Germaine [Princen] said she feared that when things are realised, the people who took part would now have a new claim: 'I wanted something, now you did something else'.**

A - They said a lot of things. There was not one perspective.

**Q - You do not expect it to be a problem.**

A - No, not that.... I think people who want a lot of traffic over there, the busy image of the big town, it will not be... that image, it will not be realised. People who thought about integrating traffic and pedestrian use of the area, and there were different solutions for it. I think the best things from those proposals we are doing now.

**Q - And all the time and money that was spent on it? That is not an issue?**

A - No, I don't think so. It is very cheap. A lot of discussion.... In the traditional way, a lot of money and time is spent in the final phase.

**Q - But you do not actually eliminate the discussion in later phases? Once you come up with a plan you go back to the 'normal', with the inspraak?**

A - But the normal is then that people can give their criticism. And a lot of this criticism they already gave now. And the local council now decides: we will do this. Perhaps they will say: we will do something else. Then we have to start again. That will be a shame.... But I don't expect that. They chose something now, and we finished the plan in this period of this council. 'Normal' is then the steps to be taken. People say.... The traditional way the discussion costs us 4 years, the process, now it is going faster. It is one year now.

**Q - *And when the decision is made in November...?***

A - We make this plan in half a year, and then it is 2 years from the beginning to that moment. I told a lot of people that we will try and do it in one year... I guess we need two. But the faster the better, I think.

**Interview 3**

**Heleen van Bommel**

*beleidsmedewerker - Bestuurdienst*

political assistant, advisory department to governing bodies

28 July 1999

*Q - Shall we start with a brief introduction of your part in the process?*

A - I am an advisor to the city council. My participation in the project was mainly directed to the alderman who was involved with this project. Sort of an in-between, between the project manager and the department, and the City Council or the aldermen. I looked at things that are politically interesting and delicate, and I advise how to go... at what stage should you go public with them, focus on the procedures, which steps to take, when to make decisions, who has to take the decisions.

*Q - Why an Open Plan Process?*

A - I missed that part. I was not here at the beginning. Maybe it was the other way around. Someone designed the Open-Plan-Process, and they had to find the project where they could use it, experiment with it, and they selected the *Wibautas*

project. So it is mainly the question: why do they think this project is suitable for an Open-Plan-Process? In theory, I think that any project could be or should be subject to an Open-Plan-Process, but certain projects appeal more to the public. And I think that is one of the reasons they selected this one. It was initiated by people who live nearby the street, and there is a lot of traffic there, and they think it is dangerous for children. There is a lot of noise, so they said: 'You should do something about that'. And also it looks a bit messy, it is not really very nice to walk there. And they wrote a letter to the city council, and asked the local government to change it, and this initiated this project, so that you already got the interest of the local public, so you have a good chance that they will participate if you start an Open Plan Process.

***Q - The goals of the project - were they defined in physical terms or were there also ideological/democratic goals behind it?***

A - No, I think the objects of the project were physical. Both in the sense that - not so much that we have to change it physically that way - but the goal was to make an environment and to combine the functions better, and to make it a nicer place to be, really. Another goal of the project would be the Open-Plan-Process. Experimenting with the process. To find out if that works and if that is a good way to involve the public in a project. But that was not the first goal of the project, it was really a physical goal, the Open-Plan-Process was like a secondary goal.

***Q - How was the target group for participants defined?***

A - Yes, of course because they initiated by writing letters, we already had the one group... two groups of people. I don't know how many people were behind that [the letters]. I guess around 50 people in the two groups. I don't know how the selection goes, but I know there are a lot of people they have got organisations, they have addresses of them, they know which organisations stand for what. So we have selected all of them, and we sent out information to everyone living in the surrounding. Also we sent information to certain groups, which could be, depending on the kind of organisation that they have, interested in this kind of project.

***Q - Were there any specifically politically oriented groups among them?***

A - Some more or less are. But most are not politically linked to one party. But there is one group of people who live there, they have quite extreme ideas about how much traffic should pass on this street, and they sort of made a link to a Left party, which also had those ideas. But I think they link only by subject, so it depends, really. In this project they can find that party or they can find that party. They are not political groups.

***Q - So it is not a political conflict for the aldermen who deal with it?***

A - There is a political clash because the project is about something with quite a bit of impact, and about traffic, and traffic is a very sensitive subject. But it is more or less defined... just mainly one party, I guess. The more Left Wing parties do want to take measures against traffic, and the right wing parties don't want to take measures, because they think that less traffic will bring less employment. The main spiff in this project, the main question.

***Q - Do you think there was any problem with the representative level of the participants (white, well educated etc.)***

A - I think you do not reach the average people who live there. They tried to undo that. Of course you cannot force people to come. There were mainly white people who came there, more or less well educated, but not too busy because it took a lot of time to go there. To reach outward the project manager, Maurits [de Hoog], went to Turkish women, to schools, other organisations and groups to have an idea of the other people that did not come to the meetings.

***Q - Do you think that is enough?***

A - He visited quite a big list of organisations and groups, I think that more or less a good view of the different points of view.

***Q - In the sense that they were interviewed separately and did not share the process of negotiation...***

A - That is true, absolutely. It is not ideal, I think on that approach you never reach everyone. There is always... you appeal more to one group than to others.

***Q - In terms of the cost of time and money - was it worth it?***

A - I think it is too early to tell, really. It was pretty successful at the beginning, at the start, but now there is a very big gap between the end of the Open Plan periods. And now it takes almost a year until the city council has made decisions and all that, and come back. And afterwards, again, there is a really big gap between deciding on the plan and implementing it. And so there is uncertainty as well, if they are ever going to implement it. Because there is such a big gap, and there will be other aldermen sitting there. For me it is the main thing... uncertainty. Because the participation was successful. You have to invest money in that, and time. I do not think that is really big of a problem. Because you definitely win a lot, but I think the biggest risk in this project, the big gaps. And that is partly because it is not only a project of the Central City, the

*Stadsdeel* participates, and that makes it really complicated. They have to go to the city council, and to the Council of the *Stadsdeel*, and that takes a lot of time.

**Q - *The danger that things will not be implemented when the alderman changes - is it really a one-alderman baby, and when he is gone it might also go?***

A - The whole project will not go, I don't think that, but times change....

**Q - *The plans that come out - do you think they are significantly different when produced in the Open-Plan-Process and when done 'the old way'?***

A - I think the good thing about this plan is that you try to make one plan for the whole route. The *Binnenstad* [borough of central Amsterdam] that had a say in this part, and the other part is the *Stadsdeel* [the borough (East/Watergraafsmeer)]. There could be a lot of difference between them - how they use it, how they carry on with it. So I think it is good that they combined it and made one plan for it. But I do not think the difference will be a very big difference from what is now. The main difference that can be made are not up to the local government, it is up to project developers, because they are the owners of the buildings, and if you change the buildings, that will make a bigger impact than if there is a cycle path - yes or no. Politically that is a big issue, but if you walk through the street or if you drive through the street, it is not really.... It does not make a really big impact, I think. There is also one thing that I am uncertain how it will turn out - whether the *Weesperstraat* will be... will have two lanes or four lanes.

**Q - *So it is a political decision now?***

A - Yes, very political. But this will not be implemented before 2,004.

**Q - *What do you think should have been, or in the future should be done differently?***

A - I think they should think before more about how they plan the decisions, and should think about if you ask the public to participate, you cannot wait one year to get back to them, and say, oh yeah. Because you ask them to participate and they really invested in that. They spent hours thinking with you, and thinking ideas. And you say all right, thank you for this, and then you go back for one year, and then you come back and say - oh, yes, I decided this and this and this. I think that is too long a period and you should be well aware of that before you start this project.



**Q - *Is that for the planners, or the politicians, or a combination?***

A - A combination. Another thing, that we did - you have to really be aware of the things that could be changed and all the things that you were certain could not be changed. You have to think about that as well - what do you ask to think about. What do you ask the public, what can they say. What are the borders. But we did that, I think.

**Q - *What was the level of involvement of the politicians in the day-to-day running of the project, and do you think there is a great change in the role of politicians in planning in that respect?***

A - There is a difference between the *Stadsdeel* and the Central City. The Central City - you do not inform them every day, we inform him maybe once a month.

**Q - *Did they ever come to the workshops themselves, talk to the people?***

A - One did, but [kept a] low profile because he was not the chairman of the board, the committee... the alderman that was supervising the project. One of them visited quite a few public meetings. There is a special committee for the project, which includes 2 of the aldermen of the central city, 2 of the aldermen of the *Stadsdeel*, and another two aldermen of the central city that get the information and can make decisions as well, but they are not always present. They are from different parties, but all of them are Left Wing. But it was not decided by political affiliation, but those with planning responsibilities.

**Q - *You do not know how involved were the politicians of the Stadsdeel?***

A - I guess they were more informed, because they are closer, and they are not as busy... and they also visited the public meetings.

**Q - *Do you think that it is, or at least it should be a change for the politicians in their attitude to planning?***

A - I think it should be a change, because it demands of the politicians to have an open mind, and not first to think an idea out and then go to the public, but to take the public seriously, and go before you have a fixed idea yourself. They need to adjust. They have got certain ideas about how the public thinks, very pre-judged. They think they are not clever enough, or: they do not understand this, they do not understand that.... They put more energy into manipulating with that, than they put energy in just listening to the public. I think it is very difficult to listen to the public, have an open mind.

*Q - That could be relevant to all areas of political life, not just planning....*

A - Absolutely, yes.

*Q - Do you think they realise that?*

A - That will have to take more years, but maybe.

*Q - In the future do you think all plans should be done more or less this way?*

A - No, not all, because that will be too expensive and too time-consuming. But I think more, yeah. I think it is also a change, it is another way of working. Not only for the politicians, but for the civil servants as well. It is a different way of working together with the public.

[A] - What I am going to tell you is not based on 'true facts', it is just based on my experience, the way I think people like the process and how their opinion was used during the process. But it is not based on the evaluation.

**Q - *Shall we start at the beginning? How did it start?***

A - Have you seen this [information sheet, see attached]? It is a big area we are talking about, so we had to find all the people interested. So what we did was send a letter to all the people in the area, which was very inviting, in which we asked them - please let us know if you want to take part. The sheet was not attached to the letter because I think we sent almost 20,000 letters so it is too expensive. As a governmental organisation you should not put this in every door because it is a waste of money and people will think about that too, so you have to think about it.

**Q - *How were the people who were supposed to get the letter defined?***

A - We had the area marked, we knew which streets and which numbers of houses had to be included, and we used the registration system for the addresses. The sheet was used for everyone who was interested and replied to the letter. It is some general information on the project, which is still relevant, so it was very good, actually. And we had the plan [schedule] on the back, and that was very good, I think. So that was the way we started. We put all these letters in the post boxes, we waited, and... we also used the media, of course. So we got some more interested people by that channel. Local press: local papers, our local television station. We did not pay for that, but from the beginning we had some attention from them. And then we started with the big event - walking to the area. That was very strange. It was such a beautiful day...

**Q - *Why strange?***

A - Because you are walking with, I think, 40 people and some people were taking their bicycle, it was very cosy, very funny.

*Q - Did you expect more or less people?*

A - We expected more.

*Q - And why do you think they did not come?*

A - Because it was too early in the morning, and maybe they were not so interested, as we thought they were. Or maybe people are lazy, so they think: 'oh, I know all that. So I will come to the first information evening, and then I will skip two, and then come to the third one again, and I can still give them all my ideas and things I want to say.'

*Q - Why the Wibautas for this project? Why this particular area?*

A - It is a big area of which the future is not typified yet, and although there are some projects along the way, there is still so much to talk about that it not yet defined. When I got this project it was already starting up, and we were in the phase of talking about: is it possible for this project, because it is very big, and still there are many programmes already running, so we cannot stop them. There is a lot of the land that is not owned by the government so we cannot do anything with the programmes they are making for these areas. But still we thought there was enough to talk about with the citizens.

*Q - Might it not have been better to start experimenting with the Open-Plan-Process on a smaller scale? Rather than such a complex situation that includes discussions of traffic and so forth?*

A - Sure, but this is already happening in the *Stadsdeel*. It is happening in the small scale, so they are already starting Open-Plan-Processes before the *Wibautas*. We think that this is really exceptional, but it is not. It is just exceptional because it is such a big area and we are talking about the future plan.

*Q - Can you give examples of where this is happening?*

A - It is happening all over. When there is a gap in the built-up area, and they want to build. It is on another scale, but they are asking the people in that part of the city. But it is different, it is not this big. It is maybe two evenings: one information evening and one discussion evening and then an end, so it is not that ambitious as this one. I think this is more for the politicians to learn how to co-operate with citizens and vice versa. To understand what is happening in the city and what you

need to know before you can make decisions, just to understand the politics. That is exceptional from the small-scale projects. Maybe the arrogance of the big city, this organisation.

**Q - *How do you see the differences between the Open-Plan-Process and the 'normal', old way of participation?***

A - Well, it is very different. It is an attitude of workers of the government - civil servants, because they are working for the citizens then. Actually, they are always working for the citizens, but... they do not know, they forget, or they do not want to know. So that is a big difference. I do not know if the plans really change that much if you use an open plan structure or if you use a lot of *inspraak*, at the latest part [of the planning process] they can also come... they still can with this project. I do not know if it differs very much for the result. But, it is a learning project. In that way it is very different.

**Q - *You said you approached the people in the area, but I understand you also asked the people in cars, commuters using the road...***

A - That was in a later stage. So we approached them by their own mailbox, and we said you are very welcome and everything, and we had some attention in the local press. And we had this promenade, when we were walking. We put posters in the area and we got the attention by that and also by the strange group of people walking through the street. And then we had some information evenings about some global topics which could/should have effect on the development of the area, but which you leave actually open because it is not defined yet. This is all the first week - we had an information evening and a discussion part. In these evenings we had a speaker, someone from a school, from... whatever. And after that... so this evening we did inscriptions for the process, for the active participants. And it started just a few days later. So we built up a number of people who were interested, and finally we got around a hundred people who wanted to participate in an active way, but we lost some of them of course, and we got some new ones. In the end I think we had some 1,200 interested people in the computer system. I think at the end we had 60 people who really wanted to participate in making the plan.

**Q - *How many people did you expect before it started? Did you have any number in mind?***

A - We did not plan for it. We had a communication plan, of course. But that was made before I participated. And there are no numbers.... Well, we talked about the specific groups of people, and we did not get those. Like young people, immigrants, elderly people....

**Q - *And that did not happen?***

A - No, it did not happen.

**Q - Do you think it is a problem?**

A - Yes.

**Q - Do you think it is a problem that only 60 people participated actively and they decided for the rest of the 20,000 who got the invitation letters?**

A - No, I do not think so. As I said, this is for making a global structure for a lot of the future of the area. And when you are coming to make a programme for specific parts of this area you still have to follow the regular procedure. And then you can get these people again who are interested in their own neighbourhood, which can only be one hundred metres around their home, and then you can have their opinion and detail.... I think that is ok.

**Q - And what can you do about the problem of misrepresentation of immigrants, young people, elderly people, as you mentioned?**

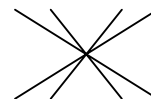
A - Next time, you mean? We should have made a special programme. We just evaluated and discussed with the communications group, and we thought we should have started a separate part. I don't think you can combine it, we should have started a separate line for immigrants.

**Q - But then if you separate immigrants or any other specific group, such as, also, business people, you lose any possibility of communication and mutual understanding between such groups. You will need a planner to combine and bridge the gaps.**

A - I think that is necessary. I think you need a planner to translate the ideas into concrete plans. You cannot ask the business people to join a table with citizens, because it is really another level of communication within the group.

**Q - But they still have to use the same space.**

- That is true, but you do not have to force them to talk in the same group. You can start maybe 6 lines, and it can look like this: come together, so that they can present their own plan, separate again, come together, separate, together.... That is better than if you try to force them all together in one group, they will not come, so you know you have those



ideas but you might lose them. And then at the end you think – oh, we should join them. And you ask them to have an opinion on this idea which is formed by other people. I think it is utopian to think that you can combine them. So that is negative...

**Q - *In the case of business people - if you do not include them in the discussions, the people might decide what they will, but since they have the money and the ability to actually build things...***

A - Yes, but that is why you should start up 6 groups next to each other at the same time, but with another frequency, or....

**Q - *You mentioned before that people chose to only come to some of the meetings, but not to all of them etc. Is it not a problem that it takes so long, and people do not have the time to come to all the meetings...***

A - It was not really necessary, to join all the meetings in the first week, it was more like a communication boom: this is the starting of the project, *WHAM!* The only things they had to join was the promenade in which we surveyed the problems in the area, by letting them tell us what they thought had to change, and this discussion evening. So we needed them here, so here were the results presented of the survey. But this was actually in the obligatory programme, and that was strange. You had to join all the evenings, but you cannot force people to come. But we formed these groups, and people in the groups went along with these ideas, and when at the third evening someone would join them and start all over again, they would not accept it. That was difficult. So we had a comment about the planning of the many evenings in a short time. But if you would spread it, more people would start all over again when they meet each other. Maybe it is better to spread it, because it was a problem for them - twice a week a meeting which they had to join. Maybe it is better, if it is possible, to divide topics on every meeting so you can join again and you can talk about maybe tourism in the area or infrastructure importance or.... It is difficult to work that out in one evening, but maybe it is better.

**Q - *What do you see as the main problems of the process?***

A - We did not reach the working people, and the immigrants, young people, students, and we did not get all the people along the way, so it must be something in the planning that was not good. What really was not good was the start with the survey, which was really bad, and it was the start of the project.... And then people thought: oh, they are bad, this is the quality...

**Q - *Why/how was it bad?***

A - It was made by someone who was not used to practice an investigation in a high level. What is strange, at first we explained this is a big area, we can talk about it, but there are some parts, or things we cannot talk about, because.... That is the infrastructure part, because it is part of the city in which we need heavy transport. And we had to explain this very well, because we did not want people to get angry at us, or let them make ideas and then say: no, it is not possible. So at first we had a big discussion with the people who said: 'But the traffic is the problem here, so if we cannot talk about that...'. But I think they understood the traffic had to find a way too. But during the process people still were going to talk about this stuff. And they knew they could not talk about it, but still they did. They needed this space to let out.... They knew it was very hard for us to develop their ideas if it did not fit in to the governmental programme, but they needed this space, and I think it is fine to do that. And, actually, now you can see that there is more possible than we thought at the beginning. So it is very difficult now, we do not know what is going to happen. I do not know what is going to happen with this street when you are talking about traffic, but in the beginning I thought we cannot even talk about it at all, but now we hear that there is more possible than we thought. It is funny, because we closed it up at the beginning and the people just wanted to talk about, talk about, and maybe they are right.

***Q - There was a group that retired and made an alternative plan. They changed the basic assumptions. The people who stayed under the original rules could be upset that they were working with rules that are suddenly no longer relevant.***

A - I think you should not divide it so strictly in three, maybe four directions. That was what I did at the beginning. I thought - oh, it is going to be 1, or it is going to be 2, or it is going to be 3. And that is not the way. We want to pick out all nice ideas from all 3 or 4 directions, and to combine them together. There are 3/4 concepts. Of course the transportation did play an important role. One of the groups was only talking about it, and little shops, and everything. And you can take that and even put it on a big street like the Champs-Élysées, so you do not have to divide that strictly on the issue of transportation. I think, even if the politicians do decide to go along with this fourth idea, they do an investigation, prove that it was possible with keeping the transportation as it should be, they still would use the ideas of the other groups, which are good. It is not that the ideas would be very different if they knew that they could talk about another street. I don't think so.

***Q - Where does the questionnaire fit in?***

A - We had two. One at the beginning, during the walking. Just to get all the ideas about people - what they thought would have to change, what is the most important thing. And at the end we did an investigation. Like we sent this letter in the beginning, we made a sample of the same area and we sent I think 10,000 questionnaires. And because we knew we did not get the students, we did not get the business-people, and the people who are only using the area by metro or by bus, car or bicycle,



so we gave them the questionnaires on the street. So that is at the end. To find the good ideas of the three directions, and to ask a big number of people, very different people, to ask them - what do you think would be best.

***Q - How many questionnaires were returned?***

A - I think only... 10% (1,000), from the 10,000. But it was a very difficult questionnaire. We made it very attractive, by graphic means, but the contents was too difficult. It looked fine, we tried to catch the attention but the questions were very difficult. We thought about it but we could not change it. That must be a reason for not getting so much response. We marked them so we knew which categories gave which answers. But some categories were very small, so you cannot do anything about that.

***Q - Did you notice any significant pattern to the participation of women - were there significantly less or more women than men?***

A - I think it was quite equal. I do not know the specific people who normally come to these meetings because we do not organise those, we are the central division, so you have to look in smaller areas. So I do not know if this is different than normal participation.

***Q - You mentioned that the process changes the relationships between politicians and the citizens...***

A - It did, from the people towards the politicians it did...

***Q - But the other way around?***

A - The other way around... I don't think so, not yet.

***Q - But eventually it will, do you think?***

A - Eventually. But we will have to do it many more times. The politicians are only here for 4 years, and there are new ones and new ones and new ones. But it will take some time before they are used to it.

***Q - Was there political involvement in the process itself?***

A - In the process... no. At the end. When they thought: hmmm....

**Q - *And for planners - do you think they should come to any serious conclusions about their role in planning?***

A - Yes, I think so. Some of them will have learned a lot of this, and some of them will not, and they will not change. I think they can learn a lot, but they can learn a lot from the normal procedures too.

**Q - *Do you think the Open-Plan-Process is where the future is going?***

A - It depends on the politics, if they do not want it, it is not going to happen. So we do not know what is going to be the result of this, and that is not very motivating. We are still waiting for them to decide on the big topics, which are the differences between the directions. And you can see it takes them very long. 5 months, that is as long as the discussion project took. And it is very bad for the process. I wrote a letter to the participants to explain to them why it took so long for them to get any results. And even I do not understand. And they are too afraid now to 'go for it', I think it is sure that the open structure... on this scale. So if they do not dare to use the result and do it, it is the end. We will not do it again.

**Q - *Do you feel that this is what is actually going to happen?***

A - I am the one who had the contacts with the participants, so I am a little bit afraid of that. We already lost the contacts, because they are not phoning us anymore, we do not receive any email. Like that it is a waste for the process. It is a waste for next time to get people again they will: aahh... and then the politics at the end, and they will decide and maybe they are going to do something with what we did, and all the time we spent on it....

**Q - *Let us assume that is not the way it is going to happen, but the politicians will decide, and adopt some of the suggestions. Do you not think there will be people who will get upset since their specific ideas are not chosen?***

A - There will be people who will say that. But I think if the area is changing.... They did not believe it at first. We were really listening to them, and we really had no intentions yet for this area. At the beginning it was like a struggle: 'I do not think they are honest...'. But in the end, that is in the survey too, they really believed us that we wanted them to participate and to give us good ideas on the contents.

**Q - *If this is the beginning and you will have more and more projects run this way, do you think this calls for somehow changing, or redefining the work of the planner?***

A - It is possible. But it is going to take a lot of time and money. We have to see if the quality of the programmes is better. If not, we should find another way.

**Q - *Was it worth it, in terms of all the time and money?***

A - Yes, in the beginning. But now I am kind of disappointed in the process. Not only me but all of us are disappointed. If they decide something that is not following the process, then it is not worth it. Well... it is worth it, like an experiment, but it is not worth the quality of the outcome.

**Q - *Does it cost much more than the 'normal' process?***

A - Oh yes. Yes, it costs very much.

**Q - *So that was a political decision.***

A - Yeah.

**Q - *They just do not live up to it?***

A - It is a big city and the money is coming from several parts, so a lot of money did come from a restructuring fund, and a lot of money came from... communication, which costs more. Normally we are not involved in the planning programme. It came from an experimental fund for processes like this. That money is not here for next time, we have to find it....

**Q - *Can you give me a budget estimate?***

A - It is in the books.

**Q - *So, your overall evaluation is that it was a good thing or a bad thing...?***

A - It was very nice to do, actually, it was very nice to believe in it yourself. But it is a very difficult phase now. We are just waiting, and we lost contacts, and we do not know what is going to happen. It is a difficult part, but maybe, maybe it is going to be fine.

**Q - *What would you do differently next time?***

A - We would split up for separate groups, so we will have a different structure. Separate groups for citizens, and businesses.... Have meetings and separate again etc. Now we had meetings with some business people, we organised it, but it was ad hoc: 'O-oh, we have a problem, we don't have them, let's get a meeting with them'. We will structure that more now, because we know we cannot count on them. And we would ask the politicians to really join us in this programme.

**Q - *Did you ever have a serious evaluation meeting with the political level?***

A - No. I don't have that. Maurits [de Hoog] does. A politician with a politician.... It is a big game around this project.

**Q - *A game? In what sense?***

A - Just a few weeks ago one of the political parties organised an evening on this topic. For all their members and everyone who was interested, to plead, or to say there have to be less cars, more green.... And you think: what is this? I know another political party that has other ideas. So, like marionettes, we did it and....

**Interview 5**

**Dirk-Jan Huisman**

*beleidsmedewerker - dIVV (dienst Infrastructuur Verkeer Vervoer)*  
political assistant, department of Infrastructure, Traffic and Transport

**Q - *How does the Traffic and Transport department fit into the whole thing?***

A - What we had was the City Province there were plans to make a Region in Amsterdam, like a city council for a whole region, the *ROA* [Regional Organ Amsterdam, changing the administrative definition of Amsterdam from a city to a region] in Amsterdam. The plan was to make that region, but there was a referendum, and the people in Amsterdam did not want it, I think 99% did not want it. So Amsterdam stayed as it is, as well as the cities around it. So at that time they were also thinking about a new system of participation of people, because it was the first referendum in Amsterdam (1994). Nowadays the people in Amsterdam can order a referendum if they can get enough signatures. The politicians and the civil servants were afraid that if you do not let the people participate at an early stage, you will get a referendum and they will vote your plans to.... From that moment on there was thinking about a system of participation where people could participate at an early stage, with the goal that there are not enough signatures at the end to make the plans impossible. At that time I worked at the *Stadhuis* [city hall], when I heard about some people who were writing letters to the council about making a master-plan for this street. I thought that was a good opportunity to experiment with the Open-Plan-Process.

**Q - *What was the situation in the plans of this street before?***

A - From the point of view of the traffic there is no real... it is not urgent. We have a programme in Amsterdam to repair streets, the main streets in Amsterdam. This street is in good condition so there is hurry to do something. It was supposed to be left like that from a traffic point of view. So for me that was also a good reason to experiment with this street, because we have the time, there is no hurry, it is not a bad street, so there is time to experiment and do something about it. I suggested that to the people who were thinking about experiments of the Open-Plan-Process. I had a meeting with Maurits de Hoog and Magrit... from the *Stadhuis* and Maurits adopted the idea and that is the reason it took place.

**Q - *As I understood it one of the underlying assumptions to the process was that traffic flows will not change... is that wrong?***

A - there are two things. The process, how it works, and the other thing is the rules of the game - what do we talk about and what are we not talking about. And one of the things of the Open-Plan-Process is that the politicians will say at the beginning of the process what the discussion is about and also what the discussion is not about. Otherwise you get a

discussion and at the end the politicians say this is not what we want to discuss about and then you have a problem. In the beginning we said: the function of the street in the traffic system of Amsterdam is not in discussion. That was just a rule in the beginning.

**Q - *So there was no reason for the involvement of the traffic department, actually...***

A - A good point. Well, there is because of two reasons: the people just wanted to talk about it.

**Q - *But you were involved before it started...***

A - That was because I like the Idea of the Open-Plan-Process. I thought... and there is more than traffic. This street is one of the main streets in Amsterdam, it belongs to the autos. It is for the cars.... The problem with those main streets is, that often it is not a nice street to walk in and to live in, and to try to make it better is challenging. There is also a lot of space to do that. Even if you say that the traffic function of this street in the system is not in discussion, you can still do a lot about the environment of the street. And people wanted to talk about it too, so in the process itself it was in discussion.

**Q - *How do you see the main differences between this and the 'normal' participation process?***

A - In this case, because I think it is not a real example for an Open-Plan-Process, because we stopped it one time, and it was not driven to a conclusion. Maurits de Hoog did a lot of talking with the people. People wanted to discuss about the street. They developed three different perspectives of how the street could function but my view of the Open-Plan-Process, a real Open-Plan-Process, in fact that by talking to people there will be a plan at the end, just one plan....

**Q - *That they will agree on.***

A - Maybe not all, but you know who agrees and who does not etc. Also a plan that fits in the rules of the game settled at the beginning of the process. But that was not the situation. But, at the same time... now there are three perspectives that came from the discussions with the people, and now, at this moment we are just making new steps.

**Q - *Do you have examples of where the Open-Plan-Process happened the way you think it should?***

A - *Deventer* and *Groningen*. In *Deventer* I read that people in the neighbourhood got an amount of money and they could just make a plan for their own neighbourhood. With the help of the civil servants, who just advised and said how much things cost

and if it were possible or not. And they are just making their own neighbourhood, that is the real Open-Plan-Process. And in this case there is more directing from above.

*Q - Would you have done it differently?*

A - I should have done this differently, yes.

*Q - Do you think it is possible for such a large area? It is not a small neighbourhood, after all.*

A - I think it is possible and it is also... the discussions went that way. In the end even the real 'die-hards' in the direction of just keeping down the traffic etc. said we have to make a compromise, have to talk with the other perspectives and make something that...

*Q - But they never did it?*

A - They never did it because it was not part of the process to get together, it was part of the process to develop three different perspectives.

*Q - And then a fourth one... so are you developing the possibilities for the new perspective now?*

A - No... what is happening now is that the politicians, in fact, and we are helping them, are making an *opdracht*, a goal, and they are deciding on what direction they want to go with this street, so that will be the fourth possibility.

*Q - Reducing the traffic?*

A - They are not even talking about the traffic at this moment. They are just talking about specific physical space for the traffic, not really talking about the kind of cars....

*Q - Is that not kind of inter-related? But we are just ignoring the other thing now?*

A - I think they are ignoring the traffic problems that will arise, yes. But they are not really ignoring because they are also asking for advice from other traffic experts, so they are not ignoring it but... it is just what the people wanted, and they wanted as little space as possible for the traffic.

**Q - *Do you think the people who actually participated in the workshops etc. represent the people who live here, the people who use the street?***

A - They represented more than the normal people who are just... at the *inspraak*. Because normally at those hearings, the *inspraak*, normally you have the pressure groups, and you are hearing the action group for bicycle people, and the people from the neighbourhood are just....

**Q - *So here you have a less organised forum?***

A - Yes, sure, and I was amazed about the quality of the people who were participating. There were a lot of 'normal' people, just ordinary people from the neighbourhood, but also architects and professionals.

**Q - *Isn't that part of the problem? That the people who participated were white, well educated...***

A - Not all. I think the average level is higher, and I also think the people who are participating are interested in public things, and public questions, so they are also working in other parts of government, or architects, or just people who understand the language... etc. But at the same time there were just people really from this neighbourhood. I think it was a good mixture. The only real problem I saw was that the immigrants: the Turks and the Moroccans etc., they were not participating. And the companies were not participating in the process. Not enough. The minority groups were not there. And it was a good thing by Maurits de Hoog that he decided to go and talk to these people and those organisations, to let them participate not in the main stream but to get their opinion.

**Q - *But this is the same problem that you brought up before - the lack of dialogue between the different groups. They do not get to have the same input.***

A - That is true. And I do not know how you can achieve that. If there are groups in society that do not want to participate, you cannot do.... You can go to them, and I think you should as the government, because if you do not do that the trouble will be reached later. But it is a problem.

**Q - *It is more than just the fact that they do not want to participate. There are issues of language, and cultural differences. The Netherlands is quite unique in its culture of participation, which the Dutch are accustomed to.***



A - Yes, but also the question is: are those people interested in the questions that are in discussion. Because it is about the beauty of the street etc., trees are not... For some people it might be very interesting, for some groups in society, but for other groups, maybe it does not matter - trees or not, if the street is good looking or not. But I think the action by Maurits de Hoog to go to the mosques, and to go to the companies etc., and to try to hear from them what they are thinking about. It is a good way to deal with that problem, and we should do that in all the processes - looking for the groups that are not there. Because another group that is not there is the group that is driving on the street, and using the metro. They were not there. But also in the questionnaire, at the end, they tried to reach those groups. The general point is that if you... that is something that I like very much about this process. If you just talk to the pressure groups, you think that those pressure groups represent the opinion of the people, and it is always a strange world you are living in, with strange points of view. Not strange but a bit... not really something to compromise. And if you see what the workshops produced, and what came out of the questionnaires, you see a totally different view. Because it is so much more relaxed, it is not that extreme.... And also from the discussion it seemed that 60% of the people wanted the traffic function route to continue. Even the people who live there. If you look at the results, it is amazing that... if you think about people living in this neighbourhood, you think - they will just want to get rid of this street, of this traffic, and it is not true. It is also their street. They are using it with their cars. But mostly these are not the people you hear at the *inspraak*.

**Q - *But although you might have less pressure groups, still the people who show up are not necessarily representative, so you do not necessarily solve the problem.***

A - That is true, but I think you have more results, and also more chance for compromising and for a product that is really what the neighbourhood wants and what the street wants. And on the other hand I think that when people do not want to participate, that is also ok. If they do not want to participate because they are afraid to go to those meetings... because of cultural differences etc. it is something different, but if it is because they are not interested then it is ok. Because in the end the people who are interested, who want to talk about it or to discuss it, those are the people also who are, in fact, opinion leaders. If you put people who do not want to participate... the majority don't want to know.

**Q - *I have a question that might be impossible to answer. There are no results yet, there is no final plan. But do you think the plan that will eventually be drawn up would be significantly different than a plan drawn under the 'normal' process?***

A - let us wait for the results. I think that the discussion about the project is different. There is more discussion, also among the civil servants, and there is more thinking about other ways to solve the problems of the street. I also think that not for everybody, but for me it worked that way that you are more aware to what the real problems are. Because normally we are

thinking about traffic: about speed, and about circulation, etc. And the people are mostly thinking about safety, and not only 'real safety' but also what they feel about it, and also talking about that the speed of the traffic is too high etc., different problems. And I like that, because those are the real problems. And I think it will be different. But also this government, this time, the political parties that are involved give a chance to do it differently. I don't know about after 4 years...

**Q - *When are the elections?***

A - 2,002. So that is in between the plans and their implementation. If there is a more Right Wing government then I think that the whole situation will be changed.

**Q - *In a dramatic way?***

A - I don't know.

**Q - *Were no Right Wing politicians involved at all?***

A - Not at this moment. No.

**Q - *Did the leaders of the workshops, planners who were involved somehow direct the people into a certain output?***

A - I think, especially Maurits de Hoog had an influence. The strange thing was that he just suggested things and the people accepted it. I don't know why they did it. He had a nose for that...

**Q - *Because he is the planner and he should know?***

A - No, no. In other times they were very aggressive about ideas and plans from professionals. But he suggested, for example, those three perspectives that will develop separately, and not connected etc. And the main character of those three perspectives - he suggested that. And also he suggested that in the future maybe the rail could go underground and everybody accepted that, and that was a main theme in the plans. It is very funny to see that.

**Q - *Do you think these are personal abilities, leadership skills?***

A - I don't know. I think it is also because of... maybe that is true. But maybe on the other hand these were just good ideas and people thought it was a good way to deal with the problems. And other ideas from professionals were....

*Q - Do you think this calls for a change in the profession of planners?*

A - I think so, because... well, it is a difficult question. On the one hand it is very important that there are people in the government who are specialists, who know about traffic circulations and the streets, and how to make it safer and other kinds of things. The point is that if you have these professionals, and you are just going to discuss this with people from the neighbourhood or people who use this street, they just talk in different languages. And also for the professional it is easy to say that something is impossible, and the point is that as a professional you have to explain why it is impossible. And the other party has to understand that and to say he is right. But there is a chance that they will say: nice story, but you are not right. If you are a specialist it is a problem that someone who is just a... in your eyes tells you: you are not right, about some things you studied a lot about. And I think that is the most difficult problem. And that is also for me the fun for this kind of project. That you have to explain the things that you normally do not explain because it is so logical, that you do not talk about it anymore. The people are just asking, they don't believe you. That is a problem. Then you get those clichés from: 'How can they talk about it, because they don't know anything about the subject'. This kind of thing a specialist always says about other people.... So I think that is in fact a skill that you should learn. To explain everything you are doing and to accept the people do not take what you are saying for granted.

*Q - The cost...?*

A - High. That is a problem.

*Q - Was it worth it?*

A - I think that is a political question. Of course you can do anything without any participation. And that is very cheap, the process, and it has results too. If you have a dictatorship in Amsterdam and just do what you want, it is very cheap. And I think the results will be ok. And maybe people will like it. And the traditional way of democracy in Amsterdam, the council etc., it is also a kind of quality of involvement of people. But I think in some difficult questions, and when the tension is high - the political tension is high. Not only the real political tension, but also in society the discussion about an issue, then it pays off. Because if you want people to participate in making their own city, if you want that then you have to get an extra quality.

**Q - *And then, we have talked about this before, the people themselves need to find the time to do it, and you only get the people who can find the time.***

A - Of course, yes, you have that problem, too. So there is always the group who is not discussing, and the group who is in fact deciding. The only thing you do is you make that group bigger. I think the quality is then higher. Maybe not in the sense of how a specialist looks at the question, but higher in the sense of how people experience a street like this. Maybe it is not functioning sometime as good as it did before, but the people like it better. The quality is higher in fact.

**Q - *So your evaluation so far is good, you are happy with it?***

A - Yes, I am happy with it. I like it very much. Not everybody who participated in the process, as a civil servant, professional, is happy with it. There is a lot of opposition against it. Mainly because people are talking about things, discussing things that were said in the beginning: the function of the street, the traffic system, people are talking about it just because they want to talk about it. And if somebody says: that is not a part of the discussion, ok.

**Q - *So if people want to talk about something that was 'banned', do you think they should, or not?***

A - They should. It is impossible to ignore it. You can ignore it but then you will get yourself into a lot of trouble. Because they want to talk about it, then they have to talk about it.

**Q - *And as for the decision in the political level...***

A - I think it is good the way it went. The politicians said in the beginning that it was not part of the discussion, so it was very clear. You need to make it clear in the beginning. But if people want to talk about it, well, let them talk about it. If the politicians at the end say again: 'it was not part of the discussion, so we are not doing anything with what you said there' I think it is fair. Because they said it in the beginning and they say it in the end. You cannot say to people that they are not supposed to talk about things they want to talk about.

**Q - *I heard a lot of criticism about the political level, and how they are handling things now, that they are taking too long to decide...***

A - It is true, but it is also a very political question. So it is also... for me it is logical that they are taking such a long time. Because it is very difficult, politically, a very difficult question. But for the people themselves it is not a good idea.... I think

that if the process would have gone in the more traditional... not traditional, but if the people would have integrated their own proposals it would have created another problem. That would be in fact the only alternative, or the basis of the alternative, that the politicians could maybe change some things, but that would be the basis. Because in a way the politicians are now deciding about the main course they want to go.

**Q - *So this is the main thing you would do differently? Make it into one stream, one discussion?***

A - I should try to do it differently, but I don't know if it is possible, because it is a political question, it is a bit difficult to... the politicians wanted to decide for themselves. Because it is a political question. So if you let another party make a proposal, and it is just one proposal, then for the politicians it would be very difficult to play their game. And I do not know if they would accept it. If they should accept that the people here, in the neighbourhood would make in fact a final proposal that they can also make little changes to it, but not about the main thing... I think it is because it is politically complex that it takes time now, and if we should have done it the other way it would have been the same, I think.

**Q - *What would you change about the process?***

A - This point. If it were possible I should have changed this part. Because, also what I like about that idea is that people were thinking that traffic should go off the street, people were thinking about that the traffic function exists, something that is a part of the street, that it is ok. Those two streams would have discussed with each other, so that there would have been a discussion between the different groups in society, and not a discussion between... When all I did in one workshop, that was for a small street, between the civil servants and the people. In fact that was the discussion - between us and the people. And it would have been nice if in the end there would have been a discussion between the different perspectives. Then also you have the civil servants facilitating that discussion, and not a part of it anymore, and that is a good thing. Because... and really you are in a good role as a civil servant.

**Q - *So in the future, is planning going to look like this?***

A - All the planning, I don't know. I don't think so. I also asked the people who were there, the specialist on this kind of process. If there is a system, if you can make a system that is less intensive and less costly than we did with the *Wibautas*, and the results are about 80% of what you get with such a process, that will be a good thing. Because then a lot of questions in the city that are not so heavy and so straight as the question of the *Wibautas*... It is a strange thing to talk about a small street and spend one million for the process for this street. So we also made a brochure for our *dienst*, where we are talking about what we call: interactive working. There are three systems presented, three different types of working, from

the easy way to the very obligatory way of participation. There is also an answer to the problem that it gets too costly and too intensive to treat all the questions in the same way. And this is also a result of the experiment of the *Wibautas*, that I try to introduce in our department just to make it work, and also not to make every question as difficult as the *Wibautas*.

*Q - Is there anything else you want to tell me?*

A - I think that if we try to work this way, if this is a system that is going to be more tolerated and more accepted, and also people get used to work this way, I think it will change the way civil servants are thinking about society, people.... I think they will be less afraid of talking with people who are not that informed about issues. I think also that there will be a lot of clichés, different from the clichés there are now, about how people think about their neighbourhood, about traffic, about speed, about safety, etc. Because I think there are a lot of clichés... maybe cliché is not a good word. For example, a lot of people, if you ask them what is the biggest problem of traffic, it is very strange, that every time, here in Amsterdam but also in the highways in Holland. One of the biggest problems for the traffic users, is the behaviour of other people. That is a big problem. I think it is an un-solvable problem. The biggest question here is the way people behave in the traffic. At the same time, I think people like to irritate themselves with the behaviour of other people. So I think those clichés, or these patterns will come up every time again. In every process that traffic is involved, people will say - the behaviour of other people is one of the biggest problems. So I think also that we, as civil servants will learn to know what to expect from people. You are not aware what other people really think about the neighbourhood. Every time we are surprised when we hear that about 60% of the people want the traffic function of the street to continue in the future. How is it possible? I thought the whole neighbourhood and everybody would say that people would want traffic to calm down and have less traffic, but it is not true. And wherever you go in the city and you ask people about the traffic function, about the *Overtoom* or another street, I think it will always be about 60% that say that it should stay like this. There is also a lot of fear, because if you let the people talk they will say all kinds of stupid things.

**Interview 6**  
**Pieter Jannink**  
*Stedebouwkundige*  
Town planner  
Workshop leader  
16 august 1999.

A - ... I think it is a new method right now, it is very established, like you said, in asking the people what they think, but normally it was *inspraak*, so you ask after the plan what people think of it. And I always have to think about the 70s, where you have after the big constructions of the 60s and the big city renewal where city planners were really building new parts of the cities, and also the Wibautas right now is a result of that. There was a phase of *stadsvernieuwing*, city renewal, that was really done by the citizens themselves, it was *bouwen vor de buurt*, building for the neighbourhood. And there was a period at that time that a lot of things were built and were developed from the people themselves, and they asked city planners and architects for their ideas. And I think in the 80s and 90s it disappeared, that idea, and now the Open Plan Process is a new way of introducing the openness again, but make it more professional, and make it more structured.

**Q - *So in the 70 they asked people in unstructured ways? How did they do that?***

A - It was a part of the government, not to make a big plan but to really talk with the citizens themselves, and there was a big difference. There was a lot of room for small initiatives and small projects, and small ideas from the citizens, and it just grew. And what this is trying to do is to have the same openness and the same collaboration of more people, but to make it bigger, or make bigger projects, better control, higher ambition for the city as a whole instead of only for the citizens. So in that sense I think it is a very good initiative to do it like this. And the Open Plan Process comes from, at least that is where I heard it first, the ministry of traffic and transport, and they are very far with taking people into the plan process, to let them experience how decisions are being made on how their road will be, or how things will change in the traffic system. They experienced a lot with this method, and the city of Amsterdam wanted to experiment this method in Amsterdam. In the beginning of the project, of the *Wibautas*, it was connected together. There was the project, and Maurits [de Hoog] and I were trying to get a grip of it, and there was a group who was doing the Open Plan Process, and they said: maybe it is a good idea to do it on the *Wibautas*. And it was really new, because it was on a big scale, and a lot of people were involved. Also it was a very complex problem with a lot of [potential] participants. Not only the people who live there, or the people who use the road or the people who work there, but also people from Amsterdam because for the city as a whole it is rather an important street.

*Q - That was in theory...*

A - In theory, yeah, only in theory. But it was the idea behind it. To try and see if in such a complex project it would work, or we would succeed. And I think in some parts it did, but also in parts it failed. The first people you reach, and we reached, where the citizens, or the active people who live there and are always in the talking groups of the neighbourhood, and you always get their reaction and they are willing to think with you and that is not a problem. The bigger issue was the people who work there, or the offices there, and how to contact them. Especially Maurits did a lot of visits and I think he succeeded a lot, also with the schools and the social institutes there, like churches etc. He was trying to make a circus (?) out of it, to visit a lot of groups and to talk to them about their ideas, to have their reactions. And a third group, which I think we missed completely, are foreigners. I don't know why. Or, I do know why, I don't have a solution, but the way the Dutch are used to talk about the neighbourhood is very, very familiar for Dutch but not necessarily familiar with different cultures. Also the Open Plan Process group that, I think the knowledge how to contact the other groups, and I think it is a big shame because in big parts of the *Wibautas* there are a lot of foreign people living there. And also the city of Amsterdam as a whole, we missed, I think. The people who use the street, or the people living here who come and only use the street by car or by metro. There were some attempts to contact them for the questionnaire, but there was not a lot of reaction from that kind of people. I was asked in a talk show in Amsterdam at the bar at the Hilton Hotel, a very open and informal talk show about things going on. And one issue was the Open Plan Process, and it was not an issue. We talked about it but there was no discussion about it: 'it is just a street we have to use and we want to go through it with a car very quickly, don't bother



about it'. No feeling with it and no connection to it from people who don't live there. So it was not a good point of discussion. It was surprising, also. There was no spark to a bigger area than the immediate surrounding residents.

**Q - *It is not a very attractive street...***

A - Or it is the ugliest one...

**Q - *People might have had more feeling or concern for its future if it were more attractive. They might feel more of a connection to an attractive street, when they don't live in it, which symbolises something in their city, in their environment.***

A - Maybe that is different... because I think the Wibautas functionally is a part of a lot of people's system, they use it a lot, the shops there, the schools or metro stations etc. You come there, but you don't go there because it is nice, or you do not go there with a feeling: oh, it is Sunday, I am going to the *Wibautas*. The functionality was maybe the big issue there. I think it functions right now, that is not really the big problem. Maybe the safety can be a little bit better, but that is technical, you can have technical solutions for that.

**Q - *Do you think that the separate interviews Maurits held were enough, that they solved then problem of the people who did not come to the workshops - business people, immigrants?***

A - Is it enough? That depends on how you see it. If you do not look at it from the Open Plan Process view but just as a town planner, then it was very useful, and very good material you can use to make a plan, or to understand how people use space or are connected to it. I think it is really good that it was done. If you see it in the Open Plan Process structure, then you see that the impacts of these interviews and how they were translated into plans was completely different than the workshops. And then you can ask yourself if there was a balance between them, balance on an even scale, and I don't think it was. If you give more respect to the town-planner then you can say - even the interviews with the institutes were more useful than the workshops themselves. Because they were not only people who are living there but people who really want to invest. The schools, for example, there are 30,000 people, students, circling around there. They had a lot of ideas about what the students need.

**Q - *But the students didn't say what they needed.***

A - No, but the institutes did. That is true. But I think it was a first step to ask the institutes.

***Q - How were the suggestions that resulted from the interviews reflected in the plans, the three alternatives?***

A - The three alternatives are only alternatives by the workshops, not by the institutes. [They are listed separately in "perspectiven *Wibautas*"]. What we did is we put it in this book as a separate block - ideas from the information that was gained that way.

***Q - So they formed part of the material submitted to the political level to decide upon?***

A - I think you have to see it like this. It was only food for the politicians and also the ideas from the institutions were food for the politicians. I am not sure the Open Plan Process is the structure for that... the material is very fragmented. Especially from the institutes. They only talk about what their need is, or what they want. And it is very logical. They did not have any time to join the workshops. And that is very logical because it is very time consuming. I was really impressed how many people came night after night after night, again and again and again, to these workshops. And it is impossible for offices and for institutes to do the same. They do not have the strong connection with it, and they can do it - no, not even during working time, because it is too valuable. And they don't have the urge to do so. They want to give their ideas and their opinions about things and say - they are professionals, they should decide what to do with it.

***Q - So we need to go back a step, because then it depends how you define the goals of the Open Plan Process. If it is "collaborative planning", co-operation, compromise, then you don't really get there, do you?***

A - Well, if you say it in an unfriendly way, the Open Plan Process was only a lubricant to help slide easily through the decision-making process of planning, and the political choices and the *inspraak*. Because people are very much involved, they think it is their own idea that is there, and they know every problem, and they know every tricky thing, and they know it is a difficult decision, so they accept early on that they do not get what they want.

***Q - So lets pacify the people so that later on in a referendum they will not reject the plans we have already made?***

A - Yes.

***Q - So, the point is not having a real democratic process, but problem-prevention.***

A - That is the unfriendly attitude. If you see it in a cynical way you can see it like this.

**Q - *But you don't see it like that?***

A - I think it is a part of it. But I don't think that is wrong. I also think the only way to do urban planning or to do city renewal is with collaboration with more people. Because a lot of city planners are finding out a new way, or want to try out something new, and they are able to do it without listening to more people, and that's a very problematic side of city planners. If it is a nice and shiny political... politics are very easy to be on the side of the planner and we go on and on and on. So the way of talking, the only way is to really big together a plan. Politics here in Amsterdam, what I found out about it, is also your father or your neighbour that is in politics. Very 'normal' people are the representatives. It is incredible. A lot of parliament people from Amsterdam were joining the workshops. You could really have a good discussion with them. And some of them also came along to the pub with us afterwards... and really had a good talk with them. If you can do it like this you can really build together something.

**Q - *Were these politicians only Left Wing?***

A - No, in my group there was also one of the Right Wing. There were a lot of Left Wing people, but then Amsterdam is very Leftist.

**Q - *You said it was very representative of the people, besides the immigrant problem that we have discussed. But if you have a bunch of white, middle-class, well-educated people who can spare the time, it is hardly a good representation of all residents.***

A - If you see the workshops themselves, and the perspectives from them, it is not representative at all. I think you have to see it as a parallel. This is the product of a group that could organise like this, and were able and interested to co-operate in this way. For example, the HvA hired an architect, and flew in some Americans to make another, completely different plan, and that was their collaboration. And the interviews by Maurits, that was also a part. And the questionnaires, that was also a part. You have to see them all together if you want to see a little bit of the total. I think the focus is too much on the workshops in the Open Plan Process.

**Q - *But the workshops are the Open Plan Process, aren't they?***

A - No, that is not true. That was the original idea, but we saw very quickly that it was not working, and it was only a part of it. And I think we made a mistake in the report, for example, to make it so important, or rather to make the other suggestions

at least as important. I also enjoyed it a lot to talk to the people who live there about their ideas and how they saw some things. It was also good to see that people did not have the same ideas, and they had a lot of discussions among themselves, and they found out about the 'other' and what he liked, what their interests were. There were Jewish influences, too. There is by the *Mr. Visserplein*, there is the monument there, and the *Jona and Daniel Meijerplein*, it is one of the centres of the Jewish memories of Amsterdam. And the feeling there... there were a few people there who also had memories of the war [WWII] still, and you had to be careful with it, with the memories of the place. And a lot of people did not know it and they know it now. They have more understanding and more appreciation for people who live with them.

**Q - *So you feel that the people had their own original ideas that did not come from the professional level, it was not just output of whatever they heard from planners or leaders of the workshops?***

A - What we did was, first, when we launched the workshops, we first had a walk...

**Q - *But by walking and mentioning specific points of reference there is really a guidance that is leading, possibly to certain things.***

A - yes, of course, that is a part of it. It is very influenced by who is active. But that is not only in the professional role, but also in the public role. I think the professionals were... in the walk and the first round of workshops they were really keeping back and trying to get informed, rather than saying: look at that, look at this. But what we did do in the walk, and that was what I liked, that we talked to people about what they saw and what they liked. It was really their own talk. We also invited some people who could explain something, about history, about how things were changed. I think people are strong enough and are willing enough to make up their own minds. For example, the Euro-delta, the big Le-Corbusier building. There was a big discussion about it, and people hated it, and people loved it, and nobody agreed about it. But to speak about it was very good, there was no consensus...

**Q - *There was no attempt to reach a consensus, either.***

A - At that time not. Inside the perspectives there was.

**Q - *But the whole idea of having three different perspectives, prevents from reaching a common consensus.***

A - There was a big discussion at the end, and there was consensus. People especially from two of the perspectives, the boulevard and the main street began to negotiate and they said: if we get a big from you, and we give a bit to you then we

have one perspective, why don't we do it, why don't we integrate them? And we did not do it right then because we wanted to give several options or choices to the politicians. But the people went further already at that time, and they wanted to make a lot more, one big idea.

**Q - *This is a question that is somewhat impossible to answer. But especially since you were involved in the planning of the Wibautas before the Open Plan Process, do you think the end result, when it eventually comes, will be a significantly different plan to what might have otherwise been drawn up by planners, by you?***

A - The plan itself? No. As a plan it might even be worse. But I think the social connection of the plan will be a lot better, and the understanding of the plan to the people who are going to use it will be better.

**Q - *Although such a small fragment of the population actually took an active part in the Open Plan Process?***

A - Yes. It was a small group that joined the workshops, and was a particular group that was always active, always in the neighbourhood houses, and they always had a big mouth, and the same group everybody knew already was already there. I think what was the attempt that inside the neighbourhoods there was a discussion about the Wibautas, and to feel connected to it. And I think the discussion was wider than only the people who came to the workshops. There were posters, and some articles in the papers, and people knew that something was going in their neighbourhood, and only that thing is very good, I think. But, of course, and also for me it is a big question - if it was worth it. I don't know. Maybe I do not have the overview anymore because I was so involved in it. I think what was worth it was to get such a good information connection and feeling of what is going on there, for somebody who makes a plan. Very very good and very useful, so in that respect it was worth it. The question is if you cannot do it in a different way, or if you have to do it like this. And that is what I don't know, if there is another way. That is also because I have a little bit a sceptic vision, so it is a little bit stopping the criticism. Because it is... it was an incredible process, with a lot of energy of a lot of people. It also costs a lot of money and time, and also the time of the people. If I should do it again that is one thing I should want to change - that it should cost less time, also for the people who want to participate. On the one hand it is very good to give them a lot of time to think about it, and not to discuss a lot of issues, but you also exclude a lot of people who don't have the time, and that is a big shame, I think. Maybe it is not very... maybe the fragmented interviews with the institutes are far more interesting than the completed or consensus made perspectives. Although the institutes did not have to find the compromise, and they did not have to discuss with the others, so in that way you do not reach much understanding about each other. It is sometimes a little bit like social working. To get people talking to each other about their neighbourhood, and make them conscious about their neighbourhood, and that their neighbourhood is important and that they can really be a part of it. And only that consciousness is also very beautiful, and also very nice if you have the feeling that you have a chance to do something about

it. Also very important if you do it like this, and that is when I stepped out, so I don't know how it is right now, that you keep the channels open and let the people really see what happens with their ideas, and their plans. We went into the strange circus of policy, and after that I didn't hear anything about it anymore, and I don't know if the people there did. And it must be very clear why some things are decided to do, and some things are decided no to do. It is also very difficult to keep it open. I think if you do it again, you should involve the political level better. Because now really they could join, they also did that, joined the workshops and the walk etc., and they were informed by this, but they did not give their opinion. For me it was a big disappointment that they did not have the courage after reading the booklet to say: we as the central party think that... Because then the discussion is transferred to the policy. That is what I did not see in the project. The alderman was really: thanks a lot, I am listening, and I am open and I am not going to say anything. And if you ask an Open Plan Process of the people, you should also have open politics.

***Q - So you think this calls for a change in the political system, or political ethics?***

A - yes, but maybe, I don't know much about it, but you get idealistic but you really are aware of idealistic discussions of the political parties that are there, and we don't see them a lot. Maybe it is too much to ask.

***Q - Do you think this also calls for a change in the planning profession?***

A - No, no. I don't think so. You can see the planning profession in two ways, I think. One way is the idea factory, to have new ideas to give people food for discussion with new ideas. And you can go on with it and you can decide as a politician or somebody else. That is one role, and I think every designer and every planner should play it. The other role is to translate other ideas or consensus into plans, into solid plans to construct or to build. And that is a more... then you are working for somebody else, and doing, trying to work out your decision. If you play those roles together at one time, that is what planning is about. I think in the Open Plan Process a lot of people will disagree.

***Q - Maybe planners should be educated, or given skills to handle communicative processes better?***

A - I can give you more skills that a planner or designer should have. The strange thing about a planner or a designer is that he should be a debater; he should be a communicator; he should be a designer; he should be a planner; he should be a writer; he should be a painter; he should be a lot of things in one time. And I think that is also the nicest part of the job, that you try to do it. But I don't think it is the impossibility of the plans to communicate that is the big problem in the Open Plan Process. We made a big mistake, I don't know if you heard about it, in the workshops. What we did was that we had a few phases in the workshops, and the first round with a lot of people in three groups, and we said: 'we will listen to you, and you

say what you want, and we will talk about it, it is your show. And then we, as professionals, and some experts are going to look at it and say if things are possible, or try to have further going ideas, or to go on with it, and try to put it back to the people. In the first part we did, the designers who were working on it made too big a step between the material the people gave, and what they gave back. A lot of ideas were dismissed and thrown off the table, very easily said: 'that is impossible, we don't do it, gone'. And then: 'oh, that is a good idea, let's do that'. And it was really not recognisable for the people anymore. It was a big mistake, and from that point the designer as an idea-factory was taking over far too quickly, and we really should have concentrated more on the problems and ideas that were there, and tried to work them out. Even if we already knew or felt that it was not the best solution. But it was the solution that people wanted to see or wanted to feel, that was really... if you discuss it and if you work it out you can also throw it away. If you throw it away immediately because you have already done it once, then it is not acceptable. But we went far too quickly. It is always a little bit of a balance. The kick off of these perspectives, I think I did it here, in the office, in the evening. I talked in the afternoon with Maurits about the perspectives very quickly, and I made a few drawings of them. In the evening afterwards, with the people I had a talk about the three ways, very enthusiastic and very happy: we can do it like this, we can do it like that. It was completely open and I thought really happy way of expressing the different possibilities you could think of. And also very open to invite people to throw things away. But that was the first attempt to make several plans, but not making a plan, or what you said getting output of the input you give them, but to keep it very open and to keep people as brainstormers. And I think it worked at that stage. It escalated afterwards, but we returned to a good phase again. But it is really funny, I don't know if you have done it like this once. I had a lot of fun with the people who are so connected and strongly attached to their neighbourhood, and they have so much to say about it. It was really good to work with them and to listen to them, although there are a lot of emotions attached to it. Sometimes you don't feel very appreciated for what you do, because you can always do it wrong.

***Q - The impression I got from you on our first meeting was that you thought it was a terrible project...***

A - No, I think it is part of working for the government - it is a completely different kind of work. What I did mostly there was organising. I tried to see that people were talking to people, and I was helping people to talk to other people, and translate ideas... it was not a big role for me as a designer. I think it is also part of working in the government.

***Q - Did you feel you were being a kindergarten teacher?***

A - Sometimes, yeah, but I did not mind that. That was not the problem, only that it is very different to work in an office like this than it is to work for the government. Here in the office you work a lot more on the 'idea-factory' level. And in the government you are always working out ideas for the politicians, or for people, and it is not about the plans but about the

processes. It is always about to convince people, to talk to people, talk about the money. And here it is - what do we think is best. And about the *Wibautas* I think... I am very happy that I did it, and that I experienced it. But the way we did it is not the way I believe in it.

**Q - *But you cannot really say what should be changed, how it should be done differently?***

A - I was thinking about it a lot in that time: what would bring me, in this neighbourhood, to a connection with my street like the people there. My god, why are these people doing this? Why don't they go home and do something nice? This is so stupid, why are people doing this? Let's make a nice plan, have a nice neighbourhood, and no problem. I don't have an answer to it. I would not do it. I would never spend so much time on discussing with my neighbours the colours of our street-stones. And I think, maybe it is strange, a lot of people my age, from our generation have the same connection to public life. The discussion should not really do it like this but more informal. It is very good to inform yourself and get the knowledge about the use, but I would like it very much if a professional or somebody makes a plan and I can react on it. If the getting information part is done well, it does a lot. Because many plans are done without good knowledge. And if you reflect on my generation, or how I feel about... I think I really have to say something about the street, and I have an opinion about it, and I want to give it if I am asked, but I don't want to put my finger on it, or I don't want to make solutions for it.

**Q - *Or argue with someone who thinks differently about it?***

A - Oh yes, maybe I want, but just on the street, very informal. But then I still have my idea. Maybe it is changed a little bit. But what I want is a very open and a very clear process where decisions are made: what things are done and what things are not done. And if I can see that, and if I can see why my opinion was not chosen, it is ok. I do not have to make a plan for that first, with other people evening after evening. The striking thing with it, I think I told you, to 'clean' (?) the problems with the referenda or *inspraak*, is that people don't feel themselves hurt, or they don't see why decisions are being made. And I was very disappointed in the way that was clear in this project. In that way it is a little bit of a façade, a show. You said if our profession should need a course in communicating. What I was thinking about it was that a lot of designers or planners that are doing well now, that have a good office or are considered big in the municipality, you see that they are mainly communicators, and that they can really sell their plans, and that they really know how to say things the right way. It doesn't have anything to do with the contents of the plan. So that is not such a good thing. There is also a risk that of the show of selling would come at the expense of the quality, of the content of the plan.

**Q - *If you educate planners to communicate, you might eliminate the advantage of these people, and get good planners to have good communications...***



A - That is true, but it is strange. I think a big part of my job is communication. A lot of people ask me - what do you do, are you a communications officer? The way you make plans or the way you draw maps, or the way you write text or the way you present yourself, that is so part of the profession, I think you just cannot disconnect it from everything and improve it and then everything is ok. It is a big part of the person. It is never wrong to do so. During my studies I worked a lot in summer camps, organising all kinds of activities for children but also for grown-ups, During all day recreational programmes. And you had to present activities and games etc. to people who are really different than you are. I learned a lot there, and also in the workshops, to communicate with people who really have an interesting story, but it is a completely different story than your own. And it is also there that I really started to like it. To hear what their story is and to see what you can do with it, or if you can pick something out of it and do something with it. If you see the [design] schools, if you see Delft, communication is not a subject there, you are not really being taught how to present things. But it is there, and that is what I am afraid of. What I noticed in Delft was that by having a good story you get a good grade, and it doesn't matter what kind of plan you have. Just by being convincing. That is what worries me, and that is why you should embrace, or be happy with such a thing as the Open Plan Process. You are really getting a lot of information that you can use.

**Q - *You said yourself that the bottom line plan is less important than what the planner might have come up with in a different process.***

A - But the information from the Open Plan Process is very important. And I think plans can only get better with that kind of information. But the way we did it here, to make perspectives, and now the politicians are going to do something with it and make one of them - that is not necessarily a better plan. But the information which is behind it - if you have it as a planner you can make a better plan than if you would not have had it. What I thought first was that it was something going back to the 70s. Maurits started his career, while he was studying or just afterwards, in the same neighbourhood with the *bebouwen vor de buurt*, in the same neighbourhood as an advisor for the people there. So he also had a history with these people. At first I thought this is a new social side of planning, but I think the openness that is involved in it is a very good thing, but the promises that are being made with it are very confusing.

**Q - *Do you think in the future there are going to be more and more of these processes?***

A - It is very American, I think. Maybe it is strange to say, because America is completely different, of course. It is a certain kind of arena, and you throw the lions in to the arena and they are going to fight themselves tired, and then the government can take the tired lions and do what it wants. I think that is not necessarily wrong, of course what you do is you are really trying to get on the table the problems or the issues that are there, and that the people themselves are trying to solve it. I

think that is not wrong, but maybe it should be more of a cultural thing. Maybe it should be on the talk show I told you about. But if it isn't, then maybe it is not such a cultural thing as we want it to be, and it is really only about people's backyard, and they are only concerned about that.

**Q - *I think Dutch culture does play a big role in it, I could not define it as American. The involvement in the planning process, the tolerance and openness on the one hand and the order and rules on the other.***

A - The feeling I had of this process is the question whether it is only a circus and a show that gives people the idea that they have influence, that there is tolerance. That everybody is saying that you can give your ideas right now, but we are doing the thing we want to do. And if it is that, it is really American, to build up a big media show, where people can fight their problems and do the things they want, and after it is finished, it is burned out, we can say: we had a discussion, and now we are going to do this. That worries me because there is no escape, or no trick how to keep it out of this process. It is also a question of what position you give to the local policy. It is also relevant to the referenda, this question. We elect our government every four years. I elect somebody who I think has good ideas. Why don't I trust that he... why do I have to do it again? Why do I elect somebody who does not have the guts to speak out, and to have an opinion and to say, after he read this: I think this is the best idea.

**Q - *Maybe because you are getting him into a catch 22 situation: you get people involved but then you divide into different groups, different perspectives, and since only one of them can be chosen, two thirds of the people are going to be upset that their work was not the one chosen.***

A - I don't agree with you at all - two groups were trying to combine, and they were already making the deals. If we let them talk they would have settled it. And if you asked the organisers of the Open Plan Process they never would say that the big issue about this was to make everybody happy, but to make more people understand why things are being done and not done. It is not wrong that the people know with what reasons something else is being done than what they wanted. They are not happy, but then they understand why it is done.

**Q - *But if you don't choose their alternative, then they might feel their time has been wasted. What did you ask me for, if you are not listening to what I am saying?***

A - If that is true, there should be nothing in the final plans of what they said. We always said that it will never be that one of the perspectives is the plan. We are not going to vote, and one of the perspectives might be realised, that was never the intention. Maybe you are right, that that was too academic, and maybe too much a method for designers to research

different possibilities. The intention was of the three perspectives, to give a wide perspective of what was possible. The problem is if you at the beginning try to find consensus, a lot of the ideas, or possibilities won't be on the table, because they are of a minority or... so this way you get more ideas on the table. One of the biggest problems in the process was how we are going to border the things we can discuss. Are we going to discuss if there will be no traffic anymore at the *Wibautas* or not? Is that an option? So we first explain. So politically it was bordered what was on the table and what was not. And some of the people did not accept it and they started their own investigation about traffic. The communication about what was possible to talk about and what was not, and why it was impossible to talk about it, but this was very difficult. But not impossible.

**Q - *There are so many fault lines between different parties in this process where there is no communication, no collaboration. Is collaborative planning only something to write a lot of literature about? You do not have immigrants and minority groups, you do not get the business community talking to the residents. There is no mutual understanding. The school cam and gave a lecture, but they never heard what their neighbours think and see if they can find a better solution for all of them. And Philips one day decide they want to do something with their building...***

A - I think if Philips want to do something they have the baggage of this process and they cannot and will not ignore it.

**Q - *but they did not come into the process, and see if they can contribute something.***

A - Collaborative planning for me is not about consensus at all. If you try to find consensus in collaborative planning, you kill the process, I think. The only thing is to grow understanding. The only thing to do is to try and build a discussion, people talking to people. The big problem with it, and sometimes, at least I do - overestimate the power of the city, or the power of spatial planning, or the power of design. Only a part of the people are interested in it. It is not important for everybody.

**Q - *It is not interesting for everybody, true, but then everybody gets to use the same space later. So some people decide for other people who are less interested, who have less time, who have stage fright...***

A - But how many decisions are made for you? I am very happy when some decisions are made for me, otherwise I would have an impossible life.

**Q - *If I vote and the elected council makes the decisions, that has a certain kind of legitimacy. But if a somewhat arbitrary group of people happens to find the time to participate in the process that later affect me... I did not elect them, it was the circumstances that bring them to make decisions.***

A - But they did not make any decisions. Decisions are being made by politicians. And the power you give to politics is naive. The deals that are being made do not have anything to do with what you voted for. But if you say collaborative planning is planning with people who are concerned, then you can also say concern is shown in attention, in care, and we achieved the people who were really concerned. And Philips was not concerned. So why should you plan something with Philips if it is not concerned? I think it also a part of our profession not to make a plan for a very limited part of the people, to plan for a lot of people and also for people who are not represented.

*Q - But it does not come up in this kind of process.*

A - No, but this kind of process is not the final product, only material to make a plan. It looks a big job to designers, politicians, etc.

**Interview 7**  
**Niesco Dubbelboer**  
*onafhankelijke procesbegeleider*  
Independent Process Director  
AGORA Europa  
18 August 1999.

*Q - At what stage did you join the project?*

A - From the very beginning, even before the *Wibautas* was chosen for this process I was involved. My background is that I used to work for the city of Amsterdam, and 4 years ago I went to this independent foundation [AGORA Europa] to improve democracy and democratic relations between citizens and politicians. What happened was that when I left the city of Amsterdam there were some people who didn't want me to leave, so they offered me a contract that I should be a special advisor for interactive policy making and open-plan-processes, as they would become to be called. To stay at the city hall. There was a group of public administrators, who came together and I was one of them, as a special advisor, to talk about Open Plan processes. At that time there were several things the city of Amsterdam was involved in, and a lot of the people who were members of this groups said: we want to do something with the *Wibautas*, maybe it is a good example to make the Open Plan Process. So we discussed it [OPP generally] for a year, and we were looking for concrete development projects which would fit in this Open Plan Process.

*Q - So why the Wibautas?*

A - It is quite... controversial is a bit too strong to say. It is not the most easy subject to make an Open Plan Process about. The good thing is that it is a main-city issue. Amsterdam has been divided, you know all this story, of course. It is a large project. So it is a project that has some content, so it is also very good. If you want to do a pilot project, or an experiment, around an Open Plan Process, than this is a very good one, because there is a lot at stake. That is also the weakness of it, because then it has a vulnerability and sensitivity, a political sensitivity around it, which makes it sometimes difficult for an individual citizen to get involved in the process because the interests, or the stakes are high. But nevertheless, at the same time, it is easy to do an Open Plan Process when there is nothing at stake, but probably not so many citizens will be involved. So I was very much in favour of the *Wibautas*. The only thing I found very important was that the politicians would agree with the Open Plan Process as well, and that they would stay behind a little bit in their discussion about what should happen with the function of the traffic of the *Wibautas*. That was exactly, right from the beginning, the biggest discussion - what should happen with the traffic.

*Q - I thought that was defined as an issue not to be discussed.*

A - Not that strongly, as you say it now. It is not true that there was no discussion possible, but what they said was that the main function of this road, of the *Wibaut*-axis, that the traffic to the centre, and from the centre back to outside Amsterdam, that this function should not be discussed. But there is of course a range of interpretations of what it means that the function should not be discussed, but nevertheless you could reduce the whole stream of car in the morning and in the evening. Nevertheless, it is still one of the roads that leads to the city. Of course there were a lot of interest groups, citizen groups, that wanted a total block of any cars. That, has been said, is not in discussion. I did not mind that there were some conditions around this project. We have done many of these processes, you will never find a situation in the city, especially not when it is a bigger issue when things are at stake, you will never find a blank situation. 'Ok, we have a street and it is completely open how we can decorate it and you can change everything'. No, that is not possible. There are always real existing buildings, planning that has been going on, buildings which have been reconstructed, companies have been making deals with the city about what should happen with parking etc. so there are always on-going processes. Nevertheless, I had to make the estimation at a certain time if it was interesting enough to bother citizens with this issue. Because that is the second main thing that should be done, after you choose a subject, like the *Wibautas*. The next stage is to say: well, do you think that enough citizens are interested, and interest groups are interested to participate in a process like this? The whole basis for the *Wibautas* was a letter sent by citizens' groups saying: please do something about the *Wibautas*. The funny thing was, it was the first time in my short experience of the last years, was that the city came up with this Open Plan Process, we went to the citizen groups and told them: 'ok, this is what we want. Thank you for the letter, it is two years later, which is not a really good basis for confidence. But, nevertheless, here we are, and now you can say what you want. We can work in workshops and have meetings and blah-blah-blah'. And then these groups were sitting like that and said: 'but, you know, we don't know if we like that, because now we have to do the work. What we prefer is a supervisor, who is making all the plans. Three or four plans, and then we can make a choice'. I had many difficulties in the beginning with Maurits, because I didn't think he was the right person. He didn't have the open attitude towards citizens. He was very much the example of a person who would like to... the technocrat, as I call them, who likes to draw and: 'shut up everybody, I am busy, I am working, I am the brilliant spirit, so I can make.... So that is a little side-line. Especially in the beginning, when Maurits and I went to the citizen groups, to talk to them, to tell them what we were planning. And Maurits was kind of triumphant: 'you see, they did not even want to participate in a process like this, they just want me to do the work. I will be the supervisor and I will do the work'. But after that people started to get a little bit more confident. And we said, what I remember: we wanted to do interviews, you have seen the process: the week of the *Wibautas*, and walk around and questionnaire, and discussion, and some lectures. We will see how many people will participate. If it is not many people then we should maybe do something else. But every time, every step there were just enough people to go on. It was not overwhelming. I think the part of communication has been done very well. A very nice brochure has been made, free publicity has been arranged quite well. There were at several times enough moments for people, for individual citizens to find out what was going on. I was very much surprised that at the survey [of the research and statistics bureau] half of the people

who live at the *Wibautas* did not know that there was anything going on there. Then I really think: My god, we have been in all the papers, brochures has been sent to the home, 10,000 pieces has been sent around, it has been in the newsletters of the neighbourhoods themselves, it has been on the television. And of course there has not been a huge discussion on the front pages, but I would imagine if you are living in an area, and you are a little bit concerned about what is going on, you should have found it. Nevertheless, there were enough people for the survey, there were enough people at the first evening of public discussion, there were enough people who said to themselves, or said to us that they want to participate in the workshops, and on and on.

**Q - *Were the goals of the Open Plan Process defined in terms of the physical environment or the political environment [democratic processes]***

A - More or less a combination. As for me, because I always focus on the process, not on the content. Of course it is very important that there is a good mix between them. For me the main goal, for every Open Plan Process, if politicians want to do that, that anybody who wants to participate at a certain moment in the process should be able to participate. Is that a goal in itself for an Open Plan Process? No, because behind it the goal of improving democracy, to get a more legitimate basis of the decisions that are taken for the people. That you will say that you were represented. The whole basis is we have a representative democratic system, less and less people vote at the elections, less and less people are members of political parties, so there is a problem of legitimacy in the democratic system. One way to solve a little bit of that for specific issues, is that you organise processes. So that people who are interested in their environment, in their city, are able to participate and to think of solutions that could improve the situation for themselves and for other people. That is the whole basis of the Open Plan Process and that is also the main goal. Then there is the whole complication, that there is no one solution for a problem. There is a problem at the first stage of every Open Plan Process. If the city sees a problem, is that also seen by the public? What we will do is, next to the agenda of the politicians, we are going to work on the agenda of the citizens and the agenda of interest groups, including companies who are in this area. When you have these agendas you can see if they make the same analysis of the problems that are out there. In case of the *Wibautas*, something should be done. It is not a nice street, nobody likes to walk there, bad climate, too many cars, not safe, a lot of accidents happening there, so something should be done. Everybody agreed about that. Only a few people said: 'I love a street like this, because it is so non-typical Amsterdam, please let us have one non-typical Amsterdam street'.

**Q - *People actually said that?***

A - I invited a very good friend of mine, he used to be the director of the *Balie*, political-cultural centre, and he loves the *Wibautstraat*. He thinks the *Wibautstraat* is the nicest street in all of Europe.

In general everybody agreed something should be done. But then of course you have the interpretation of what should be done. And then you have to construct your process to offer different solutions to the different problems. In this case, what we did in the workshop stage, we organised workshops about visions of the *Wibautas*: car-street, not-too many cars, boulevard and *grootstedelijke as* [major urban route]... the *stadstraat* [city street], boulevard and big-city alley. Another good possibility that we talked about but we did not decide to do that, is that you have a work group, workshop for traffic, a workshop for recreation, a workshop for artistic impressions of the street. We did not choose for that because quite soon we noticed already that you have these political tensions about the functions of the *Wibautas*. Very strong emphasis on traffic, very strong emphasis on the public-domain quality of that area. And it worked, more or less. We had some problems. In the first attalier we came together the citizens were very mad, because Maurits [de Hoog] and his team have gone on in a direction which they did not like, so there was a big clash at this moment, we had to work very hard. One chairman of the workshops went away, left the building. There was a lot of mistrust, which in Amsterdam is always there. There is an Anarchistic tradition in Amsterdam, and everything the government does is: 'what do you think you are doing?' But that is the general attitude, so you have to be very very careful, and very, also in communication, very honest and very open to everything that is going on. And that is something public administrators have to learn, because they have to get used to the attitude. One of the reflexes is to hide yourself and to close the doors: 'ok, I will do the work, and then I will show you what I have done, and then you can complain, and ok, you do not like it but politicians make the decision'.

**Q - Explain the difference between the 'normal' participation in the planning process and the Open Plan Process.**

A - Oh, there is quite a lot of differences. It depends a little bit on what you consider to be normal participation. In Holland the tradition was always, from the 60s on, the 70s, the *inspraak*. The term is not translatable, because I once went with the Mayor of Amsterdam to Toronto, and he was going to give a speech, and we were completely panicking because we had no word for *inspraak*. We have a law on *inspraak*, in-speech, and it means that the politicians take a decision, they develop plans, but before they really take the decision they have to organise a public meeting in which people can protest against the plan. So it has been a good practice for 10-15 years, and sometimes it still is, but. Because of the legitimacy problem, more and more people do not believe anymore in going to a meeting like that. So we have the same people all the time who are complaining about the plan a, b, c, d, e, f, g, etc. What has been done after that is that more and more, and then we start to see changes, the *inspraak* has been developed into [a process] that every time in an earlier stage you confront people, with some of the decisions you want to take in the future. But they were always very, still, reactive. So then the plan was made, but only an early stage, and then you went to talk, you changed maybe some of the plans, and then you came back. So there was more often a moment of public transparency, responsibility, accountability. The accountability is now in more moments. The OPP, however, is something completely different, because there is not even a beginning of a solution. You first start to analyse what the problem is. We think it is a problem as a city, as the politicians, but: do you consider it a problem too? If



you do not consider it as a problem, then we should not bother about thinking of solutions to a problem that is not there. And then the second step is: ok, so we agree that there are problems, now let us think about solutions, and let us do it together, and let us make a process in which everybody is free to come, and that you also mention, or appoint in the beginning all the groups that have an interest in this area, and that you will find them and invite them to participate in the process. That is also something different than the whole *inspraak* thing, because that is more passive, and reactive. You put an announcement in the paper, and you say: we have this plan, and you can come on that and that evening, we will inform you about the plans and you can say what you think of them. This is completely different: we agree on a problem, and now, together, we are going to work on solutions. Mr. B., tell us what you think a good solution would be. Of course it sounds too simple now, because there are several steps in the whole process, and those workshops come together 4 or 5 times, and so first you have the general discussion, and then you can focus on different thing. I call it always process architecture, because the architecture of the process is very important, and you should be very careful, very attentive to everything that could go wrong. You have to make a picture, actually, of the whole environment that has interest in the process, and there are parties that have an interest that the process will fail. Sometimes politicians, sometimes citizens groups, and especially when things are not going in the direction.... You can imagine, we have now 3 scenarios, but I have also been in processes where the citizens, it was very clear, were 80% in favour of, but there was a small group who was resistant, and then when they really tried to mess up the whole process they could. And also sometimes politicians. Especially when the politician... it is not completely that they want to have it. And then I always say: don't do an Open Plan Process. If you already know what you want, don't think that an Open Plan Process will bring that to you, and that you can say: 'you see, everybody wants it, and I am a very democratic alderman'. You have to have an open mind for an Open Plan Process. I was worried, especially at first with Maurits, when I met him. I don't know if he has an open mind. Stronger: I know he does not. And the second one was the alderman: Frank Köhler. He is a Green-Left man. I have been working with him on several discussions when I worked for the city of Amsterdam, I always organised discussions with politicians, etc., and he was always one of the least receptive people for this kind of thing. But he now was very much in favour because he thought, and he was right to a certain extent, that there will be a very active citizen group that will back him up in his discussion in the college of mayor and aldermen.

***Q - The cynical view will be that the Open Plan Process is there to cover the politician's back-side and to prevent a referendum decision to against plans that have been drawn-up a very long time.***

**A -** Make a distinction. One part is they want backing for their plans. That could be, sometimes, but I am always very keen on that. If they think it is they backing of their position, as long as they do what the majority of the people think is important. It is not even the majority, by the way. But as long as they let all the arguments that play a role in the whole process, that they really take care of every detail, every argument. That they are really attentive to everything that is happening, then I don't care so much if they use it for the backing of a certain idea that they already have, as long as it is in the open. I don't

even care if they say it in advance, sometimes, as long as they still are open for other arguments and that they give it a place in the whole process. It is very important in an Open Plan Process, to be, from the beginning to the end, to be very open. It is a big problem with the *Wibautas*, and I knew it in advance, because every time there is something.... There is a lot of pressure in time, that people have to work very hard, the citizens have to work very hard in these workshops to make the plans. And they promised before the summer they will come with a decision, then it was placed over the summer, and now it is even longer. And now they are coming together in September to talk about what further investigation should be done. Still not to pick a scenario, or elements of scenarios.

**Q - *Why is that?***

A - Politically there is too much tension about that. And the second thing is about the referendum. There has been a very important reason for the city to be open for things like this. We had this huge referendum in 1995 about the city-province, that Amsterdam should be a province and go together with a lot of surrounding cities. 92% of the citizens said "no way", we don't want it. So that was a big ... for the politicians. After that I did a whole process where 10,000 of Amsterdam people were involved, about what should happen. There we also started at what we thought, as politicians, that we had a problem with the city. Our solution was city provinces, but now we want to know are we already wrong in our analysis of the problems. We had huge discussions in the city. Than that senator [alderwoman] who was at the time my boss, she said once: 'I do this to prevent referenda'. I said 'you should see it exactly the other way around. It is not to prevent referenda, it is to have a referendum but with results that you can live with'. Because there is no plan-making that has been so well done, and so open for a lot of ideas that are there in the city, that you will win the referenda very strongly. Actually in IJburg, that was quite important for the background for the Open Plan Process and what will happen afterwards. The ideal Open Plan Process for me ends with a referendum. Not like we had in Amsterdam, a corrective referendum, as they call it, when the politicians take a decision, and if the citizens do not like it they can start a whole process of correcting this decision. No, I am very much in favour of a positive progressive referendum. For example, at the *Wibautstraat*, which is not, I think, a good subject for a huge referendum all over Amsterdam, because it is a too specific area. But, for example, if you take the whole area and you just say to the people who live here - make a circle around it, as we did to the invitations of the people - that you say: ok, we have done a whole process, and three scenarios came up. And now, in the referendum, you can choose between the three scenarios. But then, of course, there is a big discussion always, which I find more and more old-fashioned. The positions of politicians are old-fashioned. In that they lose the primacy of the political decision making. What is my role as being a representative of the Green-Left Party, or the Social-Democratic Party, or the Liberal Party in a process like this where I cannot make my own decisions any more.

**Q - *There also a question of legitimacy, if the group making the decisions are a more-or-less random group of people who had the time to join a participatory process at a specific day and time.***

A - That is why you should have this referendum, for everybody. What we did do, it was not instead of a referendum, but it was the second-best solution, I would say. The representative opinion pole. We made a big questionnaire about the three scenarios. Without asking: are you in favour of that scenario, that scenario or that scenario. No, much more for different solutions on different parts of the Wibautas. I think that is a very good substitute. This survey, which has been also spread among groups of commuters, bikers, students, people who work and study in this area. And then you get quite a representative picture of what people think are the best solutions for the problems they agreed on. In this context it means that the politicians still make the decisions, but they can make the decision much better, based on the opinions of the citizens and the interest groups. So your comment is very much on the surface, it is not a deep criticism. Because those 10 people who come to a workshop, or 20 people, or 80 people, even if it is 1,000 people then still it is a minority of 20,000 people who live there. So my saying is always: how about the politicians, then? It is a group of 45 people who are taking care of the city for 4 years...

**Q - *But they were elected to do just that. The people who show-up at the workshops were not elected by anyone to show up at the workshops.***

A - But they are not taking the decisions.

**Q - *What about the problem that the people participating in the workshops had rather similar profiles: white, middle-class, well-educated, and happened to have time. No minority groups, no immigrants, no...***

A - We had a lot of reparations during the process. When I just talked about process architecture, it should be very carefully done. You should make... look at all the target groups whose opinion you want. That has to play a role. Why I started loving Maurits more and more during this process was that he was very concerned about that and he put a lot of emphasis on getting in contact with groups, which he thought it was very important to have their opinion in the process. And that varied from the metro-company people, to the fire-brigade, to the Turkish-women who live there and are grouped together, children at the schools. He was very receptive to those groups. It is a big difficulty. Because the specific forms of the Open Plan Process, and the specific Dutch culture - by the way, I think also the Israeli culture - is very talkative, and very equal. The equality thought that is beyond it - that everybody is equal. That is not always shared by, for example, minority groups. They listen very carefully still, to their Muslim leader, for example. Or if they have a representative, this representative is

very important, and that is the person you should talk to. 'He is the chairman, don't talk to me.' That is still a cultural gap for some processes.

**Q - *But even their leaders did not participate in the workshops.***

A - I am not worried about that. Because those workshops are doing nothing else than giving the people a possibility to work on solutions. I do not care that people who want to spend a lot of time, that there is a specific group. I find it very important that things should not be overseen at a moment that the decisions are taken. It cannot be that a workshop comes up with a solution, that because they were together and they worked on it, the politicians should take it over blindly. No, not at all. I always preferred, as I said, like the survey, that you go back to groups. So what you can do is, when the workshops are ready and they have done their work.... Of course first you try to take care that as many people as possible are involved in these workshops. That is step one. If that does not succeed, and there are a lot of specific reasons why that is very difficult, then you have to take care that the results of these workshops are presented to those people, and that you have a real good discussion about it. That is what we try to do now, which has not been an enormous success, but, nevertheless, the achievement has been there. And then at the end you can have this representative pole, we spread it [the questionnaire], so then you can say a little bit more about the people's opinions and what people found important. That is my answer - try to get them involved, try to reconstruct your instruments to reach out to these people, I find that very important. If they do not want to come to you, to a certain place, to have an open discussion, then go to them. And if that does not succeed, confront them with some results, ask them what they think about it. If that does not succeed, then at least make a representative pole under everybody who lives there, but you have to check where they are from. And then you will see that it is still very difficult. Most of the time it has a lot to do with the subject you are talking about. If your main concern in a city like this is that you do not speak the language, and if your main concern is that your children will be safe, and that they go to a good school, and that your wife or husband has a job. So what would you then do if they asked you do you want to think with us how the whole *Wibautas* should be reconstructed? That is not your main concern at that moment. I cannot force them. But the other thing is, because there are always people who say this: what is the alternative? It is that politicians will do it, and that public administrators will do it, together. But then we are going back to the old system. And what are you generating then? A lot of frustration and a lot of resistance at a certain moment. Because all of the sudden out of the blue there is a plan coming, and nobody accepts the plan. So maybe we can go to court again. Because don't underestimate how much time and energy and money is being spent on doing a process very stupidly. On that they thought of solutions, and that they presented to the neighbourhood, and they said: what? What a stupid solution, because that is the problem this is not a problem. The solution is for that problem, blah-blah-blah. I find it a very logical step in modern democracy, where more and more people emancipate, more and more people have knowledge about a lot of things, and if you look at the workshops, for example at the *Wibautas*, the expertise that was brought in, at least three people were very

professional designers, architects, and they lived in this area, and they loved to participate. And it is all free, for the city. So it is very stupid not to do it. Why should you not do it?

**Q - *What about the collaborative planning ideal of reaching co-operation and compromise? When you have three different alternatives studied, and on top of that groups interviewed separately, schools presenting their opinions in lectures without listening to comments.... Is this an attempt to reach a better solution through communication and understanding each other's problems in relation to the environment they share?***

A - It is a very moralistic thing to have... to want people to understand the.... I don't think like that, and it is not the goal of the Open Plan Process. I mean, I am moralistic on the democratic issue. I am very moralistic about it. I find it important that people, who live in a certain situation, that they have a say about how the situation is constructed for them. That is the democratic moral in which I am working. I am not working on the fact that I think it is good for person A to meet person B, because then they have an understanding of each other's point of view. I think it will follow out of having a discussion with several people. But I find it very healthy in a democracy that people differ on a lot of issues. I do not care, I even think in Holland there is sometimes too much of a consensus driven policy-making. That is why I like the scenarios, because then you can make some radical positions. I never want an Open Plan Process where they try to work on one thing. It was very funny, I was working in Germany as an advisor to the city of Münster, about half a year ago. They were looking for... their main goal was consensus. I said that is not a goal. The goal is to get the best solutions, and to know why that solution is the best, and why it is the best for the people who live there, or work there, or whatever. And sometimes it means that it is not maybe the most efficient solution, but it has a certain basis, so people have the feeling, that they know, although maybe their ideas were not chosen, but they feel that the decision that was taken was a very well thought decision. And that it is in their interest that the decision is taken. It is not taken over them, but it is taken with them. It does not mean that the decision is completely their decision.

**Q - *It goes back to the question of legitimacy. If you have three alternatives, and you pick one out of three, you have chosen the solution of a minority. It might be a stronger argument against the legitimacy of the process - you asked me, but then ignored what I had to say. My time and effort were wasted.***

A - People are not stupid. They see that in every group people are working on several ideas. And then it depends on the politicians, of course. But at the moment that a politician has taken a decision, for example on the basis of the survey that has been done. And they see in the survey, that 80% of the people are in favour of reducing traffic, and on this and that way: making the *Weesperstraat* a small street. There is a lot of consensus about that idea. The people who were not in favour of that, they will scream to hell. They will say: 'no, it is stupid and people do not know what they are doing'. Then it is

up to the politicians to say: 'listen, we find it very important: 80%'. They can also say: 'although we know 80% were in favour, but because of the interest of...'. But then they know very carefully with what message they should go to those 80%, and tell them why they do not make the decision. My experience is, and it is always very difficult to explain to politicians, for example, when I try to get them involved in an Open Plan Process, that they always think they should do what the majority says. That is not democracy. Democracy is when you know very well why people want certain things, and that you are in an open discussion with those people about what, in the end should be the best. A process like this always brings up a lot of solutions that you never thought of, which you can really profit from. It does not mean that on every stage, and every solution should be taken over. When I say people are not stupid I mean that they see very well when they are working on the process that there are conflicting solutions. And they know very well that the politicians have to make a decision on that, for example, the traffic of the Wibautstraat. But that is exactly a decision the politicians cannot make at this moment in this particular case because they differ a lot between the Left, completely with the Liberals about what should happen. So it is the *Stadstraat* vs. the big city *Alley*.

**Q - *You obviously think that a plan resulting from the Open Plan Process will be significantly different than a plan produced through the 'normal' participatory planning.***

A - Yes. That is hard to prove, of course. But the point is, the whole plan that is now being presented by Maurits and his team has elements from all three scenarios, which is not bad, I think. I think, and Maurits has said that, at least to me, that there are a lot of solutions that he would never have thought of in the beginning, that came up in the plan process. I think plans will be different. There has been quite a lot of incidents in the 70 here in Amsterdam related to planning, and that has a lot to do with not involving the citizens who live there, or the interest groups. To prevent those mistakes.... One of the big criticisms of the Open Plan Process, is that you get the mediocrity, you do not get the highest quality. You do not get disasters, because those will be prevented, but you also prevent brilliant ideas, futuristic or brilliant plans of geniuses. On the other hand, if you look at normal planning, 90% of what is built is also not brilliant, and not by geniuses. I can imagine that sometimes you should create free space for people who are very authentic, and very artistic, and just to give them space with no *inspraak*, for example. Or you say: these are the limits. They had a big discussion in Groningen. They have asked 5 architects to make a new building at the *Grotemarkt*, which is [the central square] like the Dam in Amsterdam. And then they said in advance, when the plans are ready we are going to do a referendum in the city. All the architects, not those five, a lot of people who were working in planning and architecture were screaming: 'ridiculous idea, how can you do that.' But the alderman said: 'it was very good to listen'. We have a programme on the conditions where the building should fit in. So any of these five buildings should fit in this programme. But we found it very important that the people who live in the area and have to look at it every day, can take a decision, choosing from these five. None of the buildings is bad. Cannot be, because they all have to fit in the programme. If it does not fit in the programme then we do not have to go to the public

and ask what they think about it. There a beautiful building has been chosen. It all depends on how your process is constructed. If you construct it poorly, you will get a poor result. To be honest, I am not still sure if the Open Plan Process of the *Wibautas* has been a success. Partly because politicians messed up and they still do not have an answer, and it took too long.... The final meeting we had, a lot of people came actually, was in 9 February, after that people have not heard except one letter that was sent just before the summer, in which was said that politicians took more time to make a decision. I understood that Maurits was so furious about that, that he was going to resign... because there was a lot of pressure on not keeping this pace. We had so much pressure on the people, and they wanted extra time, and Maurits had to say no, because this is the plan, and they had to do it. And then everything was done, models were made, drawings were made, everything was made and all the plans were there, and then silence. Silence, silence, silence.

**Q - *So this calls for a change in the political attitude, how about the planning profession?***

A - Could be. Politicians as well as public administrators and designers, they should be more service-like. They should be more, in that sense also accountable for the things that they do, that they do it for the people. Especially in these modern times, where a lot of people do know a lot about - I mean, not everybody knows a lot about planning, of course not - but a lot of people know more about aspects of planning than 20 or 30 years ago, and that is the reason why things are changing. If nobody is interested in the process, ok, go ahead, you do not have to let yourself be disturbed by individual citizens. But if you invite people and they are coming, then you should take it very seriously.

**Q - *Do you need to educate planners for that?***

A - It already happens. I gave a lecture in the University for planners and I told them about processes like this, and it is already part of their programme, in their studies, this module. I got the impression that Pieter [Jannink] also in the beginning did not like it so much, but later he started to like it and he also noticed that people came up with good ideas. He was responsible for the big city allee, and he was very enthusiastic about working with some of the people. I can imagine that people, especially citizens, could be very negative about the process. They are not all well educated, by the way, if you make the summary of the profile of the average workshop participant... no.

**Q - *Do you think it is worth the time and money that it cost?***

A - Yes. Especially my contract.... Yes. But, I think it could be so much easier if there would not be these, again, old-fashioned discussions: 'but I am the one who should take the decision, because I have been elected four years ago'. I will say: 'but you have not been elected to know everything about the *Wibautas*'.

***Q - The way you have it they still end up making the decision.***

A - Sure, but in the context we are living in now. But I see no reason why, if you can delegate the decision making, or the content of the decision, if you want to, delegate that to the people that you represent. People always forget - maybe I am going a little bit too far now - but people forget how things grew in history. Why do we have a representative democratic system? Because we have the big social issues. Over the last hundred years, you always see an expansion of the rights of the individuals. First there was a census representative system - everyone who had money, they elected someone to represent them. Then it was a male thing, then the females came to it, and then we stopped for a long time. Actually since that time we are still thinking - are we going to go on? Almost a hundred years further, and the system has not been revised thoroughly. If you look at the emancipation, the simple rule is what you can decide for yourself, you should decide for yourself, or together with people in a discussion. And of course, it is very good that there is a group of people who have been elected, and they make a lot of decisions, that you do not want to be bothered with. But as soon as you want to be bothered with it, then there should be a place for that. And not - and this is also a very old-fashioned idea, we have had a lot of discussions with politicians - is that they say: become a member of a political party, then. But if I want to be involved in the environmental issues on my street, or in my neighbourhood, why the hell should I go to a political party, become a member of it, to go to all these meetings that have a lot of subjects. No. I am interested in that issue, and that is what I want to participate on.

***Q - Pieter mentioned that he does not understand why people would do this kind of thing. He would not go to a meeting like that, he would not spend his time on it. Not too many people would...***

A - That is not true. If you look at all the people, hundreds of people have been involved at a certain moment, in a certain stage of this process.

***Q - What would you do differently?***

A - A much stronger emphasis on exactly what you said, about the minority groups. Something very personal I would do differently was to take more time for some things. It was a very busy period for me with a lot of projects.

***Q - It was a very busy time for the people who came to the workshops. It was not their job.***



A - It was very hectic. To the politicians involved, and I warned them about that all the time, it was too little. Too many times they were on a distance. That is always a problem, because then when there is a plan they do not feel attached to elements of that plan.

**Q - *Can you tell me more about the involvement of the politicians? Were they part of the Open-plan-process discussion group you mentioned at the beginning?***

A - No. It was a request from one of the alderman to have this group working. What is in those processes, politicians should play a part not as a listener, not only saying - we invite you to this and that public meeting - but give them a role. They have to play a role. They can play a role because we do round-table discussions, which is a very important element. One of the main conditions to make it a success, the Open Plan Process, is that there should be involvement, in that sense involvement in a nice atmosphere, that people feel free to express what they want to express, with music, etc. One of the tricks, or one of the instruments, is the round-table. So if we invite 200 people, and they are in one place, and then on the stage you have certain discussions. I was very fond to have round tables, to split up the 200 people to 20 tables, so there are 10 people at each table. Those 10 persons discuss things among each other. You get a nice mix of people, who do not know each other very well, and there is a nice buzzing around in the room. There it is very important to give the politicians a role, because they can be the technical chairpersons of a round-table. So then at least you 'get rid' of 20 politicians. So they can play a role. I always say to them: 'of course you have your opinion, you can express your own opinion, but not in a veto way. It is not allowed for you to say on the round table when somebody has an idea: that is absolutely not possible, because I am the politician. Let people talk, and you can say yourself what you find important, so there is an open discussion about it possible.' So that was the way we wanted that politicians get involved. But we had to do it ourselves, the administrators. I was very unsatisfied with that. And it had a lot to do with Frank Köhler, because he said in advance: 'no, it is now the citizens who can talk, and I do not want politicians to get involved, and I am the responsible alderman'. I think that is completely nonsense. Of course he is the alderman who is responsible for the process, but it is very important for the adequate process that politicians know what is going on. So we had some public meetings and sometimes politicians showed up and they listened, and sometimes they did not. Frank Köhler was there, quite prominent, he has been quite active in the process. I wanted politicians also in the workshops. It hardly happened. Some of the members from the *stadsdelen* were there, but not from the Central City. Another thing... there were a lot of tensions also between citizens, and it is difficult to... because those tensions have a lot to do with all the bad experience that a lot of citizens had with the politicians, or with the government. In the *Wibautstraat* there are these metro stations, a lot of junkies, junkie problems, and the city has not done anything about it for a long time. So there were people coming to these workshops who were now really aggressive towards the city, and very critical, which was not good for the atmosphere in the workshops.

***Q - How can you solve that?***

A - Take more time in the beginning, to get that out of the way, more or less. Build more trust one way or another. But sometimes it is impossible. I was very satisfied with the communication group of Heleen van Loenen. They were a young team of people, it was very nice. Not only the communication, but also the group of Pieter and the other planners, so I really had the feeling that it was a new generation of public administrators. With them, with Pieter a little bit, but with some of the others, I did not even have discussions about this whole political primacy thing. The older generation - always.

***Q - Do you think that it is more obvious for them?***

A - Absolutely. Because there is a big logical drive in an Open Plan Process, because actually it is all based on: you would be stupid if you will not ask people to think with you about the solutions. That is all you do, actually, so what on earth is against that? I can really not think of an argument.

***Q - Do you think the situation would have been any different if the politicians involved would have been from another location on the political map? Is it only coincidental that they are all Left-Wing?***

A - No [it would not have changed]. The differences between the Dutch political parties are so minor. There is one big issue in the city at this moment, and that is traffic. And there you can see the difference between the parties. There is nothing Social-Democratic about this issue. There is an environmental thing, an economic thing relevant, and of course in that sense you can say social-democratic work is very important, so what happens if we cut the *Weesperstraat* into two streets, and then businesses are going away, maybe. Maybe companies will be leaving, and other companies coming back, whatever. But that is the big issue. That is the only ideological issue that is taking place in the city.

***Q - Would you have involved the business community any differently in the process or are you satisfied with the way it went?***

A - No, I am not satisfied with the way it went. What I mean with the minority groups, I should also say the interest groups. In that sense I am not satisfied, I would have liked it if people like that were more.... But that has a little bit to do with the politics as well. Because very often in processes like this, especially companies say: 'we have already very good contacts with the senator, and we have our regular meetings with him, so we are not going to talk with the citizens, we are going to talk directly to the alderman'. I always say to the aldermen, please be careful because there is a chance that they are not going to participate, and then when the plans are done they will suddenly come and say: this is no good, and here is our plan. Ask

them either to make a plan in parallel, so there is an interaction between their plan-making and the planning done in the Open Plan Process, or force them into the Open Plan Process, to participate. Refuse if they ask to talk to you, tell them you are anxious to see the plans of the Open Plan Process. If they want to influence it they should participate in the Open Plan Process. But of course you need a strong back for that, as a politician.

**Q - *Is this where the future is going? Are all plans going to be like this?***

A - If I look at the Dutch situation, we are living in the country of the muddling through, as I call it. I think more and more of this planning will be normal practice. There could be a back-lash, in the sense that it takes too much time, it takes too much money. Money is not so much the problem, but it takes time. There will be a group of politicians that will say: lets forget about all the pretence to reach out to the public, they are not interested. And then they look at the results of the elections and so on and they say: 'ok, we are just kind of business people taking care of the city, we do not have to have any discussion with the citizens'. Because that is a thing that is going on, of course, that less and less the city is a stakeholder in the biggest issues, in the biggest development. It is a real problem for the politicians. They are shrinking in their importance of controlling the city. Companies and more and more all kinds of things people take care of themselves.

**Q - *As I said, it is the politicians ego that might get in the way...***

A - But it does not help for the ego if they say: I am going to give myself a certain importance, I am not going to discuss any more. But that is an importance in their shrinking position, no-one is going to take them seriously anymore.

**Q - *When I asked Maurits about the time question, that it took so long, he was quite confident that it actually saves time, because then you save on the inspraak part of the process.***

A - Yes. When you have done the process well, then you get the reward at the end. If you are not doing it well, it is not completely certain. If the politicians make the choice then of course people can still go to court, and say: 'this is not good and this is not good'. But one thing the court can do... the city can say: 'listen, we have talked it over and over with a lot of people, we have done the survey, we took this decision'. Then the judge will say: 'you have done it very carefully, the complaint is overruled'. Again, the biggest problem with time is not in the Open Plan Process, it is in the decision making, and the fighting between the public administrators which is going on now between the dIVV [*dienst Infrastructuur Verkeer Vervoer* - department of Infrastructure, Traffic and Transport] - that was a difficult *dienst* to get into this Open Plan Process, because they knew. And there are some administrators there who have not an open mind. The younger people did, and who were representative in the group of the Wibautas: Dirk-Jan Huisman and the communication person from the dIVV

and she was very open, also - a young person. But their bosses, their 'top' people in that sense... some people are in the 1970s still, and they think: we are... they are not even elected, they are public administrators, but they were: 'we know best, what is best for the city, and my boss is the alderman, and I am working for the alderman, I am not working for the city'. I would say: 'who do you think you are working for. You are not working for the politician, you are working for the city, you are working for the people's interests'.

**Q - *You are questioning their professional ability... nobody likes when that happens.***

A - That is right, but I think that you should feel confident of yourself and of your qualities. That is also for the politicians.

**Q - *That is what I meant - if this is the way it goes, then it does change planning as a professions in quite a significant way. Of course people who have been doing it 'the old way' for many years are going to find it intimidating.***

A - Yes. Or they like it and think - this is nice, now I can show people how I work. But it is true. I have many friends, partly in art, architecture, they get shivers when I tell them about projects I am involved in where artists or architects are working. 'My god, leave me alone. People are stupid and my ideas are the best. And I do not want any involvement of anybody'. And then I say: 'you are making houses for people, are you not? People should just shut up and live in them...'.

**Q - *Is this [the Open Plan Process] post-modernism?***

A - It has some elements of post-modernism. What it is, actually, like eclecticism very much. Which is pragmatic picking up the best things of everything, which is post-modernist. Also the fragmentation of society, because that is another thing politicians had problems with. It is not enough anymore, again - I emphasise, it is not enough anymore to say to people - you can vote for us once every four years, and as for the rest you can shut up, because we are making.... Of course, if you do not want to be involved again - no problem. But if something is going on then the politicians should right away go to the fragmented part of the electorate who want to express themselves about a certain development.

**Q - *Can you give me other examples of places where an Open Plan Process took place?***

A - There were a lot of places. In Groningen we did a big project, not with the building I mentioned, but concerning the traffic in the inner city. It was a very good process. We did a project in Zaandstad, about the future of the town, where the emphasis should be, the accents. Tilburg, Rotterdam, the Hague, we did a big project there.

*Q - Were they more or less successful than what happened at the Wibautas?*

A - The problem is... the proof of the pudding is in the eating. I said from the beginning of the project of the *Wibautas*: ask me if it is a success when I see the decision taken by the politicians. Then we can reconstruct completely how this decision has been taken, what the content of the decision is and how much it is analogue to the development in the workshops and so on. Until that time I cannot say if it is more or less a success. Because I can say about some things that I missed, or I did not think of, or what I think went wrong. But the whole thing might be falling apart if there is a decision which has nothing to do with all of the discussions that have been going on. Of course, it is no very likely that this would happen, but in degrees you can have more or less similarity between the whole process and the decision taken. If the politicians take a decision because they want to save their position in the coalition, and that is the most important thing - ingredient - of the decision taken, and they are not paying any attention to all the nice ideas that came up about the public domain and to make the area much nicer. If they all leave that then I will say it is a failure. But again - the decision has not been taken. It is very bad that a decision has not been taken, but that is bad because of the credibility from politics towards the citizens who have been so active in the whole process. I was pretty pleased in that respect with the letter that Maurits sent a month ago. He said very honestly what the problems were, and he apologised for the delay in the decision making.