

### design strategy for a network of play

The practical application of the PIP-principle leads to a number of general principles in regard to designing a play network.

### process

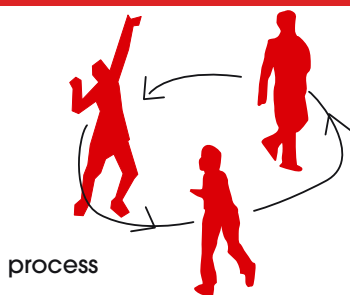
A play network should not be developed from the drawing table. It is important to discover the neighbourhood for oneself, at the very least. It is better still to gain an insight into the local play culture through participation. Residents can also be involved in other stages from design to management. The realisation of play areas will then become a game in its own right, one which brings people together.

### structure

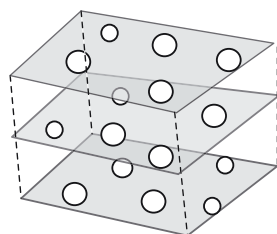
A play network should include several layers in order to give room to different groups. Next to a layer of small 'in-between areas', bigger zones are being developed in other layers where especially the getting together of people of different ages will have a place (the intergenerational zones). Spaces should also be left open for temporary or spontaneous interpretation.

### identity

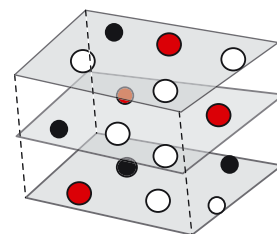
By strengthening the play culture of a neighbourhood in design concepts, a play network will develop that binds people to areas and gives identity and meaning to public spaces.



process



structure



identity

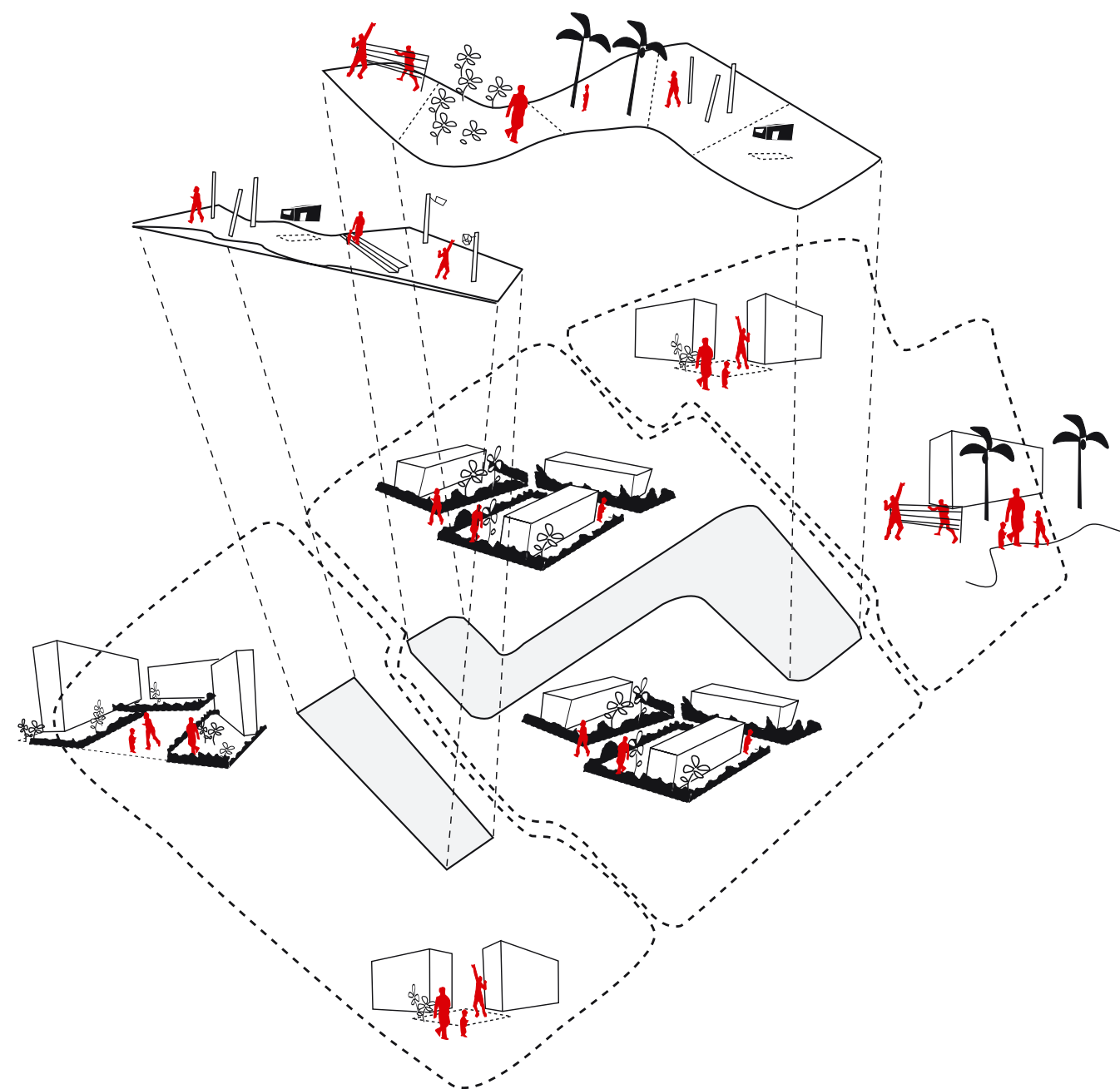


Döll - Atelier voor Bouwkunst presented the study 'The world is my Playground' to approximately a hundred designers, policy makers, artists and other interested parties in the NAI in Rotterdam on 5 July 2005. 010 Publishers will publish the results of the study in book form in the first quarter of 2006. In addition to the publication of the book, Lefaivre and Döll are planning to organise a symposium in association with the TU (University of Technology) in Delft. The organisation of a competition featuring the subject of the study is in the pipeline. Döll would, above all, like to dedicate itself to actively designing 'playable' networks in public spaces.

# the world is my playground

## design strategy for a network of play

The research project 'The world is my Playground' presents an urban development design strategy for play areas in the city. The strategy leads to a network of play areas that are like an extensive weave throughout the neighbourhood. The play network brings children and grown-ups from different backgrounds together. The design of the areas fits in with the local play culture. In this way play areas become meaningful public spaces.



### The World is my Playground - Design strategy for a network of play

Project Team: Döll - Atelier voor  
Bouwkunst  
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Study: June 2004 - May 2005

Information: Alijd van Doorn  
Döll - Atelier voor  
Bouwkunst



A lively discussion is in progress on different fronts concerning the identity of the city and the way children and grown-ups use public spaces. Play areas can have a role in increasing the livability of a city as they are pre-eminently meeting places for people of different ages and backgrounds. Play areas are often, wrongly, anonymous areas in lost locations. A new vision of playing in the city is necessary. In this project an urban development design strategy is being developed by studying the applicability of a theoretical model for play area design for two specific locations.

#### historical analysis

Art historian Liane Lefaivre developed the theoretical model for play area design in urban development. She bases herself on an historical overview of play and playing in art, architecture, and town planning. With this study, Lefaivre continues the exhibition in the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, about playgrounds by Van Eyck, for which she acted as a special curator in 2000. The emphasis of the historical study is about the way in which the more or less spontaneous development of play areas in the town centre of Amsterdam was translated into a conscious strategy for the garden cities in the West. The most important elements of this unique historical example have been summarized in the PIP-principle by Lefaivre. PIP stands for Participation, Interstitial (the in-between), and Polycentral. Participation refers to the interactive processes between residents and the municipality within which the play areas came about: the play areas were realised at the moment the residents informed the local authorities of their need for them. Another strong point of the play areas is the degree in which they adjust themselves to the weave of the urban development, called 'interstitiality' by Lefaivre. The play areas are naturally embedded which provides great quality of use and social control. These play areas form a 'polycentric' network, a web of many small play areas. The great density of small play areas mean children can conquer public places step by step and that playing becomes an integral part of the neighbourhood.

#### reflective design

Döll - Atelier Bouwkunst studied the applicability of the PIP-Principle as a design instrument for the development of play networks in contrasting environments. Test sites are the inner city neighbourhood the 'Oude Westen' and the post war 'Meeuwenplaat' in Hoogvliet. The 'Oude Westen' is a densely populated neighbourhood with large families in the centre of the city. Outwardly, this neighbourhood can be defined by a confined layout and a public space composed of bricks and concrete. There is strong sense of community. By contrast 'Meeuwenplaat' is a suburb, with a green and spacious layout. 30% of the houses are empty at the moment because of restructuring of the neighbourhood. The public space makes a desolate impression.



Before, left over space Amsterdam



After, playground

by Aldo van Eyck



Stadtlounge Sankt Gallen 2005, Pipilotti Rist and Carlos Martinez



Play area at the Barcelona forum

The concept of participation in the PIP-principle has been practically applied by allowing children to photograph their play culture themselves. This study shows that the way children play is defined by physical circumstances. The urban children of the 'Oude Westen' have strong associations with places that are fed by a variety of impulses from the neighbourhood. Every street corner has its own story and its own way of playing. This association with places is much less prominent in children of the spaciously designed but monotonously equipped 'Meeuwenplaat'. Their way of playing is rather limited and geared to formal playgrounds.

The interstitial spaces in the urban weave have been documented for both neighbourhoods. It emerges that the 'in-between spaces' with the highest play quality are light, open spaces close to the front door. They mark a transition from public to private. The interstitial spaces do not only have quality as safe play areas for little children; for grown-ups they are the ideal places for informal meetings. They can also claim them by placing flower boxes or by making tiny gardens against their front walls. Many neighbourhoods have these 'in between places' which often have unused play potential.

The use of the term polycentral leads to a proposal for a play network with a high density of play areas. The interstitial spaces are the building blocks. In the proposal they are transformed from empty spaces into scenic 'playscapes' with room for child's play, meetings and (temporary) manipulation of outdoor space by placing street furniture, garden gnomes

and pavement chalk etc. Bigger spaces are designed thematically on the basis of the existing play culture in the neighbourhood. Here, the first matter of importance is bringing different groups of people together. The urge to garden, apparent from the well tended front gardens, has been transformed into collective allotments. The youngsters can learn the tricks of the trade from the many older people in the neighbourhood. The culture of car-washing in the 'Oude Westen' has taken form in a car wash area where adults can wash their cars while children play on playground equipment they have made themselves from used tyres. In this way, two different spatial models for the 'Oude Westen' or alternatively the 'Meeuwenplaat', which both originate from the same strategy, come into existence by combining the PIP-model with specific local features. These models can be utilized as a template for concrete planning.

Based on the same strategy, every neighbourhood is given its own play network by taking advantage of specific local circumstances. Attention is hereby given to the spatial possibilities, the social structure in the neighbourhood and the existing play culture. In this way, the play network gives the neighbourhood an identity as regards structure and interpretation.



#### images above

Left: 'Meeuwenplaat'; typical postwar area with an open structure, apartment blocks are places around green courtyards

Right: 'Het Oude Westen', typical late 19th century urban fabric, with narrow streets and little open space in a tightly knit urban fabric



### best practices

The best references in playground design are found in designs that don't look like playgrounds. Their imaginative design provokes the playing nature of human beings of all ages. At the same time the designs offer landscape design of high quality instead of being an alienating composition of play furniture.



Badeschiff, Berlin 2004 by Susanne Lorenz



Hormigas/Anís, Platja d'Aro Spain by Martiría Figueras



Pink Ghost, Paris 2002 by Périphériques Architectes

### the nature of play

Playing is a part of human nature, from young to old. Playing is also a cultural phenomenon; people express their identity in this way. Proceeding from this belief about playing, Döll has created a play network that forms a relationship with the local play culture and where there is room for all ages. A play area is not a collection of playground equipment. It is a public space created with playing as a design theme. In this way renewing concepts arise and give identity to the play areas.



Tree House For Booker T. 2004/5, by Karyn Olivier



Urban golf competition



Public play and sport equipment for the elderly in Shanghai

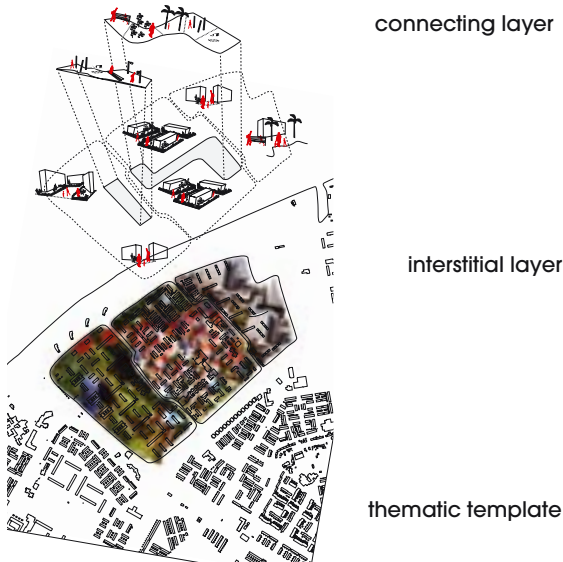


# case study 'meeuwenplaat'

**analysis**  
play culture in 'de Meeuwenplaat'



**model**  
the 3-D network for play in 'de Meeuwenplaat'



participation: children from 'de meeuwenplaat' take photographs of their own play culture

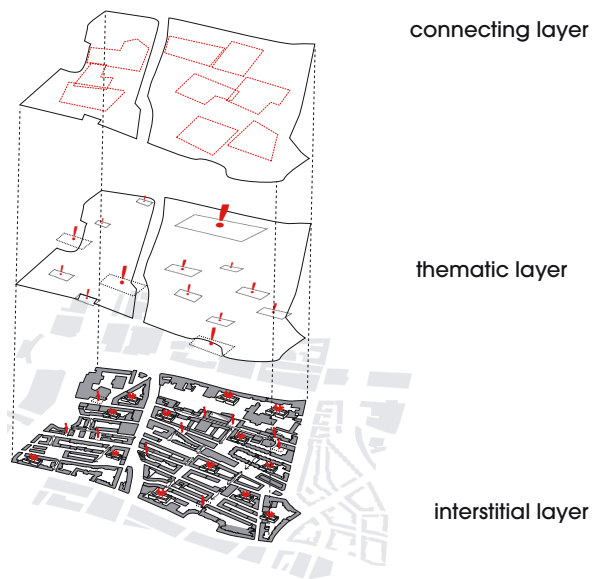


# case study 'oude westen'

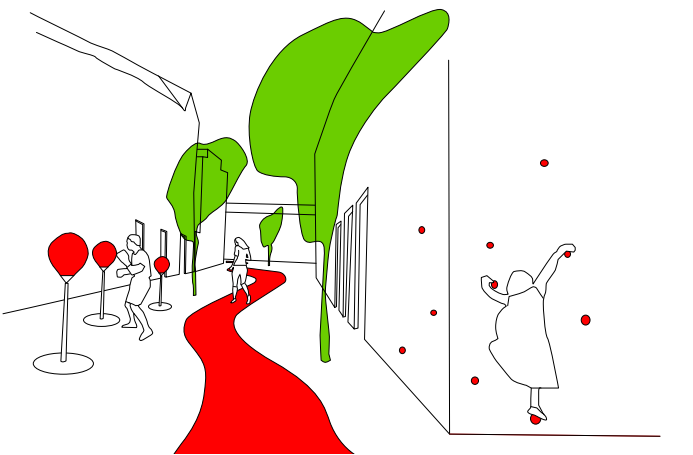
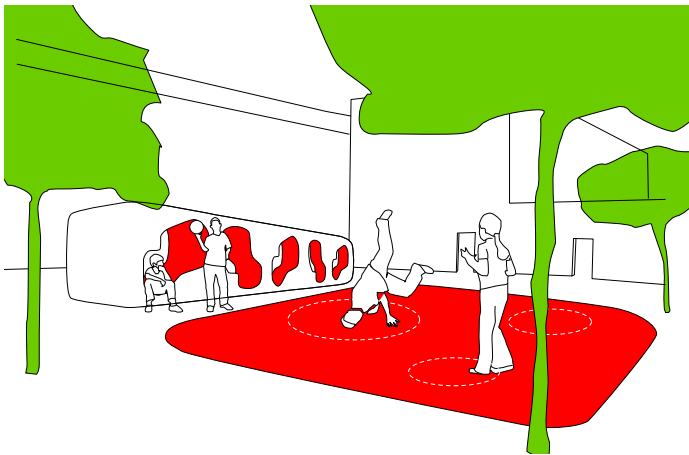
**analysis**  
play culture in 'Het Oude Westen'



**model**  
the 3-D network for play in 'Het Oude Westen'



participation: children from 'het oude westen' take photographs of their own play culture



These children's pictures show a fascination for building sites and 'wild' nature. This inspired us to create a type of play landscape named 'the buildingsite'.

Children's pictures in 'het Oude Westen' show that the children perceive their neighbourhood as one big play area. Older children feel connected to spaces that are 'cool'. This inspired us to create the 'play path' and 'the crib' playgrounds.