



### National Spatial Strategy

*Archis* is of Dutch origin, rooted in the country whose social housing and spatial planning programs are acclaimed world-wide. There is a long and rich heritage of architectural achievements. Take, for example, just the last century. The Beurs of Berlage, the Rietveld house, the Sanatorium Zonnestraat by Duiker. The reclaimed land from what used to be the Zuiderzee. The Delta works. The housing schemes for workers' families. Also, more recently, the Netherlands has received international recognition for its architecture. A whole generation is now traveling around the globe fueled by the fame they were able to achieve as a result of the opportunities they had as young designers. On the wings of a veritable architecture policy, they were able to achieve unprecedented breadth and purpose through their ideas. And across the decades, this magazine has followed and heralded this triumphant parade of civilization. I am purposefully making this a little bit pompous to emphasise the contrast with what has been occurring since the turn of the century, with the most dramatic example being the publication of the Dutch government policy paper, "Space" on April 27, 2004.

The above will not be an unfamiliar story for many Dutch readers. But as many of *Archis*'s readers are not Dutch, it is important to clarify the significance of these developments in a broader perspective. The Netherlands' spatial politics and architectonic creativity were an example for many in the world on how to redize societal ideals. It is an act of historical justice to also describe the reversal of this project as a valuable lesson. And valuable it is. What is becoming more and more obvious is that everything that has arisen on a national scale within architecture and urbanism since roughly the introduction of the Housing Act of 1901 can in retrospect be seen as a spatial framework advancing societal pacification. Just as social democracy in the public sector was successful in establishing countless social agreements via the welfare state, so too was architecture the product of a solid social contract. We can conclude, slowly but surely, that this time of peace is coming to an end. The progressive dismantling of the

welfare state has predictably provoked angry and pointed criticisms. The deconstruction of spatial policies, however, has in large part been spared from public outrage.

These two dissolutions are very similar in character. The time of peace has now passed not only in fact but also in law. The subtitle of the policy paper reads 'Creating space for development', which removes any possibility of doubt. The development is meant to be economical. Where for the last century there has been a primacy of politics, in which space was the consequence of political debate about the social contract, now there is the primacy of the economy. Architecture is in this sense no longer the cornerstone of societal cohesion, but a fuel for world-wide economic growth and competition. Space is no longer the end product, but raw material with which the maximal profit margin must be achieved. Along these lines, one can only recognize that the old spatial order, just like the social safety net, has become more of an obstacle than a glorious act of civilization. Civilization is in the way.

Ole Bouman

**Archis 3**

**Text** Ole Bouman  
**Photo** 'Zonnestraat', Arthur Wortmann

**Editorial**