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Histories and Futures

Cultivating the in-betweens

Amersfoort lies at the heart of the Netherlands, and the Otto Scheltusflat serves as a metaphor for the city's unique position: **in-between, both geographically and symbolically.**

The building sits halfway between Amersfoort's central station, and the historical city center.

It is also located at the **intersection of two urban scales**: on one side, the low-rise buildings of the old town; on the other, the large-scale office blocks typical of more recent developments. Built in the 1970s and later partially refurbished, this structure rises from a sloped site, suspended between the street level above and the lower terrain below.

The vision of this project embraces these in-betweens, reimagining them not as limitations but as **opportunities for connection, transition, renewal, and enriched experience.**

To reconnect the station and the city center in a meaningful way, the departure point is the analysis of the **daily routes of different users.** What path does a local resident take from the station to the old town? How does a weekend tourist explore the area? Which shortcuts do office workers use? How do the residents of Otto Scheltus navigate this key junction in the city?

An urban transformation

Open the plot

Today, the plot remains underused, serving primarily its residents. This proposal aims to **open the plot to its surroundings** by **extending the existing green belt** encircling the city center, improving legibility at the urban scale and creating **bioclimatic continuity.**

Then, **activating and rethinking the site's entrances**: in addition to enhancing the existing accesses from Burgemeester de Withstraat and Noorderwierweg, new

clearly defined access points are introduced, making the site more dynamic, porous, and welcoming. By **opening up the building's two corners at the ground and first floors**, the Van Asch van Wijckstraat is linked to the inner courtyard by an open, transparent space. This improved permeability better connects the Otto Scheltusflat to its surroundings and **strengthens urban links.**

Tuin tussen twee

A sponge garden for biodiversity and informal life

These different floor heights, aligned with the topography, converge around a newly envisioned park: **Tuin tussen twee.**

This experimental **sponge garden** benefits the site, its residents, and visitors. Like a sponge, it helps **regulate** extremes by absorbing water, storing it temporarily, and slowly releasing it into the subsoil. It **improves biodiversity and ground permeability** during heavy rainfall, supports **natural water retention** and redistribution during drought, and offers a **cool meeting point** on warmer days in this highly mineral environment. Through this project, permeable surfaces increase from 350 square meters to 2,500 square meters. **The garden becomes the heart of the site**, a hub for experimenting with plant species adapted to increasingly severe weather, reinforcing the ecosystem, and **serving as a new green symbol for the neighborhood.**

To support the transformation, parking is relocated to the basement and periphery, freeing the ground level for a **continuous, active, and pedestrian-friendly public space.**

A delicate densification

Harmonize mass and context

The architectural vision for Otto Scheltusflat begins by **honoring its existing structure**: two wings poised to transform into **three distinct yet connected blocks**, linked by **two new vertical circulation cores** inspired by what already exists.

At the heart of the design lies a **graceful modulation of height**, a dialogue between the building and its surroundings. The block closest to the towering office buildings will rise to seven floors, stepping down gently to six floors in the middle block, and finally settling at five floors nearest the intimate scale of the city center.

This **subtle cascade** softens the boundary between urban scales, dissolving any sense of monolithic uniformity, and instead evoking a harmonious cluster of buildings — each with its own identity, yet **speaking the same architectural language**.

Their façades, uniform in material richness yet diverse in housing and form, compose a varied tapestry that enlivens the streetscape.

The site's triangular shape becomes a **canvas for contrasting urban moods**: serene and contemplative in quiet corners, vibrant and buzzing near the water's edge, and seamlessly woven into the city's pedestrian rhythms.

Greenery blossoms throughout, a living thread that weaves together Amersfoort's aspiration for a **bioclimatic city** — where nature and architecture embrace in quiet balance.

Architectural interventions

Spaces for encounters and community life

At street level, **openness invites city and garden to mingle**. Shops, a café, and a nursery animate the ground floor, while **shared communal spaces foster connection among residents**: a place to dance, to work, to mend a bike, to build friendships. Here, the building becomes an **urban agora**: a vibrant stage where lives intersect, stories unfold, and community thrives in an inclusive, nurturing environment.

By **reclaiming and reducing the cut-outs in the north-west wing**, we create room to breathe and build upwards, adding homes and communal spaces at every vertical juncture.

These shared areas, visible from both street and courtyard, open staircases and circulation cores invite life and light inside and out.

The iconic Mondrian mural, a vivid emblem of the site's soul, is preserved, **framed by these new communal spaces**.

Connectivity flows seamlessly through a **network of corridors, weaving indoors and outdoors**, accessible to all, children, elders, and those with reduced mobility. These pathways are more than routes; they are **places to meet, to pause, to belong**.

From their heights, residents enjoy views that stretch from the green heart of the courtyard, across the cityscape, to the spire of Onze Lieve Vrouwetoren.

Movement as invitation

Where circulation meets community

Circulation is designed to **embrace the outdoors**, and **promotes natural ventilation**. Façades and shared spaces come alive as stages for cooperative life, inviting encounters and shared moments. The building blends **private needs with community spirit**, and places human connection at its very center. In reshaping the façades and the apartments, old single-aspect homes give way to thinner volumes, opening space for dual-aspect apartments and vibrant communal areas. Every home, basks in natural light and cross-ventilation. The kitchen, heart of social life, **opens onto the community spaces**, encouraging warmth, connection, and shared moments.

Layers of life

Typologies of living

On the ground and first floors of Blocks B and C, 7 duplex urban villas: **double-height homes** on the quiet side, with private gardens.

In Block A, the apartments - 30 two-bedroom units (72 sqm) and 12 one-bedroom units (47 sqm) have a double orientation, served by generous adaptable exterior walkways, with more intimate balconies on the street side.

In Block B, five eight-bed co-living units (300 sqm) and five five-bed units (200 sqm) encourage intergenerational interactions and sociability among workers, students, and older residents.

In Block C, apartments — ten three-bedroom units (85 sqm each) and ten four-bedroom units (100 sqm each) — are arranged around loggias that bring light into the heart of the block.

Each facade responds to **orientation and function**. The south-facing façades of Blocks A and B feature existing extended slabs that provide solar shading and spaces for outdoor living.

Apartments are **double-orientated, naturally ventilated**, and accessible via outdoor shared galleries. Block C incorporates loggias inspired by the existing building, paired with sunshades that reinterpret the original orange awnings in a contemporary way.

Extensions use **timber frame structures and CLT wood flooring**, a fast, **low-impact** system. **Off-site prefabrication** reduces environmental impact and nuisance, while ensuring speed, ease, and cost-effectiveness.

Existing and new constructions will be insulated with 22-36 cm straw bale insulation. **Improved thermal performance will drastically reduce energy consumption**. Photovoltaic systems will meet domestic hot water and heating needs.

Finally, a financial balance is achieved.

Ground floor and first-floor adaptations create valuable commercial spaces that strengthen urban connections and improve profitability. **Densification** and elevation of new units — carefully studied for cost-effectiveness and architectural quality — generate **substantial financial contributions** through future rents.

Through these adaptations, the Otto Scheltusflat **brings together diverse social groups**, housing typologies, and urban scales into a **cohesive architectural statement**: a building designed to last, evolve, and remain, like Amersfoort itself, ***in-between***.