



Westergasfabriek

*Isocarp Congress
October 20, 2015*

Rebirth of the Westergasfabriek site

Liselore van der Heijden

Outline presentation

Economical, urban and cultural impact of heritage

- 1 Brief presentation of Amsterdam
- 2 History of the site and neighbourhood
- 3 Project of renovation
- 4 What we are now



Westergasfabriek

An aerial photograph of Amsterdam, showing a dense network of colorful buildings and winding canals. The colors of the buildings are vibrant, including reds, oranges, yellows, and blues. The canals are dark, and the overall scene is a classic representation of the city's unique urban layout.

Amsterdam, facts and figures

540 years ago, Amsterdam's the earliest recorded

Famous for its Golden Age 17th century, enormous growth and wealth

Stock exchange was launched here: the first company which share could be traded was the Dutch East Indian Company

Since centuries Amsterdam has been playground for many nationalities, and divers religious background. Currently Amsterdam has over 800.000 inhabitants with 176 different nationalities

“Live and let live” is the Dutch adagio

Amsterdam grows in 19th and 20th century, after period of decrease. New neighbourhoods outside the canals were build. Amsterdam West is one of them

Westergasfabriek, what we were

In the 19th century, Amsterdam, like most European cities, switched in the public lighting from candle to – the much saver- gas lighting

In 1895 just outside Amsterdam, the English association ICGA (Imperial Continental Gas Association) build The Westergas Factory. Soon after the construction, the city of Amsterdam purchased the factory

Originally, the land was designated for a city park

Gas was extracted from coal and distributed to the city

During the first 20-30 years, the factory was surrounded by meadow and canals

In 1920, the Staatsliedenbuurt was constructed, just on the other side of the canal. A working class neighbourhood, with high density of houses, narrow streets and barely any park or green areas

WesterGasfabriek

14 hectare factory site



In 1957, Slochteren was discovered, and Amsterdam switched to natural gas

Like many others, the factory was shut down in 1963

Site became a storage place from 1963-1996 for Amsterdam Municipality Energy Company (GEB)

Because of the storage space, the buildings were spared from demolition (not because of the stunning architecture)

In 1996 GEB moved their storage place elsewhere and...

Bordering downtown Amsterdam

Left the city with an extremely polluted Brownfield with buildings in very bad shape

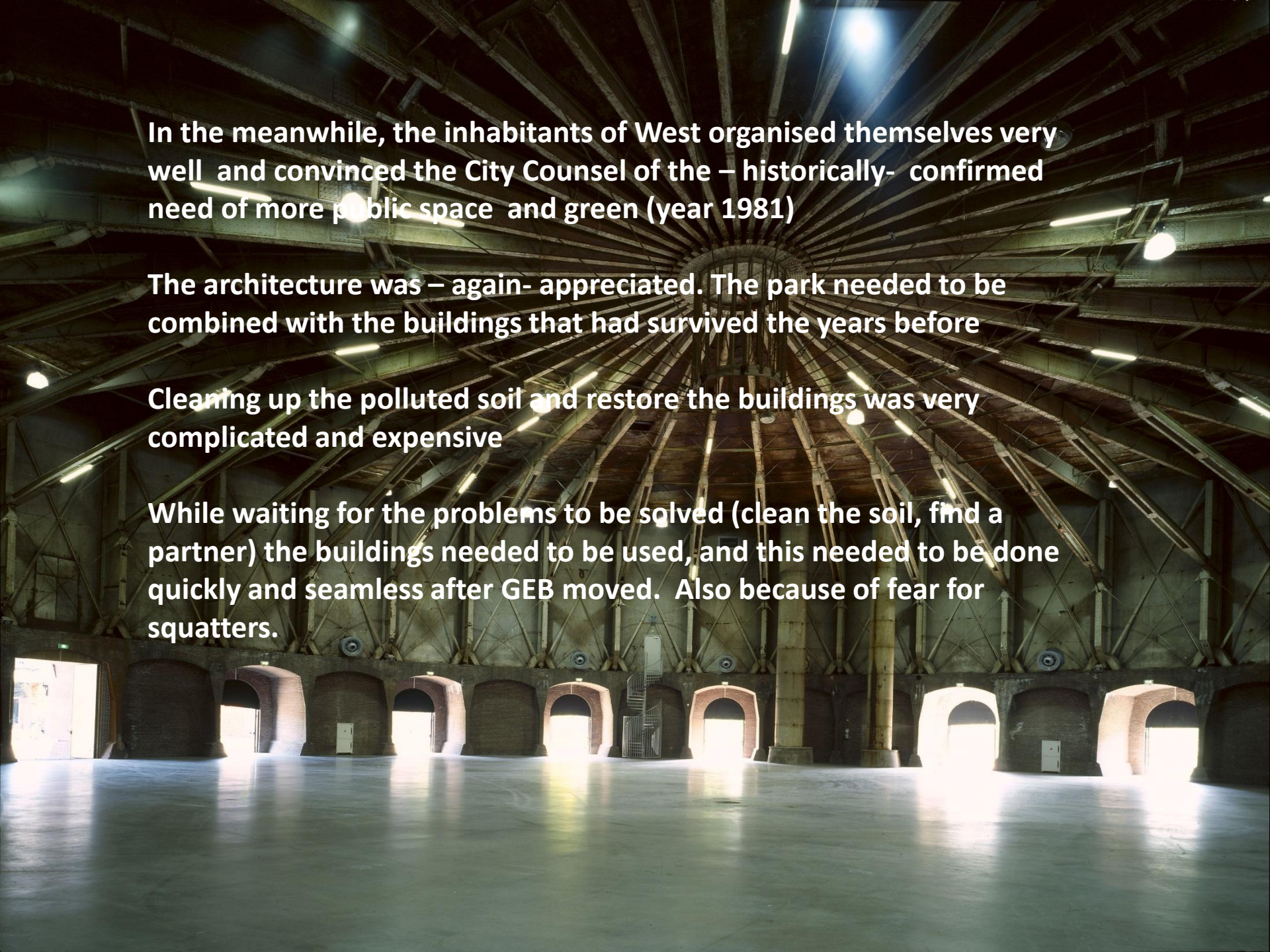
The area was now, 100 years later, located in the city, bordering downtown Amsterdam

The land was a merely used as parking lot and looked like it too

And the city's economic DNA had changed: From blue to white collar, often international

The houses in Amsterdam West district were deep, with four layers of apartments with no green and small gardens, if any. And hardly any public park's





In the meanwhile, the inhabitants of West organised themselves very well and convinced the City Counsel of the – historically- confirmed need of more public space and green (year 1981)

The architecture was – again- appreciated. The park needed to be combined with the buildings that had survived the years before

Cleaning up the polluted soil and restore the buildings was very complicated and expensive

While waiting for the problems to be solved (clean the soil, find a partner) the buildings needed to be used, and this needed to be done quickly and seamless after GEB moved. Also because of fear for squatters.

This how it looked like at the time...







Temporary use

- In 1992, it was decided to give the site a for maximum of 18 months temporary content. The small team with excellent network in the cultural sector was installed by the city, started in 1993. They were physically based at the Westergasfabriek
- Combination of events (few days) and more permanent tenants. Both with a very wide ranch
- Events: The extreme and unexpected was possible. 24 hours events, Drum Rhythm Festival, house parties in the gasholder and the week after an opera produced by the Holland Festival
- The tenants were cultural entrepreneurs who rented space. Office, but more eventually artists and open studio's/stages.
- The team carefully selected on cultural and added value to the other events / tenants and diversity was desired.

Westergasfabriek

The 18 months became 6 year

- It became clear that restoring the real estate and cleaning the polluted soil was to expensive for the Municipality
- A partner was searched and found: MAB BV, privately owned, was asked to restore the buildings. Contract was signed in December 1999
- The cleaning of the soil was paid by the Amsterdam
- Though facing a lot of 'head wind' the successful public - private co-operation at the Westergasfabriek was born

Results

WesterGasfabriek

- A workforce with professionals and engaged residents was formed to decide on the final design of the park
- Needs of the neighborhood were combined: park, public space, recreation and culture became the new destination of the site. The temporary use proved to be a stayer
- Prize winning example for urban redevelopment
- Neighborhood happy with park and buildings
- Local economy and culture strengthened
- A profitable exploitation

WesterGasfabriek

Money

Commercial

Enable

Cultural

Branding

WesterGasfabriek



Method in the madness

- **Vision should precede development: Know what you end goal is: Experimentation is good but you can really build on a strong vision.**
- **anything goes in the short term – evidence that procedures and consensus can evolve in retrospect.**
- **Tenants that strengthen each other and create a collective for co-creation**
- **Tenants with a good buzz create a major boost for your location**
- **Tell the world and create a strong communication platform to support your brand and talk to your fans. They are you're best ambassador**

Difficulties and pit falls

- Without cultural or social fundament, the money wins
- Local governments, project developers, business people and creative's each speak their own language
- Find investors willing to accept low returns (cultural entrepreneurs)
- Keep a healthy balance between commercial and cultural prospective
- Don't let the big brands rule



WesterGasfabriek

Cities are the new Nations

- City's all want to attract talent, students, families and HQ
- People and companies are no longer bound to one location. Footloose
- City's that are liveable for inhabitants, lovable for visitors are profitable for companies
- Increase of social mobility: Culture en economic growth go hand in hand
- Better neighbourhoods
- Entrepreneurship / culture new innovations
- cities with the ability to adopt to the changing world are the winners
- Adopt is re-use re- invent
- Westergasfabriek embodies this all

WesterGasfabriek

What we are



WesterGasfabriek

Westergasfabriek BV / Ltd. Healthy and independent

Westergasfabriek



Park: Giving space... to the neighborhood



WesterGasfabriek

for nature, sports and relaxation



WesterGasfabriek

Buildings are rented out on day to day basis



WesterGasfabriek

for festivals and events



WesterGasfabriek

Creates environment to meet and socialize



WesterGasfabriek

for art and culture



WesterGasfabriek

for business and conferences



WesterGasfabriek

10.000 m2 for permanent tenants & workplaces, including a kinder garden



WesterGasfabriek

Art House Cinema, Theatre, Television studio's



WesterGasfabriek

Restaurants, Clubs, Café's, Galleries



WesterGasfabriek

Thank You



WesterGasfabriek