

# NETHERLANDS

## Amsterdam: Advertisements on Scaffolding in front of Historic Facades

In 2010, the 17th-century canal ring area of Amsterdam was added to the World Heritage List. As in the opinion of the World Heritage Committee giant outdoor advertisements on scaffolding threaten the visual integrity of the site, “the application of measures to eradicate aggressive advertising hoardings on scaffolding” were recommended. As Amsterdam did not follow



Fig. 1: Amsterdam, Rokin, October 2018



Fig. 2: Amsterdam, Dam Square, next to the Royal Palace, December 2018

that recommendation, in 2011 UNESCO took the decision (35 COM78.100) that this “practice has to stop”. Moreover, Amsterdam was included in ICOMOS’ Heritage at Risk report.

Thanks to ICOMOS and UNESCO, and to the efforts of Amsterdam stakeholders VVAB and Wijkcentrum d’Oude Stadt (Community Centre of the Old City of Amsterdam) from that year on, the advertisements-on-scaffolding project stopped altogether. That’s to say until 2018.

To the surprise and shock of many, the giant advertisements were back in full glory! The Amsterdam authorities, juggling with percentages of advertisements covering the scaffolding, claim



Fig. 3: Amsterdam, Rokin, September 2018, giant advertisement on scaffolding

that they are small in size now. That claim can simply be disputed by these photographs. Moreover, the initial 2011 zero demand by ICOMOS and UNESCO was clear: “eradicate” and “stop” this practice.

In 2019, Amsterdam is actively no longer respecting, even violating the clear agreement made with UNESCO.

*In early 2020 the Amsterdam authorities proposed to ban (again) advertisements on scaffolding altogether. However, this proposal still has to be discussed and decided by the Amsterdam city council.*

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All photos by R. Rijpma



## High-rise Development Outside the 17th Century Canal Ring of Amsterdam

The municipality of Amsterdam has established a zoning plan for the new residential area 'Sluisbuurt' with high-rise buildings at slightly more than two kilometres from the World Heritage, outside the buffer zone of the '17th-century canal ring area of Amsterdam'. The new residential area has 14 high-rise buildings between 30 and 60 metres and 10 buildings above 60 metres. The two tallest towers are 120 and 125 metres high. Municipal impact assessment reports are mandatory above 30 metres. The average height of the old centre of Amsterdam is only 24 metres.

The impact assessment report shows that this high-rise cluster has a major visual effect on the surrounding landscape and may damage the visual integrity of the World Heritage. However, the municipality considers this damage acceptable. It is admitted that the high-rises are in theory visible from the World Heritage site, but that would not affect the Outstanding Universal Value, because the towers disappear in the tree crowns.

The Friends of the Inner City of Amsterdam (Vereniging Vrienden van de Amsterdamse Binnenstad, VVAB) do not agree with that. The VVAB with its 3000 members, mostly inhabitants of Amsterdam's historic centre, is recognised by the municipality as a stakeholder of the World Heritage. According to the VVAB, the high-rise cluster is in conflict with the municipal high-rise policy. In this policy, for the location where the high-rise cluster is to be built, only a single landmark of 60 metres is possible, not a cluster of high-rise towers. Such a high-rise is unprecedented for Amsterdam. An independent study, commissioned by the VVAB, also found that the visibility of the highest towers is underestimated. It can be assumed that the impact on the Outstanding Universal Value will be greater than described.

The municipality has informed UNESCO in accordance with paragraph 172 of the 'Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage'. In its technical report ICOMOS suggested that the State Party "prepare Heritage Impact Assessments to be carried out to consider the impact on the attributes of Outstanding Universal Value, something the (municipal) assessments do not examine, relying instead on purely visual measures".



Fig. 1: The World Heritage of Amsterdam (photo credit: Bureau Monumenten en Archeologie, City of Amsterdam)



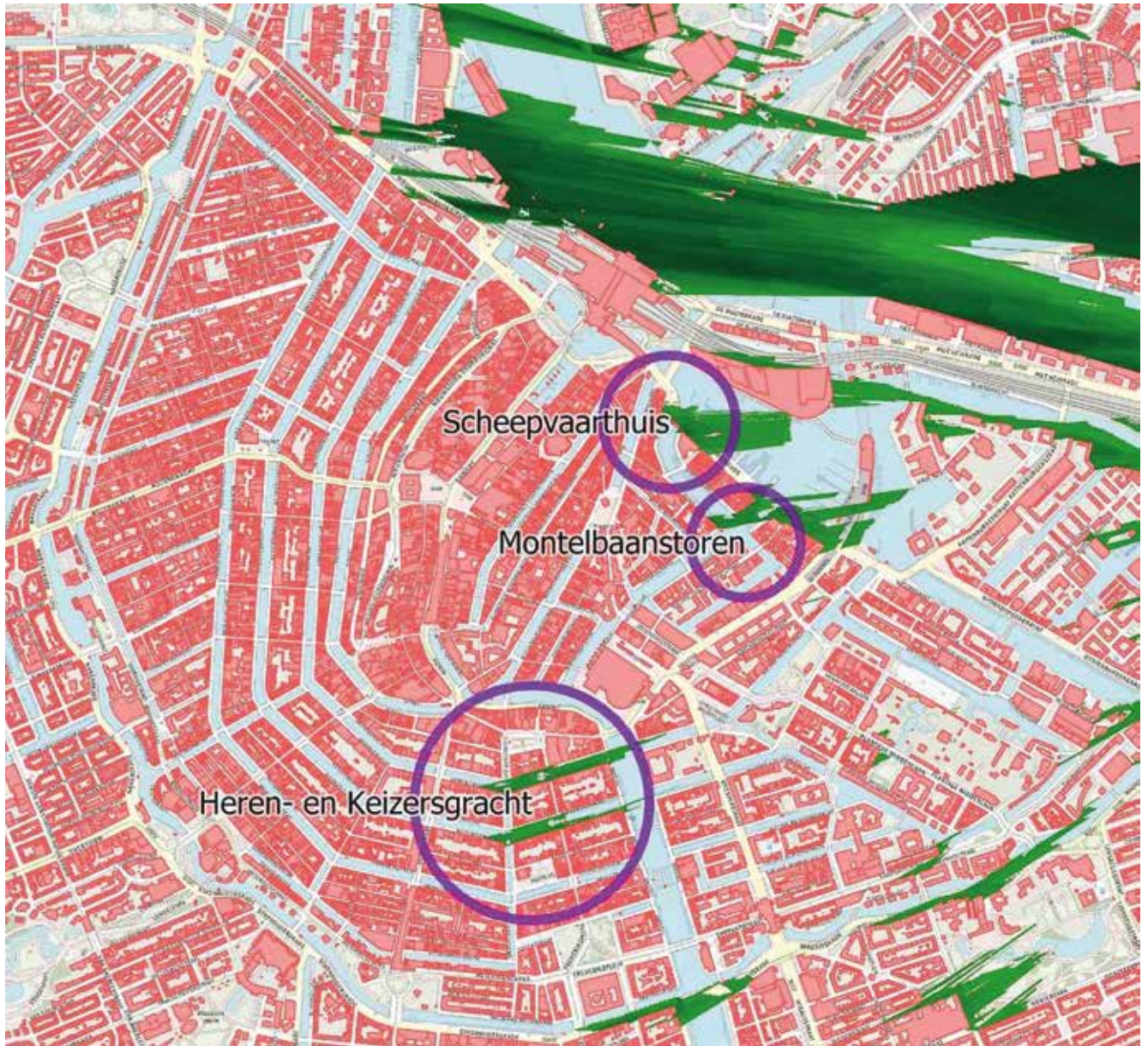


Fig. 2: Visibility of the high-rise development, in green, and the locations in the World Heritage where the highest risk is to be expected (see purple circles) (from the independent VVAB study).

The municipality has determined the zoning plan prematurely without awaiting a response from ICOMOS regarding the new impact assessment report, which uses the same criticised methodology. The new assessment report does not meet the requirements

of a Heritage Impact Assessment as described by ICOMOS, either.

The VVAB has taken the step to appeal to the highest court in the Netherlands, but hopes that UNESCO will respond as soon as possible.

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Fig. 3: Artistic impression of the Sluisbuurt high-rise development (from the municipality report on Sluisbuurt)