Constructing mosques: the governance of Islam in France and the Netherlands

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8.1. Introduction

Over the past years the image of the Netherlands abroad has changed from that of a guiding nation in the domain of immigrant integration policies to that of a country facing a deep crisis due to the failure of its multicultural policies. Social scientists argue that the Netherlands was a prime example of a country implementing multiculturalism, and that it now provides a first-class illustration of the disastrous effects of “granting group rights” to immigrants and allowing Muslims to set up “an Islamic pillar”.452 Others have argued that these critics misrepresent the actual progress of integration and that they far too easily suggest that continued problems with immigrant integration are the direct outcome of erroneous policy choices. In addition, so they argue, it is very doubtful whether in reality the Dutch ever implemented multicultural policies.453

This chapter makes a contribution to this debate by analysing policies of accommodation of Islam in the Netherlands since the early 1980s. It explores the ways Dutch integration policies and institutionalised church-state relations have structured public policies. The chapter in particular focuses on municipal public policy discussions around mosque creation in Rotterdam. This city has been at the forefront of discussions on immigrant integration and Islam in the Netherlands. Of special relevance is to see whether, and if so how and why, policy responses to mosque creation changed over time. In addition, the various institutional arrangements that were drawn upon in the local context are discussed. Finally, the chapter aims to generate possible explanations for the radical shifts in Dutch policy discussions over the past 8 years that have puzzled many outside observers.

8.2. Ethnic Minorities Policy and mosque creation in Rotterdam

In the 1980s Dutch immigrant integration policies started off on the premise that the Netherlands were now “de facto a country of immigration”.454 Ethnic Minorities Policies were based on dis-
tinctions between cultural minority groups, which would make it possible to attune policies to the specific circumstances of each group. This approach was driven by the twin ideals of equal opportunities and respect for cultural differences. A flourishing multicultural society could develop if immigrants would be enabled to participate fully and equally in society and if discriminatory talk and behaviour were not permitted. National and local advisory councils were set up that would allow a new generation of ethnic elites to replace the self-appointed Dutch fiduciaries who had represented migrants in the 1960s and 1970s. The slogan “integration with retention of cultural identity” became the motto of Minorities Policy. Emerging ethnic elites rapidly picked up this slogan to argue that successful integration did not require cultural assimilation and to justify their attempts to create community-based institutions.

Ethnic Minority Policy had a structural similarity to the foundational ideas of pillarisation. The legacy of the pillar-system, as a way of handling diversity, seemed of particular relevance for the religious dimension of integration. In 1982 this idea was developed by Klop, a member of the scientific bureau of the Christian Democrat Party (CDA), in an article entitled *Islam in the Netherlands: Fear of a new pillar*? According to him, Dutch history had shown that a certain level of isolation could be beneficial in the early stages of collective emancipation. At first, members of minority groups would be preoccupied with their own community, but later they would participate more in the central spheres of society (Klop 1982: 528). Another

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455. Minorities Policy distinguished between ethnic minorities (Turks, Moroccans, Yugoslavs, South-Europeans, Surinamese and Moluccans) and native underprivileged groups (caravan dwellers). Dutch policies were seen as paradigmatic for a pluralist approach by leading experts such as Entzinger 1984; and Castles 1995. In the late 1970s research on immigrant groups in the Netherlands was dominated by cultural anthropologists who had been influenced by more relativistic social theory paradigms and who argued that a certain level of engaging with immigrant cultures was necessary in order to understand group-specific needs. These scientists played an important role in the formation of Minorities Policy (Scholten 2008: 113ff.).

456. This view of the integration process was strongly indebted to the theories and categories developed in pioneering Dutch academic studies. See Penninx 1988; Penninx and Vermeulen (eds) 2000. See Scholten 2008: 97ff. on the relationships between policy development and social scientific research and on the role of the Advisory Committee on Minorities Research (ACOM) and the Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR) thereby. Minorities Policies also developed in tandem with a commitment to combat discrimination. Several policy measures were illustrative of a pluralist approach to immigrant integration. Dutch legislation was scrutinised as early as 1983 to see whether it contained elements of discrimination on the basis of nationality, race and religion (Beune and Hessels 1983). Existing programs for education in migrants’ native languages and culture were continued and new intercultural education programs were set up. The revision of the nationality law in 1986 made it easier for immigrants to become Dutch citizens. A National Advisory and Consultation Body (Landelijk Overleg en Inspraak Orgaan) for minority organizations was set up in 1985 and in 1985 active and passive voting rights for alien residents in local elections were introduced (See Penninx 2005).

457. Already in the late 1970s policy advisors had questioned the idea that immigrants could, in actual fact, preserve and hold on to their cultural identity. The Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR) had argued in 1979 that the slogan diverted attention away from the need for integration and adaptation. The council had argued that permanent immigrants could only successfully participate in Dutch society if there was a mutual adaptation of majorities and minorities, if immigrants respected the law and if the achievements of Dutch culture were protected (Scholten 2008: 104ff.; Minorities Bill 1983: 38-42). In 1985 a municipal memorandum in Rotterdam was even more outspoken and insisted that migrants should learn the Dutch language, show a willingness to adapt to the host society and should not “hold on too much to their own ‘identity’” (GR 1985: 14-16).
important lesson to be taken from the Dutch experience of pillarisation, was to see religion as “a force affecting all aspects of societal life”. Klop also thought that religion would remain important for immigrants and their offspring, whereas national and ethnic differences would slowly fade out. Therefore there were reasons to expect the forming of a kind of Dutch Islam that would eventually bring together various national groups of Muslims.\textsuperscript{458}

However plausible it may have seemed to Klop and others to think about the creation of Islamic institutions in light of the Dutch history of pillarisation, in actual fact policy responses to the presence of Islam in the 1980s were barely shaped by this idea.\textsuperscript{459} There was never much enthusiasm to see an Islamic pillar emerge.\textsuperscript{460} The collapse of the pillarised society was interpreted as a result of processes of individual emancipation, democratisation and growing social mobility.\textsuperscript{461} The overall emphasis in policy was on participation and integration. As important, there was also no enthusiasm on the part of emerging Muslim leaders in the Netherlands to create a Dutch Islamic pillar. The new ethnic and religious elites, and especially the Turks, set out to create ethnically-based religious organisations and religious institutions. The most important context for discussions about appropriate forms of Muslim organisation-building was the level of municipal politics.

8.2.1. Integration policies and Islam in Rotterdam in the 1980s

Policy makers in Rotterdam believed that by forming ethnic organisations immigrant communities would demonstrate that they were able “to accept their own responsibility”. In 1981 a special municipal bureau had been created to deal with ethnic groups, called the Migrants Office.\textsuperscript{462}

\textsuperscript{458} Klop (1982: 533) believed that religious diversity would prove to be lasting, whereas in a few generations ethnic and national differences would become nothing more than a “flourishing folklore”. For a discussion also Fermin 1997: 121ff. and Klop 1999. In 1983 Jan Slomp, who worked as an Islam expert for the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands and who participated in the Waardenburg Working Party (see below) wrote a critique of these ideas of Klop. He argued that the parallels that were drawn between the situation of Muslims and Roman Catholics and Orthodox Protestants were mistaken for three reasons: Muslims were immigrants who had a completely different mindset than Christian groups in the 19th century, there was no intention from the side of Muslims to create an Islamic pillar and Muslims were ethnically and denominationally a very heterogeneous group (cf. Hampsinck 1992: 3).

\textsuperscript{459} The suggestion that Dutch accommodation policies with regard to Islam in the 1980s and early 1990s were primarily shaped by “pillarisation” still figures prominently in political and academic debates. See for example Statham et al. 2005. For a critical discussion see Sunier 2000; Vink 2007; and Maussen 2009.

\textsuperscript{460} The idea that Muslims in the Netherlands should organise themselves around their religion, as opposed to them organising on the basis of ethnicity, continued to play a role within the Christian Democrat Party (CDA). The ideas of Klop (see above) were, for example, further developed by the sociologist Anton Zijderveld who was a prominent member of the Scientific Bureau of the CDA. For a discussion Maussen 2006: 61ff. On ideas about integration and religion within the CDA see also Fermin 1997.

\textsuperscript{461} See Kennedy 1995.

\textsuperscript{462} The Migrants Office had been created in 1981 to replace the municipal Bureau for Special Groups (Sunier 1996: 244). In 1980 the municipality had stimulated and subsidised the founding of a co-ordinating body for ethnic organisations: the Platform Foreigners Greater Rotterdam (\textit{Platform Buitenlanders Rijnmond}). The platform should function as an alternative to the Foundation for Foreign Workers in Greater Rotterdam (\textit{Stichting Buitenlandse Werknemers Rotterdam Rijnmond}) that was the typical form of welfare organisations set up during the guest workers regime and that was mainly administrated by Dutch fiduciaries. The Platform Foreigners
In a short text submitted to the Board of Mayor and Aldermen and entitled “Mosque groups as self-help organisations”, the Migrants Office sought to develop a more open approach to mosque associations (GR 1983). Municipal policies on employment, housing, family reunification and discrimination could be discussed with representatives of mosque associations. Hans Simons (Social Democrat Party, PvdA), the alderman who was responsible for Ethnic Minorities Policy, was open to the idea of mosque associations becoming “social partners in immigrant policy”.

To investigate the matter further, officials of the Migrants Office and alderman Simons met on three occasions with Turkish imams. These meetings were deemed a critical dialogue to underline that differences of opinion would be expressed, not concealed. During the third meeting, in February 1984, one of the municipal officials asked:

whether in the future there might be a looser relationship with the home country- for there are still intensive contacts with the embassy- and there might develop a kind of “Dutch Islam”, in which Moroccan, Pakistani and Dutch Muslims can also participate.

When municipal officials talked about the development of “a Dutch Islam” they also thought about integration and adaptation to Dutch culture. What role did the mosque play when it came to retention of religious and Turkish identity, and in view of the integration of Turkish men, women and youth in the Dutch society? And what did the imams think about Turkish parents who kept girls of school age at home during school time? Would imams be willing to try to motivate Turkish migrants to vote in the upcoming city district elections? The question about the practice of Turkish parents to give their children in marriage to partners in the country of origin was pushed forward to a later occasion. These questions were illustrative of the fear that conservative values and strong ties with Turkish society and government would hinder the integration process.

The Turkish imams presented their activities as an illustration of the ways in which Turks were able to take care of their community affairs. In their work, so the imams explained with the help of an interpreter, they put the emphasis on Turkish culture and combined spiritual counselling and religious instructions with teachings about Turkish culture and language lessons. They

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Greater Rotterdam refused membership to Muslim organisations because these were said to be not sufficiently “democratic” (Rath et al. 2001: 114). Initially, this was not a big deal as the municipality was only involved with secular ethnic organisations anyhow, and in the 1970s these had also been the most socially active forms of immigrants self-help organisation (Rath et al. 2001: 113-114).

463. Simons was the alderman of Social Affairs between 1983 and 1989. He had the portfolio of Special Groups and since 1985 that of Cultural Minorities (Sunier 1996: 143). He wanted to see whether some of the costs for non-religious activities and accommodation of Mosque Committees could be subsidized. Perhaps a special training could be developed for imams allowing them to “contribute to the emancipation and participation of Turkish migrants in Dutch society” (Rath et al. 2001: 115).

464. [“of in de toekomst wellicht sprake kan zijn van een lossere band met het thuisland –er zijn nu immers nog intensieve contacten met de ambassade – en er een soort “Nederlandse Islam” ontstaat, waarin ook de Marokkaanse, Pakistaanse en Nederlandse Islamieten kunnen participeren”]. Minutes of meeting with Turkish imams, February 14 1984, p.3. All policy notes, letters, minutes and transcripts that are not reproduced in an official publication by the municipality are to be found in the personal archive on Rotterdam of Frank Buijs, Jan Rath and myself.

465. [“de rol van de moskeeën bij het instandhouden van de religie en Turkse identiteit en de integratie van Turkse mannen, vrouwen en jongeren in de Nederlandse samenleving”]. Minutes of meeting with Turkish imams, February 14 1984, p.3.
were now giving priority to the development of a network of Turkish Muslim organisations and made clear that they were less enthusiastic about the development of inter-ethnic Muslim platforms in the Netherlands.\footnote{466} Also, the contacts with the municipality should not serve to “enforce Dutch policy upon the Turks” but should be about “the rights Turks have”.\footnote{467} The co-ordinator of the Turkish imams emphasized that Islam was “a universal religion” and rejected the term Dutch Islam.\footnote{468}

These reactions were illustrative of prevailing ideas and strategies within Turkish Muslim organisations. In 1979 the Turkish government stimulated the forming of the Turkish Islamic Cultural Federation (TICF) in the Netherlands, a platform of Muslim associations affiliated to the Directorate of Religious Affairs founded in 1924 by Atatürk and located in Ankara (the Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı). The idea was to foster strong ties between Turkish immigrants and their home country, to facilitate the forming of a Turkish Islam in Europe and to guarantee that the government had a direct influence on Turkish mosque associations abroad. With the creation of the Islamic Foundation in the Netherlands (ISN) in 1982, the properties of mosques affiliated with the Diyanet in the Netherlands were centralised, which meant that additional funds and mortgages for the creation of mosques became available (Landman 1992: 101ff.).\footnote{469} In Rotterdam, of the thirteen Turkish Muslim organisations that existed in 1985, six were affiliated with the TICF. These organisations had succeeded in achieving good relations with Dutch officials and all the imams who had been invited to the critical dialogues were working for the Diyanet (Sunier 1996: 86).

\footnote{466} The imams referred to the Foundation Muslim Organisations in the Netherlands (Stichting Federatie Moslim Organisaties in Nederland (FOMON)) that was one of the first inter-ethnic Muslim council set up in the Netherlands. However, the council was already moribund at the time (Landman 1992: 243-249). Actually, Turkish Diyanet associations remained sceptical (if not hostile) to attempts to develop Dutch Muslim institutions, such as a multi-ethnic platform of Islamic organisations and Dutch training programs for imams. They also left the multi-ethnic platform of Muslim organisations in Rotterdam (SPIOR) in the mid 1990s.

\footnote{467} “[als het niet gaat om het opdringen van Nederlands beleid aan de Turken, maar om het duidelijk maken van rechten die de Turken hebben”]. Minutes of meeting with Turkish imams, January 31 1984. Alderman Simons had suggested that the critical dialogues should also help to “get the municipal policy accepted, as far as possible, by those who are primarily concerned” [“Doelstelling is ook het gemeentelijk beleid voor zover mogelijk aanvaard te krijgen door de eerst betrokkenen”]. See policy note “Policy for mosques” [Beleid t.a.v. Moskeeën], April 1984.

\footnote{468} Minutes meeting with Turkish imams January 23 1984. During the final meeting the imams asked for more understanding from the side of Dutch society for Islamic and Turkish religious and cultural practices. Turkish girls often were insulted because of their clothes and headscarves and school boards insisted on mixed sports lessons and obligatory naked showering which were not allowed for Muslims. Minutes meeting with Turkish imams, February 14 1984.

\footnote{469} The Turkish government had become increasingly concerned about the growing influence of religious and political movements that were being suppressed in Turkey and that had succeeded in setting up networks in Western Europe. In response the government developed a threefold strategy: firstly, it supported the creation of national umbrella organisations of mosque associations in various Western European countries that were affiliated to the Turkish Directory of Religious Affairs. These mosque associations could receive financial support and were staffed with Turkish imams. Secondly, these associations were encouraged to begin a public relations campaign in which they warned public authorities in Western Europe about the dangers of Islamic fundamentalist movements. Simultaneously they argued that Muslim associations that were affiliated to the Diyanet were liberal and respectful of secularism. Thirdly, it sought to encourage the maintenance of cultural and religious bonds between Turks living in Western Europe and those living in Turkey (Landman 1992; Sunier 1996).
The critical dialogues had brought to light quite profound differences of opinion. Instead of spelling these out, the Rotterdam officials tried to avoid jeopardizing the recently established contacts. Ethnic Minorities Policy discourses provided a whole set of rather vague concepts to maintain this kind of suggestion of mutual understanding. All parties agreed “discrimination” and “assimilation” should be prevented and that the goal was “integration with retention of cultural identity”. To show that the imams were also in favour of “participation” they promised to encourage Turks to vote in the upcoming municipal elections.470

New attempts to develop relations with mosque associations

The dialogues with Turkish imams were only one among several attempts to see what kind of relationships could be established between the municipality and Muslim associations. Mosque associations in Rotterdam were struggling to survive and were hoping to receive some kind of financial support for their activities and accommodation costs. In 1984 a municipal Working Party on Self-help Organisations (Werkgroep Zelforganisaties) published an advisory report on municipal subsidies for ethnic organisations.471 It suggested making public subsidies available for activities in the areas of emancipation, education, integration, participation and identity formation, but only to the extent that these activities served to promote “the integration process of foreigners in all sections of Dutch society” (cited in Rath et al. 2001: 137). Public money would not be simply given to ethnic organisations without scrutinizing exactly its intended use. This approach created possibilities for Muslim associations to receive subsidies for some of their non-religious activities. The working party remained divided, however, on the question of whether mosque associations could actually become eligible for municipal subventions.

Parallel to the activities of the municipal Working Party on Self-help Organisations, a study on Turkish ethnic organizations was conducted between 1983 and 1985.472 The researcher, Hein de Graaf, distinguished between different functions of ethnic organisations. These could provide a “safe haven” (toevlucht) and “assistance” and they could contribute to “transformations in the own group” and “transformations in Dutch society”. Drawing on this typology De Graaf concluded that most Turkish organisations had set up activities aiming to preserve Turkish culture. Ethnic organisations, and the mosque associations above all, functioned as “safe havens” and as a kind of “cultural home”.473 He argued that mosque leaders were hardly able to act as brokers for ethnic groups because they barely spoke Dutch and were primarily defending the interests of their own faction (Buijs 1998: 44).

The classification developed by De Graaf was immediately absorbed in policy discourse. Mosques functioned as “cultural homes” and as “safe havens” and this was important, especially

470. The municipal elections in March 1986 were the first in which non-nationals would have the right to vote. This right was given to non-nationals who had lived in the Netherlands for a minimum continuous period of 5 years.


472. A summary of the report of 1983 had been sent to the members of the Rotterdam municipal council. Representatives of the TICF also mentioned the report in an address in which they asked for Muslim organisations to be treated on par with secular migrant organisations. In 1985 a more elaborate report on Turkish organisations in Rotterdam was published. See De Graaf 1983 and 1985 and for a discussion Buijs 1998: 43-44.

for migrants from rural areas who had difficulties in adapting to urban life; for them “the mosque [was] the only constant point in face of a risk of disorientation” (GR 1983: 4). These attempts to specify the exact functions of mosques had still not resulted in a framework that was clear and acceptable to all parties.\textsuperscript{474} At closer look distinct discourse coalitions had been formed of actors that supported different images of mosques. One coalition consisted of the officials of the Migrants Office, alderman Simons and the leaders of the Turkish mosques. They sponsored a frame in which the mosque was seen as a “cultural home” and the mosque association as an important form of “ethnic self-help organisation”. In addition, they believed that the government should be willing to financially support these kinds of institutions and activities. In an address to the municipal council in 1985, alderman Simons emphatically argued: “Their own community is the basis for the maintenance of the spiritual identity, a first condition for the kind of well being that Dutch society grants everyone”. If the council would now reject the requests to give at least some subsidies this would also “signify a setback in the chosen policy of trying to break through the isolation of the Moroccan and Turkish ethnic organisations”.\textsuperscript{475} This framing of mosque associations was also forcefully supported by the Turkish Muslim leaders who felt that at present Islamic organisations were being discriminated against (Buijs 1998: 43).\textsuperscript{476}

Another coalition was being formed that framed the creation of large, multipurpose mosques as a worrisome trend. Representatives of secular ethnic organisations had looked with dismay at the ways municipal officials and politicians had approached Muslim associations. In 1985 the Platform Foreigners Greater Rotterdam, that was not open to Muslim organisations, spoke out against any kind of municipal subventions for mosque associations. They questioned the idea that mosques had an important meeting place function. For one, there were hardly any spaces available for women and the youth. The municipality, it said, should stimulate the participation of migrants in public welfare facilities and subsidise only the activities organised by

\textsuperscript{474} In the meanwhile Turkish Muslim organisations sought to influence municipal decision-making and handed over a letter to the alderman that was signed by 2,443 mosque visitors. They demanded that mosque associations and other immigrants organisations would be treated equally. In April 1984 municipal officials came up with a new policy note called “Policy towards mosques” that acknowledged that often times ethnic organisations provided “a social, cultural and national home” to immigrants. The Board of Mayor and Aldermen was now inclined to give some subsidies to mosque associations. However, taking notice of the advice of the Working Party on Self Organisations, subsidies would only be available “on a very limited scale, exclusively for activities in the socio-cultural sphere directed at integration, and which were in no way at variance with municipal policy” (cited in Rath et al. 2001: 137). Alderman Simons, however, was willing to go a step further and also subsidize, on an incidental basis, some of the accommodation costs of the non-religious activities. In what ways accommodation costs for religious and non-religious activities were to be distinguished remained unclear. See letter by alderman Simons sent to various mosque associations and addressed to “the Muslim citizens of Rotterdam”, June 25 1984 and “Policy on mosques”(Beleid t.a.v. Moskeeën), April 1984.

\textsuperscript{475} “[De eigen gemeenschap is de basis voor het behoud van de geestelijke identiteit, een eerste voorwaarde voor het welzijn dat de Nederlandse samenleving iedereen gunt” (...) “een terugslag betekent voor het ingezette beleid van doorbreken van het isoleren van de Marokkaanse en Turkse eigen organisaties”] in “Subsidising Turkish and Moroccan mosques” [Subsidiëring Turkse en Marokkaanse moskeën]. Meeting Municipal Council Commission, April 2 1985.

\textsuperscript{476} As an intermediate solution some minor subsidies for the accommodation costs of language classes in mosques were made available in 1985. However, the financial benefits were so meagre that they could not take away the feeling that mosque associations were being disadvantaged. Turkish Muslim leaders thought that this stingy municipal attitude towards their associations stood in glaring contrast to the generous subsidies that were being given to secular ethnic organisations (Buijs 1998).
secular ethnic organisations. In addition, the creation of mosques by Turkish associations affiliated to the Milli Görüş and the Nürcu movements had led to anxiety among Dutch residents in some neighbourhoods. In the media these movements were portrayed as Islamic fundamentalist groups with “outspoken, right-wing political goals.”

These concerns were more elaborately explained in a letter addressed to the municipality in August 1987 and in an article in the periodical Traverse written by two migrant community workers. Migrant community workers were social workers who had been employed by the municipality to encourage the participation of immigrants in Urban Renewal Project Groups. The migrant community workers argued that mosque associations propagated conservative ideas about “education, gender relations, the authority of the father over the children, and matters of honour.” The Friday sermons, that were spoken of as a “form of propaganda”, were said to concentrate on themes such as feelings of honour and the obligation of women to wear the headscarf. Imams promoted “hatred of Jews and Christians”. Mosque associations also showed no interest in “the problems in the neighbourhood” and in actual fact they aimed to create a greater distance between the Turkish and Dutch populations and to obstruct the “integration of Turks in Dutch society” (Aksu and Dogan 1987: 9). The municipality had actually been fuelling this process of isolation and segregation by encouraging mosque associations to also develop sociocultural activities. Thereby the efforts of the migrant community workers to establish contacts between migrant communities and the Dutch residents and their attempts to stimulate the further emancipation of migrants were being nullified.

Migrant community, often of immigrant origin themselves, argued that originally small scale houses of worship had been created in Rotterdam that provided prayer space and meeting places for Turkish and Moroccan immigrants. However, in the 1980s the “fundamentalist” mosque associations had begun to create “large mosques” that catered to all kinds of activities. These mosque associations seemed to become like “a state in the state”. To visually emphasise these worrisome developments the earlier mentioned article in Traverse had been accompanied by a drawing representing a typical Rotterdam neighbourhood overshadowed by a huge replica of a Turkish mosque. This trend should be stemmed: mosques should return to their “original function”, serving as “rooms for prayer and nothing more” just as they did in Muslim countries. Welfare institutions should also become more open to Turkish men and organise activities for the young.

Initially, the alarming tone of the article was met with scepticism by municipal officials.\textsuperscript{482} However, it was also becoming clear that worries about the influence of the conservative mosques were resonating with the concerns of Dutch residents associations. The disagreements on the actual role that mosques played in the integration process made it increasingly unlikely that a generous and determined policy of subsidising mosque associations would see the light any time soon. In a policy note issued in December 1987, the municipality said it wanted to make Muslim organisations aware of the necessity to be active in domains such as “education, complementary schooling, work etc.”.\textsuperscript{483} This reserved attitude was also a reaction to the ongoing discussion in Rotterdam neighbourhoods.

\textsuperscript{482} Officials of the Migrants Office thought the ways the migrant community workers had voiced their concerns was inappropriate. In a policy note an official argued that speaking of Muslim “fundamentalist movements” in Rotterdam that supposedly were under the influence of Saudi Arabia and Iran was highly exaggerated. The article expressed outright hostility towards all mosque associations and as such it could better be understood as resulting from the outspoken left wing political ideas of the authors (Buijs 1998: 57).

\textsuperscript{483} Policy note “Rotterdam Municipal Policy with regard to mosques etc.”. [Beleid van de gemeente Rotterdam inzake moskeeën e.d.], October/December 1987.
8.2.2. Mosque creation and Urban Renewal Policies in Rotterdam

Throughout the 1980s the number of Islamic houses of worship increased steadily in Rotterdam, from 8 in 1980 to about 28 in 1987.\(^{484}\) Most prayer spaces were created in abandoned commercial premises and dwellings that were readily available in the older, more run-down neighbourhoods. Many of these neighbourhoods were selected for urban renewal. The newly created houses of worship often caused environmental problems: many buildings did not comply with fire and safety regulations, there was insufficient parking space available or the use of residential property had been changed without permission (Rath et al. 2001: 139). The municipality had tolerated illegal and semi-legal forms of mosque housing and did not enforce strict compliance with safety regulations. However, environmental problems were repeatedly signalled in the Urban Renewal Project Groups, where municipal officials worked closely with residents organisations to discuss urban and social renewal projects.

Mosques were also becoming symbols of the (perceived) over-concentration of immigrant populations in relatively poor neighbourhoods. Islam was now becoming a more central issue in protests against the presence of immigrant communities. In 1985, the residents organisation in the Feijenoord district protested against the “uncontrolled creation of new houses of worship in the city district” and especially against the creation of mosques that were affiliated with “conservative Muslim movements”.\(^{485}\) They called upon the municipality to specify the total number of mosques needed and to specify how these would be spread over the city districts.\(^{486}\) The residents questioned the role of the Migrants Office that, so they argued, unconditionally supported all initiatives to create a mosque.

In June 1985 the municipal council and the alderman discussed the letter of protest and decided to organise a meeting between the Urban Renewal Project Group and some officials of the Migrants Office. That meeting would serve to discuss short term solutions for some of the existing problems, whereas subsequently the Migrants Office would develop ideas for a more structural solution for the location of mosques in urban renewal districts.\(^{488}\) When discussing

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\(^{484}\) There were five prayer houses in 1979, eight in 1980, thirteen in 1982 and twenty-eight in 1987 (Landman 1992: 290; GR 1987a and 1987b).

\(^{485}\) Of the 8 houses of worship in the Southern part of Rotterdam 6 were established in premises that were on the list to be demolished or renovated because of Urban Renewal projects. The direct reason for the protest of the residents was the fact that a group of Moroccan Muslims was looking for a new location in Feijenoord and that a group of Turkish Muslims affiliated to the Milli Görüş movement had transformed a rented dwelling into a house of worship.

\(^{486}\) In 1982 an interdepartmental working party on mosque establishment had been formed, but it ceased its activities almost immediately because there was no money available to improve the housing situation. The Migrants Office made an overview of minority houses of worship in the city in 1982 and had suggested to establish a municipal housing policy and to include houses of prayer in municipal zoning plans (GR 1982 and 1983).

\(^{487}\) A special official worked at the Migrants Office since 1984, who was a Muslim himself, and who tried to help different groups in finding suitable accommodations. This new “Muslim employee”, Ibrahim Spalburg, had played a pioneering role in the development of Islam in Rotterdam. He had, for example, been involved in the project to create a central mosque in 1979 (see chapter 6) and later became the president of the platform of Muslim organisations set up in 1988.

\(^{488}\) The Migrants Office could make use of an overview of houses of worship that had been made in 1982. In the period July-October 1985 a new working group on mosque establishment was created that formulated proposals for the spreading of mosques over the city and made an overview of the accommodation problems.
the placing of mosques in the city districts it was clear that quite different understandings of the significance of mosque creation existed. In addition, the two main groups of actors that were opposing one another in these discussions about the placing of mosques overlapped with the groups that had been opposed in discussions about subsidies for mosque associations.

There were the officials of the Migrants Office and the leaders of some of the more active, mostly Turkish, mosque associations. They framed mosque creation as about providing for the elementary needs of a new group in society. As one official put it, if there was a private initiative of Muslims who had collected money for a house of worship than a “mosque [had] the right to exist” and by consequence “a space [had] to be found”.489 The alderman for Social Affairs, Simons, agreed with this view. The Migrants Office was simply a “service bureau”. According to the alderman, the fact that the Migrants Office put so much emphasis on the interests of mosque associations was also a result of “certain resistances” against mosques among the Dutch populations in the neighbourhoods.490 Leaders of a Turkish mosque association in Feijenoord spoke of discrimination against the Muslim population and said “they would defend with all the legal means at their disposition their rights to have a mosque in their neighbourhood”.491

Alternately, the residents associations suggested thinking of mosque establishment in Rotterdam in very different terms. The following fragment illustrates some of their arguments:

Also in the district Feijenoord/Northern Island we are convinced of the necessity of a Turkish and a Moroccan mosque. Because our district has almost 30% Muslims. But what we fear is that the uncontrolled growth in facilities, like it is becoming now, is socially a bad thing. Not only do we expect opposition from the Dutch population, there is also something brewing within the Turkish community. As residents’ associations, project bureau, but especially you as municipality, we are co-responsible that Feijenoord remains a liveable district. Riots, like they occurred in former days in the Afrikaanderwijk should be prevented at all times…492

The Feijenoord city district was thus represented as in need of careful management, both socially and physically. The immigrants living in a particular district were entitled to have adequate housing and facilities in the neighbourhood, but they should also make an effort to take some interest in the “problems of the neighbourhood”.493 The residents association thought that

489. Minutes meeting of the Migrants Office and the Project Group, June 14 1985.
492. [“Ook in de wijk Feijenoord/Noordereiland is men overtuigd van de noodzaak van een Turkse en een Marokkaanse moskee. Onze wijk bevat immers bijna 30% moslims. Waar we bang voor zijn is dat de wil-groei in voorzieningen, zoals die nu aan het ontstaan is, sociaal gezien een slechte zaak is. Niet alleen ver-wachten wij verzet van de Nederlandse bevolking, zeker binnen de Turkse gemeenschap broeit ook iets. Als Bewonersorganisatie, projectburo, maar zeker u als gemeente, zijn we er medeverantwoordelijk voor dat Feijenoord een leefbare wijk blijft. Rellen zoals die vroeger in de Afrikaanderwijk hebben plaatsgevonden moeten te allen tijde voorkomen worden”]. Letter of the residents association Feijenoord/Noordereiland, 1985, no further date.
493. In 1985 a special program had been set up called “Migrants, Urban Renewal and Community Work” [Projekt Migranten, Stadsvernieuwing en Opbouwwerk]. For this project the Rotterdam Institute for Community Work
each district should provide for “its own” Muslim residents and therefore there should be “district-oriented mosques” (wijkgerichte moskeëns). There was no room in Feijenoord for “urban mosques” (bovenwijkse moskeëns).  

Between 1985 and 1987 the relations between the residents organisations and the mosque associations in Rotterdam gravely deteriorated. The residents accused the officials of the Migrants Office of constantly siding with the mosque associations. The municipality could not afford a conflict ridden relationship with the residents associations, because it needed their support for major urban renewal projects. One possible way of getting out of this conflict was to find a way of thinking about mosque creation that would function as a bridge between the two parties involved. A crucial categorisation in this respect would prove to be the distinction between neighbourhood mosques and urban mosques.

In 1985 one of the officials of the Migrants Office had already suggested organising a municipal conference to discuss “mosque integration at the neighbourhood level” and to approach the location of mosques in a similar way as the planning of welfare facilities in the neighbourhoods. It would require more involvement of the central city government and the removal of the Migrants Office from the dossier to allow this new municipal position on mosque creation to crystallize between 1987 and 1991.

8.2.3. Towards a municipal policy on the housing of mosques

In September 1987 the director of the Municipal Secretariat of Social Affairs, Health and Cultural Minorities suggested subjecting mosque establishment to a “central municipal co-ordination”. Such a strategy had also been used to locate caravan dwellers and it might be an effective way to overcome protests and to rise above the “non-objective resistances in the neighbourhoods”. In the meanwhile an overview study was made jointly by officials of the Migrants Office and officials of the Urban Renewal Projects Coordinators Collective (PCC).
The study provided insight into the situation of houses of worship in the urban renewal districts and suggested some short term solutions (GR 1987a). The second part of the report was issued in October and discussed the structural solutions for the longer term. This second report had been made exclusively by officials of the PCC who had refused to further collaborate with the officials of the Migrants Office. The latter were said to be too unconditional in their support for new houses of worship and they were refusing to think about the societal consequences of the growing influence of conservative mosque associations and of the further concentration of immigrant populations in certain city districts (GR 1987b).

These detailed overview studies would form the basis for a new policy approach. One of the propositions was to concentrate on the issue of accommodation and to disentangle this aspect from the wider discussions about the societal role of mosque associations. The mosque issue was “complex” and “sensitive”. The municipality should refrain from taking sides in these discussions. In order to avoid “drowning in the unlimited”, municipal authorities should focus on urban renewal, unwanted situations and new creations. 499 It was to be expected, however, that solving the housing problems and preventing environmental nuisance could help to solve social problems and improve the relations between migrants and Dutch residents. Every neighbourhood with a sufficiently high percentage of foreigners should be willing to provide for “at least two mosques”. 500 A new project bureau was created that consisted of officials of the Urban Development Department and the Cultural Minorities Department. 501 The municipality was now ready to move forward. In the meanwhile, a new platform had been created by local Muslim associations in June 1988, called the Platform Islamic Organisations in Greater Rotterdam (Stichting Platform Islamitische Organisaties Rotterdam Rijnmond) (SPIOR). 502

A draft policy text was issued in early 1991, entitled “Faith in the Future. Mosques in Rotterdam” and announcing a “more stimulating and regulating approach” (GR 1992: 75). 503 There would be an overall “catching up operation” to improve the housing situation of mosques and four larger mosques would be built at “strategic locations”. These mosques would be located on major thoroughfares, catering to Muslims living in different neighbourhoods and providing primarily for the needs of the more numerous Turkish and Moroccan populations. The large mosques could also become “more recognisable” (herkenbare) and “well constructed” (bouwkundig goed). To ensure that these large mosques would be open to different Muslim communities they should be more “neutral”, meaning that they should not be dominated by any specific denominational group. Muslim associations that were likeminded and belonged to the same national group would be encouraged to “unite their forces” so as to create a larger mosque

501. This meant that the Migrants Office was removed from the dossier. Only a few years later the office disappeared altogether because of a reorganisation.
502. In October 1988 the municipal council decided to provide a substantial municipal subsidy to allow the platform to be developed and to promote the interests of Muslim associations in Rotterdam (Rath et al. 2001: 119ff.).
503. Several structural problems were identified, including the chronic lack of space, the stagnation of urban renewal projects, the illegal use of dwellings and commercial premises, illegal commercial activities in mosques, unsafe spaces and non-compliance with fire-regulations, nuisance for the surroundings, and mosques being targets of hatred of foreigners. References are to the final memorandum published in 1992.
There would be no direct subsidies for the creation of new houses of worship “because of the separation of church and state”. Mosque associations could benefit from urban renewal funds, however, if they would have to be relocated because of urban renewal projects. Somewhat inconsistently, the municipality promised it would do its best to convince the national government to issue a temporary subsidy regulation to help improve the housing situation of prayer spaces of ethnic minorities. Apparently, the principle of separation of church and state was not seen as an obstacle for direct financial support by the national government.

The mosque policy, which was to be implemented by the Town Planning and Housing Department, was based on three interrelated frames. Mosques in Rotterdam were primarily depicted as “neighbourhood facilities” (wijkvoorzieningen). This view helped to approach the mosque problematic within a framework of urban development and renewal policies. A central idea in urban renewal policy discourses was that social cohesion and the harmonious living together of different groups of residents would benefit from the availability of adequate facilities for each group. By speaking of “mosque integration at the city district level” the policy created a common perspective shared by the native Dutch and immigrant residents. All “residents of the neighbourhood” – Muslims and non-Muslims alike – had to reconcile their various interests and concerns. In this way the demand of mosque associations that immigrants be fully recognised as residents was reconciled with the demand of Dutch residents associations that immigrants should show more interest in “the problems of the neighbourhood”. Finally, mosque creation would from then on be discussed in the vocabularies typical of urban development. The “pragmatic approach” was supported by a vocabulary and a set of practices that transformed the issue of mosque creation into a matter of technical know-how, good urban planning and pragmatic balancing of ideas and interests. Urban planners would take the lead in the entire “planning process”. They made inventories of the existing accommodation problems. When there were plans for a new house of worship they would conduct a “location study” and determine the “supply area”, being the area of the city where the members of a specific mosque congregation lived. Municipal services would also monitor adherence to existing rules and regulations more strictly. Houses of worship would be subject to the same procedures and treatment as other premises. The relatively technical urban planning vocabulary and the embedding of mosque creation in urban planning regulatory practices helped to normalise what usually was seen as a sensitive and socially explosive issue.

This particular interpretation of the municipality’s role helped to finally move things forward. The municipal council, the city districts and the platform of residents associations reacted positively to the new policy proposal. The SPIOR also welcomed the municipality’s willingness...
to tackle the issue, but was critical of some aspects of the new policy. The urban planning lens downplayed the efforts Muslim newcomers had made to create houses of worship and how immigrants had experienced the obstacles and the opposition they had encountered. SPIOR (1991: 7) spoke of the “sacrifices of the Muslim community” and of “discrimination of Muslims in Dutch society”.508 The municipality had also put the discussion on the role of mosques for integration on hold. However, a particular normative view on the socio-cultural functioning of mosques in Rotterdam was being articulated, even though this was presented primarily as a result of urban planning considerations.509 The municipality hoped to see mosques in Rotterdam function primarily as places of worship and not as full-blown community centres organising all kinds of activities and risking obstructing integration.510 SPIOR argued that it was not up to the municipality to impose a view on the functioning of mosques because this went against the principle of separation of church and state. It was also inappropriate that the residents associations had been given a prominent role in these matters. Finally, there was also a striking silence in the policy memorandum concerning the way the creation of larger mosques entailed some kind of symbolic recognition of the presence of Islam. Policy makers emphasised that all places that “on a regular basis catered to collective worship” were considered as mosques, irrespective

508. SPIOR argued that mosque creation was also about the emancipation of immigrant groups and about recognition and not only, as the municipality now suggested, a matter of good urban planning and of incorporating a relatively new facility in the urban tissue. Municipal officials had acknowledged that often times mosques were targets of hatred of foreigners, but they had refrained from framing protest against mosques as being primarily inspired by hostility and prejudice. Residents associations had explicitly and repeatedly pointed out that protesting residents should not be disqualified as “racists”. SPIOR also objected to the way the residents associations were being involved and argued that it seemed as if residents associations would “determine how large a mosque should be and which activities are allowed to take place in it” (SPIOR 1991: 3).

509. Ironically, the mosque policy text was written by an official, Mustafa Aksu, who had previously worked as a migrant community worker and who was one of the authors of the earlier mentioned alarming article in Traverse that spoke about the growing influence of “fundamentalist” mosque associations and about mosques combining all kinds of activities and functioning like “a state in the state”. However, the need to separate different types of activities was now primarily defended from the perspective of town planning. The idea of the larger mosques functioning as “neutral prayer halls” was defended because “seen from a planning perspective” (ruimtelijk gezien) these kinds of mosques would be “the solution for many problems” (GR 1992: 36). Whatever mosque associations might claim, according to policy makers the majority of Turkish and Moroccan mosque-goers experienced prayer services as a “neutral event” (neutrale belevenis) and attended several different mosques without caring too much about the religious or political views of the boards of the respective mosque associations (GR 1992: 36). Muslim residents would be more inclined to go to the larger mosques that were located closest to their residency if these mosques were not affiliated to any specific “religious group”. It would also be better if religious education and Koran lessons could be accommodated in regular school buildings that were far more suited for that purpose. In “the Moroccan community education [had] already been separated from the mosque” (GR 1992: 39, my emphasis, M.M.). It would be even better if public welfare facilities were more accessible for Muslims, so that they no longer felt the need to set up their own welfare and leisure activities. The policy text also stipulated that in the future organisations that wanted to “express an ideology” should be located “clearly next to the mosque” (GR 1992: 39).

510. The Municipal Council Commission for Urban Development and Housing underlined that “socio-cultural activities and the accommodation of the meeting place function would better take place in public facilities from the viewpoint of integration”. Agenda Municipal Council Commission on Town Development, August 9 1991. The platform of migrant community workers had welcomed the fact that in the future functions would be separated. See “Reaction of the project migrant community work to the draft memorandum Faith in the Future” [Reaktie van het project migrantenopbouwwerk op de konseptnota Geloven in de toekomst], 1991 (no further date).
of whether they were small or large and whether they looked like mosques or not.\textsuperscript{511} There was only the rather vague suggestion that newly built mosques on strategic locations would be “well constructed” and “more recognisable”, immediately followed by the observation that this would help to “put a brake on initiatives to create new mosques”. Despite these criticisms and silences all stakeholders, including SPIOR, realised that their support for this policy approach would mean that finally real progress could be made. In 1991 the municipal council voted in favour of the new mosque policy. Throughout the 1990s the policy discourse developed around this municipal approach would structure public discussions on mosque creation in Rotterdam.

\section*{8.3. National discussions on subsidy schemes for mosques}

In the 1980s many mosques in the Netherlands still struggled with a chronic lack of space. On national policy agendas an important issue in this period was whether the national government had a responsibility in this matter and whether or not existing subsidy regulations should be continued. In August 1982 the Minister of Culture, Recreation and Social Work, De Boer (Christian Democrat Party, CDA) set up a working party that was presided over by one of the leading Dutch scholars on Islam at the time, Jacques Waardenburg. This working party would “advise on the need for premises in which members of cultural minorities can carry out their religious practices, the desirability of government support for this, and the conditions under which this support might be granted” (cited in Rath et al. 2001: 48). The working party published its final report in January 1983 entitled “Religious Facilities for Ethnic Minorities in the Netherlands” (Religieuze voorzieningen voor etnische minderheden in Nederland). It advocated a “fair and positive public policy for religious facilities for ethnic minorities”. Subsidy schemes for houses of worship should be prolonged and extended to all ethnic minorities. There should be no maximum budget and extra financial support should be provided for socio-cultural activities of minority religious organisations.\textsuperscript{512}

This plea was remarkable in light of ongoing amendments in church-state legislation. Since 1977 there had been negotiations between the churches and the government on ending

\textsuperscript{511} The idea that newly built mosques and minarets could function as symbols of the presence of Islam in the city had been brought up occasionally. It had been voiced, for example, around the plans for a central Rotterdam Mosque in 1979 and also around building plans for a purpose-built Turkish mosque in 1987. See Buijs 1998: 51ff.

\textsuperscript{512} See chapter 4 and 6 for a discussion of previous subsidy schemes. The General Regulation concerning Subsidies for Places of Worship (1976-1981) had resulted in subsidies for 31 mosques for a total amount of 1,657,650 guilders (Hampsink 1992: 17). The Temporary Regulation concerning Subsidies for Places of Worship for Muslims (1981-1983) had resulted in subsidies for 69 prayer houses for amounts varying between 2,760 and 30,000 (the maximum) guilders (Hirsch Ballin 1988: 80). These amounts stood in contrast to other subsidy schemes for the same purposes. The Regulation concerning financing of Church building in the IJsselmeerpolders had amounted to 27 million guilders of subsidies. The special regulations for Moluccans had resulted in subsidies of respectively 1,800,000 guilders and 300,000 guilders for maintenance costs for the mosque in Ridderkerk and a substantial amount had been given for the mosque in Waalwijk (Hampsink 1992: 19). Subsidies because of the Church Building Subsidy Act (1962-1975) alone amounted to a total of nearly 112 million guilders (Hirsch Ballin 1988: 33).
the financial obligations for salaries and pensions of religious personnel. Also with regard to
the financing of houses of worship the trend was towards non-financing. These ongoing legal
alterations were not seen as of much relevance for the Waardenburg Working Party. In line
with its official governmental instructions, the working party did not approach the issue of fi-
nancial support for minority religions in light of church-state legislation, but in light of Ethnic
Minorities Policy.

The working party argued that integration with retention of cultural identity meant that
immigrants were not obliged to “throw off their own identity once they decide to stay here”.
The creation of mosques should be understood as a part of the creation of a normal basic struc-
ture, which was a natural aspect of the formation of ethnic groups and settlement processes.
Immigrants should be able to benefit fully from the freedom of religion that existed in the
Netherlands (Werkgroep Waardenburg: 10-12). Cultural minorities were depicted as “victims of
the economic crisis” facing difficulties and “immense problems”, and willing to make “sacri-
fices” to create some basic facilities to provide for their cultural and religious needs.513 The Dutch
should be more critical about the way they approached immigrants and should become more
aware of what members of minority groups could experience as “discriminatory behaviour”:514

The responsibility of the government applies to all residents, but especially to immigrants
from the former colonies and to those who came to the Netherlands as employees because
of the government’s interference, and who have settled here as aliens to provide for the
labour demand.515

There were also more strategic reasons for a relatively generous subsidy regulation. It would
allow the government to create some goodwill among immigrant communities and halt the

513. Werkgroep Waardenburg 1983: 30, 32 and 78
514. One can also read in the report that the Dutch should understand that it “often makes the Muslims desperate that
their religion is not taken seriously. Yes, it makes them sad that only sporadically their own houses of worship
have been made available in the Netherlands”.[“dat het islamieten vaak radeloos maakt dat hun geloof niet serieus
wordt genomen. Ja, het stemde hen verdrietig dat er voor hen in Nederland nog maar sporadisch eigen gebeds-
ruimten ter beschikking zijn gekomen.”] (Werkgroep Waardenburg 1983: 40). This moralising tone and way of
thinking about government responsibility resembled the discourses of solidarity groups for foreign workers in the
1970s. This was no coincidence. In the late 1970s and early 1980s there existed dense networks between these
kind of support and solidarity groups, social scientists who were interested in immigration issues, and policy
makers. Researchers often displayed a strong sense of concern about the social position and difficulties of
minorities and argued that understanding the situation of immigrants required good knowledge of their cultural
and religious background and a sufficient level of engaging in alien cultures (Scholten 2008: 112ff.). This was
also the case of the Waardenburg Working Party. The president of the working party was Jacques Waardenburg,
a professor of Islam and phenomenology, and another member, Mr. Slomp, was also an Islam scholar. In terms
of research methods the working party had argued (1983: 5-6) that there needed to be “intensive conversations
with people from the respective groups” in order to understand the ways those involved themselves interpreted
their “life situation” and to understand what kind of needs existed with respect to religious facilities. Some of
the passages in the report cited above were illustrative of an approach in which engagement with the perspective of
immigrants was being combined with a critique of the lack of knowledge and sensitivity in Dutch society.

515. [“De verantwoordelijkheid van de overheid geldt voor alle ingezetenen, maar met name voor immigranten uit
vroegere koloniën en voor diegenen die als werknemers door overheidsbemoeienissen naar Nederland gekomen
zijn en zich hier als vreemdeling gevestigd hebben om de gevraagde arbeidsfunctie te vervullen”] (Werkgroep
growing “bitterness” (ressentiment) among the Muslim population (idem: 37 and 41). Public subsidies could also help to speed up the process of integration. The fact that immigrants were still struggling to create basic facilities was hampering the much needed process of reflecting on the “development of religion in a new and alien environment” (idem: 20). In addition, financial support and government involvement would help to prevent unwanted developments of Islam in the Netherlands. At this point the working party picked up on themes that already figured on policy agendas across Europe, such as the influence of Saudi Arabia and the dangers of Islamic fundamentalism. Public subsidies would prevent Arab countries stepping in to use their vast financial resources to create “uncontrollable influence” over Muslims in the Netherlands (idem: 17). The government should also stimulate the teaching of Muslim religious instructions in regular primary schools. In this way it would prevent Muslims from holding on to the “traditional models” of education that prevailed in Morocco, Turkey and Surinam, and that usually came down to “learning the Koran by heart” (idem: 33ff. and 51ff.).

The government tended to agree with the conclusions of the working party and in the new Minorities Memorandum, issued in 1983, argued that it should be avoided that the principle of separation of church and state would lead to a situation in which the religious facilities of minorities continued to lag behind (cf. Hirsch Ballin 1988: 81-82). However, it was obvious that clarity should be given as to how a new subsidy scheme fitted in with the new church-state legislation.

The issue of financing houses of worship for immigrants was now being more and more linked to political discussions about the appropriate relations between state and religion. In these discussions there was a growing opposition between the Christian Democrat Party (CDA) and secular parties such as the Social Democrat Party (PvdA) and the Liberal Party (VVD). This became clear when during the parliamentary discussions on the Minorities Policy Memorandum in 1984 a member of the Christian Democrat Party (CDA), Krajenbrink, tabled a motion for the government to take over the recommendations of the Waardenburg Working Party. This motion was rejected by a majority of the Social Democrats and Liberals (Rath et al. 2001: 49). In 1984 two MPs, Wiebinga (Liberal Party, VVD) and Dales (Social Democrat Party, PvdA) tabled a parliamentary motion arguing that a selective policy to support specific religious groups was unacceptable because of the principle of equal treatment and that of separation of church and state. Therefore subsidies for the building of houses of worship for ethnic minorities should be

516. Looking back on these discussions in 2003, the coordinator of Dutch Ethnic Minorities Policy in the late 1970s and 1980s – Henk Molleman- argued: “I have always regretted that the government did not financially contribute to mosques (...) because we did not financially contribute, we did not manage to get any influence. At the openings of mosques I heard imams mention big foreign subsidisers. Especially Saudi Arabia has a large influence on the mosques. If we had contributed financially, that foreign influence would not have been so big”.

517. In 1983 there were talks between the Prime Minister, the Minister of Internal Affairs and the Minister of Welfare, Health and Culture and representatives of church bodies, the Humanist Union and Hindu and Muslim groups. These talks served to “exchange ideas” about the implications of the new constitutional framework for the principles of equal treatment of religious and denominational groups and about the relations between church and state.
rejected (cf. Rath et al. 2001: 50). This motion was accepted by Parliament in October 1984. Another attempt to create a regulation to grant “investment subsidies” allowing minority groups to build houses of worship, was also obstructed by a parliamentary motion by the same MP’s in 1986.\(^{518}\) In reaction the government set up the State Committee concerning Subsidies to Churches and other Religious Societies (Commissie van advies inzake de criteria voor steunverlening aan kerkgenootschappen en andere genootschappen op geestelijke grondslag). This committee was presided by a legal scholar and prominent member of the Christian Democrat Party (CDA), Mr. Ernst Hirsch-Ballin.

The Hirsch-Ballin State Committee would advise the government on criteria for the state providing financial support and material facilities to church bodies and other spiritual associations, in particular for spiritual care, chaplaincies and houses of worship. The committee investigated these issues in light of constitutional and legal principles that were discussed in a historical and comparative perspective.\(^{519}\) The constitutional right to religious freedom was understood as meaning that citizens and groups should have the effective possibilities to exercise their legal rights. The principle of equal treatment was taken to imply that religious and secular worldviews were to be treated equally and that religious organisations should not be disadvantaged when it came to possibilities to receive state support for societal activities.

Starting off from this pluralist interpretation of the Dutch constitutional regime the committee argued that there were good grounds to reject structural subsidies to religious bodies (Hirsch Ballin 1988: 57).\(^{520}\) However, the committee also argued there were no constitutional reasons per se against financial or other forms of support for the exercise of religion. Sometimes “special circumstances” and a sense of even-handedness could justify state support.

At this point the committee criticised the ways in which politicians had framed the constitutional significance of the principles of separation of church and state and of equal treatment in discussions around the recommendations of the Waardenburg Working Party. The Hirsch-Ballin State Committee observed that more established religious communities, and most of all the Christian Churches, had benefited from state support in the past.\(^{521}\) Furthermore, a special fund had been created to provide for the costs of maintenance of Moluccan churches and mosques and the state had contributed 12.6 million guilders to this fund (idem 1988: 81). Turkish and

\(^{518}\) In March 1986 the Ministers of Internal Affairs and of Welfare, Health and Culture wrote a letter to Parliament stating that the government would indeed refrain from a general subsidy regulation. Instead, possibilities would be created to provide “investment subsidies for social-cultural spaces that can also serve as prayer spaces” (Hirsch Ballin 1988: 82). Until 1989 400,000 guilders would be set aside on the budget for welfare of minority groups that could be used to co-finance the costs of investment to create these kind of premises. However, a new motion tabled by the same MP’s, Wiebinga and Dales, also obstructed this plan, which, as they had argued, was merely a subsidy scheme in a concealed form.

\(^{519}\) In this sense the report of the Hirsch-Ballin State Committee resembled the report by the Machelon commission in France (see chapter 7).

\(^{520}\) The combination of state support and infringement in the internal organisation of religions had been a part of the Dutch approach until the mid 19th century. Only with the 1848 constitution and the 1853 law on church bodies the principle of non-infringement had been laid down (Hirsch-Ballin 1988: 22ff. and 57). See chapter 2.

\(^{521}\) The ending of financial relations in view of the revision of the constitution in 1983 had resulted in a transfer of a substantial amount to those religious communities that, comparatively speaking, had already been privileged in earlier periods. In May 1981 the state had agreed to pay 250 million guilders to the church bodies to buy off its financial commitments for salaries and pensions of ministers of religion.
Moroccan Muslim communities had also been able to benefit from, far less generous, subsidy schemes. However, other groups, such as the Surinamese Muslims and Hindus and the Buddhist refugees from South East Asia, had not been able to benefit from any support. According to the committee this was unfair:

The committee cannot but observe … that Dutch society has gradually evolved towards the present situation that is ruled by the principle of separation and by articles 1 and 6 of the constitution. Where in the past there has been room for direct support for buildings catering for church bodies – and for which the reasons justifying that support at the time can be established – the associations of minorities have practically not been having any part in this.522

To compensate these groups the committee advocated a one-time and temporary subsidy scheme. This could, for example, result in a regulation for a period of three years, covering 30% of the costs of the creation or renovation of houses of worship and with a maximum amount of 750,000 guilders. The committee also advised that a criterion for subsidy would be that the “group to which the association belongs” had not been able to benefit from one of the earlier subsidy schemes (idem: 84ff.).

In national government circles there was support for these recommendations (Rath et al. 2001: 51). Municipal governments also believed that a national subsidy scheme was a good idea. In Rotterdam the municipality had expressed the hope that the proposals of the Hirsch-Ballin State Committee would be implemented so that additional financial means would become available for the municipal mosque policy (GR 1992: 44). Also the Minister of Internal Affairs, Van Dijk (Christian Democratic Party, CDA) and Christian Democrat MP’s spoke out in favour of a temporary subsidy scheme. However, MP’s of the Social Democrat Party announced that they were not in favour of the state subsidising church building of minorities (Rath et al. 2001: 51). It was up to the new government that would accede to power in 1989 to decide on what to do with the recommendations.

Political support for the kind of pluralist interpretation of church-state legislation that was developed by the Hirsch-Ballin State Committee, however, was waning as secular parties became more outspokenly opposed to any kind of financial support for financing of houses of worship. The principled debates on subsidy schemes for immigrant minority religions foreshadowed political debates in the 1990s when secular parties sought to do away with some of the institutional and legal remnants of pillarisation that, so they argued, had become obsolete in a society that was increasingly secularised.523 However, the coalition government that was formed

522. [“Voor deze groepen geldt dat zij door hun recente komst naar Nederland niet in de gelegenheid zijn geweest de historische ontwikkeling mee te maken die heeft geleid tot het huidige voorzieningenniveau van de kerkgenootschappen, noch hebben kunnen gebruik maken van regelingen betreffende subsidiëring van gebedsruimten. De commissie kan niet anders constateren … dan dat de Nederlandse samenleving met een zekere geleidelijkheid is toegegroeid naar de huidige situatie welke beheerst wordt door het scheidingsbeginsel en de artikelen 1 en 6 van de Grondwet. Waar in het verleden ruimte was voor directe steunverlening ten behoeve van gebouwen die de kerkgenootschappen ten dienste staan – en waarvoor in die tijd ook redenen kunnen worden aangegeven – hebben genootschappen uit minderhedenkring daaraan praktisch geen deel gehad”] (Hirsch-Ballin 1988: 84).

523. The Purple Coalition Government (1994-2002), the first government since the Second World War that did not include the Christian Democrats, would legislate on a series of issues that until then had met with opposition of Christian parties, such as euthanasia and same-sex marriages.
in 1989 included both Social Democrats (PvdA) and the Christian Democrats (CDA). Ironically also, one of the MPs tabling the motions against a subsidy scheme for minority religions in the mid 1980s, Ien Dales (Social Democrat Party, PvdA), had now become the new Minister of Internal Affairs and the president of the State Committee, Ernst Hirsch-Ballin (Christian Democratic Party, CDA), had become Minister of Justice.

The Minister of Internal Affairs seemed little inclined to speed up the process, which was not surprising given her earlier position on the matter. In March 1991 the minister declared that discussions with representatives of religious minority organisations had shown that actually there was no longer a shortage of houses of worship (Rath et al. 2001: 52). In this way she effectively dismissed the whole idea of a subsidy scheme without engaging in a renewed principled discussion about constitutional principles and the goals of Ethnic Minorities Policy.

8.4. Integration policy, multicultural architecture and executing the mosque policy in Rotterdam 1992-2002

In the early 1990s Dutch integration policies began to move away from the pluralist orientation of Ethnic Minorities Policy. The immigrant population had been growing rapidly and continued to grow because of family reunification, marriage immigration and, especially since the mid 1990s, because of a growing influx of asylum seekers. Key elements of the multicultural approach were being gradually abolished, such as government sponsored native language classes, migrant advisory councils, and the generous and constant subsidies for ethnic organisations. A new vocabulary sought to sustain a frame-shift towards an individual-oriented approach: Ethnic Minorities Policy became “integration policy”, members of ethnic groups became the allochtonous (allochtonen) and great emphasis was put on “civic integration” (inburgering) a concept that was introduced in the mid 1990s. The Purple Coalition Government that ruled the country between 1994 and 2002 based its immigration policies on the idea that successful integration would result from empowerment of individual migrants and creating equal opportunities for participation in the economy and in Dutch society at large.

Islam figured occasionally on the public agenda in the 1990s. In 1991 Frits Bolkestein, the leader of the Liberal Party (VVD), caused some turmoil by arguing in an address to the Liberal International Conference that Islam and Western values were irreconcilable. He believed that immigrants should adapt to the dominant cultural patterns of Dutch society. In 1997 Pim Fortuyn, at the time a well known columnist of the weekly Elsevier, published a book on “The Islamisation of Dutch society” in which he argued that liberal values concerning homosexuality and women’s emancipation should be defended against the conservative influence of

524. Representatives of one of the larger Muslim Federations maintained that they had not been consulted and that there was still an urgent need for adequate prayer spaces.

525. Already in 1989 the Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR) had advised the government to try and restrict further immigration, to put more emphasis on employment policies and to further develop Dutch language education and other forms of training for immigrants.

526. The idea was developed in the 1994 Contours Memorandum Integration Policy (see Scholten 2008: 164ff.).

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Islam. On the whole, however, these kind of alarming outcries were the exception rather than the rule in discussions about integration and Islam in the 1990s (cf. Prins 2004).

More became known about Islam in the Netherlands because of a series of academic studies. These essentially argued that the process of institutionalisation was steadily moving forward and that Muslims and Dutch society were getting more accustomed to one another. The consensus among academics was that in an international comparative perspective, the conditions for Muslims in the Netherlands were very favourable (Rath et al. 2001: 286).

As in France, there was also a growing interest in the development of religion and the formation of organisations among younger Muslims. Dutch researchers in the mid 1990s also observed a gap between the individualised Islam of “the young” who had made a “cognitive shift” (Sunier 1996) and the traditionalist Islam of “the fathers” who remained strongly oriented towards the countries of origin (Phalet et al. 2000). In public debate and policy the findings and reasoning in these academic studies translated into optimism: Islam was finding its place.

The national government was now only marginally involved in the development of policy responses. Many legal aspects of the incorporation of Islamic practices and institutions had already been regulated in the 1980s. The government remained implicated in successive attempts to create some form of national Muslim council and a training program for imams and in the late 1990s the Inspectorate for Education became increasingly involved in investigating the functioning of the growing number of Muslim primary schools (Maussen 2006: 43ff.). Mostly, however, the further accommodation of Muslim needs and demands for recognition had become a matter for municipal governments to solve.

In Rotterdam, integration policies had traditionally focussed on the need for immigrants to participate and integrate. By the 1990s the remnants of the older style multiculturalism and the understanding for immigrants “retaining their cultural identity” had been even further marginalized in local policy discourse. However, in the mid 1990s there gradually developed a new kind of multicultural policy discourse at the municipal level. Ethnic Minorities Policy and its “group-approach” was criticised in retrospect as too paternalistic. Culture and identity should be seen as fluid and policy makers should understand the ways individuals were able to find their way between various allegiances and identities.

Municipal governments that were dissatisfied with traditional Ethnic Minorities Policies turned to “diversity policies” as a new approach. Strongly inspired by fashionable diversity management philosophies in the private sector, diversity policies suggested focussing on the ways all individuals were “different” and how this could be a source of enrichment for society as a whole. The receiving society should be sufficiently open-minded, willing to endorse difference and to combat discrimination. In Rotterdam this kind of “diversity talk” became increasingly important for local policy discourse when a new municipal government succeeded to power in 1998.


528. The phase in which diversity policies became increasingly popular in the domain of integration issues is usually overlooked in studies that focus exclusively on the national level (Penninx 2005; and Scholten 2008). By contrast, studies on local integration policies have pointed to the importance of these policy frames. See Alexander (2006) and Uitermark and Van Steenbergen (2006) who speak of post-multicultural policies. See also Maussen 2006.

8.4.1. Negotiating the location and functioning of larger mosques: discussions on the Kocatepe Mosque

In 1993 a special bureau had been created at the Town Planning and Housing Department to implement the mosque policy. The municipality had posited that mosque associations should preferably separate their religious from educational, social and cultural activities. Larger mosques would also be created outside the neighbourhoods, which was sensible from the perspective of urban planning, as it would be far easier to find building sites outside the neighbourhoods. Policy makers had also argued that the location of a large mosque in the middle of a neighbourhood led to the unwanted “stigmatisation” of these neighbourhoods as Turkish or Moroccan and that large mosques could easily become seen as symbols of ethnic segregation (GR 1992: 35-37). Larger mosques should concentrate on their “prayer function”. It remained to be seen what kind of policy instruments the municipality had to impose these ideas.

One of the first test-cases presented itself with the relocation of the Turkish Kocatepe mosque, one of the oldest mosques in Rotterdam. The mosque association had been looking for a new accommodation since the mid 1980s. In 1991 the Town Planning Department pointed to the Kocatepe mosque association as the “main candidate” to build a new Turkish mosque. Urban planners hoped that a new “grandiose” mosque might also be attractive to the Turkish Muslims who until then visited the nearby Fatih Mosque. Municipal and city district officials and the residents associations spoke out in favour of a location somewhat on the outskirts of Hillesluis, an adjacent neighbourhood of the Afrikaanderwijk. Municipal officials put some pressure on the Kocatepe association to accept this location by threatening to open negotiations with “other candidates”. This had been seen as one of the instruments to execute the mosque policy: mosque associations that would not collaborate would be warned that they might “miss the boat” (GR 1992: 37).

The Kocatepe mosque association was not enthusiastic about the suggested location. Members of the mosque congregation feared vandalism because of the neighbouring Feijenoord soccer stadium and they believed that the location was too far removed from where most of the worshippers lived. During a meeting with the alderman of Urban Renewal and Housing, Hans Vermeulen (Social Democrat Party, PvdA) in February 1993, Turkish speakers underlined that the mosque should be located in the centre of the district so as to “remain a meeting place for the Turkish Islamic community”. A protest banner copied the municipal policy vocabulary: “we want to stay in the supply area”. A location on the outskirts of the neighbourhood, which had been presented as a pragmatic solution to avoid environmental nuisance and traffic jams, was now being represented as an attempt to take the mosque out of the neighbourhood and even as a way of putting Muslims away on an “outside area”. The mosque associations also underlined that they did not intend to build a “neutral” prayer hall but a multipurpose Turkish Islamic community centre.

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530. SPIOR (1991: 5) had argued that public authorities could not impose their ideas on the functioning of Muslim associations or on the character of mosque buildings. The platform also underlined that historically mosques had always been “centres of education”.


533. One Turkish speaker said to a journalist: “for the Dutch one also does not build a church in an outside area (buitengebied)”. Cited in Rotterdams Dagblad February 18 1993.
These protests created a serious problem for the municipality. If it chose to persist it seemed unavoidable that a conflict would result with one of the most influential Turkish Muslim associations. Officials still believed though that it was necessary to “separate functions” in order to build what were now labelled “large, recognisable, future oriented mosques-to-be-proud-of”.\footnote{Minutes Meeting Department of Town Planning on the executing of the mosque policy, March 12 1993. In an attempt to find a solution the municipality suggested another location in 1994. This location was more centrally located in the Afrikaanderwijk, but it would take no less than 7 years before building activities could begin.} In 1995 a new opportunity presented itself. A large school building of some 6500 square meters, located on a square in the centre of the Afrikaanderwijk became available. The Kocatepe Mosque Committee immediately expressed its intention to purchase the building.

The municipality now decided in favour of this solution. If the Kocatepe mosque association could create a mosque in the former school building this would solve its accommodation problems in a relatively short amount of time. The fact that mosques continued to cater to educational and cultural activities was by now also accepted as an inevitable reality.\footnote{Mosque associations preferred to organise activities in their own buildings rather than making use of public facilities and also argued they had the liberty to make use of their own spaces as they deemed appropriate (GR 1994: 8). The general liberalisation of the Shops Acts also meant that it became far less problematic for mosques to cater for small scale commercial activities such as selling groceries and religious and ethnic products.} However, by allowing for the creation of a large multipurpose mosque within a neighbourhood the municipality was compromising the deal that had been made with the residents associations in the late 1980s. The idea had been that mosques located in the neighbourhoods would function as normal “neighbourhood facilities”. Once it became known that the Kocatepe association wanted to purchase the school building the residents associations in the Afrikaanderwijk protested.

The Dutch residents argued that the Turkish community deserved a beautiful mosque and that Muslims “should not worship on the street”. However, a part of the school building should remain available for other purposes, such as a neighbourhood education centre on biology and for the lessons of a primary school in the district. A mosque that would occupy the entire school building was far beyond the “normal size”. Other residents – including “some of the Turkish residents” – were said to be afraid of the “creation of a huge religious fortress (bolwerk)” that would “dominate their life in the neighbourhood”.\footnote{Note distributed during a public hearing on November 14 1995.} Residents spoke of “stories going around” about the creation of a “mammoth mosque” with an Islamic school and shops.\footnote{[“Zo gaan nu verhalen over de vestiging van een mammoet-moskee met een islamitische school, winkels en verhuur van zalen voor partijen”]. Letter of the platform of associations in the Afrikaanderwijk to the Daily Board of the City District Feijenoord, April 19 1995.} The school building should be converted into “a multifunctional centre, for the whole neighbourhood” and within that centre a mosque could be created.\footnote{Besluitenlijst commissie ROGR, January 23 1996.} In this view the overall emphasis was on facilitating integration and the underlying idea was to avoid Islamic practice of "stories going around" about the creation of a “mammoth mosque” with an Islamic school and shops. The municipality now decided in favour of this solution. If the Kocatepe mosque association could create a mosque in the former school building this would solve its accommodation problems in a relatively short amount of time. The fact that mosques continued to cater to educational and cultural activities was by now also accepted as an inevitable reality. However, by allowing for the creation of a large multipurpose mosque within a neighbourhood the municipality was compromising the deal that had been made with the residents associations in the late 1980s. The idea had been that mosques located in the neighbourhoods would function as normal “neighbourhood facilities”. Once it became known that the Kocatepe association wanted to purchase the school building the residents associations in the Afrikaanderwijk protested.

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The discussions stimulated others to articulate views on the ways mosques could function. A city district council member, Van Grunsven (City Party, Stadspartij) argued that she was a “principled advocate” of “multicultural community centres” (multiculturele buurthuizen).\footnote{[“Het moet een multifunctioneel centrum zijn, voor de gehele buurt. En daarin kan ook best een moskee zijn gevestigd”] in “Weer verzet tegen verkoop van Oldenbarneveltschool” in Rotterdams Dagblad February 7 1996.} The school building should be converted into “a multifunctional centre, for the whole neighbourhood” and within that centre a mosque could be created. In this view the overall emphasis was on facilitating integration and the underlying idea was to avoid Islamic practice...
becoming isolated from the neighbourhood society. Interestingly, in the early 1990s the board of the Kocatepe Mosque Committee had also developed ideas about ways to avoid the mosque being experienced as an inaccessible and inwardly turned institution within the district. The younger Muslims who had dominated the board at the time had wanted to develop contacts with organisations and residents in the neighbourhood and they believed that “the mosque de facto [had] a place in the neighbourhood society” (cited in Sunier 1996: 119, my translation, M.M.). However, now a new wind was blowing. The new board members, mostly of an older generation than their predecessors, were primarily interested in further developing a Turkish religious infrastructure. In fact, within Turkish Muslim associations the ideas developed by the young board in the early 1990s were the exception rather than the rule. A study on Turkish Muslim organisations in Rotterdam conducted in the mid 1990s concluded that the leaders without exception gave priority to maintaining and strengthening Turkish identity (Canatan 2001: 185; Sunier 1996: 135). A compromise was reached in the end and the building was sold to the Mosque Committee under the condition that it would allow the primary school to temporarily use some of the class rooms. Still, this compromise could not prevent that the relationship between the Turkish mosque association and the residents associations had considerably worsened (Buijs 1998: 75ff.).

By the mid 1990s the municipality had become convinced that it had few instruments to impose its ideas. The Turkish mosque associations further pursued their strategy to develop a strong Turkish Islamic infrastructure, while seeking to remain on good terms with the Dutch authorities and the neighbouring residents. Effectively, the larger Turkish mosques developed into independent and full-fledged ethno-religious community centres. The municipality, on the other hand, emphasised time and again that its priority lay with improving the housing conditions, not with developing or imposing a view on the functioning of mosques. (GR 1995: 10).

8.4.2. Normalising and exceptionalising mosque creation: Urban planning, multicultural architecture and discussions on the Essalam mosque

When politicians and municipal officials looked back on ten years of municipal mosque policy in 2002, they congratulated themselves on having successfully guided the process of mosque location. The total number of houses of worship had decreased to 36 and the remaining mosque associations were better housed. There seemed to have developed a gradual process of mutual accommodation between neighbouring residents and mosque associations. Occasionally delegations from other Dutch cities visited Rotterdam to learn from their approach. The municipal government had decided to adopt “a pragmatic approach within a town planning perspec-

540. Buijs and Schuster (2001: 91) came to the same conclusion in a study on the relocation of a Moroccan mosque in the mid 1990s.

541. Also at the national level Turkish Muslim organisations successfully obstructed attempts to set up a Dutch imam training that would function as an alternative to religious education in Turkey. They also remained extremely reserved when it came to participation in multi-ethnic Muslim platforms, both nationally and locally (Landman 1992; Maussen 2006).

The municipal approach functioned as a two-edged sword: it allowed municipal officials to be strict when dealing with the boards of mosque associations. Mosque associations should learn to accept how town planning in the Netherlands included many rules and regulations and gave ample opportunities to residents to object and protest against building plans. Muslim representatives should not all too rapidly accuse other stakeholders of hostility and discrimination. Conversely, municipal officials could rely on a relatively technical approach when dealing with the emotions on the side of the Dutch residents for whom mosque creation often functioned as a “crystallisation point of the fear for an increase of the number of allochtonen” and worries about changes in the “social structure” of the neighbourhoods (GR 2002: 34). A lot of effort had been put in creating “more knowledge and understanding for this new facility” (GR 2002: 21). One of the occasions to put this approach to work was around the building of a new Moroccan mosque.

Defending and opposing mosque creation: symbol of cultural diversity or regular neighbourhood facility?

The Moroccan Essalam mosque association had actively begun looking for a new accommodation in 1994. When it turned out that another Moroccan mosque association located in the same district, the El Mohcinine association, was also looking for a new place the idea arose to aim for the building of a larger mosque to cater to the two congregations. In 1995 a location was found on the edge of the neighbourhood where a mosque could be built on a green belt that was squeezed in between an apartment complex, a school building and a fly-over. The location close to the borders of the rives Maas, was quite remarkable, and because of urban development programs the new mosque would in a few years time be bordering on the prestigious newly built urban area called the “Head of South” (Kop van Zuid). The Essalam mosque association, the municipality and the city district were all enthusiastic. Protests between 1995 and 2001 would mainly be voiced by a group of residents living in the neighbouring apartment complex.

By 1995 the plans for a new mosque building that had until then been developed by the mosque associations and the municipal officials had become sufficiently concrete to be discussed with the other immediate stakeholders. In an interview with a local newspaper the

543. Interview with Maaike Groen, Project-leader mosque policy, Rotterdam, July 23 2001. Policy texts and statements on Islamic houses of worship in Rotterdam were built up around the image of mosques becoming more adequate and more safe. A typical illustration thereof was an interview with the municipal policy coordinator in 1995. The journal article was subtitled “a search for place for good facilities”, new mosques were replacements of “mosques that had outgrown their coat” and the header of the article cited the coordinator: “It is mainly about good mosques “. See “Plannen voor vijf grotere moskeeën. Speurtocht naar goéde voorzieningen” in Rotterdams Dagblad July 20 1995.

544. [“In deze deelgemeente (IJsselmonde, M.M.) werkt de potentiële vestiging van een moskee als kristallisatiepunt voor de angst voor toename van het aantal allochtonen, de angst voor een verandering in de sociale structuur die hoe dan ook al aan de gang is”] (GR 2002: 34).

545. This also meant that discussions would become more public. The SPIOR had come to play an important role in helping representatives of mosque associations find their way through complex urban planning procedures and write letters and declarations to publicly explain their plans and demands. Municipal officials of the Town Planning and Housing Department and the some of the leading figures of SPIOR were on good terms and this facilitated the role of go-between of the Muslim platform.
vice-president of the Essalam mosque association, Abdelrazak Boutaher underscored that a new house of worship was urgently needed. In addition, the new building could serve for religious instructions, language lessons and for new activities for women and the youth. A relatively new idea was that a new and beautiful mosque would also be of value for the neighbourhood as a whole:

For Dutch society a newly built mosque means an enrichment to the urban landscape. It expresses the multicultural society in Feijenoord and shows that people with different cultural backgrounds can live together in harmony. For the Dutch with a migrant background it represents recognition, positive reception and above all, acceptance of their cultural and religious background.

This idea of a new mosque being an “enrichment to the urban landscape” had gained some plausibility in the Netherlands in the mid 1990s. In 1995 23 newly built mosques existed that had visible and typical architectural characteristics and 19 of these had both a dome and one or more minarets (Dijker 1995: 43). The architecture of these mosques showed clear references to the countries of origin: Moroccan mosques usually had a square minaret and were made of brick and Turkish mosques had slim minarets and a dome, usually with white outside walls and with parts of the building (such as the roof or dome) made of bright coloured materials (usually in red or green).

If one reads through the various background articles on mosque building published in newspapers, they typically told a story of a local mosque association that after years of struggle had been able to collect the resources to build a proper mosque. Some basic information on Islam and the various functions and architectural requirements of the mosque were discussed and the architecture was then depicted as “oriental”, “fairy-tale like” or “typical”. The mosques were “prestigious projects”, built in an “oriental style” and showed that Muslim communities refused to be treated as second class citizens.

546. The Essalam Mosque association usually was represented by Mr. Boutaher and Mr. Ajid and received support from Mr. El Kourchi of SPIOR. Since 2001 the Dutch architects also voiced the ideas and wishes of the mosque associations in meetings with residents and municipal officials. The residents of “De Laantjes” who protested had set up a “Committee to maintain the green belt” and received some support of a community worker who worked for the residents association in the district.

547. [“Voor de Nederlandse samenleving betekent een nieuwbouw moskee een verrijking van het stadsbeeld. Het geeft uiting aan de multiculturele samenleving in Feyenoord en toont aan dat mensen met verschillende culturele achtergronden in harmonie met elkaar kunnen leven. Voor de allochtone Nederlanders betekent het erkenning, waardering en vooral acceptatie van hun culturele en religieuze achtergrond”]. Speech held by Mr. Boutaher during the City District Council Meeting, January 18 1995.

548. The creation of the ISN (Diyanet) resulted in more opportunities for local Turkish Muslim associations to build new mosques. In 1990 about 96 local mosque associations were affiliated the ISN that was the owner of 62 mosque buildings. The platform organisation had real estate capital of 30 million guilders in 1990, which it used to give cash advances to local mosque associations (Landman 1992: 109).

to remain “invisible”. This interpretation of mosque building was congruent with the more general image of successful integration and institutionalisation of Muslim communities and with the idea that expressions of ethnic identity should be endorsed in a multicultural society.

By the mid 1990s “diversity policy” or “post-multicultural policies” had become more prominent at the municipal level. Diversity policies decoupled the more problematic, “harder” aspects of immigrant integration processes, including socio-economic disadvantages, exclusion, persisting arrears and cultural rights, from the “softer” aspects, including the expression of differences in various life-styles and the ways societies had been enriched because of the presence of people with a non-European cultural background. Especially the more folkloric aspects of cultural diversity as a result of immigration were being represented as an enrichment to Dutch society, such as food, dress, habits, looks, language and slang. Diversity policy discourses also helped to link ideas about imaginative architecture to the possibility of endorsing and enjoying ethnic differences. In its political program called “Multi-colourful City” (Veelkleurige Stad) (1998) the new Centre-Left municipal government had articulated that it aimed “to stimulate architectural cultural expression and works of arts in the cityscape that refer to the diversity of cultures in the city”.

It seemed plausible to start thinking about mosque building and mosque architecture in the perspective of what was now called “multicultural architecture”. However, it was less evident how the idea that a new mosque would function as an “enrichment to the urban landscape” related to existing municipal policy discourses on that issue. Policy makers had time and again emphasised that it primarily mattered that prayer houses were adequate and safe, not that they were visible and recognisable. Aware of the possible tensions between this endorsement of architectural diversity and the goals of the municipal mosque policy, alderman Meijer carefully tried to explain the differences between the two perspectives during a discussion evening on mosque architecture organised by the Rotterdam Art Foundation in 1998:


551. A municipal policy paper of 1991 had already argued that members of cultural minority groups were in need of specific facilities such an “oriental bathhouse”, an “oriental market or Kasbah”, prayer houses and places for migrant families to “meet in the open air” (GR 1991: 11).


553. The organisers of the discussion evenings on multicultural architecture were convinced it was good to approve of recognisable mosque architecture. In the announcement of the program they also suggested why some people were opposed to typical mosque architecture: protest was to be understood as a sign of hostility against the “manifestation of cultural differences” (een manifestatie van culturele verschillen). See Brochure “Naar een multicultureel stadsbeeld”, Rotterdamse Kunststichting, February 1998.
By building large mosques on remarkable locations in the city, one can give the Muslims the impression that it is also their city. One could say: we want that to be manifested, but in fact this is two steps ahead of what we want at this moment. The current mosque memorandum of the Rotterdam municipality has been elaborated because of the awareness of a problem: too many small houses of worship in factories and garages. But now that I am thinking about it, I personally think that it would be a good road to embark on…

One of the reasons for the alderman to be careful not to present the mosque policy as essentially about promoting the possibilities of Muslim immigrant communities to be more visible was because of the ways the municipality was presenting and discussing mosque creation with the Dutch residents.

**Discussing mosque creation with the residents**

Through the coordination of citizens participation evenings and information dissemination, the municipality had built up a great deal of expertise in interacting with protesting residents. Yet, there had been occasions in which tensions on mosque creation had escalated. The turmoil around the relocation of the Kocatepe mosque was such an illustration. However, the events around the creation of a Moroccan mosque in Crooswijk, in the North-Western part of the city, had been even more distressful. Here plans to build a new mosque combined with apartments and sports facilities on a square in the middle of a neighbourhood had met with fierce opposition from the city district and the Dutch residents. One night in 1996 anonymous vandals had nailed pig slaughtering remains on the walls of the youth centre located on the site destined for the new mosque. This had caused fear and anguish in the Moroccan community (Buijs and Schuster 2001: 86ff.).

In all, the chances that the selected location for the new Essalam mosque would lead to equally intense conflicts seemed rather small. The new mosque was located on the edge of the neighbourhood and would only face an apartment complex for the elderly called De Laantjes. This complex had been built in the late 1980s and predominantly catered to people who had lived in the surrounding neighbourhoods for most of their lives. Some of the residents objected to the selected spot and in 1995 created a committee to “maintain the green belt” on which the mosque was to arise. The residents of De Laantjes argued they accepted that migrants had the “right to practice their religion” but they objected to the location that had been chosen. They had chosen to live in an apartment complex established “next to a park”, surrounded by a “beautiful green belt” that was “like a forest” to them. But now a “strange building” and “huge tumour” would be

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554. [“Door op markante punten in de stad grote moskeeën te realiseren, geef je moslims de indruk: het is ook onze stad. Je kunt zeggen: wij willen dat gemanifesteerd zien, maar eigenlijk is het twee stappen verder dan wat wij op dit moment willen. De huidige moskeeënnota van de gemeente Rotterdam is opgesteld vanuit een probleembef: te veel kleine gebedsruimten in fabrieken en garages. Maar als ik er zo over nadenk, vind ik het persoonlijk wel een goede lijn om in te zetten.”] cited in “Men ziet een minaret en koepel als uiting van: dit is een moskee” in Rotterdams Dagblad February 12 1998.


556. During one of the information evenings one of the residents wrote in capital letters on a piece of paper: “MOSQUE OKAY, BUT NOT HERE” (MOSKEE OKE, MAAR HIER NEE). Minutes of Stichting “De Laantjes”, January 19 1995.
built “on their doorsteps” instead.557 Another set of arguments focussed on the various forms of environmental bother that would be produced by the mosque: “Where will remain the calmness for which we moved to this flat, if on a daily basis some hundreds of mosque visitors walk and drive up and down?”. Residents expressed their worries about the sound of the call to prayer and about the fact that alongside a planned facility for the homeless in the district there would now also be “an increase of the number of Muslims, which will bring bother with it”.558

The arguments mentioned above concentrated on the competing interests of various groups of residents and the possible environmental nuisance caused by the new mosque.559 However, other arguments concentrated primarily on the fact that this was a building for immigrants. These arguments were illustrative of the specific kind of emotions evoked by mosque creation. The residents of De Laantjes presented themselves as “the native people” (het eigen volk) and as the “older residents of the neighbourhood”, in opposition to the mosque visitors who were the “foreigners”, the “allochtonen” or “those people”.560 As one residents wrote frankly in a letter to the alderman: “The main problem is, however, that there live far too many allochtonen in the city district. Those fellow country men (medelanders) are not tolerant toward each other and towards the Dutch”.561 There was a story going around that someone had seen an old van that was “stuffed with slaughtered sheep”, the result of “an Islamic slaughtering”.562

These kind of statements expressed the kind of worries that the creation of a mosque aroused among some of the Dutch residents. Of particular relevance was the idea that ever since the coming of immigrants the entire neighbourhood had been steadily going downhill. The importance of that image was confirmed in a study on representations of community life and social cohesion in Hillesluis, conducted in the mid 1990s. The researcher observed how native Dutch residents would often evoke a “collective nostalgic picture of how beautiful the life in the neighbourhood used to be” (Blokland-Potters 1998: 302). Another idea was that the native population of Rotterdam was being pushed out of the neighbourhoods. In Rotterdam particularly, a new generation of people from a strongly disadvantaged background, mostly of immigrant origin, began to move into the older neighbourhoods in the 1990s.563 Another aspect of this image of the “native population on the run” was the idea that the older residents were now on the defensive. The remaining Dutch residents were living in a flat for the elderly, some were even “confined to

557. [“Bij een eventueel besluit van de Deelgemeente, zou dit stukje groen worden opgeofferd aan een Marokkaanse moskee”], Letter of Stichting “De Laantjes” to City District Feijenoord, March 16 1995.
558. The residents linked the building of the mosque to the nuisance that would result from a planned centre for homeless people. Address to the City District Council, September 28 1995.
559. See the documentary “Higher than the Kuip” (Hoger dan de kuip) by Ingeborg Jansen, Holland Doc January 17 2008, for an impression of the feelings of different groups of residents about the building of the Essalam mosque.
561. [“Het alles overheersende probleem is echter, dat in de deelgemeente veel te veel allochtonen wonen. Deze medelanders zijn niet tolerant ten opzichte van elkaar en t.o.v. de Nederlanders’]. Letter of the association of proprietors and residents of Hillevliet and surroundings addressed to alderman Meijer, March 1 1995.
562. Address to the City District Council, September 28 1995.
563. Interview with Maaike Groen, Project-leader mosque policy, Rotterdam, July 23 2001. Interview with Anton Bruchez (resident of De Laantjes), Rotterdam, 22 March 2003. See also documentary “Higher than the Kuip” (see above).
their beds” (bedlegerig) and they would easily be accused of discriminatory talk if they dared to protest. The “Muslims”, on the other hand, were being supported by the municipality and “those Mohammedans” were able to show up massively at the information evenings to defend their interests.564 Out of this mixture of arguments and emotions the protesting residents deduced that it would be better if the municipality would look for another location “where many Muslims live”.565 In summary: “a mosque does not belong on this spot”.566

Municipal officials were aware that mosque creation could arouse these kind of emotions. Based on their experiences and confident about the strength of the pragmatic approach, officials would rely on two discursive strategies. On the one hand, they did their utmost to inform residents well, explain all the different steps in the planning process, including the possibilities to voice protests and raise objections. They promised that worries about bother and legitimate concerns would be taken seriously.567 On the other hand, it was made very clear that the municipality would not tolerate discrimination aimed at the immigrants. The chairman of the city district stressed that the existing situation was unacceptable because sometimes the mosque-goers “were obliged to sit outside on a rug to worship”.568

**Political debate on making an exception to municipal land policy**

Negotiating the building plans with neighbouring residents was not the only concern for the Moroccan mosque association. They also needed to find the necessary funds to build a new mosque. Once the Essalam Mosque association knew there were opportunities to realise a new mosque building, they had begun to send out letters to a great number of potential foreign sponsors. With the letter sent to the Al Maktoum Foundation in Dubai they got the first prize. After a visit of the chairman of the mosque association – during which he had spoken about “tulips and Muslims in the Netherlands” – the foundation agreed to sponsor all the costs of the project, estimated at the time at about 3 million guilders.569 However, in 1998 it became clear that the foundation coupled together the gift for the building costs to the possibility to purchase the land on

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564. [“Wij waren met z’n vieren... Zaten we daar tussen tachtig van die mohammedanen.”] in “Altijd bonje, niemand wil een moskee naast de deur” in Trouw March 11 1995.

565. See Blokland-Potters (1998 : 277-282) for an analysis of a similar kind of conflict about the use of a square in Hillesluis.


567. One of the community workers in Hillesluis made a detailed communication plan in 1997 arguing that: “At the moment the communication does not go well the effect is that the involvement of residents or neighbouring residents and the support for such a facility as a mosque decreases. The aim is to enlarge the support for the mosque in the neighbourhood” [“Op moment dat de communicatie niet goed verloopt is het effect dat de betrokkenheid van bewoners c.q. omwonenden en het draagvlak voor een dergelijke voorziening als een moskee afneemt. Doel is het draagvlak voor de moskee in de wijk te vergroten.”] Ton Koppens, Communication plan mosque Colloseumweg, February 7 1997.

568. Minutes of the City District Council meeting, February 1998. Also “Moskee puikt uit, toch geen schot in nieuwbouw” in Rotterdams Dagblad November 30 1999. In an earlier letter addressed to the foundation De Laantjes alderman Meijer also emphasised that all citizens, including the Muslims, were entitled to the facilities they needed. Herman Meijer letter to Foundation “De Laantjes, January 19 1996.

which the mosque was to be erected. They argued this was necessary because of the Islamic tradition, in which mosques could only be built on land that was owned eternally and not on land that was given in lease, but also because the foundation wanted to have guarantees that the mosque would actually be built and that the donation would not be used for other purposes. This demand meant a setback because the Rotterdam land policy only allowed land that became available to be given out in long term lease for a period of maximum 99 years. The municipality turned down the initial request of the mosque association to make an exception to the municipal land policy.

In January 1999 the Essalam mosque association renewed its request with the help of SPIOR. In a letter they explained that the sponsor threatened to withdraw his “generous offer” which would mean that “a unique occasion” might be missed to create “a remarkable building” on a “magnificent location”:

By building this mosque several goals are accomplished simultaneously: the city obtains an architectural *landmark* (in English in the text, M.M.) that will contribute to the image of multicultural Rotterdam. Besides, the mosque will function as the centre for the Moroccan community that has been looking for an adequate mosque location for many years now.  

The municipality was now divided on whether some kind of exception should be made. Officials from the municipal land-office (*grondbedrijf*) and the alderman for Town Planning and Land Policy (*Grondzaken*), Kombrink (Social Democrat Party, PvdA) were opposed to the idea. They were afraid that a precedent was being created and that the image of the municipality giving in to the demands of an “Arab Sheikh” would cause bad publicity, which ultimately would negatively affect the Muslim population. Alderman Meijer (Green Party, GroenLinks) for Urban Renewal and Housing, however, believed that it should be possible to find a “creative solution” so that the mosque could be built. This solution consisted of a deal in which the municipality would argue it intended to purchase the privately owned land on which the present Essalam mosque was located for purposes of urban renewal projects. This plot of land would then be swapped for the one on which the new mosque was to arise. Because the new plot was far larger the mosque association would still have to pay for the remaining parts and guarantee that the land would be sold back to the municipality if the association would at some future date decide to leave the location. Meijer also argued that the municipality should not suggest that the fact that an “Arab Sheikh” was now involved in financing a mosque project was of any consequence. Suggestions that there might be reasons to be suspicious of these kind of foreign donations met with a principled reaction of the alderman: “if the Vatican pays we also don’t ask any questions”.  

This creative solution required generating political support for a legally somewhat doubtful way of bypassing the land policy. In political discussions that followed the building of the new mosque was being justified both in view of the municipal mosque policy and in view of

570. [“Met de bouw van deze moskee worden meerdere doelen tegelijk verwezenlijkt: de stad wordt een architectonische *landmark* rijker die bijdraagt aan het image van multicultureel Rotterdam en tevens fungeert de moskee als middelpunt voor de Marokkaanse gemeenschap, die al jarenlang op zoek is naar een passende moskeelocatie.”] Letter of SPIOR, January 20 1999.

571. This statement of the alderman was confirmed in an interview with Yassin Hartogh former director of SPIOR, Rotterdam, June 22 2001.

the new goal of favouring multicultural mosque architecture. The aldermen wrote a proposal for what was euphemistically labelled a “land-swap” (grondruil) and would discuss this in the municipal council in April 1999. During the deliberations in the municipal council, alderman Meijer spoke of the new mosque as “aesthetically valuable” and as “a visible sign of the presence of a large Muslim population in our city”. By now the alderman indeed argued that mosque building should be understood in light of the “multi-ethnic and international composition of the city’s population” and that the existing “diversity in cultures” should be “allowed to be visible in the cityscape” and could be “looked at with joy”.

In the end the municipal council would, with a majority vote, approve of the proposal for a land swap. Members of the local City Party (Stadspartij) and the Socialist Party (SP) voted against, primarily because of their principled views on the rectitude of the municipal land policy and out of fear that a precedent was being created. However, there were differences between the parties that voted in favour of the land swap. The representative of the Liberal Party (VVD), Mr. Janssens, for example, primarily justified his support in view of the existing municipal mosque policy. He spoke of the value of tolerance and of religious freedom and said the new mosque stood for the basic idea that “people with a particular religion should be given the opportunity to practice that religion in a respectable accommodation”.

Mrs Hellwig-Kuipers of the Christian Democrat Party (CDA) did agree that the new mosque was a “gaining for the urban landscape of our city”. However, she was also warned the municipal government to make sure the mosque would become embedded in the “frames of reference (belevingsfeer) of its surroundings”. A timely and well-though-out communication plan should be developed together with the city district officials in order to create societal support for the “incorporation of a mosque in an Arab style in the district”. Thus while they supported the municipal government in its decision to make the building of the new mosque possible, these representatives of parties of the Right were more reserved when it came to supporting the alderman’s enthusiasm about multicultural architecture.

By contrast, representatives of the parties of the Left were more outspoken. Municipal council member Mr. Çelik (Social Democrat Party, PvdA) argued that the mosque policy explicitly foresaw the building of four “real mosques” and said that now there was an opportunity to build such a “real, beautiful mosque, with a dome and minarets”. A representative of the Green Party (GroenLinks), Mr. Daal, spoke of the way the urban landscape of Rotterdam was illustrative of a “global city” (wereldstad). At this time these divergences in political discussions about the value of grandiose mosque buildings were still of minor relevance. It would require the societal and political changes that occurred in the early 21st century for divergences to become more articulate.


575. [“Wij realiseren ons dat een zorgvuldige en vroegtijdige wijze van communiceren over de inpassing van een moskee in een Arabische bouwstijl in de wijk in overleg en samenspraak met het bestuur van de Stichting Moskee Essalam, de deelgemeente en omwonenden noodzakelijk is”.] Minutes Municipal Council Deliberation April 15 1999.
Mosque design and protests

In the second half of the 1990s there had been some hesitant attempts to link the praise for multicultural architecture more directly to the execution of the Rotterdam mosque policy. The building of the new Mevlana mosque between 1999 and 2001 would give additional plausibility to that idea. The Turkish mosque with its two slim minarets and green dome was clearly visible from trains reaching Rotterdam from the Amsterdam and The Hague. To the mosque association it was self-evident that building this type of mosques was a way of developing Turkish Islam in a Western European context “with retention of cultural identity”.

The Dutch architect, Bert Toorman, said the mosque was “an autonomous building with its own appearance and identity”. He suggested the building of this mosque was a result of the municipal policy: “The Rotterdam municipality has laid down in the past that the Muslim community is a full-fledged and important part of the town community”.576 At the ceremonial placing of the first stone in 1999 the chairman of the city district council had stated: “If I will return from my holidays, and drive back home from Schiphol, the first thing I will see in Rotterdam are the minarets of the Mevlana mosque. And then I will know that I am home”.577 In the local and national press the plans and architecture of the mosque were spoken of enthusiastically as a “classical mosque” that was “one of the largest in Europe” with a “record dome”, minarets that were the “highest in Europe” and a building that “gave Muslims an appearance”.578 The building was

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577. [“Als ik straks terugkom van vakantie, en vanuit Schiphol naar huis rij, dan zie ik bij Rotterdam als eerste de minaretten van de Mevlana moskee. En dan weet ik dat ik thuis ben”] in de Volkskrant November 10 1999.
seen as illustrative of the process of emancipation of Turks and a journalist spoke of the “spatial integration of Muslims”. “Monumental mosques” were becoming characteristic markers in the Dutch landscape. While there was a lot of praise for the architecture of the newly built mosques it was far less clear what exactly were the architectural merits of the buildings. The new mosques were principally said to be “beautiful” and “typical”. It seemed as if mosque buildings were so exotic and different that they evaded the categorisations of Dutch architectural discourse.

When the design for the new Essalam Mosque became known it also showed a fairly traditionally styled mosque that to amateur observers mainly seemed to imitate mosques in the Middle East.

The design was presented during a meeting with municipal officials at the city district office in September 2001. When asked her opinion of the model the City District Mayor exclaimed “I think it is a baby”. The municipal Commission for Aesthetic Appearance (Welstandscommissie) did not present a much more enlightening commentary on the mosque design either. Usually the commission discussed proposals for new buildings at length and gave explicit judgements on the ways new buildings fitted in with their surroundings and gave a substantial aesthetic judgement on the architectural quality of a new project. According to the director of the commission this had not been possible in the case of the design for the Essalam mosque. In retrospect he concluded in 2003 that the commission lacked guidelines to evaluate mosque architecture because

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there existed no local culture policy that laid down the role of Islamic houses of worship. In 2001 the commission had formulated parameters (stedebouwkundige randvoorwaarden) for the design, but these merely stipulated that the building should have a “representative expression” that should match the high quality of the area “Head of South” (Kop van Zuid kwaliteit). In their official comments on the design the commission had focussed on aspects such as the alignment of the building to the street, the neighbouring buildings and the green belt.

The ways the urban planning discourses and the pragmatic take on the issue of mosque creation were shaping discussions on appearance and aesthetics was also becoming clear during the meeting at the city district office when the design was being presented. One of the Moroccan commissioners, Ahmed Ajdid, suggested that the sponsor would also be willing to pay for a fountain, which would make the forecourt of the mosque more beautiful and that could be enjoyed by all the residents, migrants as well as native Dutch.

Mr. Adjid: the forecourt, the sheik also wants to do something about that. Perhaps a fountain…

Mrs. Steenbergen (City District Mayor): It almost looks like the Tash Mahal! What about parking? The parking garage has only been a suggestion (…)

Mrs. Groen (Coordinator mosque policy): ...What I can worry about are those fountains. Who is going to do the maintenance, the city district?

Mrs. Steenbergen (City District Mayor): we don’t want any fountains because it is a burden on the budget.

This type of interactions served to mutually explore and adjust interests and ideas about the further embedding of the mosque in the city district. The City District Mayor in the same sentence moved from the idea that a building resembling “the Tash Mahal” was going to be erected, to the idea that what was primarily at stake was avoiding parking problems. Municipal officials, not incorrectly, often were under the impression that the representatives of the mosque association constantly came up with additional suggestions and that they did not show enough concern about practical issues such as available parking space and maintenance. From their side the
representatives of the mosque did their best to suggest how the mosque would function as an asset for the neighbourhood as a whole. The new mosque was there “for everyone” and it would function as a meeting place for “Muslim and non-Muslims”. There would be “multifunctional spaces” that would be available for lectures, calligraphy exhibitions and expositions on the Arab world. The neighbouring residents would be “invited for dinner” during the month of Ramadan and they could visit “symposiums” and visit the “library that would be open to everyone”.

This rather curious mixture of vague promises and celebrations of diversity combined with very down to earth concerns about practical issues was also visible in other discussion settings. In October 2001 there was an information evening for residents. The Dutch architect Van Winden presented the design and spoke of the mosque as “a centre of social functioning” that could be seen as a “cultural and religious centre”. The municipal coordinator of the mosque policy had stated that the aim was to build a mosque that was “beautiful” and that “everyone could be proud of”. However, she then immediately proceeded by stating:

Large mosque also means large prayer room. In the totality of the planning around mosques this is an important issue. What is often related to it, is the parking facility. For the neighbouring residents the parking facility is an important aspect.

An opening statement such as this privileges a specific set of arguments by promising that legitimate objections—such as those concerning parking facilities—will be taken seriously. At the information evening municipal officials explained at length how “parking tables” (parkeertabellen) and the “parking balance” (parkeer-balans) had been used to minimize the risk of nuisance. If residents were bothered about noise, they also were reassured by officials who explained that there were “plenty of regulations and little rules” that applied when a mosque association tried to obtain “a permit for an amplified call to prayer”. The setting for discussions on mosques thus created, was further supported by a political culture that strongly disapproved of overt racist or xenophobic statements when opposing a prospective planning decision. Dutch residents were well aware that they would be accused of racism if they did not carefully phrase their objections against mosque building.

Following the information evening there was the legal opportunity provided by the procedure that allowed residents to formally protest against the change of the zoning plan and the building plans. A number of residents, for the most part living in De Laantjes, did write such a formal letter of protest, mostly by signing a standard letter written by one of the residents. These protests restated the arguments about possible nuisance, the need to maintain the green belt and the wider concerns about the neighbourhood. Somewhat far-fetched were the ideas that people

Schaijk, official working at the city district Feijenoord, August 30 2001.

585. [“GGD, gezondheid, politiek, voorlichting, lezingen, expositie van kaligrafie,, informatie over de Arabische wereld, bijvoorbeeld over Marokko. Om te eten, de buurt uitnodigen”]. Personal observation of a statement by Mr. Adjid during a meeting with city district administrators on the design of the mosque on September 2 2001.


587. [“Grote moskee betekent ook grote gebedsruimte. In de totaleitie van de planvorming rondom moskeeën is dit een belangrijk onderwerp. Wat vaak eraan gekoppeld wordt, is de parkeergelegenheid. Voor de omwonenden is de parkeergelegenheid een belangrijk onderdeel”]. Information evening on the Essalam Mosque, October 16 2001.

588. See also Buijs and Schuster 2001: 121.
might “climb the minaret” to stare at the women who “like to sun bathe on the inner part of the complex” and that residents would no longer be allowed to take their dog for a walk because that was “unclean in regard to the mosque”.

Technical frames were used to counter these protests by pointing to parking regulations and “assigned dog-walking spaces”. These hardly allowed participants to address broader discussions over the social implications and symbolical dimensions of mosques in the Netherlands. Feelings of discomfort could only enter discussions via the filters that had been introduced in these settings. The careful attention to practical issues in the present was combined with rather vague expectations for the future. When it came to the looks of the new Essalam Mosque it was merely stipulated that this was a “beautiful building”, “something to be proud of” and something that people would in the end get used to. When it came to the functioning of the new mosque there was the idea that a flourishing cultural centre was being built that would contribute to integration.

In 2001, municipal officials concluded that the main accommodation issues had essentially been resolved. The special mosque policy was ended and a final report drawn up. The town planners concluded that now “the baton of the builders could be passed on to the more content focussed policy makers in the city” (GR 2002: 11). It remained to be seen whether new opportunities would present themselves for the Dutch residents to express their anxieties.

8.5. The “multicultural tragedy”: populism, assimilation and new polemics on mosque architecture in Rotterdam

In 2000 an essay entitled the “Multicultural Tragedy”, written by an intellectual affiliated with the Social Democrat Party (PvdA), Paul Scheffer, was the starting point for a national debate on the failures of consecutive policy approaches to immigrant integration. Discussions were continued throughout the “long year 2002” when Pim Fortuyn and the party he had founded (the List Pim Fortuyn, LPF) dominated the campaign for the parliamentary elections. Fortuyn introduced issues and positions in the integration debate that had until then been marginalized, arguing for example that Islam was a backward culture and a threat to liberal values such as equal rights for women and gays. After Fortuyn was assassinated in May 2002, the LPF made a spectacular electoral breakthrough and entered a (short-lived) Centre-Right coalition government with the Christian Democrat Party (CDA) and the Liberal Party (VVD).

Dramatic events also sparked off continuous polemics and debates on various aspects of Islam. At the international level these included 9/11, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the ongoing conflict in the Middle-East and terrorist attacks by networks of radical Muslims in Europe and the rest of the world. In the Spring of 2001 a national debate had followed a televised interview with a Moroccan imam, Mr. El Moumni, who worked in Rotterdam and had stated that “Europeans were lower than pigs” and that “homosexuality was a contagious decease”. It was also the period of the rapid and spectacular rise to fame of Ayaan Hirsi Ali, who not only forcefully pointed towards the dangers of Islamic fundamentalism but also questioned the naivety of

589. See Reservations with regard to permission to build a mosque on the Laantjesweg (“Bedenking verzoek om vrijstelling voor het oprichten van een moskee aan de Laantjesweg”), March 2002. Personal archive of the author.
the multicultural policy model and the Dutch tradition of toleration and the tendency to look the other way. A new generation of writers, intellectuals and opinion leaders entered centre stage in public debates saying they intended to “break taboos”, discuss the downsides of immigration and display rather than conceal the tensions between a progressive and permissive Dutch society and the deeply conservative and sexist culture of Islam (cf. Prins 2004). The death threats directed at Hirsi Ali and the brutal assassination of Theo van Gogh in November 2004 by a radicalised Moroccan-Dutch Muslim sent yet another shockwave through Dutch society. A brief period of unrest and anti-Muslim violence followed the horrific attack. Policy makers and politicians were increasingly concerned about the ways significant parts of young Muslims in the Netherlands were tempted by Islamic radicalism. They sought to develop responses to address both societal polarisation and radicalisation. Up to the present day populist politicians continue to mobilise public opinion and the feelings of discontent with existing political parties, and speak out in favour of a tougher approach to the integration of Muslims.590

The turbulence in political and public debate also had its effect on immigrant integration policy discourses. New approaches were proposed that would help prevent unwanted forms of immigration, defend key liberal and Dutch values and enforce adaptation by immigrants. Under the leadership of Minister Verdonk (Liberal Party, VVD) “Integration Policy New Style” was introduced that, as its name suggested, was to signify a major rupture with past approaches.591 Between 2002 and 2005 the gulf widened between the kind of ideas and policy measures that appeared on the public and political agenda and policy measures that were effectively being developed and that could be implemented given existing legal and constitutional constraints. The dust has not settled yet and it will take some time to determine in what ways Dutch policies with regard to Islam have actually been altered and to what consequences. In this final section I explore the ways in which these broader political changes shaped discussions on mosques in Rotterdam and resulted in (plans for) new public policy responses.

In March 2002 the newly created local party Liveable Rotterdam (Leefbaar Rotterdam) won 16 out of 45 seats in the municipal council in Rotterdam, which was in significant part a result of the charismatic leadership of Pim Fortuyn who was the head of the list. Liveable Rotterdam formed a Centre-Right coalition government with the Christian Democrats (CDA) and the Liberal Party (VVD). The new coalition government ended decades of Social Democrat dominance in the city and made Rotterdam into the key experimental ground for the new assimilationist approach to integration.592 New political winds would soon start blowing over mosque building projects.

In 2002 the beginning of the construction works for the new Essalam mosque still required the approval of the change of the zoning plan by the municipal council. At this stage this

590. New political leaders such as Geert Wilders and (later on) Rita Verdonk split off from the Liberal Party (VVD) and founded their own populist movements of the Right. See Prins 2004; Buruma 2006; Buijs et al. 2006; Maussen 2006; and Vink 2007.

591. In 2002 the Dutch Parliament took the initiative for the creation of an investigative committee to review 30 years of integration policy. This investigative committee, known as the Commission Blok, concluded in its report published in 2004 that on the whole integration process had been “relatively successful” (Scholten 2008: 212ff.).

592. The coalition program was entitled “The new élan for Rotterdam… and this is how we are going to do it” (GR 2002). See Maussen 2006; and Tops 2007.
was merely an administrative decision that was scheduled on the municipal council agenda for November. When this date approached spokesmen of Liveable Rotterdam began raising new objections. Alderman Pastors said in an interview that he was opposed to the building of large mosques in a “deviating style” on prominent locations. Municipal council member Sørensen said he was also concerned about the possible influence of the foreign sponsor on the mosque association. Liveable Rotterdam politicians announced that they intended to halt the procedures until a new design was made that would be of smaller size and “less dominant”. Administratively, however, it was inconceivable to contemplate obstructing the building of the mosque after all the procedures had already been completed. As alderman for Physical Infrastructure Pastors even had the political responsibility of defending the new zoning plan in the municipal council, which was then sanctioned by the council by majority vote.

However, half a year later Pastors reopened the discussion when he announced that he had held a meeting in August with the authorized solicitor of the Al Maktoum Foundation, Mr. Al-Sayegh. Pastors claimed that he had succeeded in convincing the foreign sponsor that a new design should be made that would be more “modern and contemporary”. However, a new design meant that all procedures had to be redone. The mosque association denied there existed any agreement on the need for a new design and threatened to go to court if the alderman would refuse to sign another contract needed to begin building. The city district council also objected to the way the alderman tried to reopen the discussions and insisted that all procedures had already been concluded. Once again the alderman was forced to back down.

When finally, in October 2003, the day of the ceremonial laying of the first stone had come, it celebrated, in the words of a representative of the Al Maktoum Foundation, “a dream come true”. However, to the painful surprise of most of the people who attended the festivities, the Mayor of Rotterdam, Ivo Opstelten (Liberal Party, VVD), chose the occasion to express his dissatisfaction with the design of the new mosque. A “less prominent building”, so he argued, would have been “more suited given the limited role of religion in Dutch society” and it would have been a “recognition of our culture”. The mosque might now become an “exotic attraction” for non-Muslims. As the Mayor put it: “we are enriched with a curiosity, which is nice for the people of Rotterdam to see or to show to others. We don’t have to go each time to a museum or to the Euromast”. During the ceremony alderman Pastors ostensibly held his arms crossed so as to express his dissatisfaction.

The lack of courtesy of the Mayor and the alderman at this special occasion for the Moroccan community caused a small scandal, and especially for the Mayor to be so outspokenly critical was unusual. It was all the more striking because Opstelten had warmly welcomed the Turkish Mevlana Mosque in October 2001, a building that was also fairly traditional, equally large and (at least in the eyes of alderman Pastors) equally “weird”. During the opening ceremony of the Mevlana Mosque, only a few weeks after 9/11, the Mayor had underlined that Islam in the Netherlands should not be associated with the violence of extremists abroad and that this beautiful new building gave the mosque “the status it deserved in the city” and created new

593. See “Moskee in Rotterdam eigentijdser” in *de Volkskrant* August 16 2003.
possibilities for further integration of Muslims. It seemed that ideas about the significance of traditionally styled mosque buildings had changed quite a bit since that time.

8.5.1. Public and political views of mosque architecture

The design for the new Essalam mosque had been made by Dutch architects who, according to their own words, had been inspired by a number of postal cards of “mosques across the world” provided by the chairman of the mosque association. To an amateur’s eye, however, the mosque with its dome of about 25 meters height and two minarets of 49 meters, seemed to be strongly inspired by mosque architecture in the Middle East. The mosque was said to copy a mosque in Dubai, which happened to be the home country of the sponsor of the project, the Al Maktoum Foundation. When the project was presented in 2001 the architects had self-confidently presented the design as illustrative of high-standing and innovative Dutch mosque architecture. A year later, however, the Essalam Mosque was portrayed in the media as a “contested mosque” and the self-evident praise for this type of design seemed to have completely vanished.

Opposition against Islamic presence and visibility

An interview with alderman Pastors in Rotterdams Dagblad in November 2002 had stimulated the beginning of a wider discussion on mosque building and architecture. He argued he would not have allowed the building of the Mevlana Mosque because the building “contrasts sharply with the rest of the environment”. A new debate on mosque architecture was developing in which specific figures of speech were used to depict newly built mosques. In Rotterdam the main targets of these discourses were the Mevlana Mosque and the Essalam Mosque. The Essalam Mosque was a “megalomaniac sugar cake”, a “mega-mosque” and a “Castle of Ali Baba”. It was a “colossal house of worship”, of “enormous proportions” that made it the “largest of Europe”. The 49 meters high minarets were depicted as “enormous”, “dominant” and especially the fact that they were to be “higher than the light posts of the neighbouring Feijenoord soccer stadium” showed the lack of reticence of Muslims.

The idea that the looks and size of the new mosques made them weird and incongruent was also being linked to wider concerns about Islam, integration, the secular character of Dutch society and extremism. There was the idea that the failure to develop a different kind of mosque architecture was a symbol of the failed integration of Muslims and also of their unwillingness to assimilate and adapt to the Dutch context. According to alderman Pastors “An all too showy

597. According to the architects the board of the Essalam Mosque Committee had rejected a first sketch because they thought it looked like “a swimming pool and a garage”. The design that was ultimately chosen had taken its inspiration from a number of pictures of mosques “from all over world” Interview with architect Wilfred van Winden, Rotterdam, 23 March 2003. See the forthcoming PhD of Eric Roose for a detailed reconstruction of the designing process of this mosque.
classical mosque is, so I think, a signal in the wrong direction with respect to integration”. Then there was the idea that behind this type of mosque architecture there stood a wider strategy of Islam to impose itself on the West. A journalist from the conservative weekly *HP/De Tijd* spoke of the way “Muslim architecture marched on” and explained the significance of these mosques:

The new mosques in the Netherlands are closed bastions with minarets that tower high above the houses and thereby seem to declare a message of religious imperialism. (...) Because they do not seem to share in the rest of the district and their architecture contrasts sharply with our urban landscape, their presence only makes the gulf between Muslims and non-Muslims more sharply perceptible.

By now the critique of mosque architecture also targeted other Islamic designs. When the rather futuristic design for a 44 meters high minaret of the Kocatepe mosque was presented, a local journalist wrote that it looked “like a missile fresh from the factory”. Sørensen was more outspoken as to the significance of this new construction: “The minaret on the Afrikaanderplein has a symbolic function for many Rotterdammers. To them it signifies: Watch out we are coming and in the meanwhile you know what that means, because we will not step aside a single meter”. There was the idea that the building of the large new mosques should be seen in light of international Islamic radicalism. There were now doubts about the Essalam mosque association. Sørensen spoke of the Essalam Mosque association as “a very conservative Moroccan group” and qualified mosque visitors as “fanatic Muslims”. The foreign sponsor who was spoken of “an obscure sheikh” doing missionary work for an extremely conservative version of


601. [“De nieuwe moskeeën in Nederland zijn gesloten bastions met minaretten die hoog boven de huizen uittorenen en daarmee een boodschap van religieus imperialisme lijken te verkondigen. Hun architectuur harmonieert niet met de overige bebouwing en roept een onwerkelijk gevoel op (...) Het effect van deze gebouwen is er een van vervreemding. Omdat ze geen deel lijken uit te maken van de rest van de wijk en hun architectuur scherp contrasteert met ons stedelijke landschap, maakt hun aanwezigheid de kloof tussen moslims en niet moslims alleen maar scherper voelbaar.”] in Renate van der Zee “KathedraLEN voor Allah” in *HP/De Tijd* November 28 2003. The front page title of this issue of the weekly read “Mega mosque. Muslim architecture marches on” [“Mega moskee. De moslim architectuur rukt op”].


603. [“De minaret op het Afrikaanderplein heeft voor veel Rotterdammers een symbolische functie. Hij betekent voor hen: Pas op we komen eraan en je weet ondertussen wat dat betekent want we zullen geen meter wijken...”]. Ronald Sørensen on the website of Leefbaar Rotterdam, accessed December 19 2003.). A French-Dutch columnist of *Trouw*, Sylvain Ephimenco, spoke of a strategy of “visual conquest”. He questioned the naivety of Dutch public authorities who still refused to acknowledge “the totalising presence of a conservative religion that damages the modern and neutral identity of Rotterdam via huge architectural settlements of an old fashioned design” [“de alomtegenwoordigheid van een conservatief geloof dat via gigantisch architectonische nederzettingen van oudere wetsen, de moderne en neutrale identiteit van Rotterdam aantast”] in “Oorlog met Irak om meer dan olie” *Trouw* December 5 2002.

604. “Gesteggel om een Rotterdamse moskee” in *Trouw* November 28 2003; Ronald Sørensen in *Twee Vandaag* November 30 2002; and Ronald Sørensen “Leefbaar Rotterdam vraagt moskee om ‘enige ingetogenheid’” in *Rotterdams Dagblad* August 28 2003. The earlier mentioned documentary, that was broadcasted in 2002, on sermons of conservative imams preaching intolerance, had also been filmed in the Essalam mosque.
Islam and a “despot” who applied the Sharia in his own country. On the internet some people even suggested that the Rotterdam mosque was financed with “terrorist money”. Three members of parliament in 2003, asked the government to investigate the matter. Whatever was true of these allegations, not much as it turned out, it did lead to a more general concern about possible financial linkages between conservative and radical international Islamic movements and mosque associations in the Netherlands. An editorial comment NRC-Handelsblad defended the right of Muslims to build mosques but presented the Essalam mosque as “a foreign mosque”. The editorial then went on to raise questions about the activities of foundations and billionaires from the Middle East funding mosques in Western Europe, thus trying to spread their “orthodox, anti-western ideas”. In previous periods the symbolical dimensions of mosque buildings in Rotterdam had been consistently dampened. It had been suggested that mosques could be seen as normal neighbourhood facilities and only hesitantly, since the mid 1990s, the idea that mosques were also to be seen as welcome symbols of cultural diversity had come up. This approach was now being turned on its head. The Essalam Mosque had come to stand for a variety of urgent social issues and concerns. As Ronald Sørensen argued in the municipal council: “it is about a symbol: a building can be a symbol”. According to Sørensen, politicians who took the anxieties of Dutch residents seriously would only allow Islamic houses of worship that were “very discrete and reticent” and “completely absorbed in the built environment”. By now, it appeared that if governments showed their determination to act upon this concrete issue of the building of too large and too visible mosques they would be able to address other urgent social problems, including failed integration and mounting Islamic radicalism. Because newly built mosques had become a symbol of a number of social evils, acting upon the symbol seemed an effective way of addressing societal challenges.

Defending multicultural architecture and visibility

The fact that the choice of fairly traditional designs was now under heavy fire led advocates of this type of architecture to express their ideas more clearly. One discursive strategy was to point

605. In 1999 the sponsor had been depicted as someone who was “incredibly wealthy”, a “generous spender” (gulle gever) who was financing mosques all over the world out of “charitable considerations”. See “Gulle gift van sjeik uit Emiraten” and “B en W Rotterdam buigen voor rijke sjeik” in Rotterdams Dagblad March 18 and March 23 1999.
606. In October 2003 three members of Parliament (Mr. Wilders (VVD), Mr. Eurlings (CDA) and Mr. Eerdmans (CDA)) asked the government whether it was correct that the sponsor of the mosque was a major sponsor of international terrorism (“Opnieuw commotie rond Essalam moskee” in Trouw October 29 2003).
609. Sørensen in Twee Vandaag November 30 2002 and “Sørensen bindt strijd aan met moskee” in Rotterdams Dagblad November 26 2002. More radical solutions were also being voiced. On the discussion forum on the website of Liveable Rotterdam some individuals suggested to throw “fire bombs at the mosque” and “to erase all those buildings”. See discussion forum Website Liveable Rotterdam, accessed November 27 2002.
610. In this way discussions on mosque architecture in Rotterdam functioned in a similar way as discussions on headscarves in France (see Bowen 2006; also Gusfield 1981).
to the fact that this public outcry about mosque design should be understood as illustrative of the more general hostility of Liveable Rotterdam towards Muslims and Islam. During the period Liveable Rotterdam was in office some of its prominent spokesmen were linking Islam to all kinds of evils, from petty crime to gang rapes, from honour killings to female circumcision, and from language deficiency among immigrants to domestic violence. See in this light, the critique of mosque design could be depicted as merely one among several ways of expressing hostility. Another argument was that, in the end, criteria of beauty were subjective and relative. As a municipal council member of the Green Party argued: “we hope that many people can enjoy this building and that others will in the end get used to it”. Others argued that issues of taste could not be solved in a political debate. These kind of arguments sought to demonstrate the reasons a wide discussion about mosque architecture was beside the point and why public authorities should be more reticent in imposing their views on the looks and functioning of religious buildings. However, there were also ways of more positively defending the creation of recognisable mosques built in this kind of exotic style.

One could argue that architecturally the new mosques were an aesthetic gain for the cityscape, rather than spoiling it. The “oriental mosques” were actually “enchantingly beautiful” and should be welcomed in a city like Rotterdam that had a tradition in building “exotic houses of worship”. This praise for imaginative architecture was usually linked to all kinds of virtues, such as open-mindedness, imaginativeness and tolerance. There was also the more principled justification of Muslim minorities building the kind of mosques they deemed appropriate and of minority groups controlling their identity. Municipal council member Mr. Çelik (Social Democrat Party, PvdA) argued: “A great number of identities live in Rotterdam, and the mosque is an expression of one of those identities”. Those who protested against this kind of buildings were suggesting that Muslims should worship in the Islamic version of “hidden churches”. The chairman of SPIOR also defended the Mevlana mosque and argued that it played a positive role for integration: “It is a symbol of the diversity of the city. For the integration of Muslims it is important, because they will feel more at home and start thinking: Rotterdam also belongs to us”. One could also argue that religious minorities had the

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611. For a discussion on these discussions and the role of Liveable Rotterdam therein see Maussen 2006: 116ff.
612. To some the suggestion that politicians of Liveable Rotterdam genuinely wanted to discuss the architectural style of religious buildings was even laughable, because they sharply criticised the traditional looks of mosques but had never complained about the building of a traditionally styled Russian Orthodox Church (completed in 2003) or about the wooden Norwegian Church, an exact copy of a traditional Norwegian village church that had been built in 1914. On the website Maroc.nl, a popular discussion forum for young Muslims, the discussion on mosque architecture were represented as yet another illustration of anti-Muslim prejudice. Accessed November 27 2002.
613. [“Wij hopen dat veel mensen van het gebouw kunnen genieten en dat anderen er uiteindelijk aan zullen wennen”] Mrs Kruse (Green Party, GroenLinks), Deliberations Municipal Council, November 29 2002.
614. Jantine Kriens (Social Democrat Party, PvdA) “Is Pastors er echt op uit kwaliteit van samenleven in Rotterdam te verbeteren?” in Rotterdams Dagblad December 5 2003.
617. [“D’r leven heel veel identiteiten in Rotterdam, en een moskee is een uiting van één van die identiteiten”] Mr. Çelik in Twee Vandaag November 30 2002.
618. [“Het is een symbool van de diversiteit van de stad. Voor de integratie van moslims is het juist belangrijk, omdat die zich hier meer thuis voelen en gaan denken: Rotterdam is ook van ons.”] Ibrahim Spalburg, Director
right to create the kind of building they preferred and that neutrality demanded the government to be reserved in these matters. It was not up to the majority to decide whether or not Muslim minorities were entitled to build specific types of mosques.

A third way? Modern mosques and “poldermosques”

Advocates and opponents of multicultural mosque architecture were not only disagreeing profoundly on how to evaluate the new buildings, they also accused one another of avoiding a discussion on the real issues. According to Liveable Rotterdam and the other critics, the real issues were radical Islam and failed integration of Muslims, whereas according to their opponents the real issue was intolerance of difference and prejudices against Islam. However, a new position in the debate became available when the idea of modernising mosque architecture arose.

In 2003 four architecture students of the Hogeschool Rotterdam working under the name MEMAR presented an alternative design for the Essalam Mosque that they had made as a graduation assignment. It showed a fairly futuristic building, largely made of glass and lacking typical elements such as a dome and minarets and with a grass incline serving as a roof. The Turkish-Dutch and Moroccan-Dutch students, not only graduated with honours, they also won various architecture contests and for the moment became highly visible in the media and were invited to participate in several discussion evenings to present their design for a “modern” and “multicultural mosque”.

The students primarily depicted their own mosque design by placing it in opposition to the design of the Essalam Mosque that was actually being built. The Essalam Mosque was “massive and closed”, it displayed a total lack of interest in the immediate surroundings and merely imitated a “traditional mosque”. The students suspected the Dutch architects had simply given in to the demands of the donors and of the board of the Essalam Mosque association that was, so they thought, dominated by “older Moroccan men”. The students had been confronted...
with a similar reaction from their parents when they had shown them their own, more modern, design: “Our parents immediately asked why the minaret was missing in our design. Older Muslims especially need tradition and familiar forms”.

This anecdote was important because it strengthened the idea that the students were speaking with insider knowledge who had discussed mosque architecture with their (older) Muslim parents. This image was further enhanced when the students picked up on the figure of speech “nostalgia mosque” (heimweemoskee) to qualify the traditionally styled mosques in the Netherlands. To contrast their own design with the prevailing style in Dutch mosque architecture, the students spoke of their mosque as not only a modern mosque but also as a more truly Dutch “polder-mosque”.

The MEMAR design for a polder mosque could be used to articulate a sharp critique of existing forms of “nostalgia mosques”, without reproducing the more unfriendly messages


622. To my knowledge, the figure of speech “nostalgia mosque” first appeared in the title of an article in Vrij Nederland. See “De heimweemoskee” in Vrij Nederland, January 12 2002.

about Islamic presence. What was problematic, was the way an older generation of immigrants were unable or unwilling, both intellectually and emotionally, to leave behind the images and cultural orientations of their home country. Their “nostalgia architecture” had its way because of the naivety and lack of interest of Dutch architects who avoided a confrontation and did not uphold Dutch architectural and aesthetics norms and standards. In addition, the conservative branches in Islam with their basis in foreign countries now saw an opportunity to impose their standards and create an Islam that was “massive and closed”. This story was a version of Scheffer’s “multicultural tragedy” applied to mosque building: under the eyes of the Dutch, society and the urban landscape were being deeply transformed without them even seeking to challenge the demands and ideas of conservative and nostalgic Muslims. As a result the country ended up with unimaginative, cheap and ugly imitation mosques that were also inappropriately large.

This new perspective opened up a space for Dutch intellectuals and architects who thought of themselves as open-minded, to also enter the fray. They criticised Disney architecture and the ways the “mosque was becoming a caricature of itself”. Now speaking of the new mosques as “Disney mosques” meant not so much to question exotic or traditional architecture as such, but to question the building of clichés and cheap copies of traditional buildings. The Mevlana Mosque was depicted as a building that “had nothing to do with the Netherlands” and that was the result of “an architect who after looking at post-cards from Istanbul has designed a mosque in one day”.

In diametrical opposition to this highly problematic form of mosque architecture, the “modern” and “polder mosque” design was portrayed as a symbol of change and hope. Younger generations were better educated and willing to reconsider their culture and identity in the new context of the Netherlands. A journalist of NRC-Handelsblad wrote enthusiastically: “Young Muslims in the Netherlands are fed up with the minaret”. The younger generations were in favour of a more “Dutch mosque”. There was also the idea that the functioning of the more modern mosque would be illustrative of an openness towards the Dutch context. Even politicians of Liveable Rotterdam now concluded that they in fact also were in favour of “more modern” mosque architecture. Alderman Pastors explained that the Essalam Mosque was “a reference to the past”. New mosques in Toronto and Rio de Janeiro showed other possibilities, because these modern buildings were “open and progressive”: “That is the kind of thing we

625. “Heimweemoskee of poldermoskee” in NRC-Handelsblad May 1 2004. According to a high-ranking municipal official in Rotterdam there were good grounds to reconsider the enthusiasm for the design of the Essalam as it had prevailed in the late 1990s: “I do think that this should be the last mosque that looks like that... a process of emancipation and real integration also entails that one is aware of the context in which one finds oneself. I miss that awareness in this case”. [“Ik denk wel dat dit de laatste moskee moet zijn die er zo uitziet. Bij een emancipatieproces hoort ook dat je je bewust bent van de context waarin je je bevindt. Ik mis dat bewustzijn in dit geval”.] Jean Piret cited in “Dit moet de laatste traditionele moskee zijn” in de Volkskrant January 16 2004.
626. The discussions on mosque architecture could be associated to all kinds of initiatives and debates for a different, more “Dutch”, type of Islamic organisations and mosques in the Netherlands. There had been demands of younger Muslims that sermons be held in Dutch and a few years later, in 2008, a new project for a mosque for younger Muslim began in Amsterdam that was – not coincidently- also labelled a “polder mosque”. See “Jongeren krijgen Poldermoskee” in de Volkskrant April 14 2008.
need - a signal that we want to go forward and that we work on integration”. It remained to be seen if these ideas would translate into concrete policy responses.

8.5.2. Proposals for a new mosque policy in Rotterdam

The polemics about mosque architecture had many different effects. They figured within the context of a series of spirited discussions about Islam in Rotterdam between 2002 and 2006. Whether or not these debates contributed to a deepening of distrust of Muslims and a growing dislike of the new mosques in the city remains difficult to establish. After the assassination of Van Gogh in November 2004 there were several minor attacks against mosques in Rotterdam and a small fire was created on the doorsteps of the Mevlana mosque. These events caused serious distress and anxiety among Muslim communities in Rotterdam, but in other Dutch cities similar and more dramatic incidents took place, such as the burning down of an Islamic school in Uden and a mosque in Helden. There were also renewed protests against the building of the new Essalam mosque: someone threw a paint-bomb at the announcements plate on the building site, the extreme right group New National Party (NNP) organised a protest in March 2003, and the extreme right politician Michiel Smit (a former municipal council member of Liveable Rotterdam) produced a special brochure and a website under the confrontational title “no mosque” (Mosknee).

The period 2002-2006 was also a period of radical reorientation of public policies with regard to Islam in Rotterdam. In 2003 a large project was developed that was called “Islam in discussion” and that included series of lectures and discussions that were held at the municipal and city district level. In addition, in the wake of the murder of Van Gogh the municipality also developed policies to combat radicalisation among younger Muslims in Rotterdam (Maussen 2006: 116-124). Here I focus on the new policies with regard to the creation of mosques.

Alderman Pastors had failed to enforce his ideas about the outer limits of appropriate mosque architecture upon the new Essalam Mosque building. He continued to think, however, that Islam should be less visibly present in the urban landscape and presented a draft memorandum entitled Spatial Mosque Policy in 2004. The memorandum began by arguing that the ability “to take in” (incasseringsvermogen) by the citizens of Rotterdam had been pushed to the limit. A new policy would take as a starting point that the constitution stipulated that there was freedom of religion but that sometimes “societal reality” diverged from “legal reality”. In this case the societal reality was the building of mosques that by their architecture in an unwanted way visualised and accentuated the differences between cultures. It also mattered that for new faith communities “the freedom of religion should not only be a pleasant surprise that allowed them

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627. [“Zoiets moeten we hebben – een signaal dat we vooruit willen en dat we bezig zijn met integreren”] in “Moskee in Rotterdam moet eigentijds” in de Volkskrant August 16 2003. The Toronto Mosque is a large building in a modern style.

628. In 2001 a study had begun on the societal role of mosques in Rotterdam. The making of this report was strongly embedded in the kind of approach that had dominated in the 1990s. The idea was that now that the housing issues had been dealt with the builders would pass on the baton to policy makers who would think about the further social integration of Islam and possibilities to develop the role of mosques. However, when this report was published in 2003 the political context had changed significantly. Municipal official interpreted the report as a confirmation that many of the mosques did not contribute enough to the integration process. See Canatan et al. 2003.
to claim rights” (GR 2004). They should understand that freedom of religion also implied respect for others, an open attitude towards Dutch society and “respect for the modern architecture and town planning of our city”. The new mosque policy was to be a part of the wider integration policy. Seen in this light “the creation of large, prestigious projects for mosque building” was no longer in line with the new policy approach that favoured integration (idem: 4). Since a mosque did not fulfil a broad societal function it was not sensible to give the buildings a remarkable position in the city. In fact, in light of the municipal integration policy, mosques should preferably also provide for functions that targeted other residents of the neighbourhoods, such as child day-care centres. If mosque building could also be used by non-Muslims this would help to lessen “the feeling of separation”.

The alderman seemed willing to restrict religious freedom and the separation of church and state in order to enforce the integration of Muslims. It also seemed discriminatory if only Islamic houses of worship would be subject to a special policy with regard to their design, size and location. The policy memorandum immediately sparked intense political opposition. Muslim organisations protested at the Rotterdam City Hall. The united Rotterdam city districts wrote a letter saying that it was inappropriate that “a presumption of resistance” against mosques was now being used to justify this kind of policy.629 All parties in the municipal council, with the exception of Liveable Rotterdam, rejected the proposed policy. The alderman thereupon withdrew the proposal.

This was not the end of the matter, however, because in 2005 alderman Pastors again presented a plan for a new Spatial policy for houses of worship. This time the alderman had been careful to present the policy as addressing all prayer houses and the policy guidelines were also much vaguer. The goal was now to ensure that regarding new plans for religious buildings a “careful process” would be developed that would allow all stakeholders to “take their responsibility” in view of integration. The municipality wanted to stimulate “congruent architecture” and wanted to alter the regulations concerning the maximum height of “towers next to houses of worship” (GR 2005). The use of general categories such as houses of worship and towers could not really disguise that the aim was to prevent the building of large mosques and minarets that exceeded a certain maximum height.

Despite its more general and vague phrasing, the adoption of the new policy memorandum would again create tensions with existing constitutional and legal regulations, among them the freedom of religion and the separation of church and state. However, because of political developments such a principled discussion of the policy memorandum never occurred. In 2005 a new controversy began when alderman Pastors said in an interview that “Muslims often used their religion to justify their crimes”. These comments led to a motion in the municipal council forcing the alderman to step down. The issue was removed from the agenda and the new Centre-Left municipal government that acceded to power in 2006 seemed little inclined to pick it up again.

The heavily mediatised public discussions on mosque architecture seemed in the end not to have resulted in a clear and comprehensive policy. The ways politicians of Liveable Rotterdam had translated their ideas into policy measures had met with strong political opposition and they also existed in tension with basic elements of Dutch constitutional and legal regulations. However, there did seem to be consequences for policy practice in more indirect

ways. As I mentioned, the president of the Aesthetics Commission had asked in 2003 for clearer guidelines as to the kind of criteria that should be used to evaluate mosque buildings. Perhaps coincidentally, the commission in August 2003 rejected the initial building plans for a new Surinamese mosque in the city-district of IJsselmonde in Rotterdam, arguing that the suggested building looked too much like a “collage of a mixture of styles” and seemed “an incomprehensible construction” in its direct environment that demanded “some kind of peacefulness”. In November 2006 the plans for a new Moroccan mosque in Delfhaven were presented that, according to the architect, was “a liberal building” that took notice of its immediate surroundings. The sharp lining and the use of glass made the building “transparent”. The board of the mosque explained that for them transparency was important. The new mosque building was contrasted to the neighbouring Mevlana Mosque that was now depicted as that “oriental looking mosque”. 630 Mosque architecture thus continued to be discussed in close relation to the process of immigrant integration.

In the meanwhile the completion of the building of the Essalam mosque was repeatedly delayed between 2005 and 2008. At first there were problems with the German subcontractor and with the payments of the Al Maktoum Foundation for what by now had become a project of 6 million euros. In December 2006 a conflict developed within the Essalam mosque community when a group of members protested against the presence of representatives of the Al Maktoum Foundation on the board. They accused the existing chairman of corruption and feared that the influence of the Al Maktoum Foundation constituted a risk for the autonomy of the Muslim associations and might result in a more conservative religious profile of the mosque. The conflict escalated when there were brawls between different mosque-goers in front of the mosque. 631 These concerns were picked up in the media and also resulted in two members of parliament, Van der Toog (Christian Democrats, CDA) and Dijsselbloem (Social Democrat Party, PvdA), requesting the Minister of the Interior to order the General Information and Security Services (AIVD) to conduct an investigation of the influence of foreign sponsors on mosque associations. The building remained to be completed in August 2008. Because of continuing problems with the financing there was even the possibility that the building permit for the mosque would be withdrawn because of the association failing to stand by the agreements.

8.6. Conclusion

It has become a commonplace to suggest that the Dutch sought to accommodate Islamic institutions by mixing “pillarisation” with multiculturalism. This chapter has shown that this image is a distortion of actual governing approaches in the past 30 years. Institutional relations between state and religion cannot be equated with “pillarisation” and the growing emphasis on the

630. See “Annasrmoskee na 30 jaar nieuw gebouw” in Rotterdams Dagblad November 18 2006.

631. In the Fall of 2007 the board of the mosque association sought to obtain a court order to refuse entrance to the mosque of their critics. See “Conflict over macht in Essalam escaleert” in Rotterdams Dagblad October 9 2007. “Gelovigen Essalam blij met aangekondigde rechtszaak” in Rotterdams Dagblad October 23 2007 and “Moskee wil af van kritische bezoekers” in Algemeen Dagblad June 9 2008.
principle of separation of church and state since the 1980s had considerable impact upon public policy responses. Sometimes short-lived policy approaches, such as the now notorious idea of supporting the efforts of immigrant communities to “retain their cultural identity”, fuelled a dynamic in institutionalisation processes that then largely followed its own trajectory. However, crucial factors shaping integration process proved relatively immune to changing policy measures, notably the continued arrival of new immigrants lacking essential cultural and educational skills to successfully participate in Dutch society.

In the 1980s Dutch church-state traditions and Ethnic Minorities Policies converged around the idea that minorities ought to have equal rights. This resulted in a series of measures assuring Muslim participation in domains such as public broadcasting, education, spiritual care and burial arrangements. To compensate for structural disadvantages it seemed fair to give extra financial support for religious facilities. In 1983 the Waardenburg Working Party proposed a comprehensive program of support. It argued that the host society had a responsibility to assure immigrants’ basic religious rights and insisted that ethnic institutions had an important cushioning function for immigrants communities facing difficult circumstances. Substantial subsidies would create more equal opportunities for Islam and allow for the gradual evolving of guest workers policies towards a condition in which Muslims would be able to loosen the cultural, institutional, ideological and financial ties with their home countries.

However, the proposals of the Waardenburg Working Party were drawn into ongoing discussions on church-state relations. Therein, secular parties, such as the Social Democrat Party (PvdA), the Liberal Party (VVD) and the Liberal Democrat Party (D66), had taken a more principled stance on the issue of separation of church and state. They saw the revised constitution of 1983 as a welcome move away from the church-state traditions belonging to the age of pillarisation. In Parliament representatives of these parties took a firm stance: the state should not financially support religion and it should refuse to make an exception to subsidise religious facilities of immigrants. In 1988 the Hirsch-Ballin State Committee again came to the conclusion that it was fair to set up a subsidy scheme to support the creation of houses of worship for immigrant communities. This time the arguments turned primarily around the obligation of the state to guarantee effective religious freedom and compensate groups that were confronted with “special circumstances”. Yet, the secular parties remained opposed to direct financing. In the early 1990s, they effectively removed further discussions on subsidy schemes for mosques from the political agenda.

The national government reasoned that municipalities were better able to regulate the creation of mosques. In Rotterdam mosques entered the municipal policy agenda in the early 1980s and from then on moved with the tides of discussions on immigrant integration. Two major themes figured on the municipal agendas: the societal functioning of mosque associations and the incorporation of mosques into the urban tissue. Initially, it had seemed plausible to focus on the societal role of Muslim associations. However, early attempts in this direction

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632. The infamous slogan “integration with retention of cultural identity” did inspire policy measures and attitudes, such as generous support for ethnic organisations, the creation of native language and culture classes, reluctance to enforce further adaptation of immigrants and a public debate that was suffocated by the severe norms of antiracism. But processes of ethnic-organisation building and integration also took their own course and national and municipal governments found they had little opportunities and instruments to effectively change those developments.
rapidly brought to light the many underlying tensions in Ethnic Minorities Policy that were so ingeniously evaded when speaking of “integration with retention of cultural identity”. In different arena’s political discussions on mosques touched upon concerns about the growing number of immigrants in certain neighbourhoods, anxieties about the perceived rise of Islamic fundamentalism, and struggles about the goals of integration policy and the distribution of municipal subsidies for immigrant self-help organisations. These increasingly complex and contentious discussions ended in a dead-lock. Despite this setback, Muslim organisations were increasingly able to create the kind of Islamic institutions they deemed appropriate. Turkish Muslims especially, used the opportunities provided by the Dutch institutional environment to set up what was basically a trans-nationally organised Turkish Islam. They skilfully employed the slogan “integration with retention of identity” and the principle of separation of church and state to protect their associational autonomy. The municipality was obliged to acknowledge it lacked effective instruments to intervene in the development of Muslim organisations. Alternatively, municipal policy makers came to think that it would be possible to move progressively from better spatial to further social integration of mosques.

Policy makers announced in 2001 that the moment had arrived for “the builders to pass on the baton” and they initiated a study on the “societal role of mosques”. However, a year later the populist party Liveable Rotterdam dominated the political agenda on these issues. Instead of incrementally and carefully working on the further societal integration of mosques, municipal policy discussions “went wild”. Confrontational discussions and an endless flow of new proposals became the trademark of policy making around Islam in Rotterdam. When the coalition government of the Right was replaced in 2006 many of these plans ended in an indeterminate state.

The second major theme on municipal policy agenda was the location and housing of mosques. In the late 1980s increasingly incongruent depictions of mosques were articulated by various stakeholders: Dutch residents related mosque creation to the unwanted concentration of immigrants in the neighbourhoods, Muslim representatives and municipal officials believed mosque functioned as a “cultural home”, and secular ethnic organisations perceived them as obstacles to integration. Between 1987 and 1991 a critical juncture occurred, when the image of mosques as regular “neighbourhood facilities” developed and the idea of aiming for “the integration of mosques at the neighbourhood level” began to structure problem-definitions. Building on a discourse coalition between residents associations, mosque committees and municipal officials around this policy frame, a cohering policy approach was implemented by the Town Planning and Housing Department. Urban renewal and town planning policy practices provided many tools to navigate through the discussions that tended to become emotional and controversial. For a period of more than 10 years the vocabulary and frames of the municipal mosque policy shaped perceptions and helped to convert the process of the incorporation of mosques into an matter of sufficient parking space, preventing environmental nuisance and building up understanding among the Dutch residents for this “relatively new facility in the neighbourhood”. The mosque policy intended to progressively normalise the issue of mosque creation and it sidelined more symbolical aspects.

A second juncture occurred in the debate when issues of cultural diversity and immigrant integration re-appeared in mosque discussions in the second half of the 1990s. The idea that newly built mosques functioned as symbols of recognition and expressions of ethnic diversity was picked up in new discourses on the need for “multicultural architecture”, associated with the “diversity policy” approach developed in the political program of the coalition government of the Centre-Left that acceded to power in 1998. Within the more formal settings, discussions
still very much focussed on practical issues and concerns. In addition, Dutch political culture in the 1990s strongly disapproved of overt racist or xenophobic statements and thereby smothered possible criticisms of the dominant ways of praising ethnic mosque architecture. In January 2002 the alderman for Urban Renewal and Housing, Herman Meijer (Green Party, GroenLinks), enthusiastically announced that the special mosque policy had been concluded and he claimed that in Rotterdam the social conflicts about “visibility, dignity and presence” of immigrant communities had essentially been regulated (GR 2002: 5).

Ironically, at this time a third juncture occurred in municipal policy discussions on mosques. By 2002 the underpinning of politically correct speech had been weakened and alternative views on the symbolical meanings of newly built mosques entered the fray. Under the stimulation of representatives of Liveable Rotterdam the symbolical dimensions of mosque building were now put at the centre of public discussions. Architecture was associated with immigrant integration and the (perceived) growing prominence of Islam in the Netherlands. Discussions on the appearance of mosques now touched upon all kinds of societal issues. Advocates of multicultural architecture positioned themselves as open-minded and tolerant, and they were opposed by supporters of more modest and “adapted” mosque architecture. Others suggested there was a need to overcome “nostalgia architecture” and for Muslim institutions in the Netherlands to become more modern. They argued that there should be more room for “the young” and more imaginative “poldermosques” and buildings that were socially and physically oriented towards their Dutch surroundings.

This third juncture in public policy discussions has not (yet) been converted into institutionalised public policy responses. On two occasions, in 2004 and 2005, alderman Pastors of Liveable Rotterdam did try to create a policy that would result in banning the building of mosques in an all too showy and incongruent ethnic architecture. He defended his proposals in light of prevailing assimilationist interpretations of integration policies, but they met with intense political opposition and bumped into the boundaries of the institutional church-state regime. The legal order constituted an important obstacle to the implementation of policy plans that came down to institutionalising unequal treatment of Islam. Still, more indirectly, public policy discussions on mosque architecture have been giving increasing plausibility to the linking of mosque architecture to processes of immigrant integration and to the attitudes and ideas within the Muslim communities. Over the past years, these ideas have been picked up by various institutional actors, among them municipal aesthetics commissions and representatives of mosque associations. Figures of speech such as “nostalgia mosque” and “polder mosques” have had considerable impact on perceptions and discussions on mosque creation and design in the Netherlands, and they are now an obligatory reference point in discussions on mosque architecture.633 In 2001 a member of the Mevlana mosque congregation observed that the Turkish appearance and architecture of the new building were entirely appropriate, because “a mosque should look like a mosque”.634 A few years later the self-evidence of that observation had vanished.

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633 See recently the presentation of a new “polder mosque” in Doetinchem in “Zonder heimwee” in NRC-Handelsblad August 2 2008. The article was written by the same journalist, Bernard Hulsman, who had sharply criticised “Disney” mosque architecture in 2003, see above.