City Expedition Rotterdam
Streets as Places
11 October 2017
Public space is located at the intersection of many global issues from health to sustainability, innovation to equity. Placemaking Week is all about leveraging this convergence.
Participants

There was a good mixture of male and female participants from all around the world during this placemaking excursion. There were a lot of attendees from the USA, but also from India, Belgium, Argentina, Australia and other countries around the world. The ages of all the attendees were mixed as well as their professions, although all were involved with placemaking. The overall input of the day was coming from a group with many different background and expertise. On behalf of the city, there were project managers, urban planners, traffic planners, and public space designers as well as stakeholders from the case study areas, to present, participate and interact with the international placemakers.

Many of the participants already had seen each other during past events or met in the early morning at Pakhuis de Zwijger, or during the train journey to Rotterdam. The atmosphere was very informal and everybody was “chatty” and inspired, also due to the inspiration on arrival of the new Central Station and Station square, and the Flying Grass Carpet on the Schouwburgplein (Theatre Square). During the day people were looking after each other, making sure nobody got left behind. All of them were participating enthusiastically and interested in Rotterdam (although some were disappointed they didn’t get to see the Markthal during the visit, however they visited it themselves after the end of the program). And as one of the participants said: “We think it’s so great of you (municipality of Rotterdam) to spend so much time and effort in having us over and ask for our advice. That’s really great!”.
Introduction
This trip to Rotterdam explores how the city is reimagining its streets and public spaces. After the bombing of the city centre during WWII, the innercity has been developed as a New Town with separation of functions according to the modernist planning principles. Also the mantra of traffic engineers was “faster and wider.” This evolved in an city centre with the first pedestrian shopping street (Lijnbaan) and broad streets for cars. However, it turned out not to be an attractive innercity to live and stay.

In recent years the City of Rotterdam, the Dutch capital of modern architecture, has worked on the city as urban lounge. It added new architectural landmark buildings like the Markthal and Central Station, in relation to redesigned public spaces like the Stationsplein, the Binnenrotte, and the river banks. It worked on rebalanced streets to work better for pedestrians, bikes and transit such as the Meent. Also there were temporary interventions in public spaces, like the Luchtsingel, the Trap and the new Flying Grass Carpet (visited on arrival in Rotterdam).

But what’s next for Rotterdam? How can we remake our streets into a series of multi-use destinations with many ways to move from place to place? Popular streets like Nieuwe Binnenweg and West-Kruiskade still need new solutions for bikes and pedestrians. Inner-city areas like Wijnhavendistrict could benefit from efforts to strengthen the community. And the laneways behind Rotterdam’s shopping streets are rich with placemaking potential.

Goals for the day
The municipality of Rotterdam itself has been very active in (supporting) placemaking, especially in the last few years. It recently developed a city policy Places for People Experiment Programme 2017-2018 for the innercity. The chosen areas to look at today, still lead to many challenges and questions amongst the city planners and designer, also related to traffic issues. The municipality is looking for new insights and ideas from placemakers around the world. The goal for the day is to discover what the municipality of Rotterdam can learn from international placemakers?
What kind of areas are we looking at?

In Rotterdam three areas were visited by three separate groups:

1) The first group visited the Wijnhaven district / Maritime district. This is an area in-between the innercity and the river Maas, that has been undergoing a major transformation in recent years from mainly a desolated business area with offices into a new residential area with new high rise along existing streets and quays. However, this area is still a bit of an isolated island: how can we make it more attractive?

2) The second area was in the city centre: the small back alleys behind the main pedestrian shopping streets. These alleys often are abandoned and empty streets, only used for expedition and parking. However with the new vibe in the innercity, these spaces offer a lot of opportunities for an upgrade, leading to a new kind of use and public space in the innercity. What can be done to bring more atmosphere, and do we need even more public space in the innercity?

3) The third group went out exploring two high streets of Rotterdam, both with very different identities and thus with their own challenges and opportunities. The West-Kruiskade is a melting-pot with a lot of small shops and entrepreneurs of different cultural backgrounds. The street is a main street into the city for both cars, bikes and streetcars, not offering may space for pedestrians. How can we change the use of public space, making it a street to stay? The Nieuwe Binnenweg is an attractive street with a lot of cultural and catering amenities. The street is undergoing major roadworks for renovation of the streetcar tracks; how can we make sure the street will be easy to cross and improve walkability without losing its distinct character?
## CHARACTERISTICS

### Strengths
- Proximity to water
- Historical aspects
- Families with young children

### Opportunities
- Relation with water → The Harbour Island
- Branding and creation of an identity
- The best quality of the island is the water, make use of it! Café on the water, playground on the water

### Weaknesses
- Isolated
- Nothing to do for residents
- A lot of cars
- No communities (formal or informal)

### Threats
- Complaining residents if there is more recreation or if the cars are banned
- Impossible to create children playground because of the water (danger to fall in the water)

## PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

- Diminish number of cars, especially along the water sides/quays, more space for pedestrians
- Increase connections to the surroundings but keep island character
- Branding of the island, identity of the island
- Connect to the water
- Apple tree: only tree that survived WO2: place red chairs around it.
- Attract people to the island, a reason to come: e.g. create an indoor play area on first floor instead of parking space → activating for families with young children
- Oblige developers to work on placemaking
## CHARACTERISTICS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Opportunities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abandoned places, thus perfect for experimenting.</td>
<td>Make temporary functions: day / night to attract more pedestrians during the day / place to enjoy at night.</td>
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<td>Places that could be added to the public space.</td>
<td>Art on the walls or lighting scenes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Vertical green walls</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
<th>Threats</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Most back alleys feel rather unsafe and not very attractive</td>
<td>Complaining neighbours (no / less parking spaces, noise at night....)</td>
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<td>Lack of accessibility (at the moment)</td>
<td>Already enough public space in the inner-city of Rotterdam to think about?</td>
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## PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

- No parking, more green and trees
- Better connections for bikes and pedestrians to surrounding streets (e.g. Lijnbaan)
- Add identity and value
- Add a destination in the area so more pedestrians will pass by
- Add more shops/entertainment to attract more pedestrians during the day / place to enjoy at night (container – pop-up cafés, night galleries etc)
- Art-exhibitions, wall paintings and lightshows to make it more attractive
- Make it safer, cleaner and lighter, make sure there is a good pavement and green (trees)
ROTTERDAM HIGH STREETS

CHARACTERISTICS

**Strengths**
- Vibrant streets and entrepreneurs
- Small initiatives that can create something bigger
- Mixed opportunities due to high collaboration

**Opportunities**
- Less parking: make only one side of the street for parking, or parking only at specific places and times
- Create more sitting opportunities, make green space.

**Weaknesses**
- Different kind of functions are needed in these streets so it’s difficult to make it for pedestrians only

**Threats**
- Complaining residents if there is more noise in the area or if the cars are banned

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

- Less parking and more places to sit (both public and cafés)
- Parking: time frames, time restrictions,
- Better ways to cross the street
- Facilities for bikes
- Introduce temporary pop-ups: art and other things
- Shop owners and entrepreneurs are positive so help them to create a unique street
Proposed solutions are both short and long term, because the perception of time frames differed per country and thus per place maker. For them is was not clear what would be feasible in Rotterdam on short terms, also regarding local policies, permits and engaging local stakeholders. What we see here as short term solutions can be seen as long term ones in another part of the world.

Main conclusions based on the analyses and presentations:

- **Less cars in the city!** This is a complicated political issue, however due to gentrification cars become more and more abandoned from the identity of the city. Goal: making areas in the city car-free; get rid of parking spaces.

- **More small spaces for people.** Not only big squares and parks: more green, and possible to do it in small steps. Also temporary projects and installation.

- **Use blank walls for placemaking:** you can make art on walls or make it green (although that can be expensive).

- **Create different time frames** for proposals and experiments, like day/night, day one/day two, weekdays / weekends etc.
ROTTERDAM
You can read more stories on the City at Eye Level and Placemaking in the Netherlands in our new book

The City at Eye Level in the Netherlands

More info on www.thecityateyelevel.com
City Expedition Rotterdam
Streets as Places

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