The role of knowledge institutions in placemaking

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Abstract

Urban development is increasing in its complexity. Processes that transform urban areas are not steered by the public sector or private enterprises alone. Hybrid forms of urban development are emerging, with a gradually bigger role given to citizens' initiatives and self-organization. This favours also the involvement of knowledge institutions that add to new models of innovation by actively contributing to and partnering with public and private initiatives.

With the growth of urban areas we also witness the proliferation of urban spaces. There are every time more areas for common uses, more nodes and also more underutilized spots within the urban fabric due to conflictive ownership, lack of planning or other reasons. Rapidly urbanizing territories provide not only a quantitative challenge but equally qualitative demands to our urban environment.

New models that apply integrative strategies in particular to the development of public space use placemaking as a core concept, referring to the processes that reveal new, complex and multi-level perspectives for urban systems. The idea that cities are unpredictable in their development trajectories (Herrle, Jachnow, & Ley, 2006) and not subject to centralized control is widely recognized. However, the appreciation of complexity in the domain of urban development and planning and the involvement of non-governmental actors is relatively recent (Jachnow, 2006; Roo, Hillier, & Wezemael, 2012).

We suggest that, with the growing complexity of urban development, the role of universities and knowledge institutions could increase for the qualitative improvement of urban public space by bringing expertise, students and innovative ideas. At the same time, academic institutions could get the opportunity of exposure to contemporary societal challenges, real

cases and "testing grounds" for meaningful research, thus establishing a mutually beneficial process.

In this paper, we analyse the experience of the Institute for Housing and Urban Development Studies (IHS), Erasmus University Rotterdam, Netherlands. As an academic institution with a focus on the Global South, IHS took the initiative for an experimental placemaking process in its hometown, Rotterdam, in 2015. Within the Master of Science for Urban Management and Development, participants and academic staff of the specialization for Urban Strategies and Planning (USP) engaged actively in conceptualizing placemaking activities for deprived areas in the city.

The result was the development of diverse concepts and methods to facilitate placemaking processes, assess and evaluate demands and potentials, and reflect on the multifaceted implications of each of the possible contributions. Moreover, it provided valid lessons learnt for the opportunities and limits of placemaking as a tool for developing cities and societies that we herewith intend to feed back into the academic discourse.

Content

Introduction

Knowledge institutions in the area of urban management, i.e. academic and higher education institutes, can potentially play roles in the general process of city development and also specifically in placemaking. This paper examines how such a process can be designed and what can be learnt from a recent experience of the Institute for Housing and Urban Development Studies, IHS, engaged in diverse placemaking processes in Rotterdam, Netherlands.

At first, the paper explains the concepts central to the ideas of public space and placemaking in the light of complex urban environments. It indicates the challenges and opportunities for self-organization as a new mandate for stakeholders coming from bottom-up, and leads into the theory of the complexity of urban contexts and the quadruple helix model of multi-stakeholder collaboration.

In its second part, the paper illustrates the integrative placemaking activities applied by a group of international academics, constituted by the lecturers and participants of the Master of Science for Urban Development and Management (UMD). The overarching objective of this open educational process was to study the city from below, collaborate with actual stakeholders, gain first-hand experiences and, ultimately, make an impact on the city while learning.

The paper concludes with a reflection on how knowledge institutions can play an active role in placemaking processes, including an outlook to further assess and develop these approaches.

Public Space & Urban Development

Hybrid forms of urban development

In the Global North, urban development is considered less an exclusively public or private sector domain than it was some 20 years ago. The responsibility for developing our cities is increasingly shared by a variety of actors that all have their stake in the city, be it in ways of possessing parts of it, managing its functions or just by using its spaces. Hybrid forms of city making hence emerge, with an increasingly bigger role given to citizens' initiatives, active participation and self-organization. We believe that this shift of responsibilities can bring different forces together so that we can achieve inclusive and effective ways of making better cities for today and for the future.

New Public Management in the 1990s brought the transfer of executive powers for urban development projects from the public sector towards private enterprises, resulting in a range of different public-private partnership models. These models have been used mainly in the field of infrastructure and service provision, while public spaces have seen interventions from the private sector mostly in forms of sponsoring spatial improvements and the deployment of private safety officers. Although it could be argued that public space is a concern of the local

government that cannot be outsourced easily for its nature of being public and inclusive, the 'rationality of the market' is nowadays seen as 'the organizational principle for state and society as a whole' (Shamir 2008:6).

On one hand, investments of the public sector have been downsized, while on the other experience shows that the successful development of public space is better ensured by involving a broad range of current and future users. Therefore, urban planning practice at wide and interventions on public spaces are moving away from top-down approaches towards forms that recognize the complexity of urban areas (Portugali, 2012). For the improvement of quality and quantity of public space, the active participation of citizens and civil society organizations can take a stronger stance and engage in the development and management of space-usage for the benefit of local communities.

Certain aspects of public spaces contribute significantly to the local social and economic development. If these cannot be ensured through the traditional models of public or private implementation and management, these can be provided by socially innovative communities (Moulaert & Swyngedouw, 2010). In this respect, emerging self-organized initiatives can also be understood as a reaction to the unsatisfactory accomplishment of the government. The reasons for shortcoming are manifold, but it has to be recognized that some can be traced back to the formalized, though inefficient, organization of participation (Boonstra & Boelens, 2011).

The complexity theory of cities tries to explain the difficulties of planning (Portugali, 2012). It indicates the apparent fact that the changing composition of actors involved demand a change of steering urban processes. While we witness a decline of the importance of the public sector in urban development we simultaneously observe an increased need to facilitate and enable actions undertaken by private actors and the civil society. The increased complexity in urban processes derives both from the presence of a diverse set of stakeholders and from the inclusion of different dimensions, with environmental, social and economic dimensions being added to the spatial dimension (Roo, 2000). Hajer (2003:175) observes an 'institutional void' as the context in which public policies are made in a changing environment, missing 'generally accepted rules and norms'. Thus, the composition of the set of actors involved in urban development processes is changing. The previous "top-down" modus operandi appears to be obsolete and dysfunctional to the current socio-economic conditions of cities.

Academic and public discourse illustrates that there is a clear ideological side to this discussion, to re-focus on reclaiming the city in a broader movement that can be described as 'the right to the city' (Boer & De Vries, 2009; Görgens & van Donk, 2012; Harvey, 2008; Sorensen & Sagaris, 2010; Uitermark, Nicholls, & Loopmans, 2012). The debate is strongly based on the work of the French philosopher Henry Lefebvre in the sixties. Lefebvre claims that cities are collective artworks and that communities have the right to appropriate space and time in their city. Furthermore, he argues that we need a radical new kind of urban politics that includes room for conflict and in which citizens have the right to decision making (Boer & De Vries, 2009). Harvey also argues that: " the freedom to make and remake our cities ourselves is (…) one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights" (Harvey, 2008, p.23). Among his main

messages is that the city creates surplus and that democratic control over the production and utilization of this surplus constitutes the right to the city (ibid).

Therefore, we should perhaps not ask the question *whose* concern public places are, in terms of organization, regulation and 'placemaking', but *how* various rationalities, rights, rules and norms inform the making of public places. This paper explores how universities and knowledge-institutions can play a role within this variety of inputs in the process of placemaking.

Challenges for public space and place

Public spaces represent a central pattern of the life in our cities, they constitute vital urban cells (Mehaffy, 2014). Streets, squares, parks are the spaces where people meet - and all kinds of social and economic interactions occur. In our view, public places are crucial for social cohesion, they stimulate local economic growth, but also the re-introduction of environmental qualities in the urban grid.

Public space is not a static entity. On the contrary, it is extremely dynamic as a reflection of the ever changing human society. The ingredient that remains diachronic is the value of public space, the one that demarcates it from its surroundings through criteria such as its image, history, "genius loci", or name (Mayerhofer, 2005) combined with their physical characteristics.

Public space is a multifaceted formation. Its cultural, social, political, economic, recreational and environmental aspects are responding to the needs of the city and highlight the values of good – e.g. vibrant, green, functional, accessible - public spaces. In its non-spatial aspect, public space is an expression of identity, symbolic beyond its geographic boundaries and sometimes characterizing a complete neighbourhood – also in terms of stigma and associations.

However, in the light of the threefold global crisis, i.e. socially, economically and environmentally, the question of societal development is at stake in cities - and along with it, the question of the role and existence of public space. Global population growth and urbanization rates indicate a trend towards an increase of space used per capita (Angel, 2011) but this rather amplifies the problem, bringing attention to the lack of properly used public spaces, and the abundance of underused ones, in the cities of today.

On a global scale, we witness an ongoing trend of urbanization, which comes along with the most diverse urban challenges. The Global South is challenged by unprecedented and unplanned growth of urban areas. Meanwhile in the Global North we still observe processes of ongoing urbanization in some growth poles, but also urban decline and shrinking cities. However, the rise of inequalities is reflected within urban areas worldwide. This diversity of trends also implies a diversity of urban challenges: we observe the proliferation of urban spaces, i.e. more areas for common uses, more nodes and also more underutilized spots within the urban fabric due to conflictive ownership, lack of effective planning or other reasons. The

dynamic and complex process of urbanization provides not only a quantitative challenge but equally qualitative demands to our urban environment (United Nations, 2012).
We believe the need for –more and better– urban places is indisputable and should lead to new concepts of the city from below in which communal spaces are the point of departure. This questions the previous paradigm of functionality and zoning at the core of public city planning. How can we understand the potential role academia plays in the making of public spaces and urban development, addressing the challenges identified above?

The role of academia in the process of placemaking

As society is changing and rules and norms that inform placemaking are not or no longer generally accepted (cf Hajer 2003), the role of knowledge and knowledge institutions is not unambiguous. Scientific knowledge is (no longer) automatically trusted, it 'often produces only more uncertainty' (Hajer 2003: 180). This observation calls for further exploring then *how* science and academia can position itself in the making of places.

Based on the notion that a variety of actors shape societies and consequently cities we embrace a collaborative city-making approach. There is a need to define the role of academia within this approach and the underlying processes. We understand that academics can play a bridging role in linking various sectors and that the concept of co-production of knowledge is essential for actions that shape our physical environment, namely commonly used spaces. We would like to explore in this paper how academic institutions can play this bridging or boundary spanning role in urban development.

Turning to the ideas of "mode 1", "mode 2" and even "mode 3", science could help us to understand the potential role of academia in what is called science-society interface. Mode 1 is a knowledge-first approach in which the scientist is perceived as knowledge provider, acknowledging a boundary zone between science and society. Following Hajer (2003), mode 1 is no longer the hometown for academia. "Mode 2" science is more process oriented (Rydin 2007; Schmale et al. 2013; Wittmayer & Schäpke 2014), hence other stakeholders than researchers are perceived as problem owners and even the definition of the problem itself becomes collaborative, opening up a space of joint knowledge co-production where science and society overlap (Nowotny et al. 2001; Miller 2013 in Wittmayer & Schäpke 2014). Researchers are only one of the knowledge providers in these spaces (Miller 2013 in Wittmayer & Schäpke 2014), which could be created and maintained by researchers in process oriented research (Wittmayer & Schäpke 2014). Mode 2 could offer spaces of *"facilitated participatory learning"*. The mode researchers are only starting to explore is mode 3, in which the fluid roles and relations of researchers and the "others" are explored (see also Avelino & Wittmayer 2014: 16 – 17). "Mode 3" science comprises a re-orientation towards societal relevancy and problems, along with and informal science institutions (incl. organizations, routines, paradigms, self-image) (Schneidewind & Singer-Brodowski 2013)(based on Olivotto & Zuijderwijk 2015; Zuijderwijk et al. 2014).

For collaborative placemaking within the framework of developing public space, contributions from knowledge institutions can be manifold. For the explained reasons, the public or private sector alone would not meet the goal of creating qualitative and inclusive public places. At the same time, a mere community-based approach hardly exists and also would not provide the desired efficiency in terms of outcomes and effectiveness in terms of management. Hence, the involvement of professionals as well as academia can potentially contribute to the success of the process.

In the following, we introduce two cases in which IHS as a knowledge institute has been involved in placemaking, in terms of agenda setting as well as in the urban reality of Rotterdam.

Case 1: Transdisciplinary agenda-setting: Sustainable Development Goals and public space

Global debates and policy discourses on urban and social development make reference to the importance of public space and recognize the significance of urban places for the city. Also the UN-led drafting of a New Urban Agenda that should be adopted by all member states in the context of Habitat III, defines public space as crucial for urban development.

In terms of urban design, the draft indicates that *"new planning methods and systems can contribute to the process of changing the city"s structure and (…) promote public spaces and vibrant streets"* to better address current urbanization challenges. Fostering the idea that urbanization has *"the potential to help the world to overcome some of its major challenges"*; the New Urban Agenda intends to provide *"guiding principles for promoting sustainable urban development; such as designing compact cities, protecting public spaces and the commons, enhancing street connectivity, and encourage\ing well-designed urban layouts, favouring social diversity and mixed land-uses."* (UN-HCLP, 2014).

The current preparation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that are built upon the Millennium Development Goals, promote an "urban" SDG, including a target for public spaces. Within the SDG draft, "safe, inclusive and multipurpose public space" is a proposed target of Goal 11, accompanied by a set of indicators (see following box).

Proposed Urban Sustainable Development Goal (SDG11):
Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

Target 11.7:
By 2030, provide, maintain and encourage access to safe, inclusive and multipurpose public space.

Indicators:
Proportion of total public space in a city that is assigned to support livelihoods of the poor

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Urban green space per capita
Proportion of urban areas located fewer than 300 meters away from an open public space
Number of reported crimes (homicides, injures and theft rates) committed annually in urban areas, per 100,000 population

Source: UrbanSDG Campain, 2015, http://urbansdg.org/, (IIHS, 2015)

During a workshop on the urban SDG hosted by the IHS on May 20th 2015, the proposed urban SDG was scrutinized by academics and practitioners representing various disciplines and organizations (IHS, forthcoming 2015). Both the target and its indicators triggered a broader discussion about the specific attributes of public space and their critical externalities, highlighting the importance of the social dimension. The relevance for monitoring good public space was discussed along with the challenges of measuring qualities such as inclusiveness.

Though the target itself was welcomed, the expert discussion also indicated the shortcomings when trying to measure the efficiency of public space. As the indicators are to measure the goal's achievements, it implies that successful public space is related to and can be measured through the livelihoods of the poor, urban green space, distribution of public space and safety within the city. However, features such as urban competitiveness, land value of public space surroundings, the educational role of public spaces, awareness of sustainability, quality of life, happiness, healthy living, walkability, the right to the city, security, and many others are also important and could be equally used for monitoring qualities and quantities of public spaces (IHS, forthcoming 2015).

Figure 1 - Outcome of the discussions on Sustainable Development Goal Target 11.7: public spaces – Workshop on Capacity Development for Sustainable Urban Development, IHS, May 20th 2015.

Accordingly, in order to be able to accomplish the urban SDG target in its "safe, inclusive and multipurpose public space" aspect, the focus inevitably moves to experiences, perceptions and qualities rather than quantitative characteristics of public space - although quantity should not be disregarded. This qualitative perspective is the point where the requirement of making "place" becomes apparent and indispensable. A public *place* can be described as a unique entity in both space and time, transmitting its atmosphere and qualities to the visitor or user, providing the reasons why people gather on it.

In this context, the idea of placemaking can be understood as a response to the increasing complexity of urban development. It considers the potential of cities to be powerful social reactors that can support holistic processes, involving public and private sector, organizations and individuals as well as professionals, academia and grassroots.

Placemaking

We understand placemaking as the making of places that are concrete, geographic locations that are lived, produced and regulated, and constitute meaningful physical domains or realms. We conceptualize places like this after Tayler, seeing them as the concrete realms of the lived experiences (Taylor 1999 in Amin 2002: 388), Lofland (1998: 64) and as *"especially meaningful spaces, rich in associations and steeped in sentiment"* (Lofland 1998: 64) (cf. Zuijderwijk

[forthcoming]). Public places in their capacity to fulfil a multitude of functions, acting as ground for unexpected encounters, providers of fulfilling experiences, arenas for conflict solution, symbols and references for communities. Making of space, the importance of which can emanate far beyond its physical aspect.

Placemaking is a multi-stakeholder, multi-level and multi-sectorial approach. It requires a transdisciplinary perspective which can only be ensured by bringing different professionals and communities together. Diverse communities should be able to find common grounds around specific places (Martin, 2003). Knowledge and experience need to be further built among all stakeholders in a continuous process of learning by doing -and vice versa. It should be highlighted that meaningful implementation requires the coordination of all different stakeholders and groups from the very beginning. The local public sector needs to play a guiding role but the process should be inclusive and ensure all stakeholders' participation, together with marginalized communities and the "invisible" stakeholders.

In practice, local governments often tend to favour "flagship placemaking projects" that are seen as favouring urban transformations by increasing attractiveness of cities for investors (Madureira, 2013). Drawing from this example, the placemaking process requires strong social antennas, abilities to sense and understand the functions, problems, and dynamics of both the city and public space. In addition, it calls for readiness and skills to respond, in order to prepare conditions for collective action's expression and development. Local governments often lack such capacities, making the case for a stronger involvement of organizations from different sectors (Blanchet-Cohen, 2014).

Actors and networks

As mentioned, any placemaking process necessarily involves a vast array of actors. However, actors possess different perceptions regarding the place and its problems and therefore may develop different strategies, aimed at influencing the transformation process (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2007). Furthermore, actors involved in the process are not to be understood as independent from each other, but rather in their quality of being a part of a wider network, in which decisions regarding subsets of issues are taken as an outcome of their interactions (Rhodes, 1997). A proper understanding of the involved stakeholders is of paramount importance, due to the high amount of interconnections present in our societies (Bryson, 2004). Within network societies no single stakeholder is in charge of a whole process, but responsibilities are more and more shared between diverse coalitions (Koppenjan & Klijn, 2004). The recognition of the multifaceted urban complexity is the first step in the design of an inclusive placemaking process.

Collaborative models: the potential role of knowledge-institutions

However, the above does not allow us to identify yet the potential role of knowledge institutions in urban development. In the discourse of innovation dynamics, the "triple helix" model calls for a collaboration between industry, government and academia (Etzkowitz &

Leydesdorff, 2000). New theories of innovation claim that it is necessary to add a civil society component, leading to the formation of a "quadruple helix" (Afonso, Monteiro, & Thompson, 2012).

According to Trencher et al. (2014), when applied to the urban development context, such "quadruple helix" collaborative partnerships are emerging for a number of reasons. Increased complexities and uncertainties require innovative practices in urban development to start on an experimental level before scaling up. In such experiments, universities can interact with societal actors, using urban areas as a ground for trial. It has been argued, that a new kind of urban coalitions can produce first-hand experience and at the same time contribute implicitly to the improvement of the city's liveability as a whole. Eventually, the interaction of different actors stimulates mutual learning, leading to the co-creation of knowledge and practices that then can also be adapted and applied to other contexts.

Thus, it is the complexity of urban settings, deriving from being at the intersection of different disciplines, from the interaction of a diverse set of actors and from the presence of different scales, which calls for innovative approaches. Knowledge institutions can play a key role by applying technological and social cognition and by breaking the established disciplinary frameworks (Perovic, 2014). At the same time, academic institutions can train skilled professionals with the capacity of combining different disciplines and dimensions when approaching urban issues.

Case 2: Developing approaches for placemaking in Rotterdam

An inclusive approach for placemaking was developed during the ten-week-long module "Urban Strategies and Planning", which is part of the Master Course on Urban Management and Development. Through an action-research approach lecturers and fifteen participants gradually developed a strategy based on theoretical and practical inputs, and applied it to three selected areas in the city of Rotterdam, Netherlands. Participants in the course were international professionals with different academic and professional backgrounds coming from Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America.
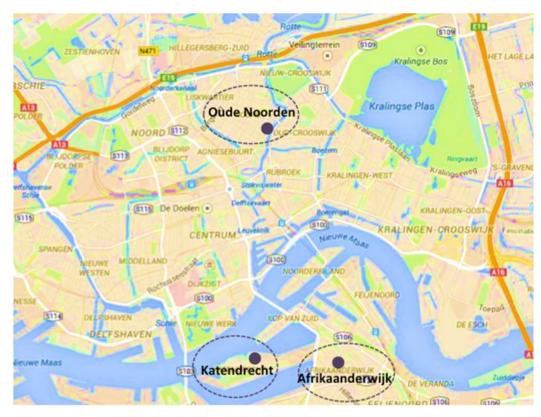
The purpose of the course was to create placemaking tools for reviving specific public spaces, converting them into desired places with features identified and accepted by residents and other stakeholders within the given complex context. The course departed from a critical review of formal planning processes, as defined by urban visions and master plans. Through lectures, participants were enabled to familiarize themselves with different viewpoints of the three main stakeholder groups; i.e. public administration, local government and the citizens, or self-organizing groups.

Throughout the course, the participants worked on certain localities. The core idea of the interventions was to adapt and further develop recent concepts of placemaking within the lived and political reality of Rotterdam.

The selection of places for "making"

For the placemaking process, three neighbourhoods in Rotterdam were selected as case studies. The selected cases were considered essential in two aspects: they indicate a valuable insight to the reality of the city in terms of social life and integration, and they are meaningful examples for assessing planning theory and practice from different scales and perspectives. The three selected cases could provide ground for beneficial observations when compared to each other, in terms of their distinct characteristics and their importance for the broader city development of Rotterdam.

Apart from their differences, the areas have a lot in common: they recently underwent urban transformations, possess a mostly residential character, present a wide range of local stakeholders and contain strategically important public spaces within their borders. First observations showed, however, that these public spaces suffer from negligence or are not being used to their full potential by the community.

Figure 2 - The three case-study areas within the city of Rotterdam
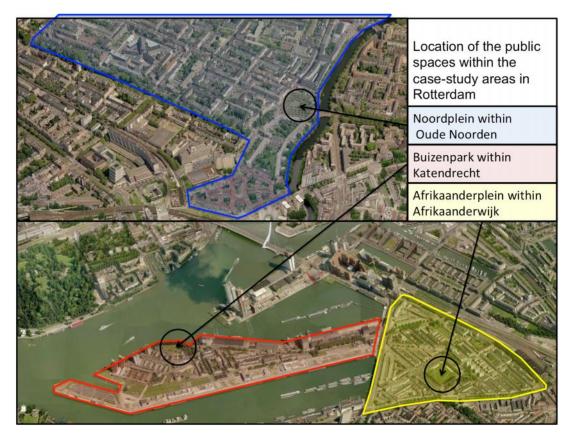

Two out of the three neighbourhoods (Afrikaanderwijk and Katendrecht) are located in the South of Rotterdam, which is historically considered deprived but is now in the centre of social policies. While Afrikaanderwijk continues to be considered as a problematic neighbourhood, the peninsula of Katendrecht has been in recent years influenced by large real estate

investments. It attracts now a wealthier population, a fact that also creates new economic opportunities. The third area, Oude Noorden (Old North), is close to the city centre, north of the river Maas which divides Rotterdam in its two parts. It houses a multi-ethnical population and a wide range of retail and other small economic activities.

Afrikaanderwijk's main square, the Afrikaanderplein, was identified as an underused space - albeit with potential. In Katendrecht, the park area was selected given its location and potential to host more leisure activities, not only for the locals but also for visitors. In Oude Noorden, the Noordplein square presented unexploited connectivity potentials. The square is a good transit point for pedestrian and vehicular traffic, but limited activities and interactions occur on it.

Location of the public spaces within the case-study areas in Rotterdam

Noordplein within Oude Noorden

Buizenpark within Katendrecht

Afrikaanderplein within Afrikaanderwijk

Urban Strategies and Planning: placemaking process

1. From the city vision to the neighbourhood

The course generated overviews of the governance situation and explored ongoing processes of interaction and decision making related to planning activities in each area, with the aim of proposing alternative or complementing strategies. As a starting point, through a critical review of the city vision, participants identified potentials and challenges for the three neighbourhoods, in the city context.

2. Identification of the area and tool selection

In order to gather information for the current situation analysis (stakeholders´ profiles, interests and power) related tools were developed by the participants, referring to concepts from the literature and practice. The aim of these tools was not only to collect the required data, but also to engage with the stakeholders and understand their perception of physical and social dimensions of the neighbourhood. Before acquiring primary data, participants assessed the qualities and challenges based on secondary data and spatial mapping, both helpful for a first understanding of the existing situation. However, the core element for the final strategies was the activation and participation of the stakeholders in situ, and the participants engagement with them in order to reach valid conclusions and make meaningful proposals.
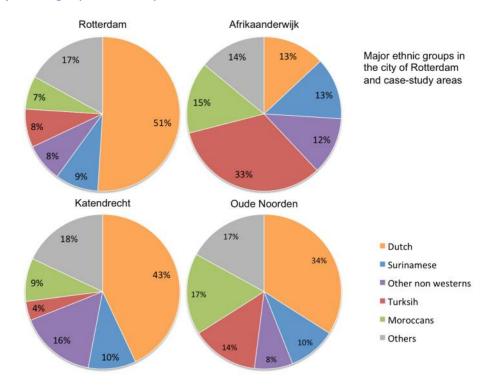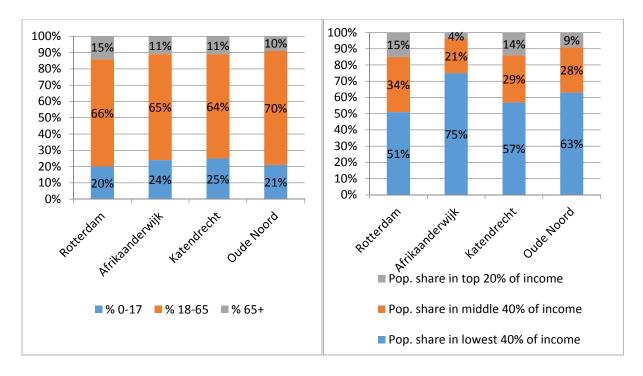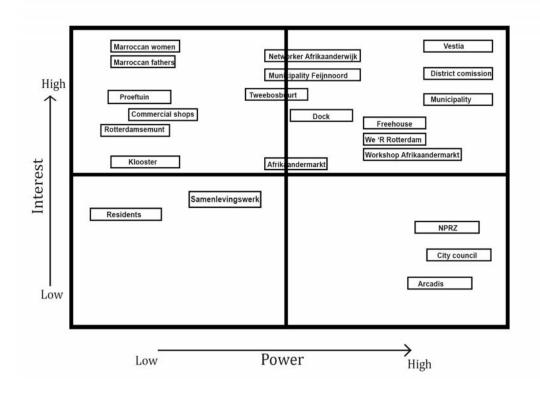
Figure 4 - Major ethnic groups in case-study areas

Figure 5 - Age distribution and income distribution in case-study areas

Left chart — percentages by age group:

	Rotterdam	Afrikaanderwijk	Katendrecht	Oude Noord
% 65+	15%	11%	11%	10%
% 18-65	66%	65%	64%	70%
% 0-17	20%	24%	25%	21%

Legend: % 0-17   % 18-65   % 65+

Right chart — population share by income:

	Rotterdam	Afrikaanderwijk	Katendrecht	Oude Noord
Pop. share in top 20% of income	15%	4%	14%	9%
Pop. share in middle 40% of income	34%	21%	29%	28%
Pop. share in lowest 40% of income	51%	75%	57%	63%

Legend:
■ Pop. share in top 20% of income
■ Pop. share in middle 40% of income
■ Pop. share in lowest 40% of income

3. Consultation processes / generating ideas

As a vital part of this process, a consultation process was designed for each of the areas, using a wide range of the different tools and methods selected by the participants. The tools developed followed local specifics, as the aim of the consultation meetings was to gather ideas from all the different groups (in terms of ethnic origin, age and sex) and understand how they can benefit from better public spaces. More importantly, the meetings looked for input from groups that often fail to be heard by decision makers. As an example, the "power vs. interest matrix", helped to identify the local stakeholders that had to be included in the following steps.

Figure 3 - Power vs Interest analysis of stakeholders in Afrikaanderplein. *The information in the "power versus interest" matrix - one of the different methods to assess stakeholders – was obtained from interviews with local actors.

Figure with a 2x2 matrix plotting Interest (Low–High, vertical axis) against Power (Low–High, horizontal axis), containing the following stakeholders:

- Top-left quadrant (High Interest, Low Power): Marroccan women, Marroccan fathers, Proeftuin, Commercial shops, Rotterdamsemunt, Klooster
- Top-center/right (High Interest, High Power): Networker Afrikaanderwijk, Municipality Feijnnoord, Tweebosbuurt, Dock, Freehouse, We 'R Rotterdam, Workshop Afrikaandermarkt, Afrikaandermarkt, Vestia, District comission, Municipality
- Bottom-left quadrant (Low Interest, Low Power): Samenlevingswerk, Residents
- Bottom-right quadrant (Low Interest, High Power): NPRZ, City council, Arcadis

4. Placemaking strategies

The ideas that sprung from the consultation meetings provided input to the strategic planning process, and were further developed into a specific local vision for each neighbourhood, as well as concrete project proposals. For each public space, the ideas were prioritized and six of them were further developed into detailed projects, highlighting related stakeholders and potential supporters. The identified projects were presented back to local stakeholders in public meetings, in order to gather feedback and explore the possibility to further develop them.

A tailor-made communication strategy for each area proved to be of key importance to engage and inform residents and stakeholders towards the end of the process. The initial stakeholder mapping and analysis of governance structures had already prepared the ground for a better understanding of related actors and potential beneficiaries (therefore allies) of public space transformations. In addition, consultative processes and development of the strategies on the ground as a bottom-up approach, favoured the potential for ownership of the proposed solutions.

Figure 7 - Placemaking project proposals for the three case-study public spaces

Project proposals and potentially involved stakeholders for Afrikaanderplein, Afrikaanderwijk, Rotterdam
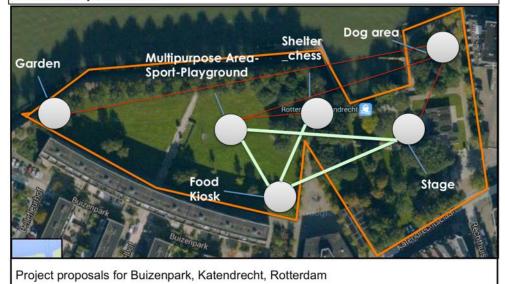

Project proposals for Buizenpark, Katendrecht, Rotterdam

1 — Noordplein Themamarkt
2 — Landscaping — Phase I
3 — Snacks stop

Project proposals for Noordplein, Oude Noorden, Rotterdam.

Figure 8 - The steps of the placemaking process

City Vision

Identification of the neighbourhood

Analysis of the area

Generating ideas

Planning the place

Lessons learnt

Assessment from an applied research viewpoint

Throughout this process, the students acted as intermediaries. They engaged with public actors and invited them to participate in the consultations, they triggered discussions about consistent problems that had been ignored, and they activated the more silent parts of the local populations. Their active participation combined with the opportunity to enter the process as an external observer, led them into developing genuine interest in the future of the ideas and issues under discussion, as well as in engaging with members of the community. This fact added significantly to the experience and significance of the educational process.

From the stakeholders' perspective, there was a broad spectrum of responses towards this active educational process. Overall, stakeholders from almost all social groups expressed their interest, shared their ideas and participated in the activities. The local government and self-organized groups proved very open in sharing, discussing and also listening. However, contributions from the private sector was not strong and would have provided an additional valuable input. As it was to be expected, not all neighbours were equally keen to participate, hence making it problematic to declare the outcomes of consultation workshops as representative for the entire community. The educational process experienced thus one of the core challenges in participatory planning approaches. Difficulties were for example encountered with the so called "NIMBYs", (*Not In My Back Yard*) that rejected any change within their neighbourhood. It has to be recognized that this was not a mere passive attitude of denial, but needs to be understood more in the context of gentrification. Residents of deprived neighbourhoods are threatened by economically-driven expulsion, if these areas have the potential to convert into highly attractive places.

This also leads into the critical review of the "joint vision", i.e. the concept of following one sole image for the future of the place at stake. Different interests among stakeholders are often conflictive and the question of power and influence cannot be solved locally. Neighbours tend to see the public place in front of their residences as their own, while commuting users primarily perceive the utility of the space for their daily routine. Both can agree upon some joint visions, but a number of features are only negotiable by specifying the time or the area for using it e. g. for making noise, walking the dog or protecting green areas.

Additionally, it also became clear that the concept of inclusive public space has its shortcomings. Inclusiveness can here not be understood as bringing different people and interests simultaneously together, but that places also have the role of providing exclusive spaces for specific groups, such as women, children or the elderly. Equity can be ensured by providing equal access to all groups and individuals, but it also presents the biggest challenge for integrative approaches for place and city making.

Concluding the lessons learnt we should highlight that going beyond physical interventions, and dealing with the planning process as the multifaceted issue which it actually is, (for example, dealing with social issues) poses important challenges to all involved stakeholders, including ourselves as academic actors. Stimulating discussions, motivating participation and eventually triggering interactions cannot be done without creating expectations or real-life consequences. This is the thin line between educational and placemaking processes which leads to impacts beyond the traditional sphere of academia.

Assessment from an academic viewpoint

Academic institutions have actively contributed to urban transformation processes since many years. A shift however within the responsibility for urban development and the emergence of the described new urban coalitions also demand new forms of engagement from academia. On one side, academic institutions contribute with knowledge, technical expertise and methods. However, this "mode 1" of the science-society interface has come under pressure in the last decades. How can we reimagine the role of academic institutions in urban development in general and placemaking in particular? Knowledge institutions that engage participants in a "mode 2" or even "mode 3" science-society interface may hold a key for future involvement of knowledge institutes.

We suggest that knowledge institutions can connect and facilitate processes of urban transformation as they are prone to taking a more neutral role, balancing the interests of the different stakeholders. They provide critical points of view and help the creation of synergies widely free from vested interests, and can thus support local governments, the private sector and civil society to engage in the most desired solutions. This role can be particularly important in communities still need to be further empowered, from a certain point of view. Subsequently, academic institutions can use urban neighbourhoods as testing grounds for the application of new tools and methods for placemaking. Educational interaction in real urban settings brings new opportunities and challenges to such complex environments.

As "outsiders", academics can bring new perspectives and venture into unexplored fields. Their participation provides new energies and experimental approaches to clarify and process unsolved issues. They can:
- Explore innovation and favour the encounter between different stakeholders.
- Pursue interaction, experimentation and trust in the learning process.
- Facilitate the co-creation knowledge with local actors and help transferring it to other contexts
- Bring in new points of view - in our case international ones – and widen the understanding of public space as a multi-faceted and complex social and spatial structure.
- Provide strong theoretical background and make techniques applicable to the different urban contexts.

- Link one specific placemaking process to its wider context and observe the implications at scale – thus ensuring that the single intervention does not impact negatively on the urban equilibrium.
- Bring future professionals in direct contact with real case scenarios taking them out of an isolated academic setting.
- Initiate collaborations between different disciplines and institutions and engage individuals as well as groups.
- Generate capacities playing an indirect, informal role in the field.

However, the following points need to be mentioned among the challenges:

- Due to time and resource limitation, the understanding of challenges can be limited, especially with regards to interpersonal and inter-organizational relationships and their evolution over time.
- Operating within experimental solutions might result unfeasible for practical reasons. Innovations are unlikely to be enforced by outsiders and need time to be accepted.
- Novel thinking can disrupt existing balances and improper communication can raise unintended expectations.
- A single intervention – maybe even strengthened through the academic support - might contribute to an unequal development within the neighbourhood and eventually lead to gentrification.
- The specific conditions of the selected case or scenario - in terms of socio-economic development, local culture, etc. - strongly influence the collaboration process and the specific role taken by academic institutions. There is no standard concept.
- Similarly, ways of using urban space are worldwide different, it needs to be further explored how comparable the processes are and how different the approaches and tools need to be.

We conclude that knowledge institutions such as the IHS can undoubtedly play an important role for placemaking. The establishment of collaboration frameworks with local actors is important for successful placemaking processes. This can serve both as an entry point and a mandate for academic institutions. Moreover, within such collaboration frameworks exists the possibility of actual knowledge co-creation and cross-contamination between the different actors that can be fed back into the academic course. Eventually, the creation of local alliances can empower communities as new knowledge is brought in and contributes to societal change supported by academia.

Notwithstanding, the role of academic institutions in placemaking also has clear limits. Mandate, legitimacy and the level of engagement need to be agreed and negotiated with local stakeholders in the process. Academic institutions provide knowledge, but lack financial or political resources for implementing identified interventions. They can however help to mobilize funds and resources by organizing coalitions and establishing links with decision makers.

Academic institutions need to be careful in addressing all relevant stakeholders. For example, in our experience, the engagement with the private sector proved to be difficult, also given the wide range of organizations, ranging from local shops to international real estate investors. However, academic institutions possess the capacity to properly assess their interests, thus providing support to the residents and civil society groups dealing with the business sector. Moreover, academic institutions need to be careful in managing the expectations raised during educational activities. In many cases, the projects developed can result of difficult implementation. Therefore it is of paramount importance to communicate properly with local stakeholders regarding the future of such plans, including the possibility of repeating similar experiences with new participants.

We suggest that further research explores the role of knowledge institutions more precisely in terms of power ownership, as addressed by Wittmayer & Schäpke (2014).

Conclusions

It is not new that academics engage in placemaking and urban development activities. In Rotterdam there are other initiatives such as the Veldacademie (see: http://www.veldacademie.nl/). Also, globally, there is a growing number of academic work directly engaging in the field of placemaking, for example at the POLIS University in Tirana Albania (see: http://www.universitetipolis.edu.al/). These approaches need however to be more consistently and systematically evaluated and more actively promoted. The recently established European Network for Global Urbanisms "Just Urban" also demonstrates keen interest in the subject of integrative placemaking. This paper is an attempt to contribute to the general knowledge created around the topic and also to build further expertise within our networks.

We believe that the responsibility for transforming our cities should be shared among different actors. We think that by bringing different forces together we can achieve inclusive and effective ways of urban development. As urban researchers, we have identified public spaces as the core pattern that constitutes our cities. Good public spaces can increase social cohesion, stimulate businesses, make real estate socially responsible and ensure environmental qualities. Good public spaces – or *places* - are of key importance for making our cities work.

The experience presented here proves the potential that academic institutions have, as actors in placemaking processes as well as the limitations of their engagement. Our self-assessment generated further questions regarding our role which needs to be further analysed through research in different directions, which we intend to further explore in the near future.

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