'Stadmakers' Rotterdam – A New Model of Civil Society-Based Urban Development?

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'... for the first time, planners had to step out of their administrative and public offices in order to work with local residents in on-site project groups.'

I visited Rotterdam for the first time in 1980, as a newly educated urban planner working with the International Building Exhibition Berlin 1987. The occasion was the urban renewal in the Oude Westen district, which had made a name for itself far beyond the borders of Rotterdam.

Since the 1970s, a transformation has swept across Europe. The reconstruction era came to an end, and there was widespread criticism of the modernist urban planning of the post-war era and its repercussions on the city. With her seminal book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), Jane Jacobs altered our understanding of the city. With the Architectural Heritage Year in 1975, a new appreciation and awareness of the historical city was brought to a broad public, while squatter movements from Amsterdam to Berlin politicized the conflicts surrounding the preservation of the nineteenth-century city.

As in Berlin Kreuzberg, the exhibition quarter of the 'IBA-Alt' in Berlin, urban renewal in Rotterdam was especially associated with demolishing historical buildings and subsequently building new developments. Citizens organized themselves precisely against this form of urban development and developed a new form of public participation; it came to be known as the *Inspraak-model*. What made this model unique was not only the broad possibilities for participation by residents, but also the fact that for the first time, planners had to step out of their administrative and public offices in order to work with local residents in on-site project groups.

This Rotterdam approach was revolutionary for my young IBA colleagues and me, because in Kreuzberg we had been confronted with almost the same problems. For the large housing associations redevelopment meant demolition and new construction. Participation was not seen as a serious alternative. The consequences are all too evident. Hundreds of houses where squatted in Kreuzberg and other parts of the city. This led to massive political disputes, and the IBA was caught in the crossfire. We realized that it was not enough to simply side with the squatters and residents, what mattered was working out concrete built and legal solutions with activists on site.

At that time, it was my task to legalize *Instandbesetzer Gruppen* (squatter groups) and then to refurbish and modernize their buildings, inexpensively and by means of self-help. This was successful in the case of about 100 out of a total of 165 squatted houses. And of course we wanted

to implement the Rotterdam project-group and *inspraak-model* in the IBA. Following this model, resident committees were formed by 1982 and an independent tenant advisory service was established, which became the blueprint for tenant participation within our *Behutsame Stadterneuerung* – cautious and soft urban renewal schemes, which later reached far beyond Kreuzberg.

The City as Project

Up to the 1980s, planning models all over Europe were, to a great extent, based on modernist principles of urbanism. The city was considered an entity that could be created and made, like a machine or an automobile. And as with machines and automobiles, there was only one direction for urban development – progress. Sure enough, this progress also meant a progressive suburbanization, the flight of the middle class from inner-city areas and the desolation and decay of the city centres.

In addition to that, the limitations of the welfarist planning approach from above became ever more obvious. Growing shortages in public spending, mounting international competition among cities, the liberalization of markets and the deregulation of financial systems increasingly limited the scope of action for cities and local municipalities. The new planning philosophy of 'incrementalism' was no longer based on overall holistic planning, instead it was grounded in 'urban acupuncture', through built interventions in various places in the city. In the course of time it became obvious that urban planning tended to reduce the fields of action in the city and to focus public and private money on the city centre – as was also the case in Rotterdam.

The Kop van Zuid and the Erasmus Bridge are the first large-scale projects of the new postmodern planning philosophy in Rotterdam. Within this new planning approach, it became characteristic that it was not only the city, or rather the municipal administration, that has to take responsibility for urban planning, but that investors, project developers and – to various degrees – citizens also need to be brought on board. It is not coincidental that the term Public-Private Partnership (PPP) has made a career since the 1990s, since it reflects precisely this new planning and financing model of a liberalized urban development.

Today it can be asserted that urban development by 'large-scale projects' has in fact tremendously regenerated inner cities and inner-city waterfronts. However, it cannot be overlooked that this regeneration is not solely due to 'large-scale projects', and especially are not only a result of private *grands projets*, but that these large interventions have always been preceded and accompanied by smaller interventions. The Kop van Zuid would not have been possible without the urban regeneration activities of the 1980s in Rotterdam's historical quarters, from the Oude Westen to Feijenoord.

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The Metabolism of the City

Despite the successes of urban renewal by means of incremental interventions in the last decades, it must be admitted that urban development of the postmodern era has also left us with tremendous problems that we must overcome, and a wide scope of duties. The bursting of the real estate and financial bubble of 2008 cost home owners and people with savings millions of euros. In addition, there are the unsolved problems that postmodernity largely ignored, such as the growing social polarization within our cities, the continued unresolved traffic problems, the increasingly grave CO_2 pollution and its strain on our atmosphere and the associated effects on our vulnerable cities.

In my conversations here in Rotterdam, I have gotten the impression that many people and urban stakeholders are occupied with exactly these issues, because they are facing these

problems and they are aware of their fatal consequences for the future of Rotterdam. Consider, for example, the highest representative of the city, the Mayor of Rotterdam Ahmed Aboutaleb, who articulated a fascinating vision for the city under the Biennale's theme 'Urban by Nature':

Imagine: before too long, there will be a transition to a circular economic system with the port as a logistic hub for the import and export of raw materials, recycling of waste materials, coupled with an urban manufacturing industry that offers great opportunities for business and employment. In the city, innovation facilitates the building or transforming of premises that no longer only consume energy, but also produce energy, coupled with local energy storage concepts or local raw material production.[1]

What the Mayor is describing is nothing less than a new, future-oriented narrative for Rotterdam as a whole (and not only for individual areas). It is the story of a city that has accomplished the transition from being Europe's largest transhipment port for fossil fuel energy carriers to becoming a global hub for sustainable commodities. At first glance, this vision may seem very bold, but it is also clearly realistic, because it is only a matter of time until the importance of global energy carriers will decrease, as a result of the worldwide exhaustion of resources, political restrictions and/or unaffordable costs.

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Rotterdam (and Hamburg as well) is well advised in making timely considerations about its future role as a global port. The narrative of a global port-metropolis seeking its economic future in the organization and logistics of metabolic economic material flows, instead of wasting resources, is more than just a nice vision. It is a strategic guiding principle for the coming decades. And it is a principle that not only applies to material and physical substance flows but to social and cultural ones as well – as Maarten Hajer[2], the main curator of IABR 2016, has pointed out.

The idea to base the future of the city on new, sustainable, metabolic cycles not only has economic and environmental implications, but social and cultural ones as well. The urban metabolism is more than the organization of material cycles, as was recently, and impressively, demonstrated by the International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam.
In a social, cultural or political sense, the concept of the urban metabolism is a permanently reflexive exchange of ideas, solutions, concepts and competences in local social networks.

Emerging New Actors Making Rotterdam

The Afrikaanderwijk cooperative is an outstanding example of this comprehensive understanding of sustainable and metabolic urban processes. 'Freehouse Coop' not only supports the individual operators of the largest open-air market in the Netherlands by generating value and vitality for their stands, but also organizes numerous activities in the value added process, from local production to distribution, consumption and recycling. This is indeed a new and innovative approach to 'Making City'. It reflects two essential characteristics: the pragmatic *hands-on method* and the scope of *civil society stakeholders*. It is no longer single (more or less) autocratic rulers or powers ('capital') that 'make' the city, but it is urban society, comprised of a constellation of powers, talents and interests, as Klaus Overmeyer, in the past year, so nicely described as 'City Agents'. In terms of 'Making City', traditional work and competence allocations of urban political and administrative systems are suspended, or better yet configured anew. The programming of the city and it's quarters is no longer only the task of the municipal agencies and administrations, but a matter of many participants who organize themselves in various urban networks.

[1] Gemeente ROtterdam, IABR et al Urban Metabolism, sustainable development of Rotterdam (R'dam 2014, p.11)
[2] Maarten Hajer and Ton Dassen, *Smart About Cities. Visualising The Challenge For The 21st Century Urbanism* (Rotterdam, 2014).

Take, for example, the 'Luchtsingel' – a group of young architects take the initiative, and by means of crowd funding a network of supporters is born. Eventually, the residents of Rotterdam vote for the financial support of the – by the way architecturally very well done – pedestrian bridge. That this unusual connection not only allows the crossing of rail tracks and urban wasteland, but also private property lines, jurisdictions and individual interests, virtually turns the bridge into a symbol of the power enabled by collectively 'Making City'. And finally, the city assumes the project as official planning.

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How roles creatively and productively redefine themselves can be seen in projects such as the Zomerhofkwartier, the Hofbogen or the Schieblock. The story of the Schieblock is especially interesting. ZUS, the architecture office, was renting it temporarily as an anti-squatter. Together with young entrepreneurs (CODUM), they managed to fill the whole building with creative businesses and attracted some reinvestment in the building, for five years. At the end of this period, last summer, the whole 'software' (tenants, contracts) was handed over to the developer who owns the building, with the intention of continuing its use by the creative entrepreneurs for another five to ten years.

What is common to all of these actions of 'Making City' is that they can only be successful because they emerge from an urban-social mind-set, which is not embedded in top-down structures, but lodged in collective, reciprocal win-win exchanges. This does not deny that the realities of individual cases of negotiation are at times difficult and nerve-wracking. In the practice of 'Making City', the borders of formal legality are not seldom crossed, in attempts to bringing about change in politics and administration – like the case of Afrikaanderwijk has shown. Here, the vitality of the market was in danger of collapsing, due to restrictive legal or administrative ordinances. To raise public awareness about this problem, the Freehouse Coop organized numerous performative actions. By means of this 'guerrilla' policy they purposely breached, for instance, the prohibition of preparing food on the market and the congregation of more than three people on site. This example demonstrates quite well the new approach of 'Making City' as an institutional and anti-institutional process, in other words: as a balancing of inside-out and outside-in oriented policy.

Learning from the IBA

When Arie approached me about being this year's guest critic at the 'Stadmakers Congress', he proposed three central questions that could bridge the eight years of praxis experience of the IBA Hamburg with the Rotterdam Making City/Stadmakers praxis:

1 **How do you organize urban development as a process of learning?**
The IBA is a reflective laboratory, intended to bring a new, shared perception of challenges and opportunities, connecting this with concrete realizations and learning from the progress that has been made. This is a process involving not just the people 'on the project', but aiming much broader, even internationally. Which conditions define the quality and impact of these cycles/loops of learning together?

2 **What makes projects strategic? What makes them forms of concrete storytelling?**
The IBA took some time to find its focuses and its themes. It aspired to 'generate modules for integrated urban development without aspiring to a comprehensive urban development plan'. It's themes are building new narratives, its projects are charging and loading these narratives with concrete projects and realizations. How is this mutuality organized, and what does it take to work like this on the scale of a city?

3 **How do you invite an open process outside-in?**
We are looking at emerging, new players/stakeholders. The traditional divisions of the arena between public, private and civic players has changed radically. How do you organize a process that is open and inviting, that is inclusive, but still delivers concrete results? How do you work from the equivalence of the different stakeholders? How do you invite them to connect, outside-in?

After an equally short and intensive stay in Rotterdam in the beginning of November, filled with numerous conversations, it is not easy for me to answer these questions directly, since the differences between the formats – that of the practice of 'Stadmakers' in Rotterdam and that of the IBA in Hamburg – are immense. A very significant one is the fact that the initiation of an IBA is almost always a political top-down initiative; therefore an IBA generally does not emerge from urban civil society, but rather from visionary ideas of vanguards or simply out of necessity. It is precisely when the conventional mechanisms of politics and planning fail in an urban quarter that the cry for an IBA is made. That was also the case with the IBA Hamburg. The Hamburger Elbisland is an urban district in the heart of Hamburg, which had been neglected for decades. The Flood of 1962 claimed hundreds of lives and the structural changes of the harbour industry caused the former social milieus of the dockworkers to collapse. Hamburg's Elbisland became the backyard of prosperous Hamburg, a place one passed through as fast as possible on one of the large public highways.

In 2005 the Hamburg senate decided to realize an International Building Exhibition, in order to search for new, holistic solutions for the neglected quarters within the format of an IBA. An International Building Exhibition is always both a motor for urban development and a laboratory for innovation and experiment. Especially the latter requires a portion of curatorial freedom, without which no IBA can be successful. A basic condition for the success of an IBA is that the top-down approach from its initiating phase is overturned in the course of the curation. Those who want to direct an IBA with a top-down approach will cause it to fail. Reversing the top-down approach in the format of an IBA in itself sounds like a paradox and in practice is not easy to achieve, since the municipal administrations are confident and aware of their power.

Location, Themes, Governance

An IBA is like a pyramid with three sides: the location, the themes and the governance. All three must fit into each other and support one another. The contents of an IBA always develop from the specific location of where it is taking place. From this practical relevance of an IBA, the necessity also arises for the development of specific governance formats. In order to secure the formal working and decision-making processes in this spectrum of 'claimed responsibilities', we had already made contracts with the necessary Hamburg authorities, as well as the Hamburg Port Authority, as early as 2007. In these we established the forms of collaboration, the necessary voting and steering modalities and mechanisms for conflicts resolution. This may sound a bit bureaucratic or typically German, but is necessary to successfully work together. Because an IBA is always a new player in an already defined system of established jurisdictions and responsibilities – and worse even – it cannot be narrowed down to one specific sectoral competence. Due to its comprehensive approach an IBA involves itself in everything – if necessary. Holistic thinking and planning is a core element of the IBA and always a point of conflict, especially when sectoral responsibilities are impeded upon. That is why it is necessary to fix these new forms of transparent and cooperative governance.

'From government to governance', this sentence also came up during our first discussion round on 3 November, describing a whole new role of urban politics and administration. The administration must take the unfamiliar position of a partner, rather than that of the sole decision-maker. It becomes one part of the constellation of stakeholders, concertedly developing solutions, and then legally and financially enabling projects. To govern is to rule and regulate, governance is to moderate and reflect. Government is based on a hierarchical organization – governance on societal metabolism, therefore on reflexive learning processes. In doing so, the knowledge, experience and competences of all participants are equally considered for problem solving. In this new governance structure, the question is also about the manner in which stakeholders and locals are included in the process of planning, decision-making and finally realization.

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Within the scope of the IBA we have developed and practiced a number of different forms of participation. At the core they address four central aspects:

- Open and transparent procedures, which foster trust; since trust is the basis of every cooperation and participation.
- Deliberative instead of informative participation, which means it becomes about the collaborative development of finding solutions, rather than delivering finished recipes.
- The inclusion of groups yhat are less capable of articulating themselves, through special participation formats that take into account their specific social, demographic or cultural circumstances.
- Not only limiting discussions to those who are directly affected, but opening them up to the entire urban community. Only in this way can questions be addressed taking into consideration the common good in relation to the interests of those directly affected.
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Take, for example, the development of Katendrecht, the future High Line 'Hofbogen' or the new Market Hall. The characteristic and common aspect of these projects is that they are not conventional PPP projects, but that a diverse set of stakeholders – not only developers and the city – came together. It is interesting to see how these different forms of negotiating and designing the city require a particular set of people. They consider themselves not only 'stakeholders' but 'protagonists' that rely not only on their own, narrowly defined interests and competences, but are equipped with what we may consider *urban empathy*. Having a feeling for the functioning of the whole, rather than being focused on their individual sections, for which they may be 'responsible'. It is also interesting that these protagonists can work in a much more creative and engaged manner, the broader and more flexible their scope for decision-making within their institution is.

I would like to put forward the thesis that *urban empathy* is the result of a holistic thought and praxis concept, that is to say that urban stakeholders are leaving behind their one-dimensional roles as planners, financers, cultural producers or civil servants and are to some extent adopting the roles and perspectives of those who are carrying the responsibility for the realization of projects. This generates a form of 'Making City' by 'Stadmakers' across disciplines and beyond conventional responsibilities.

Building Real-Lab Rotterdam

This holistic oriented approach focusing on practical intervention is also the greatest strength of the IBA format. The more than 100 year history of the International Building Exhibition demonstrates that it is not only the notion of learning and experimenting that is inherent to its format, but also the built implementation. An IBA is not deserving of its name if it doesn't build something. Therefore, it will still be possible to rate and evaluate the processes and built results after many years. Theory and praxis are closely linked in the format of an IBA, as is otherwise rare in conventional planning.

With the International Architecture Biennale, Rotterdam has a similar format of doing an 'open heart' analysis of the current urban and societal transformation processes. In the past years, the biennale has raised and theoretically examined themes (such as 'Urban Metabolism' or 'Open City'), which are worth being experimented with and implemented, especially in a city like Rotterdam. Different from an IBA, the IABR is a lasting facility with regular activities and exhibitions, setting important accents for international architecture and planning discussions. If it was possible to collaborate with other Rotterdam based think-tanks, (for example the AIR or other cultural entrepreneurs) towards a continuous urban laboratory for concrete places and situations, 'Making City' could become a 'Real-Lab' of urban development in Rotterdam.

A Story of Learning

It is not always about composing new narratives, as in the Kop van Zuid; it is equally important to productively develop existing narratives further, like those of the Afrikaanderwijk, Charlois, Pendrecht or other urban quarters in the outer rings. While the modernist era orchestrated the story(ies) of the city from above and postmodernity more or less left them to the forces of the market to decide upon the fates and fables of the city, the new urban culture of 'Making City' could make the narrative of the city – as a whole and in its parts – a matter of a broad participative civil society discourse.

From my perception, Rotterdam is not following a very clear strategy for this. In a conversation with Henk Oosterling he said: Rotterdam tells two stories, that of the north and that of the south. The northern city tells of the city of the aspiring middle class, in every respect that of the 'Smart City'. The narrative of the south proclaims 'Look at what is! Look at us who are living here!' It is about the life worlds and realities of the people, of their opportunities for living and education, for housing and employment. It is about the place and the future of people coming from a diverse range of nations and cultures in the civil society of Rotterdam.

Henk Oosterling's idea of connectivity means: not focusing policies – in particular education policy – on the subjects, but improving the networks and relationships around the subjects, in order to create this form of inclusion on the level of neighbourhoods and on the level of the city. This is a completely new approach that has to be discussed on a city-wide level. But the role and position of public authorities is difficult to recognize. The 'National Program Rotterdam South' seems to be worlds remote from the approach of Henk Oosterling and his SkillCity/Vakmanstad. The issue is: Do these separate systems learn from, or influence, each other? Or are they parallel worlds, operating in the same physical domain?

With the IBA, we initially experienced a similar phenomenon. The initiative of *Bildungsoffensive Elbinsel* was launched in 2001, so a long time before the IBA, by teachers and parents on the Elbisland. They no longer wanted to accept that every fourth schoolchild on the Elbisland left school without a formal degree. In the framework of the IBA, for the first time, the education department, the social department, the cultural department, the ministry of urban development and environment, and the local district administration of Hamburg Mitte collaborated in order to pursue a concerted education policy. The most important insight this gave us was that education (policy) is more than just school policy! Especially in socially marginalized neighbourhoods, schools must be transformed into community centres, allowing for early childhood language education, facilitating job placement and vocational training, as well as cultural education. And of equal importance: it is not only parents and teachers that educate children; urban neighbourhoods also determine the future of children. Scientifically there is no doubt about the fact that diverse urban structures and neighbourhoods offer better chances for education and vocational careers than monostructural ones. That means we have to focus on urban planning when it comes to education.

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Grounding the New Practices

And there is yet more that we can learn from our experiences in Rotterdam and in Hamburg (and many other cities): also in times of economic crisis, politicians and administrations carry the responsibility for the city. That is their inherent role in a democratic community. Neither education nor urban development can depend solely on the dedicated idealism of the few. On the contrary, this dedication must be the catalyst for a reflection and self-transformation of administrations and institutions. In Rotterdam, it seems to me that this is also the point where the public administration is now refinding and redefining its tasks and role, after a long period of reorganization. The goal is not to hand over responsibility, but to practice it in a new cooperative and transparent way.

The question about the role of state politics and institutional responsibilities will, sooner or later, also gain relevancy in other fields, namely when a new real estate boom is looming. Already, the articles concerning the real estate market are declaring:

The Netherlands' housing market has finally bottomed out. House prices are rising after five years of price declines, amid a recovering economy. Property transactions grew very strongly in the first half of 2014 . . . In Rotterdam, house prices increased by 4.1%. This was the first price hike after 9 consecutive quarters of y-o-y price declines, including the previous quarter's 0.2% y-o-y decline.[3]

Of course this is good news for the real estate sector, but it raises some questions: What kind of impact will a new real estate boom have on the recently emerged creative industries in the city? What happens in the 'long run' with excellent inner-city locations such as the Zomerhofkwatier? How resilient are the new social and cultural networks and cooperations? Does the promise of being experimental prevail in times of new, and perhaps increasingly liberalizing economies, and less public influence? How stable is the present culture of cooperation and connectivity when it is becoming less necessary – at least in the eyes of some shareholders?

The test for a new culture of 'Making City' still stands, and it will only prove successful if the lessons of the crisis do not melt away like snow in the march sun, when the real estate industry gains momentum again.

It is foreseeable that, along with civil society, urban politics will have to step up and play a key role. With this, it is not about exercising formal institutional power, so not a return to godfather planning, nor is it about a regression to a *Laissez Fair* state of being.
It is about municipalities and their political representatives making use of their informal authority and legal powers, to persevere the new urban culture of 'Making City', also in times of economic revival.

Presumably, there is no better time than now to sit at a roundtable and discuss new terms and conditions for a '*City Contract*' between all involved parties. The goal of such a formal agreement between the stakeholders, the administration, investors and civil society should be to establish and set up general rules for the current culture of 'Stadmaker'. These rules should then also apply to peripheral urban areas surrounding Rotterdam's centre, those that today may still stand in the shadow of inner-city interests.

Then the new 'Rotterdam Model of Making City' will write history once again.

Thank you for your attention.

Uli Hellweg
28 November 2014

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[3] http://www.globalpropertyguide.com/Europe/Netherlands.

I want to say thanks for inviting me to the 'Stadmakerscongres' as this year's guest critic. It's a great pleasure to be here in Rotterdam again and to participate in this unique form of discussing and reflecting on urban issues of international importance.

The role of a guest critic is rather unusual for me, because normally I'm the person (or the representative of the organization) being criticized. I enjoy this comfortable situation thanks to all the kind colleagues and friends who helped me understand what 'Making City' is about here in Rotterdam:

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