Introduction

In November the first UrbanA Arena events took place in Rotterdam and Lisbon. The UrbanA project aims to *) synthesize and broker knowledge for sustainable and just cities generated by prior research and innovation projects and translate this knowledge into action, *) empower participants to apply this knowledge locally, *) facilitate interaction among diverse participants and *) influence policies in favour of sustainable and just cities. In a series of four translocal arena events we zoom in from a broad mapping of approaches (arena 1) to drivers and manifestations of urban (un)sustainability and (in)justice (arena 2), beneficial policy contexts (arena 3) and policy recommendations (arena 4). In between side events are organized.

The UrbanA arena’s for sustainable and just cities are set up as a translocal arena: a temporary space to co-create knowledge and develop new ideas, and also a space for critical reflection and debate. In Rotterdam the mapping of approaches was a starting point for the conversation on day 1, followed by three parallel sessions in the afternoon about: the transformative potential of approaches, learning across contexts and participatory processes. On day 2 we opened up the program for session proposals during the open space and ended the day with three field visits.

During this first Arena event we only laid a foundation for upcoming conversations. At the end of the day the need was felt to dive deeper, bring more focus and context in the discussions. This is something to do in the following Arena events. This UrbanA city-zine is an impression of the first UrbanA arena event in Rotterdam and side event in Lisbon and includes pictures, reflections by participants and summaries of the sessions.
A translocal UrbanA Arena
By Flor Avelino

This event was an experiment in various ways. To a large extent, we could build on years of experience at DRIFT for transition & partners in co-organizing localized ‘transition arenas’ as an approach to bring people together in temporary networks to transform systems by analyzing, envisioning, networking and experimenting with alternative futures. However, the UrbanA project is one of the first times that we design a TRANSlocal arena with people from over 30 different cities. Fostering translocal connections across different cities, regions and countries is an important way of people teaming up for creating more ecological, social & economic justice. But how to develop such a temporary translocal community across different places, identities, professions and issues? How to, on the one hand acknowledge and learn from their particular differences while at the same time also transcend them and finding common ground? Besides the concept of transition arenas, we have built on notions such as Urban Living Labs, Communities of Practice, network weaving, and pattern language to design UrbanA’s arena events and other activities as spaces of active knowledge co-creation by diverse actors. (You find more background information on how we designed the translocal arena here: https://urban-arena.eu/.../D2.1_UrbanA_Arena-Design_website.p...).
Blended meetings how and why
By Flor Avelino

“Another experimental aspect of our translocal arena is making it a ‘blended’ endeavor with both offline and online participants. We were blessed to have ECOLISE’s ‘remote-ready’ expert Nenad Maljković with us from beginning to end, setting up the physical technology and also – just as important – guiding us in the practices and ‘etiquettes’ of virtual hosting and blended community-building (see more about this in Nenad’s articles here.) I was particularly struck by the simple idea of ‘mobile virtual hosts’: anybody with a smartphone that is physically present can use the video on his/her phone to ‘show around’ the online participants, which is so easy and yet such a powerful way of bringing more dynamic engagement into remote participation. If we acknowledge that making our world more sustainable and just requires solidarity and collaboration between cities, regions and nations across the world, we need to find ways in which can have meaningful meetings both offline and online. Making the best use of online communication is not only a matter of saving CO2-emissions, but also of increasing inclusivity of people who cannot travel for whatever other reason (budget, lack of time, care duties, etc.).” Read some more of my afterthoughts on the arena event here or here.

Sharing is caring
By João Dinis

During the two-day workshop in Rotterdam, participants were clearly invited to a friendly collaborative atmosphere. This feeling was ensured by the diversity of participants, based on their country of origin, background and working context. Even the online guest management went flawlessly and despite the distance, it was easy to listen and collaborate with all those unable to attend the “physical meeting”.

Thus, this meeting can be considered as a perfect metaphor for the diversity of human and physical geography you can find in cities. If a group of people can actively engage in collaborative meetings to reach a given result or consensus, then we are clearly on the right path to design, produce, or collaborate towards just, sustainable communities.

During the workshop, at any given moment, I felt my opinion mattered and was useful for the group’s goals. However, this aura was achieved as all opinions, stances and opinions were constructive (sometimes dissonant) and enlightening. The correct term for this is “empathy”. Local communities face so many challenges nowadays, that an empathic dialogue will surely be followed by solution driven decisions and knowledge. This is why we should have a greater sense of responsibility and pride. Let us share this empowering feeling.
As a scholar working on social innovation, I sometimes feel overwhelmed by the vastness of the so called ‘wicked problems’ or the ‘grand challenges’ faced by the society today. Yet, we see many local efforts succeeding at developing solutions to these challenges to a certain degree. These bottom-up initiatives give me hope that we may fix what we broke with the help of a resilient society. However, it takes time, effort and dedication to reach systemic change. Then I keep reminding myself: one step at a time.

The first Urban Arena at Rotterdam was a realization of this motto for me. The Urbana Team had shared with us a program of the workshop days before our arrival at Rotterdam. But I was unsure about how we would make sense out of the enormous amount of approaches on sustainable and just cities in only two days. The team had already done a great job in converging more than 400 EU-funded projects into 34 approaches for sustainable and just cities. Still, the workload seemed a lot, considering the time limits.

The flow of the first urban arena addressed all my concerns. The team guided us smoothly throughout the workshop step by step, so that we unfolded concepts related to urban sustainability and justice one by one. The arena started with a warm welcome. The ice-breaker session was also designed to encourage us to think about how we would like to spend the next two days (in fact, all ice-breaker and energizer activities in between sessions served a specific purpose to prepare us for the next step of the arena). As we moved through the agenda, I realized that it was getting easier to make sense of the ongoing discussions, and that we were being encouraged towards further questioning and further sharing.

In the coming months, each arena will build on the previous one. It will be an interesting journey to see how the Urbana community of practice will arrive at policy implications for systemic change, one step at a time...
In the first months of the UrbanA project the UrbanA consortium has been mapping ‘approaches to sustainable & just cities’ and developing a ‘database’ of these approaches. With approaches we mean (sets of) interventions, actions, strategies, solutions or policies which address (urban) sustainability and/or justice. This can be a general approach (e.g. Nature Based Solutions) or a more specific sub-approach (e.g. rain gardens).

The power and importance of this database-making is not to be underestimated. The process of mapping what is - and/or related notions such as analysing, scoping, observing, examining, etc. - is an important starting point across multiple perspectives on how to enable people to co-create solutions and collaborate for social change (e.g. design thinking, transition management, permaculture, sociocracy). This step of first mapping that which already exists, before moving on to visioning, designing or intervening, is not only a prerequisite for understanding, but also for engaging people. It is not only a matter of gathering data and information, but also of people feeling heard and acknowledged by others for their prior and ongoing efforts. Despite the gravity of the societal challenges in question (e.g. climate change and social inequalities) and the urgency to ‘act’ upon them, there always remains a need in any community, network or Arena, to first engage in some sort of mapping of what has already been done or is being done so far. Indeed, no effort ever unfolds on a blank slate.

During the arena event we opened up the mapping process to the Arena participants. In a world cafe setting 24 approaches were presented and discussed in depth. The input and suggestions that were shared during this session, were taken up afterwards in adjusting the wiki-pages. From this point onwards the wiki-pages are open to be edited by anyone who wants to.

Read more about the mapping process here. And have a look - and co-create - the wiki pages.
Parallel session: learning across contexts
By Philipp Spaeth

Presentation: Learning across contexts

The participants of this session (18 physically present in Rotterdam, eleven online) formed a multi-vocal choir warning against oversimplifying the complex processes of translation that are involved in learning between places for sustainable and just cities. The forms in which inspirational knowledge on the topic is communicated are manyfold, from academic writings via databases and all electronic media to conferences and personal communications. Particularly the latter are considered crucial, since no sender of information can know about the needs of potential followers without entering into a case specific dialogue. Specific gatherings have been named, at which such dialogue happens (from Urban Future Global Congresses to protests by Extinction Rebellion or Ende Gelände); networks which are engaged in supporting it (ICLEI, C40, Ecolise, Eurocities, Covenant oM); and a number of journals and mailing-lists, which are scanned for respective information. Both the ‘solutions’ to achieve justice oriented sustainability governance in cities themselves, and the context factors that may enable or block their implementation, are each consisting of an unmanageable number of distinct factors. Developing a shared understanding among people of different backgrounds requires intense and case specific dialogues. Yet some key aspects can be identified, which are used to check whether a particular ‘success story’ is likely to provide inspiration for another urban context: Is it feasible that similar actor constellations can be achieved? Can similar resources (knowledge, land, money etc.) be mobilized, as they have been considered key to realizing a success in the original context? Several groups have furthermore expressed an interest in learning not only from ‘success stories’, but rather from failures too. This again strengthens the focus on informal processes, as the culture of sharing failure stories is not very pronounced in our societies.

When two groups of 3 participants were merged into one larger group, they found their notes so nicely complementing each other, that 5 minutes later they were ready to present their findings to the rest of the group.
Parallel session: transformative potential
By Lily Lin

“Transitions are defined as non-linear processes of social change in which a societal system is structurally transformed. This process is conceptualized in terms of dynamic interaction between ‘regimes’, ‘niches’ and a changing ‘landscape’.”

DRIFTer Flor Avelino began the workshop with a brief talk on how to conceptualize the processes of upscaling transformative social innovations and the inherent problems that practitioners and activists may run into as niche, or radical grassroots, practices are transformed into mainstream practices. For instance, one of the main challenges is that niche practices lose some of their transformative and innovative characteristics and risk reproducing the broader power relations and structures of the system that they were trying to change.

In order to reflect this theoretical insight within empirical settings, this workshop invited two participants to each present a project scenario. The two initiatives were the Nest City Lab and Omek. Discussions were led within small groups with the aim to reflect on the transformative potential of these projects, their unintended consequences and how to increase their transformative potential.

“Rethinking the issue of diversity and inclusion”: How digital platforms can empower African diasporic communities

Omek Interactive is described as a social entrepreneurship project. It is a digital platform dedicated to creating new job opportunities, collaborations, and support networks for the African Diaspora community. The social transformative value of this project can be judged by its uptake to increasing the visibility of the African Diaspora community and creating a safe and trusted space for talented African diaspora professionals to come together. Fostering spaces of belonging and professional support can be a road to empowerment.
Parallel session: participatory approaches in practice
By Ian M. Cook and Tom Henfrey

We came together in the UrbanA garden to examine the nature, potential and pitfalls of participation in urban planning. Participants assumed the role of local government officials seeking to initiate a participatory process concerning the future of a disused patch of land. The aim was to understand the multiple conflicting interests and unintended consequences that can arise in participatory approaches, and the importance of careful process design to navigating these.

Participants were given the following scenario:

We are elected council members of a local government in a working class neighbourhood which is showing its first signs of gentrification – increasing rents, arty types, cool bars, people on scooters. There’s an election coming up, and we’re from the same political party as the central government. Accordingly, some central funds have been thrown our way to do something ‘noticeable’ in the next year (about enough money to build something, hire a couple of people for two years – obviously the actual amount this would cost depends on the local context).

There’s a patch of state land where a condemned building was demolished (about 10 000 m² | 2.5 acres | 1 hectares | 110 000 feet²). Although there’s a bid to build an Aldi Supermarket on the site (which will bring in revenue from rent and tax), and another proposal to sell the land to a brother of a politician, after attending an UrbanA event we want to do something to promote sustainable and just cities. And we want to get re-elected. There is a requirement for public input on projects of this size, but the shape and depth of the civic engagement is up to us. The last time the ‘community’ decided on what to do with a piece of land, they chose to create a park with a guard and a fence to keep out homeless people – this is popular amongst some residents.

Participants split into three groups to examine this scenario, through discussion and application. Their first task was to think about what participation means: to identify the goals of participation and in doing so identify possible benefits and problems. Their second was to design a participatory process that could realise the goals raised in the given scenario.
Each group presented its results as follows:

**Group 1.**
The core of the proposal was to create a citizen-led project through a series of participation processes aimed at:
1) Identifying ideas and proposals that come from citizens
2) Supporting a citizen-led evaluation of these proposals
3) Creating a framework for citizen-led monitoring of the progress of the selected project.

Specific methods and principles that might enable this were:
- Approach specific groups able to engage or represent stakeholder groups that are often absent from public participation processes (e.g. immigrants, women’s groups, elderly)
- Hold many meetings in different places and at different times, in order to be more inclusive
- Within these processes: present any existing research or information about the needs of the neighborhood or city, open up to new and emerging proposals and inform people about limiting factors (e.g. legal, financial and technical constraints)
- Form expert citizen committees to express ideas and to participate in the selection process
- Provide an online platform or app to enable wide participation in voting
- Compensate people for their time, providing care options during meetings and other events (child care etc.) and dinner/lunch.

Key limitations and challenges identified by this group were how to hire experts who are also local residents, and how to represent and serve different interest groups.
Group 2.
The second group presented a similar proposal based on some sort of a competition to collect and select ideas, making sure everyone is included and that all proposals considered are feasible.
Specific suggestions included:
- Work together with social scientists to map out social needs
- Hold workshops that specifically target different stakeholder groups
- Compensate participants for their involvement
- Form a citizen assembly to take responsibility for assessment
- After 2 or 3 years, conduct a people’s assessment (also as a participatory process) to record levels of public satisfaction with the project and its outcomes

Group 3.
The third group also presented a similar proposal, with the following additional specific recommendations:
- Keep everything open source
- Hold open workshops and other activities, both to inform the municipality and to ensure developments return into dialogue with the community
They also noted a key challenge, that participatory processes can require substantial resources - but that such investment is always worthwhile and cost-effective due to the long-term savings of time and money in the future.

We closed the session by reflecting on some common themes and approaches. It was interesting that only one of the groups thought to involve experts - planners, social scientists, etc. - in any significant way. The need to have funding for participatory process was stressed by all. Given more time, we might have been able to reflect on drivers of injustice not only arising within to participation processes directly, but also the contextual injustices that underly pressures on the empty patch of land itself.

Finally, we got some bad news: whilst we were busy with the planning process, a member of the local government sold the land to a supermarket.
Plenary Wrap Up

Day 1 closing session
Plenary wrap up facilitated by Giorgia Silvestri

Many interesting thoughts were raised in the closing session. The two key points of discussions that emerged in the closing session were the questions: ‘how do we share and capture existing knowledge to help people improve their practice?’ and ‘how do we build alliances and solidarity?’ It was suggested that to build a community of practice and solidarity, a platform where people can put up questions and challenges that they are experiencing, such as an online forum, should be created. It was also suggested that in order to bring the UrbanA Wiki to life, a loop should be created between UrbanA Wiki and the practitioners. For instance, if someone is engaged with an initiative, that person can refer to the UrbanA Wiki approaches and (later) reflect his/her experience and update it on the UrbanA Wiki. In addition, it was pointed out that newsletters or blogs from respective organizations or individuals can be written to engage with a wider audience in various languages.

Overall, many have reacted positively to the opportunity to be physically among people from different backgrounds and to be here at the venue in Rotterdam for the first of the four UrbanA Arena event. As one participant said that it is very meaningful to have the informal talk and the personal connection, as it allows her to “see the people and the potential for collaboration from that space”. She stressed that it is important for her to “understand all these people she would like to collaborate with.”
“It felt like a really good start to building a community and opening up the project with a wide array of people.”
Isabelle gave an overwhelming overview of evidence on the correlation between greening projects and processes of gentrification, i.e. displacement, exclusion and segregation. I especially enjoyed the Q&A session and dinner talks afterwards, which included some interesting critical questions and points of disagreement on whether/how green gentrification can/must be avoided and who bears responsibility for it. To learn more about green gentrification check out http://www.bcnuej.org/green-gentrification/. I look forward to continuing discussions around this important topic over the coming years.
How can Meta-Mapping add value to UrbanA Wiki: “enrich database with new initiatives from COP into Wiki”

“how do you enable the communities to solve their own challenge?”

Exploring How To Neutralize The Negative Impact of Big Fishes

OMEK Community Empowerment:

Structural and System Biases and Perverse Incentives

Eco-Feminism

Online Community Platform for UrbanA Arena
In the open space session, all participants were welcomed to host a session about a topic of their interest. We ended up with 6 sessions about: ecofeminism; exploring how to deal with the impact of ‘big fish’; systems, structures and perverse incentives; a platform for the UrbanA Community of Practice; meta mapping - co-creating a common knowledge base; and community empowerment.

Pictures of the open space flip overs can be found [here](#).

**Community building platform for the UrbanA Community of Practice**  
by Rafael Calado

**These two days @UrbanArena Rotterdam, were not enough ;)**  
We felt the need to get in contact with so many handsome people that we met on the event to evolve in further future collaborations…

So for my **Open Space** I proposed the **creation of a user friendly community-building platform for the Urban Arena community** (not a messenger, not a whatsapp, not a asana nor a slack but something else)( I'm no coder just a end user)

**First steps:**  
Without a platform - nothing might happen, no platform covers all our needs, we will experiment with an open source platform (Planet Makers), in the meantime you can join the [LinkedIn group, UrbanA Community of Practice](#)

During this session we framed **needs:**

- Creation of general spaces for discussion and co-creation (at various levels)
- Access to libraries, key resources (like wiki, websites, youtube,...)
- Access to topics and data like: mapping, individuals, institutions, locations, projects or areas of interest where people are involved or want to collaborate, calendar with - events, calls...
- A platform where we all can post and search, see with whom someone relates and who might join you in a new discussion group or team in an easy and visual way (strings,...)

**Some characteristics and musts:**

- ✔ User friendly with integration on multiple platforms (desktop, email, app,...)
- ✔ Based on open source platform and preferably free.
- ✔ Searchable by topics, tags, themes, date, field, region, etc.
- ✔ Have some level of community management
During this workshop, participants were asked to connect their experiences from this first Arena event to questions of justice, around which UrbanA will start placing more emphasis in the next months. The overall message that emerged from the group work and discussions was that while problems are place-specific and connected to concrete urban challenges (housing, land values, food access, mobility), there are greater issues of (global) inequality, privatisations/commodifications of resources (e.g. land) and restricted access to knowledge as well as limited recognition of and dialogue between different forms of knowledge, that stand in the way of potentially more sustainable cities being also more just. Participation in and ownership of projects that serve sustainability objectives (from climate change adaptation measures, to greening etc.) was very central in discussions about urban justice and drivers of injustice, where issues of time (lack of), access to processes of consultation/civil participation, representation of marginalized groups, access to valuable information, participation and inclusion in community-led projects, gender issues and undervaluing of care labor, all came up as important. Participants highlighted the “vicious cycle” of exclusive processes of urban change leading to exclusive “solutions” and in turn to conflict and violence (of various sorts, including displacement or gentrification) - and thus the need for urban “agoras” as spaces of political debate and direct democracy (other proposals included people’s assemblies, people’s media and referendums).

**Coercive isomorphism**: when sustainability actors are pressured to conform to the demands of powerful actors that are culpable of stimulating injustice

**Superficial actions** that do not address root causes (structural drivers) of sustainability i.e. operate within neoliberal frameworks; will tend by default to drive injustice
The UrbanA ArenA event was a unique experience, as it attracted a diverse group of people that were dedicated to making cities more just and sustainable. It was meant to provide a collaborative space for a bottom-up knowledge co-creation, synthesis and reflection. Many participants have expressed appreciation for this event having taken place and that being in Rotterdam had made them feel hopeful. In the words of one in-person participant, she said: “I felt that we shared a sense of common purpose. Meeting people is very inspiring. Felt a sense of overwhelming at various points. Skimming over the surface of deep topics that have impacted me emotionally and intellectually. There is an interest for me to reflect on how to facilitate deeper understandings.”

A similar appreciation for this event can also be found in one on-line participant’s reflection, as she puts it this way: “It is interesting to connect as an online participant. Thank you for making an effort to include us as much as possible. It was interesting to be engaged—talking and drawing. During these two days, we have been very generous to each other, giving energy and inspiration.”

In this regard, the first ArenA event can be regarded as a success in the sense that it was able to provide a space that made participants feel at home and allow people to come together. This is an important first step toward building a community. At the same time, it is crucial to point out that these moments of reflections illustrate the ongoing-ness of community building. It is worth asking what can be done at the level of individuals and organizations to foster a meaningful closeness that brings the UrbanA community together? Some have expressed the desire to get to know one another better. Commenting on this, one participant said: “It would be nice to get to know a bit more about what fields the other participants are working in. To help find common interests—this can help move the discussion between participants beyond talking about the approaches.”
November 12th 2019 was the start of the UrbanA project in Lisbon, a city going through such rapid and profound change that it was recently deemed “The new capital of gentrification and evictions” (Ara.Cat). After much time reaching out to local groups and projects active in the city, a group of about 30 participated in a full day of activity in the cities most multicultural community, Mouraria. The event started with a walking tour of the labyrinthine neighbourhood under the old castle, where, like many European cities, touristification, gentrification and Airbnb are driving up rents so quickly that locals can no longer afford to pay and are moving out of their bairros. Although Minimum wage raised 6% to 635 euros in 2019, it is still the lowest in western Europe (Reuters). Activists from Housing and Right to the City groups Stop Despejos (Stop evictions), Jardim Martim Moniz and Habita led a mostly local group through the streets to the heart of this transformation, the now mostly emptied, Rua Dos Lagares, where remaining families recently had their evictions stalled due to mobilisations in the streets. Later in Mouraria’s Creative Hub participants explored how the approaches to urban justice and sustainability identified in UrbanA translate to the Lisbon context, using Fishbowl, World Café and other participatory methods.
Field Visits
Fieldtrip 1: Social innovation and community organising at Het Wijkpaleis.
By Giorgia Silvestri

Het Wijkpaleis is a community center in the west of Rotterdam where local residents can meet for learning, developing new activities and projects and realizing ideas. The organisation is going through some important changes since it is moving from one building to another in Middeland neighborhood.

As part of the field visit to Wijkpaleis we met Marieke Hillen, the founder of Wijkpaleis and with her we visited both the old and the new building of the organisation. Our visit started in the old building in Middelandstraat in which Marieke warmly welcomed us with coffee and sweets. She explained us the story of the organisation and she showed us a video showcasing some of the activities and experiences of the key members of Wijkpaleis. We learnt that the organisation was set up in 2015 with the aim to foster social inclusion in the neighborhood. As part of the initiative, residents of the neighborhood with many different nationalities and background can meet together in the community center and they can learn and develop different activities together. Some of these activities are cooking, tailoring, carpentry, sewing, programming, etc. and there are also multiple activities organized for kids. As explained by Marieke ‘when you make things together you do not need languages’, it is the best way to start interacting and making new friends. The Wijkpaleis is a place where everyone can share what they know or can do with everyone else. It is a place that allow elderly people to exchange knowledge and experience with youth and children and in which people from different countries can share their different food and culture.

Wijkpaleis also created and maintained a network of multiple organisations and initiatives active in the neighborhood. In the summer of 2017, the municipality decided to sell the building that was hosting Wijkpaleis initiative. This was a shock for the funders and members of the initiative, it created the fear of loosing a ‘family’ and a place that meant so much to the community. The funders and members didn’t give up and started a long process of discussions with the municipality and other local stakeholders. In 2019 they managed to obtain a new location in the same neighborhood for Wijkpaleis. The new building is still under construction but we had the opportunity to visit it. Marieke showed us the ground floor and the first floor and she showed us some pictures of the building’s project as showed on a wall of the building (see figure below).
She explained us that the building will have a special structure: the ground floor will be designated to the Wijkpalaies activities including the trainings and workshops for the community members. In addition, the building will have a community garden in which everyone will be welcomed. The other floors of the building will be rented to entrepreneurs and students. Next to the building there is also a school and the students could easily joined some of the Wijkpaleis' activities in the afternoons. The entrepreneurs hosted in the building would pay a rent to the Wijkpaleis initiative. Through an agreement with the municipality the Wijkpaleis will pay a mortgage and in a few years it would be able to buy the building.

Marieke explained us that the process to get to this agreement with the municipality was very challenging but they also managed to find allies on the way, such as civil servants that understood the value of the initiative and have been supportive.

At the end of our visit we also had a surprise! Since many things in the building still needed to be arranged and fixed, Marieke invited us to offer our help by making a funny team game: building an IKEA bookshelf! So we ended up laughing and getting to know each other better by understanding how to assemble the different pieces and how to use the tools. It was the best way to even experience that ‘making things together’ is a great way to connect and collaborate!

**Humor, Art and Dance can be part of Resistance.**
By Burcu Eke Schneider

During the field visit in Rotterdam I realized that a person can also do a lot even she/he can not take part in physical activities like all other participants. Using art, humor and creative resistance tools are alternative methods to support active members in the same environment while they are working. These tools help the resistor to reach peace and may trigger new ideas with joy in here and now.
Fieldtrip 2: Changing food waste practices: A new purpose for old bread.
By Maarten Markus

Almost all cities have waste issues, but Rotterdam’s southern district has a peculiar litter issue: bread. While many citizens don’t like to throw away bread, this is considered a major sin by most Islamic communities. However, a good intention can go bad when moldy pieces of bread attract vermin like rats and decreases the lifespan of ducks. But how do you change a deeply engraved habit of throwing bread in parks and squares? The local initiative ‘Broodnodig’ (freely translated as ‘in need for bread’) is doing just that by giving a new purpose for old bread in Rotterdam Neighborhoods.

With the cooperation of the municipality and a waste collector company, the initiative created a network of bread collector bins and a new cause, green bread powered energy. However, changing strong habits requires more than infrastructure or information signs. In order to activate the community on the ground approach proved very effective in reaching the local community and understanding their views, identifying barriers to alternatives and sharing the new found purpose for old bread. The network of collector bins has soon been complemented with a network of local ambassadors that spread the word and make sure the bins are in order. The example of Broodnodig shows that talking is an approach that makes you learn why certain practices are conducted, like strong cultural norms, and what answers potential solutions need to provide for before these norms change: a new purpose for old bread.
Fieldtrip 3: Urban garden of Creatie Beheer.
By Frank van Steenbergen

‘What is the city made of’ was the first question asked during this field visit. People, was the answer of Rini Biemans, ‘city doctor’ and founder of Creatief Beheer (‘Creative Maintenance’) a social enterprise who is involved in creating a more ‘green and healthy city of Rotterdam’. The field visit was quite a wild ride in the sense that the participants expected to see and experience a community garden, while our hosts showed us around a very brick- and asphalt-dominant environment.

They also were skeptical on ‘exclusive’ community gardens which in their eyes were often initiated by ‘hippies’ and ‘middle class people’. Unlike these gardens, Creatief Beheer (CB) is focused on the maintenance of the public domain via an inclusive, cost-beneficiary and effective manner. By greening the public streets and squares in collaboration with skilled gardeners, volunteers and residents they aim to ‘heal’ the city. Maintenance is seen as the key method to improve the health of the city and its people. Our hosts showed different sites in the neighborhood of Bloemhof of successful and failed initiatives aimed at improving the public realm and we discussed how such maintenance initiatives could have more impact and be scaled-up.
Pictures by photographer Jan van der Ploeg and participants; also available online. Venue: Verhalenhuis Belvedere, Rotterdam.