Placemaking for People and Nature

Creating Meaningful Connections in Public Spaces



HUNC

Human Urban Nature Connected





A City That Connects

The ideal city is a place of connections. A city where people naturally form bonds, where encounters happen naturally, and where urban life and nature are interwoven. A connected city invites interaction, supports health and well-being, and creates space for play, wonder, and co-creation.

At HUNC, we believe that the perfect city is born from connections. Our mission is to help cities foster meaningful relationships: between people, between people and nature, and between residents and their environment. Through our urban interventions and designs, we create space for social interaction, playfulness, and sustainability.

We design places where residents feel a sense of belonging, where children can play, where biodiversity flourishes, and where every user feels welcome. We challenge entrenched patterns, offer fresh perspectives on the existing, and open up space for shared ownership. In doing so, we promote placemaking in the broadest sense of the word. We aim for cities that connect.

A connected city is...



- **vibrant and healthy** – enhancing well-being and quality of life
- **inclusive** – accessible to all, encouraging participation
- **nature-inclusive** – integrating greenery into every day life
- **ecosystem-oriented** – designed in harmony with natural networks
- **playful** – surprising and inviting discovery
- **creative** – enabling initiative and expression
- **wise** – smart connections between technology and humanitarianism
- **collaborative** – a shared space shaped through cooperation

Connections are essential for a healthy and resilient urban life.
Humans are social beings: we thrive in contact with others and in relationship to our surroundings. Urban environments that invite encounter, proximity, and interaction demonstrably support both mental and physical well-being. Connection with nature plays a key role in this. Green spaces reduce stress, encourage movement, and foster a sense of purpose. A city that focuses on connection – among people, cultures, generations, and with nature – contributes to greater happiness, health, and togetherness.

Placemaking is the ultimate way to make connection tangible.
It places the user at the centre, actively involves residents in shaping their environment, and translates local stories, needs, and values into concrete places. Placemaking results in spaces supported by the community – places that invite meeting, mutual care, and care for nature. It is a process that combines social cohesion, participation, and nature-connectedness into a unified design approach.
By using placemaking as a driving force for connection, we're not just building a solid city – we're creating a meaningful one. A city where people don't just live, but truly come alive.





Connected Cities, Connected People

How Urban Life Makes Us Healthier, Happier and Stronger

Humans are social beings. We don't thrive in isolation, but through connections. Whether it's a meaningful chat with a neighbour, children playing on a square, or making plans together for a greener local park — our quality of life improves when we feel connected to others. And nowhere does that happen more intensely than in cities.
In well-designed cities, these connections aren't left to chance. They are nurtured, encouraged and cherished. The city provides a stage where we can meet, share, create and play — a place where relationships develop, both between people and between people and their surroundings.

1. Social Connection
A city is more than bricks and streets — it's a living network of people. In compact, vibrant neighbourhoods, encounters happen naturally. Squares, pavements, markets, playgrounds and parks are the places where glances meet and conversations begin. Thoughtful public space design encourages social interaction — and that interaction forms the foundation of trust, cooperation and community spirit.

2. Connections with Nature
Especially in an urban context, embedding nature is essential. Nature calms us, improves our health and strengthens our sense of connection — to ourselves and to others. Urban greenery acts as a social catalyst: from shared gardens to leafy court yards where neighbours meet. Even personal connections with nature — in city parks, for example — contribute to better health and wellbeing.

3. Inclusive Cities
True connection can only exist when everyone is included. Accessible, inclusive cities ensure that people of all backgrounds, ages and abilities can fully participate in urban life. This means barrier-free spaces, multilingual information, safe routes for all, and social places where everyone can be heard and involved. Inclusivity is a prerequisite for genuine connection.

4. Playful Interaction
Connection also emerges through joy, wonder and the unexpected. A playful city surprises and invites. Interactive installations, colourful street art, seating that encourages movement or play — all create opportunities for spontaneous encounters and break daily routines. Playful design not only makes the city more enjoyable, but also more social.

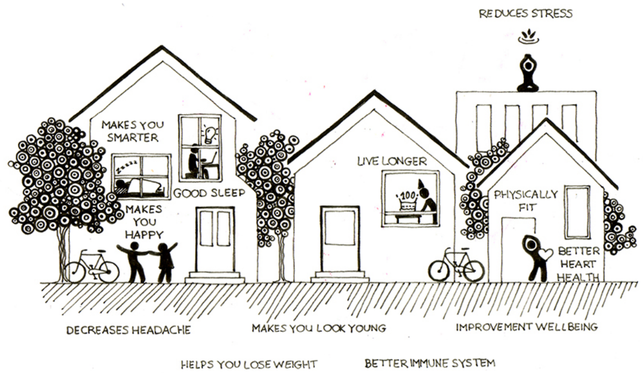
5. Health and Wellbeing
Physical and mental health flourish where people are active, feel safe, are listened to and have access to green spaces. Cities that prioritise health create space for walking and cycling, clean air, quiet zones and resting areas — but also a sense of community. Connection with others is a proven buffer against stress, anxiety and loneliness.

6. Ecosystem Thinking in Cities
A city is both a social and ecological system. When we design infrastructure, nature, water, economy and human behaviour in coherence, we create a resilient urban ecosystem that reinforces interdependence. Such a city thinks in circular systems, integrates natural processes and promotes sustainable interaction between people and their environment.

7. Participatory Urbanism (Placemaking)
Connections deepen when people can shape their own living environment. Participation is not just about having a voice — it's about taking part. From neighbourhood gardens to co-creation sessions for redesigning public squares, cities that embrace placemaking offer residents ownership. This strengthens involvement and the bond with place.

8. Sustainable communities
Connecting with the city also means caring for its future. Sustainable materials — such as reused plastics or locally produced elements — connect people to the wider story of circularity and responsibility. In this way, we collectively contribute to a liveable city for future generations.

9. Urban Vitality
A vital city buzzes — with culture, economy and diversity. This vitality attracts people, retains talent and creates space for creativity and innovation. Urban dynamism acts as a magnet for new connections — personal, professional and creative. The true strength of a city lies in its ability to connect people — not only with each other, but also with nature, with their wellbeing, with ideas and with the future. If we design cities that actively strengthen these connections, we are not just building better urban environments — we are building a better society.



Participation

The Value of Neighbourhood Participation – Building Connection and Meaningful Places

When residents are involved from the outset in shaping their living environment, more emerges than just a physical space: a sense of connection is created. Neighbourhood participation paves the way for encounters, shared ownership and places where people truly feel at home. Not because it was imposed on them, but because it was created together.

In participatory processes, the stories, habits and needs of residents come to the surface. This produces insights that do not fit into standard urban planning models. A shady spot to sit, a place where children can let their imagination run free, or a green corner where neighbours spontaneously come together over a cup of coffee. These wishes are often small, but they touch on something fundamental: the feeling of being seen and heard. When children, young people and adults reflect together on their surroundings, space emerges for creativity and collaboration. Participation gives everyone a role, regardless of age, background or physical ability. Through this broad range of voices and experiences, designs arise that are unique — specific to that place, that moment, that community. Not a generic design that could land anywhere, but a place with character and meaning.
The social value of such a process is at least as important as the end result. Designing and building together strengthens connections within the neighbourhood. People get to know each other, discover shared interests and build trust. You can see this reflected in how the place is used: it becomes an environment that invites meeting, play and rest — and where residents want to take care of it, precisely because they contributed to it themselves.
This process also delivers practical benefits. Designs become more resilient and adaptable because they have been shaped from the beginning with the realities of daily use in mind. Whether it's mobile greenery, seating that can be moved, or play features that spark imagination with modest means — participation makes designs robust, relevant and future-proof.

Neighbourhood participation is therefore not just about having a say. It is a way of working that contributes to strong neighbourhoods, connected people and lively, community-owned places. Places that brim with meaning — because they were created together.









Integrated squares

– are vibrant places of encounter
Great squares form the beating heart of a city. They invite connection, spontaneous conversations and shared experiences. People feel at ease there – alone, together, or in casual togetherness with strangers.

– invite interaction
Everyone matters in public space. Squares should be inclusive: accessible, recognisable and free of physical or social barriers. A good square embraces difference and connects generations, cultures and perspectives.

– make urban nature tangible and experiential
Squares are ideal places to experience nature. With climate change driving more frequent heatwaves, paved squares heat up quickly and offer little relief. Incorporating trees or green structures provides shade and cooling, making squares liveable, climate-resilient and meaningful.

– foster social dynamics
A connected square feels alive. Not just through organised events but also informal activities – from music to markets, encounters to quiet retreats. These are places where community spirit thrives and people share ownership.

– are part of a larger ecosystem
A square is not stand-alone but a link in the urban network. Its power lies in how it relates to street life, housing, greenery and routes. At HUNC, we think in ecosystems: urban spaces work best when connected to networks of people, nature and infrastructure.

– bridge sectors and interests
The best squares are built collaboratively: designers, planners and policymakers working with residents, entrepreneurs and nature experts. By weaving sectors and sharing knowledge, we create genuinely meaningful public spaces.

– are adaptable and open to local initiative
Squares are the city's collective living rooms. They offer space for initiative – from teenagers rehearsing a dance to someone celebrating a birthday or organising a protest. Flexible design invites ownership.

– have an active and playful atmosphere
Cities are in constant motion. That energy should be visible and felt. Well-designed squares accommodate dynamism and play.

– are firmly embedded in daily life
A connected square has an "active edge": cafés, shops, studios or libraries that create vibrancy and passive surveillance. The square must be clean, safe and well-maintained. Scale, sightlines and materials foster safety and trust.

– have their own character and tell a story
Like cities, squares have an identity. They tell the story of a place – rooted in history or pointing to the future – and inspire new connections.









Giant Flying Grass Carpet

Location: Schouwburgplein, Rotterdam
Team: HUNC & Studio ID Eddy
Client: Municipality of Rotterdam
together with: Vereniging Verenigd Schouwburg plein

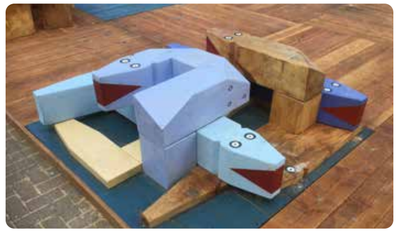
The art of good square design lies in creating a human scale and space for different groups — from young to old, from rich to poor, from locals to newcomers. There must be room for both organised and spontaneous activities.

At Schouwburgplein, we added a homely sense of familiarity and cheerful softness through a design that resembles a patchwork of carpets. Each carpet section contains a reference to an iconic Rotterdam building.











Bleiland





Location: Plein 40-45, Amsterdam
Team: HUNC, local residents, NINOK
Client: Municipality of Amsterdam

(modular, movable, local, co-creation, place testing)

Bleiland is a temporary, modular play installation at Plein 40-45 in Amsterdam, co-designed with local residents and based on their wishes. Children can play freely while parents gather at picnic tables. The structure is made of movable platforms — ideal for placetesting and temporary activation of public space. Bleiland is constructed from locally felled timber and eco-friendly materials. The project shows how co-creation, sustainability and tactical urbanism can come together in a flexible, reusable public space.









Tante LoeKoe

(movable, temporary, eye-catcher, play trigger, meeting spot)

Tante LoeKoe is a 130 m^2 flattened cow that serves as a temporary meeting place, play element, and soft urban furniture in one.
The huggable sculpture has long been a public magnet on major city squares in Rotterdam and Amsterdam. With her eye-catching form and cuddly character, she invites both young and old to play, relax, meet, climb, or slide.
As a mobile eye-catcher, Tante LoeKoe contributes to placema-king and place-testing in locations that need a temporary boost of activity.



Agoraphobia

The image that pops into my mind when I think of a square is of a place that forms the nucleus of urban life. Where old men sit cosily on a bench, hats on, legs slightly apart, a walking stick between them. They exchange tall stories, laugh, and still carry a mischievous look. Children run around playing tag. A group of teenagers lingers in a corner of the square, nonchalant and cool. By the fountain stands a couple in love, seeing no one but each other. Neighbours meet in the middle of the square, stopping to exchange the latest news. In my imagination, this is a place of spontaneous encounters, for seeing and being seen. And of course, the weather is always warm and sunny—because I picture such a place in a Southern European country. When I think of Dutch squares, what comes to mind instead are empty, grey, stony expanses.









Square-people

Why don't Dutch squares have the same urban significance as those in Southern Europe? What's the reason for this? And would it be possible to give Dutch squares a touch of Southern joie de vivre?

I always assumed it was down to the climate. If the weather here were just as lovely, surely our squares would be lively too. Yet when the temperature rises above 20 degrees Celsius, the Dutch head outdoors en masse. The streets grow busy, terraces overflow—yet the squares remain empty. Are northerners simply not square people? Do we see squares as serving a different function? Or are Dutch squares designed in such a way that they are inevitably used differently?

Empty places

In the Netherlands, squares serve another purpose. Rather than being places where the community gathers, they are functional voids: empty spaces reserved for markets and fairs. Dutch squares are barer than their Southern counterparts. But people don't like empty expanses. This is linked to a prehistoric instinct: on an open plain we feel exposed, with nowhere to hide in case of danger. Intuitively we avoid crossing a bare square, let alone sitting down for a spontaneous chat.

National character

Pragmatism is deeply rooted in the Dutch character. A Dutch square is straightforward, without embellishment. The Dutch seldom feel emotionally attached to a square.

In the Mediterranean, squares embody a connection to local history. They are the stage for historical events and commemorations. Many feature statues of local heroes—figures everyone recognises. In the Netherlands too, you will find bronze horses with riders on their backs. But I would wager that 99% of the Dutch, myself included, have no idea who these figures are meant to represent.

Southern squares also host traditional festivities—celebrations unique to a particular city or region. These strengthen the square's significance in people's minds.

Old men

Pragmatism has its merits. Problems get solved, life runs smoothly, waste is avoided. But pragmatism also needs a counterpart—for life is not complete without feelings, attention, and a touch of romance. The same holds true for squares.

Too many Dutch squares are empty gaps in the urban fabric, places that trigger a kind of agoraphobia: the fear of open squares. What they need is a binding identity—a design that feels sheltered, welcoming, and encourages people to stay.

A few Dutch squares have taken a step in the right direction. These are the ones with cafés and terraces. Yet staying there is tied to commercial activity; they are not inviting to all.



And that is precisely what they should be. Because when the sun breaks through, I long for Dutch squares to brim with life—for places where you can see old men boasting, laughing, and swapping tall tales.

Connected Shopping Areas

– support thriving local businesses
The look and feel of a shopping area significantly influences customer behaviour. Vacant shopfronts dampen the atmosphere and negatively affect the turnover of neighbouring entrepreneurs. A well-maintained environment helps businesses flourish.

– welcome everyone – not just shoppers
Public space is for everyone – and shopping streets are no exception. Even those who aren't buying anything should feel at ease. A connected shopping area invites people to linger, and enjoy the space, regardless of whether they make a purchase.

– offer opportunities to meet, stroll and observe
For many, the high street is more than a retail destination – it's a social space. People meet friends, pause for a chat, or simply enjoy people-watching. Comfortable walking routes and thoughtfully placed seating encourage this kind of interaction. Benches should be positioned so as not to obstruct the flow of visitors, but close enough to feel connected to the street's bustle.

– remain pleasant after hours
With more people choosing to live in city centres, shopping streets are also used outside business hours. A connected retail area feels safe and welcoming at any time. Streets lined with grey shutters and poor lighting create an uninviting atmosphere in the evening. High-quality public space should remain appealing after closing time.

– get the basics right
Cleanliness, lighting, accessibility – these are the fundamentals. Clear signage helps people find their way, and good connections by bike, public transport, or car make the area more accessible. Free parking, where possible, is appreciated. Toilets – ideally with facilities for baby changing – are essential for comfort. Street proportions matter too: streets that are too wide can feel empty and uninviting, while those that are too narrow limit movement. The best streets find a balance that allows people to flow naturally while also offering pockets for pause and connection.

Tips for people-friendly shopping streets

Women influence up to 80% of purchasing decisions – so it's important that shopping areas feel safe, welcoming, and appealing to women. Consider incorporating:
- soft, warm colour palettes
- minimal use of grey tones
- greenery: trees, plants, and flowers
- inviting, friendly-looking benches
- high-quality lighting
- accessible, clean public toilets with baby changing facilities







Carpet Runner

Location: Korte Hoogstraat, Rotterdam
Team: HUNC & Studio ID Eddy
Client: Municipality of Rotterdam

Despite an interesting selection of shops, this street struggled to attract enough foot traffic due to competition from the main shopping street and a barrier at the street's entrance.
Its harsh modern appearance also lacked a welcoming feel.
The Flying Grass Carpet runner helps draw public attention to this overlooked location.





foreest winkelcentrum

Square & shopping area Foreest

Location: Foreestplein, Delft
Team: HUNC
Client: Municipality of Delft

Foreestplein and the surrounding shopping area De Foreest are in need of revitalisation. The municipality of Delft commissioned a temporary design by HUNC to explore how best to activate the area. This method of testing, trying and learning is known as tactical urbanism. Together with local entrepreneurs, a dotted pattern design was chosen. The project is rooted in resident and business participation.



HUNC



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Silvery delights

Location: Aert v. Nesstraat, Rotterdam
Team: HUNC
Clients: Mothership, SKVR

To make the ground floor more appealing, HUNC installed Silvery Delights at the entrance of the Rotterdam building. These objects broke up the gloomy look of the entrance, invited people to sit, and provided a fun, playful challenge for children.









Study
Location: Leyweg, The Hague
Team: HUNC & MOVE urban architecture

The Leyweg shopping centre in The Hague is at a tipping point — facing increasing vacancy and early signs of decay. It's essential to reverse this negative trend. At the same time, the centre holds potential. We analysed the existing strengths and identified where further development is needed to spark a positive turnaround. We also mapped out currently untapped opportunities. This analysis offers clear starting points for establishing a fresh identity for Leyweg.

Studie Leyweg

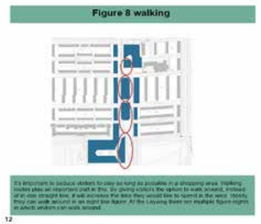
Den Haag, 2017

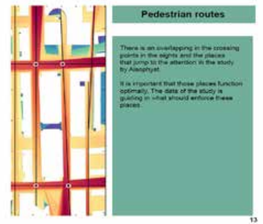
Team: HUNC & MOVE urban architecture















Girls, make room for them

Nadine Roos & Nikki Daniëls

Who doesn't recognize the following? A couple of girls are playing outside. They are chatting happily and laugh about each other's jokes. A bunch of boys arrives. They are about the same age. Enthusiastically they fool around, trying to tackle each other. The boys ignore the girls completely. The girls are not interested in the boys. Nevertheless, you see the girls move a bit to the side. The boys are acting wild; what if they bump into them? Unconsciously, the boys claim their space. Eventually, the girls move away altogether. There hasn't been any fight, nothing really happened. Still, the girls stay at a distance from the boys.

Space for girls

The dynamics between girls and boys differ and that's why girls don't have an equal space. Playing outside is for every child important, but girls lack playgrounds that meet their needs.
In this article, we discuss the cause of this problem, how playgrounds can be improved and if girls need their own space. We understand that not all the boys are the same, and of course, girls differ as well from each other. Nevertheless, we consciously make use of stereotypes. Simply, because we need, from a practical perspective, to rely on averages and because they match our observations. We see that girls and boys play differently and that girls are missing chances. We feel that playgrounds should anticipate on this.

Small and big

Young children play in a different manner than older kids. The little ones balance bravely on a small ridge and hold the hand of dad or mum. The older children easily jump over it and make a run for the climbing frame. We see them go through a physical development, but also through a social one. Toddlers primarily play on their own. Often close to each other, they each make their own stack of cubes. Further, in their development, their play becomes more associative. They'll play together, but don't tell each other what to do. Later on, when the children learn to play co-operatively, they'll organize themselves and give each other roles to play. One child will play the burglar and the other the police officer. All children go through these phases, but girls and boys each have their own pace.

Differences in development

Toddler girls play socially and structured quicker. Boys stay longer solitary. Between the age of four and five something interesting happens. The boys overtake the girls in their associative play. At the same time, the girls are ahead in their cooperative play. In the age-group five to six year old, the boys again overtake the girls. Now in the cooperative play. But the girls stay ahead with their social interaction. When they grow older, the girls keep staying ahead of the boys in the area of social development.
This difference in development is clearly visible at playgrounds. It also shows why boys and girls don't find each other while playing outside; they are busy with completely different things.

Inequality

Throughout the city, you can find soccer fields, basketball courts, and skate parks. Typical 'places for boys', where you won't find any girls. Nowhere do the girls get the same amount of attention. While designing playgrounds, the age differences are often taken into account. But the different needs of boys and girls are completely forgotten. The reason? Boys are more buoyant in their play and can cause a nuisance when they are bored. The, on average, more quiet girls tend to be overlooked. Besides, most urban designers are men and they design from their own perspective. It's not surprising that they let themselves be inspired by what they would have liked as a young lad. They have a blind spot for the girls' wishes. And so the girls stay away.

A place of their own

Playing outside is important for all children. Learning through playing is crucial in their development and having fun is a right for each child. That's why it's important that girls can have the same amount of joy outside as boys. The need their own places. Places where they can be together with their friends and where the boys won't scare them away. A place to chat and also to do physical challenges. Girls are sensitive to the atmosphere of a place. It needs to look bright, with cheerful colours and good lighting.

We must stop overlooking girls. At the moment only little study has been done on this subject. In practice, there have barely been any tests done with places specially designed for girls. This is a whole untapped area to get concurred.



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Girls' Play-ground

Location: Agniesebuurt, Rotterdam
Client: Municipality of Rotterdam and Havensteder
Team: HUNC & Eric Douma

(participation, inclusion, nature, calm, eco-friendly)

This sheltered girls' playground in Rotterdam's Agniesebuurt was initiated by residents and offers a space for calm, sensory play. Together with local children and parents, we designed a sensory garden with fragrant plants, natural paths, and soft seating and play areas. Using nudging techniques and insights from environmental psychology, the design caters to children who need tranquillity.
Through material reuse and a green layout with lavender, butterfly bushes and sustainable "Silvery Delights", we created an inclusive girls' space that reconnects the neighbourhood.



Connecting parks

In a world that's growing faster and denser, parks are more than just green spaces – they are social and ecological anchor points in our cities. They're where people meet, where nature weaves through the urban fabric, and where calm and vibrancy coexist. A park that truly works does more than attract – it connects.

An oasis of connection
Parks offer space to pause, but also to meet, mingle and interact. Well-designed layouts – with benches that invite conversation, open lawns, and shaded resting spots – foster spontaneous encounters across generations and cultures.

Nature as an active presence
Urban nature is not a backdrop but a vital part of daily life. Green elements support clean air, cooling and water regulation, but also wellbeing and social cohesion. Through community gardens, nature trails or participatory planting, parks can foster awareness and local stewardship.

Room for contrast
The best parks are hybrids: accessible zones for sport and social activity alongside wild areas for rest, play and discovery. This mix welcomes all ages and moods – from the solitary stroller to the adventurous child.

A foundation for public health
Green space is not a luxury – it's essential. Parks that invite walking, playing, resting and learning help us live healthier lives together. Shaded paths and open lawns offer both ecological and social value.

The city as a connected ecosystem
Large parks are vital, but so are pocket parks, courtyards, and green passageways. A small corner with herbs, a safe space for girls, or a sunny bench for neighbours – these elements soften the city and build community resilience.

From idea to action
Designing with an ecosystem mindset means seeing the city as a living network. Insights from HUNC and others show that cross-sector collaboration and local engagement lead to places that are both inclusive and practical – from grassroots to city-scale.

Let's not just create beautiful parks – but build connected places where biodiversity, interaction and care come together. Because in a connected city, it's not just the grass that grows – the community does too.

Tips and tricks
Create small pocket parks throughout the city – miniature green spaces in places that were once paved or neglected. Transform them into something special.

It could be a quiet spot for older residents to sit in the sun and chat, a welcoming place to enjoy lunch during a break, or a space designed especially for girls – where they can play and feel at ease, free from unwanted attention.



The Flying Grass Carpet





The Flying Grass Carpet
Team: HUNC & Studio ID Eddy

(movable, iconic, wonder, pop-up park, welcoming for all)

The Flying Grass Carpet is a unique, temporary art park that can be rolled out anywhere. It resembles a giant Persian rug made from various types and colours of artificial grass. The Carpet brings people together and invites everyone to relax, play, picnic, or host events.

Just like in fairy tales, The Flying Grass Carpet travels from place to place, creating connections between people and forming a global bond.
When it lands, it's perfect for all kinds of events — from lounging or football with friends to extraordinary shared picnics, music performances, and art shows.



Djakartaterras

Location: Djakartaterras, Amsterdam
Team: HUNC & Eric Douma Landscape Architecture
Client: Betonrestore BV
Main client: Eigen Haard

Residents of the Djakartaterras now enjoy a new communal courtyard. They live in a unique location — above a supermarket. The roof of the supermarket is their shared terrace.

The greenery is planted in large planters with deep blue glazed brick edges. Blue sculptures inside the planters support climbing plants. The pavement features alternating light and dark stripes. Each household has a private terrace, edged with a row of planters.











Flocci

team: HUNC & Studio ID Eddy

Flocci transforms bare, stony places into inviting green spots. It's made up of interlocking modules that can be combined in many ways. The result is a poetic design that enriches cities with green meeting spaces.

Flocci planters are 3D-printed from locally recycled plastic, sourced from Dutch household waste.
A water-buffering layer is printed into each module to store rainwater during downpours and supply it during dry spells.

















Sumatrakade

Location: Sumatrakade, Amsterdam
Team: HUNC & Eric Douma Landscape Architecture
Client: Betonrestore BV
Main client: Eigen Haard
Gardener: Van der Tol

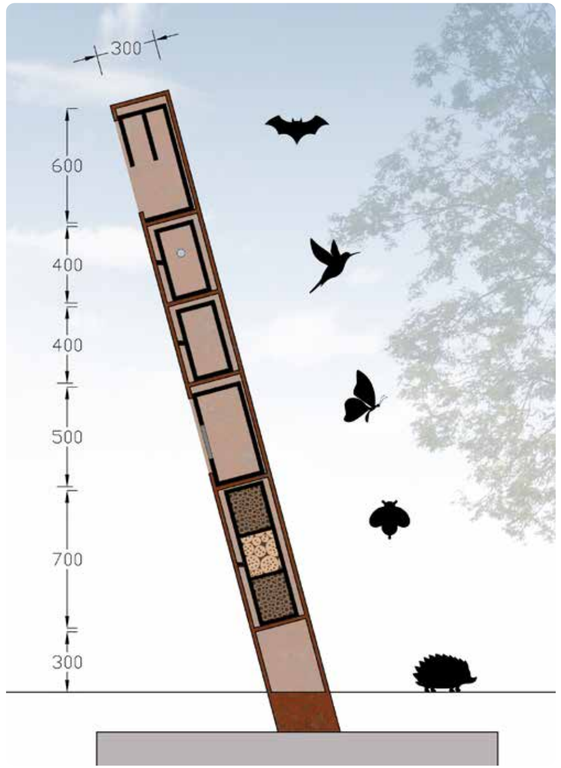
Due to maintenance of the underlying parking garage roof, the green strip and terraces were redesigned. Residents now have terraces with sprinkled mastic asphalt. Corten steel partitions with climbing plants were placed between homes.

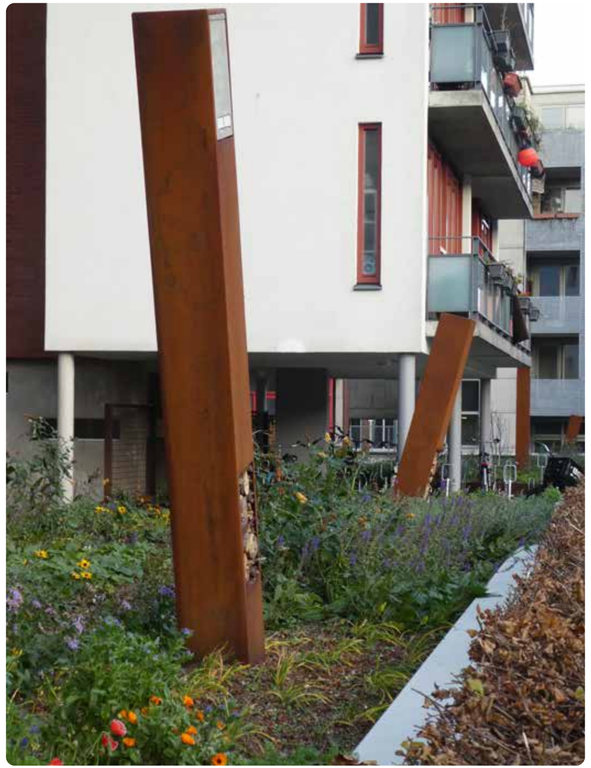
Large planters with corten steel edges complement the warm orange-brown hues of the buildings.
Inside the planters are corten steel poles filled with bird and bat houses and insect hotels. Pollinator-friendly plants were added to provide a welcoming habitat for animals.











Connected Neighbourhoods

A good neighbourhood is more than a collection of homes. It's a living network of people, stories, and ecosystems. A connected neighbourhood embraces diversity, weaves people and nature together, and helps shape a city where everyone feels seen, healthy, and at home.

Room for difference, room for connection
Strong neighbourhoods offer space for all. Designing from everyday experience, creates places where encounters feel natural – on a front step bench, near a playground, in a shared garden.

Neighbourhood pride grows where connection takes root
Residents who feel connected to their surroundings take better care of them. This sense of belonging grows in the space between private and public – where neighbours greet each other, tend plants, park bikes or play in the street. Informal zones strengthen ownership and the social fabric.

Trees as social and ecological anchors
Mature trees bring calm and continuity – but they do more. They cool cities, filter air, absorb water, and support biodiversity. Making these ecosystem services visible increases awareness of nature's value.

Neighbourhood character
Connected neighbourhoods build on local identity – through architecture, landscape, and community. Stories can be shared through murals, street names or heritage walks, and strengthened through resident-led initiatives in public space.

A neighbourhood as part of an ecosystem
Neighbourhoods thrive when linked to wider networks – of green routes, care, education and culture. Ecosystem-based thinking helps cities grow in ways that are robust, social, and sustainable.

From doorstep to playground: the walkable neighbourhood
When everyday life is walkable, connection follows. Wide, green pavements, safe crossings and inviting routes promote health, independence, and spontaneous encounters that bring streets to life.

Places for everyday connection
From a barbecue to a street party, neighbourhoods flourish where shared spaces exist. Squares, play areas and collective gardens form the social heart of the community – especially when combined with nearby shops, schools, and libraries.

The basics as a foundation for connection
Clean, safe and well-maintained spaces are essential – but they can do more. Quick repairs, good care, and accessible schools show residents they matter. When infrastructure supports both people and ecology, neighbourhoods will thrive.

tips and tricks

Create a transition zone between the privacy of the home and the city's public domain. Residents find it pleasant if they can structure this space to their own preferences. A city can facilitate in this by creating a strip along the houses for the residents to decorate themselves.



Boomkensdiep

Location: Capelle aan den IJssel
Team: HUNC & Eric Douma
Client: Havensteder

For the redesign of Boomkensdiep, we aimed to introduce as much greenery as possible into this paved environment. Greenery contributes to well-being and significantly improves people's perception of place.

Because the homes sit atop a shopping centre, real gardens aren't feasible. To create a rich green experience, we de signed green sculptures and fences. Resident involvement was enhanced with red pavement tiles in two tones — warmer red near the houses subtly encourages residents to personalise and enjoy the space with planters and benches.




previous situatie


new situation







Place-making/testing

The efficient city
Quicker, quicker, quicker. Everything has to be more efficient. We expect everything to move much faster. Behind this lies an interesting self-reinforcing phenomenon: the positive feedback loop. Inventions change our behaviour. This makes us crave even more effective inventions—until we can't imagine how things used to be. Then we discover that we are missing something. We are missing places.

Since the arrival of horse trams, we have not had to rely on our own feet. We move ever more quickly from one place to another. This acceleration feeds the desire to move even faster. Electric trams followed horse trams, cars replaced carriages. Urban designers kept creating increasingly efficient cities. Away with the small and narrow streets; make room for the car. The faster you go, the less contact you have with your surroundings. More than that, urban designers began to create public spaces with the least possible friction.

But simply getting somewhere quickly is not a satisfying quality. We also need places to stay. After 150 years of efficiency-driven urban design, we are starting to miss places: places where we can meet and where social cohesion can thrive. Placemaking turns spaces into places. It restores the connection between urbanites and their city.

Place versus space
Gradually, a large part of the city turned into an area for mobility. Cars dominate the streets, and buildings have such smooth façades that you can only speed past them. Early urban designers did not expect this to cause problems. In their eyes, they were perfecting the city.
The trouble is that nobody feels engaged with mobility spaces. Degradation, vandalism and a sense of unsafety soon appear. The city's cohesion starts to unravel.
City fabric designed purely for circulation feels like a space. City fabric that allows for lingering and slowing down feels like a place. It is the places that create a city's identity. By providing opportunities to stroll, to encounter surprising details and to have a chat with someone passing by, a city regains its places and becomes more pleasant. People feel connected and treat their city with care.

Creating places
In the 1970s, efficiency thinking escalated into a proposal for a highway through Manhattan's Greenwich Village. Journalist and local resident Jane Jacobs successfully protested against this plan. Together with her neighbours, she managed to stop the highway and began to promote the importance of good places. From this renewed interest arose placemaking, which proved to be an effective tool to build involvement in neighbourhoods.

The term placemaking was popularised by the New York–based organisation PPS. In short, it means creating places—bottom-up, from within the neighbourhood. Locals are the experts. They know which parts are precious, where it is pleasant to sit in the sun and chat with a neighbour, where children like to play, or where a bench for older residents is missing. They know which areas feel unpleasant and need greenery or a cheerful mural. Locals propose improvements, and because the ideas come from them, they are embraced.

Another advantage is speed. Initiatives do not need to be slowed down by the municipal administrative whirlpool. Ideas can be executed quickly, while enthusiasm remains fresh. By contrast, municipal improvements can take years to be realised, and by the time they are completed, the original residents may have moved away. Belief in the project is often lost.

By giving locals influence, improvements happen sooner. Placemaking has another advantage: changes can be temporary. This makes them adaptable and easy to improve over time. A pleasant corner can be made cosier week by week with an extra seat or some potted plants. If you have to wait for the municipality, you may wait decades before the neighbourhood is due for renovation—and even then, the focus often remains on efficiency and vandalism-proofing.

New identity
It is important that people feel connected to their city, that the city has an identity, and that there are places where people can experience its character. Social shifts constantly change neighbourhoods. Both immigration and gentrification bring new residents who must form connections with the area and with each other. The same applies in new housing developments, where nobody yet knows one another. Placemaking helps to create contact and build commitment. Community lunches, puzzling art performances and shared vegetable gardens provide opportunities for conversation and bring new life to the neighbourhood.

Barriers
Some residents do not have the capacity to feel connected to their neighbourhood. They may live there because of housing shortages and would rather be elsewhere. They may feel indifferent to their surroundings. Others face financial or emotional difficulties and lack the energy to make contact or contribute. For them, the threshold is too high.

Neighbourhoods with a relatively large number of vulnerable residents should not be left to cope alone. Here, the municipality should actively apply placemaking techniques. Especially in these areas, creating connection is crucial, because degradation can spread like an oil stain. Imagine: your life is already filled with problems, and your neighbourhood also radiates negativity. It can feel hopeless and overwhelming. If placemaking is no longer feasible, then we must shift to placetesting.

Placetesting
With placetesting, the initiative does not come from residents but from the municipality, a housing association or another party involved in improving the city. Locals are invited to participate, but the project can continue without them. The neighbourhood is enriched with benches, plants and artworks. Performances, music shows and events bring life to the area.
The difference between placemaking and placetesting is that the latter allows different options to be tested with the aim of finding a permanent solution. It is a self-reinforcing system: it shows what works well and what still needs improvement. Many locals find it hard to imagine possibilities for their neighbourhood; they are not trained designers who can translate ideas quickly into plans. Placetesting provides a bigger picture of what is possible and lowers the threshold for participation. From there, a shift back to placemaking becomes possible.

The slowed-down social city
The goal is to create cities in which people lovingly slow down. They respond to their city and to one another. They come together—for a chat, or to improve the city together. They feel connected and embrace their environment. No more only "quickly, quickly, quickly".
In a resilient city, people move at different speeds: sometimes rushing to an appointment, sometimes strolling in a relaxed way. In the slowed-down social city, business is done effectively but always with opportunities to connect with the neighbourhood. Both placemaking and placetesting are powerful tools for shaping cities with character.

Benefits of Place-making
- creates a belongingness to the neighbourhood
- improves the living environment for residents
- fosters friendships between neighbours
- can be applied quickly
- is adaptable
- achieves big results with small means
- can be temporary

Benefits of Place-testing
- includes all the benefits of placemaking
- also applicable when residents do not have the capacity to participate in placemaking
- suitable for public spaces, such as squares, that are intended for more people than local residents
- gives residents a quick, positive experience of their neighbourhood
- also brings neighbours together who might other wise lack the energy to join in
- provides municipalities and housing associations with a quick tool to realise improvements
- is measurable, and results can be used to refine the test
- shortens the distance between the drawing board and the neighbourhood
- is not fixed for the next 40 years, but flexible and therefore optimally adaptable to the neighbour hood
- can quickly improve opportunities for children to play
- creates a positive neighbourhood experience and contributes to residents' well-being





Fuculogos

(pop-up, playful, modular, temporary, inviting for all ages)

Fuculocos are modular seating elements that fit in a single suitcase — perfect for one-day pop-ups that transform squares or streets in no time. Made from reused dunnage bags and filled with air, they form soft, bouncy seating islands that invite play, lounging and social interaction.

Arranged in playful patterns — as long strands, lacy grids or colourful fields — they create instant placemaking and joy.
Children and adults alike are drawn to them for interaction, relaxation and delight. Fuculocos have transformed countless locations, from Rotterdam streets to festivals in Valencia.











Visserijplein

Location: Visserijplein, Rotterdam
Client: Frisse Vis & Municipality of Rotterdam

Layer by layer, the dull Rotterdam Visserijplein was transformed. Inspired by the name and history of the square, HUNC designed a continuously changing painting. Twice a week, after the market, small vehicles with rotating steel brushes clean the square — also slowly erasing its painted surface. And that's the idea: as one layer fades, a new one is added. And another. Movable giant fishing bobbers serve as playful seating for locals.
Thus, Visserijplein has become a moving watercolour painting.







Noordplein

Location: Noordplein, Rotterdam
Made possible by: CityLab010

In the summer of 2017, Noordplein became a true family square for parents and children. The goal was to encourage Rotterdam families to use the square.

Temporary artistic play and seating objects were installed to create social spaces for both children and adults.
These elements encouraged play and social interaction while also attracting parents to stay and meet up with friends.

Place Led Development

Place Led Development is about creating urban areas where people genuinely enjoy spending time. Places where you like to walk the streets because they feel lively, where the buildings are on a human scale, and where the surroundings are visually appealing.

These areas emerge by weaving placemaking into area and project development. Place Led Development fosters healthier and happier urban communities.
The public realm is the backbone of Place Led Development. It goes beyond simply designing attractive public spaces. It is the shift from 'space to place', and a balance between the short and long term. This requires new criteria for area planning and new tools in the process of urban development.

Place Led Development in practice:

Concept
Develop a concept that takes the wider context into account. Include how people will move through the area, where and how children can play, and how it contributes to the happiness and health of residents and users. Consider densification and a mix of functions.
Strengthen the team with engaged residents, placemakers, and passionate specialists.

Planning
In this phase, begin activating the site. Through placemaking and place testing you build engagement with the development, while at the same time gaining insights into what does and doesn't work in the area.

Design
Incorporate the insights from placemaking and place testing into the design. Focus on human-scale design, creating an environment that is attractive at eye level. Architecture should be designed as an integral part of the street.

Development
In this phase, placemaking becomes the tool to connect the neighbourhood. This leads to higher property values and faster development. Celebrate every milestone!

Management
Place Led Development is an ongoing process. Placemaking therefore continues after completion, ensuring that value creation in the area is sustained.



placemaking europe

Place making Europe Working-group

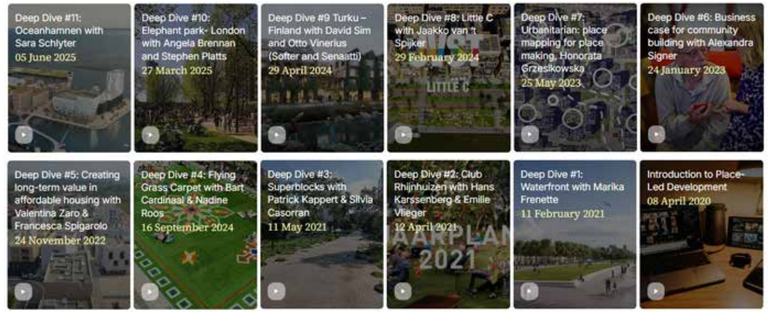
In 2019, together with STIPO and under the banner of Placemaking Europe, we launched a study on Place-Led Development. This ongoing research has grown into a network of around 100 professionals from across Europe. Each month, we meet online to discuss projects, host webinars, and share knowledge. Once a year, we come together in person during Placemaking Week Europe.

As a group, we produce accessible brochures and webinars filled with best practices and practical roadmaps for embedding the values of placemaking into large-scale urban development. These resources are available on the Placemaking Europe website.

https://pld.placemaking-europe.eu/



Website https://pld.placemaking-europe.eu/



Webinars https://pld.placemaking-europe.eu/webinars/

ENTREE Zoetermeer

Location: Zoetermeer
Team: HUNC, STIPO, Mooi lost op
Client: Municipality of Zoetermeer

Zoetermeer is developing a new residential neighbourhood: De Entree. This marks the city's first inner-city transformation. A two-kilometre-long industrial zone is being redeveloped into a high-density urban district with 7,000 new homes.

The municipality commissioned a Place-Led Development strategy for the transformation period, which may last up to 12 years. This strategy includes both an organisational framework for implementation and a ground-floor (plinth) strategy for the completed neighbourhood.

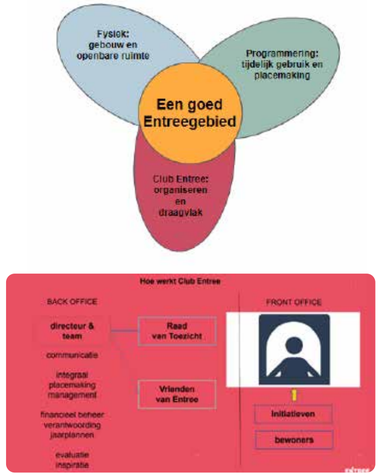
After carefully reviewing the new plans, conducting street interviews, and engaging with all stakeholders, we presented a strategy that includes a step-by-step roadmap. This plan is now being implemented—ensuring not only a vibrant and attractive neighbourhood once completed, but also a meaningful and liveable place throughout the construction period.



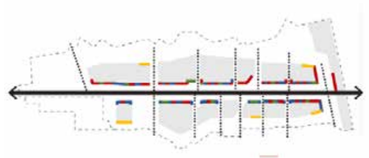
The key question in the development of De Entree in Zoetermeer is how to organise such a large-scale project within the city limits in a way that ensures the area remains meaningful and liveable — not only throughout the twelve years of construction, but also long afterwards. This applies not just to the future residents of the new neighbourhood, but equally to the surrounding communities.

HUNC

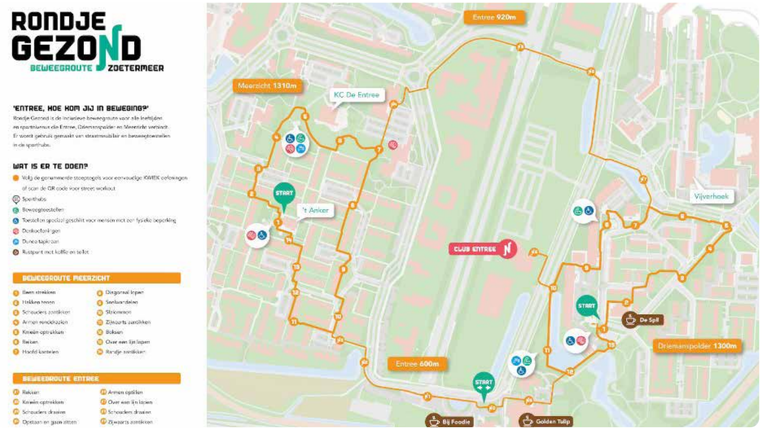
Organisation structure



Plinth strategy



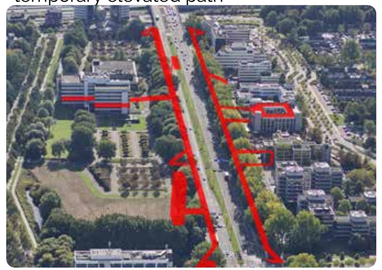
First placemaking action



Club Entree



temporary elevated path



HUNC

Very beautiful, but expensive not ?



Early Tuesday morning, the end of May. A square in a deprived neighbourhood in Rotterdam. It's still a bit chilly. The cold grey skies make the place appear even duller than normal.
We are participating in an initiative to make the square more attractive for the neighbours. It's an exciting morning. The first layer of paint of our temporary design is being applied. As I watch the painting grow, I get more and more excited with the result. I can see the paint taking over the greyness.

In the meantime, people pass the square. Curiously they look at the freshly applied blue lines. Passers-by start to chat with me. Very happy with the result, I gladly answer all their questions. There is a remark though that surprises me and keeps me thinking for days. One man says: "Very beautiful, but expensive not?"

It's not the first time I hear this comment. At a previous project, I encountered a similar reaction. Neighbours, in an also deprived part of the city, had taken up the initiative to create a garden, especially for girls. Together with a landscape designer, we were asked to make the design. One neighbour had taken up the job of applying for the necessary funds. At one point we just needed €4000,- for one last addition to the design. For projects in the public realm, this is a very small sum. Only the neighbour refused to apply for it. As there are very poor people living in the area, families for whom €4000,- is a huge amount of money, she had the feeling she couldn't explain the amount of money to them.

These reactions are understandable and are full of sympathy. At the same time, they are dangerously toxic. Because what if we change this string of thoughts around. This would mean that only in affluent parts of the city it's possible to work with generous budgets. Imagine what that would be like. It would give the following signal to the residents and especially the children of poorer areas: You are not worthy to live in a good, pleasant and healthy environment.

It is especially important to invest in the public realm in areas where people are struggling. Otherwise how hopeless does one's life become if on top of all your troubles you also have to live in harsh surroundings.

I have no doubt that most municipal employees and designers are permeated with the value of a good public space. But how do you make sure that the residents also feel that they are worthy of living in a pleasant place? Of course by having conversations with them and by keeping making beautiful designs. Still, I have not quite figured it out yet. This sentiment goes deep, and I suspect much more is needed.

Luckily we also heard another comment that day, one that made our hearth melt. Later in the afternoon, while we were taking pictures of the



square from the top floor of an adjacent flat, we overheard a little girl talking to her dad. Enthusiastically she said: "Look daddy, from here it even looks more beautiful!" It's so precious that this little girl knows and feels that beauty is there for her.

This article appeared on
www.childinthecity.org

Going Green Together:

The Power of a Community Garden

A community garden is more than just a green patch in the neighbourhood. It is a place where neighbours meet, work together, and enjoy each other's company. Research shows that shared green spaces strengthen social cohesion: people get to know one another and feel more connected to their surroundings. Moreover, a garden that is set up and maintained collectively is also used more often. This contributes to both the physical and mental wellbeing of residents: gardening is relaxing, spending time outdoors is healthy, and social contact helps reduce loneliness.
But how do you actually start a community garden? Below you'll find a practical step-by-step guide to setting up a successful garden with local residents.

Step 1: Collect ideas
Organise a residents' meeting or start with a short survey. Ask people what they would like to see. Do some prefer individual vegetable plots, while others would rather share one large communal area? Are there wishes for flowers and ornamental plants, or is the focus on edible crops? What do children want – a sandpit, climbing trees, or a den-building corner? And how can older residents feel at home in the garden – with benches, a pétanque court, or quiet shaded spots?

Step 2: Create a plan together
Based on the collected ideas, an initial design can be drawn up. Involve residents actively: organise a design session with sketches, reference images, and models. Decide together which elements should be prioritised and which can be added later. Also think about practicalities such as water points, compost bins, or storage for tools.

Step 3: Realistic planning and clear communication
Establishing a community garden takes time. The area may be muddy for a while, there may be building materials around, and machines might be in use. That's why it's important to make clear agreements with residents in advance about the timeline and communication. What will happen when? Where might there be temporary inconvenience? And who is the contact person for questions?

Step 4: Phased implementation
By developing the garden in smaller phases, the project stays manageable and keeps moving forward. For example, start by laying a path or building the first planter. Next might come play equipment, then an herb garden or seating area. Each phase is a milestone – and a perfect moment to celebrate together what has been achieved.

Step 5: Celebrate together!
Use the completion of each phase as an opportunity for a small neighbourhood event. Invite neighbours for coffee, a shared lunch, or a festive opening of the new section. This keeps the project alive and helps residents feel continually involved and connected.

Not everyone will join in – and that's fine
It is important to recognise that not all neighbours can (or want to) take part actively. People have different levels of energy, interest, or time. Some may simply want to enjoy living in a green environment without feeling responsible for maintaining it themselves. These residents are also entitled to their say and to a pleasant, well-kept garden. A successful community garden makes space for every form of involvement: from keen vegetable growers to quiet appreciators.
A community garden grows with the neighbourhood
A community garden is never truly "finished". It is a place that evolves with the wishes of residents, where something new can always flourish – both literally and figuratively. By designing, building, and celebrating together, you not only create a greener neighbourhood, but also a stronger community.



De Gaarde

Location: De Gaarde, The Hague
Client: Haag Wonen
Producer: Rigro

Commissioned by Haag Wonen, we co-designed a collective neighbourhood garden and multifunctional stair modules with residents of five apartment blocks in The Hague South-West.
The stairs connect the flats to the garden and double as social spaces: they can be sat on, used for plant pots or birdhouses.
Through intensive participation, a garden design was created that residents truly feel is their own.
This project demonstrates our experience in socially driven spatial design in The Hague South-West, and our ability to translate individual wishes into shared green spaces that unite communities.













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