Honours Programme | CC2100 | Amanda Brandellero
Dina Nemirovsky | 698540
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Theme 3 Assignment: Blogpost for Cultuur&Campus Putselaan

Keeping it Bottom-up: How Cultuur&Campus Putselaan Maintains Dialogue, Inclusion, and Overall Social Sustainability

Introduction

From engaging community walks, to construction site visits, to collaborations with local artistic hubs – there is always something going on at Cultuur&Campus Putselaan! (Cultuur&Campus Putselaan, 2024). Cultuur&Campus, rooted in Rotterdam's Feijenoord and Charlois neighbourhoods, is an innovative space designed to act as a creative, inclusive, and sustainable hub for both community locals and beyond. Collaborating with both local organisations and educational institutions, C&C strives to work as an open and spirited hub for innovation and development.

Cultuur&Campus Putselaan places a great emphasis on inclusivity and sustainability (Cultuur&Campus Putselaan, 2024). The hub actively takes action to act as a space where local residents guide the organisation and development of the project based on their own hopes and values. Nevertheless, previous creative placemaking literature has touched upon the potential tensions that may emerge between project organisers and locals (Wichowsky et al., 2023). This blogpost sees the topic of participation and engagement as socially crucial and relevant from both a micro and macro perspective: looking at the Cultuur&Campus Putselaan initiative specifically, as well as broader future creative community hub projects and their development, a topic gaining greater popularity in city environments (Kagan et al., 2023). This blogpost strives to contribute to existing literature, collecting information about similar projects, and developing an understanding of both the successes and pitfalls that Cultuur&Campus can take into consideration.

Theoretical Background

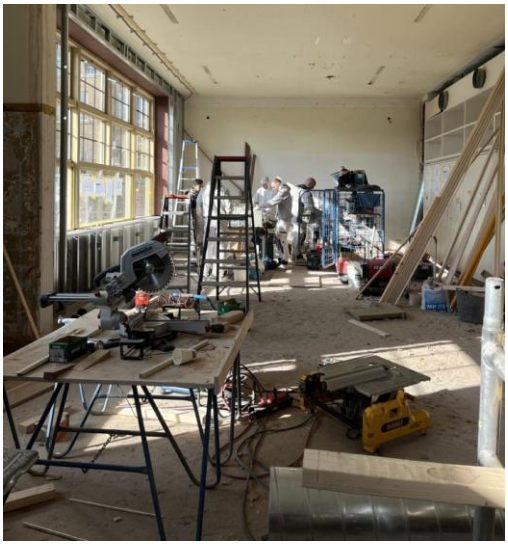
Feinberg et al. (2021), borrowing Comune di Bologna & Urban Center Bologna's 2014 understanding of the concept, define the *urban commons* as common materials within an urban setting – something beneficial to each individual, as well as the entire collective. Developing common space can be extremely beneficial to encourage group identity, inspire generally positive feelings, and even increase economic value in neighbourhoods. Markusen and Gadwa (2010) chime in, claiming that creative placemaking can restore street structures, improve local business potential, secure greater public safety, as well as encourage greater diversity and openness. Cities are often looked at as optimal environments for facilitating change, with the cultural sector playing an important role in urban dynamics (Kagan et al., 2023). Redaelli (2017) adds to this, emphasising that creative placemaking, combining community engagement and the arts, may allow for the celebration of an environment's specific culture and history as well as encourage communal emotional affiliation.

Although the positives of creative placemaking are certainly quite clear, it is also important to mention its risks. Wichowsky et al. (2023) beg the question: who is even empowered to participate in such projects? How do such initiatives take existing race-class inequalities into consideration? Feinburg et al. (2021) add to this, bringing up potential challenges, such as neoliberal political critique and social tensions, especially with local governments' power dynamics. And indeed, contextualising literature into real environments and their socio-historical background is necessary (Romero, 2023) to recognize the significance of the Cultuur&Campus initiative. Rotterdam has been the target of state-led gentrification processes, the socioeconomic reformation of neighbourhoods (Janssen et al., 2024). Despite the city's pivotal regional positioning, Rotterdam's industrial heritage, unemployment gaps, and significant ethnic minority population have acted as justification for the implementation of diverse policies, challenging ethnically diverse neighborhoods' internal structures.

Nemirovsky, D. (2025). Cultuur&Campus Putselaan.
Photo of schoolchildren who attended the Putselaan school. A representation of the building and community's roots and history.

Empirical Illustration

Similarly to the Cultuur&Campus Putselaan's emphasis on co-ownership and participation with local initiatives (Erasmus University Rotterdam, 2023), the Cultural and Creative Spaces and Cities (CCSC) project strives to increase local participation in the development of city-wide cultural policies (European Cultural Foundation, 2023). Within the CCSC's 7 Urban Labs initiative, cultural organisations, paired with regional authorities, are pushed to develop common solutions to local challenges (CCSC, 2025). The project's objectives are to encourage co-creation between various city stakeholders, facilitate greater learning and exchange, and to explore and produce greater knowledge on urban challenges. The Cultural and Creative Spaces and Cities project shares Cultuur&Campus Putselaan's reciprocal approach. Within C&C's agenda, one can identify the "together" tag, one the majority of its events sustain. Its programming places great emphasis on taking action as a collective, whether that be meal-prepping a community Christmas dinner or touring the construction site and thinking about its renovation potential.



Nemirovsky, D. (2025). Cultuur&Campus Putselaan.
Photo taken during a tour of the construction site, a view local residents may expect when visiting the hub.

Cultuur&Campus Putselaan utilizes the IDEA system, focusing on points, such as inclusion, diversity, equity, and access (Erasmus University Rotterdam, 2023). C&C developers recognize that they are coming in as "outsiders" and that local (Feijenoord and Charlois) residents have more experience with their community's organisations. Similar to the literature previously presented, Femke Vandenberg (2023), a researcher and lecturer of EUR's Arts and Culture Studies Department, highlights that tensions may emerge when residents feel too alienated from imposed-upon-them projects. In parallel, the Helsinki Urban Labs project strives to activate local citizens, changing their role and position within the system from passive audiences to change-makers, working hand-in-hand with city authorities (CCSC, 2025). Urban Labs Madrid focuses on strengthening collaboration with child-locals, something Cultuur&Campus places great emphasis on as well. Both initiatives consider neighbourhood stakeholders as important and deserving to have their voices and ambitions heard within organisational policy work.

Conclusion

Cultuur&Campus Putselaan, seeing as it is funded by the European Union's New European Bauhaus Initiative, often has to face institutional constraints or work with formal guidelines. C&C project leaders act as intermediaries between a highly bureaucratised formal funding organisation and local residents who, naturally, have their own values, goals, and visions on how their neighbourhood should develop. This results in a challenging balancing act for

Cultuur&Campus: how can they find a path forward that avoids any top-down attitudes? It seems the solution, as banal as it may seem, is through dialogue and conversation, a point C&C places great emphasis on.

Although the European Union may be working with Cultuur&Campus leaders directly, conversation between local organisations and the "higher-up" funders could still be encouraged and promoted. It seems Cultuur&Campus takes great efforts to act as mediators between locals and bureaucratic processes, however, perhaps the Urban Labs initiative proves that this is not always necessary. My first recommendation would be for C&C to encourage direct conversation between neighbourhood stakeholders and funding organisations. This can, and should be, incorporated into the program for any and all to attend. My second recommendation would be to incorporate community debates on how C&C should be developed into the programming. Although space for those to make their voices heard is provided by C&C, developing an event solely dedicated to platforming conversation may encourage greater participation and facilitate important discussions. My final recommendation would be for the Cultuur&Campus leadership to include local stakeholders' opinions in the letter they plan on addressing to the European Union. In response to the occasionally limiting bureaucratic processes large organisations impose, C&C plans to address a letter requesting certain reformations in the system. Including local residents' thoughts and feelings can positively enforce certain arguments.

Overall, these actions could result in greater transparency and the better dissemination of information. Problems can be solved together, as a community, avoiding any top-down discrimination or feelings of alienation. Cultuur&Campus Putselaan already takes great effort and care to include locals in its organisation and programming. In recognizing that there is still much room to grow, C&C already reflects its open attitude towards change for the community and the greater good.

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