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Intersecting Green Infrastructure with Social Infrastructure to Foster Growth in Every Way

Cities covered largely by concrete, traffic, and shifting demographics can shed a grey shadow over their initial idea of being places for the most innovative and revolutionary ideas. In cities, green spaces hold transformative potential that is needed for them to stay livable as well as fuel innovation and inclusion in the most basic and humane way. Nature is for everyone, and it gives great benefits to all.. Cultuur&Campus Putselaan (C&CP), based in the South of Rotterdam, in the Afrikaanderwijk neighbourhood, is set to become more than a cultural and educational site. With its goals of inclusion and feasibility , it is intended to embed sustainability and inclusion into its urban mission. Its garden is one of the most powerful, local, yet often overlooked instruments in accomplishing these goals. While being a small-scale project, existing on the margins, a carefully designed and community-driven garden can bring people together, sustain ecosystems, and offer possibilities for collective as well as versatile learning.

This blog post shows how the C&CP garden is a major site for inclusive placemaking and sustainable urban development in a gentrified neighbourhood. Drawing on the case of Oosterwold, a neighbourhood in Almere, this reflection shows how practices of shared governance over a green area, with the encouragement of applying permaculture practices and community responsibility, can turn green infrastructure into social infrastructure, contributing to an inclusive and sustainable C&CP hub in the heart of the city.

Culture and space are not fixed resources, rather, they are dynamic sites of exchange and transformation that need active input and ideas to make the most out of their potential. Creative placemaking, urban commons, and intersectionality provide theory to reimagine how a garden can function within a broader agenda of sustainability and inclusivity of an institution. Creative placemaking at C&CP means incorporating the arts into the garden, not

merely through events and workshops, but also in how diverse users can design, grow, and experience it. This should go beyond putting public art or events in a common space, it is about the whole incorporation of the arts into the fundamentals of placemaking and community development (Markusen & Gadwa, 2010). This succeeds only when it is deeply embedded in local contexts and cultures, with careful attention to the needs and wants of the locals, thereby supporting community-driven goals, not just overarching visions of policymakers (Markusen & Gadwa, 2010). While creative placemaking has great attention for common goals and community, it can also be a site that invites participation without giving power to its people (Redaelli, 2018). The garden must, therefore, be a place for co-creation, actually letting people space to decide what they want to achieve.

The attributes of an urban common gives another lens of the garden and its diverse possibilities. An urban common is a collectively held urban asset outside of market or state ownership, belonging to the people of the city, it can be a park, a square, or in this case, the garden of an open institution of the neighbourhood (Fienberg, 2021). If the specific urban common is guided with care and attentive consideration of shared decision-making and transparency, it can become a site of empowered participatory governance, allowing citizens to reclaim space and agency in a segment of their city life (Wichowsky, 2023). For this to remain a long-term characteristic of the C&CP, it is crucial to not just create access but simultaneously, encourage the neighbourhood to co-manage the activities so the garden can flourish and provide space for growth.

For that to have a reach on the whole of the neighbourhood, intersectionality is required to ensure that the garden actually benefits all the individuals to whom it reaches (Romero, 2023). It needs to take into account intersecting identities in one of the most culturally diverse neighbourhoods of Rotterdam, think about cultural backgrounds, gender, class and age. It needs to function in a manner that creates space and comfort for different forms of expression and participation, and most importantly not to take on and replicate social hierarchies.

This proposed vision of the C&CP garden follows a powerful structure of reference in Oosterwold, a neighbourhood in Almere, designed as a participatory urban agriculture community. In Oosterwold, residents are required to allocate 50% of their estate for green production, which can include gardening, farming, or untouched nature sites (Jansma, 2013). Combining local food security with community building as residents take care of infrastructure, land use, and related governance, sets a large-scale example of what C&CP could be as a participatory urban common. Oosterwold's collaborative strategy in land-use shows how citizens of Afrikaanderwijk can co-design the layout of the garden and make

decisions about its vegetable plants through open communication and ongoing dialogue throughout the process in each season. The idea of adoption of small parcels would contribute to personal goals that work well together and strive towards common goals in ways of planting days and harvest festivals promoting personal and collective governance in a long-term communal engagement.

Reflection of past issues and successes is also a great way to learn from each other and create a functioning garden as a community. Knowledge-sharing about permaculture practices and organic farming can contribute to the C&CP's educational programmes as well. In a way, this garden would be able to bridge together biology and the arts, including storytelling and visual crafts. The observation of the different cycles of plants and the lives that live inside the garden from different insects and butterflies to the vegetables in the soil, can all inspire visual arts projects, poetry and performances all through an embodied, close sensory-based learning curve.

However, even Oosterwold has its limitations, with its steep buy-in costs threatening inclusive access for all participants (Tkachenko, 2016). C&CP must actively prevent this by lowering participation barriers and keeping them that way, this can be in the form of free classes, tools, seedling plants and also tools for artistic practices linked to the garden. This applies also to the knowledge that is exchanged in the space, informal or formal knowledge already existing in the neighbourhood can be harvested, there is no need to bring everything externally to the community when it could be found between the residents as well.

The C&CP garden has the potential to become more than a neat and finished green space that people use passively, rather, it can be a site for community and urban transformation. Oosterwold gives the perfect example of how something that is made and shaped by the community shows a significant harmony between the space and its residents due to the care that has been poured into it every step of the way. Creative placemaking, the urban commons, and intersectionality theories all support a more participatory and inclusive approach of making the garden and the whole of C&CP into a truly sustainable and inclusive place. For this to function smoothly, the C&CP has to go through carefully planned actions, continued engagement, as well as a critical eye to always improve from past attempts and be on the lookout for more sufficient possibilities. A garden like this would truly represent the diversity and innovation of Rotterdam, a place of new possibilities and infinite courage to rebuild something of the past into the most functional and positive support of simple, everyday lives.

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