

699406 – Grace Wagner

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Arts and Culture Honors Programme

Renovation done- then what? My suggestions for artistic programming at the Cultuur&Campus Putselaan

The Cultuur&Campus Putselaan project is currently in development at its new location, an old school in Rotterdam's South. During a visit of the construction site, I was able to gain an impression of the monuments' renovation process and potential to accommodate Rotterdammers under the mottos: sustainable, together and beautiful. I was particularly impressed by the promising social affiliations the location presents itself with: It's next to a local school, offering opportunities to collaborate with local children who authentically represent the neighborhood and a typically marginalised age group. Furthermore, it is in proximity to a local festival's venue. From the inside high ceilings, natural light and the old monuments flair pose great potential to create an open, beautiful space.

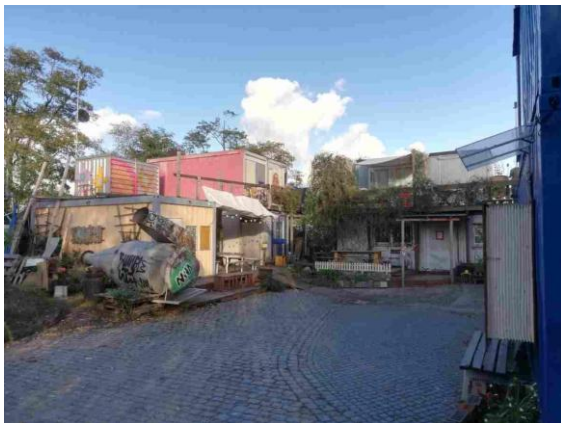


However how will the space be used once it is completed? Through artistic programming, the hub can unite people despite certain social backgrounds under shared interests, passions and (co-)creation. It gives a voice to those that are suppressed by hard economic realities or hegemony enabling a cultural democracy and strengthening a sense of empowerment, community and engagement in Rotterdam's South. Furthermore, artistic programming can be leveraged to co-create a distinct identity and future history for the yet undefined space (Feinberg, 2021).

Theoretical concepts such as the following help to organise our ideas and strategies to develop a project like this: The Cultuur & Campus will be an urban common, a publicly owned space, open for everyone to use, bringing social utility (Levebre, 1996). While benefiting identity, peer-produced

knowledge and exchange, it is often faced with the long-term challenge of gentrification, amongst overregulation and the commodification in policy (Feinberg, et al., 2021). Sustainability is contemporarily defined through its three pillars of economic, social and environmental sustainability. In colloquial terms it can be translated as made to last. It applies to considerations in the Putselaan project concerning artistic programming, ensuring sustainable means are used, sustainable practices are taught and exchanged in an accessible, practical manner. However, the academic discourse around sustainability can impose a Eurocentric bias and capitalistic growth paradigm, neglecting social solutions. Inclusivity is considered a dimension of social sustainability. It goes beyond the pressure of non-exclusion, but includes multiple dimensions such as physical accessibility, diversity in social affiliation, spatial proximity and design (Köpper & Müller, 2020). Together with notions of diversity and intersectionality, of socio-cultural backgrounds, race, gender, age, etc. Inclusivity means meaningful participation in a community (Armstrong, Armstrong & Spandagou; 2011; Romero, 2023). Tokenism, which is defined as the effort to include a person of marginalised group to claim diversity without giving that person real meaning, is a common pitfall to avoid (Rivera & Tilcsik, 2019). A means to secure inclusion of local communities in decision-making processes is the concept of participatory governance: It argues that through a bottom-up participation, decision making processes and the division of authority are a democratic decision-making process can be achieved (Wichowsky, 2022).

There are multiple existing comparable cases and initiatives, which we can study to guide our considerations with regard to possible solutions for the challenges faced as illustrated in the theoretical elaborations. Though each space is different in its affordances, neighborhood and vision, we can still learn a lot from the challenges and opportunities they face. The PLATZproject in Hanover Germany is an initiative that was founded by 2 skateboarders who turned 3000 m² of wasteland into a skateboard park and to a container village. The containers and the square offer a place for people to implement ideas, sustainable non-competitive business ideas and DIY workshops. It is their vision to promote inclusive urbanism.



Their focus lies on enabling a commoning practice from the bottom-up rather than delegating the usage of the common from top-down. This means in terms of inclusivity, the PLATZprojekt is designed barrier free providing physical accessibility, its central location and connection to public transport infrastructure enables special accessibility. However, similarly to the Cultuur&Campus the common function is rather hidden from the general public. In their case this was reflected in the inclusivity of their close community, as only insiders would attract new people from their social circles and the community would consist of mostly educated students with an artistic background. Their non-hierarchical organisation structure and experimentation with different decision-making methods promoted a “Do-ocracy” enabling those willing to contribute to do so and evaluating the value through the opinions of those who are currently active. Through these strategies the PLATZprojekt creates a meaningful community inclusion theoretically enabling diversity, however they lack the programming and outreach to actively attract more of an intersection among participants. Here the Putselaan location offers similar geographical and physical accessibility. A decisive difference between the two cases is that the Culture&Campus has institutional resources and collaboration to specialise and reach diverse audiences. Another difference is that through a top-down governance the Cultuur&Campus holds curating power to ensure that an intersection of people are targeted through the artistic programming. However, this neglects the possibility of meaningful ideas from the bottom up. The Putselaan tries to compensate for this with research activities and their collaboration with the Afrikanderwijk cooperation as representative for the neighbourhoods. However,

one must realise that by example of PLATZproject Putselaan can experiment more with means and approaches to participatory governance.

From comparing Cultuur&Campus with the PLATZproject, it's clear that active curation and programming must intentionally engage a diverse intersection of people. Emphasizing DIY approaches helps blur the line between participants and organisers, deepening meaningful involvement. By dedicating parts of the building or programming to collaborators, Cultuur&Campus can foster participatory governance and inclusivity in its organisational structure. To support this, I propose several programming ideas: First, a sustainable makeup workshop where community members share home remedies, cultural beauty practices, and natural alternatives with schoolgirls interested in fashion and makeup. This encourages intergenerational exchange, challenges mainstream beauty standards, and promotes DIY, sustainable solutions. Broader events like e-sports tournaments, chess competitions, and open mic nights can also attract underrepresented groups—e-sports for youth, chess for seniors, open mic for creatives—expanding the audience and diversifying participation. Additionally, I recommend creating a physical and/or digital "Inspiration Hub" to showcase the campus's evolving identity. This could include a collage of past projects, artistic outputs, ideas, music, and future visions. QR codes placed around the building could link to an archive of content, with optional contact info for contributors to spark collaboration. Content could be structured either by a tinder like swiping outline, connected to the QR codes placement or just entirely random. Engagement data could also inform future programming decisions.

To summarize, it takes a lot of considerations in the attempt to make this art and culture organisation more open, diverse and sustainable. In programming it is imperative to attract diverse people and create a sense of community. The Cultuur&Campus must experiment with the levels of Do-ocracy, participatory governance, bottom-up approaches and negotiate the standards set by the New European Bauhaus. Certainly, the Cultuur&Campus and Rotterdammers can look forward to an exciting future of overcoming challenges and creative opportunities.

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Images:

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