

# (Re) production of space

The history of Rotterdam and Schiedam is inevitably linked to the port area. Their watersides have been transformed for centuries to accommodate industry – the main economic driver. Industrial euphoria did not come without sacrifice and the artificial port-landscape has not been built without negative long-term consequences. With farms and villages evacuated or demolished, ecosystem services denied and ruined, they shaped a fit-for-purpose area with a clear goal in mind – to produce.

In the 19th and 20th century's many people's livelihoods depended on work in the port area. The shipbuilding, jenever, cork, cloth, candle and glass industry in the Nieuw-Mathenesse area employed a vast amount of people. Men and women worked long days in unhealthy and often unsafe conditions. Workers were the backbone of the city, relentlessly building its prosperity throughout the centuries. Factories were not only places of labour, but fostering grounds for socialising, self-organising, fighting for equal rights and fair pay. Even in the harrowing conditions, workers could find pride and unity, building communities around the places of production.

As industry expanded over the years so did the exploitation of both land and labour, profiting from colonial trade and capitalism. Modernist urban renewal erased the previous programmatic mix, enforcing a strict separation of functions. With the rise of capitalism and globalism, factories were closed and small businesses were pushed to the cities' margins in the search of more affordable spaces. For many, the loss of their job also meant a loss of identity.

Today, in the era of the knowledge and service economy, pressure on the land mounts with an increased demand for housing and attractive urban environments from higher income newcomers. The port is moving and leaving behind vast areas vulnerable to gentrification, homogenisation and climate change.

With the terrains around Glasfabriek between Schiedam and Rotterdam's Merwe-Vierhavens being almost ready for the transformation it is a good time to ask questions about what kind of renewal we want to initiate. This area, a part of Nieuw-Mathenesse, is full of manufacturing, small scale businesses, storage facilities and logistics. Hidden, forgotten, and bundled at the edge between two cities, these units of production may soon be considered deployable, losing their established networks, communities and investments. In the new developments there is no space for sheds and warehouses, while selected pieces of architecture are destined to change their function and become monuments of past industrial activity. Using production as a branding tool, fetishizing work, and fitting it into places that it will never flourish is a symptom of the lack of clear vision on how to create a mutually beneficial environment for both existing and new users, inhabitants and workers, production and recreation. This establishes a situation that once again places job security and social balance under threat.

*"Kan uit het Ruimtelijk Raamwerk in grote lijnen worden opgemaakt dat de gemeente een transformatie van dit gebied nastreeft ten behoeve van wonen en werken, maar waarbij waarschijnlijk geen plek meer is voor onze bedrijven en huurders? Dit baart ons niet alleen grote zorgen, maar geeft ook een groot gevoel van onrecht." NIEUW-MATHENESSE - PARTICIPATIE RUIMTELIJK RAAMWERK (vragen)*

In Nieuw-Mathenesse there is a chance to create a new, brighter future for once exploited areas. The unique position of the space available within the city allows for production ecologies to develop

new city flows with local production. While not relying on nostalgia of the past or the allure of new technologies, we should take on the challenge to balance labour inequality, reconnect forgotten industrial areas with the city, renew the natural environment and create a social space for production, exchange, living and learning. The question becomes not only who has the right to the city, but also what does the city need?

In the urban context there is no room for architecture or programmes that don't deal with the public realm. While a city that is striving for a circular future needs to secure a space for local production and businesses, it is imperative that these, in return, contribute back to creating a liveable and a healthy environment. At the same time, improving conditions of public space shouldn't be an excuse for gentrification and commercialization of the public realm. The high quality space, in fact, does not need to be generated by new architecture nor evolve around commercial functions: the way to create it is through collective effort.

A return to the collaborative strength and resilience of the working people can provide a key to success. The existing businesses of the Nieuw-Mathenesse that are willing to work together in creating renewed domain for public and nature should be allowed to stay. New urban space inserted by them into the existing fabric will uncover and display businesses that no longer felt welcome, providing an anchor for them to stay, offering representation, public interface and empowering workers to claim their spot in the city.

A new harmony will emerge as renewed fronts of industrial sheds will frame a well defined public place, at the same time still allowing for surrounding functions to maintain their spatial flexibility, organic and informal character and carry on with their productive activities. The thrilling and distinct appearance of industrial buildings will be embraced and reunited with the city, offering places to rest, connect with nature, exchange ideas and interact with production. A new representative envelope of open facades and new volumes will create an interplay between private and public, working and living, while added contained public space will allow for a gradual renewal of soil and greenery.

New public space will attract visitors with its unique character and a possibility to learn and observe, offering more than usual commercial functions. By interacting with activities that used to be hidden and often fenced off, the public will be exposed to processes that make the city function. This added link can create a better understanding between different social groups, poor and wealthy, locals and tourists. By having productive functions in their proximity, many will choose to use their services, buy local products, repair and rebuild, together allowing for a circular economy to transform the dynamics of the city.

The future post-industrial transformation has to support the quality and security of available work. With a future spatial framework a new order of renewal is proposed, starting from the edges and working together in a search for the collective subject and reproduction of social relations of work, blurring boundaries between poor and prosperous, supporting job equality and social balance.

(Re) production of space is proposing a strategy to heal forgotten industrial edges between Rotterdam and Schiedam, offering a chance to create urban and environmental reconnection and recognizing a potential to work within existing areas towards creating inclusive, diverse and circular neighbourhoods. It is a negotiating strategy for mutual benefit of different communities and a plea for a new method of renewal and transformation. Finally, it is a commentary on the need to provide a space for both unity and diversity, structure and organic growth, appropriation of space, spontaneous use and reproduction of commons.

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