

AMSTERDAM
PLACEMAKING WEEK
OCT 10-14, 2017

City Expedition Zwolle 10 Principles for Successful Squares

11 October 2017

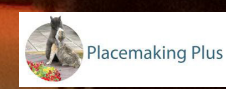


PAKHUIS
DE ZWIJGER*

Placemaking week opening City expeditions

@Dorling
#placemaking

Public space is located at the intersection of many global issues from health to sustainability, innovation to equity. Placemaking Week is all about leveraging this convergence.



1 ZWOLLE SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE CASE STUDY

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List of participants

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Ruth Knoll
Sharan Bekker
Sienna Veelders

Who was present during the day

A diverse, (inter)national group of people working in urban planning & placemaking, varying from architects, to employees of the municipality, to students and community builders attended during the placemaking expedition in Zwolle. Attendees from the USA, Germany, France, Australia, Great Britain and other countries around the world. The overall input of the day was given from a group with many different background and expertise. On behalf of the city, there were projectmanagers, trendwatchers, urban planners, placemakers, local and regional government and public space designers as well as stakeholders from the case study areas, to present, participate and interact with the international placemakers.

Description of the atmosphere during the day

The attendees from Amsterdam arrived at the station and got a warm welcome in the best of ways by the 'informal mayor' and city prior of Zwolle in the passengers tunnel. Welcome to the Hanseatic City of Zwolle. [Appendix city priors welcome speech] We spend the day –when not exploring the city- at the location Brainz. A workspace for business, students and local government in the middle of the station area on a big and wide red square. Both locals and (inter)national guests interacted easily. It was nice to go outside during the expedition and the game. The people engaged nicely, were communicative and curious about each other and very collaborative. Everybody was enthusiastic and interested in the city of Zwolle. Some people were disappointed that we didn't visit the old city centre, but with the one and only Orsolino from our infamous bakery van Orso we made it right;-) Our Alderman Ed Anker expressed his appreciation for the presence of the participants, their enthusiasm, inspiration, tips and advice. It was also surprising as affirmative, as they've been working very hard in the two areas over the past period. We ended this beautiful and interesting day with a snack and a drink.

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Introduction

Zwolle is a modern city with a rich history (Moderne Devotie / Haseatic City) and a steady economy. The city lays two till three meter below sealevel and is part of the Delta. The city is in the top five in terms of economic growth in the Netherlands and has a lower unemployment rate than the national average. You will find lively streets there, with students, entrepreneurs, free-thinkers, and creative doers who have all worked together to keep public prosperity and well-being at a high level. At the same time, the city attracts multinational corporations. This crossover has resulted in many innovative projects coming together, however the station square doesn't reflect the city's many assets. How can we, with placemaking, reimagine a station square so that it will become a centerpiece of a comfortable and vibrant city center? How can we learn from the historic city square? How can we open up the surrounding buildings and offer more comfort from the sun and the wind? Which new activities and programming could be started and how should we facilitate the community at large to be the expert?

What kind of areas are we going to look at?

In Zwolle two station areas were to be visited by two separate groups:

- 1) The first group visited the Station area at the old city centre side. This is an area inbetween the innercity and the central station, that is going to be redeveloped in the next two years. The busstation will move to the other side of the station. This leaves the front of the station with a huge blanc space to play with. We looked at the square of the station and the lane going from the station to the inner city. How does this area become a nice place to stay? And interact with the inner city?
- 2) The second area was Het Lubeckplein. The group focused on the square directly adjacent, surrounded chiefly by commercial buildings and the city's secondary town hall.



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What goals were there for the day

The municipality of Zwolle and especially the station area is a dynamic place in the making for the last three years and is still busy to work on the area. Since 2016 we have a group who calls themselves Vrienden van Hanzeland [friends of Hanzeland]. It's a group with residents, businesses and local,- regional government. We explored Zwolle's station area in two groups and were focusing on the square directly adjacent, surrounded chiefly by commercial buildings and the city's secondary town hall. The municipality is ongoing looking for new insights and ideas from placemakers around the world. The goal for the day is to discover what the municipality of Zwolle can learn from international placemakers. And here the thoughts and visions on our own environment from the international group who visit our city, that's valuable. So we visited the two locations in the area, made an analysis of the strengths and improvement points in the area, and come up with short term and long term interventions for an improved Station area. The chosen areas to look at today, still lead to many challenges and questions amongst the city planners and designer, also related to climate issues. We played a place game to analyse, observe and find new ideas for how to turn this space into a great place. To investigate potential ways in which the square's vibrancy might be improved, both in the long and short term. We used the lessons of the 10 principles for successful squares [PPS].



2 ZWOLLE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE AREA

One of the cases is about the Lubeckplein in Zwolle. In this case it's important to at least think about creating comfort in relation to climatic features. The other is about a square, in front of the central station on the side of the city centre, and the connection of this area with the inner city centre.

Are you willing and able to give a talk about the principles for great squares and do you know of some information for a good connection between places?

Station area at the city centre side

Strengths

1. Green/old trees;
2. Beautiful architecture/impressive buildings;
3. Lots of space available to give (new) function.

Opportunities

1. Potential of becoming the ramblas of Zwolle;
2. Connecting outer area with inner city;
3. New (public) role for Mexican building.

Weaknesses

1. View of the city is blocked by Smullers etc. and busstation;
2. Only accessible by pedestrians with special passage cards/and by bicycle through detour;
3. Unclear route to city center.

Threats

1. unsafe street for bicycles (no bicycle lane);
2. Too focused on (too many) busses and cars;
3. No public places that makes you want to stay (benches, bars etc).

Station area at the square

Strengths

- 1 Accessible (right next to station) large space;
- 2 Clean and safe (during the day).

Opportunities

1. Given its location, the square could feasibly become a hotbed of social activity amongst train-goers and students alike (university very close as well).

Weaknesses

1. Interface inside/outside buildings: small, dark windows, shutting off the inside from the outside and vice versa;
2. No activities/things to do: a static 'space' rather than a dynamic, lived 'place';
3. Its materiality: red brick is 'too much'.

Threats

1. Feel 'closed in' when standing in square. Town hall should reflect democratic values of transparency and openness, but feels closed off, distant by virtue of its inward-looking architectural design;
- 2 Feels lifeless, somber, dreary, morbid even;
- 3 Feels 'hard' and 'cold'.

3ZWOLLE PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

Station area at the city centre side

Long term

1. Close lane off from cars and busses: bicycle/pedestrian only area;
2. Use same kind of stones for pavement and street as in inner city (unity);
3. Move busstation to other side & get rid of Smullers etc to unblock the view on the city.

Short term

1. Put down benches, give room to pop up stores/foodtrucks & new public function to Mexchican building;
2. Create a bicycle lane in Stationstraat & make crossroad at the end more safe/accessible;
3. Create playful signs that direct pedestrians/bicyclists to city center.

Station area at the square

Long term

1. Change the dynamic between inside/outside by enlarging entrances and windows of buildings;
3. 'soften' public space by increasing foliage: redesign with green and colour.

Short term

1. Involve local youth by allowing them to spray the square's one drab, gray wall with graffiti (a contest perhaps?)
2. Programming: bring in food trucks and temporary art/music installations, attractive to passengers and students.
3. Involve kids by transforming the square's architecture into an interactive game for children, e.g.: who can find (hidden) objects on the tops of buildings, on walls, etc.

4ZWOLLE CONCLUSIONS

The municipality of Zwolle is very happy by the results of the day. Despite we heard things we already knew, we learned a lot.

Main conclusions:

- Area with enormous potential but in need of (radical) change.
- Extend the qualities of the inner city towards the station.
- Invest in people, to turn the Station Area from transit place to people place.
- What it lacks in current vibrancy and imagination, it makes up for in potential.
- Use the wind it can become a friend.
- Lack of real ownership to get started. That is also the hardest task for placemaking, the community is the expert.
- Mobilise budget.
- No need to wait any longer, engage and mobilise! Start programming





DE STAD OP OOGHOOGTE IN NEDERLAND

Samengesteld door Jeroen Laven, Sander van der Ham, Siënnä Veelders & Hans Karssenbergh

blauwdruk

You can read more stories on
the city at eye level and placemaking in the Netherlands in our
new book

“The City at Eye Level in the Netherlands”

More info on

www.thecityateyelevel.com

City Expedition Zwolle

10 Principles for Successful Squares

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