AIR Jeanne van Heeswijk is revitalising the public space and unleashing the potential of people who have been left behind in the scramble for global urban identities. Here she sets out her theoretical approach and shows how she put it to practice in Rotterdam's Afrikaanderwijk.

Inclusive urban strategies for radicalising the local

Jeanne van Heeswijk

1
Founded in 1998 by Jeanne van Heeswijk and Herve Paraponaris. Further developed in 2008 by Jeanne van Heeswijk and Dennis Kaspori. www.freehouse.nl

2
Derived from 'Radicalizing the Local' (2009), the brochure accompanying a workshop in the Afrikaanderwijk with Berlage students led by Teddy Cruz, Miguel Robles-Duran and Jeanne van Heeswijk.

3
Henk Oosterling's Rotterdam Vakmanstad (Skill City) concept concerns developing the potential of existing skills. www.vakmanstad.nl

The public space is the domain we inhabit collectively. In a time of accelerated globalisation and changes in our environment, city-dwellers are increasingly feeling excluded from their own space. I believe that creative cultural production is crucial for a lively public domain. The Freehouse foundation engages with the relationship between cultural production and public space, initiating projects aimed at redressing the balance in public space.[1]

We are presently working on a project in Rotterdam's Afrikaanderwijk (Afrikaander district). It has a plaza for a huge twice-weekly market where people from many cultures come to buy and sell. One would expect it to be the vibrant heart and soul of the area, but when we first got there it was a dreary place, bound up in a web of overregulation. So Freehouse started a process of tiny interventions, pinpricks in the urban fabric, to bring life back to the area. Some interventions have been successful, others less so, but they have all fed into our experience and practice, so we can inject humour, highlight frustrations or provide opportunities for people to reconnect.

We are engaged with the question of how one can connect formality and informality to arrive at a situation that is neither overly regulated nor overly chaotic. The key question is: how can we redress the balance of public space?

The city can always be transformed, but how should we go about it?
The current economic crisis and the shifting of geopolitical boundaries and socio-cultural demographics produced by global urbanisation all call into question traditional methods of artistic and architectural interventions in the city. The complexity of the intensified geo-economic and political forces continue to generate global and local zones of conflict. The territory, the city and the neighbourhood become sites of contestation where different conditions of power are inscribed. Ultimately, it is in the city that the politics and

economics of privatisation, control, labour and migration are manifested, splintering it into sectors of mega-wealth and marginality. There is an urgent need to re-engage the invisible vectors of power that shape the territory, to reorganise systems of urban development and to challenge the political and economic frameworks that produced the crisis in the first place.[2]

The development of a city should be a collective process. There is a growing faith in the potential of greater community participation in developing models and instruments for city-building. However, this faith is largely blind to the naivety of the notion of transformability based on harmonious togetherness. Enabling the individual or the community to participate in building the city means more than merely presenting them with a few choices and allowing them to communicate through public comment channels, demonstrations or standard procedures. In fact it is precisely these conditions – the notions of how we wish to and are able to live together – that we should be able to question again and again within this process. Offering a range of choices is a last convulsion of the idea of supply-side transformability that still treats the citizen as a consumer.

Are we capable of creating a place – a public domain – where we can debate, face up to the confrontation and address one another as co-producers of the city? Can we make this area of tension visible and develop instruments to enable intervention in that area? Can we collectively develop a narrative about the city in which everyone has a place? And can we then develop instruments that enable people to fill in this place and deepen, sharpen or question that narrative?

Creative City vs. Skill City[3]
Cities are increasingly seeking to differentiate themselves on the global market by developing attractive urban environments where culture is the distinctive factor. In line with this trend Rotterdam is attempting to position itself as an

attractive global location for industry by transforming from a workers' city to a creative city. Plans include the replacement of approximately 20,000 dwellings in the coming decade.

In order to succeed, however, these external physical and economic goals must be matched by internal social cohesion and cultural infrastructure. The rapid developments have taken a narrow global economic view that seeks only to attract a select a largely wealthy, well-educated and white population. Rotterdam has a relatively high low-income population that does not belong to this group, and the city. The urban infrastructure and socio-cultural structure have been ignored in the vigorous transition from worker's city to creative city. The 'creative city' project will be no more than a marketing strategy if it does not take into account the education, development and unrealised entrepreneurial and creative potential of other sectors of society.

As Richard Florida explains: 'Creativity in the world of work is not limited to members of the Creative Class [...] I strongly believe that the key to improving the lot of underpaid, underemployed and disadvantaged people lies not in social welfare programs or low-end make-work jobs [...] but rather in tapping the creativity of these people.'[4]

Surely the qualities of city dwellers are best developed when they are taken seriously in their creative contributions and addressed as co-producers of metropolitan society? Co-producers are stakeholders and interested parties who connect, formally or informally, with others and in the process create public space and communication. It is crucial to find ways to initiate and stimulate these interactions to foster co-production of the public domain.

The idea of co-producers is inextricably linked to the idea of the public domain. *In Search of New Public Domain* by Maarten Hajer and Arnold Reijndorp defines the public

domain as those places where exchange between different social groups can and does take place:

The shift toward a cultural-geographic approach implies letting go of the idea of a single way of determining the value or meaning of spaces. The core of a cultural geography in fact consists of analysing the multiplicity, or in more political terms, the struggle that takes place among different meanings. Shaping a public domain can then be a question of eliciting unconstrained manifestations of diversity and avoiding interventions aimed at making this impossible.[5]

The public domain, then, is primarily a cultural perception. We must stop seeing the public domain as the outcome exclusively of economic and legislative factors, and begin to see it – and use it – as the performative basis for a city under development.
First and foremost, inclusive urban design should mobilise the existing local physical and socio-cultural capital. The public domain provides a platform for exchanges, for participation and communication, and underpins a broadly supported and integral idea about living together in the community.[6]

Freehouse, a model for radicalising local production
Freehouse sets up spaces where local shopkeepers, young people and artists can come together to exchange knowledge, experience and ideas. This exchange leads to a form of cultural production that can reinforce the economic position of those involved and make tangible the cultural process of conceptualisation and realisation, thereby stimulating cultural self-awareness.

We took as our starting point the model of the medieval free house, a place where 'outsiders' who did not possess the social, cultural and economic infrastructure to participate in formal political and social life were nonetheless able to operate within the informal economy.

4
Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2002) p.10.

5
Maarten Hajer and Arnold Reijndorp, *In Search of New Public Domain* (2001) p.37.

6
Open 15 – Social Engineering, 'Marketplaces for Cultural Collaboration', Jeanne van Heeswijk and Dennis Kaspori (2008).
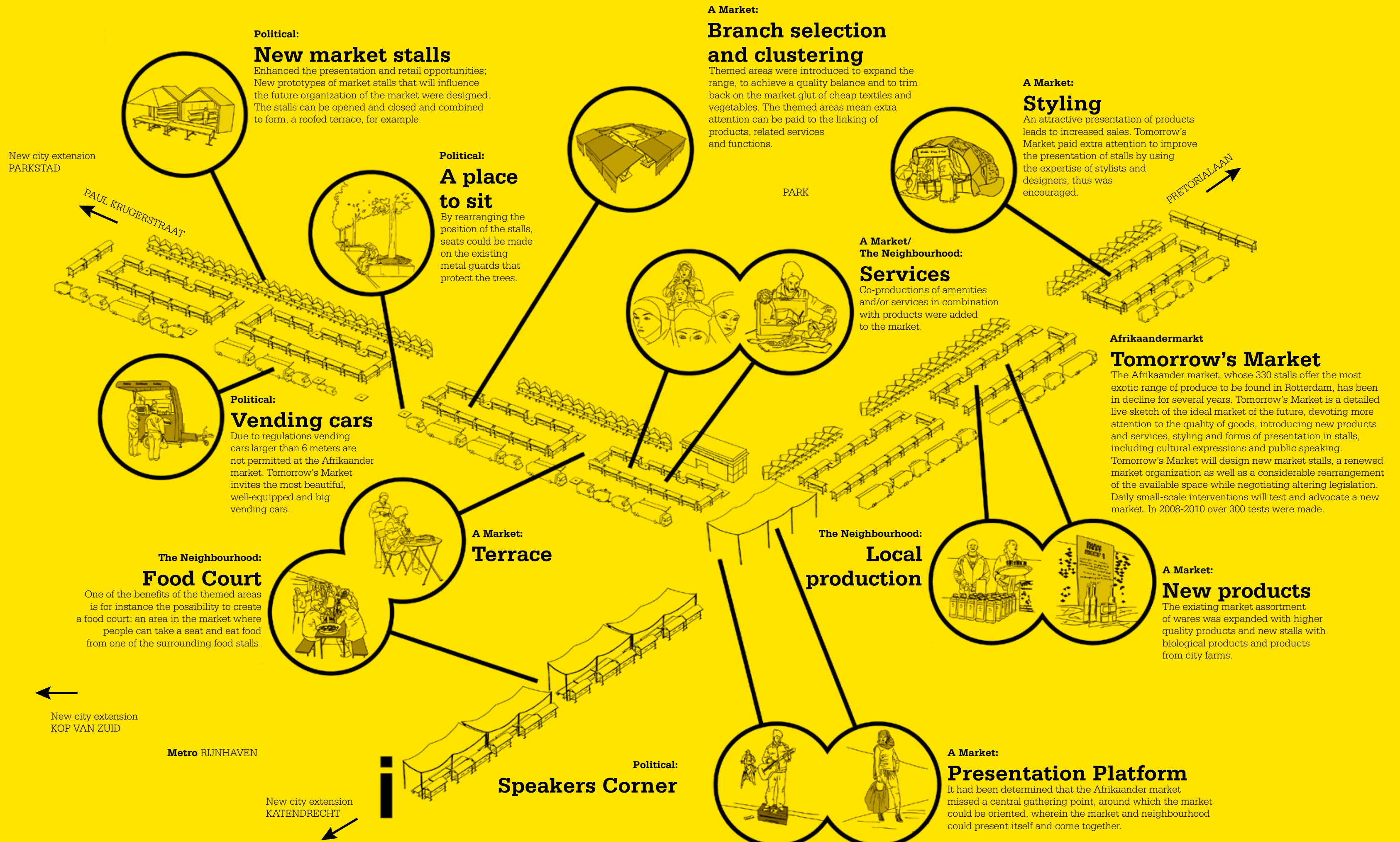
Political:

New market stalls

Enhanced the presentation and retail opportunities; New prototypes of market stalls that will influence the future organization of the market were designed. The stalls can be opened and closed and combined to form, a roofed terrace, for example.

A Market:

Branch selection and clustering

Themed areas were introduced to expand the range, to achieve a quality balance and to trim back on the market glut of cheap textiles and vegetables. The themed areas mean extra attention can be paid to the linking of products, related services and functions.

A Market:

Styling

An attractive presentation of products leads to increased sales. Tomorrow's Market paid extra attention to improve the presentation of stalls by using the expertise of stylists and designers, thus was encouraged.

New city extension
PARKSTAD

PAUL KRUGERSTRAAT

PRETORIALAAN

Political:

A place to sit

By rearranging the position of the stalls, seats could be made on the existing metal guards that protect the trees.

PARK

**A Market/
The Neighbourhood:**

Services

Co-productions of amenities and/or services in combination with products were added to the market.

Afrikaandermarkt

Tomorrow's Market

The Afrikaander market, whose 330 stalls offer the most exotic range of produce to be found in Rotterdam, has been in decline for several years. Tomorrow's Market is a detailed live sketch of the ideal market of the future, devoting more attention to the quality of goods, introducing new products and services, styling and forms of presentation in stalls, including cultural expressions and public speaking. Tomorrow's Market will design new market stalls, a renewed market organization as well as a considerable rearrangement of the available space while negotiating altering legislation. Daily small-scale interventions will test and advocate a new market. In 2008-2010 over 300 tests were made.

25

Political:

Vending cars

Due to regulations vending cars larger than 6 meters are not permitted at the Afrikaander market. Tomorrow's Market invites the most beautiful, well-equipped and big vending cars.

A Market:

Terrace

The Neighbourhood:

Local production

A Market:

New products

The existing market assortment of wares was expanded with higher quality products and new stalls with biological products and products from city farms.

The Neighbourhood:

Food Court

One of the benefits of the themed areas is for instance the possibility to create a food court; an area in the market where people can take a seat and eat food from one of the surrounding food stalls.

New city extension
KOP VAN ZUID

Metro RIJNHAVEN

New city extension
KATENDRECHT

Political:

Speakers Corner

A Market:

Presentation Platform

It had been determined that the Afrikaander market missed a central gathering point, around which the market could be oriented, wherein the market and neighbourhood could present itself and come together.