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Pleasure Reconsidered and Relocated

Modern Urban Visions in the Wake of Rotterdam's Discontinued Amusement Areas

Baptist, V.; Van de Laar, Paul

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Pleasure Reconsidered and Relocated: Modern Urban Visions in the Wake of Rotterdam's Discontinued Amusement Areas

Vincent Baptist and Paul van de Laar

1 Introduction

En hoe zal het gaan met de ontucht, die hier voor het overgrootste deel gelocaliseerd was? Zal ze [...] zich weer inkwartieren in een bepaalde wijk, die dan de nieuwe [Zandstraat] zal worden? Geeft de blijkbaar voorkeur voor oud-Katendrecht, daar om de havens heen, al eenige aanduiding?

And what about the debauchery that was largely localized here? Will it [...] resettle in a particular neighbourhood, which will then become the new [Zandstraat]? Does the apparent preference for old-Katendrecht, around the harbours, already give an indication? (authors' translation)

BRUSSE, 1917, p. 14

Zal er in het nieuwe stadsplan ook ruimte zijn voor [de Schiedamsdijk]? Is het mogelijk er een te maken? Men kan het proberen. Die nieuw te ontwerpen "Dijk" zal dan ingeleefd moeten worden; hij zal geschiedenis moeten krijgen en dan zal hij mogelijk nog lang kunnen teren op de schoone reputatie van zijn voorganger [...].

Will there also be room in the new city plan for [the Schiedamsdijk]? Is it possible to build one? They can try. That newly designed 'Dijk' will then have to become animated; it will have to accrue history, so that it may be able to live on its predecessor's fine reputation for a long time to come [...]. (authors' translation)

MEERUM TERWOGT, 1947, p. 176

Places of constant hustle and bustle, where people and goods arrive and depart, where land and water meet: port cities have traditionally, and quite easily, given rise to slogans, metaphors, and even myths ascribed to their

particular maritime urban profile. Such conceptions are not merely superficial one-liners. As pointed out in the introduction to this volume, they also function as invitations to explore micro-geographies, often overlooked associations and traces in the contemporary environment (Harteveld, 2021), and to further theorize the distinct character of port cities (Hein, Luning, & Van de Laar, 2021). However, as with more general urban discourses, trying to pinpoint 'the port city' leads to the realization that any notion of 'port cityness' inevitably brings together certain meanings and dimensions that potentially compete with and contradict each other (Vigar, Graham, & Healey, 2005). In the context of port cities, the well-known 'hustle and bustle' narrative evokes imagery with an economic dimension of the mass cargo serving as indicator of global port competition; a social dimension, of the constant in- and outflux of varied groups of people; and a cultural dimension, of the places and practices port city residents and visitors have engaged in. This chapter focuses on the latter aspect, thereby examining the cultural dimension of port cities through the history of their often-stereotyped pleasures (Baptist, 2020), and how over time these have been reconsidered and relocated through different urban planning initiatives.

This chapter bridges the spatial and cultural sides of port cities' internal hustle and bustle, by investigating the case of 20th-century Rotterdam and how its three notorious pleasure districts (Zandstraatbuurt, Schiedamsedijk and Katendrecht) were put to an end during a period defined by modernization and reconstruction initiatives. As the port city's most distinct areas for controversial amusements, the districts have been closely linked together in virtually all historical accounts of Rotterdam's modern development on the basis of their chronologically successive dissolution. While more overlaps exist between their respective life cycles than is often accounted for in their merged narrative, the epigraph by local reporter M. J. Brusse, who published a defining memoir of the Zandstraatbuurt's ending, in which he also nodded to Katendrecht as a potential heir, highlights how, during their existence, these neighbourhoods became interconnected. This is largely attributed to the classic urban issue of prostitution displacement and concentration, given all three neighbourhoods' roles as prominent red-light districts. While we do not necessarily aim to provide a detailed and comprehensive account of this theme for Rotterdam's historical context, our overarching analysis of the port city's disreputable amusement areas certainly needs to be considered from that particular background.

In this chapter, we analyze the demise of these three neighbourhoods in connection with municipal plans, some of which did not materialize in the end, to

replace the pleasure districts, thereby showcasing the future-oriented port city imaginaries of various urban actors at the time. Throughout the text, the viewpoints of these people are juxtaposed with voices of local artists and commentators that are often submerged in more nostalgic and reflective sentiments regarding contentious municipal reconstruction attempts, as the epigraph on the Schiedamsedijk illustrates. Along the conceptual-historical grid that we set up between pleasure, place, people, and planning, it is possible to discern early echoes of maritime branding and regeneration, while acknowledging the changing character of waterfronts, from bustling to tranquil, as quintessential spaces in the modern port city. Ultimately, our chronological discussion of Rotterdam's three amusement areas generates a more encompassing view of port city culture and so-called 'maritime mindsets'. In the following conceptual section, we first reflect on this term, and link it to certain tensions and clichés that have prevailed in characterizations of water and port contexts. This allows us to further articulate our central inquiry into historical conflicts between modern reconstruction initiatives and environments of seemingly unbridled entertainment. By subsequently discussing the different case studies, we pinpoint the spatial consequences of port city authorities' progress-driven maritime mindset on the basis of the disintegration of Rotterdam's pleasure neighbourhoods.

2 Conflicted Mindsets and Revalued Waterfronts

Coined as a kind of synonym for 'port city culture', and in light of discussions on rekindling contemporary port-city interactions based on historical legacies and affinities, the concept of 'maritime mindset' presents itself as an explicitly value-driven one (Hein, 2020; Sennema et al., 2021), similar to that of 'hustle and bustle' as outlined in the introduction to this volume. In reintegrating and reinforcing social, cultural, and spatial factors in port city contexts, a maritime mindset also points to the one asset that seems dominant in this type of environment, namely water. While water may appear as a potentially unifying force, and water awareness thus as something to foster, certain traces in classical philosophy indicate how water and its immediate surroundings have traditionally been characterized and perceived in more conflicting ways. In his geophilosophical history of water, Dutch philosopher René ten Bos indicates the long-held negative associations with and distrust towards water in a European context, by reconsidering the opening passage of Plato's famous *Republic* (Ten Bos, 2014). In it, he finds evidence of Plato's strong opposition to the sea and maritime settlements, in contrast to inland cities: Athens signified cultural

and political stability in the eyes of the Greek philosopher, while the adjacent port city of Piraeus was perceived as a morally degenerate place, where decency and honesty had been replaced by opportunism and other suspicious behaviour (Ten Bos, 2014). Here, we find traces of port cities' rebellious, 'hustling' side, through their political, cultural, and economic open-mindedness.

Plato's anti-maritime stance seemed particularly informed by a disapproval of the trade and entrepreneurship that the prominence of the sea enables (Ten Bos 2014, p. 52), and which potentially leads to overtly profit-oriented and competition-driven motives for action among different actors and communities. On the other hand, the prosperity generated from maritime trade has historically also been celebrated and expressed through a variety of practices and artefacts, stimulating port cities to repeat and remember their successful hustle and bustle stories over time (Sennema et al., 2021). Philosophers like Plato and Socrates may well have retorted that the sea and its surroundings thus become places where people start to believe in their own illusions (Ten Bos, 2014), but modern history shows that self-boasting narratives and imagery have helped port cities to sustain and promote themselves. Consider the affinity and praise expressed by the American historian and sociologist Lewis Mumford, whose ideas on urban planning and reconstruction also influenced post-war debates and developments in Rotterdam,¹ regarding the nature of port cities in an article on Marseille:

A bred-in-the-bone New Yorker, I have a feeling of kinship, deeper than mere liking, with seaports like Rotterdam, Genoa, and Marseille, full of scheming, energetic men, hearty eaters and drinkers, generous gamblers, who like to carry out big ideas in a big way, if they get their share of the rake-off. Writers of guidebooks, licking their chops over the vices of Marseille, have never done justice to the natural beauties of its harbour, (...). One sees these beauties more clearly now, and the grosser sexual displays more dimly, because the red-light quarter was razed by the Nazis. (...) Now this area is covered by a comely palisade of office buildings (...).

MUMFORD, 1964, p. 68

¹ Mumford's study *The Social Foundations of Post-War Building*, initially published in 1943, was translated and published in Dutch right after the Second World War, as part of a series of books by De Rotterdamsche Gemeenschap to stimulate discussions and ideas on Rotterdam's post-war reconstruction: see Mumford (1946).

In this passage, Mumford indulges in various well-known stereotypes of port cities, while also connecting their distinct profile to a new, modern era. Here, port cities do not remain a stigmatized entity on their own anymore, in the way Plato used to perceive them. Rather, their supposedly moral decay only keeps lingering in their notorious prostitution-related neighbourhoods and waterfronts, an aspect that Ten Bos also recognizes in contemporary contexts (2014). This points to a central and long-standing juxtaposition in perception when it comes to maritime mindsets. To the industrial progress and wealth generated in the port city, a counter-image of deviance and crime always seems attached. One side is inextricably linked to the other, and “[t]he paradox of both cultivating and condemning the port city” has likewise given rise to urban planning struggles throughout recent history (Meyer, 1999, p. 33).

In his classic study on port-city planning, Han Meyer (1999) summarizes the changing appreciations for water, port cities and specifically waterfronts, to motivate the assessment of recent waterfront developments backed by an emphasis on “the cultural significance of the urban form” (1999, p. 13–4). As “[o]ld harbour areas were discovered as ideal sites for the development of new urban milieus” over the past decades (Meyer, 1999, p. 13), the dubious character of waterfronts was turned into a key city marketing tool. Think of the successful ‘Cities on the Edge’ narrative that was developed at the time of Liverpool’s European Capital of Culture run in 2008 (Mah, 2014; Van de Laar & Baptist, 2022). The edginess, or intrinsic ‘otherness’, of waterfronts became a unique selling point. In the process of securing new attraction on local and global levels, however, the equally mythologized ‘bustling’ and social togetherness that waterfront and dockside areas would typically nourish did not always translate into sustained connections with the general public (Mah, 2014; Van de Laar & Baptist, 2022).

The following discussions of the discontinuation of Rotterdam’s three main pleasure districts add nuanced historical perspectives to the struggles of reconfiguring and revaluing waterfronts and related cultural areas in the port city, from what Michel Foucault would call “counter-sites” or heterotopias to places that ultimately have given way to more utopian ideals (Foucault & Miskowiec, 1986). In the case of Rotterdam, these utopian ideals mainly comprise visions formulated by municipal authorities on the modernization of the port city. This attests to only one side of a maritime mindset’s inherently conflicted nature, however. In the next sections, we therefore further uncover how, throughout Rotterdam’s recent past, a positive stance towards the port and its industry has caused friction with and has even tried to subjugate more negatively perceived aspects of maritime urban culture during city planning processes.

3 Zandstraatbuurt: Making Way for the Modern Port City

Ze gaan de Zandstraat netjes maken / 't Wordt een kernenadebuurt [...] Nou vinden we temee op Charloi / Een huisie en 'n boterham. Of anders op de Hoek van Holland / Dat is ons nieuwe Rotterdam.

They are going to clean up the Zandstraat / It's going to be a fancy neighbourhood [...] Then we will soon find on Charlois / A small house and a sandwich. Or else at the Hook of Holland / That is our new Rotterdam. (authors' translation)]

SPEENHOFF, 1962, p. 93–4

Starting with the centrally located Zandstraatbuurt, it should first be noted that this neighbourhood already had quite a reputation well before the start of the 20th century. One of the earlier sources describing the area is the publication *Physiologie van Rotterdam* (1844), authored by two anonymous city residents,² which tries to give an encompassing, yet tongue-in-cheek characterization of Rotterdam's diverse population and urban structure. The *Physiologie* explicitly mentions the Zandstraat, along with the Schiedamsedijk, as holding a unique position in the entire country, with its rowdy dance salons as well as surrounding alleys and slums that lack proper hygiene standards (1844).³ By the turn of the century, however, it became increasingly clear that Rotterdam's municipal council had big ambitions in changing this image of its inner city. The status of a world port in rapid transformation was no longer in accordance with the overcrowded, dirty, and unhealthy appearances of the old town centre. During the early years of the 20th century, Rotterdam's ambitious new mayor A. R. Zimmerman, serving from 1906 to 1923, launched a plan to transform the central Coolvest, the former medieval moat to which the Zandstraatbuurt was connected, into a high-class city boulevard, inspired by new ideals of urban planning such as those of Baron Haussmann in Paris (Van de Laar, 2021). Remodeled into the Coolsingel, the location was set to house a contemporary administrative and commercial centre for Rotterdam, with a new city hall, head post office, and stock exchange building, all architectural markers that expressed and confirmed the successes of the new port metropolis.

2 The two authors have later been identified as J. T. Dutillieux and G. W. van der Voo.

3 Later on, the notorious legacies of the Zandstraatbuurt and Schiedamsedijk were also further cemented by their inclusion in a popular historical overview of former sailortowns: see Hugill, 1967, p. 145–6.

In a way, these iconic plans were a continuation of certain ideas held by G. J. de Jongh (Van de Laar, 2017), who served as Rotterdam's chief engineer from 1879 to 1910 and believed that “the [port] economy of Rotterdam *was* the culture of the city,” and thus should be displayed as such in the urban scenery (Meyer, 1999, p. 305, emphasis in original). This also implied the integration of modern transportation infrastructure, and a monumental city centre without broad roads was therefore inconceivable. Improved traffic functions became one of the key elements in the plans for a modern city centre, with broad thoroughfares directed to the new business district, both from north to south and from east to west (Figure 5.1). In 1909, the council officially agreed to the

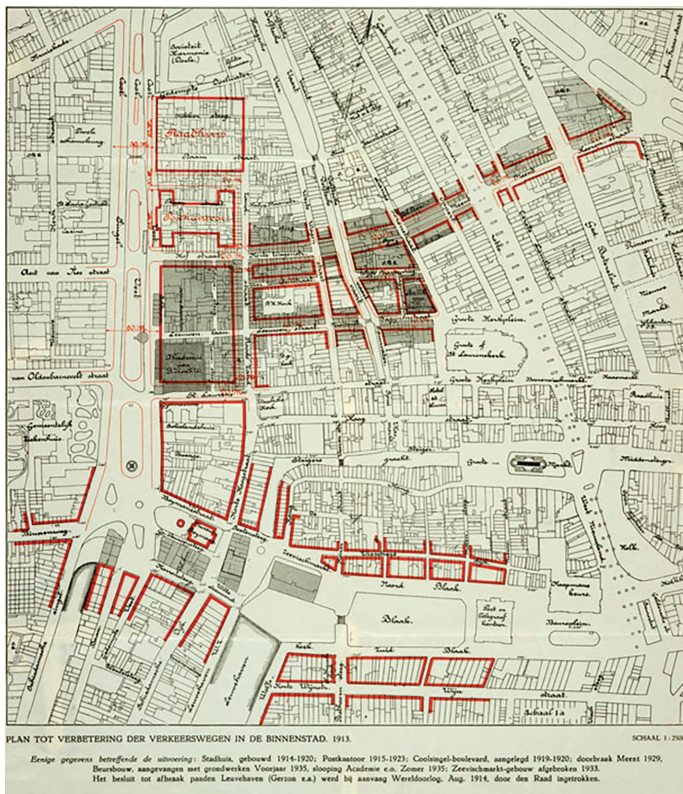


FIGURE 5.1 Map (1913) indicating plans for the new Coolsingel boulevard running from north to south, and the Meent running from east to west as a connecting road between the Goudsesingel and Coolsingel. The envisioned city hall and post office buildings are labeled and delineated, and part of the plots to be expropriated for the construction plans are coloured

SOURCE: ROTTERDAM CITY ARCHIVES, SIGNATURE NUMBER: 1980-353, [HTTPS://HDL.HANDLE.NET/21.12133/41FEE43C58DF4DC39C74A9D58654CC1B](https://hdl.handle.net/21.12133/41FEE43C58DF4DC39C74A9D58654CC1B)

radical redevelopment plans and the Zandstraatbuurt's corresponding demolition, which meant that many small houses and business premises disappeared and around 2,000 inhabitants had to look for accommodation elsewhere (Van de Laar, 2000). With the cramped neighbourhood dismantled, the Coolvest no longer maintained as a canal, and the adjacent recognizable flour mill 'De Hoop' ultimately also torn down, little remained of the rather romantic and small-town image that previously dominated Rotterdam's centre (Figure 5.2). It is important to note that the disappearance of the central canal solved the lingering problem of the water as a source of pollution and contamination, as well as a danger for unattended children and drunk partygoers, among others, who could drown (Koomen, 1947; Van de Laar, 2017).

A city canal and its direct surroundings thus became the central battleground for an uneven tug-of-war between the opposing sides of a port city's maritime mindset. The demolition of the Zandstraatbuurt certainly fit in an



FIGURE 5.2 Left – view on flour mill 'De Hoop' and the Coolvest, with the Zandstraatbuurt in the direct background (1900); right – view from the new city hall tower onto the Coolsingel, with the soon to be demolished flour mill 'De Hoop' and the new post office under construction (1918), by H. Berssenbrugge

SOURCE: LEFT – ROTTERDAM CITY ARCHIVES, SIGNATURE NUMBER: VIII-130, [HTTPS://HDL.HANDLE.NET/21.12133/E857D1B44A85466C8DDA362E4C5A3A17](https://hdl.handle.net/21.12133/E857D1B44A85466C8DDA362E4C5A3A17); RIGHT – ROTTERDAM CITY ARCHIVES, SIGNATURE NUMBER: III-148-02-5, [HTTPS://HDL.HANDLE.NET/21.12133/E2F9F6BA23964B1C85D6AC5E158D52AF](https://hdl.handle.net/21.12133/E2F9F6BA23964B1C85D6AC5E158D52AF)

often-heated public debate on norms and values in Rotterdam at the time. Local confessional parties benefited from political reform movements that led to an expansion of voting rights for male citizens. Their increased political strength subsequently opened new ways of controlling events in the city that potentially jeopardized public order and decency. Pressured by Catholic and Protestant parties, the municipal council for instance decided in 1907 to abolish the city fair, the annual party of working-class Rotterdam (Van de Laar, 2000). By the end of the 19th century, such debates, along with the expansion of civilization offensives and 'norm entrepreneurship' among varied local associations, institutions and community figures (Van de Laar, 2000; Couperus & Wolfram, 2020), created a climate in which the Zandstraatbuurt's existence in the centre of the city was increasingly questioned. Plans for the new Coolsingel further sharpened the difference between civilized commercial entertainment in music halls and theatres and those smaller dance salons and café *chantants* (singing cafés) that were increasingly seen as indecent. While Zimmerman's more liberal opponents rightfully claimed that the port city of Rotterdam could not be imagined without nightlife, the mayor himself made no secret of his hopes that a new layout for the city centre would thoroughly clean up its old and overpopulated streets, along with their murky memories (Van de Laar, 2017).

To facilitate the demolition works, numerous building plots were expropriated by the municipality. By letting local establishments' music and dance licenses expire on the eve of the planned destruction, the Zandstraatbuurt's hustle and bustle was quite literally silenced by the authorities in its final hour, thereby sidestepping the potential confrontation between residents and law enforcers that many had anticipated (Brusse, 1917). In his report of the Zandstraatbuurt's last evening, Brusse (1917, p. 129) also alludes to the fact that business owners in the district were given opportunities to start new establishments elsewhere in the city, under stricter licensing. This serves as an indication that the Zandstraatbuurt's demise may have been less radical or drastic than has since been recounted and presented, at least when it came to the commercial entrepreneurship that formed the beating heart of the neighbourhood and that was seemingly reeducated, so to speak, by partially enabling its relocation, instead of prohibiting and eradicating it entirely.⁴ To which locations the

4 A notable figure linked to this cultural transition engendered by the Zandstraatbuurt's demolition is Abraham Tuschinski, a Polish emigrant who would become the Netherlands' most famous cinema entrepreneur. Months before the Zandstraatbuurt's end, Tuschinski set up his first cinema venue on the Coolvest, where he had already tried to lure a more upper-class clientele. After the demolition of the neighbourhood began, he successfully reopened

pleasure district's expelled dwellers actually wanted to move is expressed in a poem by Brusse's friend J. H. Speenhoff: the epigraph above mentions Charlois, a southern neighbourhood close to Katendrecht and surrounded by the expanding port, but also Hook of Holland, a sub municipality of Rotterdam located by the seashore. The poem thus suggests how, driven by their affinities for a fading sailortown culture and search for a close-knit working-class community, the Zandstraatbuurt's populace could well find a desired destination near the estuary with the sea, some 25 km away from the actual port city.

4 Schiedamsedijk: Filling the Void with Office Spaces and Theme Parks

Waar eens het bier en de jenever vloeiden / Wordt mijn oog geen druppel
thans gewaar [...] In mijn eenzaamheid loop ik te dromen / Komt hier
ooit nog leven en muziek? [...] Ook al word ik gammel en versleten / De
Schiedamsedijk vergeet ik nooit.

*Where once the beer and the gin flowed / My eye now does not notice a drop
[...] In my loneliness I am dreaming / Will life and music ever come here
again? [...] Even though I am getting old and tired / I will never forget the
Schiedamsedijk. (authors' translation)*

POLZER, 1998, p. 58

In the city itself, the Schiedamsedijk and Katendrecht became the new hot-spots for disreputable pleasures near the waterfronts. Before and after the Zandstraatbuurt's disappearance, prostitution could still be found in other parts of the city, from more luxurious brothels near the inland Haringvliet port to rental houses controlled by criminal pimps around the nearby Tweede Lombardstraat, for instance (Stemvers, 1985; Pluskota, 2017, referencing Van Dijkhuizen, 1925). Coinciding with the Zandstraatbuurt's demolition, as well as the passing of a similar legal bill on the national level, a new municipal regulation to ban brothels was accepted in 1910, but the intended effect on prostitution in Rotterdam was certainly not entirely achieved (Hazewinkel, 1982; Stemvers, 1985). The local morality preachers, together with Mayor Zimmerman, had not sufficiently realized that the port city's sinful hustle

his cinema in the Hoogstraat, one of Rotterdam's main shopping streets. See also Van der Velden (2021) for additional references and sources about the start of Tuschinski's career in Rotterdam.

and bustle would simply diversify and move to other areas. In the case of the Schiedamsedijk, a long and narrow street that formed the spatial link between the Coolsingel and Rotterdam's northern riverbanks, street prostitution eagerly mingled with the numerous sailor-oriented bars scattered along the pavement (Stemvers, 1985; Altink, 1983). It is this more encompassing amalgamation of maritime culture, entertainment, vice, and criminal tendencies, partially inherited from the Zandstraatbuurt, that turned the Schiedamsedijk into a genuine 'pleasurescape' during the interwar period, causing its distinct physical environment to imbue visiting pleasure seekers with strong emotions and lasting memories (Van de Laar & Baptist, 2022; Kosok, 2022). The epigraph from the Schiedamsedijk song by Heinz Polzer, better known in the Netherlands by his artist name Drs. P, is an emblematic expression of this.

Polzer's song particularly mourns the Schiedamsedijk after its destruction at the onset of the Second World War. The staunchly nostalgic sentiments expressed in it are exactly the kind of feelings that local leaders steering Rotterdam's post-war reconstruction initiatives explicitly opposed. A well-known comment of chief urban planner Cornelis van Traa from 1946 reads as follows: "Dost thou realize, Rotterdammer, that many of the most precious memories of what has been lost [...], were connected to what, looking soberly, were only shortcomings of our old city?" (qtd. in Rooijendijk, 2005, p. 81, original translation). The future of Rotterdam was linked to images and promises of modernity, instead of the city's past, a tendency that began early in the 20th century, as the Zandstraatbuurt's fate showcased. With the German *Luftwaffe* destroying Rotterdam's inner city on 14 May 1940, local urban planners were offered an unprecedented opportunity to experiment with a new, decidedly modernist vision of the port city that had to be rebuilt, while further accelerating previously conceived ideas about the city centre's drastic infrastructural reorganization. Such plans had been set up by Rotterdam's main urban planner W. G. Witteveen before the war, who further adjusted to the new situation after the bombardments but was met with increasing backlash from other local elite figures on his supposedly too traditional and rigid way of working (Van de Laar, 2014). Succumbing to this pressure, Witteveen was ultimately replaced by his assistant Van Traa who, as Rotterdam's definitive reconstruction visionary, later declared that Witteveen's initial plans had been subject to an all too sentimental view on the city's lost past (Van Traa, 1956).

The initial post-war reconstruction period may be characterized as an era boasting strong utopian tendencies regarding the articulation of new urban ideals, perhaps even more so than the period 1840–1880, when Rotterdam's port experienced a breakthrough with the realization of the New Waterway connection to the North Sea and the city simultaneously underwent an

aesthetic and infrastructural upgrade (Geurtsen et al., 1990). As previous research has pointed out, urban ideal images do not necessarily mean fantastical or completely fictitious visions in a concrete city planning context, but rather utopias with realizable potential, presenting “a belief in a better world” and “the compasses for action” to achieve it (Rooijendijk, 2005, p. 4, referencing Van Middelaar, 2002). Van Traa’s ‘Basic Plan for the Reconstruction of Rotterdam’ was such a compass, intended to produce a new, socially committed city that would also form a basis for the European welfare state (Wagenaar, 1993; Van de Laar, 2014). Essentially a zoning scheme, the Basic Plan provided a continuously adjustable layout for the composition of housing, offices and shops in and around the city centre, held together by a modern traffic system (Figure 5.3). Because of its unprecedented car-free and hyperfunctional character, the central Lijnbaan shopping street became one of the utopian signboards of Rotterdam’s renewed inner city (Bosma & Wagenaar, 2002), also praised by Mumford (1958). Elsewhere, Van Traa’s focus on motorized traffic

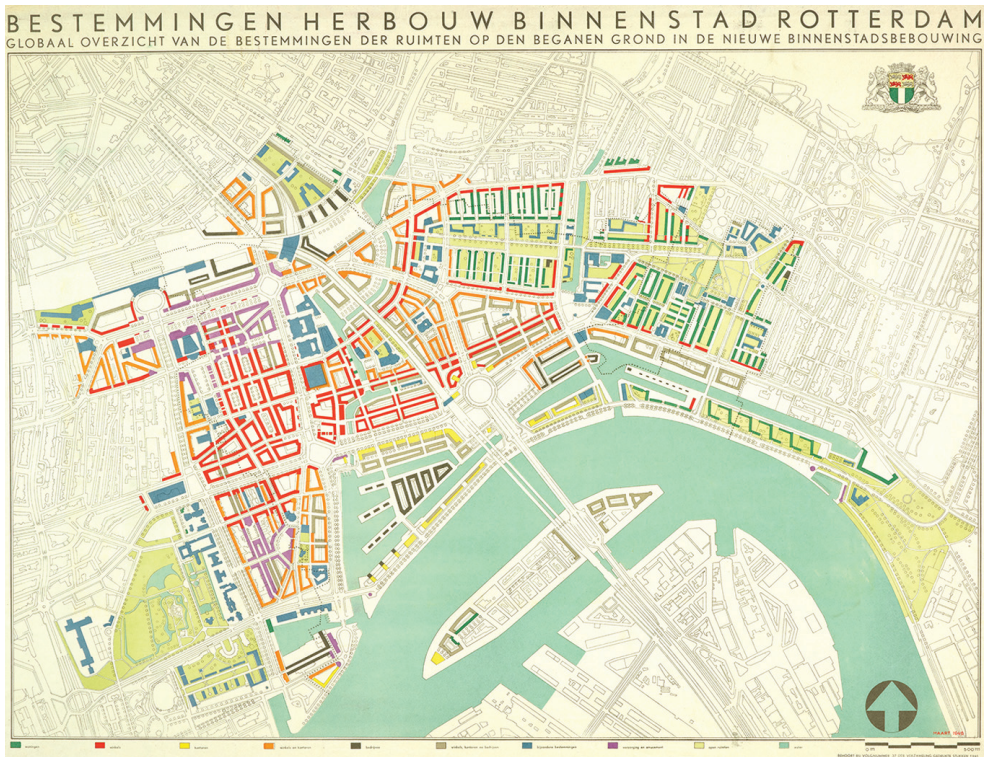


FIGURE 5.3 Map of the basic plan for the reconstruction of Rotterdam’s inner city (1946)

SOURCE: ROTTERDAM CITY ARCHIVES, SIGNATURE NUMBER: I-215-15A, [HTTPS://HDL.HANDLE.NET/21.12133/88AF2361A26140C99F0BD22181AF260E](https://hdl.handle.net/21.12133/88AF2361A26140C99F0BD22181AF260E)

dominated, and while his transport-oriented interventions at the city's inner harbours arguably underlined his maritime mindset, the disrupted visual contact between the surviving Coolsingel area and the waterfronts was only properly restored in the 1960s (Van de Laar, 2014; Werkman, 1965).

While department stores, restaurants, cafés and related facilities enhanced the leisure character of the central city district, the loss of the Schiedamsedijk created a moral dilemma. Many Rotterdammers and city visitors had enjoyed its lively pre-war pleasure and entertainment, which gave Rotterdam the allure of a real port city and comparable to other pleasures in Hamburg,⁵ Liverpool, or Marseille. However, the welfare city ideal, geared towards the emancipation of the working classes through civic urban culture, proved incompatible with indecent pleasures. In this respect, it is worthwhile to briefly highlight a text by port entrepreneur Jan Backx, one of Rotterdam's main civic culture proponents at the time (Meyer, 1999), expressing his personal vision on the planned city reconstructions: Backx (1944) initially laments the prospect of seeing the old inland ports turned into an "open air museum," due to the lack of proper connections between city and port, and adds to that the necessity of planning a new "pleasure quarter" to fill the gap of the Schiedamsedijk. Remarkably enough, however, in a revised version of Backx's text (1945), officially published one year later, both these concerns are omitted. Did Backx suddenly change his mind about the presence of sailors and maritime culture in post-war Rotterdam? In a later publication, he assures readers that pub owners no longer exert control over maritime labourers, who meanwhile have become well-educated workers (Backx, 1951). Offices ultimately came to replace former buildings along the Schiedamsedijk and adjacent waterfronts (Meyer, 1999), endorsing reconstruction architects' ideas that watersides were calm and optimal spaces from a sensory perspective (Van den Broek, Kraaijvanger, & Van Tijen, 1945). Silence therefore starts to replace the traditional urban bustle, in a change of the modern port city's appreciated stimuli.

In contrast to contemporary post- or de-industrial port city settings, where the natural and sensory aspects of water zones are increasingly sought out to escape bustling urban life (Mazy, 2021, p. 210–2), the reconfiguration of waterfronts in post-war Rotterdam especially accommodated desires for modern working and living conditions. Echoing the "comely palisade of office buildings" that Mumford (1964, p. 68) encountered in Marseille's reconstructed cityscape, as previously highlighted, the Schiedamsedijk and its surrounding area became neatly polished (Kalkman, 1956), and with that came a remodeling of

5 See e.g. journalist Egon Kisch's historical comparison of the Schiedamsedijk with Hamburg's Reeperbahn (Kisch, 1927).

sailor lodgings and their clientele (Figure 5.4). Had the port city's stereotypical pleasure environments completely disappeared? Apart from an intensified concentration of activities in the southern Katendrecht district, discussed in the next section, the entertainment legacies of Rotterdam's old centre found striking temporary replacements during the occasion of large-scale city festivals and exhibitions. One-off events like Ahoy' (1950) or E55 (1955) attracted mass audiences with showcases of future developments for port, city, and the Netherlands as a whole. In addition to this effective 'progress propaganda', these concentrated festivities incorporated fairground-like reconstructions of Rotterdam's old inner city, maritime atmosphere, and cosmopolitan amusement facilities (De Winter, 1988). As they were highly popular among visitors, the underlying purpose of these functional and artificial attractions was clear, namely, to test idyllic entertainment sites for their further integration into the



FIGURE 5.4 Left – group of sailors in front of a reconstructed boarding house on the Willemskade, around the corner of the Schiedamsedijk (1960–65), by A. Groeneveld; right – group of visitors in the 'Old Rotterdam' amusement park during the Ahoy' exhibition (1950), by J.F.H. Roovers

SOURCE: LEFT – ROTTERDAM CITY ARCHIVES, SIGNATURE NUMBER: XXIV-103-04-01, [HTTPS://HDL.HANDLE.NET/21.12133/82C4640166584E36956643673BC440A4](https://hdl.handle.net/21.12133/82C4640166584E36956643673BC440A4); RIGHT – H.A. VOET / ROTTERDAM CITY ARCHIVES, SIGNATURE NUMBER: XXXIII-780-03-3, [HTTPS://HDL.HANDLE.NET/21.12133/34C7C3B585494DD8BFE188E356542259](https://hdl.handle.net/21.12133/34C7C3B585494DD8BFE188E356542259)

modern port city's tourist image (De Winter, 1988; Kowalewski, 2021), rather than authentically resurrect Rotterdam's past pleasures.

5 Katendrecht: Trying to Contain Prostitution

Op naar de Erosflat! [...] Ik denkt dat Caland en dat Rose / In d'r graf legge
te blozen [...] Maar dat fijne onbevangen / anoniem de beest uithangen /
nou dâssienik niet zo net [...]

*Off to the Eros flat! [...] I think that Caland and Rose / Are blushing in their
graves [...] But that nice, uninhibited / anonymously fooling around / I don't
see that anymore. (authors' translation)*

VAN BERGEN EN HENEGOUWEN, 2000, p. 78

Once again, utopian planners and social reformers could not neglect the natural tendency of people, be it urban dwellers or itinerant sailors, to seek and be tempted by pleasure. Already during the Second World War, many had found a new escape route in the peninsula of Katendrecht, a port area located in Rotterdam South that, especially due to its functioning as a Chinatown earlier in the 20th century, was perceived as a 'place of otherness', isolated and stigmatized in comparison to the rest of Rotterdam and its population (Meyer, 1983; Davids, 1987). During the war itself, Katendrecht's allure as a zone of liberation was indirectly promoted by the fact that German soldiers, and later on, Allied forces (Meyer, 1983), were not allowed to enter the area where bars, dance houses and sailor lodgings sheltered *entartete* jazz and other forms of condemned entertainment. In post-war Rotterdam, Katendrecht became a quasi-natural place to concentrate the cultural hustle and bustle that would not fit in the schemes of civilized amusement as promoted by the port city elites. After 1945 the concentration of pleasure establishments took off on Katendrecht, attracting bar owners and pimps in search of new spaces after the bombardment of the city centre and the destruction of the Schiedamsedijk as former pleasure epicentre (Davids, 1987). In addition, the waterfronts to the Rijn- and Maashaven that surrounded Katendrecht were busy harbours and meeting places for international sailors who were for instance employed on tramp ships with bulk cargo, and whose irregular work lives fed and merged with the image of Katendrecht as a socially abnormal neighbourhood (Meyer, 1983).

It should be stressed that interactions between different social groups along the maritime urban shores stimulated the deviant characterization of Katendrecht, in contrast to the waterfronts near the city centre, such as the

Schiedamsedijk, where actual port activities were only seen from a distance in the post-war era. Whereas the port functioned as a harbinger of modernity for the remodeling of Rotterdam's former pleasure zones into upgraded city districts, the close interplay between Katendrecht and the maritime industry led to a more indecent impression of the area. In the late 1940s officials reported on the increase in girls, often young, boarding ships, with the river police not taking strict enough action against these alarming practices (Davids, 1987), itself a symptom of the informal power relations and policing standards that would traditionally govern sailortown environments. At the same time, prostitution and related pleasure activities began to spread further across Katendrecht's residential areas. Generally regarded as a worrying development, the social-democratic newspaper *Het Vrije Volk* reported that some local inhabitants had nevertheless started to rent out rooms for these purposes, hoping to somehow benefit from the rising demand for "rendez-vous" spaces ("*Katendrechtse slaan alarm*," 1947). Two days later, the same newspaper provocatively asked its readers to "[i]magine (...) your upstairs or downstairs neighbours renting out rooms by the hour or by night to girls and women, who stumble up and down the stairs with half or completely intoxicated white sailors, negroes, lascars and Arabs (...)" ("*Op de bres voor bedreigde kinderen*," 1947, authors' translation). Countering these publications, one of Katendrecht's local bar owners replied to the news editors by stating that accusers should realize that the neighbourhood simply offered much-needed services to sailors going ashore after long journeys ("*Caféhouder spreekt zich uit over het Katendrechtse rapport*," 1947).

With Katendrecht further transforming into a full-fledged red-light district during the 1960s, sex businesses diversified and expanded across the entire peninsula, and the nuisance for residents increased (Hazewinkel, 1982; Davids, 1987). The changing nature of prostitution became a serious cause for local concern (Stemvers, 1985; Davids, 1987). At the same time, the traditional sailors were increasingly replaced as visitors of the amusement area by migrant labourers. Residents who did not leave or were forced to stay, suffered from the increasingly stigmatized image of Katendrecht. Wanting to turn the tide in the 1970s, they started pushing the ideal of Katendrecht as a residential area that should be devoid of prostitution (Davids, 1987). Around 1970, younger residents started a campaign focusing on the liveability for children and adolescents on Katendrecht, and distributed posters that pointed to the untenable position of the prostitution industry and outright called it 'environmental pollution' (Figure 5.5).⁶ In 1973–74, tensions peaked between

6 Note that this campaign also came at a moment when Rotterdam's port activities and expansion were increasingly met with environmental protests. The oil crisis of the early 1970s



FIGURE 5.5 Left – protest poster of Katendrecht youth action group, framing prostitution as ‘environmental pollution’ and addressing the municipality to take action, by Dolf Henkes (1970–75); right – photograph of brothels and sex clubs on Katendrecht with show windows damaged by protesting local residents (1974), by H. Peters

SOURCE: LEFT – CULTURAL HERITAGE AGENCY OF THE NETHERLANDS (RCE), SIGNATURE NUMBER: AB15324-B; RIGHT – NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF THE NETHERLANDS, SIGNATURE NUMBER: 927–5124, [HTTP://hdl.handle.net/10648/AC57AB66-D0B4-102D-BCF8-003048976D84](http://hdl.handle.net/10648/AC57AB66-D0B4-102D-BCF8-003048976D84)

Katendrecht’s local action group and the sex entrepreneurs, often with criminal records, who sought to defend their pleasurescape (Stemvers, 1985, p. 154). Rotterdam’s municipal council was at first hesitant to act upon the increasingly violent clashes between local residents and pimps, because it had previously favoured the almost exclusive concentration of prostitution activities in this isolated neighbourhood on the southern riverbanks away from the modern city centre, and because it was also not able to predict how a future dispersal of sex businesses outside of Katendrecht would pan out (Stemvers, 1985; Meyer, 1999).

Various sources document the ensuing debates and protests in the city during the 1970s, thereby focusing on the long-winded process of formulating new

equally cast a more critical perspective on the port city’s industrial outgrowth. See Van de Laar (2014, p. 227) and Van de Laar (2021, pp. 62–5). For another example of a local protest poster, circulated in the press at the time, see “*Kan dit kind werkelijk leven op Katendrecht?*” 1970.

propositions and changes to the municipal prostitution policy (Hazewinkel, 1982), the many pitfalls in related urban planning and decision-making processes (De Wildt & Yap, 1980), the increasing spread or 'democratization' of prostitution-related problems and monitoring across the port city's social fabric (Meyer, 1983), and neighbourhood-specific actions and project groups trying to steer nuisance reduction and related urban renewal initiatives (Van Rossum & Verhulst, 1981). While the previous cases of the Zandstraatbuurt and Schiedamsedijk illustrated how civilization offensives of the city leaders enabled the elimination of the port city's former pleasure quarters, it is exactly the achieved emancipation of working-class citizens, in alignment with the image of a welfare city, that caused Katendrecht residents to speak up and fiercely address the municipality's negligence and hesitation regarding the prostitution issue. Led by PvdA, the main Dutch socialist party, the new city administration that took office in 1974 became more sensitive to the local protests and resistance, but the solutions that were proposed by various councillors ultimately failed to materialize, thereby testifying to the fact that deep-rooted port neighbourhoods like Katendrecht had fundamentally changed in terms of their socio-cultural character. They no longer accepted the uncontrolled contingencies and disturbances that had shaped their past sailortown community feel.

It proves insightful to further reflect on the types of solutions that were formulated for the prostitution issue, as they showcase the shifting aspirations attached to Rotterdam's modern maritime mindset and waterfronts. Yearning for a continued concentration of prostitution activities, albeit no longer on a district-wide scale, the municipality at first planned to establish a so-called 'eros centre', a single building complex that would act as a one-stop mega-brothel for the entire city. This idea was initially inspired by police visits during the 1970s to assess the example of previously constructed 'eros flats' in Hamburg and Düsseldorf (Hazewinkel, 1982, p. 67). Rotterdam councillors initially proposed repurposing the Poortgebouw, a prominent building and former headquarters for harbour trade activities in a neighbourhood adjacent to Katendrecht, but this plan was subsequently changed to create an eros centre in old boats – one of them even happened to be named after the aforementioned industrialist Backx ("Buurt", 1980) – on the northern riverside around the Euromast, a modern watchtower overlooking the water.⁷ Both ideas to repurpose characteristically maritime urban locations as newly

7 For illustrative newspaper articles on the plans related to the Poortgebouw and Euromast area, and how these subsequently turned into sites of turmoil and protest, see respectively "*Eroscentrum ook op de korrel tijdens Vrouwendag*" (1979) and "*Eroscentrum van baan*" (1980).

concentrated prostitution complexes generated widespread protest from various local resident groups with often diverging motivations, and eventually led to the plans' abandonment. The entire situation showcases a kind of reversal when compared to the destinies of the Zandstraatbuurt and Schiedamsedijk: the municipal council did try to draw up new plans for the future of notorious pleasure practices in Katendrecht, and even considered emblematic sites in the port city, but in the end was hindered by its own indecision and persistent civil unrest.⁸

The proposal for an eros centre generated mockery and divisive opinions among Rotterdam's inhabitants. The epigraph above, from one of the several local songs on the topic at the time, suggests how past Rotterdam engineers like Pieter Caland and W. N. Rose, who had successfully transformed the 19th-century port and city, would have been embarrassed hearing about municipal plans to install brothel boats and the like. On the other hand, the eros centre idea was also negatively perceived as an initiative that too forcefully linked spatiality to strict control (Altink, 1983), at the expense of desires for anonymity. Perhaps the most concrete vision delivered to help solve the problematic culmination of Katendrecht's pleasures was architect Carel Weeber's plan for a phallus-shaped entertainment centre that would occupy the neighbourhood's central Deliplein square (Figure 5.6). Given the urgency in Katendrecht, congruent with general tendencies in civil society (Altink, 1983), to hide prostitution from public sight again, the overall design and interconnected leisure facilities, intended to stimulate rather than restrict sexual encounters,⁹ likely proved too provocative to carry out. Nevertheless, Weeber apparently remained fascinated by the idea of creating functional infrastructure for erotic getaways by the water: he continued brainstorming about a floating eros centre near the Euromast (Altink & Schiffauer, 1982, p. 2), and repurposed this idea in futuristic sketches of a mass 'Eropolis' hotel for sexual encounters off the coast of Hook of Holland (Taverne, 1989, p. 104), and later also Amsterdam (Kuiper, 2007). Waterfronts maintain a pivotal role in all these designs, as they interweave the heterotopic, fringe character of sex establishments, following

8 In addition, Meyer (1983) has developed the thesis that the widespread mobilization and protest of city residents led to increasing social self-regulation with respect to prostitution in Rotterdam, thereby making the actual realization of an eros centre ultimately no longer that important.

9 For a suggestive description of the building's form and functions, see the following archival source: Het Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam, Weeber, C.J.M. (Carlos José Maria / Carel) / Archief (WEEB), inv.nr. WEEB313-9, <https://zoeken.hetnieuweinstituut.nl/nl/archieven/file/110701774>.

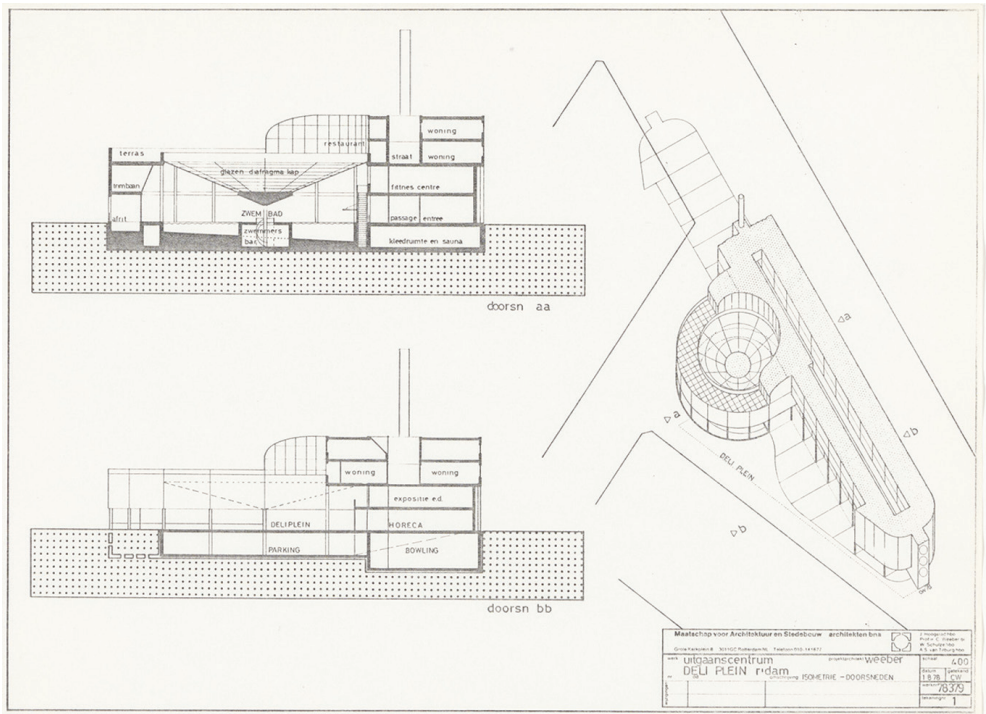


FIGURE 5.6 Design plan of (unrealized) entertainment centre on Katendrecht's Deliplein, showing cross-sections of the building's intended facilities, by architect Carel Weeber (1978)
 SOURCE: HET NIEUWE INSTITUUT, ROTTERDAM, WEEBER, C.J.M. (CARLOS JOSÉ MARIA / CAREL) / ARCHIEF, ACCESS NUMBER WEEB, INVENTORY NUMBER WEEB310, [HTTPS://ZOEKEN.HETNIEUWEINSTITUUT.NL/NL/ARCHIEVEN/FILE/110274747](https://zoeken.hetnieuweinstituut.nl/nl/archieven/file/110274747)

from Foucault's vision, with an imaginative and ultimately idealized appeal (Foucault & Miskowiec, 1986).

6 Conclusion

In the aftermath of the Katendrecht turmoil, the neighbourhood was officially recognized as a district in need of urban renewal. While the eros centre idea lingered in Rotterdam's public debates, prostitution activities in the meantime had dispersed across various locations in the city, where they were also met with continuing complaints from residents. Meyer (1983) has argued how the protesting Katendrecht community created a strong precedent for this, and the district's shutdown as a notorious pleasure zone with strong maritime roots thus also notably differs from that of the Zandstraatbuurt and Schiedamsedijk

before it. This is because, by the 1970s, Katendrecht's visitor composition and entertainment functions were fundamentally altered: the traditional figure of the sailor had disappeared from sight, and professional sex businesses had taken the upper hand. The physical destruction of the Zandstraatbuurt and Schiedamsedijk was accompanied by more nostalgic undertones, although these were also discarded rather quickly by the drastic urban reconstruction initiatives that followed. Nostalgic lures about Katendrecht's past only increasingly surfaced much later, particularly in light of recent declines in entertainment and nightlife facilities in the neighbourhood and Rotterdam as a whole ("*Tattoo Bob wil raamprostitutie terug op Katendrecht*", 2014; N8W8 R'dam, 2020, p. 17).

To return to the hustle and bustle of port cities, as conceptualized in the introduction to this volume, it is possible to uncover dualities and changes in the sensory perception and appreciation of a port cityscape through the relocation of particular facilities and practices. This chapter has investigated exactly that: the changing spaces and locations of notorious pleasures throughout Rotterdam's modern history, and the local motivations and reactions related to the changes. As the successive moves from the Zandstraatbuurt to the Schiedamsedijk and Katendrecht lay bare both a fragmented maritime mindset and urban layout over time, this chapter's overarching analysis of these neighbourhoods also highlights how urban planning initiatives can contain strong emotional dimensions and trigger similar responses. Leading policy makers may grow annoyed or impatient with culturally significant hotspots in the port city, while residents and visitors are happy to indulge in such environments if they are not confronted with unavoidable nuisances on a daily basis. The stereotypical, almost mythologized hustle and bustle of port cities can therefore instigate not only romanticizing but also conflicting emotional climates among different local groups and social actors.

In the course of the 20th century, deviant pleasures near the waterfronts in the port city of Rotterdam came to be replaced by new markers of urban modernity: from impressive administrative buildings and big traffic roads to office facilities and touristic event parks. The urban visions that were put forward to replace Rotterdam's most infamous amusement areas show how local authorities' aspirations of progress desired to engulf the seedy cultural undertones that form the undeniable flipside of a maritime mindset. Plato in his time recognized, and personally denounced, the direct connection between the economic and cultural hustle and bustle of a port city. In the modern era, the deeper contradictions contained in this relationship have been increasingly brought to the surface. The case of Rotterdam and its three notorious pleasure districts is indicative of this development. Finally,

it underlines the kind of dissatisfaction and resistance that can potentially arise when a city stubbornly pursues its utopian ideals, while simultaneously trying to concentrate undesired remnants of its past in specific local communities.

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