beyond street harassment

cultivating agency over the public space for young people in Rotterdam

master thesis Strategic Product Design
by Juliëtte van Driel
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Master thesis // Strategic Product Design
Beyond street harassment: cultivating agency over the public space for young people in Rotterdam

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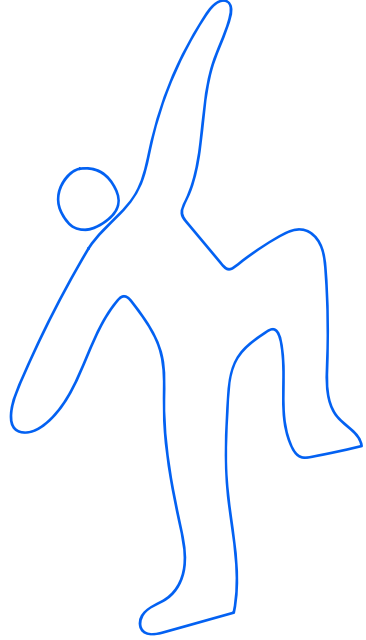


Preface

Street harassment is an issue so ingrained in our society that many of us don't even see the problem. In the past few months, I had the chance to explore how design can strengthen a culture of equality in the public space.

The project was close to home in more ways than one. It has challenged me - as a designer, and as a person. It has challenged my view on the world and my ideas about right or wrong. And I can honestly say, while writing this preface days before submitting my work, I am still contemplating about some things. This is illustrative of the complexity of the topic. Luckily, I was not on my own. There are numerous people to whom I owe a huge thank you:

Charlotte, for the wonderful and fun collaboration, for answering all my questions, for being curious and open-minded

Milene and Sine, for your attentive guidance that has simultaneously challenged and encouraged me

Robin, for embarking on this journey with me

my parents, sister and brother, for encouraging and supporting me throughout my entire education

my roommates and friends, for the endless discussions, helpful suggestions and needed coffee breaks

Meike, for your time and your sharp eye, but mostly for believing in me as a designer - and telling me that all the time

Job, for being my number one fan.

This marks the end of my time at IDE, a time I have enjoyed immensely. I am happy to conclude it with a project like this: I've always been fascinated by people and why they do what they do, and in this project, I was able to indulge all the questions I had. Moreover, in doing so, I have met many inspiring people - most of them younger than me - who took the time to contribute to this project.

In terms of equality, there is still a world to win - I hope this work contributes to winning that world, however small the contribution may be.

Juliëtte

Poem spotted on a pub's window in Rotterdam. Translated by ChatGPT.

On the streets of the city, by day and by night,women deserve respect and strength as their right. A glance of respect, not an unwanted move—that's how we keep the vibe safe and smooth. Dignity in words, calm in your tone—so every woman feels safe and at home.

Summary

Aim and relevance
The aim of this project is to design for understanding and reducing street harassment behavior among young people in Rotterdam. In 2020, nearly half (47%) of the women surveyed in Rotterdam, reported being targets of street harassment (Fischer et al., 2021). Street harassment is a persistent and normalized form of gender-based violence in public spaces that can have severe effects on the target. In Rotterdam, young people aged 15–25 are not only disproportionately targeted but are also often the perpetrators. Current interventions have focused primarily on supporting targets and bystanders or on raising awareness but often fail to address the social structures that sustain the behavior. This project addresses a critical gap: the lack of understanding about why young people engage in street harassment.

Method
To address the complexity of the topic, I used a combination of multiple design methods and practices. To better understand the social structures surrounding street harassment, I adopted a systemic design approach. To better understand the context of young people in Rotterdam, I adopted a participatory approach. Activities included, but were not limited to, stakeholder interviews (n=5), guerilla street interviews (n=27), two generative sessions with young people in youth hubs (n=7, n=12), testing the design proposal three times (n=3, n=5, n=5) and interviews with relevant stakeholders to evaluate the design proposal (n=5).

Results
The research showed that street harassment is difficult to tackle because it is deeply normalized and sustained by intersecting structures of inequality, like gender inequality, racism, and classism. It is not an isolated behavior, but is entangled with broader systems of inequality and identity formation that unfold in public space. When in public space, young people experience and reinforce these inequalities, but are unable to challenge them. Resulting from a lack of accessibility, agency and ownership in regard to their environment, young people conform to the status quo: a culture of inequality, in which street harassment is normal.

Therefore, the design proposal, a workshop, aims to increase young people's sense of agency over the public space by enabling them to contribute to shaping public spaces in a way that is both fitting and valuable for them. Through engaging in speculative design practices, I created alternative futures of public space, made tangible in the form of scenarios and objects. In the workshop, young people engage with these scenarios and objects. Through discussions about the meaning and the consequences of these futures, they share their dreams and concerns about their own neighborhood.

Conclusion

Iteratively testing the workshop showed that the process is highly engaging and encouraged participants to think critically, listen to others and reconsider their own views. The design proposal enables urban developers and planners to gain insights into the preferences and priorities of various groups of youth, opening the door for more diverse and representative youth participation overall.

By shifting focus from punitive measures to cultivating agency, this project reframed young people not as part of the problem, but as a part of the solution. The project demonstrated two main things: the potential of speculative design as a tool for meaningful youth participation on public space, and that young people are willing and more than capable to contribute to societal issues it is framed accessibly and when they are taken seriously. With the right follow-up, the workshop has the potential to not just inform, but to activate as well. It can make young people feel seen, heard, and more aware of their role in shaping the future. More than anything, the workshop is a way to take young people seriously and to position them as valuable contributors to society.

Reading guide

The content of the report is generally portrayed like this, running text.

Key takeaways are marked with green. At the end of every chapter, you find a summary of the key take-aways.

Sometimes I want to explain *how* I did something. Parts that describe a methodological approach are placed in a methodology box, like this.

The entire report is written from my perspective. At times, I introduce a personal intermezzo in a red box like this one. This way I aim to make the personal explicit.

Terminology

Perpetrator: a person that engages in street harassment behavior.

Target: a person that street harassment behavior is directed at.

Young people: in this project, young people are defined as 15-25 years old.

Youth worker: a type of youth professional that supports young people's development, typically employed at a welfare organization

Youth BOA: special investigating officers employed by the municipality, that are legally authorized to enforce laws and specifically trained to monitor and address youth-related issues

Content

Report overview

report phase

chapter 1, 2

What is going on?

In this phase, I take a systemic perspective on street harassment and uncover deeply rooted structures that make street harassment hard to tackle.

chapter 3

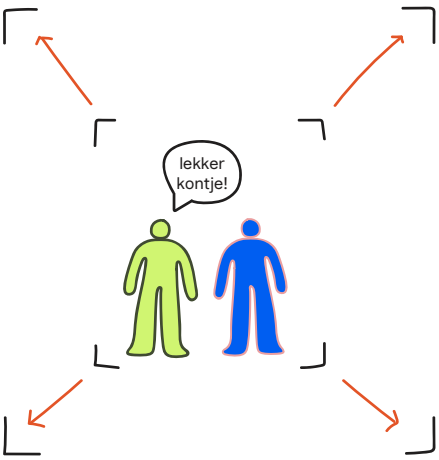
What is that really about?

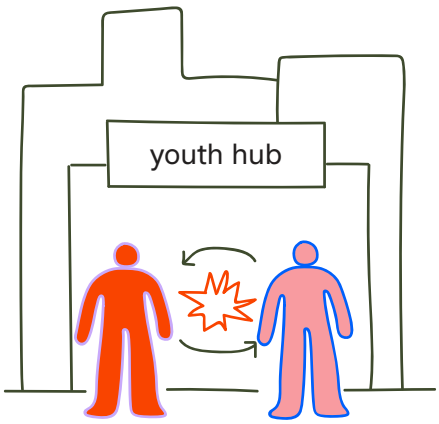
In this phase, I delve into the context of of young people living in Rotterdam, leading me to reframe the issue of youth perpetrating street harassment.

research questions

CH2: “Why is street harassment so hard to tackle?”

CH3: “How do young people in Rotterdam experience interacting in public space?”





approach

I employed a combination of activities to explore the complexities of street harassment. The insights gathered throughout these activities were synthesized into five key challenges through an iterative process. You can read about this on p. 33.

I involved youth through participatory design practices. Specifically, I designed a generative session, that were held in two youth hubs in Rotterdam. You can read about this on p. 56.

activities

S1 I1 I3-5 AA1-6 PM1 DA1-3

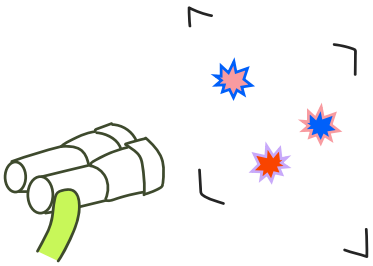
S1 I2-3 AA6 DA4 PM2-10

chapter 4

What can we do about it?

In this phase, I looked for leverage points in the system, resulting in a specified design goal.

CH4: “How might we leverage the public space in Rotterdam to support young people in forming their identities in a constructive way?”



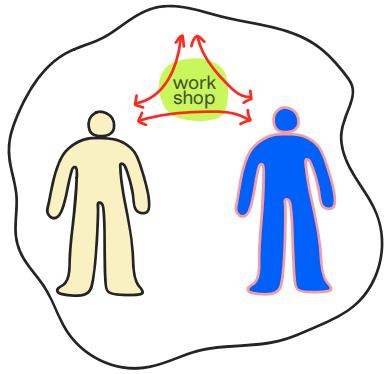
Using leverage point theory, I looked for places in the system we can intervene. You can read about this on p. 88.

chapter 5, 6, 7

How can we design for that?

In this phase, I propose strategies to achieve the design goal. I put these strategies to practice in a design proposal, that I present and evaluate.

CH5:“How might we involve young people in Rotterdam in shaping inclusive and supportive public spaces?”
CH6: “How might we meaningfully engage young people in contributing to shaping public spaces through speculative design practices?”
CH7: “To what extent does the workshop allow us to meaningfully engage young people in contributing to shaping inclusive and supportive public spaces in Rotterdam?”



I designed a workshop. For this workshop, I engaged in speculative design practices to create tangible futures for public space that young people can engage with. You can read about this on p. 110.

I2 I5-10 AA7-8 DA5
PM6 PM8 PM11-13

chapter 8, 9

So what?

Here I discuss the project and its results. Finally, I reflect on my experiences.

CH8: “What can be learned from connecting this project’s findings and results to the broader project aim of designing for understanding and reducing street harassment behavior among young people in Rotterdam?”

1) Introduction

This chapter marks the start of the ‘What is going on?’-phase. It introduces the project. I highlight its relevance and explain what the aim of the project is (1.1). Furthermore, I elaborate on the collaboration format (1.2). Finally, I introduce the approach that was taken to achieve the project aim and I address my role and position in all this (1.3).

What is going on? | What is that really about? | What can we do about it? | How can we design for that? | So what?

1.1 Aim and scope

In the eyes of the Dutch law, all people are equal (Algemene Wet Gelijke Behandeling, 2020). However, inequality takes many forms. One way it can be seen in our everyday lives is through our behaviour in the public space. I refer to a behaviour that seems to be universally experienced by all marginalized groups: street harassment. Street harassment is unwanted sexual attention from strangers in public spaces (Fairchild, 2022).

In 2020, nearly half (47%) of the women surveyed in Rotterdam, reported being targets of street harassment (Fischer et al., 2021). However, homosexual, bisexual, transgender and intersex people are targeted often as well. Experiencing this behaviour can have severe effects for the target, such as decreased self-worth, feelings of unsafety in public spaces, restriction in movement and social isolation (Farmer & Jordan, 2017; Fileborn & O'Neill, 2021) only to name a few. Moreover, street harassment is part of a continuum of violence (Vera-Gray, 2017) and therefore it contributes to the broader climate of fear and insecurity often associated with sexual violence, reinforcing the 'shadow of sexual assault' (Fairchild & Rudman, 2008).

This has not gone unnoticed. Since 2017, Rotterdam is one of the Dutch cities leading the national 'Aanpak Seksuele Straatintimidatie' (the 'addressing street harassment' approach). Rightfully so, considering that a very large proportion of women in Rotterdam, namely 84%, experiences sexually suggestive advances in public space (Fischer et al., 2021).

Additionally, per July 1, 2024, street harassment is a criminal offense as part of the adjusted law Seksuele Misdrijven (Sexual Offences) (Ministerie van Justitie en Veiligheid, 2024). Again the city of Rotterdam plays a role here: together with Utrecht and Arnhem, it is part of a pilot in which undercover investigating officers (in Dutch: Buitengewoon Opsporings Ambtenaren or BOA's) patrol street harassment 'hotspots' and write a court report where necessary. On October 2, 2024, the first hearing during which someone was convicted for perpetrating street harassment took place in the courthouse in Rotterdam.

In practice it is difficult to prove when an incident is punishable (NOS, 2024). The truth is, we don't know why offenders commit such acts, making it difficult to know which lever to pull. This is because research often focuses on the target's coping strategies and on the impact of street harassment, leading to a limited understanding of the reasons why offenders commit such acts (Van Tuijl et al., [under review]). This is also reflected in the current interventions of which most focus on targets.

We do know two things. First, young people are the demographic group targeted the most, but also the group most involved as perpetrators. A study on street harassment in Rotterdam by Fischer et al. (2017), showed that young women are by far the most likely to encounter sexual street harassment. From the 1164 women that participated, 68% of the women aged 18-25 reported experiencing street harassment in that year. To illustrate, for the age group 39-45, this was 24%. In that same study (Fischer et al., 2017), 41% of all participating women indicated that the perpetrators they encountered are always or often young, with a peak between 15-25. As such, young people play a key role in upholding this culture of inequality in public space.

Second, the underlying cause of street harassment is an interplay of various factors, including communicative motivations, social norms, gender norms, group dynamics and the socio-spatial environment (van Tuijl et al., [under review]). Hence, the issue of street harassment is of systemic nature. Combining these two pieces of information provides us with a new avenue to take, an opportunity to discover alternative approaches to combat this harmful and persistent problem: exploring street harassment behavior among young people from a systemic perspective. As street harassment is a highly normalized behavior, it's important to understand how the social structures around it contribute to it. Fairchild (2022) states: "*Street harassment is a*

misogynistic tool that sustains a patriarchal society, and sadly, as Fogg-Davis (2006) states, "it is the banality of street harassment that makes it so effective in maintaining a larger system of sexual terrorism" (p. 63). Because how do deeply rooted power structures, like gender inequality, influence the way we experience and perceive street harassment in public spaces?

This project aims to design for understanding and reducing street harassment behavior in Rotterdam, through

1) involving youth (15-22) from Rotterdam in exploring the social structures surrounding street harassment behavior from a systemic perspective

2) designing a strategic approach to counter this behavior.

Focus areas

The specific areas focused on in this project are Bospolder-Tussendijken and Schiebroek-Zuid (see Figure 1.1). I made this choice partly based on the extent of the street harassment issue in these areas and partly for convenience. Bospolder-Tussendijken is part of Delfshaven, which is one of the three areas in which the proportion of women experiencing sexual street harassment in their own neighborhood is almost 50%, which is higher than in other neighborhoods in Rotterdam (Fischer et al., 2017; Fischer et al., 2021). In Hillegersberg-Schiebroek, the district that Schiebroek-Zuid belongs to, this percentage is lower, about 20%. However, one could question the representativeness of this number for Schiebroek-Zuid. In an investigation by NRC, it became clear that Schiebroek-Zuid is often studied as part of the entire area Hillegersberg-Schiebroek, resulting in the problems of Schiebroek-Zuid being overlooked (Rosenberg, 2024). In any case, these numbers indicate that street harassment is an issue in both these neighborhoods. Another important driver to choose these neighborhoods was a possibility to collaborate with local youth. As a resident of Bospolder-Tussendijken, I was able to establish a direct connection with the local youth hub. In Schiebroek-Zuid, Charlotte van Tuijl - the client for this project - had an existing connection with the youth workers as she had previously interviewed them. These connections allowed me to engage young people in this project.

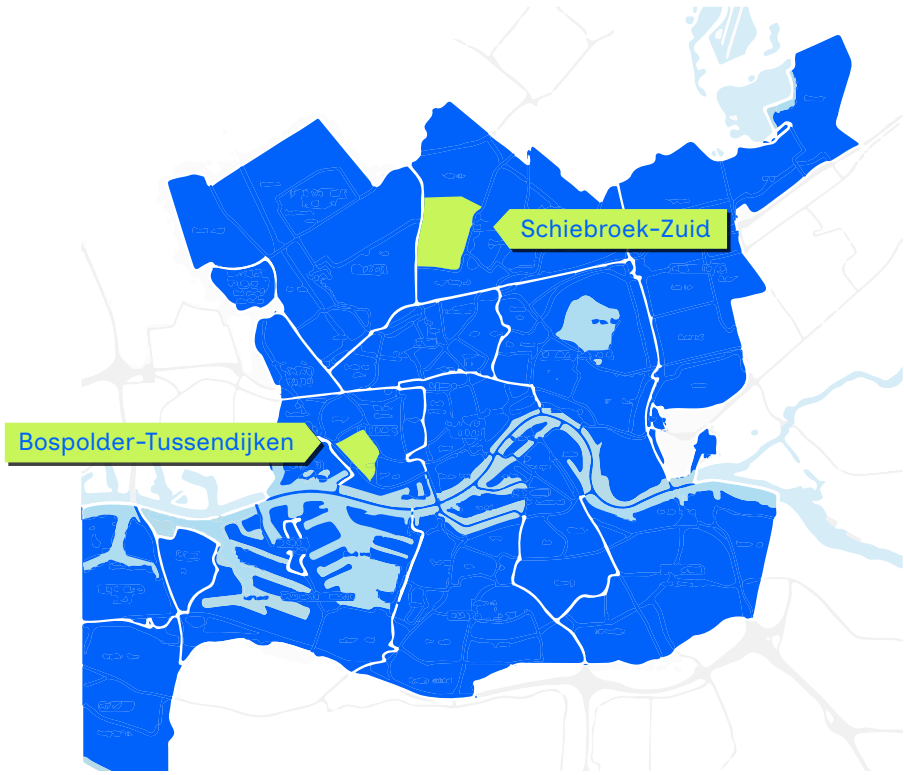


Figure 1.1. Focus areas for the project.

1.2 Collaboration format

This graduation project is part of an ongoing PhD by Charlotte van Tuijl, who also fulfills the role of client for this graduation project. As part of the Healthy Start Convergence programme, she aims to discover new avenues for youth participation that concerns countering street harassment behavior. To do so, she has engaged in a variety of activities since the start of the research in October 2023. Her systematic literature review on studies that delve into the reasons why people perpetrate street harassment is under review for publishment at the time of writing this thesis. She also conducted interviews with 28 youth professionals to better understand how youth workers currently address street harassment and how they approach preventing youth from engaging in this behavior. In doing so, she built relationships with youth workers all over Rotterdam. Charlotte's connection with the youth workers from Schiebroek-Zuid was an entry point for collaborating with them as part of this project. Additionally, having collaborated with Charlotte for this graduation project, some preliminary insights are based on materials she collected.

A few weeks before starting this graduation project, Robin Smits started her graduation project as the final part of her masters Design for Interaction. It had the same collaboration structure and a similar topic, however her focus was on co-creating with youth aged 12-16 (Smits, 2025).

As a result of this collaboration format, certain aspects of this report reflect contributions from collaborating with Charlotte and Robin (Figure 1.2).

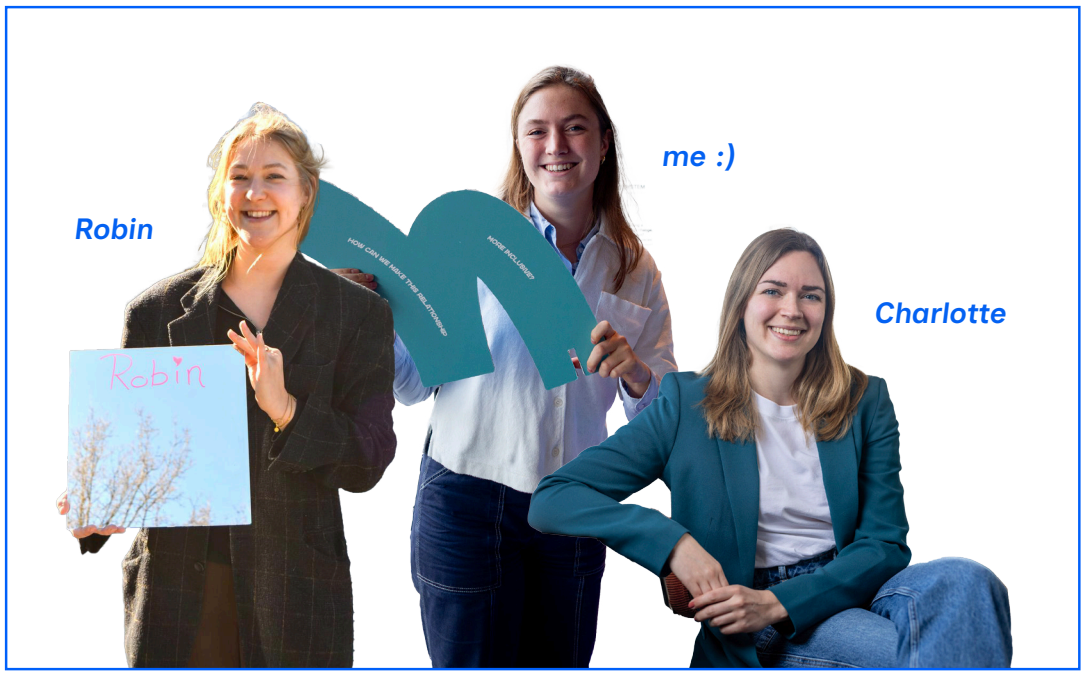


Figure 1.2. Me and Robin Smits were both graduating with Charlotte van Tuijl at the same time.

1.3 Approach

To be able to design for understanding and reducing street harassment, I adopted a combination of multiple design methods and practices. The main approach, Research through Design (Stappers & Giaccardi, 2014), is informed by principles from systemic design, participatory design and feminist design. The goal of this paragraph is to give clarity on how I approached the project and how it was executed.

Research through Design

Street harassment has no single cause or straightforward problem definition. I see this behavior as situated in what Snowden & Boone (2007) describe as the *complex domain* within the Cynefin framework: this is a domain in which cause and effect can only be understood in retrospect, therefore the only way forward is through experimentation. Thus, I wanted to 'learn by doing', adopting a Research through Design approach (Stappers & Giaccardi, 2014). Research through Design is a way of exploring and understanding complex, future-focused issues by using the hands-on process of designing itself as a tool for gaining insight (Godin & Zahedi, 2014). Rather than separating research and design phases, I went through multiple cycles of discovering and prototyping where the design activities informed both research and design. This is an iterative process, as the activities and sub-processes were entangled with each other: pursuing new activities gave new layers of meaning to learnings from earlier activities. On the next pages you can find an overview of all activities I engaged in. Don't worry, at the beginning of each chapter I will mention the relevant activities.

Systemic Design

The focus of the first part of the project was to gain understanding of the project context and the system it is part of through adopting a systemic perspective. Systemic design, originated from the integration of systems thinking and design, is not limited to a single theory or methodology (Van Der Bijl-Brouwer, 2023). It is about embracing multiple perspectives and complexity. Combining a Research through Design approach with systemic design principles was a fruitful combination, as addressing complex challenges asks for a co-evolving approach (Van Der Bijl-Brouwer et al., 2021): through experimenting and engaging with the system, I was able to learn more about how the system behaves, which further informed research and design decisions. Specifically, I explore the complexities of street harassment from a systemic perspective in Chapter 2. You can read about how I did that in the methodology section on p. 33. Additionally, in Chapter 4, I draw on Meadows' (1999) leverage point theory to look for places in the system we can intervene. You can read about this on p. 88. Ultimately, drawing on systemic design theory and practice helped me in making sense of all the factors and actors that drive street harassment behavior among youth, allowing for more strategic intervention points to emerge.

Participatory Design

Doing these experiments means that I have been intervening in the context and involving people in the project. Therefore, I have also adopted a participatory design mindset. According to Sanders & Stappers (2013), design researchers with such a mindset work *with* people: "*They see people as the true experts in domains of experience such as living, learning, working, etc. Design researchers who have a participatory mindset value people as co-creators in the design process and are happy to include people in the design process to the point of sharing control with them*." (p. 18). Though this mindset has guided the entire project, it explicitly manifests itself in Chapter 3, where I describe how I involved young people from Rotterdam through generative sessions. You can read about this on p. 56. Involving the people this project is about in the process helped generating knowledge that reflected the complexity of young people's social environment.

Feminist Design

Design has commonly been presented as neutral. However, as the act of designing consists of humans making choices, it fundamentally lacks impartiality. As Price

put it during one of her lectures at Delft University of Technology: "*When you think about the future, you inherently encounter an ethical component*." (Price, 2023). As a result, design often reproduces existing inequalities in society (Costanza-Chock, 2020; Khandwala, 2019). Therefore, I have drawn on principles of Design Justice, which can be described as a framework that focuses on how design perpetuates or challenges these inequalities (Costanza-Chock, 2020). The community that practices Design Justice offers over 10 principles, of which I found the following important to highlight here: centering those who are most impacted, meaningful participation and challenging power structures. To educate myself on designing in feminist ways, I have often consulted the book 'Feminist Designer' (Place, 2023), that emphasises how "*feminist design is not just a thing you do, it's how you do every thing*." (p. 7). This feminist approach helped me question and expose how street harassment is upheld by broader structures of inequality and guided my design choices to center marginalized voices instead of reinforcing dominant narratives.

Both Costanza-Chock (2020) and Place (2023) highlight the personal and political nature of design. The designer and the context are inseparably connected, and therefore, the fact that I am the one doing this project, matters. So before diving into this story, I wish to shed light on my positionality and the positionality of this project. Writing this positionality statement, has been an ongoing reflective process throughout this graduation project. Some activities include answering '50 questions for every designer' (Armbrust, 2023), filling out the privilege framework (Goodwill et al., 2021) and attending a workshop on power relations and researchers' positionality by Clementine Degener, lead lecturer and researcher Social Work at Hogeschool Rotterdam.

I am a white, straight, cis, able-bodied woman, pursuing an academic degree. This graduation project is the final step I take to receive my diploma. I was raised by two white, straight, cis, able-bodied parents, who have also studied at university. Growing up, my education has always been encouraged and prioritized.

Important to note is that I live in Bospolder-Tussendijken, Rotterdam, myself (see p. 24-25). Thus, I am part of the city and the specific design context of this project in the more literal sense. Me and my roommates, all women, have experienced street harassment in our own neighborhood often enough. This made working on this project challenging and enriching at the same time: coming home to the project context could be overwhelming the one day and emboldening the other.

The project is connected to the PhD Charlotte is doing. We are interested in the drivers of street harassment behavior, not in 'who' the perpetrators are. I do not wish to contribute to the popular narrative of the current ruling political parties in the Netherlands that street harassment is the doing of traditional immigrant men (more about this in 2.4.3). If anything, this project aims at offering a counter narrative.

Positionality is dynamic and such a statement is never finished. Throughout this project, I have often felt discomfort. I have tried not to shy away from that feeling and to be curious about what it meant. Throughout this report you can find small notations of my experiences. I hope to show you fractions of my inner world as a person and a designer. As I moved through this process, the inseparability of these roles became more apparent and logical than ever.

In conclusion, by combining a Research through Design approach with principles and practices from systemic design, participatory design and feminist design, I was able to approach street harassment not as an isolated act, but as a symptom of larger social structures—while still being able to move forward through the complexity.

One last thing: The report is built on academic literature and data collected from research and design activities. However, given the real-world relevance and ongoing developments surrounding the topic, I also captured insights from the context itself, for example news

articles, documentaries, podcasts, Instagram posts and exhibitions. These can be seen as vignettes that illustrate academically supported insights.

Activities overview

This section gives an overview of the activities I engaged throughout the project (Figures 1.4 - 1.8). As can be seen in Figure 1.3, I organized activities myself, but I also attended activities organized by others. Additionally, I was able to use transcripts of interviews done by Charlotte van Tuijl as part of her PhD research. She interviewed 28 youth professionals (of which 18 were men and 10 were women) on street harassment and how they address it with young people. I refer to this data as secondary data. When I use a quote from these interviews in this report, I only add the participant code of that youth professional, e.g. 'JB01M'.

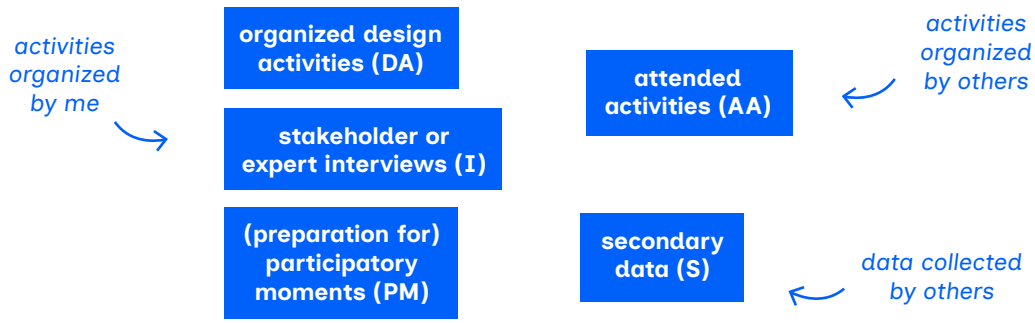


Figure 1.3. Types of activities.

(Preparation for) participatory moments (PMx)

Code	What did I do?	When?	Appendix
PM1	Doing guerilla street interviews with probes in Schiebroek-Zuid with Charlotte (16 conversations with 27 people)	02/12/2024	C5
PM2	Introductory meeting with 4 youth workers @youth hub Bospolder-Tussendijken	17/12/2024	-
PM3	Introductory meeting with youth workers at the @youth hub Schiebroek-Zuid	19/12/2024	-
PM4	Participating in the game night @youth hub Schiebroek-Zuid	08/01/2025	C15
PM5	Preparatory phone call with young person who co-organized the session in Schiebroek-Zuid	14/01/2025	-
PM6	Generative session with 12 young people (age 15-20) and 3 youth workers (age 27-34) @youth hub Schiebroek-Zuid	15/01/2025	-
PM7	Preparatory meeting with 1 youth worker and Charlotte @youth hub Bospolder-Tussendijken	21/01/2025	-
PM8	Generative session with 7 young people (age 12-20) and 1 youth worker (age 22) @youth hub Bospolder-Tussendijken	29/01/2025	-
PM9	Meeting to reflect and share insights with 1 youth worker @youth hub Bospolder-Tussendijken	13/02/2025	C16
PM10	Meeting to reflect and share insights with 3 youth workers @youth hub Schiebroek-Zuid	13/02/2025	C16
PM11	First test of the workshop with 3 non-design students (age 20-26) @IDE TU Delft	25/02/2025	C17
PM12	Second test of the workshop with 5 young people (18-20) @Erasmus Medical Center	25/03/2025	C18
PM13	Third test of the workshop with 5 young people (15-16) and 1 teacher @Wolfert van Borselen high school, Rotterdam	03/04/2025	C19

Figure 1.4. (Preparation for) participatory moments.

Organized design activities (DAx)

Code	What did I do?	When?	Appendix
DA1	System mapping session with Meike Huisman, Reframing Studio @Rotterdam	06/12/2024	C11
DA2	System mapping session with 3 fellow graduation students at the Systemic Design Salon @IDE, TU Delft	09/12/2024	C12
DA3	Iceberg-session with Meike Huisman (Reframing Studio) and 1 participant @IDE, TU Delft	18/12/2024	C13
DA4	Analysis session with Charlotte van Tuijl @Healthy Start Hub	30/01/2025	
DA5	Testing the 'future archeologies' method with 3 (ex-)design students @IDE, TU Delft	07/02/2025	C14

Figure 1.5. Organized design activities.

Stakeholder or expert interviews (Ix)

Code	What did I do?	When?	Appendix
I1	Interview with with the street harassment coordinator of the municipality of Rotterdam @Municipality of Rotterdam	15/11/2024	C6
I2	Interview on participatory design with Eva Oosterlaken, participatory designer, Studio Futurall @Rotterdam	09/12/2024	C7
I3	Interview with youth professional of wellbeing organisation wmo radar, also coordinator street harassment @online	19/12/2024	C8
I4	Interview Accountmanager BOA's, Stadsbeheer Rotterdam @online	21/01/2025	C9
I5	Interview Stijn Sieckelinck, lector and researcher on societal parenting matters, youth work, citizenschip and youth policy at Hogeschool van Amsterdam @Healthy Start Hub	22/01/2025	C10
I6	Interview youth participation coordinator Municipality of Rotterdam @online	26/02/2025	-
I7	Evaluative interview with urban development professional, Maakdestad @Maakdestad	01/04/2025	-
I8	Evaluative interview high school teacher, Da Vinci College Leiden @Rotterdam	02/04/2025	-
I9	Evaluative interview with Adinda de Lange, participatory designer, Zeewaardig @Zeewaardig	07/04/2025	-
I10	Evaluative interview with youth worker @youth hub Bospolder-Tussendijken	09/04/2025	-

Figure 1.6. Stakeholder or expert interviews.

Attended activities (AAx)

Code	Where did I go?	When?	Appendix
AA1	Attending the first court hearing where someone got convicted for perpetrating street harassment @Rechtbank Rotterdam	02/10/2024	C1
AA2	Attending the book presentation 'Stem op een vrouw' by Devika Partiman @Cossee Amsterdam	21/10/2024	C2
AA3	Participating in a 'Cross Pollination' workshop on combining Social Design and Social Science with Charlotte van Tuijl and Robin Smits @Dutch Design Week	23/10/2024	-
AA4	Visiting the 'Not My Fault' exposition on victim blaming by Fairspace @WORM Rotterdam	26/11/2024	C3
AA5	Visiting the 'Psst He Schatje' traveling theater experience and testing probes		C4
AA6	Supporting Robin Smits in facilitating a co-creative session on street harassment with students at Stanislas high school in Delft	06/12/2024	-
AA7	Networking meeting 'Meaningful youth participation' @Hef House	27/01/2025	-
AA8	Visiting open rehearsals of youth-led participative theater @ Stichting Formaat	04/02/2025	-

Figure 1.7. Attented activities.

Data collected by others (Sx)

Code	What data did I use?	Data from	Appendix
S1	Transcripts of interviews done by Charlotte van Tuijl as part of her PhD research. She interviewed 28 youth professionals (of which 18 were men and 10 were women) on street harassment and how they address this with young people	August 2024 - March 2025	-

Figure 1.8. Secondary data.

On the next pages, you can get a glimpse of my life in Bospolder-Tussendijken >


favorite supermarket
Kist
4.99


night time travels


me :)
Dakpark


This is where I live -
me and the project context
are inseparable
Delfshaven
Kleiwee
RET

2) Understanding street harassment

As part of the 'What is going on?'-phase of this report, the aim of this chapter is to better understand street harassment, answering the research question:

"Why is street harassment so hard to tackle?"

I define what street harassment is (2.1), why it is a problem (2.2), and what we currently know about why people do it (2.3). Next, I introduce five interrelated challenges to illustrate why it is such a complex problem to address (2.4). Finally, I point out a lack of adequate strategies and highlight the importance of delving into the perspective of the people it is about: young people living in Rotterdam (2.5).

This chapter is informed by academic literature, secondary data (S1) and insights from the following activities: interviews (I1, I3-5), observations, (AA1-6), guerilla street interviews (PM1) and various mapping exercises (DA1-3).

What is going on? | What is that really about? | What can we do about it? | How can we design for that? | So what?

2.1 Defining street harassment

Street harassment, predominantly carried out by men against women, constitutes a form of gendered violence (Ribeiro, 2023). Fairchild (2022) defined it as "*unwanted sexual attention that occurs in public places (i.e. on the street) between individuals who are strangers*" (p. 1141). Bowman (1993) illustrates what unwanted sexual attention is by stating that it "*includes both verbal and nonverbal behavior, such as wolf-whistles, leers, winks, grabs, pinches, catcalls, and stranger remarks; the remarks are frequently sexual in nature and comment evaluatively on a woman's physical appearance or on her presence in public*" (p. 523). Though this list gives a good impression of what street harassment is, the behaviors that define it can vary depending on the context, making its boundaries fluid and situational. For example, experiencing street harassment in one's own neighborhood or in a quiet street is more likely to be seen as intimidating (Fischer et al., 2017).

In this project, I define public space as more than just the built environment or places physically accessible to the public. Instead, public space is where public life unfolds—a dynamic and multidimensional realm shaped by social interactions, cultural practices, and power relations.

2.2 Consequences of street harassment

In 2020, nearly half (47%) of the women surveyed in Rotterdam, reported being targets of street harassment (Fischer et al., 2021). However, homosexual, bisexual, transgender and intersex people are targeted often as well.

In the moment itself, street harassment disrupts the norm of 'civil inattention', where strangers acknowledge each other's presence without engaging too much (Gardner, 1980) and burdens the target with having to respond to the behavior (Fairchild, 2022). Experiencing the perpetration of street harassment can have severe effects for the target, such as decreased self-worth, feelings of unsafety in public spaces, restriction in movement and social isolation (Farmer & Jordan, 2017; Fileborn & O'Neill, 2021), only to name a few. Ultimately, it can discourage targets to participate in society as a whole: "*The sexual terrorism of street harassment keeps women from being full participants in public life by increasing their anxiety and fear in public spaces.*" (Fairchild, 2022, p. 1157). In the long term, being exposed to street harassment causes higher acceptance and tolerance for violence and contributes to further normalization of harassment behavior (Stroem et al., 2021).

Though a lot can be written (and has been written) on the direct, indirect, short term and long term impact of street harassment on targets, communities and society, that is not the focus of this thesis. Rather, the star of the show is the driving factors behind street harassment, as the perspective of the perpetrator has been neglected in research (van Tuijl, [under review]).

2.3 Reasons for perpetration

Research often focuses on the targets coping strategies and impact of street harassment, leading to a limited understanding of the reasons why offenders commit such acts (van Tuijl, [under review]). This results in interventions focused on targets or bystanders, that often address symptoms instead of the root causes of street harassment. The million-dollar question seems to be: why do people perpetrate street harassment? This paragraph aims to give a brief overview of known perspectives on the driving forces behind street harassment.

In her systematic literature review, van Tuijl ([under review]) delves into the range of explanations for this behavior that scholars have suggested so far. In Figure 2.1, I adapted a visual from this paper to highlight the variety of themes and factors that scholars relate to the perpetration of street harassment. Van Tuijl ([under review]) concludes: "*Overall, more systematic research is needed into the mechanisms and situational conditions under which these acts are perpetrated going beyond the examination of only a set of individual-level risk factors*.".

To conclude, understanding why people perpetrate street harassment is not so simple. Because street harassment is a complex, multifaceted and interrelated issue, there are multiple reasons as to why perpetrators do what they do. There are many plausible explanations that are intertwined, can coexist and are greatly influenced by the context. What we can learn from this is that it is important to see this behavior in a bigger picture. To elaborate on what makes street harassment so challenging to tackle, in the next paragraph, I aim to paint this picture through presenting five interrelated challenges.

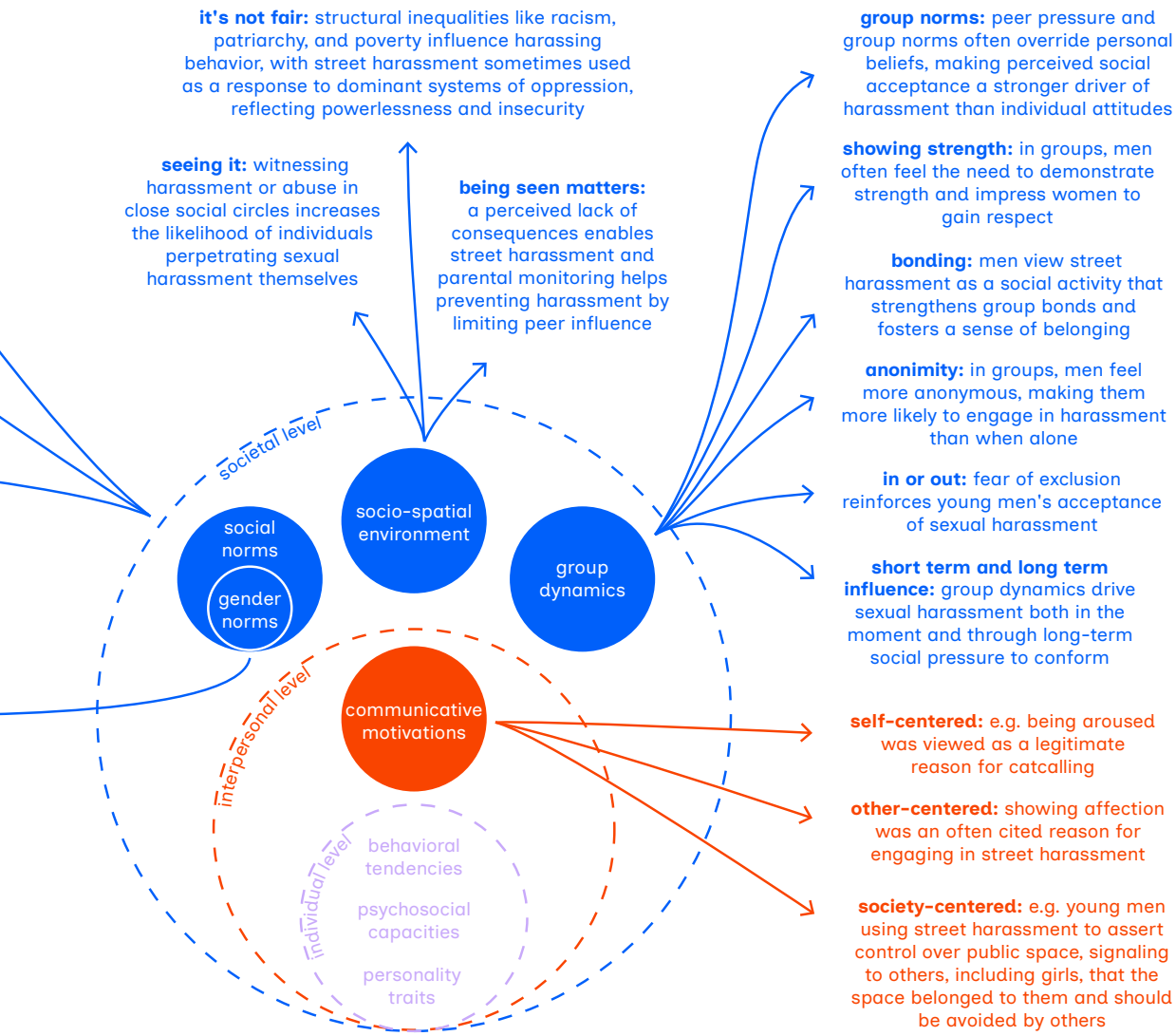


Figure 2.1. Various themes and factors that scholars have related to the perpetration of street harassment. Adapted from van Tuijl ([under review]).

2.4 Challenges in tackling street harassment

In this paragraph, I present five challenges that make street harassment an issue that is difficult to tackle:

1) People normalize the issue of street harassment
2) Gender expectations sustain the cycle of harassment
3) Oppression based on gender is never just about gender
4) Criminalizing street harassment is ineffective and can be harmful
5) Peer pressure makes effectively addressing street harassment with youth difficult

The synthesis of these five challenges emerged as a result of the methodology described on the next page.

Writing about a complex issue can be complex as well. You will notice soon enough when engaging with this content, that most challenges are connected and therefore have some overlap – it's difficult to distinguish where one challenge ends and the other one starts. The goal is not to paint an all-encompassing picture, as that would not only be impossible but pointless. Complexity theory tells us that for complex issues, the best approach is probe–sense–respond (Snowden & Boone, 2007). This is because the system is so intertwined and evolving, there is no point in trying to understand it all. By probing the system with safe-to-fail experiments (Van Der Bijl-Brouwer et al., 2021), we can see how it behaves and better decide on our next step.

The goal of this paragraph, therefore, is to make some kind of sense of it all, so that later, we can find points of interest that might open up possibilities to move forward.

m e t h o d o l o g y

I employed a combination of activities to explore the complexities of street harassment. The insights gathered throughout these activities were synthesized into five key challenges through an iterative process. This process alternated between data collection and iterative synthesis (Figure 2.2) and allowed for a holistic exploration of street harassment behavior, capturing both theoretical perspectives and lived experiences, and resulted into five key challenges that make tackling street harassment difficult.

Data collection: Insights were drawn from a mix of academic literature, secondary data (S1), interviews (I1, I3-5), observations, (PM1, AA1-6) and contextual sources such as news articles, documentaries and social media.

Iterative synthesis: Findings were continuously analyzed and structured, as my understanding of the subject evolved. To do so, I sometimes engaged others in various mapping activities (DA1-3).

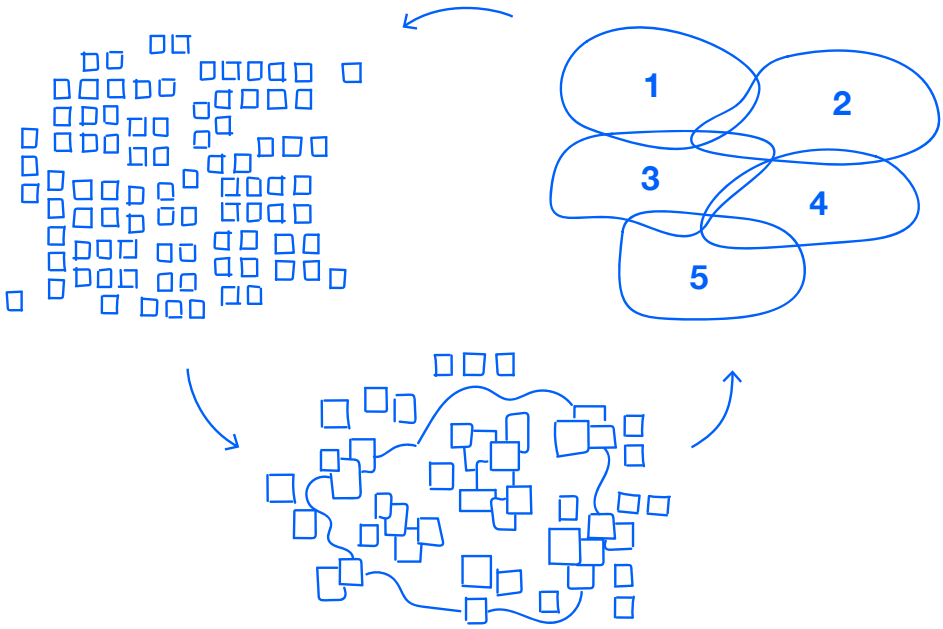


Figure 2.2. Iteratively synthesising collected data into five key challenges to tackling street harassment.

2.4.1 Challenge 1

People normalize the issue of street harassment

Street harassment is a highly normalized behavior. For many, it happens so often that they have gotten used to it or that it is seen as just part of everyday life. Many young people don't realize this behavior is wrong, having been exposed to it often. For example, a youth BOA explained: "The thing is, just often those younger boys and girls don't even realize they are doing something that is wrong. Because it's normal to them." Research shows something similar: that many perpetrators report that they mean well or see it as harmless fun when participating in street harassment, suggesting that they are unaware of the implications of their behavior (DelGreco et al., 2021). Finding street harassment normal is problematic: tolerance for sexual harassment increases the likelihood of perpetrating street harassment (DelGreco et al., 2021). In turn, being exposed to street harassment does not only further normalise the behavior, but it might also increase the chances that one shows in this behavior. A study by Stroem et al. (2021) showed that exposure to harassment or abuse within one's close social environment is associated with a higher likelihood of engaging in sexual harassment. Similarly, experiencing harassment or violence firsthand may lead individuals to reproduce such behavior. Henry (2017) theorized that perpetrators of street harassment may identify with their aggressors and redirect their aggression toward others. An interesting aspect, I would say: it means that the role division in street harassment is dynamic and context-dependent. The same individual could be a target in one context, but a perpetrator or a bystander in another context, see Figure 2.3.

The examples we encounter in life heavily influence our perception of what is normal and trickle down into everyday interactions. Children and youth often look to their parents, peers, and broader societal norms to shape their understanding of right and wrong. A youth worker from Schiebroek-Zuid explained how they consider role models an important aspect in tackling street harassment: "I think that is also a factor, and not only with boys, but also with girls, because both often do not know what is right or wrong, how a male person addresses them." (S1, JW06V). In another interview, a youth BOA from a different area even deflected responsibility from youth for their behavior, stating the following: "You can hardly blame them. Because they have never known what is or is not right." (S1, JB01M). The youth BOA highlighted the importance of father figures and how those are often missing in Schiebroek-Zuid. When parental monitoring is lacking, chances of perpetrating street harassment are higher as peer pressure plays a stronger role (Stroem et al., 2021). Other elements that can set examples in young people's lives are social media, the way marginalized groups are represented and treated in national politics, school dress codes or sayings like "boys will be boys". Fairchild (2022) refers to street harassment as "*a misogynistic tool that sustains a patriarchal society*" (p. 1156), drawing on Fogg-Davis (2006), who declares: "*It is the banality of street harassment that makes it so effective in maintaining a larger system of sexual terrorism*" (p. 63).

"I think that is also a factor, and not only with boys, but also with girls, because both often do not know what is right or wrong, how a male person addresses them" - youth worker (JW06V, S1)

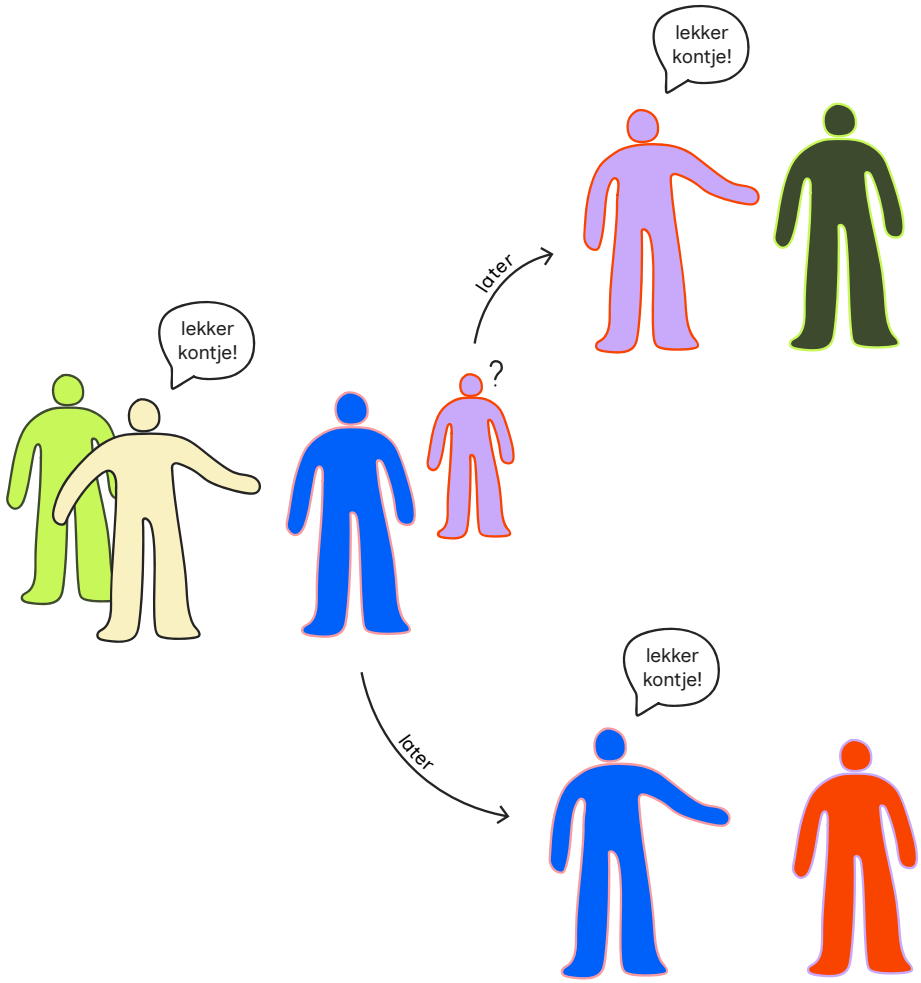


Figure 2.3. The role division in street harassment is dynamic. In a different context, a target or bystander may become a perpetrator, and vice versa.

I conclude from all this that addressing street harassment involves challenging the status quo. It's no surprise that many initiatives that aim to counter street harassment are focused on raising awareness, see Figure 2.4 for an example. However, raising awareness of street harassment can backfire. This is because the concept of street harassment is not universally understood in the same way. Subsequently, the effect of raising awareness can vary depending on who is being made aware and how.

People who do not perpetrate street harassment, but feel perceived as possible perpetrators, can develop ranges of micro-behaviors to cope. Examples are keeping their distance from certain people, not greeting them or communicating friendliness in more implicit ways. Though Figure 2.4 depicts a rather funny way in which people can deal with being consious of their position in public spaces, this is not always the case. A common response to being made aware of a problem that you don't see as a problem (yet) is resistance. For example, one could say something about how 'you can't say anything anymore these days'. A youth worker referred to this phenomenon as well:

"Uhm. And then, of course, you also have that whole woke thing that, uh... is being promoted, uh, everywhere. And maybe that's a certain... yeah, what is it? Uh... uh... yeah, that they're pushing back against it and actually start doing the exact opposite." (S1, JM12M)

These mixed responses to being made aware of street harassment are partly due to the fact that what is understood as street harassment, varies depending on the context, creating gray areas around what behaviors are considered appropriate. Thus, it can be unclear what is right and what is wrong. In other words, without offering perspective of alternative ways to cope with the system,

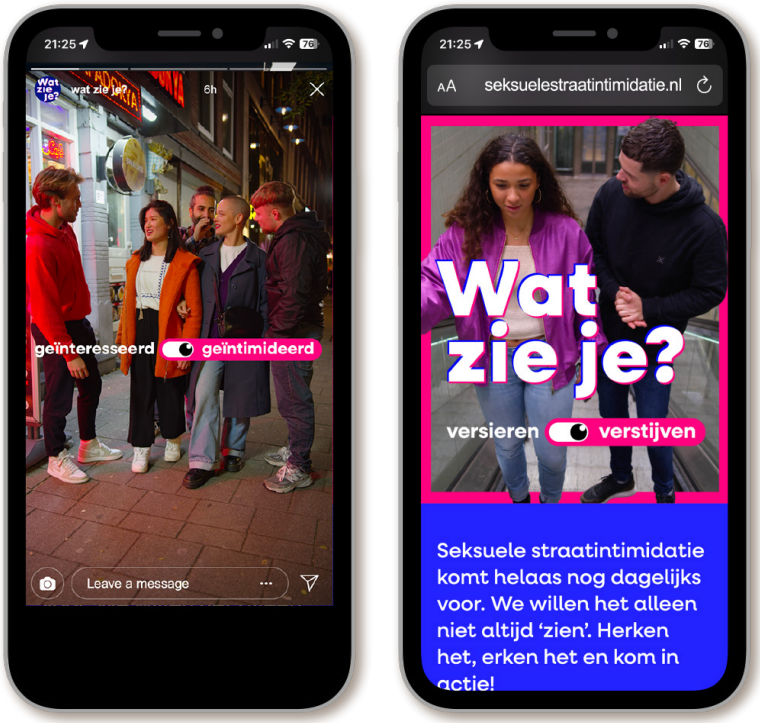


Figure 2.4. Campaign to raise awareness of street harassment, aimed at bystanders. Initiated by the Municipality of Rotterdam, campaign by Endore Agency. Image retrieved from www.endore.agency/portfolio/watzieje

being made aware can trigger resistance for perpetrators or people who belong to social groups associated with perpetrating street harassment.

We can conclude that street harassment behavior is highly normalized. Many people experience it so often that they see it as just part of everyday life, and young people may not even recognize it as wrong. This normalization perpetuates the cycle: exposure to street harassment makes it seem normal, increasing tolerance for it and raising the likelihood of future perpetration. Therefore raising awareness is no frivolous luxury but remains challenging, as perceptions of appropriate behavior vary depending on the context and one's norms, and roles are interchangeable.

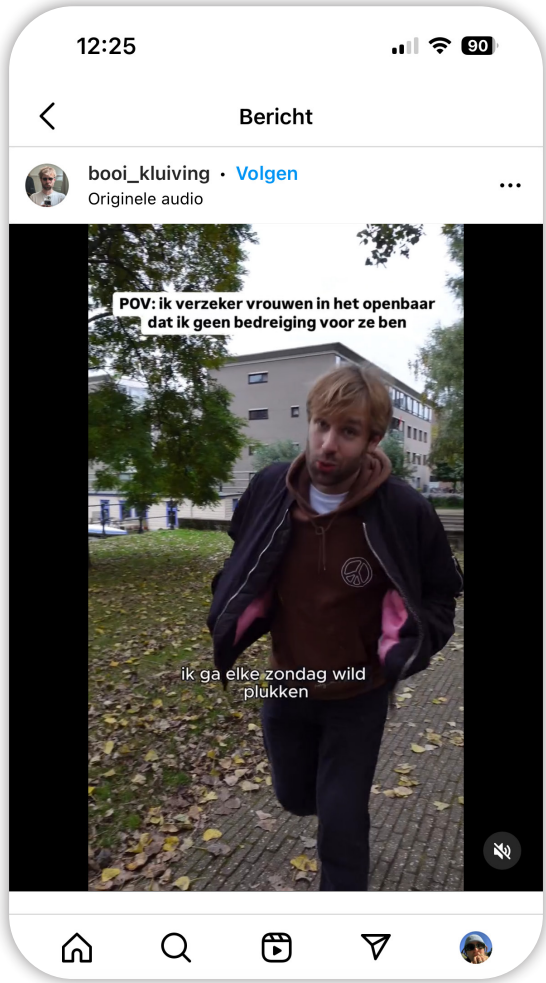


Figure 2.5. Instagram meme Instagram meme where an man explains what micro-behaviors he performs to assure women in public that he is no threat to them (retrieved from the account @booi_kluiving / 11,3k followers).

2.4.2 Challenge 2

Gender expectations sustain harassment behavior

Blue if it's a boy, pink if it's a girl. From the moment we are born, people are taught what is considered 'masculine' or 'feminine', shaping our beliefs, behavior, careers, and even personal relationships. Social structures, media, education, the built environment, healthcare and so on are often designed around binary gender norms, where white cis hetero men are the norm. An example in public space is that in the Netherlands, roughly one in five new streets is given the name of a person, with almost 80% of those names honoring men (Van Dijke, 2019). Another example is the heavy emphasis on facilities for male-dominated sports in the public space such as soccer and skateboarding, as pointed out by Schram et al. (2024) while researching the subjective safety experience of young women in Rotterdam-Zuid. They found that of all societal factors, the gender norms in our society play the biggest role in how young women in Rotterdam-Zuid experience public spaces. A youth BOA operating in this area elaborated on the existing culture of boys conquering as many girls as possible: "Who has the most girls? At that age, that does play a role, so to speak, because that's status for them too. How many girls have you managed to fix? This is how they talk among themselves." (S1, JB01M)

Street harassment behavior clearly reflects deeply rooted beliefs about masculinity and femininity in our society. Quinn (2002) wrote: "*Masculinity is not a static identity but rather one that must constantly be reclaimed.*" (p. 394). Similarly, femininity is not static either, though it is often reinforced through norms of passivity, appearance, or compliance rather than acts of dominance. In their paper on sexual harassment and masculinity, Quinn examines sexual harassment behavior as a practice of producing male identities. In this case, men were using the practice of 'girl watching' in their work environment as a way to signal to other men that they were heterosexual. Quinn concluded: "*A man must be interested in women, but not too interested; they must show their (hetero)sexual interest, but not overly so, for this would be to admit that women have power over them.*" (p. 395). Similarly, van Tuijl ([under review]) showed that in group settings, men often feel the need to demonstrate strength and impress women in order to gain respect from others. One of the interviewed youth BOA's confirmed that masculinity expectations play a role in how the youth in Rotterdam behave: "It's purely status for them, because then you're the man, yes, and you can see that clearly in the group." (S1, JB01M)

It can be tough living up to these expectations. Men are taught to suppress emotions, to avoid seeking help and to constantly affirm their masculinity. This contributes to higher suicide rates among men than among women (Sitanala, 2022). In the Netherlands, in 2023, 202 men aged 10-29 committed suicide. In that same year, 78 women aged 10-29 committed suicide (Nederlands Jeugdinstituut, 2024). Victims of sexual violence often face victim blaming, where they are made responsible for others harmful behavior. At an exhibition on victim blaming by Fairplay (Appendix C3), I learned that men who experience sexual violence face a double stigma: they are men, so they should enjoy any sexual interaction, or, if they did not enjoy it, they should have taken action. In the documentary Man Made (Bergman, 2019), a man explains:

"Victimhood is not part of the image of masculinity we are given. We would rather be perpetrators than victims, and we would rather be in control than out of control."

Consequently, society often dismisses their

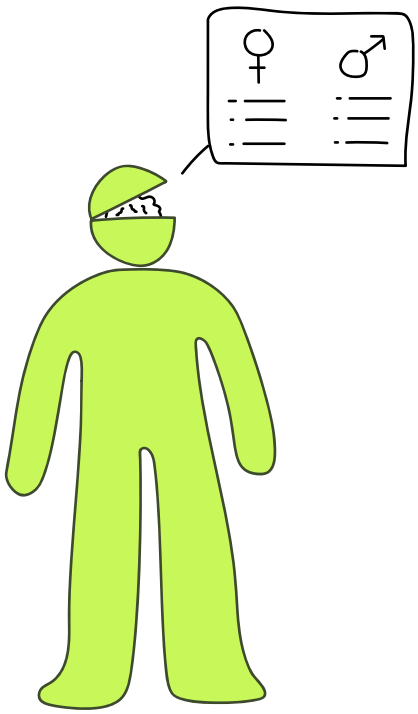


Figure 2.6. Gender norms are internalized.

trauma, further silencing them and sustaining the cycle of toxic masculinity.
So, traditional masculinity norms impose unrealistic standards on men that feed harassment behavior. People of all genders can contribute to upholding these masculinity expectations. In her work on masculinity and sexuality in high school, Pascoe (2012) challenges the notion, often upheld by masculinity theorists, that masculinity is inherently tied to male bodies. Her empirical research separates masculinity from the male body, expanding on the 'multiple masculinities' framework, which understands masculinity as a socially constructed set of practices performed by both men and women. An example is how some individuals expect men to pay on the first date, reinstating the belief that men should provide.

Ergo, perpetrators and men are not the only ones displaying behavior that sustains the system. Often, when people don't adhere to the traditional expectations linked to their gender, the responsibility for harassment is placed with them. For example, targets of sexual violence are often told that they were 'asking for it', or asked what they were wearing - if that matters – which strengthens belief that targets are responsible for preventing violence. This leads to victim-blaming and slut-shaming themselves and others. In a group conversation with youth workers from Schiebroek-Zuid, one of them mentioned a conversation with a young person they had earlier. She recalled the following: "Then at one point someone said something like, when you go out you do it for the attention of men. Yeah, that's really one of those typical phrases, so to speak." (S1, JW06V)

In the previously mentioned study by Schram et al. (2024), it becomes clear that women themselves sometimes enforce strict norms among each other about what constitutes acceptable behavior for girls in public spaces, while also monitoring each other's actions. This can discourage girls from behaving in certain ways or frequenting specific areas, such as being near boys, out of fear of being judged by their peers. Feeling pressured to conform to societal expectations, women police each other's behaviour rather than the oppressor's. This internalisation of norms (see Figure 2.6) and the behavior that stems from it, helps sustain the cycle of harassment.

In that sense, street harassment persists because everyone plays a role in its continuation. However, I don't mean to victim-blame. Not everyone is equally responsible for it. To explain this, I wish to delve into the concept of responsibility as used by Dekker (2024), who was in turn drawing on Bankston & Gusfield (1983). In Dekker's work on the influence of intersectional identities on deflection of responsibility for street harassment, they make a difference between causal and political responsibility. In this case, causal responsibility is when an individual commits or facilitates street harassment. Political responsibility, however, refers to the understanding that street harassment is not just your problem if you are directly involved in that behavior, but if it is something that happens within one's own community or social group. In that sense, it involves recognizing

one's role in both the conditions that allow such violence to occur and in the actions needed to prevent it, emphasizing personal and collective accountability. In Dekker's words: "*Even though not all men may be perpetrators of sexual violence, all men can have an influence on the culture and environment in which violence is committed.*" (Dekker, 2024, p. 5). But how would that work in practice? Later in this thesis, I will return to this notion of responsibility.

In all, deeply ingrained gender norms and expectations sustain street harassment behavior. These norms are internalized by everybody, causing everyone to play a part in street harassment in some way, even though they might not realize it.

2.4.3 Challenge 3

Oppression based on gender is never just about gender

Street harassment is often understood as a gendered issue, which, according to the previous paragraph, is not untrue. However, its roots extend beyond gender alone. While gender is central to understanding it, street harassment intersects with other forms of oppression. As Place put it in their book Feminist Designer (2023): "*Owing to the concept of intersectionality and the key assertions of Black feminist thought, this book emphasizes that oppression based on gender is never just about gender.*" (p. 4-5). This section addresses how this presents another challenge in tackling street harassment.

Intersectionality highlights the interlocking nature of race, class, and gender, and how they intersect in unique ways for individuals who belong to multiple marginalised groups. These factors do not only have an influence on how individuals experience street harassment, but also on their perspective on the phenomenon. E.g., Dekker (2024) showed that race and class have an influence on how people respond to street harassment awareness trainings.

So, next to gender-based inequality, another form of oppression that is important to highlight, especially in the Dutch political climate at the time of writing this, is racism.

People have racist assumptions about street harassment that are untrue

As cited by van Tuijl, ([under review]), no empirical studies have found a relationship between race or ethnicity and the perpetration of street harassment (Banyard et al., 2020; Cooney et al., 2023; Maletsky, 2019; Walton & Pedersen, 2021). However, the media and some politicians frame gendered violence as a culture clash between traditional immigrant men and modern empowered women. For example, Bente Becker, member of the House of Representatives (Tweede Kamer) for VVD, recently posted a video on Instagram, warning

Figure 2.7. Instagram video in which Bente Becker, member of the House of Representatives for VVD, associates 'foreigners' with street harassment (retrieved from @bentebecker).

people for ‘foreign poison spread through weekend schools and mosques’ (Figure 2.7). Later in the video she explains how the VVD aims to counter this movement, one of the proposals being criminalizing street harassment. It’s not just street harassment that People of Color are wrongly associated with. In a hidden-camera experiment from over a decade ago, three individuals—a white man, a Black man, and a white woman—try to steal a bicycle to observe how bystanders react, see Figure 2.8 (Everyday Feminism, 2014). Notably only the Black man is reported to the police. Racial associations influence perceptions of criminality, and media coverage fuels these racial perceptions (Ghandnoosh, 2014).

This framing of street harassment as a cultural issue and relating it to immigration and ethnicity, complicates efforts to address the problem by diverting attention away from it. Moreover, it reinforces harmful stereotypes about People of Color, which is despicable on it’s own, but it also makes it more difficult to hold all perpetrators accountable and to create an inclusive, effective response to street harassment. For example, as shown by Dekker (2024), racist stereotypes about street harassment can spark deflection of responsibility for boys of color in street harassment awareness trainings.

People have more important things to worry about than street harassment

During street interviews in Schiebroek-Zuid (PM1, n=27), hardly any individuals mentioned street harassment occurred in their neigborhood. If they did, they did not see it as a huge problem. It may be seen as less pressing compared to other societal challenges.

Rotterdam is a city with high levels of violence and poverty. In 2024, Rotterdam was listed third place in the top five municipalities with the highest poverty rates (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2024). In a recent news article it became clear that youth crime in Rotterdam is decreasing, however the young people who do cross the line are becoming increasingly violent. Ahmed Aboutaleb, mayor of Rotterdam at that time, reacted on this by expressing his

Figure 2.8. YouTube-video showing a hidden-camera experiment in which three individuals—a white man, a Black man, and a white woman—who try to steal a bicycle to observe how bystanders react. Only the Black man is reported to the police (4.4 million views / retrieved from the account @VladCantSleep).

concern about young people growing up in poverty and unsafe situations (NOS, 2023). In areas like Rotterdam-Zuid, Schiebroek-Zuid and Bospolder-Tussendijken, there is a lot of disparity, which may lead people to prioritize survival and economic concerns. Recently, the newspaper NRC published an article and podcast about Schiebroek-Zuid, titled ‘How a vulnerable neighbordhood in Rotterdam keeps being forgotten’ (Rosenberg, 2024). A youth BOA confirmed how some problems can overshadow others: sexuality and respect are part of raising youth, but with these youth, there are more pressing issues that are prioritized.

In a city with a lot of serious crime and disparities, it is possible that street harassment is perceived as a less pressing issue or not even perceived as an issue at all, because people have more important things to worry about. Downplaying the issue of street harassment sustains the cycle of normalizing it, making it seem trivial and unworthy of attention. This can discourage targets from speaking out. It can also perpetuate a culture of impunity, where perpetrators face little accountability and societal norms continue to tolerate such actions.

In conclusion, the concept of intersectionality reveals how gender, race and class intersect and influence individuals' experiences and perceptions of street harassment. While it is often framed as a cultural problem tied to immigration, no evidence supports a link between race and perpetration. This harmful narrative distracts from real solutions, reinforces stereotypes and can cause deflection of responsibility. Additionally, street harassment is often downplayed, possibly due to communities facing other significant social and economic challenges.

2.4.4 Challenge 4

Criminalizing street harassment is not effective and can be harmful

Since July 1st, 2024, street harassment is a criminal offense in the Netherlands (Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap, 2024). The already existing law 'Sexual Offenses' (Seksuele Misdrijven) was revised based on the belief that all sexual relationships should be equal and consensual. More information on how this law came about and its content can be found in Appendix D.

Though criminalizing street harassment seems a step in the right direction, one could question whether society can rely on this development as the ultimate solution that shall change social norms. In this section I wish to point out three factors that may hinder the effectiveness of criminalizing street harassment: proving punishability, interpreting the incident, and judging youth. I will also discuss their consequences.

Proving punishability

For both BOA's and police officers, enforcing the law is no easy task. In practice, it is difficult to prove when an incident is punishable (NOS, 2024). Evidence is required to actually prosecute the perpetrator and just a target's statement is not enough. However, considering the size of the street harassment problem, chances that an undercover BOA is present and notices it when you are being street harassed are slim. For a target, filing a report that does not lead to anything can induce feeling unsupported and can ultimately reduce trust in law enforcement. Also, it can demotivate the target to file a report again. This sustains the cycle of unreported incidents as the police is unable to investigate the case without a target's formal complaint (Ribeiro, 2023).

Oct 28
It was about 5 pm when my roommate called me, asking me to bring her ID to the police station. A man had flashed her on the corner of our street and she was on her way to file a report. When we left the police station, the officer told her: "Well, I hope you don't think about it too much anymore." A week later or so, the police reached out with the news that they could not do anything due to a lack of evidence.

Interpreting the incident

At the first street harassment hearing ever, that took place in the courthouse in Rotterdam (AA1), the judge explained that:

"Context is important in determining whether offenses committed are punishable."

Street harassment can take many forms and interactions can be interpreted differently by different law enforcers. This means that incidents are prone to subjectivity and therefore to (unconscious) bias. Personal bias can not only lead to trouble with recognising street harassment and taking targets seriously, but also give police officers the chance to fall prey to (internalized) sexism and ethnic profiling. According to Ribeiro (2023), the institutional environment one works in, influences how street-level bureaucrats enforce laws. They argue that the prevailing masculinist culture at police institutions negatively affect the criminalization of violence against women by police officers. Within the Rotterdam police force, this is the case

as well. In 2024, after complaints of racism, discrimination, bullying, sexism, and sexual harassment, independent research shed light on an unsafe working environment (Haenen, 2024).

Young people with a migration background are two to three times more likely to be suspected of a crime than other young people (Nederlands Jeugdinstituut, 2021). Specifically in the case of street harassment, the belief that only men of color perpetrate it is fed by the media and the current political environment in the Netherlands. The subjectivity and personal biases of law enforcement, including sexism and ethnic profiling, can significantly impact how street harassment is recognized, reported, and addressed.

Judging youth

The last factor hindering the effectiveness of the law is the fact that prosecution means that perpetrators will be judged for their offense. However, with youth, that is not an effective approach. Youth BOA's recognize that with youth, judgment and punishment can be counterproductive. While Charlotte was shadowing youth BOA's for a day, they explained that with youth, even though street harassment is now criminalized, they handle it differently than with older people because 'youth still need to be educated. Enforcement then backfires.' (S1). I interviewed the manager of the youth BOA's in Rotterdam (I4), who is involved in organizing the pilots in which undercover BOA's enforce the new law. She explained that now, the policy is that young people under 18 get a warning instead of being reported. According to Ribeiro (2023), one's perception of a policy's content influences how street-level bureaucrats enforce laws. In this case, the belief that punishing youth for street harassment is not effective, influences how law enforcers implement this recent criminalization.

To conclude, it's good that the law is there, because of the sentiment it signals: street harassment is not okay. But, as put by Ribeiro (2023) in a study on criminalizing street harassment in Portugal: "*This also indicates a disparity between the recognition of practical and symbolic benefits of Article 170°, which tends to happen when the legislator addresses the symptoms of a certain problem—here, street harassment—instead of the root of its cause (McConnell, 2010)—the reproduction of a patriarchal society through gender violence*." (p. 1446). Criminalizing street harassment remains a rather reactive approach that not only is ineffective, but may also reinforce existing systemic issues such as distrust in law enforcement, ethnic profiling, and ineffective youth interventions. In essence, the law is born from a wish for equality but reinforces inequality in more ways than one.

2.4.5 Challenge 5

Peer pressure makes effectively addressing street harassment with youth difficult

Young people often perpetrate street harassment in groups (Fischer et al., 2021). Men, for example, tend to feel a greater sense of anonymity in groups, which makes them more likely to engage in harassment collectively rather than individually (Wesselmann & Kelly, 2010). Group norms play a powerful role in shaping individual behavior, especially during adolescence, when identity is still being formed. If late adolescents witness their peers engaging in stereotypical, sexualized behaviors and assume that everyone in their group approves, they are more likely to replicate those behaviors themselves (Jewell & Brown, 2013). As Van Tuijl ([xxxx], under review]) pointed out, drawing on Henry (2017), not conforming to these group norms can lead to exclusion or alienation, reinforcing the pressure to fit in. For example, sexist jokes or locker room talk, where everyone laughs along, can normalize harmful behaviors and contribute to an environment where street harassment is tolerated and even performed to enhance one's conformity to the group. Van Tuijl ([xxxx], under review) highlights that perceived social norms within the peer group predict perpetrating sexual harassment above and beyond their personal attitudes, indicating the relevance of working on prevention in groups rather than alone.

However, young people tend to amplify their tough exterior when interacting in groups. This is partly because traditional masculinity discourages showing weakness, which reinforces problematic behaviors among young men (previously discussed in 2.4.2). This tendency to act tough to hide insecurities or fear of vulnerability, intensifies in group settings. Youth workers from Schiebroek-Zuid explained that when alone with youth workers, youth show less toughness than in a group setting, indicating that peer pressure reinforces this behaviour. They also recognized the practice of youth 'hardening each other', or making each other tough. Because of this, the youth workers stress that judging youth and emphasizing negative behaviors can be counterproductive.

To conclude, addressing street harassment among young people requires more than individual interventions—it calls for group-focused prevention strategies that take into account how group dynamics, peer pressure, and the societal expectations tied to traditional masculinity greatly influence young people's behavior.

2.4.6 Relationships between the challenges

While reading about these challenges, it might have already occurred to you that they do not exist in isolation. They are all connected and interrelated, see Figure 2.9. The goal is not to show the one and only truth or an an all-encompassing visualisation of the system in which street harassment behavior exists. The goal is to illustrate the complexity of the topic and to make some kind of sense of it.

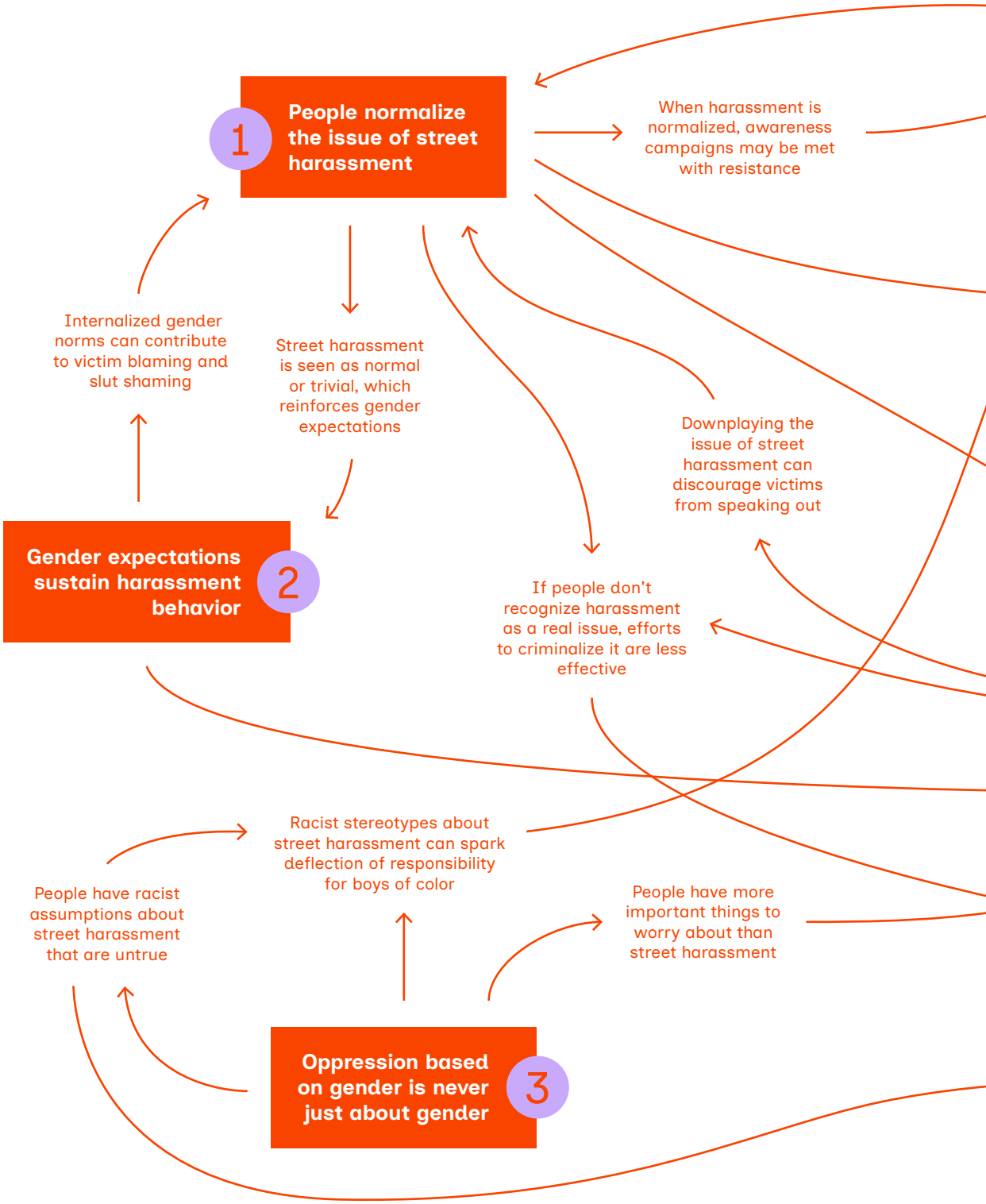
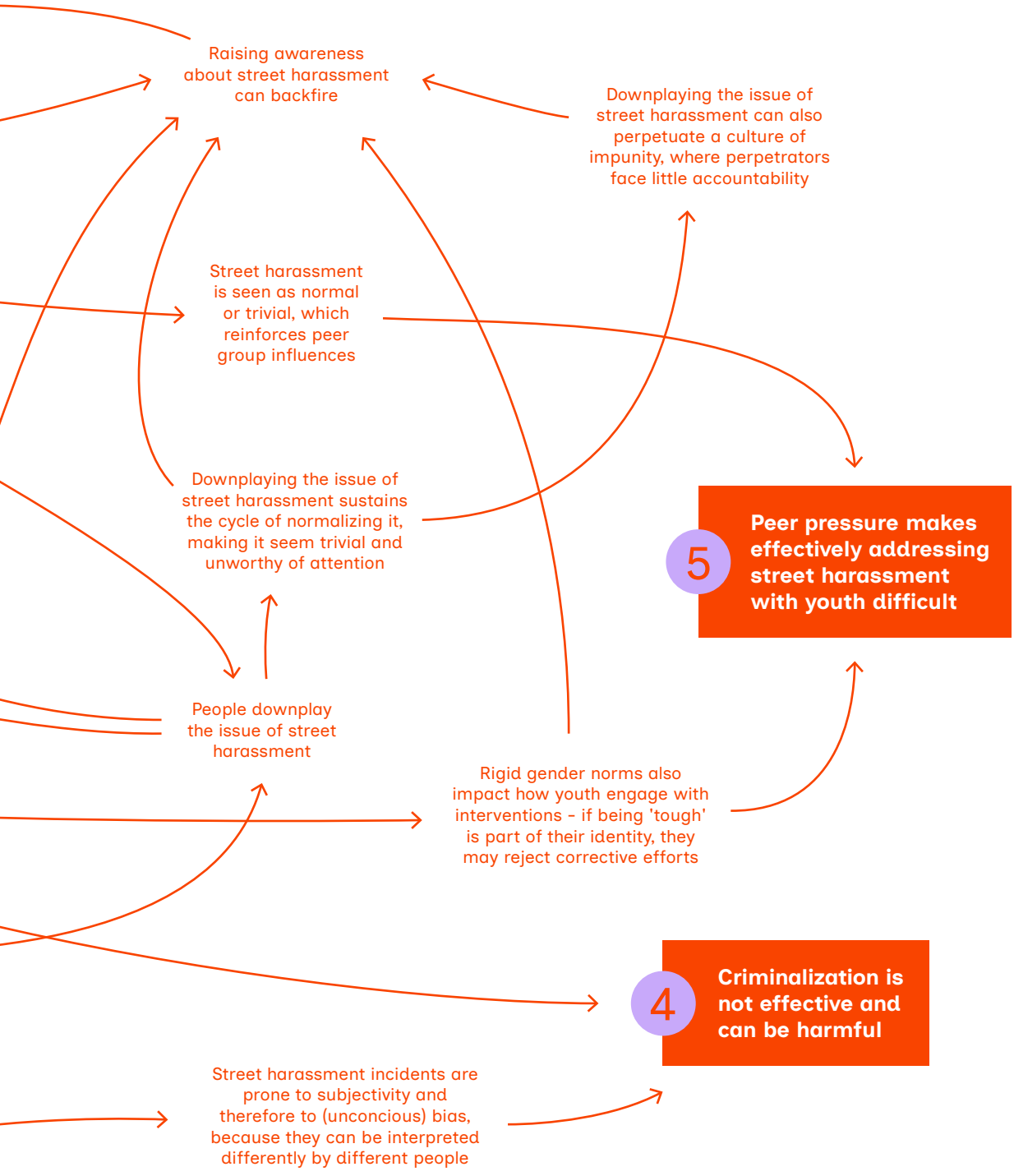


Figure 2.9. The challenges outlined in this chapter are all interrelated.


Raising awareness about street harassment can backfire
Downplaying the issue of street harassment can also perpetuate a culture of impunity, where perpetrators face little accountability
Street harassment is seen as normal or trivial, which reinforces peer group influences
Downplaying the issue of street harassment sustains the cycle of normalizing it, making it seem trivial and unworthy of attention
5
Peer pressure makes effectively addressing street harassment with youth difficult
People downplay the issue of street harassment
Rigid gender norms also impact how youth engage with interventions - if being 'tough' is part of their identity, they may reject corrective efforts
4
Criminalization is not effective and can be harmful
Street harassment incidents are prone to subjectivity and therefore to (unconcious) bias, because they can be interpreted differently by different people

2.5 Concluding this chapter

The aim of this chapter is to answer the research question **'Why is street harassment so hard to tackle?'**. I conclude that street harassment is a complex issue driven by an interplay of various factors and tackling it is obstructed by various challenges. To illustrate this, I use the analogy of an apple tree, see Figure 2.10.

In the crown of the tree we see apples growing, representing street harassment incidents. These incidents are highly normalized. Therefore raising awareness is no frivolous luxury but remains challenging, as perceptions of appropriate behavior vary depending on the context and one's norms.

At the roots of the tree, we see how gender norms and expectations play a central role in sustaining harassment. While this is key to understanding street harassment, it does not exist in isolation—intersecting with racism and classism, which shape both experiences of street harassment and societal responses to it. While it is often framed as a cultural problem tied to immigration, no empirical evidence supports a link between race and perpetration. This harmful narrative distracts from real solutions, reinforces stereotypes and can cause deflection of responsibility. The internalization of norms causes everyone to play a part in street harassment in some way, but people are not always conscious of how their behavior comes about. Revealing these social structures that sustain the cycle of harassment, raises questions about accountability.

On the left we see a person picking up apples, showing how criminalization, though symbolically powerful, is ultimately ineffective. It fails to address the roots of the apple tree and risks reinforcing systemic issues like ethnic profiling and distrust in law enforcement. We need a more preventive approach, but working with young people presents its own challenges, as group dynamics and peer pressure reinforce harmful behaviors: it's hard not to grow into an apple when you're growing on an apple tree.

In all, the apple tree analogy highlights that the system is a living organism in which everything is connected. Street harassment is difficult to tackle because it is deeply normalized and sustained by intersecting deeply rooted social structures like gender norms, racism, and classism, while efforts to address it often focus on symptoms, rather than the underlying forces driving the behavior, leaving questions of accountability and effective intervention unresolved.

So, what actually happens in those branches? Given that street harassment behavior is very context dependent, we need to delve into the perspectives and context of the people it is about. Therefore, in the next chapter, I aim to get a better understanding of how young people in Rotterdam experience interacting in public space.

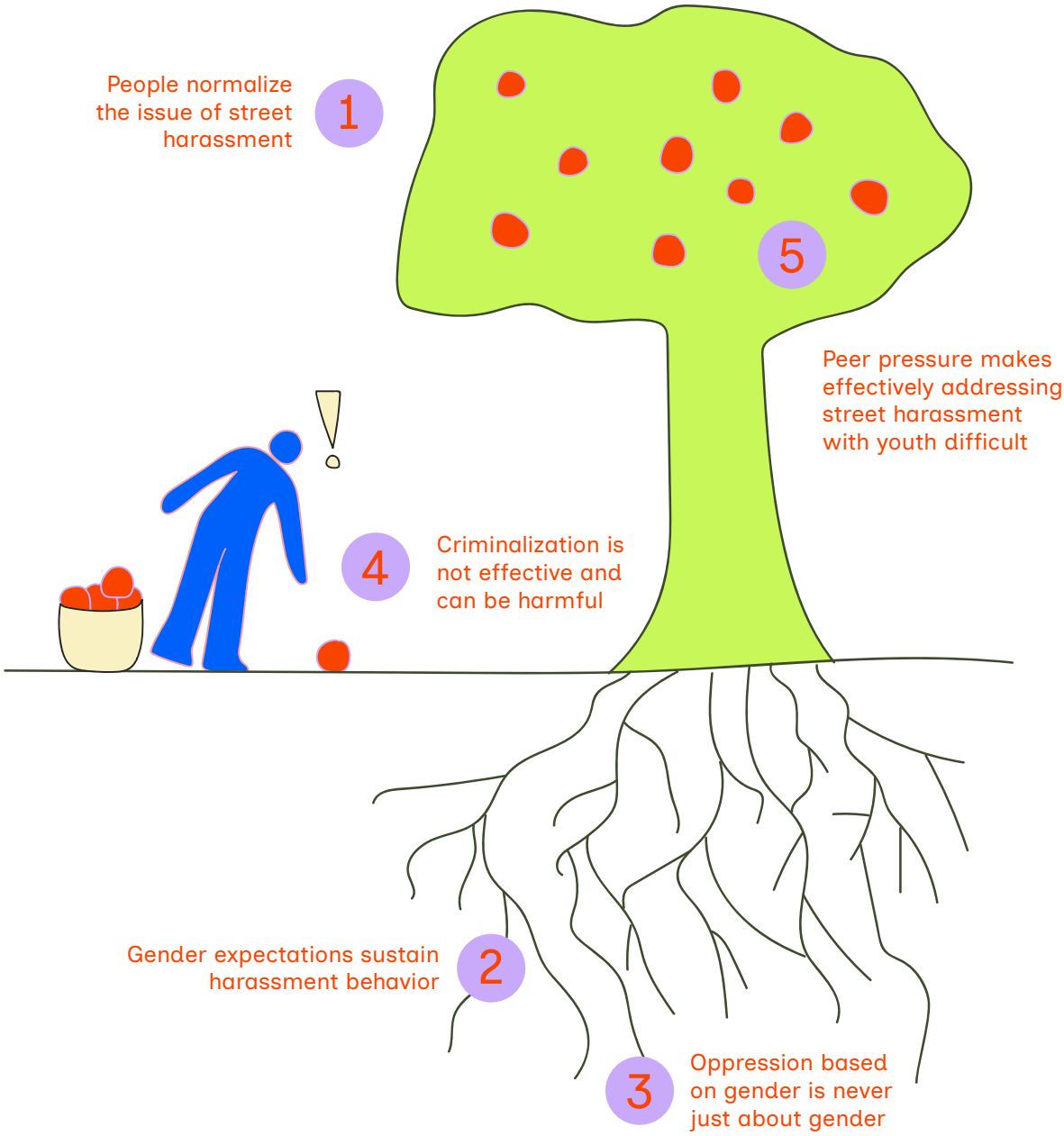


Figure 2.10. Using an apple tree analogy, we see that repressive measures won't do much, as they leave the apple tree and its roots intact.

Chapter 2: Key take-aways

“Why is street harassment so hard to tackle?”

- Street harassment is a complex issue. There are many plausible explanations for it that are intertwined, can co-exist and are greatly influenced by the context.
- Many young people don’t realize this behavior is wrong, having been exposed to it often.
- The role division in street harassment is dynamic and context-dependent.
- Mixed responses to being made aware of street harassment are partly due to the fact that what is understood as street harassment, varies depending on the context, creating gray areas around what behaviors are considered appropriate.
- Street harassment behavior reflects deeply rooted beliefs about masculinity and femininity in our society. Perpetrators and men are not the only ones displaying behavior that sustains the system. Street harassment persists partly because everyone has internalized these norms and thus plays a role in its continuation.
- Street harassment is often framed as a cultural issue and related it to immigration and ethnicity, which complicates efforts to address the problem by diverting attention away from it. Moreover, it reinforces harmful stereotypes about People of Color.
- Because Rotterdam is a city with a lot of serious crime and disparities, it is possible that street harassment is perceived as a less pressing issue or not even perceived as an issue at all, because people have more important things to worry about.
- Street harassment can take many forms and interactions can be interpreted differently by different law enforcers. This means that incidents are prone to subjectivity and therefore to (unconscious) bias.
- Youth BOA’s recognize that with youth, judgment and punishment can be counterproductive.
- Young people often perpetrate street harassment in groups (Fischer et al., 2021). Group norms play a powerful role in shaping individual behavior, especially during adolescence, when identity is still being formed. This highlights the relevance of working on prevention in groups rather than alone.
- Street harassment is difficult to tackle because it is deeply normalized and sustained by intersecting deeply rooted social structures like gender norms, racism, and classism, while efforts to address it often focus on symptoms, rather than the underlying forces driving the behavior, leaving questions of accountability and effective intervention unresolved.

3) Understanding young people in Rotterdam

This chapter represents the 'What is that really about?'-phase of this report. It delves into the context of the lives of young people living in Rotterdam. The goal is to better understand the underlying needs that performing street harassment behavior fulfils for young perpetrators by taking a step back and exploring the value of interacting in public space for all young people. The following research question was formulated:

'How do young people in Rotterdam experience interacting in public space?'

In 3.1, I explain how me and Charlotte involved youth through generative sessions in youth hubs and what we learned from it. Results are presented in 3.2. I interpret these results and subsequently reframe the issue of youth perpetrating street harassment in 3.3. I conclude the chapter by deciding on how to move forward in 3.4.

This chapter is informed by academic literature, secondary data (S1) and insights from the following activities: interviews (I2-3), observations (AA6), meetings with youth workers and/or youth (PM2-5, PM7, PM9-10), generative sessions with young people from Rotterdam (PM6, PM8), analysis (DA4)

What is going on? | **What is that really about?** | What can we do about it? | How can we design for that? | So what?

3.1 Generative sessions with young people in youth hubs

To better understand how young people in Rotterdam experience interacting in public space, we involved these youth in through employing participatory design methods. Specifically, we made use of generative techniques. The aim of this paragraph is to explain why and how we did this.

Generative design research gives people a language with which they can express their thoughts and experiences, allowing them to access different levels of knowledge (Sanders & Stappers, 2013). As argued by Sleeswijk-Visser et al. (2005), conventional user research techniques, such as interviews of focus groups, usually reveal explicit and observable knowledge - knowledge that people are aware of. Generative techniques, however, are focused on making and can help us gain a deeper understanding of what people know, feel and dream by revealing tacit knowledge and exposing latent needs (Sanders, 2001). I argue that when working with young people, generative techniques are especially valuable. During adolescence, young people are building their verbal, written, cognitive, and social skills and have a wide range of abilities, shaped by both their individual competences and life experiences (Merves et al., 2014). For example, not all youth are stimulated to express their opinion. As young people may not always be able to articulate their experiences though traditional methods, generative techniques offer more open-ended, accessible ways to share their perspectives beyond words.

I designed a generative session with the goal of uncovering the value of interacting in public space for young people in Rotterdam. We held the session twice: once at the youth hub in Schiebroek-Zuid (PM6) and once at the youth hub in Bospolder-Tussendijken (PM8), see Figure 3.1. An impression of both neighborhoods is given in Figures 3.2 and 3.3.

In 3.1.1, I describe the collaboration with the youth hubs and the process of designing the generative session. 3.1.2 gives an overview of the final design of the session. I describe how we processed the results in 3.1.3. Finally, in 3.1.4, I reflect on how the sessions went and what we learned from this, presenting eight participation principles.

The results from the generative sessions are presented in 3.2.

Youth hub	Participants	Participants' age	Youth worker(s)	Youth workers' age	Session date
Schiebroek-Zuid	12 boys	15-20	2 women, 1 man	27-34	15-01-2025
Bospolder-Tussendijken	5 boys, 2 girls	12-20	1 woman	22	29-01-2025

Figure 3.1. Overview of the organized generative sessions.

Figure 3.2. Impression of Schiebroek-Zuid.

Figure 3.3. Impression of Bospolder-Tussendijken. Retrieved from www.bospolderplein.nl

3.1.1 Collaborating with youth hubs

The municipality of Rotterdam has recognized young people's need for a place to belong and develop. Currently, Rotterdam is home to almost 30 (and counting) youth hubs across the city, operated by various well-being organizations. In Schiebroek-Zuid, the youth hub is operated by gro-up and DOCK, whereas in Bospolder-Tussendijken, the youth hub is run by wmoradar. At the youth hubs, youth workers and professionals cater to the needs of the local young people through a range of offerings and activities.

In this paragraph, I explain how Charlotte and I collaborated with youth and youth workers in youth hubs, elaborating on its advantages and disadvantages, how we have gotten to know the youth and the process of designing the generative sessions.

Advantages and disadvantages

When involving young people through participatory design, there are various advantages to collaborating with youth hubs:

- Youth hubs are existing places where local young people already come anyway. Youth workers have the contacts and were able to estimate which young people might be interested in participating in such a session.
- The youth workers already know these youth, so they could tell us what kind of activities would work or not and how to best approach addressing certain topics, ensuring that the session reflected the young people's needs. It also meant that they could call us back when needed, providing us with and extra safeguard.
- In both cases, we were able to facilitate the session at the youth hubs under the umbrella of existing activities. This allowed the session to be in a known and trusted environment for the youth where they felt comfortable.

Something that can be seen as a disadvantage is that you only reach a select group of youth. However, even this creates advantages, as potentially interacting with the same group of people in several stages in the project can enhance a feeling of familiarity and open communication.

Getting to know the youth

Both in Schiebroek-Zuid and Bospolder-Tussendijken, we worked with already existing groups and hitched on to their regular activities. This worked well for two reasons. First, as the young people were going to gather anyway, they were all available. Additionally, the young people already knew each other, making them feel more at ease and allowing us to observe the group dynamics. Figure 3.4 shows the visits to the youth hubs.

Schiebroek-Zuid

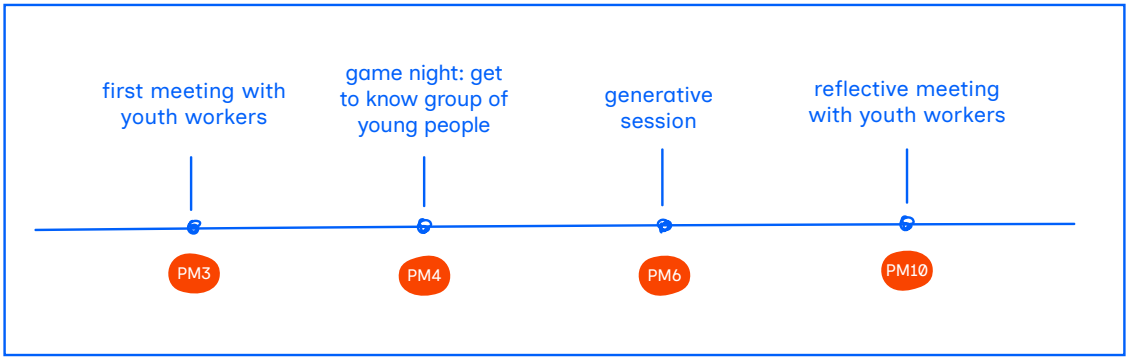
In Schiebroek-Zuid, every week, a group of boys comes together in the youth hub. One week they play games together, and the other week they have a discussion evening. This is all organized by one of the young people. The week before the session, following the youth workers' advice, me and Charlotte joined their game night to meet the young people and get a sense of the ambiance.

Bospolder-Tussendijken

In the youth hub in Bospolder-Tussendijken, a group of both boys and girls meets up every week. One week they cook together, and the other week they do various other activities.

In this case, the youth worker did not think it was necessary to meet the young people beforehand. However, since the session design had evolved over time and Charlotte had not been at this youth hub before, I did visit a second time before the session to explain the session plan to the youth worker and to introduce Charlotte.

Visits to the youth hub in Schiebroek-Zuid



Visits to the youth hub in Bospolder-Tussendijken

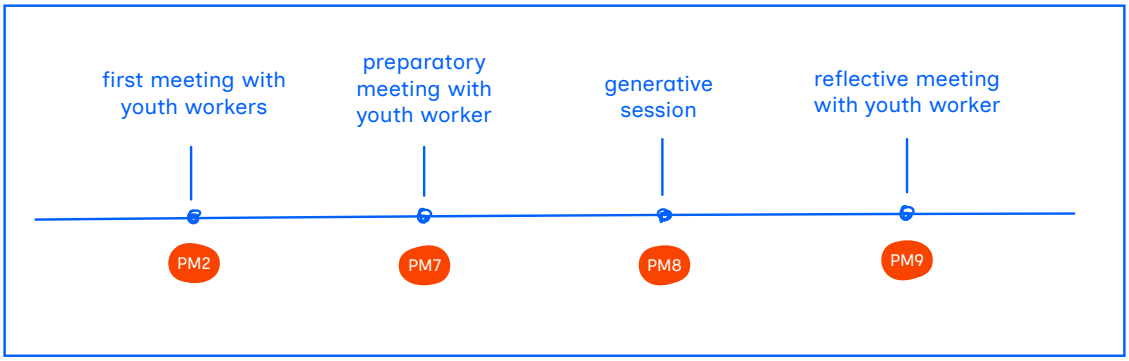


Figure 3.4. Overview of visits to the youth hubs.

Designing the generative session

The design of the generative session was an iterative process in which we collaborated mainly with the youth workers. Figure 3.6 depicts the process of validating and iterating on the session plan with them. Additionally, I interviewed a youth professional (I3) to enhance the likelihood of youth finding the generative session engaging and a participatory designer (I2) to gain insight in co-designing with communities. As you can see in the visual, the final design of the generative session was a result of multiple insights, as many activities informed the design. In Figure 3.5, you can see an example of what I would show the youth workers to communicate my ideas. To allow for honest feedback, I didn't make it look too shiny, to avoid giving the false impression that the session was already finished.

Figure 3.5. Impression of materials I used for sharing my ideas for the session with youth workers and youth professionals.

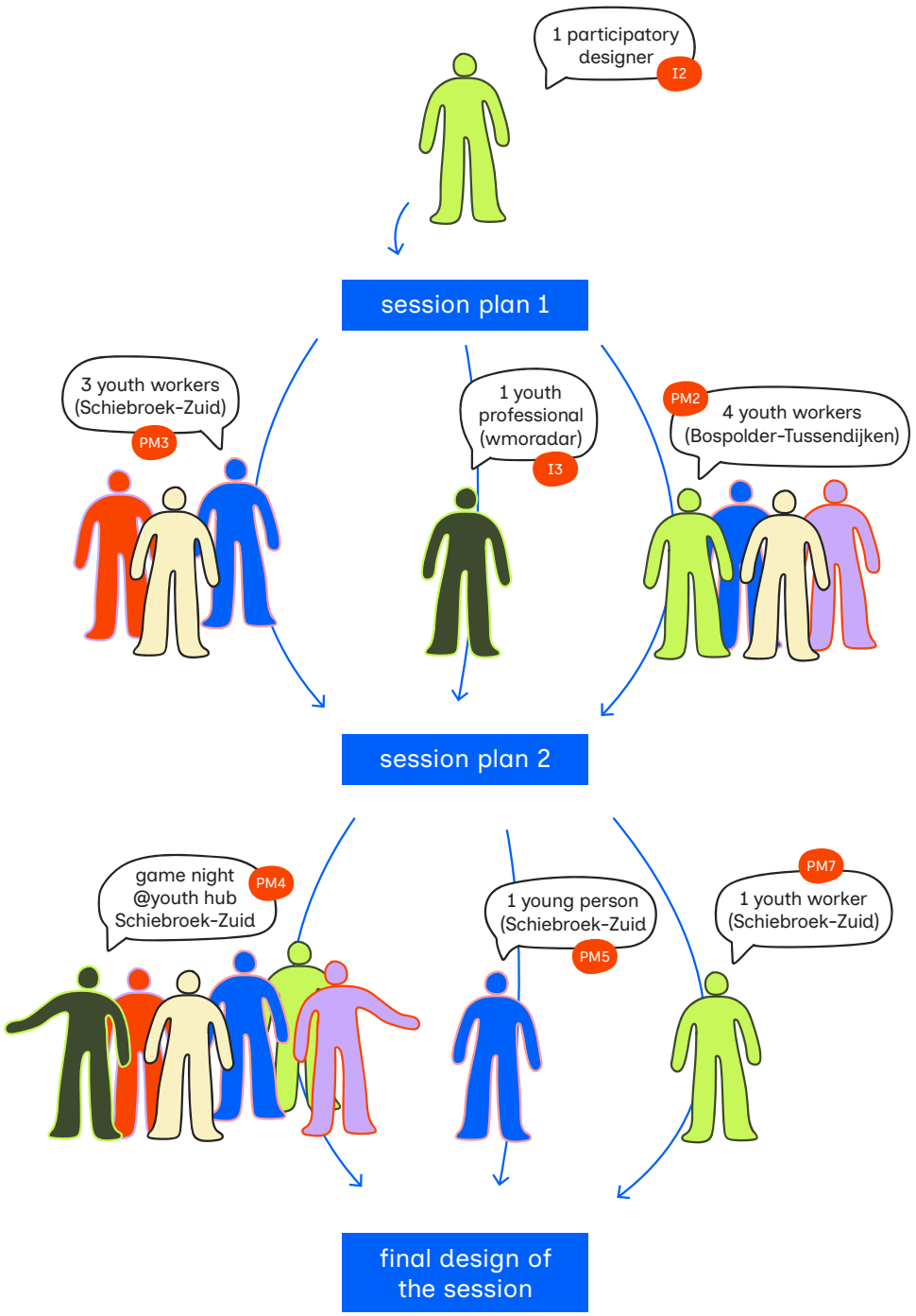


Figure 3.6 Co-developing the generative session with youth workers, youth professionals and a young person.

3.1.2 The session design

To grasp the underlying needs that performing street harassment behavior might fulfil for young perpetrators, I took a step back to explore the value of interacting in public space for all young people living in Rotterdam. Therefore, the goal of the generative session was to better understand this value.

An overview of the session design is depicted in Figure 3.7 and materials designed for the session are shown in Figure 3.8.

The statements on the statement cards were:

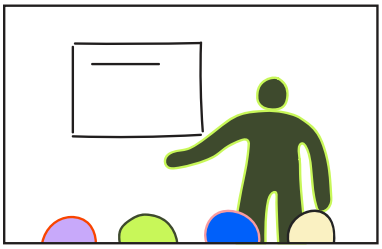
1. The public space is a place where I can be myself.
2. I think the public space is well-designed for young people like me.
3. The presence of other people makes a place in public space more pleasant.
4. Girls and boys use public space in the same way.
5. There are unwritten rules about how you are supposed to behave in public space.
6. I speak up if I see someone being harassed in public space.
7. Street harassment is a big problem for young people in Rotterdam.
8. Young people can do something themselves to counteract street harassment.

Using the statements in this sequency allowed us to first uncover general insights about how young people experience interacting in public space before discussing street harassment.

The session was meant to take 2 hours at most because I estimated that would be the maximum amount of time that the young people would be able to focus. The youth workers agreed with this. Additionally, as the participants received a 15 euros gift card for their efforts, I thought it unreasonable to take more of their time. However, in Schiebroek-Zuid, due to the group size, the session ended up taking about 2.5 hours.

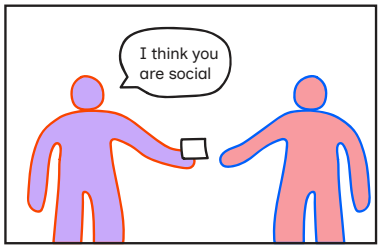
We recorded audio from the sessions and collected all created materials afterwards. Figures 3.9, 3.10, and 3.11 give an impression of what the sessions were like.

1 Introduction



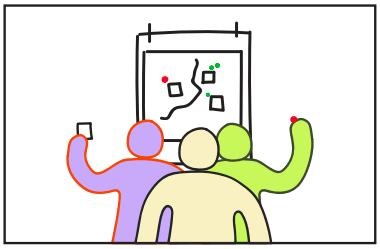
Goal: explain why we are here, inform about the goal of the session and the activities
How: presenting with slides

2 Getting to know each other



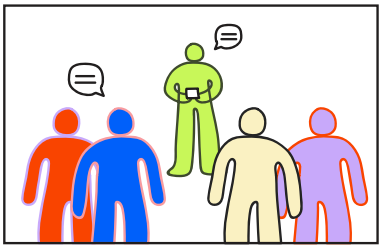
Goal: break the ice, start on a positive note
How: an introductory round in which everybody gives a 'quality card' to the person next to them

3 Map of the neighborhood



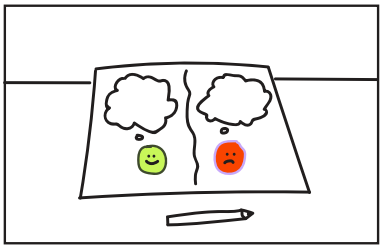
Goal: better understand how the participants use the public space
How: Using an A0 map of the area, participants use stickers and post-its to mark places they like to be, activities they do there and places they avoid. They present the outcome and we have a conversation about why this is the case.

4 Discussing statements



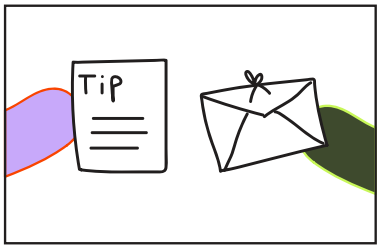
Goal: better understand why the participants use the public space in the way they do
How: Participants move across the room to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with the statements. We discuss their motivations.

5 Recalling memories



Goal: better understand what makes an interaction in public positive or negative
How: Participants draw or write a positive and a negative memory of interacting in public space using the worksheet. We share stories in the group.

6 Wrapping up

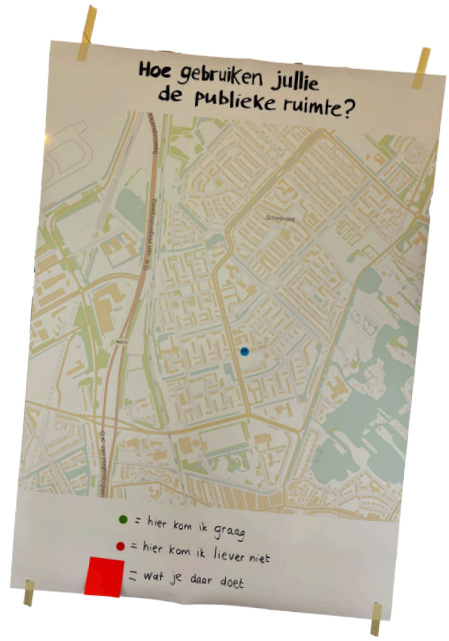


Goal: thank the participants and gather initial feedback
How: The partipants write their tips and tops on post-its and receive a giftcard for their efforts.

Figure 3.7. Overview of the generative session.

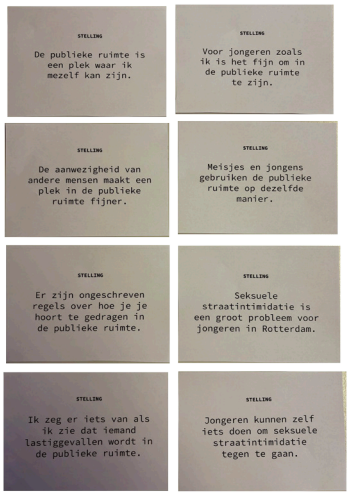
Quality cards

cards to describe someone's personality. I only included personality traits that I thought would generally be interpreted as positive.



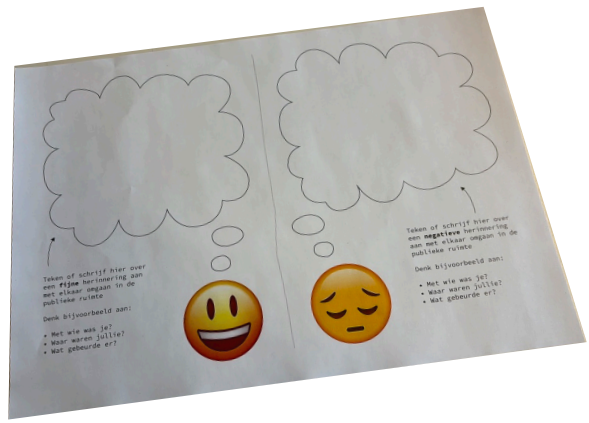
Map of the neighborhood

A0 size. Instead of printing the title and legend, I wrote them on there myself, using the power of imperfection to encourage the participants to add their own input.



Statement cards

I prepared eight of them, covering various topics: belonging and identity, youth-friendliness, social norms, gender, street harassment and youth agency. All in the context of public space of course.



Memories worksheet

A3 size. To encourage creativity, but avoid 'blank page syndrome' where the participants worry about making mistakes, I created these templates with guiding questions.

Figure 3.8. Materials created for the generative session.

Figure 3.9. Young people from Bospolder-Tussendijken during the generative session.

Figure 3.10. Young people from Schiebroek-Zuid during the generative session.

Figure 3.11. Young people from Schiebroek-Zuid presenting their map of the neighborhood.

3.1.3 Processing the results

In this paragraph I explain how the results from the generative sessions were processed. There were three key steps:

1. **Data immersion:** I immersed myself in the collected data from both sessions. I listened to the audio recordings, went through the materials made during the sessions and re-read personal reflections of the sessions.
2. **Analysis:** In an analysis session with Charlotte (DA4), we put all session materials on a wall (Figure 3.12) and started reviewing them, connecting them to parts from the transcripts and personal observations to identify insights (Figure 3.13).
3. **Identifying key themes and insights:** We identified 3 key themes: navigating the public space, access to public space and perceptions of street harassment. Each key theme is illustrated by multiple insights, of which we have 14 in total (see Figure 3.14). These insights are presented in the form of insight cards, on which the insights are supported by quotes from the sessions (see Figure 3.15). The insight cards are presented in 3.2.

Next to insights based on data collected from the generative sessions, we also learned a lot about working with young people in a participatory way. From our reflections on the sessions I distilled eight participation principles that are presented in 3.1.4.

Figure 3.12. Analysis of session materials on the wall.

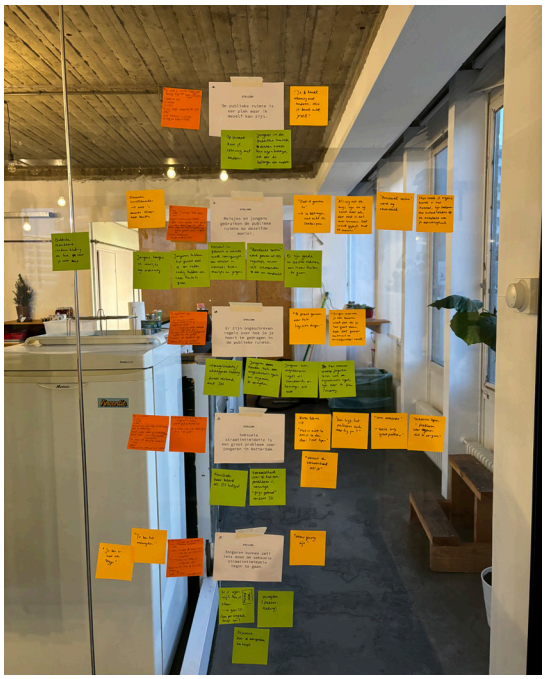


Figure 3.13. Analysis of session materials on the wall.

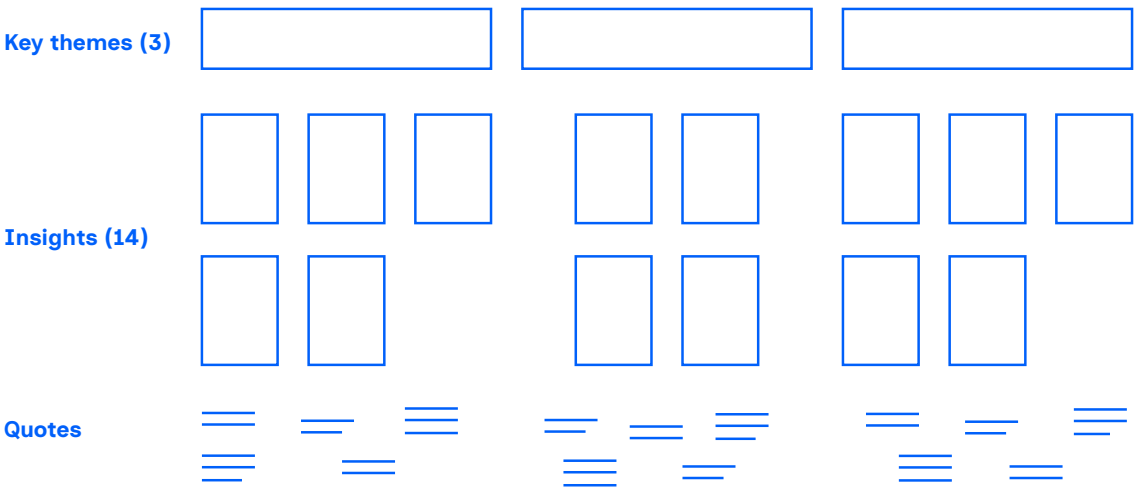


Figure 3.14. Three key themes, supported by fourteen insights, supported by quotes.

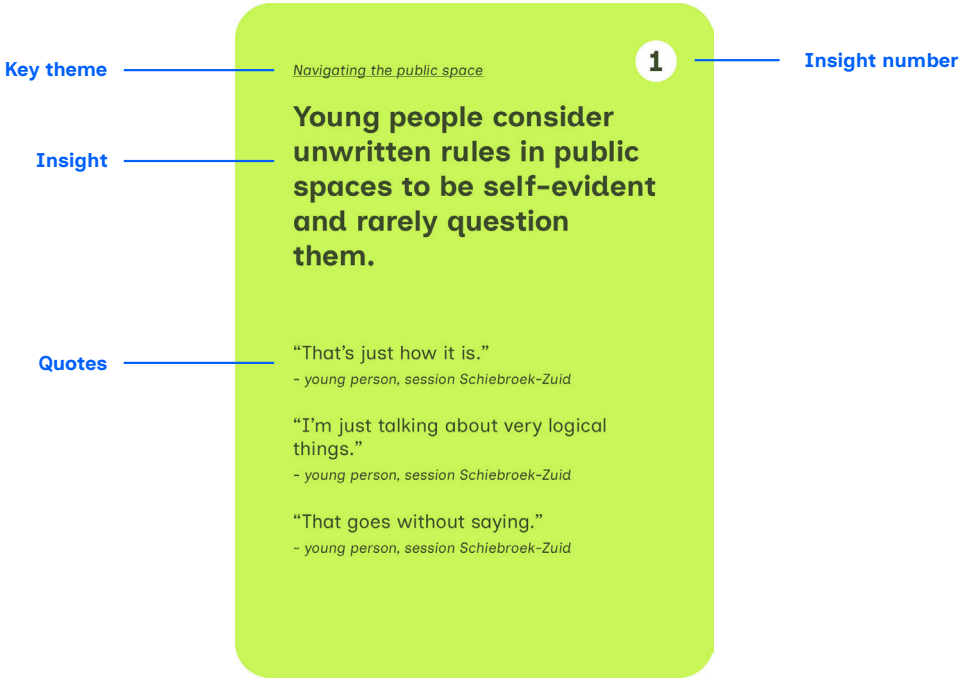


Figure 3.15. Structure of the insight cards.

3.1.4 Reflecting on the generative sessions

In this section I discuss feedback received from the young people as well as the main insights from co-evaluating the generative sessions with youth workers. Finally, I present learnings from working with young people in a participatory way in the form of 8 participation principles.

Feedback from youth

Overall, based on how engaged the young people were during the sessions and how they reacted, we concluded that the young people had a positive experience with the generative session. At the end of the session, we asked the young people to fill out a short questionnaire to gather feedback (see Appendix E for the questionnaire). All of them filled out that they left the session with a good feeling. These are some of the answers to the question 'Why do you have this feeling?':

"Because it was a nice event with the boys where we could share all sorts of things."
- Young person, Schiebroek-Zuid

"It was very educational."
- Young person, Schiebroek-Zuid

"Because it was fun and very well received by the people."
- Young person, Schiebroek-Zuid

"The ladies were very trustworthy and very sweet."
- Young person, Bospolder-Tussendijken

"Because it was very easy to express my opinion."
- Young person, Bospolder-Tussendijken

"Because I felt appreciated."
- Young person, Bospolder-Tussendijken

Co-evaluating with youth workers

A few weeks after the sessions, I revisited the youth hubs to discuss the youth workers' experiences with the session and collaboration, as well as to share and reflect on insights gained from the sessions (PM9-10), see Figures 3.16 and 3.17. To do so I brought the insight cards and I prepared questions. Full documentation of the reflective meetings with the youth workers can be found in Appendix C16.

In both Schiebroek-Zuid and Bospolder-Tussendijken, the youth workers and youth had a positive experience with the sessions and the collaboration. They appreciated the continued involvement and the sharing of insights. They thought the main value of the session for the young people was that they were actively reflecting on the reasons behind their behavior. One of them said: "They started thinking: why do they actually do what they do?"
- youth worker, Schiebroek-Zuid (PM10)

Schiebroek-Zuid

In Schiebroek-Zuid, we had ended up co-facilitating the session with one of the youth workers and the young person who usually organizes the get-togethers. This was particularly valuable because:

- The youth worker and the young person both had more 'status' and goodwill with the group than we had, so it helped with keeping everyone focused and engaged. In the co-evaluation meeting, the youth workers explained that they were surprised how open the young people were, highlighting the importance of the young person organizing and facilitating the session with us.
- It created more value for the young person. After the session, he expressed that he really enjoyed it and had learned new ways to spark meaningful conversation.
- For me, it enhanced the feeling of an equal collaboration.

There were also points for improvement. The two female youth workers pointed out that they felt a lack of opposing perspectives. The group consisted only of boys, and the

only women present were the two female youth workers and me and Charlotte, but we were not in a position to challenge certain viewpoints or ask counter questions in the way that female peers would have been able to do. However, the youth workers also agreed that including girls could have limited boys in expressing thoughts they know are not accepted by girls. For both group compositions, there were advantages and disadvantages.

The session also created value for the youth workers: it highlighted the importance of the topic and gave them new entry points for initiating specific conversations with youth.

Bospolder-Tussendijken
Overall, the session was perceived as enjoyable. The youth workers said that the youth had expressed that they enjoyed the session, found it engaging, and would like to participate in similar activities more often. The youth worker explained that at first, the youth found it a bit daunting when they heard what it would be about, as they initially thought the topic was focused on sex. The term “sexual street harassment” triggered that assumption. The youth worker then explained what the session was actually about and reassured them that participation was entirely voluntary. This put them at ease, and they became interested in the discussion. This highlights the importance of involving the youth workers thoroughly in the planning and approach of the session.

For the youth worker, the session helped putting knowledge from training into practice. She explained that by attending the session and observing how the conversation was facilitated, she gained tools to use in her own work and that it also motivated her to discuss similar topics more often.

On the next pages, I present the participation principles I distilled from reflecting on the generative sessions with Charlotte and the youth workers. In Chapter 5, you can read about how these principles inform the design proposal.

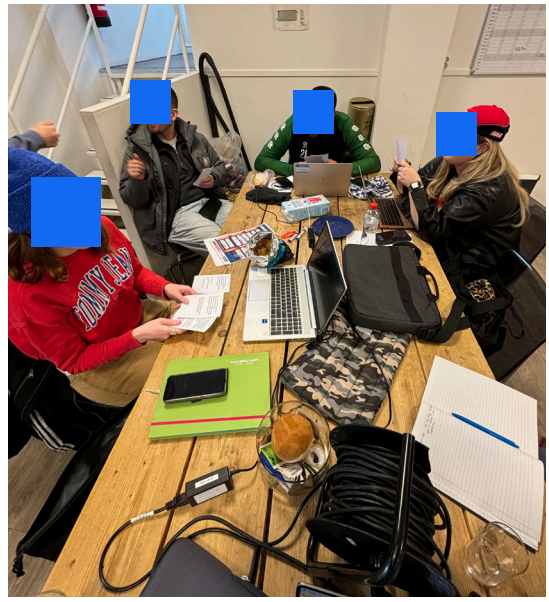


Figure 3.16. Sharing insights with youth workers.

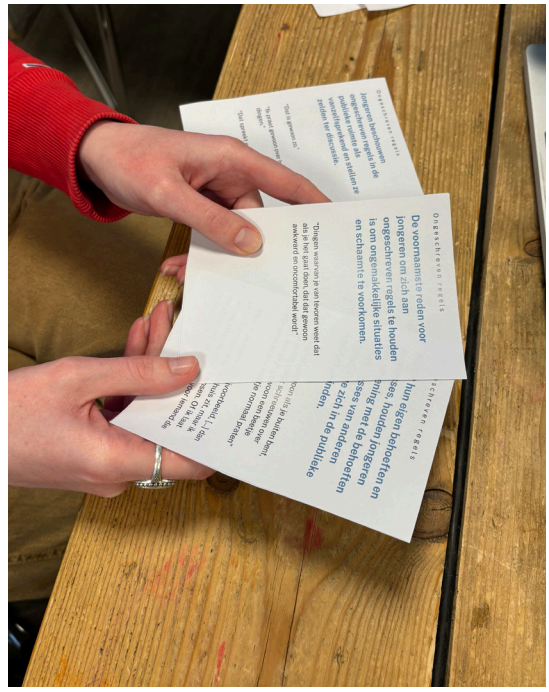


Figure 3.17. A youth worker looking at the insights.

Participation principles

Participation principle 1

Build relationships before a participatory moment

Taking time to understand the context and the youth, allows you to design activities that are more relevant and engaging for the group.

Building rapport in advance helps the youth feel more comfortable and open during the session. It helps to meet the youth in their own setting, where you are on more equal footing, and to work with existing groups, where the young people already know each other so you are the only 'new' person around.

Participation principle 2

Teamwork makes the dream work

Youth workers, familiar with the youth, can help assess whether the activities will resonate with their youth. Trust their expertise and take them along in the organization of your session. It does not only make the session better catered to the youth, but it's also fun.

Participation principle 5

Everyone is a participant

Having 'the adults' do the same activities as the young people supports having an equal playing field during the session. The youth are influenced by the youth workers anyway.

It can be helpful to have a youth worker lead an activity: as the youth trust them and look up to them, they will engage more, and you as a designer/researcher get some extra time to observe and to listen.

Participation principle 6

Make it easy to share things

Sharing experiences becomes easier when the threshold is low. Youth find it easier to participate when the topic is practical and based on their own experiences—this way, there's no "wrong" way to do it. Starting with an accessible and familiar subject, such as their own neighborhood, helps them feel more comfortable speaking and presenting. This creates a foundation for discussing more complex and sensitive topics later on. It's best to save more personal assignments for the end, when trust and a sense of safety within the group have been built.

Participation principle

3

Balance group size and composition

We've learned that the group size is very important. You want to be able to give all young people present enough attention and time to express themselves. Otherwise, they might not share much. Or, even worse, they might feel like they have to fight for your attention.

At the same time, there should not be too many 'adults' in comparison to the youth. I recommend having a maximum of 10 young people present, and having more young people than adults.

Participation principle

4

Do something active and do it together

Group activities encourage more participation and interaction, keeping the youth engaged. Individual tasks can make youth feel isolated or "put on the spot," reducing their comfort and involvement. Therefore, activities should be active and collaborative to engage the youth effectively.

Participation principle

7

Adopt an equal and open attitude

Young people are highly perceptive of the facilitator's attitude. They engage more when they feel that the facilitators see themselves as equals rather than as authority figures. Creating space for the young people leads to more meaningful interactions.

Participation principle

8

Make it worthwhile

The value of a session is twofold: the experience in the moment and the insights that emerge from it. It's crucial that the session itself holds meaning for participants—not just as a research tool, but as a valuable experience for them. Through letting go of 'extracting insights' and focusing on making new connections allows for more meaningful discoveries. And yes, it is uncomfortable—for the young people, for you, for everyone. But that discomfort is where it gets interesting!

3.2 Results from the generative sessions

In this paragraph, the key themes and insights from the generative sessions are presented in the form of insight cards. In 3.3, these insights are interpreted.

Navigating the public space

1

Young people consider unwritten rules in public spaces to be self-evident and rarely question them.

"That's just how it is."
- young person, session Schiebroek-Zuid

"I'm just talking about very logical things."
- young person, session Schiebroek-Zuid

"That goes without saying."
- young person, session Schiebroek-Zuid

Navigating the public space

2

The main reason for young people to follow unwritten rules is to avoid uncomfortable situations and embarrassment.

"Things you know in advance will just be awkward and uncomfortable if you do them."
- young person, session Schiebroek-Zuid

Navigating the public space

3

Besides their own needs and interests, young people also take into account the needs and interests of others when they are in public spaces.

"For example, when you're outside, you don't just start shouting in the street. You just whisper a bit or talk normally."
- young person, session Bospolder-Tussendijken

"For example, when I'm sitting in the subway, [...] I don't sit as if I'm at home, but I do take other people into account. Either I leave a spot open, or I stand up for someone who's pregnant."
- young person, session Schiebroek-Zuid

Navigating the public space

4

Being alone in public space without a clear reason is seen as inappropriate by young people.

"If I go to a square this summer where I've never been before, and I see forty girls standing there, dancing or whatever, I'm not just going to stand there keeping my ball up by myself."
- young person, session Schiebroek-Zuid

"But you can't go outside aimlessly."
- young person, session Bospolder-Tussendijken

Navigating the public space

5

Not only the reason for being outside but also who you are with, what you do, and how often you visit a place influence social acceptance.

"But does she come there regularly?"
- young person, session Schiebroek-Zuid

"If we're with the boys and she shows up there solo, I don't think that's okay, it's not appropriate. That's not the way."
- young person, session Schiebroek-Zuid

Access to public space

6

Young people feel that there is little to do in their neighborhood.

"It's no longer attractive for young people to be outside."
- young person, session Bospolder Tussendijken

"Back in the day, it was just, we're going outside, and then we went outside. What happened? Now it's just different. I don't go outside for no reason. I want to do something. You need to have a plan or something."
- young person, session Bospolder-Tussendijken

Access to public space

7

Young people feel that they and others need to have a reason to enter public spaces.

"Nine out of ten boys who are here have no business being here."
- young person, session Schiebroek-Zuid

"I don't just go outside for no reason. I want to have a purpose. You need to have a plan or something."
- young person, session Bospolder-Tussendijken

Access to public space

8

There is a double standard for girls being in public spaces; their presence is judged differently than that of boys, depending on factors such as clothing and time of day.

"I think as a woman, I think you wouldn't go outside half-naked because you know people are going to say something about it or comment on it." / "But as a guy, you can go outside half-naked?" / "I don't think anyone would say anything about that."

- young person, session Bospolder-Tussendijken

"I actually think it's more that, women go alone, because I think if they walk with guys, everyone will think they're a slut."

- young person, session Bospolder-Tussendijken

Access to public space

9

Differences in the use of public space by boys and girls are attributed to different interests.

"I do see them secretly looking out of their windows and stuff. They're not out on the street."

- young person, session Schiebroek-Zuid

"Of course, they don't use it in the same way. They don't play football. They do more jump rope and drawing."

- young person, session Schiebroek-Zuid

"No, I think that girls, when they go outside, want to go get something or do something, while boys just hang around with their groups in the evening."

- young person, session Bospolder-Tussendijken

"I also think that men and women can use public space in the same way. But I do think that sometimes, their interests might lie in different places."

- youth worker, session Bospolder-Tussendijken

Perceptions of street harassment

10

Young people are divided on the gravity of street harassment. This is partly because they find it unclear when something is considered street harassment, and partly due to uncertainty about the extent of the problem.

"If I can't even walk up to someone to have a conversation normally, and that's already considered harassment, then I don't think it's a big problem."

- young person, session Schiebroek-Zuid

"Yes, the fact that you can get a fine for it means it's a big problem and that it just has to stop."

- young person, session Schiebroek-Zuid

Perceptions of street harassment

11

Young people believe that street harassment does not occur in their own neighborhood because people know each other.

"If something happens here to the wrong person, everyone in the neighborhood will know about it."

- young person, session Bospolder-Tussendijken

"You're easy to find. You know they're from here. So it's easier to go somewhere else and behave like that, rather than doing it in the places where you're from."

- young person, session Bospolder-Tussendijken

Perceptions of street harassment

12

Not all young people see ‘provocative clothing’ as a reason for street harassment, but they do acknowledge that, in practice, it is connected.

“And also, for example, girls usually walk around in short clothes and stuff on the street. Yeah, of course you’re going to approach them. It’s not like you’re just going to let them walk by.”// “Yeah, but then the problem lies more with you, doesn’t it?”
- young people, session Schiebroek-Zuid

“It’s also about what you wear.”
- young person, session Schiebroek-Zuid

Perceptions of street harassment

13

Young people are divided on whether it is worthwhile to confront and hold an offender accountable.

“Yeah, if you see a girl being harassed, I hope you’re man enough to say something about it.”
- young person, session Schiebroek-Zuid

“Okay, you see those guys doing that. Yeah, you confront him. The next day, he’s just going to say it again. They’re not suddenly going to think, ‘Oh, what? Maybe he’s right.’”
- young person, session Bospolder-Tussendijken

Perceptions of street harassment

14

To counter street harassment, young people mention avoiding certain areas.

“You can avoid it yourself.”
- young person, session Bospolder-Tussendijken

“Yeah, but if you go to Kruiskade, you see that every hour. [...] So if you go to Kruiskade, you’re not going there without a reason.”
- young person, session Schiebroek-Zuid

“There’s a prejudice now, like, ‘Oh, you’re going to Kruiskade. Why are you walking there and stuff?’”
- young person, session Bospolder-Tussendijken

3.3 Young people and the public space

Now that I have explained how we have involved youth and what we have learned from that, we can move on answering this chapter's research question: "How do young people in Rotterdam experience interacting in public space?"

I do this by interpreting the results from the generative sessions (3.2) and from the interviews with 28 youth workers, conducted by Charlotte (S1). I assign meaning to them through finding relationships between them and placing them in the context of young people growing up in Rotterdam.

In 3.3.1, I argue that for young people, public space functions as a social arena in which they explore who they are through interacting with their environment. In 3.3.2, I explain that social expectations and unwritten rules are the main drivers that shape young people's behavior in public space. In 3.3.3, I point out how youth who spend time in public space are often framed negatively. In 3.3.4, I relate these social expectations and the negative framing to deeper issues of accessibility and inequality. In 3.3.5 I explain how these issues enable the perpetration of street harassment among young people, reframing young perpetrators of street harassment to young people navigating identity exploration in a complex social landscape.

3.3.1 Public space as a social arena

One thing we learned that might seem obvious, but is important to point out, is that young people are young and quite busy figuring out who they are. Preliminary findings from interviews that Charlotte van Tuijl did with 28 youth professionals (including youth workers and youth prevention officers) in Rotterdam (S1) show that youth professionals see young people mainly as developing people who are influenced by many different actors and factors, one of them even stating "actually, they are children." - youth prevention officer (JB02M, S1)

The fact that these young people are in times of rapid personal development is of great importance for the story I am about to tell. Because forming identities is not something we do on our own. Identity is not something static, it is a dynamic and interactive process (Sieckelinck & Kaulingfreks, 2022). It is the temporary result of the interplay between aligning and distancing ourselves in relation to our environment.

Therefore, I argue that public space plays an important role in young people's identity formation. Unlike home or school—where roles and expectations are more rigid—public space offers young people a chance to explore new perspectives, encounter different people, and navigate social structures with greater freedom. Without direct parental supervision, they learn to make their own decisions, negotiate social norms, and build relationships. Free time, space for experimenting and being bored is crucial for youth's development (Gray, 2023).

Concluding, for young people, public space functions as a social arena in which they explore who they are through interacting with their environment (Figure 3.18). However, in the next paragraphs, it becomes clear that the freedom to explore and develop in this social arena is often constrained.

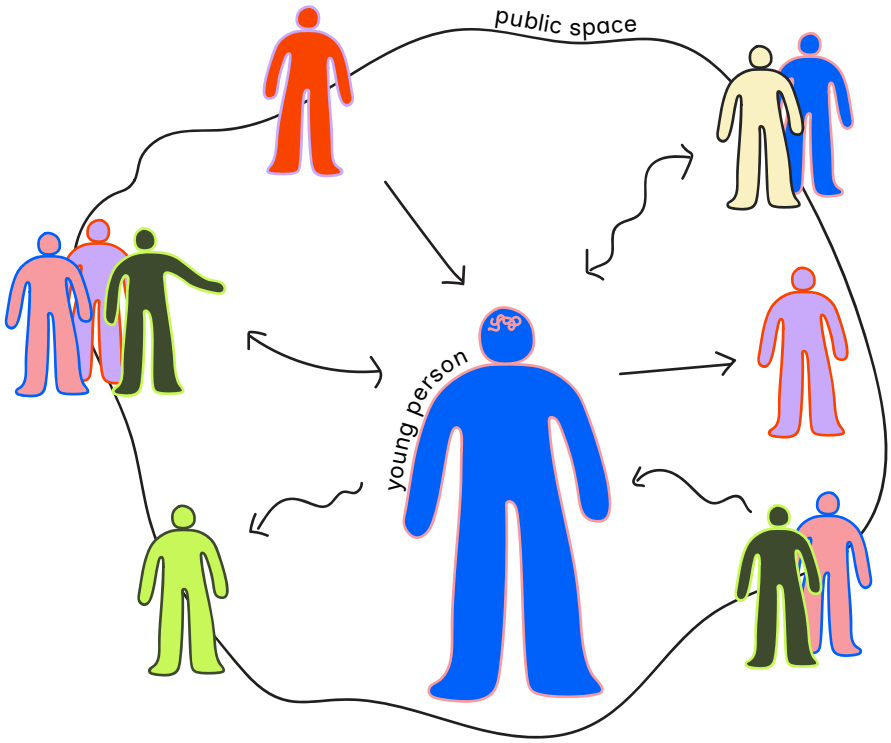


Figure 3.18. Public space as a social arena; young people explore who they are through interacting with their environment.

3.3.2 Social expectations and unwritten rules

In this section, I explain how the function of public space as a social arena for exploration is diminished by the unwritten rules that youth experience in public space.

Though young people are generally portrayed as selfish, they are not just concerned with their own desires when in public space. Insight 3, "Besides their own needs and interests, young people also take into account the needs and interests of others when they are in public spaces." captures that youth have social sensitivity when in public spaces. This is not entirely selfless: youth are not only focused on how their behavior affects others' experiences, but also on how they are perceived: "The main reason for young people to follow unwritten rules is to avoid uncomfortable situations and embarrassment." (insight 2). Interviews with youth professionals that Charlotte did (S1) taught us that because of social media, young people also feel like they are being watched more closely and therefore must 'get it right' immediately:

"But I mean, there's much more pressure behind it. These kids are much more aware of: what if it doesn't work out, what will happen then? [...] Social media adds so much more pressure, simply because people also feel like: oh, everyone is doing this, so I have to do it too." – youth worker (JW09M, S1)

This captures the desire for social acceptance and how it plays a significant role in shaping behavior. Insights 4, 5 and 6 support the point that for young people, there are many factors that influence the social acceptance of your presence in public space:

- Insight 6: "Young people feel that they and others need to have a reason to enter public spaces."
- Insight 4: "Being alone in public space without a clear reason is seen as inappropriate by young people."
- Insight 5: "Not only the reason for being outside but also who you are with, what you do, and how often you visit a place influence social acceptance."

In all, young people feel there are many unwritten rules to conform to. They aren't alone in this, as everyone encounters unspoken expectations in public. It's also not necessarily a bad thing: as a society, we need unwritten rules to provide social order and cohesion. However, freedom of movement is an important factor in growing up as an independent and autonomous individual (Boer et al., 2021). In this case, these unwritten rules seem to limit freedom of movement and hinder exploration.

What's more, the young people did not seem to question the unwritten rules at all. Insight 1, "Young people consider unwritten rules in public spaces to be self-evident and rarely question them.", relates to a point made earlier in Chapter 2, that norms are often internalized, meaning that people are often unaware of how they are socialized. This can lead to seemingly contradicting expressions: "Differences in the use of public space by boys and girls are attributed to different interests." (insight 9) , but at the same time, "There is a double standard for girls being in public spaces; their presence is judged differently than that of boys, depending on factors such as clothing and time of day." (insight 8). This shows how failing to question the unwritten rules can reinforce exclusion and inequality. In that sense, young people are both shaped by and upholding the culture of inequality in public space, judging each other based on norms that they might not now they have.

In conclusion, social expectations significantly shape how young people navigate public space. They are sensitive to their own needs and the needs of others, guided by a desire for social acceptance. Additionally, they are unaware of how deeply rooted social structures influence their behavior. Consequently, these social expectations don't only hinder exploration, but can also reinforce inequalities.

3.3.3 Negative framing of youth in public space

Another factor relevant for how young people experience interacting in public space, is the fact that youth who spend time in public space are often framed in a negative way (Figure 3.19). This is important because how your environment responds to you plays a crucial role in shaping your identity (Verhaege, 2012). Even though hanging around is essential for the development of youth (Bataljong, 2023), young people that spend time in the public space are often framed as troublemakers and viewed with suspicion, reinforcing negative stereotypes. This is related to the belief that hang youth are trouble.

At www.hangjongerenweg.nl, ('loiteringyouthaway.com') you can buy a product that emits a high-frequency sound that young people find highly irritating, or strips with spikes that make any flat surface unsuitable as hangout. Youth are not the only ones that get the signal that they are not welcome in public space. Recently, the Volkskrant published an article about 'hostile architecture', meant to keep certain groups out of the city (Hannema, 2024).

Apart from the built environment, this negative frame can also be communicated to young people through interactions with strangers. Research shows that people genuinely enjoy conversations with strangers and gain from the moments of social connection they create, yet they often worry that neither they nor their conversation partner will find the interaction enjoyable (Sandstrom & Boothby, 2020). Additionally, people are more likely to engage with those they believe share common ground with (Guéguen et al., 2011). This is related to 'stranger danger', the belief that what's known is safe. An episode of the podcast Straatvonk explains that we decide about interactions on the street in the blink of an eye (SMELT, 2021). In the podcast, the interviewer talks to over 50 young people who spend time in the public space of Rotterdam. They explain that they often feel disappointed when others take one look at them and decide to cross the street to avoid them. People can show this avoiding or rejecting behavior, like crossing the street, not making eye contact or walking

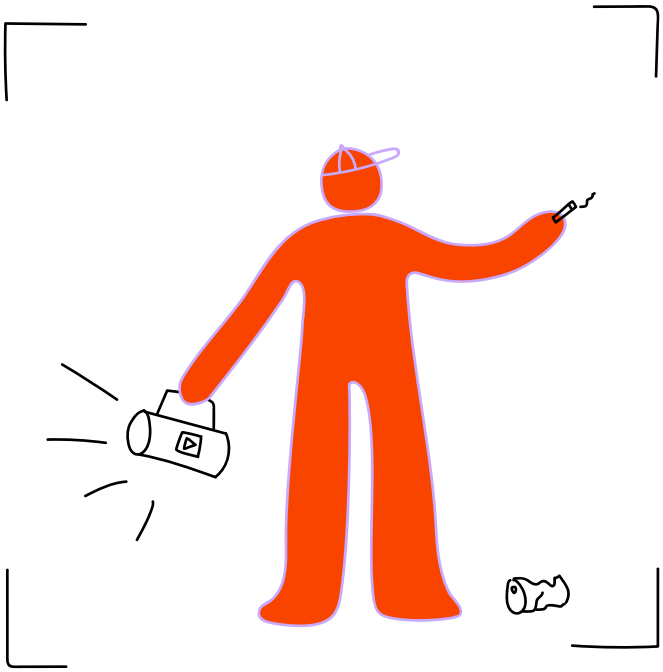


Figure 3.19. Young people that spend time in the public space are often framed as 'hangjongeren', loitering youth.

taller, to cope with discomfort in public spaces. These snap judgments and subtle social cues can contribute to making young people feel unwelcome in public space. During the generative session in Schiebroek-Zuid, when discussing the 'mapping the neighbordhood' exercise, the young people pointed out very specifically that they never went to Schiebroek-Noord. They explained that they experience racism there, saying things like, "We don't go to the other side because we feel stared at there." and "We're not the right type of Dutch." - young people, generative session Schiebroek-Zuid (PM6). Apparently, not all youth get the same reactions in public space. Structural inequalities play a significant role in how young people are perceived and treated in public spaces.

This negative framing does only make young people feel unwelcome in public space, but it also reinforces harmful stereotypes, which can have a negative impact on young people's identity formation: "Sometimes young people suffer greatly from identifications attributed to them, especially when these are labels put on them by others." (Sieckelinck & Kaulingfreks, 2022, p.18). For example, if a child is repeatedly told by their caretaker that they are shy, they may internalize that label and behave in ways that reinforce it.

In a reflective meeting with a youth worker from Schiebroek (PM9), she highlighted that in public space, young people often feel misunderstood by other people:

"I think part of it lies in the understanding of others. I think young people are often misunderstood by other people who use public spaces. So I think that's very important because I think it [understanding] also creates a safe foundation. Very often, youth is seen as troublesome, 'de jeugd van tegenwoordig', while I think that doesn't have to be the case at all, it's often a prejudice people have. Meanwhile, I see here so often that one of my youth... Recently, there was a fight outside between two little kids. S. goes outside and resolves it. The way he did it, an adult couldn't do that. So there is a lot of potential, a lot of strength, and a lot of love in these young people. So I think they just need to... people just need to be more understanding. Of course, young people can also be troublesome, but they are in a developmental phase. And mischief is simply part of growing up."
– youth worker Bospolder-Tussendijken (PM9)

To conclude, the negative framing of young people who spend time in public space undermines the potential of the public space as social arena. On the contrary: through experiencing reactions of disapproval, public space becomes a site where young people are confronted with structural inequalities.

3.3.4 Who gets to be in public? Accessibility and inequality

In this section, I relate the social expectations and negative framing that youth experience in public to deeper issues of accessibility and inequality.

Verhaege (2012) states that the way your environment reacts to you has decisive effects on your identity. The effect of the reflections you receive is even measurable in your brain structures.

In the previous sections, I explained that the important function of public space as a social arena, in which youth can explore who they are through interacting with their environment, is diminished. Social expectations, heightened by social media, constrain young people in exploring and their presence is framed negatively. However, not all youth experience the same social expectations or get framed in the same way.

This highlights a deeper issue: not only do unwritten rules and social expectations shape young people's experience in public space, but structural factors also determine who gets to be present and how. Some young people have little choice in whether they spend time in public space, while others face restrictions—girls, for instance, are often discouraged or even forbidden from being outside freely. Family circumstances also play a role; in large households, private space may be limited, making public space a necessity. Meanwhile, not everyone has access to alternative indoor spaces for leisure, such as a gaming console at home.

Also, public spaces themselves are limited in their offerings: "Young people feel that there is little to do in their neighborhood." (insight 9). At the same time, insight 4 states: "Young people feel that they and others need to have a reason to enter public spaces." If these spaces lack meaningful activities but young people still feel pressure to justify their presence, then the accessibility of public space for all youth comes into question. This suggests that the urban gender gap among youth is a symptom of public spaces failing to meet the needs of young people as a whole.

3.3.5 Reframing young perpetrators

Through investigating how young people experience interacting in public space, we have found out that while public space should function as a social arena, in reality, it is a site where exclusion and discrimination play out. In this paragraph, I argue that this contributes to street harassment behavior.

Considering all these structural factors influencing how youth experience interacting in public space, it's no wonder that young people are grappling with the question of who is responsible for (addressing) street harassment. Insight 11, "Young people believe that street harassment does not occur in their own neighborhood because people know each other." captures a belief that familiarity in a neighborhood reduces harassment, suggesting community responsibility. However, insight 13, "Young people are divided on whether it is worthwhile to confront and hold an offender accountable.", questions the effectiveness of individual actions from within that same community. Insight 14 "To counter street harassment, young people mention avoiding certain areas.", shifts responsibility to targets, whereas insight 12 "Not all young people see 'provocative clothing' as a reason for street harassment, but they do acknowledge that, in practice, it is connected." challenges victim blaming by capturing the perception that clothing and street harassment are related, but that type of clothing does not justify the perpetration of street harassment.

It's possible that young people's struggle with this question is related to the grey area's surrounding street harassment behavior: "Young people are divided on the gravity of street harassment. This is partly because they find it unclear when something is considered street harassment, and partly due to uncertainty about the extent of the problem." (insight 10). These grey areas make it hard to hold perpetrators accountable, but also to address the issue of street harassment with young people. In the reflective meetings (PM9-10), one youth worker from Schiebroek-Zuid highlighted the role of division around this topic, theorizing that that is what makes it so hard to address it with youth and stating "The unwritten rules are unwritten for a reason." (i.e., they are not that black & white). In Bospolder-Tussendijken, the youth worker noted that even in training programs for youth workers, there is still a lack of clarity on this issue.

I wonder: if norms are so deeply ingrained, can we truly blame young people for following them? If we cross the street when seeing a group of young people hanging out, can we expect them to feel positive about themselves? If there are so many rules to conform to and no space to be, then how much agency do young people truly have over shaping how they behave in public space (Figure 3.20).

In sociology, this is called the structure-agency-debate (Walsh, 1998): do humans have a certain level of autonomy in their actions, or are they driven to conform by dominant social forces that influence their behavior? Asking this question, also means asking the next one: Can we hold young people accountable for perpetrating street harassment?

This is not a question that I like to ask. In fact, it causes internal friction and writing about this makes me feel uncomfortable and intrigued at the same time.In a way, questioning the accountability of perpetrators of street harassment, feels contradicting to the feminist values that I have and that I say I am taking along into this project. Isn't feminism about holding people accountable and dismantling

power structures? Can I make space for the social structures enabling street harassment and condemn this behavior at the same time? Aren't these mutually exclusive? After all, feminism is also about healing and acknowledging that no one is better off under the patriarchy. Is this what systemic designers mean when they tell me to 'embrace complexity and plurality'?

Perhaps the question is not whether these young people are accountable for their behavior. Perhaps the question should be whether that is the right question to ask. Because we already know that focusing on the negative is not something that works. We also know that the negative, in this case, is a grey area. What exactly would we want to achieve by holding them accountable for something so vague? Rigidly labeling them as perpetrators, when the behavior itself is not so black and white at all? Perhaps the question we should ask is: what kind of framing would help us out of there? What could we do that will show us the way to change?

I have been in the context of these youth, I have gotten to know them, and I have spoken to them about street harassment. Though some of them expressed themselves in ways that I would call sexist, none of them struck me as having the intention to do harm to another. Moreover, they often don't even know why they behave in the way they do, stating things like 'that's just how it is' aligning oneself with someone else's opinion. All those social structures highlighted in Chapter 2, are not things that people are necessarily aware of. Which makes sense, because the whole point of those structures is that they are invisible. Additionally, it's unclear what street harassment is, because perceptions of certain behaviors are influenced greatly by many contextual factors. We can't really tell them: this is okay, this is not. In fact, not even this role of the perpetrator is rigid. Previously addressed in Challenge 1 (2.4.1), seeing or experiencing perpetration of street harassment can increase likelihood of perpetrating it yourself. Bystanders and targets can become perpetrators and vice versa, making it unclear who we are even talking about when we talk about perpetrators. All of this has led me to believe that these young people are not trying to sustain the patriarchy through monopolizing the streets.

Perhaps they are just exploring who they are in quite a complex social landscape. In other words, they are still figuring out who they are, and for some youth, perpetrating street harassment is part of that. When I think of it now, it makes sense to me that if there is no space for you to be, that you conform to what is already there: a culture of inequality.

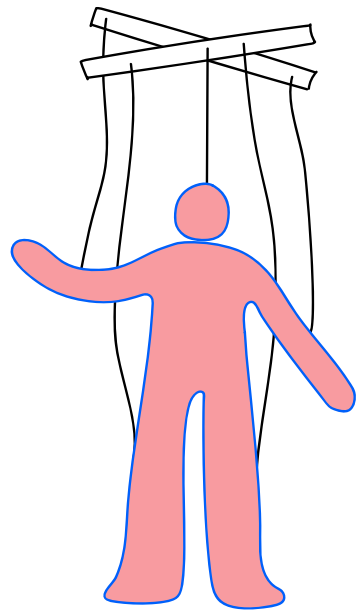


Figure 3.20. Structure vs. agency.

3.4 Moving on

The goal of this chapter was to answer the research question: “How do young people in Rotterdam experience interacting in public space?”

Through delving into the lives of young people living in Rotterdam, we uncovered that a key value of interacting in public space lies in identity exploration. Because identity is developed in interaction with your environment, public space functions as a social arena and plays an important role in providing an environment to explore. But, resulting from a lack of accessibility, agency and ownership in regard to their environment, young people conform to the status quo: a culture of inequality, in which street harassment is normal.

I started the project with a focus on youth and on the perpetrator perspective. In my attempts to take that perspective, my own perspective on the perpetrator has changed. I now frame these perpetrators as young individuals who are navigating identity exploration in a complex social landscape. That does not mean I condone the perpetration of street harassment, or that I am refraining from holding perpetrators of street harassment accountable. It means that framing the issue like this offers a possible way out of this situation. Even though street harassment behavior is wrong, we have learned that focusing on the negative does not work. So, what if we focus on the positive and try to make space for young people instead of restricting them?

In their book Speelruimte voor Identiteit (Room for Identity Exploration), Sieckelinck & Kaulingfreks (2022) state: “*Sustainable behavioral change can rarely be achieved without constructive identity formation, which is not solely the responsibility of young people but requires support from their environment.*” (p.30). So, say we now see young people as navigating identity exploration in a complex social landscape. Then what role can the public space play in supporting them in forming their identity in a more constructive way? In the next chapter, we delve into this.

Chapter 3: Key take-aways

‘How do young people in Rotterdam experience interacting in public space?’

- Young people are in times of rapid personal development. For them, public space functions as a social arena in which they explore who they are through interacting with their environment.

- Social expectations significantly shape how young people navigate public space. They feel there are many unwritten rules to conform to. As they are unaware of how deeply rooted social structures influence their behavior, these social expectations don’t only hinder exploration, but can also reinforce inequalities.

- Youth who spend time in public space are often framed in a negative way. This negative framing does only make young people feel unwelcome in public space, but it also reinforces harmful stereotypes, which can have a negative impact on young people’s identity formation. Additionally, it undermines the potential of the public space as social arena. Through experiencing reactions of disapproval, public space becomes a site where young people are confronted with structural inequalities, that also determine who gets to be present and how.

- I questioned whether young people have enough agency in the public place to be held accountable for following ingrained social norms, theorizing that perhaps they are just exploring who they are in quite a complex social landscape and don’t feel the possibility of doing anything other than conforming to what is already there: a culture of inequality, in which street harassment is normal.

- In any case, rigidly labeling individuals as perpetrators in a behavior that is influenced by many factors may not lead to effective change.

4) Envisioning it otherwise: from loitering youth to co-creators

This chapter represents the 'What can we do about it?'-phase of the report. In this chapter, the aim is to see how the reframing young perpetrators of street harassment to young people navigating identity exploration in a complex social landscape opens up new possibilities to change the current situation into a more desirable one. This chapter answers the research question:

'How might we leverage the public space in Rotterdam to support young people in forming their identities in a constructive way?'

In 4.1, I use leverage point theory to argue that we should give youth more agency over their environment. In 4.2, I propose a corresponding design goal.

This chapter is informed by academic literature and insights as described in the previous chapters.

What is going on? | What is that really about? | **What can we do about it?** | How can we design for that? | So what?

4.1 From loitering youth to co-creators

The initial goal of this project is to design for understanding and reducing street harassment behavior in Rotterdam. Through many activities, including involving youth from Rotterdam in exploring the social structures surrounding street harassment behavior, we uncovered that public space plays an important role in young people's development, because youth form their identity through interacting with their environment. However, in the current situation, the public space is not very supportive of this ongoing identity formation process. This is because this environment constrains young people in exploring and frames them in a negative way, highlighting issues of accessibility. This leads to questions about how much agency young people truly have over shaping their behavior in public space and, subsequently, to what extent we can hold young people accountable for it. It makes sense: if you don't have the power to change a situation, you adapt to the situation. In this case, that means complying to the dominant culture in which street harassment is an everyday matter. Combining this with the fact that with young people, focusing on the negative is ineffective, and the negative in this case is not so black and white, led to the realization that a more positive and supportive approach is necessary. In that sense, the urban gender gap among youth is a reflection of a society that fails to meet the needs of all young people.

methodology

Designs that aim to drive a shift in a system often build on the idea of leverage points (Van Der Bijl-Brouwer, 2023). Leverage points are key spots within a complex system where a small change in one thing can trigger widespread transformation (Meadows, 1999). At this point in the process, I went looking for leverage points by revisiting the challenges from Chapter 2.

Remember the apple tree from Chapter 2, depicting an overview of identified challenges in tackling street harassment (Figure 4.1)? It showed how the challenges are interrelated and persistent: Criminalization is a path we dismissed as a sustainable way forward (Challenge 4). Youth experience pressure (Challenge 5) to conform to the status quo. Deeply rooted social structures (Challenge 2 & 3) shape the status quo, and the status quo in turn reinforces these entrenched ideas (Challenge 1). Many efforts have been made to change the status quo, so that does not represent an unmet need in the field. Moreover, altering entrenched mental models is a challenging task and raising awareness can sometimes backfire (see. 2.4.1).

In this case, if a lack of agency compels young people to conform to the status quo, then the solution must lie in either changing the status quo or giving young people more agency (Figure 4.2).

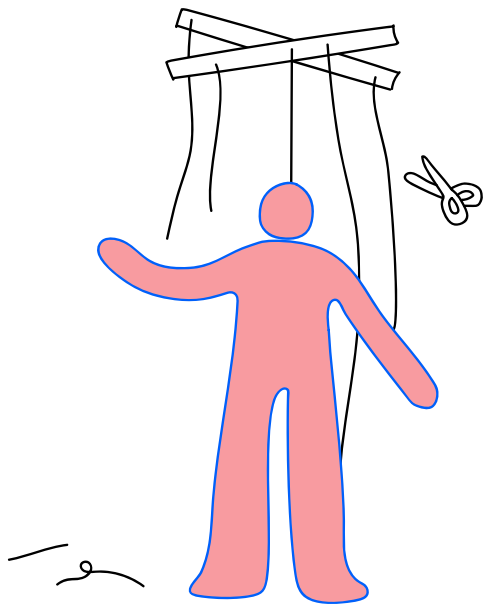


Figure 4.2. Giving youth more agency.

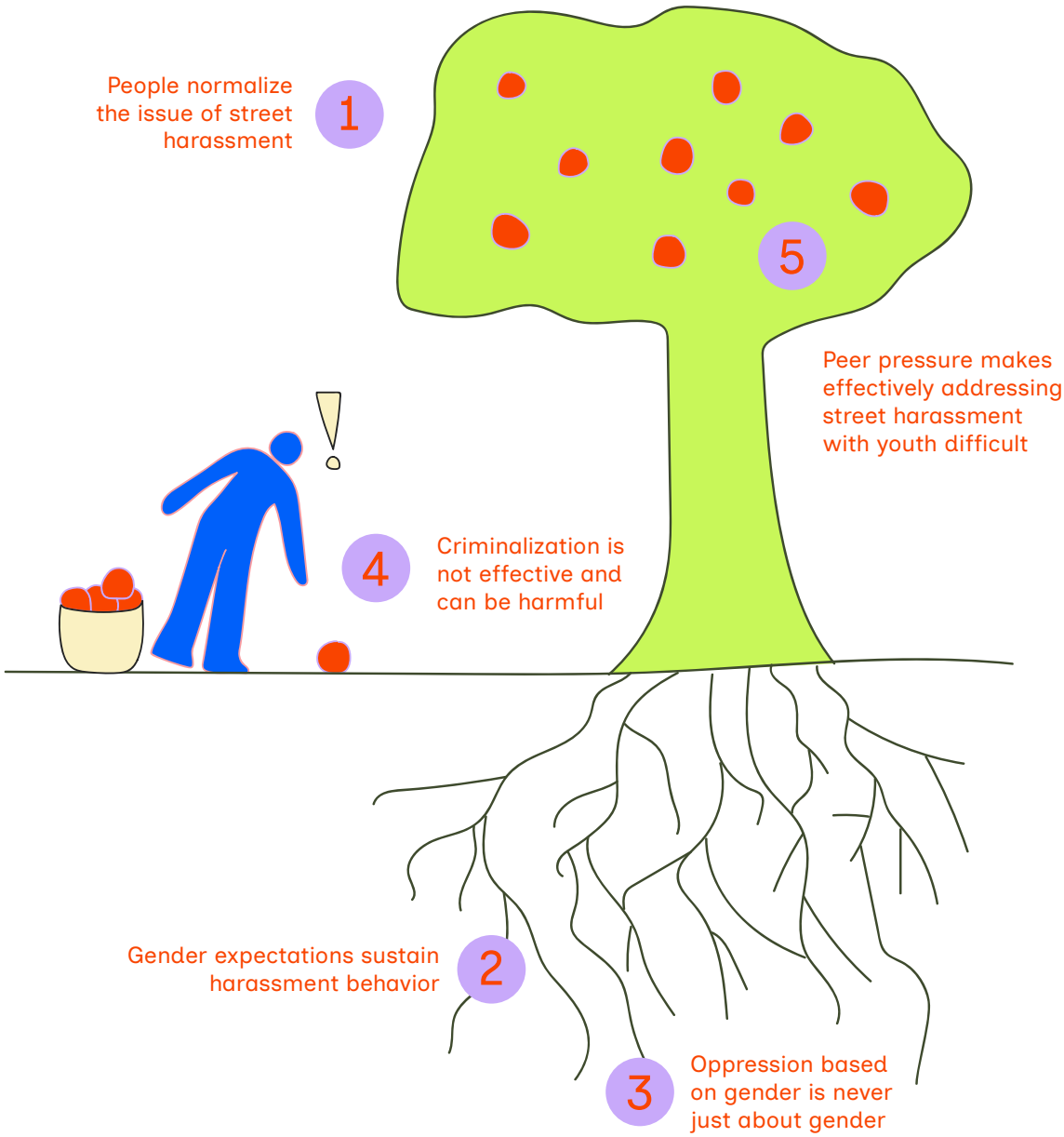


Figure 4.1. The apple tree shows how the challenges to tackling street harassment are interrelated.

The choice seems clear. The more promising approach is to focus on giving young people more agency over their environment. Making space for the voices of young people allows them to actively shape public spaces, ensuring that these spaces meet their needs and thus better support them in forming their identities.

Perhaps even more valuable than this outcome is the approach, participatory involvement in decision-making. We've learned that simply taking young people seriously and involving them in the process significantly increases their sense of ownership—of the spaces they inhabit and the decisions that affect them. This approach aligns with design justice and participatory principles, which advocate for empowering those who are most affected by a situation to take part in creating solutions and emphasize how everybody is the expert on their own experience.

In this way, participation is not just the means to an end but the strategy itself, creating a process where youth can gain empowerment through direct involvement and inviting them to become co-creators of society.

4.2 Design goal: Towards ownership of the public space

Throughout this project, two key shifts in thinking have reshaped our approach to addressing street harassment. First, rather than viewing young perpetrators solely as wrongdoers, we now understand them as young people navigating identity exploration in a complex social environment. This reframing does not excuse harmful behavior but recognizes the deeper social structures that shape it.

Second, instead of focusing on changing societal norms—an approach that is often slow and met with resistance—we shift our attention to increasing young people's agency over their surroundings. By giving them a voice and the ability to shape public spaces, we create an environment that better supports their identity formation. Changing the soil and cultivating agency (Figure 4.3) not only addresses the root cause of street harassment behavior – not having space to do anything other than conform to what is already there - but also empowers youth to take ownership of their public spaces.

The answer to the chapter's research question, **"How might we leverage the public space in Rotterdam to support young people in forming their identities in a constructive way?"**, therefore lies in taking youth seriously and giving them greater agency over their surroundings. If we want to leverage the public space in Rotterdam to support young people in forming their identities in a constructive way, then we should involve the people it is about in shaping this public space.

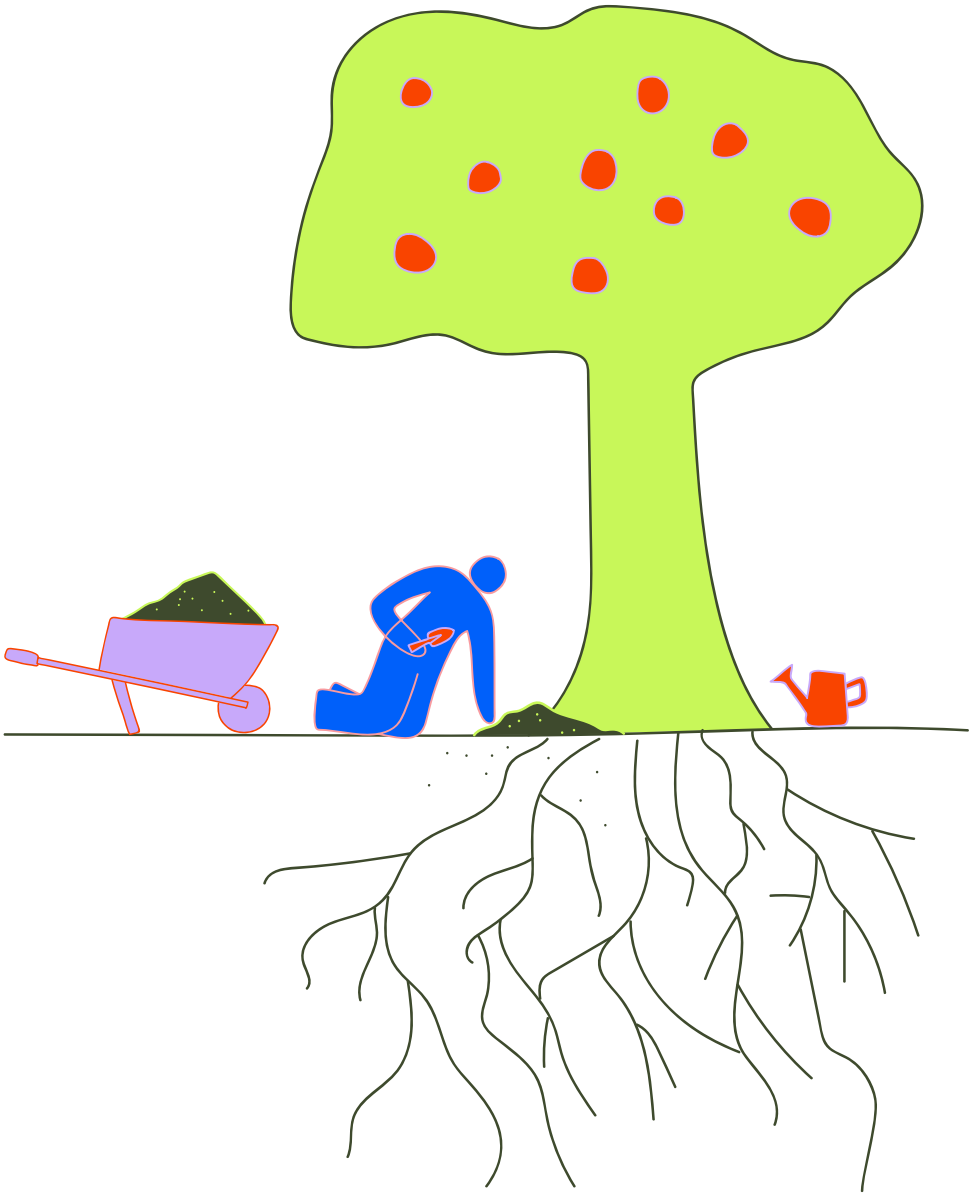


Figure 4.3. Changing the tree's soil affects the entire ecosystem.

These insights allow me to specify the goal of this project - to design for understanding and reducing street harassment behavior in Rotterdam - to the following design goal:

to design for a strategic approach that involves youth in shaping inclusive and supportive public spaces in Rotterdam, enabling them to take ownership of their lives and surroundings.

A participatory approach is essential for achieving this goal to ensure that young people will not just be passive recipients of decisions made on their behalf but active contributors. In that sense, this approach goes beyond merely providing physical spaces for young people; it emphasizes the importance of giving them the opportunity to influence how those spaces are designed and used, reinforcing the agency that I argue is crucial for long-term change and therefore offering a more sustainable path forward.

Also, having gained experience with involving young people in a participatory way throughout this project, we can use that knowledge and experience to design an approach that is fitting for young people.

In the next chapter, we will explore how to create such an approach.

Chapter 4: Key take-aways

‘How might we leverage the public space in Rotterdam to support young people in forming their identities in a constructive way?’

- If a lack of agency over the public space compels young people to conform to the status quo, then the solution lies in increasing young people’s agency over their surroundings.

- This approach not only addresses the root cause of street harassment behavior – not having space to do anything other than conform to what is already there - but also empowers youth to take ownership of their public spaces and to create environments that better suit their needs.

- The following design goal was formulated: ***to design for a strategic approach that involves youth in shaping inclusive and supportive public spaces in Rotterdam, enabling them to take ownership of their lives and surroundings.***

- A participatory approach is essential for achieving this goal, because taking youth seriously increases their sense of ownership.

5) Cultivating agency: reshaping interactions with youth about their environment

This chapter marks the start of the 'How can we design for that?'-phase of this report. A lack of agency over their surroundings restricts young people's room for exploration in public spaces and drives them to conform to harmful existing norms. Therefore, I aim to increase the agency young people in Rotterdam have over their environment by involving them in shaping the public space. This chapter investigates how to do that, answering the research question:

"How might we involve young people in Rotterdam in shaping inclusive and supportive public spaces?"

The answer to this question should address the two main activities mentioned: involving and shaping. In 5.1, I focus on involving. I elaborate on current efforts to involve young people in shaping the public space. I argue that in order to do so, we must redesign how we interact with them about this, proposing strategies for more meaningful involvement. In 5.2, I focus on shaping. I explain why shaping public space requires thinking about alternative futures and I suggest exploring how speculative design can play a role in shaping public spaces with youth. I end the chapter by summarizing the insights into design requirements for the design proposal presented in Chapter 6.

This chapter is informed by academic literature and insights from various activities: generative sessions with young people in Rotterdam (PM6, PM8), interviews (I2, I5-6), observations (AA78)

What is going on? | What is that really about? | What can we do about it? | **How can we design for that?** | So what?

5.1 Involving young people

This paragraph focuses on involvement. In 5.1.1, I elaborate on current efforts to involve young people in shaping the public space. In 5.1.2, I argue that we must rethink these current practices, proposing strategies for more meaningful involvement.

5.1.1 Current efforts

The aim of this section is to elaborate on current efforts to involve young people in shaping the public space. I highlight two main issues: exclusionary participation and a lack of meaningful youth participation.

The municipality of Rotterdam is the owner and manager of public space (Gemeente Rotterdam, n.d.). Being the property owner, the municipality is a key stakeholder in shaping the public space. As such, it holds the authority to initiate, fund, and steer development and interventions in public space. However, the municipality rarely designs or executes these interventions itself. Instead, it often commissions external parties — such as architecture firms, urban development agencies, housing corporations, cultural institutions, and social design agencies — to carry out specific assignments (Figure 5.1). These 'public space actors' operate within the frameworks set by municipal policy, yet they are the ones translating broad ambitions into concrete actions. This outsourcing creates a layered dynamic: while the municipality sets the agenda, external parties play a crucial role in how participation processes are designed and how youth involvement is actually shaped on the ground.

In recent years, there has been increasing policy attention to the social importance

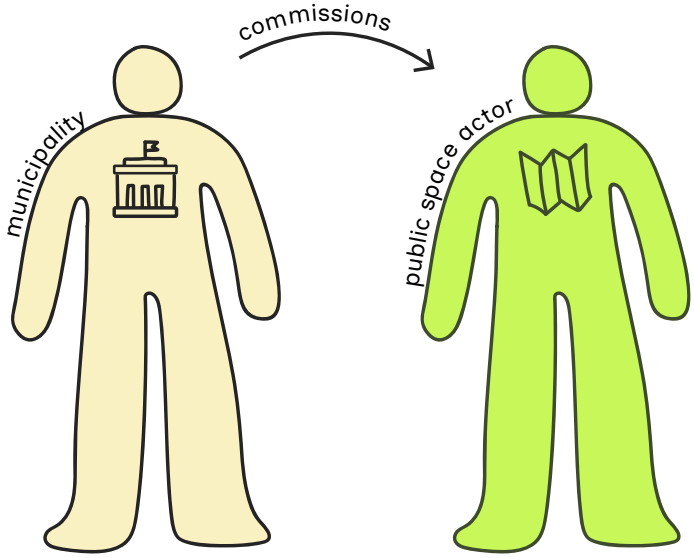


Figure 5.1. The municipality often commissions external parties for specific tasks regarding public space development.

of the living environment. Since January 1, 2024, the 'Omgevingswet' ('Surroundings Law') mandates local governance to 'do' in participation about the environment (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2023). This means that when a municipality is preparing for example a vision or plan for a certain area, they are obligated to communicate beforehand how citizens can engage in conversation about it. However, the law does not define *how* this should be done. Without clear guidelines, participatory efforts risk giving mainly the 'usual suspects' a voice, while many others, including young people, are left out. Often, we talk about youth, instead of engaging in conversation with them (Figure 5.2).

This is illustrated in a study by Middendorp et al., (2023) in which it becomes clear that especially young people are often sidelined in shaping their environment. They state: *"While co-creation and a sense of ownership are crucial for sustainable spatial and social development, participation is often limited to adults, who are engaged through public consultations or neighborhood associations. Young people, on the other hand, rarely have a voice. In fact, in discussions about livability, they are often framed as a source of nuisance that needs to be controlled, rather than as equal partners in shaping their communities."* (p. 4, translated from Dutch). This is not surprising, considering the findings from 3.2.3 about negative framing of young people who spend time in public space. When youth are included, these are often 'professional youth' – the small group that does know the system and knows where to share their opinion (Figure 5.3). As they dominate the discussions, others are rarely reached. This results in public spaces that only cater to the needs of select groups.

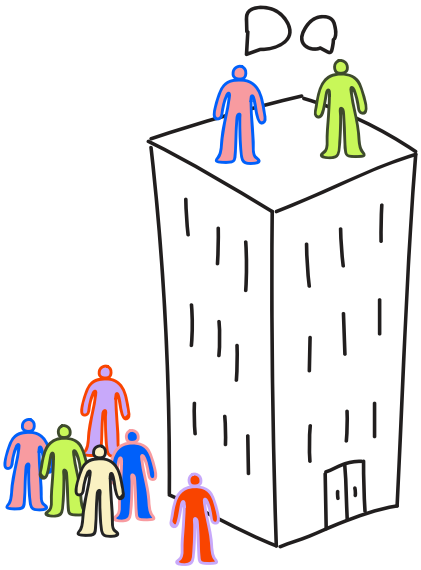


Figure 5.2. Talking about youth instead of with them.

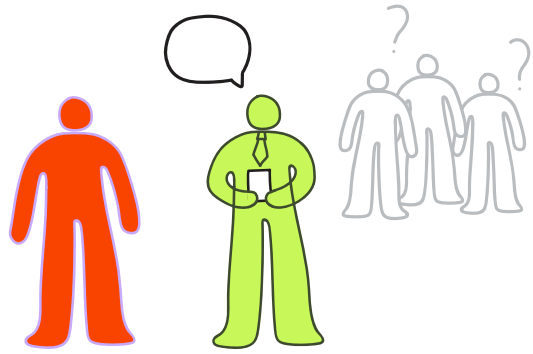


Figure 5.3. 'Professional' youth.

Current youth participation practices often fail to engage youth in a meaningful way. In her graduation project, Loeffen (2024) uncovered obstacles and tensions that policy advisors experience regarding youth participation. One key challenge is that participation is often treated as a 'check in the box' formality, aimed at gaining insights quickly (Figure 5.4). In doing so, policy advisors tend to act on assumptions about youth needs instead of seeing the moment as a genuine opportunity for youth influence. This is echoed by Osinga (2024). Having studied the same topic, she highlights the importance of genuine interactions and letting go of prejudices.

Along the same lines, at a networking event on meaningful youth participation (AA7), it became clear that current youth participation initiatives are frequently held in locations that are appreciated by or convenient for policymakers rather than for youth themselves, with incentives like free pizza used to attract participants (Figure 5.5). This not only raises the threshold for partaking in the participatory moment but also reinforces an unequal dynamic in which young people are invited as guests rather than recognized as equal collaborators.

Additionally, Loeffen (2024) found that many feel uncertain about how to engage with young people. As a result, policy advisors often resort to something they know well: talking (Figure 5.6). This does not align with the preferences or communication styles of young people, making the experience unappealing and ineffective. Roggeveen (2024) graduated on the topic of youth participation in youth hubs and revealed that 'thinking along' still appears to be seen as something serious, pointing out a lack of methodological approaches that allows youth to freely contribute their ideas in a collaborative setting and express themselves in their own way.

Figure 5.4. 'Harvesting' insights.

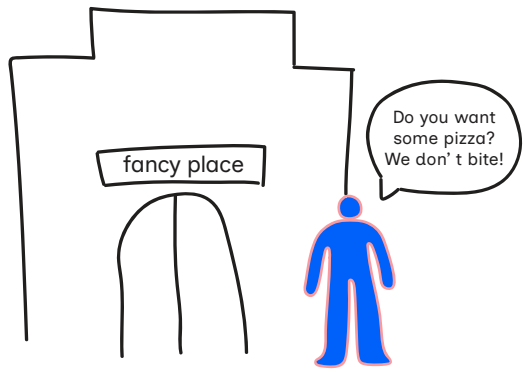


Figure 5.5. Inviting youth as guests.

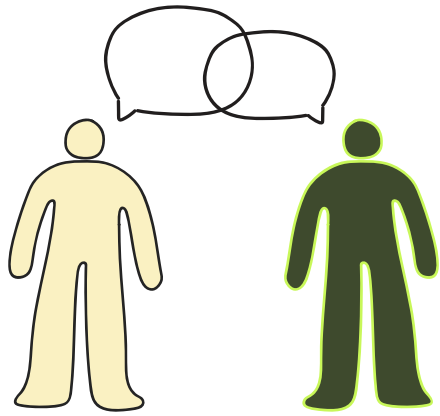


Figure 5.6. Using formal, spoken language.

5.1.2 Rethinking how we interact with youth about their environment

Existing participatory efforts that concern the public space often fail to engage young people meaningfully or to include them at at all. Thus, involving youth in shaping the public space requires an approach that is outreaching to diverse groups. But that won't be enough. Throughout this project, we have learned that youth participation is a field of its own: Creating space for young people to sit at the decision-making or policy table requires more than just an empty chair (Spijkers, 2024). Therefore the approach should also be specifically tailored to young people. In other words: how we interact with young people is key to their involvement.

This means that if we want to change some of the interactions between youth and their environment, such as street harassment behavior, we have to change how we interact with youth about their environment (Figure 5.7). The question is how to do this in practice. What is the desired way of interacting? In Figures 5.8–5.11, I propose four strategies to rethink how we involve young people. For each strategy, I explain how current practices should be changed.

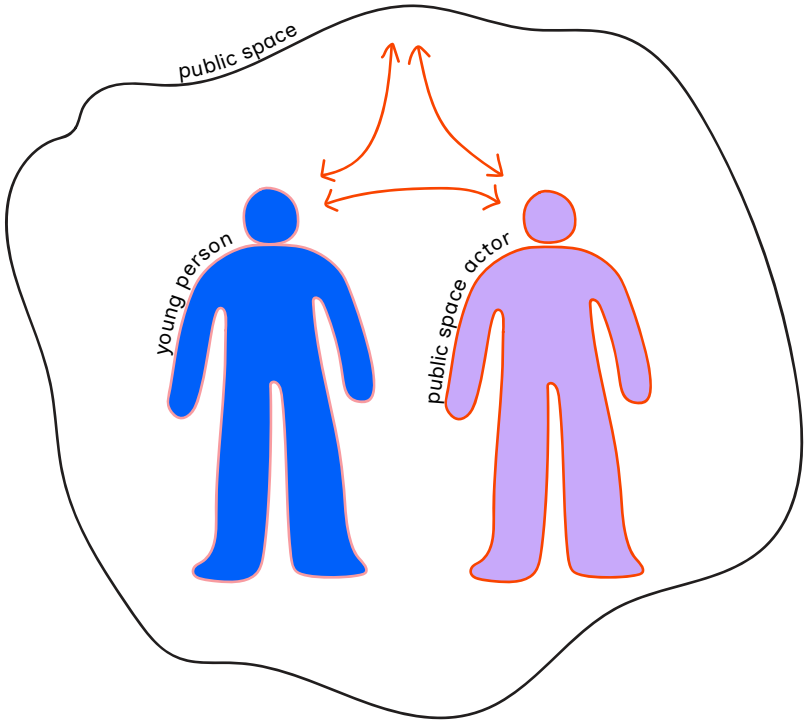


Figure 5.7. Interacting with youth about their environment.

Strategies for meaningfully involving young people

1) Who's included?

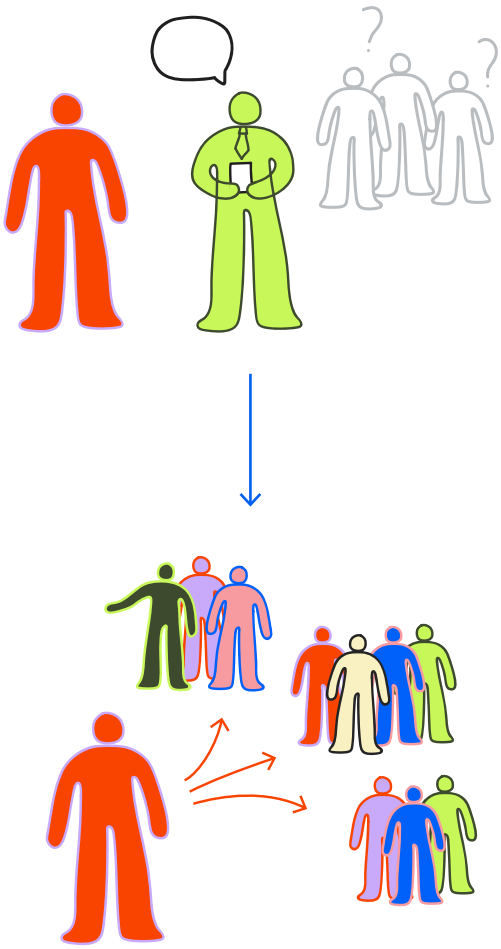


Figure 5.8. From using 'professional' youth to actively involving diverse groups of youth.

Move beyond relying solely on the 'professional' youth who already know how to navigate systems, and instead actively involve a broader range of youth from different backgrounds and experiences. For example, through youth hubs, schools and sports clubs. This will result in more inclusive and representative public spaces.

2) Doing what?

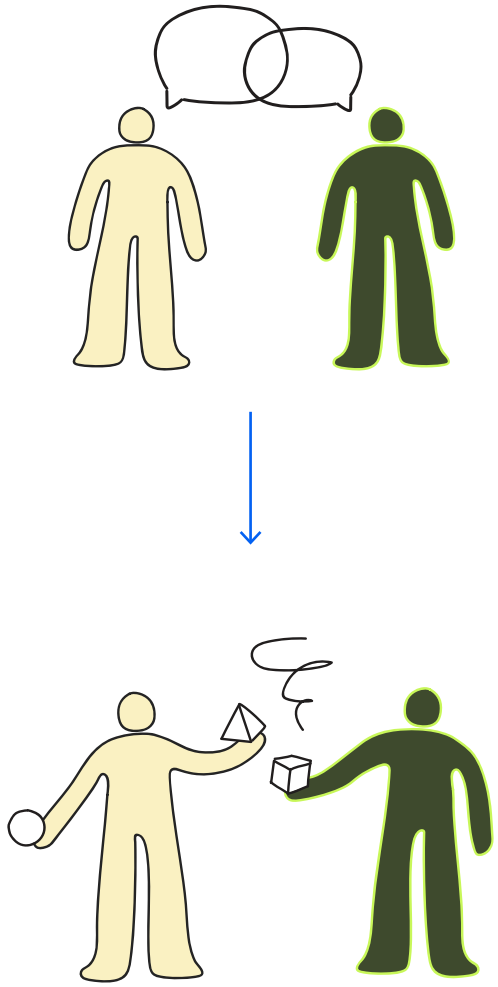


Figure 5.9. From formal, spoken language to shared activities.

Move away from traditional, formal communication methods and instead use collaborative, interactive activities that allow youth to express themselves freely and make the process more accessible and easier to engage in for young people. The type of activity should depend on the group - think of (or ask!) what they would find interesting.

3) Where?

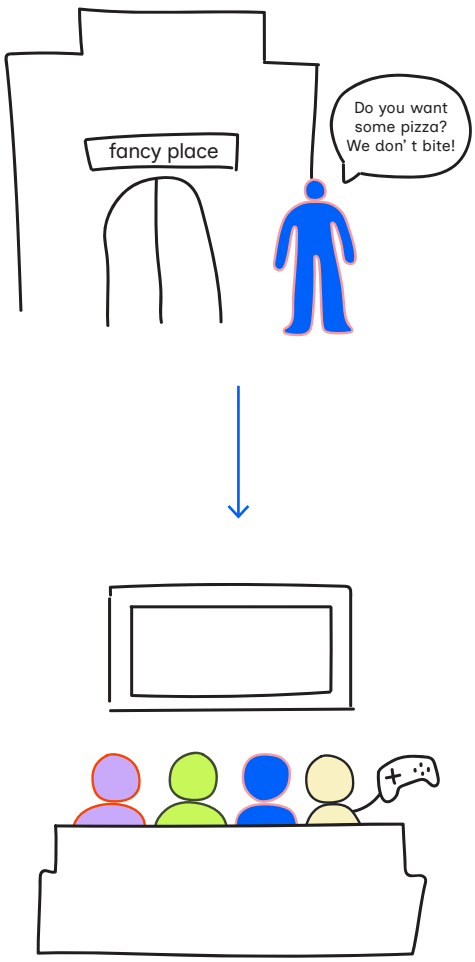


Figure 5.10. From inviting youth as guests to meeting them on their terms.

Make participation inviting and relevant by meeting youth in informal spaces that they are familiar with. Meeting them where they naturally gather and are comfortable, lowers the barrier to participate and creates more room for meaningful interaction. The moment should also be short and too the point, according to YOUNG010, youth participation initiative in Rotterdam (Stichting LOKAAL et al., 2019)

4) Why?

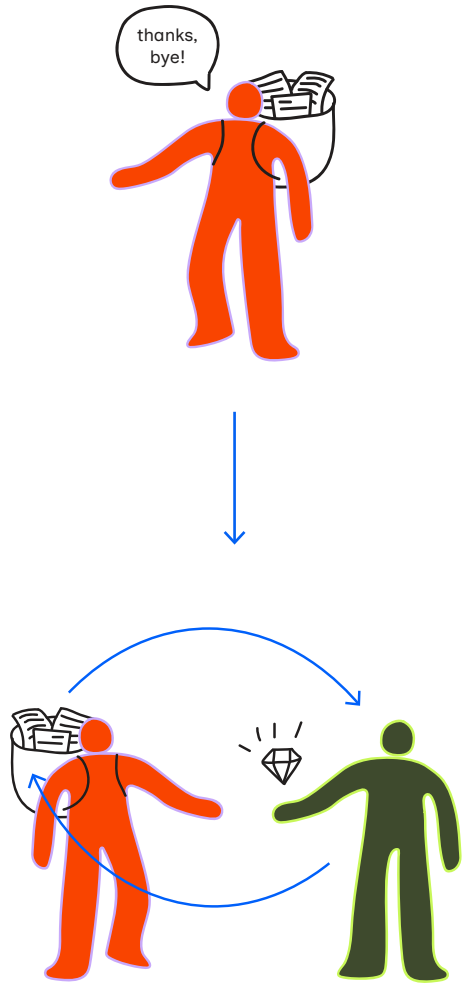


Figure 5.11. From harvesting insights once to creating value for young people.

The value of a participatory moment should be two-fold, both in the moment itself and in the insights gathered. Making sure insights are integrated into a continuous cycle of feedback will enhance the value of participation for youth even more.

It is important to note that employing these strategies will only be effective if the insights will actually be used and youth get feedback on how the insights were used. This means that we have to see participation as a continuous process, as well as the end goal (Figure 5.12).

Working iteratively and continuously with young people means that participation becomes embedded as a continuous practice rather than a one-off consultation. Of course, this task is neither easy nor small. However, I believe that the strength of a designer lies in our ability to move beyond advice and to materialize the change you would like to see in the world. Therefore, with this project, I want to manifest the proposed strategies into something tangible. Though Figure 5.12 depicts a continuous process, this process starts with a meaningful participation moment, which will be the step of the process I will focus on. This has multiple reasons. On the one hand, this is because the previously mentioned graduation students have been researching and designing for the policy side. On the other hand, I now have experience with youth participation, so I can use that experience and contribute something more meaningful. A more practical matter played into this decision as well: Having built relationships with youth workers and youth throughout the project, this provided me with opportunities to test a design proposal.

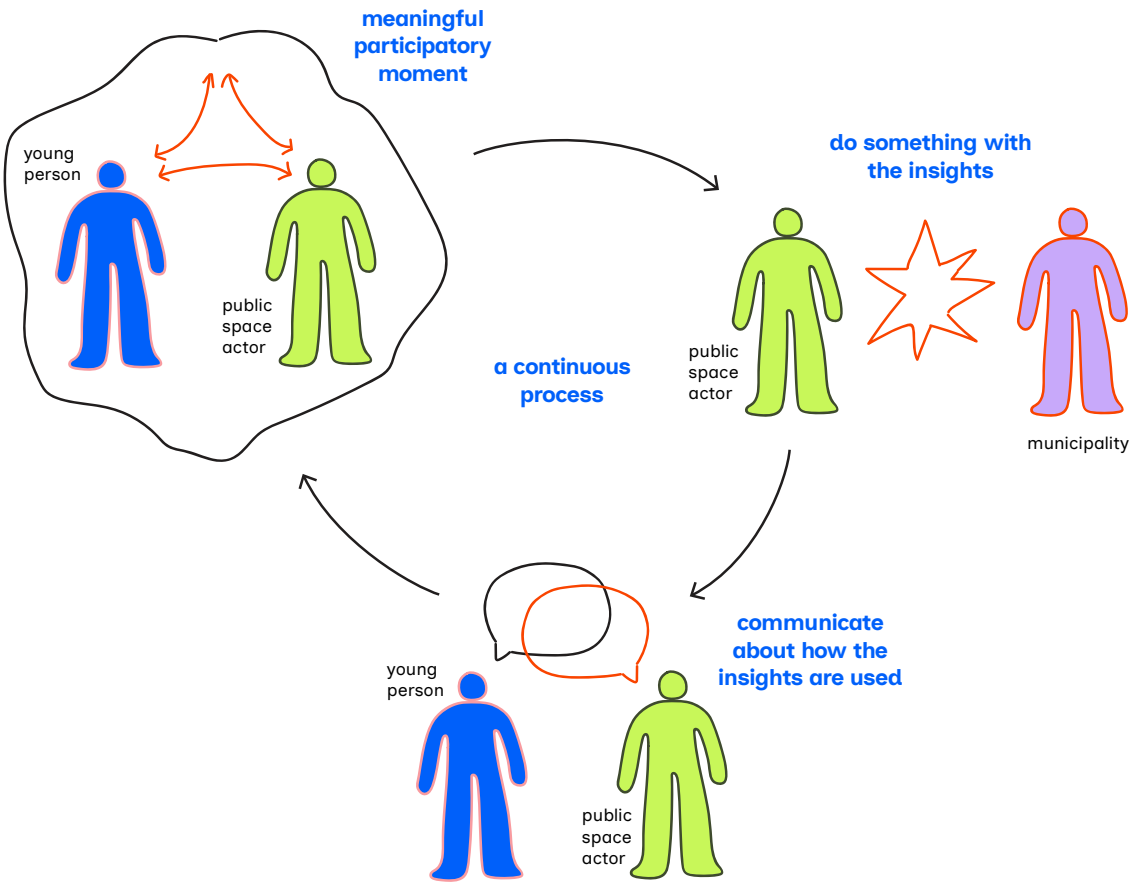


Figure 5.12. Participation is a continuous process.

5.2 Shaping with young people

The aim of this chapter is to investigate how we might involve young people in Rotterdam in shaping inclusive and supportive public spaces. In the previous paragraph, I elaborated on the involving aspect of this question. In this paragraph, I focus on the shaping. I explain why shaping public space requires thinking about alternative futures in and I suggest exploring how speculative design can play a role in shaping public spaces with youth.

If we recognize that the current way public spaces are shaped does not serve all communities equally, then we have to acknowledge that change is necessary. Change, by definition, requires us to think beyond what already exists. That means that we need to imagine alternative futures: possibilities beyond the status quo that challenge what is there now. So asking young people to participate in a matter of shaping something, inherently means asking them to think about the future.

It is well known that young people tend to have trouble considering the consequences of their decisions, partly because the areas of the brain responsible for long-term planning are still developing (Hersenstichting, 2023). But this does not mean that they are not capable of considering the future. In fact, their brains are more flexible than those of adults, allowing young people to explore paths that adults have already closed off (Van Rossenberg, 2024). In fact, Toenders et al. (2024) showed that during adolescence, individuals are particularly open to learning how to think and act in innovative ways, giving young people the potential to drive change in society. This suggests that young people are well-suited for exploring futures. However, during the generative sessions, previously discussed in CH3, we learned that youth find it easier to participate when the topic is tangible and they can draw on their own experiences (participation principle 6: 'Make it easy to share things').

So, what if we could make the future tangible, and let young people experience it to some extent? This is where the practice of speculative design comes in. Farias et al. (2022) state: "*Speculative design employs design as a platform for imagining and creating alternative sociotechnical narratives that challenge our current relationship with reality, opening up discussion and debate about current and emerging issues.*" (p. 147). Speculative methods are widely used to uncover unforeseen possibilities and foster critical thinking and can have various functions (Maciejko & Lecuna, 2025). Its relevancy for this project lies in using speculative design as a way of "*imagining the future in order to actively engage with the present.*" (Maciejko & Lecuna, 2025, p. 6131).

Though there has been more attention for the emerging field of participatory speculative design recently (Farias et al., 2022), it is yet to be explored how we might use speculative design in the context of youth participation about public spaces. I argue that this has various potential advantages:

Lowering the barrier to participate: Youth find it easier to share their perspective when the topic is tangible (participation principle 6), and are more engaged when doing something active (participation principle 4). By making the future tangible and providing materials to engage with through hands-on exploration, we could lower the threshold to participate.

Engaging through evoking: Hormonal changes heighten emotional responses in teenagers, making their brains temporarily imbalanced. As a result, emotions often outweigh rational thinking (Hersenstichting, 2023). Presenting them with extreme futures and objects, will potentially elicit an emotional response that will enhance engagement.

Broaden the concept of public space: Traditional discussions about public space often focus on its physical aspects—streets, parks, and squares—but speculative design invites us to explore new possibilities beyond the built enviornment.

It's fun: One of the biggest insights we gained from involving youth in this project is that the value of participatory moments should be twofold; in the moment itself and in the insights (participation principle 8). By using speculative design, we create a more engaging and accessible way for young people to participate, enriching the value of the immediate experience.

In conclusion, speculative design offers a promising approach for involving young people in shaping public spaces by making future possibilities tangible, engaging them emotionally, and creating enjoyable, meaningful participation moments.

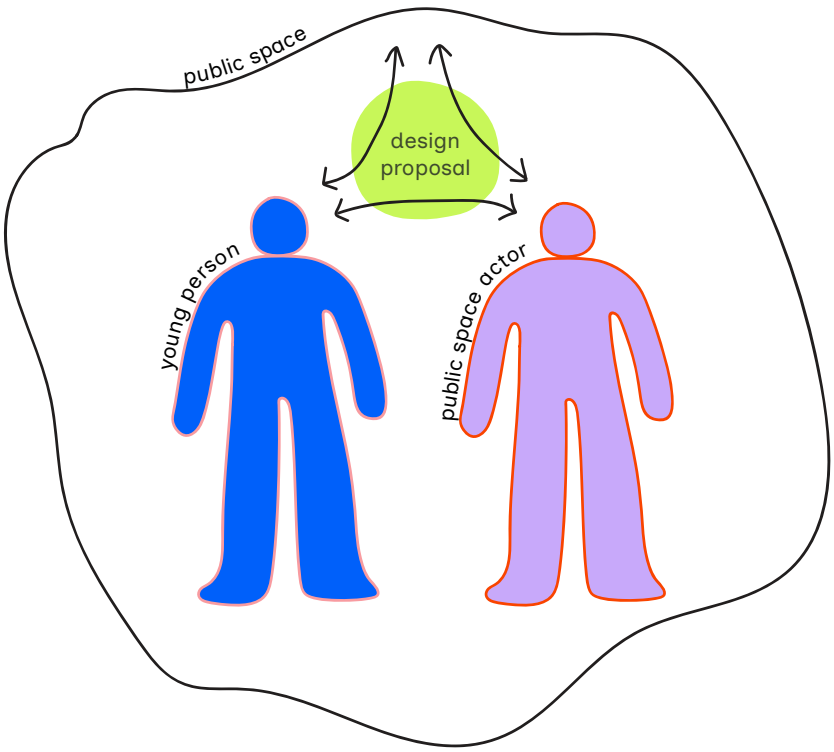


Figure 5.13. The design proposal should facilitate meaningful interaction about public space between young people and a public space actor.

5.3 Moving on

The goal of this chapter is to answer the question: "How might we involve young people in Rotterdam in shaping inclusive and supportive public spaces in Rotterdam?" Through focusing on involving young people, we learned that shaping public spaces is prone to exclusion and youth participation is a field of its own. Therefore, to give all young people more agency over their environment, we must reshape the interactions with youth about their environment in a way that reflects young people's needs. Proposed strategies for meaningful engaging youth plead for direct interaction with diverse groups of youth in places where they feel comfortable; doing shared activities and focusing on creating value in the participative moment itself. Additionally, I argue that speculative design offers a promising approach to involve young people in shaping public spaces.

In the next chapter, I put the discussed strategies and speculative approach into practice. I present a design proposal that enables us to start experimenting with meaningfully interacting with young people about their environment through the use of speculative design (Figure 5.13). This design proposal is grounded in design requirements outlined below, which draw on insights of this chapter as well as earlier insights, such as the participation principles (3.1).

Design requirements

The goal is to enhance young people's sense of agency in public space by creating a participatory moment for them to meaningfully contribute to shaping that public space.

When asking young people to participate in something, the focus should be on making it worthwhile (participation principle 8) and creating value for young people (strategy 4). Therefore, the design proposal should **1) offer value to young people through the experience of participating** and **2) give the sense that their input or involvement makes a real contribution.**

To create a valuable experience for young people, the design proposal **3) should be of active and collaborative nature** (see strategy 2 'doing shared activities', and participation principle 4 'do something active and do it together'). Additionally, as explained in 5.2, the design proposal **4) should allow young people to engage with tangible futures of public space** (see participation principle 6: 'make it easy to share things'). Also, the intervention should **5) be group-based,** as we have learned from 2.4.5 & 3.3.1 that group settings plays a key role in how young people form opinions, test behaviors and respond to peer norms.

Strategy 1 tells us that the intervention should allow for involvement of diverse groups of youth. Therefore, the design proposal should **6) be usable in different contexts** and **7) be catered to various levels of social and cognitive skills**. Additionally, the design proposal should respect the time young people are able to spend on participating and consider their attention spans. Therefore, the design proposal **8) should fit within a two-hour time frame** and **9) be accessible to participants without requiring any prior knowledge of the topic.**

Strategy 3 tells us that the intervention should allow to meet young people wherever they are comfortable. Therefore, the design proposal should **10) be usable in a variety of locations** and **11) be self-sufficient**, meaning it should not rely on those locations providing any materials or resources.

Chapter 5: Key take-aways

“How might we involve young people in Rotterdam in shaping inclusive and supportive public spaces?”

- Existing participatory efforts that concern the public space often fail to engage young people meaningfully or to include them at all.

- Involving youth in shaping the public space requires an approach that is outreaching to diverse groups and specifically tailored to young people.

- I proposed four strategies to rethink how we involve young people:

1. Actively involving diverse groups of youth.
2. Engaging in shared activities.
3. Meeting them on their terms.
4. Creating value for young people.

- I choose to focus on creating a meaningful participatory moment, while highlighting the importance of seeing participation as a continuous process, actually using the insights and giving youth feedback on what happened with their contribution.

- To create this meaningful participatory moment, I point out wanting to explore using speculative design practices to create tangible futures that young people can engage with.

6) Materializing change: a design proposal

Speculative design offers a promising approach for involving young people in shaping public spaces by making futures tangible. But how might we put that into practice? The purpose of this chapter is to answer the research question:

“How might we meaningfully engage young people in contributing to shaping public spaces through speculative design practices?”

In 6.1, I explain how I engaged in speculative design practices to develop the design proposal. In 6.2, I present the design proposal: a workshop. I explain how the workshop works, why it was made in this way and how and by whom it can be used.

This chapter is informed by academic literature and insights from exploring speculative design practices (DA5) and iteratively testing the workshop (PM11-13).

What is going on? | What is that really about? | What can we do about it? | **How can we design for that?** | So what?

6.1 Speculative design

In this paragraph, I explain how I practised speculative design.

The goal of engaging in speculative design practices is to create tangible alternative futures for young people in public space that young people can engage with. Voros (2003) distincts between multiple types of alternative futures, see Figure 6.1. They range from the projected future, 'business as usual' to preposterous futures, 'impossible!' ones. As the alternative futures should elicit emotional responses from the participants, I focused on making preposterous ones to provoke the participants.

To create these preposterous alternative futures and make them tangible, I followed three main steps: creating a futures matrix (6.1.1), writing scenarios (6.1.2) and creating objects for each scenario (6.1.3).

6.1.1 Futures matrix

To come up with the possible futures for public space, I used a 2x2 futures matrix as a tool for organizing and differentiating possible scenarios. Scenarios are tools for helping people picture different ways the future could unfold. Using scenarios has three big benefits: they help you think more clearly about how things might change, they show how those changes could affect you, and they give you a fresh perspective on the present (Stucki, 2024).

The idea of the futures matrix is that you choose two 'critical uncertainties', in this case two variables that will have influence on youth and the public space in the future, but of which we are uncertain how they will develop over time (Rhydderch, 2017). Each critical uncertainty represents an axis of the futures matrix, see Figure 6.2. An axis can be seen as a spectrum with two extremes, one at each end. Combining the axes creates a 2x2 futures matrix, in which every quadrant holds a different future, influenced by the critical uncertainties.

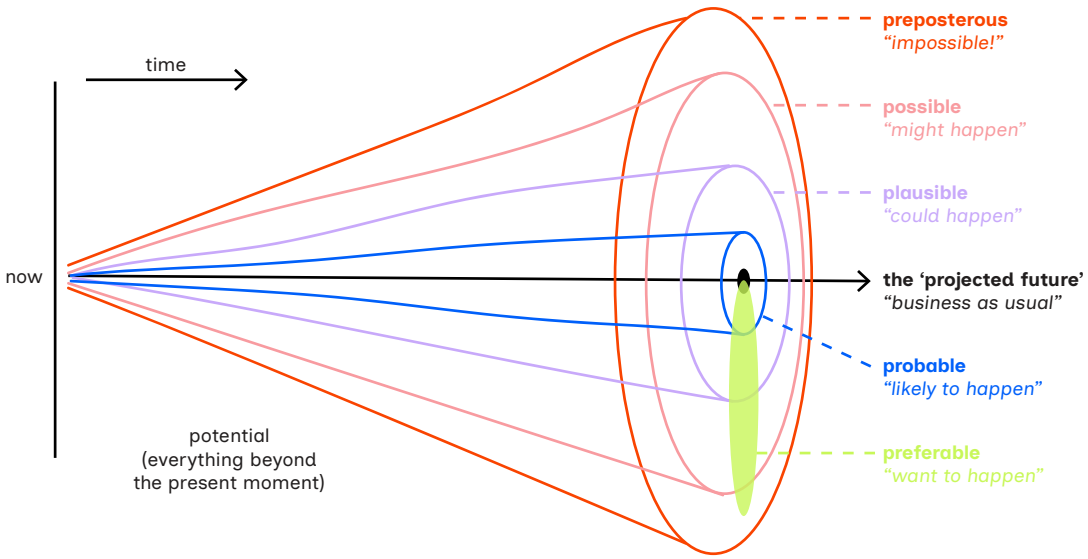


Figure 6.1. The 'futures cone' depicting different types of alternative futures. Adapted from Voros (2003)

Deciding on two critical uncertainties that would allow for the creation of alternative futures that would be relevant for young people, was an iterative process in which I tried many options. Usually, the critical uncertainties are chosen out of a set of key drivers that are derived from trend research. However, the goal of this exercise was not to create plausible futures, as often done in strategic foresight, a practice done to prepare for what might be coming. In fact, the futures should provoke the participants and be relevant for them. Therefore, the two key tensions that shaped the 2x2 futures matrix were not selected through traditional trend analysis, but rather emerged from recurring themes surrounding the reframed problem at the heart of this project: how young people experience and influence public space. They reflect real value conflicts, like the push and pull between individuality and belonging, or between personal responsibility and collective care (see Appendix F for the overview).

The two key tensions I decided on are:

1. The purpose of the public space: is it a place to explore or to belong?
2. The responsibility for the culture in public space: it is individual or collective?

The first uncertainty—whether public space is a place to explore or to belong—draws on tensions between personal values and group norms, individuality versus fitting in, and the desire for freedom versus the need for acceptance. The second uncertainty—whether responsibility for the culture in public space is individual or collective—is based on tensions such as individual accountability versus structural causes, victim blaming versus shared responsibility, and youth autonomy versus adult control.

The intersections of these axes created four quadrants that represented different possible futures for the public space in Rotterdam. To create these futures, each quadrant was explored through scenario writing.

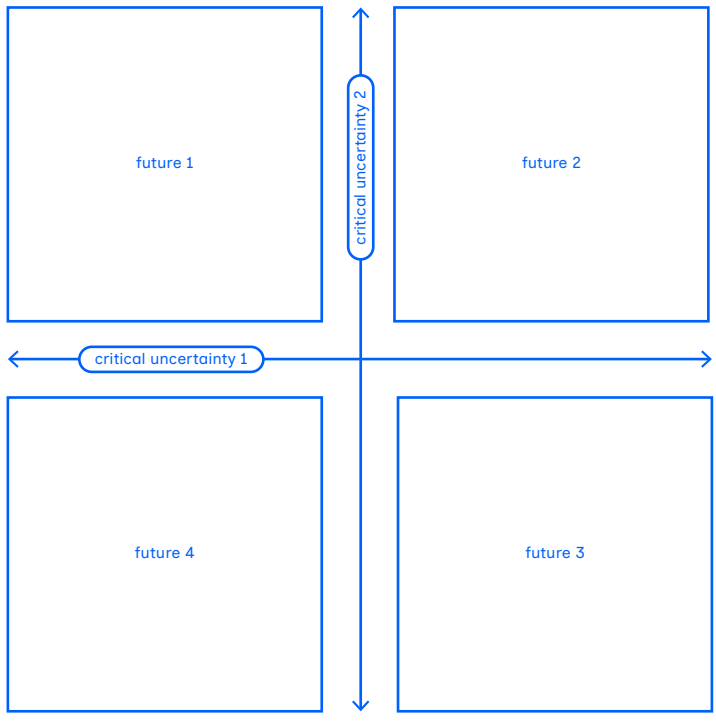


Figure 6.2. Futures matrix. Adapted from Rhydderch (2017).

6.1.2 Scenario writing

Scenarios turn vague futures into stories that people can relate to. They are meant to help people imagine what life could actually look like—what they might see, feel, or do in a different version of the future.

Scenario writing is an iterative and creative process, each scenario representing a different combination of the two axes of the futures matrix. First, I generated words to describe the ends of the axes through association (Figure 6.3). Those words were the starting point for writing. I utilized an artificial intelligence tool, specifically OpenAI's ChatGPT, to assist in the development of future scenarios. ChatGPT was employed as a support tool to generate, refine, and explore various potential scenarios based on the input I provided. For example, I would provide ChatGPT with a draft scenario that I had written and ask for ideas about how young people would interact in this future.

The main goal for the scenarios was to encourage the participants to imagine the public space and their role in it differently. To make the scenarios relatable and impactful, I wrote the scenarios from the perspective of young people. This decision was informed by a desire to center their voice and their experience, as well as to make the stories more relevant for them. I also incorporated specific locations in Rotterdam, mentioned during the generative sessions, to create a sense of familiarity and local relevance. Additionally, to enrich the stories, I explored trends and developments around youth, growing up and the public space. To improve the clarity and accessibility of the texts, I asked three people for feedback and used *www.ishetb1.nl* to check that the language would be understandable to a broad and diverse audience. Additionally, when testing the design proposal (PM11-13), I would specifically ask the participants whether there were any unclarities, iteratively improving them. This was important to make sure the scenarios could be meaningfully engaged with by all participants, regardless of reading level or background.

This process resulted in four future scenarios in the context of youth and the public space that I would be able to use to engage youth in meaningfully contributing to shaping public space. In Figure 6.4, you can see a short, adapted version of each scenario. For the full English version, please see Appendix B1 For the full Dutch version, please see Appendix B2.

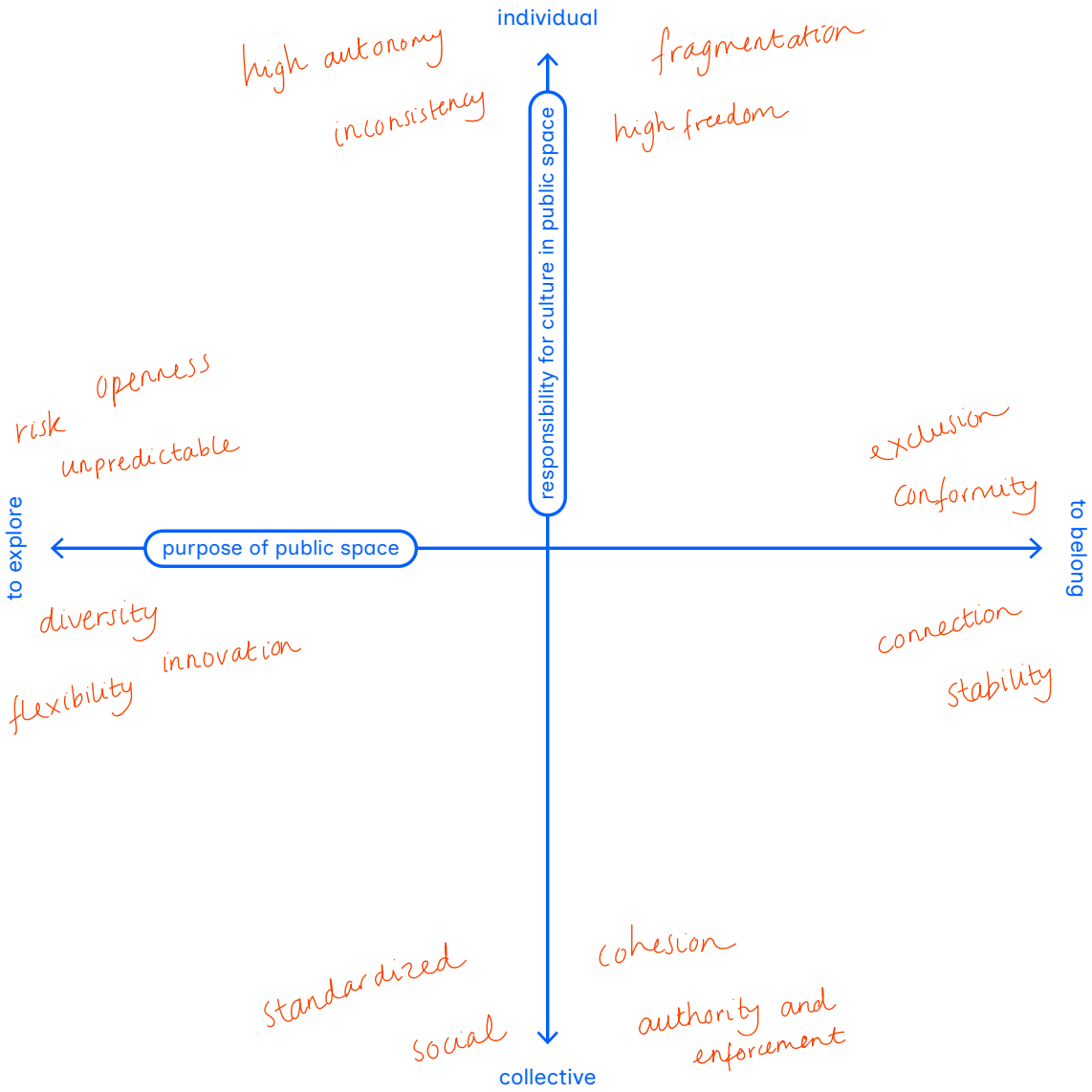


Figure 6.3. Words I associate with the end of each axis.

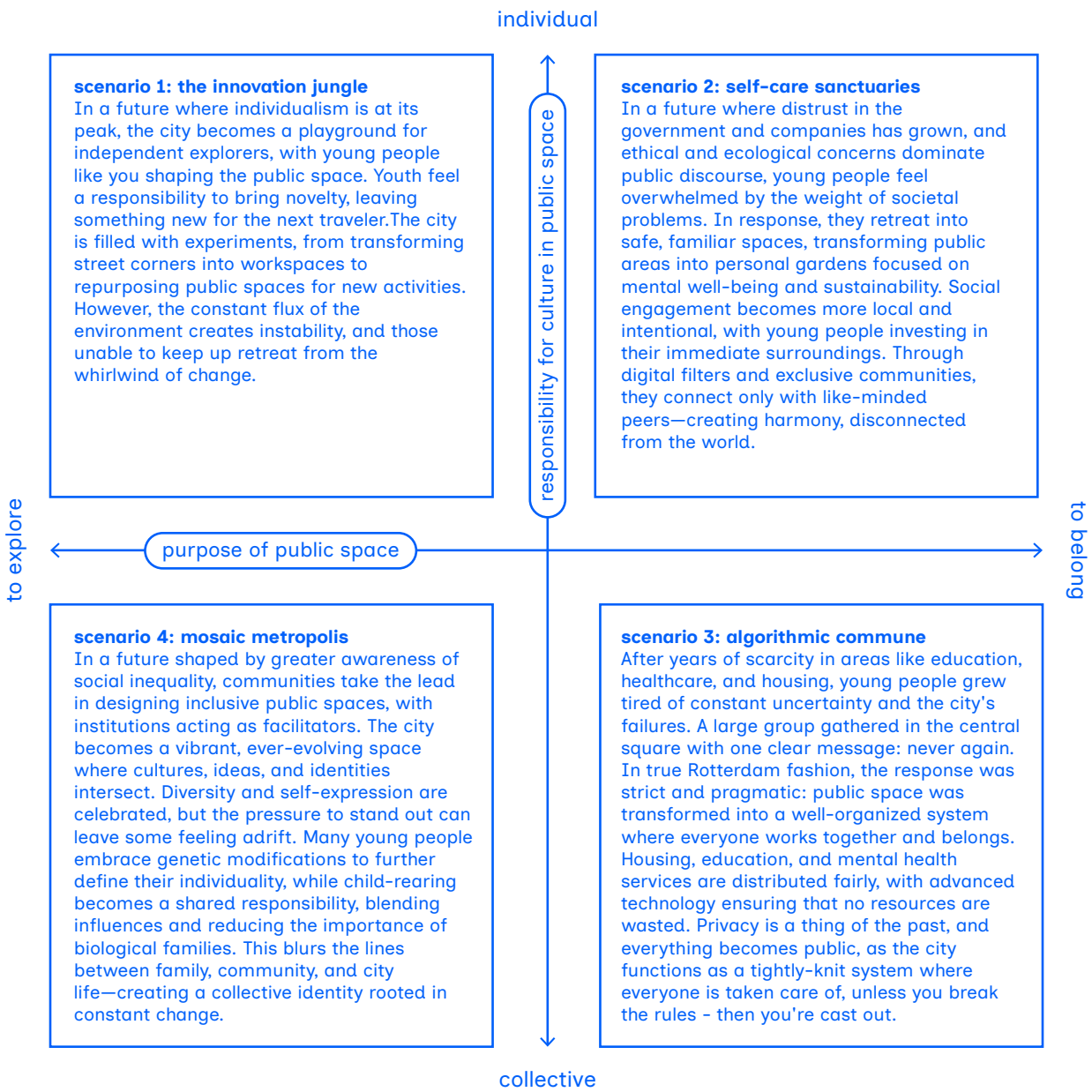


Figure 6.4. Shorter versions of the scenarios I wrote for each future.

6.1.3 Future artefacts

Peter et al. (2020) highlight the potential of design artefacts portraying future uses as tangible tools to spark conversation and critical thinking. Because I wanted to stimulate the young people's imagination through engagement with something tangible, I prototyped a physical object—or 'future artefact'—for each of the four future scenarios (Figure 6.5). These objects served as prompts to bring the imagined futures to life. Each object was designed with the tone, values and context of its scenario in mind, either through its function or symbolism, or both. On the next pages, I conclude this methodology paragraph by presenting the prototype made for every object. In paragraph that follows, I show how the futures matrix, the scenarios and the objects can be used in practice in my design proposal, a workshop.

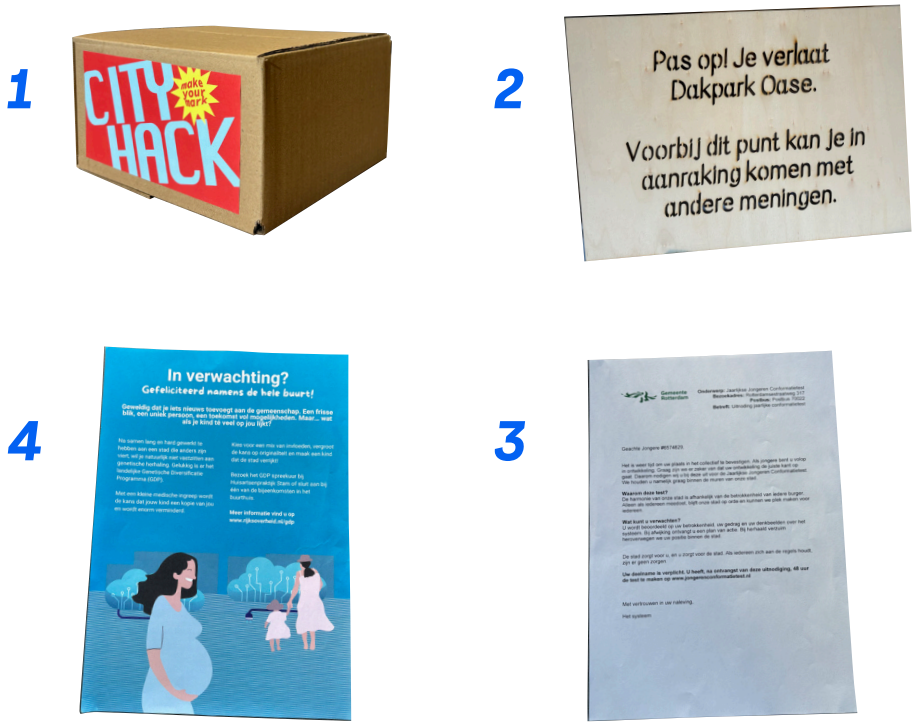


Figure 6.5. Prototypes of future artefacts.

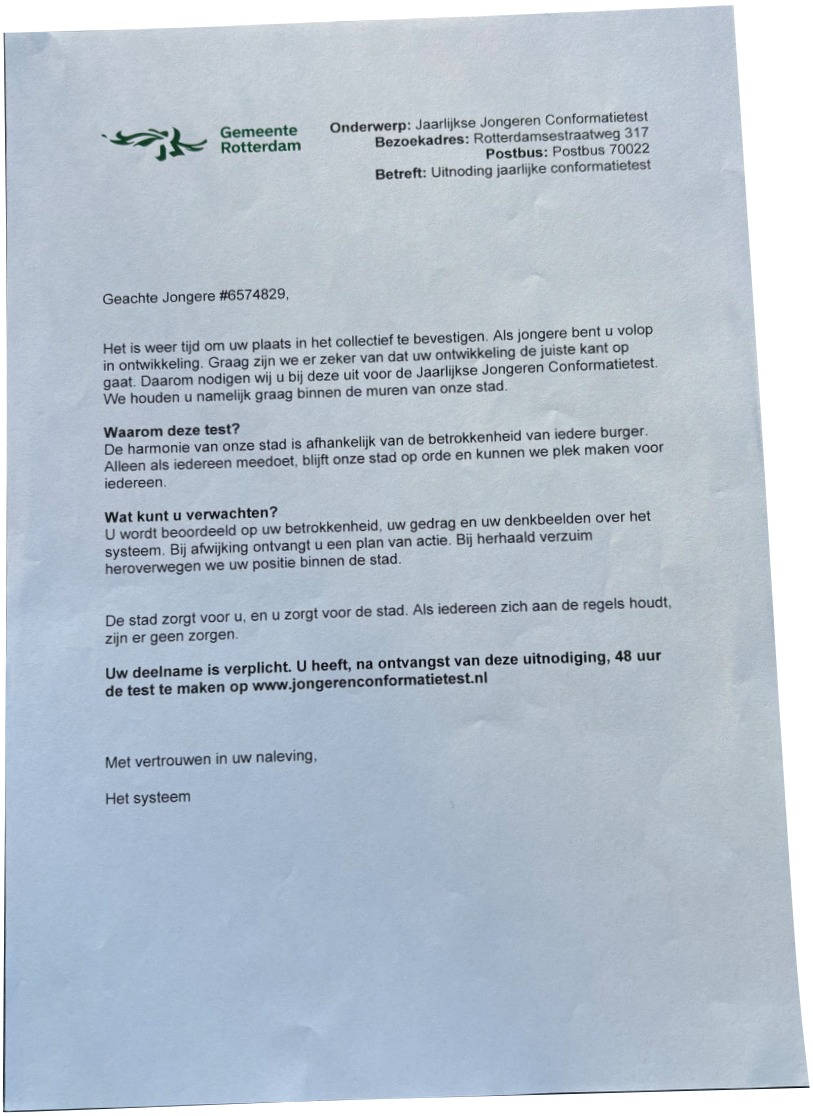
1 **CityHack Kit (scenario 1 // innovation jungle)**
In this future, the city belongs to the young. The CityHack Kit is a handy pouch containing all kinds of tools that young people can use to make alterations to the environment. The prototype is the packaging for this kit.

Figure 6.6. CityHack Kit.

2 **Sanctuary sign (scenario 2 // self-care sanctuaries)**
In this future, young people retreat into carefully curated green environments. When travelling between these places, they wear filter goggles to make sure they only get in contact with the known. Upon leaving such a green environment, like Dakpark Oase, they encounter this sign, gently nudging them to put on their glasses before leaving. The sign is made from wood to fit into the natural environment.

Figure 6.7. Sanctuary sign.

3 **Invitation to the Yearly Youth Conformity test (scenario 3 // algorithmic commune)**
In this future, youth are seen as a threat to society, as they are in a time of great development - and thus a time of unpredictability. To make sure the young people develop themselves into adults that will uphold the system, they have to take a yearly test to determine whether they are developing in the right direction. The object I designed is a letter from the municipality inviting them to take the test. The tone of voice is polite but threatening in a way.



Gemeente Rotterdam

Onderwerp: Jaarlijkse Jongeren Conformatietest
Bezoekadres: Rotterdamsestraatweg 317
Postbus: Postbus 70022
Betreft: Uitnoding jaarlijke conformatietest

Geachte Jongere #6574829,

Het is weer tijd om uw plaats in het collectief te bevestigen. Als jongere bent u volop in ontwikkeling. Graag zijn we er zeker van dat uw ontwikkeling de juiste kant op gaat. Daarom nodigen wij u bij deze uit voor de Jaarlijkse Jongeren Conformatietest. We houden u namelijk graag binnen de muren van onze stad.

Waarom deze test?
De harmonie van onze stad is afhankelijk van de betrokkenheid van iedere burger. Alleen als iedereen meedoet, blijft onze stad op orde en kunnen we plek maken voor iedereen.

Wat kunt u verwachten?
U wordt beoordeeld op uw betrokkenheid, uw gedrag en uw denkbeelden over het systeem. Bij afwijking ontvangt u een plan van actie. Bij herhaald verzuim heroverwegen we uw positie binnen de stad.

De stad zorgt voor u, en u zorgt voor de stad. Als iedereen zich aan de regels houdt, zijn er geen zorgen.

Uw deelname is verplicht. U heeft, na ontvangst van deze uitnodiging, 48 uur de test te maken op www.jongerenconformatietest.nl

Met vertrouwen in uw naleving,

Het systeem

Figure 6.8. Invitation to the Yearly Youth Conformity Test.

4 **Flyer about the Genetic Modification Programme (scenario 4 // mosaic metropolis)**
This future is all about diversity and embracing your uniqueness. People who are expecting a child can partake in the national Genetic Modification Programme, to make sure their child adopts a mix of influences and to increase originality. The object is a flyer advocating for this programme.

Figure 6.9. Flyer about the national Genetic Modification Programme.

6.2 Presenting the design proposal: a workshop

This project initially focused on sexual street harassment among young people in Rotterdam, with a particular emphasis on the perspective of the perpetrator. Throughout the project, I discovered that for some young people, engaging in street harassment is part of exploring who they are. While this behavior is wrong, we also found that, even though it could be a place where young people develop themselves and experiment, public space does not necessarily provide space for them to do anything other than conform to the status quo – a culture of inequality. Additionally, focusing on the negative does not work when working with young people. This led me to explore how we could leverage the public space to support young people in forming their identities in a more constructive way. I argue that the answer lies in taking young people more seriously and giving them more agency over their own environment. In order to do this, we must reshape the way we interact with young people about their environment in such a way that it provides value for young people and better fits their needs. This interaction takes shape in the workshop I present in this paragraph.

The workshop in its current form came to be through iterative testing. In total, three tests (PM11-13, see Appendix C17-19) have informed the design.

In 6.2.1, I introduce the workshop. I explain why a workshop format was chosen, who would use the workshop and when. In 6.2.2, I explain how the workshop works by presenting the workshop kit. In 6.2.3, I discuss every workshop step in detail. In 6.2.4, I elaborate on what happens after the workshop.

6.2.1 Introducing the workshop

The goal of the workshop is to enable young people to meaningfully contribute to shaping their public environment by fostering creativity, critical thinking, and dialogue in a way that is fitting and valuable for young people.

It encourages the participants to explore different possible futures for public spaces and facilitates meaningful conversation about the imagined futures and their implications, in order for young people to share reflections, dreams and concerns about the public spaces that surround them. Afterwards, these insights can be used by the party that initiated the workshop. By doing so, the workshop centers young people as active agents in envisioning and influencing the future of their environment, but on their terms. In that sense, it's a way to take them seriously.

Why a workshop?

Unlike top-down approaches such as awareness campaigns, disciplinary measures or educational lectures, workshops are participatory by design. They shift young people from being recipients to being contributors, which can help strengthen their sense of agency. By engaging in dialogue, making decisions and reflecting together, participants are given the space to explore their perspectives and consider their role in shaping their environment. This makes workshops a practical and context-sensitive way to support young people in navigating and influencing their surroundings: it gives them a tangible role in contributing to shaping their shared public spaces and a space to practice agency.

Besides its use in enhancing a sense of agency, there are other reasons to choose a workshop format for this intervention. The general idea of a workshop is that it creates value for participants, which is in line with design requirement 1 ('the design proposal should offer value to young people through the experience of participating'). Additionally, the word 'workshop' suggests that the intervention is active and hands-on. Combined with its group-based nature, this format aligns with design requirement 3 ('the design proposal should be of active and collaborative nature).

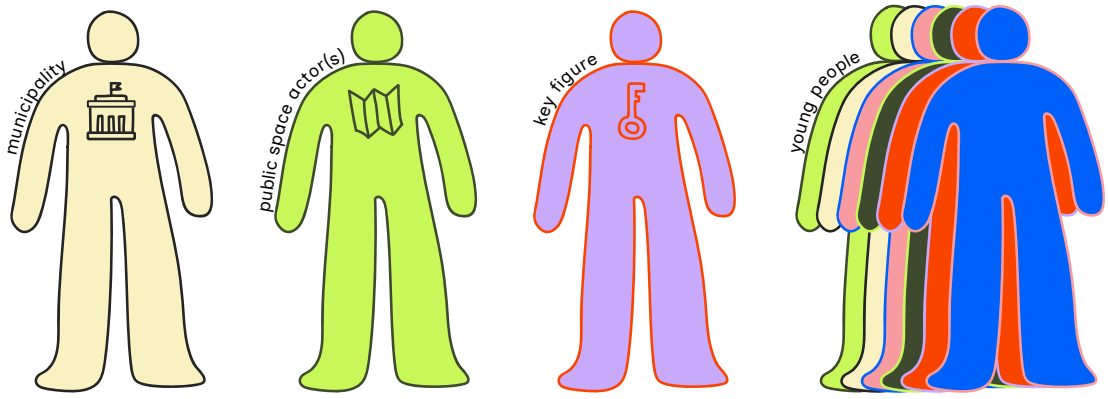
Moreover, a workshop format also allows for the intervention to be usable in a variety of locations (design requirement 10) and adaptable to different contexts (design requirement 6).

The final reason why a workshop format is well-suited for this intervention is it's time-bound nature. The workshop takes no more than two hours, which makes it easier to fit into the busy schedules of both youth and facilitators. It strikes an important balance: it respects young people's availability while still creating enough space for them to contribute meaningfully.

If you're interested in seeing other intervention options I have considered, see Appendix G.

Who would use this workshop?
This design proposal introduces two additional stakeholders into the network of actors shaping public space. As discussed in Chapter 5, the municipality, as the formal owner of public space, often commissions external parties—such as architects, urban planners, or housing corporations—to carry out specific assignments. The idea behind the workshop is that these public space actors reach out to people who work directly with young people, such as teachers or youth workers. These people, also known as key figures, help organize the workshop for an existing group of young people. This way, the workshop takes place in a setting that feels familiar and accessible for the young people. The workshop attendees are outlined in Figure 6.10. The public space actor should determine the number of workshops to organize, taking into account how many are needed to gather meaningful insights from a diverse range of young people.

When to use this workshop?
The workshop is best used when there is a need to meaningfully involve young people in questions related to public space. It would works especially well during moments of transition, such as the start of a new urban development project, a policy shift, or the redesign of a public area. For example, because of the 'Omgevingswet' ('Surroundings Law'), previously discussed in 5.1.1, municipalities are obligated by law to create a 'gebiedsvisie' ('area vision') for every area under their jurisdiction. Civil servants and public space actors could collaborate and organize several workshops to gather insights from youth about how they experience a space and what values they believe should guide its future.



municipality of Rotterdam

actor working on shaping public spaces

key figure for young people, e.g. teacher, youth worker

existing group of young people

Figure 6.10. Workshop attendees.

6.2.2 How the workshop works

In the workshop, young people engage with scenarios and objects representing different alternative futures of public space. Through discussions about the consequences of these futures, they share their dreams and concerns about their neighborhood. The idea is that the workshop allows young people to meaningfully contribute to shaping public spaces by fostering imagination, reflection and dialogue, in a way that is relevant to them. The next pages (p. 124-125) depict an overview of the workshop steps, which are described in full in the next section.

The workshop can be used with various groups of youth in various contexts - therefore it is designed as a workshop kit: all required materials are packed in a box that is easy to take along (Figure 6.11). The content of the kit is shown in Figure 6.12. It includes a facilitator handbook, the futures matrix (printed on fabric so it's washable and foldable), the future objects, question cards and poster templates. The future scenarios are pre-recorded and included as audio files. The facilitator can access these and the poster template files through the facilitator handbook. Besides the workshop kit, not much else is needed besides enough seats to accommodate everyone, including the adults, and a spacious table to function as a shared workspace.

The workshop takes almost 2 hours, depending on how much time you need for getting to know each other and introducing the case and workshop goal. It's meant to accommodate about 6-10 young people aged 15-20 and requires 1-3 facilitators, based on participation principle 3, 'Balance group size and composition'. The facilitator explains and guides the process, guided by the facilitator handbook that is included in the kit. In line with participation principle 5: 'Everyone is a participant', all other attendees are participants, whether they are young people or adults. However, the roles are not so rigid. If they want, some participants can take on a role as facilitator for a single workshop step. This should be discussed, decided and communicated beforehand.

< Figure 6.11. All workshop materials can be found in the workshop kit.

> Figure 6.12. Workshop kit contents.

futures matrix *(made from cloth)*

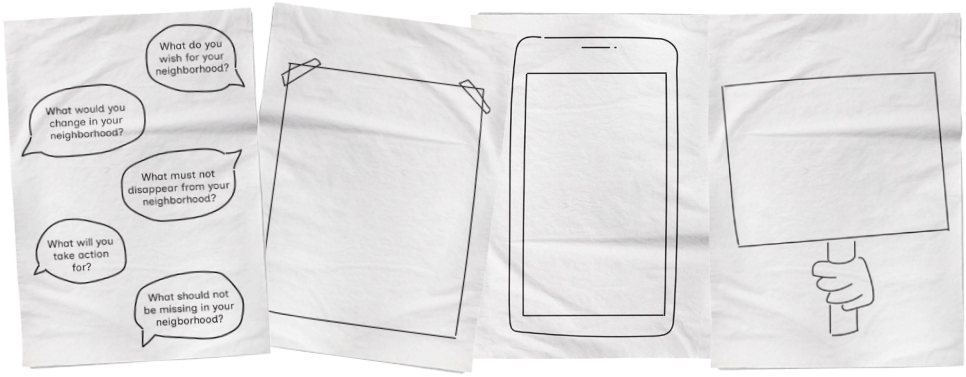
future objects

question cards

facilitator handbook

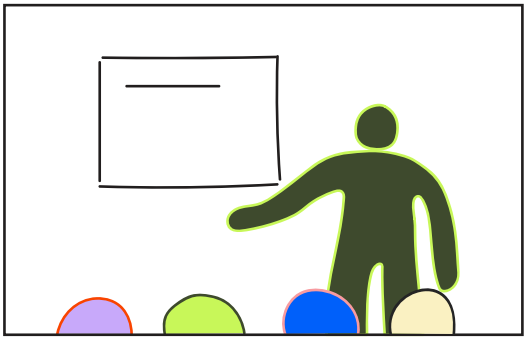
poster templates & guiding questions

you can download these templates and the future scenario audio files from the handbook



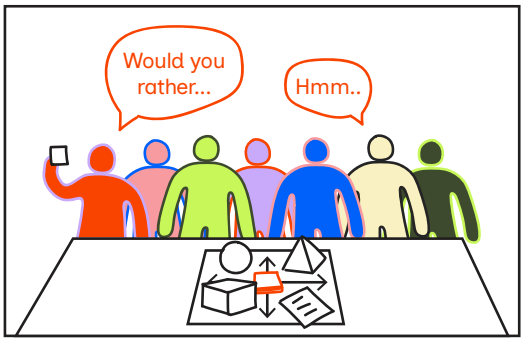
Workshop overview >

1 Introduction (15 min.)

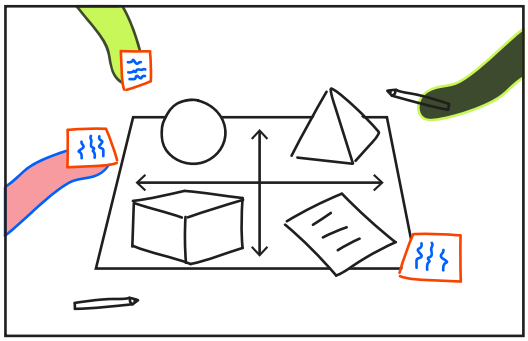


The facilitator welcomes the participants, explains the goal of the workshop and reveals the activities. If applicable, they might do an introductory activity.

3 Reflecting (20 min.)



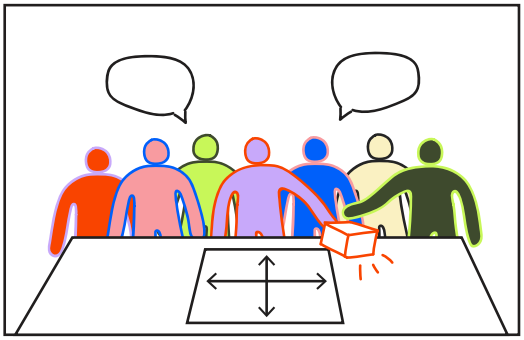
This step's goal is to engage in meaningful conversations about the imagined futures and their potential consequences. Using a card deck with questions on them, the participant takes turns picking a card and answering the question. After one person answers, the rest of the group is invited to respond and share their thoughts.



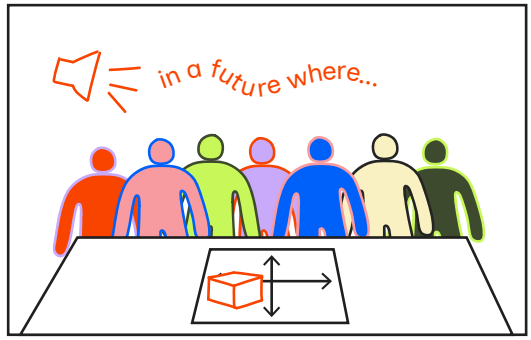
Then, the participants write down elements of the discussed futures, that they would or would not like to see in their own neighborhood using post-its and placing them with the corresponding future.

An attentive reader may notice that the total time doesn't add up to two hours—this is because a break has not been included in the schedule. When to take a break is up to the facilitator and should depend on the energy and needs of the group.

2 Imagining (30 min.)

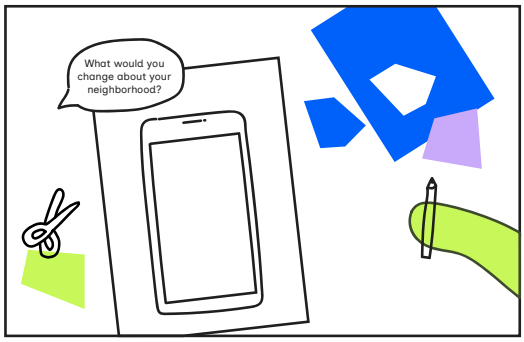


The aim of this step is to encourage participants to explore various possible futures for public spaces. The participants first interact with one of the objects, while the facilitator asks questions as presented in the facilitator guide.



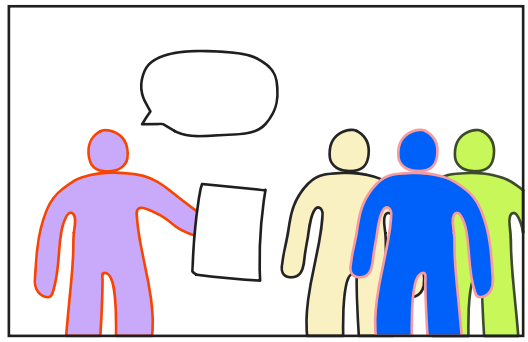
Then, the participants are asked to close their eyes and listen to the scenario of the future that the object belongs to. After a short discussion, guided by facilitator and aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of what happens in each future, the object is placed in one of the quadrants of the matrix. This is repeated for every all four possible futures.

4 Calling to action (20 min.)



The goal of this step is to share reflections, dreams and concerns about the public space in their own neighborhood and translate them into call to actions. The participants create “calls to action” in the form of campaign posters, for which they are provided with questions and poster templates. The idea is that they pick one of the questions and place it on their poster. They create one or multiple posters to promote whatever they find important for the case they are working on.

5 Wrapping up (15 min.)



To conclude the workshop, the participants are asked to show their posters to each other and to tell a short story about what they made. The facilitator summarizes the initial take-aways from the workshop and informs the participants about when they will be contacted again to hear how the insights from the workshop were used. Finally the facilitator thanks the participants for their time and valuable contribution.

6.2.3 Step by step

The workshop consists of 5 main steps:

1. Introduction
2. Imagining
3. Reflecting
4. Call to action
5. Wrapping up

In this section I will explain in detail what happens in every step.

Step 1: Introduction

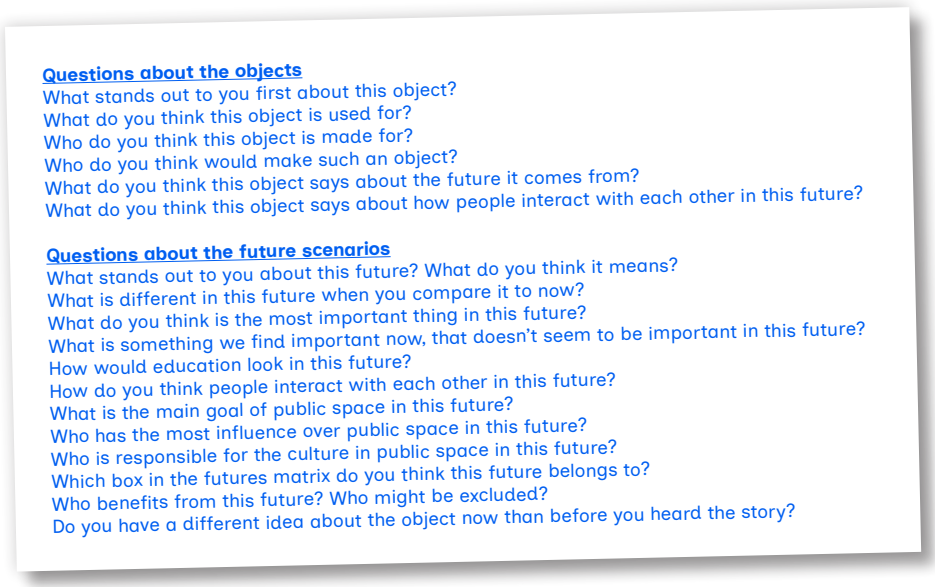
The goal of this step is to welcome the participants and introduce the workshop. This includes explaining the workshop's purpose, revealing planned activities and doing an introductory activity, such as an icebreaker. The introduction should be adapted to the group and context. For example, the goal of the workshop can vary - e.g. gaining youth perspectives on what they find important for their neighborhood's future vision or sharing dreams for a square's programming for this this summer. Similarly, if the facilitator knows the young people already, they might do an energizer. If the workshop is hosted at a hockey club, they might incorporate something related to team sports. The facilitator handbook provides some options for introductory activities as well as guidelines for adapting them to the group of young people.

Step 2: Imagining

The aim of this step is to encourage participants to explore various possible futures for public spaces. For this step it is important that the facilitator emphasizes that the futures are not necessarily desirable ones; they are simply different possibilities for how the future could unfold. The purpose of this step is to understand what these futures look like. At this point, we don't need to judge whether they are good or bad. The goal is to be curious, understand, and try to imagine what is happening in these different futures.

First, the facilitator introduces and explains the futures matrix. Since four futures can be a lot to take in, the futures matrix provides structure, helping participants to better understand and remember them. Placing the sheet in the middle of the table, also creates a shared workspace.

For each future, the participants first interact with the object while the facilitator



Questions about the objects

What stands out to you first about this object?
What do you think this object is used for?
Who do you think this object is made for?
Who do you think would make such an object?
What do you think this object says about the future it comes from?
What do you think this object says about how people interact with each other in this future?

Questions about the future scenarios

What stands out to you about this future? What do you think it means?
What is different in this future when you compare it to now?
What do you think is the most important thing in this future?
What is something we find important now, that doesn't seem to be important in this future?
How would education look in this future?
How do you think people interact with each other in this future?
What is the main goal of public space in this future?
Who has the most influence over public space in this future?
Who is responsible for the culture in public space in this future?
Which box in the futures matrix do you think this future belongs to?
Who benefits from this future? Who might be excluded?
Do you have a different idea about the object now than before you heard the story?

Figure 6.13. Questions from the facilitator handbook that the facilitator might ask during the imagining step.

asks some questions from the list in the facilitator handbook, see Figure 6.13. Then, the participants are asked to close their eyes and listen to the pre-recorded audio of the future that the object belongs to. Reading the scenarios out loud puts the participants on the spot, and reading 'mistakes' cause listeners to dwell off. Pre-recorded audio prevents this and makes it more understandable and engaging, and adds the possibility of adding audio effects that match the futures. The facilitator handbook explains how to download the files.

After listening to the audio fragment, the facilitator guides a short discussion aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of what happens in that future. The participants discuss and place the object in one of the quadrants of the future that they think this object comes from. This is repeated for every all four possible futures.

Step 3: Reflecting

This step's goal is to engage in meaningful conversations about the imagined futures and their potential consequences. Here, the participants do make value judgments about the futures. They explore and articulate their own opinions and consider other's opinions as well. To guide this conversation, I created a set of question cards (Figure 6.12, see Appendix B3 for the full set), which are placed in the center of the matrix sheet. The participants take turns picking a card from the stack and answering the question. After one person answers, the rest of the group is invited to respond and share their thoughts.

There are two types of cards in the stack:

- **Comparing the futures:** e.g. in which future would you... feel the safest?
- **Dilemma's:** e.g. would you rather... never be allowed to talk to anyone on the street, or be required to strike up a conversation with every single person you see, even if you don't know them?

These questions are aimed at reflecting and revealing areas of friction, encouraging participants to think critically and share their thoughts and feelings about the different futures. To conclude this step, the participants write down elements of the discussed futures, that they would or would not like to see in their own neighborhood (or in the area the workshop is about) as it is now. For this, they use post-its. The post-its are placed on the matrix sheet with the future that the described element comes from, creating a visual representation of their preferences and helping to link their ideas back to the different possible futures. This process allows participants to connect their thoughts to the broader context and gain clarity on what they think of their own present environment.

Step 4: Call to action

Finally, the participants create 'calls to action' in the form of campaign posters. They are provided with guiding questions, see Figure x, of which they can pick one that they would like to answer. The idea is that they cut out this question and place it on their poster. They create one or multiple posters to promote whatever they find important for the matter at hand. They can either use one of the campaign poster templates (Figure 6.12) or, if they wish for more creative freedom, an empty A3 sheet. Depending on the group, this activity can be catered to various levels of comfort in being creative. Do take into account how this impacts the workshop duration. If you are preparing this workshop and you don't know the young people very well, it's best to consult somebody who does, e.g. the key figure, or one of the young people themselves.

Step 5: Wrapping up

To conclude the workshop, the participants are asked to show their posters to each other and to tell a short story about what they made. The facilitator summarizes the initial take-aways from the workshop and informs the participants about when they will be contacted again to hear how the insights from the workshop were used. Finally the facilitator thanks the participants for their time and valuable contribution.

6.2.4 What's next?

When the workshop is finished, the work is not done yet. Actually, it has just started. The materials created during the session, such as the 'call to action' posters, should be documented and can even be exhibited locally to give visibility to the ideas generated. Most importantly, the participation loop must be closed (Figure 6.14). This means processing the insights from the workshop and ensuring they are meaningfully integrated into the relevant case or project. These outcomes should also be shared with other stakeholders, such as colleagues, to broaden their impact. Finally, it's essential to inform the participating young people about how their input is being used, reinforcing the real-world value of their contributions and supporting a sense of agency.

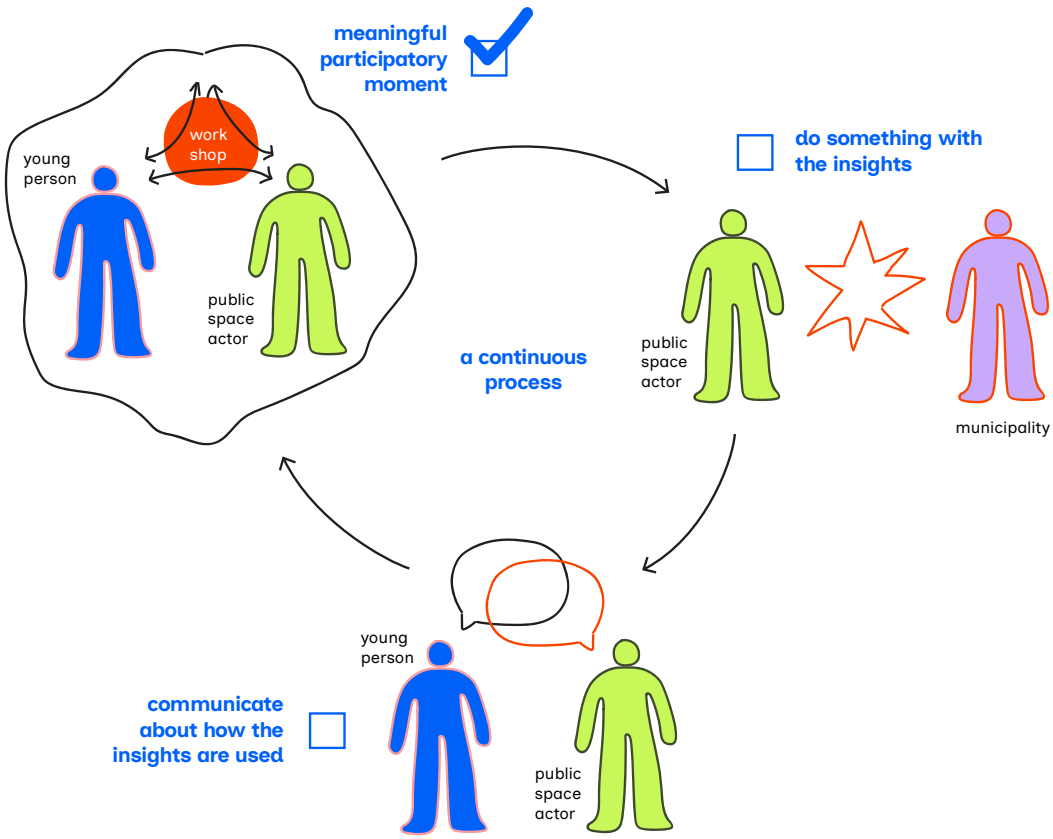


Figure 6.14. After the workshop, the participation loop must be closed.

Chapter 6: Key take-aways

“How might we meaningfully engage young people in contributing to shaping public spaces through speculative design practices?”

- I presented my design proposal: a workshop. The workshop enables young people to meaningfully contribute to shaping their public environment by fostering creativity, critical thinking, and dialogue in a way that is fitting and valuable for them.

- The workshop format was chosen because unlike top-down campaigns or lectures, it allows for treating young people as active contributors, not passive recipients. Additionally, it’s hands-on, collaborative and adaptable to different context and locations. The workshop is packaged as a portable kit with all materials included.

- Public space actors (e.g., municipalities, urban designers) initiate it by collaborating with key figures (teachers, youth workers). They facilitate the process using a facilitator handbook.

- The chapter presents a detailed overview of the design. In the workshop, young people explore alternative futures of public space by engaging with pre-recorded scenarios and objects representing possible futures of public space. Through discussion, they express dreams, concerns, and reflections about their neighborhood.

- After the workshop, the participation loop must be closed, meaning that the participants should be informed at a later moment about the impact of their contribution.

7) Evaluating the design proposal

This chapter marks the end of the 'How can we design for that?'-phase of this report. In the previous chapter, I presented my design proposal, a workshop. The aim of this chapter is to evaluate this workshop by answering the research question:

"To what extent does the workshop allow us to meaningfully engage young people in contributing to shaping inclusive and supportive public spaces in Rotterdam?

First, in 7.1, I explain how I evaluated the workshop. Then, in 7.2, I shed light on how the workshop works in practice, drawing mainly on iterative testing. In 7.3, I assess the desirability, feasibility and viability of the workshop for the direct stakeholders as well as systemic value. In 7.4, recommendations will be given for further development of the workshop. In 7.5, I conclude the chapter, and in doing so, I conclude the 'How can we design for that?' phase of this report.

This chapter is informed mainly by insights from iteratively testing the workshop (PM11-13) and evaluative interviews with various stakeholders (I6-I10).

What is going on? | What is that really about? | What can we do about it? | **How can we design for that?** | So what?

7.1 Evaluation approach

The aim of this paragraph is to explain how I evaluated the workshop. I assess whether the workshop delivers the value it intended to. Additionally, I evaluate whether the workshop meets the design requirements as outlined in Chapter 5. Since this project follows a Research through Design approach, the workshop was gradually developed and refined through iterative testing over the course of the project. For every test, I calculated some time to discuss how the participants had experienced the workshop. In total, I tested the concept three times:

1. with 3 non-design students aged 20-26 in Delft (PM11, for plan and insights, see Appendix C17).
2. with 5 young people aged 18-21 in Rotterdam (PM12, for plan and insights, see Appendix C18)
3. with 5 young people aged 15-16 and their teacher at a high school in Blijdorp, Rotterdam (PM13, for plan and insights, see Appendix C19). After this test, I was also able to gather feedback from the teacher, who I refer to as 'high school teacher 1'.

Additionally, I presented the workshop during 5 semi-structured evaluative interviews with different stakeholders:

1. with the youth worker from the youth hub in Bospolder-Tussendijken (I10)
2. with a teacher from a high school in Leiden (I8), referred to as 'high school teacher 2'.
3. with Adinda de Lange, participatory designer, working at Zeewaardig (I9)
4. with an urban development professional, working at Maakdestad (I7)
5. with the youth participation coordinator of the municipality of Rotterdam (I6)

This chapter is informed by insights from both the iterative testing and the interviews.

7.2 Using the workshop in practice

This paragraph's goal is to shed light on how the workshop works in practice. I elaborate on the key insights per main activity (imagining, reflecting and calling to action) and illustrate them with quotes and pictures from the tests. Finally, I present and reflect on the feedback from the participants.

2 Imagining

In this step, the participants were asked to imagine the futures through engaging with the objects and the scenarios. They compared the futures based on the axes – is it about exploring or about belonging, is there collective or individual responsibility for the culture in public space? - and gave the futures a place on the futures matrix. See Figure 7.1 for an impression.

Through discussion, sometimes fueled by questions I asked, they created a collective and in-depth understanding of what the future scenarios mean, see Figure 7.2. They also asked questions themselves: **"In this future, how would you make friends?"** – Young person, test 3 (PM13).

The objects and scenarios sparked their interest and evoked various reactions, such as being surprised, laughing, or disbelief, see Figures 7.3 and 7.4.

Sometimes, after discussing or listening to the scenario, the participants changed their mind on where the object belongs on the futures matrix, showing that the conversation contributes to an evolving understanding of the futures. One young person (test 3, PM13) said: **"Before, I thought it [the object] should be here, but now I think it should be closer to here."**. Additionally, the young people did not always place the object within one of the quadrants, see Figures 7.4 and 7.5. Sometimes, when in disagreement over where a future would belong on the futures matrix, they would negotiate about its location on an axis. This shows that the participants were

Figure 7.1. Young people during the imagining step, test 2 (PM12).

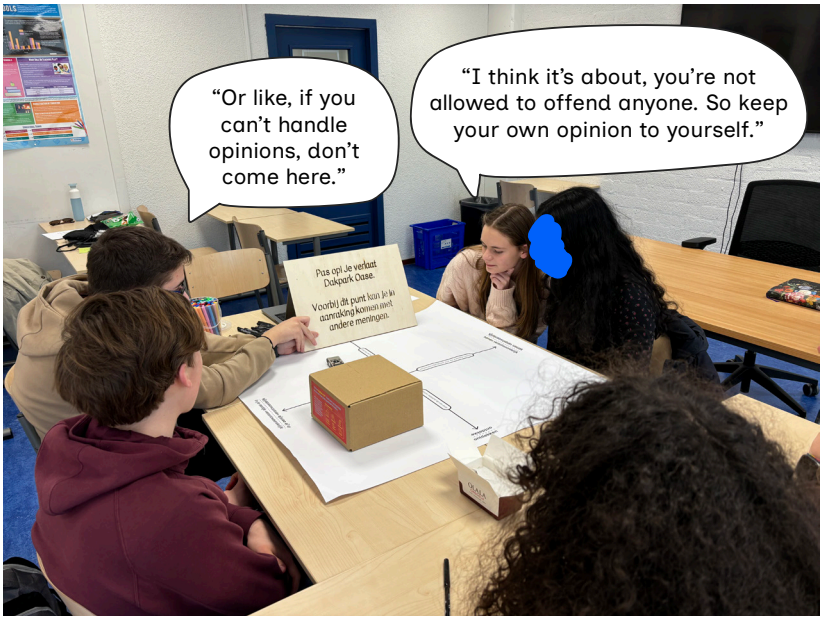


Figure 7.2. Young people during the imagining step, test 3 (PM13), speculating about the meaning of an object.

Figure 7.3. Young people during the imagining step, test 3 (PM13). The letter addresses them as ‘Dear young person #7492824,...”

Figure 7.4. Young people during the imagining step, test 2 (PM12), having a laugh about something they heard while listening to the audio of one of the futures.

actively engaging with the complexity of the futures thinking process, demonstrating not only critical reflection but also a willingness to reconsider their perspectives through dialogue and collaboration. Rather than treating the futures matrix as a rigid framework, they approached the axes as a spectrum—using the space between quadrants to express nuance, ambiguity and evolving viewpoints.

Overall, the objects and scenarios worked well to trigger imagination and emotional engagement. One of the participants of test 1 (PM11) said: **“I can immediately picture these scenarios, I immediately have some kind of feeling about them.”** At test 2 (PM12), one of the participants stated: **“The objects and stuff really helped with imagining, especially those audio clips.”**

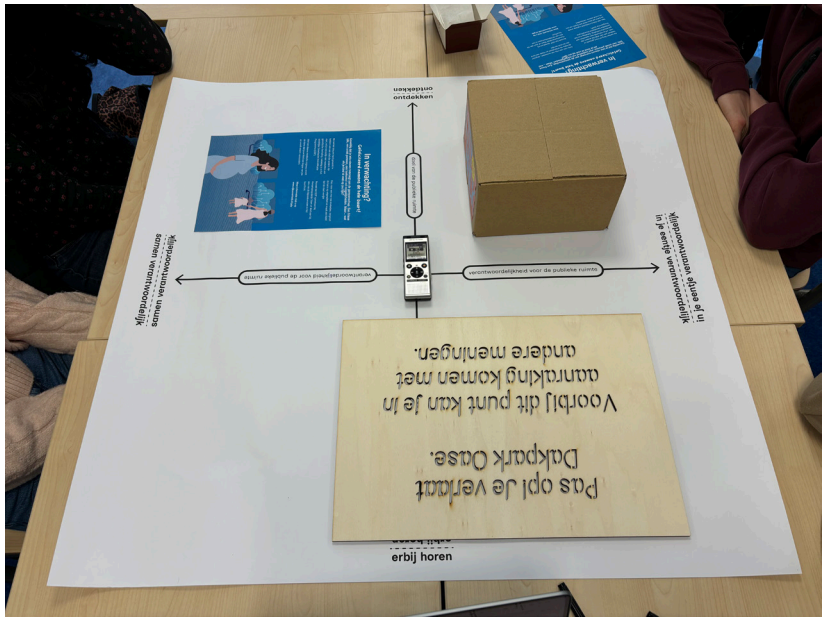


Figure 7.5. Impression of the imagining step, test 3 (PM13). The wooden sign was not placed in a specific quadrant, but along the axis.

3 Reflecting

In this step, the participants were first asked to reflect on the futures using a stack of question cards. In all three tests this part worked really well. The participants were very engaged (see Figure 7.6), articulated their opinions (see Figure 7.7) and had in-depth conversations (see Figure 7.8)

Afterwards, they said that the questions were easy to answer, that they enjoyed it and that they wanted to spend more time on this: **“I thought it was a pity that we had so little time.” // “Yeah, I could have spent more time thinking about this.”** - young people, test 2 (PM12). Some of them said it was because of the discussion, stating things like: **“I enjoyed the discussion, why you agree with something or why not.”** - young person, test 3, (PM13) or **“It’s fun to hear other’s opinions and to have a discussion.”** - young person, test 3 (PM13). I learned that the young people were eager to reflect and capable of complex, critical thought when framed accessibly.

To conclude this step, the participants were asked to write down elements of the futures that they would or would not like in their own neighborhood (see Figure 7.9). The results differed in levels of abstraction (see Figure 7.10). For example, participants would write down ‘involvement’ or ‘neighborhood BBQ’. The way these answers differ highlights the importance of tailoring the workshop to meet specific objectives. If the goal is to spark concrete ideas for action, then more specific responses (like ‘neighborhood BBQ’) are useful. However, if the goal is to provoke deeper reflection on community values, more abstract answers (like ‘involvement’) may be more appropriate.

This variability also points to the need for further research into how these responses can be influenced or guided during the workshop. Understanding what prompts participants to give more specific or abstract answers could help in refining the approach and aligning the workshop’s outcomes with desired results.

Figure 7.6. Impression of the reflecting step, test 2 (PM12). The participants engaged in lively discussions.

Figure 7.7. Impression of the reflecting step, test 2 (PM12).

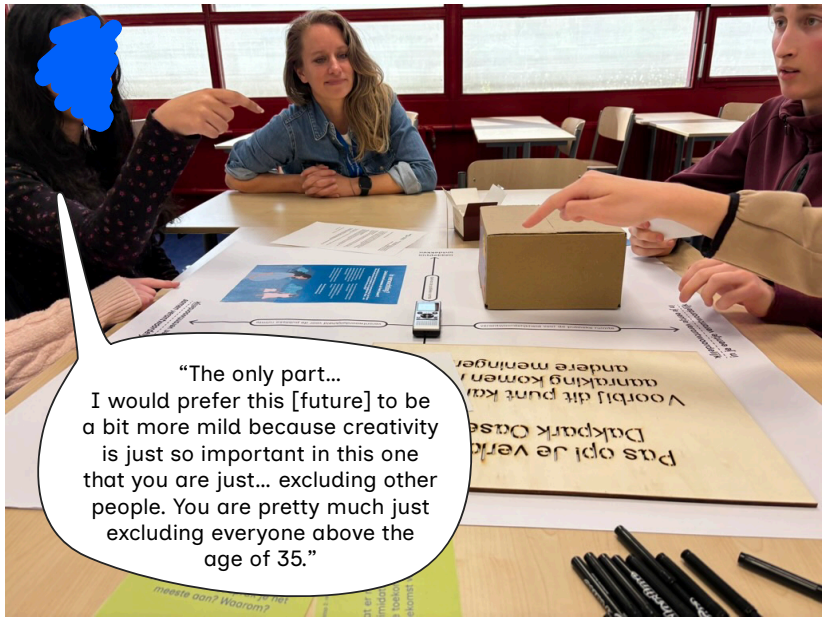


Figure 7.8. Impression of the reflecting step, test 3 (PM13).

Figure 7.9. In the final part of the reflecting step, participants write down elements from the futures that they would or would not like in their own neighborhood, test 2 (PM12).

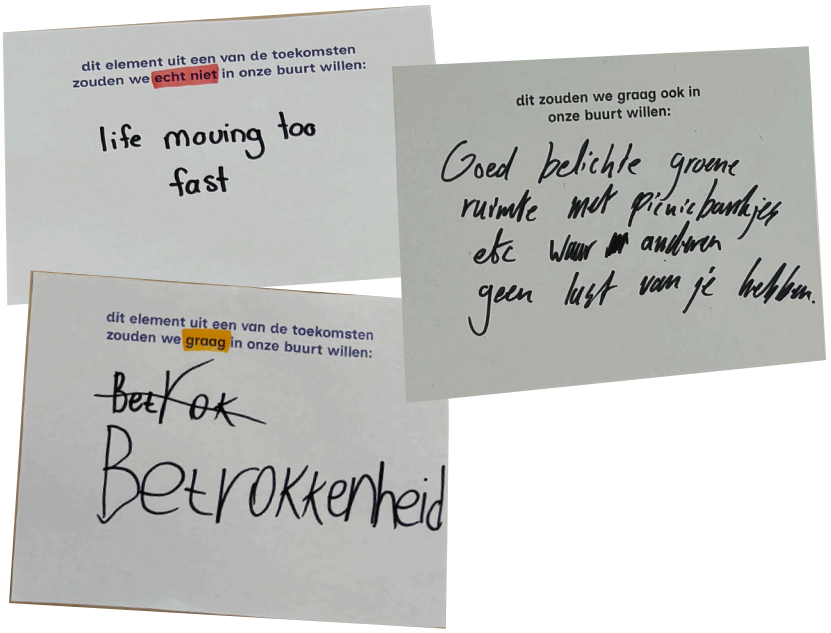


Figure 7.10. Impression of materials from both test 2 (PM12) and test 3 (PM13). 'Life moving too fast', 'involvement', 'well-lit green space with picknick benches etc. where others aren't bothered by you'.

4 Calling to action

Finally, the participants created 'calls to action' in the form of posters to campaign for something they find important for their neighborhood, see Figures 7.11, 7.12 and 7.13.

This step was experienced as great fun by the participants. The provided questions were helpful to get them started. When looking at the questions, one of them said: **"The first thing I thought of was the creativity!"** - young person, test 3 (PM13).

They also explained that they found it easier to start making the posters because of the provided materials.

Most of them used the elements that they had written down in the previous step as a starting point: **"Maybe we can use some things from here... Let's look at all the cards first."** - young person, test 3 (PM13).

Overall this step provided an opportunity for the participants to connect previously discussed topics to real-life possibilities. For some, it even sparked motivation, see Figure 7.14.

Figure 7.11. Impression of the participants making a 'call to action' in the form of a campaign poster, test 3 (PM13).

Figure 7.12. Impression of making a 'call to action' poster, test 2 (PM12)

Figure 7.13. Impression of a participant showing his 'call to action' poster, test 2 (PM12)

Figure 7.14. Impression of the participants presenting their 'call to action' in the form of a campaign poster, test 2 (PM12).

Evaluating afterwards

After the workshops, I asked the participants how they experienced participating in the workshop.

Their continued engagement and reactions showed that they had a positive experience overall. One young person (test 3, PM13) reflected: **"It was much more fun than I expected. I thought we would just talk about things. So I thought you would just have questions for us, and we would answer them."** Another participant (test 2, PM12) echoed this sentiment: **"I really enjoyed it. I actually did it a bit for [name], but looking back, I'm really glad I went. I really thought it was, yeah, fun."** These reflections suggest that the workshop format offered something more engaging than they initially anticipated.

The format encouraged active thinking and reflection. For instance, one participant from test 3 (PM13) noted: **"I thought the axes were fun. It wasn't obvious, I really had to think about it."** The participants from test 2 (PM12) thought something similarly: **"I found those different worlds interesting," // "It's also fun to have a discussion about that." // "I never thought about the fact that you could actually have such a future."** These reactions indicate that the speculative nature of the futures presented helped spark imagination and dialogue in a way that the participants found enjoyable.

Several participants also commented on the open and respectful environment of the sessions. One young person shared: **"I also felt that we had a lot of freedom to share our opinions."** (test 3, PM13), suggesting that the design of the workshop encouraged honest and personal contributions. Another participant (test 2, PM12) reflected more deeply on the process: **"I was most surprised by where it went. Like, at first I thought, okay, it's fun, we're having these discussions, but when we got the poster, I thought, oh wow! I really enjoyed that. I thought: this is what we were doing it for, and we really gained something from it, from first formulating your opinion and then thinking about yourself and your own environment."**

The teacher present at test 3 (high school teacher 1, PM13) was also enthusiastic, remarking: **"Presenting future scenarios really let them imagine the implications of choices we still have to make together."** This supports the idea that the workshop didn't just entertain, but prompted meaningful reflection.

However, there is room for improvement. The first thing I wish to point out is that without a real-world assignment or project, the workshop might engage young people and make them feel taken seriously and heard in the moment, but won't necessarily strengthen their sense of agency. The teacher present pointed out: **"It's not entirely clear to me whether the students really had a sense of what could actually be done with this approach or their input in practice. Making this even more concrete would strengthen it further."** - teacher, test 3 (PM13)

In reality, the workshop would be initiated and facilitated by a public space actor that is interested in the young people's perspectives on a specific matter, something I proposed with the collaboration structure outlined in 6.2.1. When testing the workshop, I asked the participants to think of their own neighborhood as a use case. Though this provided enough direction for the participants to carry out the tasks and led to valuable conversations, the tests taught me that a clear goal to contribute to is essential to make the participatory moment meaningful for the young people.

Second, as described earlier in this paragraph, the workshop worked really well in terms of emotional engagement - maybe even better than expected. Although the future scenarios and objects focus on youth and their role in public space, the conversations often expand beyond public space itself. This highlights that the issues surrounding public space are ultimately about how we coexist and live together as a community. In the workshop, the young people showed compassion and a sense of societal awareness. At some point during test 3 (PM13), one participant asked: **"Do we take homeless people into consideration? This might be really hard for them."** Later in the session, the participants had the following interaction: **"Do you guys remember**

the social bonding theory?" // "Ah, that is something you learn in social studies, but not in global politics." // "It's, when you have a good support system, then the chance that you do a crime is lower. And I don't think you have a good support system here." - young people, test 3 (PM13). This kind of reflection does not only show that young people are well aware of current societal issues and capable of critically engaging with them, it also shows that they are already doing so. For them, thinking about the future is not just fun, it's important, and it can be scary. After the workshop, the young people from the third test expressed that though they enjoyed thinking about the different futures, it had also been unnerving in some way. While pointing at one of the futures, one of them said: **"I honestly think that this is going to be the future..."** - young person, test 3 (PM13). After the workshop, when I asked how the participants had experienced imagining futures, they had found it fun, but one of them also said: **"It was also a bit scary. Because the only thing we see in real life, is bad."** - young person, test 3 (PM13). This demonstrates how speculative futures, even when fictional, can trigger real emotional responses—especially when they resonate with lived experiences.

For example, one of the future scenarios, 'algorithmic commune', tells the story of a future with a tightly controlled public space where citizens have to adhere to the existing system. While this future was meant to provoke thought, the participants took it seriously: **"The one [future] about the system might be a bit too strong, maybe it is a bit exaggerated." // "The bad thing is... it's not exaggerated."** - young people, test 3 (PM13)

Another exchange revealed how global perspectives shaped interpretation: **"I think that could be a future for another country, maybe not the Netherlands..." // "Russia or the United States?" // "Yes. But all those futures are possible. We can't imagine it because the Netherlands is organized differently, but in other countries, it makes sense."** - young people, test 3 (PM13)

These remarks were especially interesting considering that only one participant in that group was born in the Netherlands. Their international backgrounds clearly informed how they responded to the scenarios — revealing how cultural and geopolitical context shapes perceptions of what is 'possible' or 'realistic.' The teacher present at this test had also noted this: **"In this multicultural group, with recent experiences of living in very different countries and under very different regimes, the scenarios might not even seem all that unimaginable."** - high school teacher 1, test 3 (PM13)

This also made me reflect on my own position as a designer. What I considered to be preposterous was, to some participants, not that unrealistic. This underlines the value of engaging with diverse perspectives — and the importance of treating participatory futures work as a two-way exchange, rather than a one-directional tool for prompting discussion.

In conclusion, by iteratively developing and testing the workshop, I was able to refine the design and understand how it works in practice. The workshop supported young people in exploring possible futures of public space, reflecting on their own values, and translating these into calls to action for their environment. The imaginative and emotional engagement it generated shows that speculative design can be a useful way to open up conversation around complex topics such as the public space. The tests also highlighted some areas for improvement — most notably, the importance of connecting the workshop to a real-world context or question. This could help make the process feel more relevant and strengthen the participants' sense of contribution. Lastly, the range of perspectives shared during the sessions underlines the value of including different backgrounds when thinking about the future of shared spaces.

7.3 Assessing the workshop

This paragraph's goal is to assess the workshop in terms of desirability, feasibility and sustainability. As the workshop concerns various stakeholders, this assessment is done for every stakeholder group: youth (7.3.1), key people working with youth or 'key figures' (7.3.2) and people working on shaping public spaces (7.3.3).

7.3.1 From the perspective of young people

As described more extensively in the previous paragraph, the participants found the workshop engaging and relevant. Many expressed that it exceeded their expectations, particularly because it was more interactive, imaginative, and meaningful than they had anticipated. The workshop gives them a platform to express their ideas, fears, and hopes for the future of public spaces in a way that is fitting for them. It enables them to contribute to shaping public spaces in a meaningful way without spending a lot of time on it or actually having to do something with the insights themselves. The workshop is meant to be used with existing groups and can be held wherever the young people are comfortable, making it easier to participate from a practical standpoint but also in that it lowers the mental threshold to partake in such an activity.

In the sense of how sustainable and meaningful this workshop is for young people in the long term: that depends on follow-up and context. This is echoed by insights from the evaluative interviews: **"There must also be some kind of result for the young people. It seems challenging to me to make it concrete enough so that young people feel like they have contributed to something. It would be nice if they have the sense that someone can do something with this, or that it goes somewhere."** - high school teacher 2, (I8)

"If you want to feel that you have an influence, you also need to see something come of it." - Adinda de Lange, Zeewaardig (I9)

This is in line with insights from 5.1.2 on closing the participatory loop. While the workshop effectively allows young people to meaningfully contribute, this contribution should be used and communicated about to the youth later on. Without that, the (perceived) lack of a link to real-world outcomes may limit its long-term impact on young people's sense of agency.

7.3.2 From the perspective of people working with youth

The youth worker and the high school teacher I interviewed (I10, I8) and the teacher present at test 3 (PM13) showed a positive attitude toward the workshop, particularly appreciating that it is youth-centered and focuses on empowering young people to shape their environment. High school teacher 2 (I8) appreciated that the workshop wasn't imposed in a top-down way but instead stemmed from a genuine interest in young people's perspectives: **"I really like that it's genuinely focused on the young people. Often, these kinds of things are designed more in a top-down way. But this comes from a genuine interest in the young people themselves, and I think that's really good."** The teacher present during test 3 (PM13) echoed this sentiment, noting the impact of the method used: "**The well-thought-out method in which you let students experience an approach that surprises them is valuable, because you can see that it makes them look at things differently."** She also added: **"It's really beautiful to see how deeply and thoughtfully students think, reflect and look ahead when you ask them important questions and let them work with it in an interactive way. Definitely of added value."**

The youth worker from Bospolder-Tussendijken (I10) saw similar value, particularly in the workshop's interactive format and the way it encouraged young people to explore what matters to them: **"I think it definitely adds value for the young people, because it makes them think about what their needs are in the neighborhood, especially with the last assignment. What are you missing or what**

would you like to see, what makes you take action?" She also believed the young people would enjoy it, as she knows how much the young people that come to the youth hub in Bospolder-Tussendijken like to express their opinions, be creative, and engage in discussion.

Ultimately, the key figures working with young people were enthusiastic about the workshop because it doesn't just invite young people to imagine different futures — it shows them that their voices matter in shaping those futures, something that aligns with core principles of both teaching and youth work. As high school teacher 2 (I8) put it: **"I think this workshop can definitely add value. And that value lies in giving young people the idea that their environment is something they can shape, that they can have an influence on it, and that if they have an opinion about something, it can be acted upon. It's great if people at a young age already have the sense that they can contribute something, and that they can have an impact."** This exemplifies how key figures working with young perceive the workshop's value to lie not only in engagement, but in reinforcing a sense of agency — encouraging young people to see themselves as active participants in shaping their surroundings.

In terms of feasibility, the youth worker and both high school teachers perceived the workshop as easy to organize in their context. High school teacher 2 (I8) said: **"I think it fits very well and easily into the current situation. It's not something for the future or anything, it can be done tomorrow."** However, full lesson schedules make it hard to find time for new initiatives, but not impossible: **"There already are a lot of things. So I don't really feel there's much room for more programs. But something that's really about participation and genuine interest in the young people — that's something that's really missing. I think they often have to do things that the school finds important."** - high school teacher 2 (I8)
Therefore, while feasible, the main obstacle is ensuring there's time for it within the existing curriculum. The youth worker highlighted a similar obstacle. When I asked her how often she gets requests for research activities at the youth hub, she explained: **"Actually, that happens quite often, I think about once a month. So I don't do everything - that's a lot - and it's sometimes difficult to motivate the young people to participate. Because often they think: okay, but what do we get out of it? We have to participate in this, but why?"** - youth worker Bospolder-Tussendijken (I10)

This shows the importance of clearly communicating the relevance of the workshop to young people and the people that work with them. In a teaching context, it might be sustainable to embed the workshop in citizenship education. High school teacher 2 explained that the workshop touches upon a gap in the current offerings: **"It fits very well into citizenship education. Citizenship is mandatory in all schools, and where I work, there is a lot of money and space for it. It mainly focuses on political issues and feeling like a citizen, but participation actually plays a small role in that. However, when I look at society, participation plays quite an important role. So, it fits very well within citizenship, and I think it's an underrepresented topic."** - high school teacher 2 (I8). After workshop test 3 (PM13), the high school teacher present said the following: **"As a teacher, it was interesting to see how students connected concepts from lessons and reading materials to the issue at hand. This offers interesting possibilities for incorporating such an approach into lesson series. It would be even more powerful if there were an actual question, like from a municipality or the neighborhood at hand, where something could actually be done with the gathered input. This would be a wonderful way to address the challenge schools face in integrating citizenship into the curriculum."** - high school teacher 1, test 3 (PM13), highlighting how for people who work with young people, the design proposal taps into a real need to empower youth and make them feel that their opinions matter.

In summary, from the perspective of key figures working with youth, the workshop is seen as a valuable and timely approach to engaging young people. Its perceived strength lies in its ability to center youth perspectives,

support critical reflection, and strengthen a sense of ownership over their environment. Practical constraints like limited time and busy schedules can pose challenges. However, the overall fit with existing goals in education and youth work is strong. From an educational perspective, the workshop has the potential to bridge the gap between the classroom and real-world issues. Additionally, I learned that to be implemented on the long term, it is essential to clearly communicate the workshop's purpose and potential impact, not only to young people but also to the professionals working with them.

7.3.3 From the perspective of people working on shaping public spaces

Both the urban development professional (I7) and Adinda de Lange, the participatory designer (I9), expressed an interest in engaging young people in their work more often, as they recognize the importance of understanding their needs and perspectives, particularly when designing public spaces or urban areas. Though both parties usually come up with their participatory methods themselves, they were open to trying new things: **"We're open to new ways of engaging in conversations with people. How can that be done better?"** - Urban development professional, Maakdestad (I7).

"What we usually do is come up with a method based on the question, the people involved, and the goal. But I can really imagine offering this as a kind of standard add-on, where you say: with young people, you start with this, because you want to get a glimpse into their minds—what's going on there, what do they think about it?" - Adinda de Lange, Zeewaardig (I9)

De Lange highlighted that the workshop offers a valuable opportunity to interact with young people who may not be regular participants: **"What really appeals to me is that in two hours, you have really spoken with these youth. Which means you can reach those who don't want to come weekly. I think that's really great."** - Adinda de Lange, Zeewaardig (I9).

They thought it was a good way to engage young people. For example, the urban development professional (I7) said: **"I can completely imagine that this gets things going."**. Additionally, the participatory designer stated: **"It feels like a way that is so focused on making it enjoyable for young people, which makes it very attractive. And that it can be done in a short time, and that they go through an experience together."** - Adinda de Lange, Zeewaardig (I9). She added: "**But I think what makes it appealing is that it's like: it's ready to go, so you can just get started with it.**" Adinda de Lange, Zeewaardig (I9)

Of course, these public space actors would need to be able to use the insights from the workshop in their work. In the interviews, I asked them for their view on the usability of the insights. The interviewees were positive: **"I think we would definitely benefit from what comes out of it. This simply sparks the conversation about what is important to you. And you can eventually translate that into something that you find important for public space."** - Urban development professional, Maakdestad (I7). She emphasized: **"I think with any form of co-creation, it's not so much about what people write on the post-its, but more about the kind of atmosphere—you're listening, you're reflecting, and that's what you take away from it. What you usually don't get is the literal things people write down. What you get out of it, you kind of have to feel it, or something like that."** - Urban development professional, Maakdestad (I7). De Lange agrees with this: "**What happens is more important than what ultimately comes out of it.**" - Adinda de Lange, Zeewaardig (I9).

This shows that these interviewees acknowledge that the essence of the experience lies not necessarily in the tangible outcomes (like materials made in the workshop), but in the process itself and the atmosphere it creates. In other words, the process is what allows for deeper understanding and reflection.

In terms of feasibility, both professionals have engaged young people through schools before,

meaning they already have existing channels for reaching youth and some experience with establishing those channels. De Lange envisioned a win-win situation: **“I think you can definitely do something like this in the classroom. You can say: we can fill your hour with a really cool workshop. We’ll learn something from it, and so will you.”** - Adinda de Lange, Zeewaardig (I9).

They agreed that the workshop could be adapted to different contexts, though some customization of materials would be necessary depending on the local context and the specific project or neighborhood: **“I can imagine that depending on your case or the reason you’re doing this, these kinds of questions would be phrased a little differently.”** - Adinda de Lange, Zeewaardig (I9). She sees it as task of the facilitator to adapt the materials to a specific case and bring this local nuance: **“What often works well is to make it locally recognizable. So that in Lombardijen—for example, the young people there often call it ‘Lomba’—you say ‘Lomba’ a few times. A kind of personalization, adding nuance.”** - Adinda de Lange, Zeewaardig (I9).

According to these people working on shaping public spaces, the workshop has potential for being a sustainable approach to engaging youth in this. Both de Lange and the urban development professional suggested that the workshop could be implemented on an ongoing or regular basis, particularly in a modular or adaptable form. De Lange mentioned that the workshop could become a recurring activity in neighborhood councils or schools to help policymakers and other stakeholders keep in touch with the needs and concerns of youth in their communities. The urban development professional saw the potential for scaling or adapting the workshop for different areas, and potentially even using it as part of educational packages or as part of a broader strategy for engaging youth in urban development processes.

So, De Lange and the urban development professional saw potential in the workshop. However, as with any new approach, they explained that they might refrain from using it without clear benefits. They would need to be able to specifically communicate to their clients and the key figures working with youth what is going to happen in the workshop and more importantly, what value it brings. Luckily, the youth participation coordinator of the municipality of Rotterdam (I6) saw great value in the workshop when I presented it to her: **“The way you’re approaching youth participation is so different, I really like it. It completely aligns with the way we believe it should be done.”** This indicates that this communication of value should be further developed and even supported, but is definitely doable.

To wrap up, I conclude that professionals working on shaping public spaces see real value in engaging young people through this workshop. They’re open to using it, especially because of its accessible format and ability to reach youth they normally don’t, although it should be emphasised that the purpose and impact of the workshop need to be clearly communicated and adapted to fit their context.

7.4 Recommendations

This paragraph gives on overview of recommendations for both implementing and further developing the workshop.

Recommendations for implementation
To implement the workshop, I recommend to

- look for possibilities to embed it within existing structures such as educational programmes, youth participation initiatives or urban planning processes. This will increase feasibility and sustainability by building on what is already there.
- support area development parties in communicating benefits of the workshop to different stakeholders.
- further look into diverse participant needs. Some of the participants of the iterative testing thought the futures were fun but also scary, especially when scenarios resonated with real-world experiences. This underlines the need for thoughtful facilitation and space to process.

Recommendations for further development
One of the main insights from evaluating the workshop through iterative testing and stakeholder interviews is that young people need a reason to participate. A real-life case and feedback are essential to give young people the sense that they contributed to something and to make the participatory moment meaningful. This highlights the importance of closing the participation loop previously discussed in 5.1.2 and 6.2.3. Further development of the workshop should therefore focus on ensuring that participants receive tangible feedback about the impact of their input. This includes investigating how to help the facilitator to give feedback to the youth people, for example by embedding a preparation or a feedback step in the workshop process. A preparatory step could also assist the facilitator in customizing the workshop to different contexts: **"Maybe the facilitators should also ask themselves a few things beforehand. Some guiding questions. What makes this neighborhood meaningful for the young people, what are a few landmarks you can mention?"** - Adinda de Lange, Zeewaardig (I9)

While the workshop should be adaptable to different contexts to bring some local nuance, for wider application, an aspect of the workshop that should be further developed is the relevancy of the created future scenarios and object for other areas. The urban development professional noted that the scenarios are very clearly about a big city and specifically mention the city of Rotterdam (I7). She questioned if they would be relevant for young people that live in other cities or in more rural areas and suggested creating more futures so the facilitator can choose which ones are relevant for their project context.

As the diversity in abstraction levels of the answers given during the reflecting step suggest, another recommendation is to explore ways to guide participants toward specific outcomes based on the desired focus of the workshop.

Although the future scenarios were aimed at depicting 'preposterous' futures, test 3 (PM13) taught me that cultural and geopolitical context shapes perceptions of what is 'possible' or 'realistic' with regard to the future scenarios. This is not necessarily a problem, as I also learned that real-world relevance also has value in the sense that it enhances a sense of contribution. However, to ensure cultural sensitivity, the next iteration of the workshop should aim to involve diverse perspectives in creating the futures.

Additionally, both the youth worker and the urban development professional noted that despite efforts to write in B1-level language, they perceived some of the words used in the scenarios as too difficult. Thus, accessibility of the language used requires renewed attention.

The final recommendation for the workshop development that I would like to make is to consider the influence of the aesthetic qualities of the future objects on participants' experience with the workshop. For testing purposes and due to time constraints, I created low fidelity prototypes. It's possible that this enhanced accessibility or hindered imagining the object to be from the future.

7.5 Concluding this chapter

The aim of this chapter is to answer the question: **'To what extent does the workshop allow us to meaningfully engage young people in contributing to shaping inclusive and supportive public spaces in Rotterdam?'** I conclude that the workshop presents a promising approach to meaningfully engage young people in contributing to the shaping of inclusive and supportive public spaces in Rotterdam.

The iterative testing (PM11-13) showed that the workshop is highly engaging and that the future scenarios and objects play a big role in this. The futures matrix and reflection questions encouraged participants to think critically, listen to others, and reconsider their own views. They demonstrated the capacity to engage with complexity, ambiguity, and nuance through collaborative discussion. The young people voiced concern for community, fairness, and inclusion, and showed strong societal awareness. They're already thinking about societal issues — and with the right tools and environment, they can contribute meaningfully. For the workshop to strengthen a true sense of agency, it is essential to link it to real-world decision-making.

Evaluative stakeholder interviews (I6-10) have revealed that the workshop effectively aligns with the needs of young people, key figures and public space actors, demonstrating its desirability, feasibility, and viability within the current system. It offers a structured yet flexible platform that allows young people to voice their opinions, express their needs, and reflect on their environments, while positioning them as active co-creators rather than passive recipients.

With the right framing and follow-up, the workshop has the potential to not just inform, but to activate as well. It can make young people felt seen, heard and more aware of their role in shaping the future. More than anything, the workshop is a way to take young people seriously and to position them as valuable contributors to society.

Chapter 7: Key take-aways

‘To what extent does the workshop allow us to meaningfully engage young people in contributing to shaping inclusive and supportive public spaces in Rotterdam?’

- Iterative testing (n=3) showed the workshop is highly engaging and fosters meaningful dialogue. The workshop supported young people in exploring possible futures of public space, reflecting on their own values, and translating these into calls to action for their environment.

- The imaginative and emotional engagement it generated shows that speculative design can be a useful way to open up conversation around complex topics such as the public space.

- Cultural background influenced the interpretation of the futures.

- Youth demonstrated strong awareness of fairness, inclusion, and societal issues.

- Evaluative interviews with various stakeholders (n=5) showed that the workshop is widely seen as desirable: creative, youth-centered, and meaningful. It’s feasible to implement with few barriers, though time and clear communication of purpose are recurring challenges. Sustainability depends on integration into existing systems (like school curricula or planning workflows) and ensuring that youth voices are visibly acted upon.

- Recommendations for further development include closing the participation loop by providing tangible feedback to youth, ensuring cultural and contextual relevance by adapting scenarios and language, and supporting facilitators with preparatory steps. They also involve exploring ways to guide participants toward specific outcomes and investigating the influence of the aesthetic quality of materials.

8) Discussing the project and its results

This chapter marks the beginning of the ‘So what?’ phase of this report. So far, I have explored the issue of street harassment among young people from a systemic and in-context perspective, developed a design intervention grounded in a systemic understanding, and iteratively tested it. But what do the findings mean? The purpose of this chapter is to answer the following research question:

“What can be learned from connecting this project’s findings and results to the broader project aim of designing for understanding and reducing street harassment behavior among young people in Rotterdam?”

First, in 8.1, I address several limitations of the project. Then, in 8.2, I interpret the findings and results. Finally, in 8.3, I end this chapter with a concluding remark.

This chapter is informed by academic literature and insights from the project as a whole.

What is going on? | What is that really about? | What can we do about it? | How can we design for that? | **So what?**

8.1 Limitations

Before interpreting the findings in relation to the project aim, I wish to acknowledge several limitations.

The iterative nature of the Research through Design approach allowed for feedback throughout the development process. Pilot testing yielded rich findings. However, the fact that these findings are based on pilot testing means that even though the approach appears effective in principle, more extensive application is needed to confirm its impact. Additionally, the effect of the workshop has not yet been validated over time. Though the evaluation chapter has shown the potential of the design proposal, a longitudinal study would be needed to assess whether the workshop truly leads to a lasting increase in young people's sense of agency over the public space. Similarly, as the tests lacked collaboration with an urban development party, future research should focus on how urban planners can use these findings in practice and whether they lead to public spaces that embrace young people rather than reject them. This would strengthen the validation of the value and effect of the workshop - for young people, for key figures working with youth and for stakeholders interested in participatory practices and the insights the workshop generates.

Throughout this project, it was challenging to recruit participants for testing. Building relationships with key figures and young people takes time and investing that time does not automatically result in organizing a participatory moment together. Eventually, the groups of participants were smaller than the workshop is intended for, meaning that I have missed insights on important dynamics like group facilitation or peer influence that scale can introduce. To still gain valuable insights, I focused on facilitating rich discussion within the smaller groups and documenting the interactions in depth. For future facilitators, I recommend partnering early with schools or youth organizations. In addition to this challenge, there was also a limitation in the diversity of age and educational backgrounds among participants. The participants from test 1 (PM11) and test 2 (PM12) were all university level students above the age of 18, whereas the participants of test 3 were high school students aged 15-16. Test 3 offered promising signals that the workshop is also suitable for this group. However, further testing is needed to confirm the workshop's accessibility and relevance to youth with different educational backgrounds an ages.

Another factor limiting the understanding of the workshop's effect and impact is the fact that the workshop has not been tested in alternative youth-centered settings such as youth hubs or sports clubs. These contexts could reach different segments of the target group and offer important insights into how the format performs outside of a school environment.

Also, the insights produced through the workshop are closely tied to the skillset of the facilitator. This raises questions about the transferability and scalability of the approach. A less experienced or differently positioned facilitator may yield different outcomes, suggesting that developing and validating the facilitator handbook is essential for consistent implementation. While the workshop is intended to be facilitated by public space actors, this group is diverse and may bring varying levels of experience with participatory methods, futures thinking, or youth engagement. The facilitator should at least be able to create a safe and inclusive environment, guide group dialogue, handle emotionally charged or complex topics with care, and translate abstract ideas into concrete reflections. These are not rare or unattainable skills. With light training or onboarding, a broader group of facilitators can be empowered to deliver the workshop confidently and consistently.

Another limitation I wish to point out is that of my positionality. As a designer and researcher with particular values, experiences, and assumptions, these may have influenced the direction, framing and design proposal of the project. In fact, in the evaluation chapter it already became clear that the realisticness of

the future scenarios was clearly judged from my point of view as I have grown up in the Netherlands. Although reflexivity was practiced throughout the project, my perspective inevitably shaped the design and research choices made.

The final limitation addressed here is that the workshop assumes a willingness among public space actors to engage in meaningful youth participation. However, as Loeffen (2024), Osinga (2024) and Roggeveen (2024) have shown, there are often practical, institutional, or attitudinal barriers that prevent this from happening. Of course, such actors have to start somewhere, and my hope is that this workshop can serve as a low-threshold entry point, helping to make youth participation more tangible, structured, and accessible.

8.2 Implications of the project and its findings

The goal of this graduation project was to design for understanding and reducing street harassment behavior among young people in Rotterdam. We've come a long way from where we began. The purpose of this paragraph is to connect the project's findings and results to the broader project aim.

First, this project has demonstrated the complexity of street harassment behavior among young people in Rotterdam. The challenges outlined in Chapter 2 highlight that street harassment is not an isolated behavior. By involving young people through a participatory approach, we uncovered that street harassment is entangled with broader systems of inequality and identity formation that unfold in public space. In that sense, we framed public space as more than a backdrop to daily life—it is a space where societal values are negotiated and challenged. This resonates with Henri Lefebvre's concept of 'The Right to the City' which emphasises the fundamental right of individuals to access, shape, and reclaim public spaces as places of collective participation. For Lefebvre, public space is not just a physical location but a site where social, cultural, and political values are constructed and contested. This perspective aligns with what I argue to be one of the main functions of public space for young people: a social arena in which they explore who they are through interaction with their environment. It is where young people get confronted with the real world - a world full of inequality. They, too, are subject to it. Building on the insight that street harassment is deeply connected to identity formation and broader systems of inequality, future research could further investigate how public space influences the development of social identities among youth.

Moreover, of the complex and intersectional nature of street harassment, this project emphasises that it cannot be addressed in isolation, urging to move beyond reactive solutions. I highlighted the need for a more positive and constructive approach to tackling street harassment – youth work was way ahead of me in that sense, as one of the core principles of their work is positive behavior support, where the focus lies on desired behaviors (Golly & Sprague, 2013).
That the design proposal aims to increase young people's sense of agency is not just to prevent deviant behavior but also to show them that they don't have to adhere to the examples they see or the label they receive.

In the previous chapter, I have discussed the desirability, feasibility and sustainability of

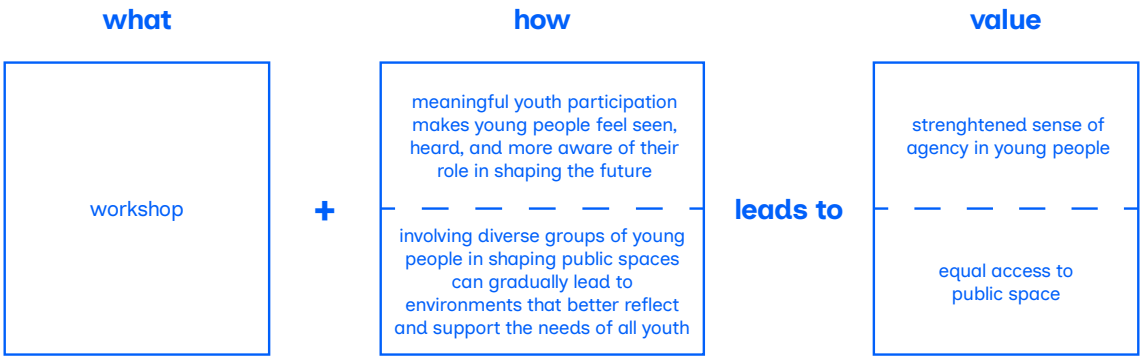


Figure 8.1. Systemic design rationale behind the workshop. Adapted from Van Der Bijl-Brouwer (2024).

the design proposal for young people, for key figures working with young people and for public space actors. This has shown how the workshop is experienced and perceived on an individual and organizational level, but I argue it also points to something bigger. Therefore, I will now elaborate on what value the workshop and its rationale can deliver to the system it was designed for and what ripple effects that could have on the long term. In Figure 8.1, I present a systemic design reasoning (Van Der Bijl-Brouwer, 2024) to illustrate how the workshop contributes to increasing the accessibility of public space as well as strengthening a sense of agency in young people.

The workshop creates an immediate bridge between young people and urban development processes by giving them a platform to voice their perspectives on public spaces. This directly addresses the need for more and inclusive participation from youth in shaping their environments. Within the system of urban development, where the voices of young people are often underrepresented, this workshop delivers value by providing a structured yet engaging way for them to express their opinions, needs and ideas. The design proposal enables urban developers and planners to gain insights into the preferences and priorities of diverse groups of youth, opening the door for more diverse and representative youth participation overall. Implementing the workshop can help institutionalize participatory approaches in urban development, education and youth work, addressing gaps in how young people are engaged in general. When a broader range of young voices are included, especially those who are often overlooked, the environments will eventually begin to better reflect the realities, needs, and identities of all youth. Over time, a more inclusive approach to shaping public space can help dismantle the inequalities that certain groups face, gradually creating public spaces that are not just accessible but welcoming to everyone. Thus, the project contributes a small piece to a future where all young people can feel ownership over public space and take part in public life on their own terms.

Taking youth seriously has other benefits. The evaluation of the workshop has shown that when asked in the right way, young people are more than capable of meaningfully contributing to shaping public spaces. In fact, they want to, exactly because they experience public space in the way they do. Young people already feel responsible for contributing to society (Nationale Jeugdraad et al., 2022) and want to contribute to tackling societal issues (Andriessen et al., 2024). It's not just fun, it's important to them. Especially in the context of schools, the workshop has the potential to bridge the gap between education and practice and to connect young people's fresh perspectives to their communities. The workshop re-brands young people as co-creators of society and positions them not as 'hangjongeren', loitering youth, but as valuable contributors to their environment. Taking part in the workshop could therefore encourage young people to begin seeing themselves like this, increasing their sense of agency over their environments and their lives. In this context of education, the workshop can serve as a practical tool to help schools deliver citizenship education in a more interactive and impactful way by involving students in real-world issues related to public space. I think the teacher from the DaVinci high school in Leiden (I8) put beautifully why this is important:

"What I really notice around me is that young people often feel like their opinions don't matter. They're all required to go to school, and they love to complain about that. So they end up downplaying their own role. Maybe that's just part of being a teenager—feeling like you don't really matter—but it's still a shame. I think a lot of students feel this way. Especially during the Research & Design course, where they're supposed to solve real-world problems. A persistent feeling they have is: why would anyone listen to us? They say it all the time: 'Why are they asking us? They're not going to do anything with this anyway. No one cares.' So every time someone actually listens to them seriously, it's a win. And I've seen what kind of impact that can have. When a client shows interest or is impressed, you really see a huge shift in those students. Suddenly they grow an inch and feel proud." - high

school teacher 2 (I8)

Earlier in this report (5.1.2) I have argued that to unlock the full systemic value of youth participation (in shaping public spaces, but also in general), we must move beyond symbolic participation and toward processes where young people feel heard, respected, and influential. This quote shows that when that shift happens—even briefly—it can deeply affect how young people see themselves and their place in the world. Implementing the workshop could therefore not only be a way for public spaces to become better catered to the needs of youth, but also a way to make young people's lives more meaningful, emphasising the power of participation.

The project has also shown the power of youth. In a study on youth perspectives on societal issues (Andriessen et al., 2024), more than 2/3rd of the young people participating reason from the perspective of general well-being and the common good when considering various challenges in society, mentioning values such as equality, caring for others and justice. However, the study also reveals a key barrier: youth often feel that they are not invited to participate meaningfully, or that their voices are not taken seriously (Andriessen et al., 2024). This underscores a main insight from this project: in order for young people to contribute, participatory practices must be catered to the needs of youth. Testing the workshop has demonstrated the potential of using speculative design practices in youth participation. By making futures tangible in the form of pre-recorded scenarios and objects, the workshop allows young people to explore alternative futures of public space, reflecting on their own values, and translating these into calls to action for their environment. This offers an engaging, interactive and new way to invite young people to challenge current realities and uncover new possibilities, which, to my knowledge, has not been done before.

While this project has been focused on Rotterdam, the principles and methods explored here could be scaled to other cities or even more rural areas. Future research could examine how cultural, spatial, or institutional differences affect the implementation and outcomes in different contexts. Additionally, I argue that the participatory and speculative design practices used in the workshop can be applied to address a wide range of societal issues. For example, young people could be engaged in imagining solutions to pressing issues like climate change, mental health, and social inequality. By empowering youth to contribute to addressing these challenges, we can encourage a culture of active citizenship and a deeper connection to societal issues. In this way, the work here serves as a model for tackling not just issues of harassment and exclusive public spaces but a broader set of challenges that affect communities everywhere. Future research could explore how these speculative design practices can be further developed and scaled across different social themes.

8.3 To conclude

This graduation project set out to explore how design can strengthen a culture of equality in public space by designing for understanding and reducing street harassment behavior among young people in Rotterdam. To better understand street harassment behavior, I explored this phenomenon from a systemic perspective and involved young people from Rotterdam through generative sessions. In doing so, it became clear that street harassment behavior is deeply rooted in existing structures of inequality. In public space, young people experience and reinforce these inequalities, but are unable to challenge them. I argued that this is due to a lack of agency over their surroundings, restricting young people's room for exploration in public spaces and driving them to conform to harmful existing norms.

This project reframed young people not as part of the problem, but as a part of the solution. To simultaneously make public space better catered to the needs of youth and reduce street harassment behavior, I wanted to increase the agency young people in Rotterdam have over their environment. The design proposal, a workshop, enables young people to contribute to shaping public spaces in a way that is both suitable and meaningful for them. It demonstrated two things: the potential of speculative design as a tool for meaningful youth participation on public space, and that young people are willing and more than capable to contribute to societal issues when they are taken seriously and it is framed accessibly. For the workshop to strengthen a true sense of agency, it is essential to link it to real-world decision-making.

The insights from the workshop can be used by public space actors to work towards a city that better accommodates the needs of various people and that is equally accessible for all. Moreover, the workshop positions young people as valuable contributors to society and cultivates optimism about a future in which they are seen, heard, and included. Ultimately, the project is a call for embracing youth and encourages an ongoing societal discourse with our young ones.

9) A personal reflection

My personal goals for this project included learning about doing design in feminist ways and practising to be a resilient designer. In this final chapter, I reflect on these goals and my experiences of the past months.

What is going on? | What is that really about? | What can we do about it? | How can we design for that? | **So what?**

A while ago, I was assisting Robin in a meeting where she was presenting the results of her graduation project to a group of investors. The design concept she presented, an interactive installation, is based on the practice of reflection. It allows young people to explore the impact of their voice. One of the investors – white, male, and over 50 – asked her about the impact of the concept. He wondered how reflection would help these young people, who 'live in underprivileged areas, suffer from mental health issues and have deeply rooted is-sues'. It threw me: which young people did he mean exactly? The ones I have met during this project, were not like that at all. In fact, most of them were sweet, idealistic and almost radically kind. I tried to explain to the man that his description did not match my own experiences. I wonder if he believed me.

We have known for years and years that public spaces are not accommodating the needs of women, People of Color, queer people, transgender people, intersex people and people with disabled bodies. A few weeks before submitting this report, Charlotte showed me scanned documents from the 70s, studies showing the exact same findings that studies are showing today: public spaces are accommodating male-dominated activities, poorly lit streets make nighttime travel dangerous, and so on. Not much has changed over the years. This reminded me of a visit to the theatre, last fall, around the start of this project. The show was called 'De jaren' ('The years') and it told the story of a woman growing up and old post WW2. Though the world changed completely over the course of her life, the routines she followed and her position in life remained the same.

Something that has been bothering me throughout the project is the fact that I've been focusing so much on the perpetrators of street harassment. Though this attention is justified – after all, we hardly know (knew?) anything about the driving factors behind street harassment behavior and placing emphasis on targets or bystanders directs attention and thus accountability from the people causing harm. Still, it felt like I was creating more space for people who already seemed to have a lot of it, in both the literal and the figurative sense. Though having space turned out to be something more fluid and context-dependent, I do like how the design proposal has turned out. The idea of the workshop is that we create more space for all young people, not just those who don't see any other option than to con-form to and uphold a culture of inequality. Our public space has always been shaped by those in charge, a select group of people that is predominantly white, male and privileged. I wonder: What would our cities look like if public spaces were designed with everyone in mind? What if safety, accessibility, and inclusivity weren't afterthoughts, but starting points? The answers to these questions have existed for decades. I would say it's about time we start acting on them - the workshop alone won't be enough.

Although, I do understand that the issues of our time can seem so vast, you would not know where to start. I found that adopting a Research through Design approach helped me with this. It made working on such a big issue way more manageable. I did not have to come up with a golden egg - I just had to come up with questions and ways to generate answers to those questions. Well, that I can do. In that sense, Research through Design assisted me in practising resilience throughout the project.

Besides the size of the street harassment issue, another reason why I wanted to practise being resilient in this project is because it was so close to home, both in the figurative and literal sense. As a young woman, I experience street harassment quite often. As a resident of Bospolder-Tussendijken, I came home to the project context every day. This was a bit overwhelming at first, however, interestingly enough, I noticed that as my understanding of street harassment evolved, so did my experiences with it. About halfway through the project, I was walking home when a man told me to smile or something, saying I was in a bad mood. I remember that I thought it was funny, when the summer before, a similar incident had made me very angry. I'm not sure what exactly caused this change. Maybe it was because I had spent so much time analyzing and contextualizing these encounters that they started to lose their power over me. Or maybe it was because I had gained a deeper understanding of the dynamics at play, of what street harassment says about how we live together.

In terms of what I learned about feminist design, I think this excerpt from the book Feminist Designer covers most of it: "*To be a feminist designer is to see the world as it is and to continually imagine it otherwise – to wilfully occupy the space between epistemological despair and radical hope*." (Place, 2023, p.8). That space—that tension—is exactly where I found myself throughout this project. In fact, it is where I find myself often. It's not an easy place to be. It means constantly questioning: questioning the world, the things we do, and myself. It requires staying open, even when things feel too big or too close to home. For me, doing this project has shed new light on the act of asking questions. They mean that you don't accept the world as it is, while being curious about how it came to be this way.

With this project, I conclude my time here at IDE. It has been taking up quite some space in my mind, not leaving much for considering what comes after. Though I don't know what the future holds, I now know one thing: for anything that seems daunting, I can always start by asking a question.

Donderdag
30 januari 2025

de Volkskrant

Columnist Diederik Samsom vreest de aantasting van de rechtsstaat

'In de Verenigde Staten worden eeuwenoude conventies over macht en tegenmacht als luciferhoutjes omvergeblazen'

PAGINA 25

De Next Level Chill Academy in Wormerveer is een ontmoetingsplek voor jongeren en biedt activiteiten aan. Dergelijke sociale structuren kunnen volgens de gemeente Zaanstad voorkomen dat jongeren een beroep doen op jeugdzorg. Foto Guus Dubbelman / de Volkskrant

Jongeren kunnen nergens anders heen

Sinds de jeugdzorg tien jaar geleden naar de gemeenten werd overgeheveld, zijn de kosten verdubbeld, terwijl juist op een kostendaling was gehoopt. In Zaanstad is te zien waarom. 'Dan hoor ik zeggen: vroeger zaten er nauwelijks kinderen in de jeugdzorg. Maar vroeger konden kinderen nog fatsoenlijk buiten spelen, was er een buurthuis, een vaste juf en een voltijds conciërge.'

PAGINA 13-15

Omdat weerapps als Buienradar zoveel verkoopbare data van u hebben, kunnen ze 'gratis' blijven. En dat is een probleem

PAGINA 4

Ziek hart gerepa
met 'levende' p

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PAGINA 1

Sjos 150

Lezende over het Sjostakovitsjfestival in Groningen werd ik teruggeworpen naar een periode in de jaren negentig, toen sommige mensen in Nederland ineens hadden bedacht dat het Sjostákovitsj was, en niet Sjostakóvitsj. Waarom dit idee bestond is een raadsel, want het is gewoon Sjostakóvitsj. Misschien gebeurde het naar aanleiding van de ontdekking, ook rond die tijd, dat de schilder Malevich niet Málevich heette, maar Maljévich.

Het kon destijds niet even snel worden gecheckt op internet, en daarom hield de 'Sjostákovitsj'-golf nog best lang aan.

ik een filmpje bekijken van een strenge Russi-belangrijke Russische componis-rde. 'En zeg alsjebliéft tse componist

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Appendices

The appendices of this report can be retrieved from the repository of Delft University of technology: www.repository.tudelft.nl

A // Project brief
B1 // Future scenarios (English)
B2 // Future scenarios (Nederlands)
B3 // Workshop: Question cards for step 3 (Reflecting)
C // Key take-aways per activity
C1 // First street harassment hearing (AA1)
C2 // 'Stem op een Vrouw' book presentation (AA2)
C3 // 'Not My Fault' exhibition on victim blaming (AA4)
C4 // 'Psst He Schatje' traveling theater experience (AA5)
C5 // Guerilla street interviews Schiebroek-Zuid (PM1)
C6 // Interview street harassment coordinator Municipality of Rotterdam (I1)
C7 // Interview Eva Oosterlaken, Studio Futurall (I2)
C8 // Interview youth professional / coordinator street harassment, wmoradar (I3)
C9 // Interview Accountmanager BOA's, Stadsbeheer Rotterdam (I4)
C10 // Interview Stijn Sieckelinck (I5)
C11 // System mapping session (DA1)
C12 // System mapping session Systemic Design Salon (DA2)
C13 // Iceberg-session (DA3)
C14 // Future archeologies method (DA5)
C15 // Game night @Youth hub Schiebroek (PM4)
C16 // Reflecting on the generative sessions with youth workers (PM9-10)
C17 // Workshop test 1 (PM11)
C18 // Workshop test 2 (PM12)
C19 // Workshop test 3 (PM13)
D // Information about the adjusted law 'Sexual Offenses' (Wet Seksuele Misdrijven)
E // Questionnaire for participants at the end of the generative sessions
F // Tensions Futures matrix
G // Ideation