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The Visit of the King

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Blog: The Visit of the King

4 May 2023

Words by Dr. Theresa Audrey O. Esteban, LDE GMD Research Fellow

It was a beautiful sunny day, 27 April 2023. A perfect day to celebrate King Willem-Alexander's birthday. This year, the King's birthday celebration was held in Rotterdam. The host city has selected a number of locations for the King and his royal family to visit throughout the city. People who are interested (or not) in seeing the royal family can plan their own itineraries for that day using the [route](#) that was made public a month in advance. I discovered the first stop on the route is close to my neighborhood. And so with my bike, I pedaled my way to the King's first stop, and on my way I saw King Willem-Alexander and Queen Maxima on their tour bus waving at us. *Wat leuk!*



More than seeing the Dutch Royal Family, it was the festivities and the energy that lured me to the crowd; mind you, if I can avoid crowds, I would. I patiently waited with tens of thousands of people for the royal family to alight the bus. While I waited, I snapped a selfie and jokingly captioned it, "Just one of them peasants waiting for the King to start the parade." It reminded me of period movies I watched about kings, queens, and princesses, and how the commoners would wave and offer flowers or fruits when the King would pass by, only this time everyone's waving their mobile phones so they can take pictures and videos. Well to-mato, to-ma-to!

As I stood there at Afrikaanderplein and watched the royal family, I couldn't help but smile and talk to the people beside me. I had a hard time getting a nice photo so I asked the girl sitting on her mother's shoulder whether she could see clearly, and she responded yes. So I asked her to take some photos for me, and she readily obliged. The photos were so amazing that I showed them to another lady on my left side, who said she would have her daughter do the same. This reminded me of our session "Where'd my neighbor go? Understanding the perils of living in a climate-vulnerable neighborhood" I co-led with [Dr. Mahardhika Sjamsoe'oad Sadjad](#) at the [2023 LDE GMD Conference](#).

Our panel: "Where'd my neighbor go? Understanding the perils of living in a climate-vulnerable neighborhood"

In our session we gave an overview of climate gentrification, and how the process of

designing and constructing more climate-adaptive housing and neighborhoods in Rotterdam may affect community composition. The exercise we conducted in the session thrashed out together with the participants our experiences living in and navigating our neighborhoods, and how we position ourselves in our communities. We asked questions on whether participants know their neighbor, if they live in a diverse neighborhood, and if there are changes in their neighborhoods. We distinguished similarities and differences in experiences based on our backgrounds but that Koningsdag I had the impression that everyone present, regardless of our origins, was having a good time. I was not a minority in Afrikaanderplein; we all looked different.

As the royal family proceeded to the water taxi station, some of the crowd from Afrikaanderplein moved towards the river and sat along the dock to wait for the royal family to get on the boat. I sat in between two ladies with their children. We laughed and cheered “*Kom deze kant op Willem!*” wishing that the water taxi driver would go to our side so we can get a closer look at the royal family. And as the water taxi drove through Nieuwe Maas passing by the large shipping vessels, we heard the ship captains honk their horns to acknowledge their presence. That gave me goosebumps and I thought that was special.

After the bombing of Rotterdam during World War II, there were immediate plans to rebuild the city. Rotterdammers were driven by rebuilding the city and the port to restore the economy. During the period of economic boom and urban regeneration in the 1960s, there was a demand for laborers especially those who will work at the port. As such there was a rise in what was known as the guest workers coming from Italy, Spain, Turkey, and Morocco. However, as I have also written in my [dissertation](#) it was quite naïve for the government to think that after the guest workers' contracts, ended they would go back home. As [Paul van de Laar and Peter Scholten](#) have written, the guest workers had a hard time integrating. Interestingly, news the next day of the Koningsdag in Rotterdam indicated how “[unforgettable](#)” the day was for King Willem-Alexander but also that the king spoke to locals about “the Netherlands’ history of slavery and how that translates to discrimination today.” These exchanges show an understanding or a desire for introspection that I think we all have to do.



As I reflect on what transpired that Koningsdag as well as on my own work and research interest on climate and social justice, I see clearly the value of introspection in our research. The very smart way Rotterdam used the background and history of the

city not only as a port city but also as a migrant city on Koningsdag, made the visit of the King all the more special. The theme [We are all Kings & Queens](#), which according to the website meant “everyone is different, but special”, was displayed in full regalia with music and dancers coming from different countries of origin. But beyond these festivities and oneness during that day, it also made me think of how we can make this feeling of neighborliness and openness last beyond the King’s visit. How can we make it real, so none of us immigrants, refugees, or queers feel left behind?

How can we make this feeling of neighborliness and openness last beyond the King's visit?"

In my own research in the [RED&BLUE](#), I try to see beyond the financial or infrastructural risks in climate adaptive investments in real estate developments in Rotterdam and Dordrecht. I try to do this by listening to the stakeholders' stories – from the government, private sector, academe, and more so the people in the community. These stories including experiences feed into a collective story of the city which can be used in co-creating solutions that is equitable and just. It is important to hear everyone’s stories and that is why the “collective introspection” we tried out during the recent LDE GMD conference was noticed by many of the participants. Many of whom invited us to do another round in their own organizations and institutions. Do you have a story to tell about housing, climate change, resilience, disaster risk? Do you want to co-create inclusive climate adaptive developments and build urban resilience through collective engagement? Feel free to contact me.

Dr. Theresa Audrey O. Esteban is a [research fellow at the LDE GMD center](#) and a post-doctoral researcher at the Delft University of Technology for the RED&BLUE project. Her research interest is in collective engagement urban resilience, climate, and social justice. Using her collective engagement urban resilience framework, she is currently developing a methodology she calls ‘collective introspection’ that looks at how lived experiences and local realities shape perceptions of risks and resilience.