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## How to become a wise city

*The first steps at reinventing  
Eindhoven from within*

> About the authors

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> A city in transition

At a time when cities are increasingly becoming the focal point for societal change, through the process of developing sustainable living environments, it can be said that cities have become places of transition. The city of Eindhoven is one such example of a place that is increasingly exploring its new post-industrial potential as an innovative and creative contemporary city.

Observing the societal debate around the creation of sustainable cities, the practices of fellow social designers around us and the diversity of local initiatives in Eindhoven, it seems as if, at certain levels, the city is buzzing and bubbling with an energy desiring change. To be able to make and undergo the transition towards a balanced, sustainable city and to interconnect the diversity of subjects that are being addressed, new ways of analysing the city are urgently needed. By exploring the city from a more holistic point of view, we aim to add to this investigation, while starting with the everyday reality of the lived city. This enables us to include local practices, energies and potential as well as the actors changing our point of view.

In this context, through this paper, we propose a new way of approaching urban research and aim

to explore and present an alternative perspective on, in our case, the city of Eindhoven. As such, next to sketching an observation or perception of the current city in the process of change, we will present introductory, exploratory remarks on this new scope and way of working while reflecting on the recent process of developing the concept of 'The Wise City', as well as the experiences of change makers in the field of our research area, the Doornakkers district.

> Seeing the city 'from within'

Currently, both in practice and in public discourse, a shift is taking place in which traditional conservative top-down views and approaches are placed next to, or are even replaced by new explorative, often unconventional and (more) empowering bottom-up initiatives, causing what is often referred to as a 'turning movement' (see: Rotmans, 2006), towards awareness of the need for more balanced and sustainable systems in society. As places are in transition, understanding the 'social layer' of events and developments in the city is needed to broaden and deepen the debate about the conception of Eindhoven as a city in transition.

Therefore, our point of departure in this approach is the cross-disciplinary connection between the fields of social design and human geography: in-between science and design. The scale we aim to focus on is that of the neighbourhood as an everyday lived world consisting of tangible practices. Hence, as a concrete outcome of this cross-disciplinary connection through which we aim to reinvent urban fieldwork, we are currently building on the notion of developing a learning platform - 'The Wise City'. The first activity in this context has been a summer school, which we organised during the summer of 2015. Through this, we aim to develop outlines for the reinvention of approaches to urban fieldwork. As such, we strive to connect design thinking to scientific research in order to gain insights about sustainable urban development, investigating the scope of Eindhoven as a Wise City.

In our view, both the fields of social design as well as human geography are fertile disciplines into which we can tap. Therefore, we aim to establish cross-disciplinary connections between these and additional fields. To do so, we need to leave behind the contra-positioning of top-down and bottom-up, or, in terms of de Certeau (1984), the 'city from above' versus the 'city from below' when investigating, acting in and building the city. Rather, we would like to work towards a starting position inside the city that enables citizens and urban professionals to observe and create it from inside-out in a process that we see as iterative and interactive. This is why we prefer to speak of the 'city from within'.

When observing the city from within, the city can be perceived as a constellation of a multiplicity of elements, that in their assemblage together shape the city (see: Fariás, 2010; McFarlane, 2011). Through this perspective, elements can be perceived to be of equal meaning that are empowered through their relations with others. This way of approaching urban fieldwork provides opportunities to 'cross', 'weave together' and 'connect' different disciplines, as well as different actors in the urban landscape in an open way.

In the following section, we will set out the outlines of a theoretical breeding ground for our methodological steps, which are outlined in section 3 and then synthesised in section 4.

## > 2. *Towards urban transition*

In order to shape and guide the transition towards a Wise City, a new understanding of urban fieldwork is needed, which facilitates the transition process in the city. This transition process can be seen as an ongoing movement, a

'transition landscape' in which 'tipping points' take place, that are 'moments' and 'movements' (see: Rotmans 2005; 2006) that accelerate or broaden the transition momentum. The practice of doing urban fieldwork in a new way, for instance, can be or lead to such tipping points. To give form to this process, 'transition experiments' (van den Bosch, 2010; Rotmans, 2005) can be undertaken. These can be seen as "practical experiments (...) that can make a potentially large contribution to a transition process" (Rotmans, 2005: 50). Such transition experiments can, for example, be done by making a place, an intervention, a process and/or a set of 'tools' that can guide a transition process.

Derived from the above, the transition process is seen as a 'turning movement' in which various transition experiments happen or take place simultaneously, thereby often strengthening each other. In the transition landscape (see: Rotmans 2005; 2006), the accumulations of such experiments or movements can together contribute or lead to tipping points. The active creation of new methods, places and objects can contribute greatly to creating such tipping points. What may seem like small steps taken by active local 'change-makers' - both groups and individuals who are actively contributing to urban transition, often at a local level such as the neighbourhood -, may actually lead to valuable insights in how to operate from here as active urban professionals. Creating tipping points, or contributing to make them happen, can already be done on a small scale. Later on these might be enhanced by building on these small steps. As we see it, reflecting on steps taken is important in this process, as only then can the transition towards a Wise City be deepened in a meaningful way. As an explorative step, in the next section we lay out a possible new approach for doing such experiments.

## > 3. *Outlines of a methodology: iterative stepping stones*

In the context of urban design and development as well as in that of sustainability issues we often tend to think at a large and abstract scale. However, in order to reinterpret these processes and themes and to see the city in a more 'complete' way, a change of scope is required. To see the city from a more 'holistic' point of view - that is, taking into account different domains (social, ecological, economic) - we would rather start within the reality of the everyday lived city, including a smaller and tangible scale of already existing everyday life. These human scale practices can be connected to an iterative design

process that does more justice to actually existing problems, qualities and opportunities present in the local context, while bringing 'solutions' at a human scale and scope. When looking at it this way, everyday practices present themselves as containing key actions, moments and processes to which we can connect. To be able to find these connections, we will need new ways of analysing the city that thoroughly include local practices, energies and potential in order to find grounded design questions as well as strategies to digest and distil the findings of these investigations into highly interactive and iterative design processes that connect rather than produce. These strategies for new 'fieldwork' will need to combine creative processes and skills with a more theoretical understanding of research and the ability of reflection.

In exploring and sketching possible methodological outlines for such strategies, which inherently will never become fixed, we, as writers of this article, aimed to position ourselves 'within' a living case: the Doornakkers neighbourhood in Eindhoven. Seeing the writing of this paper and its underlying research as an example of the iterative processes we are aiming for, our approach to actually organise a summer school, making use of the neighbourhood as a learning platform, gave us the opportunity of a participatory approach. This enabled us to get to know active people and the key actors amongst them in the local area. As such, developing the summer school 'the Wise City' can be seen as part of a participatory research process, an active case study.

In organising the summer school as a first pilot project, we closely collaborated with the locally embedded social designers from Corner Spot (Minsung Wang and Conor Trawinski). In their position as such, they are the actual 'change makers' on the local scale of the Doornakkers neighbourhood. Corner Spot, as a local 'social design hub', is a place where the city obtains new meaning. As a team of social designers, Wang and Trawinski actively participate with and in the local community to activate change in a practical way. They organise all kinds of hands-on practices through which they strive to (re)shape the city on a local scale, creating a fertile ground for social innovation. Explaining the participatory process approach they call 'co-design', Wang states, that "traditionally, design is a lot about problem solving, but we don't work as problem solvers. The conclusion is always open. Because we put a lot of focus on the participatory process, whatever outcome, it becomes something that everyone takes ownership of and embraces".

Therefore, working in such a way creates a new role and position for the city-making professional.

Wang explains: "in our case, being rooted and based here in the neighbourhood, we try to find an interdisciplinary connection that rarely happens by itself. We have to have someone in the middle to connect and to mediate, to bring together the professionals at one side and the good will, motivation and manpower of the community on the other side". Trawinski adds: "it is really about connecting all these levels and making sure that they are able to see each other. So in a way we are acting a bit as a translator as well. It is important to have that role in between". Hence, Wang and Trawinski are located in between different life worlds, of different actors, connecting, moderating and translating between them. This new in-between role of the city-making professional is explored and given form along the way through the hands-on practices they collectively shape with neighbourhood inhabitants.

By acting in ways such as in the summer school and Corner Spot, small steps towards urban transition are set in motion. The summer school can hence be seen as a transition experiment that is a valuable frame in the chain of events that together create societal tipping points towards the development of a Wise City.

In this methodology, forming the guidelines for the summer school, our first step was to draw up an inventory of a wide range of features of the neighbourhood in order to get a feeling of the lived reality of the area. Through this process the current situation and presence of (social) material and potential can be mapped. This creation of an inventory best happens in a visual, dynamic and accessible way, making it more tangible and interactive. Then, essential qualities and issues can be distilled, forming elements to build with towards a contextualised strategy or scenario for a Wise City. The selection or distillation has brought together various elements, which form a collection. Now, possible relations and connections may be probed or tested, to create a new constellation of the selected elements, leading to the development of a scenario. When the new constellation of elements is set, the ingredients are there to create a 'storyline'. This storyline can be seen as a scenario for future possibilities for developing the neighbourhood in a wiser way, including the time aspect. City making should be seen as a dynamic process that takes time to evolve, in which reflection may be the most important means. These scenarios are thus visualising a future for the neighbourhood. The outcome and results of the summer school have been presented during its closing event in the form of scenarios for the future of the urban environment.

#### > 4. *Reinventing the city from within*

As we explored in the former section, in order to 'make' and concretise the transition towards a Wise city, we believe that improved synergy between disciplines and active 'transition fieldwork' is needed to interpret and give meaning to social and urban innovation.

Through this paper, we have attempted to point out our view on developing new ways of conducting urban fieldwork by outlining the first stepping stones that we are taking. We are currently exploring these steps to actively contribute to a tipping point in the transition towards a Wise City. Renewed meaning can be given to the city in transition, as we have given an impulse by developing and 'doing' the summer school, The Wise City. Our next steps in this ongoing process of exploring and designing will be to continue to develop the theoretical and practical framework into a comprehensive methodological toolbox for doing urban fieldwork for city-makers; social designers, human geographers, urban planners, among other professionals. This we will do on the basis of the outcomes of the summer school, where we will set out the scenarios for a Wise City. As said, what will continue to be our point of departure, are everyday cycles in lived space, which may serve as starting points for new ways of doing, making and being in the Wise City.

To collectively give form to these new spaces and ways of sustainable urban living, new roles are needed. Cross-disciplinary place-makers and change-makers, connectors and transition coaches are among these new roles of urban planning professionals, able to connect various scales and actors. What binds this 'new' group of city-makers, is that they collectively think and do outside of known pathways. As such, collectively we create opportunities to grow towards a Wise future.

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