

placemaking week europe Rotterdam

Creating
better cities
together



placemaking
europe



Official Report

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This report provides an overview of the Placemaking Week Europe 2024 (PWE 2024) in the City of Rotterdam in the Netherlands. The event is the result of a collaboration between Placemaking Europe and the City of Rotterdam.

Placemaking Week Europe is an annual festival that brings together hundreds of placemakers, urbanists, city officials, and community leaders from across Europe and beyond. Placemaking Week Europe is created in the spirit of collaboration and inspiration and it has proven to be a vital platform to share best practices, foster meaningful collaborations across borders, and to experience the host city's places, and initiatives firsthand. We provide a friendly environment surrounded by brilliant minds. The 8th annual edition, hosted from September 24 - 27, 2024, marked yet another successful Placemaking Week. We thank you for your interest to read our summary of fantastic sessions, activities, and learnings - and further, we motivate you to join our community of placemakers and bring the shared takeaways from Rotterdam forward into your practice.

Reflecting on our time together in Rotterdam, we are proud of these outcomes:

- The incredible turnout of placemakers from all across the globe. 700+ placemakers this edition.
- The tight cooperation between Placemaking Europe and the City of Rotterdam, tapping into the local strengths, hidden secrets and opportunities.
- Welcoming newcomers into the community: *"One aspect that stood out to me as a newcomer to placemaking was that Placemaking Week Europe was not exclusively Eurocentric. It was incredibly valuable to learn from and be inspired by global projects, offering ideas and solutions that I can now adapt and implement within the European context."*
- Honest, meaningful conversations and discussions all over the city, in different settings and with a lot of fun as well!

SECTION 1

Welcome

During the week, Urbanistica produced 37 episodes featuring placemakers from 24 countries. The total content reached 360 minutes, covering a wide array of topics such as:

- Placemaking in different contexts like Australia, Canada, Asia, and Latin America.
- Themes include gamification, mental health, creative placemaking, and gender inclusion.
- The exploration of concepts like the 15-minute city, tourism, and mixed-use developments.

Listeners can tune in to these discussions on:

- Apple Podcasts: [Urbanistica Podcast](#)
- Spotify: [Urbanistica Podcast](#)

Featured Episodes:

- Reflection about Placemaking Week Europe in Rotterdam – Ethan Kent (Episode 485, Oct 29, 2024)
- Placemaking Movement and Bureaucracy – Charles Landry (Episode 484, Oct 28, 2024)
- Playful Urban Spaces – Laska Nenova (Episode 483, Oct 27, 2024)
- Creative Placemaking & Urban Acupuncture – Donica Buisman & Marlon Titre (Episode 480, Oct 24, 2024)

Stories from Placemakers

A significant feature of this year's Placemaking Week was the collaboration with the Urbanistica Podcast, hosted by urbanist Mustafa Sherif and interviews led by Robin Cox on the iconic portable Good Place Bench.

During Placemaking Week Europe 2024, Mustafa showcased the voices and stories of placemakers, spotlighting their projects, challenges, and passions in his temporary, very cool Urbanistica Podcast Studio at Keilepand, where he recorded some special episodes live. He reached listeners from 140 countries.



The Good Place Bench celebrated the community by asking, "What is your good place?" and featured voices from 25 cities, including Malmö, Lisbon, Berlin, New York, Chicago, Singapore, Toronto, and more.

You can now listen to all [25 episodes](#) on:

- Apple Podcasts: [Good Place](#)
- Spotify: [Good Place](#)

We want to thank Mustafa, Robin, their teams, and of course all the participants and contributors, for their time, curiosity, openness, and dedication in sharing their personal stories!



Keep reading to learn more about:

- Why did we collaborate to host PMWE 2024 in Rotterdam
- What themes and questions did we explore together with the City of Rotterdam
- How did we address the 4 key themes and synonymous local site workshops
- What are the facts & figures
- Insights from our keynote listeners
- What was the impact of the event
- What's next...





SECTION 2

The city

Words from the Rotterdam team

Rotterdam was very proud to be the host city of Placemaking Week Europe in September 2024.

The main goals of organising Placemaking Week Europe were to strengthen the belief in placemaking as an indispensable instrument for successful City-making and to show everyone how proud we are of Rotterdam as a city of Placemakers. Placemaking Week Europe and the additional program were a success, with immediate results.

We have involved as many partners from Rotterdam in the organisation as possible. The city showcased itself as it truly is: a colourful and international city, and a place shaped by people from all corners of the earth, along with some heavy rain showers from time to time.

Placemaking Week Europe had an enormous impact for both the municipality and the city itself, and it gave a massive boost to our just-released Placemaking manifesto. It raised more awareness among councilors and management regarding placemaking.

Rotterdam's local Placemakers were a powerful force in executing Placemaking Week Europe's events and in developing a comprehensive side program for the residents of Rotterdam. Along with Placemaking Week Europe, the side program was highly successful, featuring events such as Placefaking, Tile-Flipping, and a City Makers Dinner.

Continuing with the manifesto aimed at systematising placemaking, the city is developing an action plan to link placemaking initiatives and Placemakers within the municipality to the Rotterdammers. This action plan is expected to be completed by mid-2025. The initial step was undertaken during the local placemaking dinner, which was part of Placemaking Week Europe, and a project leader has already been appointed. We aim to implement this action plan in August 2025 with the necessary capacity and resources secured.

A big thank you to all participants of Placemaking Week Europe 2024 for all the energy, ideas, and inspiration you have given us!



The City

Rotterdam is known for its harbour, lively cultural life, modern architecture and... placemaking. The extensive distribution system including rail, roads, and waterways have earned Rotterdam the nicknames “Gateway to Europe” and “Gateway to the World.”

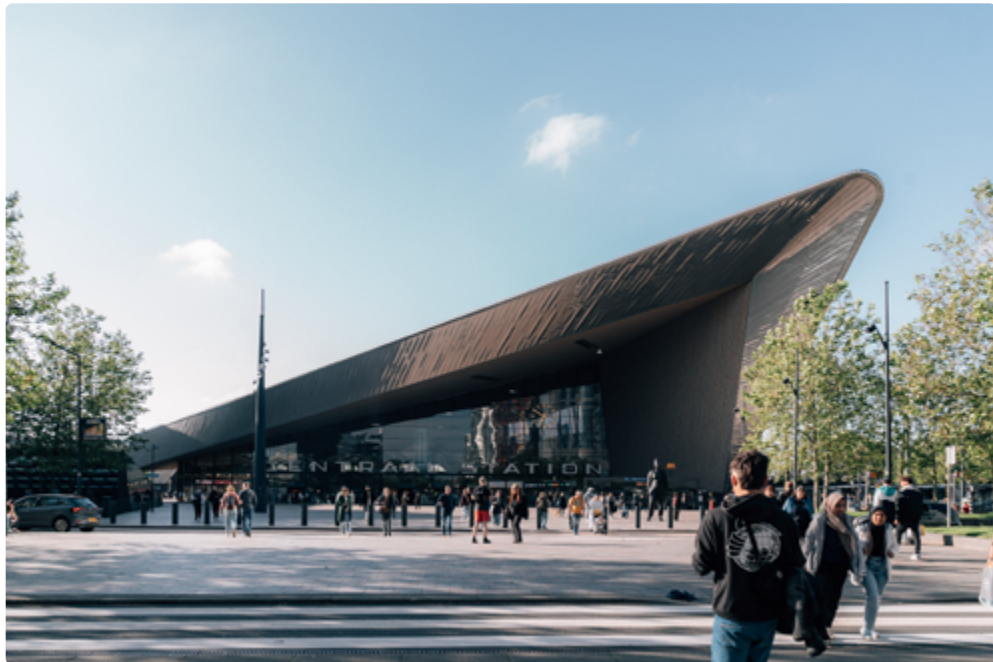
The city’s nightlife is filled with diversity. Glamorous cocktail bars and classic pubs, hip and happening dance clubs and intimate concert venues. Rotterdam also has a varied architectural landscape, including skyscrapers designed by architects such as Rem Koolhaas, Piet Blom and Ben van Berkel.

Rotterdam exhibits impressive examples of placemaking and sets a stage for a future of initiatives that cater to diverse groups and that address complex issues across various topics in the city.

During Placemaking Week Europe 2024, you could explore the hidden forces of Rotterdam placemaking and aspects of the process that are vital for innovation.

In this quest, we teamed up with local heroes who sometimes navigate beyond existing power structures to create a sense of place, specifically around Keilepand, our homebase located in the Rotterdam Makers District of Merwe-Vierhavens (M4H), which tells an impressive place-making story and our other venues in Rotterdam South and Rotterdam Central District.







City Tours

The Placemaking Week Europe 2024 program featured a series of special city tours that offered attendees an extra, in-depth look at Rotterdam from a variety of perspectives. These unique excursions were designed to showcase the city's diverse urban landscapes, uncover hidden stories, and explore the impact of placemaking in different neighborhoods. Led by local community leaders, the tours provided

an immersive experience into Rotterdam's evolving public spaces, waterfront areas, and creative districts, allowing participants to see firsthand how placemaking principles shape the city's identity and foster community connections.

Rotterdam & its Climate Adaptation Measures

The weather is changing. Rotterdam increasingly faces flooding due to heavy rainfall, but at the same time, summers are getting hotter and drier. How do we as a city deal with sometimes too much, and sometimes too little water. During this tour, **Tim de Waele** and **Stefan Herwig** guided participants past various climate-adaptive measures that the city, with, for or by residents, has taken to keep the city liveable. In addition, they learned everything about the municipality's climate adaptation program.

Rotterdam Introduction: Urban Vibe Tour

Why is Rotterdam so un-Dutch? This tour introduced the participants to the typical Rotterdam scene, with stunning modern architecture and social experiments. Countless cultures influence the vibrant urban life. Historian **Ferrie Weeda** explained how Rotterdam has been continuously reinventing itself for over 150 years. The result is a city of contrasts - often the product of conflict. Big-scale icons like Erasmus Bridge, Markthal, and Cube Houses contrast with charming parks and picturesque districts like Delfshaven. Huge port industries on one side, and alternative sustainable experiments on the other. In this tour guests learned about Rotterdam's strong civic pride, based on a history of struggling, adopting, and resilience.

Rotterdam & its Waterfronts

The **Rondje Bruggen** is a popular running route that runs along the north and south banks of the Maas and no fewer than three iconic bridges: the Erasmus Bridge, the Willems Bridge, and the Koninginne Bridge. There are great opportunities to develop the area into a river park where you can relax for a while, with a beautiful view of the river, where you can meet friends or meet new people. Where you can muse on a bench, exercise outside, or

just take a walk. Where you can eat your sandwich or drink a cup of coffee during the break. This is already clearly visible in some places and good use is also made of public space. In other places, a lot still needs to be done to make the space attractive for use. **Sandra Smit, Pieter de Greef, Marina Baas and Malissa van Wijk** toured and discussed the opportunities with the participants.

Rotterdam & its Intangible Neighbourhood Heritage by the Wijkcollectie

Stichting Wijkcollectie (the Neighbourhood Collection Foundation) provide a platform for neighbourhood stories in Rotterdam and preserve them as the city's 'intangible neighbourhood heritage'. In this way, stories are made visible, preserved, and shared. Not with a large collection of stories as an end goal, but precisely to learn from those stories and use them to initiate connection and cooperation. Stories can inspire others, spark ideas, and bring people together, that's why!

On this tour, placemakers were inspired by the local heroes of Bospolder-Tussendijken, a Rotterdam city district where everything comes together. What do they experience here? What ideas do they have for the neighbourhood? And how do they make sure these ideas become reality?

Behind the Scenes: Keilewerf Tour

During Placemaking Week Europe Keilewerf's 10th anniversary was celebrated with an exclusive tour by **Lenard Vunderink and Solange Frankort**. This tour offers a comprehensive overview of the past, present, and future. The creative workspaces were explored to learn more about the makers and their projects, and to discover how we are shaping our future.

Tour the Bajonet: A Climate-Proof Neighborhood

During this tour, one discovers how the Oude Westen is transforming into a climate-proof neighborhood. Through community-driven projects, paved areas have turned into green, rain-absorbing spaces. With gardens, green roofs, and water storage systems, we're building resilience against climate change. Together with the Municipality, Aktiegroep Oude Westen, **Wolbert van Dijk**, and the local residents, nine projects were completed over the past seven years. By tapping into the talents and enthusiasm of the community, we're not just greening the neighborhood—we're bringing people together.

The Energy of Middelland

Middelland is a real city neighborhood in Rotterdam West with residents from 172 cultures, rich and poor, low and highly educated, young and old. This diversity is an enormous wealth. At the same time, this diversity does not immediately make a community. 13 very different places in Middelland offer space for meeting and connecting in their own way, through which the richness, the energy of the community can be tapped and accessed. **Marieke Hillen** took people along these places for meeting, such as the Wijkpaleis or the Spoortuin, but also along places that, thanks to the community, have acquired a new form and meaning in the neighborhood.

The Museum of Unintentional Art

Art without a story is just an object. But can an object become art with the right story? Welcome to The Museum of Unintentional Art, the museum with the largest exhibition space in the world: the world itself.

We turn the museum walls inside out and elevate the mundane into art. Our curious museum director, **Willem Dieleman**, took everyone on

a one-and-a-half-hour tour to transform them into an unintentional art connoisseur.

Radicalizing the Local in the Afrikaanderwijk: The Power of Self-Organization

The Afrikaanderwijk has its own strengths and challenges: it has the highest unemployment rate in Rotterdam, but it also has a lot of values, in Culture, Creativity, and Craftsmanship. These talents are deployed by the neighborhood cooperative in order to keep the benefits local. **Paula Zwitser** ran the tour through the neighbourhood, visiting the circular recycling station on the market which is run by the neighbourhood cooperative, and the community garden. It focused on what it means to self-organize in a gentrifying area.

Holy Houses and the City

Holy Houses and Placemaking in the City: Podwalk Cool Zuid investigates the urban development in Rotterdam's Cool-Zuid neighbourhood, where thousands of additional homes will be built, and new residents will move into the area soon. Amid this urban development, there are four varying church buildings. What role do these buildings play in the neighbourhood, and how will their role change in the face of this development?

Heilige Huisjes Rotterdam created this **PodWalk** that tells the story of these places in a changing urban landscape and gives the listener the chance to experience the neighbourhood of Cool Zuid in a new way. Composed of interviews and contemplative commentary, the PodWalk will be presented through a publicly accessible neighbourhood tour.

Rotterdam Rooftop Tour: A Sustainable Second Layer to the City

Flat rooftops offer a wealth of underutilised, high-potential space in urban environments worldwide. In Rotterdam, both temporary and permanent initiatives have begun to transform these spaces into vibrant hubs of urban sustainability. The cultural organisation 'Rotterdam Rooftop Days' explores this potential through creative programming showcased in their eponymous annual festival. During this tour by Nikki Kamps, several rooftop sites were visited where temporary cultural programming and permanent (green) redevelopment come together to maximise sustainable impact.



Reflections on Rotterdam from Attendees:

*“Great city for cycling!
Amazing cycling
infrastructure and very
relaxed and friendly people.”*

*“Such a fitting city for Placemaking
Week! Rotterdam showcases
design bravery, treasured heritage,
community values, diversity, fab
public art, reimagined spaces, and
great transport options—a mosaic of
everything we strive for in our work.
It was wonderful to return and
learn more about this imaginative
place. The festival was inspiring
and energizing as always, and we
loved the mix of old friends and new.
Thank you, Placemaking Europe and
Gemeente Rotterdam!”*

**Thank you for joining
us in Rotterdam!**

Our Venues

Placemaking Week Europe 2024 took place over 3.5 days and featured keynotes, workshops, plenaries, and fun activities all over the City of Rotterdam. At our disposal were 9 venues, each with its own placemaking story, providing a unique canvas for this year's edition. On top of that, people met at many different spots in the city for offsite workshops, tours, and experiences that added more flavor and excitement to the programme. All in all, the complete city of Rotterdam served as a canvas for Placemaking Week Europe 2024.

1. OASE

Oase Rotterdam, located along the Rotterdamse Maas is a vibrant, sustainable hub described as “the fertile, green place in the concrete-grey desert of Rotterdam.” Oase serves as a social and co-collaboration space where connection, creativity, and resilience are at the heart of its mission.

2. Keilepand

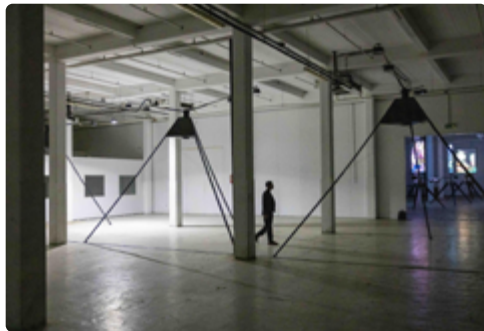
The Keilepand, located in the Rotterdam Makers District of Merwe-Vierhavens (M4H) Rotterdam, served as the home base for Placemaking Week. This remarkable site tells an impressive placemaking story: once a pre-war fruit and vegetable shed, it has been masterfully transformed by GROUP A in collaboration with studioADAMS into an activity-based building. Like-minded entrepreneurs come together at The Keilepend to forge a sustainable future.

The Keilepand stands as a cultural and culinary breeding ground where passionate entrepreneurs from diverse disciplines pursue their creative ambitions. The space centers the same creation and collaboration that defines the Keile Collective. It is a hub of innovation, where knowledge and experience intertwine with the development of the M4H area.



3. Katoenhuis

Katoenhuis, situated in the heart of Rotterdam's Makers District (M4H), serves as a cutting-edge hub for immersive experiences and technology. Originally known as "Van Bennekum's Katoenloods," this building's history is deeply tied to Rotterdam's maritime past. The area's evolution, driven by the changing demands of global shipping routes, saw this former cotton warehouse emerge as a symbol of the city's innovative spirit. Today, Katoenhuis is a dynamic space that brings together a diverse community of artists, creators, and technologists.



4. New Lab

Lab, formerly known as "New Grounds," is a dynamic third space and venue in Rotterdam West dedicated to hosting artists and fostering creativity and community. Designed as a hub for artistic expression, Lab offers a welcoming platform for new artists to perform and create through a variety of neighborhood activities. Lab is deeply engaged with the local community, actively seeking out new talents from Oud West and offering them the chance to perform on stage. Through these neighborhood activities, Lab not only nurtures emerging artists but also brings together residents from different cultural backgrounds, fostering unity and understanding through music.



5. Gemaal op Zuid

Gemaal op Zuid, serving the community of Rotterdam South, is a community hub where a variety of activities seamlessly coexist, fostering a lively community atmosphere. Managed by the Afrikaanderwijk Coöperatie since 2014, this striking building, formerly a sewer pumping station, has become a hub for collective use, programming, knowledge exchange, and district meetings.

This characteristic location showcases local power, opening its doors to talent development, showcases, exhibitions, workshops, and the community in and outside of the district. Among its many initiatives, the resident-run Wijkkeuken van Zuid stands out, bringing together the diverse flavors of the district and celebrating the rich culinary heritage of the community.



6. Hillevliet

De Hizlevliet, located in Rotterdam-South, is a dynamic space where diverse individuals, organizations, and companies converge to innovate and collaborate. This beautifully renovated former technical school accommodates a wide range of fields, from architecture and legal services to film and education, embracing both well-established professionals and emerging entrepreneurs.

Open to anyone passionate about making a positive difference, De Hillevliet seamlessly blends community building with entrepreneurial spirit, hosting nonprofits, developers, and the district's residents.



7. Roodkapje

Roodkapje is Rotterdam Centre's multi-use laboratory for the arts, food, performance and everything in between. The space serves as a local hub where creativity, innovation, and community converge. Roodkapje invites five interdisciplinary artists each year to form an in residence collective known as the "Hamburger Community." These artists, guided by mentors and collaborating with other collectives, shape Roodkapje's program, contributing to the dynamic and ever-evolving artistic community, singular in its role as a testing site for surprising artistry.

8. Independent School for the City

The Independent School for the City, located in the heart of Rotterdam, is a "playground for urban thinkers, doers, and designers." This unique venue brings together critical and experimental ideas in urban research, design, strategy, and activism, creating a dynamic platform where urban professionals can share ideas and produce practical urban solutions.

Initiated by Crimson Historians and Urbanists and ZUS, the school embodies their critical and activist approach to urban issues. It champions an incremental approach to city planning, blurring the lines between critique and practice, as well as research and policy.



9. Rotterdam as the canvas

Beyond the main venues, Placemaking Week 2024 featured a range of auxiliary locations that truly elevated the experience and added layers of excitement to the program. One standout was the evening DJ set at Keile Café, which brought everyone together for vibrant nights of music, relaxation, and conversation, giving attendees a chance to unwind and connect informally. Other locations, like the Museum of Unintentional Art, transformed ordinary spaces into unexpected galleries, encouraging participants to see the city's urban elements from an artistic perspective. We closed the week with beers and fries at the Biergarten, hiding from the rain under the cosy umbrellas. These offsite experiences not only deepened engagement with the city but provided a unique backdrop for inspiration, conversation, and learning.





SECTION 3

Key themes
of Placemaking
Week Europe 2024



Placemaking isn't just about temporary interventions: it aims for lasting impact for a more inclusive, resilient, and dynamic urban environment. We invited you to contribute to the discussion on how to acknowledge, define and ensure placemaking within the systemic reality.

How can we leverage and integrate the city's cultural capital into the urban development processes? And how can we achieve sustainable collaborations with the people who are the DNA of a place?

Within this theme, we explored the importance of diverse perspectives and communities in shaping the city. We delved into the power of crossovers to come up with fresh and innovative solutions, ranging from experiments and temporary initiatives to long-term transformation.

And some of you wrote your personal highlights:

- *I enjoyed engaging with colleagues in ever mature conversations of how to move from tactical action to wider and strategic societal change.*
- *To speak honestly about the pains and gains of placemaking - on the fish bowl.*

Creating Place & Making it Last

Keynote Listener Charles Landry on
'Creating Place & Making it Last

Something old is dying and something new is trying to be born: Rotterdam Listening

Before I even arrived in Rotterdam I was already listening both to my own mind and my positive preconceptions about Placemaking Europe and what it is trying to achieve - namely a mindshift in how we think about city making. I imagined what the week might bring.

Seeing the vast agenda with its profusion of topics and examples from young people shaping city projects, to dilapidated areas coming to life, to variations of the 15 minute city to using water revitalization to bring people together and much more I thought: 'You can make everything into a place if you have the right attitude and perspective'. I pondered and reminded myself of a sentence I had formulated 15 years ago: 'A place becomes a space when it is imbued with meaning'.

I could feel and experience that as I actually arrived in Rotterdam. Here there were 700 plus people from across the continents who understood that you need to shape your thinking about what makes a place, that planning with and for people is crucial so that what you enact in your city making 'is imbued with their meaning'. Being 'imbued with' means: 'going with the flow of the distinctiveness of a place'; 'feeling that you have agency in place shaping so it becomes part of you'; 'finding ways to focus on what we share rather than what divides us as place shaping is never without conflict'.

700 people is more than 100, 200 or 500 people. It feels like a mass - a critical mass. **Message one** came to me: 'Placemaking has arrived', it is now 'a tool in the toolbox'. So many feel it has something for them.

But, and then there was a big 'but'. Placemaking is catching on and many are using the term, perhaps a speculative developer who wants to make a quick buck or a marketing company that is simply playing with brands that have little to do with the placemaking philosophy. They



take and misuse the placemaking name and forget its ethics - an ethics focused on listening to communities and working with them. This is a danger.

Yet, whilst placemaking has arrived in our ever increasing bubble - it has been 60 years in the making - it has still not normalized as a practice across the cities of Europe. At Rotterdam we heard about the dissonance between what city development investors and other decision makers want from the places where they live and what they actually decide in their corporate work. And that is often driven by internal rules that make little sense, such as: I am a housebuilder and having a café in my development does not fit the template. These kinds of misalignment are astonishing and frequent.

Message two there is more to do to deeply influence the planning structures. We have managed to change the semantics, but less the power structures. This calls for a strategy of influence with activities beyond Placemaking Week, such as its 'City to City Learning Programme' or considering a lobbying campaign.

Here we could link to a bigger story namely: **Something old is dying and something new is trying to be born**. That is placemaking done at its best and it responds to a profound yearning that people want to belong to places that are life affirming, that exude generosity and that generate opportunities.

This process of placemaking is never finished. It is always in the making. **We have to rehearse what we want to become** and that includes citizen making. It reminds us too of Tommi Laitio's distinction between conviviality - something we all want and convivencia which he describes as like a family Christmas dinner. You probably love the family members, but many annoy you, but you still get on. This is more like the lived urban life where you have to negotiate conflicts over public space from noise to behaviour. This is what Placemaking Europe is trying to do.

Where next and how:
some priorities

Try to establish common ground: See things through the eyes of the others, be that a developer, a citizen, a minority group and understand where they are coming from and their different languages.

Hold onto the placemaking principles and its ethical frame. Do not compromise on that.

Have an ambition to get in early on any project and be part of its definition. Finally, the placemaking communities need to become much more finance literate so that they can talk or negotiate with those actors with knowledge, confidence and at eye level ■



Placemaking provides opportunities to enhance the resilience of communities and cities against the impact of climate change, such as heavy rainfall, sea level rise, flooding, drought, land subsidence, and heatwaves. Placemaking can bridge the gap to involve inhabitants and visitors in these transition challenges and encourage them to take collective action in numerous ways, sustaining it over time.

Within this theme, we explore solutions for establishing a balanced relationship with nature, climate inclusivity and the use of climate actions to achieve broader social and physical goals. We are curious about nature-based or regenerative placemaking practices that create greener, healthier, and more resilient environments for humans and biodiversity.

Climate Adaptation: Together Towards Change

And some of you wrote your personal highlights:

- *"Great community. I especially liked the engagement with lasting plans and climate action. Workshops were also a highlight."*
- *"The variety of venues and use of alternative spaces."*

Keynote Listener Marlene Vermeij
on 'Climate Adaptation: Together
Towards Change'



(Q) What case or presentation about this theme stood out the most for you and why? What is the main takeaway for this theme?

In the climate adaptation track the power of local and small initiatives stood out.

I'm sure not everyone agrees, but for me the small projects enable the bigger ones. It connects individuals to their places and therefore connects people and therefore connects bigger developments.

Next to that, a case study from Milan showed the importance and (financial) benefits of long term placemaking. While finance shouldn't be the driver of placemaking, it would be a good argument to convince others.

(Q) If you were mayor, what is the one thing that you would put at the top of your agenda for the coming 5 years? What is the boldest thing we should all do?

If I were to be a mayor, I would promote and support and enable everyone to be a placemaker of their own neighbourhoods. Being able to care for your surroundings requires time, trust in each other but definitely also including government, relations with others, thinking-capacity etc. etc. To enable everyone to be a placemaker, I would launch a substantial programme consisting of all the different aspects.



Living with Water: The Flow of the City

The function of waterfronts has changed over the years, as has the approach and utilisation of these spaces. This theme explores the dynamic relationship between urban environments and waterways, transcending traditional notions of waterfront development.

Waterfront placemaking celebrates the natural ebb and flow of the coexistence between urban life and water. We delve into the local stories from past and present, and investigate how local heroes and innovators can develop these areas into vibrant, inclusive, and accessible spaces that build upon the accumulated value. Through these urban narratives, we explore how to enrich waterfronts and in what ways placemaking can contribute to creating connection and awareness around water among our urban residents.

And some of you wrote your personal highlights:

- *I loved the water spirit in Rotterdam. Being on the water, water alongside, getting rained on a lot. I was just extra in tune with the character of water in our lives while in Rotterdam.*
- *Learned a lot from the enjoyable Bajonet walkabout, LOVED the 1.5minute city (including the rain hammering on the roof).*



Keynote Listener
Fredrik Lindstål
on 'Living with
Water: The Flow
of The City'

During the week, we saw a versatile program of ideas, initiatives and projects on the theme "Living with water". Ranging

from research-based sessions on waterfront erosion to historic preservation of the city's maritime heritage, it is evident that Rotterdam is truly living with water.

As a fitting start, a tour of the city's waterfronts was organized. This allowed for participants to gain knowledge of how the city has evolved along its shores; as a port, a growing city and as a home. What have been the goals of development? How has it affected architecture? Contemporary challenges? What will tomorrow's Rotterdam look like – and for whom? Questions that led to vibrant discussions and important reflections for the coming days ahead.

Can placemaking be used as a tool to solve challenges on a global level? As participants of a practical research based session, we learned how founding placemaking principle of "lighter-quick-cheaper" may be used to support projects to prevent coastal erosion and waterfront protection. A key takeaway from the session is how creativity fuels community engagement. A small-scale project may not solve a physical problem then and there. But if you can create an inclusive and creative approach to present ideas on how to tackle local (and global) issues, you will significantly raise awareness and elevate immediacy, whether it may be on a council level or at the helm of global decision-making.

Cities are defined by their ability to constantly evolve. But who is invited to sit at the table where decisions of development are made? It is clear that Rotterdam, like many cities, has a clear focus on community involvement to create bottom-up systemic development, and is moving in the right direction. Yet, there will always be initiatives that feel neglected in the long-term planning of the city. Cultural institutions, for example, play an important role of any city's identity. But are physical cultural institutions affected when surrounded by large scale development, and what chances do they have to be part of the longer conversation? It remains clear that for culture & arts to be part of the long-term planning of cities, its institutions are helped by formal and continuous representation in the overall decision making of developmental progression. During the week, it was also commonly argued that cultural initiatives build a certain resilience to top-bottom change, and community driven third place-initiatives can in fact create consensus and support long term planning of urban environments.

Same argument was applied to the historical preservation of cities. One initiative that was highlighted during placemaking week was the future of the traditional bridge keeper's houses. In their efforts to preserve and re-image the use of these historic buildings, it may be argued that they both exist as a reminder of a city's history, but also signals modernization and opportunity to move away from their former practical use into new community driven local initiatives.

A common denominator for many sessions was how speculative design can exist as a powerful tool when imagining space in contact with water. In cities with abundant waterfront access, there will never be a shortage of ideas on how space may be used. But what is the actual value of living with water? Shared identity, inclusive recreation, health benefits and city vibrancy were unifying themes in these conversations. The message was clear – if we use an inclusive approach when planning waterfronts, these values are guaranteed. And by using design, temporary activations, and deregulation of land- and water access, a commonly agreed narrative may be formulated to define what living with water could look like. And placemaking has a clear role to play ■



Local Power & The Battle for Space

Within this theme, we embrace the powers that make cities thrive, including creatives, artists, community builders, social programmers and everyday individuals. Anyone can be a placemaking hero, and local initiators are incredibly important players in strengthening their ecosystem. Despite often operating without official recognition or financial support, they shape the true identity of a place. Meanwhile-spaces for arts, culture, and community are vital for solidarity, self-expression, and resilience, and contribute greatly to the spirit of a place.

Under this theme, we delve into the stories and needs to allow the transformative potential of the placemaking landscape to flourish. We'll explore how these sometimes overlooked forces can be cherished, and how the continuity of these powers is not only important but essential for fostering vibrant, innovative, and inclusive cities.

And some of you wrote your personal highlights:

- *The Power of the Street excursion - meeting local residents and activists working together bringing greening, community and engagement to neighborhoods.*
- *The session about Building Creative Cities and also the Culture as Connecting Force were my two highlights. And of course the parties at the end of each day!*



Keynote Listener
Rosaria Battista
on 'Local Power
and The Battle
for Space'

Representing a
young perspective
on the theme "Local
Power and the
Battle for Space,"
I felt compelled
to take a critical

approach—questioning why we do what we do, stepping back, and reflecting on our role as placemakers. This mindset was further sparked by the title of session at Gemaal op Zuid (outside the official PWE program) titled "Issue Wrestling: The Dark Side of Placemaking." Although I didn't attend the panel, the title sparked a thought: How can we maintain a critical perspective to avoid the pitfalls of "place-washing"?

Big development projects sometimes position themselves as innovative, branding their efforts with the term "placemaking" without truly grasping its core principles. This creates a disconnect between those affected by the projects and the intended outcomes. Placemaking isn't just a label—it's a continuous process that requires active listening and genuine involvement from the people it aims to serve. The challenge lies in avoiding inaccessible and non-inclusive spaces. I'm not demonizing large-scale projects, but it's crucial that we ensure these projects truly benefit the communities by involving them throughout the process.

What kinds of people from the community are crucial to this process? Let me tell you the story of a particular local community hero. Amongst all the sessions that I was able to attend, her personal story truly stood out to me. Amina Hussen is the founder of Stichting Krachtvrouwen Oude Westen. As a Somali refugee in the Netherlands, she faced significant challenges integrating into her neighbourhood and forming meaningful relationships. Over time, she got to know more women who faced similar struggles. Determined to ensure no one else felt as isolated as she did, Amina gradually connected with these women, inviting them for coffee, creating

meetups and offering refuge for some who faced difficult circumstances in their homes. "Even if we sometimes did not speak the same language, the most important for me is the language of love," she shared. The group grew exponentially, and despite her selfless dedication, she often faced financial hardships to maintain it, torn between paying her own rent and sustaining her foundation. It took seven years for her to receive financial aid from the municipality. Stichting Krachtvrouwen Oude Westen has become a vital, safe and meaningful space for women in the neighbourhood.

Amina's story raises additional critical questions: How can we prevent communities facing similar challenges from enduring years of financial struggle? How can Placemaking Europe spotlight these stories, ensuring they gain the visibility and support they deserve? These local heroes, with their deep community knowledge, are essential to our neighbourhoods and cities. These are the types of individuals whose voices and expertise we cannot afford to exclude from the decision-making processes that shape our neighbourhoods

In a similar vein, I was inspired to learn more about the role of nightlife in urban development, as an avid participant in Nightlife activities. Nightlife is often seen simply as a source of entertainment, but it is also a powerful catalyst for socio-economic and cultural growth. After-hours spaces can bring together diverse groups, nurturing creativity, and building strong social bonds. Cultural activities, especially those that take place after dark, play a crucial role in fostering a sense of belonging and providing a refuge for individuals. These spaces allow people to thrive beyond the conventional boundaries of traditional community frameworks tied to daytime activities. However, as gentrification and development pressures reshape our cities, we must be mindful of the impact on cultural stakeholders. While some changes may be necessary (in the Dutch context it is often due to housing pressures),

we should remember that cultural spaces and communities contribute much more than just economic value—they foster meaning and connection. If we overlook these communities in urban planning and development, we risk losing what makes our cities truly vibrant: places where people feel seen, heard, and part of something bigger. The challenge is clear: we cannot afford to exclude these vital voices from the conversation.

On stage we were asked "If you were mayor, what is the one thing that you would put at the top of your agenda for the coming 5 years? What is the boldest thing we should all do?"

I would focus on closing the gap between municipalities and neighbourhood communities by improving communication. This disconnect often stems from a lack of mutual understanding, rather than bad intentions. For example, economic language can hinder collaboration if it's not understood by the community, though it remains important. The key is framing it in a way that resonates with everyone. By creating intentional spaces for listening and speaking the same language through placemaking, both sides can work together to drive meaningful change. Communities are the backbone of a meaningful place. Let's work together to make better cities ■



The fifth theme of Placemaking Week was Placemaking Essentials, which focuses on the foundational principles and practices that are crucial for newcomers to understand and implement placemaking effectively. This topic serves as a guide for those who are new to the concept, offering an introduction to the core ideas that drive placemaking.

Placemaking Essentials

And some of you wrote your personal highlights:

- *The 4 main themes and 'Placemaking essentials' were good for orientation/choosing sessions.*
- *Connecting with other professionals. Hearing about global placemaking networks and initiatives.*

SECTION 4

**The Festival
at a Glance:
Numbers and Impact**

1. Participants and Experience

700+

participants from
around the world.

4.7/5

Average participant
rating

171

Total number of sessions

8

Plenaries

28

Panels

39

Workshops

25

Short Sessions

3

Special Curated Sessions

15

Outdoor Sessions

11

City tours

38

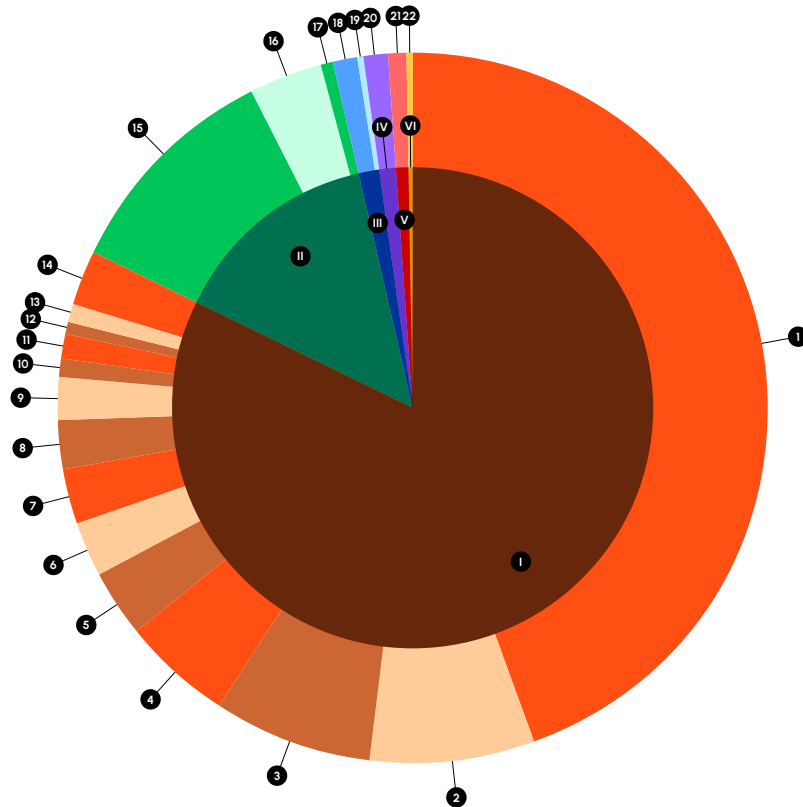
Side activities

4

Fun Evening activities

2. Global Representation

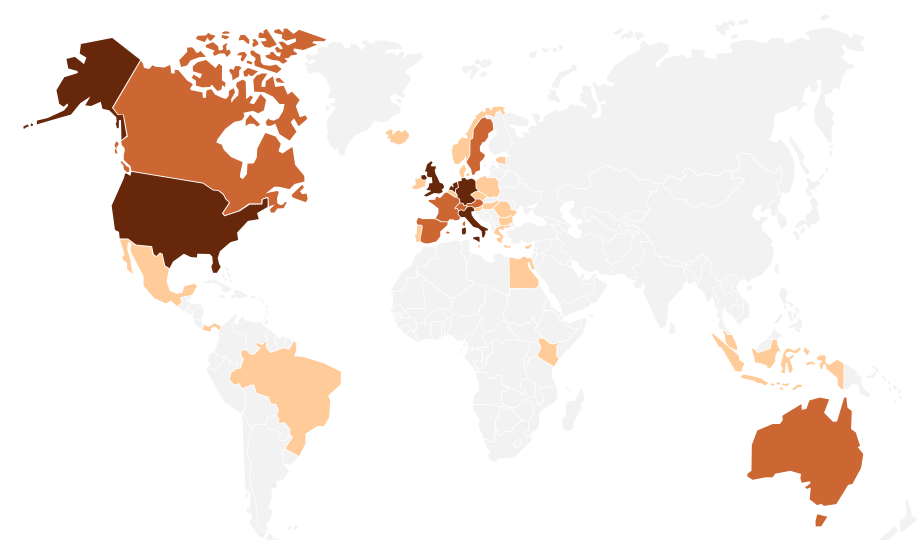
Though predominantly a European event, Placemaking Week Europe 2024 had participants from more than 39 countries across Europe, North and South America, Asia, and Oceania. Notably, contributions from Central and Eastern European countries added valuable perspectives to discussions on the region's growing role in placemaking initiatives.



SUMMARY

I. Europe: 85.27% II. North America: 14.68%
 III. Asia: 1.35% IV. Oceania: 1.16%
 V. South America: 0.75% VI. Africa: 0.26%

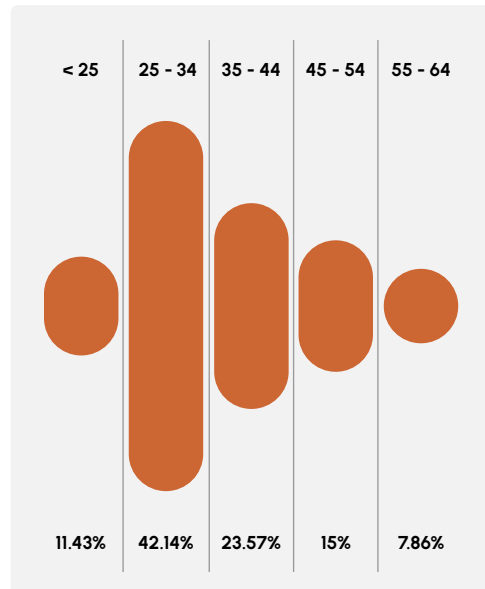
I. EUROPE			II. NORTH AMERICA			IV. OCEANIA		
1. Netherlands	46.27%		15. United States	10.63%	20. Australia	1.16%		
2. Germany	7.78%		16. Canada	3.38%				
3. United Kingdom	7.58%		17. Others:					
4. Italy	5.31%		Slovakia	0.54%				
5. Sweden	3.18%		Romania	0.54%				
6. Spain	2.56%		Iceland	0.33%				
7. France	2.56%		Greece	0.13%				
8. Austria	2.36%		Bulgaria	0.13%				
9. Switzerland	1.95%		Czechia	0.13%				
10. Denmark	0.96%		Estonia	0.13%				
11. Norway	0.96%		Finland	0.13%				
12. Belgium	0.75%		Ireland	0.13%				
13. Hungary	0.75%		Lithuania	0.13%				
			Luxembourg	0.13%				
			Malta	0.13%				
			Poland	0.13%				
			Cyprus	0.03%				
			III. ASIA			V. SOUTH AMERICA		
			18. Israel	0.96%	21. Brazil	0.75%		
			17. Others:					
			Malaysia	0.13%				
			Indonesia	0.13%				
			Singapore	0.13%				
			VI. AFRICA:					
					22. Kenya	0.13%		
					Egypt	0.13%		



This year, we were particularly proud to welcome participants from every continent on the globe, only with the exclusion of Antarctica!

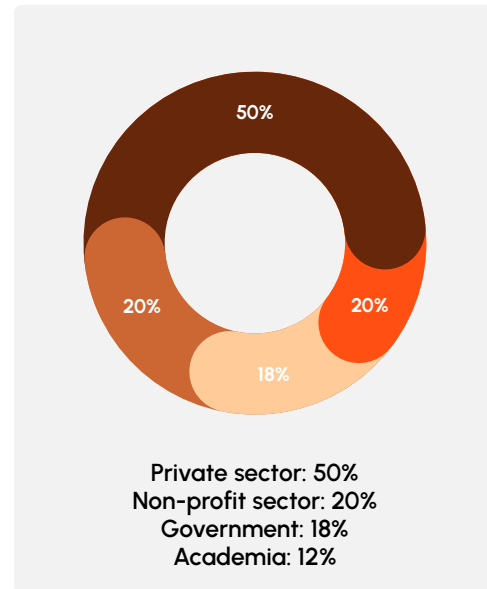
3. Age Range

Participants ranged in age from under 25 to their mid-60s, with the majority being professionals in their mid-20s to mid-40s. The largest age group, representing 42.14% of attendees, was between 25 and 34 years old. A smaller proportion, 11.43%, were under 25, while 23.57% fell into the 35-44 age range. Attendees aged 45-54 accounted for 15%, and those 55-64 made up 7.86% of the total participants.



4. Sectoral Diversity

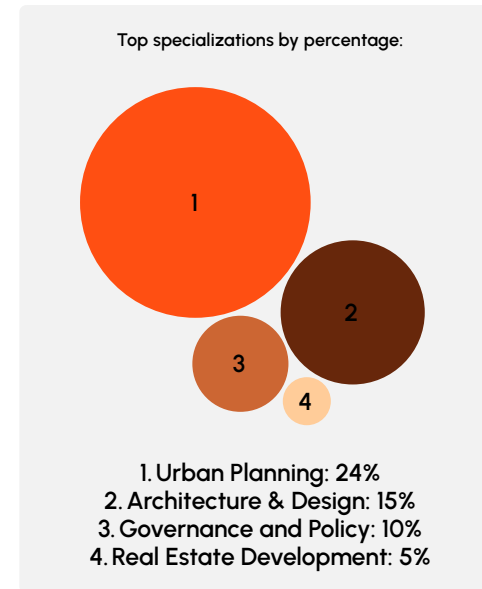
Professionally, attendees represented a wide range of sectors, with private-sector participants being the largest group, particularly from real estate development, architecture, and other related services. Non-profits, many of them small organizations, followed, along with governmental and academic institutions, which each made up a smaller but notable percentage of participants.



5. Roles & specialisations

In terms of professional focus, three main groups emerged among attendees:

- **High participation:** The largest group comprised specialists in Urban Planning, representing 24% of participants. Another substantial segment worked in Architecture & Design (15%), with Governance and Policy professionals also well represented (10%).
- **In-between:** Real estate developers and specialists in Community Development were also present, though in smaller numbers, each making up around 5%.
- **Lower turnout:** Sectors like Sustainable Development and Community Engagement saw fewer participants, despite Rotterdam's own focus on sustainable urban development.



6. Evaluations: how participants enjoyed Rotterdam and the festival

An evaluation survey, completed by approximately 15% of attendees, provided insights into how the festival and Rotterdam were perceived by participants. Ratings from 1 to 5 show high satisfaction:

- Overall event rating: 4.7
- Content of sessions: 4.5
- Rotterdam as host city: 4.8

Additionally, in terms of likelihood:

- To attend the next edition: 4.6
- To recommend Rotterdam as a host city: 4.8

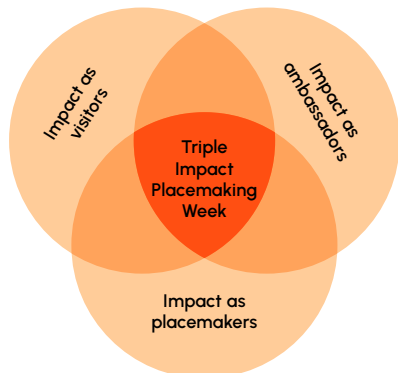
Most participants indicated strong interest in returning to future events and recommended Rotterdam highly, showcasing the city's appeal as a dynamic setting for placemaking discussions.



7. Economic impact

In a qualitative way, Placemaking Week Europe is an event that provides a threefold kind of impact. On one hand, we can measure the direct economic impact of the visitor's expenditure in the city and the local investment from organising it. Additionally, there is also the long-term impact stemming from glowing recommendations to visit Rotterdam from approximately 500 international ambassadors that joined the 200+ locals. Finally, the last impact is measured around the expert placemaking knowledge that is handed over to locally stay embedded with the municipality and local stakeholders.

Placemaking Week Europe brings international talent and ideas to help the city to deal with its challenges, particularly around the four thematic questions that are highly relevant for the city and local stakeholders and used as centre focuses for the workshops. While we recognise the fantastic economic impact brought to the City of Rotterdam, we synonymously understand the deep value that the Placemaking Europe community took away from collaborating and learning from Rotterdam as a case study.



Attendees spent on average 4 nights in the city and had an average individual expenditure of 532€; which made a total figure in the city of 381,000€ from participants alone.

Considering the organisational costs, the total direct impact linked to the event was off 538.000€. If we take the multiplier effect of MICE activities that helps us to calculate the indirect impact and we estimate the value of the knowledge created in the city and the communications campaigns, the overall impact of the festival is calculated to be over 1.071,000€. That makes a Return of Investment (ROI) for the city of Rotterdam of 4.94, benefiting almost 5€ for each 1€ of investment.

Direct expenditure attendants	380.737.50
Direct expenditure of organisation	156.800.00
Total direct impact in the city	537.537.50
Multiplier effect*	1.77
TOTAL IMPACT OF THE EXPENDITURE	951.441.38
Estimated direct value of generated knowledge	80.000.00
Estimated impact of communications campaign	40.000.00
TOTAL ECONOMIC IMPACT	1,071,441.38

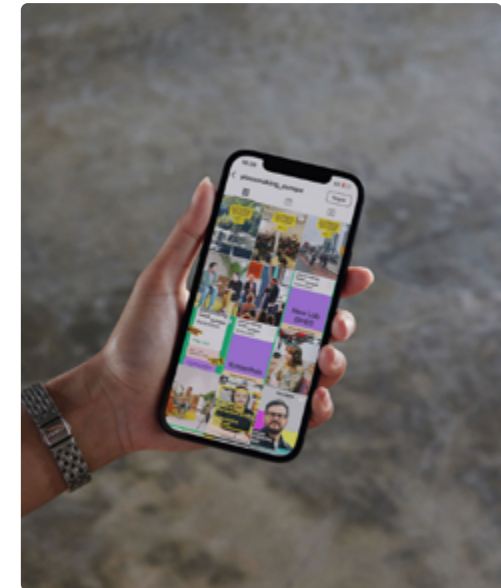
Placemaking Week Europe had an overall economic impact of over 1 million Euros

8. Social media reach

Performance across all social media platforms of Placemaking Europe increased during Placemaking Week Europe (24/09 - 27/09). For example:

- LinkedIn reached up to 3,401 reactions, an increase of 391% until September 25th.
- The posts and stories made by Placemaking Europe during the festival week have reached (within September 11th and October 2nd) 14,513 on Instagram, and more than 46.264 impressions.

The festival also brought new followers to our networks. In this case, our Instagram account experienced an increase with **385 new followers** during September first and October 2nd.



SECTION 6

What's next

Main takeaways

Placemaking Week Europe 2024 in Rotterdam marked another milestone for the placemaking community, with our largest attendee roster in the history of the conference, more cross-city venues than any other year, and representation from diverse voices both from Rotterdam and from around the world. Some major takeaways from this edition of the festival:

1 Rotterdam showcased its leadership in placemaking by aligning event goals with its **Placemaking Manifesto** and mobilising local stakeholders.

2 Active engagement of local communities is vital as we have seen this year, particularly from the host city, ensuring placemaking efforts reflect the needs of those who live there.

3 Exploring interactive plenaries that mix formal sessions with informal gatherings—like walks, hands-on workshops, and games—has proven effective in engaging participants more deeply-

4 Developing placemaking networks across Europe, and fostering relationships across global communities, will help broaden the impact and reach of placemaking practices. Placemaking Europe plays a pivotal role in helping out and supporting these networks in their development.

5 Actively building and nurturing connections among event participants was highlighted as an essential component for knowledge sharing and future collaborations.

6 Placemaking must continue to integrate more inclusive approaches, ensuring spaces are accessible, welcoming, and reflective of all community members.

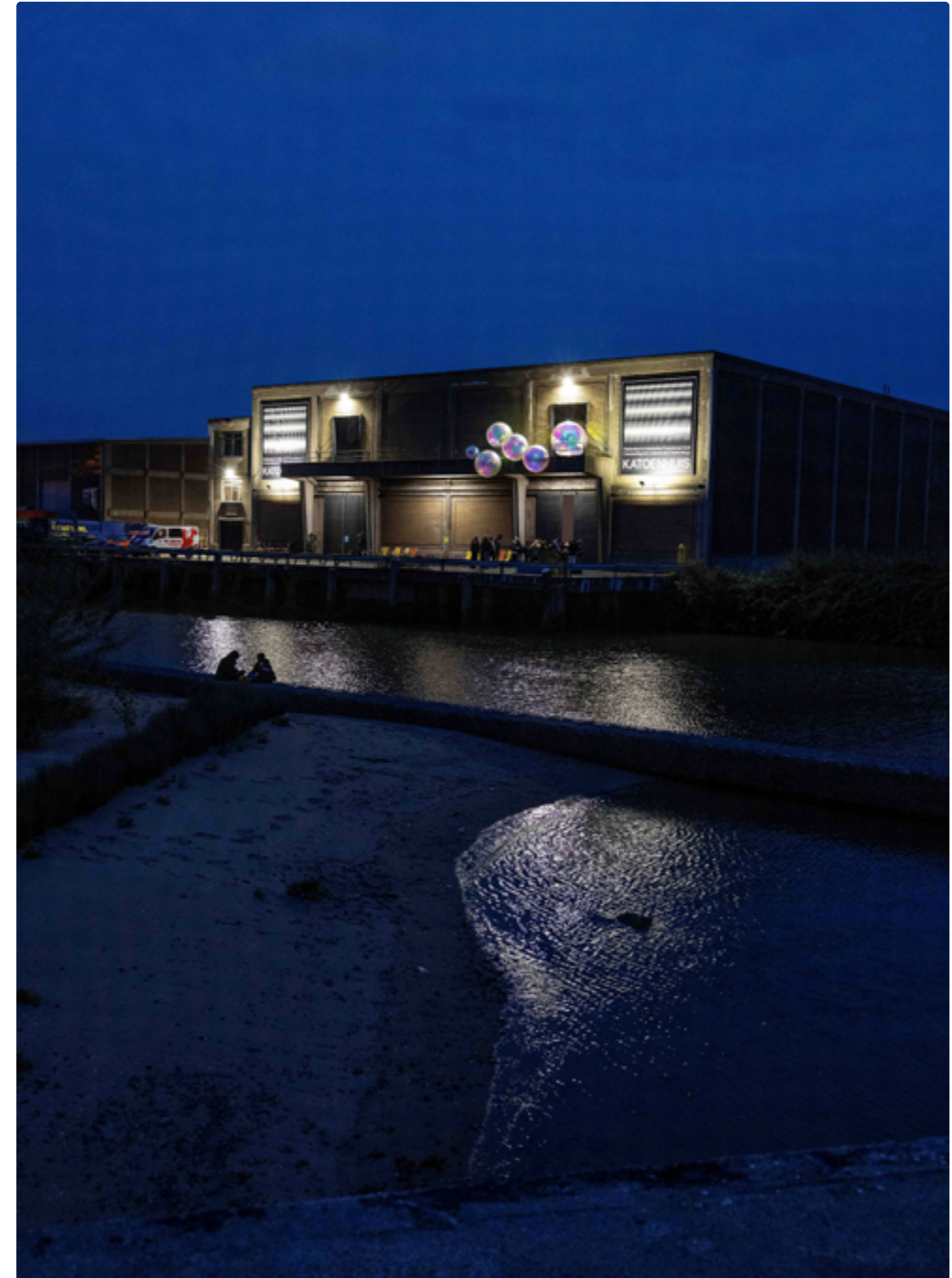
7 The need to blend tactical actions—like short-term interventions—with wider and more strategic societal changes is essential to ensure long-lasting impact.

Next Steps

We are extremely proud and happy to have announced the host of the Placemaking Week Europe 2025: Reggio Emilia, Italy! This 9th edition will take place from 23 - 26 September 2025! We look forward to welcoming you in Italy and will work with team from Reggio Emilia to yet another insightful and warm Placemaking Week Europe.

We also continue to work on:

- 1 Developing relationships with local partners, stakeholders, and communities. Focus on expanding the network across Europe to foster more collaboration and share placemaking best practices.
- 2 Blend short-term tactical actions with broader structural changes to push for more resilient, sustainable, and people-centered urban environments through for example our 'Cities in Placemaking' programme and the launch of our 'Districts in Placemaking' programme.
- 3 Insights from the PWE2024 provide a strategic direction to build on the momentum generated during the event, ensuring that placemaking continues to be a dynamic, inclusive, and impactful practice, advancing both local and global initiatives. We will reach out to critical voices and stakeholders and continue to build our community.
- 4 As Placemaking Europe, we recognize the importance of reflecting on the pressing challenges impacting our cities. Recent flooding events in Valencia and Eastern Europe highlight the urgent need to re-examine our urban development models and approaches to recovery. This is a pivotal moment to rethink our relationship with nature and water specifically and advocate for participatory, community-anchored co-design in reconstruction efforts. Moving forward, we remain committed to addressing these challenges, fostering resilience, climate adaptation and integrating collaborative solutions into urban recovery processes.



placemaking week europe Rotterdam

Creating
better cities
together



placemaking
europe



Official Report