

Making the Circular Built Environment a Reality:

A Call for Collaboration

**People matter:
Exploring the social relevance of circularity**

*The event took place the Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment at TU Delft. Three guests were invited to think along with us and to share their experiences from the field: **Maurice Specht from Buitenplaats Brienenoord, Jeroen Apers representing De Ceuvel and Cesare Peeren representing Boschgaard.***

After a short round of presentations, participants split in three working groups, each following one of our three guests. Over the course of our exchange and using their initiatives as case studies, we reflected on the following questions:

- *what motivated them to become involved with their group in the first place?*
- *how the group members came together?*
- *how they co-defined their objectives and their roles, but also how they evolved over time?*
- *what or who facilitated the realization of their ideas beyond the group members?*
- *how they position themselves now with regards to the rest of society?*

The initiative started when a group built their floating homes in Amsterdam North (Schoonschip). A few hundred meters away, they noticed a piece of land left undeveloped amidst the economic crisis of the moment. On the empty lot, they envisioned a workspace for creatives (broedplaats) who struggled to afford rent in Amsterdam. They brought houseboats on the land and started using them as studios. Initially, the group of mostly architects was unfamiliar with circular concepts. However, they teamed up with Metabolic, who introduced them to the concepts of a circular economy. This quickly captured the group's imagination, and De Ceuvel evolved into a "playground" for circular technologies. Some of the experiments at De Ceuvel worked out well, such as the helophyte water filters. However, others, like the blockchain system for solar energy, didn't take off on such a small scale. Nevertheless, the knowledge the group gathered is now being shared with communities visiting from around the globe. Over the years, the De Ceuvel community has witnessed the growth of plants and trees around its houseboats. Recently, De Ceuvel became a "Zoop," which means that non-human actors also have a voice and an official vote in community decisions. De Ceuvel's ten-year temporary lease is ending, and the community is under pressure to leave the land for housing development. Currently, they are exploring future pathways, whether at the same place or another space in Amsterdam.

Buitenplaats Brieneoord

The initiative set off by six people originally in the lead all of which held a different knowledge background in either history, political science, or the arts. All of them had experience in working for community projects. Now two of them are still in the lead running the initiative with the voluntary help of a community of 25 individuals with whom they share responsibilities. Every three months they engage people in showing them the building and share all relevant information about its infrastructure in case a change of leadership is necessary. The realization of their original planning was motivated by their intention to help combat immigrant unemployment and provide with social return on investment. However, they were met with numerous obstacles, mainly bureaucracy as their way of working challenged public officers' protocols. The system wasn't ready for an initiative such as this one. Same with construction work: all work was done on a voluntary basis with people living in Rotterdam with the only requirement for participating being to help do serious work. Interestingly, the contractor who accepted the task felt challenged to learn more during construction and even travelled to Ireland to get additional training. Meanwhile, Superuse made scaled mock-ups to help them program the spaces. The building follows a "non finito" philosophy allowing it to be subject to continuous transformation. Monday dinners with the group and the neighbors continue to foster close ties between BB and its community whilst BB members have engaged in more than 150 lectures to help disseminate the specifics of their initiative and help inspire others.

Boschgaard

The group that squatted the original building, 'The friends of Boschgaard', assumed the responsibility of becoming a housing organization to build a bigger community. The group consists of almost 60 people, who have collectively worked on developing the project as is. The project realization was founded on two core values: making planning participatory and promoting an ecological lifestyle. To ensure the first, they followed a democratic process where everyone's wishes were listed and accounted for. This resulted in clustering the different functions across spaces that are private and spaces that are shared (kitchens and workshops). For the latter, it was decided that only a limited amount of the materials used will be new. Therefore, future residents were trained to harvest materials and store them in a warehouse within the site. The design was thus driven by what was available. It was for this reason, that the actual project implementation required careful planning. One of the major challenges was supervising the building construction and following the appropriate building requirements. Even though in the beginning the residents were not directly involved in the building process, with time, some turned into very good craftsmen making this project a co-creation project. In the end, the new inhabitants became ambassadors of the idea of circular building. For the completion of this project two additional factors were key: one was the group's diversity, as the different tasks were distributed over different individuals based on their expertise and personal fascinations (some people grow food; others are better with spreadsheets). But the connection to the rest of the neighbourhood was also important, and luckily that was already established via the allotment gardens nearby.

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