

FUNDING THE COOPERATIVE CITY

Rotterdam



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After debates and workshops in six European cities (Rotterdam, Berlin and Paris in 2014 and Budapest, Madrid and Rome in 2016) on Saturday May 28th, 2016, Funding the Cooperative City project returns to Rotterdam. Eutropian organized and moderated another benefic debate on alternative funding schemes as part of the **IABR 2016** (International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam) and the **New Europe City Makers Summit**. The debate was moderated by **Daniela Patti** and **Levente Polyak** (Eutropian) and benefited from the input of the following speakers:

Jeroen Laven (STIPO, ZOHO Rotterdam)
Tiago Saraiva (ateliermob, Lisbon)
Marc Neelen (KO GRADI GRAD, Belgrade)
Mariska Vogel (Afrikaanderwijk Coöperatie, Rotterdam)
Martine Zoeteman (De Besturing, The Hague) and the following three respondents:

Timothy Duin (welovethecity, Rotterdam)
Christian Grauvogel (ex- Mörchenpark e.V. / Holzmarkt25, Berlin)
Piet Vollaard (Stad in de maak - City in the making, Rotterdam)

and by representatives (and aspiring members) of the **re:Kreators** network.

The debate started with an overview of the previous three workshops organized in the first part of the 2016 during which citymakers from all over Europe exchanged experiences on models of property development based on community-driven initiatives, civic economic models and cooperative ownership. The participants reflected on: How do City Makers access and develop spaces in various European regions? What is their relationship with public administrations and private financial actors? What are the legal frameworks, organisational formats and economic models they employ? How do they access capital for their development projects? What are the regional differences in how civic economy and

community-led urban development are unfolding in Europe?

The debate was started by **Jeroen Laven** (Stipo). As an active agent of the ZOHO initiative in Rotterdam he emphasis that it is key to stop thinking and acting in “top-down” and “bottom-up” frameworks and start to fill the gap between them. In his views this can be made by urban moderators and agents. He also added that ZOHO initiative managed to develop a certain type of business case but “is not successful yet” because there is too much voluntary work involved.

The discussion was continued by **Tiago Saraiva** which is involved in social responsible architectural interventions in Portugal. He highlighted that there are numerous differences between South and North of Europe. In Portugal seems to be currently a “stressful situation” because the public space is under the pressure of being rented or sold by the state. He and his colleagues started to act on the public space and to “work with the 99%” (of the people). In regard to the possibility of financing such initiatives he underlines that generally their organization or projects are not considered eligible for private banks. The current solution in their view is to start from small interventions, create wide visibility and then scale up.

Martine Zoeteman from De Besturing continued Tiago’s remark and added that continuity can play a key role in negotiating new actions and new roles in urban transformation. De Besturing is a community of citymakers which are using and transforming an old industrial building. Their initiative developed in a space rented out with small rents but where tenants accepted a higher level of uncertainty. They were aware that they could be anytime required to move out on a short notice (2 weeks). The initiative is now more than 10 years old and thus obtained a certain

credibility in the eyes of the local administration. Martine underlined that, in their case the financial model they are testing is to try to buy the entire building.

Marc Neelen (KO GRADI GRAD) expended the discussion and brought in the debate the Croatian context where buying a house represents a key challenge. In contrast to other European countries in Croatia all social houses had been privatized after the collapse of Yugoslavia. Moreover the predominant banking institutions invest in safe places and thus the financial opportunities for property development are limited. Under this context, an alternative funding solution seems to emerge from the new “ethical banks” which are just developing in Croatia and which can provide a system of guaranties for urban investments.

Shortly later, the discussion shifted more from site development to economic models and flows. **Mariska Vogel** from the Afrikaanderwijk Coöperatie in Rotterdam South explained that the aim of their organization is to challenge local administration and organizations to spend money “locally” because in this way they can create new jobs in the community and a more appropriate relation between inhabitants, their space and their community. In practice they function as a platform for support for local businesses and organizations which aim to improve the local economy. One of their important achievements is that they managed to obtain 50% of the cleaning contracts of the properties owned by the local housing association. These services are now offered by local inhabitants which directly benefit from this new jobs. Mariska underlined that their new goal is to manage to clean the local market area with people from the community. On the other hand she recognized that competing with bigger players is not easy and that requires time and to build community trust.

After this tour of opinions, the rest of the participants had been invited to intervene and share experiences. At this point, **Christian Grauvogel** (Holzmarkt25) highlighted that based on his practical experience in Berlin there are two main possibilities to change the current market. One is to scale up the small initiatives and the other to change the existing policies. For both of them he advocates that citymakers need to team up. Additionally to Christian remarks both **Mauro Baioni**, **Jeron Laven** and **Alexandru Matei** agreed on the key role of cooperation in such projects. Alexandru extended this point by highlighting that the experts and urban actors involved in urban transformation should go beyond “labels” and start to think in terms of “values”. He considers that quitting the formal tags and complimenting each-others around common values could integrate open minded investors and will facilitate better property development based on community-driven initiatives.

Funding the Cooperative City official part needed to end but interesting debates continued to emerge at the informal drinks which took part immediately after in the city center of Rotterdam. Numerous voices both from organizers and participants agreed that the “property development based on community-driven initiatives” represents a topic of paramount importance and that the energy created around the Funding the Cooperative City project should and will be further valorized with future actions.