

# MATERIALIZING IDENTITY

Utilizing inherent urban identity as a main design factor in the inner city regeneration of Rotterdam

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## PROBLEM STATEMENT:

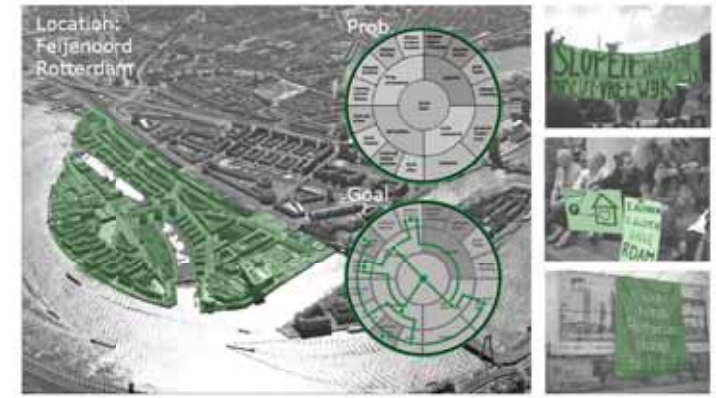
Rotterdam is one of the largest cities in the Netherlands, with a relatively strong economy and rich culture. However, when it comes to urban developments, Rotterdam (like many other **Dutch cities**) tends to develop **ambitious plans** that are **bluntly imposed** on their respective locations. Any trace of the **original quality is wiped out**, including its **communities**, its **culture and history**; resulting also in many protests of the inhabitants.

Rotterdam thus constantly changes, but never actually evolves...

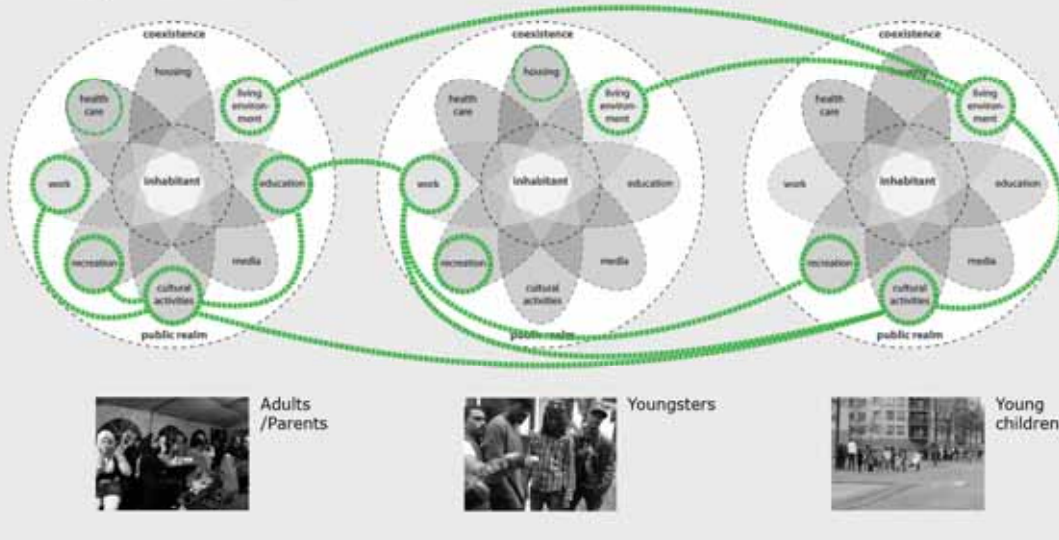
## RESEACH QUESTION:

How can the current neighbourhood of Feijenoord be regenerated to meet future requirements in relation to the municipality's vision, while maintaining the disadvantaged groups currently residing in the area, so the inhabiting social structures/communities and the emergence/consolidation of the local culture is also stimulated?

Sub: - What are the future requirements that the neighbourhood of Feijenoord needs to meet, in the spatial and social context, with respect to the municipality's vision?  
- Which type of people make up the population of the neighbourhood Feijenoord? (And why are they called disadvantaged?)  
- What makes up the culture of the disadvantaged groups currently residing in the neighbourhood of Feijenoord?  
- How can the valuable (cultural) aspects of Feijenoord be developed along with the new requirements in a harmonious/liveable way, which benefits both the original inhabitants and the newcomers?



## Social Strategy: the active social network



## RELEVANCE:

The relevance of Materializing Identity, or the need for 'identifiable places', is best summarized by Relph:

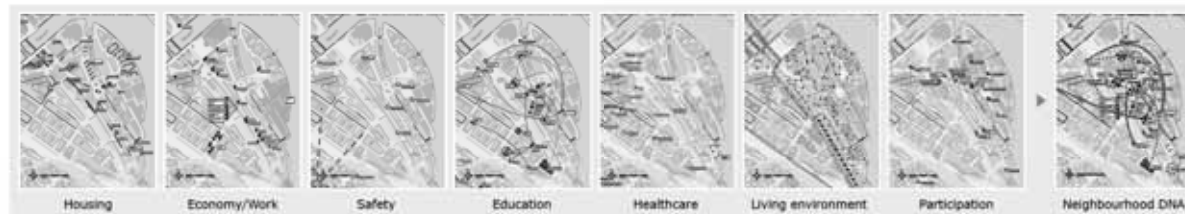
A deep human need exists for associations with significant places. If we choose to ignore that need, and follow the forces of placelessness to continue unchallenged, then the future can only hold an environment in which places simply do not matter. If, on the other hand, we choose to respond to that need and transcend placelessness, then the potential exists for the development of an environment in which places are for man, reflecting and enhancing the variety of human experience.

Relph (1976, p 147)

## SOCIAL STRATEGY:

**The active social network:** As stated in the paragraph "angle of approach" the m.o. in not only to facilitate all the inhabitants individually or per group, but also to link these groups. In doing so, one not only maintains the thin social structures of status quo, but one also solidifies them and in addition stimulates the creation of even more active social crosslinks.

Active in the sense that the linking of people enables them to share and utilise one another's talents and interest, thereby not solely benefitting the individual or the groups, but also the entire neighbourhoods network in a socially sustainable way.

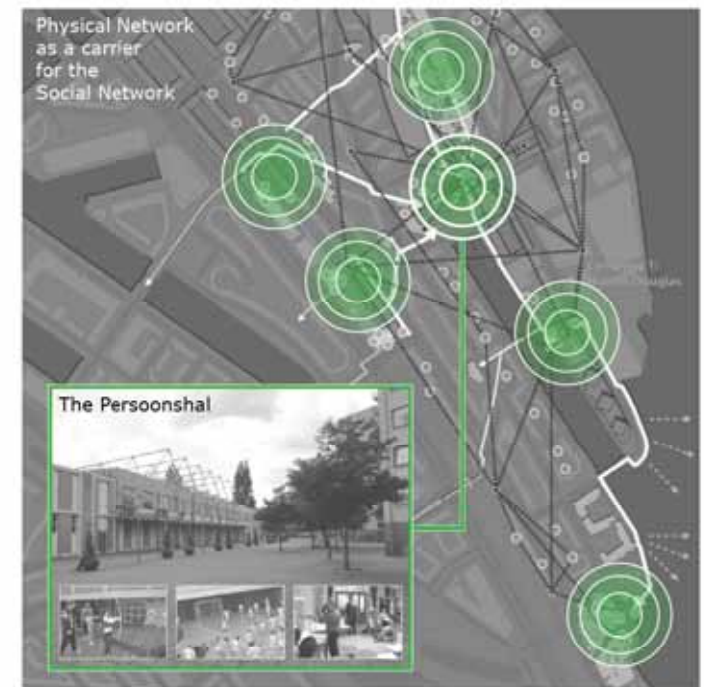


## RESEARCH STRATEGY:

In order to deal with the vast complexity of an entire neighbourhood one needs a structured research methodology on which a proper strategy can be based. In this case the custom neighbourhood-based research methodology of the FieldAcademy Rotterdam provides a good solution. This methodology, known as the Livingspheres-analysis (or Leefvelden analyse). Consists of 3 phases. Phase 1 consists of a quantitative analysis of the neighbourhood (which amenities and functions can be found and where). This first phase is subdivided in 7 categories, among which are housing, economy, safety and participation. Phase 2 is the qualitative analysis, which utilises interviews and other means to find the correlation between these various layers, thereby uncovering the neighbourhood's inner workings or DNA. In doing so one can move on to formulate specific acupuncture actions to enhance or augment these inner workings. One can start to adres the neighbourhood's problems with a strategic urban design (Phase 3).

## URBAN DESIGN:

As stated earlier, Materializing Identity aims to regenerate a neighbourhood by utilizing its inherent strengths, thereby reaching socially sustainable liveability. For Feijenoord this meant tracking down those elements of the DNA that already have an inherent tendency to stimulate the liveability and then augmenting/improving them. These elements or 'nodes' are visualized in the map to the right. One can interpret them as the physical and programmatic network that function as the carrier for the neighbourhood's social network.



## ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN:

The architectural assignment provides a further specification on how one of these physical/programmatic nodes can be augmented. For this specific assignment the choice was made to augment the Persoonshal, one of the neighbourhoods strongest inherent nodes and thus also one of the elements with the most potential for stimulating social sustainability. Augmentations consisted of e.g.: Expanding the programmatic flexibility, improving accessibility, stimulating social interaction through program, transparency, routing and the like. For more specific documentation reference is made to the thesis Materializing Identity (2011).

## KEYWORDS & DISCIPLINES:

**Keywords:** society, community, culture/history, revitalization, urban planning, architectural form, public space, heterogeneity

**Disciplines:** urban planning, architecture, social studies, public housing/RE&H, revitalization/RMIT

