

Urban - Camping

A guide on how to be present within the urban landscape in a surprising and open way, both from a research perspective as well as as an intervention.

A tool powered by :



placemaking
europe



This manual will serve as a guide for people who are looking for participatory observation methods. The manual will look into details of urban camping: camping in a caravan on a square (or another urban space) to converse with users of the square and experience the place and its daily rhythm by being present. This multiple-day intervention within public space is helpful for understanding the soul of the place, to build a network through spontaneous encounters (triangulation) and informal conversations. It is also an intervention that can very naturally facilitate on-site brainstorming sessions. These different elements and layers can be useful in the exploration phase of area transformation, placemaking projects or participation processes.

The background story of *Urban - Camping*

Project Deventer Grote Kerkhof 2019, caravan interventions in April and May.

The initial idea to go camping on the Grote Kerkhof square in Deventer was conceived by urban anthropologist Renée Rooijmans from STIPO. The idea behind was to bring a placemaking approach to the co-creation process of redesigning the Grote Kerkhof square. This redesign project initially was launched to make the square car-free. The square looked like a parking lot, which resulted in an obstructed view of the Lebuinus church. There have been critical opinions on the underutilisation of the square, the small amount of visitors in the area and therefore smaller turnover rates.

The municipality of Deventer has asked STIPO for a placemaking approach that would provide insights on the improvements that can be made on short-term notice, in combination with a mixture of programming and quicker, cheaper, lighter measures. The motivation behind this was to reveal what are the long-term possibilities of permanent improvement of the square and how structured cooperation between all parties involved can be organized.

How will we co-create a square that all local residents, visitors, entrepreneurs and institutions are proud of and enjoy making use of?

Through interviews and *anthropological research* at the Grote Kerkhof square, ideas were retrieved about the physical future of the square and the surrounding plinths (the hardware), how the square can be used (the software) and which parties should share responsibility for contributing to distinctive destinations and an attractive city square (the orgware).

How does anthropology play a role in our Placemaking approach?

Anthropology is the study of us, our clothes, our rituals, how we talk and think, within the past and present. One of the aims of an anthropologist, is to live among the people you study and be part of the local daily rhythm, in order to get a grasp of the complexity of urban life and its people. Anthropology within our Placemaking approach makes us careful not to homogenize urban life and account for the multiple actors that shape the city and its spaces like political, social, economic, and cultural forces that shape urban forms and processes.

Disclaimer: We are aware that not everyone around the world has the freedom to use their public space for this kind of activity. Therefore, we would like to emphasize that the key ingredient is to partake in a longer intervention and the vulnerable position that you put yourself in, in order to get to know the people and place better. It is about looking for unexpected encounters, while guaranteeing your own safety and respecting the feelings of others.



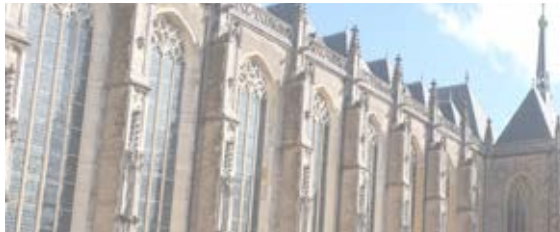
Urban - The Camping mindset

Any placemaking process starts with first encounters: in order to get to know the context, we take a walk through the neighbourhood and discover the area.

“To kick off the co-creation process of redesigning the Grote Kerkhof square in Deventer, we wanted to get to know the soul of the place in a short term. We wanted to get to know the users of the square and their dreams and wishes. In order to get to know the people behind the doors and the daily use of the space, we had to become part of the daily rhythm of people's life and the usage of the square. The idea for the multi-day intervention arose from the desire to simply be present for a few days, observe and converse.” Said Renee Rooijmans, one of the initiators.

And that's what happened, the people in Deventer were surprised with the sudden appearance of a colorful caravan in the middle of the square.

The attraction to the caravan was incredible. Some passersby immediately **stopped for a chat**, others **looked surprised** during their daily walk across the square. The strength of the vulnerability and accessibility of visiting the caravan in combination with people's curiosity made that at one point seven different people from the neighborhood sat down next to each other under the awning. Some people enjoyed the **gathering** that the caravan created, others preferred an **individual** conversation.



Goals

A. Understand people's relationship with a place

The camp action can be seen as a participatory observation, an anthropological approach where you become part of the place. It's a great method for assessing the daily life of the square, understanding the context and the social structure and grasping the soul of the place. You will always stay the outsider who comes by if you visit a place only once in a while. You can become part of a place only by having multi-day conversations, movements and by being present in the area for a longer period of time.

C. Surprise!

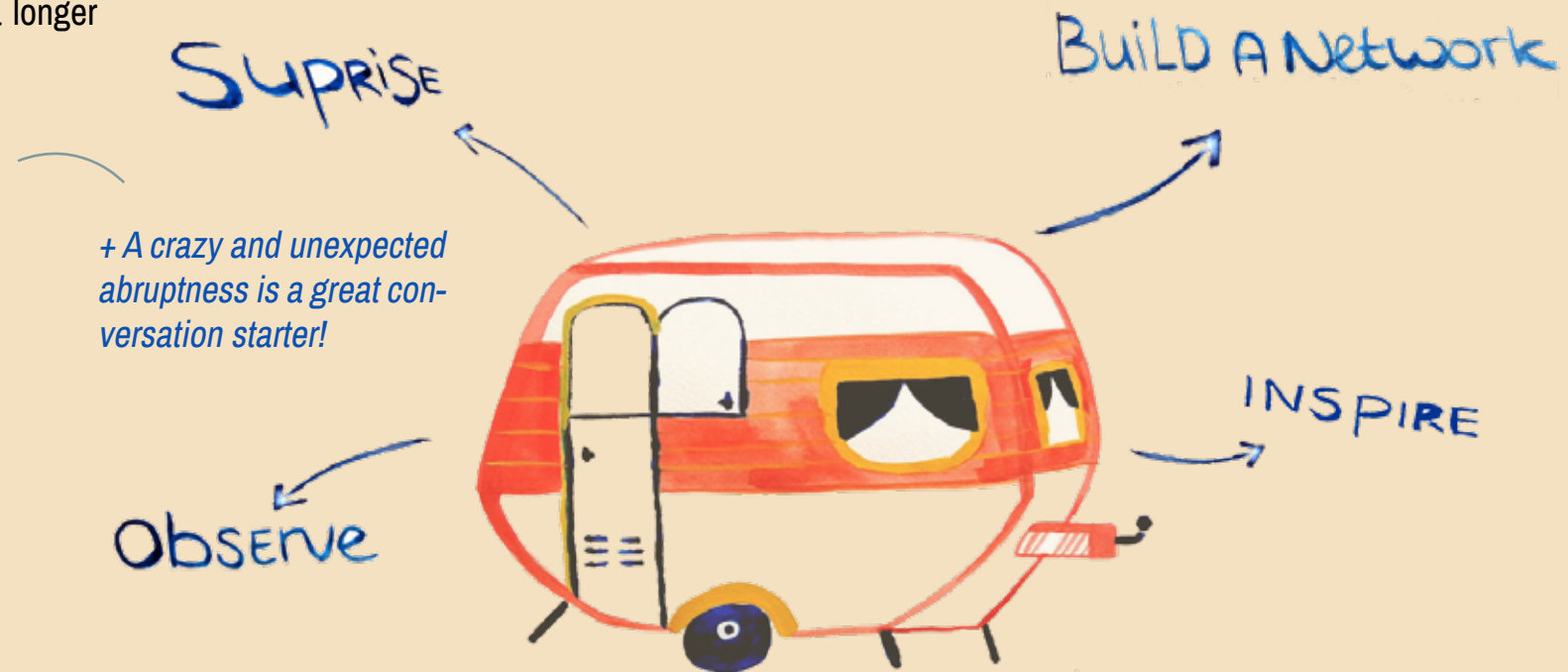
The camp action is doing something unexpected, creating a surprise and excitement, which could help to initiate new projects or relaunch the ones where citizens have had the feeling that they have not been listened to.

B. Build a network

The initiators Renee and Charlot talked to 300 people over just one weekend. "We don't always have a lot of time in our work, therefore, the multi-day camp action is a solid way to build a network in just a weekend's time". The people you speak to are outside of your usual suspects, it allows you to meet all users of the public space: skaters, homeless, a local yoga mom and a Moroccan dad-everyone comes by for a chat!

D. Inspire others

The pop-up city camping on the square will create spontaneous collaborations. From the questions of people who came to the campsite, we noticed that it is quite unclear what is actually allowed on a square. Eventually people were inspired from this particular example, and perhaps were motivated to return to the square? After their camping visit.



Guidelines for organisation

1. Pitch the camping idea to the municipality

2. Arrange the caravan

3. Arrange the camping permit

Within most municipalities in the Netherlands you can get a camping exemption through submitting a camping application at the events department of the municipality. This is specifically intended for camping activities outside of camping areas. The timing may vary, but make sure to request this at least 3 weeks in advance! Within this application you must indicate, among other things, the reason for your camping visit, when it will take place and with whom you will be camping. You can also indicate whether you need electricity. The costs for the permit are 34 euros.

4. Create a local network

It is important to create a local network, where you can go if you need any help. In the case of urban camping in Deventer, the willingness of locals to cooperate was quickly visible. Local residents lent an extension cord for the electricity of the caravan, someone else brought drinking water and another neighbor let the campers to use the shower.

6. Take care of yourself

It can be quite intensive on your own, therefore, it can be nice to have a co-host from the neighborhood who assists with conversations and where you can shower sometimes! I will be back in a minute to listen to all your beautiful stories! Indicate with a signboard when you want to have a break. And most importantly have fun!

5. Choose a form of documentation

Determine how you want to collect and summarize all the information from the conversations. You can choose to record the conversations, with voice recorder or on a video. **Tip. Why don't you make an after movie?** Or maybe think of a drawing pad, so people can visualize their ideas and give color to the story. Notes from all the conversations can be documented in one big notebook. This book serves as a collection of all the input, which can be given as a report to the municipality and to all the people who visited the caravan.



Golden tip! Attach a letterbox to the caravan so you can receive letters and drawings, even if you are away for a little while.

CHECK LIST

DO YOU HAVE EVERYTHING READY
FOR YOUR CAMP ACTION?

- ☐ CARAVAN (TENT)
- ☐ ELECTRICITY
- ☐ CAMPING PERMIT



- ☐ ENOUGH COFFEE!
- ☐ NOTEBOOK/SKETCHBOOK
- ☐ CAMERA

CHOOSE A FORM OF DOCUMENTATION



- ☐ SHOWER
- ☐ NEIGHBOUR FRIEND
- ☐ SIGNBOARD

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF
INDICATE IF YOU NEED A BREAK

More inspiration?



Bakkerij de Eenvoud

A wood-fired oven in a caravan, the mobile bakery is placed in a residential area in public space for a longer period of time. The cart is open to residents to bake together and to discuss all kinds of themes.

- Initiators: Sander Van de Ham & Peik Suyling



De Buurt camping

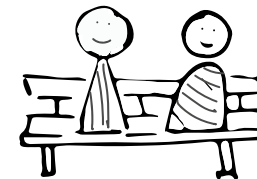
Public parks become a neighborhood camping for a short period! organized by neighbours for neighbours, everyone meets each other at the Buurtcamping.

- Website: <https://debuurtcamping.nl/>

Credits

Urban campers and initiators **Renee Rooijmans** and **Charlot Schans** from **STIPO**

Written, edited and illustrated by Djina Bruine de Bruin.
With the help of Nazaket Azimli & Eva Zemmour, STIPO



July 2020