

# Making City

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## Inspiration and the Search for New Strategies

The economic situation in Europe and the Netherlands has repercussions for the City of Amsterdam as well. The municipal organization has less money to invest in the city and must learn to operate in a different way. This is being addressed with the aid of the Structural Vision: Amsterdam 2040, which was completed in 2012.

The *Structural Vision* serves as a dot on the horizon when tackling the question of how Amsterdam, notwithstanding the economic crisis, can remain attractive for businesses, residents and visitors. The inspiration of foreign cities and sharing knowledge with them is indispensable in the search for new strategies and integral solutions for managing with fewer resources more shrewdly, more efficiently and more effectively.

### Metropolitan Governance

Metropolitan regions are becoming increasingly important in economic terms; metropolitanization forces cities to look beyond their municipal boundaries. Urban regions are usually composed of several municipalities with different sector-specific concerns. This also applies for the Amsterdam Metropolitan Area, in which 36 municipalities, two provinces and a traffic and transportation authority cooperate in an informal way. National government continues to play a part in the development of the Port of Amsterdam, Amsterdam

Airport Schiphol and the financing of major infrastructure projects, but in recent years has delegated many powers to provincial and municipal authorities.

The way in which metropolitan regions are run – the governance question – is therefore increasingly important. How do other cities tackle this and are there instructive examples among them? The Paris region offers a fresh perspective.

Spatial planning in France has been administered centrally since time immemorial, but in recent years there has been a shift towards a more democratic cooperation. For example, Nicolas Sarkozy broke with the presidential building tradition of predecessors such as Georges Pompidou with his *Centre Beaubourg* and François Mitterand with his *Bibliothèque Nationale*; he was keen to realize a different type of project. In 2008 he launched the *Grand Paris* competition. Ten teams, composed of architects, urban planners and landscape architects, were invited to submit a spatial plan that

**1** Some 200 communes, departments and regions are associated with 'Paris Métropole'. They are working together to create a coherent and attractive metropolis.

Maps: Paris Métropole, 2012

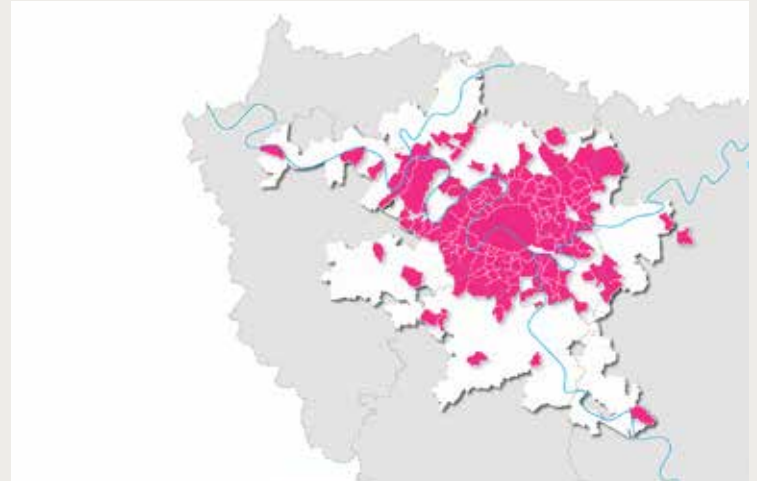
**1a** the Ile de France region, Paris plus the 7 member departments

**1b** 150 member communes  
 ■ member commune  
 □ contiguously built-up area

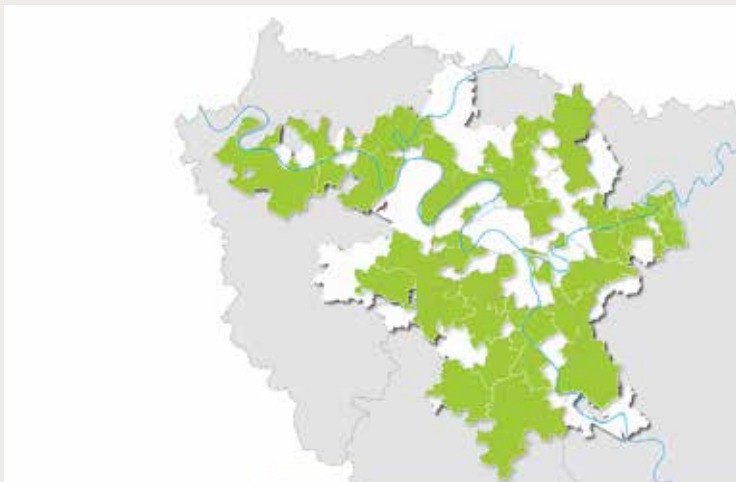
**1c** 45 member intercommunalities  
 ■ member intercommunality  
 □ contiguously built-up area



1a



1b



1c

would interconnect the city and the region to better effect. The competition eventually yielded a new transportation plan, with a new metro that will run 24 hours a day between city and region as a key component.

Another shift towards greater cooperation is embodied in *Paris Métropole*, a regional collaboration established by the City of Paris in 2008 with the object of collectively determining the course and choices for large-scale spatial projects. According to the Mayor of Paris, Bertrand Delanoë, the days when Paris threw everything that was ugly or dirty, but still belonged to the city's fabric, over the fence along the *périphérique* have been

consigned to the past. More than 200 communes, intercommunalities and other tiers of government are participating. The themes that *Paris Métropole* is addressing include development and solidarity, transport, housing and metropolitan projects.

This form of regional cooperation goes further than intergovernmental collaboration such as the Amsterdam Metropolitan Area platform. For example, the *Paris Métropole* website serves as a platform for the exchange of all kinds of information. *Paris Métropole* also organizes public debates, for example about the question of how the international office district of *La Défense* can become a dynamo for metropolitan development. Central to these discussions is 'the integration of the *banlieues*': projects intended to improve connections between the *grands ensembles* housing projects on the outskirts and the city centre, by means of cycle routes, tramlines and regeneration projects.

### Who Builds the City?

Over the last two decades the construction of housing and new public spaces in the city has reinforced Amsterdam's gravitational pull. It also seems that the city has become more attractive for families. Amsterdam welcomed its 800,000th inhabitant in 2012, four years earlier than expected.

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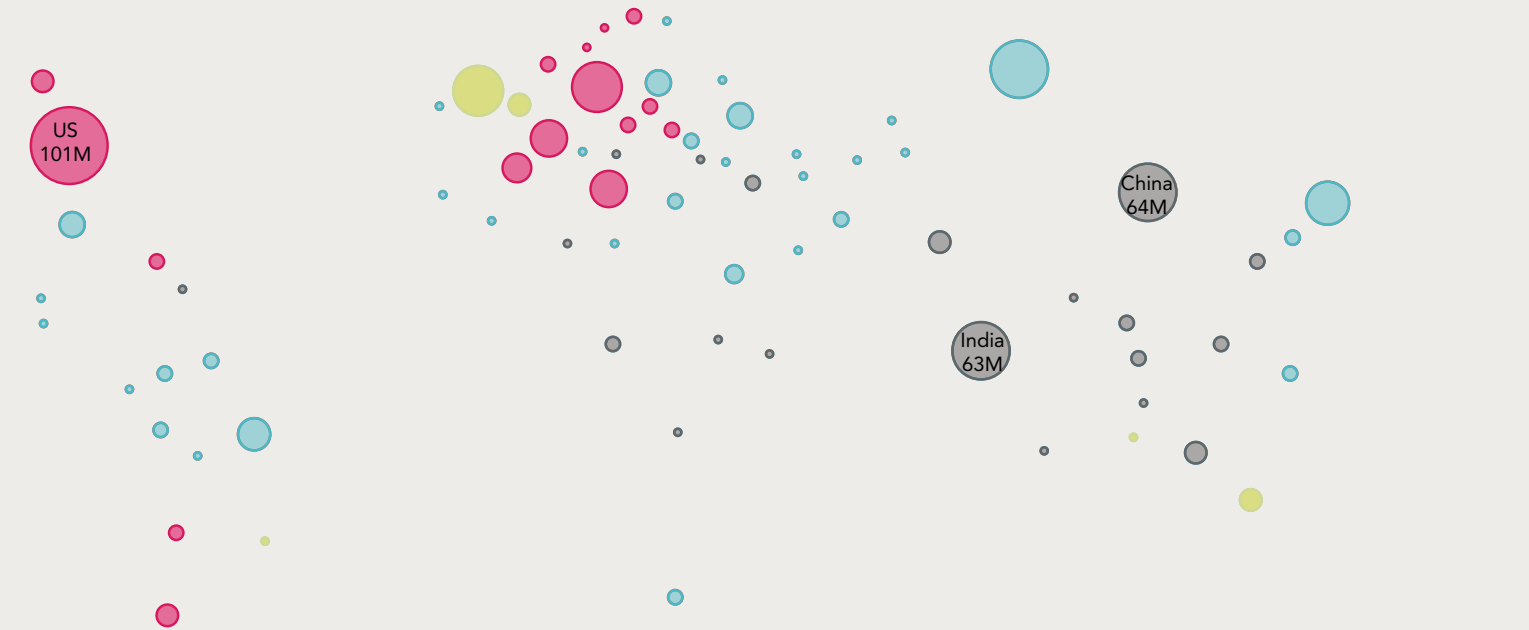
**2** The growing urban population: 1950, 1980, 2010 and 2050.

Infographics: Karla Gutiérrez

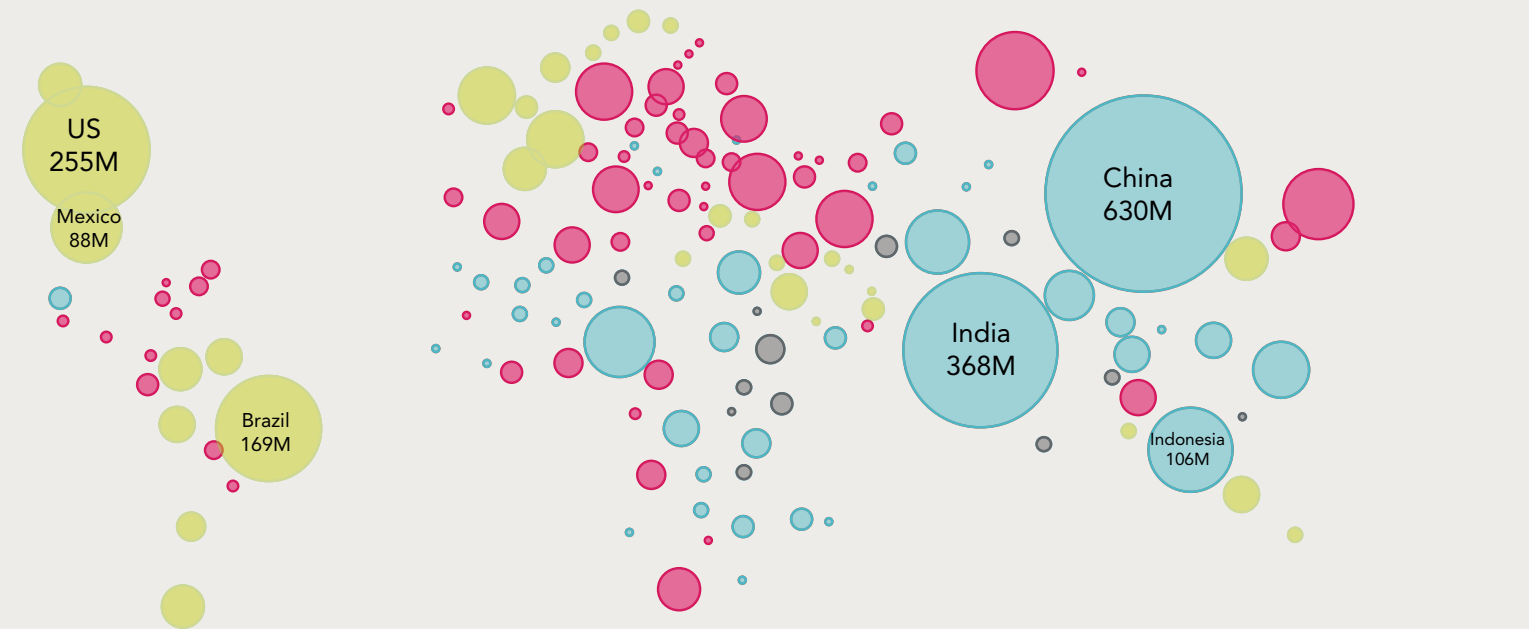
- > 75%
- 50-75%
- 25-50%
- < 25%

**3** Example of a social housing project in Vienna, which is one of the few cities in Europe where, the crisis notwithstanding, they are not dealing with stagnation in residential construction while the population is growing.  
Photo: Georg Mittenecker

**4** Berlin has a substantial head-start in 'self-build' projects compared to Amsterdam: the DIY culture in the German capital is strong and there is more construction activity. With government guidance and the assistance of professionals, the passive Dutch could be more active in this regard.  
Photo: Joyce van den Berg



**2** 1950



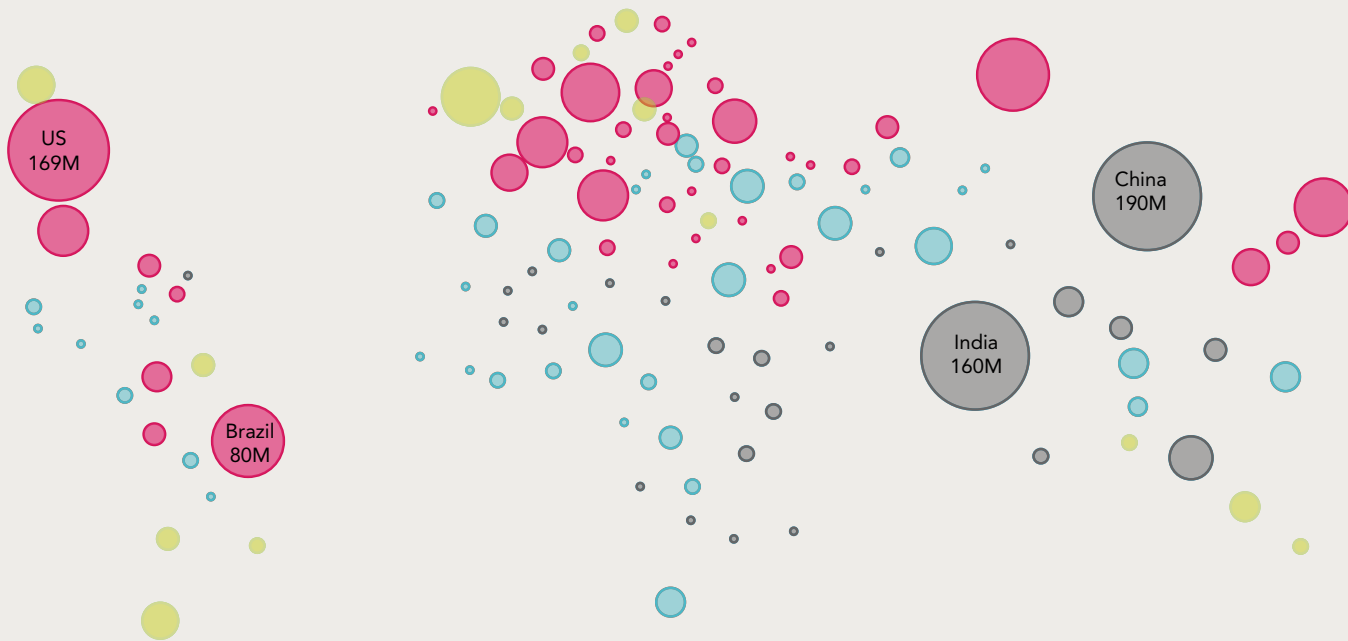
**2** 1980



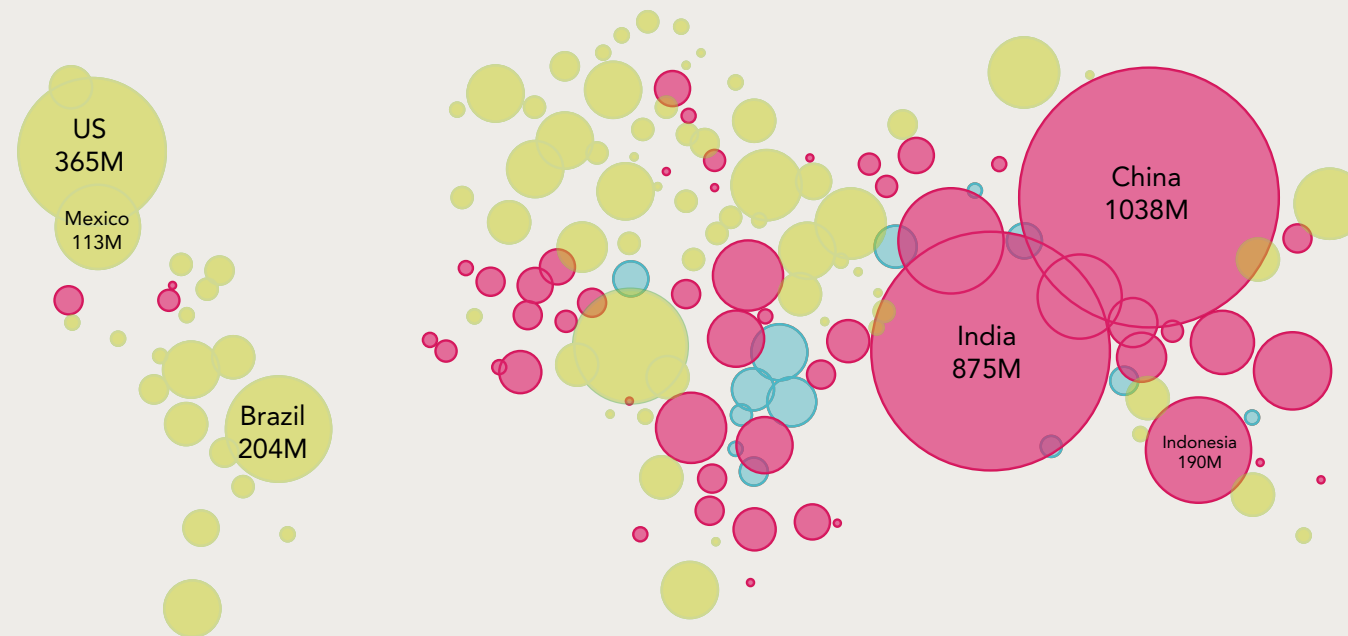
3



4



2 2010



2 2050

# 'It seems that large-scale area development involving substantial volumes and large numbers of dwellings are a thing of the past.'

With such population growth, to which the region certainly makes an important contribution, it is essential that starters (e.g. students and expats) can find living accommodation and can then climb the housing ladder to larger homes, while older people must be able to downsize to smaller dwellings for seniors after their children have left home. This 'escalator function' is important: an adequate supply of homes for every stage of life is crucial for a vital city and region.

It seems that the Amsterdam Metropolitan Area can no longer provide this. As a consequence of the economic crisis, in the space of just a few years the production of new housing has more than halved, from 5,000 to 2,000 dwellings per year for Amsterdam and from 10,000 to 4,000 for the region. With urban housing production almost grinding to a halt and increasing pressure on the city the escalator function has come to a standstill. Who will resolve this?

The housing corporations were traditionally responsible for the construction of social housing in Amsterdam, at least during the 20th century. Besides taking care of the construction of housing, these corporations and developers were involved in the development of entire districts. But that is all in the past, because the corporations are no longer able to do this, as a consequence of stricter legislation handed down by central government. Developers also have fewer resources available to them, due to tightened European and national legislation for banks. It therefore seems that large-scale area development involving substantial volumes and large numbers of dwellings are a thing of the past. A similar situation is evident in many European cities, but Vienna is an exception to this.

The population of Vienna is growing by approximately 8,000 inhabitants a year and the city expects to see a total population increase of 300,000 by 2050. Between 80 and 90 percent of the existing housing stock is subsidized by Vienna City Council. The City Council oversees about 90 percent of new-build projects, assuming a supervisory role by way of competitive tendering procedures. Teams composed of an architect, building contractor and developer submit a tender at a predetermined social price. This means it is possible to set high quality standards with regard to architecture, sus-

tainability and social criteria. A combination of grants to individuals and object-specific subsidies for developers, a land procurement and urban renewal fund and the private means of tenants, this social financing system makes it possible to achieve a socio-demographic mix at the scale of the residential block or building, which means there is no segregation whatsoever.

Vienna's housing policy is one of the factors that contributed to the city taking the top position in the 'Quality of Living' index by Mercer in 2011.

From an Amsterdam perspective the Viennese approach is exceptional. This Austrian city council has assumed responsibility for residential construction and is therefore responsible for absorbing demographic growth. The city seems to be more crisis-resistant because of this.

It is no longer possible to imagine the Viennese situation in the Netherlands. Government oversight of the production of social housing was relinquished when the Dutch housing corporations were privatized in the 1990s and commercial parties are no longer in a position to finance larger area developments in full. The Viennese situation nevertheless provides food for thought with regard to possible creative solutions within the Dutch residential sector.

## Greater Freedom and Dynamism?

In the Netherlands, particularly in the major cities, the government pursues a proactive policy with regard to spatial development. Such oversight has advantages, as the government can then prevent undesirable developments; the downside is that it can lead to an excessive mania for regulation. In times when economic growth is stagnating, strict regulation has an obstructive effect on temporary or innovative initiatives. The foundations of the economy, urban or otherwise, are anchored in an environment of spontaneous and unforeseen interaction, which calls for flexible zoning plans.

In Amsterdam we are not yet very familiar with this, but Berlin can serve as an example. Berlin has the advantage that there is sufficient space in the city and it pursues a more flexible policy with regard to what is or is not permitted. This allows leeway for spontaneous initiatives, which attracts creative residents and generates economic development.

5 Prinzessinnengärten in Berlin was opened as a green space for local residents in 2009, at a site which had been a wasteland for over half a century. Locals can grow organic food there and discover more about biodiversity.

Photo: Assenmacher



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### The Dynamics of Society as an Organizational Force

The urban population is growing because of the city's allure. The way in which new communities arise means that urban societies have distinctive features. For example, in recent decades the knowledge-intensive economy in Amsterdam has grown considerably. The proportion of highly skilled workers has risen from 10 percent in 1970 to more than 60 percent today. Many creative people have been drawn to the city, boosting to the city's open, tolerant and creative image.

With a government that is increasingly hands-off, there are ever-greater demands on society's self-reliance and creativity. In his inaugural lecture as Professor of Urban and Regional Planning at the University of Amsterdam in September 2012, Zef Hemel, who is Deputy Director of the DRO, advocated taking the 'the City as a Brain' as the starting point for city planning: How can urban societies contribute to the quality of life in the city?

Part of the answer has already been given: cities like Chicago, Pittsburgh, New York and Berlin demonstrate that bottom-up initiatives, such as crowd-sourcing,

urban agriculture and cultural events, can make a contribution to the city as a whole. An ever greater diversity of groupings are self-organizing themselves and with their organizational wherewithal they are in a position to improve the quality of life of neighbourhoods in particular, and by extension that of the whole city. Amsterdam is also working on the encouragement and facilitation of bottom-up initiatives.

### Smart Solutions for the Citizen

The ever increasing individualization of society calls for a government that facilitates and is transparent; the citizen must be able to find their bearings in the city as easily as possible and the use of public services must be as efficient as possible. Smart technological solutions can contribute to this.

Tallinn, the capital city of Estonia, is a trendsetter in the field of digitalization and digital government. Many municipal services can be arranged wholly online and this is proving to be fast, efficient and cheap. Internet is available throughout the city via WiFi – for free – and in buses there are even built-in computers on the backs of the seats so that passengers can carry on working.

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**6** During his first term in office, Mayor Bloomberg of New York launched an experiment to improve the quality of the public space and the liveability of the city centre. Along Broadway he temporarily replaced one direction of travel for motor vehicles with a bike path, flower tubs and space for terraces. Thanks to the success of this pilot, a definitive design was made in which the bike path is actually replaced by a broad sidewalk.

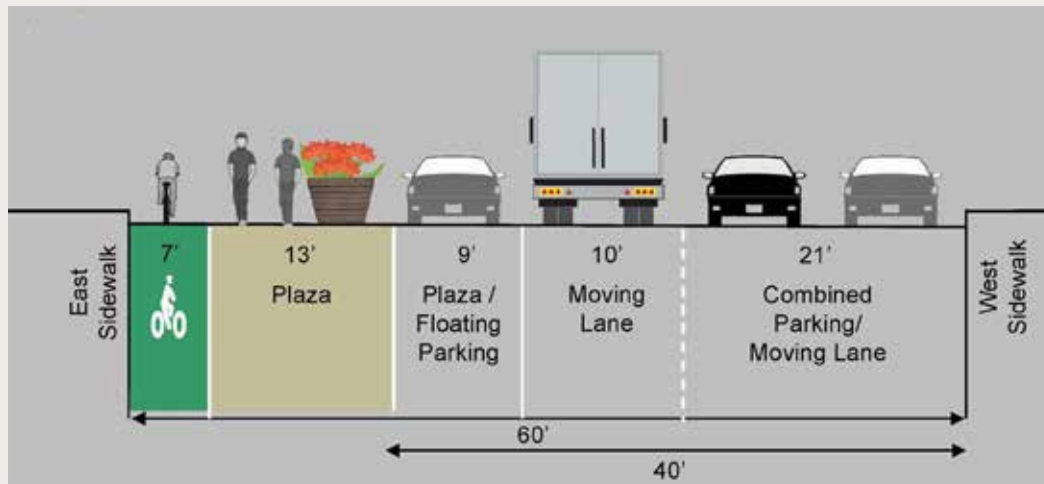
Illustrations: [www.streetsblog.org](http://www.streetsblog.org)

**7** More experimentation in public space, as with Broadway in New York, is a means of testing the quality of public space in areas where the dynamism and pressures of use are high.

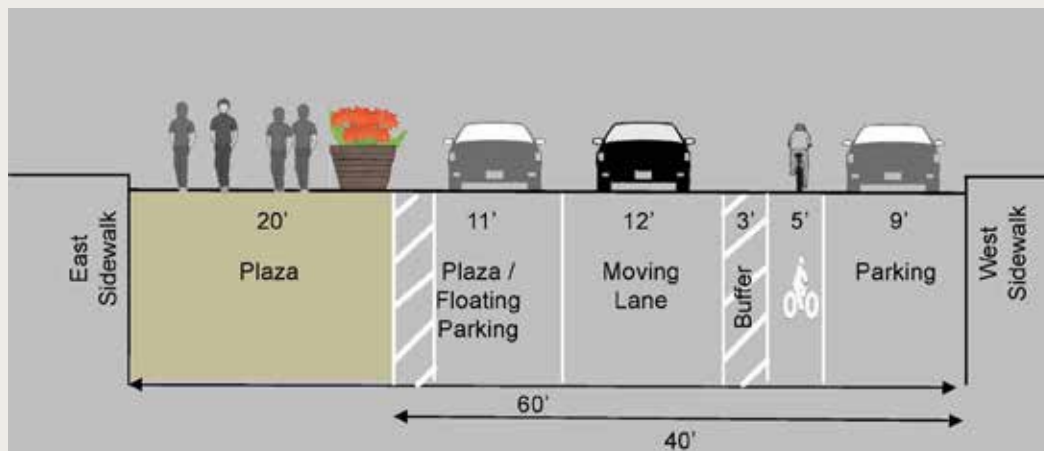
Photo: Eric van der Kooij

**8** In Toronto high-density construction goes hand in glove with consideration for lively street frontages and high-quality public spaces.

Photo: Eric van der Kooij



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The government's far-reaching provision of services in Tallinn has resulted in all the services being interconnected, but the system is transparent as well and offers optimum service for the inhabitants.

### Temporary Experiments as a Flywheel

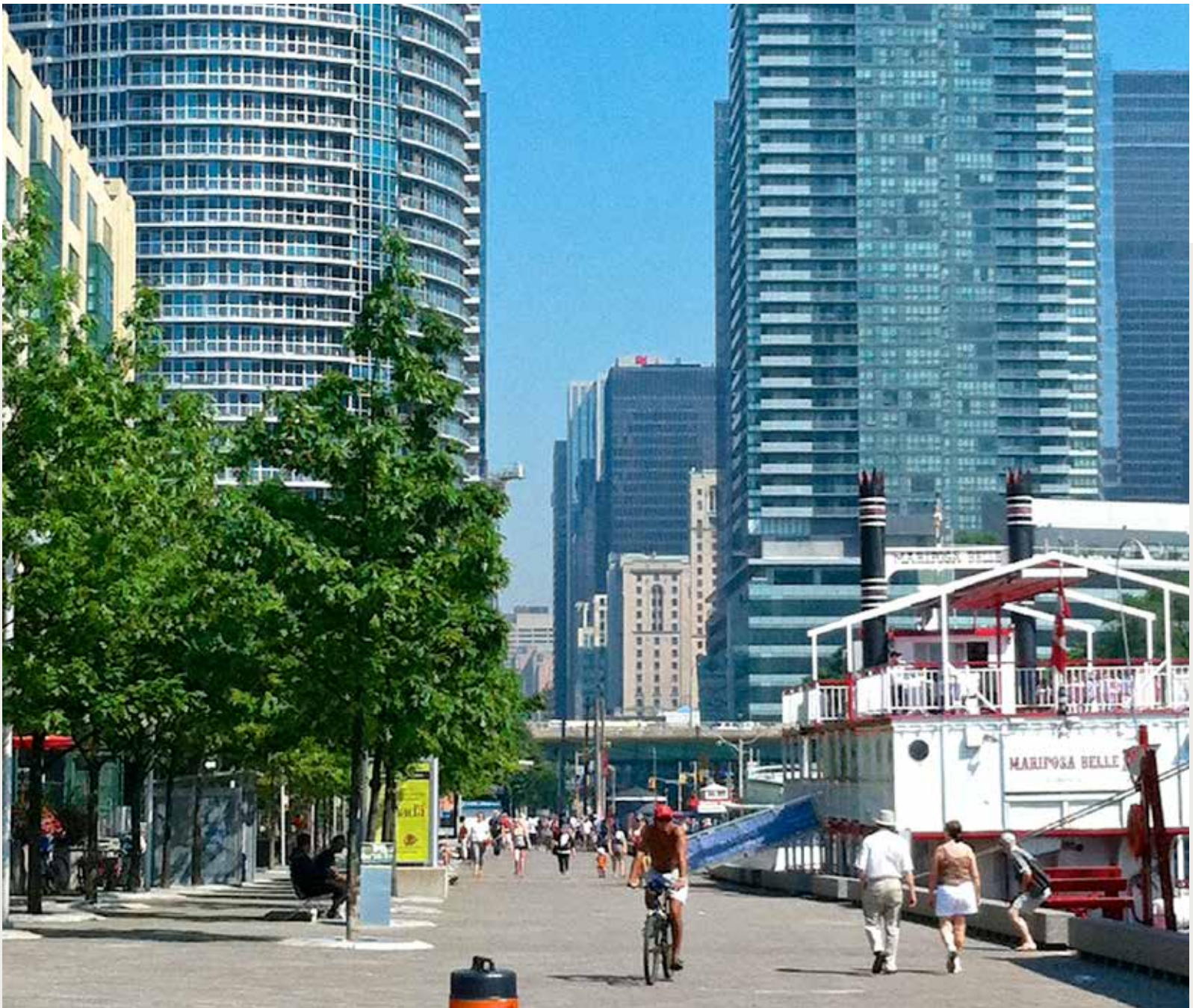
In the Netherlands we are used to tackling spatial planning projects in a thorough manner. A well-considered design is drawn up and its realization is often robust. We prefer to do things well the first time rather than having to do something two or three times.

However, the approach of Mayor Bloomberg in New York teaches us that **temporary experiments in the public space can be a flywheel for a greater transformation.** Bloomberg won over everyone with the

introduction of a temporary bike lane along Broadway. He managed to convince people that the bike path would improve the quality of life and the public space, thus fulfilling his election promise to find a sustainable solution for Times Square: the transformation of this link on Broadway from a traffic bottleneck into a metropolitan public space.

### From Vision to a Sustainable Implementation Strategy

When it comes to sustainable ambitions and urgency of concrete problems, New York's sustainability agenda from 2007, *PlaNYC*, has been a source of inspiration for Amsterdam's sustainability vision. With *PlaNYC* New York has not only pinned the urgency of sustainable



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urban development very firmly onto the map; it has devised the corresponding implementation agenda as well.

Just like New York, Amsterdam has opted for an integral approach to sustainability. So the two cities are not just looking at climate and energy, but at aspects such as accessibility and the business climate as well. One difference is that New York has involved a whole array of issues in its approach: from water, food and social behaviour to buildings and infrastructure. Amsterdam has opted for four interrelated themes: energy, mobility, the economy and materials. The method of the two cities is, however, the same: they couple a long-term vision for 2030 with a short-term implementation plan.

### Cooperation as Key

Cities and metropolitan regions compete with each other. In conjunction with global relations that are in flux this calls for different strategies, competencies and working methods, as well as new coalitions with the private sector and knowledge institutions that are beneficial to finding solutions for metropolitan issues.

Cities also have a duty and responsibility to their inhabitants and visitors to assist each other in the creation of smarter, better and sustainable cities. Amsterdam is keen to learn from other cities around the world in this ongoing quest. Sharing expertise, reciprocal cooperation and inspiration can make an important contribution to this. ■