

# Report Site Visit: **Vierhavensblok, Rotterdam (NL)**

**Activating Urban Commons in the Productive City**  
**Transforming an Industrial Port Area into a Circular Urban Makers District**



**Model of the M4H area and surroundings; site representative Walter de Vries explains the larger urban context of the 'Vierhavensblok'**

Photo: Frank Hanswijk

**On Friday 26 April AIR and European NL organized a full day programme to introduce the five European sites in Rotterdam in depth. It was a unique opportunity to explore the five areas and meet representatives and stakeholders of each site.**

## **SITE VISIT (morning)**

### **EXPERTS ON SITE:**

Walter de Vries (City of Rotterdam, urban planner)

Monica Adams (founding architect Bekkering Adams / Keilecollectief)

Erik Sterk (independent city maker / initiator Voedseltuinen)

Robbert de Vrieze (independent city maker / Transformism / Delfshaven Coöperatie)

### **QUESTIONS & ANSWERS:**

**Q:** What were the main objectives for the city to choose this site for the European competition?

**A:** Because it is a very interesting site. M4H is very big and a former harbour area. Now it will be developed into a Makers District and become part of the city. Something that is quite new and we're looking for new concepts to inspire us. This specific area, the Vierhavensblok already shows the first hints of this new world. The future is still to be dreamt of, but also already a bit there. Some key players, anchors and a very interesting energy are already there. In the middle is a public domain, the "Voedseltuin" (Food Garden). An urban space which binds the area together. People are very committed to this test site. Some of the makers even wants to live here, some designers already asked if it would be possible to build their own houses here. Key-questions are:

- How to realize a good climate for the makers in combination with other functions and densification?
- How to implement the 8 guiding principles for sustainable urban development, giving meaning to our main starting point "collectivity as foundation for circularity"?

**> Read the site brief for the official assignment:** <https://www.european-europe.eu/en/session/european-15/site/rotterdam-vierhavensblok-nl>



### **The 'heart' of the Vierhavensblok, with the Keilecollectief building in the background (black-and-white-façade)**

Photo: Frank Hanswijk

**Q:** What can you tell about the buildings inside the block? Are there any characteristic buildings that we have to keep or plans for buildings to be demolished?

**A:** On the map in the site brief (pp. 22-23) the darkest pink building blocks are listed

monuments, which cannot be demolished. Soundport is a monument as well, but you are free to redevelop it with another programme for example. Buildings in lighter pink are considered valuable buildings. Try to keep them, but if they are not of good quality you might consider to remove them.

**Q: What do you know about ownership?**

**A:** The land is owned by the municipality of Rotterdam. Users have land use contracts (“erfpacht”) with the municipality. The buildings are mostly owned by the users. Possible plots to be developed in a few years are the 3 in the corners that were given in the site brief (dotted yellow line on the map). But you’re not limited to them in your design. Feel free to decide otherwise.

**Q: What can you tell about the users on the project site?**

**A:** There are 6 main stakeholders:

- Atelier (Joep) van Lieshout (AVL) is a famous Dutch artist who e.g. makes big controversial statues. He has plans for a 24-hour museum for big art and a hotel. He owns the building and could be an interesting participant in the developments.
- Keilecollectief, various architects and urban architecture studios are based here. They are owner of the building.
- Daan Roosegaarde, an artist engineer who owns the Droomfabriek. His site also contains a garden that he uses as a test site. The smog free tower is standing there now. Owner of the building is Studio Roosegaarde.
- Keilewerf 1 and 2; in these two buildings there are all kind of wood companies and a do it yourself wood workplaces situated. Temporary rent, but this collective fits quite well in the concept of M4H as Makers District. The question is how such collectives could get a permanent place in the area. This has both spatial and financial consequences.
- Voedseltuin (Food Garden); renting the site from the municipality.
- SKAR (Stichting Kunst Ateliers Rotterdam) owns the building of Soundport, housing small sound studios. Ideas to redevelop ground floor but nothing concrete yet.



**Erik Sterk explaining the Voedseltuin, with an artwork of Van Lieshout (white object), and Studio Roosegaarde (left) and Keilecollectief 2 (right) in the background**

Photo: Frank Hanswijk

**Q: What can you tell us about the surrounding area?**

**A:** Most important buildings around the Vierhavensblok are:

- On the south side, there is a famous juice cluster situated, called HIWA. The white warehouses look cheap, but needed a high investment for cooling installations. HIWA has a contract to stay till 2035 at least.
- The HAKA building is a listed monument on National level. It was one of the first concrete buildings in The Netherlands. The original function was a warehouse of goods from overseas. Here goods were packed and sold directly to residents of the surrounding neighbourhood, without a supermarket in-between. Later on, this company evaluated into the COOP (which is a supermarket branch by now). The building is now owned by Dudok, a developer. They want to realise a coffee company on the ground floor, offices in the middle and horeca on top.
- The gasholder is a monument as well. In the "Ruimtelijk Raamwerk" (Spatial Framework) for the whole area, this location is highlighted as public hotspot.
- Praxis (a DIY-yourself shop and gardening shop) has a long lease contract.
- A beer brewery will be realised along the quay of the Merwehaven. Restart of "Uit je eigen stad" (From Your Own City) will be next year, close to the brewery.

**Q: Any other companies, facilities or initiatives to mention?**

**A:** Some more:

- Warehouse at the end of the plot, mainly used for stock. Housing is not allowed here, because it belongs to the port and they are forbidden to develop dwellings. But it keeps the ground price lower in its surroundings.
- Katoenveem, a building that is in very bad condition owned by the city. Nevertheless, it is a listed monument on the National level. A philanthropical foundation wants to realise an art museum in it for live making and exhibit big art projects. Negotiations for this project are going on.
- Warehouses on the southwest are for transshipment of bananas. Long term lease contracts.
- There is budget to create a tidal park in the Keilehaven. Here the tide difference is 1,5 metres. It is a small harbour with slopes; ideal conditions for greening. Unfortunately, the tide is too weak for energy generation.
- The watertaxi has a stop in this area and will stay. Currently, the density is still too low to facilitate a waterbus stop.

**Q: Is it complex to work with parties that are already there?**

**A:** You should see it as a unique quality of this area. All parties are very interested in making a community together. All people who came here have the feeling that everything is possible. They are experimental, like to make, work together, and act as an entrepreneur. Our strength is to find challenges and shared ambitions, and create new opportunities.

**Q: Are there existing synergies within the Vierhavensblok?**

**A:** Yes, there are already some examples. The Urbanisten have designed and are building a sponge garden in Voedseltuin. Joep van Lieshout exposes art in the garden.

**Q: Do they want to keep the garden in the middle?**

**A:** It does not have to be in the same way, but be aware it has a lot of connecting strength between the different collectives on site and is a worthwhile social value. In the "Ruimtelijk Raamwerk" (Spatial Framework) the area of the Voedseltuin is designated as green area.



### **Walking through the Voedseltuin, heading to Keilewerf 1 (left)**

Photo: Frank Hanswijk



### **Creative hub and maker space Keilewerf 1**

Photos: Frank Hanswijk



### **Coming out of the backdoor of Keilewerf 1 / Facing the Marconi Towers**

Photos: Frank Hanswijk

## WORKSHOP (afternoon)

### **EXPERTS:**

Walter de Vries (City of Rotterdam, urban planner)

Monica Adams (founding architect Bekkering Adams / Keilecollectief)

Madir Shah (moderator, European NL board)

### **QUESTIONS & ANSWERS:**

**Q:** Are we expected to elaborate on one site within the contours of the European project site?

**A:** You're expected to make a vision on the area, and an architectural concept or design on one of the plots. Incorporate the 8 principles on sustainable development. The bigger question is; what makes sense to organise in a collective if this is the scale level? What is the right scale level? Local level, building or city neighbourhood. Be specific on what is logic to organise in a circular way on this scale.

For example:

- Think about mobility, how to share? Find an entrepreneur to find it, make a business about it. Who will do that?
- Think about phasing, are people coming all together joining the community at once? How will they become part of the community?

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### Walter de Vries explains the variations of use and ownership on site

Photo: Frank Hanswijk

**Q:** Are there already ideas on circularity?

**A:** Yes, there are already some examples, like the sponge garden and the smog free tower. On building level there are ideas for energy exchange, green roofs, sharing wood, waste products, health etc. People work on organic waste innovation in the science towers.

**Q:** What is your worst nightmare?

**A (by Keilecollectief):** That it becomes a copy of the Mullerpier (100 metres further on). This place has the opportunity to become something very interesting. It should not have a vinex-wijk-feeling (only brand new and mostly dwellings). We want to create a new kind of city life.

We want a concept with mixed working and living and share items together within a community. We also think it's circular to build upon current values and existing things.

**Q:** Is the "Ruimtelijk Raamwerk" established policy?

**A:** The port already agreed. The municipality will do hopefully before summer. Currently, it is not public yet.

**Q:** Is the ground polluted?

**A:** The design area has clean soil.

**Q:** How much houses do you expect to build on the European project site?

**A:** Quite a high density. We don't have exact numbers yet, but around 1,000-1,500 could be a possible density to further elaborate.

**Q:** Are you looking for a densification strategy with partners that are already there? Are they open to suggestions?

**A:** It depends on the position of the partners and the termination of their contracts. The challenge is to explore the borders of what is still acceptable for current users.

**Q:** If we win the European competition, how will the city of Rotterdam follow up?

**A:** We hope the city is inspired and that it helps to formulate the content for a tender to take the next step. On block level we can work together on further elaboration. No guarantee on elaboration or realisation.

**Q:** When is next event on the Keilecollectief?

**A:** On the 5th of June, about alternatives on AVL. This is an open studio of the Rotterdam Academy. And on the 12th of June, 1010 will tell about the research they did last year in the context of the International Architecture Biennial (IABR).



### **Map of the users on site**

Photo: Frank Hanswijk

## NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS

- Tour: 60
- Workshop: 60

**END**