

(re)CYCLE LIMBURG 2

INTERNATIONAL DESIGN WORKSHOP
11 > 15.12.2017



2020



(re)CYCLE LIMBURG 2

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FOREWORD

In December 2017, the Research Centre for Smart Urban Redesign (SURD) organized its second international design workshop on the revitalization of public space in the district of Kerkrade-West. In this workshop ('(re)CYCLE LIMBURG 2'), international teams of students, designers, and researchers explored possible ways to improve public space with respect to local identity, sustainability, and a diversity of uses and users. The workshop was part of a longer running project in which students, designers, and researchers together with the local community (inhabitants, shopkeepers, entrepreneurs, the municipality, housing corporations) are actively engaged in the transformation and revitalization of Kerkrade-West. The workshop is financially supported by the Province of Limburg and the executive of the Stadsregio Parkstad-Limburg conurbation.

(re)CYCLE LIMBURG 2 partly built on the knowledge, experiences, and ideas that had been explored in the preceding workshop ('(re)CYCLE LIMBURG'), which was held in December 2016. Both workshops were framed in the interdisciplinary project Kerkrade-West of Zuyd University and SURD. In this follow-up workshop, new insights, inspiration, and solutions were stimulated and developed. Continuity is being ensured by a small group of designers, researchers, and local partners. Fresh insights will come from a new international group of students and additional designers/researchers.

The analyses and designs produced in this workshop are mainly presented in the form of drawings, maps, schemes, collages, artistic impressions, etc. This booklet provides an impression of these results.

SURD is continuing to work in Kerkrade-West and with its inhabitants and other stakeholders in the context of the GRACHT VITAAL project¹, which is financially and logistically supported by the Province of Limburg and the Municipality of Kerkrade. A selection of the proposals for the Gracht neighbourhood are being further developed by students and staff with the aim of implementing them, thus making Kerkrade-West a living lab for tactical urbanism. The local community of Kerkrade-West is actively involved in defining the goals and programme of this continuing project. This booklet concludes by reporting how this process currently (i.e. in the spring of 2018) is being implemented.

¹ See: Provincie Limburg. 2018. *De Vereniging Limburg*. online: <https://www.devereniginglimburg.nl/parelkaart?id=1804151>



INTRODUCTION: THREE CASE STUDIES AND ONE PROJECT ELABORATION

(re)CYCLE LIMBURG 2 focused on three locations in Kerkrade-West:

- Akerstraat: a central, urban street surrounded by shops with apartments above. This street, together with a public square – Carboonplein – forms the main shopping area in Kerkrade-West, but has many vacant buildings due to economic and demographic decline. Akerstraat was developed from the 1920s onwards. Carboonplein was developed in 2007–10 as a square, but it is mainly arranged and used for parking.
- Heiveldplein: a triangular square in the Kaalheide neighbourhood, mainly surrounded by 2-storey terraced houses and 3-storey apartment blocks dating from the late 1950s. The square was previously used as parking space for the former Roda JC soccer stadium. Nowadays, the stadium is only used as training facility for Roda JC. Due to the loss of its public function, the stadium no longer requires parking space, leaving the square in need of re-design and new use(s).
- Gracht: a neighbourhood with mainly low-rise housing from the 1960s–1980s (some rather experimental) and two dominant blocks of high-rise apartments from the 1970s. Some of the housing typologies and parcelling are typical of the late 1970s experiments in Dutch urban design and architecture for social housing. Most of the public space in Gracht, however, was not consciously designed but rather consists of ‘left over’ spaces between housing and as a result of demolition.

These three locations have in common that while they’re well maintained and safe (and many have recently been refurbished), they are rather mono-functional in terms of use: they accommodate traffic, parked vehicles, or greenery. The full potential of these spaces has not been developed. They lack socio-cultural function and meaning, because they are not receptive to everyday usage, such as playing, sporting, meeting, and relaxing. The three types of public spaces can also be found elsewhere in the Parkstad conurbation and beyond, and they often have similar problems. This makes the knowledge and experiences generated in the Kerkrade-West living lab, to which this workshop contributes, also valuable for other locations.

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CASE STUDY 1 AKERSTRAAT



Akerstraat is the main commercial spine of Kerkrade-West. It crosses the district from north to south, linking together many functions like the library, commercial activities, apartments, and two squares: Carboonplein and Patronaatplein. Despite its central position, Akerstraat is a symbol of decay in Kerkrade-West, and the intense car traffic contrasts dramatically with the vacant buildings and negatively affects how people experience the street. Its increasingly marginal role has led to the closure of several shops, further strengthening the image of quite a shabby and unsafe street. These conditions exclude Kerkrade-West from the events planned throughout the year in Kerkrade, except for the weekly markets on Carboonplein.



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AKERSTRAAT: A NEW IDENTITY

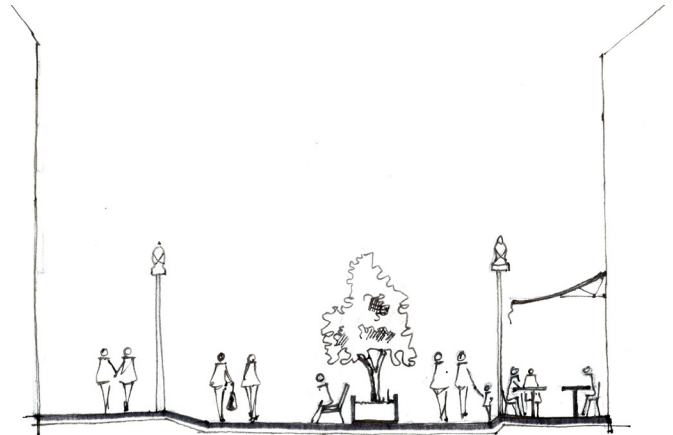
The first analysis focused on the urban design, mapping out the buildings along Akerstraat with their different functions and also the vacant buildings. This led to the conclusion that there are many vacant buildings that make the street look quite shabby.

The second analysis was about the traffic flows. It clarified that Akerstraat is predominantly used as a connector road between the supermarkets and the main street. The parking on Carboonplein creates an exclusion from Akerstraat, because people park their cars, load their groceries, and leave again without visiting the shops in Akerstraat. An analysis of the parking spaces in the area showed that there is ample room for parking close by; hence, parking in Akerstraat is not a necessity.

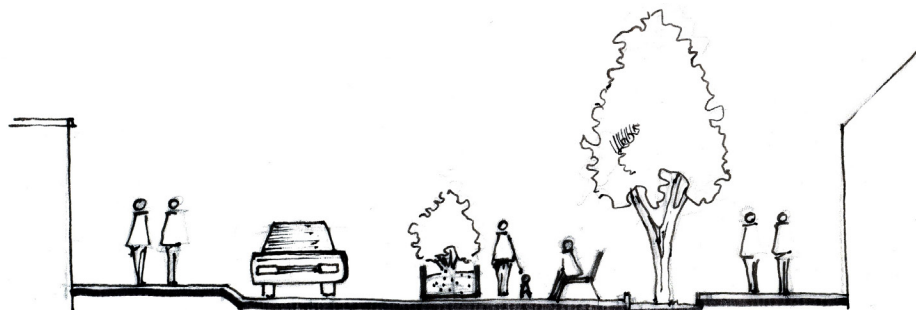
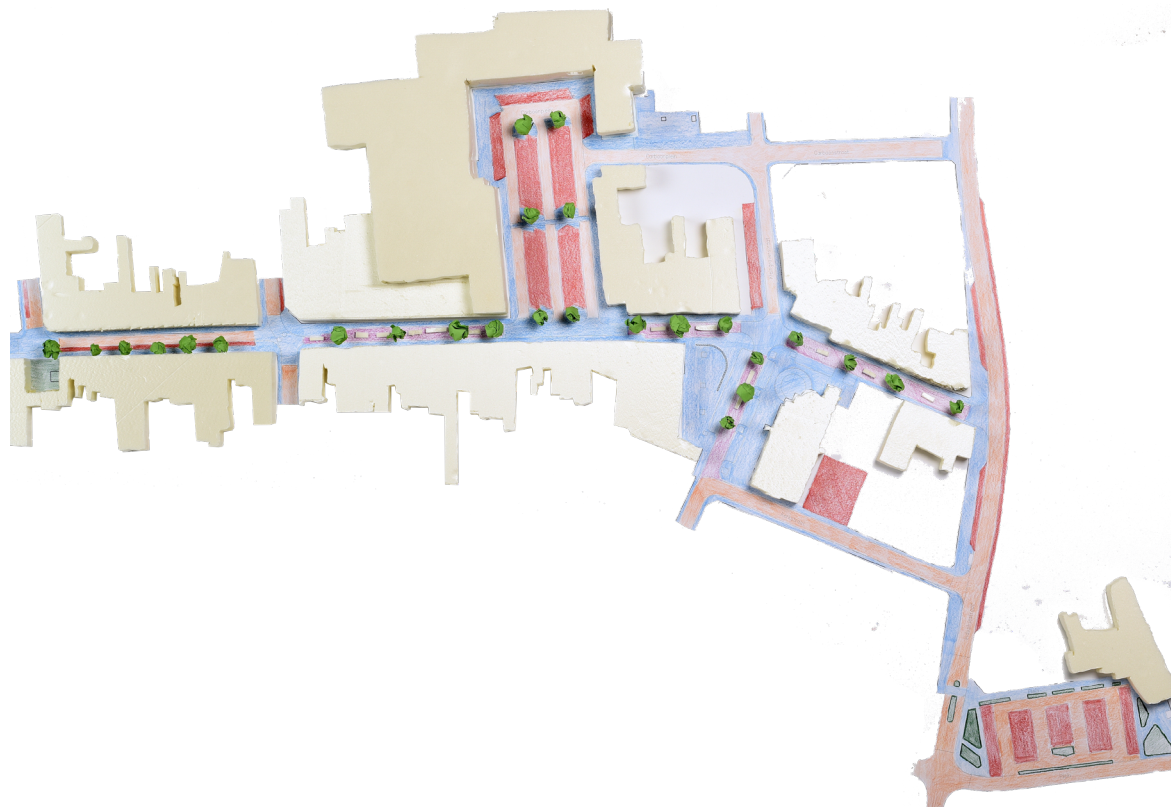
Based on this knowledge, a concept was drafted. The biggest change proposed in this concept was to reduce the traffic on Akerstraat by excluding cars from the lower part of the street. Creating a public space on the street itself should attract shoppers and invite them in a safe and environmentally friendly way to visit shops along the street. In time, this would revitalize Akerstraat, reduce the number of vacant buildings, and hopefully increase the usage of the new public shopping space.

Relocating events such as the weekly market from Carboonplein to the street would bring shoppers into touch with the shops on the street and also enable more cars to be parked on the square. To give the space an instantly better appearance, we suggest using removable street furniture as

well as plants and trees. Furthermore, we suggest giving some colour to the area by painting vacant buildings and the pavement in pronounced colours. The neighbourhood children would be included by letting them paint pavement tiles to have an influence on their own public space.



A CAR-FREE STREET



X MULTI-FUNCTIONAL STREET

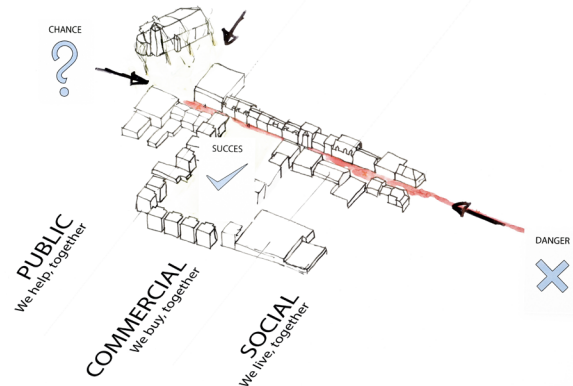
STEPWISE IMPROVEMENT OF AKERSTRAAT

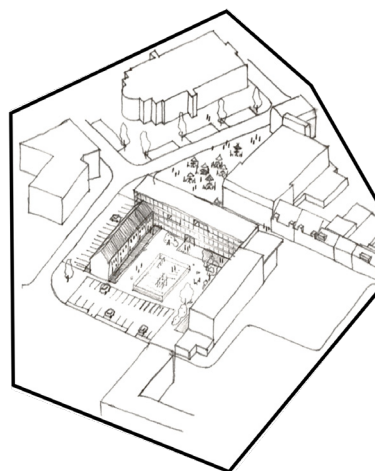
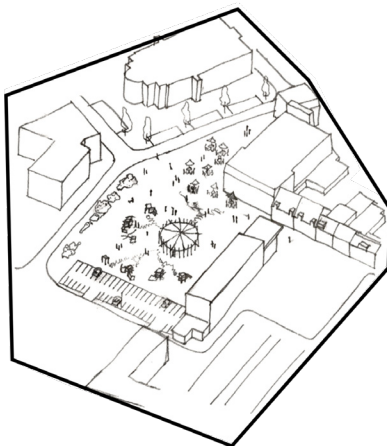
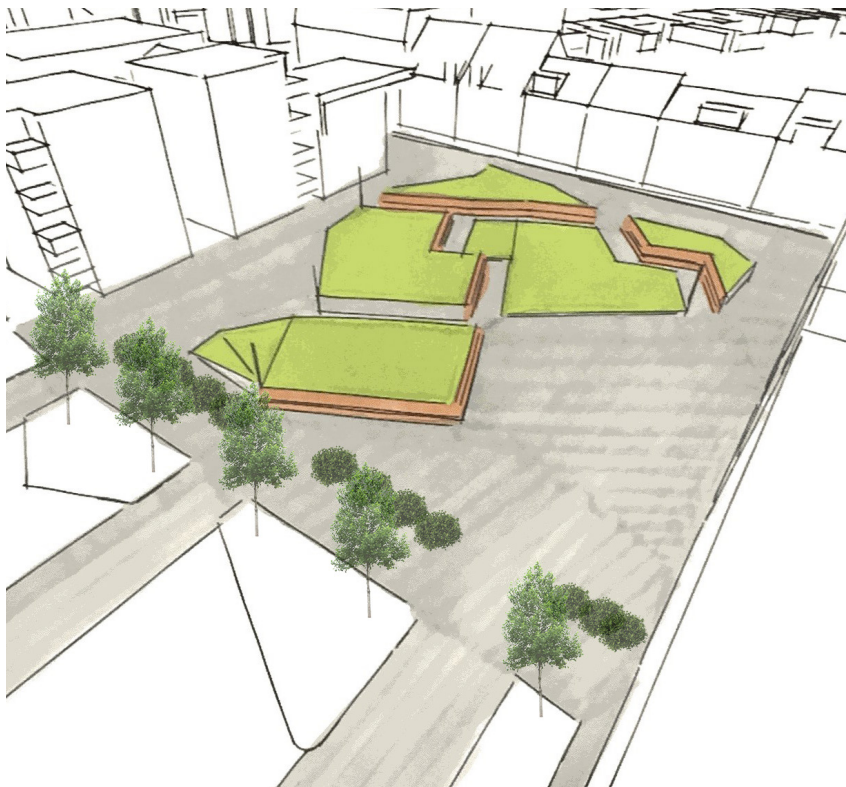
The main emphasis of our analysis was on the layout of and the vacant buildings in Akerstraat. Emphasis was also put on the relation of Akerstraat to the surrounding neighbourhoods in Kerkrade-West, where there is a combination of housing and shopping, in addition to a significant number of vacant shops in one street. We also noticed that there was no connection between Akerstraat, Carboonplein, and Patronaatplein. The interventions we propose are divided into two phases. Phase 1 comprises small interventions that could be realized in the short term, and phase two would address the long term. The latter interventions would be bigger, but before this phase can be carried out, the impact of phase one would have to be evaluated.

In the first phase, Akerstraat would be divided into three parts: a public part, a commercial part, and a residential part. The aim of this division is to tackle the issue of vacant buildings and the current negative street scene. We propose creating pop-up shops in Akerstraat and making Carboonplein car-free and green. The Big Bazar building would be demolished, creating a large public space (opposite page, bottom left) and improving the connection between Akerstraat, Carboonplein, and Patronaatplein. The site of the demolished Big Bazar would accommodate a playground and the parking places removed from Carboonplein.

Phase two would continue where phase one ended. The area of the demolished Big Bazar would be used as a space to create new buildings, architecturally similar to the buildings surrounding Carboonplein

(opposite page, bottom right). The part of Akerstraat between Patronaatplein and the area designed for informal social interaction would be completely car-free, there would be a lot of green, and sustainable wooden benches would be added. Street lighting that harks back to the period of the mines is proposed for Akerstraat. A kitchen garden would be realized next to the playground realized in phase one. The aim of these changes is to transform Akerstraat and its surroundings into a safer and better neighbourhood.





CASE STUDY 2 HEIVELDPLEIN

Heiveldplein is in Heilust-Kaalheide, a neighbourhood that was developed during the mining period. This area has seen improvement in the housing stock, but improvement in the public domain lags behind and faces challenges. Since 2009, the neighbourhood and the terraced houses have been renovated, as part of the Limburg District Approach, which is an initiative of the Province of Limburg. The whole of Kaalheide is one of the five pilot districts in Parkstad that are subject to the District Approach. The way in which Kaalheide was addressed as a pilot scheme is considered an example of how to renovate housing stock and how to deal with the consequences of population shrinkage. Although the neighbourhood was renovated the public spaces are not properly used, which also applies to Heiveldplein. This triangular square bordering the training site of soccer club Roda JC at Parkstraat, is no longer used intensely for parking. It therefore has potential in terms of usage for other public activities.



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HEIVELDPLEIN: CENTRE OF KAALHEIDE

The aim of this project was to make a new design for Heiveldplein. The former Roda JC stadium is now only used on Saturdays for sporting activities. Thus, the parking facilities on the square are underused and could be removed.

In this analysis, we looked at the neighbourhood on a bigger scale. We discovered that there are a lot of unused green patches in the neighbourhood. Dogs are banned from the lawns and there are no facilities for children to play. In addition, the neighbourhood has a historical background, determined by the remains of a Roman villa and the old stadium, and it used to be known as 'Wijk van Morgen' ('Neighbourhood of the Future'). The analysis also showed that most people in the neighbourhood are between 25 and 65 years old.

Our idea is to make a green boulevard running between the renovated church at Kampstraat at Heilust and the old stadium. This green boulevard would connect the parks and lead pedestrians over Heiveldplein. This would turn the square into a central point where different activities would take place and where the old and the young could have fun. A skate track would be made in the square, in combination with an open theatre and a spot for a catering trailer.

It would be of a great importance to involve the aforementioned lawns in our plan to make Heiveldplein a central point in the neighbourhood. The green patches in the neighbourhood lack a clear function and design, but could be transformed into different types of parks that would attract

different types of people. A park with several playing facilities would be interesting for children. This is an idea that was developed in the concept of several routes that pass through Heiveldplein, making it the centre of all the routes. Another idea was to make a route for children. Along this route there would be interesting elements that would make children playfully walk towards the different parks and Heiveldplein. Other routes that were designed were: a historical route; a green route that passes by all the green spaces, offering the option to walk to the botanical garden and to the forest; a sports route that passes by the sports facilities and that could also be used as a running route; and a shopping route that would pass by all the little shops in Kaalheide and offer the option to walk to Carboonplein.





THREE TIMES HEIVELDPLEIN

The analysis revealed the abundance of parking facilities in the neighbourhood. Because of the high thresholds and the narrow pathways, the square is currently not sufficiently accessible.

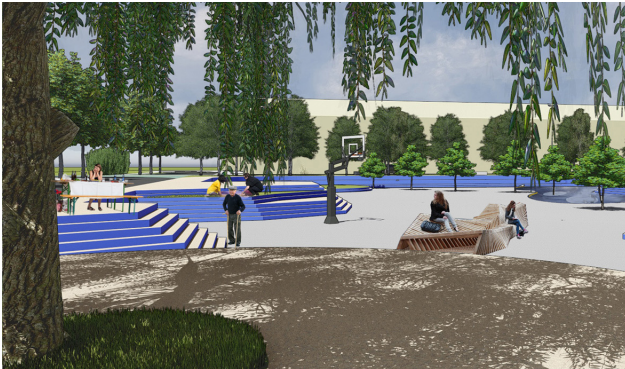
We therefore decided to give the square a recreational purpose. There isn't a lot of greenery in the surrounding area; this needs to be added to the square. In addition, the analysis revealed that the street next to the square has a historic value. In order to strengthen the proposal, a street other than the historic street would need to be decommissioned.

The analysis was translated into a concept. We propose a green vein running alongside the square equipped with vegetable patches for people with disabilities. A variety of colours would also be used as eye catchers for the project. The level of the current parking lot would be raised and equipped with surrounding stairs to sit on, pop-up stands, a playground for children. Trees would be used to divide the current square into three smaller ones, each of which would have its own theme: rest, nature, and colours & taste. Finally, we propose to provide facilities to make the square accessible for everyone.

The existing slope would be decisive, due to soil pollution. That is why we chose to raise the ground a little so that there can be a natural staircase descent. Besides regular steps, there would be 'sitting steps' for people to sit on. The stairs would be made of a sand coloured, recyclable material. Further on, there would be two ramps for

wheelchair users. In the square would be a wooden bench within a swing, as well as a wooden tunnel in the centre of the square for children to play in and on. The playground device would be placed on an impact-absorbing plate covered with a soft synthetic grass. The proposal also includes a space for events and a skate-park, materialized using a mixture of recycled asphalt and concrete. A path would run across the square with trees planted in movable containers alongside it. At the highest point, there would be an area for parking vehicles such as ice-cream vans or for holding a small pop-up market. Next to the square there would be a green corridor, with some fitness equipment for elderly people in one part of it. The second area would be for gardening. The last area would be developed for dogs. On the corner opposite this corridor, an artwork would be installed as an eye catcher.





CASE STUDY 3 GRACHT

Infrastructures played a major role in the urbanization pattern of Kerkrade, producing a fragmented conurbation. In the specific case of Gracht, this neighbourhood was built alongside the railway track, in relation to the activities of the Willem-Sophia coal mine. Soon after the closure of the mine in 1970, the railway line was no longer used for transporting coal. In 1988, the Schaesberg–Simpelveld section between Kerkrade-West and Schin op Geul was closed for public transport, and since 1992 the Kerkrade centrum–Valkenburg ('Vetschau' in German) section is used only by the ZLSM, a touristic railway company. The railway line thus lost its importance and it acquired an informal recreational function. The railway separates the built-up area from the open landscape, which is why Gracht is a neighbourhood in need of new connections.



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THE HIDDEN GARDEN

Gracht is confined to a triangular shape defined by the railway, the outer ring road, and the Willem-Sofia industrial estate. The only connection between Gracht and the rest of Kerkrade-West is Grachterstraat. The aim of the project is to make Gracht part of a bigger system that will give a totally new identity to the whole of Kerkrade-West.

By creating a central ribbon across Grachterstraat in Gracht, we want to revitalize the neighbourhood. This ribbon would pass through the Spekholzerheide district and thus be part of a larger system in Kerkrade-West. This system would comprise two ribbons in Spekholzerheide: the green ribbon and the commercial ribbon through Akerstraat. The two need to work together.

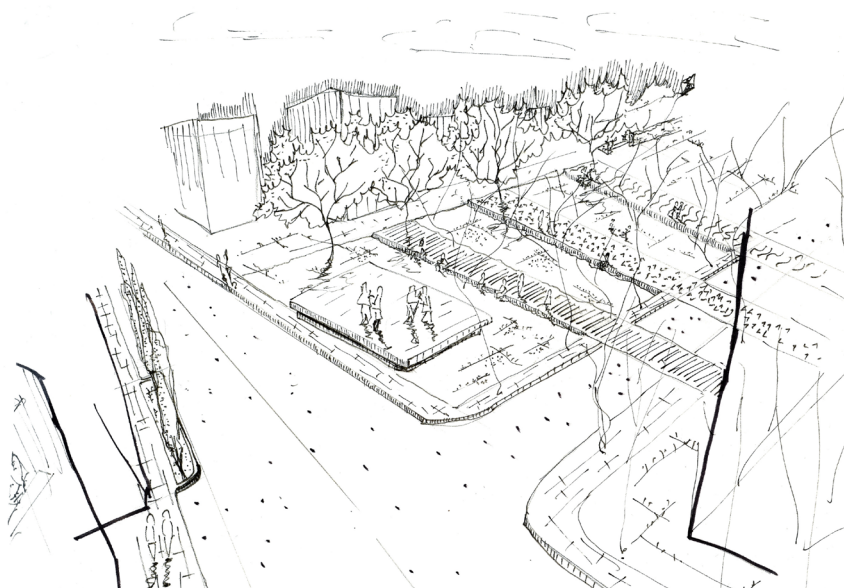
Both of these ribbons would make it more attractive to move on foot or by bike and give the impression that Gracht is linked to the rest of Kerkrade-West by flowing lines. The ribbon across Grachterstraat would be connected to different networks of roads, paths, and public spaces developed throughout the entire neighbourhood. These networks would feed the ribbon created here.

The school in Gracht is of a great importance to the neighbourhood. This urban element is centrally located on Grachterstraat and is a part of the local cultural heritage. The structure of the neighbourhood is such that one can easily and safely reach the school. When the school was closed, the paths in the neighbourhood lost their function. In cooperation with associations and local residents, we want to give the characteristic

school building a new life as a community centre – a central building with a social function for the entire neighbourhood, where different generations and population groups can meet and find space for recreation and social contact. The social function would be concentrated in the vacant school. The building is centrally located in the district and would connect to the new ribbon.

The area where the church used to stand is now empty, closed off by a fence. This area would be made functional in coherence with the area around the school. Together with the school, the playground and the cemetery, this would be a meeting place for different population groups. These different functions would be combined in the design of this park.





COLOURED ACTIVITIES

Intense fieldwork in the Gracht neighbourhood, which we elaborated into diagrams and an interpretational map, revealed that public spaces have limited accessibility and lack specific functions.

The aim of the project is to transform inaccessible public spaces into useable areas. To do so, we made a plan in which all kinds of public spaces would be upgraded to form interrelated networks that would change the character of and everyday life in Gracht. Focusing on the network of public spaces and squares, our scenario results from collaboration with groups that designed the mobility and road networks. The chosen functions are: play, game, meeting, sport, and gardening. Each function would target different audiences; for example, a sporting function that could be used by youths for soccer games and by adults and the elderly for fitness activities. The evolving synthesis of this project was supported by a participatory process involving the local inhabitants. With the help of a physical model of the area, the inhabitants gave their input on how the public spaces should be organized, by putting different coloured flags in different locations on the model (each flag was linked to an activity). This information was of great importance to the conceptual progress.

Each function had its own colour. In response, we aim to transform the public spaces into a colourful and enjoyable environment (pictures this page: current condition; pictures opposite page: proposed intervention).

A major quality of the project is that it would be easy to implement. Many of the public spaces, like the secluded courtyards, could be upgraded simply by adding some colour and new public furniture. We visualized our design with photo-montages in a way that everybody could easily understand. The project is intended to make the inhabitants of Gracht proud of their neighbourhood again. To do this it is important to create a sense of ownership of the public spaces, which would result in a more respectful use of those spaces. Connecting different functions and different ages stimulates social control. Our vision includes the intensive use of the public space in a realistic way. Hence, we can revitalize Gracht.





COLOURED CONNECTIONS

During the analysis, we walked through Gracht and noted that the neighbourhood is divided into three segments. The upper part of the neighbourhood can be characterized as the main entrance to Gracht. From the elementary school, the Spoorzoeker, you need to cross the railway to enter Gracht. The middle part is the area where the majority of the public spaces of Gracht are located. The third segment looks like a maze where the roads are like a spider web following no logic. There are many paths between the houses; they are mainly unused and are unwelcoming to users. From the analysis it became clear that the paths were no longer essential to local mobility and the residents do not value them.

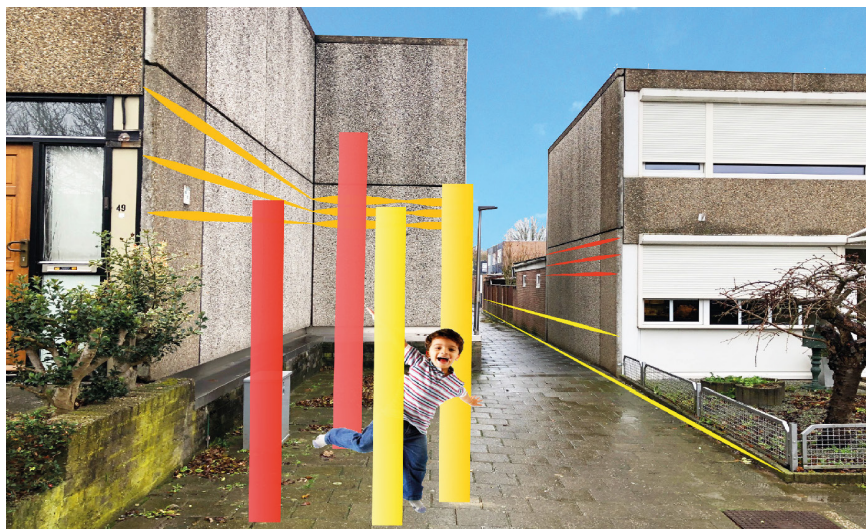
The aim of the project is to make those unappreciated public spaces attractive by linking the most important public spaces with a path. The small alleys would be used as much as possible to make them more approachable for the inhabitants and for visitors to Gracht.

The colours of the rainbow would be used to enhance the attractiveness of these alleys (pictures this page: current condition; pictures opposite page: proposed intervention). The intention is to brighten these alleys, to make their sober reality into a more colourful one. The colours would be linked to certain functions (i.e. meeting, sports, nature) in the public spaces.

Because the other groups focused on the connectivity of Gracht and on the revitalization of the squares and public spaces, our team focused

on the footpaths and connections between the squares. The final design was created by combining functions and designs with the utilized spaces that are connected to the proposed main path. We want to use different colours to guide people to the squares they want to go to. The closer people are to one of these squares, the more a colour would be used. In a number of cases, routes were defined by using a coloured line on the ground.





GRACHT VITAAL: ELABORATING THE PROJECT

The results were presented to local residents, who selected the 'coloured connections' and 'coloured activities' projects for further elaboration in the context of the GRACHT VITAAL follow-up project. SURD started this process at the beginning of 2018. The initial idea to implement colours and sensible street furniture together with the municipality as an act of tactical urbanism is being developed further during the 2018 spring semester. These concepts will be applied to a number of sites in Gracht that have been proposed by the neighbourhood committee itself. Certain spaces are considered by the community to be in need of improvement and retrofitting. This includes underused spaces, such as an alleyway that is felt not to be safe (Corneliusstraat), a secluded semi-public courtyard where parking facilities are concentrated (Elisa-Gracht), and a soccer court and a boules court (Birgitta-Gracht) that have potential to be used more intensely and diversely.





CONSULTING THE COMMUNITY

The GRACHT VITAAL follow-up project is strongly founded on interaction with the local community and the municipality. A discussion with inhabitants of Gracht resulted in the decision to focus on the soccer and the boules court. The consultation with inhabitants underscored the diverging expectations that people have regarding this public space: there is a need for sporting facilities for teenagers and for tranquil, safe meeting spaces for middle-aged and senior residents. Residents' input pointed towards making this area a place that would allow usage by diverse generations, a place where neighbours can meet in safety and organize activities for young and old.





REDESIGNING PUBLIC SPACE

The conceptual answer of the students is to soften the barrier between the area where the soccer and the boules court are, and the playground next to it. This playground for young children is semi-public, as it is fenced, making it inaccessible after closing hours. The softening of the barriers would allow the perception of one, unified [area, area that provides room for outdoor activities for both young and old.

In that way, a better interaction among generations would be stimulated. This does not imply that functions would be radically changed: the playground would remain a playground, for example. However, the barriers between this playground and its surroundings would be useable street furniture rather than fencing, indicating a separation in a more friendly way and allowing for exchange. Furthermore, the visual relations and routing would be redesigned to promote connectivity, a sense of safety and visibility, and an increased vitality for multiple kinds of users. Design by Sjoerd Saljé, Nando Severens, Bas Vissers and Lars Vleugels.





PARTICIPANTS' IMPRESSIONS

'After working on Zuyd's Kerkrade-West project for 13 weeks, it was nice to tackle Heiveldplein and come up with a new plan for this. Thanks to Zuyd's project, the problems in the neighbourhoods were already fairly clear and we were therefore able to get to work quickly. It was fun coming up with an idea in a week's time that can actually improve and contribute to the living conditions of the people around Heiveldplein. In addition, it was instructive to work together with people from other schools who follow a different education and therefore have a different view on certain things. Because of this we came up with ideas that we, as architects, might never have been able to come up with.'

- Luciano 't Lam

'I found the workshop very informative. It was nice to apply small interventions in Kerkrade-West that lead to positive changes there. Furthermore, it was a nice experience to work together with students from other schools, because they usually had a different view on the assignment.'

- Jesse Buskens

'Various competencies were needed during this workshop, and could be further developed. I found the collaboration with the student from Leuven most important, since she didn't speak Dutch. My English is very bad and this workshop offered a good opportunity to improve it. I also found it pleasant to work with people with four different professional perspectives. In this way, we could achieve a result based on these different perspectives. I found urbanism very interesting, as I had never come into contact with this field. I do,

however, regret that all the presentations were in English, since I couldn't follow large parts of some of them.'

- Bas van Dael

'The Kerkrade-West workshop gave a new perspective on the project area. Every day we gained new insights about the problem areas. It was interesting to include the opinions the various experts, and others involved in the concept, had about the problems.'

- Bram Orbons

