ekip

Prototyping Innovation Policies with(in) cities

Innovation Area:
Gaming & Inclusivity

Rotterdam, Netherlands

How does "prototyping..." work?

This City Case Description is the outcome of two policy prototyping exercises within a city ecosystem. Once the ekip-research team has explored a policy area and its connection to cultural and creative industries (CCIs) and innovation, we ask: what would this mean in a local city context?

Together with local stakeholders, we test how a draft policy recommendation might stimulate innovation. Using Portfolio Sensemaking, stakeholders simulate an innovation portfolio, analyze the strengths and gaps of the local support system, and identify what resources are needed to realize the portfolio.

Rotterdam Context & Area of Focus

Rotterdam is considered a forward-thinking city. It is also a superdiverse city: because of the port and its connection with the rest of the globe, Rotterdam has attracted people from all over the world for decades. Nowadays, over 170 different nationalities call the city their home.

Recently, the term 'superdiversity' was used by anthropologist Steven Vertovec as a way of looking at the mix of identities in our cities in a less reductive, less statistical way. Superdiverse cities like Rotterdam bring with them a next stage in the integration process, where ethnicity is no longer the most important, let alone the sole, factor with which people define themselves. Instead of the old dividing lines of ethnicity or language, superdiversity seems to create new connections. Communities also start being based on other factors, such as education level, religion, profession, sexual orientation, or neighborhood, in which many ethnic backgrounds and languages are mixed. (source: Independent School for the City, Rotterdam, 2022)

GAMING & INCLUSIVITY

Together with experts, we explored the opportunities and challenges in Rotterdam. We organized two policy prototyping exercises: one specifically on accessibility, and one on the opportunity of improved community dynamics and social interactions—enhancing both virtual and real-world environments, and promoting social cohesion. We also explored what kind of policy is needed to support this.

The City of Rotterdam is a category sponsor for The Best Applied Game in the national Dutch Game Awards

Portfolio sensemaking

Portfolio 1

HOW CAN WE MAKE GAMING ACCESSIBLE FOR EVERYONE?

Main idea/ Scope:

What if Rotterdam had a 'temple of gaming'—like a music hall or a sports stadium, but specific for gaming?
This portfolio focuses on the social dimension of gaming: persistent underrepresentation in content and leadership creates barriers for marginalized groups and the industry. This development is relevant for citizens, players, and communities in Rotterdam. Currently, it is driven mainly by coincidence, through economic policy (network) and social programs (focusing on youth culture, for example).
In this workshop, the experts explored the issue of developing an accessible infrastructure for gaming and what kind of policy is needed to support this. For example, the infrastructure for learning how to play an instrument (trumpet, violin, etc.) is well developed and accessible. Could a similar infrastructure be developed for gaming?

The experts proposed a moonshot: what if Rotterdam had a 'temple of gaming'—accessible, visible in the public space, and normalized rather than a niche people can avoid? This could create opportunities to bridge generations. Older people could play games, have fun, and socialize with friends doing the same games. Similarly, younger generations would play their games, enjoy them, and share experiences with friends. The experience of playing or gaming is not fundamentally different across generations.

What if Rotterdam has a
- *'temple of gaming' (like a music*
- *hall or a sports stadium, but*
- *specific for gaming)*

Analysis
THE LOCAL INNOVATION SUPPORT SYSTEM

This sector is currently driven by coincidence, mainly through economic policy (network) and social programs (focusing on youth culture, for example). For instance, Levels Foundation is a foundation that organizes tournaments and meeting spaces, mainly project-based and financed through social and public programs (youth culture, poverty programs). It is also connected to the economic ecosystem because it represents the target group of players and developers.

Also noteworthy are the place-based communities of players, tournaments, and communities. Even in the digital world, they represent their neighborhoods, for example. Resources are limited, mainly consisting of time and effort by individuals to secure funding or sponsorships. Participants also noted that young game professionals are leaving Rotterdam to work in other cities.

The portfolio case is the development of a 'temple of gaming': a moonshot that is community-driven and can be achieved with the right ambitions, values, and resources. This also implies a role switch in the ecosystem.

Some positions in the ecosystem are held by organizations with a long-term perspective, but they approach gaming as a side activity (for example, libraries, youth organizations, etc.).

Organizations that focus on gaming, such as cultural foundations and communities, are project-driven and sometimes receive budgets from different policy areas. The idea is to shift towards fully focusing on gaming, with other subareas contributing (such as economy, culture, education, etc.). One current issue is the wide variety of budgets but no specific program or funding dedicated to gaming. This forces the sector to focus on securing a broad range of budgets rather than pursuing specific, community-driven, and community-valued ambitions.

For different target groups, this temple of gaming can make a difference: it would be accessible for people who want to play or watch, and it would also gain wider acceptance in society. The game sector itself, together with societal partners, can drive its development.

The current innovation support system does not strengthen the game sector specifically, but rather its side effects. The future innovation support system needs to focus on the qualities, opportunities, and challenges within the game sector itself.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The current innovation support system is not strengthening the game sector specifically, but more the side effects. The future innovation support system have to be focused on the qualities, opportunities and challenges in the game sector itself.

1. Money & manpower

Develop a program focusing on the game sector, its values, and role models. One of the first steps is fostering a constructive discourse and positive storytelling.

2. Infrastructure & place

Consider the city as a playground for gaming. Making the infrastructure visible and giving it tangible places in the city will help with understanding, developing awareness, and building connections.

3. Frameworks

Frameworks should be shaped together with communities and focus on achieving a community-supported moonshot.

Who was there?

A SPECIAL GROUP OF EXPERTS CO-CREATED THIS CASE

LEVELS FOUNDATION

Levels is an educational platform based in Rotterdam. Our mission is to discover, develop, produce, and programme talent. We believe in the power of voices that are often overlooked and aim to provide them with a platform, both online and offline. This does not only mean physical performances, but also making use of various digital and social media channels.

We believe that practicing music and developing your talents has a positive impact on your life. At Levels, we strive to build a community where talents can grow, learn, and collaborate. We see music, in its broadest sense, as a powerful tool to connect people. Through this power, our goal is to create a positive impact on society and contribute to an inclusive and diverse music scene.

Levels aims to offer everyone the opportunity to share their passion and put themselves on the map. We are accessible to all, regardless of background, experience, or age.

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EXPERTS

Rashwan Jogi
Najel Monteiro
Aram Tesfatsion
Teshawn Thompson
Basem Alshihabi
Chakil (Shaqueel) Tahtahi
Randy Semwell
Kevin Rodrigues
Adam Lopes Filipe
Garry de Brito
Shawish Jogi
Ruwhel Emers
Martijn Heemskerk
Kenny Gomes

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The participants are invited by City of Rotterdam and the Levels Foundation. Most of them are part of the community of this foundation. The majority is relatively young: between the age of 22 to 35, and some more seniors. The participants are mostly game-players, but also involved in organising game-events and cultural events. And multitalented: such as spoken word artist, musician, teacher, developer and entrepreneur.

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Intermezzo
SCREENCULTURE

The City of Rotterdam started the exploration into screenculture with a deepdive into the game industry and the B2B opportunities. Which has lead to the policy which can be summarized in it's catching slogan: Rotterdam Serious About Gaming. Hereby signalling that creative digital entrepreneurship should be treated with serious respect, as we do with other sectors in the economy.

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The City of Rotterdam literally gave me a blank canvas to design an art piece in which I combined my passions for gaming, Japanese culture and tattoo art. "

Rotterdam Tattoo artist Neomi van Aerde

"

We can not express how much it appreciates to young talent being given the chance to perform on a large event. At Stichting Levels we support youngsters in pursuing their creative career. But in the end, we need to get them out in the open. As this will sent them of on a career of their own. "

Ruwhel Emers on Rotterdam anime inspired rap duo Primsmoke performing at TwitchCon

Portfolio 2

WE SEE THE OPPORTUNITY OF IMPROVED COMMUNITY DYNAMICS AND SOCIAL INTERACTIONS, ENHANCING BOTH VIRTUAL AND REAL-WORLD ENVIRONMENTS, AND PROMOTING SOCIAL COHESION

Main idea/ Scope:

This portfolio focuses on two conflicting developments and two conflicting ecosystems: a money-driven approach and a more publicly oriented approach. They differ in nature and character. The money-driven digital world, where money can be earned, and the more public-driven digital world where you can be, meet and explore.

The innovation nature / focus of the money-driven companies is mission-oriented innovation or development. The innovation focus of the value-driven makers, developers and users is more enhancement-oriented.

The resources are almost entirely the opposite. In the money-driven context, the resources are almost unlimited and yet inaccessible. In the value-driven context, the resources are limited, but accessible/available. Interestingly: these public values are priceless.

In this portfolio we use the speculative design of a public digital world. Currently there are not so many frameworks or policies. Besides a strategy of the money-driven ecosystems that says that it is not possible to change the digital world, and all efforts are useless. This group of experts thinks that it is and will be possible to change.

What if the digital world became a digital public world? Perhaps a bit like The Digital City in the nineties in Amsterdam

ERASMUS UNIVERSITY ROTTERDAM

In the article 'Everything is Designed' architect and urban designer Harmen van de Wal and digital fashion designer Suza Vos reveal how physical and digital spaces merge, and how design can foster inclusive, meaningful environments.

Analysis
THE INNOVATION SUPPORT SYSTEM

The potential of a public digital world will be enormous. It will be a world where we will live, work, exchange, enjoy themselves. The challenge is enormous: it is like inventing a new world, but also a culture in which to behave, communicate and maintain. This public world can be developed from a public perspective, like other public worlds or structures like education, culture, science, democracy, et cetera. It will be strong and it will be vulnerable. If we do nothing, this digital world will become more and more a non-public world. For the short term, we must focus on awareness, support and taking action. For the long term we must focus on implementing action, development and continuous maintenance.

Our portfolio case is the development of a public digital world. Therefore, we have examples from the past (like The Digital City in the nineties in Amsterdam), we also have current examples, such as alternative programs, which offer a contrast to the money-driven, privacy-unfriendly, data-harvesting programs.

The experts proposed the concept of 'digital citizenship'. This means that there is no digital world that is controlled, but a public digital world, with public responsibilities, actions and culture. One of the most important elements is educating this digital citizenship. There are already examples: small digital neighbourhoods where the users can explore and interact. And that is possibly also one of the strategies: to develop small neighbourhoods with strong communities, also to test these public values.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A lot of things are needed. Also, a lot of these things are unknown and are open. But if our strategy is to create a public digital world through digital citizenship we need:

1. Money & manpower

Develop programmes for this digital citizenship and money and manpower to develop this public digital world

2. Infrastructure & place

The infrastructure of public education in the Netherlands is well-organised. But it needs a new dimension: the digital world. And that has to be developed bit by bit. And with a strong idea as well.

3. Frameworks

Frameworks can help keep this public digital world as a public area. But frameworks can't arrange everything, so also a resilient culture and community life is needed.

Who was there?

A BROAD MIX OF STAKEHOLDERS CO-CREATED THIS CASE

ARTISTS, DEVELOPERS, MAKERS

Floris Smit, developer and producer (UpscaleXR)
Michaela Larosse, strategic communication
Maja Blom, fashion and digital designer
Harmen van der Wal, architect (Krill Studio)
Stefka de Ruijter, designer (Stefka Studio)
Fabz Pi, artist
Sy Santos, immersive marketing (Broken Egg)

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ACADEMIA

Lisa Ezrati, researcher
Kamran Khan, master student (Digital Fashion)
Kim Cornelius, director education (Zadkine, Rotterdam)
Paul Herz, cultural economist

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LOCAL AUTHORITIES

City of Rotterdam, Culture: Martijn van der Mark

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SPECIAL THANKS TO

Suza Vos, researcher, designer, teacher, developer

FOR INVITING THESE EXPERTS

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CONCLUSIONS
Portfolio 1

By running this portfolio case, it shows the important power and necessity of:

- Bridging generations and communities to show the value of gaming in society;
- Making game-activities visible in the city itself: organizing tournaments in public space. Don't game in a bubble, but just open it up;
- For this and future generations the game sector can be a gate to culture. It introduces people to other culture disciplines (such as literature, film, art, music);
- Think two generations ahead. If society considers the value of gaming instead of framing it as a strange, stupid thing that young people do. This reaction is comparable to other reactions to the culture of a young generation (like the first reaction to music of the Beatles, or grunge music; while it is now broadly accepted);
- Consider the value of gaming and support the game sector generously, because it will leverage and has a huge spin-off!

CONCLUSIONS
Portfolio 2

By running this portfolio case, it shows the important power and necessity of:

By running this portfolio case, it shows the important power and necessity of:

- An open, public, digital world.
  Therefore, we need to:
  - o Embrace that we can use this digital world is a new dimension added to our real world;
  - o Embrace that we can use existing infrastructure, such as education and culture, to develop and maintain this digital world;
  - o Embrace that this public digital world is similarly/equally vulnerable and strong at the same time.

We have to learn how to live and how to cope with challenges. Education from a young age is key, as are public value systems that guide us. The future of our digital world depends on it. Perhaps a European system is not just needed; it is **essential** to run this public digital world, ensuring it remains **inclusive**, **resilient**, and **sustainable** for generations to come.

What is happening now?

INDIGO

Rotterdam is the proud host city of INDIGO, the Benelux Game Development event. With tracks on business, investor meet-ups and the best industry networking even in this region a must attend event according to the industry.

ROTTERDAM GAMING CONNECT

Celebrating the Dutch female Counterstrike team in winning the worldchampionship in Romania during Rotterdam Gaming Connect. The network event for game, esports and streamer industry professionals and educators.

TWITCHCON

We made TwitchCon one of the worlds most accessible events for the public. It was such a proud moment to see all visitors enjoying themselves without having to worry about all the hurdles that we see to much every day.

Accessible events expert Marianne Dijkshoorn

Our methods

The Prototyping Workshop Methodology and the Innovation Portfolio Policy Canvas guide local stakeholders to analyze their local ecosystem, make an inventory of actors and resources, identify and create a potential innovation portfolio and analyze their local innovation support system.

THE OPSI MODEL

The OPSI-model (Open Public Sector Innovation OECD) is adapted to analyze the innovation character of the policy area. Participants explore whether the policy involves new legislative measures or is more exploratory in nature, allowing for a deeper understanding of how the policy might influence the local ecosystem

THE LIEPT MODEL

The Lund Innovation Ecosystem Portfolio Tracking (LIEPT) model is a tool that provides a framework for tracking changes in innovation portfolios in ecosystems where impact and growth happen not in one organisation but in many. This relies on collaborative efforts by many stakeholders.

What is ekip

The ekip partnership funded by the European Commission consists of 5 universities, 4 consultancies, 4 creative and cultural organisations and 4 cities. Together we develop innovation policies for the cultural and creative industries in Europe. We do that in various ways: through research, consultations and interaction with people in the sector at policy labs and focus groups and assessments in city ecosystems.

Want to know more? Want to do it in your city?

Would you like to explore the topic of Gaming and Inclusivity? Visit Gaming and Inclusivity on the ekip website, where you'll find relevant policy posters, presentations, videos, and articles.

You can even host your own session in your city! It's an empowering and insightful way to bring together local stakeholders across sectors and disciplines for a focused discussion on a topic of shared importance. The ekip method and approach are open for anyone to use including a Facilitator's Guide and templates available in the ekip Knowledge Bank under Tools and Methods.

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Disclaimer:
Each City Case Description reflects the views of workshop participants. It is a perspective from one city context, intended to inspire and ignite action

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