

BUILD YOUR OWN AREA TRANSFORMATION GAME

One of the tools we created for stimulating the conversation between different people and collecting data for the area, is our Transformation Game: a simple board game where stakeholders can transform their area in ten minutes. They need to create a good mix of functions and amenities and attractive outdoor space and they need to work together in order to achieve that.



The game design is quite rudimentary, and you can easily make one yourself for your own area. We add a list below that you can use for that, but you can also create something yourself of course. The basis is the area map with simple foam blocks as the current buildings, every function its own colour. You can choose to give the vacant buildings a lighter shade or make them white for recognisability. In our Amstel III case there were only offices, so we chose to start with only grey blocks. By emphasising the current greyness, we also wanted to stimulate the thinking about the possible futures, about literally adding colour to the area. Now we made a lot of big and small blocks in different colours for housing, hotels, shops, cafes and restaurants, social program. We had green and blue paper and little trees and a small box with all kinds of fun decoration for special objects and art works in the area.

In turns everybody had to do something in the area. It could be organising an event, making a green roof, adding a café or transforming a complete building to housing. They could also build on earlier initiatives. We asked everybody to reason out loud. For every function we made specifications visualised like meters, roughly comparing things like costs and rent income per m2, social and liveability benefits, branding power, etcetera. And we made a set of gold and black cards that we could use as show hosts to intervene and make comments; we could also “punish” or reward people for specific choices, giving them extra credits or skipping a turn. Examples of rewards were that when you invested extra in a very special building with extra events and art, you win an award and attract new high-profile tenants. A punishment could occur when you were only thinking about your own commercial interests and free-riding on other people’s investments. You have to skip a turn. Or the other way around, when you were only thinking about the social aspects and are about to go bankrupt and you have to accept Coca Cola as a sponsor to save your bio organic healthy community garden and shop.

Of course, these rewards and punishments were over the top and also a bit tongue in cheek. We really used the light-hearted show setting and a lot of humour to allow for some critical nudges without attacking personally. Because it was not real, people did not feel offended. The game is really meant to open the conversation and lay the different considerations and collaborations on the table. There is no objective end to the game, we just explained in the beginning that the goal is to get to 1000 points as a team, which equals a vibrant, liveable and socially, ecologically and financially healthy area. As show hosts, we sensed when the area was 'finished' or how the conversation was flowing and then we chose the momentum to announce the 1000 points, usually after ten or fifteen minutes. In our case the reward was a round of champagne, but it can be another treat as well of course. In our experience the game helps to get the conversation started, it gives some food for thought while lowering the threshold between different stakeholders thanks to the laughter generated during the game. In a way the game is a prelude to the actual stakeholder conversations that take place afterwards in a more informal setting. And it gave us important insights in how people perceived the area, what were their first steps to upgrade the area and what was their reasoning: were there things that stimulated them extra or that were holding them back?

It is funny that initially we created the game as a fun activity for museum night at the Amsterdam Architecture Centre. It was made to play with the general public to make them aware of what urban transformation is, what makes it complex and exciting and how this is taking place in Amstel3, an area most people were taking for granted as boring, nothing happening there. By having a conversation and documenting their choices and argumentation, we got a clearer idea of what the general public thinks is important and how they see the future of Amstel3. We did a few rounds that evening, including one round with a group of real estate owners from Amstel3 who were also attending the museum night.

The game actually worked really well to get the conversation flowing and to address a lot of important topics, so we decided to use it more often. We played the game several times in Amstel3 with different stakeholders, often as a warming up for more serious discussions. Also, we played the game at municipality events where it helped to make civil servants more aware of what makes urban transformation so fundamentally different from top-down development and to give them a taste of the type of discussions you may have with the different owners and other local stakeholders.

In a way the game had a similar effect as our glamour narrative. It made the real world a bit lighter through metaphors and humour, but nevertheless addressed the important topics. People dared to be more honest and transparent than in 'real life' and we as 'show masters' could intervene pretty critically sometimes. Most of all, it was a fun activity that gave a lot of food for conversation afterwards and therefore I can say it is a powerful community building tool.

What you need:

- a large (A0) printed map of the area, this can be a simple line drawing
- the existing buildings as white or grey (foam) blocks (you can give vacant buildings a lighter shade)
- a few boxes with big and small (foam) blocks in other colours, for example red for housing, purple for hotels, etc
- green, grey and blue paper for public space
- you can also make small parks with trees, etcetera to make it even juicier (a bit like a model train kit)
- also add a box with special objects and artworks, this can also be candy that people can also eat while playing the game
- make small cards to explain the different values for every function: financial, social, economic, ecologic, etc (see the next page for an example of how we did this)
- make black and gold cards that you can use as show master moderator to intervene and guide the discussion
- make sure you have a reward for the group for when they reach 1000 points, ideally something for them to socialise around, like cake or champagne or something else

Examples of interventions for your black and gold cards:

You've only been thinking about money! Your biggest office is coming up empty.

Your ambitions are too high for your wallet, and you become dependent on a commercial party (e.g., Coca-Cola as a sponsor Bioshop)

Where do these people buy their bread? Drive the emergency SRV car around for punishment.

You can't afford the cost of green space maintenance. Take the hoe and do it yourself (one turn)Your subsidy stops and your theater (movie house, cultural institution) is taken over by Joop van den Ende. Hum for one round 'My heart will go on'.

Your store does not attract enough customers. Have you thought about your target group? You have to work at one of Amstel III's call centers to earn some extra money.

You are behaving like a cowardly property owner. Think about what fantastic guerrilla action you will come up with in the next turn.

The first 'Urban (network) Picnic' in Amstel III is a fact. Champagne!

Your guerrilla action generates a lot of media attention and sponsors are lining up. Champagne!

The image of the area has improved enormously. Apple's Headquarters will be located in Amstel III! Champagne!

The houses in Amstel III win the Amsterdam New Build Award 2014. Champagne!

Amstel III is proclaimed the best shopping area in the Netherlands. Champagne!

"Amstel III the new Westergas?" reads the Parool. Champagne!

You've been drinking too much! Skip a turn

There is more demand for hotel rooms in Amstel III than in Amsterdam center. A new tourist office opens at Bullewijk station.

The apartments in Amstel III have brought so much liveliness and security, that your office tenant extends his contract for 10 years! Champagne!

Holland Festival begs you if their high brow fesitval can take place in new cultural hotspot Amstel III. Champagne!

Due to the fantastic bars and restaurants in the area, the value of the homes increases by 10%. Champagne!

Example of the value meters per function (only rough indications)

HOTELS

Worden vaak als oplossing gezien voor kantoren-leegstand vanwege de hoge financiële opbrengst. Sommigen vrezen zelfs voor een hotelbubbel. Hotels kunnen een impuls geven aan een wijk, maar alleen als zij openbare voorzieningen (zoals bv een restaurant) huisvesten.

financieel: hoge boekwaarde



sociaal: alleen icm openbare voorzieningen



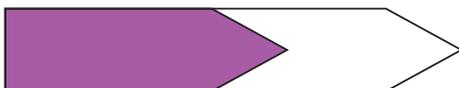
cultureel: alleen icm openbare voorzieningen



ecologisch



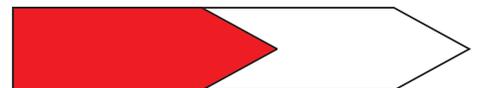
levendigheid: alleen icm openbare voorzieningen



WONINGEN

Varieert van sociale woningbouw tot luxe appartementen en van woon-werkunit tot studentenhuising. Antwoord op woningnood in Amsterdam. Verlevendigt de buurt en zorgt dankzij continue aanwezigheid van mensen voor sociale veiligheid.

financieel: medium boekwaarde



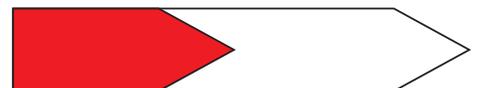
sociaal: woningnood, veiligheid



cultureel: geen speciale meerwaarde



ecologisch: hoge bezettingsgraad=energie-efficient



levendigheid: dag en avond mensen op straat

