
REPORT ON THE MOBILITY EXPERIMENT PROEFTUIN WEESPERZIJDEBUURT

Exploring Barriers and Drivers for Sustainable Mobility Transitions



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INTRODUCTION

This document reports about a citizen-led city street experiment called the ‘proeftuin Weesperzijdebuurt’ that was hosted in the early summer of 2019 in Amsterdam-East. This investigation into the process of the proeftuin was done in the context of CLEAR (City LiveAbility by Redesign) in which the city of Amsterdam collaborates with Munich and Milan. CLEAR is a key Innovation Project activity of the EIT Urban Mobility with the objective of enhancing the value of urban spaces for the quality of life by re-shaping urban mobility. The current report contains a process reconstruction and analysis of a particular city street experiment concerned with transforming a neighbourhood by experimenting with urban mobility. The underlying purpose is twofold. Firstly, from the process reconstruction I aim to draw lessons about this particular experiment in Amsterdam (what went right and what went wrong), and secondly, I aim to draw more general conclusions about the feasibility of upscaling, extending and replicating this experimental arrangement elsewhere as a means of facilitating systemic (car-free) transformation in urban mobility.

METHODOLOGY

This process reconstruction is based on a document analysis and various stakeholder interviews. The relevant documents and actors were identified using a snowball sampling method: I started out with two useful contacts who could then redirect me to other people and sources of information. Efforts were made to get data from as many sources as possible, so information could be contrasted and cross-checked. Among the interviewees are: the three main initiators from the Weesperzijde proeftuin; a neighbour who organized a protest movement against the initiative, two officials of different ranks in city government and the project leader of a 3-year Smart Mobility pilot involving eHUBS. Analysed documents include: news-articles; websites; project descriptions; email histories; a community newspaper and various sorts of written correspondence. Data gathering was stopped when a satisfying degree of consistency in the reconstruction was reached and all the key actors were interviewed. All interviews and online/offline materials were then reviewed again and coded to discover the barriers and drivers for upscaling.

The names in the reconstruction are left out to guarantee anonymity for all interviewees. Before finalising the reconstruction, the project leader from Smart Mobility was consulted to validate its accuracy. Although a satisfying degree of consistency on important facts was reached, it is important to keep in mind that there exist multiple versions of this story, which I have attempted to synthesize here. Many claims were made that I was not able to verify. The account of events described here remains factual as much as possible; claims and opinions are denominated as such.

The interviews were all performed by the author between June 28th and July 31st, 2019. In all cases, the objectives of this research were clearly stated to the interviewees and explicit permission for recorded interviews was granted. Interviews typically had the following structure:

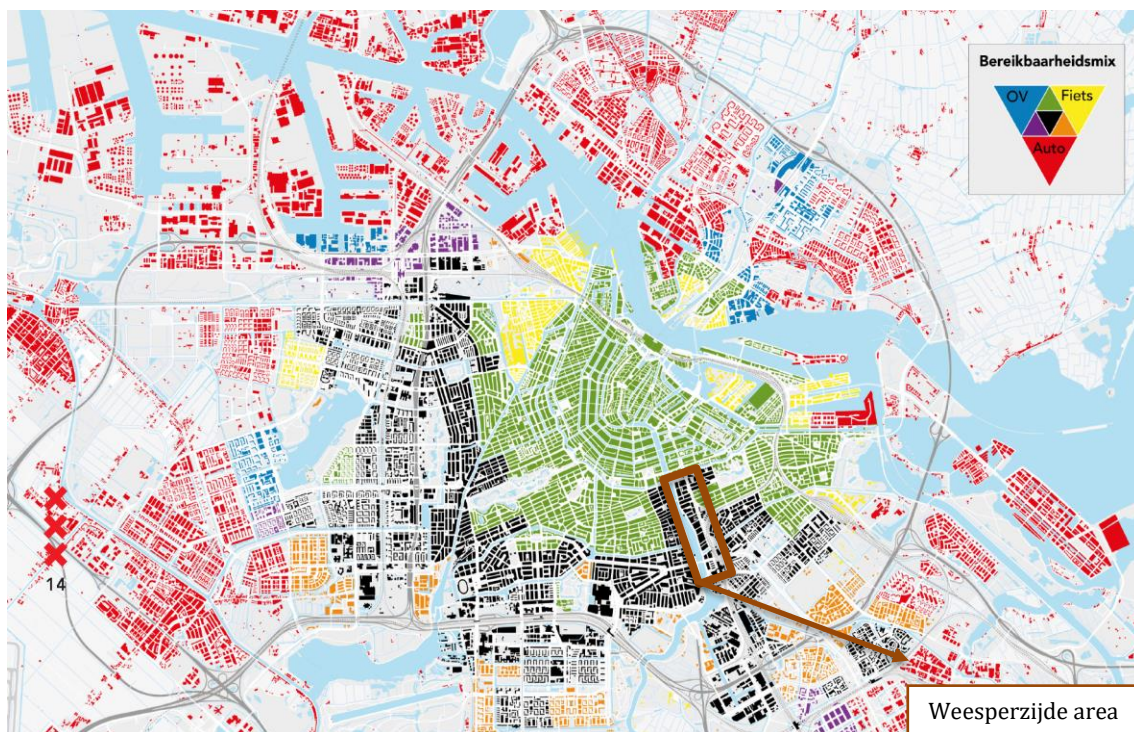
1. A general question, e.g. how did the project come about? What is your side of the story? (This allows the interviewee to sketch his/her version of the process and elaborate on the things that are most important according to him/her).
2. Follow-up questions to probe deeper into interesting statements made by the interviewee.

3. Which lessons have you learnt from this process? What went right and what went wrong?
4. What are the barriers and what are the opportunities for upscaling or replicating this arrangement elsewhere?
5. What other people should I talk to?

N.B. In some cases, I asked additional questions to address inconsistencies and/or missing pieces of information. Interviewees were mostly free to talk undirected, but some interventions were made to prevent repetition or digression from the topic.

CONTEXT

The Weesperzijde is a historic neighbourhood in the East of Amsterdam, situated on the eastern bank of the river Amstel. It is adjacent to the famous historic canal belt of Amsterdam in the North and stretches down to the Amstel train station in the South. A major two-way traffic artery, the Wibautstraat, runs parallel to it and multiple metro lines run directly underneath it. Combined with the renowned Dutch cycling infrastructure, this means the Weesperzijde is particularly well-accessible, be it by car, by bike or by public transport (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2015)¹. The accessibility map below visualizes this.



Map 1. Accessibility by mode of transport in Amsterdam Colors indicate which mode of transport characterizes areas in the city. Blue is public transport; yellow is bicycle; red is automobile; black denominates that an area is well accessible by all three modes of transport. Source: Gemeente Amsterdam, 2015.

¹ Gemeente Amsterdam (2015). Strategische Verkenningen Verkeer en Openbare Ruimte.

As interviewees attest, the Weesperzijde hosts a relatively wealthy and well-educated community that is remarkably engaged with the welfare and development of their neighbourhood. For example: their local neighbourhood association² explicitly aims to work towards solutions for increasing the liveability, sustainability and circularity of their neighbourhood.

PROCESS RECONSTRUCTION

I. Lead-up

The Weesperzijde proeftuin is rooted in the negotiations surrounding the neighbourhood redesign plans³, which have been in the making for over 15 years. This redesign is directed at and limited to the public space on the Weesperzijde street (between the houses and the waterfront). Although the contours of the redesign were drawn up by the municipality in 2015, containing plans to give greater priority to cyclists, the municipal department of Amsterdam-East initiated a collaborative process in 2016 in which a panel of local residents could have their say on certain issues in the redevelopment plans. Although the redesign plans are now confirmed to be implemented starting in the summer of 2020, some participants of the focus group were dissatisfied with the outcomes and with the way the discourse was dominated by car-owners and/or car-related interests. These participants were also disappointed in the municipality (department of Amsterdam-East) because they felt the newly-elected coalition at the overall city level (headed by a left-wing green party) was not practising what they preached in terms of sustainable, car-free ideals. Officials from Amsterdam-East argued that the municipality cannot proceed to remove parking spaces in this neighbourhood as long as demand for parking is too high.

Triggered by these developments, two engaged citizens started an initiative in the fall of 2018 to investigate the local mobility needs and to explore what alternative designs of their neighbourhood could be. Their citizen initiative was underpinned by practical concerns (e.g. how can we solve the shortage of bike parking racks?) as well as shared values on car-free mobility, sustainability and adequate provision of public space. In order to systematically reduce demand for parking on the long term, a civil servant from the department of Amsterdam-East introduced residents to the European Interreg program eHUBS, coordinated by the team Smart Mobility of the municipality of Amsterdam⁴, which also operates within the institutional framework of the Amsterdam municipality to explore shared mobility options. By linking up with Smart Mobility and their three-year pilot aimed at transforming mobility, the citizen initiative unlocked access to resources like eHUBS (hubs with shared electric mobility options such as (cargo)bikes and scooters) and green street furniture. As a sign of support, the alderperson from the municipality of Amsterdam responsible for mobility (Sharon Dijksma) appointed the Weesperzijde as a 'testing ground' (Dutch: proeftuin) for sustainable mobility experiments.

² <https://verenigingweesperzijdebuurt.nl>

³ <https://www.amsterdam.nl/projecten/weesperzijde/>

⁴ <http://www.nweurope.eu/projects/project-search/ehubs-smart-shared-green-mobility-hubs/>

II. *Preparatory phase*

In the months that followed, the initiators charted the mobility needs in their neighbourhood by means of a survey, assisted by the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences. In addition, they hosted ‘mobility-café’s: events where neighbours were invited to discuss mobility-related topics with each other and think about what they want their neighbourhood to look like. The issues discussed there frequently also had a social equity dimension, e.g. ‘How can car-less people make their voices heard?’, or ‘Should the design of our neighbourhood favour residents or visitors?’. Communication about the results of the survey, the discussions and the plan making took place via digital newsletters that people could sign up for.

Gradually, the citizen initiative took on form as a partly collaborative and partly subversive movement. Despite their collaboration with team Smart Mobility, the initiative remained a largely independent endeavour, as shows from the fact that initiators’ car-free ambitions were more radical and went beyond the possibilities offered by team Smart Mobility. Furthermore, though the citizen initiative has its roots in the neighbourhood redesign and was triggered by a shared dissatisfaction with the proposed plans, these are strictly separated processes. According to municipal officials, at no point did they suggest that the redesign plans could be renegotiated on the basis of the outcomes from the neighbourhood experiment. There may have been initiators or other citizens who believed otherwise, but it is not clear how exactly this misconception came to be. An answer to that question may lie in the fact that at this point, three partly overlapping developments are taking place in the Weesperzijde neighbourhood, that need to be clearly distinguished. The first is the neighbourhood redesign. This process is coordinated by the department of Amsterdam-East, in which focus groups with local residents are involved, but which is no longer under negotiation. Secondly, as proposed by the department of Amsterdam-East, a 3-year mobility pilot is being coordinated by team Smart Mobility, using eHUBS to explore ways to reduce car usage on the long term. And thirdly, a citizen initiative of a more informal and activist nature is unfolding. This last process has a strong grassroots character and displays radical ambitions to make the neighbourhood temporarily car-free as a way to demonstrate how things can and perhaps should be different. The 3-year mobility pilot as well as the citizen initiative are further described in this account as they have both unfolded under the name of ‘proeftuin Weesperzijde’. Even though these processes have become intertwined, at certain points it is important to maintain this distinction as they have different sets of objectives, networks and modes of operation. For example, whereas officials from the department of Amsterdam-East were adamant that the neighbourhood redesign was in no way being renegotiated through this experiment, they did suggest that adaptations could perhaps still be made if the 3-year mobility pilot would effect a noteworthy decrease in car use.

III. *Design phase*

In January and February 2019, the initiators and team Smart Mobility started deliberating and designing plans to temporarily shut down parts of the Weesperzijde to cars, remove parking spaces, increase green space and experiment with shared mobility hubs. This experimental ‘proeftuin’ arrangement was set to start during the *We Make The City* festival (17th -23rd June) in parts of the neighbourhood that show the highest levels of support for the experiment. However, realizing the ambitions of the proeftuin, especially those that go beyond what Smart Mobility could arrange for, was a difficult and messy process, with a lot

of friction within and between the neighbourhood community and different municipal departments. For a long time, it remained unclear what possibilities there are, who's responsible for what, who needs to be involved and what bureaucratic and practical issues lie ahead.

From April 2019 on, officials from the department of Amsterdam-East start being involved in the process of planning the proeftuin, but intensive communication between different municipal layers did not start until May. In this phase, initiators increasingly begin to experience the limits of municipal flexibility and they discover the practicalities of acquiring the appropriate permits needed to realize their ambitions. It turns out that the 'living street'-concept is in fact the only suitable municipal instrument that corresponds to the citizen initiative. A living street is an arrangement that originated in Ghent, in which a city street is temporarily closed to motorized traffic and repurposed to accommodate functions of public space⁵. Even though this is not exactly what the initiators had in mind, an official request for a living street in the Gijsbrecht van Aemstelstraat was submitted on the 28th of May by the proeftuin-initiators. Their request was denied on the 4th of June because of insufficient funds, doubts about public support and because it was too short notice: a living street request officially needs 10 weeks to be assessed on feasibility and safety issues⁶. This added to the initiators' frustration as they found it hard to understand how 'the municipality' can claim to support and, at the same time, obstruct their initiative. An administrator from the department of Amsterdam-East explains that he supports the experiment's ideals, but has serious reservations about public support as he received several messages from concerned and ill-informed neighbours. He proposed to postpone the living street so it can be arranged properly and community endorsement can be safeguarded. The Weesperzijde initiators were not keen on this, as they have already invested a lot of effort and private resources into the proeftuin. They argued it is too late for the process to be stopped now. In consultation with officials from the department of Amsterdam-East, a makeshift solution was found: by means of a temporary adjustment of traffic regulation (in Dutch: tijdelijke verkeersmaatregel or TVM) initiators were able to clear 54 car parking spaces in specific parts of the neighbourhood. This newly created empty public space could then be temporarily re-appropriated for the purposes of the mobility experiment. This alternative arrangement was approved on June 6th for the period of June 15th until July 14th, in the Gijsbrecht van Aemstelstraat and a limited section of the Weesperzijde street. Although this solution shows that at least some municipal flexibility was possible, not everybody in the department of Amsterdam-East was too happy with this display of creativity in civil service. This lays bare a more common issue, as apparently, TVM's can be misused to bypass the application procedure for event permits.

⁵ <https://www.leefstraat.be/>

⁶ <https://www.amsterdam.nl/wonen-leefomgeving/leefstraat/>

IV. Executive phase

The proeftuin kick-off took place during the *We Make The City* festival (17th -23rd June). The freed parking spaces were redesigned by the community and the people from Smart Mobility with bike racks, shared electric (cargo-)bikes and parklet-style urban gardens. In addition to the eHUBS and other facilities offered by Smart Mobility, the community also arranged (and paid for) a lot of green street furniture on their own initiative. According to interviewees, some community members invested up to several thousands of euros of private money into the organization of the proeftuin. The proeftuin hosted a communal lunch in the Gijsbrecht van Aemstelstraat on the 23rd of June that attracted more than a hundred community members (see Fig. 2). A large dining table was placed in the middle of the street from



Figure 2. Communal lunch in the Gijsbrecht van Aemstelstraat / Photo by Pieter Boersma

12 AM to 3 PM, even though they did not have the formal permit to do so (as their TVM only affects parking spaces and not public thoroughfare). Although the department of Amsterdam-East did not approve of this lunch, when confronted with the event, they did condone it.

In addition to this subversive action, enforcement officers also noticed illegitimately placed street furniture (bike racks; tubs with plants), evoking further irritation within the department of Amsterdam-East: some officials got the impression that the TVM is being taken advantage of to push plans that weren't officially agreed to. Additional tensions arose when resistance to the proeftuin was organised in the neighbourhood community. Some people claimed to not have been informed properly, that they dislike the experiment's form and lack of democratic process and that they don't know where to park their cars anymore. There was also suspicion that this is a politicized game played by leftists activists and the newly elected green leftists leaning city coalition. One particularly outspoken critic even reached out to the media⁷ with these suspicions and spread a letter through the neighbourhood, encouraging people to reach out to the municipality if they also are discontent with the mobility experiment. In reaction to this, proponents of the experiment called upon their neighbours to let the municipality know if they *do* like the new neighbourhood design. As a result, several municipal officials received hundreds of e-mails and letters, either protesting against or supporting the proeftuin. What becomes clear at this point is that both proponents and opponents are circulating inaccurate/misleading information, for a large part based on the misconception that the current arrangements of the proeftuin could be turned into a long-term/permanent change or that it could somehow influence the neighbourhood redesign plans. This prompts a reaction from the department of Amsterdam-East. A letter is sent to the entire neighbourhood informing them about the experiment taking place and assuring them of the temporal character of the event. The intensity of emails subsides after this. There is also positive publicity⁸ that documents how people living in the transformed streets experience more tranquillity and increased neighbourliness.

V. Aftermath

In the weekend of 13th -14th July, the Weesperzijde is restored to its original state. Although no conclusive enquiry has been made (yet!) to gauge the community's experiences, most Interviewees have mixed feelings about the effect the proeftuin has had on the neighbourhood and their assessments of the experiment range from tentatively positive to very critical. Initiators are frustrated with the privileged position of car-owners and incensed because they feel the municipality is slow, inflexible and hardly willing to cooperate, even though the proeftuin clearly corresponds to the interests of political parties in

⁷ Mike Muller. (July 2nd, 2019). Woede op Weesperzijde na parkeerplekblokkade. *De Telegraaf*. Retrieved from <https://advance-lexis-com.proxy.uba.uva.nl:2443/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:5WG6-VFF1-JCBS-P2JS-00000-00&context=1516831>.

⁸ Sybilla Claus. (July 31st, 2019). Zonder parkeerplaatsen komt er rust en ruimte op straat. *Trouw*. Retrieved from <https://advance-lexis-com.proxy.uba.uva.nl:2443/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:5WP9-G431-JC8X-63S6-00000-00&context=1516831>.

the coalition. Some of the community members are disappointed because they feel badly informed, or worse, ignored and overruled by overzealous neighbours. And the municipality (that is: the department of Amsterdam-East) feels irritated because initiators try to rush things without regard for procedures and without successfully mobilizing support from the community. Some claim the proeftuin has effected a polarization of the community and are concerned that social cohesion has deteriorated.

Despite this, there are also positive sides to the story. Initiators claim to have had lots of support and positive feedback from the community. Allegedly, people felt more like a community as life took place on the streets and it was easier to meet your neighbours. Particularly interesting is the claim of one of the initiators that car-less neighbours, mainly women and supposedly many vulnerable citizens, felt empowered by this new arrangement, because finally, their needs were valued equally to those of the much more outspoken car-owners, who are typically male. This claim explicitly gives the mobility experiment a gender-dimension. On top of that, almost all interviewees admit that, despite shortcomings in the process, the proeftuin has effectively stirred up the discussion on sustainable mobility and reclaiming public space. According to some, this is a crucial phase because the momentum gained by this experiment towards car free development needs to be maintained and nurtured. In addition, this year's experiment charted which bureaucratic routes to take and it unearthed a lot of barriers and drivers. That's why Smart Mobility is now exploring possibilities to continue car free experimenting in the Weesperzijde neighbourhood. They will probably start up a new participatory process shortly, but this time under municipal supervision.

TIMELINE

Start of the Weesperzijde redesign planning	2004
Preliminary design plan established	2015
Further negotiations with community panel	2016 - 2018
Start of the citizen initiative / mobility pilot planning process	October 2018
Municipal alderperson appoints the status of 'proeftuin' to the Weesperzijde	December 2018
Community is surveyed about local mobility needs and desires	February 2019
Communication to and with community members about the 'proeftuin' plans	February 2019 - July 2019

Exploring possibilities to realize a neighbourhood eHUB	March 2019 - April 2019
Inter-municipal communication to realize the proeftuin ambitions	April 2019 - June 2019
Official request submitted for a 'living street' in the Gijsbrecht van Aemstelstraat	May 28 th , 2019
Request for living street denied	June 4 th , 2019
Approval of alternative arrangement by means of a 'TVM'	June 6 th , 2019
Proeftuin commences	June 15th, 2019
<i>We Make the City</i> festival / Proeftuin kick-off	June 17 th - June 23 rd , 2019
Communal lunch in the Gijsbrecht van Aemstelstraat	June 23 rd , 2019
Protest letter is circulated in the neighbourhood	June 25 th , 2019
Response letter from the east municipal department	June 27 th , 2019
Proeftuin ends	July 14th, 2019

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

When asked to reflect upon the Proeftuin experiment ('what went right/wrong?'; 'what lessons did you learn?'; 'what should be done differently if it were to be repeated?') interviewees gave divergent answers, as is to be expected considering their different roles in and perceptions of the process. In fact, there may be as many interpretations of this story as there are people involved in it. Therefore, many lessons can be drawn from the Weesperzijde experiment, depending on which version of the story you adhere to. In addition, interviewees made certain claims that were hard to verify, particularly those concerning the political nature of decision making. One interviewee claimed for instance that the proeftuin was a clear example of how the leftists-leaning coalition of city government favours desires of their electorate over others. By contrast, one of the experiment's initiators asserts that a 'gentlemen's agreement' between those same coalition partners might have prevented the realization of all too radical ideas. Assessing these claims and allegations goes beyond the scope and purpose of this report, but the very fact that they exist points to interesting issues in their own right, such as politicization, (mis)communication and

cooperation. Despite stark differences in the interpretation of the process, certain common themes were mentioned and lessons can be drawn from this. Three principal themes came forward from the stakeholder interviews: the importance of adequate communication, community endorsement and safeguarding a democratic process of decision-making. These issues are intricately linked, but they are discussed separately below.

I. Communication

Both within city government and between city government and the Weesperzijde community, there were many instances of miscommunication. In fact, it was often difficult for initiators to see the Municipality of Amsterdam as a coherent entity, as there are various departments with different jurisdictions, priorities and modes of operation. First of all, there is Smart Mobility, which formally falls within municipal responsibility and works with residents towards a long-term change in mobility behaviour, but within a limited framework. Then there is the central city government, which has expressed clear intentions to reduce the overall dominance of the car in Amsterdam, but which is not visible to residents as an urban partner. And then there is the municipal department of Amsterdam East, which is charged with the practicalities of city government in specific areas. Within the department of Amsterdam East there are officials managing specific clusters of neighbourhoods, but there are also divisions tasked with permits and regulation enforcement. This intricate web of organisational connections makes a citizen-state partnership complicated, because all relevant departments and officials need to be involved and attuned to one another. This was often not the case, leading to frustration and disappointment on both sides. Some civil servants have tried to work with the experiment's initiators more than others, as in the case of the TVM-permit. While this case of 'civil servant creativity' allowed the experiment to take place, it also resulted in disgruntled government officials and residents alike. Other officials have tried to make the citizen initiative fit within the living street framework, only to discover later on that there was not only a lack of time, but also a lack of municipal budget to realise a living street. Thus, while the municipality of Amsterdam in general is ambitious in its efforts to bring about a 'car-light' mobility transition⁹, accommodating the car-free ambitions of this citizen initiative has created considerable friction. Part of that friction can be attributed to a lack of interdepartmental municipal communication. As an official from Smart Mobility remarked, this was a pioneering experiment for city government as well since they did not know very well how to handle an initiative like this. They now know who needs to be involved, what possibilities and what challenges lie ahead if this experiment is to be repeated (elsewhere). Several of the experiment's initiators remarked that they would be willing to work more closely with 'the municipality' towards a car-free development under the condition that 'they' put in more effort to organise and behave themselves more coherently.

Communication within the community was not without friction either. Although considerable efforts were demonstrably made by the experiment's initiators to invite community members to participate as well as inform them about the decision-making process, some neighbours have claimed there was a lack of

⁹ <https://www.amsterdam.nl/bestuur-organisatie/volg-beleid/ambities/fijne-buurtten/leefbare-toegankelijke-stad/>

communication nonetheless. Some allegedly have never received the community newspaper nor any of the newsletters, and others simply feel excluded from the decision-making process. While these claims and allegations are hard to assess, multiple interviewees confirm that there was little to no discussion between proponents and opponents prior to the experiment. As a result of this, uncertainty and distrust concerning the exact purpose of the proeftuin was allowed to spread. This shows from the many negative reactions to the experiment that were prompted by misleading or inaccurate information. Especially the suggestion that the experiment could have a lasting legacy, elicited strong responses. The majority of emails with complaints abated when the department of Amsterdam East issued a clarification letter, assuring the residents that the proeftuin would last 30 days only. Nevertheless, the inaccurate information could easily spread and gave opponents the media attention needed to further compromise the viability of the experiment. The fact that the discussion about a mobility transition had such a polarization effect on the neighbourhood was also one of the reasons that the department of Amsterdam East decided against a living street in the Gijsbrecht van Aemstelstraat. This polarization might have been contained if proponents and opponents had found a more effective way to debate with each other in an early stage.

II. Community endorsement

Interviewees consistently mentioned the importance of community endorsement ('draagvlak' in Dutch). They did not agree however in their assessments of the degree to which this was attained. Some of the experiment's initiators claim that at least two thirds of the Weesperzijde community supported them and that there are a few very vocal opponents that are spoiling things with inaccurate information. However, one of the main critics of the experiment claims that there is considerable opposition and that initiators are suffering from confirmation bias. One official from the department of Amsterdam East estimates about 50% of the emails they have received concerning the Proeftuin is overtly negative. To be fair, the true level of support will probably be different as citizens without strong opinions about the matter are less likely to reach out. Furthermore, people from outside the Weesperzijde neighbourhood also wrote emails in response to the media attention generated by the experiment.

Two factors have complicated community endorsement in the case of the Weesperzijde proeftuin. Firstly, not only the residents in transformed parts of the neighbourhood, but also neighbouring streets are dealing with the consequences. Even though there should not have been a shortage of parking spaces (as documents show that even in the experimental setting, parking demand was not 100% of all available space), there have been people claiming to experience more difficulty in finding a parking space. This raises an important issue: what counts as the neighbourhood? And who is the community? Is it the entire Weesperzijde neighbourhood, or just the transformed streets, or perhaps something in between? Engaging with these issues is crucial because it involves defining the parameters of the experiment and anticipating how consequences of a local mobility transformation may reverberate through a larger area.

Secondly, since this mobility experiment was initiated and coordinated by local residents trying to prove a point, it was prone to misrepresentations from the very start. When a group is enthusiastic about their initiative and invests a lot of effort into organising it, scepticism can perhaps only be accommodated to a certain degree. This holds especially true in this case, as initiators were trying to demonstrate to the municipality that their neighbourhood could look different. Even though initiators have clearly made

efforts to reach out to and involve the community, it was never a fully democratic process. Inevitably, some people care more about it than others and so not everyone participates equally. On top of that, some people may not feel comfortable speaking out against the proposed plans, fearing the social backlash.

III. Democratic process

The issues above both points toward a fundamental question concerning the nature of the proeftuin experiment: who owns the experiment and what purpose(s) does it serve? While there were both local state, market and community actors involved in the organisation, the locus of control was firmly in the hands of the experiment's initiators. What made matters suspicious is the fact that some of the proeftuin initiators were also involved in the neighbourhood panel consulted by the municipality in the Weesperzijde redesign planning process. While the planning process was formally finalised, some have feared that the proeftuin was a covert way of continuing those negotiations, bypassing a democratic process. This suspicion effected in resistance within the community and made for a reluctant cooperation with the department of Amsterdam East.

To unpack this cooperation further, as mentioned in the reconstruction, a distinction should perhaps be made between the e-HUBS experiment coordinated by Smart Mobility and the more radical citizen initiative that is being coordinated by local residents themselves. Most of the discord with the experiment seems to be directed at the latter of the two processes. This is to be expected since the citizen's initiative is of a more radical and activist nature. Quite obviously, there is a large gap between an activist mobility movement pioneering what a car-free city could look like and a participatory process in which car-use is being incrementally reduced by an urban partnership of state, community and market-actors. As Paul Chatterton also notes, both approaches to car-free development can create the opportunity for urban change, but they are accompanied by different sets of challenges and opportunities¹⁰.

Although the e-HUB was realised and will continue to be available for residents to experiment with, the uniqueness and radicalness of the proeftuin resides within the persistence and the organisational capacity of the Weesperzijde community. According to the initiators, for real car-free change, 'You cannot wait for city government to take actions'. Sometimes changes need to be purposefully forced "with a crowbar" in order to get things moving. While there is truth to this, their guerrilla-strategy can also be seen as risky because it may have damaged future community support for similar experiments and jeopardized the municipality's willingness to cooperate. Ambition and persistence are crucial, but it is paramount that everyone affected by the experiment is involved in the decision-making process. Admittedly, this may slow down the pace of development and conceivable also the radicalness of ideas, but a higher degree of support also increases the chance of turning experiments into permanent change.

¹⁰ Chatterton, P. (2018). *Unlocking sustainable cities: A manifesto for real change*. Pluto Press.

BARRIERS AND DRIVERS

From the above, I have distilled five barriers/drivers for upscaling and replication.

1. It is paramount that the objectives of a mobility experiment are clear for everyone involved in order to prevent suspicion and streamline cooperation. If the redesign of a neighbourhood is at stake, this needs to be clearly spelled out from the outset.
2. If an experiment aims to bring about a neighbourhood transformation, special attention needs to be paid to democratic participation. When such an initiative becomes politicized, that is- when the process is being determined by the political motives of a select few- it mobilises both proponents and opponents, risking polarisation and endangering social cohesion.
3. Setting up a mobility experiment requires considerable capacities, in terms of organisation, persistence and financial resources. Having these capacities can make the difference between success and failure.
4. Having good relations with city government and understanding their bureaucratic restrictions and possibilities is paramount for a successful cooperation.
5. City governments aiming to facilitate car-free developments, would do well to harvest and nurture the momentum that is being built up by these kinds of street experiments, rather than frustrate these efforts. A flexible and pro-active stance is necessary to ensure a productive cooperation.

In what ways the public opinion and mobility behaviour in the Weesperzijde was affected by this experiment, remains to be investigated further, but what's certain is that it has kick-started a discussion on car-free development, both within the community and within city government. This momentum needs to be harvested. As a suggestion, a new participatory process, headed by a third, neutral party, could be more successful. As shows from the living street experiments performed in Ghent and consequently, in many other places across Belgium and the Netherlands, a facilitating professional partner like the NGO 'Lab van Troje' can be a great advantage to the community to help navigate bureaucratic pathways and explore the boundaries of transformative possibilities.