

Yes, We Can: Putting co-creation into practice at Spinoza Imaginaries Lab & Café

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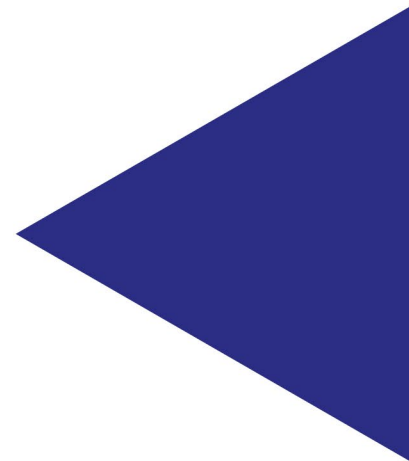
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Yes, We Can: Putting co-creation into practice at Spinoza Imaginaries Lab & Café

In Amsterdam we have been working with a diversity of partners in the city for more than a decade now. Our study and research in our research group Cities & Visitors have been focused on the image and reputations of our cities, including the image and reputation of different areas of the city itself. Year after year, we have seen together with our students in different European cities, how somehow intangible concepts truly influence the prosperity and the prospects of those living in different city areas. While some areas have been considered cool and 'the place to be' (mostly in the carefully restored older city centers) others suffer from a resilient bad reputation (see especially some neighborhoods in the peripheral areas)

However, we have also realized that good and bad reputations do not last forever. Before the covid pandemic, many of the beautiful but overcrowded historical centers had become 'no-go areas', according to many residents. Simultaneously, we were also starting to identify clear signals that the reputation of some 'peripheral' places that had been considered the 'worse places' for years were beginning to be reframed.

Operating from one of these peripheral areas in Amsterdam, the Bijlmer in the South East, we had already started to discover the interest, the knowledge and the creativity that slowly but surely had been nesting in Bijlmer, home to people from all over the world. We also realized that many of these areas had also become the home of our university campuses, including student housing. At the same time, we also saw that lots of work still needed to be done and that all of the appealing potential was not necessarily visible at first sight. The area has been lacking infrastructure to articulate and put the already existing interest on the map.

Challenged by our students, we reflected on our role as a university of applied sciences and decided to put some results of our research into practice. We have started a real-life Lab & Café with a number of partners in Amsterdam South East. In the Lab we work on place making, building maps, exploring and documenting in cooperation not only with our students and co-researchers but also (and especially) with many key actors in Bijlmer who believed in and advocated for its potential before others. These experiments and practices respond to the need to develop (by doing) a more polycentric mapping of our cities and to stimulate different views on creativity and creative business initiatives. The work has the extra impact of being part of a consortium of five cities in Europe linked by our project IMAGE.

In the U!reka workshop we would love to share with you how Spinoza Imaginaries Lab & Café has enabled us to become better 'agents of change' in our campuses. Through a "Yes We Can," approach one finds commonalities and discovers that co-creation is also a matter of commitment and trust and that creativity is inherent to life and belongs to all life phases and facets.