Example Project

"Wild Parking" around the University of Amsterdam's Roeterseiland Campus

In this Placemaking course project, a student team explored the issue of wild parking around the Roeterseiland Campus (REC) of the University of Amsterdam. On this lively city-centre campus, students, staff, residents and visitors all move through a shared public space.

Although underground bike parking is available, it is often underused. Instead, bikes and scooters are frequently parked on sidewalks, green spaces and at building entrances. The result is a cluttered streetscape, limited accessibility and growing tension between different users of the space.
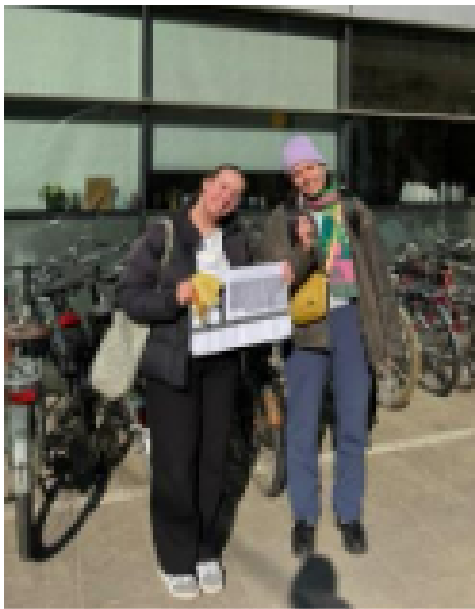
The students chose not to focus on improving the existing parking facilities. Instead, they asked a different question: *How can we reduce informal bike parking in public spaces, in a way that aligns with how people behave?*

The students carried out a detailed analysis of the location and the issue. They mapped the area, observed user behaviour and spoke with various stakeholders, including municipal officers, campus housing staff and local residents. They used interviews, surveys and informal conversations on the street. A co-creation session with fellow students helped deepen their understanding.

Key insights included:

- **Behavioural norms play a key role.** Parking choices are influenced not only by infrastructure but also by habit, perception and time pressure.
- **The space is overloaded.** Bike parking competes with other functions of the corner, such as socialising and resting.
- **Norms are shifting.** Students tend to view public space more individually, which complicates shared use.
- **Speed matters.** Many informally parked bikes are left there only briefly, suggesting that convenience is the main driver.
- **The basement is already being used.** Students are aware of the underground facility, but it often fills up early in the day.

The students also explored theoretical perspectives to enrich their analysis. Inspired by Reijndorp and Reinders (2010), they saw that people often "claim" space based on personal routines and lived experience, even when doing so breaks rules.

Kelling and Wilson's *Broken Windows Theory* (1982) added another layer of insight. It suggests that visible signs of disorder, like messy bike clusters, can lead to more norm-breaking behaviour. When a space looks neglected or unmanaged, people feel less responsible for it.

Together, these insights helped the students reframe the issue. They no longer viewed informal parking as disobedience, but as a mismatch between system design and how users interact with the space.

Designing a Transition Experiment

Rather than jumping to a solution, the students aimed to design a transition experiment. Their goal was to create a low-threshold intervention that could shift behaviour and generate learning.

Through co-creation, they developed three possible interventions:

1. **Buurthoek (Neighbourhood Corner)**
   Transform the corner into a welcoming social space. A more cared-for and active area can discourage unwanted behaviour and support shared use.

2. **Coloured zones**
   Apply colours and visual cues on the pavement to guide bike parking.
   This form of nudging helps structure behaviour without enforcement.

3. **"Move your bike, make someone's day"**
   Use friendly notes on bikes to raise awareness and encourage respectful parking. This appeals to social responsibility rather than rules.

The ideas were presented to local stakeholders and improved based on their input.

Read more (in Dutch):
https://placemakingamsterdam.nl/partners/uva-huisvestingsontwikkeling-rec/wild-parkeren-rond-roeterseilandcampus.