

SPATIAL IMPLICATIONS FOR DESIGN (& PLANNING)

by Rebecca Baugh

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INTRODUCTION | **WHAT & WHY?**

Hello and welcome! The intention of this booklet is to highlight the spatial implications that arose from discussions and work by various people in Delfshaven who participated in the project, Space-making, Playing it Forward. The booklet seeks to showcase some of the existing insights from people in Delfshaven, to boost their confidence in their existing abilities to read urban space and how this impacts human lives. The insights may also lend to the work of practitioners, educators, policymakers, academics, students and more, specifically regarding elements of space that can be reflected upon and/or addressed.

‘Space-making, Paying it Forward’ investigates how co-creative participation through a language lens and decolonial underpinning can make socio-spatial justice a more tangible reality. The project is grounded in the Dutch, Rotterdam context and underpinned by participatory action research (PAR) regarding fieldwork and co-making/co-creation of a storybook about the Rotterdam neighbourhood, Bospolder-Tussendijken (BoTu), also referred to in a broader sense as Delfshaven.

**All images are either translated from participant analogies by Rebecca Baugh (no further citation) or by works created by the participants themselves (citation).*

VISIBILITY & FAMILIARITY

How can the design of urban space ensure that inhabitants can identify and connect with cities as they evolve and develop?

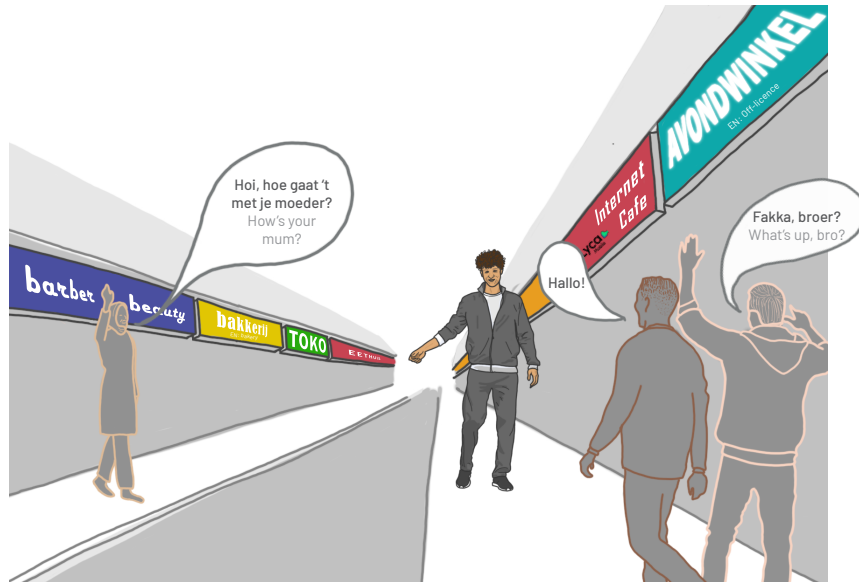
Several participants explained how home involves having a connection to their environment while also recognising it as it grows and changes [Figures 1 & 2]. When exploring the theme of familiarity within a broader context, 'trading zones' and boundary objects come to mind. The concept of 'trading zones' with boundary objects was developed by Peter Galison¹. Galison observed how innovation and change occur when exchanges between actors with different perspectives and ideas take place, which is enabled by intermediary languages that create understanding and opportunities for exchange. For example, this could entail ensuring that space is made for specific shops, services and amenities that cater to varying people groups, as opposed to a selected few [Figure 3]. The amalgamation of all these contrasting familiar spaces that speak to different communities may work as nodes of convergence. This lends to people resonating with spaces, and therefore being included in the emergence and creation of new socio-spatial identities, after all "you feel at home when your environment welcomes you" [Figure 4].



Figure 1
Cranes in the sky as Rotterdam's skyline builds upwards
Rijnmond & NOS, 2022



Figure 2
Protest banners on the facade of a Rotterdam residential block exclaiming "Don't demolish us"



NL: "Je voelt je thuis als je omgeving je ontvangt"
 EN: "you feel at home when your environment welcomes you"



Figure 4
 Using a participant's analogy, a toilet attuned to the different needs of its users to welcome and feel at ease while using the space

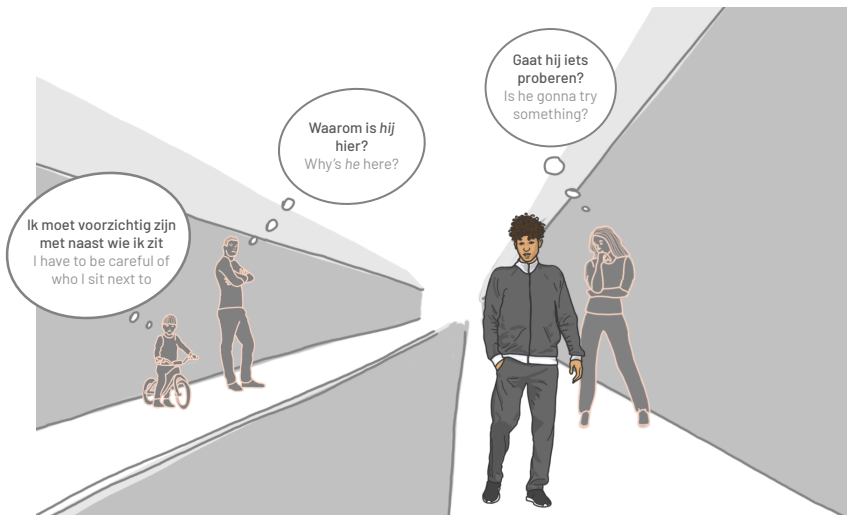


Figure 3
 A Moroccan Dutch participant's feelings on a street that is home to services & amenities that are familiar and resonate with him (above). Versus walking along a street where he has little connection (below)

VISIBILITY & SAFETY

How can we design and plan for more overview and less anonymity, especially as it relates to feelings of safety and community?

Participants noted how having more overview of what is happening around them contributes to higher levels of safety while decreasing feelings of anonymity [Figures 5, 6 & 7]. They also spoke about how low-rise walls and other separating elements help to safeguard privacy while also encouraging neighbourly interaction [Figure 7]. Another participant also mentioned how more densely arranged buildings foster community spirit [Figure 8]. Jan Gehl² examines some of these insights through his explorations of sight, field of vision and overview by describing how every urban inhabitant should be afforded optimal conditions for seeing by way of the built environment not obstructing sight lines. For example, he describes 'zones for staying' and the 'edge effect' (p. 165) whereby areas around perimeters or transition/border zones between spaces are popular. These offer ample opportunities for observation while feeling protected and less exposed than in the middle of an area. Moreover, in relation to safety, especially for women and girls, it is essential to have well-lit paths that allow for easy direction as well as for seeing people during the day and at night.



Figure 5

Overview of surroundings at night & during the day that contribute to increased or lower levels of safety

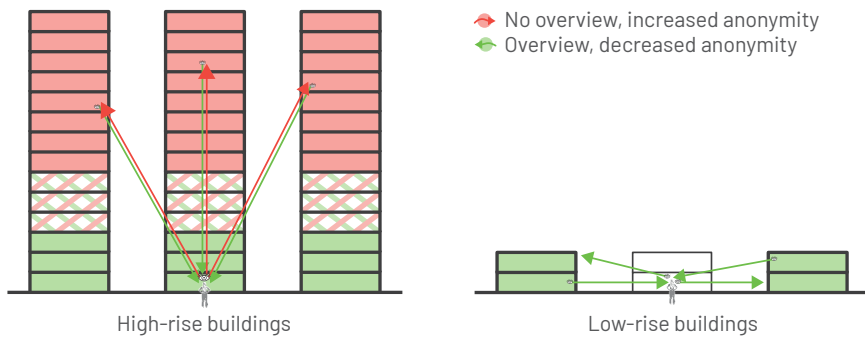


Figure 6

Comparison of high and low-rise buildings in contributing to feelings of overview and anonymity

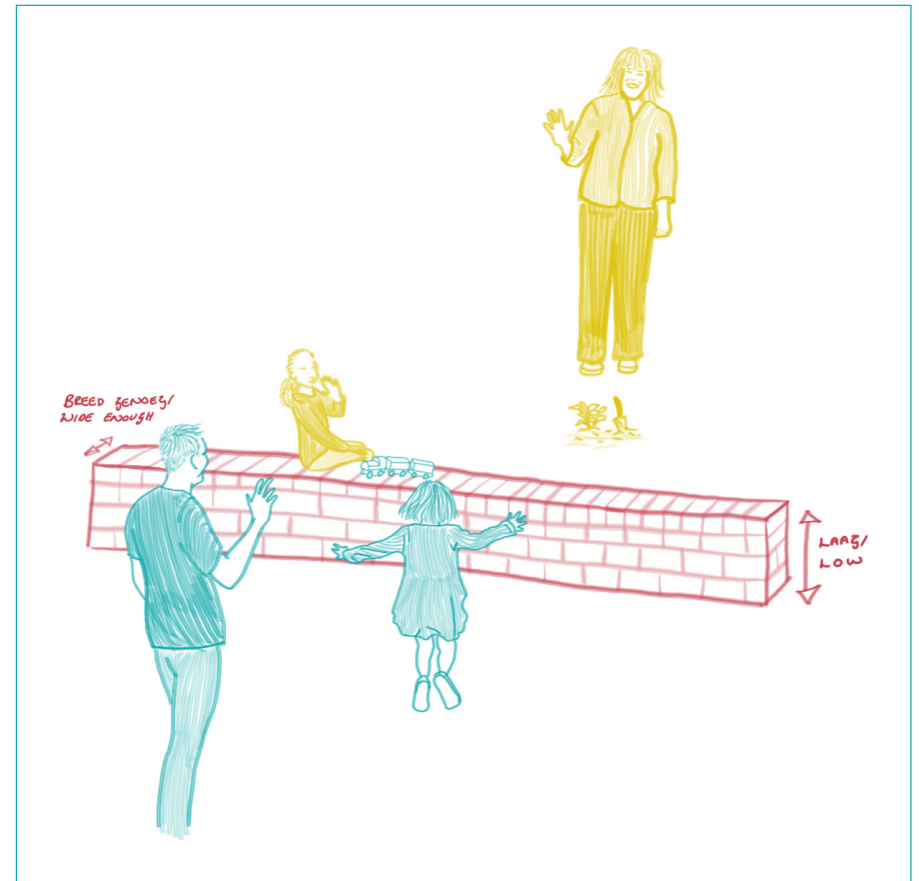


Figure 7

The low yet wide walls separating neighbours that allows for friendly interaction & privacy

ROTTERDAM ALEXANDER

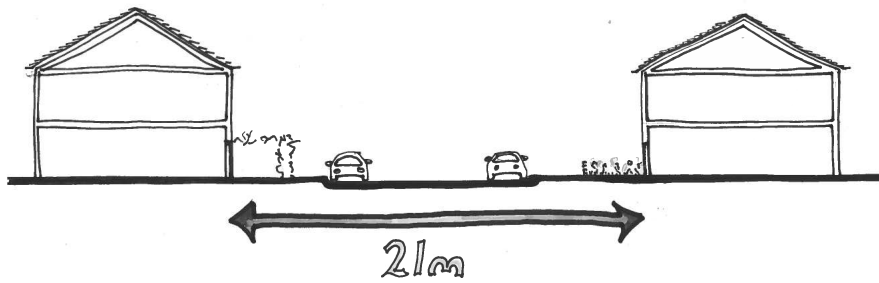
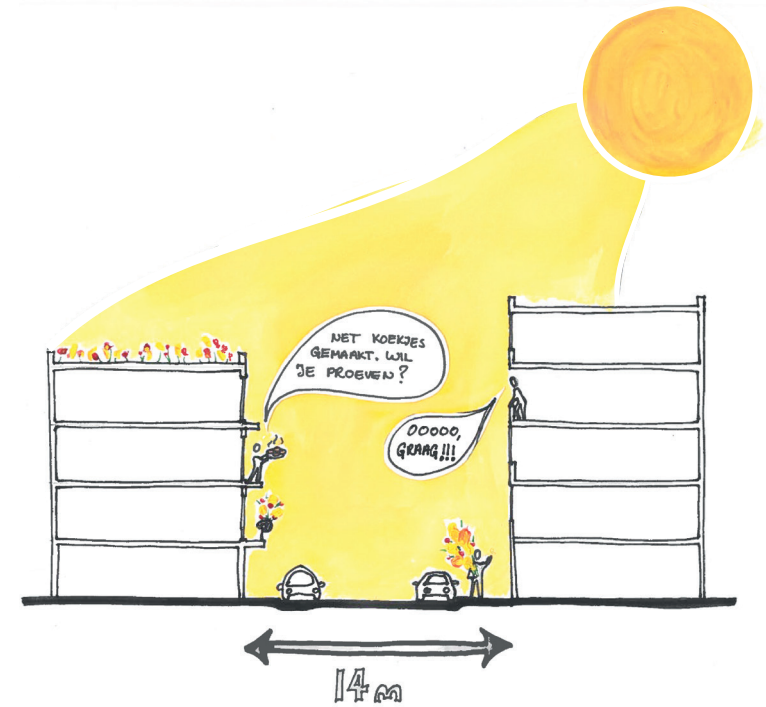


Figure 8
Differencing street widths in Rotterdam Alexander and Delfshaven which informs levels of community spirit

DELFSHAVEN



HARNESSING KNOWLEDGE, EXPERIENCES & SKILLS

How can we harness, champion and use the diverse knowledge, experiences, and skills from other perspectives, geographies and cultures?

Political theorist, academic and life peer Bhikhu Parekh³ argues that no one culture possesses all that is valuable to human life nor can one culture nurture the broadest range of human capacities. A key to fulfilling human potential though, may lie in multicultural societies. A way of realising this potential is being curious, being curious enough about knowledge and experiences that are often and have historically been 'othered', dismissed and/or made invisible⁴. Being curious pushes the bounds of our imaginations, prompts us to reflect on our own limitations, inspires us to search for new knowledge and experiences to disrupt harmful cycles, and equips us with the tools to remould and create more just realities^{3,5}. Insights from participants in Delfshaven do just that. There seems to be an abundant opportunity to collectively harness, leverage and celebrate the knowledge, experiences, skills and perspectives of a diversity of communities to evolve cities and create new identities. As one participant described in terms of creation and innovation, "people don't stop".

For example, the fishing community in Delfshaven has rich knowledge and skills about marine biodiversity and could be engaged in the design, development and maintenance of water bodies. There could also be more public spaces for the youth as well as women and girls to ensure that they have spaces outside of their homes where they feel safe, at home and in community. For example, a woman mentioned how she is eager to make her own cosmetics products. Thus, plants, trees, flowers and so forth that are indigenous to the Netherlands could be planted in various spaces to invite people to use and become connected to public nature, which they can use for cosmetic, medicinal or food purposes.

Moreover, during the summer months several businesses, namely restaurants and cafes, temporarily close [Figure 9]. Several people explained how they would be going back to Turkey, Morocco or other countries for July and August. This is partly to be closer to and connect with families who live in other geographies. Nonetheless, in doing so, several communities are exposed to other ways of being in and experiencing space, which can be harnessed.

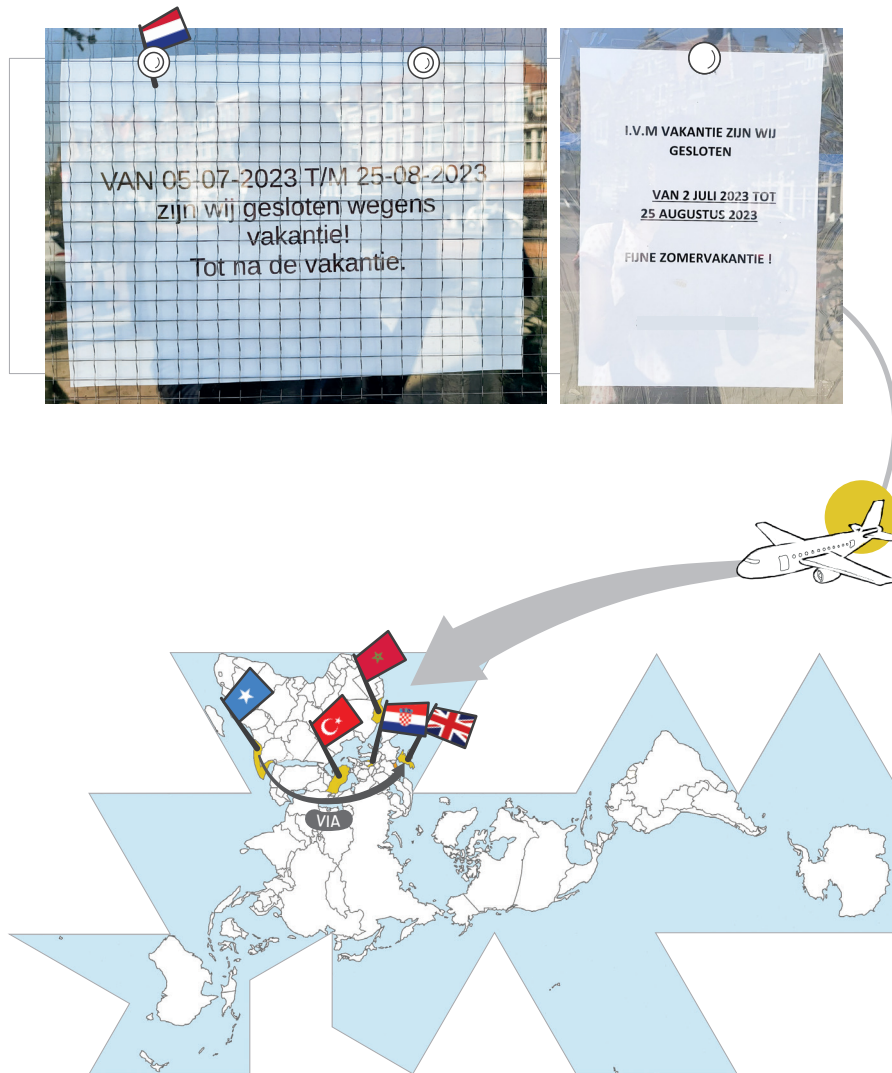


Figure 9

Photos of signs in BoTu cafe and restaurant windows notifying customers that they are closed for the summer as they travel to some of the locations highlighted in the Dymaxion map

REMIXING OF THE STREETScape

How can spatial design invite appropriation?

Remixed and evolving spoken, written and visual languages also help to create new identify and capture nuance [Figure 10 & 11]. For example, when describing Kruiskade, a well-known chilling spot for youth in Rotterdam, the Niteshop uses a Somali word, 'Ciyaal Suuq'. The term literally translates to 'children of the market, of the shopping street', to allude to the area being a 'Campus of Everyday Knowledge' as opposed to its negative connotations. In doing so this remixed language infuses other ways of understanding, and provides opportunities for other ways of perceiving, imagining and being. This also requires the practitioner to keep abreast of how different types of language evolve and change.

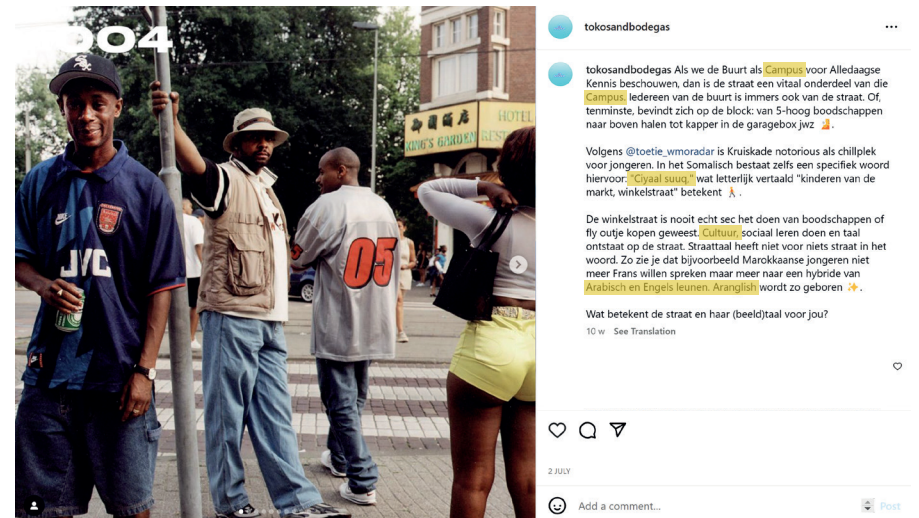
There were several examples where shops, food or retail establishments extended into the street altering its character, and adding a certain dynamic layer [Figures 12 & 13]. For example, the pavement was appropriated by tables, racks displaying products for sale, and seating options. Richard Sennet⁶ reiterates the principles of porosity where urban space becomes more fluid as opposed to self-contained by, for instance, creating more entrances in buildings or expanding open-air markets into streets. Another

opportunity for porosity may present itself in wide pavements that allow for diverse ways of using the street. Of course, there are other considerations, such as ensuring that the pavement width can accommodate additional functions without hindering people's ability to actually manoeuvre or walk ².

Figure 10
Remixed Capri-Sun juice boxes into sneakers
The Niteshop, n.d.



Figure 11
A Niteshop Instagram post with highlighted words of solidarity, adjectives, and infused words from other cultures including 'ciyaal suuq'





Figures 5.12 & 13
*Remixed streetscape by way of shop
extensions onto the public street*

SHIFT TO A FOCUS ON HEALING

In what ways can we shift our thinking to enable healing?

Some participants explained how communities are necessary in order to disrupt cycles of trauma and poverty [Figure 14]. Urbanists can assume roles and adopt mindsets that champion shifts in planning to focus on healing, which consequently challenges status quos and living histories of hierarchy. For example, Gloria Anzaldúa's 'border thinking'⁷, a concept of decolonial thought, advocates for platforms where intersectional sharing, exposure to other types of knowledge and experiences, and the building of understanding occur. Scholar-practitioner Aftab Erfan⁸ expresses that such arenas of convergence and communication, involve "a group [that] has, within itself, the knowledge, creativity, sensitivity, and power it needs to solve its own problems" (p.5).

Street width, hospitality & multifunctionality, community, accessibility

In addition to considerations of visibility, familiarity, safety, and embracing a diversity of frames of reference, multifunctional design choices can also help nurture community, an essential part of healing. For example, there are traditional seating options

that people use in urban spaces such as benches . In Delfshaven there are also multi-functional items, like thickly rimmed, low dividing walls, and low planters and boundaries around metros, that people use to sit on, which indicates how these elements foster more hospitality in space and the possibility for spontaneous, casual meetings [Figures 7 & 16]. Jan Gehl² introduces the concept of 'sitting landscapes' where multipurpose elements such as large stairways, monuments, and fountains with broad terraced bases, allow for increased diversity in how a city's spaces are used and henceforth become more compelling and intriguing environments. This multifunctionality of space can perhaps extend to supporting the hobbies, interests & needs of inhabitants. For instance, in terms of accessibility of steps and public transport for getting to and from different places [Figure 15].

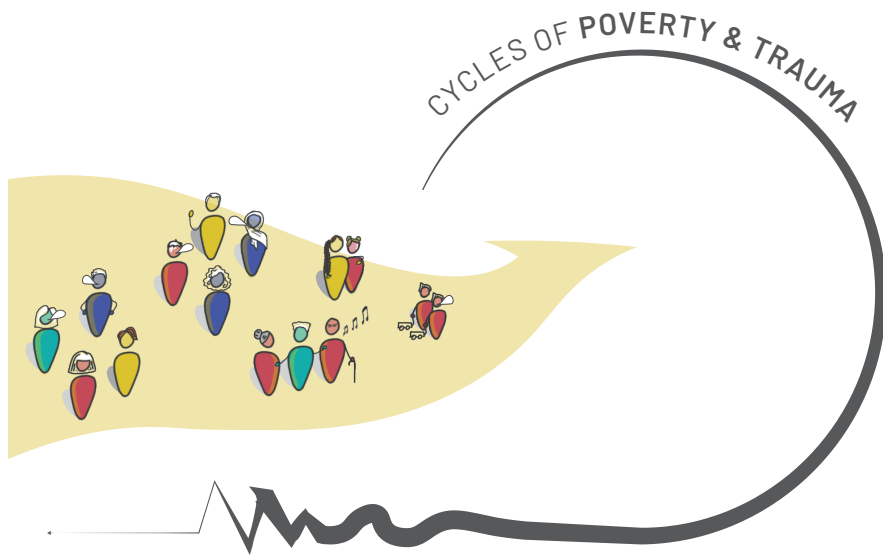


Figure 14

Community as a primary ingredient to disrupt cycles of trauma and poverty



Figure 15

An elderly woman struggling with her shopping trolley before someone goes to help her



Figure 16
Collection of hospitable, traditional and/or multi-functional & appropriated seating in Delfshaven

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