



Winy Maas.
Photo credit: Daria Scagliola.

‘We humans share a responsibility to contribute to keeping the world habitable.’

Winy Maas on Rotterdam, the ‘second reconstruction’ and his green mission

Coming up with solutions for the city of the future. Getting people involved and inviting them to come up with their own ideas. That is Winy Maas’s mission. That mission really came out in the conversation we had with the leading architect, urban planner and landscape architect. We met in the lead-up to our ICEC Conference, where he will be featured as a keynote speaker.

Text by: Sandra Kagie (Sanscript Tekstproducties)

Of all the cities in the Netherlands, Rotterdam and Eindhoven have the largest roof surface areas per capita. And there are all kinds of things you can do on those roofs. Maas starts off by saying: ‘That’s where you can build more, add to the city and make it greener. It’s essential in the densification of the city and in providing sustainable housing for more people.’ He calls it the ‘second reconstruction’ of Rotterdam: building buildings, gardens and parks on the roofs of the existing city. Born and bred in Brabant, this is the city he’s lived in for decades and where he says he’d like to stay.

When we ask Maas what you must do if you’re in the city in June, the tip he offers is the Rotterdam Rooftop Walk - which you can book tickets for as a visitor to our conference - and the event’s organisers say you’ll not only be treated to some gorgeous views: you’ll walk over and between the rooftops, experiencing how the innovative use of roofs contributes to a better future for cities and city residents. It’s like taking a look at the inner workings of Maas’s brain. The Rotterdam Rooftop Walk was designed by MVRDV, the agency he founded in 1993.

Plea for city densification

Maas has pled for the densification of (Dutch) cities for years. “Densification will enable more people to live in the city, and keep the space surrounding the city empty,” he explains. “It would be ludicrous to fill up half of Brabant’s natural landscape with housing developments,” he laments about his native soil (eds. - Maas grew up in Schijndel, not far from Den Bosch). “We should be using that land for agriculture and forests.”



Rotterdam Market Hall

Photo credit: V. Zoest.

At The Why Factory, which he founded - a think tank at Delft University of Technology that researches and visualises the cities of the future - he researches ways in which cities can remain compact and habitable. This all centres around the realisation that the world population will reach 10 billion people by 2050. That is about 2 billion more than we have now. And at that time, the majority of those people will be living in cities. Maas believes we absolutely have to build upwards, and develop innovative forms of high-rise construction where people can live and work in peace.

The 'Green Dip' is one of the think tank's most famous and striking ideas when it comes to the necessity of making cities greener to help slow global warming. Maas wants us to cover all concrete in the cities until there isn't any visible concrete left. He wants to plant greenery on every surface and cover buildings with plants, until they are overgrown. Everything should have a natural green layer.

The Valley and the Depot

In previous interviews, he compared the Green Dip to a Magnum: cities dipped in green chocolate. The recently completed project The Valley on the Zuidas in Amsterdam is a prime example. Though the abundant green jungle that was supposed to surround the residential and office complex in upcoming years has yet to reach full maturity.

Another example is the Boijmans van Beuningen Depot, which - after the Market Hall - is the second iconic asset from Maas's portfolio in his home city of Rotterdam. On top of the Depot, a green oasis was created, a rooftop park with a restaurant. That's Maas's second tip for conference attendees. To Maas, it is very special that he is able to work on such iconic projects like the Market Hall and the Depot in the city he lives in. "I'd recommend it to everyone," he says. "In any case, I'd like to create something that I myself would like to live in, or live near. And that is literally the case here, because I live in the Depot around the corner."

Building in his own city does make him a little nervous, he admits. "Because you see it every day, but also your friends and family. That's an extra challenge. I feel pressure to do it properly," he laughs.

Reactions to progressive ideas

What does he think when people look at his mainly progressive ideas, often accompanied by futuristic images of things like flying cars, and brush it off with a 'I'm not going to live to see that anyway' or a 'but that's in the very distant future...'? "I hate comments like that," he answers. "It borders on lethargy, a passive attitude. I believe that we humans share a responsibility to contribute to keeping the world habitable."



Winy Maas

Photo credit: Barbra Verbij.

"I always think: I wish I could live to see that, because then I'd actually see the progress. That doesn't mean that people shouldn't be critical. I am myself as well. We should explore concepts like flying cars to be able to answer the question of whether certain developments are useful. Whether they can offer us anything, whether they contribute added value. That is what I do; nothing more, nothing less."

Such reactions don't keep Maas from starting the conversation time and time again. "Of course," he says. "Otherwise, nothing will change. It helps that I have the perspective and resilience to deal with that. Combined with a solid amount of self-criticism."

Focus on value

And finally: what does he expect of his contribution to our conference? "I expect to meet people I can talk to about value, and not just costs. And for those values to really count for our financial feasibility on the short term."

"On the long term, we are going to need more oxygen. And for that, I need the help of the cost experts to explain that city densification may cost more on the short term, but that it will offer a lot more in that area on the long term."

"How do I get these ideas calculated, and eventually financed? That is where the value engineer comes in. I am not seeing those really long-term calculations, and that is why, for example, we are currently making investments in the natural landscape that will be considered ridiculous in a few decades' time. That's also why I am looking for the tools to make these kinds of long-term investment calculations. Hopefully, in June, I can meet people that can help think about these things."

Winy Maas will be one of the keynote speakers at the ICEC World Congress In Rotterdam from June 12 - 15, 2022. This global conference of the International Cost Engineering Council (ICEC) will be held in conjunction with and hosted by the Dutch Association of Cost Engineers (DACE). Please visit our [website](#) for more information and registration.

