

Roombeek wint Europese hoofdprijs

De tweejaarlijkse prijs van de European Council of Spatial Planners in de categorie "Public Participation" is in 2008 op de jaarlijkse bijeenkomst in Dublin toegekend aan Roombeek in Enschede.

Het jury rapport geeft daarbij de volgende motivatie:

"The jury was impressed by this project, in the way in which it combined the regeneration of an established residential district and an post-disaster site, innovatory public participation and social aspects. In particular, the Jury commended the role of public participation as the main axis of the project and this is what makes it an exemplar of best practice in planning for urban regeneration. Innovation is also seen in planning governance structures, whereby the planning process can respond to specific and sudden circumstances such as occurred in this case, in which the elected politicians agreed with the local discussion groups composed of the local people most directly affected. The Jury felt that this approach went well beyond the statutory requirements, and moved from participation to citizen empowerment. This, the Jury feels, is particularly noteworthy as a succesful approach to crisis management.

The role of the planner in this project was seen by the Jury to be vital to the process, as evidenced through the quality, comprehensiveness and timeliness of the implementation."

Wethouder Bleeker van Enschede nam op donderdag 23 oktober 2008 samen met Peter Kuenzli (Directeur Gideon Consult, directeur Projectbureau Roombeek 2000 - 2005) de prijs in ontvangst uit handen van de Ierse Minister van VROM, Mr. John Gormley.

Roombeek: a new Dutch standard in urban development

Cities and neighbourhoods change over time. Sometimes by deliberate urban development policies, sometimes through a calamity. In both cases, the physical reconstruction of urban areas provides a window of opportunity to experiment with new standards. The experience in Roombeek - the district that was hit by a fireworks explosion on 13 May 2000 - shows that new insights in urban planning such as the mix between citizen participation and integrative policies can set new standards in urban development.

Urban development is not just about bricks and mortar; the heart of urban development is about regenerating the skeleton work and the backbone of physical, social and economic structures of cities and their districts. That is why the Roombeek district has literally been rebuilt on the wishes and ideas of the former inhabitants and entrepreneurs in the area. The emphasis on stimulating and guiding people to participate in the design of their neighbourhood naturally resulted in providing space for self-building in Roombeek. Roombeek is about citizens building their own dream on high-quality foundations laid by local government.

History

With its 154,000 inhabitants, Enschede is one of the most important cities in the east of the Netherlands. The loss of the textile industry at the end of the 1960s left deep marks. Just as it was rising out of its decline, the city suffered a major setback as a result of the fireworks disaster on Saturday 13 May 2000.

The fireworks disaster caused tremendous damage and suffering to the people who lived and worked in the Roombeek district. Twenty-three people died as a result of the explosion, more than 1,000 were injured, over 1,450 lost their home and 123 businesses lost their premises. All in all, an area of about 42 hectares in the city of Enschede was ruined. These figures hide another serious effect: the sense of security of many Dutch people and their trust in the government were undermined. Restoring this trust was one of the main challenges the council of Enschede set itself.

These consequences marked the start of a major reconstruction process to enable victims of the disaster to regain their lives in a renewed and prosperous district. At the time, it was evident that participation of all interested parties - including the people directly affected by the disaster - should play a key role in the reconstruction process. It was the only way the local government could regain trust. The city council also saw the regeneration as an opportunity to strengthen the economic structure of the city and to create a new economic and cultural identity for Enschede. The reconstruction of Roombeek thus became a laboratory for innovation and urban renewal.

Area-based approach versus people-based approach.

The decades of experience with the area-based approach ensured that the capacity for cross-sectoral efforts can be co-ordinated. The integration of the physical, social and economic reconstruction in one cohesive plan was, however, a new frontier in urban planning. Given that the reconstruction of the demolished area would take years, there was a clear risk of displacing problems to the rest of the city instead of solving them. Because of this, the city government opted for a people-based approach. This means that actions are focused on the right of the former inhabitants to return to the district and to ensure that all stakeholders - including the people directly affected by the disaster - are intensively involved in the reconstruction process. These points of departure helped shape the planning process.

From the autumn of 2000 an exceptional and intensive participation was initiated among all groups concerned: young people, older people, tenants, home owners, migrants, entrepreneurs, building corporations and schools. Participation was organised around former neighbourhoods within the district, such as the 'Roomveldje'. It was expanded in creative sessions in combination with simple questions as: 'what do you want to keep - or bring back - from the former neighbourhood or district, what must be different, and what is important?' In the end, more than 3,000 wishes, suggestions and ideas were received. All have been documented, which also added to regaining trust.

The urban development spatial vision 'Roombeek, a familiar district' (October 2001) translated all these contributions into a single cohesive plan. Besides initiating the physical reconstruction, this plan also contributed towards the social and economic programmes for Roombeek. The urban development spatial vision can be summarised in the following eight principles:

- a district to return to
- a vibrant district (diversity and blend)
- a familiar district (e.g. restoring the old street layout)
- a district with a history (conservation of old buildings, bringing back the Roombeek stream)
- a district with value for the future
- a district without boundaries
- a district under its own control
- a safe district

Other examples of the widespread influence society has had in the reconstruction of Roombeek:

- The choice for the urban planner (Pi de Bruijn) had to be approved by the former inhabitants.
- The former inhabitants of the 'Roomveldje' could vote for the reconstruction plan of their neighbourhood. Four different plans were made for this election.
- The architect selected for the development of an amenities centre in the district submitted a plan that consisted of no more than a blank piece of paper (and an excellent reputation!). His explanation: you can only build an amenities centre after a participation process in which all future users are involved. Only on this basis can a plan be drafted that can work in the future. And so that was exactly what happened.
- Inhabitants were also involved in the choice for a monument as a remembrance to the fireworks disaster.

Project office

For focus and to create the energy needed for the reconstruction, a special Reconstruction Project Office was set up next to the Roombeek area. This office was tasked with co-ordinating the social, economic and physical reconstruction of Roombeek. Many former residents were (temporarily) rehoused elsewhere in Enschede. The social programmes were therefore implemented city-wide. All Project Office programmes and activities were aimed at giving the new district added social value for both returning former residents as well as new residents, and to help upgrade the entire city of Enschede. As such, social cohesion in the community had to be strengthened to improve quality of life, building community commitment and participation, and unemployment tackled.

Roombeek Development Plan & high quality

Together with representatives from the organisations concerned, the spatial vision was translated into the Roombeek Development Plan (RDP). This resulted in a number of ambitious objectives, some of which were part of an explicit Quality Boost:

- Continuing participation of and interaction with all groups concerned throughout the reconstruction process;
- A dense mix of uses in the district, both residential and commercial, as well as various amenities;
- The reuse of old mill complexes for cultural amenities, combined with high-quality business activities and new styles of housing as characteristics of the new Roombeek.
- A culture cluster that will be opened on 22 April this year. The culture cluster is housed in the former mills of textile manufacturer Rozendaal and is a unique integration of old and new, of living, working and culture. The culture cluster will accommodate a mix of functions, among which a new Nature and Culture museum, an observatory, a visual arts centre and artists' ateliers. In addition to these functions, it will also comprise a few houses and apartments.
- Next to the culture cluster the Cremer museum will arise: a dynamic museum built around Dutch artist and writer Jan Cremer.
- Amenities cluster: the amenities cluster is a multifunctional centre in the heart of the district with a wide range of amenities under a single roof, such as three different primary schools, sports facilities, a theatre, a day nursery, shops, sheltered accommodation, a youth centre and club halls. Associations and organisations that played a part in Roombeek life before the disaster will return. The risk-bearing development and exploitation of the entire complex is in the hands of Housing Corporation 'De Woonplaats'. As indicated above, the future users have contributed to the design. Each section will have its own façade, thus creating a building cluster that, while forming an entity, also allows for the individuality of each separate user.
- Knowledge district/broadband: all households, businesses and public bodies in Roombeek will be connected to a fibre optic network. Thanks to this ultra-speed internet connection, such major developments as teleworking, tele-education, telecare, electronic government and business will become a reality.
- Private commissioning: the objective is for half of the owner-occupied housing to be developed on the basis of private commissioning. This will involve approximately 450 houses. Compared to the rest of the Netherlands, where the rate of private commissioning is at most 20%, this percentage is high.
The degree of free choice has been determined for each Roombeek neighbourhood. Some neighbourhoods have a high level of free choice in, for example, architecture, house style and material, while others have less. Architectural quality is stimulated in all cases.
- Public spaces: a great deal of attention has been paid to public spaces in Roombeek. Thanks to the quality boost, more money than usual can be spent on the layout of places that co-define the view of Roombeek, with a visibly higher quality as a result. There will be three interconnected parks: the so-called Bleken (the Dutch word

‘Bleek’ means bleaching field, the grass fields on which laundry used to be spread out to bleach in the sun).

A special avenue has been built between the Rijksmuseum Twenthe and the culture cluster. Four rows of trees and 13,000 boxes have been planted along this stylish avenue and the houses that line it are all fine examples of quality architecture. The trees add a touch of tranquillity to the Museumlaan. A selection of art will be positioned in various places along the avenue.

What is unique about this avenue is that it was laid out before housing construction started. It gives structure and shows faith in the regeneration of the district. This avenue is part of the cultural mile that connects the culture cluster in Roombeek with a new music theatre in the inner city of Enschede.

- Reconstructing the Roombeek stream above ground: the idea for bringing the Roombeek stream back also stemmed from the participation process. As one older inhabitant said: ‘There used to be a stream here for bringing clean water to the textile industry (...).’ The stream used to flow through the Roombeek district to the adjacent town of Hengelo and as a result of industrialisation, it disappeared from the townscape. Now, the Regge & Dinkel Water Authority and the municipality of Enschede plan to restore the course of the nine-kilometre stream to be able to discharge excess and relatively clean rainwater and groundwater.

All these ambitions stemmed from the tremendous enthusiasm, energy and creativity that emerged in response to the disaster. ‘Breeding ground’ is perhaps the best way of describing the RDP (November 2002). A breeding ground for former inhabitants, for modern self-builders, artists, ICT specialists and entrepreneurs who all feel at home and meet and inspire each other. Roombeek offers them the scope to develop their talents in a challenging, high-quality environment, filled with possibilities to shape their own environment and build their own homes.

Working in Roombeek

For decades, developments in the Netherlands were based on the perspective of segregating functions. But because this fails to create conditions favourable enough to attract each individual function, the separation of functions is becoming less popular, although regulations (e.g. environmental policies) are still based on the common practice of separating functions and preventing nuisance.

The objective for Roombeek is to create a mixed (but still safe!) district, where different functions are brought together, based on the firm conviction that this will help to create a vibrant, flourishing district. In several subprojects, a maximum effort is being made to realise this mix of functions.

The economic goals set for Roombeek comprise the ‘re-migration’ of 1200 jobs to the area. By the end of 2007, about 400 jobs were created and filled. Now that the economic revival has gained momentum, Roombeek is going full throttle in making sure that all economic opportunities in the area are captured. The objective is to inject the neighbourhood with a

new urban vitality and a forward-looking economy. Different propositions are being put into place to make Roombeek attractive for small start-up companies, especially in the creative arts and culture sector.

Art and Culture

Roombeek was already an artists' sanctuary before the fireworks disaster. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the position of art and culture is so securely anchored in the plans for the new Roombeek. In addition to the development of the aforementioned culture cluster, a great deal of attention has been paid to creating a sustainable artistic and cultural infrastructure within which the residents of Roombeek, artists from Enschede, and cultural and artistic institutes from Enschede and beyond will be inspired not only to participate passively in activities in Roombeek, but also actively as a producer, organiser and initiator of artistic and cultural events in Roombeek.

Financing Development

Because of the scale of the disaster, media exposure and the sense of urgency, the National Government, the Province of Overijssel and various European Institutions have given their financial commitment to the reconstruction plans. This commitment has been essential to ensuring that the ambitious goals set will be achieved. The subsidies for the Quality Boost functioned as a catalyst for other parties to commit time, money and effort to the reconstruction (multiplier effect). For example, about 50% of the investment in Roombeek is financed by the local government and public-private institutions. In the amenities cluster, 33% is financed by the national government. This amount is matched by local government funds and funds from. In other areas, such as the installation of fibre optic connections, financing has come mainly from the housing corporations and business community.

Roombeek today

All the objectives formulated at the start of the planning process have been or are being implemented. And while the area is taking shape more and more every day it is clear to all visitors - professionals as well as inhabitants - that a new standard in urban development is being set. A standard that comprises a central role for participation, high process qualities, adding specialist (planning) knowledge from local government, high quality public space, a central place for architecture and, last but not least: the leadership necessary to realise a new district along the lines of a new standard.