

ROTTERDAM *the Netherlands*



630,000 inhabitants

Inspired by the example of Ghent, the Living Streets in Rotterdam, called “Dream Streets”, started in 2015. They are defined as initiatives of citizens and/or professional organisations to make their street, square or neighbourhood a nicer place to meet and play by implementing temporary or permanent measures.


A cross-sector process to create Dream Streets

The Dream Streets take place within the framework of the “CityLab010 fund for local innovation” (2015–2018), containing an annual amount of three and a half million euros in total. All municipal departments are involved in the programme. With CityLab010, the Municipality of Rotterdam aims to generate and support initiatives that contribute to the further development and improvement of the main municipal policy challenges, such as: sustainability, economics, sports and culture. Via CityLab010 a grant fund is available for proposals of local initiatives that can be submitted. For each of the Living Streets implemented up till now in Rotterdam, a dedicated inter-departmental team of 5–7 civil servants meet regularly before and during implementation of the specific Living Street. They

advise the inhabitants on their plans and assist during implementation when needed. The Living Streets are managed by the Urban Planning department with a large involvement of the Traffic department and Maintenance department.

The process of Dream Streets in Rotterdam is as follows:

- A new Dream Street initiative approaches the dream coach of the city of Rotterdam. He assists them in defining their plan and introduces them to the interdepartmental team (“Kendoe team”) which advises on the plan and budget. They also check that the planned activities comply with the regulations. This team meets once or twice and they help to further improve the project and give support and suggestions. Usually this process takes a couple of months. After this, the Living



Street submits their proposal for funding by the CityLab010 programme.

- The final proposal is assessed by the Living Street project manager. The interdepartmental team formulates the conditions for funding and the Living Street receives a subsidy contract. During implementation, civil servants assist and advise if needed. This means that in some Living Streets, there is a high level of involvement of the city administration, while in other Living Streets there is much less. In all cases, there are many formal and informal moments of

contact between the Living Streets and the civil servants as often, civil servants attend the local Living Street events.

- After implementation, each Living Street submits a financial and narrative report on the results. Thereafter, the civil servants and the inhabitants discuss together which of the temporary measures could be continued or become permanent. Evaluation is also done by the Living Street initiators, sometimes using monitoring equipment bought by the municipality, but also based on a qualitative analysis.

The Dream Streets activities and their impact in the streets and the municipality

13 Dream Streets were organised between 2015 and 2017, covering topics such as improving traffic safety, enhancing social cohesion, building permanent places to play and meet, greening communal gardens. Most Living Streets have a time span of one year in which they organise several activities, mainly in spring and summer when the weather is nice. The most represented social category is highly educated people, however some Living Streets are also taking place in socially and economically mixed neighbourhoods, where a professional organisation is needed to develop the plan and coordinate the project together with the citizens. The Dream Streets have diverse impacts. First, they bring more social cohesion to the streets as well as an increased sense of ownership of the public space by residents. Besides, these experiments, before investing in permanent measures, enable the municipality to have more insights on what works well or not



in the streets to enhance meeting and playing. Some measures then become permanent, such as reduced space for car parking, benches, small playgrounds and meetings places. These initiatives also have an impact on rethinking the role of the municipality: How do we cooperate with citizens? What do they expect from us? Are we capable to explain the municipal regulations for public space well enough and how do we manage to bend the rules without breaking them?

Challenges ahead

The successful experience in Rotterdam has raised a number of key questions:

- How to deal with temporary versus permanent measures? Most permanent measures concern the installation of bike parks, benches and playgrounds. As this is public space, the city administration should implement these measures and citizens are not allowed to do this themselves. However, permanent measures

need a budget, which is not always available. Some solutions were found by the residents, for instance via crowdfunding.

- How to deal with initiatives from professional organisations? Professionals also approach the municipality with their ideas (like architects, urban planners) and find citizens to join them. How to ensure that the citizens feel and take ownership of the project? The municipality then considers that at least 10 residents from the street should support the proposal so that it can be accepted.
- High diversity: not everything is a Dream Street! In Rotterdam, there is a high diversity of initiatives that qualify as Living Streets. This is also a risk, as not every local initiative is a Living Street. What to do with this diversity of proposals?
- Do we 'spoil' our Dream Streets? A Dream Street can receive a subsidy of up to 40,000 euros. The positive effect is that real changes can be





made, the negative effect is that this may hinder creativity.

- To what extent do we coach the initiators in engaging their neighbours and getting their support? Some initiators, especially in mixed neighbourhoods, find it difficult to approach all neighbours in their street and to involve them in the project. What kind

of support should the municipal administration give them?

- When is the support for the plan sufficient to continue and if not, how to deal with that? Most Living Streets are initiated by highly educated people. In socially and economically weaker neighbourhoods, professionals write and submit the proposals

and involve the citizens in the implementation.

Contact



Esther Sprangers
Project manager,
City of Rotterdam
e.sprangers@rotterdam.nl