Eindhoven is currently the largest city in the south of the Netherlands. Eindhoven got his city rights as far back as 1232. In the 19th and 20th century it started growing fast due its attractiveness for cheap land and cheap labour for developing industries.
Especially when, in 1891, Philips founded a lightbulb factory which led to the major growth of Eindhoven throughout the 20th century, making the city a major technology and industrial hub. Today, a quarter of the jobs in the region are in technology and ICT companies.

However, when Philips, at that time the main employer in Eindhoven, underwent a major reorganisation in the 90s, the city suffered a lot. Eindhoven was at the time considered more as an industrial place than a true city, but the city capitalised on its legacy and used it for its renaissance.

Considered today as a knowledge based and innovation oriented city, Eindhoven strongly focuses on creating the needed support structures in the domains of innovation, labour market, technology development and business development. An important asset of Eindhoven is the triple helix management structure the city has been developing for a long time. Local government, universities, and business are cooperating on a daily basis. Additionally, the city promotes the involvement of grassroots movements in which citizens, end users, artists, and entrepreneurs take a leading role, a quadruple helix management structure.

Wealthy in industrial heritage, Eindhoven, in cooperation with builders and private enterprise, has established a system of revitalisation of industrial heritage areas to increase city attractiveness. These resources have allowed the city to implement community building and identity building among citizens in the area. The city has also developed a strong connection between industrial cultural heritage and its own economic functions and attractiveness.

The case study’s approach

Transforming the former Philips factories into a creative and cultural quarter made Eindhoven a major technological and industrial hub. ‘StrijpS’ is now considered an urban rejuvenation success story. Together with the further development of the High Tech Campus, the Brainport region surrounding Eindhoven is one of the most innovative regions worldwide.

The main challenge for Eindhoven at the time was to position itself as a location with potential in the creativity and innovation sectors. To do so, the city used the brains of its citizens! Eindhoven has mastered the living lab approach to innovation, where the facilitation of trials uses real life situations as part of the design process.

According to the European Network of Living Labs, “Living Labs (LLs) are defined as user-centred, open innovation ecosystems based on a systematic user co-creation approach, integrating research and innovation processes in real life communities and settings.”

LLs operate as testbed platforms between municipalities and citizens, research institutes, business and tech companies, to co-create, design and prototype either products or services. LLs have common elements but multiple different implementations and can be considered as an innovative approach to governance.

In Eindhoven, this approach to LLs is used in the regeneration process of the NRE-area, where the former gasworks of Eindhoven were located. The redevelopment of this area is now managed in an organic way, with as little legislation as possible, and in strong cooperation with the end users (i.e. future residents of the area).

The NRE-area (NRE-terrein) is situated very near the downtown area on one side, and next to a residential area on the other side. The buildings that remain are of historic and cultural value, but they are in a very poor state. The soil is heavily polluted. The NRE-area was acquired by the city in 2004 with the intention of building 350 houses. With the outbreak of the financial crisis, the project was put on hold. However,
as the real estate company Endinet moved away, the buildings became vacant and it was decided to sell them.

The city council underwent market research for possible buyers of the existing buildings and lots, focusing on future residents and not real-estate developers. A sufficient number of future residents were found to start the development process. It is important to note that there was no pre-defined plan. The development process was initiated together with the selected parties and other stakeholders, leading to a roadmap in which the base and ambitions were defined.

As the buildings were vacant, the municipality offered them to people to work in temporarily. Through a foundation, the buildings are rented out to artists and craftsmen. Thanks to these first residents, the area has developed a friendly reputation, and popular awareness during major events such as the Dutch Design Week and Glow festival of lights. The ambition is to grow this area into a city community that will feel committed to taking care of it.

The way the NRE area was shaped and developed into a creative, mixed city district is unique in Eindhoven, and maybe even in The Netherlands.

Impact and results

No participant dropped out of the project during the period of 3.5 years that it lasted

This method of trial and error is one of the main lessons from Eindhoven: cities are labs, and therefore can apply the same principles as in any start-up company when it comes to testing new tools and initiatives.

The city has fully taken on its role as enabler and facilitator: the original intention was to arrange as little as possible in advance.

The citizens have to make decisions that concern them. Citizens and users are given more responsibilities and therefore commit more strongly to the process of co-creation.

The city has also taken a not-so-easy role, as the end objective of the process is for the municipality to let go. It requires a lot of trust between the city and the end users.

The most remarkable result is the community building through the intense way of working together. No participant dropped out of the project during the period of three and a half years that it lasted. In August 2017, the first building activities started.

The construction activities on the site are in full swing and since the end of 2018 the first residents have actually been living in their homes. The most important building on the site, the former gasworks, has just been thoroughly renovated and opened in May 2019, Jazz Club Fifth NRE is now bringing new notes to the area.
Planning and sustainability

The cooperative philosophy at the root of this project is very innovative. The future residents and people that will work here decide together how to implement the options for living, what will be allowed and what won’t be. Even the organisation and maintenance of the public space is a group action, a responsibility of the residents. The ambition is to grow this area into a city community that will feel committed to taking care of their own environment.

Transferability

- The development of the area is managed in an organic way, with as little legislation as possible, in cooperation with the end users, i.e. the future residents;
- The end users are at the very start of the process, not real estate developers;
- The temporary use of the buildings before they were sold allowed the creation of a dedicated community that is then ready to take care of its own environment;
- Adapting the plan to people’s projects and ideas takes more time but is rewarding in the end and more efficient in the long term.

Management level and partners

A roadmap was defined together with the end users to make clear from the start what was the ambition and reach a common understanding for implementation of the project.

A small project group was set up at city level, with meetings every month with end users and individual buyers to discuss their plans. This direct and regular contact facilitated the process.

Budget and financing

Total budget required for this project was €9,910,000, with a direct allocation from the city of €2,805,000 (24%), and €615,000 from the region, mainly for depollution of the soil. About 70% of the total budget was covered by selling buildings and ground lots to future residents.

Contact person

Marianne Willemsen, project manager
m.willemsen@eindhoven.nl

Useful links

http://www.fifthnre.com
http://www.peelcentrale.info/fotos
https://stedenintransitie.nl/plek/nul-zes
https://eindhoven.raadsinformatie.nl/document/3572531/1/document