



EURO
CITIES



Do-it-yourself houses

Renovating run down neighbourhoods

By buying several hundred badly maintained houses and apartments to sell on top owner-occupiers, Rotterdam hoped to revive run down neighbourhoods. It soon became clear that selling newly renovated houses would be a challenge, so the city launched 'do-it-yourself houses' in 2004.

Bargain buildings

The scheme began with a pilot project between 2004 and 2006 through which an entire block of houses owned by the city was given away to people committing to renovate them. From 2006 onwards, the official project was launched and houses were sold at a bargain price.

Several mechanisms were put in place to ensure that the finished renovation met the city's expectations:

- potential buyers must prove they have the financial means to renovate the property
- a plan for the renovation – developed in cooperation with an architect – must be presented before the buyer receives the keys
- once renovated, the house must meet insulation, construction and safety benchmarks, confirmed by an inspection one year after handover



They want a nice house, but also a nice neighbourhood, and they make it happen!



Hamit Karakus, vice mayor of Rotterdam

cities in action

September 2013

where: Rotterdam, The Netherlands
what: economic development, social affairs
when: 2004-2014

Support for success

The city works in cooperation with partners, including a team which advises buyers on the renovation. This involves an architect, who helps draw up the plans, and civil servants who advise on legal matters such as building permits. Rotterdam has also partnered with two banks willing to provide mortgages. Another organisation, Urbannerdam, is contracted by the city to assist potential buyers in the process of acquiring a 'do-it-yourself house', and also acts as an 'ambassador' for the scheme, promoting it to other cities and corporations in The Netherlands.

The goal of the project is not just to turn out beautiful houses, but to bring about change in neighbourhoods. As part of the contract buyers commit to live in the property for at least the first three years, with no letting or selling permitted in that period. A large penalty is applicable if buyers break any of the terms of the contract.

This safeguarding mechanism also helps encourage buyers to look at the project as a long term investment, rather than a quick sell, so they are more likely to renovate houses with care and attention, and most importantly, a 'personal touch'.

A positive response

So far, 450 old apartments have been sold to private buyers who have converted them into around 210 new properties. The cost to the city has been around €16.1 million in total, with €30,000 allocated to each old property purchased. The city teamed up with a housing cooperation in 2006, which has sold a further 85 old properties for conversion.

The funds allocated by the city cover the cost of selling the properties and the support team as well as communication and publicity. The resources for the initial 170 houses came from a national fund for urban renewal, but from 2009 onwards the costs have been covered by the city.

The scheme is advertised with flyers and a website, and properties are offered at least once a year. The demand has been overwhelming and has even attracted buyers from outside the city, despite it normally not considered to be an attractive place to live. Potential

buyers are drawn by value for money and the freedom to design their own home. They tend to be well-educated and enterprising people looking to live in a multicultural environment.

The effect on the local communities has been positive, with the new residents participating in and initiating local activities. The city recognises that improvements will not come about instantaneously; instead it will be a gradual process of 'upgrading' neighbourhoods. This project is just one element in the renewal of these disadvantaged districts, and must be accompanied by tackling crime and promoting the inclusion of young people in education and work. It is a long-term project of urban regeneration, and the city envisages the scheme running until at least 2014.

EUROCITIES recognised Rotterdam's achievements by awarding it an 'innovation' award in 2011. The project has also received international publicity and was featured in the New York Times in January 2012.



This project gave us the chance to build our dream house.

Rolf Bruggink & Yffi van de Berg
designer and architect

