



## SOCIAL INNOVATION FOR ACTIVE INCLUSION

# ROTTERDAM – SOCIAL GREENING: JOB CREATION AND SOCIAL COHESION THROUGH SMART INVESTMENT



Rotterdam's *Community Gardens* project is an innovative example of social greening: smart investment is making it possible to create urban green spaces in deprived neighbourhoods, both to provide jobs and to increase social cohesion.

Like many former industrial cities and ports in Europe, Rotterdam is evolving into a service-based economy. Many people who worked in traditional industries are now long-term unemployed. In addition, they live in deprived areas of the city and experience social isolation. They know relatively few people in the area, and only mix with others of a similar age and background.

Rotterdam has benefited from many social greening initiatives, both by the public sector and the private sector. Until now, these have mainly been developed to improve the environment, create new spaces for leisure, and reduce food miles by growing vegetables. However, over the past few years, the city has recognised that social greening can deliver additional social benefits.

With a need to cut unemployment and social isolation in deprived areas, Rotterdam's Social Affairs and Employment Department decided to use active inclusion funding to establish the Community Gardens project. This involves working with the local community to create two green spaces in two of the most deprived neighbourhoods in Rotterdam: Schiemond and Oudeland.

One of the key requirements of the active inclusion funding is to create jobs. So the project has been designed to provide local unemployed people with paid work and skills training: in gardening, agriculture and maintenance.

At the same time, the project aims to increase local social cohesion. So people living in the area have been actively invited to have a say in what they would like in the gardens (e.g. a stage for performances and vegetable plots), through discussions and workshops, and also to help maintain and manage the gardens.

Cities for Active Inclusion is a dynamic network of nine European cities – Birmingham, Bologna, Brno, Copenhagen, Krakow, Lille Métropole - Roubaix, Rotterdam, Sofia and Stockholm – each with a local authority observatory (LAO) within its administration. Their aim is to share information, promote mutual learning and carry out research on the implementation of active inclusion strategies at the local level.

The observatories are co-ordinated by EURO CITIES, the network of major cities in Europe, and supported by a partnership between the European Commission (DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion) and EURO CITIES.



## Innovation

Rotterdam's Community Gardens project benefits from several key innovations:

- smart investment is the most innovative element of the project: the use of active inclusion funds from Rotterdam's Social Affairs and Employment Department not only to improve social inclusion by creating jobs, but also to improve social cohesion;
- extending the policy arena of the Social Affairs and Employment Department beyond its traditional role is further innovation: its focus has been extended to urban greening, use of public space, health issues and the environment, which points to a new way of implementing the city's policies;
- using a new bottom-up approach is also a relatively new departure, to ensure local people are involved in the decision-making process right from the start: this creates new partnerships between citizens and the municipality, new ways of planning, and new types of user involvement.

## Success

The project is still at an early stage. Actual outcomes will be evaluated during the next stages, but it is expected that the following key benefits will be achieved:

- local people who have been unemployed will be given jobs in the local service team, providing a range of services such as graffiti removal and year-round maintenance;
- social cohesion will improve as people of different ages and backgrounds in the community build stronger ties, through working together to design and maintain the gardens, and to grow fruit and vegetables to eat;
- the gardens may help people who are particularly affected by the tough economic climate to cope with their situation: through feeling less isolated, through an increased awareness of the environment, food production and healthier lifestyles, and through living in a more attractive neighbourhood.

## Dissemination and sustainability

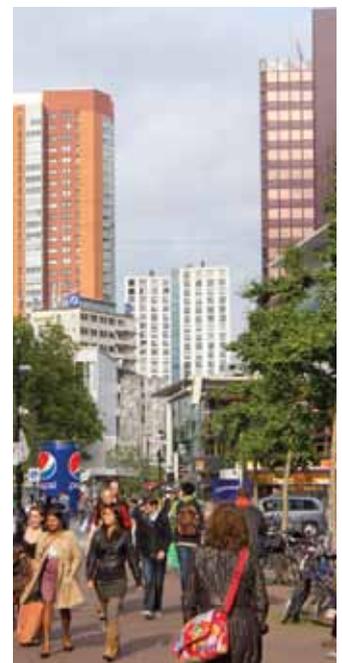
Rotterdam is continually learning from the experiences of greening projects elsewhere: locally, nationally and internationally. For example, the city has taken into consideration the experiences of projects in Germany (e.g. Göttingen), the UK (e.g. London) and the USA (e.g. Milwaukee, Detroit, New York City).

In 2009, to bring together local knowledge and ideas on greening initiatives, Rotterdam established an urban agriculture think tank. It involves representatives of all city departments, including the Social Affairs and Employment Department, and advises on the city's greening projects. Issues that are taken into account include: the environment, the quality of public space, reducing thermal heat-stress in hot weather, air quality and reducing food miles.

Once the outcomes of the Community Gardens project start to be evaluated, the project's experiences will be shared within the city's urban agriculture think tank, and with other organisations, both locally and internationally. This will help promote social greening and best practice in improving social inclusion and social cohesion.

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For more information see: <http://ec.europa.eu/progress>.



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