

URBAN II Evaluation

Project Case Study: Re-establishment of Youth
centre 'Het Klooster' (Rotterdam)



1.0 Goals

In 2002, the URBAN II project youth centre '*Het Klooster* (The Cloister) *Oude Noorden*' in Rotterdam was founded. The project focused on the re-establishment of an existing (but redundant) centre, and aimed to become a 'second home' for immigrant youth in the neighbourhood, predominantly of Moroccan origin. Its long term ambition is to compensate the shortcomings of homelife and support the social and personal development of youth. The target group are young people in the age group of 6 to 27, consisting of about 200 individuals. Young people are considered to be 'reached' when they visit the centre at least 3 times a week regularly.

These aims were in stark contrast with the baseline situation: *Het Klooster* was already an existing centre for (immigrant) youngsters, but rather than addressing broader social problems of the neighbourhood, it had evolved into a centre that became a problem in itself. Analysis showed that the centre had started to function as a drugs trading place, in which not only the youngsters but also the youth workers themselves were involved. Furthermore, youth workers were involved in acts of violence and one of them even proved to be a leader of one of the youth gangs in the neighbourhood.

In short, *Het Klooster* was not the place where anyone would send their child to – or was it?

Within Programme Priority 3: Strengthen Socio-Economic Potential, the focus was on increasing the safety of local people and reducing crime. This is exactly what this project was aiming at, and a case was built for re-establishing the youth centre into a solution rather than a problem.

2.0 Implementation

The approach to this project was highly unconventional. The basis of the project was laid with an undercover operation, implemented by a local detective organisation. This operation identified that the youth centre was actually working as a centre for drugs dealers, in which the youth workers were involved. This resulted in an evidence-based report to the police and on the basis of the problems identified, the project was defined.

The first step in the project was the identification of the key factors for successful youth work: a clear regime, professional youth workers, a programme that is of interest for youngsters and that is directed to informal education.

A coordinator was appointed and new rules were set up for the centre. The unprofessional and even criminal youth workers were ousted and replaced by strong youth workers who could maintain the new rules that were set up.

The most radical measure taken was that the youngsters needed a membership card/ID card to be able to enter the youth centre. A packaged programme directed at the development of the youngsters was then established and successfully implemented. It included blocks on theatre, music, film and discussions. The centre sees itself as an extension of the youth's formal education and is open only when the schools are closed: six days a week, at the weekends and also during school and public holidays.

However, the implementation of these measures required the overcoming of numerous hurdles, including vandalism, rioting around and directed at the renovated centre and security measures were implemented to protect the centre from further damage by those who did not support its new direction.

The implementation of this project cannot be seen in isolation. Parallel to this project, other projects (inside and outside the URBAN II programme) were run, targeting the environment, family support projects, enforcement of the social support policy, co-operation with housing corporations on the enforcement of the rules in housing estates, and the closure of pubs and cafés which were associated with drugs trading. Establishing rules in the neighbourhood in a range of areas was helpful in normalising the environment around the youth centre. A range of organisations were involved in and around this project, such as housing corporations, police, social workers and the social welfare department. The projects that influenced the environment around the youth centre were crucial for the success of the project.

This transformation went in shocks and was unavoidably accompanied by confrontations and disputes between stakeholders involved. Much pressure was put on partnerships, which were tested to the limit.

3.0 Results and Impact

The **results** of the project are substantial and can be summarised as follows:

- The ***situation within and around the youth centre has normalised***. The centre and its surroundings were 'conquered' by the neighbourhood and no longer seen as a liability or as a place to be avoided;
- The ***centre has started to function as a youth centre***. It developed over time from a liability to an asset; Nowadays the centre offers various activities that young people can develop as hobbies and interests. The emphasis is put on music, theatre, film and discussion groups and youngsters can learn, develop and express themselves in an informal but controlled way.
- ***Youngsters do actively participate*** in the programmes, which supports their personal as well as the broader community development.

The following **impacts** of the project can be identified:

- **Troubles with youngsters have diminished considerably**; at the individual level, the risk of youth derailing and ending up in criminal activity has been steeply reduced, with immense multiplier effects on their families, neighbourhoods and society as a whole;
- The project contributed significantly to the **reduction of crime** in the neighbourhood Oude Noorden as a whole; notably the increase in the safety index from 3.1 (2002) to 5.1 (2003) in one year, and coinciding with the implementation of this project can be considered remarkable. The case study URBAN II Rotterdam provides evidence for substantial improvements in the safety index over the years, and this project has clearly been an important element in the overall success.

Safety index by neighbourhood and over time

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Rotterdam	5,6	5,6	6,2	6,6	6,9	7,2	7,3	7,2
Noord	5,2	4,8	5,8	5,9	6,5	6,3	7,1	6,9
Oude Noorden	3,0	3,1	5,1	4,0	5,2	5,3	6,0	5,2
Agniesebuurt	4,9	5,0	5,3	4,9	5,8	5,3	6,0	6,0
Liskwartier	6,0	5,8	6,7	6,9	7,7	7,5	7,7	8,1

Legend:

- Problematic neighbourhood 3,9 - 5,0
- Threatened neighbourhood 5,0 - 6,0
- Neighbourhood in need for attention 6,0 - 7,1
- Safe neighbourhood $\geq 7,1$

Source: Veiligheidsmonitor 2003, 2005 and 2009, Municipality of Rotterdam

- Reduction in **school drop-out rates**; these drop-out rates reduced over time as well, and was partially related to the fact that the youth centre was closed during school hours;
- Improvements in the **perception of the area**; this part of the neighbourhood is no longer seen as a 'no go' area, with longer term positive impacts on the willingness of residents to stay, visitors to visit, and investors to invest.

4.0 Factors of success

The success factors behind this project can be summarised as follows:

- **Approach based on thorough analysis, tackling the real problems;** rather than approaching the problem from the fringe, a bold choice was made to tackle the problems head-on;
- **Strong and professional staff involved in the youth centre;** the centre clearly required high calibre professionals that were able to develop and enforce rules of behaviour, and remain firm in the light of fierce opposition. The introduction of the ID Membership cards was a clear example of such rules;
- **Surrounding projects;** This project was part of a broader strategy and campaign to bring safety back to the neighbourhood; the various projects brought about synergies and spill-overs that were essential for changing the behaviour of the targeted youngsters;
- **Strong political support;** The broad political support for the project was embodied by the visits of the mayor, which made sure that the project became iconic in nature; it also placed more pressures on the project and its actors – failure was no longer an option.

Despite these successes, there are a few comments to be made regarding transferability and sustainability of the good practice.

- **Transferability:** The immigrant group that was targeted within this project, youth of Moroccan origin, had specific problems which differ from problems found in other ethnic groups, even within Rotterdam.
- **Sustainability:** the costs of running the centre are substantial, especially due to the high personnel costs related to the need to rely on professionals. URBAN II funding came to an end in 2004, and subsequently a political row started about the longer term funding of the project. Although the centre still works today on the basis of local funding, this remains a longer-term risk for the project.