O1 – Pilot – participative adaptation solutions in city district with social housing & small enterprise

I. Co-create & realise an integrated area design for Agniesebuurt, combining multiple small-scale, innovative adaptation measures in social housing and company buildings (e.g. vertical green, blue roofs) and public spaces (e.g. greening) by local community actors

During the process of sewer replacement and implementation of climate adaptive measures into the Agniesebuurt public space, led by HHSK and the Municipality of Rotterdam, the plan was forced to a halt. The stakeholders affected had many concerns and questions, and this resulted in insufficient support for the plan as it stood. The Municipality of Rotterdam, the 'Noord' area commission, HHSK, Havensteder and residents agreed to abandon the existing plan and to instead introduce a proposal for a new participative process, facilitated by an independent participation consultancy, Volq.
Initially, a neighbourhood community was set up, who worked together on an integrated plan for the outdoor space. An important issue in the Agniesebuurt was how to deal with the negative impacts of climate change, such as heat, water management issues and drought. The project team wanted to look, with the stakeholders, for possible underground and aboveground solutions to counteract these negative effects of climate change and explore potential opportunities. In order to create a water management plan, they set up a 'water expertise panel'. This was necessary because water management is a specialist topic with which not everybody from the community can or even wants to engage. Experts and representatives from the different stakeholder groups had places on the panel. Their task was to come up with a package of solutions which fulfilled the shared ambition of the community.

Process

The expert table needed ten meetings to develop their advice for the technical design of the water management solutions. During the first few meetings, the panel had to establish their role, responsibility and mandate and bring everyone up to the same level of knowledge on the key issues. This process took time and was somewhat labour intensive.
After that, the Water Expertise Panel mapped the existing situation and projected expected climate change on to it. Then they collectively suggested and discussed solutions which could be possible within the boundaries of the established criteria and what would be technically feasible. To develop scenarios they first looked for all possible (out of the box) solutions for waste water, stormwater, ground water and surface water. Three scenarios were then compiled from the different elements for every solution, to create a complete water system. They chose to create three scenarios which each included different measures and solutions. The three scenarios were then scored against the various criteria. By combining elements from the different scenarios, a preferred solution as developed, which was both technically feasible and met the criteria of the various stakeholders. This scenario was then handed to the neighbourhood community as advice on how the water elements of the technical design of the Agniesebuurt should look in their (expert) opinion.

The neighbourhood community

The first step in this new participation process was to speak to residents and home owners in the neighbourhood about their interests and concerns for the project. From this, the "Agniesebuurt neighbourhood community" was established, which was central to the participative process. The community exists online (through a website, newsletters and via social media) and offline (through a walk-in consultation hour, information meetings, etc.). As a result, as many residents as possible can contribute according to their own level of expertise and time available.
The first meeting of the neighbourhood community was based around sharing knowledge. All stakeholders were able to gain relevant knowledge about water, sewer systems and climate adaptation. Following this, a group of participants brainstormed options for the follow-up process. Volq presented the outcomes of this brainstorm in a participation plan. It was important that experts on sewerage systems, geohydrology, climate adaptation, construction and building foundations, as well as representatives from the neighbourhood, were present on the panel. In addition, an independent expert, the supervisor, joined to reflect and challenge during discussion, and to bring experience, examples and solutions for inspiration or reference.

Lessons learned

In practice, it proved difficult to reach and involve all stakeholders. The expectation in advance was that most residents would not be interested, be busy with other matters and/or believe the success of the scheme to be primarily a responsibility for the municipality and the water authority. Fortunately however, enough active residents were involved to make the process worthwhile. An important lesson learned by the project team was not to organize a plenary residents' evening at the start of such a complex climate adaptation project. It is better to work in advance with existing networks for concerned residents and 'local heroes'. These individual conversations can paint a valuable picture of interests and points of attention before holding a wider public meeting. They can also then play a role as 'ambassadors' in the continuation of the project.
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