

New | Arrival Towns | Cities

Lab 5 | Nissewaard Reshaping government-citizen relations



New developments from the years 1990s and 2000s. Ph. Fiona Robinson

The present report is a documentation of the insights related to New Towns and migration from the two-day New Town Lab in Spijkenisse and it should be read within that context. The lab was the fifth of five events as part of the two-year project “New Towns Arrival Cities”, led by the Municipality of Nissewaard and coordinated by INTI, the International New Town Institute. European New Towns, built by the welfare state to accommodate growing urban populations, all share a social democratic background and planned nature; today, they all face similar challenges as they struggle to adapt to rapidly growing and diversifying populations. The New Towns Arrival Cities project, funded by the European Union as part of its Europe for Citizens Programme, is a platform for knowledge exchange between six European New Towns and three research institutions on the topic of migration. It consists of five two-day “New Town Lab” events in five partner cities: Milton Keynes, UK (November 22-23, 2017), Sabaudia, Italy (May 16-17, 2018), Grand Paris Sud, France (October 17-18 2018), Vällingby, Sweden (December 12-13, 2018) and Nissewaard, The Netherlands (February 20-21-22, 2019).

The five chapters of the report reflect the main topics addressed in each of the project’s five New Towns Labs, with the aim of establishing a structure that would make the results of the five labs relevant to the other partner cities and easily comparable. Instead of offering definitive conclusions, the report presents the main challenges, insights, observations and questions that came out of the presentations and discussions, with the intention of providing a base for further investigation.

New Towns Arrival Cities project website:
<http://www.newtowninstitute.org/spip.php?rubrique149>

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Spijkensisse. A historical introduction¹

History of a peculiar urban development

Spijkensisse is situated southwest of Rotterdam in the Rhine-Meuse delta. Since 2015 the New Town is part of the municipality of Nissewaard. The municipality has a population of 85.000 inhabitants, of which about 73.000 live in Spijkensisse.

Founded as an agricultural and fishing community along an inlet of the Old Meuse (Oude Maas), after the second World War the village had a modest scale of about 3.000 inhabitants. It is only during the years 1960s that Spijkensisse's urban growth gained momentum in relation to the municipality's decision to facilitate the westward expansion of the port of Rotterdam.

Part after part, neighbourhood after neighbourhood, the 'Spikecity' we know today was built through different additions. The districts of Hoogwerf, Schiekamp and Groenewoud respectively to the North and South of the old village, were built **in the 1960s** to respond to the pressing housing crisis of Rotterdam and the westward expansion of the city harbour which had become a new strategic hub of petrochemical industry also in relation to the 1956 Suez crisis and the conflict in the Middle East, which had consequences for the Netherlands' supply of oil. At that time, workers from all over the Netherlands moved to the region which, combined with the peak of the post-war baby boom and the existing housing stock in dire need of maintenance, translated into a housing crisis of considerable dimensions.



The village of Spijkensisse in 1953
Source: Municipality of Nissewaard

¹- This text is a free adaptation of the text presentation of Raymond van der Sluis, Municipality Nissewaard.

Constructions started in 1958 with large scale residential developments like Schiekamp and Hoogwerf. One of the sources of inspiration for these projects were the principles formulated by the modernist architecture movement, as elaborated by the members of the International Congresses of Modern Architecture, or C.I.A.M. The plans were intended to meet the multiple requirements set by living, working, leisure and traffic. Top-down planned communities following the common model of the western European New Towns, characterised by parallel rows of flats (mix of affordable single-family units and low-rise blocks of flats), organised in a grid by perpendicular residential roads and centralised neighbourhood facilities, including schools and local shopping centres. Standard homes were comfortable for that time, with a wall-to-wall living room, separate bedrooms for the children, an efficient kitchen and a bathroom with a shower or mini-bath. The units had their own garden or balcony and were surrounded by greenery. The prevailing idea was that the new neighbourhoods had to be concentrically positioned around the actual town centre, as a kind of self-contained residential districts.

In 1962, construction works continued along the southern end of the village, in the Groenewoud neighbourhood. This was followed by Sterrenkwartier, where building sites started in 1965.



Plan West, construction works for the new Zeeheldenbuurt (1957)
Source: municipality of Nissewaard

Here the same template was applied as in the Northern social housing blocks, as well as the same unit types. **Monotony and a uniform urban landscape** became a distinctive mark for Spijkenisse.

The late 1960s saw a major shift in people's thinking about town and country planning. Whereas previously there had been a strong focus on collectivity and large scale development, the new plans opted for the smaller and more individual scale. **The new point of departure was 'building for the neighbourhood'**, with lots of low-rise buildings, hardly any tower blocks and **active participation by local stakeholders**. In other words, **residents were given a say** in the development of their residential environment: **the democratisation of the social housing processes** was described as the 'Spijkenisse Model'¹.



Housing typologies in Spijkenisse.
Source: Municipality of Nissewaard



Housing typologies in the in the Vriesland neighbourhood, 1983.
Source: municipality of Nissewaard

However, this new approach led to spatial confusion and ineffective orientation at the neighbourhood and district level. The neighbourhoods De Hoek and De Akkers are clear examples of these new ideas.



Pedestrian and bicycle paths cross the neighbourhoods built during the 70s and design friendly and safe urban spaces. Ph. Nick Tameris



¹ - Text presentation by Raymond van der Sluis, Municipality Nissewaard.

The Spijkenisse model has been defined by the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency (PBL) In the framework of the 2012 '*Nieuwe Steden in de Randstad*' Rapport <https://www.pbl.nl/publicaties/2012/nieuwe-steden-in-de-randstad>

The conventional housing units of the previous decade didn't respond to the new ideals "the representatives of late 1960s counterculture had no interest in the middle-class lifestyle" explains Raymond. In response, architects of the 1970s designed neighbourhoods for pedestrians and children playing in the public squares, rather than traffic lanes. Waterland is a wonderful example of this new principles, offering zones with limited access to cars, and bike paths drawing the regular grid layout for streets and squares. These areas are called 'cauliflower neighbourhoods' "places where you might get lost and won't find your way out easily..."

Today's Waterland is still a great place to live, with an abundance of green space. Although here as well, some streets are in a state of decay.

In 1977 the municipality accepted the national status of *groeikern* (growth town) with an increased task to provide housing. A new top-down planning phase was starting. The national government was the leading party in this operation. The Third National Policy Document on Spatial Planning (*Derde Nota Ruimtelijke Ordening*) defined stricter regulations for the growth of the Dutch towns and villages. Several New Towns were designated to rehouse the excess population of the central cities, such as Rotterdam.

The national government's decision to include Spijkenisse was motivated by a number of different considerations, among which the fact that the town had been growing at a fast pace for years, so obviously had a lot of experience with expansion. As a New Town, Spijkenisse had to build 16.500 new homes within a period of fifteen years. The state provided funding to extend the Rotterdam subway line to Spijkenisse, under the condition that the largest part of the housing stock would be realized within a certain proximity to the metro stations. The planning concept behind the new housing developments was the creation of single-family homes with private gardens, which led to the creation of low rise, compact and high density neighbourhoods. High rise buildings were out of the question. Owner-occupied and social rental dwellings were fully mixed. The dwellings were for the largest part occupied by home seekers from Rotterdam, Schiedam and Vlaardingen. Mainly the middle-income families, often employed in the harbour, that move to Spijkenisse. In the 1980s the population grew to almost 70.000 inhabitants.

The goal set by the national government was to build 16.500 new homes within a time span of fifteen years. Only in the period between 1976-1981, Spijkenisse built 7,000 new homes.

By 1981, Spijkenisse was the fastest-growing town in the Netherlands. And by the time Spijkenisse's three new subway stations opened for business, two completely new neighbourhoods had been constructed: De Akkers and Vriesland, followed by the neighbourhood of Vogelenzang in 1987.

The neighbourhoods of the 1980s show a great variety in terms of architectural forms and design solutions to combine the requests and wishes of the new inhabitants **with the need to build densely and within a limited space:** 85% of the home-seekers wished for a single-family home. The imperative was to realise as many homes as possible in the direct vicinity of the subway stations. However, by using every last square metre of the available area and keeping the gardens as small as possible, planners were able to strike a decent balance between residents' wishes and the Ministry's demands. In some cases, building density was as high as 70 homes per hectare. **The houses were smaller than the ones built in the 1970s.** On the one hand this had to do with the Ministry's requirements, on the other with the need to minimise the costs. Also, for this reason, houses have relatively small windows, to save on heating expenses: climate adaptation *avant-la-lettre*.

In order to achieve the required building density, the plans for the neighbourhood De Akkers included a lot of multi-storey buildings, but none of the buildings exceeds four storeys. By now, everyone agrees that this building density is too high, since it affects the neighbourhood management and the residents' quality of life negatively.

In the early 1980s, planners aimed to create a more attractive and varied residential environment. They continued along these lines in the 1990s and beyond. This variety, combined with a somewhat unclear street pattern and poor accessibility, has given the neighbourhoods from this period a somewhat obscure character. Combined with increased crime, vandalism and drugs, some of the neighbourhoods of this period are labelled for their social issues.



Housing developments built during the 80s: small apartments and spaces densely built.

Ph. Viviana Rubbo

The 21st century marks another milestone for the recent history of Spijkenisse's development. After decades of growth and housing production, the focus is now shifting from quantity to quality and the municipality is determined to improve the anonymous image of the town. Large investments have been made for the revitalization of the town. Those include the upgrading of the New Town centre and new cultural facilities driving the regeneration of some of the older neighbourhoods and finally the construction of more expensive housing stocks. All this, according to the municipal voice, is valued as necessary to stay attractive for the middle-class residents.

Spijkenisse urban development has changed its course and new neighbourhoods have been created along the river Oude Maas: Maaswijk and Schenkel. Here, the City Council's² new target is to realise a varied mix of homes – social rentals for low-income households as well as for middle and high incomes up to even luxurious townhouses. The project developments started in 2000 but were interrupted by the crisis in 2008. These neighbourhoods have been designed in a rational way, combining a clear main structure with close attention to outdoor public areas in the urban environment. These areas were relatively expensive for Spijkenisse in those years, with detached homes and large semi-detached homes.

The plans for De Schenkel were not developed with the participation model; as a reaction to the small-scale approach they proposed a radically different path: avenues, canals, open spaces and a distinctive, historicist architectural style.

The present and future plans are represented by the **Elementen neighbourhood**. The land for this project was purchased by the municipality from a private landlord for 40-plus million euros “so the city probably won't be turning a huge profit from that” says Raymond, “but it's important for other reasons, since it will be connecting Spijkenisse with the river again”. Given the geographic location and the close proximity of the dike, the high-rise plans had to be developed in close consultation with Rijkswaterstaat (The national agency for water management). The new neighbourhood brings together tower blocks and low-rise developments of which the architecture takes inspiration from the historical buildings of the port. It offers urban facilities and healthcare services on the towers' ground levels and green areas which extend towards the water.

These new developments are the result of the first masterplan of 1995, meant to attract the middle-class and high-income groups to that area, mainly from Spijkenisse itself. However, they are presently occupied for more than a 50% by people coming from outside the city. This raises questions about social and cultural connections with the existing town and demographic composition and about accessibility and mobility networks to and from the town centre.

Economic and socio-demographic changes. Spijkenisse repositions itself in the Rotterdam region

New Towns in the Netherlands have been developed to relieve the pressure on the large cities and to make sure that suburbanisation would develop in a structural manner. Presently these large, historical cities have become more appealing and more popular again. Suburbanization is no longer always self-evident. Through the years, the regional development has changed the territorial organisation and the relation between Rotterdam and its suburban poles. The region is more urbanized, transport systems have been extended and the economic structure transformed.

2 - Since 2015 Spijkenisse is part of the new Municipality of Nissewaard.

Within this new setting, new challenges for Nissewaard emerge. Throughout the years, most of the housing provision in the city was especially meant to accommodate the workers of the port (with neighbourhoods like the Akkers where the social housing estate reaches the 70%).

Lately, as a consequence of the economic turmoil, that segment of the population is not there anymore and Nissewaard finds itself with a large amount of cheap housing which becomes attractive for people who cannot afford Rotterdam or are not allowed to live in the main city because of the Rotterdam Act. That is a major challenge for the city who wants to favour the social mix and also attract new promising residents who make the choice to live in Nissewaard because of the new amenities and services the city can offer today.

As a result, the town has to confront itself with a number of questions : What is the definition of its new role in relation to the mother city Rotterdam? In what way does the city want to position herself? What is her unique selling point?

The revitalisation of the town centre

The town centre of Spijkenisse was constructed during the early 1980s but after a few decades it no longer met with the standards and needs of the visitors. Its architecture and amenities became unattractive and were thought to be lacking a nice and welcoming atmosphere. Facilities were meant to serve a much smaller population.

During recent years, a lot of investments have been made in the town centre. It has been transformed into the 'living room' of the town. The area for shopping, hotels, bars and restaurants has been expanded, building façades and pavements were renewed, and a new theatre and a new library were built. These both have a distinctive architecture and were designed by top-class architects. At the same time, retail is going through a rough time as a consequence of the increased popularity of the online shopping. Together with real estate owners and shopkeepers, the town has tried to increase the quality of the environment. Initiated by the municipality, a so-called 'business investment zone' was set up, in which every owner and every user of the centre pays an extra tax, serving collective goals. This idea comes from the owners and the users of the area who have taken this decision via popular vote.



The urban regeneration of the inner-city centre (1990s) on the left and the North-east access to the commercial city center with the new Theater De Stoep realized by the Architectural Office UNStudio. Ph. Viviana Rubbo



The Boekenberg, the city public library designed by architectural office MVRDV
Source: municipality of Nissewaard

The Questions of the Lab

The fifth and last New Town lab of the New Towns Arrival Cities programme was held in Spijkenisse on Feb 20-21 2019. Organized by the Municipality of Nissewaard, the focus of the debate was 'Reshaping government-citizens relations'.

This lab had a specific focus on the neighbourhood de Hoek which was the product of the city's urban developments of the 1980s. The public administration, together with the housing association De Leeuw van Putten, is exploring new ways to steer a process of integrated and inclusive socio-economic and physical renewal, working closer with citizens and motivating new forms of engagement. The main question of the City Lab was "How can we make our neighbourhoods better places to live through a renewed cooperation between government and citizens?".

The lab brought together local actors, the young generation of citizens, residents, international delegates and experts (among them Helena Casanova, Maarten de Booij, Carine van der Horst and Femke Kaulingfreks), with the aim to seek ideas for policy tools and measures.

1. Heritage & Culture

The city as an open-air museum: the history of architecture and urban planning since the post-war period to the present time

Challenges

The small village of farmers and fishermen has abruptly changed its face in the blink of an eye. In the aftermath of the second world war, combined with the peak of the baby boom, the years 1960s have turned the small village into a New Town. From then on, the construction of Spijkenisse has continued decade after decade. Without an all-encompassing masterplan, urban growth has gone through different phases dictated by policy frameworks, ambitions and goals which differed from time to time. The history of this peculiar development is clearly visible when exploring the city as we did during the first tour day guided by Raymond van der Sluis, Head of the Urban Management department in the Municipality of Nissewaard. Understanding and reading the history of the town, despite its young age, can help to foster the sense of belonging to the place, as we widely discussed in Vallingby, Sabaudia, Grand Paris Sud and in Milton Keynes. It could also contribute to raise the interest and the participation of the citizens in envisioning a new transformation phase based on co-creation and co-planning. This could be a good start to make people feel at home and become active players of a future urban project.

Walking through the city today one can read the history of the town's urban developments. Every decade is recognizable by its own spatial and architectural characteristics. Like a journey across the time, the city is indeed an open-air museum. The appreciation for the older (1960s and 1970s) buildings is still an acquired taste in Spijkenisse: not many people see the value of the architecture from the typical New Town-era or find it interesting. To a certain extent this building period defines the identity of Spijkenisse, but the city does not want to be associated with it. Can there be a renewed positive identification with the housing and architecture of the period of the 1970s?

In addition, contrary to the top-down planning applied in the post-war cities of new foundation, present trends show new models emerging based on **self-organization and participation**: what's the limit and how can you combine top-down planning and decision-making processes with bottom up ideas and projects?

Questions for further discussion:

- How can (the process of creating) architecture and urban planning contribute to make people feel at home and strengthen the sense of belonging to a place?

2. Public Space

Rediscover collective spaces as a strength and a value for the community

Challenges

Principles behind the construction of the expansions of the years 1970s and 1980s gave priority to the pedestrian and bicycle roads. Neighbourhoods were connected by green spaces and parks. Most of the social houses built in the neighbourhood De Hoek date back to those years. The typical houses of that time look uniform, with the same orientation and storages located on the front facing pedestrian streets where one can hardly see children playing anymore and squares and public spaces are often turned into parking lots or reduced in space by fences and wooden walls “protecting the individual privacy”.

Maarten de Booij, CEO of the housing corporation De Leeuw van Putten, goes straight to the point: the Hoek was mainly built during the 1980’s according to the housing needs and wishes of that time. Apart from the dimensions and the dense configuration of the neighbourhood, these types of houses do not seem suitable for today’s family composition. Also because of the need to reduce the construction costs, the quality of these houses is quite low, and the housing association knows it needs to be prepared for renovation works in the near future.

Things have changed in the neighbourhood: *“A lot of the supermarkets, stores and entrepreneurs have left De Hoek. This makes spontaneous interaction between inhabitants scarce. A lot of squares that were in use as playgrounds have been transformed into parking spots. There is a lot of critique on youngsters, because they cause nuisance in the neighbourhood. Unfortunately, they do not have places indoors where they can meet”* (Robin, a young adult grown up in De Hoek).

As Maarten de Booij highlights, there is no evident problem to complain about in De Hoek at present. And that is, the real challenge today.

Houses and public spaces are not in a bad shape yet. But they know it will happen soon. And that is why the housing corporation is strengthening its cooperation with the municipality with the aim to explore new approaches to initiate a process of cooperation with the inhabitants tackling the decaying process of the built environment and of the public spaces well before the emergency point; and most of all, to do this combining bottom-up and top-down approaches, making the residents and the civil society part of the process from the very beginning. Keywords for this new ambitious programme are cooperation, trust and mutual confidence.



The neighbourhood De Hoek. Fences and wooden structures mark the space and squares are often used as parking lots. Ph. Viviana Rubbo and Stefanie Korrel

This is why there is need for strengthening the social bonds between the inhabitants of the area. *'How do you increase collaboration between inhabitants?'* is the question addressed to the international delegates attending the Lab.

On the short-medium term, the plan of De Leeuw van Putten is to keep up with maintenance on the built environment and the public space fostering the improvement of the social dimension with activities which keep the area liveable. For the long-term, a strategic perspective and big interventions should be planned. They are aware that if the status of the neighbourhood drops than its more difficult to improve the area as a whole. The combination of improvements that are not easy (read: expensive) and a soft approach (acupunctural as architect Helena Casanova says) at the same time requires a comprehensive approach at neighbourhood level. In this respect, Helena Casanova, also highlights the importance to "integrate in the project the voice of the users, together with institutional and non-institutional experts."

Public spaces are very important and starting from the analysis of how they are used from a sociological point of view, it becomes extremely relevant for the understanding of the current social dynamics. Users and residents should be placed at the centre of the project of the neighbourhood renewal process.

As a housing corporation, De Leeuw van Putten is dealing with three main dilemmas:

A planning dilemma: the need to think about the future when there is no evident problem

A dilemma of scale: how to engage people in a vision which requires to look at the neighbourhood level and even beyond (city, region): a change of scale is needed.

A communication dilemma: *how to inform and talk to people without making them afraid that the neighbourhood will disappear (does it mean my house will be demolished? When do you do that? Why? Where should I go? How will this neighbourhood change?)*

Tensions might raise. So, the question is *'how to involve people in the overall vision with the aim to create innovation?'*

The goal is to give another image of the neighbourhood, starting from asking the citizens: *"What do you really want today? What are your aspirations?"*



(above) Housing typologies in Condorhoek, 1970s-80s
Source: Housing Corporation De Leeuw van Putten

(below) Kiekendiefhoek
Source: Housing Corporation De Leeuw van Putten



In terms of facilities and collective spaces, **the school De Vuurvogel has become an important meeting point in the neighbourhood**. As the school principal Arnold Eijgelsheim explains “**the school connects the community**: the youth with the elderly. It is important to think big and start small, this will create dedication and loyalty to the place.”

Questions for further discussion

- *How to involve people in the overall vision of transformation of a neighbourhood with the aim to create innovation?*

- *How do you increase collaboration with and between inhabitants?*

3. Adapting the welfare state model Cities in transition - the old urban patterns have become outdated and new socio-economic and structural conditions challenge the contemporary city.

Challenges

Social housing has been one of the main features of the housing provision in Spijkensisse. As Raymond van der Sluis mentioned during the explorative tour of the town, the city offered a lot of rentals; homes for regular households consisting of Mum, Dad and two kids. All were geared towards the same target groups, with a median income at most. If people started earning more – you could make a good living working in shifts in the port or the chemical sector – the town didn't really offer any options to move up the housing ladder. And the same applied to senior citizens and young people.

Due to the fact that Spijkensisse was built in one go and during a very short time span, the built environment is getting old all at once. This is a characteristic Spijkensisse shares with all the other New Towns. In order to prevent a massive deterioration, timely investments are necessary. Some of the oldest parts of the housing in the town have already been demolished by the housing associations and have been replaced by something new. During the period of the welfare state, amenities and urban services received a lot of architectural attention. Many of these buildings have now become empty and share today the same fate as the political system that has produced them and also that has also changed: many of these modest shop rows have been adapted for other uses and urban facilities and shopping centres have disappeared.

After 40 years, social housing has been drastically reduced and the housing corporations usually renovate, sell or tear down the buildings. And that's what has been happening in particular in some of the Northern neighbourhoods of Spijkensisse built in the 1960s. Many of those blocks from the first expansion phase were considered outdated.

A far bigger part of the housing supply, however, is younger than that (the biggest growth of Spijkenisse took place between 1975 and 1985), and -more important- is owner-occupied. Throughout the years, that part of the housing supply has lost a lot of its attractiveness; a process that was enforced by the use of cheap materials, and planning concepts which by now are perceived as outdated. All this necessitates to rethink the quality of the living environment embracing public spaces renewal and accessibilities, improvement of community services and facilities and the refurbishment of large part of the housing stock, which also implies energy efficiency solutions.

Many dwellings need to be adapted to the current targets of sustainability. This effort also offers the chance to diversify and to improve the aesthetic of the housing supply, making it possible to break the uniformity and monotonous landscape of many neighbourhoods. This aspect is carefully taken into account by the City Council since the attractive living environment has always been one of the most important qualities of Spijkenisse.

Nissewaard today is strongly committed to renew the housing supply in order to make it future-proof. With different measures.

Only recently, a new policy concerning three decentralization acts took place in the Netherlands. Youth health care, participation and social support became the responsibility of the municipalities. It was the reason for Nissewaard to apply major changes in its own vision and methods. The basis of the idea is to change the attitude and work and act closer to the citizens instead of the top-down and distant relation which is the usual approach of the governmental system. This for instance means the introduction of integrated approaches to help inhabitants, both between municipal departments and between the municipality and health care partners. But it also means working more from inside the neighbourhoods. It is a new way of working which is called "*Thuis in de Wijk* ('At Home in the Neighbourhood').

Questions for further discussion:

- *The massive deterioration of the housing provision raises questions which include the role of the citizens in the urban project: how to work with the inhabitants and make their participation effective?*
- *What kind of approach is needed when the urban transition implies changes in the socio-economic and demographic trends?*

4. Building a positive narrative

What will be Spijkenisse in perspective?

Challenges

“In Nissewaard, we keep positioning Spijkenisse as a residential area for families. Because we are situated close, yet not attached, to the agglomeration of Rotterdam, we create a distinct profile for ourselves as a green large residential area, on the border of the Rotterdam region and the rural area of the province of Zeeland. The employment of the port of Rotterdam is just around the corner. The economic structure of the port has changed in the course of the time due to automation resulting in a decreasing demand for employees. That change continues, but at the same time, the demand for higher-skilled work-force increases due to the transformation of the port into a green industry. Nissewaard wants to be the safe haven of a world harbour. The transport connections for it are already in place. As a town we accept that our inhabitants will continue to visit the centre of Rotterdam, but we would like to encourage them to visit the town centre of Spijkenisse on a regular basis and feel at home there”.³

Many of the inhabitants in Spijkenisse have a migrant background: there is a large group of people from Suriname & The Netherlands Antilles who arrived in the early days of the city (1970s), and a more recent flow of refugees and asylum seekers which the city accommodates just like any other city in NL. They are especially Syrians and Eritreans. But also, because of the harbour, the city still attracts many European workers, mainly from Poland. Within this mix of cultures, people might feel less connected to the town (and sometimes remain closed in the own communities), but it also means that the social and cultural structures are still in development.



Some ethnic shops in the neighbourhood
De Hoek
Ph. Viviana Rubbo

³ - City' ambitions, as described by the local partners in preparation of the Lab
Source: <http://www.newtowninstitute.org/spip.php?rubrique155>

Differently from the past, this is a crucial point: there is a new generation which was born and raised in the city. This generation demands some extra attention and urges the city, as in many other European middle-aged New Towns, to critically address questions which relate to the redefinition of its own identity and its future. *What will be Spijkenisse in perspective? What is her vision for the future?*

Drawing an overview of the Dutch New Town context, Michelle Provoost, INTI Executive director, stressed the similarities and exceptional condition of Spijkenisse in comparison with other New Towns. They all share for example **a lack of urban character, a lack of housing diversity**, a car-based infrastructure, a need to make the city climate-proof, and a need to add housing for the local youth and for the **increasing aging population**. On the other hand, there are some aspects which distinguish Spijkenisse from the others. In fact, while many New Towns are confronted with **outdated centres**, Spijkenisse has made a leap ahead already a decade ago by creating a New Town centre with shopping and services facilities, investing in cultural infrastructures.

Today in Spijkenisse there are people of all kind: expats, Eastern-Europeans working in the harbour, old Vietnamese, a large Antillean and Suriname population, young second generations with migrant background, asylum seekers. When the city was founded the population was quite homogeneous. *How to include those who moved in this heroic phase when the city has started, with others who have arrived later on?*

Despite the premises, also here the pioneer spirit is evaporated say the city representatives. There is a lot of skepticism around the demographic changes and the recent arrival of newcomers. This is also emphasized by the so-called “Rotterdam law”, which prevents people with a low social status to move into areas with a low social status (=cheap housing) within the Rotterdam borders, and so they are likely to move to Spijkenisse because of the low rental prices. Political parties such as the extreme right Party for Freedom led by Geert Wilders has a strong hold in the Dutch New Towns in particular in Almere and Spijkenisse these days, tending to promote the paradoxical mutation of the New Town original idea of an open city to a fort. It is important to tackle these issues. And to do this **it is necessary to reinvent the social narrative and take the necessary steps to promote a mutual understanding** and the acceptance of the new face of the city.

Questions for further discussion:

- *Does Spijkenisse attract people from Rotterdam because there is less ethnic diversity?*
- *The pioneer spirit has gone away, what are the new founding values which make the city unique?*

5. Government-Citizen relations

Own the city. Create the conditions for a collective construction of the city

Challenges

To address this pressing and complicated topic, the host partner has chosen a geographic area in the town: De Hoek, a neighbourhood that one might call typical for Spijkenisse. It is one of the areas developed in the beginning of the 1980s, during the town's largest growth spurt. About 60% of the housing stock is social rent, 40% is owner-occupied. While the first residents were mainly young families, nowadays the neighbourhood has a more diverse population. De Hoek has a somewhat parsimonious and gritty appearance as a consequence of the economic crisis of the time. The neighbourhood has never been on top of the neighbourhood ladder, but as the years have passed, De Hoek now finds itself in the lower regions.

Housing association De Leeuw van Putten and the municipality of Nissewaard are about to develop a regeneration vision and plan for De Hoek. Both spatial-physical and socioeconomic aspects will be included. With the aim to explore the topic of the lab “How can we make our neighbourhoods better places to live through a renewed cooperation between government and citizens?” the Municipality of Nissewaard has organized a workshop gathering inhabitants, local organizations, institutional and non-institutional representatives and international delegates.

Own the city. Feel home and responsible

Within the format of the workshop, the working method adopted was that of the “the battle of the Absurd”: a creative way to stimulate thought-provoking approaches and dismantle the fixed thinking patterns for producing new ideas.



Morning workshop sessions

The morning sessions explored the theme of “*how to mobilise the neighbourhood’s residents in becoming active players and city-makers of their own town*”.

In Dutch New Towns, the first-generation residents sometimes feel less connected and less involved in the daily life of the New Town than in ‘regular’ towns. Since they are not born in the New Town, first generation residents are for instance more likely to identify themselves as Rotterdammer than as Spijkenisser. Next to that they came to live in a planned town, where the government more or less took care of every aspect of life. Without an existing civil society, social and cultural networks had to be built from the ground.

How to encourage residents in the neighbourhood to become active players in the urban project, to engage themselves with the future of their neighbourhood and - on a bigger scale - of the town? How to make them feel at home? And to promote a sense of responsibility of the collective spaces in this age of individualization and digitalization? How to find out whether citizens are satisfied about the way the local government acts?

Divided in groups, participants were encouraged to make extreme, “absurd” proposals which could help to attract the attention, facilitate the interactions among neighbours and activate the participation. Among others, ideas included: tear down something valuable (the school for instance), *get drunk, occupy a parking lot and organize a summer camp!*

Those first strange ideas then were developed into rational and potential solutions taking into account their feasibility. And they became: create something valuable for the neighbourhood, start a local wine production to create and improve the identity of the neighbourhood and organise a week-long market with free food, with activities and amenities to make the summer time enjoyable for everybody and include open houses to improve contact between inhabitants, **all giving priority to the reconquering of the public squares** in the neighbourhoods, currently used as parking lots.

Commenting on the results of this animated co-production of ideas and proposals, architect Helena Casanova observed that shock can be a good way to initiate neighbourhood participation.

Physical interaction is an important factor to take into consideration when wanting to increase neighbourhood participation. It is an important way to connect. A whatsapp-group for participation (and not only to report vandalism) can improve the social network within a neighbourhood.

More importantly, the City should think and plan ahead instead of taking sudden interventions. The construction of a long-term vision highlighting what the city wants to become, and how the neighbourhood should improve, is a vital starting point. Within the farsighted framework, in order to keep inhabitants committed and involved, it is necessary to show fast results and concrete actions. **Small steps and achievements are the key to create participation and make it valuable for the community.**

The second round of questions focused on the success factors in organizing involvement of residents by turning the question around: *what you should do to create an environment without involvement?* Answers included making too many promises, use a lot of jargon, reduce accessibility to services and information, lack of facilities and unclear map of the city’s services. Answers formulated from these first inputs then showed that from a public point of view **it is important to set priorities and make a plan before making promises.** As already mentioned, **start from small actions, this helps to gain trust** and be clear on what kind of participation you are asking of the community. Create a team of ambassadors for more direct communication, to explain plans and avoid jargon. Make the public services information accessible 24/7. Give everybody the right to act but also be innovative in terms of services and public offer. In Milton Keynes they already have an “express service” where

you have to pay extra (according to your income) to get faster attendance.

Another idea was to create the conditions to start a local economy at the neighbourhood level. This model would increase the way the community works together, by being encouraged to invest money in the neighbourhood. With a special attention to newcomers and new arrivals in the town, it would be also important to create a special department with a comprehensive knowledge of the public services, infrastructures and information about hospitality.

The Unusual Suspects

The third workshop was centred around reaching the youth of Nissewaard and involving them in the policy process of the municipality. Dutch New Towns have been developed as suburban, residential towns and therefore struggle to tie their youngsters to the towns. At the same time, young people in general are often forgotten in the development of policies and plans.

Several parties were invited: JOZ (the foundation involved with youth in Nissewaard), the youth panel of the municipality and students of a high school in Spijkenisse. The Youth parliament, as the gathering was immediately called, enthusiastically defended their points of view and were pleased to discuss the challenges they are confronted with while representing the future of the town.

The discussion was built around a series of statements that obliged the youngsters to take a position and line up as supporter or opponent.

“I want to live in Spijkenisse for the rest of my life” has divided the group, showing a wide disagreement. Feeling unsafe and the lack of opportunities were listed as reasons why one should leave the town.



Afternoon working session – the Youth Parliament

Only a small group indicated that they want to stay in Spijkenisse with the argument that the city is close to Rotterdam but provides a better environment to start a family. Reasons also included that “stay” is a form of loyalty towards the city where one grew up.

“There is nothing to do in Spijkenisse” found the disagreement of the majority of the group. Besides the presence of a lot of associations and activities, many have argued that people need to take responsibility by themselves in finding the services already in place. While some participants highlighted the need for more flexibility in terms offer and functions/amenities.

To the statement *“Everywhere in Spijkenisse, I feel safe”*, the majority of the group does not agree. What emerged is that more incidents had happened in places that used to be seen as safe spots. Interestingly, one of the participants argues that often the terms of safety and security are based on feelings instead of facts, leading to the following statement *“There are enough police officers visible in my district”* which is very much related to the individual experience.

The closing statement invited the youth to take on their future and look at themselves as the one responsible for the town *“If I were to be in charge, I would do everything differently”*.

While a large part of the group states that they are more than satisfied with their lives in Nissewaard/Spijkenisse, however, if they have to make a list, they would invest in safety and make the town more vibrant and richer in terms of opportunities. Being responsible means, as one of the youngsters explains, make sure that all the districts are treated the same way, same service offers and opportunities, and no longer difference between rich and poor neighbourhoods.

Conclusions

Spijkensisse is the typical product of the welfare state. The years 1960s and 1970s saw the creation of many amenities, youth and community centres, those emblematic places of the New Town where one could develop his own talent. Everybody was encouraged to be part of the city life by organizing their own activities (this concerned the youngsters of that time, for instance), says Michelle Provoost, INTI Executive Director.

As part of a cycle, **the contemporary town has to reinvent its dialogue with the community again**. The Lab has addressed what are the things that most alienate the people from the government, and one of the things on top of the list was “if you make a lot of promises and then you don’t deliver” it will create disappointment, lack of trust and distance.

When the government makes a promise than expectations should be met emphasizes Michelle Provoost and the result of discontent can turn people into strangers and alienated, from the government in the first place, but also from democracy as a model.

The wistful wishes from the youth parliament were very clear and call for a reflection within the government itself: how will the city start to deliver on what has been brought up? The City can have big plans, but it is important to bring the community with you and start from the small real and sound steps which can produce changes.

What has emerged clearly during the two days, is **the relevance of creating better connections between this generation of inhabitants and the city government of Spijkensisse** and create more opportunities for everybody: the youngsters, the old pioneers arrived in the early years, the new arrivals, the expats and the varied diversity which makes **the city again a laboratory of inclusion**.

Femke Kaulingfreks, analyzing the debate with the youngsters, explains that what has become very clear is that there is not ‘one thing’ that ‘the youth’ wants. There are multiple views and ideas. She liked the fact that the youngsters want to develop themselves further and have a critical look on the present condition.

In order to feel safe and at home you need to feel connected. It is in our nature to want to be a part of something, says Carine van der Horst, project manager for the project ‘*Thuis in de Wijk*’. It is important to invest and make efforts to become part of a certain group. That is where reciprocity seems to be key. The citizen is both consumer as producer of the city and its future.

Concluding this inspiring two-day event in Spijkensisse, keywords for further thinking are focused on talent development, investment in training the skills of young people, keep engaging the whole spectrum of people, including minorities and a mix of different groups. Do not only offer solutions but make the citizens involved to come up with their own projects, creating the conditions for empowerment.

Motivation seems to be the most important key to success. But how do you motivate people? is the question from Magnus Rydevik, Vällingby City-district in the City of Stockholm.

In general, the delegations see the municipality of Nissewaard as do-ers, people who act and therefore produce innovation. ‘When you are looking for citizens’ participation, do not make promises you cannot keep and make sure you can achieve short and mid-term results. And do not forget the youth, they hold the future’, was the closing remark of Marc Weerts, City manager & town clerk, Municipality of Nissewaard.

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Appendix 1

Lab Programme

DAY 1 : February 20 - Tour day

Introduction to Spijkenisse: development, context, challenges, residents

11:00 - 13:00 Delegations' arrival

13:20 - 14:00 Lunch at the Boekenberg Library

Meeting point: De Boekenberg Library, Markt 40, 3201 CZ Spijkenisse

14:00 Welcome and introduction

Welcome by Igor Bal, Alderman of the Municipality of Nissewaard

Opening by chairman Raymond van der Sluijs, Head of the urban management department, Municipality of Nissewaard

14:30 New Town Context

New Towns in the Netherlands by Michelle Provoost, director INTI

14:45 Film presentation

Short film of Nissewaard and its inhabitants with the Filmmaker Marit Geluk

15:00 - 18:00 Tours

Tour of the library with the director Victor Thissen

Walking tour in the old village by Raymond van der Sluijs, Municipality of Nissewaard

The tour of Spijkenisse by bus

18:30 Drinks & bites at windmill Nooitgedacht

18:45 Recent developments: De Elementen by Klaas Boonstra, urban designer at

Municipality of Nissewaard

20:00 Dinner at apartment tower Rokade by the Oude Maas

22:00 Return to the hotel

Appendix 1

Lab Programme

DAY 2: February 21 - Seminar day

With international representatives, local professionals, national experts and residents

07:00 Breakfast at the hotel

08:30 Walk or e-shuttle ride (upon request) to the elementary school De Vuurvogel in De Hoek neighbourhood

09:05 Opening of the seminar day by chairman, town clerk Marc Weerts

09:15 *Workshop 1: De Hoek Neighbourhood development*

with the participation of the experts:

> Maarten de Booij, CEO, housing association De Leeuw van Putten

> Helena Casanova, architect, urban designer and landscape architect, Casanova + Hernandez

> Elisabeth Boersma, architect and urban strategist, planB

10:45 Guided walking tour

Group 1: guided by Albert Meijer, urban designer involved in the development of Spijkenisse in the 1980s

Group 2 guided by residents of De Hoek

11:30 *Workshop 2: Sense of place and involvement with neighbourhood and town*

with the participation of the experts:

> Carien van der Horst, programme manager social development, Nissewaard municipality

13:00 Lunch at neighbourhood centre De Hoek

13:45 Departure for town hall Nissewaard

14:00 *Workshop 3: Understanding youngster as unusual suspects*

with the participation of the experts:

> Femke Kaulingfreks, political philosopher, anthropologist, pedagogue and lecturer at InHolland university of applied sciences

15:30 Coffee break

15:45 Conclusions by Marc Weerts

16:30 Drinks and bites

Short free time in the town centre

Delegates are invited to meet at the harbour at 17:45 for the boat tour.

18:00 Boat tour of Rotterdam and the port of Rotterdam

Dinner is included

22:00 Return to the hotel

Day 3 - February 22

Evaluation of the New Towns Arrival Cities project

07:00 Breakfast at the hotel

08:30 Departure for Nissewaard Town Hall

08:45 *Evaluation of New Towns, Arrival Cities project*

11:30 Light lunch at Town Hall Nissewaard

12:30 Departure of the delegations

Appendix 2

Speakers' biographies



Michelle Provoost (Director of the International New Town Institute)

Dr. Michelle Provoost is an architectural historian specialised in urban planning history, postwar architecture and contemporary urban development. She co-founded the office of Crimson Architectural Historians in 1994, and has been the Director of the International New Town Institute (INTI) in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, since 2008. Under her direction, INTI has grown into an internationally known center for education and research relating to New Towns.

Dr. Provoost is the head editor of the INTI publications. She teaches at various universities in the Netherlands and abroad and continues to be in great demand as a public speaker. She lectures regularly throughout Europe, Asia, Africa and the United States, and has been involved in many municipal, national and private



Raymond van der Sluijs, Head of the urban management department, Municipality of Nissewaard.

Raymond van der Sluijs is an Experienced Head Of Department (urban management) with a demonstrated history of working in the government. Skilled in Public Sector, Management, Leadership, Economic Geography, Government, and Governance. Strong operations professional with a double academic background. He tries to connect human geography with challenging issues within the local government.



Marc Weerts City manager & town clerk, Municipality of Nissewaard.

Marc has a legal background and an origin as an attorney at law with a law firm in Rotterdam. Since 2002 he became affiliated with local government and had several jobs within the municipality of Spijkenisse and later Nissewaard. He started as legal adviser and later on switched to management positions at the legal department and the policy department. As such he has attended earlier meetings of the former European New Town Network. He has developed a special interest in local government and in particular for Nissewaard with its interesting physical and social structures as a new town. As a manager Marc was involved in the merger of the municipalities of Bernisse and Spijkenisse into the new Nissewaard.

The last four years Marc served as City manager/ town clerk at Nissewaard. The relevance of the greater Rotterdam area for Nissewaard is as elementary as it is extensive. Therefore as chairman Marc presides the gathering of the 15 city managers of the greater Rotterdam Area since 2017.



Helena Casanova, architect, urban planner and landscape architect.

Helena is Spanish. Since the year 2000 she is registered as an architect at the Dutch Architects Register. She is also a member of the Spanish Association of Landscape Architects (AEP). In 2001 she founded, together with Jesus Hernandez, Casanova + Hernandez architects, urban planners and landscape architects. The Agency has been awarded in several international competitions. In 2018 she has been guest professor at the University of Navarra, Spain. She has also been a guest at educational institutions such as the Berlage Institute, TU Delft, Lebanese American University, Chalmers School of Architecture at Gothenburg, Architecture University in Shenzhen.

She was co-founder and board member of the new European NL organization.

Appendix 2

Speakers` biographies



Carine van der Horst, “Thuis in de Wijk” Programme manager.

Drs. Carine van der Horst, MCA is an experienced change manager specialized in issues within the local government. As a child she herself grew up in a New Town, namely Nieuwegein. After her History studies she worked as an organizational consultant within the municipality of Utrecht on metropolitan issues. Today she is working as a program manager of the project “Thuis in de Wijk” (Home in the Neighborhood) for the municipality of Nissewaard.



Femke Kaulingfreks, researcher

Femke Kaulingfreks has been a lecturer in Youth and Society at the knowledge center “De Gezonde Samenleving” since March 2018. In her research work she addresses complex social issues concerning the relation youth, education and employment, being the empowerment of the youngsters a central topic of her investigation. In her study it is outlined how informal and professional assistance can come together and reinforce each other. This results in reports and methodological advices for professionals on both sectors: youth and education.



Maarten de Booi, CEO of De Leeuw van Putten

Maarten is CEO of De Leeuw van Putten, a housing association that manages around 4000 homes, shops, business spaces and social real estate in Spijkenisse. De Leeuw van Putten is primarily a social housing association. Maarten works in order to create networks and alliances with local stakeholder as an essential part of a modern social housing model.

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