

NETHERLANDS

Local development

Location

Wijk bij Duurstede

Programming period

2014 – 2020

Priority

P6 – Social inclusion & local development

Measure

M19 – LEADER/CLLD

Funding (EUR)

Total budget 244 827.50

EAFRD 60 000

National/Regional 60 000

Private/other 124 827.50

Project duration

2019 – 2022

Project promoter

Natuurlijk heel leuk v.o.f.

Contact

info@natuurlijkheelleuk.nl

Website

www.natuurlijkheelleuk.nl

A project that aims to connect people with their local environment, food production and with each other.

Summary

The project has multiple goals. It aims to connect people more intimately with nature in their living environment; with local food production and innovative methods like food forestry, as well as with each other. It is based on the main ethical standards of permaculture: to take care of people, the planet and share with others.

Through this socially inclusive project, a food forest and natural playgrounds were created. To ensure their sustainability, a maintenance group was set up by refugees who gained the opportunity to develop their skills, learn the language and make new friends while working together with local people, volunteers and people without access to the labour market.



Results

The project has developed a food forest and an edible garden of about 1.5 hectares with trees, shrubs and plants with various nutritional values.

Other quantifiable and tangible results include the:

- establishment of seven natural playgrounds;
- creation of ten more edible green strips (zones) in direct living environments;
- support provided to refugees to participate actively in society, learn Dutch traditions and language; and
- the setting up of a local green maintenance network with citizens.

Lessons & Recommendations

- ❑ This project is a good example of citizen participation and cooperation with the local government in connecting, in a positive way, people of all ages, cultures and backgrounds: helping them to get to know each other, work together and to know and support their own local environment. The approach is transferable to other areas and municipalities in the Netherlands, and at a European level.

Context

Where the river Nederrijn splits up into the river Lek and the Kromme Rijn, is where you can find the city of Wijk bij Duurstede, central Netherlands. The area has a long history which has influenced the modern city, its people and the landscape. Currently, around the city, agriculture is dominated by monoculture and fruit growing. There is a great deal of food production, however, not much of this is consumed locally.

Also, when it comes to recreation, citizens usually drive to the nearest well-known forest, without getting to know the nature on their doorstep. Local children prefer to stay indoors or are too busy to play outside. The children's playgrounds in Wijk bij Duurstede were not that attractive or exciting for creative free play outside.

The gap between food production, nature and citizens has become too wide. This leads to more pollution, less understanding of the value of green surroundings, more bricks instead of plants and less active use of the natural environment for recreation.

In this context, the municipality decided to involve its citizens more in the design and maintenance of public spaces. It wanted to stimulate them to participate in new plans or renovations of public green areas and playgrounds. This is how the idea for the project 'Naturally much fun!' was born.

The project's approach is to work carefully for nature and people according to Social Permaculture principles. These are that everything in nature is there for a reason and has its place in the circle of life. People are part of nature, so everybody can join in and share their talents and skills. The strength of the project is therefore in making connections between plants, animals and people.

Objectives

The main objectives of this project are to:

- share knowledge and experiences about nature and local food production;
- stimulate people to go out into nature for recreation and play; and
- bring together people from different cultures and backgrounds by working together to create a green environment.

Activities

The project team works together with the Municipality of Wijk bij Duurstede and three local environmental organisations to provide nature activities. This collaboration is part of a provincial project 'Groen doet

Goed' (Green does well). In addition, they work with an asylum centre through the Asylum, Migration and Immigration Fund (AMIF) project on 'Participation and language' and with a local welfare organisation for integration and participation.

At the design stage, the project team involved various fruit growers from the area by asking them to incorporate saplings of their crop/fruit trees into the green strips. They work together with youth workers and sports coaches on the playgrounds. They also collaborate with local citizens' participation projects such as 'Maintenance of public green by citizens' and 'Replace bricks for plants', the regional stimulation projects 'Green does well' and national civil society projects including the 'Civil society traineeship for high school students'. They also work with local companies on the development of the natural playgrounds.

Food forest and edible garden according to Permaculture

The project focused on creating a historic herb garden with plants from the time of the Romans and the Vikings (a link to the area's rich history) as well as plants common in the area. Two sheep and some chicken graze the grounds, and for pollination they have beehives. Food is harvested from the forest and used by local restaurants and other project activities.

The project team has refurbished a haystack barn and a stable to receive visitors and serve as a canteen for the maintenance team. A visit to the food forest and the edible garden can therefore become part of a 'package' arrangement with canoeists and guests of De Krommerijnder (a historic riverboat created by local citizens). In addition to being a recreational attraction, the garden is also an example of nature-friendly food supply.

Construct, Experience, Enjoy – incentive to play outside

The Wijk bij Duurstede municipality financed the design of the natural playgrounds – linked together in an attractive, playful and exciting way by green strips. The playgrounds and connecting strips include elements characteristic of the surrounding agricultural environment including fruit trees, berry bushes, wooden crates, crow's nests, willows etc.

To actually get children and parents out to play and have fun, the project started an educational activity on outdoor play for schools that encourages children, parents and teachers to go outside more. In addition, they started a club for children who want to go out into nature to play, discover, build, explore and above all enjoy. With this nature club, the project ensures that natural play areas and nature in the kids' direct environment are actively used. In this way, the kids are also becoming an example to their own family, school and neighbourhood.

Management and maintenance

Green spaces require maintenance and management. This also applies to the project's food forest and the natural play areas that have been created. Often, the management and maintenance can be a bottleneck. To resolve this, management and maintenance comes down to the voluntary commitment of citizens and parents.

The project can offer continuity, because it involves paid supervisors as well as a core group of people who are not part of the job market (refugees, people with disabilities) to manage and maintain these green spaces as work-related day care. The project's food forest is the learning environment for this group of people to make the nature-friendly and permaculture-based principles their own.

This permanent group of employees will then, under the guidance of 'Natuurlijk heel leuk' together with volunteers and citizens from the neighbourhood, take care of the management and maintenance of the natural play areas and the green connection strips, and help with other green initiatives in Wijk bij Duurstede and the surrounding area. The project works closely with the Wijk bij Duurstede municipality who sees it as a pilot scheme to achieve this kind of citizen participation (for future initiatives). This will entail a new management method in addition to regular maintenance.

Timeframe

Between 2019 and 2020 the project worked on the development of the food-forest and on bringing together volunteers and refugees.

In 2021 and 2022 the natural playgrounds and greenery strips will be developed with a mixed group of volunteers, refugees and citizens and activities will be started in these new green areas.

From 2022 onwards, an inclusive group of workers will take care of the maintenance of the food forest and playgrounds and of the increasing nature activities for all generations.

Main results

The project has developed a food forest and an edible garden of about 1.5 hectares with trees, shrubs and plants with various nutritional values.



Other quantifiable and tangible results include:

- the establishment of seven natural playgrounds;
- the creation of ten more edible greenery strips in direct living environments;
- the support provided to refugees to actively participate in society, learn Dutch customs and the language; and
- setting up a local green maintenance network with citizens.

Key lessons

There are other examples of refugees working in green maintenance. However, there are not many projects where a mixed group of refugees, volunteers and local citizens work together. Therefore, this project is a good positive example of citizen participation and cooperation with the local government to connect people of all ages, cultures and backgrounds so they get to know each other, work together and can know and support their own local environment. The approach is not only transferable to other areas and municipalities in the Netherlands, but also at European level.

Additional sources of information

<https://m.facebook.com/natuurlijkheelleuk/>