

CoNet newsletter May 2010

The URBACT Cohesion Network CoNet is a network of 11 cities from 11 EU countries exploring current approaches to strengthen social cohesion in neighbourhoods.

CoNet meeting in Sofia

The CoNet meeting in Sofia on 25 and 26 February 2010 had two main topics: The first day focused on **inclusion and integration** exemplified by projects in the Krasna Poliana district of the Bulgarian capital. The second day focused on **social enterprises**.

Krasna Poliana district has 65.000 inhabitants. Two thirds of the population are from the Roma community. The housing quality in some streets is clearly below Sofia's average standard. Visiting **two schools**, one which teaches mostly children from disadvantaged families from the Roma community and one which teaches a socially and culturally mixed group, made it clear that the mixed environment makes it easier for children from disadvantaged families to succeed in education.

The **Nevo Drom Cultural Center** is an association promoting Roma culture but also giving vocational training in the tailoring and hair dressing trades. There was a lively discussion on the reasons for exclusion of many people from the Roma community in Krasna Poliana. What role does discrimination in the job market play? What role does a lack of interest in education and an early age of marriage especially for girls play? There are similar discussions in other EU countries about disadvantaged groups, like some immigrant groups in Germany. Despite the differences in assessing these factors there is consensus that cities must challenge exclusion and promote equality of chances in education and employment.



A daily center for people with mental disabilities in the district of Slatina visited on the second day opened a laundry as a social enterprise to create eight jobs for the clients. Examples of social enterprises from Apeldoorn, Gijon, Liverpool and Vaulx-en-Verin were presented by CoNet partners. Thematic inputs by lead expert Prof. Dr. Rotraut Weeber are available in the document section of www.urbact.eu/conet.

CoNet meeting in Apeldoorn

The meeting in Apeldoorn, on 22 and 23 April 2010 gave participants an interesting vision about school, youth work and approaches to prevent exclusion in different fields in this city of 155.000 inhabitants. The CoNet project is located in the South neighbourhood (Apeldoorn Zuid), which has a relatively large share of socially and economically disadvantaged inhabitants in its population. The programme and investment strategy "Zuid Vooruit" (South Ahead) is running for the period 2009-2015. Its first objective is to improve the quality of life in Apeldoorn Zuid through a combined social, physical and economical approach.



Most of the projects and sites visited during the meeting are located in this neighborhood. The first venue **Dok Zuid** is a new neighbourhood center that opened last year and houses three schools, a library, a meeting room for the Neighbourhood Council, a health and care information point and a café. Next door 100 care apartments will be built by the end of 2010. Dok Zuid is a multi-functional center facilitating the life in Zuid, stimulating interaction between different groups of the population in the neighbourhood and giving attention and space for youngsters.



Youth work and related issues were presented in **the Community Center Maasstraat TWILIGHT**. This center was established more than 20 years ago and has developed experienced, original and efficient methods to create links between the youth and their neighbourhood. A youth bus provides mobile services to young people throughout Apeldoorn in different neighbourhoods. A music studio in the center gives young people the chance to record their own music. The results are also shared and

published on a special website. Sport activities outside the center, like football tournaments on "Cruyff courts", small football play grounds supported by the foundation of the Dutch football star Johan Cruyff, were also presented. TWILIGHT and youthwork in Apeldoorn educate and support young people and reduce conflicts in the neighbourhood and with police, even if the social effects of preventive measures are always difficult to measure.



The concept of "**Brede school**" (wide school or community school) was explained in the **Lugtmeijer primary school**. This school provides extra sports and arts activities for children but also training for parents. The activities and lessons offered outside the normal curriculum are organized and planned according to the needs and interests of the children and their parents. There are language, computer and parental skills lessons for parents and arts and sports activities for children. The social service provider Wisselwerk supports all 10 "Brede schools" in Apeldoorn and in each school one teacher has a few hours a week to coordinate and organize activities.

The first aim is to give all children opportunities to develop their skills and talents. The second aim is to make the school a hub and center for parents and the neighbourhood and thus strengthen social cohesion in the neighbourhood.

On bike, the favorite local mean of transport, the CoNet group cycled to **Metaalbuurt** or



Monument, a housing project of 300 houses. 120 houses were renovated and 180 are built completely new. 60 houses were demolished on the site. The original inhabitants have the option to return after the renovation. Not all of them make use of this option. This project provides quality housing for different groups of people. Some houses are sold at market conditions to "middle class" families, others are social housing for rent or housing for special groups like young handicapped adults. The aim is to create a social mix

and a stable neighbourhood in high quality modern buildings.

The project is financed and built by the housing corporation "De Goede Woning", one of the formerly public, now private, not for profit big housing corporations in Apeldoorn. The relation between "De Goede Woning" and the Municipality of Apeldoorn, was earlier described as "a marriage". Both partners are committed to the goals outlined in the masterplan "Zuid Vooruit". While the municipality provides the infrastructure and building permissions the housing corporation provides the financing and administers the buildings.

Preventing exclusion was the focus of the second day that started with a visit to **Felua-group**. A core staff of 100 people offers a broad variety of guided work (production and services) for 1500 disadvantaged people on the job market. The principle is: « *we are committed to people's abilities, not to their disabilities* ». In the Felua halls simpler tasks, like bundling towels and very complex tasks like assembling machines to sort eggs are performed. About half of the employees are already working outside the Felua premises for commercial companies. Felua's ultimate aim is to qualify and motivate its work force for direct employment outside of this protected environment.





The **Avondzon (Evening sun) center** is an example of a community-based living and care district for elderly, infirm and people in need of care. The priority of the center is to maintain as long as possible the clients independence in their own accommodation, having still an immediate access to care, medical help or leisure services, when necessary. This practice fits in well with the wishes of the elderly themselves.

The center is an example of cooperation between different actors. The housing corporation De Goede Woning, the social service provider Wisselwerk and smaller associations work together. The residents choir created the CoNet group with traditional Dutch folk songs.



The last project visited has been **Activerium**, Apeldoorn's central job center, where national and local agencies are working hand in hand to help unemployed people to find a job. A new method is the "day one approach", which assures that at the end of the first day the client comes to the Activerium there will be a roadmap or plan towards work or training. The client manager is given as much time as necessary to attempt this objective. Benefit payments are taken care of by the agencies so the unemployed

person can entirely and only focus on work issues. The client only has to provide a proof of identity but most of the data needed for benefit payments is generated from existing data pools. Clients are generally trusted and only in a few cases there are checks whether benefit claims are illegitimate. The focus of time and thought of the client should be on finding a job not on worries about benefit payments.

The whole Friday afternoon has finally been dedicated to discussion about what the group has learned during this meeting. The input of lead expert Prof. Dr. Rotraut Weeber, about education and youth work is available in the document section of www.urbact.eu/conet. The discussion focused on the questions how youth work can strengthen young people against the pressure of the consumer society and individualization and to what extent youth work should make young people politically active.



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