

## GEBROOKERBOS, Heerlen



Main theme	Capacity building/ Co-production / Empowerment
Year	2016 - ongoing
Budget	€1,3 mln.
Initiator	Gebrookerbos is a network of citizens' initiatives and is supported by the 'Open University', Neimed (Limburgs Knowledge node for demographic thinking) and the municipality of Heerlen.
Summary of the project	<p>In the past, mining was part of the landscape, along with streams and beautiful castles. When that mining collapsed, there were also holes in the identity of Heerlen, particular in Heerlen Noord. There are many open or empty spaces in the landscape: green areas along streams, old mining areas, quarries, business parks waiting for companies or an empty place where a school or church was previously demolished because of the population decline.</p> <p>Instead of considering these places as "lost", the municipality saw a potential for the quality and vitality of the neighborhood. A bottom-up approach has been organized to involve those interested in these places, to stimulate ownership and the organizational capacity of citizens, and to change the relationship between local authorities and inhabitants. From 2016 until now there are over 50 initiatives in North Heerlen, from which 16 have been realized, 9 are in progress, 15 are not continued or are realized elsewhere and 17 initiatives are in idea formation. The initiatives vary from urban farm, to a bed and breakfast (tourism and recreation), to a life course forest (nature).</p> <p>In parallel, in May 2016, the study/research 'Gebrookerbos Method' by Neimed (Limburg's knowledge hub for demographic thinking) was launched for a period of five years. The aim of this research is to gain insight into the portability and effectiveness of 'Gebrookerbos' as a possible generic method for other regions. The research monitors the social return of Gebrookerbos, the experience of residents and initiators and the significance of Gebrookerbos for Heerlen-Noord. In addition, the ownership and organizational capacity of citizens, the relationship between government and citizens and the vision for the future on the area will be further investigated.</p>
Methods/tools	<p>A 'brooker' is appointed from the start of the project. He's an independent, neutral person and has a threefold role:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- supporting citizens' initiatives in their growth and development;</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- engagement marketing (encouraging citizens to come up with ideas);</li> <li>- sharing knowledge such as organizing thematic meetings and workshops.</li> </ul> <p>Starting point is to encourage committed people to mobilize their own network and skills, and start interacting with their immediate circle of acquaintances (ABCD Method). This creates small communities with good prospects for reaching and 'touching'. These engaged communities will inspire enthusiasm amongst other initiators or residents, so that they will undertake initiatives themselves or use and experience the initiatives.</p> <p>A close collaboration is established between brooker and researcher, which allows the project to be evaluated from the start.</p> <p>On the other hand, a couple Account Managers working for the municipality help the initiators to realize promising concepts within Gebrookerbos and with the municipal organization. The Account Manager is results-oriented, thinks in terms of solutions, knows how to build bridges and set the right priorities. He must ensure that the customer receives and the municipal organization delivers what has been agreed. Together with the brooker, he will form a team capable of getting a flow of initiatives off the ground to give shape to the desired transformation of the region. There are 6 account managers active at the moment.</p>
<p>Keys</p>	<p>The most vulnerable part of the process is the facilitation of micro-initiatives and communication, to the extent that they can be said to redefine the relationship between government and citizen. The key concepts are self-management, being creative with rules and daring to experiment. This means that the municipality will give civil-society partners, residents, businesses and smaller social groups the scope to assume responsibility themselves for the economic and physical development of their everyday environment.</p>
<p>Results</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Over 50 citizens' initiatives have arisen since the start of the Gebrookerbos in 2014. All initiatives concern ideas of residents or entrepreneurs in Heerlen-Noord. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Gebrookerbosacademy organizes several workshops for (potential) initiators of micro-initiatives in the neighborhoods. Several subjects are discussed: funding, finding and keeping volunteers, insurance etc.</li> <li>- A "Gebrookerbosfund" has been launched, where initiators can apply for financial support. A special feature of this fund is that the applicant does not have to account financially afterwards, but rather provide a justification in the form of photos, film or report.</li> </ul> </li> <li>- In progress: the municipality of Heerlen wants to engage long-term unemployed residents for the citizens' projects of Gebrookerbos. This, because, any of these projects have the same problem: a lack of volunteers. Nowadays people are already being motivated through daytime activities, but now the municipality is also looking into whether a kind of 'Gebrookerbospoule' can be used for maintenance.</li> </ul>
<p>Sources</p>	<p><a href="http://www.gebrookerbos.nl">www.gebrookerbos.nl</a></p>