

INTEGRATED URBAN STRATEGIES: TWO CASE STUDIES FOR CROSS BORDER PROSPERITY

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ABSTRACT: “We cannot solve problems using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them.” This quote from Albert Einstein brushes upon the challenges currently being faced in our contemporary urban environments. After decennia of top-down conditioning, bottom-up responses have gradually emerged. However, is there a way that the ‘either-or’ position can be transcended? This paper shares the learnings from two cases searching for sustainable development strategies, the first initiated by a village in the Marowijne region of Suriname, the second by the government of the island of St. Maarten. One and the same methodology was applied to research the feasibility and potentials of an integrated approach.

KEYWORDS: sustainable strategies, planning cultures, governance, integrated development, relational space, inclusive urbanism

COMPLEX URBAN MANAGEMENT

The evolution of advanced technologies has stimulated new ways of inter-relating diverse disciplines and professions. Simultaneously, the intensification of mixed societies through increased global migration of cultures has created complex social fabrics that render the planning and territorial management new challenges that surpass the established planning praxis. The steering of urban life to a sustainable and progressive model cannot be carried out simply from above, nor can we expect it to unfold itself from below.

The conventional ‘top-down’ approach where governments set the condition under which economic production and social livelihoods may spatialize is threatening to loose its ‘grasp’, whilst the growth of self-organized settlements poses yet another threat to those governing bodies that strive to remain in control – two sides of a similar coin aspiring to develop the urban terrain. Is there a way to transcend this seemingly paradoxical bottleneck? Are there new ways of relating from which problems can be seen as potentials and opponents may become allies?

ACTION LEARNING AND ACTION RESEARCH

The opportunity stemming from two case studies striving for sustainable development laid the ground to research and test the possibility for alternative modes for sustainable development, one which was initiated from a ‘bottom-up’ approach, and the second from a ‘top-down’ approach. Through utilizing *action-learning* and *action-research* as a methodological approach for co-engagement, a symbiosis for multiple parties was ascertained. Outside-in analysis was complimented with inside out fieldwork in which voices and aspirations to realize seemingly hidden potential were collected through various scales and institutions, from the most private to the most public. Introducing the academia as a potential bridge between governments and citizens, a trilateral relationship was formed from which a collective vision was formed that represented the range of stakeholders. The symbioses generated an integrated urban development strategy and catalyzed the educational platform as a generator and contributor of change.

The first case study looks at the village of Perica in Suriname where 70 families reside in search for new economic potentials. The research and design proposal eventually lead to insights that contributed to the territorial spatial planning necessities for the Marowijne region, and later contributed to the decentralization of the national spatial development plan of the country.

The second case study looks at the island of St Maarten in which the government requested a research for the zoning plan. By illustrating the interrelation between socio-spatial and spatial-economic forces, an

integral development plan was generated by including grassroots desires with governmental aspiration, with the private investors as the economic driving force. The holistic approach has led to the 2020 Vision Plan for the island.

The cross border correlation between disciplines, institutions and various layers of the society, embracing the local to regional to global correlations, opened the door for an integrated and progressive development strategy.

SPATIAL-POLITICS AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES ON THE URBAN TERRAIN – A BRIEF HISTORICAL RECAPITULATION

Crisis of wars and economic depressions over the past century and the choices governments have installed in response have conditioned the territorialisation of the urban surface – with crisis often being the catalyser motivating governments to pull the power back to the state. This overarching position dominated the form of urbanization in the resulting nations as political beliefs conditioned the development process. Reviewing the American and European model, we see two typologies of how at first a predominantly liberal approach leads to a privatization of urban space where market-driven investments steer the urbanization process as illustrated in the sprawling of the American cities. In Europe on the other hand, a predominantly state driven process, with public-private partnerships, set the conditions in which its people, proceeding centuries of aristocratic rule, could foster and grow accordingly. However, the reconditioning of their social fabric enhanced by increased globalization processes after the 1950s engendered the start of a new demography for most Western European states. The increasing influx of economic migrants particularly from challenged nations (e.g. Africa, Asia and more recently from Eastern Europe) has created conditions that illustrate larger forms of inequality within the overall populace. The seemingly well-managed urban environments struggle to find modes of co-existence in this new condition as contemporary urban renewal projects dominate the agenda of the vast majority of municipal governments.

Development, as it has progressed over the past century utilizing the effectiveness and technological advancements stemming from industrialization, has primarily been geared at stimulating the economic potentials of nations as illustrated in the measurement of a country's performance by the international standard of their Gross Domestic Product or Gross Domestic Income. In effect, one can say that development, as it has commonly come to be recognized in the occidental nations, solely concerns the *economical*, and *technological*. However, one can consider the justification of this focus as pointed out by an Indian community worker active for the past 30 years in Dharavi, India, one of the largest slums of Asia, he states, "Europe and America represent the developed world, right? And we in India, and many more parts of Southeast Asia, Africa and South America are seen as developing countries, right? But what is the West so developed in? Economically and technologically for sure, but are they also socially, culturally and spiritually developed? In fact I believe it is *we* who are the more developed in these later categories, *they* in fact, are the developing nations!" Although the point may be argued in myriad ways, it does put into question what in effect does one tend to develop when setting out a development strategy? And more importantly, what are the consequences to those aspects that have not taken into account? Have economical and technological advancements restricted the growth of social cohesion, self-satisfaction and perhaps spiritual awareness? A provocative thought but nonetheless essential to consider, particularly if one takes into consideration the astonishing numbers of global avoidable immortality (particularly in 'developing nations) and stress-related deaths (particularly in the 'developed' nations).¹

Being in the midst of an economic crisis – succeeding an oil crisis, food crisis, terrorist crisis and global warming crisis – notions of development are being gradually reconsidered. Pure economic-driven competitiveness between cities and countries, although still highly desired by many nation states as represented by the trillions of 'bail-out' Dollars and Euro's that have been invested to reignite an old economic model, and decades of development support by institutions and the prioritization of their economic targets such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, are being questioned by a growing populace. The voicing of other needs and requirements within the development discussion are gradually emerging. Yet the question remains, how does one include and integrate this after centuries of 'top-down'

¹ See <http://globalavoidablemortality.blogspot.com/> and <http://faculty.css.edu/dswenson/web/Stress/stressfacts.html>

decision-making? And can perhaps the growing support for on grass-root or more commonly known as ‘bottom-up’ responses offer a solution, as represented by the heightened recognition of micro-credit financing system?² Perhaps an even more challenging proposition, is there a way to transcend the ‘either-or’ approach wherein one group of stakeholders (e.g bottom-up) is re-acting to decisions taken by the other (e.g. top-down)? Two case studies strived to develop an inclusive approach that collected the voices of multiple stakeholders in order to weave them into a synergetic model creating a win-win solution for all parties. However, a radically new methodological structure would be required, as history has illustrated that we cannot solve problems with the same kind of thinking, we used when we created them.³ The challenge entailed a “deconstruction and strategic reconstitution of conventional modernist epistemologies - in other words, the radical restructuring of long-established modes of knowledge formation, of how we assure that the knowledge we obtain of the world can be confidently presumed to be accurate and useful.” (Soja, 1997)

TWO CASE STUDIES, ONE METHODOLOGY

In search for sustainable development strategies, two case studies initiated from opposite sides of the spectrum of ‘power’ were requested. The first stemming from the leaders of Perica, a village of 70 families in the eastern region of Suriname, representing a ‘bottom-up’ initiative; and the second, stemming from the ministry of Spatial Planning and Environment (VROM) from the island of St. Maarten, representing a ‘top-down’ initiative. Both requests were sent to Cross Border Relations (CBR), a foundation set up in 2003 striving to utilize academic potentials to foster “prosperity” projects in developing countries. Embarking with the philosophy that development should be achieved by ‘investing in people and planet first, with pleasure and profit as a result’⁴, the CBR approach rethinks the economical model in order to safeguard local culture and local nature in a globalizing milieu. A group of students and researchers from Delft University of Technology (TU Delft) and The Hague University (HHS) formed an interdisciplinary team representing the fields of urban planning, urban design, landscape architecture and architecture from TU Delft, and the fields of marketing and communication were represented from HHS.

The research methodology was structured to support continuous and diverse forms of knowledge exchange. An interdependent framework generated a nonlinear and progressive formation of the *collective intelligence*⁵ of its contributors. As a result, an inclusive engagement with all stakeholders stimulated a sense of co-ownership and co responsibility. This process is referred to as *action learning* and *action research*.⁶ This open-ended structure allowed for an evolutionary learning curve that helped stimulate and direct the research and design process. While retaining more conventional urban analytical toolkits (e.g. program mapping, geographical conditioning, etc) as a valuable asset, a subjective enhancement for the overall understanding was required. To support the interrelation of more innovative scientific mapping techniques such as Space Syntax, which illustrate the spatial integration and connectivity of a region, with the more perceptual reflections⁷, a collection through dialogue, surveys and temporal co-habitation with local peoples was required.

The foundation of the research departs with an understanding of ‘space’ as the underpinning upon which all other activities (social, economical, political) unfold. In other words, space comes first and over time, is gradually inhabited by human activity. Man in turn creates forms in their environment, which in return

² Muhammad Yusuf won the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize award recognizing his efforts to catalyze the micro loans revolution.

³ Albert Einstein

⁴ Cross Border Prosperity, see www.crossborderrelations.org

⁵ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collective_intelligence

⁶ Reginal Revans is given credit as the originator of “action learning” as he introduced this method in 1940 (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Action_learning), whereas Kurt Lewin coined the term “action research” in 1944 (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Action_research). However, the concept of action learning and action research finds a more historical origin in the pre-Christian literature stemming from Sanskrit writings on self-development and inner work, often referred to as learning by doing.

⁷ Henri Lefebvre teaches us in “The Production of Space” three notions of space; *conceived*, *perceived* and *lived* space.

shapes the user through its spatial conditioning.⁸ As such, correlations were sought after interconnecting conditions (and aspirations) from the social, economical and political to the spatial. Finding ways to synergize social-spatial and spatial-economical conditions set the platform for the diverse forms of knowledge exchange. Stakeholders in this regard entailed the diverse ministries within the local and national government representing top-down intentions, community leaders and local inhabitants representing bottom-up aspirations, and the economic sector represented by members of the chamber of commerce and large-scale private industries. The three primary sectors were complimented by the middle sector represented by non-governmental organizations, academia and local churches.

Following the mapping and data collection of the two areas, looking at the various spatial scales (e.g. village, region, country and neighbouring countries) and time scales (past, present and futures – near, middle and far), workshops were setup to enhance the understanding by collect reflections, testimonies and ideas stemming from the Surinamese and St Maarten diaspora. This allowed the subjective perspective and sensibilities to be honoured while simultaneously generating a network of ‘co-owners’ to the project, both abroad as well as locally.

Once on location, field analysis was carried out mapping spatial livelihoods of inhabitants while assessing geographic potentials together with local NGO’s. Aspirations for new forms of economy such as ecotourism, small scale agriculture, aquaculture and cultural crafting were voiced, while propositions for language economies⁹ and knowledge economies¹⁰ were investigated together with local academia. Issues concerning ‘culture and knowledge’ as well as ‘sport and health’ were supported through the design of diverse recreational facilities spatially situated, financially supported and politically backed-up, as they were the result of a collective contribution. (See figures 1 & 2)

Reflections and Openings

The learnings from both projects illustrated that regardless if an initiative stems from a seemingly bottom-up or top-down perspective, through the utilization of an integrated approach a sustainable and win-win outcome is feasible. It is however relevant in this regard to open up the concept of integration to as many domains as effectively possible to ensure a holistic approach. To start off this would require *inclusiveness* at its foundation in order to generate the required support from the responsible stakeholders. The role of academia, and in particular interdisciplinarity is seen as a principal condition to stimulate dialogue and continuation through progressive capacity development¹¹. An inter-professional engagement follows as it allows academic and professionals to exchange potentials and insights from the theoretical

⁸ This and further researched insights into space stem from the continuous research of Spacelab: Research Laboratory for the Contemporary City (see www.spacelab.tudelft.nl)

⁹ Due to their strategic regional positioning and postcolonial ties, inhabitants of both regions are gifted with the capability of speaking numerous languages, ranging from English, Dutch, Spanish and French, to more local dialects and languages. Connecting global corporate and academic events with the local geographical and language conditions allows for both nations to host international events connecting North and South American parties with European stakeholders.

¹⁰ Putting value into cultural heritage as a valuable (and thus marketable) asset was investigated introducing concepts such as ‘edu-cul-tourism’, connecting education, culture and tourism. Particularly in St Maarten much of this was lost due to the sole focus on mass tourism and real estate development following 50 years of neo-liberal policies. Furthermore, the climatic conditions of Suriname supported high potentials for research into tropical medicine, as the Guiana Shield, the northern region of the Amazon, is the largest expanse of undisturbed tropical rain in the world. It homes one of the richest biodiversities while having a highly reduced threat posed by more dangerous life forms as found further south in the Amazon. However, bauxite and other energy resource excavations supported by international mining industries often threaten the natural habitat.

¹¹ The term *capacity building* is purposely not used here as it insinuates the building of capacities that partners in developing areas may not have. Unfortunately this perspective is both contentious and disrespectful to the local parties as it lacks sensibility to the existing capacities that *are* apparent. As such, the further developing of the existing capacities whilst generating a reciprocal learning and exchange process for both parties through the term *capacity development* is preferred.

frameworks (as represented in the educational institutions) with the more practical challenges and bottlenecks as experienced from the praxis. The long-term and required continuation is then secured through the financial investors whether local or international, while the perspective of NGO's and local churches ensure that the CBR philosophy of 'investing in people and planet first, with pleasure and profit as a result' would be adhered. This interdependent framework of stakeholders, disciplines and their correlations in a *spacetime* based evolutionary process, set the configuration for an integrated and progressive development vision.

From a spatial perspective, an enhancement and more inter-relational understanding of space to the parallel fields of society, economy and policies then becomes the engine to integrate top-down political intentions with bottom-up aspirations as embodied by the people. Refined concepts of the social-spatial and spatial-economical relationships can weave perspectives in a systematic and synergetic way, and thus reduce the consequences of rigorous and often naïve restructuring. Deploying strategies to *remake* the city are insensitive to the consequences they generate, as such environments are the result of a generational process gradually conditioning its surrounding and its constituents. The research carried out during the two case studies of Suriname and St. Maarten reiterate the belief felt by many, yet supported by few, that through the inclusion of the hidden potentials of the inhabitants, a true social and environmental sustainability can be achieved.

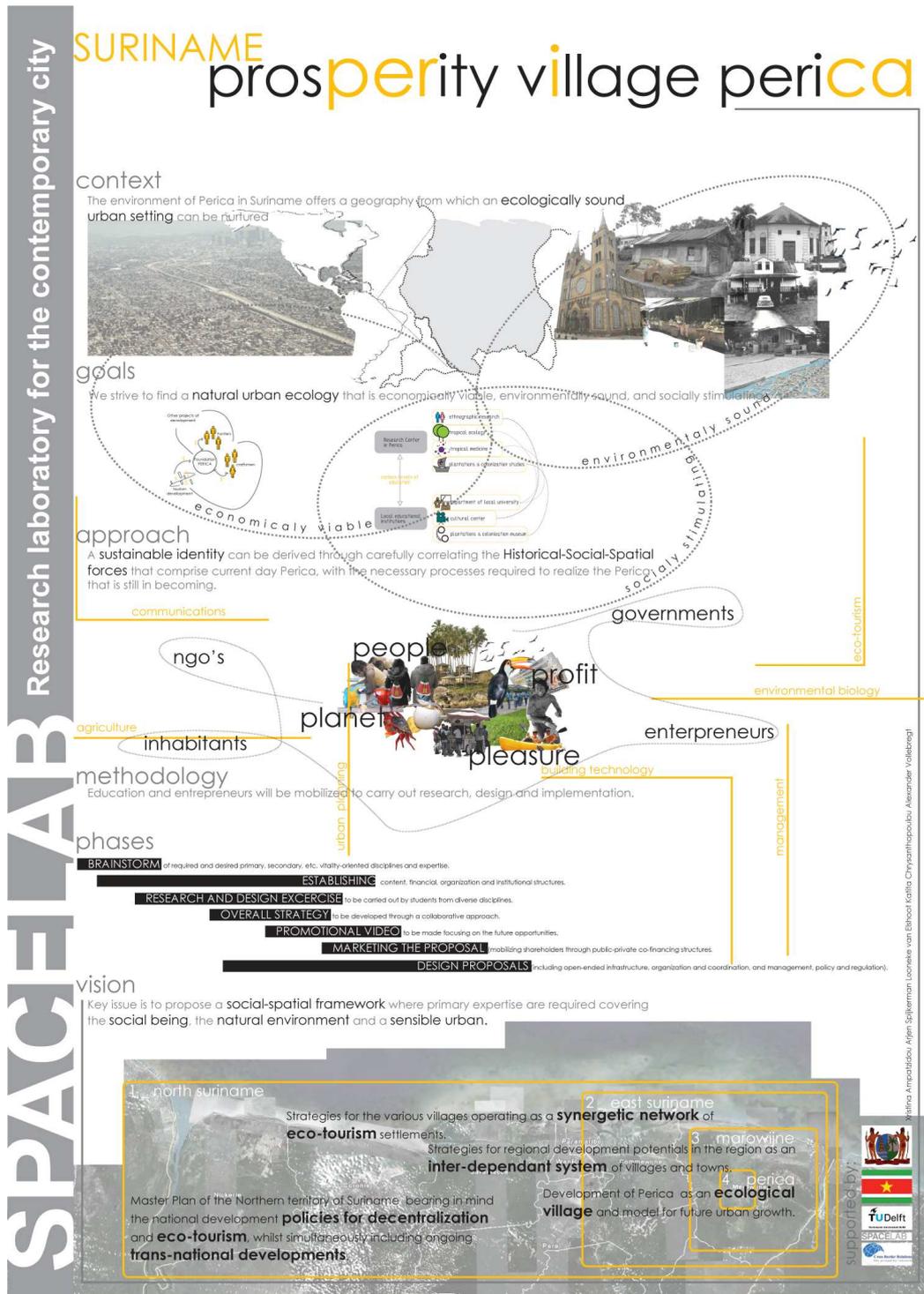


Figure 1: Prosperity Village Perica – multi scalar (in space and time) integrated development vision for North Suriname. Starting from the scale of the village of Perica, and moving up and interrelating to the regions of Marowijne, eastern Suriname and eventually the northern territory. See <http://www.spacelab.tudelft.nl/perica> for more details.

SUSTAINABLE STRATEGIES FOR ST. MAARTEN

Regional Development proposal for a **prosperous future** for the island

1st of January — 1st of June 2008

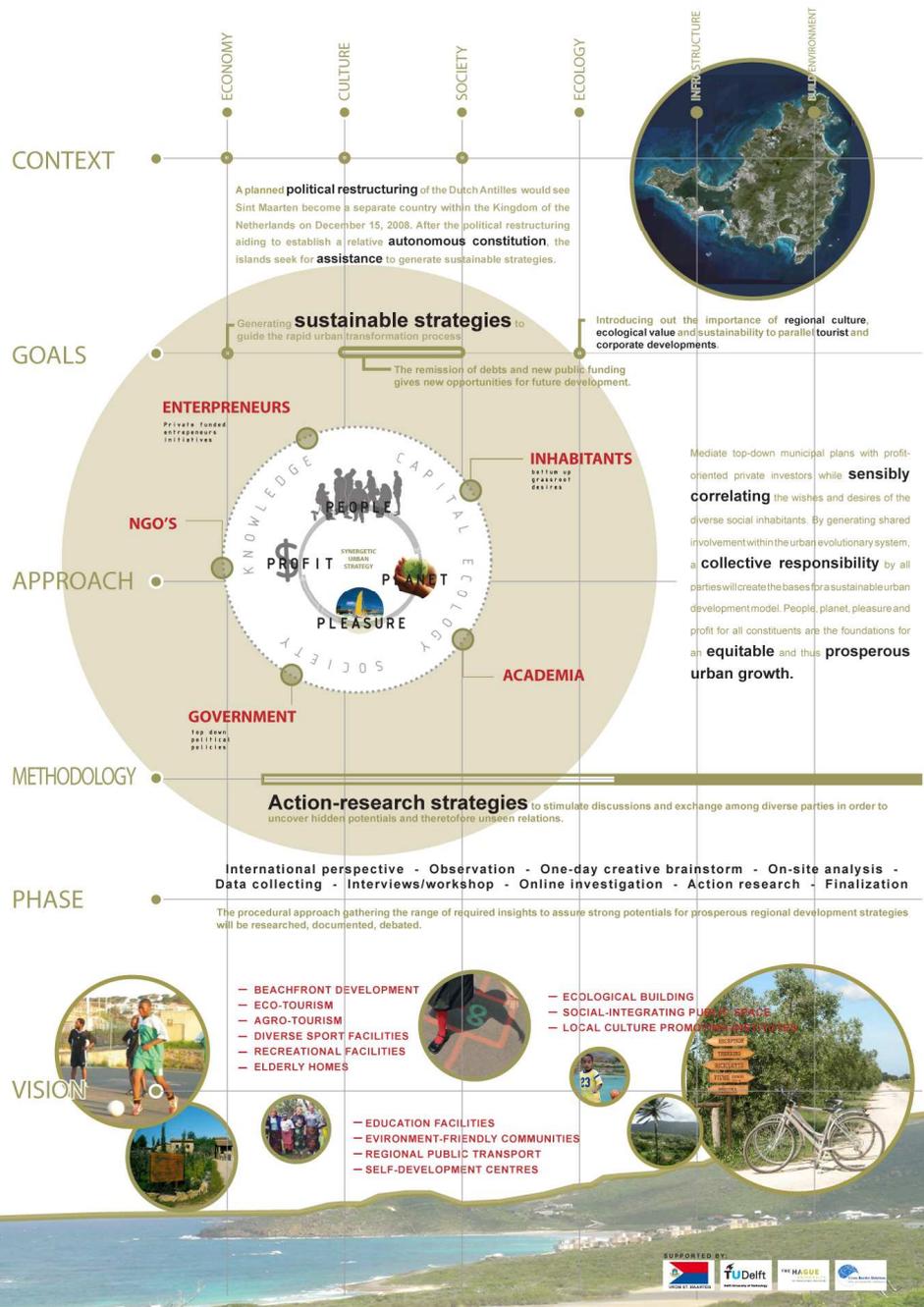


Figure 2: Sustainable Strategies for St. Maarten – integrated and progressive spatial development vision utilizing spatial underpinning to facilitate social-economical development with local culture and local nature as points of departure. See www.spacelab.tudelft.nl/stmaarten for more details.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Both research projects would not be possible without the continued support of the Cross Border Relations foundation and their extensive network and partners, and in particular the students and researchers of TU Delft and The Hague University. Further more, a special thank you to the inhabitants from Perica and St Maarten for their time and effort as they contributed to the various 'krutus' and 'jollifications' (e.g. workshops) held over several weeks during the on-field research, as well as members from the government and the chamber of commerce.

Fieldwork for the Perica research was co-funded by the Van Eesteren-Fluck & Van Lohuizen foundation and the Fonds Internationale Stage, while research for St. Maarten was fully funded by the local government, and in particular the ministry of Spatial Planning and Environment (VROM) through the mediation of Delano Richardson.

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