

ARHUS, A LIBRARY BECOMES AN OPEN KNOWLEDGE CENTRE



COMMUNITY LIFE-LONG LEARNING COOPERATION
NETWORK KNOWLEDGE DIVERSITY **CROSS-SECTORIAL**
PARTICIPATION INCLUSION INNOVATION

1. Context

Roeselare is a medium-sized city of more than 61.000 inhabitants in Flanders, Belgium. The city was looking for a place for a new library as two independent libraries were merging. When the main bank closed and the building became empty, this created an opportunity in the middle of the city centre. A former manager of the bank and a local urban developer launched the idea to develop the empty building and the surrounding site into a new urban renewal project with public services. This urban development project would create new possibilities for living, working and shopping. The local government embraced this idea and combined it with the need for a new library.

The local government wanted to give the new library a new horizon so that it could be a place where every inhabitant and visitor would feel at home. Roeselare committed itself not only to catch up with other cities, but to be ambitious and get ahead. The government wanted to show that a library, even in a small to medium city, has a future; moreover, that the library itself is an indispensable part in the future success of that city. In the same period, Roeselare started to design a vision for a new railway station area and a new central boulevard, all of which was part of the aim to become a warm, vibrant, caring, accessible, enterprising and ambitious city.

THE LIBRARY AIMS TO BE AN OPEN HOUSE THAT CONNECTS PEOPLE, HELPING TO RENEW LEARNING AND OTHER PROCESSES AND ENCOURAGING ENTREPRENEURSHIP.

2. Roeselare and culture

During the policy period 2007-2012, the realization of the open knowledge centre was the most important topic for the city of Roeselare.

The town of Roeselare is convinced that the library is an important contribution to the overall urban policy, and not just to culture. In the current policy period, the project also takes initiative in integration, urban development, e-inclusion, health literacy, working with disadvantaged people, digitization, entrepreneurship and participation.

ARhus, the open knowledge centre of Roeselare, has links to the nine sections of commitments of the Agenda 21 for culture.

1. **Rights:** Works with vulnerable groups to give them access to cultural expressions and a collection of more than 500.000 titles..
2. **Heritage, diversity and creativity:** A heritage collection of 85.000 titles. The naming of the various parts of the collection refers to the history of Roeselare. Many creative activities for youth. Introduction sessions and projects for migrants and refugees, in cooperation with local initiatives.
3. **Education:** Special programs and projects for all schools in Roeselare based on 21st century skills. ARhus is also involved in research projects with universities and colleges.
4. **Environment:** Gives the floor to people who work on sustainability. Pays attention in its catering business to local products and Fair Trade.
5. **Economy:** Works on a new business model for libraries. Cooperates with businesses to create other systems of innovation and knowledge transfers. Stimulates entrepreneurship
6. **Equality and social inclusion:** Partner for the city in working on e-inclusion and disadvantaged groups. Partner of one of the largest hospital clusters in Flanders working on health literacy (e-health, mobile, social and mental health).
7. **Urban planning and public space:** By planning ARhus in an urban renewal project, Roeselare recognizes the importance of cultural and social issues and resources.
8. **Information and knowledge.** Guarantees the access to free and plural information to participate in cultural and socio-economic life. Works on creating European partnerships.
9. **Governance:** The governing board of ARhus consists of politicians, representatives of educational and training institutions and citizens. The policy framework approved by the Governing Board is based on the mission of UNESCO.

3. Objectives and implementation of the project

3.1 Main goal

“Everyone along” is the ambition of the city of Roeselare. ARhus is the perfect example of that ambition. In addition to enabling people to read, study, create and have fun, ARhus provides people with qualitative, non-coloured and versatile information so that they can learn at every stage of their



lives. Each day ARhus will imbed on language skills, social and digital skills and cultural awareness. It wants to be a laboratory for innovation and transfer of knowledge. Briefly: ARhus works 365 days a year for people so they can actively participate in today's society. In short, the library aims to be an open house that connects people, helping to renew learning and other processes and encouraging entrepreneurship.

THE PROJECT ALSO TAKES INITIATIVES AROUND INTEGRATION, URBAN DEVELOPMENT, INCLUSION, HEALTH LITERACY OR PARTICIPATION.

3.2 Development of the project

The vision of the project was developed through cooperation with cultural actors and educational partners. In addition, it was fuelled by contacts and working visits to inspiring examples. Among them, we can distinguish three school communities, private and public investors and other partners involved in programming.

During the planning process of this project, all kind of groups and people were involved: e.g. the advisory board for culture; schools; associations of people with disabilities; forum for migrants; all political parties (majority and opposition); Flemish Government; adult and non-formal education; open door for urban renewal projects in Roeselare: study of the University of Antwerp on the impact of libraries in urban renewals; youngsters involved in designing the youth area; and the technical school of Roeselare made some furniture.

ARhus had the cooperation and support of the following governmental partners: The Flemish Government, Flanders Department of Education and the province of West-Flanders (for the library automation). Its sphere of influence was not limited to the inhabitants of Roeselare. ARhus attracts many visitors from outside the city.

4. Impacts

4.1 Direct impacts



Impacts on the local government

ARhus defines itself as a cross-sectoral organisation. In this way, it shows enormous potential in almost all areas of local government and the local politicians recognize this. This recognition is also the basis for the expansion of the operations in the future.

Impact on culture and local cultural actors of the city/territory

Many cultural actors acknowledge the value of the open knowledge centre as successor to the traditional library. Many young cultural artists showed their artistic products in ARhus. Also all cultural actors recognize that ARhus is strengthening culture by co-operation with economy, education, health and other actors to realize crossovers.

THE SPHERE OF INFLUENCE IS NOT LIMITED TO ALL THE INHABITANTS.
NEARLY 20% OF THE VISITORS ORIGINATES FROM OTHER MUNICIPALITIES.]

Impact on the territory and its population

Thanks to the opening of the new library, the number of visitors increased to up to more than 338.000 a year. In 2015, ARhus organized 336 activities, alone or in co-operation with the civil society. Each month more than 300 new people become a member of ARhus.

4.2 Transversal impacts

ARhus works every day to give people access to information. Located in the centre of Roeselare, ARhus is easily accessible.

4.3 Continuity

Now, the local government has a cooperation agreement with ARhus until 2019. As the project also provides the library activities for the local government and with the success of ARhus, this agreement will continue after 2019.



ALL CULTURAL ACTORS RECOGNIZE THAT THE LIBRARY IS STRENGTHENING CULTURE BY CO-OPERATING WITH OTHER SPHERES SUCH AS ECONOMY, EDUCATION OR HEALTH.

5. Further information

The city of Roeselare was a nominated candidate for the second 'UCLG International Award - Mexico City - Culture 21' (January-May 2016). The awards jury produced a final report in June 2016 and asked the UCLG Committee on Culture to promote this project as a practical example for the implementation of Agenda 21 for Culture.

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