

MIXED YOUNG PEOPLE HOUSING COMMUNITY

STARTBLOK RIEKERHAVEN (SR), CITY OF AMSTERDAM, DE KEY AMSTERDAM, NETHERLANDS



CATEGORIES

- S** Community spaces where diverse people meet
- A** Connecting activities & community events

PRESENTER

Saskia Guzman Morales, Communication & PR

DESCRIPTION

Of the 565 tenants at Startblok Riekerhaven, half are young Dutch people and the other half are young status holders (refugees with a residence permit). Startblok aims to surpass mere housing and is designed to function as a community that can provide a good start into adult life in the Netherlands to all its residents. The project is run through self-management: everything that can be done by residents is done by residents.

MOTIVATION

Startblok aims to contribute to the integration of status holders into Dutch society, to encourage self-development, and to make sure that all residents find their way into the housing market after their five years at Startblok. To do this, Startblok aims to create a community where the residents can learn from one another, build networks, and help each other prepare for the next step in their lives.

PROBLEM ADDRESSED

In 2015, the Netherlands experienced a sharp increase of asylum requests. As Dutch cities are allocated a number of status holders to house based on the city's number of inhabitants, the city of Amsterdam faced a very high number of refugees that needed to be housed as soon as possible. Besides this, Amsterdam has dealt with a severe lack of affordable housing for years. Finding accommodation was already extremely difficult, especially for young professionals and students. As such, Startblok Riekerhaven was meant to create an affordable solution for both newcomers and young Dutch people.

MORE DETAILS

Of the 565 tenants at Startblok Riekerhaven, half are young Dutch people and the other half are young status holders (refugees with a residence permit). All 565 residents are between 18 and 28 when they move in, and they live here through a “youth contract”; a contract for 5 years during which their waiting time for the Dutch social housing system keeps building.

The project came into existence in July 2016 through a collaboration between the Municipality of Amsterdam, housing corporation De Key, and the organization Socius Wonen. It was designed to address the challenge of a severe housing shortage in Amsterdam combined with the extraordinarily high number of refugees that needed to be housed. The project aims to surpass the mere housing of status holders, and offers them a communal living space with local young people to help streamline their integration into Dutch society.

While some of the residents live in shared apartments, most of the housing units are single studios. To ensure that even the independent houses form a community, all units are divided into hallways with a communal living room and kitchen. Two residents are appointed per hallway to ensure that the residents keep the space clean and support each other where necessary.

Residents collectively carry responsibility for their own living environment, which adds to a sense of ownership and community. In addition, a team of ten residents under the supervision of a project coordinator from De Key manages all the daily dealings of the project. Aside from these ten paid functions, there are also many residents involved in exchange for a monthly discount on their rent; for example, as hallway managers, handymen, translators, and cleaners. Additionally, a foundation has been set up by a group of residents who voluntarily organize activities and events for all residents.

OUTCOMES

As the project is still fairly new (it has existed for three years now) it is difficult to draw any definitive conclusions. Research carried out by the Technical University of Delft has shown that living at Startblok helps newcomers become acquainted with the city, the culture, and the language faster. As a result of knowing their neighbours and participating in events, they experience less of a barrier when it comes to asking for help, and it improves their ability to build networks.

LESSONS LEARNED

As the first of its kind Startblok was in many ways an experimental project. The concept has by now been replicated by De Key in another part of the city, and more similar projects have been founded by multiple housing associations both nationally and internationally. These all draw upon the knowledge gained from the Riekerhaven experience and have tried to improve the aspects that proved imperfect. This, for example, included reducing the number of residents per hallway.