

BLUE-GREEN CITIES IN THE SPOTLIGHT: DORDRECHT

By the City of Dordrecht and Bax & Company

An introduction to Dordrecht's
Blue-Green vision for a more resilient
and liveable city.

The city of Dordrecht has the ambition to become a healthier, more attractive, and liveable city by investing in blue-green infrastructure (BGI). Dordrecht has a long history of water management and know both the benefits and dangers that come with it, as the city has experienced small-scale flooding, but enjoys proximity to the beautiful Biesbosch National Park - one of the last extensive areas of freshwater tidal wetlands in Northwestern Europe. Now Dordrecht is taking its ambition a step further by developing a broader integrated blue-green vision, to become a more resilient city with a robust infrastructure. This vision not only tackles flooding but incorporates other vital aspects such as biodiversity, health, recreation, mobility, the spatial quality of the city and even agriculture.

Vision for the blue-green network

Dordrecht started developing the vision by looking into its existing blue-green network, especially within the *Dordwijkzone*, the largest green area within Dordrecht and the Wantij Zone, the area along the Wantij river. The overall plan was to improve and make better use of existing green spaces, such as green streets, sports parks and public parks, and also from the blue domain; creeks, retention ponds, waterways and rivers across the city. Many of these areas are not well connected, so Dordrecht is working to link them via green routes for walking and cycling. By *bringing the green and blue to citizens' front doors*, citizens can quickly go to the robust blue-green area, and from these areas travel further to the Biesbosch park. This will improve the liveability and attractiveness of Dordrecht, while at the same time creating a blue-green climate buffer - an area where natural processes are given space in order to increase social and ecosystem resilience against the impacts of climate change. Dordrecht's goal is to develop a city that people enjoy living and working in. This goal complements the overarching ambition to boost the city's population, as when choosing a home, people consider the surrounding area as well as the house itself.



The proposed vision for the Dordwijkzone, developed with over 100 people from the city

The two main projects: Dordwijkzone and Wantij zone

Dordrecht's two main projects that contribute to the vision are the redevelopment of:

THE DORDWIJKZONE

A combination of sports parks, fields and public parks, bringing these segmented areas together as one large public zone. The new plan is to create a healthy and robust city park, where every inhabitant wants to visit on a weekly basis. Previously, the Dordwijkzone used to divide the city, now it will be a community hub where all neighbours can meet, play and exercise.



THE WANTIJ ZONE

A green corridor, running from the city centre to the Biesbosch National Park, along the Wantij river. This zone can function as a freshwater tidal park, where people and nature interact. The corridor will also lead people from the city centre right to the large nature area via attractive cycling and walking routes.



An inclusive approach, facilitated by the blue-green city task force

Since the project began, Dordrecht has been working with an interdisciplinary group: *the blue-green city task force*. This team consists of many different experts from the municipality; the city maintenance, the city development, communicators and engagement experts. The task force aims to mainstream the blue-green approach through the entire municipality, to ensure the city is developed and maintained in a climate-proof and blue-green manner. The blue-green city task force carries out its design and planning activities in the SPUILAB 210. The SPUILAB 210 is an open workspace, where the task force works and organises workshops, among other organisations who also work on blue-green projects and systems.

The blue-green city task force has engaged with relevant stakeholders, citizen groups and

experts from various fields, delving into their ambitions and initiatives to gain their support and create a bigger and all-inclusive vision. Over 100 people participated in creating the future blue-green vision of Dordrecht. Furthermore, several programmes and events have been organised to create plans and visions for the two large blue-green zones - the Dordwijkzone and Wantij Zone.

Taking an inclusive and broader approach, and not just looking at blue-green infrastructure as a sole challenge, has generated wider endorsement for the city's plans and strategies. There has been a lot of enthusiasm about the idea of the larger blue-green zones functioning as the city's '*green lungs*'. The vision has also received a lot of political support, which has opened up financing opportunities.

Bringing blue and green to citizens' front doors

Part of the vision is to bring nature and water from the natural park to the front doors of citizens and make private gardens part of the blue-green network. To support this initiative, the city joined a national Dutch campaign titled *'Breaking the tiles'* (literally translated from Dutch). The goal is to replace paved areas with greenery in private gardens. The citizens have the opportunity to showcase their garden, seek advice and get inspired through the online portal of the campaign. Currently, there are several projects where Dordrecht is engaging and assisting citizens with their own private gardens.



The Alderman helping to plant a tree in a paved garden

The city is keeping an inventory of the different measures, processes, benefits and best practices of all developments. The knowledge gathered and the successful cases will support the development of a green investment fund. A dedicated fund for blue-green infrastructure will ensure their wider implementation and maintenance, whereas now they have been built using the remaining budget from other domains of grey infrastructure, like sewer rehabilitation. For the new blue-green network, a dedicated green fund will be essential.

Dordrecht's achievements so far

- 🕒 The creation of an overall blue-green vision for the city and specific plans for the Dordwijk & Wantij zones
- 🕒 The approved national investment subsidy for 3 sets of blue-green projects in the Dordwijkzone
- 🕒 The establishment of the multidisciplinary blue-green team and the SPUILAB 210 shared working space
- 🕒 The realisation of 6 maintenance projects with blue-green solutions, including one new tiny city forest
- 🕒 The creation of the Sterrenburg flood solution park, through a participatory method
- 🕒 The political support for the blue-green vision of the city
- 🕒 The wide acceptance and participation of the citizens for the *'breaking the tiles'* initiative

All projects started in 2016 and continue to this day. The BEGIN project has been a vital catalyst to materialise the vision of the city, as well as for the two large blue-green zones/projects.

Dordrecht continues to work on creating blue-green principles that will be implemented with every new construction and maintenance project.

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Dordrecht's story shows that BGI requires multi-departmental and multi-stakeholder collaborations. For further information read the **BEGIN Policy Brief** at: baxcompany.com/begin-policy-brief/