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Be a bit more angry

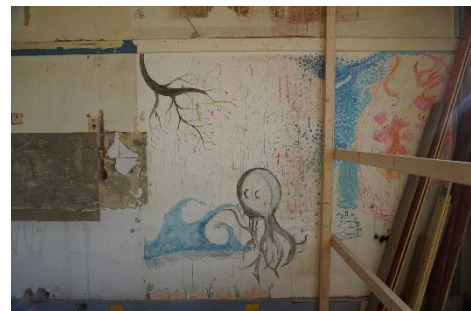
Introduction

When I think of cultural heritage, I first think of people. Culture and its contents - be it buildings or abstract knowledge – would not exist without people.. I sensed this when visiting the future Campus.

Everywhere, I could recognize some residue of the people who have been there before. It started with a picture of a class from a long time ago, when this place was still a school, taped to the wall of the room in which we changed our shoes.



It continued on through the rooms. From things as obvious as murals painted by the students who lived there in the anti-squatting initiative to little things like stickers in the inside of closet doors that seemed to have hardly come off, or even scribbles on the outside walls of the building. Everywhere it seemed there was something left over from past times.



When asked to reflect on how the Cultuur&Campus Putselaan hub can be sustainable, what comes to mind first is the aspect of social sustainability. A project on the scale of the Cultuur&Campus will of course have a great effect on people, not only the future attendees of the programmes that will take place there but also those that live in the surroundings of the Campus. It is important to incorporate this sentiment into the project planning.

Some theory

To understand how social sustainability relates to the Cultuur&Campus Project, it is first necessary to understand what it even is. For the sake of this post, I will use the definition proposed by Stephen McKenzie in 2004. He defines *social sustainability* as “a positive condition within communities, and a process within communities that can achieve that condition”. While this definition is vague, he does tie this ability of communities to move toward “a positive condition” to several conditions. Those relevant in the context of the Cultuur&Campus Putselaan, are:

- “equity of access to key services (including health, education, transport, housing and recreation)”
- “the widespread political participation of citizens not only in electoral procedures but also in other areas of political activity, particularly at a local level”
- “mechanisms for a community to collectively identify its strengths and needs”
- “mechanisms for a community to fulfil its own needs where possible through community action” (McKenzie, 2004)

These points relate to an issue that often goes hand in hand with projects that aim to revitalize and economically strengthen specific areas of a given city: gentrification. This describes a process in which new, affluent renters settle in a neighborhood, driving up prices and ultimately pushing out residents that had been there before (Finio, 2022). Social sustainability suffers from this, as the points relating to equal access and community participation are all negatively impacted by this. Policy makers are aware of this and try to incorporate bottom-up approaches into their policy-making regarding urban development. Bottom-up describes the incorporation of communities in the process of policy-making and project development. The idea here is that traditional forms of governance are top-down, putting policies onto communities without knowing what they need (Fraser, 2005).

The Case of the Cultuur&Campus

The New European Bauhaus also recognizes the need for a bottom-up approach in urban development, calling into life the Lighthouse Project Funding Scheme, under which several projects, among others the Cultuur&Campus Project, are funded with the aim of creating “sustainable, inclusive and beautiful spaces” across European cities and “involve citizens in the green transition at the local level” (European Commission, n.d.). About the Cultuur&Campus specifically they write:

“through blending education, research, policy, and culture, and considering the lived experiences of its residents, Cultuurcampus aims to transform the disadvantaged urban area of Rotterdam South.” –

European Commission, 2022

Calling a part of a city a “disadvantaged urban area” is a tale as old as gentrification, so I immediately set out to find some evaluations of the effectiveness of EU lighthouse funding schemes. In a case study of the Hamburg based mySMARTlife initiative, which aims to introduce green energy and better the quality of life of Hamburg residents, it was found that rigid application and contract requirements of the EU Funding Scheme inhibited the effective incorporation of local communities in the project (Lange & Knieling, 2020). This is something that rings true for the Cultuur&Campus Putselaan, although the project aims to incorporate the local neighbourhood, especially by including the Afrikaanderwijk Coöperatie, a cooperative based in Rotterdam South, in the development of the Campus.

As confirmed in several interviews with representatives of the project from EUR and the Afrikaanderwijk Coöperatie, this incorporation is more of a consultancy position. The bigger decisions regarding the project are made without input from the cooperative by the Steering Committee and the Board of Directors, which both include representatives from the future rental partners of the campus building. The reason for this is that the European Lighthouse Funding Scheme favors large organisations, which can manage large amounts of money (European Commission, 2022; Interviews EUR & Afrikaanderwijk Coöperatie). It becomes apparent that this project, although seeking to include local voices, inherently inhibits this with its structure.

It seems to me that it is necessary to turn toward a cultural heritage project, which manages to sustain itself without greater institutional funding as a solution – not only to overcome this issue specifically but also because the Lighthouse funding scheme runs for only 3 years, expecting participants to sustain themselves thereafter. A successful example is the Philadelphia Folklore Project. This project was founded in 1987 and aims to preserve folk arts and culture from the Philadelphia-area, USA. It too, was initially under the wing of a greater institution, the American Folklore Society, before later transforming into an independent institution (Kodish, 2013). What stands out about this organisation is that they spread their funding widely, naming 17 supporting organisations, as well as accepting private donations on their website (The Philadelphia Folklore Project, n.d.). This proves to be effective. In their 2023 tax report, they report no more than 5000 USD in support from individual grants or other assistance from organisations (ProPublica, n.d.). This independence seems to translate into the work they do, which is deeply rooted in field work and learning about social action from the community, centering it rather than reducing it to a sidenote of a greater project (Kodish, 2013).

Conclusions and Recommendations

For the Cultuur&Campus Project, this example can pose a solution in two interconnected ways. First, it is important to diversify sources of income to reduce reliance on a single one and to avoid making the project members unable to make independent decisions more in line with social sustainability. Second, after gaining more financial independence, it is necessary to actively incorporate the neighbourhood in decision making regarding the project, accepting organizations like the Afrikaanderwijk Coöperatie as equal members of the project rather than consultants. Third, on a very personal note, I would like to suggest being very angry. In my opinion, the European Lighthouse Project follows a longstanding tradition of EU initiatives that are a half-hearted attempts at dealing with public demand for more equality and sustainability, and this is something that should not be accepted. Be angry about it, reject it and change the project for the better – that is the future that I hope to see for the Cultuur&Campus Putselaan.

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