



Sustainable
URBAN FRINGES
SURF

Hengelo Reflection Report



W e u s t h a g P a r k



The Interreg IVB
North Sea Region
Programme



*Investing in the future by working together
for a sustainable and competitive region*

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1. Introduction

The project of Weusthag with the SURF project was Weusthag. The main challenge of the project was to find ways to improve the social value of the Weusthag, and to improve recognition, attractiveness, awareness and engagement. We want to achieve this by heading for a landscape park, well maintained and used by a diversity of people for nature, sports, culture and education.

Because of that we developed the slogan *Weusthag, park of connection*. We found out through a study of a student of Saxion that the name Weusthag is rather unknown in the city. On the other hand there are quite a number of people crossing the area on their way to the city to work or school. There are also several citizens and societies of Hengelo who care about Weusthag. The Friends of Weusthag turned out to be a key tool in making the connection with a group of engaged people and Weusthag. The Friends organised working groups: construction and realisation, maintenance (use plan), activities, converting work foundation, communication and sponsoring.

This reflection report is a gain from this since it is drawn up in cooperation based on input from the friends and municipality together. The challenge turned out to be to find the balance between municipality and friends. As a local government it is a concern to us that the friends would become a wide reflection of the citizens of Hengelo. On the other hand to the friends it is important to become in charge of relevant elements of the Weusthag and to develop the citizen park concept.

Finding this balance is not easy and needs quite some effort. A second track to develop the social value of Weusthag is to realise physical improvements. These two tracks cross each other of course. Now we are in the process of bringing them closer to each other.

2. The opportunity for change

Strengths

In addition to the strengths identified in SWOT 1, there are new strengths. The active participation of citizens by Friends of Weusthag has developed from an opportunity to a strength! This has led to much more involvement of stakeholders and public private cooperation.

Another one is the regional vision and strategy on urban fringes which helps us with agenda setting and put power together as cities in favour of our urban fringes.

Added to this SURF resulted in a much more constructive and positive relationship with our regional SURF partners which leads to synergy benefits.

A strength that is still there is the appearance of diverse facilities such as a place for learning and work, 't Geerdink, Houtmaat baiting place, petting zoo and nature education centre. This has been extended with a trout fishing place thanks to the initiative of an entrepreneur and support of the municipality.

Another place will be added this summer: a combi track for skeelering and ice-skating thanks to the active cooperation of private and local and regional government.

A strength that has been there but has not been identified as such is the Culture platform in Weusthag with her organisational capacity. This can be seen as the coathanger of activities in Weusthag for the benefit of all citizens.

Weaknesses

We have been able to address several of the weaknesses from SWOT 1 although some still exist. The traditional tendency of the municipality to have plans ready preceding interaction with citizens turned out to be a weakness that has become a developing point towards a more facilitating role.

We have been working on several weaknesses. One of them is the lack of accessible paths. We are happy that an Infrastructure Plan was agreed and realisation in progress within the SURF-period. We have been able to make a significant positive change concerning our weakness of making plans with no realisation in general during SURF.

Opportunities

We see plenty of opportunities to improve the social value of Weusthag fringe. In addition to the identified ones in SWOT 1 new ones became visible.

An achievement that we have been able to make is 'to start the engine of communication about Weusthag', by means of the Weusthag site. Friends of Weusthag started a working group about communication, promotion and activities, which want to develop a communication plan. This opened up the opportunity to enhance the communication and promotion of Weusthag by the citizens and stakeholders themselves. The Weusthag site itself offers several (potential) opportunities for more interactive communication, such as a link to Facebook and crowd sourcing. From SURF Partners in our spatial planning theme group and others we learnt about other digital possibilities as 3D visualisation and apps.

A new office in the city *Buro Hengelo* creates the opportunity to support events and link Weusthag to the city programme and city recreation.

The available facilities for organising all sorts of activities, is a big opportunity. The 'Weusday' (*Weusdag*) is an event developed in the SURF project with the potential to grow to an event of importance to the whole city and surrounding. It is an important instrument for branding.

Another opportunity that is created during SURF is the skeelering and ice-skating combi-track. This binds a big and active club also in summer time to the area and the agreement that they will take care of a social activity programme is promising.

An available instrument revealed to us by partners of SURF is Green Flag. This is an opportunity for us for balanced further development of Weusthag. Another opportunity is the increased emphasis of businesses on corporate social responsibility. This carries the opportunity of stronger support by businesses of Weusthag and its social value e.g. with money, co-creation or other support.

Threats

The economic crisis leads to financial cut backs. This causes a threat for the availability of money from the government, as well as from entrepreneurs. Another threat is the job to bring more clarity in the roles of municipality, Friends and other stakeholders. It is important that this is sorted out properly over the next period, otherwise trust could be damaged or unable to grow further. Further development of vision, focus, action plan (based on the themes nature, recreation, education and culture), means, steering and organisational capacity

by the Friends is necessary for successful further development. A threat is that this is not going to happen in time. A consequence might be that the dynamic that has grown falls back to standstill. The taking place of activities in Weusthag is a fundamental condition for success.

3. Unlocking the potential of the urban fringe

We approached our urban fringe project in a practical way in which we tried to cash opportunities that showed up in an incremental way. This is the opposite to extended planning without doing, which happened to us in the past. This brought us involvement from citizens and stakeholders which moved from an attitude of resistance and own interest into the direction of enthusiasm, valuable input and a responsible attitude. Amongst them are landowners, clubs and entrepreneurs based in the area, nature organisations and others. The challenge for the municipality is to keep up with this positive change and respond properly to that to make most of Weusthag urban fringe.

Our theme group spatial planning offered valuable information to us in this process and the conferences have been important to exchange information and experiences with the other participants on a wide range of themes: About 3D from Belgium partners, Norfolk, Aberdeen. About entrance gates from Hamburg, Norfolk. About the citizen involvement from everybody. About Education from

Aberdeen and Norfolk. From Harryda, about realising tracks. From East and West Flanders and Aberdeen about horticulture and allotments. From Almelo, Enschede, Aberdeen about Green Flag as a method to develop the area.

4. The Project Teams View

We learnt a lot during our SURF project. A lesson learnt is the importance of a group of people like Friends of Weusthag to ensure the feeling and reality of ownership by citizens and stakeholders. Moreover we realised that it is quite special to have such a group since a lot of SURF-partners are still searching for that. Another lesson learnt is the need for a high quality communication plan to make a success of community participation with citizens and stakeholders. To reach clarity in roles and responsibilities between municipality and the active citizenship is a condition for further successful social development of the fringe. Another lesson learnt is that it helps tremendously to mobilise citizens and to achieve citizen involvement when you have money available which enables you to realise changes. This works as a catalyst. Our efforts to find funding for this have paid off well in that way. Our investment in a solid political foundation at the

different levels of government have been crucial for this.

The benefit of the SURF project is that it has led to the recognition of Weusthag as a garden of the city. It enhanced the agenda setting of city fringes in general locally and in the region. Moreover it gave Weusthag a substantial impulse to develop as valuable for and from citizens.

From the experiences up until now main issues for an action plan can be withdrawn. The main elements are:

- an agreed maintenance plan including safety
- consolidation of Weusdag
- activity programme of culture platform, combitrack, nature centre and others related to the 4 themes education (young children!), recreation (especially for individuals), nature, culture.
- clear communication
- development of organisation and funding

We trust that the Friends of Weusthag will ensure and strengthen this for the future, facilitated by a supportive municipality.