

Plan Einstein: an innovative way of receiving asylum seekers in the neighborhood

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In Kanaleneiland, a neighborhood in Utrecht, an innovative asylum reception initiative was launched in 2016 called Plan Einstein. It is small-scale initiative with an open and relational attitude towards the direct environment. Apart from housing asylum seekers, 53 young people from the neighborhood were also given access to units of social housing within the project. This recognition of accessibility issues around affordable housing has put the experience of competition at the housing market in a very different light.

This broader vision for the neighborhood also became clear through the fact that activities that were offered by Plan Einstein like learning English or courses in entrepreneurship were also made accessible for residents without a refugee background. This made it an initiative where people not only co-live but also co-learn. Connections are built to the direct environment and its residents. The shared social space turned out to be a crucial part of the project where important encounters took place and the power of connection was recognized.





Initially a small group of 40, young, male asylum seekers lived at the asylum seeker centre from February 2017 onward. Then more people arrived from August 2017 and this included many more families. It needs to be said though that the population of the asylum seeker centre was rather atypical. Approximately 60% of asylum seekers housed at the centre had, or knew they would get, a permit to stay in the Netherlands. This was a different population to that for which the project was conceived in the emergency context of early 2016.

The co-housing and co-learning reception facility of 'Plan Einstein' aimed to develop asylum seekers' social networks with neighbours, while providing opportunities for participants to develop their skills, to enhance wellbeing and improve community cohesion in the neighbourhood. As such, the project aimed to engage with concerns from receiving communities, activate asylum seekers 'from day one', as well as reverse the negative spiral of boredom, anxiety, and worsening mental health that existing approaches to reception generate.

Find out more:

- Homepage of Plan Einstein: [Plan Einstein \(plan-einstein.nl\)](http://plan-einstein.nl)
- Dekker, R., K. Geuijen & C. Oliver (2021), Co-creating asylum reception in a living lab: learning from the experiences of refugees and locals, in van Praag, L. (Ed.), *Co-creation in Migration Studies: The Use of Co-creative Methods to Study Migrant Integration Across European Societies*: pp. 199-220, Leuven University Press.
- Oliver, C., Dekker, R., Geuijen, K & J. Broadhead (2020), Innovative strategies for the reception of asylum seekers and refugees in European cities: multi-level governance, multi-sector urban networks and local engagement. *CMS* 8, 30: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-020-00189-y>