

SAUL Final Conference, Amsterdam 27—29 June 2006

The final conference of SAUL emphasized its fundamental values: working together transnationally, regionally and locally to create socially-inclusive vital public spaces which enhance quality of life in city regions of North West Europe.



Delegates are welcomed to Amsterdam and view the SAUL project village at the Zuiderkerk (photo: R. Lewis)

On day one, the conference was kicked off by the overall project leader, Clive Fox of Groundwork London. Daniel Von Hugo, Interreg IIIB North West Europe Secretariat, assured the 170 delegates that sustainable urban development would continue to be a priority in future funding rounds and that the programme will be more flexible, particularly in allowing involvement of partners from outside North West Europe including new member states, but warned that there would be less money. Piet Eilander of the Amsterdam Spatial Planning Department joked that since SAUL is about transformation of space, our venue was appropriate: the church was designed for worshipping God and was used that evening to honour urban planning!

On day two, site visits included SAUL projects in Noorderpark or Amstelland. Noorderpark is an urban landscape being transformed to better meet local and regional needs. With an increasingly diverse population in the area, a new north-south metro line which will have a station in the park, and a new plan for its redesign, it is destined to become the 'Central Park of North Amsterdam'. The innovative landscape design for the park is about bringing people together. Local people have been part of the vision process, including a photo exhibition in which a photographer visited park users' homes after she met and photographed them in the park. The results were published in a high quality coffee-table book which includes plans and visions for Noorderpark. The SAUL Youth



Visiting the Youth Ambassadors bus project on the Noorderpark site visit (Photo: A. Maurer)

Ambassadors project enabled cultural exchanges and learning experiences between young people from Noorderpark and London's Burgess Park, another new urban landscape which was created



Redevelopments at the northern banks of the River IJ, location for SAUL site visit (Photo R.Lewis)

after the clearance of a bomb-damaged neighbourhood post-World War II. The Youth Ambassadors project included video-making and music events to attract and maintain commitment.

During the Amsterdam site visits, representatives from other partner regions related elements of their SAUL projects. In the case of the Rhein-Ruhr region, the Emscher River was formerly an open sewerage system carrying industrial waste. The sewer is being moved up to 35 metres underground and the waterway restored for recreation and ecology so they are now able to create a landscape park. Saarland, a so-called 'relaxed city region' without growth pressure, has taken an 'acupuncture' approach in the Regional Park Saar, in which design interventions are limited to special nodes important for the overall spatial vision as a whole. In Frankfurt Rhein-Main, a Route of Industrial Culture extending 160 kilometres

interprets the former industrial landscape along the river Main with art, heritage and recreational features. A new level of municipal and public engagement has emerged during SAUL, and a result is a new institutional structure in which a nonprofit agency oversees the Route's development and programming.

Day three of the conference was appropriately held at an award-winning new urban landscape: Cultuurpark Westergasfabriek, a former gasworks which is now a multi-use complex and modern city park. Amsterdam Mayor, Job Cohen, addressed delegates and emphasized his support of SAUL and the importance of transnational working.

In a provocative talk, Alain Thierstein, professor of spatial and territorial development, Technical University Munich, described SAUL as being about innovation, which in his view makes the world go round. Innovation in terms of sustainable spatial development and local quality of life as well as international competition of places is about trial and error and so is bound to fail at times. Fred Schoorl, The Netherlands Institute of Physical Planning and Housing, also highlighted SAUL's role in innovation planning, which can bring a paradigm shift to more complexity in involvement of people and in developing solutions.

Tracy Metz, a journalist covering architecture, urban planning and landscape, was an excellent chair and skilled at getting to the point of delicate matters, such as constructive criticisms of SAUL. Mr. Schoorl challenged SAUL leaders to be sharper on the issues at stake in the policy recommendations to Europe, because, otherwise, 'no one will lose any sleep in Brussels'.



Lunch at the Westergasfabriek (Photo: A. Maurer)

The SAUL video was unveiled, and it provides a sense of the scope of the work on the ground in each partner city region. This compelling film brings SAUL to life through partner interviews and citizen testimonials. For example, in Warndt, Saarland, a former miner's daughter has become involved in the re-interpretation of the former mine because of her own heritage. A teenager in London has discovered a talent in photography as part of a community access and education programme at Leamouth, East London. Partners in Luxembourg underline the importance of bringing emotions to planning. At the Bonames former military airfield in Frankfurt Rhein-Main a former runway is now a place for children to play, and the restaurant in the park was built and is run mainly by long-term unemployed people who are being trained in new skills.

Lewis Dijkstra, Urban Actions Unit, Regional Policy DG, gave a European Commission perspective in supporting SAUL and suggested that in future the partners would be eligible to apply for support as part of the 'competitiveness' objective and that the scope of Interreg would be enlarged under the 'cooperation' objective. New member states, such as Hungary, which was represented at the conference, will stand to benefit from the latter.

Clive Fox concluded the conference with moving personal reflections, suggesting that the key to the future of Europe is held by citizens' satisfaction with quality of life and enjoyment of diversity. Delegates to the conference left with the knowledge that SAUL, with its commitment to socially-inclusive and vital public spaces, is making a contribution to a successful future for Europe.



Forum members discuss innovative ways of involving citizens in quality of life issues (Photo: M. Jones)

With thanks to Jayne Engle-Warnick for compiling this article. Jayne, who now lives in Canada, was formerly Senior Development Officer at Groundwork London and was involved in setting up the SAUL project. This article will be featured in the next issue of Green Places magazine.

What next for the SAUL partnership?



SAUL Final Report: Recommendations for politicians and planning professionals. Copies are available in English, German and Dutch from Rhiannon.lewis@groundwork.org.uk or to download from www.saulproject.net

promoting the well-being of residents by empowering citizens of all age groups to take responsibility for their future environment.

Details of the next round of EU funding are due to be released in the spring of 2007 and SAUL partners hope opportunities for future transnational cooperation will arise within this context.

With the current SAUL project drawing to a close at the end of August 2006, the partnership is looking for ways to continue its valuable work on 'new urban landscapes'.

An application is being prepared for the eighth call to Interreg IIIB. This funding call is open to existing Interreg projects and is available to extend current programmes, and/or provide a bridge to the next round of EU funding. The proposed work will add value to the present SAUL project, and relate to the Lisbon and Gothenburg strategies through:

- Developing and capturing the evidence base for the last, forward looking chapter of the SAUL Report, testing effective models for illustrating the economic significance of vital public spaces in major city regions, by engaging businesses and public authorities, in partnerships with their employees, to evaluate the potential impact of current projects and planned changes on the viability of their area.
- Demonstrating the potential value of new urban landscape projects in building social cohesion in city regions,

Burgess Park Sports Centre Wins Green Apple Award



SAUL Project, Burgess Park Community Sports Centre, has recently been awarded gold in the community projects category of the Green Apple Awards.

The International Green Apple Awards for the Built Environment and Architectural Heritage were launched in 2000 and they have since become one of the major award schemes recognising and rewarding environmental endeavor in heritage and the built environment around the world.

The community sports centre in Burgess Park, Southwark, London, provides an all weather centre for sports including rugby, football & cricket with an all weather pitch, eight turf pitches, and changing spaces for 128 players alongside toilets and a café, open to the public.

Burgess Park was created after the second world war by demolishing bomb damaged dwellings and factories. It is just 3km from central London, yet surrounded by some of the most deprived areas in the country, and with a higher than average youth population. The sports centre was designed in close consultation with the local community and has proved popular since its official opening in November 2005.

The £1.8m building also utilises innovative 'green' technology including photovoltaic cells for energy generation, geo-thermal heating, water recycling and various energy saving and conserving measures. Predictions are that these systems will halve Carbon Dioxide emissions and quarter energy use for heating and hot water compared to an equivalent traditional building.



Exterior of the football centre, showing photovoltaic cells (photo: Studio E Architects)



Footballer Anton Ferdinand and the Mayor of Southwark at the opening of the football centre (photo: S. Turner)



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