

Designing with Children

Avonturis

In the spring of 2013 the municipality of Maassluis, the Netherlands, commissioned Omgeef and Sigrun Lobst to design a large nature play area. The city's ambition to create an area for all citizens to enjoy enabled the designers to exemplify the benefits of participatory design. Added to this, they were given the objective to design a natural play area that would be accessible to, and well suited for, children with a disability. At least 70 percent of the overall area was to be made accessible to children in a wheelchair. An important insight during the design process was to realize that participatory design and inclusive design are essentially co-productive. The ambitious goal to create an area for such a wide group of users, including children with a disability, motivated everybody to come together. The shared goal became a shared vision and a challenge that energized the development, well into the production stages.

Motivation

Already one year prior to the development of Avonturis, the city acknowledged a shortage of informal, outdoor play spaces. In addition, the city had made plans to develop a recreational area close to the city in order to provide better facilities for healthy living. The city had researched different options and concluded that a nature play could be an integral part of such an area.

Because of the area's city-wide function the city aimed to develop the area, and the nature play area in particular, in close cooperation with citizens, including children.

Children's involvement

Alongside the involvement of other citizens, co-design with children was essential for the adaptation of the area. Because of the area's city-wide function the city wanted to involve a large number of children during the development stages, including children with a disability. For this purpose the designers developed an educational program that teachers at local schools could use. The outcome of the program summarized children's associations and expectations and formed the basis for a combined vision that was used to further develop the area in co-creation with other citizens. In later stages, co-design sessions were held

What

Large nature play area

Where

Maassluis, Netherlands

Age

5-12

Group Size

Approximately 100

Project Stage

Brief, Concept, Construction

Children's Roles

(Co) Designers, Builders, Expert Consultants

Timescale

Spring 2013 - June 2014

Partners

Schippers (Maassluis Municipality)
Bolten (Facilitator, Bureau Omgeef)
de Jong (Facilitator, Bureau Omgeef)
Lobst (Architect)
Groot Koerkamp (JSO)

together with children and professionals in order to improve understanding and consolidate design choices. Overall, involving many different groups, and enabling close cooperation between them, established a common ambition - to develop an area for all citizens of Maassluis.

Outputs and outcomes

Since its opening in June 2014, Avonturis has been hugely popular amongst children, adults and visitors from other cities. A large group of volunteers and ambassadors are now involved in the use and maintenance of the area. Schools organise outdoor lessons and different parties organise their own activities. Neighborhood citizens use the area for their daily stroll and children and parents alike enjoy visiting Avonturis in their own right. People's contributions during the development and construction phases of the project can be seen as the first steps towards building a sustainable community.

Resources and links

<http://www.maassluis.nl/avonturis>

<http://www.omgeef.nl/projecten/natuurspeelplaats-maassluis>

http://aardrijk-sigrunlobst.nl/?page_id=808

<https://www.facebook.com/avonturis/>

<https://www.platformbuitenspelen.nl/avontuurlijk-samen-spelen-in-avonturis-maassluis>

<http://www.maassluis.nl/document.php?>

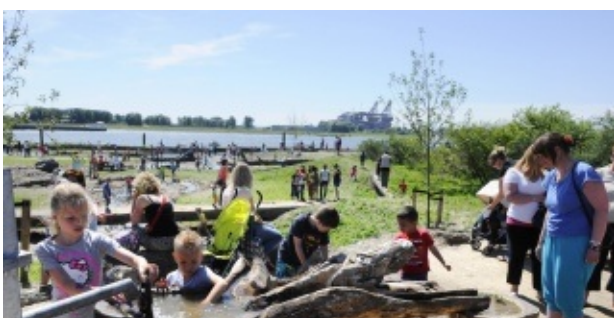
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