



Floriade: the livable city of the future starts with education

Currently more than 50 percent of all people worldwide live in cities; by 2050 this is expected to be almost 70 percent. Creative green solutions are needed to make and keep cities safe, sustainable and attractive – often by applying the latest technology and healthcare innovations.

With the theme Growing Green Cities, Floriade Expo 2022 Amsterdam-Almere aims to make cities more sustainable and livable. One of the cornerstones of their programme: educating young people and involving them in shaping the future of cities. What can innovative ecosystems learn from this approach?

Yoël Schuller, deputy director of the Floriade, was involved almost from the start. Among other things, he was responsible for setting up the Floriade Academy in 2018 and in recent years, as a member of the board of directors, he has helped steer the final phase of the Floriade Park's preparations, operations, exploitation and commerce. "Involving young people and in particular students in the horticultural work field is absolutely essential if we are to keep qualified and motivated staff in the future."

Unlocking the future

"A mega event like Floriade releases a lot of energy", Yoël kicks off the interview. "It creates a wonderful window of opportunity in the city for young people, and that releases a contagious enthusiasm. I also noticed that our organisation would not automatically connect with young

people. Accompanying young people takes time and the experts and project managers in a project organisation such as Floriade are often under a lot of pressure and therefore often have a full agenda. I think you can only make a Floriade for young people with young people. That's where the spark was initiated, we couldn't wait to work out the concept and plan, and to get started with Floriade Academy."

Meanwhile, the Floriade Academy is in full swing. "1750 students have done a project, internship, or graduation assignment in recent years between 2018 and 2022, and about 100 students are currently doing internships. We just finished the first half of Floriade Expo 2022, in which 100 students also did internships. We expect this number again for the second half, during summer and autumn. The scope is gigantic: from studies of

GROWING GREEN

business processes to innovative waste concepts, and from free publicity to facility management - in the full breadth of the horticultural sector.”

Although now the Floriade Academy is a cornerstone item within the event, at the beginning, certainly not everyone understood its importance. “After all, guiding young people takes time and why would an educational institution partner up with the Floriade Academy, if they have already taken care of these matters in their own network? At that moment I decided to take on a group of about 50 students for all kinds of internships, projects and graduation assignments and to just start. Everyone was amazed and quickly convinced by the incredible energy the young people brought with them.”

Generation Green

Yoël notices a lot of enthusiasm of the next generation for a sustainable future of our world – which still continues to surprise and inspire him day after day. “When asking young people what they think of Floriade, the answer is often ‘flowers and plants’. And then some mumbling about dull, boring and old-fashioned. The contrast with the reaction to the Growing Green Cities theme and the combination of Floriade with the development of future neighborhood Almere Hortus is enormous. Especially when young people themselves experience what the theme entails and what Floriade is about, a wonderfully and unstoppable enthusiasm arises.”

Floriade Academy also aspired to be a valuable and reliable place for young people and the local and regional partners like AERES, ROC van Flevoland and Amsterdam, Windesheim and numerous other educational institutes, especially during COVID-19 lockdowns. “It is hard for me to imagine how difficult it must be to study hard and stay motivated from your room or your parents’ house with only your online environment. And this also reinforced our awareness that there are also a lot of young people, who are not able to fully reach or even fit in the education system and always be successful in it. We tried to really be creative here and think along with their situation. E.g. by launching an impact generator programme for 36 young people in Almere – which will offer people concrete opportunities on the job market.”

On the Floriade site there are numerous examples, best practices, that illustrate this story to the visitor. The aim is to inspire and encourage the visitor to do things just a little differently tomorrow.



WZC Flora - At the Flora residential care center, you can learn what it’s like to live with dementia through VR. These innovations contribute to better healthcare.



Greenhouse - In the Technical Innovation Center, visitors will gain insight into future cultivation methods such as a robotic vertical farm, drones and other types of robots. What is the future of the Gerbera and Paprika?



AERES – the most circular building of Floriade 2022, which is already in use during this years’ Expo to educate young talents on growing green, livable and sustainable cities.



Food Forum - This pavillion was created to illustrate the special and innovative history of the province of Flevoland. Here people dare to make innovative choices, because at the bottom of a former sea anything is possible!



Save Plastics - This beach house was built using 7400 kg of plastic waste which is equivalent to 5 million sandwich bags! Plastic is indestructible, and therefore very sustainable in some applications.

A renewed design

No one can ignore the fact that the number of visitors is disappointing at the moment. “This is extremely unpleasant for all the people who have worked very hard on this in recent years and who continue to work hard to this day, to the municipality of Almere and its residents. However, we shouldn’t forget how special it is, both that the Netherlands is the only country in the world with the right to organise a world expo every 10 years, and that with all the challenges since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Netherlands is able to organise Floriade Expo 2022.”

“And let’s also not forget about the nitrogen crisis and the impact on the built environment and mobility. In other countries, this kind of Expo is seen as an investment in the development of a neighbourhood, a city, a country. The infrastructure, employment, the international networks

and the image of the organiser are important reasons for countries and cities to organise this type of Expo. That story is currently getting snowed under in the Netherlands and it is precisely the story that can be the basis of a renewed design for a Dutch World Horticultural Expo.”

From the making of to next steps

The Floriade has a lot going on to look forward to a bright future, Yoël thinks. “This years’ edition already had a successful making of. The station area was renovated, the train connection on the Amsterdam-Lelystad route was intensified and the A6 freeway was deepened and widened more quickly, with a huge positive impact on the flow of traffic. Currently, we’re in the middle of the exhibition, the Floriade Park is looking really beautiful and the vast majority of visitors are very satisfied with the experience of Floriade Expo 2022.”

“We’re also looking forward to the legacy of this exhibition, where we combined the Floriade with the development and realisation of a sustainable green urban district called ‘Hortus’. A truly unique district, where students enjoy their education, elderly people with mild dementia are housed and nine innovative bridges have been built as part of the bridge campus – literally building bridges, by reusing and sustainable use of materials.”

Yoël himself hopes to inspire and support other organisations to also keep moving forward in this trend. “Harness the energy of large-scale trajectories, events and other initiatives. This generates a contagious enthusiasm among education and among young people. Here lies the basis for a valuable and long-term cooperation between governments, businesses, entrepreneurs, education, research and a lot of young people. At Floriade, we hope to successfully complete Floriade Academy and transition it well into Growing Green Cities Academy for Almere, Flevoland and the Metropolitan Region of Amsterdam. Then discuss the entire process again with a number of people and draw lessons from it.”

“At the same time there are other places where Academies are being created (again), like SAIL Amsterdam 2025 where a wonderful hybrid learning environment is now being set up. And I’m just going to say it: I would love to set up a youth programme at the Noviotech Campus in Nijmegen. The environment, The Vibe of the Future, the companies and the place seem to be a perfect fit for young people and are totally ready for it!”