

Rotterdam has more than 600,000 inhabitants and is the second largest city in The Netherlands. In addition to new growth sectors such as the medical and architecture clusters, the city's port and industrial complex is still a major growth engine of the city's, and even national, economy. Distinguished from other cities by its innovative, new clusters (e.g. cleantech) Rotterdam also faces challenges such as congestion and pollution stemming from the city's port, paired with socio-economic challenges such as a relatively large share of inhabitants with low incomes; a high unemployment rate and a mismatched labour market.

Project overview

Formerly a shipyard, the RDM Campus is a new technology and business space located in the city ports area of Rotterdam. Established with the aim of putting the 'golden triangle of business, education and research' into practice, renovated historical industrial buildings house a combination of start-ups, firms and educational and knowledge institutes. The project also deals with the re-integration of the campus with the village of Heijplaat (constructed 100 years ago for shipyard workers) which continues to face socioeconomic challenges after the closure of the shipyard by providing 'new blood' to an isolated area that is surrounded by industrial and port industries. The project is seen as a 'joint adventure' between major partners, the port authority, two educational institutes and a housing agency, given that they had no experience in integrated mixed-use area development. The project is part of the larger Stadshavens ('City Ports') Development Strategy, in which the Port Authority and City Government are jointly responsible for the long term transition of various port and industrial sites into new urban and port functions until 2040.

Results and impact

To date, the RDM Campus seems to be developing well and has contributed to Rotterdam's competitiveness. The first of the historical buildings have been transformed and now house educational institutes, an

incubator centre and a number of firms that make use of the educational facilities and incubator centre. Many of them focus on cleantech, one of the new key clusters of the city and port that covers the bio based and energy sectors; hydraulics and maritime engineering, including offshore, infrastructure and mobility; construction and integrated area

development. The first educational programmes have also started and joint research pilots have been set up, but more structural cooperation between business and educational institutes will likely be a long term process, requiring a change in working attitude. Finally, the RDM Campus increases the critical mass of the village of Heijplaat and offers new facilities for the inhabitants, including a waterbus connection to the city centre, although further socio-economic integration between the village and the Campus still has a long way to go, also related with the delay of new housing construction in the village caused by financial problems of the housing agency.

Enablers

The successful development of the RDM Campus so far rests on a number of related factors. First, the new campus concept was introduced by visionary leaders of educational institutes who possessed both the skills and patience to create trust among the project partners. Secondly, the project benefits from the organisational and financial power of the owner of the area, the Port Authority, which employs a smart and flexible development approach in the area. By developing 'building-by-building' and 'plot-by-plot', based on the requirements of tenants with a long term contracts, it limits financial risks and creates opportunities to cross-fund general facilities and spaces for tenants with short term contracts (such as incubators). Thirdly, the target fields are 'not too narrow nor too broad', and are based on the history of the area and the profile of the city, but can also be slightly adapted to new opportunities and challenges. For instance, including the growing 'offshore' sector in the key fields of the campus has resulted in a large concentration of offshore firms on the RDM site, in addition to the successful incubator Ampelmann that was 'born and raised' at the former shipyard. The success of Ampelmann has been a major selling point in attracting new businesses to the site. Finally, the project has been supported and managed on various levels (decision making and operational), although organisational and financial changes of the major project partners could potentially bring new challenges in the further development process of the campus.

