

Foundation Co-trees (Lent / Nijmegen)

"In forgotten places in the Waalsprong lay beautiful orchards. They have been neglected and are on the verge of ruin, however, they continue to provide delicious fruit. So far, we have discovered apples, pears, and nuts. We want revive the orchards so that we can reap the benefits together."

(1) Introduction

Foundation Co-trees revives orchards in the Waalsprong in Nijmegen that are no longer being cultivated and are deteriorating. This initiative allows people to collectively reap the fruits of their labor. The initiative is not launched from a commercial perspective but with the intention to keep citizens involved in nature and to invite them to take responsibility for their environment. The initiative was launched as a foundation in 2014 and currently (one year later) has 125 members.

(2) Principles

The initiative of Co-trees is not organized according to economic principles. It is intended to keep people involved in nature through citizen participation and civic responsibility. Through this participation, social value is created; it brings people together. People from the same neighborhoods often participate which yields local connections. The activities are often accompanied with a lunch or something of that nature. This reinforces social cohesion. The orchards are accessible to everyone which creates a social meeting place. The initiative also has an ecological value because the unused orchards are being revived. The economic value comes from the produce in the orchards which is distributed among the members. The concept is to collectively maintain the orchards, and thus all members subsequently reap the benefits.

(3) The design

The idea originated at the location of the "Pear Lane", a forgotten orchard where the co-founder, Bas Broeder, went to pick fruit with his children. As the orchard was not maintained by the municipality, it became overgrown, and the tree branches began to break off from the trees. Foundation Co-trees now has an operating agreement with the municipality until 2017. It is the foundation's goal that the orchards will become of such value that they will ultimately be maintained.

The business model is still under development. Currently, the harvest is still considered as a nice extra but not as a goal in itself. In the long run, we can explore additional possibilities and go to markets to sell the produce. There are many opportunities to do more with the yields from the orchards. At one of the locations, a beekeeper is willing to set down a few hives which would result in producing honey. In another location, a chicken coop will possibly be constructed which will then result in the production of eggs. There are many ways to continue expanding as there is much land that is still not being used that could be included in future plans.

Because there are yet no initiatives like Co-trees, there is no competition in the neighborhood. The founders are increasingly being approached about how things are operated within the foundation. Once something is running successfully, everyone wants to know how it works. The foundation is making use of various transaction forms. The members create things together and revenues are shared amongst each other. The transaction means consist of cash because each member pays a contribution with their time investment and also receives the harvests from the orchards.

(4) Value Proposition

Foundation Co-trees arose because the founders thought it was disgraceful that orchards are deteriorating. They have selected this form because they believe it is important that citizens become involved. As a foundation, they can reinforce a community with the members and collaborate with each other. The initiative is easy to copy and easy to upscale. There are several places other than Lent in the Netherlands where there are orchards that are no longer maintained by the municipality. This NBM can possibly be applied in these places as well. There is a collective value creation because Co-trees is a foundation that revives orchards together with its members. The founders attempt to encourage the involvement of its members. The shared value creation consists of the harvest from the orchards but also the fact that the orchards are once again accessible to everyone. There are benches placed in the orchard, and it is once more a nice location to walk, play, and sit. The NBM adds value in several areas. The harvest provides economic value while accessibility and participation creates social value and, because the neglected orchards are revived, it also provides an ecological value.

(5) Community

We have selected a foundation so that subsidies can also be requested. Foundation Co-trees now has 125 members, and that number is beginning to stabilize. Thus far, there has been no publicity for recruiting new members. There has been a press release, a flyer campaign, and members had a booth at a historical garden. The rest of the community emerged through networking.

The municipality of Nijmegen is also part of the community. The orchards are owned by the municipality, however, with a usage agreement, Foundation Co-trees is allowed to make use of it. In addition to the municipality, there are other landowners who donate their land for the purposes of Foundation Co-trees. These owners may own a large plot of land that is unused but requires maintenance. In this aspect, the foundation is allowed to use the land and can, for example, make a beautiful field of flowers.

The agreements with the members are voluntary. It is acceptable when a member only pays his membership fee (€ 35 per year) throughout the year and does not contribute any additional labor or time. This is explicitly communicated: as a member you are allowed to only pay a yearly fee, and you are not required to do any additional work. The nature of the relationships between the members is informal. It is important that the maintenance of the orchard is done together. Currently, the founders are completing most of the work, however, the goal is for the members themselves to eventually take 'ownership' of the orchards. Therefore, the founders are

attempting to organize an increasing number of activities so that individual members will take responsibility for the orchards. The input of members is slowly growing.

The community also plays a major role in creating values. The idea of participation and the bringing together of the people has great value. Most participants are from the same neighborhood. One enjoys a day of hard work, and the other prefers to take the children on a sunny day to come and pick some plums. This way, everyone is working in the orchard in their own way and, in the meantime, connecting with the social environment. A lunch is often organized, and members invite other neighbors from the street which reinforces the growth of social cohesion.

(6) Results

The NBM has an obvious value for the neighborhood. The participants often come from the same areas and that can strengthen the bonds and connections, especially as the orchards become more accessible. Economically, members are collectively attempting to “save” the orchards. The contribution from the members is adequate enough for the foundation to maintain all that is involved. They also receive subsidies from the social value of the project and the natural components. In addition, Foundation Co-trees stimulates the collective creation of values. During all of the activities, members come together to collaborate, and the foundation tries to stimulate this. The orchards subsequently increase in value which is good for the neighborhood. These are all especially positive values. The foundation has also been confronted with negative values. As they grow larger, the municipality will begin to take them more seriously. Space in the Netherlands is a scarce resource, and everyone has an opinion about it. There are many interests that are involved, and all of these interests need to be considered, especially in areas where construction is occurring. These obstacles are not always obvious or transparent. Therefore, such an initiative risks unconsciously stumbling against such obstacles. However, it does not make much sense to spend significant time and energy on this; the foundation rather focuses on opportunities and hopes to attract the appropriate people that have a positive approach.

(7) Conclusion

Through cooperation and common interest, Foundation Co-trees is creating a beautiful and socially sustainable initiative. The NBM will be expanded, making it increasingly viable. The goal is that the orchards ultimately grow enough in value that the operating agreement with the municipality will be extended in 2017. Now, a year later, Foundation Co-trees would still establish the NBM in the same way. In hindsight, we would possibly have played the strategy of “the bull in the china shop” to a lesser degree. In the meantime, they have learned the consequences of playing by this strategy. In the end, the foundation exists due to extensive support, but it still needs to be granted success. If things become out of control, the municipality can terminate the agreement, therefore, the foundation must proceed with caution. The key to creating such an initiative is to just go out and do it! Become aware of the opportunities. The Netherlands is not always as stiff and restricted as many people believe. It is important to be aware of what society is looking for and to create an initiative. It is important that the plans are

described in a report and that it is supported by a long-term vision. There are many things involved in starting up an initiative, and this must be properly described on paper. It is also important to be surrounded by the right people.

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