

Blokhuispoort – sustainable initiatives in a former prison



CONTEXT

Blokhuispoort is a large castle like building, which used to be a prison. Now this is a place for the creative businesses, that use the former prison spaces, like the cells as their offices. There are about 100 creative minds working separately and together in the Blokhuispoort. This results in great products and services.

Thus, Blokhuispoort has a sustainable element of being a former prison turned into a housing for different product and services businesses, but some of those businesses are also sustainable on their own through co-creation, co-design and/or co-working. One of the examples is the D'Lab, a fablab, which is a part of a VET institution (Friesland College) which works closely with Frisian Design Factory (part of a University of Applied Sciences, NHL/Stenden). Students can work on innovative assignments from the "clients" (companies) and those companies have access to the latest innovative methodologies and technologies. D'Lab has its own Circulair Plastic Hub, which cooperates with a primary school to recycle plastic.

Now, Blokhuispoort is being exploited by Stichting BOEI, a non-profit organisation, which has as its objective the reallocation of industrial heritage.

PROBLEM

Of course, back in 2008 - 2009, the transition from the prison to the Cultural Business Center had to be made and there had to be thought of approaches on how to form Blokhuispoort as this Cultural Business Center. The main question was back then: how can the former prison, with all its space, be optimally used and attract as people as possible?

SOLUTION

So how has Blokhuispoort become successful, with about 100 businesses, which are regularly visited by the locals and the tourists? Stichting BOEI has decided to place different businesses and organisations in Blokhuispoort, which attract different visitors, like a library, a restaurant, educational initiatives, a great number of several (cultural) businesses, innovation driven organisations, a café, a hostel etc., with a creative prison touch (like calling the café De Bak, which is slang for jail). Thus, it attracts all kinds of visitors and tourists.