

Short biography

ir. B.J.A. (Hans) Thoolen

Mr. Thoolen was born in the City of Rotterdam in 1955 during the intensive rebuilding of this city after the 2nd world war. After his gymnasium he studied Housing and Town Planning at the Technical University in Delft. During his study he worked at the university and for the municipality of The Hague and supported different social movements and organizations on housing and rehabilitation-issues.

After his study (finished in 1983) he worked for several years in different roles in the intense urban renewal process in the city of Rotterdam, and was a teacher in architecture, town planning and housing at the Academy for Arts and Technical Sciences in Rotterdam.

At the beginning of the nineties mr. Thoolen moved to the city of Breda (with 185.000 inhabitants the 9th city of the Netherlands). In the role of process- and project manager he redeveloped one of the early expansions of the city and coordinated a large-scale intervention in the (historic) city center (with a total investment of 700 million Euros). Highlights in this period are the re-instatement of the former harbor and river in the city center and the ambitious redevelopment of a former military terrain into a multifunctional district, the Chassé Park, with residential, cultural and commercial functions. For about 10 years he managed the department of Project Management in Breda.

Between 2008 and 2020 mr. Thoolen worked as Coordinator Urban Quality in the very dynamic and quick evolving city of Breda, and in this function, he was a strategic advisor, but he was also managing complex projects (like the Growth and Development Strategy Breda 2040, and the making of a strategic development plan for a huge brownfield near the historic city center of Breda). A recent result is also the creation of a “city laboratory”, powered by local universities, entrepreneurs in city development and the municipality, with the target to give professional support to initiatives by the population of Breda.

Due to his theoretical and practical experience in inner city development he was and still is connected to several innovation programs and committees of the Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and Environment, is a guest teacher in different universities, contributed to several publications, and operates as an advisor for mainly municipalities. For several years he was a member of the national advisory committee on town planning of the Netherlands Architecture Fund.

Mr. Thoolen is involved in a lot of European and international activities.

For several years he was one of the international members of the jury for the French “Grand Prix d’Urbanisme”, he takes part as president or member in international design competitions (a.o. member of the juries of European 9 in France in 2009, and European 11 for Germany and Poland in 2011), and he is often invited abroad as an advisor or lecturer for sustainable urban (re)development.

In the Interreg III period he was the project manager of the successful Interreg IIIB project “Water in Historic City Centers” (recently rewarded as a “star EU project”),

and in the Between two Seas program he presided the project VIVID (value increase by visual design).

Recently he finished his task as the project manager of the InterregEurope project WaVE, directed at the revalidation of the relation between water and water related heritage (see www.interregeurope.eu/WaVE). Water is a 'red ribbon' in his international activities.

Between 2007 and 2017 he was the project manager of a twinning between the City of Breda and the Metropolitan Municipality of Ekurhuleni in the Republic of South Africa, about social housing, urban renewal, local economic development and water management (this in the framework of a program aimed at the improvement of the quality of local governance, powered by the international department of the association of Dutch municipalities, VNG International).

Mr. Thoolen retired from public office in June 2021, and started a small consultancy firm as town planner/ specialist in urban regeneration, under the title TOWNWORK City Surgery.

Besides he is acting as a volunteer in several organizations and initiatives, with an emphasis on urban culture as a carrier for urban transformation, and initiatives that intent to improve inclusion and participation in urban and regional areas.

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