

Revitalizing Spoorzone Weert:

A Connected, Green and Vibrant Future for Working and Living



A Proposal by [REDACTED], *February 2025*

Introduction

The **Revitalising Spoorzone Weert** project aims to transform the station area in Weert into a green, connected, and vibrant living and working urban spine, addressing critical **economic, social, ecological, and spatial challenges** that currently affect the area. By engaging with citizens, and various stakeholders, this project envisions a brilliant future that will enrich community life and increase **socio-ecological well-being**. This initiative is led by a collaborative partnership between **TU Delft**, the **Municipality of Weert**, and **ZUYD University**, establishing a design-oriented knowledge network to promote durable urban change.

Context

Proximate to 'Brainport', the Spoorzone Weert is a major transportation hub in mid-Limburg, connecting the city to regional and national rail networks. Connected to the Eindhoven-Roermond-Maastricht line in 1879, Weert has long been central to regional transport. Weert station, built in 1914, beside the tarins, serving as a terminus for many bus routes and offering intermodal connections with bike facilities, parking, and taxi-bus station. Despite the Spoorzone Weert's centrality, it acts as a spatial barrier in between the historical part of the city, its new developments, and the working and living areas in the either side. The underutilized, vacant, and fragmented surroundings of the Spoorzone Weert, present an opportunity to be considered as the focal pivot of Weert's future vision. (Van der Horst, L. 2022. Station Weert Cultuurhistorische waardestelling.)

Questions:

The initial question that ignites the research is:

- How to revitalize the Spoorzone Weert to transform it into a connected, green and vibrant zone for living and working?

This question would be supplemented by a number of more comprehensive questions, as follows:

- What is the role of 'Spoorzone Weert' in the city's future visions, including population growth and densification, ensuring the city's being socio-ecologically vibrant and resilient, economically circular, and spatially accessible and desirable, also in a broader regional and national perspective?
- What partner would be involved and what kind of practices would be effective to revitalize the Spoorzone Weert?
- How do Weert's citizens think about the Spoorzone Weert in their city and in the region on the way of North Brabant to Southern Limburg? What shapes their perception and aspirations accordingly?
- How to revitalize Spoorzone Weert, making it the spine of Weert's urban transformation?
- How will the project ensure the whole city's economic and socio-ecological well-being in the future for its citizens and in the region?
- How can academic networks be involved in this project, shaping co-creation?

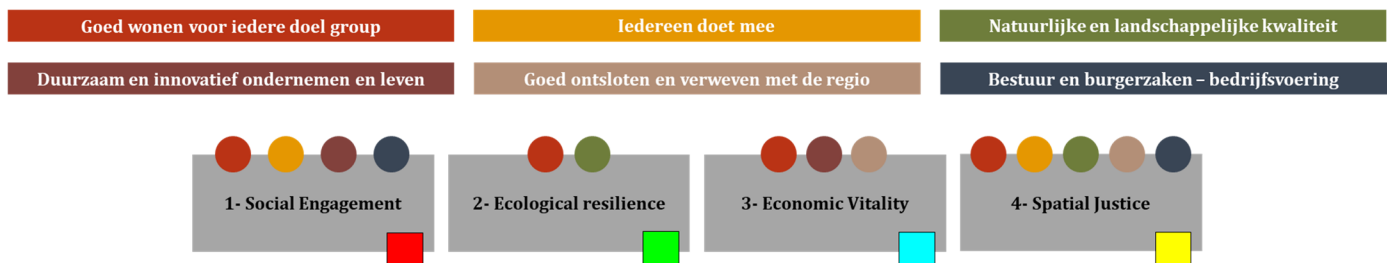
Project Objectives

Considering the abovementioned questions, with a focus on the Spoorzone, this project's primary goal is to reimagine the perspective of Weert and redefine its position in the region and country with regards to its contextual and identical potentials. Key objectives include:

1. **Social Engagement:** Build a collaborative platform for co-creation involving local citizens and those who live along the trainline and broadly in the city of Weert, regional entrepreneurs of 'Brainport' and those who work in Weert, students and those who are affiliated with academies, and public authorities to ensure that residents have an active role in shaping their vibrant environment.
2. **Ecological Resilience:** Develop nature-based solution to promote green infrastructure and biodiversity corridors that enhance quality of life through ecological enrichment, strengthening the green identification of the city.
3. **Economic Vitality:** Promote data-driven strategies for the future proof development approaches, envisioning a circular economy for the city within the growing region of 'Brainport', with regard to the significance of urban accessibility and densification.
4. **Spatial Justice:** Address spatial barriers and fragmentation to connect segmented sides of the city and reclaim neglected or underutilized spaces to create accessible and safe areas for all citizens, encouraging a sense of community and place attachment.

These aforementioned quadruple objectives can be derived from the visions considered in *Beleidsdoelenboom 2024* of Gemeente Weert and the main question of the research, as explained below:

- Goed wonen voor iedere doel group (Objective 1 – 2 – 3 – 4)
- Iedereen doet mee (Objective 1 - 4)
- Natuurlijke en landschappelijke kwaliteit (Objective 2 – 4)
- Duurzaam en innovatief ondernemen en leven (Objective 1 – 3)
- Goed ontsloten en verweven met de regio (Objective 3 – 4)
- Bestuur en burgerzaken – bedrijfsvoering (Objective 1 – 4)



How to revitalize the Spoorzone Weert to transform it into a **connected**, **green** and vibrant zone for **living** and **working**?

Methodology

The project, combining an **urban design project** with an **academic research programme**, employs a “research through design” method by utilizing living labs and co-creation, setting foot on both theory and practice:

- **Urban Living Lab:** As a project affiliated with *Limburg University*, the research will be grounded in the *Urban Living Lab Weert*, enabling the communities to address complex urban challenges while experimenting practical and contextualized solutions in real-life.
- **Co-Creation:** Within the Urban Living Lab, Co-creation will actively involve actors in various levels in the process and facilitate ongoing knowledge sharing through collaborative-learning and participatory design. It integrates the communities’ aspirations with design development. knowledge sharing networks, structured workshops, and collaborative platforms would be considered as some tools for co-creation.
- **Research through Design (RtD):** As a design-based research project, an iterative approach is needed for resonating with community aspirations. Through multi-scaled design process including mapping, ideation, prototyping/implementation and monitoring, the research develops throughout the life cycle of the project.

Expected Outcomes

The project expected outcomes are:

Publications: A series of reports and academic articles will be produced to document the project's process, findings, and implications, contributing to a wider understanding.

Guidelines: The project will deliver a comprehensive framework for design and spatial interventions in Spoorzone Weert as well as to inform future urban development programmes in similar areas, based on its findings and achievements in Spoorzone Weert.

Design: Plans for spatial interventions in Spoorzone Weert will be developed, aiming at addressing spatial needs such as urban densification, economic vitality, environmental resilience and enhancing socio-ecological justice.

Several collaborative activities and exhibitions will be organized during the project and in conjunction with the Urban Living Lab.

Project Timeline

The project will unfold over a four-year process, in two tracks of Research and Practice:

- **Year 1 and Year 2: Research and Co-Creation**

In this period of two years, aligned with the *Beleidsdoelenboom*, concurrently the focus will be on both research and practice tracks. While the co-creation process will be grounded, the future perspective for Spoorzone Weert will be precisely conceptualized. These will be resulted in **design guidelines** and **future perspective developments**.

Research Track: Based on the objectives and the *Beleidsdoelenboom*, the focus of this track will be on establishing a theoretical foundation by clarifying project's sub-questions, defining methodologies, data collection, socio-spatial analysis, and indicating the *Urban Living Lab Weert* through possible participatory community networks for co-creation.

Practice Track: Focusing on the practical sides of the living lab, concerning the Research Objective 1 and the vision *iedereen doet mee*, in addition to a network of co-creation, participatory community workshops will be formed, ensuring the research and practice tracks can effectively benefit the appealing perspective of Weert.

These will help to reimagine the future of Weert, as well as its position in the region among major cities like Eindhoven, Antwerp, Aachen, and etc.

After an iterative process, the design guideline will be presented for the municipal and public approval, while the future perspective of Weert is shaping out from the end of the first year onwards.

- **Year 3: Pilot Implementation and Monitoring**

Following the vision, design guideline and the master plan, in parallel with design development, small-scale pilot projects, will be launched to test and refine concepts before full-scale implementation. Throughout this phase, various aspects such as economic, environmental, and social impacts will be monitored to assess the effectiveness of interventions and inform necessary adjustments. Co-creation network and participatory community workshops will continue to encourage social engagement and back the iterative process.

By the end of the third year, the practical spectrum of the project will rise more, since the design framework will be materialized through a set of small-scale pilot projects, that can be monitored as well.

- **Year 4: Research through Design (RtD) Outcome and Final Evaluation**

Considering the outcome of implementation and monitoring phase, the design will be ameliorated and finalized. This phase will also include knowledge dissemination with a glance to all the published reports, articles, and events of the project over the previous years to share findings and best practices, possibly with other communities, academies, and municipalities.

By the end of the last year, a final project evaluation will be conducted to assess the long-term impact, providing a foundation for future urban revitalization initiatives across Spoorzone Weert and beyond.

Project Scheme

With regards to the partners' collaboration and their directions, the project is formulated in the intersection of research and practice tracks, with reciprocal interconnections, as below:

