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## Theme - Bakery Simplicity - A Recipe for Building Better Communities

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# Bakery Simplicity — A Recipe for Building Better Communities

Baking and eating bread in a small group seems to have some sort of mystical power to break down barriers, not only between strangers, but between different races, ages, genders and worldviews. Now, every week in Amsterdam and surrounding areas, people are discovering this “power of bread” as it creates dialogue between neighbours, within communities, and between locals and the outside world.

Text by Steve Jarvis Photographs by Bakery Simplicity

Community doesn't just emerge from proximity; in fact, proximity between different groups of people can easily foment distrust and social alienation. Having a hook to bring disparate people together, to share experiences and find common ground is fundamental to generating a sense of community and wellbeing. In Amsterdam, one organisation, Bakery Simplicity (Bakkerij de Eenvoud) is now bringing communities together by combining people's passion for bread with their desire for a more understanding society. As the name suggests, Bakery Simplicity's approach is simple, bringing people together to bake, and then eat piping hot bread over a cup of something hot. Their discovery, however, that without prompting participants will readily tune into each other to listen, to share, and to learn, is profound.

This form of 'baking communication' is the idea of Dutch social designer Peik Suyling, who thinks such an honest and simple activity brings quiet and focus to people, allowing reflection and providing a foundation for changing perspectives. He has a theory, "Baking bread is possibly one of the first food systems that was built on peace, meaning you need safety and stability in order to get the necessary components to create bread. Consuming the bread is the end result of having these conditions, and it naturally creates a peaceful environment." Suyling suspects this emotional response is hardwired in the human brain. "It is not fast food; you need time, patience and acceptance of process to get the end result."

Peik dubbed the project Bakery Simplicity, and while descriptive of how the bakery operates, it has a much more personal dimension. Primarily, because in 2011 Peik was craving to make his life simpler away from the demands and complications of busy projects. It was a message he wanted to spread to the wider community where so many people live demanding and complicated lives. For Peik, "The bakery stimulates people to think about what it would be like if things got back to basics, and it helps to simplify bigger questions. It is a way to break through our very complex society by bringing people back to the fundamental act of baking bread."

The project first took root in New West, a depressed area on the

outskirts of Amsterdam's Old City. Originally designed in the 1950s as a family housing development, in recent decades an aging population, dated housing, and successive waves of immigrants took the shine off New West's image and replaced it with wide-ranging and seemingly intractable social problems. The origins of Bakery Simplicity lie in a neighbourhood workshop established by Suyling and some collaborators in New West, in a space donated by the local government that housed a range of tools and equipment for people to build, repair and design products as they pleased. Suyling, a passionate baker, took advantage of the workshop to experiment with building a mobile bakery inside a disused caravan.

The first step was to create an oven, so he started to build a basic brick and clay oven in the van, and it caught the attention of the many people using the neighbourhood workshop. Suddenly he had lots of people helping him make the oven, and before long they had created a space for people to gather for the workshop's weekly meetings, and discuss matters over freshly baked bread and coffee. It was at this point Suyling's social designer antenna started to twitch when he saw people getting ideas and becoming enthusiastic about projects as they were baking. He realised that he had stumbled upon a simple way to get people communicating at a deeper level.

With the support of local councils and a philanthropic donor, Bakery Simplicity has been able to grow to eight bakeries spread over four cities in the Netherlands. Four of the bakeries are mobile caravans, which can be moved to areas in need of enhanced social communication, or used for events to share knowledge and brainstorm community building ideas. Suyling points to the fixed bakeries, such as a bakery in New West's Community Centre, to highlight the potential for bread-based community building. The idea for a communal oven in Schakel was proposed by Moroccan and Turkish immigrants, who came from cultures where community ovens are widespread.

The Moroccan and Turk communities often live segregated lives in the Netherlands, and they have difficulty in mixing with the wider community, and especially with older Dutch that have less experience and exposure to people from different cultures. Schakel's ageing and isolated population was reflected in the slow decline of its community centre. Whereas now, having a weekly baking day that attracts people from the area, the centre is generating a sense of inclusion and contribution between groups that do not feel a sense of common ground. Baking together is a chance to build bridges and connections in a friendly and sharing environment. So every Tuesday for 4 hours the Schakel Community Centre becomes a little cultural plaza bringing locals together, and offering a glimmer of hope for other struggling communities.



Name: Bakery Simplicity  
 Location: The Netherlands  
 Contact: [www.facebook.com/bakkerij.deenvoud](https://www.facebook.com/bakkerij.deenvoud)

