



# AARDSCHAP

ACTION RESEARCH GROUP

AARDSCHAP develops communities of practice for dysfunctional landscapes, and piece together what makes places thrive.

Aardschap Foundation  
Pieter de Raadt straat 37b  
3033 VC Rotterdam (NL)  
0031 616482956  
[info@aardschap.nl](mailto:info@aardschap.nl)

**Aardschap** is an action research group using methods from art and science to help communities transform their environment. Aardschap projects each begin with experiments where we work together with local communities in a process of **"learning by doing"** we call action research. This process enables us to understand places and groups of people in depth, so that the actions we then take together have the potential for long-lasting impact.

Informed by our artistic backgrounds and experience with social interventions, we are able to develop new narratives which gives a fresh perspective on a communities habitat. This is the engine to strengthen social capital even in challenging contexts.

We have successfully built a working car from scrap in Ghana, created a Department of Search at the Science Park Utrecht in the Netherlands, developed the System D Master's program at the Sandberg institute on self-organization versus systems, and much more.

The results of our process are shared with the wider public in the form of lectures, exhibitions, workshops and publications. Most projects are self initiated and executed with a wide variety of partners from art institutions, municipalities, urban development companies, and social enterprises.



# ACTION RESEARCH

A group of approximately 15 men are standing behind a bright orange, open-top truck. They are dressed in casual clothing, including t-shirts and button-down shirts. The truck is parked on a dirt road, and the background shows a hazy landscape with some buildings and trees. The title 'ACTION RESEARCH' is overlaid in large, bold, black letters at the top of the image.

There is a long tradition in Academia of action research in which research is conducted during the course of an action that effects change. Through intervening in real life, researchers tangibly map the resilience of an environment by “learning by doing”. Important characteristics include the researchers’ special personal involvement, their active participation and the close cooperation with the local population on terms that are as equal as possible.

# FIELDWORK EXPEDITIONS

All action research projects start with fieldwork expeditions. The main goal is to experience the landscape in person and meet the inhabitants. Using all senses enriches the awareness of the context and steer the research more into depth. Every expedition includes a minimum of 24 hour stay on site.

Fieldwork dome, expedition with Master program Urbanism by G.A.N.G. at A12 highway (NL) 2002

# MERGING EXPERTISE



Action research creates the possibility to join forces between different disciplines. By leaving out a fixed end result, and work in context, it generates a constant feed back from the surroundings. Thereby the end goal can be reached in many ways. To take form it demands collaboration, creativity and openness from all parties.

Expert meeting Aardschap on African automotive engineering. hosted by Dutch Design Week & Xelvin in Eindhoven 2015

# INTERVENTION

The interventions are designed after the fieldwork. Coming from a visual art background Aardschap uses artworks to create interventions that sparks the action research. Strong visual expressions can make visible what is hidden. It can provoke debate or inspire people to contribute.

Gas station by Melle Smets in the Wadden Sea (NL) 2007

# CAPTURING THE COLLECTIVE MEMORY

The image shows a radio studio in the foreground, with several people wearing headphones and speaking into microphones. The studio is set up with professional equipment. In the background, a shopping mall is visible through a large window, with people walking and various store displays. The overall atmosphere is one of active communication and public engagement.

The visual interventions provoke people to react. These are captured by interviews. By making the stories of people public it reveals the public opinions of fears, frustrations, dreams and hope. But also unveils how people create a home, built a community, and work on the future city. This way the collective memory is activated.





# KICKSTART CHANGE



The collected stories of hope, skills, natural resources and urban myths come together in a new narrative. We help communities to conceptualize and visualize their story in an action plan for change.

# CATCHING MEDIA ATTENTION



Media can help to put communities on the map. To get media attention a good story is vital. We generate stories with communities. Once a story is framed it tells itself. The communities can use it to develop their shared vision into tangible results.



HD  
is off  
  
</>  
share

National television broadcasting the Turtle 1, first car from Africa 2013

# STORIES THAT LAST



We document every action research in independent publications. The collected knowledge is combined and archived for future references. Also it shows the social capital in the communities.

# INTERNATIONAL EXPOSURE



The research fases are visually documented. The whole proces is presented in traveling exhibitions. This way local projects get showcased in art museums, architecture and design platforms.

Highway Museum exhibiting at the National Architecture Institue Rotterdam (NL) 2010

# FOUNDER

Melle Smets is an artist, researcher, and founder of AARDSCHAP Foundation. He has led numerous creative collectives across Europe and Africa which have produced a large body of work focused primarily on social interaction and public space. Using existing social structures and local customs as a starting point, Smets presents an alternative view on our landscape and culture. His aim is to turn ideas into actions, and to trigger wider participation in shaping our environment.





AARDSCHAP develops communities of practice for dysfunctional landscapes, and piece together what makes places thrive.

Aardschap Foundation  
Pieter de Raadt straat 37b  
3033 VC Rotterdam (NL)  
0031 616482956  
[info@aardschap.nl](mailto:info@aardschap.nl)