



BUURTBUIK UTRECHT OOST

Community kitchen rescuing food waste for free weekly meals in mixed neighborhoods

Overview

BuurtBuik Utrecht Oost is a volunteer-run community kitchen that fights food waste and loneliness by turning rescued surplus food into free, nutritious three-course meals every Monday evening. Located in the diverse Oost neighbourhood (students, families, seniors, entrepreneurs, and long-term residents), the kitchen currently operates from a temporary venue (Nyssa building, Burgemeester Ter Pelkwijklaan 2) while its usual home, Buurthuis Sterrenzicht, is being renovated. Food is collected on the same day from local supermarkets, Persian grocers, and partners (ATV Stadion, Persepolis, Voedselbank). Meals are completely free (reservation requested), open to everyone, and served in a warm, sociable atmosphere. Launched in 2021, it is run by approximately 30 active volunteers and coordinated by a six-member city-wide board overseeing all five Utrecht locations. Part of the national Stichting BuurtBuik network (20+ cities), it promotes social connection, creativity in the kitchen, and a sense of belonging in an increasingly expensive and isolated urban environment.

History and Inspiration

The BuurtBuik concept started around 2015 in Amsterdam as a simple idea: rescue good food that would otherwise be thrown away and cook it together with and for the neighbourhood. The model proved highly successful at bringing people together and quickly spread to other Dutch cities. BuurtBuik arrived in Utrecht in 2020 (first location in Overvecht), with Utrecht Oost opening in 2021 as the second site. It was inspired by the growing visibility of food waste, rising living costs, and the need for real-life meeting places after the isolating Covid years.

Key milestones:

- 2021 – Launch of Utrecht Oost
- 2022 – Expansion to Utrecht West; total of three active locations
- 2024 – Crowdfunding campaign (€10,000 raised for e-bikes and kitchen equipment); growth to five Utrecht sites
- 2025 – Temporary relocation during Sterrenzicht renovation; new location planned in Transwijk (spring 2025)

Despite challenges such as limited kitchen facilities and occasional regulatory blind spots, the initiative has remained fully volunteer-driven and self-sustaining since 2022, serving hundreds of meals weekly and creating lasting social bonds across all Utrecht neighbourhoods.

How It Operates

Every Monday one volunteer cycles around local partners to collect surplus food (vegetables, bread, dairy, etc.). The rest of the team arrives around 15:30–16:00. In a 15-minute huddle the group decides the menu on the spot (soup starter, main course, dessert) and divides tasks according to everyone's strengths – some excel at soups, others at desserts. Cooking is described as “organised chaos” in a basic kitchen without a dishwasher. Dinner is served from 17:30 to 19:00 to 30–50 guests (drop-in or pre-registered via utrecht@buurtbuik.nl). Around 30 active volunteers rotate via a monthly schedule drawn up by two coordinators; most cook 2–3 times per month, some every week, others only occasionally. No membership fees, no income checks, no paid staff. The focus is on creativity, social mixing, and turning unpredictability into a shared adventure. Informal side activities include themed conversation evenings and the gradual formation of regular guest groups who now meet outside BuurtBuik as friends.

Costs

Costs are minimal and largely covered by donations and in-kind support. Main expenses: bicycle/e-bike maintenance for food collection, basic kitchen supplies and cleaning materials, occasional replacement of utensils, and small contributions toward electricity/gas at the venue. Annual extra costs for events or new equipment are estimated at €500–€1,500 per location. Scaling to new neighbourhoods increases logistics costs (e.g., extra bikes) but remains low thanks to 100 % volunteer labour and free food donations.

Funding Sources

Initial support came from the Municipality of Utrecht, DOCK (venue partner), and Fonds voor Oost grants (2021–2022). Ongoing funding is crowdsourced (2024 city-wide campaign raised €10,000 for all Utrecht locations), small voluntary guest donations, and occasional project grants from sustainability or neighbourhood funds. The national Stichting BuurtBuik provides coordination, branding, and shared know-how. Food itself is donated free of charge by supermarket and shop partners. No large structural grants since 2022; the model is deliberately lightweight and community-financed.

Revenue Generation

As a non-profit initiative, BuurtBuik does not charge for meals. “Revenue” consists almost entirely of voluntary guest donations (placed in a jar), occasional themed-event contributions, rescued food (valued at hundreds of kilos weekly), and crowdfunding income. All money is immediately reinvested in equipment, bike repairs, or new locations.

Cost categories

Assets	Operational costs	Personnel costs	Administration and management
Venue premises	Food collection (e-bike maintenance, petrol if needed)	Volunteer coordination (~30 active volunteers)	Monthly scheduling & WhatsApp group
Delivery equipment (bicycles & e-bikes)	Utilities (electricity/gas at venue)	No salaries (100 % volunteer)	Partnership coordination with shops
Basic kitchen utensils & cleaning materials	Event/workshop materials (rare)		Crowdfunding & donation management
	Logistics		Occasional impact reporting