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# INVISIBLE VOICES

## A BOOK OF PARTICIPATION METHODS

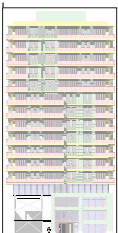
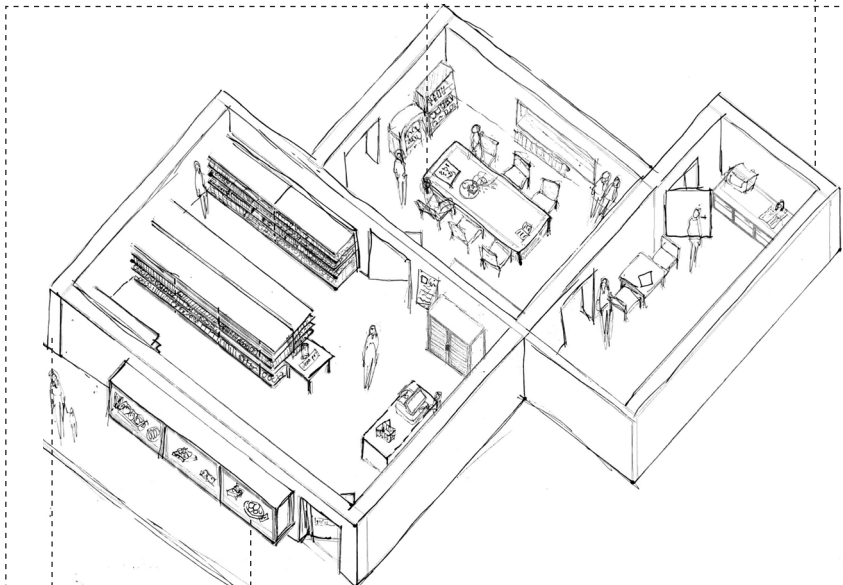
Anton de Koning TU Delft

This book brings together my research into the invisible voices of a neighbourhood.

It started with listening: to stories, struggles, and dreams of residents in Kiel – a place often spoken about, but rarely with. The first booklet, *Methods to Participate*, shows how I searched for ways to design together: through drawing, talking, building, and observing. It reflects on what worked, what didn't, and what I learned about participation along the way.

The other three fold-out booklets – *The Cooperative Tower*, *Transformation of the Factory Hall*, and *The Plinth* – translate the voices of residents into space. They are not finished solutions, but open proposals. Each part builds on real conversations and moments of exchange, shaped by both the context and the people in it.

Together, these booklets form one model, one story, one attempt to build differently – starting not from answers, but from people.



# Methods to Meet



# METHODS TO PARTICIPATE

This book is about participation.

It tells the story of my journey: how I tried to reach people in a neighborhood—especially the people whose voices are often not heard. How do you find these invisible voices? And how can you invite them to participate, or even help design their own neighborhood?

Many people with a migrant background or with fewer opportunities often don't take part in neighborhood activities. But why is that? Is it because they don't want to? Or because the system doesn't really see them? This book looks for answers to those questions—not in theory, but by meeting people, listening to them, and working with them.

This book is an adventure. In a way, it's also like a diary. It follows my steps in the order they happened—how I got to know the people and the area.

I started with simple, short conversations. Step by step, I built trust. In the end, we worked together more deeply. The book follows all levels of participation—from how to meet, to how to co-create.

It shows what worked, what didn't, and what we can learn if we really want everyone to have a voice in shaping their city.





# METHOD 1: STREET ENCOUNTER

Step One: Talking to People on the Street  
Or how a smile isn't always enough

To understand how people live in the neighborhood, I started by simply walking around and talking to whoever I met. No interviews, no forms—just casual encounters, open to coincidence.

It wasn't easy.

Some people turned away. A man said, "I don't know you. Goodbye." That was it. Others were more open, but trust came slowly. People had reasons: bad experiences, fear, fatigue.

I asked simple questions:  
"What's it like to live here?"  
"What do you think about the garbage?"  
Sometimes, these opened the door.

One man first said no, then minutes later called me from his window: "Come up." That moment showed how fragile and valuable trust can be.

People shared frustrations—mold, broken doors, neglect—and the feeling that no one listens. Yet there was also pride in their homes, even in difficult conditions.

Why it matters

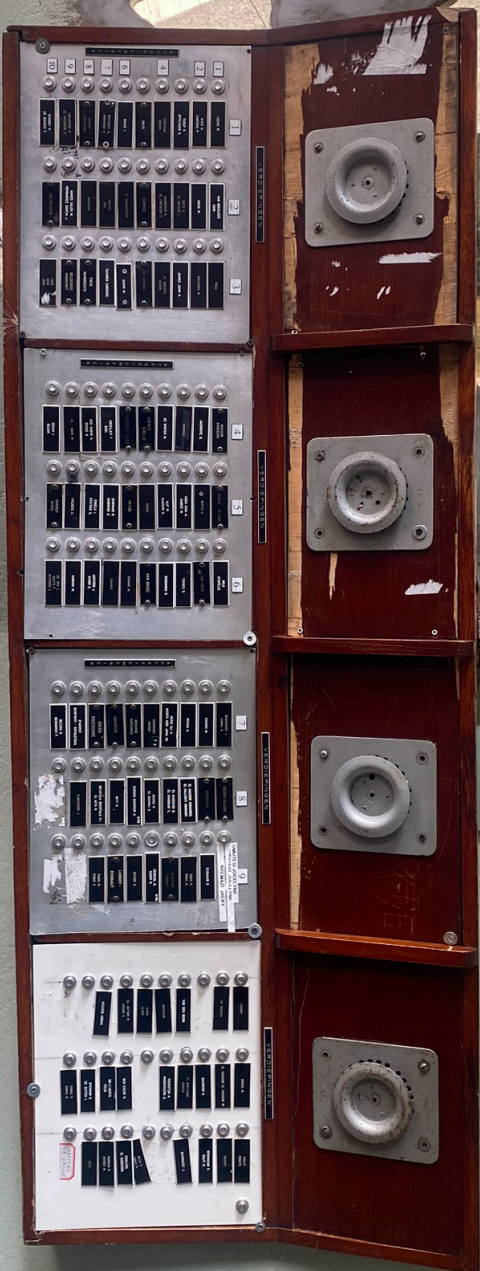
This method is about presence. Not rushing. Not expecting deep stories right away. Just being there, asking, listening. Even short conversations reveal how people feel and what daily life is like.

Real contact takes time.  
It's not something you get—  
It's something you earn.










VOOR MEER  
**GROEN**  
IN 2020

  
Ministerie van  
Binnenlandse  
Zaken  
Postbus 20012  
2500 CA Amsterdam  
T 020 473 47 00  
F 020 473 47 01  
Huidvlekken  
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020 22 25 00  
Sluikertje in uw deuren | vaker gang  
Gedownload op 11/11/2019  
Gedownload op 11/11/2019

# METHOD 2: RINGING DOORBELLS

## Step Two: Ringing Doorbells

Or how to be mistaken for a lottery vendor

When the streets were quiet, I tried something else: ringing doorbells. I buzzed social housing blocks and asked through crackly intercoms if someone might let me in.

It almost never worked.

A stranger at the door feels like an intrusion. People are used to sales, contracts, or scams. Most often, I heard:

"I don't know you."

"No thanks."

Then silence.

## Boundaries at the Door

The doorstep is sharp ground. More private than expected. Unlike the street, where both can walk away, the door puts one person in control.

But once, a door clicked open.

"Yes, of course. Come in," someone said.

It felt accidental—like we caught the right moment.

Even then, it was clear: being let in isn't being trusted. That takes more than a buzzer.

## Why it matters

This method showed how fragile the line is between public and private. Trust doesn't start at the door—it starts long before that.

Ringling doorbells brought mostly rejection. But it taught me about caution, distance, and the need for new approaches.

For now, I'm leaving this one behind.











# METHOD 3: COMMUNITY SPOT

## Step Three: A Community Spot

Or how a low-cost supermarket gave us a first real connection

Some places make talking easier. Not because you're invited—but because people already belong there.

That's how we found the Sociale Kruidenier in Kiel-Hoboken.

## A Shop with a Second Role

It looks like a small supermarket—basic groceries, second-hand clothes, and a big table in the back. People come with a referral for low-cost food, but they also come to sit, chat, or just take a break.

Behind the counter is Koropacka, offering coffee and conversation. The atmosphere is open, informal, and calm.

## An Unexpected Invitation

While talking quietly one day, Claire overheard us.

"I'll show you my house," she said.

Moments later, we were walking out the door together.

That moment didn't happen on the street or at a door. It happened here—where trust and contact grow more naturally.

## Why it matters

This wasn't about asking the right questions. It was about being present. Watching how people move in a space that feels safe.

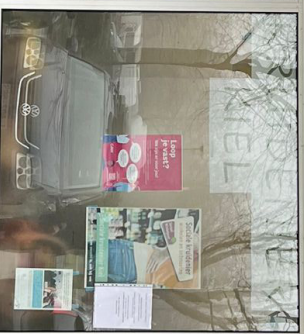
Through this space, we also met Saamo, a local organization working on social inclusion. Their presence helped us understand what connects people—and what doesn't.

## Conclusion

Places like the Sociale Kruidenier weren't made for research—but they make it possible.

We didn't build a method.

We entered one.





# METHOD 4: CONTRIBUTE TO THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

## Step Four: Helping Out

Or how helping out becomes a method

There's a difference between observing a neighborhood and becoming part of it. This method is about that shift—from outsider to participant.

## A Change of Position

True participation isn't a tool—it's a change of role. It starts with presence, patience, and asking:

What does this place need?

That's how I began helping at the Sociale Kruidenier. Every Wednesday, 9 to 3.

## What Changed

By helping out, I became familiar. People recognized me, shared stories, and even sent WhatsApp messages. I was no longer just a visitor—I belonged, even if just a little.

Over time, I saw how networks quietly form:

Claire's son turned out to be someone I had just met.

An exhibition visit led to new invitations in Deurne.

One small moment created a bigger connection.

## Why it matters

Helping out isn't fast. It takes time and trust. But it offers something no interview can: a view from within.

You don't ask for access.

You earn it—by being there, doing something real.

## Conclusion

This method is simple:

Show up.

Be useful.

Keep coming back.

And slowly, the neighborhood starts to let you in.





# Loop je vast?

We zijn er voor jou!

Er is altijd een CAW team in de buurt. De huisarts, huisarts-assistent of verpleegkundige. De huisarts-assistent kan je helpen met vragen over je gezondheid. Het CAW team kan je helpen met vragen over je welzijn.



€0.67

€0.58

€0.20





# METHOD 5: 'HET VELDJE'

## Step Five: Het Voetbalveldje

Or how a patch of grass connects worlds that never meet

Some spaces seem ordinary—like a football field. But they're quietly powerful. You show up alone, and end up playing with strangers. No plan, no introductions. Just play.

### Everyday Encounters

At Bont, where I work with young people with disabilities, I talked to Kars, a former Feyenoord player. Football shaped him—not through sport, but through connection.

"Black, white, rich, poor—all together," he said.

Later, we visited a pitch. Kids called out to us. We played. No barriers—just real interaction between different people.

### Different Days, Same Pattern

On Saturday, we played a match in Kinderdijk—no diversity off the field, full mix on it.

On Sunday, a public pitch in De Esch. Moroccan teens joined. Then French students.

Without football, none of us would have met.

### Why it matters

Fields like these are third spaces—not home, not work, not curated cafés, but open places where people blend.

But access is shrinking. Some pitches require booking or payment—cutting out those who can't afford it.

### Conclusion

At first, I hesitated to include a field in my project. Too noisy? Too chaotic?

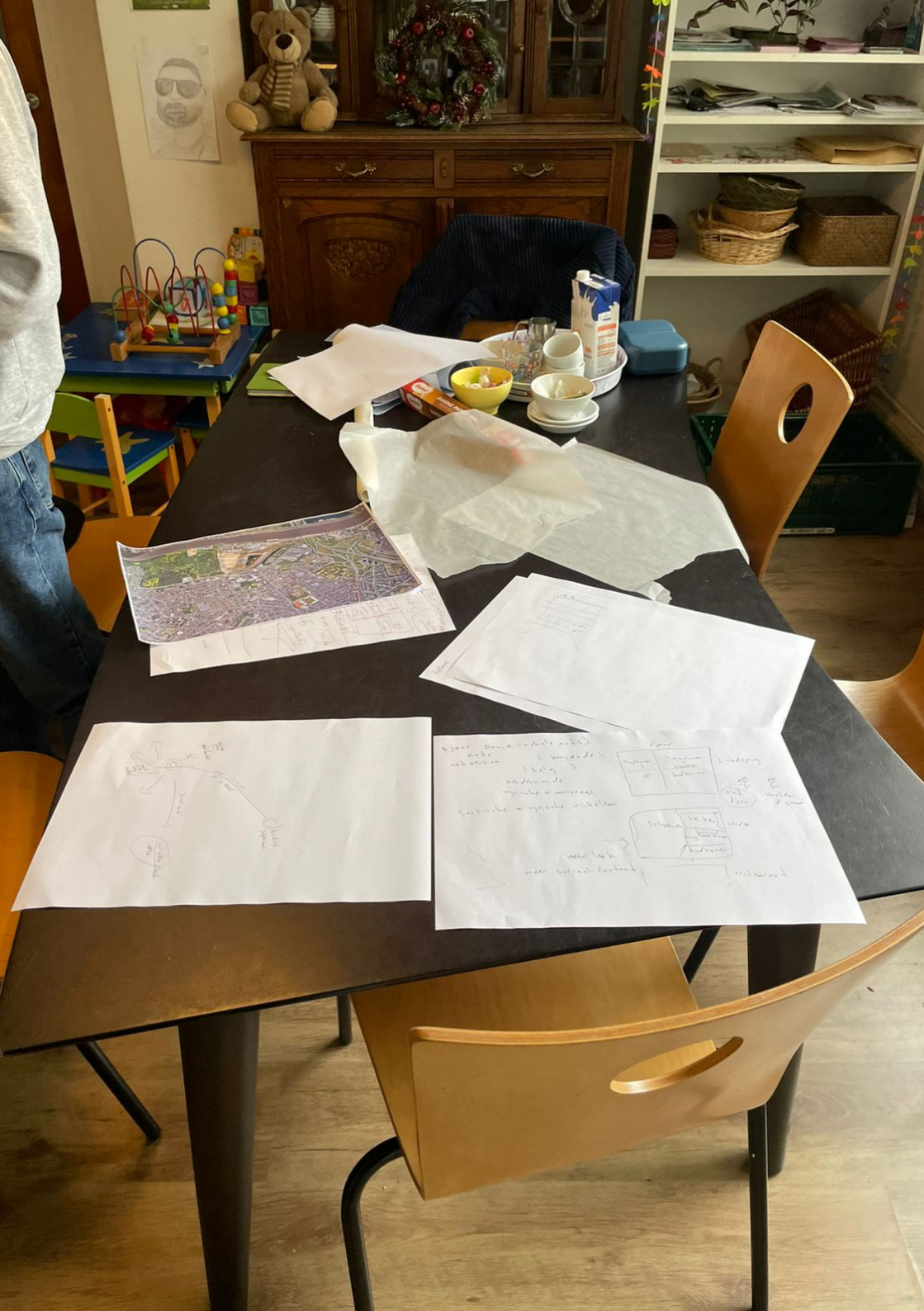
But now I know: if different people are to live together, they need somewhere to meet.

A simple football field can do that.

No ticket. Just show up.







# METHOD 1: NARRATIVE MAPPING

## Step Two: Narrative Mapping

Or how drawing opens up what words can't reach

Narrative mapping is a participatory method where people draw their own stories. The combination of drawing and talking opens space for memories, emotions, and spatial experiences that words alone often miss.

### How it works

With just A3 paper, pens, and printed maps, I met people at the Sociale Kruidenier—a place where they already felt at ease. I asked open prompts like:

"Can you draw your home?"

"Where do you feel safe?"

"What does your day look like?"

Most were unsure about drawing. I reminded them: there are no ugly drawings. Sometimes I traced or added alongside them. The act of drawing helped people slow down and reflect.

### What it revealed

People stayed longer than expected. Stories emerged naturally—about illness, isolation, routines, or memories. Even hesitant sketches led to trust and unexpected depth.

Roland, who first refused to sit, ended up guiding me through the neighborhood.

Alex drew his tiny studio and spoke about sleeping on the floor.

Daria shared how she misses city life since moving away.

### Conclusion

Narrative mapping isn't about drawing skill. It's about creating a moment where someone feels safe enough to share their world—and maybe sees it differently themselves.





Bouwserve

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ANWERPEN

2170

park sport + Nood

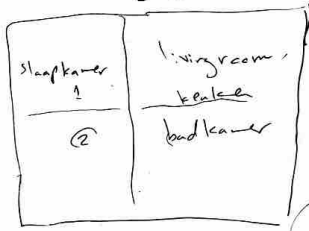
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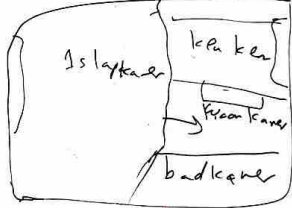
1 jaar



2 verdieping

8 jaar

Hashem  
7 jaar



studio

meer leuk

meer sociaal contact

restaurant

45

45

0466 396 141

kerish

04 66 396 141

Bakht

Bakht

Bakht

8 jaar. Daria (mobiele arts)

Arts

net pension

(busscode)

(belg)

ben derman de

syrische + marocans

Turkische + syrische winkelen



# METHOD 2: VISUAL QUESTIONNAIRES

Or how design choices became conversation starters

After narrative drawing, I tested a more structured—but still accessible—method: a visual questionnaire. It was a poster with simple questions and illustrated options. The goal wasn't to collect data, but to start conversations about housing, public space, and daily life—especially with people less fluent in Dutch or unfamiliar with formal interviews.

How it worked

The poster combined:

- Personal prompts: "Where do you live?", "What do you like or dislike?"
- Visual choices: "Larger balcony or shared garden?", "More cafés or more libraries?"

People could point, choose, or explain. We met at the Sociale Kruidenier—a trusted space that made participation feel easy, even for those unsure about reading or drawing.

What emerged

The method gave room for many voices:

Chris (23) values green space over parking and dreams of more privacy. Samira (49) wants benches, parks, and a market square. Kousouma (42) prefers shared kitchens and gardens but misses personal space. Koropacka (60) longs for cafés, green parks, and someone to talk to in her own language.

Reflections

- Some visuals weren't clear—misunderstandings happened.
- Either/or questions felt too rigid—people wanted nuance.
- Still, the format worked: it opened the door to real conversations.

Conclusion

The poster wasn't perfect—but it made people think spatially, react intuitively, and share stories. Even imperfect tools can create meaningful exchange—if used with care.

# ONTMOETING

Kent u mensen uit uw wijk?

Waarvan kent u ze? Kies



Anders:



Gemeenschappelijke tuin

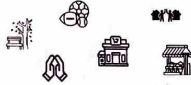


Meer winkels



Meer planten

Mist u plekken voor ontmoeting? Kies



Anders: Markto



Gemeenschappelijke keukens



Meer gemeenschappelijke ruimtes



Meer groen en parkjes

Ontmoet  
u zelf  
aan de Raad

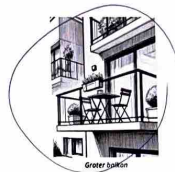
# WONEN

Waar woont u en met wie?

Kiel met vriend  
Buren  
Wat voor woning is het?  
appartement

Wat vindt u fijn aan uw woning?

alles!  
2 slaapkamers  
Wat vindt u minder aan uw woning?  
schimmel



Groter balkon



Meer parkeerplekken voor de deur



Gedecorede woonruimte



Gemeenschappelijke Tuin



Meer groen in de wijk



Eigen was ruimte (kleinere woonruimte)

Ontmoet  
u zelf  
aan de Raad

misschien

graat

# WONEN

Waar woont u en met wie?

met slaapkamer, kleine dochter Eigen huis

Wat voor woning is het?

Maurits Sobbe, 54 jaar, 11/7, van hoven, nie fine

Wat vind u minder aan uw woning?



Groter balkon



Meer parkeerplekken voor de deur



Gedecorede woonruimte



Gemeenschappelijke Tuin



Meer groen in de wijk



Eigen was ruimte (kleinere woonruimte)

Ontmoet  
u zelf  
aan de Raad

# ONTMOETING

Kent u mensen uit uw wijk?

Ja  
Waarvan kent u ze? Kies



Anders:



Gemeenschappelijke tuin



Meer winkels



Mist u plekken voor ontmoeting? Kies



Anders:



Gemeenschappelijke keukens



Meer gemeenschappelijke ruimtes



Ontmoet  
u zelf  
aan de Raad





# METHOD 3: DRAWING OVER

## Step Four: Drawing Over the Plan

Or how people wrote on my plans and gave them meaning

After listening and observing, I brought something of my own: a fictional design proposal. I laid out plans, models, and drawings. Then I asked: "What should this bring to the neighborhood?"

People responded not with yes or no, but with pens—writing, circling, crossing out, adding. There were no rules, and that made all the difference.

## How it worked

This wasn't about testing a final design. It was about resonance.

Does this idea belong here?

What does it connect to?

What does it miss?

With broad questions like:

- What should this block contribute?
- What's missing from your daily life?
- Where do you feel you belong?

## What it revealed

People wrote more than they drew. One man summed it up:

"Positief: multiculti / Negatief: multiculti."

He valued diversity, but also felt its weight.

Kiel was called warm and loud. Hoboken: green and calm.

Places like Saamo and the Sociale Kruidenier came up often—not as services, but as anchors.

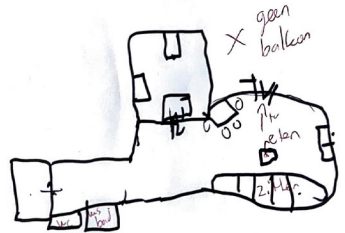
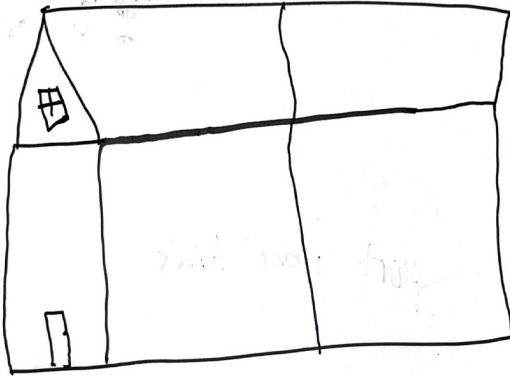
## Why it matters

Sharing my drawings reversed the roles. The conversation became mutual. It wasn't just about critique—it became about possibility.

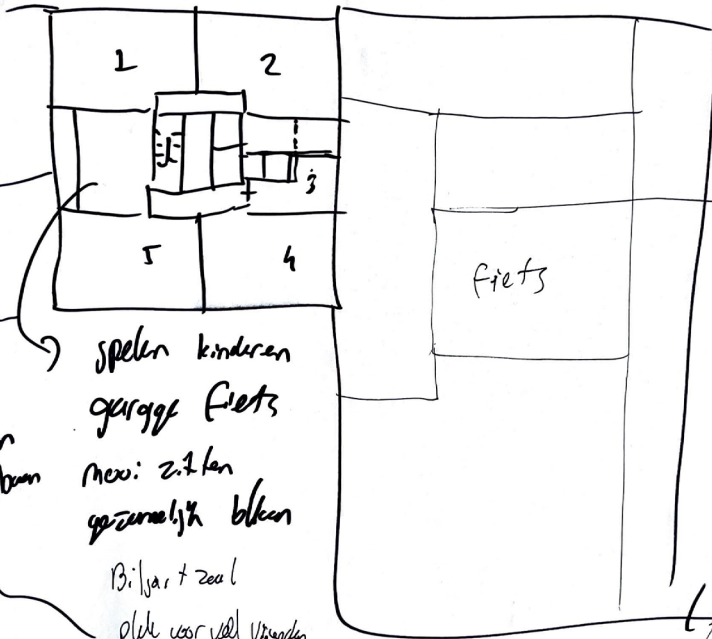
## Conclusion

Letting people mark your plans makes design a shared act.

Participation isn't clean or easy—but that's what gives it meaning.



6 maart



alle mensen  
spaan geld  
5 allemaal  
-> kopen tabel

6 maart





# METHOD 4: MODELS

## Step Five: The Model Exercise

Or how a kitchen door became a design problem

We created a Playmobil-style kit: scaled walls and furniture that people could move to recreate or rethink their home.

With printed floor plans as a starting point, we asked:

Can you rebuild your home?

What would you change?

What's missing?

### Why it worked

People didn't have to imagine—they could build. Once something stood, edits followed naturally. The 3D setup helped visualize proportions, flows, and daily routines.

### What it revealed

Koropacka rebuilt her flat and pointed at the hallway:

"Too narrow. The kitchen door hits you."

She added a small bar to drop things—a detail that mattered.

Another participant moved one wall to make space for his son:

"We don't need more rooms, just fair ones."

That one sentence reframed how we think about space.

### 3D shifts the mindset

Compared to talking or drawing, physical models made people more precise. It wasn't theory—it was their life, made visible.

### Conclusion

This method is slow but deep. Physical models invite practical, personal feedback.

And often, real design insight starts with a door that swings the wrong way.





# CONCLUSION

Looking back, I've learned that the classic participation ladder isn't something you can just follow step by step. It doesn't always make sense, and honestly, it often doesn't fit the reality on the ground.

What really mattered was the first part of this journey: meeting people. Just being there, starting small, and slowly building trust. That's where everything began.

I tried all sorts of methods: from street conversations to model making, but what made the difference was not the tools themselves. It was presence. Showing up, helping out, listening without rushing. Being seen not as a researcher, but as a person.

Some things worked, some didn't. Ringing doorbells failed most of the time. But standing in the local supermarket, helping on Wednesdays, or kicking a ball on a field. those opened real doors.

Participation isn't clean, and it's never perfect. But that's okay. It's not about control or ticking boxes. It's about sharing space, ideas, and stories. And sometimes, the smallest conversations turn out to be the most powerful.

So no, I didn't follow the ladder.  
I followed the people.





Sociaal  
Winkelpunt

GROENTEN ZYN  
GEZOND  
EN  
LIKKER IN DE  
MOND

Puree d'Agave

