

# Participation at your doorstep

Stimulating social cohesion and building new relations between Rotterdammers and the municipality



## Background

*A growing distance between citizens and municipalities*

The public good became something that is not created publically anymore. The interaction between the municipality and citizens is characterised by distance: civil servants are used to design services without citizens and citizens are used to a municipality that does its own thing. Both are not used to approaching each other in order to collaboratively make better public spaces, services and policies. The historical low turnout rate of last municipal elections in Rotterdam, 39%, reflects the low trust people have in the municipality and how they feel unrepresented by the city council. If the municipality does not put effort in finding new ways to actively invite people to participate between 'city maker' and 'city user' will become bigger, the city less inclusive and neighbourhoods less liveable.

## The goal

*The municipality as initiator of social connection and participation*

Participatory activities strengthen the social network of people within a neighbourhood and through this a neighbourhood can become more resilient. This process also works the other way around and through a stronger local network, people tend to engage more in participatory activities. It's an ongoing challenge for the municipality to include less obvious citizens in participation processes. This research shows that participatory activities can exclude citizens as they don't feel addressed, spoken to or don't have the practical means to join these activities. In order to promote participation and to make it more accessible for a broader group of citizens, the municipality should be a facilitator of community building and actively approach people in order to connect to them.



**Hand out**  
Connect with citizens



**Fill in**  
Express your opinion



**Pass on**  
Interact with your neighbour



Value for citizens of Rotterdam

**An accessible way to do something for your local environment and meeting new people**

Value for gemeente Rotterdam

**Building trust through personal contact and stimulating citizens to participate**

## The Wijkbox concept

*A participatory tool that initiates social contact*

The Wijkbox concept is an intervention that combines these social and participatory aspects. In this box, citizens can leave their opinion, dreams and concerns about the neighbourhood. The box is handed out by civil servants in the neighbourhood and later passed on from citizen to citizen. As the boxes travel through the neighbourhood, more opinions are collected and more social connections are formed. The Wijkbox is a starting point for collaboration related to the topics proposed in the boxes. As the boxes end up in unexpected places, new people enter the local network. The Wijkbox allows civil servants to approach citizens more personally and provides citizens an accessible way to form their opinion about the neighbourhood, possibly stimulating them to join other participatory activities.

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