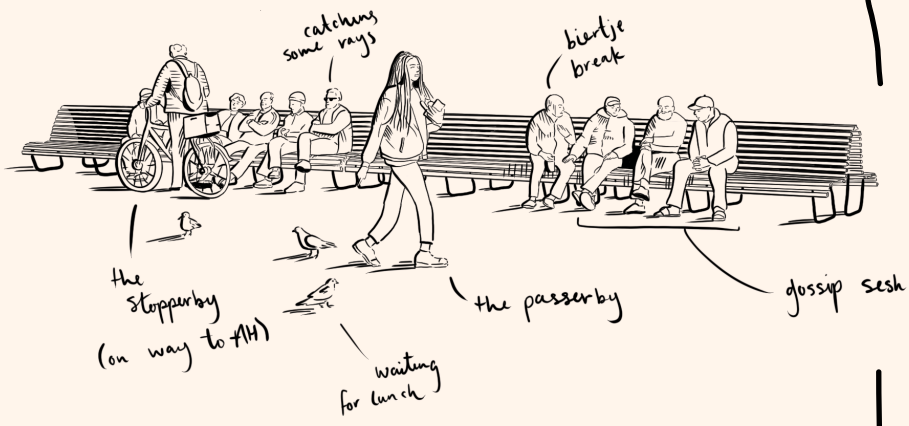


Shared Ground

Co-Creating Neighbourhood Transformation through Participatory Design

Kaitlyn Smith
6024009
TU Delft
Industrial Design Engineering
Design for Interaction
2025



Shared Ground:
Co-Creating Neighborhood Transformation through Participatory Design

A participatory design project to surface resident voices, build trust, and lay the foundation for transforming Mathenesserplein.

Masters Thesis

Author
Kaitlyn Smith
6024009

Chairperson
Dr. Laurens Kolks
Department of Human-Centered Design
Faculty of Industrial Design Engineering
Delft University of Technology

Mentor
Dr. Froukje Sleeswijk Visser
Department of Human-Centered Design
Faculty of Industrial Design Engineering
Delft Institute of Technology

Secondary Mentor
Dr. Pieter Jan Stappers
Department of Human-Centered Design
Faculty of Industrial Design Engineering
Delft Institute of Technology

Client
Mustapha Akchich
Project Leader / Van plein naar park

All images, graphics, and diagrams are by the author unless otherwise mentioned.

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Participatory design, co-design, resident engagement, civic participation, mixed-methods research, public-space transformation, urban planning, Mathenesserplein, Rotterdam

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This graduation thesis project took place from March 2025 to August 2025.

This document summarises the 6 month MSc project that evaluates participatory methods and prioritises design changes for Mathenesserplein's upcoming renewal.

Project Catalyst
The MSc project works in conjunction with Van plein naar park, an initiative by Mustapha Akchich to transform Mathenesserplein's central square into a park for residents. Mustapha will be referred to as my client for paperwork and clarity reasons throughout the report.

Intended Audiences
City planners, community groups, participatory researchers, urban designers, academic assessors.

Acknowledgements
I am deeply grateful to the many people who have supported, guided, and encouraged me throughout this project and my time at TU Delft.

First, to my supervising team. Laurens- from the very beginning, you created an environment where I felt comfortable sharing ideas, questions, and concerns. Your past work has been a source of inspiration, and taking the time to visit the neighbourhood with me was a gesture I deeply appreciated. It was a sign to me of how much you cared, and how deeply you were invested along with me. Your steady presence and consistent support throughout this project made me truly grateful to have you on my team.

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To Froukje- who joined later in the project but at exactly the right time. You gave me a push when I truly needed it. Your fresh perspective helped me see things the rest of us had stopped noticing. I am also indebted to you for connecting me with my client, without you, this project simply would not have happened.

To Mustapha Akchich- your energy, care for the community, and willingness to try unorthodox approaches have been nothing short of inspiring. This project would be unrecognisable without your passion and commitment. Thank you for taking a chance on me, for introducing me to so many people, and for sharing your excitement for the work. I'm glad our collaboration will continue beyond this project.

To my friends- thank you for keeping me going over the past months, for the meals, coffee, and endless patience in listening to me talk about this work. To my coworkers at Coffee Company, thank you for supplying me with caffeine exactly when I needed it. To my "editing team," Margot, Misha and Kevin- thank you for your sharp eyes and last proofreads. Margot, a special thanks for that long session that helped me untangle my thoughts when I was feeling lost.

To my parents- I could not have done this without you. Your belief in me and constant support made it possible for me to study here, but more than that, it gave me the courage to keep going when I doubted myself. There have been so many moments where I've called you just to see the look on your faces. The look that says you believe in me, that you know I can do this, even when I doubted myself. You have always told me I could do anything, and you would never have cared what I chose to do with my life as long as I was happy. That kind of unconditional support is what helped me find design in the first place. Knowing I can always come to you, no matter what, has been a constant source of strength. I am forever grateful.

To my professors at Ohio State University- you helped lay the foundation for everything I have done since. In particular, Sébastien Proulx, who encouraged me to come to Delft and gave me the confidence to take that leap. Without you, I may never have believed this was possible.

Finally, to my Delft "second family," the friends who have made this city feel like home when I'm far from my own. You've been the ones I could turn to when the time difference meant I couldn't call home. Your support has made all the difference.

To all of you- thank you for making this journey possible, and for making it one I will never forget.

abstract

Context

Mathenesserplein is a culturally diverse square in Rotterdam-West that sits at the intersection of tram lines, local shops, and everyday routines. Despite its centrality, it is often treated as a pass-through space rather than a shared place. The square is now the focus of Van plein naar park, an initiative led by resident-advocate Mustapha Akchich and supported by the Gemeente Rotterdam, aiming to reimagine it as a community-oriented public space.

In January 2024, the Dutch government passed the Environmental Act, requiring early stakeholder participation in all spatial and environmental plans. Yet the law leaves participation undefined. There are no clear methods, thresholds, or tools. Mathenesserplein offers a live testing ground to ask:

What does meaningful participation look like when it's built from the ground up?

Objective

This project aims to lay a foundation for transformation that is rooted in real community power, not just consultation. It **explores** how participatory design methods can:

- Surface genuine needs and ideas from the neighbourhood
- Build trust between residents and institutions
- Deliver tools and insights that can carry the process forward.

Through on-site research and co-creative engagement, this project **delivers**:

- A record of resident priorities, frictions, and hopes
- A set of tested participatory tools that made those insights possible
- A plan for the next phase of engagement, including participation methods, neighbourhood proposals and prioritisation tools

Together, these outcomes form a system that supports continued transformation with the neighbourhood, not just for it.

Environmental Act

There is a movement in Urban Development and policy towards participatory methods (or participatie). In January of 2024 the Netherlands passed the Environmental Act requiring that all "omgevingsvisie, omgevingsplan, programma or project-besluit" (environmental-vision, environmental plan, program, or project decision) include participation from the stakeholders.

Government of the Netherlands

"If an initiative is likely to have consequences for the physical living environment, the initiator shall describe the efforts made to involve stakeholders and the outcomes thereof." (p. 17, Article 16.55)

"In the preparation of an environmental plan or programme, the competent authority shall provide opportunities for participation in a suitable manner." (p. 94, Article 16.4)

"The administrative authority shall ensure that participation is transparent and that the results are taken into account in the decision-making process." (p. 95, Article 16.4)

Government of the Netherlands, in force 1 Jan 2024.

The Environmental Act requires motivation and planning to be submitted to the corresponding Gemeente for approval, yet it does not specify exactly what participation looks like. What tools are needed? How can it be executed correctly and without bias? What experts are needed? It therefore, informally, calls for initiators and passionate residents to step forward and co-shape the participation process themselves.



Custom map of Mathenesserplein

preface

I'd say that first and foremost, I am a people person. But, not always in the way one might typically notice. When I was in my first year of preschool at 4 years old in Shaker Heights, Ohio, my mom got a call from the teachers that they were worried about me because I was not speaking. At all. My mom thought this was quite strange because that was definitely not the case at home. One thing I was not, was quiet. But, around my peers, I was not ready. As an adult hearing this story, I instantly knew what that little girl was doing and why she was acting that way.



Kaitlyn & Mom circa 2003

"Well, I had to understand where I was first and who these strangers were." I explained to my mom.

I understand it now because it is something I find myself doing still. I love to observe. To see what people gravitate towards, how they hold themselves. So that when I am ready to speak, to engage, I know how to properly balance the conversation and energy so that the other party has the space to be themselves. In acknowledging this nature of myself, I wholeheartedly believe that I have found, led by myself, my professors, and my loved ones, to the career (it's more than that to me) of my dreams. I love to understand people, their behaviour, their wants and their needs, and I love to make their lives better, easy, and more fulfilling to THEM and their unique positionality. I aim to approach with a gentleness that provides space, and then move forward with a passion for a change that serves.

Back at Carol Nursery School, eventually, on a random Tuesday at snack time, I did speak. And believe me that I did not stop.

Before we get into my work in Mathenesserplein and how I found myself working on this particular project, it is important to establish my positionality. Who I am, my priorities, and what biases I have that shape how I engaged in the following research. I was born in Seattle, Washington to two loving parents. When I was 2, my Dad's job moved us to Cleveland, Ohio and later to Washington, DC. I am the second of five children. That identity is crucial to my being. I am a sister and a daughter and I take those roles very seriously. I attended eight schools and lived in six houses by the time I turned fifteen. This was a chaotic time for a developing mind, and my family was my constant. We were the consistent factor in an environment that was not stable. I know how important home is and I know that the meaning of the word is different for everyone.

Because I moved a lot growing up, I was not worried when I made the decision to move to Delft for my Masters. I'd moved before, I'd started over before, could it really be that different? As it turns out, it is an entirely different experience without my family. This was the first time I lived in, explored, and got to know a place all on my own. Navigating Delft in a new language and culture sharpened my awareness of how easily outsiders, newcomers, migrants, even long-time residents who feel unheard, can be excluded from decisions that shape their environment.

These same instincts, to watch first, to speak when I can help move a shared idea forward, shape how I will work in Mathenesserplein. I arrive as an outsider to the square, fluent in design methods but still learning its languages, rhythms and unwritten rules. My pledge is therefore to keep listening longer than feels comfortable, to let residents' own measures of "good" guide the brief, and to use my skills only to translate their priorities into forms that the municipality can act on. If this project succeeds, it won't be because I found the answers, but because the people who already call Mathenesserplein home felt enough trust to voice the answers themselves.

There are a few important prefaces to point out before we get into my work, things to keep in mind about who I am and therefore how I conducted my research and how it might be received.

Language Comfort

My Dutch sits around children's-book level. Policy jargon or rapid street talk still outrun me. First contact therefore leans on English or on bilingual student/client helpers. That tilts early conversations toward residents already at ease in English and puts extra weight on what translators choose to relay. As the project went on, I got more comfortable and noticed I was able to understand interviews conducted in Dutch by students or Mustapha. While I could not contribute in the language, it improved my understanding and made the sessions go much smoother.



De Wilde Princess, Mijn eerste Nederlandse boek, read February 11, 2025

Newcomer eyesight

I have lived in the Netherlands for just two years. Everyday codes, respect for the "green man" at cross-walks and how to plan your meals around what bonuses are on at the AH, are still lessons. Fresh eyes help me notice taken-for-granted glitches but can also turn local subtleties invisible. I check these readings in weekly debriefs with Dutch colleagues and with Mustapha, who offer the inside view.

American upbringing and public-space reflexes

Coming from car-centric suburbs, I instinctively celebrate trams, bike lanes and any curb cut that nudges trips away from private cars. Long-time locals juggling groceries or a mobility aid may value drop-off space more than another cycle rack.

American studio culture tells me that moving fast equals success. Dutch spatial projects advance by layered consensus, slower but often more durable. Therefore padding timelines and celebrating incremental wins are important as a step to the final goal.

Academic & Socio-Economic privilege

As a TU Delft researcher I have flexible hours and the explicit mandate to "listen." Residents may have shift work, care duties or language hurdles that limit meeting times. To balance this, we schedule sessions at varied hours, rotate venues (mosque hall, school gym, café) and compensate participants for their knowledge.

Design-research mindset

Studio culture trains me to prototype first, talk after. Mustapha, rooted in community organising, reminds me when a sketch races ahead of trust-building.
I return the favour when a meeting drifts without a tangible next step. That two-way check helps keep both depth and momentum.

Declaring these lenses keeps me accountable and invites readers, especially Mathenesserplein residents, to question, correct or add to the view.

executive **summary**

This thesis delivers a model for citizen participation that I call the **Iterative Engagement Growth Model**; a resident-driven system that embeds low-barrier co-design, transparent decision-making, and continuous feedback into neighbourhood transformation.

By specifying the actors (community facilitator, research lead, Gemeente experts), intentions of each phase, and providing concrete tools for each participation moment, the model offers both a clear template and the flexibility to adapt as new needs emerge. Although physical pilot installations reside in the model's Future Implementations phase, their anticipation underscores the system's emphasis on visible change and ongoing collaboration.

Moving forward, the model prescribes co-design cycles, matrix recalibrations with municipal partners, and feedback loops. Its portability sets Mathenesserplein on a path from resident stories to shared authorship of place.

Rather than isolated activities, the model weaves five interlocking phases

- Field Research
- Prioritisation
- Refined Engagement (Generative and Evaluative Co-Design)
- Feedback Loop
- Future Implementations

into a coherent cycle that sustains momentum and builds trust over time.

Iterative Engagement Growth Model

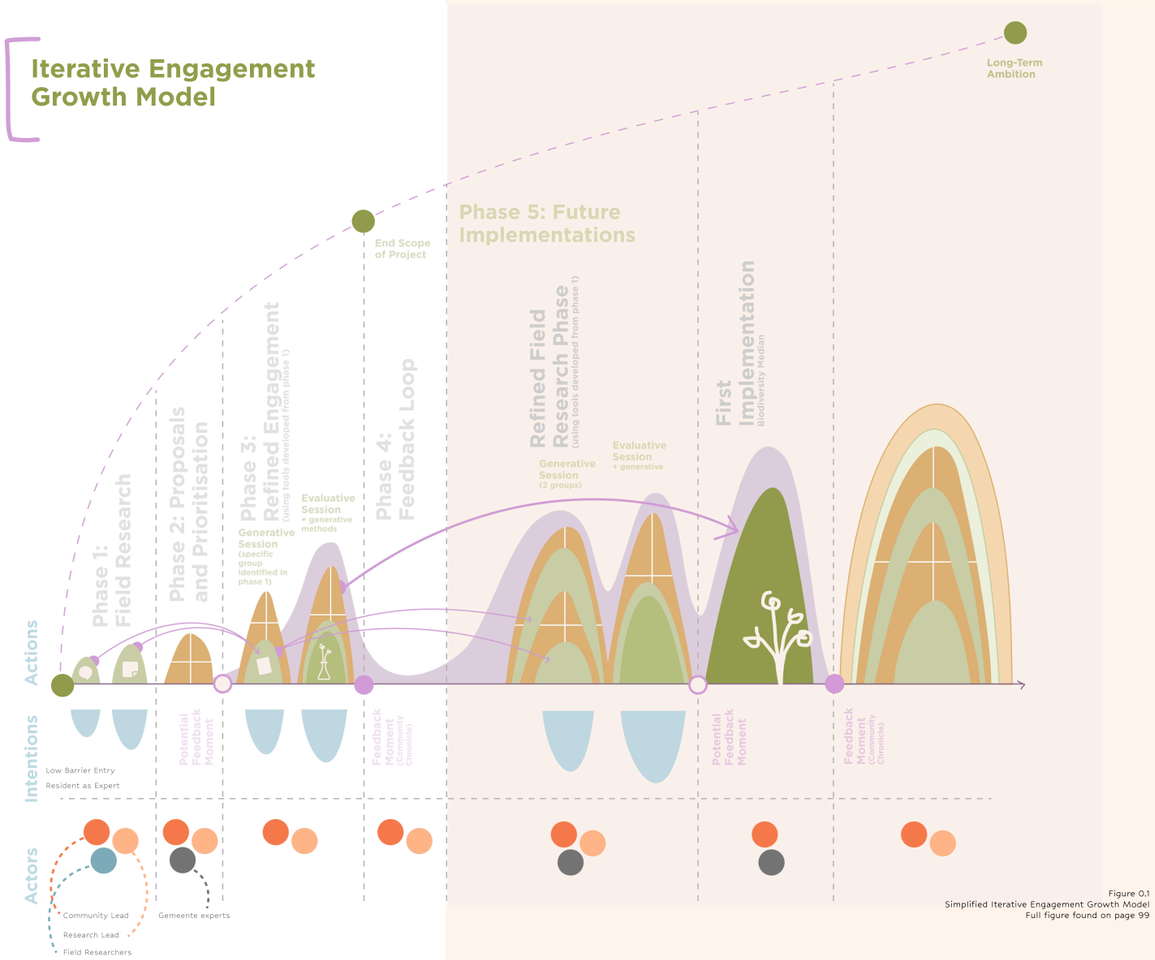


Figure 0.1
Simplified Iterative Engagement Growth Model
Full figure found on page 99

Key outcomes include:
Rich Ground-Level Insights: Over 60 intercept interviews, route mappings and thematic analyses revealed resident priorities and mapped local connectors.



Figure 0.2
Sample Quotes from student research:
Chapter 4.4-4.5

Co-Design Toolkits
Custom "What/Where/How" cards, Flower-Vote pop-ups, and custom maps lowered participation barriers, generating design proposals.



Figure 0.3
What/Where/How Cards:
Chapter 6.2



Figure 0.4
Resident at Flower Vote:
Chapter 6.3

Prioritisation Framework
A dynamic Ease × Impact matrix distilled ideas into a focused set of top concepts, ensuring equity and feasibility guide every decision.

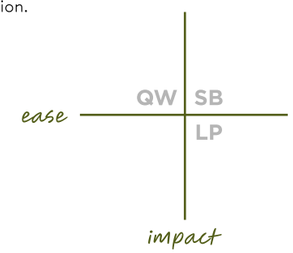


Figure 0.5
Prioritisation Matrix Sneak Peek:
Chapter 5.3

Community Chronicle Prototype
A bilingual, quarterly fold-out newsletter that closes the loop by reporting back on how resident input shaped real planning discussions.



Figure 0.6
Community Chronicle Sneak Peek:
Chapter 6.4

This report details the research methods, fieldwork, and design decisions that shaped the final model and its companion tools. Because the work unfolded in a live public setting, with external dependencies and a duty not to raise expectations we could not meet, we made deliberate pivots in response to Gemeente Rotterdam constraints, partner timelines, and resident feedback.

The model is intentionally flexible to accommodate changing conditions while maintaining a clear participatory ethic. The report that follows provides a transparent, sequential account of how we arrived at the final model: from the initial brief through literature and policy framing, ethnographic immersion, observation of current practice, synthesis of criteria, prototyping with students, evaluation, and refinement. Together, they explain how the model was derived and why it is suited to Mathenesserplein.



Rotterdam City Archives – Smoke and fire after the German bombing, viewed from Mathenesserplein, 14 May 1940

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A Student Lectures
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C Prioritisation Criteria
D Refined Engagement Insights

1 chapter summary

1.1 Project Brief and Evolution
- Frame the shift from redesigning Mathenesserplein to a trust-based, participatory process.

Key Question: What drove the pivot from spatial redesign to co-creation?

1.2 Collaboration
- Introducing the Client
- Stakeholder Map

Key Question: Who are the core stakeholders and what roles do they play?

1.3 Why Participation?
- Practical Application
- Empowerment Rationale

Key Question: What makes participatory methods essential here?

1.4 Why Mathenesserplein
- Site History and Significance

Key Question: Why is Mathenesserplein uniquely suited for this study?

1.5 Research Question
- RQ Development
- Design Process

Key Question: How did our research question emerge and shape the design process?

1.1 project brief and **evolution**

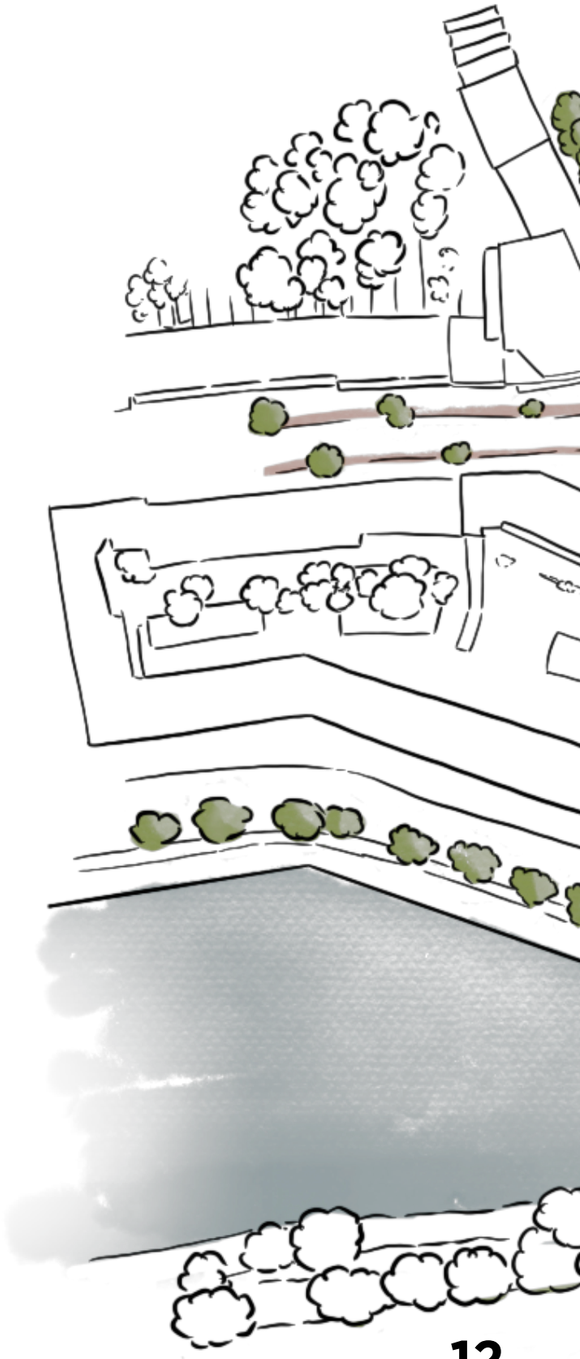
From Brief to Redefinition

When I joined the Mathenesserplein project, the brief I received was straightforward: contribute to the redesign of the square with a focus on engaging residents. The transformation, part of the early-stage initiative Van plein naar park, was framed around sustainability, climate adaptation, and social cohesion in Rotterdam-West. My task, as a design researcher, was to ensure the process included and reflected the voices of the people who live around the square, and to turn these insights into actionable design interventions.

But, as I began to observe the space, speak with residents, and collaborate with community lead Mustapha Akchich, it became clear that what was missing was not just a better spatial design, but a way to rebuild trust and create channels for participation that actually work. Many residents had experienced participatory efforts before, but often ones where decisions were already made, where feedback went nowhere, or where language and timing made participation inaccessible.

Rather than jumping straight into design proposals, I turned my attention to the process: how can we invite participation that is meaningful, low-threshold, and rooted in care? What tools help people feel seen, heard, and included- not just consulted?

This project, then, became about building the foundation for transformation. It documents the insights surfaced from the neighborhood, the tools that enabled that process, and the trust that can grow from visible feedback loops. What began as a design project for a square has become a system for sharing authorship, and a roadmap for how this process can continue- led by residents, supported by institutions, and rooted in the rhythms of Mathenesserplein itself.



1.2 Collaboration

Introducing Van plein naar park & the Collaboration

Van plein naar park is the working name of an emerging initiative to transform Mathenesserplein from a transit-heavy intersection into a green, shared public space that supports community life. While still in its early stages, the initiative is guided by a vision of climate-adaptive design, social cohesion, and long-term resident involvement. At the heart of this vision is Mustapha Akchich, a long-time neighborhood resident and advocate, and the community lead for the project.



Mustapha Akchich
Coördinator Wijkaanpak, Rotterdams Weerwoord
Van plein naar park Founder

Mustapha has spent years navigating the bureaucratic and emotional labor of urban change: advocating for his neighbours, building trust across stakeholder lines, and maintaining momentum when official channels stall. But, more than that, he is of the community. His intimate knowledge of the square's daily life and unspoken rules makes him both a trusted voice and a powerful connector. His dual role as resident and organiser gives the project its credibility and reach; without his presence, many residents may never have felt comfortable engaging at all.

His leadership brings not only legitimacy to the effort, but a deep sensitivity to the square's social fabric. He is both a facilitator and a bridge: between residents and institutions, frustrations and opportunities. As a researcher embedded in this context, my role has been to listen, prototype, and translate. This project would not have been possible without its collaborative foundation. What follows is not a solo design effort, but a mesh of partnerships across scales.

Stakeholder Network

This network map illustrates how the partners; municipal planners, academic researchers, local facilitators, and the project team, collaborate around the community. By placing residents at the core, it emphasises that every meeting, decision, and design choice must align with their needs and priorities. It shows both direct connections to the residents and the cross-links among stakeholders that keep everyone working in concert to support and empower the community.

van plein naar park



Project Lead/Author/Facilitator (Kaitlyn)
Coordinates activities and communication between stakeholders, guide workshops and research efforts, and ensure every decision centers on residents' needs and voices.

Van plein naar park
With Mustapha and Van plein naar park, as co-hosts of resident sessions and community facilitator.

Residents
With residents at the center, whose time, stories, and skepticism shaped every step of the process.



HOGESCHOOL ROTTERDAM

Hogeschool Rotterdam
With Hogeschool Rotterdam, whose 24 Business Administration students carried out the first wave of interviews, tested tools, and surfaced critical insights

Gemeente
With the Gemeente Rotterdam, whose planners and advisors followed this work as a live pilot.

Together, this coalition did more than conduct research. It formed a small working system of what shared authorship in urban transformation might look like.

Figure 1.1
Stakeholder Map

1.3 Why Participation?

Across the Netherlands, cities are being asked to do more with residents, not just for them. The 2024 Environmental Act legally mandates participation in all major spatial plans (Omgevingswet (Environment and Planning Act)). But what exactly does participation mean? And how can it move beyond symbolic consultation to real shared authorship?

In many neighbourhoods, residents are asked to weigh in only once decisions are nearly made. Others are left out entirely, because of language, timing, or lack of trust. (Gemeente Rotterdam, De Grote Participatie Samenvatting). In this landscape, the tools and tone of participation matter deeply. In order to diagnose what type of decision-making process is being used in the neighbourhood, this study will reference Arnstein's Ladder of Participation, as seen below.

This project takes Mathenesserplein as a real-world site to ask: What does meaningful participation look like? What methods actually work? And how can we build systems that invite residents back in, early, and often, with care?

Why here?
If the need for meaningful participation is clear, the next question is where, and with whom, that participation should begin. Mathenesserplein is not just a square in need of redesign; it is a place shaped by layered histories, overlapping communities, and longstanding tensions. To understand how to involve its residents in shaping its future, we must first understand the ground we're standing on.

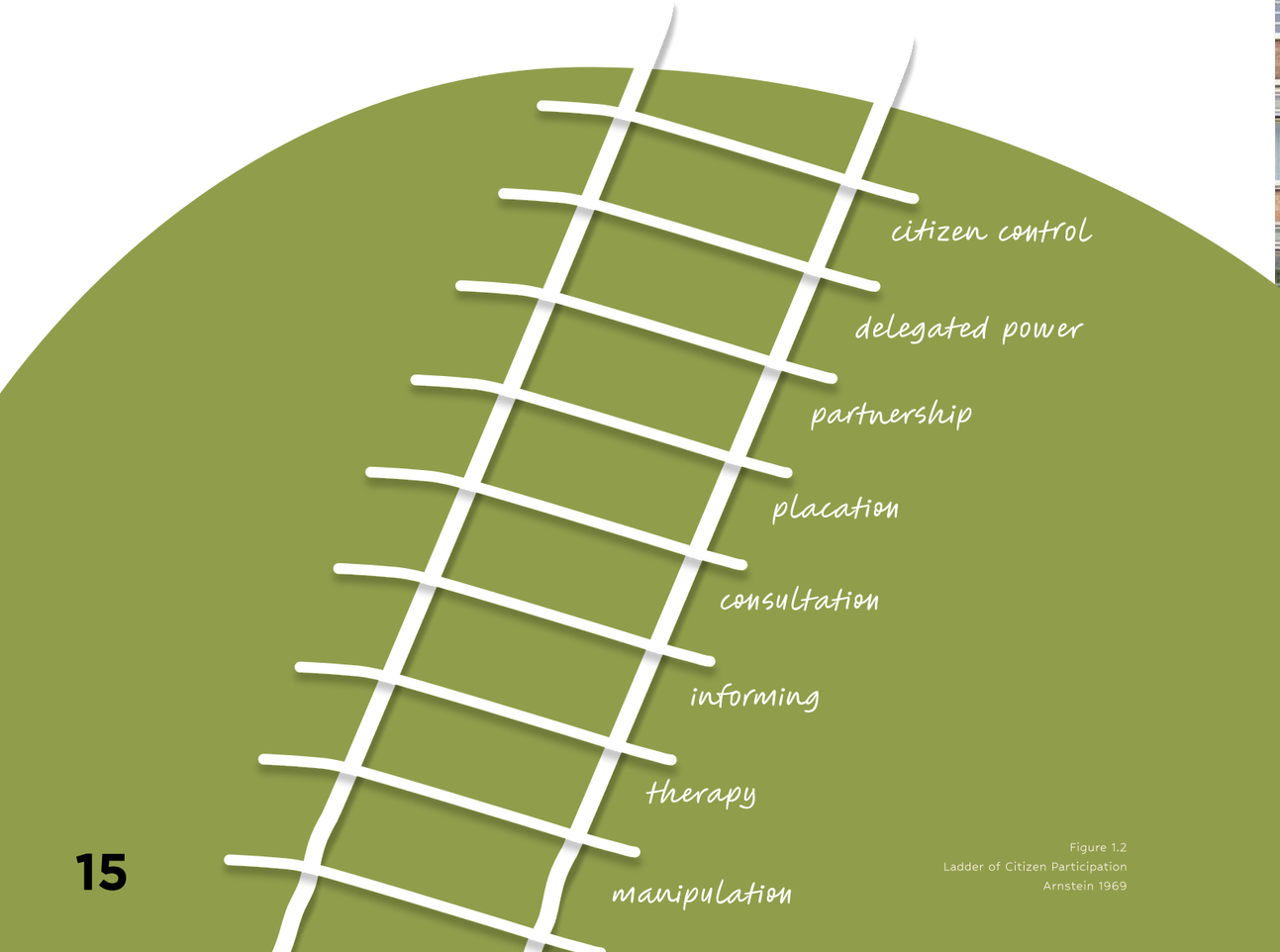


Figure 1.2
Ladder of Citizen Participation
Arnstein 1969



Why **Mathenesserplein?**

1.4 why **Mathenesserplein?**

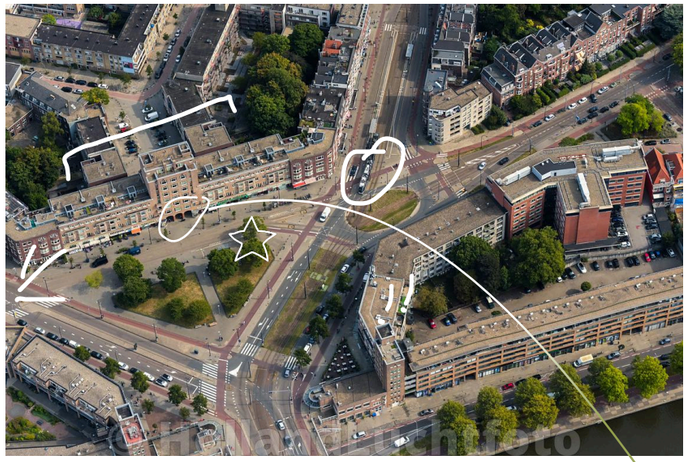


Figure 1.3
Bird's Eye View of Mathenesserplein

Mathenesserplein was laid out in the early 1920s as a monumental entry point to Rotterdam's westward expansion- a "city gate" that combined a prestige bridge (1923) with J.H. van den Broek's first large-scale housing project in the city (Vanstiphout, 2005). Three symmetrical perimeter blocks formed the Y-shaped square, with ground-floor shops, five-metre-wide apartments above, and three towers: two facing the Schie and an eight-storey central tower aligned to the bridge axis. A passageway beneath this tower provided covered pedestrian access to Rauwenhoffplein and to lift-served entries. Typical flats offered five rooms in 70–90 m², while the central tower held smaller four-room "luxury" apartments. Yellow-brick façades, concrete lintels, steel shopfronts, and pavilions for hospitality and retail gave the complex its distinctive appearance (Vanstiphout, 2005).

By the late 1980s, the Nieuwe Westen district was in visible decline. In the 1990 "Stadstimmeren" festival, the municipality designated Mathenesserplein for renewal (Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands, 2009). Following expropriation, Putter Partners restored the pavilions and small towers (1999) and replaced the deteriorated middle blocks in 2002 with designs by E. Bakema, Z. Zavrel, and Putter Partners. These new buildings retained the six-metre façade grid, 2.89 m ceilings, and yellow-brick cladding, but reconfigured interiors into maisonettes and split-level flats (51–159 m²) around a shared garden. Modern lift and gallery access, underground storage, parking, and high-quality catering in the pavilions completed the update. The renewed ensemble is now pre-listed as a potential national monument (Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands, 2009).

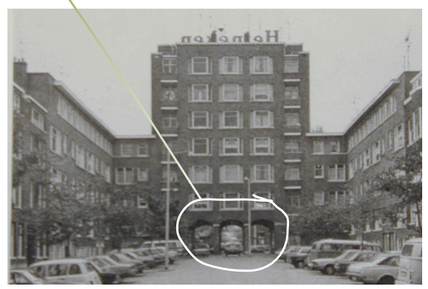


Figure 1.4
Van den Broek Housing

Historic anchor, but overdue for coherent care
Originally conceived as the civic "living room" for the emerging Middelland district, the square survived the 1940 bombardment but lost its architectural unity in the rush to repair wartime damage. Since then, municipal works have been isolated rather than integrated: upgraded street lighting in 1984, tram curve resurfacing in 1995, a single playground in 2006, and platform-height corrections in 2018 (Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands, 2009; RET, 1994, 2018; Speelruimteprogramma, 2006). Each addressed one issue without rethinking the square as a whole, leaving a historically important but spatially fragmented public space- a prime setting for participatory redesign that treats the place as an interconnected system.

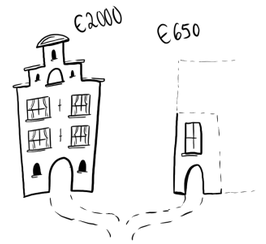
Transit crossroads versus place-making
Mathenesserplein is first and foremost a hinge in the west-side tram spine. Line 32 cuts straight across, RET buses swing through, delivery vans dive into the supermarket dock, everything screams "keep moving". Automobile traffic is constant, tram wheels throw up a permanent metal shriek at the curve. Pedestrians can be seen crossing, waiting, or hugging the two benches by the kiosk. It is referred to by some as a "het overstap-pleintje" (transfer square). (Notitie Mathenesserplein, Klimaatrechtvaardig)

Multicultural crossroads
There is a long-standing mix of migrant communities at Mathenesserplein, and you hear that diversity in the street: Dutch blends with Arabic, Sranan Tongo, Turkish and English. Within a 150-metre walk you can buy Surinamese roti, shop at the Indian Mini Markt, pick up meat from the Islamitische butcher and grab late-night halal take-out. On Fridays the prayer crowd from Moskee Annasr fill the pavement, while Dutch primary-school children pedal past on their way to hockey practice. Those overlapping rhythms, and the businesses that serve them, give the square its distinct multicultural identity.



Surinamese Roti and Rice
Roopram Roti, Mathenesserplein 89,
3022 LD Rotterdam

Socio-economic contrasts side-by-side
Pre-war brick townhouses on the south-east frontage, part of Van den Broek's 1920s ensemble, now rent for well over €2 000 a month, while the north-west edge is lined with 1960s social-housing blocks where regulated rents sit closer to €650 (Parius, 2025) (Woonbond, 2025). A forty-metre walk thus crosses a sharp income gradient, yet the single tram stop, the lone ATM and the supermarket shortcut compel residents from both ends of the spectrum to share the same pavement every day.



Townhouse vs. Social Housing: Co-existing

Underserved in city investment cycles
Neighbouring areas (Nieuwe Binnenweg 2018, Heemraadsplein 2021) have already been refreshed. Mathenesserplein remained "on the list". In 2024 the municipality earmarked 8 Million Euros for a re-design, tying it to a participation mandate "plus-ontwerp pas na draagvlakmeting bewoners." (Notitie Mathenesserplein, Klimaatrechtvaardig) Commitment of funds must be demonstrated by 2025.

Research potential
This project uses Mathenesserplein as a test site to explore which participatory tools truly resonate with residents. What draws them in, what surfaces real stories, and what begins to build trust? By comparing a range of methods in context, from interviews to visual prompts to co-created public votes, it becomes possible to see not just what people say, but how they feel safe enough to say it. The aim is to understand what works here, with these communities, in this square.

While deeply place-based, the process also points toward broader possibilities. The tools and insights developed here can inform future engagement efforts in similar neighbourhoods, especially those navigating the same tensions of diversity, distrust, and transformation.

1.5 research **question**

The historical layers of Mathenesserplein reveal a place with civic potential but a fragmented legacy. It has long been the subject of piecemeal fixes, lighting upgrades here, tram adjustments there, but never a holistic effort to shape the square with the people who use it every day. With new funds allocated and a mandate for participation in place, change is finally possible. But where to begin? Before any physical transformation, the first step must be to listen, to understand the rhythms, needs, and perspectives of the neighbourhood itself.

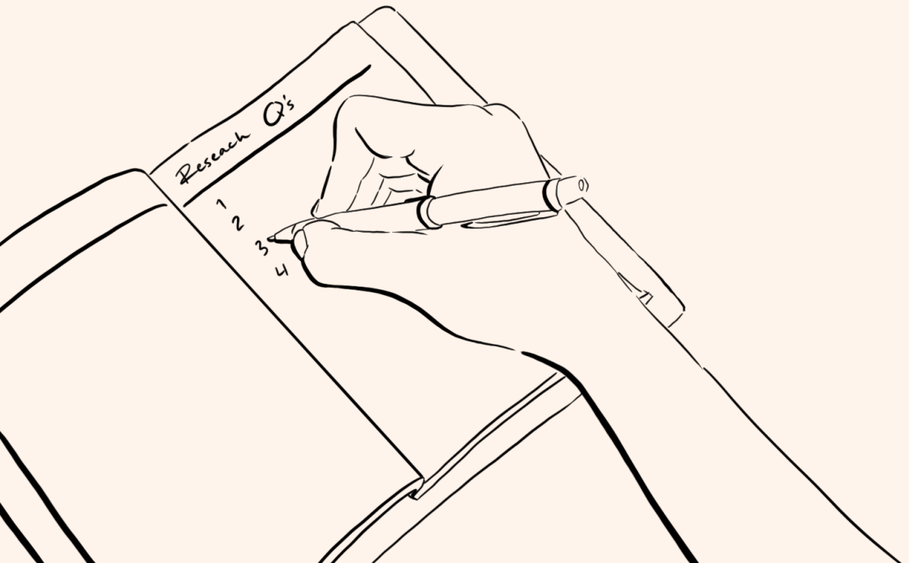
This project began with a spatial design brief, but as the work unfolded, it became clear that what the square needed first was trust, tools, and a system for participation that works. The following chapters explore how I set out to understand the square's rhythms, gather voices often left out, and co-design a foundation for resident-led transformation.

The research is guided by one central question:

How can I build a grounded understanding of Mathenesserplein, its people, rhythms, needs, and history, in order to design for this place and its future with care, relevance, and by amplifying voices that are often left out of formal urban processes?

Four sub-questions helped steer the work:

- Who uses the square, when, and for what?
- What shared needs and frictions emerge across groups?
- What barriers prevent some publics from engaging?
- What tools actually surface meaningful input and build trust?



This project followed a research-through-design process, guided by the Double Diamond. Each phase shaped the next: early observations framed the brief, field collaborations sharpened the tools, and live testing validated the methods. The upcoming chapters follow this same structure, moving from place immersion to tested design outputs that reflect the voices of Mathenesserplein.

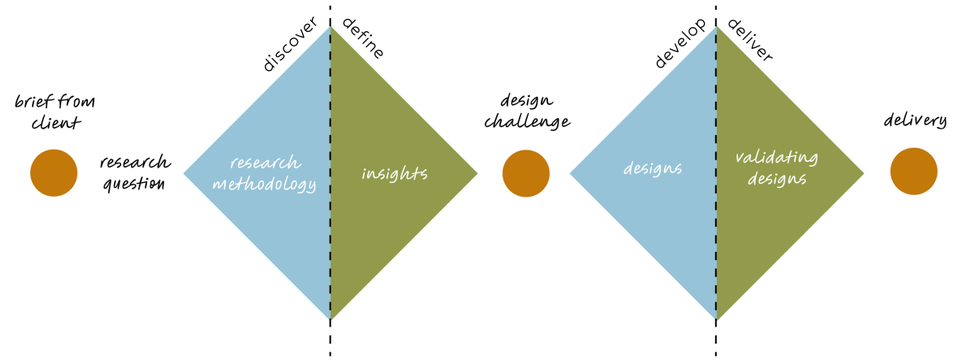


Figure 1.5
Shared Ground Double Diamond

discover	→	Site visits, history, desk research, observing
define	→	Patterns from research, defining the problem
develop	→	Methods, tools, feedback loops
deliver	→	Methods, tools, feedback loops (validated and adjusted)

design **process**

2 chapter summary

2.1 Methodology Overview
- Summarises research-through-design approach.

Key Question: How does this sequence build a foundation for meaningful participatory tool design?

2.2 Literature review
- 2.2.1 Citizen Participation Paradigms
  - Arnstein's eight-rung Ladder diagnoses how much decision-making power a given tool grants residents
- 2.2.2 Publics and Counterpublics
  - Warner's "issue-publics" frame focuses engagement on those already using, caring about, and conversing around Mathenesserplein
- 2.2.3 Co-Design
  - Sanders & Stappers' shift "from designing for to with to by residents," and living-lab models, position community members as co-authors of space

Key Question: Which frameworks best expose power dynamics and guide the creation of fair, trust-building engagement tools?

2.3 Ethnographic Site Immersion
- On-site sketch-sprints, mapping resident flows at different times and micro-locations, revealing informal rhythms, pain points, and social nodes

Key Question: How did immersive observation uncover hidden use patterns that should inform our tool design?

2.4 Current Participation Observation
- Attending a Gemeente sponsored pop-up session; we saw who shows up, who's left out, and where trust breaks down

Key Question: What structural, cultural, and practical barriers in existing practice mute resident voices, and how can new tools address them?

2.1 methodology overview

Overview
This project followed a layered, research-through-design trajectory, blending historical analysis, field immersion, participatory prototyping, and observation of existing institutional methods. Each approach offered a different entry point into understanding Mathenesserplein, and together they shaped both the process and the outcomes of the work.



Historical & Spatial Research
Already presented in Chapter 1.4, this work set the foundation: how the square evolved, how it was used and neglected, and why it is ready for change. This phase continues to underpin later analysis.



Literature & Policy Review
Key texts on participation (Arnstein, Warner), co-design, and trust-building clarified what is at stake when cities claim to involve residents, and helped form the critical lens used to evaluate existing methods.



Ethnographic Site Immersion
Six weeks of sketching, observing, and mapping resident behavior at different times and places revealed informal rhythms and shared pain points that are rarely visible in formal plans.



Participation-in-Practice Observation
By attending a multi-stakeholder participation session in April, I was able to witness firsthand what current public engagement looks like in Mathenesserplein; who it reaches, and who it misses.

Why this sequence?
Rather than jumping straight into design, the process was intentionally paced to first listen, observe, and understand. This gradual build, from context to critique to lived experience, allowed the participatory tools to be grounded in real community insight and aligned with gaps in current practice.

2.2 literature review

2.2.1 Citizen Participation Paradigms
- What it is: Sherry Arnstein's eight-rung "Ladder of Citizen Participation" diagnoses how much decision-making power residents hold, from non-participation through tokenism up to genuine citizen power.
- Why it matters: Provides a quick diagnostic to locate existing tools (surveys, meetings, pop-ups) on the ladder and set realistic goals for incremental shifts in power-sharing.

Key Question: At which rung does our current participation practice sit, and what concrete steps can we take to climb one rung higher?

2.2.2 Publics and Counterpublics
- What it is: Warner's concept of "issue-publics" focuses engagement on those already using, caring about, and conversing around Mathenesserplein rather than the undifferentiated "public." This lens helps us target interventions at residents who have a stake and social energy to sustain dialogue.
- Why it matters: By designing for an issue-public, we channel existing concerns (e.g. safety, green upgrades) instead of trying to manufacture participation from scratch, and avoid excluding quieter voices.

Key Question: Which existing issue-publics around Mathenesserplein should our tools activate, and how can we ensure quieter or emerging publics aren't left out?

2.2.3 Co-Design
- What it is: Sanders & Stappers' co-design framework shifts the designer's role "from designing for to designing with to designing by residents," often enacted through living-lab models that treat community members as co-authors of both tools and spaces.
- Why it matters: Embeds residents in every stage. Framing questions, prototyping, testing, so that final tools carry both local legitimacy and practical usability.

Key Question: How can we structure our co-design sessions so that residents lead idea generation and prototyping, rather than merely reacting to pre-set options?

2.2.1 citizen participation **paradigms**

2.2.1 Citizen Participation Paradigms

Why do we need a theoretical lens? Whenever a municipality invites "stakeholder input," the tools it chooses (workshops, surveys, pop-ups) quietly define who can speak, how much influence they have, and which voices remain unheard. Two complementary theories; Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation (1969) and Warner's Publics & Counterpublics (2002), help expose those power mechanics and guide the design of fairer engagement methods.

2.2.1 Arnstein's Ladder (1969) – measuring how much power is shared

Sherry Arnstein analysed U.S. urban-renewal programmes and arranged participation into an eight-rung ladder :

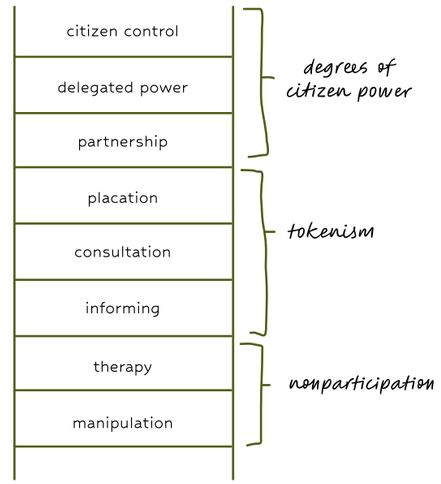


Figure 2.2
Arnstein's Ladder

Citizen Power
- Residents share decision-making or hold final authority e.g. community land trusts or co-design juries with veto power.

Tokenism
- Citizens can speak but have no guarantee they will be heard. Typical online surveys or one-off public hearings sit here.

Non-Participation
- PR exercises: decisions pre-made, citizens used to "educate" or placate. Example: glossy renderings displayed after the plan is fixed.

Urbanist and activist Jane Jacobs, in her seminal work The Death and Life of Great American Cities, warned against "the great blight of dullness" that emerges when urban spaces are designed without regard for the organic patterns of everyday life (Jacobs, 1961). Jacobs' critique of top-down planning parallels Arnstein's (1969) description of tokenistic participation, where decisions are made without meaningfully integrating the lived knowledge of those who inhabit the place.

The ladder is still a quick diagnostic: where on the rungs does a given tool land? For Mathenesserplein we aim to eventually climb into the partnership zone by letting residents not only voice preferences but physically engage in design decisions and influence the design brief.

This is not a short-term goal. It is important to be realistic about pace. A single project will not leap 3 rungs. Instead, we will treat this study as the first deliberate step forward, demonstrating one rung of change and outlining a plan for the next step.

Over the past 18 months, the Municipality of Rotterdam has used neighbourhood "information evenings", a survey distributed via the Mijn Rotterdam portal and an open-house session in the Wijkhub to collect input for the redesign of Mathenesserplein. Residents are free to make suggestions, but the municipality retains full control over the final programme of requirements and the selection of design consultants. No resident representatives sit on the steering committee and none of the proposed interventions are subjected to a resident vote or co-decision procedure.

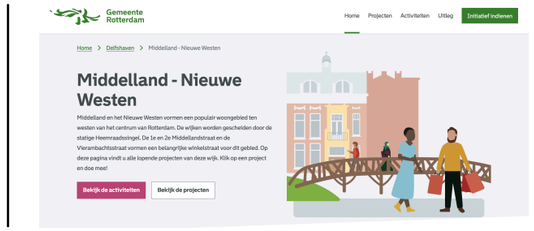


Figure 2.3
Mijn Rotterdam Portal

2.1.2 publics and **counterpublics**

This pattern lines up with what Arnstein (1969) calls Consultation, the fourth rung in her eight-step "Ladder of Citizen Participation." Consultation is still within the zone of tokenism: residents are asked for their views, "but they lack the power to insure that their views will be heeded by the powerful... participation remains just a window-dressing ritual" (Arnstein 1969). Arnstein notes that the common tools on this rung are "attitude surveys, neighbourhood meetings, and public hearings," (Arnstein 1969) exactly the toolbox deployed so far at Mathenesserplein.

There are a couple main issues here. One being the intention from the municipality. Did they ever intend on carrying out resident proposals or was this tokenism consultation? Secondly, who were these surveys distributed to? Who accesses the Mijn Rotterdam portal and takes the time to be involved in information evenings?

2.2.2 Warner's Publics & Counterpublics (2002)

When we think of publics, we think of **the** public. As in conflicting of the private, or concerning a people as a whole. But, there is a difference between **the** public and **a** public. For the sake of this research, we will refer to **a** public in particular, following the theory of Publics and Counterpublics by Michael Warner.

A public refers to a group of people gathered (physically or virtually, in body or mind) around a singular topic or cause (Warner). The public we aim to address, and design for, are those who use, care about, and want to improve Mathenesserplein.



Our public in question

In Warner's terms, this is an issue-public rather than the public-at-large: it comes into being only in relation to a specific matter of concern and "is constituted by the discourse that addresses it" (Warner 2002).

Our discourse is the square itself- its noise, its mix of users, its unrealised potential. The people who routinely cross, linger in, or overlook Mathenesserplein and who already swap remarks about its flaws- shopkeepers trading complaints about evening safety, mosque congregants discussing pedestrian crossings after Friday prayer, parents chatting about shade at the school gate, are the public we seek to engage. This framing deliberately leaves aside passer-by's who feel no stake in the place and abstract "city residents" who will never set foot on the square. By targeting those who inhabit, care, and already converse, the interventions can draw on existing social energy rather than try to manufacture participation from scratch.

Who is currently being addressed?

The municipality's main participation gateway is the Mijn Rotterdam portal, a public website that advertises current projects, lists information evenings and lets residents upload their own initiatives. Access is open, yet the site functions only in Dutch and presumes digital and reading fluency. Census figures show that 60.4 percent of Nieuwe Westen residents have a non-Dutch migration background, and municipal health data put functional literacy problems at roughly one in five adults (Open-Data Rotterdam). With no built-in language switch, and a browser-translation prompt that many older or less-tech-savvy users ignore or cannot activate, the portal effectively excludes a large share of the neighbourhood.



Figure 2.4
Mijn Rotterdam Portal
Language Inaccesibility Pop-Up

	Geen migratieherkoms [2024]	Niet-westerse migratieherkoms [2022]	Westerse migratieherkoms [2022]
Delfshaven	39,5	44,4	16,0

Figure 2.5
Rotterdam Open Data 2022-2024
Migrant Data

There is currently no data classifying the first languages of residents. Yet, from the above data set, we can make the assumption that the non-western and western immigrants to Nieuwe Westen have a Non-Dutch first language, making this portal (the go-to place for neighborhood participation) less accessible to 60.4% of it's residents.

The same pattern played out in 2023-24 face-to-face outreach. Facilitators reported that information evenings and online surveys mainly attracted Dutch-speaking homeowners who are comfortable with formal meetings. Immigrant parents, elderly renters and late-shift workers appeared only sporadically. Listening to the loudest public risks stopping at Arnstein's consultation rung: voices are recorded, but representation, and therefore influence, remains unequal.

Why this matters for the project

- It shows exactly who has not been in the room so far.
- It compels us to develop formats, languages and time slots that let every public enter on its own terms, lowering digital and linguistic barriers rather than asking residents to climb them.

Warner reminds us that a public is not declared in advance; it "emerges in response to being addressed" (Warner 2002). In this study we assume that somewhere in and around the square there is a set of residents, workers and regular users ready to engage, that have not been addressed by the current participation methods, yet we do not claim to know exactly who they are or where they gather. The first task of our primary research is therefore investigative: to discover whether such an "action-ready" public exists, to trace the informal and formal places where its members already exchange ideas, and to listen for the needs and aspirations that bind them. Only after that mapping will we ask how design artefacts can become the communication bridges that let this newly identified public steer urban change. The next section introduces the participatory-design concepts and tools we will use to build those bridges.

2.2.3 From Participatory Urbanism to Artefact-Based Co-Design

While tactical urbanism shows the power of quick builds, co-design frameworks bring structure to that spontaneity. Authors Mike Lydon and Anthony Garcia describe these moves as "short-term actions for long-term change," noting that a pop-up plaza or cardboard model can unlock dialogue faster than a thousand-page masterplan (Lydon & Garcia, 2015). Urbanist Charles Montgomery, in his book Happy City, extends this argument by showing how even small physical changes in the urban environment can shift behaviour, invite connection, and alter how people feel about a place. As he puts it, "changing the conversation about a place often begins with changing the place itself" - a principle that underpins our suggestion of street-level prototypes and participatory artefacts as catalysts for dialogue in Mathenesserplein. (Montgomery 2013). Sanders and Stappers (2008) frame this as part of a broader shift from designing for people, to designing with them, and ultimately by them.

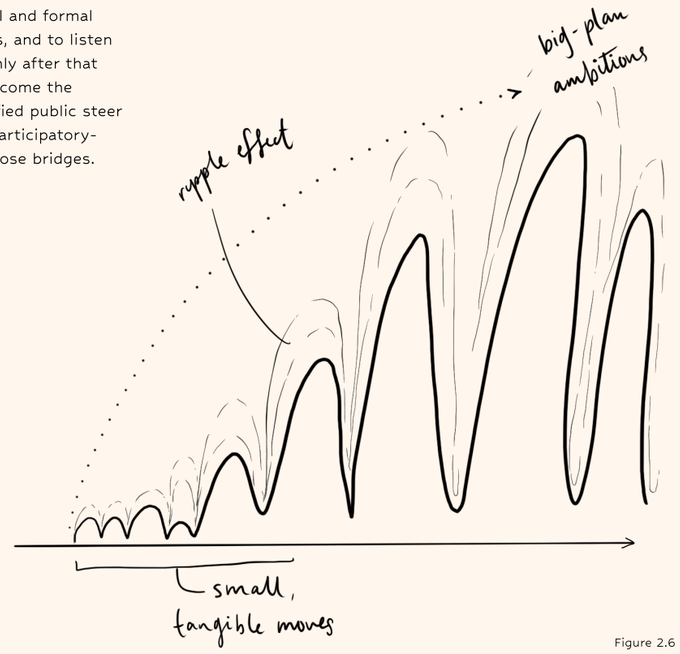


Figure 2.6
Draft Iterative Engagement Model

2.2.3 co-**design**

Co-design in planning (Sanders & Stappers, living labs)

While tactical urbanism shows the power of quick builds, co-design frameworks bring structure to that spontaneity. Sanders and Stappers (2008) frame the evolution as a shift from designing for people, to designing with them, and ultimately by them (figure 2.8). In urban practice this means residents move from critics to co-authors of space. Living-lab research extends that idea: real streets become test environments where citizens, designers and officials iterate prototypes under everyday conditions (Evans & Karvonen 2014). The takeaway for this study is that small artefacts, whether street interventions or generative co-design session tools, must be embedded in an iterative, resident-led loop if they are to transcend token consultation and climb Arnstein's ladder.

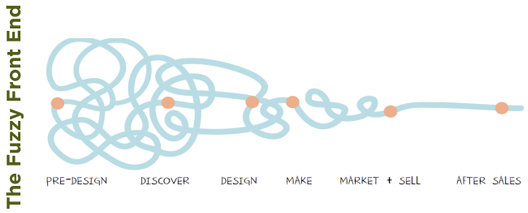


Figure 2.7
The Fuzzy Front End,
Convivial Toolbox, Sanders and Stappers

Generative vs. Evaluative Co-Design Tools

This project takes place in what Sanders and Stappers describe as the fuzzy front end, a space of ambiguity, complexity, and potential (Sanders & Stappers, 2008). Here, the goal is not to define a final product, but to open a participatory process that surfaces needs, tensions, and possibilities.

As Sanders and Stappers explain, on the research side we "investigate what people say, what people do and what people make" and on the design side we play "with the same tools and methods...making props and prototypes, telling future stories and enacting future scenarios" (Sanders & Stappers, 2008) By contrast, evaluative tools; usability tests, concept-rating surveys or focus groups, are designed to assess and refine ideas: a usability test evaluates "the ease of use and learnability of a product (or prototype) by users, typically from the target group" (Sanders & Stappers, 2008). Together, generative methods uncover latent needs and foster creativity, while evaluative methods ground those ideas in practical feasibility and user acceptability.

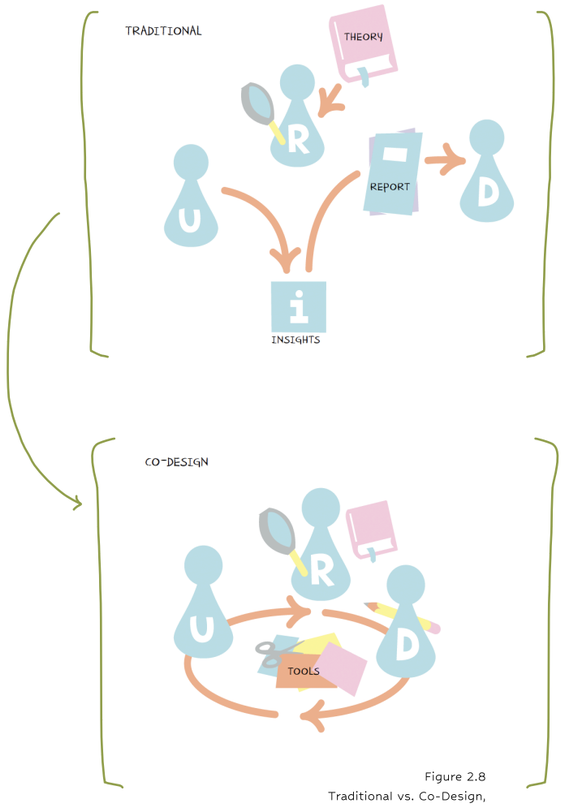


Figure 2.8
Traditional vs. Co-Design,
Convivial Toolbox, Sanders and Stappers

Co-Design as a Foundation

Co-design offered a crucial mindset shift: to frame the residents not as passive users or consulted informants, but as experts of their own experience (Sleeswijk Visser et al., 2005; Sanders & Stappers, 2008). Their insights are not extracted, but expressed through tools that invite creativity and reflection. This approach feeds into how I trained student researchers, how tools were developed, and how the square itself was framed, not as a blank site for solutions, but as a place of lived narratives, ready to be voiced.

2.3 ethnographic site immersion

2.3.1 Ethnography Overview
- Conducted sketch sprints at key areas of the square, used rapid sketching, field photographs, and structured note-taking to capture movement, lingering, socialisation and overheard snippets

Key Question: What did these multi-vantage site sweeps reveal about resident flows and social nodes?

2.3.2 The Bench Crew
- The central bench beneath the archway emerges as the square's most reliable social anchor, especially at lunchtime and around 17:00 when commuters pause

Key Question: How can our tools build on this existing gathering point to deepen engagement and promote spontaneous dialogue?

2.3.3 View from the Archway
- Framed by the tiled vaults of the historic archway, this vantage aligns benches, lamp posts, and sightlines toward the grass, yet the transit road slices the view, forcing renegotiation of movement

Key Question: How does the archway's threshold effect shape resident perceptions of the square?

2.3.4 Life at Laurens
- Outside Laurens retirement home, isolated residents light up when approached; the "Pigeon Guy" feeds birds daily, offering a ritual touchpoint amid accessibility barriers

Key Question: What specific social rituals and barriers at Laurens should our tools address to foster genuine inclusion?

2.3 ethnographic site immersion

2.3.1 Ethnography Overview

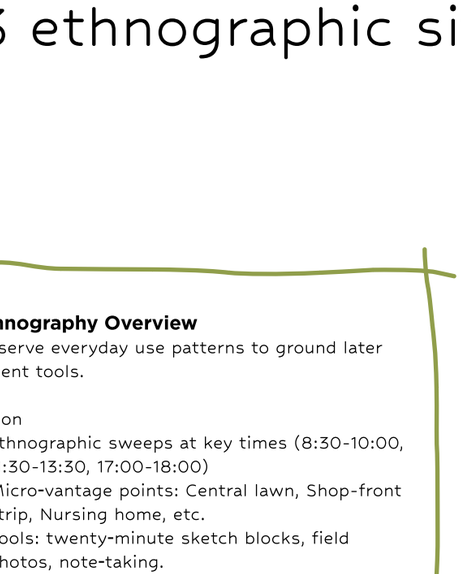
Goal: Observe everyday use patterns to ground later engagement tools.

Description

- Ethnographic sweeps at key times (8:30-10:00, 11:30-13:30, 17:00-18:00)
- Micro-vantage points: Central lawn, Shop-front strip, Nursing home, etc.
- Tools: twenty-minute sketch blocks, field photos, note-taking.

Deliverables

- Layered site-map infographic: movement lines, linger nodes, noise pockets.
- Observation illustrations



Sketch sprint
Corner of Mathenesserplein and Van Cittersstraat

Ethnography

To ground later participation tools in lived reality, the project began with 30-minute "sketch-sprints." Each sprint fixed a single vantage point, captured movements in real time, and was annotated on site (date, weather, flow lines, roles, overheard phrases). The sketches reveal how counter-publics actually claim space, information that cannot be inferred from plans or surveys.

These "sketch sprints" were then turned into a series of illustrations used to convey the nature and personality of a particular place on the square

The Bench Crew

One of the first informal meeting spots I noticed was what I've come to call the "Bench Crew" area. Centrally located in front of the archway facing the grass, this bench acts as the most common meeting space throughout the day. It's particularly popular during lunchtime and again around 17:00 when people return from work. Residents frequently gather here, forming a reliable social node in the square.

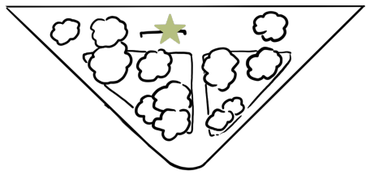


Figure 2.9
Bench Location Top View

The Regulars

Over time, I began to recognise many recurring figures, "the regulars." These are people who consistently return to the same seats with the same groups, often at the same times. The space supports habitual practices. People seem relaxed and familiar with one another's rhythms. Two specific groups, pictured in a related sketch, occupy nearly identical spots day after day. A few other regulars play with their dogs on the grass, tossing balls back and forth while others sitting nearby follow the action with their eyes.

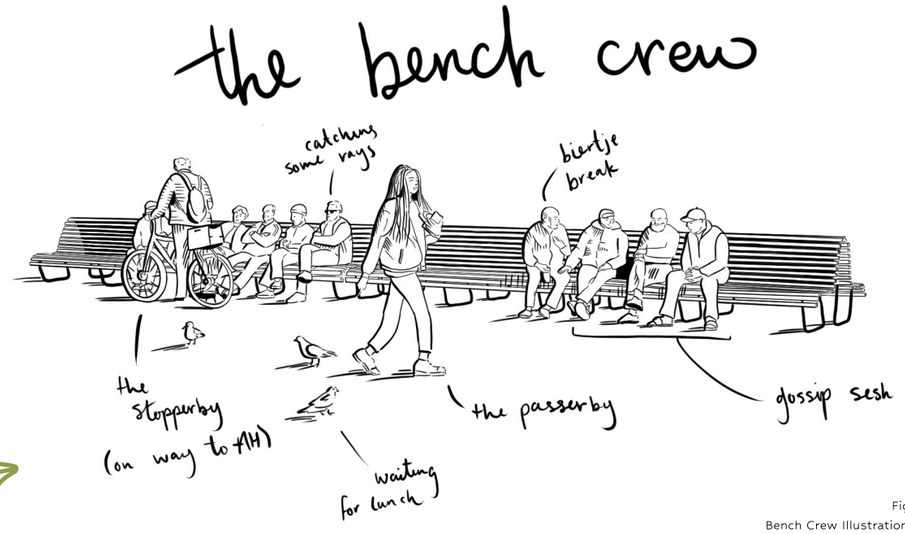


Figure 2.10
Bench Crew Illustration, Author

Religious Rituals

After prayer, many worshippers come to sit in the square. One day, I observed the Imam from Mosque Annasr join a group, with each person respectfully shaking his hand one by one. It was a powerful moment of community connection. These gatherings often involve reflective conversations about life, family, work, and spirituality. Some continue in quiet contemplation or sit thoughtfully after prayer, making this space a site not only of social activity but also spiritual rest.

Snack Break

In the afternoons, many parents stop by with their children for a snack after school or errands. Often, they pick up bread from Albert Heijn and share it while sitting in the sun. The children watch the birds, sometimes feeding them bits of bread, while the parents ask about their day. These family moments tend to be more self-contained. Unlike other groups, they rarely interact with others nearby.

Photo-Synthesising

As spring progressed into April and May, I noticed people coming simply to soak up the sun. When the weather cooperates, the square becomes a magnet for sunlight seekers. During dusk on sunny days, there's a noticeable uptick in casual conversations with strangers. It's amazing what sunlight can do, not just to a space, but to the social dynamics within it.

Bird Watching

An often-overlooked but important "group" in the square are the birds, and the people who watch or feed them. There are several key bird feeders in the area, we will meet them later. Residents love tossing scraps from their lunch to the birds. This quiet coexistence adds a soft layer of daily ritual, observed and appreciated by those who sit nearby.



Pigeon

Why does this place matter?

Mathenesserplein's central green is more than a transit point, it is the most popular informal meeting spot in the neighbourhood. It's a vital shared ground that serves different communities and publics for many reasons. From spiritual rituals to playful pauses, and quiet reflections to habitual routines, this space is layered with meaning. It is something worth enhancing and definitely worth supporting.

2.3.3 view from the archway

View from the Archway
This sketch captures the perspective from within the central archway of Mathenesserplein's historic apartment complex, designed in the 1920s as part of Rotterdam's westward expansion. Framed by tiled walls and vaulted ceilings, the view is almost perfectly symmetrical, offering a visual corridor that stretches from the inner courtyard of the building all the way to the bridge across the Schie. From this vantage point, the entire square opens up- trees, benches, light posts, and people all aligned along a central axis. As a resident, stepping out from this quiet, sheltered corridor means immediately entering the vibrant and sometimes overwhelming energy of the square. It's a dramatic shift.

Gates
The concept of a "gate" feels central to understanding Mathenesserplein. The square itself operates as a kind of urban threshold. People are constantly passing through, moving in all directions. The bridge, the tram lines, the shops, the mosque, and the supermarket all pull people in and push them out again. But if the plein is a gate, what does that mean for the people who live here? What does it mean to stay, rather than pass through? A gate is not inherently a place to dwell, but this square challenges that idea. It is both a corridor of movement and a place of gathering. The view from the archway invites us to consider: how might the square become not only an entrance, but a shared destination?

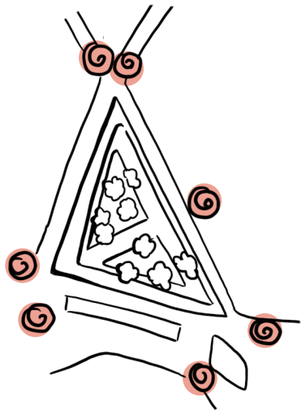


Figure 2.11
Gates Top View

Prayer Bells - The Migration
This illustration also captures a familiar daily ritual: a worshipper crossing the square after the afternoon prayer bells ring. This journey happens five times a day. Worshippers flowing in from various corners of the neighbourhood toward the mosque. Though prayer can happen anywhere, many choose to walk to the mosque together, forming a quiet procession across the square. It resembles a migration, a repeated act of community and intention. These movements mark the square with a kind of spiritual rhythm that gives meaning to its constant circulation. The "passing through" becomes purposeful, symbolic, grounded in a shared daily practice.

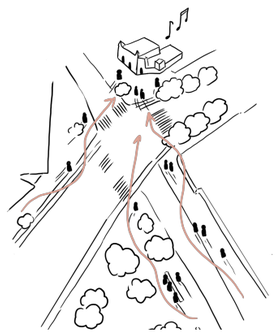


Figure 2.12
Prayer Bells - The Migration: Top View

The Bus / Road / Trucks
And yet, the square's role as a passage is not always graceful. From the archway, you immediately confront the chaos of a fractured street. Buses rumble past, delivery trucks idle or block the view, cars cut across, and people navigate it all- dodging traffic, stopping to chat, weaving through. This road slices through the heart of the square, severing what could be a unified public space. Instead of walking peacefully from the archway to the grass, you're cut off, forced to navigate around vehicles and obstacles. This constant interruption stifles spontaneous interactions and limits access, especially for the elderly or parents with children. The square feels less like a shared living room, more like an accidental intersection. And yet, people persist. They cross, they pause, they gather, suggesting the square's potential, if only the road could be tamed.



Figure 2.13
View from the Archway Illustration, Author
Mathenesserplein x Rauwenhoffplein

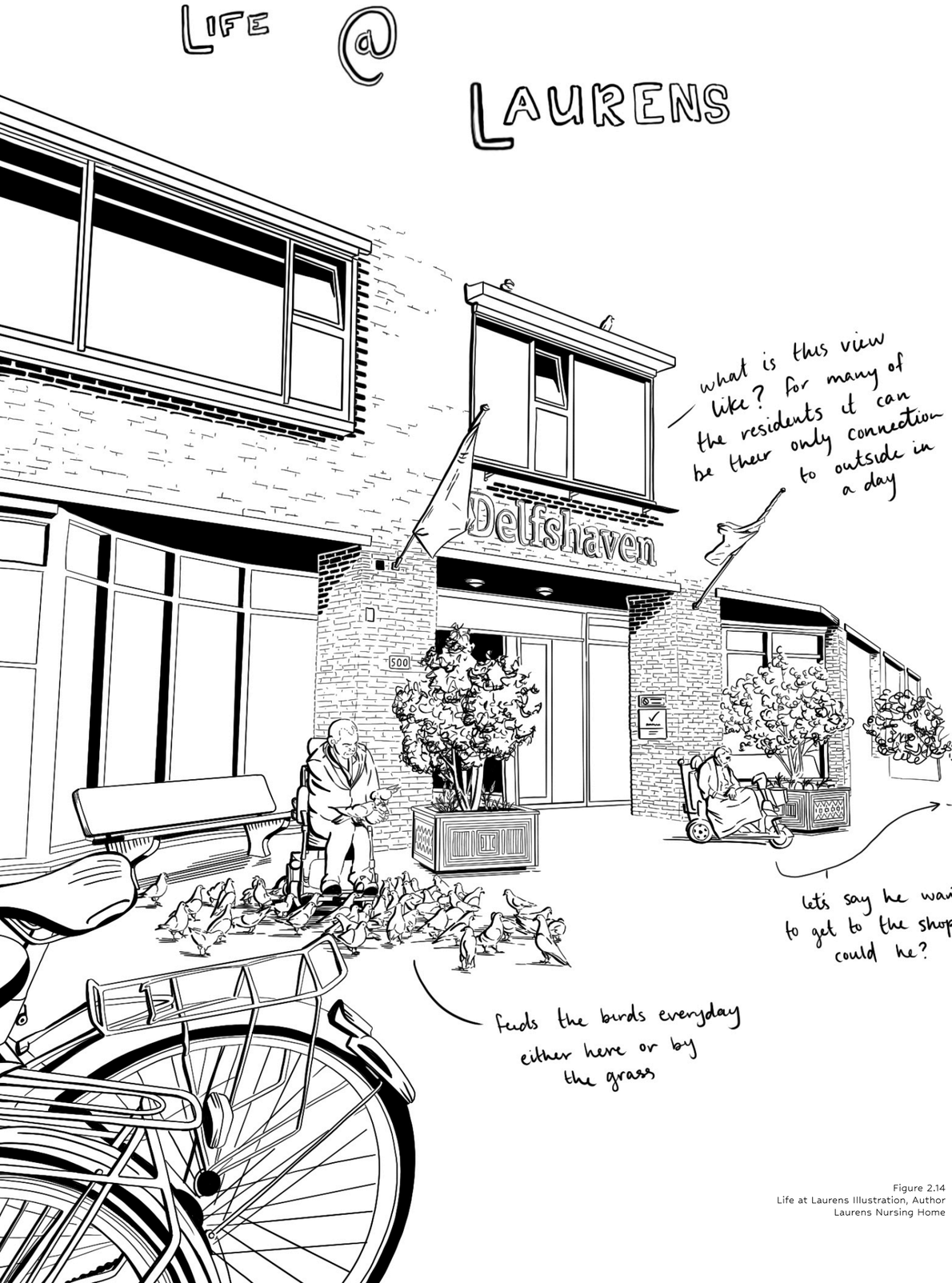


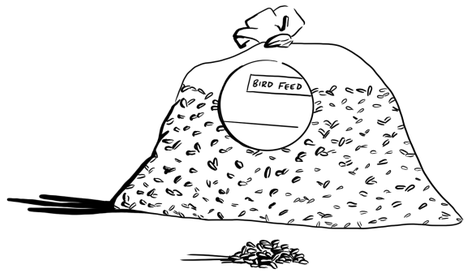
Figure 2.14
Life at Laurens Illustration, Author
Laurens Nursing Home

Life @ Laurens

During a visit to the Laurens retirement home, I noticed a few residents sitting outside, quietly taking in the air. They sat apart from one another, isolated in their own corners of the front area. But when my client Mustapha, who has spent months getting to know the neighbourhood, approached each of them with a simple "hello," their expressions lit up. It was a small but powerful reminder that many of them are craving connection. One-on-one social contact is incredibly important here. These are not just passive residents. They are people with stories, humour, opinions. But their needs often go unnoticed. Government officials don't come to listen to them, don't see their daily realities. That absence is palpable.

The Pigeon Guy

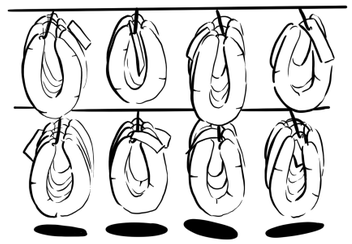
There's one figure who seems to bridge the gap between solitude and routine, an older man I've come to think of as the Pigeon Guy. He sits outside the Laurens building nearly every day, feeding pigeons in front of the entrance. Sometimes he chats with a passerby, sometimes he's alone, but he's always there. Part of the furniture. His presence is consistent and grounding, a kind of slow-motion anchor in the ever-moving square. It says something about the importance of small rituals, of being visible, even if only to the birds.



HEMA Rookwurst

Inaccessibility

Despite being located just steps from the square, the front entrance of Laurens might as well be miles away in terms of access. The moment you step out the door, you're confronted with a mess of obstacles- signposts, bicycles, cars, uneven pavements. For residents in wheelchairs or using walkers, it's a minefield. I watched several people have to veer into the bike lane just to make it across. Cyclists were frustrated; residents were anxious. One story stood out: a woman who used to buy her favourite snack, a Rookworst, at the HEMA each day. Now that she lives at Laurens, that HEMA is right across the street. And yet, she no longer goes. The traffic made her so nervous that she gave up. A simple routine that once gave her joy is now inaccessible. Even from their windows, the view is disorienting. Trams speeding past, bikes weaving unpredictably, rush hour creating constant noise and motion. It's not a welcoming scene.



HEMA Rookwurst

Loneliness

The residents at Laurens feel lonely. Their building is physically close to the square but emotionally and socially disconnected. They're not right in the heart of the action, and due to the accessibility barriers, they can't easily join it. People don't stop to chat, and they rarely wander close. The residents are near enough to hear the world moving, but too far to participate in it. That proximity without connection creates a painful sense of isolation. So close, yet so far from the community around them.

2.3.4 life at laurens

2.4 Participation-in-Practice Observation

2.4.1 Participation-in-Practice

- Observed one of Gemeente Rotterdam's early pop-up engagement sessions, analysing formats, invitations, language, spatial setup, and facilitation by Van plein naar park, Gemeente, Woonstad, and Woonbron

Key Question: How do these existing formats and setups enable or restrict resident participation?

2.4.2 Findings

- Free coffee and plants drew a steady stream of passersby; red/green sticker mapping, freehand sketches, and informal chats revealed initial impressions, suggestions, and emergent frictions. Orientation challenges with printed maps and lack of clear follow-up undermined deeper trust
- Key Question: Which observed strengths and weaknesses should inform the design of more effective, trust-building engagement tools?

2.4.1 Participation-in-Practice

Mathenesserplein is not new to participation. But, what does participation currently mean here? In this phase, I observed one of the Gemeente's early engagement sessions and reviewed materials shared with the public. I paid close attention to the formats, invitations, language, and spatial setup. This was not about critiquing individuals, but about reflecting on the systems and assumptions that shape participation practice today.



Stakeholders

This session was facilitated by Mustapha via Van plein naar park in collaboration with Gemeente Rotterdam, Woonstad, and Woonbron

Methods

• Data collection: field notes, informal interviews, photo documentation

Activities observed:

- Sentiment mapping with red/green stickers on a printed map
- Freehand mapping of local area on blank paper with sharpies
- Community discussion around a plant-and-coffee giveaway table
- Contact cards to register interest in follow-up



Generative vs. Evaluative Sessions

During the April 5th observation, the team employed exclusively generative techniques to invite residents to investigate what is going on in the neighbourhood, how residents feel, how they use the space etc. Upon investigating further, it seems that this type of session is usually where the research stops. Residents are not often brought in on actual interventions in the neighbourhood to determine if the design changes suit them, and if anything needs to change. While this front-loaded generative ideation is invaluable for surfacing latent needs, it also highlighted a gap: without evaluative tools, there is no concrete confirmation for participants that their ideas will be tested or implemented.

In response, my research will weave generative and evaluative methods together to sustain momentum, build trust, and signal early wins that encourage residents to keep contributing fresh insights.

2.4.2 Findings

While stationed at the pop-up table, I observed a steady stream of passerbys; dog walkers, shoppers, and neighbours drawn in by the free coffee and plants. Participants first encountered a printed map dotted with red and green sentiment stickers, then moved on to sketch the local area on blank paper, and finally chatted informally at the cleanup station. Tools rotated through these low-stakes activities and residents paused to share impressions, suggest improvements, and even joined the trash-pickup on the spot. This dynamic mix of mapping, discussion, and hands-on action set the stage for the following themes.





Incentive Drives Engagement

Evidence
"Free plant!" sign + coffee table drew steady passers-by; residents described the event as "festive, like a party."

Interpretation
Small giveaways significantly lower the barrier to initial participation.



Drawing Participation Activity, April 5th Event
Participation Facilitator: Stefany de Oliveira Santos

Spatial Tools Can Exclude

Evidence
Many participants stared at the printed map, and it took them a while, with help, to orient themselves

Interpretation
Low spatial literacy. People like to interact with their surroundings but they need to understand where they are first.



Sticker Participation activity, April 5th Event
Participation Facilitator: Stefany de Oliveira Santos



Broken feedback loop erodes trust

Evidence
When asked to get their contact info for further events, some gave it skeptically saying "we always do this and never hear back anyways," and some refused to give info for this reason.

Interpretation
Without visible follow-up, even willing participants become skeptical of future engagement.

Momentum yields action

Evidence
Several residents who lingered to use the tools immediately joined a nearby trash-cleanup activity.

Interpretation
When energy is harnessed on the spot, participants quickly shift from input to tangible action.





3 chapter summary

3.1 Findings Overview
- Brings together key insights from methods.
- Sets the foundation for defining what meaningful participation in Mathenesserplein requires.

Key Question: What emergent patterns and needs have we uncovered that will frame the participatory system?

3.2 Criteria
- Elicit Stories and Surface Needs
- Enable Low-Barrier Entry
- Build Trust through Feedback Loops

Key Question: Which criteria synthesise our findings into actionable principles for tool design?

3.3 Design Challenge
- Translate the four design criteria into a single systemic brief
- Present metaphor to promote neighbourhood growth

Key Question: How can we translate these criteria into a cohesive design challenge for a systemic participatory toolkit?

findings

Overview

This chapter brings together key insights from the first research phase, including literature and policy review, historical analysis, ethnographic site observation, and the evaluation of existing participation practices. Rather than by method, the chapter will review the four sub-questions that have guided this project so far. Each question offers a different lens on the square, its users, its frictions, its blind spots, and its untapped potential.

The goal here is not to conclude, but to set the foundation. These early findings help surface what matters in this place, and begin to define what meaningful participation might require.

The chapter closes by translating these insights into a set of design criteria for the participatory practices that follow (which in turn draw out neighbourhood proposals from residents through eliciting wants/needs/stories) and to build trust through feedback and visibility. These criteria then shape the central design challenge moving into the next phase.

Sub-Questions

1. Who uses the square, when, and for what?
2. What shared needs and frictions emerge across groups?
3. What barriers prevent some publics from engaging?
4. What tools actually surface meaningful input and build trust?

3.1 findings overview

Figure 3.1
Findings Overview

1

Who uses the square, when, and for what?

The square is used by many publics throughout the day, but not all of them are typically involved in formal participation efforts. Through observation and early engagement, I identified several recurring resident groups/communities that might be part of our public:

This list is not exhaustive, but it reflects the groups most visible in my research. While it would be ideal to conduct deep participatory work with all of them, scope and capacity require prioritisation. These decisions were made based on presence, accessibility, and opportunity to build sustained engagement.



Elderly residents
from the nearby Laurens care home



Parents and children,
mostly connected to the Emmausschool



Mosque visitors,
particularly at prayer times



Local shopkeepers
and small business owners



Shoppers and commuters, passing through but rarely staying



Teenage clusters,
who often use the square as a social stage

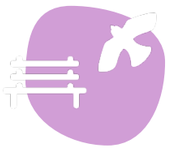
2

What shared needs and frictions emerge across groups?

Despite their differences, several themes cut across user groups. These shared needs point toward a design challenge that is both spatial and social: to create a space that holds difference while offering calm and connection.



The square is often perceived as chaotic, stressful, and difficult to navigate due to traffic and congestion



There is a desire for quieter, peaceful areas where people can sit or pause



Many express a longing for the square to feel more like an extension of home, rather than just a place to pass through



Residents want spaces to connect, both within their own communities and across social lines

3

What barriers prevent some publics from engaging?

Many of the people who use the square most are also those least likely to participate in traditional engagement formats. These barriers suggest that participation cannot rely on residents seeking it out, it must be brought to them, in ways that feel relevant, respectful, and worth their effort.



Limited mobility or caregiving responsibilities (e.g., Laurens residents or parents with young children)



Language and tone, particularly when invitations are formal or bureaucratic



Lack of awareness that participation is happening at all



Timing of meetings, which often exclude working people, parents, and elderly residents



Lack of time, energy, or perceived relevance



Skepticism, shaped by past experiences of being ignored or not hearing back

4

What tools actually surface meaningful input and build trust?

Insights from observed sessions and early prototyping point toward tools and formats that work. Together, these moments suggest that trust is built not just through what is asked, but how it is asked, and whether people feel they'll be taken seriously.



Quick, low-barrier decisions (like placing a sticker on a map) engaged people immediately



Follow-up and feedback matter. Residents asked to stay informed, and expressed hope that input would be acted on



Drawing activities revealed unspoken priorities, such as peace, greenery, or safety



Casual conversations, grounded in care and curiosity, surfaced deeper feelings and ideas



Residents showed willingness to volunteer time and energy when approached with sincerity

3.2 criteria

Figure 3.2
Criteria from Findings

From Findings to Criteria

The insights gathered so far begin to reveal not only what people need from the square, but what they need from the process of shaping it. By clustering the patterns surfaced in each sub-question, a set of design criteria emerges, principles that should guide any participatory approach in Mathenesserplein. These criteria respond directly to lived experiences: they are not abstract ideals, but grounded needs. They will inform the next phase of the project, shaping the participatory tools, timelines, and communication strategies that follow.



Cluster A: Use & Desire Across Groups

People use the square regularly, but don't feel ownership of it.

Many wish it felt calmer, safer, or more social

Existing formats don't make space for deeper reflection

There's interest in connecting, within and across communities

Cluster B: Accessibility Barriers

Participation formats feel formal or intimidating

Timing often excludes working people, caregivers, elders

Some people don't know engagement is happening at all

Low barrier entry prompted more engagement

Cluster C: Lack of Feedback or Follow-Up

Residents are skeptical participation will lead to real change

There is little clarity on how input is used or whether it's valued

Interest and willingness to engage exists, but fades if nothing follows

Design Criteria 1: Elicit Stories and Surface Needs
Participation should invite people to share what matters to them, their routines, frustrations, hopes, not just make decisions. Story-based input reveals underlying needs more effectively than simple preferences.

Design Criteria 2: Enable Low-Barrier Entry
Participation should be visible, informal, and easy to access, allowing people to engage spontaneously, in their own language and context, without prior knowledge.

Design Criteria 3: Build Trust Through Feedback Loops
Participation must include visible, ongoing communication that shows residents how their input is used, what comes next, and how decisions are made.

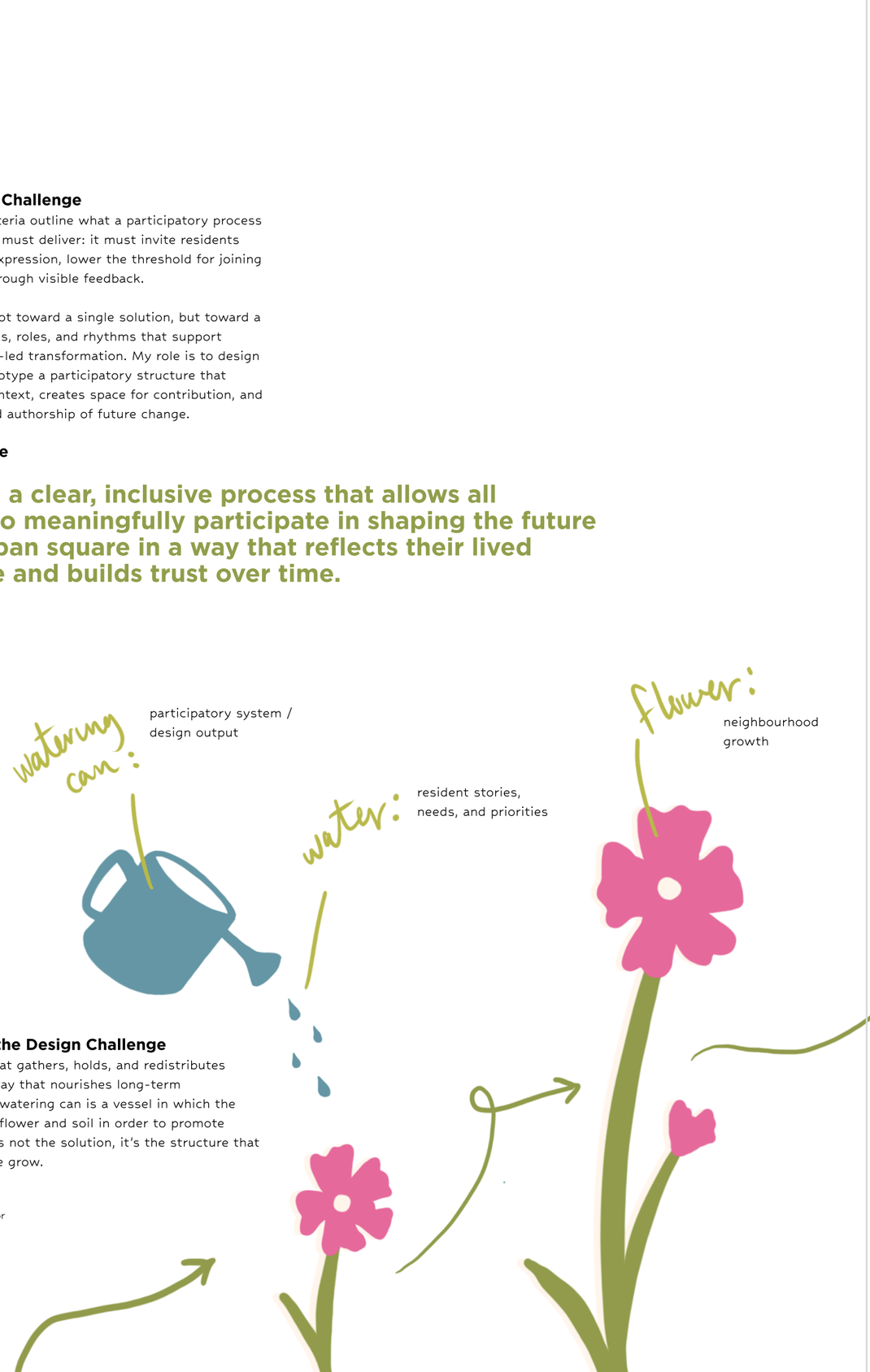
3.3 design challenge

From Criteria to Challenge
The three design criteria outline what a participatory process in Mathenesserplein must deliver: it must invite residents into reflection and expression, lower the threshold for joining in and build trust through visible feedback.

These needs point not toward a single solution, but toward a system, a set of tools, roles, and rhythms that support ongoing, community-led transformation. My role is to design that system: to prototype a participatory structure that responds to local context, creates space for contribution, and builds toward shared authorship of future change.

Design Challenge

To provide a clear, inclusive process that allows all residents to meaningfully participate in shaping the future of their urban square in a way that reflects their lived experience and builds trust over time.



A Metaphor for the Design Challenge
To build a system that gathers, holds, and redistributes resident input in a way that nourishes long-term transformation. The watering can is a vessel in which the water can reach the flower and soil in order to promote growth. The vessel is not the solution, it's the structure that helps something else grow.

Figure 3.3
Design Challenge Metaphor

4 chapter summary

4.1 Design Phase Overview
- Recap how we translated our criteria into a sequence of pilots, tests, and refinements

Key Question: How does this phase stitch together research insights into actionable design activities?

4.2 Student Fieldwork Deployment
- Planning & sensitisation lectures for 24 Hogeschool students
- Student-led testing of low-threshold methods in April-May

Key Question: What real-world feedback did student "field researchers" generate on our early prototypes?

4.3 Neighbourhood Themes and Insights
- Synthesise the four emergent themes from fieldwork
- Translate each theme into a direct "insights → action" briefing

Key Question: Which themes most strongly reshape our tool functions and facilitation strategies?

4.4 Prioritisation Matrix Development
- Define and weight criteria (ease vs. impact, short- vs. long-term)
- Build the two-axis matrix to rank nine initial proposals

Key Question: How can we systematically surface the quick wins and the strategic bets?

ideation

What does ideation look like here?
In this project, ideation did not begin with sketches of the square, but with the question: how can we involve residents in a way that is meaningful, low-threshold, and trust-building? Based on the design criteria developed in the previous chapter, this phase focused on developing a participatory system, one that could surface local needs, elicit lived experiences, and guide future spatial decisions.

Ideation here meant designing the design process itself. With the opportunity to collaborate with 24 students from Hogeschool Rotterdam*, I began by considering how researchers should be prepared to enter the field: what they should observe, how they should listen, and how trust could be built quickly and respectfully. I explored which participatory methods would best capture stories and desires, how to structure a timeline that made space for iteration, and how to turn fragmented input into something visible and actionable, a base for future prioritisation.

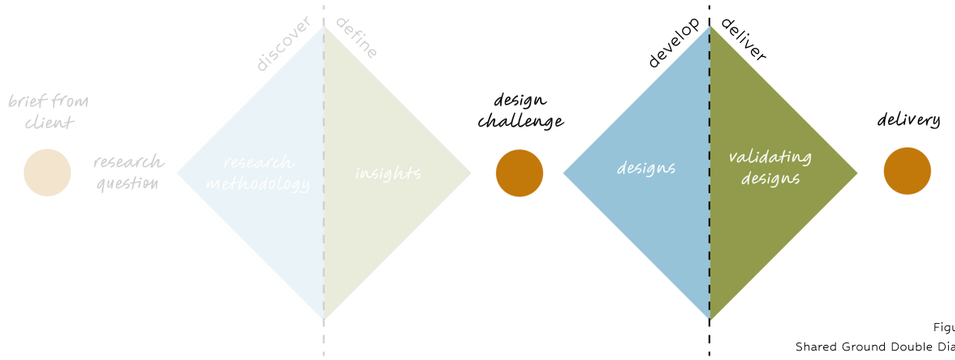


Figure 4.1
Shared Ground Double Diamond

*
Student involvement was not a planned part of the project, but an opportunity that arose in late March, and Mustapha and I decided to run with it. Details on the scope of the student work and what it means for the project will be presented on the following pages.

4.1 design criteria to design components

Design Criteria 1: Elicit Stories and Surface Needs
Participation should invite people to share what matters to them, their routines, frustrations, hopes, not just make decisions. Story-based input reveals underlying needs more effectively than simple preferences.

This is the foundation for each step of the system. Every tool, every moment of participation, is designed to draw out what residents actually want, feel, and need in their square. Without this, participation is empty, it becomes performative rather than generative. This criterion ensures the process begins with listening.

Design Criteria 2: Enable Low-Barrier Entry
Participation should be visible, informal, and easy to access, allowing people to engage spontaneously, in their own language and context, without prior knowledge.

True participation doesn't start with the loudest voices, it starts with access. This criterion ensures the process invites people in across language, time, format, and confidence. It's about thoughtful design that makes contribution feel simple, intuitive, and worth the effort. Without this, we risk engaging only the same publics again.

Design Criteria 3: Build Trust Through Feedback Loops
Participation must include visible, ongoing communication that shows residents how their input is used, what comes next, and how decisions are made.

Participation without follow-up erodes trust. This criterion pushes the system to give back, to show residents how their input is used and what changes as a result. Feedback can take many forms, but it must be visible, ongoing, and sincere.

Iterative Engagement Growth Model
This visual outlines how the participatory system builds upward using the three design criteria. At the base, Criteria 1 **(green)**, eliciting stories, sets the stage to start each tangible move, without it we would not know what moves to make. Criteria 2, enabling low-barrier entry **(blue)** is our base of which, without, we would not succeed in engaging in authentic participation, only reaching the same voices as always.

As interactions unfold, Criteria 3 **(purple)** finds its place along the timeline, providing feedback as proposals come to fruition.

The ripple effect suggests that each act of participation creates impacts beyond its immediate output, strengthening relationships, growing local momentum, and slowly building toward lasting change. The next section shows how this system was first activated through student-led field research.

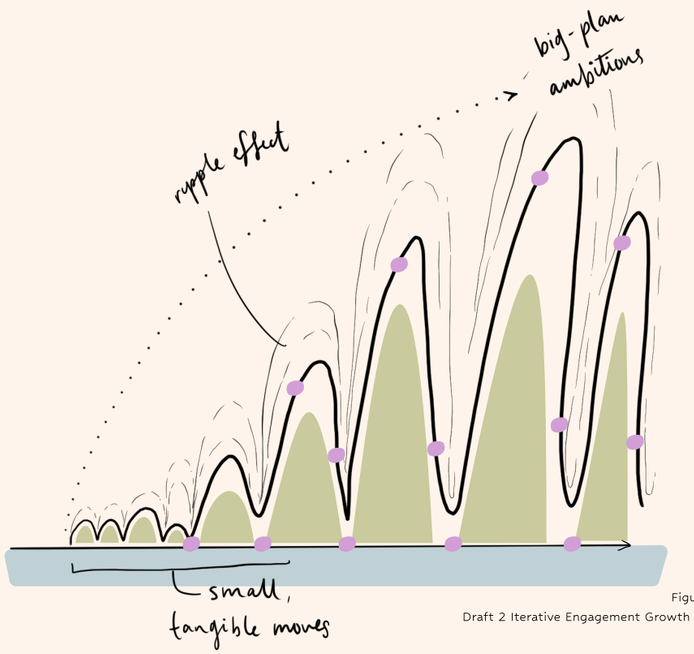


Figure 4.2
Draft 2 Iterative Engagement Growth Model

How do 24 students fit into this story?
This project gained momentum when 24 second-year Business Administration students from Hogeschool Rotterdam joined as part of a course on stakeholder management. The course placed over 20 student teams in different urban contexts, and we had the opportunity to embed one full cohort into Mathenesserplein.

Until this point, fieldwork had been carried out by just two people, myself and Mustapha. By welcoming the students as sensitised entry-level researchers, we multiplied our capacity twelvefold. This opened the door to richer street-level data, more resident interactions, and early tool testing at a scale that would have otherwise been impossible.

In the system shown here, the student phase marks the first activation of the design criteria in the field, particularly Criteria 1 and 2: surfacing stories and lowering the threshold for participation.



Figure 4.3
Shared Ground Triple Diamond

4.2 student introduction

4.2 student introduction

3.3 Phase 2 – Student-Led Exploratory Engagement

Goal: Pilot first-contact scripts and identify language and trust barriers.

Description

- 3 lectures on brief + ethics + participation for 24 Hogeschool Rotterdam BA students.
- 5–10 min street-intercept interviews.
- Student teams focus on economic, environmental or social angles.
- Testing rapid-prototyping interview tools

Deliverables

- Raw interview logs and verbatim quotes.
- Booklet usability notes.
- Personas + neighbourhood sentiment heat-map.
- Design-Change Prioritisation matrix



Kick-Off Session
Bachelor's Business Administration students: Stakeholder Management
Neighbourhood Team Assignment and Course Requirements

Student Exploration

Twenty-four second-year Business-Administration students from Hogeschool Rotterdam joined the project for a six-week module on stakeholder management. Their academic brief was to practise working with "real stakeholders," residents, municipal staff and community partners, our research brief was to multiply eyes and ears on the square.

By training the students as entry-level field-researchers we could collect far more street-level stories, quotes and low-fidelity artefact tests than our core team could manage alone, and we could impress on them that residents should not just be data points but decision makers in any neighbourhood project.

To align the two agendas we ran a three-part mini-curriculum.

Week 1

The first lecture introduced context-mapping and observation basics.

- Setting goals
- Focus and Scope

Week 2

The second unpacked participation theory.

- Arnstein's ladder
- The Fuzzy Front End and why it is important
- Asking the right questions

Week 3

The third challenged each team to design a creative field session.

- The benefit of artefacts and props
- Brainstorming
- How to collect data
- The Importance of quotes and personas

Over the following weeks the students' interviews, bingo boards and poster props served a double purpose: they fed our data log and demonstrated, in practice, that centring residents leads to richer, more actionable findings.

Setting the timeline and dividing the groups

To structure the engagement, the students were divided into smaller teams and assigned specific lenses: social, economic, or environmental. This helped distribute focus while still allowing freedom in how each team approached their fieldwork. We worked within the course's six-week timeframe, aligning the project arc with their existing deliverable structure. Students had regular contact moments with me as their field partner and co-instructor, while also receiving guidance from their university supervisor.

The timeline was intentionally staged to mirror a design cycle, from initial context exploration to tool design and early testing. This mirrored the larger system's structure and gave students a role in its early activation.

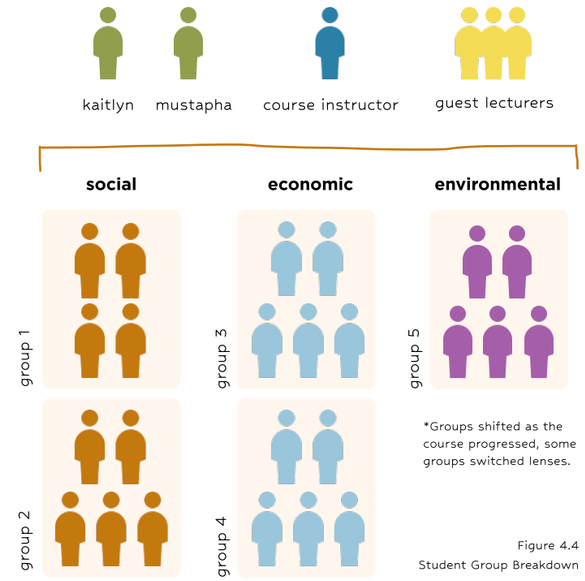


Figure 4.4
Student Group Breakdown

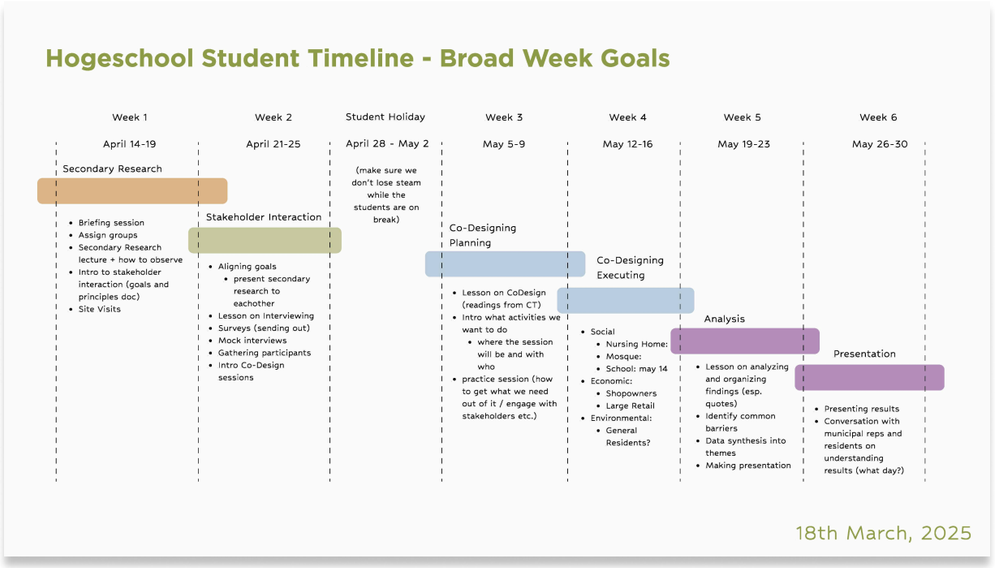


Figure 4.5
Student Timeline

*
This timeline evolved week by week, as we adapted to course logistics and adjusted based on the students' strengths, pace, and needs. Flexibility was key to aligning our goals with theirs.

4.2 student introduction

4.3 student lectures

Before sending two dozen student-researchers into the neighbourhood, we first had to equip them with a shared ethic: residents are the primary experts, and any data worth having begins with respectful, bias-aware contact. The briefing sessions that follow were not classroom extras; they were a deliberate research method, engineered to calibrate the students' lenses so that the stories they gathered would be honest, open and grounded in reciprocity. What I taught, and why, is laid out below so the reader can see exactly how we primed the teams to meet Mathenesserplein's people as equals rather than as subjects.

For full lecture slides,
see Appendix A

week 1

Contextmapping

We opened with context mapping: a reminder that good fieldwork starts by learning the ground you stand on, people, rhythms, blind spots, before you try to "solve" anything. Students were told that their first job was discovery inside everyday life, not solution finding.

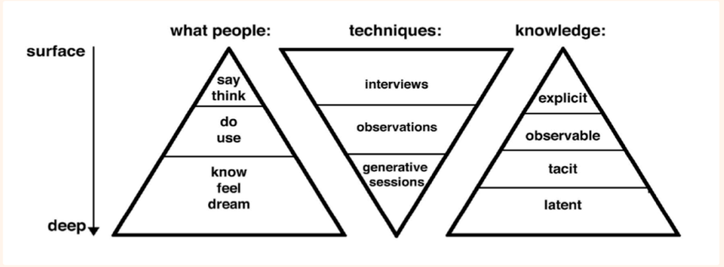


Figure 4.6
Context-Mapping Triangle
Froukje Sleeswijk-Visser

"You do not have to find the right answers yet! You SHOULD expect to find the right questions."

Quote: Week 1 Presentation
Kaitlyn Smith

Key principles we set

- Residents are the experts of their own experience.
  They are partners, not subjects; your role is to help them surface expertise they already possess.
- Research fatigue is real.
  Mathenesserplein has hosted multiple studies; approach with care and manage expectations about what will happen with their input.
- Convey genuine care and respect time.
  Acknowledge that participation costs residents effort atop busy lives.

With the students, we crafted their goal, focus, and scope for the project.

Goal
Understand what the residents of Mathenesserplein want and need to be changed in their neighborhood

Focus
Residents living in and around Mathenesserplein (nursing home residents, parents, shop owners, Muslim community members who attend Moskee Annasr)

Scope
Green space, quiet, walkability, safety, gathering spaces..... etc.

week 2

Co-Design 101

In this session, we explored the foundations of co-design as a participatory approach that moves beyond token consultation toward genuine partnership.

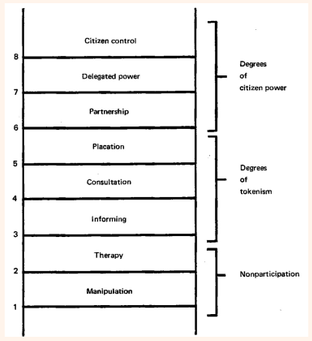


Figure 4.7
Arnstein's Ladder



We began with Arnstein's Ladder of Participation to diagnose where typical civic processes stall, then located our work in the "fuzzy front end" where framing the right questions and aligning flows of people, materials and information are critical.

Finally, we discussed practical tactics, crafting engaging questions, managing logistics, and respecting participants' time, to ensure co-design activities feel both meaningful and accessible. Students were provided with additional optional relevant readings from Convivial, as well as an excerpt on Arnstein's Ladder.

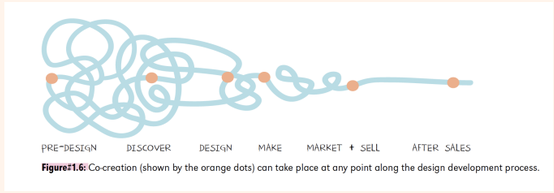
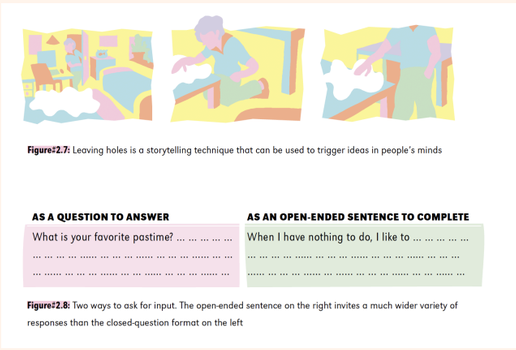


Figure 1.6: Co-creation (shown by the orange dots) can take place at any point along the design development process.

Figure 4.8
Fuzzy Front End
Convivial Toolbox, Sanders and Stappers


Figure 2.7: Leaving holes is a storytelling technique that can be used to trigger ideas in people's minds

AS A QUESTION TO ANSWER
What is your favorite pastime? ... ...

AS AN OPEN-ENDED SENTENCE TO COMPLETE
When I have nothing to do, I like to ... ...

Figure 2.8: Two ways to ask for input. The open-ended sentence on the right invites a much wider variety of responses than the closed-question format on the left

Figure 4.9
Asking the Right Questions
Convivial Toolbox, Sanders and Stappers

Lectures

week 3

Assignment

In Week 2 we explored key engagement frameworks (Arnstein's Ladder, Warner's publics/counterpublics) and discussed how participatory design tools map onto different levels of community involvement.

We began week 3 with a recap and answered any questions that arose.

Introduction to the assignment

- Original brief: Students were to propose an engagement plan, outlining activities, materials, and tools, for a real or hypothetical community project.
- Early reactions: enthusiasm for hands-on workshops, some uncertainty about how to present findings in report

Examples provided: I shared sample quotes, personas, and data-presentation formats to guide their report writing. (The persona examples shown to students were drawn from past student reports. As permission to reproduce them here was not granted, they are not included in this report.)

Tips:
Bring your Toolkit!

- Printed questions per group member
- Printed map to guide and allow resident to point out an area
- Notepad/pens

Taking pictures:

- "Ask permission! They can hold an object in front of their face for anonymity or we can blur later. In context photographs are great for explaining research and helping the receiver of the research believe your story. "

Final Assignment

Field implementation: Students then carried out their plan "in the wild," collecting data via observations, interviews, and mapping sessions.

Final deliverable: A Report & Presentation including:

- Findings with direct quotes and generated Personas
- Spatial Analysis visualisations of engagement hotspots
- Optionally, Design Recommendations grounded in their data (e.g. proposed seating layouts, digital interface tweaks).



Group 2 Participation Plan Presentation



Group 6 Plan Execution

Lectures

entering the square



What the students carried with them

After three short lectures, the students stepped into the square not as surveyors or consultants, but as sensitised field researchers. They were equipped with frameworks

- Arnstein's ladder
- stakeholder mapping
- goal-setting
- asking the right questions

but more importantly, they were challenged to see themselves as temporary guests in someone else's space.

We framed participation not as a box-ticking exercise, but as a mindset rooted in humility, curiosity, and co-creation. As Sanders and Stappers write, "the people we are designing for are the experts of their own experience" (2008). This shift, from extracting data to entering into dialogue, was foundational to how we hoped the students would engage.

Practically, they carried simple tools: guiding questions, bingo boards, visual prompts. But under the surface, this was also a test of tone. How do you approach a stranger in a way that feels respectful? What builds trust? What gets someone to pause and share more than just an answer?

In this way, the student fieldwork served two roles: it expanded our data reach, and it tested the dynamics of low-barrier participation across publics. What formats opened the door? What made people stay?

"With this shift in mindset, we can invite future 'users' into the front end of the design process and move toward designing with them, not just for them."

- Sanders & Stappers (2012)

4.4 student-tested engagement methods

As part of their six-week involvement, students became our first wave of field researchers, testing different methods for engaging residents in and around Mathenesserplein. The tools they created, from playful prompts to visual surveys, helped reveal not only what people think, but how they prefer to participate. Below is a summary of the six most used methods, along with the design takeaways we drew from each one.

For student reports excerpts detailing engagement methods, see Appendix B



Figure 4.10
Students Interview owners of Janna's Bloemenpleintje

1. Street Interviews (Semi-Structured)

Used by nearly every group, semi-structured interviews aimed to gather personal stories and concerns from a wide range of square users. While the depth of conversation varied, some students managed to surface deeply personal reflections, especially around trust in local government and everyday safety.

What we learned:
Interviews are powerful when approached with care and openness, but they rely heavily on the interviewer's tone, confidence, and ability to listen.
Design Takeaway: Best for story capture and emotional insight, not scalable alone.
Criteria Supported: Surface Stories (1), Trust (3)
Reached: Shopkeepers, mosque visitors, commuters



Figure 4.11
Students conduct street surveys

2. Street Surveys (Enquêtes)

These were short paper or tablet-based questionnaires used to quantify attitudes on issues like safety, cleanliness, and desired changes. Positioned in high-traffic areas like tram stops or market entrances, they were efficient in collecting large volumes of opinion.

What we learned: Fast formats reach more people, but lack nuance. Surveys also need to be phrased simply to avoid confusion.
Design Takeaway: Useful for trend spotting, not for depth.
Criteria Supported: Low Barrier (2)
Reached: Commuters, shoppers, casual passersby



Figure 4.12
Student-made experience dice participation artefact

3. "Experience Dice" Prompt Game

These were custom six-sided dice printed with icons or short questions on themes like noise, comfort, and safety. Passersby rolled the dice to prompt a spontaneous conversation, often in pairs or quick one-on-one chats, facilitated by a student.

What we Learned: Low-threshold and playful formats help engage younger audiences and spark dialogue, but the data gathered tends to be superficial and highly dependent on the facilitator's energy.
Design Takeaway: Great for visibility, youth engagement, and opening informal conversations, but not for deep or nuanced insight.
Criteria Supported: Elicit Stories and Surface Needs (1), Low-Barrier Entry (2)
Reached: Younger passersby, casual walkers, students in informal settings.

Figure 4.13
Student-made Sentiment Map Boards



4. Visual Talk Boards (Visuele Praatplaat)

These were large aerial maps of the square laid out in public, with colour-coded stickers (green = good, orange = needs improvement, red = bad) that participants placed to mark meaningful spots.

What we learned: Bypassing language barriers and tapping into spatial intuition makes feedback fast and inclusive, but the format leaves little room for deeper context or explanation.
Design Takeaway: Ideal for quick, multilingual spatial input and prioritising specific locations, but should be paired with other methods for richer insight.
Criteria supported: Low-Barrier Entry (2), Support Prioritisation and Decision-Making (4)
Reached: Multilingual residents, passersby of all ages, and those less comfortable with verbal participation.



Figure 4.14
Students interviewing nursing home residents at Laurens

5. Bingo Game with Laurens Nursing Home Residents

These were custom bingo cards printed with spatial or emotional prompts (e.g., "I've sat here before," "I feel safe when..."). Cards were played one-on-one with residents, supported by caregivers.

What we learned: Familiar formats like bingo provide emotional safety and draw out stories, especially in dementia contexts, but the findings aren't broadly generalisable due to the small sample size.
Design Takeaway: Excellent for empathetic engagement with vulnerable users and surfacing personal connections, but should be complemented by broader methods for wider reach.
Criteria supported: Elicit Stories (1), Low-Barrier (2)
Reached: Elderly residents, especially those with limited mobility or cognitive impairments.

Figure 4.15
Students conducting sentiment session outside Emmausschool







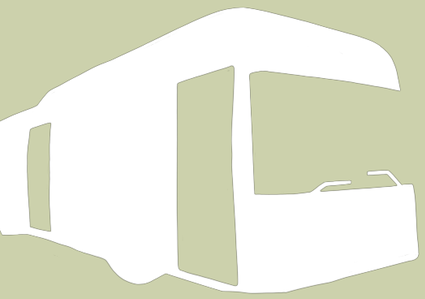
6. Sticky-Note Boards

Large posters displayed in school drop-off areas featured spatial or emotional statements (e.g., "I feel safe on the plein") with colour-coded stickers for quick reactions. Parents and children added sticky-note comments in their own words or languages.

What we learned: Visually engaging and family-friendly formats draw good turnout, especially during morning school runs, but require active facilitation to clarify ambiguous notes and follow up on insights.
Design Takeaway: Great for inclusive, multilingual engagement and surfacing emotional nuances, but needs a facilitator to translate comments into actionable themes.
Criteria supported: Elicit Needs (1), Low-Barrier (2)
Reached: Parents, children, and caregivers during school drop-off times.

4.5 neighbourhood insights

Themes



1

Safety and Mobility

Navigating Mathenesserplein is a daily source of stress, especially for parents, elderly residents, and newcomers. Chaotic traffic, unclear crossings, and poorly placed infrastructure contribute to a sense of physical and psychological risk. Residents called for calmer flow, better lighting, and child-safe zones.

"Ik laat mijn kind hier niet zomaar spelen, het verkeer is te druk en onveilig."

"I don't let my child play here easily. The traffic is too busy and unsafe."

Interview with a parent on the square, Group 6

"Tijdens het gebed staat het hier soms helemaal vast."

"During prayer times it's completely gridlocked here."

Interview with resident near An Nasr mosque, Group 6

"De fietsenrekken staan voor de ingang en de vuilnisbakken staan raar, dat maakt het rommelig."

"The bike racks are in front of the entrance and the trash bins are placed weirdly, that makes it messy."

Interview in front of Albert Heijn, Group 6

"OV gebruiker, chaos door fout geparkeerde fietsen en scooters. Bus sluis: gevaarlijk en rommelig, verkeer door elkaar. Voelt zich onveilig bij oversteek."

"Public transport user, chaos from badly parked bikes and scooters. Bus sluice: dangerous and messy, traffic all mixed up. Feels unsafe when crossing."

Notes from interviewing a public transport user at OV point near Mathenesserplein, Group 6



2

Usable Green and Climate Relief

Green space exists, but it's fragmented or uninviting. Parents wanted playable lawns; others flagged a need for shaded rest points or softer planting. Ideas around climate resilience aligned with desires for daily comfort and beauty.

"Veel bewoners vonden het grasveld niet aantrekkelijk. Dit kwam doordat het iets verhoogd was maar ook mede doordat veel honden daar hun behoefte doen."

"Many found the grass patch unattractive because it was slightly raised and also because many dogs use it to relieve themselves."

Conversations with residents around the lawn, Group 2

"Oók zouden ze willen dat het plein meer wordt doorgetrokken ... meer plekken komen om rustig te zitten in de schaduw. Ze vinden dat vergroening ... bijeen draagt aan verkoeling en een prettigere sfeer."

"They would also like the square to be extended ... more spots to sit quietly in the shade. They feel that greening ... contributes to cooling and a more pleasant atmosphere."

Interviews with residents and shopowners, Group 4

Student Exploration

The insights on this page distil the most urgent and recurring needs voiced across more than 60 street conversations. While quotes varied in tone and detail, common patterns emerged. These four themes, Safety & Mobility, Social Belonging, Local Economy, and Usable Green, reflect not just what people said, but what they hope the square could become.

For detailed Quote lists, personas and further student-gathered insights, see Appendix B

Figure 4.16
Theme summary from student fieldwork



3

Social Encouragement

Many residents described the square as a place to pass through, not stay. Elderly residents in particular expressed feelings of isolation, while parents wished for casual social moments. The absence of shared rituals, inviting spots, or family-friendly anchors was felt across generations.

"De mensen die langslopen gaan niet zomaar een gesprek aan."

"People passing by don't just strike up a conversation."

Interview with Mrs. Huisman, Laurens resident, Group 6

"Vroeger hadden ouderen een plek om samen te komen, die is nu weg."

"In the past, the elderly had a place to gather, but that's gone now."

Interview 2, Group 4

"Ik mis hier een leuk koffietentje."

"I miss a nice little coffee shop here."

Desire for social spots, Interview with Nadia (parent), Group 2



4

Local Economy and Activation

There's appetite for a more active square: a better market, street life, or small social businesses. But congestion, noise, and trash are barriers. Residents want activation without overload, spaces to linger and connect, not just move through.

"Gezellige plekken met vriendelijke mensen."

Could use: "Cozy spots with friendly people."

Passer Interview, Group 3

"Markten vind ik allemaal leuk."

"I'm always in favor of markets."

Interview, Group 4

"Veel mensen komen hier alleen om door te reizen, er is geen plek om echt te blijven hangen."

"Many people come here just to pass through; there's nowhere to really stay and linger."

Interview 9, Group 2

4.6 from insights to action

Insight to Action

After synthesising student engagement methods and clustering our core themes, we were ready to move from observation into design. This spread marks the moment we pivoted from insights to proposing targeted interventions.

Yet, as we mapped where students naturally gravitated, one space stood conspicuously empty: the street median in between the Albert Heijn and the central lawn. The median was originally put in place because vehicles routinely used it to U-turn when the bridge opened, in a hurry to get to their next destination, so the Gemeente installed it to prevent unsafe traffic manoeuvres. It was noted that no gatherings or activities ever took place there. Recognising this 'urban crack' (Dekeyrel 2011) as an untapped site for engagement, Mustapha proposed pursuing formal approval to transform the median into a dynamic green zone.

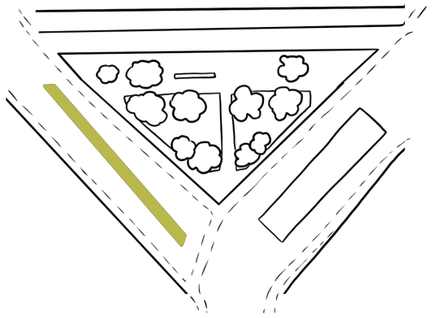


Figure 4.17
Aerial view median location

Seizing Opportunity

To bring the median's potential to life, I sketched a realistic visual mock-up. Studies show that clear, context-rich visualisations improve stakeholder comprehension and can accelerate formal approvals (Lu & Lange, 2023). Equally, tactical urbanism literature emphasises the value of seizing emergent openings, leveraging unplanned opportunities to demonstrate change and build community trust (Lydon & Garcia, 2016).

Inspired by these insights, I developed the first prototype of the median visual, which then informed my early thinking on how to rank and refine proposals from the large amounts of data we have gathered with the students.



The Median



Future Median Renewal
Render

Proposals and Prioritisation

Given the decision to prioritise the median first, I realised I needed a clear rationale for why one intervention should come before the rest and a system to make those choices intentionally.

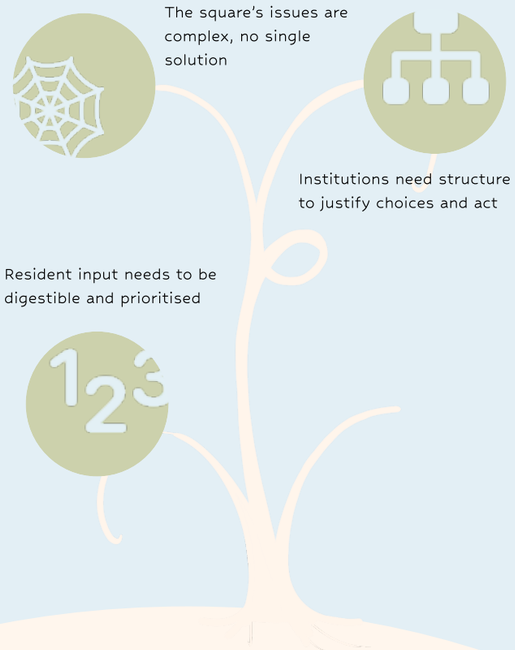
At this point, I was feeling overwhelmed by the volume of data and uncertain how to turn insights into action. It's time not only to propose interventions drawn from our student findings, but also to establish a 4th criteria that will guide which ideas we develop most fully.

Design Criteria 4: Support Prioritisation and Decision-Making
Participation tools should be paired with a system to organise public input in a way that supports institutional planning, enabling both short and long-term changes to be proposed and defended.

On the next page, I'll share a first draft of our prioritisation matrix, a rough sketch showing a handful of criteria to determine where neighbourhood proposals lands. This will let us visualise our early decisions, and later, during evaluation, we can revisit and refine the criteria before reranking everything for the final recommendations.

Below are new findings from the student insights that led to the development of our 4th criteria.

Cluster D: Turning Input Into Action



Design Criteria 4: Support Prioritisation and Decision-Making
Participation tools should help organise public input in a way that supports institutional planning, enabling both short and long-term changes to be proposed and defended.

Figure 4.18
Design Criteria 4: Findings to Criteria

4.7 prioritisation ideation

Prioritisation Ideation

To help gauge where each proposal sits, we'll use a familiar Ease × Impact quadrant. (seen to the right)

- Ease (horizontal axis) reflects our capacity to deliver: how straightforward it is to implement considering resources, regulations, and decision-support clarity.
- Impact (vertical axis) measures the degree to which the intervention will benefit and engage the local community.

By plotting each idea against these dimensions we can spot quick wins, strategic investments, low-risk trials, and concepts to defer.

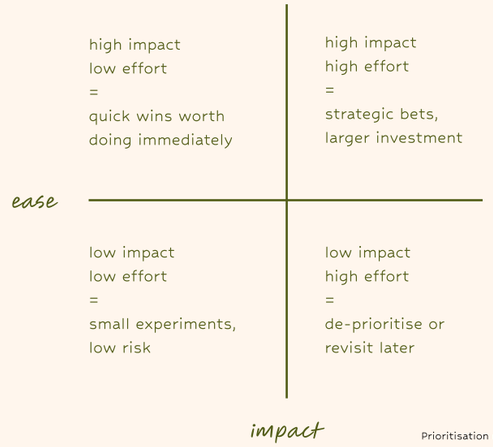


Figure 4.19
Prioritisation matrix quadrants

Prioritisation Criteria

To ensure our Ease × Resident Impact assessments capture both broad and focused benefits, we're defining four guiding criteria with built-in prompts for deeper reflection:

Ease (Gemeente Axis)

1. Feasibility (30 %)

Can the intervention be logistically implemented in the space due to permits, regulations, physical capabilities and timelines?

Scope: Addresses "Can we legally and physically do this here?"

Key considerations:

- Zoning and permitting requirements
- Structural or environmental constraints (e.g., underground utilities, heritage protections)
- Alignment with city policies or master plans

Example: If we propose planting the garden on the median, feasibility asks whether the city allows vegetation there, if soil tests are needed, or if an environmental impact study is required.

2. Implementation Complexity (20 %)

What level of effort, coordination, and ongoing resources will this intervention require to install and sustain effectively?

Scope: Looks at "What will it take to make and sustain this happen?"

Key considerations:

- Resource demands (materials, budget)
- Coordination and stakeholder management (contractors, volunteers, departments)
- Ongoing operations and maintenance needs

Example: Even if planting is allowed, complexity examines how many labour hours the garden requires weekly, who will water and prune it, and whether specialised equipment or training is necessary.

*note: for the ease axis, low is better, the 1-5 scale here pertains to the difficulty to implement, making 1 easy and 5 difficult

Weighting Approach

To ensure neither dimension dominates, for this case we have assigned equal overall weight to the two axes, Ease and Resident Impact, so they each account for 50 % of our prioritisation. Within each axis, we then reflect the sequence in which real-world constraints and community value come into play:

- Ease axis (50 % total) is split into **Feasibility** (30 %) and Implementation **Complexity** (20 %), since feasibility is the gate-keeper, if a proposal isn't legally or physically possible, its complexity becomes moot.
- Impact axis (50 % total) is split into Resident **Impact** (30 %) and **Equity** (20 %), because while broad community benefits are our primary goal, we still need to ensure underserved voices are not sidelined.

Note:

This weighting scheme represents just one plausible approach based on our field research, neighbourhood immersion, and expert input, but it is not a fixed "scientific" formula. Later in the recommendations, you'll see alternative matrix variations and sensitivity analyses. For now, consider this a transparent starting point to guide our initial comparisons.

Impact (Resident Axis)

3. Resident Impact (30 %)

How significantly will this intervention benefit and engage community members?

Scope: Focuses on the positive outcomes; social, economical, environmental, that residents experience as a result of the proposal.

Key considerations:

- Number and diversity of users reached
- Improvement in safety, wellbeing, or social cohesion
- Likelihood of repeat engagement or spillover effects into adjacent spaces

Example: Converting the median has high environmental impact, supporting pollinators and native flora. Impact analyses mental health impact of the intervention on residents themselves, physical impact/changing behaviour is low.

*note: for the impact axis, high is better, the 1-5 scale here pertains to the positive impact on residents, making 1 not impactful and 5 very impactful

4. Equity (20 %)

Does the intervention serve all groups fairly, and what measures ensure no one is unintentionally excluded?

Scope: Examines whether benefits and access are distributed equitably across different demographic or user groups.

Key considerations:

- Accessibility for people of varying ages, abilities, and mobility
- Cultural or linguistic inclusivity in design and outreach
- Mechanisms for gathering input from under-represented voices

Example: While the median will be visually prominent to anyone walking or driving past, residents of the nearby nursing home cannot physically access the median, so their direct interaction is limited to what they can see from their windows or along their common routes. Equity helps us analyse accessibility and ensure that proposals are not catered towards only one group, and if they are, make sure we turn attention towards the rest.

5 chapter summary

5.1 Proposals
- Present all nine tool concepts with goals, sources, and theoretical anchors
- Show each proposal's placement in the prioritisation matrix

Key Question: What proposals rose from the insights gathered thusfar?

5.2 Proposal Prioritisation
- Transition to Matrix

Key Question: How do the proposals fit together in a bigger picture?

5.3 Proposals
- Present all nine tool concepts with goals, sources, and theoretical anchors
- Show each proposal's placement in the prioritisation matrix

Key Question: Which proposals rise to the top, and what evidence supports their priority?

proposals

5 proposals from insights

Design responses to what we heard

The four neighbourhood themes don't stand alone. They intersect in daily life, shaping how people feel, move, and connect in the square.

The following proposals respond directly to those insights. Each is grounded in specific resident input and builds on what was observed, tested, or requested throughout this project. Together, they offer a tangible vision for change, starting small, but rooted in what people actually want.

Prioritisation

Each proposal will be paired with a prioritisation analysis, building up to a matrix that will present all proposals.

More information for the justification of each score can be found within Appendix C: Table 7.1.

safety and mobility

usable green and climate relief

social encouragement

local economy and activation



Figure 5.1
Mathenesserplein Overview Illustration with proposals implemented

The following pages detail each final proposal for this phase; what inspired it, how it responds to the square's needs, and what role it plays in long-term change. The proposals are not fully fleshed out, some remain just recommendations for where more attention is needed.

5.1.1 proposal 1

Biodiversity Median: Adding Green without Taking Space

As stated, at the outset, Mustapha noted that the municipality was already open to reworking the central median at Mathenesserplein, no formal design existed yet, but the space was one the city was open to change, and residents did want more greenery.

This project doesn't claim to be the community's top priority, but it does tap into genuine resident interest and, crucially, represents a "quick win" by municipal standards. Delivering a tangible improvement so early demonstrates that change really is possible and when guided by ongoing resident input, sends a clear message: we're on your side, trust can be rebuilt, and more ambitious transformations lie ahead.

Design Goals

- Enhance biodiversity and beauty by adding green without shrinking gathering areas
- Secure a fast, visible success to rebuild trust
- Establish a living testbed, proof that resident-led change can stick and expand over time

What sparked the idea?

"We had tulips. That's nice, but after six weeks they die, and then nobody replaces them." (Groep 5, Interview 6, Ondernemers Janna's bloemenpleintje

"It is easy to get approval for ideas that have already been done in the city, if you can follow the style guide, it's easier to get it done quick." (Bastiaan Dekker, Gemeente, Area Advising)

Research & Design References

- Used the Rotterdam Public Space Style Guide to understand spatial and planting constraints (Rotterdamse Stijlhandboek)
- Flower selection guided by pollinator support, seasonal visibility, and low maintenance (De Vlinderstichting,, Stichting Steenbreek)
- Prioritised a mix of annuals and perennials to test growth and visual continuity
- Ethnographic Site Immersion, Author

*Approved by Gemeente





Weighting

axis	criteria		weight	
ease	Feasibility	1	.3	1.8
	Complexity	3	.2	
impact	Impact	2.5	.3	3.1
	Equity	4	.2	

Table 5.1
Proposal 1 Ease and Impact Criteria

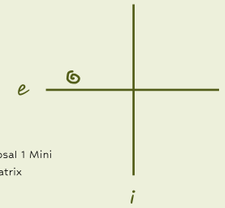


Figure 5.2 Proposal 1 Mini Prioritisation Matrix

Weighting

axis	criteria		weight	
ease	Feasibility	1	.3	1.4
	Complexity	2	.2	
impact	Impact	3.5	.3	3.7
	Equity	4	.2	

Table 5.2
Proposal 2 Ease and Impact Criteria

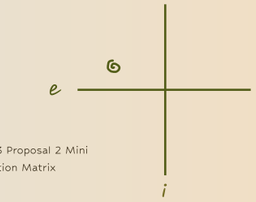


Figure 5.3 Proposal 2 Mini Prioritisation Matrix

Bike Racks at AH: A Simple Fix for Everyday Friction

Though small, the area around Albert Heijn functions as one of the busiest micro-zones in Mathenesserplein, drawing shoppers, parents with strollers, schoolchildren, and elderly residents alike. Observations and interviews revealed that bike racks and various containers crowd the storefront, creating constant visual and functional frustration for passers-by.

This everyday clutter undermines confidence in broader improvements: if residents cannot rely on a space to support simple routines like locking a bike or navigating with a stroller, they begin to doubt that anyone is paying attention. Quickly resolving these low-barrier pain points demonstrates that the city and this project value and respond to their lived experiences.

Design Goals

- Declutter sidewalks to lower stress and congestion in busy area
- Improve access and visibility with bike parking relocated from storefronts
- Foster calm community interactions by increasing potential socialisation area

What sparked the idea?

"He mentioned that the area in front of the store is quite messy. Bikes, containers, mailboxes and other items are placed very close together." (Group 4, AH Manager Interview)

"The bike racks are placed in front of the entrance and the trash bins in odd spots, which makes it look messy." (Group 6, Interview outside AH)

"After the prayer you want to sit and talk for a bit, but I find it too busy to do so outside." (Group 1, Interview outside Mosque)

Research & Design References

- Rotterdams Stijlhandboek guidelines on sidewalk clearance and rack placement
- Flower vote and parent interviews pointed to this area as one of the most emotionally stressful
- Considered spatial layout and safety zones to avoid conflict with delivery trucks
- Ethnographic Site Immersion, Author





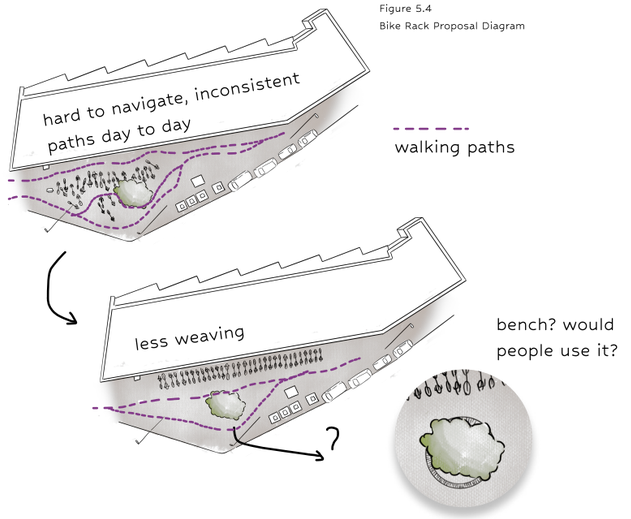


Figure 5.4
Bike Rack Proposal Diagram

5.1.2 proposal 2

5.1.3 proposal 3

Lawn Accessibility: Improving Access to Informal Green

The grassy island near the school may be the only soft surface in Mathenesserplein, and it's already quietly loved. People don't play there, but they sit along its edges, pause with their groceries, or bring their dogs to chase a ball. Even those who don't enter it describe it as a visual relief: "It makes the square feel calmer." (cite xx)

What's striking is how many residents value the space, yet can't actually use it. The curb is just high enough to block access for people with strollers, walkers, or limited mobility. It maintains it's use as informal seating, and that it excels at, but if the grass is to be used and become a contact point for residents, there will need to be a change. This proposal doesn't aim to redesign the area, but to enhance it: adding a few discreet access points to allow more people to share in the grass's everyday charm.

Design Goals

- Keep the grass informal and open-ended (Used for sitting, short pauses, dog visits; avoid over-programming)
- Introduce access points for more inclusive use (Support for strollers, walkers, elderly residents)
- Preserve visual calm while expanding practical use (Aligns with Design Criteria 2 & 3: Accessibility and trust through thoughtful detail)

What sparked the idea?

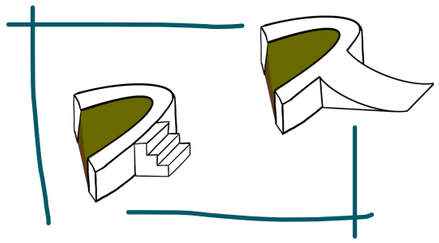
"It's the only patch of green I can see from my home." (Group 4, Interview 9)

"The grass as it is now, you can't do anything with it." (Group 4, Interview 7)

"We observed that there is a lot of greenery present, but it is mainly 'viewing green.' The grass is raised above the sidewalk, making it uninviting to use." (Group 1, Observations)

Research & Design References

- Rotterdamse Stijlhandboek: green edge transitions
- Informal interviews and sketches near AH corner and school edge
- Student field notes, especially Group 3 and Group 6
- Ethnographic Site Immersion, Author



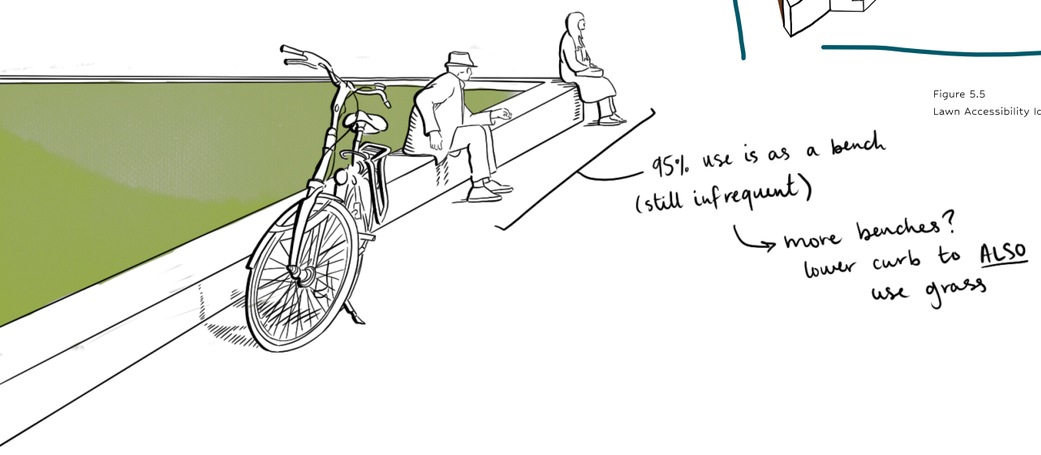


Figure 5.5
Lawn Accessibility Ideation

Weighting

axis	criteria		weight	
ease	Feasibility	4	.3	4
	Complexity	4	.2	
impact	Impact	4	.3	4.4
	Equity	5	.2	

Table 5.3
Proposal 3 Ease and Impact Criteria

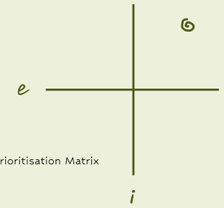


Figure 5.6
Proposal 3 Mini Prioritisation Matrix

Weighting

axis	criteria		weight	
ease	Feasibility	5	.3	5
	Complexity	5	.2	
impact	Impact	5	.3	5
	Equity	5	.2	

Table 5.4
Proposal 4 Ease and Impact Criteria

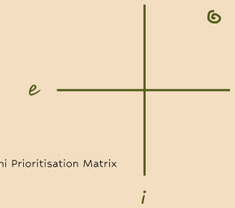


Figure 5.7
Proposal 4 Mini Prioritisation Matrix

Bus Re-Route: Transit Corridor to Community Space

Among all the proposals, the idea of rerouting the bus is perhaps the most ambitious and the most emotionally charged. Raised independently by multiple residents during interviews and student sessions, the recurring complaint was clear: the bus splits the square in two. It creates not only noise and pollution, but also a psychological and physical barrier to the idea of the plein as one connected, social space.

This proposal does not assume rerouting is simple, nor does it claim the square should be closed off completely. Rather, it reflects a legitimate resident desire to reimagine traffic logic. Raising the issue opens the door for dialogue about mobility justice, public space hierarchy, and who the square is truly designed for. Even if not immediately achievable, naming it keeps the long-term vision clear.

Design Goals

- Open a conversation with the gemeente about alternative bus routing or timing
- Reduce perceived danger and pollution at the core of the plein (Addresses noise & air quality concerns from bus traffic; supports social comfort)
- Reinforce the square as a place to stay, not just pass through (Encourages lingering and connection; responds to resident vision of a unified, social space)

What sparked the idea?

"Shuttles and buses drive intermingled, the bus sluice is ignored and as a result the square feels like two separate halves." (Group 3, Observations)

"The bus traffic generates a lot of noise and pollution; psychologically it feels as if the square is being torn apart." (Group 1, Interview by Bus Stop)

"Multiple residents independently pointed out: the bus divides the square in two, that has to change." (Group 6, Interviews)

Research & Design References

- Rotterdam mobility zoning maps (used to review alternative routes)
- Community feedback during refined engagement activities
- Ethnographic Site Immersion, Author



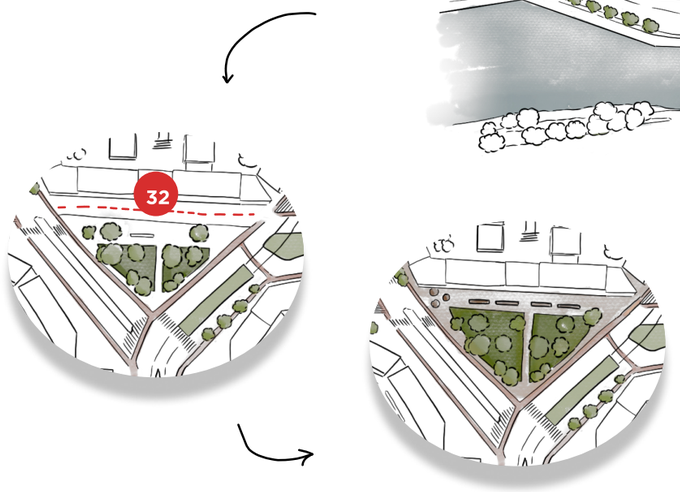


Figure 5.8
Bus Reroute Potential Top-Down

5.1.4 proposal 4

5.1.5 proposal 5

Nursing Home Crossing

Among all the safety measures, the crossing at the nursing-home corner stands out as both highly pragmatic and deeply humane. Brought forward by residents and caregivers alike, the recurring concern was clear: many elderly users struggle with the curb height and rapid traffic flow, turning a short stroll into a hazardous ordeal. This proposal doesn't pretend that heightening curbs or slowing cars is simple, nor does it claim to solve every mobility challenge at once. Instead, it acknowledges a fundamental resident wish, to make the crossing accessible for those most vulnerable.

Even if full implementation takes time, naming this "nursing-home crossing" keeps safety and empathy at the forefront of our long-term vision for Mathenesserplein.

Design Goals

- Guarantee universal access so wheelchairs, walkers and prams can cross without obstruction
- Calm mixed traffic flows, find a way to reduce vehicle speeds without relying solely on signage
- Create a psychologically safe crossing. Improve sight-lines by trimming back obstacles (signposts, bike racks) near the curb

What sparked the idea?

The moment you step out the door, you're confronted with a mess of obstacles- signposts, bicycles, cars, uneven pavements. (Ethnography Site Immersion, Author)

Nursing Home workers have to take residents around the long way to cross safely, avoiding bike lanes and dangerous crossing, residents are rarely allowed to go on their own, limiting autonomy greatly. (Ethnographic Site Immersion, Author)

A woman who used to buy her favourite snack, a Rookworst, at the HEMA each day. Now that she lives at Laurens, that HEMA is right across the street. And yet, she no longer goes. The traffic made her so nervous that she gave up (Story told by Mustapha to Author)

Research & Design References

- Ethnographic Site Immersion, Author
- Rotterdamse Stijlhandboek: curb-taper slopes, tactile paving dimensions and crossing plateau heights to ensure safe, legible, universally accessible crossings

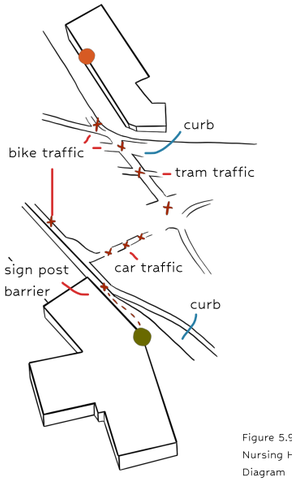


Figure 5.9
Nursing Home Crossing Traffic Diagram

Questions to ask:

- Can we lower curb cuts?
- How many sign posts don't allow room for a wheelchair to pass beside it?
- How can we slow traffic or make cars and bikes more aware that they are in a "wheelchair zone"?
- Audio-Visual Cues?
- Wheelchair guidance strips?
- How are sight-lines from the entrance to the shops?

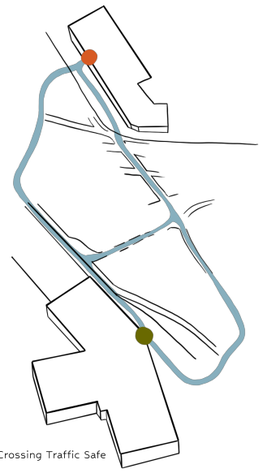


Figure 5.10
Nursing Home Crossing Traffic Safe Path Diagram

Weighting

axis	criteria		weight	
ease	Feasibility	4	.3	4.2
	Complexity	4.5	.2	
impact	Impact	5	.3	4.2
	Equity	3	.2	

Table 5.5
Proposal 5 Ease and Impact Criteria

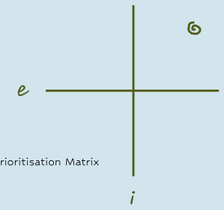


Figure 5.11
Proposal 5 Mini Prioritisation Matrix

Weighting

axis	criteria		weight	
ease	Feasibility	1.5	.3	1.7
	Complexity	2	.2	
impact	Impact	3.5	.3	3.5
	Equity	3.5	.2	

Table 5.6
Proposal 6 Ease and Impact Criteria

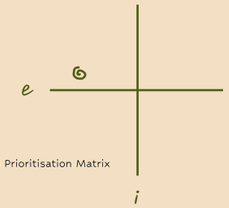


Figure 5.12
Proposal 6 Mini Prioritisation Matrix

Upgrade to Bench: Supporting Socialisation

Among all the interventions, enhancing the central bench may seem modest, but it carries profound potential to deepen Mathenesserplein's role as a communal hearth. Raised repeatedly by residents and illuminated through our student-led intercepts, the bench already functions as an unspoken gathering point.

This proposal does not presume radical redesign overnight, nor does it mandate a complete overhaul of materials; rather, it elevates an existing social anchor by inviting more inclusive, face-to-face configurations, universal access and subtle co-design touches. By naming, celebrating and improving this as a first success of social infrastructure, we signal our commitment to human-centred space-making. It opens the door to questions of who feels welcome, what gestures encourage conversation, and how small shifts in design can ripple through the square's broader civic life.

Design Goals

- Maximise comfort & dwell time. Ensure seating is deep and supportive enough to invite lingering.
- Facilitate face-to-face and group interaction. Break the strictly linear arrangement by introducing subtle arcs or paired modules so small groups can see and converse with one another, rather than only side-by-side.
- Maintain flexibility for multiple uses
- Build in evening safety & ambience
- Promote local identity & co-ownership

What sparked the idea?

This bench isn't just a place to rest, it's our brightest 'hope point,' where neighbours choose to connect rather than pass through. (Ethnography, Bench Crew, Author)

As Pieter Jan put it, 'good design amplifies sparks of conviviality, not just fixes pain points.'" (Informal Conversation, Pieter Jan and Author)

Research & Design References

- Ethnographic Site Immersion, Author
- Warner's Publics & Counterpublics (2002): bench's regular users as an "issue-public" whose emergent discourse and daily rituals can guide targeted, inclusive design interventions



Figure 5.13
Bench Addition Ideation

5.1.6 proposal 6

5.1.7 proposal 7

Market

Among all the activation ideas, introducing a regular market on Mathenesserplein stands out as both community-driven and economically energising. Raised enthusiastically by multiple student teams and echoed in resident interviews, the call for a weekly or monthly market reflected a clear desire for fresh produce, local crafts and community encounters.

This proposal doesn't assume launching a market is a one-step fix, nor that it must immediately rival larger city markets. Instead, it honours residents' entrepreneurial spirit and social aspirations by framing the square as a low-risk testbed: pop-up stalls on market days, flexible layouts to minimise disruption, and a simple event framework co-managed by local vendors and community volunteers.

Even if full-scale activation evolves over time, naming a "Mathenesserplein Market" confirms our commitment to local livelihoods, communal gathering, and the square's role as a living, ever-changing public forum.

Design Goals

- Maintain clear pedestrian flow
- Calm adjacent traffic, doubly giving us a regular opportunity to show residents what the area could feel like with less pass-through traffic
- Foster local identity & co-management. Incorporate rotating signage with local schools, mosques and shopkeepers; establish a volunteer market committee with residents and vendors to steward scheduling and promotion

What sparked the idea?

"I like all kinds of markets. I'm always in favour of markets. I'd also enjoy something local, with people from the neighbourhood, with little stalls and such. A small market or so. Not too much of a hipster market, then it gets too crowded again. Just something where you can stroll around comfortably." (Group 1, Interview)

"Organising a small-scale market to promote vibrancy and social interaction, with practical aspects such as location, frequency, and offerings tailored to the wishes of entrepreneurs and residents." (Group 3 Recommendation)

If Proposal 3 (reroute bus lane) succeeds, it paves the way to convert the existing bus lane into a pedestrian-only pop-up market space, demonstrating that these initiatives are interconnected and mutually reinforcing, rather than fragmented. (Author synthesis)

Research & Design References

- Student recommendations (Reports Groups 1 & 3)
- Rotterdam existing market research: Rotterdamseoogst



Figure 5.14
Market Ideation

Weighting

axis	criteria		weight	
ease	Feasibility	2	.3	2
	Complexity	2	.2	
impact	Impact	4.5	.3	4.7
	Equity	5	.2	

Table 5.7
Proposal 7 Ease and Impact Criteria

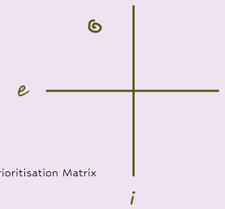


Figure 5.15
Proposal 7 Mini Prioritisation Matrix

Weighting

axis	criteria		weight	
ease	Feasibility	1	.3	1.8
	Complexity	3	.2	
impact	Impact	4	.3	4.2
	Equity	4.5	.2	

Table 5.8
Proposal 8 Ease and Impact Criteria

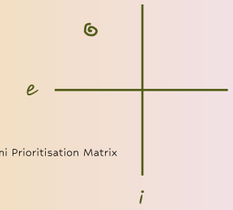


Figure 5.16
Proposal 8 Mini Prioritisation Matrix

Community Chronicle

The Community Chronicle reimagines Mathenesserplein's noticeboard as a living, two-way platform where residents become both storytellers and informed participants in their neighbourhood's evolution. Inspired by the same collaborative spirit that fuels our participation and other proposals, the Chronicle blends printed newsletters, a communal bulletin board, and a digital mailing list to share everything from local event announcements and vendor spotlights to oral histories and children's artwork.

By inviting a rotating editorial committee drawn from schools, shops, places of worship, and long-time residents, to curate each issue, we ensure that every voice finds a place, every initiative gains visibility, and every season's activities are celebrated. As a recurring, co-designed publication, the Chronicle not only keeps the square's many activations connected through shared narratives, but also builds trust and fosters social cohesion.

Design Goals

- Clarity & Accessibility: Simple layout with large type, multilingual editions (Dutch, English, Arabic), and clear visual hierarchy so readers of all ages and language backgrounds can engage. (Criteria 2)
  - Physical instead of digital for accessibility (Criteria 2)
- Continuity & Feedback: Each issue encourages reader feedback via stamped postcards or a QR-linked survey-creating a feedback loop that shapes subsequent editions and builds trust. (Criteria 1 and 4)

What sparked the idea?

"They won't tell us until everything has been decided." "We filled out all those forms, but didn't even get a response." (April 5th Participation session)

Residents repeatedly flagged that communication felt one-way and too late, decisions go up on the board only after they're already made, leaving people out of the loop (Student group 3)

Residents were hesitant to give out contact info or answer questions as they did not have faith that it would be used/ that they would ever hear back. (April 5th Participation session, Author)

Research & Design References

- Current participation observation session (Author)
- Ethnographic Site Immersion Illustrations
- Custom Map
- Student field research that will feed the information organised in the newsletter (Student Reports 1-5)



Figure 5.17
Community Chronicle Cover and Back-Cover: English

5.1.8 proposal 8

5.1.9 proposal 9

Van plein naar park Insta

Launch a dedicated Instagram feed to share bite-sized project updates, behind-the-scenes photos, event reminders, and resident spotlights. While this platform primarily would reach digitally literate users, it serves as a vibrant secondary hub for ongoing information, complementing the chronicle, flyers, and in-person meetings.

Regular stories and posts will invite comments, polls, and direct messages to deepen engagement, offer real-time transparency, and give residents another easy way to stay informed and get involved.

Design Goals

- Deliver timely, transparent updates to build community trust
- Amplify under heard voices through resident spotlights and stories
- Foster two-way engagement with interactive polls and Q&As
- Maintain consistent visibility and brand recognition via recurring features
- Offer accessible, multimedia content in clear, community-friendly language

What sparked the idea?

"They lack clear information, do not feel taken seriously and therefore no longer want to participate." (Group 4)

Enthusiasm to participate if given the opportunity (Current Participation Observation, Author)

Research & Design References

- Social Media Strategy and Engagement Experience (Author, 6 years professional and personal experience)
- Content from Student and Author Sessions



42 8



27 4

Figure 5.18
Van plein naar park
Instagram Post Mock-ups



Weighting

axis	criteria		weight	
ease	Feasibility	1	.3	1.4
	Complexity	2	.2	
impact	Impact	3.5	.3	3.5
	Equity	3.5	.2	

Table 5.9
Proposal 9 Ease and Impact Criteria

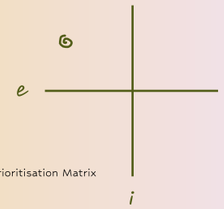


Figure 5.19
Proposal 9 Mini Prioritisation Matrix

Proposal Prioritisation

In the previous pages, we explored nine proposals in depth. Each one draws directly from resident insights and student fieldwork, making them grounded in the lived reality of Mathenesserplein. These are not the only ideas surfaced in this project- they are the ones we had time to develop into tested, place-specific proposals. Many others remain in the wider idea pool, ready for future exploration.

But having ideas is only the beginning. The next question is: which ones should we act on first?

"They do ask things, but nothing is done with it." -Resident April 2025

So let's do something about it. Each proposal is now evaluated against a shared set of criteria; impact, equity, feasibility, and complexity, agreed upon with governmental stakeholders. This process turns a diverse set of concepts into a clear set of priorities, showing where early wins are possible and where long-term investment is needed.

Where We Are in the Process

We've gathered insights, developed concepts, and shaped them into proposals. This is a moment to focus, weighing each proposal against shared criteria to decide which should move forward first. While the matrix narrows the field for immediate action, the wider pool of ideas remains open for future development and refinement.

On the next spread:

The prioritisation matrix shows all proposals side-by-side. Scores are based on criteria defined with governmental stakeholders during a dedicated evaluation meeting. Full scoring details and reasoning are provided in Appendix C: Table 7.1.

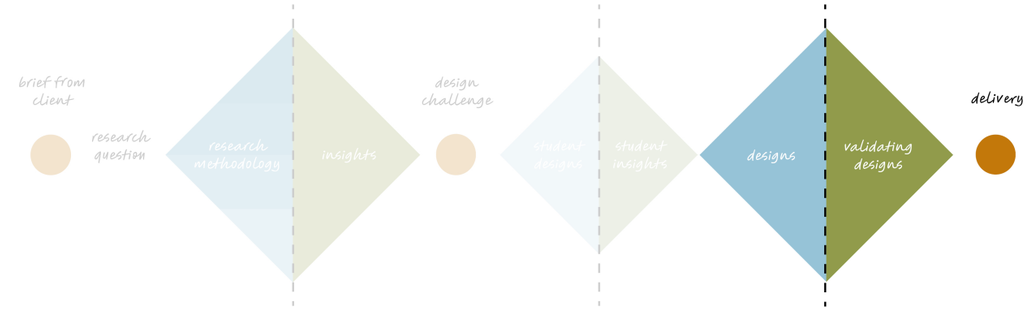


Figure 5.20
Shared Ground Double Diamond

5.2 proposal prioritisation

5.3 Prioritisation Matrix

Figure 5.21
Prioritisation Matrix Filled
with Main 9 Proposals



Notably, all nine proposals fall into either the "Quick Wins" (high impact, low effort) or "Strategic Bets" (high impact, high effort) quadrants. We see no entries in "Low Priority" or "Rethink" because any idea that surfaced during data collection but scored low on impact was filtered out before becoming a formal proposal. In other words, if a concept couldn't meaningfully engage residents, it never advanced past initial ideation. Though those "low-impact" insights remain in our data and could be revisited later for small experiments or reframing.

Quick Wins include interventions with both easy implementation and significant resident benefit. For example, the median renewal sits at an initial Ease score of 1.8, but since the city has already approved the feasibility study, its effective implementation difficulty is even lower, and it can slide further into "Quick Win" territory once construction permits arrive. Likewise, the Community Chronicle booklet, our seasonal fold-out that keeps participation visible, ranks high on impact and was purposefully designed for low resource demands and rapid distribution.

Strategic Bets require more coordination or budget yet promise transformative change. Take lowering the lawn curb: if we remove the entire curb, complexity and permitting escalate, pushing it toward "Strategic Bet," whereas a simple ramp insertion could reduce effort and shift it closer to "Quick Win." This underscores the matrix's dynamic nature. Scores can evolve as design details and municipal feedback emerge.

Purpose & Next Steps:
This Ease × Impact framework is a living tool to guide which proposals to develop and deploy first. As we gather new data, refine methods with the Gemeente, or pilot prototypes in the field, we'll update the weightings and re-rank ideas, perhaps even exploring multiple matrix versions to reflect different policy or budget scenarios. Ultimately, it ensures our system remains responsive to both community needs and institutional constraints.

Low Priority / Rethink Proposals
Although several minor ideas surfaced during the research, we did not develop all of them into official proposals. These fell into the category of lower impact and higher difficulty, and it quickly became clear that our time and effort would be better spent on ideas with broader relevance. As a result, the "low priority" quadrant remains empty. Examples of suggestions that were noted but not advanced include the addition of public Wi-Fi, which residents mentioned casually but which does not address the core challenges of safety, greenery, and social cohesion. Similar small-scale ideas, while interesting, were set aside in favour of more impactful proposals.

6 chapter summary

6.1 Toolkit Overview
- Introducing the Toolkit
- Revisiting our Design Foundations (Criteria)
- Present tools and criteria met

Key Question: What is the scope and purpose of our refined engagement toolkit? How does each tool directly fulfill our overarching criteria?

6.2 What/Where/How Conversation Cards
- Origins and Prototyping
- Elements
- Design Rationale
- Arnstein Ladder Placement
- Insights and Iteration

Key Question: How did this card surface new story-based needs and enable low-barrier input?

6.3 Flower Median Vote Kit
- Origins and Prototyping
- Elements
- Design Rationale
- Arnstein Ladder Placement
- Insights and Iteration

Key Question: How did the flower-vote format test our feedback-loop and prioritisation goals?

6.4 Community Chronicle
- Origins and Prototyping
- Elements
- Design Rationale
- Arnstein Ladder Placement
- Next Steps

Key Question: How will the chronicle sustain long-term dialogue and track municipality follow-up?

6.5 Using the Matrix
- Using in Practice
- Arnstein Ladder Placement
- Ideation

Key Question: How can the Prioritisation Matrix be used in practice to involve both residents and Gemeente to make decision-making a partnership?

6 refined engagement

6.1 Toolkit Overview

We've just explored a highlight reel of prioritiseddesign proposals drawn from our desk research, ethnographic sprints and the diverse student fieldwork methods that surfaced early, high-potential interventions for Mathenesserplein. From the wildflower median to curb ramps and bike-rack clusters, each idea emerged through our participation methods, through observing and listening. These proposals map the neighbourhood's needs, but they also pose a new question: how do we invite residents to test and own these changes themselves?



Figure 6.1
What/Where/How Conversation Cards

Introducing the Refined Engagement Toolkit

To move beyond one-off consultations and into genuine co-creation (Criteria 3: Build Trust & Criteria 4: Support Action), I distilled our learnings into four higher-fidelity tools:

1. "What / Where / How" Conversation Cards
   Retesting the low-threshold prompts that students piloted, now redesigned with clearer icons, bilingual cues, and personal touches from research to spark on-the-ground storytelling and pinpoint exact locations.
2. Flower-Vote Pop-Up
   Building off of approval for the median renewal, residents use real tokens to cast votes. This fast, visible flip from vote to flower builds instant ownership.
3. Community Chronicle Booklet
   A quarterly A5 magazine, co-written with neighbourhood voices, summarises results, previews next actions and invites fresh ideas. By mailing it door-to-door, we close the feedback loop and signal that listening leads to doing.
4. Prioritisation Matrix
   A flexible workshop tool where residents and municipal staff score proposals together using shared criteria. Formats range from small mixed groups to large events, making trade-offs transparent and turning a list of ideas into an agreed set of priorities.



Figure 6.2
Flower Vote Set-Up

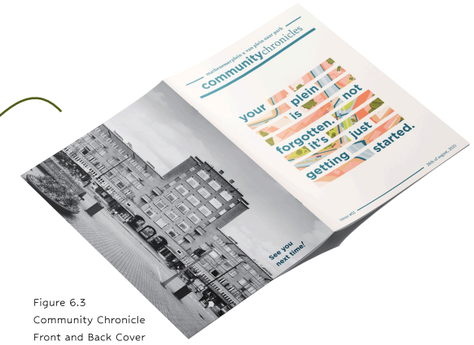


Figure 6.3
Community Chronicle
Front and Back Cover

Each tool is designed to meet our twin goals of making participation easy and meaningful, and of ensuring resident input translates directly into visible change. Over the next spreads, we'll see how these refined artefacts perform in live sessions and how they lay the groundwork for the final Prioritisation Matrix.

Deepening Trust Through Refined Engagement

Before we dive into each toolkit, it's helpful to understand why these four tools were selected and how they work together to close the loop between resident insight and visible change.



Figure 6.4
Blank Prioritisation Matrix

Recap

Revisiting Our Design Foundations

Our goal has been to build a participatory system at Mathenesserplein that truly listens, lowers barriers, closes feedback loops, and channels insights into actionable plans. We distilled four design criteria from our literature review, site immersion, and early fieldwork to guide every next move:

1 **Elicit Stories and Surface Needs**

2 **Enable Low-Barrier Entry**

3 **Build Trust Through Feedback Loops**

4 **Support Prioritisation and Decision-Making**

Each of the following tools has been crafted to deliver on one or more of these criteria, ensuring our process remains generative rather than performative.

Tool	Criteria Met	Core Function
	1 2 4	• Open-ended, centred around routines, inviting of personal stories • Tangible cards, simple clustering, understandable language and relevant icons, easy to engage • Provides base to tally cards and cluster into wants and needs, translatable to proposals
	2 3 4	• Vote is quick, token is intuitive • Accumulating votes on display signals collective preferences, updating residents on ongoing projects, opportunity to gather further ideas for future proposals • Working with our chosen “quick win,” seises opportunity when it arises and keeps us moving
	1 3	• Co-Authoring with residents provides opportunity to hear and share rich stories • Distributing back to the neighbourhood shows that their voices are important, that they “made print” so to say, aims to make them feel heard, seen, understood, updates them on ongoing initiatives and takes in new proposals
	4	• Compares proposals side-by-side to make trade-offs visible and transparent creating a shared decision-making space between residents and municipal staff and turns a long list of ideas into an agreed set of priorities for action

Table 6.1
Tool > Criteria > Function Chart

6.2 what/where/how card development

Research and Inspiration

The Card Kit was developed based on insights from student-led interviews and my own immersion in the neighborhood. By combining observed routines, emotions, and local places, it became a personal, intuitive tool for residents to share their daily experiences. Its simple format invites open dialogue and helps surface what matters most to them.

“Routines are not just sequences of actions; they are the threads that weave individuals into communities.”
-Sanders & Stappers (2012)

Ideation

From the start, I knew the Card Kit needed to capture what people do, where they do it, and how they feel about it, three lenses that, together, reveal the full texture of daily life.

- “What” cards ask participants to name specific activities
- “Where” cards map those places in location
- “How” cards surface the emotions and activities that color each moment.

This triad ensured we didn’t just collect abstract opinions but grounded every insight in lived routines. Thanks to the rich stakeholder profiles and theme lists generated by the student teams, assembling these categories was remarkably straightforward: we had a ready-made inventory of local spots, common actions, and emotional touchpoints to translate into card form.

Source Lists

Pulled directly from field observations (e.g., Albert Heijn, mosque, playground), plus a few “wildcards” to surface unknowns.

Icons & Translation

Drew simple, locally meaningful icons for each item; Mustapha verified Dutch terms for clarity.



Figure 6.5
What/Where/How Cards

What is it and How will it be used?

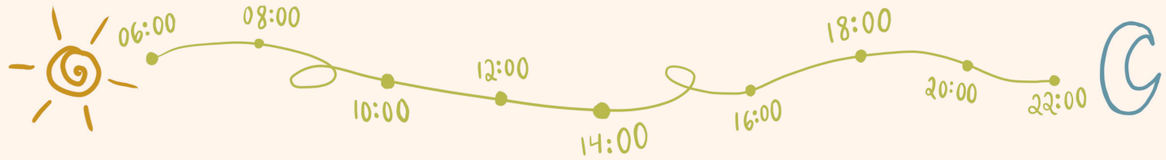
A custom-designed toolkit of cards representing neighbourhood places, everyday activities, and common emotions. During the session, parents used the cards to map their daily experience from sunrise to sunset, placing each card along a horizontal timeline to reflect how and when they interact with Mathenesserplein.

This method transformed abstract questions about space into personal stories of rhythm, stress, and joy, tied directly to specific times and locations in their day.

Why was it needed?

Traditional urban participation tools often isolate moments (“Where do you feel safe?”), ignoring how public space weaves through people’s lived routines. For Emmausschool parents who are managing juggling drop-offs, errands, and care responsibilities, a day-in-the-life structure helped them express how they really use and feel the square over time.

The cards reduced language and literacy barriers while centring their voice.



Custom Map Integration
After seeing participants fumble with generic maps, I designed two custom maps (Mathenesserplein and the larger Nieuwe Westen area) with some of the locations printed on the cards, coupled with icons for easy recognition. This let parents point as they spoke, closing the “where” question in real time.

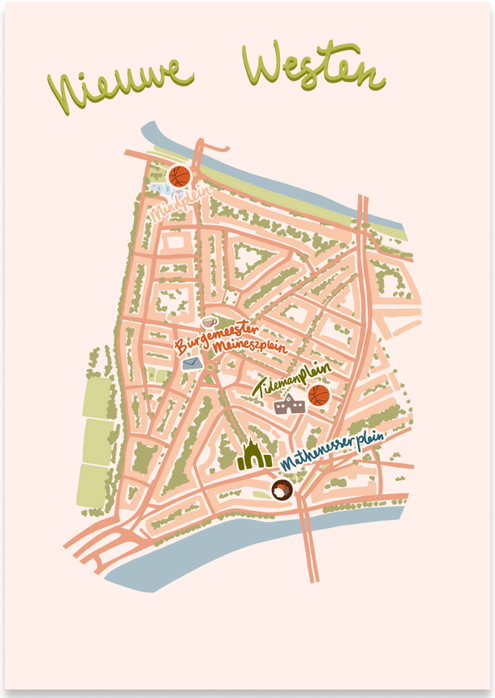


Figure 6.6
Custom Nieuwe Westen Map



Figure 6.7
Custom Mathenesserplein Map

Synced Kit
Having a complete kit, where each element worked hand in hand with the next, set us up for a smooth session that could truly focus on the participants. Clarifying language of participants ahead of time allowed us to operate in the language most linguistically comfortable with our group. Operating with a seamless kit allows facilitators to focus on listening and probing, rather than be distracted by tool logistics.

Cards



Figure 6.8
Places Emmausschool
Session Page 1



Figure 6.9
Places Emmausschool
Session Page 2



Figure 6.10
Activities Emmausschool
Session Page 1



6.11
Activities Emmausschool
Session Page 2

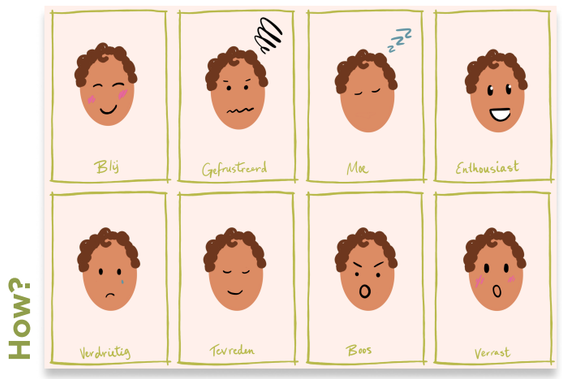


Figure 6.12
Emotions Emmausschool
Session Page 1



Figure 6.13
Emotions Emmausschool
Session Page 2

6.2 Emmausschool Card Kit

Temporal Mapping of Daily Life Through Participatory Cards

Design Rationale

This tool was only possible because of extended field immersion. Early ethnographic observations and conversations revealed patterns, when parents arrive, where they wait, how they move, that shaped the content and form of the cards. The result was a kit custom to this community, rather than a generic participatory tool.

Testing the Kit

Because of that specificity, the session ran smoothly and elicited rich, reflective stories rather than surface-level answers.

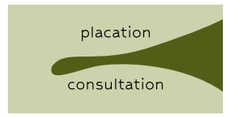
In Practice: Using the Card Kit

Date & Setting: May 2025, 8:00 AM, teacher's lounge at Emmausschool

Facilitators: Mustapha (lead, Dutch), Kaitlyn (support + documentation)

Participants: 7 parents (multilingual, mostly Dutch-speaking)

Language: Session conducted in Dutch



somewhere a bit in the middle

Arnstein Ladder Placement

While the Card Kit did not give residents decision-making power, it offered a deepened form of consultation tailored to their context. The output was not discarded or stored, it directly informed the design of the Flower Vote Kit and populated the Prioritisation Matrix along with the student findings.



What It Revealed

(Highlights, more available in Appendix D)

- Moments of joy (e.g. sitting in the sun while children play) tied to specific informal gathering spots
- Consistent stress around crossing the bus lane, especially during school rush hours
- Strong emotional connection to "unofficial" uses of space; benches, corners, shortcuts
- Garbage and unpleasant smells came up repeatedly, especially near the tram stop and kiosk. One parent pointed to the area as somewhere they rush through, not linger.
- Some parents highlighted unspoken social tensions; not feeling fully comfortable using benches if groups (often men) were already sitting there, even if no conflict occurred.

Where It Led

- Informed the Flower Vote Kit by emphasising emotional tone and simplicity
- Contributed directly to the Matrix via impact- identified problem areas and desired atmospheres (e.g. safety + pride)
- Highlighted the need for low-barrier visual storytelling → later reinforced through the Community Chronicle

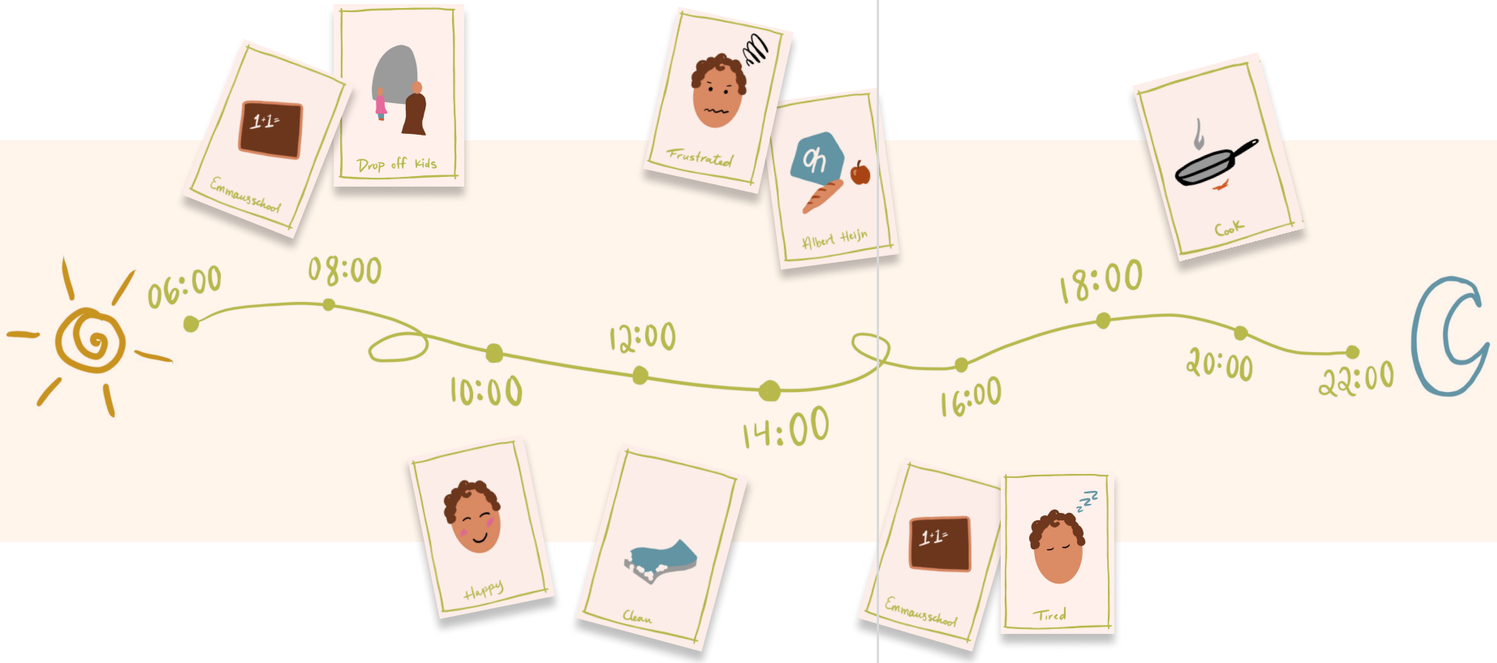


Figure 6.14
Sample English Card Timeline

Cards are shown here in english for understanding. In practice they were in Dutch.

6.3 flower median vote development

Research and Inspiration

Many greening initiatives feel pre-packaged and top-down. We wanted a visible, resident-led micro-change that would both democratise the wildflower median and test a low-barrier engagement methods. Drawing on insights from participatory design and urban prototyping, we aimed for a tactile, fun activity that would turn theory into an immediate, shareable experience of co-creation.

Ideation

From the outset, key questions drove development:

- Which species would thrive in the area?
- How could we signal critical info (bloom time, pollinator value) at a glance?
- What form would make voting intuitive for passersby?

To answer these:

- Consulted Stichting Steenbreek and De Vlinderstichting on native blooms, bloom calendars, and soil compatibility.
- Sketched iconic plant cards, each pairing a real sprig with a simple bloom-time icon and color swatch.
- Explored pipe-cleaner vote jars, testing heights to ensure even hurried votes landed correctly.

Custom Map Integration

Building on the Card Kit's map, we repurposed our Mathenesserplein map to frame post-vote discussion. Rather than asking "where?" as before, this map now:

- Anchors next-step dialogue: Participants point to areas they'd like future improvements.
- Reinforces feedback loops: "You voted here; now what would you like to see there?" clarifies that their input leads to action.

By physically linking the Flower Vote to a location map, we created a seamless bridge from a simple choice to richer, site-specific conversations about seating, crossings, and beyond.

Site Selection

Placed directly in front of the median's future home, this spot sees peak footfall and natural pausing moments, ideal for a low barrier, "vote as you pass" engagement

- Observations showed parents and shoppers naturally linger here, so planting our pop-up in their path guaranteed low-barrier entry (Criterion 2).

Kit Components and Set-Up

We distilled the Flower Vote into interlocking elements to maximise visibility, ease, and invitation:

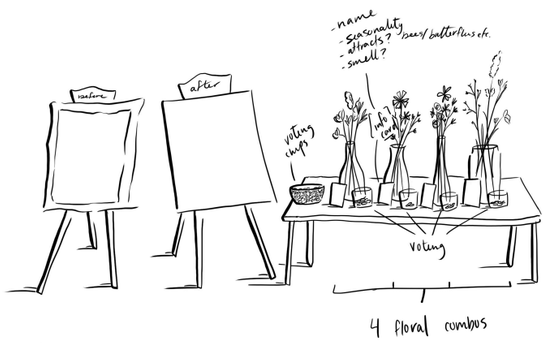


Figure 6.15
Flower-Vote Set-Up Plan



Figure 6.16
Custom Mathenesserplein Map

Real Flower Samples

Four species chosen for pollinator value, seasonal spread, and local appeal (per Steenbreek & Vlinderstichting advice). Displaying actual sprigs reinforced authenticity and let residents see, touch, and smell what they're voting on.

Visual Info Cards

A6 "flower ID" cards paired with each sprig: name, bloom-calendar icon, and a simple pollinator silhouette. Optional deep-dive info, but never required to vote, so even hurried passersby get the gist at a glance.

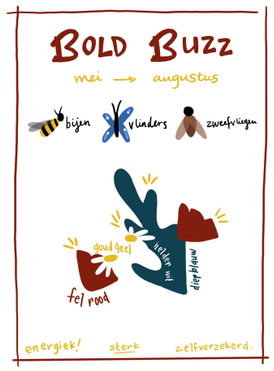


Figure 6.17
Bold Buzz Bouquet Info Card

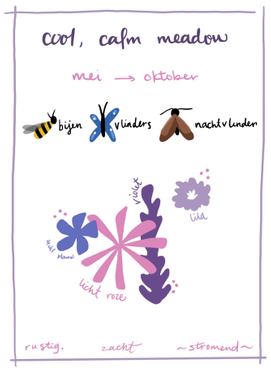


Figure 6.18
Cool, Calm Meadow Bouquet Info Card



Figure 6.19
Wild Harmony Bouquet Info Card



Figure 6.20
Sunlight Stroll Bouquet Info Card

1. Bold Buzz

Klaproos	May-July	Bees, Butterflies
Korenbloem	May-August	Bees, Butterflies
Margriet	May-August	Hoverflies, Bees
Duizendblad	June-September	Hoverflies, Butterflies

2. Cool, Calm, Meadow

Duifkruid	June-October	Butterflies, Bees
Veldsalie	May-September	Bees, Hoverflies
Koekoeksbloem	May-July	Bees, Beetles
Beemdooievaarsbek	June-August	Bees, Hoverflies

3. Wild Harmony

Slangenkruid	June-September	Bees, Butterflies
Korenbloem	May-August	Bees, Butterflies
Koekoeksbloem	May-July	Bees, Beetles
Duizendblad	June-September	Hoverflies, Butterflies

4. Sunlight Stroll

Zonneroosje	May-August	Bees, Hoverflies
Klaproos	May-July	Bees, Butterflies
Margriet	May-August	Hoverflies, Bees
Veldsalie	May-September	Bees, Hoverflies

Common to all bouquets (ground layers)

Dalmatische klokjesbloem	Ground Cover	Late Spring-Summer	Bees, Hoverflies
Iers mos	Ground Cover	Spring-Autumn	Low pollinator value; aesthetic base
Pijpenstrootje (Purple Moor Grass)	Vertical Structure	Summer-Autumn	Shelter for insects & small wildlife

6.3 Flower Median Vote Kit

Evaluative Participation Through Tangible Choice

What is it?

A street-side voting kit designed to let residents co-select the look and feel of a proposed biodiversity wildflower median. Residents viewed real flower samples, each paired with visual information cards and a rendered concept of the redesigned median, then voted for their favorite by placing a pipe cleaner into the jar in front of the sample.

This simple act turned a speculative design into a visible, personal decision, bridging the abstract idea of green renewal with something playful, specific, and grounded.

Why was it needed?

The Flower Vote Kit aimed to reverse top-down approachs by offering agency in a visible transformation. The flowers weren't just decorative, they represented the first resident-facing shift in the square. Letting people choose what blooms made the change feel like theirs.

It also served as a test of public engagement strategy: Could a tactile, low-pressure activity activate participation more effectively than formal surveys?

In Practice: Running the Vote

Date & Setting: July 7, 2025 – covered entry outside Albert Heijn due to rain

Setup:

- Real flower samples in vases
- Pipe-cleaner voting jars
- Printed visual render of median transformation
- Hand-drawn map for open conversation

Facilitator: Kaitlyn (English); Mustapha (Dutch/Arabic)

Participants: 27 votes logged in ~30 minutes

Topic Expansion: After voting, participants were asked:

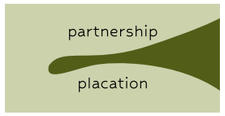
- "Is this type of change important to you?"
- "What else would you like to see here?"
- "What do you use the square for now?"

Concept Render of the Median

A large, on-site graphic showing the finished wildflower median in its real context. This "before-and-after" visual cue tapped into residents' spatial memory of the square, making the abstract "future change" feel immediate and signalling that their vote would actually be built. Render was made for the Bold Buzz mix.

Design Rationale

The flowers selected were not random. They were chosen based on consultations with Stichting Steenbreek and De Vlinderstichting, ensuring they would boost biodiversity and align with local soil and sun conditions. Each was labeled with bloom times, color palettes, and icons for quick visual understanding. The full kit fit on a single standing table and could be run by one facilitator.



somewhere a bit in the middle

Arnstein Ladder Placement

The Flower Vote didn't just gather opinions, it allowed residents to visibly shape a public space change. While the vote was not formally binding, the kit modelled what more responsive, grounded participation could look like. Even skeptical voices revealed an underlying desire to be heard.



Figure 6.21
Bold Buzz Median Render



Mustapha and Resident
discussing Flower Mix options

What It Revealed

(Highlights, more available in Appendix D)

- Residents were split, some enthusiastic, others skeptical about priorities ("Why this, when rent is rising?")
- Visual/tactile set-up worked well: even in a rush, people understood and acted
- Prompted deeper conversations, including desire for:
  - More seating and shade
  - Safer crossings
  - Spaces that "feel less sad"
- The question "Can I vote again?" reflected both playfulness and a hunger for influence
- Vote Counts can be found in Appendix D: Table 7.2

Where It Led

- Demonstrated the value of visible micro-changes, quick to install, easy to explain
- Confirmed resident appetite for green upgrades
- Supported the municipal approval of the Median Design Concept
- Built momentum for Community Chronicles to report back and keep the loop alive
- Resident bringing up "why is rent rising" showed desire to discuss bigger issues, they just need to be provided the space, time, and structure to do so



Resident posing with Flower-Vote Kit

6.4 chronicle development

Research and Inspiration

Residents kept asking, “Will we ever hear anything?” We drew on Arnstein’s call for genuine power redistribution and Warner’s notion of an issue-public to ground a periodic publication that both reports back and invites new voices

Kit Components and Layout

- Chronicle page material

Cover

	Bold, minimal cover, eye-catching statement catered to residents.

Spread 1

Resident 1 Interview: • headshot • intro • sketch • quotes	Resident 1 Interview: • headshot • intro • sketch • quotes

Spread 3

What’s next? Showcase next focus area with possible changes	Visual + QR callout for feedback (confirmation or new ideas)

Ideation

Local Authorship: Center the newsletter on reflecting back resident voices. Call for resident input, interviews, sketches.

Rhythmic Engagement: A quarterly (or milestone-based) cadence keeps the conversation alive without meeting-fatigue.

Low-Barrier Distribution: Pocket-sized fold-out format at mosque, school gate, nursing home lobby, and shop counters, no apps or logins required.

Feedback Loop Built-In: A “What’s next?” box plus QR code in each issue invites new micro-change proposals for the following edition.

Funding: Funded by Gemeente, facilitated by Van plein naar park team

Intro Page

Message from editors	Mini-Map with relevant locations for this issue

Spread 2

Project update- most recent/active change	Results or Intervention visuals

Figure 6.23
Chronicle Page Layouts

What is it?

A pocket-sized, fold-out publication distributed once a season at high-traffic community points: the mosque, Emmausschool, nursing home lobby, and local shops. Each issue blends sketches from fieldwork, short interviews with residents, progress updates, and a space for new proposals and questions. It’s designed to reflect the square back to itself.



Figure 6.24
Community Chronicle Cover and Back Cover Page

Why was it needed?

Residents repeatedly asked whether their input would go anywhere. The Chronicle ensures that stories, changes, and ideas don’t vanish into a report. It keeps participation visible and low-threshold. No app, no meeting, no login. Just a piece of paper on the counter that says: “Here’s what’s changing. You’re part of this.”

It also creates a gentle rhythm of participation. Each issue invites reflection (“Did this project land?”), new proposals (“What should come next?”), and even shop owner involvement via the neighbourhood map.

Design Rationale

The Chronicle was shaped by three principles:

- Local authorship: The residents should recognise themselves in the pages
- Visibility without overwhelm: Short, bold formats with visuals first; minimal text to lower language barriers.
- Feedback built-in: A “What’s Next?” page and QR code let people give feedback on the next steps.

What it aims to do

- Keep participation alive and visible
- Make residents feel their input was not one-off
- Allow new publics to join without starting from zero
- Build a relational memory of the project as something shared

6.4 Community Chronicles

A Seasonal Newsletter to Reflect, Respond, and Co-create

partnership

Arnstein Ladder Placement

The Chronicle transforms input into shared authorship. It doesn't just report. It invites, documents, and re-invites. By placing the process in public hands, it sustains engagement across time and makes space for future voices.

In Practice: Chronicle Distribution

Frequency: Every 3–4 weeks (or milestone-based)

- Distribution Points:
  - Mosque
  - School gate
  - Nursing home
  - Local shop counters

Print Format: A5 fold-out, full color, plain Dutch with minimal text

Facilitators: Kaitlyn (editor, layout), Mustapha (interviewer for resident call-outs, network & shop engagement)

Timeline

The Community Chronicle is a pilot developed in this graduation project. Issue 01 is designed and ready to test, but continuing the series depends on Gemeente approval and a modest budget for editing, translation, printing, and delivery.

If approved, it will move to a seasonal schedule and continue after the project, with templates, an editorial calendar, and a simple survey workflow handed over to the local partner. If funding or staff time are tight, we'll publish a digital-first edition with a smaller print run.

Intro Page

A welcome from the editors!

- This is your newsletter: what it is and how to use it
- What you'll find in this issue
- Map of the square with key places highlighted

What's Next Spread

An overview of proposals drawn directly from research

- Next focus area at a glance
- What residents told us (key findings)
- Have we got it right? Confirm or add new ideas via QR

Resident Highlight Spread

Meet your neighbour!

- One illustrated story from our research
- Clear, honest recap of what we observed
- Meet a key neighbour
- Short quotes
- Link to the research findings
- Call to action: "Say hello when you pass!" to ease loneliness at Laurens



Figure 6.25
Community Chronicle
Introduction Page



Figure 6.26
Community Chronicle
"What's Next?" Page



Figure 6.27
Community Chronicle
Resident Highlight Page

6.5 Using the Matrix

Using the Matrix in Practice

The Prioritisation Matrix is more than a way to record one evaluation. It can be a live tool for decision-making. By bringing residents and institutional stakeholders to the same table, it turns abstract proposals into a tangible, shared discussion.
In future sessions, the matrix could be used in different formats:

- Small mixed group: Two residents and two municipal staff work through each proposal together, scoring and discussing trade-offs in real time.
- Individual scoring, shared review: A larger group (e.g. 15–20 participants) scores proposals independently, then compares and debates their results.
- Aggregated insight: Scores from many individuals are averaged to reveal collective priorities, while still highlighting areas of disagreement for deeper discussion.

These formats allow the process to be adapted to different contexts, from focused workshops to open public events, while keeping prioritisation transparent, collaborative, and rooted in shared ownership of outcomes.

partnership

Arnstein's Ladder Placement

When used well, this approach sits at Partnership. Residents and government working as equals to set priorities and decide on actions.

Ideation

In discussion with stakeholders, we explored ways to use the matrix not only as a planning tool but also as a shared space for idea generation. One promising approach is to invite diverse community members; residents, shopkeepers, institutional partners, to co-complete the matrix together at an early stage.

The goal is to collectively map priorities, constraints, and opportunities. The process itself surfaces perspectives that might otherwise remain unheard. This collaborative filling-in can be followed by a structured brainstorm, ensuring all voices are represented before narrowing to a set of methods for testing.

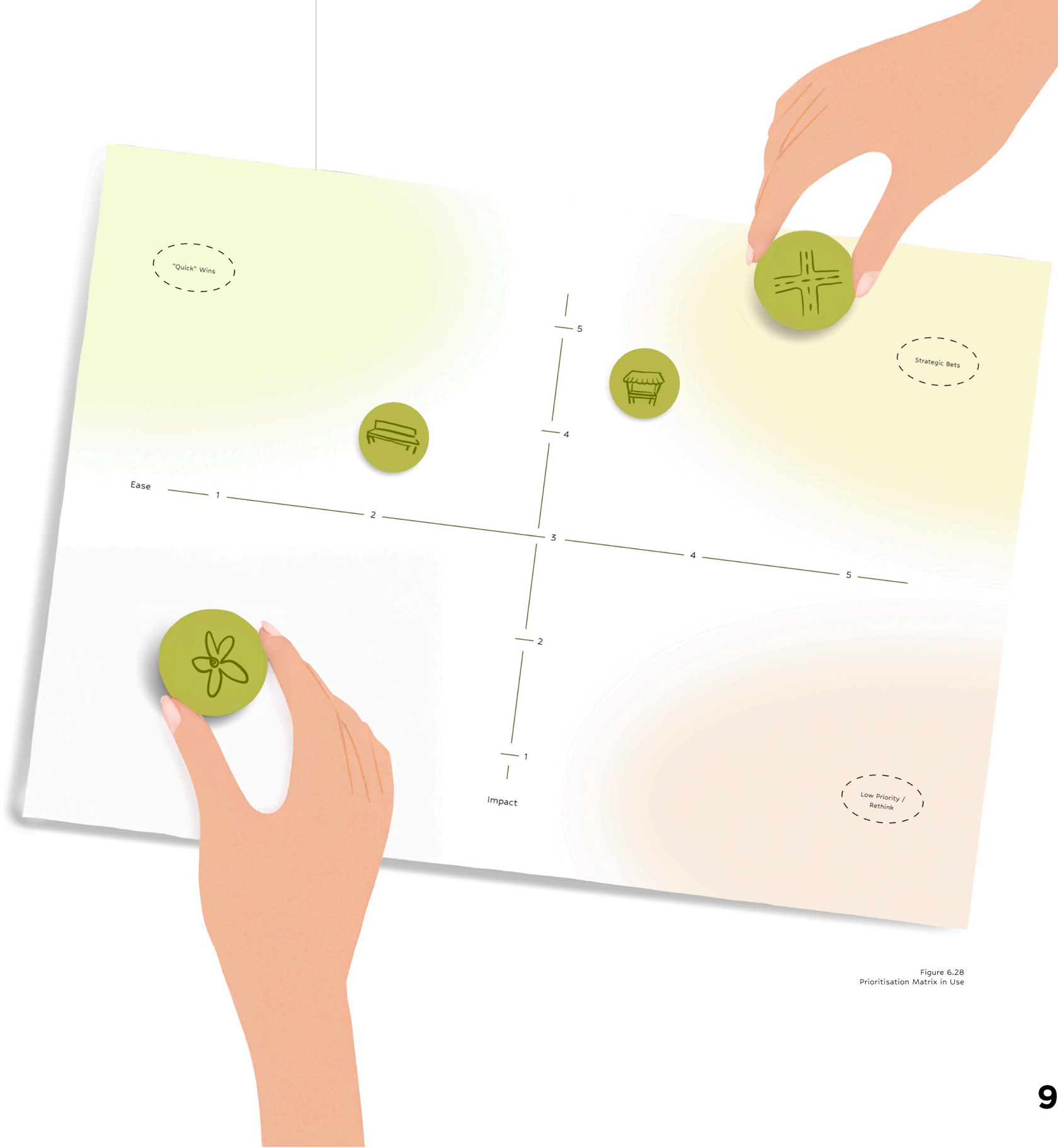


Figure 6.28
Prioritisation Matrix in Use

7 chapter summary

7.1 Project Timeline
- A six-month overview of the project from initial research to refined engagement
- Shows sequencing and overlap between literature review, student-led testing, proposal development, and final deliverables

Key Question: When and how did each phase of the project unfold, and what activities shaped the overall process?

7.2 Final Deliverable
- Overarching design challenge and criteria
- Summary of all deliverables (research data, proposals, toolkit components, growth model)
- Rationale for combining outputs into a cohesive engagement system

Key Question: What exactly is being delivered to the client and community, and why must the outputs work together rather than as standalone tools?

7.3 Iterative Engagement Growth Model
- The phased structure of the engagement system
- How each tool fits into the model and supports different criteria

Key Question: How does the model sequence activities over time to build trust, adapt to context, and maintain resident–municipality collaboration?

7.4 Discussion
- The model as the most important deliverable
- Theoretical contributions (Warner, Sanders & Stappers, Arnstein).
- Alignment with research questions and objectives, and practical/policy implications

Key Question: How does the model answer the original research questions, connect theory to practice, and offer a sustainable pathway for participatory urban design?

7.5 Sources
- Full list of references and student report citations.

Key question: What are the project's academic, methodological, and practical foundations?

review

Why we did all of this?

Our process followed a continuous, participatory loop...

Observe → Ask → Design → Reflect → Adjust...

...so that each insight fed directly into the next cycle of action. We began by observing the lived patterns and pain points in the public realm, then asked residents and stakeholders to surface their needs through low-barrier methods. From there, we designed targeted interventions, reflected on outcomes and feedback, and adjusted both the tools and priorities accordingly. This iterative rhythm ensured the toolkit remained grounded in real-time community dynamics and adapted as new voices and challenges emerged.

Review

Following this introduction, we pause to review the full project timeline at a glance. The next spread lays out a comprehensive Gantt chart tracing each phase from literature review and site immersion through student-led fieldwork, proposals, tool refinements, and matrix development. By stepping back and seeing when and how every activity unfolded, readers can appreciate the deliberate pacing and iterative overlaps that underpinned the work. This timeline review will set the stage for an at-a-glance inventory of all deliverables; methodological findings, student prototypes, proposals, the prioritisation matrix, and refined engagement artefacts, before we synthesise what the complete system delivers and why it matters.

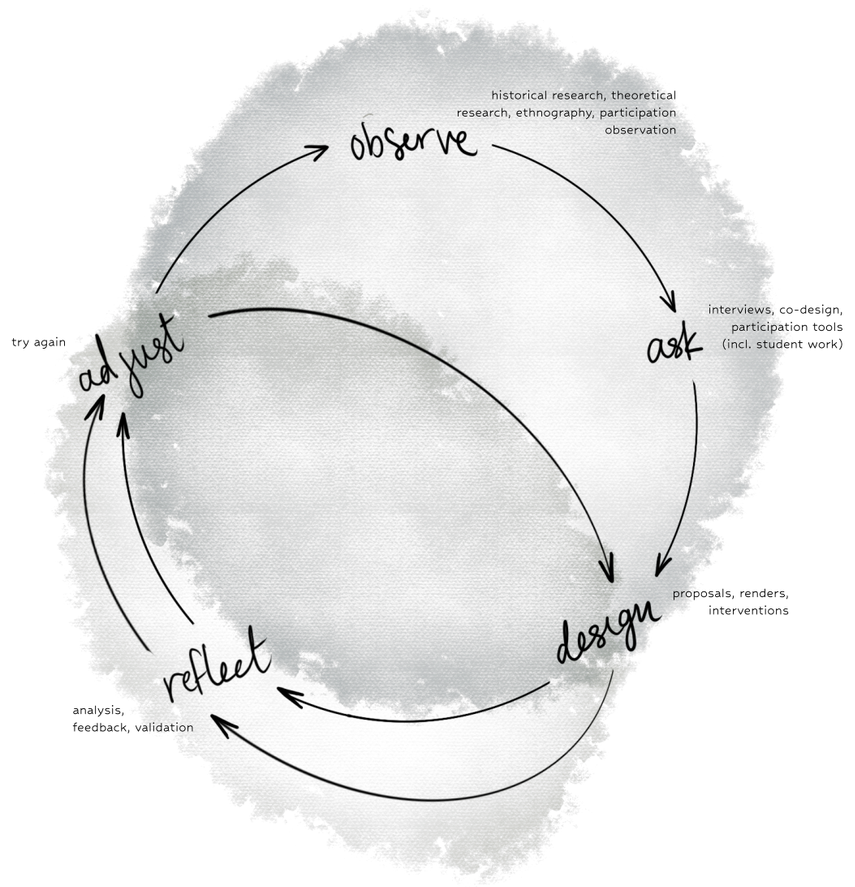


Figure 7.1
Iteration of the: do → reflect → adjust → do again loop, adjusted for the project

7.1 project timeline

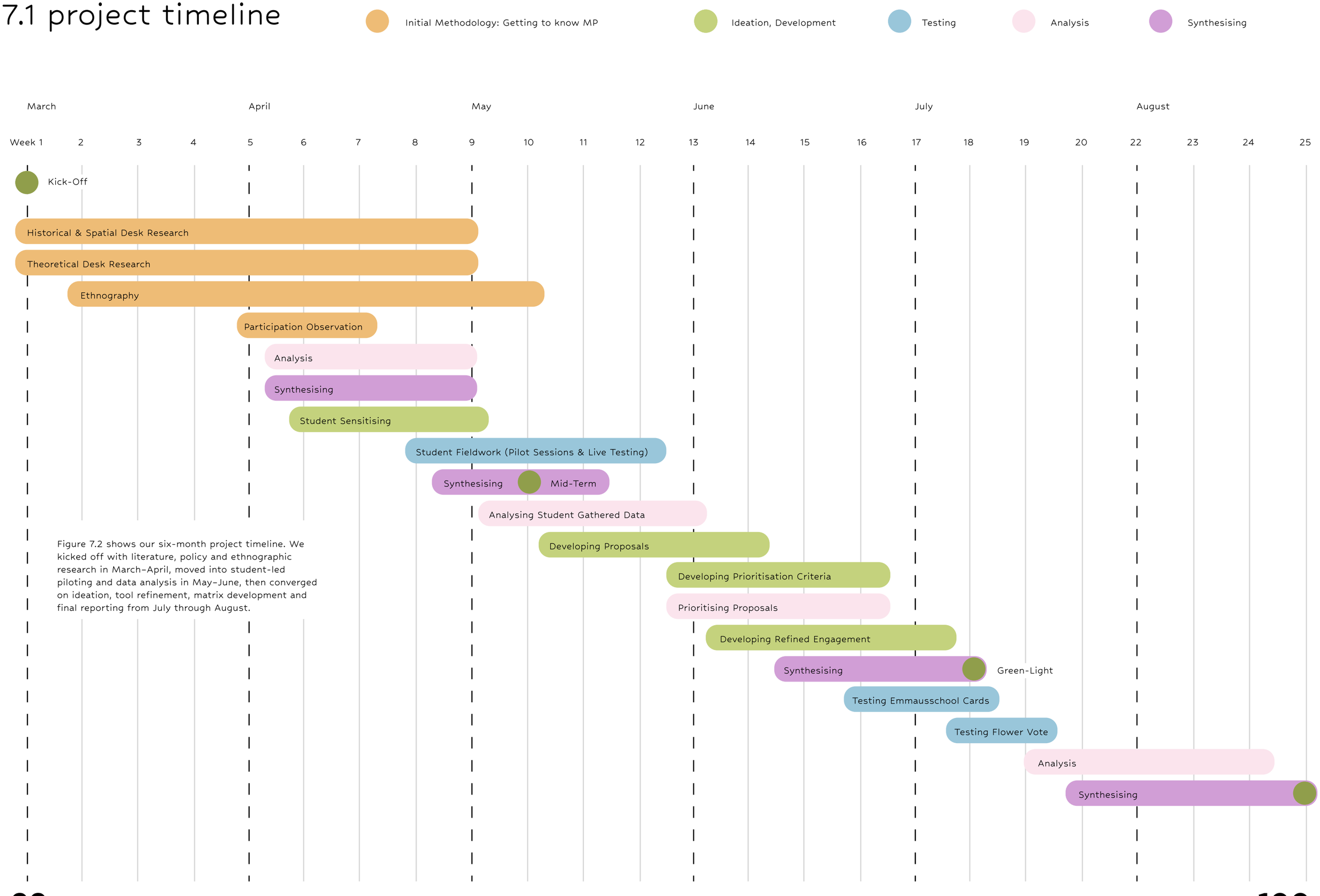


Figure 7.2 shows our six-month project timeline. We kicked off with literature, policy and ethnographic research in March–April, moved into student-led piloting and data analysis in May–June, then converged on ideation, tool refinement, matrix development and final reporting from July through August.

Figure 7.2
Project timeline

7.2 final deliverable

Recap Design Challenge

To provide a clear, inclusive process that allows all residents to meaningfully participate in shaping the future of their urban square in a way that reflects their lived experience and builds trust over time.

Criteria to meet challenge:

1 **Elicit Stories and Surface Needs**

2 **Enable Low-Barrier Entry**

3 **Build Trust Through Feedback Loops**

4 **Support Prioritisation and Decision-Making**

Client Recap:

While we have emphasised throughout this report that the work being done here is for the sake of the residents, it was first and foremost commissioned by Van plein naar park, in order to serve the residents.

Thus, the mandate from Mustapha through Van plein naar park was to address our design challenge for Mathenesserplein specifically.

Nevertheless, it is of course an ambition always to create something that is applicable and replicable to other similar contexts. Thus, this output also aims to be a guide for other Dutch urban neighbourhoods undergoing changes.

Deliverable Summary

As part of this engagement, we delivered:

- The foundational research data
  - secondary research
  - ethnographic observations
  - 60+ intercept interviews
  - All synthesised into clustered thematic insights, as a key output for both our client and the community
- 9 Proposals distilled from research
- The participatory toolkit
  - Card Kit (Generative Example)
  - Flower Vote (Evaluative Example)
  - Prioritisation Matrix
- Iterative Engagement Growth Model
  - Recommendations for the next phase



Figure 7.3
Project Deliverable Umbrella

Why No Single Output Suffices

No single tool or deliverable can fully address the complex, evolving needs of Mathenesserplein's diverse community. Instead, this project delivers a cohesive suite of assets, research data, thematic insights, low-barrier engagement artefacts, and the Prioritisation Matrix, all designed to work in tandem. The research data grounds every decision in real-world resident experiences; the toolkit of cards, votes, and chronicle methods creates multiple entry points for participation; and the matrix ensures that proposals are evaluated transparently and adaptively. Only by weaving these outputs together into a continuous cycle can we build lasting trust and drive meaningful change.

If we look at the Iterative Engagement Growth Model, our initial ideation plotted against the four design criteria (Stories, Low Barrier, Feedback Loops, Prioritisation) we can see how each component of the toolkit supports a different dimension of long-term engagement. In practice, no two neighbourhoods unfold in the same way: each context demands time to understand local rhythms, histories, and residents' priorities. By respecting this uniqueness and tailoring the process accordingly, the engagement plan becomes more than a checklist, it becomes a living framework that adapts to real needs rather than imposing a one-size-fits-all solution.

Building on this living framework and the research conducted, we then recalibrated our model to Mathenesserplein's specific rhythms and insights. The next spread shows the updated figure, re-scored and re-plotted with real project touch points, so you can see exactly how each tool and engagement wave unfolded on the ground and paves the way for future changes.

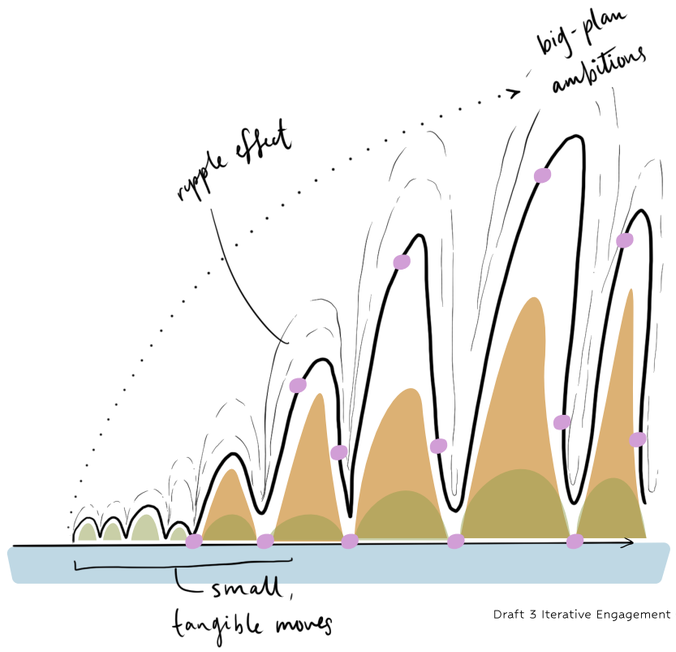


Figure 7.4
Draft 3 Iterative Engagement Growth Model

7.3 Iterative Engagement Growth Model

Tailored for Mathenesserplein

Figure 7.5
Final Iterative Engagement Growth Model

What am I delivering?

Sequential Logic of the Growth Model

On this spread, we outline the Iterative Engagement Growth Model as it unfolded, and will continue to evolve, in Mathenesserplein.

We didn't just hand over isolated reports or one-off activities; we delivered an integrated **Engagement Growth System** composed of five interlocking components:

Phase 1: Field Research
Thematic Insights: A deep dive and analysis into local rhythms, pain-points and community actors, synthesised into actionable themes.

Phase 2: Proposals and Prioritisation
Proposal package: derived from thematic insights, prioritised through criteria organised by the:

Prioritisation Matrix: A dynamic matrix with clear criteria (feasibility, complexity, impact, equity) to turn resident proposals into a focused set of pilot concepts

Phase 3: Refined Engagement
A set of co-design tools ("What / Where / How" cards, Flower-Vote pop-up, custom maps) that enabled low-barrier, in-context idea generation and evaluation.

Phase 4: Feedback Loop
Community Chronicle: A quarterly newsletter prototype that closes feedback loops by reporting back on how resident input shapes real decisions

Phase 5: Future Implementations
While actual installations were beyond this project's scope, the full model anticipates implementations of proposals and presents a guide for engaging and increasing participation along the way.

Actions

Intentions

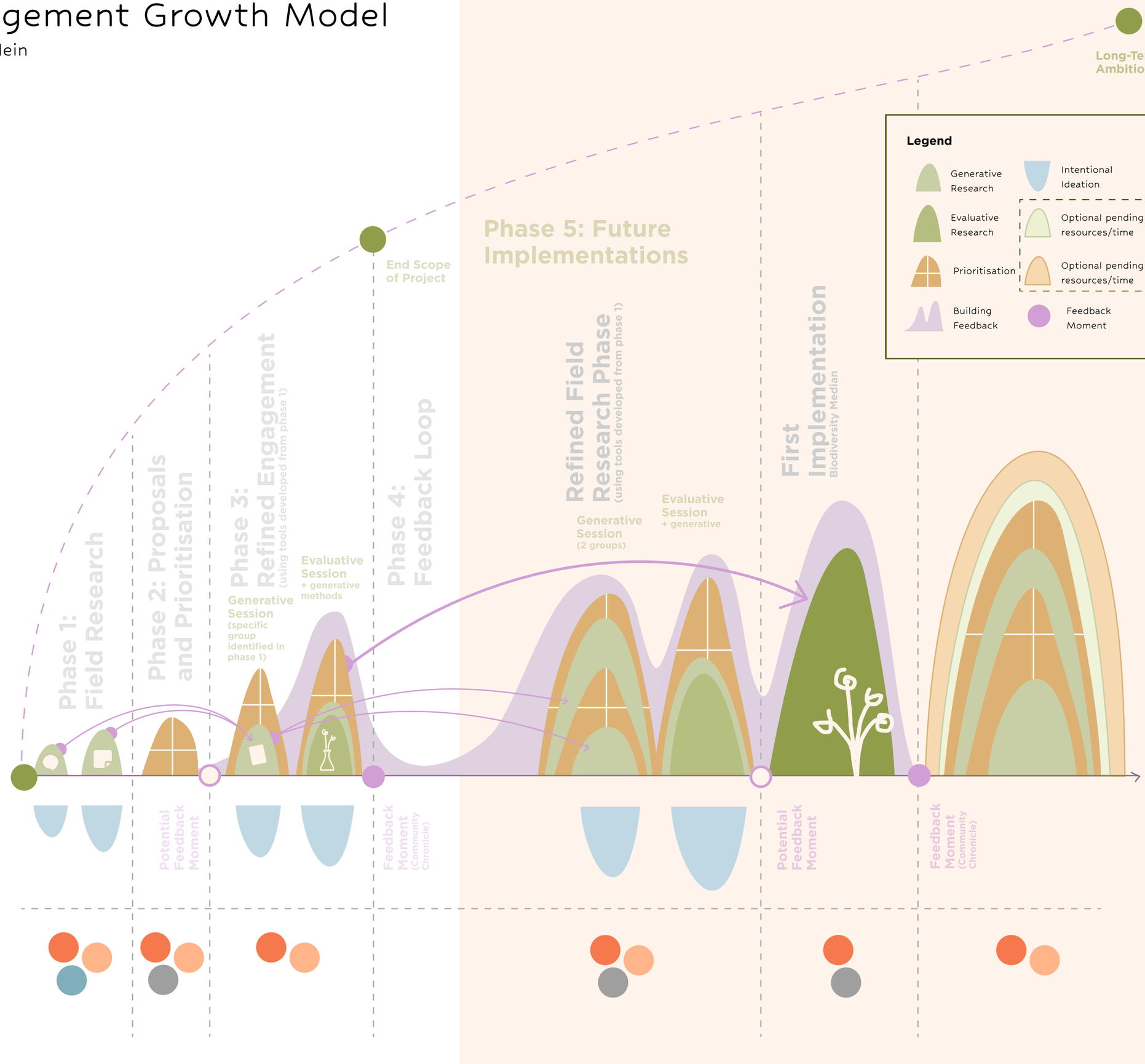
- Low Barrier Entry behind every action
- Resident as Expert Mindset

Intentions

Necessary **Actors** to carry out model:

- Community Connection & Lead Facilitator: Mustapha Akchich
- Research Lead/Oversight: Kaitlyn Smith
- Field Research Team: HS Student Team
- Gemeente Experts

Actors*



7.4 discussion

The Model as a Deliverable

While the project certainly yielded rich data and a suite of participatory methods, its most important output is the Iterative Engagement Growth Model itself. Rather than risk Mathenesserplein reverting to the familiar cycle of one-off interventions and the fragmentation that follows, this system provides a coherent structure to sustain momentum and deepen trust over time. Every toolkit, proposal and newsletter prototype you've read so far is a concrete example of one way to enact the model; its success depends on flexible actors who can adapt in-flight to emerging outcomes.

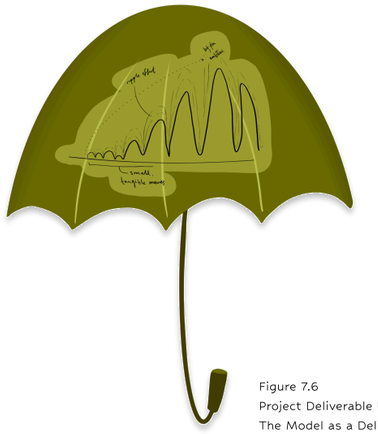


Figure 7.6
Project Deliverable Umbrella: The Model as a Deliverable

Goals of the Model

At its core, the model sets out a standardised roadmap while allowing for adjustments tailored to each neighbourhood's unique circumstances. It is designed to prevent the all-too-common "one big win, then fade away" trajectory by:

- Embedding regular feedback loops that surface new opportunities before interest diminishes
- Ensuring each phase generates both insight and visible progress, so stakeholders always see tangible value
- Keeping decision criteria transparent, so the process remains credible even as priorities shift

Iterative Nature

The model's strength lies in its five interlocking phases, each feeding into the next:

a. Ground-Level Research builds the foundational database of resident needs, which then directly shapes...
b. Co-Design & Prioritisation, where community proposals are evaluated and distilled into clear priorities. Those priorities inform...
c. Refined Engagement, in which targeted toolkits and sessions deepen buy-in and generate fresh data. From there, we enter a...
d. Feedback Loop, closing the circle by reporting back and validating choices in the Community Chronicle. Finally, in Phase 5: Future Implementations, we're ready to pilot interventions based on all prior insights.

Because the Prioritisation Matrix is designed to evolve, the model never locks you into a static plan. If, mid-stream, a new stakeholder group emerges or resource constraints shift, you can drop back into earlier phases, rerun targeted sessions, and update the matrix on the fly. This flexibility is exactly what keeps the system alive.

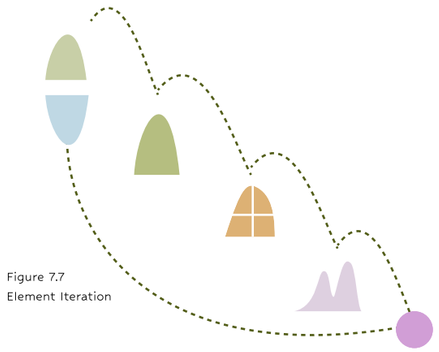


Figure 7.7
Element Iteration

Key Actors

No model succeeds without the right people in the right roles. In Mathenesserplein we've seen that:

- A Community Lead Facilitator (Mustapha) is essential for translating between residents and researchers.
- A Project Manager / Research Lead (Author) keeps the cycle on track, synthesises insights, and steers adaptations.
- Strategic moments to bring in the Gemeente: notably during prioritisation workshops and at the implementation phase, ensure the model feeds into formal planning and secures the resources needed to act.

Alignment with Research Questions & Objectives

From the start, this project asked: How is citizen power theorised? Which existing co-design frameworks apply? What barriers prevent inclusive participation? And so what? How do we weave theory into practice? Through five iterative phases, our model directly answers each question:

- Phase 1 builds a resident-driven evidence base, illuminating structural and cultural barriers to engagement
- Phases 2–3 operationalise key co-design toolkits (cards, pop-ups, maps) drawn from Arnstein's Ladder and Warner's Publics frameworks
- Phases 4–5 test transparent prioritisation and feedback loops, demonstrating a living framework rather than token workshops

Our stated objective: to "provide a clear, inclusive process that allows all residents to meaningfully participate... and build trust over time" is met not by a single deliverable but by this composite Engagement Growth System.

Practical Implications & Policy Integration

Embedding this model within Rotterdam's formal planning requires:

- Municipal Partnerships at key junctures (prioritisation workshops, pilot approvals) to ensure feasibility and resource alignment
- Budget & Staffing: a dedicated community-lead facilitator and a research manager, supported by the Gemeente, to sustain cycles
- Digital & Physical Infrastructure: Chronicle layout with QR-linked micro-surveys and Instagram feed to complement in-person artefacts, broadening reach beyond site visits

By aligning our Prioritisation Matrix with zoning, permitting and maintenance criteria, we've created a tool that city planners can adopt directly in official processes. In the spirit of Montgomery's call for cities that make people healthier, happier, and more socially connected, this model offers a pathway for embedding those values into the everyday practice of municipal design. While participation processes are often framed as policy obligations, their true potential lies in creating environments-physical and social, that invite joy, trust, and agency (Montgomery 2013).

Theoretical Contributions

Warner's Publics & Counterpublics prompts us to target issue-publics; shopkeepers, mosque congregants, parents, rather than the abstract "public-at-large." Our ethnography and targeted sessions operationalise this insight, ensuring participation is relevant and resonant for each group (Warner 2002).

Drawing on Sanders & Stappers' Convivial Toolbox, we demonstrate how generative toolkits (cards, mapping, prototyping) can scaffold resident creativity while remaining adaptable to context, bridging individual "fuzzy front end" ideas with collective decision-making (Sanders and Stappers 2008).

Arnstein's Ladder of Participation remains a vital diagnostic for power-sharing, yet our model extends its utility by functioning as a roadmap for moving upward on the ladder over time. We position the ladder in the background of the model (figure xx), framing each phase as a step toward greater resident control. For example, illustrating how a process might progress from "Consultation" to "Placation," or from "Consultation" to genuine "Partnership." By embedding small, visible wins and revisiting priorities in each cycle, the model offers a repeatable pathway for climbing the ladder in a grounded, context-specific way (Arnstein 1969).

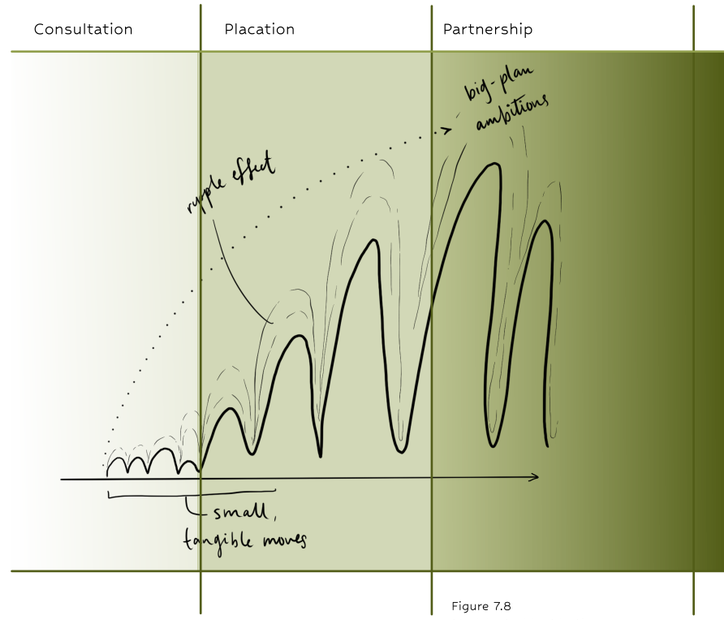


Figure 7.8
Model x Ladder Ideation

Limitations & Reflexivity

No single project can capture every nuance. Key constraints included:

- Scope & Time: With only six months, we prioritised depth in Phase 1 to build our database and testing methods in Phase 2 & 3
- Method Nuance: Some tools (e.g. street surveys) delivered quantity at the expense of contextual richness
- Implementation Gap: Actual pilot installations remain planned, not executed, future work should validate proposals contextually and physically

Acknowledging these limits helps future teams calibrate expectations and adapt timelines.

Lessons Learned & Best Practices

1. Invest in Phase 1: Deep ethnographic immersion uncovers hidden barriers and trust-builders before any toolkit is deployed.
2. Maintain Transparency: Openly share prioritisation criteria and matrix scores to uphold credibility as community priorities shift.
3. Deliver Early Wins: Even small prototypes signal progress and sustain momentum.
4. Be Ready to Pivot: Treat the model as elastic. If a new stakeholder group emerges, loop back to targeted sessions rather than forging ahead blindly.

Sustainability & Scalability

To keep the cycle alive beyond this project, neighbourhood teams need:

- Dedicated Roles: A community lead and research manager with clear handover processes.
- Budget Lines: Recurring funding for tool replenishment (cards, printing) and Chronicle production.
- Digital Platforms: Low-bandwidth, multilingual survey tools integrated into existing municipal portals.

This infrastructure makes the model portable to other Rotterdam districts and beyond, while respecting local rhythms.

Future Research Directions

Building on these foundations, subsequent studies could:

- Quantify impact: Measure the effect of interventions (e.g., the biodiversity median) on pedestrian flows, patterns of use, and indicators of social cohesion over time.
- Compare modalities: Evaluate in-person versus digital co-design sessions for cost-effectiveness, accessibility, and inclusivity, especially for underrepresented groups.
- Matrix validation: Systematically test the model's decision-making matrix in different contexts, refining how it guides method selection and sequencing.
- Longitudinal trust assessment: Return to the same community after several cycles and interventions to assess whether the trust built in earlier phases sustains and strengthens over time.
- Simplify field research: Explore streamlined approaches for the early research phase that still capture rich insights but reduce resource intensity- especially important when mentoring or collaborating with new facilitators, as in the student-led sessions of this project.
- Cross-case learning: Apply the model in multiple neighbourhoods to understand its context-sensitivity, adapt resource requirements, and identify transferable patterns.
- Feedback loop enhancement: Develop lightweight, continuous feedback tools that make the impact of resident input more visible between major interventions.

Closing Synthesis

The Iterative Engagement Growth Model transforms placemaking from one-off events into a sustained, trust-building system. By weaving theory, methods, and visible feedback into a continuous loop, it moves beyond tokenism toward genuine resident–municipality partnership. This living framework not only delivers immediate insights and prototypes, but also charts a roadmap for future neighbourhoods to co-create, reflect, and adapt- together.

This project has also been deeply personal. Over the months spent in Mathenesserplein, I was welcomed into the rhythms, routines, and stories of a neighbourhood that generously opened its doors, and its history, to me. Residents trusted me with their perspectives, showed me their favourite spots, introduced me to their families, and shared pieces of their culture. That generosity shaped the work as much as any method or theory.

It is not lost on me how far I have come to be here, and how different life can look when you step into another place's daily life. This project became part of that journey, showing me that design is as much about relationships as it is about ideas. I am grateful to know that this is not the end of the story. I will continue to be part of the work here, building on the trust and shared ownership that began in these first steps.

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Appendix A: Lecture Slides

Week 1



Amplifying Unheard Voices in Mathenesserplein

Week 1: Context Mapping

16th April, 2025

Imagination is very important!

There is funding and we want to remind people that change is possible.

But- for now your focus is to get to know the neighborhood **as it is.**

16th April, 2025

Let's peek ahead...

Goal	Understand what the residents of Mathenesserplein want and need to be changed in their neighborhood
Group	Residents living in and around Mathenesserplein (nursing home residents, parents, shop owners, Muslim community members who attend Moskee Annasr)
Preconceptions & Expectations	Green space, quiet, walkability, safety, gathering spaces..... etc.

16th April, 2025

Focus and Scope

Focus:
The core thing you want to learn about

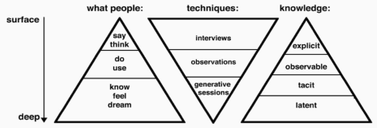
Scope:
How broad do you want to wander in the context

we scoped it for you this time!

the narrower the scope the easier it is to find your answers for a specific group of people

16th April, 2025

What is Context Mapping?



16th April, 2025

Discover (in) their everyday context

- Learn all about the context: all aspects for which you are going to explore
- You do not have to find the right answers yet!
- You SHOULD expect to find the right questions
  - find the blind spots



16th April, 2025

Focus

How do the residents experience the neighborhood? We want to learn about their everyday challenges, the positive aspects they value, and the changes they believe would make Mathenesserplein a safer, more inclusive, and more vibrant place to live, work, and gather.

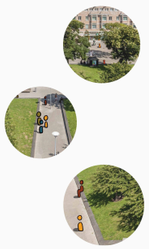
- Daily Routines
- Needs & Barriers
- Hopes & Improvements
- Sense of Belonging

16th April, 2025

Who are the residents?

- They ARE the experts of their experiences.
- They are NOT subjects to be used for interrogation
- It is your job to help them bring out their expertise

- Think of this as an investigative exercise, the answers are out there. You need to discover the right questions to uncover them.



16th April, 2025

Things to keep in mind:

- There is a lot of research going on in this area
  - Research fatigue is a real thing and there are ways to mitigate it
    - Convey that we are here because we care about their neighborhood
    - We want to involve them in the process but we understand that this can be a lot of work on top of their busy lives!
    - Manage expectations

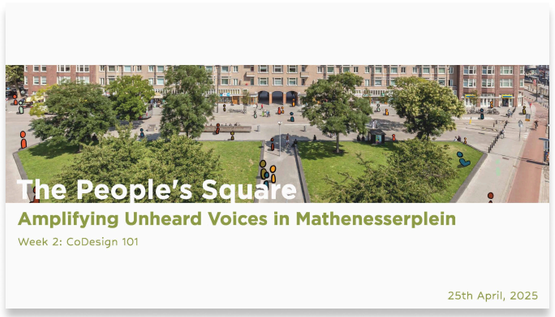


16th April, 2025

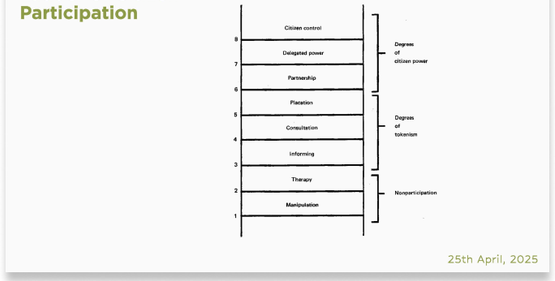
Figure 7.1-7.9
Lecture 1 Slides

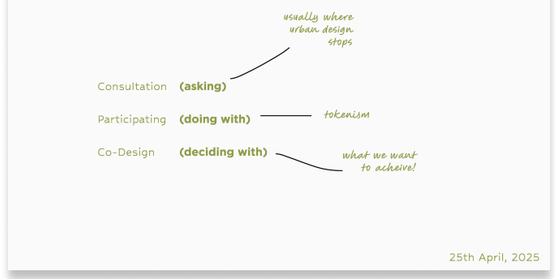
Appendix A: Lecture Slides

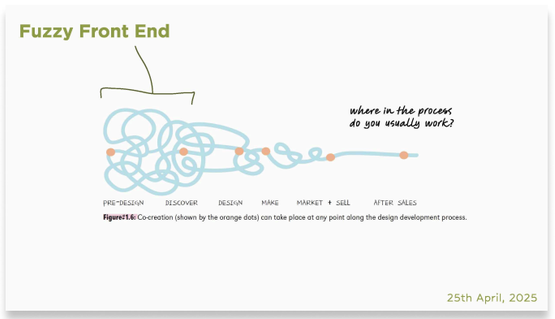
Week 2











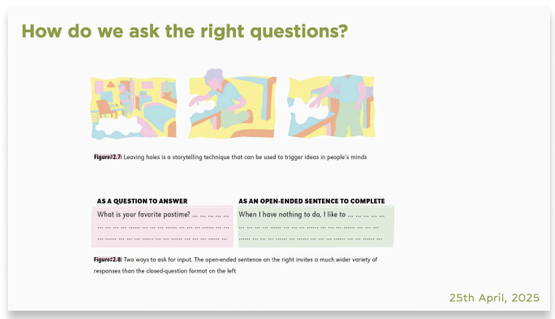
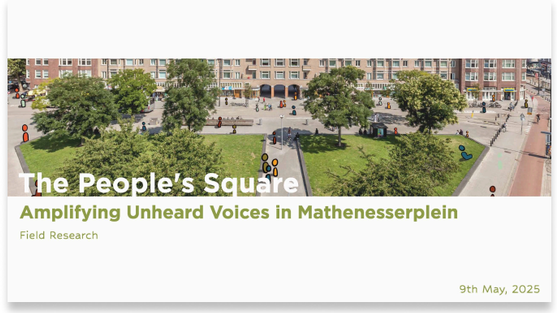
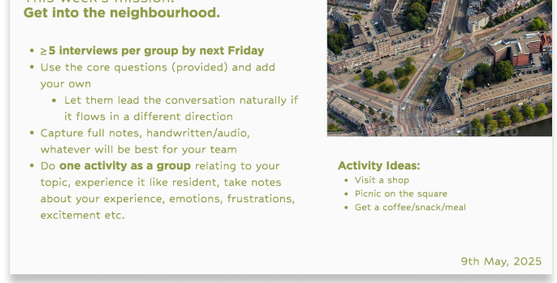


Figure 7.10-7.15
Lecture 2 Slides

Week 3









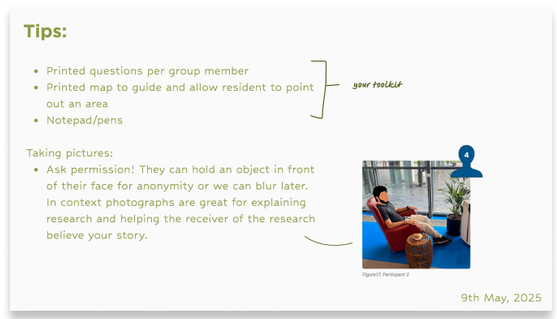


Figure 7.16-7.10
Lecture 3 Slides

Appendix B: Student Tested Engagement Methods

All 5 student groups are combined on the following pages. The following are not the full reports (which are 30 pages each long and in Dutch) but instead a summary of valuable insights and examples of student work that resulted from teachings.

Street Interviews: Relevant Quotes

Purpose & Use

Street interviews were used to directly gather the experiences, needs, and ideas of residents, visitors, and other stakeholders in the Mathenesserplein area. This method allowed participants to speak in their own words about what works, what doesn't, and what changes they'd like to see. Interviews were often conducted on location in a casual, approachable way, leading to honest and detailed responses.

Sessions:

- May 2025 – Multiple sessions on and around Mathenesserplein: bus stops, benches, in front of Albert Heijn, at the mosque, near the bakery, and across the square. Participants included residents, shoppers, parents, seniors, youth, mosque visitors, and shop managers. (Groups 1, 6)
- April–May 2025 – Opportunistic interviews during observation periods at various points in the square. (Groups 2, 3, 4)
- Mid-May 2025 – Targeted stakeholder interviews: Albert Heijn store manager, mosque attendees, and local entrepreneurs. (Groups 1, 3, 6)

Safety and Comfort

Direct quotes:

- "I don't just let my child play here; the traffic is too busy and unsafe." (Group 1 – Parent)
- "In the evenings it's noisy and messy, and that doesn't feel safe when you walk through." (Group 1 – Resident)
- "The sidewalks are not level everywhere, and at the crossings it's unclear who has the right of way." (Group 1 – Elder)
- "It's chaotic with all the traffic; scooters, bikes, cars, buses, trams all mixed together." (Group 1 – Resident)
- "The overpass area feels unsafe in the evenings." (Group 6 – Resident)

Non-verbatim insights:

- Multiple interviewees noted that the lack of safe crossings, especially for children and elderly, discourages them from spending time in the square. (Groups 1, 3)
- Residents feel the bus sluice and unclear traffic rules create unsafe conditions. (Groups 1, 4)
- Poor lighting at night was cited as a reason to avoid the square after dark. (Groups 1, 6)

Social Interaction & Atmosphere

Direct quotes:

- "People walking by don't just start a conversation." (Group 6 – Resident)
- "The atmosphere is friendly, I never feel unsafe, always nice people." (Group 1 – Resident)
- "The coziness isn't what it used to be." (Group 1 – Elder)
- "I think it would be nice if there were more events or activities, so neighbors get to know each other better." (Group 1 – Resident)
- "After prayer you want to sit and talk, but it's too busy out there." (Group 1 – Mosque attendee)

Non-verbatim insights:

- Many residents miss informal meeting places; they feel current seating and public space design doesn't encourage spontaneous conversations. (Groups 1, 4)
- The mosque community expressed a need for quiet, comfortable gathering space after services. (Groups 1, 6)
- Several interviewees linked social decline in the area to increased nuisance from loitering youth and lack of maintenance. (Groups 1, 3)

Facilities & Green Space

Direct quotes:

- "It's pretty bare here; there's not much to do if you're waiting for the bus." (Group 1 – Youth)
- "The flower boxes they used to have should come back; it would make it more cheerful." (Group 1 – Resident)
- "There's too little play space for children and it's unsafe." (Group 6 – Parent)
- "More plants and new benches would make it more attractive for young people." (Group 1 – Youth)
- "The green areas are just for looking at; you can't use them." (Group 1 – Resident)

Non-verbatim insights:

- Across groups, the existing greenery was described as "look-only," elevated above the walking level, and not interactive. (Groups 1, 4)
- Residents would like multi-functional green areas that provide shade, seating, and play opportunities. (Groups 1, 6)
- Benches were often described as uncomfortable, dirty, or poorly placed. (Groups 1, 4, 6)

Specific Stakeholder Needs

Direct quotes:

- "On Fridays it's always a search for a parking space." (Group 1 – Mosque attendee)
- "I like going to the square to get coffee and chat together." (Group 6 – Resident)
- "I come here for the Zeeman, but the square itself isn't really cozy." (Group 1 – Shopper)
- "The bike racks are right in front of the store entrance; they should be moved." (Group 1 – Albert Heijn manager)
- "The containers block the sidewalk, it's not accessible." (Group 1 – Shopper)

Non-verbatim insights:

- The Albert Heijn manager expressed frustration about municipal placement of bike racks and waste containers obstructing entrances. (Groups 1, 6)
- Mosque attendees reported peak-time congestion and parking pressure during Friday prayers. (Groups 1, 3)
- Retailers see potential in events and markets to increase foot traffic but want better space management. (Groups 1, 4)

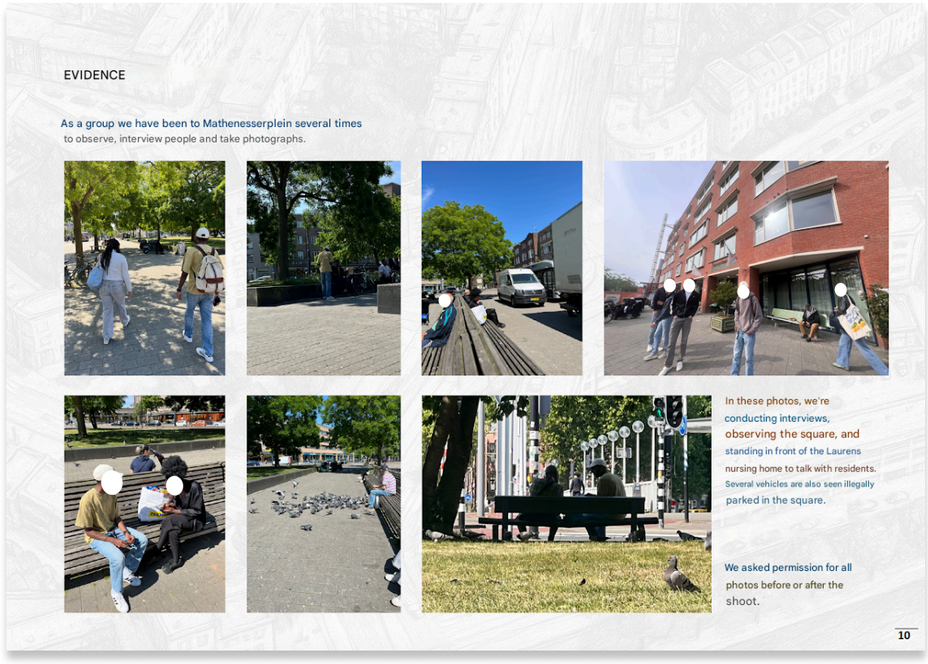


Figure 7.11
Group 6 Photos from Interview and Observation Sessions



Figure 7.12
Group 6 Personas from Interviews

Appendix B: Student Tested Engagement Methods

Experience Dice: Relevant Insights

Purpose & Use
The Experience Dice was used as a playful way to engage passersby during market day. Participants rolled a custom die printed with prompts on themes like safety, comfort, green space, and social life. The roll determined the question they would answer. This format lowered the barrier to participation and encouraged spontaneous, candid responses from people who might not stop for a longer interview.

Session info:
- Location: Day setup near Albert Heijn and tram stop, Mathenesserplein.
- Participants: Shoppers, commuters, local youth.
- Setup: Large foam die with 6 prompts relating to themes like safety, green space, facilities, and atmosphere. Each roll determined the question the participant answered.

Question: "What is your favorite place on Mathenesserplein?"
Answers:
- "The market, because I can meet people there." (Group 2 – Shopper)
- "The bakery on the corner; they know me there." (Group 2 – Resident)
- "I like the mosque area after Friday prayers." (Group 2 – Mosque attendee)
- "Nowhere really, I'm usually just passing through." (Group 2 – Commuter)

Question: "What would you like to change here?"
Answers:
- "Add more benches, especially in the shade." (Group 2 – Resident)
- "A small playground for the kids." (Group 2 – Parent)
- "Better bike parking; the racks block the shop entrance." (Group 2 – Shopkeeper)
- "Plant more flowers; it's too grey." (Group 2 – Resident)

Question: "How safe do you feel here?"
Answers:
- "It's fine during the day, but not at night." (Group 2 – Resident)
- "Too much noise from the trams. It doesn't feel relaxed." (Group 2 – Resident)
- "Crossings are confusing; drivers don't know who has right of way." (Group 2 – Parent)

Question: "What is missing here?"
Answers:
- "Somewhere to sit and talk with friends." (Group 2 – Youth)
- "Public toilets." (Group 2 – Elder)
- "Shade- there's nowhere to hide from the sun." (Group 2 – Shopper)

Question: "What should stay the same?"
Answers:
- "The market(AH), it's the best thing about the square." (Group 2 – Shopper)
- "The mosque and the shops nearby." (Group 2 – Mosque attendee)

Question: "If you could add one thing here, what would it be?"
Answers:
- "A sports area where kids can play ball." (Group 2 – Youth)
- "Benches you can actually sit on comfortably." (Group 2 – Resident)
- "A garden where you can sit among flowers." (Group 2 – Resident)


Interview 9: Name unknown 21-05

Question: Is there anything on the square that will make you stay longer than planned?
Answer: Just to eat an ice cream because there is an ice cream shop nearby.
Furthermore:
- Too busy because of traffic
-Too little green
- Low sense of security because there is a lot of recruitment for criminal circuits
- A catering coffee shop would be nice, but it doesn't solve the feeling of safety
- Mosque is good and creates a stir
- Still missing a good bakery

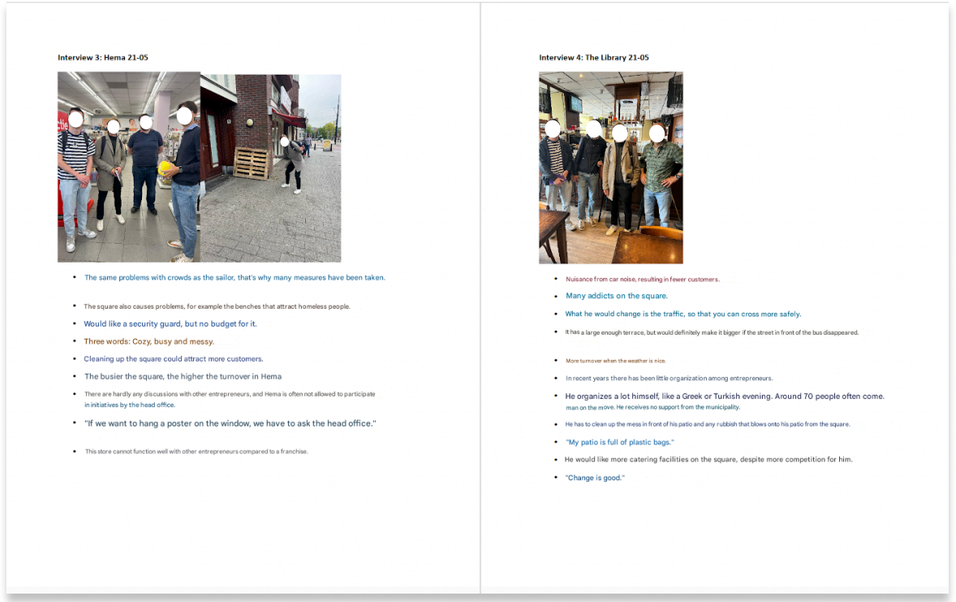
Interview 10: Enforcement 21-05Enforcement interviewed:

Question: What do you like about this square?

Answer: Not much actually.

- Wouldn't want to live there ourselves
- Too busy
- Nice that there is a bit of green, but too little color on the square
- Feels safe, but knows from her role as law enforcement that there is quite a lot of nuisance (problem behavior of people in the neighborhood)

Figure 7.13
Group 2 Interview 9 with dice

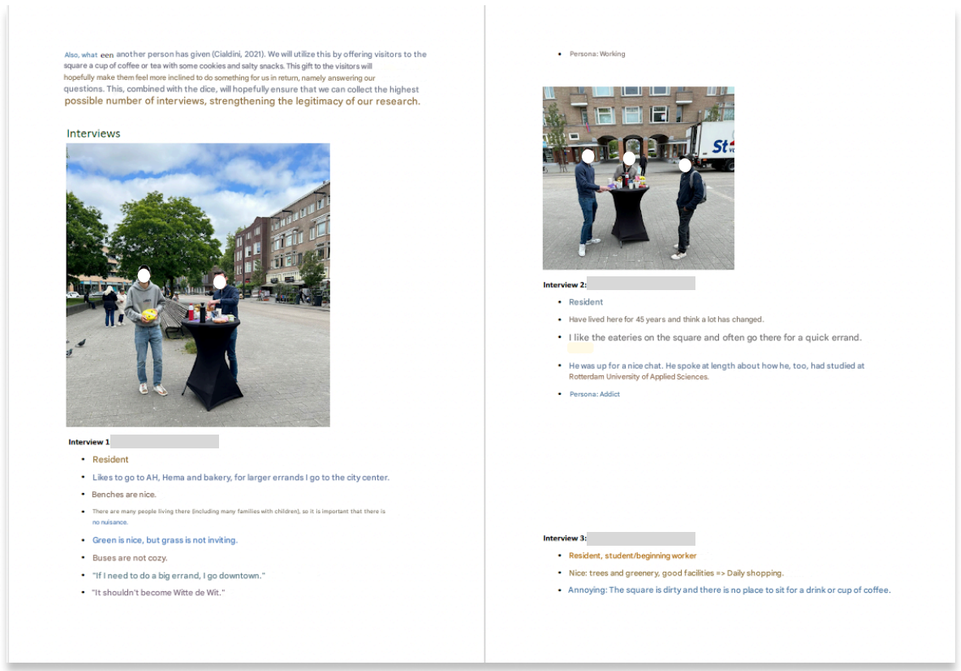

Interview 3: Hema 21-05

- The same problems with crowds as the sailor, that's why many measures have been taken.
- The square also causes problems, for example the benches that attract homeless people.
- Would like a security guard, but no budget for it.
- Three words: Cozy, busy and messy.
- Cleaning up the square could attract more customers.
- The busier the square, the higher the turnover in Hema
- There are hardly any discussions with other entrepreneurs, and Hema is often not allowed to participate in initiatives by the head office.
- "If we want to hang a poster on the window, we have to ask the head office."
- This store cannot function well with other entrepreneurs compared to a franchise.

Interview 4: The Library 21-05

- Nuisance from car noise, resulting in fewer customers.
- Many addicts on the square.
- What he would change is the traffic, so that you can cross more safely.
- It has a large enough terrace, but would definitely make it bigger if the street in front of the bus disappeared.
- More turnover when the weather is nice.
- In recent years there has been little organization among entrepreneurs.
- He organizes a lot himself, like a Greek or Turkish evening. Around 70 people often come.
- man on the move. He receives no support from the municipality.
- He has to clean up the mess in front of his patio and any rubbish that blows onto his patio from the square.
- "My patio is full of plastic bags."
- He would like more catering facilities on the square, despite more competition for him.
- "Change is good."

Figure 7.14
Group 2 Interview 3 and 4 with dice


Also, what een another person has given (Cialdini, 2021). We will utilize this by offering visitors to the square a cup of coffee or tea with some cookies and salty snacks. This gift to the visitors will hopefully make them feel more inclined to do something for us in return, namely answering our questions. This, combined with the dice, will hopefully ensure that we can collect the highest possible number of interviews, strengthening the legitimacy of our research.

Interviews

Interview 1
- Resident
- Likes to go to AH, Hema and bakery, for larger errands I go to the city center.
- Benches are nice.
- There are many people living there (including many families with children), so it is important that there is no nuisance.
- Green is nice, but grass is not inviting.
- Buses are not cozy.
- "If I need to do a big errand, I go downtown."
- "It shouldn't become Witte de Wit."

- Persona: Working

Interview 2:
- Resident
- Have lived here for 45 years and think a lot has changed.
- I like the eateries on the square and often go there for a quick errand.
- He was up for a nice chat. He spoke at length about how he, too, had studied at Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences.
- Persona: Addict

Interview 3:
- Resident, student/beginning worker
- Nice: trees and greenery, good facilities => Daily shopping.
- Annoying: The square is dirty and there is no place to sit for a drink or cup of coffee.

Figure 7.15
Group 2 Interview 1 and 2 with dice

Appendix B: Student Tested Engagement Methods

Visual Talk Boards: Relevant Insights

Purpose & Use
Talk boards were large, visually engaging displays set up in public spaces to prompt conversation and gather community feedback. They often featured maps, images, or thematic prompts, allowing participants to place stickers, write short comments, or mark areas of concern and opportunity. This method makes feedback visible to everyone, encourages interaction between participants, and helps facilitators spark deeper discussion based on what people add to the board. It is especially effective in busy public areas, as it draws attention from passersby and enables contributions from those who may not engage in formal interviews or surveys.

Talk Boards from Group 3

Key
Positive experiences (Green)
Places such as the bakery, supermarket, flower stall, and benches are experienced as pleasant. Visitors appreciate the liveliness, familiar faces, and the opportunity to rest or make contact with others.

Less pleasant places (Pink)
The alleys behind the shops, the square in the evening hours, and areas with nuisance or litter are experienced as less pleasant. People don't necessarily feel unsafe here, but prefer not to linger for long.

Opportunities for improvement (Orange)
Areas for improvement include making use of unused space, creating cozy spots such as terraces, improving traffic safety, and addressing chaos and nuisance.

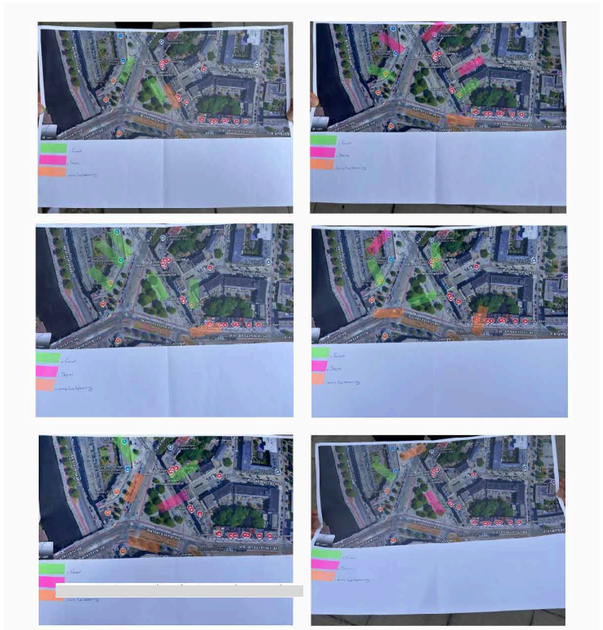


Figure 7.16
Group 3 Talk Boards
Individual Residents Results

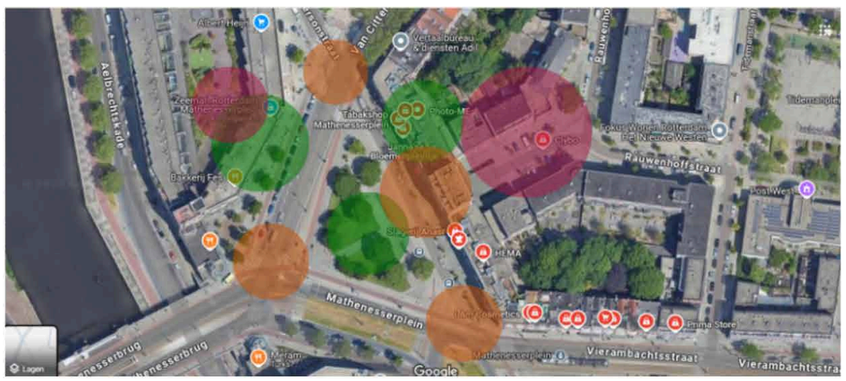


Figure 7.18
Group 3 Talk Boards
Cumulative Residents Results

Bingo Game: Relevant Insights

Purpose & Use
The bingo game was used as a playful, familiar way to engage older residents at the Laurens care home in conversation about Mathenesserplein. By embedding discussion prompts within a casual bingo format, facilitators lowered the barrier to participation, created a fun social atmosphere, and encouraged residents to share experiences and ideas that might not emerge in a formal interview.

Session info:
- Date: 21 May 2025
- Location: Laurens Care Home, common room
- Participants: Elderly residents of Laurens, including regular square visitors and those with limited mobility
- Facilitators: Group 6 students, with printed bingo cards integrating local themes

Quotes:
"People walking by don't just start a conversation." (Group 6 – Elder resident)
"I often feel alone, even when there are people around." (Group 6 – Elder resident)
"The people who pass by aren't really looking to chat." (Group 6 – Elder resident)
"I like going to the square to get coffee and chat together." (Group 6 – Elder resident)
"It would be nice to have more flowers and benches." (Group 6 – Elder resident)

Non-verbatim Insights
- Residents expressed that the square lacks spaces designed for casual social contact, especially for seniors.
- Feelings of loneliness were common, with many wishing for more interaction opportunities in public space.
- Greenery and seating were repeatedly cited as the simplest ways to improve the square's appeal.
- Safety was less about crime and more about comfort- the need for pleasant, welcoming spots to linger.

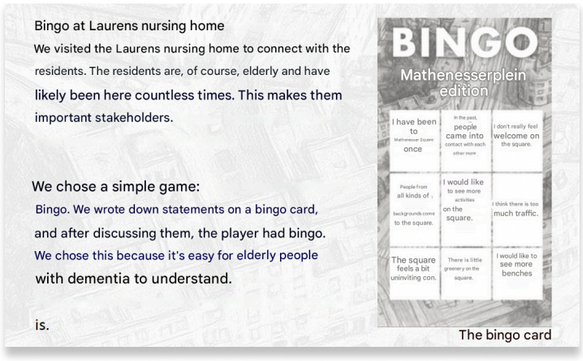


Figure 7.19
Group 6 Bingo Board



Figure 7.20
Group 6 Bingo Index

Appendix B: Student Tested Engagement Methods

Sticky-Note Boards: Relevant Insights

Purpose & Use
The sticky note boards were used to gather resident perspectives quickly and inclusively, allowing participants to write down their ideas, concerns, or wishes in response to specific prompts about Mathenesserplein. This low-barrier format reduced the pressure of speaking in front of others and made space for more candid contributions, while colour-coded notes and themed sections on the boards helped visually organise responses. The method allowed multiple voices to be represented simultaneously, making it easier to spot common themes and diverse needs during and after the session, and proved especially effective for capturing input in a limited time while keeping the process accessible to everyone.

Insight Summary
Using posters with prompts and color-coded sticky notes at Emmaus School allowed residents (mainly parents and children) to share views despite significant language barriers. Visual prompts and multilingual accessibility helped gather input from both younger and older participants. Themes that emerged included:

- Desire for more safe play spaces and child-friendly areas.
- Requests for more greenery and shaded seating.
- Mixed feelings about safety. Some parents expressed feeling unsafe, particularly due to traffic.
- A wish for more things to do for children of different ages.
- Positive responses to opportunities for meeting and socializing in the square.
  The activity succeeded in attracting diverse input in a short time, but required active facilitation to clarify meanings and encourage contributions. (Group 6)

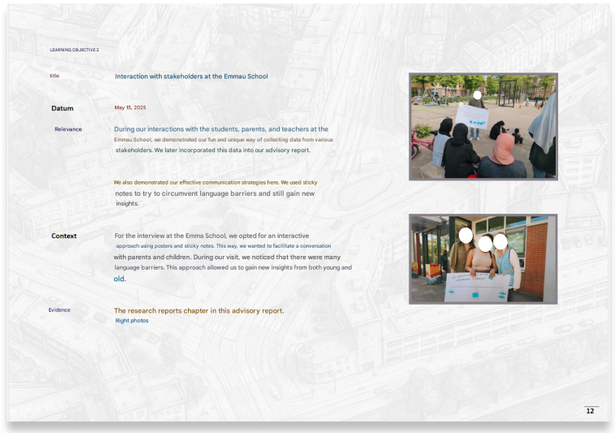


Figure 7.21
Group 6 Sticky Note Board Objectives

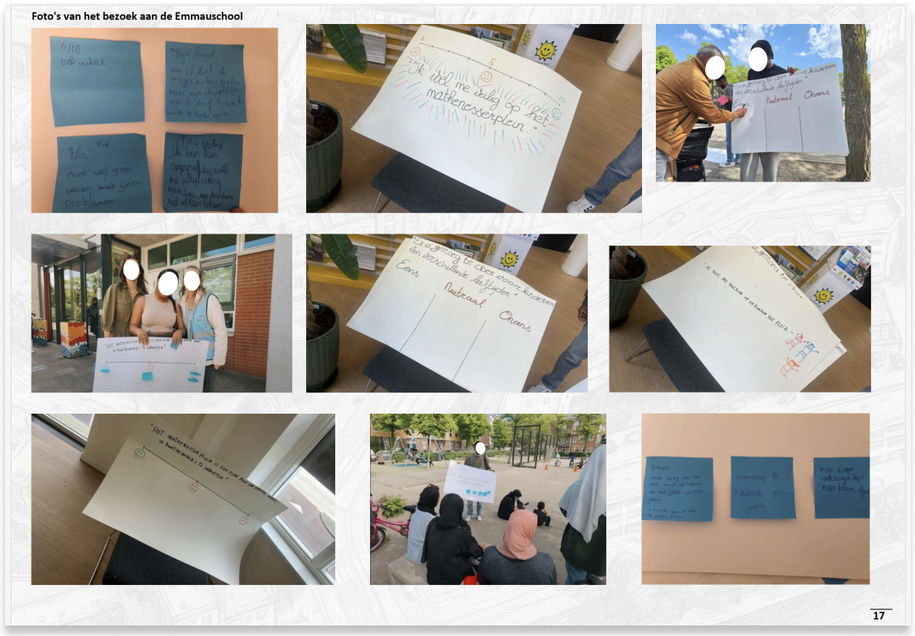


Figure 7.22
Group 6 Sticky Note Board Photos

Insight Summary

Group 1: Methods & Theme Summary

Methods Used
Interviews, Observations, Visit to Moskee, Street intercept conversations, Co-Design Canvas

Themes distilled

- Safety concerns from traffic, unclear crossings, and evening nuisance.
- Lack of child-friendly play zones and accessible seating for elderly.
- Desire for more greenery that is functional, not just decorative (“view-only” green).
- Reduced social cohesion and sense of togetherness compared to the past.
- Need for inviting spaces to sit, socialize, and rest, especially after prayer times.
- Parking stress during mosque prayer times.

Group 2: Methods & Theme Summary

Methods Used
Interviews (residents, entrepreneurs, visitors), Observations, Co-Design Canvas

Themes distilled

- Lawns unattractive and poorly maintained; issues with dog fouling.
- Dangerous road crossings and traffic flow around the square.
- Need for a “green barrier” to reduce noise and visual intrusion from roads.
- Desire for accessible hospitality and social spaces to increase dwell time.
- Preference for improvements that match neighborhood identity.

Group 3: Methods & Theme Summary

Methods Used
Interviews, Observations, Visuele praatplaat (talk board), Co-Design Canvas

Themes distilled

- Five main recurring themes: safety & nuisance; traffic & mobility; social interaction & experience; cooperation & organizational capacity; space use & design.
- Lack of active shopkeepers’ association hinders collaboration.
- Low participation rates in municipal initiatives; need for more transparency and shared ownership.

Group 4: Methods & Theme Summary

Methods Used
Interviews, Observations, Visual preference cards, Co-Design Canvas

Themes distilled

- Strong majority support for greening the square.
- Low trust in municipality due to negative experiences with past participation processes.
- Stakeholders feel unheard; perception that feedback isn’t acted upon.
- Safety concerns in evenings; desire for shaded seating and improved traffic safety.
- Language barriers and lack of early, accessible communication limit participation.

Group 6: Methods & Theme Summary

Methods Used
Interviews, Observations, Bingo with Laurens elderly residents, Sticky Note Boards with Emmaus parents/children, Co-Design Canvas

Themes distilled

- Safety concerns from traffic, over-crowding, and unclear layout.
- Shortage of greenery and seating.
- Weak connections between different user groups of the square.
- Low trust in participation processes, amplified by language barriers and lack of visible results.
- Social as well as practical needs (recognition, meeting opportunities).
- Elderly residents express loneliness and lack of informal social contact points.

Appendix C: Prioritisation Criteria

This version of the proposal matrix was completed in collaboration with Mustapha, as a governmental stakeholder, with expertise in municipal processes, zoning regulations, and local governance. The ratings and reasoning were informed by his knowledge of legal and logistical requirements, as well as insights from our field research and student-led activities. This combined perspective ensured that the assessment reflects both community input and the practical realities of implementation.

Table 7.1
Prioritisation Criteria Assessment
9 Main Proposals

proposal	feasibility	reason	complexity	reason	impact	reason	equity	reason	ease (60/40)	impact (60/40)
median	1	-Already approved by the municipality -No underground pipe conflicts -Similar installations have been successfully implemented in other areas. -Funding is earmarked -Permissions granted	3	-Moderate ongoing upkeep (plant care, cleaning) -Closing road during construction	2.5	-Visually enhances the square -Delivers greenery residents asked for -Improving atmosphere and morale. -Benefits are primarily aesthetic -Does not significantly alter access, behaviour, or address deeper social/economic needs.	4	-Could be innaccesible from nursing home side -Is blocked by cars, so can not be enjoyed in close proximity	1.8	3.1
bike racks	1	- Location already agreed upon -Surrounding shop owners in support -Only equires a single municipal request	2	-Simple one-day installation -Minimal upkeep -Straightforward build	3.5	-Moderately improves the square by reducing chaos and creating a calmer environment -Supports shop owners' needs -Potential to increase socialization space.	4	-Accessible to all who cycle -Benefits extend to non-cyclists through a more relaxed public space.	1.4	3.7
bus reroute	5	-Zoning and bus route designations are highly fixed, making approvals challenging. -Major construction required to convert the road. -Significant regulatory hurdles before work could begin.	5	-Would require shutting down and rerouting buses, delivery trucks, trams, and cars. -Extended construction period with heavy disruption to the square's circulation. -High level of stakeholder coordination across multiple agencies.	5	-Extremely high, could transform the square into a pedestrian-focused, calm, and social space. -Enables markets, extended café seating, more green areas, and safer crossings. -Addresses one of the most common and strongly expressed resident desires.	5	-Benefits all users equally, regardless of age, mobility, or activity type. -Would increase inclusivity and encourage diverse groups to spend more time in the square.	5	5
lawn access	4	-Large physical area to alter; significant construction required. -Likely need to re-route tram, bus, or car traffic during works. -No checks yet for underground conflicts (pipes, cables, soil conditions), high risk of issues.	4	-Extended construction timeline. -Coordination with multiple transport and municipal stakeholders. -Potential for major disruption to surrounding activity during build.	4	-High potential use as green public space for relaxation and nature connection -Strong alignment with resident requests for more accessible green areas. -Could transform daily use and perception of the square.	5	-Designed for full accessibility to all residents and visitors. -Benefits are not limited by language, age, or specific activities.	4	4.4
bench	1.5	-Simple implementation, could involve adding more benches, a table, or games. -Multiple low-cost options available depending on design choice. -No major permissions or infrastructure changes required.	2	-Light upkeep needed (cleaning, trash management). -If modular/movable elements are used, need occasional repositioning and monitoring. -Minimal disruption during installation.	3.5	-Would enhance existing socialization and potentially attract broader groups, including children. -Builds on an already active spot to create more opportunities for casual interaction.	3.5	-Generally accessible to most users, but nursing home residents still face access barriers to the square. -Some groups may still find the location difficult to reach or use regularly.	1.7	3.5
crossing	4	-Significant traffic and tram route changes required. -Zoning alterations likely needed. -High approval barriers before work can begin.	4.5	-Expensive infrastructure project. -Requires coordination across multiple municipal and transport stakeholders. -Long construction timeline with potential disruption to surrounding circulation.	5	-Very high for the affected group, improves safety, access, and quality of life for nursing home residents. -Enables greater social connection and reduces isolation by making the square more accessible to them.	3	-Benefits primarily the nursing home community and nearby residents. -Improves accessibility equity for a group currently at a disadvantage, but has limited direct benefit for others.	4.2	4.2
market	2	-No physical or structural changes required. -Requires permits and event coordination, but similar markets have been successfully run elsewhere in the city. -Established contacts and processes already exist for organising such events.	2	-Ongoing coordination needed if run regularly (e.g., monthly). -Scheduling, vendor management, and setup/takedown logistics required. Moderate effort, but well within known municipal/event capacity.	4.5	-Draws people to the area, boosts local economy -Promotes health through access to fresh goods -Encourages social interaction. -Strong resident interest expressed during interviews.	5	-Open to everyone, located in a public space -Increases access to goods and community events for all demographics.	2	4.7
chronicle	1	-Easy to implement -Can be created digitally and printed locally. -Requires only basic design, printing, and distribution resources already available.	3	-Ongoing effort for content gathering, translation, design, printing, and distribution. -Small team will need to coordinate feedback collection and regular updates.	4	-Strengthens neighbourhood pride, improves communication, and delivers the feedback loop residents requested. -Provides resources, event updates, and visibility for local initiatives.	4.5	-Intentionally designed to reach all groups through multiple formats: multilingual print, simple language, audio, visual focus. -Distributed via high-access points (shops, mosque, nursing home, public areas) to minimise exclusion.	1.8	4.2
insta	1	V-ery easy to set up, requires only creating an account and basic content strategy. -Minimal startup resources needed.	2	-Ongoing content creation, posting, and moderation required. -Less time-intensive than the Chronicle, but still needs consistent management to stay relevant	3.5	-Serves as a go-to source for updates, announcements, and visual storytelling. -Supports transparency and engagement for digitally active residents.	3.5	-Lower than Chronicle, benefits primarily those with internet access and social media familiarity. -Digital-only format risks excluding older residents, low-tech users, or those without smartphones.	1.4	3.5

Appendix D: Refined Engagement Insights

Parent Card Session: "What / Where / How"

(Quotes originally in Dutch; translated to English)

Quotes

- "During the day, you also see those drunk people." (several participants agreed this was a recurring issue)
- "When they said they were going to fix it up, it was so nice. Now they're tackling it again."
- "In the beginning it was really neat, but now I wouldn't sit there with my children anymore."
- "It's because of the drunk people who come there."
- "Oh, on those benches... yes, especially near Heemraadsplein."
- "It has always been like that at Heemraadspark."
- "That little house there always smells bad."
- "They have swings, a slide, merry-go-rounds, and a football table there."
- "It used to be closed with a fence, it felt safer then."
- "There are a lot of broken tiles; maybe they should fix those."
- "The flower boxes are nice but get damaged quickly."
- "There's nowhere comfortable for parents to sit while watching the children."
- "They should have more shade for summer."
- "The rubbish bins are too far away, so people leave trash on the ground."
- "Sometimes groups hang out there and make a mess. It doesn't feel safe."
- "Shops nearby are friendly, but the street itself doesn't feel inviting for families."

Locations & Notes

- Heemraadsplein / Heemraadspark (figure xx) – Cited multiple times as a nearby green/play space, but with ongoing issues (loitering, safety).
- Little House (small park structure) – Mentioned for unpleasant smell.
- Playground near the square – Equipped with swings, slide, football table; positive but in need of better maintenance.
- Benches by the square (figure xx) – Used for sitting, but often occupied by drunk individuals.
- Curb around grass – Currently difficult for children to access; seen as a barrier to play.
- Waste bins near Albert Heijn – Appreciated for accessibility but disliked in current location; preference to relocate near Albert Heijn alongside bike storage.
- Mathenesserplein – Strong ties to Albert Heijn and mosque; desire for more shops and community-oriented amenities such as a fabric market.
- Bus stop removal – Discussed as an opportunity to repurpose space for children's play, coffee seating, or mosque-related functions.
- Bench placement at mosque – Desire for additional benches, but with consideration for privacy and post-prayer gatherings.

Themes

1. Safety Concerns Parents repeatedly mentioned drunk individuals, loitering groups, and damaged infrastructure (e.g., broken tiles, vandalised flower boxes) as reasons for avoiding certain areas. This affects perceptions of whether the space is suitable for children. Some parents felt benches near the mosque left them feeling exposed after prayer, suggesting seating design and placement should consider privacy and comfort.
2. Maintenance & Cleanliness
   Overflowing bins, unpleasant smells near certain facilities, and general upkeep were seen as ongoing issues. Many participants linked cleanliness directly to how safe and welcoming the space feels.
3. Play Facilities & Comfort
   The playground equipment was appreciated, but parents wanted more seating and shade for themselves, and safer surfacing for children. Requests included small, simple play areas on the square, comfortable benches with backrests, and longer seating to accommodate groups.
4. Social Use of Space
   Some parents remembered past periods when the area felt livelier and better maintained. They expressed a desire for more community activities and family-friendly events to bring people together.
5. Perception of Change Over Time
   A contrast emerged between nostalgia for a "neat, safe" past and frustration with current neglect, suggesting that visible improvements could quickly rebuild trust and use.
6. Centrality of Mosque and Cultural Hubs
   The mosque was repeatedly referenced as a focal point for the community, influencing preferences for public space use. Proposals tied to the mosque, ie. more space around it, improved seating, relocation of waste and bike storage, were seen as benefiting not only mosque attendees but other community groups.



Figure 7.23
Anger, unsafe, overstimulated: Heemraadsingel

Engagement Observations

- Conversation flowed easily when parents spoke about personal safety and children's use of space- this triggered detailed stories and agreement across the group.
- Discussions about infrastructure (benches, shade, bins) generated practical suggestions without much disagreement.
- Nostalgic comparisons to "how it used to be" drew visible emotion and longer turns from multiple participants.
- A few moments of laughter occurred when describing certain "typical" issues (e.g., broken flower boxes), showing a shared understanding of recurring problems.
- Participants occasionally interrupted each other to agree or add details, suggesting strong consensus on key points.
- The discussion revealed a strong cultural and spatial connection to the mosque, shaping many practical suggestions. Even lighthearted comments (e.g., separate women's bench) reflected genuine needs for comfortable, culturally appropriate gathering spaces.



Figure xx:
Excluded: Mathenesserplein + the Bench



Figure 7.24
Frustrated, Nervous: Albert Heijn



Figure 7.25
Satisfied, Praying: Moskee Annasr



Figure 7.26
Enthusiastic: Action, Zeeman, Hema (Shopping)

Note:
This material is still under analysis. The focus of including it here is to demonstrate the value of the What / Where / How card tool in generating rich qualitative input from parents. The insights gathered will continue to be processed and may be incorporated into future issues of the Community Chronicle. At this stage, the emphasis is on the method's ability to spark conversation and reveal lived experiences, rather than on final conclusions.

Appendix D: Refined Engagement Insights

Flower Median Vote Session

This session was designed not only to identify residents' preferred planting option for the proposed median but also to test a light-touch engagement method that could draw people in and open broader conversations about the square. While the vote itself provided clear direction for planting, its greater value was in creating a relaxed, approachable moment for residents to share observations, concerns, and ideas about the area.

Vote Results

Flower Mix	Votes
Bold Buzz	4
Cool, Calm Meadow	19
Wild Harmony	2
Sunlight Stroll	9

Table 7.2
Map 1: Cleanliness Concerns

Additional Insights from Resident Map Annotations

1. Cleanliness Concerns (figure xx) – One map circled an area known for heavy litter, noting a need for more frequent cleaning or waste facilities.
2. Event & Activity Space (figure xx) – Residents suggested using part of the square for festivals, community activities, and children's play to make the area more social and fun.
3. Transport Access (figure xx) – A resident noted that while they often come for the bus and Albert Heijn, the bus stop feels too far from their preferred location.
4. Emotional Impact of Planting (figure xx) – A participant linked lavender planting to improving the area's atmosphere, saying it could "calm the people" in what they felt was currently a tense environment.
5. Teen Engagement (figure xx) – A group of teenage boys initially dismissed the vote, but after conversation about the role of green space, they engaged enthusiastically. They shifted from prioritizing cars to suggesting more greenery and grassed areas, showing that even skeptical participants can be drawn into constructive discussion with the right prompts.

Engagement Observations

- The voting activity served as both a visual draw and a conversation starter, prompting participants to share wider concerns and ideas beyond the flower choice.
- Map annotations revealed that residents naturally connected planting decisions to broader issues such as cleanliness, social activity, and safety.
- Informal dialogue, especially with younger participants, proved effective in shifting perspectives toward valuing green space.
- The session confirmed the value of low-barrier, hands-on tools for sparking multi-generational engagement in public space planning.



Figure 7.27
Map 1: Cleanliness Concerns



Figure 7.28
Map 2: Social Desires

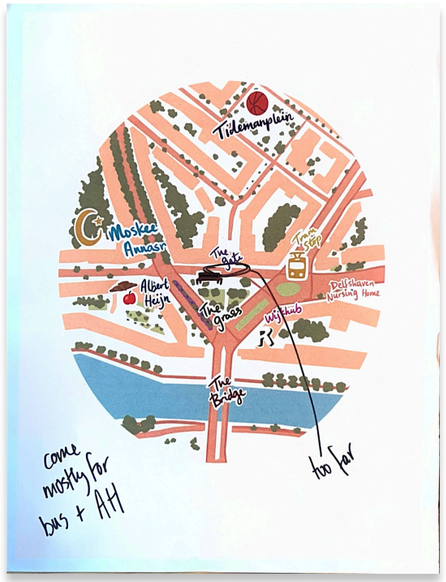


Figure 7.29
Map 3: Transport Concerns



Figure 7.30
Map 4: Desire for Calm

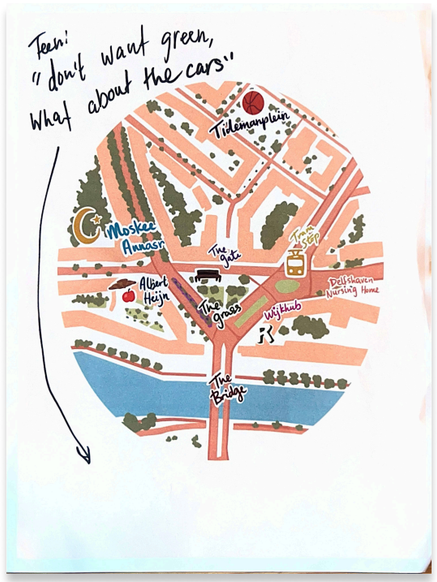


Figure 7.31
Map 5: Teen Engagement

Note:
This activity and the insights gathered are still under analysis. Beyond selecting a preferred flower type, the session was an early opportunity to build trust, inform residents about upcoming changes, and invite their perspectives. Future phases will compare this method's effectiveness with other planned tools, such as the Community Chronicle and an Instagram channel, to see how repeated, transparent engagement moments contribute to trust-building. Because trust develops over time and is difficult to measure in the short term, these interactions will need to be revisited and assessed across multiple rounds.

Personal Project Brief – IDE Master Graduation Project

Name student Kaitlyn Smith **Student number** 6,024,009

PROJECT TITLE, INTRODUCTION, PROBLEM DEFINITION and ASSIGNMENT

Complete all fields, keep information clear, specific and concise

Project title The People's Square: Amplifying Unheard Voices in Mathenesserplein

Please state the title of your graduation project (above). Keep the title compact and simple. Do not use abbreviations. The remainder of this document allows you to define and clarify your graduation project.

Introduction

Describe the context of your project here; What is the domain in which your project takes place? Who are the main stakeholders and what interests are at stake? Describe the opportunities (and limitations) in this domain to better serve the stakeholder interests. (max 250 words)

There is an ongoing iniative to transform Mathenesserplein into a more community-focused space. This iniative is driven by passionate stakeholders such as Mustapha Akchich and Rosemarie van Ham, who have been advocating for change in the neighborhood. Without their persistance, the Gemeente Rotterdam would likely not sustain this effort on their own, and the community would not have the resources to make the changes they want to see. While the municipality has currently allocated 8 Million Euros to the project, it is the commitment of these local advocates that keeps the momentum going.

Mathenesserplein is a central public space, with a green area at it's core, surrounded by shops and major transportation routes (cars, buses, trams) constantly passing through. While there are ongoing conversations about improving the area, participation tends to be skewed more towards residents who have the time, money and resources to engage in these discussions. Meanwhile, many affected residents, particularly lower-income or marginalized groups are not heard.

My project focuses on amplifying these underheard voices and creating a process that gives more residents a meaningful role in shaping their environment. A key opportunity in this process is the involvement of 24 students from Hogeschool Rotterdam, who will be conducting stakeholder research and participatory design activities for 4 weeks starting April 14th. Their work, combined with my own research anf collaboration with local actors, will be crucial in identifying community needs and ensuring the transformation of Mathenesserplein truly reflects those who use it everyday.

Some clear limitations exist in this process. One is the language barrier, as many residents are more comfortable speaking Dutch, and I am not fluent. However, the Hogeschool students can bridge this gap by conducting participatory reserach in Dutch while I oversee the process. Another challenge is potential resistance to change, which is common in urban transformation projects. Additionally, working within municipal regulations presents its own constraints, but I am fortunate to have strong contacts within the Gemeente who can help me navigate the rules.

➔ *space available for images / figures on next page*

introduction (continued): space for images



image / figure 1 Mathenesserplein (above)



image / figure 2 Potential intersection focus

Personal Project Brief – IDE Master Graduation Project

Problem Definition

What problem do you want to solve in the context described in the introduction, and within the available time frame of 100 working days? (= Master Graduation Project of 30 EC). What opportunities do you see to create added value for the described stakeholders? Substantiate your choice.
(max 200 words)

The project is part of a much larger urban transformation effort, with an estimated completion time of 10 years. There are also many stakeholders and effected groups, each with different priorities and levels of influence. In large scale urban transformations like this one, participation from underrepresented residents often lags behind. While Mathenesserplein's redevelopment is planned over the next decade, decision making is primarily influenced by those who have time, money and resources to engage in this process. Meanwhile, many lower-income and marginalized residents are excluded, despite being directly impacted by the changes.

This lack of representation creates a gap between who shapes the neighborhood and who lives in it. My focus is on identifying the barriers that prevent engagement from underheard residents and working towards a process that amplifies their voices. Through research and participatory methods, I will pinpoint a specific underrepresented group and develop ways to increase their confidence in contributing to urban decision making.

My role in thie project is primarily that of a design researcher, using participatory and co-design methods to ensure that community input is not only gathered but meaningfully integrated. The outcome will be a process framework that can serve as an example for other urban projects to eleveate resident-lead transformation in public spaces.

Assignment

This is the most important part of the project brief because it will give a clear direction of what you are heading for. Formulate an assignment to yourself regarding what you expect to deliver as result at the end of your project. (1 sentence) As you graduate as an industrial design engineer, your assignment will start with a verb (Design/Investigate/Validate/Create), and you may use the green text format:

Design a system that enables underheard residents to meaningfully participate in urban transformation, ensuring their contributions shape neighborhood changes and decision-making processes.

Then explain your project approach to carrying out your graduation project and what research and design methods you plan to use to generate your design solution (max 150 words)

This project takes a participatory approach to ensure Mathenesserplein's transformation reflects the needs of underheard residents. Using design research and co-design methods, I will explore how to amplify marginalized voices and integrate resident-led change into urban development.
The project begins with observational and secondary research to understand Mathenesserplein's history, behavior, and stakeholder dynamics. I will also analyze other urban contexts where participatory methods have successfully increased community involvement.
In the first 4 weeks, I will develop a research plan and assignment briefs for Hogeschool Rotterdam students. Their 4 week engagement starting April 14th) will focus on identifying needs of underheard groups through participatory methods.
The final phase will assess the effectiveness of these methods based on engagement levels, resident confidence in contributing, and integration of their input into the transformation process. Findings will inform a replicable framework and design recommendations.

Project planning and key moments

*To make visible how you plan to spend your time, you must make a planning for the full project. You are advised to use a Gantt chart format to show the different phases of your project, deliverables you have in mind, meetings and in-between deadlines. Keep in mind that all activities should fit within the given run time of 100 working days. Your planning should include a **kick-off meeting**, **mid-term evaluation meeting**, **green light meeting** and **graduation ceremony**. Please indicate periods of part-time activities and/or periods of not spending time on your graduation project, if any (for instance because of holidays or parallel course activities).*

Make sure to attach the full plan to this project brief.
The four key moment dates must be filled in below

Kick off meeting	7 Mar 2025
Mid-term evaluation	12 May 2025
Green light meeting	7 Jul 2025
Graduation ceremony	31 Aug 2025

In exceptional cases (part of) the Graduation Project may need to be scheduled part-time. Indicate here if such applies to your project

Part of project scheduled part-time	
For how many project weeks	
Number of project days per week	

Comments:

Motivation and personal ambitions

Explain why you wish to start this project, what competencies you want to prove or develop (e.g. competencies acquired in your MSc programme, electives, extra-curricular activities or other).

Optionally, describe whether you have some personal learning ambitions which you explicitly want to address in this project, on top of the learning objectives of the Graduation Project itself. You might think of e.g. acquiring in depth knowledge on a specific subject, broadening your competencies or experimenting with a specific tool or methodology. Personal learning ambitions are limited to a maximum number of five.
(200 words max)

I chose this project because I care about how and deeply believe in public spaces shaping everyday life. A well-designed space can bring people together and improve quality of life and mental well-being. Mathenesserplein has great potential to be that kind of community space, but it is not yet.

The people who influence urban change are those with the time, money, and energy to speak uo. But, what about those who don't? This project is about reaching those voices, understanding their needs and visions, and giving them a role in shaping their neighborhood.

I also see this as a chance to grow. I want to strengthen my skills in participatory design, urban research, and working within diverse communities. This prokect challenges me to bridge design, policy, and lived experience.