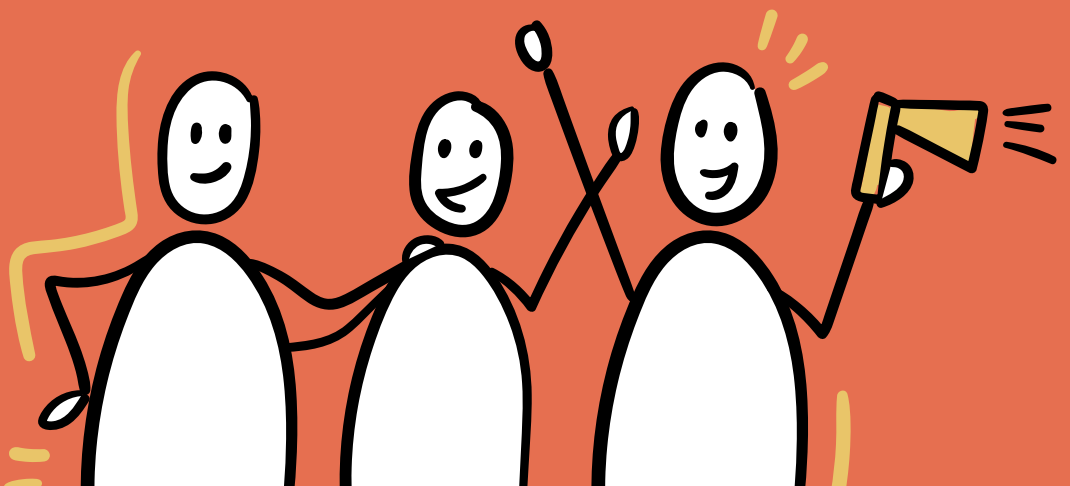


ACTIEF HOOGVLIET: DISCOVER OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD.

Exploring how a digital tool can support active citizens in Hoogvliet with their contributions to informal networks.

Master thesis
Elja Bos



Actief Hoogvliet: Discover opportunities for active participation in the neighbourhood.

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Thesis

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Preface

Dear reader,

This thesis marks the end of my graduation project for the Master's Design for Interaction, and my time as a design student in Delft at the faculty of Industrial Design Engineering.

After investing much time, effort and thought into this project, it feels strange to declare it is now 'finished'. In fact, I feel as though I could spend another year of time designing with and for the neighbourhood of Hoogvliet. However, I believe that this is a common thought that designers and researchers have when they are deeply immersed in a project, so I too had to draw a line and finalise my graduation project.

For this project, I specifically explored how a digital tool could support the active citizens of Hoogvliet in their contributions to informal networks. Naturally, this meant many visits to this neighbourhood and conversations with its residents. Before this project, I had no perception of Hoogvliet and I had never visited it. If you ask residents of Rotterdam about Hoogvliet, you often hear preconceived assumptions regarding its reputation: impoverished buildings, its proximity to the Shell Energy Park and issues with drug dealers and crime. However, I did not take note of these assumptions and simply went there to get to know the neighbourhood myself. As a result, I rather gained many positive insights about this neighbourhood and its residents. During my project, I developed a strong admiration and respect for the active citizens of Hoogvliet, who all work hard, often voluntarily, to ensure the liveability of their neighbourhood and genuinely care for the well-being of their communities. I believe that this is a rather unique quality of Hoogvliet that should rather define its image.

Concluding my thesis, I would therefore first like to thank all the kind residents and local professionals of Hoogvliet whom I approached and engaged with throughout this project. Conducting research in their neighbourhood would not have been possible without their willingness to share direct insights from their own experiences and personal stories, which made me feel truly welcome in the neighbourhood.

Secondly, I would like to thank my supervisors, Stella and Virginia, for guiding me through my project. Your encouraging words during sometimes more difficult meetings definitely helped me to regain focus and confidence in my project, while your critical feedback also kept me on my toes and allowed me to improve and reflect on my project when needed.

Thirdly, I would like to thank the Veldacademie for giving me the opportunity to work on a project that allowed me to explore designing for residents as users, while maintaining my human centred approach as a DFI student. Thank you, Otto, for our inspiring conversations and check-ins, which further sparked my critical thinking and shaped my design ideas.

Fourthly, I want to thank all my friends and family for their continuous support throughout this project, helping me keep my head up. Heleen, our study sessions, your always supportive words and genuine interest in my project really got me through. Roos and An, thank you for being there at home to listen to my frustrations, which I often felt during this project. Mom and dad, thank you for always providing me with a safe space to go to. Your home brought me comfort, a place to study and, perhaps most importantly, mom's cooking to enjoy and to help me regain some energy.

Finally, I would like to thank Mees for his support, believing in me and my abilities more than I probably did myself. Your constant reassurance and hugs made this process much more bearable.

I hereby proudly present to you my final report, I hope you enjoy reading it.

Best,
Elja

Executive summary

Informal neighbourhood networks play a significant role in enhancing the well-being of citizens. These informal networks consist of active citizens and local organisations collaborating to organise initiatives and activities that improve the liveability of their neighbourhoods. Such activities are particularly important in neighbourhoods with vulnerable social groups, such as the elderly or those with a low socio-economic status, as these groups often rely more on local connections for social engagement and support. Strengthening these informal networks can therefore significantly improve the resilience and quality of life for residents.

The goal of this project was to examine how a digital tool could support citizens who actively contribute to informal networks, focusing on the neighbourhood Hoogvliet of Rotterdam as a case study.

The research began with a literature review identifying drivers and barriers for active participation in informal networks, forming a theoretical framework that guided the contextual research on resident's experiences in Hoogvliet.

This contextual research revealed how the interviewed active citizens of Hoogvliet are generally experienced initiative takers, who have built substantial local social capital and capacity to self-organise effectively. Consequently, they face few significant barriers that a digital intervention might address.

A rather interesting finding was that these experienced initiative takers are currently limited in their capacity to expand their reach and involve more citizens, indicating a high demand for such activities. This demand stems from Hoogvliet's social challenges and a lack of commercial activities nearby.

Based on these findings, the project shifted its design focus to supporting citizens interested in becoming active but lacking the social capital and capacity, which experienced initiative-takers have already developed. The contextual research highlighted areas where support for these interested, but inexperienced residents in Hoogvliet could be improved. These challenges informed the creation of a design vision, which was used to start the design phase.

Following two design iterations - resulting from evaluations with stakeholders, in which I implemented methods of participatory design and research through design - the project resulted in a final design: the platform Actief Hoogvliet.

This platform is designed to help interested residents explore opportunities for contributing to Hoogvliet's informal networks. Residents can learn about existing initiatives and their opportunities to help, get motivated by success stories and explore tools for realising their own ideas.

For active residents, the platform is a space to showcase their established initiatives, get recognition for their contributions and expertise, and include help requests to invite residents beyond existing networks to join and help.

The thesis concludes that while a digital tool like Actief Hoogvliet provides opportunities for engaging and supporting new residents, its potential to directly support experienced active citizens in their informal networks may be limited. Existing local networks in Hoogvliet are deeply embedded in established communication channels, with strong values of autonomy and ownership, which may limit the lasting impact of a new digital tool.

Nonetheless, Actief Hoogvliet provides a valuable entry point for interested residents, helping to build capacity and confidence for active citizenship in the community.

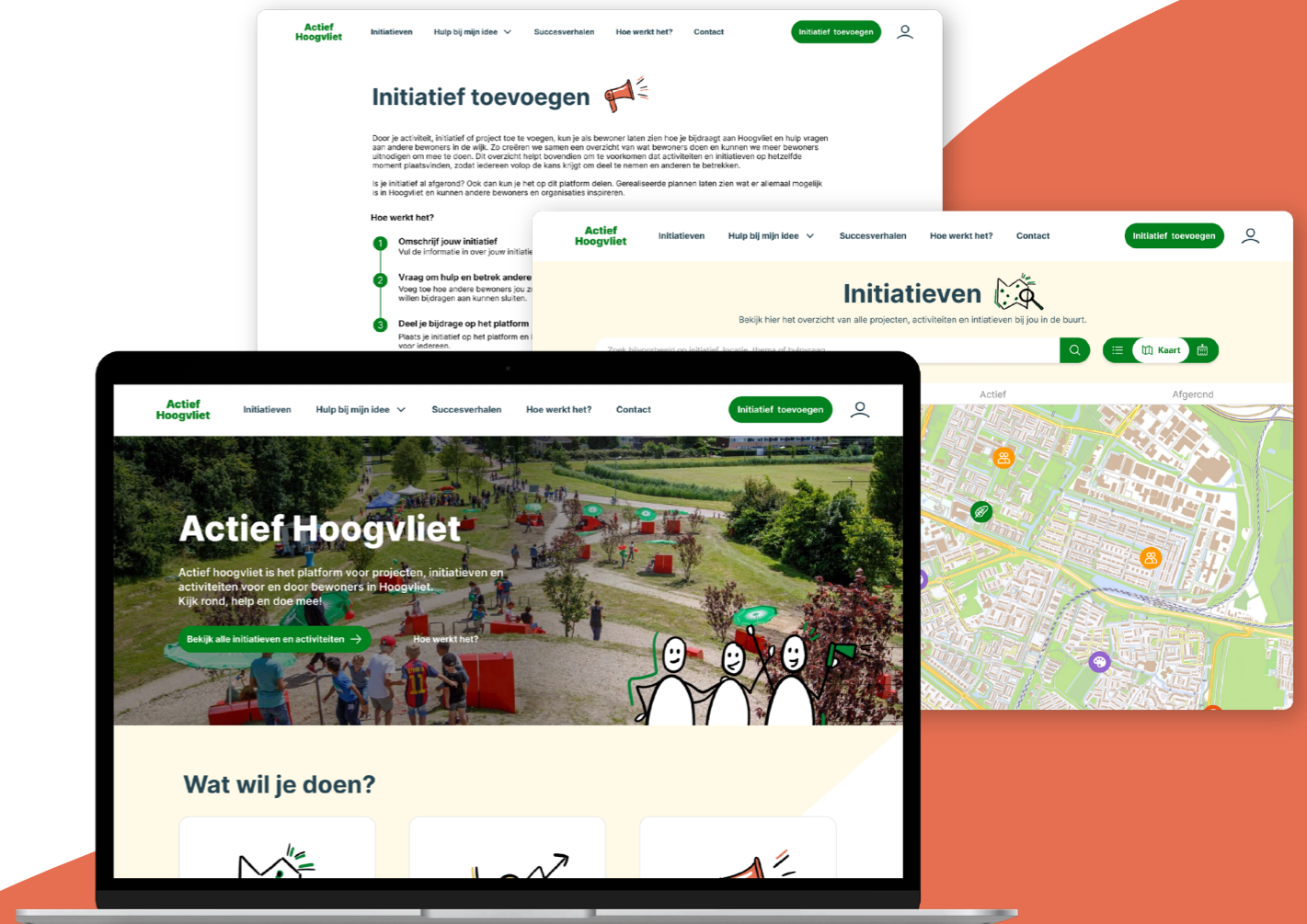
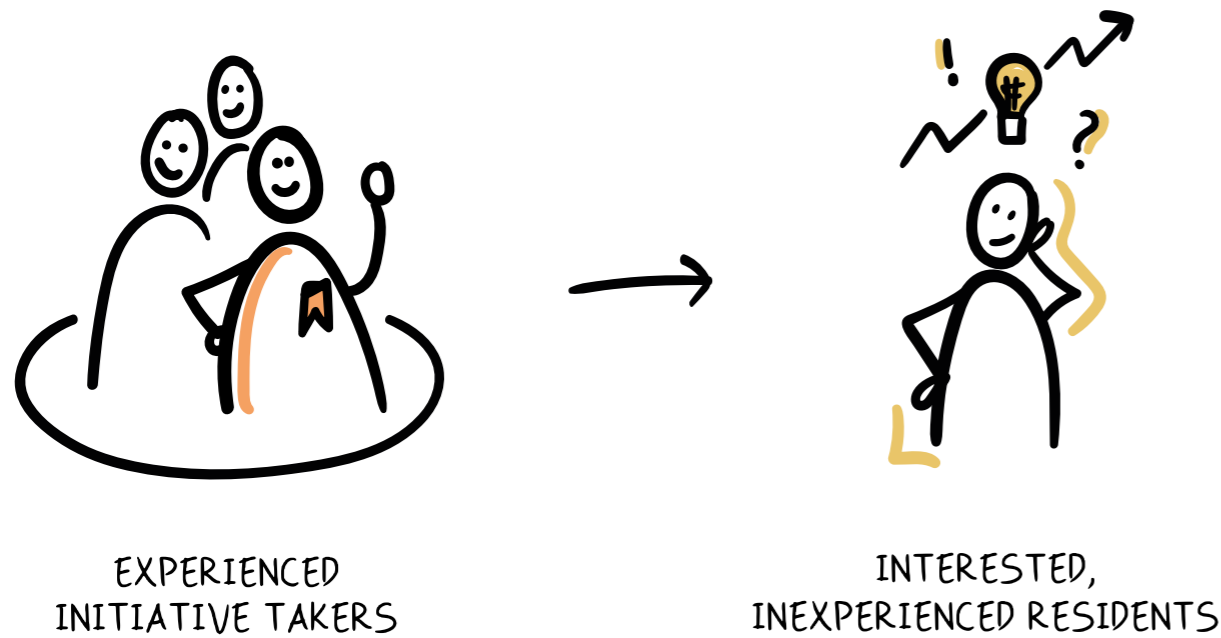


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1

PROJECT INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the topic of this master's graduation. It covers an introduction to the context, an introduction to the collaboration with the Veldacademie, the initial assignment of the project and the research questions that guided the project. Finally, it concludes with the methodology that was used to approach the project.

- 1.1. Project context
- 1.2. collaboration with the Veldacademie
- 1.3. Initial assignment
- 1.4. Research questions
- 1.5. Project approach

1.1. Project context

Informal neighbourhood networks play a crucial role in enhancing the well-being of citizens (Movisie, 2020). These informal networks consist of local actors such as active citizens and local organisations who collaborate to self-organise local activities and initiatives that improve the liveability of their neighbourhoods.

Often initiated and sustained by volunteers, these informal networks address local needs within their neighbourhoods and build trust and cohesion. They provide spaces for residents to meet, connect and engage in meaningful ways. One of the key strengths of these informal neighbourhood networks is their ability to reach vulnerable populations, particularly where formal organisations often fall short. In contrast to professionals operating within formal systems, volunteers and active citizens within informal networks are able to form stronger, more trusted relationships, even friendships with residents. This is a quality that professionals are often restricted from due to their professional roles (De Gast en Hetem, 2018).

The accessible nature of local initiatives creates safe spaces for citizens to share their needs with people who they trust and identify with, offering each other a sympathetic ear. As citizens connect and engage in such informal conversations, they casually learn about each other's needs (Putnam, 2000). This helps in the early detection and resolution of issues, potentially preventing the need for formal care or serving as a bridge to professional support systems. In this way, these informal networks not only complement formal care systems but can also alleviate the

burden on them. This is especially important considering demographic challenges, such as an ageing population, where the demand for care and support is likely to exceed the capacity of formal systems. Informal networks therefore act as a safety net when institutional resources are either insufficient or unavailable.

In addition, local initiatives that engage and connect residents also help communities to become more self-sufficient and resilient. This is particularly important in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, where vulnerable social groups, such as those with low socio-economic status, are often more reliant on local contacts for social and practical support (Hoogerbrugge & Burger, 2018). Research indicates that active citizenship is a key factor in explaining why some disadvantaged communities demonstrate greater resilience than others (Rippon et al., 2020). When citizens actively contribute to strong informal networks, they not only improve individual well-being of residents but also help to build the community's collective capacity to adapt to challenges in the neighbourhood (Fransen et al., 2022).

Informal networks, therefore, function as both a social safety net and a mechanism for building long-term resilience, enabling communities to better withstand unforeseen challenges. Strengthening these informal networks and supporting the local actors that drive them, can therefore significantly improve the quality of life of residents and improve their collective resilience.

1.2. Collaboration with the Veldacademie

This graduation project is a collaboration with the Veldacademie, providing me with an initial context and assignment for this thesis. The Veldacademie is a research institute based in Rotterdam that focuses on socio-spatial neighbourhood development. The Veldacademie consists of a diverse team of urban researchers from various disciplines. They work closely together with external researchers and educational institutions like the TU delft. These collaborations with students offer fresh perspectives and provides students with opportunities for contributing to the future development of the city of Rotterdam.

Their research approach is predominantly practice oriented. They use action research and research by design methodologies to test and refine solutions in the living environments of citizens. These approaches can deliver in-depth outcomes and surprising insights and solutions which may have not been initially anticipated. As part of the municipality of Rotterdam within the cluster Social Development, the Veldacademie serves as a crucial link between the municipality and a broad range of researchers, students, professionals and citizens. This integration facilitates comprehensive research on urban issues, aimed at the continuous development of Rotterdam and its neighbourhoods.



Figure 1: The Veldacademie's location and its logo (Airrotterdam, 2017)

1.3. Initial assignment

This section covers the initial assignment of the project. The initial project brief set up for this thesis can be found in appendix A.

1.3.1. De basiskaart

The Veldacademie is currently developing an online dashboard called de basiskaart, providing an overview of informal neighbourhood networks of Rotterdam. The dashboard aims to increase the visibility of these networks for professionals focused on neighbourhood-oriented work. By understanding how local actors work together and contribute, and having an overview of this through the basiskaart, professionals can better engage with these networks and so further build upon what is locally used and valued. The dashboard is currently online for the neighbourhood Bospolder-Tussendijken, which can be viewed by clicking this [link](#).

However, the current development of the dashboard' prioritizes its applicability for professional, formal actors, allowing them

to gain insights in the informal networks of neighbourhoods. In its current form, the basiskaart uses informal, local actors and active citizens primarily as data to fill the dashboard.

This design project seeks to shift focus from professionals as primary users of the basiskaart to citizens active within these informal networks. Recognising the crucial role that these citizens play in enhancing the well-being and quality of life in their neighbourhoods, the goal is to explore how a digital tool like the basiskaart can better support their efforts and contributions to their communities. While the dashboard offers initial opportunities such as enhancing the visibility of local actors and potentially increasing their reach, new digital tools may also introduce unforeseen risks or disadvantages. Therefore, researching how informal networks are constructed and understanding the challenges faced by active citizens within them is crucial. This will ensure that a design intervention meets their needs and potentially redefines the purpose of a tool like the basiskaart.

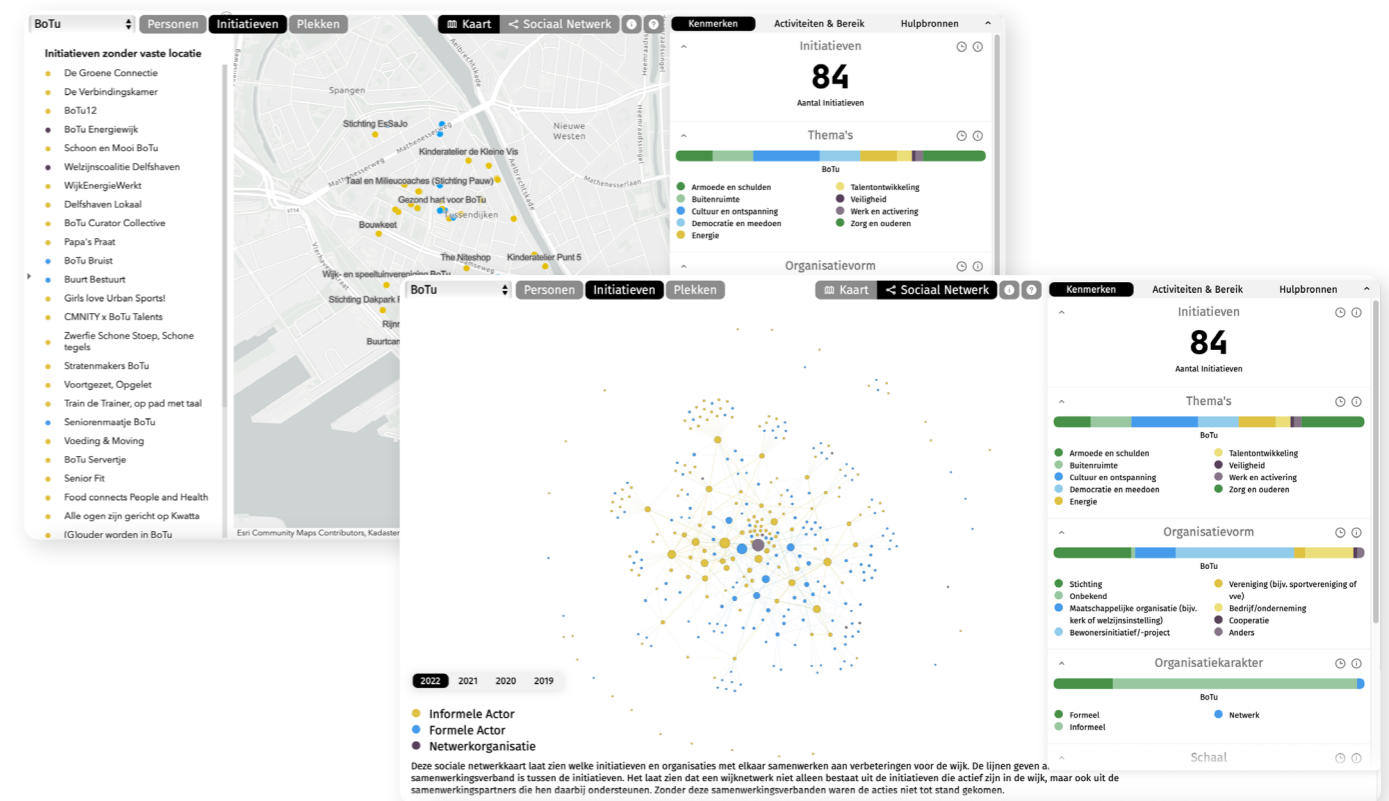


Figure 2: The online dashboard called the 'basiskaart': top-left is the map view, right-bottom the network view (Veldacademie, 2024)

1.3.2. Project case: Hoogvliet

Given that each neighbourhood has different social structures and corresponding local networks and needs, it was important to choose a specific district as a case study for this project. In consultation with the client, I chose to focus on Hoogvliet, a district located in the far south of Rotterdam. At the start of the project, the client was already considering the application of the basiskaart in Hoogvliet, to map the informal networks active in the district.

According to the municipality website of Rotterdam, Hoogvliet is known for its active and engaged citizens. This suggests that informal networks in Hoogvliet play a significant role in enhancing the liveability of Hoogvliet through the contributions of these active residents. This intrigued my interest to design for this district and its active citizens, to understand what drives and limits active engagement within such communities and how they can be further supported in their contributions.

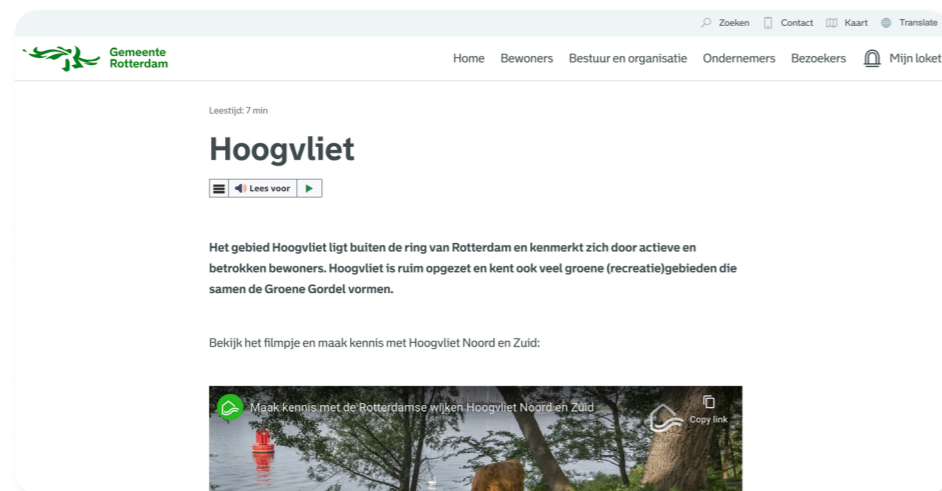


Figure 3: A description of Hoogvliet on the website of the municipality of Rotterdam (Gemeente Rotterdam, 2024)



Figure 4: Hoogvliet (cluster stadsontwikkeling, n.d.)

1.4. Research questions

The project's main research question is as follows:

MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION

How can active citizens in Hoogvliet who contribute to the neighbourhood be supported in their informal networks by a digital tool like the basiskaart?

After an initial exploration of literature outlined in the following Chapters 2 and 3, I gained a broader understanding of the key concepts and factors that act as drivers or barriers for active citizenship. Using this as a foundation, I formulated detailed sub-questions to further address the main research question and to inform the contextual research in Chapter 4. These sub-questions are as follows:

SUB - QUESTIONS

1. What are the social challenges, social dynamics and demographics of Hoogvliet, that might influence the presence of and need for informal networks?
2. How are informal networks in Hoogvliet structured?
 - 2.1. Which stakeholders are part of the informal networks?
 - 2.2. What is the role of active citizens in the informal networks in Hoogvliet?
 - 2.3. What is the perspective of active citizens on their informal networks and their relations to others within these networks? (How is bonding, bridging and linking social capital currently active?)
3. What digital and non-digital infrastructure currently supports active citizens in their informal networks in Hoogvliet?
4. What drivers and barriers can be identified for active citizens to successfully engage in informal networks in Hoogvliet?
5. Given these drivers and barriers, how can a digital design intervention support these active citizens?

1.5. Project approach

This section describes the methodology used to approach the project, including a brief overview of the research and design activities that are applied within this approach. The overall method that was used to approach the graduation project was the double diamond model (Design Council, n.d.). This model is a commonly used framework for design, embodying the design process by the principles of divergence and convergence through four phases: discover, define, develop and deliver.

During each phase I adopted different research and design activities that aligned with the process. The following text and accompanying figure 5 describe the used methods in each phase of the double diamond.

Discover

In the discover phase I aimed to deepen my understanding of active citizenship within informal networks, and so explored the opportunity space for a digital design intervention to serve as a supportive tool aligning with needs of active citizens in Hoogvliet. The research phase started with a literature review, outlining fundamental drivers and barriers that influence active citizenship. This literature review provided a theoretical framework for the following contextual research conducted in Hoogvliet. This included a variety of research activities using elements of field research, ethnographic research and desk research. Details about the approach for this contextual research can be found in Chapter 4.1. The insights gathered from this contextual exploration provided a foundation for defining a design focus in the following phase.

Define

This phase focused on synthesizing the insights obtained during the previous discover phase. I analysed and structured the insights gathered from the various research activities, which are documented in Chapter 4. Based on the key findings of the research, I defined a focus for the design intervention. The insights revealed new opportunities for a design focus that better addressed the identified needs and challenges

of Hoogvliet's informal networks than initially anticipated, thus leading to a shift in the original focus. This informed the creation of a design vision including a design goal, mission statement and design guidelines, which guided the subsequent design phase.

Develop

With the defined design vision, the design phase was initiated. Ideation sessions resulted in the generation of two initial concepts. By seeking feedback from key stakeholders in Hoogvliet in the preliminary stages of these concepts, I was able to incorporate their input for the further development of one concept. After iterating on the chosen concept, it was once more evaluated through user testing with residents of Hoogvliet. This evaluation led to new insights, which in turn informed a final iteration of the design. In this phase, the designs thus also served as research tools, providing new insights as they were evaluated and tested with stakeholders. This approach helped to further refine the design and identify its essential purpose. More elaboration on the approach for this design phase can be found in Chapter 6.

Deliver

In the deliver phase I present the final design proposal as the outcome of this graduation project. It also includes recommendations for implementing the design, along with a final round of validation with stakeholders in which I discussed its feasibility, viability and desirability. The design project ends with a conclusion on the project's research question, a discussion including limitations of the project and a final set of recommendations on a future perspective for the Veldacademie's basiskaart. Finally, I provide a personal reflection on my experiences throughout the project and my growth as a (social) designer working for and with communities.

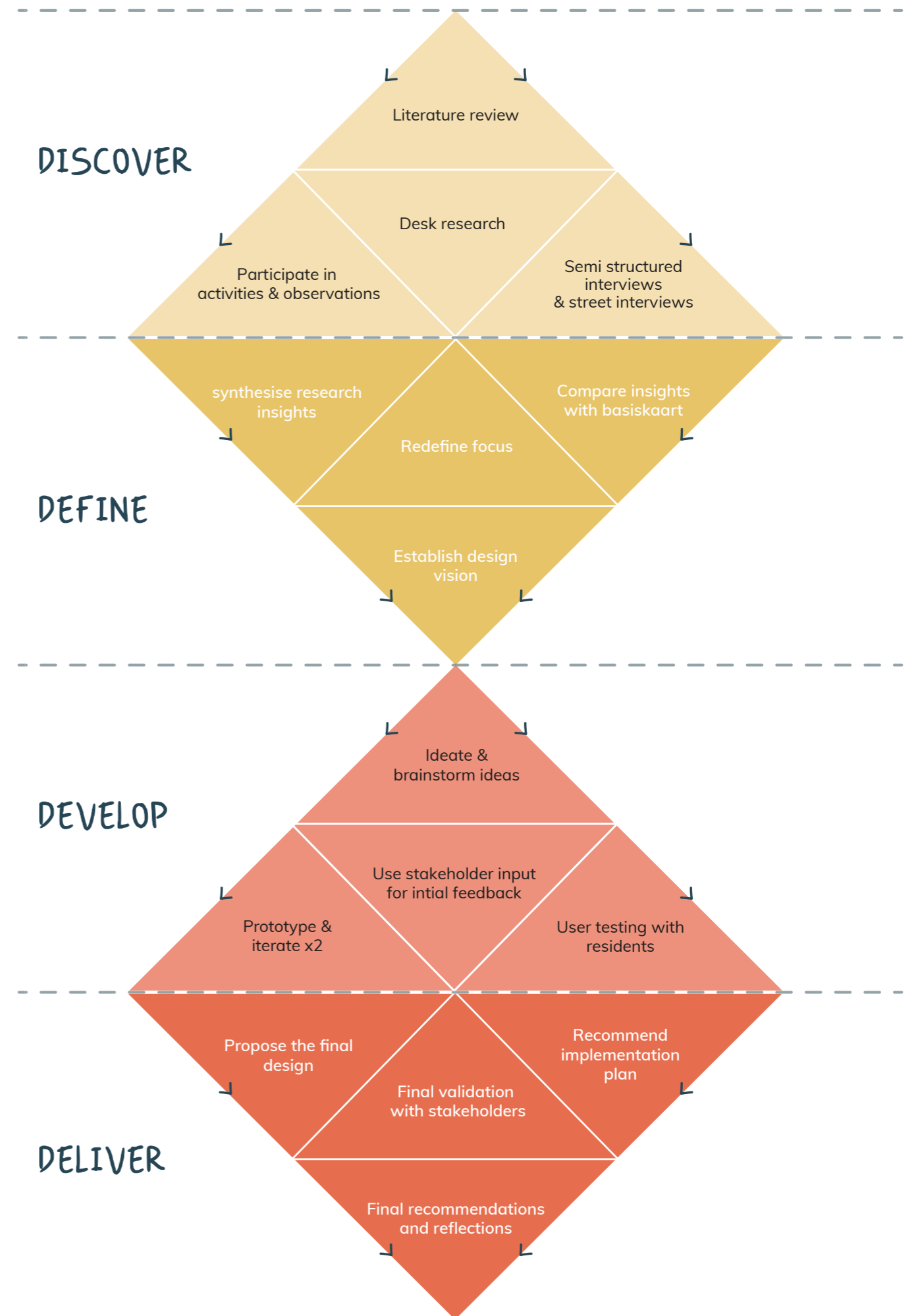


Figure 5: The employed double diamond model including an overview of activities per phase

2

KEY CONCEPTS

In this section I explain the key concepts of active citizenship and informal networks, to understand how they are defined and used within this thesis. Lastly, I introduce the concept of infrastructuring, to explain how a digital tool like the basiskaart could act as a valuable infrastructure for active citizens.

2.1. Informal networks

2.3. Active citizenship

2.2. Infrastructuring: a designer's role in active citizenship

2.1. Informal networks

The term 'informal' is used to describe the non-professional execution of tasks. In the social sector, informal primarily relates to 'casual social interactions' (Post, 2017). At the Veldacademie, researchers describe informal actors as acting ad hoc and consisting of a relatively small group of actors who collaborate closely with few rules and procedures, such as a small social enterprise or a citizens' group. Formal actors, on the other hand, are characterized by their relatively large organisational structure with stable access to resources and professionals, collaborating according to fixed rules and procedures. They often carry out large assignments through tenders. Examples of such organisations are the municipality, welfare organisations, and housing corporations. By examining several definitions of informal and formal actors, I have identified characteristics that distinguishes them in the following table.

The term semi-formal can also be used, which covers bigger citizen organisations and social ventures that work more structurally with partly paid professionals as well.

Networks refer to the social bonds and collaborations between people. Within these social bonds, people can get support, combine their efforts, and access resources. These collaborations between actors are crucial for citizen initiatives of active citizens to achieve their goals and become sustainable on the long-term (Manzini, 2014). An informal network can thus be defined as:

The connections and collaborations between various local actors like active citizens and local organisations, who typically non-professionally and/or voluntarily contribute to the well-being of citizens in a neighbourhood.

INFORMAL	FORMAL
Flexible	Planned
Bottom up	Top down
Little to no regulations and procedures	Restricted to regulations and procedures
Small scale	Big scale
Citizen initiatives	Local government, welfare organisations
Often dependent on volunteers and external resources	Permanent access to resources and professionals

Table 1: Identified characteristics of the terms 'informal' and 'formal'

2.2. Active citizenship

Active citizenship can be described as “the sense of commitment to the neighbourhood and involvement in activities to improve the quality of life of there” (Rijksoverheid, 2024). This design thesis specifically focuses on civic engagement within local, informal networks, excluding active citizenship in the form of engaging citizens to participate in the development of governmental policies.

What characterizes active citizenship is that it reaches beyond personal interest: it is about starting activities, taking initiatives that contribute to the social domain (van de Wijdeven et al., 2013). Unlike volunteerism, which often involves responding to opportunities for individuals provided by formal organisations for one-time, individual activities, active citizenship is characterized by citizens taking the lead in starting and organising activities within their communities. Although active citizens often also act voluntary, this deeper level of engagement and initiative-taking by citizens is what distinguishes active citizenship from volunteerism.

A key aspect of active citizenship is the citizen’s dual role, where they assume the roles of both organisers as well as participants in local communities. Formal parties like the municipality take a more facilitating role, providing assistance to active citizens to execute their own projects and initiatives. Examples of activities that may

be considered civic engagement in informal networks include starting citizen initiatives, contributing to local voluntary work within such initiatives and participation in community activities.

Citizen initiatives

Citizen initiatives are a form of active citizenship. De Gemeente Rotterdam (2022) defines a citizen initiative as the effort of an individual or a group of citizens to voluntarily undertake activities to enhance social cohesion and liveability in the neighbourhood. This resonates with the definition of an informal network, as highlighted above. Both concepts emphasize the collaborative efforts of citizens to address community needs. Citizen initiatives therefore strengthen informal networks, and can also be regarded as an example of an informal network.

Citizen initiatives come in various forms and focus on a variety of themes (Hermus et al., 2020). They range from small-scale, one-time projects like street barbecues or clean ups, to larger, more professionally organised citizen groups that organise activities and provide services that can span entire neighbourhoods or even cities. The bridging term ‘initiative’ is employed to suggest that the focus is on citizens assuming responsibilities for addressing issues.

2.3. Infrastructuring: a designer’s role in active citizenship

Manzini (2013) emphasizes that designers can play a critical role in driving social innovation through participatory design. These design approaches are characterized by their dynamic, creative and proactive nature. Manzini (2019) stresses that designers do not merely respond to the immediate needs of people, but rather act as agents of empowerment, striving to enhance people’s capabilities.

The concept of “infrastructuring”, embedded within participatory design, embodies this approach by seeking to amplify the capacity of individuals and groups to actively engage in their neighbourhoods. It involves creating and refining systems that enable active participation and community empowerment, serving as the foundation for action,

engagement and awareness (Dantec & DiSalvo, 2013). Participatory infrastructuring fosters environments where stakeholders can shape and finally use these systems effectively. In this approach, designers thus view citizens not as mere passive users of services, but as active subjects who are included in the process and so contribute to the infrastructure for their communities.

In the context of the initial project assignment, the basiskaart represents a potential digital infrastructure. By conducting thorough research on the informal networks within Hoogvliet and integrating the insights of the local communities into the design of a digital infrastructure, I aim to contribute as a designer to the empowerment of active citizens in Hoogvliet.

CONCLUSION CHAPTER 2

Key concepts

This section introduced the key concepts of active citizenship and informal networks, and the role of designers through the concept infrastructuring in participatory design.

Informal networks within this thesis refer to the connections and collaborations between various local actors like active citizens and local organisations, who typically non-professionally and/or voluntarily contribute to the well-being of citizens in a neighbourhood.

Active citizenship is understood by the sense of commitment to the neighbourhood and involvement in activities to improve the quality of life of there. This thesis will focus specifically on active citizenship in the form of contribution

to informal networks, excluding participation in decision-making for policies.

Citizen initiatives are the efforts of an individual or a group of citizens to voluntarily undertake activities to enhance social cohesion and liveability in the neighbourhood. They therefore strengthen informal networks, and can also be regarded as an example of an informal network.

Designers, through **participatory design and infrastructuring**, can empower communities and its active citizens by creating systems that facilitate active engagement and capacity-building.

Understanding these key concepts is crucial to understand how they will be used in this thesis.

3

DRIVERS AND BARRIERS FOR ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP IN INFORMAL NETWORKS: LITERATURE REVIEW

To understand how to support active citizens who contribute to informal networks, it is important to understand what factors influence effective community engagement. This section outlines a literature review, providing an overview of drivers and barriers to active citizenship, which can then be used as a theoretical framework to guide context specific research activities for identifying barriers and drivers for active citizens in Hoogvliet. This literature review first integrates insights from two key theoretical concepts: **The Social Capital theory** and the **Civic Volunteerism Model (CVM)**. Both concepts provide perspectives on factors influencing civic engagement. While social capital helps to understand how community dynamics and social structures influence participation, the Civic Volunteerism Model focuses on individual characteristics and motivations driving participation.

Following this, the review explores **the role of digital infrastructuring in active citizenship**. By searching with terms as community platforms, participation platforms, and neighbourhood platforms, the literature review provides an understanding of how digital tools can support community engagement and identify potential barriers to their effective use.

- 3.1. The role of social capital in informal networks
- 3.2. The Civic volunteerism model in informal networks
- 3.3. Digital infrastructuring to support active citizenship

3.1. The role of social capital in informal networks

Social capital theory is a theory often used by researchers to understand networks and relations. Social capital refers to the resources embedded in social networks that individuals or groups can access for personal or collective benefit. Trust, shared norms and values, reciprocity and connectedness are important constructs for building social capital (Wentink et al., 2018). Looking into this theory thus provides a useful framework for understanding barriers and drivers for active citizenship.

3.1.1. Introducing and defining social capital

There are three dimensions of social capital: bonding, bridging and linking social capital. Putnam (2000) distinguishes between bonding and bridging capital, based on Granovetter's (1973) theory of strong and weak ties. Bonding social capital refers to connections within a group, where people have strong emotional ties, which provides a sense of belonging. Individuals are often similar to each other, for example in terms of personality traits, values, or interests. Examples of these close-knit groups are friends

or family members.

Bridging social capital refers to horizontal connections between different social groups. Although Granovetter (1973) emphasizes these connections are not as strong as the ties that make up bonding social capital, they can foster more valuable outcomes. These connections help facilitate the exchange of information, resources and ideas across diverse social networks. Examples of bridging social capital include links to acquaintances or other communities.

Lastly, linking social capital is the third dimension of social capital. It refers to relations that individuals or groups have with institutions or authorities of influence, that have relative power over them. Linking social capital enables individuals to access resources, opportunities and support from higher levels of society. These relations are perceived as vertical rather than horizontal ties, which distinguishes them from bridging social capital (Szreter & Woolcock, 2004). Examples of linking social capital include relationships with representatives of formal institutions such as the local government.

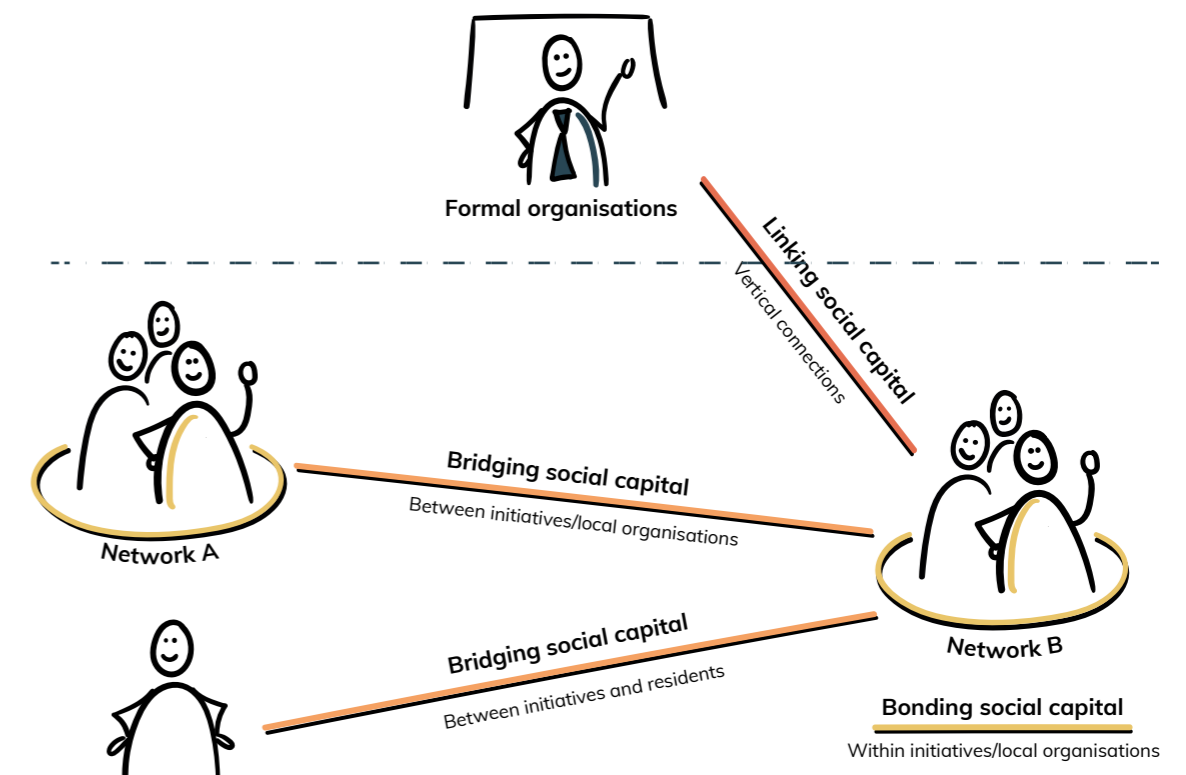


Figure 6: The social capital theory applied in the context of active citizenship in informal networks

3.1.2. Social capital in informal networks of active citizens

This section examines the three dimensions of social capital in the context of informal networks of active citizens. Social capital and its three dimensions are important drivers for active citizenship but can also impose possible barriers. In this context, bonding social capital can be defined as the strong and trusted relationships within citizen groups, initiatives or organisations (Agger & Jensen, 2015; Igalla et al., 2020). Bridging social capital refers to relations between different initiatives or between initiatives and their target groups, which are citizens as possible new members, volunteers or participants in their organised activities. Lastly, linking social capital refers to the vertical ties of citizen initiatives with formal organisations providing institutional support and the facilitation of citizen initiatives. In this context, formal institutions include local governments and other possible institutions with the authority and resources to support such initiatives.

3.1.3. Bonding social capital: in group cohesion in initiatives

Bonding social capital within core groups ensures the durability of initiatives through strong, trusted relationships, forming the organisational capacity and preventing the initiative from collapsing when members leave (Igalla et al., 2020). Collaboratively working on projects and complementing each other's skills fosters enjoyment and a sense of unity, making bonding social capital a crucial motivator for neighbourhood initiatives (Denters et al., 2013). A shared group identity among active citizens ensures that people feel at home, are accepted, recognised and respected, and that they can rely on mutual support (Gray & Stevenson, 2019). Additionally, strong ties within a group makes it easier to ask for institutional support (linking social capital), as people are part of a supportive network in which they feel secure to do so (Agger

& Jensen, 2015).

However, while strong in-group cohesion benefits the core group, it can inadvertently create barriers for potential participants. Even individuals who may share similar values might feel unwelcome or intrusive, leading to exclusivity and a lack of belonging (Agger & Jensen, 2015). Groups with strict norms, values and ideas can be less attractive to those who do not fully identify with them; and strict rules and responsibilities can also deter volunteers who often value flexibility (Akin et al., 2019). Such restrictiveness can also drive away current members if they no longer agree with the group's established norms and ideas (Agger & Jensen, 2015).

Furthermore, Akin et al. (2019) observed that groups with similarities in demographics and lifestyles face challenges in reaching individuals outside their own social circles, limiting effective bridging social capital and the inclusion of new participants (Prins, 2021; Akin et al., 2019).

3.1.4. Bridging social capital: relations and collaborations between other initiatives and citizens

Bridging links, while characterized as weaker, superficial links, can provide significant benefits for active citizens in informal networks. These bridging links facilitate the formation of new relationships between community groups within a neighbourhood, contributing to a sense of embeddedness in the neighbourhood for initiatives (Henning & Lieberg, 1996). Even brief encounters on the street and seeing familiar faces can strengthen trust and familiarity, fostering a sense of belonging in the neighbourhood (Blokland & Nast, 2014).

Connecting with individuals outside one's core group also creates access to new knowledge and resources (Granovetter, 1973). For active initiatives, this can lead to expanded organisational capacity of initiatives through the recruitment of new volunteers and finding more resources. Collaborative efforts among

active citizens can also promote shared goals and support the initiation of new ideas by offering fresh perspectives (Corbett & Le Dantec, 2018). Moreover, working together with other organisations, initiatives and citizens can increase the visibility and reach of one's initiative, attracting more participants (Prins, 2021). These collective efforts also contribute to the acquisition of linking social capital; local initiatives and citizens working together create a stronger support foundation for securing institutional support (Agger & Jensen, 2015).

However, there are potential downsides to bridging social capital. Active citizens may perceive each other as competitors rather than allies, particularly when they both rely on the same financial resources from local governments (Welschen et al., 2021). Bridging links can also threaten the desired independence of initiatives, and lead to unmet expectations if clear agreements have not been made about collaborations (Blokland-Potters & Savage, 2008). Furthermore, these relations often emphasize differences rather than commonalities, reinforcing divisions and hindering community cohesion (Blokland-Potters & Savage, 2008). It can also strengthen prejudices leading to conflicts, causing friction rather than cooperation (Agger & Jensen, 2015). Lastly, the nature of bridging relations is that it involves more impersonal contacts, which can make it challenging to form more meaningful connections, leading to lower engagement and support (Akin et al., 2019).

3.1.5. Linking social capital: institutional support for active citizens

When collaboration extends to institutional support and involves formal actors, we are speaking about linking social capital. Researchers highlight linking social capital as a crucial facilitator for the emergence and durability of active citizen initiatives (Fransen et al., 2022). Such links provide access to (financial) resources, additional knowledge and

expertise for initiatives. Within these relations, building trust between local actors and formal organisations is essential (Doff, 2017).

While linking social capital provides essential resources, it also presents challenges that can hinder active citizens. Local governments, for instance, can become overly involved and exert control over citizen initiatives, asking demands that may limit their accessible nature and autonomy – two elements crucial for self-organisation (Doff, 2019; Igalla et al., 2019). Financial support from institutions in the form of subsidies often comes with administrative procedures and responsibilities that active citizens may struggle to manage due to a lack in bureaucratic skills. Furthermore, government funding typically comes with requirements, further compromising the autonomy of these initiatives. These funds are also often project-based and short term, hindering the financial stability for the durability of initiatives (Achahchah et al., 2023).

Moreover, formal institutions may delegate too many responsibilities to initiatives under the cover of 'promoting social resilience', without fully recognizing the contributions of active citizens to the well-being of communities (Igalla et al., 2019). This instrumental view reduces active citizens and their initiatives to mere tools for achieving broader goals. It thus often results in more symbolic forms of recognition such as honorary awards rather than meaningful participation for citizens in policy and decision-making processes which may affect their neighbourhood and initiatives (Welschen et al., 2021). This lack of genuine recognition and visibility for the impact of their work can strain the relationships between facilitating institutions and active citizens. Furthermore, active citizens often struggle to articulate their contributions in the similar policy language of formal organisations (Achahchah et al., 2023), which can make it difficult to explain the impact and value of their work.

3.1.6. The reinforcing and dynamic relation between social capital and active citizenship

Social capital and active citizenship act in a dynamic relationship where they both reinforce each other. As individuals participate in local activities they build stronger local connections. These stronger connections, built on shared trust and reciprocity within a community, in turn

further encourage individuals to take on active roles within society (Guagnano & Santini, 2020). In this process, social capital serves as both a motivator as well as an enabler for active citizenship. A strong sense of belonging and connectedness within a neighbourhood intrinsically motivates citizens to engage. Furthermore, local networks enable collaboration with others in the neighbourhood, allowing citizens to access more resource and knowledge. This enhances their capacity for collective action.

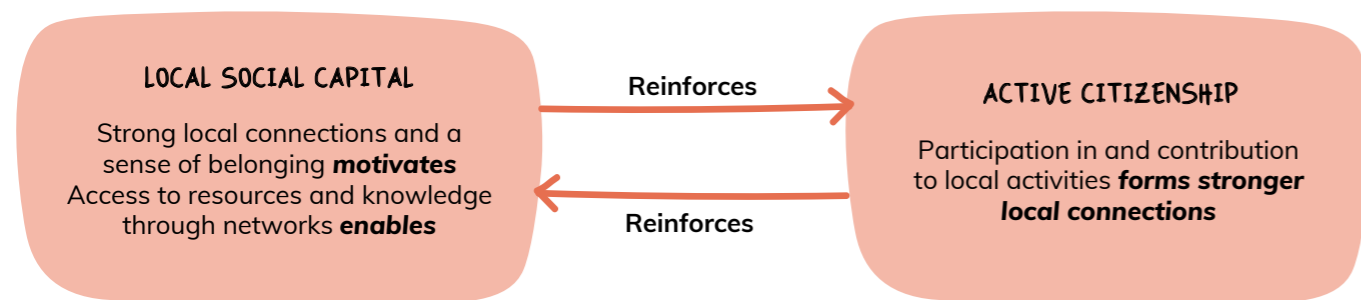


Figure 7: The reinforcing and dynamic relationship between social capital and active citizenship

3.2. The Civic Volunteerism Model in informal networks

The social capital theory explains factors contributing to civic engagement through the lens of networks and what can arise from connections useful for active citizenship. **The Civic Volunteerism model (CVM)** complements the social capital theory by elaborating on individual factors influencing participation. It is developed by Verba et al. (1995), who invert the question of civic engagement to ask why people do not want to become politically active.

They state three answers to cover this question: because *they can't*, because *they do not want to*, or because *they have not been asked to*. In other words, they lack the capacity, they do not have the motivation to do so, or they have not been invited to participate. Mourik et al. (2022) used this model to specifically describe factors for active citizenship in the context of volunteering and initiating initiatives. The following section will briefly go into the three defined factors in the Civic Volunteerism Model and elaborate on how they operate as drivers or barriers for citizens to contribute to informal networks.

3.2.1. Can do (capacity, resources)

Verba et al. (1995) explain that individual resources, specifically time, money, and civic skills, form an insight into one's capacity for civic participation. In terms of available time, people generally value flexible engagement opportunities that align with their schedules. Strict rules and responsibilities within initiatives can deter citizens from volunteering, as they may be unwilling to commit to such schedules when they conflict with their personal or professional lives (Akin et al., 2019). Retirees often have more time available to engage and want to spend it meaningfully.

Research indicates that individuals with higher socio-economic status (SES) or educational level tend to participate more in civic activities (van de Wijdeven et al., 2013). This is largely due to greater availability of time and financial

resources. Moreover, individuals with a higher SES often possess over more bureaucratic skills, bigger social networks and easier access to institutions which can help in starting an initiative (Marschall, 2004). In contrast, those with a lower SES often face considerable barriers to participation in terms of capacity. They are often already preoccupied with demands of daily life, leaving them with limited time and energy for civic engagement (RMO, 2007).

Civic skills can be defined as the abilities of citizens to effectively use time and money through participation (Verba et al., 1995). This for instance covers organisational skills, but also having well developed vocabulary. Such skills may be enhanced through one's education and work experiences. Furthermore, one's skills are strongly related to the perception of self - how one perceives their own capabilities (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2018). A lack of confidence or uncertainty about one's capabilities may act as a barrier to participation. Discovering, developing and learning to trust one's abilities are important factors for people to participate, and so for new initiatives to flourish (van de Wijdeven et al., 2013). Trainings and guidance by more experienced volunteers can strengthen this (van Mourik et al., 2022). Furthermore, bridging social capital, as previously outlined, can help in acquiring resources and skills beyond one's own networks.

3.2.2. Want to (motivation)

Van Mourik et al. (2022) refer to motivation within the CVM as a critical determinant of citizens to engage actively. They distinguish between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation stems from personal fulfilment. This includes personal passions, interests, a sense of satisfaction and meaning. A key intrinsic motivator for active citizens to engage in local networks is the presence or desire for local social capital, which creates a sense of connectedness

and belonging with the neighbourhood or its community (Guagnano & Santini, 2020). This desire for neighbourhood varies across social groups. For instance, elderly and those with lower levels of education often rely more on local contacts and spend more time in their neighbourhoods (Hoogerbrugge & Burger, 2018). These are also frequently more vulnerable social groups, for whom the capacity of time and resources is not so apparent. Furthermore, families who care for a safe living environment of their children also tend to invest more in community-based activities.

Motivation can also arise from dissatisfaction with certain neighbourhood aspects, driving citizens to engage in civic activities to address and improve these issues. The perceived effectiveness of such initiatives and confidence in their skills further affects the motivation for continued participation. (Van de Wijdeven et al. 2013; Ubels, 2020).

Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, relates to external stimulants for civic engagement. This includes incentives such as rewards, networking opportunities, or skill development. While intrinsic motivations are often the primary drivers for active citizenship in informal networks and volunteerism (van Mourik et al., 2022), research shows that extrinsic motivations can also increase the willingness to engage (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2018). Moreover, motivation can evolve over time: initial reasons for engagement may not be the same as one's motivation to continue participation (West, 2016).

3.2.3. Being asked to (feeling invited and welcome)

This factor is closely linked to the advantages and disadvantages of strong bonding social capital. Verba et al. (1995) highlight that people are more likely to engage voluntarily when they are being asked to. The way people are invited or asked significantly influences who eventually decides to engage. Effective recruitment of new volunteers often occurs through existing networks and personal invitations (West en Pateman, 2016). People in existing networks often share similar norms and values, facilitating better identification with an initiative. Word-of-mouth invitations, where motivated volunteers spread the message, also prove successful (Einolf, 2018).

The downside of relying on existing networks and word-of-mouth invitations is the potential exclusion of new groups, leading to a less diverse group of volunteers (Maas en van Seumeren, 2021). Individuals outside of these existing networks may feel unwelcome, and if new members do not identify with the core groups values, it can result in a lack of cohesion and potential friction (de Gast & Hetem, 2018). Therefore, it essential to find a balance between integrating new participants beyond existing networks, while maintaining shared values and norms that foster a cohesive and effective initiative.

3.3. Digital infrastructuring to support active citizenship

Current literature recognizes digital infrastructuring as an effective means for enhancing community engagement. An online platform can provide valuable insights into the local needs and sensitivities of citizens. Understanding these needs can facilitate more responsive community initiatives as well as municipal engagement to address these needs (Schreiber, 2020). Hampton and Wellman (2003) found that online connections primarily support local communities by increasing contact with weaker ties (bridging social capital), thereby fostering local connections beyond existing strong ties. This perspective aligns with research by Mosconi et al. (2017), who suggested that community engagement should be viewed in terms of diverse individuals coming together around common interests or concerns, rather than people who share many similarities. In their study, a digital infrastructure provided opportunities for these individuals to find each other. Capece & Costa (2013) similarly highlighted that online platforms can simplify collaboration among different community members to address local issues. Lastly, Capece & Costa (2013) also highlight its potential for promoting public initiatives, which activities are often hidden or invisible.

For a digital platform to succeed, many researchers stress the importance of a connection to physical environment and offline interactions (Hampton & Wellman, 2003; Morelli, 2015; Mosconi et al., 2017; Schreiber, 2020). A strong connection to the physical environment is essential in attracting a substantial number of users (Morelli, 2015). This connection ensures that a digital platform complements rather than replaces offline interactions. Schreiber (2020) further explains that when connections are initiated online, they require offline engagements to endure. Other researchers support this view, demonstrating that initial online forms of community engagement are complemented by offline interactions to further build on these connections, creating a continuous flow between

online and face-to-face interactions (Hampton & Wellman, 2003; Mosconi et al., 2017). Therefore, it is crucial to consider the physical infrastructure of communities, providing spaces for citizens to encounter and interact with each other.

Furthermore, building trust on an online platform can present challenges. The anonymity afforded by online platforms can undermine trust and reciprocity within virtual communities. Without face-to-face interactions, individuals may struggle to establish genuine connections and assess the credibility of other members (Ridings & Gefen, 2004). Ensuring that online interactions parallel real-life interactions can help to build this trust. Additionally, having a mediator or manager for the platform can further establish trust (Morelli, 2015).

Lastly, online platforms can inadvertently support mechanisms of social exclusion. For instance, Schreiber (2020) notes that people with migration background are rarely found on community platforms. Akin et al. (2019) found that elderly individuals prefer paper communication like leaflets, which are more visible and do not require accessing the internet. To address these issues, Schreiber (2020) suggests considering the inclusivity of digital platforms, for instance by raising awareness of the availability of such platforms, building digital competencies, and design user-friendly interfaces.

In conclusion, while digital infrastructuring presents significant opportunities for enhancing community engagement, it must be thoughtfully integrated with physical interactions, offer opportunities to build trust, and designed inclusively to overcome potential barriers and ensure broad participation.

CONCLUSION CHAPTER 3

Drivers and barriers for active citizenship in informal networks literature review

This section presented an overview of drivers and barriers to active citizenship from literature, integrating insights from two key theoretical concepts: the Social Capital theory and the Civic Volunteerism Model. Furthermore, the review included an exploration of the role of digital infrastructuring in active citizenship. **The key takeaways** from this literature review are outlined in the section in the right. This knowledge will be employed as a theoretical framework to guide context specific research activities for identifying barriers and drivers for active citizens in Hoogvliet.

KEY TAKEAWAYS CHAPTER 3

Drivers and barriers for active citizenship in informal networks literature review

Implications social capital theory

Bonding social capital

- Citizen initiatives should strive to balance strong internal cohesion for the durability of initiatives, with openness and inclusivity for others outside this core group join.
- Encouraging flexible participation and actively reaching out to diverse groups can help in creating a more welcoming environment for all citizens to join.

Bridging social capital

- While these connections can broaden the reach of initiatives, enhance visibility, and introduce new resources and perspectives, they also carry the risk of fostering competition, creating unmet expectations, and reinforcing divisions when differences are emphasized.
- To maximize the benefits of bridging links, initiatives should establish clear agreements within new bridging connections, emphasize shared goals, and cultivate both impersonal and personal relationships.

Linking social capital

- While linking social capital offers essential access to (financial) resources and expertise, it can also undermine the autonomy and sustainability of citizen initiatives.
- Over-involvement by formal institutions may impose bureaucratic demands and specific requirements that conflict with the self-organising nature of these initiatives.
- To navigate these challenges, active citizens should strive to build reciprocal and trusting relationships with formal actors while advocating for meaningful participation in decision-making processes.
- Clear communication and demonstrating the tangible impact of their work are essential to gain genuine recognition and avoid the instrumental use of their contributions by formal institutions.

Implications Civic Volunteerism model

Capacity and Resources

- Flexible engagement opportunities help to accommodate varying schedules of volunteers.

- Individuals with lower socio-economic status (SES) are less likely to participate and contribute compared to residents with high SES, as they face significant barriers in terms of capacity, such as limited time, resources and civic skills.
- Enhancing civic skills can boost confidence and participation.
- Bridging social capital is essential to increase capacity with access to resources and skills beyond one's immediate network.

Motivation

- Intrinsic motivation such as personal fulfilment, sense of belonging, and desire to improve neighbourhood aspects is a crucial factor for active citizenship in informal networks.
- Extrinsic incentives can enhance the willingness to engage.
- Motivation evolves, requiring adaptation to changing interests and incentives for continuous engagement.

Feeling Invited and Welcome

- Recruitment through personal invitations and leveraging existing networks can boost participation, though efforts should be made to include diverse groups.
- Finding a balance between integrating new participants and maintaining shared values and norms is essential for a cohesive and durable initiative.

Implications digital infrastructuring

- Digital infrastructuring presents significant opportunities for enhancing community engagement, like enhancing the visibility of local initiatives and increasing bridging social capital for residents to meet regarding common interests or concerns.
- It must be thoughtfully integrated with physical interactions, fostering genuine connections and opportunities to build trust.
- Ensuring inclusivity is essential to overcome potential barriers and ensure broad participation.

4

UNDERSTANDING AND EXPLORING THE CONTEXT: HOOGVLIET'S INFORMAL NETWORKS

The previous chapter outlined the theoretical framework for understanding drivers and barriers for active citizenship in informal networks. In this section, I apply that theoretical framework to understand active citizenship in the specific context of informal networks in Hoogvliet; and how it is both encouraged or hindered. The section aims to answer the main research question and its detailed sub questions as were introduced in the introduction in Chapter 1.4. of this thesis.

- 4.1. Research goals and methods
- 4.2. About Hoogvliet and its perceived sense of connectedness
- 4.3. Institutional stakeholders and their role in supporting active citizens
- 4.4 The citizens of Hoogvliet and their informal networks

4.1. Research goals and methods

The overview of research activities in figure 8 illustrates how each of these activities informed subsequent activities of the research. It also includes their respective research goals, demonstrating how the literature insights guided me in those activities. These goals align with the established main research question and sub questions of this study. The research methodology I used in these activities combined elements of desk research, field research and ethnographic research. Together, these methods provided a deeper understanding of different forms of what digital and physical infrastructure in Hoogvliet are used and valued and provided insights into the dynamics and relationships within Hoogvliet's informal, local networks from different perspectives. Furthermore, Appendix B includes interview guides that illustrate how the literature in the theoretical framework was used to form interview questions.

The initial phase of the research took an exploratory approach, aimed at familiarizing

myself with Hoogvliet and its residents. Using a list of Hoogvliet's local initiatives and organisations provided by the Veldacademie I began shaping my understanding of informal networks in Hoogvliet. This list allowed me to conduct desk research, where I gathered complementary information about these initiatives, their activities and where they are established in the neighbourhood.

This also helped me to identify the current digital infrastructure that supports active citizens. I examined online sources including Facebook groups, municipal websites and local news pages to build an initial overview of ongoing initiatives in the area. Through this initial understanding, I proceeded with field visits where I walked and biked through different parts of the district, to observe both its physical and social landscape. During these visits I also participated in local activities, in which I engaged in informal conversations with residents as participants and volunteers active in Hoogvliet's communities.

These visits also included my first encounters with active initiative-takers in the neighbourhood.

Building upon these initial exploratory insights, I moved into a more focused phase of research aimed at understanding the individuals active within these informal networks, and their motivations and needs that drive or limit their active participation. This involved in-depth interviews with active residents. I used semi structured interview guides and design probes to guide the interviews, which can be found in appendix B. These interviews provided more in-depth insights into the needs and challenges experienced by these active residents in their work. Additionally, these interviews further helped me determine the key institutional stakeholders, who support the activities of these active residents. I first conducted additional desk research to learn more about these stakeholders, whereafter I also approached them for in-depth interviews allowing me to understand their perceived roles in supporting residents.

While this phase deepened my understanding of active residents and the institutional support structures, I recognized the importance of also including the perspectives of Hoogvliet's residents in general, who may not yet be engaged in informal networks and local initiatives. Understanding barriers that prevent participation as well as possible motivations that could encourage their involvement, would provide a fuller picture of community engagement in informal networks in Hoogvliet. Therefore, final street interviews with residents from different neighbourhoods of Hoogvliet were also conducted.

These activities together allowed me to create a comprehensive understanding of the informal networks in Hoogvliet. The gathered data through these activities were analysed and structured within the context of my theoretical framework, helping to derive relevant insights that align with the project's research goals. These insights will inform the design vision for a design direction. The results and corresponding insights will be presented in the following sections.

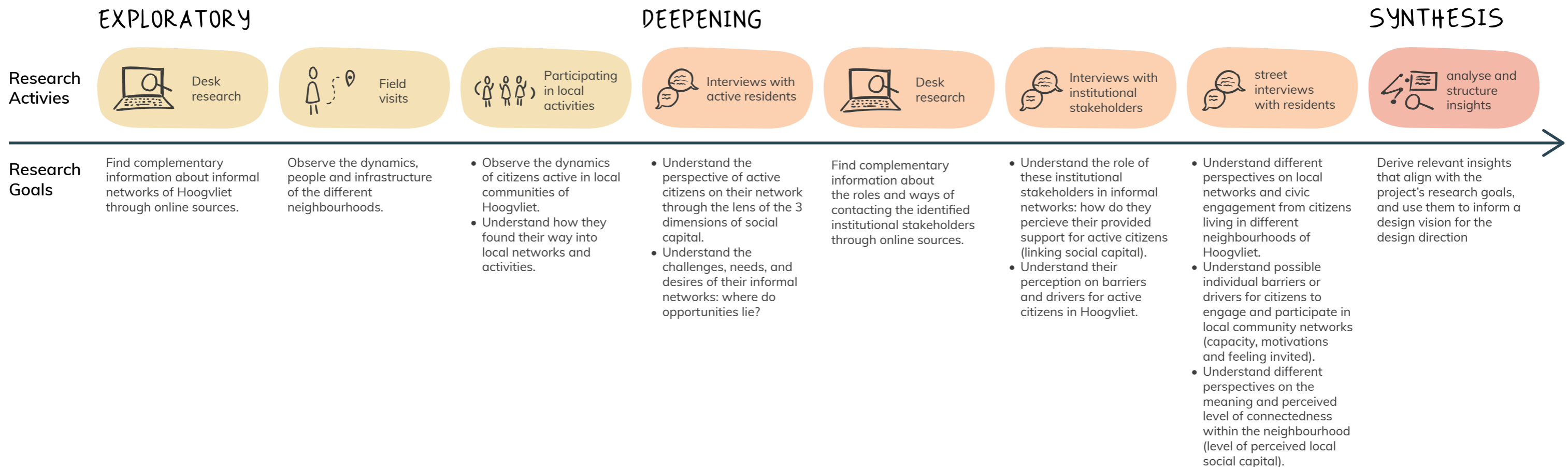


Figure 8: The research goals and according activities of the contextual research

4.2. About Hoogvliet and its perceived sense of connectedness

This sub-chapter first introduces the history, the different neighbourhoods, the demographics and the physical infrastructure of Hoogvliet, to gain an understanding of the context of the present study. Secondly, I further dive into the social dynamics through the sense of connectedness within the neighbourhood as perceived by residents of Hoogvliet. This complements the contextual information with personal interpretations of Hoogvliet's citizens on the level of local social capital.

4.2.1. About Hoogvliet

Hoogvliet's History

The district of Hoogvliet is located in the south of Rotterdam (See figure 9). Up until the 1950's, Hoogvliet was a small village where people lived from agriculture and fishing. After the second world war, Hoogvliet was expanded and annexed as part of the municipality of Rotterdam. Plans were made to make Hoogvliet

the 'first satellite city of the Netherlands', and to create a new living environment for workers of the nearby petrochemical industrial areas of Shell. A large part of the housing consisted of six storey apartments in the social rented sector. In 1968, a big explosion at Shell caused a lot of damage in the North of Hoogvliet. In the following years, Hoogvliet suffered from impoverished infrastructure, neglected and vacant buildings, social problems and economic recessions. In 1990, the municipality of Rotterdam planned a program to restructure Hoogvliet and reverse the decline of the neighbourhood. This project started at the end of 1999 and was completed in 2015. During this period of time, a lot of impoverished housing was demolished and replaced with more expensive rental and owner-occupied houses. The goal of this renewal was mainly to improve the reputation and liveability Hoogvliet, making it a more attractive place for people to live.



Figure 9: The location of Hoogvliet in relation to the other districts of Rotterdam

Hoogvliet's neighbourhoods and demographics

Hoogvliet is divided into ten neighbourhoods, six of which are located in the northern part of the district, Hoogvliet Noord (Westpunt, Digna Johanna Polder, Nieuw Engeland, Oudeland, Binnenban and Tussenwater) and four within the southern part of the district, Hoogvliet Zuid (Middengebied, Meeuwenplaat, Zalmplaat and Boomgaardshoek). An overview of Hoogvliet's neighbourhoods can be seen in figure 16, providing a map overview of the district on the next page.

The neighbourhoods are separated by big dikes and roads while the green belt- 'de Groene Gordel' - connects them spatially. Hoogvliet has a population of approximately 35.000 citizens. In comparison to the rest of Rotterdam, Hoogvliet has a relatively older population, with at least 20 percent of residents aged 65 or above. This illustrates how Hoogvliet's aging population form a large demographic in Hoogvliet. This aging population is mainly concentrated in Hoogvliet Zuid, which has a higher percentage of residents aged 65 and above (25%) compared to Hoogvliet Noord (15%). Hoogvliet Noord is mainly populated by families, with 40% of households comprising children.



10



11



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14



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Figure 10 - 15: Images from field visits to the neighbourhood

Hoogvliet's physical infrastructure

The literature review outlined that the physical infrastructure is important for the resilience of informal networks, providing spaces for citizens to encounter and interact with each other. This section gives an insight into the important physical infrastructure for informal networks of Hoogvliet. The relevant locations are outlined in the map in figure 16.

Public spaces and amenities

While most neighbourhoods of Hoogvliet have their own basic amenities like supermarkets, centrally located in the Binnenban is the shopping center which provides more shops attracting citizens from the different neighbourhoods. The Groene Gordel provides green meeting places, as well as several parks around the district. Furthermore, examples of public spaces include



Figure 16: A map providing an overview of how Hoogvliet's relevant physical infrastructure is distributed

playgrounds for children and a skatepark.

Wijkhub

Each district of Rotterdam has its own WijkHub, serving as a local municipal space where citizens can meet with civil servants. The Wijkhub in Hoogvliet is located in the municipal building within the central shopping centre and offers walk in hours for citizens to consult with civil servants to discuss questions and information regarding initiatives, ideas or perceived problems in the neighbourhood.

Houses of the Neighbourhood

Hoogvliet has two Houses of the Neighbourhood ('Huizen van de Wijk'), both located in Hoogvliet Noord. They function as community centres for citizens to walk in and meet, while also offering the opportunity to contact welfare workers for support and questions. In these centres, a lot of

activities for citizens of Hoogvliet are organised. These activities are either initiated by welfare workers who work in these community centres or by active citizens themselves. In the latter case, the welfare workers often assume a facilitating role.



Figure 17: one of the Houses of the Neighbourhood

Local organisations in Hoogvliet

The district of Hoogvliet is enriched by various local organisations where citizens come together to organise initiatives and activities. These organisations in Hoogvliet include foundations

initiated by citizens serving similar purposes as community centres, as well as sports associations, social clubs, schools and playground associations. Together with the Houses of the Neighbourhood, these organisations form the physical infrastructure where neighbourhood activities most often take place. The map shows how these local organisations are spatially distributed across the district. With Hoogvliet having no commercial cultural amenities like theatres, cinemas or museums, these local organisations play a crucial role in Hoogvliet's informal networks, providing opportunities for social and cultural engagement. Active citizens are often part of such organisations, or seek to connect with them to collaborate on neighbourhood initiatives. Those who are part of these organisations often already have the organisational skills, resources and networks necessary for effective self-organisation. The following figures include some examples of activities that have been organised in Hoogvliet by such organisations and residents.



Figure 18: An image from the participade, a big yearly returning local festival organised by several local organisations and citizens (facebook page Gebied Hoogvliet, 2024)



Figure 19: Kunst en Cultuurroute Hoogvliet: a week of cultural activities throughout the neighbourhood (facebook page Kunst en Cultuurroute, 2023)



Figure 20: Zomerland Hoogvliet: A week of summer activities for children (facebook page Zomerland Hoogvliet, 2024)



Figure 21: A bingo organised by citizens in the House of the Neighbourhood (facebook page Dock Hoogvliet, 2024)



Figure 22: A christmas market organised by residents in a primary school (facebook page Tussenwater 2024)



Figure 23: A scoot mobile activity for elderly, organised by a local resident organisation (youtube Hoogvliet Online, 2023)

4.2.2. Perceived sense of connectedness in Hoogvliet

The theoretical framework outlined that local social capital serves as a motivator for active citizenship. A strong sense of belonging and connectedness within a neighbourhood, or a desire for this, intrinsically motivates citizens to engage. This section gives an insight into the perceived sense of connectedness in Hoogvliet. The insights are drawn from the perspective of active citizens (initiative-takers) and street interviews with citizens. Additionally, it is supplemented by perspectives of interviewed institutional stakeholders, who closely observe and understand the interactions among Hoogvliet's citizens.

Hoogvliet as an independent village with close communities rather than a part of Rotterdam

Hoogvliet is located relatively far from the city centre of Rotterdam. At the same time, residents of Hoogvliet don't feel part of Rotterdam South. This causes multiple citizens to perceive Hoogvliet as an individual village rather than a part of Rotterdam. This village-like identity resonates with the history of Hoogvliet, where it only was annexed later as part of the municipality Rotterdam. The sense of separation from the big city is also reflected in the valued close-knit communities in Hoogvliet. Initiative-takers highlight that they appreciate the strong local connections, where familiarity and connections with neighbours reinforce this village identity.

“Well, I always say Hoogvliet is Hoogvliet and Rotterdam is Rotterdam. And why? Because Hoogvliet has a tight-knit community. And in Rotterdam-Zuid, you don't even know who your neighbours are. So yeah, in that respect, it really is like a village.”

– Initiative-taker 1

Lack of connectedness between neighbourhoods in the district of Hoogvliet

In addition to specifically focusing on local bonds, many citizens mentioned that they feel connected to Hoogvliet primarily through its physical infrastructure. The proximity of basic amenities like the supermarket fosters a sense of spatial connectedness limited to their residential neighbourhoods rather than Hoogvliet's district as an entirety. In terms of community connectedness, initiative-takers also mainly focus on activities within their own neighbourhood, where they have well established contacts with the citizens. Thus, each neighbourhood within the district often has its own amenities and active citizens/local organisations that arrange accessible activities for citizens. One citizen specifically mentioned that the sub municipality used to put in efforts to connect the different neighbourhoods of Hoogvliet, but since the sub municipality has been abolished in 2014 this connecting factor is missing. A welfare worker also noted this lack of connection between neighbourhoods.

“[...] No, it's not like they concern themselves with what's happening elsewhere in Hoogvliet. I can't imagine that people who have just moved to a new part of Meeuwenplaat know that there is a neighbourhood called Boomgaardshoek. Yes, everything is centered around the importance of their own home.”

– Welfare worker 3

Even though this shows how people live mostly focused on their own residential neighbourhoods, the Groene Gordel and the central shopping centre maintain a sense of unity in Hoogvliet. Several citizens mentioned that the large number of green spaces are key elements for a sense of connectedness within Hoogvliet. Moreover, citizens mentioned the importance of the centre of Hoogvliet with its big shopping mall, serving as a central place for citizens to access larger shopping facilities or the weekly local market.

Feelings of alienation and individualism

While citizens express a sense of belonging to Hoogvliet based on its spatial characteristics and its village-like identity and community, many citizens also explain a lack of or decline in local connectedness. This disconnection is attributed to various factors, including the arrival of new citizens following the restructuring between 1999 and 2015. These newcomers are often unfamiliar with Hoogvliet's history and its village identity cherished by long-term citizens. While this restructuring plan has been concluded, ongoing plans for redevelopment in areas like Oudeland continue to attract new citizens to Hoogvliet, potentially affecting the level of local connectedness. Furthermore, citizens perceive a division between those living in rental properties characterized by higher turnover rates and those in owner-occupied houses who have lived there for longer durations. Two citizens stated that tenants often show less care for their living space and surrounding areas, compared to long-term homeowners who place greater value on this. Lastly, citizens also link the decline in local connections to a growing focus on individual lives and the digital age, which diminishes local engagement. This lack of need for local connections was also mentioned as reasons for citizens to not engage in local activities. They have their own social groups to do activities with, or don't identify with the social groups that do tend to participate in these local activities.

4.2.3 Discussion

This section provided general information to better understand the context of Hoogvliet, and emphasizes both its sense of community and spatial connectedness as well as a perceived decline inw and lack of local connections. The feeling of local connectedness can be linked to Hoogvliet's history as a village, while the decline can be linked to recent developments that changed its demographics, infrastructure and lifestyles.

However, further enhancing local connections remains relevant for Hoogvliet, especially given initial insights on social challenges like an aging population, as this social group relies greatly on local contacts for social engagement and support (Hoogerbrugge & Burger, 2018). Furthermore, with Hoogvliet having no commercial cultural amenities and being located far away from the city centre of Rotterdam, citizens increasingly rely on local activities. Restrengthening a close-knit village feeling in Hoogvliet, countering feelings of alienation and individualism is also set up as a one of the goals in the district agreement:

“Hoogvliet is a village as a district of Rotterdam. This has advantages and disadvantages. The major advantage is that the village atmosphere is naturally present. However, in this day and age, this is no longer self-evident. In the coming years, efforts will have to be made to maintain and strengthen this village atmosphere. In a society that increasingly relies on networks and volunteers, this is of great importance.”
(Wijkraad Hoogvliet, 2022 p.23)

Thus, while the current perception on local connectedness presents challenges in terms of community cohesion, the engagement of active citizens in informal networks remains important given the district's social challenges and the lack of commercial recreational activities.

KEY TAKEAWAYS CHAPTER 4.2

About Hoogvliet and its perceived sense of connectedness

The following takeaways offer an initial insight into the demographics, social dynamics and social challenges of Hoogvliet, which influence the presence and importance of informal networks in this context. The next step is to deepen the understanding of the stakeholders involved in these informal networks, focusing on the roles of institutional stakeholders and active residents. This deeper exploration will help to identify key drivers and barriers that influence residents' ability to successfully engage in and contribute to their informal networks.

- Residents of Hoogvliet feel a sense of local connectedness. This can be related to its village like identity with close-knit communities.
- The sense of connectedness in Hoogvliet is also expressed spatially, driven by proximity to local amenities and green spaces within neighbourhoods.
- There is a lack of broader connectedness across the district, as residents describe it is mainly limited to their residential neighbourhood.
- Strengthening local social capital is particularly important for Hoogvliet's aging population, being a vulnerable social group more dependent on local connections.
- The physical infrastructure of Hoogvliet shows many active local organisations, who play key roles in organising accessible local activities.
- The lack of commercial recreational activities available in Hoogvliet further highlights the importance the value of active citizens who organise local activities.

4.3. Institutional stakeholders and their role in supporting active citizens

This section introduces the key institutional stakeholders involved in the informal networks of Hoogvliet. First, I will describe who the different institutional stakeholders are, followed by a more detailed explanation of their respective forms of support for active citizens. In addition to their tasks as described on online pages, I will further explain how the stakeholders themselves perceive their institutional role and relations with active citizens, divided into drivers and limitations. This complements the online information about their assigned tasks, providing a clearer understanding of the actual level of linking social capital within Hoogvliet.

4.3.1. Institutional stakeholders

The identified institutional stakeholders include **local civil servants from the municipality, the welfare organisation Dock, and the foundation OpzoomerMee**. They play an important role in facilitating, stimulating and supporting active citizenship in Hoogvliet. In this section I will further describe who these stakeholders are.

Local Municipality

The municipality of Rotterdam has several civil servants working for a specific district, who balance the organisational perspective of the municipality with the local perspective of citizens. Specifically relevant for this project are **the neighbourhood networkers**, because these civil servants are locally based in Hoogvliet and are assigned professionals to support active citizens. **The neighbourhood manager** has a complementary role in this. Furthermore, although its members are not civil servants, **the neighbourhood council** is also introduced here, since it also plays a role in providing subsidies for active citizens.

Neighbourhood networkers

Neighbourhood networkers focus on building and maintaining social networks within the neighbourhood, stimulating neighbourhood initiatives and facilitating collaboration between citizens, organisations, and government agencies to strengthen social cohesion and address local needs. Hoogvliet has two neighbourhood networkers, whose work is divided among the different neighbourhoods of Hoogvliet. They are the first assigned contacts for citizens seeking to speak to someone from the municipality in the neighbourhood, and are located in the Wijkhub for citizens to visit during the walk-in hours.

Neighbourhood manager

The neighbourhood manager is responsible for the integral management of specific neighbourhoods, acting as a connector between the municipality, citizens, and local organisations. They coordinate activities, promote participation, and address issues to improve the liveability. Hoogvliet has one neighbourhood manager.



Figure 24: From left to right: the neighbourhood manager and the two neighbourhood networkers (Facebook Gebied Hoogvliet, 2024)

Neighbourhood council

Each district of Rotterdam has their own neighbourhood council, composed of representative citizens chosen by the neighbourhood's inhabitants. These councils advocate for citizens' needs and interests. While initiated by the municipality, it is important to note that they act as citizens and not as civil servants, rather serving as a bridge between citizens and the municipality. Through the council, citizens, organisations, and entrepreneurs can bring attention to matters they find important in the neighbourhood. The district council encourages citizens to participate and share their thoughts.



Figure 25: The neighbourhood council of Hoogvliet (Jan van der Meijde, 2024)

Welfare Organisation: Dock

In Rotterdam, different areas have their own welfare providers, with Dock fulfilling this role in Hoogvliet. These welfare organisations work on behalf of the municipality, carrying out welfare tasks based on the established policy on social support outlined in "the entire city" (heel de stad) framework for 2021-2026. This policy framework, developed by the municipality, partners and citizens, serves as the foundation for the acquirement of social support in Rotterdam. As explained earlier, the welfare workers of Dock in Hoogvliet are located and work in the Houses of the Neighbourhood (Huizen van de Wijk), where citizens can walk in and meet with these welfare workers.



Figure 26: Dock's logo and information on locations (Dock, 2024)

OpzoomerMee

OpzoomerMee is a foundation dedicated to enhance the quality of Rotterdam's neighbourhoods through stimulating community driven activities. While OpzoomerMee can be seen as an organisation less formal than the municipality and the Dock, it is introduced here as an institutional stakeholder with their organisation providing structural and professional support for active citizens. They currently run two main programs to support citizens in this. First off, they have their own initiative called 'Opzoomereren', which focuses on supporting citizens to organise something small with their direct neighbours on street level. Secondly, they work closely together with the municipality to also play a role in the facilitation of subsidies for citizen initiatives (bewonersinitiatieven), which will be further elaborated in the following chapter. Their office is located in the city centre of Rotterdam.



Figure 27: OpzoomerMee's team and their logo (OpzoomerMee, 2024)

4.3.2. The roles of institutional stakeholders in supporting active citizens

Having outlined the three key institutional stakeholders that support active citizens to engage in informal networks, this section will describe in what way this support is facilitated. By examining their current methods of institutional support, we can better understand how a design intervention might complement these efforts or address existing gaps in supporting active citizens in linking social capital. The primary support comes from the municipality, with Dock and OpzoomerMee collaborating closely with or acting on behalf of the municipality when it comes to supporting active citizens. Given their complementary roles, I will first focus on describing municipal support, followed by an examination of the (complementary) roles of Dock and OpzoomerMee.

Municipality's role in supporting active citizens

Financial support

The municipality offers financial support for citizens who have ideas that generally improve the neighbourhood or the city through various subsidies. These subsidies are categorized on the municipality website under different themes such as culture and art, sustainability and sports (see figure 28). While social organisations and citizens can apply for multiple subsidies and funds to support their activities, navigating this extensive list can be perceived as overwhelming and not all subsidies can be requested by individual citizens who are not acting through legal entities.

Furthermore, the municipality of Rotterdam differentiates initiatives into social and spatial initiatives. For citizens interested in contributing to the neighbourhood related to fostering informal networks and community cohesion, mainly social initiatives are relevant. A specific subsidy encouraging social initiatives are called

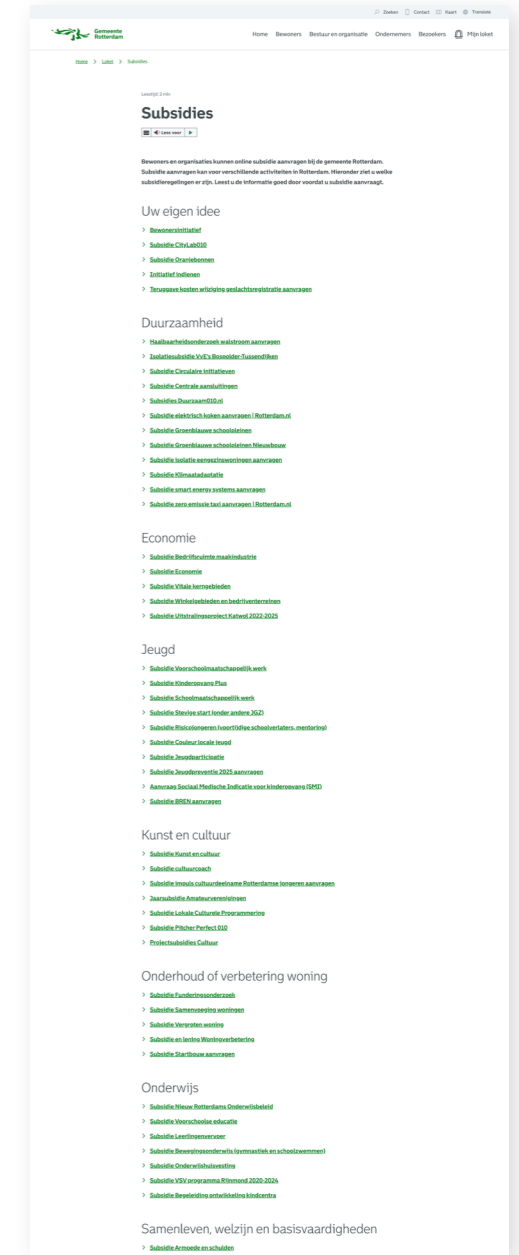


Figure 28: A cut out of the extensive list of subsidies available for Rotterdammers (Gemeente Rotterdam, 2024)

citizen initiatives (bewonersinitiatieven), which will be detailed further in the following section. Therefore, although the municipality provides various forms of financial support for citizens, this project will specifically focus on the financial support available through the citizen initiative subsidies as they are most relevant for enhancing informal networks and community cohesion.

Citizen initiatives subsidies (bewonersinitiatieven)

The subsidies for citizen initiatives (bewonersinitiatieven) aim to better support and encourage individual citizens and local communities to initiate ideas and activities within their neighbourhoods. They offer an accessible way for individual citizens to obtain financial support.

Applying for these initiatives comes with specific rules. The three primary rules are as follows: The initiative must have four citizens supporting the idea proven by signatures, it is an idea that will be executed by citizens themselves and it should be accessible to all citizens of the neighbourhood. This type of subsidy is project or activity oriented, thus mainly focusing on one-time initiatives.

Applications for citizen initiatives can be submitted via the municipal participation platform, **Mijn Rotterdam**.

Requests for these initiatives are handled and reviewed by the neighbourhood council and the neighbourhood networkers, in cooperation with OpzoomerMee. This process can take up to eight weeks, implying that citizens should take this timeframe into account when submitting a citizen initiative. Figure 30 provides a general overview of the process for applying for the citizen initiative subsidies.

Mijn Rotterdam

Mijn Rotterdam is a municipal participation platform. It is a space for citizens where they can express their opinions and so contribute to decision making on municipal projects in their neighbourhoods. Additionally, it serves as the main website for citizen initiatives in Rotterdam. Through this website, citizens can apply for the citizen initiative subsidies for their neighbourhood ideas. It also provides an overview of the initiatives that have been granted subsidies, including details on when and where these initiatives occur and an option to contact the organiser to ask questions or collaborate to help. The platform allows citizens to filter initiatives by neighbourhood, to find those happening nearby. The platform can thus be seen as a municipal infrastructure to empower citizens.



Figure 29: The platform Mijn Rotterdam

Additional support

In addition to financial support in the form of subsidies, the municipality provides different ways for citizens to contact the municipality so they can engage for questions and advice. The municipal website offers a general phone number, general email addresses and online forms to be used by residents. These ways of contacting the municipality are focused on citizens for the whole city of Rotterdam. The municipal website does explain that local civil servants such as the neighbourhood networkers can also be reached via the general phone number. Accessing these local civil servants is particularly important in the context of ideas or initiatives regarding their neighbourhood.

In the section on the participation platform Mijn Rotterdam where citizens can apply for the citizen initiative subsidy, citizens with questions are redirected to contact OpzoomerMee, visit the Wijkhub during its walk-in hours or visit the Houses of the Neighbourhood and ask for help there.

The local municipality is also active on Facebook and Instagram, where they regularly post updates and news on activities and projects in Hoogvliet. This provides an informal way for citizens to be in close contact with the local municipality and to stay easily updated on municipal projects.

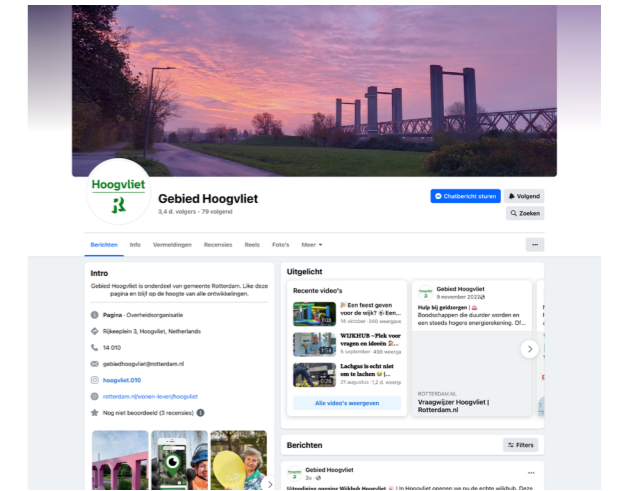
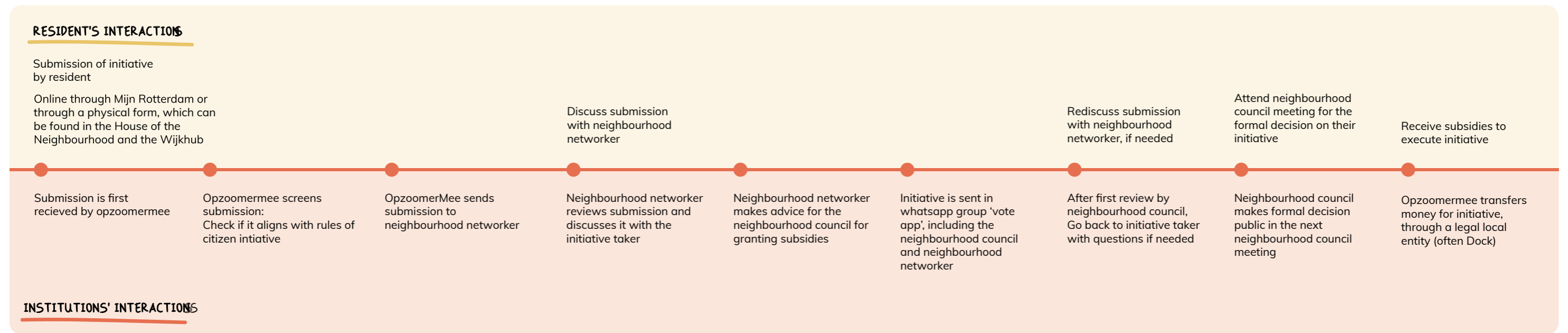


Figure 31: The municipal facebook 'Gebied Hoogvliet' (Facebook page Gebied Hoogvliet, 2024)

Figure 30: process overview of submitting and obtaining citizen initiative subsidies



Possible duration of 8 weeks

OpzoomerMee's role in supporting active citizens

Financial support

As explained earlier, OpzoomerMee first only had their own program called Opzoomeren which focuses on supporting citizens with organising activities on street level. When citizen initiatives subsidies were initiated, the municipality started collaborating with them, acknowledging OpzoomerMee as an accessible organisation that already works closely together with active citizens and their communities. Besides applying for the citizen initiative subsidy through the municipal platform Mijn Rotterdam, citizens can also apply through the website of OpzoomerMee. The less formal and more user-friendly nature of their organisation and accompanying website aims to make it more accessible for citizens to take action in self-organising for their communities.

Additional support

Being a foundation specially focusing on community cohesion, they provide various ways of supporting citizens besides the financial support provided through their two programs. On their website, OpzoomerMee provides open advice, examples of initiatives and execution plans, and resources for self-organising activities. They for instance have a booklet including all sorts of tips and tricks for citizens to organise an initiative and practicalities on what they need for applying for the citizen initiative subsidies. This booklet can be downloaded on their website, or found in the Wijkhub and the Houses of the Neighbourhood.

In terms of contact for help, they provide contact details like a phone number and email-address on their website as well. Lastly, they are occasionally present on information markets or citizen meetings, where they explain about the opportunities their organisation provides for citizens, and show their range of resources open for active citizens to use.

Dock's role in supporting active citizens

Financial support

Dock as the welfare organisation in Hoogvliet provides financial support for active citizens through the 'local budget', alongside the municipal citizen initiatives subsidies. The local budget is allocated to initiatives proposed by local organisations, social entrepreneurs and/or citizens who want to carry out welfare activities in the neighbourhood. These activities range from small-scale to longer term or weekly repeating activities, accessible and close to the living environment of Rotterdammers.

Similarly to the municipality's role in supporting citizen initiatives through subsidies, welfare workers assume a more facilitative and supportive role in assisting active citizens with welfare tasks through the local budget. The main distinction between the two is that the financial support provided through the local budget of Dock must align with the welfare assignment that the welfare workers are executing on behalf of the municipality.

Additional support

As welfare workers are located in the Houses of the Neighbourhood where citizens part of local communities of Hoogvliet already tend to meet provides an accessible space for citizens to contact these welfare workers. Here, they can walk in and ask for help. Their website provides an email-address and phone number for each of the Houses of the Neighbourhood in Hoogvliet. Dock also maintains their own Facebook page, through which they update citizens on several local activities initiated by Dock or by citizens in collaboration with Dock.



Figure 32: OpzoomerMee's booklet for help with your idea

4.3.3. The perceived roles of institutional stakeholders from their perspectives

While the previous section outlines the different institutional stakeholders and an examination of how they provide institutional support, this section outlines how the stakeholders themselves perceive their roles in supporting active citizenship within the community. Through in-depth interviews with one of the neighbourhood networkers as a representative from the local municipality in Hoogvliet, three welfare workers and an employee from OpzoomerMee who has Hoogvliet as her assigned neighbourhood, we gain insights into both the drivers and barriers they experience in their efforts to foster active engagement among citizens.

Municipality's perspective on supporting active citizens

Drivers

In addition to the financial support that the municipality provides through citizen initiative subsidies, the neighbourhood networkers working as local civil servants primarily explained to use their supportive roles as connectors in the neighbourhood. This means using their broad local network to link citizens with ideas for the neighbourhood to other (active) citizens, local organisations or professionals in the neighbourhood that could offer them help or might want to collaborate on executing their idea.

Limitations

Despite these supportive roles, the local civil servants face several limitations. The neighbourhood networker explained to feel more responsible for fostering and supporting community building activities through their assigned work tasks by the municipality. However, their capacity to stimulate and support this is limited. Their work is divided among the different neighbourhoods of Hoogvliet, and being limited to only two neighbourhood networkers

responsible for these neighbourhoods restricts their capacity to proactively approach citizens and interact with them about needs and concerns for their local communities. Consequently, they can only encourage citizens to reach out to them online or visit them in the Wijkhub with questions. However, they observe that this location is currently not very familiar among citizens, and it has its limiting opening hours. In addition to that, they perceive that their affiliation with the municipality creates a certain barrier of formality and trust for citizens seeking assistance, making them appear less approachable. The Wijkhub being located in the municipal store of Hoogvliet can further aggravate this sense of formality.

"[...] we also hope to have our own space on the ground floor in the shopping centre soon. That way, we might have people just walking in, and it may all seem a bit less intimidating, because the municipality still feels intimidating."

– Neighbourhood networker

Approaching citizens to meet them face-to-face helps to build this trust, and is explained as an important method for local civil servants to overcome these barriers.

"[...] So yeah, in my case, I said, hey, I'll come to that meeting with the mothers sometime. Then they also see that I'm just a regular person. And you know, just making the threshold a bit lower in that way. So that we can also just have a conversation to see how we can make something work."

– Neighbourhood networker

OpzoomerMee's perspective on supporting active citizens

Drivers

OpzoomerMee describe their role mainly as an advisor and redirector, providing citizens with specific information, what other subsidies might be relevant, or redirecting them to contact the neighbourhood networkers for more neighbourhood specific questions. Furthermore,

they also emphasize the importance of the resources available through their website as a means of supporting active citizens.

Limitations

A limitation that OpzoomerMee perceives in their supportive role is the lack of physical presence in and limited knowledge about Hoogvliet. Consequently, they have a more restricted role in offering neighbourhood specific advice, perceiving this to be the responsibility of the neighbourhood networkers. Therefore, they often redirect residents to the neighbourhood networkers. OpzoomerMee are thus mostly in contact with citizens through the phone and by email, where they can answer their general questions. They did try to have walk-in hours in the neighbourhood with the intention to be more approachable for citizens, but they noted that citizens did not make use of these hours to approach them personally.

OpzoomerMee also explain their limited role of supporting active citizens and local communities through initiatives which have been submitted for the citizen initiatives subsidies or via their Opzoomeren program. They don't have an insight into other informal activities that are organised in the neighbourhood. In Hoogvliet, there is not a central place to find and navigate this information.

Municipality and OpzoomerMee limited to advisory and financial support

For receiving the financial support for subsidies, both the neighbourhood networker as well as OpzoomerMee explain it is never directly declined. If it does not fit within the set boundaries of the citizen initiative subsidy, it is always discussed with the applicant what other type of financial support is suitable.

Offering support in terms of building skills and acquiring knowledge for active citizens who want to self-organise, the local municipality and OpzoomerMee thus mainly noted to give useful tips and tricks on how to approach executing

an idea, but enhancing skills and knowledge stayed limited to this advisory form of support. These professionals thus rather perceive their support as advisory rather than collaborative to directly help citizens in executing their ideas. The main reason for this is that the ownership, responsibility and execution of initiatives ultimately lie with the citizen, which is evidently a part of self-organisation.

“No, the ownership is really with the applicant of the initiative itself, we don't really get involved in that. So it is not like we really practically help them.”

– OpzoomerMee

Dock's perspective on supporting active citizens

Drivers

Collaborative support from welfare workers for mutual benefit and citizen self-confidence

In contrast to the roles of OpzoomerMee and the local municipality, welfare workers of Dock explain to occasionally provide more practical and collaborative support for active citizens. This includes helping them with submitting for the citizen initiatives subsidies and mentoring them during the execution of their initiative and activities as the collaborative organisation. Given that many initiatives take place in the Houses of the Neighbourhood and some citizen activities are funded through the local budget, welfare workers consequently act more often as a collaborator rather than merely a facilitator of active citizenship through providing financial resources and advice.

Furthermore, they explain that the role of the Houses of the Neighbourhood as community centres help to make it an approachable location for residents to walk in. This close involvement with citizens fosters stronger connections and a reciprocal relationship, where welfare workers appreciate mutual support in a way that new citizens will also start contributing to the Houses of the Neighbourhood.

“And when someone new comes in, they also need a bit of time to settle in. [...] So, it's very important that when we get new people, they are well-guided and carefully assessed to see... are you also bringing something to the table?”

– Welfare worker 3

While welfare workers perceive these forms of practical and collaborative support as time-consuming, they also observe that citizens gain confidence and become more self-reliant after receiving their support. Seeing how citizens take independent action after their initial assistance validates the additional effort put in by welfare workers. Thus, collaborative support not only fosters better connections to build trust and reciprocity between welfare workers and active citizens, it also boosts citizens capacity and self-confidence to take own action in the future.

“ [...]But for us, it's a one-time investment, and we know that citizens will now organise a big bingo four times a year entirely on their own. All they need is the space, a bingo machine, and they'll handle the rest themselves. They're already working on a funding application.”

– Welfare worker 2

Limitations

Lack of clarity for welfare workers about their role in supporting active citizens

Among welfare workers, there is a certain level of unclarity regarding their role in supporting active citizens. This ambiguity is exacerbated by the absence of a designated professional within their organisation who is responsible for assisting citizens with general ideas and needs for the neighbourhood beyond the scope of welfare specific concerns. As a result, welfare workers often perceive supporting active citizens as additional time spent outside their regular working hours. This lack of clarity is also reflected in the information which can be found online, with online pages listing Houses of the Neighbourhood as first locations for citizens to seek assistance

with questions regarding possibilities for active citizenship, suggesting a broader role than their defined capacities. Furthermore, they explain to not have insightful in what way and to what extent specifically the local municipality supports active citizens, making it unclear how their work specifically complements or overlaps this.

“It's a bit of the missing community builder. Someone who goes into the neighbourhood, does neighbourhood focused work, but who isn't specifically there for the elderly. Because what I think is, if you have people who are not linked to a youth worker or to elderly care, but who says, 'I am here for the Hoogvlieters.' That's what we're missing.”

– Welfare worker 1

The grey area of aligning neighbourhood ideas within the welfare assignment

When a citizen has an idea that closely aligns with the welfare assignment, it is more straightforward for welfare workers to provide financial support through the local budget available and to take on a more active role in providing collaborative support as explained before. For instance, projects targeted to reduce loneliness among elderly are more likely to receive direct support from welfare workers, as this is a specific goal part of the welfare assignment. However, determining if an idea fits within the welfare assignment can sometimes be a grey area. This ambiguity can make it more challenging for welfare workers to determine their support for active citizens. As a result, there can be a confusing overlap in the financial support provided by the welfare organisation with the local budget, and on the other side, OpzoomerMee and the municipality providing subsidies through citizen initiatives.

4.3.4. Discussion

The municipality, OpzoomerMee and Dock provide a diverse range of support for active citizens in Hoogvliet, each contributing with their own valuable resources and assistance. However, we can identify several challenges within these forms of support. Firstly, the local municipality as a formal actor may appear less approachable to citizens, potentially deterring citizens from seeking help. Furthermore, with only two neighbourhood networkers, local civil servants perceive limitations in their capacity to help. This can restrict the municipality's ability to effectively engage with citizens. OpzoomerMee can offer a more approachable form of support for citizens with their user-friendly website containing information, tips and resources, and their less formal character compared to the municipality. Nonetheless, their lack of local embeddedness in Hoogvliet could reduce their accessibility and effective support for neighbourhood specific questions. Additionally, the primary support offered by these actors focuses on financial and advisory support, leaving the responsibility of executing initiatives to citizens own capacities. Welfare workers on the other hand, while also providing advisory and financial support, occasionally offer more hands-on assistance. However, ambiguity regarding their responsibilities and roles in supporting active citizens can complicate this support. Despite these complexities, their support has proven beneficial in enhancing the

capacity and self-confidence of active citizens to self-organise, and builds stronger, reciprocal relations.

With these forms of institutional support for active citizens and their identified limitations, the ways of accessing this support also indicates challenges due to the fragmented nature of information across different online pages and websites. During the desk research, understanding the different forms of support through information online required extensive navigation and only after the in-depth interviews I got a deeper sense of understanding their support. Additionally, when citizens seek personal contact for help or questions, they rely on visiting the neighbourhood networkers in the Wijkhub with its limiting opening hours. Visiting the Houses if the Neighbourhood appears more approachable, but here only welfare workers are located who don't have clearly assigned roles to support active residents in contrary to the neighbourhood networkers.

In summary, while the existing institutional support infrastructure provides significant resources for active citizens in Hoogvliet, there are notable challenges related to accessibility, role clarity, lack of practical and collaborative support and the fragmentation of information. Addressing these issues could enhance the effectiveness and outreach of these support systems, fostering better linking social capital for active citizens in Hoogvliet.

KEY TAKEAWAYS CHAPTER 4.3

Institutional stakeholders and their role in supporting active citizens

These takeaways provide insight into the perceived roles of institutional stakeholders in supporting Hoogvliet's active residents, along with the drivers and barriers they encounter in providing this support. Building on this, the next step is to gain a deeper understanding of the perspectives of residents who actively contribute to informal networks, to finally understand barriers and drivers from their own perspectives. This includes exploring how they perceive their relations within their informal networks and the drivers and barriers they face in receiving support within these networks.

- The municipality, OpzoomerMee, and Dock each provide valuable institutional support for active citizens in Hoogvliet, though with distinct approaches and resources.
- The municipality, as a formal actor, fear they appear less approachable to citizens, and working with only two neighbourhood networkers reduces their capacity to engage effectively.
- OpzoomerMee offers more user-friendly, informal support, but its lack of local presence in Hoogvliet hinders their accessibility and lacks their support for neighbourhood specific knowledge.
- The primary focus of support from the Municipality and OpzoomerMee is financial and advisory assistance, leaving the ultimate responsibility and capacity for implementation to the ownership of citizens, which is evidently a part of self-organisation.
- Welfare workers sometimes offer more practical and collaborative support which can help to build the confidence and capacity of residents, but they face unclear responsibilities regarding their support for active citizens which can complicate their role.
- Fragmentation of information across multiple online sources can make it difficult for citizens to navigate and access the possibilities for institutional support efficiently.
- The limited availability of neighbourhood networkers in the Wijkhub reduces opportunities for a face-to-face approach for contact and support.
- Addressing accessibility, clarity of roles, and improving centralized information could strengthen institutional support and empower active citizens more effectively.

4.4. The citizens of Hoogvliet and their informal networks

This section introduces the different types of citizens involved in the informal networks of Hoogvliet. First, I will describe how these citizens may assume different roles in these informal networks and in what way they contribute to the informal networks of Hoogvliet. In the second section, I will dive deeper into the perspective of citizens who actively contribute to the initiation of activities in these informal networks, to identify drivers and barriers within their contributions and how a design intervention could better support them in this.

4.4.1. Different citizens involved in informal networks

This section describes the different citizen types that are involved in informal networks, which I defined as a researcher by actively engaging in the local context, their local activities and talking to citizens. I distinguished initiative-takers, long-term volunteers, occasional volunteers and participants.

Initiative-takers

Initiative-takers are the primary drivers behind neighbourhood initiatives. They generate ideas for neighbourhood activities and take the lead in organising them. They are often characterized by their leadership roles, taking responsibility for managing projects. Sometimes their activities are more formally organised through their own established foundations, or they closely collaborate with/are a member of a local organisation. These individuals often have the organisational capacity and strong social capital in the neighbourhood, so forming the usual suspects who most often apply for citizen initiatives. They often get support from long-term volunteers and/or occasional volunteers.

Long-term volunteers (members)

These are citizens who work together closely as a cohesive citizen group, complementing each other's skills and functioning as equal partners. Sometimes, one member may take the lead as the main initiative-taker keeping the group together, but often they also act as a collective with equal contributions to an initiative.

Occasional volunteers (helping hands)

These volunteers are defined as individuals who occasionally assist initiative-takers and long-term volunteers in their activities without taking on leadership roles and major responsibilities. They prefer to act as helping hands, contributing to smaller tasks and offering their time, skills, or resources when needed.

Participants

Participants are community members who enjoy engaging in local activities without being involved in organising them. Their motivations vary, from socializing and meeting new people to enjoying activities that align with their interests. While they don't contribute directly to the setup of events, their attendance is crucial for the success and vibrancy of local activities.

Different citizens do not belong exclusively to one group. Their individual roles can change over time based on new experiences, motivations and connections within local communities. For instance, participants can become occasional volunteers after some time as they build more trust and connections within the community, while occasional volunteers may be inspired by initiative-takers to take on more active, long-term roles in organising activities. Furthermore, while an initiative-taker acts as an organiser in their own activities, they may take the role as a participant in other local activities.

4.4.2. Active citizens' perspectives on informal networks

Building on the previous section that outlined the citizens involved in informal networks, this section dives into the perspectives of active citizens contributing to these networks through their self-organised initiatives. These insights are drawn from in-depth interviews with four initiative-takers, complemented by conversations with other citizens of Hoogvliet. Table 2 gives an overview of the four interviewed initiative-takers, providing contextual insight into their contributions and roles within the informal networks of Hoogvliet.

The goal is to understand how these active citizens perceive their roles within informal networks and to identify the support structures

they depend on. To achieve this, I employed the social capital theory to examine the relationships within their informal networks that possibly provide them with support, or where social capital might be lacking or even hindering them. Furthermore, the Civic Volunteerism Model is applied to understand the individual factors that influence them to self-organise. Combining these frameworks allowed me to identify potential drivers and barriers they experience in their roles and the support systems available to them.

INITIATIVE TAKER 1 (+- 50)	Initially started as part of a citizen group, who have now formed a foundation. Focuses primarily on organising accessible activities for families/children, specifically targeting her residential neighbourhood in Hoogvliet.
INITIATIVE TAKER 2 (+- 45)	Operates through a foundation with a group of long-term volunteers, and manages a dedicated space serving as a community living room for elderly where they can drop in for coffee and a conversation. They organise activities aimed at seniors, including a project that specifically addresses loneliness among the elderly in Hoogvliet.
INITIATIVE TAKER 3 (+- 65)	Focuses mainly on organising activities for children in Hoogvliet through an informal citizen initiative group. They don't have their own space but collaborate closely with the House of the Neighbourhood where their activities most often take place.
INITIATIVE TAKER 4 (+- 45)	Started as a citizen group focused on isolated women, primarily refugees, and has since grown into an established foundation functioning as a community centre for all residents of the surrounding area. The foundation organises accessible activities for residents and supports participation in society, for instance by providing volunteering opportunities at the centre.

Table 2: An overview of the four interviewed initiative takers

Bonding social capital: relationships within the initiatives

Strong core group in active initiatives

All interviewed initiative-takers emphasize that they have a strong core group of long-term volunteers, which contributes to effective cooperation within the team. They can count on each other to do their part, making it easy to organise activities and form close relations. They perceive each other as friends beyond volunteers. One initiative-taker noted that another active local group had not been self-organising lately, due to a lack of volunteers. This aligns with findings in the literature review, which highlights that strong bonding social capital in the core group of an initiative is needed for its durability

“We have a really nice team here, a very good team. A team you can rely on. [...] I have so much support from my volunteers. They are not just volunteers anymore. It's really a team that just pulls me through the difficult times.”

– Initiative-taker 2

(Agger & Jensen, 2015; Igalla et al., 2019). Reaching and inviting new residents for support While initiative-takers commented that occasional volunteers for activities outside of their core group are appreciated and often needed, it is hard to explain this to people. Initiative-takers explain that currently personally approaching and inviting citizens works best for reaching new interested citizens. Explaining what they do in person, how people can join or help through genuine interactions helps to develop a sense of trust and to let someone feel invited to join. It is easier to ask questions and it helps to explain and discuss possibilities for volunteering. These people are mainly being reached through their existing local contacts. This aligns with the theoretical framework, which outlined that effective recruitment often happens through existing networks and personal invitations. A downside of this could be the potential exclusion of new, interested groups.

“If people feel like they have to do all kinds of things for the organisation for whole weeks, it can also be a very small thing. If you just want to help set up a tent, that's fine. We're very happy with that. But you can't explain that. You can post a message on Facebook a thousand times. But if you explain it verbally, they more often say I can do that.”

– Initiative-taker 1

Bridging social capital: engaging citizens as participants in the initiatives

Social media as a digital infrastructure for engaging citizens and spreading information

Local networks of active citizens are connected online through social media platforms, mainly with Facebook pages. These social media form the online infrastructure where citizens spread information and engage with other citizens.

The interviewed initiative-takers generally expressed satisfaction about the efficacy of this mode of interaction for reaching citizens to engage in their activities and give up to date information. Based on the interview insights and desk research, the social media platforms can be connected to the following interaction qualities, contributing to this efficacy:

- **Embeddedness:** One's existing personal networks are already active on social media. This makes it accessible for active citizens to use the same means of interaction to reach people and create new pages for new social networks, specifically for local initiatives. Most initiatives in Hoogvliet are active on Facebook, with users being predominantly adults, targeting either elderly or families with young children.
- **Ease of use:** Residents who are already active on social media are familiar with its user experience, mitigating the need to acquire skills in navigating unfamiliar interfaces. This enhances seamless interactions of the platform, contrary to an interface they are not yet familiar with.

- **Personalisability:** Users can choose which local pages they want to follow or interact with. This customization enables users to tailor their online interactions to align with their interests and preferences, avoiding information overload from all different kinds of groups.
- **Autonomy:** Users can easily start and manage their own community groups/pages on social media independently. They can post content and share information, without centralized regulations or guidelines.

Social media platforms were thus mentioned as the main digital tools that active citizens use in their informal networks. Although desk research identified Mijn Rotterdam as a possible digital infrastructure that provides an overview of citizen initiatives, it is merely used as a tool for applying for the citizen initiative subsidies and is not used for purposes beyond that.

The disadvantages of dependency on social media

While these are positive interaction qualities of using social media, initiative-takers also mentioned disadvantages that come with dependency on social media as local community platforms. First off, initiative-takers expressed worries for people who are not active on social media but would still be interested in or would benefit from their activities. Both initiative-takers as well as the citizens approached through street interviews explained that they used to have a local newspaper before the corona crisis, which they now miss. Furthermore, initiative-takers suggest concerns regarding the dependency on social media platforms, naming the influence of algorithms as a factor of not reaching individuals effectively.

“What is very unfortunate is that we no longer have a local newspaper anymore where everything is featured. We were regularly featured in the newspapers and people could read about it and then they could think, oh yes, we can go there, or we can go there. And that's gone now. There are a lot of elderly who miss that, you know.”

– Initiative-taker 2

Personal contact crucial for building familiarity, embeddedness and trust within the neighbourhood

In addition to social media, the interviews revealed that personal interactions through word of mouth remain an important way of engaging participants, similarly to finding volunteers. When initiative-takers and participants share details about local activities, they will tell others in the neighbourhood and so on. Furthermore, as highlighted by residents in street interviews, knowing someone else who participates would lower barriers for people to join as well.

Initiative-takers say that personally approaching people helps them to show the faces behind the organisation and in this way gain more respect, familiarity and consequently a sense of embeddedness within the neighbourhood. Moreover, some initiative-takers also use social media with a more personal approach to enhance this recognition and familiarity, by sharing pictures of the activities and of people that joined or helped.

Limitations of word-of-mouth communication

However, as outlined in the literature review, word-of-mouth mainly reaches people within existing social circles, making it difficult to spread information about activities across different groups (Akin et al. 2019). This was substantiated during the interviews, where both welfare workers and one initiative-taker specifically pointed out that they mostly had recurring clubs visiting the local activities.

Additional sources for local information

Though social media and word of mouth are highlighted by initiative-takers as the most effective means of communicating their initiatives, citizens gather information about local activities and initiatives through various ways. They are mentioned by initiative-takers and/or citizens interviewed on the street.

Flyers

Flyers are distributed throughout the neighbourhood and placed at community centres by initiative-takers. This keeps citizens who regularly visit the Houses of the Neighbourhood up to date.



Figure 33: An overview of flyers in the House of the Neighbourhood (Author's own image)

Digital newsletters and pages

Digital newsletters and pages from the municipality as well as informal sources occasionally feature information about local events, although mostly featuring stories after events have occurred.

Direct, local observation of activities

Citizens learn about local activities by directly passing them by in the neighbourhood, coincidentally encountering the activity.



Figure 34: 'Hoogvliet Online', an online local newspaper (Hoogvliet Online, 2024)

Inclusive motivations and goals, exclusive constraints

Initiative-takers are mostly motivated by the key social challenges that they observe in Hoogvliet. They stress problems like loneliness, an increasing elderly population and (hidden) poverty. The positive feedback and validation that they get from participants in their initiatives gives a sense of fulfilment. Furthermore, the personal enjoyment in the work itself adds to their intrinsic motivation. For instance, one initiative-taker who mainly organises activities for children highlighted the joy she finds in

working with children. These combined extrinsic and intrinsic motivations drive them to keep organising accessible activities for everyone. Moreover, many local networks are highly dependent on these initiative-takers. Without their involvement, initiative-takers fear that local networks will fall apart. Consequently, they feel a strong sense of responsibility to the community of Hoogvliet, also motivating them to continue organising.

"And then we made an agreement, being that whatever happens, we keep continuing you know. You can not disappoint all those children, you simply cannot."

– Initiative-taker 3

However, despite their inclusive intentions and sense of responsibility, initiative-takers often face constraints that limit their ability to expand these efforts and include new citizens to participate, which would foster more bridging social capital.

Activity clubs reach their limit of participants, the spaces they organise in are limited in their size to include more participants, and they already manage to reach more than enough people through their social media pages and by personally approaching people. This focus on existing networks can inadvertently exclude individuals who are unaware of or unable to participate in these activities, or who do not feel invited when word of mouth communication and social media primarily targets familiar groups.

Vulnerable social groups of Hoogvliet

Through my conversations with residents on the streets, experienced initiative takers and institutional stakeholders I gained a clearer understanding of Hoogvliet's social issues, and what the vulnerable social groups are that struggle with these challenges. These are consequently often the targeted participants of the informal activities and initiatives in Hoogvliet.

Rising elderly population

The rising elderly population of Hoogvliet is considered one of Hoogvliet's biggest social challenges by local actors. Many elderly residents, specifically in Hoogvliet Zuid, live alone and consequently experience feelings of loneliness. Creating opportunities for this social group to connect through local activities is therefore important.

Low-income families

Poverty is also noted as a significant challenge in Hoogvliet. Many families in Hoogvliet struggle financially, though these circumstances may not always be clearly visible, which is referred to as hidden poverty. In response, initiatives often aim to make their activities as accessible as possible, ensuring they are free to visit or only asking a minimal fee.

Residents with a migration background

Residents with a migration background in Hoogvliet are perceived as a social group that needs additional support to fully participate in society. For instance, a lack of Dutch proficiency was mentioned as an issue that these residents struggle with. Welfare workers and local initiatives assist these residents by helping them with official paperwork, organising language courses and providing volunteering opportunities to support their integration in society.

Youth

The youth of Hoogvliet are also key target group that could benefit from greater attention and support, as described specifically by the welfare workers. They emphasized the lack of opportunities for young people to develop and socialize in the neighbourhood, with concerns raised about increasing levels of loneliness among youth in Hoogvliet. In response, a new 'jongerenhub' is opening this year, aiming to enhance opportunities for youth to connect and engage. Additionally, several local organisations specifically target young people through for instance sports activities or other programs for them to develop their young talent.

Barriers for participating in community activities

Several individual barriers were identified for citizens to not participate in local activities through the street interviews.

Lack of time

Activities are not planned at times that citizens are available, or people are too busy with other things where they already spend much of their (free) time on.

Lack of awareness

There is a lack of awareness among citizens about local activities. While some citizens manage to find information through their specific channels of choice such as Facebook or digital newsletters, others struggle to identify where to look for such opportunities and would resort to searching on Google as a next step.

Lack of personal connections (bonding social capital)

Some citizens also highlight a lack of personal connections with individuals engaged in local activities as a reason not to participate. They mention that their own social circles would not necessarily become involved, leaving no reason for them to join either.

Lack of alignment with interests and needs

For people to want to participate in local activities, they said it should also match their personal interests. A citizen for instance specifically mentioned that they would consider joining if the local activities would be fun for her kids.

Bridging social capital: collaborating with other active citizens and their initiatives

Respect for each other's autonomy and ownership

While most initiative-takers appreciate helping hands from citizens, there is generally less interest on collaborating with other active citizens who have their own initiatives. This reluctance comes from the fact that each initiative has their own values, ideas and ways of organising, which could cause for more complications rather than fruitful collaborations. However, initiative-takers explain that when they do see chances for collaborations or exchange of information, they know how to find each other. They generally prefer to focus on their own ideas and specific areas of Hoogvliet, while respecting others on doing the same. Despite these efforts to respect each other's plans and avoid simultaneous activities, scheduling conflicts occasionally occur due to a lack of coordinated communication.

The reliance on individual Facebook pages for sharing dates and details about initiatives contributes to scattered information, making it difficult to coordinate and have an overview of when organised activities take place in the neighbourhood.

"Most of us won't really get in each other's way. We all truly respect each other. But to actually do activities together, we don't really see it happening. Because it's all our own activities in our own neighbourhood, so to say."

- Initiative-taker 3

Sharing resources and helping others: desirable, but not self-evident in practice

As was found in literature, sharing skills, resources and knowledge could benefit active citizens in achieving their goals. Though in practice, this way of collaborating is not so straightforward or preferable. For example, the sharing of physical

resources for activities can also come with unforeseen logistic issues. In this sense, active citizens may prefer to keep ownership over how these resources are utilized.

"How cool would it be, how much money would it save if we placed a popcorn machine there that everyone could use? Well, then we all have to coordinate and make sure we don't want to use it on the same day. And who's going to pick it up? [...] It's really just a lot of hassle."

- Initiative-taker 1

Collaborating with citizens who have ideas

Currently, helping with skills and knowledge mostly happens when initiative-takers assist others who approach them with own ideas for initiatives. The nature and expectations of this practical support resemble those expressed by the welfare workers. Most initiative-takers mention they appreciate something in return for offering help. Consequently, initiative-takers are more inclined to share their expertise when they perceive a certain value for themselves. This effort of helping often results in citizens taking on their own initiative in the future and builds better connections between the citizens asking for help and the initiative-takers providing help.

"If there's a request from someone in the neighbourhood, like, can we organise a garden market? Then we look into what we can do. Yes, and then we hope that those people also want to contribute in some way. This often results in additional volunteers."

- Initiative-taker 1

One initiative-taker expressed that she mainly considers the opinions and ideas of citizens to incorporate them into their own organised activities rather than to encourage others to self-organise. She emphasized the importance of considering the interests of the people they organise the activities for.

Linking social capital: relations with institutions

Close ties with welfare workers

The presence of welfare workers in the Houses of the Neighbourhood facilitates close contact and collaborations between citizens and welfare workers. It leads to more informal and trusted relationships, despite welfare workers being part of a formal organisation bound by rules and regulations with the municipality as their client. This dynamic reshapes traditional linking relations of power to more equal bridging relationships with closer ties.

"We have very good contact. We can turn to Dock with questions, and if we have something for them, they also approach us. So, really very good contact with Dock."

- Initiative-taker 4

Relationship with the municipality and OpzoomerMee: facilitative financiers rather than collaborators

A key factor mentioned in maintaining good relations with the municipality is for securing financial support, which is crucial to ensure that local activities remain accessible and inclusive for participants to join. The interviewed initiative-takers find the application for the citizens' initiative subsidies relatively straightforward due to their familiarity with the application process. Furthermore, their established trust with the local civil servants in Hoogvliet which they have built through organising previous activities makes it easier to secure the subsidies. However, they still perceive the reliance on these subsidies for continued engagement as unpredictable.

In addition to this, the citizen initiative subsidies provided by the municipality and OpzoomerMee are more project oriented rather than long-term, further aggravating the uncertainty of initiatives. The municipality is consequently seen as a source of funding rather than a collaborative partner, from whom they could learn and exchange

skills. While they strive to maintain these linking relationships for financial support, it often does not extend beyond that.

“We have much more close contact with Dock, yes. Especially when you want to organise something. And from the municipality I just get money.”

– Initiative-taker 3

Lack of municipal recognition for their contributions

The limited collaboration with the municipality can be linked to the perception of institutional stakeholders that the responsibility of self-organising activities ultimately lies with residents themselves. This perspective also aligns with the identified needs of initiative-takers, who value autonomy and ownership of their initiatives to maintain control and keep them accessible for the community. However, while they appreciate this autonomy and try to maintain good contact with the municipality for financial support, this does not mean that they don't expect more from their relationship. Initiative-takers mention to feel that their voices are not fully heard. While they are driven by the appreciation of participating citizens, the acknowledged social challenges of Hoogvliet and their own intrinsic motivations, they also desire greater recognition and engagement from the municipality. As a result, they sometimes feel their contributions go undervalued. This aligns with literature, which indicated that a lack of genuine recognition and visibility for the impact of their work can strain the relationships between facilitating institutions and active citizens.

“It's so ironic. I try to help the municipality by supporting their redirected volunteers, guiding them a bit to participate in society. But yeah, still... It seems like you're not heard, not seen.”

– Initiative-taker 4

4.4.3. Discussion: support for active citizens in Hoogvliet

This sub-chapter explored the drivers and barriers experienced by active citizens engaged in informal networks of Hoogvliet in order to understand how a digital infrastructure could support their contributions. Despite identifying various challenges, all interviewed initiative-takers generally expressed satisfaction with their work. The challenges identified did not significantly hinder their ability to effectively execute their initiatives, they were rather mentioned as minor barriers. These insights thus imply that these active citizens are experienced initiative-takers: their long-term involvement in the neighbourhood has allowed them to build strong social capital and develop the capacity necessary for leading citizen initiatives.

Contrary to expectations based on literature about bridging social capital, which suggests a need for collaboration with others for collective action, the initiative-takers demonstrated a strong sense of autonomy and ownership over their projects, showing little need or desire for extensive collaboration with other active citizens. The strong sense of bonding social capital within their core group may explain the lack of need for such collaborations. However, they do welcome and require the support of occasional volunteers. When they do collaborate, they mainly work together with local organisations, alongside whom they are known as the “usual suspects”: the people with the organisational capacity to self-organise initiatives in Hoogvliet. Occasionally, initiative-takers provide hands-on assistance to other active residents that have their own ideas for the neighbourhood. This helps to build the capacity and self-confidence of these citizens seeking support and fosters better reciprocal connections between the initiative-takers and the active citizens asking for help.

In terms of linking social capital, the insights reveal that one of the greatest challenges stem from the insecurity of financial support. Relationships

with the institutional stakeholders vary: relations with welfare workers are perceived as strong, trusted bonds, indicating bridging or even bonding connections. In contrast, links with the municipality and OpzoomerMee are primarily seen as a means to gain financial resources. Lastly, initiative-takers also indicate a lack of recognition for their contributions from the local municipality.

An interesting finding is that the high popularity but limited capacity of their initiatives to involve more participants indicates a high demand for such activities in Hoogvliet. This aligns with the social problems found in Hoogvliet, where citizens struggling with loneliness, poverty and an increasing elderly population are more dependent on these local, accessible activities.

This research therefore only identified minor opportunities to provide support for experienced initiative-takers. A central digital infrastructure could create an overview of the currently scattered initiatives in social media pages, which in turn could support initiative-takers to better coordinate their activities. Furthermore, a digital platform not reliant on social media could promote more bridging social capital by reaching a more diverse audience beyond existing social media and word-of-mouth networks.

However, integrating a new digital tool poses challenges. Social media is already deeply embedded in the informal networks of Hoogvliet. The high embeddedness and ease of social media presents a barrier for a new digital tool to provide effective support beyond what active citizens can already achieve through social media. To successfully integrate a new digital tool, it is thus desirable to have an added value beyond merely replacing similar functionalities of social media. This added value should specifically appeal to these experienced initiative-takers, as they are trusted key figures in the neighbourhood with extensive local networks. Consequently, they play an important role in embedding and promoting a new tool within local communities

of Hoogvliet. Given the research insights, which reveal little direct need for additional support for experienced initiative-takers, convincing initiative-takers of the benefits of a new platform may be difficult. This could potentially limit its integration and the effectiveness of addressing opportunities.

In conclusion, despite minor challenges, experienced initiative-takers in Hoogvliet are generally satisfied with their initiatives. They demonstrate strong autonomy and ownership as well as established skills. The insights do indicate that there is high demand for community activities. A new digital infrastructure for active citizens could help to coordinate their activities and reach a broader audience, but its success depends on offering clear added value beyond existing social media tools.

KEY TAKEAWAYS CHAPTER 4.4

The citizens of Hoogvliet and their informal networks

These key takeaways provide me with insights into the support available to active citizens through their relations within their informal networks, and thus what potential drivers and barriers they experience in their contributions to informal networks. Together with the insights from sections 4.3 and 4.4, these takeaways will guide the final conclusion of this chapter and help inform the design focus in the following chapter.

- The interviewed active citizens in Hoogvliet are generally satisfied with their work, despite facing minor challenges.
- Their long-term involvement has helped them build strong social capital and capacity for leading initiatives, implying they are experienced initiative-takers.
- Contrary to literature on bridging social capital, initiative-takers show a strong sense of autonomy and prefer minimal collaboration with other active citizens.
- They mainly collaborate with local organisations, where they are known as “the usual suspects” for their capacity to organise.
- Initiative-takers occasionally assist other active residents with their own initiatives, helping them develop skills and confidence and so fostering better relations.
- A challenge regarding linking relations is financial insecurity, with relations with institutional stakeholders varying in trust and recognition.
- Their initiatives are popular but have limited capacity to involve more participants, indicating high demand in Hoogvliet.
- A digital infrastructure could help to better coordinate initiatives and reach a wider audience beyond established social media networks. However, the strong embeddedness of social media tools in informal networks poses a challenge for integrating a new digital tool.
- Any new digital tool must offer added value beyond social media functionalities to appeal to these experienced initiative-takers.
- Experienced initiative-takers are key figures in the community and are crucial for embedding and promoting a new tool.
- Convincing initiative-takers of the benefits of a new platform may be difficult due to their satisfaction with current systems.

CONCLUSION CHAPTER 4

Understanding and exploring Hoogvliet's informal networks

In this chapter, I used the literature as a theoretical framework to explore active citizenship within the informal networks of Hoogvliet.

The first section provided an overview of Hoogvliet's social context and the sense of connectedness among residents, which serves as an important motivator for active citizenship. I then examined the support offered by institutional stakeholders—the local municipality, Dock, and OpzoomerMee—and how these institutions perceive their support for active residents. Lastly, I delved into the experiences of residents who actively contribute to the informal networks, particularly experienced initiative-takers. I focused on their perceived levels of bonding, bridging, and linking social capital, and how these relations enable them to effectively self-organise their initiatives, or where it falls short.

The ultimate goal of this contextual research as explained in the introduction was to identify drivers and barriers that affect active citizens' ability to successfully engage in informal networks through self-organising initiatives.

Based on these insights, I aimed to define a design direction for a digital intervention to serve as supportive infrastructure enabling more successful active engagement. However, the findings reveal that from the perspective of experienced initiative-takers they encounter minor barriers in their contributions. Their long-term involvement has enabled them to build strong social capital in their neighbourhood, resulting in a solid support structure as well as a strong sense of local trust and connectedness. A main barrier lies in the limited capacity of their popular initiatives to include more participants, possibly disappointing residents with the identified social challenges demonstrating a high demand for such activities.

Although institutional stakeholders identified limitations in their ability to support active residents, these were not similarly reflected in the way experienced initiative-takers perceived linking social capital. Instead, experienced initiative-takers felt that the main limitation was the lack of security on financial support and lack of recognition for their contributions. This gap

in their perceptions could be due to institutional stakeholders focusing more on the challenges they face in supporting new or inexperienced active residents, whose challenges may not align with experienced initiative-takers, as they already know their way around in the neighbourhood

and have built established linking connections. The accompanying figure 35 illustrates how these experienced initiative-takers perceive their relations to other local actors for support in their informal networks through the lenses of bonding, bridging, and linking social capital,

including the drivers and barriers for successful active citizenship within those relationships. In the next chapter, I will determine a design focus informed by the insights gathered in this contextual research.

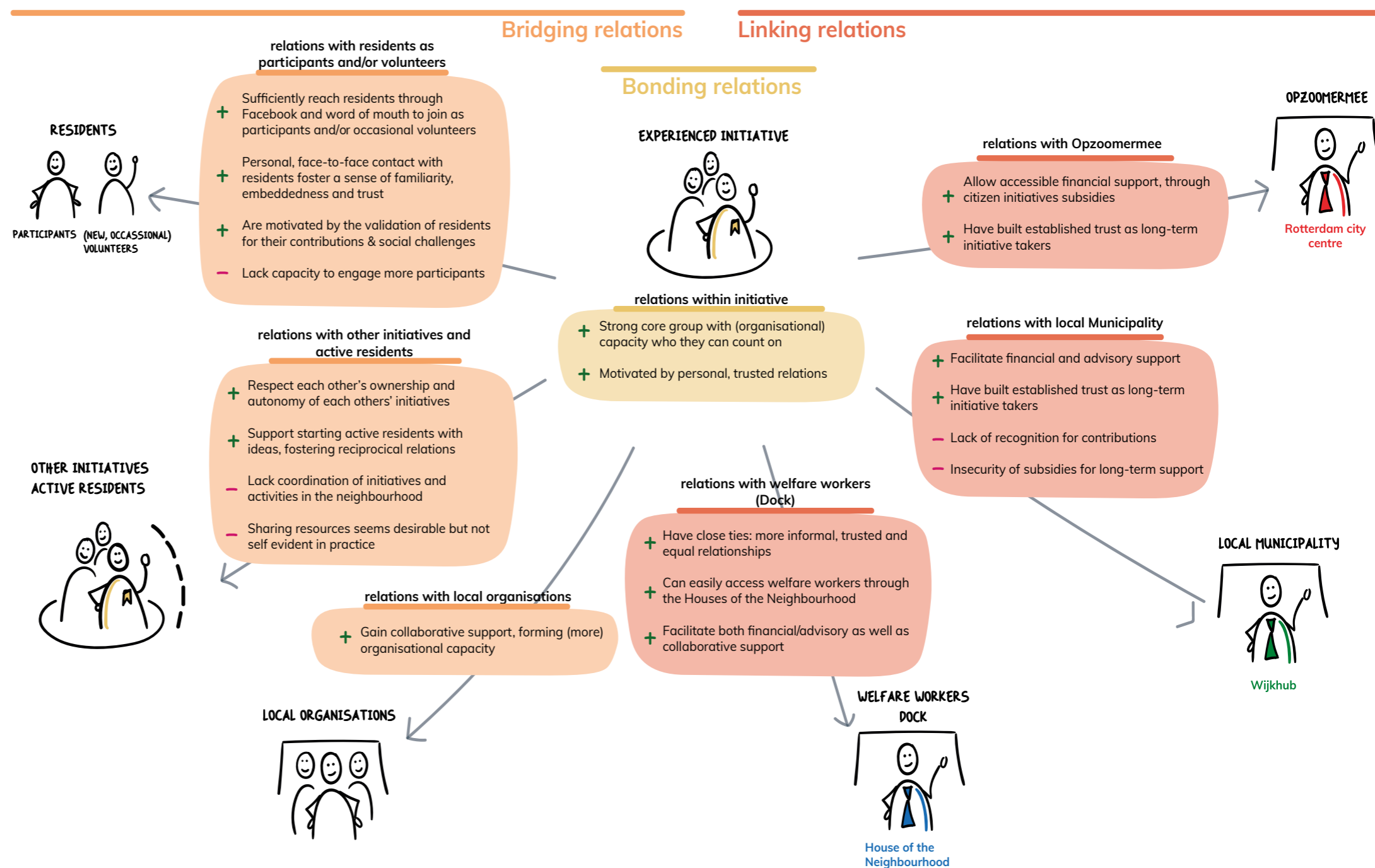


Figure 35: The identified support structure for interested, inexperienced citizens, adapted from the social capital theory

5

DETERMINING A DESIGN FOCUS

In this section, I will define a design focus based on insights gained from the research, which provided a comprehensive understanding of Hoogvliet's informal networks, the key actors within these networks, and the drivers and barriers for active citizens contributing to these networks through self-organised initiatives and activities. Choosing a design focus should further help to answer the project's (design) research question:

How can active citizens in Hoogvliet who contribute to the neighbourhood be supported in their informal networks by a digital tool like the basiskaart?

To define this design focus, I first conducted an analysis of the basiskaart by the Veldacademie. With this analysis aimed to identify how the current design of the basiskaart provides opportunities to align with the needs of active citizens and where it falls short. This analysis was used as inspiration to define a design direction and can be found in appendix C. Thereafter, I further defined the design focus using the discussions and conclusion of the contextual research in the preceding chapter. This further helped me to determine how a digital design intervention in Hoogvliet could be most effective.

5.1. Shift of focus to interested, inexperienced residents

5.2. The current support infrastructure for interested residents

5.1. Shift of focus to interested, inexperienced citizens

The previous chapter concluded that experienced initiative-takers generally express satisfaction with their contributions to informal networks and do not face major challenges. This raises questions of whether a new digital infrastructure could provide them with significant support in their initiatives. Nevertheless, their efforts are highly valued by people participating in these initiatives, reflecting a strong demand for such activities. The main limitation they face is the capacity to expand their reach and involve more citizens. This is substantiated by their minimal efforts to build bridging social capital and attract new participants, as their activities reach sufficient people through word-of-mouth communication and minimal promotion on Facebook.

Given these insights, it may be more valuable to focus on supporting citizens who wish to engage or contribute to informal networks through self-organising initiatives or activities, but lack the necessary capacity and social capital to do so, which experienced initiative-takers already have built.

Who are these 'interested residents'?

Such interested, but inexperienced residents can be both long term residents as well as new residents of the neighbourhood. Their core characteristic is their current or potential interest in engaging in the neighbourhood and its informal networks. This desire for local connectedness and concern for the liveability of their environment is important to distinguish them as active citizens, rather than general volunteers whose efforts are not specifically neighbourhood oriented.

INTERESTED, INEXPERIENCED RESIDENTS

Can be both long term residents as well as new residents of the neighbourhood. They have a current or potential desire in engaging in the neighbourhood and its informal networks.



MOTIVATIONS

POSSIBLE PERSONAS

Spare time

They have more free time and want to spend it meaningfully.

Personal development

They want to gain new skills and learn from new experiences.

Pursuing personal passions

They have a specific passion or interest in something that they enjoy pursuing and bringing to life through ideas for the neighbourhood.

Expanding local connections

They want to expand their local network and form stronger connections with other citizens in the neighbourhood.

Perceived local issues

They are driven by a perceived problem or local need in their neighbourhood that they want to address.

Inspiration from active role models

They are inspired by experienced initiative takers who act as role models, and may currently already be engaged as participants or (occasional) volunteers of these initiative takers.



Rita is a retiree who wants to use her newfound free time to make a positive impact in the neighbourhood, and so meet other residents to expand her local social circle.



John cares for a safe and fun environment for his kids to enjoy and play outside. He is aware of the lack of fun, accessible activities in the neighbourhood, specifically for children from low-income families to join.



Anna is new to the neighbourhood, and has a passion for gardening. She is interested in starting a community garden, and so get to know others in the neighbourhood that share her interest for sustainable living.

Figure 36: Motivations and possible personas of interested residents

The underlying motivations for this interest in self-organisation and active involvement varies per person, meaning there is not a distinctive persona or demographic to describe this target group. However, by outlining different motivations, we can better understand which residents of Hoogvliet possibly form this group of interested residents. Figure 36 on the previous page describes these different motivations, as derived from literature as well as my contextual research, and includes descriptions of possible personas that align with these motivations.

The vulnerable social groups introduced earlier in the thesis are often regarded as targeted participants of local activities and initiatives. However, these same groups can also be considered as potential residents who are interested in active contribution to informal networks. In fact, they may have a particular strong motive to contribute, as they personally benefit from building local contacts for social engagement and support and already tend to spend more time in their neighbourhoods (Hoogerbrugge & Burger, 2018).

Some examples of their motivations may include the desire of retired elderly to spend their spare time meaningfully, families who care for accessible activities for their children, residents with a migration background who aim for personal development and better integration into society, and youth who seek to meet peers and connect over shared interests.

Accordingly, these social groups should not be regarded solely as participants or target groups of social initiatives; rather they should also be considered as residents who may have an interest in actively contributing to their community.

Why is this important?

If a design intervention can improve the support for interested but less experienced citizens, the informal networks of Hoogvliet can be strengthened through the possible emergence of new initiatives. This in turn would help to meet the high demand for such informal activities,

stemming from a lack of commercial activities in the neighbourhood and the key social challenges in Hoogvliet. With an increasing elderly population and citizens struggling with loneliness and poverty, there is greater dependence on such local, informal activities for social engagement and support. Recognising these vulnerable social groups not only as targeted participants but also as potential interested residents, they can in this sense be supported in building resilience and improving their own well-being through active participation in Hoogvliet's communities.

Furthermore, new initiatives can foster a more welcoming environment for participants who may benefit from and be interested in informal activities, but have not yet engaged with them. Existing activities often include recurring participants and established social clubs that have already formed close connections. This dynamic makes it less appealing for new residents to integrate and participate. Possible new initiatives therefore also increase opportunities for residents to build new connections.

Moreover, new active residents have the potential to identify unmet needs and interests within local communities of Hoogvliet that extend beyond what current active residents offer through their existing activities, reflecting broader and evolving interests of Hoogvliet's community. As many active residents focus on maintaining their ongoing and repeating activities, few new activities emerge. For instance, much focus of local initiatives is on recurring activities for elderly people and families with children, leaving fewer opportunities for youth engagement or for addressing specific interests such as environmental or creative initiatives.

Therefore, I shift the design focus towards supporting less experienced but interested citizens to actively engage with their own ideas and visions for the neighbourhood.

5.2. The current support infrastructure for interested residents

The research insights have provided a general understanding of Hoogvliet's informal networks and the current support infrastructure within those networks for residents seeking to contribute. This has helped to identify how the current infrastructure facilitates active citizenship of new, interested residents, and where it falls short. To illustrate this support structure, I created figure 37, which is displayed on the next page. This figure outlines my perception of the support available to interested citizens based on my research findings. It is adapted from the social capital theory as provided in the theoretical framework.

Each institutional stakeholder has their own drivers and limitations for supporting active citizens, as earlier defined in Chapter 4.4., which are visualised in the figure. Furthermore, a lack of coordination among the support of institutions, specifically between welfare workers and the local municipality, results in scattered information and a lack of clarity about their roles in supporting citizens. This in turn leads to a lack of clarity for interested residents to understand who they can and should approach for support. Addressing these limitations could increase effective support from institutions for interested residents, thereby improving linking social capital.

Furthermore, possibilities for linking social capital are mainly limited to advisory and financial support. This aligns with the principle and desire for citizens to take primary responsibility in executing their own initiatives.

However, for these initiatives to be successful, residents also need practical skills and supportive collaborators who can help them to implement their ideas. Using the theoretical framework, this refers to efficient bridging and eventually bonding social capital and is in this visual described as collaborative and practical support. Institutions, specifically the neighbourhood networkers, indirectly facilitate this type of support by using their local network to connect and redirect people

to help them find the support they need.

The research insights indicate that residents as volunteers and participants, experienced initiative-takers, local organisations and welfare workers are actors who occasionally provide practical and collaborative support. This support includes activities such as helping with the submission of initiatives, finding citizens for direct collaboration on the execution of initiatives (e.g. writing a proposal, making a budget, promoting the initiative, delegating tasks), and providing mentorship throughout the project to ensure its success.

Research indicated that such collaborations, beyond financial and advisory support, are crucial for residents to build their capacity and self-confidence for future engagement, and so achieve their goals. Moreover, the research insights indicate that this practical and collaborative support fosters stronger reciprocal relations between those seeking help and those providing it.

However, the following challenges were identified for interested residents to obtain this collaborative and practical support, as is also illustrated in figure 37 on the next page.

Limited accessibility of neighbourhood networkers

The neighbourhood networkers, who can use their extensive local network to connect and redirect citizens, perceive limitations. Their role as municipal actors may make them appear less approachable to citizens. Additionally, their capacity to help and proactively approach residents is limited, with only two neighbourhood networkers serving the entire district of Hoogvliet. Their physical location, the Wijkhub, also presents challenges due to its association with the municipality and its limited walk-in hours.

Practical and collaborative support

Informal, local support, related to **intrinsic motivations** for improving the livability of the neighbourhood, often expecting certain levels of **reciprocity**. Helps to build the **capacity and self-confidence** of interested residents, and forms **stronger bonds**.

Financial and advisory support

Formal, institutional support, related to **work-driven motivations** from institutional responsibilities. Financial support is important for **accessible execution of ideas**, and advisory support for **discussing realistic possibilities** and **redirections to other residents/organisations for collaborative and practical support**.

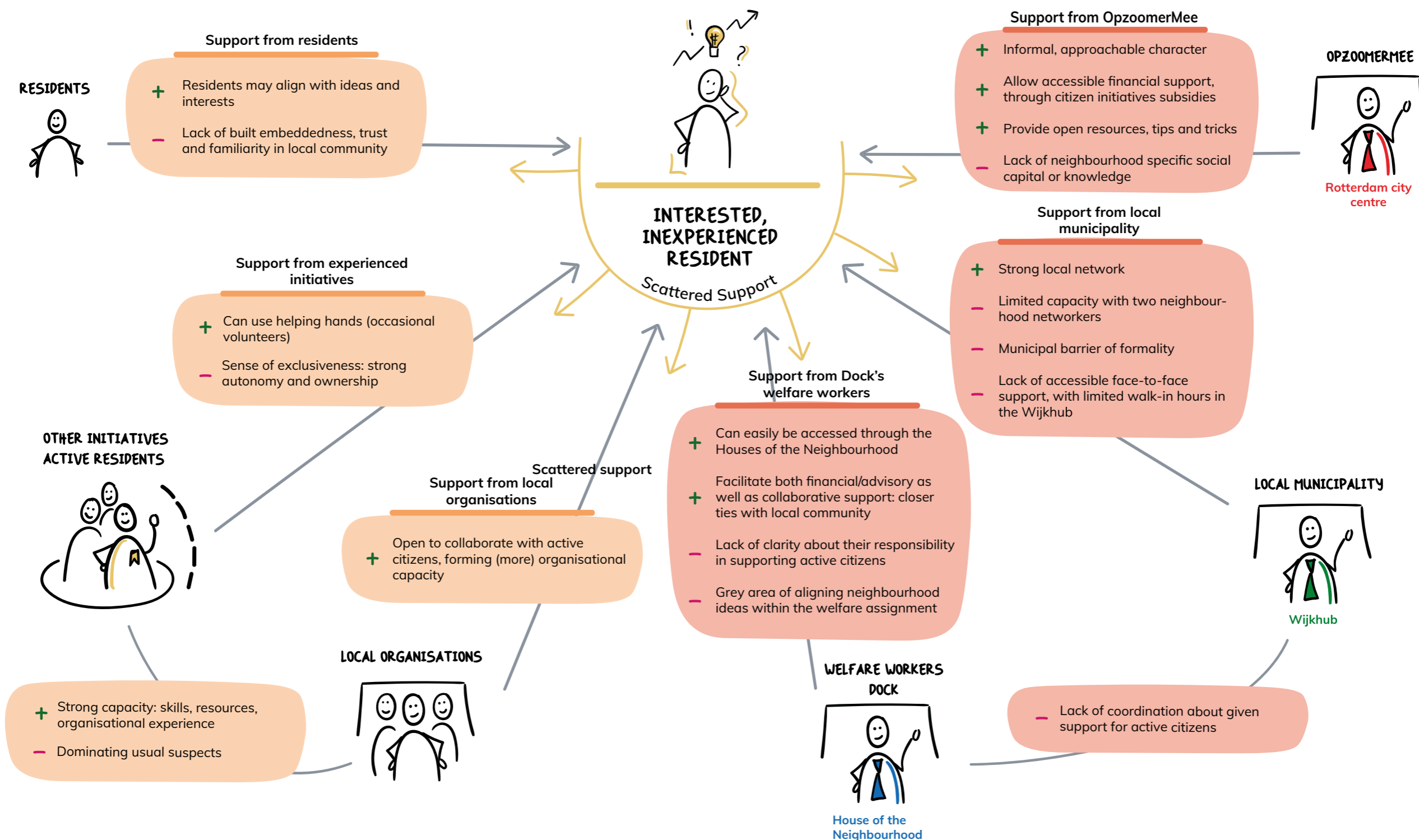


Figure 37: the identified support structure for interested, inexperienced citizens, adapted from the social capital theory

Expectation of reciprocity

The research insights suggest that experienced initiative-takers and welfare workers, when supporting interested residents with their own ideas, often expect a benefit in return for their assistance. For instance in the form of new volunteers in their own contributions.

Strong sense of ownership among initiative-takers

Experienced initiative-takers value strong ownership and autonomy over their projects, more often seeking helping hands for their own initiatives rather than direct collaborations with other active citizens.

Dominance of usual suspects

Experienced initiative-takers and established local organisations are the usual suspects in taking action, dominating the neighbourhoods of Hoogvliet. This can intimidate other interested citizens from pursuing their own ideas, as they may not feel called upon to contribute or lack the self-confidence, feeling unqualified to initiate their own projects. Consequently, residents may be more inclined to support existing projects of these experienced individuals than initiate something new, which ultimately may diminish the motivation for interested residents to take own action.

Lack of built local embeddedness

If residents lack embeddedness and trust in the local community, it can be difficult to attract residents, both as participants as well as volunteering members for helping with their ideas.

These points highlight possible challenges that inexperienced, interested residents face in securing the necessary support from actors in informal networks to successfully self-organise.

Finally, while this analysis and the following design direction mainly focuses on identified challenges in obtaining support through the social capital framework, it is essential to not overlook individual barriers to active

engagement. Vulnerable residents more often face limitations in their individual capacity to engage, as was already similarly outlined in the literature review. This review noted that individuals with higher socioeconomic status (SES) are more likely to engage successfully in civic activities than those with lower SES.

For instance, language barriers may prevent residents with a migration background to engage fully, and low-income families may lack the capacity to contribute as they are preoccupied with the demands of their daily lives. Additionally, elderly may be unaware of opportunities to participate in informal networks due to a lack of digital literacy or engagement with social media.

Although the following design direction will not explicitly address these individual barriers, it is nevertheless important to be aware of them in order to enhance inclusion and ensure more equal access to participation opportunities within Hoogvliet's informal networks.

Include experienced initiative-takers in design focus

When considering designing a digital tool to address the identified challenges, it is essential to acknowledge the issue outlined in the preceding chapter. The effectiveness and integration of such a new digital infrastructure likely depends on its adoption and promotion by experienced initiative-takers. Therefore, the design focus will also encompass these experienced initiative-takers as users, thereby ensuring that the tool offers benefits for them as well.

It can therefore be valuable to outline the common interests and motivations of these experienced initiative takers and interested residents to contribute, as well as where they diverge. Understanding these overlaps and differences can clarify on what common ground these residents can connect, or in what sense their motivations for active participation may

differ. As figure 38 demonstrates, they may all be driven by a common desire to improve the liveability of their neighbourhood, even though the specific activities and initiatives that contribute to this goal may vary. They may also have similar interests and personal passions that they wish to pursue, such as working with children or expressing an affinity for art. Connecting these individuals around these shared goals and interests may potentially encourage the development of new connections and a sense of mutual support.

A key distinction between these groups is that experienced active residents are often driven by a sense of responsibility as key figures within the

community, focused on long-term commitment. In contrast, interested residents may be driven by curiosity or more personal, short-term goals that initially sparked their interest, such as a desire to meet new neighbours or getting involved to fill spare time.

Nevertheless, despite these differences in motivation, emphasizing the ultimate common goals that they share for the improvement of their neighbourhood may foster new connections between these residents.



Figure 38: The overlapping and differing motivations and interests of experienced active residents and interested, inexperienced active residents

CONCLUSION CHAPTER 5

Determining a design focus

This chapter explored the insights gained from research that informed a design focus. **The key takeaways** outline the most important insights from this chapter. The chapter reveals how designing a digital infrastructure to support active residents may be more relevant and desirable for residents who are interested in actively contributing, rather than active residents who are already experienced in initiating projects. Consequently, this leads to a reformulation of the (design) research question:

How can citizens interested in active contribution to the neighbourhood be supported in their informal networks by a digital tool like the basiskaart?

With the research insights, I identified possible challenges within the existing support structures for such interested citizens through the lens of the social capital framework. This includes limitations in acquiring linking social capital –

referring to both financial and advisory support – as well as barriers to build bridging and eventually bonding relations, which provide collaborative and practical support. This latter type of support is particularly important for such interested residents in order to build their capacity and self-confidence for active engagement in the neighbourhood.

Though the primary focus will be on creating a design for interested residents as users, experienced initiative-takers will also be considered as key users. Their involvement is essential, as they are influential figures in the community and can significantly impact the adoption and promotion of a new tool.

In the following chapter, I will present a design vision that outlines how I plan to design for the identified challenges. Additionally, I will describe my approach for the next steps, entering the design phase of the project.

KEY TAKEAWAYS CHAPTER 5

Determining a design focus

- As Experienced initiative-takers are generally satisfied with their involvement and face few challenges, The design focus has shifted to supporting interested but inexperienced residents who lack the social capital and capacity to self-organise but wish to engage in the community.
- Interested residents can be diverse, including long-term and new residents, elderly, families, youth, and residents with migration backgrounds. Their motivations also vary, such as seeking meaningful engagement, personal development, or forming new social connections.
- Supporting interested residents could lead to more diverse local activities, possibly addressing unmet needs and creating a more welcoming environment for new participants in the community.
- The current support structure using the social capital framework reveals several limitations for interested residents to acquire financial and advisory support, as well as collaborative and practical support.
- Collaborative and practical support are particularly important for interested residents to build their capacity and self-confidence and this type of support forms stronger connections.
- While the primary design focus is on interested residents as users, experienced initiative-takers are also included, as their involvement is crucial for the tool's adoption and integration into the community.
- The next chapter will present a design vision to address the challenges, as the project transitions to the design phase.

6

DESIGN VISION

This section describes the design vision for a design intervention. It includes a design goal, a mission statement to achieve the desired goal, the stakeholders involved, recommended design guidelines to consider for possible concepts and ideas and finally an elaboration on how I will approach this design phase.

- 6.1. Design goal
- 6.2. Mission statement
- 6.3. Stakeholders
- 6.4. Design Guidelines
- 6.5. Design approach

6.1. Design goal

Design a **digital tool** that guides **interested, but inexperienced citizens** to **initial support for active citizenship** within the informal network of Hoogvliet, **building their capacity and self-confidence** for future engagement in the neighbourhood.

6.2. Mission statement

By **connecting interested citizens** with experienced initiative-takers and other interested citizens looking to contribute for **practical and collaborative support**,

and simultaneously **lowering barriers for advisory and financial support** from institutional stakeholders.

6.3. Stakeholders



Interested, but inexperienced citizens

These are the main target group as users of the design. As described in the previous chapter, their core characteristic is their current or potential interest in engaging in the neighbourhood and its communities. In addition to this, they can have individual motivations that further drive their engagement.



Experienced initiative-takers

Experienced initiative-takers show opportunities for providing interested residents with collaborative and practical support, using their expertise and strong embeddedness in the neighbourhood to build the capacity and self-confidence of others. These connections should provide mutual benefits for both skilled initiative-takers and interested citizens, as the research insights indicate.



Institutional stakeholders

These are the institutions providing financial and advisory support for active citizenship, namely the local municipality (specifically neighbourhood networkers through their assigned work role in community building), OpzoomerMee, and the welfare organisation Dock. These institutions are primarily motivated by their professional responsibilities to support active residents, and therefore do not require reciprocal benefits. However, Dock's welfare workers, who also occasionally offer more practical and collaborative support, often seek a return in the form of new volunteers for the Houses of the Neighbourhood.

6.4. Design guidelines

To ensure quick and easy validation of concept and ideas, the following design guidelines are formed. These guidelines are based on research insights from both the literature review as well

as the contextual research, which are important to consider for achieving the desired design goal. In brackets is included where I derived each design guideline from.

The design should..

.. sustain autonomy and ownership for initiative-takers: It should ensure that initiative-takers can maintain their desired autonomy and ownership over their own projects and activities.

(contextual research: strong desire for autonomy and ownership among initiative takers)

.. enhance personal interactions: It should ensure that the design complements and enriches personal interactions built on trust, rather than replacing them entirely.

(literature review: ensure integration with physical interactions)

.. lower thresholds for institutional support: It should make accessing institutional support easier and more approachable, reducing barriers of this type of support.

(contextual research: identified barriers for institutional support)

.. encourage reciprocity: It should promote mutually beneficial interactions between interested citizens and experienced initiative-takers, fostering a sense of reciprocity that motivates ongoing engagement.

(contextual research: need for reciprocity in practical and collaborative support)

.. centralize relevant information: It should provide centralized access to local information that can be relevant for active citizens.

(contextual research: scattered information for active participation)

.. facilitate connections: It should support new connections among interested citizens to encourage mutual, practical support and collaboration.

(contextual research: practical support crucial for citizens to successfully engage and self-organise)

.. ensure accessibility: Use of the design should be as accessible and inclusive as possible, by prioritizing a user-friendly use and actively promoting awareness and adoption among citizens.

(literature review: ensure inclusive design to ensure broad participation)

.. support institutions in coordinating their help: It should help the institutional stakeholders to better align their support for active citizens.

(contextual research: lack of coordination of support among institutional stakeholders)

.. have an inviting nature: the design should have an inviting nature, promoting inclusivity for active residents beyond usual suspects to join.

(contextual research: strong, existing initiatives as usual suspects creating barriers of exclusivity)

6.5. Design approach

As we transition into the design phase and conclude the initial research phase, it is relevant to outline how the design phase will be approached. Following the double diamond method, I will begin an ideation phase where various ideas will be generated and refined into concrete concepts.

These initial concepts will be prototyped and iterated on by gathering feedback from stakeholders within the relevant context of Hoogvliet. This aligns with the *participatory approach* of infrastructuring as introduced in Chapter 3: Rather than viewing residents as passive users of the designed system, they will be engaged as active subjects in the process, contributing to the design of the infrastructure

that serves their communities. This iterative process also reflects a *research through design approach* (Stappers & Giaccardi, 2014): the designs will serve not only as solutions to evaluate their intended purpose as outlined in this design vision, but also as research tools to uncover new insights that will allow for continuous refinement and will contribute to answering the refined research question.

Thus as the designs are evaluated in the context, their purpose beyond this design vision may evolve based on new discoveries. The second phase is therefore not limited to design activities, but still incorporates ongoing research insights to better understand what the core purpose of the final design should be.

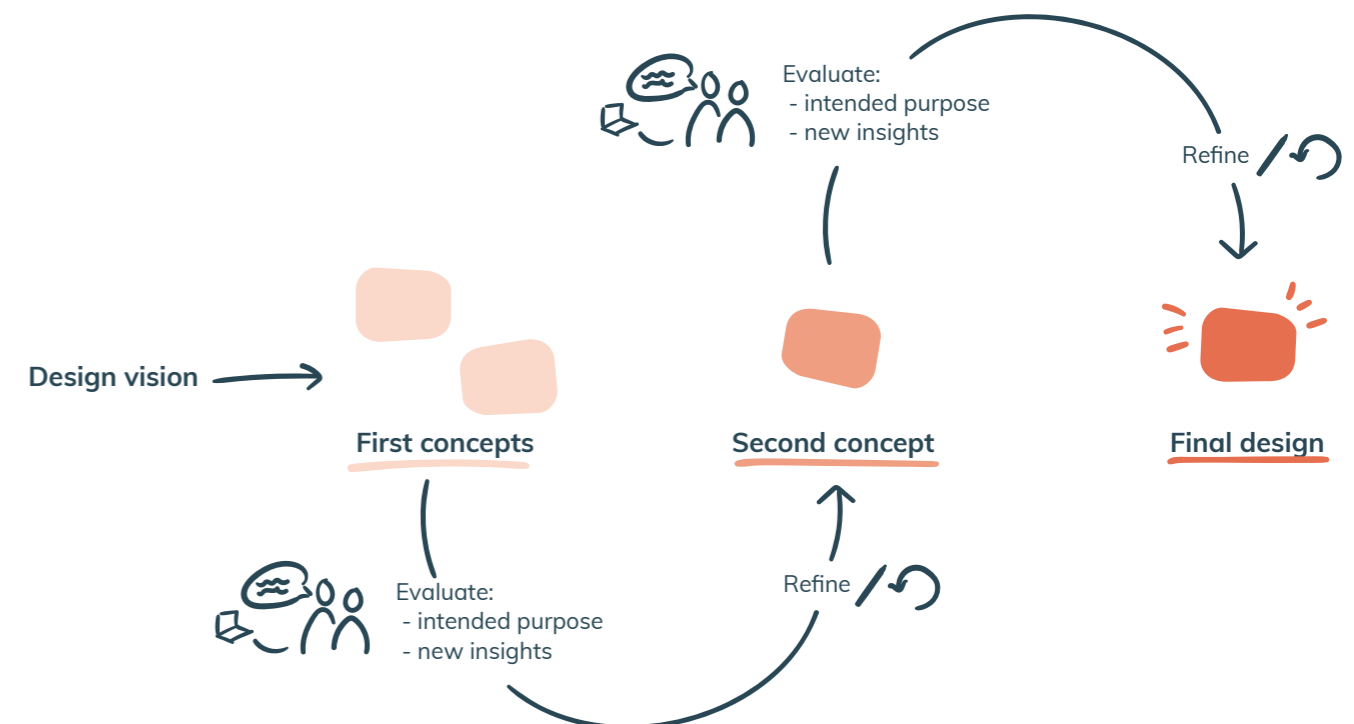


Figure 39: Overview of the design approach including methods of participatory design and research through design

CONCLUSION CHAPTER 6

Design vision

This chapter outlined the design vision that will be used to start the design phase. It included a design goal, a mission statement and design guidelines. The approach for the design phase

will include methods of research through design and participatory design. The next chapter will dive into this design phase.

7

IDEATION & FIRST CONCEPT IDEAS

This chapter begins with the ideation phase of the project, concluding the exploratory research phase of the design project from which an initial focus and design vision were defined. Two ideas that resulted from the ideation phase are presented, each illustrating a different approach to achieving the established design goal. These ideas were subsequently prototyped, in order to test and evaluate the designs with relevant stakeholders (interested residents, experienced initiative takers and institutional stakeholders) on their intended goals and interactions, as will be detailed in the following chapters.

7.1. Ideation process

7.2. Concept Idea 1. Platform: Connect for the desired support

7.3. Concept Idea 2. Workshop: from idea to initiative

7.1. Ideation process

The ideation process was guided by the elements outlined in the design vision. While the objective, as is articulated in the design goal, is to design a digital design intervention, the findings from the research suggest that this digital approach may have limitations in supporting interested residents to develop their capacity and self-confidence for active citizenship. It is possible that a digital platform alone is not sufficient to address their needs.

The literature review on digital infrastructuring identified the primary opportunity of a digital tool as its ability to connect residents, but also pointed out significant challenges. For instance, connecting residents through a digital tool may lack the personal trust that physical interactions naturally foster, and it may exclude residents who are not digitally active or skilled. The literature therefore emphasizes the necessity for an inclusive design and integration with physical interactions to foster genuine connections and opportunities to build trust. Moreover, challenges were identified with regard to the adoption and implementation of a new digital tool, given the strong embeddedness of existing digital tools among experienced initiative-takers.

These limitations suggest that to effectively support interested residents in Hoogvliet to build their capacity and self-confidence in active citizenship, a combination of tools that complement and interact with each other is required, extending beyond a solely digital intervention.

This insight intrigued me as a designer to also explore complementary physical design interventions, which may offer alternative or additional ways to support residents in building their capacity and self-confidence for active citizenship. Consequently, the design exploration can be distinguished into two main directions:

1. Digital design interventions

These concepts are directly aligned with the design goal and the mission statement, leveraging the possibilities of digital tools to address the identified challenges. The ideas

further build upon the potential of the basiskaart as a desirable infrastructure for active citizenship. This exploration involved creating various wireframes with different functionalities of such a digital infrastructure.

2. Physical design interventions

Within these concepts I looked beyond the scope of digital design, broadening the design perspective to consider opportunities of how the desired design goal could be achieved and/or complemented with alternative, physical design interventions.

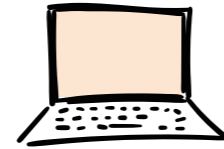
The outcome of the ideation process resulted into 2 ideas: **a digital platform and a workshop**. Both concepts aim to support interested residents in building their capacity and self-confidence, connecting them with experienced initiative-takers and other interested residents for practical and collaborative support, while lowering barriers for institutional support.

After establishing these two ideas, they were further developed into interactive prototypes, making them more tangible and so facilitating their evaluation and testing with relevant stakeholders.

The following sections elaborates on these ideas. They include a description of the ideas and the value exchanges between the concepts and the different relevant stakeholders. Additionally, the intended user scenarios are illustrated through a storyboard and low-fi prototypes of the ideas are provided, that aim to achieve the desired user experience as defined in the scenarios. It is important to note that these ideas and prototypes are still in their preliminary, conceptual stage, with the aim of obtaining insights from stakeholders for further development and refinement.

7.2. Concept idea 1: Platform

Connect for the desired support



The first idea is a platform that aims to create a desirable digital infrastructure that facilitates connections between the stakeholders, ultimately leading to the desired initial support for interested citizens to build their capacity and self-confidence.

The core functionality of the platform is to provide a space where active citizens can upload their ongoing initiatives or new ideas and request the support they need. For interested citizens who have a specific idea, the platform offers them the possibility to upload their idea and specify requests for support to bring it to life. This feature aims to help them to find other residents who are interested in their idea and can help to implement it. Furthermore, the platform offers

the opportunity to create a comprehensive overview of locally valued initiatives and ideas, promoting collaboration and mutual support among citizens.

Alignment with design goal and mission statement

Experienced initiative-takers can share their projects, activities or initiatives on the platform, and are encouraged to specify how interested citizens can contribute and get involved through various tasks. This setup allows interested citizens to connect with these initiative-takers and gain practical experience of self-organisation by helping with their ongoing initiatives. The

contextual research suggested that this type of engagement already occurs through occasional volunteers working with experienced initiative-takers. In this sense, the platform aims to encourage more bridging relations, so that active citizens can invite interested residents to join them beyond their established networks. The platform is not intended to replace the main means of communication used by initiative-takers through social media to inform participants about their initiatives. Rather, it serves as a digital infrastructure specifically designed for active citizens, both interested and experienced, to find each other and the support they need. The supportive role of institutional stakeholders is more accessible in the sense that the platform provides the institutional stakeholders

with insights into local needs, thus offering opportunities to proactively respond to citizens' posted ideas and requests for support. For the neighbourhood networkers in particular, the platform is an efficient, centralised tool to make better use of their networking role by connecting people in their network to open requests for help on the platform.

7.2.1. Stakeholders: roles and value exchanges

The stakeholders will have different benefits and values from using and contributing to the platform. Figure 40 explains on how the platform is of value for each of these stakeholders and what they contribute in return.

INTERESTED, INEXPERIENCED RESIDENTS



Role

Uploading new ideas on the platform with help requests and/or providing help by responding to help requests from other residents that match their interests, including both new ideas and ongoing initiatives.

EXPERIENCED INITIATIVE TAKERS



Role

Uploading their initiatives to the platform with help requests, inviting citizens beyond established networks to participate. Additionally, they can respond to help requests of new ideas, providing support with their experience.

INSTITUTIONAL STAKEHOLDERS



Role

Proactively review new ideas posted on the platform and use their network to help connect citizens and open help requests accordingly. Additionally, a possible role of institutions could be governance and management of the platform.

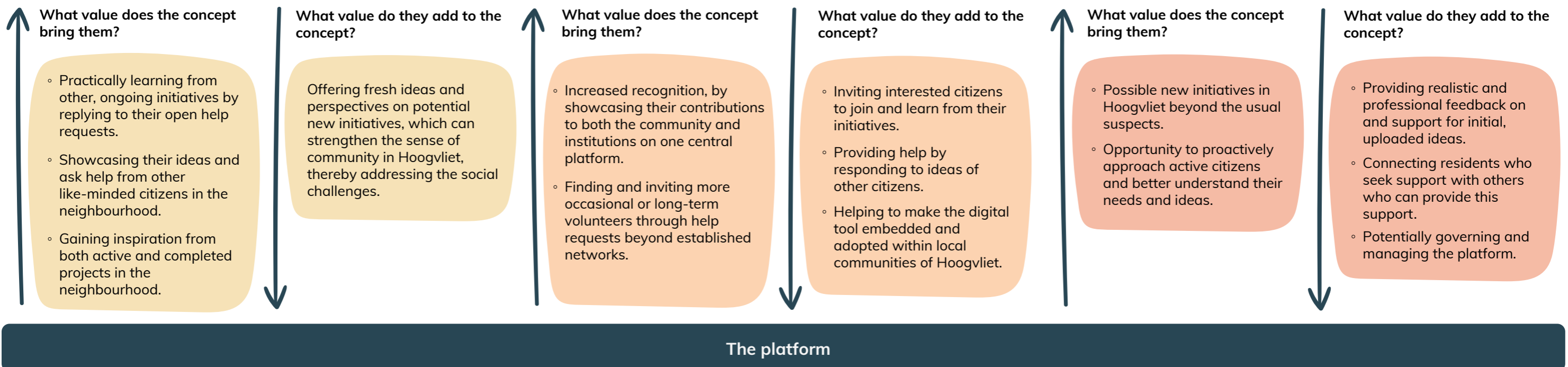


Figure 40: Value exchanges between the stakeholders and the concept

7.2.2. Storyboard

The following storyboard further explains the intended user scenario of the platform from the perspective of an interested citizen and the interactions that surround it.

PLATFORM: CONNECT FOR THE DESIRED SUPPORT

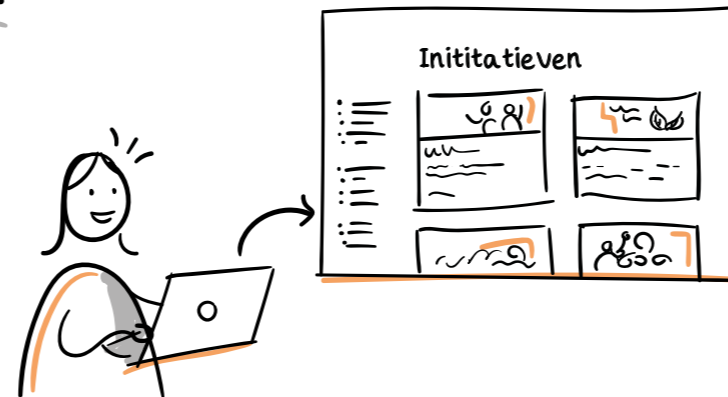
1

Lisa, a resident of Hoogvliet, has always had a desire to contribute some way to her neighbourhood. Only she has no experience with organising and does not really know how to start. Through a local facebook group she discovers a new platform, specifically for initiatives in Hoogvliet and decides to visit it.



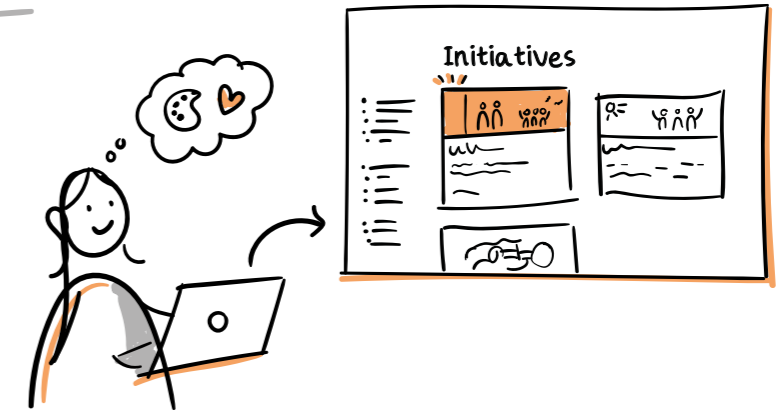
2

On the platform, Lisa sees an overview of several initiatives in Hoogvliet. She immediately feels inspired and is impressed by everything that is done by neighbours so closeby.



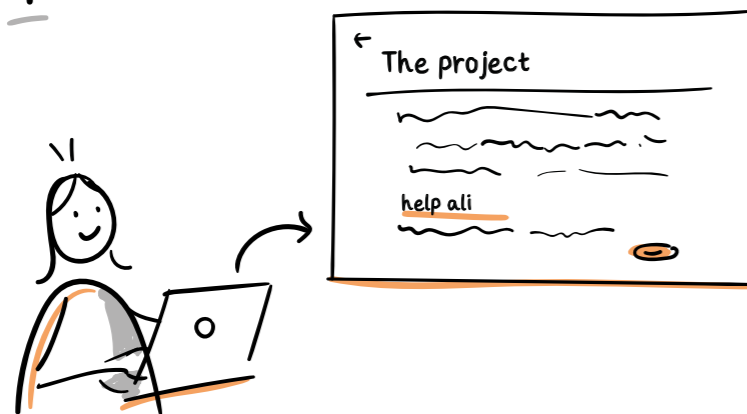
3

Curious about how she might contribute, she filters the initiatives to view ongoing projects. She selects the theme "arts and culture," which aligns with her interests, and a project for a mini-museum for kids catches her eye.



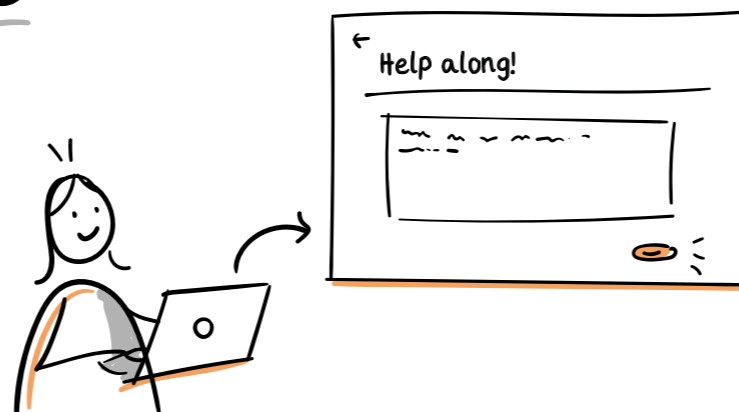
4

Lisa clicks on the museum project to learn more. On the project page, she reads about its current status and sees that help is needed with planning and promoting the initiative. Something she feels she could assist with.



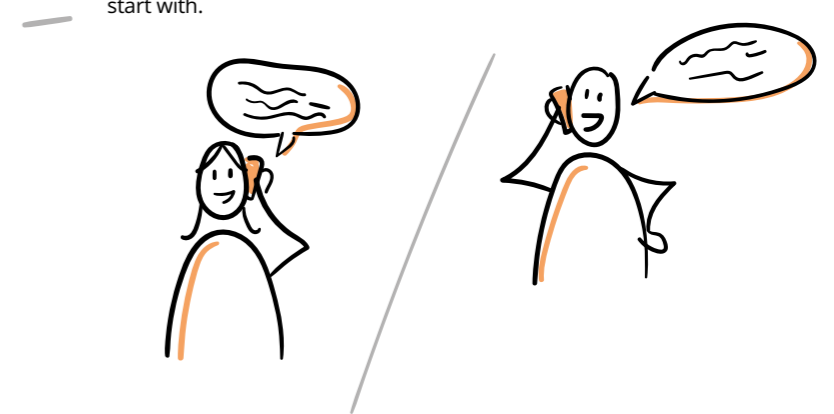
5

She responds to the help request of the project, and in a short message explains why she would like to help. She explains her interest in arts, and a desire to contribute something closeby.



6

Short after she is contacted by Thomas, the initiative-taker of the project, to get to know each other. He explains the current status of the projects and what the next steps are. He shares his experiences and explains how Lisa may help with the planning and attracting visitors. Lisa feels that this is a realistic task she can start with.



7

Lisa joins the initiative and helps with the planning of tasks and promoting the project on social media to attract more visitors. By being involved in the project, she also learns about other practical tasks, like which subsidies they requested and how they did that.



8

By helping with the project, Lisa has developed her skills and feels more confident about organizing something on her own in the future.



9

On the platform, Lisa now would also like to share her own idea. She posts her first idea for an initiative and describes different help requests, inviting other residents to support her.

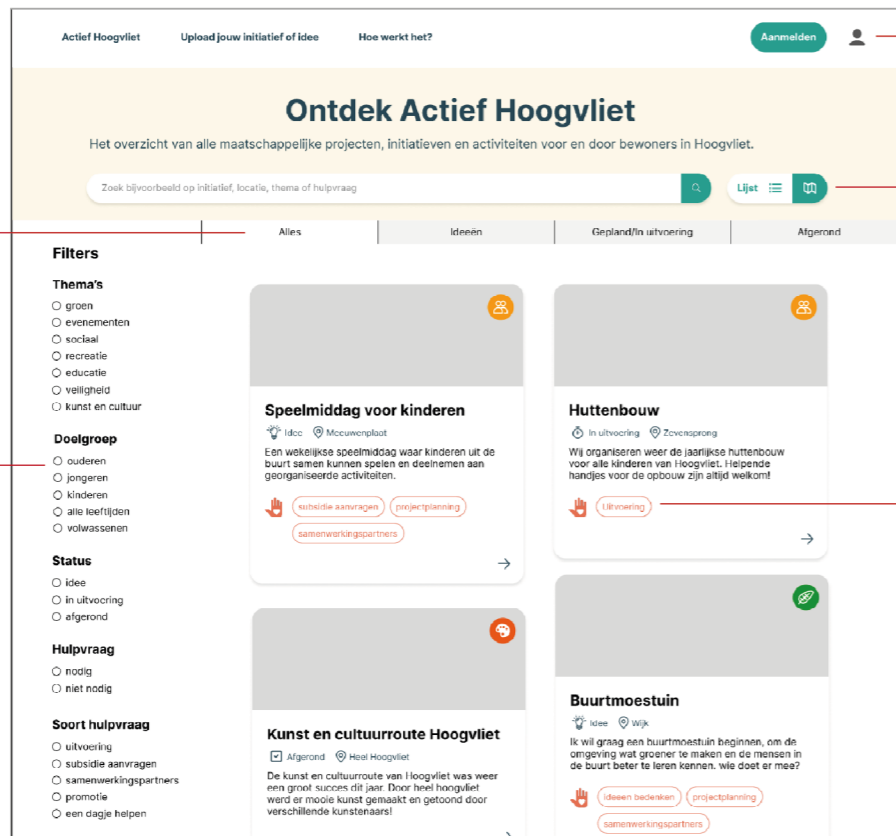


7.2.3. The prototype

The prototype for the platform is a digital mock-up created in Figma. This section will illustrate the screens that were developed to gather feedback

on from the stakeholders. The prototype can also be accessed and interacted with through this [link](#).
(Link not working? *)

HOME PAGE



Quick filters on the status of the idea/ or initiative

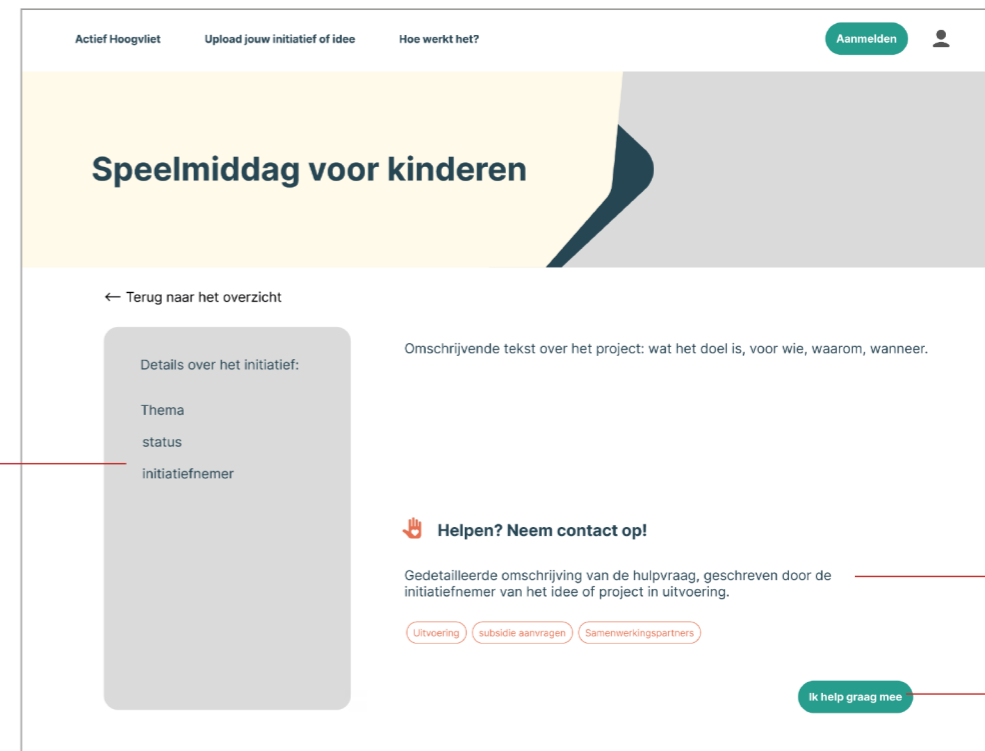
Additional filters to further specify preferences

Buttons to sign up and going to your personal page

A switch from list to map view

Highlighted requests for help in the form of short tags

INITIATIVE PAGE

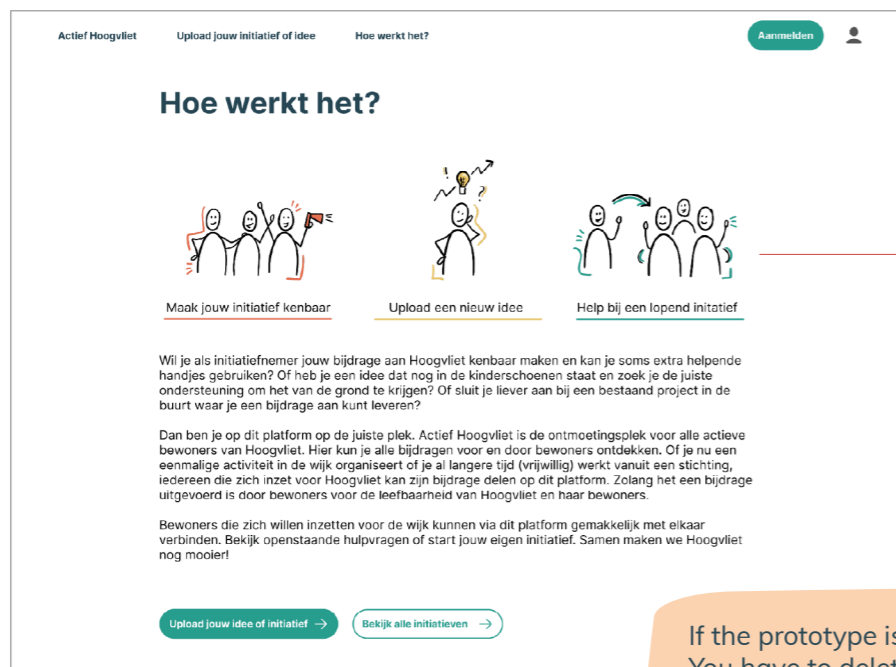


Quick overview of details about the idea or initiative

Detailed description of help request

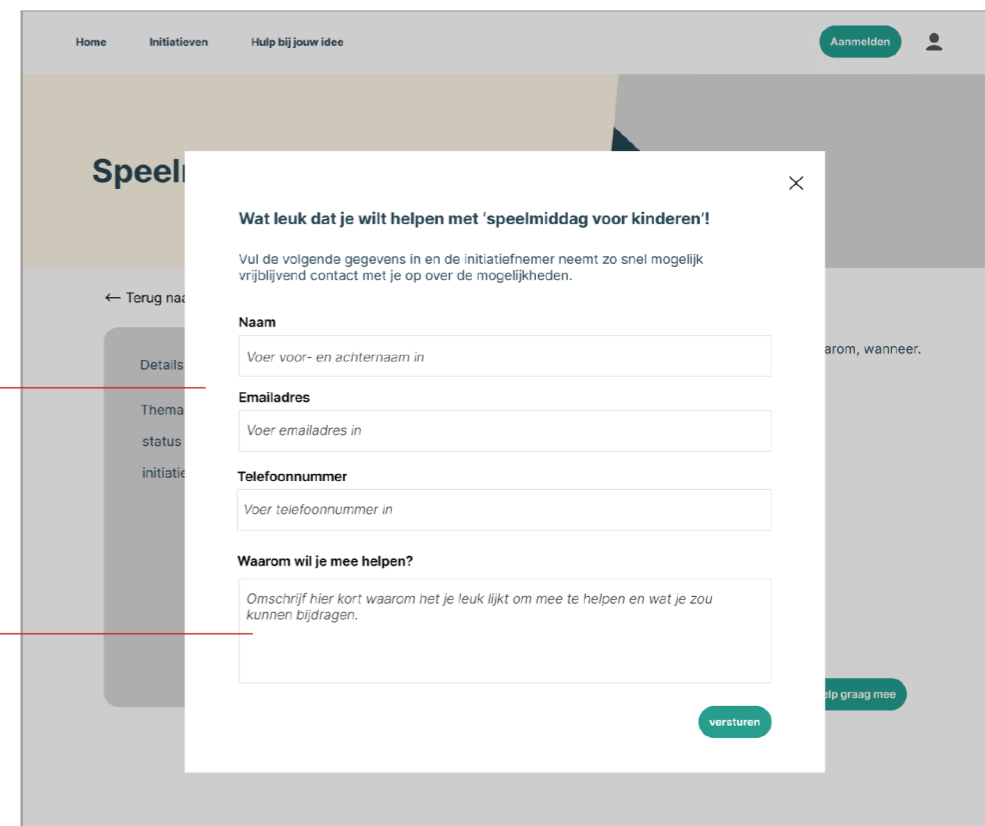
Button to respond to help request

'HOW DOES IT WORK?' PAGE



Visual way of explaining the functionality and goal of the platform through three possibilities

RESPOND TO HELP REQUEST POP UP OVERLAY



Provide general contact details for the initiative taker

Explain why you want to help

If the prototype is not loading in Chrome, You have to delete the Cookies. In Chrome, navigate to settings → privacy and security → Cookies → search for Figma & remove its Cookies.

UPLOADING YOUR INITIATIVE OR IDEA

Actief Hoogvliet Upload jouw initiatief of idee Hoe werkt het? Aanmelden

Upload jouw initiatief of idee

1 2 3 4
Algemene informatie Hulp vragen Persoonlijke informatie Overzicht en uploaden

Titel
Geef jouw idee of initiatief een titel

Omschrijving
Wat houdt jouw initiatief of idee in? geef een korte omschrijving.

Status Kies een status **Thema** Kies een of meerdere thema's

Locatie
Typ een adres of buurt of Kies een locatie op de kaart

Mijn initiatief heeft (nog) geen vaste locatie

Doelgroep
Kies een doelgroep

Volgende →

Step progress indicator

General information about the initiative or idea

Option to choose no location

Actief Hoogvliet Upload jouw initiatief of idee Hoe werkt het? Aanmelden

Upload jouw initiatief of idee

1 2 3 4
Algemene informatie Hulp vragen Persoonlijke informatie Overzicht en uploaden

Hier kan je een oproep doen voor hulp bij jouw idee of initiatief. Kies zelf wat voor hulp jij zou kunnen gebruiken.

Voeg je een afgerond initiatief toe, of heb je op dit moment nog geen hulp nodig? geen probleem! Kies dan volgende en voeg eventueel later nog hulpvragen toe.

Ik ontvang graag hulp bij:

- uitvoering
- subsidie aanvragen
- benodigde materialen vinden
- sponsoring
- een dagje helpen
- planning
- vrijwilligers werven
- samenwerkingspartners
- promotie

Omschrijving hulpvraag
Geef hier nog een gedetailleerde omschrijving van welke hulp je kan gebruiken. Wat heb je bijvoorbeeld nog nodig?

← Vorige Volgende →

Quickly select possible ways to receive help

Provide description of help request

7.3. Concept idea 2: Workshop

From idea to initiative



The first idea focuses mainly on connecting stakeholders which in turn can result in building the capacity and self-confidence of interested citizens. This second design idea rather focuses on building this capacity and self-confidence directly, with face-to-face support from both experienced initiative-takers as well as institutional stakeholders in an organised workshop.

The workshop is designed to guide citizens interested in self-organisation as participants through the entire process of self-organising an initiative. The workshop aims to empower interested but inexperienced citizens by allowing them to learn through hands-on experience in groups, with like-minded individuals who are also interested in contributing to their neighbourhood. By focusing on each stage of organising an initiative, interested citizens

can develop essential practical skills, building their capacity and self-confidence to turn their ideas for the neighbourhood into action. In addition, the approach of this workshop helps to anticipate unexpected barriers in the process of self-organising an initiative, by offering a comprehensive understanding of the process - from the formation of an initial idea to the final evaluation.

The steps outlined in the workshop are based on insights gathered from interviews with experienced initiative-takers and are in line with what OpzoomerMee already identifies on its website as key steps to consider for successful self-organisation. An illustration of these steps can be found in Appendix D.

Alignment with design goal and mission statement

The literature review already outlined how trainings and guidance by more experienced volunteers can strengthen one's capacity and self-confidence to participate (van Mourik et al., 2022). Participating in the workshop would connect residents with *experienced initiative-takers*, who would serve as facilitators of the workshop to provide collaborative and practical support. By guiding participants through each step of the process, they can support residents with their expertise in the neighbourhood. This allows interested residents to learn from the experiences of these experienced initiative-takers and form stronger connections with them and likeminded participants. The involvement of these key figures could be incentivised by the municipality. Furthermore, it is intended that *institutional stakeholders* are present at the workshop, to clarify how they can be

approached to provide advisory and financial support to residents, thereby reducing ambiguity about their supportive role. This also provides an opportunity for institutional stakeholders to meet interested residents face-to-face in an accessible and informal setting. Moreover, they can provide direct feedback on residents' ideas during the workshop, helping participants to further refine and develop their plans and so manage expectations about what is feasible.

7.3.1. Stakeholders: roles and value exchanges

The stakeholders will have different benefits and values from using and contributing to the workshop. Figure 41 explains on how the workshop is of value for each of these stakeholders and what they contribute in return.

INTERESTED, INEXPERIENCED RESIDENTS



Role
Participants of the workshop. These can be both citizens with a specific idea for an initiative already, as well as citizens eager to know what the possibilities are of organising an initiative.

EXPERIENCED INITIATIVE TAKERS

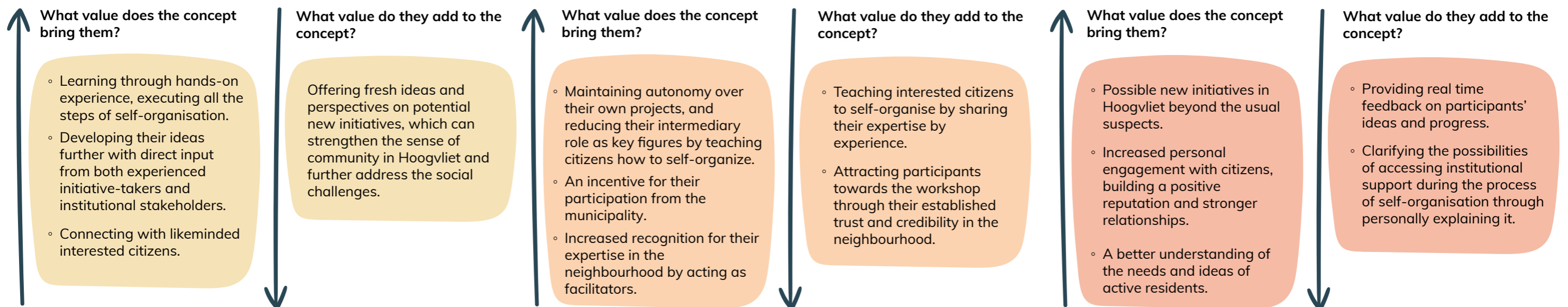


Role
Facilitators of the workshop, guiding the groups of interested citizens through the steps of self-organisation.

INSTITUTIONAL STAKEHOLDERS



Role
Providing direct feedback to participants throughout the workshop and explaining how they can offer support in future execution of initiatives.



The workshop

Figure 41: Value exchanges between the stakeholders and the concept

7.3.2. Storyboard

The following storyboard further explains the intended user scenario of the workshop from the perspective of an interested citizen and the interactions that surround it.

PRACTICAL WORKSHOP: FROM IDEA TO INITIATIVE

1

Anna reads an article about a successful initiative in the district on one of the local facebook pages. She is inspired and enthused to also contribute something to the neighbourhood.



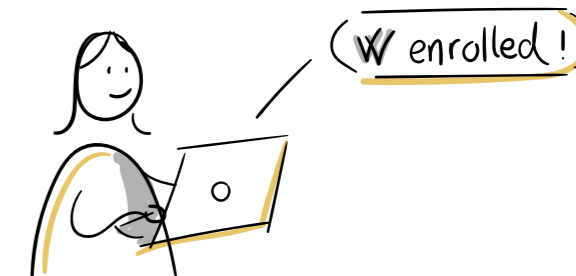
2

She approaches a neighbour who she knows has experience with organising local initiatives and activities. He tells her that they are soon organising a workshop, 'from idea to initiative', in which citizens can get practical experience with the different steps of self-organisation.



3

Anna is definitely interested in this workshop, and subscribes through the facebook page of her local community centre. More preparation is not necessary, although initial ideas on initiatives for during the session are welcome.



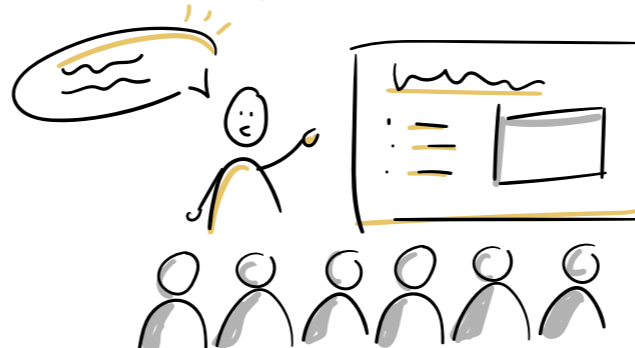
4

It is the day of the workshop. In the community centre, everyone is welcomed and the program of the day is introduced. Anna engages in a conversation with neighbours who also attended the workshop.



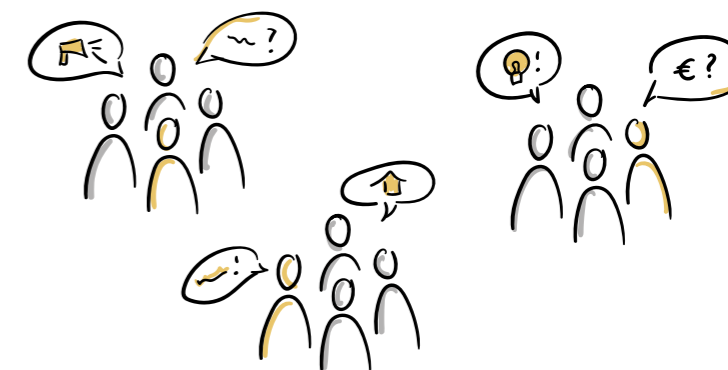
5

The day begins with some short presentations of initiative takers on their previously organised initiatives, and some local professionals introduce themselves and how they can support active citizens. In this way, Anna gets a better understanding of the roles, experiences and support available from these local actors in the neighbourhood.



6

Thereafter, the practical part of the workshop starts. Participants are divided in groups, each lead by an experienced initiative-taker. In these groups, participants go through the entire process of self-organisation together, from brainstorming an idea to accounting for subsidies. In this way, Anna gets to learn about all the different steps involved by practicing and executing them.



7

The workshop ends with a small presentation per group, in which they explain how they worked together and went through all the steps. Experienced initiative takers, citizens and professionals can give their feedback and ask questions. In this way, Anna learns about possible obstacles or on what steps to pay more attention to be improved.



8

After the workshop, Anna and the other participants get a certificate for their attendance, in which the skills they acquired today are qualified. Anna discusses the day with other participants, and the new ideas they gathered together.



9

Anna comes home, full with new ideas, new contacts, more practical knowledge and self-confidence to execute the plans that she has for her initiative.



7.3.3. The prototype

As the workshop aims to guide interested residents through the different steps of self-organisation, the prototype materials are designed to be used at each step. The prototype consists of several design materials and probes that can be used to guide both participants and facilitators during the workshop. This section explains these materials and their intended use.

Guiding templates

The templates are designed for participants to use and fill in during the workshop. These templates can be printed on different sheet sizes and feature visual elements, encouraging fun collaboration and engagement among the participants.

Inspiration cards

The inspiration cards provide support and inspiration to help participants think beyond their

own ideas and knowledge. The card sets can be tailored to the different steps of the workshop, providing targeted inspiration and guidance.

Instruction booklet

The instruction booklet provides a step-by-step guide outlining what participants are expected to do during the workshop. It explains how and when to use the design materials (templates, cards). It also provides a general overview of the workshop process for experienced initiative-takers as facilitators.

Certificate of participation

Participants could receive a certificate after completing the workshop. This could boost the confidence of interested citizens and acknowledge the skills they have developed during the workshop, further increasing their motivation and resilience to pursue self-organising initiatives.

Figure 43 and 44 show examples of the design materials that could be used for steps 1 and 2. These will be used to illustrate which possible materials and probes could enhance the workshop for each step during the following feedback sessions with stakeholders.

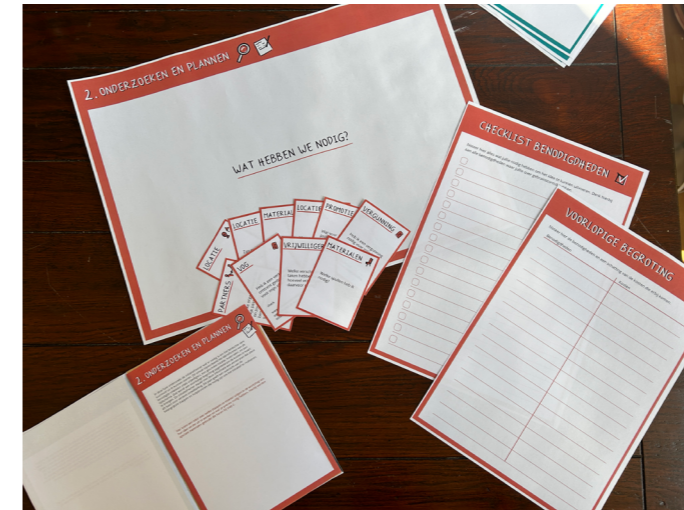


Figure 43: design materials which could be used during the first step of the workshop: idea forming

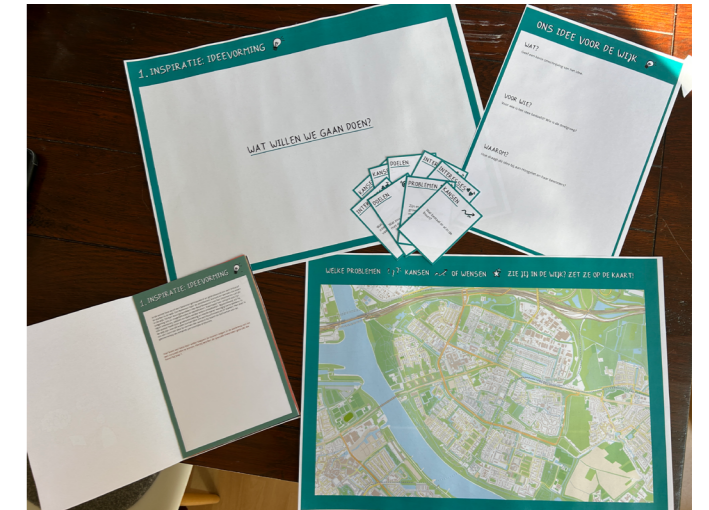


Figure 44: the design materials which could be used during the second step of the workshop: research and planning

A certificate to be received after participating in the workshop

Templates to be filled in by the participants during the workshop

inspirational cards with questions which can be used as guiding materials to fill in the templates



An instruction booklet for the workshop, including all the steps that should be followed and additional information

Templates to be filled in by the participants during the workshop

CONCLUSION CHAPTER 7

Ideation and first concept ideas

This chapter introduced the two concept ideas that emerged from the ideation process. The first concept is **a platform**, which closely aligns with the design goal. The second concept, **a workshop**, emerged from further exploration of physical design interventions to support building the capacity and self-confidence of interested residents in a possible different or complementary

way. These additional ideation sessions were done recognising the limitations of solely relying on a digital tool, suggesting that a combination of tools may be required for effective support. In the next chapter, these two initial concepts will be evaluated through feedback sessions with a selection of relevant stakeholders.



FEEDBACK SESSIONS ON IDEAS WITH STAKEHOLDERS

In this chapter, the concept ideas are evaluated with a selection of relevant stakeholders. This involves actively engaging the stakeholders by having them interact with the prototypes, and allowing them to give feedback by reflecting on challenges, opportunities and ideas for further development. The aim of these sessions is to evaluate and understand how the concept ideas contribute to achieving the defined design goal, and to what extent they are in line with the context and the essential needs of the residents of Hoogvliet. Thus, as the designs are evaluated in the context, their purpose may evolve based on new discoveries during these feedback sessions. The feedback and information gathered at this early stage will be analysed and used to further develop one of the ideas into a refined concept.

- 8.1. Research questions
- 8.2. Approach
- 8.3. Results: Feedback and insights on the design ideas
- 8.4. Discussion for further development

8.1. Research questions

The broader, revised goal of the thesis is to investigate how a digital tool can effectively support residents interested in active contribution to informal networks of Hoogvliet. In these feedback sessions I therefore aim to understand how the platform, as a digital tool, can provide initial support to build the capacity

and self-confidence of these residents, as outlined in the design goal. Additionally, I seek to examine how the workshop might offer distinct or complementary support to achieve the established design goal. In line with this broader objective, I formed the following research questions:

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Feedback sessions with stakeholders

1. Do the stakeholders understand the intended interactions with the prototypes, and the goal that the designs aim to achieve as outlined in the design vision?
2. How do they perceive their intended roles within these design ideas and how does it align with their current daily practices?
3. Which elements of the ideas show potential for achieving the desired design goal, and where do stakeholders identify challenges?
4. What further development is necessary to achieve the desired goals of the ideas?
5. What opportunities or other ideas do stakeholders see to address possible unforeseen or unintended needs within the design ideas?

8.2. Approach

8.2.1. Participants

I presented the two ideas to a selection of my previously contacted stakeholders. The sessions were conducted separately with the stakeholders, to accommodate their individual schedules. The stakeholders included:

- Two experienced initiative-takers
- Two employees of OpzoomerMee
- Representatives of the local municipality: the 2 neighbourhood networkers and the neighbourhood manager.

Although the designs were thus not directly tested with the main intended user group (interested, inexperienced citizens), by discussing the ideas with my initial stakeholders I attempt to create an understanding of how these designs could be useful for interested residents from different perspectives. When further developing one of the ideas, I will also seek to evaluate the concept with this user group.

Due to time constraints, the ideas were not evaluated with all the stakeholders who were approached during the contextual research. However, the feedback gathered provided valuable insights into the potential and areas for improvement for both design concepts.

8.2.2. Procedure

The following section outlines the general steps I took during the sessions for each idea.

1. First, I updated the participants on the topic of my project and described the intended design goal and why this direction was chosen. Then I gave a short explanation of the ideas and a brief insight into how the design materials should help to achieve the design goal.
2. After this introduction to the ideas, I let them interact with the designs and asked them to share their initial thoughts:
 - a. What questions arise about the

prototypes?

b. What do they like about the ideas, where do they see opportunities?

c. Where do they see challenges or doubts?

d. How do they perceive their role within the design idea?

3. Based on their given feedback, I started asking corresponding questions to gather necessary information to further develop the ideas and address the mentioned opportunities and challenges.

A set of guiding questions had been prepared specifically for each of the ideas to help gather useful information. These questions can be found in appendix E.

8.3. Results: feedback and insights on the design ideas

This section provides an overview of the insights I gained from the feedback sessions with the stakeholders. The insights are organised in three parts. Firstly, I outline how they perceive their intended roles within the concepts, and how the design might fit with their current practices. Thereafter, I present specific feedback on the prototype materials, that stakeholders gave as they responded to and interacted with the designs. Finally, this section highlights general opportunities and challenges that stakeholders identified for the concept ideas.

Colour coding is used to distinguish the feedback from the different stakeholders, to understand how their perceptions may differ. **Green blocks** refer to comments made by the local civil servants, **red blocks** refer to comments made by OpzoomerMee and **yellow blocks** refer to comments made by initiative-takers. After outlining these findings, a list of recommendations for each of the ideas outlines what should be considered for further development of the designs.

8.3.1. The Platform

Perceived roles, values and alignment with current practices

Opzoomermee perceived value of the platform as a means to get an insight on neighbourhood activities beyond what they know about initiatives submitted through OpzoomerMee. This could give their organisation a better insight into what happens in the neighbourhood and the needs of citizens. Furthermore, they explained that they could use the platform to redirect residents who lack experience in organising initiatives to join open help requests, thereby encouraging them to first learn from others before applying for citizen initiative subsidies. However, they expressed some concerns regarding the digital nature of the platform, which could increase anonymity and exclude residents who are less digitally active or skilled.

“We could use this platform to guide residents who come to us with an idea and questions but have no experience yet. We could say, ‘hey look at this platform and maybe learn from others who are already active and looking for help!’”

– OpzoomerMee employee

Initiative takers also recognised the value of the platform in offering an overview of local activities and potentially in attracting more residents to become involved and help in the community. One initiative taker was even already articulating enthusiasm for promoting the platform on her Facebook page, indicating a desire to adopt such a platform. The other however expressed more doubts about digital fatigue, especially among elderly who may be inclined to contribute to the local community but are reluctant to engage with online platforms. This feedback highlights both challenges as well as opportunities for aligning the platform with the needs of active community members.

“I was already imagining about how I can promote the platform on our Facebook page! Yes, it would be really nice to have something like this for Hoogvliet.”

– Initiative taker 2

Civil servants saw the platform as a more engaging alternative to the current municipal platform Mijn Rotterdam, noting that it feels more inviting and better connected to the local context of Hoogvliet’s community. They discussed their institutional role in management of the platform, or how this role could be assigned to one of the welfare workers of Dock who are already in close contact with active residents. They also saw the platform as a way to make their location at the Wijkhub more approachable, encouraging residents to connect with them in person.

“Maybe the platform could include a message saying that if residents have questions, they can always visit the Wijkhub or the House of the Neighbourhood to talk to one of us.”

– Civil servant

Feedback on the prototype

Enhanced, interactive version of Mijn Rotterdam

Stakeholders view the prototype as a better alternative to Mijn Rotterdam, fulfilling its purpose more effectively. Research shows that Mijn Rotterdam currently lacks value as an infrastructure for initiative-takers and interested citizens. Adding interactive features, like allowing citizens to upload projects and activities, could make the platform more engaging and dynamic.

User-friendliness

The interface appears easy and intuitive to understand and the stakeholders seem generally satisfied with the look of the platform.

Offering help question

Instead of asking “why do you want to help?” it might be better to ask “how can/would you like to help?” as the first question may be harder to answer.

Clarity of help requests

It is not immediately clear that the hand icon and tags on the project tiles indicate a need for help. Adding text could improve clarity and accessibility.

Profile button

The profile button generated questions on what users of the platform could and would want to put on their profile.

Possibility of selecting ‘no location’ is useful

It is important that people can choose no specific location for their project or initiative, since not all might have one.

Added value of completed projects

Displaying completed initiatives can inspire interested residents and allow visitors to contact experienced initiators on how they managed organising an initiative or for other specific questions regarding their expertise.

Opportunities

Comprehensive overview

All stakeholders substantiated a strong need for a centralized overview of district activities and projects, which aligns with my research insights indicating the current scattered nature of local activities. This can help coordinate initiatives and encourage collaborations among interested residents, while still allowing experienced initiative-takers to keep ownership of their projects.

Encouraging local participation and learning from others

The platform can motivate people with ideas to first learn from other initiatives, to gain skills for self-organising.

Profiles

Citizens could create profiles showcasing their skills and availability for helping interested citizens.

Expanding and coordinating the role of institutional professionals

The institutional professionals also show interest in further expanding their roles in assisting active citizens through the platform by actively replying to help requests or ideas.

Filling the platform with up-to-date information

Information on existing initiatives could be sourced from organisations like OpzoomerMee, and DOCK could upload activity flyers that they have on local initiatives directly to the platform.

Include application for citizen initiative subsidy functionality

The platform can integrate the feature for submitting citizen initiative applications, further centralizing the process of active engagement on one platform. If users have questions during the application, they could be directed to community centres or the wijkhub for assistance.

Challenges

Balancing requests and offers to help

Institutional stakeholders highlight that there is a chance that there will be more help requests than residents offering to help. A critical challenge could be activating and motivating people to contribute and respond to help requests.

Increased anonymity

Users don't immediately know who is behind the platform or with whom they are interacting. Personal profiles and face-to-face contact can reduce this anonymity and increase trust, which the platform currently may lack in.

Narrow scope

The scope of only making it a platform for citizens with initiatives may be limited. Civil servants suggest including all local projects and activities on such a platform, also those organised by more formal parties like activities organised by DOCK. This broader scope would not only help in providing a comprehensive overview but could also further help avoid scheduling conflicts between different organisers.

Static platform

A static platform can deter users. It's important to show that the platform is actively being used by other citizens to encourage engagement and usage.

Digital exclusion

The platform risks excluding residents who are not digitally active or skilled. How do you make the platform visible and accessible to this group, and how do you ensure they want to and can use the platform?

Visibility

Promoting and maintaining the platform's visibility to attract users poses a challenge. Integrating a physical element linked to the platform, such as in the Houses of the Neighbourhood, could draw attention and encourage engagement.

Management and maintenance

It is important to consider who will manage the platform. Civil servants indicate that possible managers could include the municipality or DOCK, or a new employee that the municipality is already searching to manage the Wijkhub.

Recommendations for further development



Based on the found feedback, challenges and opportunities, the following list of recommendations is made for further development of the platform.

Consider design ideas on **how to activate and motivate citizens** to respond to help requests, especially through an online platform that might feel more impersonal. For instance, highlighting stories of successful use of the platform ending in collaborations and citizens learning from each other.

Consider **how it can be clearer that the platform is active** to prevent that it becomes a static dashboard that is not being used. For instance, showing interactive features like comments, like and share buttons and thus seeing interactions from other people could encourage citizens to interact with it.

Consider **expanding the current focus of only initiatives and ideas by active citizens to including all local activities and projects**. This could provide a more comprehensive overview of everything that happens in the neighbourhood and could help avoid scheduling conflicts, which were identified as two needs by stakeholders.

Consider **integrating existing structures within the platform**. For instance, the application process for citizen initiatives could also be included as a functionality of the platform.

Consider **how the platform could be more accessible to those who are not digitally active or skilled**. This could involve integrating a physical element linked to the platform, which could draw attention to the platform or provide assistance in using it.

Encourage personal interactions and face-to-face contact to build trust among users.

Clarify the help requests on the tiles, for instance by adding a text.

Further develop the profile feature to think what users should and could include in their profile on such a platform. Think about opportunities for users to clarify their skills and availability for guiding other citizens with ideas.

Think about **how information can be kept up to date**. For instance, sourcing details from organisations like OpzoomerMee and Dock could possibly work, but also think about how active citizens can be encouraged to upload their initiative or idea.

Identify potential managers for the platform, such as the municipality or Dock.

8.3.2. The Workshop



Perceived roles, values and alignment with current practices

Current workshops offered by **OpzoomerMee** focus mainly on the rules for submitting new initiative ideas for subsidies, rather than on the practical skills needed for the execution of initiatives. They therefore suggested that this workshop could complement their current workshops. It would be of particular value to OpzoomerMee if the workshop focused on the first two steps of self-organisation, which include the formation of the initial idea and carrying out research and planning. By helping participants to refine their ideas and create a solid plan during the workshop, before submitting their ideas for the citizen's initiative subsidies, this workshop can reduce the need for adjustments at later stages and prevent disappointment for residents. This in turn would lead to clearer and more realistic submissions, benefiting both the residents and OpzoomerMee by streamlining the approval process. Finally, OpzoomerMee expressed interest in collaborating to support such a workshop, seeing it as a useful addition to their current approach.

“When we give workshops we mainly go over the requirements and process for the submitting subsidies, like getting enough signatures from neighbours [...] we don't really focus on teaching them how to set up a good plan, which is actually very important for receiving the funding in the end.”

– OpzoomerMee employee

Experienced initiative takers also saw benefits in such a workshop to complement their practice. One initiative-taker explained that it could reduce her current role as an intermediary, mentoring residents to organise initiatives in the neighbourhood. By empowering residents to develop their own skills by sharing their expertise, the need for these key figures to mentor others in their initiatives would be lowered. They were

therefore interested in helping to run such a workshop, recognising its potential to build the capacity and confidence of residents to self-organise. However, one initiative taker explained that she did not currently have the time to facilitate such a workshop, as she was busy running her own projects. Both of these insights highlight the current busy schedules and responsibilities of initiative takers, suggesting that such a workshop should be time efficient to make it more accessible to busy initiative takers.

“People often come to me because they know I have experience. Then I end up acting as a sort of intermediary, like being the responsible person for the subsidies. But sometimes I'd rather not have that responsibility. So, with this (workshop) it would be better to teach residents to handle these things on their own.”

– Initiative taker 1

The civil servants aligned with the intended goals of organising such a workshop, as they expressed a desire to stimulate new initiatives in the neighbourhood beyond the recurring, similar initiatives that are often led by experienced initiative takers. Therefore, they showed an interest in taking on an active role during the workshop. However, they raised doubts about whether the workshop would successfully attract new residents outside of the local community, and how these people can be reached. This is a challenge they currently already face when they try to engage people beyond “usual suspects” in Hoogvliet's community.

“Most of the people that come to these activities are the same familiar faces from Hoogvliet's community, the usual suspects so to say. So we wonder how you would attract new people with this workshop? We would also like to see new initiatives, instead of the same ones that are organised each year.”

– Civil servant

Feedback on the prototype



- **Realistic steps of self-organisation**
■ OpzoomerMee and the experienced initiative-takers found the identified steps of self-organisation realistic and useful, especially for citizens who are organising for the first time. Following recommendations were given to improve the designed steps of the workshop:
 - **Include an explanation of the waiting period:** The waiting period and activities that occur in that period between the application of an initiative and approval should also be included to inform interested residents, to reduce any potential discouraging factors.
 - **Focus on problem-solving skills during the execution step:** While one can make a thorough planning, unforeseen issues may emerge during the execution of an initiative. It is important to teach residents problem-solving skills and emphasize the importance of having a plan B.
 - **Less focus on accountability and reflection step:** The accountability phase is often straightforward, so less focus is needed on this step.
 - **More focus on initial steps:** OpzoomerMee propose to put more focus on the first two steps (idea formation and planning). Developing a good idea and a clear plan before the submission for the citizens' initiative subsidies can mitigate the need for adjustments in later stages and avoid potential disappointment.

- **Lack of space for people with ideas in the current workshop design**
 Civil servants emphasized that many successful initiatives come from residents with existing ideas, as they are more often intrinsically motivated to realize them. It should be clearer that the workshop not only supports idea formation but also the development of pre-existing ideas of residents.
- **Functionality of the map**
 While the intended use of the map is for participants to pinpoint opportunities for initiatives in the district, it can also be useful to include information on the map about available actors/partners/locations nearby that can be utilized.
- **Include a target group in the step 1 cards**
 a 'for whom' card can be added to the cards in step 1.
- **Value of visual materials for a fun workshop**
 The cheerful visual materials can attract interest. Visual elements instead of extensive text, or maybe even a role-play activity as suggested by one of the initiative takers, can make the workshop more engaging and interactive.
- **Clarity with cards and steps**
■ The cards provide a fun and clear way to see what needs to be considered, rather than overwhelming participants with a list of text. Generally breaking the workshop down into steps makes it more manageable and less intimidating.

Opportunities



- **Incorporating multiple roles**
■ Having different roles at the workshop—both institutions for providing feedback and experienced initiators for sharing expertise and guiding interested citizens—is perceived as beneficial and the stakeholders show willingness in participating through these different intended roles.
- **Focus on first steps and stimulate starting small**
 OpzoomerMee employees noted that individuals lacking experience are often unaware of what is involved in the organisation of an initiative. They often see the application for the citizen initiative subsidy as a starting point, thereby failing to recognise the importance of the preparatory steps. By emphasizing during the workshop to start with a small idea, residents can better align their expectations with what is realistic to achieve from the beginning and avoid the need for adjustments after the submission of their initiatives.
- **Encouraging collaborations**
■ By working together in groups the workshop could promote collaborations, encouraging new residents to work together rather than all organising their own idea.
- **Possible target group**
 Citizens who currently organise initiatives at the street level can be a suitable target group. They might be interested in scaling up their ideas for a bigger reach.

Challenges



- **Reaching new, interested participants**
 Civil servants explain a desire to reach people who are not already active in the local network, as usual suspects often attend these types of events. Though there are doubts on how to reach this new group and how big this group of interested citizens would be. New citizens and younger people could be a possible target group, but there would have to be a clear motivation and/or need to participate in the local community of Hoogvliet to excite residents for such a workshop.
- **Importance of intrinsic motivation for realising ideas**
 People who already have their own ideas more often tend to have a strong intrinsic motivation to realise them. Since the journey from idea to success requires significant time and energy, possibly taking away enthusiasm, this intrinsic motivation might be the most crucial factor for successful initiatives. Thus, building practical skills and confidence, which the workshop would primarily address, is perceived by civil servants as not the decisive factor for the success of initiatives.

Balancing realistic expectations and enthusiasm

It's important to manage expectations (understanding the scope of work) and maintaining enthusiasm. Explaining people all the practicalities and how much work or time it may cost in such a workshop may take away their excitement for their initial idea.

Time Commitment

Time could be a barrier. It should align with different schedules of both experienced initiative takers, institutional stakeholders and participants. Additionally, a full day might not be necessary and one workshop a year is expected to be sufficient as it can be challenging to generate enough interest.

Recommendations for further development



Based on the found feedback, challenges and opportunities, the following list of recommendations is made for further development of the workshop.

Emphasize starting small during the workshop to manage expectations, set realistic goals and prevent disappointments among residents.

Provide space and support for those with concrete ideas to join in on the workshop and refine their concepts.

Put **more focus on the first two preparatory steps** before the application of the citizen initiative subsidies.

Address the waiting time between the application and approval of the subsidies.

Focus on learning problem solving skills for practicing with the execution of an initiative.

Focus on making the workshop more engaging and fun, by further developing the visual materials and probes or possibly developing role-play activities.

Keep the content and activities of the workshop organised into manageable steps to break down the information and activity load of the participants engaging in the workshop.

Keep incorporating the multiple roles of both professionals and skilled initiative-takers in the workshop.

Critically think about specific target groups: Focus on reaching citizens who may already organise activities on street level looking to expand their reach and think about strategies, to reach interested people outside of usual suspects.

Reconsider the time duration of the workshop to match people's schedules and sustain interest.

Conduct a pilot test with revised design materials to understand whether the workshop materials and the assigned roles of people involved in the workshop are clear.

8.4. Discussion for further development

After evaluating the design concepts with a selection of the stakeholders, it became further evident that each concept has a distinctive role in guiding interested residents towards initial support for building their self-confidence and capacity. Consequently, they cannot be considered interchangeable in terms of their added value and impact. In addition to this, the insights further demonstrated how they can complement and interact with one another. The values of each concept, along with their respective differences and how they relate to one another are illustrated in figure 45.

the skills for self-organisation, to build the capacity and self-confidence of interested residents to take on active roles. In contrast, the platform is mainly designed to facilitate connections between active residents to support each other, thereby creating opportunities to develop one's self-confidence and capabilities. Furthermore, the stakeholders indicated that the platform has the potential to attract a broader group of interest residents, reaching those who may not yet be familiar with Hoogvliet's communities and informal networks. In contrast, the workshop is more likely to engage interested residents who are already involved or familiar with Hoogvliet's informal networks, such as

The workshop focuses more directly on acquiring

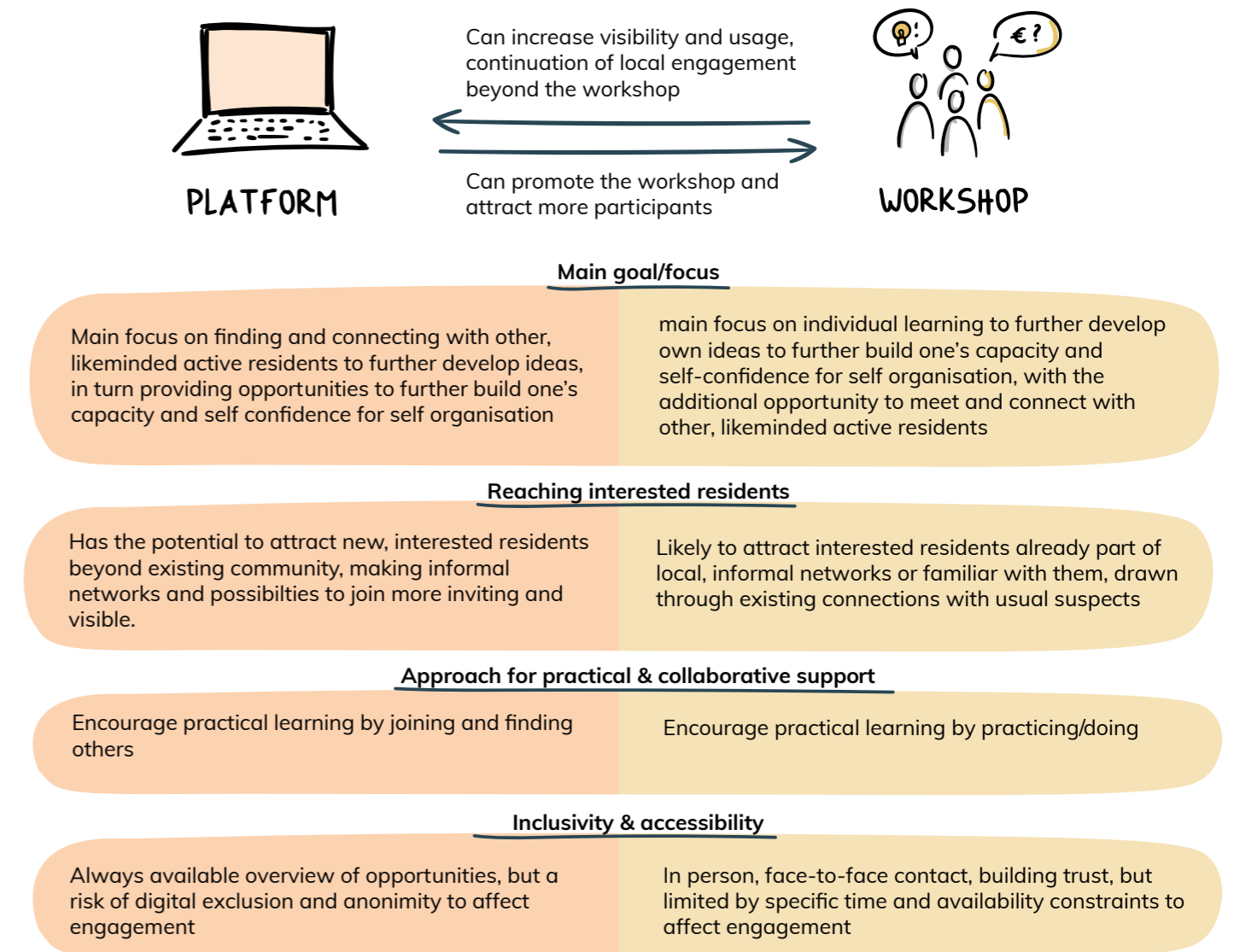


Figure 45: The values of each concept along with their respective differences and how they relate to one another

current volunteers or participants in community activities. Moreover, each concept can encourage residents to engage with the other concept: the platform, for instance, could serve as a promotional tool for the workshop, attracting participants. Conversely, the workshop can direct participants to the platform, thereby encouraging the continuation of local engagement beyond attending the workshop. Thus, these insights on the complementary relationship between the two concepts underscore that supporting active residents in Hoogvliet cannot be achieved through a single solution, but that effective support requires addressing of multiple needs through a combination of tools.

Given the scope of this graduation project, it is feasible to focus on the further development of a single concept. Despite my interest in also exploring non-digital design interventions due to the limitations associated with introducing a new digital tool, the main focus throughout the project has remained on creating a digital solution. Accordingly, I have chosen to focus on further developing the platform as a valuable infrastructure for Hoogvliet's active residents. Nevertheless, the feedback on the workshop should not be disregarded. The insights gathered from the workshop can also be integrated into the platform's digital features, in sections where it is applicable.

All stakeholders highlighted that they perceive opportunities for further development of the platform. Its functionalities could be broadened, potentially increasing its reach of users and applicability. However, while this platform's first design currently centres around providing better initial support for the capacity and self-confidence of interested residents, the institutional stakeholders (the municipality and OpzoomerMee) expressed some reservations about this limited goal. Although they recognize the importance of supporting residents to build their capacity and self-confidence, they perceive that the challenge extends beyond this. They emphasize that the broader challenge lies in motivating residents to become interested and contribute in the first place. While both the platform and the workshop are seen as promising tools for Hoogvliet, they thus highlighted the need for these designs to better address critical elements of activation and motivation. Therefore, further development of the platform should include an exploration on how the platform's design could inspire and motivate residents to become interested in actively contributing.

With these insights in mind, it is thus essential to test the platform with potential interested residents as users of the platform, to determine if it meets their needs and addresses relevant challenges.

CONCLUSION CHAPTER 8

Feedback sessions on ideas with stakeholders

This chapter presented a first evaluation of the two ideas developed during the ideation phase, by gathering feedback from a selection of key stakeholders. The primary aim of these feedback sessions was to gather input from relevant stakeholders on the preliminary concepts for further refinement and development. These insights also helped to assess to what extent the concepts are in line with the needs of Hoogvliet's residents and stakeholders, and how these concepts may need to evolve in their purpose based on found insights.

The findings revealed that both concepts offer distinct values and have the potential to complement each other. This reinforces the idea that supporting active citizenship in Hoogvliet requires a combination of tools to address multiple needs. Aligning with the original goal of the graduation project, I will focus on further exploring how the platform as a digital tool can

be developed into a valuable infrastructure for active citizens in Hoogvliet.

However, it is essential to recognize that providing a supportive infrastructure for increased capacity and self-confidence does not automatically increase active engagement. Thus, in addition to facilitating connections for support to build the capacity and self-confidence of residents through such a platform, further development should include an exploration on how the platform's design could **inspire** and **motivate** residents to become interested in actively contributing.

Testing the concept with potential interested residents will be key to understanding how well it aligns with needs of these main intended users. In the following chapter, I will present the iteration done on the platform, which will be evaluated with this intended target group.

KEY TAKEAWAYS CHAPTER 8

Feedback sessions on ideas with stakeholders

The following list summarises the key takeaways from this chapter, and the implications for the next steps of the thesis.

- The platform has the potential to attract a broader audience, including residents unfamiliar with existing networks in Hoogvliet, while the workshop, on the other hand, is more likely to engage those already connected to local networks, such as current volunteers and participants.
- The insights further highlighted how supporting active citizenship in Hoogvliet requires a combination of tools, as a single solution may not adequately address the diverse needs of residents. A combination of digital and non-digital interventions is ideal for comprehensive support.
- Given project scope and ongoing emphasis on a digital solution, further development will focus on refining the platform as a desirable infrastructure for active residents.
- Feedback and recommendations from the workshop should be considered to integrated into digital features of the platform's design where relevant.
- Further platform development should focus on features that not only support but also inspire and motivate residents toward active participation.
- Testing the platform with potential interested residents as users will be essential to ensure it meets their needs, addresses relevant challenges, and inspires interest in active citizenship.

9

ITERATION ON THE DESIGN OF THE PLATFORM

This chapter presents the iterations and further development of the design of the platform, after a first evaluation with stakeholders. I will first explain what guided the iteration, followed by descriptions of the improved design details.

9.1. Guiding aspects for the design iteration

9.2. . Improved design details

9.1. Guiding aspects for the design iteration

With the initial design still being on a conceptual level, I further developed the design of the platform through an iterative process. This development was based on 4 main aspects:

1. The design guidelines

By revisiting the design guidelines which were formulated in alignment with the design goal derived from research insights, I critically analysed the concept for potential improvements.

2. Feedback from the stakeholders

The feedback and recommendations from a selection of the stakeholders were carefully considered to refine the design. In particular, I considered how the tool could also serve as an instrument to inspire and motivate residents to become interested in contributing, as this was the primary concern raised which was not directly addressed in the current design challenge.

3. Interaction qualities

Interaction qualities can serve as critical design criteria, assisting designers in aligning a functional prototype with the intended experiential interactions (Liu et al., 2012). By envisioning interaction qualities for the platform, I thus aimed to bridge the gap between developing a digital, functional prototype for the platform and achieving the desired user experience.

4. Empathising with the journey of an interested citizen

Acknowledging the lack of initial evaluation with potential interested citizens, I adopted a personal perspective to envision the journey of a citizen interested in contributing to informal networks. This approach aimed to uncover possible pain points and barriers in using the platform. However, being aware that the subjective bias of this approach does not capture the actual experience of citizens, it is essential to complement it with involving citizens for the next iteration.

Interaction qualities

Interacting with the platform should be experienced as...

.. Exploratory: Interacting with the platform should feel exploratory, allowing users to explore the possibilities of active citizenship through the platform without the immediate pressure to actively contribute.

... Inviting: Interacting with the platform should feel inviting, encouraging active engagement beyond exploratory interactions.

.. Empowering: Interacting with the platform should make users feel valued and appreciated for their efforts in the neighbourhood.

9.2. Improved design details

This section will summarize the adjustments made to the design based on the 4 aspects which were used as criteria. To better understand the adjustments, the prototype can be viewed and interacted with through this [link](#). *(Link not working? *)*

Creating profiles

A section for creating profiles has been further developed and designed. Creating personal profiles offers several benefits, aligning with insights from previous research.

- The use of profiles reduces the anonymity of online interactions, which is particularly important when individuals respond to help requests. The ability to see the person they are considering helping can foster trust and more meaningful connections.

- By allowing users to select their interests and describe themselves on their profiles, the platform enables citizens to **easily find and connect with others whose profiles align with their specific interests or needs**.
- Users can easily **manage their contributions on their account**, increasing their autonomous use of the platform.
- The feature of highlighting users' ideas and initiatives on their profiles can **boost the desired recognition of initiative-takers**. An overview of their contributions showcases their active participation and impact in the neighbourhood.

If the prototype is not loading in Chrome, You have to delete the Cookies. In Chrome, navigate to settings → privacy and security → Cookies → search for Figma & remove its Cookies.

While creating profiles offers these advantages, it can also pose a barrier to the desired exploratory interactions with the platform. To balance this, the design ensures that platform visitors can explore and gather information without the necessity of creating an account. For instance, users can explore the first steps of uploading an idea or initiative without having to sign up for an account immediately. Additionally, replying to help requests does not require an account, only some basic contact details are required.

Uploading an idea or initiative

The process for adding an initiative or idea to the platform has been **separated and refined**, to better guide citizens through their submissions of ideas. In the process of uploading an idea, the following changes have been implemented:

- An **introductory page** has been added to explain the steps involved in submitting an idea, what to expect afterwards and the rules of submission. This ensures that users are well informed and helps to manage their expectations.
- **Users can click on a help button for guidance** on filling in the required fields. This section also emphasizes to start with a small idea to increase the likelihood of success and execution, particularly for first-time organisers.
- Users have the option **to initially save their ideas privately** and choose whether they want to be contacted by the neighbourhood

networker for assistance with their idea. This provides flexibility and additional professional support for users beyond asking help from other citizens or local organisations.

- After submitting their idea, **users can download a document outlining necessary steps to consider for further development of their idea**. This approach emphasizes the importance of developing a clear idea and plan as the initial focus, rather than immediately focusing on obtaining subsidies for an idea. This helps to prevent disappointment if subsidies are not immediately granted and ensures building a solid foundation for their idea.
- At each step, a section provides **an entry towards the district experts for questions and support**, stimulating and supporting offline interactions beyond the platform.
- With both uploading an initiative or idea, users now have the possibility to add whether they **are uploading on behalf of an organisation that they are a part of**. This is also included in the creating a profile page. Within this section, they can also **add links to their social media/websites**, where they post more up to date information.

These improvements aim to make the submission process more supportive, encouraging citizens to contribute their ideas with confidence and clarity.

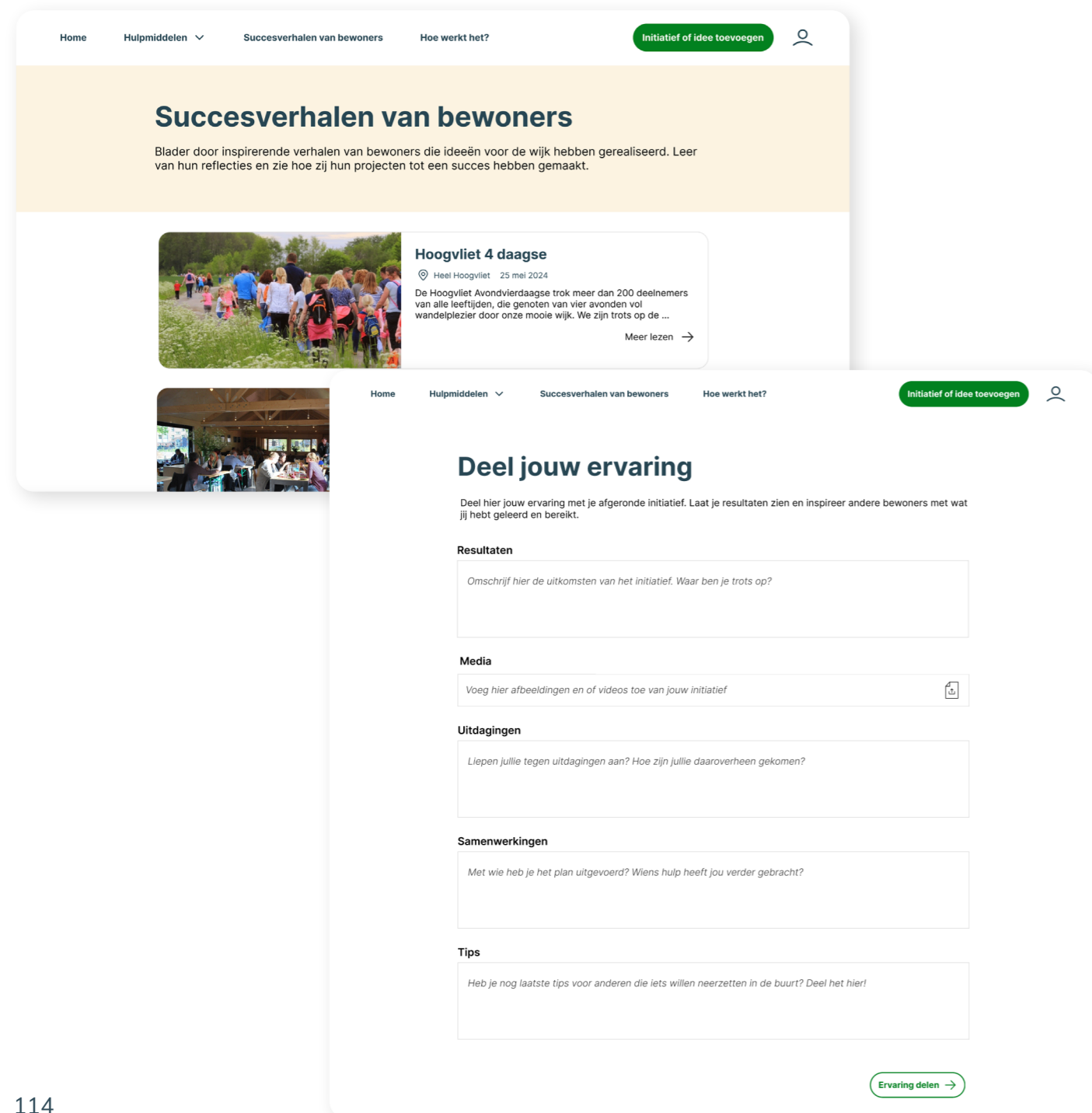
[? Klik hier voor tips bij het invullen van jouw idee.](#)

Section for success stories

A new section dedicated to success stories has been integrated into the platform. This section allows visitors to read about completed initiatives in the neighbourhood. Shared success stories can have a positive impact on citizens' motivations to actively engage (van de Wijdeven et al., 2013). By learning about the outcomes, challenges, collaborations and tips shared by initiative-takers, citizens can be encouraged and inspired. Furthermore, seeing how other citizens

have successfully self-organised and how they possible also had some challenges can enhance future initiative-takers' confidence in their own capabilities.

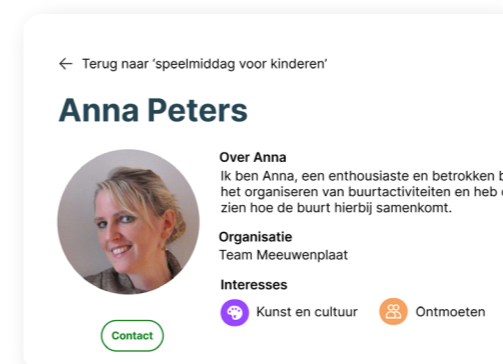
When initiative-takers finalize their project on the platform (transitioning from 'active' to 'completed' status), **they are invited to answer a series of questions regarding the execution of their projects.** The insights gathered from these responses can then be displayed in this section of success stories.



Section for relevant 'tools' for self-organisation

A section for tools (hulpmiddelen) has been added to the navigation bar. This section is designed to serve as a central space for information about tools and resources available for self-organisation in the neighbourhood. While this section has not been fully developed, it aims to illustrate how the platform can function as a central hub for relevant information, inspiring citizens with the available tools and resources. This section may include:

- An overview of the institutional stakeholders who can support active citizens and how they can provide support. To foster trust and facilitate easy communication, it is desirable to include personal photos of each stakeholder alongside their direct contact details. This makes the process of reaching out and connecting with these stakeholders more straightforward and personal.
- Possible locations available for initiatives.
- Materials available for use in various initiatives.



- Hulpmiddelen
- Wijkexperts
- Materialen
- Locaties
- Workshops

- Workshops which citizens can attend to develop specific skills for organising initiatives. Here, the workshop which was one of the initial ideas could for instance be promoted.

Interactive elements

The platform has been further developed with several new interactive features, designed to enhance user engagement and ensure it remains dynamic.

- Users can now see how many others have joined or supported a particular initiative or idea, which can encourage them to participate as well
- Users can show their support by liking an initiative or idea, boosting its visibility and motivating others to get involved.
- Users can contact the individuals behind initiatives through a contact button on their profile, facilitating easier communication and connection.



Replying to help requests

Replying to a help request has been changed:

- A new section allows users to specify **what they would like to learn** by participating. This highlights the opportunity of learning new skills from experienced initiative-takers, while contributing to the initiative.
- A user is now asked to explain **with what they want to help**, and not why they want to help, aiming to make the question easier to answer.

Wat leuk dat je wilt helpen met 'speelmiddag voor kinderen!'

Vul de volgende gegevens in en de initiatiefnemer neemt zo snel mogelijk vrijblijvend contact met je op over de mogelijkheden.

Naam
Voer voor- en achternaam in

Emailadres **Telefoonnummer**
Voer emailadres in Voer telefoonnummer in

Waarmee wil je mee helpen?
Omschrijf hier kort waarom het je leuk lijkt om mee te helpen en wat je zou kunnen bijdragen.

Wat zou je willen leren?
Omschrijf hier kort wat je nog zou willen leren door aan te sluiten bij dit initiatief.

versturen

Agenda view

The possibility to **switch the initiatives to an agenda view** has been added, allowing users to see initiatives organised by date. This helps active citizens avoid scheduling conflicts by providing a clear overview of planned activities.

Visual design and usability of elements

A general iteration was done on the visual design and usability of the digital prototype, to make the user interface elements more user friendly, attractive and intuitive to use. For instance, A **picture of Hoogvliet** has been added to the hero of the landing page to make it more inviting and connected to Hoogvliet. Furthermore, **adding**

an initiative or idea was added as the main call to action in the navigation bar, guiding visitors to this functionality. Furthermore, the **primary blue colours were changed to the green** which aligns with the colours of the municipality of Rotterdam. This was done as I perceive them as key stakeholders for managing and further developing the platform.

CONCLUSION CHAPTER 9

Iteration on the design of the platform

This chapter presented the iterated design of the platform, guided by several elements among which the initial feedback that was given by stakeholders. In the next chapter, this design will be evaluated through user testing with interested residents as the main target group of the platform.

10

USER TESTS: EVALUATING THE DESIGN WITH INTERESTED CITIZENS

In this chapter I present the evaluation of the platform through user tests conducted with residents of Hoogvliet, who fit the target group of residents interested in active contribution. The objective of this evaluation is to assess the extent to which the platform's design meets its intended goals and how residents experience this purpose. Specifically, the platform aims to connect residents with each other to foster initial support, thereby building the capacity and self-confidence for active citizenship of such interested residents. Moreover, the platform should act as an inspirational tool that can motivate residents to start contributing. Through these tests, I seek to gather insights on how well the platform serves these goals and to identify any additional or unforeseen needs and interactions that emerge by using the platform.

- 10.1. Research questions
- 10.2. Approach
- 10.3. Discussion of the key insights
- 10.4. Recommendations for further development

10.1. Research questions

The research questions of the evaluation of the design with interested, inexperienced residents of Hoogvliet are as follows:

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

User tests with interested residents

1. How do residents experience the platform's intended goals and interactions: to connect them with others for support; thereby building their capacity and self-confidence for active citizenship?
2. To what degree does the platform align with the essential needs of residents interested in active citizenship?
3. To what extent does the platform integrate with their daily lives and living environment, and what opportunities exist for further alignment?
4. How does the platform impact residents' motivation and willingness to contribute actively to the neighbourhood?

The primary objective is to understand how residents perceive and experience the initial intended purpose of the platform and whether this meets their needs and expectations as residents interested in actively contributing to the neighbourhood. Additionally, I aim to explore additional desired interactions with the platform beyond this intended purpose and understand how the platform could fit into their daily practices as a useful tool. Furthermore, as institutional stakeholders identified activating and motivating new residents as a key challenge, I also aim to understand how the platform can address this issue. Lastly, though not specified as a separate research goal, through interacting with the platform the overall usability of the design can also be assessed.

10.2. Approach

10.2.1. Participants

The participants (n=3) were recruited through one of the Houses of the Neighbourhood. Two participants had just started organising small activities for residents in this House of the Neighbourhood, while the third participant, though not yet engaged, had shown interest in contributing by visiting the House of the Neighbourhood.

10.2.2. Set up and tools

The user tests took place in the House of the Neighbourhood in a separate meeting room. The participants interacted with the prototype on my laptop, which was designed in Figma. It included various flows that allowed participants to experience the platform's key functionalities. I recorded their actions through a voice recording and observed their interactions while taking notes. See figure 46 for the set up.

10.2.3. Procedure

Each session took around 30 minutes, and followed these steps:

1. Introduction: I introduced myself, the project and the objectives of the user test. Participants were provided with a consent form outlining how the recordings would be used and managed.

2. Interview: This short interview served as an ice-breaker, exploring the participants' previous experiences in the neighbourhood and how they currently seek information about local initiatives and other neighbourhood related information. This helped to define the potential context of use of the platform and identify relevant touchpoints in their daily lives where the platform could possibly be promoted or aligned to.

3. First impression: After the initial conversation, participants were given a few minutes to get familiar with the platform, allowing me to observe their initial reactions.

4. Use cases (tasks): The participants completed two assigned tasks with given user scenarios: replying to a help request and uploading an idea. After completing each task, I asked a few deepening questions to further understand their experience.

5. Questionnaire and final discussion: Participants were asked to fill out a questionnaire to rate their experience and perceptions of the concept. Following the questionnaire, I allowed them to elaborate on their responses. This let me gain deeper qualitative insights on the questionnaire.

6. Conclusion: I thanked the participants for their help through a small gift, asked if they had any remaining questions and invited them to keep in contact in case they want to follow the progress of the project.

The full plan including more detailed descriptions of each section can be found in Appendix F.

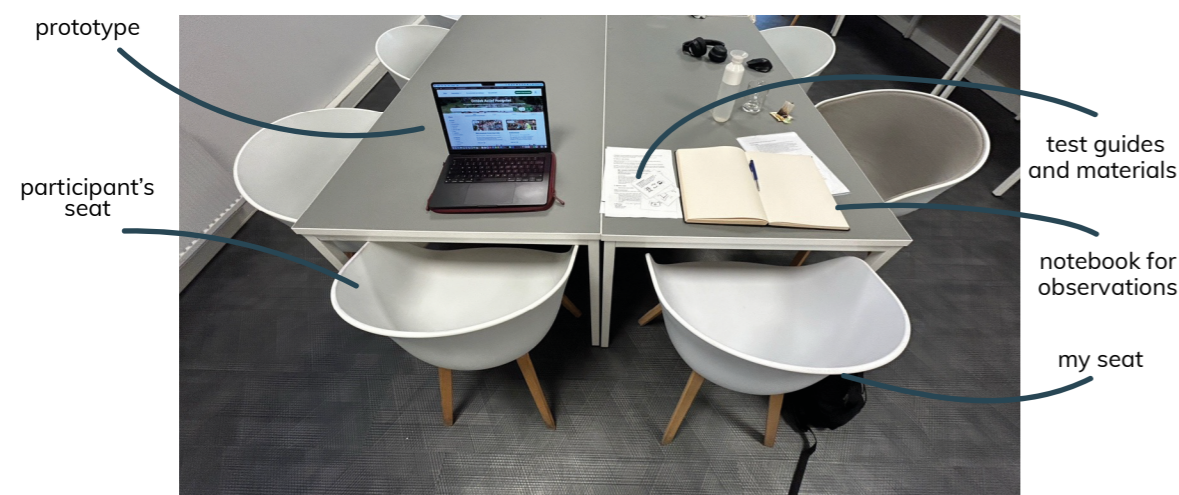


Figure 46: Set up and tools for the user tests

10.3. Results and discussion of the key insights

In this section I discuss the most relevant insights of the user tests in response to the research questions. For an overview of summarised results without direct interpretations, refer to appendix G.

1. How do residents experience the platform's intended goals and interactions: to connect them with others for support; thereby building their capacity and self-confidence for active citizenship?

The platform's intended goal of fostering connections for initial support in active citizenship was experienced as valuable but with notable limitations. Participants valued the feature allowing them to respond to other's help requests, finding it useful to engage with established initiatives. Two out of three participants who currently had organised their own small activities showed interest in uploading their activities to attract both new participants as well as volunteers who would like to join. However, they were more hesitant to upload their own ideas to seek support. They preferred to still use their existing trusted networks rather than rely on the platform to form new connections for support. This suggests that while the platform shows opportunities for facilitating new connections, it cannot replace the trust and familiarity of pre-existing social capital. One participant noted that she preferred using the feature to await a follow-up talk with the neighbourhood networker, rather than for waiting for support from others. In addition to this, participants expressed to prefer conducting their own research on possible resources, materials and locations for ideas, rather than asking help from others through an online platform. This further highlights a preference for self-reliance and established networks over the platform's more public method of support.

"If you have an idea, you can put it on the platform, but I think it's more important to first check whether it's even possible to do something and gather information for that. I would prefer to figure that out myself first, rather than asking people for help in this way."

– P2

Concerns about privacy and the visibility of personal information also contributed to their reluctance in publicly sharing ideas. These trust and privacy issues limits the effectiveness of online interactions in fostering new, supportive relationships. The original intent behind profiles – to allow residents feel recognised for their contributions – was not perceived as a meaningful benefit by the participants. This indicates that public recognition may not resonate with users in the early stages of developing ideas, when the ideas are still vulnerable and not yet concise.

"I wouldn't be comfortable with everyone on this platform being able to see my profile and what I like. I'd prefer to first meet people in person, to talk about myself and my ideas rather than doing it online."

– P1

Overall, they perceived the platform as more useful for sharing existing initiatives to involve others, where they show interest in replying to such help requests rather than seeking support for new ideas. For existing initiatives in Hoogvliet, the platform could serve a greater purpose beyond the functionality of inviting others to join and help. It could be a valuable tool for gaining recognition on their initiatives and contributing to an overview of local activities to help prevent scheduling conflicts.

The preference for turning to existing networks and individual research on possibilities for realising ideas underscores the limitations of the platform in fulfilling its intended goals. Lastly, the long-term impact of how such new connections would enhance the capacity and self-confidence of such residents cannot be realistically evaluated, as the study focused primarily on initial reactions to these features rather than the outcomes of actual engagement.

2. To what degree do the platform's functionalities address the essential needs of residents interested in actively contributing to Hoogvliet?

The results suggest an essential role of platform beyond the intended goals. The exploratory interactions with the platform were perceived as very valuable. It allowed participants to browse without pressure and it sparked inspiration and curiosity. The "tools" section was also seen as a useful feature for exploring the possibilities for realising an idea. This also aligns better with their found preference for conducting their own research rather than asking others for help. However, the current feature was not fully worked out yet. It could be further developed by considering more direct access to information about available public resources, spaces, materials and district experts.

These insights indicate that the essential role of the platform may not be to directly facilitate connections by asking for support from others, but to provide an extensive overview of information and possibilities for actively contributing to the neighbourhood for residents to explore at their own pace. By offering an overview of existing initiatives and their possibilities to join as well as useful tools for realising ideas, the platform can empower interested residents to explore possibilities independently. Thus, while it was already a desired interaction quality, the insights now show that prioritizing the exploratory role of the platform as a core strength is important.

**While uploading her idea* "Can't figure it out and would you rather speak to one of the district experts? .. *clicks on district experts section* Oh, here are the district experts, how great! Oh, they really do exist! That's good to know. I would first take a look around in this tools section."*

-P1

The platform can still play a role in expanding the social capital of interested residents, though in a different way than envisioned with the

functionality of uploading an idea. Instead of encouraging immediate online connections through the platform, the platform can guide residents towards more valued face-to-face interactions after their initial exploration. By discovering who is active in the neighbourhood, how to contact them and where they are located, residents can take the next steps to meet these residents and engage offline. In this sense, its strength lies not in facilitating online connections but in guiding users toward more valued offline interactions—which can be through connecting them to local experts, introducing them to neighbourhood initiatives, or encouraging visits to local spaces like Houses of the Neighbourhood and the Wijkhub.

**Browses the overview* "When I see something like that, I think, I might attend, or if it's nearby just pass by to see. I'm curious about the activities being organised and the people who help with them."*

-P1

3. What are possibilities of the platform to align with the daily practices of these residents?

The user tests helped to identify relevant touchpoints in the participants' daily lives, providing insights on how the platform could be aligned with these touchpoints. The findings suggest that an online platform has a low probability of being the initial contact point for residents interested in engaging in active citizenship. Participants currently rely on their existing networks regarding neighbourhood related information and say they would visit familiar local spaces to discover opportunities, like they also did by visiting this House of the Neighbourhood. Despite this, the platform has the potential to complement and enhance these existing practices, by offering an overview of additional opportunities for active citizenship within the neighbourhood, beyond what they might discover through their current networks or familiar locations. Their interest in replying to help requests suggests that the platform

enhances these opportunities. Though for the platform to be visible and engaging, it is important to recognise that existing networks and well-known physical infrastructure play an important role in helping residents discover opportunities for active citizenship.

"I first visited the House of the Neighbourhood to discover opportunities for being a volunteer here. Now after some time here I got to know other volunteers, and now together we organise a bingo for elderly and are planning on also doing a high tea."

-P3

Another key challenge is aligning the platform with the context and social habits of older residents. Previous research insights already indicated that this demographic is often interested in actively contributing to the neighbourhood. However, they are usually less digitally active or skilled, as reflected by all three participants in the study. They preferred face-to-face interactions over online engagement, or need help from others to find information online, which can limit the platform's effectiveness in fostering new connections and supporting active citizenship through digital means. This further emphasizes the need to integrate the platform with offline locations or adopt a hybrid approach that combines online functionalities with opportunities for in-person interactions.

"I mostly get online information by asking my daughter. She then sends me a link with the information, but I'm not really online myself. Sometimes I google something myself, but I actually prefer not to."

- P3

Participants noted that while they don't frequently search for local information online, they occasionally use Google, Facebook, or municipal webpages to look for information. This suggests that improving the platform's visibility could involve enhancing its search

engine optimization (SEO) through Google, promoting it through social media and linking it to municipal pages. Additionally, promoting the platform through local amenities - such as the Houses of the Neighbourhood but also libraries, supermarkets, and schools - could be effective in boosting its visibility and reach, as residents already feel a sense of connectedness to the neighbourhood through these local places.

4. How effective are the platform's features in motivating and activating residents to start contributing to the neighbourhood?

Assessing the platform's effectiveness in motivating and activating residents to contribute was limited, as two out of the three participants were already somewhat active in the neighbourhood through organising small activities. Their existing intrinsic motivations to contribute made it difficult to determine whether the platform had any additional influence on their commitment.

However, reading about existing initiatives in the overview and success stories did seem to spark new inspiration among the participants. They started recalling past initiatives they missed, discovered new activities on the platform which they would like to learn more about, and started talking about new ideas already just by reading the existing initiatives. Particularly the third participant who had not yet been active in the neighbourhood, showed excitement about exploring the platform and explained that seeing how others can do it encouraged her to join and get involved. This suggests that the platform does have the potential to motivate those who are not yet engaged. That said, while the platform shows promise in sparking interest, the extent to which it can turn that interest into meaningful engagement remains uncertain. Longer-term use and observation would be necessary to fully understand its impact on motivating residents to take action.

**Browses through overview* “Oh, this is nice for the youth as well. It makes me think of the past, when I was younger—things like this used to happen in the neighbourhood. I don’t see that anymore now. It would be great if that could happen again.”*

-P3

**sees the initiative on a community garden* “This, I find interesting. People don’t have much money, so I think it’s great if they can also take something from there. I also give away my vegetables to people, so I think this is a really good initiative.”*

- P2

Limitations

While the evaluation tests provided these valuable insights, it is also important to acknowledge its limitations. First off, the small sample size of three participants restricts the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, since participants were recruited through the House of the Neighbourhood, their pre-existing relationships and familiarity with this local space might have influenced their responses. These connections could have shaped their views of possibilities for active citizenship in Hoogvliet, potentially influencing the neutrality of their feedback. Finally, the evaluation test was focused on evaluating initial insights on using the platform, which limited gaining an understanding on the long-term effect of using the platform. This would give more in-depth insights on how forming new connections through such a platform could help to build residents’ self-confidence and capacity, and would give a better insight on its actual effect in activating residents to participate.

10.4. Recommendations for further development

Based on these insights from the user tests, recommendations are made to guide a final design iteration on the platform and its implementation strategy. Through a final iteration, I aim to better align the platform with the needs of residents who may be interested in active citizenship.

1. Focus on exploration first

Put more focus on the platform’s role as an exploration tool, by offering a comprehensive and easy-to-navigate overview of existing initiatives, success stories and their possibilities to join. This also includes expanding the tools section, to include more comprehensive information on local spaces, materials and resources for active residents in one place. This aligns with residents’ preferences to explore possibilities for ideas by doing their own research.

2. Enhance motivations of residents with existing initiatives as platform users

To create an overview of local initiatives and activities for residents to explore, requires motivating initiative-takers to upload their initiatives to the platform. While initiative-takers from the first feedback session and two participants from this user test already suggested an interest in doing so, the platform’s final design and implementation strategy should consider possible different factors that could further drive their motivation for using the platform. Emphasizing possible benefits such as attracting new volunteers, gaining recognition for their contributions and coordinating schedules of initiatives and activities to avoid conflicts can possibly increase their engagement and participation.

3. Reconsider the feature of uploading an idea

The functionality of uploading an idea was intended to invite new residents to share their ideas and find fitting support. However, insights show users feel hesitant to publicly post their ideas and would prefer using their existing networks for help. On the other hand, the exploratory and inviting design of the platform already creates a supportive environment that encourages residents to gather useful

information on support and so potentially initiate new ideas, without having to share them on the platform. This suggests that the platform’s existing structure already fulfils part of the role that the “uploading an idea” feature was designed for. This feature should therefore be reconsidered or redesigned to better suit the user needs. Additionally, the requirements for signing up for a profile should also be reconsidered, and it should be more transparent and clear what specific personal information is used and how their privacy is valued.

4. Focus on connections to offline engagement after initial explorations through platform

The platform’s explorative focus should place greater emphasis on facilitating offline interactions, providing users with the information they need to transition from online exploration to in-person participation, rather than connecting online. While this was already an established design guideline, these insights highlight that it is a rather crucial role of the platform. By guiding residents towards in-person events, activities, and community spaces, users can still indirectly use the platform to expand their social capital. Additionally, a hybrid approach should be further considered, to also align with needs of interested residents who are not digitally active or skilled.

5. Increase platform visibility through existing valued channels and local amenities

To make the platform known, visible and findable, it could be linked to a municipal page, and promoted through social media and key physical locations. This could be the Houses of the Neighbourhood and the Wijkhub, but also collaborations with local organisations and amenities like schools, playgrounds, supermarkets and libraries. By connecting the platform to existing local infrastructure that residents regularly visit and feel connected to, it can strengthen its presence and relevance within the district.

CONCLUSION CHAPTER 10

User tests: evaluating the design with interested residents

This chapter presented the findings from user tests conducted with residents interested in active citizenship. The outcome of these user tests revealed valuable insights into the essential roles of the platform that extend beyond the original design goal. Insights emphasized its role as an exploration tool rather than a space for directly connecting with others for support. Residents appreciated the opportunity to engage with established initiatives, but when it came to realising their own ideas they were

more inclined towards relying on existing networks, independent research and in-person interactions than directly using the platform to form new connections for support. From these insights, recommendations for improvement were established, as summarised in the **key takeaways**, which will guide a final iteration of the platform's design, aiming to better meet the needs of residents and so enhance its role in fostering active citizenship within Hoogvliet.

KEY TAKEAWAYS CHAPTER 10

User tests: evaluating the design with interested residents

The following list summarises the key takeaways from this chapter in which I evaluated the platform with possible interested residents, and the implications for the next steps of the thesis.

- The platform's primary value is as an exploration tool rather than a direct networking space for support.
- Residents value the ability to discover and engage with established initiatives, but prefer existing networks, independent research, and in-person interactions when further pursuing their own ideas.
- To enhance engagement and usability, the following recommendations were developed:
 1. Emphasize the platform's role as an exploration tool above other functions.
 2. Encourage residents with existing initiatives to participate as platform users, increasing content and inspiration for newcomers.
 3. Reevaluate the "upload an idea" feature to better align with user preferences.
 4. Strengthen connections to offline engagement after initial exploration on the platform to support continuity in participation.
 5. Increase platform visibility through trusted, local channels and physical spaces in Hoogvliet.
- These recommendations will inform the final design iteration to better align with resident needs and support active citizenship in Hoogvliet.

11

FINAL DESIGN PROPOSAL: ACTIEF HOOGVLIET

This chapter presents the final design of the platform, marking the end of this design project. The design has been iteratively refined one last time based on the insights gathered from the second evaluation session with residents. It is presented through its key functionalities alongside the corresponding user interfaces.

Additionally, a **service blueprint** was made. This helped me to understand and define the roles, interactions and values of the different stakeholders within the ecosystem of the platform; not only in its stable use but also for its implementation and long-term integration. The complete service blueprint can be found in appendix H. Using this service blueprint as a foundation, I created two storyboards to illustrate the envisioned experiences for both new, interested residents as well as experienced initiative-takers in using the platform as a supportive tool. Additionally, the chapter elaborates on the roles and values of all stakeholders involved in the platform. Finally, recommendations for effective implementation and realisation of the platform will be outlined.

10.1. Actief Hoogvliet: Discover opportunities for active participation in the neighbourhood

10.2. Storyboards of residents

10.3. Key functionalities and interfaces

10.4. Roles and values of involved stakeholders

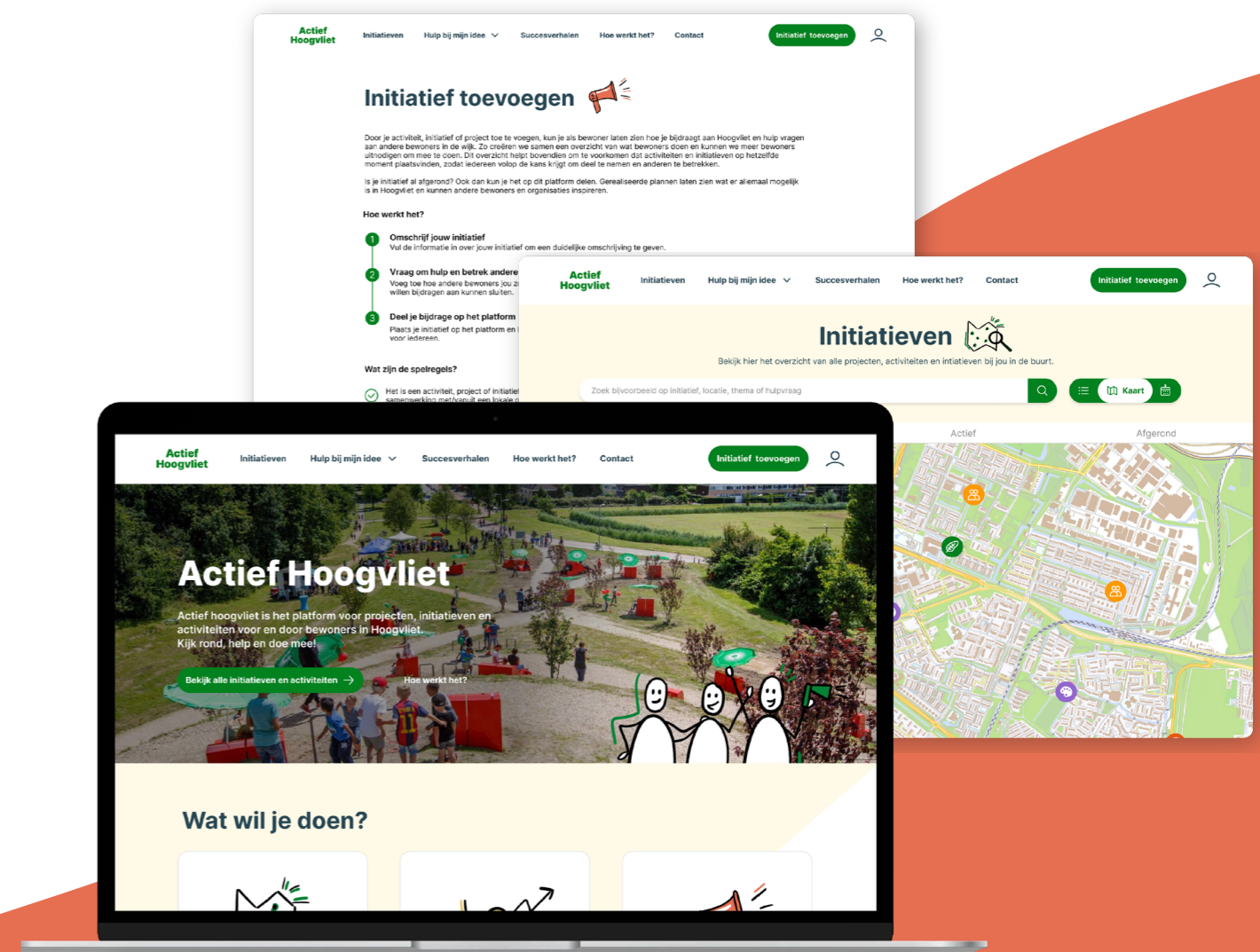
10.5. Recommended approaches for implementation and realisation

11.1. Actief Hoogvliet

Discover opportunities for active participation in the neighbourhood

Actief Hoogvliet is designed to help residents explore opportunities for contributing to the informal networks in Hoogvliet, all through one accessible, local platform. It serves as an exploratory tool for discovering local initiatives led by active residents and their possibilities for interested residents to contribute, along with available information on local resources and support for self-organisation. The platform is therefore particularly of value for **new and interested residents**, providing them a space to observe and familiarize themselves with ongoing community efforts before deciding how they want to get involved, whether they wish to join an existing initiative or start one of their own.

At the same time, Actief Hoogvliet aims to empower **active initiative-takers** by providing a space to showcase their initiatives, share success stories, and invite new residents to help beyond their existing networks. This not only enhances the visibility of their contributions and impact, but also fosters connections with new residents who may be interested in getting involved. By designing the platform for both new as well as experienced active residents, it aims to support active participation in the informal networks in Hoogvliet, ultimately building a more connected and vibrant neighbourhood.



11.2. Storyboards of residents

This section presents a storyboard illustrating how the platform can support a resident's journey from initial interest in participating

towards active contribution to Hoogvliet's informal networks. While this scenario describes one potential journey for interested residents

towards active engagement, it is essential to recognize that everyone's journey and preferences for discovering ways to engage will

vary. Consequently, this scenario serves as an example of one ideal experience of using the platform to support active engagement.

SARAH'S JOURNEY FROM INITIAL INTEREST IN PARTICIPATION TOWARDS ACTIVE CONTRIBUTION TO HOOGVLIET'S INFORMAL NETWORKS

Sarah, a resident of Hoogvliet, notices a flyer at her local supermarket about a new neighbourhood platform: Actief Hoogvliet. Intrigued, she wonders if this might be interesting for her. She always thought a community garden somewhere in the neighbourhood would be a nice idea, but she's never been really sure how where and with who to start.



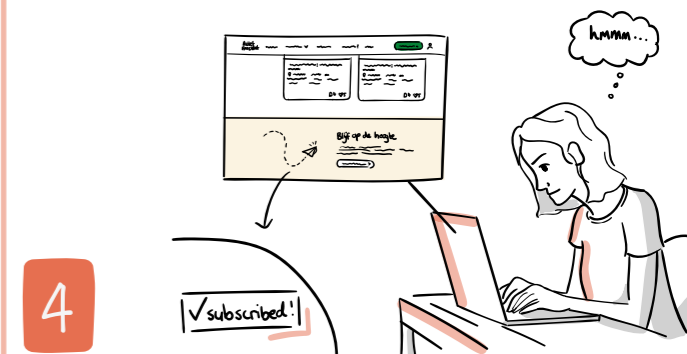
At home, curious about the platform, Sarah visits it on her laptop and browses through various initiatives happening in her area. She uses the map feature to explore activities nearby and filters them based on her interests, such as arts and nature. To her surprise she discovers how much is happening already in her neighbourhood, and how many residents are engaged in meaningful ways.



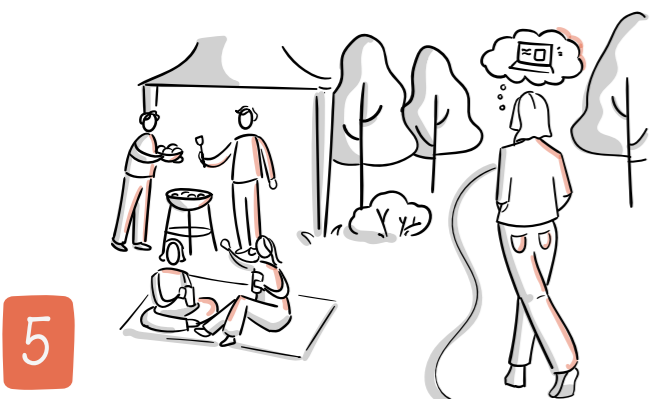
As she dives deeper into the platform, she reads more information about possibilities to realize your own ideas. She also browses the section of successes of other residents, and so learns about inspirational experiences from others.



Feeling inspired but not sure yet how she wants to engage, Sarah decides to follow social media pages of a few initiatives that catch her eye. She also subscribes to the platform's newsletter with her own preferences, allowing her to stay informed on new initiatives and upcoming events in her neighbourhood that align with her interests.



A few weeks later, Sarah comes across a community event while walking through the park. She recognizes it from seeing it on the platform. Observing how residents connect and have fun at the event further sparks her motivation to take action and contribute herself.



Sarah receives an email from the platform, notifying her of a new initiative nearby—an arts project for kids. Curious, she revisits the platform to learn more about the initiative. As she reads about the project she notices an open help request from the initiative taker. This time she decides to respond, and shares that she would like to learn more about self-organising activities by becoming involved in the project.



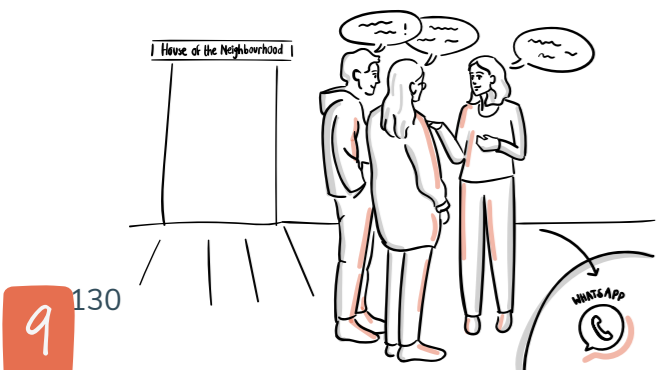
The initiative taker, John, reaches out to Sarah to discuss the possibilities. They arrange to meet in person at the neighborhood house where the arts project for kids takes place. They get to know each other and discuss ways Sarah can contribute and help.



Through helping with this initiative, Sarah gains hands-on experience in community project management. She understands more about how to turn ideas into tangible initiatives, and feels more confident in her abilities.



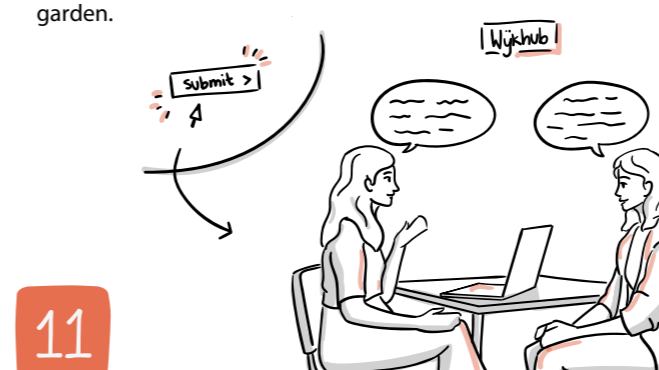
During her visits at the neighborhood house, Sarah has met other active residents who she gets along with well and also share her interest in gardening. They start talking about the possibility of creating a community garden together. They exchange numbers and form a whatsapp group to keep in touch.



Remembering that the platform provides information on how to realize ideas, Sarah explores the platform for relevant and available resources and possible locations for setting up a community garden in the neighbourhood and discusses it with the others. She also reaches out to John, for practical advice on how to get it started.



With initial information gathered for their idea to take shape, Sarah submits a description of the idea to the platform, for a talk with the neighbourhood networker. During a follow up discussion the neighbourhood networker offers advice and answers questions regarding funding possibilities and a possible location to start a first garden.



After a few weeks of planning and preparation, Sarah and her group have made progress in realising their idea to an active initiative. They have started with a small shared plot near the neighbourhood house to start the community garden. Feeling proud of their first accomplishment, she uploads their initiative to the platform, inviting other residents to get involved and contribute.



In addition to new, interested residents, Active residents - being experienced initiative-takers in the community - are key users and contributors

to the platform. The following scenario describes how the platform can complement and enhance their current experiences, supporting their

ongoing engagement and contributions in the neighbourhood.

JOHN'S EXPERIENCE WITH THE PLATFORM AS A COMPLEMENTARY TOOL FOR HIS ACTIVE CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

John, a resident of Hoogvliet, is part of an active residents' group in Hoogvliet who regularly organise activities for the local community. They specifically focus on activities for children as they all enjoy working with kids.



1

The municipality reaches out to John about the launch of a new platform, Actief Hoogvliet, and asks him to upload his initiative as one of the first users. He is excited to contribute as John has been closely involved in the development of the platform.



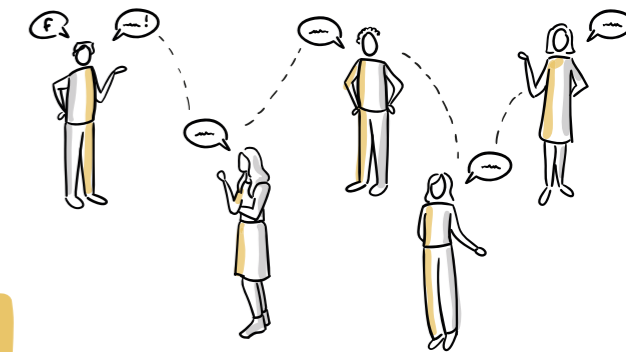
2

John sets up his profile on the platform. He describes his initiative's activities and adds details about an upcoming arts project for kids. He posts the event in the platform's agenda, invites residents to join or help, and links to his group's social media for more updates.



3

Once the platform officially launches, John spreads the word among his community, encouraging them to check out the new platform. He also shares it on the Facebook page of their initiative.



4

Some time after the launch, John is notified that several residents have liked his initiative on the platform. He feels appreciated for their work, and proud to be a part of what citizens contribute to Hoogvliet.



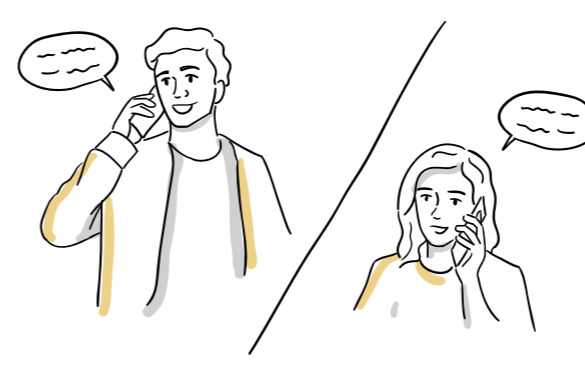
5

The notification also asks whether his help request is still up to date. Since the group could still use some helping hands for the arts project, he decides to describe that on the platform, hoping to attract more volunteers.



6

A few days later he receives an email informing that a resident named Sarah has responded to his help request. He reaches out to her through the phone, and plans to meet up in person to further discuss possibilities to help.



7

In the House of the neighbourhood he gets to know Sarah. She explains how she has some time to join in, is interested in the event and would like to know more about the active community of Hoogvliet and self-organising activities. John suggests that she can help a bit with the upcoming event to get a feel of how things work.



8

The day of the event is a success. The turnout is great and John feels a sense of fulfillment watching the kids come together and enjoy the activity. John also appreciated Sarah's help and looks forward to keeping in touch.



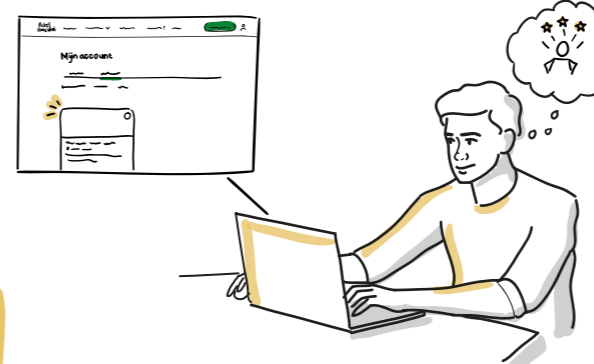
9

A few days later, John receives an email from the platform, asking if he would like to share the success of his event. He answers a few simple questions on how they planned and executed the event. He uploads it to the platform, seeing it as a way to document their efforts and inspire others to get involved.



10

As he looks on his profile, now featuring their first event on the platform, John feels proud of the group's contribution to Hoogvliet. He's already discussing possibilities about their next event, excited to continue using the platform to keep an overview of their contributions and to encourage more residents to contribute as well.



11

11.3. Key functionalities and interfaces

The platform has several features and interactive functionalities, that all aim to align with the desired needs of residents of Hoogvliet, both active initiative-takers as well as residents

interested in actively engaging and contributing to informal networks. In the following section, the designed interfaces with its features and functionalities will be

further elaborated, illustrating how the design of the platform aligns with the envisioned user scenarios. The prototype itself can also be accessed and interacted with through this [link](#).

If the prototype is not loading in Chrome, You have to delete the Cookies. In Chrome, navigate to settings → privacy and security → Cookies → search for Figma & remove its Cookies.

Navigation bar (A)

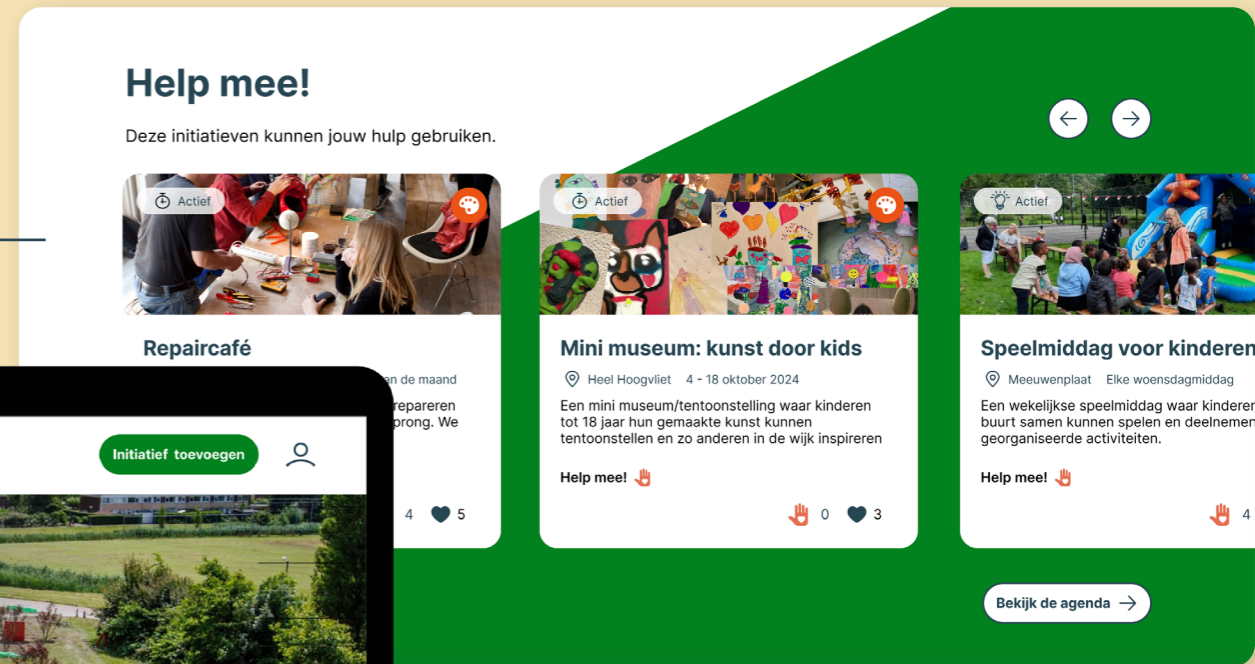
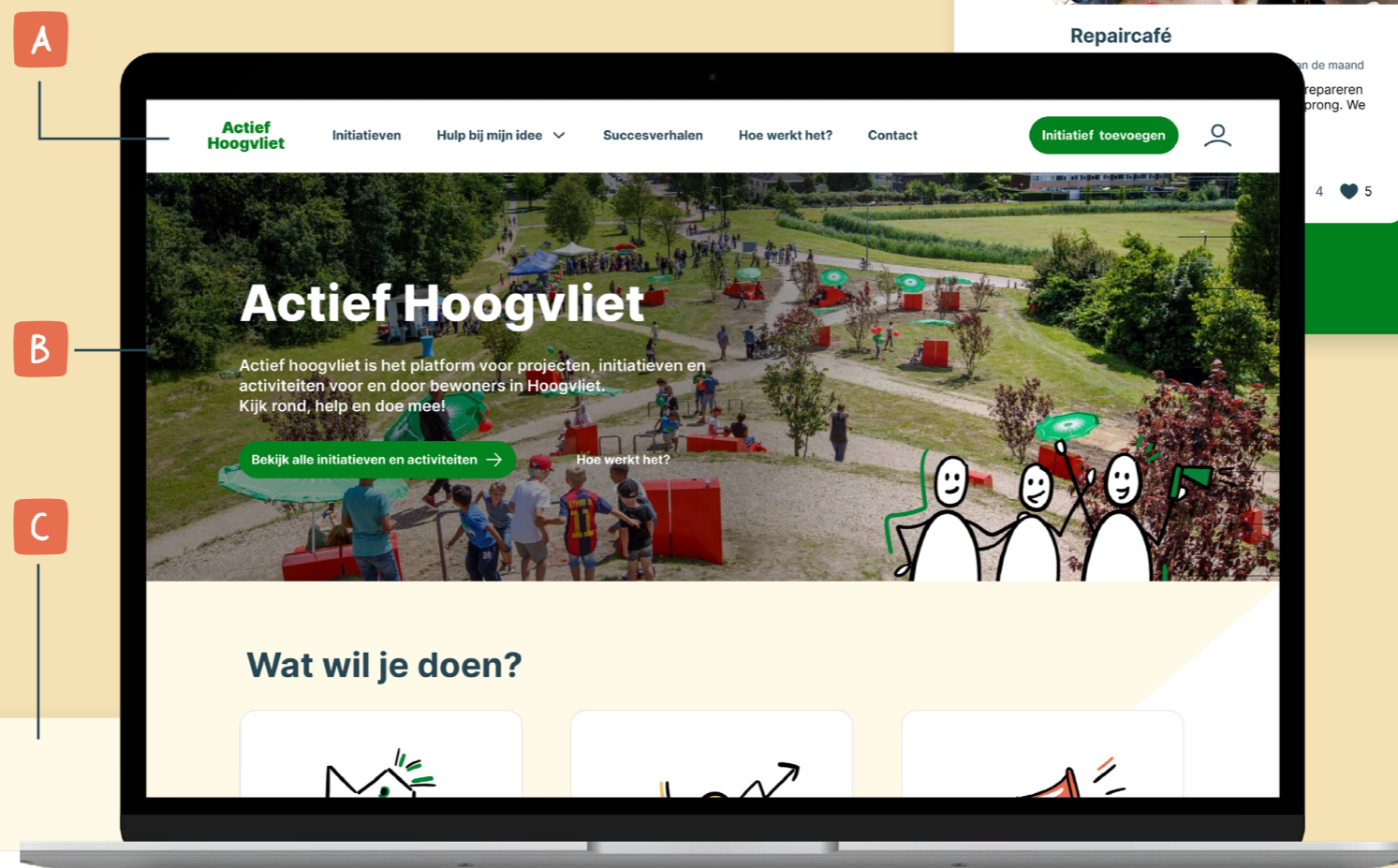
The navigation bar offers users a quick and intuitive way to explore different sections of the platform. The main call to action in the navigation bar is to upload an initiative, as this is the most essential functionality to keep the platform vibrant.

Landing page (B)

The landing page is the first page residents see when they visit the platform, designed to foster a connection to Hoogvliet and its community. The large header including an inviting image of Hoogvliet aims to foster this sense of connectedness and invites residents with a text to explore. It includes entry points to the initiatives page and the 'how does it work?' page. These two options aim to fit both residents who are ready to explore as well as those who prefer to first understand the platform's purpose, intended benefits and use.

Scrolling further, residents are encouraged to take three primary actions: **explore, realise an idea and upload an initiative (C)**. These options are

tailored to the possible different goals and needs of residents visiting the platform, ensuring that every resident visiting the platform regardless of their current level of active engagement can understand how they can use the platform.



Further down, they'll find a section that highlights **nearby activities and initiatives (D)**. This feature encourages residents to find out what's happening around them, extending their online exploration with real-world engagement.

Lastly, it includes a **section for residents to subscribe for updates (E)**. By entering their email and personal preferences, users can stay informed about new initiatives and opportunities in Hoogvliet that they may be interested in. This aims to sustain engagement with the platform and may lead residents to return to the platform beyond their initial visit.

Wat wil je doen?

Actief Hoogvliet ontdekken
Ik wil initiatieven en activiteiten in de buurt ontdekken, waar ik aan mee kan doen en helpen.

Een idee realiseren
Ik wil informatie en hulp vinden over het realiseren van mijn eigen idee voor de wijk.

Mijn initiatief kenbaar maken
Ik wil mijn initiatief kenbaar maken, om zo onderdeel te worden van het overzicht van Actief Hoogvliet.

E

Blijf op de hoogte

Wil je op de hoogte blijven van initiatieven? Stel dan hier jouw voorkeuren in, en zo ontvang je een mail als er een nieuw initiatief is dat aansluit bij jouw interesses.

Houd mij op de hoogte →

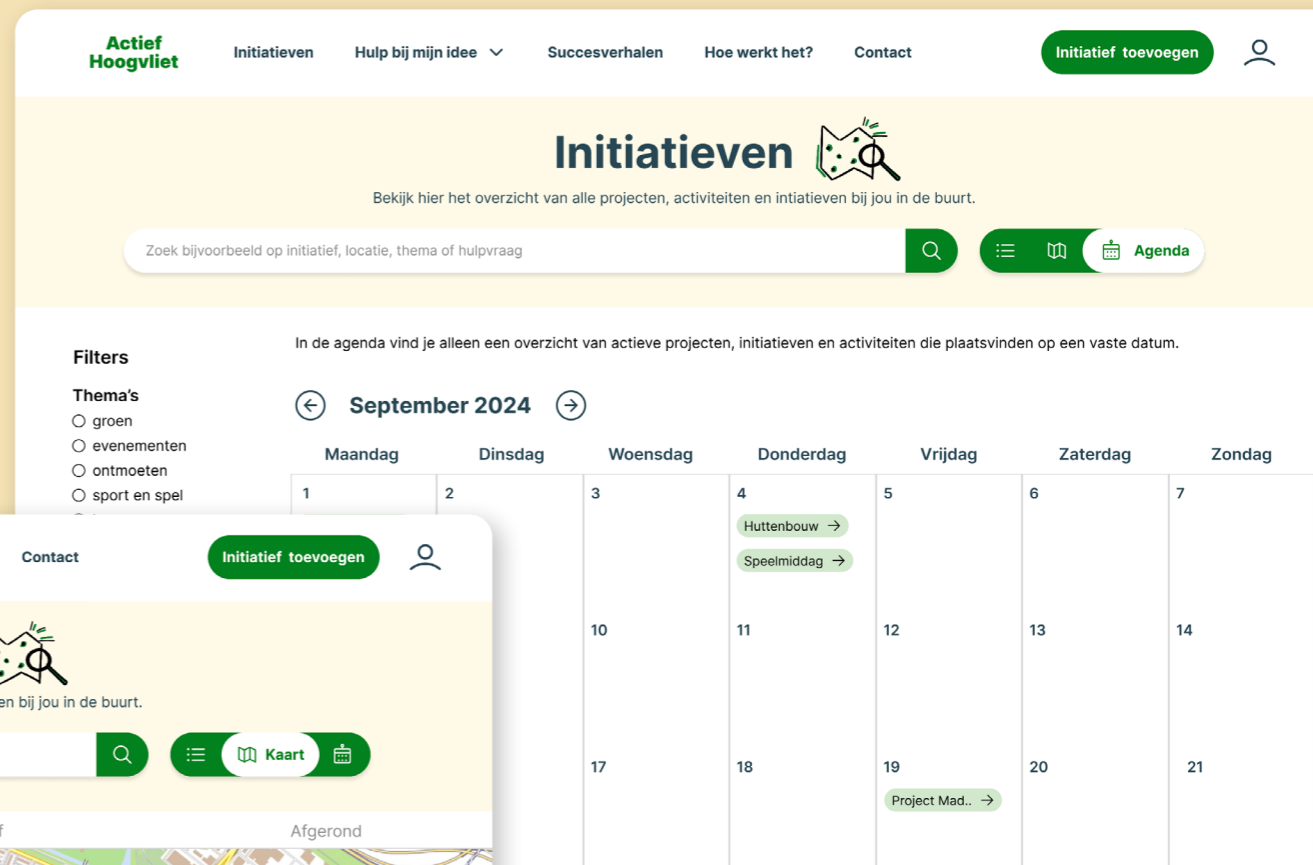
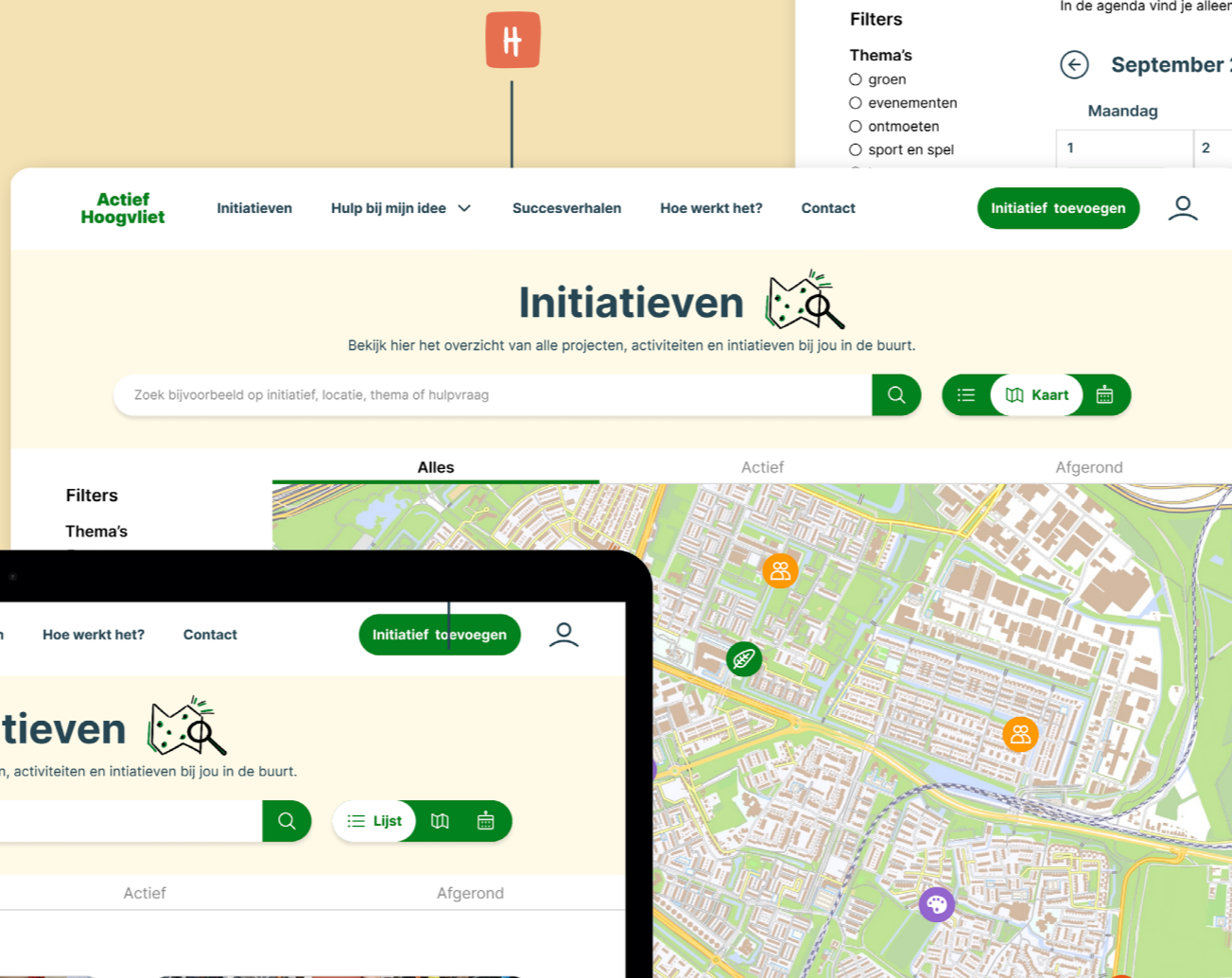
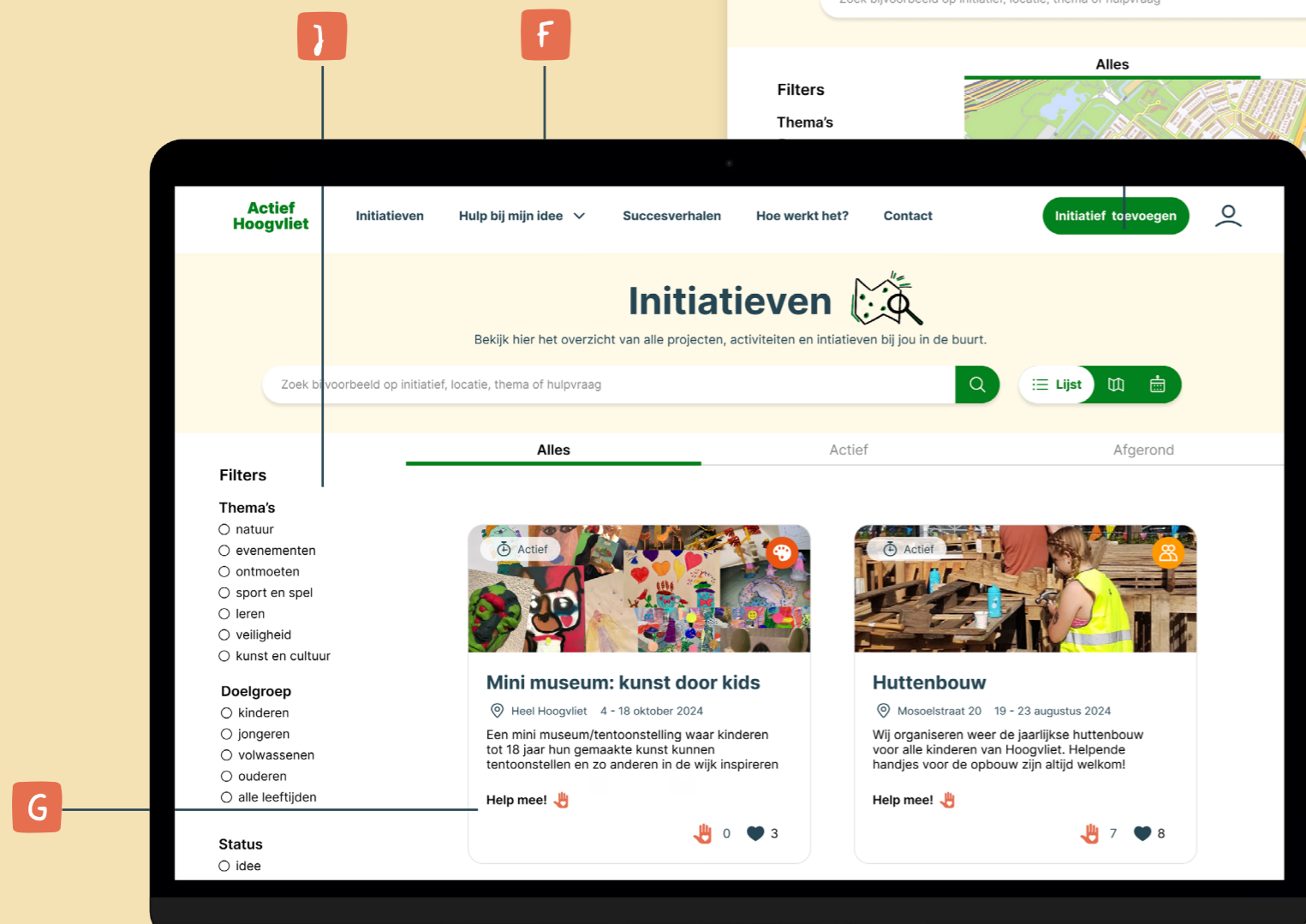
Initiative overview page

the initiative overview page invites residents to explore active initiatives and activities in the neighbourhood, organised by individual citizens or in collaboration with local organisations. Users can easily switch between a list, map and agenda view.

The list view (F) gives an immediate overview of all initiatives to scan, and allows side by side comparisons of different initiatives. Each initiative tile provides essential details for residents to read before clicking it to go to the detailed page. With the **“help mee!” label (G)**, residents can instantly scan if new volunteers are needed, making it easy to scan initiatives that are inviting support. Visitors can also view how many others have liked the initiative, and how many others are already joining in on helping.

The map view (H) offers a spatial perspective,

showing where activities and initiative take place and accordingly where certain citizen groups and organisations are based in the district. This helps residents to discover what’s happening nearby and identify locations where to engage and connect with these active citizens.



The agenda view (I) puts more focus on upcoming events and activities with set dates, giving residents a clear timeline of what is happening in the coming weeks. This also helps active initiative-takers to avoid scheduling conflicts, to prevent that (similar) activities will be planned simultaneously.

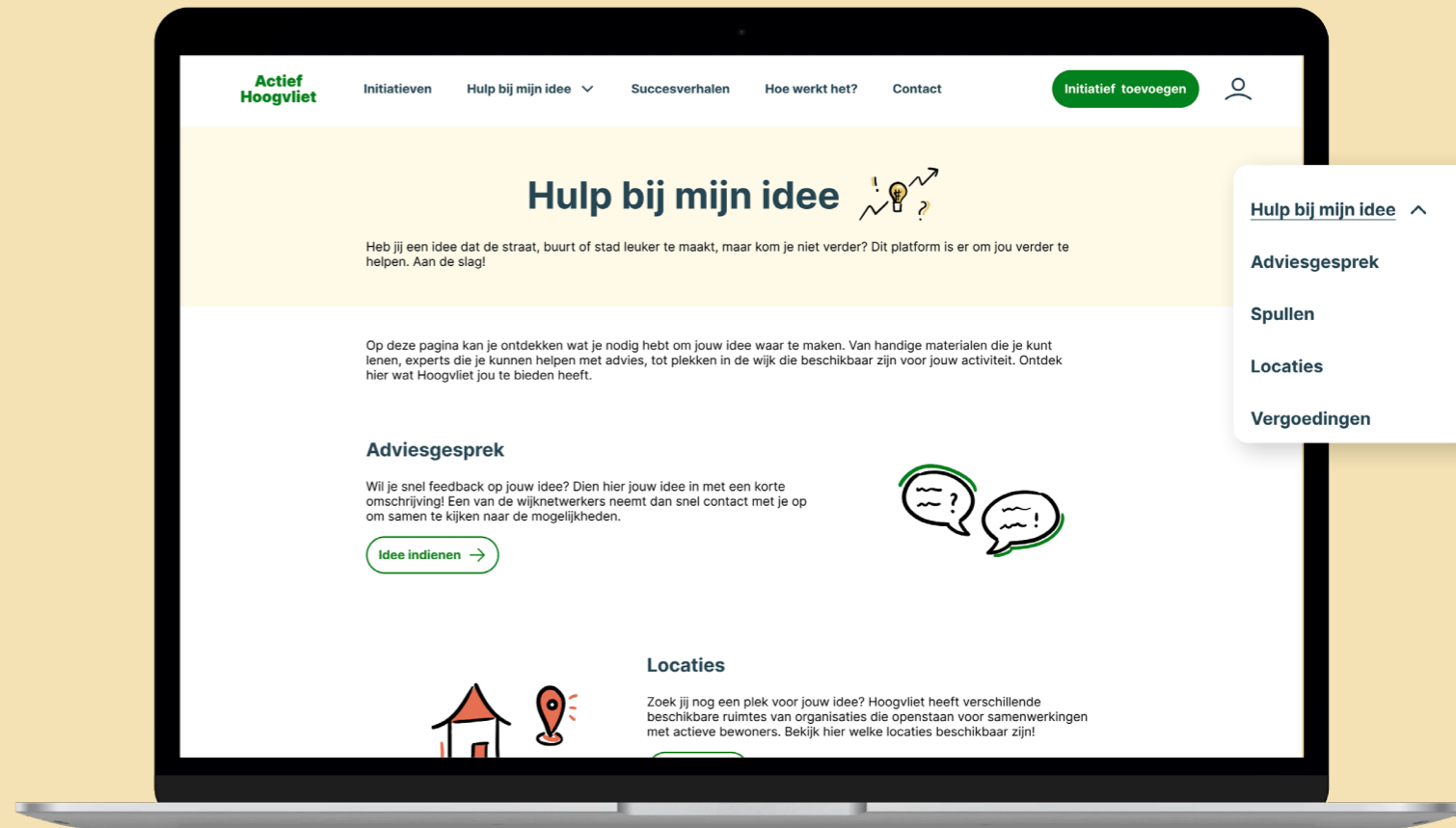
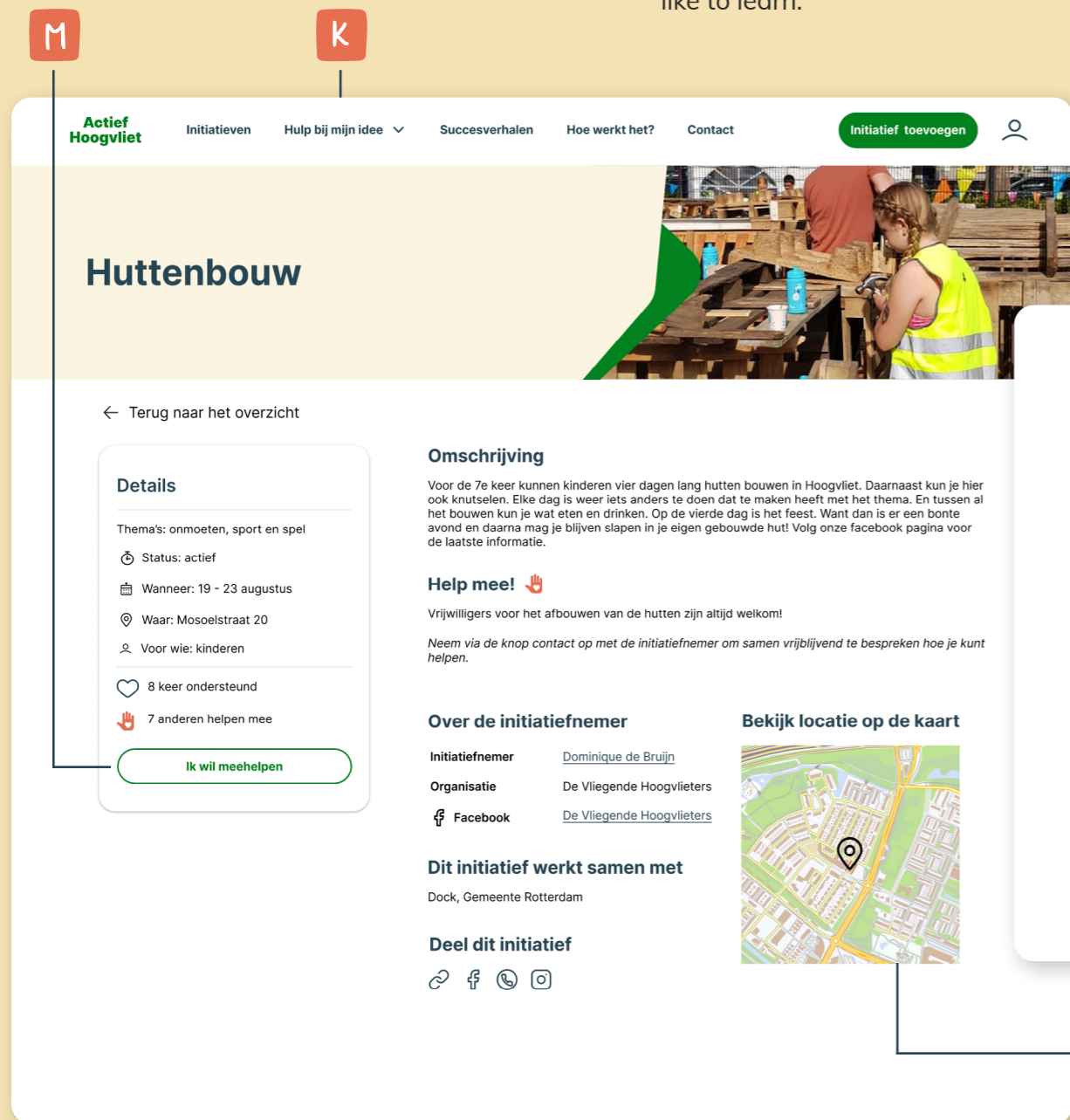
On the left side of the page, visitors can refine their search using **filters (J)** that align with preferences, ensuring a more personalised experience.

At the bottom of the page scrolling down, it again includes the section to guide residents to subscribe for updates.

The initiative detail page (K)

The initiative detail page provides more information about each initiative, including a more detailed description of the help request if this has been included by the initiative-taker. Outlining how residents can get involved aims to create an inviting atmosphere for residents who are currently not yet active in the local community to join. **The location map feature (L)** further encourages offline engagement by helping residents find where the initiative is based. This is specifically useful for those who may prefer face-to-face interactions with the initiative-takers before responding through the platform, providing a more personal way of initial connection.

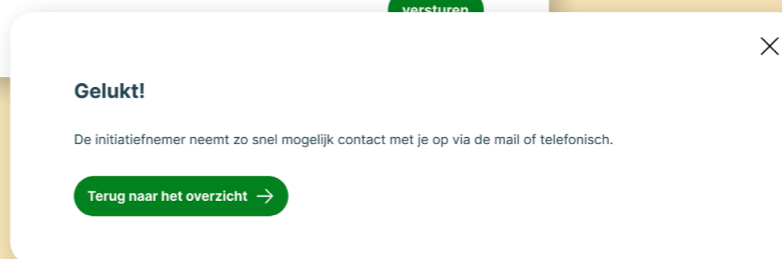
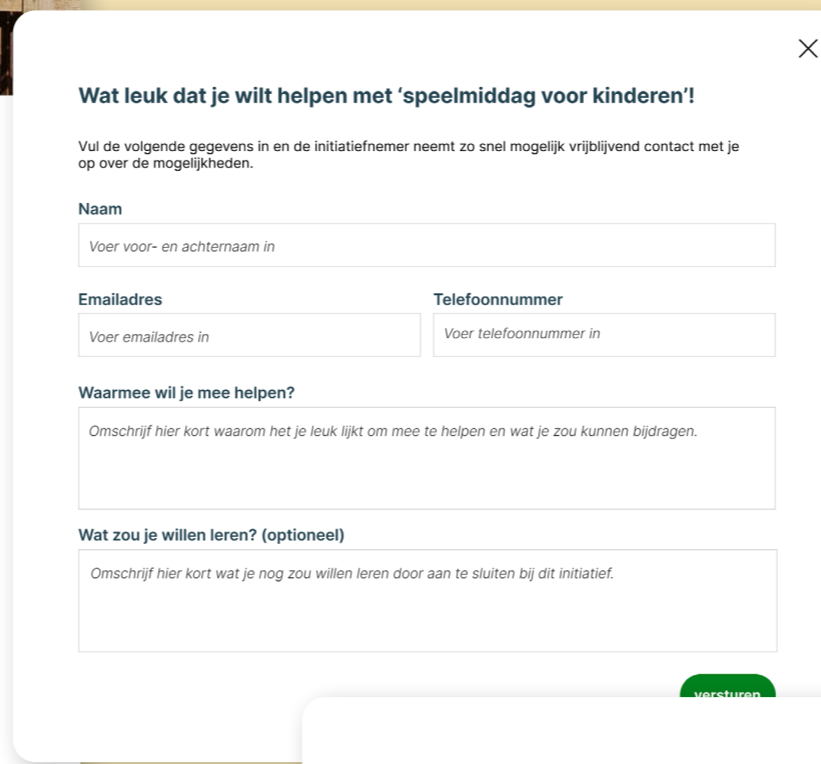
An “I want to help along” button **(M)** allows residents to easily reach out to the initiative-taker, to discuss how they can contribute. Visitors can simply enter their name, email address and specify how they would like to help. This emphasizes that residents can describe their own skills and interests. The second, optional question asks what they would like to learn. This encourages residents to share how they might want to grow or learn new skills through their involvement, so that the initiative-taker is aware of this when discussing possibilities to help. This question is left as optional, as insights indicated that it can be difficult to answer for residents who just want to contribute but have difficulty specifying something that they would like to learn.



Help with your idea page (N)

This section introduces residents to various tools and resources for realizing their ideas. It provides a comprehensive overview of information needed to bring ideas to life, allowing residents to explore this information on self-organisation and so conduct individual research. Alongside general information, it highlights local resources like goods and locations available for use, making it easier for residents to access what they need to support their initiatives. By combining both general and neighbourhood-specific information, this section aims to empower residents with the tools and knowledge needed to pursue their ideas.

While the content and functionalities are not yet fully developed, this section demonstrates its potential to support residents in exploring active engagement opportunities.



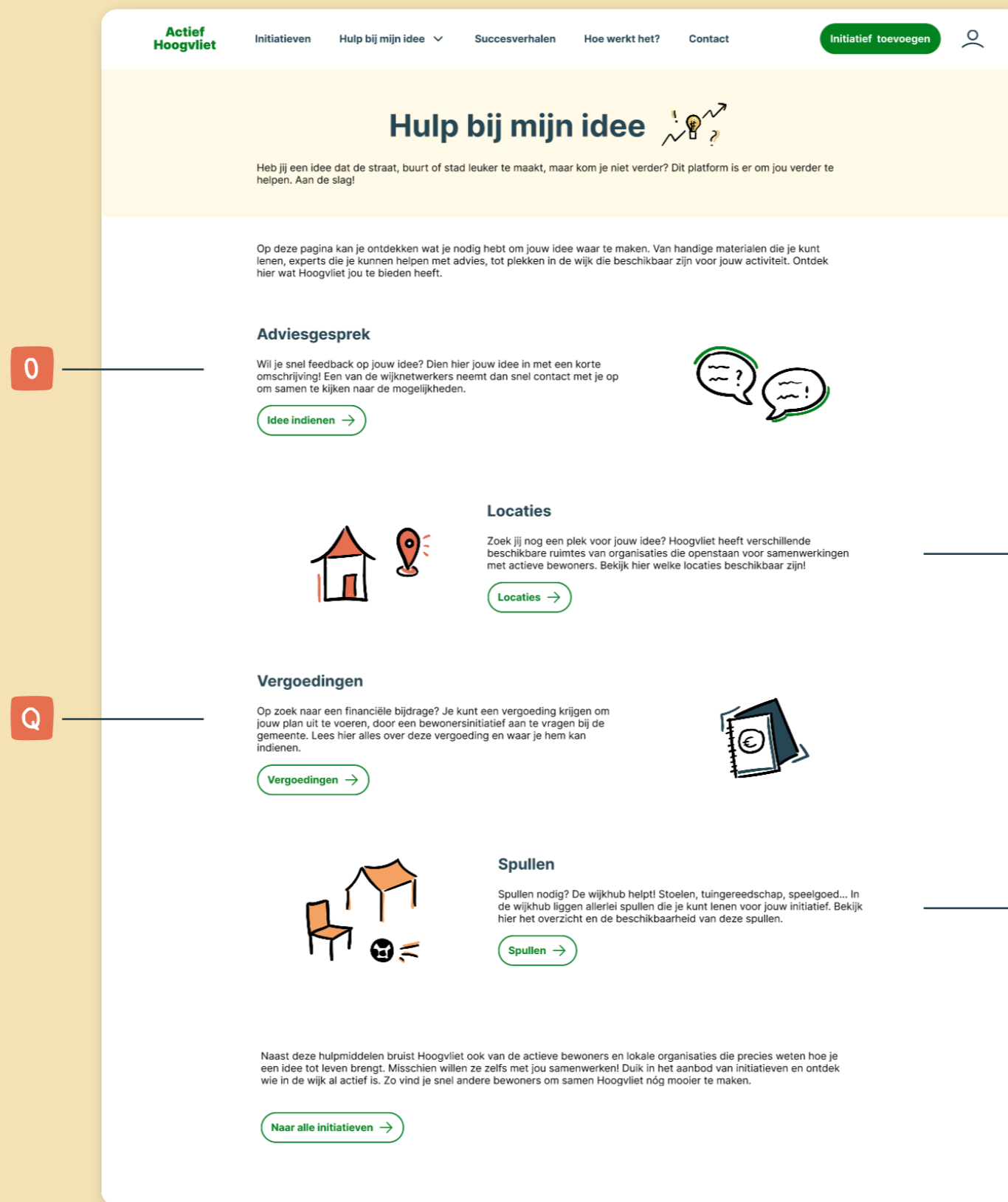
Submit idea for advice meeting (O)

The “submit an idea” functionality is still included, but with a different main purpose to better align with resident’s needs. Now, residents can submit a brief description of their idea, with the primary goal of scheduling an informal conversation with the neighbourhood networker to discuss the possibilities. This feature aims to provide an accessible way for residents to initiate a conversation with the neighbourhood networker, focusing on obtaining advice and asking questions in an early stage. Currently, the submission of ideas on the municipal website is focused on obtaining funding through the citizen initiative subsidy, which can result in disappointments if ideas need to be adjusted or money cannot be granted. Therefore, this functionality focuses rather on advice and possibilities at an early stage to better manage residents’ expectations. Additionally, it emphasizes the assigned roles of the neighbourhood networkers to support active residents, listing them as the first contact person to contact for advisory support.

The idea will no longer be publicly uploaded to find others for support as insights indicated that with the vulnerability of ideas residents prefer to seek support within existing networks or through forming trusted relations first offline. The platform therefore emphasises its focus more on redirecting residents to engage in informal networks offline, helping them to build connections with likeminded individuals themselves in real life, and on supporting individual exploration on available tools and resources.

Locations (P)

The locations page could include an overview of available spaces in Hoogvliet that residents can use or rent for community activities. The welfare workers could for instance provide information about the availability of rooms in their Houses of the Neighbourhood. Furthermore, it could be a section for local organisations of Hoogvliet to share information about their available spaces and facilities if they are open to collaborate with residents. This will also encourage collaborations between active residents and local organisations.



Financial compensations (Q)

The section on financial resources (vergoedingen) can provide information about the citizen initiative subsidies. It can include a detailed explanation about these subsidies, as they are particularly relevant for residents seeking to self-organise initiatives on a small scale. To further assist residents in exploring potential subsidies and compensations beyond this subsidy, it should include a feature that redirects visitors to contact district experts. Research has indicated that navigating the various options for financial compensation can be confusing due to bureaucratic complexities. Thus, by redirecting residents to the district experts, it can facilitate direct discussions with experts who have more knowledge about the availability of financial resources and can clarify possibilities.

Goods (spullen) (R)

The goods (spullen) section, similar to the location’s section, could provide an overview of local materials that active residents in Hoogvliet regularly use for self-organising activities, such as event tents, a bingo machine or other relevant resources. The neighbourhood networker had already indicated plans to use a space in the Wijkhub to store such goods, making them accessible to use for all residents who want to self-organise something. This online section could then serve as an inventory of what’s locally available, supporting residents by exploring what materials are at their disposal. However, there may be some challenges for realising this. Some active residents have expressed a preference of ownership over goods that they use, which could complicate to convince them to share resources. Additionally, managing the distribution of goods, especially larger items like tents may present logistic challenges. Thus, if a functionality like this were to be implemented, the municipality would need to carefully consider a structured system for managing the borrowing of materials. A potential way to do this could be a booking system that shows when goods are available or currently in use, as well as providing logistic support for transporting large goods. Alongside local goods, this section could also again link to the webpage of OpzoomerMee, where they also provide goods and materials available for residents who want to organise community activities.

In the **submission process for discussing your idea with the neighbourhood networker (S)**, the questions asked to describe their idea are shorter making the process less intensive and easier to complete. Furthermore, residents are still encouraged to start with realising a small idea, especially if this is their first self-organised initiative, to help manage expectations and minimize disappointments if an idea is not feasible.

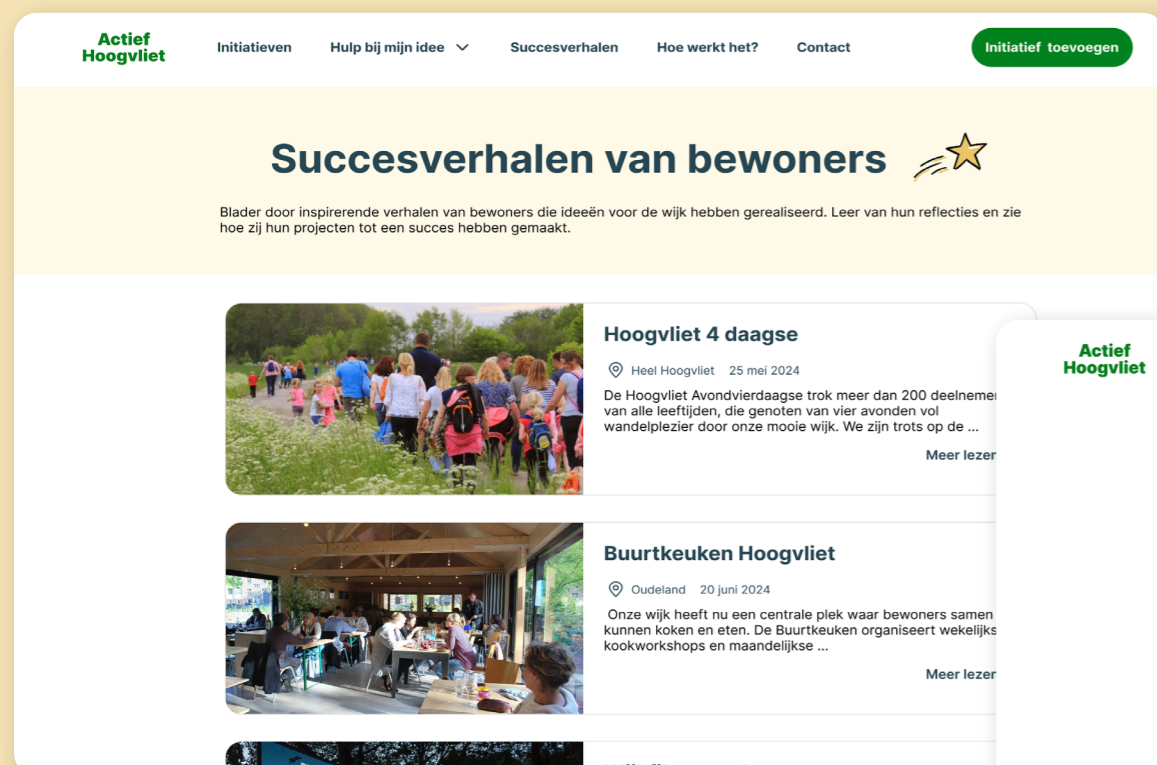
Additionally, **residents have the possibility to already include specific questions**, to indicate what they would like to discuss with the neighbourhood networker.

The section on personal information has been simplified to only providing contact details, allowing residents to submit their ideas without needing to register for a profile. A name, email address and phone number will suffice.

After submission, the platform could give them the possibility to **download a document that provides them with more tips and tricks for realising their idea**. The aim of this is to further motivate residents to think about planning their idea.

While this functionality is designed to offer an informal and accessible way for residents to discuss possibilities for their idea, some may prefer to have immediate contact or only have a quick question. Therefore, during the submission, **the platform also directs residents to contact details of all the district experts (T)**, allowing residents to approach them in a manner that suits their preferences, not being limited to submission through this functionality.

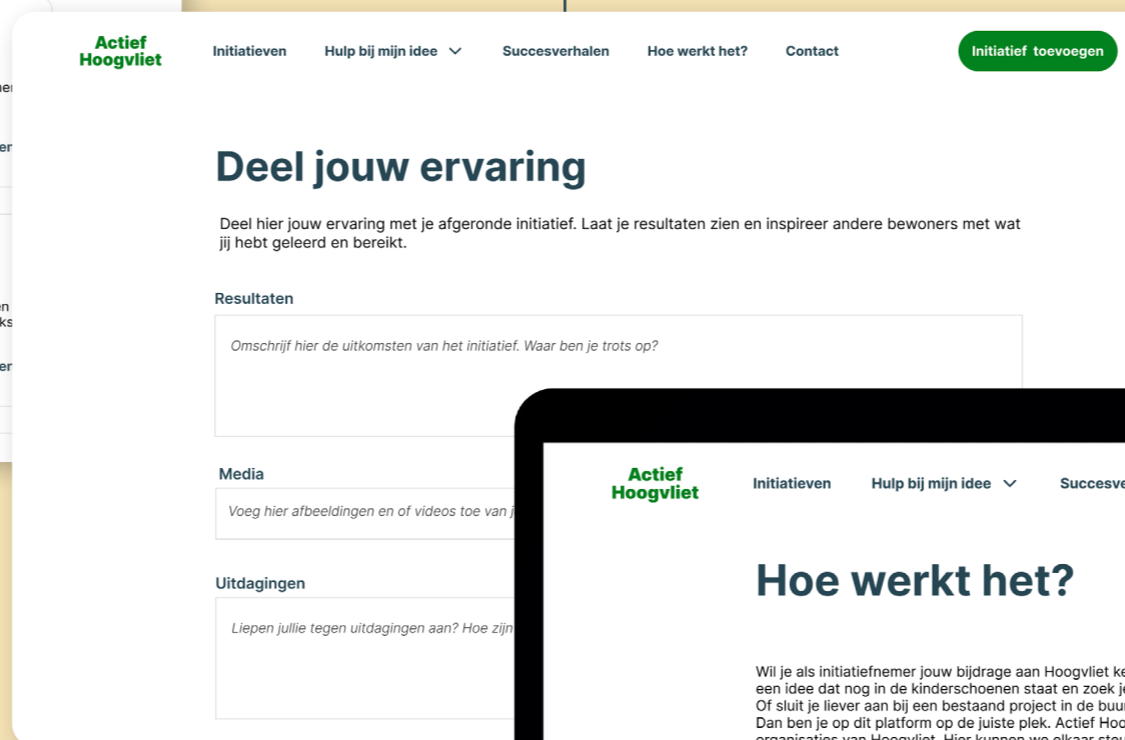
These functionalities of the 'help with your idea' page provide an initial idea of what could be included, encouraging residents to explore information and local resources in one centralised place. However, for further development, it is recommended to better research what all should be included in this essential information and what is manageable to keep effectively up to date on the platform.



Success stories (U)

This section has not been iterated on based on the previous design. It showcases finalised activities and/or initiative projects that have been successfully established by active residents, as shared success stories can have a positive impact on citizens' motivations to actively engage (van de Wijdeven et al., 2013). Unlike the overview of initiatives, where the focus is more on inviting residents to join, this section focuses on the impact and results of such initiatives. It describes the outcomes, challenges, collaborations and insights that initiative-takers have experienced while realising their initiatives. Thus, learning how other citizens have successfully self-organised but also how they possibly encountered challenges can enhance future the confidence of interested residents in their own capabilities.

When initiative-takers finalise their projects, events or initiative on the platform (transitioning from 'active' to 'completed' status), they are invited to **answer a series of questions regarding the execution of their projects (V)**. The insights gathered from these responses can then be displayed in this section of success stories.



How does it work? page (W)

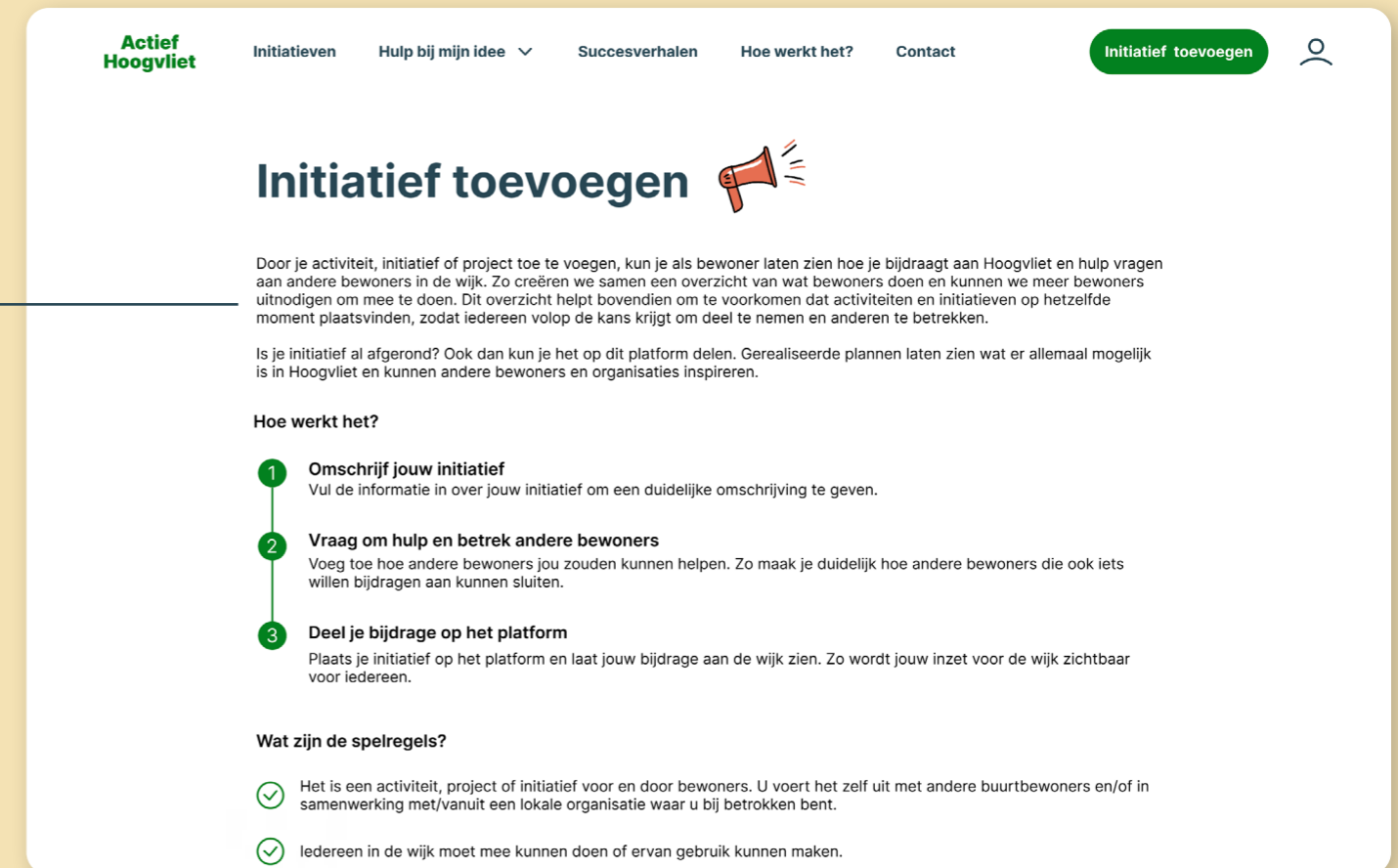
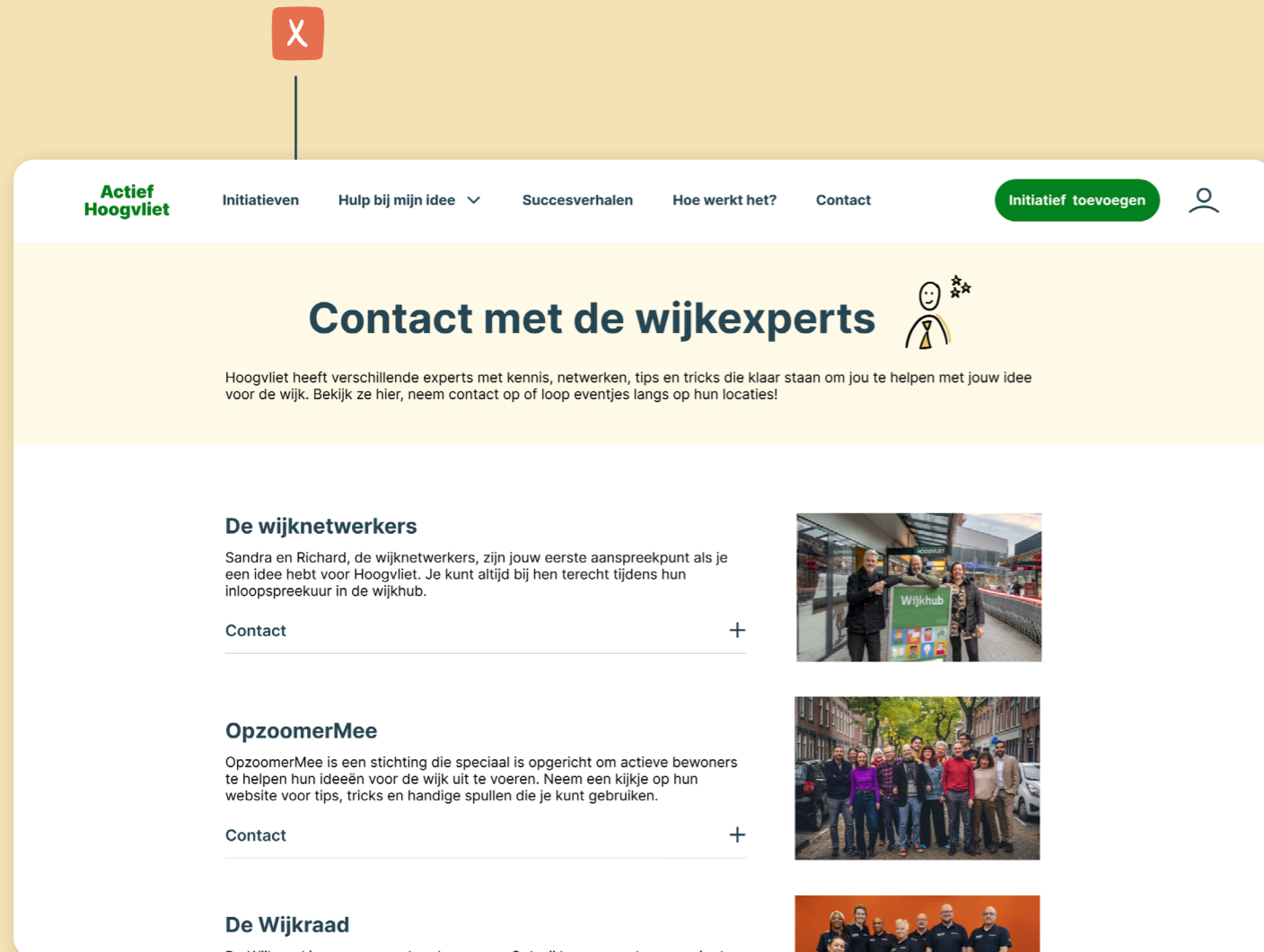
This section describes the platforms' purpose for first time visitors. It emphasizes the importance of resident engagement in Hoogvliet and how coming together through initiatives contributes to a stronger, more vibrant neighbourhood. In addition to informative text, a recommendation would be to include a video to visually explain the platforms' purpose. In this video, an explanation on how to use the platform could also be beneficial for residents who are not digitally skilled, to explain how to navigate and use the platforms features. These recommendations could enhance broader participation and so promote more inclusion.



Contact page (X)

This section has been moved from a subpage in the tools section, where it was labelled district experts, to a main page visible in the navigation bar, now called 'contact'. By clearly designating the institutional stakeholders as the primary contacts on the platform, the aim is to enhance residents' access to institutional stakeholders who can offer valuable support for self-organisation.

The page includes personal photos of the district experts, to create a more approachable and trustworthy image and so reducing barriers of intimidation that residents may feel. It also includes information about their locations and direct contact details, facilitating easier communication and connection.



Submitting an initiative

This section is one of the most crucial parts of the website, as it will keep the platform active and engaging with up-to-date content. It therefore also serves as the main call to action prominently displayed in the navigation bar. It allows active initiatives takers to upload their existing initiatives on the platform for other residents to join and see.

The introductory text on the first page (Y)

intends to convincingly convey the benefits of uploading your initiative to this platform, both for the community as well as for the initiative-takers individually. It explains that by uploading, residents can:

- **Showcase their contributions** that improve the neighbourhood, gaining

recognition not only from fellow residents but also institutional stakeholders like the municipality.

- **Contribute to a centralized overview**, helping to prevent scheduling conflicts to ensure that similar events don't take place simultaneously.
- **Attract support from other residents** who may be interested in their initiatives, but whom they currently might not reach.

While these points serve to motivate residents to upload their initiatives, a clear strategy is needed to encourage active residents to become and stay active users of the platform. This will be further elaborated on in the following section, which outlines recommendations for implementation.

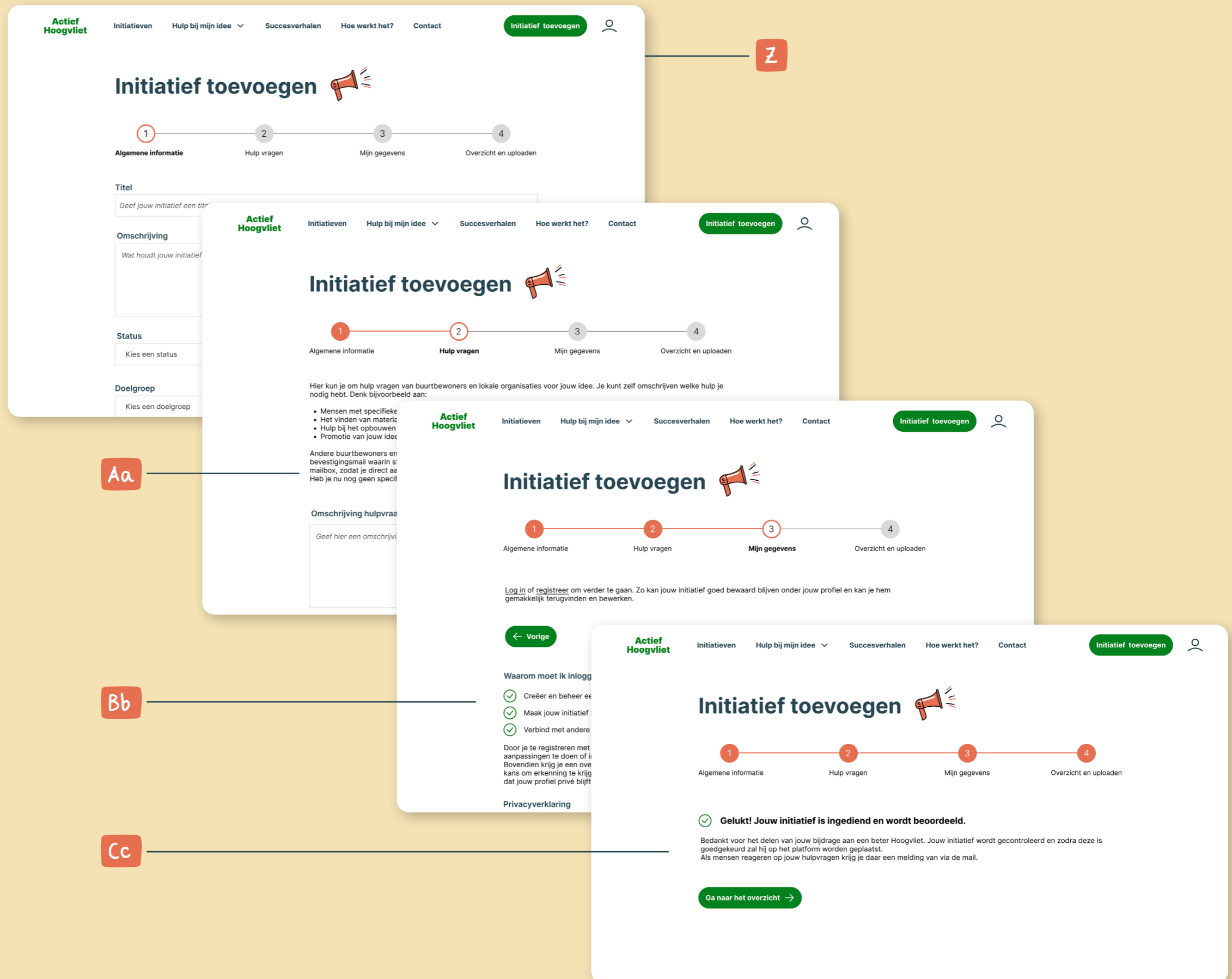
In the first step, users are asked to **describe their initiative (Z)**. This could be for a specific event, where they also have the possibility to add a date, or for a more general ongoing project from an active citizen group or local organisation, for which they would not have to include a date. For events with set dates, they can add it to the agenda of Actief Hoogvliet, ensuring that it is visible and included in the local calendar.

Residents will also be asked to detail collaborations related to their initiative. This will show visitors that active citizenship is a collective effort, and showcases organisations that are open to collaborating with active residents. This also aligns with one of the initial goals of the Veldacademie's basiskaart: to illustrate how informal networks in the neighbourhood are interconnected, thereby motivating residents to become part of these networks.

In the second step, active initiative-takers are encouraged to **upload a help request along their initiative (Aa)**, inviting others to join. Since active initiative-takers tend to feel strong ownership over their initiatives, they can specify themselves the type of assistance they may need.

In the third step, they are asked to log in. This page includes **a brief explanation on why logging in is necessary, along with key benefits (Bb)**. It also includes a link to a privacy statement, detailing how the platform will handle their personal information. This added description aims to lower the barrier for residents to register with a profile, by also highlighting the benefits of doing so.

Having logged in, the fourth step lets users check their information and upload the initiative. The upload ends with **a message indicating that they will be updated through email on the approval of their initiative and for updates on replies help requests (Cc)**.



Profile page

This brings us to the final section, the profile page. To register for uploading initiatives, **residents will need to provide basic information including their name and email address (Dd)**. After registration with these basic details, **residents are asked to enhance their profile with additional details (Ee)**, though they can skip this

step if they prefer not to share more information. In this step, they can add a profile picture, write a brief a description about themselves, list their interests and include links to existing social media pages and websites if they are connected to a local organisation or citizen group.

The first screenshot shows the registration page titled "Registreer en doe mee!". It features a form with four input fields: "Naam" (Name), "Emailadres" (Email address), "Wachtwoord" (Password), and "Herhaal wachtwoord" (Repeat password). A green "Registreren" button is at the bottom. A red box labeled "Dd" points to the email field.

The second screenshot shows the profile completion page titled "Vul jouw profiel aan". It includes a "Profielfoto" section with a placeholder image, an "Over jezelf" section with a text area and a list of prompts: "Wat vind je leuk?", "Waar ben je goed in?", "Heb je ergens veel ervaring mee?", and "Wat zou je nog willen leren?". Below this are "Welke thema's vind je interessant?" with buttons for "natuur", "evenementen", "veiligheid", "ontmoeten", "leren", "kunst en cultuur", and "sport en spel". At the bottom, there are fields for "Organisatie (Optioneel)", "Organisatievorm", and "Organisatiernaam". A red box labeled "Ee" points to the "Over jezelf" text area.

The third screenshot shows the "Mijn account" overview page. It has tabs for "Mijn gegevens" and "Mijn bijdragen". Under "Mijn gegevens", there is a profile picture placeholder, a "Naam" field with "Anna Peters", an "Emailadres" field with "Annapeters@gmail.com" and a privacy icon, and an "Over mij" section with a bio. A red box labeled "Ff" points to the "Mijn gegevens" tab.

The fourth screenshot shows the privacy settings page for "Anna Peters". It has a back arrow and the title "Anna Peters". Below it, there is a privacy icon and the text "Het profiel van Anna is privé." A red box labeled "Gg" points to this privacy setting.

On **the account overview (Ff)** they can see their details and what information is visible to other visitors of the platform. The section with contributions is designed to thus showcase how individuals have contributed to past and active initiative in the neighbourhood, fostering a sense of pride and empowerment.

Residents can also choose to **keep their details private (Gg)** if they prefer not to share their personal information.

11.4. Roles and values of involved stakeholders

All stakeholders involved in Actief Hoogvliet will have different benefits and values from using and contributing to the platform. This chapter will elaborate on how the platform is of value for each of these stakeholders and what they contribute in return.

Roles and values of interested, new residents



For new, interested but inexperienced residents, using the platform supports different ways for engagement in informal networks. This enables residents to engage in a manner that aligns with personal needs and preferences.

By exploring the platform, residents interested in participating in the local community can learn about active residents of Hoogvliet, how they self-organise activities and initiatives and where these interactions take place. This serves as an accessible entry point into the informal networks of Hoogvliet, allowing residents to observe and familiarise themselves with active initiatives in the community first before deciding to engage themselves. The platform's exploratory and inviting nature is also designed to spark curiosity and interest, inspiring residents who may not have initially considered getting involved to feel motivated to participate. After this initial exploration, residents can eventually decide to connect and engage at their own pace, in their own preferred way.

Residents can also use the platform to help with an existing initiative, by replying to open help requests of active initiatives. In this way, they can learn about self-organisation through hands-on experience and at the same time form more local connections, further building their self-confidence and capacity for active participation in Hoogvliet.

The platform also supports residents to explore possibilities of starting their own initiatives.

For this, the platform provides an overview of information about available local tools and resources that support self-organisation, a functionality to plan in a conversation with the neighbourhood networker, along with a clear, personal overview of the district experts and their contact details, whom they can approach for questions and advice. This allows them to do individual research on possibilities and available local tools.

If these new, interested residents can be involved to contribute to the informal networks of Hoogvliet, they can provide additional support for ongoing initiatives. Furthermore, their involvement not only strengthens existing initiatives, but also creates opportunities for new initiatives to emerge. Such new contributions can further strengthen the sense of community in Hoogvliet and will help to further address the social challenges that Hoogvliet faces.

Roles and values of active, experienced residents



The platform not only aims to be a valuable tool for residents interested in participating, but also for those who are already actively contributing to the neighbourhood. The platform enables these experienced active citizens to showcase their established initiatives and activities as well as success stories which can increase recognition of their contributions and impact in Hoogvliet. Furthermore, by creating an overview together of what happens in the neighbourhood, it can help them to avoid scheduling conflicts with activities of other active residents. Finally, they can use the platform to write help requests and thereby invite residents beyond their existing networks to join and help.

If these active citizens engage with the platform for its intended use, they can create an inviting atmosphere for others beyond residents already

active in the community to join, and so foster more bridging social capital. By inviting others to join, they will also help to further build the self-confidence and capacity of these interested residents to possibly start their own initiatives. Finally, the involvement of active residents is essential for the platform's adoption in the local communities of Hoogvliet. This will further be elaborated on in the following sub-chapter.

Roles and values of the institutional stakeholders



For institutional stakeholders, though they are not the primary target users, the platform shows opportunities to be a valuable, complementary tool to their current practices. The neighbourhood networkers can use the platform to schedule informal conversations with interested residents who submitted their ideas for advice. This positions the neighbourhood networkers as the main contacts for such residents, aligning with their responsibility through their assigned work-role. In addition to this, the platform also aims to increase the visibility and approachability of the institutional stakeholders for residents, making it easier for residents to engage with them. Furthermore, the platform provides these stakeholders with a broader understanding of initiatives in the neighbourhood beyond what is familiar to them from their existing networks and contacts. This broader insight can firstly be useful when residents approach institutional stakeholders seeking opportunities to contribute to the community. Stakeholders could then use the platform as a guide to connect and redirect residents with available opportunities to join. Secondly, the overview of initiatives and their open help requests will also help institutional stakeholders to understand the current needs and gaps within the community and so use their extensive networks and resources to stimulate new collaborations.

Beyond this, the institutional stakeholders play a key role in the realisation and implementation of the platform. They are essential for ensuring that the platform's content, such as the "Help with Your Idea" section, remains accurate and up-to-date with relevant information. Additionally, institutional stakeholders can play an important role in encouraging active citizens to use the platform. For example, the welfare workers from Dock have strong relationships with active residents and frequently collaborate with them. Dock already uses their Facebook page to share local activities that active citizens organise in collaboration with Dock. Similarly, they could take an active role in uploading initiatives and activities onto the platform. They could do this on behalf of residents, especially when residents may be hesitant to do it themselves and rely on the organisational role of Dock. Or they could assist and motivate residents to upload their own initiatives, helping them to showcase their contributions and impact. OpzoomerMee also has contacts with active residents who have applied for the citizen initiative subsidies through their organisation, who they can motivate to upload their initiatives.

Lastly, the development, management, and governance of the platform are envisioned to be overseen by the municipality. This will be discussed in more detail in the following sub-chapter.

11.5. Recommended approaches for implementation and realisation

When the platform is to be realised, it is important to consider how it will align with the daily lives of residents and their needs, to ensure that it remains a valuable and desirable tool. Additionally, defining responsibilities for the platform's development, management and ongoing governance is essential to assess its viability and feasibility. This section outlines recommendations for facilitating successful implementation and realisation of the platform.

Continuous involvement of active residents for successful implementation and adoption



Most crucial to the platform's success will be the active involvement and adoption of the platform by active residents, specifically experienced initiative-takers. These residents are essential in keeping the platform relevant, as they provide up-to-date information about initiatives in the neighbourhood. If they do not upload their initiatives and invite others to join, the platform would lack content for residents to explore and engage with.

Furthermore, they play an important role in ensuring the platform becomes a visible, trusted and embedded tool within the community. These residents are key figures who already have established strong local social capital, meaning they are trusted and familiar individuals in their neighbourhoods. Thus, as first users they will help to build the credibility of the platform and create awareness by spreading it within their networks through word of mouth and on social media, encouraging others to use and visit the platform.

To ensure their adoption, these active residents should be continuously involved in the development of the platform as validated users. By actively engaging them in the development process, the platform can be further tailored to meet their needs. Otherwise, it risks becoming

a tool that does not resonate with them and may remain unused. The platform's current functionalities as the outcome of this project, such as showcasing their initiatives for recognition, providing an overview in the local agenda to avoid scheduling conflicts and finding others to join, are designed to resonate with these active residents. However, it should be further evaluated if this rightfully aligns with their needs and offers them sufficient value to use it consistently.

Furthermore, their contribution in shaping the platform can foster a sense of ownership and trust over the tool. They may feel more invested in its implementation, which can motivate them to use and promote the platform within their networks after its launch. Given that neighbourhoods are dynamic and constantly changing, involving these residents for feedback and points of improvement beyond the initial launch phase ensures that the platform stays relevant and continues to meet their evolving needs. Finally, continuous involvement can also strengthen linking social capital between residents and the municipality, building on more equal and transparent relationships, with their input and feedback being recognised.

Table 3 presents recommended activities that can be done for the continuous involvement of active residents for the platform's development.

Collaboration with public spaces, amenities and events for awareness and promotion



Collaboration with public spaces and local amenities will be key to raising awareness and promoting Actief Hoogvliet during its launch. By distributing or placing flyers in widely visited spaces like supermarkets, libraries and the weekly market, the platform can reach a broader audience. This approach ensures that the platform also captures the attention of possible interested residents who currently are not yet

STAGE	ACTIVITIES	PURPOSE
Before launch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gather input from residents until launch; for instance at local neighbourhood council meetings or through focus groups in co-creation workshops for a more active and in-depth approach. Further test key functionalities in pilot tests (e.g. uploading initiatives, user profiles). Contact previously involved residents to upload their initiatives as first users. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build ownership and trust over the tool. Ensure that it is tailored to their needs. Ensure initial content on the platform.
Platform launch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Update involved residents of the platform's launch, and encourage them to promote it on their social media pages and spread it among their networks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leverage key figures as trusted community figures for promoting and adopting the tool.
First stable use stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inform active users of the platform to keep their initiatives updated. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain engagement and current content on the platform.
Long term growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gather feedback from residents who have signed up with profiles and used the platform to upload initiatives and help requests. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure the platform meets user needs and maintain transparency.

Table 3: recommended activities for the continuous involvement of active residents for the platform's development.

connected to informal networks or familiar with local community events of active residents. By sparking curiosity, these promotional efforts can encourage more residents to explore opportunities for active citizenship in Hoogvliet, fostering greater community involvement.

Additionally, promoting the platform at key events like the local volunteering market held twice a year in Hoogvliet, presents a valuable opportunity. Since residents attending this event are already interested in volunteering, they may be inspired by specific local opportunities beyond general volunteering work and discover ways to get involved in neighbourhood initiatives through the platform. This could help connect them with volunteer work that directly benefits their community.

Hybrid approach for better alignment with the context of active residents



To successfully embed Actief Hoogvliet within the daily lives of the current informal networks of Hoogvliet, a strong connection is needed to physical locations where active residents come together. This conclusion was already found in the literature review and further substantiated by insights from the evaluation tests. The platform itself already aims to bridge visitors towards real-life engagement, but a hybrid approach that also incorporates physical elements of the platform aligned with the daily lives of active residents can enhance its visibility and relevance in the local community.

Key locations for this hybrid approach are the Houses of the Neighbourhood, being well-known and frequently visited places by active residents of Hoogvliet. Welfare workers could for instance use screens in the common area to display in the most recent uploads or open help requests, enabling residents who visit the House of the Neighbourhood to encounter and use the platform in a familiar context.

This hybrid approach not only helps to integrate the platform in the daily lives of active residents, but also makes it more accessible for those who are not digitally active or skilled. Interested residents who visit the Houses of the Neighbourhood seeking for opportunities to contribute can in this way still discover the possibilities that the platform provides, without having to navigate a website. Additionally, the welfare workers could assist visitors in navigating the platform and explaining its features, providing guidance when needed.

Development, governance and financial responsibility by the municipality of Rotterdam



The Veldacademie was commissioned by the municipality to do initial research for possibilities of the 'basiskaart'. In light of this, I envision that the municipality could take a proactive role in further developing and governing the platform Actief Hoogvliet. Currently, the municipality already manage the participation platform Mijn Rotterdam. Mijn Rotterdam similarly aims to provide an overview of local initiatives, through information available on submitted citizen initiatives. However, during my research, I found that Mijn Rotterdam is not adopted to use it for this purpose, despite its potential. By closely comparing Actief Hoogvliet with Mijn Rotterdam, I identified several areas where Mijn Rotterdam may be falling short, providing insights into how Actief Hoogvliet could address these gaps and better meet the needs of residents. Additionally, Mijn Rotterdam also has strengths which could

be considered for further developing Actief Hoogvliet. This comparison of the platforms can be found in appendix I.

Looking ahead, I therefore envision that the municipality could shift their focus from maintaining Mijn Rotterdam to co-developing a platform like Actief Hoogvliet with residents. This could extend beyond Hoogvliet to other neighbourhoods of Rotterdam, transforming the platform into a tool not just created for residents but owned and developed with their input.

Given that the municipality already allocates budget and staff to maintain Mijn Rotterdam, these resources could ideally be redirected toward developing Actief Hoogvliet. The usability of the platform is very important to ensure inclusivity and accessibility, therefore it is preferable to hire developers to create a customised solution, making its components accessible in a Content Management System (CMS).

By aligning the platform more closely with the needs of residents, the municipality can ensure it becomes an adopted and valued tool, not only for Hoogvliet but also for other neighbourhoods of Rotterdam.

Roles and tasks for maintaining and managing the platform

For maintaining and managing the platform, an administrator is needed. The municipality could take on this responsibility by hiring a dedicated local employee. This employee will only need basic skills to manage the platform in a Content Management System (CMS). Ideally this employee would be based in the Wijkhub of Hoogvliet, allowing the administrator to not only manage the platform's content and system but also manage the physical goods for local initiatives that are to be stored in the Wijkhub. In addition to the administrator's tasks, the platforms should be designed with automated systems that can handle specific tasks based on user input. The key tasks for the administrator as well as the automated functionalities the platform system should perform are outlined in table 4.

ADMINISTRATOR TASKS

- Review new initiative uploads and new replies to open help requests, to ensure that it contains no inappropriate content.
- Regularly contact active users with profiles, to ensure their engagement for uploading new initiatives and that content is up to date.
- Review if content beyond the overview of initiatives is up to date, like information in the 'help with your idea' section.
- Evaluate the platform's engagement and performance, for instance by surveying active residents or visitors of the website, to identify points of improvement, or analyse how features are being used.
- Monitor and manage technical issues and user support.

SYSTEM'S AUTOMATED FUNCTIONALITIES

- Update users who have subscribed to the newsletter on new initiatives when it matches with their preferences.
- When the date of an activity has past, send a request to the initiative-taker to write a success story.
- Send updates to initiative-takers when they receive new likes on their initiatives.
- Update initiative details, when users adjust something in an uploaded help request or initiative.
- Send email to initiative-takers with contact details of residents who have responded to their open help requests.
- Provide an introduction tour on the website, when residents first visit the platform.

Table 4: key tasks for the administrator and the automated functionalities that the platform system should perform

CONCLUSION CHAPTER 11

Final design proposal: Actief Hoogvliet

The goal of this chapter was to present the final design proposal of the digital platform Actief Hoogvliet as an outcome of this design project. The final design proposal aims to support interested residents to explore the possibilities of active citizenship within Hoogvliet's informal networks, after which they can engage in their own preferred ways. In the journey towards active participation in informal networks, a digital platform has indicated to be most effective as an accessible exploration tool for discovering possibilities. Therefore, the platform aims to

support this exploration by offering residents possibilities to engage in various ways. The chapter includes storyboards with the envisioned experiences of residents, the roles and values of all stakeholders involved, and provides a description of the key functionalities along with their designed interfaces. Finally, it offers recommended approaches for implementation and realisation of the platform. The following chapter will present the final validation of the concept with stakeholders, primarily regarding its desirability, feasibility and viability.

12

FINAL VALIDATION WITH
STAKEHOLDERS

This chapter presents the final validation of Actief Hoogvliet with its stakeholders. The aim of this final validation is to gain feedback on the overall perceived desirability, feasibility, and viability of the platform. This will ultimately be considered for the project's conclusion and reflection, in which I will discuss the outcome and the potential impact of such a digital tool to support active citizens in Hoogvliet.

- 12.1. Approach
- 12.2. Insights
- 12.3. Discussion

12.1. Approach

The outcome of the platform was presented at the local neighbourhood council meeting. I ended the presentation with emphasis to give feedback on their perceptions of its desirability, feasibility and viability. The previously contacted stakeholders in this graduation project – the institutional stakeholders as well as residents – were sent emails inviting them to attend the neighbourhood council meeting for reviewing the outcome of my

graduation project. While not everyone attended, the audience at the neighbourhood council meeting consisted of a wide range of relevant stakeholders, including (active) residents, local professionals and individuals with overlapping roles as both professionals and citizens in the neighbourhood, like the neighbourhood council.



Figure 47 and 48: Images of my presentation at the neighbourhood council meeting

12.2. Insights

Desirability

Several attendants acknowledged the value that the platform offers to residents of Hoogvliet. They saw how it could ease the journey for residents to explore and join active informal networks in Hoogvliet. It was emphasised that increasing the platform's visibility by linking it to physical locations like supermarkets was important to ensure its promotion among residents who are not digitally active. While attendants noted its similarities to Mijn Rotterdam, they emphasized the added value of its focus on Hoogvliet's context and the relevance of its neighbourhood-specific information and functionalities.

Despite this interest, concerns were also expressed about how to ensure the platform's adoption and long-term use, in particular by

active residents. Although attendants, of whom a few were active initiative takers themselves, perceived the platform's usefulness, they emphasised that if some active residents do not participate by showcasing their initiatives and inviting others, its value would diminish.

Furthermore, one resident noted that the centralisation of informal networks through a digital tool like Actief Hoogvliet may work inadvertently, possibly leading to further decentralisation. She explained that active residents in Hoogvliet mostly work independently, often within their own 'islands', valuing the strong sense of ownership and autonomy over their initiatives. This raised doubts about the desirability of such a central platform, as it may restrict their desired autonomy. Moreover,

attendants questioned whether Actief Hoogvliet, with its current functionalities of showcasing impact and successes and inviting new residents, would offer sufficient added value for active initiative takers to adopt it and use it over the long term. Without ongoing use, the platform may become stagnant and lead to further fragmentation.

Feasibility

There was limited feedback given to directly address the feasibility of the platform. It was generally perceived as a technically feasible tool to develop, rather hinging on its viability and desirability as key factors for actual development and implementation of the platform.

12.3. Discussion

The final validation with residents and professionals of Hoogvliet provided valuable insights into the perceived desirability, feasibility, and viability of the platform by local stakeholders. The key challenges as outlined by these stakeholders through these three factors align with those previously identified during the research phase of this project. Although attendants recognised the platform's potential added value and expressed a desire to use it, uncertainties were also expressed regarding its broader desirability among active residents of Hoogvliet, which is a crucial consideration for its implementation.

The adoption and implementation of the platform is highly dependent on experienced, active initiative takers, suggesting that it should offer them clear, added value to ensure their engagement with the platform. However, the initial research insights already indicated that

Viability

The feedback on the perceived viability of the platform was closely linked to its dependency on the municipality for funding. Currently, the municipality of Rotterdam is reducing their expenditures on service provision, leaving little to no budget for such projects. A member of the neighbourhood council mentioned a previous attempt for launching a similar app for Hoogvliet, but eventually failed to secure a budget to build it for the same reasons. He emphasised that only a strong, demonstrated need from many residents for such a platform could justify its funding for execution. Therefore, the viability of the platform is closely tied to the challenges related to its desirability. Without strong evidence of active demand from residents which would ensure the platform's adoption, it will be difficult to persuade the municipality to allocate a budget to develop and sustain the platform.

these experienced active residents face few challenges in their current ways of operating and highly value their autonomy and ownership, which diminishes the potential for a new digital tool to be of significant value for these citizens beyond their existing preferred channels.

The platform currently aims to address identified needs of these active residents by gaining recognition through showcasing their impact, attracting additional volunteers, and providing a centralised overview to avoid scheduling conflicts. While these functionalities were appreciated, residents also expressed reservations about whether they would offer sufficient long-term value to ensure adoption and integration. Although the project's focus shifted towards targeting new, interested residents as primary users, this feedback stresses that active residents remain crucial users. Their consistent engagement will ultimately determine

the liveability and relevance of the platform. Therefore, their feedback and needs should be given more consideration for further development of the platform.

Furthermore, the attendants highlighted challenges regarding the platform's viability, particularly regarding its funding. The municipality, which I perceived as a key actor for further development of the platform, has limited to no budget available for such projects. It is therefore questionable whether it is realistic to rely on their key role for further development and budget, or the platform should have a

strong foundation of proven desirability by many residents of Hoogvliet. Furthermore, its close resemblance to Mijn Rotterdam may make it difficult to justify and persuade the municipality of the additional benefits of allocating budget to a new, separate tool. A potential consideration could be to integrate certain features of Actief Hoogvliet into Mijn Rotterdam, rather than focusing on developing a new, separate platform. Nevertheless, the success of this approach would ultimately depend on whether active residents perceive it to align with their needs and whether it offers sufficient added value to encourage their adoption.

CONCLUSION CHAPTER 12

Final validation with stakeholders

The goal of this chapter was to present the final design proposal of the digital platform Actief Hoogvliet as an outcome of this design project. The final design proposal aims to support interested residents to explore the possibilities of active citizenship within Hoogvliet's informal networks, after which they can engage in their own preferred ways. In the journey towards active participation in informal networks, a digital platform has indicated to be most effective as an accessible exploration tool for discovering possibilities. Therefore, the platform aims to support this exploration by offering residents possibilities to engage in various ways.

KEY TAKEAWAYS CHAPTER 12

Final validation with stakeholders

- The platform's potential is recognized, but its desirability among all active residents of Hoogvliet needs further validation.
- Success depends on the adoption among experienced initiative-takers, though they may not find significant added value in a new platform and prefer maintaining autonomy which a new, central platform might limit.
- While the platform aims to support active residents through gaining recognition, inviting new volunteers, and scheduling support, these features may not provide sufficient long-term value for this group.
- Limited municipal funding and overlap with Mijn Rotterdam suggest viability concerns for Actief Hoogvliet as a new, separate platform.
- To address viability, integrating Actief Hoogvliet's unique features into Mijn Rotterdam could be a viable alternative if it meets residents' needs and enhances engagement.

13

FINAL CONCLUSION, DISCUSSION
AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter embodies the final conclusive sections of the project. It first outlines a general conclusion on how the project has evolved to address the defined research question. Following this, I will reflect on the role and impact of designers in empowering communities in a discussion, drawing on my experiences as a designer throughout this project. Additionally, I will discuss the limitations of this project and the methodologies employed. Finally, I will provide recommendations for the Veldacademie, regarding future development of a digital tool like their basiskaart, based on insights gained from this project.

- 13.1. Conclusion
- 13.2. Discussion
- 13.3. Recommendations

13.1. Conclusion

The initial objective of this project was to examine the potential of a digital tool like the basiskaart to support active residents in their contributions to the informal networks of Hoogvliet. Through extensive contextual research followed by evaluations and iterations of possible design interventions, the project culminated in the development of a final design, titled Actief Hoogvliet. The process leading to this final design revealed both opportunities and challenges of such a platform to effectively support these active citizens.

Actief Hoogvliet demonstrates the potential of a digital tool to support citizens who are actively engaged in the informal networks of Hoogvliet to showcase their initiatives and success stories. This is intended to address the current lack of recognition for their expertise and impact in the neighbourhood. Moreover, by contributing to a centralised overview of activities and initiatives in Hoogvliet, the platform could help these active residents in avoiding scheduling conflicts, while allowing residents to maintain control over their own projects by linking their uploads to their preferred communication channels, such as their social media pages.

However, despite these opportunities, significant challenges were also identified with regard to the effective alignment of such a digital tool with the essential needs, values and current daily practices of active residents in Hoogvliet. The research findings indicate that active residents in Hoogvliet are often experienced initiative-takers. As a result of their long-term engagement, they have already built strong local social capital and sufficient capacity for self-organisation, encountering few to no obstacles within their contributions that a digital tool could meaningfully address. This reduces the perceived added value of a new platform for these citizens.

Furthermore, their informal networks are already deeply embedded in existing social media platforms, which they use to communicate effectively with residents of Hoogvliet. The introduction of a new digital tool that lacks

this embeddedness could therefore encounter challenges in terms of its implementation and adoption, particularly if its added value is not perceived as indispensable or as offering something beyond what these existing social media platforms already provide. Despite the fact that Actief Hoogvliet does not intend to replace these current communication methods of active initiatives through their own social media pages, but rather intends to serve as a complementary tool that allows them to link their uploads to their preferred platforms, some may still perceive this centralisation as undermining their autonomy and ownership. It is possible that the advantages of Actief Hoogvliet may not outweigh the strong desire to maintain control and ownership over their communications and the way in which they operate their initiatives.

If active citizens fail to perceive a direct benefit or positive change in their current practices as a result of using the platform, there is a risk that it will not be adopted over the long-term. A failure to achieve successful adoption could inadvertently result in further decentralisation of these informal networks, leading to a platform that becomes stagnant and underused.

In light of a few of these challenges which were already acknowledged after initial research insights, I modified the project's primary goal and research question after the initial contextual research phase. The revised goal was to investigate how such a digital tool could support interested, inexperienced residents to actively contribute to the informal networks of Hoogvliet, acknowledging the importance of including new active residents in order to better address the high demands of such informal activities in Hoogvliet. For this target group, the project indicated several opportunities for a digital platform like Actief Hoogvliet to serve as a complementary tool to guide residents from initial interest to active participation.

New, interested residents can use it as an exploratory tool to discover the possibilities of active citizenship in the neighbourhood. It

provides a centralized overview of relevant information regarding self-organisation and current active initiatives in Hoogvliet. Such a comprehensive overview enables residents to observe and familiarise themselves with the current active residents of Hoogvliet, thereby facilitating an understanding of how they self-organise activities and initiatives and where these interactions take place. After this initial exploration, residents can eventually decide to connect face-to-face and engage at their own pace, in their own preferred way. In this sense, the platform can facilitate residents' transition from online to offline interactions with others, rather than serving as a tool to directly connect citizens online.

Moreover, a digital tool like Actief Hoogvliet demonstrates opportunities to spark curiosity and interest, motivating residents who may not have initially considered getting involved to feel encouraged to participate. Lastly, a digital tool can facilitate an inviting atmosphere for new residents to join the local networks, thereby encouraging the formation of bridging social capital by clarifying open help requests regarding how residents can potentially join and contribute.

Nevertheless, challenges remain for such a digital tool to effectively support new, interested residents. Potential new residents who show an interest in contributing are often of an older age. My research findings suggest that digital tools may not be seamlessly integrated into their daily lives and preferred ways of communication and exploring possibilities. This reinforces the necessity of a hybrid approach and the importance of promoting the platform through local amenities to ensure its visibility. Moreover, the platform's successful implementation continues to rely heavily on the adoption among experienced initiative takers. As key figures within the neighbourhood, they play a crucial role in fostering trust in the platform and embedding it within the community of Hoogvliet. However, as previous challenges already revealed, if these active residents do not perceive the platform to offer sufficient added value, their lack of engagement could hinder its

overall success. Without their involvement and up-to-date content, the platform risks becoming stagnant, which would restrict its usefulness to new residents seeking to engage.

In conclusion, this thesis offers valuable insights into potential opportunities as well as crucial challenges of integrating a new digital platform like Actief Hoogvliet within this neighbourhood. The final design exemplifies how such a platform can be designed to address the opportunities identified, while the project's findings also highlight the necessity to maintain a critical perspective with regard to the challenges of implementing such a new digital tool.

13.2. Discussion

In this discussion, I will reflect on the role and impact of designers in empowering communities, drawing from my experiences throughout this project. I will focus particularly on the participatory approaches and research-through-design methodologies I adopted and the specific context of Hoogvliet. Additionally, I will address the limitations of the project's methods and scope.

Design probes as tools for residents to envision and articulate thoughts

Using design probes and visual elements (See figure 49 and 50) during my contextual research helped to facilitate conversations and interviews with residents and so supported the gathering of new insights. These probes encouraged residents to respond to the tools, and participants used them to express themselves by for instance pointing at things and explaining their thoughts about it accordingly. Furthermore, these visual designs proved effective to attract residents' attention during street interviews, which led to more dynamic interactions compared to using traditional methods like static questionnaires. Thus, using these design probes helped me in gathering insights from residents in a more interactive and engaging way.



Figure 49: Materials used for street interviews

Navigating trust, embeddedness and practical constraints of a participatory approach

Ironically, I found that the theory of social capital not only plays a role in active citizenship within communities but is also relevant for designers trying to design for and engage with these communities. As an individual designer leading and executing this project, I encountered personal limitations when I wanted to involve as many relevant stakeholders as possible. First off, a lack of built trust and embeddedness can make it difficult to adopt a participatory approach and include all these stakeholders. Though many residents were still open to share their thoughts with me as a researcher, one active resident did not want to be involved in the project expressing frustrations about institutions treating her as an instrumental, key figure in the neighbourhood. This implies how a lack of built trust and personal connections within communities and existing ties with institutions can possibly hinder designers from effectively engaging with residents. Furthermore, the inclusive ideals of participatory design can be further limited to practical challenges of designers such as set time frames for projects and the limited capacity to organise input from many residents, which in this project was limited to my own capacity as one individual designer carrying out this project. So in this sense, I learned that while participatory design aims to include stakeholders and their opinions in the design process, a lack of local embeddedness and limited time and capacity can hamper successfully designing with and for communities.

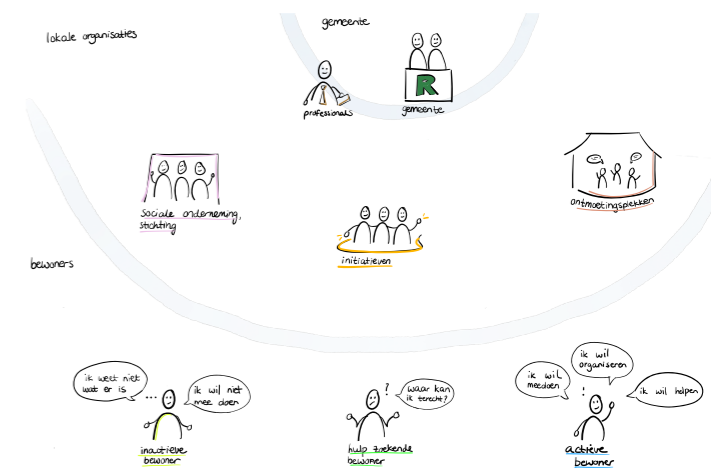


Figure 50: Materials used for in depth interviews

Tangible design interventions for envisioning possibilities and sparking discussions about community desires

Although Actief Hoogvliet remains a conceptual design limited to the scope of this graduation project, the process towards this final design demonstrated how the design project itself had a possible impact on the local community of Hoogvliet.

Through initial design interventions and the development of the final prototype, stakeholders were able to interact with the designs and envision how they might work in practice. By making these designs tangible, the project allowed participants to easily give input, identifying potential challenges and opportunities. Using tangible design interventions in preliminary stages have therefore proven useful for engaging stakeholders and giving valuable feedback.

The design interventions also played a critical role in sparking important discussions about the needs and desires of Hoogvliet's informal networks beyond the intended scope of the design interventions. Presenting tangible concepts and prototypes empowered stakeholders to explore deeper community desires. Thus, even if the designs did not fully align with resident needs, the design process itself showed to have an impact in opening up dialogue among stakeholders and exploring new aspirations for the community. This indicates how designers have the potential to empower communities by showcasing future possibilities through rapid prototyping, facilitating new discussions for community desires and needs.

Neighbourhood specific focus necessary for uncovering local informal networks and their needs

This project focused specifically on Hoogvliet and the informal networks active within this neighbourhood. By focusing on this neighbourhood I have learned a lot about its active informal networks, and built strong admiration and respect for the active residents

in Hoogvliet who all show genuine care for their neighbourhood and its residents, and work hard to improve its liveability. In Hoogvliet the active citizens strongly value autonomy and ownership of their initiatives, showing limited interest in collaboration. This dynamic, along with other challenges discussed in the conclusion, suggests that introducing a digital tool to support informal networks in Hoogvliet may not be viable or desirable.

However, these findings are specific to Hoogvliet and do not imply that digital tools generally lack relevance for supporting active residents. Each neighbourhood has unique social structures, and targeted, neighbourhood-specific research is essential to understand local informal networks and needs. Insights from this study should therefore not be generalised without considering the unique context of other neighbourhoods.

13.2.2. Limitations

In this section I will outline the limitations of the project.

Individual bias in contextual research

The research methodologies employed in this project were predominantly qualitative, with a focus on field research and ethnographic methods. While these methods were crucial for understanding the dynamics of Hoogvliet and fostering informal conversations with residents, they may have introduced personal bias and less structured findings. By minimizing my role as a formal researcher, I took less structured notes during these informal interactions and occasionally strayed into topics that were not directly relevant to the research. This may have resulted in inconsistencies and a lack of focus in the data collected.

Limitations of theoretical framework in contextual research

The contextual research was guided by the theoretical framework established during the literature review. Although this framework provided me with structure and focus, it may have also constrained my perspective, potentially

overseeing important insights. By focusing on the neighbourhood through the lens of this framework, I may have missed opportunities to capture more diverse or unexpected findings that fell outside this scope.

Limited evaluations with essential stakeholders

A restriction of the project was the limited number of participants involved in the evaluations of the design interventions, particularly residents as essential stakeholders. During the first evaluation, I mainly gathered feedback from institutional stakeholders, which proved insightful but provided a limited perspective. Ideally the evaluation would have included more residents, particularly the defined target group of interested, inexperienced residents. Engaging these participants earlier on could have provided more relevant feedback, possibly reducing the necessity for a second evaluation.

Moreover, the sample size further restricted the generalisability of the findings, which consisted of only two experienced initiative-takers in the first evaluation and three participants in the second evaluation. These limitations were due to my own lack of connections in the neighbourhood, which made it challenging to identify and recruit additional interested residents and active initiative takers. Furthermore, the time constraints of this graduation project also had an impact. As an individual researcher, it was time intensive to visit the neighbourhood, engage more participants and accommodate their varying schedules for user testing and feedback sessions.

Lack of user testing with active residents

The first evaluation focused primarily on gathering initial reactions and feedback. It was not conducted as a structured user test like the second evaluation. As a result, the designs were not thoroughly tested by active residents through real scenarios, limiting evaluations of functionalities such as uploading initiatives or creating profiles. Conducting user tests also with these experienced initiative takers could have provided more valuable insights into how the

platform would be used in practice from their perspective, rather than limiting the feedback to initial impressions.

Lack of validation of long-term effect of the platform

The evaluations of the design interventions mainly focused on participants' initial reactions and interactions with the platform, rather than assessing its long-term effects. Consequently, the platforms defined goals – such as building self-confidence, capacity and motivation to actively contribute – were solely evaluated based on immediate feedback. This leaves unanswered how expressed initial interest and interactions with the platform would translate into actual action, long-term involvement and increased capacity. Therefore, the actual effect and impact of the platform on the long-term remain unanswered.

13.3. Recommendations for the Veldacademie

In Chapter 12.6 of this report, I addressed specific recommendations for the further development and implementation of Actief Hoogvliet as the design outcome of this project. Therefore, the following recommendations will primarily focus on what the Veldacademie should consider for further development of their basiskaart, derived from insights gained during my design research.

1. Consider motivations for local actors to share data on their initiatives and collaborations.

Gathering information on local, informal networks and how they are connected with others requires extensive, neighbourhood-specific research as well as motivations from these informal actors to share this information. In the basiskaart's current form, its continuity relies heavily on the Veldacademie conducting this research and proactively approaching local actors in neighbourhoods to obtain this information. However, without clear incentives or outcomes that directly benefit or positively impact these informal networks, local actors may perceive that they are merely serving as instrumental tools, providing data on their informal networks solely for institutional benefits. To encourage local actors to contribute data and ensure continuity, the Veldacademie should consider the following insights to positively influence their motivations.

1.1. Identify essential needs of local actors to directly align the digital tool and develop it as a tool to be used by local actors themselves.

This project revealed opportunities for a digital tool to provide direct benefits to local actors in their informal networks. In Hoogvliet, positioning such a digital tool as a useful platform that offers recognition for their impact and expertise aligns with the identified needs. However, research indicates that these benefits may not be sufficient for long-term engagement. Continuous involvement of active residents in the development process, as outlined in recommendation 3, could further enhance alignment with their needs.

1.2. Emphasize mutual benefits of the tool, including examples of positive outcomes of using the digital tool for local communities.

To prevent that local actors feel like their role is simply to provide data for professionals or institutions, diminishing them as instrumental tools, the Veldacademie could emphasise benefits of providing this information. For instance, the Veldacademie could explain how their contributions to local information can lead to improvements in their neighbourhoods. To make these benefits more tangible, they could do this by for instance showcasing examples of how professionals have successfully used the tool to create positive changes that directly benefited local actors.

1.3. Clarify and address possible concerns of autonomy and ownership.

It is crucial to respect the autonomy of local actors and ensure that the platform does not appear as a top-down initiative aiming to centralize information and impose control. Residents may perceive that sharing information with institutional stakeholders can undermine their independence. To mitigate these concerns, the Veldacademie should clarify its commitment to respecting and protecting the autonomy and ownership of these local actors. For instance, allowing local actors to determine themselves what information they want to share, how often and clearly explain how it will be used can foster transparency and trust.

2. Examine the effect of the visualisation of social networks on resident's participation.

A distinctive feature of the basiskaart is its visual representation of collaborations within informal networks through a social network map (figure 51). While this visual feature was not included in the development of Actief Hoogvliet, it has the potential to serve as an additional motivator for interested residents to participate. Although the initiatives and activities on Actief Hoogvliet already offer textual descriptions of collaborations, a visual depiction of these interconnected relations could further enhance

residents' motivation to engage with these networks. The Veldacademie could thus further explore the potential impact of visualising local collaborations on residents' local engagement. This would help them to better understand the significance of this main unique feature of their product, potentially stronger distinguishing it from other neighbourhood platforms. An example of how to visualise this in a user-friendly way on a platform designed for residents like Actief Hoogvliet can be seen in figure 52.

3. Continuously involve active residents as key figures, as they are indispensable for successful adoption and implementation of a new digital tool in neighbourhoods.

If the Veldacademie aims to develop the basiskaart as a tool to be used by both professional stakeholders who want to do neighbourhood-oriented work and local actors themselves that form the informal networks, insights indicated that continuous involvement of active residents, particularly key figures, is crucial to ensure successful implementation and adoption of such a tool in the neighbourhood. Continuous involvement ensures that it aligns

with their evolving needs, fosters a sense of ownership and trust over the tool, and so helps to ensure that it becomes an adopted and embedded tool within local communities.

4. Critically evaluate and outweigh possible positive impact of increased visibility, as well as negative impact and efforts required to maintain continuity.

Finally, I recommend that the Veldacademie critically evaluates the potential drawbacks of increasing the visibility of informal networks through such a digital tool. While there may be opportunities to support local actors as well as professionals with such a tool, the critical challenges identified in this project highlight significant difficulties in implementation and the potential to undermine core values such as autonomy and ownership within informal networks. Therefore, the Veldacademie should assess whether the benefits of increased visibility truly outweigh the effort required and the potential disruption to the current dynamics of these networks, before further developing and maintaining this digital tool.

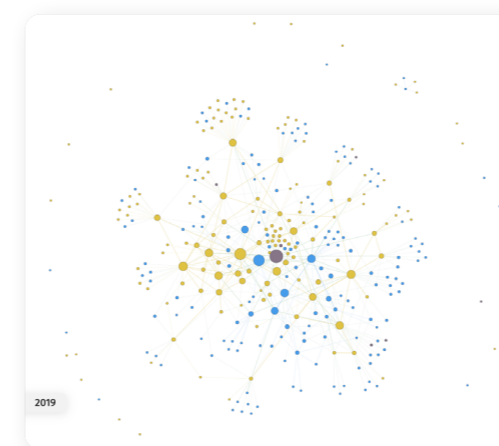


Figure 51: Current depiction of social networks in the basiskaart

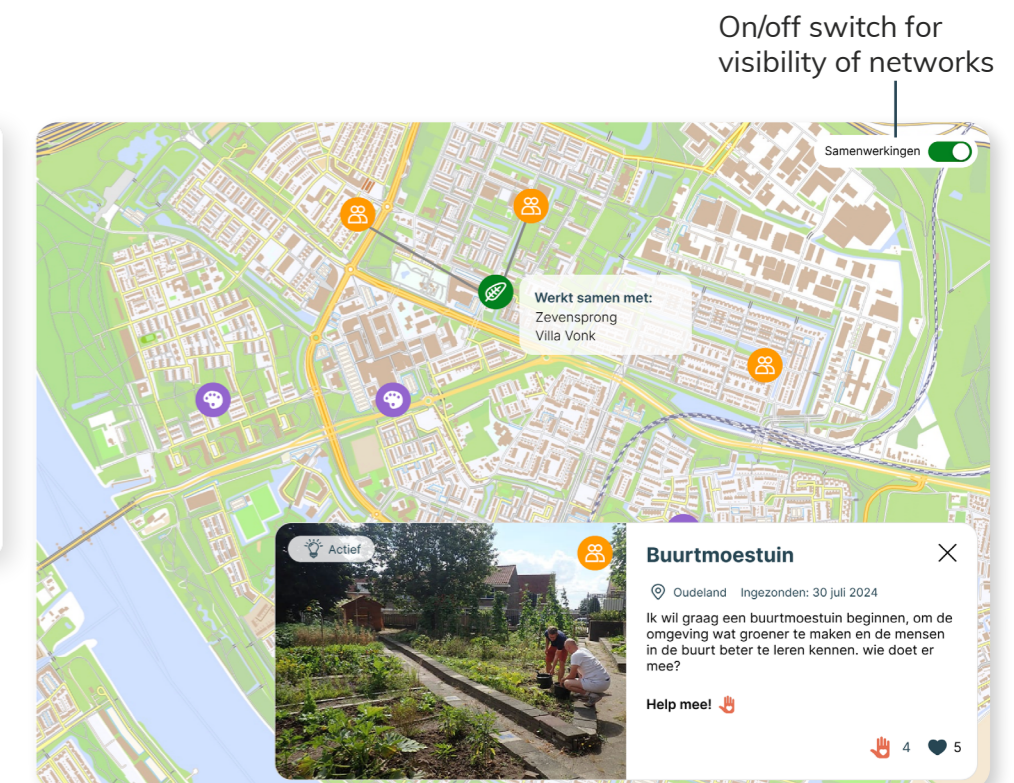


Figure 52: Possible visualisation of networks in a platform like Actief Hoogvliet

14. Personal reflection

As I write this final, personal reflection to conclude my project, I feel a mixed sense of pride and relief. This project was a long and challenging journey for me, so I have to say that I am glad that it is now coming to an end.

Starting the project I already felt somewhat daunted, perceiving the final master thesis as the 'big, most important project of your masters, to be executed individually'. The 'individual' part I was not particularly excited about, as I knew that I had struggled in previous individual design projects, regarding for instance time and project management, insecurities, and my own critical mindset with perfectionism. Furthermore, I think the pressure I felt from perceiving it as the 'big most important project of your masters' only further amplified these insecurities, wanting to deliver a perfect end result. This often led to uncomfortable feelings of anxiety and stress, which made it difficult for me to stay focused and feel excited about the project. While this was not so pleasant to experience during the project, it did allow me to reflect both now and during the project where these struggles originated from. More importantly, it allowed me to learn from them and develop ways to overcome them to still finish this project with a sense of satisfaction, while also providing insights on how to approach future design projects.

During the project, I came to learn about myself that I when I dive into an unfamiliar topic or context, I first want to get a holistic understanding of this topic and context before starting to design interventions. In this project I therefore first conducted extensive exploratory, contextual research, hoping this would reveal clear opportunities and needs to design for. However, during this process I came to realise that researching and designing within complex systems which involve multiple stakeholders with varying needs and desires often left me feeling overwhelmed and rather restricted by the abundance of information. I felt myself getting lost in these complexities and unsure about a valuable direction of my project, which resulted in a lack of taking decisions and choosing a

focus when needed. Furthermore, from previous experiences I was rather used to approach projects that have a clear defined problem set from the beginning, rather than adopting this more exploratory approach to uncover opportunities. This also further aggravated insecurities and doubts about the potential value of my design interventions.

Furthermore, my desire to thoroughly understand the context combined with my own perfectionism, restricted me from wanting to design interventions at an early stage of the project. Without solid understanding and knowledge about essential needs of the context, I did not feel confident and comfortable enough to start designing and evaluating. However, I came to understand that research-through-design approaches are specifically valuable to adopt when designing for such complex systems and contexts. As I already reflected on in the discussion, adopting these methods allowed me to uncover new opportunities and needs as the project progressed, rather than first aiming to find one specific problem or opportunity to design for. Thus, even though these methods did not initially align with my preferred, usual ways of approaching a design project, I did learn how they are actually rather valuable in such contexts. I also found that, even though I don't think it is my strongest suit, writing helped me a lot to find clarity during my project and to make decisions. Structuring my thoughts in writing allowed me to think more critically about insights and build stronger arguments, rather than keeping the abundance of information and doubts about insights in my head. However, this maybe also resulted in me wanting to include every insight, thought and argument which I thought could be possibly relevant, as perhaps can be seen in the word count of this thesis.

Alongside writing, I also found that visualising thoughts helped a lot to clarify insights, which I also consider as one of my strengths as a designer. Trying to ease the complexity of systems by creating structured visuals to explain insights proved valuable not only for myself, but also for

conveying my thoughts to other stakeholders in my project and potentially also for readers of this thesis.

Reflecting on set learning goals

Alongside these learnings, I had also set initial learning goals starting this project which can be found in Appendix A in my initial project brief. One of these learning goals was to deepen my understanding about the field of social design, specifically in relation to designing for societal issues within urban development through a human-centred lens. As I already noted, I learned that designing for social issues comes with complex challenges that I found difficult to navigate, more specifically as an empathic, user-centred designer, wanting to consider all stakeholders and their own needs and preferences. This resulted in a lack of resilience as a designer and project leader to take decisions where needed. However, from the experiences in this project I did learn how to better navigate and approach such social design projects in the future, and they also reinforced my understanding of the value of designers in complex social issues. Another learning goal was to expand my skills in qualitative research. I believe that I learned a lot about this during this project, as all research methods were highly qualitative of nature. To be able to conduct this research, I was encouraged to approach unfamiliar stakeholders in the context by myself. While this required some self-confidence, I learned that I genuinely enjoyed conducting interviews, talking to people and listening to their stories, understanding what they have to say and thereafter gather essential insights from these conversations.

One learning goal that I think I could still improve on was the adoption of co-design methods. Although I included stakeholders in a participatory way through feedback sessions, I think I could have structured these sessions more collaboratively, specifically regarding the inclusion of residents to co-design and give input on interventions. I think this is where my project may have lacked and what I would probably have done differently if I could do it again.

The project also allowed me to extensively prototype platform designs in Figma. This further reinforced both my skills as well as my passion for User Interface (UI) design. A challenge that I encountered here was defining the scope of designing my prototype. As I wanted and enjoyed creating a detailed, clickable prototype with working flows and accurate content, I found it difficult to determine when and where to stop this prototyping. Finally, I would say that the last learning goal still proved to be struggle for me, namely improving my project management skills. I do believe that this was caused not necessarily or only by a lack of skill in planning, but also by personal struggles that I encountered and a dependency on external factors that may have delayed my project. Furthermore, as it was my first social design project focusing on designing for a neighbourhood and its residents, I also encountering challenges that I had not anticipated, which likely affected the project's planning as well.

Future vision

Finally, I think that changing my mindset from perceiving this as the 'big final project', to acknowledging it rather as a final opportunity to learn new things within my studies allowed me to worry less about having the most perfect end result but rather focus on my personal growth as a designer, engaging in new experiences to learn and acquire new skills. In that sense, I do believe that I have learned a lot from this project, not only in terms of developing new skills but also in understanding more about who I am and want to be as a designer. Looking forward, I think this project has helped to build my confidence and understanding of valuable methods for approaching design projects regarding societal issues. Furthermore, I found that my passion for UX/UI design has grown by putting much effort in designing a prototype that I feel proud of. I am curious what the future holds, and in what design field I will start to further develop new skills that I acquired and learned throughout this project.



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