

On the right path in Mooi, Mooier, Middelland (Lovely, Lovelier, Middelland)

Experiences and results of two years of co-creation.

#meetandconnect

Mooi, Mooier Middelland is all about the quality of the district, and about the people who live there. The key to this is the organisation of meetings. We have opted for an integrated approach at a number of sites in the district. Mooi, Mooier Middelland takes advantage of the social, economic and physical capital present in the district, such as young people, entrepreneurs, parents, playgrounds, and squares. We identify this potential, shake it up, and give it free reign. We bring people together. Meetings encourage the sharing of knowledge, networks, and investments. This becomes apparent at public places in the district, including shops, the locations of Huize Middelland and also on the squares. We have opted to use an integrated approach at a

number of sites in the district. At those sites, we work together with people with different backgrounds and perspectives. We focus on physical and social improvements and their mutual relationship.

#creatingcitydistrictstogether

The 'Mooi, Mooier Middelland' programme is not just a programme for improving the district, but also a testing ground for partnerships between residents, entrepreneurs and the municipality. Co-creation is a new work method for all parties involved. Many people are participating or have participated in many different ways: as initiators, advisers, participants in activities or – sometimes more remotely – as observers of the process. For those working for the municipality, this work method involves switching roles and combining tasks and questions. The officials involved work on the district as civil servants. We have also drafted rules for the way in which we work together and how we use public funds. A number of reflections, assessments, and studies have been and are being performed. The researchers provide positive criticism and give tips for limiting the

meetings and for ensuring that not everything is discussed over and over again. Visiting guests such as Frans Soeterbroek and Saskia Sassen have encouraged us to continue developing a strong community and keep working on the district. We also participated in the International Architecture Biennial Rotterdam and the City Makers Conference in 2016.

#journeyinthemiddleofrotterdam

We are aiming to improve many aspects of the Middellandstraat. Entrepreneurs and the residents of the street and the square are the key to the improvements. In addition, we are focusing on the appearance of the buildings and small improvements to the street and the square. We have developed a network of entrepreneurs, building owners and residents. As these groups do not necessarily have the same agenda, we also invested in a shared vision for the street's development: Middelland, a journey through the middle of Rotterdam. We are implementing this by investing in the quality of the

entrepreneurs and their cooperation, and by improving the appearance of the buildings.

#middellandsquare

The Middellandsplein is being transformed. An uninviting and stony site is being turned into the vibrant centre of the district. The square is changing. Not just physically, but also as a location for activities and events that bring the residents of Middelland together. Despite having been organised just once, the skating rink has already become a tradition. In the summertime, the Tjop Tjop food festival was a resounding success. Investments were made in broad support base for the redevelopment of the square. Soon, the square and its vicinity will have ample room for scheduling initiatives brought forward by people in the district. The square also offers opportunities for getting together, cars are becoming less dominant, and we believe it is turning into a safer outdoor space.

#oostervant

In the Oostervant neighbourhood, people are working on the short-term and long-term development of the neighbourhood (vision for the area). In the short term, improvements in the square are being realised and we are working on strengthening the connection between residents. The long-term developments target the improvement of the residential area as a whole. We have worked on the planning process for the vision for the area in an interactive manner: with neighbourhood interviews, neighbourhood consultations, and workshops in which many people participated. There are strategic issues that are decisive for the development of the vision for this area. On the one hand, it pertains to keeping a swimming facility in the neighbourhood; on the other hand, it concerns the opportunity to use the distinctive building of the Marnix Gymnasium. This discussion is partly beyond the scope of Mooi, Mooier Middelland, however.

#communitywork

We want to restore public life in and around the Johannes de Vouplein, turning this area into a fun place to hang out and meet for people of all ages and backgrounds. We talked to 200 people in the neighbourhood to determine what is going on and what they believe is important. We used this information to redesign the square. We also found out that many of the local residents of the Johannes de Vouplein find it hard to make ends meet, do not fully master the Dutch language, and do not know how to get help. We will be working with this knowledge over the coming period. The new square was redeveloped at the end of 2017. It is now greener and offers more space for games and get-togethers.

#brancopark

We made significant investments in the community of the Branco neighbourhood, organising activities such as Geranium Day, a Spring Festival, and Camping Branco.

We are working closely together with a large group of residents who are contributing to the redevelopment of the

park. A number of the improvements had already been completed in 2017, while the remainder will be completed in 2018. To make the activities that are being organised more sustainable, the Branco Foundation (Stichting Branco) was founded. This foundation aims to boost the cooperation between residents, entrepreneurs and organisations in the district. 'Veilig Veiliger Middelland' ('Safe, Safer Middelland') focuses on traffic safety. The experiments that were launched will continue in 2018. (Residential) organisations and government agencies are working closely together in the Branco neighbourhood. The development of a pavilion is scheduled for 2018. It will be a challenge to develop and run this pavilion sustainably.

#teamzebra

Team Zebra is all about improving routes and connections in Middelland, especially for cyclists and pedestrians. Team zebra focuses on creating greener, more welcoming pavements and making them more fun to play on. We organise a weekly walk to broaden our perspective on the district and are also developing a new community: the

walking club. Traffic safety is also high on team Zebra's agenda and, since recently, we have also been dealing with climate issues. One of the activities team zebra is developing is aimed at creating a sense of urgency regarding these issues and making solutions doable for the residents.

#homemiddelland

In Middelland, we reinforce and connect a diverse variety of residents' initiatives in twelve completely different locations. All sites and initiatives are keen to show what they are achieving together and what activities they are getting involved in. It is all about the sum of the parts: a collection of locations that offer space and a huge variety of activities to many different residents. Collectively, the twelve sites are a familiar environment that allows people to come into their own and reinforce each other. We have been working on aligning the activities and what is on offer, and on increasing network sustainability, enhancing site visibility, and achieving more widespread recognition of the programmes. We have observed a significant increase in the

total number of volunteers and volunteer hours (from 15,000 to 22,000 hours). There has also been an increase in the activities being held for and by residents at the various locations, such as open-air concerts and even an annual party.

#youngpeople

Through Mooi, Mooier Middelland, we are trying to establish a link between young people, entrepreneurs, and sites and squares, encouraging young people to get involved in the developments within their district, launch initiatives, and help improve the general image of young people. It gives them the opportunity to develop their own talents be involved in various aspects of the Mooi, Mooier Middelland programme at the same time. Through the youth brigade, they support initiatives by helping distribute flyers and/or supervising activities. They can even earn some money with some of the activities. We are currently working with a group of approximately thirty young people.

#liveabledistrict

A clean and safe district is important to many Middelland residents. We ensure that the streets and pavements are clean thanks to the help of a robust network of neighbourhood ambassadors. The municipality supports this by providing appropriate resources. We are also working on reducing the number of dilapidated buildings and boarded-up façades, and we are ensuring that nuisance-generating bars are removed from residential streets. So far, we have tackled sixty premises. Their owners have revamped their appearance. It remains important to focus on safety in Middelland because, as a city district, Middelland cannot escape things like drug-related nuisance.

It goes without saying that working together to create a pleasant atmosphere is an absolute must. To this end, we are using the district investment game to enhance the district's social robustness and interconnection. Using 'Middellandjes' (little Middellands) distributed throughout the district, the residents can organise wonderful activities

aimed at making contact in the street. They have already been used extensively.

#neighbourhoodpower

Middelland also has vulnerable residents. We believe it is important that they can also participate in the district. The Neighbourhood Power workgroup has carefully reviewed the Johannes de Vou neighbourhood, producing an intricate image of vulnerability and underdevelopment. It also reviewed the Oostervant area. Based on this, the workgroup has created a 'toolkit' that others can also use to get people involved in issues in the neighbourhood. And it is not just about vulnerable people: it is also about involving people who believe it is not important to participate in activities in the neighbourhood or who are not bothered either way.

#future

Of course, two years of closely working together on a city district does not end overnight. Relationships have been reinforced, friendships have been established, arguments

have been settled, and work methods have been tested. A culture of co-creation has arisen. In addition, in the district itself, an awareness of the district has arisen. People are now far more confident of the fact that 'we are allowed to do it ourselves' than they were two years ago. Middelland residents are becoming less cautious in their ambitions. The future is becoming increasingly important. Middelland residents really want to become (and remain) self-sufficient. How can we become less dependent on local government without jeopardising our collaboration? How can we work on our own income?

#peekintothefuture

We have achieved visible results in the district. We are in the middle of the redevelopment of four important squares in district: Johannes de Vou is almost completed; the design for the Middellandplein is in progress; Branco Park is being spruced up based on the insights of the residents and the Oostervantplein may be used for water storage, only time will tell. The physical alterations of the Middellandstraat are also slowly becoming visible. Moreover, many activities are

being organised with and by residents and entrepreneurs. There is something for everyone at varied locations. We have focused carefully on the organisation of all the processes. This means that a lot of time and effort were spent on preparing everything properly. The results will become even more visible over the coming year: the renovation of the squares will have been completed, the district will have become greener, and neglected premises and façades will have been fixed. We are continuing to work on the substantive coherence within the programme between neighbourhoods and streets. We have noticed that sector-based thinking has a tendency to quickly creep into daily routines. We have gained insight into the needs and requirements of vulnerable residents and are eager to translate this insight into concrete actions. We are also keeping a watchful eye on the district's safety. We encourage people to reflect on the future of their district. We also encourage residents to think about ways to become less dependent on government funding while still being able to organise and run wonderful projects in the district. We want to stimulate experiments that make sustainable

contributions to the local challenges, that are able to be self-sufficient and that, if at all possible, also strengthen the position of vulnerable residents. The unique thing is, that many residents are voluntarily committing themselves to making the Mooi, Mooier Middelland programme a success. The large diversity in residents has yielded a variety of talents, from young people handing out flyers and tackling nuisance together to a lecture given by a professor who lives in the district and who is specialised in democratic processes. The increasing number of daily contacts, conversations, and initiatives of many Middelland residents shows that residents are becoming increasingly involved in their neighbourhood. The collaboration for the Middelland city district is on a roll and ready for more. Middelland has been put firmly on the map.

#Colophon

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In Mooi, Mooier Middelland, residents, entrepreneurs, and the municipality of Rotterdam are working together on a district improvement programme. Meeting and connecting are key concepts in this collaboration, which has been called 'co-creation' by Mayor Aboutaleb.

This publication explains what has happened so far and shows the results achieved to date. The generous use of images provides the reader with an insight into the events and makes the energy, fun, and dedication of everyone working together on the district more tangible for a broad audience.