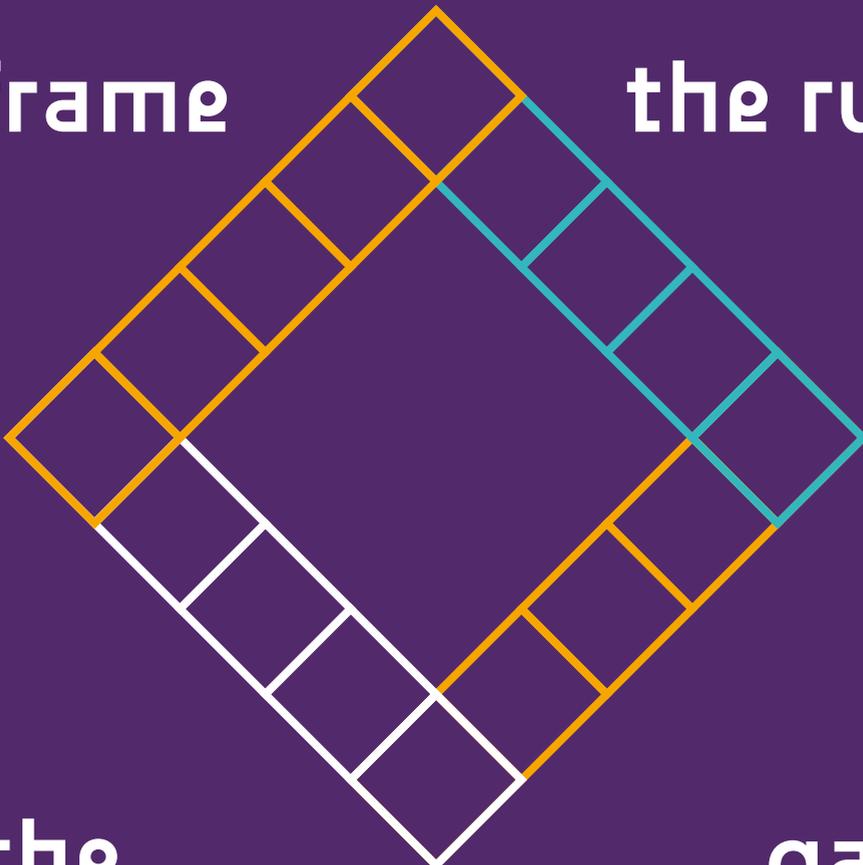


Reframe

the rules



of the

game



Expedition  
to Planet B

waag  futurelab



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# Essay: Futuremaking through Gameplay

With each passing day, we perpetuate further environmental degradation, income inequality, surveillance technology, and erosion of democracy and human rights. The potential futures that we can imagine from this trajectory are petrifying, as we face the responsibility to reshape strained relations between human beings, technology, and the environment into a more sustainable symbiosis. Reshaping our relationship between each other and the world involves an overhaul of the ways we incentivise our core values and purpose as a society. In light of this daunting challenge, there is promise in our instinctive capacity for *playfulness* to reframe our response to the question: what game are we playing, and why?

Playfulness is a superpower, a hack – a resource that we, humans, have to rehearse our futures by disrupting rules and assumptions in the present. We might play by telling a joke, writing a song, or performing satire. Sometimes, we play in a structured way through games. Games allow us to blur the lines between reality and fiction by redefining boundaries, roles, goals, and authorities. Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens* famously articulates that players enter a “magic circle” where the game's rules create a new reality. By setting boundaries, we limit the playing field and break down complex, interconnected, and wicked problems into manageable parts that can be built upon constructively.

Gameplay brings people together. Its components like play, creativity, and innovation are all core to the human experience and crucial for learning and connecting with others. Coordinating, helping one another, and working as a team are not *just* fun (although they *are* fun) – they are necessary aspects of addressing those future challenges that we must take on together.

As we make use of games, however, it is crucial to acknowledge that they are not always just ‘fun and games’. Games can be

harsh in their designation of winners and losers; unfair in their allocation of judgments, rewards, penalties and subsequent comparative hierarchies. Gamification can mask surveillance, for example by tracking players' movements and interactions, or by coercing them into sharing private data. Game theory may be misinterpreted to advocate for approaching reality as a zero-sum game. Toxic cultures, misogyny, and the over-idealisation of winners can emerge from the echo chambers of gaming communities. Games can trap people, or make them addicted. People cheat. And, of course, some games are rigged.

We see these problems play out not only in games of leisure, but also in the games that govern our most important interactions with each other and the planet. These are games like government, where people compete for roles within discursive power constructs; or economics, where we invented rules to make money from money through stocks, investment, interest. The problems caused by these games are not relegated to the safe vacuum of a playing field, but impact every pocket of our planet and beyond.

So who should make the rules in these games we play? Building better futures requires a collective effort that goes far beyond any individual or closed group. At Waag Futurelab, we approach the effort to achieve positive collective systems change as a system itself, comprised of an undefined network of free thinkers, creative minds, and empathetic humans from around the world. This is why we facilitate collaboration in our own local area and make our stories and resources available for others, regardless of distance, to inspire and help others who want to contribute to collaborative futuremaking in their own communities.

We use games to investigate systems and alternatives – to reframe the rules of the 'the game', which is itself a system that includes all of us. Waag Futurelab facilitates co-creative public research with people from all walks of life by hosting open, fair, and inclusive enabling environments where communities collaborate around topics of shared interest and concern. Gameplay and playfulness are important components of our research methodology, where people test and feel in a way that wouldn't be possible without the engagement of both mind and body. People are safe and free to tinker, experiment, and fine tune. Embodied interactions with processes, rule sets, and other people result in a deeper understanding of both the

research question at hand and other phenomena of the human experience. Once we understand a system's rules and their implications, we can start to change them with intention. By observing the outcomes, we can identify the conditions which lead to the future we want and put them into practice.

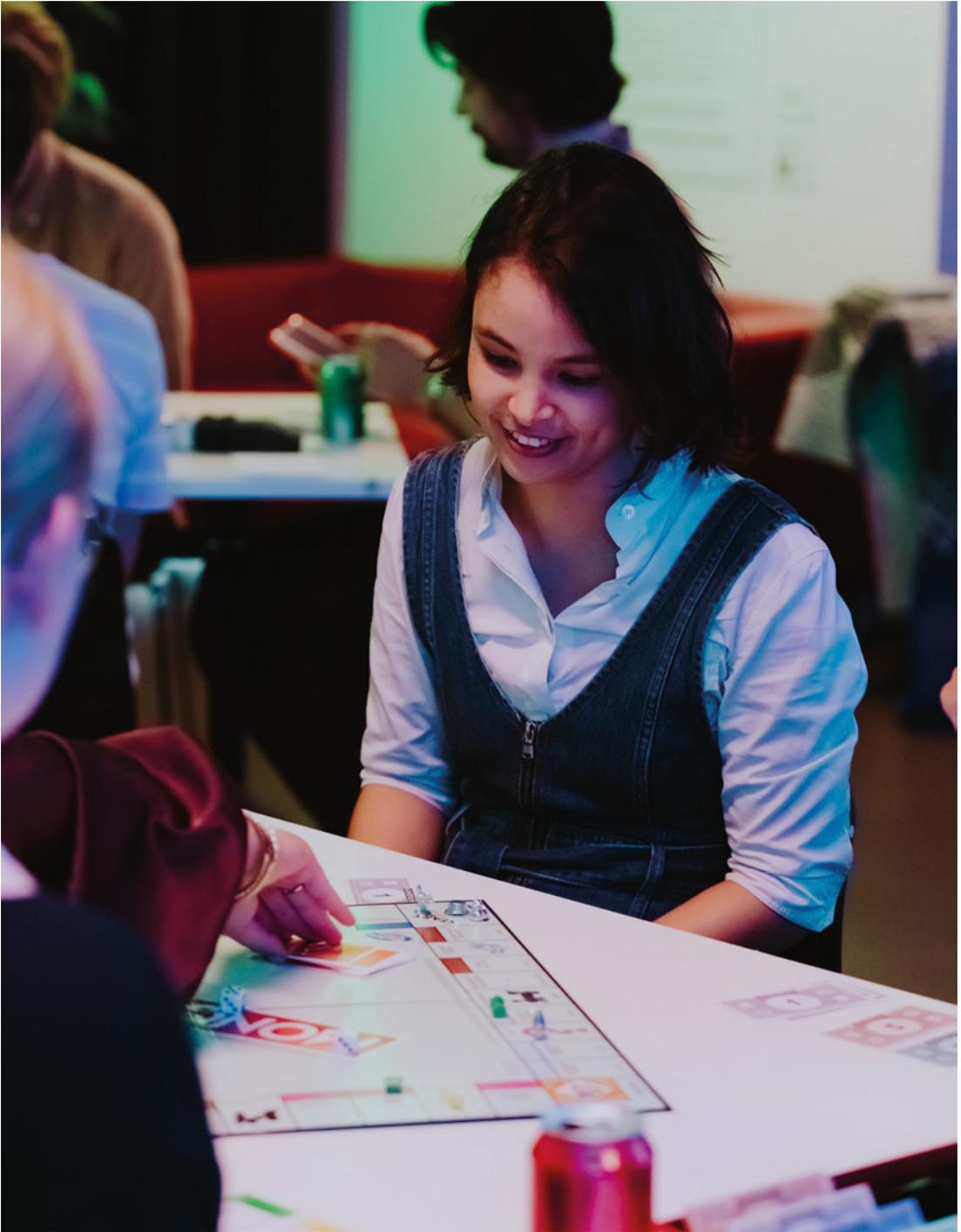
Waag Futurelab's public programmes incorporate inclusive games and reflections upon the ethics of play, embodying shared public values by shifting modes of power and authority and creating new rules to generate novel outcomes. We tend to make use of contests of representation and open outcome games – that is, games that don't prioritise winning and losing. Such games are not governed by strict rules or predetermined outcomes, and foster human creativity, expression, and the exploration of new ideas and possibilities. Playfulness is thus espoused as a design principle, and elements of open gameplay are embedded throughout our research.

This book shares highlights from our expedition to the future through gameplay. It leads us through a game of musical chairs that reconsiders scarcity; to interviews with rule breakers about how and why they challenge the status quo; to dinners, board games, and other collective experiences. These stories of playful and collaborative futuremaking are accompanied by instructables that can be adapted and used by others. Our hope is that you, the reader, are inspired and enabled to contribute to building futures in your own environment and community, adapting and using methods from this book where helpful.

Ultimately, the game whose rules ought to change – “real life” – is not a game at all. But games nonetheless teach us about how to change the real world – not only through practical lessons in rule breaking, imagining, and collaboration – but because great joy can be found in contributing to a shared goal with other people. As great as the challenges are, we can also hope to find joy in building better futures together.

Max Kortlander  
Researcher Waag Futurelab

*Amsterdam, June 2023*



# Monopoly, but different

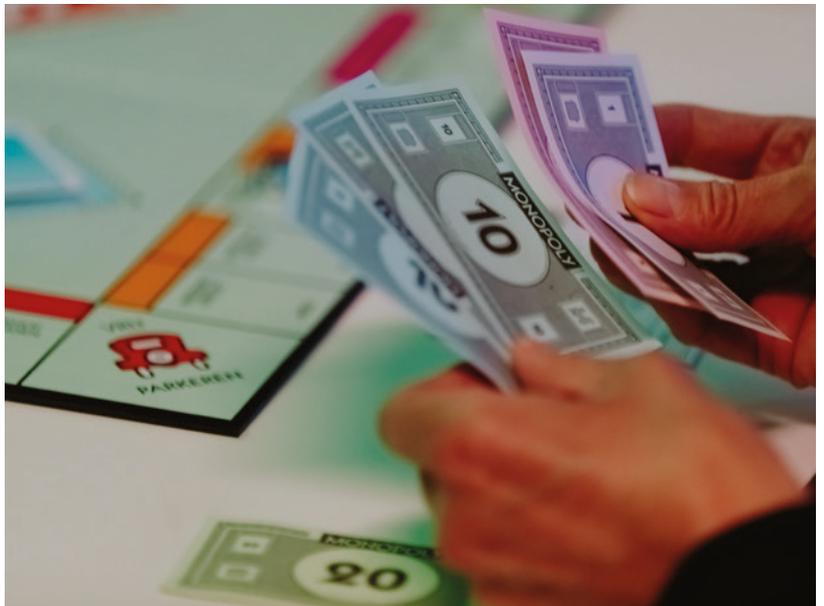
Play the game - or don't. Because, who actually made the rules? While researching the system we live in, and the beliefs we accept for it, Waag Futurelab found out that Monopoly was originally conceived as a critique of capitalism.

## **In action**

Together with students from the HvA, we came up with a new version for Monopoly, where you can be an idealist, but also a capitalist. During a public gaming afternoon at FLOOR - HvA, we tried out the game of Monopoly, but different.

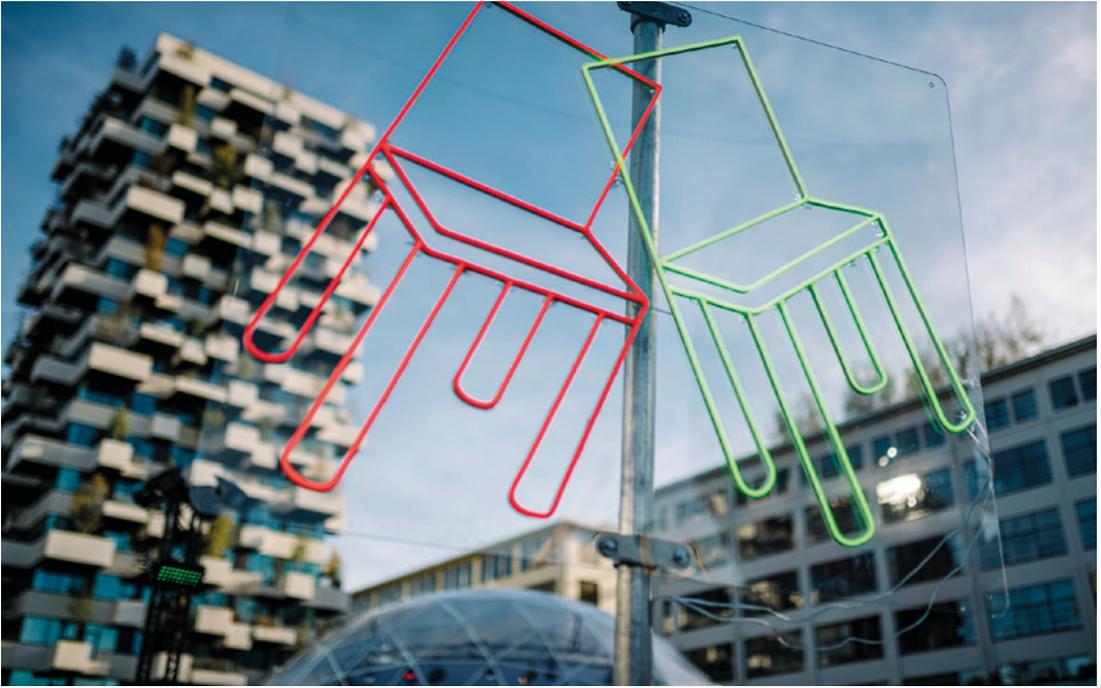
## **Do it yourself**

You can very easily organise and play Monopoly, but different yourself. Check out Instructable 1 in the appendix!









# Musical Chairs, but different

Once you set the rules of the game, limited possibilities emerge. But these represent neither the world nor the future.

The rules of musical chairs necessitate scarcity. It is the element that propels the game forward, ensuring that players will be eliminated each round. Children understand the rule easily: there is not enough for everyone. It is an assumption that creeps into the public sphere, but is it true, and is it helpful?

Arne Hendriks and Waag Futurelab developed Musical Chairs, but different to explore societal perceptions on value, scarcity, and abundance. What sets this game of musical chairs apart? This one has plenty of seats for everyone.

## **In action**

'If I can't dance, I don't want to be part of your revolution!' said Emma Goldman, feminist, activist, and self-proclaimed troublemaker, back in 1934. Serious action needs dance, music, movement, and a loud voice. Musical Chairs, but different prompts a discussion about economic growth, value, solidarity, circularity and the redesign of the economic system.

Musical Chairs, but different, was part of Surfana Festival 2022, Better Future Now Festival and Dutch Design Week 2022.

## **Arne Hendriks, creator of Musical Chairs, but different**

Arne Hendriks is an artistic researcher and artist. His work in recent years has focused on 'de-growth'. Last year he presented Hara Hachi Bu Dorp at Dutch Design Week. It refers to the Japanese principle to stop eating when you feel full for eighty percent. Currently, Arne Hendriks is focusing his artistic research, The Incredible Shrinking Man, on reprogramming our initial reactions to growth. Can we change the urge to always grow, and can we change our need for more into a need for less?

**Arne, how would you introduce yourself?**

'I'm an artistic researcher. This means I use the freedom I have as an artist to investigate things that interest me. For over a decade, for me, that has been our irrational desire for economic growth. On the one hand, it is a desire that has enormous implications for the health of life on earth, and this is what makes it urgent for me. On the other hand, our desire also defines us as a species, and thus it is also an examination of human kind. My hope is that human kind can shape their desire in such a way that it is in balance with the survival of the planet.'

**Together with Waag, you developed the concept of Musical Chairs, but different. Can you explain what you think it's about?**

'Many cultures have some form of musical chairs. A group of people dance to music around a number of chairs, the premise being that there is always one chair less than there are dancers. When the music stops, all must sit down as quickly as possible. The person who cannot get a chair is no longer allowed to participate. In fact, you learn, often at a young age, to compete with others for scarce resources. You could thus call musical chairs a kind of economic-ideological choreography. As we dance and have fun, we are programmed to be selfish.'

**Where did the idea for Musical Chairs come from?**

'The idea came about during a workshop in collaboration with students from the Design Academy at MU in Eindhoven around the Japanese motto that at meals you should eat only eighty percent of what you can eat, and thus save twenty percent space in your stomach. On the island of Okinawa, the older generation is convinced that this way of eating is the reason they grow so old. And that could very well be the case, because nowhere else do so many people live to be 110 years or older. The idea for Musical Chairs, but different is to deconstruct the archaic version of the game, and to organise a dance in which we change the rules in different ways. For example, you can add one chair too many, and see how the dance develops then. From the observations about the current economic system, we want to engage in a conversation with the participants.'

**Do it yourself**

You can very easily organise and play Musical Chairs, but different yourself. Check out Instructable 2 in the appendix!



STOLEN  
DANS

Erasmus  
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S  
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RIJKER





De Relatie van Kunst en Design

HARRY

# stolenen dans



waag futur

waag futur

TSJA

Feel FREE to sit

WE HEBBEN ER GEN

DR



# Better Future Now dinners

What better time to talk to each other about the future than over a nice dinner? During the Better Future Now dinner, you will engage in a conversation about what you can do tomorrow to make your own and the city's future brighter. Expect an evening full of (new) encounters and conversations from the heart, while enjoying delicious food.

## In action

Waag organised two Better Future Now dinners in Amsterdam-Zuidoost in 2022 in collaboration with Angelo Bromet. In preparation for the Better Future Now Festival, we formed round tables with local residents, where the future could be freely discussed using conversation cards.

## Do it yourself

You can very easily organise a Better Future Now dinner yourself. Check out Instructable 3 in the appendix!









**Game  
Changers:  
interview  
series**

In 2022, Waag Futurelab developed serious games that make us reflect on the invisible rules and convictions we abide by as a society. At the same time, we questioned how these rules can be broken and what we need to ensure systemic change. That is why we started interviewing people working on innovation and change in society, people that we like to call Game Changers.

### **Break the rules, make a change**

Sometimes, you have to break rules to change the game. In the Game Changers series, we interviewed artists, musicians and do-gooders who do things differently. We asked them: what rules do they set aside, and how do they see the open, fair and inclusive future?

The people we interviewed help to bring about systemic change by contributing meaningfully within their own area of expertise. Their stories demonstrate how anyone can be a game changer – because changing the world starts with changing what's close to you.

### **There's more**

Apart from the interviews you'll find in this booklet, there are seven more Game Changers we would like you to meet. Their stories can be found through [waag.org/reframe](https://waag.org/reframe).

Here, you will also find:

- ◆ The episodes of our Planet B podcast, in which we interview changemakers on the question how they would design a new planet – their planet B.
  
- ◆ The video series we shot during all Expedition to planet B events in 2022, called 'What if we changed the rules of the game?' Focusing on the internet, the economy, product design and the environment.
  
- ◆ Photo series and reports on all Expedition to planet B events in 2022.

**Game Changer  
Hanane Abaydi:  
'We need  
to take activism  
more seriously'**



Hanane Abaydi is a corporate activist, member of the Change Management Lectorate at The Hague University of Applied Sciences and co-founder of the inclusive primary school Waldorf aan de Werf. She pleads for more understanding of activism in organisations and a more diverse worldview in education.

### **How would you introduce yourself?**

'I'm Hanane Abaydi and I work as a corporate activist. I try to change systems and organisations from within and use activism as a strategy for change. In doing so, I try to combat the negative connotation associated with activism. To me, activism is a sign of commitment that we need to take much more seriously. Organisations are mini-societies and that is why it is very healthy if activist sounds from the outside can also be heard on the inside.

If you don't hear this sound, it's a signal that there may be more going on beneath the surface than you think. Do employees feel safe to speak up? Are their voices taken seriously? Are voices that are different also being heard? Or does your team only consist of like-minded people who share the same interests and backgrounds? Activists can hold up a mirror and help you to better understand the state of your organisation.'

**'The more perspectives you add, the more carefully you can set the rules.'**

### **What, according to you, are the rules of the system we are currently living in?**

'Our rules of the game are based on a euro-centric set of values. They describe what is right or wrong, and at whose expense. The ethics have been formed through a Western lens. It is in need of multiple perspectives.

The MIT conducted a worldwide test with their Moral Machine about moral dilemmas associated with the choices that the self-driving car would make. Should the driver be protected first and foremost in the event of a crash? Does the car save an old passerby, or a schoolchild? A successful businessman or a fellow human being who is homeless? This research showed that different choices are made worldwide. I think our current rules of the game don't allow enough room for those differences. What if the choice is to not protect the driver of the car, thereby preventing other victims?

The question is from which moral compass our current systems depart, for example when it comes to education, healthcare or the economy. In any case, the current compass is one that puts pressure on, or ignores, the social security of a large part of the world's population. It differentiates along ethnic and income-related lines and primarily caters to the needs and benefits of the group least affected by crises.'

### **What's not working about the rules of the system? And why?**

'Dependence forms the basis of the rules of the game and determines the space and the opportunities you have in the game. There is an uneven playing field. Take the Zwarte Piet discussion. Just the word is wrong. *Discussion* suggests a level playing field in determining what is ethical and what is not. But you are up against an entrenched 'tradition' in which ownership has been claimed. In the conversation about it, it seems as if something is being 'taken away'. You may only remove a small piece of it with the permission of that group.'

'The people who determine the rules of the game now also determine the room for tolerance for a different voice. That is not a sustainable situation. Look at the difference in how activists are responded to by institutions. Farmers are given bottled water by the police when occupying a highway, while other activists are attacked under the same police watch. We have created a myth of equal opportunity to participate in the game. But the dominant power structures still determine the playing field. I still depend on their interpretation of the other voice. The house seeker who has been on the waiting list for twelve years is still dependent on municipal policy. And the victims of the institutional racism by the Dutch tax authorities are still dependent on the speed at which the perpetrators proceed to compensate them. That dependency determines the rules of the game.'

### **If you could change the rules of the system, what would you change?**

'Let those who are hit the hardest by policy determine the rules of the game. The group that now determines the rules, should temporarily be set aside. We then give people a chance to create a level playing field. We have to get rid of the idea that only education and experience are variables that make someone

**'If you cannot empathise with the impact of your actions on the other person, then you are unable to determine the rules.'**

suitable to determine the rules of the game. With such a narrow definition of the ability to think along, we sell ourselves short. The more perspectives you add, the more carefully you can set the rules.

If you teach students the other economic models in addition to the linear economic model, they can make more careful choices. If they nevertheless choose to stick to current economic thinking, they will at least be aware of the consequences. And with that, also of their suitability to determine the rules of the game for others. If you can't empathise with the impact of your actions on the other person, then you won't be able to determine the rules.'

### **How does your work contribute to an alternative to the system we are currently living in?**

'Too many generations have been left behind by the system. We can't wait for another generation. I feel this time pressure, and I believe that education can really make a difference. That is why I founded Waldorf aan de Werf (WADW) with a group of parents a few years ago. This is an inclusive primary school in Amsterdam-Noord, where the team and parents are working so that every child feels safe and seen. Inclusive thinking is key.

The school gets its *raison d'être* from applying different 'rules of the game'. We question the rules of over a century of Waldorf education. This educational concept was once intended for children of factory workers and is now known as a segregated form of education. The starting point of WADW is the obligation as an educational institution to provide children with a complete worldview. You can't just hand over euro-centric fragments of world history, regardless of the composition of the teacher and student population. Certainly not in a world in which so much one-sided information is already coming at children.

Only when you have taught all the different systems will you fulfill your duty as a teacher. It really doesn't have to lead to more work. If you talk about explorers for six weeks, then you can also tell the perspective of the peoples who see the ship coming and talk about enslaving people. But also about the rich history of African countries. You could do so much more in education if you'd bring the wealth of different cultures with you.'

**'If you can talk about explorers for six weeks, you can also tell the perspective of the peoples who see the ship coming and talk about enslaving people.'**

**Game Changers  
Harmen Zijp  
and Sandra Sijbrandij:  
Open Knowledge for  
and by the City**



Harmen Zijp is an artist and independent researcher. Sandra Sijbrandij is project leader in the field of sustainability at the municipality of Amersfoort. Harmen and Sandra have been working together for seven years, including in their citizen measurement network *Meet je Stad*. With their work they experiment with open knowledge building for governments and residents.

### **How would you introduce yourselves?**

Harmen: 'It depends on who I'd introduce myself to. For some people, it is interesting to know that I studied chemistry. For others it is useful to know that I am active as an artist. Or that I have some experience in working with communities and open technology. It's all true. All those aspects have something to do with who I am and what I do, but I don't have just one word for it.'

Sandra: 'I worked abroad for ten years as a development worker. And now I have been working for the municipality of Amersfoort for more than fifteen years as project leader in the sustainability field. This actually kind of makes me a development worker in the Netherlands. I consciously take the position where I do not have the knowledge or make the choices. I make sure that I facilitate others and put them in the position where they can do so. In addition, I always work with networks. I also practice Zen meditation. This helps me not to want to direct and plan, but to trust what arises from the network.'

### **What, according to you, are the rules of the system we are currently living in?**

Harmen: 'I think the limit of endless growth is coming into perspective and we are now learning the hard way that we really have to do things differently. In the current system you are either a consumer or an employee. This does not include taking the initiative yourself. Knowledge comes from a university, from an expert, and confidence in that knowledge is based on a certificate. But if you want to start a neighborhood playground as a parent, you just want to have a conversation with someone.'

At *Meet je Stad* we are very openly experimenting with knowledge development between different parties in society: government, institutes, residents. Companies are not quite there

yet. They thrive on revenue models of exclusivity and secrecy. It can be done differently, you can also earn well with service or open technology.

In the beginning of *Meet je Stad* I did have discussions with commercial parties. I had a few conditions for them: all hardware and software will be open, all data will be open. And with our community, we unscrew your measuring device on the spot to see where they can be hacked, so that we can make improvements. Well, that was the end of practice right away. The commercial party was absolutely against that.'

### **What's not working about the rules of the system? And why?**

Sandra: 'Compared to twenty years ago, we see there is more distrust. The people and the government have less trust in each other. It is important to start the conversation. There should be a dialogue: what are we measuring, and what does this mean for our city? Then you can come together a little closer. If a resident is measuring their environment, they are involved in it.'

When I look at the way in which a municipality works, they mainly focus on outcome: what did it yield, what did it cost, what are the results? And that is of course important, but for *Meet je Stad* I certainly had no answer at all in the beginning. When you are still searching, and not yet measurable and not billable, that is quite difficult in a municipal system.

Fortunately, there are plenty of civil servants who want to work in a different way. I have always been supported to continue, but still I did it with a slight cramp in my stomach. Because I am part of an environment concerned with annual budgets, KPIs, et cetera, and I myself have to get my work right with inspiration, the stories, the personal. For *Meet je Stad* I couldn't tell you what kind of research we were going to do, who was going to do it, or what it would yield. But I really believed in the power of the city and its inhabitants. Let's just go and see what knowledge is out there and let it all happen. And they gave me that space.'

Harmen: 'Since the start of *Meet je Stad* we have been overwhelmed by researchers who come to study us. They all extract knowledge from the group of residents. Scientific articles are then written and they disappear behind a paywall. That's not

exactly how it should be. What we are trying to do is to see where we can find each other in the production of knowledge through collaborations with governments, residents and institutes. What we do with *Meet je Stad* is setting up exercises: small experiments that always teach us something. But broadly speaking, this applies to all public-private-civil partnerships. We try to enter into new forms of collaboration with each other.'

### **How do you commit yourself to an alternative to the current system in your work?**

Harmen: '*Meet je Stad* once started with what we called the co-operative university of Amersfoort. The idea behind it was not to start a traditional university, but to focus on self-employed and amateur researchers. We wanted to set up a place for research and knowledge sharing that is derived from the old cooperative: if you can set up a lab together, you can use it together. So, what would that look like?

For example, we started developing open-source measuring stations for air quality with a group of interested parties. How to do that is now openly available. Beginners can assemble a measuring station in three hours without any prior knowledge. The process went very slowly and we have been very open: we are going to do something new, and we do not yet know how to do it. It is very important to mention that it will also sometimes get uncomfortable and difficult. And also to give out the invitation: let's take the initiative and think about how we can organise ourselves. It has continued to evolve. New people came into the group, with new knowledge. This has led up to environmental measurements being taken at six hundred locations in four cities and two countries.'

Sandra: 'As a municipality, we kept ourselves very much to the side during the first six months of *Meet je Stad*, to provide room for self-organisation. Now Harmen and I meet every three weeks. We do not go through KPIs, but rather have a conversation without an agenda. We are experimenting with new, community-driven forms of collaboration. All around me I see colleagues finding it very interesting on the one hand, but it's also still a little bit scary to them. I often get questions about it, such as: how do you build a network and be part of it? What is your role as a government in the network? Can we ourselves also

**'Measurements are now being made at six hundred locations in four cities and two countries.'**

sharpen our models with citizen science data? The value is really being appreciated.'

Harmen: 'We are not yet where we would like to be in terms of data analysis. Because it is terribly difficult to make sense out of the measurements. But we have come a long way when it comes to open data and open hardware. How can citizen science data be used in policy? That's really a new question. It is important that we remain clear about residents' motives for participating. They also have ideas of their own and don't just want to collect data. People who do this in their free time are not driven by salary or status, but mainly by their own energy, their curiosity, and the social community they feel at home with. All very different factors that you as an organiser need to understand. And as a government you shouldn't say: I want to measure this, and this will be the plan of action.'

Sandra: 'The projects I work on always turn out differently than I had imagined, and at the same time: apparently that's how it should be. They are not so much projects as they are networks in which I work. What is most important to me is: do I see the energy being put into what we agreed on? Maybe something completely different will happen than I expected, but that's okay. Or people try very hard but then it just isn't possible. As a government you have to take into account that things can sometimes not run that smoothly for a while. Look at it in a humane way - that's really, really important. And sometimes things just don't work.'

**Suppose you were allowed to redefine the rules for cooperation between governments and social initiatives. What would you change?**

Harmen: 'At *Meet je Stad*, we are now moving towards a subscription for local governments, so that the financial basis we need to keep the measurement network running and to build up knowledge is secured. In addition, we make our own income from, for example, the sale of open hardware. We apply for project grants to expand and innovate the technology. This allows us to offer the continuity that is so important and we can look very specifically at further development. We then plan our steps. This way, we have a strong basis but are flexible at the same time.'

Sandra: 'I would like to see the government offer more scope for not working on a project basis. That part of the budget could be used to create free room of movement, in which networks of residents, governments, science and business can jointly look for the best solutions for complex issues. Without predetermined results and detailed goals. Because otherwise you will never come to innovation. I have not yet come across a single subsidy provider who dares to do that: 'here is some money, take us along in your search! What are you running into? What works? Where do you see more opportunities?' Being able to search freely: I really believe in that.

I get this space within the municipality of Amersfoort. In my experience, activities arise from this free space that you can often scale up after about five years and put in a more formal form. And more importantly, a network of involved parties is created, within which opportunities are jointly sought, openly and in confidence, and everyone's own qualities are used.

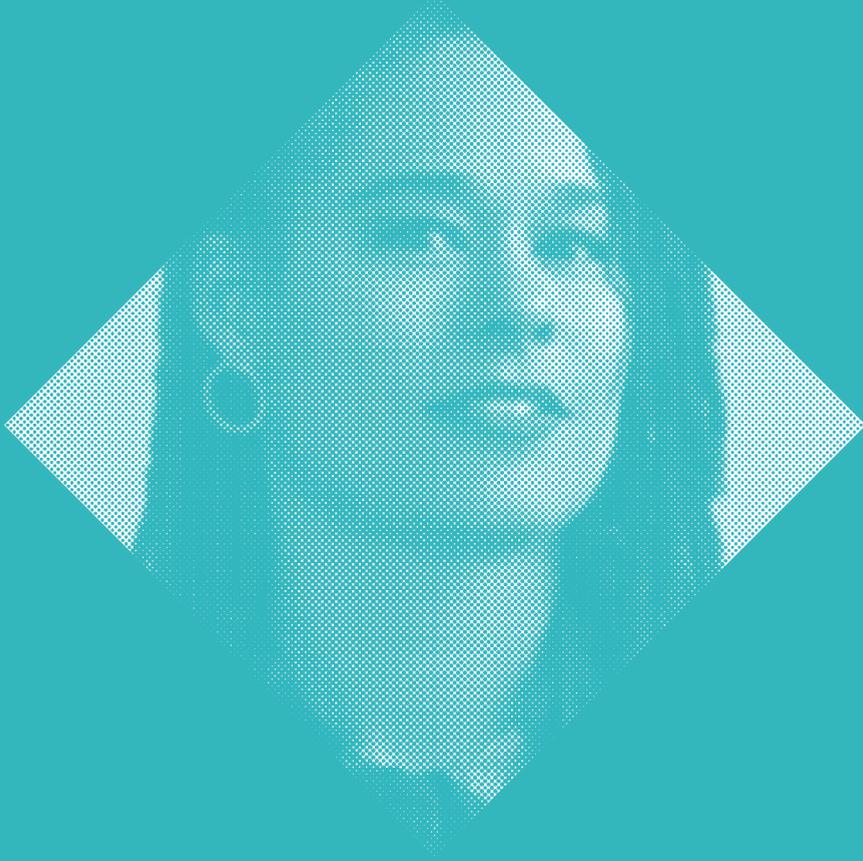
*Meet je Stad* also has three rules that you can fall back on when you want to change something:

1. Do you really need to change something, or does your discomfort come from habit or tradition?
2. If it really has to change: can you do it yourself? Then take the initiative.
3. Can't do it yourself? Then do it together.

That first question is so important: is my problem really a problem? From there you look at: where does it come from that it's a problem? The first question is very personal: why do I think this is a problem? If you don't ask this, you won't feel the need to get to work on it yourself.'

Harmen: 'A very small example of this is making coffee during our *Meet je Stad* meetings. If someone asks for coffee, I show them how the coffee machine works, so they can prepare the coffee themselves the next time. Those are the rules of the game, here in a very small example, but you can apply that to anything. Where can you take the initiative yourself, and where do you need help?'

**Game Changer  
Afaina de Jong:  
Misplaced Self-evidence  
in Architecture**



Afaina de Jong is an architect and head of the master Contextual Design at the Design Academy in Eindhoven. With her work, De Jong aims to encourage social and spatial change and to offer space for divergence.

**How would you introduce yourself?**

'I am an architect. In 2005 I started my studio AFARAI. I work on the crossings of architecture, research and art. As an architect I do build things, but not big neighborhoods or houses. More so, I am interested in the public space, the spaces we share with each other – be it squares, museums or public pavilions. I consider my studio to be a feminist practice. Through my work I try to encourage social and spatial change and to make room for divergence. I design exhibitions and public spaces and objects such as a pavilion or spatial installation. I am also head of the master Contextual Design at the Design Academy in Eindhoven.'

**What, according to you, are the rules of the system we are currently living in?**

'Money is an important driver in construction. As a result, the cheapest contractor and the cheapest materials are often chosen. In this way, there is always some sort of extraction or exploitation at the root of the process, be it exploitation of nature or of man.

The rules of the system in which architecture functions are outdated. You can see that not only in the way we build, but also in who we build for. Very often we design for standardised 'people'. What does 'man' actually look like? From the point of view central to the era of enlightenment, design was based on Leonardo da Vinci's 'Vitruvius man'. Le Corbusier, one of the founders of modernist architecture, came up with the 'Modular man'. Both models should represent a kind of 'universal human being'. In fact, it's just a six-foot man with specific body proportions. He probably likes women and is supposedly 'rational' in his thinking. Design is tailored for a very specific type. Most of the world's population does not fit within these descriptions.'

'The aesthetics of neoliberalism look like the ideals from the era of enlightenment, but on steroids.'

'Architecture shapes the determined values of that moment. So it can say a lot about the system we live in. Neoliberal architecture and the underlying values are clearly visible in the Zuidas. The buildings are tall, austere and often made of glass,

because it exudes a certain ‘transparency’. There’s irony in the fact that the organisations working in these glass towers are not transparent at all. A building must radiate certain values, but no thought has been given to, for example, how all of this glass increases heat inside of the building. The aesthetics of neoliberalism look like the ideals from the era of enlightenment, but on steroids.’

**What’s not working about the rules of the system? And why?**

‘In architecture, as far as I’m concerned, we should be questioning the system much more. It is believed that when you design from the general point of view, your design is fun for everyone. There is still too much self-evidence in design, which offers no comfort at all for the majority of the population.’

**If you could change the rules of the system, what would you change?**

‘The current scarcity in building materials is actually a good thing. We are forced to rethink how we handle material. It should be a rule that companies must operate in a circular way. More value should also be given to the composition of the teams that work on spatial issues. Why don’t we give priority to agencies and project developers that employ a wide variety of people? If everyone has the same background, it is very easy to reach consensus because the way you think is more or less the same. If you work with a diverse group, however, it will take a lot more time to come to a consensus. You’ll suddenly get different types of input that you have to take into account. Then, for example, you’ll find out that your exhibition is not wheelchair accessible because the paintings are hanging much too high. Or that your pavilion is not safe for women because it contains dark corners. We need to spend a lot more time on these kinds of conversations.’

**How do you commit yourself to an alternative to the current system in your work?**

‘I designed a pavilion for the Grafikens Hus museum in Sweden. With this pavilion I tried to question the status quo of design. Instead of designing for the ‘universal human being’, I chose a very specific target group. I decided to only do workshops with women of all ages and backgrounds. I asked them

what criteria a pavilion or public space should meet for them. It was quite an eye opener that one of the first things women need is security. For women, a public place should be uncluttered, without dark corners. My starting point was a very specific group, but that doesn't mean the end result is not accessible or interesting for the rest of the people.

I also try to work as circularly as possible. The first time I designed an exhibition, I hadn't thought at all about the fact that the design just disappears into a container after a few months. Now I try to design my exhibitions in a way that they can be taken apart and reused. Yet we remain stuck in this system of profit. Why not just find a builder and a museum that support your circular plans? Fortunately, there are more and more builders who also organise their business operations in a circular way. And that's how we learn from each other.'

'I am very happy with my role as head of the Contextual Design master at the Dutch Design Academy in Eindhoven. It allows me to shape the direction of education. I think it's important to convey certain values to my students, for example that design is not just about rationality and functionality. I want to teach my students how to critically question the status quo through their designs.

I am interested in what a whole different architecture might look like. That doesn't mean that my style is the answer right away. It is my interpretation of a different way of designing with a set of references that transcend modernism. I hope there will be many more interpretations. Imagination is the power of design.'

**'I want to teach my students how they can critically question the status quo through their designs.'**



**Report:  
How art  
can change  
the rules  
of society**

The Future Talks series was part of the Expedition to planet B. These talks served as a forum for artists, creatives and socially engaged professionals, to exchange their knowledge and expertise on shaping the future. Waag Futurelab believes that artists are at the frontiers of creating an open, fair and sustainable future for all.

Waag asked commons artist Jeanne van Heeswijk, filmmaker Renzo Martens, art collective CATPC, photographer Ahmet Polat, Kleine Komodie director Jörgen Tjon A Fong and Noordbrabants Museum director Jacqueline Grandjean to jointly reflect on how art can actively change the rules of the game in society. This debate took place at Pakhuis de Zwijger on 14 June 2022.



As an artist, how can you actively change the system you are part of? In Future Talks, Waag, together with Tabo Goudswaard (Social Creative Council), talked to artists and administrators from the art world. All six have something in common: their art, work and research are both critical of and intertwined with society. Not only do they show us what the ground rules of the social system are, but also what we can change and improve.

So how do you change the system through art? There is no clear-cut answer after an evening of discussion at Future Talks, but at least we can make a start:

# 1

## Break through the glass walls between different disciplines

Ahmet Polat is a photographer, documentary maker, researcher, storyteller and actor - although until now he has only played himself on stage. So, to sum it up, he is an artist. Because, as he says during Future Talks, an artist does not just want to stick to making exhibitions within their field: they aim to enter the public domain, to work with their peers and with people who are facing completely different problems than you are.

Polat portrayed the Afro-Turkish community in Turkey and recently exhibited these photos on Mercatorplein in Amsterdam. But he mainly works on multi-disciplinary projects - which in turn are difficult to fund: in The Netherlands, one applies for subsidies with funds that are directly aimed at documentary, visual art, performing arts. Polat says that if you try to cross these borders in your work, you will soon be told that what you want is not possible. Still, he states, this means that you have to do it.

A recent project shows how Polat crosses the boundaries of disciplines as an artist: the Amsterdam municipality asked him to shoot a campaign to prevent excessive drug use by a group of young people in Amsterdam-Zuid. Polat expanded this into a two-year project. He advised officials on how to take their work further within the municipality. He himself got to work with the young people around whom the campaign revolves. Together, they opened an exhibition in the autumn of 2022, featuring work the youngsters themselves have made on the subject of the campaign.

Not making a work about a system, but rather making yourself a part of that system: that is what Polat shows in the previous example. Here, the artist is not an outsider, but someone who puts himself in the middle of the system and hacks it.

Renzo Martens released his film *White Cube* in 2020. As an artist he exhibited his work in museums funded by Unilever and wondered: how does Unilever pay for all this? His search led him to a palm oil plantation in Congo, previously owned by Unilever. The residents working there never saw any money when Unilever sold the plantation. The land still belongs to multinationals and the palm oil is still used for Unilever products.

# 2

## Hack the system

Martens, in collaboration with architecture firm OMA, put a 'white cube' on the plantation: a white space where art can be made and exhibited. To boost the local economy, plantation workers modelled sculptures there, which were cast in chocolate and displayed in a museum in New York. With the money they earn, the workers buy back their land from the multinationals that bought it from Unilever.

In the film, we also see something else happening: during a big conference set up on the plantation, a professor from Kinshasa visits the plantation. He explains that Unilever's plantations were built using forced labour. Resistance by the residents led to military reprisals, upon which the residents in 1931 murdered the colonial Belgian agent who came to recruit the forced labourers. To capture the evil spirit of this agent, a statue was made. Around 1972, the statue was taken to the West, where it is now owned by an American museum in Virginia.

In a series of short documentaries made after White Cube, Ced'art Tamasala and Mathieu Kasiama are being followed as they try to get Balot's sculpture back to the white cube on their plantation. They have formed the CATPC (Congolese Plantation Workers Art League) for this purpose. Tamasala and Kasiama travel to Kinshasa, Europe and the United States, but repeatedly just miss Balot's sculpture: it is often on loan. Consequently, their request to lend the sculpture to their plantation exhibition space in Congo goes unanswered.

During Future Talks, Ced'art Tamasala, Mathieu Kasiama and Renzo Martens are on call from Art Basel. The three of them are there to announce that they have created 306 NFTs of a digital drawing of Balot, downloaded from the website of the museum where the sculpture is located. The artists will sell these NFTs and use the money to buy back land from Unilever and restore ecology and community there. NFTs require a lot of server space and therefore energy. The CATPC plants trees on the depleted land to offset its carbon emissions and uses so-called proof-of-stake NFTs, which are less polluting than proof-of-work NFTs.

Martens and the CATPC hack the system: by taking the same position as powerful white multinationals and museums from the West do, they show that equality only works one way. Martens'

**By taking the same position as powerful white multinationals and museums from the West, they show that equality only works one way.**

work has been widely criticised: anyone who has seen *White Cube* also sees the downside of the project and the huge impact it makes on the lives of plantation workers - without their asking for it.

Nevertheless, the project gives off a strong and clear signal: if a museum is funded by Unilever, which makes its money by exploiting people and land in a country like Congo, then it's only logical that the plantation workers who do this work should also be allowed to exhibit in that museum themselves. They earn this money to buy back their own land. If an American museum does not want to return or loan a sculpture taken from the plantation to that same plantation, then why not make NFTs of the digital image and sell it to restore and buy back your land?

Art has the potential to stay on top of important societal matters, as Renzo Martens, Mathieu Kasiama and Ced'art Tamasala show.

# 3

## Stay on top, or even ahead of things

And art can stay on top of the times: good art shows the state of society and holds up a mirror.

But art can also be ahead of the times. This is seen in the work of Ahmet Polat and Jeanne van Heeswijk, among others. Ahmet Polat founded his *De Man is Lam* initiative with Lucas De Man in 2015, focusing on the position of men in the 21st century. Soon after came #MeToo, making their research painfully relevant.

Thirteen years ago, Van Heeswijk founded the Afrikaanderwijk Cooperative: a small, self-functioning economic system in Rotterdam-Zuid, which now provides paid work to 60 people and is committed to the neighbourhood, by deciding together how they see things. Meanwhile, municipal officials and many others are eager to know how the cooperative works and what lessons can be applied to the rest of the city or even the country - the cooperative therefore set up a knowledge bank. There, at a charge, people can access the theory and practice built up by the collective over the past 13 years.

'The main problem with a museum is that you will expect art to be in there.' Jacqueline Grandjean, director of the

# 4

## Art is not just work of art

Noordbrabants Museum, is speaking. Previously, she has worked with both Renzo Martens and Jeanne van Heeswijk and, as director of the Oude Kerk in Amsterdam, she was known for her audacious programming. She argues that the meaning of art should not just be determined by curators and museum historians: you have to discuss it with each other. At the Oude Kerk, Grandjean invited Van Heeswijk to work in the neighbourhood, where she created 'Drop in... It's OK' as a place to talk to the community. Van Heeswijk has five years to do so.

Art is not a work of art: how would you hang Jeanne van Heeswijk's work in a museum? The artist talks about the commons - shared resources managed by a community without a profit motive - and how we apply them especially to tangible things, like energy and data. Instead, Van Heeswijk commons uncertainties. She goes to places that are under constant pressure and trains groups there to shape and bring together their different realities.

**Not projects, but living entities: they are, in fact, life.**

In Rotterdam, for instance, the municipality uses images of deprivation in 'less nice' neighbourhoods and, based on that, makes invisible assumptions and policies. Neighbourhood residents do not recognise themselves in the image and only feel the effects of policy when it is literally on their doorstep, for instance when their house is to be demolished. 'People no longer feel how their daily environment is governed and portrayed,' Van Heeswijk argues. 'How do you visualise the ways in which an area is mapped and give people input on their future?

Dreamscaping, is what Van Heeswijk calls her method: reflecting together on how things could be, and then working towards them. Everyone wants their neighbourhood to provide the right to live, the right to health, the right to congregate. Partly because of their long duration, Van Heeswijk's 'projects' should not be called projects. They are living entities, she says: they are, in fact, life.

Jörgen Tjon A Fong is the director of De Kleine Komedie. About this position, he says: 'I have criticised gatekeepers for a long time, and now that I am one of them, I want to take my responsibility.' According to Tjon a Fong, after covid, a new

# 5

## The responsible gatekeeper

**‘Solidarity is a prerequisite for systemic change.’**

generation of directors has come into power in the cultural sector. Instead of keeping the doors of their empires closed as much as possible, they are instead opening the doors and connecting people without losing their identity. The covid era led to solidarity, which is a prerequisite for systemic change, Tjon A Fong argues. With an initiative like *Kapsalon Theater*, he showed that administrators in the art world also play an important role in using art for the good of society.

‘We are in a sort of pre-time,’ Jacqueline Grandjean (director Noordbrabants Museum) says. ‘The future is foggy and invisible, so we’ll escape into the past. We are becoming increasingly conservative, rolling out laws that have been fought over for years. Artists should help!’

Artists can imagine the future and make it conceivable. We should therefore stop to see artists as outsiders, Grandjean says: they just as much deserve a seat at the table in Shell’s board room. As artists, to be able to change the system is also a matter of ‘time’. And we are now in the era of artists. What do we call this era? Van Heeswijk has a suggestion: the Ultradependent, a term by artist and cultural worker Clara Balaguer. This is the time when we see and learn that everything is interconnected and connected.

‘If you’d ask me if I think the system is bankrupt: yes,’ Van Heeswijk adds a little later. ‘If you’d ask me if it is very important to imagine our future together now, then also yes.’ Get up every day and stick to keep doing it, otherwise we are lost: it is with this attitude that she’ll proceed.

# 6

## Time

**We should stop seeing artists as outsiders: they just as much deserve a seat at the table in Shell’s boardroom.**



**Waag  
Futurelab  
and  
Gameplay**

Waag has employed games and playfulness as a core methodology in participatory projects throughout its history. A few examples are:



### Escape the Smart City

Tomo Kihara's *Escape the Smart City* was a physically-embodied and experiential critique of pervasive surveillance that turned the city centre of Amsterdam into an escape room.

<https://waag.org/sites/waag/files/2018-10/Escape-the-Smart-City.pdf>

### Digital Identity 'Ganzenbord'

The Digital Identity Goose Board challenged players to reflect upon how their digital identity is shared by apps, software, social media, and other technology.

<https://waag.org/nl/article/digitale-identiteit-ganzenbord-gepubliceerd/>



### Black Box Bellagio

*The Black Box Bellagio* won't take your money, but goes after your freedom, integrity, and private data instead. Disclaimer: the house always seems to win. This concept was developed by Roos Groothuizen and performed at various Waag events.

<https://roos.gr/The-Black-Box-Bellagio>  
<https://waag.org/en/event/black-box-bellagio/>

### Gaming for the commons

Serious gaming is a great way to learn more about the concept of the commons. Waag created a collaborative knowledge base, containing examples of commons-oriented games and customisations of traditional games that help explore and 'live' the concept of commons.

<https://chamberofcommons.waag.org/gaming-for-the-commons/>



# Thank you

Want to see more from this expedition to planet B?

Go to <https://waag.org/en/reframe/> or scan the QR code below:



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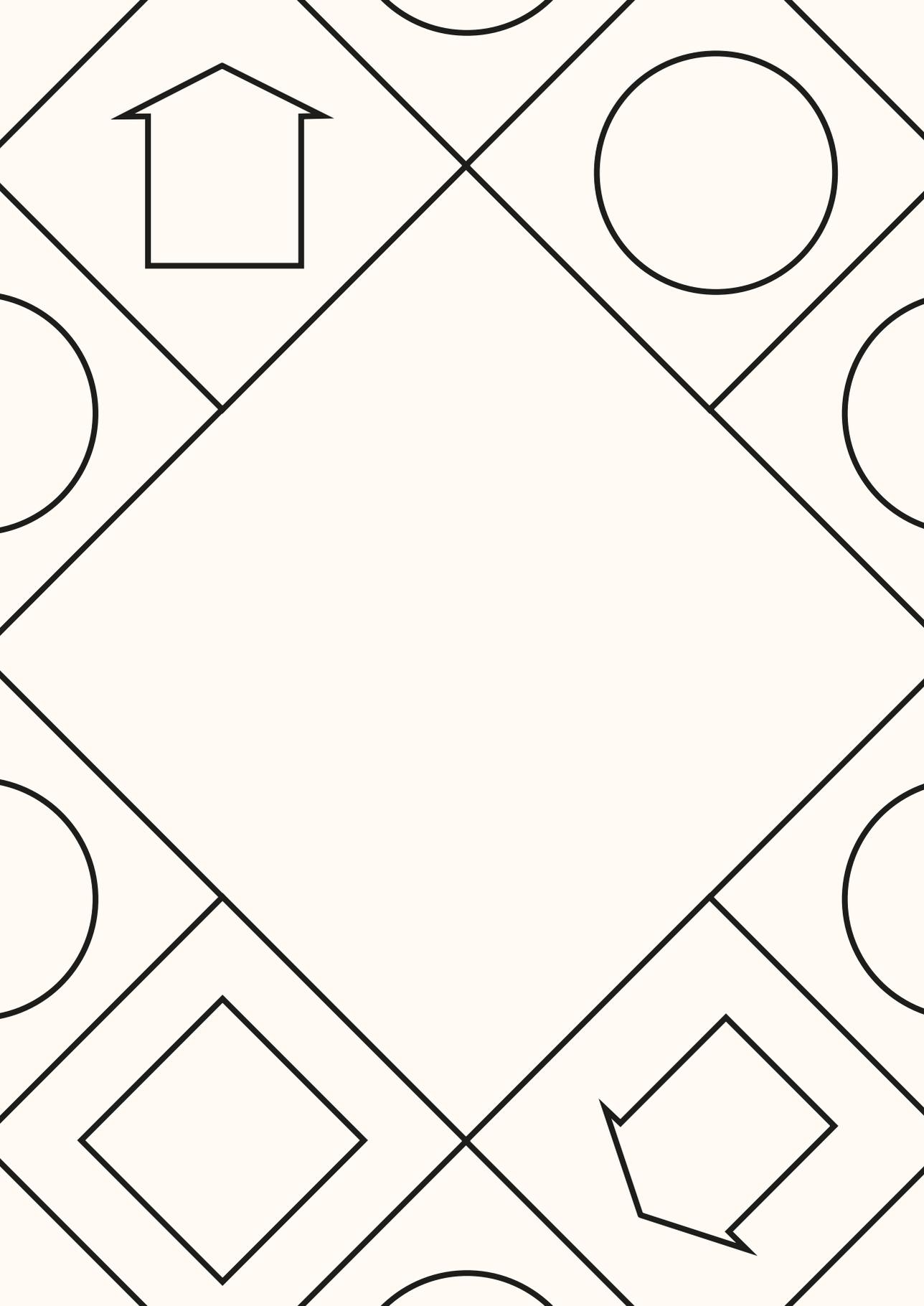
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# Appendix



# Instructable 1: Monopoly, but different

## Introduction

Monopoly is one of the best-selling board games in the world. By playing it, you'll learn a lot about the way our world is organised. Unfortunately, there can only be one winner - will you be the one who is soon to own everything?

But wait a minute... Who actually made the rules? And does everybody have an equal chance of winning?

'Monopoly, but different'; was created in collaboration between cultural platform FLOOR of the Hogeschool van Amsterdam and Waag Futurelab. Want to know more about the origins of Monopoly? Watch The forgotten history of Monopoly on YouTube.

Please note: This instructable was based on the Dutch version of the Monopoly game.

## Preparation

We use the rules of the traditional Monopoly game as a starting point.

The rules that are different are explained below:

You can play 'Monopoly, but different' with 4 or 5 people. With 5 people, one person plays exclusively as a banker. With 4 or fewer players, one person can both play and take on the role of banker.

## What do you need?

- An original Monopoly game
- Chance cards, but different (see below)
- Timer





## **How to play**

Today we will play the game slightly different. Every 10 minutes, something in the rules of the game will change: by using the Chance cards, but different, you will add or remove a rule each time. Do these interventions make the game more fair or not? Sometimes you are in control, but that is not always the case.

The banker keeps an eye on time through the use of a timer and brings the Chance cards, but different into play. Make sure to allow players enough time to discuss when the intervention calls for it. The banker may also determine to deploy the interventions more often to make the game more dynamic.

1. Distribute the starting profiles (see the card Starting profiles). You can draw lots and let your fellow players draw one. Everyone then collects their corresponding materials.
2. Lay out the Chance cards, but different.
3. Place your pawn on one of your own streets.
4. The Rubber Duck may start throwing. On the first throw, the banker starts the timer.
5. Now it's up to you: do you play the game or would you rather make your own rules? Use the Chance cards, but different to bend the game to your (idealistic, capitalistic?) will.
6. The game ends after 60 minutes. Together, you will decide who has won.

Let the games begin!

# Starting profiles

## Profile 1 — The Unlucky

Pawn: Rubber Duck  
Money: 100 (no notes of 100 and 500)  
Street: Dorpsstraat, Ons Dorp and Steenstraat, Arnhem  
House: 2 (place them on one of your own streets)  
Hotel: 0

## Profile 2 — The Average John

Pawn: Penguin  
Money: 1500 (standard amount)  
Street: A-Kerkhof, Groningen and Zeilweg, Haarlem  
House: 3  
Hotel: 0

## Profile 3 — Old Money

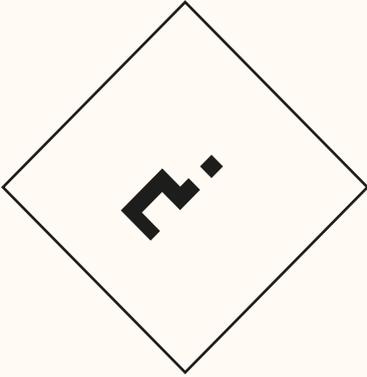
Pawn: Hat  
Money: 1500 (standard amount)  
Street: Biltstraat, Utrecht and Leidsestraat, Amsterdam  
House: 2 (place them in Utrecht)  
Hotel: 1 (place them in Amsterdam)

## Profile 4 — New Money

Pawn: T-Rex  
Money: 2900  
Street: Coolensingel, Rotterdam and Spui, DH  
House: 4 (place them on one of your own streets)  
Hotel: 0

## Chance cards, but different

Cut out the cards and shuffle the deck. Every 10 minutes, the banker brings one of the cards into play. Put the green card on top so that it comes first. The rest may be brought into play in any order.



Compensation Surcharge scandal:  
the Rubber Duck is compensated  
with 500 euros.

Chair dance in the cabinet! A new  
political wind is blowing. A new tax rate  
of 50 per cent is being introduced with  
immediate effect. Decide together  
whether this rate applies to cash  
(money) or bricks (houses) and remit to  
the bank.

The green card: The nitrogen problem  
turns out to be fake news: building is  
allowed immediately! So you don't have  
to wait until you own a complete city and  
you may build a house right away if you  
own the street.

A grant of 1000 euros is distributed.  
Who gets which part, or does one person  
get everything?  
Agree to the solution together.

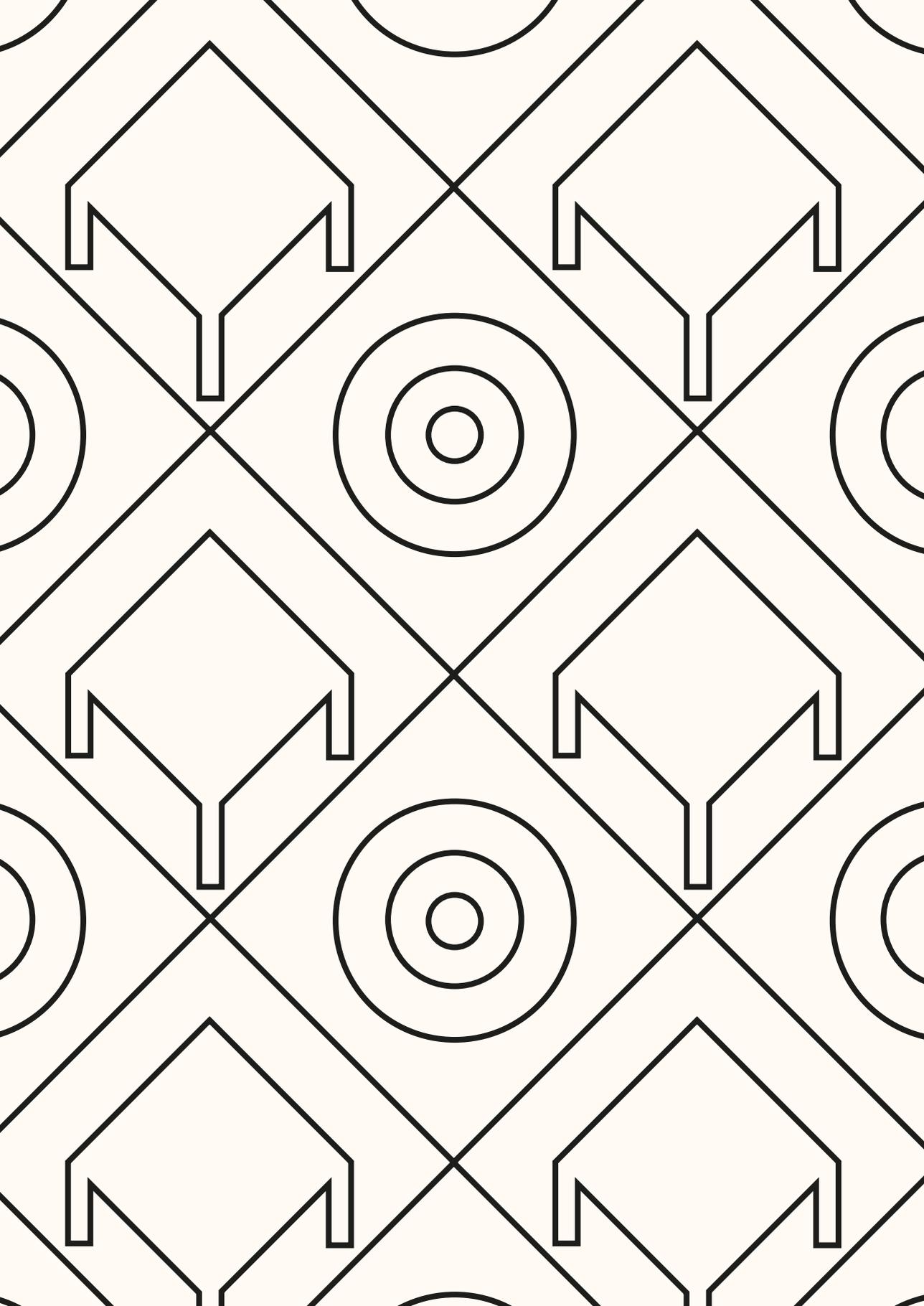
Devise your own game rule.  
Only condition: the majority must be  
in favour.

The State imposes an additional one-off  
tax of 2000 euros (total amount).  
How do you divide the burden? Make the  
decision together.

The Netherlands is experiencing severe consequences of climate change. You have to choose:

1. The Hague is swallowed by the sea
2. Earthquakes have destroyed the city of Groningen

Consequence: houses cannot be built (anymore) and houses/hotels that have already been built are lost and disappear from the game.



# Instructable 2: Musical Chairs, but different

Do you remember musical chairs from the old days? As a child, you quickly learned that there is not enough room for everyone during the dance. This causes competitiveness, stress, and also a sense of victory when you manage to get a spot. But what if we reverse the rules of the game? In this instructable, you will find the steps to organise your own version of musical chairs, but in a slightly different way. Most importantly, this game of musical chairs always has one chair too many. The question is: how do we deal with that?

With artist Arne Hendriks, we explore our reactions to perceived scarcity and the drive to want to 'win' at the expense of others. Share your outcomes with Waag Futurelab.

## **Why?**

With this version of musical chairs, you'll have a way to discuss our drive for more, or our fear of not having a place, through a few simple actions. Doing this exercise will help you figure out your own assumptions rather than just talking about them.

The most important thing about this version of musical chairs is the conversation you can have afterwards. Take up space, and discover where you and your fellow dancers see comparisons with real life.

## **What do you need?**

- A group of people willing to dance
- The number of chairs for the amount of people you expect, plus at least one chair extra
- A device to play music





**Step 1: Find the chairs**

How many chairs can you get together? Look carefully around you; you probably won't be more than fifty metres away from a fair number of chairs, stumps, stools or canteen benches.

**Step 2: Circle around**

Put the chairs in a circle or oval (with the seat facing outwards), this way you can turn the chairs inside after the dance and interact with each other. Make sure you have a chair for each dancer, and one extra. Can we deal with abundance, rather than the scarcity we are always led to believe?

**Step 3: Music**

What would you like to dance to? Rhythm, tempo and lyrics are important to think about. Do you want to dance quietly, or go wild, and is there a song that describes musical chairs for you? In need of some musical inspiration? Check out Waag Futurelab's Spotify list 'Stoelendans'.

**Step 4: Dance**

Get a group together that is willing to dance along. Don't tell too much about the idea yet, but let them experience musical chairs first. Indicate the direction in which you will dance around the chairs and start the music. You decide when to stop the song, and have the dancers sit down. What happens? Is there an urge to find a chair? Is there pushing or pulling? Or do people quietly find their seats?

One song is generally enough. Stop the music several times, even if it feels weird. Don't remove chairs. Maybe participants will change the rules themselves, that's good too.

**Step 5: Talk**

Turn the chairs inwards and start the conversation. What did you experience? This can be the first question to your fellow dancers. During musical chairs, there are bound to be situations, funny moments, disruptions, frustration or joy. Each person handles musical chairs just differently when there is one chair too many.

What did you experience? Was it relaxing or was it stressful? From your observations at the dance, you can ask questions to specific fellow dancers.

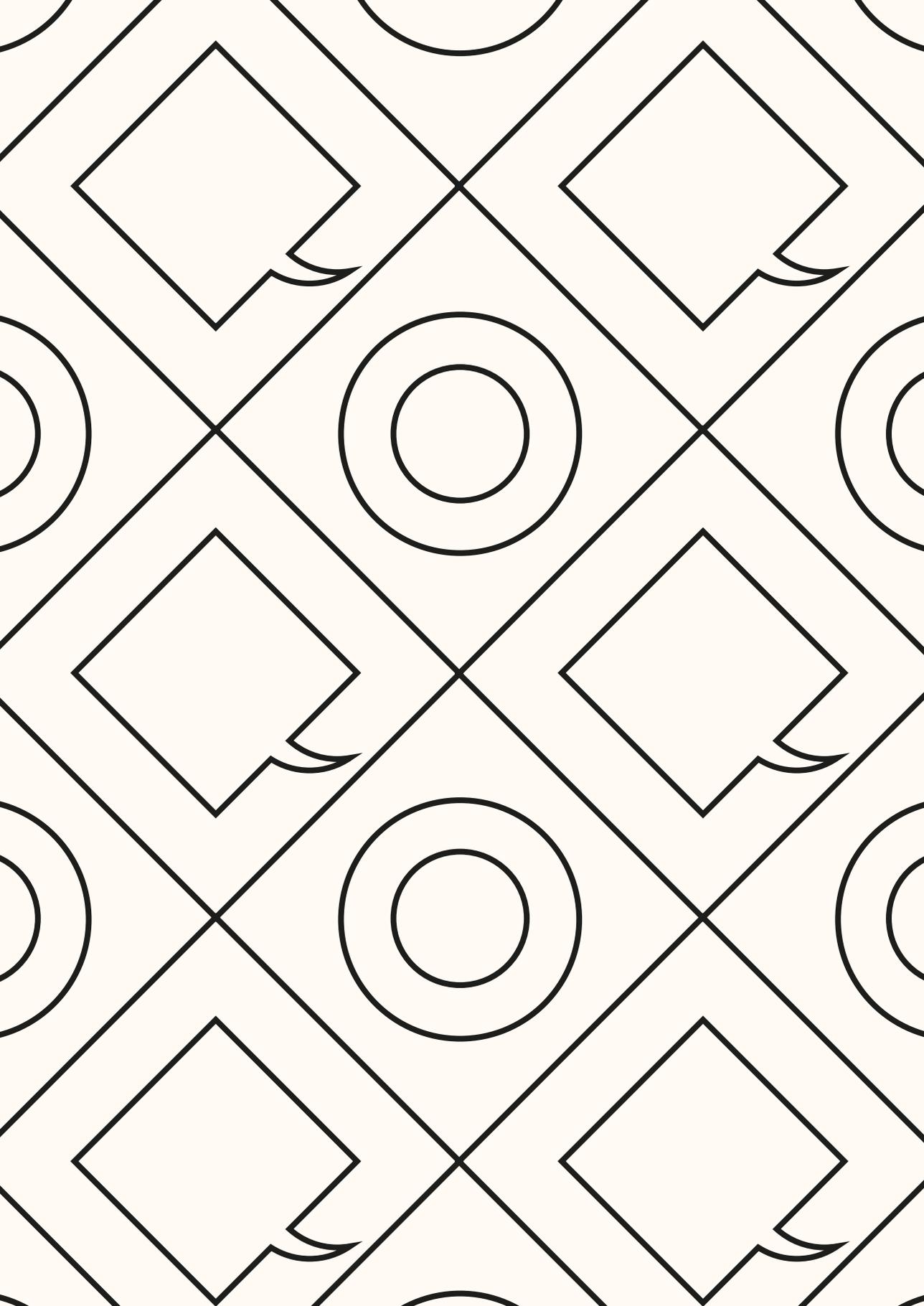
Why was someone still so competitive?

Or what was someone thinking who was happily dancing on? Follow through on your questions, and try to find the parallels with the real world. Is musical chairs about gaining a place in the housing market or in the economy, about competitive spirit, about a political voice? There are no wrong answers. By relating your own emotions from the dance to themes that are normally more intangible, you may come to new insights.

Take time to really discuss with the audience how to see musical chairs as a serious simulation of our own innate reactions.

### **Step 6: What do you stand for?**

What would the audience like to change? What will they take away? Perhaps this version of musical chairs has given them more insight into their daily lives. Write down the most important quotes and lessons from the dance, and send them to [thieu@waag.org](mailto:thieu@waag.org). They will then be added to the growing archive of insights about musical chairs, and learning how to deal with less as a society.



# Instructable 3:

## Better Future Now dinners

What better time to talk to each other about the future than over a nice dinner? During a Better Future Now dinner, you will engage in a conversation about what you can do tomorrow to make your own future and that of the city brighter. Expect an evening full of (new) encounters and conversations from the heart, while enjoying delicious food.

### How to prepare

To organise a Better Future Now dinner, you need a few things:

- A group of people from diverse backgrounds (in work, gender, interests, cultural background, etc.). It will be the most fun when people don't know each other very well, this way unexpected conversations could arise. But of course, you can also organise the evening with friends or colleagues.
- Better Future Now placemats and cards with questions to ask each other during dinner.
- Tasty food and drinks.

### How to run it

Once you have a nice group of people together and the food is arranged, there is really not much that can go wrong! Make sure there are not too many people at one table. About five participants per table works best. There are three types of question cards. Start with a few 'warm-ups', then you can use the different cards interchangeably. You may want to designate one person to take the question cards and make sure everyone has space to share their stories.





### **The three types of cards:**

1. Warm-ups, questions to start with:

‘What would you like to learn more about?’

‘Who else would you like to meet and why?’

2. ‘What if I’ questions are about what you can do to make your own future brighter:

‘What or who could help you achieve your dream?’

‘What would you like to tell your younger self

(12 years old, on the way to secondary school)?’

3. ‘What if we’ questions are about what you can do to change the future of your city or the Netherlands:

‘What is needed so that everyone has equal opportunities?’

‘How do you see The Netherlands in 20 years?’

Note: the questions above are examples. Feel free to add additional or alternative questions to the question cards.

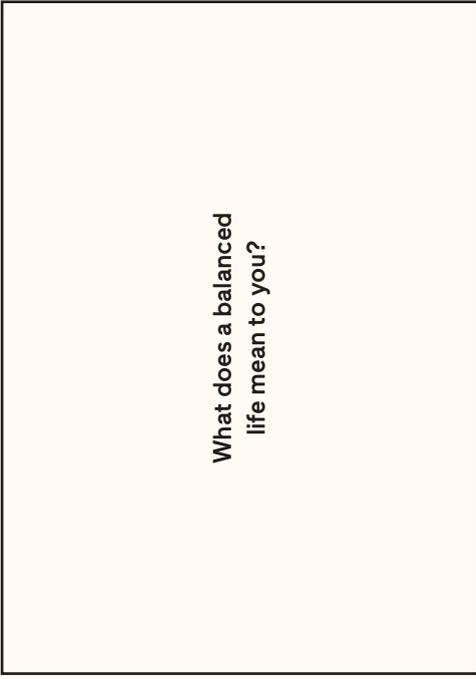
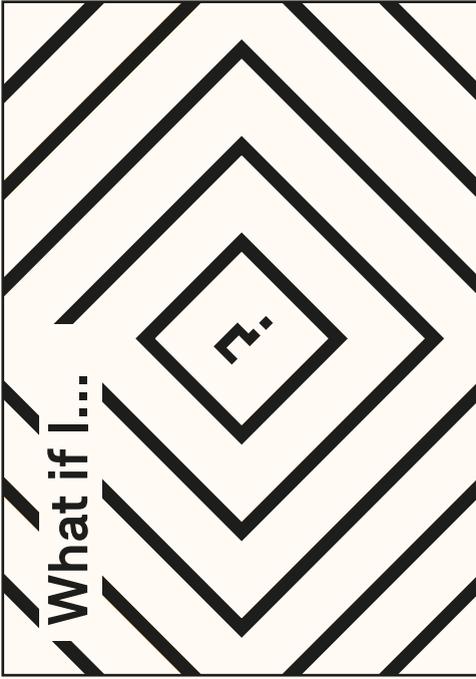
At the end of the evening, reflect on the conversations by writing on the back of the placemat. On it is the question: ‘What cue could you give to your environment to have more influence on your future?’



What is the nicest thing that happened to you this week?

Who or what is important to you?  
Why?

What films or music has impressed you? Why?



Is local economy in the place you live different from other places in town or in your country? Why is this?



What would you change if you were the president?  
Pick one thing only.

What would be needed to make sure everyone has equal chances in life?

**What cue could you give to your environment  
to have more influence on your own future?**