

THE WICKED NOTES # 3

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From Problem to Opportunity: Crowdsourcing the Wise Elders

EXPEDITION: AGEING SOCIETY

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Kennisland and Hivos are organising the '[Wicked Series](#)'. Over the course of three evenings we have learned about new innovation strategies that are being developed in response to 'wicked problems'. This report wraps up our findings and makes you part of our last exploration that set out to learn more about how new approaches are wired. To find out we worked on another societal challenge: 'the ageing society'. What innovative approaches exist that respond to the wisdom and potential of the elderly? What can we learn from these initiatives? And how can we strengthen them? At Wicked 3 we recast the problem as an opportunity by harnessing the untapped potential of The Wise Elders and reframing it as a value producing segment of society, our grey gold. It was an exciting evening with an entertaining talk show, a refreshing [Metropolis movie](#) from Burkina Faso and energetic Wicked Teams.



Photographer: Aukje Dekker



RECAP: WICKED 1 AND 2

Chris Sigaloff opened the evening in a buzzing, full Open-Coop in Amsterdam. In two previous episodes of Wicked we have learned about tough issues: social challenges that cannot simply be solved. At [Wicked 1](#) we became hopelessly trapped in analysing a big problem: the economic crisis in Greece. From this evening we experienced that it is not helpful to get completely entangled in fully understanding and attempting to solve a wicked problem. But one practical strategy seemed to emerge: transparency. What happens when tough issues become more transparent? We yielded very interesting insights during Wicked 2 about strategies that attempt to move away from wickedness. Unfortunately, the strategy proved itself to be a wicked problem too. Transparency not only leads to more openness, it also leads to other new, opaque dynamics. You can read more on Wicked 2 in the [Wicked Notes!](#)

Besides describing the outcomes in the Wicked Notes we have visualised results in a Wicked Cloud: a word cloud that we have derived from all

the written words on the posters during the group sessions in the series, and the wicked notes that summarised the group work. The Wicked Cloud hints at our lessons learnt, but also provides clues for working with wicked problems in your own work practice.

1. Analysis (Think)
2. Strategy (Design)
3. Approach (Act)



WICKED 3

So what can you do, when you cannot understand or solve a wicked problem in its entirety? Instead of thinking in troubles, or talking in possible solutions, we look at what people are already doing in their daily practices on a small scale. How do they work? And how can they strengthen their approach?

Our thematic focus of the evening is the ageing society. In the media our rapidly ageing population is often portrayed as a costly challenge in the light of the imminent retirement of the Baby Boomer generation. By 2050 35 percent of the Dutch will have reached the respectable retirement age of 65. The onset of sudden strains and intense pressures draw increased attention to shortcomings of our existing welfare system. To make good on the social contract between generations, we must therefore rethink how and why we deliver welfare services to the elderly, as well as redefine the general understanding of all life stages. By recasting ageing as an opportunity rather than as a problem we change the very understanding of 'elderly'. This is one important step towards a deeper conversation about the future of our welfare systems, its underlying values and the populations they support.

ELDERS ACROSS BORDERS

To broaden our mental horizons on this topic we first look at initiatives taken across our own borders. For example the [Granny Cloud](#), where elderly teach children in India through Skype. In the project [The Amazings](#) elderly from the UK offer their knowledge and skills through workshops and courses on a crowdfunding platform. And what happens in Burkina Faso with the

elderly? Watch the [Metropolis movie](#) here.

ELDERS IN THE NETHERLANDS

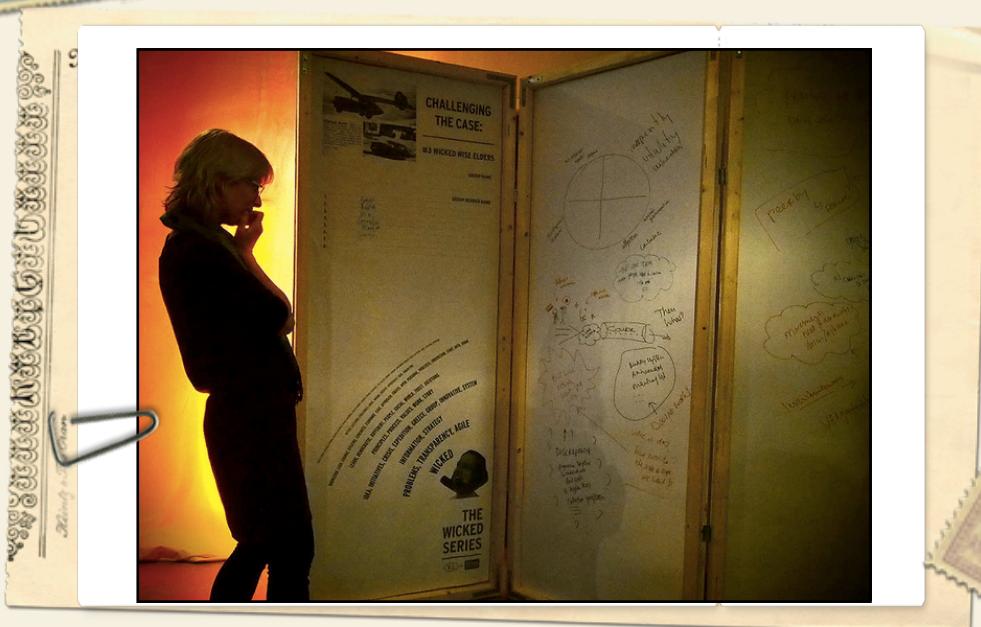
Which initiatives are created in Dutch societies that anticipate on connecting the social and economic capital that resides within the current and upcoming elders? To find out we invited four inspiring pioneers who each in their own way engage in new ways with an ageing society. In a talk show setting they each told us what they are doing. Sageetha Hoeba of [Volunteers Centre Utrecht](#) is the leader of the project '[Life Books](#)'. The concept of Life Books is simple and powerful: a volunteer works with an older person to document his or her life in a personalised book. The project brings volunteers in touch with older people in their city to make new connections over old memories.

[Pluspunt Rotterdam](#) is an expertise centre for senior participation. Marjan Tuk speaks enthusiastically about the course 'Ongekend Talent' that is designed to support seniors in mapping their talents and skills, and to use these in volunteering activities. The method can be downloaded [here](#).

The third pioneer is Mary van Vucht. She takes us to the initiative '[City Village South](#)' in Amsterdam: an alternative system that offers customised and low-cost reliable services in the neighbourhood. Based on a membership scheme, they ensure that older people can stay in their own home in an active, healthy and safe way. Mary provided us with a tip in advance: "If you want to do something, then do not look at how others do it, but just go and sail your own race!".



Mary: "If you want to do something, then do not look at others. Just go and sail your own race!"



The fourth and final pioneer Caro van Dijk presented her initiative **Design Age**. How do new designs help to visualise and shape a new type of welfare state? She shows how design can work to influence public opinion: by having people to look at ageing in a positive way, it becomes a lot more attractive to design fun, convenient and innovative products and services.

SMALL SOLUTIONS, VALUABLE INSIGHTS

After the introductions of the pioneers the Wicked teams started to work with the initiatives to find out what makes good approaches, and how can you make them more contagious? After an hour of sweating, drawing, talking and digging with the change makers each team came with its own insights on the planning, implementation and reinforcement of successful change approaches.

From Pluspunt Rotterdam we learn that a change approach begins with one **(1) solid foundation**: a mission and vision that is rooted in the needs of daily practices of the elders. Without

such a rooted framework a good idea cannot even spawn. But a strong, solid initiative cannot grow without **(2) new connections**, as we learn from City Village South. This initiative gets its energy from the new contacts that occur nearby, between young and old and between different cultural communities. Once this foundation is well put together, as in the project 'Life Books', it is easy to get an idea to roll over to **(3) creative spin-offs**. So many new ideas were delivered in one hour: an old tales festival, a day of wisdom, history lessons, and special editions of the living books on old arts and crafts. But how do you grab the attention of a wider audience about your projects? That is where a **(4) smart design** comes around the corner, tells the Design-Age Group. A good design is nice and attractive, but also challenges underlying assumptions and behaviours and ways we look at problems. For example, a campaign like "Getting Old is Your Best Option!" may constitute a cultural manifesto against the trend that we need to look forever young.

How to strengthen an approach:

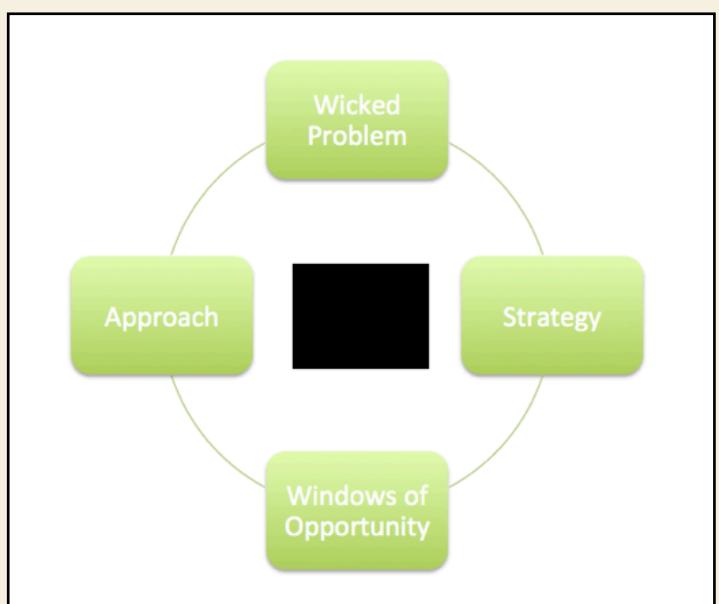
1. Solid Foundation
2. New Connections
3. Creative Spins Off
4. Smart Design

HORIZONTAL SOLIDARITY

Naturally the question arises: what can we do with all these small initiatives? Do they offer real alternatives to a dysfunctional health care system? No. Not by themselves. But the approaches give us ideas on how to work with such big problems in a positive, innovative way. The belief is that plenty of new sounds from our society force broader changes in the underlying values of a system, such as the welfare state. Albert-Jan Kruijter, director of the [Institute for Public Values](#) and initiator of the [Social Hospital](#) led the fifth wicked table on strategies that strengthen innovative initiatives on a national level. He gives his own vision on the aging problem. Albert-Jan: "The Baby Boomers have truly transformed our view of society. In the sixties they were the ones who came loose from traditional care systems like religion, families and the neighbourhood. The individual flourished like never before and retirement care became an issue taken care of by the state. And now we are facing a big problem. It is time that those who caused the problem, themselves take responsibility to solve it. I plead for more horizontal solidarity: people must begin again with taking joint responsibilities and form collectives to settle problems in a cheap, efficient way. Instead of the current standard where the younger generation is the sole responsible for the maintenance of older people through an out-dated institute like the welfare state. Especially also because it is not going to solve the current issues of our time: loneliness and a feeling of irrelevance to contribute to society. Mary of City Village South backs up Kruijter: "That's exactly what we do! I feel challenged! I believe that with our initiative we contribute to a new perception of how things could be. And as we begin, there will be others who follow."

WICKED THEORY

After three times Wicked little hunches of understanding emerge from analyzing, strategizing and approaching wickedness. From an attempt to tackle and analyze a wicked problem, and failing miserably at it, new strategies (stuff you think you can do) and approaches (stuff you actually do) arise. Together they may create new (intellectual) views, or new (physical) spaces. These are what we have started to call: windows of opportunities, or experimental learning spaces. They are actual or mental spaces to experiment with new initiatives that bring forth approaches and strategies that address systemic failures, from which we can derive new perspectives on old paradigms and their underlying values. Sometimes they are born out of pure necessity in very poor, dire, politically restrained situations in developing countries. But they also emerge here, in the Netherlands as reactions to systems that do not work. One of those experimental learning spaces has been the Wicked Series itself.



In the middle of it all remains the black box: which dynamics make a dysfunctional system really tip? We do not know. We have learned that in the black box persistent power structures, vested interests, knowledge gaps, financial markets, technology, skills, values, behaviors, rules and regulations all work together. But how they exactly work together to make shifts remains a top secret, puzzling mystery.

It might be a daunting idea to think that wicked problems cannot be solved. And if they do finally submerge in the history of time, other grand challenges and wicked problems will emerge. You might then wonder: so what the \$#%&^ can I, me, myself do then? Well. In collective nodes of action, windows of opportunity do arise from which actions, small or big, follow. It is a matter of making the outcomes of those windows of opportunity, those experimental learning spaces more accessible and visible to a wider audience. In this way it becomes easier to learn from new approaches and strategies, and kick start transformation processes. Windows of opportunity create movement and leverage, to challenge the status quo and develop alternative ways of living.

WICKED: THE END?

The Wicked Series is over, but together we have constructed the basis for new insights, relationships and partnerships around tough, social challenges. Hivos and Kennisland continue in a [new project](#) where we work together with partners worldwide continue to work and learn in experimental learning settings on this theme. Stay tuned, stay Wicked!

View photos of Wicked 3 [here](#).

