Open Up

RESEARCH

REPORT

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PROJECT AIM

In light of the pandemic caused by Covid-19, much of the connections we have in the physical world has been swiftly transferred to the digital sphere. This sudden shift and expectation to adapt to digital ways has forced us to reckon with its benefits and consequences.

Together with Digital Society School, Delfshaven Digital, De Middellander Het Wijkbedrijf and Stichting CAATS, project Open Up aim is to create a digital social net to connect residents in Middelland together. It is an innovative approach to community co-creation and strengthening camaraderie and sustainability in a community.

The project Open Up is aligned with the following Sustainable Development Goals set by the United Nations:

- Goal 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure,
- Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities
- Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities
- Goal 17: Partnership for the Goals

We hope to ensure that any progress made are enduring, palpable, and genuinely improve the quality of life of the residents.

DESIGN VALUE

To build community resilience
and inclusivity using digital tools.

WHY?

The concept of community resilience is treated as a way to progress towards the objective of sustainable communities (Wright, 2016). And inclusion allows people with different identities to feel valued, leveraged, and welcomed within a given setting in the workplace, or neighbourhood (Keam, 2020). Thus, achievement of a resilient and inclusive community is creating a "community for all".

Ensuring community resilience and inclusivity can:

- Encourage community empowerment and autonomy
- Increase diversity and value all marginalized groups
- Enhance social learning and regulatory feedback
- Strengthen civil society organization to engage with governments and other stakeholders
- Bring active citizen engagement to disaster and climate risk management

DESIGN QUESTION

How to playfully bring residents together and create social
interaction based on shared values & interests?

PROJECT TIMELINE

SPRINT 1

EMPATHIZE

Assess current situation
Understand the users
Conduct Interviews

SPRINT 2

DEFINE

Define user groups
Reframe the problem
Co-creation sessions

SPRINT 3

IDEATE

Brainstorm features
Use visual reference

SPRINT 4

PROTOTYPE

Build lo-fi prototype
Ideas into design

SPRINT 5

Open Up

TEST

Revisit design
Finalize features

CASE: MIDDELLAND

With its 12.000 inhabitants, Middelland has a high population density when compared to the rest of Rotterdam. The neighborhood situated in the west of the city of Rotterdam. The area has both faces of the big, busy city and of a nice living area. After passing the city centre and few shopping streets, the neighbourhood gradually transforms into a rustic area with beautiful streets and lanes connecting the area.

AGE DEMOGRAPHY

4>	4-11	12-17	18-26
4%	7%	5%	20%

27-39	40-54	55-64	>65
27%	19%	10%	9%
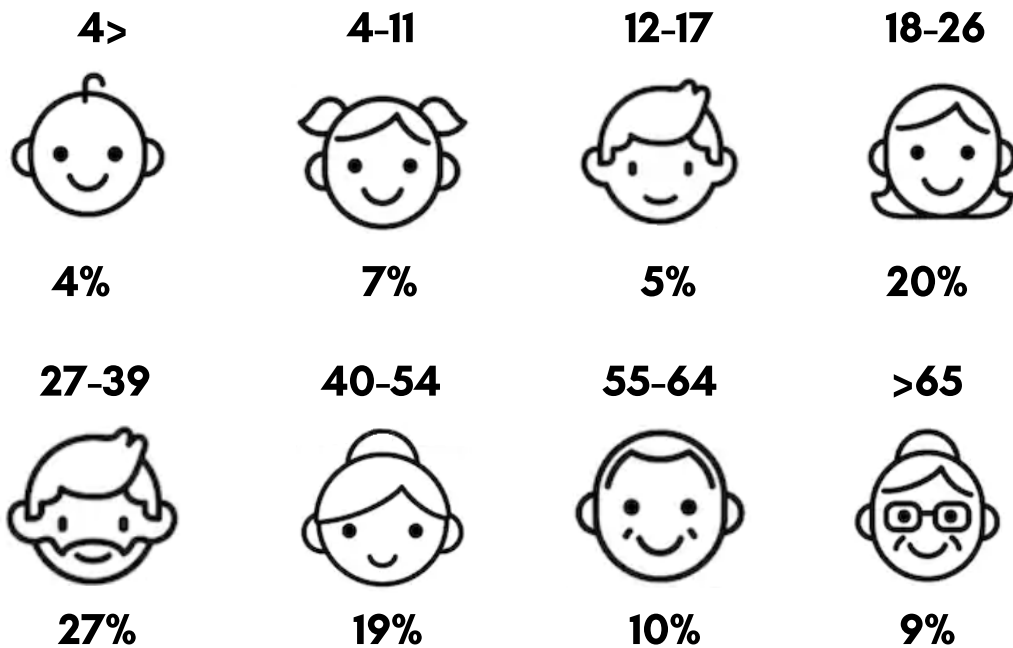
The age demography of the neighborhood indicates that Middelland consists of relatively young population.

BACKGROUND OF RESIDENTS

Dutch Natives: 43.3%
Non-Western Immigrants: 41.7%
Western Immigrants: 15.0%

The majority of residents are Dutch natives and non-Western immigrants.
Within non=Western immigrants, there are:

Antillen: 2.5%   **Marokko: 7%**   **Suriname: 8.2%**
Turkije: 8.2%   **Others: 16%**

PROPERTY TYPES

In Middelland, there are different property types ranging:
36% Social Housing, 31% Private-Rental,
31% Private-Owned and 2% Others.

LOCAL ACTIVITIES

The concept of co-creation is central in Middelland as residents, entrepreneurs and the municipality collaborate together to strengthen the social and physical characteristics of the neighbourhood. Various citizen initiatives in Middelland are created to bring people in the area closer together and to offer various activities and places to do so. There are 48 Houses in Rotterdam, and these Houses are managed and programmed by professional welfare organizations and also by residents.

In Middelland, *Huize Middelland*, is made by the Spoortuin , the Graaf Florisstraat , Care Free State , Recreation Center Oostervant , the Dierenlandje , the Wijkpaleis, Werkgroep Jongeren Middelland , Singeringen , Ettaouhid , Thuis in West , the Oranjerie and the BuurtAtelier. *Huize Middelland* works together with welfare parties Wmo Radar and Both , but also with the Neighborhood Team and the Center for Youth and Family.

ABCD APPROACH

Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach has been used as a means of social innovation towards community inclusion with more action oriented and community-based solutions. It is a bottom-up sustainable approach to a community's development that leverages the existing strengths, resources, skills of a community, and mobilizes the community (ABCD, 2016).
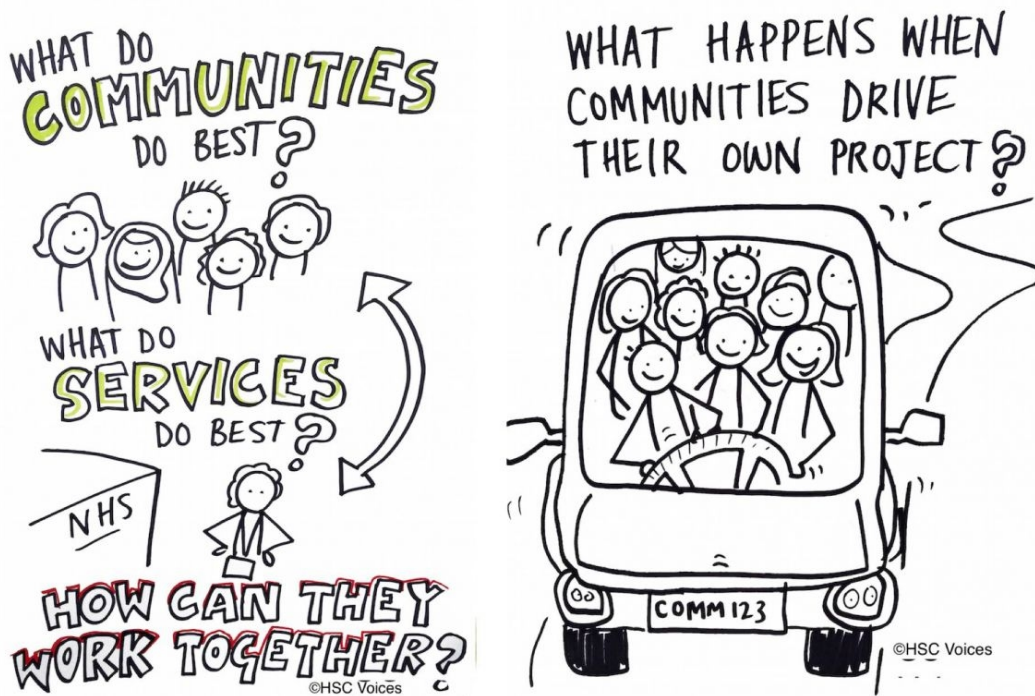
The first pillar of ABCD is **asset-based**, identifying various assets in a community, often through in person conversations with residents to create an asset map that includes local institutions: libraries, associations etc.

In addition, ABCD is **internally focused**, highlighting local definitions, creativity, and control. The residents have significant input into the nature and process of engagement activities in the neighborhood

The third piller of ABCD is **relationship-driven**, suggesting an emphasis on building relationships among residents, associations, and institutions (Gatti & Matterson, 2018). The ABCD can foster stronger links between residents and build connections with different groups.

E-ABCD

As the building of engaged citizens in the form of digital citizenship is rapidly becoming central to civic life, traditionally enacted face-to-face contexts is now appearing in digital spaces using the framework "e-ABCD," also known as electronic asset-based community development.

When instruction and service are both entirely online, it can have positive learning and community outcomes (Waldner et al., 2010). However, coordinating clear communication and effectively using technology to replicate ABCD approach in online spaces remain challenging as there needs to be a great effort to alter a sense of social disconnection and isolation in virtual space (Bourelle, 2014; Alexander, 2014).

SOCIAL CAPITAL

Social capital has been theorized as a major issue in local neighborhood participation. While a rich supply of social capital can encourage collaboration and cooperation between members of groups for their mutual benefit, the neighborhoods with low social capital are more vulnerable to disconnection, and can result in less social cohesion and community networks (Biggs, Carstensen, & Hogan, 2012).

The key ingredient that can develop social capital is trust as the level of trust can either act as enabler or barrier to successful and meaningful engagement within the local neighborhoods. Overtime, the participation of residents depends on how local initiatives build trust with one another and maintain the level of social capital that can lead to ongoing collaboration in neighborhoods.

Moreover, place attachment strengthens participation of local initiatives. Without this, the initiative faces challenges in bringing local community power and collective action. To add, the level of participation works best when it connects the direct, lived experience of a particular place with an understanding of the socio-economic forces that shape our lives. On the other hand, places with a history of failed plans and unpopular projects, local engagement is unlikely to be productive as many residents maintain their guard up when the public sector issues an invitation (Gosman & Botchwey, 2013).
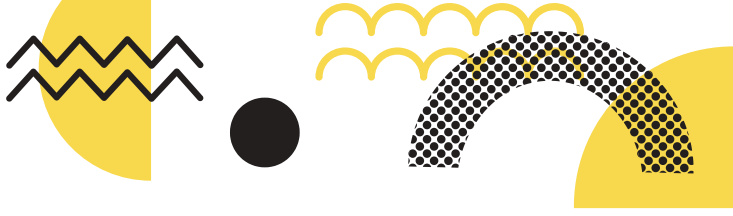
METHODS

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH: Semi-Structured Interview

The team has contacted and spoken with leaders of Middelland-based initiatives and residents to understand behaviors and pain points within the community. The team believes that the most valuable data will come from the community itself, especially as they are guided by the ABCD approach. Meaningful insights can be generated from real people telling real stories. The main goal is to design for the residents, so they play the biggest role during the research phase.

QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH: Survey:

A survey paired well with the conversational object. A QR code on the conversational object was engraved via a laser cutter, which leads users to a survey. The aim is that the object sparks a conversation between residents and provides us with information on the residents themselves. Through the method it could provide more context to the qualitative research data and get a clearer view of neighborhood issues. By identifying the problems, it can kickstart the ideation on a solution. The outcome of the survey could arrive at a "How might we" question that can act as a catalyst.
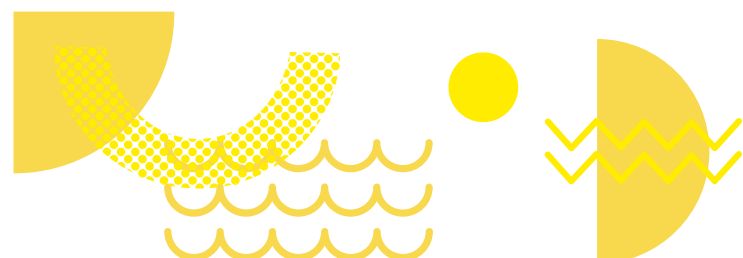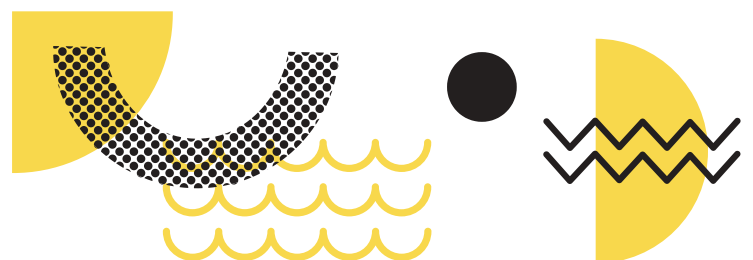
RESEARCH INSIGHTS

From the interview data and desk research, our team has gathered several insights about Middelland and have divided into four different themes:

Engagement, Facilitation, Connection, Communication

1.ENGAGEMENT

The interviews of initiators and residents of Middelland have shown the different levels of engagement in the neighborhood. Although there is active engagement among the initiators of the neighborhood, the majority of residents have lack of engagement and do not necessarily take part in the neighborhood events.

Initiators create one size fits all solution for the neighborhood.
Interviewee Cye

MWe work with paper To reach people that don't have access to the internet, we work with paper using posters and flyers. We try to engage people in different ways and this is important.
Interviewee Han

The findings have shown that people more tend to engage in activities when they can gain something out of them. The incentives vary, as there are different interests and goals, but incentives have a huge role in encouraging people to join.

Also, people gravitate to activities they can relate to. This can be language, interest, or the community. If there are activities around the neighborhood that match align with their needs and goals, then residents would be more interested to follow the activities and join.

2.FACILITATION

Another theme that emerged is facilitation. In Middelland, there are different Huizen in different parts of the streets where residents can use as meeting places. The facilitation of initiatives is crucial as it can bridge the connections between residents in the neighborhood. The initiators invest their own time and energy to facilitate activities. Thus, having efficient facilitation process with less paper work can assist initiators to reach diverse groups in the neighborhood. The community leadership is seen crucial and intermediary actors with shared visions can also provide wide social networks.

*If there is facilitation from neighbors you know
then you are more likely to come along to the event.*
Interviewee Sezer

Moreover, the residents feel less daunting and more approachable towards neighborhood activities when facilitation brings shared experience. The example of Polish Catholic church shows that if a Polish neighbor/colleague invites one of the residents to a Sunday dinner, then he or she is more likely to join the activity. To add, shared experience can increase the level of interaction among different residents.

3.CONNECTION

From the research findings, it was also crucial to establish certain level of trust before engaging in mutual reciprocity. Thus, the level of trust need to be built through time and networks of connection. With personal connections, people are more likely to join because then the entry level for a third person is fairly low, as that newcomer could already know someone within the community.

Since each neighborhood has its own unique context, the local issues can bring residents together. Having community voice can empower residents to be more engaged and take part in matters that affect their neighborhoods. With mutual connections established from shared experience and issues can further create support system and sense of belongingness within the neighborhood.

If you have a problem where you need a hammer. a vacuum cleaner, or moving furniture out of your house, then you just call your neighbor instead of a friend in the next city.
Interviewee Robert

In addition, the connection can strengthen as the residents go through continuation of mutual reciprocity that can be socially rewarding. For residents who have never met and interacted with each other, the act of reciprocity can bridge one another by doing something of value, and creating the the feeling that they are mutual and have their neighbors support at heart.

4.COMMUNICATION

The last theme from the findings is communication. Middelland has multiple decentralized information platforms that offer neighborhood news, and activities of local initiatives. Thus, there is no centralized information platform where residents and initiators can oversee the activities happening in Middelland. The multiple sources of information made people voluntarily look for the information on their own, and facilitators had to announce the activities of their initiatives multiple times on different platforms to promote the events.

You just can't keep up with the enormous amount of information, that you need to share on social media. I do Twitter. I do Facebook. I do Whatsapp and I do paper. But, still there's people who never heard about Spoortuin.
**Interviewee Philip**

Further, the findings showed that the neighborhood is very localized with its own community issues and initiatives. Thus, it was important to develop community awareness through the use of centralized platforms. Since there is only a small number of residents who are active, it is important for the neighborhood to provide local context and information to the residents who are less active to provide transparency and keep them onboard. If the initial engagement takes much time and effort for people to communicate, then less people would be willing to be part of the neighborhood activities. The information of the neighborhood should be easily attainable and the process should not be complex.
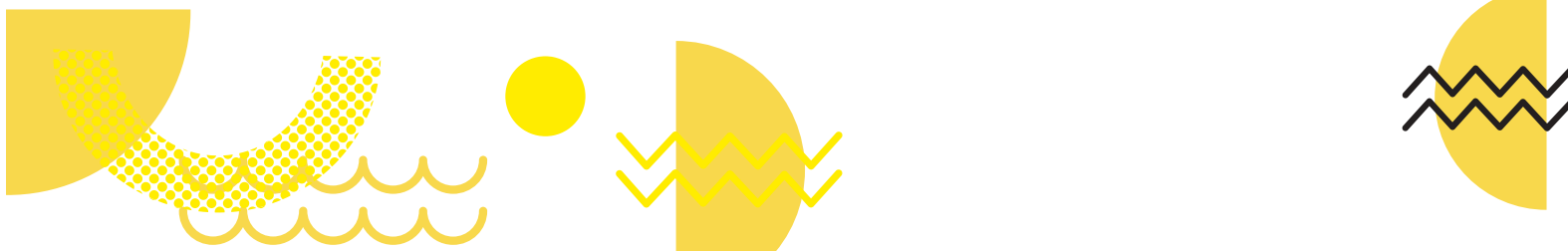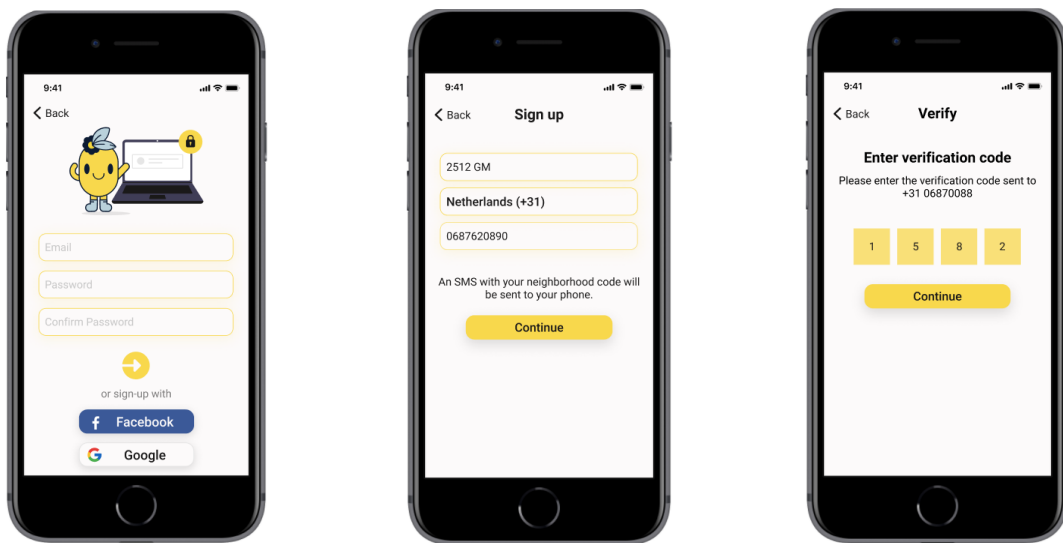
FEATURES OF OUR PROTOTYPE

AVATAR
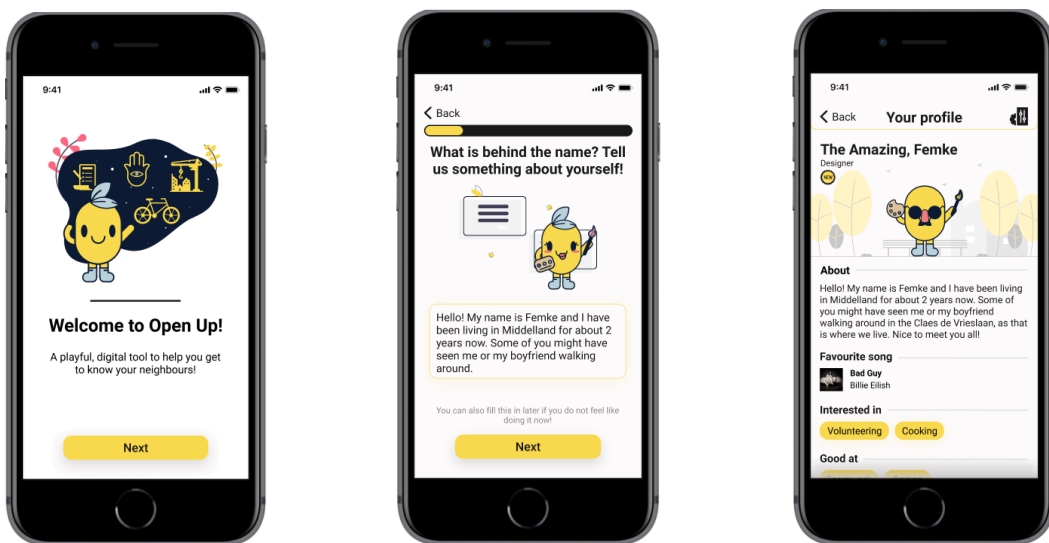
The use of avatars offers playful elements to our prototype. The avatar can be customized to the user's liking and creates an informal way of engaging residents. To add, the use of avatars creates a safe space with no discrimination that one might experience when using a real-life picture.
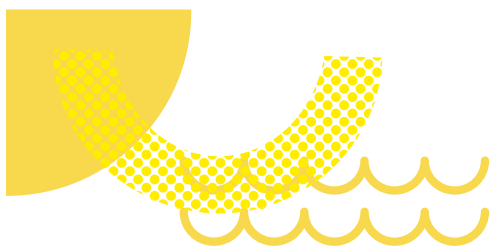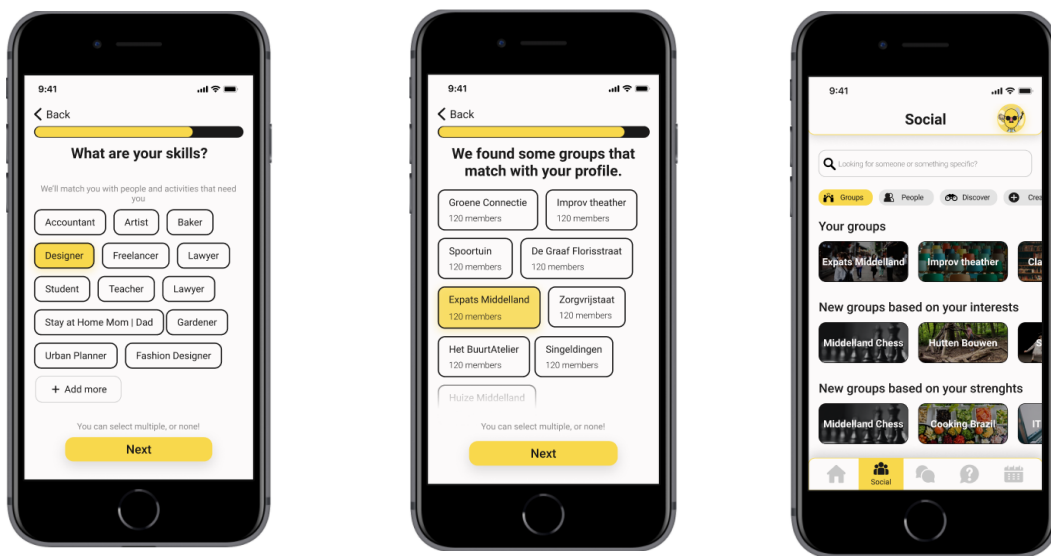
FEATURES OF OUR PROTOTYPE

VERIFICATION

In order to create a safe space, there is a verification process that requires your postal code and phone number. Each neighborhood has its own neighborhood code that provides location-specific features.
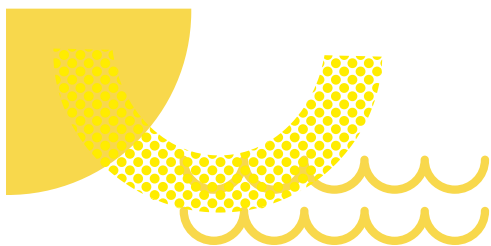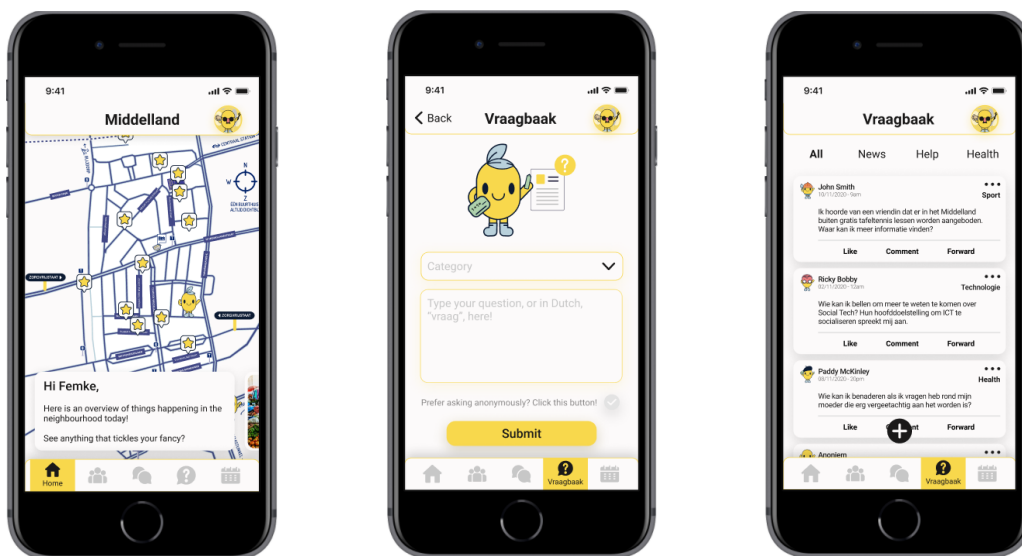
FEATURES OF OUR PROTOTYPE

GROUP FINDER

Group finder allows residents to connect with others who have the same values and interests. This fosters a sense of belongingness and provides an opportunity for residents to find a use for their skills within their neighborhood.

FEATURES OF OUR PROTOTYPE

INFORMATION SUPPORT

The map provides residents with up-to-date activities that are happening in their neighborhood. In addition, collaboration with the Vraagbak offers a place of support for residents who have questions regarding the neighborhood.

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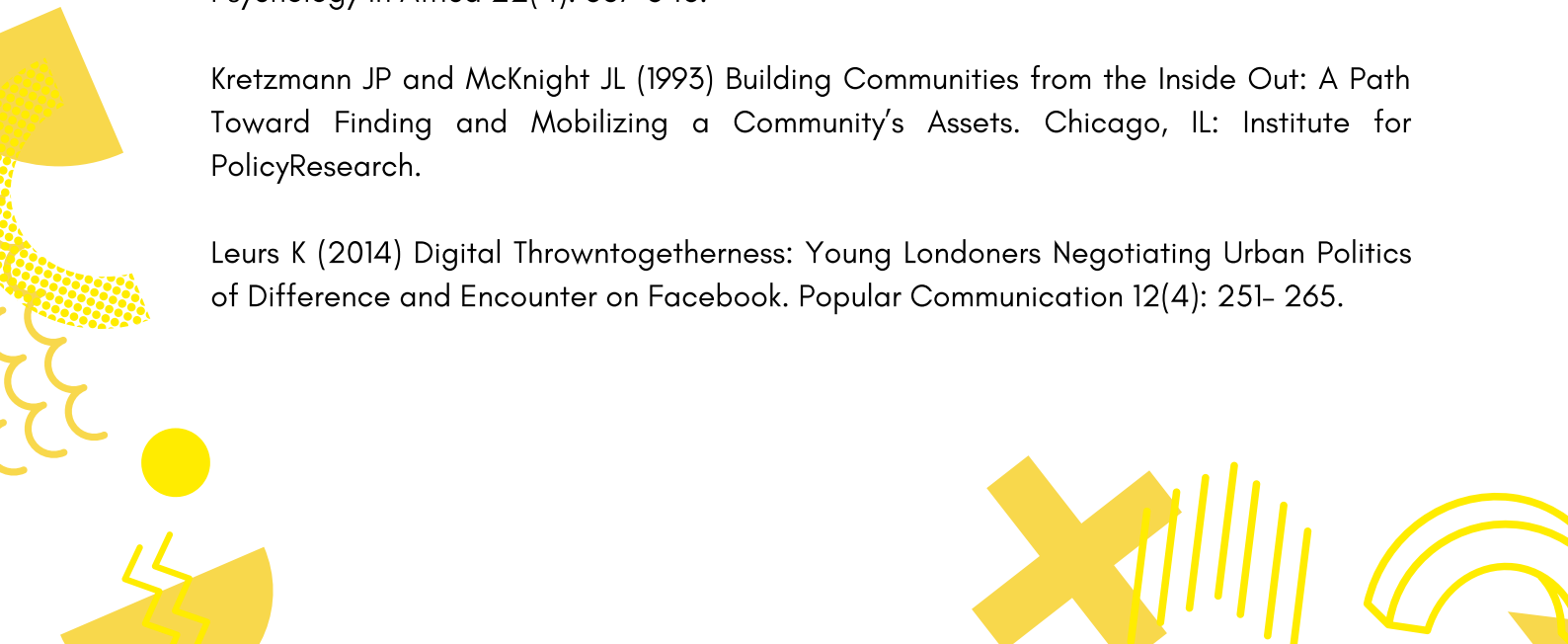
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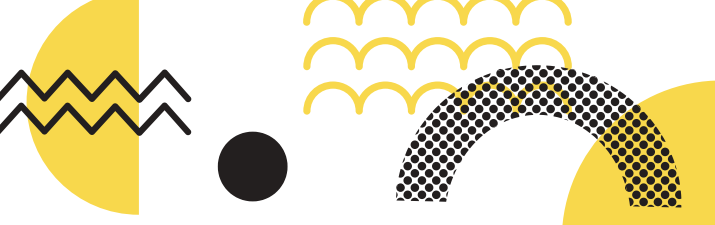
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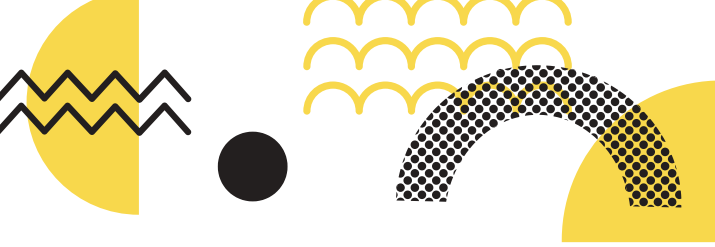
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