

## Social lab in Amsteldorp

**Published On:** 19 June 2017

**Organisation:** Kennisland

**Country:** Netherlands

**Level of government:** Local government

**Sector:** General public services

**Type:** Public Service

**Launched in:** 2014

**Overall development time:** 11 month(s)

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# Description

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The social lab in Amsteldorp generates knowledge and results for better outcomes in the domain of: citizens: how residents of Amsteldorp “can grow old better”.; the system: how organisations can more effectively organise elderly care.; methodologies: how generating knowledge and collaboration between citizens and the system can be better organised. The social lab method in Amsteldorp entailed an inclusive process in which we collected stories from and with all stakeholders involved, from the municipality to the citizens themselves, by using our Feed forward method as guideline (please refer to the attached publication 'Lab Practice for more info). Afterwards we reflected on the topics that surfaced and we tested the underlying assumptions during group sessions. The next step was to develop possible solutions to the problems identified with the people involved, so-called prototypes. Currently, we're in the process of further developing prototypes with designated partner organisations.

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## Why the innovation was developed

- Amsteldorp, a neighbourhood in Amsterdam, has a vulnerable socioeconomic and demographic composition. As a result the risk exists that people will be negatively affected by recent public sector reforms and cutbacks, such as cuts in elderly care.
  - Policymakers from the district council admitted that they had concerns about the area, especially regarding the elderly: there are many residents of a relatively advanced age, residing in social housing with low incomes.
  - The policymakers expressed that in this situation statistics may not be enough to understand what is happening in an area or, with regard to a social issue, to know how to act. In what way will people continue to live their lives in the coming years? What are the possible consequences when there will be less care provided by the state and what can be done to ensure people do not fall between the cracks of the system? This is why we went looking for stories and experiences in Amsteldorp.
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## Objectives

Develop staff capacity, Improve effectiveness, Improve service quality, Increase citizen engagement

- A social lab can provide an alternative response to social and economic dilemmas. Firstly, it is aimed towards a type of inclusive knowledge production that does justice to the variety and complexity of society.
  - It involves a process of research and policymaking in which everyone, from public administrators to citizens, adopts an open, curious attitude so that a common spirit of exploration emerges between researchers, citizens, professionals and policymakers with the objective of arriving at new perspectives for action.
  - Moreover, it is not limited to producing collective knowledge as part of a research process; it also leads to trying out new practices. Amsteldorp's social lab resulted in new connections and new initiatives that show how new interactions between citizens and the system may look like and develop by developing staff capacity, improving public service, increase citizen engagement and improve the effectiveness of services.
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## Main beneficiaries

Elderly people, Government bodies, High-risk populations, Low-income groups, People with disabilities

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## Existing similar practices

### Kudoz

In other countries' public administrations

InWithForward

InWithForward makes social services, neighborhood networks, and public policies that measurably shift outcomes with and for the most marginalized folks. By (1) collecting local ethnographic data, (2) testing & tweaking interventions, and (3) creating immersive learning experiences to spread the thinking and practice. They use a blend of theories and methods from design, social psychology, philosophy, and history. Kudoz is one of their projects that focuses on improving the lives of people with a cognitive disability.

<http://inwithforward.com/>

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# Results

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## Results not available yet

- Several prototypes are being further developed at the moment. For instance, an initiative to 'swap homes', run by housing corporations is being taken up on a big scale.
- A proposal to implement the idea of organising a tour in the neighbourhood to demonstrate what facilities are available has just been accepted by the municipality.

# Development

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## Design

Kennisland first tested the assumption that an approach as such would work in this context. That's why Kennisland took the initiative to organise a 2 week 'sprint', which took important stakeholders through the social lab process. This helped build momentum and interest at the levels of the municipality, local service providers and neighbourhood citizens, setting the stage for implementing the 9 month social lab from 2015 onwards. Design time: 1 month(s)

## Testing

- As mentioned above: a 2 week 'lab sprint' helped as a 'trial' to testcase the method & partnership. We wrapped this sprint up with a publication (see attached) that evoked an international discussion about our methods and outcomes. The latter helped us to further develop our methodology (Feed Forward Stories) and made it significant in the international social lab / social innovation arena.

Testing time: 2 month(s)

## Implementation

### Tools used:

- Most significant is the use of Slack as a tool for communication among team members.

### Resources used:

- For the lab sprint (2014): 4 Kennisland staff, 2 interns, totalling a €25.000 investment from Kennisland reserves.
- In addition, the team consisted of 10+ professionals / civil servants / citizens For the social lab (≥ 2015): 3 staff, 1 intern, total funding from 2 municipal agencies: €75.000. In addition, the team consisted of 10+ professionals / civil servants / citizens

Implementation time: 8 month(s)

## Challenges and solutions

- (all elaborated in the Lab Practice attachment, chapter 5) Lab work requires new work cultures that are not supported by the status quo: Although lab team members are supported and trained, it becomes quickly apparent that the lab's ways of working are very different from regular jobs. Not only is it different, it is often even exactly contrary to standard rules and procedures.
- The lab setting was used to experiment with new forms of ICTs, tools, methods and differences btw new and old ways were made explicit through team reflections. Handling ethical dilemmas with care: Working in a social lab means working with people, which per definition means dealing with emotions, values and conflicts. For this reason a lab gives rise to ethical tensions.
- Again, no easy solutions exist. The methodology makes serious effort out of making tensions explicit and up for discussion. That's how team members experienced tensions & dilemmas as features of the experience rather than problems

## Partnerships

### Various partners

Civil Society, Other Public Sector, Private sector

2 Municipality agencies, 3 health care service providers, countless citizens, 2 housing corporations, 3 social designers, 1 social arts curator, a local voluntary organization

# Lessons Learned

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## Lessons Learned

- In our recent experiences (in Amsteldorp, but also in the cities of Dordrecht and Nijmegen) we have encountered various struggles while innovating with both systems and societies. Struggles that have to do with operating in a political field with strong stakes and dominant power relations.
  - social lab is not a solution, nor is it an end in itself. It is not the latest recipe for success. It is a possible addition to many other initiatives for improvement, such reports for civil servants, training for professionals and pilot projects for citizens.
  - What is special about a lab is that it is a temporary space for teamwork involving researchers, civil servants, professionals and citizens. Temporary, but potentially of lasting value for everyday lives of people.
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## Conditions for success

- Facilitating a lab successfully means becoming extremely competent in managing the frictions that arise while trying to innovate within the existing conditions.
  - It means learning, trying and failing. Every social lab creates new loose ends and new dilemmas which we must resolve, and flexibility is therefore crucial.
  - Besides, the motivation and dedication of stakeholders such as citizens, municipal employees and other public institutions is a prerequisite for fostering sustainable impact.
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## Other information

Please do refer to our publication Lab Practice for a comprehensive reflection on our work in Amsteldorp:  
<https://www.kl.nl/en/publications/labpracticecreatingspacesforsocialchange/>

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