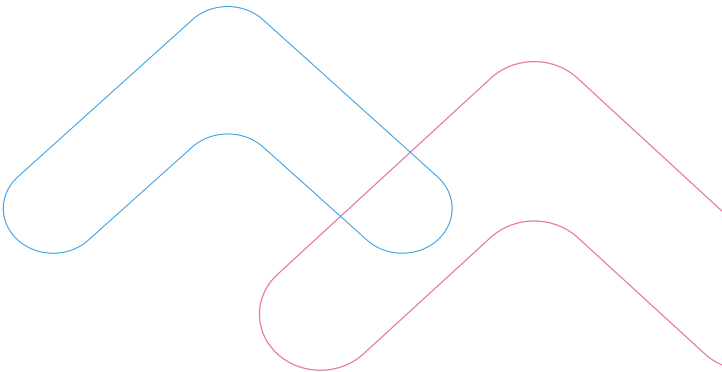


ECOD 2026 APPLICATION

# Rotterdam

February 2025

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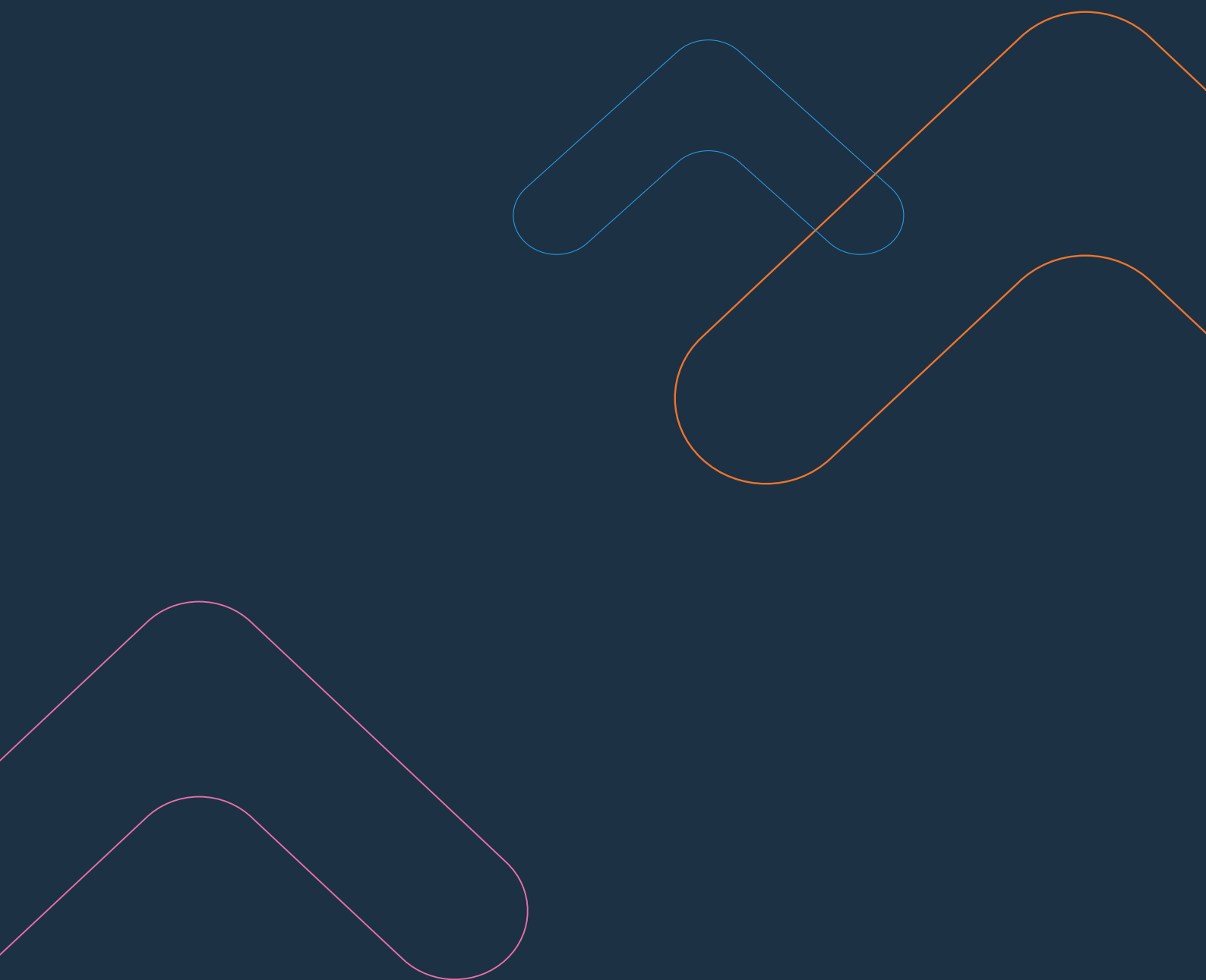
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ECOD 2026 APPLICATION - ROTTERDAM

# Mission Statement





# We do Democracy



## Rotterdam: We do Democracy

### Teaser

Democratic diversity in a city of doers

### Summary

Rotterdammers do. Out of the ashes of the bombed city, Rotterdammers built a new city. Tackling challenges is in the nature of Rotterdammers. They are all different, have different backgrounds and diverse customs. But they do. They make the city. There are plenty of challenges in the city but Rotterdammers put their shoulders to the wheel. They take initiative to improve their neighbourhoods, they organise themselves in communities. Social entrepreneurs work on innovative and sustainable ideas, and residents are active in neighbourhood councils. Democracy in thought and action is daily practice in our city. Title as a chance With the European Capital of Democracy programme, we give extra energy to all the different ways in which Rotterdammers participate in our democracy. This is important because the ballot does not appeal to everyone; turnout at elections is the lowest in the Netherlands. Yet, at the same time, there are almost 300 elected Rotterdammers who represent their neighborhood in neighborhood councils every day. They contribute to connectivity in the city and strengthen communities. They translate the voices of neighbourhood residents into concrete actions for the municipality of Rotterdam that have been agreed with the City Council to be carried out. Respect, an eye for difference, listening (also to the soft- sounding voices), and doing what the city needs. That is the value of our democracy. It requires the city government to offer various options for entering the democratic dance floor. This rich palette of options for working together on the city's future deserves a place in the shop window of the European Capital of Democracy programme. There is of course always room for improvement, but Rotterdam becoming the European Capital of Democracy would be icing on the cake of all the hard work that is being done by its citizens. We would be more than proud to put them in the spotlight. Shaping the future together 2026 is a Rotterdam election year with both the city council and neighbourhood council elections. We put democracy on the agenda with a public programme focusing on young Rotterdammers. The shaping of our city concerns us all. For young Rotterdammers this is extra meaningful. A vibrant city is one in which residents are seen and heard and in which decision-making is transparent and clear. The challenge for Rotterdam is to invite citizens from different backgrounds into daily democratic practice. We aim to improve existing practice, increase opportunities for participation, enrich the democratic landscape and surprise both Rotterdammers and guests from outside our city by 2026. This enticing programme is created in collaboration with (young and diverse) Rotterdammers.



# We do Democracy



## **Rotterdam: We do Democracy: democratic diversity in a city of doers**

### Summary

The challenge for Rotterdam is to invite citizens from different backgrounds into daily democratic practice. We aim to improve existing practice, increase opportunities for participation, enrich the democratic landscape and surprise both Rotterdammers and guests from outside our city by 2026. This enticing programme is created in collaboration with (young and diverse) Rotterdammers.

# We do Democracy

## Democratic Ambitions

We would like to take the opportunity to use ECoD 2026 to emphasize issues we think are supportive to a healthy democratic landscape. Topics we have come across during our search for a more inclusive democratic landscape. We would like to share and discuss them with European partners: learn from one another. There are several topics we would like to emphasize during the programme year in different events for European partners. Needless to say, the topics are reflected in the projects we name in this application.

1. Participatory budgets We noticed that many European cities have budgets available for citizens to improve their neighborhood. Budgets citizens can apply for, hoping to realize ideas that they think are important for their environment. The way different cities have implemented these budgets differs greatly. A subject worth discussing, worth sharing. We showcase our experiences in our project Initiatives
2. Democracy for everyone Lowering the threshold for people to engage or to become politically active. That's a challenge we all face. We want people from different communities to show up on the political stage. Politics is not reserved for a specific group of, say, highly educated people of a certain age and gender. We look for ways to give access to different voices. We showcase experiences in our projects Neighborhood councils and Youth hubs
3. Accessible government Contact between citizens and government is under pressure in many countries and cities.

There are citizens who experience a big gap. Government organisations struggle with trust and mistrust. Contact with the government is increasingly taking place digitally. This is easy and brings services to a higher level.

But not everyone is digitally competent. And even for them, the need to meet in real life remains. Government being close to citizens, both offline and online is a hot topic. We showcase experiences in our project Neighborhood hubs

4. Citizens' Assembly Citizens' Assemblies are booming. Citizens' Assemblies could be seen as an interesting way to involve citizens in social issues, who would otherwise not participate, and a way for a city council to be held more accountable. It makes sense that in many cities, the concept comes up as an idea. So a lot of experience has been gained. What lessons do we learn from this? How do we value the commitment of a citizens' assembly? What does the deployment mean for citizens engagement in their living environment and politics as a whole? We showcase experiences in our project Citizens' Assembly
5. Lottery as a new phenomenon Lottery helps to diversify representatives and can be an interesting and innovative form of democracy. At the same time, a municipal council elected by residents is also very valuable. How does drawing lots compare with elections as a selection mechanism? What are the experiences of groups of people drawn and elected? We showcase experiences in our project Citizens' Assembly & Neighborhood councils.

# We do Democracy

## Achieved Successes

Neighborhood Councils Rotterdam has a long tradition of local democracy. We tried to improve these local democratic institutions by starting our Neighborhood Councils in 2022. The focus with the Councils was to scale the size down and skip the need for members to be politically active. Through this we try to make local democracy much more accessible for all citizens. A big part of the success of the Councils is the low threshold for membership. Not only do we have more citizens that are members of a Council (291 in total), the members are much more diverse. Citizens' Assembly on Climate In 2024 Rotterdam held its first Citizens' Assembly. This is a participatory initiative focused on tackling the city's climate goals. In this assembly, a randomly selected, representative group of approximately 100 residents collaborates on impactful climate solutions. Through learning, deliberation, and expert-guided assessments, participants develop actionable proposals for the City Council. Rotterdam wishes to organize more of these assemblies.

Participatory budgets Rotterdam places great emphasis on Rotterdammers creating their own solutions to urban issues. Three programs are a proven success in giving Rotterdammers the opportunity to shape their own city.

- With CityLab010, creative minds and entrepreneurs receive financial support to realize innovative ideas. This instrument has already enabled hundreds of initiatives - from sustainable food projects to digital innovation in education.
- Right to Challenge offers residents the chance to take over government tasks if they think they can do it better or more efficiently. It challenges Rotterdammers to take responsibility, with positive effects on social cohesion and effectiveness.
- In addition, Rotterdam encourages neighborhoods to work with local residents to improve the quality of life and safety in their neighborhoods through the small-scale Residents' Initiatives.

Neighborhood Hubs  
A Neighborhood Hub is a small-scale municipal office, present in all of our 39 neighborhoods. With the Neighborhood Hub the municipality tries to meet the wish of residents for an approachable government. For our civil servants the Hub functions as a workplace and meeting in the neighborhood in question. Rotterdam residents with a question or idea for the neighborhood can visit a Hub. It's a place where municipal employees and partners work, and a place where municipalities and citizens will meet. Youth Hubs  
Youth Hubs in Rotterdam are community centers aimed at providing safe and engaging spaces for young people aged 10 to 23.

Since 2022 the city has created 33 youth hubs. These hubs offer a mix of recreational, educational, and social activities, aiming to support personal development, social inclusion, and well-being.



# We do Democracy

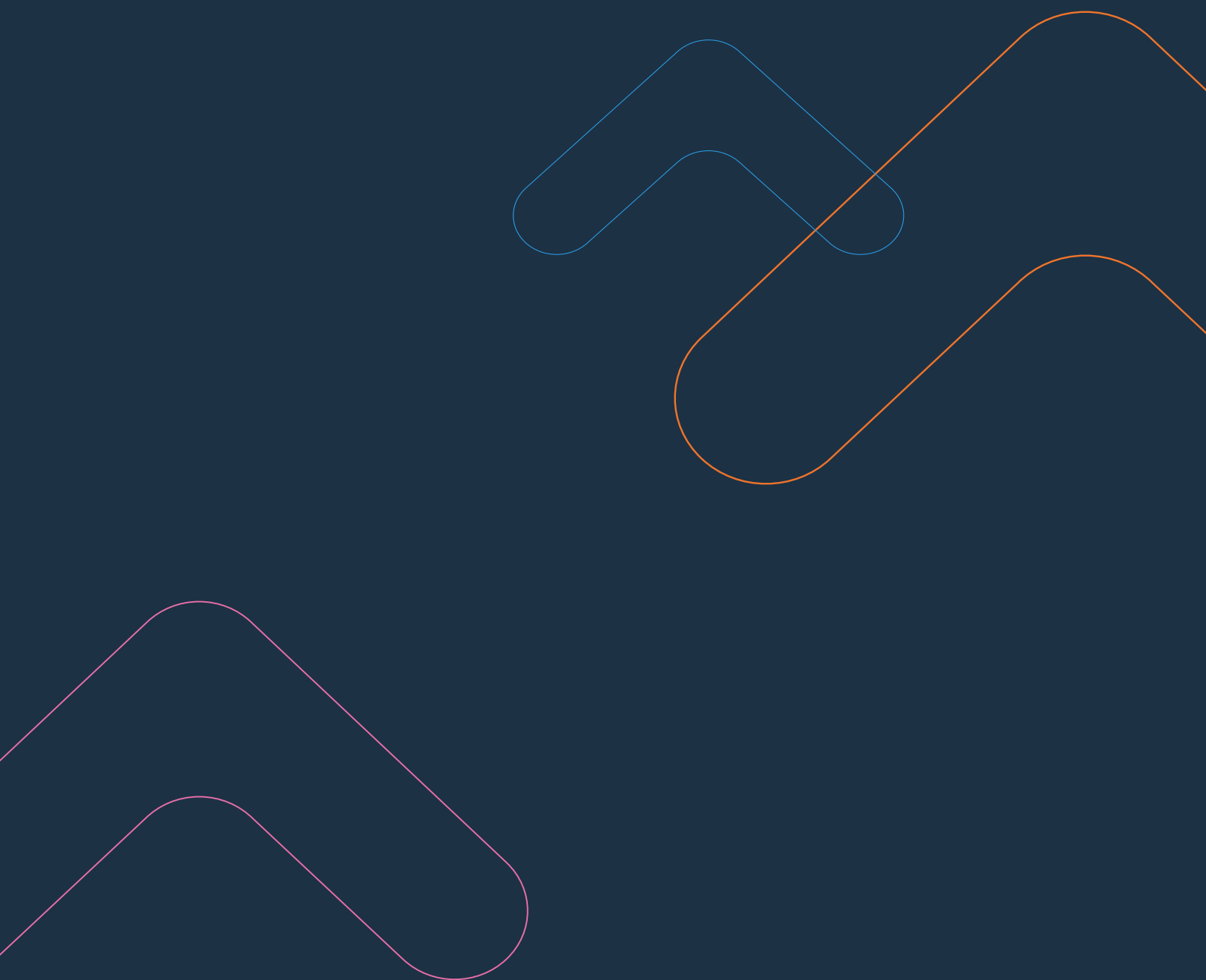


## Future Challenges

While Rotterdam has a vibrant civil society, many citizens feel disconnected from formal political processes, with barriers that include language, a sense of exclusion from mainstream decision-making and simply the fact that people just don't know where to go. As in many cities in the Netherlands, trust in government institutions is a pressing issue. A perceived lack of transparency and the feeling that the government is not there for you. The low turnout rate is a big challenge as Rotterdam is the city with the lowest rate of the Netherlands. Low turnout in local elections is a critical issue, with certain neighborhoods and demographics significantly underrepresented. This phenomenon reflects broader social and economic divides, as lower-income, less-educated communities tend to have lower participation rates. Mistrust and disengagement can create a vicious cycle where low participation leads to policies that don't align with citizens' needs, further reducing trust and engagement. There is also a media and public debate challenge. There is little media engagement with democracy in Rotterdam. Few reporters from independent media organisations are present. In addition, urban debate on democratic development can be more robust.

ECOD 2026 APPLICATION - ROTTERDAM

# Projects



# Rotterdam – Project 1

BEST PRACTICE | PERMANENT

## Neighborhood Hubs

### Brief description

With the Neighborhood Hub (Wijkhub) the municipality tries to meet the wish of Rotterdam residents for a clear, accountable and approachable government. The hubs also help our civil servants: it functions as a workplace and meeting point for employees working in the neighborhood in question. Rotterdam residents with a question or idea for the neighborhood can visit a Hub. It's a place where municipal employees and partners work. For example, the district police officer or youth worker also work in the Hub. In addition, members of the Neighborhood Council can be found here. Residents will receive immediate answers to their questions or discover which municipal colleague can provide further assistance. We also have a mobile Neighborhood Hub that can be deployed flexibly in the neighborhoods. This helps with issues that require extra attention, like informing EU migrants about the municipality or providing residents with personal information about subsidies and social support.

### Detailed description

Rotterdam residents can expect the municipality to be friendly and clear. Our goal: residents can easily reach the municipality; we respond on time and agreements are kept. Good services contribute to improving confidence in the government. With the Neighborhood Hub we hope to make an important contribution to accessibility for all Rotterdam residents and thus also build confidence in the government. Every neighborhood is different, and there are many differences within those neighborhoods as well. In addition to the diversity in age, religion, culture, education and income, Rotterdam is also a city with great differences in opportunities to participate. Many citizens do not know where to find us with perhaps simple questions or (neighborhood) problems. Maybe because they lack the digital skills to find their answer online. While they all have one thing in common: every resident of Rotterdam deserves our support. Since the end of 2023, every district has had its own Neighborhood Hub. Those Hubs are accessible places in every neighborhood where residents can be helped with their questions without an appointment.

# Rotterdam – Project 1

## Detailed description

Where colleagues from all departments work so that there is always the necessary knowledge available to immediately point someone in the right direction. So that someone who doesn't yet know where to find us will soon walk out of the Neighborhood Hub and really be a step further. In addition to being a place for residents, a Neighborhood Hub is also a place to work. Civil servants use the Neighborhood Hub to work where their job takes them. And where they can immediately work on solutions, visible to the neighborhood. The Neighborhood Councils also use the Neighborhood Hubs. The councils bring together different groups in the neighborhood, listen to what is going on in the neighborhood and help ensure that everyone in the neighborhood can participate.

## Contribution

The Neighborhood Hubs function as important links in (local) democracy by offering an accessible and open location in the immediate living and working environment of residents, companies, and neighborhood representatives. They facilitate direct dialogue and participation, which is crucial for citizen engagement and transparency. During the year, the neighborhood hubs strengthen democratic processes by involving citizens in having a say on local issues, such as redevelopment of facilities and neighborhood development. In addition, the hubs support educational and

informational meetings to underline the importance of participation in democracy. As a result, the neighborhood hubs not only promote the connection between the municipality and its residents, but they also contribute to a broadly supported and active democratic culture in the city.

## Collaboration

In each district we actively seek cooperation with local parties. Together we try to organize suitable activities that meet the needs of residents. Because each district has its own issues, the programming is different for each district. By making Hubs a reflection of the neighborhood, we want to promote that the Hubs and their users truly represent the district. The Neighborhood Hubs stand for proximity. Something that we will never take for granted, but we also continue to test by asking the users of the Hubs for feedback.

## Target Group(s)

The idea is for residents to come in easily, for professionals from different organisations working in the neighbourhood to work together with colleagues from the Rotterdam municipality and concerned residents. It can be different in every neighbourhood. That is the power of the neighbourhood hub.

# Rotterdam – Project 1

## Communication

Internally, we encourage as many civil servants as possible to work in the Neighborhood Hub. In this way, they are in more direct contact with Rotterdam residents. Externally, the communication initially focused per neighborhood hub on the opening hours and the idea behind the hubs. All 39 district hubs have now been opened and the communication focuses more on the programming via district-oriented channels. As mentioned, we have proudly had our 39 Neighborhood Hubs since 2022. Every opening so far has been used as an opportunity for a party for all local inhabitants to celebrate democracy and highlight the low threshold to government access that the Hubs provide. Every opportunity for local participation we aim to organize at the hub of that specific neighborhood. Because all neighborhoods have different needs, the Neighborhood Councils continuously monitor whether a hub is able to meet those needs and make significant impact.

## Project Setup

Internal: The entire municipal organization is involved. Participation and democracy apply to almost everything that municipalities are involved in. Through an innovative, accessible and transparent administrative approach, all disciplines work on this project. External: The district is the world in miniature. The collaboration partner is of course the residents, elected Neighborhood Councils and local organizations. Also, partners such as the police, youth work, social work and housing corporations.

## Participation of Civil Society

N/A

## Budget - Total

**1,000,000€**

## Funding

The cost of accommodation for these falls under the municipality's housing costs. We have not yet made these specifically for neighbourhood hubs.

## Programme Year Integration

As a city, we want to facilitate democratic processes and citizen participation as best we can. The 39 Neighborhood Hubs spread across the city offer an excellent infrastructure for this. The Hubs also serve as polling stations. In combination with their location in the middle of the district, this makes them ideally suited to bring democracy and decision-making closer to the residents. It is therefore more than logical to use these venues as programme spots for the ECoD year. Especially for cooperation with local parties and organisations, it is a suitable infrastructure. Guests from outside the city thus experience what it is like to be part of our cooperation at neighborhood level.

## Democracy Dimension

Community

# Rotterdam – Project 2

BEST PRACTICE | PERMANENT

[HTTPS://WWW.ERASMUSX.IO/PROJECT/REDEFINING-THE-CLASSROOM](https://www.erasmusx.io/project/redefining-the-classroom)

## Youth Hubs: Amplifying the Voice of Youth in a Young City

### Brief Description

Rotterdam is a young, diverse city, so we value the voices of our youth. The “Youth Hubs” provide young people aged 10 to 23 with safe, inspiring spaces to discover their talents, grow, and make their voices heard. Since 2022, Rotterdam aims to establish 33 hubs that offer a wide range of recreational, educational, and social activities. Among them, HefHouse stands out as a self-governing youth hub that illustrates Rotterdam’s vision of an “optimal democracy” — a city where youth and residents work together to shape the future. Led by Stichting L.E.S. and in partnership with local schools, HefHouse addresses social challenges and strengthens community bonds, creating a model of inclusive, participatory democracy. Through collaboration with schools and social organizations, the Youth Hubs contribute to a resilient, inclusive Rotterdam.

### Detailed Description

The Youth Hubs in Rotterdam are essential pillars of youth empowerment and community engagement, fostering an environment where young people can participate meaningfully in their neighborhoods and city.

Among the Youth Hubs, HefHouse exemplifies a self-governing model that empowers youth to take an active role in community development. Created out of the need for a space where young people could meaningfully contribute to their neighborhood and city, this space brings together youth, community, and education to address local challenges and foster a connected, inclusive society. Stichting L.E.S., established by local residents, leads HefHouse with a mission to improve youth well-being. The organization provides support, job training, and personal development opportunities for local youth. In partnership with schools and universities HefHouse connects young people with practical, community-oriented education, fostering a sense of belonging and responsibility. Through initiatives such as the Youth Council, neighborhood councils, and citizens’ assemblies, HefHouse creates avenues for youth voices to be heard and valued. This collaboration between community and education at HefHouse reflects Rotterdam’s ambition to set an example as the European Capital of Democracy, a city where every generation, young and old, feels involved and heard.

# Rotterdam – Project 2

## Detailed Description

HefHouse is an impactful model within the Youth Hubs network, illustrating the potential of self-governing hubs to drive community resilience and youth engagement. Core Objectives and Purpose: 1. Empowerment through Participation: The Youth Hubs aim to provide a platform for young people to voice their perspectives and influence decisions that shape their communities. 2. Education and Skill Development: By collaborating with local educational institutions, Youth Hubs like HefHouse bridge academia and community, offering hands-on learning and skill-building relevant to the local context. 3. Community Engagement: Each Youth Hub fosters a sense of pride and responsibility among young people through projects that benefit their neighborhoods. Programs and Activities Offered: • Job Training and Practical Education: Youth Hubs provide job skills and community-centered education, in partnership with local educational institutions. • Civic Engagement Initiatives: Initiatives like HefHouse's Youth Council and neighborhood councils give young people firsthand experience in democratic practices, fostering a sense of civic responsibility. • Cultural and Social Activities: Regular activities organized by and for young people encourage engagement, self-expression, and mutual support within the community. Guidance and Mentorship: Mentorship is a cornerstone across the Youth Hubs. Within Youth Hubs local professionals, educators, and alumni mentor young people, supporting them in making positive life choices and fostering connections between personal growth and community well-being. Accessibility and Inclusivity: The Youth Hubs are accessible to all young people in Rotterdam and free of charge, ensuring that socio-economic background does not limit participation.

## Contribution

Rotterdam's youth hubs showcase a model of community-centered youth engagement and inclusive democratic practice. This initiative embodies Rotterdam's vision of a city where every generation feels heard and engaged, promoting participation through Youth Councils and citizen assemblies. We find it especially important to include the voice of the youth throughout every activity organized in 2026. We will work with Erasmus X, within the Redefining the classroom program, to create an engaging activity in the program year.

## Collaboration

To ensure inclusivity, Youth Hubs work closely with municipal services, local schools, and community organizations. Programs are designed to reflect the voices of youth, with mentors and staff from diverse backgrounds. The hubs work hard to ensure that young people feel welcomed and valued, regardless of background.

## Target Group(s)

The Youth Hubs target young people aged 10 to 23, supporting youth at various developmental stages. The hubs also attract young people seeking an active role in their community, providing them with tools for personal growth and civic engagement.

# Rotterdam – Project 2

## Communication

Every Youth Hub communicates as it sees fit according to the different needs of the neighborhood they cater to.

## Project Setup

Led by Rotterdam's Department of Social Development, the Youth Hubs project collaborates with organizations like Stichting L.E.S., Albeda College, Erasmus University, and other local partners.

## Participation of Civil Society

Without young citizens, no youth hub. Young people themselves are in the lead in creating the program in the youth hub. Sometimes they are supported in this by the welfare organization, sometimes they do it themselves.

## Budget

Housing costs for a part of the hubs (support is funded by municipal welfare work) Planning costs 1,800,000€

## Budget - Total

**Total Budget: 1,800,000€**

## Funding

Collaboration with Erasmus University Rotterdam, Foundation LES, Albeda College

## Programme Year integration

In 2026, HefHouse will serve as a prime example of Rotterdam's commitment to youth engagement and inclusive democracy, with events and initiatives highlighting youth participation in civic life as part of the European Capital of Democracy. We will work with Erasmus X, within the Redefining the classroom program, to create an engaging activity in the program year.

## Democracy Dimension

Empowerment

# Rotterdam – Project 3

BEST PRACTICE | PERMANENT

[HTTPS://WWW.ROTTERDAM.NL/WIJKRADEN](https://www.rotterdam.nl/wijkraden) [HTTPS://WWW.ROTTERDAM.NL/WIJK-AAN-ZET](https://www.rotterdam.nl/wijk-aan-zet)

## Neighborhood Councils

### Brief Description

The Rotterdam neighborhood councils are local advisory bodies that act as an intermediary between residents and the municipality. Each neighborhood council consists of elected members who actively represent the interests of the neighborhood residents. They provide advice on various local topics, such as urban development, safety, infrastructure, and the well-being of residents. Neighborhood councils can influence municipal decisions by supporting resident initiatives, assessing municipal plans and informing the municipality about the wishes and concerns of neighborhood residents. They play an important role in promoting residents' involvement in policy and ensuring direct communication with the municipality. There are 39 neighborhood councils in Rotterdam, each with their own focus and challenges, depending on the specific needs of their neighborhood. The neighborhood councils contribute to strengthening social cohesion and quality of life in the city.

### Detailed Description

**Function and Objectives of the Neighborhood Councils** The most important task of neighborhood councils is to promote resident participation and strengthen social cohesion within a neighborhood. They ensure that residents have a voice in the municipality. They act as representatives of neighborhood residents in various municipal processes, such as drawing up policy plans, submitting neighborhood initiatives or advising on projects that impact the neighborhood. In addition, neighborhood councils are an important point of contact for residents who have questions, complaints or suggestions about matters that directly affect them. They provide an accessible means of communication between residents and the municipal government. This is particularly important in a city like Rotterdam, which consists of many different neighborhoods, each with their own characteristics, challenges, and needs.

**Composition and Organization** The members of the district councils are elected during elections that take place every four years, and the number of members per district council depends on the size and number of inhabitants of the district. A neighborhood council can consist of 7, 9 or 11 members. Candidates do not have to represent a political party, which means that the council shows the diversity of the district, both in terms of background and needs.

# Rotterdam – Project 3

## Detailed Description

Each district council is supported by a municipal official, who helps organize meetings and communicate between the district council and the municipality. The monthly meetings of the neighborhood councils are public, so that residents can attend and discuss matters that concern them. Specific Duties of the Neighborhood Councils

1. **Advisory function:** Neighborhood councils provide advice on municipal policies that affect their neighborhood. This can vary from infrastructure projects, the design of public spaces to the construction of new homes. They provide input on the proposed plans and ensure that the needs and wishes of the residents are considered.
2. **Participation:** Neighborhood councils encourage residents to actively participate in decision-making about their neighborhood, for example by organizing residents' evenings or holding surveys or petitions.
3. **Link between residents and municipality:** Neighborhood councils act as an important link between residents and the municipal government. They translate the concerns, wishes and ideas of residents to the municipality and ensure that important issues are heard by the responsible officials and politicians.
4. **Resident initiatives:** Neighborhood councils have a budget at their disposal to support initiatives and projects that improve the quality of life in the neighborhood. This budget can be used for, for example, building playgrounds, renovating parks, or supporting neighborhood activities.

Neighborhood councils and the Municipality of Rotterdam Although district councils only have an advisory role, they are an important part of the political process. They ensure that policymakers consider the local context and the voice of residents, so that policy better meets the wishes of Rotterdam neighborhoods. In recent years, the municipality of Rotterdam has tried to strengthen cooperation between the district councils and the municipality. To achieve this, each alderman of the city council adopted a few neighborhood councils, to achieve a regular exchange of experiences. Members of the city council visit neighborhood meetings regularly and invite members of neighborhood councils to their own meetings to provide background on local matters.

## Contribution

The four-year term of the current district councils ends in 2026. In March 2026, Rotterdam will therefore organize elections for new neighborhood councils, which will be appointed for the next four years. We want to make these elections central to the ECoD. We will elect 291 new council members who will fill 39 neighborhood councils. We not only want to focus on the elections, but also on the subsequent process of training the new neighborhood councils. How does a neighborhood council find its way in the municipal and political organization? Because the members of the district council do not have to be politically bound, this challenge is great for the new council members. To support the district councils in this, we organize a district council conference in which topics on the agenda of the district councils themselves are central. During this conference we want to organize a parallel program in which we invite European partners to learn from each other's experiences with local democracy.

# Rotterdam – Project 3

## Collaboration

We hold the neighborhood council elections at the same time as the elections for the city council. With this we try to get the turnout in the elections as high as possible. And while as a municipality we hardly have to promote the elections for the city council, we do our extra best for the neighborhood council elections. For example, we place election signs throughout the city, next to the signs for the city council election. Moreover, we enable each candidate to campaign. We offer them the opportunity to have a good photo taken for free, a poster and flyers printed with their slogan and program. In this way we enable every candidate to campaign within their neighborhood. For free, to keep the threshold as low as possible.

## Target Group(s)

We set the age limit at which candidates can stand for election at 16 years. Moreover, candidates do not have to be politically connected. This makes the threshold for putting yourself forward low. This paves the way for residents of all backgrounds, origins, and educational levels. During the 2026 elections, we want to make it clear to as many residents as possible that everyone aged 16 and older has a potential district councilor.

## Communication

The Neighborhood Councils are, despite their relatively new status, well-known in Rotterdam. Depending on the Council they chose to communicate themselves with their local constituents through the means that match best with their population. They are voted in (or out) every four years by their own neighbors to ensure democratic accountability.

Also within the municipality evaluations are being held to check whether the organization involves the Neighborhood Councils as much as possible and to what extent it has the impact envisioned. An internal evaluation will be available in the first half of 2025 and will also be discussed by the municipal council.

## Project Setup

Social development department of the municipality

## Participation of Civil Society

All citizens aged 16 and up can stand for election to become neighbourhood councillor. See target group If there are not enough candidates for elections, we will use a lottery. This practice empowers all residents regardless of their background, age, gender.

# Rotterdam – Project 3

## Budget

€ 3.500.000 annual operating costs for the 39 councils, € 3.000.000 compensation for councillors (roughly € 500 per month per councillor) Operating costs 3,500,000€

## Budget - Total

**3,500,000 €**

## Funding

€ 3.000.000,- planning costs for organizing the election, once every 4 year

## Programme Year integration

We like to showcase the neighborhood councils on two or three occasions. All 291 new council members are sworn in during an official event in April and we like to combine that with an international event. In the autumn we organize a conference for the new neighborhood councils where they can learn from each other's best practices. We like to combine this with an international workshop on local democracy, organized together with the ECoD-organization. We also like to propose a new Democracy Lab around local democracy during our ECoD-year, again organized in collaboration with the ECoD-organization.

## Democracy Dimension

Community

# Rotterdam – Project 4

BEST PRACTICE | PERMANENT

[HTTPS://WWW.OPZOOMERMEE.NL](https://www.opzoomermee.nl)

[HTTPS://WWW.CITYLAB010.NL](https://www.citylab010.nl)

[HTTPS://WWW.ROTTERDAM.NL/RIGHT-TO-CHALLENGE](https://www.rotterdam.nl/right-to-challenge)

## Rotterdam, city of initiatives

### Brief Description

Rotterdam places great emphasis on Rotterdammers creating their own solutions to urban issues. Three programs are a proven success in giving Rotterdammers the opportunity to shape their own city. With CityLab010, creative minds and entrepreneurs receive financial support to realize innovative ideas. This instrument has already enabled hundreds of initiatives - from sustainable food projects to digital innovation in education. Right to Challenge offers residents the chance to take over government tasks if they think they can do it better or more efficiently. It challenges Rotterdammers to take responsibility, with positive effects on social cohesion and effectiveness. In addition, Rotterdam encourages neighborhoods to work with local residents to improve the quality of life and safety in their neighborhoods through the small-scale Residents' Initiatives.

### Detailed Description

With these three projects, Rotterdam tries to pioneer in citizen participation by transferring responsibility to Rotterdammers. Crucial for a future-proof democratic city in which Rotterdammers themselves drive the change needed to build an inclusive, sustainable, and innovative community. CityLab010 is an initiative that serves as a platform for innovative, sustainable and social ideas that contribute to the future of the city. It offers residents, entrepreneurs and organizations financial support and a network to turn their concepts into projects. The main objectives are to improve livability, sustainability and inclusion in the city. Every year, CityLab010 launches a call where citizens and businesses can submit project proposals. A City Jury evaluates the submitted projects for impact, feasibility and alignment with municipal goals. Projects that meet the criteria receive grants and are guided by professionals who support them in implementation and development. Since 2020, hundreds of innovative projects have been realized thanks to CityLab010. Examples include green roofs, new forms of neighborhood mobility and platforms that reduce loneliness among the elderly. The program contributes strongly to a resilient and future-proof city, where innovative solutions meet the needs of residents and local businesses. Right to Challenge encourages active citizenship by giving residents the opportunity to directly influence the way services and facilities are designed in their neighborhood. Resident groups, foundations or associations can submit a request

# Rotterdam – Project 4

## Detailed Description

to take over the management of a green space, cleaning services or social services, for example. After submission, the municipality assesses whether the proposal is feasible and whether those involved have sufficient resources and knowledge. By giving residents responsibility for public services, they are encouraged to remain involved in their neighborhood for the long term. In Rotterdam, successful Right to Challenge projects have been set up around neighborhood management, energy initiatives and cultural facilities. These projects have resulted in lower costs, higher satisfaction and enhanced social cohesion as residents feel responsible for their surroundings. Residents' initiatives are smaller, low-threshold projects through which Rotterdam encourages its residents to make direct improvements to their own living environment. This instrument focuses specifically on the local community and aims to strengthen neighborhood safety, livability and social cohesion. Applications range from playgrounds and neighborhood festivals to green initiatives such as urban gardens and waste collection drives. The municipality makes a budget available annually and uses a simple application process to make participation as accessible as possible. The criteria are usually based on direct impact and collaboration between residents. By carrying out their own projects, residents strengthen mutual bonds and the neighborhood becomes more livable and safer. Rotterdam has supported thousands of successful resident initiatives. This has led to a significant increase in involvement and well-being of residents in various neighborhoods. These three instruments - .- form a complementary whole in which there is room for both large-scale innovations and small-scale improvements. Through this approach, Rotterdam has acquired a unique position as a pioneer in citizen participation and co-creation. This successful collaboration between municipality and residents contributes strongly to an inclusive and future-oriented city where citizens take the lead in shaping their own environment.

## Contribution

CityLab010, Right to Challenge and Residents' Initiatives contribute to the European Capital of Democracy year by actively involving citizens in municipal duties. CityLab010 encourages innovation and inclusion by supporting citizens and entrepreneurs in projects that improve the city. Right to Challenge offers residents the opportunity to take over municipal tasks, strengthening civic responsibility. Residents' Initiatives promote livability and social cohesion by supporting neighborhoods with small-scale projects. These instruments make Rotterdam a pioneer in civic participation and democratic engagement, a valuable contribution to the ECoD. At the same time, Rotterdam is not the only city that makes participatory budgets available. In 2026 we hope to share our experiences with other European cities, but also hope to learn from them.

## Collaboration

The city of Rotterdam makes CityLab010, Right to Challenge and Residents' Initiatives inclusive through broad communication in multiple languages, simple application procedures and assistance in applying. Low-threshold workshops and guidance are offered for residents with little experience, often in community centers. Small, flexible grants also make it possible for less wealthy residents to participate.

# Rotterdam – Project 4

## Collaboration

In addition, the municipality works with local organizations to involve hard-to-reach target groups. In this way, Rotterdam ensures that all residents, regardless of background, age or means, can contribute to and benefit from these programs.

## Target Group(s)

Rotterdam residents, foundations, associations and entrepreneurs who want to realize social impact in Rotterdam.

## Communication

<https://www.rotterdaminnovationcity.com/connect/citylab010/>  
<https://www.citylab010.nl>  
<https://www.rotterdam.nl/right-to-challenge>

## Project Setup

The City of Rotterdam, with social partners like Rabobank, PLOUM, Hoge School Rotterdam, Erasmus Universiteit and Opzoomer Mee.

## Participation of Civil Society

CityLab010, Right to Challenge and Residents' Initiatives are all about civil involvement! All three programs are about giving citizens a change to take the lead in changing or even developing their own environment. We challenge citizens to come up with better solutions and make funds available to support those ideas.

## Budget

The annual budget available for CityLab010 and Residents' Initiatives. For Right to Challenge there is no fixed budget. These are addressed per case. Operating costs 6,000,000 €

## Budget - Total

**6,000,000 €**

## Funding

None but the operating costs.

## Programme Year integration

CityLab010, Right to Challenge and Residents' Initiatives contribute to the European Capital of Democracy year by actively involving citizens in municipal duties. CityLab010 encourages innovation and inclusion by supporting citizens and entrepreneurs in projects that improve the city. Right to Challenge offers residents the opportunity to take over municipal tasks, strengthening civic responsibility. Residents' Initiatives promote livability and social cohesion by supporting neighborhoods with small-scale projects. These instruments make Rotterdam a pioneer in civic participation and democratic engagement, a valuable contribution to the ECoD. At the same time, Rotterdam is not the only city that makes participatory budgets available. In 2026 we hope to share our experiences with other European cities, but also hope to learn from them.

## Democracy Dimension

Participation

# Rotterdam – Project 5

TOOL | ONE-OFF | 16/04/2024 | 21/09/2024

[HTTPS://WWW.ROTTERDAM.NL/BURGERBERAAD-KLIMAAT](https://www.rotterdam.nl/burgerberaad-klimaat)

## Citizens' Assembly on Climate

### Brief Description

The Rotterdam Citizens' Assembly on Climate is a participatory initiative focused on tackling the city's climate goals: a 55% CO<sub>2</sub> reduction by 2030 and climate neutrality by 2050. In this assembly, a randomly selected, representative group of residents collaborates on impactful climate solutions. Through learning, deliberation, and expert-guided assessments, participants develop actionable proposals aimed at reducing emissions and fostering a sustainable urban environment. These recommendations are presented to the City Council as advice, enhancing climate policy and strengthening trust and cooperation between the city and its citizens, while harnessing local knowledge and creativity for a greener Rotterdam.

### Detailed Description

The Rotterdam Citizens' Assembly on Climate is a participatory initiative that actively involves Rotterdam residents in shaping the city's climate policies to meet ambitious targets: reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 55% by 2030 and achieving climate neutrality by 2050. This assembly engages a randomly selected, representative group of Rotterdammers who bring diverse perspectives and ideas to address one of the city's most urgent challenges—climate change. The assembly took place over six sessions, during which participants embarked on a structured journey of learning, discussion, and proposal development. They were educated on climate issues, policies, and the science behind effective solutions. Through both plenary and smaller breakout sessions, participants collaborated with peers, consulted experts, and examined key topics, including sustainable energy, emissions reduction, and the societal impacts of climate measures. This process empowered them to craft concrete, realistic proposals aligned with Rotterdam's sustainability goals. A significant outcome of the assembly was the development of 22 recommendations aimed at reducing emissions and creating a sustainable urban environment. After a careful vetting and discussion process, the assembly itself formally adopted 10 of these recommendations, ensuring they are both practical and resonant with the needs of the community. Each recommendation was assessed with input from experts to confirm its feasibility and impact. This expert guidance covered aspects such as economic viability, legal compliance, and compatibility with existing municipal programs,

# Rotterdam – Project 5

## Detailed Description

helping refine and focus the proposals. The assembly's final recommendations are now set to be presented to the City Council as advisory input. The Council has committed to a thorough review of these proposals, with a requirement to explain any decision not to implement a recommendation to the assembly and other stakeholders. If approved, the accepted recommendations will be implemented in 2025, bringing them into action as part of Rotterdam's broader climate strategy. This transparent process ensures that the public's voice has a direct influence on local policy and that the collaboration between citizens and the government fosters trust and accountability. In addition to influencing climate policy, the Rotterdam Citizens' Assembly on Climate has helped to raise public awareness and broaden community engagement with climate issues, promoting a city-wide conversation on climate issues and sustainability. The initiative strengthens social cohesion, as it brings together residents from diverse backgrounds to work collaboratively on shared goals for Rotterdam's future. This participatory model highlights Rotterdam's commitment to civic innovation, showcasing how citizen voices can be effectively integrated into addressing complex policy challenges like climate change. Through the Citizens' Assembly, Rotterdam leverages the creativity, wisdom, and lived experiences of its residents, ensuring that the city's path to a greener, more resilient future is both inclusive and community-driven. This process demonstrates a powerful approach to climate governance and offers a model that might be replicated to tackle the urgent global climate crisis.

## Contribution

Rotterdams Burgerberaad Klimaat (Citizens' Assembly on Climate) is a prime example of participatory democracy, where a randomly selected group of citizens collaborated to develop solutions for the city's climate challenges. Over six meetings, they were educated on climate issues and worked together to shape policy recommendations. This initiative builds civic trust, enhances collaboration between residents and local government, and empowers citizens to influence decisions on pressing matters like climate change. By involving citizens in shaping climate policy, Rotterdam fosters a more inclusive approach to governance. This initiative aligns with the objectives of the European Capital of Democracy 2026, showcasing how citizen-led processes can address complex societal issues and strengthen democratic resilience, ultimately setting an example for other cities across Europe.

## Collaboration

The Rotterdam Climate Citizens' Assembly was designed to be inclusive and fair by ensuring the selection process reflected the city's diversity. The 100 participants were chosen through a lottery, with demographic factors such as age, gender, ethnicity, employment status, and educational level all considered to create a representative group. The municipality's Department of Research and Business Intelligence (OBI) helped ensure the group accurately mirrored the city's population and conducted independent research to further validate the process. Additionally, accommodations were made for participants with physical disabilities, childcare was provided, and interpreters were available for non-Dutch speakers to English.

# Rotterdam – Project 5

## Target Group(s)

The target group for the Rotterdams Burgerberaad Klimaat consisted of approximately 100 randomly selected residents, ensuring a diverse and representative sample of Rotterdam's population. The selection process considered factors such as age, gender, ethnicity, and neighborhood, aiming to reflect the city's demographics accurately. Every Rotterdammer, excluding civil servants and politicians, was part of the target audience.

## Communication

As this Assembly is finished, we won't have separate communication about this project during the ECoD-year. We do like to share our experience with the Assembly with European partners during the ECoD-year.

## Project Setup

Department of Sustainability of the Municipality of Rotterdam

## Participation of Civil Society

The Assembly consisted of 100 members, which we selected by means of lottery.

## Budget

Project management, lottery process, venue rental, participant compensation, campaigns, outreach efforts, independent facilitation, and support for participants. Planning costs 1,800,000€

## Budget - Total

**1,800,000 €**

## Funding

The funding for the Rotterdam Climate Citizens' Assembly is covered by the Sustainability Transition Budget (DTB). A total of 1.8 million euros has been allocated: 800,000 euros for the project organization and 1 million euros to implement the assembly's proposals.

## Programme Year integration

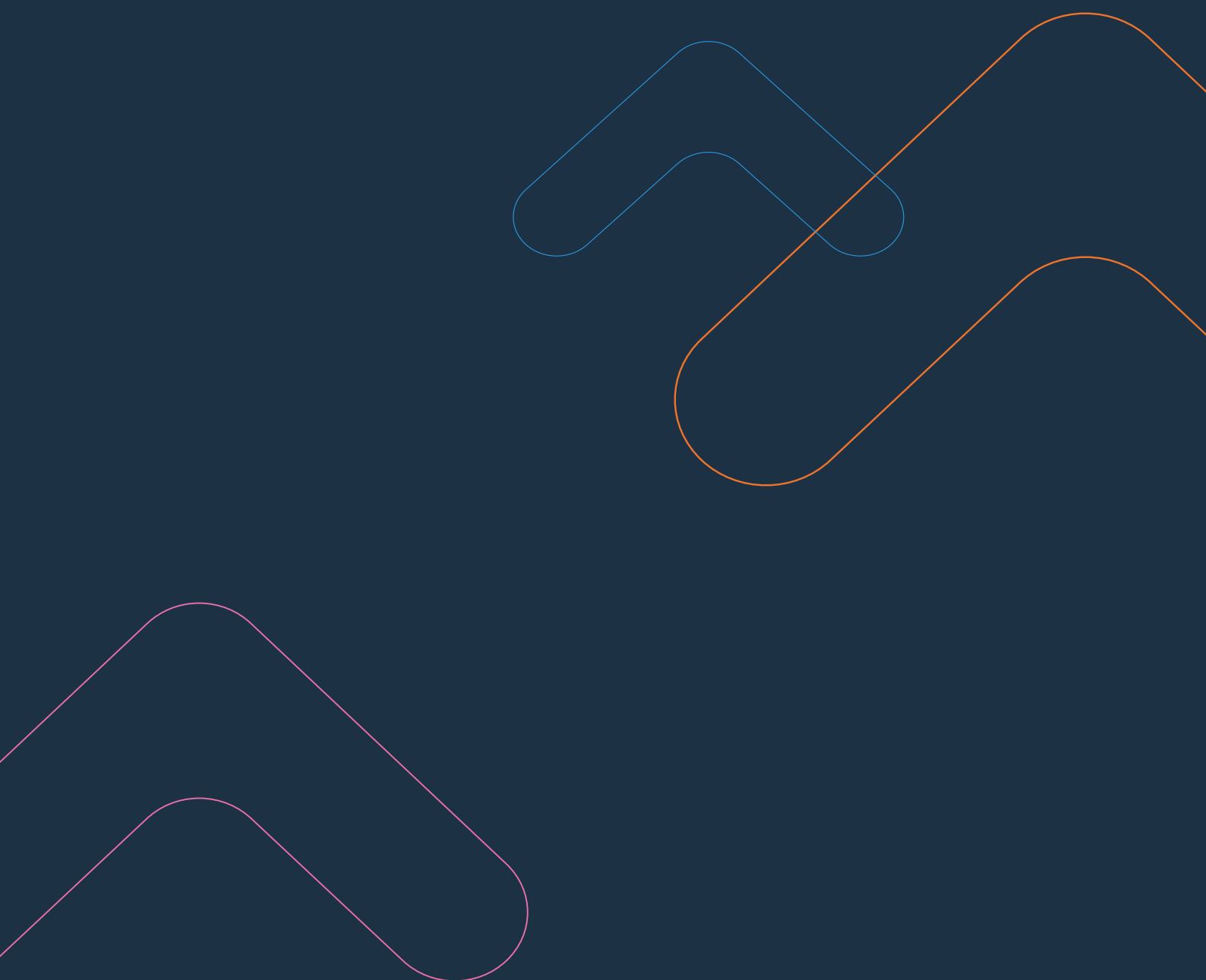
Short testimonials from Participants (live, or video with subtitles) - Presentation of the independent research conducted by Rotterdam's Department of Research and Business Intelligence (OBI) - Presentation of what has been realized from the advises (taken it takes place around 2 years after the beraad) - Speeches from stakeholders: municipal executors of the citizens' assembly advice, the vice-major climate or the project manage.

## Democracy Dimension

Sustainability

ECOD 2026 APPLICATION - ROTTERDAM

# Project Ideas





# Rotterdam - Project Idea 1



## DEMOCRACY DIMENSION: COMMUNITY

### Democracy daily

#### Challenge

In a hyper-diverse city, how can we make democracy a part of everyday life? Many residents are preoccupied with the challenges of daily survival, leaving little space to engage with the value and benefits of democracy. Yet, it is crucial for everyone to understand and appreciate the role of democracy in fostering a resilient community and contribute to a positive narrative on democracy. How do we reach more diverse groups with the story and mission of deep democracy? How can we provide inspiration for democracy? How can we embed democracy into the daily lives of all residents?

#### Solution

Although residents do not always talk about democracy as such, they have many experiences with democratic values, questions, and challenges. Our city is rich with diverse stories from people with different backgrounds and ages. Democracy Daily seeks to bring these stories to life by creating a digital platform that engages citizens daily on democratic values and practices. We focus on young people and connect with their social physical digital world by actively using digital opportunities such as immersive technology. In this way we contribute to a stronger new generation being inspired by stories of themselves. By partnering with local media and community organizations, such as OPEN Rotterdam and Roffa Takkies, we can share meaningful content that resonates with communities. The platform will either take the form of a simple, user-friendly app or offer content on existing channels: daily doses of democracy through stories, quotes, short videos, or interactive polls. The format will vary, but every piece will inspire citizens on deep democracy, raising awareness and encouraging participation in building an inclusive society.

# Rotterdam - Project Idea 1

## Impact

Our goal is to inspire a broader, more diverse population to take an interest in democracy and actively participate in making democracy a true “demos” — a movement of (young) people: a new generation.

## Implementation

The success of Democracy Daily depends on a collaborative effort between the municipality and local partners to ensure it aligns with community needs and values. To guarantee independence, the initiative and editing lies with grass root initiatives or social entrepreneurs.

## Support

It is important to develop and maintain a network of “democracy ambassadors” to spread the word, collect stories, and foster engagement. There is also a need for capacity building of these ambassadors: training in storytelling to make them effective representatives of Democracy Daily in their communities. With robust support from local communities, Democracy Daily can grow into a powerful tool, making democracy a meaningful and accessible part of everyday life for all Rotterdam residents, especially for the younger generation.

## Video Link

N/A

## Images





# Rotterdam - Project Idea 2



## DEMOCRACY DIMENSION: SUSTAINABILITY

### Democracy on wheels

#### Challenge

Many residents experience government services as distant. This perceived distance affects involvement in their own neighborhood and illustrates the gap between locals and city hall. Moreover, it is difficult for many people to reach city hall or other municipal offices, for example, due to physical limitations, limited mobility, lack of digital skills or a language barrier.

This hinders their access to important services. Having access is a precondition for being a democratic actor.

#### Solution

The municipality of Rotterdam has a Hub on Wheels to give local residents easier access to various municipal services and support in their own neighbourhood. The concept aims to increase the involvement and reach of the municipality by being closer to residents. For example, a Hub on Wheels can provide advice on care, welfare, debt, or work and can help with administrative questions or applications that normally take place at the town hall. The local Ombudsman also works with a mobile office called the Ombulance to connect easily to citizens who experience problems and complaints with the administration on the spot. Our Ombudsman provides a channel for citizens to submit complaints against (local) institutions without influence from the accused. The Ombudsman conducts fair and unbiased investigations at no cost to the complainant, providing resolutions or mediation services.

#### Impact

The advantages of a Hub on Wheels and the Ombulance include:

1. **Accessibility:** It is easier to reach for people who are less mobile or live far from city hall.
2. **Threshold reduction:** Residents often feel more quickly helped in their own environment than in a formal office environment.

# Rotterdam - Project Idea 2

## Impact

3. Flexibility: The hub can travel to different neighbourhoods and respond to specific neighbourhood needs at the time.
4. Community spirit: By being present in the neighbourhood, the municipality strengthens the connection with residents and fosters a sense of belonging.

The hub on wheels fits into the Rotterdam municipality's broader vision of bringing services closer to citizens and identifying and addressing problems early. The Ombudsman endorses this way of working and works with the Ombulance mobile as well. Democracy on wheels focuses on youth. Both the Ombulance and the Hub on Wheels visit schools and local communities with young people to identify their wants and needs.

## Implementation

The Hub on Wheels and the Ombulance are already driving around and will continue to do so in 2026. Democracy on wheels creates an itinerary for the mobile devices according to the needs of the citizens. Implementation will take place within the existing budget.

## Support

Democracy on wheels is supported by the local broadcaster OPEN Rotterdam. This is important for news and awareness. In addition, it is important for local democracy that independent media report on various activities. Also neighbourhood councils are involved in Democracy on wheels. They can give tips for dates and locations for the Ombulance and the Hub on Wheels.,

<https://www.rotterdam.nl/ontdek-de-nieuwe-mobiele-wijkhub>

<https://orr.nl/>

## Images





# Rotterdam - Project Idea 3



## DEMOCRACY DIMENSION: PARTICIPATION

### Travels to the Powers That Be

#### Challenge

It is a big challenge to improve contact between the citizens and the city hall, the members of the city council. This is especially a task for Rotterdam because many citizens experience a big gap. Citizens in Rotterdam are nationally amongst the lowest in voting turnout. Precisely because so many locals express low interest in politics, it is important to improve contact between citizens and the city hall daily. Few citizens know what happens there. Who sits there? How do you get there?

#### Solution

Travels to the Powers That Be is a “travel organization” that organizes trips to the centre of power for citizens in Rotterdam. Different trips are available for different target groups. In 2026, we focus on young Rotterdammers aged 15 and up. They will learn what the difference is between an alderman and a councillor, what a clerk does and what a motion is, in the political heart of the city. Most importantly, they not only learn how political practice works but also experience how they can influence it themselves by telling councillors how they experience their city. By joining a trip, they experience directly what it means to have contact with representatives of the people and can share their questions, concerns and interests directly. A trip with the travel agency is democracy in real life. It is not a citizenship training course out of a book but a substantial step into the real world.

#### Impact

We are partnering with three major educational institutions and 10 schools for children up to 16 years old. We combine the trips with school-based learning programmes. We want to reach 20 classes with an average of 25 students. Besides the cooperation with schools, we also organize trips through youth organizations to involve young people we cannot reach through school. Youth organisations are known to have good contacts with young people in the district. By doing so we ensure that young people from different walks of life have a chance to come along on the trip with Travels to the Powers That Be.

# Rotterdam - Project Idea 3

## Implementation

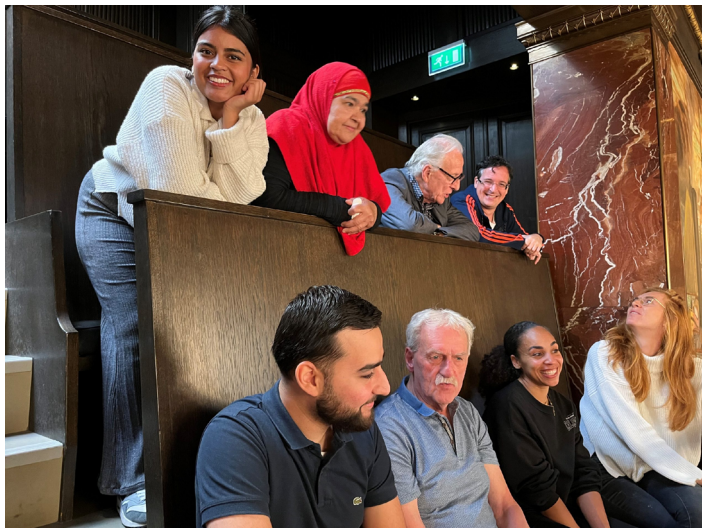
We will shape the implementation with education and youth organisations. We will also involve a local foundation Lokaal which focuses on democracy for citizens in Rotterdam. They support a youth advisory council, Young010. The first milestone is to make an annual plan for the various trips for 2026 with the parties mentioned above. Implementation will take place within the existing budget.

## Support

Most important is the fruitful cooperation of the various organizations involved in planning the trips. Support from city council members is important. For city councillors, the trips are valuable because it gives them a lot of insight. Participants tell councillors how they experience the city and what they think needs to be done to improve it. The exchange of perspectives is meaningful. This goes both ways and is valuable both for city councillors and (young) residents of Rotterdam.

<https://www.versbeton.nl/2022/07/hoe-een-ludiek-reisbureau-actualiteit-en-urgentie-naar-de-coolsingel-brengt/>  
<https://www.young010.com/>

## Images





# Rotterdam - Project Idea 4



## DEMOCRACY DIMENSION:EMPOWERMENT

### Neighborhood councils on stage

#### Challenge

Our biggest challenge is to increasingly lower the threshold for people in Rotterdam to participate in city wide decision making. We are proud of our unique system of 39 Neighborhood Councils, and we are continually exploring ways to involve locals in local decision making. Despite these efforts and successes turnout in elections remains lower than in the rest of the country. We are continuously learning and adapting to tackle this issue.

#### Solution

Rotterdam has a long tradition with democracy on a local scale. We've tried to improve on our system by sizing down the scale to neighborhoods, which means that since 2022 Rotterdam has 39 Neighborhood Councils, each representing a district of roughly 15.000 citizens. The result of this smaller scale is promising, so we like to continue our Neighborhood Councils. In 2026 the four-year term of the current councils ends, and we'll organize elections in every neighborhood for new councils, appointed for the next four years. In total, we'll appoint 291 new council members. The first two months of 2026 will be the build-up to the elections, in which the city will help all candidates in running their own local election campaign. In March we'll have the elections itself, alongside the elections for the city council. In April we'll swear in members of both councils. Our focus will be on the neighborhood councils and we'll organize a big event around their inauguration, to celebrate local democracy. In the second half of the year, when all 30 councils are established, we'll help them organize their own Council Conference, in which they hope to learn from each other's best practices. On both occasions we will invite European guests and organize a side program in which we discuss the challenges of local, small-scale democracy and the solutions we selected. We aim to learn from our European partners and start a process of continuous collaborations.

# Cascais - Project Idea 4

## Impact

The inauguration will strengthen the confidence of the 291 new neighborhood council members. Our mayor will be present to personally take the oath of all 291 new members and make them aware of the important role they play in our democratic system. The inauguration will also be the first occasion in which the new councils will meet each other and discover the benefits of cooperation among councils. By focusing on the integral role that they play within our democratic system we aim to make the inauguration a festival of democracy. The conference in the second half of the year will contribute to defining the role the councils see for themselves in their four-year term and will help them find their way through all organizational layers of the city. The conference will also aim at prioritizing the matters they want to put on the political agenda. The impact will be that everyday problems of everyday people will reach the city hall and the city council.

## Implementation

For the inauguration we'll create a moment the councillors elected never forget! We organise a festive moment with mayor & aldermen and all the councillors the city has: from neighborhood as well as from the city. In the second half of the year, we challenge the neighborhood councils to organise their own conference. When they can decide on the subjects, they feel empowered in their role as a neighborhood councilor. During the conference we will organize an international orientated side program in which we will invite European partners interested in forms of democracy on a very local scale. For instance a Democracy Lab.

## Support

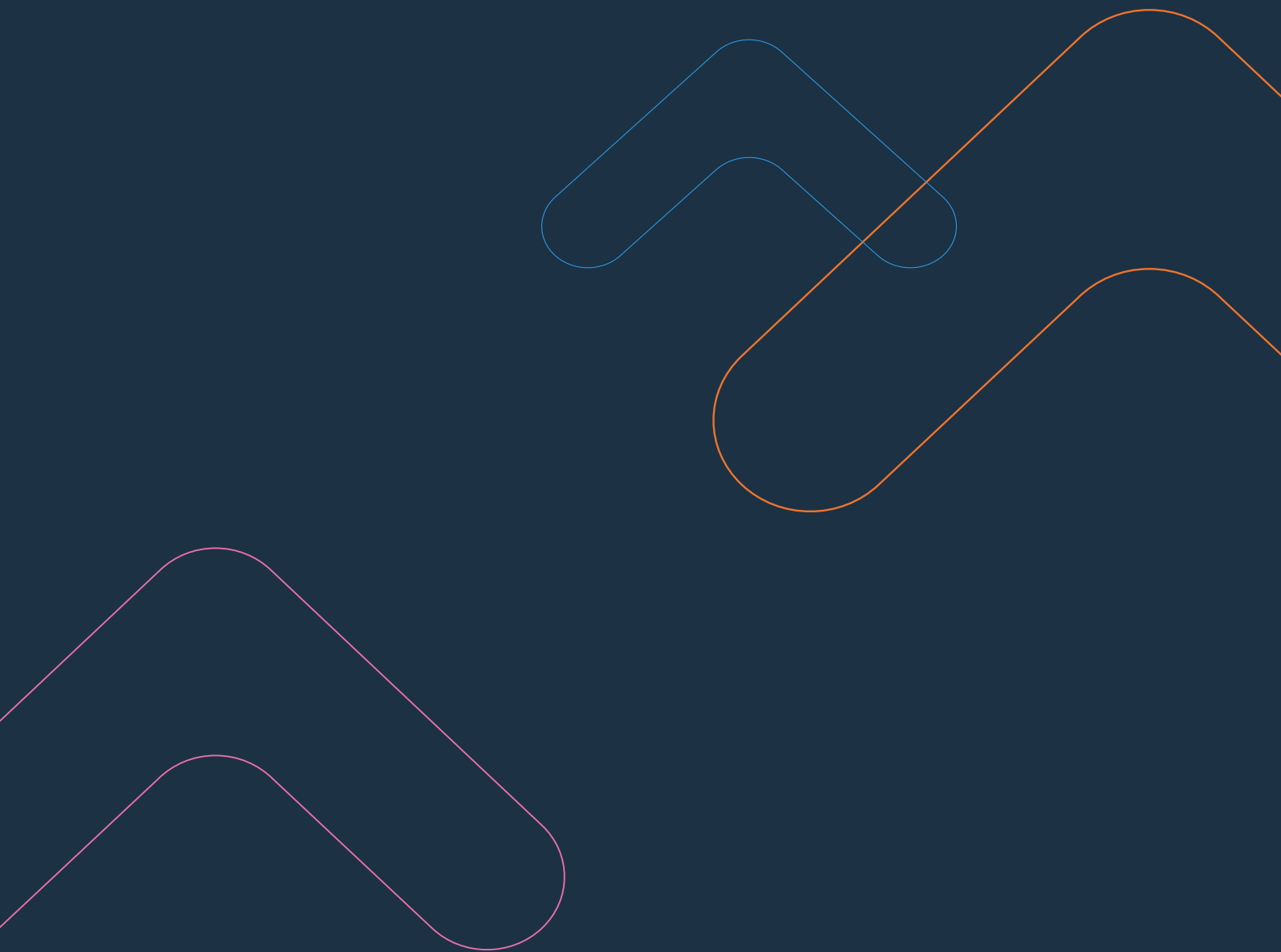
The city supports the neighborhoods councils with a small number of civil servants who will help organize both the inauguration and the conference. Budget is allocated for both.

## Video Link

<https://openrotterdam.nl/wijkraden-blikken-terug-op-eerste-twee-jaar-het-is-nog-een-beetje-zoeken/>

## Images





**European Capital  
of Democracy**