

Green Stories of Moerwijk

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#MoerwijkNoord #MoerwijkNorth #UseableGreenspace #TrandisciplinaryResearch
#PublicOpinion #LocalNeeds #Encounters #UrbanGreenSpaces



The field at van Van Ruysbroekstraat 1 2531 TG Den Haag as viewed from Coornhertstraat 22, 2531 VC Den Haag. Photography by Marta Gallego Garcia.

Introduction

This research focuses on Moerwijk North, a neighbourhood located in The Hague South West. The central community points identified there are a nursery, a primary school and a daycare centre. Our research centres around the empty field located at Van Ruysbroekstraat 1 which we refer to as ‘the field’. This is because we identified this empty as an opportunity to co-realise local stakeholders’ wishes for green spaces.

From our encounters, we identified overall low satisfaction with the number of green spaces in the area, with the exception of two stakeholders. Moreover, we identified two central issues in the area, the need for more **interactive** green spaces aimed at children and adults, and the need to resolve the littering problem, which attracts rats. Notably, both of these issues ranked significantly higher on the list of priorities of our stakeholders than biodiversity, which we took into account in our recommendations. Repurposing the field could tackle the above-mentioned problems by providing residents with the interactive green space they desire, cleaning up the littering and increasing biodiversity in the process.

This transdisciplinary research was conducted with the hopes that it will convey residents' perspectives and concerns about their neighbourhood to The Hague municipality. We hope our research can serve as a base for the co-creation of green spaces in our target neighbourhood and beyond. In the following, our stakeholders have been given fictive names to protect their privacy.

Encountering Moerwijk

Over the past weeks, we gathered information by and on Moerwijk. During the first week, we walked through the area, identified biodiversity, held casual conversations with residents and identified less obvious but equally relevant stakeholders. We went back into the neighbourhood the subsequent week to encounter more locals. To research resident desires for green spaces, or lack thereof, we encountered them through casual unscripted interviews. In this process, we mostly asked about their satisfaction with green spaces and what kind of green spaces they would like to see. In the third week, we also sought the opinion of someone in the [Moerwijk Cooperatie](#)¹ and a community builder, for which we held semi-scripted interviews. From these different perspectives, we were able to piece together the main concerns in the neighbourhood and their perceived causes.

Greenspace in Moerwijk, The Hague



The map below provides a brief overview of the study area and relevant features.

¹ **Moerwijk Cooperatie** is a registered business working to support the interests of residents in Moerwijk and provides another avenue to represent them within the municipality and other formal institutions. They also conduct projects related to biodiversity and green spaces.

Stories of Moerwijk

On the whole, many stakeholders reported low satisfaction with green spaces in Moerwijk, however, when asked about the field, not all of them wished for a green space in its place. Indeed, many wished for a playground and one for affordable housing whilst the majority of stakeholders wished for a green space. **Jan** works in a local corner store and has been living opposite for a few years now. He is among the stakeholders who desire a park instead of the field. We approached him casually, asking where we could find some green areas in Moerwijk when he mistakenly thought we were asking for directions and sent us to Zuiderpark in the Escamp neighbourhood. He later told us that he finds Moerwijk very urbanised and low on greenery and that he would like to see more parks around. Jan shared that he misses hearing the birds chirp outside like he did when he lived with his grandmother outside the city. He was the first to mention the empty field, telling us that it would be the perfect opportunity to build a park.

Lena, a local mother, agreed that green space would be a nice addition to the field, she added that a playground and outdoor exercise facility would also be valuable to incorporate. Lena told us that the playgrounds in the area are old and need renovation. She added that the lack of public exercise equipment leads adults to use the playgrounds for exercise, which contributes to their overcrowding. She wished for a well-kept, relaxing green space to have lunch instead of the field which she described as dirty and attractive. **Rabia**, another local mother, shared similar wishes for a green interactive space for adults and children. She told us that she interprets the empty field as a sign of neglect from the municipality, adding that municipal taxes are high and that she would like to see some of the money poured back into her community.

While Jan, Rabia and Lena wished for more green spaces, Kim, a local daycare employee, described Moerwijk as 'very green already' and cited litter and rats as more salient issues. She shared valuable insights on the needs of local children whom she told us already play in the littered field after the school playground closes. For this reason, she wished for a new playground instead of the field.

Johan, a contact person for Moerwijk Cooperatie criticised the municipality and social housing companies for their management of green spaces in the Moerwijk North. He claims that they do not promote enough connection to green spaces, fail to integrate the perspective of locals and don't install enough benches, which limits opportunities to connect with greenery. He added that the green spaces in Moerwijk lack biodiversity and that the low-maintenance bushes planted by the municipality are well suited to rats' nests, contributing to the pest issue. He was aware of the plans to create housing in the field, however, he wished for a park or playground, where both young and old residents could meet and interact with greenery instead. On the whole, Johan was critical of the management of green spaces and seemed very involved at the neighbourhood and municipal level. However, we later learned that this friction between him and the municipality sometimes also works as a barrier to collaboration. Thus his energy and passion for the neighbourhood might not always lead to fruitful outcomes.

Sarah², an urban sociologist working in Moerwijk told us that usable green spaces, while important, were not a top priority for the neighbourhood. As a community builder, she taught us about the different challenges facing the neighbourhood, one of which is the lack of usable greenspaces. However, Sarah said this is not a priority in Moerwijk. She told us that residents want a green space, somewhere they could meet, but also need more affordable housing. From her we learned that there will almost certainly be some type of housing built in the field, residents are being consulted but the amount of influence they will have is not entirely clear yet.

	Stakeholders	Satisfied with the number of green spaces in Moerwijk (yes/no)	Desired purpose of the field
	Jan Local corner store employee and resident	✗	Park
	Laura Local employee	✗	Playground
	Lena Mother of a child at the local school	✗	Park, playground and public exercise space.
	Rabia Mother of a child at the local school	✗	Playground with benches.
	Kim Local daycare employee	✓	Playground
	Elisabeth Local resident	✓	Housing
	Marie Local school employee	n/a	n/a
	Johan Moerwijk cooperative representative	✗	Useable green space (park, community space or playground)
	Sarah Local community builder	n/a	Useable green space (but knows it will not happen)

² Sarah works with the municipality to improve the social cohesion in the area and ensure the residents are heard at a macro level. As a community builder she holds a valuable role in the neighbourhood for residents to speak to and create action at the municipal level.

Reflection and Conclusion

We came into the neighbourhood thinking we would focus on biodiversity, however, our perspective quickly became more nuanced. We found that residents usually pointed out the lack of green areas in Moerwijk rather than the lack of biodiversity. We were also faced with the fact there are other, more salient, challenges than the lack of green spaces in the neighbourhood. In light of this, we decided to centre our research on the empty field because multiple stakeholders identified its lack of defined purpose as a salient issue in the area.

The neighbourhood expert we consulted told us that there is already a sense of research fatigue in the area, with many different studies being done over the years. As researchers coming into the area residents might be less willing to engage with us and we may contribute to the preexisting research fatigue ourselves. To prevent this as much as possible, we made it clear we are also giving back to stakeholders, with this blog and a presentation reflecting our findings.

Looking back at our stakeholder diversity we can recognise certain limitations of our research. We mostly spoke to women aged 25 to 55, partly due to the fact that we visited Moerwijk during the morning and early afternoon which is when most people except for stay-at-home mothers are not home. Furthermore, we did not interact with social housing companies, as they are not prevalent. They could have provided additional insights into resident needs and their ability to respond. However, we believe our stakeholders already provide a representative perspective regarding the lack of usable green spaces and the perceived lack of purpose for the field of the green space challenge and possible solutions.

Combining the different perspectives and wishes of the residents and local stakeholders into account would result in the interactive park depicted below. However, we realise the municipality's need for housing is great and future plans will most likely include housing as well.



Our suggestions for the neighbourhood are based on stakeholder encounters. These include benches, a playground, a community garden and public exercise spaces along with dustbins to help curb the litter issue.