

DOOR TO DOOR

TOOLS FOR STARTING A CONVERSATION ON SOCIETY IN PUBLIC SPACE

From 2020 to 2022 Door to Door used different creative conversation tools in different cities. Below you find descriptions of 12 tools we experienced as most inviting and inspiring...

We list three types of tools:

- 1) **In the street:** in public space, on a square, in the park... talking to passers-by
- 2) **Door to door:** at people's doorstep, after having rang their bell - they are 'at home'
- 3) **On appointment:** meeting people that registered for the conversation in advance, so they are prepared for this and can take some more time

Feel free to adapt to your own creativity!

SWAP YOUR COFFEE MUG



TYPE	Door to door
WHAT?	An exchange of coffee mugs between neighbours on one street, to initiate conversations about ownership, sharing, neighbourly contact.
MATERIAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- One coffee mug- Simple paper cards (which fit in a coffee mug) with two pre-printed fill-in boxes: 'my home number' and 'what else I could share with you'- One ballpoint pen

CONTEXT	<p>This tool was conceived during Door to Door in Ninove, where they are proud of their many coffee-drinking traditions ('Ninovieters, kaffegieters'). Coffee in many cultures symbolises 'catching up', 'sharing' and 'hospitality'. How do you ring the doorbell with a good reason? How do you connect neighbours in one street?</p>
HOW?	<p>You ring the first doorbell with a coffee mug. You ask residents if they want to swap that coffee mug for one of theirs, which you will then swap again with the next neighbour - and so on down the street (= the principle of the 'barter tour')</p> <p>This barter question helps as a warm-up for a conversation about topics such as ownership, sharing, special talents, social cohesion in the street.... Questions you can ask:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you sometimes share things with your neighbours? - Has that changed? Why? - What do you need yourself that you would like to get more of from others? - Should we share more in this society? Why? - Do you have certain dreams about that? <p>You can also let people fill in a pre-printed narrow card, on which they write down their house number and what else they could share with their neighbours: something they are good at, that they have too much of, that they could help others with (in Ninove, the following appeared on those cards: 'children's toys', 'a Lebanese meal', 'all that is needed', 'a free work of art'). You then put that completed card in the coffee mug you were given and can hand it to the next neighbour who opens.</p> <p>This is how coffee mugs switch from house to house in one street. Thanks to the card, neighbours know who the mug belongs to and what this person wants to share. Who knows, maybe something will come out of this?</p>
EXTRA	<p>The power of this tool is that you actually give people a kind of assignment when you ring the bell, which turns out to work surprisingly well to break the ice - before you start asking other questions. Their object becomes cause for conversation.</p> <p>Keep in mind: Not everyone likes to write. You can also write the answer on the card yourself and briefly ask them for approval of the result.</p>

PICK YOUR PIC



TYPE	In the street
WHAT?	A visual tool with a range of pictures that people can relate to in answering a general question: “choose the picture that shows best what you think about... “
MATERIAL	A cardboard placard with 15 to 20 pictures that show a wide variety of feelings and topics linked to “living together”. (You can find our selection in the Door to Door documentation folder and print, cut & paste them on a big cardboard)
CONTEXT	We used this tool in Kortrijk. It appeared to be a smooth conversation starter: you ask people to do something first.
HOW?	<p>Ask a passer-by (a small group of people can also work) if they have 10 minutes to choose some pictures or ‘to do a picture game’.</p> <p>You can use different questions to make them select a picture:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What image shows your main concern about living together in this city? - What gives you hope in society today? - What picture should become the main topic in the coming elections? <p>If they choose a picture, ask some follow-up questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What should be changed? Can you do something about it? - Was it different in the past? <p>In the case of a small group, you can ask all people to choose different pictures, which could result in a nice group discussion.</p>
EXTRA	The advantage of this tool is that it works very visually, also for people with less knowledge of the language. The pictures function as a kind of help to get the conversation started.

JENGA TOWER



TYPE	In the street / on appointment
WHAT?	A visual and concrete tool to make people discuss different phenomena in society that they don't like. One by one, they remove these phenomena from the tower (of society) by taking away the corresponding blocks, until the tower falls. You ask them to explain their choices.
MATERIAL	<p>For this tool, you need a normal or bigger 'Jenga'-tower. You can buy this wooden game in most toy shops, from 20 €. There's also the XXL version.</p> <p>On the wooden blocks, you add stickers with the names of a diverse range of phenomena in society, like: <i>Loneliness - Football - Taxes - Social housing - Debt - Social security - Bio-food - Social media - Work - Violence - Cars - Poverty - Porn - Economy - Multinationals - Noise - Capitalism - Plastic - Drugs - Family - School - Banks - Unemployment - Dirt - Cleaning - Meat - Subsidies - CD&V - Gays - Fashion - Pension at 67 - Racism - Traffic lights - Air pollution - Mayors - Vooruit - Shops - N-VA - Prisons - VAT - Wealth - Bicycle - Court - Birth control - Technology - Mosques - CEOs - Medicines - Playground - Art - Police - Refugees - Prostitution - Elections</i></p> <p>This tool also needs empty stickers or post-its in the shape of the blocks, so people can write down their alternatives on it.</p>
CONTEXT	We tested this tool for the first time in Kortrijk. It works well on the street, as people get curious when passing by.

<p>HOW?</p>	<p>Start the conversation with a question: 'what would you like to see disappear to make our society more attractive?' Ask people to take away the selected block. With each block taken away, a short conversation can develop around three questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Why exactly did you take away this phenomenon? ● What or who would have to change so that it actually disappears from our society? ● What could you yourself do for this? <p>The answer to the last question (or a broader alternative to the removed block) is written on a post-it sticker on the block, which is used to build a new tower next to the tall tower.</p> <p>You can also participate yourself after every block of a participant. In this way, you get an equal exchange, and not only an interview.</p> <p>You continue like this until the tower falls, or the conversation partners are satisfied with the conversation.</p> <p>Another alternative for on the street, starting from empty blocks (so without prewritten phenomena):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● You ask passers-by on the street to each write down on a blank sticker one phenomenon they don't like about our society (or about their city). ● Challenge them to think broadly: it could be very small things or very big things (pigeon shit, a politician, abstract tendencies...), but it would be good if other people can also imagine something about it (so not too personal things). ● Try to start a short conversation from their choices. "Why did you choose this?" "What can be done about it?" ... In the meantime, stick their words onto the block of a large Jenga tower that you slowly build up. ● When all the cubes have been filled and you have a tower, you can follow the above methodology with bystanders. This can also be with more than two people.
<p>EXTRA</p>	<p>This tool makes it easy to start a conversation, but harder to deepen a conversation (use the Door to Door-flowchart to deepen your conversation).</p>

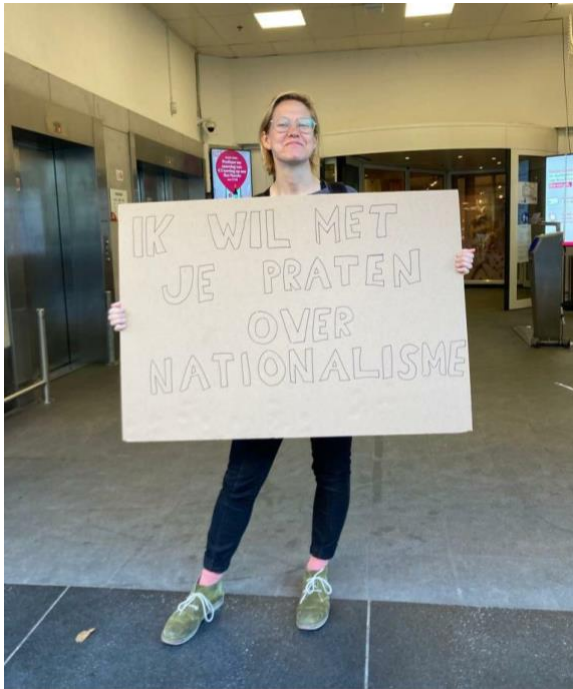
WHAT ABOUT CULTURE?



TYPE	Door to door / In the street
WHAT?	A (photo) tool to engage in conversation about people's views on art and culture in their city or life, or about a building/symbol in the city with a controversial character or history.
MATERIAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - An original photograph of a well-known cultural building - Some 20 prints of a (possibly photoshopped) version of the image of a controversial building, place, intervention, on which people can add something. These images can be hung somewhere afterwards. - A marker
CONTEXT	<p>This tool came about in Dilbeek, where the local cultural centre Westrand shows itself with the controversial inscription 'Dilbeek, waar Vlamingen thuis zijn' - 'Dilbeek, where Flemish people are at home' on top of the roof.</p> <p>The tool used had two functions: 1) to start a conversation about the value of art and culture for people, 2) to gain more insight into Dilbeek residents' views on Flemish identity in a bilingual municipality in the Brussels periphery. It is best to choose one of the two functions.</p>

<p>HOW?</p>	<p>This tool can be applied in two ways, with a different approach each time:</p> <p>1) What is people's view of art and culture? Take/search a picture of a symbolic cultural place in your city: the theatre, the cultural centre, a museum... Call people with this picture, or address them in the street: "Do you know this building?" (In Dilbeek, half of the people addressed in one street turned out not to know it). Further questions can dig deeper into how people look at art: When or for what do you visit this place? What do you associate with it? What would have to happen for you to come there more often? What do you associate with art in general? Are you creative yourself? Should the government support artists with grants or not? ...</p> <p>2) What do people think of a controversial local symbol? In Dilbeek, we also presented interlocutors with a second photo: an A4 image of the cultural centre with the caption 'Where Flemish people are at home' blanked out. We asked: what other slogan would you like to put on that visible spot, as a message to the general public? That concrete question sparked a conversation about their own position on Flemish language politics and living together in general. People could caption their own slogan with a marker on the empty board in the photo. (For example, someone wrote: "Dilbeek, do yoga and believe in God"). Thus, every municipality has a concrete point of contention: a colonial statue, a new building project, a certain association's regular pub. It symbolises conflicting perspectives in a micro-society. So a picture of it, with or without the request for an alternative, is a good starting point for a broader conversation. As a conclusion, you can ask people to add something to the picture.</p> <p>For tips on further conversation: see the brochure 'The art of dialogue'.</p>
<p>EXTRA</p>	<p>Keep in mind: for some people, suddenly coming up with a slogan feels like something high-stakes. If the idea is to complete the image with writing, you can also make your own suggestions to translate their opinion concisely.</p>

PLACARDS



TYPE	In the street
WHAT?	A very simple tool for busy places that explicitly shows your conversation question or topic on a cardboard sign. As your sign spontaneously attracts attention, people easily react and ask for more info, or give their opinion.
MATERIAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stiff cardboard - Thick markers

CONTEXT	This is a good tool if you want to start conversations via direct provocation, and if you want to be very visible in public space.
HOW?	<p>Make a cardboard placard with a clear message or question, e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "WANTED: proud Flemish person" - "Who do you blame?" - "I want to talk about nationalism" <p>Go to a busy place and ask people to respond to your message. Sometimes you will have to address people, sometimes people will spontaneously approach you.</p>
EXTRA	With this tool, you are very much on display. The advantage is that it is not so difficult to engage with people in conversation. On the other hand, at a busy square with no conversation, you can also feel alone and overly visible. With this tool, it's nice to have other conversation fellows around.

STREET NAMES



TYPE	Door to door
WHAT?	Starting conversations in a street with a thought-provoking name on a topic related to that street name (e.g. Leopold II Avenue, Toekomststraat, Verzetkaai)

<p>MATERIAL</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Potentially a few blank papers and a clipboard to write down answers on, if you are more likely to choose the researcher role - Potentially a camera to take a quick portrait of people outside their front door afterwards, with their permission.
<p>CONTEXT</p>	<p>It can help to have a good reason to casually ring people's doorbells at home. The name of the street where people live is a handy starting point, if it can relate to a topic for conversation. In Kortrijk, Door to Door took the test in the Passionistenlaan: we asked about the passions of Passionistenlaan residents, as an icebreaker for a longer conversation about their view of the wider society.</p>
<p>HOW?</p>	<p>Google the list of street names of your city or neighbourhood beforehand. Sometimes you come up with surprising insights or inspirations for conversation topics this way.</p> <p>You ring the doorbell and choose how to introduce yourself:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - openly saying who you are and why you are doing this (preferable) - presenting yourself as a kind of curious researcher <p>Make the link to the street name and choose what you would like to know, e.g:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Toekomststraat (Future Street): 'Sorry to interrupt, I was just wondering what people from Future Street actually think about the future of this city. Are you optimistic or pessimistic?' Or 'What do you dream of for this street?' - King Leopold II-laan: 'Should we change the name of this street or not? If so, which name would you prefer?' - Vlanderenstraat (Flanders Street): 'Are you proud to live in this street? What do you think of Flanders today? What do you dream of?' - Verzetskaai (Resistance Quay): 'What should we resist today? What resistance do you support?' - Vooruitgangsstraat (Progress Street): 'What does progress mean to you? Do you feel you have moved forward in recent years? Or just barely not? How would you like to see this city or street progress?' <p>More inspiration on how to then take the conversation further can be found on Door to Door's map and flowchart.</p>
<p>EXTRA</p>	<p>This tool is mainly an icebreaker to start the conversation. Tips for a fruitful further conversation can be found in the booklet 'The art of dialogue'.</p> <p>You could set up a broader project around this tool to give the answers back to the street, for instance a series of photos of residents with a central quote for each resident, in answer to your recurring question. Then you have to be clear about that during your conversation with people.</p>

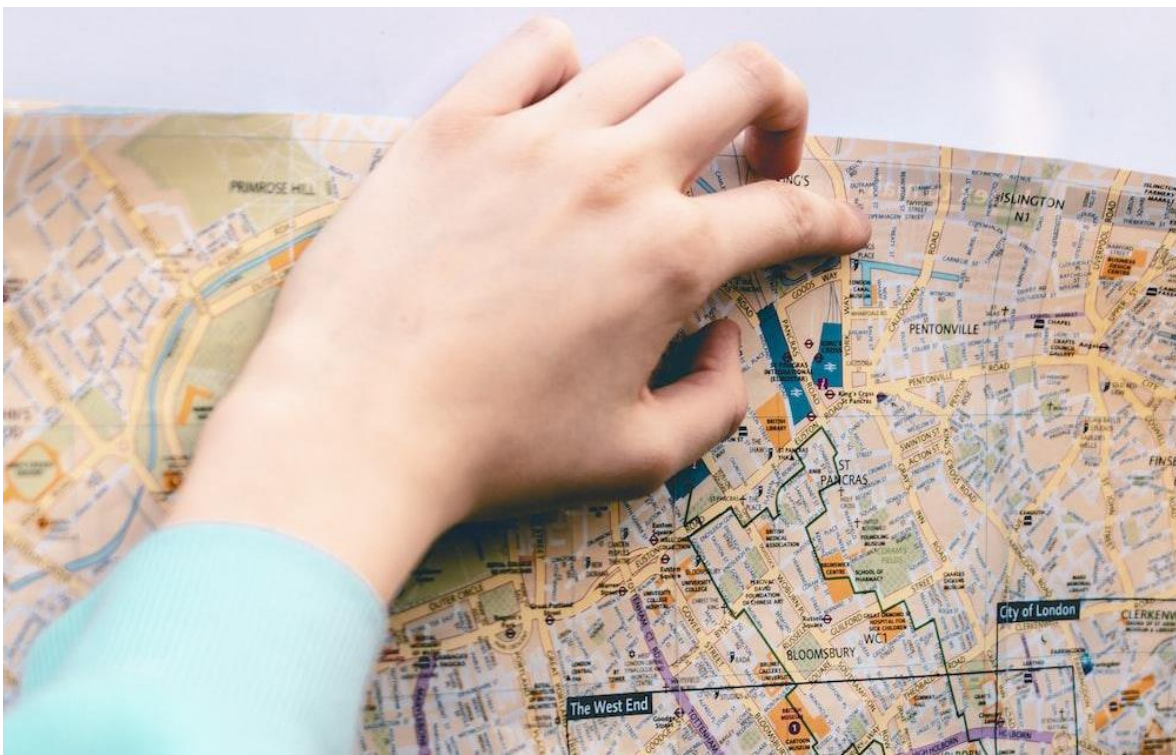
STREET SALON



TYPE	Door to door / In the street
WHAT?	A double tool, based on the idea of making a home of public space. First go find a sofa with people in the neighbourhood, then put it somewhere on the street and invite passers-by to have a conversation next to you on the sofa, with or without coffee and cake.
MATERIAL	<p>If you opt for part 1, the challenge is to borrow everything from people, and start ringing doors for it. If you only go for part 2, make your salon as simple or as dressed up as you like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - coffee, tea, biscuits, cake... - cutlery, plates, bags... - two- or three-seater - plants - a floor lamp - frames with photos - carpets

	- a stuffed dog
CONTEXT	How do you make it clear to passers-by what the intention is? A sofa with an open seating area communicates that quite clearly, just by seeing it. In Antwerp, Dilbeek and Etterbeek, Door to Door even built a wider salon, including plants and a floor lamp on a square, with white chalk lines on the ground as if to indicate an open house, like in Lars von Trier's film Dogville. A comfortable seat creates calm in the urban bustle and makes people want to sit down for a while.
HOW?	<p>This tool has two parts, but you can also go for one:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Door to door: start calling around the neighbourhood to be allowed to use someone's sofa (or other salon tools) for a few hours. This is a strange question, of course, but precisely because of that, a good opportunity for a conversation about personal ownership, trust, cocooning... Even if people are not into this, you can have an enriching conversation. Moreover, a concrete request for help is a handy entry point for going door-to-door. Some people are more willing to help than just strike up a conversation. 2) On the street: place the sofa and any other lounge pieces in a public place that is also a place people pass through. Visibly display the coffee/tea and biscuits/cake and sit yourself at one end. You could possibly add to this inviting setting a specific question on a board (see the 'placard' tool): what would you like to talk to people about? You could also set some 'house' rules for your seat discussions, e.g. 'max 20 min', 'each take turns to ask a question', 'one biscuit = a very personal question'... (Playful) rules can help give the conversation structure and get deeper together. <p>A logical conversation topic is 'hospitality' or the question 'how at home do you feel in this city?', but actually you can link any possible social topic to this tool, or just choose a very open conversation without a predetermined theme.</p>
EXTRA	If you want to keep a trace from the talks, you could put a guestbook on a table, where people could write something about their opinion or experience.

CITY MAP



TYPE	In the street
WHAT?	Through a city map, ask people about their relation to 'The Other' in the city: Who do they consider different? Who in the city is least like them? Then place a quote from the conversation near the place where you met them on the city map.
MATERIAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A city map - A pen and/or pens in various colors
CONTEXT	The tool was conceived during Door to Door in Kortrijk. There, we talked to different people along the river Leie and mapped who they considered 'different' in the city. From this, 'the rich' emerged as the most predominant answer.
HOW?	<p>You look for a city map in the local tourist centre or print one yourself. You choose a manageable area in which you intend to move. With the map in your hands, you approach people in the area, like a tourist asking for directions. You then explain to them that you are trying to map how people in that particular area think about 'others'. You can start with questions like these:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Who do you consider different? - Which people in this city do you feel the greatest distance from? - Why is that? - At what moments did you feel that this distance was bridged?

	<p>To deepen or get a dialogue going, show them the card with quotes from previous conversations and try to connect the two conversations, e.g. "Person X considered this group different/said this in our conversation. How is that for you?" In this way, you also try to establish a dialogue between people in the same area. People thus see the invisible thoughts of the others on the map.</p> <p>At the end of the conversation, write a quote from the conversation and possibly the name of your conversation partner.</p>
EXTRA	<p>The city map is a handy way to approach people. They are less suspicious when you approach them. You also keep a material trail afterwards that maps the different conversations. In addition, the conversations do not remain separate, but are linked together because people can also look at the map and the quotes on it.</p>

TOLL BRIDGE



TYPE	In the street
WHAT?	<p>A site-specific tool, inspired by a specific (historical) spot in the city. In this case we designed it on the historic toll bridge in Kortrijk, but it could be used for every bridge. After blocking the bridge with homemade 'stop' and 'toll' signs, passers-by have to answer a question (about society) as a toll before they are allowed to cross.</p>

MATERIAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A bridge leaving little passage space - 'Stop' and 'Toll' signs - Works better with several people 'occupying' the bridge, making it harder for passers-by to pass.
CONTEXT	<p>What is rewarding about the historical toll bridge in Kortrijk is that it frames the conversation very clearly: you say 'did you know that this used to be a toll bridge?' Today it is again, and as a toll, you have to answer my question.'</p>
HOW?	<p>Two people stand at each end of a bridge with a self-made 'stop' and 'toll' sign. These encourage casual passers-by to stop before they can cross the bridge. This can be done in an active way: being many and blocking the bridge, or in a more passive way: walking up to people with your sign and urging them to stop for a moment. When the passer-by stops you say:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Hey, did you know this is/was a toll bridge? Today the toll is the answer to one question, and then you may walk on." <p>After which you ask a question, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Who pays the toll in our society?" - "Are you rather optimistic or pessimistic about the future of our society?" <p>Based on the answer to the question, try to engage the person in conversation (use the flowchart for this), and when that is over, let the person walk on.</p>
EXTRA	<p>A historic toll bridge works best because that context legitimises the situation. But other bridges (or tunnels?) can also become temporary toll bridges.</p>



TYPE	In the street / on appointment
WHAT?	A tool on (national) clichés and Flemish identity, proposing an alternative to the Flemish Flag. Instead of a lion, it depicts a turtle to portray the introverted and anxious nature of Flemish people.
MATERIAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A flag drawn in advance, in the style of a Flemish flag - A list of clichés about the Flemish - A few bottles of beer - If found in public space: table and chairs
CONTEXT	This tool was created for Door to Door in Antwerp, where Flemish-nationalist thought is prominent. It was devised by two non-Flemish artists from Door to Door that have been moving in Belgian and Flemish circles for several years. From a distance, they have a specific image of what characterises Flemish people. That image is less fine and heroic than Flemish nationalists would make you believe.
HOW?	<p>Bring a flag with your alternative national drawing (in this case: the turtle) and mount it in a public space where many people pass by. Or lay it on a table.</p> <p>It's good to know in advance what 'The Fleming' symbolises to you in this drawing on your alternative flag, and to have a list of characteristics in mind. As foreign people living in Brussels we saw the nature of 'the Fleming' as introverted and anxious. One of our observations was that Flemish people only open up and show their emotions when they drink alcohol. That's why we offered the passer-by a pint to engage in a conversation about this alternative flag.</p> <p>Try to address interested passers-by: 'We made an alternative to the Flemish flag and since you are Flemish, we wanted to hear your opinion.' Explain how you got to know Flemish people and discuss how that corresponds or differs with your interlocutor. So what exactly is this Flemish identity? What animal would your interlocutors give to the Flemish and why?</p>

FLEMISH FLAG



TYPE	Door to door
WHAT?	A flag-tool starting from an empty yellow cloth: people are asked to imagine what they would like to see on the Flemish flag. It's a good tool to use with several people together at the same time, as a collective concept for the dialogues.
MATERIAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Empty yellow flags (as many as the amount of talks that you plan) - Permanent markers
CONTEXT	We used this tool on the Flemish National Day of 11 July 2021 in Neerrepen, a small village near Tongeren. This had two major advantages: there was a clear context, and because the village was small, our new flags had a big impact on the streetscape.
HOW?	Ring the bell and introduce yourself. Show the yellow flag and say "I am redesigning the Flemish flag, and am curious to know what you think is the appropriate symbol to represent Flanders". Ask why your conversation partner thinks this is the appropriate symbol and engage in conversation (tips for this can be found in the flowchart). Ask if your conversation partner would like to draw their chosen symbol on the yellow flag. If they are reluctant to do this, draw it yourself. Ask if they would like to hang the flag on their facade.
EXTRA	We used this tool collectively, with all participating conversation starters on the same day. It created a strong group feeling and a focused form of research.

SIMPLE POLL



TYPE	Door to door / In the street
WHAT?	A visually accessible way of asking people's opinions on topics of their own choosing, via a cardboard board with sliders ranging between 1 and 10.
MATERIAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A sturdy cardboard board with three sliders, made by six long cuts and three smaller cardboard plates in a different color as the sliders. Use some scotch and strings so that they don't fall out. - Possibly a camera
CONTEXT	This tool was developed during Door to Door Antwerp, under the global conversation theme "To what extent does the city feel like everyone's city?". We surveyed people about their relationship to their city. With this tool, we focused on Sint-Jansplein on Antwerp citizens with a migration background, who do not always speak Dutch. For that, this more visual tool worked quite well.
HOW?	<p>Craft a board as shown in the picture.</p> <p>Choose the overall theme you want to question, plus three sub-questions. Write them with a few simple keywords above the sliders. Devise the precise wording of the questions, as simple as possible to answer with a score. (In Antwerp, it was:</p>

	<p>"How much do you feel at home here?", "How proud are you of this city?" "How optimistic are you about the future of this city?")</p> <p>Pick a square or shopping street with some passage (or go door to door) and speak to people: "Do you have 10 minutes for a small survey about...". You can get people to move the three sliders immediately, but it is better to do it one at a time. Once their score is there, the logical next question is: "Why this score?" From there, you can continue the conversation. Would you then rather listen/interview or also reveal your score? You find out as you go along.</p> <p>If the conversation fans out a bit, or people get nervous, you can easily switch to the next question/slider.</p> <p>In Antwerp, we chose to eventually photograph people with their plates. That way you do a kind of quantitative survey at the same time. You can do something with the pictures afterwards, but you have to be clear about that with your discussion partners.</p>
EXTRA	<p>The strength of this tool is that it is immediately visually understandable and it starts with a simple task. Once the score is given, the rest of the conversation follows naturally.</p> <p>Some people prefer not to be photographed. In that case, we only took a picture of the actual board with their scores, by placing it on the ground.</p>

Interested in more tools?

Check the Door to Door [documentation folder](#)
and find the list '12 extra tools'
(mostly tools for 'on appointment', in Dutch)

