

## Maastricht, city of connectedness

**Maastricht is a cohesive city in which all residents should be able to feel at home. We must strengthen Maastricht's connectedness to realise this ambition. The new coalition of Seniorenpartij Maastricht, D66, CDA, PvdA, PVM, VVD and Volt sees improving Maastricht's connectedness as an urgent task for the next four years.**

We will therefore work on the connection *within* the city between all residents of Maastricht, the connection *with* the city that is a home for all its inhabitants and the connection *of* the city with its partners and the (Eu)region.

It is crucial that the residents of Maastricht know that they can put things on the agenda, join the conversation and help take decisions about issues that are relevant in the neighbourhood, the district, the city and the (Eu)region. There is a great need for this. It not only requires realistic ambitions from us, but also adaptability: the will and strength to change (oneself). In today's time of various international crises, being able to change is perhaps more necessary than ever.

In many respects the idea of Maastricht that one gets when looking at the city from the outside is correct: a thriving international university city in a dynamic, knowledge-driven region that is attractive to live and stay in. This provides the city with a lot of benefits and offers many opportunities for further reinforcement. At the same time, it entails specific responsibilities towards our (Eu)region and our residents.

We believe that it is high time to shape such responsibilities more actively and concretely. Division in particular threatens to become an increasingly persistent feature in Maastricht society. Division takes many forms: between original and new residents, between residents and visitors, between language groups, between neighbourhoods and along national borders (especially for border commuters) and certainly between wealth and poverty. The dividing line between rich and poor and the issue of debt that is increasingly occurring in this context is a concern for a growing group of Maastricht residents, also in the middle class and in the middle groups in our city. This poses a risk to the city's future.

We recognise the risk that division entails and we will start a countermovement – also because the price that the city pays for division continues to rise. Not only in the field of finances and the credibility of governance and policy, but especially when it comes to many residents' well-being and health. After all, residents count on governance that protects what is valuable and vulnerable, which they often do not see reflected. Our mission starts here: in recognising the risk posed by the city's dividing lines. Our starting point is important, but also no more than that – a starting point. Doing something about it, with concrete plans and actions, requires a view that extends beyond the current 2022-2026 government term. We therefore aim to do both: drawing up concrete actions for the current government term and outlining the longer-term ambitions in which they fit, which has also been done in the vision documents recently adopted by the municipal council. This will require a profound change in the social domain in particular. The previous city council has already initiated the changes. We want to build on this with determination.

Our ambitions require the municipal executive and employees of the municipality to have an open attitude towards our city. The municipality belongs to the neighbourhoods and the residents of Maastricht and should be experienced as such. It requires a different communication method and a more service-oriented governance style and service provision. It also calls for experiments with supplementary forms of democracy (via innovative forms of citizen participation, such as a citizens' council on a specific theme) and above all more and more visible area-oriented work.

All of this must be part of an internal culture change from the start, both in terms of governance and within our organisation. This means improving the quality of participation in policy formulation and implementation, which will increase support and resilience.

Offering all residents of our city a home and protecting our society requires coherence and solidarity (in the city) as well as a realistic view of the outside world (around the city). For a vital and resilient Maastricht, knowledge about the region is indispensable, as are networks in the region, the country and (near) foreign countries. Maintenance is overdue in this respect, both in the Dutch and the Euregional context. Lobbying in the region, country and Europe can and must improve.

To be able to accomplish this extensive task, we must balance our ambitions and responsibilities with the changeability of the internal organisation. The city deserves it and can expect it from us.

All this translates into concrete plans and actions in the following areas:

### **Community resilience in districts**

Community resilience in districts requires an innovative way of working for Maastricht, in which we will draw up integrated local development plans together with residents and partner organisations. Not the regulations but the solutions will take centre stage. We will start by concluding a social contract in two areas yet to be designated, setting concrete and measurable goals.

### **Spatial development**

We will not build purely for profit, but for the broad prosperity of all Maastricht residents. Spatial development is an instrument to promote quality of life, social and economic development. We foresee major developments in several important areas of the city in the coming years. Think of the ENCI site, Limmel aan de Maas, Belvédère, vulnerable neighbourhoods and the riverbanks of the Maas. In the medium term, we will continue to break down remaining East-West barriers, such as the railway.

### **Safety and liveability**

A safe and liveable living environment is a core value for our residents. Visibly present and approachable community workers, enforcement officers and local police officers are therefore important. Increasing the number of enforcement officers on the street is necessary, also at night, as is regional lobbying for more police capacity.

### **Housing**

Housing is a universal human right, which is why we want to make the housing offer in Maastricht more affordable, sustainable and diverse. We will facilitate the construction of student campuses and focus on higher quality social rental housing, more mid-market rent and sufficient supply in the owner-occupied market. We will pay special attention to housing for older people and first-time buyers to promote mobility.

### **Climate and energy**

Environmental objectives and geopolitical developments require us to accelerate on several themes, in collaboration with our residents, companies, social partners and knowledge institutions. This mainly concerns realising solutions for the flooding problem of the Maas and its tributaries, and reducing our dependence on fossil fuels. In the field of mobility, too, we will make choices that will make the living environment of our city even more attractive.

### **Participation**

Everyone should be able to join the conversation, brainstorm with us or help us make decisions. The low turnout in the municipal council elections shows how important it is to stimulate resident participation more frequently and

more strongly. In the coming years we will strive to close the gap between the municipality and its residents through various initiatives in the field of citizen participation. This includes introducing dedicated project leaders and members of the municipal executive who are each committed to one of Maastricht's seven districts, adequate working budgets included, adopting a participation ordinance and further developing the citizens' budget.

### **Economy and labour market**

The task for the coming period is to intertwine Maastricht's knowledge-based economy with the residential, working and visitor city that Maastricht currently is and will always be. In short: tourism, the manufacturing industry, people with practice-oriented training and residents who deserve more opportunities must form permanent links in the growing Maastricht knowledge economy. It is crucial to involve small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) to achieve this. It is also necessary to strengthen the bond between 'knowledge and neighbourhood' and make it tangible.

### **Sport and exercise**

To improve public health, it is essential that our residents participate in sport and exercise. We will create more facilities in our public space for playing, exercise, sports, meeting and general mobility. Together with residents and sport and exercise providers, we will provide safely accessible and well-maintained sports facilities and playgrounds in the districts and neighbourhoods, and we will facilitate residents who want to take the initiative themselves. After all, sport is not only important for health – it also stimulates encounters and acts as a social glue in the city and the neighbourhood.

### **Maastricht and the (Eu)region**

We must improve cooperation between neighbouring municipalities and sister cities, especially in view of projects such as the Einstein Telescope and the realisation of cross-border public transport. The flooding in July 2021 also shows that cooperation is more important than ever in the field of climate, sustainability, energy and strengthening our joint lobby towards The Hague and Brussels. Maastricht must play the right role in all these collaborations by taking the lead and creating connections.

### **Education and youth**

The current municipal executive aspires to prevent division and wants to do this by promoting equality of opportunity. A person's place of birth in the city should not influence their life chances. Opportunity starts with education and preventing disadvantage at an early age. Equality of opportunity also implies accessible education for everyone, which requires a broad school community on both sides of the Maas.

### **Governance, organisation and finance**

We are convinced that the municipal executive must shape the development of the city in closer collaboration with its residents. A solid area-oriented working method, both in terms of governance and organisation, is necessary to restore the connection with districts and neighbourhoods. An open dialogue with the municipal council that transcends traditional coalition-opposition thinking also fits within this approach. Here, too, we will ask ourselves: how can we arrive at the best decisions based on connection? Getting on top of the municipal finances is a decisive precondition for the success of the municipal executive's ambitions, starting in the social domain. We must also organise business operations more robustly through centralisation.