

Opening Speech

[slide 1: Welcome]

Good morning, everyone,

It is our great pleasure to welcome you to Zaanstad.

I hope you enjoy your visit so far.

I hope you've enjoyed your site visits yesterday.

And that you had a lovely diner at the 'Black Whale'.

Also by now, you probably understand why people,
often call our city center 'the Dutch Disney',

because of our modern architecture, which refers to the historic
green houses.

Welcome, to this second day of the program.

It marks a very special moment for us, to host so many of you,
from all over Europe.

And this special moment, is taking place in a very special year,
as we celebrate the 50th anniversary of Zaanstad.

Your presence here today, reminds us,

of our rich history of international connections.

For centuries, Zaanstad has been a hub of trade,
craftsmanship and co-operation.

Our timber industry and trade, have drawn people from all over
the world.

Today, this legacy lives on, in the 185 *[one hundred and eighty
five]* nationalities of residents, that call 'Zaanstad' their home.

However, we are not here to dwell on the past.

We are here to look ahead — to focus on the future.

A future where the concept of “well-being”

takes center stage for our residents.

A future built on collaboration, both within and beyond borders.

A future where we, as governments,

find and support one another,

to form one co-hérent front,

to tackle the immense challenges of our time.

As public leaders, we face enormous tasks.

Our challenge is to turn big ambitions, into concrete actions, actions that improve the everyday lives of our residents.

For this, we need to keep **their** perspective front and center.

[slide 2: foto kinderen]

Let me illustrate that,

by sharing the story of one of our young residents,

whom I'll call “David.”

David is 11 years old, lives in the eastern part of Zaandam,

and is now in the seventh grade of primary school.

He received his school's advice,

an advice, to which high school he should be attending next: vocational training.

Most of his classmates received the same advice.

This is not the level of education
that David's parents had in mind.
Their dream for him is that one day,
he might become a doctor or a lawyer or a pilot.
Hoping to see their son achieve more than they had.
But their reality is different.
His parents completed only primary school,
And now struggle to make ends meet.
They live on the edge of poverty,
which also takes a toll on their family's health.

The stress of unpaid bills weighs heavily on the family.
Their home is poorly maintained.
Healthy meals are the exception, rather than the rule.
David has been overweight from a young age.
And here is the painful truth:
David might had the chance to receive a different school advice
and to become a doctor or a lawyer or a pilot,
if only he had been born elsewhere.
He might had the opportunity to attend an academic college,
if he was born in another neighborhood — perhaps in the
western part of Zaanstad instead of the eastern part.

[slide 3: cijfers]

Because the numbers in the eastern part are telling:

- One in five children, is obese.
- One in three children, grows up in poverty.
- One in six children, faces a high risk of doing criminal activities at a young age.

Last week is an example of this.

Three boys, from the age of only fourteen years old, committed a robbery.

Just around the corner from where we are now.

Not the common mis-chief of some kids.

No, this was an armed robbery. And not the first one.

The last months, we see an increase in such high-risk, high-profile criminal behavior, and these kids get younger and younger.

These figures highlight why the concept of “well-being” is so important.

Economic growth alone, does not capture the distribution of well-being.

Prosperity means housing, environmental quality, education, the labor market, healthcare and social cohesion.

These aspects are interconnected and interdependent.

The eastern part of Zaandam,
is not the only neighborhood dealing with such challenges.
This is not unique to the Metropolitan Region of Amsterdam.
Across Europe, metropolitan regions face similar struggles.
This is why it is crucial —
for children like David and for many others like him,
that we join forces and work together.

[slide 4: de molen]

Today, we explore some of the most pressing themes of our
time.

I challenge you to connect, to find common ground,
but also to embrace differences and friction.

Avoiding the inconvenient truths,
will not get us to the solutions we need.

By addressing these head-on,
we can uncover the underlying issues
and craft meaningful, lasting solutions.

To guide these discussions,
I want to share four key values that inspire me every day.
These values are painted on the wall of my office in graffiti art
— a tribute to Zaanstad's creative spirit.
They are written in the blades of a windmill,
the historic engine of our economy.
Just as the blades keep the mill turning,
these values drive our actions:

[Ruimte] **Space** – for new ideas and perspectives.

[Lef] **Courage** – to make bold, sometimes difficult decisions.

[Waardering] **Appreciation** – for each other's contributions and efforts.

[Vertrouwen] **Trust** – in ourselves, in our residents, in our partners and in our shared vision and ideals.

These values remind us to act with integrity and purpose.
When we do so,
the outcomes will surely lead us in the right direction.
The collaboration that has connected us through history,
offers the strength we need to look into the future.
So that in 50 years from now,
future leaders will reflect with pride
on what we have achieved today.

And who knows?

Perhaps David —

empowered by the decisions we make today —
will end up becoming one of those future leaders.

A leader whose children,
regardless of where they are born,
will enjoy the same opportunities as anyone else.

Thank you.