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The politics of belonging in ethnically diverse places

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Chapter 4

Neighbourhood participation in super-diverse contexts: Comparing Amsterdam and Vienna

This chapter is co-authored by Julia Dahlvik and is under review at an international peer reviewed journal.

ABSTRACT – Urban policies are increasingly localized, stressing the role of neighbourhood social contacts in generating cohesion and citizen participation. Studies on ‘everyday’ multiculturalism also emphasize the neighbourhood as a meaningful place for encounters. However, there remains a lack of understanding of how specific contexts condition encounters with difference. We compare two European neighbourhoods that provide different contexts for participation: Amsterdam and Vienna. We ask how residents experience local spaces of encounter and how this influences their experience of the neighbourhood. We find a mismatch between the aims of local policies and the experiences of residents, who also value more superficial contacts.

4.1 Introduction

European cities are increasingly heterogeneous, housing both established and new migrant groups, who are increasingly recognized as also internally diverse (in) themselves. Vertovec coined the term 'super-diversity' to underline the complexity of these developments, encompassing all relevant aspects of diversity which influence 'where, how, and with whom people live' (Vertovec 2007, p. 1025). Responses by local authorities, service providers, and residents co-condition integration outcomes of newcomers along with other factors such as immigration status, labour market position et cetera. Migration and ethnic diversity are often politically controversial, as they are considered to pose a threat to the identity of places and social cohesion among residents, particularly when migrants are spatially concentrated in deprived areas (Robinson, 2010). These areas are viewed as places in which a host of physical, economic, and social (including ethnic) problems accumulate, resulting in multiple deprivation (Vranken, 2005).

Increasingly, national and municipal governments address these concerns through holistic territorial strategies. To solve problems of social exclusion and liveability, 'hard' physical measures, such as restructuring the housing stock, are combined with 'soft' social measures, for instance stimulating social interactions. Both problem and solution are thus situated at the local level (Andersson & Musterd, 2005; Atkinson, 2008; Van Gent et al., 2009a). The shift of responsibility from the (national) state to local institutions and citizens fits with processes of welfare state reform and/or retrenchment (Coaffee & Healey, 2003) that result in a 'localization of the social' (Amin, 2005, p. 615). Neighbourhoods are not only regarded as administrative units but also as functional and meaningful places for residents. The emphasis is therefore on constituting the neighbourhood as a community through the efforts of active citizens who are expected to feel responsible for and deploy initiatives in their local environment (Lowndes & Sullivan, 2008; Marinetto, 2003; Newman & Tonkens, 2011; Williams, 2005).

The focus on urban neighbourhoods as meaningful places for residents is also evident in recent academic literature on 'everyday' or 'lived' multiculturalism (see e.g. Clayton, 2009; Wise & Velayutham, 2009) which looks at small-scale interactions across cultural differences and the ways in which these are spatially contingent (Neal, Bennett, Cochrane, & Mohan, 2013). However, there is still a lack of integration between the literatures on urban neighbourhood governance and the experience of diverse places (Allen & Cars, 2001). As argued by several authors (Amin & Thrift, 2002; Phillips & Robinson, 2015), more research is needed on how different

(national, municipal, neighbourhood) contexts influence the way diversity plays out in a specific locale, including the role of spaces of encounter that are created as part of government interventions. In this chapter, we examine whether and how local initiatives create spaces of encounter where residents of diverse backgrounds can build social relations. A more in-depth look into the dynamics of participation in contexts of high diversity can contribute to debates on the circumstances under which intergroup contacts are experienced positively, and how local initiatives can be designed to facilitate encounters among residents. Thus, the study responds to calls for research that identifies 'key forms of space and contact that might yield positive benefits' (Vertovec, 2007, p. 1046). The study is carried out in two different urban contexts, Amsterdam and Vienna. Both represent internationally significant case studies of cities in which ethnic diversity has long been a reality but remains a dynamic question due to the continued incorporation of new groups and identities into the city and neighbourhood, the effects of which are politically contested.

4.2 Organizing encounters with difference

Super-diversity challenges policy-makers seeking to organize communities and provide services for a diversifying population (Vertovec, 2007). Neighbourhood diversity might undermine residents' sense of belonging as it makes everyday routines and interactions more uncertain and unpredictable (Neal et al., 2013; Wise, 2010). On the other hand, when diversity has become unremarkable and 'commonplace' (Wessendorf, 2013), the shared use of public spaces may also create a degree of mutual acknowledgment and feelings of comfort based on public familiarity – recognizing others and being recognized in local spaces (Blokland & Nast, 2014). While such encounters do not necessarily increase understanding of the Other or result in more sustained relations, their presence may nevertheless serve to stave off prejudice (Wessendorf, 2013). However, Valentine (2008) warns that interactions in diverse neighbourhoods are always embedded within existing power relations and shaped by people's accumulated social experiences (see also Chimienti & Van Liempt, 2015). Rather than having a positive influence, sustained encounters can also reproduce negative stereotypes and breed conflict.

With the potential benefits of encounters in mind, local governments have invested in purposefully created micro-spaces of local organizations and initiatives (Matejskova & Leitner, 2011) that facilitate the creation of social links between residents. These could potentially function as 'local micro-publics of social contact and encounter' (Amin, 2002, p. 959) that allow participants to step out of their 'ordinary' environment

and social roles into spaces of displacement and destabilization. According to the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1979), under the right circumstances, interpersonal contact between majority and minority groups has the potential to reduce prejudice. The criteria for positive contact are personal interaction, equal status between the groups, cooperation towards a common goal, and support of authorities, law, or customs. If these are fulfilled, contact would enhance knowledge about out-groups, reduce anxiety, and increase empathy, resulting in less prejudice (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). Neighbourhood projects which offer sustained engagement and cooperation between individuals of different groups in a neutral space approximate Allport's conditions for beneficial contact (Matejskova & Leitner, 2011), as well as Amin's (2002) description of micro-publics.

In-depth studies of projects aiming to increase participation and cohesion in diverse neighbourhoods show that while these provide opportunities for interethnic encounters, their nature can both foster and foreclose understanding across group lines (see e.g. Askins & Pain, 2011; Bloch & Dreher, 2009; Matejskova & Leitner, 2011; Phillips et al., 2014). This suggests that more conditions need to be fulfilled in order for contacts to be experienced as positive, such as local ownership of the initiative, shared activities or goals (Askins & Pain, 2011; Matejskova & Leitner, 2011) and mechanisms to overcome power inequalities between individuals and groups (Phillips et al., 2014). The open-ended nature of encounters with difference in local spaces (potentially destabilizing or reinforcing pre-existing attitudes and boundaries) necessitates paying close attention to interactions as they unfold in specific contexts.

4.3 Participation and institutional embeddedness

Resident engagement in super-diverse neighbourhoods can take different forms, ranging from participation in top-down organized initiatives to bottom-up grassroots movements. The institutional context influences how local initiatives are organized and which kinds of participation are stimulated. As Cornwall (2004) notes, 'invited spaces', which are provided by institutions at their terms, result in different dynamics and outcomes than 'popular spaces', which are initiated by members of the public (see also Jupp, 2008). Yet 'popular spaces' can become co-opted and/or institutionalized, and 'invited spaces' may be used for counter-hegemonic purposes. Recent studies of social cohesion policies (Eizaguirre, Pradel, Terrones, Martinez-Celorrio, & García, 2012; Miciukiewicz, Moulaert, Novy, Musterd, & Hillier, 2012) also show an increasing prevalence of hybrid forms of 'bottom-linked' participation, whereby initiatives

developed by residents are supported and realized through top-down policies. While this provides new opportunities for residents to engage with and potentially influence policies, there is a danger that such participation mainly serves to legitimize top-down interventions (Jones, 2003; Teernstra & Pinkster, 2015) or to shift responsibilities for neighbourhood development from the state unto local communities (Taylor, 2007). It is, therefore, necessary to further examine the 'meanings and practices associated with participation' (Cornwall, 2008, p. 269) in order to understand who participates, under which circumstances, and what this means.

A first question that should be asked is who can take part and who cannot or does not want to participate and for what reasons (Kesby, 2007). Problems faced by local communities are often framed as resulting from a lack of participation (Jones, 2003; Williams, 2005) and non-participation of individuals or groups within neighbourhoods is problematized as a sign of inability or unwillingness (Mathers, Parry, & Jones, 2008; Taylor, 2007). In fact, differences in participation result not only from individuals' motivations, but also depend on power relations within specific initiatives (Barnes, Newman, Knops, & Sullivan, 2003) and their embeddedness in other (neighbourhood, institutional) contexts. Barriers to participation can arise due to inequalities in terms of skills, resources, and bargaining position between various actors involved in neighbourhood programs (Taylor, 2007; Teernstra & Pinkster, 2015). Projects aiming to increase local involvement depend heavily on residents who are willing to take the lead and invest time and effort (Coaffee & Healey, 2003; Robinson et al., 2005). Urban professionals may want to stimulate participation but at the same time describe residents, especially those with a migrant background, as lacking organizational capacities and the cross-cutting social networks which would allow them to be seen as community representatives (Dekker & Van Kempen, 2009; Kokx & Van Kempen, 2010). Institutional representatives aim to support interventions based on 'shared interests', whereby they position themselves as neutral actors (Lavoie, 2012). However, as neighbourhood diversity increases it becomes more likely that groups disagree on what is desirable or even acceptable behaviour (Dinham, 2007), begging the question of who has the power to define 'the' public interest (Barnes et al., 2003).

4.4 Study design

This chapter discusses residents' experiences of neighbourhood initiatives as spaces of encounter, illustrated by one neighbourhood case study in Amsterdam and one in Vienna. The findings are part of the comparative research project 'Interethnic Coexistence in European Cities',¹⁷ which looks at the possibilities for urban neighbourhood policies to create a sense of belonging in ethnically diverse neighbourhoods. We employ a mixed methodology, including semi-structured interviews with participants and non-participants of neighbourhood initiatives¹⁸ as well as expert interviews with local stakeholders (representatives of municipal organizations, housing associations, and other neighbourhood organizations). In addition, we analyse interactions in 'Urban Livings Labs' (Franz, 2015), spaces of sustained participant observation with the researchers participating in activities where people meet, learn and collaborate as part of their daily life and environment. Amsterdam and Vienna are both highly ethnically diverse cities with a long history of governing diverse neighbourhoods through area-based programs. In Vienna, this took the shape of soft urban renewal, which focuses on gradual and sustainable renovations by including current residents in the process (Fassmann & Hatz, 2012). In The Netherlands, the Big Cities Policies and successor policies have approached economic, social, and physical issues in an integrated way (Van Gent et al., 2009a). A major difference between the cities concerns the organization of policy measures at the local level: while in Vienna these are largely organized in a top-down manner, funded by the municipality, Amsterdam prioritizes 'bottom-linked' initiatives in which resident groups cooperate with and are funded by the local government but also institutions such as housing associations.

The neighbourhoods discussed in this chapter are Gumpendorf (part of the 6th district) in Vienna and a neighbourhood in the New-West district in Amsterdam. Within these neighbourhoods, specific initiatives were selected for in-depth analysis. Desk research and preliminary interviews with local stakeholders indicated that these initiatives provide spaces of encounter to residents of diverse backgrounds because of their aims and/or design. In Gumpendorf (Vienna), interviews with 44 residents and five stakeholders (representatives of the initiatives studied) were conducted between March and June 2015. In New-West (Amsterdam), 32 residents were interviewed between April and June 2015, as well as eight local stakeholders (municipal employees,

17 ICEC (2013-2016), funded by JPI Urban Europe, see www.icecproject.com.

18 Non-participants were included to find out how they perceive the selected initiatives as well as their reasons for non-participation. The larger study also included secondary data and policy document analysis.

Table 2 | Respondent samples of selected neighbourhood case studies

	Gumpendorf (Vienna)	New-West (Amsterdam)
Residents	44	32
Participants	18	15
Non-participants	26	17
Gender		
Female	25	17
Male	19	15
Age		
≤30	5	9
31-59	31	16
≥60	8	6
Unknown	0	1
Ethnic background ¹⁹		
Austrian / Dutch	28	13
Non-Austrian / Non-Dutch	16	19
Duration of residency		
≤10 years	14	16
>10 years	20	15
Unknown	10	1
Educational background ²⁰		
Low	3	7
Middle	19	8
High	16 ²¹	13 ²²
Unknown	6	4
Occupational background		
(Self-)employed	28	7
Unemployed	4	13
Pensioner	4	5
Student	1	6
Unknown	7	1
Household composition		
Single	9	9
/with children	3	2
/with others	1	6
Couple	8	4
/with children	15	10
Unknown	8	1

19 Self-identified

20 Low includes primary or secondary education; Middle includes low tertiary education (e.g. trade school); High includes higher tertiary education.

21 These numbers mirror the high rate of persons with tertiary education in Gumpendorf (28.2%) relative to the Viennese average of 17.9%. The share of residents having only compulsory education is relatively low (21.8%), and 50.1% completed secondary education (Statistik Austria, 2011; City of Vienna, 2012-2013. Own calculations).

22 The relatively high share of highly educated respondents in the sample (41%, compared to 17% in the overall neighbourhood) is due to the inclusion of a number of student volunteers.

employees of housing associations, and civil society representatives). Participants were contacted at initiatives and through leaflets distributed in the neighbourhood; non-participants were reached through snowball sampling and quota-based sampling in public space. Table 2 provides detailed information on the two resident samples. The semi-structured interviews discussed residents' perceptions of the neighbourhood and selected initiatives, their experiences of diversity and their (interethnic) encounters in the neighbourhood and (where applicable) in the selected spaces of encounter. Stakeholders were likewise asked about their perception of the neighbourhood and its residents, their work in the neighbourhood, and neighbourhood initiatives. In addition, participant observation was conducted during activities in the 'Urban Livings Labs': the Neighbourhood Centre in Gumpendorf and three 'neighbourhood living rooms' in Amsterdam New-West.

4.5 Neighbourhood case study 1: Gumpendorf in Vienna

The study area Gumpendorf is part of the larger borough of Gumpendorf in Mariahilf (6th district), located in Vienna's inner city. The neighbourhood forms a homogeneous and compact spatial unit. Access to green spaces is limited as Mariahilf is Vienna's most densely built and least-green district. Gumpendorf has a comprehensive social infrastructure, including eleven educational institutions as well as a relatively high density of social services (drug counselling, Sisters of Charity et cetera), and is well connected through a dense public transport network. Roughly half of the buildings in this neighbourhood were constructed during the 19th century (*Gründerzeit*). Twenty public housing buildings are located in the area. Although residents distinguish the 'hip' area close to the city centre from the more run-down area further from the centre, it is generally perceived as a good area. The proportion of residents with a migrant background reflects the city average. The largest ethnic groups (first and second generation migrants) in Gumpendorf are people with backgrounds from former Yugoslavia (8.1%), Germany (4%), Turkey (3%) and Poland (2.7%), while Austrians without a migration background make up 59.7 percent of the population (Statistik Austria, 2011; City of Vienna, 2012-2013). Gumpendorf was a target area for renewal subsidies (in 2006) by the municipality, including revitalization of apartment buildings and improvement of recreation areas. Currently, municipal policy measures regarding interethnic coexistence, ethnic diversity, and local integration are implemented in the neighbourhood.

Five initiatives were selected for in-depth analysis. Two of these target specific resident groups: *Free Pre-school*, introduced in 2009 by the municipality, provides public education for children aged 0-6, with social integration being one of the aims. Participation in *Free Pre-school* is voluntary and usually related to living nearby. In the last year before primary school, however, it is obligatory for children to attend (public or private) pre-school. The *Neighbourhood Service for Social Housing*, which is also funded by the municipality, aims to improve social relations and mediate conflicts among social housing residents. Participation is usually related to some conflict within one's building, such as interfering uses of the courtyard, vandalism, or perceived noise pollution. Its 'Welcome Neighbour' initiative promotes (not only, but also) interethnic living-together within the building by welcoming new neighbours and familiarizing them with the conventions in Austrian social housing.

The other three selected initiatives are open to all residents. *Gardening around the Corner*, introduced in 2008 and led by the Urban Renewal Office²³, is a hybrid initiative for residents who are interested in urban gardening and embellishing the neighbourhood. *Ask Next Door*, a bottom-up initiative introduced in 2014, is an online platform that aims to improve contacts among neighbours. Participants use the platform to get recommendations for physicians or other services in the neighbourhood, among other things. Finally, the *Neighbourhood Centre*, established in 1997, is a top-down initiative that considers itself a low-threshold meeting point in the neighbourhood. Activities are either free or based on a voluntary donation. The Centre's activities, which are mostly scheduled during the day, tend to attract specific groups such as pensioners, persons unfit for work, or those who are self-employed or part-time employed. Participants have often experienced some 'emergency situation' in their lives or have psychological problems, and the Centre also provides counselling for those who find themselves in socially precarious situations.

The selected initiatives thus differ in the type and degree of participation that they require. While participation in *Free Pre-school* and the mediation offered by *Neighbourhood Service for Social Housing* often represent a necessity, the other initiatives are based more on residents' voluntary involvement. Several residents explain that they do not participate in the latter kind of initiatives because they are not interested, unwilling, or unable to make the required time commitment. Many interviewees who live in Gumpendorf also have houses outside of the city where they spend most of their spare time:

23 The Urban Renewal Office is a service facility of the City of Vienna concerned with topics such as housing counselling, neighbourhood infrastructure, public space, and promotion of coexistence. It aims to be low-threshold and to reinforce resident participation in urban renewal processes.

I'm not interested in these activities and prefer to spend my time otherwise. Maybe because I only spend much time in my house on the countryside. My wife and I just had to be here because of work. As soon as we could, we drove to Lower Austria. ... I like the tranquility out there; it's so relaxing. Here it's quite loud after all (Male, in his 60s, from Austria).

Among those who do participate, some interviewees point out that they have developed new contacts through the initiatives. The initiatives studied created spaces that engendered different types of contact, often with fellow participants. Some parents whose children participate in Free Pre-school mention that they have come to know other parents based on their children's friendships, although deeper or longer-lasting contacts between parents are rare. The Neighbourhood Centre also contributes both to inter- and intra-ethnic contacts through the open character of its classes and the availability of rooms for rent for group meetings, for example religious or self-help groups, with people from the neighbourhood but also from further away:

The Neighbourhood Centre is great, there is an open atmosphere, everyone is warm-hearted and friendly. You can also get to know people here with whom you meet privately afterwards. You also get information and tips on different issues... I think the Centre contributes to togetherness; it's an important institution and it's important that participation is for free (Female, in her 40s, from Germany).

The recently established online platform *Ask Next Door* also seems to be successful in creating contacts at least for those interviewees who seem open and interested in meeting new people, implying a certain (self-)selection process. One of the participants, an Austrian ethnic woman in her sixties, explains that she has come to know many new people through the platform and has already been invited to a birthday party. 'The platform once organized a barbecue for all in our building block; that was nice for making new acquaintances,' another interviewee (Male, in his 60s, from Austria) points out.

In other cases, encounters take place between participants and others in public space. This was particularly the case for participants in Gardening around the Corner. As a legalized version of previous guerrilla gardening, it takes place in public space where participants work to improve the urban landscape by taking care of a small plot of greenery. Even though social contacts are not the main aim of this initiative, participants (most of whom are Austrian ethnic) explain that they often receive

positive feedback from pedestrians walking by when they are working in their garden. Sometimes, neighbours also bring plants for the garden, or offer to help care for them. One of the participants, an Austrian woman in her fifties, notes that since she started taking care of the greenery in front of her house, many of her neighbours (Austrian and non-Austrian ethnic) have also shown interest in gardening and started contributing. Another participant explains that the fact that he is now caring for the plants in the courtyard of his apartment building has improved his relationship with his neighbours, as it 'solved [my] debt with the older neighbours from earlier times when it [my parties] was a little louder' (Male, in his 40s, from Germany).

Due to its nature – urban gardening on the street – the initiative promotes interaction among residents and with passers-by in public space, which is otherwise rare, and thereby enhances public familiarity (Blokland & Nast 2014) as well as generating a more general sense of responsibility for the neighbourhood's upkeep. A similar effect was reached when the Neighbourhood Service for Social Housing opened a playground to the public that was previously only intended for the social housing block. 'They once came to look at the situation in our playground [since it was locked and not used very much]; now it's open all day for everyone, also for those outside our building' a social housing resident (Female, in her 50s, from Austria) explains, adding that she thinks it is a good development for the neighbourhood to share this place. These findings show that public space, as opposed to institutional settings, should not be underestimated as an urban space of encounter.

Although the investigated initiatives enable various forms of small-scale encounters and interactions, these are not necessarily interethnic. Interviewees often failed to mention this, and when questioned sometimes did not know the ethnic background of their contacts. This can be interpreted as a sign of functioning integration since the interviewed residents apparently do not make this differentiation. However, as (with the exception of Free Pre-school) most participants in the studied initiatives were ethnic Austrian or German, it seems likely that same-ethnic interaction accounted for a large part of overall encounters engendered by these initiatives. The relative absence of non-Austrian ethnic participants – which is notable given that they make up forty percent of neighbourhood residents – can also indicate that they are less interested in existing initiatives and/or face more barriers for participation. In some cases these barriers are formal requirements, as is the case for the Free Pre-school, where both parents need to be employed for their children to be admitted. Non-participants, many of migrant background, often report that they did not get a place in free pre-school for their children due to the restrictive admission criteria:

I really wanted my son to go to public pre-school but they kept telling me that there is no place for him anymore and that I'm too late for the registration. The private pre-school is expensive and I heard from another mother that the care is more or less the same (...) I didn't get a place in the neighbourhood, so in September he has to go to pre-school in the 10th district which is really unpractical because it's a long way
(Female, in her 20s, from Romania)

The requirement of employment for both parents creates a vicious cycle, as childcare must first be secured in order to be able to access the labour market, which already tends to be more difficult for migrants, especially women. Besides, the limited opening hours of the free pre-school are problematic for persons who have to work late, in particular, single parents. Therefore, these parents often have to find a private pre-school for their children. Moreover, several interviewees – of Austrian and non-Austrian ethnic background – prefer private over public pre-school. They explain that the private pre-school has a better ratio of teachers to children and that they think that children do not learn German well in public pre-schools, since non-Austrian ethnic children tend to speak different languages there. Thus, for some parents it is a deliberate decision not to participate in the free pre-school offered by the city²⁴:

We put our daughter into a private kindergarten so that she learns German and it's better in the private kindergarten. In the public kindergarten all children are foreigners and the children learn Turkish; they don't learn German well (Male, in his 20s, from Turkey).

In other cases, the limited success of initiatives in attracting participants of different ethnic backgrounds can be attributed to a variety of implicit exclusionary mechanisms. A number of initiatives require German language skills and Ask Next Door also requires IT skills, which might exclude the elderly, among other groups. Other initiatives such as the Neighbourhood Centre have activities primarily during the day, when most people have to work. Although the threshold in the Centre is low due to a shop-like walk-in premise and donation-based course fees, non-ethnic Austrians seem to be less attracted by the offer; a majority of participants appears

24 It should be noted that the financial difference between the public and the private institutions is rather small since in the public preschool parents have to pay for the food while this is included in the fee for the private preschool, which is also subsidized by the city.

to be ethnic Austrian. The same is true for Gardening around the Corner, which however has a higher threshold since people need to know where to go and whom to ask regarding the registration procedure. Also, those residents who know the Neighbourhood Service describe it as only partly successful in its mediating role since conflicts cannot always be solved sustainably (for example regarding the activities of youth groups in the social housing blocks). In addition, its 'Welcome Neighbour' initiative, which is specifically designed to promote peaceful (not only, but also interethnic) living-together within the building, is mostly not known even when residents are familiar with the Service itself. Summing up, communication with potentially interested residents is a general problem, which cannot be reduced to the German language as a barrier: initiatives tend to reach only certain groups of residents – others either do not know that the initiative exists or whether and how they can participate. If initiatives want to create more inclusive spaces of encounter, they will have to address other groups more actively and demonstrate the possibilities they offer.

Although – with the exception of Ask Next Door – the initiatives studied do not primarily aim to promote interaction between residents, they do offer potential spaces of encounter and to some extent create contacts – both among participants and in some cases also with other residents – which did not exist before. However, these new contacts are often not interethnic. One advantage of top-down initiatives where residents do not have to become active themselves, such as Free Pre-school and the Neighbourhood Service for Social Housing, is that they reach at least part of the so-called hard-to-reach groups, especially migrants. These kinds of initiatives allow policymakers to implement planned social mixing 'from above.' Contrary to their inclusionary aims, however, they also exclude certain resident groups. In Free Pre-school, these are for example parents who cannot fulfil the requirement of employment, and others who decide not to participate based on quality concerns. In contrast, in initiatives where participation is based on voluntary involvement, barriers to participation – especially for residents of migrant background – are related to different factors such as other primary aims, exclusionary mechanisms such as the need for German language skills, and the fact that some initiatives are little known among residents. To what extent (interethnic) contacts between residents take place thus depends on the design of the initiative, with top-down and bottom-up initiatives both having benefits and drawbacks in regard to fostering interethnic encounters.

4.6 Neighbourhood case study 2: New-West in Amsterdam

The neighbourhood selected as Amsterdam case study forms part of the Amsterdam New-West district. Built in the 1950s as a response to urbanization and post-war housing shortages, the intention was to create quiet, residential neighbourhoods for the growing number of blue-collar workers living in crowded conditions in the city centre. Its design is based on the 'garden cities' ideal, emphasizing light and spacious housing, green spaces and parks, and community-building institutions such as schools and neighbourhood centres. While the New-West district was viewed as an attractive place to live until the beginning of the 1990s (Mepschen, 2012), today its image is rather different. Many New-West neighbourhoods are classified as 'deprived' due to physical (deterioration of public space, social housing concentrations) and social aspects (many residents have a low socioeconomic status, and the majority has a migrant background). In the selected neighbourhood, the largest ethnic groups are first and second generation migrants from Morocco (26.6%) and Turkey (18.2%), while ethnic Dutch make up 24.3 percent of the population (OIS, 2016). Policy papers and research commissioned by the Amsterdam municipality stress the neighbourhood's perceived lack of cohesion and the tense relations between population groups as major problems (see e.g. Broekhuizen & Van Wonderen, 2012; Amsterdam New-West, 2012).

The neighbourhood has participated in area-based regeneration programs – targeting the 'worst' neighbourhoods in the Netherlands and Amsterdam – at least since 2008. These policies consist of a mix of physical and social initiatives along thematic lines, including liveability (safety, public space) and togetherness (creating ownership, improving social cohesion and participation), that include a budget for small-scale resident initiatives (Amsterdam New-West, 2012). This study focuses on three such initiatives, called *buurthuis* or 'neighbourhood living rooms,' that embody the policy aim of stimulating resident participation. Rather than viewing participation in resident initiatives as a means to an end, policy-makers consider the act of participating itself to be a social good as it would generate feelings of connection and belonging (De Wilde, 2015).

The neighbourhood living rooms organize their own activities and host those of other neighbourhood groups, and in addition provide a space for consultation with the housing association, welfare organizations et cetera. They are central points where residents can get information in an informal manner: to ask whether the housing association representative is in, or for help with translating an official letter. They can be characterized as 'bottom-linked' (Eizaguirre et al., 2012; Miciukiewicz et al.,

2012): housing associations and/or the district government provide premises and subsidize activities, but their informal and personal approach is feasible because of the great efforts of a few central volunteers. These are often either students or long-time ethnic Dutch residents who are unemployed or receive disability benefits. This allows volunteers to spend a lot of time in the living rooms (in one case equivalent to a full-time job). The exception is one neighbourhood living room in which most of the organizational work is done by the (Surinamese) housing association representative who also invests much of her spare time in the initiative. These volunteers embody the policy ideals as they feel a great sense of ownership and responsibility for their initiative and the broader neighbourhood. Their importance is also repeatedly mentioned by participants of living room activities: ‘before we had nothing. Since [volunteer] came here, there are a bit more contacts with the neighbours and so on. Before I didn’t know that many people’ (Female, in her 50s, from Suriname).

Although they find their involvement rewarding (both in terms of learning specific skills and in terms of social relations), volunteers can feel overburdened or have trouble letting go and delegating to others. As they become familiar faces in the neighbourhood, they are often approached by other residents for information or advice, which can be time-consuming and thus they may feel as if they are always ‘on duty’. Volunteers are also unhappy with the complicated and bureaucratic procedures they have to follow and which they interpret as signs of mistrust. One volunteer talks about being ‘undermined [by the housing association] (...) like they want me gone [from the neighbourhood living room]’ (Male, in his 50s, from the Netherlands). Navigating bureaucratic requirements is especially an obstacle and deterrent for lower educated and non-ethnic Dutch residents, who consider it a waste of time and tend to experience ‘the system’ as unfair and hypocritical: ‘employees of [housing association] sometimes treat volunteers as regular employees, with the things they expect’ (Male, in his 50s, from the Netherlands). Some interviewees (both volunteers and ‘regular’ participants) applied for funding to start an initiative, only to be rejected for reasons they experience as arbitrary. Others indicate that, rather than becoming active themselves, ‘the government’, the district, or ‘people in the know’ should organize activities:

[paraphrased from interview notes] *the municipality should send people to ask what residents want (...) I can be a part if they need someone [for an activity], so I can see how it works, but the one organizer has to be someone with power or money, someone who knows how it works* (Male, in his 30s, from Turkey).

Higher educated residents (most of whom are ethnic Dutch) on the other hand, tend to view participation as offering networking and learning opportunities. Their cultural capital makes higher educated interviewees feel capable of organizing activities if they want to (which is often not the case). Thus, who participates and how participation is experienced depends on various factors including external constraints such as work or other obligations, one's personality as an 'association person' or not, and residents' confidence in their abilities.

As such, interviewees' views differ from the district's vision on participation as something that all residents can (and should want to) do. This is especially the case for volunteers, who are more actively involved in organizing activities and setting up initiatives than 'ordinary' participants. While they can apply for subsidies to offset organizational costs, they do not receive any personal monetary compensation as – according to institutional actors – this would detract from the sense of cohesion and shared responsibility that neighbourhood initiatives are intended to cultivate:

[paraphrased from interview notes] *the idea is not to pay volunteers because we want to signal that the neighbourhood is yours, you as residents have to keep it a liveable place together. The housing association shouldn't have to pay for that (...) they [volunteers] derive satisfaction from a sense of ownership, that's the real reward* (Area representative of the housing association).

The one exception to this rule of unpaid voluntary work is the 'DIY team' of one of the neighbourhood living rooms, whose members receive a small compensation²⁵ in return for performing minor maintenance tasks. Interviewees indicate that this compensation is a reason why the team is also highly ethnically diverse, with ethnic Dutch, Turkish, Moroccan, and Surinamese members (although not diverse in other aspects, as all participants are low-educated, middle-aged men). Financial compensation is an incentive to join, not just to supplement one's income – the team members either receive welfare benefits or are retired – but also because participants believe that it increases their chances of finding regular employment. Although they joined for pragmatic reasons, they have come to enjoy the social contacts (they work in pairs and also have a weekly teambuilding meeting).

25 4 Euros/hour, for a maximum of 6 hours a week. In 2015, minimum wages were at 8.66 Euros/hour in the Netherlands.

The design of the 'neighbourhood living rooms' emphasizes homeliness and informal social interactions. Although there are also more structured activities (such as Dutch language classes), residents are encouraged to drop in 'just because' and interact with the volunteers and other participants. As the centres derive their legitimacy from serving the neighbourhood residents, attracting a diverse group of participants and creating an open and inclusive atmosphere are considered important. One way in which this is done – which was mentioned during interviews and also emerged from participant observation – is through the moderation of activities and group discussions by volunteers, who take care to emphasize any shared interests or experiences as well as insist on using Dutch as a shared language whenever possible. For example, during a meeting of the DIY team, a discussion on the Dutch political system results in a Surinamese Christian and a Turkish Muslim participant together defending the legitimacy of confessional political parties, a statement which the organizer enthusiastically repeats to the rest of the group. During a later discussion on living in the neighbourhood which was started by the researcher, the same Surinamese man remarks that 'I speak a bit of Turkish and a bit of Arabic, that's only logical if you live here.' Notwithstanding the matter-of-factness of his remark, many other (non-participant) interviewees do in fact regard the numerical and symbolic dominance of Turks and Moroccans in the neighbourhood as highly problematic, and especially criticize their (perceived) inability or unwillingness to speak Dutch.

Shared neighbourhood residency is also used to invoke common ground: participants would greet each other as neighbours and refer to earlier occasions when they ran into each other in the neighbourhood. In turn, encounters within the living rooms increase public familiarity as participants see more familiar faces on the street or are greeted by people met at activities. Being 'visibly active' also serves to establish and reinforce norms of friendliness and neighbourliness: 'Activities increase the [social] bonds (...) A neighbour sees you clean up the [common] garden. Yes, of course, that does something to you. You think hey, somebody is cleaning up my garden' (Male, in his 40s, from Morocco). While all interviewees profess to adhere to an 'ethos of mixing' (Wessendorf, 2013) whereby 'good neighbours' greet one another, keep shared spaces clean, and generally behave respectfully towards others, participants mention more small-scale interactions in the neighbourhood than non-participants, especially across ethnic boundaries:

[at the activity] *there is also a gentleman, he lives here in the neighbourhood, I've seen him a couple of times. And he has a big beard like, it's a Moroccan guy I believe. And then I saw him a couple of times, and he now also raises his hand [in greeting], that's kind of nice. You do get to know each other* (Male, in his 40s, from the Netherlands).

Such 'fleeting' social contacts are treated as valuable in their own right, and participants are not necessarily looking for close ties (although some have also made friends at activities). Respondents indicate that establishing a low-level form of familiarity is key in the functioning of living rooms as (also) places for giving advice and providing support. This became evident during participant observation, as participants discussed mundane topics but also highly personal issues such as having to take care of an ill and elderly partner, or not being accepted by one's family-in-law. However, there is also a trade-off between achieving 'homeliness' and inclusivity. In two of the three living rooms, many activities are dominated by particular ethnic (sub)groups, who use the space to gather with like-minded friends and create conviviality by invoking 'sameness,' to the exclusion of ethnic or religious Others. For example, an Antillean woman explains that she is sometimes made to feel unwelcome by other participants in her knitting/cooking club, which she attributes to her different ethnic background:

They gossip, [in] their own language. I am from Curacao, and they are [Surinamese] Indian. I just think, if you know, speak Dutch (...) And well, some of them dislike me because I speak up (...) We are equal just the same I think. Because we, you know I'm not allowed to cook here? Because they think our food is gross (...) I find it very annoying you know, and sometimes it makes me so tired. So tired that I... sometimes [organizer] calls me and I look at my phone and put it [away]... or turn down the volume... just for a day you know (Female, in her 50s, from the Netherlands Antilles).

Although she continues to attend out of loyalty to the organizer, a friend of hers, the hostility that she experiences detracts from her enjoyment of the initiative and turns it into an obligation, so much so that she deliberately schedules her doctor's visits during the club's activities. As many participants experience their involvement as an important part of their neighbourhood social life, tensions are emotionally draining and a reason for some to become less involved in the neighbourhood in general.

Thus, barriers to participation in the Amsterdam case study mostly result from implicit exclusionary dynamics. While the local government calls on all residents to be active in their neighbourhood, residents' own (perceived) abilities to navigate bureaucratic requirements determines who actually takes part. Furthermore, social dynamics within activities also had exclusionary effects as some participants – who are ethnic or religious Others in the context of the initiative – were sometimes made to feel not at home. However, the neighbourhood living rooms also functioned as positive spaces of encounter whose effects transcend the space of the specific initiative through an increase in fleeting social contacts in public space.

4.7 Comparison and concluding thoughts

The purpose of this study was to explore whether and how local initiatives create spaces of encounter for residents of diverse backgrounds. Policy interventions in ethnically diverse neighbourhoods often aim to create positive interactions, resulting in more social cohesion. Yet much remains unclear regarding the dynamics of participation in such contexts.

In Viennese Gumpendorf, participation in the selected initiatives is partly needs-driven (Free Pre-school) or imposed (Neighbourhood Service for Social Housing) and partly interest-based (Neighbourhood Centre, Gardening around the Corner, Ask Next Door). All initiatives have different aims and thresholds and therefore tend to include and exclude particular social groups. While most of the selected initiatives generated some contacts, these typically tended to stay on the superficial side. Nevertheless, they all resulted in some contacts among residents which did not exist before, regardless of whether the initiative was organized top-down or bottom-up. However, the amount and type of contacts among participants (and with other residents) differs. This is related to the regularity of participation and the design of potential spaces of encounter. Developing closer ties is not necessarily a motivation for participation. While participants at the Neighbourhood Centre meet each other in different classes on a regular basis, parents of Free Pre-school children meet each other rarely (at children's parties or events organized by the pre-school), and participants of Gardening around the Corner mostly do not even know each other; instead, they get to know strangers (and neighbours) on the street. The latter example illustrates that public space represents an important place for promoting public familiarity, such as saying 'hi' on the street. As all selected initiatives require a certain level of German, language is a barrier for non-Austrian ethnic interviewees. In order to further promote interethnic contacts in the neighbourhood, existing initiatives could

reach out with incentives for social groups who do not feel addressed or are not interested in existing initiatives. In addition, new strategies (funding opportunities, informational campaigns et cetera) might have to be developed to facilitate inclusion of different social groups in future initiatives.

In contrast, in the New-West neighbourhood, there is less variety as all the selected initiatives are 'bottom-linked': they are facilitated by formal institutions (the municipality and housing associations) but are run mostly or entirely by resident volunteers. This rather one-sided selection was not a conscious decision but a product of the organizational landscape. A significant role of the 'neighbourhood living rooms' is connecting marginalized and vulnerable residents to institutions in an accessible manner. To this end, these centres lean heavily on a particular type of volunteer (ethnic Dutch, middle-aged, not employed) for day-to-day coordination as well as handling bureaucratic requirements. These volunteers develop a strong sense of ownership and responsibility which aligns with the kind of attitudes that institutional representatives aim to stimulate. However, the idea that 'good deeds are their own reward' also breeds resentment and can undermine the viability of these centres in the longer run. While there is currently a mix of active residents across social class (although ethnic Dutch are overrepresented), too strong an emphasis on 'active citizenship', which presumes a significant degree of independence and know-how on the part of volunteers, might tip the scales towards favouring activities by middle-class 'networkers' while inhibiting participation of non-ethnic Dutch residents and lower-class ethnic Dutch. A similar tendency can be observed in the Viennese example of Gardening around the corner. While (interethnic) contacts intensified through the initiatives and were often described as positive (both superficial encounters that increased public familiarity and more profound conversations which provided opportunities for bridging differences and providing support), there were also examples where activities rather highlighted differences and made participants feel excluded. Therefore, resident participation offers opportunities but also raises expectations that cannot always be met.

Comparing the two cases, socializing within residents' ethnic and social group appears to be the norm, while (positive) encounters and contacts across these boundaries require sustained efforts. One theme that emerged in both cities was the role of initiatives for creating fleeting encounters and public familiarity that result in a sense of belonging to the neighbourhood (Blokland and Nast 2014) and reinforce norms of good neighbouring (Wessendorf 2013). While neighbourhood initiatives often focus on more sustained encounters and aim to create 'thick' forms

of community and cohesion, participants do not necessarily desire close ties and may value more superficial contacts, with recognizing each other on the street and greeting being enough. Highly visible activities in public space (such as being seen working in the garden) result in more positive perceptions of neighbours since their inherently material (plants, dirt) and spatial (shared green spaces) characteristics facilitate emergent and transitory encounters (Askins & Pain, 2011).

In spaces of encounter that are more 'planned' – such as the community centres in which much of our research took place – interactions were recurring and more sustained, sometimes resulting in friendly and supportive contacts. In both case studies, especially the neighbourhood centres aimed to create 'micro-geographies of inclusion' (Fincher & Iveson, 2008) through emphasizing homeliness and informality and offering opportunities to build trust. Notably in Amsterdam, residents are invited to treat the centres as their 'living room' and to recreate communities that are believed 'lost' by professionals. However, too much homeliness generates exclusion as conviviality is invoked by practicing 'sameness' based in ethnic background or participants' shared experiences of marginality and (psychological) vulnerability. Therefore, sustained encounters can also deepen prejudice – for example that children do not learn German in the free pre-school – and result in conflicts or disengagement (Valentine, 2008).

As noted by Cornwall (2004; 2008), dynamics and outcomes of participation depend on the design of initiatives and their embeddedness within governance structures. Our study highlights some of the barriers to participation that result both from formal (ineligibility for free pre-school) and informal (not feeling welcome, language barriers) exclusion mechanisms. These relate not only to ethnic but also to class difference and more generally to the ability and motivation to participate. On the one hand, personal circumstances can play an important role: many interviewees have other priorities such as work and family life. Education and employment (which also correlate with ethnicity in the two neighbourhoods) seem to be key dimensions: the higher educated feel more able to organize themselves; those not (regularly) employed have more time to participate and might even see this as a step towards finding a job. On the other hand, the design of initiatives and what they offer to participants influence whether residents are interested and willing to invest time and energy. From the Viennese case study, it appears that while the top-down initiatives studied connect participants to educational and housing institutions, they provide less regarding encounters with fellow residents. In contrast, bottom-up and bottom-linked initiatives in both case studies did not only have a social

function but also offered low-threshold access to representatives of Dutch/Austrian mainstream society. However, the Amsterdam case also shows that such 'bottom-linked' relationships can become fraught as volunteers demand more (also financial) recognition from institutional 'partners.'

Therefore, organizers and local institutional actors should consider how the structure of their initiative influences who takes part, and consider using different incentives to 'give voice' to social groups who currently do not feel addressed by, nor interested in, existing initiatives. Moreover, the findings show that there might be a mismatch between the aims of social cohesion and resident participation policies and the lived experiences and desires of residents. Institutional representatives generally sought to stimulate sustained interethnic contacts and support, and (in Amsterdam) called on volunteers' sense of civic duty and personal fulfilment. In contrast, our respondents (also) valued more superficial types of contact and are motivated to participate from a desire to improve not only the neighbourhood but also their personal circumstances.