



## UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

### Governing diversity, experiencing difference

*The politics of belonging in ethnically diverse places*

Hoekstra, M.S.

#### Publication date

2017

#### Document Version

Other version

#### License

Other

[Link to publication](#)

#### Citation for published version (APA):

Hoekstra, M. S. (2017). *Governing diversity, experiencing difference: The politics of belonging in ethnically diverse places*. [Thesis, fully internal, Universiteit van Amsterdam].

#### General rights

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

#### Disclaimer/Complaints regulations

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

# **Chapter 7**

## Conclusion and discussion

## 7.1 Introduction

This dissertation explores how Dutch urban discourses on diversity and belonging are formulated, how they are implemented through policy interventions in diverse and deprived neighbourhoods, and how these interventions influence local experiences of difference and belonging. By bringing together literature on (local) integration policies and urban governance with studies on residents' encounters with difference and sense of belonging, this dissertation aims to provide insight into how place co-constitutes formations of belonging. This concern with place reflects the local turn in the literature on integration discourses and practices (Scholten, 2013a), in which increasing attention is being paid to cities and municipal governments as policy actors who can express ideas on diversity and the 'good' community – more or less independently from the national government. Furthermore, national and urban discourses point at the very local level, in particular ethnically diverse and socioeconomically deprived neighbourhoods in large cities, as locations where the achievement of a shared sense of belonging is threatened most. Thus, these places are seen to require intensive policy intervention in order to safeguard or recreate local social cohesion and liveability. By defining belonging as the affective relationships between individuals and their environment, and the politics of belonging as the (discursive) mobilization of such relationships for purposes of inclusion or exclusion, I interpret these policy interventions as being about belonging in an emotional as well as a political sense: they imagine the diverse neighbourhood, city, and nation as places where residents should feel 'at home' (Duyvendak et al., 2016), and they propagate normative ideas on how 'good' citizens should live together (De Koning et al., 2015). The question then arises how the emotional and political aspects of belonging interact at different levels of scale, and how these can be – and are – influenced by ethnic diversity.

There is a large body of literature with a focus on residents of diverse neighbourhoods, discussing everyday experiences of living with difference as well as the possibilities of finding common ground. From a policy perspective, diversity in urban neighbourhoods is often viewed as problematic (Allen & Cars, 2001; Robinson, 2005). However, empirical studies show a wide range of outcomes from neighbourhoods where diversity in public space has become 'commonplace' and unremarkable (Wessendorf, 2013) to more fraught interactions where 'native' resident groups reject newcomers' claims to belonging (Leitner, 2012; Nelson & Hiemstra, 2008). Thus, as suggested by Phillips et al. (2014, p. 55), diverse neighbourhoods are

‘spaces of contradiction – places of conviviality and conflict, spaces for erasing and reinforcing differences, territories of inclusion and exclusion’. How residents experience difference, and the consequences for their sense of belonging, depends on the context in which they find themselves – the physical and social characteristics of the neighbourhood, including its reputation – but also on how they encounter others and the Other. In particular, research has focused on the potential for semi-public spaces to function as micro-publics where residents can engage in sustained interaction and thereby come to hold more positive attitudes towards Others (Amin, 2002; Matejskova & Leitner, 2011). Given that in the Netherlands these places are often created as part of local policies that aim to stimulate belonging, these locations are not just places where residents encounter each other, but also where they encounter the (local) state and its assumptions of ‘good’ citizenship.

To understand how belonging is experienced in diverse places, as well as how it is harnessed as a political resource, the five empirical chapters in this dissertation traced Dutch national and urban discourses of belonging and their implementation ‘on the ground’. The overall question guiding this research was:

**How does the governance of diversity through urban and neighbourhood policies influence residents’ lived experiences of difference and belonging?**

In the following section, this question is answered through a comparative summary of the main findings. The discussion of findings from case studies at the neighbourhood level is limited to Amsterdam. Subsequently, the theoretical and societal implications of the findings are explored, after which an agenda for future research is outlined. The final section reflects on the political potential of belonging.

## 7.2 Summary of findings

### 7.2.1 Part I. Governing diversity: Comparing urban politics of belonging

#### *Urban policy discourses*

Chapter two studied whether and how urban politics of belonging in the form of migrant-related policies in Amsterdam and the Hague depart from the Dutch national policy discourse. In particular, the focus of the analysis was on the concepts of diversity and (urban) citizenship. The Netherlands has experienced a sharp policy shift from allowing migrants to retain their cultural distinctiveness while stimulating their socioeconomic participation, to stressing their unilateral adaptation to the Dutch majority culture. Current national policy discourse makes a dichotomous and value-laden distinction between *autochtonen* or 'native' Dutch and *allochtonen* or first and second generation migrants, leaving virtually no room for a more nuanced approach of diversity (Dukes & Musterd, 2012). Moreover, the national discourse posits a notion of citizenship which is highly restrictive for *allochtonen*, who are more and more (discursively) positioned outside the Dutch society even if they have the Dutch nationality and are therefore citizens in a legal sense (Schinkel, 2010).

In contrast, since its adoption of a diversity policy in 1999 and subsequent development of citizenship policies Amsterdam has explicitly distanced itself from the national approach. Using arguments that are reminiscent of Vertovec's (2007) notion of super-diversity and Florida's (2003) creative city thesis, the Amsterdam municipality acknowledges residents' intersectional identities, which include but are not limited to ethnic or national background, and argues that cultural diversity forms part of the city's (economic) attractiveness. Urban citizenship is envisaged as integration 2.0: the self-evident belonging of all *Amsterdammers* to the city.

In the Hague on the other hand, departure from the national discourse has been more subtle and uneven, with subsequent municipal governments going back and forth between more or less inclusive policies. In contrast to the national discourse which either addresses migrants as individuals or as *allochtonen*, collectively, the Hague has a strong focus on ethnic groups and migrant-concentrated neighbourhoods. Migrants are exhorted to identify with the city while the belonging of the 'native' population is assumed. Similarly, while at its conception in 2005 urban citizenship was envisioned as a more inclusive alternative to integration, over time its connotations have shifted from shared rights to the city to emphasizing the duties of especially migrants to participate in the urban society.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate how diversity and citizenship function as 'floating signifiers' (Phillips and Jørgensen, 2002), whose meaning is not fixed but differs between contexts and over time. While Amsterdam and the Hague both formulate policy discourses based on what are perceived to be characteristics and challenges unique to each city, there are also similarities, in particular in the formulation of urban citizenship as a more inclusive approach to integration. Here, attempts are made to formulate a new in-group based on those who are willing (and able) to comply with norms of civility and participation that are considered vital to a well-functioning urban society, and in contrast to those who only take but do not wish to contribute to the city. However, the degree to which this distinction between 'good' and 'deficient' urban citizens maps onto the familiar categories of 'native' and 'migrant' determines whether this amounts to anything other than old wine in new bottles.

*Imaginations of the city and the divergence between discourse and practice*

Chapter 3 asked how urban discourses of belonging are connected to policy practice, at the level of the city and in ethnically diverse neighbourhoods. Based on an analysis of policy documents and interviews with policy actors in both cities, I concluded that despite an overarching policy discourse, actual policy practices are not coherent. Nevertheless, both in Amsterdam and the Hague a distinctive approach could be identified based on city-specific imaginaries or the 'mental and cognitive mappings of urban reality' (Soja, 2000, p. 324) that influence which policy solutions are considered appropriate and feasible in the local context.

In Amsterdam, the divergence between a discourse of positive diversity and inclusive urban citizenship and its (non)implementation seems at first most striking. Especially at the sub-city level, in districts and neighbourhoods, diversity is not thought to play a substantial role in policy-making. In contrast to the city level where the focus was on the recognition of diverse identities within the broader framing of Amsterdam citizenship, ethnic diversity in neighbourhoods is treated as a given that should not be politicized because it is not experienced by residents as a meaningful boundary. These understandings fit Amsterdam's positive narrative of past migration, which has contributed to the desired development of the city into an economic and cultural hub. Today, Amsterdam views itself as an integration success story and a frontrunner in terms of governing difference, compared to other (Dutch and foreign) cities but also to the Dutch national government. This self-understanding as evidently highly diverse yet undivided depoliticizes diversity and downplays spatial segregation and (ethnic) inequality.

In the Hague on the other hand, (ethnic) diversity is problematized both at the urban and the neighbourhood level. Coupled to its self-understanding as the most highly segregated city of the Netherlands in terms of income and ethnicity, the Hague seeks to integrate migrants into the 'mainstream' in order to avoid further polarization and a loss of belonging among the 'native' population. Despite official adherence to generic policies, implementation focuses on those neighbourhoods and ethnic groups whose policy needs are deemed most urgent. In contrast to Amsterdam, neighbourhoods are viewed as (potential) locations of ethnic tension, and getting residents to identify with the city and the neighbourhood and participate together is a policy aim, rather than a point of departure.

The comparison between the cities demonstrates the relevance of urban imaginaries to understanding policy practices, in particular how decisions regarding the implementation of policies come to be understood as pragmatic or self-evident courses of action. Furthermore, comparing the diversity and citizenship policy in Amsterdam to the implementation of policy projects in diverse Amsterdam neighbourhoods shows some interesting paradoxes, suggesting that concepts used in these policies might travel in unexpected ways. For example, policy-makers at the city level argue that the urban citizenship policy is not relevant to Amsterdam's neighbourhood policies (although the concept of citizenship is used by the Southeast district, as chapter 6 has shown), yet these policies make very similar assumptions about how residents (should) interact with and relate to their environment.

## **7.2.2 Part II. Experiencing difference: Policy interventions and neighbourhood belonging**

### *Neighbourhood belonging and the experience of difference*

The three Amsterdam neighbourhoods were selected as case studies because of their highly diverse population: their share of first- and second generation migrant residents is (far) above the city average and these migrants are highly diverse in terms of national or ethnic background, but also in terms of their language, religion, and length of residence, among other things. Thus, from a statistical point of view these neighbourhoods can be characterized as 'super-diverse' places (Vertovec, 2007). Urban policies originating at the Dutch national level, and to a lesser extent the city level, presume that this diversity causes or contributes to a lack of neighbourhood belonging and contacts between residents, in particular between residents of different ethnic groups. High ethnic diversity would even place these areas at risk of becoming alienated from 'mainstream' Dutch society. From the interviews with

residents and local professionals, as well as extensive participant observation in the spaces of neighbourhood organizations, a more nuanced picture arises.

Residents on the whole considered ethnic diversity to be a defining characteristic of their neighbourhood, but they did not necessarily conceive of it as super-diverse. Instead, the key signifiers of difference that were identified by residents depended on their own social position as well as characteristics of the neighbourhood. In particular, physical design and the historical and current population composition affected how diversity is experienced and how it influences neighbourhood belonging. For example, in Amsterdam North respondents frequently referred to their neighbourhood's history as an urban garden village built in the 1920s for the (white) working class population of the city. This history structured ideas on who are the 'original' and thereby more legitimate inhabitants of the area, excluding migrant working-class residents as well as the white middle class, even though members of both communities also have a longstanding presence in the area. Moreover, it has bolstered resistance against urban renewal and gentrification, as through these processes resources have been made available for different ethnic and social groups. How diversity is experienced thus changed over time and was affected by broader processes of neighbourhood change, such as gentrification, that influenced which new groups have come into the neighbourhood.

In Amsterdam New-West on the other hand, many residents did not experience their neighbourhood as highly diverse and instead described it as a predominantly 'Muslim' area, due to the presence of many residents originating from Morocco and Turkey. While for some members of these groups, living in what they experienced as an ethnic or religious enclave bolstered their belonging, the symbolic dominance of Islam (perceived through such things as Islamic sartorial codes, foreign languages spoken in the street, and shops selling halal products) detracted from the belonging of many non-Muslims, including other 'non-native' Dutch residents. The neighbourhood's reputation as a 'Muslim' area moreover contributed to the place-based stigma that many residents experienced.

Finally, Amsterdam Southeast was described as more 'multicultural', although here as well the relatively large presence of residents from the Caribbean and West-Africa is noted. These residents were credited with giving the area a certain joyous but also boisterous atmosphere. The area's diversity, which has long made it an attractive place to live for the undocumented and marginalized (Aalbers, 2011), today still functions as a refuge for those residents who feel they 'can be themselves' and 'do not stand out' in the Bijlmer. Physical design, in particular the high-rise apartment

blocks, contributed to a sense of relative detachment and pleasant anonymity. Here, stigma rather strengthened residents' belonging as they shared experiences of dis-belonging and feeling Other outside of the neighbourhood.

*Policy interventions and the consequences for belonging*

The policy interventions studied in the Amsterdam case studies are very similar in their design and methodology. Although they are funded either in part or wholly by (semi)public money – usually through subsidies from the district government, while housing associations provide premises and sometimes sponsor activities – they largely depend on the efforts of unpaid resident volunteers for their day-to-day functioning. The exception are two paid staff members in the neighbourhood centre in Amsterdam Southeast. Residents' participation is taken as evidence of their sense of belonging to and willingness to take responsibility for the neighbourhood. Therefore, making decisions on the funding and defunding of neighbourhood interventions is also a matter of deciding which residents can be considered representative of the broader neighbourhood population, and who can be counted upon to provide the organizational efforts that make the spaces of these interventions function as spaces of encounter. Interactions within the spaces of neighbourhood interventions – with professionals but especially with fellow residents – are expected to have relatively far-reaching effects on residents' lives (in the form of increased social contacts and sense of belonging) and on the neighbourhood itself (in the form of improving social cohesion and liveability).

In all three neighbourhoods, residents articulated a less straightforward perspective. In Amsterdam New-West, residents especially valued the more superficial encounters that resulted from their participation, for example in the form of recognizing and greeting fellow participants or, in the case of outdoor activities, neighbours and passers-by. In contrast, more sustained relations in spaces designed to feel informal and 'like your living room' sometimes resulted in friendships but also generated tensions and disengagement, as these spaces were colonized by the home-making practices of specific groups. Moreover, residents questioned the norm of engaging in unpaid participation from a sense of civic duty and/or personal fulfilment. Rather, they were (also) motivated by a desire to improve their personal (financial, career) circumstances, for example through gaining work experience or network contacts, and by a desire for recognition of their skills and personal value. When these were not forthcoming, disenchantment with governing institutions grew and threatened residents' sense of belonging.

Similar dynamics were found in Amsterdam North, where successive incarnations of a neighbourhood centre aimed to include all neighbourhood residents but in practice generated feelings of exclusion and non-belonging. Local institutions played a crucial role in these dynamics as they aimed to accommodate the shifting diversities in the area. Through their decisions about which groups were most representative of the neighbourhood at different points in time, local officials anticipated changes in the neighbourhood's character while their actions simultaneously worked to bring these into being.

In contrast, in Amsterdam Southeast professionals were not so much looking for active residents to organize spaces of encounter but rather used activities in the neighbourhood centre to convey 'appropriate' forms of interaction and participation. However, the findings clearly show the messy and ambiguous reality of policy implementation. Not only did the staff members of the Centre express reservations about their work, they also built personal relationships with participants as a direct consequence of the Centre's vision. These emotionally charged relationships resulted in increased empathy and understanding, but also in frustration about participants who are viewed as 'unwilling' and ungrateful. Together, these findings underline the important role that local governing institutions and community centre staff members played in shaping not only how and for whom spaces of encounter are designed, but also how interactions in these spaces play out. These subsequently influenced residents' sense of belonging to the wider neighbourhood, as claiming local spaces implies making claims about who belongs there.

## **7.3 Theoretical and societal implications**

### **7.3.1 Space as productive of difference**

In the light of these findings, this dissertation highlights the ways in which space is productive of difference, rather than merely reflecting pre-existing insider/outsider configurations (Clayton, 2009). The comparison between Amsterdam and the Hague and their respective politics of belonging demonstrates how the social, economic, and spatial composition of these cities becomes represented and reimagined in narratives about urban identity and community. What Löw (2013) calls the 'intrinsic logic' of cities – or their locally specific experiences and meaning-making processes – influences what are believed to be the boundaries of the community and who is considered 'out of place'. Urban imaginaries become visible in, for example, narratives about the economic and cultural benefits from past migrations, or narratives about

the future city which variously present diversity as a threat to civic values that should be neutralized or an expression of individualized identity that should be celebrated. Moreover, a focus on imaginaries may contribute to understanding the continuities and discontinuities between policy discourses and policy practices. The study thereby contributes to work on local or urban migrant policies and the question of whether these are primarily driven by pragmatic considerations (as argued by e.g. BakJørgensen, 2012; Poppelaars & Scholten, 2008). It is argued that not only should pragmatic and ideological considerations not necessarily be seen as mutually exclusive, the notion of pragmatism itself deserves further scrutiny as what is considered pragmatic is not a given but is itself the product of local sense-making processes.

On the neighbourhood level, the case studies highlight how the social and physical characteristics of neighbourhoods and the design of spaces of encounter within these neighbourhoods work to produce different formations of (not)belonging. The findings in Amsterdam New-West provide a tentative indication of the importance of local institutional contexts in designing spaces of encounter, which subsequently influence how people interact with each other within and outside of these spaces. In a similar vein, the other two case studies show how perceptions of the character of the neighbourhood and its residents influence the design of local initiatives. Place images of Amsterdam North as a gentrification frontier and Amsterdam Southeast as highly marginalized and spatially and socially distinct from the rest of the city inform decisions on who should be made to meet in local spaces of encounter and which resident groups are exhorted or enabled to participate. Taken together, these findings underline the significance of the specificities of place to belonging and its political resonance. The case studies demonstrate how place co-constitutes local politics of belonging and highlight the relation between the establishment of local spaces of encounter and broader neighbourhood developments.

### **7.3.2 Super-diversity, politicized diversity, and experienced difference**

This dissertation also raises new questions about concepts of super-diversity based on how residents experience difference and make distinctions in ethnically diverse places. While super-diversity presupposes a situation (or a place) with a significant amount of heterogeneity – described as ‘a level and kind of complexity surpassing anything (...) previously experienced’ (Vertovec, 2007, p. 1024) – in this research local understandings of diversity and processes of boundary-drawing were usually more limited in scope. In Amsterdam, diversity is the main concept through which migrant incorporation is approached. However, in practice this notion primarily serves to depoliticize inequalities that can be traced to – in particular – migrant

descent and provides a false sense of equivalency ('everybody is diverse'), a criticism of (super)diversity that has also been articulated by Makoni (2012). In the Hague on the other hand, ethnic or national background remains the main aspect of diversity that is politicized.

At the neighbourhood level, variations were found in how residents experience difference and who is considered Other. How residents described the ethnic composition of their neighbourhood and which aspects of difference affected their sense of belonging differed markedly. Three interrelated factors may contribute to explaining varying constellations of belonging. These factors are the numerical and symbolic dominance of specific ethnic groups within the neighbourhood, the relative presence of the 'native' population and the value accorded to notions of 'mainstream' Dutch society, and neighbourhood history and place identity.

In the Amsterdam North neighbourhood, in 2016, 'native' Dutch constituted around forty per cent of the population and could be considered the locally dominant group as they were best positioned to shape the neighbourhood's character and identity. The history of the neighbourhood as a working-class 'garden village' built to house workers in the nearby shipyard industry contributes to a place narrative that stresses the right of working-class white Dutch to the neighbourhood and neighbourhood facilities. This narrative ignores the belonging of Turkish and Moroccan groups in the area, who were later attracted as guest-workers in the same industry, and underestimates the current ethnically diverse composition of the area.

In the Amsterdam New-West and Southeast neighbourhoods on the other hand, 'native' Dutch were a smaller minority, constituting 24 and 14 per cent of the population respectively (in 2016). In New-West, respondents frequently referred to their neighbourhood as a 'Muslim' area – which for some contributed to and for others greatly detracted from their sense of belonging – rather than experiencing it as ethnically diverse. Given the strong politicization of Islam in the Netherlands by populist political parties who place 'the' Dutch identity in opposition to Islam and Muslims, it is perhaps not surprising that some residents (interestingly these included 'native' Dutch but also residents of Surinamese and Antillean descent) experience a lack of belonging based in the perceived loss of self-evidently shared codes of conduct (see also Mepschen, 2016). Moreover, loss of neighbourhood status and the experience of place-based stigma also contribute to feelings of not-belonging and lead to practices of distancing oneself from 'bad' parts of the neighbourhood or from the neighbourhood altogether, as in particular long-term residents describe how their neighbourhood changed from a 'respectable' lower middle-class area

to an increasingly undesirable place. These findings are reminiscent of the spatial alienation and dissolution of place in response to territorial stigmatization as described by Wacquant (1996).

In contrast, in Amsterdam Southeast the experience and valuation of ethnic difference is very different: the neighbourhood was often described as ethnically diverse, rather than dominated by a particular group, or contrasted positively with other places which are seen as 'more Dutch'. Although respondents recognized the numerical dominance of Surinamese and increasingly also West-African communities, their presence was not widely perceived as diminishing the belonging of others, but rather allowed for other minority groups to also 'be themselves'. The area's historical reputation as having always been ethnically diverse but also highly stigmatized stimulates a defiant form of belonging that includes the notion of being successfully multicultural. In addition, the built environment turns out to be an important dimension of belonging as the high-rise flats are seen as allowing residents to both engage with and keep a distance from their neighbours – directly contradicting the idea that the design of the Bijlmer high-rises was a large factor in the area's decline<sup>33</sup>.

In addition to the aspects mentioned above, which pertain to the experience of difference based in ethnicity or migrant background, other dimensions of diversity were also found to be salient. In particular, contestations around spaces of encounter revolved around class identifications and, in Amsterdam North, gendered divisions of space. Class and ethnicity together structured the encounters between local officials and active residents in all three Amsterdam neighbourhoods. In Amsterdam North and New-West, middle-class 'native' residents were more likely to be considered 'good' active citizens. In contrast, working-class 'native' Dutch and migrant residents were more often perceived as insufficiently representative of the neighbourhood and were thought to have less know-how and to be less (financially) independent. In Amsterdam Southeast, where the share of middle-class residents is smaller, the lack of residents who could successfully run local policy interventions resulted in a relatively large degree of involvement of paid staff, in spite of the district's intention to stimulate active citizenship. Moreover, labels such as 'Muslim', with which residents mostly referred to people of Moroccan and Turkish, and to

---

33 During the large-scale revitalization of the area that started in the 1990s and ended around 2010, around 7,000 spacious and relatively new high-rise social rental apartment units were demolished (constituting more than half of all high-rise units) and replaced by a mix of mostly (more expensive) social rental apartments and owner-occupied single-family dwellings (Bijlmermeer Renovation Planning Office, 2014).

a lesser degree of Middle-Eastern descent (who may or may not actually identify as Muslim themselves) demonstrate that aspects of diversity are often subsumed into larger categories that demarcate between self and Other. Local processes of boundary-drawing in diverse places thus depend on which aspects of diversity make a difference. Residents' sense of belonging is affected by the ethnic and physical composition of the neighbourhood, its place history and identity – including local histories of diversity – and the actions of local governing officials.

### **7.3.3 Local politics of belonging**

The analysis of the interplay of emotional and political aspects of belonging underlines that – notwithstanding their portrayal in neighbourhood policies as being based on consensual local interests – neighbourhood policy interventions should be seen as political acts, and as emotionally inflected political acts. These interventions are political in their effects, as they propagate ideals of participation and active citizenship which middle-class, 'native' Dutch residents can more easily satisfy than other groups, and because they create new dynamics of inclusion/exclusion in the neighbourhoods where they are implemented. Assumptions about residents' sense of belonging underlie the design of policies that seek to counter residents' alienation from each other and from wider society (Fortier, 2010). These policy framings underestimate or deny outright that many residents do experience a sense of belonging in ways that have nothing to do with or are only slightly related to their interactions with others in the neighbourhood. These include attachments to one's own home, to green spaces in the neighbourhood, or to more abstract notions of diversity and tolerance. They also include belonging to networks within one's 'own' community, with residents of the same ethnic or religious background. While policies envision 'thick' forms of community and belonging, residents did not always need or desire these types of neighbourhood contacts, or preferred to have them with co-ethnics. Rather, they also appreciated encounters with familiar strangers or near-strangers that might not result in in-depth knowledge and understanding of the Other but do create public familiarity and a light sense of community.

In contrast, encounters within the spaces of neighbourhood interventions and the emotions that these generated sometimes produced mutual understanding, in accordance with research that argues that these spaces can function as micro-publics (Amin, 2002), but also resulted in exclusionary dynamics. A contribution of this dissertation lies in its focus on encounters between local governing officials and social workers on the one hand and regular participants on the other hand, and the emotions that these encounters engendered. While state agents and social workers

sometimes employ emotions as a strategic resource (Horton & Kraftl, 2009), these can also form the starting point of empathetic engagements that unsettle pre-existing identifications. Nevertheless, the role of unequal power positions in structuring these encounters should not be discounted. There is a certain irony here, as these interventions are undoubtedly not meant to be divisive. On the contrary, policy actors involved with neighbourhood and participation policies in Amsterdam stressed their supposedly apolitical nature through their descriptions of the neighbourhood as a self-evident unit of belonging and of neighbourhood interventions as generating shared interests among residents.

Neighbourhood policy interventions are also political because of what they do not do. Area-based policies that aim to counter alienation and generate local belonging attribute both problem causes and solutions to the local level (Van Gent et al., 2009a). Through this perspective, larger-scale (relational) inequalities disappear from sight. One can wonder whether stimulating poor residents to participate – in some cases involving substantial amounts of unpaid work – and outsourcing the provision of low-threshold social services to local organizations run by residents themselves does not contribute to new inequalities between residents (who have different abilities to be active within the confines of government regulations), and between resourceful and resource poor neighbourhoods. To be clear, such arguments were not generally invoked by policy actors nor by residents themselves – except for a few cases where respondents questioned large-scale investments in student housing and business parks in Amsterdam Southeast, or resisted plans to sell social housing stock in Amsterdam North. Although the influence of macro-level factors such as housing and labour market developments on local policy interventions lies outside the scope of this research, these developments arguably underlie the findings and call for a broader theoretical perspective on living together in diverse and deprived neighbourhoods.

#### **7.4 Directions for further research**

This dissertation points to a number of possibilities for further research. First, the neighbourhood case studies and their comparison in the conclusion have hinted at some factors that might explain variations in the experience of difference between neighbourhoods, and how this is connected to feelings of belonging on the part of residents. This question could be pursued further through a comparison with other types of neighbourhoods (for instance less diverse or diverse but not deprived neighbourhoods) and in different policy contexts. With regard to the latter, research

on local migrant policies has often focused on large cities – as was the case in this dissertation – while mid-sized or smaller cities are relatively understudied.

Second, this study has focused on belonging as it is performed in neighbourhoods and paid less attention to belonging to other places – including the city, the nation, or transnational forms of belonging. However, from the empirical material there are indications that these different levels of belonging are not independent from each other. For example, neighbourhood belonging might be strengthened when residents experience a lack of belonging in other places, or experiencing a sense of belonging to the city might compensate for a lack of belonging at the neighbourhood level. Previous research indicates that in particular second-generation migrants feel a greater sense of belonging to the city of Amsterdam than to the Dutch nation (Van der Welle, 2011), and diasporic belongings are often built around specific sites of ethnic community (Fortier, 1999). Moreover, loss of neighbourhood belonging may be ‘scaled up’ and influence belonging at higher spatial scales (Pinkster, 2016) and be expressed as institutional distrust or political resentment. Though the role of (not) belonging to other places was occasionally mentioned in the study, in particular in the Amsterdam Southeast case study, much more needs to be done to understand how belonging is experienced relationally through (dis)connections with different places and across multiple levels of scale (Pierce, Martin, & Murphy, 2011), and through the power relations within which constructions of self and Other are embedded (Morley, 2001).

Third, one element that was addressed only indirectly in this dissertation but has a potentially large impact on belonging in diverse places is the dynamics of diverse neighbourhoods and residents’ geographical and social mobility. This research treated neighbourhoods as relatively static units at one point in time, not unlike their portrayal in neighbourhood policies. However, as the neighbourhood case studies have shown, their population may change over time and these dynamics influence which differences are recognized by residents and policy-makers. Similarly, residents move in and out of neighbourhoods (voluntarily and involuntarily) and their own social position within the neighbourhood might also change. The neighbourhoods studied have all been affected in some way by large-scale urban restructuring, which had either taken place in the recent past (Amsterdam Southeast) or is planned for the near future (Amsterdam North and New-West). Not only does restructuring often require part of the neighbourhood residents to move out either permanently or temporarily, such intensive interventions in a neighbourhood’s social and physical composition are potentially significant for residents’ emotional connection to the

neighbourhood even if they themselves are not directly affected (Van der Graaf, 2009). Further research could investigate the role of housing market opportunities and constraints, as well as individuals' life-course and housing trajectories in producing (dis)belonging.

Finally, this study has mentioned the variety of different actors involved with neighbourhood policy interventions. These include paid local staff but also active residents, who might be volunteers or receive some kind of compensation for their efforts. Studies on welfare state retrenchment in the Netherlands and the concomitant rise of active citizenship as an ideology of governance (e.g. Newman & Tonkens, 2011) have noted that the rise of the 'participation society' enables a greater degree of resident participation than before, while professionals are exhorted to provide tailored services at the very local level. The findings of this dissertation suggest that these developments may result in deregulation and increasing informality in social service provision at the level of the neighbourhood or local area, which becomes more dependent on personal relations that are created by active citizens and semi-professionals who function as political brokers (Koster, 2014). Further research could examine more systematically how these policy shifts result in changed social and power dynamics at the local level, and how this may impact residents' sense of belonging.

## 7.5 Reflection: The political potential of belonging

*"(...) if you have to think about belonging, perhaps you are already outside"*  
(Probyn, 1996, p. 8)

The research in this dissertation has analysed the politics of belonging to place in contexts of high (ethnic) diversity. Belonging is often – by researchers and lay people alike – taken for granted notion as it is experienced and discussed unreflexively as a 'natural' or 'authentic' state. However, in particular in the work of feminist thinkers (e.g. Bell, 1999; Diprose, 2008; hooks, 2008; Probyn, 1996; Yuval-Davis, 2006) it has been theorized as dynamic and always 'in process', never a final achievement. Many of these theorists also regard belonging as a more 'open' concept than identity and the politics of belonging as potentially better suited to a progressive agenda than identity politics. For example, Elspeth Probyn (1996) contrasts the politically open

nature of belonging to the rigid and divisive categorizations of identity, while for bell hooks (2008) belonging forms a way to resist racism and affirm inclusion in a shared culture of place.

This study has contributed to these discussions through an empirical investigation into Dutch urban politics of belonging and their resonance with micro-political dynamics around the experience of difference in local places. The findings demonstrate that belonging is performed through narratives that situate the self within (or outside of) ethnically coded place histories and imaginaries. Moreover, it is never completely detached from local and non-local power dynamics. As Diprose (2008, p. 42) notes, 'socio-political meaning can never simply be refused'. The embodied and emotional experience of belonging is informed by individuals' internalization of political imaginaries. State-sanctioned limits to belonging work their way down into everyday encounters, limiting the possibility of bottom-up understandings of and flexible belongings to place. It is perhaps for this reason that – as this dissertation has shown – the experience of belonging is usually felt more deeply and articulated more readily from the outside, when it can be contrasted with times when and places where one did not belong. For example, migrant residents experienced belonging to the neighbourhood in contrast to other places where they experienced discrimination and felt self-conscious and Othered, and 'native' long-term residents described neighbourhood change in terms of losing the ability to self-evidently and pre-reflexively belong. As such, belonging also speaks to a more Foucauldian concern with how people come to view themselves as subjects within particular social worlds, and how power/knowledge relations structure the possibilities for belonging in – and not in spite of – difference.