



Graduate School of Development Studies

**Aggregated neighbourhoods, women and public  
space: A case-study on fostering cohesion and  
empowerment from the Hague**

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# Contents

<b>Chapter 1:Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Context of the Research	1
1.2 Objectives of the Research	5
1.3 Relevance and Justification	5
1.4 Research Question	6
1.5 Methodology	7
1.5.1 Research site and rationale for choice of case study	7
1.5.2 Primary data	7
1.5.3 Secondary data	8
1.5.4 Coordination Matrix between Areas of Inquiry and Methods of Data Gathering	8
1.6 Organization of the Paper	10
1.7 Limitations of the Research	11
<b>Chapter 2: The Making of a Neighbourhood: Analytical Framework for Everyday Life Practices in the Social Construction of Urban Space</b>	<b>13</b>
2.1 Social Construction of Urban Space	14
2.2 Everyday Life Practices in Construction of Urban Space: a gender perspective	15
2.3 ‘The public’	16
2.4 Social Quality toolkit in study of social construction of urban space	17
2.4.1 Social Quality and the urban question	21
<b>Chapter 3: A troubled neighbourhood...and ‘agora’ for women</b>	<b>23</b>
3.1 Functional approach to suburban units: Laak Noord as aggregated neighbourhood	23
3.2 Laak Noord and 4 worlds of urban governance	25
3.3 The world of AGORA	27
<b>Chapter 4: Focus on women in the neighbourhood – Koffiepot mothercentre</b>	<b>29</b>
4.1 Introducing Koffiepot	30
4.1.1 Main aims: stirring towards empowerment and fostering cohesion	31
4.2 Fostering cohesion: the social & banal transgressions as a form of sustained intercultural dialogue	32
4.3 Stirring towards empowerment	36
4.3.1 Defining empowerment: Neighbourhood policy actors	36
4.3.2 Defining empowerment: A look from within a mothercentre	38

4.4 Emerging role of women in the neighbourhood – Koffiepot as a (f)actor	40
4.4.1. Looking forward – a way to Women’s Association	41
<b>Chapter 5: Conclusion and final remarks</b>	<b>43</b>
References	47
Appendix 1: Ethical Dilemmas in Fieldwork and Challenges	51
Appendix 2: List of interviews	53
Appendix 3: List of events visited	55
Appendix 4: Secondary data sources on Laak Noord and the Koffiepot	56

## List of Tables

Table 1 Coordination matrix	8
-----------------------------	---

## List of Figures

Figure 1 Constitutional and conditional factors of social quality	18
Figure 2 Constitution, opportunities, concretization of ‘the social’	18
Figure 3 Points of gravitation	19
Figure 4 Four worlds of urban governance	22

## List of Acronyms

EFSQ – European Foundation on Social Quality

SQ – Social Quality

## **Abstract**

The study deals with the multi-level dynamics of urban governance and multiculturalism in EU integration policy from a gender perspective with a focus on: (a) the accommodation of ethnic diversity at the local level of urban governance (b) the local expression of cooperation and organization to accommodate ethnic diversity (c) the local expression of cooperation and organization to increase agency of women within the context of neighbourhood. Via case-study of Koffiepot mothercentre - a functional women's organization in a context of Laak Noord, an aggregated neighbourhood of city of the Hague, the Netherlands - the paper brings to light the significance of understanding the social construction of urban space. It discusses the role of the 'agora' world of communities, groups and networks of citizens, as actor in the ongoing process of determination of the quality of the social in urban space; with special focus on its potentials in relation to processes of cohesion building in reference to community in spatial terms as well as stirring towards individual and social empowerment. Further unwrapping particular understandings of these over-encompassing terms, it points out how functional organizations like the one studied can in a context of an aggregated neighbourhood contribute to development of the urban space.

## **Relevance to Development Studies**

International migration became an increasingly popular topic in development studies in light of the intensified globalization of the last decades. As the reality of migration materializes itself in the cities as nodes in the globalizations processes, the aim of this research paper is to contribute to contemporary debate on accommodation of migration flows in urban setting. This paper places the question of accommodation of ethnic and cultural diversity or ensuring necessary level of societal cohesion into a wider framework of governance of 'aggregated neighbourhood' and empowerment of their residents for the aim of development through the people rather than development for the people.

## **Keywords**

social construction of space, urban space, gender, social quality, cohesion, empowerment

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## Statement of the Research Problem

This study examines the multi-level dynamics of urban governance and multiculturalism in EU integration policy with a focus on: (a) the accommodation of ethnic diversity at the local level of urban governance (b) the local expression of cooperation and organization to accommodate ethnic diversity (c) the local expression of cooperation and organization to increase agency of women within the context of neighbourhood. Using an approach via case-study, the paper brings to light the significance of understanding the social construction of urban space through 'the everyday', fostered interactions and creation of sites for banal transgressions. Such an understanding is a vital complement, and a challenge, to the current approach driven ideas about cultural integration and the 'good life' in the EU. By showing the making of identity through everyday practices, the paper warns against a static understanding of culture and the danger of stereotyping.

## 1.1 Context of the Research

*The macro perspective: Ethnicity and Migration in EU integration - European integration, cultural diversity and empowerment.* European integration as a macro question includes substantive pledge to deal with questions of cultural diversity and empowerment (including gender equality) particularly in relation to urban question. Thus relation of the proposed research to key domains of policy concern could be identified along the lines of debates on accommodation of migration flows and cultural diversity; on integration, intercultural dialogue and societal cohesion within the context of aggregated neighbourhood.

In the course of intensified globalization, the cities of Europe have come to be the global expressed in the local, took position of nodes in the globalization processes (Brenner 2000) and came to be the primary site of accumulation of migration inflows. In response to the social, economic and demographic change in Europe, EU-led actions appear increasingly, such as 'Transformation of European cities and Urban governance'<sup>1</sup> launched in 1995 or 'Urban Community Initiative' ongoing from 1994, and setting basis for a number of EU wide initiatives for "social regeneration of cities and neighbour-

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<sup>1</sup> COST A9 Civitas program under the auspices of the European Commission

hoods in crisis in order to promote sustainable urban development” (URBAN II<sup>2</sup>) and exchange knowledge and experience in relation to sustainable urban regeneration. When talking about gradual Europeanization of urban governance (while understanding Europeanization as fusion of values, policy types and mechanisms, see eg. Dossi 2011 or Esteves 2004), series of questions arise concerning the dynamics of urban governance, cultural diversity and empowerment.

*Migrant integration and (post)multiculturalism...and shifts in Dutch policy.* Shifts in approach to questions of migrant integration in Europe within the last couple of decades have not left the conception of multiculturalism in the Netherlands intact. Let us elaborate upon these changes across several shifts: (a) shift from group orientation to individual in centre of attention, connected with shift from language of recognition of a group by the majoritarian society to individual’s duty to recognize the majoritarian society’s norms, (b) shift of primary level of responsibility from municipal to national level and return increasingly to acknowledgement of crucial role of the local, (c) at the local level shift from focus on physical regeneration towards revitalization and ‘social renewal’ and promotion of social interaction. All these shifts correlate with an overall shift from traditionally understood multiculturalism to search for more sustainable post-multicultural arrangements. Let us briefly look at them one by one.

(a) From a group to an individual. Group orientation of ethnic corporatist model dates back to 1983 memorandum on minority policy<sup>3</sup>, based on premise that enabling ethnic minorities to operate within their own culture and managing their own institutions would enable them to emancipate in Dutch society. Each religious/ethnic group pertains a “sort of subsidized autonomy” (Uitermark et al. 2005: 627) where services are managed by the group while funded by state. Following conceptual change can be depicted on several terms: focus on individual integration rather than group emancipation; move away from elite to an individual level connected with an obligation to make use of opportunities offered; move from disregarding internal heterogeneity and idea of ethnic identities as fixed towards acknowledging hybridity, contextual aspect of coexisting multiple identities and fluidity of identities in prosaic negotiations

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<sup>2</sup> Urban II is the Community Initiative of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) for sustainable development in the troubled urban districts of the European Union for the period 2000-06.

<sup>3</sup> Minority Memorandum [Minderhedennota] by the Second chamber of Dutch parliament

(see eg. works of Amin, Joppke, Bauman etc.) and myriads of other partial inputs and effects that could form a topic for another research paper.

(b) Prior to 1980s a lack of clearly articulated policies on immigrant integration at national level left municipalities with a burden of developing coping mechanisms for relations between incomers and the 'native' population. Consequent focus on dialogue of national level policy-makers with representatives of the newly constructed target groups opened up representation questions, esp. as these consultative bodies created for governmental needs often lacked "grounding in actually existing ethnic communities" (Uitermark et al. 2005: 627). As the crucial role assigned to municipalities as local level regulation site for interethnic relationships diminished with these first official multicultural policies at national level; the importance of its role seems to be coming to the limelight again - after the recognition of failure of the top-down design of cohabitation. A move can be stipulated towards orientation on individual integration and on reconciliation of differences within prosaic interactions between individuals rather than on a nation-wide level, and the role of the micro-public as a site for these negotiations. Many theoreticians see the city as a prime site for these encounters, a "container where differences encounter each other", as "the most promising site for the negotiation of ethnic identities" (see Uitermark et al. 2005: 622-23; also in similar line Isin 2002, Amin and Beaumont 2003). Simultaneously the post-multiculturalist thinking brings a shift from an approach "centered on recognition of minority groups on ethno-national bases to one aiming to recognize ethnic diversity as such" (Uitermark et al. 2005: 635).

(c) In Dutch policy discourse, the socioeconomic development of disadvantaged neighbourhoods became closely interrelated with that of the nation as whole (Uitermark 2003). Within the urban level we can perceive shifts in management of these neighbourhoods, characterized by high migrant inflow and vivid ethnic diversity. From regeneration in terms of physical environment towards focus on societal revitalization in terms of social infrastructure (trust, integration, cohesion and the issue of liveability) and an emerging organic approach of focus on interactions between the physical and the social (people and their everyday interactions with/ in creation of space), where the policy of social renewal carries among others a commitment to "induce a sense of shared responsibility and to promote social interaction between different social and especially ethnic groups" (Beaumont 2003 quoted in Uitermark 2003: 539).

In the light of these shifts correlating with the growth of the (post)multiculturalism debate<sup>4</sup>, a search for more sustainable post-multicultural arrangements pays attention to the role of micro-public as primary site of negotiation and reconciliation of difference. Such approach proposes focus on the local and the everyday, on promoting social interaction and on conditions for and stirring towards prosaic interaction and deliberation of differences. A look at the movement towards post-multiculturalism in the light of shifts outlined above opens up a range of questions around the implications of: (i) unwrapping of formerly downplayed fact of internal heterogeneity of ethnic minorities, the individualization of integration focus and their impact upon visibility of various intersections, (f)actors and (in)equality issues within the target group of immigrants as ethnic minorities; (ii) undermining the static view of culture and consequent acknowledgement of fluidity, plurality and hybridity of identities; (iii) a shift from imagery of top-down designed cohabitation to focus on micro-public, local level and the role of everyday interaction in understanding deliberation and negotiation of difference.

*The micro perspective: The Hague as a Euro city and a city of migrants.* With the changing demographics as one of the major long-term debates in Europe generally and the Netherlands particularly, it is important to ground the debate on multiculturalism, migrant populations and 'integration' in a specific urban context. The context of this research is The Hague, one of the metropolis of European-wide significance, part of the EUROCITIES network<sup>5</sup> and itself a 'city of migrants'. Within the spaces for inquiry delineated above, and building upon a claim that urban space is created, used and transformed through community interaction in everyday life, the study focuses on the everyday of urban citizens in Laak-Noord, a neighbourhood of the Hague, and brings into focus the significance of 'intersectionality' - or how ethnic diversity and gender intersects in deliberation in the formation and bridging of migrants' enclaves, and how these are linked with the physical and social renewal of space. The aim is to contribute into the European debate by providing a case study on approaches to accommodation of diversity at local level and the creation of the 'public' space as dynamic process of social interaction.

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<sup>4</sup> Post-multiculturalism discourse emerged in 1990 around a claim that multiculturalism contributes to segregation (rather than integration) of different 'racial', ethnic, and religious groups and fragmentation of society. See eg. Wong, Garcea, Kirova 2006; Vertovec 2010

<sup>5</sup> Mayor of The Hague was elected as President of EUROCITIES in 2009

## 1.2 Objectives of the Research

Through a case study on accommodation of ethnic diversity at the local level of urban governance in the Hague, this research aims to:

- Provide an insight into contributions and potentials of artificially created local functional organizations for categories of citizens with shared particular needs, such as mother centers, in the context of ethnically mixed urban spaces and spaces with high level of (im)migration. The goal is to provide analysis in theoretical terms on their role regarding spatial dimension of deliberation of difference along ethno-cultural lines and migrant women's empowerment as substantial creators of democratic space.
- Contribute to the deepening of social quality theory on inclusion and social citizenship by providing an understanding on the dynamics of gender and ethnicity in deliberation. Through broadening the understanding of these processes as grounded at the local level, the research aims to theoretically contribute into a debate on the necessity of sensitivities to multiple inequalities<sup>6</sup> for the contours of adequate indicators<sup>7</sup>.

## 1.3 Relevance and Justification

The existing literature on accommodation of ethnic diversity at the local level of urban governance lacks a rigorous body of knowledge on expressions of cooperation and organization from a gender perspective, particularly as regards the spatial aspects of deliberation of differences among women belonging to disadvantaged neighbourhood. Within the EU-funded research on urban governance, the theory of Social Quality (European Foundation on Social Quality, since 1997) constitutes an important scientific and policy frame of reference to analyse processes of integration and empowerment of the disadvantaged groups in global cities. Nevertheless the Social Quality can be critiqued on grounds of lack of sensitivity to the question of ethnicity and gender, although it has the methods to cover this surface. The lack of inter-cultural and gender-sensitive approach within this framework seem to reflect the socio-cultural traditions and the kind of gender relations of a welfare state established in the Nordic countries in the twentieth century (Calloni 2001), while lacking deeper consideration of a multifaceted composition of civil society. There is a need for the Social Quality approach to “recognize the richness and the potential of ‘foreign cultures’ in the constitution of a new ‘quality of life in Europe’”, while

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<sup>6</sup> see eg. Verloo 2006, Walby 2005, Calloni 2001

<sup>7</sup> in response to ESQF (2010) *Local Welfare Arrangements*, Working Paper Series n.6, pp. 38

foster institutional consideration of disadvantaged groups and crucial problems (Calloni 2001: 71).

Thus relevance of the paper is the attempt to bridge the gaps of knowledge on the accommodation of ethnic diversity at the local level of urban governance in locally grounded case-study<sup>8</sup> by showing the local expression of cooperation and organization to accommodate ethnic diversity and their intersectional dynamics. In doing so, the paper also tries to deepen the Social Quality theory on inclusion and social citizenship.

#### 1.4 Research Question

*In what ways can urban public space where gender and ethno-cultural diversity are in deliberation work as a platform for empowerment (of migrant women)?*

Operationalization of the question:

- What is the history of Laak Noord, the suburban unit in question? What is the current situation, what were most significant changes?
- What is viewed as particular about problems or needs of groups of special interest to this research [migrant women in this neighbourhood]?
- Koffiepot Mothercentre as a case study organization: what is the history of this initiative, its objectives, visions, aspirations, prospects and developments?
- Understanding Koffiepot by different actors: different framings, evaluations, visions?
- A platform for intercultural dialogue? How do interactions within Koffiepot and perception of differences correlate?
- What are the (perceived) effects of case-study organization on empowerment of migrant women?
- Interpreting the context of move into voluntary sphere: Whether and in what ways this initiative has potential to create an emerging wing of civil society?

**Sub-question:** What can social quality approach as a set of ethical principles on integration learn from the Koffiepot as expression of diversity and

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<sup>8</sup> The case study on the micro level examines a multifunctional women organization creating an interesting platform for intercultural dialogue and enhancing agency of migrant women within a multiethnic neighbourhood

from voices articulated from it on specific notions of empowerment? This sub-question is linked with the use of social quality approach in understanding processes ongoing in Laak Noord, with the aim of enlightening (inter)connections within a more holistic picture than other alternative theories offer<sup>9</sup>. The indicators of this approach are still developing in practice. Bearing in mind that developing meta-theory requires some distance from the everyday world, I believe in necessity of constant interrogation of the approach while applying it in fieldwork.

## **1.5 Methodology**

The study is based on qualitative data, both primary and secondary.

### ***1.5.1 Research site and rationale for choice of case study***

The case study looks within Laak Noord, a neighbourhood of the Hague. Choice of the case study was determined by several factors: (a) the Hague as the international city where both the reality of migration and discussion on the integration and its social aspect are vivid, while (b) at the same time the European Centre on Social Quality (EFSQ) actively stimulates the debate here; (c) the district of Laak Noord as one of the most multicultural neighbourhoods of the Hague, a space encompassing more than 50 ethnicities within its inhabitants, being stigmatized as problematic - socio-economically disadvantaged, low-security neighbourhood; while at the same time (d) opening up space for innovative types of initiatives as a 'social laboratory', repeatedly studied by the EFSQ (e). At the bottom of the focus is on one of the outcomes of this 'social laboratory' – the Koffiepot Mothercentre<sup>10</sup> and the emerging role of women's migrants in neighbourhood's public life. The case study on the micro level examines this multifunctional women organization creating an interesting platform for intercultural dialogue and enhancing agency of migrant women within the context of a neighbourhood.

### ***1.5.2 Primary data***

Primary data were gathered through qualitative semi-structured interviews with three categories of local actors<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> For explanations on the context and way of utilizing of Social Quality approach within this research paper, see Chapter 2: Analytical framework

<sup>10</sup> Choice of the Koffiepot as a case-study initiative was determined in consultation with Mr. Jaap Westbroek, the district director of Laak Noord and Dr. Thanh-Dam Truong, who kindly agreed to supervise this research.

<sup>11</sup> Table of interviewees to be found in the Appendix

- *local policy actors* in order to provide an overall look at framing of what is happening within the neighbourhood, placing the case-study organization within the wider ‘experiment’ in Laak Noord, a perspective on its functioning in relation to framing, definition and attainment of objectives in question, how is the functioning and performance of the initiative in key studied areas assessed
- *actors directly involved in the functioning of the Koffiepot* with interview focus on *both* the overall field and their own story and subjective interpretations
- *external experts*: a representative of other women’s organization and a gender-studies expert, both familiar with the work of Koffiepot.

Also participant observation and informal interviews were a valuable source of information. List of events and activities visited can be found in the annex.

### 1.5.3 Secondary data

Secondary data were collected to gather information about the history of Laak Noord, demographics, migration flows and developments in the neighbourhood; to provide an overview of policies, initiatives and processes ongoing in Laak Noord. Likewise, secondary information sources were used to enrich the analysis of the Koffiepot mothercentre. Sources<sup>12</sup>:

- research conducted by the EFSQ on Laak Noord
- bulletins and information materials of various organizations and initiatives active in the neighbourhood
- website materials on Laak Noord
- printed materials on Koffiepot (magazine articles, official statements, promotion materials)

### 1.5.4 Coordination Matrix between Areas of Inquiry and Methods of Data Gathering

Table 1  
Coordination matrix

Research Questions	Information set	Data Gathering Methods
What is the history of the suburban unit in question?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• in what ways have been arranged the attempts to secure cohabitation over time</li> <li>• what were the problems and how were they addressed</li> <li>• how did the problems change over</li> </ul>	Semi-structured interviews with local policy actors  Secondary data

<sup>12</sup> List of sources used to be found in the Appendix



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>time</li> <li>how did the approaches change over time</li> </ul>	
What is the current situation in Laak Noord?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>what is currently understood as main problems of Laak Noord</li> <li>current ways to address these problems</li> <li>how are the current framing and response/initiatives innovative/different from the past?</li> </ul>	<p>Semi-structured interviews with local policy actors</p> <p>Semi-structured interviews with actors involved in Koffiepot</p> <p>Secondary data</p>
What is viewed as particular about problems with or needs of groups of special interest to this research?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>particularities of the situation of migrant women within Laak Noord (intersectionality as complication to empowerment?)</li> <li>involvement of Laak Noord's women in public affairs</li> </ul>	<p>Semi-structured interviews with local policy actors</p> <p>Semi-structured interviews with actors involved in Koffiepot</p> <p>Semi-structured interviews with external experts</p>
Koffiepot Mothercentre as a case study organization: what is the history and change over time of this initiative, its objectives, visions and prospects?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>how did the ideas and their practical applications change over time?</li> <li>how do major changes correspond to shifts in wider context</li> <li>how is the functioning of organization arranged? how does these arrangements change?</li> </ul>	<p>Semi-structured interviews with actors involved in Koffiepot</p> <p>Semi-structured interviews with local policy actors</p>
Understanding Koffiepot by different actors: different framings, evaluations, visions?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>what are the perceived roles of the organization?</li> <li>how do these fit into wider set of needs in the neighbourhood?</li> <li>how 'successful' is the organization perceived to be in carrying out its tasks/roles?</li> <li>where are its niches, spaces for improvement, potentials for growth</li> </ul>	<p>Semi-structured interviews with local policy actors</p> <p>Semi-structured interviews with actors involved in Koffiepot</p> <p>Semi-structured interviews with external experts</p>
A platform for intercultural dialogue? How do interactions within Koffiepot and perception of differences correlate?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>in what ways does Koffiepot serve as a platform for deliberation?</li> <li>how is dialogue <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>fostered?</li> <li>maintained?</li> <li>mediated?</li> </ul> </li> <li>does this dialogue affect <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>interactions out of the organizational context?</li> <li>thinking, behaviour?</li> <li>identities?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Semi-structured interviews actors involved in Koffiepot</p> <p>Participatory observation at selected activities in the Koffiepot</p>
What are the perceived	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>individual empowerment: general</li> </ul>	Semi-structured in-

effects of case-study organization on empowerment of migrant women	perception and example stories <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• women as a social category: agency of women within the neighbourhood</li> <li>• actual vs assumed impact: looking for the unexpected</li> </ul>	interviews with local policy actors  Semi-structured interviews actors involved in Koffiepot  Semi-structured interviews with external experts  Secondary data
Interpreting the context of move into voluntary sphere: Whether and in what ways this initiative has potential to create an emerging wing of civil society?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sense of local ownership (are 'they' appropriating it on their own?)</li> <li>• questions of (dis) empowerment and exclusion</li> </ul>	Semi-structured interviews actors involved in Koffiepot  Semi-structured interviews with local policy actors  Semi-structured interviews with external experts

## 1.6 Organization of the Paper

After providing a brief background for the research in Chapter 1, we proceed by elaborating theoretical framework for understanding the social construction of urban space and introducing the Social Quality as approach to study of urban governance. Chapter 2 also theoretically elaborates on choice of gender-specific approach and why it brings difference into the debate. Chapter 3 then introduces Laak Noord, an aggregated neighbourhood, as a context within which our case-study organization operates - to which it largely responds and which it simultaneously (re)creates in its work. Here, the notion of 'agora' is introduced as an actor in the ongoing process of determination of the quality of the social in Laak Noord. The case-study organization is understood as one such 'agora' for a specific subgroup of urban citizens. Chapter 4 looks at internal processes within the Koffiepot Mothercentre, focusing on two areas that stood up as the focal point within the work of the centre - stirring towards empowerment and fostering cohesion. Further unwrapping particular understanding of these over-encompassing words, it points out how functional organizations like a mothercentre can in a context of an aggregated neighbourhood contribute to cohesion-building and (individual and social) empowerment. Conclusion in Chapter 5 discusses findings as well as insights gained in relation to theory of Social Quality<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> in response to the Sub-question of the Research

## 1.7 Limitations of the Research

*Specificities of the case study and question of 'generalizability' / applicability in other contexts.* The study is limited to an organization in context of Laak Noord neighbourhood in the Hague, the Netherlands. The case-study thus inevitably carries bias of a place and historical specificity. At the same time a lot of this specificity reflects wider societal processes of immigration and shifts in attempts to create ways to cope with its consequent problems, which further correlate with shift in academic literature on (post)multiculturalism. Refusing the parsimony of search for 'universal global solutions' as every 'global problem' can only be tackled within its locally specific context, the case study has to be understood as a part of local response to a wider societal question. As certain aspects of a problem demonstrate themselves similarly in various locations, certain aspect of response can as well be "generalizable" for different contexts.

*Constraints in sampling and possibilities of a consequent bias.* As in almost every research based on interviewing, voice was given to respondents willing to speak to me, which might lead to prevalence of certain views or reflection of a certain mindset. I tried to mitigate this by triangulation of methods as well as sources of information. Qualitative interviewing was combined with ethnographic method of participatory observation and informal interactions with random co-participants as well as search for secondary sources of data. Thus I tried to reach a wider range of voices via interactions and observing of patterns of interaction and reactions to what was said or presented during selected events in the neighbourhood as to help me with questioning the representativeness of voices expressed in the interviews conducted. Concerning the selection of interviewees for formal interviews triangulation was employed to reach respondents (formal and informal actors) from both outside and inside the organization, but also diverse spectra of voices within the organization itself (founding actors, part-time employees, volunteers, random participants in randomly selected activities) as well as outside the organization (official policy actors, academic representative and representative of other grassroots organization familiar with work of the Koffiepot). In these formal interviews I occasionally asked my respondents about what do they think other alternative opinions, perceptions, motivations etc. were.

Last but not least limitation to reflect upon is the *presence of language constraints at two levels*. As some of the interviews<sup>14</sup> and informal talks at events were conducted in Dutch with help of a translator, there might have been a slight bias (aspect of interpretation) inserted. To mitigate this effect, different interviews were conducted with different translators. Simultaneously another limitation is caused by language constraints on the side of some interviewees for whom the language of interview (Dutch) was a language mastery of which is still a work in progress as it is not their mother tongue.

Furthermore, a reflection on **Ethical Dilemmas in Fieldwork and Challenges** is to be found in Appendix.

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<sup>14</sup> Some interviews within respondent category of actors directly involved in the functioning of the Koffiepot

## **Chapter 2: The Making of a Neighbourhood: Analytical Framework for Everyday Life Practices in the Social Construction of Urban Space**

This chapter familiarizes the reader with a theoretical framework for understanding the social construction of urban space through ‘the everyday’, fostered interactions and creation of sites for banal transgressions. It sets ground for a claim that urban space is created, used and transformed through community in the everyday interactions, which are intrinsically linked with the physical and social renewal of space - thus pointing out the necessity to take into account the (individual) everyday life practices in the study of social construction of urban space. Building upon such frame, this chapter presents the Social Quality framework for study of the urban space, as a toolkit for study of the ‘social’ through constructive processes between the individual (biographical development) and the collective (societal development) and/or between the informal (configurations, groups) and the formal (systems, institutions, organizations). It provides lenses for a particular understanding and decomposing of the object of this research and a guidance for identification of (f)actors and processes upon which the field research consequently focuses.

Inspired by Henri Lefevre’s concept of social production of urban space via everyday life – the everyday as struggle shaping both agent and the structure - this research provides an insight into the creation, use and transformation of urban space through community interaction. Focusing on a context of a neighbourhood through gendered lenses - migrant women as actors and subjects in these processes - it investigates how neighbourhood, gender, and the creation of the ‘public’ intersect. Before departing onto this journey I owe to my readers couple of explanations, namely:

- on theoretical background of Lefebvre’s claim
- on choice of gender-specific approach and why does it bring difference into the debate, which will be done building upon the work of feminist scholars who in various ways derive from Lefebvre in their contribution to urban sociology, mainly Lykogianni, Vaiou and Simonsen
- on ‘the public’ conceived of in this research, building upon Ash Amin’s concept of micro-public of everyday encounters and mundane transgressions as a pre-condition for democratic citizenship
- on placing the previous into the ‘Social Quality’ as an approach to study the broader picture of neighbourhood developments.

## 2.1 Social Construction of Urban Space

(i) The social constructionist approach to the analysis of geographical scale builds upon epistemology of social production of geographical scale where each geographical scale “operates simultaneously as a presupposition, a medium and an outcome of social relations” (Brenner 2000: 366). Any scale can be conceived of as a platform for construction, “not a pre-given or fixed platform for social relations, but socially constituted, politically contested and historically variable dimension of those relations” (Ibid: 367). Such approach overcomes the notion of place as bounded and fixed, an “understanding which ignores the role of human agency in processes under which structural trends are formed and changed” (Lykogianni, 2008: 135). The social constructionist approach to urban scale is more about its functional role or social content than about spatial delineation, territorial scope or setting (Brenner 2000). In other words the ‘local’ here is rather about the methodology than about dominance of specific territorialities excluding outsiders and including all insiders (Baerenholdt and Aarsaether, 2002).

In the process of globalization we can speak about contested reconfiguration of superimposed geographical scales, where “nationally organized configurations of scale are loosened and rearticulated with new subnational and supranational scalar hierarchies” (Brenner 1997; 2000: 361). The urban scale of social organization comes to play a crucial role as a “localized node within globally organized flows” (Brenner, 2000: 366), while talking about “glocal forms of urban and regional development” (Swyngedouw 1997) or the “glurbanization” (Jessop 1998). Lefebvre attributes such special role to its position of “situated between the ‘close order’ and ‘distant order’ of the society, between the individual or collective practices and wider ‘institutional’ practices” (Lefebvre 1990, 1991 quoted in Lykogianni 2008: 135). Its relation to other supra- and sub- spatial scales is “neither hierarchical nor reciprocally exclusive, but rather as co-existing and complementary, socially produced and reorganized settings with no a priori primacy, either theoretical or empirical”, thus the neighbourhoods as a suburban scale is understood as “one important, among many, urban spatialities” (Vaiou and Lykogianni 2006: 732).

The social construction of both agents and their environment in a neighbourhood are based in focus on the everyday in attempt to approach the processes and relations which produce diversity of experiences and practices. The everyday is characterized by continuous adaptations as well as by collisions with various structures of space and time through strategies of coping and through disruption of routines and (re)negotiations of daily as well as long-term arrangements (Lefebvre 1990). The (sub)urban space enters here as platform for mediating between the individuals and groups on one side and the broader structures and institutions in society on the other. The various ways in which this space defines people’s everyday practices, but also vice-versa ways in which their everyday practices (re)define this (social) space; the everyday’s invisible creative energy; present a constant opportunity to “overcome the

alienation of everyday conditions within the very everyday” (Lefebvre 1991 quoted in Lykogianni 2008: 135).

## **2.2 Everyday Life Practices in Construction of Urban Space: a gender perspective**

The everyday is a struggle shaping both agent and the structure, “it is ‘real life’, the ‘here and now’, the meeting place of individual and history” (Lefebvre 1990 quoted in Lykogianni 2008: 134) where citizens “construct their everyday life, their personal identities and relations, drawing upon – and simultaneously negotiating with – existing macro-level spatial, temporal and discursive structures/meanings” (Lykogianni 2008: 133). This everyday life involves the whole of people’s lives as developed within specific relations into which they have been involved during their life course and social conditions prevalent in their generation and locality (Simonsen and Vaiou 1996) and the politics of change under such conditions remains very much a politics of everyday life (Laurentis 1986).

(ii) Focusing on citizens as agents in the making of the city via their lived realities of social practices and social lives of a urban citizen opens a black box of how ‘localities’ are constructed and taken up by different individuals. Such approach encourages seeing women as agents in making of the neighbourhood rather than depicting them as a subject of intervention - as conceived of in several previous policy approaches, such as widely accepted concept of ‘liveability’ (focused on redesigning of living conditions, see eg Uitermark et al. 2005). What is the objective behind *adopting gender lenses in study of the micro-social level construction of space*? Such a level of analysis from below and focusing on citizens as both agents shaped by and shaping the environment needs to build on a recognition that different categories of citizens experience and engage with the urban space differently. As Vaiou and Lykogianni (2006: 734) note, the urban life and urban development are “peopled and gendered processes”. Different social relations, structures and everyday practices conduce “different involvement of men and women in various practices and processes and their different uses and perceptions of space and time”, or simply “women’s experiences and everyday lives are different from men’s and so is their use and perception of urban environment” (Ibid: 735). Besides different conceptualizations of place one needs to point out the possibly differing idea of community in urban life – different experience and imagination of collective activities and practices of people inhabiting a shared space within their everyday, their face-to-face contacts, social networks and ideas of belonging influence the conceptualization of a sense of common identity and/or characteristic (Vaiou and Lykogianni, 2006; Baerenholdt and Aarsaether 2002). Most urban citizens still live in places, their lives are characterized by locatedness, convergence, encounters, the “small scale domesticity of most people’s lives” that cosmopolitan intellectuals seem to discharge (Vaiou and Lykogianni 2006: 738). The ‘place’, ‘locality’ or ‘sense of place’ is thus bound to a “site where mundane everyday routines take place, different lifestyles can co-exist or clash, casual interactions and weak ties

develop among neighbours” leading up to a ”renewed and varied notions of community”(Ibid). These notions are connected to (social) places of interaction within the everyday life such as places where a citizens “live, work, consume, relate to others, forge identities, cope with or challenge routine, habit and established codes of conducts” (Ibid: 731) – ie. in our case study mainly the neighbourhood. Because these patterns of everyday distinctly differ for men and women, their construction of a neighbourhood is connected with different interaction, networks and strategies of getting around and making use of the (social) space.

*Why focus on a neighbourhood level organization of women?* Acknowledging the substantive role of a neighbourhood in women’s everyday lives as an immediate local of social interaction connected with development of local ties as a base for a sense of security and belonging, I believe a community organization to play an important role as a (f)actor (re)creating ‘the place’. Via different modes of enclosure, inclusion and exclusion, shares meanings are developed as the “intersecting patterns of everyday life of different women determine individual and collective identities and contribute to develop strategies which organize the everyday both as adaptation and recurrent small decisions and as particular practices and general priorities” (Vaiou and Lykogianni 2006: 731). Community organizations serve as (social) spaces of appropriation and negotiation in the processes of making sense of the place; the environment. Thus “networks among neighbours, as well as those formed around common interests related to home and its environment, often become the starting-point for collective action” (Ibid: 739). In this light it seems beneficial to focus on commonly overseen “women’s everyday activities, which are seen as ‘natural’ and given, rather as important social activities and practices” (Lykogianni 2008: 133) to add an important aspect to our understanding of the processes and developments of the neighbourhood as such.

### 2.3 ‘The public’

(iii) Despite conceiving of migrant women as a social category, it is necessary to avoid overgeneralization and bear in mind the thin line or even tension between specificity and universality of woman’s experience, the pending fact of non-existence of a single sense of place shared by everybody. What is then ***‘the public’ conceived of in this research?*** Like our micro-level (re)constructing agent, ‘the public’ of migrant women in Laak Noord can be defined as micro-public, placed between a bottom-up and top-down influences so that the everyday enactment and nature of local spaces is a result of both. The micro-publics is both a space for and a product of everyday encounters and negotiations of differences within the prosaic social interactions, a platform for encounters, deliberation, enactment and (re)negotiations. Such understood micro-publics of migrant women is itself a sub-level of the micro-publics of encounters, prosaic negotiations and deliberation in Laak Noord.



## 2.4 Social Quality toolkit in study of social construction of urban space

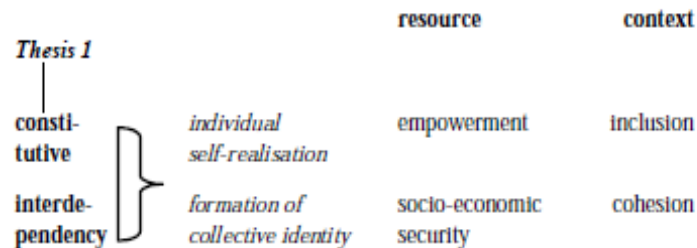
(iv) The transformational nature of societies and communities and the social quality approach or *placing the previous into the 'social quality' as an approach to study the broader picture of neighbourhood developments*. Social quality approach provides an alternative to the widely used, yet widely vague concept of exclusion; broadening the perspective on equality and integration, where the 'social' is tackled as a resource and is viewed as "not existing as such but it is the expression of constantly changing aspects of processes by which individuals realize themselves as interacting social beings" (Beck et al. 2001: 310). Stressing interaction, cooperation and social processes; this approach points out the necessity for "sustainable and functional open agoras, where the inventive potential, the organizational capacity and the creative power of participants can be realized" (Ibid: 358). Such a call can be understood as taking a step further to build upon above drafted analytical framework - adding a follow-up normative quest to understanding of social construction of space as described by Lefebvre. It informs the conceptual situating - of the case-study organization with its normative aims - into the social space of the neighbourhood.

The social quality approach attempts to fill a gap in thinking, to reshuffle focus from participatory projects towards (or in the direction of) a participatory society, viewing the excluded not as subjects of intervention but rather as an active creative force. The value added of this approach lies among others in its (a) multidimensional understanding at the problems of exclusion/marginalization connected with a more holistic frame of reference. Complex problems require complex concepts, but often what is offered are cookie cuts from different concepts rather than an attempt for a broader picture. (b) Further value resides in the positive definition of social quality resulting in focus on opportunities, rather than negative definition (such as the word exclusion carries) that oftentimes leads to focus on inhibitions and barriers. Building upon my previous point, the focus on opportunities is conducive towards a more holistic aim to guide a process of change, rather than focus on removal of one single particular barrier. Moreover it appears more digestible for any target group to identify with positively defined approach that does not suggest discursive victimization or disempowering. Last but not least stands out (c) the flexibility of the term, focusing on the "extent to which citizens are able to participate in the social and economic life of their communities under conditions which enhance their well-being and individual potential" (Beck et al. 2001: 340). Thus despite the fact that the concept remains highly normative, it appears to offer explanatory framework for open-ended processes with the possibility of remaining flexible in focusing on the process itself without necessary adoption of determinism for the outcomes.

At the heart of the social quality approach are three ontological theses to analyze the contour of the social: (1) On constitution of the social - the social "will be realized thanks to the interdependencies between the self-realization of

individual people as social beings and the formation of collective identities, based on the outcomes or consequences of these interactions. This will be true as *both* get form and content and create their (new) common context“ (Beck et al. 2001: 313). The context is a result of the constitutive interdependency and this will stimulate new contexts in a spiral-like manner where the social is and remains a changing entity.

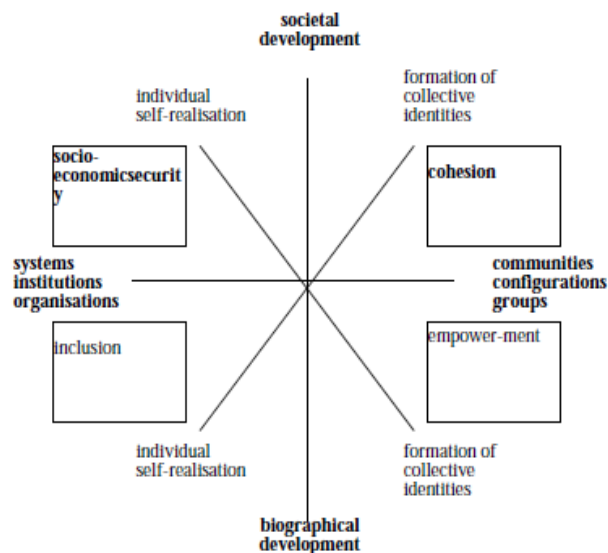
**Figure 1**  
**Constitutional and conditional factors of social quality**



source: Beck et al. 2001: 314

(2) Opportunities of the social reside upon four necessary conditions: (i) people have capabilities to interact (empowerment), (ii) the institutional and infrastructural context is accessible for these people (inclusion), (iii) the necessary material and other resources are available for the existence of the interacting people (socio-economic security) and (iv) the necessary collectively accepted values and norms will enable community building (cohesion).

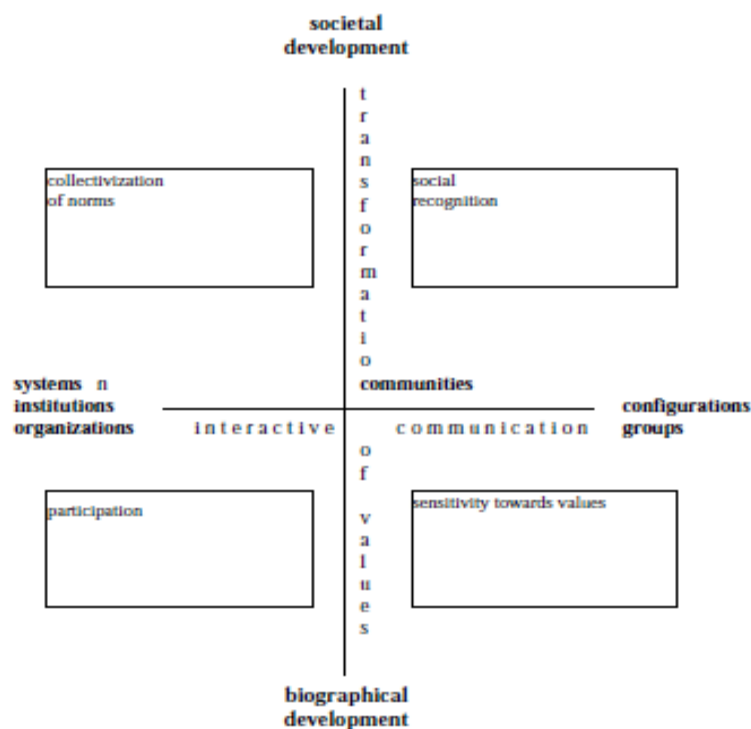
**Figure 2**  
**Constitution, opportunities, concretization of 'the social'**



source: Beck et al. 2001: 315

(3) Concretization of the social or the determination of its specific quality: “the nature, the content, the range and the morphological structure of the social will be concretized (...) by the interrelated dynamics between two main tensions (...). The horizontal axis mirrors the tension between systems, institutions and organizations on the left pole and communities, configurations and groups on the right pole. The vertical axis mirrors the tension between societal processes on the top pole and biographical processes on the bottom pole. These tensions function as sources for dynamics which influence the nature of the self-realization of the individual and the formation of collective identities“(Beck et al. 2001: 314).

**Figure 3**  
**Points of gravitation**



source: Beck et al. 2001: 332

From such derived quadrants, especially those of cohesion, empowerment, inclusion and their interdependencies form the mental framework of this research (see Figure 2). Developments within the neighbourhood and the role of our case-study organization will be looked at through the respective intersections of the above-explained axis. To study this experiment’s impacts on its target group – female migrants - I expect to move along three backspin themes: (a) accommodation of (ethnic) diversity at the local level of urban governance (b) local expression of cooperation and organization to accommodate (ethnic) diversity (c) local expression of cooperation and organization to increase agency of migrant women within the context of neighbourhood. For the aims of topics (a) and (b) providing a theoretical

understanding of the role of micro-publics as site for deliberation of ethnic cultural difference into the wider social quality framework seems promising.

As suggested above, the social quality approach carries strong normative aspect within its epistemological considerations. Conceptualizing creation of space upon Lefebvre's understanding, we might take processes of communication as a factor in the (re)construction of space. The social quality theory, on the contrary deconstructs such notion - ideal conditions necessary for communicative actions do not exist due to deep-seated inequalities inherently present in societies. Thus it gains strong normative essence via creation of reference points to combat these inequalities, processes of exclusion and misuses of power (Beck et al. 2001). The social quality and the Lefebvrian understanding of urban reality both orient themselves towards organic processes of mutual shaping between actors and their environment in daily life. However, the former brings in a normative aspect of establishing an ideational frame, a standard for assessment of that daily life against a pre-defined set of indicators (debate around these indicators still ongoing<sup>15</sup>); while the latter presupposes a contrary approach of no expectations when entering the field. I use the social quality as a conceptual ontological guide to unwrap the processes within and around the Koffiepot Mothercentre, but not as a standard for assessment of these processes. Assessments of the processes studied could by itself form core of another research.

Specificity of a Mothercentre as the case study organization? Mothers "play a key role in process of family settlement: they are responsible for making the ends meet in their households and it is they rather than the men, who develop strategies of gradually appropriating urban space, using the neighbourhood and establishing daily routines", while at a micro level migrant mothers oscillate between, "on the one hand, identities and relations formed 'there' (in the place of origin) and well accepted within their own family and community, and on the other, new roles deriving from their efforts to survive 'here'" (Vaiou and Lykogianni, 2006: 741). In the non-familiar environments an organized contact with other mothers plays a role in shaping or even directing the experience of the environment as women learn new roles and develop new identities apart from those associated with family. The Mothercentre as a space for appropriation/negotiation and making sense of place appears to have a strong ground for impact in the studied neighbourhood due to a large number of (predominantly migrant) women widely sharing a range of structural disadvantages. Moreover, the intercultural context of the organization certainly does impact on dynamic processes of (re)constitution and (re)production of urban environment which they are part of. A study of dynamics of functioning of the Mothercentre also throws

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<sup>15</sup> see eg. Maesen, Walker and Keizer (2005) *European Network Indicators on Social Quality*, Final Report, Amsterdam: European Foundation on Social Quality; or the *European Journal on Social Quality* Volume 5, Issues 1&2 2005

streams of light at the ways in which encounters of diversity play an (enabling) role in these processes.

The aim of this research was not to evaluate or take a stance in relation to the processes or actors of the study, rather the aim is to scrutinize these processes and conceptualize their different understandings. Metaphorically, if entering the field of construction of migrant space in Laak Noord was a step to unknown, the social quality with the constitutive ontological stances outlined above presents a set of points for orientation, informing but not determining the journey of ‘discovering’.

The analytical framework selected brings into focus processes largely overseen by the mainstream literature on urban governance. However, one needs to add that it like any possible framework silences couple of other possible focuses that would respond our research question from a different angle and with different outputs. Given the limited space available and the necessary level of parsimony in social sciences, it seems fair to reflect that the approach chosen is largely actor-oriented and at some passages could be accused of not developing wider focus on structural constraints of the agents.

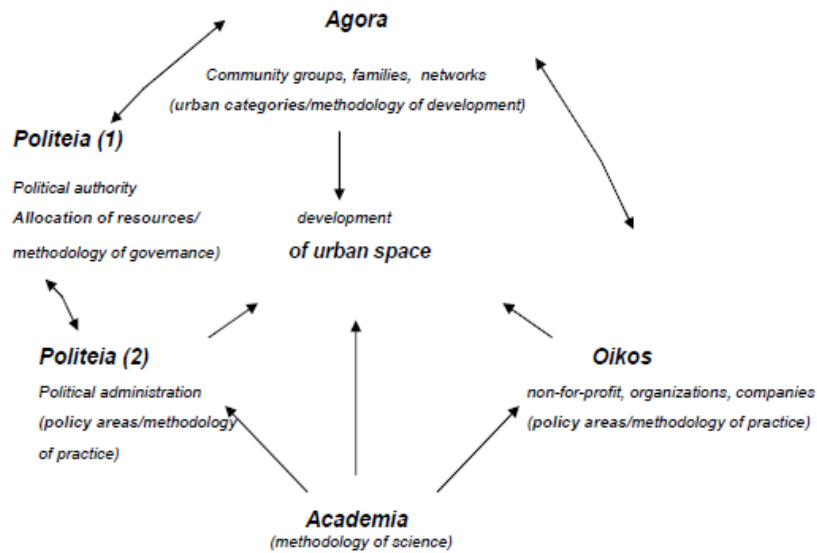
#### ***2.4.1 Social Quality and the urban question***

The ‘social’ is thus viewed as “not existing as such but it is the expression of constantly changing aspects of processes by which individuals realize themselves as interacting social beings” (Beck et al. 2001: 310). Concretization of the social and determination of its specific quality evolves dynamically across two main tensions - between systems, institutions, organizations and communities, configurations, groups as demonstrated on the horizontal axis of Figure 2; combined with the tension between societal processes and biographical processes represented by vertical axis. “These tensions function as sources for dynamics which influence the nature of the self-realization of the individual and the formation of collective identities“ (Beck et al. 2001: 314). The interest of this research is within emerging processes in the world of communities getting concretized in relation to other poles of both the vertical and the horizontal axes.

A way to localize these processes, or the manifestations of the social in our case study, is by understanding ‘four worlds in the urban space’ as designed by Nijhuis, Maesen and Westbroek (Maesen 2009, 2010) or ‘main players in the cities’ (Maesen 2008) based on their analyses of processes in Laak Noord in comparizon to urban studies elsewhere (see Figure 4). This understanding informs our understanding of Laak Noord neighbourhood and localizing of the Koffiepot centre within its (social) space. The delineations within which the social gets concretized in urban space comprise of Agora world of community groups and citizens, Politeia world of local politicians and their departments, Oikos world of semi-public/private organisations including

companies and Academia world of scientists, analysing and contributing to public policies (Maesen 2008, 2009, 2010).

**Figure 4**  
**Four worlds of urban governance**



source Maesen 2010: 30

## Concluding thoughts

The framework presented provides lenses for a particular understanding and decomposing of the object of this research and a guidance for identification of (f)actors and processes central to focus of the field research. It determines the consequent approach to and understanding of the Laak Noord neighbourhood and its constitutional and conditional factors (f)actors and processes. Likewise it determined the framework for unwrapping the Mothercentre Koffiepot, the case-study organization, guiding both the approach to and focus of the research.

## Chapter 3: A troubled neighbourhood...and 'agora' for women

### 3.1 Functional approach to suburban units: Laak Noord as aggregated neighbourhood

*Globalization, migration and the city:* reality of both urbanization and migration materializes itself in the city as localized nod in global flows (Brenner 2000) where newcomers come to affordable neighbourhoods like Laak Noord as their entry point to society. But what does the city do? Is it helping them to get to the urban situation or is it closing in a way? Neighbourhood serves as point of entry to the city, situated “between the ‘close order’ and ‘distant order’ of the society, between the individual or collective practices and wider ‘institutional’ practices” (Lefebvre 1990, 1991 quoted in Lykogianni 2008: 135) and migrant flows aggregate in disadvantaged neighbourhoods due to both affordability and diasporic flows. Should we fight aggregation as it makes the problems spatially accumulated and thus more tangible? Or should we utilize the aggregation to fight the problems it spatially accumulates? So ghettos; or aggregated neighbourhoods? Let us focus on the advantages arising from the specific function of an aggregated neighborhood. Cattacin (2006: 12) defines aggregated neighborhoods as a move beyond the historical meaning of the term ghetto, referring to a “homogenous open spaces with a high concentration of people of similar, in general low socio-economic status”. As Donzelot (2006, quoted in Cattacin 2006: 6) puts it “cities need places in which people with a low socio-economic status can live and in which communitarisation processes are possible because these places are starting point in migration, identity stabilizing and resource producing processes (...) such places have a clear function in our society that is probably underestimated”. Laak Noord presents a point of entry to the city for many migrants as a network of communities producing reciprocity and acting as self-regulated spaces of solidarity which create arenas where identity is not systematically challenged as the recognition process of one’s identity<sup>16</sup> is facilitated within homogenous<sup>17</sup> communities (see Cattacin 2006). From this viewpoint question is not to disaggregate Laak Noord’s inha-

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<sup>16</sup> For communities as identity stabilizing places offering migrants the choice in options of belonging, see Fibbi & Cattacin 2002

<sup>17</sup> homogenous in this context does not refer to ethnicity or language, rather it refers to the questions of socio-economic status and status of an “outsider” to society characterized by the lack of social networks and social capital in general

bitants, rather to understand how concretization of the social / determination of its specific quality continuously happens in this aggregate neighbourhood and a subsequent question of policy makers - how it can be worked with.

***Blue collar to socially deprived to migrant neighbourhood:*** Tracing back to early 20th century Laak Noord represented a residential area of blue collar manual workers ('copper buttons neighbourhood'). In 1960s socially deprived families from nearby quarters moved in – social landscape started to change and it gained a 'problem neighbourhood' label. After 1975 Surinamese and in 1980s Turkish and Moroccan migrant wave started to move in. Urban renewal programs in 1970s- 1980s brought exodus of people who could afford to leave; only 20% of autochtoon inhabitants remained. The character of housing stock after renovation still suggests the origins of working class neighbourhood comprising only of small houses and apartments attracting newcomers mainly by the affordability argument. Nowadays more than 50 nationalities are represented here.

*"In the meantime all the migrants came in and its a totally different situation. The people there are poor but the character of the neighbourhood is so different. Now its not unsafe, but much has to do with the view. Its difficult to understand what's exactly happening, there are people that say it has never been unsafe and there are people who still think its unsafe."*  
(policy actor)

The social landscape changed with migrant influxes, which enter the neighbourhood as their entry point to society. The history overview served to overcome the notion of place as bounded and fixed – from notion of pre-given/fixed platform for social relations to focus on "socially constituted and historically variable dimension of those relations" (Brenner 2000: 367). People with problems remain dumped in Laak Noord as a proof of initial integration failure, as integration remained practically limited to giving financial support conducive to welfare measures dependence. Question of opportunity to be socially and economically part of the society emerges - incomers are receiving support, but not a stimulating kind of support. This attributes to a lack of emerging processes.

*"What we are doing is giving people a house and giving them some money so that they can pay for it, but then it stops and they can't go on...It looks like we don't have any emerging process, they can't really enter society. They have a lot of energy but how is this energy utilized/ channeled? They cannot do much in practice."* (policy actor)



### 3.2 Laak Noord and 4 worlds of urban governance

Laak Noord as a potential entry point to the society embodies a “platform for mediating between the individuals and groups on one side and the broader structures and institutions in society on the other” (Lefebvre 1991 quoted in Lykogianni 2008: 135). Via lenses of the ‘four worlds of urban governance’ (see Figure 4) the interactions inside and between the worlds of agora, politeia, oikos and academia influence the development of urban space - closely interrelated social and physical space in Laak Noord. Within and among these ‘worlds’ people’s everyday practices get (re)defined in Laak, and vice-versa their everyday practices (re)define the (social) space of the neighbourhood. AGORA in Laak Noord is the world of communities, families, groups and networks of citizens, expressing suburban categories. Their agency in development of urban space is constantly (re)formed and (re)expresses in interaction with the world of POLITEIA comprised of political authority and political administrative systems (mainly local politicians and their departments) and the OIKOS as a world of semi-public and private organizations and companies (Maesen 2008, 2009, 2010). Though Figure 4 does not stipulate a similar direct link between the agora and the world of ACADEMIA, a direct double sided arrow here too seems to emerge in Laak Noord recently<sup>18</sup>, bringing in pilot utilization of knowledge produced by academia by citizen groups.

*What are main problems in the neighbourhood nowadays?*<sup>19</sup> (i) Between agora and oikos: socio-economic situation of relative poverty, high unemployment, lack of economy, low income. World of politeia enters this problem partially – socio-economic situation is shared trace across autochtoon and new inhabitants, while many multicultural policy measures drew upon ethnic communities rather than shared culture of poverty. (ii) Between agora and politeia: cohesion or problematic relation between immigrant and autochtoon inhabitants; and integration question - an increasing pressure for socialization without utilizing personal history, which might depress a lot of creative potential. (iii) Among all four ‘world’: lack of cooperation of various neighbourhood actors, lack of information, communication gaps - one way communication and lack of dialogue. Both policy makers and community actors point out a need to steer up local ownership and participation:

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<sup>18</sup> In line with the topic of this paper we could point out examples of cooperation of our case-study Mothercentre with experts of University of Leiden towards fostering creative learning for children in the neighbourhood or direct involvement of experts from the Hague University in organizing a Women’s Community in Laak Noord.

<sup>19</sup> as defined by its various actors interviewed

*“The system is not having a dialogue, it is having an idea what to do for the people (...) Citizens can’t express what they want and the city can’t express how they can help, how they can facilitate.” (policy actor)*

(vi) All four ‘worlds’ to environment: Inclusion of the neighbourhood and its inhabitants into wider city - ‘isolation’/not interconnected with its surrounding neither physically nor socially, need for interconnecting with actors in direct proximity as well as network-wise with policy actors, businesses (eg. on need for people in labour market with an expected gap), socially engaged organizations (terciary sector, CSR), actors to stir ideas (currently academic coalition for Laak Noord<sup>20</sup> and functional networks<sup>21</sup>).

*Approach to development of the neighbourhood.* Although Laak Noord does not figure among “power neighbourhoods”<sup>22</sup> (krachtwijk), it has special attention (Gemeente Den Haag, 2010). Most current development initiatives in Laak Noord originated from the world of oikos rather than politeia. Why? Laak as bigger district does not qualify as disadvantaged, while Laak Noord is an isolated unit of the district with distinct concentration of problems. The surge of special attention is connected with an initiative from oikos - four welfare organizations<sup>23</sup> active in the neighbourhood signaling need for special attention to municipality. Therefore the municipal investment into development of the neighbourhood comes mainly through these organizations who also largely determine the agenda, a rather unique approach different from the usual way.

The approach to development within this framework is also characterized by a shift in focus – to revitalization of the social as a starting point for complex revitalization including indirectly revitalization of the physical as they are both interconnected part of the same problem. While the urban renewal programs of 1980s concentrated mainly on physical infrastructure, these initiatives try to abridge the social with the physical aspects of the space - we see a move away from old approach of rebuilding the physical to foster change in the social to tackling the same dilemma the other way around. From 2006 Laak Noord became a ‘social laboratory’ for innovative initiatives to address its mul-

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<sup>20</sup> ISS, Hague University and EFSQ

<sup>21</sup> eg. Women’s network in the Hague

<sup>22</sup> Dutch governmental program addressing 40 aggregated neighbourhoods nationwide in the Netherlands with financial assistance to long-term local development plans.

<sup>23</sup> CARE institute, Stichting Mooi, Esloo School, Housing committee for people with lower income

tidimensional problems; local ownership of development and strengthening of the agora world are at its core.

*“When we want a change in Europe we very much focus on the rebuilding of the physical. But if we focus on the restructuring of the social, we get that the physical is a part of the social. Of course the housing situation has to be good, but I’m not organizing it first. The people do not change because of that. The other way around, starting from the social it might work....for example organizing the social in a good way brings security.” (policy actor)*

### 3.3 The world of AGORA

Focus on interactions, cooperation and social processes brings attention to the necessity for “sustainable and functional open agoras, where the inventive potential, the organizational capacity and the creative power of participants can be realized“ (Beck at al 2001: 358). In Laak Noord the world of communities, groups and networks of citizens as places where individuals get active, often-times functioning without strong institutional basis, seems both underdeveloped (largely due to problems i-iv suggested above) and underutilized by other actors of urban governance, although its potentials seemed highly estimated in interviews. Formation of open agoras to represent different categories of urban citizens is fostered within the ‘social laboratory’ initiatives for neighbourhood development. Various functional organizations active in Laak Noord contribute to creation of such agora: from self-organized sport association<sup>24</sup>, ‘cooperative’ of small entrepreneurs<sup>25</sup>, Mothercentre<sup>26</sup> to residents association<sup>27</sup>. ‘Agoras’ as social spaces have a potential in mediating between the individual (biographical) and societal development; for fostering cohesion, empowerment, aiding to social recognition and triggering sensitivity towards values; potential in formation of varied collective identities<sup>28</sup>; opening channels for participation.

The following chapter looks closer at processes of agora building among/for the women in Laak Noord neighbourhood - by looking at a specific example of the Mothercetre Koffiepot<sup>29</sup>. As Verloo (2006: 211) notes, the “political and policy practice in Europe has seldom referred to intersectionality when trying to deal with multiple inequalities”, a ‘one size fits all’ approach

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<sup>24</sup> Sportvereniging LN

<sup>25</sup> Kleine Cooperatie Eigenwijzer

<sup>26</sup> Moedercentrum De Koffiepot

<sup>27</sup> Bewonersorganisatie LN

<sup>28</sup> as one among multiple identities of each actor

<sup>29</sup> which despite its name aims to work with neighbourhood women in general

based on “an assumption of sameness or equivalence of the social categories connected to inequalities and of the mechanisms and processes that constitute them” (Ibid.) proved far too difficult to be fully overcome. In this light the interrelatedness of other complex inequalities with gender mainstreaming belongs to major issues in current analysis of gender mainstreaming (Walby 2005) and “power struggles between various inequalities will always be present, as this is part of (political) intersectionality” (Verloo 2006: 224). Part of addressing this problematique appears to be organization of public arenas or institutions for them (Ibid). Agora-building for women in Laak Noord could be understood as one such institution.

## Chapter 4: Focus on women in the neighbourhood – Koffiepot mothercentre

*"A lot of what is happening in Laak Noord is happening under the table, so the question is to put it on the table. They are getting more power (...) Their story is important. We don't know their story, we have ideas about this story but we don't know it. So us telling how they are is just our vision of how they are. There is no dialogue. We need to stimulate people to come out of the box, not to be a granite part that is fixed and cannot come out". (from interviews)*

An open 'agora' seems a way to respond to such quest. Koffiepot as an agora for women serves as community/platform where (migrant) women learn to express themselves; step out and learn to communicate, put in perspective what is happening to and around them, figure out what the options are. Vice versa it becomes a platform accumulating and channeling their creative energy. Although justification of this case-study choice has been suggested in chapter two, let us take it into the context of Laak Noord. The Mothercentre as a space for appropriation/negotiation and making sense of place seems to have a strong ground for impact here due to a large number of (migrant) women widely sharing several, mainly interconnected, structural disadvantages: (a) status of housewives which excludes the workplace as a variable in their use of the city, (b) low level of Dutch language skills as obstacle in integration into the urban society, (c) low level of official education and/or training as obstacle to integration into labour market, (d) numerous cases of cultural background fostering sense of obligation to remain inside the house as to take care of children, husband, household, (e) low density of social networks, or prevalence of social contacts predominantly connected with one's diaspora, (f) low self-esteem up to self-worth denial, absence of access to information, fear of unknown and passivity in relation to agency in one's own life as well as society. In such context the Mothercentre can be understood as a space for encounters, interactions and negotiation of routines with a potential to contribute to fostering of identities with a stronger public presence, address the absence of weak ties familiarizing neighbours with each other and contributing to a sense of familiarity of the neighbourhood as community, or contributing to the constellation of relations (see Vaiou and Lykogianni 2006; Lykogianni 2008). In addition this organization is interesting from the viewpoint of its intercultural context. The multiplicity of cultures and instant interaction of differences also impact on the processes of (re)constitution and (re)production of urban environment which they are part of.

## 4.1 Introducing Koffiepot

*Brief background:* the Koffiepot was set up in 1994 as an induced social space subsidized by welfare program (mainly Mooi Foundation) as socio-cultural adult work, offering subsidized educative, training and spare time activities. Laak Noord at the time witnessed tensions between old inhabitants and migrant settling in - “people drew swastikas on the door when we were starting here” (from interviews) - as well as among various migrant ethno-cultural groups. Many subsidized projects for migrants were run in Laak Noord, but most of them worked through ethno-cultural basis and there were many migrant women not stepping out of their home at all, as anticipated within respective cultural communities. The mothercentre was build upon a model tested in Germany which seemed successful in bridging different migrant communities via women - by gradually integrating activities for women from various diasporas and including the autochtoon Dutch women from the neighbourhood as well.

*“We worked for Dutch people as well, because they are poor as well; one poorness isn’t different from other poorness. Moreover many of the original inhabitants are ageing in loneliness.”* (from interviews)

In terms of functional arrangements the center brought an offer of wide range of activities initially in segregated manner:

*“All cultures keeping by themselves, so we started like that with activities in groups - Turkish group on Monday, Surinamese on Tuesday etc. to make them feel at home. Only then we start putting them together. If we brought all cultures at once that would be a problem, nobody would want to come here.”* (from interviews)

These were gradually integrated; nowadays women of over fifty different cultures participate jointly in activities of the organization which bring over 2000 visitors each month (Kaaden 2011), putting women together in a range of activities under a ‘second living room’ or ‘extended family’<sup>30</sup> model. In practical terms the range of activities offered covers areas of education - language, computer lessons, certification courses, information help-desk for consultation and advice, know-how sharing among members, skill-based learning - handicrafts, sports and relax; and further socializing activities such as wellness days. In terms of functional arrangements there are several women trained and employed within subsidized welfare scheme who run group activities, work in

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<sup>30</sup> Jaap Westbroek, the district director of Laak Noord explains the organization within Koffiepot as an extended family organized in a Dutch way – everybody has to speak Dutch learning from each other, the organization fosters exchange of knowledge, experience, ideas and learning from differences; while care for the other surges as natural aspect of interactions. (interviews with Jaap Westbroek and Carol Rayman)

childcare center, administration or the helpdesk; but also serve as ‘bridges’ or facilitators in interactions and in introduction of newcomers. These are mainly themselves first generation migrants who did not use to work outside their house before, come from the different ethnic groups (incl. autochtoons), and are supposed to serve as role models for the other women of the district.

#### ***4.1.1 Main aims: stirring towards empowerment and fostering cohesion***

Between the individual and the social or an approach that goes from biographical to societal development? Entry point is focus on personal development of an individual and the target group comprises mostly of women that never worked outside their house. According to Koffiepot’s staff the first steps are to assist women to “*unfold their own strength, learn things that they never suspected they have been capable of, gain self-confidence and self-reliance*” (from interviews). Next aspect is the access to information – such as an ‘i-shop’ where women are assisted in filling out forms (requests, taxes submitting etc.) and a ‘clinic’ for consultation with care and social worker, police, including a semi-secret advisory service on domestic violence. Simultaneously, the aspect of contact with variety of other women from the neighbourhood and building social networks plays a role. The social here appears both an entry point - a necessary ‘environmental’ pre-condition for individual growth and an outcome of these processes. After interviewing women around the core of the organization, two areas stood up as the main focus within these activities – stirring towards empowerment and fostering cohesion.

*Thinking in theory*, in our analytical framework we saw the processes of empowerment and cohesion located in the logic of evolution between two tensions defining the content and morphological structure of the social (Figures 2 and 3). Likewise we looked at the location of ‘social as a resource’ studied in this paper within the broader picture of urban development - focus on the agora or ‘the social coming into being’ in its world. *Thinking in terms of the fieldwork* what do we practically talk about when talking about stirring these processes in Koffiepot? Explaining these stirring processes is subject of the following sub-chapters. Before proceeding to do that, let us locate these abstract processes into tangible everyday life of women participating in the Koffiepot - in what areas of their life does the centre affect their routines?

How? Range of issues coming up in fieldwork or in what aspects does participation of women in mothercentre enter their everyday life? In what areas does it affect their routines? The following surged as main areas, around which stirring towards empowerment and cohesion building could be suggested:

- (a) Family-life: children, husband, household care and duties. Questions of relations, support for functioning outside of family/seeking out other contexts (education, work, leisure activities), upbringing children as platform for connecting to other women (sharing, joint learning), absence of extended family as enabling factor for seeking out to redefine one's roles and identities, domestic violence.
- (b) Neighbourhood: family and kinship, relating to other women, loneliness, social networks, organizing on neighbourhood basis, community work.
- (c) Work 'outside' of one's house, where paid work is understood as
- producer of identity;
  - contact with 'outside' as stimulus and way of relating to others;
  - source of 'pride' - prestige (recognition), achievement (role model), equated with empowerment, success of combining work outside with household tasks (suggesting no change in household tasks distribution, paid work as additional task, synchronizing unpaid domestic with paid work seen as achievement or proof of capabilities of a woman);
  - economic reasons (not significantly mentioned around decision to take a job, but pronounced in concerns about losing the job).
- (d) Self-esteem: improvement, learning (enhancing capabilities), recognition (presenting one's talent, compliments, peer-support), empowerment, seek out for more (visions).
- (e) Differences: language problems (language as a source of hierarchization/exclusion referring to knowledge of Dutch), groupings by cultural circuit/religion and the gossip culture, differences in skills/aspirations/levels of involvement.

## **4.2 Fostering cohesion: the social & banal transgressions as a form of sustained intercultural dialogue**

*In theory: What do we talk about when talking about cohesion?* Social Quality understands social cohesion (or its other pole of social dissolution) as "located at the communal level" and tackling "primary relationships between actors", where "both civic integration and social cohesion are part of social integration" (Beck et al. 2001: 344-345). Processes fostering cohesion (or social dissolution) based on strength (or weakness) of primary relations within a neighbourhood are tied with formation of collective identities between the world of communities/groups/ configurations and the societal development; and intrinsically connected with social recognition which arises from intersection of interactive communication and transformation of values (see Beck et al. 2001). How does this dynamic process at the intersecting axes of interactive communication and transformation of values happen in the Koffiepot?



*Cohesion building in Koffiepot – banal transgressions and deliberation of differences.*

What differences? The recent calls for diversity mainstreaming parallel to gender mainstreaming seem to be associated predominantly with ethnicity (see Verloo 2006) together with other categories of social practice – sexuality, age, class, religion, educational status, disability etc. Conceiving of these categorical inequalities in different contexts and over time is intertwined with power and shows the fluidity and innate contestability of these social categories. The Koffiepot members come from more than 50 ethnic backgrounds; and the ethnic cleavage is actually only one of many intersecting inequalities ‘embodied’ within the members of the mothercentre. However, during the fieldwork the ethno-cultural together with religious differences surged as the main subjects of debate in relation to question of cohesion.

How? A debate on cultural interchange and coherence within the centre brings in more than ethnic cultural recognition quest; the step taken is the recognition (and celebration) of differences as such - in the everyday deliberation of differences within local micro-publics of prosaic interaction. In other words living with diversity is a matter of constant negotiation of differences among individuals cohabitating the same space, not a once-for-all consensus to be achieved. The micro-publics is both a space for, and a product of, everyday encounters and negotiations of differences within the prosaic social interactions, a platform for encounters, deliberation, enactment and (re)negotiations, in line with what Amin (2002) suggests in ideas on possibilities for interculturalism. Koffiepot in this understanding forms a micro-publics of migrant women, and is itself a sub-level of the micro-publics (of encounters, prosaic negotiations and deliberation) of the agora spaces in Laak Noord.

Spaces of social contacts out of one’s familiar (social) space - like the mothercentre – have a potential to serve as spaces of appropriation and negotiation, of making sense of the place (in relation to self-definition of the individual defining the space) via interactions and continuous exposure to differences. They create a platform for ‘banal transgressions’ as conceptualized by Amin (2002) ie. sites where one is compelled to (i) step out of daily environments; sites that can work as (ii) spaces of cultural displacement and destabilization - placing people of different background into new setting in a common activity, thus disrupting the ‘easy labeling of the stranger as enemy’ - a setting enabling or even compelling individuals to break out of fixed relations and fixed notions via new patterns of social interaction. The site for banal transgressions is not to be perceived as oriented towards achieving compact community or consensus, but rather as (iii) space opening contact and dialogue with the other on equal terms as to create an opportunity to overcome mutual fears and misinterpretations, so that the contact can turn one between ‘friendly

enemies' rather than antagonism (see Amin, 2002). The Koffiepot as a space of inter-dependence and habitual engagement, as a unique setting for 'banal transgression' opens up space for intercultural dialogue - 'displacement' as basis for negotiating diversity and the 'lived experience' which opens up personal space for change in attitude and/or behaviour. In theory fostering "openness to becoming different if future circumstances allow" as Amin (2002: 16) states.

(i) Stepping out of daily environments: out of household – relatives – diasporic community nexus. In case of housewives as a substantial part of members, the cultural isolation is stronger due to absence or selectiveness of contact with the surrounding society (eg. absence of exposure to 'outside world' via workplace as central site of integration). Also many older initiatives around intercultural dialogue focused on community leaders, leaving women (and esp. housewives) out of the broader frame. In a remark of a Koffiepot member exposure to otherness is not only something new to many members but also strange for some of them:

*"When women come they only know their culture and their religion. When they sit here they talk and learn from each other about otherness, we educate ourselves, we learn to accept. For a lot of women it was an eye opener as women started to accept each other." Interviewees generally stated to see the differences as positive, thought "...it takes time to explain things... we discuss; sometimes they see it as weird. Some women confuse their values with their cultures, do not separate that and this leads to discussions. We then need to clarify that those two are not the same." (from interviews)*

(ii) Spaces of cultural displacement and destabilization: How do women get connected across multiple intersectionalities such as different status, ethnicity and culture, religion, generation etc? Solidarity and self-help aspect of the organization is stirred on the basis of contextually shared identities. Besides contextual amplification of a component from multiple identities, the components themselves are fluid and in flux rather than stable and fixed. Their developments are accelerated by negotiating between the culture 'at home' and new identities fostered by taking on new roles or introducing new routines into the old roles.

*Acting upon an identity is situational, "it is about the activity for which they convene – particular sport-lovers, students of Dutch, ladies curious for creativity in kitchen, mothers talking about childcare etc. If identity is a big cake composed of many pieces, the choice of a piece for the situation depends upon the activity" (from interviews).*

(iii) For an illustration conflict over validity of religion surged as good example of banal transgression - discussion of different stances happens during a shared activity in which the women present are out of their usual daily (social) environment, taking on a new role having an interest to remain in this

role (eg. as students at Dutch lesson or participants in handicraft group). Thus engagement within the group and prosaic negotiations are compulsory; opening floor for dialogue about differences, with an obligation to tackle difference via acknowledgement (ideally respect) - though with disagreement - for each other's meanings.

*"everyone deserves time to talk about their religion; they might not like it, but they sit there and listen" (from interviews).*

*Platform for deliberation as norm-entrepreneur?* A self-development in constant exposure to difference might present a challenge to sense of belonging and search for self-definition (from interviews). Focusing on possibilities of this open process we tend to forget that these women remain embedded in everyday reality, one which cosmopolitan intellectuals seem to forget (see Vaiou and Lykogianni 2006). However, agent embedded in situated social networks faces also structural impediments in his/hers agency to determine own identities openly. What about feelings of acceptance and belonging?

*"It is like being a first generation student. Your parents never fully understand what you're doing; you are developing in a way that they never experienced. But you also do not feel a part of the group you are into because...they are elsewhere. And I think that is what happens to women trying to step out of their own culture; they don't belong to the old culture anymore, but neither the new culture because it is not defined yet." (gender studies expert).*

The approach within the centre appears to go beyond celebrating differences for the sake of difference itself. It seems rather about fostering a particular discourse on celebration of diversity as a learning opportunity for an individual and creative/innovative potential for groups; but also a space for (automatic) acceptance of one's changing self-definition – acceptance based on co-travelling of other members along parallel self-developments. In the light of this argument we could perceive the mothercentre as a norm entrepreneur within the neighbourhood context working towards diffusion of a particular norm – a norm of diversity in deliberation being a valuable resource for growth at both individual and social level.

*Relevance of places like the mothercentre?* In understanding sites of banal transgression within the everyday life in a locality as a framework for intercultural dialogue, the focus departs from small group of elites or 'community leaders speaking for everybody' to encompass a multilayered, multileveled and interlinked network of sites, institutions, organizations, oftentimes of separate urban subgroups such as the youth, elderly, women etc. This understanding highlights the creative power of "situated everyday life in neighbourhoods, workplaces and public spaces, through which historical, global and local processes intersect to give meaning to living with diversity" (Amin, 2002: 21). Koffiepot in this sense presents a window for looking at everyday interactions

of women of more than 50 different ethnic and cultural backgrounds within a range of spaces/situations for banal transgression it creates. Although women in Laak Noord present a diverse group defined by a range of intersectionalities, we still can talk about contextual structural specificities of position of women in the making of the neighbourhood while relating to the concept of situational identities outlined above. Keeping in mind this substantial subgroup of the micro-publics, the Koffiepot could be claimed to fill in a specific niche within the context of the neighbourhood<sup>31</sup> - a fact which sets it to an advantaged position to serve as space for negotiation of difference at the local level.

### **4.3 Stirring towards empowerment**

This subchapter will outline the understanding of ‘empowerment’ by neighbourhood policy actors and compare it with the understanding of ‘empowerment’ as defined in the work of the Koffiepot mothercentre. Both of these attempts to pin down an actual current understanding of this over-encompassing word derive mainly from qualitative interviews, with usage of additional printed materials issued by the actors in question.

#### ***4.3.1 Defining empowerment: Neighbourhood policy actors***

The first set of understandings derives mainly from interviews on the development of the neighbourhood with the district director of Laak Noord; with a head of the Welfare department and with an advisor of the department Strategy & Projects of the City Hall. The definition of empowerment here is connected with the erosion of welfare state and enabling a citizen to “take care of oneself”. The mainstream definitions seem to depict a neoliberal understanding of empowerment as enabling the citizen to take care of him/herself through inclusion into the market (independence from welfare provisions); with strong support for entrepreneurship. This understanding is strongly connected with notions of integration of services with the aims of increased efficiency and decreased costs, minimizing the state involvement and “outsourcing” some of the roles currently performed by the state onto citizens’ self-organizations collaborating with other non-state actors (both for-profit and non-profit organizations) and on volunteer engagement. This understanding relies upon communitarian voluntarism, community bonds and solidarity; without tackling any of these as an integral part of empowerment. In words of an expert from tertiary sphere feminist organization, such notion of empowerment is based primarily on the imperative of saving money, without any clear vision or particular un-

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<sup>31</sup>While in functional terms still space for productive/creative self-realization, social contact, education and relax for both migrant and autochtoon inhabitants

derstanding (from interviews). Additionally, currently surging idea seems to potentially enter this understanding - the role of individual's social networks and empowering as enabling the citizen to make most out of his/her networks in the search for entry into the market. This view however still operates within the basic underlying assumption of empowerment as mainly economic question - cost-cutting and outsourcing at level of provision of services (previously supplied by the state) and at the individual level as employability/inclusion into the market.

The mainstream paradigm within municipal policy actors is challenged by an enlarged understanding of empowerment, which also surged within this round of interviews. This concept presupposes not only economic but also wider social connotations – in words of the district director “*it has to be social empowerment as well*”. In this understanding enhancing knowledge and skills should maximize one's prospect for participating in society, rather than simple equation between inclusion into market and inclusion into social environment. This view enhances the ‘neoliberal understanding’ of an individual as empowered when taking care of himself as individual able to *cope with* current development; to an individual active in *defining* the current development. Individual as an actively constructing subject utilizing his/her capabilities and operating through his/her social relations networks, rather than a coping subject dealing with the status quo. In theoretical terms this understanding strongly connects with the notion of empowerment as defined in the Social Quality framework, as it likewise encompasses “increasing the range of human choice”<sup>32</sup>; a concept of empowerment that “implies human beings as subjects of development processes rather than as objects for benevolent development interventions from outsiders” (Beck et al. 2001: 348). The process still builds upon attention to human capabilities; however it adds equal attention to their social relations as a valuable resource and special role of their networks in development through the people rather than development for the people (Ibid.).

If we think of these different notions – empowerment in the ‘neoliberal sense’ vs. empowerment which is inherently social as well - as competing norms within the institutional system of neighbourhood's policy actors, we could locate them by using the concept of life cycle of a norm. A prevailing institutional norm is the neoliberal understanding, which emerged with the overall change in Dutch political winds over last years. A wider understanding is brought and promoted by a few norm entrepreneurs within the institutional settings itself. Their understanding builds upon the argument of ‘economic sus-

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<sup>32</sup> definition of subject-matter of empowerment by European Commission (1996)

tainability and efficiency' underlying the prevalent norm, but enlarges the definition by adding an inseparable 'social' component. Such understanding might form an emerging norm, however at the moment it does not appear embraced by wide variety of actors.

#### ***4.3.2 Defining empowerment: A look from within a mothercentre***

Understanding empowerment from inside Koffiepot builds upon empowerment as grounded in local realities and seems to take a more holistic approach where a material and an ideational aspect of the process interplay in a picture focusing on the individual as inherently interconnected with the social. Such understanding is based on premise of "dreaming and doing" (a phrase reappearing across several interviews) – or as ability to both make strategic decisions in life and imagine alternative choices or think out of a prescribed frame<sup>33</sup>. The awareness of alternatives available or at least imaginable is stirred via the 'social' - in fostered interactions – within use of role-models, issue-related peer discussions, utilization of the multicultural setting for cultivating awareness of traditional roles and own mental barriers, and situations of banal transgressions.

*"Education, confidence but also choices that you have as a woman. That you are able to define a different world, that you don't have to stick to the tradition. To imagine the alternatives before having a choice."*

To locate this debate in practical terms, the process starts with emancipation of an individual located within social networks within the Mothercentre activities, where the debate interlinks with cohesion (as outlined in Chapter 4.2) and builds upon shared interest or goal. The individual gets first stimulated from outside by a professional - "*an extra push they often need*" (from interviews) - but a great deal of the process relies upon group/network dynamics of an aggregate linked together by common interest and by a 'bridge-builder' (a person trained in preventing group disaggregation, a peer facilitator). The process at individual level evolves around several interconnected fields (defined based on set of interviews within the mothercentre):

(i) Economic base (skills, training and certification, employment); as a factor strongly pronounced within majority of actors interviewed both within and outside of the Koffiepot. Empowerment as 'take care of oneself' based on

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<sup>33</sup>For comparison see what Kabeer, (2001, pp.19) in a different context of different grassroot women organization framed as: "A choice necessarily implies the possibility of alternatives, the ability to have chosen otherwise"

economic independence via incorporation into the market as employable labour or entrepreneur.

(ii) Physical base of freedom of movement/possibility to get out of the house, physical safety especially as defense against (domestic) violence strongly linked with aspects (i), (iii) and (iv).

(iii) Information base as information about existing and possible alternatives or ability to imagine taking alternative choices, know-how.

(iv) Psychological base as self-esteem, self-reliance and resilience, originating and materializing itself in social interactions.

(v) Engagement as self-validation; solidarity (*"take care of each other"*) and social activism (engagement in local development / *"sense of local ownership"*)

*"It's not just that you come to Holland, learn Dutch and you are in the society. There are women for whom their husband went home, married and brought her here, she has no ties here, she does not know the place, she can't even go to supermarket alone as she does not understand.... How small she feels..."*

The individual and the social aspect intertwine within the two interrelated processes for empowerment – emancipation and social activation of an individual. Social activation is the starting point within the ‘make aware to give choice’ approach, where social participation as meeting people by activities has a potential to give perspective, self-confidence as to demonstrate right to make choices. Emancipation, based primarily on work and education, builds upon social participation effects. Within this second process the key concepts are to ‘support oneself’ (own money as precondition for own choices), utilization of awareness to ‘think for oneself’ and claim for equality including awareness of consequences of choices (based on interviews within Koffiepot and tertiary expert interpretations).

While aspects (i) and (ii) bear similarities with the ‘neoliberal’ definition of ‘take care of oneself’; aspects (iii)-(v) are in addition connected with an ability to imagine alternatives and bear an inherently interpersonal aspects as they are mainly stimulated through relating to others, via situated social relations. An external feminist expert suggested a divergence from the view on employment (i) pushed by the policy actors top-down as to find a job meaning any job; and a view introduced by bottom-up actors as to find a job that suits you meaning utilization of individual’s particularities. Such individualization of approach seems very strongly desired within the work of the mothercentre. Hence, this community organization seems to provide space for working towards individual empowerment with effect desired by the top-down actors on the aggregate level, but via working within the complex dialectics of biographical development of an individual utilizing the dynamics of societal development.

*“Not what women need - see uniqueness and potential in every woman. The possibility to grow in her own way”*

#### **4.4 Emerging role of women in the neighbourhood – Koffiepot as a (f)actor**

Theoretically speaking, community organizations serve as spaces of appropriation and negotiation in the processes of making sense of the place, thus “networks among neighbours, as well as those formed around common interests related to home and its environment, often become the starting-point for collective action” (Vaiou and Lykogianni 2006: 739). In this light it seems beneficial to focus on commonly overseen “women’s everyday activities, which are seen as ‘natural’ and given, rather as important social activities and practices” (Lykogianni, 2008: 133) to add an important aspect to our understanding of the processes and developments of the neighbourhood as such.

*Mothercentre and participation in the development of neighbourhood.* In line with these suggestions let us look at the emerging role of the mothercentre as an increasingly visible actor. Examples of a couple of recent projects suggest increasing role of the women around Koffiepot in Laak Noord, let us look briefly at couple of different but organically interrelated activist cases. (i) Change of physical environment via utilization of private parts of public spaces in the neighbourhood by creation of balcony gardens and community garden in shared community garden is gradually put into practice and further extension is negotiation with the housing corporation; (ii) creation of new (social) spaces – plan for a teagarden on an unused green space by a chanel delineating the neighbourhood, in close proximity to one of the cultural history heritage of the neighbourhood and on a cycling-route - as creating new space for interactions within the neighbourhood but also attracting visitors from outside to stop by and developing local microeconomy; (iii) fostering change via focus at the individual level – focus on education methods for children within a project in cooperation with several childcare and educative organizations and University of Leiden to experimentally apply methodology of creative learning which is being developed by the university. Organic interrelation demonstrates itself in a nexus: the physical as surrounding impacting upon the social, the social as (re)constructor of the physical, and the individual as a constitutive element of the social.

Examples like these suggest an increasingly visible public involvement of women in different aspects of development of the neighbourhood. The Koffiepot could in this light be interpreted as one platform on which such activism surges and which presents a space to develop ideas and channel them in



cooperation with other actors; as an open agora fostering social activism and engagement with impact upon the environment of the neighbourhood. The emancipation of an individual fostered within this mothercentre model seem inextricably connected with the social activism, both of them a form of utilization as well as form of creation of further social networks. Although most interviews in diverse ways pointed to this link, the direction of causality in the link between the individual and the social element of empowerment remains blurred.

#### ***4.4.1. Looking forward – a way to Women’s Association<sup>34</sup>***

A critique of the functioning of the mothercentre points out the questionable sustainability of such model – welfare dependent, not self-sustainable, good in what they are doing but not good in economy (from interviews). In light of current cuts in welfare support for the programming period starting in 2013, the mothercentre is moving out of the direct welfare support scheme (as a top-down sponsored platform, though with a relatively open space for agency) to a voluntary sphere of self-organization (based predominantly on the work of volunteers and support arranged through partnerships with other non-governmental actors). The change presents an opportunity for reconciliation of the critique; making this part of agora fully owned by its constitutive subjects (local ownership of development, incl. self-development of the platform); and empowerment of this stream of agora vis-a-vis city hall, stimulating activism and more contacts/ networking with other actors and environment, better coordination. Nevertheless, is not such discourse overoptimistic or preliminary?

What is happening in practical terms and what are some of the emerging immediate visions as well as potentials and vulnerabilities inherent in such a shift? A Women’s Association has been established as a self-help organization for women by some of the current members and employees of the mothercentre with the aim to find ways to use the talents of its members and find ways within the system to empower these women to fully participate in society and encourage them “*to care for each other*” (Kaaden 2011). However as interviews revealed there is a lack of vision as how to operationalize these aims as well as on how to secure continuity and functioning in practical term. This lack of clear vision on both sides of the policy channel opens a list of vulnerabilities.

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<sup>34</sup> Vrouwenvereniging Moedercentrum De Koffiepot

*“It is a process and we should be very much aware that defining it is a process and it should build on the strengths of the women involved, its not to anybody who helps like me to define it.” (from expert interview)*

A question opens whether the need for more entrepreneurial attitude connected with shift to self-organization – will that not exclude many of those for whom it is supposed to serve? The connected quest for possession of planning abilities, marketable skills, neoliberal flexibility; as well as the dualism between collective aspect of institutional functioning versus individualism of project-oriented self-organization functioning on market logic; touch upon question of representativeness in long term. One could stipulate an inherent threat of divergence from working with those at bottom to working only with those that manage to make it. Such shift in functioning carries an innate danger of increasing the gap and stimulation of new structures of exclusion and hierarchization. Last but not least strongly pronounced vulnerability is the aspect of time. No comment is needed for words of a policy maker interviewed:

*“Time. We built our society in the last 40 years with all those services and now we have to make that change in society to make it less dependent on the state budget in 2-3 years.”(municipal policy maker)*

## **Concluding thoughts**

This chapter focused on processes of cohesion-building and stirring towards empowerment as these surged in interviews regarding the mothercentre activities. These processes can be regarded as ‘the social coming into being’ in the world of agora. Seen from the perspective of the EU definition of cohesion as reflected in the slogan “united in diversity” which refers to the celebration of difference, the findings at the mother centre shows that banal transgressions in a local micro-publics of prosaic interaction represent a form of sustained intercultural dialogue at the level of everyday encounters, rather than imagining future cohesive societies as a ‘product’ to be achieved according to EU understanding. Intercultural dialogue links not just to deliberation of ethno-cultural diversity, but also to a much wider spectra of differences as reflected in various practices in social categorization or the complex intersectionality without which questions of ethnicity and culture cannot be theorized.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion and final remarks

The paper addressed the problematique of urban governance and multiculturalism in European integration from a gender perspective, with a focus on a case study of Laak-Noord and the KoffiePot mothercentre within this aggregated neighbourhood. Through locating the debate into a locally grounded case study on accommodation of ethnic diversity at the local level of urban governance, the paper was guided by two aims: (a) provide an insight into contributions and potentials of artificially created local functional organizations for categories of citizens with shared particular needs, such as mother centers, in the context of ethnically mixed urban spaces and spaces with high level of (im)migration, and (b) contribute to the deepening of Social Quality theory on inclusion and social citizenship - by broadening the understanding of processes around the dynamics of gender and ethnicity in deliberation as grounded at the local level – as to theoretically contribute into a debate on the necessity of sensitivities to multiple inequalities for the contours of adequate indicators. To meet these ends the paper provides analysis in theoretical terms on the role of local functional organizations regarding spatial dimension of deliberation of difference (mainly) along ethno-cultural lines; and in (migrant) women's empowerment as substantial creators of democratic space. In doing so it utilizes the social constructionist approach and the Social Quality framework for study of urban space.

Field findings show the importance of contextualizing a given component of the Social Quality framework (keeping it mind that the components themselves are fluid and in flux rather than stable and fixed) due to the specific composition of multiple identities, which are dynamic i.e. the forging of new identities by taking on new roles or introducing new routines into the old roles. Spaces of social contacts out of one's familiar space - like the mothercentre - serve as spaces of appropriation and negotiation. Through cultural displacement and destabilization, dialogue and prosaic negotiation become compulsory. From this vantage empowerment appears different from a top-down definition. Although the concept of empowerment whether bottom-up or top-down share a common point of departure, i.e. the necessity of taking care of oneself (or increasing independence from the state, economic empowerment via inclusion in the market), there is a divergence in terms of the visions of what should be taken into account. Whereas the bottom up voices stress the necessity of empowerment being social as well or the social activation component as pre-condition for emancipation of an individual, and the need to pay attention to individual interests and talents as the bases for the emancipation upgrade (imagining alternatives and possibility of having chosen otherwise), the

top down stresses the economic aspect of empowerment without regarding either social context or any individualization of the individual in the process. In parsimonious terms this decontextualized and one-size-fit-all understanding does presuppose integration into labour market and complete independence from state support as both the means and the ends to empowerment. This divergence was shown not only in approach of studied organization to empowerment of citizens of Laak Noord, but also in different understandings of the current move of the organization from welfare scheme to full self-organization; where the governmental policy actors stress the empowering effect of this move for the organization vis-a-vis the state, while from the bottom-up we could hear voices of concern about the effect of such move on the functioning of the organization in regard to the social aspect of empowerment.

Our focus on social construction of space via lived realities of people's everyday lives also bring into the debates on multiculturalism, urban governance and European integration (including europeanization of urban governance) new insights that may be critical for further reflection on policy. Two main areas of concern have surfaced, including (i) cohesion in reference to community in spatial terms and the (ii) specific notions of empowerment by different actors in urban governance. On the question of cohesion, the findings suggest that the grounding of the debate on (post)multiculturalism in a spatial reality of deliberation, negotiation and enactment of differences as an inherent aspect of everyday interactions is superior to seeking consensus in multicultural dialogue on a level remote from the everyday life, since it breaks away from a dialogue between elites as ground for cohesion of communities, and gives the power of finding connection and adaptation to members of the "communities" themselves. In other words living with diversity is a constant process with no final product, a matter of constant negotiation of differences among individuals cohabitating the same space, not a once-for-all consensus to be achieved. This notion stresses the need for open and functional 'agoras', spaces such as the Koffiepot offering platform for a micro-publics (in this case of predominantly migrant women) which is itself a sub-level of the micro-publics of encounters, prosaic negotiations and deliberation of the 'agora' spaces within the urban space. Opening up the black-box of widely used but rarely fully defined term empowerment has enabled a comparison of different understanding of this term by actors in the urban governance in question. More interesting than the points where these notions do meet was actually the inquiry on where do they diverge. Hence the debate was brought to the social aspect of empowerment, one that develops in interaction between the individuals through social activation. The social aspect as a pre-condition for wider emancipation of an individual was stressed by all bottom-up actors as an inherent part of defining empowerment, while being almost fully disregarded by the

top-down actors. Our qualitative focus on processes has brought into light both the changing quality and the fluidity of the multiple inequalities which are reconstituted in various forms and on various bases within the process of empowerment - a fluidity of exclusion and hierarchization systems. As an example our case study points out that the processes of empowerment of some actors/groups can indirectly decrease visibility of other actors starting from a similar structural position within the matrix of multiple disadvantages; thus empowerment of some actors might actually increase the gap through affecting structures of exclusion and/or hierarchization, while simultaneously impacting the question of representativeness in long term.

With respect to the Social Quality theory on inclusion and social citizenship, our use of the Social Quality framework as toolkit for understanding of, or a method to study the questions of multiculturalism, urban governance and European integration brought into focus a range of issues largely overseen (or so far unrevealed?) by mainstream literature. Moreover, the approach as a set of ethical principles on integration can learn from the Koffiepot as expression of diversity and from the voices articulated therein on specific notions of empowerment.<sup>35</sup> The kind of qualitative research presented is about documenting process - in what way Social Quality can use insights gained from studying processes? The Social Quality theory in its framework appears to focus on quality of processes, while encountering the problem of dualism versus dialectical interaction between the individual and the societal in the measurement question when developing indicators to measure them. Despite focus on understanding the processes taking place on spectra between the individual and the societal, the attempt for measuring the quality of the social seems to measure in practical terms only at the level of the individual. There is a need for a new organic approach to bridge the gap between analytical understanding of processes with measurement of their outcomes, especially in relation to an argument stated above in debate on cohesion – much of what is attempted to be measured is itself a fluid process rather than a fixed outcome – making the notion of measurement of the social at the level of the individual quite problematic. In this respect the debate on complex relationship between understanding and measurement of processes might further impact upon practical implementation of the Social Quality framework.

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<sup>35</sup> Although developing meta-theory requires some distance from the everyday world, to contribute to the debate on indicators of Social Quality which are to be applied for practical measurement appears to necessitate an interrogation of the approach while applying it in fieldwork.

A question raises - how to account for the possible negative side-effects of processes which are normatively perceived as desirable? While such side-effects become visible when focusing on processes, they more often than not stay unnoticed when measuring only the outcomes of the process as suggested above. There seems to be a need to bear this methodological dilemma in mind within the debate on development of the Social Quality indicators. Measuring the social at the individual level might as well be connected with the fact that Social Quality theory is an actor-oriented approach. This orientation gets highlighted through the focus on multiple inequalities, pointing out that the theory is highly an actor-oriented approach tackling aspects or factors like agency, identity, self-realization as open process (the delineations of which are fluid and in flux); yet as if these had no material base when entering a processes. In other words, as suggested in the initial critique there is a sense of not paying enough attention to the structure within the structure-agency continuum - of disregarding the initial and changing structural disadvantages and constraints in theorization of urban question, although in the epistemological considerations the theory considers deep seated inequalities as one of the characteristics of societies.

Downwards from the theoretical level debate, what can Social Quality approach as a set of ethical principles on integration learn from grassroots actors like the Koffiepot on specific notions of empowerment and cohesion? The aspect of social activation discussed above should be also borne in mind in the debate of Social Quality indicators measuring aspects of empowerment. So could also be pointed out the need for sites of banal transgression or spaces for the multicultural dialogue within everyday interactions in relation to the debate on Social Quality indicators measuring aspects of societal cohesion. If cohesion is about necessary value consensus, celebration of diversity should present one of the core values here and this acknowledgement should not remain unnoticed in the 'quality' of cohesion measurement.

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## **Appendix 1: Ethical Dilemmas in Fieldwork and Challenges**

My motivation for the choice of case-study location was academic interest in the topic of migrant integration at local level, the vivid diversity and visibility of a number of initiatives in Laak Noord and interest in particular intersectionalities. I had no intention to take activist role or pre-existing sympathies or expectations towards particular ideas that I anticipated to surge during the research. However in the course of my fieldwork at the Koffiepot, with a number of informal interactions as well as due to the personal and intimate nature of some information shared<sup>36</sup>, I developed a bond of sympathy and admiration for the work of the organization and the strength of people working within it. To mitigate a bias which this personal sympathy might form, I kept a log on daily bases to help me reflect upon my own bias to myself while writing the final paper. Connected concern of conducting fieldwork is the danger of projection of my own understandings and subconscious seeking for confirmation of my own assumptions. Hardly anyone can enter the field as *tabula rasa*, thus the best I could do in this respect was to try to listen attentively, ask for clarifications and examples and pay attention to the unexpected. Aiming for continuously reflection upon my assumptions and development of my understandings, every interview has been processes in the light of the log notes which reflect upon my shifts perceptions, mental framings and sympathies.

In similar line I should reflect upon my sense of responsibility to represent certain voices and drive towards giving them more space in the final paper. This connects to one of the underlying ideas of the paper itself, which is to focus on a category characterized by an intersectionality often overlooked in policy making – not only migrants, but women migrants, especially mothers and housewives. In a way it is one of the purposes of the paper to give space to different voices within this category. However, as the interviews in the Koffiepot Mothercentre were more personalized and thus more intense than other sources, there was a need to counterbalance my affiliations and connected biases. My response to this need was to seek out for more interviews with actors active in the neighbourhood, while being external to the Koffiepot – policy actors and experts in area of gender studies, substantially more than initially planned.

The researcher, subject of study and the ever-present question of empowerment; while I as a researcher might have left 'empowered' by the insights gained via interviews, a question of what value-added did interaction with a researcher bring to the subjects studied in Laak Noord. Thus, in addition to dealing with a multitude of my own projections, assumptions, biases and tendencies; a significant ethical dilemma rose in relation to my interviewees within the Koffiepot. A moral question concerning gains from results of interaction between a researcher and his subject and expected returns. All women voluntarily devoted their time to our talks, some of them opening up sensitive issues of their private life, enabling me to collect rich information without which this study would not be feasible. At the same time these interactions left me with a sense of not giving much in return.

In several interviews concerns about the future functioning of the centre (re)appeared as this is the last year of governmental financial support of its functioning within a welfare scheme. These projections of fears and hopes into interviews due to particular coincidence in timing of my research crushed against my determination not to take an activist stance. The least I can do in return is to devote a section to look at challenges but also potentials of the process of transferring the Mothercentre from a subsidized organization to a volunteer based initiative.

Last but not least is challenge arising from potential biases of framework for analysis. While formulating the framework for approaching my subject, one can talk about the inherent 'danger' of framing. As many of the concepts employed in my theoretical framework imply positive framing and focus on opportunities, there is a challenge as to avoid a *trap of discursive over-romantization of the neighbourhood*. This implies paying attention to a tendency towards over-valorizing the potential as a space of communitarianism, dialogue and trust-building by assuming unidirectional course of processes towards a particular form of cohesion. As Ash Amin puts it down, it is inevitable to accept mixed neighbourhoods as the "spatially open, culturally heterogeneous, and socially variegated spaces that they are" instead of working with the imagination of future cohesive or integrated communities (Amin 2002).

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<sup>36</sup> It goes without saying due to sensitive nature of information gathered in the interviews with women in the Koffiepot, these were treated with keeping the anonymity of respondents

## Appendix 2: List of interviews

**1. Local policy actors** were interviewed in order to provide an overall look at framing of what is happening within the neighbourhood, to place the case-study organization within the framework of wider ‘experiment’ with development in Laak Noord, a perspective on functioning of the mothercentre in relation to framing, definition and attainment of objectives in question, and assessment of the functioning and performance of the initiative in key areas.

Jaap Westbroek	District director of Laak Noord Member of a ‘steering committee’ for Laak Noord
Ludo Steenmetser	Director Social Welfare at City of The Hague
Rudmer de Vries	Advisor at Department of Strategy & projects and Department of Education, culture & Welfare at City of the Hague

**2. Actors directly involved in the functioning of the Koffiepot** were interviewed in semi-formal and informal interviews with focus on *both* the overall field and their own story and subjective interpretations. As these interviews addressed also personal and/or sensitive questions, they were conducted anonymously. The following table provides interviewees background.

respondent 1	Founding member (employed in Koffiepot)
respondent 2	Founding member (employed in Koffiepot)
respondent 3	Long-term member (part-time employed in Koffiepot)
respondent 4	Long-term member (part-time employed in Koffiepot)
respondent 5	Short-term member (part-time employed in Koffiepot)
respondent 6	Long-term member (volunteer and participating in some activities)
respondent 7	Short-term member (participating in some activities)

**3. External experts familiar with the work of Koffiepot:** two expert opinions were taken into account – from a representative of a different women’s organization in the Hague working in the area of emancipation of women; and from a professor of gender studies.

Nathaly Mercera	Importante - Center for emancipation, the Hague
Kitty Triest	The Hague University; member of Women's platform

note: Kitty Triest lately started to serve as an external adviser involved in preparing current changes in the functioning of the organization towards a Women's Association (under the Hague Knowledge Consultants 'RegioRegisseur Haaglanden auspices)

### Appendix 3: List of events visited

List of events/ activities visited as auxiliary part of the fieldwork

1.	Laak Noord tour organized by City Hall & district director	6.4.2011
2.	Information session "Laak North dare to dream!"	24.5.2011
3.	Ondertekening Brede buurtschool Convenant	22.6.2011
4.	Visit in the Mothercentre during handicraft class	31.5.2011
5.	Visit in the Mothercentre during activities in communal gardens	12.7.2011

1. Laak Noord tour connected with a formal lunch at the Koffiepot

Program covered visits to various sites/organizations within the neighbourhood: Esloo school, Sportvereniging Laak Noord, Wenckebach and the Wenckebachplace, then the Ketelveld and the Children's Farm; connected with a lunch in Koffiepot and a discussion with the women of the mothercentre.

2. Laak Noord durft te dromen [Dare to dream] infoday in Esloo school

Various initiatives in the neighbourhood meeting and presenting themselves to residents and meeting with some policy makers. Program covered fair of initiatives, associations and organizations; speeches by Aldeman (on creativity, own initiative and efficiency challenge, social inclusion and activist mentality) and district director (on results of work of existing initiatives and further plans for development); presentation of work of some initiatives and cultural program by neighbourhood activists.

3. Ceremonial signing of an agreement by the wide neighborhood school/educative institutions on cooperation with University of Leiden in applied researchon fostering creative thinking of children in education; connected with cultural program prepared by women and children from Laak Noord.

4. Visit in the Mothercentre during handicraft class connected with semi-formal interviews.

5. Visit in the Mothercentre during activities in communal gardens connected with informal interviews

## Appendix 4: Secondary data sources on Laak Noord and the Koffiepot

Secondary data were collected to gather information about the history of Laak Noord, demographics, migration flows and developments in the neighbourhood; to provide an overview of policies, initiatives and processes ongoing in Laak Noord. Likewise, secondary information sources were used to enrich the analysis of the Koffiepot mothercentre.

Sources:

- research conducted by the EFSQ on Laak Noord referred in the References

- official website of Laak Noord [www.laaknoord.nl](http://www.laaknoord.nl)

- bulletin on development of Laak Noord issued by the City Hall of the Hague:

Gemeente Den Haag (2010) *Laak Noord Scoort! Aanvraag van de gemeente Den Haag bij het ministerie van WVI voor de 2e tranche van het Budget 40+*. The Hague: Gemeente Den Haag.

- printed materials on Koffiepot - magazine articles, official statements, promotion materials:

Drunen G, Stolwijk, I (2011) 'Hart van de wijk', *Som+ Magazine voor sociaal ondernemers binnen welzijn & maatschappelijke dienstverlening*, Jaargang 3, april 2011, n. 5.

Sakina El Yousoufi (2011) *Speech to Mayor, Aldeman and the council on the Koffiepot Mothercentre*. Transcript provided by Jaap Westbroek.

Centrum voor Communicatie over Stedelijke Ontwikkeling (2011) *Laak Noord durft te dromen! Verhalen over een Haagse wijk in opbouw*. The Hague: Centrum voor Communicatie over Stedelijke Ontwikkeling

- official speech on establishment of Women's Association by actors from the Koffiepot:

Noortje van der Kaaden (2011) *Inspreektekst commissie Samenleving*, the Hague: 20 april 2011.

- bulletins and information materials of various organizations and initiatives active in the neighbourhood