Community development in contemporary ethnic-pluriform neighbourhoods

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Abstract
Many disadvantaged neighbourhoods increasingly face influences from e.g. globalisation, modernisation and individualisation, which have led to a decline of social cohesion and social control mechanism in these neighbourhoods. Many governmental officials, politicians and community development workers consider community development a tool for improving mutual solidarity and social control leading to an improved social cohesion, liveability and safety in these neighbourhoods. Today, mixing strategies are popular tools for linking residents with a different ethnic and/or class background. The assumption is that once people are enabled to mingle, bridging social capital will develop easily. However, in practise contact between heterogeneous groups and individual residents does not develop spontaneously. Once positive encounters take place this may lead to the development of mutual trust, which is crucial for the development of successful citizens' initiatives in the Netherlands and elsewhere. This is a process which needs more attention from professionals and researchers.

1. Introduction
Bridging contact is needed in this period of globalisation and increasing diversity of ethnic groups at local settings. This is also a period in which many 'old' communities have been eroded and have made place for individualism and less social control mechanisms. A new modus of living together has to be found among natives and simultaneously with migrants with an individual and group-oriented culture associated with traditional and modern ways of thinking. Due to increased heterogeneity in urban society and more specific neighbourhoods questions of social cohesion have become of severe importance. Social cohesion has declined, while an increasing heterogeneity asks for new initiatives to bring people together. This paper will explore possibilities to improve contemporary social cohesion at the neighbourhood level.

The impact of an increased diversity of people in society was already addressed by Hall (1993: 361), who wrote that 'the capacity to live with difference is (…) the coming question of the 21st century.' In the last decade, diversity was associated with crime, conflict

and withdrawal, but the contemporary city draws increasingly attention as a site for connecting citizens (e.g. Boyd 2006; Valentine 2008: 324; Wood and Landry 2008).

Cultural differences can be bridged by processes of mixing (see e.g. Smets and Salman 2008) and hybridization in public space (e.g. Wood and Landry 2008). Such bridging initiatives have become more sincere after 9/11 when planes crashed into the twin towers in New York. This has led to widening gaps between Muslims and non-Muslims in western cities. Several occasions have fuelled this division such as the murder on the Dutch cineaste Theo van Gogh, the bombings in Spain, London and elsewhere. At the political level, Muslim migrants tend to be blamed for being unwilling to integrate into Dutch society. Moreover, Geert Wilders, a member of the Dutch parliament, has been an outspoken and harsh critic of Islam (see, e.g., Verkuyten and Zaremba, 2005; Sniderman and Hagendoorn, 2007).

This paper will focus on the following question: 'What is the potential of social encounters between people with a different ethnic background for community development in the Netherlands and probably elsewhere? To answer this question the paper is build up as follows. First, a theoretical introduction will be given on communities, social cohesion and social capital, which will be followed by a discussion of neighbourhood contacts. This theoretical background helps us to understand the description and analysis of bridging initiatives in the Netherlands. These findings will lead to insights for community development in an age of diversity, where meaningful interethnic communication deserves an important place.

2. Communities, social cohesion and social capital

Today, many attempts are employed to bring groups together by means of community development. With communities, places of interdependencies are meant, where people and institutions provide us opportunities and support of our activities, but also barriers and constraints (DeFilippis and Saegert 2008:1). The place for meeting others can be easily created. For example, community drop-in centres are spaces where encounters are relatively informal and can become familiar or home-like through repeated visits. These encounters are not incidental such as meetings on the street and squares (Conradson 2003).

Communities have changed over time. In this respect Wellman (1979) discusses the notions of community lost, community saved and community liberated. Whether communities are lost, saved or liberated, one can argue that most people are relatively place based in this period of globalisation, modernisation, individualisation and hypermobility (DeFilippis and Saegert 2008: 3-4, Massey 1994: 163; Sampson 2008: 165). 'It is a fact that [p]eople (…) can

and do form *communities*, by virtue of facing common sets of issues in their daily lifes.' (DeFilippis and Saegert 2008: 4). Apart from the importance of local community for economic resources and social-structural differentiation, Sampson (2008: 165) also emphasizes that 'local community remains essential as a site for the realization of common values in support of social goods. Including public safety, norms of civility and mutual trust, efficacious voluntary associations, and collective socialisation of the young.'

This place boundedness offers scope for community development for which purpose social professionals often focus on the development of social cohesion. To avoid confusion about concepts I will discuss first the concepts social cohesion and social capital before going back to the issue of community development. Social cohesion is a catchword that evokes a whole host of definitions and interpretations. One illustrative definition by Chan et al. (2006: 290) is:

> 'Social cohesion is a state of affairs concerning both the vertical and the horizontal interactions among members of society as characterized by a set of attitudes and norms that includes trust, a sense of belonging and the willingness to participate and help, as well as their behavioural manifestations.'

This definition encompasses only essential elements of social cohesion and not its causes and effects. That is why social inclusion, equal opportunities, tolerance and a specific set of shared values are excluded. This would imply that social cohesion is not a process but a state of affairs (Chan et al., 2006: 292-293). Moreover, one should realize that social cohesion does not tell us something about conscious and self-reflexive actions of people, which are hard to influence directly. That it is why social cohesion policy is mainly focused on safety and nuisances (Tonkens 2009: 60-61).

The scholarly view on social cohesion tends to differ from the policy-oriented one. On the policy level, the focus generally is on the problem of 'cleavages' and on the issue of how to overcome segregation. The problem is that social cohesion is thus seen as a means to reduce exclusion and obtain the inclusion of citizens. The contents of and the conditions for such a notion therefore tend to get conflated with the ways in which policies deal with the issue (Chan et al. 2006: 279-285).

In discussions about social cohesion, the notion of social capital often crops up. It is important to bear in mind that these concepts should not simply be considered as interchangeable. Social cohesion is a more holistic idea and focuses on more general,

encompassing socio-economic, cultural and political conditions in a specific society. It does not cover more specific components such as tolerance or other specific 'multicultural' values. Social capital, on the other hand, focuses on the individual and group level, addressing, for instance, the social networks that have to be upheld by individuals to secure individual benefits (Chan et al. 2006: 292-293).

Although there are critics on Putnam´s (2000) notion of social capital, his interpretations and applications of the idea of social capital makes a distinction between bonding and bridging social capital. Bonding social capital is exemplified in the reciprocal trust relations among a group of people with a similar background, such as class, gender, ethnicity and lifestyle. In contemporary society, however, people also need to go beyond their group belonging and group-dependence. In policy circles, therefore, attempts are made to foster individual and group capacities to construct bridges to others or to establish links between different groups in society. The idea is that such bridging connections could improve social cohesion at a street, neighbourhood and city level. Apart from bonding and bridging social capital, the concept linking social capital has been introduced. Szreter and Woolcock (2004: 655) describe linking social capital as the 'norms of respect and networks of trusting relationships between people who are interacting across explicit, formal or institutionalized power or power gradients in society.' In short, linking social capital relates citizens and institutions.

The decline of social capital is seen as the cause of urban problems in the USA (Putnam 2000), but not in the Netherlands, where many citizens are still organised in civil society (Dekker et al. 2007). Moreover, globalisation processes have led to more diversity where citizens have to cope with. Too much diversity of neighbourhood residents would have a negative impact on mutual solidarity (Putnam 2007).

Many contemporary policies aim at developing bridging social capital, such as mixing different ethnic groups at schools, in the neighbourhood, at sporting clubs and at the work floor. However, mixing strategies are often not focused on ethnic groups but on class and indirectly on ethnicity. Bridging social capital goes together with assumes shared interests among individuals in community. Once these interests are brought together win-win situations develop (e.g. DeFilippis 2008: 34, Fung 2004; Putnam 2000; RMO 2005; Smets and Salman 2008; Uyterlinde et al. 2007: 157).

Social capital is often seen as the motor for collective action in society or part of society such as a neighbourhood. Such social capital is the product of social contacts, which

encompass networks, trust and shared norms and values (e.g. Putnam 2000). That is why it is important to look into the issue of social contacts in the next section.

3. Neighbourhood contacts in theoretical perspective

'Encounters never take place in a space free from history, material conditions and power. The danger is that contemporary discourses about cosmopolitanism and new urban citizenship, by celebrating the potential of everyday encounters to produce social transformations, potentially allow the knotty issues of inequalities to slip out of the debate.' (Valentine 2008: 333).

Encounters refer to the micro scale of everyday interactions. Although Amin (2002) suggests that social interactions decline and city streets are spaces of transit produce little actual connection between strangers, still many different types of encounters take place. These encounters reflect a mode of togetherness which is one facet of mutual acknowledgement. For example, activities accompanied by a low level of sociability such as holding doors and sharing seats in public transport or handing napkins to the needy in cafés (Laurier and Philo 2006; Soenen 2006). Such mundane friendliness and compassion have a potential for extension of such attitudes in the wider world. These everyday movements can be seen as reservoirs of hope where positive knowledge about the other can lead to a better mutual understanding and the development of affective bonds (Boyd 2006; Dixon 2006: 2183; Thrift 2005). Many social professionals focus on the creation of encounters between citizens at squares, neighbourhood centres, schools and sporting facilities. It is, however, rarely studied whether such encounters lead to sustainable contacts (e.g. Engbersen and Uyterlinde 2006). Moreover, a focus on everyday civil encounters bares the danger that questions about power will be put aside, such as who has the power to tolerate and other issues of equality and mutuality (Weymss 2006 in Valentine 2008: 329; Müller and Smets 2009)

To obtain insight into the development of social contacts, Snel and Boonstra (2005) describe a bonding ladder with four rungs. At the first rung people meet, which will be followed by the second step, where one can develop knowledge about the other. This knowledge could be the basis for cooperation (step 3) and development of relations of mutual help (step 4). One should realize that such positive knowledge about the other is also crucial for the development of trust relations, which is needed for the establishment and maintenance of contacts and possibly friendships (Duronto et al. 2005: 556-558). Trust is often dependent on reciprocal exchange, which connects people through feelings of gratitude and obligation. It

can be seen as the moral cement of society (e.g. Duronto et al. 2005: 556-558; Komter et al. 2004: 33; Smets and Ten Kate 2008).

This brings us to the contact hypothesis (Allport 1979 [1954]), which assumes that positive contact will lead to mutual understanding. This depends, for example, on the quality of the contact, whether it is voluntary, if it exists between people of an equal status and is established in a cooperative environment (Dixon 2006: 2182). Other researchers have since added numerous other conditions to this list. This has led to a multiplicity of 'favourable' and 'unfavourable' conditions (e.g. Amir 1969: 319; Dixon 2006). However, these numerous conditions for enabling optimal contact make the hypothesis unfalsifiable (Dixon 2006: 2180). Despite these shortcomings, the contact hypothesis offers the possibility of studying mutual contacts in specific contexts.

Bovenkerk et al. (1985: 304) question the contact hypothesis' assumption that living in an ethnically-mixed neighbourhood will improve understanding between separate groups. They have found, for example, that the Moroccan neighbour is often accepted, but that Moroccans as a group are judged more unfavourably. The 'good' Moroccan neighbour is often considered an exception. Such individual everyday encounters do not necessarily change people´s general prejudices about a specific group because the 'white' majority community-based narratives of economic and/or cultural victimhood remain unchallenged (Valentine 2008: 333). She adds: '[p]ositive encounters with people from minority groups do not necessarily change people's opinions about groups as a whole for the better with the same speed and permanence as negative encounters.' (ibid.: 332).

In their neighbourhood study in the Dutch city of Utrecht, Bovenkerk et al. (1985) contended that, instead of excluding their new neighbours, the established natives were actually engaged in concerted attempts to involve the new non-western migrants. These natives primarily wanted their new migrant neighbours to adjust to Dutch habits and norms. However, when the number of non-Western migrants increased, the non-Western migrants tended to withdraw into their own groups. This leads to reprisals by the natives against the newcomers. The natives want the newcomers to adjust to established values with respect to tidiness, orderliness and decency: keeping the neighbourhood neat, making children go to bed early and speaking the Dutch language (ibid.: 317-321).

Likewise, Blokland (2003: 172) also suggests that the natives in a Rotterdam neighbourhood do not exclude non-Western migrants. Nonetheless, they are not considered equals; they are simply embraced to be 'made' equal and are expected to adjust to Dutch norms and values. Müller and Smets (2009) show that natives being willing to help migrants

tend to withdraw from this relationship once they think that these migrants can employ self-help activities.

The contact hypothesis does not presume that the presence of a large minority population among natives is problematic. Social identification encompasses the relationship between identification and attitude towards one's own as well as other groups, which can lead a certain degree of social competition resulting in prejudice, discrimination and social exclusion. In general, people judge their own group positively and negatively in relation to those whom they feel they do not belong (Verkuyten 2006: 66). Nowadays, non-Western migrants are assumed to focus more on Dutch society and cultural habits and less on their own ethnic group. The political and public debate on bridging non-western migrants and natives has become far harsher (Verkuyten 2006: 64, 77; Verkuyten and Yildiz 2007).

Many studies, according to Gijsberts and Dagevos (2004: 145), confirm that negative attitudes with respect to minorities are often found among the less privileged groups in society. Since non-Western migrants often find themselves in the lower social positions, natives in this same social position experience the greatest degree of competition and will therefore feel the most threatened. In their later work, Gijsberts and Dagevos (2005: 91) have found indications that the competition hypothesis on the neighbourhood level applies when natives constitute less than fifty percent of the population. Under such circumstances, natives can feel threatened by the large migrant population.

4. Bridging initiatives in the Netherlands

In 1989 the initiative Opzoomeren started on a small scale in the city of Rotterdam. Residents joined hands to clean their street – a place of common identity- and improve its safety and made it cosier, which has led to encounters of different kind. This initiative was expanded to other parts of the city and later on to other Dutch cities. Several activities were added such as the good morning parade in 1999, where greetings were seen as an expression of mutual respect and neighbourhood complicity. However these activities strengthened bonding social capital rather than bridging different ethnic groups (Van der Graaf 2001). Such initiatives have been spread and can be seen in other parts of the Netherlands where people wear t-shirts with the text 'hello neighbour' or information signs are placed on the pavements with the text 'Greeting is normal'.

Apart from Opzoomeren there are other activities where different ethnic groups can meet such as street festivals, dialogue projects and coffee meetings. At first sight meeting on basis of shared interest appears to be more effective such as language classes, school, child-raising,

buddies and mentorships. However, such encounters do not always run smoothly and persons involved are often those with an open mind for meeting persons with another ethnic background (Uyterlinde et al 2007).

In general, bringing people together is associated with organising cosiness (in Dutch: *gezelligheid*) which encourages people to do more things together with the result of improved mutual tolerance and cohesion. However this surpasses the reality of small conflicts and daily disagreements which are hard to solve if at all. However, disagreements need not to be solved to have a liveable neighbourhood or city (Tonkens 2009: 67). Below three initiatives will be critically discussed.

Sharing food

Sharing food by a barbeque or bringing homemade food is seen as an option to bring people together through which contact can be established. Even projects are initiated where people from different ethnic backgrounds share food at each other's home by turn. Sharing food would bring people together but in reality it is not always that easy as expected. This will be illustrated with the following example.

In a neighbourhood in Amsterdam 'white' inhabitants of the same street have set up a residents group of one street which organises also a yearly street festival, which they call 'the picnic'. All residents are informed about the activities with leaflets and posters stuck in the windows. All participants bring their own food and drink, which are to be shared by all. In addition, specific festivities, such as a puppet show and street dance, are organised. Before the eating and festivities start, mainly 'white' residents clean the street. Small children of different ethnic backgrounds helped them. At the playground, preparations took place for the festivities. Garlands were hung in trees, and tables and chairs were placed

In the meantime, youngsters of Moroccan and Turkish origin were hanging around at a small square in the street. They were invited to play a game of football between the juniors and seniors on the playground. One of the organisers, a middle-aged 'white' man, asked a boy on a cycle to mobilise his friends for the football game. He added: 'We do this for you.' and explained to me that 'there were frictions between the football players. A few days ago, they were not allowed to play and now they have to turn up. They boycott it.'

From a nearby window lemonade was provided. Slowly, home-made food and drinks were brought in. The people bringing the food were mainly 'white' well-educated people. On the tables were many bottles of wine. Some migrant youngsters were hanging around and they were offered some snacks, including apple pie.

The picnic was visited mainly by 'white' well-educated residents. Some of them complained about the low number of participants and especially among the migrant population. The year before was better, it was more crowded and even some Turkish women had come to watch the dancing performance of their daughters. They even brought a kind of pancakes. This year, the youngsters boycotted the football game.

The 'white'newcomers' intention to invest in the relations between residents was not appreciated by all. One of the activities was the annual picnic. A 'white' woman, who helped to organise the picnic, was disappointed by the poor turn out of the immigrant families and stressed: 'We try to get them involved, but they do not come. It has to be a bit spontaneous.' Another 'white' woman, who wanted to involve the Muslim immigrants, added: 'We feel that we should organise something for the women, but that takes too much effort. Because then we also have to organise something for the men.' The 'white' newcomers stressed that especially the non-Dutch people should come for the picnic to be considered a success. It was agreed that pork or ham would not be used in the dishes. In this respect, a native Dutch resident said when he was invited: 'Why should we join the picnic. We want to eat ham and bacon.'

The picnic of 2003 took place at the playground. Tables were packed with food and wine bottles. The consumption of alcohol was one of the reasons why Muslim migrants refrained from participation. Moreover, photographs taken at the picnic may have encouraged the non-Dutch residents, especially women, to stay away from the picnic. Only one Turkish couple joined, but almost no interaction with the newcomers took place. It was even the community development worker who had to offer them a seat. The 'whites' probably expected that the Turkish couple could help themselves. They expected the opportunity to be together, but in practice, the participants of the picnic tended to stay apart.

Youngsters hung around at a short distance. Some food was offered, but they tried to disrupt the activities. A 'white' woman expressed her irritation, and said: 'These brats of sixteen will not dictate what I do. I am not afraid of them.'

Different notions concerning the use of the public space in the street also lie at the root of these irritations. The street is for everybody, but the user determines what goes on there. If the weather permits, the children of the immigrant families are sent out to play on the street. This is to a large extent due to the size of the large households they belong to, who must live together in small houses (see for a more detailed description Smets 2006a)

Coffee in the neighbourhood

One of the ideas which has been implemented in Amsterdam East is Coffee in the Neighbourhood (Bakkie in de Buurt). Volunteers go with a small car to a specific street or square in a neighbourhood, build up a terrace where residents can enjoy a cup of tea or coffee together with neighbours. This would enable contact between neighbourhood residents. One of the volunteers said:

> 'That is a way of meeting other neighbourhood residents. I have encountered my neighbour and invited her to come along for a cup of coffee at my apartment. Today too many people live too much apart together.'

Coffee in the Neighbourhood was also used to 'reconquer' the street from drugs traders and youngsters hanging around and those involved in the drug scene. At a corner of the Afrikaner Square which is the dealers and users' favourite hangout, the coffee endeavour was set up. Some believe it helps in reconquering the street but others not at all. They say it is a way of approaching problems as done in the 1970s, which does not fit contemporary time.

One of the community development workers stressed 'Youngsters were surprised about what happened. If you know more people one feels safer.' Such encounters at the street could help establishing social control. This only works when people know each other. One of the Moroccan street kids said:

> 'The Moroccans had to laugh. They were young adults who found it amusing. They found it a rare idea to drink coffee on the square. The Dutch wanted coffee and sat down, but there was no coffee. Still it has to be made.'

An exchange circle between natives and asylum seekers

In the Dutch town of Woudrichem, asylum seekers lived in an asylum seekers centre located at a boat. To overcome the isolation suffered by these refugees, the Local Exchange System Circle Woudrichem (LCW) has been established by members of the host community. LCW is based on the principle of Local Exchange and Trade Systems (LETS), which are community-oriented networks in which goods and services are exchanged between members of a group. Such exchanges could be facilitated by the introduction of a local currency, here called Drops.

In the beginning, asylum seekers primarily offered services and went to work in the homes of private individuals. Some examples of their activities are painting, repairing bicycles, house work, gardening, sewing, cutting hair and babysitting. The host community

offered fewer services in return. The native participants mainly earned their Drops by offering products such as second-hand goods. Once the amount of second hand goods declined asylum seekers had difficulty spending their Drops. In 2001 a LETS shop was opened for the Drop earners, which offered new possibilities to spend one's Drops. Thanks to an exchange fund, the LETS shop was able to buy, amongst other things, telephone cards and foreign food products from other shops. During this second phase, the transaction model was better attuned to the needs of both the asylum seekers and locals. Although some women visited local people's homes weekly, the tasks available for men were often incidental. Indeed, the demand for services decreased when there were too few local private individuals for the asylum seekers to be brought into contact with. While there was less demand for services, the supply remained unchanged. The LETS shop was a favourite place to spend Drops. At this time, the LCW decided that it would also allow businesses to participate in the project. Two possibilities were created for these enterprises: internships and sponsored labour. An internship gave asylum seekers the opportunity to work in a company if that firm also wanted to train someone. Some internships were at, for example, a graphic design studio, a cleaning company, and several local farms. The second option was to offer sponsored labour at local non-profit institutions, such as an elderly day-care centre and a school. The LCW would then pay the asylum seekers an allowance in the form of Drops.

LCW made a positive contribution to the local community by means of recurring encounters. Subgroups of both the host community and asylum seekers were brought into contact with one another through transactional ties. Within both groups, people with divergent motivations, individualistic or community-directed, were able to work together. The various meeting places, in people's homes as well as the LCW house or in Woudrichem itself, created the possibility of matching up all kinds of different people. Social and political structures and people's capacity to deal with each other were thus combined, allowing asylum seekers to become a real part of the social fabric of Woudrichem's local community. This would also make it easier for them to take more active steps towards integrating more fully into Dutch society at a later stage. The so-called 'waiting room period' can be avoided, because talents do not have to be wasted while waiting for the asylum procedure to be completed. In particular, the project satisfied the asylum seekers' need for help and work. Since the organisation made the match between supply and demand, the project worked to the advantage of both the asylum seekers and the local native participants (see for more details Smets and Ten Kate 2008).

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5. Community development in an age of diversity

Contemporary community development in disadvantaged neighbourhood has to deal with different ethnic groups. It appears that best practices flourish in a specific context, but such practises may be copied and implemented elsewhere without taking the context into account. This has to do with the fact that the state tends to look for blueprints to implement, as Scott (1998) illustrates clearly in his book 'Seeing like a state'. In other words, government officials tend to look for standardised solutions (*techne*) and refrain from incorporating local practises (*metis*). This could indicate that professionals tend to employ top-down initiatives and refrain from enabling citizens to develop grassroots initiatives. Instead planners, policy makers and social workers focus on the diagnosis of social problems and remove pathologies. There is insufficient attention, if at all available, for how to overcome stumble blocks issues of communication, culture, and power which hinder the consideration of local knowledge, values and culture (Arnstein 1969; Scott 1998; Smets and Den Uyl 2008).

Professional are often caught in their knowledge about social engineering how things should take place and prefer solutions based on their professional knowledge, which makes the incorporation of local knowledge more difficult. Some social workers even confiscate (ideas for) projects to professionalise them without taking the interest and pride of initiating citizens into account as will be illustrated below.

> In an Amsterdam neighbourhood several women of different ethnic backgrounds wanted a place where women could meet and can tell each other stories while drinking a cup of coffee. This would enable women to tell their children fairy tales from other countries. This endeavour would enable more indepth contact between the women. A local community worker managed to obtain subsidy for this initiative and established a multicultural women centre without involvement of the initial citizens. Once the women centre was established the community development worker asked several original initiators to coordinate the centre on a voluntary basis. They refused because they felt that the idea of a women centre has been confiscated by a professional and not any more from the original ethnic diverse group of women.

Professional knowledge may conflict with local knowledge, which is often associated with lower quality or standards (cf. Smets 2006b). This makes it extremely difficult for professionals to take local knowledge serious, but without incorporating the local knowledge

about intra- and interethnic contact misunderstanding may dominate and widen gaps between people. This happened clearly with the sharing food example.

The initiative Coffee in the Neighbourhood shows that a mobile meeting place is brought to the doorstep which would enable the first contact between people more easily. However local people have to find out whether they want more or different contact with other residents and have to cope with interethnic communication, which is not an easy endeavour. It is an often neglected topic among professionals, but it deserves attention as Valentine (2008: 330) stresses:

'If we are to produce meaningful contact between majority and minority groups which has the power to produce social change, this gap needs to be addressed. We need to find ways in which everyday practices of civility might transform prejudiced values and facilitate liberal values to be put into practice.'

One of the few projects dealing with this issue is *Speaking is Gold* (Praten is Goud) in a disadvantaged neighbourhood in the city of Arnhem in the Eastern part of the Netherlands. Here a study on intercultural communication among neighbourhood residents is combined with social engineering in combination with physical renewal. Neighbourhood residents take place among neighbours but also among those living in each other's living environment; public and semi-public places such as streets, alleys, shared hallways and stairways in housing complexes. Although most studies focus on social problems, this project emphasises the positive side of neighbourly relations. The focus is on friendly, warm and supportive relations between natives and migrants, with special attention for different activities and themes such as greeting, daily care, mutual help, sharing food and drinks, emotional support, celebrating, children and dealing with institutions. All these issues may go hand in hand with different cultural codes. To understand these codes helps us to understand how migrants and natives approach each other in social life in general and in multicultural neighbourhoods in particular (Müller 2005).

Knowledge about inter- and intra-ethnic contacts is one issue, but it is also important to find a modern organisational form which can link people from different backgrounds. LCW which is discussed in the previous section is such an example. Here the trading system – the exchange of products and services – was not the ultimate goal, but instead a means by which familiarity with the other could develop into mutual empathy. The exchange of products and services can be seen as a way of bringing and keeping people together. It provides people with

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the opportunity of developing weak or strong ties with other participants and ensures that people are brought into regular contact with each other. These contacts led to (more) work for asylum seekers in particular. The LCW trading system was a way in which people could engage in meaningful activities and establish social contacts. Trust between the participants was not a prerequisite for achieving this. Instead, this developed throughout the course of the reciprocal activities for which the LCW laid down the norms and values.

Regarding the organisation, a LETS circle fits in well with the individualising society and the changing position of the government. Increasingly self-responsibility, stimulating and equipping oneself for participation in society, is seen to be of primary importance. The LCW was begun with a view to developing potential. People had services and skills to offer and this project sought to empower the asylum seekers. It stimulated them and allowed their competences to be exploited. The success of the LCW project was also due to the emergence of a valuable local network. The LCW initiative was based on factors that transcended ethnicity. The project began by focusing on the interests and needs that people could share with one another, rather than ethnic differences. This repeatedly allowed people to bond with each other, irrespective of their cultural background. Moreover, it offered people the chance to look and see beyond the differences.

LCW is an organisational form for a specific context, but can also be applied in a slightly different setting. These are places where people can meet each other and the presence of multiple relationships is an advantage. The reconstruction of social networks – a gradual and cumulative process – is dependent on dedicated social leaders and the creation of new places where people can meet and recognise each other, talk and enter into relationships (Putnam and Feldstein 2003: 286, 291). The use of technology, such as information and communication technology, urban and regional planning and political will all play a significant role in the creation of such places today (ibid.: 294). Moreover, the frequency of such contacts is important, which does not detract from the fact that personal attributes, such as personal characteristics and previous experiences with minority groups, can play a role (Brewer and Miller 1984: 295). In addition, keeping things on a small-scale can also increase individual responsibility for preserving the group (Putnam and Feldstein 2003: 277-278).

6. Conclusions

Although globalisation and migration streams have led to an increased heterogeneity, place attachment plays an important role; people are attached to places such as streets, squares and

neighbourhoods. These places have the potential of meeting residents with a different ethnic background.

To enable bridging contact between different ethnic groups many initiatives are employed in the Netherlands. Here attention is paid to activities linked with cosiness where the potential of meeting is present. It is believed that intercultural understanding is best achieved through micro-publics of everyday contact and encounter. The aim is that such organised encounters lead to mutual respect and ethics of care, which can be scaled up in space and time. However, the process of establishing inter-ethnic contact is rarely facilitated. This is the place where misunderstanding about daily communications and frictions may develop. Under such circumstances people only reach the first step on the bonding ladder where they meet. Developing positive knowledge about the other is the basis for cooperation and the development of mutual help. However, interethnic contact can help to break down prejudices, but can also strengthen them. The guidance of interethnic contact at the street or neighbourhood level is a relative new field of support for community development.

Meeting people has to be guided to overcome the difficulties of interethnic contact. Mutual understanding of codes, norms and values is a must for migrants and natives. This means that more knowledge should be obtained about intercultural communication at the neighbourhood level. To understand the dynamics of interethnic contacts and communication asks also for insights in what is different for contact among people with a similar ethnic background. At this stage linking and bridging social capital should go hand in hand where mutual insight in interethnic contact and communication should be developed and discussed. This could clear the sky and remove misunderstanding and prejudices leading to more sustainable (weak) ties among neighbourhood residents where cooperation and mutual help can grow. This is the basis for modern communities which go together with increased liveable neighbourhoods.

Guidance for bridging contacts has also to be accompanied by setting up new institutions in which people with different backgrounds can easily join. The LCW trading system was a way in which people could engage in meaningful activities and establish social contacts. Trust between the participants was not a prerequisite for achieving this, but could develop during participation. Such organisation started with a focus on interests and needs that people could share with one another, rather than ethnic differences. This offered possibilities of establishing and maintaining bridging contacts. All these initiatives to guide bridging contacts have to step away from standardised solutions and have to incorporate local

knowledge. This asks for a process approach rather than blueprint solutions in which results are fixed in advance.

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