Experiencing integration

Differences in social connections between rural and urban regions and the influence of social connections on the integration process, experienced by male refugees.

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Abstract

This research explores integration experiences of male refugees in Dutch society and the role of social connections and place, based on qualitative research. The study examines interviewees' constructions of integration. Particular emphasis is placed on the role of social bonds, social bridges and social links [Ager & Strang, 2008]. The amount of literature regarding this topic that focuses on the differences between rural and urban areas with a qualitative approach is limited. This study contributes to the current literature because the integration experiences will be compared for refugees living in urban and rural regions. The interviewees all come from a country in the Middle-East. This group is chosen because of their large share in the current refugee stream. By using semi-structured in-depth interviews this research explores and explains the different experiences of the interviewees. One of the main findings is that refugees who were living in a rural area had more frequent and more intensive relationships with their neighbors compared to the refugees who were living in an urban area.

Keywords: integration - place - urban - rural - refugees - experiences - social capital

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AZC	Asielzoekerscentrum,	translated; Asylum Seekers Center
COA	Centraal Orgaan opvang Asielzoekers	translated; central organization shelter asylumseekers
DUO	Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs	translated; service implementation education

Introduction

The last few years the topic of refugee streams towards The Netherlands has frequently been discussed. The current refugee stream is not the first one that The Netherlands has experienced. In 1994 the highest amount of asylum requests in the last 25 years was measured, the number of requests in this year was approximately 52.500. Another peak was measured around the year 2000 with a number between 40.000 and 45.000. A period of twelve years with relatively few requests followed until the current refugee stream started. In 2015 the number of refugees had increased to over 40.000, this is four times higher than the number of asylum requests in 2012 (Engbersen, Dagevos, Jennissen, Bakker, & Leerkes, 2015). In the societal debate a lot of attention has been given to the placement of refugees in asylum seeker centers. The period after the asylum procedure, where refugees live on their own and have to build up a new life in The Netherlands is less prioritized (Engbersen et al., 2015). In this research the emphasis is on the period of integration of refugees into Dutch society, after their residence in the asylum seeker center.

For people that seek asylum in The Netherlands it is important to integrate in a manner that is as quick, comfortable and functional as possible. A good integration process will prevent them from, among other things, social exclusion (Engbersen et al., 2015). It can also help them to form social connections and to create networks which are important to function in the host society (Spicer, 2008). What we see is that a wide range of definitions of integration are given in the current literature and no single definition of integration is generally applicable (Castles et al., 2003). Concepts that can be integrated in the definition of integration are for example education level, language, the position of refugees in the labor market and income situation in a country or social/cultural aspects like the position of women or the social network (Dagevos & Gijsberts, 2007). According to the Dutch government, important aspects of integration are to learn the Dutch language, to learn about the Dutch norms and values, to find a job and to have some knowledge about the Dutch society (Rijksoverheid, 2017a). In this research the perspectives of Engbersen et al. (2015) and Spicer (2008) that both have a focus on social connections will be followed since these are expected to play a large role in integration and integration experiences.

Most of the studies on the integration of immigrants or refugees have been conducted at the national level or on the level of big cities. Bevelander & Lundh (2007) show that multiple studies that have been done on the regional level find large differences in integration between regions. What is missing in the current literature is research that distinguishes between the integration in rural and urban areas. In this research it will be attempted to fill this gap. In The Netherlands it can also be expected to find differences between different sized places. Policies regarding the settlement of refugees describe that larger cities need to house more people than small places (Rijksoverheid, 2016). Refugees are, in first instance, not able to choose the place of residence themselves. Each status holder gets an information profile, the municipalities decide on the basis of these profiles where a status holder gets a house (COA, 2016). In this way ethnic concentrations are more likely to be found in larger cities in The Netherlands.

The existence of ethnic concentrations in larger places is a reason to hypothesize that integration will have a different pattern in the city. Often there is more cultural diversity in larger cities and there are more people with a matching ethnic background present, compared to a village (Bevelander & Lundh, 2007). The presence of these ethnic concentrations is expected to play a role in creating social connections because in cities social bonding (bonds with people from the same cultural background) will be more common than social bridging (bonds with people from another

cultural background) (Ager & Strang, 2008; Putnam, 2007).

The research question that follows is: 'What did refugees from the Middle-East experience as helpful factors and barriers on the social level to integrate in Dutch society and what is the role of place?' Since the role of place is important in this research the sub-question within this research is: 'How do social connections of refugees differ between rural and urban regions?'

The focus in this research is not on the integration of immigrants in general but on refugees, because of the mandatory nature of their move. People are considered as refugee as soon as it is determined that these people have a grounded fear for prosecution in their home country because of religious or political convictions, nationality, race or membership of a certain social group (Statistics Netherlands, 2012). The status of who is a refugee and who is not is defined and protected in international law. Migrants on the other hand are subject of the immigration laws of the respective countries. Migrants have other motives to move, for example a better labor market compared to the home country (Prytz, 2016). The forced nature of the move of refugees influences the integration process. An example is that refugees often have stronger feelings of '*migrant's opium',* this is the feeling of wanting to return to the home country and/or missing family members (Carballo & Nerukar, 2001). The choice for refugees from the Middle-East is based on their large share in the current refugee stream.

A large share of the current literature regarding integration is quantitative and the experiences of the refugees themselves are mostly left out. But especially this point of view can be important for new policies. The integration process is complex and consists of a variety of elements that interlink with each other. Therefore a quantitative approach seems not to be sufficient to explore the integration process. The different backgrounds and different perspectives on integration of the refugees can give new insights that complement the currently existing knowledge about integration processes. By comparing the integration of people in rural and urban areas on a regional level this research endeavors to contribute to the information that is available in the current literature in a qualitative manner. Within this research two specific regions within The Netherlands will be studied; the provinces of Groningen and Drenthe. The main reason for this specific choice is the cooperation with CMO STAMM. CMO STAMM is an independent knowledge center for social issues in Groningen and Drenthe. The primary role of CMO STAMM within this research is to supervise the research process.

Theoretical framework

Integration

Integration consists of multiple aspects. Ager and Strang have developed a model that covers 'ten core domains of integration' (Figure 1) (Lichtenstein, Puma, Engelman, & Miller, 2016). This research uses the theoretical foundation of Ager and Strang as theoretical foundation. The model of Ager and Strang is used as a foundation for integration research worldwide because it covers multiple aspects of integration (Lichtenstein, Puma, Engelman, & Miller, 2016). The model is based on literature review, fieldwork and survey data. The factors that were consistently emerging in their research as important are combined in this model. In the model of Ager and Strang (2008) there are four levels; *foundation, facilitators, social connection* and *markers and means* and consist of ten subcategories in total. The level of *social connections* is perceived as the core level within this research.

Markers and Means	Employment	Housing	Education	Health
Social Connection		Social Bridges	Social Bonds	Social Links
Facilitators			Language and Cultural Knowledge	Safety and Stability
Foundation			Rights and Citizenship	

Figure 1: 'ten core domains of integration'
Source: (Ager & Strang, 2008)

The level of *social connection* consists of three factors; social bonds, social bridges and social links. Social bonds are the connections that are made between different members of the same group, also called *bonding social capital* by Putnam (2007). Having links with family for example, enables the refugees to share cultural practices and maintain the same sorts of relationships that they are used to (Ager & Strang, 2008). There can be a situation in which the chances of finding people with the same culture are low and people are not part of an ethnic network, which can be the case in rural areas. In rural areas there often is less cultural diversity. In urban regions refugees are more likely to be embedded in ethnic networks and possess extensive ethnic social capital. The presence of spatial segregation of neighborhoods in certain regions can enhance the growth of this ethnic social capital. Thus, when refugees are living in a rural region or move to such a region, the expectation is that there is an erosion of ethnic networks. This means that the refugees are increasingly independent of their ethnic networks and ethnic social capital and therefore are better capable of functioning as a member of their host country (Esser, 2004).

Social bridges, also called *bridging social capital* by Putnam (2007), refer to the connections that are made between different groups. The most important social bridge is the relationship between the refugees and the natives in the host community (Ager & Strang, 2008). The adoption of cultural traits, a job in the native labor market and marriage with a person with another cultural

background are examples that show the social bridging of refugees (Esser, 2004). The connection between individuals and parts of the state, for example the government services, are called *social links*. The particular circumstances (e.g. language) of refugees often lead to barriers that require additional effort (e.g. follow/ provide language lessons), both from the refugees and the state, in order to achieve access to services offered by the state.

According to Putnam (2007) successful integration creates new forms of social solidarity, overcomes fragmentation and increases the social capital. He also shows that in places with high levels of social capital people live longer and happier lives, children grow up healthier and people find jobs quicker. This supports the expectation that the social connections are a key factor in integration. According to the *contact hypothesis* of Putnam*,* as we have more contact with people from other social/cultural groups (more social bridges) we come to trust them more. Diversity results in weaker ethnocentric attitudes and stronger out-group trust and solidarity (Putnam, 2007). Social psychologists and sociologists (Alba & Nee, 2003) say that people find it easier to trust people who are like themselves and social distance is small. When the social distance feels great, people perceive the other as a threat or as if they belong to another category. Social identity (who we think we are) influences social distance. This social identity is socially constructed and can therefore also be de- and re-constructed, which is what can happen in a dynamic and evolving society. This can be illustrated by this example: the people you interact with are likely to affect who you think you are, and who you think you are is likely to affect with whom you hang out. If you adapt another view over time about social or cultural groups, your social identity will change as well (Putnam, 2007). What we see is that many of the 'ten domains of integration' are influenced by the type of social connections one has.

The level of the model of Ager and Strang (2008) that is at the base of all the other levels is the *foundation.* In each country the integration process is largely influenced by the rights, of the people who are living in the country, and citizenship. These are based on the nation's sense of identity and the cultural understandings of nation and nationhood. According to Ager & Strang (2008), in order to develop a policy on integration that is working efficiently, these definitions of nationhood and citizenship should be clearly stated by the government of a country in order to develop the rights that apply to refugees entering (and staying in) the country.

Another level within the model of Ager and Strang (2008) is the *facilitators.* The *facilitators* have to be provided by the host country in order to remove the barriers that refugees might face during their integration process. This level consists of two main aspects; language and cultural knowledge, and safety and stability. The problem that most refugees face when they come to the host country is that they only have their so-called 'ethnic group capital'. The ethnic group capital includes the sending country's language and ethnic social capital. The ethnic group capital is often less efficient than the receiving country capital that the natives have once a refugee arrives in the host country. The reason for this is that the society of the host country is not used to work with the group capital of the refugee (Esser, 2004). The government of a country can reduce the language barrier by, for example, providing key information in the native language of the refugee (Ager & Strang, 2008). The aspect of cultural knowledge does not only refer to the task of the refugees to learn about the local procedures, facilities and customs, but also refers to the task of the members of the host country to acquire knowledge about the circumstances and culture of the refugees (Ager & Strang, 2008). Another aspect that can be facilitated by the host country is safety and stability. According to the research of Ager and Strang (2008) refugees felt more at home and better integrated if their living places were seen as peaceful and safe.

The last level that Ager and Strang (2008) mention in their model is *markers and means,* which consists of four factors; employment, housing, education and health*.* These four factors are mentioned as key indicators of successful integration. They function as a possible way of supporting the integration process. Employment is the first factor and influences the economic independence and the plans for the future; it provides opportunities to develop language skills and offers opportunities to meet new people in the host society. Finding *employment* is one of the major barriers to overcome for a refugee. Qualifications of the refugee are often not recognized, and even when they are recognized, employers are not allowed to work with these refugees. A common experience of refugees that results from these problems with qualifications is underemployment. When someone is underemployed this means this person has a job which does not require the level of skills that someone has.

A less frequently mentioned, but also important factor, is housing. Not only the social and cultural aspects of housing but also the physical size and quality of the house are important in order to get the feeling of being integrated (Ager & Strang, 2008). Another less frequently mentioned factor is *health*, which is an important source for active engagement in the new country of residence. An often mentioned problem is that language barriers and different gender and cultural perceptions make it hard to deal with the health system of the host country. An example is miscommunication between a doctor and a refugee because of the lack of language skills (Ager & Strang, 2008). The factor *education* can help to overcome these barriers and provides skills and competences to increase the chance of finding a job and be a more constructive and active member of society. There are two forms of education; education received in the home country or education received in The Netherlands. Both can have a positive effect on the integration process (Ager & Strang, 2008).

The role of place in integration
The factor place is not a part of the model of Ager and Strang (2008), this is an indicator that place is not yet considered as an important factor to influence the integration process. The role of place is significant within this research though, therefore some leads in the current literature have been searched for. One of these leads that can explain the role of place is that in many countries concentrations of individuals with the same ethnic background can be found in certain places. This phenomenon mainly takes place in bigger cities. In these cities, according to Ager and Strang (2008) and Putnam (2007), social bonding will be more common than social bridging. Within urban areas immigrants tend to create more social bonds than social bridges because they tend to have a weaker destination-country-specific social capital and they use their own ethnic networks in order to integrate in their new living place (Bevelander & Lundh, 2007; Fry, 2002). Urban areas have multiple aspects that make it easier for entrants of a country to find people of their own ethnic group (Nicholls & Uitermark, 2016). Urban regions have a large number of people, more anonymity and weaker general collective norms. These are aspects of a region that make it easier to form subcultures and groups with the same cultural background.

In rural areas the opportunity to create social bonds are present to a lesser extent which is expected to result in more social bridges. In rural areas there are fewer people and more homogeneity of residents which results in stronger social control by already established groups (Nicholls & Uitermark, 2016). When there are more immigrants or refugees in an area, more group-specific institutions like churches or social gathering places can be created and sustained. These institutions can support the immigrant/refugee groups on an emotional and social level (Nicholls & Uitermark, 2016).

When we look at social capital in general we see that rural areas often seem to have higher levels of social capital than urban areas. The reason for this would be that a lower population density stimulates inhabitants to make social connections. Also there are less public services which encourages people to cooperate within a network and to do more voluntary activities together (Ziersch, Baum, Darmawan, Kavanagh & Bentley, 2009).

Previous research

A quite extensive amount of quantitative research is done on the integration of refugees, especially the topic of the employment status of refugees has often been researched (Bevelander & Irastorza, 2014; Jennissen & Oudhof, 2008). Researchers frequently examine percentages and statistics of integration progress of refugees after arrival in the host country. What is missing in most literature is an explanation or a reason for the phenomenon that is looked into, and an analysis of the experiences of the refugees themselves, that can help with an improvement in their situation.

A study that does look into the topic of the integration of refugees in a qualitative manner is from Ager & Strang (2004). They identified general perceptions of the local community as a place to live and how refugees felt they belonged to the locality. They first addressed the expectations of relationships in an integrated community. In their research, different levels of integration were found. The first level is not having trouble in the community, having a feeling of personal safety and no feeling of active discrimination. The second level is having a mixed variety of people living in the area, people who accept a diversity of cultures, friendly people and people who participate in shared activities. The third level is having a sense of belonging within the area. This means that the refugees have multiple relationships with family members, that they have committed friendships and shared values. Factors that were seen to contribute to the process of integration in the locality according to the experiences of the refugees are: safety and stability, language skills and advice and cultural understanding. The most important facets of safety and stability were freedom from physical threats and unfamiliarity which could lead to fear. The language skills especially helped to develop friendships and relationships with the host community and provide greater access to services and shared activities. It also helps the refugees to boost their self-esteem and to grow a sense of belonging.

In the research by Ager & Strang (2004) the factor 'place' is not taken into account. The qualitative research of Spicer (2008) did take the factor place into account. This research examined the experience of place, social exclusion and social networks, based on qualitative methods. A distinction was made between excluding and including neighborhoods. The interviewees said that they experienced social exclusion in white neighborhoods with relatively few immigrants. Characteristics of neighborhoods that were said to be excluding neighborhoods were: hostility and racist harassments, few resources and inclusive local services and not many possibilities to create social connections. People living in these neighborhoods said that because there are less minority ethnic families, they experienced difficulties with creating social connections. Places that have a long history of immigration often were seen as places of inclusion. People felt safer, they had more local resources and this enabled them to develop social connections which created opportunities to create more social connections and it offered more practical and emotional support. The language skills were also mentioned as a very important aspect of integration in this research. Bad language skills had a negative consequence on their self-confidence. The interviewees did not feel secure when they were engaging with services.

Platts-Fowler & Robinson (2015) also took the factor of place into account. Two towns with

different characteristics were analyzed. One city had a rich history as a destination for immigrants while the other was relatively new in handling this process. Overall, the city with the rich immigrant history was perceived much better by the interviewees. There was no difference in experiences in employment; in both cities just a small proportion had found a job because the range of eighteen months is too short for most immigrants to find a job. In the city that was perceived well, an interesting point that came up was the access to Arabic products. The shop became an opportunity for local people to meet with people from the same ethnic- or religious group. In the city that was perceived negative, an interesting point was the fact that people felt tucked away in small streets. None of the interviewees lived in a main-street. Also they had difficulties to meet family because of the bad public transportation.

In the previous studies the social connections were perceived as a very important aspect of integration. The interviewees told that they felt better when they were in a neighborhood which had mixed ethnicities, because then it is easier to connect with people with the same background. Another important aspect was the language barrier. As soon as people were more experienced with the language of the host country they felt more confident and it was easier to make new social contacts. The role of finding a job is not mentioned very often in the above mentioned qualitative studies.

From the above mention studies it can be concluded that the main connections that arise are social bonds (connections with people from the same group), whereas social bridges and social links are not mentioned. This means two out of three factors of the level of *connections,* mentioned by Ager and Strang (2008), are missing in the experiences of these refugees. When the experiences of these refugees are compared to the aspects of good integration that are stated by the Dutch government one can see that only a few aspects are shared by the Dutch government and the experiences of the refugees when it comes to integration.

Conceptual model

The conceptual model (Figure 2) is derived from the theoretical framework. The model shows that the focus of this research will be on the social connections of the refugees. The expectation is that the place that the refugee is living in influences the processes on the social level. What also can be derived from the conceptual model is that differences is the amount of social bridges, social bonds and social links are expected to influence the way the refugees experience integration.
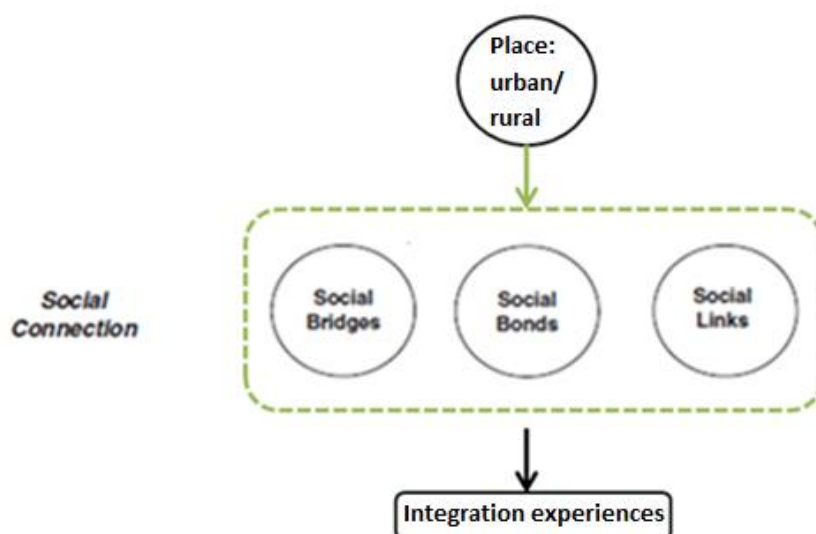

Figure 2. Conceptual model

Research design

Type of research

There are three main types of research questions: exploratory, descriptive and explanatory. In this research the explanatory approach has been applied. Central in this research are the experiences of people about an already existing process. An attempt is made to understand cause and effect and to look at the thinking processes of the interviewees. How do the process and experiences come together and interact (Flick, 2015).

The choice for a qualitative approach was made because the integration in a new country is a life event that is perceived as personal and is influenced by experiences. Therefore, the personal background of people and the experience of the current processes regarding integration can best be explored in a qualitative manner (Hennink, Hutter& Bailey, 2011).

This research is partly deductive and partly inductive. The deductive part is based on the theory and literature review which is gathered before conducting the interview and is the basis of the interview guide. The inductive part covers the detailed analysis of the interview transcripts after all the data was gathered (for the deductive and inductive coding scheme see appendix 4).

Method(s) of data collection

The main source of data in this research is in-depth interviews. This method is used because the goal of this research is to explore the opinions and experiences of the participants (Hennink et al., 2011). The semi-structured in-depth interviews took between 30 and 60 minutes per participant. After twelve interviews of which eleven were used, it was decided that enough information was gathered and there was a sufficient level of saturation.

The interviews took place in a room or location that was comfortable for the participant. In most of the cases this was the respondent's own house, for a few people a different location was better because of their schedule that day. During the interview an interview guide has been used. This interview guide addressed the most important questions that were asked, but no strict order was followed during the interviews and there was space in the interview guide to adapt the interview to the specific participant. The questions that were used were open-ended in order to offer the participants the opportunity to answer in their own words and give their personal story and opinion (Patton, 2002). During the interviews the role of the researcher was minimal in order to give the participant as much freedom as possible.

Sample selection and participant recruitment

Before a strategy was chosen to select participants it was important to define the purpose of the selection. This made it easier to choose a strategy. It is important to think about specific characteristics of the participants (Hennink et al., 2011). The participants in this research needed to have a few characteristics. Participants were selected who came from the same area (The Middle-East), they were refugees, they had been living in The Netherlands for three to five years and they had to be living in a village or city in the province of Groningen or Drenthe at the moment of the interview. The reason for the choice of this area was the cooperation with CMO STAMM (an independent knowledge center for social issues in Groningen and Drenthe) and their interest in these two provinces. The purpose was to explore whether there are different experiences in integration that are associated with the place of residence.

The participants were not selected based on their level of education or the language they spoke; every person was asked if an interpreter was needed. Most of the participants were eager to do the interview in Dutch, some of them preferred English. A few participants asked a family member to be present during the interview as an interpreter.

Purposive sampling was used to find the respondents. Informal networks were used as a starting point. After this, the Snowball-sampling method has been used; this means that participants were asked if they knew other people who could participate (Flick, 2015). Eventually these two methods seemed to be insufficient to gather the needed amount of participants. Therefore the formal network method was used: organizations and community centers within the provinces of Groningen and Drenthe were contacted in order to find participants. A sample bias may have been that organizations and community centers only introduced the researcher to refugees of which they knew they would be willing to take part in an interview.

After the interviews were held the decision is made to only include males into the study since eleven out of twelve participants were male. Because the experiences of this one woman cannot be compared by stories of other women the researcher decided to focus on the experiences of the males only.

Operationalization

In order to explore the experiences of the refugees, the most important topics had to be included in the interview guide. Topics that were included are: housing, neighborhood, social contacts, language, trust, cultural barriers, daily activities such as work or education, sense of belonging and future plans. To make sure that the interview guide worked well, a pilot interview was conducted. After this, the interview guide was revised and finalized (see appendix 5 for a reflection on the pilot interview). All the interviews were done by the same researcher and were recorded. After the interview the audio clips were transcribed (verbatim) with the exact wording of the whole interview. In this way the transcripts could be coded and this made it easier to find information and eventual patterns (Hennink et al., 2011). After this, the data had to be made anonymous as much as possible to guarantee the anonymity of the participants (Hennink et al, 2011). When the transcripts were fully anonymous, codes were constructed. These codes were either deductive or inductive. Deductive codes were made beforehand based on the theoretical framework, whereas inductive codes were made while analyzing the data (Hennink et al., 2011). After all twelve interviews had been coded, analyses were done to find patterns, commonalities and differences between the answers of the different participants. Atlas.ti was been used to code and analyze the data. Two of the interviews were done in English, the other interviews were in Dutch. Therefore a translation of some quotes had to be made by the researcher.

Ethical considerations

Especially when a research is qualitative it is important to think about the ethical considerations, because these studies often cover sensitive subjects and contain personal information (Hennink et al., 2011). According to the Belmont Report from 1979 there are three main ethic principles that have to be central during the design phase of a research. These three principles are respect for the participants, the benefits for the parties that are involved and the justice (Hennink et al., 2011). First the participants have to be treated right. In this research this is done by having respect for the participants and listening carefully. The wellbeing of the participant is always more important than the interests of science. The participants were told at the beginning of the interview

that participation is fully voluntary and the participants were aloud to stop any time they wanted, without giving a reason. Because the wellbeing of the participant was very important the choice was made to not ask the participants about their live in their country of origin, their journey to The Netherlands, or their residence in the AZC. It is possible that these experiences were traumatizing to them and the added value of this information for this research is minimal. Also the participants were given adequate information before starting the interview (the goal of the interview etc.) and informed consent was asked to them verbally before starting the interview.

The second principle is benefice. In this research experiences of integration were shared with the researcher. The participants themselves will not especially experience any benefits from this research but it can help people with the same characteristics as the participants in the future, this might give the participants the feeling that they do something good for the people fleeing from their home country. The parties that can benefit from this information are mainly policy makers and advisers.

The last principle is justice. The researchers are obliged to let the procedure of the research be as honest and trustworthy as possible. In this research the participants were not be misled; already from the beginning the researcher was honest about the goals of the research and what the data can and/or will be used for. A point of attention is that the people that were interviewed were refugees. These people have experienced a lot and may be traumatized by these experiences. The questions that were asked were examined critically before conducting the interview because it can be hard for these people to talk about certain aspects of their lives.

Rigor

The quality of a qualitative research can be evaluated by its reliability and validity. The concepts of reliability and validity are also referred to as the concept of trustworthiness (Shenton, 2004). To ensure trustworthiness in qualitative research, different kinds of concepts play a role; credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Shenton, 2004).

In this research only one method was used, therefore it is harder to compensate eventual shortcomings and the credibility of this research can therefore be criticized. For the one method that has been used within this research (semi-structured in-depth interviews) the transferability is tried to be kept as high as possible. All the interviews were conducted by the same person and all the interviews were done using the same interview guide. Only a translation of the interview guide was needed for some interviews. (Both interview guides are provided in the appendices.) Through a clear description of the whole research process the research can be reproduced by another researcher in the same manner (Shenton, 2004). An example of this is that the interview guide and changes that have been made in it according to the pilot interview were all reported. By using a coding scheme during the analysis the interviews are encrypted in an unambiguous manner and the confirmability is tried to be kept as high as possible.

<div align="center">**Results**</div>

The different types of social connections and where they were created have been examined in order to answer the research questions that are stated at the beginning of this research.

Types of social connections

      social bonds and bridges.

      neighbors and the neighborhood. The descriptions of contact with neighbors were two-sided. Some of the participants explained that it can be hard to make connections with other people and that they only had superficial contact with their neighbors, they only greeted each other on the streets when they saw each other but did not have other forms of contact or interactions with them. Other participants told that they had a good relationship with their neighbors. They had coffee or dinner together, played games with each other or performed activities outside of the house.

Yesterday, we played a game, always at 8 o'clock in the evening, till 12. Almost for 4 hours we play a game, we talk, we make jokes, so in this way your mouth can practice. Sometimes the neighbors say things, yesterday for example; waardeloos!. I say 'what is waardeloos?' yes sometimes I think, if you don't understand well I ask again 1 time or 2 times. That is good. Also my wife, she asks very well! (BILAL*; A MAN ORIGINATING FROM SYRIA, UNDER 25 YEARS OF AGE, LIVING WITH HIS FAMILY IN A RURAL REGION) *All names are anonymized.

An essential factor that played a role in the interaction with neighbors was the homogeneity of age and interests in the neighborhood. Some people experienced large age gaps or a big differentiation in interests for activities between themselves and their neighbor(s). These differences made it harder to create a social connection with neighbors. One man lived in an urban region but felt like he was the only one of his age. ''*P (participant): Students [that are living in the neighborhood], and there is a difference in age maybe. Because I don't know. I(interviewer): How do you mean? P: They are in their twenties, 25,27, they are still young. (…) I'm 43.*'' (AAYAN, A MAN ORIGINATING FROM SYRIA, OVER 25 YEARS OF AGE, LIVING ALONE IN AN URBAN REGION).

What was notable was that refugees living in a rural region had much more frequent interactions with neighbors (social bridges) than refugees living in an urban region. Several people in villages told for example that they had weekly interactions with their neighbors and that this helped them to learn the language. Besides the higher frequency, the intensity of the meetings with neighbors was stronger as well for refugees living in a village. Two quotes that describe the difference in contact with neighbors between rural and urban places are as follows:

P: Uhm, here is my other neighbor [points to other side of the room]. She is from Friesland, she is a police officer, and she is always busy but I used to drink some coffee with her. Drink coffee and yeah nice sitting with her. (…) I: and how often do you have that? P: well, yeah, like once in the month, something like that. Because she is always busy actually. (WAKIL; A MAN ORIGINATING FROM SYRIA, UNDER 25 YEARS OF AGE, LIVING ALONE IN AN URBAN REGION.)

Yes, we eat together, often times we eat together, uh, we try to uh, the Dutch food, always stamppot [laughing], stamppot with potatoes with kale, yes, meat yes. Together every week, I have contact here with the neighbor (…) every week we go to her house or she comes to my house. (OUSSAMA; A MAN ORIGINATING FROM SYRIA, OVER 25 YEARS OF AGE, LIVING WITH HIS FAMILY IN A RURAL REGION.)

Striking is that many refugees living in a village said that when there were non-Dutch people living in their neighborhood they actually had less contact with them than with the Dutch neighbors. For the participants the number of Dutch people in the neighborhood was not perceived as being a

negative feature of their living environment. In the urban areas the description of the neighborhood more often included a mixture of cultural backgrounds. None of the participants, neither in a village or a city, described an 'intensive' relation with a neighbor with the same cultural background. This is not in line with previous findings that interviewees experienced social exclusion in white neighborhoods where relatively few immigrants or refugees lived (Spicer, 2008).

Help from the neighbors or the neighborhood was mentioned often but only by refugees who lived in a rural region. Inhabitants of the villages were seen as very helpful in general. An example that was given was asking for directions and immediately receiving help.

(…) for example in the station or something else I know in this country people come to help you, or ask 'can I help you?', that is very nice. On the street if I don't know where is the address, the first time we don't have any experience on how to use GPS and we know I want to ask, I asked this to people on the streets 'no problem, to the right, to the left', never a problem. (OUSSAMA; A MAN ORIGINATING FROM SYRIA, OVER 25 YEARS OF AGE, LIVING WITH HIS FAMILY IN A RURAL REGION.)

Also near neighbors provided help in multiple ways. One way was by providing furniture in the beginning and another way of helping was helping to learn the Dutch language by interacting with the refugees. Many people who lived in a rural region told that having contact with their neighbors was a big help for them to learn the language in an informal manner.

''P; yes, always they come and drink some coffee. 'go further, do not stop' they tell, people talk not good [when the participant doesn't understand something that is told by his neighbor] ; 'come what you do not understand?', they explain the words, it really is, I really like it''(OUSSAMA; A MAN ORIGINATING FROM SYRIA, OVER 25 YEARS OF AGE, LIVING WITH HIS FAMILY IN A RURAL REGION).

Some refugees told that the combination of language lessons in school and practicing in real life, with neighbors for example, was the best way to learn the Dutch language. *'' Together it's a good combination I think. I learn theory in school and I do the practice with the Dutch people in table tennis.'' (*BILAL; A MAN ORIGINATING FROM SYRIA, UNDER 25 YEARS OF AGE, LIVING WITH HIS FAMILY IN A RURAL REGION.)

The cultural diversity in the neighborhoods of the participants was different for each participant, as none of the participants were living in the exact same neighborhood. The descriptions of the cultural diversity in the villages often showed that a large part of the inhabitants of the neighborhood had a Dutch nationality and only a relatively small percentage of the inhabitants of the neighborhood were from another country. According to Nicholls and Uitermark (2016) a low cultural diversity should result in strong social control and less social support. In this research, however, none of the participants mentioned a feeling of strong social control and the homogeneity of cultures within the neighborhood was not perceived as something negative. Because the participants felt included by their neighborhood they felt more part of the Dutch society and they felt safer.

family outside the household. Many refugees that came to The Netherlands indicated that they already knew people from the same cultural group (social bonds) who were living in The Netherlands. Most of these people were family members. It is noteworthy that most of the family members of the participants did not live close by but in another province of the country. However, this did not withhold them from visiting them on a regular basis.

Because the family members who already lived in The Netherlands already had a social network these family members were seen as very helpful for some in order to find a job.

For everyone with family living in The Netherlands these family members belonged to the group of people they trusted the most in their personal network. When participants did not have

family members living here they mainly trusted friends from the own cultural group (social bonds). There was no difference in the number of family members that one had living in the country between urban and rural living areas.

partner. The partners of the participants were all of the same cultural background except for one. An important advantage according to the participant with a Dutch partner (social bridge) was the opportunity to learn the language better, to get to know new people and new places in The Netherlands and to feel better integrated. In the households where the partner was from the same cultural group (social bond) the primary spoken language was from their home country, whereas the participant with a partner from another cultural group had Dutch as primary language.

The participant who had a Dutch girlfriend mentioned that before he was with her he only spoke English but after meeting her he tried to only speak Dutch; this really helped him. His girlfriend functioned as a personal language teacher and he could practice with her for the integration exam, additional to his language lessons on school. ''*The first year [I spoke] only English, but after that, when I had my wife, my girl, I only speak Dutch, Dutch, and that is good for me. She is my teacher always.*'' (*TAJ; A MAN ORIGINATING FROM SYRIA, UNDER 25 YEARS OF AGE, LIVING ALONE IN AN URBAN AREA*)

children. Six participants were living in The Netherlands with their wife and children. All of the children were going to school or to daycare and enjoyed being in The Netherlands. The interaction that parents had with their children was perceived as very helpful. The children of refugee families who went to school here were relatively quick in learning the language and parents felt this helped them learn the language as well. Many participants said that within their house the language of the home country is spoken mostly, but their children spoke Dutch rather than the language of their home country and this forced them to speak Dutch as well. '' *At home Syrian, but the children, oldest child, youngest child, he can't speak Arabic very well, for example the colors in Arabic. Or 'yesterday' or 'tomorrow', he doesn't know that.*'' (*TAMIR; A MAN ORIGINATING FROM SYRIA, OVER 25 YEARS OF AGE, LIVING WITH HIS FAMILY IN AN URBAN REGION*).

The participants mentioned that they thought that their children were better integrated than they were themselves. The children made friends relatively easy, learned the language quick and felt at home. Especially younger children felt more integrated because a large part of their lives took place in The Netherlands.

P: Maybe I get 50 percent of the [characteristics of the] Dutch people. But my children maybe it is more, always they have contact in the school and it is different there. Yes. Here for the children I think 80 percent or more. I: especially the youngest one? P: Yes! (*OUSSAMA; A MAN ORIGINATING FROM SYRIA, OVER 25 YEARS OF AGE, LIVING WITH HIS FAMILY IN A RURAL REGION.*)

The parents that participated indicated that having children had a large influence on their plans for the future. They felt like their children were building a bright life in The Netherlands, including a good understanding of the Dutch language, having Dutch friends and feeling more part of the Dutch society.

I have 3 children and they are really Dutch now. So yes, because I had one incident happening; we have a friend who is living in [city] and he said 'why don't you move close to us, in [city]?' there was a house there. So we started talking about it, when we were having dinner, and my daughter she doesn't like it 'no I don't want to move, I don't want, let me at my school and with my friends' and every day she started crying and she didn't sleep well. So yes I think it is, we stay here, after this incident we don't move from The Netherlands, we stay here, the children don't accept so we stop. (*ZAYN; A MAN ORIGINATING FROM SYRIA, OVER 25 YEARS OF AGE, LIVING WITH HIS FAMILY IN A RURAL REGION.*)

Five out of the six participants with children lived in a village. One family with children lived in an urban area. These children did not seem to be less content with their living environment than children living in a rural area. The parents of these children held a positive attitude towards living in the city. Facilities for the kids were nearby, examples that were given were the school, the swimming pool and horse riding. All the participants with children who lived in a village told that they liked living there because it was not as busy as in the city and this gave them a better sense of safety.

*P: Sometimes people say 'Why don't you live in the city?' But I like the village. I; Yes, why? P: Uhm, because, not many cars, environment is healthy. Partner: not busy (…) village is also good for children. P: yes. For children also. My son always goes to soccer by bike and I am not scared. (…) but in the city he cannot (…) When he goes back maybe I think 'Why he is a bit late?' But not here. (*BILAL; A MAN ORIGINATING FROM SYRIA, UNDER 25 YEARS OF AGE, LIVING WITH HIS FAMILY IN A RURAL REGION.)

*Partner: in the village you go uh talk to people, yes but in the city you don't. P: in the city not no, no, because there are many people. Partner: in Syria it is like this, in the village you have contact with people but in the city you don't. I; yes it is harder P: yes you are not familiar with everything. But here, if you go 2 times or 5 times 'o he is living in this village'. Partner: yes (name place) small. (*BILAL; A MAN ORIGINATING FROM SYRIA, UNDER 25 YEARS OF AGE, LIVING WITH HIS FAMILY A RURAL REGION.

friends. Among the friends the participants had made during their residence in The Netherlands a distinction can be made between friends with the same cultural background (social bonds) and friends with another cultural background (social bridges). None of the friendships that were made with people from the same cultural background lived in the same neighborhood, a few lived in the same village/city or another place close by and some lived in other regions of the country. They knew many friends from their home country or they met them (by acquaintances of people) in the AZC. Two of the participants said they found work with help from a friend. Most of the friends with another cultural background lived in the same neighborhood as the participant. Many of them they have met at a sports club or because they also lived in the neighborhood.

I: and how did you find that job? P: by a friend of a friend of mine actually. He lives close to the restaurant and he saw an advertisement, we are looking for a delivery man (…). He told me there is a street close by, delivery, he said; the owner is from Iraq, so that gives me, he gives me a sort of push, so okay I go talk to him. When I went, yes he was a nice guy. (MUHSIN, A MAN ORIGINATING FROM IRAQ, OVER 25 YEARS OF AGE, LIVING ALONE IN AN URBAN REGION).

Five out of the six people living in a village mentioned that they were friends with people with the same cultural background. All of the participants who lived in a village mentioned having social connections with someone from another cultural background. Refugees who lived in a city mentioned relationships with people with another cultural background twice as much as relationships with people with the same cultural background. Three out of the five people that lived in a mentioned social bonds city are talking about social bonds. Four out of the five people mentioned that they had a connection with someone who had another cultural background

Noteworthy is that the social bonds of people who lived in a village mostly lived outside of their living place and the social bridges all lived in the same neighborhood or in the same village. For the refugees who lived in the city this division was different. Friends with the same cultural background did not live in the same neighborhood but often they did live in the same city. Most of the people with another cultural background (social bridges) did not live in the same city but in village close to the city. One man who was living in the city said he only had contact with Dutch people and that he did not want to surround himself with Arabic people. His main reason for this was

that he could not learn from Arabic people and that they would not help him to build up a new life here.

P: if you want to learn the life here you need to learn from the people here in The Netherlands. So if you have more contact you can learn more and faster. (…) I almost never have contact with the Arabic people here. Only Dutch people.(TAJ; AMAN ORIGINATING FROM SYRIA, UNDER 25 YEARS OF AGE, LIVING ALONE IN AN URBAN AREA)

Another person who lived in the city mentioned he did not have any contacts at all besides his wife. For him the anonymity of the city played a big role in this. Also his opinion is that Dutch people live a busy and scheduled life and therefore it is hard to make social connections with them. The participants who lived in a rural region did not experience this. A reason for this can be that the mean age is higher in rural regions and therefore the refugees are surrounded by more retired people.

I: so, it's an individual society? P: yeah, an individual society! (…) and it's hard to meet new people, for me it's hard. I like to be always with people you know, always. As this is our society it is like this it's all the time you are [with] people, you are not alone. [here in The Netherlands] you are alone, the day is too long. (…) Nobody is here [in the building where he lived], we are alone. (...) It's fully rented but (…) we have like, we are alone.
(AAYAN, A MAN ORIGINATING FROM SYRIA, OVER 25 YEARS OF AGE, LIVING ALONE IN AN URBAN REGION).

According to previous research (Nicholls & Uitermark, 2016) urban regions have several characteristics that provide people with opportunities to find people of their own cultural background. The anonymity would make it easier for the refugees to form groups with the same cultural background. The participant did not perceive the anonymity as a positive aspect, the large number of people made it harder for them to make connections. This did not only hold for social bridges but also for social bonds. One person living in a rural region told that he liked living in a village instead of a city because it is less anonymous.

w(wife): in the village you go talk with people in the village, but in the city you don't do that. P: in the city no, no, because there are many people. w: in Syria it is also like that, in the village you have contact with people but if you go to the city not so much. I: yes it's harder. P: yes, you don't know everyone. But here, if you go 2 or 5 times [walking in the village] [people say:]'o he is living here'. w: yes [village] is small. (OMAR: A MAN ORIGINATING FROM SYRIA, OVER 25 YEARS OF AGE, LIVING WITH HIS FAMILY IN A RURAL REGION.)

colleagues. Colleagues were not perceived as an important social contact by the participants. Five participants mentioned they had a job and two of them spoke briefly about their colleagues or their boss.

social links.
local government. People were not positive about the help they received from the local government. One person mentioned that he wanted more flexibility from the local government. He told that he felt like the cultural differences were overlooked by the local government and that they do not adapt their protocols to other cultures for example. He also said that according to him they (the local government) want refugees to adapt to the Dutch culture too fast.

But uhm a bit of understanding, uh, being flexible. (…) Not the normal people but the local government for example. (…) only to be a bit flexible, because we come from another country and from another culture. And we have, we have a piece of skin. (…) if you bend it a little, without breaking it you do it slowly. But if you do it very

fast it breaks. The same is with us, we can, we can get used to the Dutch culture, but that doesn't come all at once. (…) no then we will break. ABDELLAH, A MAN ORIGINATING FROM PALESTINE, OVER 25 YEARS OF AGE, LIVING WITH HIS FAMILY IN A RURAL REGION.

Another aspect of the local government that some participants experienced difficulties with was that Dutch local governments have a bureaucratic system in their opinion. The amount of rules and paperwork can be intimidating when you come to The Netherlands as a refugee. The refugees indicated that waiting times for formal requests can take a very long time and that one has to fill in much paperwork. One man said ''*The first three words that I have learned here in The Netherland are 'no', 'wait' and 'paper'.*'' (ABDELLAH, A MAN ORIGINATING FROM PALESTINE, OVER 25 YEARS OF AGE, LIVING WITH HIS FAMILY IN A RURAL REGION.) This sentence indicates very well how the Dutch system comes across as bureaucratic for many refugees.

Non-profit refugee support organizations. Bonds with organizations that support refugees, like Humanitas or Vluchtelingenwerk Noord-Nederland, were most often mentioned by participants as helpful. Not a single person felt like he or she needed more help from organizations and all the help was perceived as positive. People mentioned receiving help for finances and paperwork.

Yes, when we came in The Netherlands we received very much help from organizations yes, and the municipality. I got an organization for here, the first is the COA, you know in the AZC they have the uhm, for example caravans and food and clothes and other stuff. After this is ready I come with the paper, you go to the court and get your ID that you are allowed to stay in The Netherlands for 5 years. You get the payment from the organization, yes. But in August we go to the study financing and we get help from the organization DUO. (OUSSAMA; A MAN ORIGINATING FROM SYRIA, OVER 25 YEARS OF AGE, LIVING WITH HIS FAMILY IN A RURAL REGION.)

Also in the social aspect of their lives the participants perceived the help from these types of organizations as being positive.

When I came here I was really lucky because I have this really sweet girl, she is from Humanitas to help me. (…) She is very sweet and helps me a lot. First she started inviting me to parties (…) without her was very hard. (BILAL; A MAN ORIGINATING FROM SYRIA, UNDER 25 YEARS OF AGE, LIVING WITH HIS FAMILY IN A RURAL REGION.)

community centers. Another example of an organization that was helpful for participants in villages was the community center. Half of the people living in a village said that the community center was an important way of getting to know new people. Refugees who lived in an urban area were often not familiar with the community centers or they did know them but did not participate in any of the activities. This does not match with other findings in the literature (Nicholls & Uitermark, 2016) that state that in places where there are more immigrants or refugees, more group-specific institutions can be created and sustained since none of the participants who lived in an urban region went to a community.

sport clubs. Sport clubs were perceived as a good way to get to learn Dutch people as well, mainly for refugees who were living in a village. The participants who were doing sports in a club were doing this in their place of residence. Because of this, the local social network increased which was perceived as positive.

AZC. Participants mainly met people with the same cultural background in the AZC and some of them still had a good bond with these people. One participant mentioned that he was very close

with some of the friends he made in the AZC and that these people belonged to the group of people in The Netherlands he trusted the most. The AZC is also the place where many people learned their first words of Dutch because of the procedures they had to go through.

(…) when I was in the AZC, uhm, I met (name 1) and (name 2), they are really good friends of me. And by them I met also friends of them. So that is the Arabic part.'' (MUHSIN, A MAN ORIGINATING FROM IRAQ, OVER 25 YEARS OF AGE, LIVING ALONE IN AN URBAN REGION.)

church. One man told he met new people in the Church that was located in the village he lived. This is also a place that this participant went to each weekend and where he met the first people when he came to The Netherlands. The people that this participant knew from the church were also the people he said to ask for help when this was needed.

Factors that influenced the integration process

education. Language lessons were mentioned as a network opportunity but were not always found to be a good manner to make new connections. The reason that the participants gave for this was that the language lessons were only followed by non-Dutch persons. Other participants did like the language lessons because for them the goal was not only to meet Dutch people but new people in general, regardless of their cultural background. What we have seen is that language lessons were only perceived as being helpful to create new social connections by refugees who were looking for more social bonds (and not only new social bridges).

Two people mentioned they were not happy with the way of teaching at their school. People felt like they had to learn too quickly and the hours spent in school to learn Dutch were not enough to learn the language. *''Yes, we really have to, the school I think, the school spends not enough time. Because 7.5 hours in the week is not enough for refugees, and the schools get a lot of money.''* (OUSSAMA; A MAN ORIGINATING FROM SYRIA, OVER 25 YEARS OF AGE, LIVING WITH HIS FAMILY IN A RURAL REGION).

Some refugees told that they went to school in their home country or that they already spoke another Germanic language (mostly English) before they came to The Netherlands. This helped them on one side but also held them back from speaking Dutch in real life.

It has pros and cons to already know English, because yeah, when I came here I always spoke English. Yes if I want to work or something it is easier to speak in English and to communicate with people. I didn't speak a lot of Dutch, but later I decided to stop speaking English and started talking Dutch. (…) Yes, you know the letters and some words are the same. Yes, yes, and with reading yes. That is an advantage; it is easier to go to school. (…) But sometimes also like uhm, when I want to speak Dutch I use a lot of English words so it's harder, each language has its own way of thinking, if you want to talk Dutch you have to think Dutch, if you want to talk English you have to think English. Yes, so to switch that I get used to talk in English it's hard. (ZAYN; A MAN ORIGINATING FROM SYRIA, OVER 25 YEARS OF AGE, LIVING WITH HIS FAMILY IN A RURAL REGION.)

Men who had been educated in their home country and wanted to proceed in this same field often experienced problems in continuing the study trajectory they started in their home country. Often the level of education that they did in their home country was not acknowledged in The Netherlands, or schools wanted their students to have finalized their previous study (pre-education) in The Netherlands in order to start a study.

employment. Two younger men told that working as a volunteer helped them to get to know new people. For one this was a motive to start doing the voluntary job, for the other it was an extra benefit of doing the voluntary job.

Next to interactions with neighbors some participants mentioned they practiced their

language skills during their job. Four out of the five men living in a city who were interviewed told that working somewhere (voluntarily) helped them to improve their language skills. Their job provided them with many opportunities to interact with Dutch people and this contact was, according to them, necessary in order to start a new life here in The Netherlands. This is in line with the level of *markers and means* of the theory that is provided by Ager and Strang (2008).

Another man told that he experienced problems when he tried to find a job or traineeship with the study he finished in his home country, this is also in line with the level of *markers and means* of the study of Ager & Strang (2008).

Here I can do something with my ICT education. But still it is hard, because everyone, uh, sees my education and 'O Iraq', mmm, he is hesitating. So 'yes how do you do that in Iraq?' and there is, there are many questions about it. For example I applied for a traineeship in the [name governmental organization]. And there is someone and he has many questions 'is this valid in here?', 'what is your study?', 'you are from Iraq so you are a foreigner', 'are you able to do this internship or traineeship?' Yes very many questions it was. (MUHSIN, A MAN ORIGINATING FROM IRAQ, OVER 25 YEARS OF AGE, LIVING ALONE IN AN URBAN REGION.)

feeling of belonging. The opinion on The Netherlands in general was quite positive. The citizens of The Netherlands were perceived as being helpful, people do not discriminate and the participants felt like they were being seen as equal by most of the Dutch citizens. Almost all of the participants said that they did feel part of the Dutch society and that they were proud of living in The Netherlands.

Yes, I am not Dutch but for us, the place where, where I live that is the second birth for me. So I am born in Syria but then I came to my house here, that is the second birth. So now I am proud I am in The Netherlands.
(ABDELLAH, A MAN ORIGINATING FROM PALESTINE, OVER 25 YEARS OF AGE, LIVING WITH HIS FAMILY IN A RURAL REGION.)

Four of the participants told that they would feel more as a Dutch person when they would also have the Dutch nationality. And some participants mentioned they don't feel completely at home in The Netherlands because family members were still in the country of origin or because they were still thinking of their home country often and/or wanted to return to their country of origin.

Yeah that I have a passport, that I have ID because now I'm kind of without papers. If the war stops in Syria I would be kicked from here without nothing even, just like the Iraq people. uh, that's gonna be like so disgusting actually, because I would be just losing my time and losing my life all the time. (WAKIL; A MAN ORIGINATING FROM SYRIA, UNDER 25 YEARS OF AGE, LIVING ALONE IN AN URBAN REGION.)

cultural differences. When the participants were asked whether they experienced difficulties with the Dutch culture most of them told that they did not see any problems. Most of the refugees realized that there are differences between the cultures but they respected these differences and tried to get used to them. People who regarded themselves as an open-minded person or a person who was raised in an open-minded family especially seemed to have fewer problems adapting to the Dutch culture.

I respect all things. I used to live in Syria, and I had the Syrian culture. And here I live in The Netherlands and I have to do things different for the culture here, but the culture here is good and we want that over time this culture comes gliding towards us. (OUSSAMA; A MAN ORIGINATING FROM SYRIA, OVER 25 YEARS OF AGE, LIVING WITH HIS FAMILY IN A RURAL REGION.)

The role of social connections in the integration process

Of course the social connections are one part of the integration process and in this research they are the main field of interest. The participants also saw the social connections as an important factor. The participants of this research talked the most about things related to family and language facilitators. The hierarchy that can be made regarding this topic can be seen below (Table 1). What can be seen is that eight out of the fifteen codes in this hierarchy are directly associated with social connections. The most important social connections are the social bonds with the family. For refugees who lived with a partner family is very important. The partner is mentioned 25 times, notwithstanding that not all of the participants that this hierarchy is based on have a partner. Interestingly, friendships with someone from another cultural background (social bridges) are mentioned more often than friends with the same cultural background (social bonds). The next quote illustrates how one of the participants values social aspects of his life compared to other aspects.

Table 1	
Hierarchy of codes	
Code:	Amount of times
1. Family	35
2. Language facilitator	35
3. Voluntary job	29
4. Friend (social bridge)	29
5. Sport	27
6. Facilities	26
7. Partner (social bond)	25
8. Children	24
9. Organizations (social links)	24
10. Network opportunity	24
11. Activity with neighbor	23
12. Friend (social bond)	21
13. Feeling of belonging.	21
14. Neighbors	19
15. Language	17

Note: Bold codes are associated with social connections

Because we have a good house, yes, we have uhm, good people, good neighbors and because of that I am happy. Not only for 'o I have money here and I have a house here', in Syria I also had money and I also had a car and a house. But maybe the neighbors, if they are not good, yes I am not happy. I am happy when you live in a city or a village with good people. More people in Germany are not happy, they have more money, more work in Germany, they have money but if you call with family or friends in Syria they say they are not happy because the people are not like here. (BILAL; A MAN ORIGINATING FROM SYRIA, UNDER 25 YEARS OF AGE, LIVING WITH HIS FAMILY IN A RURAL REGION).

Conclusion and discussion

The exploration of the experiences of refugees from the Middle-East has shed a light on the helpful factors and barriers on the social level to integrate in Dutch society. Also, the role of place in the integration process has become clearer. Three types of social connections have been distinguished within this research; social bonds, social bridges and social links. Social bonds are connections that people have with others who have the same cultural background. Social bridges are connections with people with another cultural background and social links are connections with organizations. The results of this research show that for the first research question the results are mostly in line with the current literature.

The social bonds of the participants in this research were primarily family and friends. None of the participants told he had a connection with a neighbor with the same cultural background. Family members outside of the own household were primarily helpful for finding a job since these people already had a (social) network. Within the household it became clear that the language that is primarily spoken within the house of the participant is influenced by the country of origin of the partner and whether the participant has children or not. These factors worked as a barrier (when the partner was non-Dutch and the participant had no children) or a helpful factor (when the partner was Dutch and had one or more children). This shows that, like Esser (2004) also stated, social bridges as part of social integration are an important factor to adopt the cultural traits and language skills that promote the integration process. When there were children present in the household the participant emphasized that this largely influenced the future plans of the family and therefore the effort to integrate. There was no difference between urban and rural areas in the number of family members that one had living in the country.

Social bridges that were mentioned were mostly neighbors. When there was intensive contact with neighbors this was perceived by the participants as being very helpful. Learning the language was one of the main advantages of the connection with neighbors. In the urban areas there were more participants who experienced barriers when they wanted to get to know new people. One important barrier is that the Dutch society is being perceived as an individualistic society where it is hard to make a spontaneous connection with people. Another barrier for some people was that the people who lived in the neighborhood did not have the same interests and/or age. Regarding the cultural diversity within their neighborhood there are contradictions with the theory of Nicholls and Uitermark (2016). Nicholls and Uitermark (2016) state that homogeneity of cultures within a neighborhood causes strong social control and low social support. In this research is found though that the refugees living in neighborhoods with many Dutch people and few other cultures often have a greater sense of belonging and safety and that this is perceived as something positive instead of negative. An explanation for this difference can be the difference in the feeling of having a collective identity in a place or neighborhood. When a place is characterized by a high feeling of collective identity the inhabitants of this place feel they represent one group that shares norms and values (Fischer, 1975). As a refugee you might feel less welcome in a that is characterized by a high feeling of collective identity than in a place where the collective identity is not that strong. In this study no further attention has been given to the background characteristics of the individual places of residence of the participants.

Social links are the last category of social connections is distinguished in this study. The connection with the local government is perceived as being negative mainly because of the bureaucratic character that was experienced. Social links that were perceived as positive were the

community centers, sport clubs, the AZC and the church. For many people (at least) one of these places played an important role in getting to know new people.

Factors that influenced the integration process were: education, employment, feeling of belongingness and cultural differences. The general view of refugees on The Netherlands was positive. Some refugees mentioned that not having a Dutch passport and not having their family around them prevented them from feeling like a real member of Dutch society. The individualistic character of The Netherlands also was something they had to get used to.

For the second question 'How do social connections of refugees differ between rural and urban regions?' the results are less in line with the theories mentioned in this research. In this research is found that contact with neighbors is more frequent and more intense in rural areas than in urban areas. This is not in line with what Spicer (2008) wrote. According to the study of Spicer (2008) there would be more social exclusion in white neighborhoods where fewer immigrants or refugees were living.

The refugees living in neither urban nor rural regions mentioned that they had an intensive relation with a neighbor with the same cultural background (social bond). What is notable is that the friends (social bonds) of people in villages mostly did not live in the same place and the friends with another cultural background all lived in the same neighborhood or village. For the refugees who are living in the city this division is different. Friends with the same cultural background are not living in the same neighborhood but often they do live in the same city. Most of the social bridges did not live in the same city but in a village surrounding the city. An explanation for this phenomenon can be that in absolute numbers there are more people in the urban areas with the same cultural background than in rural areas. Therefore it is more likely for the refugees living in the urban areas to meet those people. It may be that the refugees who are living in villages partly replace these social bonds by social bridges. The social bridges that the refugees have who are living in the city were often met in the AZC which is close to the city of residence.

In this study the participants told that the anonymity of the urban regions does not make it easier to make connections with people from the same cultural background. The participants told that it even made it harder to make connections. This is not in line with the literature (Nicholls and Uitermark, 2016) that states that the anonymity makes it easier to meet people from the same cultural background and form subgroups because anonymity also creates lower social control.

Limitations.

Within this research there are some limitations, but also strong features. This research is solely focused on the integration experiences of men. This has both positive and negative consequences. A positive consequence is that the experiences that are described by the participant can be compared better because they are all a part of the same gender group. A negative consequence is that only one side of most households is being looked into. Results concerning both genders can be very interesting since the role of men and women within the household can be very different within the Arabic culture (World Bank, 2004). Also, women are a minority in the current refugee streams and therefore are an interesting group to study more deeply (Sansonetti, 2016).

Another limitation is that the rural areas that are chosen for this research are not remote from the cities. The average distance from the urban regions to the rural regions within this research was about 20km. A greater contrast with respect to the population size and distance to urban regions would have maybe made it possible to show larger distinctions between the two groups. Because of the geographical features of The Netherlands it is hard though to find remote rural areas

where refugees are living.

For this research one method is used to obtain the data; semi-structured interviews. In order to make sure that shortcomings can be compensated it would have been better to use multiple methods (Shenton, 2004). Something to be reckoned with regarding the interviews is the possibility of socially desirable answers. Within this research the interviewer was not from the same cultural group as the refugees but was a native. Therefore it is possible that the interviewees told about their experiences more positive than they would have done when the researcher was someone from their own cultural group.

Further studies on the perceptions of women in a situation that is comparable to this research can, combined with this study, give a better outline of the household situation. A study that explores the integration experiences of rural areas that are more remote from the urban areas would give a better insight for countries where the geographical features of urban and rural areas are different compared to The Netherlands.

Key message.

In this research is attempted to explore the experiences of social integration of male refugees from the Middle-East in the Dutch society and the role of place in this process. The research showed that there are multiple factors that play a role in this process and that the integration process is different for refugees living in rural and urban regions. One of the main findings is the difference in contact with neighbors from another cultural background between the refugees living in an urban or rural area in this research. It appeared that the refugees who were living in a rural area had more frequent and more intensive relationships with their neighbors compared to the refugees who were living in an urban area.

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Appendices:

1. Interview guide

English:

Good morning/ Good afternoon my name is Simone Barends. I am currently doing a research as part of my Master program in Population Studies at the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen. Before we are starting the interview I would like to point out a couple of things to you. This interview will approximately take 1 hour and is part of my research about integration in the Dutch Society. Everything that we talk about during this interview will be confidential and anonymous. Only me and my supervisors will have access to the exact things we talk about during the interview. This will be guaranteed because everyone who is involved has to sign a confidentiality agreement. Furthermore, I will not use your real name anymore after this interview. The last thing that is important to mention is that your participation is fully voluntary and you are not obliged to answer a question. Also, if you would like to stop during the interview you can do this at any time. Finally, I have two questions before we start the interview: are you okay with me recording our conversation in order to make sure your answers will be used correctly? And do you have any questions before we start the interview?

- [so, we are sitting in your living room/kitchen/other now, can you tell me] How long do you now live in this place approximately?
    -What do you think of this house you are currently living in?
        -the size
        -the building/ condition of the house
        -the facilitations in the building
    - What is it like to live in this neighborhood?
        - cultural diversity/ people of own culture
        - safety
        - acceptance by neighbors
        - friends
        - facilities like supermarkets, schools or restaurants etc.
        - do you have family that lives close by?
    - How familiar are you with the streets around your house?
         - facilities
        - knowing your way around
    -Do you feel at home/ comfortable in your neighborhood?

- Can you tell me something about your daily activities?
    - routines
    - work
        - do you like the job you are doing?
            - why? Why not?
        - how did you find this job?
            - friends, family, internet, organizations, [social] media
    - education

-do you feel supported by the Dutch Society
  - what can be done to improve this
  - what did they do to help?
- sports/ hobbies
- weekend/ weekdays
- Community center/ -organized social activities
- Can you tell me how you think your daily activities and your social connections are linked together?
  - more social connections → e.g. helped finding a job or other way around.

- Would you like to tell me something about who you have social contact with in your daily life?
  - neighbors, family, friends, Dutch or same country
  - how did you meet new people when you came to live here?
  - did you already know people who were living here?
    - yes: what role did they play in forming new contacts?
    -no: how did you cope with this? – how did you find people to connect with?
  - in what language do you communicate with these people?

  - only when interview goes well → can you tell me in which relations or connections you fully trust the people and with whom   this trust is still something that has to be worked on?
  - Do you experience any different norms and values in relationships between your 'own '
   culture and the Dutch culture?
    - shaking hands
    -interrupting during class
  - how do you experience hierarchical relationships in The Netherlands?
    - did you encounter difficulties? → example?
  - what do you think that helped you [the most] in building a [new] social network?
  - Do you think that there are other things that are more important to integrate than social relations?

- Now that we talked about all these different aspects of your life, to what extent do you feel like you are a part of the Dutch society?
  - yes: can you tell me why you feel integrated?
    - is there one main aspect that is very important to you?
    - how much do you think you had to do this by yourself and how much did the Dutch
    government and organizations play a role in this?
  -no: what are obstacles for you to feel integrated?
    -language, culture, work
    - how do you think it comes that you feel this way?
    - are there any things you think Dutch organizations can help you with?
  - are there things you encountered that you did not expect that would help you to integrate?

- Can you tell me something about your future plans?

Okay, that was the last question of this interview. I want to thank you a lot for participating. Do you have any questions for me? Then now I am going to stop the recording.
Would you like me to send you the results when my research is finished?

- Yes: than you can write your contact details down for me and I will send it to you as soon as it is finished
- No: oke, then I would like to thank you again

And I wish you a very nice day!

* ask for other people who might be interested to be interviewed [snowball sampling]*

Nederlands:

Goedemorgen/ goedemiddag, mijn naam is Simone Barends. Momenteel ben ik bezig met een onderzoek voor mijn master Population Studies aan de Rijksuniversiteit Groningen. Voordat we aan het interview beginnen wil ik u graag nog op enkele dingen wijzen. Dit interview zal ongeveer 1 uur gaan duren en is onderdeel van mijn onderzoek naar integratie in de Nederlandse samenleving. Alles wat besproken wordt is vertrouwelijk en anomiem. Alleen mijn supervisors en ik hebben toegang tot de bestanden. Dit zal worden gegarandeerd doordat iedereen een geheimhoudingsverklaring heeft ondertekend die bij het onderzoek is betrokken. Ook zal uw echte naam na dit onderzoek niet meer worden gebruikt. Wat ook nog belangrijk is om te weten is dat uw deelname volledig vrijwillig is en u niet verplicht bent om een vraag te beantwoorden, ook als u wilt stoppen gedurende het interview dan mag dit op ieder moment. Ten slotte heb ik nog twee vragen voor we aan het interview gaan beginnen: vind u het goed als ik het interview opneem zodat uw antwoorden correct kunnen worden uitgewerkt later? En heeft u nog vragen voordat we met het interview gaan beginnen?

- zo, we zitten nu in je woonkamer/keuken/anders, kun je me iets vertellen over hoe lang je nu ongeveer in dit huis woont?
    - wat vind je van het huis?
        - grootte
        - gebouw/staat van het huis
        - faciliteiten in en om het gebouw
    - hoe vind je het om in deze buurt te wonen?
        - culturele diversiteit
        - veiligheid
        - acceptatie door buren
        - vrienden
        - faciliteiten (supermarkt, school, restaurants etc.)
        - heb je familie in de buurt wonen?
    - ben je een beetje bekend met de straten rondom je huis/ met de buurt?
        - faciliteiten
        - ken je de weg
    - voel je je thuis in deze buurt?

- kan je me iets vertellen over hoe een normale week er voor jou uitziet?
    - routines
    - werk
        - vind je het leuk wat je doet → waarom wel/niet?
        - hoe heb je dit werk gevonden? → familie, vrienden, internet, organisatie, media
    - school
        - voel je je ondersteund door de Nederlandse maatschappij om naar school te gaan?
        - hebben ze je geholpen?
    - sport/hobbies
    - weekend
    - buurthuis
    - kan je me iets vertellen over hoe je dagelijkse activiteiten en je sociale connecties gelinkt

zijn aan elkaar. Vb : heeft het kennen van mensen geholpen bij het vinden van een baan of andersom?

- zou je me misschien ook iets kunnen vertellen over met wie je sociaal contact hebt in je dagelijks leven?
    - buren, familie, vrienden, nederlands of zelfde herkomstland
    - kende je al mensen die hier wonen?
        - ja: welke rol speelden zij in het leggen van nieuwe contacten?
        - nee: hoe ging je hiermee om?
    - hoe heb je mensen leren kennen die hier wonen?
    - in welke taal communiceer je het meest?
    - alleen als het interview goed gaat: kun je me vertellen wie jij volledig vertrouwt?
    - ervaar je weleens verschillende normen en waarden tussen je eigen cultuur en de Nederlandse cultuur? (handen schudden, onderbreken tijdens de les)
    - wat denk je dat je het meest heeft geholpen bij het opbouwen van een sociaal netwerk?

    - denk je dat er andere dingen zijn die belangrijker zijn dan social contacten als het gaat om integreren?

-we hebben het nu gehad over allemaal verschillende apecten van je dagelijk leven, in hoeverre voel je je een onderdeel van de Nederlandse maatschappij?
    - waarom voel je je geintregreerd?
        - is er 1 aspect wat extra belangrijk is voor jou hierbij?
        - hoe veel denk je dat je dit zelf hebt gedaan en hoeveel hiervan komt ook door de nederlandse overheid en organisaties?
    - waarom voel je je niet geintregreerd?
        - taal, cultuur, werk
        - hoe denk je dat het komt dat je je zo voelt?
    - zijn er dingen waarin Nederlandse instanties meer kunnen betekenen om je te helpen als vluchteling?
    - zijn er dingen waarvan je van tevoren niet had gedacht dat ze je zouden helpen met integreren?

- kun je me iets vertellen over je toekomst plannen?

oke, dat was de laatste vraag van dit interview. Ik wil je hartelijk bedanken voor het meedoen. Heb je nog vragen voor mij? Dan stop ik nu de opname.
wil je dat ik de resultaten van mijn onderzoek stuur als ik klaar ben?
    - ja: wil je je contact gegevens voor me opschrijven dan stuur ik het naar je op zodra het klaar is
    - nee: oke dan wil ik je nogmaals bedanken
nog een fijne dag

* vraag naar andere mensen die mogelijk geintresseerd zijn om te helpen door middel van een interview.

2. Confidentiality agreement

Dutch:

Ik – Simone Barends – verklaar hierbij

- Geheim te houden wat mijn onder geheimhouding wordt toevertrouwd tijdens de dataverzamelijk voor de Master thesis opdracht [2016-2017]. Dat geldt eveneens voor informatie die mij ter beschikking komt en waarvan ik het vertrouwelijk karakter behoor te begrijpen.

- Geanonimiseerde onderzoeksgegevens alleen te benutten in het kader van dit onderzoek.

- Bij de verslaglegging van onderzoeksgegevens ervoor te zorgen dat de personen en situaties die het betreft anoniem blijven

- Geen vertrouwlijke informatie die voortkomt uit de dataverzameling te onthullen, openbaar te maken of op een andere manier te verspreiden.

- De verzamelde data niet de dupliceren, kopïeren of verspreiden, ook niet aan andere onderzoekers of derde partijen.

Deze overeenkomtst heeft ook nog geldingskracht nadat het master thesis vak is afgerond.

Datum: 28-07-2017

handtekening:

3. Time planning

Month	Week	Improve theory section	Improve methods section	Make interview guide	Search respondent	Interview	Atlas.ti + analysis interview	Write results	Write conclusion	Last revision
Februari	6	X	X	X	X					
	7	X	X	X	X					
	8	X	X	X	X					
March	9		X	X	X	X	X			
	10				X	X	X			
	11				X	X	X			
	12				X	X	X			
	13				X	X	X			
April	14				X	X	X			
	15				X	X	X			
	16				X	X	X			
	17				X	X	X			
May	18					X	X			
	19					X	X			
	20						X	X		
	21						X	X		
June	22							X		
	23							X	X	
	24	Not								
	25	Available								
	26								X	
Juli	27								X	
	28									X
	29									X
	30									

4. Deductive and inductive codebook

Deductive codes				Inductive codes
	Markers and Means	Employment	Paid job Voluntary job Unemployed by choice Forced unemployment	
		Housing	Neighborhood	Familiarity with surrounding places Visits to other places
			Characteristics house Facilities	Time in current dwelling
		Education	Language lessons Education for profession	Internship
		Health	Health constraint	
		Activities	Sports Hobbies Community centre	Food Activity outside of living place Church Household tasks Taking care of children Nightlife activity Routine
	Facilitators	Language and cultural Knowledge	Language barrier Language facilitator Cultural differences Cultural problems	 Language Food No cultural problems
		Safety and stability	Discrimination Feeling of safety(in Neighborhood) Future plan	
	Social contacts	Social bonds	Family	Children Partner Family in home country Way to communicate with family in home country
			Neighbours Friends Acquaintances	 Colleague

	Social bridges	Neighbors Friends Acquaintances	Activity with neighbor(s)
			Partner Colleague
	Socal links	Government Municipality Organizations	
			Contacts outside of living place Network opportunity Not knowing people entering the country Trust
Foundation	Rights	Integration process Financial rights	
	Citizenship	Pasport/nationality Feelings of belongingness	
Remaining			Future plans Personal goals AZC Background information Situation in home country Barrier to integrate Boredom bureacracy Characteristics of interviewee happening Help Motive to come to The Netherlands Opinion Netherlands Own initiative Religion transportation

5. reflection on the pilot interview

Before conducting all the interviews a pilot interview has to be done in order to make sure that the interview guide is as effective as possible. For the pilot interview someone is chosen that meets most of the requirements the participants have to meet to take part in this research. The participant was from the right region and lived in the right place. She didn't meet the requirement of living here for 3-5 years since she was already in The Netherlands for 1 year longer.

The interview took place at a University room which was reserved for the interviewer and interviewee alone to guarantee privacy. The interview took 1 hour and was perceived as being good by the interviewee. A few questions were formulated to complicated which made a difficult to answer them without an extra explanation. These questions were:

-1. 'What do you perceive as your neighborhood?'

-2. 'Can you describe your attachment to your neighborhood?'

These two questions will be phrased differently.

-1. How familiar are you with the streets around your house?

- facilities

- knowing your way around

-2. Do you feel at home/ comfortable in your neighborhood?

Also another questions is added in order to be better able to answer the subquestion: 'In what way do social connections play a role in the integration process according to the refugees?'. The question that is added to the interview guide is:

- Do you think that there are other things that are more important to integrate than social relations?

6. Profile of those interviewed

Respondent*	Male/ female	Country of origin	Age <25, 25+	Rural/urban living region in the Netherlands	Living alone/ living with family
1 Bilal	male	Syria	<25	Rural	Alone
2 Wakil	male	Syria	<25	Urban	Alone
3 Zayn	male	Syria	+25	Rural	Family
4 Oussama	male	Syria	+25	Rural	Family
5 Abdellah	male	Palestine	+25	Rural	Family
6 Muhsin	male	Iraq	+25	Urban	Alone
7 Tamir	male	Syria	+25	Urban	Family
8 Hammad	male	Iraq	+25	Rural	Family
9 Aayan	male	Syria	+25	Urban	Alone
10 Omar	male	Syria	+25	Rural	Family
11 Taj	male	Syria	<25	Urban	Alone
12 pilot	female	Pakistan	25+	urban	Alone

*Names are anonymized