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# Community Centres and the Future of Social Cohesion

A case comparison

Three Community Centres in  
Groningen and Berlin Compared

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## ***Abstract***

Community centres and social cohesion are frequently used interchangeably, particularly in Dutch spatial policies. As a result, for governments, this ostensible social effect is one of the justifications for encouraging participation in community centres. However, it appears that there is a research gap between the specific characteristics of community centres and their potential contribution to social cohesion. This study seeks to answer the question of how community centers in Groningen and Berlin contribute to neighborhood social cohesion. Is the organizations' current approach working, or are there better ways to connect neighborhood residents to one another? In this case study, interviews were conducted in Groningen as well as in two Berlin neighborhoods, Neukölln and Mitte because of the income differences compared to adjacent neighborhoods, or districts in the case of Berlin. Based on these interviews, the relationship between social cohesion and the role of the community centers in this will be discussed. In addition, a small survey was conducted in the Berlin neighborhoods. When comparing the community centers to the framework developed based on the article by Kearns and Forrest (2000), improvements are required. The findings demonstrate how the three community centers differ and how some outperform others in very different aspects of the theoretical framework. The community center in Mitte, for example, collaborates with the fugitive center and other social institutions in the neighborhood, whereas there is no fixed community center in the neighborhood in Neukölln to begin with. Furthermore, social institutions are not eager to collaborate with one another, which may have a negative impact on social cohesion within the neighborhood.

**Keywords:** Community Centers, Groningen, Korrewegwijk, Berlin, Neukölln, Mitte, Socio Economic Status

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Relevance and Research Problem

Sociological theorists have generally emphasized the negative effects of urbanization on social ties due to the loss of community perspective. On the basis of other theorizing and empirical research, a counterview, which we call the community transformed, has begun to emerge. However, the relationship between urbanization and social ties is still poorly understood (Buchecker, 2020). In both Groningen and Berlin policymakers have considered how to improve social cohesion within neighborhoods. One of the suggestions is the establishment of *community centers*. Van Bergeijk et al. (2008) stated that: "the glue that holds a social system together is referred to as social cohesion" which is still relevant to this day. As well as the report from Sampson et al., (1997) which stated that "social cohesion is a broad and commonly used term that refers to different levels of society, such as groups, neighbourhoods, cities, and countries. Lack of social cohesion is widely regarded as a negative factor that can lead to undesirable behaviour such as criminal behaviour, nuisance, feelings of unsafety, and anonymity". As a result, residents are dissatisfied with their communities, which may lead to population loss and vice versa (Kearns and Park, 2003).

According to Peterson (2015) and Hickman (2012), community centers can influence neighborhood social cohesion by serving as a venue for social interaction and networking. Despite acknowledging the potential impact of community centers on social cohesion, they do not provide conclusive scientific evidence to support their claims. As a result, this thesis will attempt to provide an answer to the question:

*"How do community centres in Groningen and Berlin contribute to social cohesion within the neighborhood?"*

In order to answer this question, a qualitative research design was used. The data for the research has been collected through interviews conducted with employees, volunteers and neighborhood residents of the community center 'Het Floreshuis' located in the Korrewegwijk in Groningen. In Berlin, however, the approach was slightly different. In Mitte, the 'Stadtteilkoordinatorin' for the Alexanderplatz district region and the government district region working at the 'Kreativhaus' was interviewed. Since the district of Gropiusstadt (Neukölln) lacks a permanent community center, an interview with an employee of STZ (Self-help center) Gropius Stadt was conducted. In addition, a small survey was held amongst residents of both neighborhoods located in Berlin. The following sub questions will attempt to answer the main research question:

1. *What kinds of services and activities do these community centres provide?*
2. *To which dimensions of social cohesion do these contribute?*
3. *How do community centres become more successful in this?*

## 1.2 Societal Relevance

The purpose of this study is to investigate and evaluate the possibilities for community centres in Groningen and Berlin neighbourhoods, as well as the potential of the community centres studied in terms of their influence on social cohesion. The relationship of community centres to the theoretical framework will be addressed, as will best practices of these

community centres. Based on this, recommendations for the community centres at stake, as well as potential future community centres or other social institutes, will be made.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Social Cohesion

Despite its growing popularity in academic and policy circles, the term "social cohesion" requires a more precise and comprehensive definition. It is typically used in such a way that its meaning is ambiguous while giving the impression that everyone understands what is being referred to. According to Chan et al. (2006), who conducted a critical literature review of the ways social cohesion has been conceptualized in the literature, definitions are too loosely made in many cases, with a common confusion between the content and the causes or effects of social cohesion. According to their article 'cohesion' in our common parlance refers to a state in which components 'stick' together to form an effective or meaningful whole. As a result, social cohesion should also be defined as "a state of affairs concerning how well people in a society 'cohere' or 'stick' to one another." In light of the preceding discussion, According to Chan et al. (2006), "social cohesion is a set of attitudes and norms that include trust, a sense of belonging, and a willingness to participate and help, as well as behavioral manifestations of these attitudes and norms." Kearns and Forrest (2000) stated something similar in their article. The core of the concept, according to them, is that a cohesive society "hangs together"; all of the component parts fit in and contribute to well-being; and conflict between societal groups and disruptive behaviors are largely absent or minimal. Their article claims that social cohesion can have up to five different dimensions:

1. *Social networks and social capital, based on a high degree of social interaction within communities and families.*

This is accomplished through socialization and mutual support mechanisms based on family and kinship, which occur primarily in the neighborhood but are spreading throughout the city. Strong, dense, neighborhood-based social networks are assumed to be the best means of social support, and weak ties serve as bridges to strong ties, making them important for social cohesion (Fernandez, 2021). Furthermore, it has been shown that weak ties outnumber strong ties in terms of providing a sense of identity, security, and belonging (Hirvonen and Lilius, 2019). Civic engagement networks, in line with this, refer to associational activity in neighborhood and community organizations. They both add to and create social capital. As a result, a cohesive society is one in which dilemmas and problems can be easily resolved through collective action, particularly when existing relationships and networks sustain the expectations, norms, and trust that allow such notions.

2. *Common values and a civic culture, based in more common moral principles and codes of behaviour.*

According to Kearns and Forrest (2000) their framework, members share common goals and objectives, as well as a set of moral principles and behavioral codes to guide their interactions with one another, as well as support for political institutions and general engagement with political systems and institutions rather than indifference or disaffection. People's attitudes toward the political system and their role within it define political culture. As a result, an examination of their understanding of the system, their feelings toward it, and

their evaluation of it is required. A civic culture, according to them, is one in which the process results in a participant culture.

### 3. *Place attachment and an intertwining of personal and place identity.*

A strong attachment to place and the intertwining of people's identities with those of places are thought to contribute to social cohesion by having a positive impact on things like adherence to common values and norms and willingness to participate in social networks and build social capital. Place attachment serves several functions, according to Fornara et al. (2020), including a sense of security, a connection to people who are important to us, and a symbolic bond to people, past experiences, ideas, and culture. All of these factors contribute to group cohesion, individual and group identity maintenance, and self-esteem enhancement. According to Fukuyama (1999), there has been a qualitative shift in how people are engaged. Participation ranges from broad-based church, labor, or political party involvement to more specific, single-issue, and defensive activities. This could result in the community "miniaturizing." According to the concept of "community miniaturization," a high level of social participation can be accompanied by a low level of trust, both at the individual and community levels, resulting in social disorder and a lack of social cohesion. As society becomes more disordered, people may feel more insecure and anxious. As a result, urban governors must strive for what Urwin (1990) claimed was possible: people can have multiple identities while also positively relating to multiple areas.

4. Social order and social control, based in an absence of general conflicts between groups at large (i.e. Muslims versus Christians).
5. Social solidarity and reductions in wealth disparities, based in equal access to services and welfare benefits, redistribution of public finances and opportunities, and ready acknowledgement of social obligations.

While the last two dimensions are unquestionably national policy issues, the first three are relevant in neighborhood-level strategies (Amin, 2002). As a result, this paper focuses on the first three dimensions. Because they are less important at the neighborhood level, the last two dimensions are not addressed in this paper. These dimensions will be used to quantify how these community centers affect social cohesion in the neighborhood.

## 2.2 Income and Social Cohesion

According to Kawachi and Kennedy (1997), wealth and income are becoming more concentrated globally. They claimed that, in addition to the poor's absolute standard of living, income distribution is a key determinant of population health, and that large disparities between rich and poor people lead to increased mortality due to a breakdown in social cohesion. The recent rise in income inequality has been accompanied by an increase in the residential concentration of poverty and affluence in many countries. Residential segregation reduces opportunities for social cohesion. Income inequality has far-reaching consequences for society, including increased crime and violence, stifled productivity and economic growth, and hampered representative democracy. Inequality in society is often the result of explicit policies and public choice. Income inequality reduction has the potential to improve social cohesion and population health (Manduca, 2019). In the Netherlands, too, as income inequality rises, social trust declines, and rising inequality is accompanied by a greater desire

among the populace for a government that intervenes in income distribution (van de Werfhorst, 2014).

According to a briefing paper published by the German Development Institute (DIE) (2019), economists believe that there is a positive relationship between social cohesion and economic growth because social cohesion improves formal and/or social institutions, which in turn drives economic growth (Sethi & Acharya, 2018). Although there is evidence of a link between growth and social cohesion, it is still limited to correlation analysis, so neither direction nor causality can be claimed solely. Inclusionary, pro-poor improvements in development outcomes such as job creation, education, and reduced income and resource inequality are one potential mechanism by which growth may influence social cohesion (Khan et al., 2019). Policy changes, such as those in social security and taxation, are another possible mechanism. However, more research is needed to determine whether there is a feedback loop from growth to social cohesion or if the relationship is primarily one-way. Development cooperation has become increasingly focused on economic development in general and private sector promotion in particular, especially within Germany. With the exception of peacebuilding, most development strategies do not explicitly link to social cohesion. However, economic policies and growth do not always promote social cohesion and, if not distributed properly, can even contribute to increased social dissatisfaction and unrest. Social cohesion is first and foremost a social phenomenon defined by interactions between societal actors and institutions (Fonseca et al., 2018). As a result, prudent policies are required to ensure inclusive economic development that results in changes in social and societal realities that strengthen societal bonds. As the DIE (2019) stated, it is preferable that economic development strategies include mechanisms to foster social cohesion or, at the very least, do not undermine a society's "togetherness." This can be accomplished by acknowledging the importance of social cohesion in development strategies, taking trust, identity, and solidarity into account in support of social cohesion, and incorporating mechanisms that foster social cohesion into economic development strategies.

### 2.3 Groningen, Korrewegwijk

On March 22, 2007, Ella Vogelaar, the Dutch Minister of Integration and Housing, published a list of 40 so-called problematic neighborhoods. Physical, social, and economic issues needed to be addressed in these communities. The idea behind the list was that over a ten-year period, these 40 neighborhoods, two of which were in Groningen, would see significant improvements in employment, safety, integration, and education. Despite the minister's resignation announcement, the Korrewegwijk remained on the cabinet's radar, and with success. In the last fifteen years, a lot has changed in the neighborhoods. As stated by Leidelmeijer et al., the community center has been given a prominent role, facilities have been expanded, and as a result, the neighborhoods' quality of life has improved (2015). The 'Het Floreshuis' community center, where this research was conducted, is located in the 'Korrewegwijk' neighborhood (Figure 1). Korrewegwijk was one of the "problematic" neighborhoods that required extra attention.



Figure 1 Floreshuis and Immediate Vicinity (Copyright © 2020 Mooie Wijken, n.d.)

### 2.3.1 Social Economic Status Groningen

Figure 2 compares the socioeconomic status of Groningen, GGD Groningen, and the Netherlands to the Dutch average between 1998 and 2010. Socioeconomic status (SES) is a person's position on the social ladder, as well as the prestige and prestige that comes with it. Some people are at the bottom, while others are at the top of the social ladder. This is known

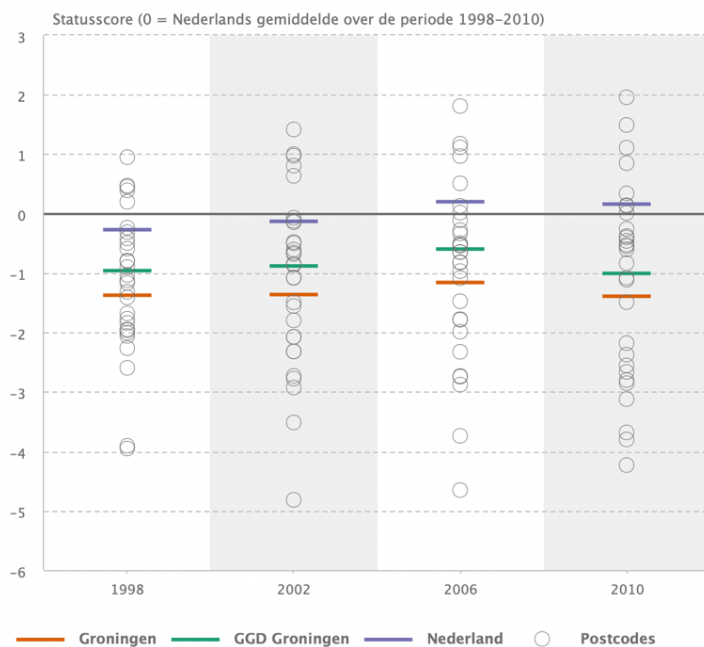
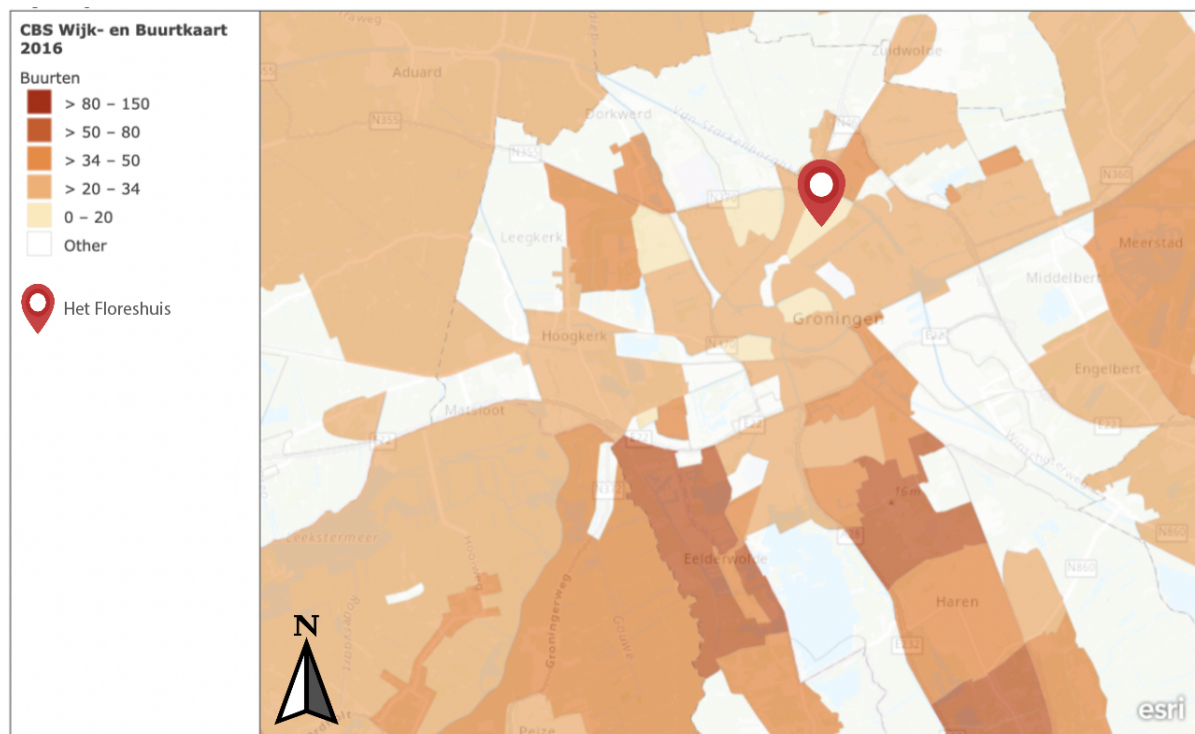


Figure 2 Development SES Groningen, GGD Groningen and the Netherlands 1998-2010 (© Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, n.d.)

as social segregation or social inequality. This inequality arises as a result of people's unequal distribution of knowledge, labor, and property. The level of education, occupational status, and income are all important indicators of socioeconomic status. The graph, depicted by the SCP (Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau) shows a socioeconomic status metric (Knol, 1998). The Dutch average was set at zero from 1998 to 2010. A positive or negative number indicates that one's social status is higher or lower than the overall Dutch average. As shown in this graph, the SES in Groningen is significantly lower than the national average.





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Figure 3 Average Annual Household income per neighborhood in Groningen 2016

To give an illustration of what the research area its financial status is a map has been made. Figure 3 depicts the disparity in household incomes and how they are lower than in adjacent neighborhoods. To calculate the annual average household income, multiply all values by 1.000. As a result, the average household income in the research area reached a maximum of 20.000 euros per year in 2016.

## 2.4 Neukölln and Mitte

Following the unification of West- and East Berlin, Berlin was portrayed as the archetypal European city, with a homogeneous fabric and socially mixed neighbourhoods (Mayer, 2013). Years after the fall of the Wall, the city is no longer divided by a "death strip," but new, more and less visible boundary lines have emerged, establishing previously unknown socio-spatial patterns of polarization. The fall of the wall resulted in an extreme decline in job opportunities and an erosion of the city's economic base, which has yet to be overcome, and led to the high base of unemployment and low level of income that exists today. This unemployment is a result of about 2.5 million workers losing their jobs in the industrial sector. From 1990 to 1991, East German industry reduced work hours (Kurzarbeit) for 900,000 employees. Unemployment surpassed a million after many hundreds of thousands had already moved West, and after 1992, early retirement at the age of 55 became available to approximately 800,000 people. Job retraining would employ an additional 400,000 people, resulting in massive underemployment (Maier, 2012). As a result, Berlin is until today not only the German city with the highest unemployment but is also on a European scale the only capital whose GDP (Gross Domestic Product) lies below the national average. This is especially true in neighborhoods that were once part of East Berlin. According to Heider (2019) the impact of ongoing demographic change is felt most strongly in Germany's former

socialist regions. Leaving a large number of men and elderly people behind The number of people with low incomes is highest in the 'bezirken,' or English neighborhoods, Mitte and Neukölln, according to the Amt für Statistik (2018). Explaining the thesis's fascination with these particular neighborhoods. Figure 4 depicts a map that shows how prevalent relatively low-income households are in Berlin's districts. Because there was no similar mapping data available for Berlin, this data differs slightly from the map that depicts the financial situation in Groningen. It does, however, show that the darker orange spots become more prominent as you move to the right side of the map. Which could be explained by the years-long division of West- and East Berlin.



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Figure 4 Household incomes with Yearly Net Income of less than €25.000 in 2021

A study from the Senate department for Urban Development, Building and Housing on the social development of Berlin districts after reunification conducted on behalf of the Berlin Senate in 1996, revealed social segregation and serious social issues, particularly in certain areas of Berlin. These socially disadvantaged areas were discovered to have demonstrable neglect of public areas, roads, squares, and green spaces, as well as social infrastructural deficits. Families who could afford to relocate from these areas did so by the time their children started primary school. As a result of this situation, the Berlin Senate implemented a strategy to support social urban development in the affected neighborhoods. The Berlin Neighborhood Management is at the heart of this strategy. Since 1999, both Mitte and Neukölln have been part of the Berlin Neighborhood Management program. The program's goal is to put residents "on the map." Residents are referred to as "local experts" because they have the most accurate picture of the situation on the ground, knowing the problems and potential of their neighborhood better than anyone else. It also aims to improve networking and communication among local residents as well as with other stakeholders such as local governments, community centers, religious organizations, and cultural organizations.

Unemployment, reliance on government assistance, and issues arising from a lack of social and ethnic integration have an impact on people's daily lives and future prospects in those areas (Be Berlin, 2010). Both neighborhoods are depicted in figures 5 and 6.



Figure 5 Gemeinschaftshaus in Gropiusstadt (© Hella Wittenberg)



Figure 6 Kreativhaus in Mitte (© Maurice Ressel)

## 2.5 Conceptual Model

The relations between the dimensions from the theoretical framework and the different concepts have been visualized in Figure 7.

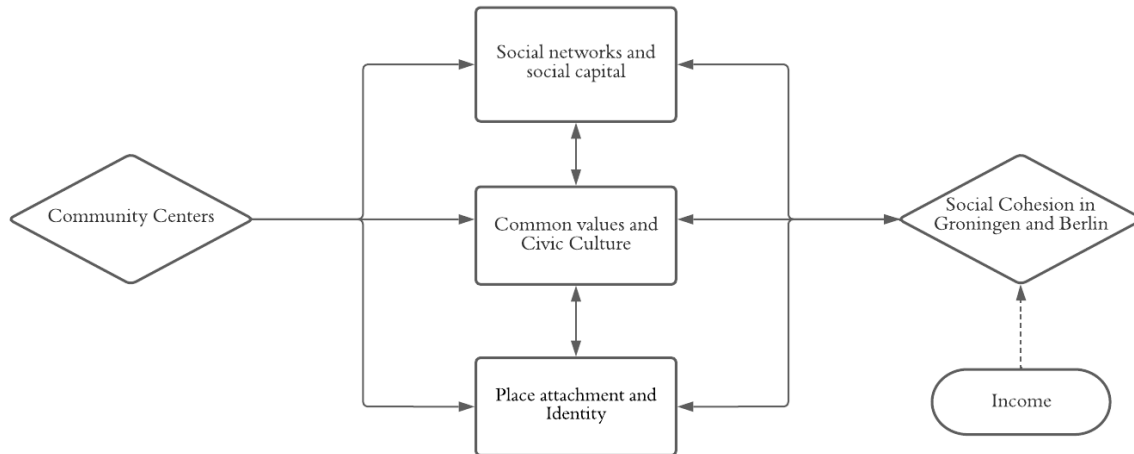


Figure 7 Conceptual Model based on Theoretic Framework

This thesis assumes that social cohesion within a neighborhood can be attained, or at least improved, if it meets the requirements of the five, or in this case three, dimensions of social cohesion. Which is now included in the conceptual model. Many policy plans for the investigated neighborhoods have been developed to improve social cohesion through the use or implementation of community centers, which should have a positive impact on the three dimensions and therefore on social cohesion. The arrows between the different concepts present a causal relation. Therefore, the aspect of income cannot be ignored and is therefore implemented as an indirect influence. In this research these outcomes will be measured against the theoretical framework and try to answer the question; *“How do community centres in Groningen and Berlin contribute to social cohesion within the neighborhood?”*

## 2.6 Hypothesis

When considering the three criteria proposed by Kearns and Forrest (2000), much has already been done to improve the popularity of community centers. The Korrewegwijk is no longer regarded as one of Groningen's more problematic neighbourhoods. Mitte and Neukölln demonstrate comparable initiatives proposed by the policy documents that can be found on for example on the website of the Senate department for Urban Development. These community centres are expected to accomplish much more through enhancing social networks and social capital, common values and civic culture, and place attachment and identity. It is expected that the neighbourhoods that have a lower SES, have more room to improve their role in contributing to social cohesion based on the theoretical framework. Whether this is accurate, the interviews and surveys conducted in accordance with the criteria established by Kearns and Forrest (2000) will attempt to reveal what has already been done and what could be improved.

### 3. Methodology and Data Collection

#### 3.1 Methods

To answer the research question: “*How do community centres in Groningen and Berlin contribute to social cohesion within the neighborhood?*”, a qualitative research design has been used. The data for this research will be gathered through semi-structured in depth interviews which will be held amongst stakeholders within the community centers targeting volunteers, employees and neighborhood residents. The reason for this approach is that semi-structured in-depth interviews allow for more information about personal experiences, allowing for deeper digging, and perceptions from neighborhood residents and employees/volunteers can be compared to each other, potentially leading to a better answer to the research question. Interviews with Berlin neighborhood residents were not possible due to time constraints. Therefore, a small survey was conducted to gauge neighborhood residents' feelings. Due to the small number of respondents, a quantitative study was not possible. Questions have been structured based on the criteria from Kearns and Forrest (2000) that have been elaborated upon in the theoretical framework. The questions in these interviews will be primarily semi-structured and open, which provides the participants with the opportunity to answer the questions to the fullest without leaving information out. Various questions will be asked during these interviews to assess how participants perceive their contributions, what their intentions are, what the positive effects were, and what could be done differently next time. The questions that will be raised during the interviews follow the interview guide which can be found in appendix 2. In Groningen, the primary data required to answer the research question has been retrieved through Snowball Sampling. This method will be used because it is non-probabilistic, and the initially chosen people will be used as informants to locate other participants who have the necessary characteristics to be eligible for the sample (Valentine, 2005). Advantages from this research approach are that it allows studies to take place when there is a small dataset available and it may help discover characteristics you were not aware existed. However, the disadvantage should not be ignored, which is that it is usually impossible to determine sampling error or make inferences about the population. Five interviews have taken place in Groningen at the ‘Floreshuis’. Table 1 provides an overview of the respondents.

*Table 1 Respondent overview Groningen and Berlin*

<i>Name in thesis</i>	<i>Function</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Location</i>
<i>Respondent 1 (R-1)</i>	Location Manager	22/4/2022	Het Floreshuis Groningen
<i>Respondent 2 (R-2)</i>	Assistant Administrator	22/4/2022	Het Floreshuis Groningen
<i>Respondent 3 (R-3)</i>	Volunteer	22/4/2022	Het Floreshuis Groningen
<i>Respondent 4 (R-4)</i>	Volunteer	22/4/2022	Het Floreshuis Groningen
<i>Respondent 5 (R-5)</i>	Neighborhood Resident	22/4/2022	Het Floreshuis Groningen
<i>Respondent 6 (R-6)</i>	District Coordination	2/5/2022	Kreativhaus Mitte
<i>Respondent 7 (R-7)</i>	Employee	4/5/2022	STZ Gropiusstadt Neukölln

## 3.2 STOURIE

Some of this research could be done on-site in Berlin. The STOURIE (Sustainable Transformation Of Urban Regions In Europe) program, which included a fieldwork week in Berlin, made this possible. STOURIE is a collaboration between the Faculty of Spatial Sciences in Groningen and Humboldt University in Berlin, Germany, Politecnico di Milano in Italy, and Stockholm University in Sweden. Since this fieldwork has been done in groups with participants who needed information for their own research, questions about climate change adaptation and sufficiency initiatives were also discussed during these two interviews and the surveys. These questions can be ignored for the aim of research. Table 1 shows how the interviewees in Berlin will be referred to. It should be noted that because the interviews were conducted in German by fellow group members, the coding for this interview was done based on the summary provided by the other group members. This may have an impact on the accuracy of the findings in this study.

## 3.3 Ethical Considerations

Before starting off with the interviews it is made sure that the participant was comfortable with the fact that the interview is being recorded. The interviews have been held in an informal setting and through a one on one interview. The interviews were audio recorded in order for them to be transcribed later. The transcripts were transcribed and coded with the help of the deductive coding tree (Thomas, 2003). To answer the three sub-questions, a theory-driven (deductive) code-tree has been developed based on the previously described theoretical framework. This code-tree can be found in Appendix 1. One of the interviewees initially did not want to be recorded. However, because the answers are relevant, they are included in the results and conclusions. It was verbally agreed upon by the interviewee to take notes.

# 4. Findings

Numerous initiatives aimed at improving neighborhood social cohesion have been demonstrated in all three research areas. Peterson (2015) and Hickman (2012) found that community centers can influence neighborhood social cohesion by providing a venue for social interaction and networking. This, along with the three dimensions proposed by Kearns and Forrest (2000), were tested in three distinct neighborhoods with three different community centers.

## 4.1 Groningen

### 4.1.1 Services and Activities

To the question what kind of activities are organized at the Floreshuis a diverse range of activities has been mentioned by the interviewees. From WhatsApp classes for elderly people to cooking with students from the University of Applied Sciences in Groningen. *“One of the more popular services provided by the community center is the tax office, where residents can file their tax returns and receive advice.”* R-2 Overall the employees and volunteers are happy with the diverse range of activities organized by the community center. However, it became clear that the community center is no longer focusing on organizing too many

activities themselves, but rather on encouraging neighborhood residents to start their own initiatives. This has been done to put the responsibility in the hands of the neighborhood residents themselves and learn what it is like to be at the other side of the table.

*“We used to organize and advertise everything, but it was like “jagen en schieten met hagel” to see who you hit and if anyone came. That has been reversed. We are now much more of a facilitating party, looking for people in the neighborhood who want something and then supporting them and making things happen.” R-1.*

What has become clear is that the people that make use of the activities and services provided by the community center are usually low on the social participation ladder. *“They are often lonely and isolated, but they want to do something, so they come here and find safety, entitlement, and the opportunity to develop themselves, and suddenly you matter and your life has meaning again” R-1.* For example, R-2, who did not wish to be recorded, stated that when he first walked into the community center a couple of years ago, he was socially isolated; however, he claims to have grown socially and learned how to listen to others.

Respondents did struggle to provide a specific answer to the question of what is currently lacking in the community center its offerings. Despite offering a variety of activities, the community center struggles to attract more neighborhood residents. According to R-4, the former building attracted more walk-ins. Many previously scheduled activities were also canceled in order to accommodate the new approach following the building's renewal. R-1 and R-4 both mentioned a lack of collaboration among other neighborhood organizations, as well as the municipality's role in this.

*“What is frequently lacking is collaboration among other neighborhood organizations, so a kind of network organization that is part of different neighborhood organizations, but also, for example, the municipality, where you all look at what is actually happening on an equal level, what is needed, and where it works. How can we respond to the situation in that neighborhood?” R-1*

#### *4.1.2 Dimensions of Social Cohesion*

While conducting the interviews at ‘Het Floreshuis’, promoting collaboration among neighborhood residents for example by providing them with space for organization has appeared to be a reoccurring theme. They *“make the necessary connections and ensure that someone can be relied on” R-2.* As a result, people learn about responsibility and how to deal with various situations and people, as well as providing neighborhood residents with a *sense of belonging* to a project, being a *collective affair*, and teaching neighborhood residents about *tolerance* and *interdependence*. Which not only contributes to Place Attachment and Identity, but also to Common Values and Civic Culture. This is also supported by the number of volunteers who work at the community center, as well as the morals displayed on the wall, which is used as general *moralties* among the neighborhood residents.

Concerning *Place Attachment and Identity*, an interesting finding is that the majority of the interviewees mentioned missing the old community center, which had been completely rebuilt in 2016. This new building is more commercialized in terms of attracting not only neighborhood residents, but also provide room for meetings to take place for non-neighborhood residents. The neighborhood residents themselves do not prefer the new atmosphere to that of the previous building. However, those who used the previous building

continue to visit the new building because of the former connections that have been made and the feeling of safety and trust which was also stated by R-5 who has been living in the neighborhood for over 30 years.

*“I know a few elderly people from the old Floreshuis, but the new structure is much more commercial. The old building had a slightly different appearance” R-4.*

There was some tension when a question about the municipality was raised. Certain activities are subsidized by the municipality. R-2 mentioned how the community center organizes evenings where residents can vote for their favorite activity and decide where the majority of the municipality's subsidies should go. However, it appears that the municipality expects different things from the community centers than the community centers wish to intend themselves, without knowing the structure of the community center in question.

## 4.2 Neukölln and Mitte

### 4.2.1 Services and Activities

The Kreativhaus Berlin is a cultural and meeting place that provides social and cultural opportunities for children, youth, adults, and seniors. It is Berlin's first theater pedagogical center, multi-generational house, Fischerinsel family center, district center and district coordination for the region Regierungsviertel/Alexanderplatz. Its mission is to promote art and culture, as well as education and upbringing through creative play and theater. Individual strengths of each individual are to be discovered, developed, and preserved through various forms of creative interaction, and mutual acceptance is to be promoted. Adding to that, initiatives for fugitives from Ukraine are offered which are promoting civic engagement. They do this in collaboration with the local fugitive organization.

*“Right now, welcoming culture is a hot topic at the community center. Consider holiday, children, youth, and family programs for Ukraine refugees” R-6.*

In Gropiusstadt, during the interview with the STZ employee, it became clear that they have been focusing on the bigger initiatives. Self-help, accompanying or supporting family members and the care for the neighborhood. Now they want to focus more on including migrants and young people. They want to ask neighborhood residents: *“What do you envision it to be? What do you require for that? How do we manage that?” Ideally, it will remain a “child” of the person who brought it in, which is what we prefer*” R-7, Which is comparable to the approach in Groningen.

Despite their efforts, in Gropiusstadt not all social institutions are interested in cooperating and there is even some kind of competition going on between those social institutes. For example, *“the kindergarten does not want them to provide activities for children because they believe it is their job”* R-7. So, to answer the question of what kinds of activities they miss out on, it is mostly due to a lack of collaboration with other social institutes. Mitte on the other hand mentions all the other social institutes they collaborate with, as stated before. Which contribute to the domain of *Common Values and Civic Culture*, since it contributes to the *Interdependence* between the different social institutes, and therefore the *Interdependence* between neighborhood residents.



#### 4.2.2 Dimensions of Social Cohesion

The Kreativhaus serves as both a community and a family center. The primary function of the community center, as with the Floreshuis, is neighborhood coordination. That is, acting as a bridge between active residents. In addition, R-6 stated that it “*serves as a link between authorities such as the municipality and boroughs*”. This is intriguing because it has the potential to contribute to the domain of *Common Values and Civic Culture*, and in particular to *Political Attitudes*, which appears to be lacking in both Groningen and Neukölln community centers.

Because of its *Civic Engagement*, another dimension that appears to be covered in Mitte rather than Groningen and Neukölln is the dimension of *Social Networks and Social Capital*. Integrating welcoming fugitives into community center practices could contribute to this domain because it assists fugitives in connecting to their new environment, which in turn contributes to the dimensions of *Place Attachment and Identity*. Another interesting discovery as a result of the other group members' questions is that at the Kreativhaus, neighborhood residents can get up to 500 euros for (sustainable) initiatives. This contributes to a better living environment and could thus be viewed as a *Civic Engagement* initiative. Also, it could contribute to the motivation for undertaking *Collective Affairs*, and in its turn to the domain of *Common Values and Civic Culture*.

*“There is a district fund, which means that each of us as district coordinators has €5000 and can use it to support citizen campaigns with up to €500. To do so, they must submit an application to the district fund, which is then reviewed by an advisory board. There are excellent resources, and you can now apply up to 16.05. and submit it to the BA, where you can receive up to €3,500 for volunteer work, but also for nature conservation, such as park planting” R-6.*

#### 4.2.3 Survey Results

As previously stated, a small survey has been conducted in both Neukölln and Mitte. The results are based on absolute numbers because there were insufficient responses to conduct statistical tests. Most of the results are not too interesting for this specific research, however, there is a clear difference in the respondents' attitudes towards community centers. Which is an interesting finding. The amount of interest among residents in Mitte is significantly higher than the amount of interest in Neukölln. In Neukölln, only one in four respondents expressed an interest in participating in the community center its activities and/or services, whereas in Mitte, it appeared to be three out of four respondents. This could be due to Gropiusstadt its lack of a fixed community center. As a result, various attitudes could emerge.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1 Social Networks and Social Capital

This dimension is divided into two sub-categories. *Civic Engagement* and *Moral Resources*. All three community centers have demonstrated initiatives that strive for moral resource similarity. Nothing was said about how Berlin's community centers strive for comparable morals. However, because both the Kreativhaus and the Floreshuis serve as bridges, encouraging neighborhood residents to collaborate, there may be some overlap in Moral Resources. This is not the case in Gropiusstadt, and it is possible that there is insufficient initiative to promote it.

The Kreativhaus seems to be the only researched community center that focusses on *Civic Engagement*. As discussed in the findings, the Kreativhaus has several initiatives to promote this sub-categories. The Floreshuis and the community center in Gropiusstadt on the other hand have not mentioned any activities promoting *Civic Engagement*.

### 5.2 Common Values and Civic Culture

The dimension of *Common Values and Civic Culture* has been divided into four sub-categories. Being *Collective Affairs*, *Political Attitudes*, *Interdependence* and *Tolerance*. It could be concluded that the three community centres have several activities and/or services which contribute to this dimension. They do, however, differ greatly from one another. There are some collective affairs in Gropiusstadt, but they are very limited. For example, a self-help group was formed by neighbourhood residents once, but new initiatives appear to be lacking. To encourage this, the Kreativhaus has launched an initiative to subsidize activities organized by neighbourhood residents. Collaboration between other social institutes in Groningen appears to exist, but could be improved. Collaboration with other Gropiusstadt social institutes is insufficient and could be greatly improved. This could be related to the interdependence of the organizations and the residents of the neighbourhood.

The sub-categories which seems to be covered in only one of the community centres is the on *Political Attitudes*. The Kreativhaus is the only community centre having a positive collaboration with the municipality and boroughs. Both the Floreshuis and the community centre in Gropiusstadt were sceptical of the collaboration. The Floreshuis has the impression that the municipality tends to view the community centre from a helicopter perspective, whereas the community centre in Gropiusstadt has the impression that communication is lacking.

### 5.3 Place Attachment and Identity

The final dimension has been divided into two sub-categories. Being a *Notion of Belonging* and *Place Attachment*. For the interviews done in Berlin it was not possible to derive the feelings of neighbourhood residents towards their *Notion of Belonging* and their notion on *Place Attachment*. However, the Kreativhaus has mentioned wanting to involve Ukrainian fugitives which could contribute to both of the sub-categories. In Groningen on the other hand it also has not been stated that the community centre wants to be a place where people feel safe and where they can develop themselves. Some of the interviewees have been around for years and refer to how attached they have become to not only the community centre but

also to the neighbourhood. Another initiative that could be linked to a Notion of Belonging is the way both the Kreativhaus and the Floreshuis serve as a platform for residents to launch their own initiatives. Being a part of an organizing body may make residents of the neighbourhood feel like they are a part of something.

## 6. Conclusions

### 6.1 Comparisons

In this study, the main research question was: "*How do community centres in Groningen and Berlin contribute to social cohesion within the neighborhood?*". It was formulated because of the research gap on how community centers actually have an influence on the social cohesion within the neighborhood. It was found that the three domains of *Social Networks and Social Capital, Place Attachment and Identity and Common Values* and *Civic Culture* are important factors of social cohesion and therefore it is important for community centers to contribute to these three dimensions. It should be noted that all three dimensions have many overlapping factors and may have a (positive) effect on each other. The three community centers studied in this thesis demonstrate initiatives that have a positive impact on social cohesion in the neighborhood. However, there is still much that can be done to expand their role in this.

For this research, three neighbourhoods have been investigated. Other community centres in other countries, on the other hand, could implement the same framework and learn from community centres that cover a larger portion of the framework. The Kreativhaus, for example, has demonstrated *Civic Engagement* initiatives that can serve as a model for the other two community centres under consideration. But also to community centres in other cities. Weak ties have been shown to outnumber strong ties in terms of providing a sense of identity, security, and belonging (Hirvonen and Lilius, 2019), and thus should be included in the programming of the other two community centres as well.

While conducting this research, the municipality of Groningen presented its new coalition agreement. It was suggested that the emphasis on community centres and their role in social cohesion be reconsidered. Taking this theoretical framework into consideration, much can be done to improve the impact that community centres can have on social cohesion within the neighbourhood (Gemeente Groningen, 2022).

### 6.2 Recommendations

The case study method was a good fit for answering the research question. However, because the findings are based on a small number of cases, it is important to note their generalization. As a result, the research conducted in Berlin appeared to be slightly different from the research conducted in Groningen, which may have had an indirect impact on the results.

It was discovered while conducting this research that collaboration with municipalities and boroughs could significantly contribute to the role of community centres on social cohesion. The more effectively the authorities and community centre collaborate, the more aspects of Kearns and Forrest's (2000) framework can be addressed. At least, according to these three community centres. There is still much that could be done to improve social cohesion in the neighbourhood, particularly in Gropiusstad. In the first place, there is no fixed community

centre, and the social institutions in the neighbourhood are not particularly eager to collaborate with one another.

#### 6.2.1 Reflection on the research process

Looking back on this study, its significance has gradually grown. The theoretical framework served as an effective guide for determining the extent to which the community center influences social cohesion in the neighborhood. Because of the snowball sampling method used in Groningen, recruiting respondents was relatively easy. The municipality, on the other hand, did not respond to any of my emails, which would have been a valuable addition to this research. This could be due to the newly presented coalition plan, and therefore the subject's sensitivity. The respondents were eager to help and tell me who I should interview next. The interviews conducted in Berlin, on the other hand, were conducted in German by a native German speaker.

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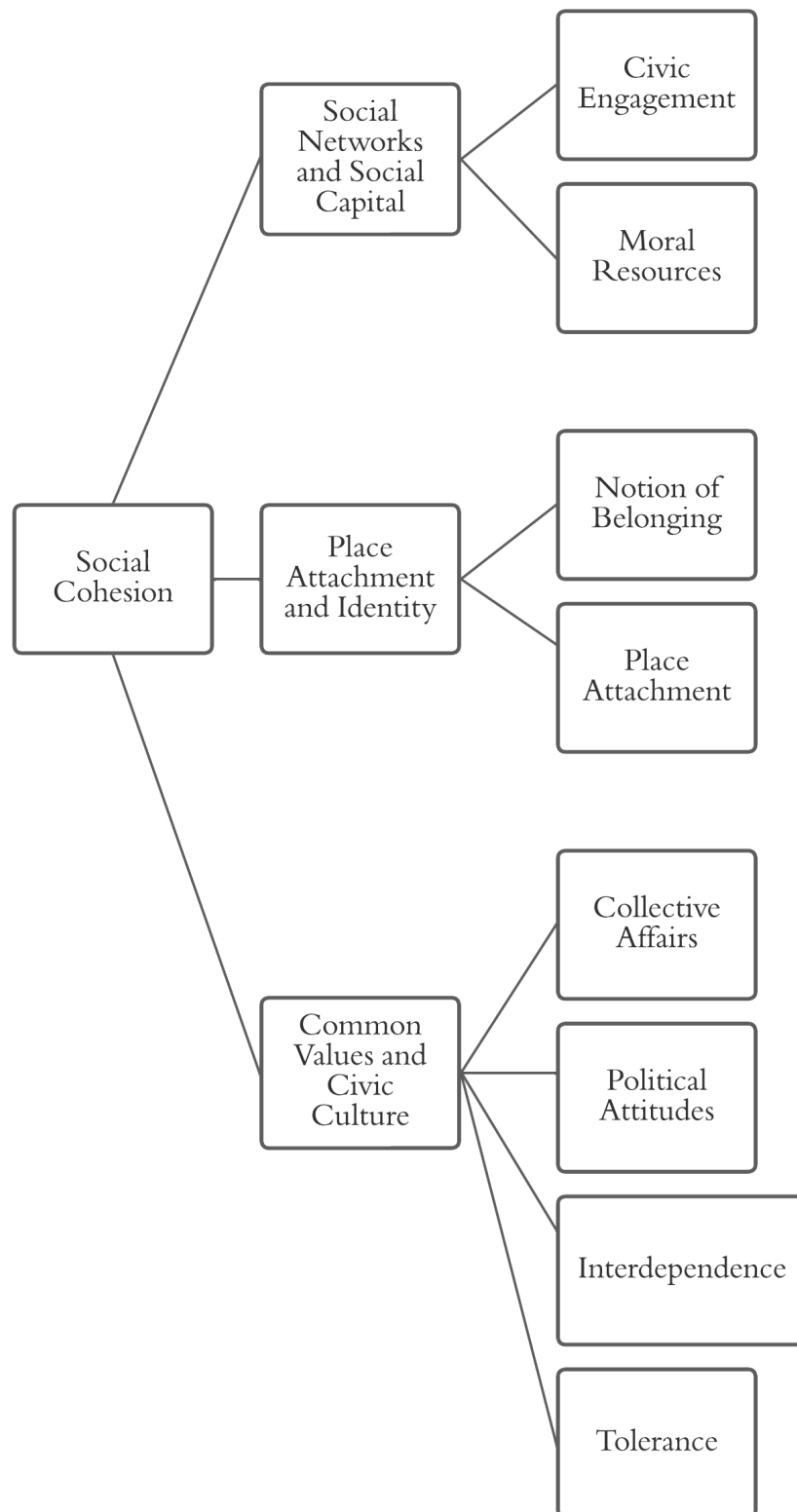


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## 8. Appendices

### Appendix 1: Deductive Coding-tree based on Kearns and Forrest (2000)



## Appendix 2: Interview Guide

### Employees/volunteers

#### *Introductie*

Allereerst nogmaals bedankt dat u wilt meewerken aan mijn onderzoek door middel van dit interview. Dit onderzoek voer ik uit voor mijn bachelor scriptie wat onderdeel is van mijn studie Spatial Planning and Design aan de Rijksuniversiteit Groningen. In dit onderzoek kijk ik naar de invloeden van wijkcentra op de sociale cohesie in Groningen, hoe de initiatieven van de wijkcentra worden opgevat door verschillende perspectieven en wat de wijkcentra nog meer zouden kunnen betekenen voor de sociale duurzaamheid van het onderzoeksgebied. Met de interviews wil ik het perspectief op deze kwesties vanuit de lokale gemeenschap goed in beeld brengen.

Zoals u in het toestemmingsformulier heeft gelezen zullen de gegevens uit dit interview volledig anoniem verwerkt worden, zal het interview opgenomen worden zodat deze achteraf geanalyseerd kan worden en kunt u op elk gewenst moment stoppen met dit interview of weigeren antwoord te geven.

Heeft u voor nu nog vragen over het formulier of over het interview?

START OPNAME

<b>Interview question</b>	<b>Related to subquestion</b>
Hoe ziet een dag eruit als medewerker/vrijwilliger van dit wijkcentrum?	
Hoe bent u terecht gekomen bij dit wijkcentrum?	
Wat voor activiteiten worden hier doorgaans georganiseerd?	1
Welke diensten worden aangeboden door het wijkcentrum? Wordt hier veel gebruik van gemaakt?	1
Zijn er specifieke activiteiten en/of diensten die u extra zijn bijgebleven? Zo ja, waarom?	1
Liggen er plannen op tafel door de initiatieven van de gemeente? a. Wat voor activiteiten en diensten moet ik dan aan denken? b. Wat vindt u van deze plannen?	1
Heeft u het idee dat er iets mist qua activiteiten en diensten?	1
Hoe zou een perfecte activiteit eruitzien volgens u? a. Hoe zit dat met de diensten?	1
Wie maken er gebruik van jullie activiteiten en diensten?	2
Bent u tevreden met de opkomst bij de voorheen genoemde activiteiten?	2
Denkt u dat de activiteiten en diensten die worden aangeboden door het buurcentrum bijdragen aan de sociale cohesie in de buurt? Op wat voor manier?	2
Heeft u het idee dat er vriendschappen zijn ontstaan onder de mensen die deelnemen aan de activiteiten/diensten die worden aangeboden door het wijkcentrum?	2
Op wat voor manier wordt de samenwerking onder de lokale bevolking gestimuleerd? Kunt u een voorbeeld noemen van een initiatief die de	2

deelnemers samen hebben ondernomen? Zo ja, hoe verliep deze samenwerking?	
Op wat voor manieren houdt het wijkcentrum zich bezig met het maatschappelijke plaatje?	2
Zorgt het wijkcentrum er voor dat de lokale bevolking een rol heeft in beleidsprocessen? Zo ja, op wat voor manier?	2
Wat voor soort initiatieven zijn er om netwerken en wederkerigheid te ondersteunen? Denk hier bijvoorbeeld aan beloningen.	2
Hoe streeft het buurthuis naar een ethos dat bewoners erkennen en accepteren, zonder dat dit de tolerantie naar elkaar beïnvloedt?	2
Op welke manieren wordt vertrouwen tussen bijvoorbeeld verschillende sociale groepen bevorderd? a. En hoe zit dat met het stimuleren van een gevoel van veiligheid?	2
Op wat voor manier wordt er nu geprobeerd een zo breed mogelijk publiek aan te trekken en hoe zou het wijkcentrum een breder publiek kunnen aantrekken? Zou u dit kunnen toelichten?	3
Is er een vraag die ik niet heb gesteld maar wat u wel graag wat over zou willen vertellen?	
Wie zou ik volgens u moeten benaderen om meer bruikbare informatie te krijgen over dit onderwerp?	

## Neighbourhood residents

### *Introductie*

Allereerst nogmaals bedankt dat u wilt meewerken aan mijn onderzoek door middel van dit interview. Dit onderzoek voer ik uit voor mijn bachelor scriptie wat onderdeel is van mijn studie Spatial Planning and Design aan de Rijksuniversiteit Groningen. In dit onderzoek kijk ik naar de invloeden van wijkcentra op de sociale cohesie in Groningen, hoe de initiatieven van de wijkcentra worden opgevat door verschillende perspectieven en wat de wijkcentra nog meer zouden kunnen betekenen voor de sociale duurzaamheid van het onderzoeksgebied. Met de interviews wil ik het perspectief op deze kwesties vanuit de lokale gemeenschap goed in beeld brengen.

Zoals u in het toestemmingsformulier heeft gelezen zullen de gegevens uit dit interview volledig anoniem verwerkt worden, zal het interview opgenomen worden zodat deze achteraf geanalyseerd kan worden en kunt u op elk gewenst moment stoppen met dit interview of weigeren antwoord te geven.

Heeft u voor nu nog vragen over het formulier of over het interview?

START OPNAME

<b>Interview question</b>	<b>Related to subquestion</b>
Bent u regelmatig te vinden bij dit wijkcentrum? Hoe vaak per week of per maand moet ik aan denken?	
Wat is de reden dat u gebruik maakt van de activiteiten en/of diensten die worden aangeboden door het wijkcentrum? a. Bent u altijd op de hoogte van de activiteiten/diensten die worden aangeboden?	
Zijn er specifieke activiteiten en/of diensten die u extra zijn bijgebleven? Zo ja, waarom?	1
Heeft u het idee dat er iets mist qua activiteiten en diensten ?	1
Hoe zou een perfecte activiteit eruitzien volgens u? a. Hoe zit dat met de diensten?	1
Heeft u ook vriendschappen en/of goede kennissen overgehouden door deel te nemen aan de activiteiten/diensten die worden aangeboden door het wijkcentrum?	2
Kunt u een voorbeeld noemen van een initiatief die u, met dank aan het wijkcentrum, samen met andere buurtbewoners heeft ondernomen?	2
Voelt u zich meer verbonden met uw omgeving door deel te nemen aan activiteiten en diensten aangeboden door dit wijkcentrum? Zo ja, licht dit toe. a. Heeft dit invloed op uw gevoel van veiligheid hier in de buurt? b. Heeft u het idee dat u en uw burens sneller voor elkaar klaar zouden staan?	2
Denkt u dat het wijkcentrum invloed uitoefent op de verstandshoudingen/tolerantie in uw wijk? Zo ja, op wat voor manier merkt u dat?	2
Denkt u dat de activiteiten en diensten die worden aangeboden door het buurcentrum bijdragen aan de sociale cohesie in de buurt? Op wat voor manier?	2

Houdt u zich door deel te nemen aan de activiteiten en/of diensten georganiseerd door het wijkcentrum meer bezig met maatschappelijke belangen? Zo ja, licht dit toe.	2
Bent u van mening dat het wijkcentrum voldoende gebruik maakt van hun positie in deze gemeenschap? Licht dit toe.	2
Zou u het een fijn idee vinden als het wijkcentrum een breder publiek zou aantrekken? Zo ja, waarom? a. Hoe denkt u dat dit zou moeten worden aangepakt?	3
Is er een vraag die ik niet heb gesteld maar wat u wel graag wat over zou willen vertellen?	
Wie zou ik volgens u moeten benaderen om meer bruikbare informatie te krijgen over dit onderwerp?	