



Building Citizenship, a project to enhance social capital among immigrant women in Amsterdam

Abstract: In this paper the effects of a social work project in Amsterdam's city district the Baarsjes are evaluated. We followed forty women for four years, all except one were of immigrant origin and 75% had a Muslim background and most of them were unemployed. We tried to determine whether or not this project that was meant to stimulate their participation in society had an effect on social capital and self sufficiency in Dutch society. The results show that there are no clear lasting measurable positive effects. Actually the pressure that was exerted on the women had a negative effect on their trust in Dutch society.

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Content

1. Introduction

2. The project 'Meedoen, Bouwen aan Burgerschap' (Participating, Building on Citizenship), background and theoretical concepts

3. Method and characteristics of the respondents

3.1 Design of the study

3.2 Content of the questionnaire

3.3 Contact with respondents

3.4 Characteristics of respondents compared to the women in the project

3.5 Health situation of respondents

4. Results

4.1 Work, education and finances (economic terrain)

4.2 Ability to cope: children, school and baby sitters

4.3 Ability to cope: home and institutions

4.4 Social contacts

4.5 Participation in the cultural and political field

4.6 Other effects

5. Conclusion

5.1 Limitations

5.2 Ability to cope and social capital

5.3 Long term effects, self confidence and perspectives

5.4 And finally a short comparison with other initiatives

References

1. Introduction

In 2005 the Amsterdam City District the Baarsjes introduced a project that was targeted at stimulating 155 immigrant women, who were living on welfare, to participate more in society. Participation means, in this context: joining Dutch lessons, getting into a full educational track, working as a volunteer or in a paid job. In 2005 and 2006 155 women joined the project, that was entitled 'Meedoen, Bouwen aan Burgerschap' (Participating, Building on Citizenship); it is executed and coordinated by an independent agency. What is particular about this project is that the women who participated were considered the most difficult category of the welfare institution, because their limited Dutch language skills or low educational level, for instance. What is notable is that considerable pressure was also exercised to keep the women involved. The women are busy at least one morning or afternoon per week, and up to five mornings, for some of them. We followed about 40 women over three years to investigate whether or not their self-sufficiency and ability to cope independently in society would improve and whether their isolation would diminish. In October 2005 we started gathering the names, addresses and telephone numbers of the women in the project to be able to interview them in the last quarter of 2005 and the first quarter of 2006. One year later, between January and May 2007, the same women were interviewed for a second time and again in the spring of 2008, after the project ended.

The central question of this research is: what is the long-term effect of this project on the participation and personal development of the women. We will study the differences and developments between the three sets of interviews, especially between the initial interviews and the third set of interviews. In section 2 we will first describe a number of assumptions of the project and some central concepts that were used in the study. In the next section we describe the interviewees, and how the characteristics of respondents relate to the total number of participants in the project and the course of the interview process. In section 4 we continue with the results in a number of fields, and in section 5 we formulate a general conclusion on the project.

2. Initiatives to encourage immigrant women, the project 'Meedoen', and the concepts 'self-sufficiency' and 'social capital'

The project of this study 'Meedoen, Bouwen aan Burgerschap' (Participating and Building Citizenship) fits in three recent trends that were visible in social policy in the Netherlands over the past decade. Firstly projects directed at the neighbourhood level have gained popularity. An overview of recent projects in neighbourhoods in the Netherlands can be found in the report by Hazeu, Boonstra & Jager-Vreugdenhill (2005). Gruijter, Boonstra, Pels & Distelbrink (2007: 6) describe how this neighbourhood approach is central in vulnerable areas, where the ongoing pressures of new immigration, a high number of people with limited opportunities and the crumbling of social cohesion, cause a need to improve the living conditions. Local authorities, for instance the city district authorities in Amsterdam and Rotterdam, are the most important actors here, supported by subsidies from central municipal sources or national sources. We cannot give a complete overview here, but we will look at a few striking examples that have been researched, before we continue with the 'Meedoen-project' in De Baarsjes.

A second related policy development in this field was that the national 'Commission on the Participation of Women of Ethnic Minority groups' PaVEM (Commissie Participatie van Vrouwen uit Etnische Minderheidsgroepen) asked attention for the improvement of participation of immigrant women in society. PaVEM was established by the national government on 3 July 2003 and functioned until 1 July 2005, because research had shown that women from ethnic minority groups in the Netherlands were often in too isolated a position. Unemployed levels for immigrant women were higher than for Dutch women, and they were often missing in the 'Citizenship course' (inburgeringtrajecten)

or other activities as well. The women concerned have low educational levels, and their Dutch is limited or completely lacking, in some cases.

One of the targets of the PaVEM was to support local authorities in their attempts to involve these women more in society. The focus was on the exchange of knowledge, experience and ideas between larger municipals, because this is where most immigrant women live. Spearheads were, according to the Dutch Knowledge Institute for Cities NICIS, as follows:

- To improve the labour participation of women from ethnic minority groups;
- To remove bottlenecks for women from ethnic minority groups when learning the Dutch language.
- To support the local authorities in their dialogue with immigrants;
- To counter the tendency towards populism, imprecision and simplification in the public discussion;
- To compose a network of successful migrant women, who can be mobilised for participation projects (NICIS 2008¹).

A third development in recent policies is the increased attention for stimulating the unemployed. The Amsterdam authorities' spearheads are that all Amsterdammers should be able to participate, in any form, in the city, as much as possible (Boer, 2007). People on welfare, who have not worked for very long, and who may have ended up isolated, have less of a chance to find work. But social participation is also seen as a contribution in effort and energy to society. Amsterdam established the so-called 'activation places' ('activeringsplekken') at community centres, sport clubs, nursing homes, etc. The intention is to motivate welfare recipients, who would have to make a large leap to the labour market, to get out of their homes and become active in the community. Since the start of this policy in 2007, the district councils found 55 organisations and institutions supplying more than 5600 places. Those who receive benefit do not receive a salary, but only an extra allowance, depending on the work and travel expenses. Increasing sanctions are imposed on people who depend on benefits and fail to cooperate with this policy.

The three ingredients: the neighbourhood approach, attention for migrant women and the social activation of people on benefits, come together in projects in which the terminology of participation (Meedoen) is often used. For instance, in the case that Gruijter, Boonstra, Pels & Distelbrink (2007: 6) describe, entitled: "Migrant women participate" ("Allochtone women doen mee") in Rotterdam, it is explicitly stated that the unutilised potential of migrant women can be mobilised for use in their neighbourhoods. Integrated and active women have a positive effect on their children and can serve as an example and information point for newly arriving women. The expectation of these programs for women in neighbourhoods are high. Gruijter and colleagues conclude that, among other things, the neighbourhood approach suits immigrant women's ways of thinking, as well as the social environment of immigrant women with children and limited financial means. The activities are relatively easy to reach even for those who cannot stay away from home long because of child and household duties. Results also show that the women find it important to meet other women from the neighbourhood.

Marguerite van der Berg's (2007: 21) study, 'The Participation of Migrant Women,' based in the city district Delfshaven in Rotterdam, describes the way in which Moroccan women live and manage with little money, supported by their network of family in the neighbourhood. Because of the absence of the family in the Netherlands, social support is missing which they would automatically receive in Morocco. But even under these circumstances in the Netherlands, the family remains so important that friendships can only last when they are accepted by the family and fit in the family relations. Like in Amsterdam, the women in Rotterdam follow Dutch language courses and take part in project in which they establish contact in the neighbourhood. Van den Berg concludes that the women in her research

¹ http://www.kiemnet.nl/dossiers/socialecohesie/Arbeidsparticipatie/PaVEM-Pagina_1016.html

interpret the increasing demands and rules of institutions like the welfare office as attempts to control and discipline them, with the implicit goal to transform them into 'good citizens with Dutch norms and values'.

The functions of the 'Meedoen-project' in De Baarsjes are subsequently outlined. In line with what was presented above, the initiators described the project as follows: "the intention is, to help women (mainly migrant women and a few Dutch women) in developing a more powerful position in society, to invite them to participate more in society, and to relieve their (assumed) isolated position". The intention was to oblige clients of the social services, both single mothers and women with husbands who are unemployed, by using the sanction that they could lose part of their welfare payment if they wouldn't participate. In the past, the women who were easy to help already found jobs or placements, but not in the case of these clients, because they were more difficult to help. The women may have joined other projects in the past, without sufficient results, due to their complicated situations. They are the most difficult clients of the social service, and many of them were earlier considered 'un-negotiable'. So the social service selected the participants. After they start, phases include a welcome group to find friends, individual coaching to deal with the complex problems, courses on language and skills, and finally placements in volunteer work or neighbourhood activities. In the final phase someone might move on to another school, or to paid or unpaid work. The city district assumes that kids and other members of the family will profit from the mothers development, and will also be helped to develop into independently operating citizens because she gives a better example. It is important that the project is categorized as a measure to stimulate unemployed people and not as a measure to provide care or assistance, though from the start it seemed to operate on the edge between an active labour market policy and care.

The city district uses the concept 'citizenship', which shows that there is more than only finding the women a paid job. It strives for active citizenship and that means that women function independently in all kinds of social contexts. From the start it has been clear that paid work was in many cases not feasible; the threshold is simply too high. Things like participating in a migrant associations or community centres seem more suitable targets. Here they feel more at ease and they can learn skills like organizing activities for children, arranging festivities and participating in meetings. Working as a volunteer within these associations can be the first step to participate outside the home. Another step can be to follow Dutch lessons at a language school. The school of the children could also become a departure point in providing opportunities to develop contacts and skills, though unfortunately some of the interviewed women see the schools a place where white mothers dominate and where their contribution is not easily appreciated.

For this research we will use the term 'self-sufficiency' (independent ability to cope), that was introduced by the city district. Self-sufficiency can be measured in several fields. The fields that Godfried Engbersen (1995) distinguishes in his book "Sferen van integratie" (spheres of integration), are relevant in the context of this research. He distinguishes three 'spheres' of integration: a) the economic sphere, finances, work, housing and education, b) the social sphere: contacts and c) the political and cultural sphere. We will now explain how these spheres or terrains are studied and what questions can be asked.

- a) The economic sphere encompasses finances, work, housing and education. Financial self-sufficiency means that one can arrange ones bank and payment affairs oneself, that one can solve or prevent debt problems and that one can provide oneself or the family with income without being dependent on the welfare office. Self-sufficiency on the terrain of housing means that someone can manage to find a suitable house him- or herself, that someone knows where technical or social problems with the house can be reported and solved. Self-sufficiency

Building Citizenship, a project to enhance social capital in Amsterdam

in the educational realm includes both women's own possibilities for schooling but also arranging those of their children. When it comes to their own schooling, finding affordable and suitable Dutch lessons, or a suitable (advanced) course, are examples. Regarding the education of the children, one can look at the choice of the school, contact with the teachers, coping with learning disabilities or behavioural problems in the children, and asking for assistance from the right institutions.

b) In the field of social contacts, self-sufficiency means that people are able to organise the support that they need. This usually takes place within a network in which services are exchanged. One can for instance think of babysitting, technical support in the house, a driver, but also children's membership of sports club or the organisation of religious rituals like funerals. Contacts in the neighbourhood and contacts in organisations are needed in these cases.

We assume that an increase of contacts is positive. Earlier research shows that people with a lot of contact within their own ethnic group usually also have a lot of contacts outside their own ethnic group.

c) The third sphere is the political-cultural one. Political activities could possibly include: taking part in elections, going to neighbourhood meetings and involvement in interest organisations. Cultural activities can include activities in ones own ethnic group, multi-cultural activities and 'Dutch' cultural activities. When women organise a cultural evening to celebrate an event from their country of origin with Dutch inhabitants of their neighbourhood, we consider this active citizenship. We expect that the social network of the women will increase during their involvement in the project. Therefore we can assume that activities will also increase. All these assumptions were points of departure before the research started.

Social capital is another basic concept that is useful in this research, besides active citizenship and 'self-sufficiency' (the ability to cope independently). A commonly used definition of social capital by Lin (1999: 35) is: "resources embedded in a social structure which are accessed and/or mobilized in purposive actions". In other words, the social capital of these women consists of contacts within their own network, which can be mobilised to organise their life. In the areas that we already mentioned, one needs social capital to find information on the Dutch society, to arrange a baby sitter, to get support when one gets ill and also simply to discuss problems, etcetera. By actively participating in new social contexts, social capital of the women in the study can increase. One can expect that because of the participation in the projects, a larger network of contacts in the neighbourhood will develop and with all these new contacts it will be easier for the participants to find their way in society.

With the information from the literature that we have summed up, we can state our central question – what the effect of the 'Meedoen project' is – more precisely. Besides general effects, we will particularly focus the study on the influence that the project has on 'self-sufficiency' and social capital of participants on the economic, social and political-cultural terrains.

3. Method of research and characteristics of respondents

In this chapter we will first describe the setup of this study (3.1), then the content of the questionnaire (3.2) and the way in which we contacted the respondents (3.3). In 3.4 we compare characteristics of the group that was interviewed, with those of the women who participated in 'Meedoen'. In 3.5 we pay attention to the health of the respondents, since this has turned out to be of high importance for the results.

3.1 Setup of this study

Because this study is meant to follow women during a longer period and to find out whether or not their situation improves, the study has four measurements, even in the years after the project has ended.

As already explained, the first measurement took place just after the women started (T1). The organising bureau forwarded the addresses of respondents and the first 38 interviews took place between November 2005 and May 2006. Three female interviewers were employed, and for the analysis and writing four weeks were available every year.

The second measurement took place between January and May 2007 (T2). In the second round one female Moroccan interviewer approached all 38 women again. Two extra Turkish women were interviewed, because the total didn't add up to 40. Because of drop outs, a total of 38 women were interviewed in the second round including the new ones.

The third measurement took place between January and May 2008 (T3), after the actual project had been discontinued. At that moment the women were not supported anymore by their personal coach and the central reception office was closed. Actually this did not mean that the women were at home again, since the community centres still functioned. A number of women continued with their courses, though the compulsory nature of the activities had been abolished. It turned out to be impossible to speak to all the women again and, with extreme effort from the interviewer, 28 women were finally willing to talk to us for the third time. In section 3.4 we will discuss the consequences of these dropouts.

The fourth measurement (T4) still has to take place in 2009.

3.2 Content of the questionnaire

At the start of this study in the autumn of 2005, a questionnaire was developed, in which the three main concepts, active citizenship, 'self-sufficiency' and social capital in the fields mentioned, were discussed. The uncomplicated questionnaire is about daily affairs, because of the educational and language levels of the women. Firstly some questions were asked on demographic characteristics like arrival date in the Netherlands, number of people in the house, etc.

Then the three terrains that we mentioned are treated in thematic blocks, first a) economics: finances, work, housing, education; secondly b) the social issues; and thirdly c) political and cultural issues. The blocks contain questions that fit to the experiences and the world of these women: when studying self-sufficiency, the questions are about the children, choosing a school, contacting the teacher, household reparations, arranging ones taxes, etc.

Questions on political or cultural activities are combined with questions on visiting services. A second block contains questions about contacts and provides information. This gives information on social capital. Who visits them during the week? To which other women do the interviewees visit? Are there contacts with neighbours? Is there anybody who helps in the event of illness? Is there anybody who to talk to about important decisions? Are there enough people to solve daily problems? Would the interviewee like to have a bigger network of contacts?

A third subject is what the respondents think about 'Meedoen', what are their experiences and opinions? Future work and education is discussed here, and what are the obstacles to starting.

The questionnaire that was used in the second and third round was slightly altered, and only the question on demographic characteristics that might change are included, for instance the number of inmates and the health situation.

3.3 Contact with the respondents

Between November 2005 and May 2006 (the first round) a total of 60 women were approached, and 38 were interviewed. Out of the 22 women that were not interviewed, 16 refused and 6 were Moroccan while a lot of Moroccan women were already interviewed. Most of the interviewed just started with the project. A number of them had only had their first meeting with the coach, while others already came together in a group to discuss their situation.

In the second round again it took a lot of effort to make an appointment. Some women were suspicious because they thought that the welfare office would check on them, others just felt it was intrusive. The compulsory nature of the project caused resistance toward the interviews, but the Moroccan interviewer had a positive effect. Some of the interviews had to be conducted half in Dutch, and half in Arab or Berber. In the second year, similar problems occurred. Again it was not always possible to discuss all subjects, since women got tired of the questions and because they are not used to this kind of interview. They state – more than the first time – that they don't understand why their 'personal' questions on opinion were asked. The questions about the social network were in many cases not answered because they were considered too private. Asking the women for their opinion about the projects, also caused difficulties, since some answered that 'they have nothing to say' and others that they have no opinion. It has become clear that the women are not used to stand up for themselves or give their own opinion. Compared to that, the easiest subject to talk about was health and problems. The researchers had trouble interviewing the but the coaches had to deal with similar trouble in their work with the women. Only extreme perseverance can lead to a successful result.

Similar problems occurred in the third round: it was even more difficult to confirm an appointment with the women. After the project was discontinued, the women didn't understand why they would talk about it. They know that there are no obligations anymore, see the interviewer as somebody who comes to check them, and don't want to give any information. Despite many attempts both by phone and by visiting their houses, only 30 of the 40 women were willing to be interviewed. The dropout rate is not particularly caused by the women that were negative towards participation (the ones who were ill). Since the interviewer brought sick women in contact with the 'Association of Islamic Care' (Stichting Islamitische Hulpverlening), a few of them were more easily willing to talk to her.

Because of the lengthy interview process, the results of this study have two limitations. Firstly the dropout – on itself common in longitudinal panel research – has changed the sample slightly. In the second round the respondents that dropped out were three single mothers, and two from the category 'other ethnic groups'. In the third round the drop out is more serious, and seems to occur particularly among single mothers: only 9 of the 19 single mothers from the first round are left. Secondly women from the 'other' ethnic groups dropped out more: 67% of the Turkish women, 68% of the Moroccan women and 50% of the 'other' women have taken part in three interviews.

A second methodological limitation of this study is that although we took a lot of preventive measures the interview process was full of difficulties. The Dutch language ability of the women was often limited, particularly in the first and second round, they were not used to the interview setting, and they found the questions about contacts 'too personal'. In the third round it became slightly easier to interview the remaining women, but still, the demands to the interviewer were high: questions were misunderstood, and the respondents assumed that the interviewer would remember the answers from last year when she posed a question again. That meant for instance that the interviewer had to judge

whether a woman actually receives less visitors than last year or maybe that she doesn't feel like giving an elaborate answer and it only looks like she receives less visitors.

There was also a problem with the content of the questionnaire. When the results were analysed, it became clear that the questionnaire for the first round of interviews didn't cover all aspects of the development process of the women. An important finding that was not formulated in advance was the psychological and attitudinal change that we saw among the women. Therefore the conclusion is not only a strict comparison of questions in the first and second round, but also additional information that was found with open questions and the remarks written on the side of the questionnaire.

3.4 Characteristics of the sample compared with all women in 'Meedoen'.

To judge to what extent our sample has similar characteristics as the total set of Meedoen-participants, we list some basic characteristics of the 155 women in table 1. The data on the country of origin, age, composition of the family, education and language ability are taken from the final report by Giltay Veth (2007).

Table 1. Characteristics of women in 'Meedoen': country of origin, age, composition of family, education and language ability.

Country of origin:		Age:	
Morocco:	49 (32%)	20-30 years:	9 (6%)
other African:	13 (8%)	30-40 years:	32 (21%)
Turkey:	36 (23%)	40-50 years:	64 (41%)
other Asian:	9 (6%)	50+:	50 (32%)
Surinam:	19 (12%)		
Other South- American:	4 (3%)		
Netherlands:	16 (10%)		
other European	9 (6%)		
total	155		155

Composition of family:		Education	
Single mother:	86 (56%)	No education:	79 (52%)
Family with children:	59 (38%)	Primary school	22 (14%)
Family without children:	2 (1%)	Lower vocational education	12 (8%) (half of them received their qualification abroad)
Single:	8 (5%)	Lower general education	19 (12%) (most received their qualification abroad)
		Intermediate vocational level	9 (6%) (most received their qualification abroad)
		Higher general education	6 (4%) (most received their qualification abroad)
		College or university	6 (4%) (most received their degree abroad)
Total	155		153

Building Citizenship, a project to enhance social capital in Amsterdam

Language ability:	At start	May 2007
Illiterate:	26 (17%)	21 (13%)
Level 1:	70 (45%)	34 (22%)
Level 2:	20 (13%)	49 (32%)
Level 3:	12 (8%)	10 (7%)
Level 4:	9 (6%)	14 (9%)
Fluent:	18 (12%)	27 (17%)
Total	155	155

Source: Giltay Veth, 2007

The two largest ethnic groups are Moroccans (32%) and Turks (23%), together 55%. When we look at age, it strikes us that not many women are younger than 30; the largest category is between 40–50 years old (41%), followed by the 50+ category (32%). Looking at the household composition, the high percentage of single parent families is striking (56%), and the very low percentage of single women (5%). The educational level of the majority is very low: 52% have no education at all and 14% only primary school. Only 4% have college or university education. The language capability at the start of the project was good for only 12%, 17% are illiterate, 45% have the so called AVI level 1, which means the level of grade 3 primary school.

Below the characteristics of the women in our sample are shown. In table 2 shows the country of origin of respondents.

Table 2. Country of origin of the respondents

Country of origin	1st round (n)	2nd round (n)	3rd round (n)	1st round (%)	2nd round (%)	3rd round (%)
Surinam	3	2	2	8	5	4
Turkey	7	9	8	18	24	29
Morocco	19	19	13	50	51	46
Netherlands	2	2	2	5	5	7
Ghana	2	1	2	5	3	4
Capo Verde	1	1	1	3	3	4
Afghanistan	1	1	0	3	3	0
British Guyana	1	1	1	3	3	4
Armenia	1	1	1	3	3	4
Colombia	1	0	0	3	0	0
	38	37 **	28***	*101	100	*102

* rounding off causes the 101%

** In the second round two Turkish women were new. One Ghanaian woman refused, one Surinam and one Colombian have not been reached after eight to ten attempts. A Turkish woman has been interviewed after the second report.

*** in the third round two Moroccan women refused, one Turkish woman has moved, six women were unreachable (one Surinam, three Moroccans, one Afghan, one Turkish, one Colombian).

Roughly a categorisation in three groups can be made: Moroccans (46%), Turkish (29%) and other (25%) women. Two women were born in the Netherlands, of whom one is a second generation Surinamese and one is autochthonous Dutch. Our sample has a relatively high percentage of Moroccans and a low percentage of 'other ethnic group' compared to the data Giltay Veth.

The age of the women varies at the start of the project from 25 to 59; four women are younger than 30 years old and half of them is older than 45. This doesn't differ much from the total. The year of arrival in the Netherlands lies between 1967 and 2001. Most women are already in the Netherlands for quite some time, half of them longer than twenty years – they arrived before 1986; and only seven women live shorter than ten years in the Netherlands.

The majority have children (98 %), only one woman has no children; ten have five or more children (25%). More than half of the women (55%) have grown up children, who are not part of her household anymore. Table 3 shows the family composition of the respondents.

Table 3 Family composition of the respondents in the 1st, 2nd and 3rd round (number and %)

	1st round (n)	2nd round (n)	3rd round (n)	1st round (%)	2nd round (%)	3rd round (%)
Single	4	5	4	11%	14%	14%
With partner/ husband	3	3	5	8%	8%	18%
Single mother with children	18	13	9	47%	35%	32%
Father, mother, children	12	15	10	32%	41%	36%
Living with partner and children in the house of another family	1	1	0	3%	3%	0%
Total	38	37	28	*101	* 101	100

* (because of rounding off the total can reach 101 instead of 100%)

In the first round we already noticed the large percentage of single mothers: 18 out of 38 (47%), which is not very different from the reference group. In the second round a lot of changes had taken place in the composition of households. In eight cases out of the 35 (23%) the composition of the household had changed. In two cases the father of the children moved in, in one case the husband with his two (step)sons left, in three cases a son moved out, and in two cases sons came back from prison. This, in combination with the three not reached single mothers and the two new Turkish women with a complete family, has reduced the percentage of single women from 47% to 35%. This means that the percentage of single mothers who take part in this research is much lower in the second round than in the reference group (56%).

During the third round we saw that more (grown up) children had left the house, in one case a man moved in, so altogether the percentage of couples (woman + partner) has grown to 18%. There are relatively a lot of single mothers who dropped out either because they refused or because they were unreachable and thereby the percentage of single mothers diminished from 47% in the first round to 35% in the second and 32% in the third round.

The educational level of the interviewed was low, as table 4 shows. The number of people without education or just a few years of primary school or Koran school was slightly higher than in the reference group.

Table 4 Educational level of respondents (data 1st round)

	Number	Percentage
None	15	40 %
A few years primary school or Koran school	9	24 %
Lower vocational	4	11 %
General lower education	3	8 %
Intermediate vocation	4	11%
Higher general education	0	0 %
College/ university	2	5 %
No information	1	3 %
Total	38	101

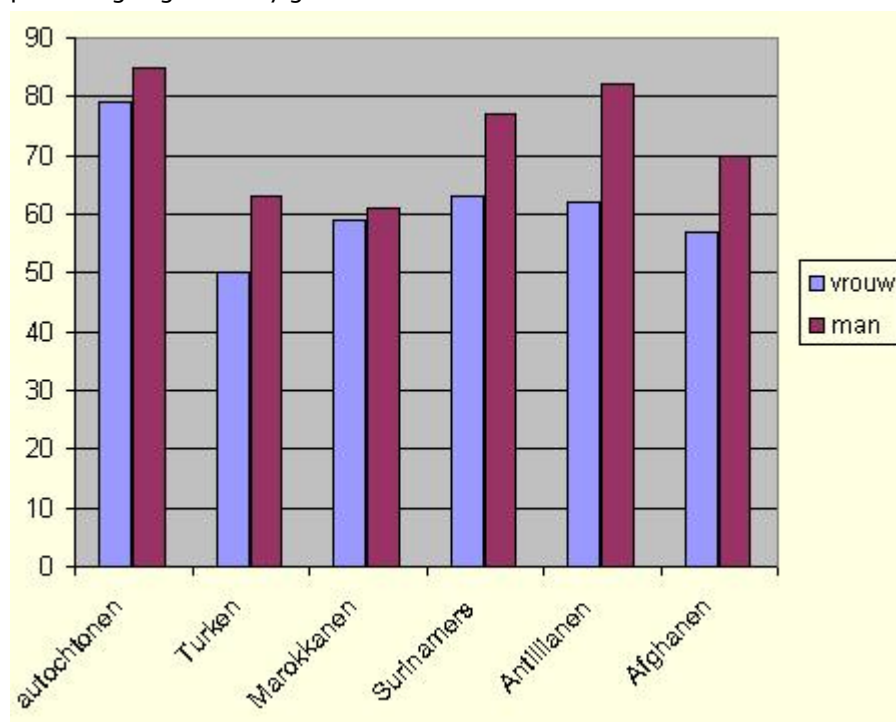
* Because of rounding of 101% and not 100%

In conclusion, the sample shows a reasonable similarity with the reference group, though Moroccan women are slightly overrepresented, and single mothers may have dropped out in the third round.

3.5 Health situation

During the interviews one factor turned out of significant relevance, and needs some elaboration here. Besides the already mentioned demographic characteristics of the respondents, the health situation of many women was extremely poor. Already at our first contact we found that 74% of the interviewees had health complaints, varying from all kinds of pain (head ache, back pain, everywhere pain) to arthritis, diabetes and heart condition, and a number of them have been officially declared unable to work. This is a higher percentage than normal: according to the Central Bureau of Statistics in the Netherlands, only 22% of the women in big cities consider their health as 'less than good', and 51% as good and 27% as very good ². Among Dutch high blood pressure is common, heart and vascular disease and cancer are more common than among Turks and Moroccans, while among these groups diabetes, obesity and related problems are more common (especially among Turkish women). Figure 1 shows the 'experienced health situation of men and women according to a large national study in 2002/2003 (Hessing-Wagner 2006). Here also, only 50% of the Turkish women and 59% of Moroccan women judge their health as good or very good, while 79% of Dutch women do so. By the second and the third meeting, the experienced health situation of the respondents had not improved: only 20% is healthy at the second meeting and 23% reports that their complaints got worst, while for 65% there was no improvement. At the third meeting 60% had the same health situation.

Figure 1 Experienced health situation per ethnic group and sex, 2002/2003, 18 to 64 years old, in percentages good-very good.



Source: Hessing-Wagner (2006: 150) table transformed into a diagram

Another sign of their problematic situation was that 68 % of the respondents in the first round of interviews said that they were sometimes fearful or down, while three said they had serious mental health problems. Since this seems a very high percentage in comparison with other women in Amsterdam. The 'Amsterdam Health Monitor' (Amsterdamse Gezondheidsmonitor AGM) shows that

² <http://statline.cbs.nl> (in juni 2007).

generally 37% of women in Amsterdam have mild psychological complaints and 5% serious complaints (Uitenbroek i.e. 2006). Moroccan women differ slightly from the Amsterdam mean with 35% of mild complaints and 8% of more serious complaints. But among Turkish women this percentage is much higher: 46% of the Turkish women have mild complaints and 8% serious complaints. Among the ones that have looked for help, there is a striking high percentage of Turks, that have serious complaints compared to Dutch/Moroccan and other women (Uitenbroek i.e. 2006, p.108–109). Our group of respondents actually shows an extremely high percentage of psychological complaints.

And the number of people with psychological complaints even increased in the second round: not 68% but 79% reported anxiety and sometimes feeling down, and in the third meeting, this rose to 82 %. The project organisation established a specific program for people with psychiatric problems, and it is clear that mental health awareness was important. One of the conclusions after our second meeting was that there was no actual increase of mental problems but that an openness to talk about anxiety and depression had developed during the project. Exercises like bio-release, yoga and gymnastic were offered to the women, and this probably stimulated these women to talk about their health situation. Shyness disappeared, and some have become more aware of the importance of positive mental health, by doing exercise and taking care of themselves. Talking about problems can be considered a first step to recognize problems and to start finding a solution.

Illness was the most common reason for women not to turn up at activities. After the interview 12 of them commented: 'I haven't been there very often, because I was ill.' Though many interviewees had indeed very serious problems, this was also the only legitimate reason for the coordinators not to come and therefore it also shows something about the motivation of the women. During the third interview the ones who were really too ill had dropped out (six cases), but some unwell women still went to the activities. A number of them even reported the positive effects of exercising on their health situation.

4. Results

In this chapter we will analyse some effects of participation in the project, comparing the first, second and third round interviews. Most interviewed women went through the following steps: they started in 2006 with their first discussion group. Most of them remember this first phase as enjoyable because they developed contacts and found new friends. Half of the interviewees (48%) had joined Dutch language lessons by the next year (2007), 33% also took part – not always at the same time – in exercises like bio release/ gymnastics/ yoga/ cycling lessons/ dance and 28% took computer lessons. In 2008 (the third round) 50% of the respondents has at any phase during the project taken language lessons and 60% had joined some form of exercising.

Sixteen women (55%) are still involved in one or two courses, ten in Dutch lessons, eight in exercising, and six in sewing or computer lessons. This means that one of the most important aims of the project, to activate people on a longer term, has succeeded for 42% of the respondents (16 out of the 38), whom we have talked to the first rounds. The reason why six women who did not take part anymore was their illness, while two had problems with the criminality in the family, one managed to find a job (while another woman went on with Dutch lessons) one woman started with a new citizenship project via the Employment Service. She was the only one that was approached by the Employment Service, while the other women were not and appeared content with this outcome.

In section 4.1 we will further explore the economic terrain; in 4.2 we will elaborate on 'self-sufficiency' with children, childcare and education; in 4.3 we elaborate on the ability to cope in the house and with institutions, in 4.4 on social contacts, in 4.5 on the political and cultural terrain and in 4.6 we will recount more general effects of participation in this project.

4.1 The economic terrain: work, education and finances

The interviewed women are predominantly dependent on welfare and the welfare service has referred them to the social activities. In the first round there was only one case with the main source of income from paid employment (actually a family with two children that lived in the house of relatives). In the second round, three families, and after the third round, four families had income from employment – in two of these cases the husbands work, not the woman. Two women started with volunteer work in 2007. In 2008 one woman found a domestic staff position in a hotel. In 2008 four families out of 28 have income from work, of which the husband works in two cases (14%). The expectations at the start about the possibilities that these women would be able to find work were clearly too optimistic. It is even not realistic to expect that many women in this target group will find paid employment.

The number of women that are continuing their education was the same in the second round as in the first round: 41%. In the third round this number had gone down to 27%. The problems that prevent them from entering schools and the labour market are: their illness, children and family responsibilities and their low qualification levels, which make most of the jobs unreachable.

In 2007 eight women followed sewing and hairdressing courses and enjoyed them immensely, seeing future possibilities in these fields. There were also two women that would like to become aerobic- or gymnastic teachers. Because a number of Turkish and Moroccan women had never taken any courses in their lives, some of them had no sense of these kinds of possibilities. Eight women still talk about future education in 2008: two would like to continue Dutch lessons, and six would like to pursue schools for social work, child care, hotel and the catering industry, and designing clothes. These eight women were relatively young (all under 40). Many women didn't see any possibilities and had no plans to better their lives, but this had improved by 2008. Now they look more positively towards the future. But plans are not actualised by, for instance, signing up with a school. This has in three of eight cases to do with small children. There is a risk that they remain in the phase of plans when they disengaged with their coach, but this remains to be seen.

Of course there are major differences between the women who are unwell, and the healthier women. Understandably more complaining occurred among the ill women about the obligatory nature of the project than among healthy women.

Finances

53% of the women arranged their own finances and payments in the first round. In the second round this increased slightly to 59%, and in the third round to 64%, so there seems to be an increase in 'self-sufficiency' on financial terrain. Besides an actual improvement – three women who asked for help in the second round are now arranging finances themselves – we noticed that answering was not completely consistent, because in the case of couples usually the husband arranged the bank affairs, but the answer 'myself' sometimes meant 'ourselves'. Because there were more complete families in the second round, the husband was mentioned relatively more often. Among those without a husband or partner, the (grown up) children were mentioned more in the first round (eight times), and secondly family members (two times), friends (once) and neighbours (ones).

The tax form was filled in by 21% of the respondents themselves in the first round. There were three families (8%) who never filled in a tax form and 26 (71%) asked for help. Of the 26 women who asked for help, half of them went to an agency, for instance the tax advisory bureau. In six cases children offered help, and in four cases a sister, friend or acquaintance. In the second round 9% arranged it herself and in the third round 11%. The number of people that received support from a free tax bureau had increased, which we see as a positive development.

4.2. Self-sufficiency with children, schools and the childcare.

Children took a central place in the respondents' lives during the first round of the study. That is why we have talked in more detail about self-sufficiency concerning the children. Because of the new activities in the project, the orientation towards the children had diminished a little and the social network had increased with new (female) friends. The respondents explained that they had become extremely busy because of the double program. In 2008 only one woman gave birth and not as many women were in need of childcare, because the oldest child was old enough to take care of the younger ones, or because all children were old enough and childcare was not needed. Of course the children remained important, both for women with a 'complete' family, for women that take care for their children alone, and for women whose children already left the house. When children are small, they need a lot of care, they have to be taken to school and nurtured. When children enter puberty, the worries change, they may not be successful at school, or become involved with the law, etc. When children have grown up, they usually become less of a worry, but remain important for their mothers. They often arrange affairs with institutions, take care of the maintenance of the house, and help with bank and tax papers.

As already mentioned there were relatively many single mothers among the respondents. In the Surinamese, British Guyanan and Antillean community single motherhood is not uncommon, and the women from these groups seem to be more prepared for this lifestyle and do not experience shame or stigma. In Turkish and Moroccan circles, single motherhood is uncommon and women have evidently never taken such a future position into account. They are for instance completely surprised when the official of the welfare office suggests that they need to take care of their own income. The idea to work outside the house doesn't fit at all to the experiences and perceptions of the elderly Moroccan and Turkish women. They think of taking care of the children as their duty, and other options do not even appear to them. They consider the pressure that the coaches of the 'Meedoen' project and the labour office exert upon them as unsuitable and unfair. And indeed, a large number of children make it virtually impossible to undertake a lot of other activities.

Giltay Veth (2007) mentions that the emancipation process of Turkish and Moroccan women has a lot of similarities with the emancipation of Dutch women in the past. The project organisers had to adjust their activities to the experiences of these women, for instance with children, exchanging care, support at school, talking about parenting and support at children's activities. The project organisers think that a long-term approach is needed to achieve the desired change in mentality, which is necessary to bring about the emancipation process and the time span of this project was actually too short. Success was easier among the youngest participants, and most difficult for the ones older than 50. The young Turkish and Moroccan women are less one sided about their role as mothers, and employment fits easier in their perception of their role in the world. This project has explicitly targeted at the most difficult group, but as we have seen, it was extremely difficult to stimulate older women, especially if they were suffering ill health.

Child minding

The interviewees considered the part of the questionnaire on children and their school career relevant to their lives. We assumed that the increase of the social network would diminish their childcare problems since the number of acquaintances has increased.

In the first interview half of the women who were asked if they have anybody who ever watches over their children, answered that they had no-one at all (18 cases). In 5 cases the children were old enough to be alone, and for 25 % there was, now and then, a babysitter. Family members were mentioned mostly, (6 cases) and in one case a friend and another mother were mentioned. Because of the large number of women with small kids, the lack of babysitters was a considerable problem. Table 5 shows to what extent the childcare problems have improved.

Table 5. Who minds the children, per ethnic category? – Who person that was mentioned first.

	Turkish women			Moroccan women			Other women		
	1st round	2nd round	3rd round	1st round	2nd round	3rd round	1st round	2nd round	3rd round
No-one	0x	1x	0x	15x	9x	2x	3x	3x	1x
Not applicable, children are too old	2x	5x	6x	2x	6x	5x	1x	4x	5x
Family	1x	0x	1x	1x	2x	1x	5x	1x	1x
Friends	0x	0x	0x	1x	0x	0x	1x	0x	0x
Others	1x	0x	0x	0x	0x	1x	3x	0x	0x
Their father, brother or sister	0x	0x	0x	0x	1x	1x	0x	1x	2x

At first sight, the number of women that has no childminder at all seems to have gone down in the three years of the project. During the first round 18 women had nobody to take care of their children, in the second round there were 13 left, and in the third round just 3 women had no one to look after their children. But this positive conclusion is after more careful investigation not completely correct, since something went wrong with understanding the question. At first women with older children answered 'no' to the question 'Is there someone who watches your kids, when you go out?', while in the next round they explained that their children were too old for a babysitter or that their husbands takes care of them. Of the 15 Moroccan women in the first round that had nobody to mind their children, six could be classified as 'children are old enough to stay alone at home' in the second round, which means that the number of people without a babysitter remained the same. In 2008 (third round) the children got older, and only three women are left with serious childcare problems (i.e. nobody at all to care for the children). The childcare problems will no longer be an issue as the children get older.

The assumption that social capital/more contacts in the neighbourhood would help to solve the childcare problem, cannot be confirmed. We did not observe that there were more friends or non-family members who could take care of children. Actually the opposite seems to be the case, the two (girl) friends that had babysitters in the first round, had disappeared later. Most people rely on family when they need someone to mind their children.

Several authors have described how responsibilities and hierarchical patterns are important in Turkish and Moroccan families (Buitelaar 2006, 2007, Gruijter i.e. 2007, Sedney 2008). A friend is only accepted in the house when the whole family agrees and her good behaviour is evaluated by all. And a 'good' woman puts her family in first place. It is not easy to leave these cultural demands aside. Contacts between the women in Meedoen tend to take place in the community centres and women do not meet in their homes.

Contacts with the teacher

The women were asked to what extent they maintain contact with the teachers of their children. In the three years of the research, we see an increase. In 2006 64% of the mothers maintained contacts with the teacher of their children at primary school; six women had now and then contact and in three cases the husband or the sister contacted the school. In the second round 77% of the mothers had contact with the teacher, and in the third round 82%. The percentage of mothers who attend parents' evening is also going up: 37% reported that they always go to the parents' evening during the first interview,

Building Citizenship, a project to enhance social capital in Amsterdam

41% in the second interview, and 73% in the third interview. On the other hand thirteen went sometimes in the third year, six in the second year and no one in the third year. That means one goes always, or one doesn't go, since the percentage that never goes has also increased from 20% to 28%. Unfortunately the question wasn't always answered during the second round, but in general we can conclude that contact with the teacher has increased.

Though the improvement is actually only for one or two women, it seems that the women are more convinced that contact with teachers is important. The exchange of information in the group and maybe the increase in self-confidence and language ability might play a role here.

Problems in raising children

The coaches of Meedoen have often tried to support women with problems with children. After the project ended, we noticed that new problems developed. During the first round we asked whether women ever experienced problems that they couldn't solve themselves, and seven women confirmed they had such problems (18%). Two mothers were in contact with a youth institution. In one family a family guardian was responsible for a stepson, who was in a court case. In another family the mother received help via the family doctor – after her husband had left – who send her to a psychiatrist with her daughter. In a third case the mother received the support of a social worker, and in a fourth case the son was placed with another family, because of her illness. Usually it was the family doctor who took care of reference to other institutions.

During the second round four women reported that they had problems raising kids, and during the third round six, three more. Possibly this increase is related to the increasing age of the kids: more got into puberty in the third round. Two women had sons in prison in 2007. One has a family guardian, another one is supported by youth care and one is, because of her illness, in contact with an institution called 'Supporting Guidance and Homecare' (Ondersteunende Begeleiding Thuiszorg OB), it means that she receives coaching regards raising her children. In the third round the same women (three) still had problems. One son was released prison, two were supported by the Meedoen coaches, and one explains that the same coach is working for her from a new position.

Most women prefer to discuss parenting issues with their own mother or with a sister. It is considered a family affair. Though 80 % had family in the Netherlands, only 48% had a father, mother, brother or sister in the Netherlands. One woman phones her sister in Morocco, another one phones her sister in Spain. They talk about serious problems but also about more usual things connected to raising kids, like shouting and not obeying. Other mothers and (female) friends are also discussion partners on these issues, but four women said at the first interview that they had nobody at all to talk with. One single mother complained that she has to solve everything on her own for six years already, and that she had found this hard.

In the second interview the most serious cases have received institutional support, often arranged by the Meedoen coach. Most women report that they have no new discussion partners to talk about the children and their problems, except the ones that are now supported by institutions. Generally they are ashamed that the interference of institutions was necessary, but they are happy with the support of the project coach. Surprisingly the new friends, whom they met in the project, are never mentioned as discussion partners. Though it is possible that the women would not talk with the others in the Group about their children, it has become clear that some cases are so serious, that they are too ashamed to talk about it. In the third round this has not changed: four people talk about their kids with an official of the youth institution.

Concluding this subject, changes on the terrain of children, school and childcare are visible since the start of the project. Contacts with the school have generally improved, and babysitting problems diminished, though this is mainly as a result of the increasing ages of the kids. Problems connected to raising kids seem to have increased with the increase of their age. In 2007 several cases were treated

by coaches and institutions. Hopefully the new problem cases will manage to find the right support without the project coaches in the future and before the situation deteriorates. It is unclear whether or not the new problem cases are indeed linking in with the appropriate support.

4.3 Self-sufficiency: maintaining of the house and visiting Dutch institutions

Maintaining the house

All women in this study live in rented accommodation, usually from a housing corporation. During the first round we asked whether they were satisfied with their house, and more than half (55%) said they were, while 45% found it too small or too expensive, or not suitable because of their medical problem. For the woman who lives with her family in law, this is most urgent and she is actively searching for a new house.

During the first interview ten women (25%) did not know how to get a new house. Three believed that their children or family would help them, and one asked the family doctor. Sixteen women (42%) know that they can register at 'Woningnet' – a computerised system of the housing corporations – to search for a house in Amsterdam and surrounding areas, but they don't seem to know that this is done on the Internet. Two mentioned the paper version of 'Woningnet', but no one mentioned the website. Probably most women would not search via a website. During the second interview only three women were unfamiliar with house viewing. They now mention many places where they would ask for help (children, project coach, and doctor). In the third round this question was not asked again, because the interviewer had explained to most women how the system worked.

Repairs in the house

As table 6 shows, six women said they would repair broken items or remedy a situation in the house themselves. In the second round this diminished to two and in the third round to none. The number of people who don't know whom to ask is nil in the third round: everyone has some acquaintance that would be of help in that situation. What is striking is that nobody solves things alone anymore, by the third round. This supports our opinion that self-sufficiency has increased, though not all women may have understood the question in the intended way. For instance, the number of women who mentioned their spouse increased between the first and second round from three to ten, and in the third round it decreased to six. But it is positive that everyone mentions support in the third round, also if this means that his or her understanding of the question has changed. We noticed that the social capital, in the sense of useful contacts was again, not found among the Meedoen group.

Table 6. Who helps to repair the house (number of times mentioned)

	Turkish women			Moroccan women			Other women		
	1 st round	2 nd round	3 rd round	1 st round	2 nd round	3 rd round	1 st round	2 nd round	3 rd round
Solve it myself	2x			1x	1x		3x	1x	
Don't know/ Nobody		2x			6x			2x	
Housing corporation/ owner	2x	2x	3x	11x	2x	7x	7x		2x
Husband/	1x	2x	2x	2x	6x	3x		2x	1x

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partner									
Children	1x	1x			2x	2x	2x	3x	1x
Other family members				3x	1x		2x	1x	1x
Neighbours					1x	1x	2x		
Friends					1x				
Other	2x		3x			1x			2x

Institutions

The women in this study did nearly not visit Dutch institutions in the first round. Nearly no one ever took part in a cultural activity (theatre, music), nor did they ever visit an organisation for migrants, and also no religious association. This has not improved in the second round, except that the whole group (100%) now visits a community centre (particularly the nearby Chassé and Mozaiek Centres). In the third round 93% of the women still visit the community centre. Table 6 shows which institutions Turkish, Moroccan and the other group visit in the first, second and third round.

Table 7. Number of women that visits Dutch institutions, migrant or religious associations.

	Turkish women			Moroccan women			Other women		
	1st round	2nd round	3rd round	1st round	2nd round	3rd round	1st round	2nd round	3rd round
Neighbourhood organisation or community centre	4	5	8	8	12	10	5	7	7
Social institution (e.g. health, child care)	5	0	0	6	8	2	8	2	1
Information evening in the neighbourhood	0	0	0	2	2	1	3	1	2
City district office	4	0	0	5	3	1	11	3	0
Dutch lessons	4	0	6	4	4	5	2	2	3
Library	2	1	0	5	4	4	3	6	3
Cultural activity	1	0	4	2	1	4	7	1	4
Migrant association	0	1	1	1	3	0	4	1	0
Religious activity	7	4	5	6	7	2	7	3	2
Other	0	0	0	2	0	0	7	0	0
n=	7	9	8	19	19	13	12	9	7

There are small differences between the Turkish, Moroccan and rest category. As table 7 shows, the 'other' women are more active and visit Dutch institutions and migrant associations more than the Turkish and Moroccan women. The Surinamese and Dutch women have less difficulty to visit Dutch institutions, while also the Ghanaian, Armenian and Afghan women get out a lot. The Ghanaian and Armenian women are active members of a church, and the Armenian woman is a doctor and has, because of her educational background and her knowledge of English, less difficulty with institutions. The institutions that were mentioned are: the family doctor (2x), school, the health centre, an elderly home (2x), social advisors, an interpreter and someone who writes letters.

The difference between Turkish and Moroccan women that we mentioned in the first round has disappeared in the second round. The Moroccan women were not going anywhere else than to the community centre. The percentage of Turkish women with very limited Dutch language ability had increased. Two women had called the Community Centre Tagrijn, a migrant organisation. In the first interview Turkish women were more involved in religious activities, but in the second interview it was the Moroccan women.

In the third round more women in all groups go to Dutch language classes. Except that all now go to the community centre, there are no systematic changes.

4.4 Visitors

We asked the interviewees who visit them during a week and where they go themselves to visit others. In the first round the most mentioned visitors were: the grown up kids, other family members (for instance an aunt, uncle, cousin, daughter in law, etcetera) and also (female) friends. Grown up children were mentioned first by the elderly women, while younger women tend to mention their own father or mother. A quarter of the women mention (female) friends first when asked who visits them, and again as the second person who comes to visit. After friends, their own children, parents, other family members, neighbours, former neighbours and mothers from the school of their kids are mentioned. The results are presented in table 8.

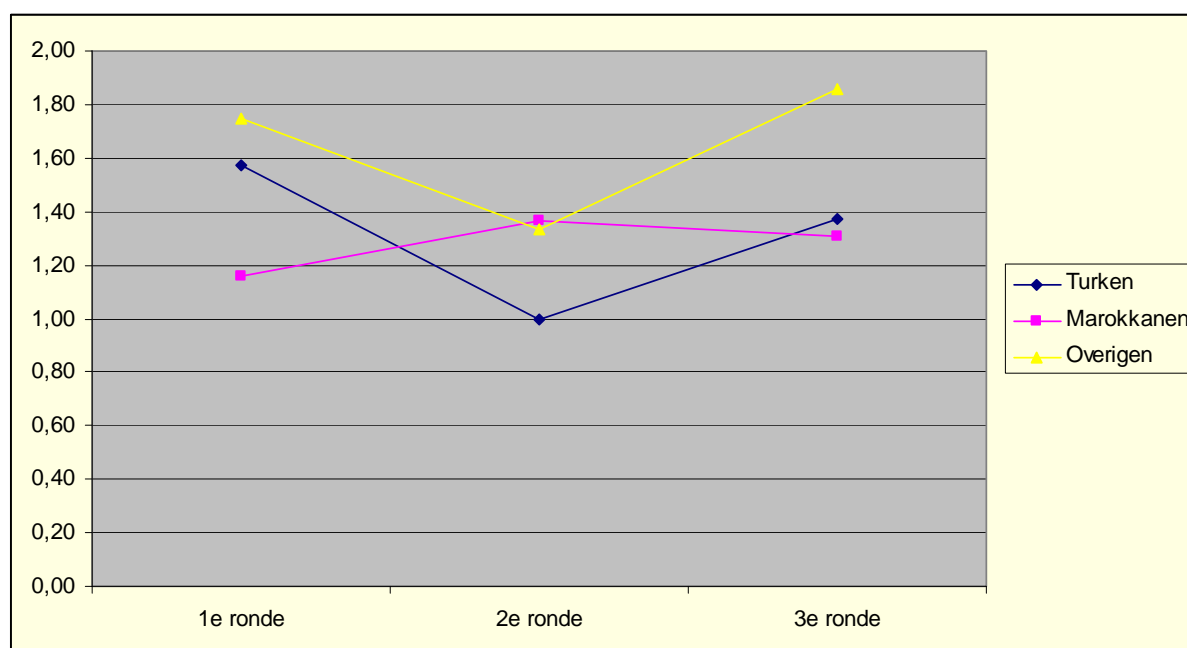
Table 8. Who visits Turkish, Moroccan and other women (1st, 2nd and 3rd round)? *

	Turkish women			Moroccan women			Other women		
	1st round	2nd round	3rd round	1st round	2nd round	3rd round	1st round	2nd round	3rd round
Nobody	1x	1x	0x	3x	6x	0x	1x	3x	1x
Partner/ father of children	0x	0x	0x	0x	0x	0x	2x	1x	0x
Children	4x	2x	2x	5x	2x	2x	2x	1x	2x
Parents	0x	0x	2x	0x	2x	2x	2x	1x	0x
Brother/Sisters	0x	0x	0x	1x	5x	3x	4x	1x	2x
Other family members	2x	2x	4x	5x	2x	3x	2x	1x	2x
Friends	3x	2x	1x	5x	5x	3x	7x	3x	4x
Neighbours	0x	1x	1x	3x	2x	3x	0x	0x	1x
Other	1x	1x	1x	0x	2x	1x	1x	1x	1x
Number of people interviewed (n)	7	9	8	19	19	13	12	9	7
Number of visitors mentioned (t):	11	9	11	22	26	17	21	12	13
t/n	1,57	1,00	1,38	1,16	1,37	1,31	1,75	1,33	1,86

* A number of women don't want to answer, they find this question 'too personal', they are not counted as 'nobody', but as missing.

A first conclusion is best visible when one looks at the total mean number of visitors per woman in the bottom row table 8 is analysed (t/n =total number of visitors/number of women). In figure 2 below, the same data are presented graphically. The figure shows that women in the 'other' ethnic groups (i.e. Surinamese, Ghanaians, etc.) receive more visitors than Turks and Moroccans. Among the Turkish and 'other' women the mean number diminishes in the second round, but increases in the third round. Surprisingly the Moroccan women show another pattern: first they get the lowest number of visitors, the number goes up in the second round, but down again in the third round.

Figure 2. Mean number of visitors of Turkish, Moroccan and other women in the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd round.



The most problematic situation seems to be that a woman gets no visitors. One Turkish woman, three Moroccan women and one woman from the other ethnic groups had no visitors at all. As the upper row of table 8 shows, the number of women that did not receive visitors at all increased dramatically in the second round compared to the first round, a fact that alarmed us. This happened particularly among Moroccan women, of whom first three and then six women (46%) got no visitors at all. But in the third round the number of visitors seems to have recovered, there is not a single Moroccan woman anymore who doesn't receive visitors. Among the Turkish women there was during the first and second round only one lady who didn't receive visitors (17%), but in the third round no-one was left. Only in the 'other' ethnic groups one woman was left, who didn't receive visitors.

Though this decrease in contacts is alarming, two other factors may explain some of the variance. First the questions on contacts – though explicit in the interview – were not always well answered. The questions were perceived as 'too personal', some people thought that two names was enough and some women didn't want to mention the same friends again in the second interview. The decrease in visits from children is probably due to this kind of methodological problems. A second reason was that women had become busier and there may have been less time for visitors. Because some women were going to courses and activities several days a week, and their work at home with young children continued as usual, there was probably less time left in their program for visitors at home. In the third round the program seems to have normalised, either because the number of courses diminished, or maybe because they got used to the program. In the end the network of the women doesn't seem to have changed much.

One of the objectives of the project had been to increase the useful contacts in the neighbourhood. These kinds of contacts were probably mentioned as 'friends'. There was a decrease of the number of visitors among Turkish and Moroccan women, and only among other ethnic groups an increase. We can conclude that the project has not led to more friends who visit at home. Respondents told us that they meet the new acquaintances in the community centre, because they have to go there very often. Those who have stopped attending activities naturally do not see these new acquaintances anymore.

Though there is some lack of clarity about the actual number of contacts, we will now divide the respondents into three categories: a) initially isolated, b) initially focussed on their family, c) initially in a large network.

a) Initially isolated women

The category of women that looked initially isolated consists of those who answered in the first round that nobody visited them (five women: 14%). Against all expectations the number had increased in the second round to 10 women (25%), but in the third round there was only one left (4%). With some caution, we can conclude that the total number of isolated women went down during the period of the research. Of the five women that initially looked isolated, two had visitors in the second round, but didn't get visitors in the third round. All the others had visitors in the third round. So the group that has no visitors is not constant and small.

We mentioned already that the decrease of visitors in the second round was probably not a real increase in the number of isolated persons, but that women had less time left for visitors. A better question may be whether or not they have enough people around them to solve daily problems. Strangely 18% of the women in the first round confirmed this, but in the second round 97%. Though social desirability and irritation about the question interfere with the findings³, this is an indication that the women are not completely isolated. The answer to the question: 'to what extent they would like to have a bigger network of contacts?' points in the same direction: no one answered affirmative. The women who do not receive visitors – particularly the Moroccan ones – have more often no father/mother or brothers/sisters in the Netherlands; and also less friends than the others. As other research also shows (van den Berg, 2007) the family is most important for both practical and emotional support.

But as Van Tilburg (1988) shows, the actual number of visitors is not always the main determinant of the perceived lack of support. Some women have objectively little visitors, but don't suffer because of that, while others have many family members and friends but still need other supports.

b) Women that were at the start of the project very focussed on their family

Some women are completely occupied with their often large families, sometimes in combination with health problems, they have no energy to involve themselves in new networks. Young mothers with small children may have difficulties to keep their household running with limited means. Care, amusing the kids, work in the house and the contacts with institutions are all their responsibility and this occupies them. But older women with a large family are also not always enthusiastic to involve in more contacts. A large family, which exists of younger and older kids, guarantees a variety of visitors, and one doesn't easily feel isolated in that situation. Among the women who receive little visitors five are single mothers and four have a complete family.

c) Women who had a rather broad networks from the start

A third category of women had a varied network, also outside the family. They mentioned family members, friends, neighbours, other mothers and contacts through, for instance, the church. The Surinamese and Ghanaian women who are members of a Pentecostal or Lutheran Church have many acquaintances through these organisations and also get practical support. Among them a few seem to have become less active in their initial network, possibly because they became busy with the activities in the project. In the third round their initial contacts were still not restored to the old level.

To what extent do these contacts take place within peoples own ethnic community? The results show that the women in category a (isolated) and b (family oriented) nearly exclusively meet others from

³ The questions 'do you have enough people around you to solve daily problems' and 'would you like to have a bigger network of contacts', are both sensitive to social desirability effects. Some women had a small network during the first round and difficulties to solve their daily problems (childcare, finances, house), but they are nearly insulted when the question is posed. They don't want to be seen as someone who is incapable of making contacts.

their own ethnic community. With a limited knowledge of the Dutch language, it is nearly impossible to broaden the network to other ethnic groups. Turkish and Moroccan women in category c (large network) usually only meet people within their own ethnic group. The women from the 'other' ethnic groups – Surinamese, Ghanaians, etc. – mix more, firstly because of better knowledge of Dutch and English, and secondly because of their broader network. However, there is nearly nobody among the interviewees who has Dutch friends, except among the Surinamese women. During the first year, the women that already had a multi-ethnic network, ended up in a multi-ethnic network in the project also. At the start of the project we assumed that contact of Turkish and Moroccan women would increase on the moment that their Dutch language proficiency improves. This was not yet the case during the second round; and for many women learning Dutch is much more difficult than they thought it would be. Contact developed among the Turkish women themselves and also among the Moroccan women themselves. In the third round the number of friends from other ethnic groups has still not increased, but more women talk to their Dutch neighbours!

Of course being focussed on family and children does not only occur among Turkish and Moroccan women. This is also the case among Dutch housewives. The emancipation process of Turkish and Moroccan women is in an earlier phase, and escalating this process under pressure is not automatically successful, patience is needed. Just like in the first round we notice also in the second and third round that the networks of the women consist predominantly of other women. When we ask about visitors, usually the only men that are mentioned are family members.

4.5. Participation on the cultural and political terrain

The last terrain that Engbersen distinguished was the cultural and political terrain. The question whether or not people join in cultural activities was answered negatively in the first round by 28 women and positively by ten, but asking for details led to answers like: watching TV, watching a DVD at home (2 women), shopping with daughters, reading, activities in the community centre and activities at the school of their child. Only three women in the whole group went once a year to a cinema, one went to a Ghanaian celebration, one to a Greek celebration, one woman mentioned a concert/ballet and one a festival. Especially the Turkish and Moroccan women don't go anywhere, not even to Turkish and Moroccan associations.

In the second round this even deteriorated: only one Moroccan and one woman from the 'other' ethnic groups mention a cultural activity. There are two reasons: the first is methodological: language problems again caused confusion and misunderstanding of the question. The second reason is that women's day schedule changed so much that they felt terribly busy. Some complained that they had become too busy, since they also had to bring the kids to school, do the work in the household, visit doctors and hospitals, and take care of other family obligations. With their health limitations it had become impossible to visit religious gatherings, too.

In the third round cultural activities increased again. Maybe because of the diminished pressure on the courses, they were better able to cope with their program and cultural activities are less under pressure. But many 'cultural' activities that mentioned now, are organised by the community centre, and that is a direct consequence of their participation in the course.

Political participation

In the second and third interview we have asked questions about political participation: voting in elections, going to neighbourhood meetings. Less than half of the women have voted: only twelve (30%) voted at the national elections of 2006, while the national turnout was 80%. In the 2008 interview we asked again whether or not they had voted in the last elections, and 14 women replied confirming their participation. In total only four women ever went to an information evening in the neighbourhood, so we cannot speak of sizable political participation on the neighbourhood level.

Summarizing the sections on self-sufficiency, we notice a general improvement on most of the terrains after the second round, but the improvements are limited. Respondents go slightly more to Dutch institutions and cultural activities. After the second round the women had become, in their view, too busy: going three times a week to the community centre, school runs, maintaining the household. They were not used to structure their day. In the third round the complaints about business diminished. Many went on with the courses, but either they took fewer activities, or they got used to the program. That they are now voluntarily going to the activities, makes them feel more comfortable with it, and diminishes the feeling that it is all too much.

4.6 Additional effects of the project

Besides our results on predetermined terrains, we also asked a general question “What do you think of the projects?” We intend to get an impression of how the women experienced the setup, and what effects may occur that we haven’t captured. The answers vary from very positive to very negative.

Firstly there is a group of women that judged ‘Meedoen’ very positively. They were in a positive mood and their general attitude towards the future had improved. For some only certain specific elements were missing, like an advanced computer course or childcare; for them the support of the coach was sufficient to start new activities. Others saw possibilities for new jobs, for instance some women joined aerobics and gym classes and thought of becoming a teacher in that field. Their horizon changed and with some support they could look for suitable options.

In the second category a lot of the women were unwell. They mentioned, as the most important result of the project, that they had developed a social network. They went out more, and felt better because of the busier timetable and because they met more people. In this category there were a number of women who had spent most of their time inside and who did not see many other people. The results seemed to last: many of these women remained in the courses after the end of Meedoen, and kept going to the community centre. They have not gone back to their isolation after the project ended.

Women in the third category looked very negatively towards their future, they were unwell, they have not participated in many of the activities, they do not wish to comment and they feel forced to participate. By 2008 a lot of them were back at home. Maybe a longer engagement with the coaches might have had more of an effect in breaking this negative spiral and in convincing them that adjusted activities are possible and positive for them. Unfortunately, these women did not join activities to develop a healthy lifestyle, like exercising for example. They were only interested in the Dutch language lessons. But when they went to Dutch lessons, they found them extremely difficult. In our sample this category exists mainly of Turkish and Moroccan women. This group could not get out of the circle of being ill, therefore not taking initiatives, and because of that their problems worsened and consequently they felt even more miserable. The illness is presented as a reason for not joining activities, but the lack of contacts and plans aggravates the illness. In psychological terms, the ‘locus of control’ is outside oneself: the idea that she could be in charge of her own life is lacking. Buitelaar (2007) shows how hard Moroccan women find it to operate independently. The group or family is always more important than the individual. We observe something similar among our respondents.

A number of women are illiterate and have never been to school, while others had some years of education in their country of origin. In the second round we met women for whom learning Dutch turned out to be very difficult and who, even after a year of courses, are still barely able to speak Dutch, this consequently effects their self-esteem. Some husbands have reinforced this since, in three interviews, the husband was present and expressed his disappointment about the limited effect of the language course, concluding that the project was useless.

The change in mentality that is necessary to even think of a plan has started off in some cases. But they also get easily discouraged. They need the support of their spouse and family and of institutions to arrange childcare before they can go to the activities. When this does not succeed, some of them easily relapse to their old habits. Their frustration tolerance is low and they have difficulties to insist, particularly when their plan is not in line with family priorities. In the second half of 2007 a lack of nursery places caused frustration in the neighbourhood. Not only for single mothers but also for the married women with protesting husbands, this became a mayor problem.

Not all women who follow Dutch lessons are unhappy about their achievements. Some are very satisfied with the Dutch lessons, and 36% of them still attend. Their goal is to function independently, to be able to talk to their family doctor or with the teacher at school or with the neighbours. It is crucial that the course is not too difficult, and that the course is in neighbourhood.

Conclusively, it has become clearer in which field the improvement of the women is taking place. Though fewer visitors come to their homes, women feel they have enough people around them. Some of them were, for the first time, active outside the home, and were not yet used to that. Planning their day was something new to them. In the third round the complaints of being too busy had stopped. The women who joined certain activities probably diminished the hours spent there to an acceptable level. Those who were ill and did not enjoy the activities dropped out.

5. Conclusion

In this report we have looked at the effects over three years of a project called 'Meedoen, Bouwen aan Burgerschap' on the development of participating women. The results of the interviews with 40 women who started with this project in 2005–2006 have been presented. In the first round 38 women were interviewed, in the second round 38, of which two were new interviewees, and in the third round, 28 women were interviewed. This means that 25 women have been interviewed three times, 12 women two times and three women once. In the interviews we talked about the extent to which they have useful contacts and the extent to which they were self-sufficient. The idea behind this was, that the social capital (in this case useful contacts in the neighbourhood) would increase because of their participation in activities, and that they would be better able to look for solutions for their problems and solve their problems. The group is characterised by a multiplicity of problems: a high percentage of single mothers, a majority with health problems, a low educational level, problematic family situations and limited or no perspective on the labour market. In section 5.1 we will now treat preconditions and limitations of this project, in 5.2 we will elaborate on self-sufficiency and social capital and in 5.3 we discuss the long-term effects. like self-confidence and increase of perspectives. Finally in 5.3 we will shortly describe another project with a similar goal.

5.1 Limitations

A project like this can only be effective when certain preconditions are met. This study has shown that it is extremely difficult to help elderly women and the ones who have long-term illnesses. They turned out to be a large section of the target group of women in welfare. Apparently women with physical or psychological problems are overrepresented among the clients of the welfare service. In section 2 we explained that Meedoen is not a 'care project' but an 'employment project'. When we take the type of problems of this target group into account, it is questionable if it would not be more suitable to provide this group with more care? Besides improvement in the problematic home situation, a change in mentality seems necessary. For ten women in our sample, the passive attitude, the complaining and the health situation has not improved during their participation in the project. The physical and psychological health situation of this group remains a major problem, particularly for the elderly

women. A number of them fail to see themselves as an actor in their own lives, but view themselves as a victim of their fate. Among the respondents there are a number of women that did not turn up at lessons because they were ill. Learning Dutch takes more time than they had expected, and because they find learning difficult, in general, they lose courage and give up. As soon as the obligatory character of the activities was lifted, they drop out. A project of one year was not enough to convince this group; only with long-term support a change in mentality and perspective might be possible. The individual coach was essential, as already became apparent after the second interview. The work of the coaches was heavy. When one considers similar projects in the future, the question needs to be raised if the work that was requested of the coaches would, on the long run, be lighter.

The ethos of the project organization, 'it is good that it is obliged', can be questioned. This study has shown that some participants find force a bad solution, particularly in the Moroccan circles. The forcing of sick women is resented and seen as a 'typically Dutch' interference. It has even led to the aversion of anything Dutch in general, and of the Dutch social system in particular. The women were well aware of the existing negative stereotypes about Muslim women among Dutch, and they see the force in this framework. As Rath wrote already in 1992, forced activation of immigrants shows similarities with the earlier policies fight against anti-social behaviour, in Dutch it is entitled 'onmaatschappelijkheidsbestrijding' (Rath 1992:4). Members of a constructed problem category have to change into 'adjusted citizens' according to this view. In the past these policies were meant to elevate the labour class into 'full social development' (Dercksen & Verplanken, 1987), while currently immigrants are forced with sanctions to adjust to an imagined Dutch middle class community. Though good intentions are recognized, some women have trouble with the idea behind it that they do not adjust enough, that they should emancipate faster and particularly that force needs to be exhibited to achieve this.

5.2 Self-sufficiency and social capital

Self-sufficiency and social capital are the central concepts of this study. We studied self-sufficiency on the three terrains that Engbersen (1995) distinguishes when he speaks about integration. Social capital is these contacts within one's own network are useful to organise one's lifestyle and make more varied life choices. We will now provide a brief summary the results on these terrains.

a) First is *the economic terrain*: finances, work, education and housing. As section 4.1 showed, the majority of the respondents didn't have a lot of perspectives on this terrain, they live from welfare benefits. Though both in the first as in second the round 38% wants to find work, only three out of forty respondents have actually become employed in 2007, and only one more in 2008. In 2007, 41% of the women wanted to continue with education, but in 2008 only 27% had this wish. The problems that make entry to education and labour market difficult are: illness, children and the busy program connected to that, and the low starting qualifications that rule out most jobs. They rent social housing and this will probably remain so, as there is no real mobility on the economic terrain. We presume that experience with courses may have a positive effect on the children and on the children's attitudes towards following courses. Actual improvement in the women's lives has been found through the pushing back of their debts.

b) Secondly Engbersen talks about *the social terrain*. The effects of this project are not directly visible in the number of contacts, but maybe more in psychological effect around it. In section 4.4 we have shown that the mean number of visitors that the women receive at home between the first and third round went slightly up for Moroccan women and women from the 'other ethnic groups', but it went down slightly for Turkish women. The actual number of visitors in their homes, in the third round, is never higher than 1, 8 per week, and these are mainly family members. The new friends and acquaintances from the project do not visit homes, and are rarely asked for help with the children or

other practical problems. But we have noticed that the women who were initially classed as 'isolated', because they had limited contacts, are in the second round less dissatisfied with their network of acquaintances. At the start, almost one in five women felt a need for more contacts to solve daily problems, there is only one left in the second round, which finds that she has too limited a contact base. Only one woman gets no visitors at all during the third round. Also, because the courses are not obligatory anymore, the women had found a better equilibrium, by the third round, in combining courses with the household and the family and children. The ones who remained in the course, see the household and children as their first responsibility, and don't want a complaining spouse or relational problems, but they find it enjoyable and important to keep going to the course.

c) Thirdly Engbersen speaks about *the political-cultural terrain*. The expectation that women would become more active on the political- and cultural terrain was maybe too farfetched. If we see the low percentage that attends an information evening in their city district (section 4.5), it seems like a positive result that 35% have voted. We don't expect a lot of improvement in the political involvement of these women. Their interest in cultural activities is also limited. But visiting the community centre is an important first step, particularly because this continued after the project ended. Though the women are not going to a lot of cultural events in Amsterdam, they go to parties in the community centre and also place more importance on the activities at their children's school. For them it is important that the activities are nearby home, because they are strongly tied to their neighbourhood.

5.3 Long term effects, self confidence and perspective

We have also discovered effects that were not directly related to our central theoretical concepts. We will summarize the three most important ones here.

- 1. - After the second round we concluded that an important positive effect of the project was, that women extended themselves out of the safety of their homes, something that they did not often do before this project. A lot of women had become more active and had contacts outside the home. Their schedules had changed because they went to the courses, meetings or to coaching appointments two or three times a week. Many of them liked this, though some complained that they had become extremely busy. Several women mentioned that it is good that one has to go somewhere, that at least they are in the open air sometimes, and that they would find it terrible if the activities would stop, because they wouldn't know where to go instead. Though many women were not going further than the community centre, some had the idea that they 'belong to society' this way. In the third round, we notice that 57% of our respondents has continued to go to the courses (16 out of 28 interviewed women: 10 follow Dutch lessons, 8 exercise, 6 follow sewing or computer lessons). Of course we do not know whether the women that were not interviewed in the third round, are still going to the courses. It is possible that the percentage of women who dropped the courses is larger than among the ones we interviewed. In the most negative scenario, the success rate would be around 40%, assuming that all women, who were not interviewed, have dropped out (16 of 40 women are surely active). In a more positive scenario, assuming that the rate of drop out is the same among interviewees and not interviewed women, the success percentage would be 57%. So after the third round between 40% and 57% of the target group is still active.

- 2. - After the second round we concluded that problems had become debatable and therefore also easier to cope with and sometimes even solve, for instance, problems with delinquent children and debts. This was mainly due to the individual coaches, who phoned institutions and arranged structural support. This gave women courage and diminished the feeling that they were stuck in an unsolvable mess. It may be clear that the respondent with two sons in prison cannot solve all her problems, but according to the coaches discussing it and seeing perspectives is an important step. Also during the third round, when the project had finished, the women were supported, though not by Octra but by other institutions. For the coaches this has undoubtedly been a hard job: the accumulation of problems

and the constantly evolving new problems were, also for the coaches, tiring and demotivating. The coach was an example for the women, as a person that insists on going to institutions and who purposefully works on solving problems. Making issues discussable and defining them was a first step to define possible solutions (comparable to 'coming out'). Though some women saw it as Dutch interference which, which they did not like, for others this psychological adjustment has led them out of the negative spiral. Some still tend to complain a lot and not to take steps but some have become carefully more optimistic: they broadened their radius of action and they are a little more inclined to investigate solutions when they worry about something. A number of them told us, spontaneously, that they take more risks now than in the past. In the third round we hear again that some women think that their self-confidence has increased during the last period; but now their increased language ability in Dutch is stressed. This even shows among the ones who were disappointed that the project had ended, and saw this as another attempt by the Dutch social institutions to hamper their efforts. We also see that new problems have emerged among women whose children became adolescents. These new problems are not addressed in the same manner, because the coaches are no longer engaged.

– 3.– A third positive effect – which showed after the second round – was that a number of women see new perspectives and possibilities, through participating in courses as a new experience. Going to a course is important because one learns something and has contact with others. But for those who have never been to a course before, except maybe the Dutch citizenship course ('inburgeringscursus'), discover the pleasure of learning about a new field of interest and gaining new skills. When asked, how do you find the project, many just answered 'nice', but the limited language ability hides that it was not only a pleasurable experience, but also an experience that led to a broadened perspective. We saw this most clearly among the respondents who wished to become gym teachers after the sport course or a dressmaker following the sewing course, or hairdresser after the hairdressing course. Unfortunately we have to conclude that after the third round there was not a single course member who had actually registered for relevant training schools. The reason why is still unclear. We conclude that the course has brought new perspectives, also for women who do not directly think of a profession, it is positive that there are interesting things one can learn about in their own neighbourhood in a safe environment and that learning is something that can be a pleasure. Not everyone uses all possibilities to the maximum, but at least there is more knowledge about courses for their children in the future.

5.4 Closing remarks: a short comparison with another experiment

This evaluation has shown that the target category of this project, the most difficult cases of the employment agency. These include the many women who are ill or single mothers or near retirement age, and who are illiterate, with a limited knowledge of Dutch. In these cases securing full-time employment would be very difficult. The choice of this target group is both the strong and the weak side of this project. For a number of women a care project would probably be more suitable than an employment project. On the other hand, the women under consideration have such complicated and multi-faceted problems, which until now, no one got a complete view of it, and because of the personal coaching, at least some of their problems have been countered in this complicated context.

Recently there have been other neighborhood projects that were targeted at tackling complex problems of inhabitants from a social work perspective. These initiatives have a more limited goal, since they are purely directed towards care and not towards labour market activation. In the Amsterdam City District Zeeburg work is done under the flag of 'Achter the Voordeur' (Behind the Front Door) and in City District Slotervaart, activities take place through a project named 'Sociaal Investerings Plan' (Social Investment Plan) (Metaal, Delnoij & Duyvendak 2006). So called neighbourhood advisors, employed by the welfare institutions, ring at all front doors of all households in selected streets, in the most problematic neighbourhoods, first for some brief introductions and pleasantries and continuing with questions on whether they need advice on for instance schools, youth, employment or other

issues, that can be solved with the help of municipal social institutions. Again the most difficult cases were households with multiple problems, for instance unemployment, debts, criminal problems, psychiatric issues or rent arrears. These kinds of inhabitants deal with several institutions that support them on specific terrains, like the employment office, debt support, the child protection agency, youth workers, psychiatric care, but only the person him or herself has an overall picture of this. The largest category of problems was related to work and income and to the schooling of the children, and this was relatively easy to solve. Problems with health and psychiatry proved the most difficult to solve.

It is questionable whether the social workers going from door to door would have met the women of this research. Their approach is that inhabitants voluntarily decide to receive help or not, and also that not just the clients of the employment agency are approached, but also people on other finances, like elderly, disabled and housewives. The women that were requested to join 'Meedoen', had until that moment, kept their doors closed for any official or social worker. That means that it is quite possible that not all these women would have been reached with another approach. 'Meedoen' exceeds other projects in intensity, and can thereby have more effect on long-term psychological processes, as was described in section 5.2, and as has become clear from this report. The intensive approach has more impact on the lives of women and on their daily activities than, for example, the door-to-door approach. But as Van den Berg correctly observes, we have to realise that women are eager to join language courses, but don't like to get 'forced' into emancipation and don't like the focus on kook arrears (Van den Berg 2007:24).

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