

The role of migrant-welcoming initiatives in the integration process.

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Introduction

In the period of the Syrian refugee crisis, many countries tried to prevent large amounts of arrivals, while simultaneously Germany and a few other European cities adopted the “welcome culture” for refugees (Braun, 2017; Artero, 2019). This culture already existed in Germany for welcoming labor-related immigration, but as it spread to other European cities, it was given a new meaning through volunteers advocating for the support of migrants and refugees (Braun, 2017).

The media framed Syrian refugees as people in dire crisis, needing a safe place of residence. In a desire to help, many people volunteered in asylum-seeker centers and joined the “welcome movement” (Artero, 2019; Fleischmann, & Steinhilper, 2017). From this, a new structure of help emerged of middle class volunteers working with established civil society actors, such as NGOs. These middle class volunteers headed the creation of new voluntary organizations, referred in this research as “welcoming initiatives” (Artero, 2019).

European cities implemented varying strategies to handle the migration flow of Syrians, resulting in differing refugee processes and structures of help across the continent. In Germany, welcoming culture was rising on a national level and handled uniformly, but cities and smaller villages in other countries initiated welcoming culture differently per municipality.

For example, the city of Gaziantep in the Republic of Turkey has over 2 million inhabitants and experienced over half a million Syrian arrivals since 2011. As a reaction to this sudden change, a new structure of help was reformed from an existing one: Kirkayak. While Kirkayak originally only organized cultural events, it became a cultural center for both locals and newcomers from Syria (Baban, Keyman, Paker, & Rygiel, 2018). They opened their doors to these Syrian newcomers, giving them a platform to introduce themselves and generate awareness about refugee issues within Gaziantep. Due to the lack of institutional infrastructure advocating for refugees in the city, Kirkayak became an essential resource for Syrian newcomers. Tarlan, one of the founders of Kirkayak, describes the practices of the organization as creating an “open space” where Syrians are considered equals and no longer refugees or “the other” (Baban, et al., 2018, pp.5). Rather, Kirkayak encourages Syrians to organize social and cultural events, allowing them to connect with the local residents of Gaziantep. An example of this type of event is a kitchen project, which brings Turkish and Syrian women together and creates a space for these women to bond through food and stories.

In Riace, a small Italian village of 1,800, local residents dealt very differently with their 500 newcomers. Under the leadership of their mayor, Domenico Lucano,

the town agreed to welcome these refugees with some financial help from the EU (Baban, et al., 2018). Riace was previously a decaying town, but it was revitalized from new policies associated with welcoming Syrian newcomers. Mayor Lucano proactively prevented fearful prejudices from locals by mixing them with refugees. His new policies, which facilitated mixed housing projects and funded employment projects for mixed work spaces, ensured that locals regularly contacted newcomers. As a result, new bonds were formed, more businesses were created, the local economic activity expanded, and the village attracted more inhabitants (Baban, et al., 2018).

These two very different examples both show varied structures of help. The case of Riace shows that the structure of help can be translated into policy and leadership. With a positive attitude, the mayor of Riace created a welcoming space with policies, soft-forcing refugees into the existing community. On the other hand, the civil society initiative of Kirkayak took on the responsibilities of creating a welcoming space and fostering interactions between locals and refugees, while governmental and institutional facilities in Gaziantep fell short. These examples provide insight into the underlying processes and conditions in refugee-accepting cities; when there are no policymakers willing to accept responsibility, the community must create the welcoming space themselves.

While accepting refugees into safe cities is commendable enough, preventing a divide between locals and newcomers requires more effort in creating a mixed community. Even though the example cases in Gaziantep and Riace are very different in policy, what they have in common shows the essence of welcoming spaces; they welcome refugees by creating opportunities to get in contact with local long-term residents. The everyday interactions that result from these opportunities impacts the notion of who does or does not belong within the community (Baban, et al., 2018). Consequently, welcoming initiatives are often perceived as organizations who play an important role in the integration process of participating newcomers. These welcoming initiatives assist the refugees in expanding their social capital, cultural knowledge of their new residence, and agency. The research conducted for this thesis critically evaluates the role of welcoming initiatives by examining a case study with respect to welcoming spaces literature.

This research explores an existing welcoming initiative in Nederweert, Limburg which is focused on welcoming status holders; former asylum seekers with a residency permit, who are members of the Dutch society. Interviews with Syrian status holders in Nederweert, a volunteer of LINK Nederweert, the municipality of Nederweert, and the NGO Vluchtelingenwerk Nederland helped uncover the impact of a welcoming space on aforementioned status holders. Furthermore, this research examines whether LINK truly is a welcoming space, identifies its functions, and analyses provided types of aid both before and during a pandemic. The following concepts will provide critical insight on the position and effectiveness of welcoming

initiatives: integration, the sociabilities of emplacement, interculturality, and transnationality. The relationship between these concepts to post-colonial theories will provide a decolonized perspective on the concept of integration and forged relationships between volunteers and welcoming initiative participants.

Most scientific research about welcoming spaces or welcoming communities is centered from the perspective of the local long-term residents. Often, migrants are written about as if they do not have agency, resulting in the rare inclusions of their opinions and perspectives. Therefore, to best communicate the perspectives of migrants on welcoming spaces, this research provides a migrant-centered approach. To put these perspectives in context, interviews with the main volunteer, municipality, and Vluchtelingenwerk creates a more holistic view on the case study.

This research explores what conditions are necessary to create welcoming space for non-European migrants, like LINK Nederweert. Furthermore, this research determines to what extent the welcoming space influences the status holders and the role of LINK in the integration process of its participants. The main research question therefore is:

To what extent does LINK Nederweert influence the local Syrian status holders, both before and the COVID-19 pandemic?

To answer the main question, the following sub-questions were composed and evaluated:

- *What are the conditions to create a welcoming space for non- EU migrants?*
- *What does LINK mean to non-EU migrants?*
- *What influence does LINK have on the life of the non-EU migrants?*
- *To what extent does a welcoming initiative impact the process of social and cultural integration of the status holders?*
- *How does the social and physical environment of Nederweert affect both the welcoming space and the non-EU migrants?*
- *What influence does the COVID-19 pandemic have on the initiative and its participants?*

Considering that most prior research involving welcoming initiatives are situated in more ethnically diverse urban contexts, this research provides unique findings on how a welcoming initiative in a rural context functions. Additionally, due to the fact that this research was performed during the COVID-19 pandemic, the research provides an unique insight in its effects on the welcoming initiative and status

holders. The results will critically analyze the position of welcoming initiatives in the integration progress of the newcomers. All in all, these are interesting insights for the currently ongoing welcoming spaces project, analysing the process of attracting non-European migrants to shrinking regions to revitalize them. These insights also apply to municipalities, policymakers, and NGOs who are interested in or part of welcoming initiatives for refugees.

This document includes four main parts. First, a detailed theoretical framework, which will discuss the four main concepts that will be used to analyse the findings in this thesis: integration, the sociabilities of emplacement, interculturality, and transnational identity. Next, the methodology section will address all decisions made during the research process, explaining and justifying selected methods and research instruments. It will also include important contextual information relevant to the case study, such as insights in the Dutch context, Nederweert, the history of LINK, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Afterwards, the results section reports findings of this research, including a thorough discussion and analysis with respect to the main concepts mentioned in the theoretic framework. Lastly, this thesis ends with a critical conclusion and discussion section, which summarizes the main results, policy recommendations, and limitations of this research. Additionally, this document includes a short reflection on the research itself and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the research process.

Theoretic Framework

In this theoretical framework, the insights and discussions on the concepts: integration, the sociabilities of emplacement, interculturality, and transnational identity, in relation to welcoming spaces that intend to welcome refugees and/or status holders will be discussed. Within the different concepts, scholarly discourse will be used to communicate a variety of perspectives and ideas, including a strong post-colonial perspective since some of the concepts are built on these decolonizing ideas. The decolonizing ideas shine light on how relationships and interactions in the welcoming initiatives are shaped by historically sedimented understandings of gender, development, and ethnicity. This section creates a theoretic framework focused on analyzing the role of welcoming initiatives in relation to the concept of integration and identifying underlying power structures.

1.1 Integration

The concept of integration needs to be reconceptualized due to problematic underlying ideas, a changing society, and new theories and perspectives. Rethinking integration poses interesting new insights on spaces like welcoming initiatives and their role in the 'integration' process of newcomers.

Integration is a topic which is mostly discussed in relation to immigration politics, resulting in the discourse and the framing of integration dominantly being shaped by the political parties of a nation. More conservative political parties are often the ones who communicate very clearly that they believe that the local dominant culture is superior to other cultures, in order to justify integration (Braun, 2017). As a result, integration is mostly framed as assimilation, which implies that the newcomers are demanded to adapt to the dominant culture, while the dominant culture remains largely unchanged (Grzymala-Kazłowska, & Phillimore, 2018; Morrice, 2017). Consequently, integration is not seen as a form of acculturation, where cultural change occurs because of the contact between different cultural groups (Grzymala-Kazłowska, & Phillimore, 2018). Critics therefore demand citizens and policymakers to rethink the concept of integration, based on notions of emerging super-diversity and transnationalism (Grzymala-Kazłowska, & Phillimore, 2018).

Integration is often a main goal of a welcoming initiative. Due to the bridges between newcomers and local communities created by welcoming spaces, the underlying ideas regarding integration of welcoming initiative volunteers shapes the

effectiveness of the initiative itself. Nevertheless, welcoming initiatives are structured according to the help provided to newcomers. Volunteers providing this help shape the welcoming initiative's agenda, effectiveness, and long-term strategies for integration. Based on underlying beliefs and power relations hidden in interactions between a volunteer and refugee or migrant, the welcoming initiative is both positively and negatively influenced through volunteer actions and inactions. By applying decolonial thoughts and post-development literature to these structures of help, insights about the existing power relations and perspectives on integration in the context of a welcoming space can be critically discussed (Braun, 2017).

Decolonization is conceptualized as the process of dismantling colonialist power structures in all its forms. Decolonization criticizes Western theories and epistemology by examining how the hierarchical relation between the West and the rest are intertwined with frameworks about history, politics, epistemology and many other aspects (Braun, 2017). Eurocentric ideas like modernity, Occidentalism, and the European paradigm of rational knowledge portray the West as civil, progressive, and developed. Furthermore, this Eurocentricity supports the idea that Western cultures are superior to other cultures, and examples of these colonial power structures are deemed problematic by decolonial approaches (Mignolo, 2000; Quijano, 2007).

Consequently, the decolonial approach in relation to integration critically assesses the colonial point of view and poses the question: to what degree does the understanding of integration affect charitable assistance, and is this reflective of the colonial desire to help 'the other' (Braun, 2017)? Thus, the decolonial approach finds it problematic that the concept of integration often includes forced Western values upon other cultures. Rather than respecting the other cultures, they are erased in favor of assimilation into Western cultures. This is especially problematic when considering education of youths with non-Western heritages by those local to the Western culture, as education initiatives may further erase non-Western stories, lessons, and morals essential to other cultures. Therefore, to prevent integration from being erasure of other cultures, integration itself must be decolonialized.

Grzymala-Kazłowska, & Phillimore (2018) argue that when rethinking the concept of integration, there are three new ways of conceptualizing it. First of all, integration can be viewed as more holistic by putting emphasis on the interactive aspects of integration, known as "reciprocal integration" (pp. 189). Reciprocal integration advances Western cultures by exposing them to other cultures during the integration process, diversifying both cultures. Secondly, integration can be conceptualized through theories that provide an alternative perspective on the adaptation and settlement process of newcomers, like the sociabilities of emplacement (Glick Schiller & Çağlar, 2016, Grzymala-Kazłowska, & Phillimore, 2018). Thirdly, they argue that the underlying notions of those involved in integration need to be researched in different contexts to reconceptualize it. For example, more research is required regarding the relationship between integration

and transnational or transit populations and what integrations means in super-diverse communities without the presence of one dominant culture.

In order to disband remaining colonial power structures and reconceptualize integration, the next few paragraphs will introduce theories that contain alternative ways of perceiving integration and the role of welcoming initiatives regarding integration. Together, these theories form a more holistic, decolonized perspective on integration.

1.2 The sociabilities of emplacement

Instead of viewing the impact of social contact with the policy term of social integration in mind, an alternative way of perceiving social contact in relation to the newcomers is focused on the settlement process of newcomers creating mutual support relationships.

In 2011, Glick Schiller et al. introduced the concept of ‘sociabilities of emplacement’, which sees sociability as social interaction that is based on the shared human capacities to relate to others and the desire for human relationships not to be solely for utilitarian purposes (pp.414-415). It is important to note that this concept focuses on relations where people see each other as equals. However, this does not ultimately have to be a friendship, since some of these relationships may be of limited durability (Wessendorf, & Phillimore, 2019). These relationships go further than bridging social capital, also including “pleasure, satisfaction and meaning” and are thus not only functional (Glick Schiller & Çağlar, 2016). The “mutual sense of being human” characterizes these relationships, representing a shift away from the concept of ‘social integration’ (Glick Schiller & Çağlar, 2016; Wessendorf, & Phillimore, 2019).

They defined the concept of emplacement as one’s effort to settle in a specific locality by building networks of connections based on the locals constraints and opportunities (Glick Schiller & Çağlar, 2016). Glick et al. (2016) identified three fruitful settings for creating these networks: among neighbors, in workplaces, and in institutional spaces. Institutional spaces include churches, schools, and libraries. At these places, relationships of mutual support are often forged with the long time local residents. When the newcomers experience a lack of support by the governmental welfare institutions, they start to look for individuals within the community who can help them themselves (Glick Schiller & Çağlar, 2016). In these cases, the migrants took initiative and established relationships which both affected the migrant and those with whom they interacted.

However, whether a newcomer feels socially embedded is not always dependent on whether they have established relationships with local residents

(Wessendorf, & Phillimore, 2019). Often, other migrants provide support to the newcomers. These other migrants may not necessarily be co-ethnics, but they are migrants who are a step ahead in the settlement process and want to help those going through the same situation they themselves experienced. Phillimore et al. (2018) explains this phenomenon of mutual support among migrants as “informal reciprocity.” This is based on the idea that trust on a local or community level will result in reciprocal actions. In the case of migrants, these actions often manifest as transfers of information, social support, use of language skill, and sharing financial and other resources (Phillimore et al., 2018).

A welcoming space has the possibility of being an ideal setting for forging mutual support relations. If the welcoming space meets the conditions that are necessary in creating an open space, both volunteers and participants are considered equal and equally respected. The type of relationship that occurs will eventually determine whether a welcoming space is focused on helping the newcomer with his or her settlement process or helping them to solely build bridging capital. Intercultural dialogue can act as a mediator for establishing these mutual support relationships, the next chapter will explain this more in depth.

1.3 Interculturality

In post-colonial literature, interculturality is a concept that is seen as free of colonial power structures, and therefore entails many possibilities in rethinking integration from a cultural and educational perspective.

There has been an increasing backlash against the construct of multiculturalism in the scholarly discourse (Vertovec and Wessendorf, 2010). Multiculturalism has many different definitions and meanings, and has been widely used in politics. However, critics argue that the construct of multiculturalism fails to address the existing inequalities between ethnic groups (Vertovec and Wessendorf, 2010). Multiculturalism puts too much emphasis on praising the cultural differences instead of addressing conflicts, segregation, and stimulating community cohesion.

As a response to the critique of multiculturalism, interculturality started to enter the discussion (Morrice, 2017). Quijano (2007) described interculturality as:

“The liberation of intercultural relations from the prison of coloniality also implies the freedom of all peoples to choose, individually or collectively, such relations: a freedom to choose between various

cultural orientations, and, above all, the freedom to produce, criticize, change, and exchange culture and society.”(pp. 178).

Thus, interculturality focuses on inter-cultural conversations where both cultures are considered equal and learn from each other’s perspectives. Quijano (2007) sees interculturality as completely free from hierarchical power structures, inequality, discrimination, and exploitation. This argument is based on the post-colonial beliefs that colonial power structures still play a role in everyday life practices; it is still present in the framework from which we view the West and the rest, discrimination, race, ethnicity and borders (Quijano, 2007). These colonial structures therefore still affect the contemporary constructions of perceptions, interactions, and relationships.

These post-colonial ideas suggest that colonial power structures also play a role in shaping welcoming initiatives, since these are places where different cultures meet and connect. Additionally, these welcoming spaces provide a structure of help, which rely on hierarchical and inegalitarian structures of ‘help’ (Braun, 2017). This indicates a power structure, since it determines who needs to be helped and how, which is connected to the way one sees ‘self’ in relation to the ‘other’. These relations are therefore also shaped by frameworks about gender, race, and ethnicity. In the context of a welcoming space or initiative, there are plenty of opportunities for interculturality if the structure of help facilitates it. According to Braun (2017), volunteers within the German welcoming culture are very eager to learn from the refugees, suggesting that welcoming initiatives are a very fruitful space for interculturality. However, because some welcoming initiatives also aim to educate newcomers, this does pose the question: how should interculturality be applied within the context of education such that representatives from both cultures feel accurately portrayed, empowered, and enriched?

According to the United Nations (UNESCO, 2020), education is a key tool in creating equitable relations between different ethnic communities. It is considered an important element in different processes, for example in the process of the willingness of the people to engage in an inter-cultural conversation and in the process of creating empathy and being able to view something from another perspective. Many welcoming initiatives also aim to educate, and LINK Nederweert is one of these initiatives, often connected to the efforts of ‘integrating’ the newcomers.

Applying interculturality in education is described by Morrice (2017) as an open educational space where fixed frameworks and binary notions of cultural groups are challenged through intercultural dialogue. Navas-Camargo and RUÍZ (2018) give a more detailed description: “[Education] should integrate dimensions such as exchange, interaction, mutual relationship, openness and effective solidarity among the diverse ways of understanding life, values, history, social conducts” (pp.3). The essence of applying interculturality in education is therefore a mutual learning experience that combats preconceptions and stereotypes. Hence, it takes the

form of everyday interactions rather than the formal textbook type of education. Navas-Camargo and RUÍZ (2018) characterize these conversations as interactions in which one tries to comprehend the other, without imposing one's own values and without needing to identify ourselves with their values.

Interculturality could be a central theme within a welcoming space, since these spaces often aim to bring together different cultures and create learning opportunities for all cultures. Using the concept of interculturality in a new way of conceptualizing integration puts the focus on the interactive impact of integration, where both the locals and newcomers learn from each other. Additionally, a more interactive perspective of integration leaves more room for concepts like transnationalism.

1.4 Transnational identity

International migration causes many transitions in relation to place and occupation and contextual changes, which consequently affect a migrant's sense of place and identity (Huot, & Rudman, 2010). These changes often go hand-in-hand with the creation of a new transnational identity.

Migrants are known for maintaining ties with people and institutions from their home country. Therefore, transnationalism is defined as the process by which migrants create and sustain multiple social relations that connects their societies of origin and settlement through the creation of cross-border and international networks (Vertovec, 2001). Transnationalism can be understood as a form of agency for migrants simultaneously participating in multiple social spaces and structural universes (Lacroix, 2014). The emergence of transnational practices in a migrant's new place of residence often results from the effort to overcome the contradictions created by their dual-embedding.

Sustaining this transnational identity has through the years been facilitated by technology, due to the technical improvements in infrastructure and the increased accessibility of online platforms. This made it easier to both maintain contacts with people and get access to homeland media outlets.

According to researchers, conflict-generated migrants use their transnationalism to become activists, representing a shift from victim to challenger, to become an impactful actor not only in the homeland but also in the hostland (Baser, & Halperin, 2019). However, it is important to recognize that while the displacement of a culture of refugees is heterogeneous, every individual has different needs, set of experiences, and agendas. Nevertheless, this is an example of how agency plays a role in transnationalism, since it can increase during the emplacement process.

Lacroix (2014) argues that transnationalism is the result of societal dynamics of both the home country and new country of residence. Due to the fact that migrants do not only identify themselves as migrants, they are individuals who have multiple alternate personas and statuses. They are mothers, fathers, daughters, sons, employees, neighbors, and citizens within both home and host nations. These identifications and roles continuously demand them to cope with the dynamic social contexts of both the societies they are embedded in, shaping their transnational identity. Instead of viewing transnationalism as the result of failure of integration in the new society, one can view it rather as a form of “hyper-integration” due to the multiple cultural insertions (Lacroix, 2014 ,pp.30).

Thus, welcoming initiatives can play a part in the creation of transnational identities. Through intercultural dialogues, newcomers have the freedom to shape their identity. The establishment of new social relations can increase their amount of resources and their agency. If the welcoming initiative can help the newcomers embed themselves in the new local context, it consequently helps form transnational identities of its participants due to the societal dynamics. Including the concept of transnational identity in reconceptualizing integration makes the perspective of integration more holistic, due to the recognition of the multiple transnational identities and increased agency. Therefore, the welcoming initiatives broadens the impact integration can have on a newcomer.

Methodology

In this chapter, the selected methodology will be justified by explaining the choices that were made during the research. First, the reasons for choosing the selected case study will quickly be addressed. Next, the used qualitative research methods will be explained, followed by a paragraph about the ethics concerning working with status holders during a pandemic and the choices that were made because of this situation during the research. Followed by an explanation on the selected interviewees who participate in this research and the operationalization of the topics. Afterwards the used methods for analyzing the findings will be discussed. The contextual information that influences the case study and the finding of this thesis will be discussed next, explaining the Dutch rural context, the history of the case study and its development over the years, the influence of the pandemic on the initiative and their current challenges. Lastly an overview of the data gathering process in the context of the pandemic will be providing a clear insight on the time-scale of this research, showing the effect of the pandemic on the case study.

2.1 Selection case study

The case study, LINK Nederweert, was selected from a list of existing “welcoming spaces” in shrinking regions of the Netherlands (van de Ven, 2019). This case study was chosen based on the demographic and geographic character of the location, Nederweert. Most of the research which is done on welcoming initiatives is situated in a (super) ethnically diverse urban context, this research intended to therefore provide insights on welcoming initiatives in a rural context. Nederweert is a village, with a relatively small population located in a rural area, making it an interesting context for a welcoming initiative. Additionally, LINK is a citizens initiative, this added to the uniqueness of the initiative. Despite the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, which just started to occur at the beginning of this research, LINK was able to stay in contact with most of the status holders, making this research possible. For more information on the contextual information and history of the case study, see paragraph 2.7.

LINK as a case study was therefore selected because of its rural context, the fact that it is a citizens initiative and because of their way of dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic and consequently being able to participate in this research.

2.2 Qualitative research methods

Since this research aims to communicate multiple perspectives, the perspective of the Syrian status holders, volunteers, municipality and Vluchtelingenwerk Nederland, this is reflected in the qualitative methods that were used. This research, however, was done during the COVID-19 pandemic which caused face to face interactions to be not possible, this consequently limited the access to some status holders. In order to get to know the multiple perspectives during the pandemic all the interviews were done through WhatsApp, Skype or Microsoft Teams video calls. These formats were chosen because they were easy accessible and often already familiar to the interviewees.

After coming in contact with the organizer of the welcoming space, who adapted a gatekeeping role, a post was written on the website of the initiative, to inform both the status holders and volunteers that are involved in the initiative about this research. The organizer also granted access to the WhatsApp group to show the interactions between the status holders and the volunteers and as a way to notify me when the next online meeting would take place. Everyone was thus informed in advance of my participation in the WhatsApp group and online meetings.

The online meetings were every Thursday evening and lasted for about an hour. Through these meetings a rapport was established; the participants of the meeting got familiar with me and vice versa.

After two online meetings an in-depth interview with the organizer of the initiative was arranged. He helped with selecting the participants, this was partially based on how well they mastered Dutch or English. Afterwards he asked the Syrian men if they were interested in participating in this research and whether they minded being interviewed online. The participants were thus selected through snowball sampling. All the following interviews were arranged through WhatsApp communication and were held through skype or WhatsApp video calls.

In total five Syrian men were interviewed, the woman who came up with the initiative, the current organizer/ main volunteer, a coordinator of Vluchtelingenwerk Nederland and a policymaker from the municipality of Nederweert. Nevertheless, putting together a diverse group of Syrian participants was hard due to technical and language limitations and the relatively small number of attendees of the initiative. The topic lists which structured these interviews can be found in Appendix A, the questions from these lists will be discussed in the paragraph on operationalization of the research..

This research is thus mostly based on nine online interviews and observations done during six online language cafés. Due to the little amount of interviews and the uniqueness of the initiative and context, the findings are hard to generalize to all welcoming initiatives. LINK should therefore be considered a case study, which

provides new insights into how welcoming initiatives can function and provide aid before and during a pandemic.

2.3 Ethics

First of all, it is important to note that with cross-cultural research like this it is necessary to take on a sensitive approach due to differences in power relations, language and translation biases.

Since the Syrian status holders do not always master Dutch or English, informed consent was as clear as possible discussed both before the interviews took place and at the beginning of the interview. Also consent for recording the video calls and using the names in the interviews were clearly discussed before the interview. To ensure richness of data and consent, some interviews involved family members who participated as translators.

Participants who only wanted to be interviewed in person, due to stress of the online interview being tapped, were not interviewed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic caused enough stress and anxiety, proceeding with these interviews would do more harm than good.

2.4 The interviewees

As said earlier, this research included as many different perspectives on LINK Nederweert as possible in the context of the pandemic. This research however started with a migrant focused approach which entailed a total of 5 Syrian men who were interviewed and the main volunteer of LINK. All men were middle aged and had a wife and children. This demographic target group was chosen because it was the largest group who attended the LINK Nederweert language café. Both in person before the pandemic as online during the pandemic. The reason why mostly men attend the (online) language café, is because of the time it usually takes place. The language café is held every Thursday around 19:30, because it is held in the evening most women cannot come because they need to supervise their children.

Afterwards the decision was made to broaden the research and include more perspectives, to increase the amount of available interviews and data on LINK. This resulted in an interview with the original creator of LINK, a Syrian female status holder and an interview with a related coordinator of the Dutch NGO Vluchtelingenwerk Nederland and an interview with a policymaker of the municipality of Nederweert. Table 2.2 shows an overview of all the interviewees, their level of participation with LINK and their Job status to show differences among the Syrian status holders.

Table 2.2 Diversity among the participants

Interviewees	Level of participation within LINK	Job status
Interviewee 1: main volunteer/organizer LINK	Always present	Retired, Language coach Vluchtelingenwerk
Interviewee 2; Syrian male status holder	Regular visitor	Not working due to health issues.
Interviewee 3; Syrian male status holder	Regular visitor	Not working, highly educated
Interviewee 4; Syrian male status holder	Regular visitor	Works, low skilled work
Interviewee 5; Syrian male status holder	Regular visitor	Works, low skilled work
Interviewee 6: Syrian male status holder	Does not visit	Works, low skilled work
Interviewee 7: Syrian woman who created LINK	Occasionally visits	-
Interviewee 8: Coordinator of Vluchtelingen werk	Occasionally visits	Coordinator Vluchtelingenwerk Nederland of the department of the province of Limburg
Interviewee 9: Policy maker Nederweert	Does not visit	Policy maker within the municipality of Nederweert

2.5 Operationalization

This research made use of two research instruments. First of all, topic lists were used to structure the online interviews as much as possible and to operationalize the used concepts in the theoretic framework. Secondly, online participation observation during the language café was done to gather additional data.

2.5.1 Topic lists

The topic lists (see appendix A) were made based on both the central concepts from the theoretic framework and the main and sub questions. To give the interviews structure and to make sure that the necessary data to answer the main and sub questions will be gathered. Due to the chronological order of the interviews, some topic lists also included questions based on findings of previous interviews. An overview of the chronologic order can be found in paragraph 2.8. However, it is important to note that the topic list that was used for the initiative's participants was used rather flexibly during the interviews due to varying proficiency in Dutch. Some questions were bended or eventually discarded if they did not understand it.

Table 2.1 shows how the central concepts from the theoretic framework were operationalized. It includes questions from all the different topic lists that were used: the list for the Syrian men, the Syrian woman who created LINK, the current organizer/ main volunteer of the initiative, coordinator of Vluchtelingenwerk Nederland and the policy maker of the municipality of Nederweert.

All the interviews started with general questions about the interviewee. The interviews with the volunteer, coordinator of Vluchtelingenwerk and the policy maker for example started with questions about their work and how they got involved with LINK Nederweert. In the case of the Syrian status holders more questions were asked regarding their family, age, education and previous experiences, in order to get to know their past and current living situation.

Next more contextual questions were asked. In the interview with the volunteer and the Syrian women who created LINK Nederweert, these questions mainly revolved around how and why LINK Nederweert was created. Followed up by the effect of the rural context of Nederweert on LINK and its participants. The Syrian status holders were asked if they experienced any struggles due to the rural environment and whether they enjoyed living in Nederweert. Posing the question if they would prefer living in a more urban area.

Afterward the focus of the interviews were directed on LINK Nederweert, the Syrian status holders were asked for their opinion on the initiatives and its language cafes and events. The participants were asked to what extent they attend these sessions during and before the COVID-19 pandemic. By asking how LINK has influenced their life in Nederweert, the underlying meaning of the initiative to the status holders was explored and insights on the role of LINK in the integration process of the status holders were gathered. Questions about the social life of the status holders, functioned as an indicator on whether or not the status holders are socially embedded and to what extent the social connections established through LINK were solely functional.

The interviews with the coordinator of Vluchtelingenwerk and the policy

maker of Nederweert, revolved more around reflecting on the practices and functions of LINK Nederweert. Since LINK consists of volunteers who obtain over knowledge gathered through work as a language coach of Vluchtelingenwerk, it does not function the same as formal institutions. In these interviews the questions like whether LINK should include a professional employee to provide additional formal ways of help were asked, and in what ways LINK differs from similar formal initiatives.

All of the interviews ended with the question whether they wanted to add any information or stories before the interview ends. Giving every interviewee some extra space for them to make sure their perspective is communicated well enough. Afterwards all interviewees were thanked for their participation and were told that they could always contact me if they had any questions or things they wanted to add.

Table 2.1 Operationalization of central concepts from the theoretic framework.

Concepts	Variables	Examples of Interview question
Household formation, age, background, work, education, experiences, expectations etc.	Household formation	<i>Did you move with your whole family? Do you currently have a job?</i>
	background	<i>How long have you been living in the Netherlands? How long in Nederweert?</i>
The rural living environment	Previous living experiences	<i>Is this the first place in the Netherlands you have lived in? If not, where else have you lived?</i>
	Satisfaction with current living environment	<i>Do you like living here in Nederweert? Are there any struggles of living in Nederweert? What do you think of the Dutch people who live in Nederweert? Are they friendly to you and your family?</i>

	Future moving plans	<p><i>Would you like to move in the future?</i></p> <p><i>Would you prefer to live in a larger/ smaller town?</i></p>
The welcoming space	History	<p><i>Who came up with the initiative?</i></p> <p><i>When was the welcoming space first active/ open?</i></p> <p><i>How did the initiative develop itself over time?</i></p>
Participants perception on the welcoming space	Participation	<p><i>Do you regularly go to the language café?</i></p> <p><i>Do you go to the events that the initiative organizes?</i></p>
	Opinion	<p><i>What Is your opinion of the welcoming space?</i></p> <p><i>What do you like/dislike about it?</i></p> <p><i>Do you wish for the welcoming space to change or add something?</i></p> <p><i>What do you like or dislike about the events?</i></p>
	Meaning	<p><i>What does the welcoming space mean to you and fellow newcomers?</i></p> <p><i>How does the welcoming space and its services influence your life?</i></p>
Social & cultural Integration	Social capital/ social embedment	<p><i>Are you regularly in contact with your neighbors or other residents, outside of the welcoming space?</i></p> <p><i>Are you happy with the amount of interactions you have with your neighbors/other residents/ colleagues?</i></p>

	Influence of the language café	<p><i>How did the welcoming space influence your social life?</i></p> <p><i>Do you feel (more) comfortable talking to other residents of Nederweert in Dutch?</i></p> <p><i>Does the language café the welcoming space help you build this confidence?</i></p>
	Influence of the events	<p><i>Do the events help you with getting to know the Dutch society?</i></p>
Reflecting on LINK Nederweert	practices and functions	<p><i>Do you think that LINK should have a professional involved?</i></p> <p><i>How does LINK differ from the services the municipality/ Vluchtelingenwerk offers?</i></p>

2.5.2 Online participant observation

During the online language café meetings, the conversations were observed and notes were made about the topics that were talked about. Interesting sentences or examples were written down.

I participated in a total of 6 online meetings, each with the duration of at least an hour . During these meetings rapports with the participants and volunteers were established and this relationship barely changed overtime during the meetings. The main goal of the meetings was stimulating the participants to talk in Dutch, which drove the attention away from my presence. The observations were a relatively large source of data due it being an indicator whether intercultural dialogue was being exercised or a rather traditional view of integration.

Even though I stayed in contact with the volunteers and status holders for a long time due to the online language cafes, i actively tried to stay as objective as possible, by taking a break before writing down the findings in this thesis. To take time to reflect and analyse the findings.

2.6 Analysis methods

After collecting the data, the interviews were firstly analysed by axial coding, followed by open coding. The axial codes were based on the theoretical framework and the relating main and sub questions. These codes were thus thematic like for example “rural context”, “language proficiency” or “social embedment”. The open codes consisted of literal words or short sentences, which can be subdivided by the thematic axial codes. All the connected codes formed different paragraphs in the results chapter. To create a coherent report. The data generated by the participant observation during the language cafés was added selectively, it often was used as given examples of conversation topics. However it also was added as a critical evaluation of the online sessions.

2.7 The case study

The following paragraphs will explain the contextual information that is gathered during the research, mostly through the interview with the main volunteer of LINK. This information provides important insights to understand the findings in the results chapter better. This section will discuss both the contextual influences of the Dutch rural context & the COVID-19 pandemic and to get to know LINK better as a welcoming initiative through their history.

2.7.1 The Dutch rural context

In the Netherlands, refugees are often kept in asylum seekers centers located in the more rural parts. Where they wait to be acknowledged as a refugee and to receive a temporary residence permit. Afterwards they are dispersed over Dutch municipalities and often end up living in villages with a predominantly white neighborhood (Huizinga & van Hoven, 2018). During this whole process the refugees do not have any choice in where they want to live or be placed (Bakker, Cheung, & Phillimore, 2016).

It is relatively common for rural areas to attract low-skilled migrants, due to gaps in the labor supply. A non-European migration flow however, can be a fairly new phenomenon in some rural areas, which causes the migrants themselves to face many barriers (Jentsch, 2007). Ethnic minorities are often underrepresented as consumers of public services because they lack knowledge of available services and of how to access them. The high costs of public transport can restrict the access to services for migrants. Migrants in rural areas sometimes pay twice as much to

participate in education than their urban counterparts (Fletcher,2000; Jentsch,2007). They also are more likely to experience loneliness or isolation, when acquaintances may not be living in close proximity which makes regular visits difficult (Jentsch, 2007). This can limit the possibility of speaking their native language and practicing and enjoying their own culture.

This lack of ethnic diversity can cause the non- European migrants to migrate elsewhere (Huizinga & van Hoven,2018). Urban areas often contain less barriers for migrants, because they are generally more ethnically diverse, thus already contain newcomers. Previous migrants may already have created a place where their culture is represented in the city (Mavroudi & Nagel, 2016). It is therefore in most cases easier for migrants to establish relationships including mutual support and embed oneself in urban settings.

Whether or not the differences between rural and urban places matter has been debated by many urban sociologists. Some claim that high population sizes don't result in less of a social life and social cohesion in urban spaces (Gans 1968; Lewis 1970; Mangin, 1970). One can also argue that due to modernization and globalization, most rural areas are hardly traditional anymore and therefore the difference between rural and urban spaces in the Netherlands remains relatively small(Müller & Smets, 2009).

Taking everything in consideration, a rural environment does influence the newcomers' settlement and daily life. Depending on the degree of the institutional assistance newcomers receive and presence of fellow migrants, a welcoming space can have a significant impact on the newcomers. It can play a prominent role in the social embedment of the newcomers, and create a space for intercultural dialogue, where new transcultural identities can be shaped.

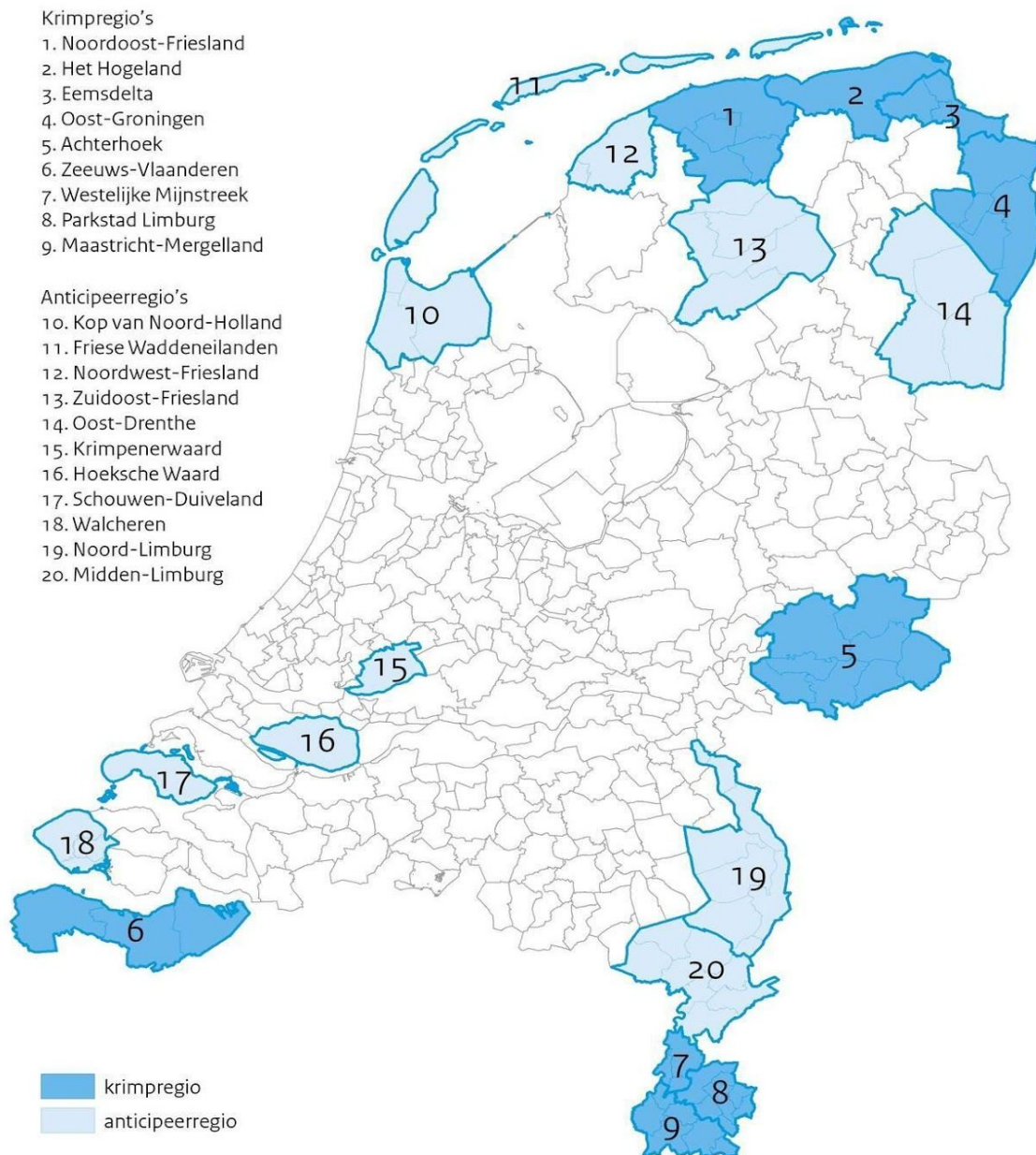
2.7.2 LINK Nederweert

Leer Iedereen Nederweert Kennen (Learn to get to know everyone in Nederweert) is an initiative in a small rural village in Limburg with a population of 8.5 thousand people living in the center and 17 thousand people in the municipality Nederweert(Nederweert,2020). The municipality (Nederweert, 2020) describes Nederweert as a “church village” with residential areas surrounded by nature and agricultural land. LINK Nederweert, organizes a language café for migrants and locals every Thursday and a few themed events a year. Their goal is to bring cultures together.

Nederweert is located in an anticipation region (region 20), which means that this is a region that has little population decline but should take it into account, to prevent further decline in the future. Due the welcoming initiative being located in a

shrinking region, the findings are relevant to the Welcoming Spaces research program.

Figure 2.1 Shrinking regions and anticipation regions in the Netherlands



Source: Rijksoverheid, 2019

2.7.3 The history of LINK Nederweert

The most important subjects, developments and moments from the history of the initiative will be discussed chronologically in this paragraph, starting with the origin story and ending with the situation during the pandemic, when the interviews were done. Further analysis on the history, development and character of LINK can be found in the results chapter.

LINK Nederweert was founded in 2017 by a Syrian woman with the help of her language coach from Vluchtelingenwerk NL. She founded it because she wanted more social contacts and interaction with Dutch people, therefore she wanted to start a talk group, where the different cultures can meet.

She could not organize this on her own, since she had little to no education and learning formerly Dutch according to the schoolbooks was therefore very hard for her. Her language coach and her mostly communicated by hand gestures and pointing at objects while speaking the Dutch words. When she told her language coach that she wanted to get to know more people and have more social contact, he tried to arrange some voluntary work for her. Through the municipality they ended up at a place called the Gunnerij in Nederweert, which was an open walk-in center, which offers a communal space. Here she could only work as a volunteer if she came up with an activity herself. Her language coach arranged that she could invite the other status holders she knew to gather at the Gunnerij. This led to the first ever language café on the 8th of march in 2017, which was a great success, the local press attended to promote the initiative and the families even took their children with them. The Syrian woman became the host during these talk sessions. Since she got little guidance as a volunteer, she had to learn to pick up the keys, switch on the lights, make some coffee for everyone and do the dishes and clean the place afterwards. After a while more Syrian people started to help and regularly go to the gatherings. Due to her busy life as a mother of 5 children, she did not have enough time to stay active as a volunteer for LINK. Her language coach became the main organizer/ volunteer of the initiative.

Over time the Gunnerij developed itself, it became a foundation and changed location. LINK moved along with the Gunnerij and experienced many changes and challenges. How LINK deals with these changes and challenges says a lot about their underlying beliefs, on their cultural differences and position in the context of LINK as

a welcoming space. The initial aim of the initiative was to connect people in Nederweert and bring the different cultures together. Due to the challenges LINK faced and the dynamic character of the initiative, it becomes visible that LINK does not solely provide a space for different cultures to meet, LINK entails many more functions to the participants. The findings in the results chapter will explain in further detail how LINK developed itself from then on.

2.7.4 The COVID-19 pandemic

Since the data of this research was generated during the COVID-19 pandemic, this had a large contextual influence on the case study, LINK Nederweert, which resulted in some new situations and highlighted problems that both LINK Nederweert and the status holders encountered.

The weekly language café sessions had to be done online during this period, which brought many technical difficulties along for some people, making it harder for people to participate. Due to the COVID-19 news mostly being spread in Dutch, the Syrian status holders were not all well informed at the start of the pandemic. They do not all master the Dutch language yet, so these news items which often used rather difficult terms would be hard to understand for the status holders. This led to a flow of questions from the status holders to LINK Nederweert, who eventually took over the role of a corona information center for all the local status holders. They shared translations of the most important news articles in Arabic with the status holders through their website and the WhatsApp group they used for organizing the language cafés.

The online language cafés started the 26th of March as an effort to keep the language cafés going and stay in touch with the status holders. Most online language cafés there were two or three Dutch volunteers in the video chat and one to four status holders. Using skype as a platform for the online meeting was a learning progress for all, but after a few sessions everybody seemed to have gotten accustomed to it. The online language cafés discussed many different subjects, some serious subjects related to COVID-19 and some lighter subjects like hobbies and cooking. During these talks the volunteers actively try to include the status holders in the conversation, by asking if they understand and follow the conversation and what their opinion on the subject is. The mood during these sessions, most of the time is very light, everybody seems to feel comfortable talking to each other and jokes are made here and there. Even though due to the COVID-19 pandemic, events will not go through for a while. The status holders are still stimulated to come with ideas for future events or trips. During the online language cafés they also talked to all the participants about their life during the pandemic, to check if everything is going alright and if they understand all the corona measures.

During the online language cafés the participants were challenged to think

about ways to help the nurses and doctors who are working in the hospitals. Ideas like making masks by hand and organizing a party for all the caretakers after the lockdown were discussed in these sessions. One of the status holders, interviewee 2, started doing groceries for other status holder families in Turkish shops, since most status holders often need specific groceries that cannot be found in normal supermarkets. All the Syrian participants were very eager to help others, which shows their collectivistic nature. The volunteers of LINK try to stimulate them to participate and organize anything they would like and acts as a mediator, bringing them in contact with for example the municipality.

The COVID-19 pandemic emphasizes the fact that status holders do need an organization or person who is always available and easy to contact to ask questions to. An actor who they can go to when they do not understand something or when they experience struggles or barriers. Trust seemed to be a very important part of this. They do need to be able to trust the actor, in order for them to open up and talk about their problems. Although the language café was during the lockdown only online, LINK kept providing the same services to the status holders as before the pandemic. They stay active and try to stay in contact as much as possible. This shows the commitment of LINK and how much the volunteers care about the wellbeing of the status holders. LINK Nederweert as a case study therefore, shows a way to establish this level of trust, and offer them the help they need during strange and difficult times.

2.7.5 LINKs Struggles

Maintaining an initiative like LINK does however come with certain dilemmas and struggles. By discussing the struggles LINK as an organization deals with, information is gathered on how LINK shapes itself and how the future of the initiative may look like. These struggles are important to keep in mind when reading the results chapter, since these are subjects the status holders themselves may not be aware of. To maintain a rather migrant centred approach, LINKs struggles therefore are discussed in advance as contextual information.

The level of trust between the volunteers and the status holders can put a lot of pressure on the volunteers. The main volunteer of LINK mainly deals with this problem. It is very easy to get carried away when a status holder asks for help. It's hard to keep a distance in these situations since they know each other so well. The volunteer cares a lot and wants to make sure that the status holders he helps are taken seriously when they seek help from other actors. Since there are few volunteers helping the status holders, the pressure on them can get quite high. The main volunteer calls this the pitfall of working as a volunteer for an initiative like LINK.

The main volunteer/ organizer strives to make LINK a bigger organization, which mostly entails attracting more Dutch people and status holders to visit more regularly during the language cafes. This has proven to be very hard however. According to the Syrian Interviewees most status holders in Nederweert know of the weekly language café sessions, but they just do not bother to come. According to the main volunteer there are certain groups within the local Arabic community which do not always go along well; a rather traditional group and a pragmatic group. LINK struggles to get the traditional group to come to the weekly language cafes. The events LINK organizes do however attract more status holders, according to the interviewees this is mainly because the themes are of interest to most people who are new to the Dutch society. When asked why the other status holders do not visit the regular language café sessions, it is mostly justified by saying that they do not have the time to visit on Thursday evenings. Due to work, school, their family, children or other hobbies.

Due to LINK not being an official foundation, it struggles with creating a large enough budget to organize events on a more regular basis. It gets a small yearly budget from the municipality which is too little to organize more events from. The main organizer did apply for more funds, but no funds were given by third parties because they expect the municipality to pay enough money already. This inhibits LINK from growing and organizing more events, for example LINK wanted to organize on the national women's day an event to discuss barriers related to work experienced by seven Syrian women. This however did not get any funding from the municipality or private parties and ended up not being organized. Resulting in great frustration to LINK.

Nevertheless, the main organizer of LINK, still has his hopes up high and hopes that the concept of LINK will eventually be copied elsewhere. So that more places will have initiatives like LINK who can help the status holders.

2.8 Data collection overview

Since this research was done during the COVID-19 pandemic, an overview of when interviews were held and language cafes were observed will give some more clarity on the impact of COVID-19 on the gathered data. The contextual information on the COVID-19 pandemic in the Netherlands over time only summarizes the measures and thus does not contain all the updates.

Date	Activity	Contextual info
27-02-20		First COVID-19 patient in the Netherlands
6/15-3-20		Start of social distancing, schools close, events are cancelled and people are stimulated to work from home.
17-03-20	Contact was first established through the main volunteer/organizer of LINK	
23-3-20		Extra prevention measures: All events get cancelled till June 1 st and gatherings with more than 3 people get prohibited both inside as outside one's home.
26-03-20	First ever online language café through WhatsApp video call.	
2-04-20	Second online language café through Skype.	
3-04-20	Interview with the main volunteer/organizer	
5-04-20		The amount of intensive care beds get doubled and more people are allowed to get tested.
6/13-04-20	5 interviews with the Syrian status holders and an interview with the Syrian woman who came up with the initiative.	
9-04-20	Online language café through Skype	

30-04-20	Online language café through Skype	
5-05-20	Interview with the coordinator Vluchtelingenwerk Nederland	
14-05-20	Online language café through Skype	
26-05-20	Interview with the policy maker of the municipality of Nederweert	
28-05-20	The last online language café through Skype. The following language cafés were held outside, due to the nice summer weather.	
1-06-20		Under some measures the catering industry may open again, as well as some schools and other public spaces. After September 1 st events are allowed

Results

This chapter discusses the findings of this research in depth. Based on the concepts discussed in the theoretic framework, this chapter will critically analyse the results of this research. To provide a clear overview of the findings relating to referenced scientific literature, results are divided into the four main concepts of this thesis: integration, sociabilities of emplacement, interculturality, and transnational identity.

3.1 Integration

As discussed in the theoretical framework (Section 1.1), integration can contain underlying assimilationist ideas or resonate more with acculturation ideas. By analyzing the way the status holders explain how LINK assists them or provides help, one can examine which beliefs underlie this structure of help and to what extent the status holders are influenced by the initiative.

While LINK provides value to some Syrian status holders, other status holders purposefully do not participate in LINK activities. These non-participants may avoid the language café talks for multiple reasons: too busy to attend, not comfortable speaking Dutch in these spaces, or general anxiety and discomfort at language café talks. On the other hand, some non-participants genuinely do not need assistance with integration. This may be due to the type of work performed at their job (further discussed in Section 3.2), individual flexibility, or stage of life.

Overall, the interviewed Syrian status holders were all very positive about LINK. They value the help LINK offers and they like the informal language café talks. It helps them comprehend the Dutch society more, and they expressed that they find this very important. They are all eager to meet new local people from Nederweert and want to learn how to be more involved in the Dutch society and local community. They find it important to help one another and care for each other. They enjoy talking about their culture to the volunteers and like to communicate their perspectives on certain subjects. However, they are also very self aware and critical when it comes to cultural differences. During the language café, some status holders expressed disagreement with a cultural norm of their home county. This shows that the status holders feel comfortable giving their honest opinion during the language cafés.

LINK thus helps the status holders with achieving their ambitions, by providing information, tools and guidance. Providing them with a space where they can feel comfortable talking and discussing their struggles, achievements, disagreements, and ambitions.

However, not all the status holders in Nederweert participate in LINKs language cafés. One of the interviewees does not participate in the LINK language

café, even though he likes what LINK does for the fellow status holders. This interviewee claims he does not participate because he does not have the time for it. This shows that not all the local status holders in Nederweert need LINK to integrate into Nederweert's society. During the interview with the volunteer, this was confirmed. The volunteer admitted that some status holders do fine on their own and not every status holder wants extra help provided by LINK. One of the status holders, however, did suspect that other status holders who do not attend the language cafes perceive the expectation of talking in Dutch during the language cafés as a barrier, and therefore do not attend.

Based on these findings, one can assume that LINK provides help to the ones who seek it or are open to it, resulting in LINK not being necessary to every status holder. However, LINK helps not only status holders, but also long-term local residents and volunteers of the welcoming initiative, specifically with respect to interculturality (further discussed in Section 3.3).

Due to the intercultural dialogue that forms a large part of the initiative, integration based on interactive underlying processes takes place, changing not only the newcomers, also the volunteers. The volunteers and participating status holders are all considered equals, and do not enforce one's norms and values upon each other. This indicates that LINK's underlying beliefs resonate more with ideas of acculturation. This also became clear during the interview with the main volunteer, who argued that "reversed participation" is necessary when expecting the newcomers to participate in the Dutch society. He puts emphasis on the fact that the Dutch citizens should not expect the status holders to participate in the Dutch culture, especially if the Dutch do not teach status holders how to participate. The volunteer thus strives for a more interactive and holistic way of 'integrating' these status holders, both in practice and policy. An example of this volunteer's drive for holistic integration is his involvement voicing required changes in policy. He wants the municipality to be more active and involved in the LINK program and respective policies, which would assist the ease of integration. Fortunately, policymakers are moving to change the structure of integration, further discussed in Section 3.2.

Rethinking the concept of integration is therefore necessary when considering the position of welcoming initiatives like LINK. Changing thoughts on integration would help bring justice to the notions of (cultural) equality and the recognition of the newcomers agency. The status holders are all individuals with their own ambitions, opinions, and experiences. Although, status holders may initially view LINK solely as a tool to increase their agency or use it in their own process of social embedment in Nederweert. The informal conversations and normalized respect result in meaningful relations. This, in combination with the rural context, lack of ethnic diversity, and the small size of the group of Syrian status holders does make LINK more valuable to them. This is especially true, because embedding oneself can be hard without many social contacts in the new place of residence and little

language proficiency in Dutch.

The following paragraphs will discuss in more detail how LINK influences the status holders by analysing parts of the development of LINK over the years and by examples or statements presented by the status holders and volunteers. LINK's influence is first explained with the social dimension by using the post-colonial concept of the sociabilities of emplacement.

3.2 The sociabilities of emplacement

The theory of the sociabilities of emplacement puts emphasis on the importance of mutual support relationships in the settling process of newcomers in their new location of residence. It assumes that the newcomers use their agency in the process of embedding themselves, by establishing these mutual support relations with both long-term locals and fellow newcomers. The role of LINK in the embedment process of their status holders will be discussed in this section through analyzing the communicated perspectives of the status holders on their life in Nederweert and the influence of LINK by reflecting on the relationship between the status holders and the volunteers of LINK during the language cafés.

Firstly, it is important to analyze the perception of the status holders on Nederweert, in order to determine to what extent the status holders are socially embedded in Nederweert. All of the Syrian status holders who had been interviewed have lived in many different cities in the Netherlands in asylum-seeker centers before settling in Nederweert. Most of them have been living in Nederweert for three years now. Not one of the status holders complained about living in Nederweert; they all admitted to be very satisfied with living there. They liked how peaceful and quiet Nederweert is and enjoyed living there with their families. Additionally, they are grateful that their children can go to school in the city.

All the Syrian status holders expressed that the local long term residents of Nederweert are very friendly to them and that the help they get from LINK makes them feel welcome in the local community. The policymaker of Nederweert also put emphasis on this, she described Nederweert as a welcoming community with lots of space and large houses for the status holders to live in with their families. She also added that due to the presence of larger cities nearby, Nederweert and its infrastructure contribute to the satisfaction of residents, making facilities that are not available in Nederweert still accessible enough in adjacent cities. When the status holders were asked whether they would like to move in the future to a larger city or more urban area, nobody seemed interested in it.

The volunteer of LINK did however express that it is difficult for LINK to find new Dutch local volunteers to join, even though the initiative is relatively well known in the area. This suggests that though the residents of Nederweert are considered welcoming, few locals actively welcome the newcomers, as they do not participate in

this welcoming initiative.

However, the status holders do feel welcomed and want to stay in Nederweert. Although, the extent of social embedment is largely dependent on the social contacts and type of relationships they have established in Nederweert.

When asked about their social life before the COVID-19 pandemic, most participants were mostly in contact with other status holder families in Nederweert. Additionally, some status holders were in contact with people they met when they lived in former asylum seeker centers, who often live relatively far away from Nederweert. Furthermore, participants with young children are in contact with other parents of the children's friends. Even though most participants knew their neighbors, not every status holder was satisfied with their relationships with them. One of the interviewees thought it was a shame that their neighbors only visited for a cup of coffee once, occurring right when they moved in. Since this participant is not in contact with many Dutch residents in the area, he would love to have more interactions with them besides greeting each other outside of their homes. Whether or not a status holder has a job seems to be very important in their social embedment process. The status holders who do have jobs seem to have more contact with local Dutch residents than the people who do not currently have it. Although, if a workplace does not have a high amount of communication, it is less likely that the status holder forms meaningful relationships with their colleagues.

Therefore, for some participants, attending the weekly language café is the most effective and important way to meet new people in Nederweert. For them, getting to know Dutch people in the area is very valuable, since getting in touch with them can be very difficult. Participants who are unemployed find it especially difficult to get to know people, and thus value the weekly language cafés more than those who are employed. Having an available space that welcomes both status holders and local Dutch residents and brings them in contact with each other is thus of great importance.

This however is not always solely to expand their social capital, since some interviewees expressed to be already satisfied with the amount of friends and contacts they have. All Syrian participants expressed that they really enjoy joining in the weekly conversations, which derives it from being perceived as a solely functional way of contact. LINK is thus a place for the establishment of mutual support relations, due to the additional values and meaning the relations obtain. The meaning and value that characterize these relationships however does depend on the settlement process of the status holder and to what extent one is socially embedded. LINK therefore may be of more importance to a status holder who is little socially embedded than to a status holder who is already fully settled.

The mutual support relationships established through LINK is characterized by trust. Due to the level of trust that was established between the volunteers and the status holders, LINK started to take over a role as a mediator in certain situations.

LINK is practically always available to contact, opposed to the other contacts the status holders obtain like the municipality, library, or Vluchtelingenwerk. The volunteers of LINK are often the first ones who are contacted by the status holders when they have certain problems or questions. This shows a great deal of trust from the status holders towards LINK. In situations where LINK is not able to help them, they make sure the status holder gets in contact with an actor that can help them. Afterwards, they check up with the status holder to ensure they got the answers or aid they needed. LINK thus only connects them to the relevant actors, the status holders are expected to proceed to solve their questions or problems after being given this connection. This way, LINK teaches the status holders how to deal with their problems and questions by informing them who to contact and not solving the problem for them outright.

One could argue that the presence of LINK has changed the relationship between the status holders and the municipality, Vluchtelingenwerk, or other third parties due to their role as mediator. The coordinator of Vluchtelingenwerk however did not see that as a problem, because LINK can help the status holders and teach them how to deal with certain problems.

Due to the fact that the volunteers have established a relationship with the status holders over the years and see the regular language café participants on a weekly basis, they are often the ones who first notice arising struggles of a status holder. Consequently, the volunteers are often the first one to alarm when they suspect that someone is in trouble. LINK helps the status holders, knowing that they otherwise would not be likely to seek help themselves due to a lack of knowledge or a lack in Dutch language proficiency.

LINK however in some situations can get a bit deeper involved in the struggles of the status holders, this is mostly due to the close relationships between the volunteers and the status holders. In some cases it is also expected due to the role of the main volunteer as language coach of Vluchtelingenwerk NL. Since he is often the one closest to the family, he consequently is often expected to help them out.

The mediator role of LINK in these situations is thus largely based on the level of trust between the volunteers of LINK and the participating status holders. This is the biggest indicator of mutual support relationships so far. Assuming that trust is very important and valuable to these Syrian refugees. The dependence of the status holders on LINK when they encounter certain problems, can be perceived as problematic however, since it indicates that other institutional actors are not providing enough assistance to these status holders. This was partially confirmed during the interview with the policy maker of Nederweert, the municipality is not much involved with the status holders on a personal level. This will however change in 2021, due to changes in the citizenship policy. The municipalities from then on will be responsible for the neutralization procedures of newcomers and therefore

will need to play a bigger role in the embedment process of newcomers in the future.

Considering everything, it is good that LINK is able to help these people, but it would be more valuable to the status holders to combat the root problems that hide in certain policies or the available services of governmental institutions. The creation of LINK and the relationships that were established through this initiative could be explained by the sociabilities of emplacement. The experienced lack of assistance in the settling process of the status holders could be the cause of the creation of LINK by the Syrian woman, resulting in her taking the initiative and looking for mutual support relationships herself as an attempt to socially embed herself more in Nederweert. Status holders who deal with the same struggles, who find it hard to get in contact with more people in the local context, value LINK greatly due to the opportunities it provides. . LINK therefore may be of more importance to a status holder who is little socially embedded than to a status holder who is already fully settled. The mutual support relationships are facilitated through the interculturality of the initiative, the next paragraph will discuss this in more depth.

3.3 Interculturality

Interculturality as discussed in the theoretic framework, is completely free of colonial power structures. Every person and culture is considered equal. Intercultural dialogue hence are conversations where no cultural norms and values are forced upon each other. It entails an interactive process where both cultures can learn from each other's perceptions, experiences and values.

Interculturality rather than multiculturalism is found at the core of LINK's practices. Since they mainly provide weekly language cafés and informing events, LINK creates many opportunities for intercultural dialogue, and uses it as a form of education for the newcomers. The type of interaction during these language cafes uncovers the underlying beliefs and values held by both the volunteers and the participation status holders. Even though, the initiative already entailed an intercultural approach from the start. The intercultural character of the initiative was shaped during the development of LINK over the years.

In the beginning, LINK's language cafe was scheduled to take place every Wednesday afternoon, because the status holders did not have school at this time of day. At first mostly women joined the weekly talks, with here and there a man joining. The language coach, who stayed very involved with the weekly talks, noticed that the women formed a very closed group towards him. Since he often was the only man present during the talk groups, he struggled with coping with this. He found this very difficult at the beginning that the Syrian women, for example, would never take off their coats and acted like they would leave soon. Since he is a language coach from

Vluchtelingenwerk Nederland, he got a lot of advice from his coordinator. He found it hard to make the next step to actually make it a language café, since by this time he had the group of status holders together on a weekly basis but they still barely spoke Dutch. He did not want to completely prohibit them from speaking Arabic during the talk sessions, since he wanted everyone to feel comfortable and engage in casual conversations. Therefore he started asking for translations, when people talked in Arabic. The volunteers do not want the LINK talks to feel as formal as their Dutch learning courses the local library provides. They do want to teach the participants proper Dutch, but they try to let go of the role of a teacher as much as possible. As long as the participants understand the conversations it is good enough. It was therefore a learning progress for both the volunteers as the participants. The volunteers needed to figure out how to get the participants to talk Dutch, without acting like a Dutch teacher and the participants needed to learn how to interact and communicate better in Dutch.

The fact that LINK stepped away from providing a rather formal way of Dutch language education, by allowing the participant to speak Arabic, shows that they do not intend to enforce learning the language upon them and that they care for the participants feeling comfortable. By assuring that they feel comfortable and accepting the conditions the participants need to feel comfortable, they make sure that both parties are considered equal. The volunteers not wanting to take on the role of a teacher indicates that he does not want LINK to be associated with the power structure of a teacher-student relationship. By keeping the sessions informal, he abandons these power structures and keeps everyone on equal footing.

When the weekly language cafés were on Wednesdays, the women often took their children with them to the language cafés. They created a room for the children with toys and a few adults to watch over them, so their parents could attend the language cafés. This resulted in some conflicts due to cultural differences when it comes to raising children. The main volunteers said that; “ the authority of the Syrian parents does not extend out of their home.”. This led to the creation of a sister initiative organized by a social worker which educated parents about how children are raised in the Netherlands.

They thus dealt with the problems by providing extra education on raising children. Even though this is a sensitive subject with many underlying cultural differences that cause the conflict. LINK chooses to educate by talking about these cultural differences instead of enforcing the Dutch ideas of raising children on the status holders. By talking about it and sharing each other’s perspectives, both parties can use this opportunity to understand each other better and reflect on the differences. All participants have the freedom to choose whatever cultural beliefs and norms they want to identify with, in the process of shaping their transnational identity. Even in these difficult situations they use intercultural dialogue as a form of education and way of constructing new solutions to try to solve or prevent these

conflicts.

Along the way, the volunteers discovered that talking about religion made having conversations a lot easier. Even though religion is a subject that many people would avoid, approach carefully or even discourage talking about according to teachers from Vluchtelingenwerk. It proved in LINKs case to be a very good conversation starter. They asked in a light and positive way about subjects like the Koran, why they wear a headscarf or keep on their coats inside. After the talk session where the subject of religion was brought, people started to bring their Koran in both Dutch and Arabic and started to read and translate verses. This made the participants feel more engaged in the talk sessions and started to feel more comfortable speaking Dutch. Talking about taboos like these, with respect, therefore can function as a tool to engage status holders into a conversation, establish a relationship and trust and make them feel comfortable enough to talk Dutch.

This approach of getting the status holders to engage in conversations, resonates with the underlying ideas of intercultural dialogue. During these talks both parties are considered equal, and nobody actively poses one's values upon the other. It is a rather informative conversation, which creates room for the volunteers to learn about the culture or perspectives of the participants. Thus it points more to an interactive process and form of education, where not only the newcomers are educated but also the volunteers.

All the developments and challenges that shaped LINK as a welcoming space indicated that LINK is rather a platform for interculturality than multiculturalism. Both the participants and the volunteers learn from the conversations and everybody is considered equal due to the informality of the initiative and the absence of power structures. The intercultural dialogue has an important role in both their way of providing education and in the process of making the status holders feel comfortable. By expressing an interest in their culture, instead of only talking about the Dutch culture.

The interactive form of education using intercultural dialogue during the weekly language cafés, entails different functions to the status holders. First of all the status holders use the language café to improve their language proficiency in Dutch. During the interviews the participants expressed that the weekly language café was of great importance to their process of mastering the Dutch language. Not only do they learn how to participate in day to day Dutch conversations, they also are introduced to different themes that are not typically talked about during formal language education programs. For example themes like theatre or funerals. Introducing them to these new themes likely increases their Dutch vocabulary.

Some participants also put emphasis on the fact that it is very important to them to practice speaking Dutch on a regular basis to master it and not forget words. Since not every participant comes regularly in contact with Dutch people, LINK provides a very helpful space to practice speaking Dutch on a weekly basis. In the

long term, the participants who regularly attend the language cafes feel more comfortable speaking Dutch in public spaces because of LINK. Especially the participants who do not currently have a job express how important practicing and getting comfortable with speaking Dutch is. This makes sense, considering that most Dutch jobs require a certain level of proficiency in Dutch. LINK to them is therefore very useful.

The informal language education LINK provides is thus valued by the participants and plays to an extent a role in their cultural integration, without strictly enforcing them to speak Dutch. The status holders are not obliged to attend and join, they can join whenever they want, LINK to them functions as an extra way of practicing Dutch on a regular basis. Participants could therefore view LINK as a largely functional platform. However when looking at the established relationships between the volunteers and status holders this seems to be not the case.

While the status holders improve their Dutch language skills during the language cafes they do this often by actively participating in Dutch conversations, which often include talking about cultural differences. Not only is this a way for the status holders and volunteers to get to know each other better, it additionally a tool of LINK to introduce the status holders to a variety of facets from the Dutch culture. The status holders are introduced and stimulated to participate in the “keukentafelgesprekken” (kitchen table conversations) as the volunteer called it. These casual informal conversations entail many Dutch cultural norms and values. For example, according to the main volunteer they upon entry ask every participant if they want coffee or tea, they use this both as a conversation starter and as a way to make them accustomed to Dutch customs and small talk. This is however also practiced the other way around, the status holders also communicate and introduce aspects of their culture. This shows the interactive nature of the interactions during the language cafes, both parties are willing to learn from each other and are eager to share their cultural norms and values. No values or norms are forced upon one another.

The organized events go a step further and discuss in more detail certain subjects. The informing events the status holders or volunteers organize, often originate out of observed or discussed cultural differences. These informing events, which are mostly organized by the Dutch volunteers, as a result are likely to increase the cultural knowledge of the status holders about the Dutch society. For example the event where a person from the local police came to talk about the role of the Dutch police in the society and to answer questions of the status holders. This was an event that made a big impression on all the interviewees, who all talked about the large cultural differences when looking at the role of the police in the society. Another event that a few interviewees mentioned, is the event where they talked about ‘saying goodbye’, what happens when someone dies in the Netherlands, which many found an important subject, since it is useful knowledge they otherwise

probably wouldn't get to know until they are confronted with such a situation. Other examples of informing events organized by the volunteers of LINK were: an event with the theme loneliness and international women day. Informing events like these are therefore very valuable to the status holders. As a result these events attract more status holders than the weekly language cafés.

The weekly language cafés together with the events LINK organizes therefore introduces the status holders to many aspects of the Dutch culture, from the general Dutch body language and habits during the language cafés to informing events on important specific topics of the Dutch society. LINK thus makes the status holders more accustomed with the Dutch society, by informing them and organizing encounters during events. The intercultural conversation, however, also educates the volunteers about the Syrian culture and customs. The intercultural dialogue therefore creates many opportunities for both parties to increase their cultural knowledge.

Since the volunteers do not enforce their personal cultural norms and values upon the status holders, the status holders are free to do with the information whatever they want. The informal character of LINK as an organization, makes it possible to have intercultural interactions due to the freedom of power structures. During the language cafés the informal talks are free of a power structure, because they treat each other as equals and do not always assume that the status holders need to be helped. The volunteers only ask for their input during the conversations. Leaving the traditional volunteer-participant relationship structure behind, where the volunteers are solely expected to provide help, and the participant is framed as always needing help. LINK rather provides a space where different cultures can talk, establish new relationships and educate each other.

The informal intercultural dialogue, LINK facilitates, hence provides a platform of interactive education. Bringing different cultures together, creating new relationships and a community which helps each other. With notions of equality at the core of the initiative, LINK provides an open space where the newcomers are free to shape their new transnational identity. The next paragraph will dive deeper into the role of LINK in the formation of the transnational identity of the participants.

3.4 Transnational identity

The notion of transnational identity recognizes the phenomena of migrated people combining their homeland culture with the new culture of residence, identifying with both cultures at the same time. It closely relates with notions of agency, the new place of residency can influence their agency, depending on the accessibility of resources. Social contacts can function as gatekeepers to these resources and are

therefore important in the process of shaping one's new transnational identity.

LINK, hence, can play an important role in the transnational identity formation of its participation newcomers. Especially since they not only provide them with important cultural information on the Dutch society and customs, they also stimulate the status holders to organize events themselves.

Additionally, LINK recognises and respects that the status holders maintain some of the cultural norms of their home country. This became especially clear during the development of LINK. When the weekly language cafe was moved to Thursday evening, the cultural gender roles became visible. "The evening is for the men and the midday for the women" said the main organizer based on his observations. Since the women are expected to put the children to bed in the evening or do not go outside at night, mostly men go to the sessions in the evening. The women do miss the language cafe sessions however and wanted to move it back to the Wednesdays. LINK therefore was going to organize an additional language café on Wednesday for these women, due to the COVID-19 pandemic however this has not taken place yet. They consider moving the sessions to the nearby school, to make it easier for the women with children.

By adding another weekly session, to make it possible for both the women and the men can join on a weekly basis, LINK shows respect to these cultural gender roles and gives the participants more opportunities to join. LINK therefore indirectly recognizes their transnationality, they give the participants the freedom to keep their cultural beliefs, habits and norms. LINKs priority rather lies with attracting the status holders and having them join the intercultural conversations during the language cafés. Since intercultural dialogue gets more interesting when more people join, due to the different perspectives and experiences people obtain.

The language café functions as an instrument for the volunteers to work on the level of participation of the attendants together. During the language café session participants are asked whether they have any ideas for events they could organize together or on their own. Most informing events so far however, have been organized by the volunteers themselves, often after encountering a question, subject or problem mentioned by a status holder. For example, the volunteers asked the participating status holders during a language cafe whether they have done some research on Dutch politics and political parties, since they will be able to vote during the next elections in 2021. The status holders all admitted to not having educated themselves in Dutch politics yet, but do want to learn more about it. This resulted in the volunteers proposing to together with the status holders organize an informing event, to introduce all the status holders who are interested to Dutch politics. So they are able to formulate their own political opinion and eventually are able to choose a political party to vote for.

The participants, nevertheless, also have taken the initiative in the past and

organized events like going with a group of status holders and volunteers to a Christmas debate in Utrecht with the theme “Veranderen van binnenuit” (“Changing from within”). Additionally, a group of women is also busy organizing a mosaic class as regular group activity. Due to the corona pandemic this has not yet taken place, but the women are very motivated and excited about it.

LINK therefore, recognized the agency of the status holders and actively tries to stimulate them to participate in the Dutch society and organize events by making them aware of all the opportunities and providing them with tools and guidance. This additionally is another indication that LINK perceives everybody as equals, since everybody gets the same opportunities to use LINKs tools. By giving the status holders access to these tools they empower the status holders and stimulate them to shape their transnational identity.

Aside from the education LINK provides through intercultural dialogue, LINKs language cafes also provide a space where the status holders can pose any questions they have. It therefore also takes in the role of an informal help service. The status holders may ask whatever they want, whether it is about received letters from the government with difficult terminology, cultural differences or about their personal life.

Since the volunteers are aware that some of the participating status holders have little contact with other local Dutch residents and mostly rely on other fellow status holders, they do try to sometimes start difficult conversations. When the participants are not as engaged in the conversation, the volunteers deal with this by proposing examples of topics or by asking if they recently experienced any struggles or any positive developments. The participants do not always know what to do when they have certain questions or ideas, LINK helps them by talking about it and redirects them to relevant actors if needed, for example the municipality. On some occasions they organize themed events that inform the status holders about certain subjects. This way the volunteers try to stimulate them to participate more in the Dutch society, help them find answers to their questions and help them to take action.

LINK thus increases, through the language cafes and events, the agency of the status holders by providing them with answers to their questions, relevant contacts and organization tools and personal guidance. LINK provides the tools for the status holders and encourages them to take action themselves. Hence, they stimulate the status holders to take the initiative, so they can also learn from the experience. The information they gather from intercultural dialogue can be used to shape their new transnational identity; they are free to identify with whatever cultural norm or value they like. By giving them these opportunities, the status holders can use these to shape their transnational identity. They are free to organize cultural events and use the platform to communicate their ideas.

Conclusion & Discussion

LINK has proven to be very valuable to the status holders in Nederweert. The COVID-19 pandemic shows the importance of LINK and its volunteers to the status holders, putting emphasis on the levels of trust within the established relationships. The intercultural character of LINK is present in its origin story, development over the years, and in every language cafe and event. LINK uses intercultural dialogue as a method to connect, educate, identify problems and as a way to find solutions. The informality of the conversation between the volunteers and participants causes the interactions to be free of (colonial) power structures and makes the participants feel comfortable.

To answer the main question of this thesis, LINK influences the status holders by providing them with tools and guidance, increasing their agency and giving them the space to shape their transnational identity. LINK offers the participating status holders the opportunity to gain social contact and establish mutual support relationships. LINK can therefore play a role in the social embedment of the status holders in their new place of residency. LINK thus plays a role in the 'integration' process of the participating status holders, who appreciate the help LINK provides, but is not necessary in the 'integration' process of every status holder.

LINK fills in the gap of the experienced lack of governmental assistance in providing sufficient knowledge, agency, and social embedment to status holders. LINK's practices resonate with the principles of interculturality and intercultural dialogue due to the informal conversations about cultural differences and the interactive nature of the interactions. It provides education through intercultural dialogue, which is not offered by other official services by the government, library, municipality or NGOs.

The volunteers especially have an important role, as a person of trust and gatekeeper to aid when problems occur. The observed relationships between the volunteers and status holders are based on mutual support and equality, and they are not solely functional because they are meaningful to both parties. The social element of the weekly language café helps the status holders in their process of settlement and social embedment. Additionally, LINK respects the culture of the participating status holders and provides them with the information, tools, contacts and guidance, empowers them, increases their agency and gives them the space to their own transnational identity.

LINK hands the status holders all the tools they need to shape their transnational identity and increase their agency. While in the process, also creating the opportunity for the local Dutch long-term residents to learn from the status holders culture, experiences, and perspectives.

This case study of LINK Nederweert serves as an example of how a small

refugee-focused initiative in a rural village impacts the status holders. The low amount of ethnic diversity can make LINK more valuable to the status holders. Due to the absence of previous migrant communities, the status holders need to make their own place in Nederweert by taking initiative in searching for mutual support relationships. This makes LINK extra useful and valuable to these status holders. Creating a welcoming space in rural locations which aim to attract non-European migrants can therefore make their process of social embedding easier for newcomers.

The structure, services and conditions LINK provides, even during the COVID-19 pandemic, seem to be an effective framework for creating a welcoming space to non-European migrants according to the interviewed Syrian participants. Therefore this research may be of interest to policymakers, municipalities, and NGOs who are interested in creating an initiative like LINK to welcome non-European migrants.

Based on the findings of this research, some policy recommendations are formulated. First of all, the role of LINK volunteers as persons of trust to the participating status holders shows how important it is to newcomers to have a mutual support relation that they can rely on for when they are in need of help. Government and NGOs who aim to provide help to these status holders should therefore try to create similar initiatives like LINK, aiming to establish these relationships in an informal environment and provide effective help.

Additionally, I advise actors or institutions who are interested in improving policies or services that are meant for status holders to organize informal talk sessions with their target population. This helps establish a relationship with trust, so newcomers are comfortable talking about their experiences, struggles, or barriers in the Dutch society. This way, the root problems that cause these struggles for status holders can be solved, creating a better situation for future status holders and refugees.

Lastly, LINK's struggles should be kept in mind when organizing a similar welcoming initiative. These struggles include finding passionate volunteers, finances, and space limitations.

The results of this research also add to the scientific debate of welcoming spaces. This case study shows how a welcoming space initiated by a Syrian status holder and her language coach functions and makes use of a migrants agency. The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on LINK and the way they dealt with it gives a new insight into how dynamic a welcoming space is and the level of dependence of the status holders on LINK.

This research did have some methodological limitations due to the data being generated during the COVID-19 pandemic. Most limitations are thus caused by doing interviews through online video calls. The connection is not always as strong and can cut out words or sentences which can make it hard to understand each other. Besides

that it is also hard as an interviewer to take control during an interview, since you can not talk at the same time which makes it hard to cut someone off and steer the interview. Due to the online interviews, the amount of achievable interviews was limited, as only refugees who spoke well-enough Dutch and had technical knowhow and hardware could attend the online meetings.

Nevertheless, the lockdown did make it possible for me to attend many (online) language cafés. However, working on this thesis during this period was difficult. Since I had to work completely on my own at home, this resulted in less opportunities to discuss the findings with fellow students or other advisors. This could have limited the overall analysis of the findings, due to a lack of outside perspectives.

To the question whether LINK Nederweert should be considered a welcoming space or not, I have found a very clear answer: LINK Nederweert is undoubtedly a welcoming space, not only the Syrian status holders felt welcome, so felt I. LINK opened its doors for me and this research in a very difficult and strange time, which I am very grateful for. The community LINK has created is very accepting and positive and eager to learn. I therefore sincerely hope that I did LINK and its participants justice in this thesis and that other institutions or actors may learn from this case study of a welcoming space.

Future research should investigate and compare more perspectives of non-European migrants on welcoming spaces to better understand what the conditions of a welcoming space should be in order to actually make non-European migrants feel welcomed. Especially when it comes to vulnerable groups like refugees, it is of utmost importance to include their perspective and opinion when creating a space for them.

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Appendix A. Interview topic lists

A.1. for the main volunteer of LINK

<i>Topics</i>	<i>Related questions</i>	<i>Possible follow-up questions</i>
<i>Origin story of the initiative</i>	<p><i>Who came up with the initiative?</i></p> <p><i>When was the welcoming space first active/ open?</i></p> <p><i>How did the initiative develop over time?</i></p> <p><i>What is the main goal of the initiative?</i></p>	<p><i>Did the goal of the initiative change over time?</i></p> <p><i>What were the important moments in the history of the initiative?</i></p>
<i>Type of events</i>	<p><i>How many participants do they attract?</i></p> <p><i>Who organizes the events?</i></p> <p><i>What kind of events do you organize?</i></p>	<p><i>What is the purpose of the events?</i></p> <p><i>What is the role of the participants?</i></p>
<i>Welcoming space</i>	<p><i>What do you think is important when you want to create a welcoming space for non-European migrants?</i></p>	<p><i>What are the necessities?</i></p> <p><i>What should a welcoming space not do?</i></p> <p><i>What effect do you think the</i></p>

	<i>What kind of services do you offer the participants of the initiative?</i>	<i>services/ help you offer have on the participants?</i>
<i>Other services/actors</i>	<i>Are there other actors active that also offer similar services to the migrants?</i> <i>What is the relation between the welcoming space and these third parties?</i>	<i>How do they help them?</i> <i>Do you collaborate or mostly work alongside each other?</i>

A.2. for the Syrian men

<i>Topics</i>	<i>Related questions</i>	<i>Possible follow-up questions</i>
<i>Individual background age, education, occupation, migration, household</i>	<i>Is this the first place you have lived in in The Netherlands?</i> <i>How long have you been living in the Netherlands?</i> <i>Did you move with your whole family ?</i> <i>Do you currently have a job?</i>	<i>What kind of job?</i> <i>What is easy to find a job? Or why was it hard to find a job?</i>

	<i>(only if they are comfortable answering)</i>	
<i>Rural/ urban</i>	<p><i>Do you like living here in Nederweert?</i></p> <p><i>Are there any struggles of living in Nederweert?</i></p> <p><i>Would you like to move in the future?</i></p>	<p><i>Would you prefer to live in a larger/ smaller town?</i></p> <p><i>What do you think of the Dutch people who live in Nederweert? Are they friendly to you and your family?</i></p>
<i>The welcoming space; their opinion on it and what it means to them.</i>	<p><i>How did you get to know the initiative ?</i></p> <p><i>What Is your opinion of the welcoming space?</i></p> <p><i>What does the welcoming space mean to you and fellow newcomers?</i></p> <p><i>Do you go to the events that the initiative organizes?</i></p>	<p><i>What do you like/dislike about it?</i></p> <p><i>Do you wish to the welcoming space to change or add something?</i></p> <p><i>How does the welcoming space and its services influence your life?</i></p> <p><i>What do you like or dislike about the events?</i></p>
<i>Social cultural integration</i>	<p><i>Are you regularly in contact with your neighbors or other residents, outside of the welcoming space?</i></p> <p><i>How did the welcoming space influence your social life?</i></p>	<p><i>Do you feel (more) comfortable talking to other residents?</i></p> <p><i>Does the language café the welcoming space provide help with this?</i></p>

	<p><i>What effect do the events have on you ?</i></p>	<p><i>Are you happy with the amount of interactions you have with your neighbors/other residents/colleagues?</i></p> <p><i>Do the events help you with getting to know the Dutch society?</i></p>
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A.3. for the coördinator Vluchtelingenwerk Nederland

<i>Topics</i>	<i>Related Questions</i>	<i>Possible follow-up questions</i>
<i>Personal questions</i>	<p><i>What is your function within Vluchtelingenwerk NL?</i></p> <p><i>What is your relationship with LINK Nederweert?</i></p>	<i>How long have you been working with LINK?</i>
<i>Opinion on LINK</i>	<p><i>What do you think of LINK and the services they offer?</i></p> <p><i>How does LINK differ from initiatives from Vluchtelingenwerk?</i></p> <p><i>Do you think that LINK should have a professional involved?</i></p>	<p><i>What should be improved/changed about LINK?</i></p> <p><i>Do you think there should be more initiatives like LINK in other places?</i></p> <p><i>Do you think LINK has a positive impact on the status holders? Are there also negative effects?</i></p>

		<p><i>LINK sometimes acts like a mediator between the status holders and other parties, do you think this is a good thing?</i></p> <p><i>Should there be more collaboration between LINK and Vluchtelingenwerk?</i></p>
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A.4. for the gebiedsregisseur Nederweert

<i>Topics</i>	<i>Related Questions</i>	<i>Possible follow-up questions</i>
<i>Personal questions</i>	<p><i>What is your function within the municipality of Nederweert?</i></p> <p><i>What is your relationship with LINK Nederweert?</i></p>	<p><i>How long have you been working with LINK?</i></p> <p><i>When/ How often are you involved?</i></p>
<i>Opinion on LINK</i>	<p><i>What do you think of LINK and the services they offer?</i></p> <p><i>How does LINK differ from the services the municipality offers?</i></p>	<p><i>What should be improved/ changed about LINK?</i></p> <p><i>Do you think there should be more initiatives like LINK in other places?</i></p> <p><i>Are you happy with the current level of</i></p>

	<i>Do you think that LINK should have a professional involved?</i>	<i>collaboration between LINK and the municipality?</i>
<i>Impact of LINK</i>	<i>Do you think LINK has a positive impact on the status holders? Are there also negative effects?</i>	<i>Did you notice a change in the community because of LINK?</i> <i>Do you think it changed the relationship between the status holders and the municipality with LINK sometimes functioning as a mediator?</i>
<i>Rural context</i>	<i>Since Nederweert is a relatively rural village, do you think this has an impact on the status holders?</i>	<i>Have they reported certain struggles?</i> <i>How does the municipality deal with this?</i>

