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Engineering community spirit: the pre-figurative politics of affective citizenship in Dutch local governance

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ABSTRACT

Over the past two decades, communitarian criticisms of the lack of public engagement and a sense of local belonging have inspired extensive debates across Western Europe on how best to govern deprived urban neighbourhoods. One governmental strategy has been to engineer neighbourhood *communities* as localised, collective spheres of belonging. In this article, we show how ‘governing through affect’ has been part of Dutch neighbourhood policy since the turn of the millennium. Through an in-depth study of a community participation programme in a deprived Amsterdam neighbourhood, we analyse how policy practitioners use ‘sensitising policy techniques’ to enhance social cohesion and encourage communitarian citizenship among neighbourhood residents. Although governments often speak of ‘communities’ as self-evident entities, we argue that communities are better understood as enactments where discourses of neighbourliness, proximity, intimacy and familiarity encourage a localised, collective sense of belonging – a governmental strategy that mimics the ‘pre-figurative’ politics of radical social movements.

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The paradox: communities as policy instruments

Many people in Slotermeer are concerned about the neighbourhood’s future. The music teacher who organises a neighbourhood musical with children ... The baker who bakes bread for a neighbourhood event ... The mother who, after school, takes care of the neighbourhood’s children. The older gentleman who sweeps the street twice a week. *Neighbourhood Circle* brings all these people together, creating new connections and ideas, where anything becomes possible. So think about how you can best use your talents to make Slotermeer even more beautiful. Because together we can do more, TOGETHERSloterMORE!¹

The above call to communitarian citizenship appeared in a free Dutch district newspaper in 2007. Whereas the paean to community involvement conjures a village-like atmosphere where residents care for each other and where, together, they weave a warm web of social relations, Slotermeer is no secluded village, but an urban neighbourhood on the periphery of the Dutch capital city of Amsterdam. Many of its residents struggle with urban marginality (see Wacquant 1999) and Slotermeer has been the frequent target of both national

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and local policy interventions. It is struggling to overcome its stigma of a 'problematic' or 'deprived' neighbourhood with a future of physical renewal, economic prosperity and the social integration of its population.

Another theme apparent in the call is the community spirit of Sloterveer's residents, presented as engaged citizens contributing to neighbourhood life as they teach, care, bake and sweep. Such 'active citizens' occupy a central place in Dutch programmes of neighbourhood renewal, and Sloterveer's *Neighbourhood Circle*² – a community participation programme initiated by the local government to build on the 'self-organising potential of the local community' and 'enhance social cohesion' (POSEIDON 2006) – is no exception. Neighbourhood Circle provides residents financial and professional support to organise activities such as weekly coffee mornings in the neighbourhood centre for lonely elderly or immigrant women, to initiate projects to refurbish dilapidated playgrounds, or to host public events on the street. Neighbourhood Circle is representative of how the Dutch nationwide Neighbourhood Renewal Policy, which ran from 2007 to 2014, sought out, solicited and enrolled residents into 'communitarian' citizenship (see Etzioni 1998).

A paradox lies at the heart of this Dutch local governance strategy, one that has been pointed to by other scholars who have analysed attempts to 'govern through community' (Rose 1999). While the 'community' is a key policy instrument in all kinds of government plans, these plans simultaneously suggest that community is a frail construct, even an absent entity (see Meegan and Mitchell 2001; Larner 2005; Macleod and Johnstone 2012; Uitermark 2014). While governments hope for spontaneous citizen identification, loyalty and engagement, the desired community does not simply exist *out there*; as a delicate field of affect-laden relationships, it must be carefully designed, shaped and made. The question then becomes how communitarian norms and values can be implemented through policy.

We examine the paradox of 'governing through community' by focusing on the prominence and promise of the communitarian citizen in Dutch local governance, and in the Amsterdam neighbourhood of Sloterveer in particular. *Creating* community-minded citizens is a central pillar in national and local policies that aim to revitalise deprived or problematic neighbourhoods in the Netherlands (Tonkens and De Wilde 2013; Uitermark 2014; De Wilde 2015). This ideal of the communitarian citizen also suggests a radical transformation from how citizens were previously perceived by governments: no longer rational, individual, calculating subjects, they have become relational, affective subjects in search of attachments to a greater good.

Fortier (2010, 17) has shown how British Government strategies to foster local community cohesion have sought to mobilise emotions associated with good citizenship, a strategy that she terms 'governing through affect'. Such 'affective citizenship' (Fortier 2010) can be seen in Dutch local governance as well. There are in fact broad parallels between the British and Dutch cases, with both societies grappling with the issues attendant to mass immigration and the integration of ethnic minorities into mainstream society. Governments in both countries have turned to lecturing their populations on citizenship – and more particularly the 'communitarian underpinnings' of citizenship – where citizenship is to be 'earned' by embracing the spirit of community responsibility and morality (Van Houdt, Suvarierol, and Schinkel 2011, 416).

The rise of communitarian citizenship in Dutch local governance can fruitfully be seen against the background of the 'culturalisation of citizenship' (Schinkel 2008; Duyvendak 2011) where familiarity with 'national' norms, values and traditions become central in

delineating the duties of citizens and where feeling the appropriate emotions – not least the feeling of *belonging* – becomes a condition at the very heart of Dutch citizenship. It is against this background, that we have to understand contemporary governance strategies in the Netherlands aiming at the creation of local communities as spheres of belonging. These strategies are partly organised from the centre, responsabilising the local arena (as in ‘domopolitics’, see Walters 2004; Darling 2011), even though their enactment is truly local and highly territorialised.

Rose (1999, 191) has aptly pointed to the ‘tensions between the moral high ground of communitarian thought and the mundane practicalities of policy formation’. We analyse these tensions by examining how communitarian citizenship is enacted in the Amsterdam neighbourhood of Slotermeer, and more specifically by policy practitioners responsible for implementing its Neighbourhood Circle community participation programme. We view affective citizenship as a technology of governance – an ‘affective register’ (Muehlebach 2012, 44) of techniques that seek to instrumentalize personal bonds, intimate relations and emotions in order to ‘sensitize’ citizens into the spirit of community engagement.

Our analysis builds on three main sources: (1) the literature on the affective turn in citizenship studies, (2) national and local policy documents on local governance and public debates on the culturalisation of citizenship in the Netherlands and (3) a detailed ethnographic study of the Neighbourhood Circle community participation programme in the deprived Amsterdam neighbourhood of Slotermeer. We focus on the ‘sensitising policy techniques’ used by policy practitioners to *produce* a particular type of good citizen, and analyse this process of *citizen-making* to unpack the communitarian norms that underlie the currently dominant ideal of citizenship in Dutch local governance. As such, this paper invites a broadening of the debates over the notion of affective citizenship to its local effects and affects.

Communitarianism, citizenship and emotions

An affective turn in local governance

Over the past decade, communitarian criticisms of the lack of public engagement and a sense of local belonging have inspired extensive debates on how deprived urban neighbourhoods across Western Europe should be governed. Ethnic diversity, strained social relations, anxiety and feelings of uprootedness have become key indicators for the marginality that fuels the ‘anxious, disaffected mood’ of their residents (Fortier 2010, 17). In response, governments have sought to engage local communities to improve ‘social cohesion’ (see Bull and Jones 2006; MacLeavy 2009; Lawless et al. 2010; De Wilde, Hurenkamp, and Tonkens 2014).

The recent ‘affective turn’ in policies to foster citizen engagement (Plummer 2003; Isin 2004) acknowledges the importance of values, feelings and intimate relations in community life, and aims to mould these to engage citizens in a super diverse, ever-changing public domain. More specific, the notion of ‘affective citizenship’ refers to how governments acknowledge, harness, and try to influence citizens’ emotions and intimate relationships within the construction of citizenship. Mookherjee (2005, 36), focusing on the various issues which emerged from the legislation against the Muslim veil in French state schools, introduces the term to show how ‘affection and loyalty’ are used in nation building. Focusing on issues of gender, sexuality, religion and race, Johnson (2010, 495) has analysed which

intimate relationships between citizens are recognised by the national government, how they are encouraged to feel about others and themselves in the public sphere, and how this culminates in a 'politics of affect' which influences who receives full citizenship rights. For the UK, Fortier ([2007] 2010) has shown how government strategies combine national visions of shared belonging with local efforts to manage diversity, which she refers to as 'governing through affect' (Fortier 2010, 17).

Similarly, Muehlebach's (2012) ethnography of the affective underpinnings of welfare state reform in North Italy shows how the Italian Government has sought to mobilize its citizens through 'a highly moralised kind of citizenship' (Ibid, 6) in which government administrators draw upon the 'affective register' (Ibid, 44) of pride, empathy and compassion to seduce people into taking better care of their neighbours and loved ones. This new form of 'ethical citizenship' (Ibid, 6) entails the reassignment of governmental functions as well as citizens' *affective attachments* to locally embedded spheres of collective belonging – a dynamic seen in contemporary Dutch local governance as well.

The culturalisation of Dutch citizenship

Since the Netherlands first began experimenting with strategies of local governance, the influx of post-colonial and labour migrants has been linked to fears of residential segregation and the erosion of traditional social structures in urban neighbourhoods (Uitermark [2012] 2014). This conflation continues to inform policy interventions to enhance social cohesion, which have been integrated within the physical, economic and social 'pillars' of neighbourhood renewal strategies. As Uitermark (2014, 8) argues:

The perceived failure of national models of integration (multiculturalism) has inaugurated a search for alternative frameworks around social cohesion that prioritize the integration of poor minority groups through their incorporation in neighbourhoods. It is feared that tensions within these neighbourhoods – especially multicultural tensions – may dislocate society as a whole.

Dutch local governance should thus be seen in the context of a national governmental strategy to manage the effects of macro processes such as globalisation and mass migration. As Duyvendak (2011) argues:

In Western Europe, the 'crisis of home' relates primarily to the changing composition of populations and the meanings attached to these developments by (populist) politicians. The raging debate around the integration of immigrants is increasingly framed in terms of who belongs in the Netherlands. (Duyvendak 2011, 22,23)

The 'crisis of home' often has its epicentre at the national level – with the nation itself conceptualised as one large home. In the Netherlands, politicians from across the political spectrum apparently believe that reinforcing Dutch national identity will help members of the ethnic majority working class feel less displaced in their own neighbourhoods, which over the past decades have witnessed an influx of immigrant populations (Duyvendak 2011). Seen as sites where public unease about Dutch multicultural society is most manifest, urban marginality in these neighbourhoods has above all come to be associated with a fragile sense of *belonging*. Given the interdependence in perceptions of what is happening in these neighbourhoods and in the country more generally, the tensions, as Uitermark (2014) points out, are more than a local affair. This can be seen in devolving responsibility for this

national policy intervention to local levels of governance and imagining neighbourhoods as local arenas of integration.

The allegedly alarming decline of social cohesion in these urban neighbourhoods resonated in Dutch public and political debate, giving rise to the ‘culturalisation of citizenship’ (as mentioned above) where citizenship itself evolved ‘from a status or practice into a deep *sentiment*. Citizens are subjected to new ‘feeling rules’ (Hochschild 2003, 82). Belonging – feeling at home – has become a requirement’ (Duyvendak 2011, 92,93; emphasis added). Public and political debate moreover emphasised the need for loyalty to the nation state and to ‘Dutch’ norms and values (Van Reekum 2014).

Although multicultural tensions and the lack of social integration in urban neighbourhoods stirred the debate on citizenship and Dutch identity at the national level, the solution – community – was deemed to lie elsewhere, namely on a local level. Deprived urban neighbourhoods were framed as porous places where the perceived loss of neighbourhood identity invaded the everyday life-worlds of people and their sense of *local* belonging (De Wilde 2015). The solution for identification and integration was not so much the nation – enacted as Dutch – but a specific locality, namely the neighbourhood – enacted as a localised, collective sphere of belonging.

The festering wounds and lost worlds of the Dutch Neighbourhood Renewal Policy

The slogan ‘TOGETHERSloterMORE!’ – especially its emphasis on *together* – is best understood within the context of the Dutch nationwide Neighbourhood Renewal Policy, an intervention initiated by the central government in 2007 to transform ‘problematic neighbourhoods’ [*probleemwijken*] such as Sloterveer into ‘powerful neighbourhoods’ [*krachtwijken*]. The Neighbourhood Renewal Policy grew out of a public debate where deprivation was equated not only with a neighbourhood’s housing stock, streets, squares and socio-economic status, but also with the *affective* state of its residents. These neighbourhoods were framed as arenas where the problems of Dutch multicultural society were most manifest. A ‘multicultural drama’³ unfolded: immigrants struggled to integrate into society, there was a growing unease among the ethnic majority working class who felt like ‘foreigners’ and ethnic relations were increasingly tense. Some neighbourhoods were even portrayed by left-wing and right-wing politicians as ‘festering wounds’⁴ or ‘lost worlds’⁵ where residents felt uprooted and abandoned, no longer experiencing their places of residence as familiar, as home.

Tying the fraying of the national social fabric to local feelings of insecurity, anxiety and fear in Dutch neighbourhoods (see Mepschen 2016), policy interventions sought to soothe affective publics. The action plan that set the parameters for the Neighbourhood Renewal Policy sketched a vision for future ‘wonderful’ neighbourhoods where ‘residents feel familiar and at home, [where] they experience their living environment as manageable with knowledge, room and respect for each other’s lifestyle’. According to the policy document ‘integration is also about returning this social cement to the neighbourhood’ (Cabinet VROM 2007, 4). Central to the Neighbourhood Renewal Policy the engineering of a new kind of citizenship at the neighbourhood level:

For social cohesion and integration, a certain degree of *communality* is needed. This does not come naturally. Through a collective engagement with life and the living environment in the neighbourhood, this communality can be brought about. This is modern citizenship on a

neighbourhood level. Importantly, this citizenship establishes cooperation between residents with different ethnic, cultural and humanist beliefs. (Ibid, 22, emphasis added)

This new kind of local citizenship points to new feeling rules, expectations of allegiance and loyalty on a neighbourhood level which indirectly emerge out a culturalised and emotion-alised national discourse about integration and citizenship. Following debates on ‘affective urbanism’ (Anderson and Holden 2008) or ‘moral urbanism’ (Darling 2013) which examine the varied ways cities and their citizens are positioned as reflective of certain values and virtues, we engage the neighbourhood as ‘a space whose moral language is entwined with a national concern to identify, regulate and manage integration issues’ (Ibid, 1795).

Affective urbanism is ‘attentive to how various modalities of the more than/less than rational, including affects, emotions and feelings compose urban life’ and points ‘to the development of a range of affective technologies that amplify, create and mobilize passions.’ (Anderson and Holden 2008, 144). We argue that communitarian citizenship forms such an affective technology and we aim to show the relationship between the moral framing of neighbourhoods as potential spheres of belonging and the local policies in which these framings are translated by policy practitioners. If the multifaceted problems that comprise urban marginality are seen in terms of ‘belonging’ and ‘feeling at home’, how are local government strategies then designed to intervene in these emotions? How are civic engagement and ‘communality’ to be brought in policy interventions such as Slottermeer’s Neighbourhood Circle?

Methods: policy analysis and ethnography

The national Neighbourhood Renewal Policy encouraged local governments to devolve social responsibilities to the neighbourhood level (Cabinet VROM 2007). Special budgets were allocated to fund small, informal initiatives by neighbourhood residents – a form of community participation privileging the appropriation of the public domain through warm feelings, intimate doings and joint actions rather than through the mechanisms of rational deliberation, voice and vote that dominate more formal settings (see Wijdeven, Hendriks, and Vrieling 2010). Neighbourhood Circle in Slottermeer, by providing us insight into the role, logic and dynamics of community participation, allows us to formulate more general conclusions about the role of affective citizenship in Dutch local governance.

Neighbourhood Circle was designed and implemented by the district administration of Amsterdam New-West. The project’s 18 staff members, all employed by the district administration, consisted of a members as ‘policy practitioners’ as they are the actors who *translate* the aims of the policy intervention through their actual labour and a variety of practices and thus produce policy at the implementation level. Their labour is common to the work of ‘street-level bureaucrats’ working in public services as pointed out by Lipsky (1980).

Over a two-year period between 2009 and 2011, the first author pursued ethnographic fieldwork within Slottermeer’s Neighbourhood Circle community participation programme. She was a participant observer in its projects, voluntary activities, collective gatherings, administrative meetings and deliberations. In addition, she conducted interviews with 16 policy practitioners and 40 participants of Neighbourhood Circle. In this paper, we draw from fieldnotes taken during these activities and events, from interviews, conversations and email correspondence with residents and policy practitioners as well as national, local and district policy white papers, weekly district newspapers, flyers, posters, the

district administration website and other communication material spread by the district administration.

Practising social cohesion in a community participation programme

How are social problems associated with urban marginality – social tensions between residents and their feelings of unease and uprootedness – created, managed and/or reproduced through policy? How is the call for communitarian citizenship translated into concrete interventions? In this section, we present our data on the ‘shifting, mobile and contested forms that a policy can take’ (Clarke et al. 2015, 34) as it moves from the design table to implementation. More specifically, we show how policy practitioners engage in this process of translation with the help of three ‘sensitising policy techniques’.

Sensitising policy techniques

We borrow the notion of ‘sensitising’ from the American sociologist Herbert Blumer. In contrast to what he calls ‘definitive’ concepts, sensitising concepts do not involve using ‘fixed and specific procedures’ to identify a set of phenomena, but instead give ‘a general sense of reference and guidance in approaching [its] empirical instances ...’ (Blumer 1969, 148). We argue that the policy techniques used in Neighbourhood Circle are ‘sensitising’ as well, in that they suggest directions along which to approach and understand everyday life in Slotmeer. Through sensitising policy techniques, policy practitioners appeal to the desires, wishes and emotions of residents; the assumption is that feelings and social interactions can be steered in the right direction by creating a ‘cosy atmosphere’ [een gezellige sfeer].⁶ Face-to-face contact, friendly chats and intimate interactions are the first steps towards kindling feelings of community. Sander, a policy practitioner, explains:

You cannot communicate it in a distant, formal manner, beginning with ‘Let’s participate now!’ and then proceeding to the first point on the agenda. People respond to a warm, cosy feeling It means you have to encourage them in a creative, nice manner ... to get *into the spirit*, you know.

Getting residents ‘into the spirit’ of community engagement is achieved through strategies, procedures and tactics that enable residents to feel, see and desire in *designated* ways. We discerned three such sensitising techniques in Neighbourhood Circle: the techniques of caring, appreciating and branding.

Caring

Previous studies have revealed how much policy work is often required to encourage active citizenship (Barnes and Prior 2009; Newman and Clarke 2009). As policy practitioners seek a balance between taking care and taking control, and engage with citizens through a broad range of formal and informal channels, they often become attached to the people they work with. Our study of Neighbourhood Circle adds to this literature by highlighting the importance of *caring*, which we define as a technique that expresses itself through acts of informality and intimacy between policy practitioners and neighbourhood residents. The technique of caring is part of the strategy to not appear bureaucratic; the latter is thought to dampen citizen enthusiasm and trust and therefore deemed ‘fatal’ for creating

the familiar, intimate atmosphere from which the desired affective attachments and social relations will emerge.

Policy practitioners in Neighbourhood Circle pay careful attention to personal matters and sensitivities. They organise monthly gatherings with an intimate, playful ambiance devoid of hierarchy and engineer settings where feelings can be shared. This is in stark contrast to common bureaucratic practice, where experts communicate top-down to lay populations. Karen, a policy practitioner, describes her own expressions of enthusiasm at these gatherings as part of a personal strategy to encourage residents to become engaged in neighbourhood life, as a 'care for interaction': 'Sometimes, to arouse the same thing among residents, it helps to tap into the enthusiasm within you and show it during gatherings.'

Similarly, at one particular collective gathering where Sander addresses residents, he taps into his own personal experience as a father and recalls the discomfort 'we' all feel when approaching strangers in the neighbourhood:

Still, the truth is that if we are really honest with ourselves, we often do not approach or talk to people we don't know. ... There is something inside ourselves that makes us not want to make that step towards the other. But it is possible. I am often inspired by children and what they do, for instance my son ...

Tapping into their own enthusiasm, anxieties and doubts, Sander and Karen prefigure the feelings, introspection and behaviour they seek to encourage among residents attending these gatherings.

Policy practitioners also imbue their office spaces with an informal ambiance. Quincy, who mans a front office, greets all who enter enthusiastically and ensures that his office is 'at least a little bit cosy'. His philosophy is that meaningful interaction starts with conversation:

Fear and nasty emotions will be released if you don't talk to each other. Because then people don't know each other. People might only talk about minor things, but at least they talk, and they will talk about how they feel about those things.

These examples illustrate how emotions and informal, intimate relations can shape interactions between policy practitioners and residents. While such relations may at first appear unprofessional, they are in fact strategic; a key assumption of Neighbourhood Circle is that residents are marginalised by their lack of social relations, thereby undermining social cohesion.

Policy practitioners describe themselves as 'friends', 'uncles' and as 'speaking from the heart'. By engaging in such personal interactions, they establish intimate bonds with residents and become part of the community they seek to bring about. Policy practitioners therefore engineer settings and situations where soul-searching is desired and emotions can be shared: their personal stories and confessions – 'if we are really honest with ourselves', 'I am often inspired by my son' – are attempts to influence the beliefs and behaviour of neighbourhood residents. While the latter may initially be drawn to gatherings for more instrumental reasons, carefully and delicately striking the right emotional register may open the door for affective relations to flourish. This, at any rate, is the idea. However, before stretching the governmental argument too far, when it comes to working with and through emotions, there is only so much that can be designed up front. Due to sharing experiences, spending time with volunteers, and engaging in intimate conversations and personal confessions, policy practitioners inevitably start to care and develop friendships

out of the situations and interactions which are also meant to relieve tensions, soothe pain and build enthusiasm. Put differently, they get attached as well.

Appreciating

Besides caring, we observe the technique of *appreciating*, for which policy practitioners have at their disposal a broad range of instruments.

First of all, Neighbourhood Circle has a considerable budget to support residents' initiatives. Given the rationalising aspects of money (see Simmel [1900] 2004), financial incentives to participate in community life may seem paradoxical. However, money gains meaning by virtue of how it is used, and the money used in Neighbourhood Circle is earmarked as 'special money' (Zelizer 1989, 371) – designated for proper use, regulated through a specific mode of allocation, and assigned special meaning. While this meaning emerges, in part, out of a set of official rules and bureaucratic regulations, it also grows out of informal negotiations as policy practitioners on the ground are the ones who eventually decide which neighbourhood contributions are *worthy* of financial recognition. The presence of a substantial budget transforms policy practitioners into budget gatekeepers. They often help residents fill in request forms, serve as the contact person, advocate the idea to colleagues, are involved in granting decisions and communicate the decision by phone and letter. The official approval letters they sent – as representatives of the district administration – begin enthusiastically: 'Congratulations! Your initiative has been approved!' Receiving financial support is framed as a joyous occasion. The allocated money thus has a symbolic function, a kind of ritual event or *rite de passage* through which residents become part of Neighbourhood Circle.

In addition to financial recognition, appreciation is conveyed through personal or public forms of recognition (e.g. a call for applause at Neighbourhood Circle gatherings or a publicly outspoken endorsement in district newspapers for residents who organised particular activities). At a gathering, Sander publicly praises Ozlem, a volunteer who has, over the course of four months, organised a traditional 'Turkish paper marbling' workshop for women. He shares a feeling of pride he felt himself when seeing the result of their weekly efforts at a festive presentation:

There was a plate with snacks and little flags on them and if you looked closely you would see that each of those flags were different, handmade and painted by hand. At this level of detail you could see that there was a whole network of women behind it, women who had taken several afternoons to make these flags. It was really amazing.

His colleague Rachida steps in to say that creative expressions like these are an asset to the neighbourhood. She goes on to emphasise that the strength of this voluntary activity was the fact that through drawing upon an aspect of her identity Ozlem managed to gather a group of women, connect them to each other and not only let them learn about the traditional Turkish handicraft of paper marbling, but rather let them become aware and take care of each other as well. Rachida closes her statement by saying the following:

Together you're stronger, than just doing things on your own. What we believe in and what we try to do is connect, to see if we can benefit from each other's talents. But also, to see that we can take care of each other and get a lot of good things done the coming years.

In their praise of this particular voluntary activity Rachida and Sander publicly value the dedication with which these female volunteers share folkloric aspects of ‘their’ culture with the aim to reach out to their neighbours.

On another note, eating together – and other activities related to food – is an important aspect of the communitarian citizenship that policy practitioners try to encourage among residents. Numerous cooking clubs were organised in Sloterveer’s neighbourhood centres for women and children, dinners for the lonely elderly, coffee mornings for women, and neighbourhood barbecues and dinners for cultural holidays such as Christmas and Ramadan. For Karen, a policy practitioner, eating together has a ‘conjoining function’ as it helps neighbours ‘learn about each other’s rich culture over a nice meal’.

At Neighbourhood Circle gatherings there is always a small buffet, and time is set aside to eat together. The dishes are usually prepared by female volunteers who prepare something from their own gastronomic tradition. In his role as chairman of most neighbourhood gatherings, Sander introduces the delicious ‘multicultural’ buffet, making it part of his narrative about Sloterveer as a rainbow palette of ‘diversities’ and ‘cultures’. By qualifying the food as ‘multicultural’ – and *appreciating* seemingly insignificant activities organised around food – the sensory experiences of tasting, cooking and eating are used to invoke curiosity and mutual respect.

Finally, competitions for ‘Neighbourhood Hero’ and ‘Volunteer of the Year’ in which policy practitioners nominate volunteers are a final form of appreciation. Volunteers are also selected for special prizes such as ‘The Tree of Benefit’. This last prize is presented by the local administration as a ‘symbol of recognition’ for residents who, in a ‘special and altruistic way’, have invested in the neighbourhood and its residents. The idea behind such prizes is that good deeds should be rewarded. Those who win are rewarded with a tree which they can plant in a park in the neighbourhood. In ceremonies usually chaired by the district chairman or alder(wo)man, winners are chosen from among three or four contestants. Their contributions to the neighbourhood are publicly praised under the spotlight (see Figure 1).

Through the awarding of budgets and prizes and through more informal forms of recognition, policy practitioners and local administrators classify certain activities and projects as ‘good’ (and others, implicitly, as less good). By attaching a price and by bestowing prizes and praise (see Dewey 1939; Stark 2011, 319), government representatives legitimise feelings and behaviour that create community, just as Neighbourhood Circle intends.

Branding

Alongside caring and appreciating, we discern *branding* as a technique to assemble stories and images of communitarian citizenship to make the future, idealised image of Sloterveer visible and tangible in the present. Neighbourhood Circle volunteers and activities are omnipresent in district newspapers, slogans and festivals – a type of communication reminiscent of ‘place branding’ or ‘city branding’ (for an overview see Dinnie 2004; Kavaratzis 2005) in which places are promoted to external markets. Place branding usually entails promoting positive emotional and psychological associations with a place to attract prospective residents, visitors and investors (see Eshuis and Klijn 2012). But in the case of Neighbourhood Circle, current residents – not outsiders – are the intended audience of the image of a harmonious, multicultural community (see Figure 2). Policy practitioners were called upon by the local government to ‘visualise the progress of urban regeneration’.



Figure 1. Left: Winner and contestants of the 'Tree of Benefit' competition, posing with the local alderman. Right: the winner plants his tree with the alderman. These images illustrate a story on the winner of the Tree of Benefit on the district administration's website.



Figure 2. Neighbourhood Circle leaflet. ‘Good idea? We participate! Do you have an idea to improve your neighbourhood? Apply for a grant at city hall’.

‘celebrate successes’ and ‘proclaim positive messages’ in an attempt to ‘touch residents’ and ‘persuade and enthuse them to participate’ in the transformation of Slotermeer into the ‘wonderful neighbourhood’ that it was to become.

Eshuis and Edwards (2012) have shown how citizens can gain or lose influence over urban planning through branding projects. In the best of cases, citizen involvement can mean that their feelings of attachment and sense of identity are included in the democratic planning of branding strategies. But citizens’ feelings play a different role in the branding of Slotermeer, where *real-life* examples of good citizenship are used as role models for other residents and as a ‘trademark’ for the neighbourhood (see Figures 3 and 4).

Concluding, sensitising concepts in social science draw attention to important features of social interaction to help social scientists *interpret* phenomena. We argue that the deployment of ‘sensitising policy techniques’ in Neighbourhood Circle plays a similar role for the residents of Slotermeer. They provide starting points for residents to discover themselves and their neighbours through all kinds of sensory experiences (eating, tasting, smelling) and sensibilities (feminine warmth, cultural care, nostalgic affection for a tree or statue, the basic human need for security), and to reflect upon these in specific ways (suggested through talks about the strength of diversity, the impact of small acts of kindness and the joy of volunteering). These techniques encourage residents to act upon their new-found feelings of belonging by organising activities and projects that fit within the designated contours of Neighbourhood Circle – to transform Slotermeer from a mere neighbourhood into a community.



Foto Jaap Wals

Vriendelijk zijn kost geen geld

Peter Mulder noemt zichzelf ook wel Peter Positiviteit. Naast zijn baan – waarin hij vijf ploegen diensten per week draait – zet hij zich namelijk dagelijks in voor een leefbare samenleving.

“Vanuit mijn woning kijk ik uit op de afvalcontainer en zie ik hoe iedereen zijn vuilniszakken naast de container gooit in plaats van erin. Dat vind ik zo irritant dat ik iedere dag wel een keer naar buiten loop om alle troep op te ruimen. Het is belangrijk om een buurt leefbaar te houden. Ik hoop dat mijn werk uiteindelijk effect heeft en meer mensen de container gebrui-

ken zoals het hoort en afval in de bak gooien. Zien werken, doet werken toch?”
Ik doe graag dingen om anderen te helpen en zeg altijd ‘vriendelijk zijn kost geen geld!’ Naast mijn baan werk ik als vrijwilliger bij Stichting Home Start. Daarvoor ga ik bij ouders langs die wat steun kunnen gebruiken bij het opvoeden van hun kinderen. Dat werk zou ik voor geen goud willen missen, want ik krijg er veel voor terug. Bij het gezin dat ik nu begeleid, leer ik de kleinste jongen fietsen. Dat is zo bijzonder om te doen, daar geniet ik enorm van. En hij kan het al goed hoor!”

“Ik hoop dat mijn werk uiteindelijk effect heeft.
Zien werken,
doet werken toch?”

Het mooie laten zien

Anders dan de naam doet vermoeden is de Marokkaanse Ouderen Salon (Stichting Mos) er niet alleen voor ouderen. Voorzitter Lahcen Farah houdt zich bezig met ondersteuning van vrouwen, mannen en kinderen. Iedereen dus!

“Ik ben graag actief in Slotervaart en vind het belangrijk om de mooie kant van de wijk te tonen. Ik woon hier nu twaalf jaar en ben sinds acht jaar heel actief. De wijk was destijds zo vaak negatief in het nieuws dat ik er genoeg van kreeg. Dit is een leuke omgeving met mooie mensen en dát wil ik laten zien!

Wij organiseren van alles: van sportactiviteiten tot voorlichtingsbijeenkomsten over gezondheid of financiële zaken. Tijdens die ramadan organiseren we ifars waar allochtonen en autochtonen voor worden uitgenodigd. Ook organiseren we reizen voor buurtbewoners, bijvoorbeeld naar Marokko om er de cultuur te leren kennen. Tijdens die reizen brengen we uitwisseling tot stand tussen organisaties in Marokko en Nederland.

Uiteraard is er ook een groep mensen die veel degelijk problemen heeft. Veel mensen komen dan naar mij toe en natuurlijk probeer ik ze



Foto Jaap Wals

dan te helpen bij het vinden van een oplossing. Ik ben veel bezig, maar krijg ook veel waardering.

Bewoners spraken mij regelmatig aan om te zeggen dat ze het ontzettend waardeerden dat ik zoveel doe.”

Van scrabbelen krijg je geduld



Foto Jaap Wals

Irene Pessy is niet alleen lid van de bewonerscommissie die actief is rondom het Confuciusplein in Slotervaart. Ze is ook continu bezig met het bedenken van realiseren van activiteiten voor jong en oud.

“Ik ben geïnteresseerd in mensen en luister naar wat ze zeggen. Vervolgens probeer ik hun wensen te realiseren. Het zit in mijn karakter om altijd bezig te zijn. Ik ben een echte ‘doener’ en wil graag zaken verbeteren.

Ook kom ik vaak met nieuwe ideeën. Laast bedacht ik bijvoorbeeld dat het leuk zou zijn als ouderen uit de buurt samen met basisschoolleerlingen gezelschapspelletjes zouden kunnen spelen. Bij veel gezinnen thuis worden tegenwoordig niet zo vaak meer spelletjes gedaan, terwijl je tijdens Mens Erger Je Niet of Scrabble een hoop kunt leren. Zaken als geduld hebben, op je buurt wachten en legen je verlies kunnen. Ik ben zelf geen spelletjesmens, maar veel ouderen houden er wel van. Het is goed voor hen en de kinderen om samen spelletjes te doen.

Het zou goed zijn als meer mensen uit de buurt zich vrijwillig inzetten. Je komt op die manier onder de mensen en leert van elkaar!”



Figure 3. Theme issues on ‘participation’ in district newspapers. The stories of Neighbourhood Circle volunteers – ‘Being Friendly Doesn’t Cost Money,’ ‘Showcasing Beauty,’ ‘Playing Scrabble Gives One Patience’ and ‘Removing Neighbourhood Anxiety’ – are assembled under the heading ‘Inspiring Residents Talk’.

Conclusion: the pre-figurative politics of affective citizenship

Although governments often portray communities as entities that already exist out there, our case study of the Neighbourhood Circle intervention in the Amsterdam neighbourhood



Goed idee! Krant

Oproep aan actieve bewoners, initiatiefnemers en vrijwilligers

Bent u initiatiefnemer van of vrijwilliger bij een bewonersinitiatief of een regelmatige deelnemer aan een cursus of activiteit in uw buurt? Samen met actieve bewoners wil stadsdeel Nieuw-West in het gebied Geuzenveld-Slotermeer een buurtnetwerk opzetten. Via dit netwerk kunnen bewoners van elkaar leren, een platform opzetten om ideeën uit te wisselen en samen projectaanvragen opstellen voor gemeenschappelijke trainingen, cursussen, etc.

Vindt u het leuk om te helpen bij het opzetten van een dergelijk netwerk, kom dan naar een van de startbijeenkomsten. Deze zijn op woensdag 2 juni 2010 van 19.30-21.30 uur in de buurthuiskamer 'Van Kuyckstraat', Johan van Kuyckstraat 42-47 of op woensdag 16 juni 2010 van 19.30-21.30 uur in de raadzaal van het Tuinstadhuis, Plein '40-'45 1. Voor meer informatie kunt u contact opnemen met Wouter Dolmans, W.Dolmans@nieuwwest.amsterdam.nl of 06 333 06 191.



Angst in buurt wegnemen

"Ik merk dat veel buurtbewoners bang zijn voor elkaar, dat is vaak onwetendheid. Buurkrachtraining leert mensen met elkaar in gesprek te gaan" vertelt Najoua Benmoussa. Benmoussa: "Mensen denken heel erg in vooroordelen: oudere autochtonen denken dat alle allochtone jongeren vervelend zijn en die jongeren denken dat alle ouderen racisten zijn. Vervolgens durven ze niet met elkaar te praten. Dat is jammer." Gedurende de training leren bewoners om niet bang te zijn voor elkaar. Om in gesprek te gaan en ook om iemand aan te spreken op ongewenst gedrag. Als mensen elkaar leren kennen, ontdekken ze dat het allemaal best meevalt. Als tegenprestatie geven alle nieuwbakken buurkrachten weer cursussen aan andere bewoners. Zo breiden de omgangsvormen zich als een olievlek uit!



Goed Idee! Bewonersinitiatieven

De bewonersinitiatieven zijn mogelijk door de inzet van actieve bewoners. In Geuzenveld en Slotermeer worden zij ondersteund door het team bewonersinitiatieven van stadsdeel Nieuw-West. Dit is mede mogelijk dankzij de Amsterdamse Wijkaanpak, een initiatief om wijken een extra impuls te geven. In Nieuw-West werken het stadsdeel, woningcorporaties en bewoners samen aan het verbeteren van de leefomgeving. Wilt u zelf iets organiseren, kijk dan op www.nieuwwest.amsterdam.nl/goedidee voor meer informatie. Op de site vindt u ook meer informatie over mogelijke ondersteuning van initiatieven in andere wijken in stadsdeel Nieuw-West.

Adressen

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BuurtEntree Geuzenveld
Goeman Borgesiusstraat 72

Cordaan
Cornelis Outhoornstraat 126,

Creamclubhuis
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De Dichter
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× Amsterdamse
wijk aanpak
× WERK IN
DUYVERING

Figure 3. (Continued).

of Slotermeer shows that community is better seen as an enactment in which discourses of neighbourliness, nearness, intimacy and familiarity encourage a collective, localised sense of belonging. This sense of belonging has to be performed through emotional identifications made possible with the help of 'sensitising policy techniques', where policy practitioners create opportunities for new forms of identification, social interaction and relationships.



Figure 4. Ambassadors at Neighbourhood Circle's information stall. Behind them is the flag of the local administration of Amsterdam New-West.

The main message communicated through Neighbourhood Circle is that Sloterveer's ethnic, cultural and lifestyle diversity is an asset for residents to come together, whether it is through street events, neighbourhood festivals, coffee mornings, handicraft workshops or other leisure or 'empowerment' activities in the neighbourhood centre. Neighbourhood Circle invites residents to participate in a warm, cosy sociability, to care for each other and their urban environment and to transform such affective attachments into active deeds of civic responsibility that will promote social cohesion.

With this in-depth case study we add to debates in 'moral urbanism' (Darling 2013) and 'affective urbanism' (Anderson and Holden 2008) in which it is argued that researchers need to be attentive to the process through which affects and emotions are spatially and temporarily distributed. As is stated by Anderson and Holden (2008, 145): 'the currently limited understanding of what affects and emotions do in cities demands the development of a vocabulary able to describe how affects and emotions emerge from everyday urban life.' Affective citizenship offers a vocabulary for focusing 'on those intangible aspects of community spirit (...) that might better galvanize the forces' (Ibid, 144) of urban regeneration and neighbourhood renewal. More specific, our paper shows how communitarian citizenship, as an affective technology, is operationalised through sensitising policy techniques.

Through their practices, district administrators and policy practitioners propagate specific communitarian norms – norms that are, first of all, *culturist*. Schinkel (2008) coined the term 'culturist' to describe discourses of otherness within debates and policies on minority integration which locate the source of both identity and behaviour in 'culture'. Neighbourhood Circle is based on a similar assumption: community engagement among residents is believed to begin from 'who they are'. But in contrast to integration discourse, policy practitioners in Neighbourhood Circle proclaim the 'diversity of cultures' to be the

'strength' of the neighbourhood, that 'culture' is 'a good way to bring people together'. Cultural differences are instrumentalised to foster a new sense of belonging to the neighbourhood; after all, no one is *yet* seen to belong to the community, which has to be brought about by developing affective attachments to neighbours and streets, squares and parks, for which the sensitising policy techniques offer situations and opportunities. Our case study thus supports Prins and Saharso's (2008) finding that there is considerable discrepancy between the polarisation of positions in Dutch public debate and the pragmatic policy measures taken on the ground where 'culture' is concerned. But whereas Prins and Saharso argue that culture is left out of the equation in local policy contexts, we see that communitarian norms come into being through a (re)formulation of the cultural aspects of everyday, multicultural life in Slotermeer as hidden strengths.

The communitarian norms propagated by Neighbourhood Circle are also *gendered*. The emotional appeal and emphasis on meaningful interactions and informal sensitivities emphasise the value of intimate, personal relations. This resonates with what are often qualified as soft, feminine values like empathy, affection and a collaborative spirit (Lister 2003). The communitarian citizen is someone who can regenerate the neighbourhood through *her* sensibilities and domestic talents. Through emphasising the power of informal, intimate practices like cooking, sewing or nurturing, the private, intimate domain of the household and family is brought out into the public.

This emphasis on feminine values and talents gives new meaning to the public sphere of the community (see Larner and Craig 2005; Buckingham et al. 2006). The affective interventions of policy practitioners offer immigrant women opportunities to pursue a 'politics of home' (Duyvendak 2011) as it fits into the larger narrative of Dutch neighbourhood policies. In accepting the invitation, these women are assisted by policy practitioners who shine the spotlight on them as good citizens. Policy practitioners emphasise the 'hidden' qualities and talents of these women. The latter play an important role in this reimagination, not so much within pragmatic policies to further the emancipation of immigrant women, but within strategies to bring forth a multicultural, inclusive community and citizenship. In their translation of a new affective norm, policy practitioners cherish culture and qualify certain morals and manners as 'cultural'. They thus play the culture card – although it is a *gendered* and *positively* valued one (see De Wilde 2016).

As such, policy practitioners encourage communitarian citizenship by appealing to the emotions of neighbourhood residents. They seek to generate identification with and commitment to one's neighbours, performing and reinforcing these culturist, gendered norms of good citizenship in collective gatherings, voluntary activities and friendly conversations. In this way, they weave a web of practices that results in 'governing through affect' (Fortier 2010, 17) which implies a form of enacting community and citizenship that establishes assumptions over affect and conduct. These policy practices disclose 'the narrowing interpretation of community when governmentalised' (Taylor Aiken 2015, 764).

Policy practitioners see Neighbourhood Circle as a web of relations emerging from and expressing a warm sociability. Through its enactment of culturist and gendered communitarian norms, the intervention mimics the community it aims to bring about. Put differently, the desired future is made present through an 'affective atmosphere' (Anderson 2010, 793). In Slotermeer, policy practitioners project a vision of community which is then communicated to residents as having emerged from the grassroots desires and needs of their neighbours. In *imagining* things to *bring them into being*, the policy practices of

Neighbourhood Circle approximate what social movement scholars have termed ‘pre-figurative politics’ – ‘the modes of organization, social relations, decision-making, culture, and human experience that strive to reflect the future society being sought by the group’ (Boggs 1977, 365). Scholars have fruitfully applied this concept to understand the rise of the women’s movement (Rowbotham 1979) and social movements that strive for participatory democracy more generally, such as the anti-globalisation movement (Graeber 2002).

Understanding the local dynamics of affective citizenship as a form of pre-figurative politics sheds light on the question how affects through which futures are presented and produced, circulate within networks of local governance. The techniques of caring, appreciating and branding show how in ‘the enactment of a better world, the future is constantly being folded into the here and now’ and ‘how futures are made present by anticipating other desired futures through a range of utopic sensibilities, skills and techniques’ (Anderson 2010, 793).

However, through culturist, gendered norms the personal is made political – albeit in a very different way than when feminists first used the slogan to challenge the division of public and private responsibilities. The affective atmosphere that emerges is born out of folkloric cultural practices, gendered practices related to the traditional household tasks of women (cooking, sewing), or gendered affects related to their being mothers (caring, nurturing). Yet, affective citizenship is a governmental strategy that ignores and fails to recognise alternative affects that give rise to practices which are qualified by oppositional voices or antagonistic interactions. The case study of Sloterveer underscores the argument of Fortier (2010, 27), who states that the governmental strategy of affective citizenship becomes ‘organized around an economy of feelings’ in which positive affects are sought after and valued and negative emotions are ignored and not valued. It is good to have fun, warm neighbourly contact; it is bad to contest norms and critically voice issues concerning the neighbourhood (e.g. plans for urban renewal or demolition), integration (e.g. recognition of minority group rights or political representation of minority groups).

This brings us back to the paradox that lies at the heart of contemporary local governance in the Netherlands. Communities are thought to form the moral fibre of deprived urban neighbourhoods. Simultaneously, residents are thought to yearn for community, implying its current absence and the need for governments to help them find – or rather, create – community. Our analysis of the Neighbourhood Circle intervention reveals a further paradox: the pre-figurative politics commonly associated with radical social movements have in Sloterveer become part of a de-politicised, top-down policy strategy that aims and claims to give voice to grassroots communitarian values. Through a ‘cosy spin on “good neighbourliness”’ (Fortier 2010, 19), human relations, cultural values and emotions are deployed and moulded to service an aim of top-down policy: to bring forth an almost utopian, collective state of happiness which will change Sloterveer into the prospective ‘wonderful neighbourhood’ of the future. It demonstrates that affective citizenship comprises a ‘normative framing of citizenship’ (De Koning, Jaffe, and Koster 2015, 121) and functions as a technology of governance which aims to produce particular forms of moral subjectivity. Eventually, the gendered, culturist norms are the localised enactment of a national development, namely the culturalisation of citizenship.

This leaves open the question whether affective citizenship as a strategy works? Does it produce the affective attachments, sensibilities and relationships it imagines? In Sloterveer, we see that in some practices it does and in others not (De Wilde 2015). Governing through

the whimsical, yet powerful, workings of emotions meets class divisions, religious convictions, practical impediments, social antagonism and political sensitivities when carried out in practice. Following Clarke (2010, 648), it shows how ‘ordinary people re-politicise issues, events and relationships’ and provides insight into the ‘complex and contested process through which new spaces, socialities and subjectivities are being constituted’ (Larner 2005, 9). Volunteers cite the regulatory norms in practices where spatial, cultural or democratic issues are negotiated. In conclusion, through these negotiations, Neighbourhood Circle-volunteers reimagine and reinscribe this affective technology in order to challenge the limitations of their positioning and to imprint promises of empowerment and democracy on their enactment of community.

Notes

1. ‘Meer’ in Dutch means ‘lake’, which gives Slotermeer its name (the neighbourhood borders on a lake). But ‘meer’ also means ‘more’, giving the slogan its double-meaning.
2. Between 2007 and 2012, this participation programme had different names. For clarity, we refer to it consistently as “Neighbourhood Circle”, a fictitious name.
3. On January 29, 2000, the newspaper *NRC Handelsblad* published the now famous essay “A Multicultural Drama” by the publicist Paul Scheffer. This essay, in which Scheffer criticized ‘Dutch multiculturalism’, has provoked ongoing public and political debate in the Netherlands.
4. Part of a statement by the Dutch Labour party leader in the Dutch newspaper *Algemeen Dagblad* of November 1, 2006. The full statement is: “The cabinet has allowed the wounds of these old neighbourhoods to fester. What the consequences might be, we know from the *banlieue* in Paris.”
5. Qualification made by Liberal politician and future minister of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment Pieter Winsemius in an interview in Dutch newspaper *De Volkskrant* on November 1, 2006. The interview was headed by the following title: “Winsemius raises alarm about problem neighbourhoods.”
6. ‘Gezellig’ is often described by the Dutch themselves as being a typical Dutch word. It is used to denote a nice atmosphere, and relates to notions of familiarity, snugness, homeliness and conviviality. The word derives from the German word ‘gezel’: ‘someone with whom one shares a home’ or ‘someone with whom one is together’. It is a very common and much-used word in the Dutch language. The best word to translate it with in English is ‘cosy’. However, in the English language the aspect of company – the warmth and pleasantness of being together with others – which is essential to the Dutch meaning of ‘gezelligheid’ is less central. (source: Wikipedia, ‘gezelligheid’)

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