



## THE PARTICIPATIVE SOCIETY

WHY SOCIAL WORK PROFESSIONALS SHOULD FOCUS ON  
ENVIRONMENT RATHER THAN BEHAVIOUR

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*Inaugural Lecture June 2008*  
*Stijn Verhagen*



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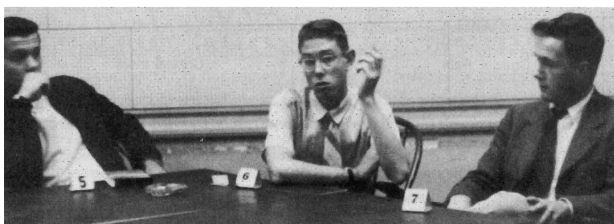
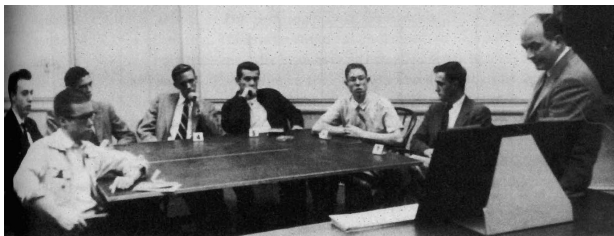
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## Introduction

People are social creatures, and the context in which they find themselves determines their behaviour. This is apparent, for example, from the classic experiments on conformity conducted by Solomon Asch (1951; 1952; 1956). This was one of the first studies I came across as a student of social sciences, and the gist of it is as follows. A group of eight people are shown three cardboard vertical lines, pasted on to a blackboard. The lines are obviously different in length. One of the people in the group is a test subject, and believes the others also to be so. However, the senior researcher has given instructions to the other persons. A standard line is then placed against the three lines in turn. The task is simple: indicate which of the three lines is equal in length to the standard line. The instructed persons take turns first, and each of them – as primed – makes a wrong choice. It is then turn of the subject. The chances of him giving the right answer are only 24 percent. No less than 76 percent of the subjects select the line that the others have selected before them. This is not owing to the degree of difficulty of the task: in control groups in which the participants note their answers independently of each other, the number of mistakes amounts to less than one percent.

Asch's experiment has been repeated often, and demonstrates that people are inclined to agree with the majority decision, even against their better judgement. Clearly, people have a deep-rooted need to conform. In addition – and this is where my interest lies – the experiment shows that people's behaviour is determined to a high degree by the context in which they find themselves.



The experiment of Solomon Asch

This public lecture, inaugurating The Participation and Society Research Group, is about social work professionals in the social domain and about the contribution they can supply to the participation of citizens in Dutch society.<sup>1</sup> I will show that the context-dependency of human behaviour forms an important element of this. Participation means 'taking part in something'. That 'something' usually refers to society as a whole or to a specific segment of it, such as the job market, care work, social networks or politics.

If citizens do not participate sufficiently in (segments of) society, 'participation problems' may arise. These problems range from integration issues to social isolation and shortages of voluntary workers. In the first instance, citizens are responsible for the degree to which they participate in society and the way in which they do so. In the second instance, social work professionals can contribute towards solving, reducing or preventing participation problems. They may be social workers or socio-educational service providers, but equally socio-judicial service providers, socio-cultural workers, youth workers or community workers. And 'new' social work professionals, such as caretakers, area managers and teachers working within the 'Brede School' (community school) initiative can play a role in this. Throughout this address, I will be talking about social work professionals (for definitions of the professional group, see Van Ewijk, Spierings and Wijnen-Sponselee 2007; Sprinkhuizen and Engbersen 2007).

### **Guide to the text**

This text is structured as follows. Section 1 concerns the background to this public lecture: the fact that social participation is becoming increasingly important in our society. This is evident, for example, from the way we are evolving from a protective welfare state into an activational, participative society. This development has consequences for the social sector and therefore also for the professionals who work in it. Social work professionals are not necessarily expected to identify or solve participation problems; they are seen as 'intermediaries' who enable citizens to take responsibility *themselves*. Social work professionals are therefore expected to provide the individual applicant with less direct support and to focus more on strengthening the social networks of people and the social contexts in which they find themselves.

Section 2 connects sections 1 and 3, but may also be read independently. It is about the fact that social work professionals are not yet in the habit of providing systematic insight into the results of their actions, while policy makers, for example, are increasingly looking to them precisely for this. First of all, I set out the reasons why it is so important to make the products of their interventions more visible, not only to policy makers, but also to social work professionals themselves and to the customers/citizens who depend on them. Secondly, I set out how the results of social interventions can be made more visible than they are at present; and what research can contribute. In this, I advocate a change in thinking: from thinking in terms of the evidence to thinking in terms of the evident. This argument forms the basis of the type of research that is being taken up from within the research group.

In section 3, I describe a number of research projects that will be conducted during my tenure. I also set out the main proposition of this address, which states that social work professionals should do more with the knowledge that people's behaviour is determined to a significant degree by contexts. In particular, *social* contexts could play a bigger role in promoting citizen participation. At present, social work professionals normally intervene *directly* in people's behaviour, such as with therapies for combating problem behaviour. Interventions in a broader, social, context are rare. Why is this? And couldn't citizen participation be more effectively promoted by these means than through direct behavioural interventions? I put forward four propositions in this regard, and explain each of them in reference to one of the current research projects within the research group. With this, in combination with the general outlines of the research presented in section 2, I hope to provide a clear and inspiring overview of the research that will be carried out within the research group in the coming years.

Finally, in section 4, I will discuss the significance of the research group to the faculty of Society and Law at Hogeschool Utrecht University of Applied Sciences, and to parties outside of Hogeschool Utrecht University of Applied Sciences.

## **1 Meaning of participation**

This chapter is based on Dutch society and the Dutch social sector.

Dutch society in general (and politicians and policy-makers in particular) is attaching increasing importance to citizen participation. This has consequences for the social sector, where a new impetus is perceptible (§ 1.1). At least two developments are behind this: the reversal from being a protective welfare state towards being an activational, participative society (§ 1.1.1), and the increased tensions between (ethnic) groups in Dutch society (§ 1.1.2). These developments lend more weight and urgency to the work of social work professionals. They also have consequences for the way in which social work professionals operate, or are expected to operate. For example, social work professionals will need to focus more on strengthening the social contexts within which people find themselves. By that I mean the public space where people congregate (squares, streets, neighbourhoods) and the social infrastructure that they use (schools, sports clubs, social organizations). In the promotion of citizen participation there are clear provisos to be made (§ 1.2).

### **1.1 New impetus in the social sector**

The social sector has undergone a severe crisis of legitimacy. This arose at the end of the seventies, when Achterhuis (1979), among others, expressed doubts concerning the value of the social sector (in particular, the welfare sector). Professionals were seen to be mainly looking after their own interests, medicalizing society and making citizens dependent – patronizing them, rather than encouraging them to take responsibility themselves (Illich 1977; Foucault 1978). Others have also said that the welfare sector is too expensive. It is thought that the welfare state economy based on Keynesian principles is generally too costly, wasteful and inefficient (Van Doorn and Schuyt 1978). Government expenditure should not have to be seen as a social investment that will possibly be repaid in the future, but as costs that are principally a burden on the budget (Clarke and Newman 1997). Welfare work was seen as a cost item, and significant cutbacks were made – much more so than, for example, in healthcare, which was equally seen to be ‘unmanageable’ (Duyvendak 2002).

But the sector has recently been showing signs of recovery. Social scientists such as Tonkens (2003), Knijn (2004), Duyvendak (2004), De Winter (2005) and Blokland (2006) appear to have restored faith in the sector. Their analyses of ‘citizenship’ and ‘participation’ have encouraged the sector to develop new concepts and methods (Broekman 2004; Spinder et al. 2007). Methods, for example, which place more emphasis than previously on encouraging individual ability and individual responsibility on the part of customers, and which manage to appeal to social networks.<sup>2</sup> And methods in which working practice and practical research are linked continuously.<sup>3</sup> Not only academics and professionals, but also administrators and policy-makers appear to have regained faith in the social sector.

In 2007, for example, the Dutch Social Support Act was introduced, dubbed 'the participation law', which implicitly emphasizes the importance of the social sector. Furthermore, in that same year, a programme minister was appointed for Youth and Family, a domain that never previously had its own minister. In the policy programme of the Balkenende IV cabinet, the promotion of social cohesion and social participation forms one of the six main tenets (Ministry of General Affairs 2007).

However, not *all* the signs are positive. The programme minister for Youth and Family is accused of being too much concerned with youth care and too little with youth welfare. And in practice, the Social Support Act sometimes looks more like a care law than a participation law. If we go by the reports in the media, the Social Support Act is not much more than home help (Mootz and Verhagen 2007a). Moreover, we are still hearing from a number of operational areas – community work, socio-cultural work, youth work – that cutbacks, bureaucracy or tendering issues are making effective work impossible. On the other hand, we hear complaints from some managers concerning the quality of these types of operations. Engbersen talks of a *sleeping giant* (see SPR 2007). In his view, the social sector has been neglected through a lack of funding, but has also made itself vulnerable through unsatisfactory performance.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, Engbersen also identifies positive developments that increase the chances of the 'giant' awaking in time, such as the possibilities that the Social Support Act provides for encouraging voluntary work and active citizenship (Uyterlinde, Neefjes and Engbersen 2007). I will restrict myself here to the finding that a new impetus appears to be entering the social sector generally. At least two bigger social developments are behind this dynamic in the social sector: the development from the welfare state towards the participative society and the development from integration towards participation.

#### *1.1.1 From welfare state to participative society*

The classic welfare state is steadily being converted into a participative society. This is also changing the thinking on citizenship. Citizenship was previously interpreted in political terms; the most important features were the right to vote and the obligation to pay tax. Over the last twenty-five years – but more particularly over the last couple of years – social citizenship has made advances (Van Ewijk 2003). In the seventies, the emphasis was almost exclusively on the rights of the citizen. In the eighties, the obligations of the citizen were added to these, for example in requiring them to endeavour to find work in return for benefit payments. A stronger focus was created on return to work by incapacity-benefit recipients. Benefit recipients were obliged to apply for jobs and to accept suitable work.

From the end of the eighties, social citizenship made its entry in three phases. In the first phase, that of the individually responsible citizen, the emphasis was placed upon the citizen's own responsibility for his health, his care and his income (Lubbers II cabinet). The second phase was that of the jointly responsible citizen, who takes responsibility not only for himself, but also for those close to him and in his immediate environment (Lubbers III cabinet). Volunteer aid, voluntary work and the 'civil society' gradually gained in appreciation. This phase continued under the Kok cabinets, though



these cabinets also placed much importance on the socio-economic domain: 'Work, Work, Work' was the credo of the first coalition cabinet.

Around the turn of the new century (last Kok cabinet; Balkenende I cabinet), a third phase started – that of the participating citizen. The participating citizen is entitled – in theory, at any rate – to take full part in society. Legislation, municipalities and social work professionals enable him to do so. A feature of this phase was the introduction of the Social Support Act. This Act is aimed at encouraging everyone to 'take part' in society: 'taking part' in the sense of jointly *doing*, *helping* and providing *ideas* (Mootz and Verhagen 2007b). It encourages *doing*, through e.g. making buildings more accessible to people with handicaps. It encourages *helping* through introducing forms of respite care by e.g. volunteers and voluntary workers. And it encourages *thinking* by promoting citizen participation in policy, for example through Social Support Act advisory bodies, participation platforms, discussion groups and other forms of interactive policy formulation. But outside of the Social Support Act, too, the 'participating citizen' is a recurring aim in policy, such as in the area of integration (see interpolation 1) and in the area of reintegration, with a view to bringing people in the margins back into society.

#### **Interpolation 1      Participation and integration**

Many Dutch natives feel torn by developments surrounding Dutch identity. In particular, they experience the increasing visibility of Islam as a threat. When natives are asked whether they would like to have minorities as neighbours, 40 percent answer in the negative (SCP 2007a). In turn, many immigrants do not feel accepted as citizens of Dutch society, not even if they were born and bred in the Netherlands. 76 percent of Dutch-Moroccan youths feel 'entirely' or 'mainly' Moroccan; 0 percent feel entirely or mainly Dutch, and 26 percent feel both (WRR 2007, p. 177). Similar figures apply to Turkish youths. It is clear that these youths feel an explicit connection with one of their two identities. This is called 'separation' in socio-psychological terms (Berry 1997). Separation does not *necessarily* have negative individual or social consequences, but it can be unsettling. However, it is vital for these youths that they feel they belong somewhere. That is why 'ambivalent identification', lack of a feeling of connection with either or both identities – Moroccan on the one hand and Dutch on the other – are probably more destructive than separation. If the basic need to feel 'at home' somewhere is not met, if the feeling of 'belonging' and 'being allowed to take part' is absent, then the risk of emotional problems and behavioural problems increases (Stevens 2003; Stevens et al. 2007). This is a negative scenario with alienation of society, radicalism and use of violence as extreme consequences (Stern 2003; Buijs, Demant and Hamdy 2006). That is why 'taking part' is such an important theme in the current integration policy. *Zorg dat je erbij hoort!* [Make sure you belong] is the subtitle of the Integration Memorandum 2007-2011, the principles of which include: combating segregation, combating discrimination and promoting citizenship and inter-ethnic contact (VROM 2007).

This shift from political to social citizenship has consequences for the relationship between government and society. That relationship becomes less hierarchical and less vertical. For example, the starting point of the Social Support Act is that municipalities no longer have to answer to the State, but direct to citizens and the municipal council. Citizens, professionals and institutes in turn are expected not to approach the State, but the municipalities for possibilities of improvement. And in sectors such as public administration, the media and education, responsibility is increasingly placed horizontally (Schillemans 2007). This fits in a society in which institutes are more inclined to address themselves to citizens and each other than to central government. In such a society, a muddled collection of actors arises in relatively obscure patterns. As Boutellier (2007) says, we can perhaps distinguish a 'nodal order': an order of dynamic and changing networks among social institutes, market players and citizens in relatively horizontal relationships (cf. Castells 2004).

We are therefore increasingly becoming a network society. This has consequences for the role of social work professionals in society. More than in the traditional welfare state, it is expected of them that they will help to strengthen the social fabric of society. More importance is being placed on the strengthening of social contexts, and organizations such as community centres, schools, shops and residents' associations are important, connecting hubs, providing people with opportunities for meeting each other. By creating and encouraging these types of structural 'opportunities' and the improved use or refinement of them, citizen participation might be more successfully promoted than by 'yet another campaign' or 'yet another project' (Blokland 2006; Schillemans, Verhagen and Blokland 2006).

How should social work professionals in this society deal with social problems? At any rate, they are expected to involve citizens actively in tackling them. They do not necessarily have to identify or solve these problems, but are seen as *operators* or intermediaries who bring citizens into contact with each other, so that they can take initiatives *themselves*. A premise not so much of 'you ask, we deliver' but of questions such as 'what can I as a service provider do to help you solve the problem?' (Steyaert et al. 2005). This involves social work professionals assisting the individual applicant less directly, and concentrating more on equipping people's social networks, and on strengthening the broader, social context that will enable people to participate in society (Kwekkeboom and Wijnen-Sponselee 2007). In concrete terms, this could lead (in cooperation with policy makers) to fewer thresholds in the street or improved access to shops, houses and other buildings (Mootz 2008). Or to more attractive meeting places for people, such as playgrounds, libraries and 'brede'(community) schools. Collective facilities such as these can avoid people having to request individual facilities. And connections with industry can also be laid, for example, by alerting postal companies to the need for lowered letterboxes, so that people in wheelchairs are able to post their mail.



Social contexts enable people to participate in society

It is appropriate in a network society that professionals be prepared to look beyond the boundaries of their own autonomy, or at any rate their own institute. Thus we now see, for example, welfare institutes supplying 'care services', such as making home visits to identify people living in social isolation. In their turn, care institutes supply 'welfare services', such as meals-on-wheels, odd jobs or social alerts. The same applies to housing corporations. They supply services such as debt assistance, sheltered housing, mediation in disputes between neighbours and reintegration programmes, which were formerly carried out by socio-juridical professionals and welfare workers (Van Arum et al. 2006). Social work professionals will also increasingly have to compare their performance with that of other institutes or with past performance, and make this visible to a wider public.

### 1.1.2 From integration to participation

The second social development that may explain the increased dynamic in the social sector is the increased pluriformity of society. In recent times, this has led to escalating tension. Since the mid-eighties, 'being culturally different' has increasingly been considered to be problematic. Since *Het multiculturele drama* [The Multicultural Drama], the acclaimed essay by Scheffer (2000), the preservation of cultural identity has been widely interpreted as a threat to social cohesion. This interpretation accelerated dramatically following the 9/11 attacks and the murders of Pim Fortuyn (2002) and Theo van Gogh (2004). The tone of the public debate was polarized and hardened, and this was noted abroad. 'Dutch confront limitations of their tolerance', was the New York Times headline on 10 November 2004. 'Dutch facade of tolerance under strain', was the title of an article in the International Herald Tribune of 17 October 2005. The 'Wilders film' evoked many disapproving reactions, nationally and internationally, even before it was shown.



Rapprochement and  
polarisation between ethnic  
groups

What does this development mean for social work professionals? Among other things, that policy makers are asking them with more emphasis than before to work on improving relations between groups in Dutch society. Perhaps the most important task of professionals in this is to demonstrate that tensions between population groups should not only be seen as contrasts between culturally different groups, but also as contrasts between socio-economic classes (Engelen 2008; De Jong 2007). This would mean that the focus would not be so much on people's origins, as on their opportunities for social and economic participation. And that could be followed up by providing opportunities for education, work and income (SER 2007; Lubbers 2007). Then the priority would be participation rather than integration of citizens. And the primary concern would not be people's ethnic background, but their participation in education, work, sport, administration and other domains of the social infrastructure (see Interpolation 2).

## **Interpolation 2      Learning in a social context**

According to Piet Boekhoud, director of Albeda College (ROC) [regional training centre] in Rotterdam, youths pursue three goals: profit, happiness and leisure. In place of these, at Albeda College, four goals are set: trust, responsibility, connection and security. 'One of the most important things we instil in students is career identity, explains Boekhoud. 'Understanding what work is, understanding that it has a place in your life.' For many young people in the Rotterdam Rijnmond region, this is a big problem. 'They grow up in neighbourhoods where there is little or no activity.' In the Albeda College approach, the student's career is more important than the teaching material. 'The approach can be summarized under the term 'context-rich learning'.' The school provides a learning environment within which the student is placed in the real work situation as much as possible. Close contact with industry is important. 'If the pupils do not come to school, we take the school to the pupils', says Boekhoud. The students at Albeda College work and learn at various locations in the city, for example the Zuidplein square, where there is a shopping centre (source: WRR 2007, p. 122-123).

In summary: in the social sector there generally appears to be a new impetus gaining ground. At least two developments are behind this. In the first place, the welfare state has been converted into a participative society/network society. For social work professionals this shift means that they should concentrate more on equipping people's social networks, and on strengthening the broader, social context that will enable people to participate in society. We discuss this in more depth in section 3. Little appears to be known about the way in which social work professionals might manage to intervene in social contexts. In the second place, the (perceived) cultural contrasts between groups in Dutch society are lending impulse to the social sector: modern professionals must help to improve communication and understanding between population groups. This task is not new to them in itself, but they will have to perform it under substantially different social conditions. They should focus primarily on people's opportunities for social and economic participation, rather than on their ethnic backgrounds.

### **1.2 Remarks on the aim for participation**

In aiming for participation, however, a few points should be noted. Until the end of the nineties, participation was mainly seen as *job market* participation, aimed at preventing poverty, unemployment and dependence on benefit. This is still an important aim, but in addition, the emphasis is increasingly being placed on *social* participation. This form of participation takes a central position in the policy programme of the Balkenende IV cabinet. The cabinet is making efforts towards 'a society in which people can participate and be valued for who they are and not what they are. [...] In order to realize this, it is necessary to promote participation, emancipation, integration and care for each other. The strengthening of social cohesion means investing in people and in the way in which people deal with each other and with their living environment' (Ministry of General Affairs 2007, p. 41-42).

To the cabinet, therefore, social participation is a means for achieving social cohesion. The question is of course whether Dutch society currently has a cohesion problem. Is there a question of disintegration? Is there a danger of conflicts? Are there groups that 'no longer belong'? We cannot answer these questions here, but it is useful to realize that often the social cohesion is in a better state than would appear from media reports or political debates. Before deploying participation to promote social cohesion, we should therefore carry out a careful problem analysis. *Is there a problem with cohesion? To what degree, and in which sectors do we find it? Can promoting participation solve it, or are there other means that may be more effective?*

Another point is that there can be not only a lack, but also an excess of social cohesion. Attempts at keeping society together, in other words, may overshoot their mark. Then we have a society with an excessive striving for inclusion, demanding loyalty from all those involved. In such a society, those who do not belong to the community are soon perceived as outsiders, foreigners, eccentric or hostile (Schuyt 2006). In this connection, Walzer (2004) speaks of involuntary associations, Granovetter (1973) of strong ties, and Duyvendak and Hurenkamp (2004) of 'heavy communities'.

Tonkens (2006) in turn refers to the high expectations that are put upon citizens in the context of the Social Support Act. Citizens are expected to be active, responsible, caring and decent, and furthermore to participate in policy. Docters van Leeuwen, in conclusion, describes very loosely that the inclusive approach will quickly turn the Netherlands into a big village, “where blissful Dutch people sing songs together in the traffic jam, on their way to their self-developing work, to return and have blissful cuddly sex with their partner in the evening, but not for too long, as the political world awaits. For the blissful nice new alderman has organized a round table meeting...” (2007, p. 4).

### **Interpolation 3      The downside of the big village**

The Netherlands is not a big village, nor will it ever become one. If you are aiming for such a society, you will probably achieve the opposite, according to the Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy (Dutch abbreviation WRR) in its report *Identification with the Netherlands* (2007). In this, the Council points out the risks of a too-rigorous anchoring of Dutch identity, such as in the mandatory civic settlement courses, in which Dutch standards and values, customs and habits are expressed with increasing emphasis. This also applies to the (mandatory) naturalization ceremony that the minister of Justice created in 2006 to emphasize how important it is to be proud of the Netherlands. But the attitude towards dual nationality can serve here as an illustration. It is increasingly being considered to be a sign of loyalty to the Netherlands when someone rejects the nationality of his country of origin. However, socio-psychological research (Eriksen 2002; Stets 2006) indicates that, to migrants, their country of origin is “a strong emotional footprint, which cannot simply be put aside, even if they wish to do so” (WRR 2007, p. 181). If people are forced to forswear their own background, this can even lead to feelings of humiliation and exclusion.

If we wish to promote citizen participation, we should therefore not aim towards an all too inclusive idea of community. It would make more sense to aim for light communities, *weak ties* and *voluntary associations*.<sup>5</sup> In such communities, the bonds between people are firm, but can easily be eluded. Community workers, socio-cultural workers, youth workers and other ‘social workers’ can help to promote light communities. But whether they should do that, and how best to do it, changes according to timing, situation and context. Usually, citizens make decisions themselves, of course, as to whether they form communities. The task of professionals is usually a stage in advance of that, i.e. when connections can be made that give rise to communities. Also in the following stage: when possibilities are created for escape from stifling communities. This involves issues such as: when should I as a professional intervene and when not, and what manner of intervention has the best chance of succeeding? When is it a case of citizens being neglected and when is it simply their own lifestyle? When does withdrawal by citizens from their own group lead to isolation and when does this result in positive effects (emancipation proposition)? Do I, as a professional, have opportunities for realizing betterment?

Professionals possess valuable tacit knowledge where these kinds of issues are concerned. But their skills in expressing this knowledge are lacking (Van Doorn 2008). Consequently, decisions sometimes depend too much on their own intuition and experience, and so an atmosphere may arise in which there appear to be good intentions, but few results (Menger 2007).

## **2 Potency of the social sector**

Why is it important to avoid an atmosphere of good intentions, and how can we transcend that atmosphere? How can social work professionals offer convincing insight into the results of their interventions? That is the subject of this section. In subsection 2.1 I set out why (and for whom) social work professionals should make the results of their interventions more visible. In subsection 2.2 I discuss the call from experts and policy-makers for more material proof of the effectiveness of interventions. That call is sometimes accompanied by the tendency to base everything on quantitative evidence-based research. In view of the nature of social interventions, however, this is not very useful. Therefore, in subsection 2.3 I show that we intend to provide a realistic and useful overview of the results of social interventions, and will adopt a broader interpretation of the evidence-based approach. In so doing, I call for a change in thinking, moving from the evidence to the evident.

### **2.1 How do social work professionals operate?**

Social work professionals are not yet in the habit of providing open and systematic insight into the results of their interventions. This applies to social interventions in general, therefore also to interventions in the area of participation. For example, the many integration projects that have been instigated in recent years have seldom been studied. There is therefore little to say with any certainty concerning the usefulness of these projects (SCP 2007b). Nor is there much known about the effect of the many crime-prevention measures that have been adopted over the last twenty-five years, however much importance citizens attach to increasing feelings of safety (Wittebrood and Van Beem 2004). For youth-care interventions, the conclusion is the same. What do these interventions contribute to the opportunities of young people as regards social participation? There is a lot of knowledge, but not about the results. And this, while foster parents and drop-in or residential institutes have often invested years of effort in looking after children (Boendermaker et al. 2006).

The relevance, success, and also the limitations and failures of the work of social work professionals are therefore not sufficiently clear. Furthermore, they are not shown to a wider audience. This lack of clarity must be one of the reasons why social work professionals are sometimes under-appreciated. Although everyone largely agrees that social work is necessary and important, it appears that municipalities, citizens, clients and financiers still have an unsatisfactory impression of how the social sector performs (De Boer and Duyvendak 2004; Spierings and Steketee 2004).

Providing more insight into the results of interventions is one way to exert a positive influence on the image of social work professionals. But there are three other reasons why it is important to show more of what their work does.

The first reason is the protection of customers/citizens who are dependent on social work professionals (Knijn 2005). Social work professionals have been given the task of promoting the independence of citizens and realizing social participation for people who



are not able to effect that under their own steam. They are required to carry out their work expertly and methodically. This should go without saying, but perhaps there are often shortcomings. The result is that social work professionals are deemed to be semi-, quasi-, pseudo- or sub-professionals (Macdonald 1995). Citizens/customers, however, deserve 'real' professionals, you might say: professionals who are able to communicate clearly and reliably on the possibilities and limitations of their field (cf. Knijn and Verhagen 2007).

The second reason is the role that social work professionals fulfil, or could fulfil, in policy forming. Policy-makers tend to focus on the costs of social provisions and not on the potential results (Doorten and Rouw 2006). It is the task of social work professionals to inform policy-makers concerning these results. For example, what are the benefits of follow-up programmes for ex-prisoners in terms of preventing criminality? What is the contribution of preschools towards preventing language deficiency and school dropout? What costs are saved through these provisions? In practice, it will be difficult to give an exact answer to these questions, but in my view that makes it all the more important for the knowledge and experience of social work professionals to be included in policy forming. Policy-makers make decisions and set priorities, with the limited knowledge, resources and capacities that they have. So why should they not use all the available expertise of social work professionals?

The third reason for increased insight into the results is the importance to social work professionals themselves. Social workers are seen as 'semi-professionals'. Against this background, it is no surprise that in recent decades they have been at the mercy of decisions by policy-makers, such as the cutbacks in the eighties and the unilateral production targets in the nineties (for comparison with the care sector, see Verhagen 2005). Had social work professionals been able to demonstrate the possibilities as well as the limitations of their work more convincingly, policy-makers would probably have allowed them more scope to provide direction for the necessary development of the profession. Of course, political considerations always play a part with policy-makers in decisions concerning social interventions. But social work professionals, too, should determinedly involve 'value-loaded considerations' in their decision-making (see interpolation 4).

#### **Interpolation 4      Effective and acceptable interventions**

In this public lecture, the central emphasis is on a result-oriented approach. There are good reasons for adopting this approach, but it is also important to understand its limitations. An intervention that produces a result is not by definition a *good* intervention. Take, for example, the ban on assembly in the Kanaleneiland area of Utrecht. I consider this ban to be merely tackling the symptoms and that it will work only partially or temporarily. The municipality of Utrecht, on the other hand, has reason to be positive concerning this ban on assembly. Whatever the case, there are a number of questions to be addressed concerning this type of intervention. Do we want such a ban?

Does it fit with the society we are aiming to be? The municipality of Utrecht has indicated it will extend the ban on assembly if the problem youths relocate. A similar ban has been in place in Rotterdam since 2004 *throughout* the city. What public values are brought into play there? What constitutional aspects play a part? Similar, value-loaded questions are involved in the current proposals for the 'behind-the-front door' policy (Van den Berg 2008), with ideas on mandatory parenting support (Levering and Kinneging 2007) and in principle in *all* the interventions that we carry out, or are inclined to carry out. In other words, decisions on social interventions should not only relate to the demonstrated effectiveness, but also to the moral acceptability (Hemerijck and Hazeu 2004; Menger 2007; Van Doorn 2008; CEG 2008).

How can we make the results of social interventions convincingly visible? How, for example, can integration projects transcend the atmosphere of good intentions without suggesting that the results can always be proven with hard figures? In the following two sections, I will discuss this issue methodologically. With this, I call for a shift in thinking from a basis of evidence to a basis of what is evident. In section 3, I deal with the substance of the issue: I present a number of types of interventions that in my view are valuable in the promotion of citizen integration and/or participation.

## **2.2 From the evidence...**

The call for the results of social interventions to be made more visible is often accompanied by the tendency to see everything in the light of evidence-based research. Quantitative evidence-based research, to be exact, that exposes correlations between facts with the aid of statistical generalization (induction). Examples are the experimental method, variance analysis and regression analysis, on the basis of which decisions are taken and applied generally. In the Netherlands, we find this approach reflected in the econometric studies and in, for example, the quantitative sociology that is taught at the universities of Utrecht, Nijmegen and Groningen. In addition, the importance of 'measurable evidence' is subscribed to by the many policy-makers and managers who try to link social ambitions to measurable goals. For example, by showing that the safety levels experienced in neighbourhood x have increased from 5.0 to 5.3, that the participation index has risen from 6.1 to 6.5 or by proposing that the number of special-needs pupils participating in early and preschool education should rise from 52 percent to 100 percent.

The evidence-based approach has proven its ability to deliver very useful research results. Experimental studies have delivered very valuable insights into what does and doesn't work, for example in limiting recidivism (Andrews et al. 1990) and preventing antisocial behaviour (Junger 2006). But there are also reservations to be made as regards the evidence-based approach. Firstly, it is very time-consuming and costly to measure the effect of social interventions. Secondly, the evidence-based approach can only partially cover the complexity of social problems and social interventions.

In evidence-based research, abstractions are made from specific persons and specific situations, for the sake of obtaining an impression of the 'average' youth, the average immigrant or the average drug addict. This is an abstract view, whereby the social reality can only be understood to a limited degree (cf. Schuyt 1995).

Why is it only partly useful to demonstrate the effects of social interventions in quantitative terms? This question can be answered on the basis of three characteristics of social interventions (Torenvlied and Akkerman 2005; Doorten and Rouw 2006; Rouw and Verhagen 2007). The first characteristic is the lengthy period that normally stretches between the intervention and its effect. In that time, all kinds of things occur in society and in the lives of the customers/citizens. This may partly relate to the intervention, or may be independent of it. Research into intervention effects may therefore be obscured by many disrupting factors. This makes it difficult to ascribe effects to the chosen method – and more so to express them satisfactorily in a round figure, such as 'percentage of explained variance' or 'degree of significance'.

A second characteristic of social interventions is that they focus on a reality that is dynamic. An example, by way of explanation: until recently, it was assumed that child abuse was suffered by around fifty thousand children per year in the Netherlands. However, it now appears that the real figure is at least double that number. But closer examination shows that, over the course of time, not only the number of cases, but also the definition of child abuse has changed. Since the introduction of the Youth Care Act in 2005, this definition has been expanded. Besides physical threats and violence, since then also psychological threats and violence have formed part of the definition. Incidentally, it is surprising that this was not done earlier, but that is not the point I want to make. What I am concerned with here is that the results of longitudinal empirical research are strongly influenced by 'mode' and 'method' (see interpolation 5). The efficacy of an aspirin has been determined for all time, but the problem that a social intervention might have solved originally can change in nature through time.

#### **Interpolation 5      Different methods, different outcomes**

Van IJendoorn et al. (2007) found that in the Netherlands one hundred thousand children were abused. Lamers-Winkelmann et al. (2007) reported as much as one hundred and sixty thousand cases of abuse. One explanation for the differences in the findings is that the researchers used different research methods. Van IJendoorn et al. based their figures on cases reported by social workers, while Lamers-Winkelmann et al. (2007) based theirs on self-reporting by young people.

A third characteristic of social interventions is that these tend to be aimed at *preventing* problems. You cannot observe something that you are preventing. And it is difficult to document something that you cannot observe. Is the prevention of child abuse the result of providing parental support? Is the absence of race riots the result of working on tension-free attitudes within society? How can we prove this? Our instinct tells us that there is a connection, just as it tells us that there is a relationship between weather warnings from the Meteorological Institute and the low incidence of traffic accidents.

But the low incidence of traffic accidents cannot be ascribed with certainty to the intervention of the Meteorological Institute.

### **Interpolation 6      Ronald Koeman**

Since the departure of Ronald Koeman as trainer of PSV Eindhoven autumn 2007, the team suddenly appeared to be turning in a poorer performance. What has caused this? It seems likely that the trainer's departure is partly responsible, but there is no proof of this. Other, partly unmeasurable, variables might be playing a part. A plausible explanation for the deterioration in performance can only be found if the following factors are also taken into account in the analysis: the opponents whom the team come up against, the atmosphere in the players group, the suspensions and injuries, the tactics selected, coincidence and (unjust) decisions by the referee. Such an analysis will not deliver any proof, but probabilities – no certainties, but supported presumptions – yet provides a better idea than an analysis of the measurable variables alone.

### **2.3 ...to the evident**

If we wish to obtain a realistic and useful insight into the results of social interventions, the evidence-based approach should be interpreted in a broad sense. Evidence can arise from quantitative analyses and experimental studies, but equally from qualitative studies, descriptive research, theoretical insights, the (confrontation of) views of experts or the experience expertise of customers (Keijsers and Paulussen 2005). The combination of these approaches results in probability rather than proof; in plausibility rather than hard fact.

Roughly there are two types of evidence: evidence-based practice and practice-based evidence (De Vries 2007; Rouw and Verhagen 2007). The evidence-based approach provides a quantifiable reference framework, based on statistical generalization (induction) and theoretical laws (deduction). The aim is to make generally applicable statements, or at any rate statements with as high a level of probability as possible. These (aggregated) statements are often too general/superficial for social work professionals to apply to the specific contexts in which they operate. The practice-based approach has a different aim in sight, namely to explore the *characteristics* of social phenomena as well as possible. This takes place through obtaining insight into how and why these characteristics correlate, on the basis of the best possible supported presumptions (abduction).

The differences between deduction, induction and abduction are summarized by Schuyt (1995) based on the example of a bag of beans (see interpolation 7). Deduction shows that there *must* be something there, given the logic of reason. Induction shows that there very probably *is* something there, given the observance of empirical facts. And finally, abduction is limited to suggesting that, given particular experiences, there *may be* something there, something that requires further investigation. Abduction, in short, indicates weaker certainties, 'certainties' that concern situations that will have to be analysed experientially (Klarus 2003).

### Interpolation 7      Deduction, induction and abduction

A bag of beans sits on the floor beside you. They are white beans. You know this, because the shopkeeper who sold them to you put only white beans in the bag while you stood there. So if you now rummage in the bag, you can predict with certainty that all the beans in your hand will be white beans. That is deduction. From the general rule that all the beans are white, a specific insight can be derived concerning the colour of the beans in your hand. This way of reasoning is convincing, but has the disadvantage that it does not deliver any insights that you do not already possess.

Induction can lead to new insights. Again, a bag of beans sits on the floor beside you, but this time you do not know the colour of them. You rummage in the bag, and what do you find: your hand holds only white beans. You rummage in the bag again. Again you see only white beans. After many attempts with always the same result, you conclude that *all* the beans in the bag are probably white. The disadvantage of induction is that, in research into the usefulness of social interventions, there is seldom the opportunity to make the relevant observations repeatedly, apart from the fact that the conditions do not remain stable.

With *abduction*, the starting point is a presumption concerning a particular matter. For example, the matter of the grocer in whose shop you are standing taking a handful of *white* beans from a bag. You notice the white colour of the beans. After all, it might just as easily have been brown or red beans. You are reasoning abductively at the point when you *presume* that the beans are white, because they are a special case of a general rule, e.g. the rule that, on the island in which you find yourself, presumably only white beans are cultivated.

Abductive reasoning is similar to induction, but there is a fundamental difference. Induction is a *quantitative* generalization, from part to whole, from observed to non-observed beans. This generalization concerns a decision on the non-observed beans. Abduction, on the other hand, is a *qualitative* generalization, based on a correspondence between a characteristic of the observed beans (the white colour) and a presumed characteristic of the non-observed beans (in the bag and on the island).

In the complex social reality in which we live, abductive, experiential knowledge is often the most we can achieve.<sup>6</sup> Marsh (2007) gives the example of Josef Semmelweis, a doctor working in the maternity clinic of a nineteenth-century Viennese hospital, who was confronted by a large number of cases of infant mortality. The clinic had two wards: ward 1 with a very high mortality rate, and ward 2 with an average mortality rate. The doctor undertook a study into the cause of this discrepancy, starting out from various presumptions.

On the one hand, he *investigated*. Might the incidence of mortality be caused, for example, by overpopulation in the ward? Overpopulation can allow infections to spread freely, with all the consequences that brings. But in fact, ward 2 was the busiest, partly because most of the pregnant women were aware of the situation and made a point of avoiding ward 1.



On the other hand, he *experimented*, for example by dissuading the duty chaplain from administering the last rites so visibly. For the priest was in the habit of walking into ward 1 with a ringing bell; might this bring about a state of shock, which could explain the deaths? Thus Semmelweis continued his investigation, until he made his last intervention. He improved the hygiene in ward 1, where doctors were in the habit of examining the mothers immediately after autopsies and without washing their hands. It was mainly nurses who worked in ward 2, and they did not perform autopsies. From the moment the employees started washing their hands with chlorinated lime, the number of fatalities dropped dramatically and the mortality rates in both wards more or less evened out.



Handwashing in the clinic of Josef Semmelweis

## **2.4 Conclusion**

To summarize, there are several reservations to be made as regards a one-sided quantitative, evidence-based approach. These do not form an objection to quantification, but they do imply that quantitative and qualitative analyses should relate to each other and that it should be acknowledged that there are multiples of probables in multiple forms and gradations. Social processes are strongly dependent on the context in which they take place, and multiple and disruptive effects play a part. It is therefore important to obtain insights into social practices through both investigation and experiment. That means that it is not enough to test hypotheses in laboratory situations, but that detection work is necessary into complicated social processes.<sup>7</sup> In the following section, I explain in as concrete terms as possible what research and development projects we plan to carry out during my tenure. In addition, I will clarify the substantive presumptions on which those projects are based.

### 3 Social perspective of the research group

At the university where I work, behavioural interventions are central in almost every graduate profile. That is equally the case in the field of operation in which the students eventually find themselves. The handicapped are assisted, problem youths are motivated, people with debts are given a budget, psychiatric patients are empowered, children with learning difficulties are supervised. Social work professionals think in terms of target groups, and within these the focus is on the one-to-one relationship between social worker and customer. Almost all the interventions that social work professionals currently carry out are aimed at influencing behaviour. I suspect, however, that interventions in people's environment – in the social infrastructure that they use – have at least as much effect on the promotion of participation as those that intervene *directly* in their behaviour. In this section, I will substantiate this presumption.

Behavioural interventions, target-group interventions and other interventions at individual level have proved to be capable of delivering valuable results (see e.g. De Ruiter 2000). We must therefore continue to carry them out. However, social work professionals are increasingly linking individual interventions with the social context, or at any rate are pointing out its importance (Wilken 2002; Brettschneider and Wilken 2007). But how can this growing insight be applied in a broader, social context? To what extent can investments in social contexts reduce the chances of problem behaviour taking place? Can they prevent people from resorting to individual forms of support, and if so, to what degree? What, for example, is the preventative value of investments in community schools, sport facilities or accessible public transport, and what role do social work professionals play in this?

And what is the position with community work and social development in neighbourhoods, towns, villages and districts? In this sector, too, the focus is directly or indirectly on the 'target-group perspective'. This can be illustrated using the example of the multicultural street barbecue, which I borrow from the Council for Social Development (Dutch abbreviation RMO) advice on inter-ethnic contact (RMO 2005). The multicultural barbecue is an activity where immigrants and natives meet, eat together and, in so doing, learn to understand what it is that is 'different' about the other. To me, this barbecue is a metaphor for many projects concerning the theme of participation. The common thread throughout these projects is that they take as their main starting point various target groups – immigrants versus natives, young versus old, handicapped versus non-handicapped – and so they are not purely social interventions. But if you wish to break down existing boundaries, it may be advisable *not* to conduct a target-group policy (Schillemans and Verhagen 2005).

We know remarkably little about social interventions. But we are now aware that social contexts exert significant influence on people's behaviour. Much has been published on this, in social psychology (Asch 1951; Milgram 1974; see interpolation 8) and in philosophy (Doris 2002; Bader 2007), sociology (Adriaansens 2004a) and pedagogy (De Winter 2000).



They refer to both the horrors (Welzer 2006) and to the strengths (Walzer 1983) of contexts. But there is very little knowledge concerning the issue of which factors determine that people will behave differently in different social contexts and concerning how we might influence these contexts (Sabini and Silver 2005).<sup>8</sup> When are interventions in social contexts useful and when not? Which aims do they promote, and which not? When are they desirable, and when not, and when would it be better to resort to direct behavioural interventions and individual support?

### **Interpolation 8      Examples of the context-dependency of behaviour**

1. People who find coins in the change tray of a telephone box are subsequently more helpful to passersby who drop a personal item than those who have not had the same stroke of luck (Izen and Levin 1972).
2. Subjects ('teachers') who were asked in the classic Milgram experiments (1974) to give increasingly stronger electric shocks to 'pupils' who gave wrong answers to questions, were prepared to go to extremes: 65 percent carried on to the final step (fatal shocks). When the context of the experiment was changed, this had significant influence on the willingness of subjects. The willingness to 'kill' declined with a different type of contact between 'teacher' and 'pupil'. If they were friends, for example, who were recruited for the experiment together, 'only' 15 percent gave the final shock.
3. If people in a department store are given free sweets, it has a huge influence on their experience of happiness. They value their marriage, work and future prospects much more positively than the control group (Dijksterhuis 2007).

*Social interventions are often more effective in promoting citizen participation than behavioural interventions.* This is the main proposition in this section, which I then substantiate with the following three assumptions:

- Interventions in advance deliver more than interventions in retrospect
- By-products deliver more than the main product
- Interventions outside of the sector are preferable to interventions within the sector.

Notwithstanding the above, I will show that behavioural interventions are still required in order to achieve citizen participation. I support this proposition with a fourth assumption:

- Individual support continues to be important.

I will examine these hypotheses experientially and experimentally, a little as Josef Semmelweis did (the aforementioned doctor in the Viennese hospital). I do not go so far as to claim a general validity for these hypotheses. The concepts of 'social intervention' and 'behavioural intervention' are too broad for that. I do, however, restrict myself to interventions in the area of participation, but even the participation domain is very extensive. Therefore, it will be necessary to investigate gradually the extent to which these hypotheses apply generally. It is already complicated enough to determine what exactly we mean by participation. For example, are we talking about social,

administrative or economic participation? And if we are talking about social participation, do we mean citizen participation in policy, feelings of national bonding, participation of volunteers or the participation of vulnerable people in society?

In other words: it should be examined per situation whether the four hypotheses are tenable. And that is exactly what my research group will be doing in the coming years: examining and developing interventions in the area of participation experientially. Therefore no hypotheses in laboratory situations, but rather investigative work in the complex social infrastructure where the professionals and researchers involved will build up a scientific body of knowledge, which will be useful in practice. I will explain each of the four hypotheses in the light of a current research project within the research group.

### **3.1 Interventions in advance deliver more than interventions in retrospect**

Social interventions can be carried out at the point when social problems arise, but they can also be carried out much earlier, in order to prevent social problems from arising. The emphasis has always been on the former method (Van der Linde 2007). A problem is identified, usually among a specific target group, and professionals then try to solve the problem. That is how it was done in the middle ages, when the local poor relief distributed food and clothing to the poor and needy. And that remained the case in the following centuries, when settlement housing, re-education camps and home nursing services were set up for various target groups. And these days, problems such as poverty, criminality, vagrancy and drug abuse are tackled through debt relief projects, Glenn Mills programmes, psychiatric admissions and other interventions aimed at the target group.

Adriaansens and Rouw (2005) speak of 'retrospective interventions'. The advantage of this type of intervention is that they tackle concrete problems that are often visible to everyone. Professionals can adopt concrete measures for them, which enable politicians and policy makers to then display concrete results to the voter. It is tempting, particularly at the present time when accountability is gaining in importance, to invest in 'hindsight policy'. Conversely, it appears that less attention is being paid to the possibility of 'pre-emptive interventions', whereby problems are prevented from arising. By tackling antisocial behaviour among young people at an early age, for example, it is possible to prevent criminality, substance abuse and school dropout from occurring at later stages (Health Council 2006).

Bearing the above in mind, the Participation and Society Research Group will be concerned in the next two years with the programme 'Young people and debt: a preventive approach'. It is a practice- and research-based programme, with the participation of the Kredietbank Utrecht, the Abrona institute for care of the mentally handicapped, the *Veiligheidshuis* [Safe House] Utrecht, the Royal Dutch Organization of Court Bailiffs and a number of primary schools and ROCs (regional training centres).<sup>9</sup> The background to this is the fact that increasing numbers of young people are incurring debt.

The number of people contacting the debt-relief agencies has doubled in the last six years (NVVK 2008 [Dutch Association for Public Credit]; Schut and Turlings 2004), and the average level of debt owed by people appealing to the relief agencies has risen. The consequences can be severe. People become socially isolated, fall into poverty or take to petty or serious crime (Serail and Von Berg 2007).

Debt assistance takes high priority on the policy agenda. It is a focal point of the Balkenende IV cabinet, and municipalities and social organizations are operating an active debt-assistance policy. Research into the effectiveness of debt assistance shows varying figures. The debt assistance benchmark of the local authorities' research unit, SGB0 (2007) recently showed that debt assistance has become less successful, while the Dutch Association for Public Credit (NVVK 2007) had previously reported that the assistance was becoming more successful. But – as the term 'debt assistance' already indicates – the emphasis here is on helping people to reduce existing debt. The interventions therefore only begin from the time when problematic debt becomes visible. It is subsequently considered to what extent the intervention is effective. And that effectiveness is usually measured by the degree to which successful measures can be taken, and the degree to which the measures actually succeed.

The programme 'Young people and debt' on the other hand aims to prevent people having to resort to credit institutes. It focuses on 'pre-emptive interventions' in the Utrecht region, and on debt prevention among *youths* in particular. This is done in the spirit of 'learn it young, and use it for life', and from the knowledge that young people in financial difficulties are often slow to seek help from debt assistance agencies. The study focuses on four groups of young people, both with and without debts: ROC pupils, secondary-school pupils, fresher students and a number of specific groups of vulnerable young people, such as youths at risk and mentally handicapped youths.

The aim of the 'Young people and debt' programme is to deliver a structural contribution to the cost-consciousness of young people. This is not a one-off lesson in 'budgeting' at schools. In the programme, conditions are created whereby cost-consciousness can be embedded in the day-to-day decisions and daily routines of young people.<sup>10</sup> The relationship with parents and families cannot be ignored in this, any more than the model role that a school can fulfil. A school that itself is extravagant with funds will not make its pupils very resistant to external temptations. Nor will a school that asks parents to make a contribution they can't afford. The 'Young people and debt' programme will test the results of the various interventions empirically as far as possible. We are carrying out – in each of the four target groups – a base measurement, interim measurement and final measurement of the cost-consciousness of young people. And we are carrying out additional qualitative analyses, among other things by reviewing the results and interventions carried out together with the parties involved: what in their view are success factors; what do they experience as problem areas; what solutions do they suggest for the identified problem area? We will try to discover the extent to which any differences between the base and final measurements are linked to

the interventions carried out, such as the planned series of lessons on finance in the standard curriculum of ROC pupils.



Numbers of people in debt  
on the rise

### 3.2 By-products deliver more than the main product

It is possible for social interventions to focus on secondary objectives as well as the main objective, but the former is rarely done. Professionals identify a particular problem, rush to the trouble spot and carry out interventions that are *directly* aimed at solving the particular problem. The aforementioned multicultural street barbecue is a good example of this. The problem identified is that the population groups in a particular neighbourhood have no contact with each other; the intervention brings the groups together, with the aim of achieving a better understanding.

However, social interventions may also be *indirect*. These interventions do not start out from an identified problem, but from a related matter. It is not the 'absence of contact', for example, that is the point of departure, but the 'participation of minorities in the job market'. Unemployment among minorities is relatively high, and the position of immigrant youths is a particular concern (SCP 2006). Improving their position is an aim in itself, but we are concerned here with the following: if more minorities are able to find jobs and progress to higher functions, significant side-effects can be created. Elster (1979) mentions 'essential by-products'. Inter-ethnic contact can be one of those side-effects. Research has shown that the more the socio-economic position of minorities improves, the more the chances of inter-ethnic connections increase (SCP 2005).

Against this background, the Participation and Society Research Group recently launched the programme 'Connecting through football'. The purpose of this programme, set up in cooperation with the KNVB (Dutch Football Association), is to support a number of football clubs experiencing problems (the improvement of inter-ethnic contacts is therefore not the primary task). In the initial phase of the programme, two socially active clubs were involved: FC De Meern and Zwaluwen Utrecht 1911. I briefly describe the latter club below. It is expected that around ten other clubs in the Utrecht region, including less active ones, will become involved in the programme at a later stage.

Clubs are increasingly confronted by forms of interaction that have little to do with football. A growing number of members are displaying undesirable behaviour in and around the playing field. Besides this – and in relation to it – there is a shortage of volunteers, a shortage that is threatening to grow because trainers, field managers, referees, canteen staff and other volunteers are considering giving up the work.

The Zwaluwen Utrecht 1911 football club, on the boundary of the Kanaleneiland, Rivierenwijk and Oog in Al neighbourhoods, is one of the clubs that has seen the incidence of undesirable behaviour rise in recent years (Zwaluwen Utrecht 2006). Attempts will be made, partly through the deployment of Hogeschool Utrecht students, to reverse this trend. On the one hand, the students will carry out services, such as developing a security plan (to combat car crime in the car park),<sup>11</sup> renewing the website (to attract new members), providing training (with a pedagogic slant), organizing a club party or providing socio-juridical advice. On the other hand, the students will seek opportunities for increasing the number of volunteers within the club. To start with, they will identify areas where the club could use the extra manpower. They will then inventory the extent to which members/parents are able to fill these ‘vacancies’. Finally, attempts will be made to bring supply and demand together.

The above-mentioned activities are aimed at the social context within which youths (and parents) of Zwaluwen Utrecht 1911 club come every week for football. It is not their ethnicity that is the central focus here, nor their behaviour, desirable or otherwise. The activities are aimed at the environment, the climate, and the organizational and social conditions around them. The thinking behind this is that the contexts in which people find themselves determine behaviour to a high degree, as indicated in the introductory section. That is not to say that undesirable behaviour should be ignored. Graffiti, vandalism, theft, fighting and discriminatory remarks cannot be tolerated. But in my opinion, a significant preventive effect can be created through positive social contexts, partly created by the students. The more powerful the effect, the greater will be the chances of the club members treating each other with respect. The greater the mutual respect, the less inclination of others to misbehave. And football can again be about *playing football* – about the game, the ambience, the team spirit and winning – rather than about unsuitable behaviour and impropriety.

The contextual interventions in this programme may furthermore deliver ‘essential by-products’, such as an increase in the number of inter-ethnic contacts. Such an increase is of course not guaranteed, but I believe that Zwaluwen Utrecht 1911 has chances of achieving this. Zwaluwen Utrecht is a mixed club, and has ambitions of becoming more strongly diverse (Zwaluwen Utrecht 2008). The club would like to constitute a better reflection of the population of Utrecht-West, and is pursuing more and better inter-ethnic contacts. Those contacts are particularly absent among the volunteers.

### **Interpolation 9      Zwaluwen Utrecht 1911 into the breach for Kanaleneiland**

Zwaluwen Utrecht 1911 FC is located in the middle of three different districts. The first is Kanaleneiland, now infamous throughout the Netherlands. The chairman of the club says: 'It is an area with a rather unbalanced population distribution, with many poorly educated Moroccans from the Rif Mountains.' The second is Oog in Al, characterized by the chairman as an 'area built in the thirties where mainly highly educated immigrants live. In the third district, the Dichterswijk and the Rivierenwijk, many 'traditional native Utrechtters live.' When Zwaluwen Utrecht 1911 was created three years ago from the merger of two existing clubs – one mainly native, the other more foreign – the new board of management decided emphatically to make the new club multicultural. 'We consider that we are part of our part of Utrecht and therefore also take responsibility for it', explained the chairman. 'Within that part, Kanaleneiland in particular has many problems, so great in fact that they can no longer be solved by the district alone. We want to do something about this, among other things by bringing our members and Kanaleneiland residents into contact with other Dutch people through sport (source: Terpstra 2008, p. 79-80).

In my opinion, the number of inter-ethnic contacts at Zwaluwen Utrecht may increase, since the club is aiming – partly with the 'Connecting through football' project – at activating citizens on grounds other than ethnic ones. The Council for Social Development (Dutch abbreviation RMO) recently concluded that this was the best way to achieve inter-ethnic connections (RMO 2005). The Council recommended structural, rather than one-off, interventions in this respect. Therefore, rather than a world music festival or day of religious dialogue, perhaps a playing football together – not a football *contest* but a football *competition* (see also Blokland, Schillemans and Verhagen 2006; Verweel 2007). Whether inter-ethnic contacts will indeed be created as a by-product of the planned revitalization interventions remains to be seen. But it is clear that the 'Connecting through football' programme is building on the shared interest of *all* the Zwaluwen club members, i.e. football. The revitalization activities are aimed at returning focus to that common interest.<sup>12</sup>

The developments at Zwaluwen Utrecht 1911 will be studied by the research group. The same will take place as regards FC De Meern and the other football clubs involved in the 'Connecting through football' programme. Students, staff researchers and external researchers will assess the revitalization activities together with the KNVB and the clubs, and will also examine how the contacts between individuals and ethnic groups at the clubs develop in the course of time. By means of observation, participative observation and semi-structured interviews, we will carry out baseline measurements, interim measurements and final measurements. We will supplement the results of these with qualitative and argumentative analyses of the degree to which any outcomes can be derived from the input of our interventions.

### 3.3 Interventions outside of the sector preferable to within the sector

'Community workers, give up!' was the headline of a column by Van der Lans (2007) in the *Tijdschrift voor sociale vraagstukken* [Journal for Social Issues]. In brief, the column asserted that housing corporations are now achieving what has so far been beyond the reach of community work: the successful mobilization of residents to develop thriving neighbourhoods. What is the explanation for this? Whereas community work of necessity operated from the margins of society, the corporations often manage to form the crossroads of the district. Corporations have relatively short lines of communication with residents, and moreover share the same interest with the residents: improving the liveability of the area. An important additional aspect is that the corporations also have something real to offer: space, buildings, funding, loans – for example, to provide opportunities for new retailers. Van der Lans speaks of the opening up of a new type of social work professionalism, whereby manpower and capital are combined and new opportunities are created for identifying, managing and encouraging area residents (see also Van Arum et al. 2006; Engbersen and Uytendahl 2006).

When social interventions are mentioned, it usually concerns interventions within the social sector. By the 'social sector' we mean social work – socio-educational assistance and community work, but also socio-judicial services, socio-cultural work and youth care. The advantage of thinking in terms of types of social work is that the expected social results can be cited with relative simplicity. The specific methods, techniques and body of knowledge within the various types of work form a quality guarantee to some extent.

But there is also a disadvantage to this 'internal thinking'. It is possible to lose sight of the fact that other types of work can also have significant social knock-on effects. For example, facilities which may not have a primarily social function, such as the above-mentioned housing corporations. Businesses that have a mainly economic function can also deliver social benefits. Neighbourhoods with shops within walking distance most probably contribute more to the social participation of the elderly than 'participation facilities' targeted at them (Adriaansens 2004b). And the organization of the public space is important in this connection. Neighbourhoods with catering outlets, squares and playgrounds probably benefit the area more than projects that are specifically aimed at promoting liveability (Boonstra and Van der Eerden 2008).

The Participation and Society Research Group therefore interprets the concept of 'social infrastructure' more broadly than the institutes and facilities that are normally associated with it. Against this background, it is mainly the connections that are interesting, which these institutes and facilities create along with the standard social infrastructure. The research group will aim at obtaining better insight into these. How does youth care cooperate with education? What does care of the mentally handicapped have to offer the SMEs? What is the input of MEE representatives in the debate on public transport? What does community work contribute to municipal management of public spaces? What do these connections deliver? And where do other opportunities lie?

In this connection, the 'brede school' (community school) initiative is an interesting concept. The community school is a cooperation between parties that are concerned with children, with the school as the centrepiece. The goal is to increase the development opportunities of children. Besides education, childcare facilities (day-care, nursery, sometimes consultation bureau), libraries and organizations for e.g. sport, healthcare, social work and culture also form part of community schools. The organizations involved form a network.<sup>13</sup> Ideally, they have short lines of communication between them and will realize continuous, uninterrupted lines of development for the children.<sup>14</sup>

The research group will collect experiences with the community-school initiative. These experiences have already been documented to some extent ([www.bredeschool.nl](http://www.bredeschool.nl)), but new research is necessary. And there is some documentation available on community schools in other countries (Studulski et al. 2005). In Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States, experiments have been carried out since the early eighties with 'community schools'. And Denmark, Austria and Canada also have the concept. Within the Netherlands, we can learn from community schools that have already passed the development phase. What is known about the effects of community schools on children's development? To what extent are the chances reduced of children dropping out from school at a later age, if they have attended community school? Is there more opportunity for (inter-ethnic) meetings between parents at community schools than at ordinary schools? The research group will set out the existing knowledge on these issues through literature searches. The aim is to formulate recommendations that will enable the community schools to improve their operations. The municipality of Amersfoort has indicated its interest in this. Amersfoort has six community schools. Together with the ABC Foundation, the city's umbrella community-school association, it will be considered what further research and development issues will be handled by the research group.

### **3.4 Individual support still important**

Naturally, we should avoid throwing the baby out with the bathwater. I explained previously that people's behaviour is to a large extent context-dependent, but that we know little as yet concerning the way in which those contexts operate. The social sector is able to manage the problem individual or the problem target group, but expends much less energy, personnel, funding and research on *social* development. Nevertheless, behavioural interventions and individual support are also necessary.

The research group will spend some of the time on assessing behavioural interventions. For example, we will assess a number of social mentorship projects and develop them further. In these projects, citizens act on a voluntary basis as mentor to members of deprived groups. One of these projects is the 'Big Brother, Big Sister' project, a mentorship variation that has come over from the United States. Among other things, this project concentrates on youths that are in danger of losing touch with education ([www.bbbs.org](http://www.bbbs.org)). Hogeschool Utrecht University of Applied Sciences is running a similar



project, in cooperation with ROC ASA and ROC Midden Nederland. The mentees are MBO (secondary vocational education) youths with a high risk of school dropout. The mentors are HBO (higher vocational education) students who have MBO students assigned to them, whom they try to steer through the education programme. They assist them with choices of schools, study issues, personal problems, developing discipline and other relevant issues. It is important that a relationship of trust is created between mentor and mentee.

Do such mentorship projects lead to the desired result? In the Netherlands (Berger and Booij 2003; Lub and Uytendinck 2007; Veldboer et al. 2008) and in the United States (Tierney and Grossman 2000; DuBois et al. 2002; Rhodes 2002) some research has indeed been carried out into the effect of mentorship projects, but the results are varied. Some succeed, others don't; there are even those that have obtained negative results. The most important conclusions are: 1) that mentorships can deliver successful results, but 2) that there is still little knowledge of the conditions under which those results can be achieved.

We call the assessment programme associated with this in the research group, 'Big Brother, Big Benefits?'. It is aimed at obtaining clarification of these conditions. Generally, the success of social mentorships is sought on an interpersonal level. This concerns, for example, the social distance or even the hierarchy between mentor and mentee. Or the similar, and perhaps different (ethnic) background of those involved. From within the research group we will determine which interpersonal criteria determine whether the mentee's educational benefits increase.<sup>15</sup> In addition, we will try to obtain deeper insight into the methods used, to establish which mentorship methods offer the best chances of success.

Finally, I wish to involve in the programme the wider context within which the social mentoring takes place. And that brings us back to the theme of this public lecture. Terwijn (2008) for example indicates that supplementary regular education can also play an important role in preventing school dropout among deprived youngsters. Mentees acquire self-confidence not only in a one-to-one relationship with their mentors, but also in the wider context of the school.<sup>16</sup> For example, practical support such as homework supervision, which can also increase levels of self-belief, could be embedded much more structurally into standard education. Mentorship projects could possibly be given a new, as yet unknown, impulse through combining individual support by mentors with contextual interventions at school level.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

This section concerned the assumption that social interventions are often more effective in promoting citizen participation than behavioural interventions. I have set out this assumption along three lines: prevention, by-products and extra-sectoral interventions. In addition to these, I have indicated that behavioural interventions remain important.

Over the coming years, the research group will develop practice-oriented research projects. I have mentioned four of them during this address, and, to a certain extent, these are random examples. I might also have mentioned other projects that are underway or projects that have yet to be launched. In selecting projects, I have opted for an incremental approach. In other words, I wish to correlate our endeavours as far as possible with the existing initiatives of parties in the field and also with the requirements and ideas that predominate out there. The 'Connecting through football' project is a good example. With this, we are responding to the needs of local football clubs who see a social role for themselves. When our interventions and evaluations start to show results, we will then aim to offer non-active clubs some perspective and motivation for taking on a more enterprising social role.

Why is it often more advisable for social work professionals to concentrate on environment rather than behaviour? The first reason is that environmental interventions can prevent problems arising. If problems are prevented, behavioural interventions are not necessary. Research shows, for example, that the bolstering of families, schools and neighbourhoods in which young people grow up is a crucial factor in the prevention of addiction (Benson, Roehlkepartain and Sesma 2004), aggression (Junger 2006) and antisocial behaviour (Elhadioui 2006). Behavioural interventions can also prevent problems from arising. The type of prevention that is aimed at with behavioural interventions, however, usually concerns target-group-oriented prevention. Whereas target-group-oriented prevention is aimed at groups with an increased risk of problems, environmental interventions are often aimed at the *whole* population.

The second reason why it is often more advisable for social work professionals to concentrate on environment rather than behaviour is the 'essential by-products' that environmental interventions can deliver. '*Thuis Op Straat*' (TOS) [At Home in the Street], for example, is an intervention aimed at the public space. TOS aims at creating a more positive climate in neighbourhoods by providing sport and play activities. The primary aim is the activities themselves and the enjoyment that the children derive from them. The secondary aim is the side-effects – the by-products – that can be created. For example, the by-products of sport and play could be improved understanding between ethnic groups, or an increase in the level of liveability of a neighbourhood. The by-product, in other words, could be that youths do not hang around, do not get bored, and do not start to misbehave. Here again is the potential of environmental interventions to prevent problems (Snel and Boonstra 2005).

The third reason is connected with the previous two. This states that the chances of participation increase when this takes place not *in addition to*, but *within* people's daily routines and networks. Environmental interventions focus precisely on the places where people normally find themselves: the school, the street, the club or at work.

Within (community) schools, for example, there are initiatives that encourage immigrant and native parents – who are coming to the school anyway – to initiate contact with each other. Although such initiatives are still at a very early stage and very little research has been carried out concerning the outcomes, the first results appear to be promising (SCP 2007b; Broekman and Uytterlinde 2007). I consider further study of this development to be an important task for the research group.

#### **4 Significance of the research group to Hogeschool Utrecht University of Applied Sciences and other parties**

The research group forms part of the Social Innovation research centre at Hogeschool Utrecht faculty of Society and Law, and works closely with the other research groups at this centre. Within the research centre, the research group will focus on social participation and *youth* (hence the project subjects: young people and debt, young people playing football, community schools and ROC mentees). The research group maintains close ties with universities and knowledge centres, including Movisie, the Dutch Youth Institute and the Verwey-Jonker Institute. There are also contacts with the professional field, such as with ROC Midden Nederland, Kredietbank Utrecht, the KNVB, the Royal Dutch Organization of Court Bailiffs, Eigen Kracht Centrale, and with institutes for parental support. But the purpose of the research group is not only to strengthen knowledge ties with the discipline and professional practice, but also to fulfil a function in respect of higher education, and vocational education at the faculty of Society and Law at Hogeschool Utrecht University of Applied Sciences in particular.

An important task of the research group is to support the faculty of Society and Law in developing from an educational faculty into a knowledge faculty. The research group can benefit from a store of knowledge and experience within the faculty in the area of education and relations with the field of practice. In addition to this, the research skills of lecturers and students will increase. The faculty is evolving into a 'knowledge environment': acquired knowledge feeds practice and experience in practice flows back into education. The Participation and Society Research Group will aim to strengthen this knowledge environment substantively by aiming to position the importance of 'environmental interventions' structurally within education.

Another factor should be taken into account in the relationship between the research group and education. Social work professionals must be able to make the results of their endeavours more visible, and we will embed this principle more firmly in the curriculum. For showing both the results *and* the limits of social interventions is important to citizens/customers, to the professional field, to social policy – and with that, to education. We must also have an eye to the limitations. An intervention that produces a result is not by definition a good intervention. Decisions on social interventions should not only concern demonstrated effectiveness, but also moral acceptability.

A further task of the research group is to provide knowledge for purposes of reviewing the curriculum. An example of this is the Master's Social Work programme. This is a programme for professionals in care and welfare who wish to specialize further in their discipline, and my fellow lecturers and I are developing this, which we expect to have ready in September 2008. A final task of the research group is to make a contribution to the professionalization of the teaching staff, among other things by offering PhD supervision.

However, my deepest concerns are not about the universities of applied sciences, the professional field, nor about the research group. I wish to make a contribution towards solving and preventing social problems – tension between groups, juvenile antisocial behaviour in the street, the growth in the numbers of vagrant youths – even if this may only be a small contribution. I believe that research groups are in an ideal position to carry out work that will benefit the field. They also have more resources for doing this than many other institutes. My aim is not to raise the profile of social work and strengthen its position as a profession *in itself*. My aim is to show the potential social added value of social work professionals, an added value that is currently under-perceived and under-appreciated.

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## Curriculum Vitae

Stijn Verhagen (1975), social scientist, is professor at the faculty of Society and Law at Hogeschool Utrecht University of Applied Sciences. Until recently, he worked as an researcher/adviser at the Council for Social Development (Dutch abbreviation RMO). This is the advisory board to the cabinet and the Dutch parliament in the area of citizen participation and social stability. Previous to that he was a lecturer and PhD student at Utrecht University and the University of Amsterdam. Verhagen publishes on integration, care, democracy, social support and youth culture, among other things. He is a member of the editorial boards of a number of journals, including '*TSS Tijdschrift voor sociale vraagstukken*' [Journal for Social Issues] and '*Journal of Social Intervention*', the journal for the science of social work professions.

## Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> The Participation and Society Research Group is a continuation of the research group Social (Re)integration and Community Support. This research group was active from September 2002 to September 2006 with Jean Pierre Wilken as the responsible professor. To see his current activities as professor in the relevant domain, go to: [www.socialeinnovatie.hu.nl](http://www.socialeinnovatie.hu.nl).
- <sup>2</sup> The *Eigen Kracht* [family group] conferences are an interesting example (Van Pagee 2007). These conferences enable citizens who are confronting life-changing decisions to use their own resources and sources of assistance as well as appealing for the (professional) assistance of others.
- <sup>3</sup> This is the case, for example, with the project '*Thuis Op Straat*' (TOS) [At Home in the Street]. This project aims to create a more positive climate in the public space, by providing sport and play activities in the squares within districts. The professionals involved keep a logbook on a daily basis, in which qualitative and quantitative data are recorded. These form the basis of evaluative research and – in consequence of this – of improvement of working practice (Woudenberg 2005).
- <sup>4</sup> I would like to add to this that most institutes as yet have little experience in making the results of their interventions visible. The field of youth work, for example, has barely any experience in this (Fabri 2007). The same applies to creative social work (Van Hintum 2008). It is therefore often unclear whether the social sector is performing satisfactorily. There is a risk that an atmosphere of good intentions is created, which makes it difficult for institutes and municipalities to make well-founded agreements with each other (De Boer and Duyvendak 2004).
- <sup>5</sup> It is not possible here to delve deeply into the issue of what 'weak ties' are, how you create these (if necessary) and whether it is indeed possible to create them. Besides the references already mentioned, I refer to the literature on cohesion and brief contacts (Blokland 2006) and on the moral, functional and expressive dimension of integration/identification (Engbersen and Gabriëls 1995; WRR 2007).
- <sup>6</sup> Even in the natural sciences, where deduction and induction play a central role, many discoveries are done abductively (Vervaeke 1988). For example, the German astronomer, Johannes Kepler, assumed at a certain point that the positions of the planet Mars lay on an ellipse. Calculations based on the observations of the Danish astronomer, Tycho Brahe, showed him that this assumption was correct. Therefore, Kepler first had an assumption and subsequently established it on the basis of Brahe's observations.
- <sup>7</sup> With Mol (2004; 2006) it might perhaps be a case of 'doctoring'. According to Mol, if you are doctoring you are learning and making adjustments as you go along, aiming for betterment without thinking from within a fixed plan. It is precisely the plan that is under discussion (see also Boutellier and Lünemann 2006).

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- <sup>8</sup> The RMO (2000a; 2007) distinguishes three dimensions of social contexts: scale, management and cohesion. The scale of a context may be large or small, the management remote or close, and the cohesion heterogeneous or homogenous. 'Social development' to the RMO means finding the right balance between both. In the 'small' scale, people can identify with their environment. The same applies to 'close' and 'homogenous'. 'Small' forms the home base: a recognizable, trusted environment from where people can move to other places. The danger of 'small' is that a sealed enclave is created. People close themselves off from the environment. There should therefore be connections with the 'large', with the wider environment. According to the RMO, there has been too much focus in recent decades on large-scale and massification; the social services, where you are a number; the neighbourhood where you don't feel at home, the rector who doesn't know his pupils. By following the principle of 'small-within-large' – the school community where HAVO (senior secondary education) and VWO (pre-university education) departments each have their own buildings, own teachers and own forms of communicating – the human dimension might be restored (see also Adriaansens 2004a; 2004b; 2007). The recommendations of the RMO are addressed to the government and parliament. In order to recover the human dimension in social service provision, according to the Council, it is necessary for policy-makers to ensure that professionals have sufficient operational scope. Overall, the Council speaks in general terms concerning the ways in which professionals can use that scope, and concerning the ways in which they could demonstrate the results of investment in social contexts.
- <sup>9</sup> Each of these organizations has its own reasons for participating in this project. Kredietbank Utrecht is experiencing a huge increase in the number of debt assistance applications. Prevention might temper that increase. The *Veiligheidshuis* [Safe House] Utrecht, which collaborates with various organizations in the legal and care chain, is concerned with youths who display antisocial and criminal behaviour in neighbourhoods. These youths also often appear to have problem debts. Abrona is an institute for providing services to people with mental and sometimes psychiatric disturbance. Borderline customers, for example, are inclined to take on irresponsible financial commitments. The programme 'Young people and debt' offers these institutes the opportunity to exchange knowledge. The professionals who work there indicate that they have insufficient knowledge of debt prevention. On the one hand, there are professionals who indicate that they have a gap in knowledge of specific target groups in debt assistance programmes, such as young people, whether or not with learning difficulties. These are mainly debt assistance workers and project employees, working at e.g. the Kredietbank. On the other hand there is the group of professionals who know the specific target groups well, but have relatively little expertise in the area of (preventive) debt assistance, such as professionals in and around schools (teachers, mentors, school attendance officers, school social workers) or service providers who support people with mental handicaps (guardian caretakers, ambulant carers, youth rehabilitation).
- <sup>10</sup> In this connection, the programmes of 'financial literacy' are interesting, in the United States and United Kingdom, among others (see Manning 2000; [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Financial\\_literacy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Financial_literacy)).
- <sup>11</sup> The association was itself also active in this area. Moroccan fathers who had been unemployed for lengthy periods were put in touch with a re-integration company and now work for the club as stewards, which means among other things that they carry out security duties.
- <sup>12</sup> Explicitly bringing together people of different cultural backgrounds is *not* the starting point. That would be too much like the previously mentioned multicultural street barbeque, where people eat together and thus learn to understand what is 'different' about the other. Such meetings do not appear to achieve the purpose for which they are organized: the promotion of sustainable contact (see Snel and Boonstra 2005).
- <sup>13</sup> Over half of the community schools are established in communal accommodation (Oberon 2005). The organizations are located *in* the school, which increases accessibility for parents, children and neighbourhood residents.
- <sup>14</sup> Practice, however, is more resistant. Institutional interests, for example, appear to stand in the way of cooperation (Voogd and Van der Kooij 2007).
- <sup>15</sup> Indicators of educational benefits are, among other things, dropout rates, grades obtained and study motivation.

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<sup>16</sup> In the case of Terwijn: the weekend school set up by her. It is a school for further education for motivated children between ten and fourteen years of age from socio-economically deprived neighbourhoods. At this weekend school, young people are taught by professionals every Sunday for three years. The aim is to support youths in expanding their perspectives, boosting their self-confidence and developing their talents.

Photos: p. 4: William Vandivert; p. 11, 12, 28: Hollandse Hoogte, Amsterdam; p. 22: University of Michigan