

Rotterdam  
voorbij discriminatie

# Experiences with and impact of discrimination and racism in three Rotterdam communities

## Similarities and differences between the Black, Jewish and Muslim communities

Het project Rotterdam voorbij discriminatie is geïnitieerd door:



vóór gelijke behandeling  
tegen discriminatie



Gemeente  
Rotterdam



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### Experiences with and impact of discrimination and racism in three Rotterdam communities

Similarities and differences between the Black, Jewish and Muslim communities in the bonding phase of the Rotterdam beyond discrimination project

#### Colofon

The Rotterdam beyond Discrimination project is a collaboration of:

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RADAR



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## PREFACE

Rotterdam Beyond Discrimination was launched out of the conviction that effectively addressing discrimination and racism benefits from strengthening the capacity of those who are affected. In advance Putnam's conceptual framework, built around the notion of social capital seemed to provide the right tools for this.

This largely came true, especially concerning personal growth of the involved ambassadors and development of their cooperation, resulting in the anti-discrimination agenda for Rotterdam. The project, which had a duration of two and a half years was a process of trial and error, of designing, sometimes going down the wrong path, going back to the ambassadors, standing still and resuming to finally develop the best feasible approach.

The commitment and trust of the ambassadors from the three communities was of great significance in this. They committed themselves without restraint for their own communities and for each other to bring about change for a better Rotterdam.

Many thanks for the commitment and support they showed in recent years that made it possible to move forward in a field of painful experiences and confrontations in which we asked them for trust that had so often been betrayed elsewhere.

Thanks also to the team members of the Rotterdam Municipality, RADAR and Art. 1 who prepared and guided the meetings, and who did so with great dedication. They distinguished themselves through commitment, care and deployment of all their competences and professional knowledge. Finally, I would also like to thank the European Union, who placed confidence in our approach and was willing to make a significant contribution to the financial realisation of the project. I hope that the methodology we have developed in Rotterdam will be an example to be followed in the fight against racism and discrimination in cities across Europe, with empowerment and capacity building at its core.

In this document, we summarise the research findings collected since 2021. Together with the anti-discrimination agenda, methodology and evaluations, these are the project's supporting documents that can be found on the website <https://radar.nl/rotterdam-voorbij-discriminatie/>

Tikho Ong, project manager RADAR  
Rotterdam, 23 April 2023

# INTRODUCTION

## Discrimination, racism and social capital

The project 'Beyond Bonding & Bridging - safeguarding equal treatment, linking and integrating communities in a super-diverse society' by Rotterdam City Council, Radar and Art. 1, co-funded by the European Union, is aimed at preventing and combating racism and discrimination<sup>1</sup> by increasing the social capital of communities disproportionately affected by it, in this case the Black<sup>2</sup>, Jewish and Muslim communities. The project focuses on these three communities, not to exhaustively and quantitatively identify who is affected by discrimination and exclusion in Rotterdam, but to get insight and develop the proposed methodology and make it transferable.

Rotterdam is a hyper diverse city in which living together of different ethnicities is challenged by experiences of harassment and discrimination. Racism and discrimination are persistent problems within the city, that frequently resist policy interventions. If effectively combated in one place, they tend to reappear elsewhere and in a different form. The municipality of Rotterdam with RADAR, the local antidiscrimination organization, have committed themselves to invest in an approach that provides for a structural dialogue with the communities affected by racism and discrimination, to realize a more effective and alert approach to the issue and greater equality in the urban environment. To counter these experiences in a way more relevant for the communities involved, the initiators developed an approach providing in capacity building, more specifically social capital building, with these communities. The project developed a combined intervention strategy to improve the social capital of the local Muslim, Jewish and Black communities (Arneil, 2006; Bourdieu, 1986; Putnam, 2007; Wong, 2007). In this approach a structural dialogue is established within the community ("bonding") and between communities ("bridging") to find common ground in defining and prioritizing critical issues and problems related to discrimination and hate crime. This to enable the communities to set a shared agenda for change and establish a continuous dialogue with the municipality and with key players in institutional life (private and public) in the city ("linking"), to realize a safe, respectful and relaxed mutuality and social life in the city of Rotterdam.

According to the Dutch Penal Code (Article 90 quater), discrimination occurs when someone is denied equal treatment on the basis of a prejudice. Experiences of discrimination are defined as personal experiences of violence, direct and indirect (micro aggression and racial slights), and institutional discrimination. In racial discrimination, this is unequal treatment based on "race, color, descent, or national or ethnic origin". The term 'race' refers to assumed biological differences between people, while ethnicity refers to the belief that one has a shared lineage, history, or cultural heritage and religion, generally linked to a specific time or place. Racism refers to discrimination based on an explicit underlying ideology of superiority and dominance over "the other" because of racial characteristics. Discrimination based on ethnicity is more likely to be preoccupied with the incompatibility of cultures and the consequent 'necessity' of exclusion (Beijers, 2020).

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<sup>1</sup> 'Racism and discrimination' or 'racism' in this context refer to differences made according to 'race, colour, ancestry, religious beliefs or national or ethnic origin', based on an explicit or implicit underlying ideology of superiority and dominance over 'the other' because of those characteristics. The term 'race' refers to supposed biological differences, while ethnicity refers to a shared lineage, history or cultural heritage. Thus, racism and discrimination explicitly refer to anti-Black racism as well as anti-Semitism and Muslim discrimination.

<sup>2</sup> When the words Black, Jewish, White and Islamic refer to an identity, they are written in this document with a capital letter.

Social capital is a concept that builds on the utilitarian<sup>3</sup> rationale that to achieve a desired effect requires capital and investment (Bourdieu, 1986; Haan, 2015). That capital can take different forms and occurs not only in the world of economic relationships, but also in the social and societal field in which people interact and want to achieve something. Social capital is one of the forms of capital that are relevant in this, and is defined by Bourdieu (1986:21) as "the set of actual or potential resources linked to the possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised mutual relations (...)". Being part of this network gives those involved the backing of shared resources and wealth, which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word, Bourdieu said. There are three 'elements' involved in this description: (1) being part of an enduring community, through which one (2) has and can fall back on a set of resources (3) and which gives (the community) access to social credit to a greater or lesser extent.

Researchers of social capital can be divided into several schools of thought. Bourdieu places social capital in the context of unequal distribution of resources and assets while Lin places more emphasis on the investment in social relationships, 'with expected returns in the marketplace' (in De Haan, 2015). However, the dominant school is that of American political scientist Robert Putnam (1993, 1994, 1995), who also inspired the developers of this project. He stays close to the utilitarian rationale and exchange relations and assumes the human being, acting rationally and calculatingly, who manages to gain a shared benefit by multiplying social capital (mutual trust, shared norms and contact between people). Social capital according to Putnam involves: "features of social organisation such as networks, norms and social trust that can facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit" (Putnam 1993: 35). In his work, he refers to examples of the fading associational life built on altruism and reciprocity in rural America, and the current picture of American self-centredness and lack of community spirit<sup>4</sup>. Social capital according to his view is built on a process of cooperation and coordination, and on mutual benefit (pursuit of shared interest) that comes as a result. In Dutch public administration, Putnamian thinking regularly surfaces as a response to the supposed loss of social cohesion in society. For Putnam himself, this was also an important motivator for developing his thinking. The concept has also attracted more attention in the light of today's society in which citizenship is given an increasingly central role as opposed to the old ideal of the welfare state that is responsible for the collective welfare and provides the resources needed for this (Beijers, 2020; Rose 2001).

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<sup>3</sup> Utilitarianism is a movement in ethics that determines the (moral) value of an action based on its contribution to well-being, prosperity and happiness: to act well is to act usefully.

<sup>4</sup> This invariably uses the stereotypical image of long rows of freestanding houses with a lawn in front, a path (driveway) to the public road, but no path to the neighbours.

# 1. BONDING

*Bonding social capital* on which we focus in this document, refers to "(...) trusting and co-operative relations between members of a network who see themselves as being similar, in terms of their shared social identity." In this case, it concerns a shared social identity designated as 'Black, 'Islamic' or Jewish' (Szreter and Woolcock 2004; Johnson 2016). Social capital in this context consists of a composite of learning effects, the mutual trust people express, the contacts they have made and the quality of the relationships, and the willingness of authorities to work towards a society based on equality of citizens, in addition to dialogue and co-production to effectively combat discrimination and exclusion.

The bonding phase of the project ran from October 2021 to May 2022 and focused on exchanging experiences of discrimination and racism, developing social capital and developing a common agenda.

Ten bonding meetings were held with a total of 50 participants from the three communities, three facilitators (each community having its own facilitator), the project leader and the researcher. The meetings took place in 'Leeszaal Rotterdam West' a community library close to the city centre. They always opened with a shared meal, followed by a short presentation (if needed), sometimes by introductory exercises to encourage mutual contact and build trust. The discussions were conducted in subgroups and plenary sessions. The meetings ended (by way of evaluation) with a feedback round in response to the question of what each person took home from the meeting.

Research of the project is aimed at (1) identifying the experiences of discrimination, exclusion, hate crime and hate speech and understanding their impact on individuals and separate communities; and (2) to evaluate each project phase with the participants (effects and satisfaction); (3) to provide an exemplary methodology applicable across cities in Europe; to build social capital, develop an anti-discrimination agenda and open a lasting channel of influence with authorities.

In this document we focus on the similarities and differences in the experiences of the three communities, based on the following research question:

*What is the impact of discriminatory acts and hate crimes (emic perspective) on the participants from the three communities involved?*

- a. *Which experiences of discrimination and violence are reported at the community level*
  - *Which language and words do participants use to express themselves and what aspects do they feel are most important?*
  - *How do participants respond to the information they receive and what experiences do they share and where do they differ?*
  - *Which priorities do they set in the experiences and to what extent does this differ from the data from research and the priorities in policy?*
- b. *Is there a gap between the perception and impact of discrimination at the community level and actual individual reports of discrimination.*
- c. *What are the underlying causes of discriminatory experiences according to them*
- d. *Which coping strategies (resilience and change capacity ) are in place?*

## 1.1 Experiences of discrimination and racism

In the analysis of the data multiple themes emerged in the dialogues of the communities which sometimes were overlapping and sometimes different between the communities. Identified themes were:

1. Micro-aggressions or everyday racism, everyday racism refers to the experiences of contempt, hatred and exclusion (conscious and unconscious) experienced in all spheres of existence (work, security, schooling, income, housing etc). They acquire meaning in the light of accumulated memories of past discrimination and exclusion. It also relates to indirect aggression and expressions behind one's back.
2. Transgressions of symbolic/social/physical and psychological integrity: violence and violations directly aimed at the person or group, not only physically or psychologically, but also against one's identity or social environment. This covers actual violence as well as the threat of violence, or the reflections of violence.
3. Systemic or institutional discrimination: discrimination, woven into the ways of dealing with people by institutions. It manifests itself in explicit exclusion, but also in subtle forms of violations - sometimes conscious, sometimes unconscious and often along unwritten lines. This includes ethnic profiling.
4. Struggle over power of definition and victim-blaming, refers to the definition of the situation in which one experiences discrimination or racism. The example of being dismissed as an 'angry black woman', or 'You shouldn't have worn a headscarf, when applying for a job', and trivialising negative experiences is regularly mentioned.
5. Burden of the past, in the narratives this relates to the memory of injustice of the Holocaust, of the history of slavery, of the history of colonisation and the actual losses suffered in it.
6. Group pressure related to the role of the group as a catalyst in the occurrence of racist violence, but also to the pressure from one's own group not to step forward as a victim of violence.
7. Systematic character of racism and discrimination: the participants all agree that the things they encounter are not random incidents. They see the things they are confronted with as representations of an underlying 'world of ideas' in which they are othered and treated and looked upon from a position of dominance and superiority.

There are differences and similarities between the experiences and stories of the participants from the three communities (see figure 1). Common denominator shared by all three communities is the conviction of all participants that experiences of racism and discrimination are representations of an underlying 'world of ideas', as mentioned. It doesn't concern random incidents (cf. Çankaya, 2022).

Experiences referred to by all three communities are confrontations in their daily lives with (1) micro-aggressions and (2) transgressions of symbolic/social/physical and psychological integrity. This doesn't exclude other experiences but there the similarity is less explicit in the stories told. Systemic/institutional discrimination is emphasised both by the Black and the Islamic community. Emblematic are the intrusive experiences with the Dutch childcare benefits scandal, but also the numerous examples of discrimination and unequal treatment in schooling and workplaces. Both communities report also more often that their experiences are denied or trivialised. Shared by the Jewish and the Black communities is the referral to the burden of the past. This implicates that the experience here and now of discrimination and racism is always co-defined by the history of violence and injustice with which ancestors were confronted, and by experiences in other parts of the world either in colonies, in Africa, Israel or in the diaspora. The experiences have a historical dimension and are transnational but are felt in the here and now. Shared by the Jewish and the Islamic communities are the experiences with group-induced violence: a Jewish participant explains how individual transgressive behaviour most of the times is addressable for him but confrontations with groups lead to violence more easily.



According to the stories told the Black and Muslim groups often are confronted with discrimination and unequal treatment and often also with the struggle for identity, against denial of their experiences or trivialisation. It seems more they often also face assaults on their physical integrity. The context of power, control and hegemony in the formulation of identities calls for careful use of language and deconstructing the language used to define the situation of people facing racism and discrimination. Also the choice and the definition of the three participating communities is disputed. It is seen as a choice of the EU and defined by the EU.

Transgressions seem to be more covert and indirect/behind the back in the case of the Jewish community, physical violence is reported less while negative images in the media and in politics and theories referring a Jewish conspiracy are becoming more prevalent and common. The battles are fought in multiple arenas.

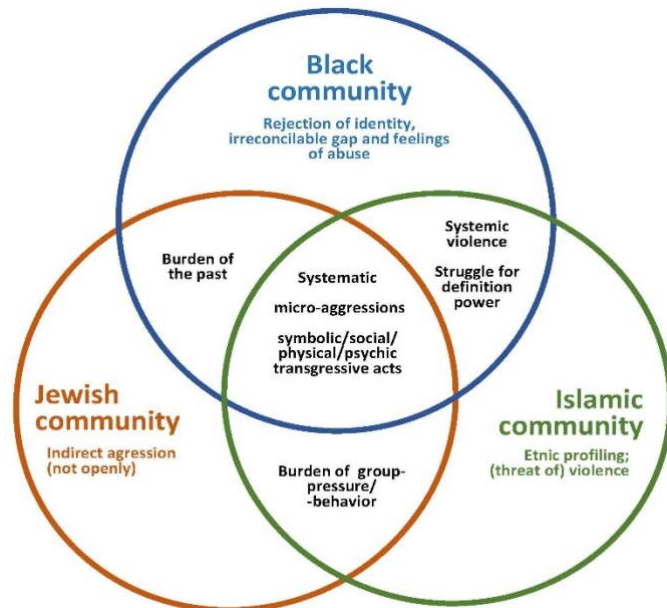


Figure 1: differences and similarities

## 1.2 Violence

A closer look at the experiences reported by the participants, reveals that their experience are transgressive and damaging in multiple ways. They touch their deepest feelings of who they are, their safety and wellbeing. Moreover they are forced upon them and come unsolicited and without cause. These are elements of experiences of violence and this is remarkable looking at the fact that this aspect of them is seldomly explicated in the policy reports about how to deal with discrimination and racism, neither in the justifications for the problem statement and the rationale of this project 'Rotterdam beyond Discrimination'. Discrimination and racism often seem to be treated in rather abstract terms as a judicial problem, a management issue or a matter of effectiveness of policies. The debate seems to be about consistency of policy, about effectiveness of systems, about having grip, about reach and proportionality and about numbers.

An example of the violence of the experience is the story of John who tells about how he was treated at school by his teachers. John explains that he felt like he had to go to some sort of court every day, to prove himself:

*"The school decides if you get a diploma, even if you're a model student. The argument they use is, 'You're not ready for the next class'". "White students did get through, I was pissed." Janet, one of the other participants, asks, "Why was this?" John can't tell..... and hesitates. He gets emotional. Janet: "What hurts you?" John: "White students were better liked and they were of Dutch descent." "We came here with nothing." "The strength of our parents, I don't want to sell them short. They were the ones who really had to fight."*

Other examples:

*A young woman points out that the sense of otherness is always present. "My father explained to me how the world works." Tears appear when she tells this, and she explains that she gets impatient. When asked where the tears come from, she says it makes her emotional because as a black woman you carry this with you every day, "Every day when I get up I have to face the world as a black woman who is always seen as different."*

*"Every time I am asked to tell my story again. For a white person this means 'a better understanding,' but for me it hurts." "You feel it and this doesn't have to be like this." She says she believes in intergenerational trauma and that she carries some of the past (and pain) with her.*

*"You can make a career, but you have to leave something of your identity at the front door. People often ask if diversity (being black) has held you back. No, it hasn't."*

*"I got beat up by the police. My family didn't want me to talk openly about this. I did and I lost my family. It made me stronger. Why do I have to deny myself? Do I have to fit into their picture? (...) basically they blamed me for the abuse."*

According to the World Health Organisation violence refers to: The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that results in injury, death, psychological harm, poor development or deprivation, or has a high probability of doing so (WHO, 2002:5). Sheper-Hughes & Bourgois explicitly emphasize the cultural and symbolic aspects of this understanding: "Violence is a continuum, not to be understood in terms of physicality (...) (it) also includes attacks on the personality, dignity, sense of worth or value of the victim. The social and cultural dimensions of violence give violence its power and meaning" (2004:1). Cultural violence is something constant, something that is perpetual and permanent, Galtung (1990) argues, and resisting it requires a long haul and counterbalance in the form of positive images and knowledge that can counterbalance the implicit nature of dominance (Bourdieu, 2017; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2017; Clifford, 1988). In their stories the participants testify of (threats of) transgressions of their physical and psychological integrity forced upon them, of the damage this causes to their health, of the collapse of their social and socio-economic situation, and their identity or symbolic integrity. They feel it is stressful to talk about it or to be remembered on the one hand and at the same time they underline the relevance of healing and recovery. When confronted with the figures and definitions of racism and discrimination, with the problem statements and the intentions during the meetings in the bonding phase, they protest and do not recognise themselves in the images presented. It seems racism and discrimination are transformed to objects and things detached from people and experience.

Racism and discrimination as acts of violence and violations have real effects in the lives of the people affected. They result for example in what Sheper-Hughes & Bourgois (2017) call the structural violence of poverty, social exclusion, chronic stress, unemployment, illness and systematic undervaluation. Not only the act, but also the effect is violent.

The stories of the participants bring this discrepancy to the fore between the experience and the way discrimination and racism are discussed in formal policy documents and the public debate. They are seen as a legal and a human rights issue, or a sociological and political issue, or a management problem. Not something that concerns people but is outside ourselves located in the correctness of systems and models. It is something we prefer to see elsewhere. Farmer (2017) states about this: coinciding the experience of violence with otherness, making you see it as something of "the Other" (not here, not "one of us").

### **1.3 Impact**

The experience of discrimination and exclusion affects people's very being. This may be because the experience of "war, persecution and survival" is seen as an essential feature of identity, as the Jewish philosopher Abram observes (Abram, 2006, 2017), or because there is a sense of being

denied and made invisible and silenced. "You don't have words for it, what happens to you," someone tells me. "It gets into your head." A young woman rejected for vocational training because of wearing a headscarf reports that she was "silent for a few days". She does not know why this happened: "My dream was taken away." Another says, "Discrimination is always packaged in a way that makes you doubt yourself." Participants speak of losing dignity and being belittled and then not wanting to show it because it is too painful. Sometimes they literally want to become invisible, by not standing out. A beard that could be associated with a Muslim identity is better shaved off, a mother suggests to her son, even though he feels it puts him out of the picture. Participants from the Black community repeatedly see the same "wall of white men" downplaying their message and stigmatizing them as unaccountable and out of control. "We are not silent" said a participant of Cape Verdean descent, "but must keep our mouths shut." This takes on even more painful forms when the image of the other is internalized. One of the participants tells how she started behaving according to the negative school advice from elementary school and intentionally performed worse in school in order not to stand out. She started behaving according to the negative label she had received. This is the phenomenon that (Bourdieu, 2017) calls symbolic violence. Bornstein (2004) argues that violence leads to erosion of individuality, the sense of dignity and identity. Following Bourdieu he describes this as "symbolic violence" which degrades and dehumanizes people's essence and dignity. "Dehumanization places the victim outside the community, outside the circle of moral behavior, and allows empathy to be withheld. By helping ordinary people distance themselves from the pain of those who suffer, symbolic violence enables them to commit or condone heinous acts of armed and structural violence" (Bornstein 2004:111). So symbolic violence is not just 'symbolic' but a lever to other intrusive forms of transgressions of human dignity and integrity..

Galtung (1990) argues that encountering violent structures leaves scars on the body, in the mind and in the soul. Participants demonstrate this in the bonding phase. They report that they store their negative experiences and begin to live accordingly, anticipating and being constantly alert and living with doubt and feelings of inferiority. They speak of chronic stress and constant vigilance and anticipation. It is known from research that chronic and traumatic stress explain the occurrence of serious physical, cognitive and psychological disorders in the long run (Hosper & Loenen, 2021; Kelley, Curtis & Wieling 2023).

Participants mentioned being overloaded and demoralized: "When you experience so much you get a sense of it doesn't matter anyway. When I was younger I got angry now I don't. I almost feel like a poser now if I say anything about it." "It's actually weird but often you don't even notice that you are being discriminated against." "There isn't a day without discrimination but we don't notice it anymore. I don't engage in confrontations anymore". Others do not dare to share their experiences because the environment is unsafe, or because they feel they have to be "realistic." "This is not our country we should not expect too much". Those who do stand up and speak up run the risk of being victim-blamed within their own social circle. They are told that they are fighting for something that is not worthwhile, and that they themselves are not good. Dividedness participants also see within their communities themselves and within families. There is a disconnect between generations. There is misunderstanding from the older generation, sometimes disappointment and the expectation that younger people will deal with it.

To be deprived of equal opportunities on the grounds of discrimination and racism means that one falls short and cannot develop and ends up in a situation of structural instability of existence and precarity. These experiences bear in the the risk of ending up in the structural violence of poverty, social exclusion, chronic stress, unemployment, illness and systematic undervaluation. Those involved feel silenced, because of the intangibility of the experience, out of shame, or because images are internalized. To summarize, the impact is:

1. Structural unsustainability of existence, poverty, social exclusion, chronic stress, unemployment, illness (active marginalization)
2. Withdrawal/being invisible/made silent: "We are not silent, but we have to keep our mouths shut". "You have no words for it, what happens to you, but it creeps into your head." (marginalized)
3. Overcharged: "working twice as hard for half the money"/ "adultification<sup>5</sup>". Constant vigilance, feeling paralyzed, constant anticipation, chronic stress. Demoralized, loss of hope, loss of self-esteem, internalizing oppression vulnerable, sick (stress)

#### 1.4 Coping

Coping strategies are reactions to deal with the violence. Some of them are simple and straightforward as one of the Jewish participants explains: after being 'Jewed' (antisemitic bullying) during his time at school he waited for the offender after classes, to he beat him up. What we end up with are damage, being torn apart, resignation, fear and stress, undervaluation and a situation of structural volatility as impact effects of discrimination and racism. Resisting that requires a long haul and countering the implicit nature of white dominance. In all communities people seek meaning in bonding, as a safe space, for themselves and in this project also they rely on bridging as a means of broadening their understanding, empowerment and a place for healing and recovery.

Bonding and bridging are considered positive coping strategies according to the participants. These are active processes that contribute to the development of one's identity and that the community must be able to carry out in safety, in its own environment where people meet and develop confidence to engage in outward conversation. The participants want to see continued investment in the possibility of communities to keep the dialogue going on within the community and between communities, and from there, a dialogue between inhabitants of Rotterdam and between the municipality and the people of the city. Dialogues seen as an attempt to rehumanize the experience of discrimination and racism. Bridging enlarges the views on the problem and offers grasp of the sources of evil, makes them more understandable and therefore more changeable. It contributes to experiential knowledge. This also relates to the conversation with authorities to be able to give meaning to current everyday experiences (linking). Where old viewpoints and norms are no longer adequate, it is necessary to find new words and new points of reference that will once again provide a foothold in the face of flaring racism. Bullying protocols in schools that are used against racist and discriminatory behaviour and are not adequate are cited as an example.

Close to this lies withdrawal as a coping strategy: separation as a strategy by surrounding oneself with trustworthy people, deriving strength from identity. "I have influence over my personal behaviour," Some of the participants do not want to be affected anymore. They focus on their own future prospects, based on their own norms and values. This can be done, for example, by becoming their own boss, in an environment that offers sufficient grip and security, but also by resorting to a stronger experience of religion: "I have become more deeply engrossed in religion precisely because of the confrontation with Islamophobia and have chosen to wear a headscarf as well." In this, people find comfort and support. Some seek strength by working on empowerment, for example by teaching young people to better stand up for themselves and talk about their experiences.

Two other coping strategies are presented which are also taken over in the anti-discrimination agenda:

First, communicating positive images, knowledge and contact: the ownership of and responsibility for the problem of racism and discrimination lie not with the people affected by it, but with the

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<sup>5</sup> The erroneous overestimation of children's responsibility

perpetrators, both direct and indirect and institutional. Research shows that fear and dissatisfaction with one's social situation, which turn into anger and aggression, give rise to racism and discrimination. Engaging in dialogues with others, transferring knowledge and building bridges, making yourself more open to this, increasing visibility and a more positive image of the communities are activities for Rotterdam that can contribute to more shared space. Instruments to achieve this include cultural encounters, such as a film festival, the activities of the Belvédère story house, and celebrating together, as well as teaching programs on history of communities and racism /colonialism and slave-trade (also Wallet, 2019). Second: Supervision and protection: the participants see the authorities as bearers and guardians of a common anti-discriminatory and anti-racist normative (legal and moral) framework. By propagating it in a powerful and positive way and shaping it themselves, but also by enforcing it in an unmistakable way wherever boundaries are crossed in the city.

In addition to this last interest of the communities involved: the participants describe Rotterdam's institutions as a 'white wall' that sees and treats them as deviant and less entitled. They experience this in several areas of life, such as work, safety, education, income and housing. Institutions perpetuate an image of 'other people' (othering), confirming prejudice and inequality. This leads to loss of trust in society and the authorities, and leads to structural insecurity of existence (precarity) for the people concerned. Discrimination and racism erode the human right to security (human security). Human security is a concept introduced by the United Nations (2005) that refers to protection against intrusive and comprehensive forms of threat that jeopardise the long-term well-being of the population concerned. It is built on three freedoms: freedom from fear, freedom from want and freedom from humiliation (Alkire, 2003). The three communities have highlighted threats in the form of direct and indirect forms of violence (attacks on physical, psychological, symbolic and social integrity) both directed at individuals and in the form of micro-aggressions that serve as status reminders (Franklin & Boyd-Franklin, 2000) and institutional discrimination. In addition, there is existential insecurity mainly through experiencing unequal opportunities. These are particularly indicated in the field of education, in access to the labour market, and in contact with the authorities.

Finally, the ambassadors pointed out the lack of recognition of the right to exist of the community one belongs to, the history of crimes against that community or the continuous negative profiling of communities, whether it is because of origin, a burdened past, religious beliefs or the ethnic group one belongs to. This affects psychosocial domains of human security, as highlighted among others by Batniji et al. (2009) and Van der Meulen (2018): 1. Feeling at home somewhere: Possessing an enduring sense of home and security, which provides identity, recognition and freedom from anxiety. 2. Feeling part of a community: Having a network of constructive social or family support, which provides identity, recognition, participation and autonomy; and 3. The sense of history, time and future: Acceptance of the past and having a positive outlook on the future, which provides identity, recognition, participation and autonomy.

The experiences of discrimination and racism are not just a human rights issue, but affect the security of individuals and the social relations they live in, here and now, as well as in the past, in the future and in the environment they come from. These experiences have a disruptive impact on their wellbeing that has been reported extensively in this project. Violence asks different questions to policy makers and fellow citizens than discrimination and racism, made into objects and abstracted form reality. It no longer seems to be about people and that gives ground to 'othering'.

### **1.5 Explanatory models: the sources of evil**

Evil is explained by all communities in historical terms, the hegemony of western society, white privilege in this and the nestling of presumed superiority in the (unconscious) Western thinking

described by Wekker (2016) as the cultural archive. She points to the colonial past stored in the collective unconscious, which dismisses racist acts and statements as incidents, harmless jokes, or as well-intentioned. The history of slavery and colonialism is systematically kept out of the collective consciousness, so social inequality and racism are not seen as systemic (also Fanon, 1971). Palestinian-American scholar Edward Said points to the negative attitude of nineteenth-century European colonial powers toward "the Eastern world" (Said, 1978) which they considered illogical, childish, sometimes fanatical and irrational, a world to be educated. In recent decades that frame of mind has increasingly focused on Islam as defining Oriental identity (Valk, 2012). That depiction served the purpose of establishing the exalted self-image, an outlet for Western identity, on the one hand, and as a legitimation of colonial rule, on the other (Çankaya, 2022).

Binding aspects of the identities of the 'communities' involved in this project differ: religion, origin, shared history and so do historical interpretations of the problem. Jewish sociologist-philosopher Bauman, in his treatise on modern man, points to the experience that culturally Others constantly occupy an outside position within the imagined harmony of the human universe. Even in postmodern conceptions of the meaning of differences between people, the Other represents chaos that belongs nowhere and has access to knowledge hidden from them. The Other undermines and infects this imagined coherent and consistent universe through its ambivalence in which he is neither friend nor foe (Marotta, 2002). Therein also emerges one of the main drivers of the problem, fear, fuelled by a lack of knowledge and contact and an ingrained resistance, according to one of the participants. This is confirmed by Gloria Wekker who points to the (false) dominant self-image of the Netherlands as a small but just country, ethically correct, colourblind, free of racism, and a beacon for other peoples.

## 1.6 Conclusion

This document focused on the similarities and differences in the experiences of discrimination and racism in the three communities.

*First research question: What is the impact of discriminatory acts and hate crimes (emic perspective) on the participants from the three communities involved?*

*Which experiences of discrimination and violence are reported at the community level*

- a. *Which language and words do participants use to express themselves and what aspects do they feel are most important?*
- b. *How do participants respond to the information they receive and what experiences do they share and where do they differ?*
- c. *Which priorities do they set in the experiences and to what extent does this differ from the data from research and the priorities in policy?*

Experiences referred to by all three communities are confrontations in their daily lives with (1) micro-aggressions and (2) transgressions of symbolic/social/physical and psychological integrity. Systemic/institutional discrimination is emphasised both by the Black and the Islamic community. Shared by the Jewish and the Black communities is the referral to the burden of the past. This implicates that the experience here and now of discrimination and racism is always co-defined by the history of violence and injustice with which ancestors were confronted, and by experiences in other parts of the world either in colonies, places of origin or the diaspora. The experiences have a historical dimension and are transnational but are felt in the here and now. Common denominator shared by all three communities is the conviction of all participants that experiences of racism and discrimination are representations of an underlying 'world of ideas', as mentioned. It doesn't concern random incidents. Experiences are phrased as experiences of violence and it is remarkable how this differs from the way discrimination and racism are understood in the views and policies of authorities in which they are seen as ahistorical objects, not explicitly related to the experience of

people who's experience moreover is seen as illustration. This is not only not recognized by the participants but also experienced as painful.

Healing practices, building safe spaces and addressing the structural aspects of violence are seen as priorities by the participants. Institutional racism and discrimination is the hard to address and to influence version of racism, which has highly penetrating effects on their daily lives. They want the authorities' help to address and to fight this. Conceptualizing racism as a problem of human security might add to the effectiveness of governmental and municipal policies.

*Second research question: Is there a gap between the perception and impact of discrimination at the community level and actual individual reports of discrimination.*

No such gap is explicitly discovered in the dialogues in this phase of the project. There are differences in the ways individuals react to their negative experiences. Some are mild, others are militant. But the interpretation of the origins of their problems hardly differs.

*Third research question: What are the underlying causes of discriminatory experiences according to them.*

Evil is explained by all communities in historical terms, the hegemony of western society, white privilege in this and the nestling of presumed superiority in the (unconscious) Western thinking described by Wekker (2016) as the cultural archive.

*Fourth research question at hand: Which coping strategies (resilience and change capacity) are in place?*

Bonding and bridging are considered positive coping strategies according to the participants. These are active processes that contribute to the development of one's identity and that the community must be able to carry out in safety, in its own environment where people meet and develop confidence to engage in outward conversation. Bridging enlarges the views on the problem and offers grasp of the sources of evil, makes them more understandable and therefore more changeable. It contributes to experiential knowledge. Dialogues rehumanize the experience of discrimination and racism. This also relates to the conversation with authorities to be able to give meaning to current everyday experiences (linking). Where old viewpoints and norms are no longer adequate, it is necessary to find new words and new points of reference that will once again provide a foothold in the face of flaring racism.

Close to this lies withdrawal as a coping strategy: separation as a strategy by surrounding oneself with trustworthy people, deriving strength from identity. Working on empowerment, helps to stand up themselves and talk about the violence they experienced.

Communicate positive images, knowledge and contact: the ownership of and responsibility for the problem of racism and discrimination lie not with the people affected by it, but with the perpetrators, both direct and indirect and institutional. Engaging in dialogues with others, transferring knowledge and building bridges, making yourself more open to this, increasing visibility and a more positive image of the communities contribute to more shared space.

Addressing the authorities' responsibility for supervision and protection as bearers and guardians of a common anti-discriminatory and anti-racist normative (legal and moral) framework.

## 2. BRIDGING

*Bridging* refers to the ability to have contact outside one's own community, aimed at the realisation of a common interest. In line with this, the amount of *bridging 'capital'* is seen as a measure of cohesion within a society and of the impact of asserting oneself as a citizen of a society. *Linking* concerns the ability to do this in connection with those who have administrative or economic responsibility in society.

This bridging phase of the project ran from May to July 2022 and focused on developing social capital and developing a common agenda. According to Szreter and Woolcock (2004), bridging includes "(...) relationships of respect and reciprocity between people who know they are not equal in socio-demographic terms (or social identity) (differences in age, ethnic group, for example)" (Johnson, 2016; Szreter & Woolcock, 2004). In this case, it concerns differences in social identity.

A total of four bridging meetings were held with 40 participants from the three communities, three facilitators who were also involved in the bonding meetings (each community having its own facilitator), the project leader and the researcher. These were the meetings in which representative policy staff (n=2) from the Rotterdam municipality alternated for the first time. The meetings took place in community centre De Banier (once) and in the Timmerhuis<sup>6</sup> (three times) where the municipality acted as host. They always opened with a shared meal, followed by a short presentation (if needed), sometimes by introductory exercises to encourage mutual contact, or by an exercise to experience the plurality of identity and the different ways people can be interconnected. The discussions were conducted twice in subgroups and twice mainly plenary ('campfire discussion'). The meetings ended (by way of evaluation) with a feedback round in response to the question of what each person took home from the meeting.

In this Rotterdam Beyond Discrimination project, one of the research questions is:

"Did the process of bonding, bridging and linking result in:

- a. A shared anti-discrimination agenda. If so, how did this develop and what is the result?
- b. An increase in trust (responsiveness, competence, reliability) in local authorities (e.g. administration, institutions) and
- c. The development of greater community involvement and influence in effective anti-discrimination policies:
  - i. A strong network of key people from the communities concerned and from local government authorities and other institutions and
  - ii. key people from the communities are given more opportunities to participate in decision-making processes, in sustainable information positions."

Based on the bridging phase, we can (partly) answer sub-questions a and b. The whole question can only be answered after the linking phase. This chapter describes and analyses the process and outcome of the bridging phase.

In the meetings, the focus was on shaping a joint anti-discrimination agenda for Rotterdam, based on the experiences from the bonding phase; and mutual aspects of social identity were explored. In this report, we describe both processes: (1) the search for a shared identity and (2) the creation of a shared anti-discrimination agenda. We then address the question of what the content of the participants' conversations mean for a better understanding of the significance of social capital for combating discrimination and racism.

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<sup>6</sup> This is the municipal office building



## 2.1 Content of the conversations

In the analysis of the data collected, six themes emerged that shaped the conversation in the bridging phase: (1) identity (who are we, who are you, how do we relate to each other, what are the hot issues?); (2) non-binding nature of the conversation about the experiences (traumatisation, grief, reliving, transmission etc. ); (3) bridging (all aspects of mutual dynamics, respect, courage trust etc.); (4) the interventions envisaged (approach, structure, authorities, dialogue, solidarity etc.); (5) instruments and factors influencing change (partners, intermediaries, conditions for the process etc.) and (6) power and powerlessness (impact of discrimination, elusiveness of power, inability, algorithms).

Identity in the analysis appears to be connected to most of the other themes, to power and the non-binding nature of the conversation on the one hand, and to bridging and the intended interventions on the other (see Figure 2). Those intended interventions and the tools and factors influencing change are close to each other and are connected to one's own identity and the burden one experiences through the conversation about power, i.e. the non-committal nature of the conversation. The themes were labelled by grouping coherent codes. The overlap of themes was then determined based on the overlap of codings.

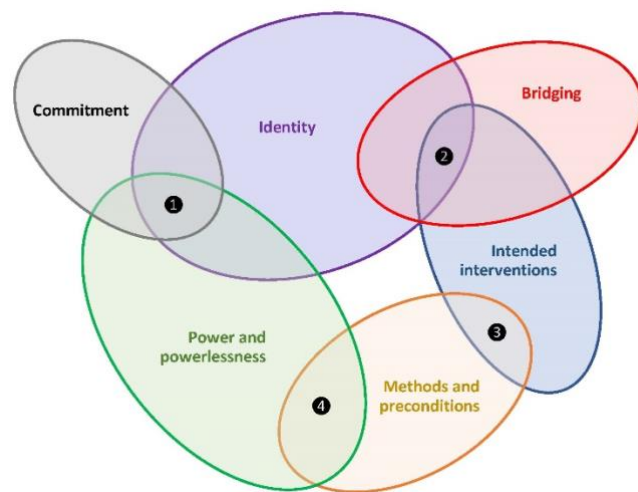


Figure 2: conversation themes from the bridging phase and their interconnectedness (numbers refer to key concepts that recur in the text)

The theme of identity ran like a thread through the dialogues.

Participants moved between curiosity about and discomfort with the Other. One does not know the Other, or sometimes has images that stand in the way of recognition, and one tries to discover how to relate to it in this context. This can lead to emotions because one is triggered. Space is then created to explore that experience. In this, showing vulnerability works healing and binding. Sometimes someone is shocked by the lack of knowledge, but people want to meet and get to know the Other. One participant comments: "The communities share many experiences, but also use very different words. It is good to get to know and explore each other's words, but also to stay away from jargon and terminology, and remain aware of the value of one's own words."

The theme of identity was largely defined in the conversation by two issues, which were not equally recognisable to all communities: (1) the question of what is black and what is white, and (2) the absence of the white perspective. We address these here because they are important for thinking about the meaning of social capital and its contribution to citizenship and combating discrimination and exclusion.

## 2.2 What is White, what is Black?

As obvious as White and Black seemed to be in the bonding discussions, they proved troublesome in the bridging phase. Black as used in this project is the Dutch translation of the American term Blackness. At the start of the project, participants were asked to agree with this designation. This was a condition for joining the project. For some participants, this is evident; they see Black as a sociological category and a political concept that refers to origin (ancestry), a shared history of slavery/colonialism that people experience as Esajas, Gabriela, & Brotto (2021) intended. It does not literally refer to a (skin) colour per se. Black stands for an identity that Esajas et al. (2021) use to refer to people of African origin who identify themselves as Black or Afro-Dutch and face anti-Black racism. These participants see a Black identity that is transnational and not constrained by language boundaries, but expresses the shared experience in its own language. It is a new Black, a name worn with pride.

This is not to say that Black was uncontroversial. In the bridging phase, for several participants from the Black community, Black turns out to be a term with negative connotations, with which they would rather not be identified. They ask who was decisive in creating this category, and there is resistance. "Don't be pigeonholed" is remarked. Another calls it a colonial category. Moreover, Black is found to be a polarising word that does not do justice to diversity within the community, for example if you are of mixed parents. They point to negative connotations like 'travelling black', 'black money' etc. and argue for a more neutral word like 'colourful'. The boundaries of the term do not appear clear when a participant wonders whether Moroccan Muslims should not actually belong to the Black community, instead of calling them North African. East and West African also seem to relate differently to this because their histories are so different from each other.

The context of power, control and hegemony in the formulation of identities calls for careful use of language and deconstructing the language used to define the situation of people facing racism and discrimination. One participant suggests stripping Black of its negative connotation and using other words (not "travelling black, but "free travel") and if someone speaks of the Muslim community as if it were one unified body, don't accept that, but nuance it," it is argued.

The same goes for the question of what is White? That question arises when the Jewish community is questioned about their position in the conversation. One participant experiences their position primarily as guardian of the conversation, rather than participant. Another asks. "How can I see you as non-White, if you would sit behind the counter of the municipal social services department without any visible sign that you are Jewish?". This ties in with the discussion also raised in the bonding phase by the Jewish participants themselves, when they referred to the exhibition "Are Jews White?" organised by the Jewish Historical Museum in Amsterdam. Among other things, that exhibition noted that communities or population groups facing discrimination find support and complement each other, but this does not seem to be the case for the Jewish community. It turns out to be a theme that also evokes a lot of emotion, both among those who observe this difference and those affected by it. One Jewish man responds, "I puke at that White perspective. Jewish people are always placed outside the White community". He continues: "I feel this in my body. This is starting to tingle all over. This pain is so deep. We are a group of survivors. (...) We were taught by our parents to be powerful: 'Go into the depths of yourself to see what your strength is, and live by that'." This response is embraced. "I needed this," responds a participant from the Muslim community, "to gain confidence". Concluding that like Black, White is not a skin colour, but an identity that stands for a privilege that excludes Others and treats them as objects.

Crucial in these conversations is the role of the 'middle men' within the group of participants who, as individuals, represent the boundaries between communities and, because of that position, can also question all the presuppositions of the community itself. There are 'Jewish-Black' people participating in the conversation, 'Black' people who are not from Africa or not from a history of slavery, Muslims with dark skin and African roots, and 'White' Muslims. These middle men manage to tilt the perspective on the relations of various identities, forcing them to step out of their context of invisibility.

It makes it clear that identities are social and not fixed entities, but dynamic and need to be understood in their context. This occurs not only between communities, but also within communities, allowing the word community itself to be questioned. For the process of bridging, finding shared values, looking for blind spots, sharing and the need to examine each other's worldview, the discomfort of these intermediaries is important. It is these intermediaries that complicate the debate but also serve as levers to pull it out of polarisation. The very conversation about Black and White makes clear that they are social constructs and do not refer to fixed biological or phenotypic<sup>7</sup> characteristics that can be seen as traits of a 'race'.

### 2.3 The absent present

Not only White and Black occupied the minds, but also the assertion by one of the participants that the project had failed because the White perspective was missing at the table. This evoked many reactions, especially when this participant announced she would leave the conversation if this was not fixed. She denounced the absence of the White norm group, which is responsible for the harm that has been done and is being done. They not only bear responsibility for the problem, but are also needed to be held accountable and come up with proper solutions.

In the conversation, this view was contested. Allowing them into the conversation would affect the security needed to speak out freely, it was objected. Not questioning this is a form of assimilating and following power, it was argued in reply. This creates neither change nor security. Participants from both the Black and Jewish communities pointed out: in Jewish history of the 19th and 20th centuries, assimilation has offered no protection. For the Black community, assimilation led to loss of identity, while structural inequality did not diminish. Safe spaces provide an environment for power-free communication.

White is also not always visible. It is internalised some believe and can become so inherent that it is difficult to see anything other than a white perspective. This white perspective does not have to justify itself and sets unspoken norms. The norm group, it is argued, is not absent, but is always present in the conversation, even if they are not there. This comes into play, for example, when the Palestinian-Israeli conflict crops up in conversations: how can it be understood without considering that it stems from a history of genocide and colonialism by Western countries. The term 'absent present'<sup>8</sup> is introduced in the meetings to indicate the dual nature of the White norm group. White has not only been internalised as previously observed, but has also gone underground. In Figure 2, this is a topic that is referred to both in the context of identity, of power and powerlessness, and of burden/non-commitment to change: in the area where those three themes overlap 'images' (no 1 in Figure 2). It is an important topic that forms a linking pin between those themes.

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<sup>7</sup> Phenotype refers to the observable characteristics of an organism that are the result of predisposition and environmental influence.

<sup>8</sup> This concept is derived from M'charek (2004) who talks about the 'absent present'. In the project, these terms were used interchangeably.

When it is argued that the linking phase will involve discussion with administrators and representatives of institutions, it does not provide sufficient comfort, and the participant who raised the issue left the project after the bridging phase.

## **2.4 Moving identities**

In this project, participants actively tried to set a shared new norm by making space for each other. "Everyone has baggage," one of the participants explained, "approach each other from a positive attitude". Another wanted to go beyond just learning from each other but also showing solidarity: "If one person faces discrimination, it is a struggle for all of us," she holds up to the group. Space is created in which people name and discover new perspectives. An example is the conversation of three young women, each from different backgrounds, who want to give Dutch radio station FunX a role in spreading the new Rotterdam identity. These three women emphasise their shared identity: young, activist, rebellious. Not always agreeing with each other creates the tension needed to be creative and the realisation that your inner world does not always coincide seamlessly with the outer world (Long, 2011).

Processes like this fulfilled the objectives of the bridging process: realising relationships of respect and reciprocity between people from Black, Jewish, Muslim communities, who realise that that they are not equal in socio-demographic terms, or social identity. They create transitional space, as Winnicott calls it, which as a place to play gives space for experimentation and exploration and for articulating new insights in which one's own perspective and a new outside perspective become connected (cf. Carballeira Carrera, Lévesque-Daniel, Moro, Mansouri, & Lachal, 2022). "The group as a transitional space creates a laboratory, a sanctuary in which one can experiment with new ways of thinking, new feelings and behaviour, which can give the participant confidence to approach other people outside the group in new ways" (Vanderhallen, 2016:55).

This is reflected in the evaluation of the bridging phase. This looked at the appreciation of the different elements of bridging: the giving and gaining of trust, growth of contacts outside one's own community, learning effects, trust in local authorities and the perceived relevance of the meetings as described in the chapters on evaluation of the phases.

The conversations about Black and White and the absent present made clear that identities move in an ever-changing interplay of similarities and contradictions between identity-meanings. Participating in this requires skill and resilience. One must be able to move in different ambiguous situations, renew oneself where necessary and have adequate identity capital and active identity management. Identity capital stands for the sum of personal and cognitive skills as well as the connection to meaningful social networks that enable people to give direction to their own personal development and to establish and maintain cohesion and continuity (Côté, 1996; Fein, 2015). At the individual level, according to Bosma (1995), Côté (1996) and Fein (2015), this can be seen as an 'identity market' and at the social level as an 'identity arena'.

## **2.5 Building blocks of the anti-discrimination agenda**

The anti-discrimination agenda compiled based on the experiences of the participants in the bonding phase is built around a number of choices made by the participants on the nature of the problem, desired solutions, relevant actors and preconditions for the way forward. These can be seen as reference points for future decisions to be made.

### ***Violent images***

The core problem faced concerns the negative and erroneous images in society about people from the three communities, which lead to unequal treatment and have a deeply pervasive negative impact. Unequal treatment occurs in all areas of life and is in the nature of acts of violence that affect the personal, psychological, physical, symbolic and social integrity of victims. Experiences have been reported in which victims internalise this negativity and inflict violence on themselves.

### ***Instilled attitudes and behaviour***

It is not a given to combat these images because they rely on the (defining) power of the dominant White society and evil intent is not always involved. It could also be a lack of knowledge, a segregated society where people do not meet, or ingrained beliefs and attitudes (prejudices) in socialisation that feed an undercurrent of rejection and discrimination (behaviour). In this context, the media are seen as transmitting channels that are insufficiently critical of these prejudices and not representative of the diversity in society. This concerns both official media and social media, in which images are repeated and get podium and thus confirmed. One of the images criticised is that difference is reformulated into disadvantage that needs to be corrected or caught up with. As a result, identification of problems, let alone solutions, is not always obvious and easily discernible. This applies, for example, to the problem of everyday forms of racism, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, which are not always recognised or trivialised.

### ***Broad approach***

Solutions to the problems mentioned are awareness-raising, knowledge-building/learning, dialogue, perspective-shifting and empowerment, in addition to the enforcement and enforcement of citizens' fundamental rights by (local) authorities. Trusting, listening, discovering, dialogue, disagreeing, friction and getting to know each other are the words used to describe the process participants go through in the bridging phase. 'Solidarity', 'propagating positive images', and 'knowledge creation and learning' are key concepts that relate to several themes as depicted in Figure 2. Communicating positive images and celebrating one's identity (no ② in Figure 2) is a linking pin between (1) 'Identity'; (3) 'Bridging' and (4) 'Intended interventions'. Solidarity is at the intersection of 'Bridging' and the 'Intended interventions' and learning and knowledge acquisition (no ③ in Figure 2) is at the intersection of 'Intended interventions' and 'Tools and conditions for change'. The key concepts are reflected in the agenda.

The communities involved want more space to positively distinguish themselves in a way that invites others to see the positive aspects of a different culture. Education will also have an important role to play in broadening the perspective on reality and breaking the dominance of biased images of society. Change is also a process of learning<sup>9</sup>, that history is plural and this must be done from an early age. One of the goals repeatedly stated is not to teach 'citizenship' in schools but 'global citizenship'. This should contribute to the image of Rotterdam as an inclusive city.

### ***Not without obligation, the burden of change***

None of this goes without effort. Just as discrimination is an assault on the moral order, talking about it always runs the risk of reproducing the negative images of that order. The burden lies at the intersection of 'Not without obligation' and 'Identity' in Figure 2. Talking does not simply lead to

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<sup>9</sup> Knowledge/learning is the key concept between the themes 'intended interventions' and 'tools and conditions for change'

change. This also requires restoration of dignity. Not just getting a place, but recognition of what went wrong, what was done wrong and restoration of human relationships and dignity. Witnessing what one has experienced or seen is not a matter of course. Teaching bystanders, to stand up to the dominant norm and break the silence, positively valuing this behaviour and absolving those who do so, must become a strong and new social norm. Whistleblowers deserve protection. It requires courage, persistence, resilience and capacity for incassation, patience and sufficient skills and knowledge to counter both manifestations of discrimination and resistance to change. Participants want to see restoration of dignity more widely established in society, and therefore do not just focus 'upwards' to the layers of authority (linking), but want their efforts to have an effect in society. People seem to want to see the desired change not only as a political change, but also as a cultural one, in society itself. It might be a suggestion to call this a process of deepening, as an alternative for Linking in Putnam's model.

### ***Knot of change***

The communities themselves need to take responsibility, both for their process of empowerment and for promoting other images that defuse prejudices and motivate connection. "You have to challenge yourself to become a better you": not discriminate against each other, examine one's own prejudices, increase knowledge, communicate personally and dare to be vulnerable. Finding the other person important enough to show your own pain even where you think the other person had a role in it.

This is not to say that communities see themselves as the knot of change. Discrimination and racism are a social and societal problem and it is the local authorities that, according to the participants, should take moral responsibility both for showing the way and setting a good example, and for sanctioning violations of rules, norms and laws. The Rotterdam Beyond Discrimination project is largely focused on this. Language is seen as a crucial factor in this by the participants, both deconstructing prejudiced language and also creating and finding new language that represents reality from the point of view of the ones who are affected by discrimination and racism. In this, the creation of safe spaces is considered important where new language can be written that provides words to a social and personal reality that has remained invisible until then.

### ***Institutions and preconditions***

Finally, reference is also made to the social middle ground: agencies, institutions, employers and employees, etc., important players who can support the implementation of new policies and serve as levers for social change. The agenda tries to mobilise those parties. However, it also warns against this civil society solutions, which as a 'social fabric softener' so often tries to streamline processes of change according to its own pre-formulated objectives and procedures<sup>10</sup>. The change process should not be made dependent on policy officers and scientists who alienate it from the people it concerns. "I want to be in the process. I am not a guinea pig," one of the participants warned the moderators during the bridging phase. White privilege resists change and addressing that resistance effectively requires long-term investment.

## **2.6 Social capital as folded object**

The dialogue in the bridging phase placed people in a social order and historical lineage ('boundedness') in which interrelationships between persons, groups, communities, genders, ages, etc, started to matter. This brought out the moral aspects of interrelation in which identities, 'who

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<sup>10</sup> 'Institutions and preconditions for change' are the key concepts between the themes of 'power/impotence' and 'conditions and instruments' (Figure 2)

you are' and 'how you relate to other people', are at stake<sup>11</sup>. The dialogue became an 'experience of understanding' in which positions and contributions demand interpretation as Van Tongeren (1990) explains, in which contexts matter. The context in which this takes place can be interpreted as an arena in which people/groups/parties influence each other, compete for meanings and for control or hegemony (De Ruiter, 2000; Das, 2011; Beijers, 2015). This implies not only struggle, but also solidarity and innovation.

Participants expressed that the conversations are embedded in a context of defining control, influence and history (cf. M'charek, 2014; Van Oorschot, 2014). The bonding phase refers to 'the system' as the set of prevailing images and norms expressed in the practices of (social) institutions and agencies in Dutch society. It is the 'world of ideas', as Çankaya (2022) describes it, reproduced daily in the images created of people and the way they are treated. This practice affirms one's own dominance and exaltation over the Other (Kerboua, 2016; Valk, 2012). M'charek's (2014) notion of the 'folded object' is helpful here in exposing that world. Folded objects are objects that carry their history of intertwining times and places folded within themselves:

'the essence of the folded object [...] lies in the intricate ways in which it gathers heterogeneous spaces and temporalities together' (2014: 33).

In order to understand whether Putnam's conception of social capital and this conversation about discrimination and racism are valid as a guiding principle for a more effective approach, it is necessary to examine the concept in this context, and that is what the participant, who addressed the absence of the white perspective, did (cf. Van Oorschot, 2014). For her, this absence was unbearable and she saw only one solution, to further avoid confronting it herself and leave.

Following M'charek's words: what other time and space (than the here and now) lies folded into the notion of social capital and the conversation in this project, and what becomes visible as participants unfold this in the process of bonding, bridging and linking? The related questions are: "Where and how was this object made? In what precise ways did times and places become intertwined? But also: how does it make its history invisible, and where does it reveal something of its own history?" (Van Oorschot, 2014:305).

### ***Here and now and there and then versus the pragmatics of human communication***

What time and space is locked in the way people talk to each other?

Social capital was assessed by asking about the growth of mutual contacts, increase in trust (reciprocity), increase in knowledge and skills, shared values and norms and trust in the authorities involved. In the context of the project, the Rotterdam municipality, one of the initiators held up to participants:

"(...) Now (is) the time for change. The rationale behind this project lies in the very persistence of the problem. We are looking for a more effective approach. It concerns the groups that experience the highest level of discrimination in Rotterdam. (...) We want to change the images, through this mutual conversation. And that should get spin-off to the city. It's an oil slick that's getting bigger. For that, communication is a challenge. We want to

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<sup>11</sup> This is in line with Verkuyten's (2015) definition of identity: '*Social identities (...) involve categories of people and the characteristics associated with those categories. (...) Membership of a particular category or group is your particular identity. That membership is not superficial or non-committal, but says something about the kind of person you are. It has identity meaning and it is shared with others. Through that membership, you are bound and connected to others. It involves characteristics that place you socially, give you a position in the world.*' (Verkuyten, 2015:28)

make a video. Think about whether you want to show yourself to the city. Bring a positive image to the city!"

Following Putnam's work, the pragmatic aspects of human communication seem to be the focus here, as a lever for change. In assessing the persistence of the problem, the participants and the Rotterdam municipality seem to agree. However, insights differ on how to explain this. According to the Rotterdam Municipality, the key lies in the momentum, now in this project, and in the erroneous perception and poor communication. The participants however point to the historical sources of the problem, power differences, the idea of superiority locked up in discrimination and racism and the inaccessibility of 'the white man'. In the bonding phase made frequent references to the history of domination, exploitation, violence and genocide, as experienced in slave trade and slavery, pogroms and the Holocaust, Orientalism and white colonisation. The argument was that participants carry with them not only that memory of 'then' and 'there', but also the negative consequences in personal experience, in social relations and social structure that they still see and experience today.

### ***The boundaries of rationality***

The dialogue is not just rational. More often, people spoke or reacted from emotion or from unconscious images or harm they had suffered. Several participants talk about the impact of the project: they lie awake because of it, call each other for mutual support, or ask for aftercare. This shows, among other things, that participants are dealing with experiences of violence rather than transactions, which is what Putnam talks about. "I see a lot of anger," says one of the participants, and that anger defines the conversation and the possibilities of starting to relate to the dominant perspective and coming to equality. The project aims to do just that, but the desired dialogue requires some form of rehabilitation (of honour) before it can be established in an open way, as described in the anti-discrimination agenda. And that does not provide enough relief. The anger is inscribed in the bodies of participants from which it cannot simply be rationalised away. Inequality makes participants vulnerable. At the same time, it is constantly reiterated that examining one's own gut feelings and having to bear testimony to them again and again is hard emotional labour. It reinscribes the experience of humiliation and violence, in the body, in the mind and in experience. This is certainly the case when those experiences, as Wekker (2015) mentions, stand in the light of a dominant cultural archive that is folded into the social and societal discourse and is so poorly influenceable. Participants describe several examples of encounters they had that subsequently did not lead to positive and relevant action from 'the white wall', as it is called. Changes are perceived as cosmetic.

The white perspective is also not based on rational choices, sometimes on ignorance and lack of knowledge, but also on perpetuation of power, not even by expressing it, but, it is regularly heard, remaining silent and not protesting against forms of discrimination when they are seen. This white perspective materialises into the 'political (extreme) right'. Participants see this as a dangerous development that puts the communities involved in this project at risk. Explicit racism, anti-Semitism and Muslim discrimination seem to be becoming increasingly salient and the beliefs of a broad layer of the population seem to be moving in this direction.



### ***The moral aspects of communication***

What other powers and influences are identified in the conversations? Regularly 'the municipality'<sup>12</sup> is mentioned, not only as a source of discrimination, but also as a guiding and leading government from which moral leadership is expected, which can enforce and facilitate innovation and must enforce justice. The message is that the government behaves too much as a bystander. The bridging phase also points out the *facilitators*<sup>13</sup>, who are bystanders (no ④ in Figure 2: overlap between themes of power and impotence and instruments and conditions) who do not always intervene when something offensive happens, or themselves show insufficient connection to the symbolic reality of a community. For example, project organisers are held accountable for not providing proper meals (halal, kosher, vegetarian) and not taking (community specific) celebrations into account when planning meetings.

"The lack of sensitivity towards strangers in society is the source of discrimination." according to one of the participants. It concerns choices made for those involved. He continued: "In fact, I have no confidence that this kind of initiatives are really effective". The quote makes clear that the mutual distance between various identities and the constant presence of the dominant norm group that determines everything within which this debate is conducted with each other is perceived as suffocating.

Facilitators and intermediaries are criticised for not paying enough attention to the process and being too focused on the outcome in which they themselves have an interest ('the project must succeed'). But the process itself is also a result according to the participants from the communities. It leads to knowing each other better, to empowerment, to broadening of support and to developing hope. Power often feels like impotence in the face of forces beyond one's control that determine what one is, should be or do as a citizen, or from which one cannot escape.

It is also asked several times why the Black, Jewish and Muslim communities were chosen and not, for example, the Asian community which has faced exceptionally frequent discrimination in the year of the project's launch. The three communities that did get invited are so different that they are not always easy to compare, according to the participants themselves. The definitions of the communities are disputed. Participants question the choice and assume it was imposed by the EU's Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme, which is funding the project. In whose interest then, one wonders.

The loaded meaning of words is pointed out. They can be perceived as alienating and representations of the dominant view of the community. "We need to deconstruct language and find new words that better represent our experience and knowledge" one of the participants said. Participants in the conversation also do not always know each other's history and, moreover, note that it needs to be retold, from the point of view of the people who were affected by it. An example mentioned is the importance of the contribution of Moroccan soldiers to the liberation of the South of The Netherlands in World War II. This could well be given more attention at commemorations, to do justice to the Moroccan Dutch and to honour their fallen as well.

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<sup>12</sup> More often the question is asked by employees of the Rotterdam municipality what is meant by 'the municipality': the administration, the politicians, the civil servants? When police and the judiciary are also subsumed under these, they find that they are not. Designations such as 'municipality' and 'administration' seem to refer to the shapeless power that participants find difficult to influence and cannot sufficiently rely on as guardians of equal treatment.

<sup>13</sup> In this project, these are RADAR, Art1., municipality of Rotterdam and the European Union who organise, guide and describe the process, make it financially possible and are intermediaries to other external parties.

The participants do not want to take reality as it presents itself for granted. They also experience this in relation to the media and social media. These are perceived as amoral, sensationalist and uncritical, channelling images that are aimed at nothing but click-bait: a message wrapped in sensation or juice to attract customers. There seems to be no authority that monitors or can monitor this.

Participants questioned the conversation itself of the bridging phase because qualifying and contextualising information seemed to disappear that turned their complex reality into flat facts. When not only what is said, but also what is (not) allowed or possible to be said comes into focus, the conversation itself is in question.

**Summarizing:** What lies folded into the notion of social capital and the conversation in this project, and what becomes visible as participants unfold this in the process of bonding, bridging and linking? The participants point to the historical sources of the problem, power differences, the idea of superiority locked up in discrimination and racism and the inaccessibility of 'the white man'. They talk about racism and discrimination as an experience of trespassing bodily, psychological and symbolic violence and question the rationality of White dominance, and finally they question the presuppositions of the dialogue itself as organized in the project Rotterdam beyond discrimination.

The hesitations and questions raised by participants echo those raised in the literature on the relationship between social capital, diversity and social inequality. Claridge (2022), for example, sees social capital theory and subsequent practice primarily as a corrective strategy, seeking to correct anti-social ways of thinking. Hallberg & Lund (2005) and Hero (2004) see in the social in Putnam's work mainly an implicit white perspective and a penchant for tradition. The latter can also be seen in other authors such as Arneil (2006), McClain (2004) and Wong (2007). Structural forms of inequality as identified in the bonding phase by the three Rotterdam communities are, according to Larsen et al. (2004), a critical factor in accessing social capital. If that inequality concerns ethnicity, Hero (2004) notes in his research that growth of social capital rarely benefits ethnic minorities in society. He adds that bridging is often overestimated, because in a society where differences between population groups are very large, it mainly strengthens the position of the dominant community. Putnam, according to Arneil (2006), upholds a static view of society that overlooks the dynamics of a diversifying society and an eroding welfare state in which large groups are falling behind. The image embedded in Putnam's theory of the rationally choosing and acting citizen, who wants to stand up for his own interests, is under pressure because inequality faced is confirmed in mutual communication and not only utility-oriented rational behaviour is leading but also emotions as Tiemeijer et al (2009) make clear. Wong (2007) investigated deployment of a social capital approach among the poorest immigrants in Hong Kong and, like Sunier (2009), finds that the assumption that those people lack social capital is incorrect. Their capital remains unseen and impossible to develop and thus cannot counterbalance dominant norms and lines of communication. He argues for more appreciation of the (new) capital these communities represent (Wong, 2007).

Arneil (2006) points to the responsibility to bridge the gap between groups disadvantaged in the old economy and the demands made on them in the new (neo-liberal) economy. The downsized welfare state may seem attractive in times of prosperity, but it comes with a price of division. Social capital itself is not value-free, but a concept that risks leaving the moral order untouched by the way it is defined.

## 2.7 Conclusion

There was a bridging effect in this phase of the project, people engaging with each other and exploring shared experiences and interests, outside the boundaries of their own community. In the conversations, a transitional space emerged that offered insight into new ways of thinking, new

feelings and behaviour, and the emergence of confidence to approach other people outside the group in a new way" (cf. Vanderhallen, 2016). Participants' appreciation for this is barely satisfactory. If this is disappointing, it is largely explained by the hesitation that people still have and the lack of time to really get to know each other.

***First research question was "Has the process of bonding, bridging and linking resulted in a shared anti-discrimination agenda. If so, how did this develop and what is the outcome?"***

In the Bridging phase, an anti-discrimination agenda was actually created around concepts such as negative perceptions, power and control, dialogue and restoration of dignity and the need to emerge in a positive way and 'celebrate' different identities. Change is brought about through emancipation, and must be supported by a civil service that sanctions transgressions and facilitates development. The draft agenda was filled based on the input provided by participants in the bonding phase and on their focal points. This draft was then discussed with the participants in subgroups and in the project group. Following this, a first draft of the agenda was prepared for the linking phase that focuses on four social domains: (1) government and police; (2) media and social media; (3) education; (4) the socio-cultural sector and self-organisations. The agenda is an important outcome of this phase. However, when asked to continue talking about it, participants also wanted to give space to the process of mutual understanding, more than sharpening and elaborating on that shared agenda, and also focused on culture change in society.

In this phase, identities were explored among other things by discussing what is meant by White and by Black. This showed that identities are not based on fixed biological, geographical or phenotypic givens and are not static, but contextual, embedded and dynamic. That fact in itself enables bridging between communities, as well as connection and change. Based on the evaluation and recording of interactions during and after the meetings, the conclusion is that a (fragile) process of bridging took place. The context of power and control did not always make the conversation natural. This prompted an examination of the White perspective, as a present absentee. In the hegemony of the White perspective, language and the need to deconstruct language plays an important role. For example, it was said, "strip 'Black' of its negative connotation and learn to use other words" (not 'black riding', but 'free travel') and "don't talk about the Islamic community as if it were one uniform body, but seek nuance". Writing an agenda is not linear stacking of experiences and needs of different communities, but deconstructing the privileges of White Others that present themselves in everyday life.

***Second research question for this phase was whether the process of bonding, bridging and linking resulted in an increase in trust (responsiveness, competence, reliability) in local authorities.***

Increased trust, besides better advocacy, is one of the desired effects of social capital growth. In the evaluation, participants were asked whether their trust in the local authority had grown? They rated it as inadequate (4.2/10). However, the local government did not yet play a substantial role as an interlocutor at this stage.

However, the concept of social capital was problematised in this phase and discussed as a 'folded object', positioned not only in the here and now, but also carrying time and space that remains invisible but is felt.

This contrasts with the social capital that the project's design and approach assesses in terms of all kinds of pragmatic aspects of interpersonal communication, such as taking responsibility, good will, daring to trust, and positive communication and opening up paths. These do not do justice to the multi-layered and stratified interpersonal relationships experienced by the participants. Historical injustice, inequality and inequity, traumatisation and the persistence of injustice, play a role in this as

has already emerged in the bonding phase. It is the voices of the past that shape the present and the voices of the present that reflect the past, making it not natural to establish relationships with each other in the bridging phase without an examination of history and without the rebuilding of trust that is needed. These histories are carried by participants from all three communities.

In the conversations among participants, the possibilities of social capital were evaluated in terms of the ingrained notion of superiority that people have faced for years and the anger and pain that results, the persistence of this phenomenon and the reproduction of inequality. Power often makes itself felt as impotence in the face of forces beyond one's control that determine what one is, should be or do as a citizen, or from which one cannot escape. These are choices that are made on behalf of those involved, and one feels them clearly. In a divided society, it is not adequate to want to create a culturally homogeneous community, but rather to focus on reciprocity of giving and receiving. Increasing and using social capital is not a responsibility that rests solely on the shoulders of the communities concerned ('You should be willing'), but is also a task for local authorities, according to the participants. Diversity is not a problem but an opportunity for a new coexistence, in which people need the Other to define themselves (Marotta, 2002; Sunier, 2009). If one is indifferent to the Other and can no longer see it as friend or foe, this disrupts the notion of unity and community to which Putnam aspires so much. This leads to 'existential homelessness' in which institutions or governments no longer take responsibility for the ethical foundations of community and society (Baumann, in Marotta, 2002). Urban coexistence is stripped of its moral aspects. That is the insight this project wants to give the institutions in Rotterdam. Baumann thinks dialogue is a solution to save the public/political freedom of citizens (right to individuality and diversity) and promote moral responsibility. Levy's (2020) stresses dialogue as a source of knowledge and moral responsibility.

The Putnamian logic of mutual conversation and communication is of limited tenability if no account is taken of the burden on participants that they have not experienced 'discrimination' but have been touched by experiences of violence that manifest across generations. Then a huge claim is placed on them and dialogue is unlikely to emerge. Where structural inequality is at stake, more friction is needed to bring about change. Power is not easy to pinpoint in this because it disguises and hides. You have to look for it and pull it forward. In the conversations, this happened, among other things, in the discussions about the definition of identities (Black, Islamic and Jewish) and whether these are White colonial classifications. In this part of the project, this was referred to as 'unfolding', after M'charek (2014) and Van Oorschot (2014), as a strategy to work on increasing social capital and combating discrimination and racism, to connect with the participants' world of experience, to arrive at a good problem definition and effective and sustainable solutions.

### 3. LINKING

Linking is a differentiation of bridging. "Bridging (...) involves relationships of respect and reciprocity between people who know they are not equal in socio-demographic (or social identity) terms (differences in age, ethnic group, for example)" (Johnson, 2016; Szreter & Woolcock, 2004). Linking refers to the connections and relationships between individuals or organisations with different levels of authority or power" (Johnson, 2016:61). Linking is on the one hand a measure of mutual trust and contacts and interactions with others with authority or power, but also (in this context) a measure of the (implemented) willingness of those authorities to engage in the conversation, and their recognisability and accessibility to the community (Johnson, 2016). Social capital in this context consists of a composite of learning effects, the mutual trust people express, the contacts they have made and the quality of relationships, and the authorities' willingness to work towards a society based on equity for citizens, in addition to dialogue and co-production to effectively combat discrimination and exclusion. The aim of the meeting was to encourage the linking process on the basis of the agenda drawn up in the bridging phase and arrive at a joint relevant and valid action agenda against discrimination and exclusion for Rotterdam.

In the period from October 2022 to January 2023 four linking meetings were organised, plus a preparing meeting with the ambassadors<sup>14</sup>. Based on the results of the bonding and bridging meetings people from the Black, Jewish and Islamic communities in Rotterdam had engaged in group discussions about their experiences with discrimination and racism. During the linking meetings the ambassadors of "Rotterdam beyond discrimination" engaged in a dialogue with managers, policy makers and professionals from institutions in Rotterdam in the field of four domains. (1) municipality and police; (2) media; (3) education and schooling; (4) social and cultural institutions. The final open research question answered in the linking phase of the project is:

*"Did the process of bonding, bridging and linking result in the development of greater community involvement and influence in effective anti-discrimination policies:*

- i. A strong network of key people from the communities concerned and from local government authorities and other institutions and*
- ii. Key people from the communities are given more opportunities to participate in decision-making processes, in sustainable information positions."*

#### 3.1 results

The answers to the research question are based on the evaluation forms filled in by the ambassadors and the external participants at the end of the linking phase. In total about 200 participants, including the ambassadors, engaged in the dialogues. The ambassadors shared their experiences of discrimination and racism and the managers, policy makers and professionals could also share their experience and ideas.

***"Did the process of bonding, bridging and linking result in the development of greater community involvement and influence in effective anti-discrimination policies, through a strong network of key people from the communities concerned and from local government authorities and other institutions.***

The meetings seem to have met the intended objectives of linking, especially where this is the (tentative) beginning of building mutual trust, establishing contact and growing reciprocity. There is a willingness of the external participants to work together and also a need to get input, as people see

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<sup>14</sup> Participants chose this title at the end of the bridging phase.

all kinds of obstacles in their own practice that stand in the way of effectively addressing discrimination and exclusion. In general, the meetings did not increase competences according to the external participants, but they did raise awareness.

The results do not fully meet the predetermined standard (75% of participants should perceive the change as improved ( $\geq 6/10$ )), but the project management has set the bar high for itself. People generally approached the standard very closely. Based on the meetings, the action agenda was adjusted.

***"Did the process of bonding, bridging and linking result in the development of greater community involvement and influence in effective anti-discrimination policies, through key people from the communities are given more opportunities to participate in decision-making processes, in sustainable information positions."***

The image that emerges from the data is that the ambassadors see the most important growth in their personal development and development as a (new) group with similar experiences of discrimination and exclusion and as a community of like-minded people. The ambassadors feel empowered by this project. They see that the process of change among their discussion partners, especially the municipality, has yet to begin and do not hide their disappointment about this. However, the negative assessment about the lack of growth in the municipality should be nuanced if we consider that the ambassadors do feel that their commitment to the municipality's efforts has grown, and that the growth in trust in society as a whole, is assessed positively. This reinforces the perception that people see the municipality not so much as guardian of a just and equal society, but increasingly as interlocutor to work towards it with united efforts. Not without reason, then, the ambassadors ask that the conversations as held at all stages of this conversation take place more often. From this, a new image of the municipality seems to be emerging, changing from guardian and administrator to implementer, contractor and provider of services.

Did the linking phase meet the set criteria? As a standard for this, we use the criterion that 75% of participants should perceive the change as improved ( $\geq 6/10$ ). Based on this, the growth of social capital (83%  $\geq 6$ ) meets the predefined criteria, as does empowerment (79%  $\geq 6$ ) and the organisation of this phase (84%  $\geq 6$ ). This is just short of the growth of trust in society (74%  $\geq 6$ ) and not at all of the linkage effect (64%  $\geq 6$ ). The criterion is not an issue for assessing the importance of financial compensation for participating in these talks, 68.4% of participants consider it to be positively important. Negative outliers (less than half of the ambassadors think there is positive contribution) concern the extent to which there were agreements and the assessment of the role of the municipality in the organisation. Positive outliers (more than 90% of the ambassadors think there is positive contribution) are the growth of the ambassadors' feeling that they feel more involved in the government's efforts to better combat discrimination and exclusion (94.7%), about the discussion management (89.5%) and about the organisation of this phase (location, catering and the role of Radar (100%, 100% and 94% respectively).

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# Rotterdam voorbij discriminatie

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