Final evaluation report bonding, bridging and linking meetings Weighing the results of the Rotterdam beyond discrimination project

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Colofon

The Rotterdam beyond Discrimination project is a collaboration of:

Gemeente Rotterdam   Antidiscriminatiebureau RADAR   Kenniscentrum Art.1

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Weighing the results of the Rotterdam beyond discrimination project

Summarizing the evaluations

In this project the concept of social capital is used as baseline of a methodology for change, that involved three phases: (1) bonding; (2) bridging and (3) linking, following the properties of social capital as conceptualized by Robert Putnam (Putnam, 1993, 1995; Szreter & Woolcock, 2004). It is important to note however that Putnam never used the concept as such, but just as a descriptive measure of social cohesion within the community.

Data are collected in focus group sessions, led by a moderator opening with broad questions and slowly focusing on the topic of interest. In the project three bonding meetings per community, five bridging meetings for participants from the three communities together, and four linking meetings were organized (total of 18 meetings). In the bonding and bridging phase aggregated knowledge from previous meetings was fed back to the participants by giving presentations and through memos. Every meeting finished with a round of 'what do you take away from this meeting'-feedback. Results were recorded as evaluation of participant satisfaction. Every phase (see table 1) concluded with an evaluation questionnaire measuring general appreciation of the program, building of social capital and satisfaction with the organization of the meeting.

The items in the questionnaire are scored on a five point scale (agree completely-almost completely-neutral-not at all-totally not) in the bonding and bridging phase. The appreciation of the ambassadors in the linking phase was scored on a ten-point scale. The scores are converted to a grade on a scale from 1-10 and the average mark for each category of assessment was evaluated against the criterion of success of 75 % of participants who are of the opinion that the topic improved positively, based on the meetings (grades ≥6). In words appreciation scores are rated as negative (≤5), neutral (≥5), positive/sufficient (≥6), good (≥7), very good (≥8) and excellent (≥9).

	Bonding	Bridging	Linking	Overall
Ambassadors	3	1	1	1
Linking partners			4	
Conference participants				1

Table 1: Number of evaluation moments per participant, per project phase

Questionnaires were distributed in total 11 evaluation moments in the period between October 2021 and May 2023. To achieve maximum coverage questionnaires were handed over personally just before the end of the meetings with pencils and participants were explicitly invited to fill them in. The meeting(s) were evaluated on:

1. Number of participants
2. Overall appreciation (meeting the expectations and objectives; relevance to personal situation; matching prior knowledge; participation value)
3. Increase of social capital (growth of trust in cooperation with other participants, increase in contacts increase in competences). In the final phase the making of appointments with linking partners and the prospect of real change was added in to the assessment of growth of social capital.
4. Growth of trust in local authorities (since bridging phase)
5. Quality of organisation of the meeting(s) (venue; catering; moderation)
6. Evaluation by external participants (overall appreciation; linking effect; organisation)

7. Criteria for success: the initiators of the project set a predetermined criterion of 75% of positive appreciation. In this report we evaluate if this criterion is met in the different phases of the project.

1. Number of participants

The process started with fifty participating ambassadors. For multiple reasons 25 of them have resigned and didn't show up anymore. Most of them were invited several times to join again, by mailing them, calling them, informing and inviting them every meeting. For some this was an incentive to actually come back and join the conversations again. Others however apparently lacked the motivation or possibilities to engage in the project, or had other priorities. Meetings were held from 18:00 h. till 21:00 h. for many of the ambassadors this followed a busy day at work or at home. Several of the ambassadors also mentioned that the meetings required great emotional investment. Probably this explains part of the absence. In the process one ambassador discussed her dissatisfaction in the group - she could no longer agree with the design of the project - and then dropped out.

In the beginning of the project team members had a personal meeting with all candidates to inform them and to get a personal consent for their participation and processing of their personal data. Based on repeated invitations after being absent and the conversations the community-experts had with ambassadors the rate of drop-outs is considered a natural course and within limits of expectations.

In the evaluation of the final phase the ambassadors were asked to indicate if they thought vacancy fees (60 € per meeting) are relevant in the future for participating in the a Rotterdam beyond discrimination platform. For the respondents from the Islamic community this is important (7,6/10) and to a lesser degree also for representatives from the other communities 6,17/10 on average). It is clear that the ambassadors don't consider these vacancy fees irrelevant, on average 68.4% of them consider them important (≥6/10). This aligns with the need they vocalized several times to appreciate their commitment and contribution and the value this has not only for themselves, but also for improving the social capital of the city as a whole. Their contribution is not without obligation.

A total of 100 people responded to the invitation and participated in the final phased as a linking partner from four domains, municipality and police; media; education and finaly sociocultural and community specific grassroots organisations. Eighty of these external participants submitted an evaluation form.

2. Overall appreciation

Ambassadors' ratings for the overall program varied from good to poor to adequate at the different stages of the project and seem to reflect the challenges they faced in the field of interpersonal and group dynamics in the process.

Based on the ratings the bonding phase could be seen as an awareness raising phase. This was specifically for the Islamic community (9,2/10). What stands out is the fact that in the meetings, people are (or have become) aware that discrimination has become part of everyday experience to such an extent that they have come to experience it as 'normal' and almost don't 'see' it anymore as abberant, even though it should not be tolerated. Sharing experiences and mutual recognition helped to raise awareness of this, and Islamophobia and discrimination against the Muslim community rose high on the agenda of many and was considered a very urgent problem. The same

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sense of urgency was seen in participants form the Black community who appreciated the meeting(s) 8,5/10. In both communities qualitative comments support this. Overall appreciation was also good in the Jewish community (7,8/10) but the meetings apparently met expectations to a lesser degree (7/10) than in the other communities. The overall average appreciation of the meetings was rated as very good (8,5/10).

The bridging phase can be seen as the phase of overcoming differences, that came at the cost of much effort. The overall appreciation drops to 5,95/10 on average. Only the Jewish community is slightly on the positive end of the scale. Regarding relevance of the meetings, in their comments on the ratings, the ambassadors mainly point to mutual relationships. It is the process of interpersonal and intergroup growth that stands out in the qualitative data: seeing each other's pain and experience, sharing, experiencing the power of words, seeing vulnerability of others. It is experienced as deepening knowledge and contributing to mutual understanding. To a lesser extent it is seen as relevant for combatting discrimination out there. Stressed during the

	Bonding	Bridging	Linking	Av.
Islamic	9,2	5,83	7,6	7,5
Jewish	7,8	6,61	6,83	7,1
Black	8,5	5,42	6,28	6,7
Av.	*8,5*	*5,95*	*6,71*	**7,0**

Table 2: overall appreciation (on a scale of 1-10)

meetings is the fact that discrimination between the members of this new community should be excluded. A linear process is not seen. Focus differs from bonding and mutual recognition, to learning and finding out who the others standing on your side are, and if they can be trusted. The final evaluation meeting reported that it was felt that there was not enough time in this phase to exchange knowledge about each other's community and history and experiences of racism and discrimination.

In the Linking phase the overall appreciation rises again. On average the appreciation is 6,71/10. The ambassadors from the Islamic community are most positive (7,60/10) about the meetings compared to the Jewish (6,83/10) and the Black community (6,28/10).

3. Increase of social capital

It is striking that the rating for increase of social capital in the bonding phase in all three communities is moderate: 7,1/10 on average. People seem not to express confidence readily that they can reverse discrimination and racism with people from their own community. On the other hand, it was also said that there was not enough time to engage properly with each other and that people would like the bonding meetings to continue. This is not to say that there are no bonding effects, because it is precisely from the qualitative data and feedback per meeting that mutual trust does appear. The issue at hand is generally considered very relevant and it is also made clear that people are facing a 'white wall' that does not give in easily. Low trust can also express the powerlessness one experiences in the face of this (segregation). It is regularly expressed in all three communities that anti-Semitism, anti-Black racism, and Islamophobia and Orientalism already have a long history and are not easily eradicated.

In the bridging phase, ratings for growth of social capital drop slightly to 5,95/10 on average, which is somewhat understandable given the challenges of discussing situations of fragility with people outside one's own community. They are still positive however. Participants from the Muslim community are slightly more positive about social capital growth than those from the other two communities. At the same time, Jewish and Black community participants are less confident

	Bonding	Bridging	Linking (process)	Linking (result)	Av.
Islamic	8,0	6,59	7,65	6,76	7,22
Jewish	6,0	5,63	6,77	5,70	6,03
Black	7,4	5,76	6,15	5,80	6,28
Av.	*7,1*	*5,99*	*6,85*	*6,03*	**6,49**

Table 3: increase social capital (on a scale of 1-10)

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about their increase of trust in the Islamic participants. Only 40% of them think there is positive growth (>6/10), while trust in the Black community has grown according to 71.4% of Jewish and Muslim community participants. This could be explained by the fact that during the bridging meetings, members of the Black community presented issues and questions that required relatively more time and were discussed in depth. This factor focuses on the social qualities of the bridging process (mutual trust, growing contacts, competences and readiness for working together), and based on the qualitative evaluations one could say that other ambassadors felt that issues from the Black community dominated some of the meetings, at the cost of their contribution.

All communities value the learning effect (growth in knowledge and readiness to address authorities) of the bridging meetings as high. This supports the idea that the bridging was a learning phase and one in which tentative trust grew between people from different communities. This is supported by the final evaluation in which participants from all communities phrased their need to have more time to learn to know each other better in the bridging, similar as they did in the bonding phase.
In the bridging phase one participant dropped out because the white perspective did not come into the picture according to her, defined as the perspective of "the absent present" (M'charek, 2014). The participant stated, "You are asking me to play a positive role, but that is only possible if the oppressor recognises that he is the instigator". This implies this participant didn't want presence of the White point of view, but recognition of wrongdoing in the first place.

In the final phase (linking) social capital was assessed on process aspects such as: daring to be vulnerable; equality and reciprocity in the conversations; improved contacts with peers; improved coordination; and increased knowledge and grasp of the situation. The appreciation for the growth of these aspects of social capital was comparable to the bonding phase (6,85/10). Again the ambassadors from the Islamic community were most positive (7,65/10).

The ambassadors were less positive about the outcomes of the linking phase. This was measured by asking about their appreciation for the prospect of real change, being part of a community of change, increase in trust in the municipality, an assessment of growth in understanding on the part of the authorities for the situation of the ambassadors and finally a rating of the extent to which agreements were reached as a result of the linking phase. Ambassadors of all communities were less positive about this aspect of linking, with a rating of 6,03/10 on average. Most negative they were about the increase in trust in the municipality (5/10) and the extent of reaching agreements (5,5/10).

4. **Increase of trust in local authorities as an effect**

Also at play in assessing the social capital of a community is the confidence one has that the process will contribute to local authorities' serious and sustainable commitment to fight discrimination and racism. Did that confidence grow in the bonding, bridging and linking process? To ensure safety in the bonding phase representatives of the municipality were not present in the meetings. And trust in local authorities was not assessed. This was a mistake since it could have served as a baseline measurement. In the bridging phase the municipality was present in every meeting.

In this bridging phase the ambassadors rate the growth of confidence as insufficient (4.2/10). The local authorities did not yet play a substantial role at this stage and were present for the first time, either as an observer of the conversation or as a discussion leader in a subgroup, but not as a discussion partner. The fact that trust in this case returns at a slow pace is certainly also due to the fact that local authorities are seen not only as a solution but also as a source of the problem of discrimination and racism.

In the linking phase the ambassadors were divide over the increase in trust in the municipality, but

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the negative rating declined and overall the ambassadors appreciated the municipality relatively less negative than in the phase before (5/10). This can be considered a positive development. Increasing trust in municipality was one of the desired outcomes throughout the project as a whole.

To avoid the potentially negative effect of the generally perceived gap between local administration and citizens and to broaden the view on trust in unbiased justice, we also asked about trust in society in this final phase. Trust in society was operationalized by asking about assessment of (1) growth of trust in justice as a norm for Rotterdam; (2) assessment of being put in a privileged position within the community; (3) growth of involvement in municipal efforts aimed at combating discrimination. The Islamic ambassadors are the most positive about this (7,87/10). They feel involved, feel part of a new community and feel privileged. This involvement is also rated positively by the ambassadors of the Jewish and the Black community (7,33 & 7,21/10). The ambassadors apparently believe that they became part of a municipal process but are hesitant about the involvement of their counterpart.

The ambassadors from the Islamic community believe that they have ended up in a privileged position (8.25/10), while this is the case to a more limited extent for the Jewish and Black communities (5.43 and 5.79/10). This is important given the fact from research including (Wong, 2007) that upward movement in one's position can become an interest in itself, which can provide a secondary benefit (authority, financial benefits). This could actually pose a risk to social capital.

	Bonding	Bridging	Linking	*Av.*	Trust in society
Islamic	-	3,93	5,40	*4,66*	7,80
Jewish	-	4,29	5,17	*4,73*	7,33
Black	-	4,38	4,57	*4,47*	7,21
Av.	-	*4,20*	*5,04*	***4,62***	7,45

Table 4: trust in local authorities (on a scale of 1-10)

5. **Quality of organisation of the meeting(s)**

In the bonding phase the quality of organization is appreciated highly (8,6/10) and people encourage organizing this type of conversations within communities. It seems important that the participants can be together in a undisturbed and safe place in which the facilitators clearly structure the conversation and keep it focused.

Satisfaction with the facilitators role drops in the bridging phase. This can be understood since from then the conversations became more personal and sometimes tense. There also seems to be a tension between the process and the results in the conversations. One of the participants is explicit in noting that the process is sometimes too much driven towards results (by the facilitators), while at the same time there is a desire among the ambassadors for mutual acquaintance and contact and trust building. The qualitative data also point to this dilemma. Process factors most often mentioned are: listening to each other, discovering what one has in common (shared pain), learning to be able to see each other without discrimination and prejudice, daring to make yourself vulnerable, vulnerability and combativeness at the same time. This at least indicates that the organisers have initiated a process of bridging, but perhaps have not yet allowed it to develop to it's full extent and were focused too much on the agenda (their own agenda).

In the linking phase the appreciation for the quality of the organisation of the meeting by the ambassadors is good again (7,28/10). Radar scores a sufficient to good for its role, and so does the moderating of the conversation, venue and catering. The role of the municipality however did not meet expectations (4.87/10) and seems in line with the assessment of growth of trust asked about earlier. The black community is the most positive about this, in contrast to the Jewish

	Bonding	Bridging	Linking	*Av.*
Islamic	8,9	7,77	7,48	*8,05*
Jewish	8,8	7,14	7,57	*7,84*
Black	8,0	6,56	7,21	*7,26*
Av.	*8,6*	*7,16*	*7,28*	***7,72***

Table 5: appreciation for organisation (on a scale of 1-10)

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(4.86/10) and Islamic communities (3.5/10). An explanation seems to emerge from the qualitative data: There is disappointment about the lack of commitment. One of the comments: "At the Rotterdam municipality, discrimination on the working floor has not been discussed. And precisely there a lot of work has to be done".

6. Evaluation of the meetings according to external linking partners

A total of 80 external participants (linking partners) submitted an evaluation form. The four different groups of these participants (municipality and police, media, education and cultural institutions and self-organisations) broadly agree in their assessment of the linking phase. The overall rating is a 7.6 on a scale of 10, reflecting the average on all questions. In their appreciation of the meeting, the four groups broadly agreed: it is rated overall as good. All groups also agree in the observation that not enough concrete agreements were reached in the meetings.

In terms of the growth of social capital, most gains were seen in awareness of the issues (8.4/10) and slightly less in terms of trust in the ambassadors (7.0/10) and the extent to which people dared to be vulnerable themselves (7.1/10). This may be due to the fact that this was only a first meeting. The content of the evenings matched prior knowledge (7.8/10) and was found relevant (7.8/10) and people felt ready for the follow-up (7.6/10). This is not because people learned from the meetings (6.8/10) and the skills they gained (6.3/10), but because they made contact with the ambassadors (7.3/10), seem to be aware of the urgency of the issue (8.4/10) and the viciousness of their own practice (qualitative data) and are willing to follow up and take follow-up steps (7.8/10). Experiences of discrimination and their impact do not reach the working floor within institutions. The viciousness of policies is pointed out, and people ask for more and recurrent input to get the big slow mass of arbitrariness and ignorance among colleagues moving and bring about change. People also want to work on it and express a desire for follow-up or feedback (qualitative data). However, it did not come to concrete appointments in these meetings (4.4/10).

	Municipality	Media	Education	Sociocultural domain	Av.
Overall appreciation	7,66	7,53	8,52	7,59	*7,83*
Linking effect	6,72	6,95	7,28	6,28	*6,81*
Organisation	8,13	7,81	8,05	8,05	*8,01*
Av.	*7,50*	*7,43*	*7,95*	*7,31*	***7,55***

Table 6: appreciation linking partners (on a scale of 1-10)

Externals generally rated the organisation of the evening as good (8,1/10). Only the preparation was appreciated slightly less. People apparently did not always know what to expect, as also emerged from the qualitative data.

7. Do the results meet the criteria for success?

The standard for success used by the project initiators in their design is that 75% of the participants must believe that there has been positive growth/effect. This was translated into a rating of at least 6 on a scale of 1-10 on the project's distinct measurement points. This six-or-higher standard was used in all phases.

In the bonding phase, the relevance of the meetings and the learning effect they produce meet the standard: on average 87% of attendees rated those aspects with a rating of 6 or higher. For other aspects, such as the growth of social capital, the same does not apply, even on partial aspects. In the bridging phase, none of the evaluated aspects meet the standard. The linking phase is more successful: according to the ambassadors, the overall rating for the meetings meets the standard for success (81% ≥6), This also applies to the process side of the growth of social capital (growth of

mutual trust, daring to be vulnerable, growth of coordination, etc.) (77% ≥6), as well as the rating for the growth of trust in the fairness of society (75% ≥6) and the rating for organisation of the meetings (84% ≥6). Appreciation for the outcome of the linking phase does not meet the standard for success (66% ≥6). Negative peaks in that phase (less than half of ambassadors feel there was positive contribution) are the extent to which there were agreements and assessment of the role of the municipality in the organisation. Positive outliers (more than 90% of ambassadors feel there was positive contribution) are the ambassadors' growth in feeling more involved in the municipality's efforts to better combat discrimination and racism (94.7%), positive appreciation of the facilitatios (89.5%) and the organisation of the linking phase (location, catering and the role of RADAR (100%, 100% and 94% respectively).

A negative result (≤25% positive rating) concerns the rating for the growth of trust in the municipality in the bridging phase, which is positively rated by only 13.1% of the ambassadors.

For the external linking partners the meetings were successful in terms of their overall appreciation of the meetings. In particular the connection to prior knowledge and the contribution to their awareness of the issues stand out positively, respectively 84% and 88% ≥6. Regarding their outlook on the future, the external linking partners indicated that the meetings successfully contributed to their readiness to engage with the ambassadors (78% ≥6). Other aspects of developing a shared conversation base do not meet the criterion but are close to it, such as increasing trust and interpersonal contact (71% ≥6). Unfortunately, the same is not true for other aspects, such as contributing to the knowledge and skills of the external linking partners (59% ≥6) and making concrete follow-up appointments (31% ≥6). External linking partners agree witht the ambassadors on this aspect.

	Bonding	Bridging	Linking
Relevance of the meetings	√		
Learning effect	√		
Opportunity for personal input	√		
Meeting expectations	√		
Meeting goals	√		
More knowledge on common anti-discrimination strategy	√		√
Connection with prior situation	√		√
Connection with personal situation	√		√
Being part of new community	√		√
better contacts with peers			√
Dare to be vulnerable			√
More coordination fighting racism and discrimination			√
Feeling more involved in antidiscrimination policy			√
Appreciation of facilitators role	√	√	√
Venue	√	√	√
Catering	√	√	√
Organisation of meetings		√	√
Negative result: increase in trust in municipality			√

Table 7: successes according to the ambassadors (>75% positive)

Summarising: In general, the ambassadors consider the project successful because it fits their personal situation, contributes to the ambassadors' knowledge and is well structured. Results they see mainly in the personal development they have experienced among themselves as ambassadors as reflected, among other things, in growth of mutual trust, contact and coordination, more grip on their own situation and knowledge about (the benefits of) a joint approach. A third success is the growth of commitment to the municipality's efforts to address the issue of discrimination and racism. However, this contrasts with a fourth result namely the lack of trust of the ambassadors in their external linking partners, that these will treat them as equals and also lack of outlook on real change with strong agreements. These results were broadly confirmed in the final evaluation meeting with the ambassadors. There, it was explicitly requested that more attention be paid to the emotional burden of the ambassadors as a result of sharing their experiences of discrimination and racism and asked both for tighter guidance and for more flexibility and time in the process.

The initiators of the project did not make it easy for themselves to bring the project to a successful

end by setting the bar so high. This implicated that the approach during the course of the project in many respects was not successful by their own standards. That standard of 75% assessment of a positive impact is (>6), is set very sharply. If the norm is on a majority of participants (>50%) experiencing growth, then the approach has been successful on almost all counts and then only the several aspects of trust in the external linking partners was not successful. If the norm is set at a rating higher than or equal to five (≥5), the same applies. Where the result of the project cannot be called successful, at least they should be considered hopeful with a somewhat milder point of view.

8. **Final remarks**

The picture 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 interlocutors (the linking 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 government's efforts to fight discrimination and racism 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 a dialogue partner to work towards it with united efforts. Not without reason, then, the ambassadors ask that the conversations as they were held at all stages of this project to be continued. From this, a new image of municipality seems to be emerging, changing from guardian and administrator to implementer, contractor and provider of services.

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