

Social, cultural and economic capital in the integration of refugees - a case study from the Netherlands



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Abstract

Settling in a new country can be a great challenge for refugees and takes effort from both the refugees and the host-country. This article explores how social, cultural and economic capital influence the integration of refugees in the Netherlands and shows how government funded projects can facilitate this process. Special attention is given to the role of Dutch language proficiency in acquiring these capitals. Using a qualitative approach, a case-study has been conducted at a local organisation in the Netherlands in which 15 participants of a buddy project have been interviewed about their experiences with the project in relation to their integration. Findings reveal that social, cultural and economic capital contribute to each other and that all of them are crucial for a successful integration. Dutch language proficiency appeared to be an important facilitator in this process. An unexpected finding was that the majority of the participants also experienced emotional support through the project, which was highly valued. The article concludes that these kinds of government funded projects are an effective tool for refugees' integration in the host-country by increasing their social, cultural and economic capital and it contributes to the empowerment of the participants in the project.

Keywords: Refugees; integration; social capital; cultural capital; economic capital; the Netherlands; buddy project

Introduction

During recent years, a great amount of refugees was received in the Netherlands, more than 22.000 asylum seekers applied for asylum in 2019 (Vluchtelingen werk, 2020). This posed a challenge for the

Dutch inhabitants as well as for the refugees: to integrate the newcomers into the Dutch society. Integration is a contested concept for which no single or general definition has been agreed upon so far (Bakker, Dagevos & Engbersen, 2014). However, in existing literature, integration is often described as a two-way process which requires from immigrants that they are willing to adapt to the lifestyle of the host-country and from the host-country a willingness to accept the immigrants in their social interaction and to facilitate their integration (Paz Aléncar & Tsagkroni, 2019). Since integration is about mutual accommodation, it is important to look at activities and connections between refugees and Dutch inhabitants to see how these interactions lead to the most effective outcome possible for the integration of the refugees in the Dutch society and for their wellbeing.

Becoming established in the host-country, which can be described as a process of personal and social development within a safe and stable context, is a key determinant for wellbeing of resettled refugees (Brough, Gorman, Ramirez & Westoby, 2003). According to Correa-Velez, Gifford & Barnett (2010), establishing a sense of belonging to the community and the host-country is crucial for wellbeing of refugees, especially in the first few years after their migration. Several studies show that the host-country can have as great a negative impact on the wellbeing of refugees as the pre-migration context (Porter & Haslam, 2005). If the demands of the host-country cannot be achieved by refugees, then this can lead to a higher risk of mental health and behavioural problems (Pumariaga, Rothe & Pumariaga, 2005). Becoming settled in the host-country can be facilitated by several factors, such as being settled with other family members (Correa-Velez, Gifford & Barnett, 2010), the social climate of the host community (Ager & Strang, 2008), being able to develop positive relationships with the host community (Pumariaga et al., 2005), resources for achieving linguistic and cultural competence (Ager & Strang, 2008), living near to members of one's ethnic identity (Beiser, 2005) and security and peace of the local area (Ager & Strang, 2008).

This research investigates the importance of the cooperation between local organisations and the government to create spaces for refugees and Dutch inhabitants to facilitate their integration. Since factors related to social, cultural and economic integration (Bourdieu, 1980) are such important predictors for successful integration (Ager & Strang, 2004; Ager & Strang 2008), these three capitals will form the base of this research.

This research aims to create a deeper understanding of the importance and outcomes of such government funded projects, for example buddy projects. This understanding can be used for future interventions and projects to stimulate the integration of refugees into the Dutch society and increase their quality of life. Moreover, this research is not only about the integration of refugees but also about their empowerment, which is important for their personal development. Furthermore, many studies that investigated the social capital of refugees focused on bonding and bridging. However, there is not much research done about linking social capital and how governmental projects can lead to the increase of these capitals amongst refugees in the Netherlands. Mentoring and buddy programmes are often positively evaluated, however, one group missing in many mentoring program

evaluations is refugees (Månsson & Delander, 2017). Therefore, this research can contribute to existing literature about mentoring programmes and fill the gap of evaluation and discussion of buddy programmes with this particular target group. The next section will discuss the concepts of social, cultural and economic capital and their relation to the integration of refugees

Social, cultural and economic capital for integration

Obtaining different forms of capital is beneficial for a successful integration into the host-society. Bourdieu made a distinction between three fundamental kinds of capital. First, cultural capital entails the accumulation of knowledge, skills and behaviors that an individual has to show his/her cultural competence and social status (Bourdieu, 1973). Second is economic capital which is directly convertible into money and might be institutionalized in the form of property rights (Bourdieu, 1986). Third is social capital, which focuses on the benefits for individuals or families by their ties with others (Bourdieu, 1980) and can be, under certain conditions, be convertible into economic capital (Coleman, 1993).

One of the key insights of Bourdieu's work was that different forms of capital are fungible. They can be traded for each other and for their further development, these trades are actually required (Portes, 2000). For example, social capital can almost never be acquired without some cultural knowledge and material resources that enables someone to establish relations with others. In this way, social contacts are able to provide access to resources that might be helpful in attaining other forms of social capital. The three capitals and their connection will now be discussed in more detail.

Social capital theory

Throughout the years, the concept of social capital has evolved and has been defined by many different scholars. The original theoretical development of social capital by Bourdieu (1980) and Coleman (1993) focussed on individuals and small groups and centered their work on the benefits for individuals or families by their ties with others. Xin (2018) summarizes it as the glue that holds individuals and a community together, by having certain structures and relations in the community that entail for example attitudes, trust, expectations, norms of reciprocity, cohesion, networks and a sense of belonging. According to Linton, Dieppe & Medina-Lara (2016), social wellbeing, which describes how well a person is connected to others in their local and wider social community, can also influence the one's perceived quality of life and social capital can therefore be seen as a determinant of different aspects of health, like mental health, emotional and social health (Xin, 2018). Paz Aléncar & Tsagkroni (2019) state that social capital and social trust are related to strong indicators of integration. In terms of social capital, an important distinction is made between three different kinds of network resources; bonding, bridging and linking social capital (Putnam, 2001).

Bonding, bridging and linking social capital

Social bonds can be described as the connections that link members of a similar group and it reinforces exclusive identities and homogenous groups in a way of building strong ties in their relatively closed network (Putnam, 2001). According to Ager & Strang (2008), these connections helped refugees to large extent to feel 'settled' and can be described as strong ties (Coleman, 1988). The establishment of these social bonds turns out to have several benefits that contribute to effective integration of refugees. Duke, Sales and Gregory (1999) concluded that refugee community organisations are very important. These organisations can provide a 'voice for refugees', create contact points for isolated people and are able to give sensitive responses to the target population. Moreover, the social and cultural activities they provide offer refugees the chance to maintain their own religion, customs and traditions, speak their own language and exchange news from their country of origin (Ager & Strang, 2008). Finally, several studies also emphasize the positive role of 'ethnic enclaves' in finding employment (Muller, 1998). Although bonding social capital can help in the integration process, it is crucial that this is accompanied by an opportunity structure that includes bridging social capital (Paz Aléncar & Tsagkroni, 2019).

Bridging social capital brings people or groups together who are outside each other's group and previously did not know each other. It encompasses people from diverse social cleavages who are less demographically similar and have differences in for example ethnicity and culture. They often have broader identities and have a more generalised trust towards many different types of individuals (Putnam, 2001). According to the fieldwork of Ager and Strang (2008), refugees emphasized that friendliness of the people they encountered in their daily life, weak ties, was an important factor in making them feel 'at home' and feeling more secure and being recognized by others in their neighbourhood was highly valued. They also found that friendliness, which gave refugees a feeling of safety and security, was highly associated with positive judgments of 'quality of life'. Intensive involvement with the local community has been found crucial in bridging longer-term economic and social benefits to a community. According to Woolcock (1998), bridging capital may significantly facilitate employment opportunities.

Linking social capital refers to the connections between individuals and structures of the state, for example governmental services (Ager & Strang, 2008). The study of Ager & Strang (2008) showed that the particular circumstances of refugees, for example not speaking the language and a lack of familiarity with the new surroundings, resulted in barriers in accessing certain services. Other barriers are discrimination, lack of information and access to resources and low self-esteem (Xin, 2018). Therefore, additional effort from both the refugees and the wider community is required in order to access these and governmental organisation can link refugees to the necessary resources.

According to Babaei, Admad & Gill (2012), bonding social capital can be considered as the foundation from which to establish linking and bridging ties to other groups. Moreover, they found that bonding, bridging and linking social capital has significant effects on empowerment.

One recurring aspect in the studies mentioned above is that in order to successfully settle into the host society and to make connections with the majority group more easily, language and cultural knowledge are essential.

Cultural capital and language

Bourdieu (1986) distinguishes three forms of cultural capital. Cultural capital in the institutionalised form refers to educational attainment, objectified cultural capital entails the possession of cultural goods and the incorporated or embodied state refers to people's skills, values, knowledge and taste. According to Ager & Strang (2008), several components of cultural competence are necessary for an effective integration into the wider community. For example, being able to speak the native language of the host country is consistently considered to be the central element for the integration process. Not being able to speak this language is often seen as a barrier to economic integration, social interaction and full participation in society. When thinking of integration as a two-way process, this issue of language competence is not only a challenge for the refugees but also for the host country, for example for health care providers. To foster community integration, reducing such barriers to important information through translation in the language of the refugees can be helpful, and are especially essential in the early stages of settlement in a new country (Ager & Strang, 2008).

Gijsberts & Dagevos (2007) state that the destination-language proficiency depends on two related factors: the 'opportunities' that people have to speak the language and the 'investments' that they are willing to make in order to learn the language. The influence of these factors can differ between people. For example, individuals who migrate for work or study purposes probably need to invest more in their destination-language to be able to function properly in their new situation (Carliner, 2000). On the other hand, since their opportunity to speak the language is bigger than for migrants who stay at home, this new situation (education or employment) also enables them to learn the language. The more refugees are exposed to the new language, the better they will speak it. The study of Gijsberts & Dagevos (2007) shows a strong correlation between more contacts with indigenous Dutch people and a better Dutch language proficiency for ethnic minorities, which emphasizes the importance of inter-ethnic contact for the Dutch language proficiency of ethnic minority groups.

Besides the issue of language competency, broader cultural knowledge is also found to be important for a successful integration in a new society. This includes the knowledge of the refugees about the local and national procedures, facilities and customs and their understanding of the cultural expectations in their new area (Ager & Strang, 2008). In their study, for refugees who were used to having strong family ties in their own culture, the lack of a strong local community and isolation resulted into feelings of alienation and depression. Many refugees valued the sharing of their own culture with others, and having a mutual understanding of this, which shows again the importance of bonding social capital. In order to bridge social capital, and thus connect with the majority group in

the host country, speaking the main language and having proper knowledge of values and customs are important facilitators and should be encouraged in integration courses for refugees. All in all, acquiring cultural and social capital are both important aspects of the settlement of refugees in the Netherlands, and at the same time, they contribute to each other and to the economic capital of these refugees.

Economic capital

According to Bourdieu (1986), economic capital is at the root of other capitals. He sees social capital as a source to obtain economic capital, which is materialized in financial means and ownership and could be used to obtain a better social position. Another scholar who makes the connection between economic and social capital is Granovetter (1985), who states that economic action and participation in the labour market of a person depends on social embeddedness. This means that social relations, networks and structures can be seen as variables which influence economic action. Following the reasoning of Granovetter, the social-cultural integration of refugees and their development of new social relations and networks is followed a better social-economic integration. This is in line with the statement of Woolcock (1998), that bridging social capital can significantly facilitate employment opportunities.

Successful integration of immigrants in the host-country is often referred to as full participation in the society and becoming self-sufficient, which implies participation in the labour market. It is therefore important to look at tools and resources that may facilitate the employment opportunities for refugees in the host-country. Besides social embeddedness, another factor that can facilitate employment opportunities is Dutch language proficiency, which is often required and at the same time seen as a barrier by refugees to full integration. Destination-language proficiency can again be seen as a tool, in this case to acquire economic capital. Chiswick & Miller (1995) describe destination-language to be a function of economic benefits from language fluency and link the earnings of immigrants to their language skills.

Also, an increase in financial means can help to get access to for example education, which is the institutionalized state of cultural capital, and therefore it is able to contribute to the cultural capital of a person. The other way around, knowledge about the labour market and communication, which is part of the embodied state of cultural capital, can also help to improve one's social position and increase economic capital.

Buddy projects

One way to increase especially social and cultural capital, and, directly or indirectly, economic capital, is through the use of buddy projects. Mentoring and buddy programmes for immigrant populations have been a popular method of social intervention for some years now in Western countries and takes various forms (Raithelhuber, 2019). These programmes are often based on the

assumption that the participants lack the conditions or resources for their societal integration or personal development, and often cover social support and social network functions (DuBois & Karcher, 2014). The mentors or buddies are often volunteers who are matched to the participants for a one-to-one relationship, so it builds on civic solidarity. According to Sipe (2002), a buddy project can only be beneficial if there is a relationship of trust between the participant and the mentor.

Although there is a big lack of proper evaluations of such programmes, the ones that have been evaluated show promising results. Raithelhuber (2019) showed that mentoring for refugee minors was a way to establish new social contacts, enhancing their communication skills because they learned the destination-language, getting easier access to resources and institutions, support for transitions in the lifecourse and emotional and psychosocial support. Månsson & Delander (2017) describe mentoring as a way of integrating refugees into the labour market and increase their success in that area. They also state that informal mentor programmes work better than formal ones. The study of Vickers, McCarthy, & Zammit (2017) shows that peer mentoring of students with a refugee-background also influenced the mentor's intercultural understandings and they gained a widened perspective of their mentees who came from different cultures than their own. The interactions between mentors and mentees evolved into mutually rewarding friendships and comfortable relationships. Moreover, a study of Pharos (2019) shows that buddyprojects can facilitate access to the Dutch society. These projects offer informal, but precisely for that reason important social support.

All in all, buddy or mentoring projects often have positive outcomes and create a space for the interplay of social, economic and cultural capital, which are key factors for the settlement of refugees in a new country. In this research, the following research question will be answered: "In what way can government funded projects help by extending the social, economic and cultural capital of refugees?". When answering this question, special attention will be given to the relation between these three kinds of capital and the importance of language in acquiring these capitals. A case study has been conducted amongst the participants of a buddy project in the Netherlands, which aimed to broaden the social network of the participants and increase their Dutch language proficiency. The expectation is that the buddies of the participants in the project can provide the participants with tools and resources to facilitate their social, cultural and economic capital. Therefore, the expectation is that the social, cultural and economic capital of the refugees will increase, what eventually will contribute to a better integration into the Dutch society. Moreover, it is expected that these three capitals influence and contribute to each other.

Methods

Research design

A qualitative design has been used in which semi-structured interviews are held with the participants to collect data. This approach has been chosen because the research question focuses on the personal experiences of refugees and therefore a qualitative point of view is needed. The use of semi-structured

interviews made it possible to achieve a deeper understanding of the research topic as well as to discover other possible important topics besides the predetermined sensitizing concepts.

Participants

The participants have been recruited in collaboration with Welkom in Utrecht (WiU). WiU is a local organisation in Utrecht that aims to bring refugees in Utrecht and people from this region into contact with each other. This helps the refugees to build their own network which contributes to their independent living. One of the projects of WiU is the Maatjes (buddies) project which links refugees to Dutch inhabitants, with the main goal to broaden the social network of the refugees and improve their Dutch language proficiency. However, learning the Dutch language is used as a vehicle to broaden the social network of the participants, but is not the main focus of the project.

The 15 participants of this research are participants of the Maatjesproject and many of them have been residents of the asylum center in Utrecht. The participants have different backgrounds: Syria (n=8), Afghanistan (n=4) and Yemen (n=3) and their ages range from 20 to 47. When recruiting the participants, one inclusion criterion was that they should be in the Maatjesproject for at least six months in order to see the results of their connection. Moreover, participants should be at least 18 years old and both the participants and their buddies had to agree to do an interview. WiU provided a list with couples that met these requirements and then the participants were randomly chosen and approached by the initiator of the project. Before interviewing the participants, their Dutch buddies have also been interviewed, as advised by the initiator of the project, in order to already get some knowledge about the background of the participants and what their relationship looked like. Since this research focuses the view of the refugees, these interviews were not taken into account when writing the final report. However, they provided helpful guidelines during the interviews with the participants themselves.

Data collection and operationalisation

The initial plan was to interview every participant face-to-face but unfortunately, this was impossible because of COVID-19. Five interviews were held face-to-face, the other ten interviews were done via (video) calling. The interviews were held in Dutch or English and two participants preferred to have a translator during the interview, who were in both cases relatives of the participants.

The in-depth interviews lasted from 25 minutes up to 75 minutes and have been conducted by means of a topic list (annex 1). The topics are based on the existing theories described above. To get a better understanding of the social capital of the participants, the topics bonding, bridging, linking, weak and strong ties and trust were included. To measure cultural capital, the topics language, cultural competency and belonging were added. To measure their economic capital, questions about their working life and connections and resources to achieve this were added. These topics are seen as the most important factors for the integration of the refugees in the host-country and are therefore needed

to answer the research question properly. The semi-structured approach was chosen to discuss all these predetermined relevant topics but at the same time, there was space for the participants to add what they thought to be important. To ensure the reliability of the interviews, open and neutral questions were aimed to be formulated and respondent validation was used by giving the participants the chance to read the transcript of their interview and make any changes to their statements if needed.

Data management and analysis

The interviews have been recorded on audio in order to transcribe them later on. An information letter has been provided to the participants before the interview so they were aware of their rights and the nature of the research and an informed consent letter has been used to gain their permission. The collected data has been safely stored on a protected server of the University of Utrecht throughout the research and after completing the research, the recordings and transcripts have been deleted.

After the interviews were transcribed, they have been analysed by means of the software Nvivo 12. This software program made it possible to give codes to the interviews, which was done in three coding rounds. The first phase was open coding, in which codes were assigned to chunks of data. The second phase was axial coding, in which the open codes were grouped into categories. The third phase was selective coding, in which the most important categories were emphasized and relations between these categories were being sought (Boeije, 2009). Although the literature review already provided some sensitizing concepts, this grounded theory approach was chosen in order not to miss any other relevant information in the interviews. After the analysis was done, Nvivo generated a codebook (annex 2) which forms the base of the results section.

Results

Main findings

The initial and main reason for participants to join the Maatjesproject was either improving their Dutch language proficiency and/or obtaining new contacts with Dutch people. The majority of the participants said they achieved these goals and all the participants highly appreciated the contact with their buddies. Besides informative and educational, they describe the meetings with their buddies as nice and many consider each other to be close friends. The next section will discuss what kinds of capital the project was able to provide, how they were obtained by the participants and how these interacted with each other. The one category that was discussed the most during the interviews was social capital.

Social capital

Bonding

Although bridging was by the majority of the participants considered to be more important than bonding, the main reason why participants valued relationships via bonding was because of their shared language. When they are able to speak their native language, they tend to be more ‘themselves’ and have easier conversations. However, when speaking Dutch, many participants experience barriers in expressing themselves properly, which often results in ‘not being able to fully be themselves’ which in turn leads to less deep relationships. Some participants mentioned that, besides language, a shared culture is also a reason to maintain bonds with people in the host-country, which is in line with findings of Ager & Strang (2008). As participant 3.2 describes:

“Yes it is also the same language that we are talking and also from like, we have a lot of things from our culture from friendship tools or different rules to have contact with each other and different places.. That's why we still have contact and we are continuing..”

Bridging

Many participants considered bridging to be more important than bonding. The main reason for this is that they prefer to focus completely on their integration into the Dutch society, and the easiest way to do this is to be in contact with Dutch people as much as possible. They emphasize the importance of contact with Dutch people for their Dutch language proficiency and learning from Dutch people who are currently studying or working in the Netherlands.

“I find this important, [buddy] also thinks that it is important, that we have contact with Dutch people and it's good for the language, for a better language and more social contact with the people, also for the integration. The people know the culture, the habits, and also not to become lonely, alone at home”. (Participant 12.1)

Another reason some participants named to connect with Dutch people more rather than with people with the same background is that they want to leave the culture, politics and problems from their home-country behind. The most important example of bridging social capital in this research can be found in the relation between the participants and their buddies.

Relationship with buddy

Many participants who joined the project in order to make new contacts often created strong ties with their buddies. Six participants said that their buddy feel like a sister, a brother, a daughter or a mom to them and there is a lot of trust between them, which according to Sipe (2002) is essential for the project to be beneficial. The relationship of participants whose main goal for joining the program was to learn Dutch sometimes resulted in weak ties and less trust, described not really as friends but more

as good acquaintances who provide help where necessary, although sometimes it also resulted in strong ties. One woman said the following about receiving a studybook from her buddy:

“I was so happy, it was really good. For me it was a big thing that somebody did for me in my life. That was [buddy], not only somebody who teaches me but looks how can this girl learn, how can her future be better, that made me really close to [buddy]. [...] I didn’t want to tell her everything about my own life, my personal things, I can’t say that to [buddy] cause [buddy] is just my teacher, not my coach. But I was so... [buddy] has done something, good behaviour, to understand me. [buddy] is really close to me, a real good person for me (Participant 2.1)

Furthermore, the social network of the participants is in most cases not broadened by the buddy. Although some buddies do bring them in contact with others, these connections often do not last. However, this way of getting introduced to new people can contribute to the participants’ social skills and make it easier for participants to connect with other Dutch people, as further described below. All in all, acquiring new social relations are an important facilitator when settling in a new country, and is definitely one of the most important outcomes of the buddy project, as participant 5.1 describes:

“The goal is not the language, but maybe it is for everything, for the living here in the Netherlands. Cause I’m a newcomer and so the best way to go on in life here in the Netherlands, I should make contact with more people, more groups or new people”.

To conclude, WiU can be seen as the linking part of social capital, the connections that the participants make with their buddies as the bridging part of social capital and the connections they make or maintain with their own ethnic community as the bonding of their social capital. The expectation that the buddy project would increase the social capital of the refugees is definitely met, and maybe the most important outcome of participation in the project because it contributed greatly to the cultural and economic capital of the participants.

Cultural capital

Cultural competency was acquired by participants by either explicitly speaking about it with their buddies or experiencing the Dutch culture together with them. Topics that were discussed and brought forward by the participants during the interviews were for example Dutch norms, values, customs and habits, but also the more implicit ways of seeing culture were considered to be important. For example, participant 2.1 emphasized the importance of not only speaking about certain Dutch habits and behaviours, but really experiencing it herself. She heard about what Dutch families were like, but when she went to the house of her buddy, she could really see what the communication between her buddy and her daughter was like.

Some participants said that a result of not knowing the Dutch culture and culture differences could lead to miscommunication or facing problems. For example, participant 14.1 experienced difficulties in fully participating in conversations and therefore sometimes feeling left out, despite her high Dutch language proficiency:

“Cause really, I don’t understand anything. It is not only the Dutch language, it is also the stories. The names of the streets, the cities, all the names of people in politics I don’t know, cause the problem is definitely not the language, it is not the language. It is everything. The conversations they have, they talk about strange things that I’ve never heard about before, so sometimes I cannot join them”.

Participant 5.1 adds to this that although he has a good language proficiency, finding the right expressions to explain himself is hard and that understanding is the most important part of the language. Besides this, the culture differences that were most discussed included for example time management, another education system, norms and values, communication, food, upbringing of children and being open and direct. This last topic, being open and direct, was mostly discussed during interviews with women. Some said that their buddies told them they may be more assertive here, something which many of them were not used to be in their home-country.

“Hm, I think [name buddy] helped with giving me encouragement, like she would tell me if you don’t want to talk about this, then don’t talk about this. If you don’t like something just say no, something like that. So it is always good to hear that people say it is fine to do otherwise” (Participant 6.1)

Another cultural thing which was brought forward in the interviews many times were silent codes, something which is considered to be really hard to learn. For example, participant 8.1 described how in Syria, you show respect by not looking someone in the eyes while talking, while in the Netherlands this is the opposite. This is only one example of the many silent codes described by the participants, which this participant described as “small things with a big effect”, that can create misunderstandings. Although learning about these silent codes is seen by the participants as a difficult process that takes time, fortunately, many of them said their buddies were able to tell and show the participants more of these and in this way, improving their cultural competency. Therefore, the expectation that the buddy project would enhance the cultural capital of the refugees is confirmed. As participant 5.1 summarizes:

“[buddy], yes, I consider him as a reason that I learned more about the Dutch culture. So he is a part of my own development”.

Economic capital

Out of the three fundamental capitals described by Bourdieu, economic capital was least discussed by the participants during the interviews. However, some participants mentioned that they spoke to their buddies about (future) job opportunities. One participant even said that she was focusing on work advise with her buddy most of the time. The first thing buddies could help the participants with was giving advice on how to find a job and where to start looking for it. For example, the couples would read job descriptions together and decide if that particular job was suitable for them or not. For others, it was more interesting to talk about how to enter the Dutch labour market and what was expected from them. Two buddies helped finding charity work for their buddies.

Another thing buddies could help with was writing a CV or helping out with job applications. There appeared to be a quite big culture difference in job interviews and applications between some home-countries of the participants and the Netherlands. For example, some people did not need a CV at all at their home country and therefor experienced difficulties writing one now. Some others said there were differences in how to write a CV and what to expect from a job interview. Therefore, some couples worked on writing CV's together and preparing for interviews. One participant mentioned that her buddy did not necessarily helped her to expand her social network, but did introduce her to people in the job market:

“She introduced me for example in the working area. She introduced me to many people who are working for example in the [subject] sector, supporting me, supporting my CV and she becomes me referee in my CV. So she expands my network, not socially but mostly in the work perspective”
(Participant 11.1).

This can be seen as an example of how bridging social capital can facilitate employment opportunities, as described by Woolcock (1998). Although not every participant explicitly discussed experiencing help from their buddies in acquiring economic capital, they might experience benefits in finding a job or studies through their contact with their buddy in the future. Since in many cases the social and cultural capital of the refugees have increased, chances are that this will eventually help them in the job market later in life, according to the theory of Granovetter (1985). Participant 14.1 stated that his buddy was not helping him in finding a job, but that she helped him learning Dutch, after which everything became easier, including finding a job.

All in all, the majority of the participants were very grateful for getting help in preparations for job interviews and discussing the Dutch labour market. It was important for them to have contact about how to enter the Dutch labour market and how the communication and procedures worked. In this way, tools and knowledge were provided by their buddies to increase their economic capital, which facilitates their economic integration. Therefore, the expectation that the buddy project increases the economic capital of the refugees has been fulfilled.

Emotional support

One topic that was not included in the topic list, but which appeared in almost every interview, was emotional support. There was only one person who specifically mentioned that she never talked to her buddy about emotional stuff. The other participants experienced emotional support in three different ways.

Hope

The first way was that the participants felt they gained hope and positive energy through their buddies. The next fragment comes from an interview with a young woman who, after some traumatizing events, almost got send back to her home-country, but her buddy helped in finding her a lawyer to avoid this and gave her hope again:

“And so I thought, that day was really good, I didn’t have hope but I really got energy that day and I thought see, these people want to help me. [...] But as a kid [...], I was in [home-country], back then it was a really bad situation, bad things happened with me and my family, such unfriendly people and nobody helped me. And I really came here with a lot of complaints. How can a person live like that, nobody was there to support me or helped me or got me positive things or a way of studying and a good life. There are no such things, in [home-country]. But yea, the day [buddy] told me that she would look for a lawyer ... I always tell my family, what the people like [name buddy] have done for me, she really helped me, so many people in Utrecht help me. Really, it was... I got hope again after the death of my brother. After all the bad things in [home-country], after all that life, I gave up, yes? But I said no, look. These people will help you, they will tell you: carry on, you can do it, life isn’t always that bad”. (Participant 2.1)

Four other participants mentioned that their buddy gave them positive energy and one of them gave an example of this that his buddy made him feel like a person, not as a refugee.

Empowerment

The second way how participants experienced emotional support can be described as empowerment. Many participants mentioned how they gained more self confidence through their buddy and that it became easier for them to make contact with new people.

“It is new for me to make good contact with everybody. First, I was a bit afraid, I thought that people might laugh at me when I spoke Dutch, I couldn’t speak Dutch so well, I think a bit shame, but now my buddy says my Dutch is okay and people won’t laugh and I understand everything and I try [...] She helps us, really good” (Participant 13.1)

She added that her buddy was also greatly involved with her daughters and tries to boost their self confidence and encourages them with their schoolwork.

It appeared in many cases that because they could speak Dutch to their buddies, it became easier to speak Dutch to others, not only because their language proficiency improved but also because they felt more at ease talking Dutch and felt less shame when making mistakes. Several participants mentioned that they were afraid to make mistakes in their language and being laughed at. This got less thanks to the contact with their buddy, who emphasized that making mistakes is normal and okay, and stimulate them to keep talking Dutch. Participants mentioned that they fully trusted their buddies in this, which is, according to Sipe (2002) essential for the project to be beneficial. Participant 14.1 emphasized the importance of a buddy, who she describes as her language coach, over contact with other Dutch people:

“But at work, nobody will correct you. They will look at you and make jokes about you, I think that is bad. But with the language coach it is a safe moment, you can say anything you want and you are confident that if you make a mistake, nobody will joke about you and you know that you are in a safe area, a safe person will correct you [...], and without judgment, he will never judge you”

Somebody to count on

The third way in which emotional support was experienced was that the participants felt that they could fully trust their buddies and they could always count on them. The fact that their buddy is always there for them, for any questions, support or advice appeared to be very important. This kind of emotional support is in the end by many participants considered to be the most important outcome of their participation in the Maatjesproject:

“It is really important that we know that there is always somebody with us, who we can ask if we have a problem or anything, we can ask them, that is important. Really important. Sometimes we don’t have a question but we... Yea I feel calm because I know Dutch people here. Many things are difficult for us or we don’t have experience. [...] So yes sometimes I try to do it on my own but I think okay, if I have a problem, maybe I can call [buddy], maybe they can help. [...] So yes it is good to ask someone, it is really good. Because, okay sometimes they don’t have an answer but they can help with looking for the answer, they know how everything works here in the Netherlands”. (Participant 8.1)

Lastly, when talking about loneliness, few participants mentioned that they felt less lonely thanks to their buddy. Some even saw this as the main goal of the matching and said they definitely achieved this goal.

“... for staying in the Netherlands for a certain period of time, I had a depression and she was a good support, she was a very good support. She was staying with me most of the time.[...] We sometimes stop the taalcoaching and just sit and speak” (Participant 11.1)

Again, trust is a very important factor in this matter. All in all, the buddy project was able to provide the participants with emotional support, which can eventually improve their mental health.

Language as a tool

The majority of the participants stated that knowing the Dutch language is the key to acquiring every capital mentioned above, which is in line with the statement of Ager & Strang (2008) that not being able to speak the destination-language is often seen as a barrier to economic integration, social interaction and full participation in society. It appeared to be crucial for making new connections, starting an education, finding a job and it was often described as the most important part of their settlement or integration in the Netherlands. The way the participants practiced their Dutch differed. Some buddies were mainly helping the participants with their language classes, but the majority practiced just through speaking with each other and the buddies encouraged speaking Dutch (instead of English, if applicable). The participants stated that their Dutch language proficiency was particularly important for 3 different reasons. The one that was mentioned the most was learning Dutch in order to make social contact, especially if they also did not speak English to switch to:

“It is really difficult to find and make Dutch friends. It is difficult contact with Dutch people. [...] My Dutch for contact is not good, you know, I cannot speak to you well. I think it is strange that I cannot speak well, a bit difficult for me, I don't feel good. [...] Yes it's really difficult to talk to Dutch people” (Participant 4.1)

The second reason was related to entering the labour market; the majority of the participants said that in order to find a job, their Dutch should be sufficient. The third reason why Dutch was considered to be important was to feel more at home in the Netherlands. Two participants said they did not yet feel at home in the Netherlands, for which the main reason was that they did not speak the Dutch language very well. They said if they spoke the Dutch language better, they would feel more at home.

Some participants also mentioned that they preferred to have contact with people from the same background because they can speak in their mother tongue to them. This makes it easier for them to express themselves, which in the end often leads to better emotional bonds.

“Yes sometimes the language is a big problem. I cannot say everything to Dutch people if I cannot speak that language very well. I can't tell my feelings. Sometimes, we find it easier with the Syrian people, we have the same language, we can make a better relationship. With Dutch people that is less, we cannot go any further. The cause is the language itself, not the culture because now we understand

almost everything in the Netherlands: how Dutch people think, what is good and what is bad, what we must say on birthdays, what we should do, but the problem is the language. Sometimes, many things I cannot say, but in the Syrian language, it is okay, is easier, I can say anything". (Participant 8.1)

These examples show how language, which can be considered as a part of cultural capital, contributes greatly to the economic and social capital and emotional support since it is needed to make social contacts, create stronger relationships and to enter the labour market.

According to Gijsberts & Dagevos (2007), opportunities and investments are needed to learn the destination-language. The majority of the participants in this study were highly motivated to invest in their language proficiency and are working hard to improve this. However, this investment should come from two sides in order to work out successfully (Paz Aléncar & Tsagkroni, 2019), which was confirmed by participant 14.1:

"Because language is practice and language is teamwork. In order to learn a new language it's not just your work but the work of everybody around you. Cause they have to help you, they have to constantly correct you, they have to constantly help you, otherwise you won't learn the language, that is why I say it's teamwork".

Another participant also explicitly mentioned that, although his buddy was very busy, it was a great opportunity to improve his Dutch language proficiency and at the same time a good opportunity to gain new contacts via his buddy with whom he could further practice the language.

All in all, contact with Dutch people, in this case the buddies, is of great importance for the Dutch language proficiency of the participants, which is in line with the findings of Gijsberts & Dagevos (2007) that shows the importance of this inter-ethnic contact. As one participant summarizes the importance of a proper Dutch language proficiency:

"In my head and eyes, the language is the key to everything. So I have to learn Dutch, not to speak it perfectly but at least proper Dutch. Yes for my career and for the life here in the Netherlands. And if you speak proper Dutch, then you gain respect from the people, the Dutch people". (Participant 5.1)

To conclude, the buddies of the participants played a very important role in their settlement in the Netherlands, as summarized by participant 5.1:

"...they are a real big part of maybe my beginning in the Netherlands, yes. And always if I think about [buddy] and [other buddy], they are not like other people. They are really special to me. They are like the key of my... or the entrance, yes the entrance for me in the Netherlands".

and participant 11.1:

“Yes she was playing a very important role in settling in the Netherlands. The taalcoach is not only just teaching you the language, he or she becomes a part of your... like a family member, someone who is very close to you. Especially if you click to each other. So it becomes like a friendship for the lifetime. And [name buddy], she made me feel home when I was lonely, I had no one to talk or share my thoughts or my feelings, she was there. So it is very important”.

Discussion

The research question stated in this research was: “In what way can government funded projects help by extending the social, economic and cultural capital of refugees?” In terms of social capital, the buddy project of WiU was able to broaden the social network of the refugees and create social bridges in terms of connections with their buddies. Although participants liked to keep their social bonds, social bridges were considered to be more important cause these could facilitate their integration the best. When looking at cultural capital, the participants mentioned that their buddies were a great help in acquiring a better language proficiency, they were able to learn them more about the Dutch culture and society in both implicit and explicit ways, and learned them more about norms, values, communication and silent codes. In terms of economic capital, the buddies were able to provide the participants with knowledge and tools to enter the Dutch labour market or to start their studies, by for example helping with applying for jobs and writing CV’s.

Language is the tool to made the acquiring of these capitals possible and easier and can be seen as a mediator between social, cultural and economic capital and integration, which is in line with the statement of Gijsberts & Dagevos (2007) who emphasize the importance of destination-language proficiency when integrating in the host-society. When looking at economic integration, language proficiency is often required and functions as tool to achieve economic capital. However, when looking at cultural capital, language more than only a tool; it is about how to use the language properly and therefore, it is about understanding.

An unexpected finding in this study was emotional support, which appeared to be experienced by almost every participant in this study. Emotional support was experienced in three ways: getting hope, empowerment and having somebody to count on. In conclusion, the participants of this study did not only acquire social, cultural and economic capital and emotional support, they also felt empowered by their buddies. Because of the contact with their buddies, they now get into contact with other Dutch people more easily and they feel less shame and more self-confidence. Emotional support is not often described in research about mentoring and buddy projects and therefore, this is an important finding which contributes to the existing literature about these kinds of government funded projects.

The statement of Bourdieu (1986) that social, cultural and economic capital are fungible, also got confirmed in this case-study, and therefore met the expectation that these three would all influence each other in the project. They can be pictured as a triangle, in which they contribute to each other and all together lead to a better integration for refugees in the Netherlands.

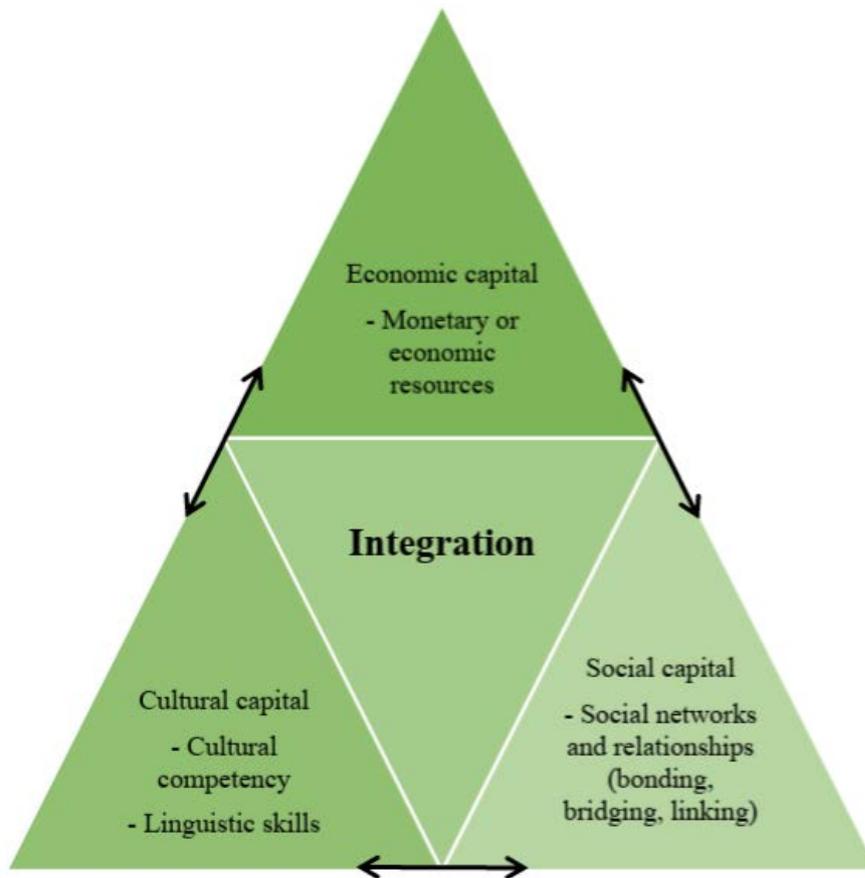


Figure 1. The interplay of economic, cultural and social capital

First, cultural and social capital are related in a way that misunderstandings caused by a lack of cultural competency can lead to more difficulties in creating social relationships. This also works the other way around, the more social contact refugees have with Dutch people, the fewer cultural misunderstandings occur. Not having enough knowledge about Dutch society can lead to exclusion or feeling left out from social contact with groups of Dutch people, even if participants have no trouble speaking Dutch. Another clear connection can be made between social and economic capital, since many participants emphasize the importance of Dutch social connections to find a job, which is in line with the argument of Granovetter (1985). On the other hand, if the participants have found a job, this provides them with an opportunity to broaden their social network even further. Moreover, ‘cultural’

knowledge about procedures associated with the labour market are essential for refugees to find a job and therefore to acquire economic capital.

All in all, this research confirmed the expectations that the buddy project of WiU was able to provide the participants with social, cultural and economic capital and emotional support, which all contribute to a more successful integration in the Netherlands (Ager & Strang, 2004; Ager & Strang, 2008). Therefore, it is important to stimulate these kinds of mentoring or buddy-projects in the future to integrate newcomers into the Dutch society. Moreover, more research on mentoring or buddy programmes focusing on the target group refugees can be useful to indicate the specific success factors and possible limitations.

Strengths, limitations and recommendations

However, there are limits in drawing final conclusions about the outcomes of the buddy project. Although evaluations of buddy projects in general show positive results, as in this study, the outcomes are not easy to assess because it is hard to trace improvement of capitals solely back on the buddies in the buddy project. Since there was no control group present in this study, and because the participants in this study mentioned they also received a lot of help from other buddies, friends or government workers, it is hard to see the exact influence of the buddy on the participants in their integration.

A second limitation, regarding the methods, is the use of interpreters during the interviews, who were relatives of the participants. This might have harmed the internal validity of the research since there is a chance that he/she might not interpreted the answers of the participants properly, and sometimes tended to answer the questions for the participants. However, including hardly-Dutch/English speaking respondents was an enrichment of the data and can therefore be seen as a strength, since it contributed to a more complete answer to the research question.

A third weakness of this research is that the results might be positively biased. One criterium on which the participants were selected is that they should be in the Maatjesproject for at least six months in order to see a proper result of their connection. However, the fact that the couple has been in the project for so long and not quitted before might indicate that it was a good connection, or that the participants were highly motivated to continue. The couples who quitted the project within 6 months are not taken into account in this study, which might have influenced the outcome of this research. A suggestion for a follow-up research would therefore be to also take this group into account and look at the reasons why they quitted.

A last weakness of this research concerns the external validity. Since the sample size of this study consisted of only 15 participants and was conducted in Utrecht, it is hard to generalize the findings of this study to a bigger population or to other cities. However, the strength of this study lies in its internal validity. The in-depth interviews reflected a complete insight into the buddy project and the experiences of its participants, and it was able to show the importance of contact between buddies and participants. Contact between refugees and Dutch inhabitants can be created in many different

ways, but a buddy project appears to work very well since the participants are actively focused on immigration, and at the same time often develop strong ties with their buddies. To conclude, government funded projects, like buddy projects, are a great way to increase the social, cultural and economic capital of refugees and thus facilitate the integration of the refugees into the Dutch society. Therefore, it is important to stimulate these kinds of mentoring or buddy-projects in the future to integrate newcomers into the Dutch society.

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Appendix 1: Topic list

Introduction to research

Informed consent

For how long have you been in contact with your buddy?

Why did you join the Maatjesproject?

Social capital

- Bridging

- Did you get into contact with new people via your buddy?

- Describe your contact with your Maatje, what does it look like? How often do you see him/her? What do you do? Providing help in which areas?
- Are you in contact with other Dutch people? What type of contact?
Function: personal friendship, or functional contact (translations, practical help, information, resources) or professional?
- How important is this contact to you?
- Bonding
 - Are you in contact with people with the same background?
 - How important is this contact to you? Why?
- Linking
 - How important was/is the contact with Welkom in Utrecht to you?
 - Did it get easier for you to access certain resources through WiU?

Strong and weak ties

- Strong: family, friends, trust
 - Are you surrounded by family and close friends in your daily life?
- Do you see your taalmaatje as a close friend?
- Weak: acquaintances, people you meet in daily life
 - Do you have many acquaintances around you?
 - Do you feel welcome and experience friendliness from the people in your area?

Loneliness

- Do you feel lonely sometimes? Can/did your buddy decrease this feeling?

Cultural capital

Language

- How did you practice your language skills with your buddy?
- Was it easier for you to...
 - obtain new resources, thanks to your Dutch language proficiency?
 - expand your network, thanks to your Dutch language proficiency?
 - find a job or education, thanks to your Dutch language proficiency?
- Does your Maatje also help you with understanding Dutch when accessing services? Like health care or understanding formalities?

Cultural competency

- In what way was your buddy able to teach you about the Dutch culture and society?
 - Norms and values?
 - Customs and habits?
 - Communication?
 - Language and understanding?

- Are there cultural differences that you have difficulties with?

Belonging

- Do you feel home in the Netherlands? (with help from your buddy)
- What else would you need to feel more at home in the Netherlands?

Economic capital

- What are currently doing regarding work/studies?
- Resources via buddy to increase economic capital?
- Was your buddy able to help you with finding a job or applying for jobs/studies?
- Education
- (Financial means)
- Was your buddy able to help you with orienting or providing knowledge about the Dutch labour market?

Reflection of taking part in Maatjes

- Is it easier for you to now to approach and make contact with Dutch people?
- Did your buddy help you in feeling more welcome in the Netherlands?
- Did your buddy stimulate you to undertake more activities and speak Dutch more?
- How do you look back on your participation in the Maatjesproject?

Appendix 2: Codebook

Nodes

Name	Files	References	Created On
Academic and Economic capital		0	0 3-5-2020 15:57
Advisory role buddy		5	8 22-4-2020 16:03
CV and job interview or applications		4	9 21-4-2020 09:18
Help with finding work		5	5 5-5-2020 10:28
Help with study (application)		4	5 21-4-2020 10:11
Introducing to people		1	1 12-5-2020 17:40
Culture		0	0 29-4-2020 17:01
Adjusting to Dutch culture		4	4 21-4-2020 10:00
Cultural competency		8	10 21-4-2020 09:57
Dutch food		3	3 4-5-2020 09:13
Dutch habits and traditions		8	15 29-4-2020 15:14
Dutch norms and values (and behavior)		7	13 29-4-2020 15:14
Dutch society		5	6 23-4-2020 13:45
Culture differences		8	12 21-4-2020 09:59
Difficult because new world		4	5 21-4-2020 09:54
Emotional support		4	6 3-5-2020 14:47
Hope		2	2 3-5-2020 15:48
None		1	2 13-5-2020 14:24
Positive energy		3	4 3-5-2020 14:51
Empowerment		2	6 21-4-2020 10:27
Easier to speak to new Dutch people		8	13 21-4-2020 09:50

Nodes

Name	Files	References	Created On
Empowerment		2	6 21-4-2020 10:27
Easier to speak to new Dutch people		8	13 21-4-2020 09:50
Self confidence		10	15 21-4-2020 10:27
Feeling home in the Netherlands		13	19 21-4-2020 10:28
Not feeling at home		5	6 4-5-2020 10:09
Language		0	0 30-4-2020 12:27
Dutch language not important		1	1 30-4-2020 12:27
Importance of language		4	4 21-4-2020 10:01
Importance of language for feeling home in NL		2	2 21-4-2020 10:29
Importance of language for finding job or study		6	9 21-4-2020 09:30
Importance of language for social contact		6	8 21-4-2020 09:52
Language competency		4	7 21-4-2020 10:25
Other shared language		8	10 30-4-2020 12:29
Other mentor or contactperson		6	8 21-4-2020 10:13
Other buddy		3	3 7-5-2020 15:16
Reason for joining taalmaatjes		13	15 22-4-2020 15:58
Outcome		2	3 12-5-2020 13:27
Social capital		0	0 13-5-2020 15:07
Description social network nowadays		9	13 21-4-2020 09:55
Loneliness		9	12 21-4-2020 09:47

Nodes

Name	Files	References	Created On
Social capital		0	0 13-5-2020 15:07
Description social network nowadays		9	13 21-4-2020 09:55
Loneliness		9	12 21-4-2020 09:47
Not lonely		7	10 29-4-2020 16:39
Social contact		0	0 29-4-2020 16:59
Background doesnt matter		3	3 5-5-2020 11:23
Difficult to make contact with Dutch people		2	3 21-4-2020 09:24
Importance of social contact with people		2	3 21-4-2020 09:50
Importance of contact with Dutch people		7	11 23-4-2020 13:42
Importance of contact with people from own backgro		10	14 21-4-2020 13:43
Relationship with buddy		0	0 23-4-2020 12:42
Close contact with buddy		11	26 21-4-2020 09:19
Description of contact		13	27 21-4-2020 09:13
Different roles of buddy		0	0 13-5-2020 15:12
Motivational or stimulating role buddy		10	19 23-4-2020 13:00
Official help		7	7 21-4-2020 10:10
Practical help		10	20 21-4-2020 09:20
Role buddy in integration		12	16 21-4-2020 10:23
First Dutch point of contact		9	15 21-4-2020 09:21
Not first Dutch point of contact		2	2 23-4-2020 12:46
Frequency of contact with buddy		10	11 21-4-2020 10:14

Nodes

Name	Files	References	Created On
<input type="radio"/> Frequency of contact with buddy		10	11 21-4-2020 10:14
<input type="radio"/> Friendship with buddy		13	24 23-4-2020 12:40
<input type="radio"/> Helps also family		6	14 5-5-2020 11:26
<input type="radio"/> Importance for language and understanding		1	2 30-4-2020 12:36
<input type="radio"/> Importance of this contact		14	38 23-4-2020 13:55
<input type="radio"/> Lessons learned		1	2 13-5-2020 11:46
<input type="radio"/> Reason contact stopped or less		3	3 30-4-2020 12:43
<input type="radio"/> Showing Utrecht		2	4 4-5-2020 09:09
<input type="radio"/> No		1	1 4-5-2020 09:09
<input type="radio"/> Social contact and activities with buddy		9	20 21-4-2020 09:17
<input type="radio"/> Someone who is always there		3	5 5-5-2020 11:19
<input type="radio"/> Social contact with non-Dutch people		9	10 21-4-2020 09:41
<input type="radio"/> No		2	4 12-5-2020 15:07
<input type="radio"/> Social contact with other Dutch people		4	6 21-4-2020 09:25
<input type="radio"/> Reason why		8	11 23-4-2020 12:53
<input type="radio"/> Reason why not		1	1 23-4-2020 12:54
<input type="radio"/> Social contact with others through buddy		6	8 21-4-2020 09:39
<input type="radio"/> No		10	10 23-4-2020 13:35
<input type="radio"/> WiU		5	7 3-5-2020 15:51