

## Summary

### Engaged neighbourhoods

#### Experiences of residents and professionals with neighbourhood improvement in four past and present priority neighbourhoods

##### S.1 Purpose of this study

###### *A review of the '40 neighbourhoods policy' from a new perspective*

Over the last ten to twenty years, there have been any number of initiatives in the Netherlands to improve the situation and satisfaction levels of residents living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. The neighbourhood action plans for the 40 'priority neighbourhoods' (*aandachtswijken*) which the then Minister for Housing, Communities and Integration, Ella Vogelaar, earmarked in 2007 for additional efforts, were largely built on earlier initiatives, such as the urban policy for the larger cities (*Grotestedenbeleid*). That policy was still in force when the plan was announced for intensified action in 40 designated neighbourhoods in 18 cities, in a bid to accelerate the improvements there. Broad goals were formulated around better housing, education, labour participation, safety and integration. To these goals were later added health, sport and culture – all areas in which there was major deprivation in the designated neighbourhoods. The aim was to eliminate the disadvantage through a cohesive (integrated) approach on several fronts, with the emphases within the broad objectives being added locally to meet the particular needs of the neighbourhood. Administrators, professionals and large numbers of residents of the neighbourhoods concerned enthusiastically set up new initiatives or continued with existing ones, although it was not long before the promised funding from central government started to dry up. Many people felt that the supplementary policy came to a halt in 2012, when government investments totalling approximately 300 million euros up to that point came to an end. Formally, the 40-neighbourhoods policy runs until 2017. Recently, housing associations have been reminded to restrict themselves to their core tasks, namely building and managing affordable rented housing. Police reforms mean that the force is also focusing more on its core tasks and adopting less of an area-wide approach. Local authorities have had to prepare and implement decentralisations in the social domain within a very short space of time, and now have to deliver more care provisions with fewer resources. All of this is combined with a call to citizens to do more in the public domain and to take responsibility for their immediate residential setting.

In this study we look at the 40-neighbourhoods policy, but also at the preceding years, in order to gain a better picture of the changes of course around the time the 40-neighbourhoods policy was introduced. We interviewed residents, businesses and professionals in four neighbourhoods in order to elicit their experiences with local initiatives and results. Earlier research by the Netherlands Institute for Social Research<sup>1</sup> SCP on 'priority neighbour-

hoods' (*Werk aan de Wijk*, Permentier et al. 2013) traced the added value of the 40-neighbourhoods policy using statistics on safety and liveability. The study revealed positive trends in the neighbourhoods in terms of liveability and (perceived) safety, a decrease in the concentration of low income households and a more positive perception of developments in the neighbourhood. Disappointing for those directly involved was the caveat that similar improvements had also occurred in other deprived neighbourhoods and had moreover begun long before the start of the 40-neighbourhoods policy. The optimistic feelings, however, were more bounded to the 40 neighbourhoods residents.

At around the same time, research was published under the title *Urban40*, which looked at the potential health effects of the 40-neighbourhoods policy. The researchers found positive and distinctive health results for the 40 neighbourhoods, especially in relation to stress. Despite the crisis, smoking had increased in the neighbourhoods to a lesser extent than elsewhere, while perceived mental health had improved and the use of mental health care had increased, possibly indicating a better response to the latent need. The more interventions that were made in the neighbourhoods, the bigger the improvements in health. These positive results were welcomed in the media, but the researchers also looked for further explanations for their results.

In a bid to explain such results as these better, in this study we wanted to talk to stakeholders in the neighbourhoods. We did this through four case studies, studying four neighbourhoods where we spoke to residents, professionals and local businesses. We also made observations in the neighbourhoods and used literature to help explain our findings. This approach is complementary to our earlier study on the priority neighbourhoods (Permentier et al. 2013). That study was mainly quantitative; our study is mainly qualitative and is told in the words of stakeholders. We attempt to offer an insight into how and under what circumstances efforts by stakeholders contribute to improving the liveability of neighbourhoods. Respondents together tell the story about what has happened in their neighbourhoods and what is still happening. How do different people describe the same processes? The research questions are presented individually in section 5.3. They are about the interventions and what made them successful or otherwise; they talk about the integrated approach, about the personal factor (*best persons*), about the role of residents and businesses, lessons for decentralisation in the social domain and finally about clarifying and explaining earlier (quantitative) studies.

### Choice of neighbourhoods

We chose four early post-war neighbourhoods: *Nieuwland* in the town of Schiedam, *Kruiskamp* in Amersfoort (since removed from the list of priority neighbourhoods), and the *Slotervaart* and *Bijlmer K* neighbourhoods in Amsterdam. To help us make this choice we carried out a preliminary study to investigate what had happened in each of the 40 priority neighbourhoods between 2002 and 2006/2007 and between 2007 and 2012, using national statistics on liveability and safety, and taking into account the local context. Among other things, the preliminary study showed that post-war neighbourhoods improved less (on average) than pre-war neighbourhoods, and we therefore chose post-war neighbour-

hoods, which also had the advantage that the study was focused on similar neighbourhoods in terms of architecture and urban development. Unexpectedly, three of the four neighbourhoods chosen had improved considerably. According to our data and analyses, this was not the case for Nieuwland, which appeared to offer an interesting contrast. Another factor in the choice was our desire for a degree of distribution across the country and the motivation of municipalities to take part, which was high in all the neighbourhoods chosen, and especially in Nieuwland. In Slotervaart, we chose a postcode area which, in contrast to the other three neighbourhoods, has seen virtually no demolition or new development since the neighbourhood was first built.

## Interviews

A total of 60 interviews were held with around 100 people. The professional network in each of the neighbourhoods was first mapped out as accurately as possible. This network consists of neighbourhood managers and local authority and housing association coordinators, officials responsible for the public space, and professionals from the fields of welfare, education, work and income, voluntary organisations, sport and games. The interviews with these professionals shed light on the number of residents and businesses, with whom interviews were also held. In order to ensure that people outside the network of professionals were also interviewed, businesses and residents were also approached directly. The focus here was on diversity in terms of age, cultural background and degree of active engagement in the neighbourhood. Representativeness was not a consideration; the mere fact that respondents were willing to take part in the study probably means that they were self-selecting in the sense of feeling engaged with their neighbourhood.

We did not conduct the same number of interviews in all neighbourhoods: there were more in Nieuwland, where we began, and fewer in Slotervaart. Most of the residents interviewed lived older properties, and less in new-build, often owner-occupied homes.

The people we spoke to living in older properties were not a random sample, but were predominantly people who had lived in the neighbourhood for some time and therefore had a good view of the changes that had taken place. We focused mainly on the question of what the neighbourhood improvement had meant for the incumbent population, and less on what had prompted people to move into the neighbourhood from elsewhere.

We probably spoke to the most important individuals in each neighbourhood in terms of their contribution to creating and maintaining a clean, tidy, social and safe residential setting. That was deliberate, as it enabled us to build a fairly comprehensive picture for this theme. The picture for interventions relating to goals such as parenting and learning, work, integration, sport, culture and health is more fragmented, with so many different partners involved in these initiatives that it was impossible to speak to all of them. We used a snowball technique to lead us to key persons such as neighbourhood coordinators, housing association staff and volunteers, and may therefore have missed interesting partners.

An exhaustive inventory was not compiled of these goals, but we drew lessons from the experiences of the many people that we did speak to.

## S.2 Key findings

First we will discuss the main findings of the study. What was the most striking, surprising or welcome finding for the future? In this section we present the findings in chronological order and do not break them down by individual research questions, because those questions often impinge on each other for different themes. In section S.3 we look at the other findings on the basis of the individual research questions, drawing from the concluding discussions in the individual chapters. A number of text boxes present a very brief outline of special features in the four neighbourhoods.

### S.2.1 The reclamation phase

- The biggest steps to improving liveability and safety in the four neighbourhoods had already taken place before 2007: physical renewal, tackling crime with an emphasis on juvenile criminal groups, and improved maintenance through joint (integrated) action by local authority and housing associations, tighter supervision of outsourced street cleaning services and the building of underground waste containers.

The earlier SCP report ‘Working on the neighbourhood’ (*Werk aan de Wijk*) established that the 40-neighbourhoods policy had not delivered any demonstrable added value for liveability and safety (Permentier et al. 2013). In our study it became clear why: a great deal had already been achieved under the prevailing urban policy, and this also applied in other deprived neighbourhoods besides the 40 designated neighbourhoods. That explains the improvements; precisely the topics evaluated in our study were the subject of powerful policy in the period 2002-2007, including the radical physical renewal that had already been completed in part and/or organised at administrative level and communicated to residents. This had therefore already created the promise of improvement. Also important, including in ‘our’ neighbourhoods, were the initiatives to tackle crime. Prosaic aspects such as improved waste collection and street cleaning also improved the appearance of the neighbourhoods.

Typical of the ‘empowered neighbourhoods’ (*krachtwijkenbeleid*) was the breadth of the goals – not just housing and safety, but also education, labour participation, integration, health, sport and culture – and the simultaneous and integrated way in which those themes were addressed. According to our interviewees, the change from a top-down approach (in which local authorities and housing associations sought to reverse the negative statistics and win back the trust of residents) to giving a more central role to residents. According to the Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR), the phase of ‘social re-engagement’, the regaining of trust through decisive action by administrators, was followed by a phase of “opportunity-driven policy that tempts residents into action by appealing to their needs and qualities and giving them the scope to shape their own neighbourhood.” (WRR 2005: 12). The process advocated by the WRR is recognisable in each of the neighbourhoods.

Professionals saw the notion of working with residents to set priorities as a turning point, and active residents in particular have warm memories of the visit by the then Minister for Housing, Communities and Integration, Ella Vogelaar. Attention and interest from professionals and freedom for residents goes down well. This may explain why residents in the 40 priority neighbourhoods were more positive in their thoughts and views about their neighbourhood in around 2009 than in earlier years and than those in other neighbourhoods. It is possible that the move to allowing greater input from residents in their neighbourhoods – a change in ownership – would not have got off the ground without the momentum from the national movement in that direction. Allowing greater input from residents is important in building satisfaction with the neighbourhood further so as to create good, sustainable and affordable neighbourhood management.

- Neighbourhood professionals unanimously advocate physical renewal in priority neighbourhoods. Residents are satisfied in retrospect, but are more critical of the policy of relocating tenants with personal problems.

As well as the local authority and housing associations – which together made and implemented the plans – the social welfare professionals to whom we spoke in the three neighbourhoods where major physical restructuring has taken place also firmly believed that without that restructuring it would have been impossible to tackle the social and other problems. The large stock of cheap housing created such an accumulation of problems that it was necessary to thin out those problems in order to be able to address them. The process also offered an opportunity to get a foot in the door and refer a number of tenants with personal problems to organisations that could offer help.

Restructuring was thus seen as an indispensable intervention. The situation in Slotervaart (where no restructuring had taken place) does little to detract from this finding, because the built environment here was already quite varied, with more readily marketable houses alongside the many flats. On the tight Amsterdam housing market, the promise that homes might yet be replaced or refurbished was enough to make people satisfied despite the small size of the homes. This was not the case in municipalities with less housing market pressure, such as Schiedam.

Two issues that are relevant for policy were raised by residents in our interviews. The first was the relocation of problem tenants to other neighbourhoods, and whether administrators in those destination neighbourhoods were equipped to support them (we shall return to this in section 5.2.3.). The second is that a number of tenants felt it was unwise to move to a new home with higher rent given their financial circumstances. The professionals we spoke to did not see a financial problem as long as rent benefit is available for the new homes. Several tenants evidently see this differently.

The great value attached by professionals to physical renewal raises questions about how this will be achieved in the future with fewer resources, as new concentrations of poor residents gradually develop in other neighbourhoods, for example in growth municipalities. It is then wise to thinking about alternatives to physical intervention, such as strengthening

the help and support infrastructure. The example of the *klusflats* (flats destined for demolition which are instead offered for renovation) in the Bijlmer district of Amsterdam also shows that demolition which appeared inevitable can sometimes be averted in a creative way.

### 5.2.2 After the reclamation: reaping the rewards

Once the neighbourhoods had been reclaimed through restructuring and robust maintenance, professionals were faced with the question of how to maintain and develop this basic level, with residents' priorities as the starting point, in accordance with the opportunity-driven policy ideal referred to earlier. In our study we encountered any number of projects and initiatives for this. We will limit ourselves here to two central principles that are decisive in the positive experiences of our respondents and that also emerged in several policy fields. We summarise these principles as 'meeting expectations' and 'accessible pivotal figure'.

#### Meeting expectations: achievement or adjustment

- Neighbourhood improvement goes hand in hand with rising expectations of residents. They set higher standards for their living environment, which means that absolute improvements do not always translate into a reduction in complaints or higher satisfaction scores: working on the neighbourhood is never done.

Liveability is measured mainly on the basis of resident appreciation. A crucial factor here is therefore whether the quality of the living environment exceeds or falls short of their expectations, quite apart from the actual condition of the neighbourhood. And it is precisely here that our visits to the neighbourhoods revealed a fly in the ointment. A key finding in our study is that those expectations are dynamic, and in two ways. First, people become accustomed to the better conditions in the neighbourhood: rising expectations can cause them to redirect their complaints from the threat of drug users to noisy schoolchildren, from broken shop windows to litter and dog fouling. Second, the physical renewal attracts new groups of owner-occupier residents in the new-build homes, who are tempted into the neighbourhood by promising renewal plans. Buyers are more particular about their surroundings and generally plan to stay for a longer period. They therefore bring with them high expectations and demands. This dynamic of expectations means that a reduction in problems does not always lead to a permanent reduction in nuisance and complaints. We can attach two implications to this.

First, absolute improvements may receive too little attention in statistics used by local authorities as a basis for their policy. Nuisance exists in the eye of the beholder. Rising aspirations and more assertive citizens can lead to the number of complaints staying largely unchanged, or even to unfavourable scores in population surveys, even though the severity of the underlying problems has reduced.



A second implication is that work on the neighbourhood is never finished. Restructuring and tackling crime had led to improvements even before 2007, but the principle holds here that staying at the top is harder than getting to the top – not only because of the risk of falling back again, but also because the raised expectations make clear that a single catch-up exercise is not enough and that permanent attention is needed. Handing back the opportunity-driven ideal for a neighbourhood to the community should then not be equated to abandoning all efforts. In our study visits, attention was repeatedly focused on characteristics of interventions that had proved to be helpful in this regard, precisely because they directly addressed the expectations of residents:

- Maintaining liveability means meeting the expectations of residents. This is helped by acting responsively (consistent, rapid, visible and flexible), structural solutions, working with residents and managing expectations.

### Meeting expectations: acting responsively

Little is so damaging to residents' trust in local authorities as the feeling of not being taken seriously. If the expectation are created that resident' concerns and needs are the main factor shaping neighbourhood actions, but there is no adequate response when residents come forward with specific suggestions or complaints, the result is disillusion. The willingness of residents to do something for themselves also depends on how much confidence they have that they will receive support from the authorities. Even simply reporting incidents – entirely out of self-interest – can then be seen as pointless. Being responsive means in the first place responding *consistently and quickly* to reports from residents. Residents generally take a rapid response almost for granted, and not something that deserves bonus points; but they are quick to judge a lack of response as negative. Responding consistently and quickly must not be confused with a 'you say jump, we ask how high' response, as we will discuss later under managing expectations (see Adjusting expectations: communication). However, reasonable appeals to public responsibility should preferably not be allowed to disappear into the oblivion of capacity shortages. An automated confirmation of receipt will not be regarded as a rapid response. Second, *visible* action contributes to responsiveness. Where supervisors, cleaners, neighbourhood coordinators, help and support professionals and even administrators make themselves visible in the neighbourhood, this induces appreciation and positivism. The same applies for taking measures visibly: visible interventions are very direct way of communicating that a close eye is being kept on things, and a presence in the neighbourhood also fosters information gathering and facilitates preventive action. Third, *coordination and flexibility* between the different parties can promote responsiveness. In the past, there was a tendency to refer residents from one professional to another, because tasks and responsibilities were strictly separated or because the incoming question impinged on different areas of expertise and it was unclear who was the most appropriate person to answer it. It is essential to avoid citizens being pushed from pillar to post; it is better if professionals are willing to step in for each other and coordinate behind the

scenes. In the neighbourhoods in our study, serious efforts have been made to achieve this coordination, sometimes between housing associations and the local authority, sometimes in safety networks or, more recently, in the neighbourhood community teams, where implementation still requires some optimisation in relation to specialist care. The principle of one point of contact is one of the goals of the integrated approach, and there is added value here in the form of working together. Moreover, this cuts two ways: coordination and flexibility within a network also avoid duplication for professionals. This can arise if citizens have to contact several bodies with the same question, but also if they approach different bodies on their own initiative in order to increase the chance of receiving help.

### Meeting expectations: structural solutions

A second feature of interventions that meet citizens' expectations is their sustainability. The term 'project carousel' is sometimes used pejoratively to describe the many short-lived projects initiated during and prior to the 40-neighbourhoods approach. The criticism was not aimed so much at the individual projects as at their ephemeral nature. Some of them were promising, and that is precisely the problem: people's enthusiasm was awoken to organise or take part in an activity, only for them to be left high and dry shortly afterwards. Isolated residents have for example no sooner made new contacts during a meeting initiative than they lose them again; or the hard shell of problem youngsters has just been penetrated through a sports programme, when they are sent back onto the streets again. There are many reasons for the short-lived nature of projects, often money-related, but sometimes entirely coincidental, such as a pivotal person who moves on to other activities. By structural solutions we mean not only long-lasting solutions, but also solutions that do not simply move the problem somewhere else. Closing an off-licence whose customers are causing nuisance makes life better for local residents, but creates a new problem for those living near the late shop a little further away. Providing a space for groups of youngsters to gather emerged as a successful strategy in our interviews, but also carries a high risk of displacing problems. This can be addressed by working with local residents – and if possible with the street groups themselves – to look for an alternative location which does have public support. The trap of knee-jerk, temporary or half-solutions is that they first raise residents' hopes and expectations, to be followed by disillusion, possibly causing more damage to the trust in professionals than if there had been no intervention.

### Adjusting expectations: communication

The factors above help in meeting expectations. Sometimes, however, the expectations themselves are the problem and it is impossible or even undesirable to meet them. The first important consideration is that professionals and volunteers do not create or prolong unrealistic expectations. It helps here if new and existing residents are occasionally reminded about the problems of the past and if attention is focused on the results of initiatives. Expectations also sometimes have to be actively scaled down. It is not always clear to residents why some measures are not possible, and in particular it is by no means always clear to them where the responsibility of government and professionals stops and



their own begins. We found one of the clearest examples of this in the deployment of the police in cases of nuisance. If the situation is not overly threatening, residents could themselves first approach those causing the nuisance personally. According to a great many assertive residents we spoke to, the results can be very impressive. And residents can be on the scene more quickly than the police. Even assuming the police have time to turn out for nuisance reports, they are often powerless when they arrive, because the volume of the ghetto-blaster has already been turned down and the beer bottles have been hidden. This clear lack of power dents the trust of citizens in the police and the willingness to report incidents.

If it is not possible to respond adequately to a reported problem, it is important to explain why, initially to the resident making the report, but preferably also to a wider public. Housing associations in our study proved to be well aware of the importance of direct communication, even when the answer is 'no'. Before giving this answer, professionals could ask themselves whether, if they are not able to meet the request, one of their network partners might be able to do so (see 'coordination and flexibility' under Meeting expectations: responsive action). The threatened sharp increase in the workload of those working in neighbourhoods due to the spending cuts means that careful management of expectations is becoming even more important. Discussions are for example under way in the police on whether they should become less involved in social and health issues and concentrate more on their core tasks. The police already have to be very selective in prioritising reports, and it is plausible that this selectivity will increase in the near future. An answer will have to be found to this.

### Meeting and adjusting expectations: acting together

Cooperation with citizens can take different forms. Here we are referring to the teams in which citizens and professionals work together to identify the nature of the problems, what should have priority in which location, and what the possible causes and solutions are. In some cases, they also share responsibility for implementing solutions. Examples include neighbourhood representation teams (*wijkschouwteams*), neighbourhood safety teams (*buurtveiligheidsteams*) and neighbourhood forums (*buurttafels*).

These teams give citizens an opportunity to formulate their expectations and allow professionals to gain a good impression of what residents want. Those expectations can subsequently be translated into shared goals on which there is consensus, as well as on the best approach. That gives rise to shared support. This structure means that citizens' expectations do not simply become a problem of the professional, but that citizens take co-ownership of problems and solutions. Cooperation in teams is then not just a valuable instrument for meeting expectations, but also for when they need to be adjusted. If expectations are unrealistic, this often becomes clear during the process, because everyone shares responsibility for finding a solution which they can then see is not achievable.

An important caveat needs to be applied to cooperation in teams. Participants, especially the professionals, always need to be aware that active residents do not necessarily speak for the whole community. Although mutual trust promotes flexible cooperation, close-knit

contacts must not lead to the formation of an impenetrable 'inner circle'. In order to remain sensitive to alternative views and innovative solutions, it is vital to constantly search for fresh and sometimes tangential branches in the network.

#### An assessable pivotal figure: point of contact, bridge-builder and lubricator

- A pivotal figure with a clearly defined remit is important as a practical point of contact and bridge-builder. A familiar face that is regularly seen in the neighbourhood also motivates professionals and active residents to make their contribution – oiling the wheels.

A second principle that shows promise in various domains (in addition to matching expectations) is the added value of having accessible and approachable pivotal figures in strategic positions in the neighbourhood. This need not be one central figure who holds all the strings and puts everyone in touch with everyone: such ambitious integration could lead to a hopeless tangle of crossed connections which requires so much ingenious planning and coordination that any gains in efficiency and decisiveness are quickly lost. We were particularly struck by the efficiency of and appreciation for people who were able to reach and bring together residents within a reasonably well-defined domain a retail area manager, to name one example. Such a pivotal figure can perform at least three useful functions in the neighbourhood.

First, he or she acts as a point of contact for stakeholders around a given policy theme, so that residents no longer have to go to different professionals with different questions. From their position as a central point of contact, they are able to pass the questions to the relevant people or suggest solutions themselves, provided they have been equipped to do so by the local authority. This is the one-stop shop idea of the integrated approach. Second, he or she has an overview of the field and is able to bring together parties on the basis of supply and demand, additional competences, etc.. Without an active bridge-builder, it is not certain that stakeholders will find each other, or possibly only by chance. Third, he or she can become a trusted figure in the neighbourhood, who facilitates personal contacts, short lines of communication and ultimately builds mutual trust. Precisely this personal contact and mutual trust are cited as reasons in our neighbourhoods for the fact that the cooperation ran so smoothly, effectively and continuously, though it is important to guard against creating an overly tight and closed inner circle. But the personal approach not only proved to lubricate relations between professionals: residents are also much more likely to be persuaded to play an active role in the neighbourhood if they are called upon to do so by people they are familiar with, than by general communications through flyers or at meetings. It is very possible that this also applies for the continuing motivation of volunteers. A coordinating, permanent figure can not only provide practical support, but also offer the personal attention needed to keep people motivated.

### 5.2.3 Austerity measures and decentralisation

Following the momentum of a national movement to clean up the ‘empowered neighbourhoods’ through a pooling of strengths and heavy resident involvement, new developments followed in rapid succession. The crisis thwarted further physical renewal, but so did spending cuts imposed on local authorities, which were felt in neighbourhoods through the closure of community centres and cultural amenities such as libraries, and staff cut-backs particularly in the areas of welfare and community work. To this can be added the decentralisation of responsibility for social provisions, facing local authorities with the task of finding ways of fulfilling these major responsibilities. The tide for housing associations changed in anticipation of the new Housing Act, which forced them to refocus on their core tasks and consequently exclude a number of initiatives within neighbourhoods. Sizeable landlord levies reinforced this focus on core tasks. In 2005, the WRR was actually saying that housing associations would become commissioners of welfare work. The euphoria surrounding the shared task in neighbourhoods, for which national attention and resources had also been mobilised, has ebbed away somewhat, although our interviews revealed that there is still great ambition. Some also believe that spending cuts can help lead to creative innovations, such as the G1000 initiative and the community enterprise in Kruiskamp (see Box) and the temporary configuration of the Wibautplein area in Nieuwland (see Box). On the other hand, concerns emerged about two related themes: maintaining the social infrastructure in the neighbourhood and the organisation of help and support services.

#### Social infrastructure requires maintenance

- Residents and housing associations attach great importance to meeting in the neighbourhood. The action radius of residents is sometimes remarkably small. Meeting others promotes feelings of safety, removes people from isolation, motivates them to action and helps in the early identification of problems. This social infrastructure needs investment.

Meeting other people is not mentioned as one of the national goals for the 40-neighbourhoods policy, probably as it is often instrumental for ‘higher’ goals which are mentioned, such as feelings of safety, health or integration. A few local authority plans, especially in Nieuwland, do mention this topic explicitly. Many people we spoke to attach great importance to meeting others within the neighbourhood and also within their own residential setting. That feeling appears to be strongest among housing associations. Meeting others contributes to public familiarity, thereby improving feelings of safety. In addition, it removes residents from their isolation, which can be important for their mental well-being. It is then a form of low-threshold mutual willingness to help. Finally, meeting forums are also places where potential volunteers can be found and possibly recruited. Housing associations, in particular, stress that people should be able to meet others close to their homes, in their own residential setting, and regret the closure of community centres, libraries and other meeting points, as do the residents who used them. An indication

of the limited radius of action of many neighbourhood residents, apart from the physical barriers presented by railways and main roads when visiting facilities, is participation in sport. This is substantially lower among residents of priority neighbourhoods, but increased sharply in Nieuwland once sports associations began showing themselves in the neighbourhood with activities.

Several community and neighbourhood centres in the four neighbourhoods have been closed, along with cultural facilities. Many regret this, but there are also voices (in local authorities and in one case a business) which argue that activities can also take place elsewhere, such as in sports clubs, churches, mosques or, as in Kruiskamp, in the premises of the newly formed community enterprise. The experience of housing associations is that people not only want to meet others within their own residential setting, but also on 'neutral territory'. To meet this need, these associations are setting up local community centres. Sometimes temporary premises meet this need, as in Nieuwland in locations awaiting redevelopment. However, temporary facilities have already almost become a way of life. Our respondents also attach value to organising activities where different groups can meet. The much-maligned neighbourhood barbecue is one such example. Housing associations like to use such activities to come into contact informally with their tenants. There is however a fairly widely shared feeling, especially among active residents, that the spirit of the times and the financial circumstances mean that priorities need to be set for publicly funded meeting activities, and that residents were sometimes too pampered by having everything arranged for them.

Criteria cited by respondents for prioritisation included: civic and other initiatives must not be too narrow, but must offer something to different sections of the population and preferably bring them into contact with each other; that the structural needs and problems in the community should be given priority above more festive initiatives; and that persistent attention is preferable to a concatenation of continually changing projects.

Can residents organise activities and amenities themselves? The answer is sometimes yes and sometimes no, while in many cases a little help is needed, in the form of subtle support from a distance, for example from a welfare worker. This can provide moral support, for example in overcoming administrative hurdles and if necessary helping to hold together the mutual relations. Self-management proves vulnerable to subtle forms of parochialisation of provisions by the most dominant group ('That's how we always do things here') and therefore demands – albeit limited – input from an outsider with professional status. This fits in with the findings of other researchers, including Specht and Van der Zwaard (2015) and Tonkens (2014).

Volunteers with the qualities of professionals do exist, as Specht and Van der Zwaard (2015) show in their book about the Reading Room (*Leeszaal*) in Rotterdam, which is led by two academically trained volunteers. We also found residents who sometimes performed better than paid officials, or who are able to reach a population group others find difficult to access. But this must not lead to overambitious expectations about what volunteers can achieve. Some residents do not feel sufficiently competent, and some roles are then not filled. The *Buitenkasten* toy library in Kruiskamp is an example; the library, which also serves

as a meeting point for mothers, is only able to open for limited hours due to a lack of volunteers. Volunteers who do have the necessary competencies are often under pressure to accept remuneration. Some succeed in being paid for their efforts, while others seek out voluntary work in strategic locations in the hope that it will lead to paid work. This is becoming difficult as more jobs are pushed from the welfare and professional domain into the voluntary sphere. Several residents in our study were indignant about the dismissal of professionals from the neighbourhood. As one resident of Kruiskamp put it: ‘So does that mean there’s nothing between pampering and ‘get on with it yourselves?’’. Such practices sometimes also bring embarrassment to volunteers and voluntary organisations. The noble volunteer can effectively be taking the bread out of the mouth of a fellow resident.

### Decentralisation in social domain creates demand for help

- Local presence of a neighbourhood support team can make it so much easier for people to ask for help that preventing (escalation of) problems is difficult because the demand for help increases so much. Decentralisation therefore demands more rather than fewer resources.

The new help and support structure in the neighbourhoods in our study is still in its infancy; it has been in place for the longest in Nieuwland, where the neighbourhood support team set up in the community centre in 2012 – at the same time putting pressure on the function of the community centre as a meeting place. Something similar happened in Kruiskamp, where the help and support team was set up a year ago in what shortly before that had been built and used as a meeting point. The theory behind this integrated approach, based on case management and providing a single coach for each family in need, is endorsed, but has in practice thus far mainly highlighted problems.

First, experience has shown that, at least initially (and in Nieuwland for more than two years now), there was a sharp rise in demand for help. Proximity plays a role here, as does the ease with which people can return for further visits. In our neighbourhoods, discussions were held in advance in individual resident’s homes, with professionals taking the initiative. They selected a number of addresses and made the visits at their own pace. The neighbourhood support team members are not able to allocate helpers themselves and feel undervalued.

At the same time, professionals and residents have the impression that there are just as many barriers to visiting the neighbourhood support team. Anxiety or embarrassment play a role here, along with unfamiliarity with the address or the lack of recognisable staff, for example people with the same cultural background as those using the service. In a team of generalists, this latter point can be mitigated through the choice of staff, while referrals can be made from places where residents feel comfortable visiting (doctors’ surgeries, schools, churches and mosques). This does however require a high probability of adequate follow-up, which means adequate staffing. Otherwise there is a risk of disillusionment (including

among those making referrals), thus undermining trust in the participating bodies and the government more generally.

A third problem relates to the limited mandate of the generalist front-office agents.

The help they offer sometimes runs into difficulties when second-line help is needed, for which an indication is needed. Despite help and support workers being brought together in a single location, in practice they have little time to learn from each other.

Fourthly, there are doubts about the assumed contribution from the networks of many of those seeking help: does that network actually exist and are its members sufficiently competent? On the other hand, there have been positive experiences in relation to informative group meetings of fellow-sufferers, on parenting, use of medicines and other matters.

Here, however, reliance is not placed on the network of stakeholders, but instead the doors are thrown open to experiential and other experts from outside the network.

Finally, it has been observed that maintaining the social infrastructure in a neighbourhood, and organising approachable meeting places and activities, leads to greater self-reliance, a mutual willingness to help on the part of (groups of) citizens and early identification of problems. These are precisely the areas from which resources are now being withdrawn massively.

### 5.3 Answers to the research questions

The foregoing has already shed some light on the different research questions, but additional lessons can be drawn from the individual questions. We will do this below, question for question.

- 1 *Which interventions do residents, businesses and professionals suggest to improve the liveability and safety of the neighbourhood and the lives of residents? How do stakeholders assess the results and what makes interventions successful or otherwise?*

#### Housing: restructuring

Three of the neighbourhoods studied have seen major demolition and new-build and, as stated, the professionals felt that this intervention was necessary. This has several advantages. The large-scale rebuilding has greatly changed the appearance of the neighbourhoods: the architecture is more varied and the public space more attractive. Professionals are very positive in their views on this, and other research shows that residents are also in favour on balance, but are more focused on their very immediate setting and less on the bigger picture. Neighbourhood residents were persuaded to take advantage of the restructuring with large grants for moving home and, in the case of Kruiskamp, more luxurious rented homes which were made affordable by the *Huur op Maat* rent support scheme. One important advantage mentioned earlier is the dilution of problems, i.e. reducing the number of residents with problems. A demolition/new-build project also requires intensive contact with residents, and that creates the opportunity to point them towards help services.



Lessons gained in Schiedam, in particular, are that the demolition and new-build need to be properly phased, with not too much all at once, partly so that shops can retain that clientele and to prevent open building sites lying around for too long. The price of new-build homes must also not be too out of kilter with the existing homes and residents.

A few drawbacks were also mentioned, though they were of subordinate importance for most respondents. They included the displacement of problems and the excessively high new housing costs for some residents. Those 'left behind' in old homes of limited quality or scheduled for demolition were sometimes troubled by this. These tenants were part of a discourse in which their dwellings were characterised as 'outdated', and in anticipation of possible later demolition, maintenance was sometimes minimised. We heard these complaints in Nieuwland and Kruiskamp, but not in Bijlmer (in the K-neighbourhood), probably because of the good quality of the flats in the latter neighbourhood. Moreover, a flat is a different product from the new single-family homes, and the flats in the Bijlmer neighbourhood are clustered, with relatively little 'interface' between old and new buildings. Finally, the marketing of the remaining flats as a 'Bijlmermuseum' was probably a success factor (see Box).

New-build and home sales attract more owner-occupiers. They are more particular about their residential setting and generally intend to stay for longer. On the other hand, home ownership can set owners against tenants, especially if there is a large status difference and if tenants have different habits. We did not see new residents systematically playing a bigger role in terms of personal engagement for the neighbourhood (other than influencing administrators).

## Safety

Safety is regarded as a basic condition for further neighbourhood improvement. Optimism about the tackling of crime and nuisance dominates in the neighbourhoods, both among professionals and residents. Criminal groups were first largely removed from the streets through a combination of judicial action and offering future prospects to young criminals (see Box on Slotervaart). Many felt that the visible presence of human supervision, by the police or other surveillants, made a major contribution to prevention and improved feelings of safety in the public space. As stated, attention then turned to nuisance (or supposed nuisance), mainly caused by youngsters on the streets.

Positive experiences have been gained with offering meeting spaces to groups of youngsters who are willing to accept it. The support of local residents for the location chosen is important here, in order to prevent the nuisance being moved elsewhere. Views are also positive on the supervision and support given by professionals who are able to speak to young people in their own 'language'. The wish was repeatedly expressed that residents themselves should also speak to these youngsters more often, but in a 'normal' and constructive way. Most young people would respond well to this, but not everyone does or dares do that. More fundamentally, residents say that too little is invested in training, work and housing for young people, which might prevent them being on the streets in the first place.

### Clean and tidy residential setting

Clean and tidy streets are a goal in themselves, but also contribute to feelings of safety. That is known from the literature, but was also mentioned by the professionals we spoke to. Maintenance and repair in our neighbourhoods are also used as a means of discouraging infringement against norms and of motivating residents to engage more actively with their neighbourhood. Major efforts were accordingly made to keep the neighbourhoods clean, as evidenced by the descriptions of the professionals and earlier observations by the researchers in a number of neighbourhoods in the 1990s.

Efforts to keep neighbourhoods clean and in good repair began before 2007. In addition to the contribution from demolition and new-build, improving waste collection also plays a role, as stated. Although the biggest improvements have already been made, this theme is still dominant streets and current. Sliding back needs to be avoided, even when local authority spending is being cut.

Further improvements are still being sought, including ways of making waste collection more efficient and therefore cheaper. Ways of achieving this include further technical innovations, for example remote measurement of whether waste containers full. There is also a trend towards passing part of the ownership to residents, though initially this is especially labour-intensive for the professionals.

We found examples of active engagement by residents in keeping the residential setting clean. Residents challenge other residents who create waste about their behaviour or clean up the litter themselves. Both approaches occur in the neighbourhoods in our study, but are not general. A good response and follow-up to reports of things such as illegal fly-tipping by passers-by (Bijlmer) helps here, as does praising those who clean up spontaneously.

Other interesting practices include managing expectations, which in Nieuwland is addressed when discussing the state of maintenance with the task force responsible for the outdoor space (Werkgroep Buitenruimte), in which residents carry out neighbourhood inspections together with professionals. Implicit agreements are made about additional cleaning that residents can tackle themselves on top of the basic level of cleanliness to be achieved by the local authority. It is striking that the demands of the local authority in respect of things such as green maintenance are sometimes higher than those of residents. This makes it fascinating to look more closely at how the level of quality that local authorities achieve compares with what residents consider necessary. The layout and maintenance of green spaces is in any event something in which residents are involved only in exceptional cases, all of them allotments, which are greatly valued by those who use them but also by other residents.

### Shops and the local economy

For many, the neighbourhood economy turns on the market and the business climate. It depends partly on the state of the economy or – when seeking to increase the retail mix and tackle vacancy – on the attitudes of owners of retail premises. Local authorities do not control everything, but structural attention and good links to all parties are of great impor-

tance. Our study showed that where retailers are able to act together and where there is good dialogue between retailers, local authority and landlords, possibly supported by the retail area manager, this leads to greater satisfaction about coordinating the retail offer and makes it easier to tackle other problems.

Naturally, individual businesses also play an important role in the success of a retail area. In the first instance, they are responsible for their own business operations. Mutual cooperation between businesses is important in order to be able to tackle issues that affect the entire retail area. We found confirmation of high neighbourhood engagement and social engagement by local businesses. We often found active business owners with lots of energy, courage and with their hearts in the right place. We learned that a number of them, partly out of pragmatism (limiting travel costs) and partly out of idealism, employ people from the local neighbourhood, offer internships and sometimes also get involved in neighbourhood help initiatives.

### Sport and games

Sport and games have received plenty of attention in the neighbourhoods. Physical amenities have been created for both, such as playgrounds, football pitches and tennis courts and cages. The resources available for supervising games are by contrast diminishing. Although this was not discussed, it is possible that the feelings of safety have improved greatly and that more children have therefore started playing out on the neighbourhood squares without supervision. Sometimes, however, as with the *Buitenkasten* toy library in Amersfoort, the play facility can only be opened for limited amounts of time due to lack of volunteers. By contrast, the playground association is flourishing elsewhere, for example in Kruiskamp, but as with many sports, games and meeting others, the radius of action of some residents is limited to their immediate residential setting.

Participation in sport receives a good deal of attention at national level, and that is reflected in the neighbourhoods. It is interesting that participation increases when sports activities are brought to the neighbourhood. Initiatives in which sports and play facilities in the neighbourhood are opened up as far as possible for activities by local residents, such as the Schoolplein 14 initiative to encourage primary school children to play together, and neighbourhood sports clubs, are therefore promising.

### Arts and culture

Sport appears to receive more attention than arts and culture in the neighbourhoods in our study, probably due to the health effects and the national sports stimulus programme. Administrators seem to have less affinity with arts and culture. However, in Nieuwland and Kruiskamp experiences with modest arts and culture projects were encouraging. Initiatives from the cultural sector itself, involving visiting neighbourhoods to scout for talent, as in the Bijlmer district during our study, are also interesting.

## Integration

Integration received little explicit attention in the interviews, though this is by no means to suggest that it received no attention in the neighbourhoods: it is interwoven through education, the labour market, sport and games, meeting others and housing. Integration was mentioned most often in relation to these latter two topics. Although several cultural groups have long been embedded in the neighbourhoods, there is sometimes a sense of remoteness and here and there of peaceful coexistence. Good contact between groups which live close together is essential if they are to feel at home; that is why so much importance is attached to meeting others and creating a dense infrastructure for this.

Residents experience problems mainly with the rapid influx of new groups into the old rented housing complexes. Successful remedies including intensifying management by providing good information about the mores. Welcome interviews also bear fruit, though all of this is labour-intensive and therefore vulnerable in the face of spending cuts.

- 2 *Which forms of integration emerge in the approach used within the four neighbourhoods? To what extent does the integrated approach add value and what makes it successful or unsuccessful?*

Although a comprehensive, integrated approach is not reserved for the 40-neighbourhoods policy, it was certainly a foundation. The goals in the 40-neighbourhoods policy were broadly defined and many stakeholders were therefore territorially linked to a great ambition, namely making progress on all fronts. The idea was to look for synergy in achieving different goals. The danger that was immediately recognised was that of fragmentation of attention across many goals and subgoals, as had happened in the previous urban policy. At the same time, critics cited the risk of everything descending into a talking shop at the expense of action.

Our impression is that people acted predominantly in the spirit of an integrated approach and that there was no stifling practice of 'linking everything to everything else'. At most there were forms of consultation by way of briefings, which were attended by partners from all domains, who then spent time listening to accounts of progress in domains where they themselves had no control. This was the case in the Bijlmer, for example, and in Nieuwland we heard from some people who had stepped down because they felt there was too much sitting and talking. Short lines of communication, informal, enjoyable and personal contacts consistently appear to be the key to forms of cooperation which enthuse stakeholders. Most examples of an integrated approach cover a limited remit, such as cleaning up a shopping centre, addressing safety and maintenance in the neighbourhood, literally mobilising young people, or helping and supporting residents. These smaller forms of integration are greatly appreciated. Attention was devoted in sections S.2.2 and S.2.3 to the desirable aspects of an integrated approach (the 'morality of integrality'):

- Not pushing citizens from pillar to post.
- Exploiting a network to avoid duplication (e.g. one family, one coach).
- Using a network for adequate referral to people with the right competence to address the problem.

- Using a network to gain a shared grip on a problem situation or group with which network members all come into contact; social problems often extend over different social domains, for which different parties have expertise or responsibility. We saw several examples of this quest for synergy, such as cooperation in relation to safety (police, youth workers, municipal public spaces), improving retail areas (local businesses, shopping street managers, local authority, property owners, police) and improving sports participation in the neighbourhood and therefore health (schools, education, local authority, private funds).
  - Seeing things in perspective. Not acting in a way that is penny wise, pound foolish, but having sight of the consequences for other partners as well.
  - Creating support among all stakeholders; everyone pulling in the same direction for a better and more efficient result.
  - Something for everyone. This did not emerge explicitly in the interviews, but our impression is that simultaneously addressing issues that affect different groups of residents strengthens the trust in administrators and professionals. If attention were given successively to new-build occupiers, older people, young people or residents with problems, the other groups might easily feel ignored. A simultaneous approach creates an impression that the neighbourhood is being improved for everyone.
- 3 *What role does the personal factor play among administrators, executive professionals, residents and local businesses in improving liveability? What competences deliver added value? What makes the personal factor successful or unsuccessful?*

In the terminology of the WRR report *Vertrouwen in de buurt* ('Trust in the neighbourhood') (WRR 2005), which was later adopted by the Minister for Housing, Communities and Integration, Ella Vogelaar, there were powerful administrators with the personal drive and charisma to force a difference. In the years thereafter, the literature devoted more attention to the personal factor, with attention broadening to *best persons*, usually professionals, though they could also be residents (Van den Brink et al. 2012). We did not monitor the respondents closely enough to be able to test the typology presented by Van den Brink et al. (2012) in practice. The characters they describe and on the basis of which they created their typology were however recognisable: the people who simply get on with things every day, the front-line workers, the social entrepreneurs and the bridge-builders.

There are people who are regarded by everyone as indispensable for the neighbourhood: the initiators of familiar bottom-up projects, the neighbourhood mayors, the people who act as linchpins between different networks, but also the professionals who are praised and followed by residents. Also mentioned were people who are visible, recognisable and approachable in the neighbourhood.

It is not always clear here who earns the credits and who sets the standards. In the literature, this also depends on the function that someone fulfils and how strategic it is. We barely spoke to any administrators, whereas that is probably the level at which the personal factor can have the most wide-ranging impact. Among those doing the more hands-

on work, which included most of our interviewees, personal qualities lead to mini-successes in a more limited area or theme (clean, complete, safe; learning; doing business). No uniform set of characteristics emerged in the interviews which apply in every role. Within a given role, for example the administration of the neighbourhood or district, it can also be a case of 'the right person at the right time', for example when Ahmed Marcouch was succeeded as district council chairman by Ahmed Baâdoud, both of whom were praised for their different qualities. This adds to the point about having the right person in the right place (as mentioned by Van den Brink et al. (2012)). This also makes planning and scouting difficult: how will the ideal profile develop, given the changes in the neighbourhood and in the tasks? Moreover, the character, priorities or skills of professionals or residents may develop gradually. We also had the impression that the appointment of key individuals was sometimes a matter of taste. The question is therefore how far the personal factor is something that can be planned. The appointment of key figures in strategic positions in a network is by contrast something that can be planned (§5.2.2), and it can then only be hoped that they will develop into someone who is better able than others to fulfil their task as a point of contact, bridge-builder and lubricator.

4 *How are residents and businesses involved in the policy and with what result? To what extent do their own initiatives contribute to the liveability of their neighbourhood?*

In answering this question, we looked at different forms of resident input, depending on who initiated it: from civic initiatives in which residents took the lead, to regular consultation initiated by administrators.

### Civic initiatives

Examples of civic initiatives in our neighbourhoods include playground groups, neighbourhood 'elders' (*buurtvaders*), community enterprises and meeting platforms. What they have in common is that they are a response to social needs in their immediate setting. Many initiatives are focused on a variety of activities and are therefore more 'neighbourhood-driven' than 'issue-driven', as we often see today with care or energy cooperatives, for example. In addition to the primary returns generated by the activities of self-organising residents, there are also side-effects; such initiatives often lead to more cohesion and mutual contacts within a neighbourhood.

Continuity of initiatives is not automatic. Key words in the search for ways of belonging initiatives are 'demand-led' and 'facilitating'. Civil servants and professionals try to meet the wishes of initiators and to support them without taking over. At the same time, the policy prescribes that the support given should as far as possible be non-financial, though obtaining grants is seen by some initiators as a form of recognition and incentive.

This applies more generally for open appreciation from politicians and administrators, including where residents have organised activities with a high degree of independence. Apart from working with local authorities, initiators also collaborate – and sometimes



compete – with all kinds of other parties: police, schools, housing associations, welfare organisations and other residents’ initiatives.

### Seeking volunteers

Local authorities made extra efforts in the 40-neighbourhoods period to stimulate new resident initiatives. Grants were frequently made available and attention was sometimes drawn to existing initiatives. As well as organised initiatives, there are lots of other ways in which residents work for their neighbourhood: keeping the streets clean, volunteering in the community centre or looking after a neighbourhood square together. As with society as a whole, it is difficult to find permanent volunteers in these neighbourhoods too, for example due to lack of time, poor health, lack of self-confidence or personal worries which soak up energy.

We regularly encountered forms of activation. First, a great deal of effort is directed towards children and young people. There is an impression among professionals that the present generation of young people are more active and more responsible than previous generations. On the other hand, it is sometimes said that it is difficult to keep children motivated for much more than six months. The involvement of children and young people is appealing and also brings in the parents. Thereafter, it is key to motivate others as well. Second, activation is also accompanied by ownership of a part of the public space. We saw that this can work very well (e.g. the Wibautplein in Nieuwland), but also that it benefits from close monitoring. Third, we saw many attempts to install individuals in key positions in the neighbourhood because they act as gatekeepers to a network. Good experiences have been gained here, too. The resident then functions as a link who raises the issues that concern their ‘rank and file’. Professionals can see from the turnout to planned meetings whether the key person has judged this correctly. We also heard that word-of-mouth is the most productive way of recruiting volunteers.

### Consultative platforms

In contrast to ‘do initiatives’, consultative platforms are more likely to be dominated by white, older men and women. Some successful attempts have been made to make these platforms more representative, for example by bringing in key figures from ethnic minority groups. This also applies for new concepts such as the G1000 consultation platform in Kruiskamp, where lots are drawn to decide who can attend a given meeting in order to talk about issues affecting the neighbourhood with other residents and with professionals. This form of consultation is found to be motivating and to raise turnout. Also interesting is that there are always a number of new faces around the table. That said, the representativeness is not yet all it could be.

## 5 Which experiences offer lessons for the decentralisations in the social domain?

Professionals in the neighbourhoods look back with nostalgia at the ‘Achter-de-voordeur’ programmes, which involved visits to the homes of individual families. The programmes no longer exist in their old form due to budgetary constraints. The neighbourhood teams have not yet reached the stage of making home visits, and there are doubts in Nieuwland and Kruiskamp whether they will ever do so. Stakeholders also wonder to what extent the old programmes reached the right people, since by no means everyone is prepared to open their door. It is also not obvious in advance which are and are not the best streets to visit, there were uncertainties about how frequent the visits should be, and the referrals process did not always go smoothly. However, the preventive nature of the approach was universally praised and is now missed. The approach was also used to persuade residents to become volunteers. Residents that we spoke to and who had been approached take a more critical view, seeing it to some degree as nannying and interference and leaving them with the feeling of, ‘If I need something, I will come and ask for it’.

This last point is the way it now is, with residents able to visit the neighbourhood teams. Section S.2.3 reported on the additional demand that the local embedding of help and support services is generating and of the difficulties facing those services. De 40-neighbourhoods policy inspired local stakeholders to an integrated approach. An important goal in this approach was to avoid pushing citizens from pillar to post. This can be efficient to avoid duplication. This requires smoothly collaborating partners in a sufficiently staffed team. Two years of experience in Nieuwland show that the team is not yet satisfactory coping with the increased demand for assistance. This bears the risk of sending people from pillar to post as yet.

## 6 What insights do the interviews in the neighbourhoods offer for predominantly statistical research on the effects of neighbourhood improvement?

Section S.2.1 reflected on the relationship between the findings of the study ‘Working on the Neighbourhood’ (*Werk aan de Wijk*) (Permentier et al. 2013) and our study. Briefly, the earlier study found no added value from the 40-neighbourhoods policy in terms of liveability and safety compared with the policy in other deprived neighbourhoods. We believe this is because the biggest contributions to those improvements were applied more broadly than in just the 40 neighbourhoods, and that this was also happening before the initiative was launched. After 2007, efforts were directed towards achieving further improvements with the input of residents, but the aspirations grew along with the improvements. This also means that a one-off catch-up is not enough and that neighbourhoods need to be properly maintained.

The stories behind the figures also help us to put the results of the *Urban40* study (Stronks et al. 2014) of health effects into perspective. Notable effects on health were found for the 40-neighbourhoods policy, especially in neighbourhoods where there had been high policy input. Some of the interventions related to health, for example sport in the neighbour-

hood, information on diet and medicines, and allotments. But interventions not focused directly on health can also help reduce stress. During activities and events aimed at promoting meeting others, those who share similar problems can get things off their chest and people are removed from their isolation.

In this study we found a plausible explanation for the increase in mental health care found in *Urban40*. As experiences in the neighbourhood support team in Nieuwland showed, but also in other locations such as schools, supply creates demand. When people feel there is no barrier to talking about their problems, this leads to more requests for help. Within the discourse of the 40-neighbourhoods policy this was seen as a good thing, because social policy had been deployed for a long period. In combination with more recent severe spending cuts in the care sector, however, growing demand will change into a matter for concern: will the support teams still be able to provide the requested support?

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### **Bijlmer K-neighbourhood**

The K-neighbourhood in the Bijlmer district of Amsterdam, so called because all the street names begin with 'K', no longer resembles the high-rise neighbourhood that it once was, with its many empty flats, decay and drugs crime. Cars no longer race around on the elevated avenues that criss-cross the district; several flats have been replaced by houses. The last batch of 'honeycomb' flats is being renovated and turned into a museum, the 'Bijlmermuseum'. Illustrative of the definitive turnaround in the fortunes of the neighbourhood is the fact that the 'Kleiburg' block of flats, which was scheduled for demolition, sold well as flats for renovation. The K-zone sports park is located beneath the Metro viaduct, the result of a civic initiative in the 1990s. Not far from the racetrack, 'the tree that saw everything' recalls the El Al aircraft which ploughed into the 'Kruitberg' and 'Groeneveen' blocks of flats in 1992. That was also the year when the renovation of the Bijlmer began.

Even before the 40-neighbourhoods approach, the 'Kansrijk Zuidoost' project was launched in Bijlmer, a large-scale initiative intended to bring out the potential of this part of Amsterdam and which went on to serve as an example for other urban districts. It helped to shed light on the problems of the district and to refer people with problems to appropriate help. Recently it was compromised for privateering successful initiatives from residents. The 'neighbourhood ambassadors' also appealed to people's imagination; the district council and welfare organisation nominated active neighbourhood residents as 'ambassadors', who gave civil servants and professionals access to the many networks in their neighbourhood, including among Surinamese, Antilleans, Ghanaians and other residents from ethnic minorities. There are large groups of people without papers living in the district, who can in practice only be reached through the many migrant churches or radio stations.

After the physical renovations and removal of the drug scene from the streets, the charms of the district are more evident, such as the many green spaces and the congenial atmosphere among the colourful residents. Despite being aware of many image problems, many residents are proud of their neighbourhood and it is not uncommon for people who had left to return. Several professionals we spoke to also live there.

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## Nieuwland

The Nieuwland district, close to the picturesque centre of Schiedam, is portrayed in a logo as a patchwork of neighbourhoods each with their own identity. This was the outcome of a branding exercise in the early 2000s and marked the start of a major offensive against vacancy, criminality and decay. Although there are still critical voices from residents of some old flats, many are satisfied and attached to their neighbourhood. There are also many active residents.

Consensus on the importance of a more varied housing stock was achieved relatively late in the 'cheap' Schiedam, so that the ultimate new-build plans for Nieuwland could not all be realised before the onset of the economic crisis. In some locations, building sites lay open for years.

One striking achievement of the renewal is the Nolenslaan shopping street, which was successfully renovated, whereas many shops in the centre of Schiedam are standing empty. Through good cooperation with local businesses, property owners, the shopping street manager and the local authority, an attractive and safe retail avenue has been created, with varied shops and business operators who live alongside their customers and sometimes organise social events for them.

Another 'pearl' is Wibautplein, a temporarily configured square containing a natural garden, a pavilion and an allotment which is used to grow food for the food bank. Local residents manage all of this and organise activities in the pavilion, which thus provides a replacement for a closed community centre.

Poverty rates in Nieuwland were above the average in the priority neighbourhoods in 2007.

Schiedam receives an influx of people from Rotterdam seeking housing. This creates concerns for the local authority, partly because of the 'Rotterdam Act', which closes off parts of the city for low-income tenants. A neighbourhood support team has been in place in Nieuwland for two years, where people can go with problems. This decentralised help and support service has generated lots of extra demand within the district, and this fuels the concerns about the influx of residents with problems into the municipality.

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## Slotervaart

The whole Nieuw-West district on the edge of Amsterdam is a priority neighbourhood. In the Slotervaart part of the district, the 1065 postcode area is situated between the Sloterplass waterway and the railway line. It is an early post-war neighbourhood that is still virtually in its original condition. There has been some physical renewal, but the economic crisis brought it to a halt. Does this mean that things can also improve even without physical renewal? The neighbourhood was already quite varied when it was first designed, and many single-family homes were accordingly sold. Moreover, the promise that flats could be renewed or renovated appears to have motivated residents to continue living in a small home – perhaps logical, given that moving house within Amsterdam is too expensive.

Nieuw-West, including Slotervaart, mainly became known for its problems with youth crime and nuisance. Feelings of safety have improved greatly, even though the number of young people has increased. Criminal groups, especially youngsters, have been removed from the streets as a result of the 'Top600' initiative targeting the 600 perpetrators of high-impact offences. In addition to this repressive action, the initiative also offers future prospects to young people who are open to them. More preventive initiatives were also taken by residents in Slotervaart, with financial backing from the district council. The Ara Cora Foundation focuses on providing sports and coaching

facilities for young people, while the Moroccan Seniors Salon (*Ouderensalon*) organises emancipatory meetings on topics such as parenting.

Shopping centre managers were deployed to smarten up the retail zones, including Sierplein.

The post-war neighbourhood development concept dictated that there also had to be local shops, which explains the small retail outlets scattered within the residential blocks. It is difficult to find a commercial use for these buildings, since retail activities are now mainly concentrated in the shopping centres. Civil-society organisations are clustered in the Huis van de Wijk building in the adjacent Overtoomse Veld neighbourhood, which falls outside the radius of action of several residents.

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### **Kruiskamp**

Kruiskamp was the first post-war district to be built in Amersfoort. It looks like a green area, and following the large-scale restructuring it contains a very varied built environment, with old and new flats mixed with houses and a highly diverse architecture. The green character, with lots of playgrounds, has remained. The Kruiskamp playground association, which has been in existence since 1930, is a sustainable residents' initiative which is run by a faithful group of volunteers.

There are a number of special features that distinguish Kruiskamp from the other cases. It has for example been removed from the list of priority neighbourhoods because the objectives set have been achieved. There has also been a community enterprise for several years: Kruiskamp Ondernemt. This is a community initiative in which residents have renovated an old municipal school and now run it as a meeting and business space. There are studios and workshops, and rooms can also be hired for parties or recreational activities. Compared with many other community enterprises, the objectives are modest: the board leaves it to residents to take the initiative to organise meetings. The centre is intended to offer an alternative to district community centres, but any activities must be organised by residents themselves.

Another difference is that a new form of resident consultation is being used. The action plans and neighbourhood consultations have come to an end, but meetings continue using the G1000 method, in which citizens themselves set the agenda and form a panel to negotiate with the local authorities. For Kruiskamp, this means in practice that periodic meetings are organised to which 100 local residents are selected at random and invited to talk about neighbourhood problems and what they would like to happen in the neighbourhood. Participants are selected by drawing lots, while groups that are still underrepresented, such as residents of Turkish or Moroccan origin, are recruited in a supplementary round, for example by the neighbourhood 'elders'. Experiences with this approach are positive, with new faces appearing at meetings.

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