



The Utrecht Refugee Launchpad Final Evaluation Report

November 2019

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This project is co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund through the Urban Innovative Actions Initiative.

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Authors and acknowledgements

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We thank the many people who have contributed to the evaluation. Partners and stakeholders of the U-RLP project provided data and assistance with patience and good humour, and we thank them for their cooperation with the evaluation. We would also like to thank a team of student researchers who provided valuable assistance throughout the project, including Yousef Assad, Imge Azdural, Carmen Dynamus, Hugo Hegeman, Camelia Nechar, Esther Nieuwenhuijzen, Stijn Scholten, Roel Wuis and Samra Zejnelagic, as well as Beaudine van Dijk and Lot Groesz from the Socius community. We thank two Masters students in particular, Margot Bandringa and Raneem Salem, for their contributions to some of the qualitative research. Thanks to Remko van den Berg, director of NOA, for assistance on using the Refugee Personal Profile (PPVS) and to Michel Mars (BI analyst at Centraal Orgaan opvang asielzoekers (COA) for helping to answer our relentless queries on the

population of the asylum seeker centre. We also wish to thank Floris Fonville for providing city work and income data.

We extend deep gratitude to the research advisory board in advising on research strategy and the synthesis of the findings: Professor Ash Amin, Professor Alice Bloch, Dr David Parsons, Professor Peter Scholten and Dr Sarah Spencer. Finally, we express our heartfelt thanks to the participants and respondents involved in the Utrecht Refugee Launchpad, including all the residents living in the complex around 'Plan Einstein' and neighbourhood residents, for giving their time to be involved in the research.

Suggested citation: Oliver, C. Dekker, R. and Geuijen, K., 2019. *The Utrecht Refugee Launchpad Final Evaluation Report*. University College London and COMPAS: University of Oxford.

Executive summary of the Independent Evaluation

The Utrecht Refugee Launchpad was an innovative solution to the issue of asylum seeker and refugee reception, conceived during the 2015-2016 refugee 'crisis'. The city government, benefiting from direct European funding, built a partnership with NGOs, social enterprises and educational institutions. Between November 2016 and October 2018, the project housed asylum seekers and refugees in the same complex as local young people in the district of Overvecht. It used co-learning, inviting residents from the neighbourhood to take courses together and engage in social activities in a shared social space. Courses in English and entrepreneurship were offered as subjects of 'futureproof' value, useful to participants' professional future regardless of the country they would ultimately reside in.

The co-housing and co-learning reception facility, known locally as 'Plan Einstein', aimed to develop asylum seekers' social networks with neighbours, while providing opportunities for participants to develop their skills, to enhance wellbeing and improve community cohesion in the neighbourhood. As such, the project aimed to engage with concerns from receiving communities, activate asylum seekers 'from day one', as well as reverse the negative spiral of boredom, anxiety, and worsening mental health that existing approaches to reception generate.

The research

A theory-based evaluation of the project was conducted, where researchers worked alongside the Plan Einstein partnership as the project unfolded. The evaluation sought to assess the project's effectiveness, benefits and early outcomes. Equally important was to generate insight into what worked and what worked less well for national government and localities across Europe to consider when rethinking asylum seeker reception. The evaluation used a mixed methods approach, interrogating a range of quantitative and qualitative data. This report presents the findings of the evaluation on the project in Overvecht, and some insights into the scaling of the project as it continues nearby in Plan Einstein Haydn.

Results

The summary provides an overview of activities provided, outcomes that Plan Einstein contributed to, and observations on governance of the project, followed by recommendations for similar projects elsewhere.

The research involved:

1. Two face to face surveys of residents at 300 addresses near the centre (one year apart);
2. Two online surveys with the young people living at Plan Einstein (one year apart);
3. Monitoring process indicators e.g. numbers of participants on courses & in social activities;
4. Analysis of asylum seeker intake assessment data;
5. Evaluations of course activities,
6. 163 Interviews with all groups involved;
7. Participant observation in centre activities, events and meetings.
8. Additional data from the national agency for asylum seeker accommodation (COA) and the Work and Income department of the local government.

Plan Einstein Activities

Who participated in Plan Einstein?

- **296** asylum seekers and refugees from the adjacent Einsteindreef asylum seeker centre (ASC) took part in Plan Einstein activities. This represents **53% of the 558** adults who lived at the asylum seeker centre. Of the total population of the asylum seeker centre, 40.9% were from Syria, with 12.2% from Eritrea, and others from countries including Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Ethiopia.
- Initially a small group of 40, young, male asylum seekers lived at the asylum seeker centre from February 2017. The majority arrived from August 2017 and included many more families.
- The population of the asylum seeker centre was rather atypical. Approximately **60%** of asylum seekers housed at the centre had, or knew they would get a permit to stay in the Netherlands. This was a different population to that for which the project was conceived in the emergency context of early 2016.
- **53** young tenants lived in the complex, renting rooms in the building adjacent to the asylum seeker centre. **40%** of tenants responding to the survey lived in the Overvecht neighbourhood before.
- Between **40-50%** of course participants came from the neighbourhood, or elsewhere in Utrecht.

Plan Einstein Outcomes

Plan Einstein's theory of change stated that the project would create good relations in the neighbourhood, as well as deliver increased skills and connections and higher levels of mental wellbeing for asylum seekers and neighbourhood members taking part in the project.

What results came from the project?

- There was good retention on courses. In the English classes, almost half (49%) of participants took a second course or more, indicating evidence of progression between levels.
- **18** people achieved advanced Cambridge certificates in English, a qualification of value for further study.
- By October 2018, there were **nine** business ideas in developed planning, some registered at the Chamber of Commerce. Most of these were from neighbourhood members (including several refugees living in the city).
- Participants commented on the high quality, enthusiastic and motivational teaching and coaching received in the Plan Einstein project. **89%** of respondents to course evaluations (both

What was delivered by Plan Einstein in Overvecht?

- **117 social activities** bringing asylum seekers, refugees, tenants and other neighbourhood residents into contact with each other.
- Flexible educational activities operating at different times:
 - 38 x 8-week classes in English**, with **558** class places and **281** unique participants.
 - 13 x 8-week classes in Entrepreneurship**, with **200** unique participants.
 - A business incubation programme**, including workshops, courses, coaching and networking, reaching **229** unique participants.
- The centre engaged participants in broader initiatives like drama, music, Dutch language-learning, and higher education. It became a hub for external stakeholders.

Who delivered it?

A partnership comprising:

- The City of Utrecht local government
- Socius Wonen
- The Dutch Council for Refugees (VluchtelingenWerk West en Midden-Nederland¹) with Welkom in Utrecht (NGOs).
- Utrecht University's Centre for Entrepreneurship
- The VolksUniversiteit (People's University)
- Social Impact Factory
- University College London, University of Oxford and Roehampton University.

residents of the neighbourhood and asylum seeker centre) reported that they had improved their English speaking and listening skills. **74%** of respondents felt their networks had enlarged and networking skills had improved.

Key findings: good relations:

The research first examined how far relationships between asylum seeker and neighbourhood residents improved following the Plan Einstein project.

In the neighbourhood, research showed:

- Initially negative sentiments dominated public debate around the asylum seeker centre. However, this hostile narrative did not reflect the views of the majority once the centre opened. By Autumn 2017, **the attitude of the neighbourhood to the asylum seeker centre was moderately positive**. It remained so until the centre closed in October 2018. This finding is in line with other research, which shows it is common for hostility to occur before an asylum seeker centre opens, but resistance decreases once it is established.
- Neutral or benign attitudes** at the neighbourhood level **stemmed from the absence of expected negative experiences**, rather than from close involvement in the centre or contact with asylum seekers there (see Jantina, in the box).
- Most neighbourhood survey respondents did not actively seek the closure of the asylum seeker centre:** 14.9% were happy that the ASC was closing, 41.4% neutral and 43.7% negative (see Roos, in box).
- The ambitions to create Plan Einstein as a vibrant neighbourhood centre facilitating positive encounters between asylum seekers and neighbours were partially met.** Plan Einstein exceeded its targets to include 20% of non-ASC residents in classes. Engagement of the neighbourhood in Plan Einstein picked up over the course of 2017-2018, although in the broader neighbourhood, the survey shows that a minority attended and most people visited on occasion, rather than regularly. Many found the threshold of visiting an asylum seeker centre to be high. There was also relatively little time to build a community centre. As such, surveys show that Plan Einstein did not lead to a significant increase in contact at the level of the wider neighbourhood.

Jantina, a Dutch neighbourhood resident in her late 20s said: *'So while it is 300 metres away, if it hadn't been for those leaflets, I wouldn't have noticed it. In that sense, my experiences are neutral, I don't really notice it that much'.*

Roos, a Dutch neighbourhood resident in her 60s said about Plan Einstein's closure: *'[It's] a waste of the money you have invested. Of the energy you have put in. And also of the neighbourhood. Because as a neighbourhood, you are being taken along in those innovation projects....For a moment you are in the picture, you are on the map. And then it remains the question whether that will still be the case'.*

- **Plan Einstein attracted specific segments of the neighbourhood to courses and activities.** The initial intended beneficiaries of young people not in education, employment and training (NEETs) shifted, and many residents of the neighbourhood attending courses and activities had refugee or other migrant-background themselves. There were also some locals of Dutch origin, of whom many had prior interests in refugees.
- **Residents of the neighbourhood and asylum centre experienced the mixed courses as positive.** Sharing a goal in learning helped lead to some meaningful encounters (see Fatima, in the box).

Fatima, an asylum seeker in her twenties, from Syria said: 'We used to study together with other refugees and other Dutch people. All refugees and Dutch people who attended the course went together to the [Cambridge] exam. We felt that we were one group, although we are different. Although they were so different from us [...], the course gave us the chance to meet and interact together. I think it was a clever idea from people who work in Plan Einstein. The course was free, so people came. Sometimes we used to meet after the course to study together'.

Research with young tenants involved in co-housing showed:

- **Engagement by the tenants living on the Plan Einstein site was variable.** A small number of tenants were very active. The majority engaged with the project on a more incidental basis and some were not involved at all.
- **Contact with asylum seeker centre residents fluctuated.** In early 2017, contact was regular and easy. This was the period when equal numbers of asylum seekers, with similar characteristics to the tenants lived there (see Janneke in the box). After higher numbers of people, including more families moved in, contact decreased. Between 2017 and 2018, contact increased again, although tenants did not experience making contact with the same ease as in the early days.
- **Social contacts** between asylum seeker residents and neighbourhood residents (including tenants) **were characterized as neighbourly, convivial relations.** They had value at the time of the initiative, but endured less beyond the lifetime of the project.
- The research **confirmed the vital importance of shared common, neutral and freely accessible space** (such as a kitchen, living room, workspace and outdoor space) with a welcoming atmosphere, for creating **meaningful social and professional encounters.** In the case of Plan Einstein in Overvecht, that neutrality and openness was achieved through having the space near but separate from the ASC, under the responsibility of the municipality, and managed by a social enterprise. It worked best following co-design with users. For much of the project, the indoor public space was closed, and participants noted this was a missed opportunity for people to begin to forge connections.
- **Co-housing in an asylum seeker centre complex meant 'adjacent' co-housing rather than mixed co-living.** The arrangement offered fewer of the conditions vital for meaningful encounters, such as equality in number, shared facilities (such as a shared entrance, and use of kitchens) to encourage habitual contact. The transience of the population was another barrier to contact: asylum seekers' length of stay was around four months, whereas tenants' average stay was eighteen months.

Janneke, a tenant in her 20s, from the Netherlands said: 'Yeah, yeah, the first part [...]. Yeah I thought it was really fun. That was by far... For me, the project succeeded there. And that was... That was great in itself, because that made the rest... We can think back like oh yeah that first part went really well, so naturally, so organic, so nice, that it simply... Because you came home and somebody was smoking outside and then you had a conversation about the Quran or so'.

Key findings: Increased skills and connections to help with early labour market activation

The research also examined whether, and how far, asylum seekers and local inhabitants had gained skills and knowledge from Plan Einstein. It found:

Salman, an asylum seeker in his 20s from Iran said, 'All these things that we found I did with the help of [my coach from Berenschot]. I had no idea [about planning to access a university course] It's not something the average person knows anything about'.

Frans, Dutch neighbourhood resident in his 50s said, 'Before I come in contact with the people of Plan Einstein, I was a little bit depressed. I could not find a job, everywhere you go 'no you're too old, too this, too that'. It's not nice to hear that. It's like you are with one leg in the grave, that is how I felt at that moment. So now it's good, I have no depression anymore, every day I go out of my bed at seven o'clock'.

legal status, age, ethnicity, nationality and gender. However, some asylum seekers found it hard to take advantage of courses (see Afwerki and Leilani in the box). These included people with lower levels of education, language proficiency and experiencing a wide cultural distance to the Netherlands.

- **Almost a year after leaving Plan Einstein**, the qualitative research followed up 35 refugees. It found that **around half of them were actively engaged in making the transition to the labour market**. For a small group this was through work, and for most, it was through accessing formal education and volunteering. **The remainder were learning Dutch**, prioritising improving language skills in order to make a (satisfactory) start in the labour market. Some felt they had lost time at the asylum seeker centre during which they could have been learning Dutch (see Faisal, in the box).
- When the research ended in October 2019, we found **no statistically significant difference in dependence**

- **Plan Einstein helped participants make a 'transition to transition' into the labour market**. It equipped participants with English language and entrepreneurship skills. It also gave them confidence and insight into Dutch society and skills in team-working. Participants built connections with local business people. They received personal, frank advice on professional plans and business ideas. This helped participants understand Dutch systems and navigate unfamiliar procedures in a new country (see Salman, in the box).

- **Entrepreneurship was attainable for some, but not all participants**. 60% of asylum seeker residents in their intake assessments expressed an interest in starting a business. In practice however, it was faster and easier for neighbourhood participants to turn business ideas into a reality than for asylum seekers or refugees. Some of these benefited from the intensive help at Plan Einstein (see Frans, in the box).

- **Plan Einstein worked best for participants with already good levels of education**. The project specifically opted to make courses open to people regardless of differences in educational level,

Afwerki, an Eritrean man in his 30s, took only a few English classes, 'because it was too difficult for me'.

Leilani, an Iranian woman in her 20s reported that many Iranians did not join the classes, 'especially older men who already had children [...] they didn't want to feel unconfident, so they didn't talk'.

One employee of the business incubation strand pointed out they had learned lessons about telling everyone that, 'they can be great and you can reach for the moon. Actually, the experience points out that sometimes, you can't reach for the moon...since for example it is impossible for a refugee to go to a bank and ask for money.'

Faisal, A Syrian in his 20s said, 'Two years in refugee camps, I could not learn Dutch. Now people ask me: 'For how long have you been here?' I say, 'three years'. They say. 'But your Dutch is not good. Why?' Of course, because for two years I could not do anything'.

on welfare benefits between the Plan Einstein group of refugees and the larger refugee population in Utrecht (cohorts 2017 and 2018 combined and controlling for gender, age and duration of being housed). However, most refugees were still in the process of civic integration (*inburgering*). Analyses from CBS (Statistics Netherlands) and the City of Utrecht show that more refugees start to leave welfare benefits after finishing civic integration (on average 32-33 months after being housed and beginning to receive welfare benefits). Only after that time would we expect any difference in welfare dependence between Plan Einstein refugees and others to emerge.

- **Evidence on the value of ‘futureproof’ education (relevant anywhere) is limited.** This is because at Plan Einstein in Overvecht, at that time, a majority of asylum seekers were likely to gain status. They expressed a desire to learn skills relevant to staying in the Netherlands, especially learning and intensively practicing Dutch language (see Faisal, in the box). Most activities and classes in Plan Einstein were in English. Interviews with three migrants who were refused status still felt the skills would be useful for futures they hoped would still be realised in the Netherlands or other European contexts. At this point, they did not wish to consider returning to countries of origin so it is not possible to conclude on the utility of futureproof education in that context.

Key findings: Increased wellbeing

The evaluation research examined whether, and how far, asylum seekers (and neighbourhood residents) experienced greater levels of mental wellbeing. It found:

Wondimu, an asylum seeker from Ethiopia in his 30s referred to his time at Hengelo ASC as a place with ‘nothing’ there, where he spent all the time (day and night) sleeping.

Jamileh, an Iranian asylum seeker in her sixties, arrived at Plan Einstein ‘*broken, tired and disappointed*’. She credited learning English at Plan Einstein as something that ‘*changed everything*’, explaining ‘*I couldn’t speak Dutch, when I learned English, I could talk to people, I could explain about myself.*’

- **Most asylum seeker and refugee participants reported improved feelings of wellbeing** achieved through the Plan Einstein project. They felt able to use their time more productively in contrast to the feelings of boredom and depression they experienced in other asylum seeker centres (see Wondimu and Jamileh’s perspective in the box). Participants represent a biased sample, already self-reporting quite high levels of mental wellbeing. Some asylum seekers were too ill, anxious or depressed to participate in the first place.

- **Participants felt more connected**, as they gained understanding of Dutch people and their ways. They described feeling relaxed and safe in the physical spaces of the project and felt respected by personnel there. There was an additional outcome of **increased bonding social capital** created for some participants with other asylum seekers and refugees. Those relationships flourished particularly through having access to

the living room (incubator) space.

- **At times, Plan Einstein enabled participants to contribute actively as co-producers**, rather than consumers or ‘guests’. This increased feelings of reciprocity, equality and feelings of being valued. However, the project could have provided more opportunities for asylum seekers and refugees to share their educational, professional and experiential knowledge in co-produced activities.
- **One year on, research showed that participants experienced varied levels of wellbeing.** Many refugees in the qualitative sample remained reasonably optimistic about the future. This was related to their improved professional outlooks. Many other refugees, of roughly equal proportion, still felt their lives were on hold until they had stronger Dutch language

skills. Once they moved into a house, their expectations that ‘their lives could begin’ were not fully met. Some participants missed Plan Einstein, as they experienced greater loneliness and fewer social connections once they moved into a house in Utrecht or in other municipalities.

- **The project’s effects on participants’ wellbeing were affected by its operation within the institutional confines of national law and policy.** Participants experienced long delays and uncertainty in the asylum procedure, and felt their agency was limited by living in rule-governed asylum seeker centres. Short stays and having to move suddenly between asylum seeker centres weakened the construction of fledgling social networks. Upon gaining status, 65% of Plan Einstein’s refugees were housed away from the city of Utrecht and 55% away from region, in contradiction with the city’s preference for local placement in their *doorgande lijn* (continuous line) policy. This made it difficult for relationships made with Dutch people in the project to endure, particularly since they were inhibited already by language barriers.

Key findings: Governance

Plan Einstein benefited from direct European funding, allowing for local experimentation. It brought together a network of organizations from different sectors, managed through the principles of equality and non-hierarchical organization, and supported by evaluation and research. The research found:

- **Funding to the local level directly from the European Commission (through the Urban Innovative Action scheme) was very important. It enabled, and gave legitimacy, to a network of local actors with different expertise, to innovate on asylum seeker reception.** Participants in Plan Einstein were able to benefit from a holistic approach, and a diverse and complementary range of skills and networks offered by a range of people, from different organizations. The direct communication with the Commission also allowed for the project to adjust and to adapt to unforeseen circumstances.
- **The project management adopted a horizontal network arrangement based on equality, which was appropriate to the challenge. As a result of this arrangement, at times however there was a risk that partners and beneficiaries found the goals, role-expectations and coordination to be ambiguous.** The research found that requests for clearer leadership emerged when decisions needed to be made on those topics, and there were differing opinions in the partnership.
- **The project came under the spotlight** as a result of the European funder’s appropriate emphasis on sharing and transferability, an interest in the project from researchers, as well as high media interest. This interest enabled **experimentation and adaptation, but could make it more difficult to highlight areas of the project in need of reform.**
- **Evaluation provided valuable information to feed into the project as it developed, facilitating adaptation.** However, some partners would have welcomed more opportunities for collective reflections on, criticism of, and revision to, the initiative as it evolved. The local government addressed criticisms by funding many new activities as the project went on, and sought to embed lessons learned at the new centre at Plan Einstein Haydn.
- **The local turn in managing asylum seeker and refugee reception has led to tensions with the national agency. These remained challenging to resolve.** At times, the role of the national agency COA was helpful to the initiative, and at other times inhibited the partnership fully achieving its goals. Cooperation became more difficult, especially as the concept of Plan Einstein transferred to another asylum seeker centre in the city. Furthermore, policy shifts and differences in ideology and organisational priorities between the local and national level have created tensions and affected Plan Einstein’s scaling to another location across the city.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Amal, a woman in her 20s from Syria said:
'When you feel that there is someone who is trying to get you out of your bubble, you have the desire to go outside and try new things.'

Plan Einstein provides an emerging solution through local level cooperation to some key challenges in asylum seeker reception. Its promise lies in its attention to relationships of asylum seekers: with each other, with people in the neighbourhood that surround reception centres and within local and national business environments. **It recognises the power of connection**, and understands social and professional networking as a key facilitator of integration. There is much evidence to support the investment in skills as a way of improving outcomes, which Plan Einstein did. Plan Einstein however also placed equal weight on developing asylum seekers' (and some neighbourhood participants') confidence, know-how and feelings of hope. **The**

innovation recognised those psychosocial aspects as necessities, not luxuries in helping participants make the 'transition towards the transition' to the labour market. They proved important in facilitating the first steps towards activation and social integration: moving people from the dependency and isolation of 'knowing no-one' and 'having no idea', to 'knowing someone' and having 'some idea'.

The concept of Plan Einstein did not change key characteristics of asylum seeker reception. **National policy choices** of accommodating large groups of asylum seekers together, prohibiting the teaching of Dutch language, as well as moving populations around and dispersing them beyond the city **inhibited some of the project's outcomes.** Yet in developing alternatives within those conditions, Plan Einstein potentially challenges the dominant rationale and its operational logics.

The next steps are to build on this emerging solution, and to extend it to its full potential. In doing so, the evaluation team offers some recommendations. These are based on what worked well and what could (and is starting to) be done in Plan Einstein Haydn and its surrounding neighbourhoods of Lombok, Kanaleineilnad and Oog in Al. The following suggestions are made to politicians, policy-makers and partners involved in building similar initiatives:

On good relations in the neighbourhood:

- **Be sensitive to, but not be overly driven by dominant narratives of hostility** emerging from the neighbourhood. Negative reactions to an asylum seeker centre may be initially dominant, but do not necessarily reflect the attitudes of the majority. They are also likely to subside once an asylum seeker centre opens. If the presence of the centre in the neighbourhood is too low key, this may mean losing opportunities to engage a silent, receptive, majority.
- **Be clear on the vision for the broader neighbourhood:** is it enough to maintain peace and have asylum seeker centre and neighbourhood populations 'rub along'? Or is the aim to build more substantial relations and create a vibrant community centre? If it is the latter, a strategy is needed, adapted to individual neighbourhoods, to lower the threshold for neighbourhood residents to visit a project such as Plan Einstein. Understanding the dynamics, needs and demographic compositions of both populations would help identify common ground (e.g. by engaging children and their parents from both the centre and the neighbourhood).
- **Think relationally rather than territorially to engage the neighbourhood.** Explore how the project can go beyond the project site and capitalize on existing spaces and sites of activity and connection, such as neighbourhood centres, local playgrounds, schools and sports halls. Consider how it can engage existing social networks in the neighbourhood. Give active and keen participants among neighbourhood residents, tenants, asylum seekers and refugees

roles as ‘change-makers’ and neighbourhood ambassadors. This would help with the development of enduring relationships and enhance the benefits of the project in the neighbourhood even if the project site itself is closed.

- **Invest in comfortable, open, neutral common spaces** (like a living room area, study/workspace, kitchen area and outdoor space). These should be openly accessible spaces without restrictive rules and surveillance. They prove vital in creating conditions conducive for social and professional contact, enabling people to do things together collaboratively, as well as to meet and socialise. The centre’s physical design should be really inviting for outsiders as well as to ‘insiders’ like asylum seekers and refugees, so that they want to come inside. Project managers should consider how the design and institutional environment of fences and car parks of asylum seeker centres might be adapted to become inviting spaces. The shared spaces should be open beyond office-hours, during evenings and weekends.
- **Facilitate co-housing or adjacent housing of asylum seekers and refugees with tenants** with a similar composition and more equality in the size of both groups and living conditions. Provide access to shared space that allows for casual encounters (see above).
- **Give it time.** A project that sets out to create connections between people needs time for trust to develop and for reciprocal and equal relationships to grow. Plan Einstein was limited by a very constrained time-scale. If a time-scale for closure must be set, do so in terms of project duration rather than by giving a fixed end date, so that a delayed start does not limit the project’s duration.

On increasing skills and wellbeing:

- **Be flexible in creating a diverse educational programme offer that fits the asylum seeker centre and neighbourhood populations.** Asylum seekers represent very diverse populations, with vastly different levels of education, skill, language competencies, demographic profiles and likelihood of gaining permits. The profile of centre populations will vary between locations and over time, so adaptability and flexibility is key. Responding to the needs of the population might require separate provision for particular groups at risk of exclusion. It might entail offering more practical skills and vocational training in addition to academic offers. Equally it might call for specialised teaching for (or by) highly-skilled participants. Be prepared to revise the programme if it is clear that populations would benefit from learning the national language. If offering this is politically sensitive, examine how the project can create its own informal opportunities to do so.
- **Develop opportunities for participants to co-design, co-teach or co-organize spaces, activities and courses.** This enhances reciprocity and helps bolster participants’ feelings of self-determination and agency. Build a real ‘community of practice’ that draws former participants back to share experience and knowledge.
- **Extend support beyond participants’ time at the centre:** Turning business ideas and labour market access into reality is a medium-term process, requiring extended support beyond the project’s territory and time. Longer-term support helps to bridge the gap between the supportive environment of Plan Einstein and the harsh reality of the labour market that some refugees experienced. Follow-up assistance would help refugees who are making the

transition maintain confidence in themselves. It would also be valuable in building the centre's community of practice and provide inspiration through examples of success.

- **Empower policymakers to address the vision upstream** on the inconsistencies between policies for asylum seeker reception and the labour market. Expose the contradictions between unstable housing, constant movement through large accommodation centres, dispersal of refugees far from the reception centres where they have forged connections, and proscribing early national language teaching, for early labour market and social integration.

On governance:

- **Develop 'facilitative leadership'**, whereby leaders function as stewards and mediators of a network of partners. Their role includes enabling partners to reflect on and to discuss preferred outcomes. It also includes acting as catalysts in providing new ideas and ways of working and facilitate agreement of clear ground rules and processes to achieve them.
- **Consider how funders could shift their project reporting towards facilitating and capturing learning.** Build in opportunities to reflect collectively before project action begins. Expect reflection and self-appraisal at specific moments throughout a project to adapt and maximise its reach and effects. Use findings of evaluation in a structured way. Build reporting on outcomes of these times of collective reflection into the project's reporting structures. This would encourage the self-criticism, reflective learning and adaptability that is vital for innovation, and support the cultural shift towards learning rather than accountability.
- **Create opportunities for regular contact of local policymakers at the national strategic level in order for local experiences to inform and influence policy.** There can be fractures in approaches between local and national government to the question of asylum seeker reception. These relate to their different priorities and organisational logics, reflecting the challenges involved in responding to asylum seeker reception as a 'wicked issue'. This refers to where policy actors identify the problem in different ways and existing policy solutions have, so far, failed to resolve the challenge. The differences in perspectives are not easily resolved, and cooperative working remains a challenge. However, learning from experiences from local initiatives such as Plan Einstein is highly valuable, especially at moments where more flexibility is being built into the asylum system to respond to people's needs. The evaluation recommends creating opportunities for regular dialogue, to enable mutual learning to occur.

1. Introduction

A global challenge of our time is how to respond to increasing migration, particularly of refugee populations requiring urgent assistance as they flee from war and persecution. These challenges have become pressing for urban authorities, particularly so in recent years where between 2012 and 2016, there was a significant increase in numbers of displaced persons seeking asylum in cities of the Global North. Within Europe, this was a context marked by a rise in right-wing populism and the polarisation of public responses to refugees. In urban spaces of the Global North, the impacts of migration remain profound, and the reception of asylum seekers provokes urgent questions. How can cities accommodate difference and diversity, while quelling receiving populations' feelings of economic and cultural threat, and subsequent problems of community cohesion associated with the arrival of asylum seekers? How can asylum seeker reception avoid asylum seekers losing skills and connections, that sees them falling into a negative spiral of boredom, anxiety, and worsening mental health, so often the outcome of current approaches? And how can the time spent in an asylum seeker centre help people prepare for a future in a new country, through onward migration or for a return to the country of origin?

Existing solutions to these questions have failed to provide satisfactory answers, with research indicating the dehumanising effects of asylum procedures. There are impacts at the societal level too; the ways in which asylum seekers are received affects the social and economic fabric of the localities in which people arrive, and may remain in the longer term. Finding appropriate solutions to refugee issues arising globally, but manifesting locally, requires innovation: bold new ways of responding that are different to the usual *modus operandi*. Solutions to such 'wicked' issues¹, defined by their complexity, systemic, interconnected and urgent nature² cannot be solved alone. They require instead emergent and hybrid constellations of people and organisations willing to experiment. Such innovation however comes with risk, with possibilities of failure and unanticipated developments.

This report summarizes the findings of the evaluation of a city-led innovation which trialled a distinctive local solution to the formidable challenges of asylum seeker reception: the Utrecht Refugee Launchpad. This initiative was funded by the European Commission's 'urban innovative action' scheme, a funding scheme designed to provide urban areas throughout the European Union with resources to experiment and test new and unproven solutions to solve urban challenges. Utrecht piloted a new asylum concept in the neighbourhood of Overvecht in Utrecht, a Dutch city of over 330,000 inhabitants from November 2016 to October 2018. The project is described fully in Chapter 2, but in short, it was an exceptional and experimental project, in terms of focus, governance and evaluation, and as a result, was also high stakes. The box below summarises the nature of innovation and the risks associated.

¹ Rittel and Webber (1973) refer to wicked issues emerging where policy actors identify the problem in different ways and existing policy solutions have so far failed to resolve the challenges.

² Mazzucato (2018a and b).

INNOVATION & RISK IN THE UTRECHT REFUGEE LAUNCHPAD

Innovation in focus:

- **Recognising asylum seeker centre residents as citizens of the city**, for whom the city has a responsibility for their welfare;
- **Activating asylum seekers' integration from 'day 1'**, however short or long their stay in the city;
- **Cultivating connections** based on equality and mutual respect between existing city residents and asylum seekers, and changing the narrative of 'burden' to one of local opportunities;
- **Offering futureproof skills** by building skills and competencies that are valuable anywhere, not only in the Netherlands.

Risk:

- **Inflaming public opinion** in local population;
- **Not meeting needs** of diverse ASC populations.

Innovation in Governance:

- **Developing a network** of local government, NGOs, academia and industry as equal partners;
- **European funding coming directly to the city**: shifting power downwards and horizontally from national governments¹.

Risk:

- **Harnessing the diverging missions, expectations and styles** of working of different organisations;
- **Managing potential for conflict** from 'the local turn' as cities adopt their own policy responses at times at odds with national trends.

Innovation in Evaluation:

- **Using a living lab constellation** to engage in constructive research-policy dialogue.

Risk:

- **Using research to validate success** rather than stimulate self-reflection.

n)

The Utrecht Refugee Launchpad quickly became known by its chosen local name: *Plan Einstein*, referring not only to the centre's location on the *Einsteindreef* street in Overvecht, but also the spirit of the innovation's operation, as pioneering, inventive and creative. The evaluation is inspired by that idea of learning through the process, providing not only accountability, but drawing out lessons that can be taken from the experience of innovation. The Urban Innovative Action programme expects from evaluations of its funded innovations that, '*one should know what worked and what did not, and why so, what should be done differently...*'³ Learning through experimenting was expected to assist Plan Einstein's developing concept.

³ ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/activity/urban/urban_innovative.actions.pdf

The evaluation report begins with a comprehensive account of how Plan Einstein developed in the district of Overvecht from late 2016 until its closure in late 2018. We describe what was achieved, consider the conclusions which can be taken from the research in a valid way, draw out the lessons that can be learned and identify what obstructed further significant change. The first part of the report is descriptive. Chapter 2 explains why the innovation was needed and present factual details about the specific activities expected to be undertaken, the costs involved in resourcing the initiative and the network of partners involved in its production. Chapter 3 explains the evaluation approach used. Crucially it outlines the Theory of Change developed with partners to identify the mechanisms through which it intended to bring change and explains the considerable challenges methodologically in evidencing that.



Figure 0-1 - Plan Einstein in Haydnlaan in 2019

From Chapter 4, we move to a more analytical perspective, focused on what the project achieved. In Chapter 4, we provide information on demonstrable outputs of the project, such as the numbers of participants who benefited, nested in an explanation of how ongoing developments in the wider contexts affected what was possible. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 provide evidence on outcomes that emerged while Plan Einstein operated, as well as the medium term effects experienced by participants into 2019 after the centre closed. In Chapter 8, we consider some of the governance aspects raised by the project and its management. In the results chapters (5-9) we relate our findings to relevant academic literature, to draw out conclusions, but in the interests of brevity, keep this limited⁴. Finally, in Chapter 9, we close with conclusions and recommendations.

Although the actual results of the project in terms of effects on individuals are extremely important, the main benefit of an experiment such as this is the learning it offers. This evaluation offers valuable lessons for those who undertook this journey of innovation, as well as those locally in Utrecht who have an interest in how that occurred. This, we hope, will inspire and inform the scaling of Plan Einstein in the city, or other Dutch cities. Equally, however, the evaluation aims to provide broader understanding, to inspire broader developments in solving this global challenge, informed by both research and experience. We hope that Plan Einstein, and the research conducted, inspires other city-led innovations and others around the world to bring to life alternatives of how displaced peoples, and receiving populations, can benefit from new forms of asylum reception.

⁴ In tandem with the publication of the evaluation report, the individual strands of research are being developed into academic articles, which will explore, in more depth, the findings in relation to specific theoretical concepts.

2. What is the Utrecht Refugee Launchpad?

The Utrecht Refugee Launchpad, known locally as Plan Einstein, was an innovative approach to asylum seeker reception that was trialled in the district of Overvecht in Utrecht, from November 2016 until October 2018. In 2019, the partnership applied the approach to another asylum seeker centre (ASC) in Utrecht, the Joseph Haydnlaan asylum seeker centre in the Oog in AI district. This chapter provides a description of the original initiative and how it emerged. It explains the rationale for the project, the beneficiaries and the resources allocated. It introduces the network of local and international organisations involved and finally, provides an overview of the activities that the partnership expected to deliver.

2.1. Need

Plan Einstein developed as a solution to problems inherent in existing approaches to asylum seeker reception. As described in the introduction, asylum seeker reception is a ‘wicked issue’, in which even definitions of what the problems are themselves are subject to debate, dependent on the perspective taken⁵. The research team in collaboration with the project team (see 3.2.1 and 3.3) helped to identify and describe the three main problems associated with existing approaches, which Plan Einstein aimed to address:

1. Problems of **community cohesion**. In the Netherlands, there is a climate of some negative public opinion against asylum seekers⁶, arising especially from the perceived economic, cultural and security threats when an asylum seeker centre opens in a neighbourhood⁷. Introducing an ASC to an existing (and in Utrecht’s case marginalized) neighbourhood can provoke hostility and protest. Asylum seeker centres are also increasingly becoming closed spaces of containment, removed from their local environments in locations across Europe⁸. In the Netherlands, for reasons of cost, they are often located in atypical housing provisions, in converted institutional facilities like disused army barracks and in remote, or marginalised locations. Such sites offer little opportunity for social contact with people locally. On the contrary, they operate with *‘reversed expectation of security, whereby societies are kept ‘safe from the intrusion of [...] asylum seekers’*⁹. Asylum seekers are moved, often suddenly, around five times on average during their legal procedures, and even more frequently in times of diminishing numbers of asylum applications¹⁰, providing very few opportunities to build local social and professional networks.
2. Problems of **arrested labour market activation** for asylum seekers while legal status is determined. Asylum seeking involves lengthy legal procedures (up to several years) to resolve applications for legal status and family reunification, while it also takes time to pass formal integration requirements. This state of prolonged legal insecurity hampers economic

⁵ Geuijen, Oliver and Dekker 2019.

⁶ Bolt and Wetsteijn (2018) show that Dutch people appear to be the least supportive in all Western European countries of generosity in judgement of asylum applications. This is based on responses to the European Social Survey Rounds 7 (2014) and 8 (2016).

⁷ Lubbers et al. (2016) and Zorlu (2017) argue that locals may experience competition for jobs and public resources. They may also see asylum seekers as an out-group that is threatening to local customs and identities.

⁸ Kriechauf (2018) argues that asylum centres in the Global North are increasingly resembling refugee camps in the Global South, becoming large, camp-like structures.

⁹ Larruina and Ghorashi (2016:220).

¹⁰ Dutch reception policy imposes efficiency standards that prohibit occupancy of reception centres dropping below a certain threshold: if this should happen, centres are closed down.

integration¹¹. During a stay in an asylum seeker centre, residents receive minimal benefits (*'leefgeld'*) from the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA)¹², the national agency responsible for management of asylum seekers in the Netherlands. They are forbidden to work for more than 24 weeks a year, and are not allowed to attend Dutch language classes, despite proficiency in the native language being crucial for economic integration¹³. Research shows that refugees, once granted status, have lower participation rates in the labour market than native Dutch citizens. They also participate less than other migrants, especially during their first years after arrival¹⁴ demonstrating the so-called 'refugee entry effect'¹⁵. Even after nine and fifteen years refugees have lower rates of participation compared to economic and family migrants¹⁶, demonstrating what is known as the 'refugee gap'¹⁷.

- Problems of **poor wellbeing** for asylum seekers. The legal insecurity of asylum seeking is a limbo period associated with a negative spiral of boredom, anxiety, and worsening mental health. Their time in an asylum centre does little to help repair the broken narratives created by refugee experiences; arguably it makes them worse. Literature on asylum seekers in traditional reception centres generally shows how the contexts in which asylum seekers live turns them into passive victims¹⁸. Particularly influential is Giorgio Agamben's (2003) consideration of 'homo sacer' and 'bare life'¹⁹, as well as the analysis of the liminal qualities of camps and reception centres as 'total institutions'²⁰. Research shows how possibilities for self-determination and agency become diminished within the experience of seeking asylum²¹.

Responding to the UIA's funding call which included local responses to migration as thematic priority²², the local government also developed the notion of Plan Einstein according to a local politician, *'as an answer to the protests and complaints'* arising from the initial plans to locate the new asylum centre in the district of Overvecht. The project sought to turn the negative framing of the problem into a positive one. By engaging the neighbourhood and asylum seekers in social contact and facilitating learning skills, Plan Einstein expected to generate better relations in the neighbourhood, activation for newcomers from day one and continuity for refugees given status, ultimately creating better wellbeing for asylum seekers in the city.

¹¹ Odé & Dagevos (2017)

¹² *Centraal Orgaan Opvang Azielzoekers*; see Ufkes, Zebel & den Besten (2017).

¹³ Martin et al. (2016) Odé & Dagevos (2017) Van den Enden et al. (2018)

¹⁴ Bakker et al. (2017).

¹⁵ Bakker et al. (2014).

¹⁶ After nine years of living in the Netherlands, 30% of the refugees still lives on social benefits, in comparison to the total population of which 2.6% lives on social benefits (CBS, 2018), see also Bakker et al (2017)

¹⁷ The 'refugee gap' occurs in the Netherlands, other European countries as well as beyond, including in Australia and in Canada (Van Tubergen et al. 2004, Connor 2010, Van den Enden et al. 2018, Ott 2013).

¹⁸ Geuijen (2003) Ghorashi (2005) Kreichauf (2018).

¹⁹ Darling (2014).

²⁰ Drawing on Van Gennep (1960), Goffman (1961) and Turner (1967), see for instance Geuijen (2003) Ghorashi et al. (2018) and Mayblin et al (2019).

²¹ More recently, the terminology has extended to 'necropolitics' (Mbembe and Meintjes 2003, Mayblin et al 2019) to describe how asylum seekers experience a 'slow violence' in the waiting period, where life for asylum seekers in some national contexts is made almost impossible for example through poor housing and very low levels of financial support. See also Darling (2014) and Rast & Ghorashi (2018).

²² The call falls under the topic: Integration of Migrants and Refugees: <https://www.uia-initiative.eu/en/call-proposals/1st-call-proposals>

2.2. Context of emergence

Plan Einstein was formulated in early 2016, at the height of the European ‘refugee crisis’. At this time, large numbers of asylum seekers were arriving from Syria and neighbouring countries. There was increased demand for emergency reception centres run by COA²³, the national agency responsible for management of asylum seekers in the Netherlands²⁴. Utrecht local government was expected to support the search for a suitable location of a new COA emergency centre. They were expected to offer a list of all possible buildings answering to specific dimensions and architectural properties in any location. When COA came to an agreement with the owner of such a building, the new site became envisaged by the local government as a place in which a new approach to asylum seeker reception could be piloted. It gave an opportunity to bring to life an idea that was emerging through the collective efforts of a range of partners working together with local government: from non-governmental organisations (NGOs), small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and educational organisations, including universities. The proposal was written collaboratively, with each partner developing their own description of the project and deliverables in the complete project application. COA was invited to become a delivery partner, but instead opted to support the application through a letter of endorsement rather than become a full project partner. It operated as an interested stakeholder, but did not share any official governance responsibility for creating the new approach. Dialogue was maintained through monthly meetings between the Dutch Council for Refugees (project partner) and COA’s location manager.

2.3. Population addressed

Plan Einstein sought to generate improvements in the lives of two sets of beneficiaries:

- **Asylum seekers** placed in the emergency centre (in anticipated numbers of up to 640 people moving through the centre and accessing the project activities).
- **Neighbourhood residents** through a) co-housing and the provision of 38 rooms for (subsidised) rent in the complex, for local people with a connection to Overvecht; and b) co-learning, by ensuring that 20% of participants in the courses and activities would come from the neighbourhood (initially anticipated to be young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs). The neighbourhood²⁵ would also have indirect benefits from having a vibrant community space to use.

2.4. Resources and Inputs

Plan Einstein was an initiative designed and led by Utrecht Local government (the local government). The European Commission’s *Urban Innovative Actions* (UIA) programme provided 80% of the funding, with 20% co-funding from the local government. The €3.4m funding supported a partnership involving multiple stakeholders and employees including:

²³ *Centraal Orgaan Opvang Azielzoekers*; see Ufkes, Zebel & den Besten (2017).

²⁴ See <https://coa.nl/nl/opvanglocaties>. At the time, many emergency housing locations opened for example in holiday parks and congress halls. There were also suggestions for the Dutch army to provide vacant military barracks as emergency housing for asylum seekers although this was rejected by the Minister of Defence, presenting challenges to the national asylum reception system (communication to research team by former COA employee).

²⁵ understood by the local government as around 9000 people living in the streets around the site in the larger district of Overvecht. These addresses were used as the sampling frame for the survey (see Chapter 3). However, this number does not include children.

- *The City of Utrecht* local government, who led the project.
- *Socius Wonen*, a housing company that transforms real estate into sustainable communities.
- The Dutch Council for Refugees (*VluchtelingenWerk West en Midden-Nederland*²⁶), working also with Welkom in Utrecht. Both are NGOs that support asylum-seekers and refugees.
- *Utrecht University's Centre for Entrepreneurship*: an education provider and research institute.
- The *VolksUniversiteit* (People's University): an education provider.
- *Social Impact Factory*: a foundation stimulating social entrepreneurship.
- University College London²⁷ and University of Oxford: research institutes, providing independent evaluation.



Figure 1-1. Sign outside Plan Einstein Overvecht



Figure 2-2 ASC Einsteindreef

The funding provided a range of resources including staff time, rental, renovation and maintenance of the building, books for students, wifi and computer facilities. Plan Einstein was also able to benefit from being within the same building complex as the asylum seeker center. As a result, tenants rented rooms in part of the building adjacent to the asylum seeker centre and were able to run social and professional activities and classes in a downstairs space close to the ASC (see Chapter 4, Fig.1. for complex layout). Funds from the city were available for converting the interior of the building and exterior space to make it more hospitable. A private owner of the facility rented space to both COA and Socius until 1st November 2018. This was in line with a political commitment made by the Utrecht deputy mayor to close the centre by the 1st November 2018 (*Raadsbrief, 2018*). As a result, hard time-constraints were set around the project, and meant there was no extension despite significant delays to the start of the project (see chapter 4).

²⁶ The regional arm of the Dutch Council for Refugees.

²⁷ In the application stage, Dr Caroline Oliver, the Principle Investigator was employed at University of Oxford's specialist institute on migration, COMPAS. In the course of the three year project, she moved first to Roehampton University in London, from where she led the project, and in its final phase, took up a post at University College London, Institute of Education.

2.5. The U-RLP activities

The Plan Einstein project included the following activity streams:

a) Co-housing (approximately 15% of budget)

The first pillar of Plan Einstein was the co-housing stream, run by Socius, a housing company specialising in community housing through a self-organising model. Socius recruited youth tenants through information days and its website, to live in 38 rooms (varying from 16.4 to 32.3 square metres) adjacent to *ASC Einsteindreef*. Socius was responsible for renovating and managing the large 'incubator space' for use by tenants, and residents from the asylum seeker centre and neighbourhood. The space included a kitchen, sofas, tables and chairs for study and socialising, and a set of classrooms. The partnership expected that Plan Einstein would become a vibrant neighbourhood centre²⁸. The municipality financed the majority of the adaptation from an office to a housing facility, since Socius always involves prospective inhabitants in this process²⁹.

b) Co-learning (approximately 30% of budget)

The second pillar of Plan Einstein was the co-learning stream. This consisted of repeating series of eight-week long courses in English language by the *VolksUniversiteit* and entrepreneurship (one level only) by Utrecht University's Centre for Entrepreneurship. Accepting 20% of course participants from the neighbourhood would encourage social mixing with asylum seekers while co-learning. This workstrand also consisted of a follow-on business incubation stream, which included a range of events and customized activities for both ASC residents and neighbourhood residents (such as coaching matches, a 'Start your own Business' course, problem-solving 'challenges' and 'experience days').³⁰

c) Individualised support for asylum seekers (14% of budget)

The final pillar of Plan Einstein was tailored support and protection for asylum seekers. The Dutch Council for Refugees had this responsibility and were the only people in the partnership to have access to individual refugees' files. Their work involved personal contact with ASC residents to encourage people go to courses, participate, and reduce stress and the consequences of trauma. Initially, ASC residents were invited to do individual 3-hour online assessments, referred to as NOAs³¹ or intakes in person for those not computer literate. Each computer assessment was followed by a discussion in person, to encourage participation in the Plan Einstein courses, or identify other steps for an individual to take³². *Welkom in Utrecht* was subcontracted to help the centre residents to meet and connect with others in the city. They attended the weekly 'stamping in' sessions at the ASC (a formal procedure to evidence presence at the centre) in order to inform people about Plan Einstein. They facilitated a weekly Dutch language café to enable people to practice Dutch language skills with Dutch volunteers (with 11 levels of language proficiency) and organised a range of sports and leisure activities (e.g. music and beauty events).

²⁸ See 4.1.1. in this report.

²⁹ See the Socius manual on co-housing produced at the end of the project by Kramer and van Rijswijk (2019).

³⁰ See 4.1.2. in this report.

³¹ The assessment is called the Persoonprofielscan Vluchtelingen (PPS-V). It was provided by NOA, a psychological consultancy company, which works closely with the Social and Organizational Psychology section of the Free University Amsterdam. It works to develop psychological tests and the assessment of individuals for work and educational-related purposes. The municipality purchased the assessments (outside this particular funding) for use with all asylum seekers across the city, to give support workers a profile of their educational and health backgrounds, competencies and aspirations.

³² For example, to study, volunteer, get psychological help, find appropriate services to help with the administration of their asylum requests, civic integration, housing, finance, health, sports and wellbeing etc.

In addition to the main workstream:

d) Estates, communication and project management (approximately 30% of budget, although 20% of the total project co-financed by local government)

The local government of Utrecht led the project and, as the organizing partner was responsible for the estate and overall project management, including finances, contracts, coordination between partners and with the UIA and communication. It also funded the NOA assessments³³ and further activities as the project grew. In addition to coordination activities, a district manager working from the neighbourhood office in Overvecht was responsible for an additional workstream of community engagement. They sought to recruit locals and create dialogue with local residents through a klankbordgroep ('neighbourhood sounding board')³⁴. Finally, the municipality was responsible for communication around the project, through the work of a senior communication advisor. They wrote articles to communicate to both a local audience, and provided material for articles in the city's most read morning paper (for further details see 8.2.2).

e) Independent Evaluation (10% of budget)

Researchers at University College London and the University of Oxford were responsible for conducting an independent evaluation over three years. They designed and carried out the evaluation, in dialogue with an advisory board of senior academics with specialisms in migration and evaluation. The research team conducted evaluation research and acted as a critical friend in sharing findings to inform the partnership's activities at steering groups as it implemented the project.

In addition, the UIA administration appointed an external expert to the project in the person of Daniel de Torres, a former director in Social Affairs in Barcelona, and founder and specialist in the anti-rumours campaign³⁵. Each UIA project is assigned an external expert appropriate to the project focus. Daniel's role was to act as an advisor to and critical friend to the project, report back to the UIA and to journal its ongoing activities, challenges and learning.

Activities outside the partnership

As Plan Einstein developed, several other initiatives run by stakeholders outside the partnership connected to Plan Einstein. Several of these were co-financed additionally by the municipality itself outside the UIA budget:

- 1) *Welcome in Utrecht*. This was a young organisation at the time of project planning in 2016. It was established to connect all volunteer activities between asylum seekers, refugees and local citizens and local organisations. It coordinated with existing Utrecht organizations, like the Central Museum and the Catholic museum (the Catharijne Convent) to run group initiatives that brought asylum seekers and local residents (or experts) together. It organized inclusive sports events, helped out with local festivals, and engaged with odd jobs such as helping refugees move into independent housing, taking children to



Figure 2-2 Activities advertised in Plan Einstein

³³ An assessment of participants' labour history and schooling, as well as emotional stability and resilience.

³⁴ See 4.1.1. for more details.

³⁵ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities/anti-rumours>

and from school etc etc. Their work helps to orientate newcomers and encourage them make sense of the local environment.

- 2) *Taalcafé* (Language café) organized weekly evenings where volunteers and local residents can converse in an informal way, in order to improve newcomers' command of Dutch.
- 3) *The Volunteer Organisation Utrecht* visited Plan Einstein on a weekly basis to recruit asylum seekers for voluntary work activities.
- 4) Local folk theatre, the *STUT-theatre* was brought in to organise low threshold theatre classes and develop a piece of theatre based on Plan Einstein (at the time of writing in October 2019, this is still in progress). STUT opened its theatre to ASC and neighbourhood participants for weekly gatherings to sing Dutch songs together.
- 5) *Radio Einstein* is a spin-off from STUT theatre. *Radio Einstein* was set up to broadcast radio productions by residents to an outside public³⁶.
- 6) Utrecht University's *InclUUsion* programme. This allows ASC residents to enrol in university courses free of charge³⁷ and operates its own buddy system³⁸. InclUUsion is a UU program, developed by two of the university's (former) PhD students, and funded and run by them. Additional funding was granted by the local government to develop their work in the contexts of Plan Einstein. COA also requested InclUUsion to deliver basic computer literacy courses such as My First Email, about using e-mail, opening a google account etc.
- 7) *Common Ground 2*: a community gardening project for people with a refugee background, staying in an ASC or recently settled in the municipality.
- 8) A '*wijksafari*' (neighbourhood safari)³⁹. This was a theatre performance on location in Overvecht in May and June 2018 established by a famous Dutch actress, theatre maker and director. She brought well-known Dutch actors and personalities to stay within the ASC, as well as with Overvecht residents for two weeks in order to collect stories. The stories formed the basis of a production which brought a public audience into contact with urban life in the ASC and Overvecht neighbourhood. The production included the residents of *Einsteinдреef* ASC. It used the ASC building and outdoor space of the Overvecht complex in a large-scale production, which attracted a large audience and media attention.
- 9) The *Catching Cultures orchestra*⁴⁰ provided opportunities for asylum seekers, refugees and others from diverse cultural backgrounds to make music together, connect, have fun and develop. The orchestra held musical evenings at Plan Einstein, and performs at concerts, workshops and festivals.
- 10) New Dutch Connections is an organisation raised by a former refugee Liberian theatremaker, well known in the Netherlands. NDC organizes courses mainly for young people on specific topics related to the labour market, using empowerment through theatre. At the outset of the project, NDC participants painted an apartment block's wall to celebrate Plan Einstein's opening. At several meters high, it included a picture of a world, including hands of all skin colours and peace messages in multiple writings in the colours of the rainbow.
- 11) Several buddy programmes (e.g. the *Buddy to Buddy*⁴¹ foundation) that help connect refugees with existing residents to overcome their sense of social isolation. People are matched in one-to-one partnerships and meet regularly to provide opportunities to talk together and improve language, go to events together etc.

³⁶ <https://www.radioeinstein.nl/>

³⁷ <https://www.uu.nl/en/education/inclusion>

³⁸ <https://www.uu.nl/en/education/inclusion/get-involved/get-involved-in-inclusion-as-a-student>

³⁹ www.theaterutrecht.nl/wijksafari

⁴⁰ <https://catchingculturesorchestra.nl/>

⁴¹ <https://buddytobuddy.nl/utrecht/>

- 12) *De Voorkamer* (The front room): a cultural meeting place in Utrecht city centre, started by young Utrecht designers which organizes cultural events and additional events like a 'taalcafé' (language café).

3. Evaluation design

3.1 Evaluation aims and approach:

The goal of the evaluation was to provide an informed judgment about whether Plan Einstein worked in improving outcomes and foster learning. The evaluation aimed to shed light on if, and to what extent the project approach worked, who it worked for and why⁴². As required by the funder, its objectives were:

- To provide evidence on the *effectiveness, benefits and early outcomes* of the U-RLP experiment for participants and neighbourhood residents;
- To offer learning and *evidence-based recommendations* for use by other cities across Europe⁴³.

Its intended audience comprises:

- a) **Internal stakeholders:** Utrecht local government, collaborating partnership organisations and the UIA funders;
- b) **Beneficiaries:** residents at the ASC, local young people living at the complex, and neighbourhood residents engaged in the courses, or living close to the centre;
- c) **External stakeholders:** local, national and international politicians, policymakers, third sector organisations, social enterprises, social researchers and academics.

3.2. Evaluation rationale

An important aspect of evaluation is to explain how far observed outcomes can be attributed to the project. A straightforward evaluation design would use a counterfactual (e.g. through randomized control trials) whereby a control group is used demonstrate what outcomes are observed in participants in comparison to people who do not participate in the project. Initiatives like Plan Einstein however operate in conditions of complexity that render such an approach simplistic and ethically problematic, and where straightforward notions of causal effect of the project on outcomes are not appropriate or feasible, for a number of reasons.

First, Plan Einstein was not a standard programme delivered in identical ways to people at one point in time. On the contrary, people experienced the project in highly variable ways, and the unpredictable ways in which participants moved through the project made a like-for-like comparison unfeasible. The project itself comprised multiple optional strands (assessments, classes, SIF tailor-made activities which themselves involved five different possible activity streams). Its design responded to the needs of actual beneficiaries present, and adapted as new organisations⁴⁴ became involved. As such, participants experienced U-RLP activities in different ways, to varying degrees and for differing periods. Some people might access one small part of the project only for a week, others would engage with a full range of activity streams more intensively over a whole year.

Second, ethical issues were raised by using an experimental approach with asylum seekers. Hypothetically, an experimental approach could have been arranged by allocating participants to the project randomly. However, deliberately withholding an intervention that wilfully denies a group of asylum seekers opportunities is problematic, and repeated testing of such a group, given their difficult circumstances, to 'prove' the benefits of the approach is also questionable, especially for those who gain no benefits at all. Third, an experimental approach was jeopardised by self-selection, since participants were not assigned randomly to participation in Plan Einstein, but chose to opt in

⁴² Pawson & Tilley (1997:34).

⁴³ Parsons (2017: 29).

⁴⁴ E.g. *Welkom in Utrecht* and *InclUUsion*

themselves. Fourth, comparing outcomes for participants in other asylum centres was compromised by the varying local conditions that affect ASC residents' experiences. These include the different sizes of ASCs, histories of the centres, compositions (see 4.2.1.) and local political influences. The only potentially credible option for a counterfactual comparison was in the Joseph Haydnlaan Centre, the other ASC in Utrecht. This however is a very different type of centre from the Overvecht complex. It opened in 1990 in a former military hospital, and met with no resistance from the more affluent neighbourhood surrounding it. Early potential for comparison was also jeopardised by exchange of populations between the two centres, when, as a pragmatic response to shifts in circumstances (for reasons explained in Chapter 4) initial participants came from the Joseph Haydnlaan Centre ASC to attend unfilled courses in Plan Einstein.

The theory-based approach set up for this project integrated rather than eliminated these important contexts by seeking understanding of the interplay of project and effects⁴⁵. Rather than seek to prove causal attribution, the goal of the evaluation was to explain, with sensitivity to contexts, how the existence and operation of Plan Einstein likely *contributed* to observed outcomes, or made 'a difference'⁴⁶. The team looked therefore for evidence of change or shifts in the direction of travel made towards reaching the desired outcomes, using multiple sources of evidence to validate findings and reach judgements on the 'plausible contribution' of the initiative. As far as possible we have used benchmarks of other projects and outcomes of similar groups to compare outcomes. The criteria for rigour in making such judgement about the project's effectiveness was by 'engaging multiple perspectives, deep questioning and critical thinking'⁴⁷. To this end, we have utilised a team approach that critically questioned findings throughout, exposed our findings to critical scrutiny at academic conferences, and used the input of an academic advisory board to underpin a sound analysis in making sense of the collective evidence.

3.3. Evaluation design: Theory of Change

The evaluation employs a non-experimental evaluation design⁴⁸, using theory-based evaluation to respond to the flexible and contingent nature of the project. The evaluation clarified a project theory (Theory of Change⁴⁹) with partners at an early stage to outline interim outcomes that needed to occur to lead to the longer-term outcomes anticipated (see 3.3.1). A theory of change aims to explain *how* the programme is expected to bring, or has brought about intended changes⁵⁰ (in comparison to a logic model, which aims rather to show *what* the key ingredients are). In this way, it provides a model of generative causality, showing the steps that occur between activities and observed changes, as well as as clarifying assumptions on what is needed for those changes to occur⁵¹.

The theory of change was developed with the project partners and the management team *ex ante*, and explained in the interim report⁵². The full version of the original Theory of Change is presented in Content Appendix 1, which outlines the sequence of changes that were anticipated to occur in order to achieve the intended impacts. The research was orientated around providing evidence on these processes, interim and mid-term outcomes in accordance with the Theory of Change.

⁴⁵ Blamey and Mackenzie (2007:441).

⁴⁶ Mayne (2012); Patton (2010); Befani and Mayne (2014).

⁴⁷ Patton (2012:376).

⁴⁸ Blamey and McKenzie (2007: 440); Pawson and Tilley (1997); Rogers (2008).

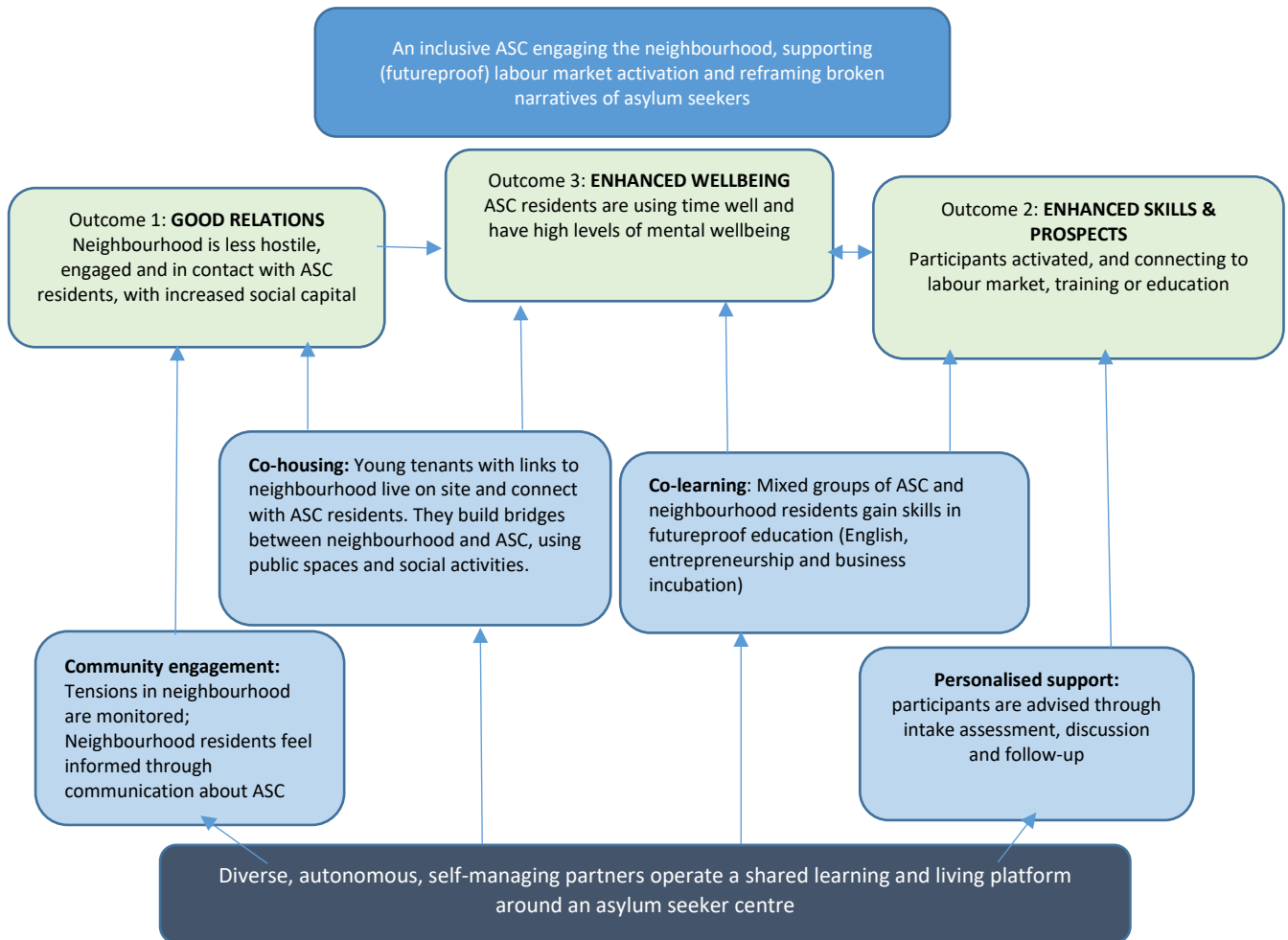
⁴⁹ Weiss (1997a and 1997b).

⁵⁰ Befani and Mayne (2014: 19).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Oliver, Dekker and Geuijen (2018).

3.3.1. Theory of Change (skeleton)



The Plan Einstein Theory of Change reasoned that a more inclusive and effective approach to asylum seeker reception can also benefit residents of an ASC, as well as residents in its surrounding neighbourhood. The core conviction was to find a common denominator and interest for both residents of an ASC and neighbourhood residents, which led to the selection of English classes and entrepreneurship courses as best fitting those properties. It asserted that asylum seekers' difficulties in restarting professional lives and their lower wellbeing could also be addressed by a reception approach that helped to activate ASC residents from the first day. Their experience would encourage posttraumatic growth⁵³ and help them to rebuild their narratives.

⁵³ This is a notion from positive psychology, referring to how individuals who have experienced traumatic and stressful events can experience trauma not only as distressing, but a catalyst for growth and other, positive effects (Park and Helgeson, 2006). Current research shows that post traumatic growth can occur among many different populations affected by trauma, among different age groups and cultures. Research shows that it relates to positive outcomes (Sims & Pooley, 2016). It is not a concept developed further in this evaluation report however, for three reasons. First, although the project used PTG as an important, guiding principal, the project did not use any particular clinical interventions (e.g. narrative exposure therapy) that could be subject to rigorous study. Second, the evidence on PTG though promising at the level of individual studies, is as yet mixed at the level of systematic review, and research as yet is unable to confirm the effectiveness of interventions to refugee populations (ibid.). Third, research to measure it appropriately and ethically would require clinical research by clinical psychologists, taking into account issues such as severity of trauma and length of time since its occurrence. This was not an expectation in the original brief to the team of social scientists and is beyond their sphere of expertise and ethical responsibilities to ASC residents.

This would be first supported through co-housing, where pro-social youth tenants would connect with ASC residents and help build bridges between them and to other people in the neighbourhood. More engagement and contact would lead to less hostility against the centre, and increase participants' wellbeing, social and professional integration. The theory corresponds with a new trend towards co-housing between refugees and local youngsters⁵⁴ where, in the Netherlands, over 50 co-housing projects with refugees exist, including three locations in Amsterdam⁵⁵ (and see also the CURANT project in Antwerp⁵⁶). This includes Riekerhaven, a large project in Amsterdam, also run by SOCIUS, as well as another run by SOCIUS at an ASC in Nijmegen, which represents the first spin off from Plan Einstein.

Second, the neighbourhood residents would join those from the the ASC to attend classes together in English and entrepreneurship, as well as access a business incubation workstream. These activities would help participants to build connections in the local business environment, formulate and develop business ideas and gain in confidence and agency. The courses would be of value in any circumstance, being 'future free' (futureproof): relevant for both asylum seekers who would get legal status to remain in the Netherlands, as well as those refused permission to stay and moving on to another country or returning to their country of origin. The theory assumes that this is because entrepreneurship, and English as opposed to the Dutch language, can be used anywhere in the world (including in the country of origin) increasing participants' incentive to study⁵⁷. Offering entrepreneurship is assumed to fit with refugees' past experience, as many refugees will come from countries with an entrepreneurial tradition. In this way, it is assumed to be a means of enabling participants to restore broken narratives of life events⁵⁸. Offering this subject as well as English would also attract local residents to the centre and also help provide a common language in which both could communicate more equally.

These two main pillars of the theory of change are supplemented too by **community engagement** work within the neighbourhood to include residents, recruit participants and monitor tensions. The theory of change also embeds **personalised support** into the change-process, whereby asylum-seeker facing NGOs work informally, informed by cultural expertise with ASC residents to engage in courses and connect socially within the city. Combined, the activities would help residents of the ASC and neighbourhood connect, reskill and build confidence and agency. It would correspond with the city's existing integration strategy, which posits a 'continuous line' policy (*'doorgaande lijn'*) in which the city aims to house permit holders in the region of the ASC where they resided.

Finally, the theory required a partnership that harnessed the skills of a range of diverse actors with a range of expertise to develop a new type of ASC reception facility. These included partners with expertise in working with asylum seekers and within the neighbourhood; expertise in education; access to local business networks etc. The partnership was to be founded on a horizontal, rather than vertical, hierarchical structure as most appropriate to meet this kind of challenge. It assumes no power differentials between partners, and that all are united and committed to the mission of the project. It assumes that there is political support, sufficient resources (human, physical and financial) and that there is a need for such a facility (i.e. that asylum seekers will be placed in the reception facility imminently).

⁵⁴ Tinnemans, Fermin & Davelaar (2019)

⁵⁵ Czischke & Huisman (2018); Zonneveld & Buter (2018).

⁵⁶ CURANT is a project also funded by the UIA. It facilitates communal living between youngsters and unaccompanied young adult refugees (see Mahieu, Van Raemdonck & Clycq 2019)

⁵⁷ See Roelfsema and Schouten (2019:9).

⁵⁸ Ibid.:p10.

From the outset, the theory gains support from a number of domains of academic literature. First, the theory draws loosely on the prominent literature on intergroup contact theory, which emerged in the 1950s through social psychologist Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis, an argument which still holds weight to this day⁵⁹. Allport's original proposition was that contact generally fosters more favourable attitudes toward out-group members, where contact counters negative preconceptions regarding the values, beliefs, and lifestyle of the 'other'⁶⁰. Second, the theory recognises the importance of social networks for newcomers to be able to integrate into a new society. Networks between refugees and the native population need to be facilitated through shared language and cultural knowledge, while newcomers need easy access, shared activities and safety and stability to develop networks⁶¹. The project assumes that physical proximity will lead to social proximity, enabling migrants to benefit from the creation of 'bonding social capital' with locals living on the same site and 'bridging social capital'⁶² with broader society. While in general, literature is supportive of the theory, other research suggests there can be limitations in trying to engineer encounters between different groups, since they should be spontaneous, rather than managed or organised⁶³.

Second, the theory of change is supported by evidence on the provision of education as a means of improving labour market activation, since gaining skills can positively influence economic integration. Research shows that the educational level of refugees is crucial in their access to the labour market⁶⁴ and accessing additional education in the Netherlands enhances and facilitates educational trajectories further⁶⁵, increasing chances of employment, and leading to work that is more at level with previous education and experiences⁶⁶. Evidence to support the project's subject choice however is more mixed. Literature on refugee entrepreneurship suggests it has merits as a potential solution to problems facing refugees. For example, in refugee camps, some research has identified as a means of filling the 'institutional void' that leads to despair, crime and boredom⁶⁷ and in the Global North, it is viewed as a way of building integration on the basis of shared values of innovation and product development⁶⁸. However, there is also criticism within academia of enterprise-focused education more broadly, for its promotion of neo-liberal ideas that shift people from a 'culture of dependency' to one of 'self-reliance'⁶⁹. Those ideas of 'responsibilising of the self' are examined more critically by some sociologists and educationalists⁷⁰ as forming part of a toolbox of neo-liberal governance of welfare and education. This orientation holds a danger of reducing the

⁵⁹ Since its origins in the 1950s, the social psychological theory of intergroup contact has been refined, receiving renewed interest especially from policy circles. In particular, it has been assumed an important means of generating 'community cohesion' in an era where multiculturalism is under question and concerns about separation and hostility between new immigrants and existing populations have grown (Askins and Pain 2011). Research among multiple groups, such as Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, or between young Asian British and white British secondary school pupils in Northern town provide high support for Allport's thesis (Hewstone et al 2018).

⁶⁰ Pettigrew (1998); Pettigrew and Tropp (2000).

⁶¹ Ager & Strang (2008) Van Heelsum (2017)

⁶² Bonding refers to within-group connections, while bridging social capital refers to between-group connections (Putnam, 2000).

⁶³ Wilson (2017).

⁶⁴ De Vroome & Van Tubergen (2010).

⁶⁵ Odé & Dagevos (2017)

⁶⁶ Kanas & Van Tubergen (2009).

⁶⁷ Betts, Omata and Bloom (2017) De la Chaux and Haugh (2015)

⁶⁸ Koltai (2016)

⁶⁹ for instance in notions of the 'enterprise education' and the 'enterprise curriculum' in Third Way politics (Peters 2001).

⁷⁰ See Nikolas Rose's (1998) conception of how the political subject in modern Western cultures presuppose the autonomous, choosing and free self as the ideal which underpins all political activity.

state's responsibilities for individuals and their futures, by placing responsibility for success entirely in their hands.

The theory of change provided the framework for the evaluation, enabling researchers to research, through monitoring of various steps along the way, and empirical research the process, interim changes and ultimate outcomes achieved by the project. The results chapter benchmark outcomes against the theory, and we return to assess its relevance in the final conclusion.

3.4. Internal stakeholder relationships: the Living Lab approach

Plan Einstein was an evolving and adapting project. Our role as evaluators was two-fold, to both independently observe and report on activities and outcomes, but also to inform the partnership and assist in their learning process⁷¹. As evaluators we also needed to consider results and achievements beyond the pre-set goals envisaged. To best assist this, we used a living lab methodology which fit the project, as entailing user-driven innovation in a real-life setting. The Plan Einstein approach developed in iterative cycles of design. In line with the living lab methodology, evaluation findings were not kept confidential until the end, but shared *throughout* the project at different stages and recommendations from the evaluation developed in the mid-term (e.g. in an interim report and policy brief on the project)⁷². This enabled a learning effect to take place during the project, to increasingly tighten and improve the developing innovation, as well as identify other unexpected or unintended consequences.

3.5. Gathering credible evidence

3.5.1. Data sources

The research team investigated a diverse range of sources to judge to what extent there was an improvement in outcomes. A mixed-methods approach was most appropriate. It provides useful data for stakeholders in a policy environment, but also communicates individuals' meaningful stories of the project. The combination of research methods, and triangulation of qualitative and quantitative data helped to develop a deeper understanding of the phenomenon⁷³. The research involved:

Quantitative Research:

- Routine **monitoring** of activities and participation⁷⁴.
- **Four surveys**: Two face to face surveys in the neighbourhood (simple random sample, N=304; N=277) and two online surveys with youth tenants (census sample N=23; N=19).
- Analysis of **NOA intake assessments** completed by asylum seeker participants (N=150; see 2.2.4.c).
- **Class and activity evaluations**: questionnaires co-designed with partners that were administered at the end of the class series (111 responses⁷⁵) and online surveys for participants in business programme⁷⁶ (95 usable responses).

⁷¹ Patton (2010).

⁷² To be valuable to inform the innovation in real time, 'users must be prepared to accept and use preliminary and provisional findings, and evaluators must be willing to provide these' (CECAN 2018: 5)

⁷³ Denzin (1978); Creswell (2003).

⁷⁴ Data was requested of partners on 21 process indicators linked to steps in the theory of change (e.g. on participation in courses and activities, composition etc.)

⁷⁵ 43 in English, 67 in Dutch, 68 in English, 27 in Dutch

⁷⁶ This was also requested of the entrepreneurship classes, but due to coordinating staff illness, our questionnaires were not administered.

- Analysis of **wider available quantitative data**, from stakeholder organisations and the local government.

Qualitative Research:

- **163 interviews with 127 interviewees** (36 repeated). This included various groups expected to benefit from Plan Einstein: 62 asylum seekers (33 from Syria, 32 from other countries including Yemen, Iran, Eritrea etc.) 14 youth tenants, and 31 neighbours (11 participants and 19 recruited from the general neighbourhood population). It also included 20 partners and stakeholders. Further background details of all interview participants are in the Methodological Appendix.
- **Ethnographic research** through researchers' participation at the centre, activities and meetings, with data recorded in fieldnotes.
- **Documentary analysis** of minutes of meetings and consideration of supplementary material associated with the project (advertisements, flyers, reports, photographs);
- **Media analysis** of Dutch and English newspaper sources between beginning of January 2016 and March 2019 retrieved through Nexis Uni and TV items collected through the database of the Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision.

The project and the evaluation operated with some very complex and challenging conditions. These constrained the design and execution of the research in important ways, for example preventing the collection of baseline data on key indicators before the project came into operation. For reasons of ethics, validity and safety, the surveys in the neighbourhood were complex, and while the research team made use of pre-existing quantitative baseline assessments of the NOA, this was not without some issues in access and validity, while replication was unfeasible in the contexts experienced. These methodological challenges and limitations to the evaluation are explained more fully in methodological appendix 1. The considerable ethical challenges of the research are also explained in methodological appendix 2. Further details on quantitative and qualitative research, including methods, sampling, creation of research instruments, piloting and validity are given in methodological appendix 3.

3.6. Data analysis and interpretation

Interpretation of the multiple sources of data explored changes in the direction of travel towards achieving outcomes both after the completion of each wave of data and at the end of both phases. This report involves the synthesis of both strands, with results from multiple sources integrated through meta-inference. For example, we used factors found in initial observations on experiences of the youth tenants, to inform both the survey and interview questions. Sequentially factors identified in both surveys provided seed categories that drove the qualitative analysis of the case data, as well as codes derived from the theory of change (adapted as appropriate) using NVivo 12 computer software. From here, we developed more selective coding, which identified core categories. Analysis involved for the surveys initially descriptive statistics (and some limited inferential statistics for academic analyses) using SPSS statistics and Microsoft Excel.

To interpret the data and understand 'success' in a context where there were few opportunities for comparison, the team were also able to draw on extensive knowledge of academic literature on the experiences of asylum seekers in contexts across Europe. This provided some benchmark against which Plan Einstein's results could be compared and recognition that some indications of success could be explained by other factors. For instance, although we found evidence of acceptance of the

presence of the asylum centre in the neighbourhood, while pleasing, we explain that this is not an unusual course of events, and can be found in multiple other examples of asylum seeker centres.

3.7. Evaluation questions and evidence sought

The evaluation seeks to answer questions on both **process** and **outcomes** of Plan Einstein as follows:

3.7.1. Process

First, the evaluation asks the question in how far were activities implemented, outputs achieved and the project implemented as intended? The following evidence on process was sought, and results are reported in Chapter 4 (outputs and implementation) and 8 (governance):

Evidence sought:	Instruments	Source of data	Collection	
			Wave 1	Wave 2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Achievement of outputs. Achievement or deviation from planned activities, and reasons for these. Delays or significant challenges in executing planned activities 	Secondary data analysis	Internal stakeholders (description of the programme; annual reporting on milestones and deviations; steering group minutes)	✓	✓
	Activity monitoring	Internal stakeholders (all process targets and outputs)	✓	✓
	Interviews	Internal and external stakeholders; Asylum seekers and neighbourhood inhabitants	✓	✓
	Observations	Internal stakeholders (steering group meetings) asylum seeker and local participants (classes, activities and events)	✓	✓

Next, the evaluation asks how far the three key outcomes intended according to the theory of change (see 3.2) of good relations, increased skills and better wellbeing, were achieved:

3.7.2. Outcome 1: Good Relations

The evaluation asks what does the evidence show about how far have relationships between asylum seekers and local inhabitants improved? In line with the Theory of Change, the research team sought the following evidence, and the results are reported in Chapter 5:

Evidence sought on	Instruments	Data source	Collection	
			Wave 1	Wave 2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduced hostility in the neighbourhood Positive attitudes to the centre and asylum seekers 	Repeat Survey 1	Local inhabitants	✓	✓
	Activity monitoring	Internal stakeholders (minutes of neighbourhood meetings, participation rates in classes and joint events)	✓	✓
	Interviews	Local inhabitants Internal and external stakeholders; Asylum seekers	✓	✓

• Neighbourhood engagement in the centre	Observations	Local inhabitants (neighbourhood group)	✓	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased connections between local inhabitants and asylum seekers Improvements in types and levels of social capital 	Repeat Survey 1	Local inhabitants	✓	✓
	Repeat Survey 2	Young tenants	✓	✓
	Activity monitoring	Internal stakeholders (participation rates in classes and joint events)	✓	✓
	Interviews	Local inhabitants and tenants; Internal and external stakeholders; Asylum seekers	✓	✓
	Observations	Asylum seekers and local inhabitants (at day to day activities in centre and events)	✓	✓

3.7.3. Outcome 2: Enhanced skills and prospects

The evaluation asks what does the evidence show about how far participants gained and have been able to apply skills and knowledge from the U-RLP project?’ In line with the Theory of Change, the research team sought the following evidence, and the results are reported in Chapter 6:

Evidence sought on	Instruments	Data source	Collection and n.	
			Wave 1	Wave 2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learning new and relevant skills Gaining relevant connections in professional and educational networks Building new business ideas and/or start-ups 	NOA intake assessments	Asylum seekers	✓	
	Class evaluations	Neighbourhood participants and asylum seekers	✓	✓
	Activity monitoring	Internal stakeholders (rates of participation in classes, coaching partnerships and experience days; rates of businesses registered at Chamber of Commerce)	✓	✓
	Interviews	Neighbourhood participants Internal and external stakeholders; Asylum seekers	✓	✓
	Observations	Neighbourhood participants and asylum seekers (<i>classes and activities in Centre run by internal stakeholders</i>)	✓	✓
	Secondary datasets	Data on participants’ destinations, activities and welfare dependence from Dutch Council for Refugees and local government		✓

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engaging in steps towards labour market activation 	Interviews	Neighbourhood participants; Asylum seekers; Internal and external stakeholders;	✓	✓
	Observations	Neighbourhood participants and asylum seekers (<i>activities at Plan Einstein run by internal stakeholders</i>)	✓	✓

3.7.4. Outcome 3: Enhanced wellbeing

The evaluation asks what does the evidence show about how far have asylum seekers experienced greater levels of mental wellbeing? In line with the Theory of Change, the research team sought the following evidence, and the results are reported in Chapter 7:

Evidence sought on	Instruments	Data source	Collection and n.	
			Wave 1	Wave 2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using time productively Feeling connected to other people Showing increased confidence and developing optimism for the future Experiencing feelings of being able to contribute 	NOA intake assessments	Asylum seekers	✓	
	Activity monitoring	Internal stakeholders (rates of participation in classes, coaching partnerships and experience days; rates of businesses registered at Chamber of Commerce)	✓	✓
	Class evaluations	Neighbourhood participants and asylum seekers	✓	✓
	Interviews	Neighbourhood participants Internal and external stakeholders; Asylum seekers	✓	✓
	Observations	Neighbourhood participants and asylum seekers (<i>classes and activities</i>)	✓	✓
	Interviews	Neighbourhood participants; Asylum seekers; Internal and external stakeholders	✓	✓
	Observations	Neighbourhood participants and asylum seekers (<i>activities in Centre</i>)	✓	✓

Having explained the evaluation framework and methodological approach, the report now presents results of the Plan Einstein initiative. First, it presents evidence on the outputs (Chapter 4). In Chapters 5,6 and 7, it gives evidence on the outcomes. Questions of process are considered in Chapter 8 and conclusions and recommendations in Chapter 9.

4. Results: Outputs and Implementation

We assess the value of Plan Einstein first by considering ‘what’ and ‘how much’ was done (the outputs) by presenting a factual account of the activities delivered in the project. The first part of the chapter (4.1) presents data and statistics on the initiative: who took part, the range of activities achieved and the products delivered. We present this first on co-housing, then second, on co-learning and tailored support offered to asylum seekers and refugees. We draw the data from monitoring undertaken by the evaluation team with partners over the project lifetime, on key process indicators aligned with specific steps in the theory of change.

The second part of the chapter (4.2) offers reflections on what these data, and other relevant insights from the independent research, show about whether the partnership implemented the U-RLP activities as designed. Here, we discuss significant deviations from the project plan. This reveals the extent to which external conditions locally, nationally and internationally affected the timing and duration of the project and the conditions in which Plan Einstein operated. We conclude the chapter (4.3) in light of these observations, with questions around the tension between fidelity to a project plan and flexibility in adapting to actual circumstance.

4.1. Project composition and outputs

4.1.1. Co-housing and neighbourhood engagement

In the Theory of Change, co-housing and engagement in the neighbourhood were envisaged as vital steps that would help create good local relations and overcome prejudice towards asylum seekers and refugees (outcome 1). The project aimed to create a vibrant community through embedding opportunities for intercultural encounters, and sought to change negative perceptions of asylum seekers as ‘a burden’. Our monitoring of project activities showed three major steps were taken towards that outcome:

First, asylum seekers and local tenants were housed together within the same complex in Plan Einstein. The former office building located was refurbished to provide accommodation for both private rental (on the left side of the red line, below in Fig.1) and asylum seekers (in an ASC, to the right side of the red line). Space was allocated in the complex on the left, including the incubator space (a comfortable lounge, kitchen and working area) as well as common outdoors space with artificial grass, planters and picnic tables. The experiences of Socius in running the co-housing experiment are captured in a manual written by the project coordinators: *the Adventures of Socius at Plan Einstein*⁷⁷.

⁷⁷ Kramer and van Rijswijk (2019).



Figure 4-1 - Aerial view of Plan Einstein in Overvecht⁷⁸

Tenants lived on floors above the communal incubator space. They received a 10% discount in exchange for being involved in various ways in Plan Einstein's housing project. Three tenants comprised a self-management team, who were paid on a part-time basis for work undertaken, including managing rents, PR and communications and the safety and cohesion of the building (for example dealing with noise complaints).

The Socius common space was accessed by the main door (Fig. 4-2) and rented rooms were not accessible to the general public. The incubator space and classrooms were visible from the outside through large windows opening onto the courtyard. The incubator space was originally painted inside in a bright orange colour to create a lively looking space. Over the course of the project, displays of asylum seekers engaging with artwork at the library were added. In early summer 2018, a business development 'challenge' was set to make the incubator space more welcoming to the neighbourhood, involving participants from Socius, the asylum centre and the neighbourhood working together. Over a course of weekends, the space was refurbished (as Fig. 4-3 shows).



Figure 4-2: the entrance to the Socius side, incubator space and classrooms



Figure 4-3: The redesigned incubator space in the 'Coffee of the World' challenge, run as part of the business incubation activities.

⁷⁸ <https://earth.google.com/web/@52.12193189,5.11658526,5.36887942a,610.49713274d,35y,-136.69551317h,44.99994766t,0r/data=CIYaVBJMCiUweDQ3YzY2ZjFmM2IyNWRmZml6MHhjMDk2NWE1NTVhOWYzYzlwGS-2tSouD0pAIWk0uRgDcxRAKhFFaW5zdGVpbmRyZWVmlDEwMBgBIAEoAg>

The following table gives information about **the populations living at the centre (2016-2018)** with data supplied by Socius and COA:

Population	Total number	Room type	Characteristics	Average length of stay	Further observations
Youth Tenants	53	Private rental in Socius community	29 male, 24 female,	505 days ⁷⁹	Population present from November 2016 to October 2018 60% of survey respondents had not lived in Overvecht before
Asylum Seekers	904 ⁸⁰	Shared rooms in ASC Einsteindreef	558 (62%) adults, 346 (38%) children 62.6% from countries with high chance of being granted status ⁸¹ 54.9% with permit for family reunification 2.2% Dublin claimants ⁸²	132 days ⁸³	Population present from Feb/ March 2017 to August 2017 Flow was not stable: only c.40 until August 2017, the remainder from then until August 2018.

Second, in order to help build community, there was a **variable menu of social activities** going on at Plan Einstein. Monitoring data requested of project partners showed from November 2016-October 2018, there were 65 one-off social activities that involved some mixing of different groups recorded over the project duration. These included many events run by other partners or organisations including the Dutch Council for Refugees, COA etc. The activities ranged from informal activities like Water fights, watching football, movie nights, bowling, Zomerfeest, Kings day celebrations and organised dinners to more established events like the Plan Einstein reunion at the end of the project (see Fig 4-4, flyer). There were also eleven types of repeating activities, which included things like eating together at Ramadan, chilling inside the incubator space, chilling outside and Dutch language tutoring.

Of those events, 53% involved a combination of youth tenants and asylum seekers, 31% involved a combination of tenants, asylum seekers and people from the Netherlands, and the remainder only tenants and people from the Netherlands. It is particularly notable however that the majority of

⁷⁹ Minimum=77, maximum=760. Standard deviation= 251.6

⁸⁰ From March 2017-August 2018, based on data requested from COA.

⁸¹ According to data from COA 46.2% (418) from Syria; 12.2% from Eritrea (110) and 38 (4.2% from Yemen)

⁸² Dublin claimants refer to asylum seekers who will not have their claim heard in the Netherlands, as they have travelled through a safe, third country to which they will be transferred, in order to pursue their claim.

⁸³ Data requested of COA shows that of the total population 12.5% (n=123) stayed at the ASC less than a month, 25.29% 1-3 months, 38.45% 4-6 months, 7-12 months 20.06% and 3.34% longer than a year.

events occurred disproportionately in the first part of the project, with 53% occurring before June 2017.

In addition to these activities, Welkom in Utrecht, a voluntary organisation, ran a series of activities that regularly brought together asylum seeker and refugee participants with other Dutch people. From July 2017 to October 2018, they recorded 52 one-off events from small group workshops, to kids' playing around days, yoga and women's meetings and lunch meetings with around 15-20 people. It also involved larger events, like participation in the Catching Cultures orchestra at the Tivoli Vredenburg concert hall, for around 100 people. Other notable activities included recurring events like the Dutch language café which attracted around 60 people each time, cooking or kids' craft workshops. All involved participation of asylum seekers and refugees from multiple nationalities. This tied in with a lively summer programme of activities in 2018, run by the Dutch Council for Refugees.

In addition to co-housing, **a dialogue with the neighbourhood** was established. Monthly meetings of the neighbourhood sounding board (twenty, overall) were held throughout the project period, enabling the local government to gauge and respond to tensions. The atmosphere report provided back to the local government show that only minor concerns were ever raised within the neighbourhood about the centre (e.g. about noise, or from a few individuals). The centre and its courses were advertised regularly at community events, and through print media and online community updates (via *the Dreefnieuws*). Our interviews showed that the project management opted for a 'word of mouth' communications strategy in the neighbourhood, to increase trust through engagement rather than risk inflaming opinion through abstract communications from the local government.



Figure 4-4 'Chilling outside'



Figure 4-5 Plan Einstein reunion invitation

4.1.2. Co-learning and tailored support

According to the Theory of Change, **co-learning** and tailored support are an equally vital step that lead to all Plan Einstein outcomes: 1) social connections and good local relations; 2) improved skills and labour market activation (which were futureproof) and 3) better wellbeing. In Plan Einstein, the 'launchpad' of educational and professional development comprised three main elements:

First, tailored support by the Dutch Council for Refugees (with Welcome in Utrecht) facilitated asylum seeker access to the educational aspects and encourage participation. All asylum seekers residing at Plan Einstein were invited to join Plan Einstein's classes and activities. They were informed about the project by email and information meetings run by the Dutch Council for Refugees. To access the programme they did the NOA assessment (see 2.5) followed by personal intake assessment. This provided personalised support to help signpost asylum seekers to the classes, assistance on legal issues, referrals to relevant services and professional support to monitor asylum seekers and encourage them to experience post-traumatic growth⁸⁴.

Second, there were eight week classes in English and entrepreneurship open to both neighbourhood residents and asylum seekers. The English classes operated classes from course levels according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)⁸⁵. Multiple levels were offered including Elementary (part 1 and 2) Pre-intermediate (part 1 and 2) Intermediate (part 1 and 2) and Advanced (part 1 and 2). There were also Cambridge certificate courses and course in conversation and grammar. The entrepreneurship classes were based on the principles of the Lean Launchpad method, as well as principles from design thinking and marketing. Its premise was not necessarily for all participants to become entrepreneurs, but also for others to learn skills and an entrepreneurial mindset that would be valuable in the longer-term. Classes were provided in English and Dutch, although one of the instructors also translated in Arabic.



Figure 8- co-learning activities in the incubator space

Third, the classes were supplemented by a professional business incubation programme, open to local residents and those from the ASC. This involved a range of activities, including one-off events and workshops on topics such as networking, CVs, LinkedIn, powerful pitching. Coaching partnerships sought to help participants to form networks relevant to their own professional interests. There was a *Start Your Own Business Course*, based on the International Labour Organisation's *Start and improve your own business programme*⁸⁶. Challenges involved group

meetings to collectively solve a problem, like organizing a pop up restaurant or run a neighbourhood project. Further information and advice on the format of these activities are given in a manual produced about entrepreneurship training produced by partners⁸⁷.

In addition to the work of the partnership, participants from Plan Einstein were engaged in other activities to improve skills. Nine participants participated in the University of Utrecht's InClUusion programme, and InClUusion also enabled one of the participants to run an ICT course with students from Utrecht University. Welkom in Utrecht also engaged participants in volunteering, running small groups on a one-off basis and also linking up with Emmaus⁸⁸, for more structured opportunities, that ran alongside the Dutch Council for Refugees referrals to the Volunteer Bureau in the city. Further

⁸⁴ This is a notion from positive psychology, referring to how individuals who have experienced traumatic and stressful events can experience positive effects (Park and Helgeson, 2006).

⁸⁵ <http://elp.ecml.at/>

⁸⁶ A programme of some forty years running in diverse contexts.

⁸⁷ see Roelfsema and Schouten (2019).

⁸⁸ Emmaus is an international solidarity-based movement to alleviate poverty. In Utrecht, its local community collect, sort and repair goods for resale. It has a location in Overvecht, where volunteers sort through items to be sold in the organisation's second hand shops.

information and advice about working with volunteers are provided in a manual for training volunteers produced by the Dutch Council for Refugees, West and Central⁸⁹.

The partners carried out the co-learning activities in the classroom spaces and incubator space. Once the centre in Overvecht closed in October 2018, classes continued in the new centre, Plan Einstein in Joseph Haydnlaan in Oog in Al. Transferring the concept has taken some time (see also Chapter 8). At first, the only location available for classes were in basement rooms of the ASC, without the comfort and novelty of the facilities in Overvecht. These did not attract many students. Following this, the local government secured a tenancy of an attic in a neighbouring building opposite the Haydn ASC, off the same courtyard. From early 2019, it has been investing in Plan Einstein 2.0 in this new location and the project will run over a five-year period. The conditions of the project are different in this site, since it is a stable ASC, in existence for 30 years, and managed by COA for this long-term period. Experimenting in a stable situation might be more risky, as it disrupts an existing equilibrium in a longstanding ASC, rather than in Overvecht, where the temporary contract was more conducive to experimentation.

The following table summarizes the achievements in the educational and developmental aspects of Plan Einstein in both locations, Overvecht and Joseph Haydnlaan:

Activity	Target	Number of participants		Registrations non-ASC (target 20%)	Number	
		Overvecht	Overvecht + Haydnlaan combined	Overvecht only	Overvecht	Overvecht + Haydnlaan combined
Intake assessments for asylum seekers	640	296⁹⁰	386⁹¹	N/A	51 information meetings ⁹²	53 information Meetings
English classes Target	800 places, 66 classes	522 class places 281 unique participants	960 class places 302 unique participants	50%	38 class groups	70 class groups
Entrepreneurship classes	600 places, 16 classes	200 participants 10 on web design course	232 participants and 52 on web design courses	40%	13 class groups	21 class groups
Business incubation programme	300	229 unique participants	258 unique participants	43%	44 coaching partnerships 4 start your own business programmes 4 challenges 178 network matches 32 one-off workshops	56 coaching partnerships, 6 start your own business programmes, 5 challenges 207 network matches 49 workshops

⁸⁹ See: Jansen and Rink (2019).

⁹⁰ 224 completed online NOA assessments, 72 had intake conversations in person with the Dutch Council for Refugees.

⁹¹ 5 completed online NOA assessments, 85 had intake conversations in person. Another 70 were directly referred onto courses.

⁹² The meetings were held for prospective participants to give information on Plan Einstein. The meetings were held in English or other languages using a translator (with a translator on location for groups, or by telephone for smaller groups).

In the new location of Joseph Haydnlaan, there were some adjustments to procedures as the concept transferred. From January 2019, with a temporarily reduced staffing team, the Dutch Council for Refugees concentrated on motivating residents of the ASC as quickly as possible to attend classes, rather than refer them to complete NOA assessments before going on courses. Another influencing factor in this course of events was that though the assessment was available in multiple languages (English, Farsi, Arabic, Tigrinya and Dutch), it was not available in all. There were many in the Haydnlaan ASC site who spoke other languages, including amongst others Turkish, Kurdish, Chinese, Krio, Dari, Luganda and French. Although to October 2019, 90 had an intake conversation and report, there were another 70 people participating in the programmes without them. The Dutch Council for Refugees is now catching up with this number, as its staff have now received training in delivering NOA assessments and explaining results to participants, a necessary condition for the assessment to work well.

Entrepreneurship classes and the business incubation programme have started more slowly. There has been another opportunity for co-creation of the space, as asylum seeker artists and the designers from De Voorkamer (a project to encourage different cultural groups to meet) worked with U-RLP participants to decorate the attic space. For example, they have used symbols from different cultures to make the place feel comfortable to all. The partnership has not transferred the co-housing element, and at the point of writing, COA has asked that they postpone this element for some time at least, if not indefinitely.

In the second part of the chapter, we turn to consider the implementation of activities and their realisation in practice, especially where external constraints and changes in circumstances had implications for the achievement of project outcomes. First, we consider the implementation of co-housing and social engagement, followed by co-learning and tailored support

4.2. Implementation of activities

4.2.1. Implementation of co-housing and social engagement

The local partnership designed Plan Einstein to co-house asylum seekers in an emergency centre and build a vibrant community (see 2.2.2). There was a huge level of commitment shown towards effective implementation of the project by the local government and their partners. It involved a great deal of resources and energy, as well as an impressive contribution of the asylum seekers and refugees themselves. There was a determination to deliver, and be flexible in overcoming obstacles, which meant that despite some changes explained below, much was achieved. These obstacles were pertinent to how co-housing and neighbourhood social engagement was realised in practice and affected some project outputs and outcomes. We identify four issues were largely outside of the partnership's control, and then consider some changes made by the partnership itself:

- 1) Plan Einstein operated within the national arrangements of asylum seeker accommodation, which meant that **co-housing, in practice, was 'adjacent housing' rather than a design that enabled mixed co-living**⁹³. Asylum seekers lived in the ASC in tenfold numbers in (what in the Netherlands) is considered a small to medium sized ASC. This was an arrangement mirroring any other conventional asylum-seeker accommodation run by COA, and COA opted to run their part more or less unadjusted. Socius tenants lived in smaller numbers in a ratio of 1:10 on the other side of the complex, separated by a kind of barrier in the form of a

⁹³ See CURANT, in Antwerp (Mahieu et al. 2019) see more reflections in Oliver, Geuijen and Dekker (2019, forthcoming).

hedge in between. These territorial aspects had implications for the outcomes, limiting the possibilities of spontaneous social interactions (see chapter 5 conclusion).

- 2) There were significant delays in the arrival of asylum seekers, which had effects on momentum.** Global political events in the form of the EU-Turkey refugee deal in March 2016 and the closing of borders in middle Europe, along the Mediterranean routes as well as (possibly) adjustments in German hospitality, probably contributed to a reduction in the numbers of asylum applications in the Netherlands. As Plan Einstein was opening in late 2016, COA was simultaneously closing down some of its emergency and reception centres and reducing occupancy in newly opened centres⁹⁴. The very placement of asylum seekers in a new centre was initially at risk, and although the local team had assurances from COA that they would arrive, COA regularly kept moving back the dates of arrival. In addition to the reducing number of asylum seekers, there were delays in completing the building work on the ASC side of the building⁹⁵. As a result, from February 2017, a much lower number than the 400 people anticipated arrived to live at the project site. These were 40 young, male asylum seekers, followed by 342 asylum seekers in August 2017 of whom 217 (63%) were adults⁹⁶. The delay likely affected momentum (see Chapter 5). Monitoring shows that as the project started, the number of social events and activities was high, but this was followed by a reduced level of social activities, a level which remained consistent over the following 18 months.



Figure 9- The Overvecht site after closure

- 3) The time-frame was short:** Despite the delay in arrival of the asylum seeker population, its end date was fixed. The Deputy Mayor had made a political commitment to the neighbourhood that the project would shut after two years, at the end of October 2018. It was felt important not to renege on this commitment, so even as the project was starting in earnest in August 2017, it already faced a spectre of imminent closure. Furthermore, the duration was shortened even further as the asylum seeker center on the Einsteindreef at the Plan Einstein complex was closed earlier than expected. From mid-August 2018⁹⁷, with minimal notice, COA moved asylum seekers to other locations across the city and to other parts of the Netherlands, compressing the time in which the centre operated fully to only one year, rather than two years as envisaged. There were lessons learned from this; as one local politician

concluded,

the project started a bit later than they expected it first. And we should have said right from the beginning that it would run for this and this period of time. Better than

⁹⁴ According to a newspaper report by Swai (2018), COA had closed 45 locations by January 2018, leaving 61 open. The report from COA is that by the end of 2018, 51 remain open (<https://www.coa.nl/en/reception-centres/opening-and-closing>, June 2018).

⁹⁵ The project management team said that they were given several different dates of when asylum seekers would arrive. They finally came in full numbers in August 2017.

⁹⁶ 115 adult males, 102 females; and 125 children

⁹⁷ This was in accordance with COA policy to move families with children only during school holidays, preferably summer holidays.

setting a final date. Because the final date meant starting later that the project would be shorter. A shorter period of time.

Despite some consideration of continuing in Overvecht, and despite a subsequent request to the local government to reopen the site by COA, the project closed entirely in Overvecht. There were plans to transfer Plan Einstein to a new location in the existing asylum seeker centre across the city in Oog in Al, but the sudden closure of Plan Einstein was disappointing for some people invested in the neighbourhood (see Chapter 5).

- 4) The asylum seeker population differed** to those initially expected in an emergency context. Rather than arriving quickly from overseas, asylum seekers were transferred from other centres in Utrecht or the Netherlands, where many had been for months or even years. However, they also differed to other ASC populations, as the number of people arriving at ASC Einsteindreef through a family reunification scheme was higher⁹⁸, and number of Dublin claimants lower⁹⁹ than in other ASCs. There were more families with children than expected, and more people were arriving into the project knowing they already had, or were likely to get a permit to stay, rather than waiting for status determination. There were relatively few participants refused legal status during or following their participation. This shift in the profile of beneficiaries had implications for the futureproof programme offer (see next section 4.2.2. on co-learning, and Chapter 6 and 7) but, as our research demonstrates in Chapter 5, the different population profile also had effects on the the ease of social mixing.

Three other issues affected the co-housing aspect of the project, which were within the partnership's control:

- 1) The local population involved in co-housing differed** from those initially the partnership expected to engage. In relation to local tenants, the original Theory of Change envisaged the youth tenants to to have strong connections to the locality, so that they could act as a 'go-between' (described by the project manager, wave 1). They were expected to perform a bridging role in connecting asylum seekers with neighbourhood residents. Research data indicates that 60% of tenants' survey respondents had not lived in Overvecht, which had implications for their connecting role. N=6 of 19 survey respondents in 2017 and N=4 of 13 survey respondents in 2018 indicated that they introduced asylum seekers to friends or family living in Overvecht, while respectively N=10 and N=5 had introduced asylum seekers to people from elsewhere. There were also shifts in the local population attending the courses (see 4.2.2).
- 2) A word of mouth communications strategy was used to communicate to the neighbourhood. This, combined with the project's location in a former office building meant that, according to many neighbourhood residents, the centre did not have a very visible, outward facing presence in the neighbourhood.** This was beneficial to increase trust and monitor tensions, but did not help the project's intention to create a vibrant community space. Indeed, the community researchers in the neighbourhood found several residents who, despite the widespread media coverage nationally, and in local communications, wanted to know more about the centre and how to access Plan Einstein. The researchers fed

⁹⁸ 54.9% (n. 499) compared to the average over the same period in other ASCs of 25.2%. Data received from COA in October 2018.

⁹⁹ 2.2% (20) were Dublin claimants, compared to other ASCs, where this was on average 14% in other ASCs. Data received from COA in October 2018.

this insight back and in the second half of the project, there was more advertising of the centre locally.

- 3) **In practice, the living room (incubator) space needed oversight.** In the opening phases, there was open access to this space. However, this was because, when there were fewer asylum seekers living there, the COA security personnel were sitting at the main doors (see Fig 4-1). When they moved to the ASC side, when the larger numbers came, Socius felt that having public access was more of a security risk. The doors to the common space were closed, and it was opened to the public only when there were organised events. From April 2018, Socius recruited hosts to facilitate social activities in the space and implemented regular opening hours of the incubator space. In April and May of 2018, the 'Einstein, Coffee of the World' initiative aimed to open the incubator space as an open and welcoming place. The initiative, run as part of the business incubation activities, was set up to make the space attractive to neighbourhood newcomers. Following this, coffee, tea, mint water and biscuits were always available free of charge, and people were welcomed by a host to give some personal attention and recognition. This altered the atmosphere of the space, as observed in Chapter 5 and 7.

All of these adaptations to the plan reflect some challenges experienced in governance and decision-making in a partnership arrangement. These are reflected on further in Chapter 8.

4.2.2. Reflections on implementation of co-learning

The partnership designed Plan Einstein to facilitate co-learning and tailored support in an emergency centre from late November 2016 (see 2.2.2). We reflect on four important issues identified in the implementation, which affected how co-learning was realised in practice:

- 1) **The intended beneficiaries shifted from those intended at the outset:** Due to delays in asylum seekers arriving at the site, for almost the first half of the project, there were very few asylum seekers to attend the courses. The Refugee Council adapted by bringing in participants from the other asylum seeker centre on the other side of town.

In the neighbourhood, recruitment of young people from the neighbourhood who were not in education, employment or training (NEETs) to the classes and business incubation was slow. Monitoring data on course participants show that take up of courses was limited in the first year (up to November 2017, only 11 registrations on the English classes came from the neighbourhood) but by the same time the following year, there was increased involvement, with the number growing to 235 (registrations not unique participants). As a result, **recruitment was widened from NEETs to a more general group interested in the courses.** One of the project managers explained mid-way through the project that the parameters had shifted. They said, it *'was not particularly about the NEETs themselves, the idea was to start a community, and have a vibrant community communicating within and without'*.

Qualitative research showed neighbourhood participants in classes to be a diverse group. Those coming included unemployed people, carers, professionals looking for a change of employment, or those interested in opportunities to connect with refugees. Others were students looking to improve their English before they went to university and even an older woman who wanted to learn English to talk to her sister's children in Canada. As the project progressed, those attending the entrepreneurship classes were recruited through Facebook rather than locally only. From Spring 2018, the Centre for Entrepreneurship used social

media and began attracting participants from across the city to the entrepreneurship classes, and even further afield across the Netherlands (see 8.2.1.1).

- 2) There were deviations from project targets.** Numbers of participants doing NOA intake assessments and attending the entrepreneurship classes were lower than that anticipated (224 did assessments out of 640 expected to do so, and 200 out of 600 expected attended entrepreneurship courses). This deviation was explained by partners as emerging from various reasons including: the change of concept from an emergency centre, the impacts of delays of asylum seekers arriving, the compressed time-scale, the speed by which some people moved through the centre (with 20.8% staying less than one month) and the fact that targets posed at the beginning were estimates rather than well-defined plans. As the orientation of the UIA programme was innovation and experimentation, the project management communicated to partners that reaching separate targets was less important than delivering overall meaningful activities. On the other hand, if the centre was expected to be an emergency centre from the outset, regular movement and some turbulence in the population might have been expected.

It was notable too that some partners exceeded their targets. In the business incubation stream in Overvecht, Social Impact Factory reported that a broad network of 156 professionals were involved, much higher than anticipated. There were 47 registrations (rather than 20) on the 'Challenges', and 55 people began the Start your own Business Programme, with 39 people finishing the courses, rather than the anticipated 10.

- 3) There was some adaptation of the plan,** according to trial and error to find what worked best. First, in the entrepreneurship classes, mixed classes were anticipated, but in practice the instructors trialled many different group compositions to find out what worked. These moved from (1) everyone together, to (2) refugees and locals in separate classes; and (3) highly skilled refugees and neighbours together, with low skilled refugees separately. The third arrangement was viewed implicitly as the best option.

Second, the business incubation stream adapted in several ways. From 2018, there was a restructuring so that people could directly enter into the Social Impact Factory activities rather than do the entrepreneurship courses first. There was also a shift away from internships. Originally, 150 short-term internships were planned, but these proved immensely time consuming to arrange because of the specialist interests of participants. As a result, SIF employees redesigned them to be individual networking meetings, allowing participants to rather meet with people who could give them insight into their chosen path: 178 of these were arranged. There was also a shift in timing of events, to more evenings and weekend activities to accommodate the diversity of the group, and from 2018 onwards, after suggestions from the research team, some more emphasis placed on contributions from refugees and asylum seekers to be built into the work, in the form of contributing to workshops, organizing and publicising events. This was important to help people feel that others were noticing their talents and counting their contributions. There were also some more specialized workshops set up for Eritrean participants (on empowerment, presenting yourself and self-esteem) with the input of VOORwerk¹⁰⁰ from COA, since they were harder to reach group.

¹⁰⁰ VOORwerk is a training initiative on soft skills to help with employment, organised by COA. See: <https://www.coa.nl/mycoa/en/content/about-voorwerk>

Finally, the awarding of sixteen start-up grants (of €2000, and designed to help participants start up businesses to have a positive effect in the neighbourhood) was abandoned. The Centre for entrepreneurship explained that this was because ideas were in too early a stage of development. Grants were also difficult to operationalize in practice because of difficulties giving award money to those still involved in an asylum procedure. However, this would not have applied to the majority of participants setting up a business from the neighbourhood, of which several were developed into real businesses.

- 4) **The change in ASC population** had implications for the course operation (repeating identical courses). The courses were originally designed to be short, 8 weeks long to fit the context of an emergency centre. However, as described in 4.2.1, the shift to a regular centre meant the population of the ASC was significantly different. Some people were staying much longer than the shorter periods imagined, while 55% stayed less than 3 months, fitting the profile expected at the outset. However, the latter issue still created logistical difficulties in practice, as some participants could not commit to courses or dropped out¹⁰¹. This explains some of the differences between recommendations to courses, registrations on courses and actual starters, complicated by participants' changing their email and physical addresses and telephone numbers. For those staying longer, the diverse offer of the English class was valuable, as there was opportunity for progression through different levels. The high number of registrations testify to the popularity of the courses as does the progression for those staying, or returning to continue courses. Of all the students, 49% (N=137) did more than one course. While 41% (N=115) of students did up to four courses, two students persevered through ten courses¹⁰².
- 5) **The change in ASC population also had implications for the relevance of the educational offer.** Most importantly, it raised questions about the futureproof concept of offering English and entrepreneurship, chosen because they would equip participants with skills of value *anywhere*. Participants with a permit, or likely to achieve one, needed more assistance at that point in integrating into *Dutch society*, particularly through learning *Dutch language* and understanding more about *Dutch society*. We consider this in more detail in Chapter 6.

4.3. Conclusions and recommendations

The chapter has shown that despite significant challenges largely outside of the partnership's control, Plan Einstein generated noteworthy outputs:

- **It delivered mixed co-housing for local tenants and asylum seekers. There were many activities onsite,** funded by the UIA as well as additionally funded by the municipality and run by a large variety of local organisations including Socius, the Dutch Council for Refugees, COA and especially Welcome in Utrecht (see 2.5 additional activities) **which encouraged social mixing.**

¹⁰¹ One project employee explained, '*sometimes people were just busy with moving on again and they said okay this is nice, but I have to move next week so I'm not going to join you*'.

¹⁰² 144 students did 1 course; 72 did 2 courses, 25 did 3 courses; 18 did 4 courses; 6 did 5 courses; 2 did 7 courses; 2 did 8 courses; 2 did 9 courses; and 2 did 10 courses.

- **A lively and well-attended series of classes and business incubation stream were run from the facility.** The number of ASC residents engaged was lower than anticipated, but appropriate in size to the overall adult proportion moving through the centre. The partnership exceeded (in fact more than doubled) the target of local participation, achieving high engagement of around 40-50% rather than 20%. This was despite a relatively low-key word of mouth communication strategy and limited outward advertising of the centre in the neighbourhood.
- **The co-learning element of the project benefited from flexibility and responsiveness to the needs of the population.** The co-learning attracted participation by offering evening and weekend activities, working with (crude) different ability groupings, or developing separate provision for specific groups.

Nevertheless, when looking at the implementation of activities, the evaluation notes:

- While the courses engaged a very high number of participants from the neighbourhood and beyond, **there was some project drift away from NEETS to others from the neighbourhood.** The courses appealed to a more diverse group including refugees living in the neighbourhood and middle-aged locals of Dutch origin than the initial intended beneficiaries of young people not in education, employment and training.
- **Fewer tenants had a strong local connection to Overvecht** (i.e. with few young people having lived there and really coming from the neighbourhood). This had some implications, considered in Chapter 5.
- Adaptations to the plan were made, by shifting beneficiaries, timing and composition of the classes. However in the time-pressured context, **there was little adaptation of the courses to correspond with the significant shifts in the ASC population.** We consider the implications of this in Chapters 6 and 7.

Recommendations:

The evaluation's attention to how the project's activities were implemented suggest several points of learning can be drawn from the experience. Some of these, we consider in subsequent chapters, given their effects on specific project outcomes. However, there are two practical recommendations we consider appropriate around implementation:

- **Planning should try to mitigate the effects of possible delays, especially by committing the project to run for a time-period in operation, rather than promise an end-date of closure.** This would reduce the pressure for partners to deliver the same activities in less time. It would also allow time for momentum to rebuild after initial disappointments experienced in the early days of building up the community. It would create more breathing space for opportunities for taking stock and reflecting, a vital necessity in a pilot and experimental project.
- **The partnership needs to build in opportunities for collective critical reflection on project progress and adaptation, and for resolving inevitable differences of emphasis between partners with differing roles.** Where targets are not met, the partnership might consider other possible reasons, in addition to the factors beyond the partnership's control, for the discrepancy and there might ideally be collective discussion on whether this matters.

5. Results: Good relations

This chapter provides an answer to the question ‘*How far have relationships between asylum seeker and neighbourhood residents improved?*’ following the Plan Einstein project. According to the project’s theory of change, the project sought to create an outcome of good relations in the neighbourhood, where residents less hostile, engaged and in contact with ASC residents. It aimed to:

- (1) **generate positive attitudes** and **reduce hostility** towards the asylum seeker centre (ASC);
- (2) **engage** the neighbourhood in Plan Einstein (the centre) by attending courses and activities, that would benefit those residents equally but also generate positive attitudes and increase connections;
- (3) **increase connections** between ASC and neighbourhood residents, and build bonding and bridging social capital.

Evidence on the first two aims draws on the two waves of neighbourhood surveys (autumn/winter 2017-2018, and 2018-2019) and interviews with neighbourhood residents. The final aim is considered through qualitative and quantitative evidence from multiple perspectives from neighbourhood residents in the broader neighbourhood and amongst the young people recruited ostensibly from the neighbourhood to live in the complex. It also considers evidence from ASC residents themselves.

5.1 Positive attitudes towards the centre

Plan Einstein was an intervention that aimed primarily at asylum seekers and refugees, but also aimed to reduce hostility in the neighbourhood and create positive attitudes to the centre within the neighbourhood. Qualitative data provides an indication of conditions in the neighbourhood prior to Plan Einstein’s opening. When the local government announced that the ASC would open in Overvecht, partners and some neighbourhood residents recall that negative sentiments dominated the public and media debate. Neighbourhood interviewees explained that several hundred people came to meetings, to protest the location of the centre in Overvecht, and a civil servant in the project management team said:

We went to neighbourhood meetings and the neighbourhood was very hostile and coming out in big numbers to protest this new thing they thought threatened the wellbeing of their neighbourhood, that was already disadvantaged and facing problems with multi-ethnicity, low social development, a lot of people out of a job. And they said for instance that their own children could not get housing, and these foreigners, these refugees were getting everything. They wanted to set the place on fire, they were really very concerned about it (project employee, wave 1).

Protest against the asylum centre in Overvecht during one of the information meetings gained attention in local and national news media. Protesters hung banners on the building where the ASC would be located with slogans such as ‘the ASC should go’. Some drew swastikas on the window blinds. There was also counter-protest of citizens stating ‘refugees welcome’ and violent conflict between the two groups during the evening of the information meeting. Interviews with project partners and neighbours indicated that violent protest against the centre had been fuelled by outside agitators, but that protestors were certainly coming from within the neighbourhood too.



Figure 5-1 The immediate vicinity of Plan Einstein

Figure 5-2. Initial reactions to Plan Einstein's opening (sources: De Volkskrant, Algemeen Dagblad and NOS 11-1-2016)



The research team sought further empirical evidence to understand whether this apparent ‘hostility’ was an enduring reaction from the neighbourhood, or changed once Plan Einstein opened. The neighbourhood surveys, conducted shortly after the ASC had full occupancy indicate that in November 2017, the group of neighbourhood residents objecting to the centre’s presence in Overvecht was a minority. Shortly after the centre opened, responding neighbourhood residents generally possessed neutral or moderately positive attitudes towards the centre (see figure 5.1).

Qualitative interviews suggested however that the neutral to slightly positive stance towards the centre stemmed from an absence of expected negative consequences of having the ASC in the neighbourhood and not noticing the centre too much. Sofie, a Dutch woman in her 40s explained how she passed by the building, but her experience was limited. Another Dutch neighbourhood resident, Jantina, aged 29, said:

In practice, I don't notice anything from Plan Einstein. If it hadn't been in the letter, I wouldn't have known at all that it was there. So while it is 300 meters away, if it hadn't been for those leaflets, I wouldn't have noticed it. In that sense, my experiences are neutral, I don't really notice it that much.

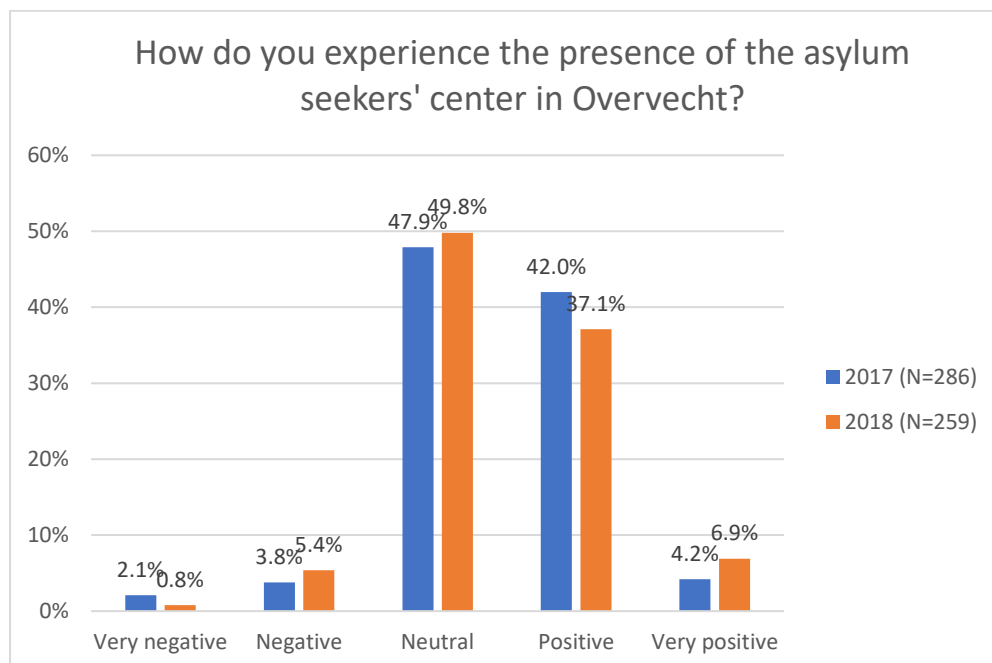
Griet, a 59 year old Dutch woman also observed:

Yes if you only drive past there, then you don't know what the building is. It could still be an office building. It is that I know that there is an asylum center, but you don't notice anything specific.

In wave 2, 12 of the 15 interviewees raised the issue that they had expected more criminality with the opening of the ASC, but this had not materialised. For example, Edward was an older, Dutch man who responded on his initially negative opinion on the centre opening, 'Yeah, against [...] Mainly because of the risk of criminality [...] That those guys would hang about, cause damage, or intimidate people in the street, that sort of thing'. He later then reflected, 'I have to admit I did not have any trouble with criminal asylum seekers or so'.

A year later, the share of neighbourhood residents having negative attitudes towards the ASC remained somewhat the same: 5.9% in 2017, 6.2% in 2018 were 'negative' or 'very negative' about the centre's presence in their neighbourhood. The share of residents who experienced the presence of the ASC in Overvecht as positive or very positive also remained at very similar levels: 46.2% in 2017, and 44% in 2018. Results of a T-test confirm that the change in mean attitudes between 2017 and 2018 is not statistically significant ($t=0,298$, $P=0,766$) – neither are the small changes within those who are positive and negative about the centre's presence.

Figure 5-3: Reactions to the ASC in Overvecht



People feeling negative about the centre concerned a remarkably small share considering that policymakers and politicians understood hostility to be the dominant reaction when they announced

the ASC's opening. We do need to consider that this small share may be partly due to social desirability in answering this question. In particular, a follow up question in 2018 that inquired about people's opinion on closure of the centre indicates that the group that was positive about the centre leaving was 14.9%. This suggests that the share of neighbourhood residents feeling negative about the centre might be larger than the direct measure indicates because respondents did not want to come across as intolerant or racist. However, the qualitative research indicates that another reason for the remarkably small share of negative attitudes towards the centre, was that was that those people in favour never went to the information evenings. Irene, a resident in her 50s of Aruban ethnicity reflected:

So I never went to say that I was for [the centre]. And usually the people who were against usually feel more strongly about it [...] than people who are for it.

This is an observation reinforced by Mescoli et al's (2019) study of responses to 12 reception centres across Belgium. They observed, 'solidarity movements or protest movements are the most visible – and mediatized– actions, while other possible opinions falling between these two poles remain quite unseen¹⁰³.'

The qualitative investigation showed too that it was possible for *some* neighbours who were initially negative about the centre to shift their opinion, although they were relatively few. Of the twelve neighbourhood participants we interviewed taking part in the project, only two, Sanne and Frans were initially fearful. Sanne was in her 30s, and, after participating in courses, she described her change of heart from her initial negative feelings:

I don't feel ashamed to tell people I was scared as well. Because that's the information that I get from the media, so they are giving us fear. So to be able to come here and visit and talk to people and see where they are coming from. And see, look I'm not going to ask them 'what have you...what's the reason that you are here?' but you will get a chance to talk to those people and understand, and how do you say, 'om in hun schoenen' [walk in their shoes].

Frans also explained he was more suspicious initially, but shifted when his fears did not materialise:

I was not so happy with the idea that they open a refugee centre. I was a little bit worried. We have a lot of criminality in the neighbourhood and I thought the criminality is going to [happen] more. But it's not, absolutely not.... They do a lot of good things for the neighbourhood, I saw.

On the other hand, the courses and activities mainly seemed to attract neighbourhood residents who themselves were not hostile towards the centre.

Furthermore, survey respondents who were more positive about having the centre in Overvecht felt more negative about the imminent closure of the centre (Spearman's rho= -0.42 P<0.001). As Table 4.1. shows, in the autumn of 2018, 43.7% of neighbourhood respondents were negative about the decision to close the centre. We can assume that they would not oppose it if the centre were to stay. 41.4% was neutral and 14.9% was happy with the decision to close the centre.

¹⁰³ Mescoli et al (2019:173).

Table 5.1

The asylum centre is closing in November. What do you think of this decision?			
		N	%
	Very positive	11	4.2
	Positive	28	10.7
	Neutral	108	41.4
	Negative	85	32.6
	Very negative	29	11.1
	Total	261	100
Missing	System	16	
Total		277	

Among the neighbourhood interviewees, most thought that closing the centre at the specific closing date was not a good idea. Their neutral or more positive attitude to wanting the centre to stay again stem from not experiencing any trouble from the ASC or its inhabitants. Other reasons included them being concerned with the asylum seekers having to relocate and finding a new home. Some neighbourhood respondents mentioned the positive contribution of the centre to the social fabric of the neighbourhood: for example Frans, a Dutch man in his fifties, referred to the fact that inhabitants were involved in planting flowers in community spaces around the centre. Marit, a 66 year-old Dutch woman expressed some annoyance at its closure, despite the political promise made to close the centre:

Yeah, yeah. Yes for me it could have stayed open. And if there was a need, then you can revisit your promise. Get it? You can explain like well it... Yeah, get it? You can always explain when you revisit a decision.

However, others also refer to the waste of taxpayer money from the investment in opening the centre, followed by rapid closure. Some people, like Roos, a 67 year old Dutch woman was initially opposed to the centre, but as a result of the lack of 'bother' associated with the centre, changed her mind about it. She complained that closure represented:

A waste of the money you have invested. Of the energy you have put in. And also of the neighbourhood. Because as a neighbourhood, you are being taken along in those innovation projects....For a moment you are in the picture, you are on the map. And then it remains the question whether that will still be the case.

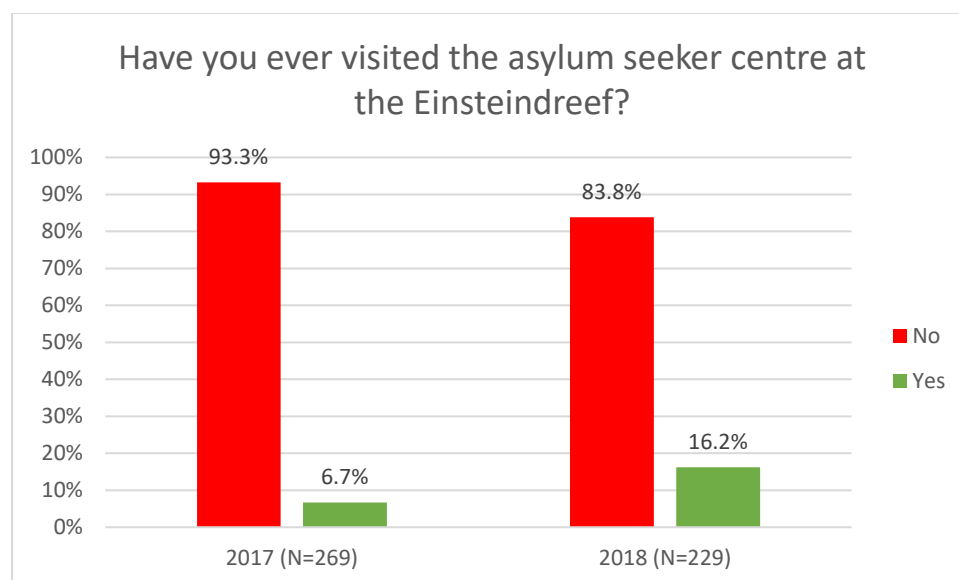
On the other hand, a minority of respondents in the qualitative interviews valued the deputy mayor keeping his promise to close the centre. These had mainly generic negative views towards asylum seekers and immigration/integration policy, or some limited negative experiences with the centre or its inhabitants. Some respondents were positive about the centre's closure because they felt it was in the interest of the asylum seekers to be leaving Overvecht and live elsewhere.

5.2 Engagement in Plan Einstein

5.2.1 Neighbourhood engagement

U-RLP aimed to create neighbourhood engagement in the centre in order to change negative attitudes, build contact and have residents benefit themselves from the centre's course programme. Our data shows that engagement of the neighbourhood in Plan Einstein picked up over the course of 2017/2018 (Figure 5.3). In the autumn of 2017, 6.7% (N=18) of the surveyed neighbourhood residents had visited the centre. At that time, Plan Einstein had been open for several months, but the large group of asylum seekers had only recently arrived in August 2017. Involvement grew to 16.2% (N=37) of the neighbourhood residents in our sample having visited the centre in the autumn of 2018 (see footnote 97). This is more than double the percentage of the previous year and suggests that about 1 in every 6 adults from the neighbourhood had visited. Analysis shows that this increase in visiting the centre is statistically significant ($t=-3.307$, $P=0.001$).

Figure 5-2



This increase in involvement is to be expected because the centre had been around for a longer period of time, giving people more opportunity to visit. Also, since late 2017, the U-RLP partnership had increased efforts to reach a larger neighbourhood public and monitoring data showed a notable increase between the first and second year in terms of neighbourhood participation in classes.

The majority of the neighbourhood respondents who had not visited, indicated they had not done so because they did not have a specific reason to visit and did not have a lower threshold introduction to get involved. Neighbours experienced U-RLP from the outside as an anonymous building with railings surrounding it. It did not come across as a place that they could drop by easily. Some of the interviewees suggested organizing more activities in the neighbourhood outside the Plan Einstein premises (for example in Wijkcentrum de Dreef, a sports hall or local playground) as a way of making Plan Einstein more accessible to neighbourhood residents, who indicated that entering into a 'new' premises might be tricky. Two pointed out this potential strategy:

There's different neighbourhood centres. First, people have to take the step of all the way going to Plan Einstein. The step needed to go to the neighbourhood centre might be smaller

for them. There you already have different communities using the same building and meeting each other there. Why wouldn't you not build upon that capital? To me, this sounds like a good idea, to build upon what is already present in the neighbourhood: social networks, activities... when you make use of this, you can probably reach much deeper in the local society. (Sofie, neighbourhood resident in her forties).

To engage these people, you can go to the neighbourhood centres of Overvecht. There are a lot of activities attracting a lot of different people. (Ton, neighbourhood resident in late thirties).

The research shows therefore that although course engagement was high, neighbourhood engagement concerns a small overall segment of the broader neighbourhood population, and that this small group slightly grew over the course of the project. Of this group, we can also identify that many were from migrant or refugee backgrounds themselves. One of the project employees said, 'I was really surprised that a lot of people, especially with migrant backgrounds came here'. Investigation of the actual participants in the English courses showed that around 80% of the neighbourhood participants in the English courses had non-Dutch surnames. Our qualitative research showed that some residents getting involved already had a previous engagement with or interest in refugees. One example is Karam, a refugee from Syria who now lived in the neighbourhood. He explained how he was involved:

Sometimes I help Kathleen (from Social Impact Factory) with workshops. And if some of my friends [find it] interesting to follow this workshop and if I see [...] because I have a lot of contacts with refugees from here, especially from Syria. So I know this workshop is good for this person, I call him, I send him a copy of the invitation, Kathleen can send it for us, and if he [finds it] interesting, he can come too.

When the broader population visited, they evaluated the occasion as neutral or positive, but visits remained rather incidental, rather than a regular occurrence (Table 5.2).

Table 5-1

On average, how often did you visit the asylum centre at the Einsteindreef over the past six months?				
	2017		2018	
	N	%	N	%
Multiple times a week	1	5.6	1	2.7
Once a week	1	5.6	2	5.4
Once a month	3	16.7	4	10.8
A few times over the past six months (less than once a month)	4	22.2	11	29.7
Once in the past six months	9	50.0	19	51.4
Total	18	100	37	100
Missing (Including those who never visited)	286		240	
Total	304		277	

The majority of respondents in the first survey who visited Plan Einstein did this once or a few times in the six-month period previously. This indicates that respondents who visited the ASC mainly participated in social activities and the COA open day. An example from the qualitative research is Marit, a 66 year old Dutch woman, who explained, *‘There was an open day and we went to that[...] yes it was a nice day.[...] No I did not visit anymore’*. Another example is Johanna, 41, who helped in the beginning with the remodelling of the incubator space and *‘indirectly’* experienced the centre through hearing news from her son and visiting him. However, when asked if she only visited her son or went to meetings too, she said, *‘Uhm, no actually not. Yes, I know there have been meetings but I have not gone there’*. Another was Sofie in her 40s, who explained:

At some point the first people moved in and I went by for one of those welcoming gatherings, a neighbourhood barbecue. It was a neighbourhood party with a barbecue and all kind of activities. Apart from that I have to say I don’t notice much at all.

Table 5.3. shows the activities mentioned by respondents as stopping by to have a look or a chat with people (N=7), visiting friends or family in the ASC (N=4), or specific activities (sounding board meetings, Eritrea day, language café etc.) that could be shared under ‘social activities’ (N=4). Observation and monitoring data confirm that neighbourhood residents occasionally took part in these activities. In 2017 and in 2018, N=3 unique respondents indicate having participated in one or multiple courses that were part of the Plan Einstein course menu (Entrepreneurship, English and business coaching), which equates to between 1.0-1.2% of the neighbourhood population within 1km of the centre (Table 5.3). This would suggest a lower figure of course participants of between 89-107 (1-1.2% of 8935) than based on the course registrations, which we estimate to be between 200-250¹⁰⁴, but the difference could be explained by participants coming from other parts of the city rather than the immediate neighbourhood.

Table 5-2

In what activities did you take part? (Multiple answers possible)		
	2017	2018
	N	N
Open day / Opening activity	6	13
English language course	2	2
Entrepreneurship course	2	2
ICT and computer skills course	n/a	0
Business coaching and mentoring	0	1
Social activities including cooking, sports, arts, BBQ	4	6
Other.....	8	19

5.2.2. Youth tenants

Having examined the broader neighbourhood response of those living outside the Plan Einstein complex, we now turn to examine the engagement of the youth tenants living in part of the building adjacent to the ASC. Socius, the housing organisation recruited youth tenants to have a central role in helping with community building within the centre, through organising joint social activities for ASC and neighbourhood residents. As a result of the selection procedure, Socius tenants possessed a broad

¹⁰⁴ Based on course registrations, the total would be a sum of 50% of 281 unique participants = 140 for English, 40% of 200 = 80 for Entrepreneurship and 43% of 229 = 98 for business incubation. If no-one took multiple courses the total number of neighborhood participants would be 318. However it is very likely that there was overlap, especially as business incubation is a follow-on course from entrepreneurship. As a result, we estimate that the total probably lies somewhere between 200-250 unique neighborhood participants.

pro-social stance of social engagement and interest in helping others. In the first survey, opportunities to meet asylum seekers and a wish to help others were most frequently mentioned reasons to move to Plan Einstein – besides pragmatic reasons of a low rent and lack of suitable housing elsewhere in Utrecht. Section 4.2 showed that an initial burst of activity from November 2016 to early Summer 2018 settled to a lower, consistent rate over the course of the project.

The survey responses indicate that Socius youth continued to participate in the initiative: all respondents in the wave 2 survey indicated that they spent time on joint activities and tasks. However, the survey showed that there was highly differentiated levels of involvement developed throughout the project. A small number of socius tenants were very actively involved in the activities and others less so. For a few Socius tenants (N=5) engagement took quite a lot of time (8+ hours on average per month), including management and engagement tasks Socius paid them to do. Most Socius tenants (N=11), were involved in Plan Einstein activities for a few hours per months. Qualitative material from the interviews support a trend in involvement of a small group of Socius youngsters in U-RLP over time. One tenant Janneke confirmed this, as she said, *'I had the idea that as a selected group we had a core and people who lived there by accident [...]. A core that was active and the rest less [...] yeah well I think more and more people dropped off as time went by'*. Helen, one of the tenants, also referred to a 'core group' from which she felt excluded.

The character of engagement however fluctuated over the project duration. There was an initial momentum of the early months of the project, but involvement was low in winter 2017/2018. On average, self-reported monthly hours of involvement decreased from 9.5 hours in the 2017 survey to 6.9 hours in the 2018 survey, an observation supported by several accounts of asylum seekers and tenants which suggests that they became busier with activities elsewhere as they settled into the complex. As noted in Chapter 4, involvement increased somewhat once the partnership started putting in strategies to open up the incubator space to the public, and make it a nicer space through the Einstein, 'Coffee of the World' challenge. However, by this time, the tenants had experienced the ASC population of 400 as too large, transient and diverse to really connect with. Survey responses showed too that they did not build significant bridging contacts with the neighbourhood, and this was also not actively encouraged. Towards the final months of the project, already asylum seekers and Socius tenants started moving out which diminished the energy to organize new activities. Janneke, who had been quite highly involved at the beginning explained in an interview in wave 2:

When all of a sudden there lived two or three hundred people and the churn was high, then... I just stopped engaging. That that simply... it became too anonymous. I no longer had any idea who were there and what they were doing...

Femke, a tenant in her early twenties, explained too the variations over the project in an interview in wave 2:

Yeah I think... I liked the start the best. You knew everybody a bit. And uhm ... Then it fell flat for a year for me. [...] before it really ... stuff was happening. And then we got... I thought that [the challenge] was great: Einstein's coffee of the world [...] Here you noticed everybody had grown towards each other and made something happen together. And that went... That was such a success, also with the opening. There were so many people! I really was... That really surprised me.

Despite differentiated levels of involvement, the majority of the Socius tenants indicated that they would again make the choice to live at Plan Einstein (Table 5.4). In fact, N=4 of those moved to another

co-housing project and N=4 moved to another shared apartment with students or starters (and see Chapter 5 on skills, where an unintended consequence was several Socius youth getting work connected to asylum or social projects professionally). Most of them cherished the good atmosphere of *'gezelligheid'* (cosiness) and learning about intercultural differences and similarities. Those who doubt or would not again make the choice to live at Plan Einstein, mentioned that they were in a different, busier stage of life now. They would not want to share facilities with others any more. They also referred to the temporary nature of the project and having to relocate soon as a barrier.

Table 5-3

Would you again choose to live at Plan Einstein? (2018)			
		N	%
	Yes	10	62.5
	No	2	12.5
	I don't know	4	25.0
	Total	16	100.0
Missing		3	
Total		19	

5.3. Contact between asylum seekers and neighbourhood residents

Finally, Plan Einstein aimed to achieve increased connections between local inhabitants and asylum seekers, to improve the types and levels of social capital of asylum seekers. The NOA assessments administered prior to entering the Plan Einstein project showed that about two-thirds (64.9%) of the asylum seekers living at Plan Einstein reported being in contact with Dutch people on a monthly basis or more frequently. This did not include Dutch people from the Plan Einstein partnership and casual contacts in shops. This contradicted somewhat the accounts from many asylum seekers and refugees in the interviews, who said that getting in touch with Dutch people was very difficult because they did not speak a common language (e.g. Dutch or English).



Figure 5-3. ASC residents' contact with Dutch people: NOA assessment responses

5.3.1 Neighbourhood contact

In the neighbourhood surveys, roughly half of the neighbourhood residents reported being in contact with the recent group of asylum seekers (Table 5.5). Comparing the reported frequency of contact by neighbourhood residents in 2017 and 2018, we see that the average frequency slightly increased, but this difference between the 2017 and 2018 survey is not statistically significant ($t=1,377$, $P=0,169$). In other words, the increased numbers of neighbourhood residents visiting Plan Einstein did not have a measurable impact on the frequency of contact between asylum seekers and neighbourhood residents.

Table 5-4

How often do you have contact with asylum seekers who have come to the Netherlands in recent years?					
		2017		2018	
		N	%	N	%
Valid	Almost daily	18	5.9	16	5.9
	Weekly	25	8.3	38	14.1
	Monthly	34	11.2	31	11.5
	Less than monthly	59	19.5	43	15.9
	Never	167	55.1	142	52.6
	Total	303	100	270	100
Missing		1		7	
Total		304			277

A follow up survey question in wave 2 showed that in 2018, most contact between neighbourhood residents and asylum seekers developed outside of Plan Einstein (Table 5.6). The number of respondents mentioning Plan Einstein as the main place of contact slightly increased, however this

difference is not significant ($t=-1,203$, $P=0,230$). Most respondents report accidental contact rather in public places or closer contacts at work or at home. This corresponds with ASC interviewees accounts of contact with Dutch people beyond Plan Einstein made at times through their own volition, through participating at religious places of worship, the local community centre, voluntary work placements (e.g. in children's activities), sports coaching etc. Some of the neighbourhood residents who completed the survey have a refugee background themselves, so their contacts with asylum seekers also involved family and friends in private homes. By the autumn of 2018, the survey indicates therefore that though contact in the classes was occurring for a minority, centre had not generally developed into a well-established common meeting space between asylum seekers and neighbourhood members.

Table 5-5

Where did this contact usually occur?		2017	2018
		N	N
Valid	At school	6	6
	In a sports club	8	5
	In a public place (street, public transport, shop)	70	68
	At Plan Einstein	5	9
	At work	18	10
	At home	10	19
	In a church, mosque or temple	5	3
	In a neighbourhood or community centre	14	8
	Total	136	128
Missing	System	168	149
Total		304	277

For a smaller number of neighbourhood residents who participated in the classes, the contact they experienced was quite meaningful. Our qualitative research came across one neighbourhood resident, Irene, in her 50s who specifically chose to go to the centre because she desired contact with refugees. Being able to do so under the umbrella of the classes felt more natural to her as a place where she could make contact on a more equal basis, as she explained:

I thought it would be a good idea to do the course so that I could meet refugees on an equal basis, because if not, I was afraid if I came just to meet them like that, it would be more like visiting a zoo. And I wanted to meet them on an equal basis, so we would both be students.

Some ASC residents reinforced this perspective, explaining that they made connections with neighbourhood residents through the shared enterprise of doing the courses. For example, Omar, 58 from Syria told us how he was invited to watch the Utrecht–Ajax soccer match at the house of a neighbourhood residents he met on one of the courses. In addition, Maahir, a Pakistani physician in

his 30s explained how he met a Dutch woman during the entrepreneurship classes, who then offered to teach him Dutch. These two regularly sat in Plan Einstein's Incubator Space and worked together. Aban said: *'for us it is very difficult to knock on doors [in the neighbourhood]. This [Plan Einstein] helps integrating'*. Fatima, a woman in her twenties from Syria, noted that she met neighbourhood residents at classes but then also had casual encounters with them in a local supermarket. She also said,

We used to study together with other refugees and other Dutch people. All refugees and Dutch people who attended the course went together to the exam (Cambridge exam). We felt that we were one group, although we are different. Although they were so different from us (like a mother who has kids), the course gave us the chance to meet and interact together. I think it was a clever idea from people who work in Plan Einstein. The course was free, so people came. Sometimes we used to meet after the course to study together.

In addition to the classes, complementary activities offered from *Welkom in Utrecht* worked very well in connecting people from different groups. These additional activities include the 'beauty meetings' at which women were able to show off skills in hairdressing and cosmetics. Other people (including Aesha, Mohammad, Omar and Samir) enjoyed Tuesday evening's music meetings, giving occasions where contacts could be made even when common language was insufficient. Some of the wider contact in the neighbourhood to sports activities etc. started from Plan Einstein's workers or volunteers, as well as contacts via the auxiliary projects like the 'buddy to buddy' and other initiatives noted in Chapter 4.

For some neighbourhood participants, once closed, the presence of the centre was missed therefore, as it was a hub from which opportunities for social contact could be made. A project employee claimed that after Plan Einstein, *'the network [in the neighbourhood] still exists. People still look each other up, or meet or have dinner together. It really goes on'*. The follow up interviews with neighbourhood participants however, showed that most people felt they were too busy. Nevertheless, people like Irene and Frans acknowledged that contact had improved amongst themselves, and they might now say hi or stop for a chat to a small number of neighbour participants they got to know on courses. They did not report keeping in touch with any refugee participants, apart from odd occasions. This corresponds too with the viewpoint of the asylum seekers, where while contact was appreciated during the time at the ASC, but for the majority, did not lead to social capital in the neighbourhood that could be accessed beyond the project. As Faisal, a young Syrian in his twenties felt that while he was there, contact *'was nice, it was very nice, but I guess it didn't make a huge difference'*.

5.3.2. Youth tenants contact

Youth tenants - understandably - were in contact with the asylum seekers on a more regular basis than were the majority of neighbourhood residents. In 2017, half of the group reported being in weekly or more frequent contact with asylum seekers and half of the group were in contact monthly or less often. At that time, the initial momentum of the project was lost and winter-time made it more difficult to meet in the outside spaces. In 2018, contact increased, with 75% self-reporting being in weekly or more frequent contact with asylum seekers while still living at Plan Einstein (Table 5.7). Socius tenants felt that the renovation of the incubator space, nice weather and increased attention to helping them meet with the asylum seekers helped. Also already knowing some asylum seekers helped them get introduced to others. The qualitative interviews however suggested that frequency of contact however never returned to the initial high level reported at the beginning of the project when a smaller group of 40 asylum seekers was living in the building. According to Femke, for example, contact was more 'natural' and based around regular activities, such as cooking together. That became a benchmark of sorts, from which they always evaluated subsequent contact. Janneke said,

Yeah, yeah, the first part [...] 40/40 was. Yeah I thought it was really fun. That was by far... For me, the project succeeded there. And that was... That was great in itself, because that made the rest... We can think back like oh yeah that first part went really well, so naturally, so organic, so nice, that it simply... Because you came home and somebody was smoking outside and then you had a conversation about the Quran or so.

Table 5-6

How often do/did you have contact with asylum seekers living in Plan Einstein?					
		2017		2018	
		N	%	N	%
Valid	Daily	3	15.8	9	56.3
	Weekly	7	36.8	3	18.8
	Monthly	6	31.6	2	12.5
	Less than monthly	3	15.8	2	12.5
	Total	19	100	16	100
Missing		4		3	
Total		23		19	

The survey responses show that when Socius tenants were in contact with the asylum seekers it was mostly in passing or at activities organised in the public spaces of Plan Einstein, like the incubator space and kitchen, or outside the Plan Einstein building. To encourage contact between the Socius tenants and asylum seekers it has therefore been very important that the project provided in these shared spaces at the Plan Einstein premises. Only a few youngsters met with asylum seekers outside the premises of Plan Einstein or in the privacy of their own rooms (which might indicate stronger social connections). Numbers of Socius tenants who indicated that they actively met up with asylum seekers show quite some variation (Table 5.8). In the first year, over half the sample never met up with asylum seekers, by a year later this had reduced to just over a third. In 2017, two people claimed to have contact with twenty plus ASC residents, by 2018, five people had minimally ten contacts.

Table 5-7

With how many asylum seekers living in Plan Einstein do you sometimes meet up with?					
		2017		2018	
		N	%	N	%
Valid	0	11	57.9	6	37.5
	1	4	21.1	0	0
	3	1	5.3	2	12.5
	4	0	0	4	18.8
	5	1	5.3	0	0

	10	2	10.5	2	12.5
	12	0	0	1	6.3
	20+	0	0	2	12.5
	Total	19	100	16	100
Missing		4		3	
		23		19	

Despite the positive change in atmosphere that was observed after efforts to improve the physical spaces, according to N=10 Socius tenants, the qualitative research showed that it still remained 'difficult' to establish contact with asylum seekers during the final months of Plan Einstein (Jan 2018-Oct 2018). This was due to the many changes in the population of asylum seekers, and the higher numbers which made organizing activities by a small group of youngsters for a large group of hundreds of asylum seekers, created a high threshold. One refugee, Raafi, in his twenties from Syria and living in the neighbourhood volunteered at Plan Einstein. He made the following observations about the arrangement of 400 refugees with 38 young people:

So that is a big difference, it is not balanced at all. And to be honest, sometimes you feel that there is a gap. You know, if you are a Dutch person who lives in this place, and you go outside your room, and you know there are 400 strangers living in this building....of course you will have fears, or you would feel like, 'I'm the stranger here, not them'. Because they are more than us. And also if I want to make a step and to get to know people, how can I possible get to know 400 people and know their names? But when there is more equality, or at least more young people living there, more young people who participate in events and workshops, it will become easier. Like if they all know 2 or 3 people all, everyone will become connected in some way. And in some time, all will know each other in the end.

Differences in the composition of the groups were a barrier as well. Some Socius tenants reported that the larger numbers of families than young people made it hard for them to make contact. Some also found that being confronted with the difficult situations and even suicidal thoughts of the asylum seekers prevented building closer relations at times. The Socius tenants were in a privileged position, but not always able to help. Contact remained close for a small number of individuals; in particular there were a few tenants who developed close relations and also offered support and help on a regular basis, for example, helping them make preparations for their Cambridge English exams.

Contact between the Socius tenants and asylum seekers can be best characterized then as neighbourly relations: youth were living adjacent to the asylum seekers, attending some of the events, but the majority were not necessarily actively arranging to meet with each other. For some asylum seekers, this proved a disappointment. Amal in her twenties from Syria explained that '*few students were integrating with us. I think others were not active. I do not know how many exactly, but I only remember 5 who used to interact with us*'. Some of the young Syrian refugees mentioned that they experienced surprise in having to get used to different norms in relationships, for example having to make appointments to see close Dutch friends. There were also some differences in interpretation of the relationship, where Syrians interpreted the contact as friendship, and were then disappointed when they experienced that their Dutch 'friend' saw it more like a 'helping' relationship.

Finally, after Plan Einstein closed in autumn 2018, half of the group of Socius youngsters reported still being in contact with asylum seekers they knew from living at Plan Einstein (Table 5.9). Numbers differed between 2 and 15 asylum seekers.

Table 5-8

With how many asylum seekers that lived at Plan Einstein are you still in contact? (2018)			
		N	%
Valid	0	8	50.0
	2	2	12.5
	3	2	12.5
	5	1	6.3
	10	1	6.3
	12	1	6.3
	15	1	6.3
	Total	16	100
Missing	System	3	
Total		19	

Qualitative accounts from asylum seekers however suggested a lower level of enduring contact, with only a couple of asylum seekers in the wave two sample (n=35) maintaining regular contact. Contact at this time was mainly on social media rather than in face-to-face meetings, and even for the few who maintained contact, it was then only with one or two individuals they could actually name.

5.4 Conclusions and recommendations: Good relations

The chapter has shown how the project has delivered its three aims related to creating ‘good relations’; we consider each in turn.

Conclusions on positive attitudes towards the ASC

Plan Einstein aimed to create positive attitudes and reduce hostility to the centre within the neighbourhood:

- **The research found reduced hostility and neutral to moderately positive attitudes towards the ASC in Overvecht.** However, this is in line with common experiences, and we cannot conclude that the reaction necessarily resulted from the Plan Einstein intervention. Most respondents did not actively seek its closure: 14.9% were happy that the ASC was closing, 41.4% neutral and 43.7% negative.

In summary, the announcement of the ASC in January 2016 was met with public protest indicating hostility from within the neighbourhood and beyond. There were also voices in favour of welcoming refugees in Overvecht. After the centre opened, the neighbourhood attitudes were neutral to slightly positive. These attitudes stemmed from absence of expected negative consequences of having the ASC in the neighbourhood and not noticing it too much. Attitudes remained the same until closure of the centre in 2018, and the majority of the neighbourhood would not have minded if the centre stayed open for a longer period of time.

The finding, though positive, is wholly in line with recent studies¹⁰⁵ which show that negative attitudes towards ASCs generally tend to dissolve once an ASC opens. This is because fears of nuisance and crime do not materialize, whereby the local response can be characterized as '*a collective sigh of relief*'¹⁰⁶. Mescoli et al's (2019) recent study of mobilisation regarding 12 reception centres in Belgium found too that the majority of neighbourhoods surrounding the centres had neutral attitudes¹⁰⁷, where respondents were not bothered by the presence of the centre, nor particularly interested in what occurred there.

Conclusions on neighbourhood engagement

The theory of change envisaged that engaging the neighbourhood in courses and activities at Plan Einstein would help neighbourhood residents to develop more positive attitudes towards the ASC (see 5.1) and build contact between locals and asylum seekers (see 5.2). It would also benefit participants from the neighbourhood by increasing their skills (6.1). Co-housing also aimed to engage young people in the aims and ambitions of Plan Einstein. The research found:

- **There is a mixed picture of neighbourhood engagement.** Plan Einstein exceeded its targets to engage 20% of neighbourhood participants in classes. The classes attracted a specific segment of the neighbourhood: neighbours who got involved often had previous engagement with or interest in refugees and many were refugees or had a migrant-background themselves. The neighbourhood surveys showed that broader neighbourhood engagement in the activities and social space of the centre was otherwise rather limited. Engagement of the broader neighbourhood with Plan Einstein picked up to 16.2% (N=37) over the course of 2017/2018 and visits to the ASC by local neighbourhood residents were found to be neutral or positive. For most visitors responding to the survey, visits remained incidental (for example through one-off visits to a COA open day) rather than a regular event. Plan Einstein remained little noticed among the majority of neighbourhood residents in Overvecht and therefore its impact was more marginal than it could have been. When applying the Plan Einstein space in different nearby neighbourhood, as is beginning in Lombok, Kanaleneiland and Oog in Al Neighbourhood around Plan Einstein Haydn, there are efforts to understand the ways to engage these particular neighbourhoods.
- **The research found that engagement by tenants in Plan Einstein was variable;** a small number of Socius tenants were very active; the majority engaged with the project on a more incidental basis and some were not involved at all.

Overall, from the perspective of the broader neighbourhood in the local vicinity of the centre, we find that the ambitions to create Plan Einstein as a vibrant neighbourhood centre facilitating positive encounters between asylum seekers and neighbours were met somewhat partially. Classes were well attended and there was an increase in neighbourhood engagement. This was a consequence of Plan Einstein being around for a longer period of time and also likely resulted from increased efforts by the partnership to engage with people from the neighbourhood (see Chapter 4). Recruitment of neighbourhood residents for courses and activities increased to a high level, although the broader population of the neighbourhood did not get very involved. As identified in chapter 4, one of the central issues was that there was relatively little time to build a community centre. However, the research identifies too that the threshold for many neighbours to go out and visit an ASC was high.

¹⁰⁵ Whyte et al. (2019); Bygnes (2019).

¹⁰⁶ Bygnes (2019).

¹⁰⁷ Mescoli et al. (2019).

Of those who went to classes at Plan Einstein, we found a high proportion with migrant or refugee background. Class monitoring showed that 80% of the English language class participants had non-Dutch origin surnames. Some neighbourhood participants were looking to (re-)enter the labour market, but others were curious to make contact with asylum seekers in the first place. This corresponds with findings from other projects. For example, Mescoli et al's (2019) research on Belgian asylum centres found that activities organised by asylum reception centres mainly attracted people previously engaged or interested in reception centres, while participating volunteers rarely lived in the direct vicinity of the centres¹⁰⁸.

For the youth tenants, the research shows that engagement in Plan Einstein was highly differentiated with a small number of tenants very active and the majority engaging with the project only incidentally. Engagement with the project shifted over time with a decrease in activities. This is not unusual, when comparing with other research. Studies of co-living initiatives find different levels of engagement in and satisfaction with co-housing projects among youngsters¹⁰⁹ and a decrease in the initial enthusiasm about co-housing is common¹¹⁰. The research on Plan Einstein found that community building mainly took place within the scope of the project itself, rather than in the neighbourhood. Bridging contacts with the neighbourhood through the tenants were less established, and were also not actively encouraged. It is questionable whether this group of youth tenants were the right social protagonists because they lacked ties with the neighbourhood and not all were willing to become actively involved in the project. However, most Socius tenants look back on the project positively and several have gone on to live in similar projects, or work in related fields.

Conclusions on contact

The theory of change suggests that bringing different people together in contact can help foster more intercultural understanding¹¹¹. The research aimed to examine to what extent there were increased connections between ASC and neighbourhood residents, and whether it helped to build bonding and bridging social capital (also considered in Chapter 7). The research showed:

- **The Plan Einstein project did not, according to the survey, lead to increased contact to a significant degree at the level of the broader neighbourhood**, referring to residents living in the vicinity of the centre. However contact occurred among a small proportion of neighbourhood residents attending the courses, and these numbers exceeded the project's targets of neighbourhood participants expected. These activities gave participants a shared goal and place from which to develop meaningful encounters.
- **Contact between the youth tenants living in the adjacent housing and asylum seekers fluctuated over the project duration.** It began well in early 2017 and dropped by the end of 2017. Between early 2017 and late 2018, contact between the tenants and ASC residents increased again (75% of respondents in the second tenants' survey reported being in weekly or more frequent contact with asylum seekers). However, contact never reached again the easy, light contact appreciated in the early days of the project where small numbers of asylum seekers of more similar composition to themselves lived there. The tenants found connecting with large numbers of asylum seekers, in a transient population, challenging.

¹⁰⁸ Mescoli et al. (2019:223) found that people coming to ASCs did not come from the neighbourhood and they already tended to have positive views of asylum seekers and refugees (2019: 223).

¹⁰⁹ Czischke & Huisman (2018); Mahieu et al. (2019); Tinnemans et al. (2019).

¹¹⁰ Tinnemans, et al. (2019).

¹¹¹ Allport (1954); Pettigrew and Tropp (2000); Gesthuizen, Van der Meer and Scheepers (2008); Hewstone et al (2018).

- **The social contacts that developed between ASC residents and tenants (and asylum seekers and neighbourhood residents) were characterized as neighbourly, convivial relations.** They had value at the time of the initiative, but endured less beyond the lifetime of the project¹¹².
- **There are limitations in the extent to which mixed living can flourish within the existing confines of asylum seeker reception.** As discussed in Chapter 4, In Plan Einstein on the Overvecht site, it took the form of ‘adjacent’ co-housing rather than *mixed co-living*. The adjacent living model imposed less than ideal circumstances for encounters with difference. There were fewer vital conditions that research suggests is needed for casual encounters, e.g. through shared areas for habitual contact, and equality in numbers and living conditions.
- **Shared common, neutral and freely accessible space,** characterised by a welcoming atmosphere, is vitally important for **meaningful social and professional encounters.** The research showed that neighbourly contact developed between asylum seekers and Socius tenants in common spaces of Plan Einstein, like the incubator/living room space and kitchen, and outside space of the Plan Einstein complex. Neutrality and openness was achieved through having the space near but separate from the ASC, under the responsibility of the municipality, and managed by a social enterprise. The spaces worked best when developed through co-ownership and collaborative design, and when project management facilitated access for habitual encounters through extended opening hours and freedom of entry. For much of the project, the public space was closed and there was a very low-key presence of the centre in the neighbourhood and this suggests some missed opportunities to engage with the broader neighbourhood.

The first conclusion of limited contact at the level of the broader neighbourhood is unsurprising given the conclusions on attitudes (which showed only a small minority of people in the neighbourhood noticing the centre). In the neighbourhood surveys, at the neighbourhood level there was no increase in the broad share of neighbourhood residents being in contact between the two surveys, and respondents indicated that most contact took place in other places than in Plan Einstein. Contact occurred with a smaller proportion of neighbourhood residents through the courses and activities. Indeed the targets for neighbourhood participation were exceeded and ASC residents appreciated the contact that occurred in the classes, through engaging in a collaborative activity, as beneficial at the time.

In reflecting on the results of the findings around contact with neighbourhood tenants, the findings confirm existing research, which shows that sharing space in and of itself is not sufficient to lead to contact. Rather a centre such as this needs to foster a range of conditions for spatial proximity to translate into social proximity¹¹³. Research suggests that there needs to be 1) equal status between groups 2) reliance on each other to achieve a shared goal 3) intergroup cooperation in a non-competitive environment; 4) a supportive institutional context, generated through authorities, law or custom and finally ‘friendship potential’, where contacts need ‘time...to develop’¹¹⁴.

¹¹² This touches upon the ongoing scholarly debate about the value of convivial urban encounters seen in the example of Plan Einstein. Some scholars suggest that even brief, light touch interactions have a positive effect in transforming dominant social values and respect for difference (Neal et al., 2016). Others suggest that as a result of their fleeting nature, they are ‘too thin’ to lead to any major change (Valentine and Sadgrove, 2012).

¹¹³ Allport (1954) established four essential conditions that must be met for success (reformulated into five by Pettigrew (1998).

¹¹⁴ Pettigrew (1998:7) see also Neal et al (2016)

Plan Einstein facilitated some of these conditions through its co-housing and co-learning arrangements, particularly conditions (3) and (4). However other conditions, such as equal status (1) and a supportive institutional context (4) were constrained by the existing conditions of asylum reception. Asylum seekers lived in much higher numbers, in shared rooms in a separate part of the building under COA supervision, where they could be moved very suddenly. Socius tenants were fewer in number. They had more spacious individual rooms, and lived in another part of the building. They were there for a longer period. Physical barriers to encounter have been identified as problematic in other co-housing projects¹¹⁵ but removal of these physical barriers does not guarantee closer social connections to develop¹¹⁶. In Plan Einstein too, the important condition of having time for friendship to develop (5) was lessened by the constrained project duration and transience of the population (see Chapter 4).

Recommendations

From the conclusions around good relations in the neighbourhood, the following suggestions can be made:

- Lessons can be learned from the fact that the dominant negative reaction in the neighbourhood was less pronounced once the centre opened. It indicates that **politicians and policy-makers should be sensitive to, but not be overly driven by dominant narratives of hostility promoted in mainstream media**. Adopting too low-key an approach may mean that opportunities to engage a silent, neutral or more receptive majority is lost.
- **Projects like Plan Einstein need to be clear in their vision for the broader neighbourhood:** if it is to maintain peace and have populations ‘rub along’, it succeeded. If it wants to build relations more substantially, it requires an unambiguous strategy to do so, that has clear goals aimed at lowering the threshold for neighbourhood residents to visit. It would benefit from research into the neighbourhood to understand its dynamics, needs, and understanding of meaningful and attractive activities. It would also involve a closer look at the demographic composition of the ASC and the neighbourhood residents, to establish common ground. For example, in this project, it might consider how to engage children and their parents from the centre and the neighbourhood (<18 years) to build more bridges, through space and opportunity for children to play together.
- **Projects like Plan Einstein should think relationally rather than territorially to engage the neighbourhood:** consider what can be done to reach out by engaging people already very active in the project as change-makers and neighbourhood ambassadors. This includes some of the active tenants, neighbourhood residents with migrant or refugee backgrounds as well as some active asylum seekers and refugees themselves. Explore how the project already capitalizes on existing spaces and sites of activity and connection, such as neighbourhood centres, local playgrounds, schools and sports halls, and make use of social networks in the neighbourhood rather than thinking only in terms of the project territory. This can enhance the benefits of the project in the neighbourhood even if the site itself is closed.

¹¹⁵ Mahieu et al., (2019); Tinnemans et al., (2019).

¹¹⁶ For example, in the CURANT project where refugees and local buddies shared housing units, the evaluators Mahieu et al. (2019) conclude that *‘living under one roof turned out to be no guarantee for in depth or extensive social contact [...] a range of personal and structural features explain why social contact between matched refugee-buddy duos often turned out to stay limited.’*

- **Invest in shared, neutral, freely accessible and welcoming common spaces** (like the incubator space, kitchen areas and outdoor space) since they are so important for social and professional contact. These should be openly accessible spaces without restrictive rules and surveillance. They prove vital in creating conditions conducive for social and professional contact, enabling people to do things together collaboratively, as well as meet and socialise. The centre's physical design should be really inviting for outsiders as well as to 'insiders' like asylum seekers and refugees to want to come in. Consider how the physical design, and institutional environment of fences and carparks might be re-designed to become inviting spaces. The spaces should be open beyond office-hours.
- **Facilitate co-housing or adjacent housing of asylum seekers and refugees with young tenants** by aiming for a similar composition and size of both groups, living conditions, and with access to a shared space which allows for casual encounters (see above).
- **Give it time:** a project that sets out to create connections between people needs time for trust to develop, and reciprocal, equal relationships to grow. Plan Einstein was limited by a very constrained time-scale, and this had effects on participants' willingness and ability to make relationships, as well as the endurance of these relationships.

6. Results: Skills

This chapter presents results on ‘whether and in how far asylum seekers and local inhabitants have gained and can apply skills and knowledge from the U-RLP project’. According to the project’s theory of change, ASC residents can be activated toward engagement in the labour market, from day one, through becoming equipped with enhanced futureproof skills and capacities that can be used in the Netherlands or anywhere. The project aimed to:

- 1) **Equip participants with new and relevant skills;**
- 2) **Help participants gain relevant connections** in professional and educational networks and use their skills and knowledge from the project to **build new business ideas** and/or start-ups;
- 3) **Engage participants in steps towards labour market activation.**

Evidence on the first two aims draws on quantitative data from the NOA assessments, class evaluations and monitoring, and qualitative data from interviews with 65 ASC residents. We consider the final aim with reference to quantitative evidence from the city’s work and income data on dependence on welfare benefits, combined with interviews and observations from former participants in Plan Einstein.

6.1. Learning new and relevant skills and gaining connections

Plan Einstein’s Theory of Change assumed that ASC and neighbourhood residents would be equipped with increased skills through the diversified professional interventions of co-learning (English, entrepreneurship and business development). U-RLP set out to fight the ‘refugee gap’ by facilitating and stimulating asylum seekers and refugees to develop relevant skills ‘from day one’. It aimed to provide meaningful activities. Chapter 4 presented the notable achievements in providing education through co-learning, supplemented by other non-formal learning opportunities. Partners were able to deliver these activities because they had adequate space for teaching, and professional teachers to run the courses.

6.1.1. Baseline: ASC residents’ skill:

In assessing longer-term outcomes of these activities, we turn first to evidence from the NOA intake assessments (N=150) which gives some baseline evidence English and Dutch language skills of asylum seeker participants as they entered the project. The NOA intakes show that about half of the respondents N=72 (48%) report attending Dutch classes in school, the majority (>90%) on an A1 (beginner) level. Another N=12 participants report taking Dutch language lessons informally. For English proficiency, N=63 (42%) indicated that they did not speak English upon taking the NOA assessment; the remaining participants indicated that they spoke English at a reasonable, good or very good level, as Fig. 6.1 shows:

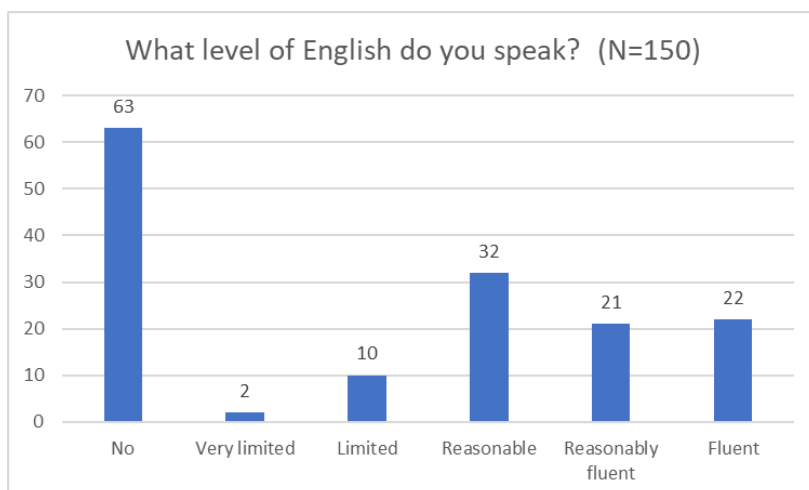


Figure 6-1 English level upon entry to Plan Einstein

6.1.2. Evidence on increased skills:

Data from multiple sources indicate that Plan Einstein’s educational streams equipped participants with increased skills. The following five points support this observation:

First, there was an obvious, but unexpected outcome for several participants from the courses, as 18 participants in the classes achieved passes on the Cambridge Advanced English exam, and a remaining 15 scored at CfE level B2 (upper intermediate). Even for those people arriving into the project with excellent English skills on paper (for example with excellent written English language skills) the classes helped them convert this in to a usable certificate, and improve their spoken English. Saad, a man in his late twenties from Syria had high proficiency in English (C2 level) but explained how the classes still improved his spoken language skills:

In our country we don’t use it [English] too much. Most of us are really good in grammar, but we don’t like practice there. So here this course helps a lot. They help people to practice to speak, you know, English. So that’s very good.

Second, progress was evident at lower levels of proficiency too, since the monitoring figures show there was a lot of progression between different levels. Nearly half of participants in Overvecht took more than one English language course, moving through different levels of classes, with 49% taking more than one course (see 4.2.2.)

Third, the class evaluations also reveal high levels of self-reported skills increase. End of class evaluations in English and business development activities collection (from January 2018 to end October 2018) indicate that by the end-point of the project a large majority of participants agreed or agreed strongly that their skills had improved following course attendance. In English, N= 89% agreed, or strongly agreed that they had improved their speaking and listening skills, 77% their written English and 77% their organisational skills (see Fig. 6.2). In business incubation, 70% agreed, or strongly agreed that the activities helped them developing an entrepreneurial mindset, and 63% their organisational skills¹¹⁷.

¹¹⁷ Unfortunately, our course evaluation format were not given to course participants in entrepreneurship.

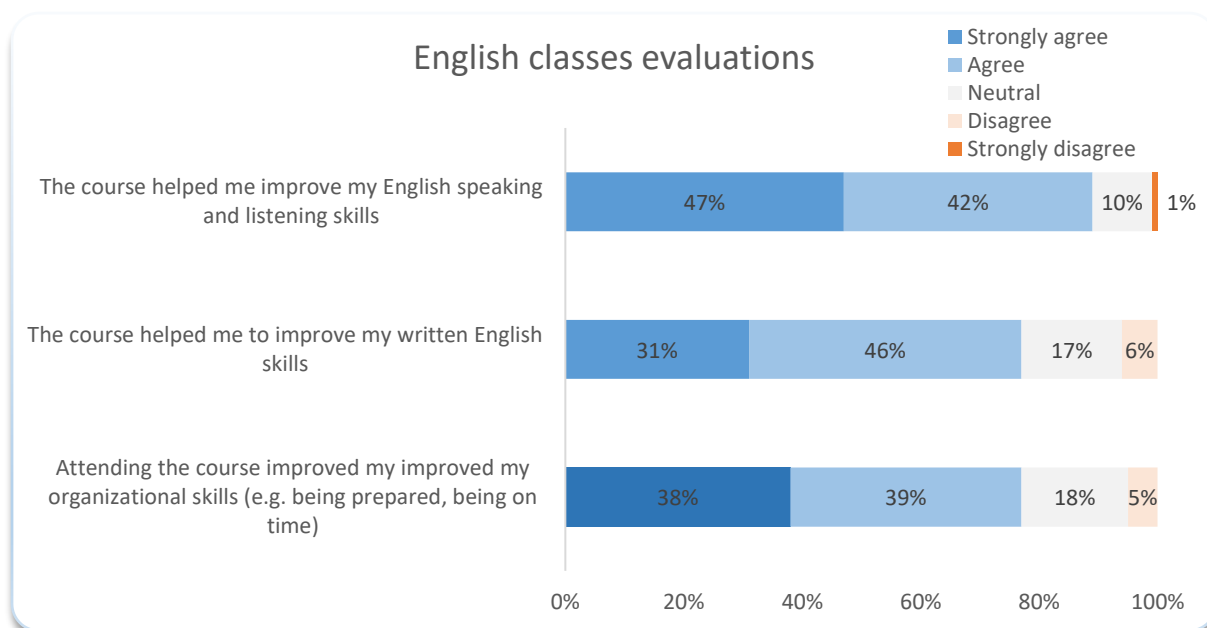


Figure 6-2 Class evaluations in English

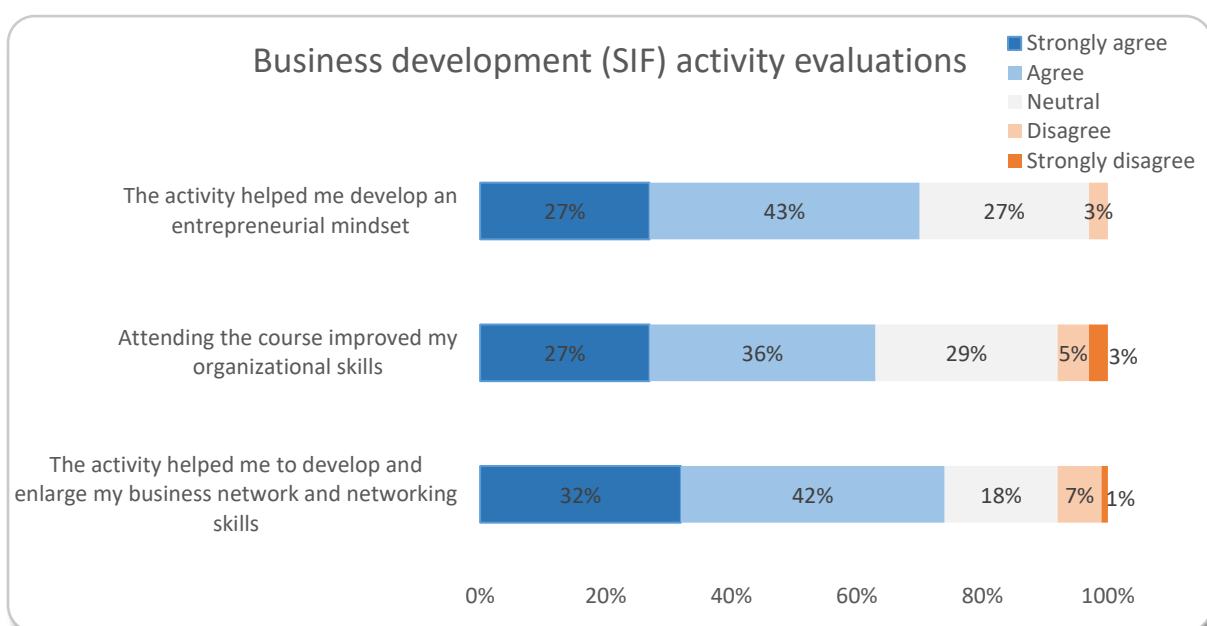


Figure 6-3 Evaluations of business incubation activities

Fourth, the quantitative evaluations were reinforced by qualitative self-reporting of skills increases among the majority of 65 ASC residents, and 10 neighbourhood residents. People found the courses challenging: ‘*hard*’ (Amal, Syrian female) and ‘*serious*’ (Hassan, Afghani male). Participants such as Aesha and Razan from Syria found teachers to be competent, good teachers, who were also nice and willing to help them at their own level. They reported that their communication skills had improved, and this enabled them to talk with Dutch participants and professionals. Participants (like Wondimu, from Ethiopia) felt learning English equipped them with a common language that they could use with other ASC residents. Zahir, a Syrian man in his fifties also said in an interview:

Previously, I could hardly understand English or speak, and now after some time I see that I have improved in English. This also applies to Dutch. After some time I really notice a difference, I've made progress.

Participants' skills increased by the formal course provision, but equally gained skills and contact through the informal provision offered by Welkom in Utrecht's taalcafe. Some felt they learned more at these classes than at the COA Dutch classes because it gave more opportunities for conversation and practice. Participants explained how helpful it was to be matched with language coaches from the taalcafe, because they could practice speaking Dutch outside of formal educational settings. Dalila, a female in her 20s from Syria said,

...the first time I started to speak Dutch was in Plan Einstein. So, when you start to talk in another language you become very afraid that you are making mistakes. You become afraid that people will make fun of you and will not understand you. In Plan Einstein, Dutch people were encouraging us all the time. They tried their best to teach us and correct our mistakes without letting us feel that we are making a lot of mistakes. They encouraged me a lot. They used to say 'good for you' and 'you can do it'.

Fifth, the qualitative research shows that the courses brought other related skills and secondary impacts to the immediate, primary skills of communication and knowledge gained. For example, participants explained how these enhanced language skills boosted their confidence to communicate outside the courses, bringing longer-term benefits beyond their time at Plan Einstein (see Chapter 7):

I have more confidence. I started to interact with people who I never dealt with before. It was not easy for me to interact with people that I never met in my life. Courses made me communicate with people. There was no way (ha ha ha)...This also helped me as well in the university and break the ice with people (Amal, Syrian, twenties)

For these reasons, for some of the participants, the impact of Plan Einstein's educational offer was even referred to as life-changing. Jamileh, an Iranian woman now in her sixties, who has experienced periodic episodes of severe depression, arrived at Plan Einstein 'broken, tired and disappointed'. She credited learning English at Plan Einstein as something that 'changed everything', because, 'I couldn't speak Dutch, when I learned English, I could talk to people, I could explain about myself'. Hamza, from Pakistan and Bahar, a woman in her forties from Iran, also felt that entrepreneurship classes profound effects. Bahar explained:

There was a very good course: entrepreneurship. My view on my life has changed because of this. First I thought: 'I cannot do anything in the Netherlands', but now I saw an opportunity. That was a special moment in my life... What happened was: I came here when I was 40 years old. I came from another culture: 'I cannot do anything here'. But now I thought: 'I might start my own business. That might be a way to go forward'. The first thing I learned was how to make a business plan. The second thing was how to prepare for a job interview, make a resume. Now I would like to have a job first and after that I would like to start my own business... I like communicating with people. I enjoy it when I feel good. That is why I would like to start my own café with homemade cakes and pies. I would like to start working as soon as possible. That would also facilitate practicing Dutch.

Other secondary benefits included gaining more of a feel for how Dutch society worked. It gave ASC residents' insight into issues such as how the labour market functioned, and what employers looked for in potential employees. Omar, a middle-aged man from Syria learned additional insights through the courses that in the Netherlands it is important to *'think for yourself, while in my country learning is being able to repeat.'* Alan, an Asian man in his early 30s, observed that for anyone looking for a job, they:

have at least to understand business... you have to understand that a company always does things ultimately to make money. And you have to understand your market segment... I saw that [the knowledge] is valuable for everybody... It was helpful [even for me] because I do these things instinctively, but then [this course] has organised my mind... I now know why some things I do work.

Indeed, though few actually became 'entrepreneurs' the business focus of classes nevertheless equipped participants with a range of other instrumental skills, such as digital literacy, or team working skills:

Before it was difficult for me to make an online appointment, and to search for places was difficult. Now everything is better than before. [I can]... make appointment in...some organisations, and find places, and it's now easy (Wondimu, Ethiopian)

Usually when we were in a group in my country (Iran), one person would finish everything, so it was always me, because I was responsible for everything. Here, everybody did their thing, everything was faster, we were like a big machine (Leilani, Iranian, 20s)

Whether this means that courses are successful in offering 'futureproof' skills to those refused legal status is difficult to answer given the small numbers involved. In following up asylum seeker U-RLP participants with the Dutch Council for Refugees, 28 were untraceable¹¹⁸ for administrative reasons, but only four were M.O.B. (*met onbekende bestemming* – with unknown destination). This corresponds with one of the project employee's estimation that there would however have been about five in the total U-RLP participants for whom *'maybe their procedure was stopped or finished or denied. And they just moved away without telling of course where to. And we know of some, two of our clients from Pakistan originally. They were rejected by the IND and left but we don't know where'*.

We interviewed these two Pakistani men once they had moved away from Utrecht. Both felt extremely positive about what they had learned on the course. However, both still hold very firmly onto ideas about staying in Europe. They both saw their chances for developing businesses in import/export (for Maahir, a male doctor in his 40s) or biotechnology (Hamza, in his twenties) in Europe only. Kofi, an Ethiopian in his 20s was denied status too, but like the others did not wish to contemplate any concept of return. All valued the skills they had learned, and saw skills relevant to their futures – but they saw those futures in the Netherlands or other European countries.

¹¹⁸ This may be because they moved outside an area in which the VWMN system worked (there were some 'hotspots' where this applied). Alternatively individuals needed to have their date of birth properly registered to use in combination with their unique V-number to trace them; if this is not done, it is impossible to find them in the system.

6.1.3. Evidence on barriers to increasing skills

These five observations suggest that the project led to participants gaining skills and further secondary benefits. However, we also observed reservations about the educational stream, which need to be taken into account when considering the outcomes of this stream of Plan Einstein's activity. In particular, data from several sources indicates that not all people were able to benefit from the courses, as the following three points show:

First, data from different sources indicate that the focus of courses may not have been relevant or of interest to all ASC or neighbourhood residents at that point in time. Around 50% of (adult) ASC residents did not join in the U-RLP courses or go to classes. While neighbourhood participants comprised around 40-50% of course participants, this represented rather a small proportion (1.0-1.2%) of the neighbourhood population within 1km of the centre attended the classes, especially since some participants were coming from further afield (see Chapter 5, Table 5.3). The entrepreneurship course attendance was also lower than anticipated, at around 200 people rather than 600. Qualitative research uncovered a variety of reasons for non-engagement: because participants were not in the centre for long enough, already too busy with work, study or internships, or too ill to participate (see Chapter 7).

However, as evaluators we also must consider that this may indicate that some were not so interested in the topics. Considering the NOA data, it was clear that the business focus of the education strand may have been of interest to quite a few. N=90 (60%) of respondents indicated that they would be open to starting their own business in the Netherlands. However, this is a rather optimistic figure. As we have discussed elsewhere, social desirability likely affected responses, and yet even so, it indicated that 40% of ASC resident participants had no specific interest in entrepreneurship. On the other hand, we acknowledge that some of the participants found that even with little interest in the topics themselves, they nevertheless gained skills beyond just entrepreneurship. As Alan pointed out (6.1.1.) the classes offered a way to get insights in the workings of Dutch organizations. As Saad, in his late twenties from Syria also pointed out, the entrepreneurship activities, *'helped me a lot you know. To understand a little bit like, to think more, to open my mind, and to meet people also there.'*

Second, data from qualitative research shows that classes were often described as more attractive to already highly motivated people. Interviewees including asylum seeker residents, neighbours and some partners suggested that the courses were less effective or accessible some lower skilled people, or those who were unwell (see Chapter 7). Amal, a highly active Syrian participant observed, *'I think most of the people who attended these courses are the people who wanted to develop themselves and work on their future'*. For the entrepreneurship classes too, she said, *'I felt that it was another category of people who used to attend the course'*, as it appealed to those who already had businesses. Irene, a neighbourhood resident participated in the entrepreneurship classes. She observed that *'There were many who were highly educated but there were also many who didn't have that much education, and they were struggling a lot more, you could see that'*. This affected around some participants' ability to grasp more abstract issues during classes. Elham, a young man from Afghanistan in his twenties explained his experience in the entrepreneurship classes:

... in the whole class I think there were... eight people. And out of these eight people I think three used to understand what the instructors were saying, the entrepreneurship process and [then] explaining the steps and giving these examples. So [...] there was this guy, he

didn't understand a thing of what's going on at all [...] he was very good in Dutch and he was here for fifteen years or something. But...he didn't have the background so he [...] got frustrated [...] there was a big gap [...] So I said [to the instructor] "You are using too much technical words here...like 'voucher' or 'invoice' or 'balance'... Now I understand what you mean but this guy he doesn't understand, so you have to come with...street language..." For that guy [the entrepreneurship course] was a waste of money.

Third, the data suggests that in addition to level of education, the activities had a language threshold. Interviews through translators with Eritrean and Kurdish ASC residents and multiple testimonies from other ASC residents showed that, (perhaps unsurprisingly) language proved a barrier to some participants' access or understanding. Wondimu explained how he knew of three Eritreans who started the entrepreneurship course, *'but after two weeks stopped. Because of language [...] they couldn't understand, and [felt] shame'*. He may have been referring to Afwerki, an Eritrean man in his 30s, who only took a few English classes *'because it was too difficult for me'*.

Leilani observed too that other Iranians did not join the classes, *'especially older men who already had children [...] they didn't want to feel unconfident, so they didn't talk'*. Faisal, in his twenties from Syria also felt less comfortable in the English classes, finding that *'as a beginner, [it was] not good'*. He, like Jamileh too expressed a desire for more intensive classes. To overcome language barriers, partners made efforts from quite early on to increase participation, by providing translators where possible in the entrepreneurship classes. However, this proved distracting for those who were more highly educated, several of whom (such as Azra and Alan) complained that the courses were too basic and slow paced, because at least half the class time was lost on translations.

Fourth, some of the project employees and participants pointed out that in addition to mismatches in educational level, and language, there were also cultural gaps between the rather more 'academic' subject choice of the futureproof offer and the experiences of some ASC residents. Shepol, a Kurdish women in her early 30s, who already had a residence permit by the time she arrived at Plan Einstein explained how her background created some distinctions with other ASC residents:

I never went to school. I worked on the land with my family... The other refugees in the centre spoke Arabic, we did not... We went to Dutch taalcafé one evening a week... and to Dutch classes three days per week... it was very difficult.

This supports the reflections of other people associated with the project (see 8.3.1). Two employees reflected:

R2: For a lot of people in the ASC, the level was far too high. For example, for the Eritrean people, a lot of them at least, others as well, they wouldn't go to entrepreneurship. It's not in their system. Especially for the Eritrean people;

R1: There was a big cultural gap between what was going on here and what was going on in their lives.

R2: But also for other people. I think the courses were mainly interesting for people who have some level of education or had some higher level of education already [...] For the other people, the families, it was really mixed. But the lessons, the programmes, the courses I mean, they weren't, they haven't been adjusted to the other groups in the ASC.

I: So you would recommend some adjustment in the level?

R2: Yes, in the level,

R1: but also in what people need [...] I think myself, it was one-dimensional as well. Entrepreneurship, it's the Western way and 'who are you? What do you want? Protect yourself!' And that is, if you are saying, well it must be future-proof or future-free, I don't think you need this attitude in the whole world. It's very based on how we do it here in Holland. That can work for a lot of people, but not for everybody. Not for all the characters either, with the differences in backgrounds. Because it's too big a gap between what they used to be.

Other (different) project employees suggested instead that ASC residents in the new setting of Plan Einstein Haydnlaan would benefit more from learning new practical 'experiences', learning topics like carpentry, mechanics, running a shop, welding and being an electrician. This, they felt would equip them with skills that would be more relevant if they remigrated. They observed:

R1: Because in a lot of countries people don't need like diplomas like this. You need some experience, so they can show 'I know how to paint...'

R2: ...Build a house, or [...]

R1: That's what people really like to do. And I think entrepreneurship for a lot of people is.. ehm.. yeah how do you say that.. I don't know.. It's maybe a bit...not concrete.

Finally, in considering what else was missing in Plan Einstein's offer, it is important to note that *all* ASC residents expressed a wish to have Dutch classes in addition to English to help them do business and build professional social contacts with Dutch people. However, Dutch law prohibits teaching the language in an official capacity until status is granted, so while Dutch classes exist in the city's integration programme, or in the ASC itself, it is only available for those whose status is granted. However, not being able to learn and practice the language during the waiting time in the ASC was frustrating for many ASC residents who later received a staying permit, or already had one when they moved to ASC *Einsteindreef*. They perceived the phase as 'lost time', a phase in which they could not communicate effectively with Dutch people, and some were ashamed of their lacking ability to speak Dutch even though they have been in the country for some time. Faisal, a Syrian man, in his mid 20s said:

Plan Einstein was a chance for people to do [lots of] stuff, but they could have developed it more... In the period that I spent in Plan Einstein, I could have learned Dutch. Two years in refugee camps, I could not learn Dutch. Now people ask me: 'For how long have you been here?' I say: 'Three years'. They say: 'But your Dutch is not good. Why?' Of course, because for two years I could not do anything.

There is even a risk that by speaking English, the possibility of learning Dutch diminishes further. Wondimu, from Ethiopia observed:

Here they have no problem speaking English with you [...] most of the time they don't mind it. So when they see you – sometimes when your Dutch is not good – they switch to English for you. [...] I'm here close to 4 years now [...] and my English also became so much better. [Laughs] But my Dutch did not become so much better because I spoke so much English!

6.2. Gaining relevant connections

In reskilling participants, Plan Einstein sought to help participants gain relevant connections in professional and educational networks. The Social Network Factory helped to build these connections the business incubation activities, including experience days and coaching partnerships.

6.2.1. Baseline: Networks

There are limited data available on the baseline situations of ASC and neighbourhood residents in terms of networks and contacts within the local and national business environment. Asylum seekers and refugees self-reported in the NOA assessments a reasonably high level of contact with Dutch people as ASC residents entered the programme (Chapter 5). Data from the qualitative interviews contradicted this somewhat, and suggest that prior to entering the Plan Einstein project however, networking depended on an individual's own volition and that people largely lacked entry to relevant networks. Several ASC residents retrospectively referred to how they 'did not have a clue' about how to begin, or move forwards with plans. The NOA assessment data showed that a large group of asylum seekers were interested in volunteering (N=111/74%) as they entered the project.

6.2.2. Evidence on networks in business and education

Using multiple data sources, we can make the following five observations about the extent to which participants' networks grew:

First, Chapter 4 showed that the project delivered solid outputs around networking. The Social Impact Factory reported that during the Plan Einstein Overvecht period, they organized 178 individual networking meetings and 44 coaching partnerships to connect participants to relevant professionals to help them learn more about how these professions work in the Netherlands. There was a lot of interest from 127 large and small organisations from Utrecht and the Netherlands, including companies such as Unilever, Port of Rotterdam, Sodexo, MVO Marketing vibes, Aleppo kitchen, Haagse Zwam, The True TalentTeam, ICM, Kirkman Company, Zihmic Theatre, Doenja Dienstverlening.

Second, the course evaluation data (see Fig. 6.2) showed that 74% of respondents to the online survey sent to all participants felt their networks had enlarged and networking skills had improved after doing the activities. Qualitative research confirmed this picture, with participants feeling extremely positive about the individualised approach used by Social Impact Factory personnel that helped them to connect, but also connect in ways that were relevant personally to them. In wave 1, we interviewed Mohammad for example, whose coach helped him find an internship in Delft with an engineering company. Leilani from Iran, was introduced by her coach to help an art director, who she ran into at a later event and only then understood how famous he was, from which she reflected, *'And then I understood I have a really professional network'*.

Our sample included a small minority, who were less happy. Some participants experienced unmet expectations around the intensity of the coaching relationship, or complained about unhelpful advice e.g. to get experience when they felt they had plenty. Often coaches had busy professional lives, which was in contrast to ASC residents, who had non-activity forced upon them. For example, Shaza, a Syrian woman, early 30s said:

I used to hear people talking about their coaches and how much they support them, but I have never experienced this... The person who was supposed to help me continued to cancel all appointments... the person in Social Impact Factory... told me Dutch people do not have a lot of time.

Third, the programme offered an unexpected benefit for young people looking to expand their educational trajectories. In our sample, several young people used the networks developed in Plan Einstein to work towards, or gain acceptance on university courses. Through InclUUsion, Claude from Burundi had been accepted on Bachelors courses at Utrecht University, which allowed him to enter a Masters program after gaining a residence permit. Amal, a young Syrian girl felt the coaching was the most important aspect of Plan Einstein's offer, because she *'didn't have any clue about what [she] wanted to do'*. Her coach helped her clarify her options by giving her a full understanding of the education system. They even came to her open day at the University she successfully applied to in 2018. He also explained Dutch student life at university, facilitating her and her sisters' application for university. Salman, an Iranian man in his early 20s was similarly introduced to his coach, a consultant at Berenschot, who helped him formulate plans to apply to Rotterdam University, so that in the longer-term he could do International Business Administration (following an access course). He acknowledged, *'Yes it's very difficult. But we've seen, I talked to my counsellor, I think it is possible for sure'*. He continued:

All these things that we found I did with the help of [coach]. I had no idea that I had to take this gap year and other such things. And nobody knew, like people would...ask. It's not something the average person knows anything about. [...] The normal way. So we had no idea, and we had to search for a lot, make a lot of phone calls and things like that to make it work. So for sure. If it wasn't for him, I don't know what would have happened. So with that, we connected. He's a friend of mine, he's a very good guy. He's not just a coach, the coaching period is technically over now. It was over a few months ago. But he's a great guy.

Fourth, for some of the older participants, networking enabled surprising opportunities for people to reconnect with former professions, even if they were unlikely to be able to pursue them in the future. Jamileh, was in her late fifties when at Plan Einstein. She had been a GP in Iran for twenty-two years, a job that she 'loved'. On account of her age, the government would not have accepted her to retrain for several years, so pursuing a high level medical career was out of the question. However, Jamileh told us how she met someone through Plan Einstein and as a result, was invited to give a 45-minute lecture at international seminar the international training conference on positive and transcultural psychic therapy. She was delighted at the experience, showing the researchers her photographs and reflecting *'that [reminded] me from my past. And I felt very nice. I remembered my abilities'*.

Fifth, the emphasis on networking in the business incubation activities seemed to have a profound effect for refugees living in the neighbourhood. One example is Raafi, in his twenties, from Syria, who had been in the Netherlands for around three years. When he first arrived in Overvecht, he did not know anyone. He saw an ASC was opening nearby and went in to offer his assistance since he spoke good English. He described feeling 'at home' there. He explained how networking helped:

I moved to Utrecht, didn't know anyone here. I was totally alone. I didn't feel at home, I felt isolated from the community, from people [...] honestly, this place, Place Einstein, why I am so connected with it is because a lot of things became better since I started doing my work at the ASC [...]

[In the challenge] that was the first time we sat and worked together. In the beginning it was a bit hard to really connect with them [two people from ASC and six from neighbourhood] but after two or three meetings we got only working together, but you can say we started a friendship. So I consider it a network, even if we are not close friends. But now I can say I know a person who lives here, a person who lives there and I know I have this problem, I can go there etc. And before, I had no-one in the neighbourhood.

Finally, another important way of building local professional networks was through volunteering, facilitated by the Dutch Council for Refugees, and through Welkom in Utrecht. Just under 100 ASC residents, and some neighbourhood residents (especially refugees who had recently acquired status) were able to use Plan Einstein to become connected through volunteering. Tasks involved translating in the ASC and at Plan Einstein, cooking Syrian and Dutch food in a home for elderly in the neighbourhood, or weeding, pruning and other maintenance jobs in the neighbourhood garden in Overvecht. In the qualitative research, five ASC residents referred to volunteering as a way for them to gain experience to get a job or open their own business, and others mentioned being willing to do 'unpaid' work for some time to help them build up experience.

6.3. Building new business ideas and taking steps towards labour market activation

Thusfar in the chapter, we have examined evidence of increased skills and larger networks entrepreneurship, language and business incubation activities. Ultimately these form part of the project's strategy of 'activation from day one' that aimed to help Plan Einstein generate longer term outcomes, helping participants build new business ideas and become active in the labour market. Here, we consider the concrete evidence on how Plan Einstein participants fared in the rather limited period of time, especially those from the ASC.

6.3.1. Baseline: Labour market activation

The baseline of ASC residents was that very few had a job, although the NOA data (n=150) gave some insight into how important respondents saw finding a job and their chances of doing so as they entered the project. These data suggest the Plan Einstein ASC participants found getting a job important to them, and were moderately optimistic, with mean scores of 20.83 on the importance of a job (on a scale of 5-25, with 25 extremely important, 5 not at all important) and 6.48 on estimated chances of getting a job (on a scale of 2-10, where 2 was highly unlikely and 10 very likely).

Figure 6-4: How important respondents deem finding a job (scale 5-25)

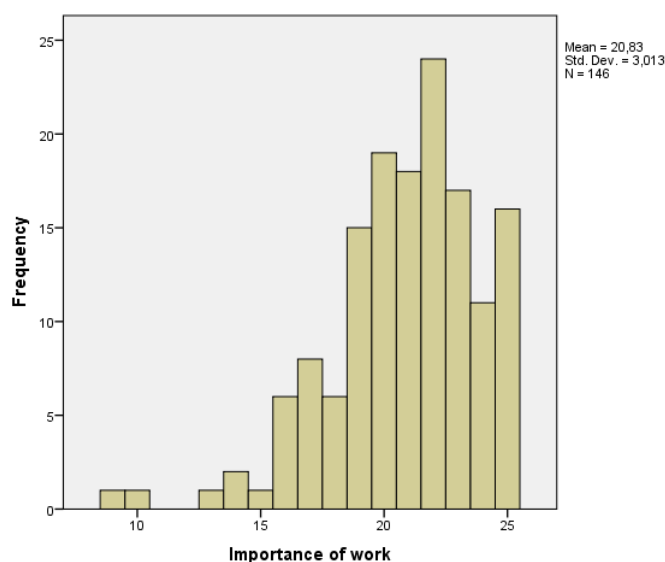
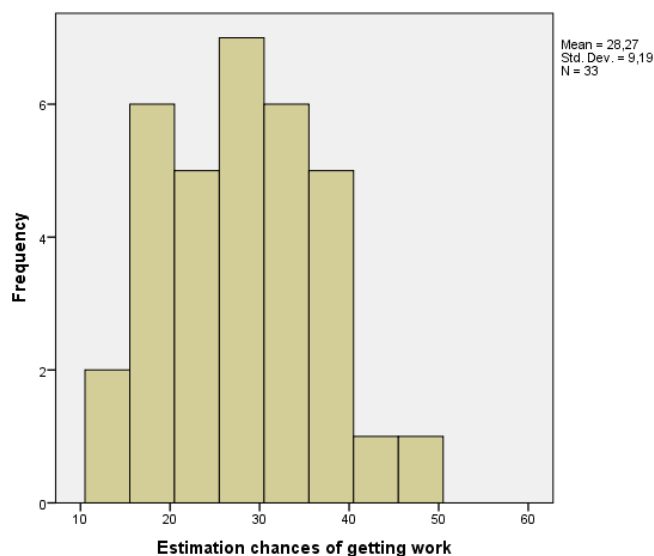


Figure 6-5 How respondents estimate their chances of getting work (scale 2-10)



6.3.2. Building new business ideas:

The business incubation activities stream in Plan Einstein aimed to help people move forward from conceiving of a business idea, moving through the planning stages and ultimately working in their chosen field. This was especially through the intensive coaching of the Start your own business programme of the incubation programme. It is impossible to know the individual starting points of individuals as they came onto the programme, but in terms of results here, we make three observations:

First, there was evidence that Plan Einstein in Overvecht had helped participants build new, actionable business ideas. As Plan Einstein in Overvecht was closing, Social Impact Factories reported there were eight businesses either registered at the Chamber of Commerce or in concrete planning stages, and another that developed during 2019. These included the following participants and ideas:

- 1) A refugee who was able to use Plan Einstein as a hub to help him develop a part-time architect consultancy, alongside paid employment.
- 2) A neighbourhood resident, of Dutch ethnicity, who came to Plan Einstein with the idea of developing his own painting and decorating business.
- 3) A neighbourhood resident, with an Ethiopian background who was setting up their own company offering catering and Ethiopian products;
- 4) A neighbourhood resident, with a Surinamese background who was looking to set up their own catering company;
- 5) A refugee from Pakistan living in Utrecht, who was able to set up their own ethnic restaurant, opening in November 2019.
- 6) A neighbourhood resident with a migrant background, who was setting up a pop-up book business outside of her full time job;
- 7) A neighbourhood resident with a migrant background, who started a business as an online marketer;
- 8) A neighbourhood resident with a migrant background who was making the transition to sell the bags she makes from second hand clothes, and progressing from teaching others to do so.

- 9) An ASC resident from Syria, who had, by October 2019, recently submitted a plan to the municipality for funding and support to open a café with speciality coffees.

In addition, other participants who had clear ideas and plans for setting up the following businesses included:

- 10) An ASC resident who was looking to grow a sustainable vegetable growing company, initially growing mushrooms in coffee grounds.
- 11) An ASC resident who was supported in his ideas to develop a bicycle repairshop and received a whole set of tools and equipment from an NGO to do so.

However, neither of these participants were in a position to develop these into actual businesses. One because they were refused status, and another because he spoke little Dutch, found setting up a business too expensive, and, with a family to support, needed to look for other types of work.

The coaches on the programme told us that existing entrepreneurs, who already had businesses, were using the experience at Plan Einstein to expand their businesses. This included two neighbourhood entrepreneurs with a refugee or migrant background (from Yemen and Morocco) who employed additional workers each in their language training and cleaning businesses. Since then, at Plan Einstein in the Joseph Haydnlaan centre, the programme has also seen another seven participants looking to, or actually setting up new businesses (at least three of were registered at the Chamber of Commerce). These include a business selling jewellery made from used bicycle tyres set up by a Utrecht resident, two ASC residents receiving status who were setting up an Islamic fashion web-shop, that actively sells through the internet. Another person with a refugee background was developing a new sales concept based on the Tupperware party concept to sell vitamin preparations. There were also others from Utrecht looking to develop their businesses as life coach, in graphic design (migrant background) and another from a refugee background opening a shoe shop imminently. This brings the total to minimally twenty business ideas over both sites.

Second, the qualitative research showed that those who have clarity on residency and status were more quickly able to pursue business ambitions. For instance, Frans, a Dutch man in his fifties who lived in the neighbourhood set up a renovation and decorating business (no. 2 in the list). Frans explained how he was given support over a five-week period to rewrite his business plan for submission to the municipality three or four times by his coach. He was constantly encouraged by staff at Plan Einstein. Frans has earned good money since he started the business, and has reached his goal expressed in wave 1 to move off welfare benefits.

Sanne a neighbourhood resident too who registered a catering company with the Chamber of Commerce (no. 4 in the list). She referred to the encouraging attitude of staff, as saying: *'don't be scared we are here we are going to help you. So just go for it'*. However, while Sanne has her business registered, she was less secure about taking it further at the time the researchers interviewed her in wave 2. She had to take on another job to earn money and explained, *'I can't say that I'm doing that good because I know what I have to do to have a good business, but I don't have the time for it'*. Others, like Irene (no. 6 in the list) who was developing the pop-up book business actively worked on it beyond her own current job. When we met her in mid 2019, she was setting up a website and having someone design a website. This was surprising she felt, since she did not really come to classes with the idea of becoming an entrepreneur, but rather sought to gain contact with refugees. She explained,

when I got there and the first thing they asked me (because I hadn't thought about it) was 'and what kind of business are you going to start?' and I was like 'oh good grief'. I more or less had to pull something out of my head.

Another example from was Maadin a Pakistani refugee who lived in Utrecht for several years (no. 5 in the list). In mid 2019, he was very angry that his business plan for a restaurant had been refused for financing by the municipality. He felt a little brushed off by his coach, who had told him to get some more practical experience, despite having worked in restaurants for numerous years. Since that time however, his plan was accepted and he was imminently going to open his restaurant in the city. This suggests that the rather frank advice he received on his business plan was good for his chances in the longer-term.

This is not to say that there were not neighbourhood participants also frustrated by limited success. Ghulam, a Moroccan man from the neighbourhood in his forties had participated in entrepreneurship and business incubation activities to help him develop his water-transfer printing business. He had already invested significant time and money in setting it up, after leaving work due to an accident. He was disappointed not to have secured funding from the municipality to fully develop a prototype to sell to potential clients, and he felt disappointed in both wave 1 and 2 interviews for perceived lack of support from the municipality.

Third, we observe that several ASC residents had business ideas, but were in a lesser position to convert these into concrete plans, or it took a lot more time. Sometimes, plans were halted by having an application for asylum refused. For example, Hamza, a man in his twenties from Pakistan developed a reputation in the early days of Plan Einstein with his business idea of growing mushrooms in discarded coffee grounds (no. 10 in the list). When he was refused status in the Netherlands, he moved to another European city to live with other people in his Pakistani network and was no longer able to pursue those plans. Nevertheless, speaking to the research team from France, he claimed that the project inspired him, and had been 'life-changing'. He still had plans to develop his interests in a similar field, albeit, in the contexts of what he hoped would be a successful outcome on another asylum application in Europe.

For other asylum seekers, the process of setting up their own business was slow. Aban, a Syrian man in his forties (no. 9 in the list) developed a plan to start his own café, based on 15 years of business experience in China. He had money to invest, but wanted additional experience in a Dutch context and needed some financial investment in the business plan. Although it did not work out immediately, he persevered and after around a year he proudly managed to submit a complete plan to the municipality for funding and support. Others took a much longer life span; Salman, in his 20s, from Iran planned to found his own business, but only once he had taken other intermediary steps, including completing university study.

Finally, in some cases even when ASC residents gained status, they found that practicalities got in the way of having the time and energy to set up businesses. They needed to shelve their business ideas because of the practical realities of having to study Dutch for their '*inburgering*' (integration exams). Wondimu (Ethiopian, no. 11 in the list) wanted to develop a bicycle business, and was set up with voluntary work in a bike shop by the project. However, when one of the researchers spoke with him, his wife had joined him and they had moved into a house. His wife was pregnant and had small children to look after, and Wondimu spent four days on classes and extra Dutch lessons. He had limited time to develop his business ideas and he was no longer in contact with the people at the bike shop. He realized that running a shop was expensive, and that the costs of buying materials

and maintenance meant it was an unlikely prospect. At that time, he was looking into doing carework instead, explaining it:

[...] is difficult to do something, because of time [...] Yes, because in the camps no problem. I have full days free. [I can take] as many courses [...] and voluntary work. Now is moeilijk [difficult].

Some of these stories illustrate the difficulties of running an ‘inclusive’ programme that includes elements like ‘Start your own business’, an issue we return to in the governance chapter. An employee reflected honestly, *‘we create sometimes expectations or dreams, and sometimes I think should we have done that?’ because of status, personal circumstances, finances etc.* Sometimes this led to, as another employee explained, some *‘not so nice conversations’* when, for example, participants wanted to investigate crowdfunding or other options to get funding for start-ups. These would be off limits for people without permits or on benefits. There were equally some examples amongst all participants where people felt frustrated that there was no follow-on after their engagement finished. Thus while the activities helped with meeting people and learning new instrumental skills, it did not always help people *‘enter [the] business environment in a profound way’* (project employee). It risked their initiators being frustrated with having invested time and energy, developing business plans, but not being able to go further.

6.3.2. Activation for labour market participation

6.3.2. Activation for labour market integration

The ultimate goal of Plan Einstein in improving skills was to activate ASC residents for earlier labour market integration. Once status is granted to asylum seekers in the Netherlands, they are housed in a municipality, and all ‘permit-holders’ between 18 and 65 years of age (as they are described in policy terms) are obligated to complete a civic integration and Dutch A2 level exam within 3 years after receiving a permit and being housed. At the time of follow-up research only a year has passed, which is a limited period to fully assess success in this domain. That caveat in place, the final section of this chapter considers early evidence on whether the U-RLP ultimately helped ASC participants move into the labour market more swiftly than would be expected of other permit holders.

Quantitative data

We now turn to consider early evidence on whether Plan Einstein residents who received a residence permit and were housed in Utrecht were engaging in steps towards labour market activation. First, we look at quantitative evidence from city-level data at the work and income department of Utrecht local government on labour market integration and evidence of dependence on welfare benefits. This is measured as part of the city of Utrecht’s collaboration with other cities and towns in the region (what is called the U16 region) to understand the labor market integration of refugees who are granted asylum.

In line with the city’s continuous line policy which aims to create continuity for asylum seekers gaining status (see Chapter 2) in 2018, 45% of the permit holders in U16 asylum seeker centres were housed in the U16 region when granted status. 35% of inhabitants of AZC Einsteindreef were housed in the city of Utrecht¹¹⁹. Most would then be involved in civic integration (‘inburgering’) for a period of around 32-33 months,¹²⁰ receiving welfare benefits once they had moved from the ASC to a house (see Content Appendix 2 for a summary of the national picture).

¹¹⁹ COA data provided in October 2018

¹²⁰ The national average, and similar in U16.

The city of Utrecht provided data on welfare dependence of permit holders who lived in the city of Utrecht on 30th June 2019, which included 91 former Plan Einstein permit holders registered as residents in the city. These former Plan Einstein residents could then be compared with the total group of permit holders in Utrecht who also received a residence permit in 2017 and 2018 (because former Plan Einstein residents belonged to these cohorts¹²¹). Former Plan Einstein residents made up 13.5% of the total group of individual permit holders¹²² (Table 1).

Table 6-1: Plan Einstein and other permit-holders

		Individuals	
		N	%
Plan Einstein	2017	29	4.3
	2018	62	9.2
	Total	91	13.5
Others	2017	330	48.9
	2018	254	37.6
	Total	584	86.5
Total		675	100

The 2017 cohort: 18 months after obtaining a residence permit, 75.9% of Plan Einstein permit holders and 80.0% of other permit holders of the 2017 cohort were receiving welfare benefits. At the start of measurement, N=1 Plan Einstein permit holder and N=17 other permit holders did not ever receive welfare benefits, since they already had a job or were in education right after being housed. There is no difference between the Plan Einstein group and others.

¹²¹ It is not possible to know the exact date in which (the first person of) the household received a residence permit, only the year so therefore we assume that they received a residence permit in December and start counting the months from that moment onward.

¹²² We compare welfare dependence of individuals rather than households for two reasons: 1) This is similar to analyses of the CBS and makes this group comparable to all permit holders in the Netherlands (see Content Appendix 2); 2) Some households consist of Plan Einstein and non-Plan Einstein permit holders. Comparing individuals provides a more clear-cut distinction between Plan Einstein participants and others.

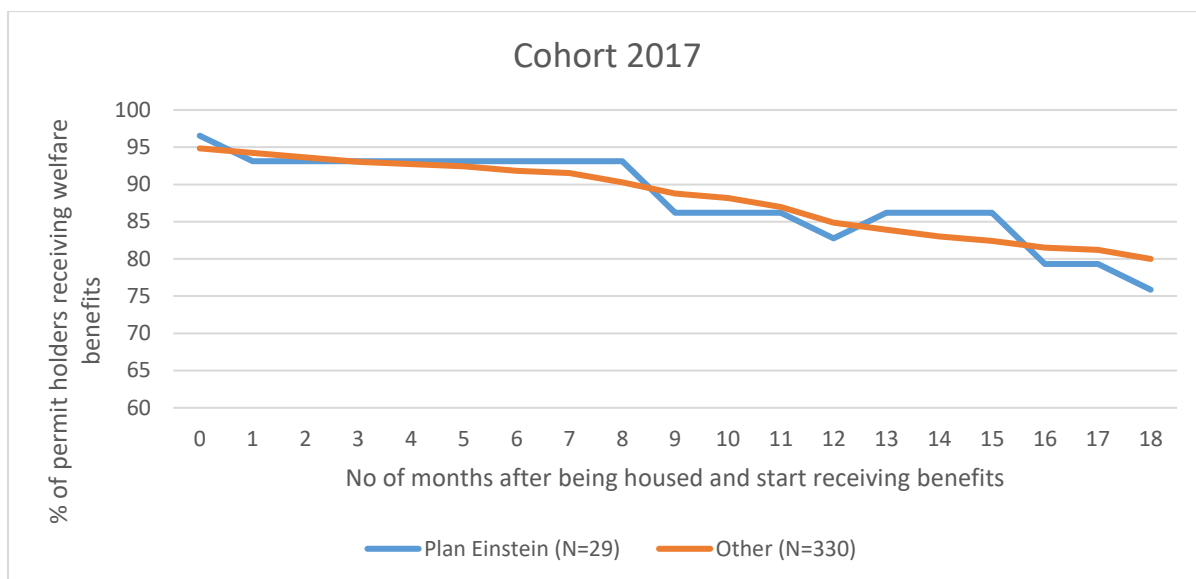


Figure 6-6: Plan Einstein and other permit-holders use of welfare benefits (2017 cohort)

The 2018 cohort: The 2018 cohort only had a residence permit for minimally six months on 30th June 2019. After those six months, 96.8% of Plan Einstein permit holders and 87.4% of other permit holders were still receiving benefits. This is slightly more than the 2017 cohort when the percentages after 6 months were 93.1% for Plan Einstein permit holders and 91.8% for others. N=1 Plan Einstein permit holder and N=19 other permit holders did not receive welfare benefits at the start of measurement.

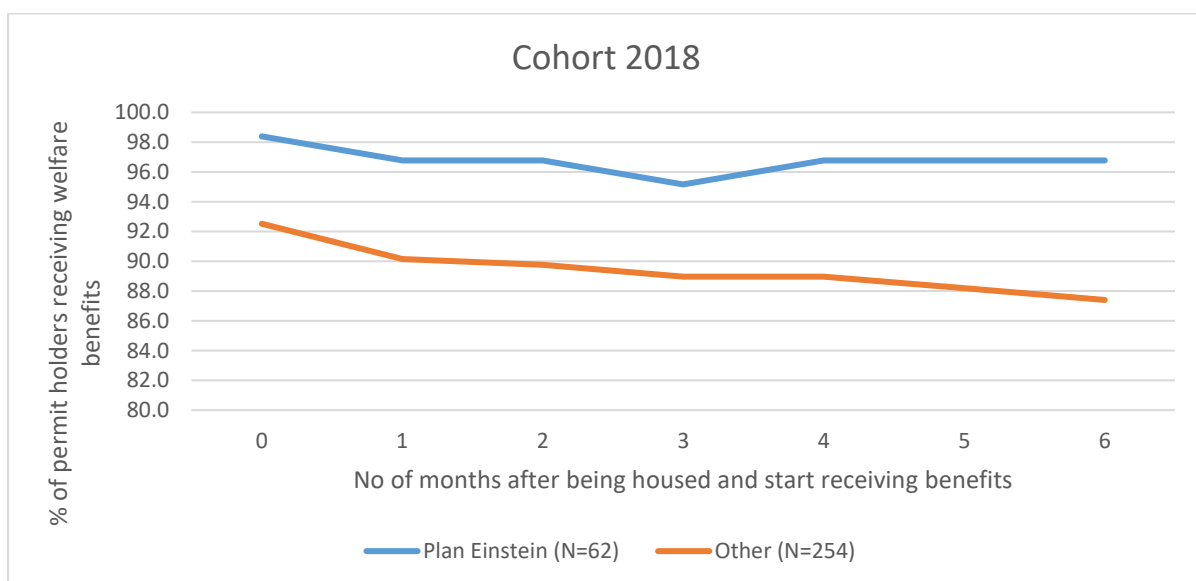


Figure 6-7: Plan Einstein and other permit-holders use of welfare benefits (2018 cohort)

According to these data, there are no statistically significant differences ($t=1,91$, $P=0,06$) when comparing the duration of receiving welfare benefits for Plan Einstein permit holders and other permit holders in Utrecht (cohorts 2017 and 2018 combined and controlling for gender, age and duration of being housed).

On the other hand, these findings must be qualified on a number of counts. First, one would not necessarily expect to be able to see a difference after such a short time. Analyses from CBS (Statistics Netherlands) and the City of Utrecht show that the vast majority of permit holders only

really start to leave welfare benefits after finishing civic integration (on average after 32-33 months). Data from the CBS and from the City of Utrecht on earlier cohorts show that after 42 months, respectively 67% (nationally) and 63% of permit holders (Utrecht) receive welfare benefits (CBS, 2019 – see Content Appendix 1; Fonville, 2019). It is only following this period of time that we would expect to see any difference emerge in welfare dependence between Plan Einstein permit holders and other permit holders.

Second, we must also be aware that dependence on welfare benefits is rather a crude measure that does not tell the full story. This is because receiving benefits does not necessarily mean that permit holders do not have a job: some recipients of benefits have some income from part time work, and receive welfare benefits as a supplement to obtain a basic income level. Conversely, when permit holders stop receiving benefits, this does not always mean that they receive a sufficient income from work. Also, when permit holders enter education and start receiving a study loan, they stop receiving welfare benefits. Unfortunately, data on income generated through work and study loans were not available to us to clarify how many this would refer to.

Qualitative data:

The qualitative data, from 35 interviews conducted with ASC residents who had participated in Plan Einstein and a year later living dispersed over the Netherlands, we get a more positive picture. Just less than half of the sample were actively engaged, sixteen were learning Dutch and three had their applications rejected.

Sixteen interviewees were either active: already working in the labour market, were in education, or were actively preparing for those options. Eight were in study, or due to start soon, four were in jobs. One had submitted a business plan to the municipality and three were actively volunteering, focused on gaining experience for a job. Of the four who had jobs, two were highly educated people, who managed to get jobs commensurate with their professional qualifications. Habib, a man in his 30s found an ICT job, which fitted well with his expertise, having done an IT masters in the Netherlands. The job was below his level of expertise, but he was promised an appraisal after six months and was confident he would be promoted rather sooner than later. Alan got his job as a company lawyer because a COA person had pointed this opportunity out to him during the Voorwerk course. Others, like Hassan, from Afghanistan was employed in a multinational company. However, this was shift work, well below his skill level. It was not particularly rewarding, nor what he would like to do long-term. He explained however that he despised the idea of living on benefits:

I need money so my life is easy, with a nice car, shoes, and that stuff, liv[ing] by myself. That is why. Not to go everyday to [the] gemeentehuis {to get social security}...I am healthy so this money is not for me. I start at 6 and get up at 4:30, if another job starts at 8 o'clock I'll be happy to run to my work... [but] you don't get reward for work. You just work and go home.

A number of participants were also engaged in continued volunteering. One worked at a primary school, with an eye on gaining experience to become a teaching assistant. Another did social work with other refugees, and one volunteered in the cultural sector trying to build connections and gain enough experience to find a job. Two mentioned wanting to work in a cafe to gain experience to open a café later, but were at that point directed to learning Dutch first.

Although those gaining a positive status decision can learn Dutch in COA-run courses at the AZC, many refugees choose to start Dutch language learning properly only at a time when they are able to continue, rather than have to change schools in between. This is particularly the case because refugees have to borrow money to do an obligatory Dutch language course, and, if they fail the course, they are required to fully pay back funds. As such, many leave the ASC with very limited

Dutch language skills. Indeed, in the sample of 35 people we followed up with, sixteen people in the qualitative interviewee sample were focused on learning Dutch intensively. At that moment in time they experienced a large gap with the labour market. Of those, four were highly educated, nine had a mid-level of education, and three were low skilled.

Most of these people found their limited language skills a barrier to their aspirations. Saad, in his late twenties from Syria for example had considered going into business, or pursuing education. He explained, *'but yeah it's not that easy to start right now. Most of them, they need like Dutch and I'm not that good yet in the Dutch language'*. Some of those refugees (now with status) felt under pressure to get a job. For example, Leilani from Iran planned to finish her language course quickly and apply to university to study an arts based course. She recounted a conversation with her client manager at the municipality however, who told her that her priority should be to come off benefits, and that they said *'we cannot wait for you to study cinema, because you are now getting our money and the money is from the Government.'* Others like Bahar, a woman in her forties from Iran was disappointed after being advised by the Dutch Council for Refugees that her priority needed to be to improve her Dutch before pursuing her interest in volunteering in a cafe.

There was also some evidence that participants experienced pressure to get a job, and that was forcing downward mobility. Wondimu for example did not have sufficient Dutch to become employed at a higher level or develop his own business. He was instead intensively learning Dutch and exploring carework rather than pursue his business idea. Particularly at risk too were older highly qualified refugees, such as Akram, a former lawyer in his fifties from Syria, and Jamileh, a doctor in her sixties, who were living on benefits. On the other hand, Jamileh, recounted how she had been reflecting on some short study courses that she might consider after learning Dutch which might lead to lower level medical jobs, like being a sonographer. She reflected more optimistically, *'I can do something. I have hope for the future'*.

6.4. Conclusions and recommendations: Skills

The chapter has shown the extent to which the outcome of improved skills and early labour market activation theorised within Plan Einstein's Theory of Change were achieved. U-RLP set out to fight the 'refugee gap' by facilitating and stimulating asylum seekers and refugees to develop relevant skills 'from day one', at the moment they enter the ASC, rather than waiting until they receive a residence permit. It aimed to disrupt long waiting times without meaningful activities while in an asylum procedure, conditions which hinder integration in the labour market¹²³. Here, we conclude on how far the project delivered its three aims in this domain (skills, networks, building new business ideas and activating people) and assess the contribution Plan Einstein made to improvement in these outcomes. The research shows:

- At the time of the research, as one would expect after such a short time, there was no statistically significant differences in dependence on welfare benefits for the Plan Einstein ASC participants than the larger refugee population in Utrecht. One would not expect to see a difference until around 30 months, as people are taking civic integration courses. Accessing the labour market rarely occurs for refugees quickly after settling in a house, and accelerates only once *inburgering* (civic integration) is completed. The qualitative sample, albeit of a biased sample, showed that after almost a year of leaving Plan Einstein, half of the former 35 ASC residents who had received a residence permit were however engaged actively in activities to enter the labour market or formal education. Four were working in jobs, two at their level and two beneath their qualifications or experience, and the rest were taking

¹²³ ACVZ 2013, Engbersen et al. 2015, ACVZ 2017.

preparatory education, or volunteering with an eye on gaining connections and relevant experience. The other half of the sample focused on learning Dutch, aware that at that stage, their language skills were not sufficient to make a (satisfactory) start in the labour market. Three other former ASC residents that we interviewed had their application rejected.

- Plan Einstein prepares participants to be in a stronger position when ready to take the next steps; acting as a ‘transition to transition’ into the labour market. This is because:
 - a) Participants in U-RLP gain skills in language and entrepreneurship that enabled them to prepare better for their futures. 18 people attending the courses achieved the Cambridge Advanced English certificate, allowing access to university education, 15 received a certificate at upper intermediate level; a majority of remainder indicate some improvement in their English fluency at lower levels through evidence of progression in course-levels. Self-reports of skills increases were very high. In addition to increased knowledge and skills, participants gained secondary, but equally important benefits, such as confidence, knowledge and insight into Dutch society, skills in team-working, digital literacy etc. There were also genuine successes in participants developing businesses at Plan Einstein in Overvecht: from the Start your own business courses, there were nine businesses emerging. However it was faster and easier for neighbourhood participants (including refugees with status) to turn these into a reality, and this worked less well for asylum seekers.
 - b) Plan Einstein delivered valuable opportunities for participants to connect with local business people and each other, as well as through events, challenges and programmes. These helped connect people to relevant professionals who helped demystify systems and enable them to navigate the unfamiliar procedures of a new country, and gain from frank advice on concrete business ideas. This workstrand helped link individuals to jobs, volunteer-work, and higher education opportunities, all connections in the long-run which helped prepare participants and furnish them with experiences and connections useful to access the labour market.
- The project worked well for participants with already good levels of education, but ASC residents had diverse needs, skills and profiles, and the project did not work for everyone. The lesser participation in entrepreneurship courses than anticipated could lead to some reflection on the assumption in the project theory that entrepreneurship would be of interest to give a broader skill-set as a start of a person’s development. The theory assumed that it would provide a common ground for some refugees and neighbourhood residents to consider the possibility of setting up a business, although it did not envisage that it would be for everyone. Certainly we found practitioners questioned the accessibility and benefits for the entrepreneurship focus for those with lower levels of education, language proficiency and at a wide cultural distance to the Netherlands¹²⁴. While older people enjoyed the classes, the research confirms the picture that the older a refugee is, the lesser chances they have for economic integration¹²⁵ (so too the case for mothers of young children¹²⁶).

¹²⁴ This corresponds with research that shows that refugees from certain countries of origin do better (Iranian and Iraqis fare better than Somali refugees (Bakker 2016, De Vroome & Van Tubergen 2010); the difference is largely related to their level of education (Dagevos et al 2018).

¹²⁵ Engbersen et al. (2015)

¹²⁶ Odé & Dagevos (2017), Peters et al. (2018), Van den Enden et al. (2018)

Differences in legal status were also relevant, affecting outcomes, suggesting that training on topics such as starting a business must be avoided or very carefully handled, to avoid disappointment and demotivation.

- The research cannot make strong conclusions on the value of the ‘futureproof’ focus of English and entrepreneurship, since we talked to few participants who were refused status. When following up with three asylum seekers whose application was rejected, they did not want to think about or discuss returning, or the usefulness of the skills gained in those contexts. They considered rather that the skills would be useful when staying in a European context. However, for the particular (somewhat atypical) population profile of ASC Einsteindreef, the futureproof emphasis was somewhat restrictive to their own future trajectories. For this population, of whom approximately 60% already knew they would get or had status, Dutch language would have been of equal, or more merit to the subjects studied. In follow-up research a year later, when half of the qualitative sample found themselves at a distance from the labour market because of their limited Dutch language skills, several expressed regret at time lost in the ASC when they could have been learning Dutch.

Recommendations

Given these conclusions, we make the following suggestions for future developments and similar projects:

- **A more diversified programme offer will help meet the needs of both lower and higher-educated refugees.** The populations of ASCs are often very diverse, and vary between locations and times, often suddenly shifting. This was the case here where, rather than becoming an emergency centre as designed for at the concept stage, it became a regular ASC with higher numbers of people likely to gain permits. There is a need to examine the specific needs of the population at the time and be prepared to adapt nimbly. Responding to needs of the ASC population at the time might mean developing separate provision if necessary, for particular groups at risk of exclusion, who may be starting at a different point than others (e.g. Eritreans). Offering practical skills and more vocational training as well as some specialist options for the highly-skilled would enable breadth of learning. Within certain activities, there is also a need to adjust expectations of participants according to diversity in the group, since an inclusive approach should not blur the fact that there are some very significant differences between participants which affect outcomes, particularly legal status. Projects like Plan Einstein cannot change demographic factors that are pertinent to integration, it can recognise the specific risks facing particular groups and adapt its offer accordingly.
- In order to turn business ideas and labour market access into reality, **support need to be extended beyond the territory of the ASC and time that an asylum seeker is there**, into the areas where refugees are housed, and beyond their time in an ASC. This would help to bridge the gap between the supportive environment of Plan Einstein and the at times harsh realities of the labour market that some refugees experienced, particularly when working below their skill level.
- **The project should recognise that a futureproof offer for some people might include learning the Dutch language at a much earlier stage.** English language provision is a helpful level to facilitate communication between ASC residents and with people from the Netherlands. However, for those who gained status (in this ASC, around 60%) Dutch is

crucial for education as well as for integration in the labour market. The project should look at how, informal – if not formal – opportunities for learning and intensively practicing Dutch might be built in the project.

7. Results: wellbeing

This chapter presents results on ‘whether and in how far have asylum seekers (and neighbourhood residents) experienced greater levels of mental wellbeing’? According to the theory of change, higher wellbeing would be facilitated by the practical support, counselling and tailored support offered by the Dutch Council for Refugees and Welkom in Utrecht. The main project pillars of co-housing and its outcomes in good relations (between neighbourhood residents, tenants and ASC residents) as well as co-learning and consequent increased skills and prospects would lead to this outcome. In particular, wellbeing refers to participants being able:

- 1) To experience more productive use of time
- 2) To experience feelings of being connected to other people
- 3) To develop increased confidence and optimism about the future (repairing ruptured narratives) and feel increased ability to contribute.

The chapter takes a longitudinal view of ASC residents’ wellbeing, drawing on quantitative data from the NOA assessments, class evaluations and monitoring, and qualitative data from interviews with 65 ASC residents (and where relevant neighbourhood residents). It explores evidence on how they felt before they came to Plan Einstein, during their stay at Plan Einstein, and finally shares their reflections on their current feelings and lasting impacts of the intervention just under a year after leaving Plan Einstein¹²⁷.

7.1. General wellbeing

As discussed in section 2.1, it has been well established in research literature that asylum seekers experience poor wellbeing¹²⁸. In addition to difficulties of refugee flight, the experience of waiting for a decision on asylum applications, and the conditions of asylum seeker centres negatively affect asylum seekers’ sense of agency. While in an ASC, residents experience limited freedoms; they cannot choose where to live, for how long, with whom, when they can leave, or when to eat. They have no say on the rules governing the space and may even be instructed on even mundane issues such as how to properly use the toilet (where they are told not to squat but to sit). Time is spent waiting for the decision on the asylum application, with little activities to occupy ASC residents. They are also moved regularly because of COA’s high efficiency targets in its ASC occupancy levels. Plan Einstein’s theory of change sought to address the negative spiral of wellbeing experienced by asylum seekers, by providing a shared social space away from the ASC context, as well as activities and classes to reskill and connect ASC residents to other people in the locality.

7.1.1. Wellbeing upon entering the U-RLP

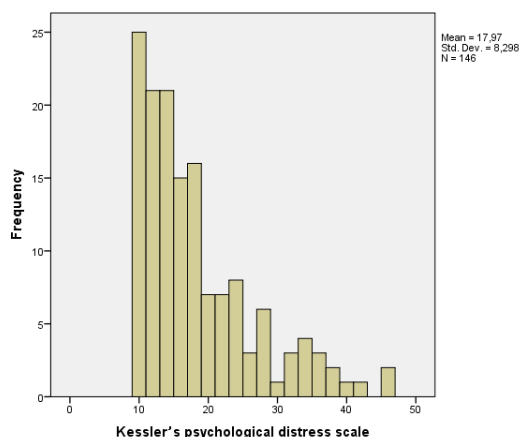
A baseline view of asylum seekers’ and refugees’ wellbeing as they entered the Plan Einstein project is provided by the NOA assessments, completed by 150 ASC residents. The test used the Kessler’s psychological distress scale¹²⁹, to elicit information about respondents’ feelings in the previous thirty days. It asked about their feelings of tiredness, nervousness, hopelessness, restlessness, depression, sadness etc, with scores of 20 or over indicating some level of mental unwellness. The data show that 32.2% of the asylum seekers and refugees scored 20 and over, while 17.8% of the asylum

¹²⁷ We refer to post-Plan Einstein interviewees as refugees rather than ASC residents. Most were living in a house after having had their asylum application accepted. Exceptions were three people whose application was rejected and were subsequently living as undocumented migrants, and one person who still lived in an ASC a year after receiving his refugee status, awaiting family reunification.

¹²⁸ For example: ACVZ (2013), Engbersen et al. (2015), Geuijen (2003).

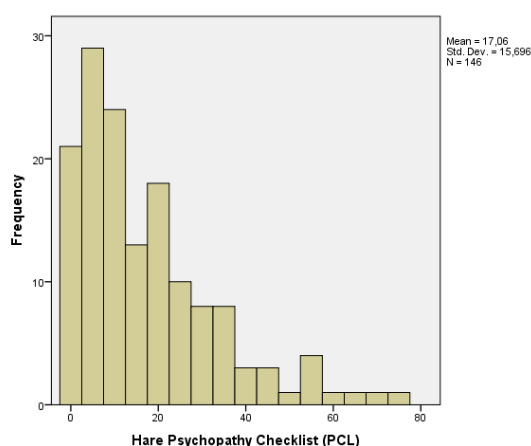
¹²⁹ https://www.tac.vic.gov.au/files-to-move/media/upload/k10_english.pdf

Figure 7-1: ASC residents' scores on mental wellness using the Kessler's psychological distress scale



seekers and refugees scored above 25 - indicating moderate to severe mental disorder on the scale. These scores are higher than seen in the general adult population, where 13% scores of 20 and over, and in primary health care, where c.25% do so.¹³⁰

Figure 7-2: ASC residents' scores on Hare's psychopathy checklist



The NOA intake assessment also scores participants on the Hare Psychopathy Checklist (PCL). This measures 'intrusion-symptoms' 'avoidance-symptoms' 'cognition and mood changes' and 'arousal reactivity'. The assessment data show too that 31 asylum seekers (21.2%) might possibly have had indications of Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome as they entered Plan Einstein.

Despite these indications, ASC residents also reported their psychological health to be relatively good in the NOA assessments. One question asked them to report psychological health problems on a scale of 0-15 (1 no problems, 15 severe problems). In this, 85.6% self-reported no psychological health problems, 8.9% reported some problems, and only 7 out of 146 reported above 4 on a scale of 0-15 (including only 1 reporting the highest score of 15). They also reported their physical health to be relatively good: 85.6% reported experienced no physical health problems at all and only one scored above 8 on a scale of 1-15 (1 no problems, 15 severe problems). Finally, ASC residents self-reported their general happiness to be moderate. On a scale from 1-9 (1 very unhappy, 9 very happy) the mean was 5.68.

In summary, the NOA assessments showed that a majority of ASC resident participants in the project self-reported surprisingly positively about their wellbeing and health, although scores on the K10 and PCL psychological tests indicated problems for some. As researchers who are not psychologists

¹³⁰For further detail on this scale, see: https://www.tac.vic.gov.au/files-to-move/media/upload/k10_english.pdf

or psychiatrists, we must take caution in the interpretation of results, but these findings suggest higher levels of wellbeing than generally indicated in the literature¹³¹.

The findings must also be qualified however, since first, this was a biased sample of Plan Einstein participants, and should not be seen as representative of the wider ASC population¹³². Second, qualitative research suggested some participants experienced the NOA assessment as a 'test', in which they wished to present a favourable picture of themselves. On the other hand, the higher levels of wellbeing may relate to the fact that a relatively high amount of this ASC population had arrived through family reunification (54.9% in Plan Einstein, in comparison to between 22.7% and 27.62% in other ASCs in the Netherlands in the same period¹³³). Their wellbeing would be influenced by their lesser existential legal insecurity¹³⁴, since they would already know that they would be able to stay in the Netherlands legally and be housed in a relatively short time. It is not possible to check these interpretations since it is not possible to link individual NOA data to individual data on legal status, but may be helpful in offering a more nuanced understanding of the quantitative NOA results.

7.1.2. General wellbeing during participants' time at Plan Einstein

The qualitative data from wave 1 shows that asylum seekers' current wellbeing while at Plan Einstein was evaluated in relation to their previous experiences of seeking asylum in the Netherlands, which had understandably negative impacts on their wellbeing. A large stressor was the common experience of regularly moving between ASCs: most interviewees reported having lived in multiple ASCs. Some, like Jamileh and Salman, from Iran, had even moved up to eight or ten times before coming to Plan Einstein. Almost all the asylum seekers interviewed referred to how in these centres, few activities or courses were available. Their experiences in those places had made them feel 'depressed' (as described by Wondimu, Samir and Faisal) and 'ill' (as described by Elham, Alan and Habib, for example). This compounded the more general low feelings that can be associated with refugee flight. Amal, a woman in her early twenties from Syria also explained how when she first came to the asylum centre she was 'depressed' and after living in other countries had no energy to start again. She described her arrival in the Netherlands:

After that, the Netherlands, where you have to start a new life and [make] new goals. I felt that I had no energy to start all over again. Literally, four or five months, I refused to interact with anyone or go outside and talk with people.

Several refugees referred to ASCs as a 'prison', describing them as meeting basic needs for survival but offering a dehumanising experience. One refugee reported still sometimes having nightmares about living in the ASC. This is because ASCs are institutions governed by a raft of organisational rules and regulations that limit individual freedom, by placing people together in forced co-housing, where they experience a lack of privacy, excessive noise and so on.

In Plan Einstein, residents of the ASC reported that engaging in Plan Einstein activities was positive, although the negative effects of the structural conditions of living in an ASC on their agency and wellbeing still remained. Some reported that Einsteindreef was de facto better since it was a newer ASC and had nicer facilities, but some remained the same, and in some cases, people experienced the ASC itself as worse than where they came from. In ASC Einsteindreef, the kitchens had limited

¹³¹ See for instance, Bäärnhielm (2017).

¹³² The baseline assessments from NOA were of people participating, and these people were likely those already well.

¹³³ Data received from COA, October 2018.

¹³⁴ One of the factors reported in the literature contributing to stress and inhibiting wellbeing (Bäärnhielm 2017).

opening hours between 8am and 9pm, so people were not able to cook in the rooms outside these hours (whereas some people had come from other places where kitchens or recreational rooms were open 24 hours a day). These conditions of life within the ASC continued to impact on asylum seekers' agency and ability to be able to plan even their daily life and framed their experiences in Plan Einstein. Claude a man from Burundi in his 20s said for example,

Once I asked COA to give me 10 more minutes. I started cooking at 8, but was not ready at 9. He said 'no'. COA people always say, 'these are the rules', but rules are made by people. If they don't work, we should change them. Some COA people sometimes treat us like we can't do anything.

On the other hand, a vast majority of interviewees reported that despite this backdrop, the Plan Einstein project had positive impacts on how they were feeling. Noticeable in many qualitative accounts was the personal contact made by committed staff, which contributed to ASC residents feeling more human and respected. One example was Akram, a Syrian man in his fifties who was feeling very low as a result of being separated from his family. In wave 2 (in mid 2019) he was still devastated at not knowing where one of his daughters was. Yet he described how two staff members from the Dutch Council for Refugee and Welkom in Utrecht staff encouraged him to participate. He recounted when he was first at ASC Einsteindreef:

and sometimes I am crying, 'cause I don't see my children for five years, that's terrible. And once they tell me 'Hello, can I help you?' I say: 'no, I am sitting alone.' 'Yeah, but we have an office inside where we can speak about what you want and how you want to work in Holland. If you need anything we can help you.' I [didn't] know if there's an office or not. 'Okay I will try'.

As noted in Chapter 5, the qualitative research (including with non-participants) showed that some asylum seekers were unable to attend precisely because of their poor wellbeing. For some participants (like Amal, from Syria and Jamileh from Iran) attending classes was a way out of depression, for others, the demands of attending courses was a step too far in their current psychological state. This was especially the case for those in positions of legal insecurity. For example, Aesha was worried all of the time because her parents might face deportation from the Netherlands at any moment. She said it inhibited her from taking courses because she was unable to focus. Elham, a man from Afghanistan in his late 20s, explained that when he was at Plan Einstein, he was '*not in a good condition*' after receiving a negative decision on his asylum application. He tried his best to participate, but skipped classes and felt his experience was '*not successful*'. Once he received psychological help and he received a staying permit, he became active again.

Others found participation too difficult because of health problems. For example, Nishtman, a Kurdish woman in her fifties suffered from severe backaches, which could not be healed. And though Aklilu an Eritrean man in his mid-30s took some English courses, he reported that health problems caused by his work in Eritrea, inhibited him from doing more. Two project employees explained that as the project moved to the new setting of Einstein Haydnlaan this was a particular concern, since the profile of inhabitants in the Joseph Haydnlaan centre was different to that in Overvecht:

And there are also a lot of people with mental problems and medical problems. And we should do something about that [...]with more education or more programs specially for that. And also

activate. Because some [people] of course are really sick and otherwise [they] are cultivating their own illness [...] Start with activating [them] to do something, but not [...] course[s on] entrepreneurship, [on] so many days. It's too much for people who have really low energy or feel bad or have psychological problems. Then you should be glad if they come once a week to do something like a game or something...I don't know. Something to get them out of their room.

7.2. Productive time-use

Research shows that the period of seeking asylum and waiting in a reception centre during the legal application for asylum is considered as 'lost time'¹³⁵. Asylum seekers feel they have little say over what happens in their own life. Plan Einstein's theory of change was premised on the notion that asylum seekers should not waste time, but be engaged in meaningful activity from day one, to rebuild broken narratives, encourage post-traumatic growth and halt a negative spiral in wellbeing. In this section, we present evidence on impacts of the U-RLP on time use, first considering this as they entered the programme.

7.2.1. Productive use of time: entering the U-RLP

The NOA assessments asked some questions about productive time-use as participants entered Plan Einstein. First, they were asked to indicate whether they were ever bored (on a scale of 1-9 with 1 meaning never and 9 meaning very often). The results show that more than half of the asylum seekers reported above average feelings of boredom:

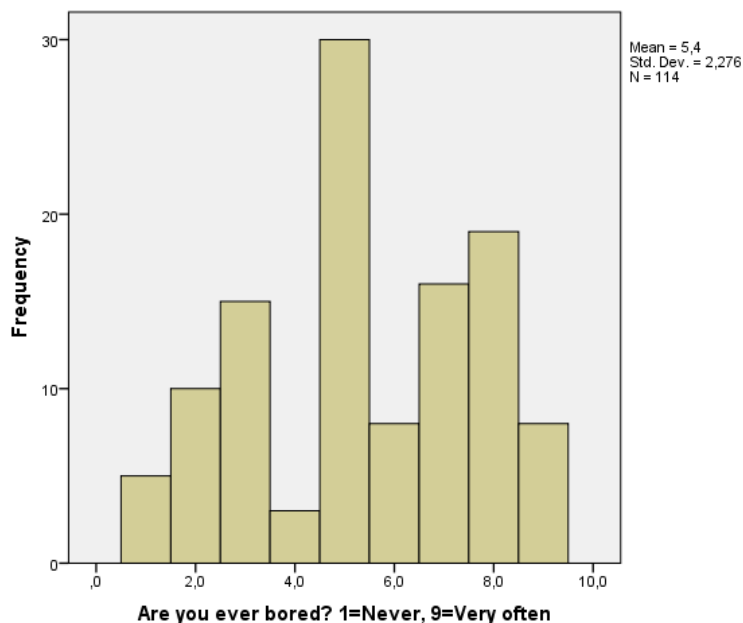


Figure 7-3: ASC participants' feelings of boredom

The assessment also inquired about asylum seeker's main activities during the day. The results showed that half of the respondents were already following a language course, while other popular

¹³⁵ ACVZ 2013: <https://acvz.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/summary36.pdf>

activities were sports, hanging out with friends and spending time on a hobby. 31.6% of the asylum seekers taking the assessment however reported spending most of their time alone:

Table 7-1: Activities undertaken by ASC residents

What are your main activities during the day? (multiple answers possible)	N	%
I follow a language course	58	49.6
I do sports	53	45.3
I hang out with friends	50	42.7
I spend time on a hobby	50	42.7
I'm mostly alone	37	31.6
I take care of my children aged under 12	31	26.5
I do voluntary work	28	23.9
I go to a café or neighbourhood centre	27	23.1
I go to school	19	16.2
I work	9	7.7
I take care of someone else (e.g. a parent)	2	1.7

7.2.2. Productive use of time at Plan Einstein

The overwhelming majority of asylum seekers and refugees experienced doing the courses and activities in Plan Einstein as a productive use of their time, and more productive than at other ASCs. The courses and activities gave participants something more valuable to do with their time than the common experience of waiting at other centres. Interviewees reported that the project gave them opportunities to 'do things', 'not waste time', or 'not sleep all day'. Wondimu, from Ethiopia in his late 30s explained that at Hengelo ASC, there was 'nothing' and he slept day and night during his time there. Amal, from Syria reported of her involvement in wave 1:

I think I am also fully participating in the activities that they do [at Plan Einstein], because when you're living in the ASC, you have a lot of free time. A lot of free time, yeah. So it was good for us to come here.

Leilani, a woman from Iran in her twenties explained her feelings of productivity:

And it was always a nice feeling when I was looking from my window in [the] ASC to the incubator, and just taking some stairs and going to the other side, it was like a different life, I had the feeling that I was doing something.

The qualitative evidence is supported by the course evaluations. Course evaluations were completed by both neighbours and ASC residents¹³⁶. There are of course some doubts around validity with these types of student evaluations, but nevertheless, in Plan Einstein there was positive self-reporting about the influence of the courses on time-use among participants¹³⁷. For example, 89% of the participants in English classes (N=111) and 81% (n=95) agreed or strongly agreed the classes and activities made them feel they were using their time well.

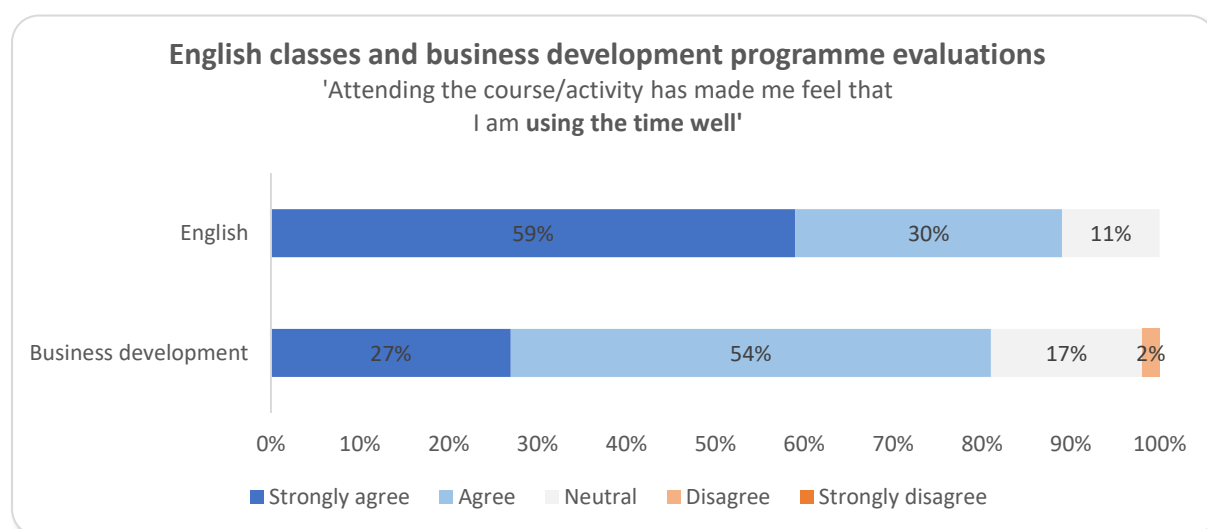


Figure 7-4: Course and activity evaluations: productive use of time

Participants and professionals working with the asylum seekers and refugees supported this self-reporting by participants. For example, the COA local manager and some of the professionals working at the reception centre reported that they experienced a more positive atmosphere in the Einsteindreef ASC than in other reception facilities in which they had worked. They observed that residents were more actively engaged, and they witnessed fewer people spending time passively in their rooms.

As in the previous section, the impacts of the U-RLP on productive use of time however were constrained by the conditions of asylum seeking itself. In particular, regular movement between ASCs was a barrier, since many did not live in the centre long enough to benefit from the courses¹³⁸. Likewise the broader experience of being stripped of one's professional identity through the experience of seeking asylum remained. Faisal, a Syrian man in his twenties had previously worked as a journalist, but his limited language skills meant he could not progress. He had been in the Netherlands for three years and felt Plan Einstein had not helped to address that problem. He explained: *'I didn't do anything, for me it's not good. Because when I was in Syria I was active'*. In particular, he regrets no longer having anything like the published articles he had before to show to his father.

¹³⁶ Evaluations did not record participants' origin, but 39% of evaluation completions for the English language courses were in English and 61% Dutch (N=117). For the business incubation programme, 71.5% were completed in English 28.5% in Dutch (N=95).

¹³⁷ Among all participants, i.e. neighbourhood participants, and asylum seekers and refugees.

¹³⁸ The Dutch asylum procedure is organized in such a way that different phases in the application process are connected to different types of reception centers, so asylum seekers have to move when shifting to the next phase. Because of the relatively large numbers of asylum seekers arriving in 2015/16 many had to stay in. When these camps closed down after days or weeks they had to move. That is why the respondents in our sample had moved often, up to nine times.

Other asylum seekers noted that even though participation in the courses and activities was a good way of spending their time, uncertainty about their status and reunification with family prevailed and negatively affected their wellbeing. Samir, a man from Iraq in his mid fifties had been waiting for years initially for assessment of his own asylum application, and later for reunification with his wife and son. Every time Plan Einstein personnel enquired about his situation, he recounted his worries about his family living in dangerous circumstances, and his frustrations at the slow pace of the reunification process.

7.2.3. Productive time-use: one year after leaving U-RLP

In following up with participants who had gained status, most interviewees we spoke with were living in a house in the Netherlands, and half of them spent their time taking language courses for their 'inburgering' (civic integration). Their post-Einstein experiences often meant they showed further appreciation of the activities in Plan Einstein. Refugees compared their current experience where they had few opportunities to engage in meaningful activities, against the motivation they felt at Plan Einstein. Amal explained for example:

I lived in another camp after Plan Einstein, and if I had lived there since my arrival to the Netherlands, I would go crazy. There is a huge difference. No one cared about anyone. In Plan Einstein [a Welkom in Utrecht staff member] used to ask about us and care about us. When you feel that there is someone who is trying to get you out of your bubble, you have the desire to go outside and try new things. When we moved to the other camp, no one ever told us about any activity.

Several refugees however, also reported that they, in hindsight, thought their time use could have been even more productive if they had been able to learn skills that would be more relevant to them given their current situation, particularly learning the Dutch language (see 6.3.2. in the skills chapter).

7.3. Feeling connected to other people

Another important aspect of wellbeing is feeling connected to other people. Plan Einstein's theory of change assumed that wellbeing would be increased not only by building participants' skills (human capital) through the courses and activities but also by enabling participants to make connections with others (social capital). Co-learning and co-housing were instrumental, as was the programme of social activities. Important too was the provision of physical space in the outdoor seating area and 'incubator' space, an informal coffee-room in which refugees could meet each other as well as other Socius students and people from the neighbourhood. The assumption would be that Plan Einstein would be a place in which higher levels of social capital could be generated, especially enabling them to build 'bridging capital' with other people from the Netherlands.

7.3.1. Feeling connected: entering Plan Einstein

At the point of entering the Plan Einstein programme, almost all ASC residents in wave 1 interviews showed a very high motivation to connect with other people socially, especially Dutch people. The NOA baseline assessment provided some initial insight into participants' contacts with Dutch people. 64.9% of asylum seekers self-reported contact with Dutch people on a monthly basis or more frequently. 35.1% reported no contact. In the qualitative research, asylum seekers reported very limited, or no contact with Dutch people apart from with professionals and some volunteers when living in previous reception centres. This limited contact arose from limited

language skills, either in Dutch or English, and some also cited the lack of opportunity to meet people outside of the reception centres. This is in line with previous research which points out limited contact between asylum seekers living in reception camps and Dutch citizens¹³⁹.

Table 7-2: Contact with Dutch people

How often do you have contact with Dutch people (besides contact with employees in shops and people from official organisations)?

	Frequency	Percentage
Twice or more per week	38	25.7
Once per week	28	18.9
Once every two weeks	14	9.5
Once per month	16	10.8
No contact	52	35.1
Total	148	100.0

7.3.2. Feeling connected: at Plan Einstein

Participants experienced Plan Einstein's courses and activities as very important for facilitating asylum seekers to meet both with people who live in the ASC and neighbourhood residents. In the skills chapter, we observed that the courses had positive instrumental values especially in helping people learn more about Dutch society, and this had overlapping benefits for wellbeing. They felt more comfortable and familiar in the environment as they understood more about Dutch ways and perceived characteristics. Kawa, a 24 year old Syrian man observed:

They are calm. They deal with situations in a calm way, they do not stress about it, they are not very emotional, or they do not get angry very fast... It is rare to find someone angry. Syrians are always angry hahaha even for small and silly stuff.

Saad, a Syrian man, who was 27 years old said:

They love life and they are very optimistic. A lot of refugees miss these feelings. They were getting this positive energy from them. The refugees within themselves started to have this positivity. It makes an effect. These little [things] are very important because it makes a difference in people's lives... the smiles and the love... When [you see] how these people love their country and they are supporting refugees in a humanitarian way [you] feel better.

Feelings of connection and togetherness were also generated on occasions when Dutch people joined in meaningful activities with ASC residents. For example a few Socius students joined some residents by fasting for a day during Ramadan and afterwards having dinner together. The most positive stories of feeling connected were of Plan Einstein's first phase (before August 2017). At this time, there were fewer asylum seekers and so both tenants and ASC residents knew each other by name, sat together at the end of day, held parties or barbecues and went together to different places during the weekends. Faisal, a Syrian in his twenties described the implications of this time for his wellbeing:

¹³⁹ Including ACVZ 2013, Engbersen c.s. 2015, Geuijen 2003.

I was depressed when I lived in all these ASCs. Refugees all come from a bad situation. They talk about Syria all the time. They worry. They have negative energy. Dutch students bring positive energy.

Aside from bridging social capital with the Socius tenants and locals, evidence from the interview also demonstrated an unanticipated outcome of enhanced bonding relationships among refugees. This was not really an outcome intended by Plan Einstein (or at least was not stressed as a potential outcome). Most striking was the story of a group of Syrians girls and their mothers, who used Plan Einstein's communal space to meet regularly. Over time came to consider themselves like a 'new family'. Amal described their meetings in the incubator space as follows:

When we gather with our mothers, we remember the social atmosphere of Syria. We miss this atmosphere of the big family. Such gatherings remind me of my aunts and my cousins. Although we are not relatives, we spent a lot of time together in the camp. So, it is nice when you meet them and talk to them. Even if we have clashes or conflicts, we solve it directly and we stay next each other.

Key in most accounts of connectedness was Plan Einstein's neutral, welcoming, communal space. This provision was very important to ASC residents and some neighbourhood residents in overcoming feelings of being alone and feeling safe in making first steps to initiate contact. Dalila, a young woman from Syria explained, '*...when we used to get to the café in PE you see a lot of people that would like to talk to you and have a discussion. You do not feel that you are a stranger or refugee or coming from another country*'. Amal and Fatima from Syria referred to Plan Einstein's incubator as their 'living room'; a space where they could meet with Dutch Socius students, as well as distance themselves from the gossip they felt their fellow country (wo)men engaged in. Some, like Aban and Faadwa (a man and woman, both in their forties from Syria) also found that it was a place in which romantic relationships could be developed in a culturally acceptable way. Others felt it was somewhere in which they could meet people from the opposite sex as friends, without opprobrium.

In particular, many ASC residents found that the incubator space became a place in which to get away from the claustrophobic experiences in the ASC. They explained that living with 400 people from many nationalities, cultures and speaking different languages was challenging, especially because typically asylum seekers would share a room with three or four strangers when single, or share a room with their whole family. Sharing bathroom and kitchen facilities could be difficult when other residents did not have the same standards on hygiene or noise. And since people have different daily rhythms and activities, it was difficult to have quiet time and privacy to prepare for classes, study, relax or make phone calls. As a result, the public space of Plan Einstein was vital as a place of escape. Faisal said, '*Plan Einstein gave us a safe environment*'. For Akram, a man in his 50s, explained it was important for refugees that, '*Einstein doesn't give money, but gives the idea of feeling relaxed*'. Salman, a man from Iran in his 20s also described the friendly atmosphere cultivated:

When I was there, it was really great. It was always a friendly environment and I considered everybody kind of being a friend. There was a great vibe. Great atmosphere [...] It was a really nice place to hang out. Around there, it was pretty much the only place to hang out. There's also some crappy places like the laundry room or something in the camp, but that's not such a nice place, with the noise and people passing by all the time. And it's kind of dirty. So it was like a little coffee shop or something, around Einstein. Sometimes we would go there and get some coffee, and sometimes just go to...use the wifi, chill out.

On the other hand, the research showed that there was a risk that some older refugees felt the space was more for younger people. Instead they gathered outside, or when the weather was very bad, in the public spaces of the ASC, like near the laundry room. Nishtman, a Syrian-Kurdish woman in her fifties, said: 'the space was meant for young people, not for us'. So too, the experiences of shared space and lack of privacy in the ASC remained a constraining factor to connectedness for some, leading some to try and avoid too much contact with other people. For example, Abia, a Yemeni woman in her twenties from Yemen recounted how she did not even take the effort to get to know neighbourhood residents in the umpteenth ASC she was moved to, since she would be moved away after some time anyway. This feeling of not having any say on when to move, where to stay, or with whom to share the room affected her willingness to connect locally, as she said:

I did not know when I would be moved. Every day you have stress about the mail which may say that you have to move again. They do not inform you when or where or why. There is a lot of talking about why people get moved. How it relates to the procedure... I did not take the effort to get to know the city of my fifth ASC again. I was so happy to be able to stay in Utrecht for half a year and now have a house here.

Finally, we suggest that it was not only space, but the co-learning activities too which were positive for enabling participants to connect to Dutch people. Course evaluations were completed by both neighbours and ASC residents¹⁴⁰. Notwithstanding doubts around validity with these types of student evaluations,¹⁴¹ in the English courses 95% of respondents reported that sharing courses with people from the ASC and the neighbourhood was a positive experience. 84% reported that they felt more connected as a result of the courses. For business incubation activities, 89% of the participants reported the experience of sharing the course as positive, and 85% felt more connected.

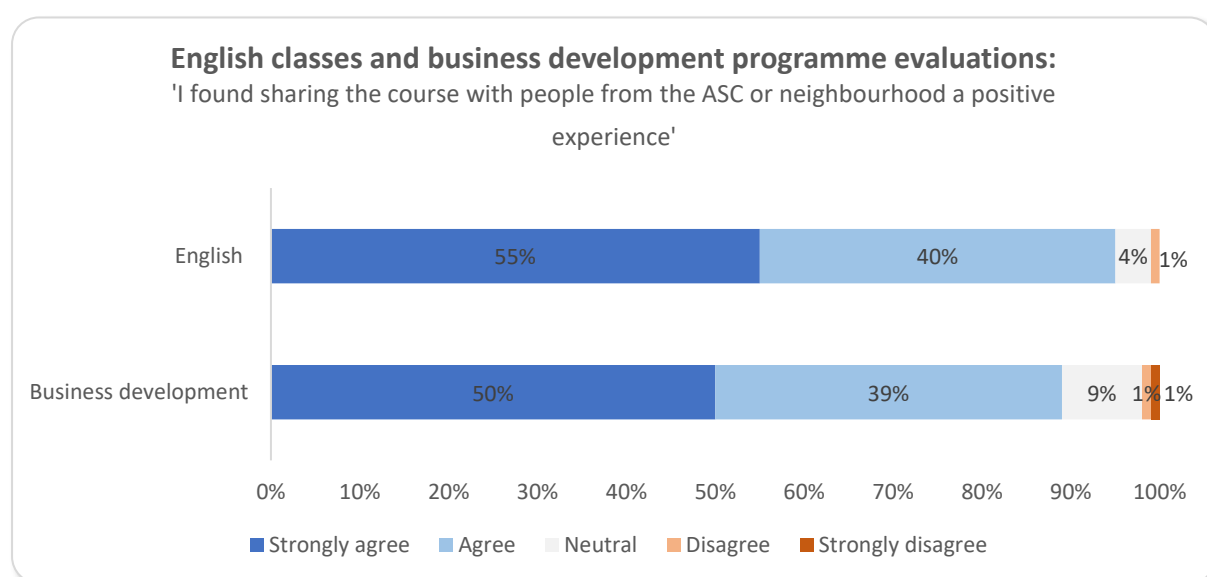


Figure 7-5 Course and activity evaluations: sharing the course

¹⁴⁰ Evaluations did not record participants' origin, but 39% of evaluation completions for the English language courses were in English and 61% Dutch (N=117). For the business incubation programme, 71.5% were completed in English 28.5% in Dutch (N=95).

¹⁴¹ Feistauer and Richter (2016).

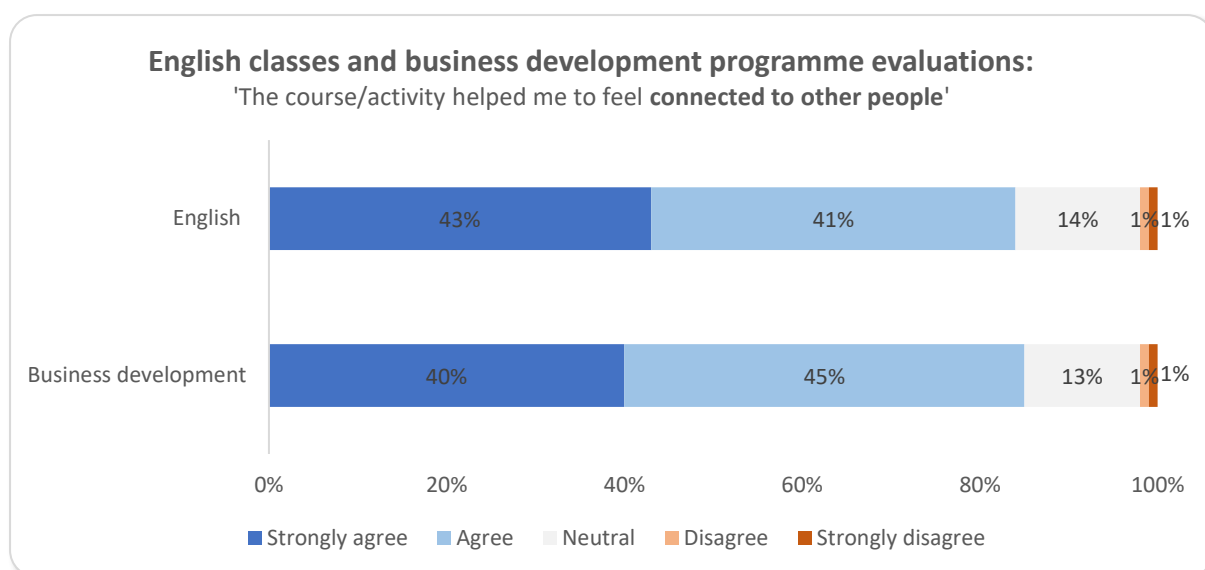


Figure 7-6: Course and activity evaluations: feeling connected

7.3.3. Feeling connected: one year after leaving U-RLP

Finally, we consider the longer-term impacts of Einstein on feelings of being connected after a year. In particular we point out three main observations:

First, for some, the connections developed were important in a profound and personal way, and changed the ways refugees experienced themselves in relation to other Dutch people. For example, some participants, especially as Muslims (wearing the hijab if female) had fears that people from the Netherlands would not accept them, but discovered that these fears were not realised at Plan Einstein. Dalila, a 20 year old Syrian girl said of a few Socius tenants:

They helped me a lot to get out of the situation and the idea that I am a refugee and I live in the refugee camp and my life is miserable. They were the ones who used to organize the activities that allowed us to change our mood. So for sure, these people pushed me the first push in my life here. I cannot forget them, and I love them so much.

She continued:

I think I have more confidence that I will not be rejected in society or be treated as a refugee or some one who has dark hair or does not speak the language fluently. In the ASC before PE, my language was very bad. I could not talk at all. My English was so bad so I could not communicate with anyone... After I arrived at PE I has some words and I started to go to the language café and then I started to have sentences. So it made me feel that people accept me, and I can express my opinion freely. Before I was so depressed.'

Second, the research showed that enduring connections were evident for several refugees, especially Syrian youngsters, with a small number (around four) of the Socius tenants, or coaches met through the business incubation activities. Some participants referred to one tenant in particular as a very good friend, or as their 'best Dutch friend'. However while most refugees reported that while they had friendly relationships with people at the time in Plan Einstein (with teachers and other professionals, some Socius tenants and Dutch neighbours in the courses) few

had maintained the relations they had established in Plan Einstein in much depth (see Chapter 3). Even those who did keep some contact looked back on the time of Plan Einstein as better than their later social experiences once they left. When we spoke to Leilani in 2019, she was feeling some sadness having moved to a new co-housing arrangement where she found some of the Dutch students cliquey. Amal now living in a house, also reflected:

For me (I do not know about other people) I felt that my social life was a bit better when I was in Plan Einstein. Now, it is okay I have friends and relationships but sometimes many days pass by and you are at home. If you do not go outside, you meet no one, you stay alone. This might not be that negative but for me it was so good to see people in the kitchen. Sometimes we [used to] go down to the incubator and we find many people sitting there.

There were several reasons for the relatively limited endurance of connections. Refugees felt that Dutch people were very busy. Some refugees' language capabilities were not sufficiently advanced to speak Dutch in anything more than superficial terms (e.g. saying 'hello'). Another explanation was that these types of relations were not perceived as really reciprocal by all parties¹⁴². If relationships are not fully reciprocal, those on the 'giving' side are no longer inclined to invest extra time in sustaining the relationship when doing so becomes more difficult (for example when ASC residents move away). This combination of factors may have been less important in Plan Einstein, and were no barriers to friendly connections ('weak ties') at the time. Few have sustained however when people moved away to a house, particularly in another city or town. Kawa, a Syrian man aged 25 said:

The language is I think the problem. There was one guy we used to see him a lot. He was living in Plan Einstein. When I moved to my house he helped me a lot. Sometimes we contact each other from time to time.

However, it was clear that refugees continue to experience some longer-term benefits of the connections established at Plan Einstein, especially through more rare spontaneous convivial encounters. For example, some of the refugees and neighbourhood residents referred to how it was nice that they could greet people they met at Plan Einstein and have a short chat in the street when visiting the city centre, or at parties and at events. Continuing contact was also facilitated through 'de Voorkamer', a cultural meeting place in Utrecht city centre, where refugees met people they got to know in Plan Einstein (including other refugees as well as Dutch people). The Voorkamer organizes cultural events, and a 'taalcafé' (language interchange) while some of Plan Einstein's former refugee inhabitants co-organize these events.

It was interesting however to note that although enduring contact was lesser with other Dutch people, most refugees reported that they were still in touch with other refugees they met at Plan Einstein, even with people from other nationalities. For example, the Syrian group of women who began meeting in Plan Einstein still met afterwards. Although all of them live in houses dispersed over the Netherlands they still gathered at each other's houses and shared important things that happened to them. Amal explained:

They are now a family. No one of us can live a happy moment without telling the others and share the moment with them. The best thing we had from Plan Einstein is this relation with these people.

¹⁴² Van Heelsum (2017).

In summary, ASC residents, especially relatively young and highly educated people, benefited from feelings of connectedness during their stay in Plan Einstein. The connections made with tenants and neighbourhood residents provided insights into the way Dutch people lived and how Dutch society worked for most. For a few people, this led to enduring bridging relationships; however most reported that regular contact with Dutch people did not continue after Plan Einstein. However, we see that for several refugees, Plan Einstein facilitated crucially important bonding relationships that continued to make them feel connected to others and meaningful in each other's lives.

7.4. Ability to think optimistically about the future, develop confidence and contribute

Plan Einstein aimed to facilitate refugees to amend their 'broken narratives': instead of being vulnerable to post-traumatic stress, the theory of change envisages the activities, courses and connections stimulating asylum seekers to hold more positive perspective on their future prospects and gain in confidence. An important aspect of wellbeing too is agency and the feeling of being able to contribute. This involves reciprocity, where people do not just consume what is given to them, but give, on an equal basis, something meaningful in return.

7.4.1 Optimism, confidence and contribution: before entering U-RLP

The NOA assessment did not have a specific question on confidence, optimism or contributions, so it is not possible to have a baseline view of these dimensions before people joined Plan Einstein. We report on this from only the perspective of people after entering and leaving the programme, including any retrospective accounts given at those points.

7.4.2 Optimism, confidence and contribution: during U-RLP

In Chapter 6, we provided a number of accounts of how some refugees felt more able to construct clearer future plans and rethink or rediscover professional ambitions following Plan Einstein participation. Abia (female, 20s, from Yemen) for example felt more inspired after taking the entrepreneurship course at Plan Einstein, explaining '*I was successful in Yemen, I will be successful again in the Netherlands.*' And Bahar, a 43 year old woman from Iran found doing the entrepreneurship course was a life changing experience as she became aware of the opportunities that she might have in the Netherlands. Jamileh also described her slow process of self-discovery and growing confidence the helped her combat her depression:

But little by little I started to take part in the courses in Plan Einstein, for example in entrepreneurship and English, and little by little I felt better. Because I really....before that, I [...] forgot myself. And I felt like [disabled] people, without any ability. But in fact I was not that, I had a lot of abilities, I did a lot of things in my life. And, with Plan Einstein, Plan Einstein helped me to find again myself. To remember me. Who I was, how many abilities did I have? And now I feel better. And I have more hope for the future. Yeah, it's really very nice.

The course evaluations among participants (albeit both neighbourhood participants as well as ASC residents) were also very positive in this regard. In the English course evaluations, 85% of the participants (N=111) report that the course has contributed to feeling more optimistic about the future. The business development program (N=95) had 74% agreeing or agreeing strongly that the course made them feel more optimistic about the future. Self-reporting on confidence in these evaluations show again the effects of Plan Einstein's educational strands on (self-reported) confidence levels: 81% (N=111) reported increased confidence in talents and abilities after taking English courses, 75% (N=95) reported this after participating in the business development programme.

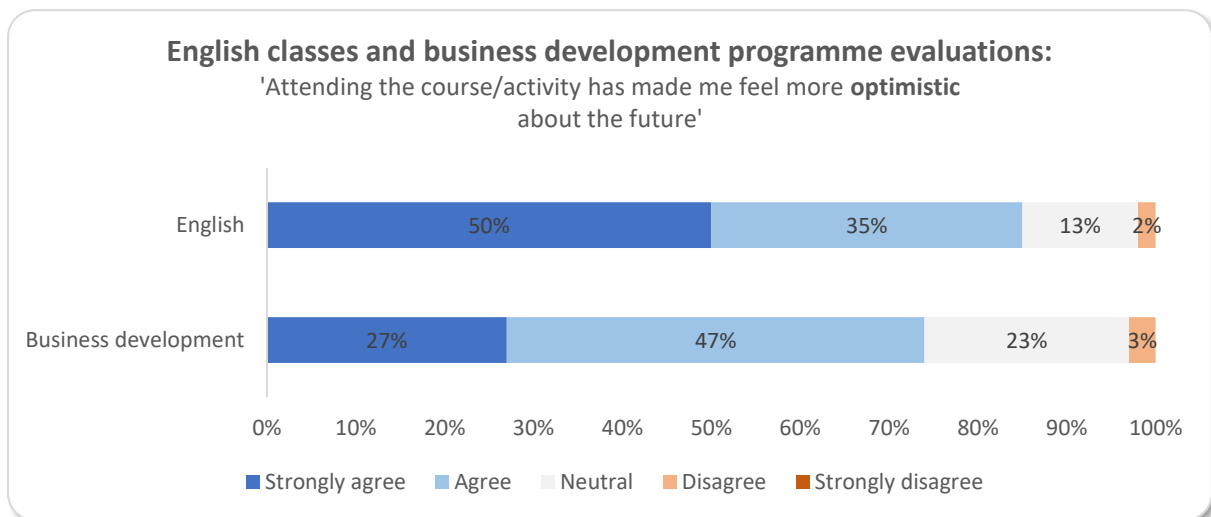


Figure 7-7: Course and activity evaluations: feeling optimistic

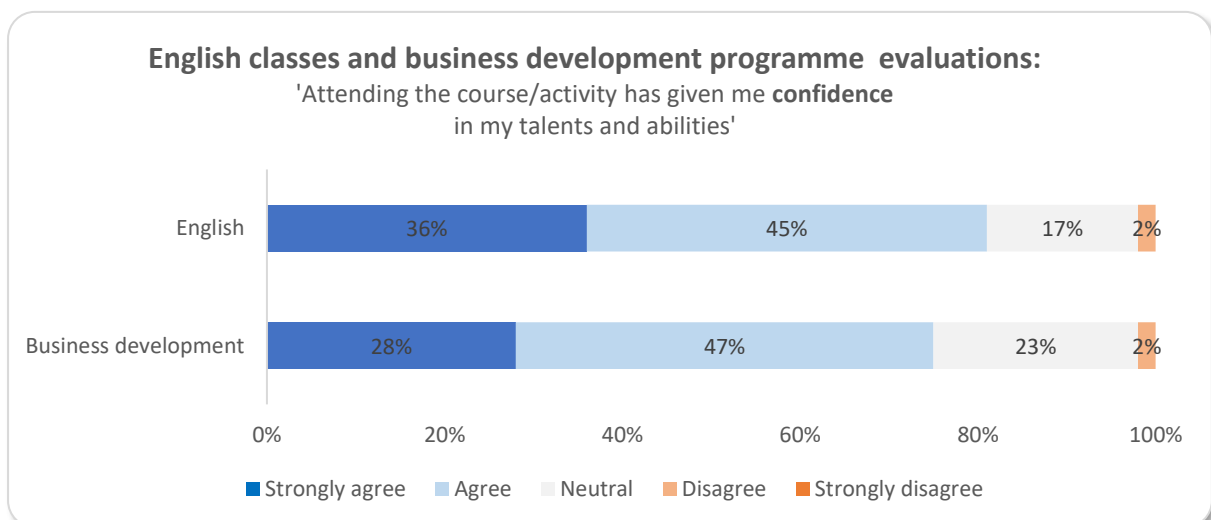


Figure 7-8 Course and activity evaluations: confidence

Although participants reported feeling more optimism and confidence at the time, in reality the ability to plan concretely was limited to those with staying permits. In wave 1, many reported that their lives could only really start only once they received a positive decision on their application for asylum or family reunification, or had a house. This influenced behaviours; for example even if an ASC resident had a positive status decision, it was common for them to defer professional Dutch lessons until they had moved into a house in a municipality rather than start a course and have to move elsewhere¹⁴³. This had implications for their skills and ability to gain a job (Chapter 6) and ability to think confidently about the future.

Although we saw much evidence of improved confidence and optimism, in the wave 1 research and interim report, we reported that there was less evidence that asylum seekers and refugees felt they were able to contribute. This referred to the possibilities of sharing ASC residents' relevant

¹⁴³ As explained in Chapter 6, refugees have to borrow money to complete Dutch language courses, and must pay this back when they fail the course. 55% of the residents of Plan Einstein were moved out of the Utrecht region (U-16).

expertise that could be put to good use on the programme. During those first stage interviews, many ASC residents expressed a desire for reciprocity – a feeling of wanting to give something back to the Netherlands. When opportunities existed, they were particularly appreciated. For example, participants spoke positively about the Social Impact Factory's challenges, which were directed at issues like solving problems of bullying at schools, or organizing a pop-up restaurant in which refugees and people from the neighbourhood could meet. These activities were valued as ways of 'giving something back', and feeling equal, instead of receiving help.

In wave 2 we saw some occasions where participants had been given further opportunities to contribute. For example, some of Plan Einstein's beneficiaries (asylum seekers, Socius youngsters and neighbours) gave presentations during the Social Affairs Forum, an international event for the Eurocities network organised by the Utrecht local authority for their European counterparts. In preparing for the presentations, all were trained in pitching and debating skills. They expressed afterwards their pride in the results; how they themselves had learned a lot, but how they also felt they had contributed something back to the project, and felt empowered, useful and that they had spent their time in a meaningful way. One of these was Amal, a Syrian girl in her early 20s. Once she had moved away, she reflected back on her time in the project, and explained how contributing to the programme through translating, organizing activities and helping others '*all made me feel that I can do something*'.

Two refugees had co-designed and co-taught a basis ICT course for refugees who were not able to use computers for formal purposes like e-mail. They helped them to create a Google-account and fill out forms. This was related to their own professional training as ICT experts. They not only experienced this activity as meaningful for these refugees, they also perceived it as potentially relevant for their own resumé aiming at finding a job or starting a business. More informally, several participants from the ASC, or some newly housed refugees in Overvecht acted as translators, or helped other refugees with filling out forms or contacting professionals. Aklilu, an Eritrean man in his early thirties says:

The best of Plan Einstein was that I could contribute. There were many Eritrean families... people contacted me for help... then I helped them. I do not care who is asking It makes me happy to be able to help people... When they arrive from Ter Apel they know nothing. One just needs to do something for them... help them. Even though I was ill, I tried to help because they needed it. It is so hard when you are new and do not know anything... I did not do it for appreciation or recognition. I did it for my own feeling and for God... I can read and I know where to go. A lot of Eritreans do not. I can help them.

There were also opportunities to volunteer. For example Welkom in Utrecht connected participants to volunteer at a festival to commemorate the end of World-War II, at a running competition, at a vocational school for care, and at a second hand shop. Claude, from Burundi, became a basketball coach after being introduced to a club through social networks from Plan Einstein.

This said, others felt limited in being able to contribute to the project, especially in a professional capacity. Alan (male, 33, Asian) for example suggested during and after his stay in Plan Einstein that he could have contributed to English classes or shared his expertise on business consultancy, since he had studied in Britain and had vast experience in the field of business law. Abia – formerly an English teacher in Yemen – also suggested that she could have contributed, Wasim, a man in his fifties used to teach technical skills, Aban in his forties from Syria taught physics, while Habib, in his thirties from Yemen was a highly educated and experienced ICT consultant who was trained in the Netherlands for two years before claiming asylum. All of them mentioned in interviews that they would have been able and very much willing to contribute.

7.4.3 Optimism, confidence and contribution: one year after leaving U-RLP

One year after leaving Plan Einstein, the follow-up research showed that optimism and confidence endured for some. In Chapter 6, we reported on several individuals who secured jobs or educational placements and showed how Plan Einstein boosted the confidence of a number of young highly educated refugees, through linking them to social and professional networks. Amal from Syria explained how being involved in the project had longer-term impacts on her confidence:

it affected me personally. I have more confidence in myself. When I came from Egypt, I had a different personality. My personality has completely changed. I am more confident [...] It encouraged me to think about volunteer or work with organisations. It affected me a lot even about my future work. I would like to help people who are new to the country or who find it difficult to integrate. The Plan Einstein experience affected all my choices, I think.

Leilani too, from Iran, reflected how far she had come since Plan Einstein:

I don't think I could've done all of this. And of course, the environment, the people, the workshops, make me to become the person I am now in 6 months, which is a lot. One of the most important parts was [the Social Impact Factory] challenge, because i learned about myself a lot in that challenge. And I was really feeling equal and it helped me a lot and I really felt equal, so it helps me a lot and it was a really good first step for me, the right and healthy one. If I was somewhere else, it wouldn't be like this.

Some similar narratives were found among neighbourhood residents who participated in courses and had successful outcomes (see Chapter 6). Frans, a Dutch man in his fifties who became a painter and decorator explained:

Before I come in contact with the people of Plan Einstein, I was a little bit depressed. I could not find a job, everywhere you go 'no you're too old, too this, too that'. It's not nice to hear that. It's like you are with one leg in the grave, that is how I felt at that moment. So now it's good, I have no depressions anymore, every day I go out of my bed at seven o'clock.

He explained the impact of his new work on his wellbeing, 'I'm free now, I can do what I want and [I have] financial freedom, everything. [It's] very nice, [a] good feeling'. For Frans, Plan Einstein played a 'very important' role; he said, 'if I didn't have plan Einstein, I think I'm not like now, I'm not independent'.

In the follow-up research, we found that some participants were also making broader contributions to society, even if not necessarily through a job. Omar, a Syrian man in his late 50s presented his vision on the bombing of Idlib at a 'Ruilbeurs' in a town near Utrecht (a place where people swap products and services). He offered a well thought speech through a geopolitical perspective, doing so in Dutch, even though he had taken Dutch classes for only a few months. During interviews it became clear that it was important for the overwhelming majority of refugees to give something back¹⁴⁴.

¹⁴⁴ In the qualitative sample (n=35) two thirds expressed explicitly a desire to contribute, although of these a quarter acknowledged it was difficult because of language barriers or ill health.

However, not all participants experienced longer-term confidence, even if they successfully gained status and did at that point have a house. In the follow-up research, we found several people only recently starting Dutch language course, a year after they had left Plan Einstein, and half of the qualitative sample not yet having a job or doing advanced education. For these people, their future vision was still rather vague, with most explaining that they first needed to finish the language course before being able to find a job (and in fact this is what they have been advised to do so, for example Abia and Leilani)¹⁴⁵. While this prohibited a clear vision on the future, still many of these people remained overall quite optimistic, a stance in line with the literature which says that in the early years after migration refugees are known to be very energetic and highly optimistic¹⁴⁶ about their future opportunities in the country of destination – a phenomenon referred to as ‘immigrant optimism’¹⁴⁷.

On the other hand, there was evidence of some nuancing of optimism for some people, despite having their own house and/or work. They all enjoyed having freedom away from the ASC, but, as explained in 7.3.3, some felt nostalgia and experienced that living in their own apartment or house meant that the easy social connections of Plan Einstein were gone. Some people mentioned being lonely; a few said they would love to return to Plan Einstein. The reduced social connections, the difficulties some people found in achieving (appropriate) work, or the difficulties in starting their own business after designing a good business plan was eroding some refugees’ confidence in the future. This was the case for who Hassan (6.3.2) who was working very hard, but below his skill level and was confronting the realities of the labour market. He still had aspirations and ideas to develop his business plan during his time at Plan Einstein, but revealed it was still an aspiration some way off:

I plan to do my own business. I really like it if I have the opportunity and the money... but I really need... help... Without money you are just dreaming... without money everything is impossible.

This was also the case with Akram, a Syrian former lawyer in his fifties living in a house in Zuilen. He realised that he would be unable to work as a lawyer in the Netherlands without Dutch qualifications, and explained instead his rather undeveloped plans instead about starting a pizzeria. However, at the time of the interview, he was very insistent that he would benefit from further help from Plan Einstein, and wished that there was a Plan Einstein in Zuilen. Both examples show that some refugees remain at a distance from, or affected by some harsh realities of the labour market. This suggests that for many refugees living in a house in the Netherlands, some more follow up and assistance might be needed to convert ideas and aspirations into concrete plans and actions. This additional work might be needed to bring the seed that Plan Einstein planted to full bloom.

7.5. Conclusions and recommendations

The chapter has shown the extent to which Plan Einstein achieved its intended outcome of improved wellbeing envisaged within its Theory of Change. Plan Einstein set out to halt the negative spiral of wellbeing experienced by ASC residents by engaging asylum seekers in meaningful activities that improved their skills, increased their connections and which ultimately raised participants’ feelings

¹⁴⁵ This used to be the policy stance in the Netherlands. However, it changed to the perspective that learning the language works best when practicing it in (volunteer) jobs (Klaver c.s. 2019). From the interviews it seemed that in many smaller towns, however, the traditional advice seems still prevalent: first language, then a job.

¹⁴⁶ Ghorashi (2005).

¹⁴⁷ Raleigh and Kao (2010) refers to higher and more ambitious educational expectations among migrants than natives. This can be explained by the act of migration itself causing optimism, or occurring before so, since immigrants are a self-selected population.

of productivity, connection, confidence and optimism. Here, we conclude with key messages on how far the project delivered its aims in this domain.

- Participants in the Plan Einstein programme self-reported already quite high levels of wellbeing upon entering the programme. Still many participants reported improved feelings of wellbeing as a direct result of being involved in the Plan Einstein project. They reported feelings of being able to use their time more productively, and contrasted their feelings of boredom and depression experienced in other ASCs with improved feelings of wellbeing while taking part in the project. In particular, we see that after closure, some participants who were placed in other ASCs found the experience negative by comparison, since there were limited activities or opportunities to connect with others.
- Participants benefited from feelings of being connected through being involved in the Plan Einstein project. Their access to common spaces, and experiences of co-learning, co-housing, and encountering and collaborating with professionals were important contributory factors into feelings of being more connected. In particular, many referred to the hard work of a few committed individuals from some of the partner organisations, who made them feel respected and valued. The project gave ASC residents increased insight and understanding into Dutch people, and generated feelings of being respected and understood in turn. In particular, the 'incubator space', away from the COA building and converted through co-design into 'Coffee of the world' by asylum seekers and refugees, tenants, as well as neighbours, was important as a place to feel safe and relaxed enough to make those connections. The project generated too an unexpected outcome of increased bonding social capital and connections to other asylum seekers and refugees. Some of the Syrians reported having found a 'new family', in relationships that flourished particularly by having access to shared, informal space outside the ASC, and being able to use that shared space according to their wishes and needs.
- After a year, refugees report only limited continuity in the connections with Dutch people, but more enduring bonding social capital. Enduring connections were inhibited by language barriers, relative short staying periods in the ASC, as well as being housed relatively far away after having received a staying permit. This is a reflection of the tendency towards dispersal far from reception centres, which weakens those social and professional ties. Most of the connections that they made at Plan Einstein were fleeting, temporary and 'helping' relationships, which were harder to sustain over long distances in place and time.
- One year on, in line with the literature,¹⁴⁸ we found that about half of the refugees in the qualitative sample experienced reasonable optimism about the future. This was closely related to the fact that about half of refugees we interviewed were either studying, in a job, or were involved in volunteering with an eye on accessing the labour market. They felt empowered by having more understanding of Dutch society and better language skills, to help with communication. Plan Einstein's courses, coaching, and informal contacts made important contributions to these feelings. However, we also found half of the sample who still felt their lives were on hold until they had stronger Dutch language skills; their expectations that their lives in the Netherlands would start once they had a house were not really met.

¹⁴⁸ For example, Ghorashi 2005.

- Some asylum seekers and refugees felt they were able to contribute actively to activities in Plan Einstein and, as a result felt more equal, although this could have been developed more. The tendency to participate as consumers or 'guests' rather than as co-producers is a common theme in innovative projects on reception and integration of asylum seekers and refugees. There are 'taken for granted assumptions and expectations'¹⁴⁹ that volunteers and professionals from the native population design, implement and execute activities, or act hosts in spaces in which the project's activities are organised¹⁵⁰. Our research showed that when asylum seekers and refugees were able to share their educational, professional and experiential knowledge in co-produced activities, reciprocity and equality was facilitated. This allows people to feel to be able to contribute to society and boosts their confidence and positive perspectives on the future.
- The results indicate overall that there are positive outcomes for participants to which Plan Einstein contributed, but these must be qualified. Plan Einstein operated within institutional confines of national laws and policy choice, which meant the majority of participants still spent most of their time within the traditional setting of a reception facility for asylum seekers. This had bearings on its success. Qualitative research suggests wellbeing was still of course negatively affected by the limits on personal freedoms of living in an ASC. Some ASC residents were too ill, anxious or depressed to participate in the first place (see 7.1.2) a well known problem for social projects. COA's policies of regular movement and dispersal also exacerbated the weakening of social ties, in some cases leading to participants missing their time at Plan Einstein, since they experienced greater loneliness and lesser social connection once they were housed in municipalities. Utrecht's 'continuous line' policy of housing people in Utrecht if placed in an ASC in the city, an important strategy that underpins the Plan Einstein concept is a way of avoiding that possibility.

Recommendations

The following suggestions are made to politicians, policy-makers and partners involved in building similar initiatives based on the research:

- **Invest in shared, neutral, welcoming and freely accessible open space with co-design by NGOs and participants:** Research in this area again underlined how important shared, physical space for which they felt ownership was for encountering people in an easy way. Such space is vital for building social and professional relations, and both enhancing bridging and bonding social capital.
- **More follow up and assistance would be beneficial beyond the time spent in the ASC.** This would enable those making the transition out of an ASC to maintain confidence in themselves, and keep feeling positive about the future. Interviews with people living in houses in municipalities show many missed the ties they had created and benefited from.
- **Develop opportunities for participants to co-design, co-teach or co-organize activities** and courses, building upon their (professional) experience and expertise. This would enhance reciprocity and might help the U-RLP in further bolstering participants' feelings of self-

¹⁴⁹ Rast & Ghorashi (2017: 196). See also Darling (2011) and Zill et al (2019).

¹⁵⁰ The literature finds that this might be due to internalization of 'normal' processes and relations Zanoni & Janssens (2007).

determination and agency. Build a Plan Einstein as a real 'community of practice' that draws former participants back to contribute.

- **Empower policymakers to address the vision upstream on some of the inconsistencies of the ASC system that affect the acquisition of connections and prove important for labour market activation and social integration.** The Dutch government advisory committee ACVZ observes that the government reception policy's goals conflict with its labour market goals¹⁵¹. In Plan Einstein this was evident in the policies of sudden movement of asylum seekers around large ASCs. It was also evident in policies of dispersing people with status far from the reception centre where they had started to build connections, as well as proscribing Dutch language teaching. The continuous line policy of housing people in Utrecht if placed in an ASC in the city, is an important pillar of the Plan Einstein concept. If this is not enabled by COA the early investments will be weakened. Relatively stable housing and early language training stimulates communication and building social and professional networks. Both enhance wellbeing and help refugees to access the labour market.

¹⁵¹ ACVZ (2017).

8. Results: Governance

In this chapter we consider the governance processes in Plan Einstein, and experiences of cooperation and organisation. The project was innovative in bringing together a network of independent organisations from different sectors, based on principles of equality and a non-hierarchical management. It benefited from direct funding from European funding streams, rather than receiving funding via national government, opening up new possibilities to trial a different method locally. As identified in chapter 1 however, experimenting with this way of working brought challenges in harnessing diverging expectations and styles of working of different organisations. There was also a need to manage relations with organisations outside the partnership. This was particularly crucial with COA, the national agency which maintains responsibility for asylum seekers and their accommodation. This final chapter on results considers the experience of these arrangements and considers how this affected the project outcomes.

The chapter's findings are drawn from qualitative data, especially interviews with project partners, employees, and those people variously affected by official decisions made during the project's operation. We also draw on observations in meetings, especially of the steering group, professional committees and the sounding board of neighbours. We begin by outlining in more detail the organisation and principles of the project. Then we consider how people in the partnership experienced working together, drawing out lessons we can learn around network organisation and non-hierarchical management. Second, we consider relations externally with COA. We conclude by considering some of the implications for project performance, and summarise the lessons learned that can help with transfer of the concept.

8.1. Governance principles of Plan Einstein

According to the Theory of Change, Plan Einstein was to use a new way of working that harnessed the skills and networks of different groups. Thus the project was based on a horizontal network of individuals from different organisations in different sectors, including NGOs, social enterprises, universities and local government. According to theorists, addressing grand challenges of current society are best done through 'mission-oriented innovative policies' which bring together a range of actors, united in non-traditional groupings, coming from different sectors¹⁵². In Plan Einstein, addressing multiple beneficiaries required diversity in partners' particular skills, experience, knowledge and networks. For example, the partnership benefited from the NGOs' understanding of refugees' experience, the social enterprise's access to a large business network, and the educational and academic institutions' expertise in teaching English, knowledge of principles of entrepreneurship and understanding of research principles.

The project management theorised that the network should be based on a principle of equality. There should be limited managerialism and top-down, executive control: the management respected each partner to manage their own area of work according to their own professionalism and skills. Decision-making would be collective: no-one should be ultimately 'in charge' and there should not be too rigid a design, or expectations for those involved, as new ideas should emerge organically. In this way the partnership would be characterized as being a self-steering horizontal network¹⁵³. The partnership should have a 'playful' and creative spirit in testing out their ideas. To

¹⁵² See the economist Mazzucato (2018).

¹⁵³ Provan & Kenis (2007).

help, the partnership was to be informed by an evaluation process based on a living lab methodology that provided some results and feedback along the way, as well as ultimately, some critical reflection and validation of the work undertaken at the end.

In the following sections, we reflect on the experience of this theory in practice, considering how the project's structure and decision-making processes were experienced by those working within the horizontal network (8.2) before considering some of the issues working closely with the government agency of COA, outside the network (8.3).

8.2. Partnership collaboration

First, we consider the experiences of horizontal collaboration within the partnership. In most cases, partners remained committed to the Plan Einstein project, and found it to be an inspiring experience to work with others in the network. They appreciated too the relative freedom and autonomy to trial solutions without too much of an explicit top-down management. Although we spend less time in this chapter examining those positive aspects, the benefits that all partners felt for participants from this collaborative working should not be underestimated. European funding to the local level was vital to enable participants to benefit from a range of partners' expertise and networks. However, in the spirit of learning, we consider some lessons we can take away from the experience, in particular drawing attention to issues around first, the importance of clarity when working in a network arrangement (8.2.1.) and second, issues in building a learning culture (8.2.2.)

8.2.1. Clarity in goals, roles and coordination

The research showed that working in a partnership like this brought some challenges around clarity in three areas: first, in having clear goals of the project, second, clear expectations for roles and responsibilities and third, clarity in on-the-ground coordination. Societal 'missions' are 'more complex because they are less clearly defined and indeed must be co-defined by many stakeholders'¹⁵⁴. With different interests of different groups however, there was a risk of ambiguity. We consider this first in relation to project goals.

8.2.1.1. Project goals

The core goals of the project was of social connection, increased skills and higher wellbeing, as well as delivery of futureproof skills to both asylum seekers (those gaining and those not receiving status) and neighbourhood residents. However, in practice there were challenges in reconciling both the overarching goals and second tier goals as the project unfolded, with the particular interests of professionals, who had quite diverse missions and experiences. This is not necessarily unusual; in cases of complex programmes, there are also contestations over the meaning of the programme, which cannot easily be simplified¹⁵⁵. In addition, not only is reaching agreement on goals challenging because of the organisations' different views on priorities from the outset, it is likely too where there are constraints on a project, as was the case in this instance (see Chapter 4). This requires further shifts in goals as the project adapts, and an ongoing process to manage those shifts. The following three examples show how there were risks of ambiguity however, or even at times, disagreement in Plan Einstein's goals, and this affected the project's operation.

¹⁵⁴ Mazzucato (2018: 804).

¹⁵⁵ Kushner (2016).

a. Involvement of locals in the project: First, researchers noted that some tensions arose in the partnership and neighbourhood over whom the project was for. Was it meant to be of genuine benefit to the neighbourhood, or was it for asylum seekers, where neighbourhood involvement was limited to a means to an end of creating social connections for asylum seekers? In the start-up phase, benefits to both groups helped to sell the project to various parties. Yet, from the beginning, some employees felt the engagement of neighbourhood residents was not clear. One explained:

In the beginning it was also said by [employee removed] oh in the courses only 5 participants from the neighbourhood can participate because it should be 20% from the neighbourhood [...] And then later on they said, 'oh no we want everybody because the asylum seekers were coming later'. They said, 'no, just get everybody you can' [...] So at first it was not really clear what was asked really from us.

As the project evolved, there was quite some ambiguity over who were neighbourhood beneficiaries, with a shift in focus away from NEETs and with the tenants group less connected to the neighbourhood (see 4.1.1). In 2018, advertising of the courses shifted beyond even the city, although not all in the project consortium agreed with this strategy, since they felt the targets should be Oevercht residents. Ultimately those who ran the courses maintained responsibility for whom they accepted on them.

Towards the end of the project, tensions arose again about the status of the neighbourhood in Plan Einstein. If it were a neighbourhood project, the impact of closure (itself a political decision) was profound and required careful management and transition planning. If it were not, moving the concept away was of minimal concern. As it was, the priority became moving the project to the new ASC. Those who joined the project to help the neighbourhood became angry that there was little action on the project's legacy within Overvecht, complaining that it contradicted the project goals 'to give something back'. One project employee said:

It can't be that we do a project here and afterwards it is finished, and then we say, 'thank you Overvecht for trying this' [...] We always said that we do not want that. We want something as a reminder of Plan Einstein here. We know it can't be the shelter, because that was temporary, but we have [to have] something else as well...with the community that was built...the courses that were given. But also the connection with all the different parties that gave a lot of energy. We wanted to keep that. We talked about that a lot of times, also in the steering group. But then, [apparently] it was not what Plan Einstein is about, 'We are going to the Haydnlaan. You cannot discuss it outside' [...] It was not, the support we thought we would get.

b. Bridging contact: The second example refers to the goal of generating contact between asylum seekers, tenants and the broader neighbourhood residents. Key to this goal was the use of the 'incubator'/living room space to meet and socialise. However, in summer 2017, the Socius manager decided that the main doors to the incubator space should be locked, open only for pre-arranged events and in a limited period of four hours a week. This was because Socius held a responsibility for the young tenants, whereby giving public access was feared to pose a security risk to the young people renting units in the building. Several people in the partnership however felt that this outcome contradicted the wider goals of the project of bridging contact. It took from August 2017 to April 2018 to resolve the disagreements between different groups, with partners frustrated at the slow pace of progress caused by difficulties in reconciling their perspectives.

After several months, Socius employed hosts to manage the space in specified working hours, and this solved the issue to the satisfaction of all partners. It took some time because extra funding needed to be found, and suitable hosts needed to be recruited. It meant however that the door had remained closed for almost half of the period in which the project was fully operational. Research confirms this became an obstacle to contact between the tenants, as well as among ASC residents.

c. Future-proof programme: Within the partnership there were different views about the future-proof idea of the education stream. All partners began the project wanting to offer an inclusive program that was open to all asylum seekers whether they would or would not have a permit to stay (or be likely to gain one). However, in reality, there were some concerns raised by partners about the applicability of ‘futureproof’ courses that did not recognise important differences between participants, particularly because the population in the ASC was vastly different than expected. For example, rather than responding to a population arriving in an emergency context as envisaged, over half the inhabitants of that ASC already had obtained, or knew they would obtain a permit when they entered Plan Einstein. Rather than ‘context-independent’ education, there would be greater need for ‘context-relevant’ education as they knew they would remain in the Netherlands. However, in response there was only informal adaptation in the form of the Dutch language taalcafe, as well as further activities provided by Welcome in Utrecht, Radio Einstein and those additionally financed by the municipality to provide additional opportunities (see 2.5).

Moreover, although the notion of inclusive, futureproof education was accepted in principle by all partners, differences of opinion arose when one of the partners started to offer the ‘Start Your Own Business’ training to any participant who wanted to join. Other partners felt that this created difficulties for asylum seekers who would not receive a staying permit, or were still in the long period of applying for status, because they would not be in a position to obtain business permits or loans. The partner who offered the training came from the position of being inclusive to all, where they did not want to know about anyone’s legal position. However, others more experienced in working with asylum seekers found this to be ‘naïve’. Indeed, once all partners had experienced asylum seekers leaving the project because their applications were rejected, and had seen some of the practical difficulties experienced by participants, there was greater understanding. One partner realized the dangers of telling ASC residents that, as one of their employees described: *‘they can be great and you can reach for the moon. Actually, the experience points out that sometimes, you can’t reach for the moon...since for example it is impossible for a refugee to go to a bank and ask for money’*.

Developing a clear understanding of the futureproof idea remains an issue of debate as the project moved forwards into the rather different context of Plan Einstein Haydn. Two employees felt that more understanding on what the concept really meant was very important in the new location, and when working with the Dutch Council for Refugees and COA there, since more people would likely face deportation. One said, *‘I think the problem is if we [the partnership and COA] don’t agree in the beginning...how we define future free [futureproof]. I think we will get [problems]. I’m afraid we’ll have discussions [...]*

8.2.1.2. Clarity of role expectations

The research team found partners reporting some similar challenges in clarity of **role-expectations**. One example is of the role of the host of the freely accessible common space. The partnership had envisaged what the role was, but there were some teething problems in practice, as another employee noted:

I don't think there were many expectations. Uhm.. I think they should have thought it through better from the beginning. When you are a host. Or when there are three...You just can't let it happen.

Another example is with regard to the role of the youth tenants. The arrangement meant that tenants benefited from a lower rent and in exchange were expected to contribute to the renovation and management of the housing. However, tenants felt that they were not clear on what they should do in the project, and without explicit direction from the partnership, faced a lot of implicit expectations from individual different parties as a result. As the research in Chapter 3 shows, as a result, some did not get involved at all and other tenants began to feel burdened by facing a difficult task without support. Ultimately the responsibility fell onto a smaller group who took on more work.

There was evidence of different views between partnership organisations on this issue. Some partners felt that tenants should have concrete obligations to attend events and mix with asylum seekers, as this was a key goal of the project. Four partners and stakeholders suggested that tenants should take more responsibilities or even have this written into their rental contracts in order to stimulate them to take a more active role. Socius employees held a different view, defending the tenants against this expectation, pointing out that the Socius community was not a 'volunteering camp', but it was the tenants' home and it was up to them to take responsibility as they saw fit. According to them, social connections would grow through spontaneous contact (such as coming together to build a snowman when it snows¹⁵⁶) rather than any sense of obligation or regular duty, an observation supported by research, which suggests contact and encounter is best developed spontaneously rather than 'managed'¹⁵⁷.

Tenants themselves, caught between these perspectives revealed in interviews that they felt very confused on expectations of their role. Several felt they were expected to put the '*Einstein idea into practice*', but did not feel clear on what that role would entail. Eve, a tenant for example explained, '*yes I knew it was expected of me that I was present or would add something, but what that was exactly wasn't really clear. I really thought that wasn't clear*'. Janneke also questioned what they were supposed to be doing, as she said, '*maybe it was the intention that we really would organise things out of nothing, but I certainly didn't feel called to do that*'. Some of the ASC inhabitants noticed themselves the different motivations and engagement of tenants (noted in Chapter 5). Amal from Syria observed:

I think most [tenants] chose to live in PE because the rent is cheap and in return, they become part of this small community. I do not think all of them lived there because they really wanted to interact with refugees. Of course, I personally do not have a problem, it is their choice. However, there was a lot of pressure on the few people who wanted to interact with refugees. When only three Dutch youngsters organize one activity, is so hard and makes a lot of pressure [for them].

In the absence of explicit guidance, the tenants became subject to implicit expectations. Femke discussed how she was both irritated by her co-tenants who contributed little, but also pressurised by an unspoken obligation held by some of the partners that she should be 'on duty' all of the time:

¹⁵⁶ See the Socius manual on co-housing produced at the end of the project by Kramer and van Rijswijk (2019).

¹⁵⁷ Wilson (2017).

There have been people who really [did]. Nothing... There are people who I think in those two years I have seen twice at best. There were also people who did absolutely nothing [...] But yeah well, you can't force people if they don't want to. And you can't really present it as a condition. I think, to live there [...] It is also simply your home. And I also found it annoying from time to time when - Yeah, well I am quite busy too - And then at times I came home and people asked me something and I was like, "ja hallo", I live here you know!

I: and who was that then? The refugees?

R: Yes or simply others you know, asking "oh yeah, this evening are you coming?" Then I'm like leave me alone!

Implicit expectations were also present about how the tenants would organise activities. Ostensibly the project was governed by an ethos that participants and partners had freedom to build things organically, a notion built into the project plan. Yet in reality, tenants raised questions about how much 'freedom' there really was. For example, the tenants felt some frustration about the red tape they perceived in accessing funds to bring to life ideas. Some of the tenants were irritated by having to make a formal plan, including a budget, for every activity for which they needed funding. City management on the other hand perceived this as a normal way of working, and felt this was a learning experience for the tenants as well, as they would need to be able to do this in their professional lives later on.

8.2.1.3. Clarity in coordination

Finally, as the project proceeded, partners in the horizontal network requested more clarity in day-to-day management, communication and internal coordination of the initiative. Project management was incredibly challenging, given the ambitious scope of the project, its different aims and objectives, the variety of beneficiaries who were targeted, the range of organisations and employees involved, and the transience and instability of the ASC population. The vision of the partnership as largely self-organizing exacerbated these challenges.

First, there were sometimes assumptions that important issues were communicated to everyone, but in reality, there were oversights. An example was when the 'klankbordgroep' (sounding board for neighbourhood representatives) were not informed by anyone about the arrival of the larger group of asylum seekers in summer 2017, despite this being of great importance for them to know. Second, partners referred to difficulties of even simple, common agreements about the use of space. When the concept transferred to the attic in the ASC at Joseph Haydnlaan, one employee in the partnership observed, '*they need to think about how to manage the space. At the moment, people ring the bell and nobody thinks it's their job to answer it*'. This was a recurring situation, as this had also been an issue in Plan Einstein in Overvecht at times. Resolving these issues should surely be the onus of the users themselves, but they may need facilitation to resolve these issues. With many organisations on board, clear and well communicated groundrules help ease tensions. One employee said:

What I sensed, is that the different layers of the partners, I am not sure if they communicated enough with the agreements we made how to control, how to use the meeting space and the incubator overall, the offices [...] It's not for me to tell [another partner's employee], it's for your manager to tell.

When common agreements were not in place, people from the partnership stepped into the gap and created their own rules, but in a horizontal network that resisted top down leadership, this was not always well received by other partners. For example, one project employee said,

[I was really keen] on keeping it organised. And I changed some rules and I made up some rules about using the incubator, and how to use it, and when to use it, and what not to do there [...] Some of the [employees] upstairs had to get used to that.

To address such tensions, four of the six operational partner organisations expressed that a helpful solution could be an on-the-ground project coordinator. They would be responsible for managing the (often) complicated logistics and communications around the centre's operation, courses and management of space. One employee summarized:

I would say you should have like a coordinator there who does the whole thing about the courses, because the courses, there were a lot of changes every time. There was a plan made in the beginning of the year and then it changed throughout the year. They [course convenors] said, 'no we are starting now on this time, now we are doing the Monday'. And then, 'no we are not doing the Monday anymore, we are starting on not on a Monday at six o'clock, but we are starting at half past four'. Or no, 'we skip this course'. So it was not easy to get it regulated, and if you have people and you inform [them] and say the course will be on Monday or Tuesday, and then the courses are changed again, I had to go back to all the people again and say it changed, 'Is it possible for you?' So it took a lot of time as well.

These issues were raised in the research and evaluation interim report and research policy brief, and as a result, since Summer of 2019, the former neighbourhood facilitator from Overvecht was employed to work to with the program manager to resolve some practical issues such as the door and the timetables and locations for the lessons.

Such reactions were not unusual. The literature shows that self-steering horizontal networks, such as the Plan Einstein partnership, tend not to have contracts which set exact definitions of their goals and targets beforehand, and do not have top down leadership¹⁵⁸. Working in this way in networks thrives when there are high levels of trust among partners, built through face to face regular meetings and when the network is relatively small (with a maximum of around ten partners). However, a precondition for this process to work well is that partners perceive that they achieve positive intermediate outcomes, like 'small wins'. They also need to develop a shared understanding of the goals of the project and the definition of the problem they are working on. They need to identify common values too¹⁵⁹. Leadership needs to facilitate this ongoing process of defining and refining shared goals and common values, and this will lead to increased levels of trust.

If a common understanding is absent however, partners can disagree on perceptions on outcomes. For example, in the case of access to the incubator space discussed in 8.2.1.1., keeping the space closed was a positive outcome for only one partner, enabling them to meet their goal of safeguarding tenants. It was not experienced as such for several others however, since it contradicted their goal of creating an open meeting space. Without reflection on the common goal, there was evidence of some partners becoming unsatisfied and asking for more leadership (despite

¹⁵⁸ Provan & Kenis (2008).

¹⁵⁹ Ansell & Gash (2007).

the fact that horizontal networks in practice do not accept top down hierarchical leadership¹⁶⁰). For example, as one employee expressed:

I think there should be, like in Plan Einstein, if you have a project like that, it has to be clear who is in the lead. If you have one who is in the lead, it should be someone you give a mandate and who gets a mandate to be in the lead.

Many of the partners expressed the view that there needed to be stewardship to facilitate agreement. This would speed up the slow pace of decision-making, and solve the protracted disagreements (such as on the open or closed door to the incubator space). This would create a way of structurally managing differences of opinion, and of building trust through leadership that allows all partners to have an equal say and to learn from trial and error.

8.2.2. Learning culture

Having discussed clarity in goals, responsibilities and coordination as a major requirement of partnership working, we also consider the second challenge of fostering a learning culture. The UIA initiative funds innovative projects that are allowed to experiment in order to generate learning to share from the experience. Here then we consider what interview and observation data tells us about how that principle was experienced in practice, in terms of how far a learning culture developed. There are two points of relevance: first was the culture around the project. Second were the opportunities and experiences for feedback, self-reflection and learning.

Celebrating a positive story

First, there was an understandable tendency to identify and celebrate success, by drawing attention to the positive impacts of Plan Einstein. Some of this was encouraged through an emphasis on transferability in the UIA funding scheme. This obliged the partnership to open up the project to interest and scrutiny from local, national and European policymakers (see the project webpage <http://www.uia-initiative.eu/en/uia-cities/utrecht>). This external communication was important to help encourage other cities to consider embedding similar ideas into their own strategies. It was also important to develop a strong external positive presentation because Plan Einstein was a politically controversial initiative. Therefore, the local government engaged in monitoring of print and social media reporting and responses to Plan Einstein, in order to manage any possible backlash. It also developed a media strategy that sought positive coverage of the centre's work, while also trying to safeguard people's privacy and prevent the experiment from turning into a 'fishbowl' experience for participants.

The media analysis (From 1st January 2016 to 1st March 2019) undertaken by the research team shows that Plan Einstein received most attention in *AD/Utrechts nieuwsblad* and *De Telegraaf*, both national popular newspapers with a local supplement. News reports from January 2016 initially focused on hostility towards the asylum seeker centre expressed in the information meetings with the neighbourhood¹⁶¹, while television news crews also came to Overvecht to report on public opinion¹⁶². This had news value as it connected with media reports on protest against asylum seeker centres elsewhere. Subsequent articles reported that information meetings were lively, but

¹⁶⁰ Provan & Kenis (2008).

¹⁶¹ "Verzet tegen ASC Utrecht", *AD Utrechts Nieuwsblad* 11-1-2016; "Rumoer op Utrechtse informatieavond ASC" *NRC Handelsblad* 12-1-2016)

¹⁶² "Danny zoekt problemen", *Powned*, 25-5-2016

demonstrations remained peaceful¹⁶³. In the remaining months of 2016, the delays to the asylum centre opening led to only limited media attention, with only incidental reports on decisions the size, costs and opening date of the ASC¹⁶⁴ and delays in opening¹⁶⁵. When Plan Einstein opened in late 2016 and the small number of asylum seekers moved in early 2017, there was also some attention¹⁶⁶.

Once the centre was open, news reports on the operation of the U-RLP program were almost exclusively positive. They reported on activities taking place in and around the ASC, including the Wijksafari¹⁶⁷, the COA asylum centre open day¹⁶⁸, Einstein's 'Coffee of the World' initiative¹⁶⁹ and a Summer programme of activities¹⁷⁰. In the final months of the project, media reported on impending closure of the centre and possibility of extension¹⁷¹. The news reports were actively managed by the project consortium through press releases. Organised visits to the ASC were enabled and journalists were brought into contact with individual asylum seekers and neighbours who changed their opinion on the ASC¹⁷².



Figure 8-1 Einstein's coffee of the world trial



In other ways, Plan Einstein attracted a great deal of external interest. In line with the



Figure 8-2: The Wijksafari

communications strategy of the project application, the project team hosted multiple visits from mayors and aldermen, high ranking national civil servants, MPs and policy advisory boards. It also fielded numerous enquiries from researchers and documentary makers interested in the project. So too there were visits from the national COA management board, and managers from other COA reception facilities. Many European politicians and civil servants visited too, especially during the EURO CITIES

¹⁶³ e.g. "Kalm protest tegen asielopvang", Telegraaf 10-2-2016; "Boosheid blijft ingetogen"(AD Utrechts nieuwsblad 20-1-2016)

¹⁶⁴ "Gemeenteraad: In toekomst minder vluchtelingen per locatie", AD Utrechts nieuwsblad 12-2-2016; "Opvang Utrecht wordt een mix, AD Utrechts nieuwsblad 31-5-2016

¹⁶⁵ "Noodopvang Einsteindreef waarschijnlijk in Juli open" Stadsblad, 27-4-2016; "Uitstel komt asielzoekers", Telegraaf 8-7-2016; "Waar blijven die asielzoekers?", Volkskrant 9-9-2016; "Weer uitstel van opvang in pand Einsteindreef", AD Utrechts Nieuwsblad, 14-10-2016; "Asielopvang februari open", AD Utrechts nieuwsblad 17-12-2016)

¹⁶⁶ Intrek eerste asielzoekers", Telegraaf 24-2-2017; "En daar zijn ze dan, alle zeven...", AD Utrechts Dagblad, 2-3-2017.

¹⁶⁷¹⁶⁷"Indrukwekkend Wijksafari ASC dwingt tot open blik", NRC Handelsblad 29-5-2017

¹⁶⁸ Jongeren en vluchtelingen één grote familie in ASC Overvecht, NOS 23-9-2017

¹⁶⁹ "Vluchtelingen en wijkbewoners starten samen culturele koffieplek in Overvecht" Algemeen Dagblad, 19-6-2018

¹⁷⁰ "Asielzoekers kijken ogen uit op Utrecht Centraal" Algemeen Dagblad, 9-8-2018

¹⁷¹ "Asielopvang mogelijk jaar langer open" AD Utrechts nieuwsblad 6-10-2018; "Plan Einstein blijft dicht nu college verzoek COA afwijst" AD Utrechts nieuwsblad 10-10-2018.

¹⁷² "Dima Kadri, Syrian refugee, opens up about her life in the Netherlands", Euronews, 6-6-2018; "Ries was fel tegen ASC maar is nu helemaal om" NPO de Nieuwe Buur, 16-11-2018; "Ries en Mireille gaan het ASC missen", AD Utrechts Nieuwsblad 10-10-2018.

Social Affairs Forum¹⁷³. In some ways, Plan Einstein became a public attraction: National television made a documentary on Overvecht ‘Typically Overvecht’ in which Plan Einstein’s hosts of the incubator space and some youngsters performed¹⁷⁴. When the national news reported on the national open day of asylum centres, it featured Plan Einstein with Director of COA, Gerard Bakker as exemplary of ‘COA 2.0’, referring to the new way that COA would seek to work¹⁷⁵. Subsequently the development of *Radio Einstein* and the *wijksafari* (see Chapter 2) also increased exposure. As a result, a positive public narrative on the intervention’s effects was built up. When the evaluation interim report was discussed in the local government, news coverage also focused on positive findings about the initiative, informed by the accompanying press release by the city administration.¹⁷⁶

The attention was beneficial in many ways, enabling support to be gained for this project, and giving opportunities for participants themselves to present their views. On the other hand, as the governance literature shows, high-profile public exposure can be difficult to reconcile with innovation and learning¹⁷⁷, since experimenting often necessarily involve learning from mistakes. An example of this tension can be seen in initially different responses between the local authority and tenants to a spontaneous event that occurred in the early days of Plan Einstein, an occasion Femke a local tenant described as ‘hilarious’. Suddenly a boy shouted, ‘really loudly ‘Allah Akbar’ and we were like, what the fuck, you can’t do that’. Rather than being upset, the ASC residents apparently found it to be funny and explained ‘everyone had had a great time’. The hijinks were captured on film and made public on Facebook. However, tensions emerged as the project management team at the local government expressed concern. The tenants expressed how as a result, they felt observed by managers and this had counterproductive effects. The events indicate how offering youngsters the freedom to build contact organically, a vital part of experimentation brought risks.

Second, the research found that some people within the partnership were critical that the positive focus inhibited a more critical and self-reflective look at the project, and on what it could do better. One of the employees said:

When people are talking about the project, it’s all hallelujah and great. And I see the good points, of course, it’s a good project. But you can improve it [...] And the other people are always celebrating what they are doing. And that’s a good thing, we can learn from that as well [...] but yeah, being a bit more critical, that’s good as well.

We now turn to focus on that issue specifically.

Opportunities for reflection

In this section, we consider the possibilities for collective reflection. First, the evaluation noted that four of the partner organisations referred to what they perceived as the absence of structural opportunities to reflect collectively. The steering group met monthly or at regular intervals with the agenda open for partners to include issues they would like to discuss. During these meetings the evaluation team provided insights from ongoing research. However, some professionals believed

¹⁷³ <http://www.eurocities.eu/eurocities/allcontent/EUROCITIES-Social-Affairs-Forum-in-Utrecht-on-7-8-March-2018-WSPO-ASLEPN>

¹⁷⁴ <https://www.duic.nl/cultuur/bnnvara-maakt-docuserie-typisch-overvecht/>

¹⁷⁵ <https://nos.nl/uitzending/27734-nos-journaal.html>: see quotes at 11m18s-12m28s; and see also <https://nos.nl/artikel/2194464-jongeren-en-vluchtelingen-een-grote-familie-in-ASC-overvecht.html>¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁶ “Aanpak rond ASC succesvol, AD Utrechts Nieuwsblad 15-2-2019; “Plan Einstein gaat als succes boeken in” Telegraaf 15-2-2019.

¹⁷⁷ Bason 2010, Bekkers, Edelenbos, Steijn 2011.

there needed to be more collective opportunities to talk about what worked for them, what they were learning as the programme was developing and how to use the research. Three employees explained that at the steering group, there was not enough space for this, and that at each meeting, important issues (such as the decision on the door opening or not) were 'kicked down the road', indicating again the difficulties in reconciling different points of view. Another employee said: *'the point was taken away. We will do it later'*. One explained:

And it was not that we said what our lessons are. What do we find from it or no...? [...] I think we learned a lot of lessons. And I asked several times, 'can we discuss the lessons together?' because I know what I got from it and I talk to some other people with it, but I think it is good to have the discussions together. What are our lessons? What have we learned together? And then we can go on. We only had the discussions in the steering group. People first said no we first have to wait for the report of [the evaluation], but we had the [interim] report, we never discussed it anymore because well people were already thinking about 2.0 [Haydnlaan]. I thought, well, I think it is a missed opportunity also in the process.

In the new location, one of the partners began to adopt a lead role in facilitating learning because the partnership had expressed a need for more discussion on lessons learned. However, some other partners felt that it should not be the role of one of the partners to take the lead, and the employee was asked not to pursue this further, meaning the opportunity for collective reflection was missed. Following that, the program manager of the municipality took up this role. According to project managers, they have now talked with all of the organizations about lessons learned, what activities should be continued, changed, or added in the activities provided, to enhance the project's implementation in Plan Einstein Haydn.

Second, the opportunities for collective reflection were felt to be inhibited by the emphasis on success, since it moved partners to focus on their own goals. A consequence of this was that some felt they were working in a silo'd way and that this overrode the sense of collaboration (an issue raised by interviewees from five organisations) and generated defensiveness about the approaches used. Some employees felt that if they raised an issue for discussion, other partners would immediately defend their approach. One employee said:

R1: We really thought it was a pity, because I told [employee] in the beginning, already in the beginning [we were thinking] 'well we don't reach everybody'. It's a pity because it's a big, big project and a lot of money is involved, so why can't the courses change or something? But it was a bit like, rigid, or something. But that was really a pity, and I felt also that people were a bit...

R2: So they put translators in the courses.

R1: But they didn't change the courses. It was difficult to talk about at the beginning, I had the feeling because people felt offended [...] So I feel that is a missed chance.

R2: And that's still the case [...] The feeling of being offended, when you want to give feedback and there's always the feeling of being offended, and that's a pity because you want to take the project further and that was – is- one of the objectives, to learn from the project and to grow.

Indeed, it was pointed out that some beneficiaries noticed this culture too. For example, an employee was talking to a resident of the ASC who mentioned that *'he had noticed some difficulties in cooperation, difficulties in the project'*. They said:

One of the refugees, told me, I know him well, told me, when we were talking about the processes 'What have you seen in Plan Einstein?' He told me what he had seen about [...] when he was with some events, for example the Social Affairs Forum. What he saw was that the different partners, in a way, wanted to present themselves as the best. And for him that was strange, because he thought it was meant [that they wanted] to be the best together, to be good together, the best as possible together. What he also had seen, that there was a way of criticising each other.

8.3. Cooperation with external stakeholders

The second interesting aspect of the governance of Plan Einstein was in the vertical relationships with national government and its agencies. Scholars have identified a 'new localism' and 'local turn' within migration policymaking¹⁷⁸, referring to the trend of cities to adopt their own policy responses, at times at odds with the national trend. Within Plan Einstein, this was facilitated by funding from the European Urban Innovative Action initiative directly to the city. As the funding was only for a temporary project, the partnership still had to consider how to continue the plan as the initiative transferred to the new site in Oog in Al, which was owned by COA. Building cooperative relationships with COA as an external stakeholder became one of the more difficult and defining challenges of the Einstein experience. First, we examine the cooperation within the Overvecht pilot, before considering the challenges as the project transferred to its new site.

8.3.1. External cooperation in Plan Einstein, Overvecht

European funding direct to the city gave new opportunities for the local turn in managing asylum seeker and refugee reception to gain traction in Utrecht. A local politician explained that it helped to have '*financial support from the European Union without the interception of The Hague, of the national government. It's a direct line between us and Brussels*'. Both he and another politician referred to how this support also gave the project a symbolic credibility, especially because it was only 1 in 4 projects on migration approved in the first UIA call and 1 of 18 projects out of a total of 378 projects that applied. This, they explained, led to the national government and also COA becoming more supportive of the project.

However, the local government still had to develop its vision under the existing framework of refugee reception according to national policy and delivered through COA. Rather than challenge outright the existing approaches through 'decoupling' from national government, local policymakers negotiated within existing frameworks to bring Plan Einstein into being¹⁷⁹. Local politicians were looking for ways to cooperate that led, as one expressed it, to '*wins for both*', respecting that COA's position was governed by financial efficiency, whereas the city's agenda was for positive local impact. This meant working from the outset with COA, which was a very important stakeholder in the pilot experience in Overvecht, but not a partner. COA played a key role in managing the accommodation of the asylum seekers in the ASC, and in determining who was moved in and out. Its personnel worked in the same complex, while it offered its own existing provision of courses to residents (such as Dutch and ~~Voorkwerk~~ *Voorkwerk* to those who had status). At the national level, as the project developed, the collaboration process was distant. There were some contacts between city management and COA national management and a lot of interest from COA in how the project would fare. For example, the project partners and municipality were invited by the COA board to explain the Plan Einstein concept on the national managers' day of COA managers.

¹⁷⁸ See Bak Jørgensen (2012) and Scholten (2013) in line with a more general point Barber (2013) has made.

¹⁷⁹ Geuijen, Oliver & Dekker (2019).

COA's role outside of the partnership however had important implications for Plan Einstein's implementation. At times, its actions facilitated the achievement of goals. For example, the population living in Plan Einstein had more permits to stay for family reunification than is usual in other ASCs¹⁸⁰. This influenced inhabitant's attitudes positively, creating a nicer environment in the ASC, which was beneficial for Plan Einstein. At other times, its actions inhibited the project's aims. For example, the project was unable to start properly, as COA experienced multiple delays (up to a year) in moving in asylum seekers to the ASC at the beginning of the project. The project was also affected by COA's sudden removal of asylum seekers from the ASC before the end of the project in the Summer of 2018, with limited and last-minute communication of the intent to do so. This negatively affected the morale of those involved in Plan Einstein. A young Iranian refugee Leilani, involved in redesigning the coffee space explained *'it felt like this is for nothing, we did everything for nothing'*. Another project employee described how *'everybody was stunned'*:

When I came back from holidays. Halfway through August. First thing I heard was do you know that almost half of all the people [ASC residents] are gone already? And I heard of the sad stories about people crying [...] but also about decisions [affecting] people that were really connected to a network here, [who] were placed far from Utrecht. We were just building networks around these people and then they have to go away [...] So it was frustrating for the people who worked on Plan Einstein, but also for Socius here. Because it came so suddenly.

At the shop-floor level, relations between COA and the Plan Einstein partnership were good at the beginning. COA staff were enthusiastic about the initiative. They attended steering group meetings to participate in relevant discussions and they helped with crucial tasks like inviting asylum seekers to attend the courses. However, relations worsened over the course of the project. The local COA manager, while still being aware of Plan Einstein's potentials and real successes, became more critical about the project. He felt that the project had missed opportunities to improve things. The COA local manager explained:

I think a lot of opportunities were not taken... For example with reaching out to target groups like Eritreans... They could have invited us to help them with this. After all, in this collaboration it is us, COA, who has the expertise on how to activate people from different cultures... And also with the Socius tenants, it just does not work... it would have been better if COA would have been invited to be part of the preparations of this project, even though we were not part of the formal EU partnership. Then we would have been able to make some crucial suggestions...but we were not invited...and there is no daily contact point for us...But I still think it is a success... I just want to make it even better.

COA was invited to be a partner in the project, but in the end, offered a letter of support rather than becoming a full partner. This likely had consequences for cooperation during the project.

8.3.2. External cooperation in transferring to Plan Einstein, Haydnlaan

From Summer 2018 onward, the partnership began planning to transfer the key principles of the Plan Einstein concept to the Joseph Haydnlaan centre, an existing ASC because of the political commitment to close Plan Einstein in Overvecht in October 2018. This entailed COA and the partnership working towards the same end goal. However, cooperation has proved challenging, with

¹⁸⁰ There were different accounts of whether this was a result of serendipity or not.

The policy shift brought some overlap and blurring of responsibilities. This can be seen for example in the fact that at the European level both COA and the city of Utrecht gained (separate) funding for their activities. While Utrecht local government gained direct funding from the UIA initiative, COA was granted separate AMIF-FLO funding (European funding that is distributed by the national government) to stimulate innovation of a similar nature. COA received funding from 2018 to late 2020 to run four pilot and experimental shelters, building on the experience of Plan Einstein and a similar experiment with shared living in Nijmegen Stieltjesstraat¹⁸². The AMIF FLO funded pilots were to be based at different operational COA locations, and would run for a minimum of 1.5 years. The aims were to create more flexible reception capacity, strengthening integration, participation and societal support in the immediate vicinity of the ASC.

The second reason for tension was that the city management and some organisations within the partnership felt there were differences between themselves and COA, because of their differing mandates, which would affect Plan Einstein's implementation in existing COA-run ASCs. COA combines social work tasks with deportation tasks but the local government's view was that its dominant role was to protect the border in the most financially efficient way. This they felt was in contrast to both the local government responsibility to secure cohesion locally and other NGO partners' goals to support asylum seekers to come to their own decisions. One employee pointed out:

¹⁸¹ <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/migratie/programma-flexibilisering-asielketen>

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[asylum seekers] to decide. We give them information. But we never would like..We would not bother [people with] 'you have to return'.

The different rationales for operating and different styles of working of COA and the partnership would, they argued, lead to very different outcomes. Initially, that was seen as a productive tension, but in practice as Plan Einstein transferred to the new location, the more ideological differences created more substantial challenges as from the outset, both factions had very different ideas for the project in the new setting. For example, COA preferred the incubator space to be a more commercial venture, run under their jurisdiction by a professional barista, where asylum seekers were working for small payments. The local government wanted a freely accessible and open place where coffee could be offered for free, and which would provide a space for the whole ASC community, especially since a majority of those in the centre have no work permits and would be unable to work there. Differences in opinion about core content of the project has, at moments, deteriorated into a full conflict at the local management level, inhibiting decision-making on how to proceed. Decisions on the new 'shared space' for asylum seekers and neighbours has taken time, and at the time of writing, the main activities remain only in the attic space rented by the core Plan Einstein team.

Despite these issues at the local management level, at the time of the research, relations between professionals at the shopfloor level continue well. COA professionals collaborate with professionals of all other partners, especially once the city management team had appointed a local coordinator to manage daily business. However, the national change of policy and the national shift in COA's perspective on its responsibilities, as well as the city's perspective on its responsibilities on integration and social cohesion, has had severe implications at the management level. This has affected Plan Einstein's scaling to another location until this point in time.

In the current period, at the time of writing this report (November 2019) the context is shifting. COA is currently 5,000 asylum seeker places short nationally¹⁸³. This is due first, to increasing waiting periods before asylum requests are handled, and second, movement out of ASCs hindered by a social housing deficit (which also affects the Dutch population). Moreover return rates to the country of origin of rejected asylum-seekers are also below numbers required. As such, the Dutch reception centre system is now the subject of policy debate, since more flexibility is required. This raises the possibility that the municipalities might be placed in a position to manage integration at an earlier stage, and have more responsibility especially where centres might be specifically tailored to host residence permit refugees waiting for independent housing and those likely to be granted asylum.

8.4. Conclusions: lessons learned and recommendations

In this chapter, we have considered some of the issues raised by new modes of organizing and working in the horizontal network, within the bounds of national arrangements. Plan Einstein was an innovative venture and several lessons have been learned as a result. We make the following conclusions:

- **Direct EU funding to the local level was very important to enable an innovative network of local actors with different expertise, to come together to address the problems of asylum**

¹⁸³ NOS (2019a). For example in November 2019, asylum seekers are now being accommodated in the sports hall of Budel AZC (NOS 2019b).

seeker reception. The direct collaboration allowed the project to adapt to respond to unforeseen circumstances.

Participants in Plan Einstein were able to benefit from the diverse and complementary skills offered by the range of people, from different organizations, some of whom had not worked with this target group before. Overall, the outcomes show that this holistic approach was beneficial for participants, ensuring they were supported to be able to join the project, and could gain from the different skills, competencies and networks of those organisations.

- **The project management adopted a horizontal network arrangement based on equal relations between partners. This had benefits but there were challenges as partners and beneficiaries found the goals, role-expectations and coordination to be ambiguous at times.**

In adopting a network arrangement, the project managers avoided a ‘top down’ management approach, whereby the self-steering group did not set out exact definitions of goals and targets beforehand. This is appropriate to the challenge of addressing a ‘wicked issue’ with a variety of partners. However, the research found that requests for clearer leadership emerged when partners become unsatisfied with results, especially if smaller groups or individuals imposed decisions that were not easily accepted by other partners (as this type of top-down decision-making is not easily accepted by others). Ultimately, ambiguity in goals could create disappointment when the project did not turn out to be what people had imagined from their own perspective. Some expectations were not met and partners retreated to work at times in a silo-d way.

- **The project came under the international spotlight** as a result of the funder’s emphasis on sharing and transferability, great interest in the project from researchers and the media, as well as the partnership’s external communications strategy. This was **helpful for experimentation and adaptation, but could make it more difficult to highlight areas of the project in need of reform.**
- **Evaluation provided valuable information to feed into the project as it developed. However some partners expressed a desire for more opportunity for collective reflections on, criticism of, and revision to, the initiative as it evolved.** Some key players felt there were ‘missed opportunities’ for improvements to the project.

The partnership were aware that the project was about learning, as much as accountability. However, embedding that required a conscious shift from an orientation to project ‘action’ to look quizzically over what was being done. This was difficult in the circumstances because in the Plan Einstein experience, the partnership was already playing ‘catch-up’ in the first year of the project because of the slower and delayed arrival of asylum seekers. This placed pressure on them to deliver the same in a more and more constrained project duration. The research found that as the project developed, there were limited structural opportunities built in for partners to develop collectively as ‘reflexive practitioners’. Some stakeholders and partners felt some of the difficult questions they were raising could have led to stronger or wider impacts if space had been given to their discussion. As a result, some commentators referred to ‘missed opportunities’ for improvements in the project.

In Summer 2019, these issues were acted upon by the municipality, which sought to assess with all the participating partners what was learned, what could be prolonged and what should be renewed for implementation in Plan Einstein Haydn. Arrangements were made around the content of the

futureproof entrepreneurship courses, additional activities from *Radio Einstein* and theatre workshops built in, and Plan Einstein's concept was expanded to the Voorkamer in Lombok. In this way other opportunities for less educated ASC residents were built in, including the continuation of courses such as 'my first E-mail', run by Utrecht university/InclUUsion which had been introduced in Plan Einstein Overvecht. Neutral, common spaces for meetings between the neighbourhood and ASC residents are being provided in Oog in Al and Kanaleneiland. The attic space in Plan Einstein Haydn is also open to both groups, although there are some drawbacks with this space since it needs to be accessed by ringing a bell and walking up several flights of steps. The existing, free, open space of the Voorkamer in Lombok, is also an example of how the Plan Einstein concept might be expanded to different neighbourhoods and provide different types of opportunities for less well educated people.

This indicates that the messages from research been taken and learning from the project's lessons is occurring as the UIA funding stopped. There is also potential for some other issues to be addressed in the future. For example, from 2021, the responsibility of integration will be taken by municipalities. Future national developments, such as the potential of housing people with a high chance of getting, and those who already have, a residence permit in integration centres, would give opportunities to offer Dutch lessons, an issue raised by this evaluation.

- **The local turn in managing asylum seeker and refugee reception has led to tensions with the national agency. These remain challenging to resolve.**

The research showed that some tensions were created in multi-level governance between local partnership action and the national agency. The project emerged from opportunities for more local action on asylum seeker reception through the trend towards localism and practically through European funding direct to the city. Relationships started out cooperatively, as the partnership operated within the broader framework set out by COA, which did not become a partner in the project. The agency's actions were at times helpful to the initiative, and at other times inhibited the partnership fully achieving its goals. There were heightened tensions as the concept of Plan Einstein transferred to the existing ASC, which has been managed by COA for many years. These resulted from policy shifts at the national level, which have led to some blurring of responsibilities.

A motion in national parliament in 2018¹⁸⁴ was approved that suggested that the Plan Einstein concept should be transferred in the asylum centres in the Netherlands. However there remain differences in ideology and organisational priorities between the local government and COA around the topic. The local government saw the concept of Plan Einstein as a plan to be managed by the urban authority, rather than be run in a fundamentally different way by a national agency. The tensions have affected Plan Einstein's scaling to another location across the city. In the meantime, the municipality of Utrecht has built more horizontal alliances across Europe to explore other ways of developing the concept¹⁸⁵.

Recommendations

The conclusions point to some key recommendations for governance mechanisms:

¹⁸⁴ Motion Segers/Paternotte to explore the possibilities of broader implementation of Plan Einstein:

<https://www.parlementairemonitor.nl/9353000/1/j9vvij5epmj1ey0/vktmd1gyerzm>

¹⁸⁵ For example, the local government are working with the Municipality of Antwerpen (Belgium) and Fedasil (the national reception agency for refugees in Belgium) on a common European Social Fund project. The 'your global future' project will use moral psychology and a renewed offer of the entrepreneurship courses from Utrecht University.

- **Partnerships would benefit from developing mechanisms for ‘facilitative leadership’¹⁸⁶.**

Partnerships benefit from cooperative relations rather than top-down management, developed over time and through trust, with a mission that adapts rather than being too strongly defined beforehand. However, partners do need to develop a shared understanding of the goals of the project, the definition of the problem and be able to identify common values. Leaders play a crucial role in supporting the network in these processes.

As such, for this particular style of leadership where leaders do not set the rules at the outset but play an important role in continually assisting partners to reflect and discuss preferred outcomes and processes which best achieve these. They act as ‘stewards’ or ‘metagovernors’ of a network¹⁸⁷, while partners within the network take roles as ‘mediators’ and ‘catalysts’. Facilitating the network to thrive must involve creating high levels of trust among a small group of partners, through face to face regular meetings. Partners must also achieve positive intermediate outcomes, like ‘small wins’ to help in building trust. Embedding such mechanisms would help resolve some of the challenges evident in managing local networks.

- **Build in opportunities for reflection and self-appraisal as structural requirements throughout a project to assist the partnership’s shift towards a learning culture.**

Projects such as Plan Einstein could benefit from more time to collectively co-define the project goals and develop collectively agreed mechanisms for leadership (as above). Collective discussions occurred in the beginning of the project, as the proposal was co-developed and, according to the council, towards the end of the project in identifying opportunities for the future. Structurally embedding further opportunities in the middle period to reflect and to learn as the project develops –and ensuring the results of those discussions are built into reporting to funders– would help shift the project culture to a culture of learning. It would also help in releasing some of the inevitable tensions of collectively addressing the complex problems Urban Innovative Actions seek to solve. It could ensure the findings of interim evaluations are used in a structured way, and support the cultural change for self-criticism and reflective learning to improve the reach and effects of a programme. Space and time for reflection is especially called for in a project of such complexity, where the diversity and changing nature of participants is possibly the only consistent element, and adaptability of the programme to the population is continually required.

- **Create opportunities for regular contact of local policymakers at the national strategic level in order for local experiences to inform and influence policy.**

Plan Einstein revealed some fractures in approaches between local and national government to the question of asylum seeker reception. These relate to different priorities and organisational logics, directly capturing the challenges involved in responding to this ‘wicked issue’. Such perspectives are not easily resolved, and cooperative working remains a challenge. However, learning from experiences from local initiatives such as Plan Einstein is highly valuable, especially at moments where a more flexible asylum chain is being considered¹⁸⁸. The evaluation recommends creating opportunities for dialogue, with mediation if necessary, to enable mutual learning to occur. The

¹⁸⁶ Ansell & Gash (2007).

¹⁸⁷ Ansell & Gash (2012) and Sorensen & Torfing (2009, 2011, 2012).

¹⁸⁸ In the Netherlands, the flexibilisation of the asylum chain:
<https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/migratie/programma-flexibiliseren-asielketen>

approval of the motion in national parliament to have the Plan Einstein concept more widely implemented in the Netherlands is an opportunity to develop these conversations.

9. Conclusions and Recommendations

Evaluation findings

The Utrecht Refugee Launchpad, otherwise known as Plan Einstein, aimed to develop an innovative solution to the challenge of asylum seeker reception between late 2016 and late 2019. The innovation confronted three central challenges: first, the need to develop an approach that took community cohesion seriously, that engaged with concerns of the public and aimed to offer ‘something back’ to the neighbourhood. Second, it aimed to address too the problems of arrested labour market activation experienced by asylum seekers while their legal status is being determined, recognising how legal insecurity hampers economic integration whether in the Netherlands or in future professional lives elsewhere. Finally, it sought to address the ways in which legal insecurity and the limbo period of waiting on a decision can lead to worsening mental health, creating passivity rather than agency for asylum seekers. The evaluation report has provided a wealth of evidence to consider the extent to which Plan Einstein achieved these goals in creating better relations in the neighbourhood, improved chances for labour market integration and enhanced wellbeing.

It is clear that Plan Einstein delivered a significant range of activities, as Chapter 4 well documents. The evaluation examined the extent that those living within Plan Einstein and neighbourhood residents surrounding it experienced changes in their lives as a result. It also sought to understand more about for whom it worked and why. Using the notion of generative causation embedded in a Theory of Change Approach, the research team examined evidence of outcomes generated, and considered the likelihood that Plan Einstein contributed to these outcomes. The research team generated a rich ‘ecology of evidence’¹⁸⁹ through mixed methods research to generate empirical findings as well as through interrogating other data sources and research literature. This enabled the evaluation team to consider whether the outcomes observed were likely related to Plan Einstein, or could be explained by other likely alternative explanations. Assessed against the theory of change about how the project would lead to desired outcomes, the evaluation concludes that:

- **Plan Einstein had some impact in generating good relations in the neighbourhood, but could have gone further to do so by earlier developing a vibrant, free, open community space**

The evaluation found that neighbourhood attitudes were less hostile than anticipated and this benign response stayed stable as Plan Einstein developed. This is a common story, and research showed that the moderately positive reactions were a result of the ASC not being noticed and there being fewer problems than anticipated. Engagement from the broader neighbourhood increased over time, although visits for these people were often incidental. A minority of neighbourhood members attended on a regular basis, with up to 50% of courses were attended by those from the neighbourhood. These participants were often of refugee and migrant background themselves, and there was a core group of youth tenants living on site who were active, although for many others, engagement was limited.

Within the broader neighbourhood, there was no significant increase measured in contact between residents of the neighbourhood and the ASC, but contact occurred on a smaller scale between some tenants living on site and the minority attending classes. Contact led to neighbourly relations. Helpful conditions that were vitally important to building relationships was shared physical space,

¹⁸⁹ Sridharan and Nakaima (2012:378).

especially when openly accessible and co-designed to make it welcoming and pleasant. Engaging in collaborative activities through the classes too was important. Tenants as well as ASC residents found it easier to make connections when there was equality in numbers and they shared similar backgrounds. The model imposed through ASC accommodation meant adjacent housing rather than co-living, while high numbers and transience in the ASC population created some challenges in building and maintaining contact.

- **Plan Einstein contributed to (some) asylum seekers and neighbourhood residents increasing skills and connections to help with early labour market activation.**

The evaluation concludes that participants were able to use Plan Einstein as a helpful means of starting to make the transition to the labour market. It equipped ASC and neighbourhood residents with skills, as well as other valuable capacities like confidence, knowledge, insight into Dutch society, skills in team-working etc. Particularly important was the *personalised* encouragement, made through connections made between participants, local business people and professionals, which helped participants demystify Dutch systems and navigate unfamiliar procedures in a new country. At present, the evaluation found there is no statistically significant difference in dependence on welfare benefits for the Plan Einstein ASC participants than the larger refugee population in Utrecht, but this would not be expected until after a longer period¹⁹⁰. However qualitative research showed that half were engaged in activities to enter the labour market or formal education while the remainder were learning Dutch.

We conclude that the project worked well for participants who already had good levels of education, but could have more actively considered how to meet the very diverse needs, skills and profiles of other residents of the asylum seeker centre. Entrepreneurship is not so accessible or desirable for everyone, and a programme of this kind, while keeping an inclusive orientation, should recognise the impacts that legal status, age, gender and other vectors of difference have important impacts on outcomes. The research cannot draw conclusions on the value of ‘futureproof’ education for those who did not receive a residence permit, since the sample was rather atypical. Many in this particular ASC, knew they would get status, or had it already. For them the Dutch language would have been at least of equal merit to the subjects studied.

- **Plan Einstein contributed to asylum seekers and neighbourhood residents increased wellbeing.**

The evaluation found strong evidence that residents in both the ASC and neighbourhood experienced greater levels of mental wellbeing in self reports, and that they attributed this to Plan Einstein. The sample had higher levels of wellbeing to begin with, but nevertheless many compared their experiences in Plan Einstein as a place where they used time more productively in contrast to feelings of boredom and depression experienced in other ASCs. Many felt motivated again by being able to conceive of professional futures. They felt more connected, safe, relaxed and at home in the physical spaces of the projects; more valued and respected by the connections made, particularly with highly committed individuals from some of the partner organisations. An additional benefit was the possibilities to generate increased bonding social capital created with other asylum seekers and refugees, with some relationships flourishing through the access to shared, informal space beyond the asylum seeker centre. When ASC residents were able to share their educational, professional and experiential knowledge in co-produced activities, this facilitated important feelings

¹⁹⁰ Research by the national and local government shows that most refugees start to leave welfare benefits for jobs or education after finishing civic integration (on average after 32-33 months) (see CBS, 2019; Fonville, 2019).

of being able to contribute, but enabling participants to act as co-producers, rather than consumers or 'guests' could be further developed.

The longer term effects of the project, once people moved on into housing, were more mixed. Those experiencing improved professional outlooks remained optimistic about their future, but others learning Dutch still felt their lives were on hold until they had stronger Dutch language skills. They also found only limited continuity in the connections made with Dutch people, with relationships inhibited by language barriers, short periods of residence in the centre and for over half the participants, being placed far away from the municipality. As a result, the research found that many missed the Plan Einstein experience as they experienced greater loneliness and fewer social connections once they moved into a house in Utrecht or other municipalities.

Finally, the evaluation notes the project's effect on wellbeing was weakened by its operation within institutional confines of national law and policy. The research assessed mainly the wellbeing of those participating, but we were less able to gain evidence on those ASC residents less interested in taking part, or too ill, anxious or depressed to participate in the first place. Although there were notable improvements in wellbeing for participants, asylum seekers continued to face considerable challenges to agency, time-use and ability to connect. These were not helped by having to live in large ASCs governed by changes, often sudden, and without notice, in the movement of populations, and, for many gaining status, being placed far from the city.

- **Plan Einstein's model of operating as a horizontal network to implement local solutions was beneficial, but not without challenge**

The evaluation found Plan Einstein's organisation that brought together a network of organisations from different sectors to experiment locally, through direct European funding to the city, offered a promising way of working. It might have benefited from more (structurally supported) opportunities to collectively reflect on, develop and revise the Plan Einstein plan as it evolved. However, the requirement to present the vision of the project externally to European stakeholders and nationally in the media, placed the project under a spotlight. That was helpful in a number of ways to the experimentation and adaptation that is vital for responding to an unpredictable and shifting situation. Yet the attention could make it more difficult to highlight areas of the project in need of reform and give space to opportunities for improvements to the project as it adapted.

Reflections

In reflecting on Plan Einstein's considerable achievements and the remaining challenges to the ongoing initiative, we observe that the project made significant inroads into addressing some of the problems associated with asylum seeker reception. It attracted neighbours to the premises, particularly those interested in refugees and those with refugee or migrant backgrounds themselves. The project also addressed several barriers to social and economic integration faced by refugees. Cognitive factors were targeted, by helping participants improving language skills and gain knowledge about Dutch systems through education. The project also provided valuable opportunities for work experience and networking. Finally, it addressed health related factors by improving psychological health and encouraging more social connection and productive time-use. There were other barriers it could do less about, including institutional challenges created through the asylum process. These include lengthy asylum procedures and movement on a frequent basis of asylum seekers through multiple reception centres (often with little notice). They also include continued relocation for many people, beyond the city once given status (despite the local government's action to discourage this through its *continuous line* policy). Finally, it could not do

much to address the structural and demographic factors that make it easier for some people to integrate than others (young, male, educated and from certain countries) and its choice of inclusive and undifferentiated education downplayed those differences.

Therefore, we note that Plan Einstein provides an emerging solution to some of the key challenges in asylum seeker reception. Very importantly however, the three-year experiment has offered great opportunities to learn from the experiment. At the end-point of the project, the research team can propose an amended Theory of Change (see Content Appendix 3) that integrates some of those learnings. On the one hand, this makes it much more clear what conditions are needed for success to occur. As the project began, the partnership were not in the position to articulate fully what the assumptions were, or conditions that would be needed to build success. After three years, the partnership is left with a much clearer idea of what external influences affect the project, and both enable and constrain success. These include issues like having a facilitating and supporting political context and acknowledging that legal status will affect whether people are able to develop business ideas. It also acknowledges more of the intermediate steps that emerged out of the intervention to facilitate the outcomes. This includes the importance of building a hub which other organisations can join, an important intermediary step which Plan Einstein managed very well. It also suggests inclusion of new opportunities for participants to collectively co-design spaces and contribute activities themselves. It builds in recognition too of how contact of asylum seekers with each other is important to lead to more feelings of connection and confidence, as well as those with people from the surrounding areas. It includes a diversified programme offer where asylum seekers and refugees themselves can contribute, and understands how these lead to intermediary feelings of confidence that are basic for making any further steps.

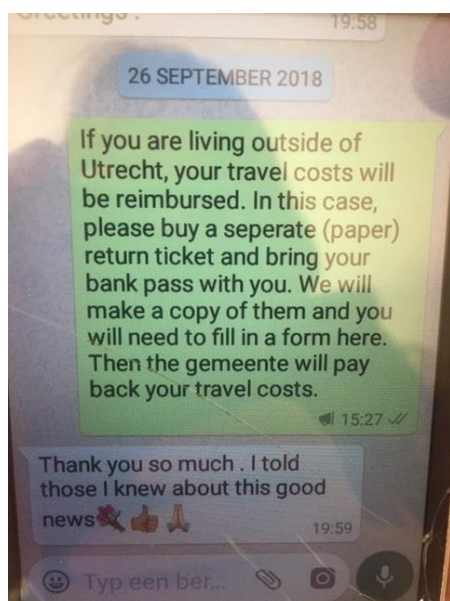


Figure 9-1: The partnership facilitating participants to attend the Plan Einstein reunion

Indeed, it is at this point that Plan Einstein really makes the difference. Plan Einstein does not work by fundamentally changing people's situation immediately. Only for few people did it directly lead them to jobs and strong and enduring friendships. In the short period of time it was able to operate, and in circumstances where the average stay of asylum seekers in Overvecht was only just over four months, it would be unwise to claim or think it could do this. Rather the strength of Plan Einstein lies in the way it encourages asylum seekers to make relationships, enables them to gain more confidence over their fate and future, and helps them deal with circumstances as they are. It attends to psychosocial issues, of building confidence, know-how and hope. It invests in connections of asylum seekers with each other, with dedicated personnel, people in the locality of reception centres and more distant contacts within local and national (business) environments. In recognising the power of connection, it addresses social networks as a key facilitator of integration.

Existing initiatives often see investing in skills as a way of improving outcomes, but Plan Einstein also placed weight on developing asylum seekers' (and some neighbourhood participants') confidence, local understanding and aspirations. The innovation recognised those psychosocial aspects as necessities, not luxuries in helping participants make the 'transition towards the transition' to the labour market and social integration. 'Rehumanising' individuals is seen as vital in facilitating people

to make the first steps towards activation and social integration: helping people move from dependency and isolation of 'knowing no-one' and 'having no idea', to 'knowing someone' and having 'some idea'. The concept of Plan Einstein does not change the bigger institutional processes of reception (certainly these remain problematic) but in developing alternatives within it, challenges the dominant rationale and its operational logics.

Recommendations

As we move on from the evaluation, the next steps are to build on this emerging solution, and to encourage the city team, and other cities to explore Plan Einstein's full potential. In doing so, the evaluation team make the following synthesis of all recommendations to politicians, policy-makers and partners involved in building similar initiatives:

- **Be sensitive to, but not be overly driven by dominant narratives of hostility** emerging from the neighbourhood. Negative reactions may be initially dominant, but likely subside once an asylum seeker centre opens. Adopting a low-key communication approach may mean losing opportunities to engage a silent, receptive, majority.
- **Be clear on the vision for the broader neighbourhood:** is it enough to maintain peace and have asylum seeker centre and neighbourhood populations 'rub along'? Or should they aim to build relations more substantially and create a vibrant community centre? If it is the latter, this requires an unambiguous strategy, with goals aimed at lowering the threshold for neighbourhood residents to visit, and understanding of the dynamics, needs and demographic compositions of both populations to establish common ground (e.g. engaging children and their parents from the centre and the neighbourhood).
- **Think relationally rather than territorially.** Consider engaging active participants as change-makers and neighbourhood ambassadors. Rather than thinking in terms of the project territory, explore how the project can capitalize on existing spaces and sites of activity and connection, such as neighbourhood centres, local playgrounds, schools and sports halls, as well as exploit social networks in the neighbourhood. This can help to develop enduring relationships and enhance the benefits of the project in the neighbourhood even if the site itself is closed.
- **Invest in neutral, welcoming, freely accessible common spaces** (with space for living and working, kitchen areas and outdoor spaces). These should be openly accessible spaces without restrictive rules and surveillance. Such spaces are vital in creating conditions conducive for social and professional contact. The centre's physical design should be really inviting for outsiders and all participants to want to come in, so it is important to consider how the physical design and institutional environment of fences and car parks might be re-designed to become inviting spaces. The spaces should be open beyond office-hours.
- **Facilitate co-housing or adjacent housing of asylum seekers and refugees with young tenants** by a similar composition and size of both groups, living conditions, and through access to shared space which allows for casual encounters (see above).

- **Facilitate co-housing or adjacent housing of asylum seekers and refugees with young tenants** with a similar composition and more equality in the size of both groups, living conditions. Provide access to shared space which allows for casual encounters (see above).
- **Give it time.** A project that sets out to create connections between people needs time for trust to develop, and relationships to grow. Plan Einstein was limited by a very constrained time-scale; if a time-scale must be set, do so in terms of project duration rather than end date.
- **Create a diverse educational programme offer.** Asylum seekers represent very diverse populations, with vastly different levels of education, skill, language competencies and demographic profiles, facing different outcomes, with centre populations varying between locations and over time. Adaptability is key. Responding to those needs might require separate provision for particular groups at risk of exclusion. It might entail offering more practical skills and vocational training in addition to academic offers, or specialised teaching for (or by) highly-skilled residents. Be prepared to revise the programme, especially if, given the profile, populations would also benefit from learning the national language. If offering this is politically sensitive, examine how the project can offer informal – if not formal – opportunities for national language learning.
- **Extend support beyond participants' time at the centre:** Turning business ideas and labour market access into reality is a medium-term process, requiring extended support beyond the project's territory and time. Extending support would bridge the gap between the supportive environment of Plan Einstein and the at times harsh reality of the labour market that some refugees experienced, particularly when working below their skill level. Follow up assistance would help those making the transition to maintain confidence in themselves. It would also be valuable in building a community of practice, as well as providing examples of success related to the centre's activities.
- **Develop opportunities for participants to co-design, co-teach, co-organize spaces, activities and courses and be involved in research.** This would enhance reciprocity and might help in further bolstering participants' feelings of self-determination and agency. Build a real 'community of practice' that draws former participants back to contribute.
- **Empower policymakers to address the vision upstream** on inconsistencies between the goals of asylum seeker reception policy and labour market policy. Expose the contradictions between on the one hand unstable housing, constant movement through large ASCs, dispersal of refugees far from the reception centres where they build connections, and prohibiting early national language teaching, and, on the other hand, labour market and social integration.
- **Develop mechanisms for 'facilitative leadership',** where leaders function as stewards of a network, assist partners to reflect and discuss preferred outcomes, and agree clear ground rules and processes to achieve them.
- **Consider how funders could shift their project reporting towards facilitating and capturing learning.** Giving opportunities for space to collectively reflect on project goals and develop evaluation approaches before the project action begins would be beneficial. Mandating reflection and self-appraisal at specific moments throughout a project would help to improve the reach and effects of a programme. Ensuring these outcomes are embedded in

reporting structures to funders would support a cultural shift towards learning rather than accountability. It could ensure findings of developmental evaluation are used in a more structured way, and encourage a culture of self-criticism and reflective learning to improve outcomes.

- **Create opportunities for regular contact of local policymakers at the national strategic level in order for local experiences to inform and influence policy.** There are challenges and tensions raised by local policy working alongside national government on the challenge of asylum seeker reception. However, it is important to learn from local initiatives such as Plan Einstein, especially when considering a more flexible asylum chain, and create opportunities for dialogue and mutual learning.

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Content Appendix

1. Theory of Change: initial

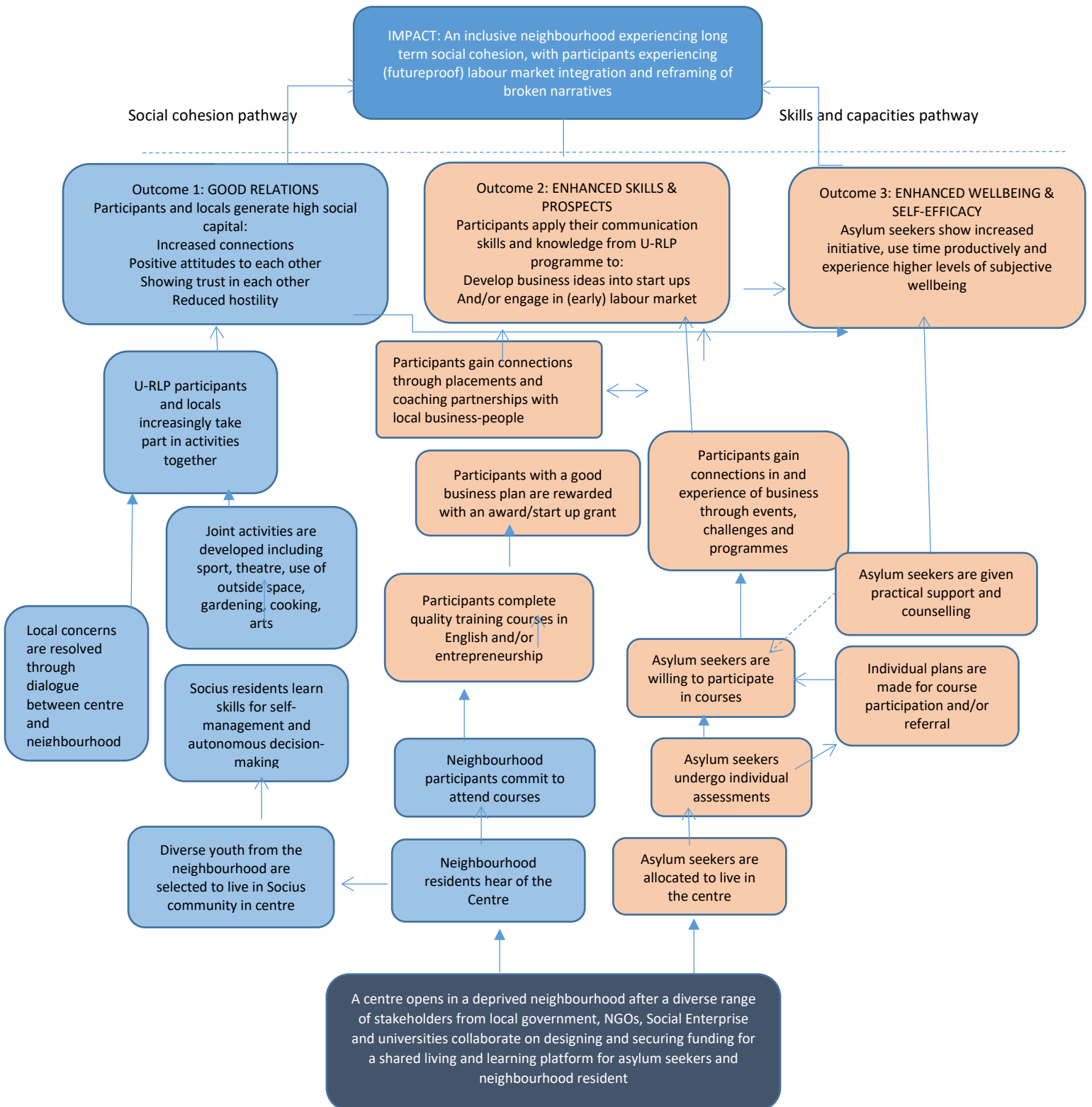
Theory of Change approaches to evaluation provide a full understanding of the steps needed to reach a long term change that addresses a complex social problem, and seeks to articulate the reasoning that are behind the steps leading to that change. The steps taken to develop a theory of change in this evaluation are identified¹⁹¹ as follows:

1. Identify a long-term goal or vision. This likely extends beyond the timescale of the project and addresses a local or national problem
2. Conduct ‘backwards mapping’ to identify the preconditions [outcomes] to achieve the goal. What are the necessary outcomes that you need to see by the end of your programme? What are the shorter term outcomes and outputs that will help you achieve those targets?
3. Identify the interventions that your initiative will perform to create these preconditions: What activities will bring about the background change and what resources can be brought to do so?
4. Develop indicators for each precondition [outcome] that will be used to assess the performance of the interventions.
5. Write a narrative that can be used to summarise the various moving parts in your theory. This programme theory should be plausible, doable and testable. This means that in addition to doing the programme work, the programme can be open to evaluation through having a high degree of specificity around outcomes.

In the initial period of the evaluation, we held conversations with every partner to understand how partners conceived of the project. A theory of change workshop was undertaken to encourage partners to do ‘backwards mapping’ on activities, to break the main outcomes down into interim preconditions. From this, the theory of change on the next page was developed. Its narrative is included in the main body of the evaluation report.

¹⁹¹ By Blamey and McKenzie (2007) using Anderson (2005)

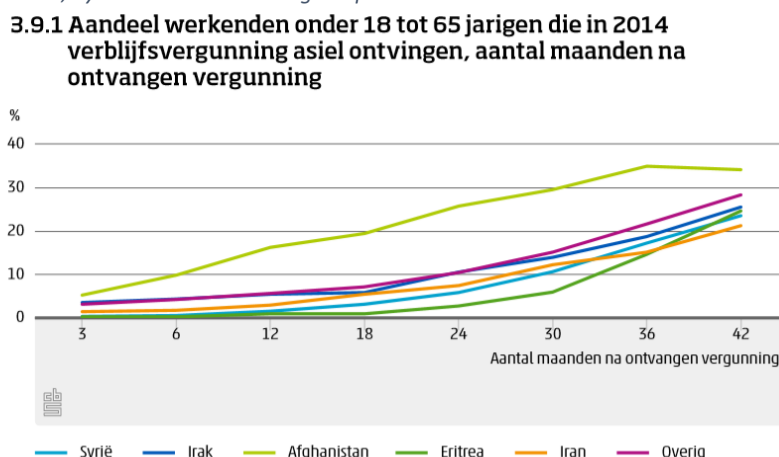
The vision: To develop an inclusive approach to asylum seeker reception and integration, which beginning from day one connects newcomers with neighbourhood residents through learning and living together, and encourages participation in a mutually supportive and cohesive neighbourhood, giving both constituents better opportunities for the future.



2. National picture of labour market integration and welfare benefits for refugees

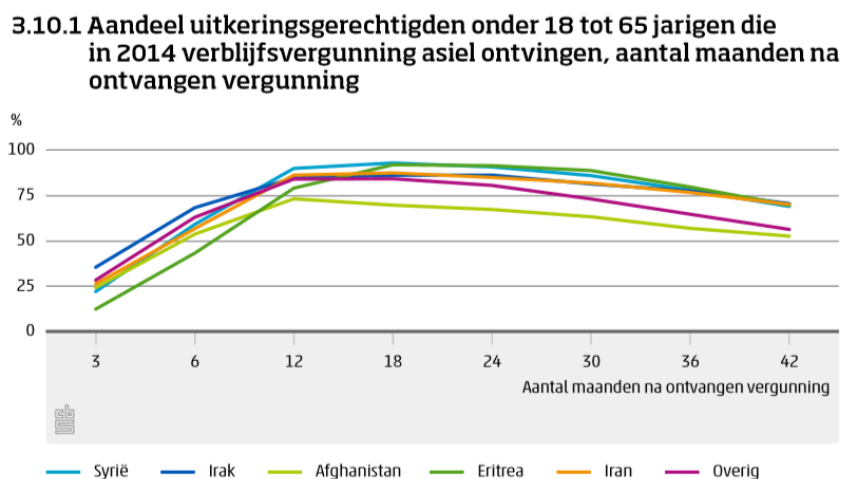
Of the national cohort of refugees who received a residence permit in 2014, 11% had a job after 30 months¹⁹². After that time, labor market participation increased because most refugees have then completed civic integration. Evidence from April 2019 shows that after 42 months (3.5 years) 25% of adult permit holders entered a job, with slight differences between countries of origin. However, employment obtained is of a particular sort: 81% of them do not work full time and 89% have a temporary contract (CBS, 2019).

Figure 6.1.(App): Proportion of people working from under 18 to 65 years old, who received an asylum seeker residents' permit in 2014, by month since receiving the permit



Permit holders start receiving welfare benefits after leaving an ASC and moving into a house. 18 months after receiving a residence permit, 90 per cent of the 2014 cohort was still receiving welfare benefits. Two years later, 42 months after receiving a residence permit, 67% of the group was receiving welfare benefits. This also includes some permit holders with part time jobs who receive additional benefits to have a basic income level (CBS, 2019).

Figure 6.2 (App): Proportion of people accessing welfare benefits from under 18 to 65 years old, who received an asylum seeker residents' permit in 2014, by month since receiving the permit



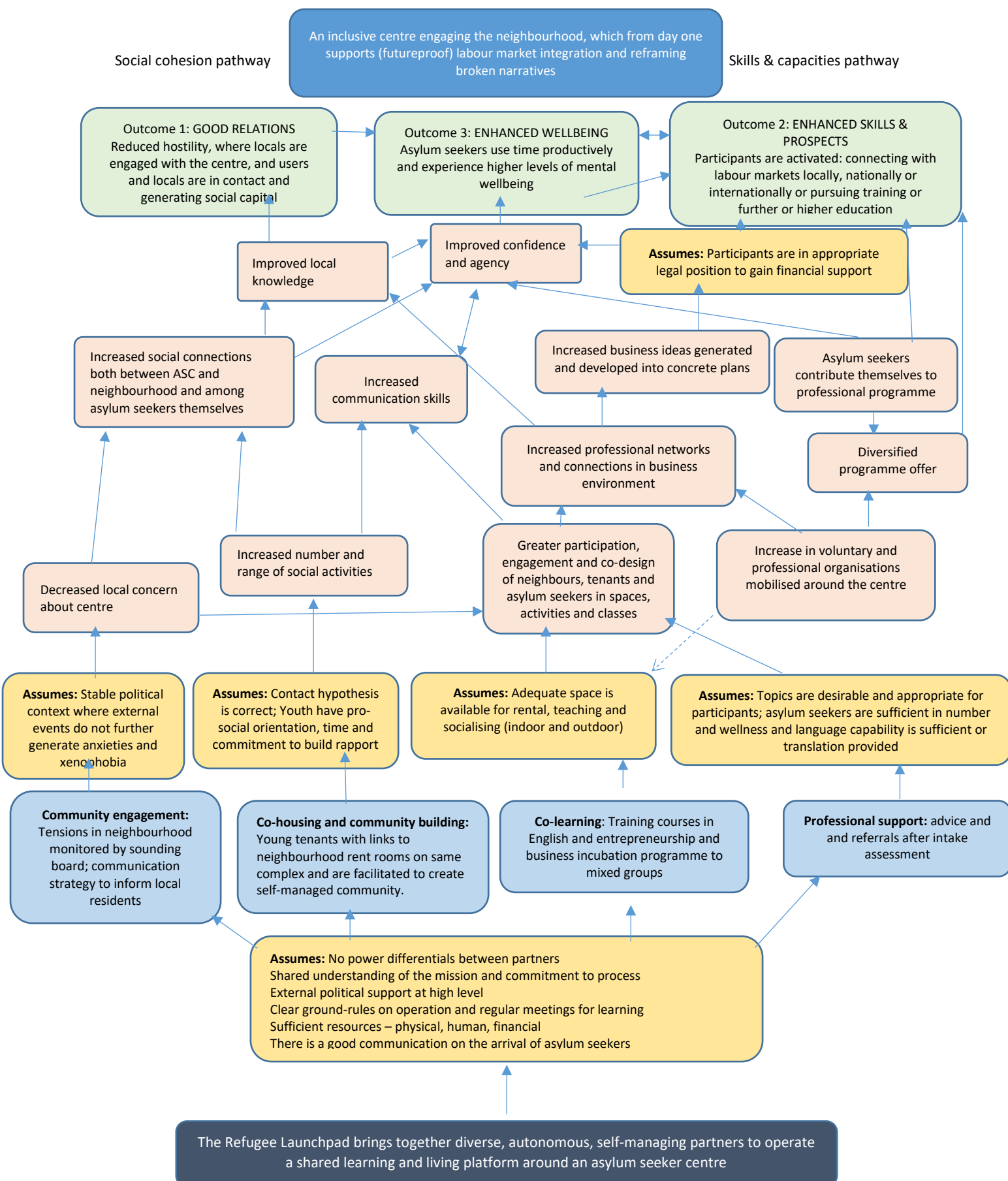
¹⁹² CBS (2019).

3. Theory of Change: end of project (October 2019)

Social cohesion pathway

An inclusive centre engaging the neighbourhood, which from day one supports (futureproof) labour market integration and reframing broken narratives

Skills & capacities pathway



Methodological Appendix

The following methodological appendices provide full details on methods, sampling, creation of research instruments and piloting.

1. Challenges in evaluation and limitations to the research methodology

In this section, we explain in this section some of the complex and challenging conditions in which the evaluation operated, and discuss how these constrained the design and execution of the research.

Data availability

First, the project's timing and logistics initially compromised the start of the evaluation as collecting baseline data at the start of the initiative proved impossible. The project started only a week after the funding decision was announced, since Plan Einstein was already going to operate in some capacity regardless of the funding. Therefore, it opened at the same time that the partnership was notified that they had been successful in securing the European funding. Research however could not begin until we had agreed an evaluation design with the partnership, based on clarified outcomes. We also had to obtain ethical approval for research and access sample frames (e.g. neighbourhood addresses). We needed time too in order for information and permissions protocols to be put in place and to recruit the local research team. The implications were that the youth tenants had already moved in (from November 2016) and the first intakes of asylum seekers occurred in February 2017 before data collection began.

Second, generating sustained evidence on asylum seekers after leaving the centre proved difficult. In case of the NOA assessments taken by the asylum seekers, it was impossible to replicate the assessment to show change in the longer-term, as we initially considered. The assessment was used in a one-off manner and it operated as a commercial product. This meant that there was associated sensitivity about sharing questions and scales. There was a logistical challenge of administering a survey again especially since many participants left the city after they left the centre. Re-administering the 3-hour survey was particularly a challenge given the instability of the population of people accessing and leaving the intervention at any time, where flow was unpredictable, and there were differing times of entry, periods and levels of engagement for participants (see 3.3).

To capture some quantitative evidence on participants' outcomes, we worked with Utrecht local government to provide an analysis of participants' use of welfare benefits in comparison with other permit-holders in the city. However, this proved a protracted exercise, requiring detailed administrative work to link city (work and income department) and Refugee Council records, while ensuring compliance with the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). Moreover, as we concluded, there has been only a limited period over which to assess change, when ideally a longer time-period would be needed to see any change in hard measures of integration outcomes.

Third, in assessing the credibility of evidence gained, we have to consider the selection bias within the sample. Firstly, participants in the U-RLP evaluation may not be representative of the larger group of asylum seekers seen in the Netherlands, especially since it appeared in the centre's activities that few participating were refused status, an aspect considered in 4.2.1. and Chapter 6. Second, many of our sample are those who participated in the project. Although all asylum seekers

in the centre were informed and encouraged by the Dutch Council for Refugees to take part, actual participants were self-selecting in opting to do the courses. To overcome this, we attempted as far as possible given the practical limitations to include in the qualitative research sample those who had not participated (in both the neighbourhood and AZC). This enabled us to investigate why they did not participate and enabled some important conclusions to be drawn on engagement and accessibility (see Chapters 5 and 6). However, while we could obviously recruit participants in the project easily, we could not easily access asylum seeker non-participants living alongside participants in Einsteindreef AZC as there is no public access to the building. This meant we were reliant on COA to mediate for us in the early stages of qualitative research, and likewise reliant on the Dutch Council on Refugees in order to help us follow up with participants once they left, who were highly mobile across the Netherlands and beyond (see explanation of sampling in detailed accounts in methodological appendix 4.2.1).

Despite the impossibility of conducting a pre-test and challenges of collecting repeated quantitative data, we optimised the situation by collecting data in two waves: in the early stages of the initiative and after the centre had closed. Where possible, we have supplemented the quantitative data with other sources on Plan Einstein participants' longer-term trajectories, particularly for outcome 2, on skills and labour market activation. We adopted two measurement points with minimally a year to maximally 18 months between the two waves of data collection. This meant insights could still be drawn on changes in key measures, albeit recognising that the first measure was only as close to the start as practicalities allowed, and we would have to rely on other less reliable measures (qualitative accounts of past situations) at times to create a picture of pre-project conditions. Using a wave approach however also enabled a modified sequential approach in mixed methods, whereby the insights of earlier findings informed later research instruments. This allowed us not only to replicate the same questions in a pre and post design but to ask new questions to test further our analysis, and meet the objective to *understand* how the project worked. It also enabled us to investigate and probe factors such as how likely it would be for improvements to be seen without the intervention.

Data quality

Capturing good quality quantitative evidence on asylum seekers can also be challenging for numerous reasons. Participating in tests can pose quite a burden on people in difficult situations. There is also a risk that people participating might be (although not necessarily) more inclined to offer positive comments on a service that they are currently receiving. The best solution was to make use of the NOA assessment, already used by the local government to gain a thorough examination of asylum seekers' backgrounds (see methodological appendix, 3.1). This gave some quantitative insight into asylum seeker and refugees and baseline scores on key measures as they entered the programme. However, as it operated as a commercial product, there was associated sensitivity about sharing questions and scales. Also, there are issues of social desirability as some participants saw it as a test. For example, in our qualitative research, at least four participants referred to experiencing the NOA as 'a test', whereby people wanted to 'score' well to make a good impression. Elham, from Afghanistan explained his views on the NOA assessment:

...Let's be honest... these newcomers, they are in a situation [where] they also have insecurities. So maybe they are not 100% accurate on what they are typing on that laptop.... [and] they are mostly from Middle East countries, [where] there it is like, 'government will decide anything'. So they were like 'OK, let's show off', [so] that they will think, 'okay this guy

is really something... and that they will help me,' and think 'OK, he is very useful as a newcomer to our society'.

Issues of social desirability probably also played a role in asylum seekers' responses to class evaluations. Even though we adapted forms that have been used and validated in a higher education setting, asylum seekers may have provided overly positive responses in order not to seem ungrateful for the course offer. To mitigate this, we used a mixed method approach complementing quantitative evidence with intensive qualitative research. Furthermore, researchers always stressed that they were independent evaluators. While we felt at times that some asylum seekers may not have been clear about the distinction of roles and saw us as part of 'the project', some of the critical reflections elicited suggested we were at least quite successful in overcoming this potential limitation.

Parts 2, 3 and 4 of this methodological appendix provide further details on methods, sampling, creation of research instruments, piloting; it also explains how validity was ensured in terms of measurement and design, description and interpretation.

2. Ethical considerations

Given the sensitive nature of the subject matter and the dynamics of working in close proximity as researchers to policymakers (see Chapter 1) the evaluation called for great care in ethical responsibilities and when practically administering the research. Ethical approval was sought from Roehampton University and subsequently University College London (as the PI moved institutions in 2019) where their Research Ethics committees gave permission for the fieldwork to be undertaken. This followed detailed applications, which explained the procedures and safeguards undertaken.

The research followed standard ethical practices supported by professional bodies and our employers to engage in ethical research practice. First, we sought informed consent by participants throughout the research. We gave survey respondents an explanation of the purpose, outcomes and details about data privacy. Before commencing the surveys, they had to indicate they understood this information and responses were anonymous. Prior to qualitative interviews, we gave participants information about their contribution to the evaluation, explaining the use of recording devices and how their personal data would be used. We obtained signed consent from most participants taking part in face-to-face interviews, although in the case of some asylum seekers, and partners with whom we had very open communication, verbal consent was obtained through an agreed protocol. Pseudonyms are used throughout.

However, at times, there were more broad dilemmas created by the team being reliant on policymakers and partners for data and access to participants, while simultaneously acting as their evaluators. Requests for data and information sometimes took a long time, and at times aroused suspicion, even though our goal was to independently garner evidence on the initiative. The sensitivity of the subject matter exacerbated this tension; for example, when preparing to research conditions in the neighbourhood we had to gain the local government's approval to proceed since they were concerned that the survey itself would inflame tensions or be misused. They were concerned that neighbourhood meetings had been hijacked by right-wing agitators, and the survey might well be open to misuse too. Therefore, we had to take additional steps to ensure that groups looking to influence results could not exploit the survey. We set up personal codes linked to individual addresses, and also opted to recruit and train researchers to administer the research face to face rather than online or on paper. While we attempted to respect the local government's concerns, we trod a fine line. For example, although we shared with them early versions of research instruments, we resisted any suggestions that they had to approve the questions we asked.

Similar ethical and practical complications arose with accessing the asylum seekers' NOA assessment data and city-level information on welfare benefits, as these data were managed through a variety of external gatekeepers. For example, to get access to the NOA intake assessments, we had to add in a clause for permissions for research use to the Dutch Council on Refugee's protocol, that they used at their first meetings with asylum seekers. We had to gain permission from the Local government to secure access to the asylum seekers' NOA intake assessment data once they gave informed consent, as the local government was the 'owner' of these data. However, these data were in practice administered and measured by an external organisation, so further steps needed to be taken to gain access to results without compromising confidentiality. This involved devising a system for the Dutch Council for Refugees to allocate and manage individual usercodes and to link these with assessments undertaken, so when the external organisation sent us datafiles, they did not contain names or identifying features, such as date of birth.

Negotiating these additional ethical considerations had implications for meeting standard practices of evaluation, for example creating delays in baseline measurement. The reliance caused some

tension too: our goal was to gain access to these data in order to independently assess participants' outcomes, with an ethical responsibility to a wider body of people than the partnership. However at times that goal could be misinterpreted, and rendered us vulnerable to being cast in the unwanted role of being data-hungry researchers, and liable to being cut off from vital data sources if we pushed too hard on our requests.

3. Quantitative research:

3.1. The NOA intake assessment

The NOA assessment tool is purchased by municipalities and NGOs across the Netherlands, and has been used with refugees since 2016. It was designed by a Dutch psychological consultancy agency which develops psychological tests and assessments for work and educational-related purposes. NOA developed the 'Persoonsprofielscan Vluchtelingen' (Personal profile scan for refugees, PPS-V) based on assessments that were developed for unemployed. The full assessment consists of:

- Sociodemographic questions;
- Two general mental ability (GMA) subtests;
- Scales for self-reported competencies, personality traits, and work motivation;
- A post-traumatic stress disorder checklist (the PCL-5; Blevins, Weathers, Davis, Witte, & Domino, 2015);
- A measure of psychological distress (the K10; Kessler et al., 2002);
- and a Dutch and an English language proficiency test.

The assessment tool was developed in Dutch and it has subsequently been translated into other languages including English, standard Arabic, Tigrinya and Farsi by a certified translation agency. They developed the tool too with attention for cultural diversity¹⁹³. Since this a commercial product, the research team were not given full background to all survey response scales, thus we can only access selected results.

As there were potential incentives associated with assessment results (i.e. opportunities in work and education) the developers suggest that the participants were motivated to respond honestly to the questionnaires and perform well on the ability tests. This supports the validity of the research findings (Duckworth, Quinn, Lynam, Loeber, & Stouthamer-Loeber, 2011). At the same time, our qualitative interviews indicate that asylum seekers experienced the assessment as an 'exam' or test on which they had to perform well, which might have led to socially desirable answers. We have therefore taken caution with interpretation of the assessment results.

All asylum seekers residing at Plan Einstein were invited to take the assessment, being informed by email and information meetings by the Dutch Council for Refugees. They undertook the assessments on computers purchased by the project on Plan Einstein premises. A consent form for re-use of assessment data for the evaluation study was introduced on August 24, 2017. Between this date and the end of the project, 150 asylum seekers who took the assessment gave consent for re-use of their assessment data. Information from COA indicates that until May 2018, 558 asylum seekers between the ages of 18 and 65 have lived in U-RLP. The 150 assessments represent therefore 26.9% of all asylum seekers living at the Einsteindreef ASC.

¹⁹³ <https://noa-vu.nl/producten/online-tests/re-integratietests/persoonsprofiel-scan-vluchtelingen/>

3.2. Door-to-door neighbourhood surveys

A door-to-door survey among a random sample of 1500 addresses within a 1 km radius around the centre was conducted twice. The first survey took place between October 18 until December 17, 2017. The second survey took place between September 25 until October 31, 2018. The samples were randomly drawn from a file with 6552 registered addresses in the area around the ASC that was provided by the city of Utrecht.

During each round of the survey, a team of trained research assistants went door to door and visited each address at least to two times on different occasions. Most addresses were visited three times. After gaining the respondents' agreement to participate, the researchers read the questions from their smartphones and directly entered the responses in specialized survey software. At all addresses that weren't home at multiple occasions, a letter was left in the mailbox inviting the residents to complete the survey online. These letters provided a personal code to prevent misuse of the online survey. 17,6% of the total number of surveys was completed online.

N=304 neighbourhood residents completed the survey in the first round and N=277 completed the survey in the second round. Response rates were 24% and 21% respectively. In both rounds of the survey combined, 403 addresses proved ineligible because they were uninhabited (garage boxes, shops, schools etc.) or not accessible (special needs living). Non-response had different reasons. 16 persons could not participate because they did not speak Dutch or any of the minority languages in which our interviewers were proficient. 719 persons actively refused to participate after the interviewer explained the research. Reasons for refusal include not having time to participate in the survey, neighbours feeling that they did not know enough about the AZC or feeling that participating in the survey would not make a difference ('the asylum centre is already there', 'the municipality does not listen anyway'). The interviewers were trained to convince the respondent to participate at that moment or another time but it did not work to convince all. 1297 addresses in both rounds combined were not home during multiple visits and did not complete the survey online after receiving the letter.

Based on register data from the city of Utrecht on the total number of 8935 adults living in this area, the research team checked representativeness in terms of gender, age, level of education and ethnicity. Females, older people, higher educated, and Dutch people were slightly overrepresented. This is probably because these people were more likely to be home and able and motivated to participate in the survey. Below, we present descriptive statistics of demographic characteristics of the sample.

3.2.1. Gender

In the 2017 survey, there was a slight overrepresentation of female respondents, probably due to surveying during daytime hours when men were more likely to be at work. In the 2018 survey, we reached a balanced sample which resembles the population in the neighbourhood.

Gender

		2017		2018		Neighbourhood Population	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Valid	Male	137	45.1	134	49.6	4493	50.3
	Female	167	54.9	136	50.4	4442	49.7
	Total	304	100	270	100	8935	100
Missing				7			

3.2.2. Age

Our sample includes respondents over the age of 18 of various age categories. Compared to register data on the total population, both samples slightly overrepresent older age group of 66+ and slightly underrepresents the younger age groups of 18-25 and 26-45. Again, this is probably due to surveying during daytime hours. The 66+ group mostly includes pensioners who are more likely to be at home during daytime. Younger groups are more likely to be away for work or study.

Age

		2017		2018		Neighbourhood Population	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Valid	18 - 25	34	11.5	35	13.4	1525	17.1
	26 - 45	93	31.4	88	33.7	3505	39.2
	46 - 65	74	25.0	72	27.6	2250	25.2
	66 and older	95	32.1	66	25.3	1655	18.5
	Total	296	100	261	100	8935	100
Missing		8		16			

3.2.3. Level of education

We used the common definition by Netherlands Statistics to recode a seven-point item into three levels of education: Lower educated, medium educated and higher educated groups. Higher educated constitute the largest group and are slightly overrepresented in the sample (comparing our sample to register data on the total Dutch population over 15 years old (CBS, 2017). This is not likely to be a result from the neighbourhood composition. Perhaps, some respondents overestimated their level of education or the higher educated were more willing to participate in university research.

Level of education

		2017		2018		Dutch population	
		N	%	N	%	N x 1000	%
Valid	Lower educated	94	31.1	81	30.2	4442	31.9
	Medium educated	98	32.5	71	26.5	5432	39.0
	Higher educated	110	36.4	116	43.3	4045	29.1
	Total	302	100.0	268	100.0	13919	100
Missing		2		9			

3.2.4. Housing situation/family composition

We asked each respondents with whom they are living in their home. Living with room-mates is common for students and temporary labour migrants.

Housing

		2017		2018	
		N	%	N	%

Valid	I live alone	122	40.1	100	37.0
	I live with a partner. no children	78	25.7	75	27.8
	I live with a partner and child(ren)	37	12.2	37	13.7
	I live alone with child(ren)	18	5.9	18	6.7
	I live with my parents/guardians	13	4.3	13	4.8
	I live with roommates	35	11.5	23	8.5
	Other	1	0.3	4	1.5
	Total	304	100	270	100
Missing				7	

3.2.5. Occupation

These numbers confirm the relatively high shares of respondents who are pensioners.

Occupation		2017		2018	
		N	%	N	%
Valid	I work full time, in paid employment (at a company or as an entrepreneur)	73	24.3	86	32.1
	I work part-time, in paid employment (at a company or as an entrepreneur)	27	9.0	51	19.0
	I am a student/I go to school	34	11.3	27	10.1
	I am a pensioner	101	33.6	65	24.3
	I am looking for a job	30	10.0	15	5.6
	I receive unemployment benefits	12	4.0	9	3.4
	I am caretaker at home	24	8.0	15	5.6
	Total	301	100	268	100
Missing		3		9	

3.2.6. Ethnicity

Overvecht is known to be an ethnically diverse neighbourhood. In the population around the asylum seeker centre, the majority of people (57%) is part of an ethnic minority. To establish the respondents' ethnicity, we used the definition used by Netherlands Statistics (CBS). A person is has a migration background when the person her/himself or at least one of their parents was born outside of the Netherlands. In case both parents were born in different countries outside of the Netherlands, the country of the mother counts as ethnicity. The questionnaire therefore inquired about the respondent's country of birth, their father's country of birth and their mother's country of birth.

To compare our sample to register data on the total adult population living around the ASC, we used the – somewhat outdated but still common – distinction between native Dutch, persons with a western and a non-western migration background. A western migration background includes people originating from other European countries (excluding Turkey), North-America, Oceania, Indonesia and Japan. A non-western migration background includes persons originating from Africa, Latin-America,

Asia (excluding Indonesia and Japan) or Turkey. In our sample, this category also includes respondents with a refugee background originating from countries including Syria, Sierra Leone, Somalia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

		Ethnicity				Neighbourhood Population	
		2017		2018			
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Valid	Dutch	198	65.1	171	63.8	3841	43.5
	Moroccan	21	6.9	32	11.9	1740	19.7
	Turkish	6	2.0	11	4.1	695	7.9
	Surinamese/Antillian	12	3.9	12	4.5	512	5.8
	Other non-western	28	9.2	28	10.4	1092	12.4
	Other western	39	12.8	14	5.2	949	10.7
	Total	304	100	268	100	8829	100
Missing				9		106	

The table shows that we slightly oversampled native Dutch and under sampled persons with western and non-western migration backgrounds. In the 2018 survey, the sample was more representative. Language was only a barrier with 16 possible respondents we met at the door. A likely explanation for under sampling respondents with a migration background in the first round of the survey is excluding addresses included in the Utrecht Buurtmonitor survey in the sampling procedure in order not to overburden people with two surveys in the same period. The Buurtmonitor oversamples people with a migration background because of their generally lower response to a mail survey.

3.2.7. Bond with Overvecht

The neighbourhood of Overvecht was built in the 1960s. Both surveys included respondents who have lived in Overvecht from this time onward. There was also quite a large group of respondents who moved to Overvecht recently (0-2 years). The average length of residence in Overvecht among both samples of respondents combined was quite substantial: 16.9 years (SD=16,6).

Time having lived in Overvecht (in years)

		2017		2018	
		N	%	N	%
Valid	0-2 years	62	20.4	47	17.4
	2-10 years	82	27.0	83	30.7
	10-20 years	71	23.4	68	25.2
	20-30 years	19	6.3	24	8.9
	30-40 years	21	6.9	17	6.3
	40-48 years	15	4.9	9	3.3
	49 years or longer	34	11.2	22	8.1
	Total	304	100	270	100
Missing				7	

3.3. Online Socius tenant surveys

The 38 Socius units were consistently rented between November 2016 and October 2018 by a total of 53 young tenants. Most contracts were long, with the average time of renting the units M=505 days¹⁹⁴. A large majority of the group (>30) rented the unit for (almost) the full length of the project (over 600 days).

To gain understanding of their experiences of the project all Socius tenants living at U-RLP received an email invitation with a personal link to an online survey on their experiences with U-RLP in December 2017 and December 2018. In the first round, 23 tenants of the 38 participated of whom 19 fully completed the survey. In the second round, 19 tenants participated of whom 13 fully completed the survey. The response rates were respectively 61% and 59%.

The survey inquired about several topics: Socius youth's experience with co-living and contact with asylum seekers of Plan Einstein, participation in Plan Einstein activities and courses (co-learning), connections with the neighbourhood of Overvecht and personal wellbeing. Here we present descriptive statistics of demographic characteristics of the sample.

3.3.1. Gender

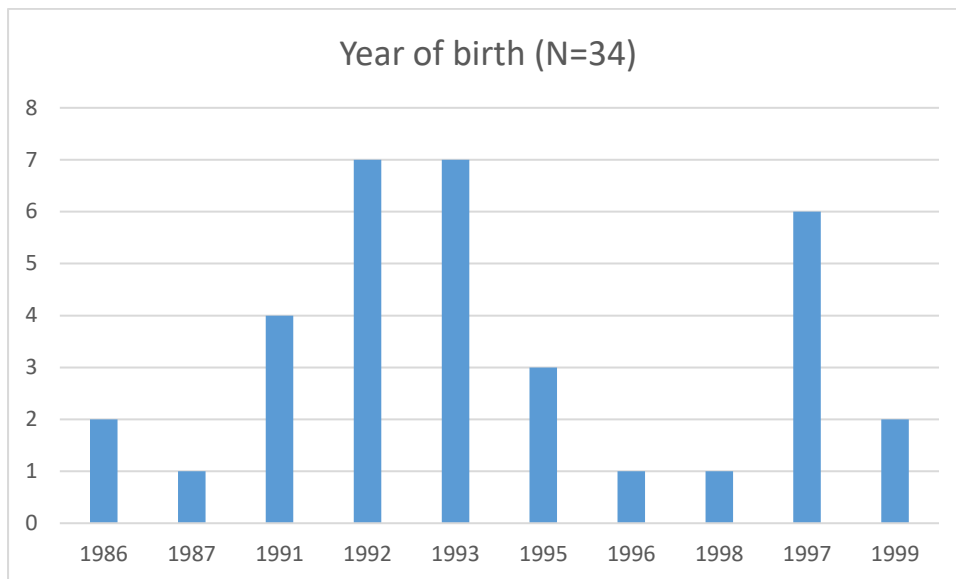
Female Socius tenants were slightly overrepresented in both rounds of the survey.

Gender							
		2017		2018		Total population	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Valid	Male	9	47.4	5	41.7	29	54.7
	Female	10	52.6	7	58.3	24	45.3
	Total	19	100	12	100	53	100
Missing		3		7			

¹⁹⁴ Minimum=77, maximum=760. Standard deviation= 251.6

3.3.2. Year of birth

Ages range between 19 and 32, with an average age of 24 for Socius respondents in both rounds of the survey is 24.



3.3.3. Occupation

This question in wave 1 and 2 of the survey confirms that the majority were students or had started working. Only one respondent was looking for a job.

What is your daily occupation?			
		Frequency	Valid Percentage
Valid	I work full time, in paid employment (at a company or as entrepreneur)	10	29.4
	I work part time, in paid employment (at a company as entrepreneur)	4	11.8
	I am a student/I go to school	19	55.9
	I am looking for a job	1	2.9
	Total	34	100.0
Missing	System	8	
Total		42	

3.4. Welfare dependence data on permit holders

The city of Utrecht provided data on welfare dependence of permit holders who lived in the city of Utrecht on 31 June 2019, which included N=91 former Plan Einstein permit holders registered as residents in the city. These former Plan Einstein residents could then be compared with the total group of permit holders in Utrecht who also received a residence permit in 2017 and 2018 (because former Plan Einstein residents belonged to these cohorts). Former Plan Einstein residents made up 13.5% of the total group of individual permit holders.

It was not possible to know the exact date in which (the first person of) the household received a residence permit, only the year so therefore we assumed that they received a residence permit in December and started counting the months from that moment onward. In using the data, we also compared welfare dependence of individuals rather than households for two reasons: 1) This is similar to analyses of the CBS and makes this group comparable to all permit holders in the Netherlands (see Content Appendix 1); 2) Some households consist of Plan Einstein and non-Plan Einstein permit holders. Comparing individuals provides a more clear-cut distinction between Plan Einstein participants and others

3.5. Monitoring data on participation in courses and activities

The evaluation team asked partners to supply management data on monitoring of 21 process indicators linked to the Theory of Change at end-April 2017, end-October 2017, end-April 2018 and end-October 2018. Data were also requested in April and October 2019 about activities continuing into Plan Einstein in Haydnlaan. Monitoring provided information and evidence on the achievement of intermediary outcomes for activities (e.g. classes held, class attendance numbers, composition of classes, events and activities, neighbourhood meetings held etc., numbers of assessments completed etc.) This information provided useful context for the evaluation as well as information to support project management. Once data was supplied, conversations with partners were routinely held by a researcher to gain more insight into the contexts of data production, ask for further information and clarify gaps in the data. This was a time-consuming process for both the researchers and partners, since this information often did not seem to be captured in any broader data management system for the partnership. However, it was valuable to gain full understanding of the breadth of activities delivered in the project.

3.6. Class evaluations

The research team adapted a validated evaluation scheme used in higher education for participants to evaluate the classes and self-report on increased skills, confidence and connections. We worked with two partners, the Volksuniversiteit, and the Social Impact Factory to ensure that the questions were adapted in ways appropriate to the aims and activities of the organisations. Evaluations were introduced in January 2019. This allowed the research team to overcome the inconsistencies of three partners each using their own preferred evaluation format, which were designed for the standard activities of the organisations, rather than the specialist work in Plan Einstein. The English classes chose to use hard copies, but for the business incubation programme, the Social Impact Factory used an online questionnaire sent to participants by email. In the English classes, 111 forms were returned, representing around 39.5% of participants. 43 of these were in English, 67 in Dutch. For the business incubation stream, 95 usable responses were returned, representing 41.5% of participants. 68 were completed in English, and 27 in Dutch. All responses were anonymous to ensure that participants could respond honestly.

4. Qualitative research

The qualitative research involved interviews, observations and documentary analysis to gain insight into the experiences and opinions of asylum seekers and refugees, neighbourhood residents, youth tenants, as well as partners and stakeholders.

4.1. Interviews

163 semi-structured interviews were conducted with 127 individuals from a range of groups, including neighbourhood residents and tenants living in the centre, asylum seekers and refugees, and partners and stakeholders. There were 36 repeat individuals, following up people as they moved through the project. The interviews aimed to gain deeper insights into process and how, and for whom, outcomes were achieved.

4.1.1. Neighbourhood and tenants interviews

- a) **Participants living in the neighbourhood.** We conducted 37 interviews with 31 interviewees living in the neighbourhood (6 repeat). 19 of these had participated in the survey and volunteered to take part in further research, with the remaining 12 recruited through convenience sampling as participants in the centre. There were 16 female and 15 male, 17 were Dutch and 14 were of other ethnic backgrounds, four were former refugees themselves and one was currently a refugee in another ASC, but living in the neighbourhood. Some participants marked with an asterisk in the table were interviewed twice.

In wave 1 (in Spring 2018) 20 interviews were conducted. Out of the 30 potential respondents we invited who had indicated during the neighbourhood survey that they would be willing to do a follow up interview, nine proved willing. These interviews were conducted by student assistants at respondents' houses. The research team recruited and conducted interviews with 11 additional people when they were at Plan Einstein's meetings and courses.

During wave 2 (Spring-to early Summer 2019) 17 interviews were conducted. These included ten respondents who accepted an invitation to be interviewed after indicating in the survey their willingness to take part. Student assistants conducted those interviews. Additionally seven respondents were interviewed who (had) participated in U-RLP courses and activities; six had been interviewed before and another was interviewed as he was known from wave 1 observations to be attempting to set up his own business. These interviews were conducted by the research team in Dutch or in English.

All interviews were conducted according to a common interview schedule, with items linked to exploring outcomes in the neighbourhood, or for participants. Interviews took around one hour each. All were recorded and transcribed.

Neighbour (N) No.	Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Attitude in survey or participant
W1 1	Ton	38	M	Mother – USA	Positive
2	Johanna	41	F	Father- S, DA or A ¹⁹⁵	Neutral
3	Malik	43	M	Indonesian mother	Positive
4	Helena	71	F	Father: Belgium	Positive

¹⁹⁵ Suriname, Dutch Antilles or Aruba

	5	Jantina	29	F	Dutch	Neutral
	6	Margot	66	F	Indonesian parents	Positive
	7	Noor	34	F	Pakistani	Positive
	8	Trijntje	71	F	Dutch	V negative
	9	Griet	59	F	Dutch	V positive
	10	Raafi *	26	M	Syrian (refugee)	Involved
	11	Stijn	30s	M	Dutch	Involved
	12	Sofie	40s	F	Dutch	Involved
	13	Mohammed	68	M	Iran (refugee)	Involved
	14	Imran	56	M	Somalia (refugee)	Involved
	15	Frans *	50s	M	Dutch	Involved
	16	Irene *	50s	F	Aruban	Involved
	17	Sanne *	38	F	Surinamese mother	Involved
	18	Karam *	40s	M	Syrian (refugee)	Involved
	19	Ghulam *	40s	M	Moroccan	Involved
	20	Liselot	40-50s	F	Dutch	Involved
W2	21	Roos	67	F	Dutch	Positive
	22	Frank	21	M	Dutch	Positive
	23	Farel	44	M	Indonesian mother	V positive
	24	Edward	44	M	Dutch	Neutral
	25	Hugo	62	M	Dutch	V positive
	26	Veerle	66	F	Indonesian father	V positive
	27	Lotte	35	F	Dutch	Positive
	28	Ilse	32	F	Dutch	Positive
	29	Marit	66	F	Dutch	Positive
	30	Joost	48	M	Dutch	Positive
	31	Maadin	40s	M	Pakistani	Involved

- b) **Youth tenants living in the Socius community.** Nineteen interviews were conducted with 14 people out of the 53 young people who rented rooms in the Socius space of the complex (five repeat interviews). 8 participants were female, and 6 male. Participants marked with an asterix in the table were interviewed twice.

In wave 1, nine interviews were conducted, six by a student researcher and three by the researcher. Six tenants were recruited after indicating in the survey that they would be willing to do an interview, three others were recruited face to face by a researcher from the team, based on their active (partly paid) involvement in the Socius activities. Seven of the interviews were recorded and transcribed (two were not recorded because the researcher felt that respondents were not willing to talk openly when knowing the interviews would be recorded). Three interviews were conducted in a cafe, all other interviews with Socius tenants were conducted in their homes. These generally took about 45 minutes to one hour, although one interview took two and a half hours.

During wave 2, five former Socius tenants were interviewed for a second time, by another student assistant. She also conducted five further interviews with tenants who had not done an

interview with the research team during wave 1. Five were recruited after volunteering through the online survey, another five through the Socius Plan Einstein tenants Facebook group, through one of the tenants who had posted the student assistants' invitation. All interviews were conducted in Dutch.

Tenant no. (T)	Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Ethnicity
1	Anne	27	F	Dutch
2	Misha	27	F	Iranian
3	Stefan *	24	M	Dutch
4	Lily	20	F	Dutch
5	Anton *	23	M	Dutch
6	Hassan	26	M	Iranian(m), Dutch (f), Botswana born
7	Peter *	27	M	Dutch
8	Alice	22	F	Dutch
9	Janneke*	28	F	Dutch
10	Luc *	24	M	French/Dutch
11	Femke	22	F	Irish father
12	Eve	27	F	Dutch
13	Yusuf	25	M	Foulah
14	Helene	26	F	Dutch

4.1.2. Asylum seeker centre residents interviews

83 interviews with 62 residents of the asylum seeker centre were conducted (21 repeat interviews). In the first wave, 34 asylum seekers were interviewed. During the second wave, a further 28 asylum seekers were interviewed while 21 of the wave 1 participants were interviewed again (noted with an asterisk in the sample table below).

Country of origin	Research sample	ASC population general ¹⁹⁶
Syria (incl. Syrian-Kurdish and Syrian-Palestinian)	53.2% (33)	40.9%
Yemen	9.7% (6)	3.3%
Iran	9.7% (6)	9.1%
Eritrea	8.1% (5)	12.2%
Afghanistan	3.2% (2)	4%
Ethiopia	3.2% (2)	3.6%
Pakistan	4.8% (3)	1.8%
Singapore	1.6% (1)	Unknown
Iraq	1.6%(1)	14%
Turkey	1.6%(1)	1.5%
Burundi	1.6% (1)	Unknown

¹⁹⁶ COA data provided in October 2018

Uyghur	1.6% (1)	Unknown
Total	62	328

Our sample overrepresented male participants, for reasons explained below:

Gender	Research sample	ASC population
Male	63.7% (42)	49.7%
Female	32.3% (20)	50.3%

Interviewees' ages varied from 18 to 57 years old. Family units varied from single people to single people waiting for family reunion, to families, including a family of seven. This corresponds to the general COA data on the population living in ASC Einsteindreef.

Recruitment and sampling

In wave 1, we initially attempted to recruit individuals in wave 1 from the whole ASC population, rather than just participants in Plan Einstein, to avoid bias. We generated a sample with the assistance of COA employees, using the local COA management information system on the population of the reception centre. Relevant categories in the sample were: gender, age, size of family (unit), and country of origin. The researcher wrote invitations letter in English and Dutch to the selected asylum seekers, with translations in the relevant languages: Arab, Tigrinya, and Farsi. Because of privacy reasons the letters were delivered through the COA post system without names, containing only initials and room numbers. However, only two respondents replied to the letter. COA employees did not want to approach residents personally to invite them again because they did not want to put pressure on residents. The researcher asked personnel at the Dutch Council on Refugees to assist in recruiting respondents but they suggested two respondents and did not want to become involved.

Following this, the researcher then recruited respondents through presenting the research and inviting respondents during meetings and activities in Plan Einstein: the language cafe, English courses, during workshops, or when sitting in the incubator space or outside. Once interviews began, we used snowball sampling, where respondents were invited to suggest others who might be willing to do an interview. As a result, the sample does not represent the population of the reception centre precisely. It contains too many men and is a biased sample towards those involved with Plan Einstein's courses and activities.

In wave 2, we tried to trace and invite all refugees who were interviewed in the first wave but not all were traceable because either their phone numbers were not functioning anymore, or because they were not able or willing to do a second interview. The other refugees were identified through Welkom in Utrecht, one of the associated partners, which was in touch with many refugees through the events it organized and the Dutch Council for Refugees. One of the professionals working at Welkom in Utrecht contacted refugees to invite them to participate in the research project. When they accepted, the research team received their contact details and invited them either through Whatsapp or by telephone. The recruitment process implies that only respondents were invited and interviewed who to some extent had been involved in U-RLP activities, either courses or other events.

Interview procedures:

Interviews in wave 1 were conducted between October 2017 and May 2018. Seven interviews were conducted in Arab by a student-researcher using the item-list the researcher had designed. All other

interviews were conducted by the researchers. Interviews took between 45 minutes and three hours. All interviews were conducted at Plan Einstein, with the exception of one interview with a former resident of ASC Einstein who had lived there during the first phase of the project. He came to the researcher's home with his friend, a former student of Dr Geuijen, who translated for him into English. When respondents indicated that they would prefer the interview not to be recorded the researcher took as many notes as possible during the interview, including quotes. All other interviews were recorded and transcribed. In wave 2, the interviews were conducted at a location selected by the respondents. About half were conducted at their homes, the other half at the researcher's university office or at a public location, like a café or public library.

Interviews with asylum seekers and refugees in both waves were conducted in their preferred language. If this was not Dutch or English, professional translation was provided by telephone, with translations done in Arabic, Tygrinya, Kurmanji, Oromo, and Farsi. However, during wave 1 six interviews were conducted in Arabic by a student assistant who was bilingual. During wave 2, 19 interviews were conducted in Arabic by a master's student who did these as part of her thesis project (transcribed in English by the student) and coded by the researchers.

Participant no. (AS)	Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Ethnicity
1	Aesha	28	F	Syria
2	Maahir*	40s	M	Pakistan
3	Kadin	17	M	Syria
4	Nabila*	30s	F	Yemen
5	Samir*	mid 40s	M	Iraq
6	Alan*	32	M	Singapore
7	Aban*	40s	M	Syria
8	Fadwa	40s	F	Syria
9	Mohammad	39	M	Iran
10	Faisal*	mid 20s	M	Syria
11	Claude*	22	M	Burundi
12	Hilal*	end 20s	F	Syria
13	Wasim	57	M	Syria
14	Hassan*	29	M	Afghanistan
15	Wondimu*	39	M	Ethiopia
16	Azra*	34	F	Pakistan
17	Amal*	21	F	Syria
18	Fatima*	20	F	Syria
19	Tesfay	20s	M	Eritrea
20	Zareb	20s	M	Eritrea
21	Kabede	17	M	Eritrea
22	Omar*	58	M	Syria
23	Razan*	19	F	Syria
24	Aesha*	22	F	Syria
25	Zahir	57	M	Syria
26	Aynur	20	F	TurkishChinese

27	Khaled	36	M	Yemen
28	Akram*	54	M	Syria
29	Jamileh*	60s	F	Iran
30	Salman*	20s	M	Iran
31	Leilani*	20s	F	Iran
32	Habib*	30s	M	Yemen
33	Saeed	20s	M	Yemen
34	Mahmoud	23	M	Syria
Wave 2				
35	Elham	27	M	Afghanistan
36	Qasim	31	M	Syria
37	Adair	30s	M	Yemen
38	Abia	20s	M	Yemen
39	Estere	19	M	Syria/Kurdistan
40	Nishtman	50s	F	Syria/Kurdistan
41	Afwerki	early 30s	M	Eritrea
42	Eymen	34	M	Turkey
43	Karam	32	M	Syria
44	Barbod	19	M	Iran
45	Shepol	33	F	Syria/Kurdistan
46	Saad	28	M	Syria
47	Bahar	43	F	Iran
48	Kofi	20s	M	Ethiopia
49	Aklilu	30s	M	Eritrea
50	Hamza	20s	M	Pakistan
51	Dalili	20	F	Syria
52	Kawa	25	M	Syria
53	Saran	24	F	Syria
54	Yana	24	F	Syria-Palestine
55	Zahwan	26	M	Syria
56	Aras	24	M	Syria
57	Shadan	31	F	Syria
58	Wael	23	M	Syria
59	Yousef	25	M	Syria
60	Saman	26	M	Syria
61	Logan	33	M	Syria
62	Iyad	24	M	Syria-Palestine

4.1.3. Partner interview sample

The sample consisted of 20 participants; 11 female, and 9 male. Interviews were conducted with project partners (those interviewed twice noted with asterisk in the sample table) as well as with representatives of (non)formal stakeholders: COA, Welkom in Utrecht. Interviews were conducted

continuously during the project's duration, mainly in the offices of the partners and stakeholders, either in Dutch or in English, dependent on the native language of the researcher. Sampling ensured that at least one professional and/or manager from each of the project partners and stakeholders were interviewed. Full details of participants are withheld to preserve anonymity. These recorded interviews were supplemented with records of multiple conversations throughout the course of the project with these individuals and other employees, as well as other stakeholders, such as InclUUsion.

Participant no.	Organisation	Gender
1	Socius*	M
2	Socius	M
3	Socius	M
4	Social Impact Factory	M
5	Social Impact Factory	F
6	Social Impact Factory	F
7	Peoples university*	M
8	Local government*	F
9	Local government*	F
10	Local government	F
11	UU Centre for Entrepreneurship	F
12	Dutch Council for Refugees	F
13	Dutch Council for Refugees	F
14	Dutch Council for Refugees	F
15	Local politician in city council	M
16	Local politician in city council	M
17	COA	M
18	COA	M
19	Welkom in Utrecht	F
20	Welkom in Utrecht	F

4.2. Ethnographic research: observations

Alongside the interviews, qualitative research was undertaken through observations of formal and informal meetings, workshops, courses, and activities. These delivered deeper insight into people's experiences at Plan Einstein. Two of the researchers visited and observed Plan Einstein regularly, often spending time in the incubator space and 'garden', having informal talks with the incubator participants and visitors as well as with the hosts and teachers.

Researchers also attended a variety of the events and workshops organized at Plan Einstein. Among these were:

- A workshop on intercultural collaboration in networks, given by Berenschot (a consultancy firm).
- A workshop on arts in the Netherlands during which professional artists presented their work, but also told about how they organized their work, and about the importance of artists-networks.

- A presentation on arts funding.
- An information workshop targeted at the recruitment of coaches.
- Some classes: English, entrepreneurship and computer skills (the later organized by InclUUsion).
- 'Einstein's Coffee of the World' Challenge and its official launch.

Many activities outside the formal class and business incubation programme were also observed, including:

- The weekly language cafe (several times);
- An Eritrean evening and Eritrean day;
- A women's meeting;
- A meeting of Socius youngsters on how to organize themselves within Plan Einstein;
- A visit to an arts museum for neighbours and asylum seekers, organized by Welkom in Utrecht.
- Visits from mayors and aldermen from towns around Utrecht,
- The Social Affairs Forum (visits from European mayors, aldermen and civil servants) and its preparation meetings with asylum seekers, neighbours and Socius tenants (pitching and debating skills trainings),

Participant observation was also undertaken during formal meetings on the organisation of Plan Einstein itself: steering group meetings, partnership meetings, operational meetings (uitvoerendenoverleg), sounding board meetings in which neighbours and officials discussed Plan Einstein issues (klankbordgroep). Detailed fieldnotes were taken as soon as possible after the events.

4.3. Documentary analysis:

Agendas and minutes of steering group meetings and partnership meetings, where available, were collected, archived and analyzed. Researchers also collected the officially published and 'grey' literature written about the project by the management, the communications department, as well as by partners. The analysis of the documents was conducted using themes identified for the interviews with partners and stakeholders.

4.4. Media analysis

We conducted an analysis of Dutch and English media sources about the Plan Einstein and the AZC in Overvecht between 1-1-2016 and 1-3-2019. Newspaper articles were retrieved through Nexis Uni and TV items were collected through the database of the Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision. To confirm exhaustiveness, we checked our set of publications against the City of Utrecht's UIA WP3 report on media attention for Plan Einstein¹⁹⁷ In total, we collected and analysed N=307 newspaper articles and TV items. Plan Einstein received most attention in AD/Utrechts nieuwsblad, a national popular newspaper with a local appendix. This was subject to qualitative analysis of the contents of media reports.

¹⁹⁷ City of Utrecht (2018). Media overview Plan Einstein, Utrecht Refugee Launch Pad.