

Chapter 4. Block 2. Time and space: Keys for migrants and host communities to live together

This section describes the leading principles of the city's reception and integration policies. Across the ten cities analysed in the case studies, the concepts of time and space appear to be essential in conceptualising sustainable solutions. Time is understood as the continuum in which solutions are executed in the city: from short-term reception and orientation, to long-term settling in the city along the key milestones of a migrant and his/her family lives. Space is understood as proximity and is well-illustrated by the word "connecting" (*Verbinding*) that the city has adopted in its approach to integration since 2003. Different communities can connect around spaces, activities, causes or housing solutions that facilitate regular interaction and break down prejudices and cultural barriers.

As it was expressed by city officers during the interviews with the OECD: *By itself, social cohesion is nothing, the main issue is where to find the connections between different communities; one can, for instance, look for these connections in a square, in a neighbourhood or at school. Finding these connections works indirectly against polarisation. It is important to find the right connections.*

It is becoming more and more evident that acquiring a host country's language and social norms as early as possible is essential to increase a migrant's or refugee's chances to find employment (Bakker, Davegos and Engbersen, 2013; OECD, 2017a). However, these skills are essential not only to newcomers, but also to other groups who might have been in the city for longer but failed to acquire them. In fact, access to almost every public service as well as participation depends on newcomers' language and cultural awareness. The city therefore considers it its role to fill the possible gaps left by national policies, in ensuring accessibility to universal services, economic and civic inclusion of migrants throughout their lifetimes. In doing so it operates within the margin available in the given legislative and financial framework; for instance, by ensuring that all groups of migrants have access to language classes throughout their lifetime (including EU migrants and migrants above the age of 65, including those who have already passed the test). Equally, the municipality supports "migrant-friendly" universal service provision: improving mediation and language skills of service providers. Sometimes it relies on the work of associations who provide targeted support for specific nationalities who then refer clients to relevant public services facilitating access to universal services (i.e. the municipality supports GGZ Keizersgracht, a Polish association providing Polish migrants with psychological care and supporting their referrals).

The integration process is conceived as mutual adaptation; therefore the city finds opportunities to create proximity between migrants and natives, who are both responsible for successful integration. For this purpose and for building support of the population for taking in and integrating with newcomers, communication with the citizens is one of the city's priorities (see Objective 2). Participation remains a key concept, along with

participatory citizenship; for this purpose specific consultative mechanisms are in place (see Objective 5).

Design integration policies that take time into account throughout migrants' lifetimes and evolution of residency status (Objective 4)

The Amsterdam Approach Status-holders: Time applied to refugee integration

Box 4.1. The Amsterdam approach status-holders

The Amsterdam Approach contains a customised, holistic integration trajectory designed for each status holder. At the heart of the programme are case managers (the municipality appointed 70 case managers) who work together with job hunters and income consultants and colleagues from the Dutch Council for Refugees [Vluchtelingenwerk]. They coach status holders from the moment they receive recognition during the first three years in Amsterdam and develop an action plan for integration based on the refugees' qualities and talents, motivation, level of language acquisition, work experience, education, and overall mental and physical condition. Generally the action plan includes short-term and long-term objectives and includes finding work or education within the first six months. During this time, learning the language, receiving schooling and searching for work occurs simultaneously rather than sequentially. Such services are implemented by a plethora of non-state actors: University Assistance Fund (UAF) (see "Establish education responses to address segregation and provide equitable paths to professional growth (Objective 12)" in Chapter 6), Dutch Council for Refugees, Implacement, the NOA, etc. If external support is needed, case managers can refer refugees to further public services such as the Team Activation (Team Activering) or the Youthpoint centre (Jongerenpunt). Further referral options are neighbourhood activities based at community centres, such as the ones mentioned in "Strengthen co-operation with non-state stakeholders, including through transparent and effective contracts (Objective 7)" in Chapter 5. The implementation of the Amsterdam Approach is monitored by the municipal units in charge (Work, Income and Participation) as well as by control units and the case managers. The performance of all external partners involved in the implementation and the delivery of the outputs is formally tracked through a monthly dashboard. The framework includes concrete targets, i.e. 75% of refugee students under the contract between the municipality and the University Assistance Fund (UAF) (see "Establish education responses to address segregation and provide equitable paths to professional growth (Objective 12)" in Chapter 6) should complete their diploma within this programme.

Language learning is a key component of the Amsterdam Approach. The intensive language course (Taalboost) is set up to advance access to work or education by teaching the essential linguistic skills relevant to the sectors of interest for the student. These trainings are tailor-made and groups are composed of a maximum four people (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2017). Furthermore, to facilitate civic integration, status holders are invited to an orientation programme, explaining Dutch norms and values, Dutch politics and the Dutch way of live. Other aspects include information about healthcare (e.g. hospital visits, personal

hygiene, insurance) as well as orientation services, such as a visit to the public library and more about the history of Amsterdam. The orientation and language boost programme is provided by a non-governmental organisation called Implacment (www.implacement.nl).

The concept of time is clearly acknowledged in the Amsterdam Approach Status-holders. Based on past statistics, the approach acknowledged that refugees take considerable time to integrate and that many of them – on average 65% – were dependent on social welfare over the long term (Kennisplatform Integratie and Sammenleving, 2016).

The Amsterdam Approach Status-holders represents the city's attempts to do things differently. The concept of time was found to structure the approach and integrate previous lessons learnt, that showed that a sequential strategy of first learning the language, then receiving an education and finally finding employment often results in late integration to the labour market – only 25% of migrants had a job 3.5 years after recognition (Amsterdam Municipality). All of the measures introduced aimed at stimulating refugees' activity from a very early stage, taking a holistic point of view whereby different aspects of the integration process are actively stimulated from the beginning (including through early guidance towards employment or education, and civic and language courses). Still, social workers and city officers are aware that a refugee might experience a backlash once the three years come to an end and he/she is confronted with the difficulties of finding sustainable employment. The municipality has already successfully advocated for accompanying refugees during three years from their recognition and could consider some sort of sunset clause to accompany them as they evolve into self-sustenance and the universal care system.

Create spaces where the interaction brings migrant and native-born communities closer (Objectives 5)

Space applied to refugee integration

The Amsterdam administration includes the notion of space and proximity when designing innovative ways of involving the local and long standing migrant communities in activating refugees. The aim is to develop a network that links refugees with their new community. In the words of one of the refugees interviewed, “we want to be able to swim alone and feel a sense of ownership of the new environment where we are settling”.

Proximity to and involvement of the local civil society are key factors for integration. There is a myriad of local, bottom-up initiatives in Amsterdam that help newcomers finding their ways into the city as well as establishing spaces that offer meeting points for migrants, refugees and natives. The municipality supports most of these initiatives either through funding or by providing free spaces.

Box 4.2. Providing space for integration: Examples of bottom-up initiatives

[Meevaart](#) is a communal centre located in one of the neighbourhoods with the highest concentration of migrants and refugees. The neighbourhood association created Meevaart Ontwikkelgroep (MOG), a foundation focusing on providing activities by and for neighbourhood residents. It contains a café and 12 classrooms that offer hospitality to migrants, locals and refugees to meet, drink, eat, chat, play and organise all sorts of activities and training. Activities that promote the social integration of different target groups are given priority. Many organisations, subsidised by the municipality, can rent the Meevaart classrooms to conduct their activities and this is how the centre covers its costs. The Meevaart space forms an important part of the community in the area, sustaining social cohesion and advancing the integration of different generations of migrants and refugees with the native community.

In collaboration with the city of Amsterdam, the Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA) opened an asylum centre (AZC) in August 2016. This AZC is located in the eastern part of the city and was formerly a prison. It provides shelter for 1 000 people and in March 2017 hosted about 600. Inside the AZC, 72 entrepreneurs/incubators have been offered working spaces with the intention to provide opportunities for refugees to connect with the local business community. This creative hotbed, called Lola Lik, is freely accessible and offers room for events organised by volunteers in the realm of refugee integration (www.lolalik.nl).

The Refugee Talent Hub also has an office in the building. This is a platform sponsored by the municipality and private companies such as Accenture and IKEA, aiming to bridge the gap between employers and refugees. The Refugee Talent Hub screens refugees who have to prepare a digital portfolio based on their professional past and personal characteristics. The hub then matches these talents to potential employers based on a specifically designed algorithm. Launched early in 2017, by February of the same year there were 500 profiles online and 15 people had been placed. The Refugee Talent Hub has about 70 professional partners, of which most are small and medium-sized enterprises. The national government is also involved, providing support via its professional network. The hub further encourages the development of skills and competencies through “meaningful waiting activities”, like language training and internships.

Another example is Boost Ringdijk. Established in 2015, Boost Ringdijk is a temporary work and meeting space for refugees and local residents. Through different activities (language and conversation classes, sports, shared workspaces, informative workshops about finding your way in Dutch society, music, dialogue and lectures, cooking and eating), groups meet and can learn from each other. Boost Ringdijk is located in the eastern part of Amsterdam and organised by both refugees and natives. Boost Ringdijk has proven to be a very successful formula. Its language teams have grown bigger and bigger. It currently has about 20 teachers, all volunteers. From the beginning, about 400 students have been enrolled. A lot of them take these classes in addition to the paid courses that third-country nationals have taken to pass the civic integration exam, through loans from the national government. There is also a language café where local people

can have conversations in Dutch with newcomers on any topic. Furthermore, people can join drama classes, where small dialogues are practiced. Refugee and immigrant chefs cook a free meal every day. There is also a women's group, as well as a barbershop. Boost Ringdijk is supported by the city of Amsterdam, which has provided a start-up fund of EUR 50 000 and free use of the building (except for energy and water bills). Boost Ringdijk also closely co-operates with the Dutch Council for Refugees, who refers refugees living in the area to the centre. Boost Ringdijk also receives a lot of support from private citizens and foundations, either in the form of funding or in kind (e.g. chairs, tables, bedding, food).

Finally, in 2015, a group of local volunteers (some of whom are tied to the Meevaart and Boost Ringdijk) initiated a special bottom-up project regarding the early integration of refugees in the eastern part of Amsterdam. Over a period of six months they hosted 30 refugees who were waiting for their houses in a vacant building. City alderpersons interceded with the COA to authorise the transfer of the refugees from the AZC to this special centre and the municipality ensured that it would find more permanent accommodation in the neighbouring area. The city of Amsterdam also found the location, which was an old public office building. Most of the costs for the transformation of the building and further living costs were covered by crowd funding via Facebook. One person was hired to assist the group with their daily needs and to monitor the general course of events in the house. From the very first day, the children were able to join the local public school. After about seven months, almost all of the residents had been allocated housing in the direct neighbourhood. Despite the success, it is not likely that this project will be repeated. It was very costly and labour intensive and in general the provisions in shelters have improved. Furthermore, the need for refugee shelter is not as urgent as it was in 2015.

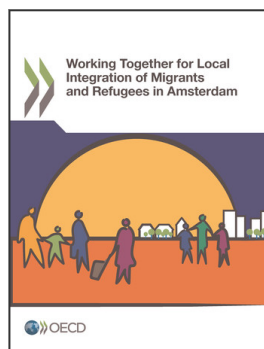
Consultative mechanisms to ensure migrants and refugees participation

Beside a regular survey to assess the opinion of non-western migrants living in the city (described in “Intensify the assessment of integration results for migrants and host communities and their use for evidence-based policies (Objective 8)” in Chapter 5), Amsterdam has established two bodies for consultation on integration issues. An independent Advisory Board on Diversity and Integration, composed of experts, and the Diversity Council (Stedelijk Overleg Diversiteit, SOD). Prior to 2004, an advisory board was made up of representatives of immigrant associations from a number of immigrant groups – Turks, Moroccans, Surinamese/Antilleans, Chinese and Pakistanis. Now the Diversity Council works as a public enquiry organ: based on interviews with municipal departments, relevant (migrant) organisations and involved residents, it prepares advice. This organ meets with the Advisory Board on Diversity and Integration about four times a year. The Board makes use of external experts and desk research. Once the advice is officially determined, it is offered to the College of Mayor and Alderpersons, who generally act upon it. It is further distributed to the City Council, relevant organisations and individuals, and the press (www.amsterdam.nl). In February 2017 the city established the Amsterdam Refugee Advisory Board. This body advises the municipality on the activities and communication oriented towards refugee groups.

Similar consultation mechanisms also exist in the city districts: for instance, the city district Oost-Watergraafsmeer has a board of representatives of migrant associations (BOMO) that meets five to six times a year, and establishes work groups on issues that are important for immigrants (Van Heelsum and Penninx, 1999). An issue oriented consultative mechanism is the so-called “soundboard group” (*klankbordgroep*), which can be alternatively described as a focus group for health professionals. This sound-board group is set up at the municipal level, and the main objective is to let key persons from different ethnic communities give their advice to professional care takers (see details in Objective 11).

Key observations: Block 2

- The Amsterdam Approach: the city adopted a holistic view whereby different aspects of the refugee integration process are actively stimulated from the beginning. This represents a deviation from the “mainstreaming universal access approach” to integration that the city implemented with other vulnerable groups.
- If this approach proves effective for rapidly steering newcomers into professional and education paths, it could be extended to other vulnerable groups, including second- and first-generation migrants.
- The city has been able to bring the local community on board for receiving and integrating refugees. Amsterdam structured bottom-up initiatives oriented at favouring exchange between different communities. This appears to be more developed than in the majority of other cities.
- The city is experimenting with innovative ways to include migrants and refugees in decision making which could be replicated elsewhere.
- Direct communication with citizens on practical reception and integration issues was effective in managing acceptance problems.



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