

## **Towards a cultural explanation of political non-participation in citizens' initiatives:**

### ***Feelings of entitlement and a 'taste for politics'***

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Abstract: This research explores the relevance of a cultural explanation for the well-established pattern that less educated citizens participate less in citizens' initiatives. Prevailing theories explain this pattern by focussing on a lack of time, money, cognitive sophistication and social capital. However, Bourdieu's seminal work suggests that the cultural dimensions of feelings of entitlement and a 'taste for politics' may also be relevant. Based on 13 in-depth interviews with less educated citizens living in Rotterdam, I scrutinize the two dimensions. The results show that people feel less entitled to participate when they experience stigma and perceive that they lack mastery of the culturally legitimate knowledge and language. A 'taste for politics' has three subdimensions: a disdain or dislike of red tape, a disdain or lack of affinity with government officials because they are perceived to come from a different milieu and a disapproval of politics as power play. These aspects can restrain but also – against expectations – induce participation. The (sub)dimensions occur in different combinations, forming four ideal types of (non-)participation among less educated citizens. From the construction of these ideal types important theoretical implications follow. First, they demonstrate that a cultural explanation is relevant in explaining (non-)participation in citizens' initiatives. Moreover, they indicate that feelings of entitlement and a 'taste for politics' are not only analytically distinct, but also empirically different. My research must therefore be seen as a call to disentangle the two mechanisms. I conclude my paper with recommendations for policy.

## **Towards a cultural explanation of political non-participation in citizens' initiatives: *Feelings of entitlement and a 'taste for politics'***

### **1. Introduction**

Today we see a rise in citizens' initiatives. These are small scale initiatives from citizens, from non-official civil society organisations, who on a voluntary basis aim to improve the well-being of the community, in cooperation with the local government (Hurenkamp, Tonkens & Duyvendak, 2006). The rise of these kind of initiatives signals a shift in the relation between citizens and their governments. Citizens become co-producers of government policies and services, and are therewith expected to take over some of the responsibilities, assets, tasks and services previously assigned to the government (Bekkers, Fenger & Scholten, 2017; Mohan, 2012; Van Buuren, 2017). It becomes the task of local governments to invite, encourage and support citizens to come up with initiatives.

Rotterdam, The Netherlands' second largest city, is taking the lead in actively stimulating and experimenting with citizens' initiatives, by for example calling into existence the Right to Challenge; citizens are invited to challenge the policies and ideas of the municipality (Gemeente Rotterdam, 2014). Citizens' initiatives vary in size, duration and intensity of involvement, of both volunteers and government officials. Examples of initiatives that successfully used this right to challenge, vary from a one-time event Lightsnight to commemorate the dead (Gemeente Rotterdam, 2015a), to the co-created development of an alternative land-use plan for the subsiding street Schepenstraat (Gemeente Rotterdam, 2018) and to setting up a school for free homework assistance in the neighbourhood Feyenoord (Gemeente Rotterdam, 2015b).<sup>1</sup>

These examples of citizens' initiatives in its diverse forms, give the impression that the opportunities for those kind of initiatives represent a democratizing force, because it gives power to 'the people' (Rydin & Pennington, 2000). However, we see a divide in who initiates or participates in initiatives and who does not. Research shows that citizens with a lower education level are underrepresented in this form of civic participation (Dekker & Uslaner, 2001).

Since citizens' initiatives require collaboration with the local government – although varying in intensity – we can understand them as a specific form of political participation. In the literature on political participation, we find three dominant explanations why the less educated participate less: lack of time and money, cognitive sophistication and social capital. So far, dominant explanations do not provide a fully satisfactory account of non-participation, as is reflected in current policies that have yet not been able to counter the divide in participation (Engbersen & Snel, 2015). I argue that a cultural explanation is needed; an approach hitherto mostly overlooked. In the work of Bourdieu and Neo-Bourdiesians, I find indications that cultural dimensions are relevant and meaningful in explaining

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<sup>1</sup> A more detailed description of these examples are provided in Appendix A.

political participation. I therefore ask the following research question: *How can we from a cultural-sociological perspective understand that the less educated participate less in citizens' initiatives?*

Thus, this research will explore the relevance of a cultural explanation of political non-participation of the less educated. Inspired by the work of Bourdieu on cultural capital, I see two ways in which a low amount of cultural capital can underlie the underrepresentation of less educated in citizens' initiatives, that will be elaborated in the theoretical framework: feelings of entitlement and a 'taste for politics'.

This research can provide deep insight into the mechanisms underlying political non-participation. My research therewith has the potential to provide an alternative explanation, that can be considered by governments when designing policies and trying to stimulate participation in citizens' initiatives.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

### ***2.1 Dominant explanations***

The first and most straightforward explanation for political non-participation, states that people from lower classes, like the less educated, lack the time and money that would enable them to participate (Dekker & Uslaner, 2001). A second dominant way of comprehending non-participation focusses on cognitive abilities. Cognitive skills are seen as necessary for understanding the complexities and abstractions of politics, underlying political participation in any form (Berinsky, 2004; Galston, 2001). The lack of participation among the lower classes is attributed to their lower levels of education and interconnected lack of political relevant skills and knowledge. These studies argue that the 'cognitive costs' of forming an opinion on political topics and developing ideas to participate, are too high for less educated people (Carpini, Delli & Keeter, 1997; Luskin, 1987; Nie, Junn & Stehlik-Barry, 1996)

A third line of reasoning, looks at the relation between social capital and participation. Social capital, i.e. the social bonds that people have, is useful to civic participation in several ways: it makes acquiring information more easy (Coleman, 1988; Teorell, 2003), increases trust in the community and politics (Putnam, 1993, 2000) and facilitates shared norms and goals (Pretty, 2003; Rydin & Pennington, 2000). However, social capital is not evenly distributed among different groups in our society. The highest level of social capital can be found among the middle classes, which corresponds with their high levels of political participation (Dekker & Uslaner, 2001). Lower classes in general, including the less educated, appear to have less social capital, which contributes to their lesser participation (Pichler & Wallace, 2009).

These explanations take an instrumentalist stance by focussing on material, cognitive and social resources and rational considerations. All three theories could explain, at least partly, why the less educated participate less in citizens' initiatives (Berinsky, 2004; Dekker & Uslaner, 2001; Putnam, 2007; Rydin & Pennington, 2000). However, they overlook cultural processes, i.e. inter-subjective meaning making that enables and constrains behaviour (Lamont, Beljean & Clair, 2014). I reckon a

cultural account to be a plausible and valuable addition that enriches our understanding of political non-participation.

## ***2.2 Scrutinizing possible cultural dimensions***

Next to the discussed material, cognitive and social factors, Bourdieusian *cultural capital* could also play an important role in explaining why the less educated participate less in citizens' initiatives. Embodied cultural capital is a form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body. It refers to the collection of symbolic elements such as skills, tastes and credentials, that one acquires through socialization within the family and educational institutions (Bourdieu, 1984, 1986). Education is referred to as an institutionalized form of cultural capital. Hence, a low educational level mostly coincides with a low amount of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

Cultural capital signifies one's ability to appreciate, understand and demonstrate the lifestyles of the elites, i.e. the legitimate culture (Jarness, 2015). In this way, cultural capital serves as a status marker, to indicate one's position in the social field. In the work of Bourdieu and contemporary Neo-Bourdiesians, I find two ways in which a low amount of cultural capital can influence political participation: feelings of entitlement and a 'taste for politics'.

### ***2.2.1 Feelings of entitlement***

The first mechanism revolves around feelings of entitlement. Bourdieu (1984) explains this with his notion of 'political competence'. Although 'competence' is easily associated with cognitive abilities, we see that this form of competence has everything to do with feelings of entitlement. As Bourdieu explains:

"This capacity is inseparable from a more or less strong feeling of being competent, in the full sense of the word, that is, socially recognized as entitled to deal with political affairs, to express an opinion about them or even modify their course." (Bourdieu, 1984, p.400)

Thus, whether one participates or not, depends on a socially recognized capacity, a feeling to be a 'legitimate' agent, a sense of having the right to speak and being entitled to participate in societies dominant institutions. This acknowledges the importance of people's understanding, perceiving and relating to political content, discourse and decision making and their place in this process (Laurison, 2015).

Research shows that having a low status, coinciding with low educational levels, decreases people's sense of entitlement; they perceive themselves as less legitimate actors in society and experience less control and efficacy in their lives (Lamont, Beljean & Clair, 2014; Laurison, 2015; Ten Kate, De Koster & Van der Waal, 2017). This leads, amongst other things, to a disengagement with politics. Moreover, the less educated are excluded from the dominant political discourse, because their dispositions are not considered legitimate or appropriate (Myles, 2008). Hence, a lack of (feelings of) entitlement, leads to objective and subjective exclusion from the political domain (Bourdieu, 1984). If

feelings of entitlement are at play, I can imagine that less educated citizens do not participate in citizens' initiatives, because they feel not socially qualified to do so.

### 2.2.2 A 'taste for politics'

A second mechanism influencing political participation can be found in the 'taste for politics'. Existing research often treats feelings of entitlement and a 'taste for politics' as the same mechanism (see e.g. Laurison, 2015; Ten Kate, De Koster & Van der Waal, 2017). However, as we will see, they need to be considered two separate explanations for political non-participation. In line with the entitlement understanding, less educated appear as victims or dupes, dominated by a social system that does not recognize them as legitimate agents or at least attributes to this perception of the less educated of themselves. But if we understand political non-participation as stemming from a lack of 'taste for politics', less educated are seen as actively opposing agents, that draw boundaries between themselves and the political realm.

The political field, just like other fields, is a field of cultural and symbolic production (Bourdieu, 1991). And just like a taste for cultural objects like high arts or French haute-cuisine does not arise spontaneously, a 'taste for politics' is not naturally given and equally distributed among each person (Laurison, 2012). Taste, like a taste for politics, is structured by social position and deeply ingrained in one's *habitus* or set of dispositions. Following Bourdieu (1984), there is a structural homology between social space and the space of lifestyles (encompassing consumptions, preferences, values and opinions), which explains the patterns of political attitudes (Sommer Harrits, Prieur, Rosenlund & Skjott-Larsen, 2010).

Given this homology, people use their lifestyles – consciously and unconsciously – to mark their social position. They draw boundaries to distinguish themselves from other classes and class-fractions (Bourdieu, 1984). This is not only reserved for the higher classes. Also people from lower classes distinguish themselves from higher class people, that they often refer to as 'pretentious' or 'elitist', while describing themselves as 'ordinary' and 'down-to-earth' (Jarness & Paalgard Flemmen, 2017).

Research indicates that people with a low amount of cultural capital use more moral status signals (Lamont, 2002). This also applies to their relation to politics. The less educated rely on their emotions and ethical notions when evaluating politics, while the higher educated turn to abstract notions and principles (Bourdieu, 1984). Less educated citizens want to be able to identify with politicians and wish to see them as suitable for solving their everyday struggles (Manning & Holmes, 2014). Since the less educated base their judgment of politics on everyday moral principles and emotions, it is important for them to have a taste for politics, i.e. an *affinity*, a natural liking or connection with politics, politicians and parties. But it seems that less educated citizens often lack this affinity (Manning & Holmes, 2014). They do not feel at ease or recognize themselves in the political field and accompanying language (Bourdieu, 1984, 1991; Manning & Holmes, 2014).

Based on their tastes, less educated distinguish themselves from the political domain with its politicians. As Bourdieu (1984) states: “[In] matters of taste, more than anywhere else, all determination is negation; and tastes are perhaps first and foremost distastes, disgust provoked by horror and visceral intolerance (‘sick-making’) of the taste of others” (p.56). Consequently, they actively oppose and disregard politics, stating that politicians do not understand their concerns, interests and ways of living. This mechanism must not be confused with a lack of feeling entitled to politically participate. On the contrary, the lack of affinity with politics leads to a looking down on politics, since it does not fit the lower class lifestyles that highly value hard work, being down-to-earth (Manning & Holmes, 2013, 2014), and an honest face instead of having a smooth tongue (Bourdieu, 1984). Following this line of thinking, I theorize that less educated people, do not participate in citizens’ initiatives because they refuse to play along in the political theatre that they disdain.

### **3. Methods and data**

The research is conducted in The Netherlands in the months April and May of the year 2018. This research uses inductive, qualitative methods, by conducting in-depth interviews. My study deploys qualitative methods in an effort to explore the relevance of a cultural explanation for political non-participation, in a field of inquiry dominated by quantitative approaches. Given the explorative character of the research, respondents were purposefully selected (Charmaz, 2006) based on their educational level, since education represents the institutionalized form of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

I selected respondents with a lower educational level (Intermediate Vocational Education or lower) who live in Rotterdam. Since educational level is a sensitive topic, I selected respondents by making an estimated guess, based on their occupation and only asked for their education once a certain trust relationship was built. Respondents were found via several entry points: a local pub, grocery store, restaurant and personal connections. From thereon I used snowball sampling to find more respondents. I asked potential respondents whether they had some time to talk about their city and the local government, and invited them for an in-depth interview.

It is important to note that over 10 people were unwilling to speak to me about the topic. Their reactions varied from “I’m simply not interested,” to “I don’t have time for that,” or “the topic of local politics frightens me” and “ew, I’m not gonna talk to a college girl about that.” In the discussion I will elaborate on this issue. Despite this difficulty, in-depth interviews prove to be a well suited method for the research, because they allowed me to listen and engage with respondents who often feel neglected, as my results will show.

Participants themselves indicated they prefer interviews over questionnaires because in surveys they feel forced to express themselves in a restricted way that oftentimes does not really reflect their opinions or attitudes (see also Bourdieu, 1984; Laurison, 2015). Moreover, the interviews opened up opportunities by letting the respondents reflect on their social position and to capture the distinctions people make on a discursive level (Lamont, 2002). Experiences of one’s social position and symbolic

boundary drawing might be more prevalent on a practical level in day-to-day actions. Therefore, I teased respondents to speak freely and give discursive form to their practical knowledge (Jarness & Paalgard Flemmen, 2017).

The in-depth interviews were semi-structured. I discerned initial sensitizing concepts and topics from the literature that guided the interviews and helped me interpreting what was being said. Empirically recurring and relevant themes and topics were further explored and added when needed. In the interviews I encouraged respondents to reflect on the three examples of citizens' initiatives mentioned in the introduction. I asked them about their opinion, images of the initiators and whether they would see themselves participate. Moreover, I asked them on their general opinion, attitude, relation to and experience with local governments and national politics. In addition, I invited them to express their associations with civil servants and politicians. All questions were posed as openly as possible, so that unforeseen themes and attitudes could be communicated. As a result, all respondents enjoyed the interview and some even revealed at the end of the interview: "Wow, this did not feel like an interview, more like a nice conversation" (Melanie).

I conducted 13 interviews. The interviews were held in a place that felt comfortable for the respondents. Seven interviews took place at respondents' homes, three at their workplace, two in my home and one at the favourite bar of the respondent. One interview took 30 minutes. The other interviews lasted between one hour and two and a half hours. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim, which resulted in 198 pages of transcriptions. The interviews were conducted and transcribed in Dutch. I translated all quotes presented below and in doing so I tried to reflect the original wording as accurately as possible. To protect the privacy of the respondents, I use fictitious names that respondents could choose for themselves. Appendix B provides an overview of the background characteristics of the respondents.

I analysed and coded the interview transcriptions using constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), starting with open coding, continuing with axial coding and ending with selective coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2014) to identify underlying discourses. The sensitizing concepts helped me coding and understanding the data, finding resemblances and differences between respondents and with developing theory (Blumer, 1954).

## **4. Results**

### ***4.1 Dominant explanations***

When respondents explain their (non-)participation in citizens' initiatives, they oftentimes refer to reasons corresponding with the dominant explanations in current research. Lack of time seems to be an important obstacle to participate, as David explains: "Well, it takes a lot of time and I don't have that much time off." Also Ziggy mentions that "you need to have enough time and I have a young family, so no..." For Johan, who is active in various citizens' initiatives, time is not an issue, as he explains: "Look, I do have time, so I spend some time on that."

Likewise, social capital is referred to as cause for (non-)participation. Johan adds that he “knows a lot of people in the neighbourhood and also has good contact with neighbours and civil servants” which enables him to start up initiatives. Norbert, who sometimes participates, sees himself as “basically the king of the neighbourhood” since he lives there for almost 70 years. Other respondents see their lack of social capital as a barrier: “I don’t have the social connections yet [...] so I don’t know who I would get to get along with my idea. That’s the issue” (Ziggy). Likewise, Aniska underscores that she “doesn’t know any people here [in the neighbourhood]” and she therefore does not see herself “recruiting followers” for her ideas.

Moreover, the amount and difficulty of paperwork that one has to fill in, related to cognitive skills, impedes respondents to initiate an initiative. Melanie illustrates that she had an idea to organize a breakfast for the elderly in her neighbourhood “but you had to fill in that many forms that I thought ‘you know what, never mind’.” And Bea, who organizes various festivities in her neighbourhood, acknowledges that she is discouraged by “all the different things you have to fill in [...] yeah that makes you struggle.”

## ***4.2 Cultural explanations***

However, there is more to the story of (non-)participation than the ‘practical’ barriers that the dominant explanations emphasize. To grasp this, we have to dig deeper into the everyday experiences and inter-subjective meaning making of respondents. In what follows, I will therefore sketch the cultural dimensions that reoccur when respondents discuss their opinions, attitudes, feelings and practices related to the local and national government in general. We see that this has everything to do with the two aspects of low cultural capital addressed in the theoretical section: feelings of entitlement and a ‘taste for politics’. Thereafter, I will distinguish four ideal types of (non-)participation in citizens’ initiatives, based on the discourses used to evaluate the discussed examples of initiatives. We can understand these ideal types by using the insights on feelings of entitlement and a ‘taste for politics’.

### ***4.2.1 Lack of feelings of entitlement***

The feeling that one is a socially recognized, ‘legitimate’ agent in the public domain, is an important precondition for participation in citizens’ initiatives. Multiple respondents stipulate that they lack these feelings of entitlement. I empirically scrutinize and elaborate on the aspects that cause this lack: experienced stigmatization and/or the perception of not mastering the legitimate style of talking and kind of knowledge.

#### ***4.2.1.1 “I find that a bit patronizing. I mean that they don’t take me seriously”:* Experiencing stigmatization induces a lack of feelings of entitlement**

Respondents stipulate that they lack feelings of entitlement caused by experienced or anticipated stigmatization (Goffman, 1963). Amongst others, they feel socially condemned by their educational



level and struggle with that: “It does matter in how I see myself, as someone who ‘only’ has vocational education, although that’s not that wrong, it is still the lowest level” (Ziggy). Aniska, who works at a university, also expresses feelings of inferiority when she compares herself to the people around her: “In the beginning I really struggled with that. Like ‘o my god I’m surrounded by smart people and here I come with my vocational education’.” Melanie “rather not talks about it with people she doesn’t know very well” to ensure that people will not think she is “retarded.”

Respondents also experience territorial stigmatization (Wacquant, 2007). Growing up or living in Rotterdam South, is put forward as a reason for stigmatization. Rotterdam South is infamous for its high concentration of poverty and criminality: “They say I live in a ghetto” (Melanie and Ziggy). Respondents residing in Rotterdam South prefer to describe their neighbourhood not as ghetto but as “working-class neighbourhood” (Leia and Ziggy) with “hard working” residents who “did not went to college” (Leia). However, respondents reckon that other people see this differently: “If you tell you’re from the South, people immediately have their opinion. They think I’m white trash. [...] It’s a shame” (Ziggy). To avoid this stigmatization, Aniska admits: “Because it remains the worst part of the city [...] I simply don’t tell anyone I come from the South.”

Respondents who experience stigmatization, sense they are not taken seriously by the authorities, as a consequence of their stigma(s): “If you’re from the South, everyone has an opinion about you, so yes I think civil servants too, they are also humans” (Ziggy). She adds that civil servants<sup>2</sup> look down on her not only because of her “coming from the South” but also because of her “education”: “[They see me] as lower educated [...] I think that they think I don’t have the right knowledge, because I’m lower educated or that I don’t have the interest in [public issues].”

Petra does not refer to stigmatization by education, but by occupation. She owns a small grocery store in Rotterdam. When she talks about her experiences and conversations with government officials, she describes numerous occasions in which her voice was not taken seriously. She found that “a bit patronizing,” to which she elucidates:

“I mean that they don’t take me seriously as citizen. [...] Patronizing is a bit from a different class. How someone of the upper class looks at the lower class. That idea. Belittling, a little belittling [...] I mean they think like ‘o well that’s that little woman from that little street with that little shop’.”

This makes her conclude that her “voice does not matter to them.”

In sum, the perception of respondents that they are stigmatized by others, including government officials, induces a feeling of being less entitled to deal with public matters. They feel inferior compared to others and think their voices matter less. A stigmatization by living in the South ‘ghetto’ of Rotterdam, is contested by the respondents. However, they do think it will negatively affect their chance of being

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<sup>2</sup> Note that respondents use the words ‘politicians’ and ‘civil servants’ interchangeably. To them, all government officials are one and the same, unless explicitly mentioned otherwise.

taken seriously in the public domain. The stigmatization by education and occupation seems to be internalised, since it influences their self-image (see also Campbell & Deacon, 2006).

#### 4.2.1.2 *“I might need to be a bit more decent I guess, with a particular way of talking”*: Insufficient mastery of culturally legitimate knowledge and language

Next to stigmatization by others, a lack of feelings of entitlement is caused by respondents' impression that they lack the 'right' capabilities to fully participate in the public domain. Respondents feel they lack 'expert knowledge' and 'do not speak the right language'. This differs from the 'cognitive skills' addressed by the dominant explanations as discussed before. In the dominant explanation cognitive skills are treated as objective abilities. However, in this case, it is all about the inter-subjective perception of the 'kind' of knowledge and 'style' of talking one needs to legitimately participate.

Many respondents stress the importance of “knowing what you're talking about” (David) or “knowing your stuff” (Bart), what they describe as a kind of expert knowledge needed to successfully initiate a citizens' initiative. They emphasize that they themselves are only “practical.” They contrast their practical knowledge with expert knowledge like “knowing what is technically possible and not” (Ziggy), implying that their practical knowledge is insufficient to have a say in the public domain. That is, they sense that their kind of knowledge is not the culturally appropriate and legitimate form of knowledge.

For some, their lack of expert knowledge keeps them from challenging plans of the local authorities: “In general it is the case that when decisions are made, that those decisions are made by people whose job it is. It is their job, they've studied for it, so they probably know best” (David). Likewise, Aniska explains that she did not oppose the city's plan to raise parking fees in her area, because “the authorities already looked at it [...] so a normal person, or let's say an average Dutchman would just assume that it's all right.” Hence, we see that this also differs from the dominant explanation in that their lack of mastery of the right kind of knowledge does not straightforwardly cause them to participate less, but that it makes respondents feel less entitled or 'not allowed' to participate and consequently do not.

Additionally, various respondents refer to the significance of language. Melda, from Turkish descent, explains that civil servants do “not like her ideas” because she cannot speak the “full sentences” that they like. However, language is not only a struggle for non-native speakers. Also Melanie is insecure about the “way” she will phrase her ideas in communication with the local government. When I asked Ziggy whether she expects to be taken seriously by the authorities, she underscores that the 'style' of language is of utmost importance. She is not “raised in a posh way” and thinks this can “work against her.” She believes she “might needs to be a bit more decent [...] with a particular way of talking,” alluding to her Rotterdam accent, which she differentiates from the preferred “Standard Dutch” that people with better education or a different upbringing speak.

Given that Ziggy perceives herself to not master the ‘right’ use of language, she expects that authorities will take her less seriously. It is clear that style of language forms an obstacle to political participation. This is not so much a cognitive capacity as it is acquaintance with the culturally legitimate way of talking.

#### *4.2.2 A ‘taste for politics’*

We see that respondents actively draw boundaries between themselves and the political field, on different aspects related to a ‘taste for politics’. They do not recognize themselves in the field. This evokes diverse reactions. For some, it results in a strong disdain, opposing the legitimate culture. Others express a dislike or disinterest stemming from their lack of affinity.

##### *4.2.2.1 “Whatever you ask from a civil servant, you just can’t get them to move”: Disliking and disdaining bureaucratic red tape and occupation with unimportant business*

A recurring theme when discussing local and national politics is the excessive red tape of bureaucracy. Aniska briefly sums up that “from the local authorities everything comes with a lot of ifs and buts.” According to Eslem “all these damn rules and regulation” are because “they want to make things complicated for you.” Consequently, respondents experience difficulties when wanting to cooperate with the authorities. Petra illustrates that she had been waiting for months for an answer from the local authorities and in the end received her own documents back again: “So I said ‘that’s not what I mean! I want you to do something with it!’ [...] I thought ‘whatever you ask from a civil servant, you just can’t get them to move.’ O boy...”

Ziggy gives another example. With an aggrieved tone, she tells how she contacted the local authorities to ask for the possibility of a playground for the children in her neighbourhood, but “then you receive an e-mail that you’ll hear from them within 4 weeks, but after that you hear nothing, nothing!” Johan, who often has meetings with the local authorities, recognizes this bureaucratic fuzz and adds: “It takes time and takes time and at a certain moment I thought ‘it cannot be this hard right?’ [...] Yeah that’s frustrating.” He explains this bureaucratic inertia by mentioning all the “many rules and regulations” and “different departments” which he sees as “the biggest problem.” Aniska agrees with that: “There’re just too many departments. Therefore there’s not much possible.”

Some respondents express a general disliking of government bodies because of this. Like Petra, Eslem and Ziggy, who do not like bureaucratic inertia and wish it would be different. Other respondents enunciate a strong disdain towards the local government and local and national politics. These respondents actively look down upon politicians, civil servants and the system they work in. They blame government bodies and officials for being busy with unimportant matters, which slows it all down: “All they do is asking Parliamentary questions about useless things. [...] They can ask questions about anything! Even Parliamentary questions about the fact that the coffee tastes gross, you know” (Aniska).

The respondents who show disdain towards red tape and occupation with trivial matters, oppose this to their own style of living: they value hard work, a hands-on mentality and practical knowledge. David does not see himself become a civil servant or politician one day, because “he doesn’t want to do a desk job.” He does not want to “sit still” and prefers to do “practical work” and “working with his hands.” Respondents do not only prefer practical jobs for themselves, they also perceive it as more valuable:

“People on the ground, practitioners, are badly needed. They should be in the city council. [...] Because you can sit behind your desk and nicely write on paper what works and what doesn’t, but in my experience, nine out of ten things put on paper by people who never actually did the job, are not do-able in practice.” (Marnix)

Bea shares with Marnix that “she would like to see things differently” and that civil servants “would know how things work in practice” instead of being busy with “rules and handling stamps [while they] simply lack the practical knowledge.” Therefore, Bea holds a “low esteem towards civil servants” and she frankly puts that she would never want to become a civil servant, because:

“I’m more of a people person anyway. As civil servant you stand apart from the people. And people look down on you. [...] Everyone looks down on civil servants right? [...] Imagine you would go to a birthday party and tell you’re a civil servant, o my god, I think that’s awful. That’s a profession you wouldn’t reveal to others.”

We see that respondents dislike and disdain the attention for unimportant matters and the focus on inflexible rules and regulations. They prefer a practical approach as opposed to an abstract theoretical system of rules and regulations. We noticed earlier that some respondents feel less entitled because they perceive their practical knowledge to not be the legitimate theoretical way of knowing. However, we also see that respondents actively disapprove and challenge the dominant form of knowledge. In this sense, we can understand it as a matter of taste; they disdain abstract knowledge and prefer practical knowledge because it fits their lifestyles.

#### 4.2.2.2 “*They just come from a different milieu*”: Lack of affinity and disdaining politicians

Another recurring idea, is the perception that local and national politicians come from a different milieu than the respondents themselves: “They just come from a different milieu” (Aniska) and “they seem to come from a whole different world” (Marnix). Politicians are by almost all respondents described as “highly educated.” Moreover, politicians are associated with pretentious frat guys coming from a good family with a distinct upbringing: “[A politician] comes from a rich or good family. Is a frat guy [...] such a hockey player, yes a stuck-up person” (Bart). Aniska shares this observation: “You just notice that they’ve joined such a fraternity. [...] And they’ve done everything that fits with it. They play an instrument and play hockey, you know.”

The distinct upbringing of politicians is portrayed as stimulating, disciplined and aiming for the best that could be achieved. Leia, Bart and Melanie simply acknowledge that they themselves come

from a different milieu and upbringing, without giving any value judgements. The perception that politicians are different from them, results in a lack of affinity with politics and disinterest: “When I see them talking on TV, I just turn the channel” (Leia).

For other respondents, it activates a disdain of politicians and politics. These respondents despise fraternities and the importance of the ‘right’ connections. Marnix viciously makes fun of a politician who pictured himself on his piano: “Pretentious highbrow. The epitome of arrogance. Hahahaha.[...] But he knows how to sell himself.” Aniska despises the ‘world’ that politicians come from, since social ties are more important than one’s capacities: “I think it’s a creepy creepy little world. Creepy in the sense that it doesn’t depend on how good or how smart you are, but on how good you can suck up to people.” We see that these disdainful respondents make moral judgements; they value ‘down-to-earthness’ and honesty instead of highbrow lifestyles and a slippery flattering tongue.

#### *4.2.2.3 “It are of course all dirty power plays”: Disdaining politics as act and morally inferior*

Multiple respondents describe politics as an *act*, a performance, a play. They describe this as a dirty play, for several reasons. Firstly, because other factors than competence are more important. This is closely related to what Aniska described as ‘creepy’ before. Marnix adds to his joking about the politician with the piano: “Well he has a pretty face, so that sells.” He carries on that “a name is more important than what you’ve done. That’s just dirty.” Moreover, respondents despise that politics is all about selling yourself and your ideas: “It’s a bit looking at who has the biggest mouth. Just to get attention” (David).

Additionally, politics is called dirty because civil servants and politicians will do anything for power; defeat others and change their opinions. Respondents find this wrong and morally disgusting. Johan sees power plays as a nasty issue: “That people will do anything to turn people against each other. [...] They get stuck in these power plays of politics.” Johan would like to see that civil servants and politicians stay true to their “ideals.” Marnix refers to the change of opinions that he loathes: “It’s incredible. This politician changed his standpoint completely, turned 180 degrees. According to me, then you’re a first class misleader. [...] How can you look at yourself in the mirror after that?”

Again we see that respondents draw moral boundaries between themselves and government officials. Respondents value a fair play with honest people; people who are chosen for their competence and who stay true to who they are. Nevertheless, respondents do not believe this is the case and therefore they set politics apart as ‘just a performance’ that one should not take too seriously.

### **4.3 Four ideal types of (non-)participation**

These cultural dimensions and subdimensions that respondents emphasize, come together in different configurations, forming four distinct ideal types of (non-)participation in citizens’ initiatives. These ideal types are based on the discourses respondents use to reflect on the three different initiatives mentioned in the introduction and to explain their (non-)participation, what we can understand using the

insights on feelings of entitlement and a ‘taste for politics’ presented above. The ideal types are analytically distinct but might empirically overlap, meaning that respondents can use more than one discourse to describe their opinions, attitudes, feelings and practices. An overview of the ideal types with their (sub)dimensions is provided in table 1, at the end of the empirical delineation of the ideal types.

Before continuing, it is important to note that the ideal types are not based on correspondences of *what* respondents think of the discussed initiatives, but on similarities in *how* they evaluate the initiatives. As Daenekindt and Roose (2017) and Jarness (2015) showed, the disposition of persons is not so much revealed by *what* they prefer, as it is the *way* they prefer. I used this insight to discern the ideal types while making sense of the different opinions on the discussed initiatives. That is, although opinions on an initiative may differ within an ideal type, the respondents within that ideal type come to their opinion using the same frame for evaluating the initiative.

#### *4.3.1 “I’m afraid I would embarrass myself”: Retreating non-participation and lack of feelings of entitlement*

The first ideal type is characterized by an evaluation of citizens’ initiatives based on the role of the government. Responses vary from “a real accomplishment that civil servants were able to actually listen to citizens” (Petra), to “[it is] a task of the government to take care of children who struggle” (Melda and Eslem) and “it’s better if citizens organize it themselves, because when the government sets things up, it’s very limited” (Ziggy). Their replies are understandable given that these respondents also have a feeling in common of being excluded from participation by the authorities, which plays a significant role in their everyday experiences and in how they see themselves.

Respondents using this discourse of exclusion strongly lack feelings of entitlement, because of one or more of the aspects mentioned before. Consequently, these respondents experience that others look down on them and do not take them seriously as legitimate agents. They feel excluded which results in their retreat from the public domain. Hence, they do not participate in citizens’ initiatives.

Ziggy, who struggles with finding the right ‘style’ of language, explains how this hinders her to go to the authorities if she has an idea for an initiative: “Usually I’ve a sharp tongue, but with those kind of people I think ‘never mind’ [...] because I’m afraid I would embarrass myself. Or that they can just talk right through it so I can’t make my point.” When asked why she thinks government officials use this kind of language, she mumbles: “To discourage me.” Melda, who stumbles on the Dutch language, sees that she is not taken seriously because of that. She is currently unemployed and would love to contribute to society. Although she has many ideas and has often tried to communicate this to the authorities, she feels unheard. Sadly she sighs: “I feel like a prisoner here.”

Petra, who described the attitude of governments officials towards her as ‘patronizing’, gives numerous examples of why she feels unheard by the authorities, like the time she went to a meeting to discuss the redevelopment of a nearby square but “they didn’t do anything with her input.” This

experience and experiences similar to this, led Petra to distrust the authorities. She implies that civil servants might be corrupt, that they can be bribed by initiators to get an initiative implemented:

“I think they pay money for it. Honestly, I cannot think of any other reason. [...] I thought it was a set-up. [...] It looked as if it was all already fixed. I didn’t trust it for a single moment. [...] As if those civil servants already wanted this to happen beforehand. [...] Sometimes I just don’t trust it.”

This mistrust makes Petra doubt that her ideas will ever be taken seriously by the authorities. Also Ziggy shows some distrust and doubts whether her ideas will make any chance because the local government “will not look very objectively to each initiative.” Instead Ziggy disappointedly suspects that the authorities will select only “what fits them.” Petra, Ziggy and Melda are all insecure that their initiatives will be swept under the rug. They believe they will pull on the short end because of their stigma(s) like low educational level, living in the South, owning a ‘little shop’ and language use.

Despite the mistrust, these respondents do not disdain politics and government officials. They dislike what happens, but do not revolt or look down on it. Respondents want to be considered legitimate agents within the system as it is; they acknowledge and accept the status quo and wish to belong to the group of people that gets heard. Ziggy, for example, expresses a desire to have had a different kind of upbringing, a more “stimulating” one, that would enable her to feel confident in the public domain. Likewise, Petra does not want to be “that little women from that little shop” but wishes she could have influence on the neighbourhood like larger “commercial chains” have according to her.

In sum, respondents within this ideal type do not participate in any initiative, because they expect no one will take them seriously. Other respondents, who also do not participate, do so for different reasons.

#### *4.3.2 “You have to look a bit at what is the fastest solution that is also a bit cheap”: Pragmatic non-participation and disdaining red tape*

The second ideal type is marked by an evaluation of citizens’ initiatives by referring to financial factors and effectiveness. Respondents mention that “[if the local government would organize it] there would obviously have to come some sort of administrator who would get paid a lot, like really a lot, so in this way it reduces the costs” (Aniska) and David argues that “you have to look a bit at what is the fastest solution, that is also a bit cheap.” These respondents look for initiatives that are “immediately effective” (David) and “important” (Marnix). These evaluations are comprehensible, given the shared pragmatic discourse that these respondents use. They want things to be quick and effective and prefer practical knowledge and a hands-on mentality over bureaucratic rules and regulations.

These respondents ridicule the ‘different milieu’ politicians come from and despise politics as dishonest performance. They do not feel fully entitled to participate since they acknowledge that some sort of ‘expert knowledge’ is needed; knowledge that they lack. Nevertheless, this does not explain their non-participation. Most prevalent is their disdain towards bureaucratic red tape, inertia and occupation

with unimportant business previously described. They would not initiate a citizens' initiative because the slow bureaucratic system does not fit their pragmatic, hands-on way of living.

They explain their non-participation by expressing their aversion to time-consuming bureaucracy. Marnix would not initiate an initiative because of "the whole idea of bureaucracy. A form here, ticket office there and 'we call you back but will never be called,' well all that kind of red tape." Hence, David points out his solution: "If I would want to organize a neighbourhood barbecue, I would just organize it with some friends."

The impressions they have of people who initiate initiatives are revealing. Marnix, Aniska and David stress that those people have "too much time at hand." David therefore assumes that initiators must be "unemployed" or maybe be "housewives." Aniska firmly states: "They must be one of those three-hugging wacko's." Marnix underscores that idea and elaborates: "I guess they're older women without bras who vote left [...] those people who tell they can see your aura. That kind of spiritual types." The respondents see themselves as down-to-earth and hard-working so participating in citizens' initiatives does not fit their lifestyles; they distinguish themselves from people who do participate.

In short, we see that an aspect of a 'taste for politics', namely disdaining red tape accompanied by a favouring of practical knowledge, triggers their non-participation. Next, we see a type of non-participation that is rooted in a different aspect of taste, namely disinterest caused by the perception that politicians come from a different milieu.

#### *4.3.3 "Well, it'll come in handy when you'd have a small group and that you can take the initiative together": Potential cooperating participation and willingness to acquire affinity*

The third ideal type is characterized by an evaluation of citizens' initiatives based straightforward on the outcomes. These respondents do not pay attention to for example the role of the government (like the retreating non-participators do) or costs (as the pragmatic non-participators do) or motives (like respondents from the fourth ideal type do). They are just positive about every initiative which they describe as "fun" and "fraternizing" (Melanie) and "you have to see the benefits of it" (Leia). In contrast with the pragmatic non-participators, these respondents speak highly of initiators of citizens' initiatives and characterize them as "doers, people who get things done" (Bart), "organizers" (Melanie) and "go-getters" (Leia).

These respondents also have in common their use of an optimistic discourse that discloses a willingness to participate. These respondents show no disdain or dislike of politics; there appears to be simply no affinity because they come from a 'different milieu' – without attaching value to that – which results in disinterest. Their lack of affinity with politics results in their ignorance of the possibility of citizens' initiatives. When brought to their attention, they state a willingness to initiate an initiative, on condition that they can cooperate with others to support them and spread responsibility.

Leia, Bart and Melanie admit that they should be better informed about local and national politics. They comprehend it as their own responsibility to acquire affinity with the domain and are



willing to learn. Bart admits that he mostly skips political content when he reads newspaper or watches television, but concedes that he should “maybe just push himself [...] to go watch it for a week long or so” in order to get a grip on it. When Leia sees political debates on television, she often switches to another channel because politicians use “fancy” language. However, she continues: “[I don’t feel excluded by it] it actually motivates me to improve my vocabulary, because I always have the idea that my vocabulary is quite good.”

The respondents propose various ideas that they would like to initiate as citizens’ initiatives like a “day out for disabled people” (Melanie), a “community bike tour” (Bart) or a “reading afternoon for children” (Leia). Nevertheless, they do mention a lack of required ‘expert or theoretical knowledge’ and fear for responsibility over other people, which intimidates them. The last two aspects signify that these optimistic respondents do not feel completely entitled to participate.

Yet, they do not abandon their hopes and have found a potential solution; cooperation. As Leia stresses: “Well, it’ll come in handy when you’d have a small group and that you can take the initiative together.” Also Bart believes that it would help to have “multiple” people to get an “initiative done” and to “spread the responsibility.” And Melanie accentuates that she would have people around her that “agree with her” and “support her,” so she looks forward to initiate an initiative. Leia, Bart and Melanie do not see structural barriers. They agree that by “working together” anyone would be able to start an initiative and will be taken seriously by the local government.

To summarize, we see that these respondents are willing to participate, in cooperation with others, but have yet not participated because of their disinterest – caused by the perception that government officials come from a different milieu – and accompanied unawareness of the possibilities. The final ideal type addressed next, deals with different aspects of a ‘taste for politics’ namely strong disdain.

#### *4.3.4 “We like to mess up the system, or at least to shake things up”: Disavowing politics and rebellious participation*

The fourth ideal type is marked by an evaluation of citizens’ initiatives by referring to the (perceived) motives of initiators and impact on the neighbourhood. They are positive about the idea of citizens’ initiatives, since it provides opportunities for “people on the ground” (Bea) who know from practical experience what is needed in a neighbourhood. But because these respondents have close-by experiences with citizens’ initiatives and initiate initiatives themselves, they are sceptical about the underlying motives and interest of other initiators. Norbert is concerned about “narrow-minded nit-picking” and the pursuit of “self-interest, not interest for the neighbourhood.” Bea affirms that one “should not do individual stuff” and condemns volunteers who only have time for “the free meetings with lunches and all, and barbecues for volunteers.” Johan appreciates initiatives that “contribute to the neighbourhood and also improve people-to-people contact.” Their focus on motives and impact of initiatives is understandable since these respondents strive to contribute to their neighbourhood themselves.

They do this in a particular way that goes together with a discourse of rebellion. The respondents using this discourse exhibit a strong disdain towards the authorities, especially on the aspects of bureaucratic red tape and occupation with unimportant business and politics as performance, as elucidated before.

These respondents acknowledge the difficulties that come with paperwork and a particular use of language. However, this does not discourage them. Quite the opposite, it motivates them to revolt: “We like to mess up the system, or at least to shake things up” (Bea). And Johan illustrates clearly how he will not change himself just to conform to the standards of authorities. When he had to speak to the alderman, people asked him whether he was nervous and if he was well prepared, he reacted:

“Nervous? Why prepare? I know what I want to say and I’m gonna say that. And if I don’t express myself the way people are used to in terms of governmental language, well that doesn’t interest me. I speak from myself.”

These respondents enjoy the role of critical rebellious citizen and they feel socially entitled to do so. Norbert is completely in his element when civil servants “start tiptoeing around for him.” The same goes for Bea who proudly admits that civil servants will describe her as “a difficult, very difficult person, terrible, when they hear my name they’ll immediately think ‘o god there she comes again’.”

Despite – or thanks to – their disdain, these respondents are actively involved in various citizens’ initiatives and also initiate some themselves. They organize for example neighbourhood festivities, cooking classes and are members of neighbourhood associations. They are confident in finding their way in the administrative domain and do not mind calling a “superior” or “the alderman” (Johan) when necessary.

Interestingly, the respondents describe their own participation as having nothing to do with the politics they despise. Johan stresses that he would never want to become a civil servant, because of the “power plays.” He sees his work as head of the local shopkeepers association as something different, without power plays: “It’s not that bad. In any case not within the board. And because we’re only small, we all want the same things. And if you don’t all agree, we just vote and the majority decides. It’s that simple.” This dissociation between politics and one’s own participation is what Bennett et al. (2013) call ‘disavowing politics’. This particular relation to politics can facilitate civic engagement while cynicism towards the political system remains, as is the case with these respondents.

In short, we see that a strong disdain does not necessarily lead to non-participation; it can also induce participation as form of rebellion against the legitimate culture. These respondents like to participate in initiatives that have a long-lasting, structural impact on the neighbourhood and enables them to rebel against the authorities.

Table 1 provides an overview of the four discerned ideal types of (non-)participation, with the (sub)dimensions of feelings of entitlement and a ‘taste for politics’ that make up the specific configurations forming the ideal types.

	Lack of feelings of entitlement		A 'taste for politics'				
	Stigma	Insufficient mastery	Red tape and occupation with unimportant business		Government officials come from different milieu		Politics as dirty power play
			Disdain (opposing)	Dislike (accepting)	Disdain (opposing)	Disinterest (accepting)	
<i>Retreating non-participation</i>							
<i>Pragmatic non-participation</i>							
<i>Potential cooperating participation</i>							
<i>Rebellious participation</i>							

Table 1: Ideal types and their (sub)dimensions. A light grey box means that the subdimension is present within that ideal type. A dark grey box indicates that the subdimension is a leading principle within that ideal type.

## 5. Conclusion and discussion

This research shows that a cultural understanding of (non-)participation in citizens' initiatives by the less educated, provides a meaningful addition to current dominant explanations as outlined in the theoretical framework. The perception of one's position in the social field and inter-subjective meaning making, matters in explaining (non-)participation.

It does so via two distinct ways: feelings of entitlement and a 'taste for politics,' with each having different subdimensions. These mechanisms are not only analytically distinct, but as my research shows, are also empirically different. Not everyone who lacks feelings of entitlement also displays the elements corresponding with a 'taste for politics' and vice versa. Hence, someone who feels not socially entitled to participate, does not necessarily exhibit disdain towards the political field. And someone who expresses a strong disdain, does not automatically do so because s/he feels excluded and unheard by the authorities. This finding has important implications for prevailing theories on political (non-) participation.

First, the dominant explanations – besides that they only partly explain non-participation – treat less educated as passive persons who are 'missing' principal features like time, money, relevant skills and knowledge or social capital. These theories do not consider the possibility that less educated citizens actively refuse to participate, because they do not want to, since they for example abominate red tape or the smooth tongues of politicians. Secondly, against what we would expect from Bourdieusian theory, I found by closely examining aspects of taste, that a distaste for politics does not necessarily lead to disengagement but can in fact enable some citizens to politically participate.

Thirdly, my findings point to a tension in Bourdieu's (1984) thinking. At the one hand, he argues that the dominant political powers exclude the less educated from the field, by dismissing them as

illegitimate actors, in order to maintain their power. The implicit image of the less educated appears to be one of docility, of submissively accepting the unequal sociocultural structure. On the other hand, he alludes to the importance of milieu-specific tastes and lifestyles and the class boundary drawing that accompanies it. Although these lifestyles are socially structured – meaning that dominant classes determine what the legitimate lifestyles are – this line of thinking embraces a quite different view on less educated citizens, namely as actively opposing the legitimate culture. Bourdieu does not directly relate these two lines of thinking to each other.

Therefore, it comes as no surprise that in Neo-Bourdieuian thinking, dimensions of entitlement and taste become intermingled, as if they are one and the same mechanism (see for example Lamont, 2002; Laurison, 2015; Manning & Holmes, 2014). Researchers then come to the conclusion that disdaining politics is a response to the feeling of not being taken seriously by the government. However, my results indicate that disdaining politics is too swiftly dismissed as coming from a lack of feelings of entitlement or being unheard. A disdain towards the political domain just as well exists within people who do feel socially entitled. My research must therefore be seen as a call to disentangle feelings of entitlement and a ‘taste for politics’ when we want to understand the political opinions, positions and forms of participation of the less educated. By disentangling the mechanisms and disclosing their subdimensions, I was able to distinguish four ideal types of (non-)participation.

Before discussing other suggestions for further research and the limitations of my research, I point out one more implication of my findings, that relates to Bourdieu’s (1984) and Lamont’s (2002) observations that lower class people rely on emotions and morals when they evaluate politics. Additionally, I found that they do not only use emotional and ethical notions, but also refer to practical grounds when evaluating politics. They draw boundaries between theoretical and practical ways of knowing and regard themselves as having practical knowledge. For some this results in feeling less entitled to deal with political matters, whilst others articulate a disdain of theoretical knowledge. Future research could shed a light on the relation between social class, ways of knowing and the evaluation thereof, which might have important implications for the reproduction of intergenerational inequality. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) emphasize that education is a field that reproduces class inequality, whereby the agents who occupy dominant positions sort and sift children into various educational trajectories – like practical or theoretical education – to perpetuate or advance their own higher social position. My analysis indicates that the reproduction of inequality through education, could also be rooted in a milieu-specific taste, namely disdain towards theoretical knowledge. If this is the case, then people from lower classes are not so much – or not only – excluded from higher educational institutions by dominant groups, but they actively choose to stay away from it, since they perceive practical knowledge to be more valuable.

My research has a qualitative, explorative approach using in-depth interviews. It proves to be a useful method to reveal underlying reasons for (non-)participation and to give a platform to ‘excluded’ citizens who are less likely to express their opinions in quantitative surveys (Laurison, 2015).

Nevertheless, my approach has its limitations. Interestingly, I did not find people who express a strong lack of feelings of entitlement *and* a strong disdain towards politics, although I can imagine that those people exist. I think it is reasonable to assume that those persons are the ones that did not want to participate in my research, as mentioned in the methods and data section. When it comes to discussing attitudes towards established institutions, like the local government, less educated are less likely to cooperate or share their (negative) opinion with people who they perceive are coming from that same establishment, like the university (Hulst, 2017). I therefore recommend researchers who want to follow up on my research, to carefully consider the appearance of the interviewer. Preferably, respondents must not immediately associate the interviewer with academia.

Evidently, quantitative research could and should build on my qualitative research, to examine if and how feelings of entitlement, a ‘taste for politics’, its subdimensions and the ideal types occur within the larger population. Additionally one could research how context conditions, like democratic tradition (Hadjar & Beck, 2010) or type of welfare regime (Larsen, 2006) are linked to the prevalence of certain ideal types. Moreover, future research is needed to explain *why* some respondents develop a lack of feelings of entitlement, whilst others more strongly develop a disdain or disinterest towards politics. This is a question of why certain citizens develop certain configurations of the (sub)dimensions. Following Bourdieu’s (1984) notion of *habitus* we would expect that socialization plays an all-important role, however this needs to be further scrutinized. A social-psychological, longitudinal or biographic approach might be suitable to answer the question.

I conclude with the implications of my research for policy makers, who want to enhance participation in citizens’ initiatives. It is clear that aiming to reduce time and costs of participation, or to boost social capital or political skills and knowledge, will not be sufficient. Policy makers need to take into account the different cultural dimensions set forth in this research, which restrain or stimulate participation, as is shown in the various ideal types. It is important to break the cultural divide that less educated perceive between themselves and the political field. One could put effort into changing the image that politicians come from a different milieu, accentuating that politicians are also “normal” people, as respondents like to see it. Moreover, sensitivity training for government officials can create awareness of differences in cultural capital and related behaviour repertoires (Van der Waal, De Koster & Van Noord, 2017).

In addition, one could strive to convince the citizens who feel excluded that their voices matter and are taken seriously. We saw that respondents feel less socially entitled to participate because of their stigma(s) and perceived lack of the right ‘kind’ of knowledge and language. Policies could aim for destigmatization (see also Lamont, 2018). As a first step, I figure that those citizens could be stimulated to participate by explicitly inviting them to participate *because of* the attributes that they perceive as their stigma(s) and *because of* the kind of language they speak and the knowledge they have.

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## **Appendix A**

### *Description of discussed citizens' initiatives*

The first example is the organization of a Lightsnight in the sub-municipality Hoek van Holland, to commemorate and honour the dead. The initiator asked the local government for permission and funding, after which she did the organizing herself. At the evening, 250 residents of Hoek van Holland gathered, listened to local choirs and talked with each other about their passed loved ones (Gemeente Rotterdam, 2015a). We see that this initiative has a rather small size, short duration and a low intensity of government involvement.

The second example is the Schepenstraat. The local government proposed a new land-use planning for this street that was subsidizing. The plan caused unrest among the residents, who saw their beloved old trees would disappear. Hence, three residents – two civil engineers and a landscape architect – took the matter into their own hands and proposed an alternative plan that would save the trees. After three years of consulting, talking and negotiating, the alternative plan was approved by the local government (Gemeente Rotterdam, 2018). We see that this initiative has a small size (only affecting the residents of the street), a rather long duration (over three years) and asked a considerable intensity of involvement of both initiators and government officials.

The third and final example, has a large size, long duration and high intensity of involvement from volunteers. This initiative provides free homework assistance and support lessons to primary and secondary school children in the Rotterdam neighbourhood Feyenoord. The initiator successfully asked the local government for funding. The initiative took off in 2015 and is expected to continue for more years to come. The initiator takes care of the day-to-day management on a voluntary basis, with the help of many other volunteers, like teachers. The local governments pays for the rent and maintenance of the building (Gemeente Rotterdam, 2015b).

## Appendix B

### *Overview respondents*

<i>Name</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Rotterdam area</i>	<i>Decent</i>
Aniska	Female	27	Management assistant	Centre (grown up in South)	Dutch
David	Male	25	Worker agriculture	Centre	Dutch
Johan	Male	47	Shop assistant	West	Dutch
Melanie	Female	26	Worker social care	South	Dutch
Petra	Female	59	Shop owner	North	Dutch
Bart	Male	29	Worker hospitality	West	Dutch
Norbert	Male	69	Pensioner	South	Dutch
Leia	Female	29	Worker social care	South	Dutch
Melda	Female	55	Unemployed	South	Turkish
Ziggy	Female	28	Worker hospitality	South	Dutch
Bea	Female	60	Worker hospitality	South	Dutch
Eslem	Female	53	Unemployed	North	Turkish
Marnix	Male	32	Worker social care	Centre	Dutch