

# Why HipHopHuis Matters?

A critical inquiry into identity, space and superdiversity in  
Rotterdam

Thesis

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## **Abstract**

HipHopHuis in Rotterdam is explored not merely as a local adaptation of hip-hop, but as a place to negotiate identities and power dynamics of a superdiverse population. This thesis investigates and challenges the concept of superdiversity by studying it as lived experience, and as urban reality and historically built narrative and image of the city. In the interplay between the two, I question whether superdiversity in migration and demography of the population also means cultural and social superdiversity. Because of its global popularity, contested artistic expressions and daring social commentary, hip-hop emerged as a space to rethink the reach of superdiversity, with spatial relations as one way to do so. The other way is that of daily interactions captured through ethnography. HipHopHuis is then a contact space through which people interact, extend their biographies and gain opportunities. Finally, the thesis concludes that HipHopHuis' identity and belonging negotiation depends on the question if superdiversity equals not only cultural diversity but an understanding of cultural differences.

**Keywords:** hip-hop, superdiversity, identity, difference, place, space, neighbourhoods, discourse, ethnography, HipHopHuis, Rotterdam.

# Vocabulary <sup>1</sup>

**Hip-hop elements-** there are four constitutive manifestations of the culture, commonly referred to as the ‘elements.’ These are emceeing (MCing), turntablism or DJing, breaking (b-boying) and graffiti art. Knowledge is often added as the fifth element.

**MCing (also used: rapping)** – refers to a rhythmic way to pronounce a rhyming text, and it is distinct from spoken word poetry as it is performed to music. MCing became prevalent in the 1970s and 1980s as the oral aspect of hip-hop when MCs used particular vernacular and rhyming to freestyle and introduce DJs and performing artists. Today this title is often given to rappers.

**DJing-** playing recorded music usually to radio or a nightclub audience where the ‘disc’ referred initially to vinyl records, but today it encompasses all of the mediums (vinyl, CDs, MP3). In hip-hop, DJs use the technique of turntablism where turntables are used for scratching and manipulating existing sounds and music in order to compose entirely new music.

**Breakdance-** b-boying or breaking, also known as breakdance, is an acrobatic style of dancing with movements such as headspins and backspins. Breakdance is divided into four types of movements: top rock, footwork, freezes and power moves. They usually dance to hip-hop music, funk music and breakbeats.

**Bboys-** a breakdancer becomes a b-boy, b-girl or a breaker in the hip-hop community.

**Graffiti-** texts or drawings that are usually scribbled without an invitation, scratched or painted on a wall or other surface, often in a public place. Graffiti can range from tags, written words to elaborate paintings. Paint (especially spray paint) and highlighters are the most commonly used graffiti materials.

**Street art-** an umbrella term used for unsolicited art in public spaces, specifically on the street. Graffiti, stencil graffiti, poster art, sticker art, street installations, sculptures and recently muralism are common forms of street art.

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<sup>1</sup> This introductory vocabulary contains some concise definitions for the easier navigation through the thesis; there is a rich history behind each dance style and element of hip-hop culture. The vocabulary refers to HipHopHuis’ vocabulary provided in their “Multiyear plan 2017-2020,” and is complemented by the shared knowledge of hip-hop culture, elements and dances the author acquired through seven years long involvement with the culture.

**Popping**- a funk and street dance style that originated in the late 1960s and 1970s, based on the technique of *popping* or 'hitting' by quickly contracting and relaxing muscles. Its roots are in funk and disco music of the 1970s; however, later poppers started to dance to other genres of music such as hip-hop, electronic music or more instrumental and experimental hip-hop.

**Battles**- the competitive side of hip-hop involving artists competing with each other and showing their skill. It is one of the most fundamental rituals within hip-hop culture where the goal is usually to exchange, realise one's skills and earn respect. Battles are also done to resolve disagreements or win a prize.

**Crew**- a group of people, usually friends or partners, with an artistic purpose. Being part of a crew used to be the only way to learn a style when hip-hop started, and when there was no organised way of teaching hip-hop. By forming and participating in a crew, you could practice, get better, make friends and build relationships.

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Lecture notes: from battles to museum exhibitions

We were seated in the large auditorium of Kunsthall museum in Rotterdam. It was late August 2019, and the last day of our summer school. That day we were discussing ‘The Glocalisation of the Music Industry,’ and while we listened about music ecologies, festivalisation, urban music culture and hip-hop, lines of visitors were forming in front of Kunsthall. Mostly youth, they were coming to see the exhibition ‘Street Dreams: How Hip-hop took over Fashion.’<sup>2</sup> The halls were filling with people, and some looked like they could have been a part of the exhibition displaying the latest influences hip-hop had on fashion and particularly streetwear. That Thursday in Kunsthall was emblematic of hip-hop’s popularity far away from its mothership in the boroughs of New York.

Nevertheless, nothing is striking about the fact that hip-hop is popular, being one of the largest music industries and immense creative force in the industry of fashion; but one should not be mistaken and think this is where hip-hop ends. On the other side of the exhibition walls, we were listening to Aruna Vermeulen, one of the founders and the director of HipHopHuis [HipHopHouse] in Rotterdam. Along with her colleague, they stood in front of a black and white PowerPoint conveying the palette of colours that is hip-hop culture. Beyond b-boying, deejaying, rapping and graffiti, hip-hop is a lifestyle, and HipHopHuis is a community that builds people up, said Aruna and Kanvie.

Later on, they looked back to 2002- the founding year of HipHopHuis when Rotterdam was in the momentum of being the European Capital of Culture in 2001. In the early years of HipHopHuis, breaking was the most attractive element of hip-hop culture people would come to learn. However, that day HipHopHuis was in the role of curator and collaborator to a museum exhibition, and they were teaching a lot more to a different audience. The first installation which the visitors of the museum encounter is the video of sixty Rotterdam residents taking part in the timeline of hip-hop and fashion relationship, filmed on West-Kruiskade street. With its shrewd name hinting context-

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<sup>2</sup> “Street Dreams: How Hiphop took over Fashion,” Kunsthall, accessed July 13, 2020, <https://www.kunsthall.nl/en/plan-your-visit/exhibitions/hiphop/>

relevant spatial reference ‘A Trip Down the Memory Block,’ the installation includes members of HipHopHuis wearing looks from iconic music videos.

Next to globally known artists, photographers and brands; pioneers and key figures of the local scene, found their place in the Kunsthal museum through grassroots forms of hip-hop embedded in HipHopHuis. Hence the question ‘how hip-hop took over museums?’

## **1.2 The moral of the story: base for the inquiry**

Years have passed since hip-hop artists made it to the top lists. In 1979 The Sugarhill Gang saw their rap song, ‘Rapper’s Delight’ join the Billboard Hot 100 and become a Top 40 hit. Larger than the success of this rapper trio, some perceive the year 1979 as the turning point beyond which the boundaries of hip-hop have become blurred.<sup>3</sup> Chaining hip-hop with commercial forces was the beginning, and the end of the movement suggests Watkins.<sup>4</sup> Hip-hop was no longer underground but became visible to a broader audience. Almost fifty years ago, hip-hop was the most accessible ‘creative form’ in the Bronx, New York City, but today it is a cultural juggernaut and global industry worth millions<sup>5</sup>.

With cultural globalisation and increasing reliance on the cultural economy, hip-hop spread around the world with the intensity worth attention of research and academic inquiry. History, testimonies and artefacts of hip-hop culture appeared worth preserving. Soon, hip-hop artists entered the hall of fame. Universities organised research departments and engaged in making all kinds of collections in addition to hosting and appointing hip-hop pioneers and artists as lecturers. The Hip Hop Archive and Research Institute at Harvard, Cornell Hip Hop Collection, hip-hop collections across Smithsonian and hip-hop courses and studies taught at numerous universities illustrate the seriousness of the grip researchers and scholars have on the culture.

However, the question of how hip-hop took over museums does not strictly refer to this line of inquiry following the emergence of the study field. It rather stems from the cross-cultural observation raising the investigation into the matter of why HipHopHuis plays a significant role

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<sup>3</sup> Samuel Craig Watkins, *Hip hop matters: politics, pop culture and the struggle for the soul of a movement* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005), 10.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Tricia Rose, *The Hip Hop Wars: What We Talk About When We Talk About Hip Hop- and Why it Matters* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 135, ProQuest Ebook Central; Watkins, *Hip Hop Matters*, 1-3.

in the cultural landscape of Rotterdam that today it appears to be one of the city-makers and valued voice in knowledge production of cultural histories. Considering Rotterdam's superdiverse population, it would only make sense that a large number of cultural expressions and logics exists within the city. Not all of these cultures and adjacent forms of art and expression are present to the same extent in the cultural setting; for HipHopHuis believes an all-white cultural organisation cannot be representative and respond to the needs of Rotterdam youth- 'It takes one to know one' is one of their slogans.<sup>6</sup> Although hip-hop enjoys global popularity and presence, not every locality fosters the social context in which hip-hop flourishes.

Hip-hop culture is an urban culture exploring urban realities. In 'hoods,' 'ghettos' and 'wards' hip-hop culture debated social struggles of Black and Latin American youth of 1970s New York in the aftermath of the urban renewal.<sup>7</sup> The result was neighbourhood destruction and further distress for the urban black population in already segregated urban housing that was, however, the 'source of community strength and general stability.'<sup>8</sup> In newly uprooted communities, hip-hop came to reflect an economy of selling mixtapes on the streets, making music in basements and 'crafting new identities'.<sup>9</sup>

In the case of Rotterdam, superdiversity shapes urban realities. Superdiversity is different from ethnic diversity and is beyond multiculturalism. While multiculturalism reached its capacity to address specific issues and realities, superdiversity too assumes opportunities as well as challenges. How hip-hop as a culture embodied in HipHopHuis addresses and debates these challenges and opportunities of Rotterdam's urban life? Do hip-hop culture and superdiverse population complement each other? How identities shaped within hip-hop interact with those

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<sup>6</sup> "Meerjaren beleidsplan 2017-2020" (Multiyear policy plan 2017-2020), (Rotterdam: Stichting HipHopHuis Holland, 2016), 15.

<sup>7</sup> Rose, *The Hip Hop Wars*, 44.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. Rose particularly refers to the notion of black ghettos as result of forced housing segregation in the twentieth century. Starting in the 1960s, urban renewal projects displaced thousands of residents without providing adequate housing replacements, writes Rose. This practice had a detrimental effect on black communities conditioning further poverty, unemployment, discrimination and social insecurities. According to Rose, while these communities were poor they rested on solid social networks. The uprooting by renewal programmes destroyed these communities. In addition to the context provided by Rose, Serouj Aprahamian investigated the patterns of building the narrative of hip-hop's origins in 'deprivation and lawlessness.' The importance of Aprahamian's observation lies in questioning the frequency and simplicity with which hip-hop is often linked to gang violence. See Serouj Aprahamian, "Hip-Hop, Gangs, and the Criminalization of African American Culture: A Critical Appraisal of 'Yes Yes Y'all,'" *Journal of Black Studies* 50, no.3 (April 2019): 298-315.

<sup>9</sup> Watkins, *Hip Hop Matters*, 9.

emerging from superdiversity? Following this direction of inquiry, research question emerges as ‘Why and how HipHopHuis and hip-hop culture debate and negotiate belongingness in the city of Rotterdam while shaping identities of its superdiverse population?’ The main research question breaks down in four subquestions corresponding to the chapters of this thesis: (1) What is the social and historical context of HipHopHuis’ emergence in Rotterdam?; (2) How did the role of HipHopHuis change over time, 2002-2020?; (3) Why and how HipHopHuis fosters many diverse identities and interactions between them? Furthermore, consequently, if this nurtures positive sentiments of belonging?; (4) Why are space and place important for HipHopHuis, and what does this reveal about the spatial manifestation of superdiversity?

The argument of this thesis develops to show two sides of the relationship between superdiversity and hip-hop culture. The first level is of the city, where superdiversity imbues the image of Rotterdam and collective identity of Rotterdammers, and where it presents Rotterdam’s urban reality. On this level, hip-hop as a culture, and HipHopHuis as a grassroots cultural organisation negotiate with existing power structures through communicative and symbolic values of space. Space and place appear to be channels of belonging to the cultural landscape of Rotterdam. Superdiversity is problematised to the extent of questioning the openness to cultural forms of superdiverse population, or the idea of requiring cultural organisations to fit in one box as superdiverse identities do in the end.<sup>10</sup>

The second level of the argument observes superdiversity as everyday experience and part of HipHopHuis’ microcosm. On this level, the complexity of multiple and diverse identities interact daily within the context shaped by the values of hip-hop culture and within its patterns of behaviour. Here, ethnography and biographical approach explore the daily realities of superdiversity questioning whether it translates into social and cultural superdiversity and creates diversity in behaviours and identity-making.<sup>11</sup> Finally, these complementary yet inverse lines of analysis investigate differences in experiencing superdiversity when it comes to hip-hop: is superdiversity the reality of the cultural landscape and grassroots organisations in Rotterdam?

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<sup>10</sup> Marianne van Bochove and Jack Burgers, “Between Choice and Stigma: Identifications of Economically Successful Migrants,” in *Coming to Terms with Superdiversity: The Case of Rotterdam*, eds. Peter Scholten, Maurice Crul and Paul van de Laar (Springer Open, 2019), 82, IMISCOE Research Series.

<sup>11</sup> Hans Siebers, “Does the superdiversity label stick? Configurations of ethnic diversity in Dutch class rooms,” *International Sociology* 33, no. 6 (2018): 687.

### 1.3 The relevance of the story: why study HipHopHuis in Rotterdam

Studying cultural organisation HipHopHuis in local context calls upon rethinking and critical investigation of the concept of superdiversity. On the one hand, superdiversity implies new ways of belonging to society, testing the limits of social interactions. On the other, challenges often come as products of interaction between different groups and in the context of how particular society has dealt with migration and integration from a historical perspective<sup>12</sup>. Superdiversity signifies complex histories of migration and includes the colonial migrant, economic migrant but also refugees and asylum seekers. In superdiversity, colonial migrant or guest workers are no longer ‘a homogenous grey mass’ put under the umbrella of post-war social and economic setting in Europe.<sup>13</sup> The extent of challenges faced in a superdiverse population also depends on the strictness of the definition of ‘us.’<sup>14</sup>

In line with this, Steven Vertovec, the leading scholar of superdiversity, explained that the fear of diversification is common for superdiverse cities. The fear often follows a rapid ethnic change, with the accent on the speed instead of the scale of the change<sup>15</sup>. The fear of diversification is also spatially represented as ‘halo effect’- dominantly white areas bordering diverse spaces.<sup>16</sup> For instance, in Rotterdam, Vertovec argues that Schiedam and Nissewaard are examples of the ‘halo effect,’ where Schiedam saw a rapid change in ethnic composition.<sup>17</sup>

Furthermore, increased ethnic diversity may lead to various practices of exclusion and exclusive spaces, ethnically, racially, socially homogenous neighbourhoods, and co-presence without contact. The ‘contact hypothesis’ assumes that positive contact with people or groups with different backgrounds can influence attitude change and foster positive sentiments.<sup>18</sup> Positive, even brief, interactions with someone of a different background leads towards more positive sentiments, claims Vertovec. Note, however, that Vertovec in this place talks about urban ethnic (and often

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<sup>12</sup> Nando Sigona, “How is (super)diversity changing how we belong?” Migration Matters, accessed June 1, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xYXrwcW-1Vc>

<sup>13</sup> Jozefien De Bock, “Not all the same after all? Superdiversity as a lens for the study of past migrations,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 34, no. 4 (2015): 584.

<sup>14</sup> Sigona, “How is (super)diversity changing how we belong?”

<sup>15</sup> Steven Vertovec, “Understanding Urban Diversity, or what’s the matter with Rotterdam?” IMISCOE Conference (June 2017), accessed June 1, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n7hKmjXcsJg>

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

religious) diversity and not superdiversity. It remains relevant to investigate spatial patterns of superdiversity and clarify what ‘super’ in superdiversity signifies.

However, could HipHopHuis be a space of encounter, a contact zone? Ethnography and the approach of biographies adopted in this thesis argue so. In 2019, HipHopHuis received an award for speaking to the most diverse audience.<sup>19</sup> However, this audience has always been part of HipHopHuis due to its grassroots character, hip hop value system and understandings of identity. HipHopHuis represents a particular cultural legacy and heritage to which many relate. For this reason, it is of great importance to have space and conditions to communicate these values to society. In addition to the social relevance of this thesis, it also employs the ethnographic method of studying superdiversity to contribute to the combination of methodologies usually applied to superdiverse populations.

Finally, this thesis’ purpose is to collect oral history accounts about hip-hop and HipHopHuis in Rotterdam, unpretentiously suggesting the importance of recording the abundance of voices shaping the local community.

#### **1.4 The Storyline: instructions for reading**

The story and analysis of HipHopHuis and superdiverse Rotterdam is structured in the following manner. The second chapter reviews the most relevant literature and scholarship about hip-hop culture and superdiversity, introducing the theoretical framework of the thesis. The literature review, while exploring debates and critiques of studying hip-hop and superdiversity, it also unveils particular methodologies that became yardsticks for researching these social phenomena. The third chapter, hence, outlines and elaborates the choices of methodology such as ethnography and mapping. It also discusses the implicit neighbourhood perspective and its importance, finally displaying the process of the data collection.

The fourth chapter is Rotterdam oriented and focuses on the city transformation following the 1970s turn towards the symbolic and cultural economy and urban redevelopment. Although concise, the insights in Rotterdam’s trajectory unveils the city’s spatial dynamics and power

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<sup>19</sup> “The Doro Siepelprijs,” awarded by the municipality of Rotterdam. See “Doro Siepelprijs for Rotterdammer of the Week Aruna Vermeulen,” *De Havenloods*, accessed July 14, 2020. <https://www.dehavenloods.nl/nieuws/algemeen/813138/doro-siepelprijs-voor-rotterdammer-van-de-week-aruna-vermeulen>

relations, as well as strong narrational currents towards the history of migration, cultural diversity and superdiversity. Reconstructing the life of HipHopHuis and the perception of its culture in Rotterdam through mostly newspaper outlets is the topic of chapter five. This chapter follows the story of HipHopHuis from 2002 to 2020 and applies discourse analysis to the narration about this grassroots organisation, capturing the change in its representation and perception.

Chapter six is purely ethnographic. Starting with how identity is understood in this thesis, it proceeds to offer the biographies of all the interviewees who are also artists, dancers, entrepreneurs, leaders and citizens, and who make HipHopHuis. After the summary and analysis of the interviews, chapter six delves into the ethnography of interactions. Contrary to chapter six, which explores the experience of superdiversity in daily interactions, chapter seven questions the narrative of superdiversity by looking into the spatial distribution of cultural institutions, organisations and activities. Employing mapping shows that the importance of positioning in the city and its cultural landscape has little to do with being close to one's audience but essentially relates to existing power dynamics embedded in space.

Finally, the eighth chapter, namely conclusions, summarise the most relevant findings and instigate two debates: first about the extent to which superdiversity relates to cultural diversity, and while Vertovec focuses on migration driven diversity but also includes different ways of life, it still might be relevant to address the distinction between cultural diversity and cultural difference. The second debate raises the question of spatial representation of superdiversity and whether the ethnic factor up to this time plays a significant role, framing the decisions about cultural activities.

## 2 Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Multidisciplinary hip hop studies: readers, companions and canons

In 2016 Netflix premiered three seasons long series of documentaries under the mighty name of ‘Hip Hop Evolution.’<sup>20</sup> The series encompassed the early days of 1970s Bronx born youth culture, the pivotal moments such as East-West Coast feud, the rise of West Coast hip-hop, the dominance of the South in the late 1990s, and the later diversification and the global rise of hip-hop. Through insights into specific regional and city-based colourations of Bronx’s originated hip-hop culture, these episodes included testimonies of hip hop pioneers and representative artists from each of the hip-hop dominated regions in the US. Their accounts show the abundant knowledge of the events that marked the history of hip-hop culture- from first block parties and basement recording labels to publicly endorsed legal battles against rap’s explicit language and the formation of a billion-dollar industry. The narration, sometimes of the biographical kind, illustrates the shifts in dominance, changes in text and musical production, the emergence of new hybrid forms of artistic expression in touch with local influences. With an overwhelming appetite for the production of documentaries on a plethora of topics, in case of ‘Hip Hop Evolution,’ the production was only able to generate such knowledge abundant, comprehensive and consistent account on hip-hop culture because of the ample literature, both of academic and popular character, surrounding the topic.

Jeff Cheng’s ‘Can’t Stop Won’t Stop: A History of the Hip Hop Generation’ book from 2005 still offers dominant timeline and chronology.<sup>21</sup> One year before Cheng’s publication, Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal edited Routledge’s hip-hop reader ‘That’s the Joint!’ with the second edition published in 2011.<sup>22</sup> This extensive reader collected academic and journalistic writings about the history and historiography of hip-hop, relevant debates about authenticity, spatial

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<sup>20</sup> “Hip-Hop Evolution Series Trailer,” Hip-Hop Evolution, accessed June 1, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rm3J5640jXo>

<sup>21</sup> Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop, Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation* (Ebury Press, 2005). KRS-One criticized Chang for accentuating the violence momentum in the birth of hip-hop culture depriving it from hopes for cultural leadership and reducing the variety of voices and personalities to that of DJ Kool Herc and his block parties. See Jeff Chang, “KRS-One on Can’t Stop, Won’t Stop,” accessed July 13, 2020, <http://cantstopwontstop.com/blog/krs-one-on-cant-stop-wont-stop/>

<sup>22</sup> Mark Anthony Neal and Murray Forman. *That's the Joint!: The Hip-Hop Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2004).



politics, gender, but also discuss hip-hop in terms of new technologies and cultural industries. In the manner of listing the milestones of the literature about hip-hop, there is a convention that David Toop's 'The Rap Attack' from 1984 stands as a starting point for what is today known as hip-hop studies.<sup>23</sup>

Tricia Rose's seminal 'Black Noise'<sup>24</sup> is almost always taken into account for its vigilant consideration of how the culture interplays with structures of capitalist and commodified societies.<sup>25</sup> Rose has also committed to addressing the uneasy relationship between the popularity and obscenity of hip-hop, specifically rap music. In 'The Hip Hop Wars,' Rose addresses ten most common debates amongst hip hop's critics and defenders, as she calls them.<sup>26</sup> The former often cling onto the idea that hip hop glorifies violence, encourages crime and degrades women.<sup>27</sup> Rose argues that these critiques come from the belief that portrayals of violent behaviours and consequently, their consumption through music and images present in hip-hop undeniably lead to the act of violence. Hip-hop and rap music are not the only examples facing the outrage of this belief; the same argument confronted violent video games in the 1980s and heavy metal music later. While Rose is not claiming that the consumption of violent images is without negative impact, she argues that the link between consumption and action is not 'one- to- one causal.'<sup>28</sup> For scholars to address the profanity and controversy within hip-hop culture became implicit considering the pro-censorship movements in the late 1980s culminating in mid-1990s. Groups such as PMRC expressed their dissatisfaction with the kind of music and expletive lyric artists such as NWA were making.<sup>29</sup> One of NWA members, Ice Cube, commented on this account: '[these] aren't fairy tales or scenes from a movie. This is our reality.'<sup>30</sup> The hip-hop's defenders in Rose's writings advance the point Ice Cube conveyed. Defender's camp of hip-hop scholarship

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<sup>23</sup> David Toop, *The Rap Attack: African Jive to New York Hip Hop* (London: Pluto Press Limited, 1984).

<sup>24</sup> Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*. (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1994).

<sup>25</sup> Guthrie P. Ramsey "Black Noise: *Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*, by Tricia Rose" *Notes* 52, no. 2 (1995): 425.

<sup>26</sup> Rose, *The Hip Hop Wars*, 34.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>29</sup> PMRC stands for the Parent's Music Resource Centre. See Rupa Huq, "Selling, selling out or resisting dominant discourses? Rap and the uses of hip-hop culture," in *Beyond Subculture: Pop, youth and identity in postcolonial world* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 112.

<sup>30</sup> Nick Johnstone, *Melody Maker History of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Popular Music* (London: Bloomsbury, 1999), 314.

underlines the idea of hip-hop culture as a social commentary and portrayal of ‘unpleasant realities and hard-to-hear truths.’<sup>31</sup>

The academic study of hip-hop is multidisciplinary, both in terms of disciplines and approaches it encompasses as well as methodologies it relies upon when studying the culture. Hip-hop scholarship comprises of sciences such as sociology, anthropology, ethnomusicology, comparative literature, political science, linguistics, urban studies, visual arts, film studies and many other. While some of the publications mentioned above are popular and other are academic, they both stem from the growing influence and global presence of hip-hop culture. The latest corpus dedicated to this powerful form of cultural expression and comprehension is ‘The Cambridge Companion to Hip-Hop’ (2015) edited by Justin A. Williams.<sup>32</sup>

In the introduction to this volume, the editor stresses two significant themes within the field. The first one is geography, implying that it is always worth examining the local context of where forms of hip hop are emerging. Exploring ‘where something is happening’ and ‘where the artists come from’ permeates the chapters of this edited volume.<sup>33</sup> The second theme imbuing the hip-hop scholarship, according to Williams, reflects the interpretations of the hip-hop culture and its local varieties as forms of empowerment and ‘giving voice to voiceless.’<sup>34</sup> Williams’ critique that the idea of ‘lacking voice’ is far more complicated when it comes to ‘ethnic and racial mixing of post-colonial cultures’ imbues this thesis.<sup>35</sup> The processes of global dissemination of hip-hop cannot be comprehended through oppositional categories such as ‘marginal-dominant’, ‘empowered-ghettoised’ because they can threaten to induce limited understandings of identity.<sup>36</sup> This complexity is observable in the multiplicity of disciplines engaging with hip-hop. They explore the ability of the culture to penetrate the problematics of political and social ills, political campaigns, grassroots movements and protests, industries, music styles, fashion, lifestyle, urban cultures but also historically loaded concepts of race, class, gender, and finally globalisation.

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<sup>31</sup> Rose, *The Hip Hop Wars*, 135.

<sup>32</sup> Justin A. Williams, *The Cambridge Companion to Hip-Hop* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

<sup>33</sup> Justin A. Williams, “Introduction: The Interdisciplinary World of Hip-Hop Studies,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hip-Hop*, edited by Justin A. Williams, Cambridge Companions to Music. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 1-8.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

The aim of 'The Cambridge Companion to Hip Hop' was not to introduce groundbreaking writings about hip hop but rather to extend the multidisciplinary conversation.<sup>37</sup> The first part of this volume, 'Elements', discusses not only four constitutive elements of hip-hop but also 'candidate elements,' in the innovative writings and interpretations of knowledge, religion and theatre. The second part comprises of dominant concepts and methods used to analyse and interpret rap music and hip-hop culture.<sup>38</sup> The third part, namely 'Case Studies' directly builds upon the diversity of global hip-hop tastes.<sup>39</sup> In addition to topics of geography and empowerment, discerning academic writings about hip-hop culture and issues of race are ample. Anthony Kwame Harrison's (auto)ethnographic study of racial identification in the underground hip-hop community in San Francisco, understands it as a space for negotiating belonging to and building of the community.<sup>40</sup>

Almost half a century after the birth of hip-hop in the outer boroughs of New York, scholarly and popular writings about this powerful cultural and economic force have produced a large body of knowledge. Academic studies, university courses, museum and archival collections centred around the culture of hip-hop signified the institutionalisation of the field. However, some critiques to these endeavours complement the understanding of the culture and the study field.

The rarely discussed 'hip hop canon' addresses knowledge production through academic hip-hop studies. The emergence of canons is not particular to hip-hop studies, as Forman addresses how the same phenomenon occurred in jazz and rock studies.<sup>41</sup> Canonical research implies that specific topics and texts become commonplace of theorising and analysing and in hip hop these often concern factors such as 'industry structures, policy and regulation, social practices and collective and subjective identity formation.'<sup>42</sup> Academic standards and analytical rigour imprint on hip-hop culture and how it is understood because they participate in producing values and experiences of history, and even act as gatekeepers of these discourses and knowledge.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Brandi A. Neal, "The Cambridge Companion to Hip-Hop." *Notes* 73, no. 1 (2016): 123.

<sup>38</sup> Here it is referred to methods coming from musicology studies as well as gender studies, film and ethnography. Neal, Brandi A. "The Cambridge Companion to Hip-Hop." *Notes* 73, no. 1 (2016): 124.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Anthony Kwame Harrison, "Hip-Hop and Racial Identification: an (Auto)Ethnographic Perspective," In *The Cambridge Companion to Hip-Hop*, ed. Justin A. Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 152-67.

<sup>41</sup> Murray Forman, "Introduction," in *That's the Joint! The Hip-Hop Studies Reader*, ed. Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal (New York, London: Routledge, 2004), 5.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-6.

Concerning the degree of devotion history, as a discipline has given to hip-hop culture, the somewhat canonical approach appears. Although Meghelli does not speak of canons, his rethinking of the historiography of hip-hop inspects the epistemological and methodological implications of the historical approach. First and foremost, he identifies the conventional narrative in hip-hop history as the story of the cultural movement of 1970s South Bronx that merged African American and Caribbean influences towards the emergence of a creative and potent form of expression.<sup>44</sup> In line with the concerns about jazz historiography bringing forward oversimplification, Meghelli postulates the future of hip-hop could have been the same.

In light of the reluctance of historians to engage with studying hip-hop as a worthy inquiry field, Meghelli pinpoints the importance of James G. Spady's work.<sup>45</sup> From the background in African diasporic social, political and cultural history, Spady has dedicated two decades of his work to hip hop and what he named 'hiphopography' a new methodology in studying hip hop. The approach centres around the diversification of historical narratives through oral history accounts. In this way, historical narratives come out of enriched primary source base that is not focused on one type of documentation. Benjamin Quarles addressed this approach as necessary 'methodological risk' for researchers in black history.<sup>46</sup>

## **2.2 Post-multicultural era: super-diversity beyond backlash and drama?**

'Is diversity about demographic categories, about identities, about perspectives, about life careers and conditions, or about all of these?'<sup>47</sup>

Looking back to the 1970s when the concept of multiculturalism emerged, it becomes evident that as long as it has existed, multiculturalism has been a subject of critique.<sup>48</sup> As in the lifecycle of the natural world, social concepts and disciplines live to see the announcement of their end. Thus,

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<sup>44</sup> Samir Meghelli, "Remixing the Historical Record: Revolutions in Hip Hop Historiography," *The Western Journal of Black Studies* 37, no. 2 (2013): 94.

<sup>45</sup> See James G. Spady, "Mapping and Re-Membering Hip Hop History, Hiphopography and African Disaporic History," *The Western Journal of Black Studies* 37, no. 2 (2013).

<sup>46</sup> Meghelli, "Remixing the Historical Record," 96.

<sup>47</sup> Philomena Essed, "Cloning Cultural Homogeneity While Talking Diversity: Old Wine in New Bottles in Dutch Work Organizations," *Transforming Anthropology* 11, no.1. (2002): 8.

<sup>48</sup> D.A. Gozdecka, Kmak M, and Ercan S.A. "From Multiculturalism to Post-Multiculturalism: Trends and Paradoxes." *Journal of Sociology* 50, no. 1 (2014): 51-64.

Britain's Daily Mail headline on July 7, 2006, read 'multiculturalism is dead'.<sup>49</sup> It was not only British Prime Minister David Cameron and other state officials who later made claims of the failure and expressed disapproval towards multiculturalism<sup>50</sup>, but there was a surprising consensus that we have reached a post-multicultural era.<sup>51</sup>

The discourse of multiculturalism had failed, its opponents concluded, and even its supporters acknowledged that the state of multiculturalism in culturally plural societies is in line for critique.<sup>52</sup> Prominent theorists of multiculturalism and diversity, like Steven Vertovec and Will Kymlicka,<sup>53</sup> announced the era of post-multiculturalism that in significant ways differs from its predecessor; however, there was no agreement of what comes after within this master narrative of multiculturalism's rise and fall.<sup>54</sup> Even multiculturalism that recognised ethnic and cultural diversity, in comparison to previous mechanisms such as assimilation that tended to accommodate it, was now being replaced.<sup>55</sup> New theoretical and analytical concepts emerged, such as superdiversity, which did not come as a surprise to historians who usually take social scientists' 'great discoveries' with a dose of scepticism.<sup>56</sup> However, this was not only a turn towards diversity, but a turn towards the approach of complexity.

Fran Meissner accepts Vertovec and Wessendorf's idea of the superdiversity as a post-multicultural term.<sup>57</sup> Exploring how academics identified the characteristics of the post-multicultural era is an endeavour that will not take place here. Still, even if it did, it is unlikely that it would resolve the confusion around the theoretical and empirical implication of the concept of superdiversity. To illustrate this lack of clarity and consistency in the use of the concept, Meissner

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<sup>49</sup> Steven Vertovec and Susanne Wessendorf. "Introduction: Assessing the backlash against multiculturalism in Europe," in *The Multiculturalism Backlash. European discourses, policies and practices*, eds. Steven Vertovec and Susanne Wessendorf (London: Routledge, 2010), 1-32.

<sup>50</sup> Isabel Awad, "Critical Multiculturalism and Deliberative Democracy: Opening Spaces for More Inclusive Communication," *Javnost- The Public* 18, no.3 (2011): 40.

<sup>51</sup> Will Kymlicka, "The rise and fall of multiculturalism? New debates on inclusion and accommodation in diverse societies," In *The Multiculturalism Backlash. European discourses, policies and practices*, eds. Steven Vertovec and Susanne Wessendorf (London: Routledge, 2010), 32-50.

<sup>52</sup> Gozdecka et al. "From Multiculturalism to Post-Multiculturalism," 52.

<sup>53</sup> Will Kymlicka. "The rise and fall of multiculturalism?" 32-50.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>55</sup> Gozdecka et al. "From Multiculturalism to Post-Multiculturalism," 53.

<sup>56</sup> Jozefien De Bock, "Not All the Same After All? Superdiversity as a Lens for the Study of Past Migrations." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38, no. 4 (2015): 583.

<sup>57</sup> Fran Meissner, "Migration in Migration-Related Diversity? The Nexus between Superdiversity and Migration Studies." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38, no. 4 (2015):557.

reviewed the literature in Ethnic and Racial Studies from the year 2007, the year of Vertovec's seminal article, until 2012.<sup>58</sup> In the scope of 5 years, only 6% of papers (4) actively used superdiversity to conduct empirical analysis, while 17% used it as a catchphrase, 38% to call upon immense ethnic variety, and 39% to show multidimensionality in diversity.

Nevertheless, as Meissner elegantly and simply puts it 'superdiversity is not about more diversity.'<sup>59</sup> The emergence of superdiversity came along with the shift in the philosophy of social science. An increasing number of scholars are adopting the complexity approach acknowledging and accepting social constellations as always complex. We should look for social patterns and try to understand them, rather than to look into casualties.<sup>60</sup>

Steven Vertovec, an anthropologist and one of the leading scholars on migration and diversity, postulates that we should move from understanding diversity only in terms of ethnicity and appreciate the multidimensionality of contemporary diversity.<sup>61</sup> This diversity, according to Vertovec, includes more variables like social and legal statuses, rights, labour market experiences, patterns of spatial distribution.<sup>62</sup> That could ultimately lead to ask the question of how hip-hop is created and practised in different locales determined by factors of demographic changes, changes in the built environment and access to political and economic resources, as suggested by Codrington.<sup>63</sup> This aspect is very relevant for the interaction between hip-hop culture and superdiversity as the former internalised various forms of exclusion of certain social groups. The premise is that exploring the history and analysing the development of HipHopHuis in Rotterdam, will also unravel the adaptations of culture to the context of superdiversity rather than marginality and empowerment as discussed earlier.

Furthermore, it was Vertovec who in his 2017 lecture asked 'What's the matter with Rotterdam?' Later he wrote an epilogue for the 'Coming to Terms with Superdiversity' book suggesting it is instead a complex place, and there is still a lot to learn about how Rotterdam shapes its residents

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 558.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 560.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 558.

<sup>61</sup> Steven Vertovec, "Super-diversity and its implications", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 30, no. 6 (2007), 1024-1054.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> R Codrington, "Hip-Hop Beyond Appropriation: An Introduction to The Series," *Transforming Anthropology* 15 (2007): 138-140.

and how in return they shape the city.<sup>64</sup> One of the ways to deepen this knowledge is engaging in qualitative research, primarily ethnographic, as suggested by Vertovec, and, in Rotterdam's neighbourhoods where diversity is multilayered. These accounts would explore how superdiversity is perceived, received, talked about and addressed.<sup>65</sup> The response to diversity in Rotterdam, as the authors pointed out, was rather negative and Rotterdam was, at times, an 'unhappy' superdiverse city.<sup>66</sup>

### **2.3 Complexity as a premise, not an answer: a theoretical framework**

After reviewing central topics and debates, this section outlines a framework ushered by the interplay of the two areas of research. The symbiosis of academic hip-hop studies with the concept of superdiversity and its implications elicits the ideas of identity, group and individual, cultural and racial, transnational and ethnic. It further brings forward the different ways of belonging and sensibilities of culture characterising contemporary cities but also specific local, national dynamics. With multidisciplinary of hip-hop studies and complexity in social sciences, it is necessary to specify how 'things are complex' and what does it mean for this research and consequently for its methodology described in the following chapter.

Interpreting the emergence of the concept of superdiversity in the aftermath of complexity turn in social sciences alludes to the limitation on causal and monocausal accounts.<sup>67</sup> The core of this critique is the idea that even small changes in one part can induce significant differences in other and set off multiple causal links across layers of a social phenomenon.<sup>68</sup> This also means that complexity does not only come from each of us having different identities, hence statuses and accordingly belonging to many group identities. The complexity lies in these groups organising on

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<sup>64</sup> Steven Vertovec, "Epilogue: What's the matter with Rotterdam?" In *Coming to Terms with Superdiversity: The case of Rotterdam*, eds. Crul, M. R. J., Peter Scholten and Paul van de Laar (Springer Open, 2019) IMISCOE Research Series, 241; See Maurice Crul, Peter Scholten and Paul van de Laar (Eds.) *Coming to Terms with Superdiversity: The case of Rotterdam*. (Springer Open, 2019), IMISCOE Research Series.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Peter Scholten, Maurice Crul and Paul van de Laar. "Introduction" In *Coming to Terms with Superdiversity: The case of Rotterdam*, eds. Crul, M. R. J., Peter Scholten and Paul van de Laar (Springer Open, 2019) IMISCOE Research Series, 3.

<sup>67</sup> Thomas Hylland Eriksen, "Complexity in social and cultural integration: Some analytical dimensions," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 30, no.6 (September 2007): 1056.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

various principles of exclusion and requirements for inclusion.<sup>69</sup> This perspective on complexity hinges several implications.

First, reflecting on superdiversity, diversification takes place along many lines, across and within ethnic groups, and across generations.<sup>70</sup> From some perspective, groups exist while from another, they disappear. Groups delineated by ethnic origin in superdiversity can become challenged by the economic gains depending on the generation. The third generation of Turkish-Dutch pupils could be growing up with the first generation of Polish pupils.<sup>71</sup> Superdiversity does not only shape demography but spatial and economic environments.<sup>72</sup> One should be careful before evaluating the ‘super’ in superdiversity as an intrinsically positive connotation. While focusing on the superdiverse microcosm of HipHopHuis, diversity appears to be imprinting on interacting biographies directly nurturing into the meanings and resilience of this organisation. On the macro level of the city, super-diversity oscillates as mainstream branding tool not necessarily addressing the lived experience. Moreover, superdiversity in Rotterdam reflects particular spatial dynamics that conditions the cultural infrastructure.

The second aspect of complexity significant for this research is the globalising character of hip-hop culture. While some talk about transnational identities, some Dutch scholars claim the existence of a ‘meta-ethnicity’ described as urban blackness. This identity comes from consuming black culture, music, art forms and related products, and it assumes anti-bourgeoisie and anti-racism.<sup>73</sup> The culture industry produces such identity explaining the worldwide presence and dominance of hip-hop. The criteria for belonging to such cultural identity is not racial or ethnic but assumes love for black culture and music.

Some lessons follow from the debates within hip-hop studies, as identified by Rose. Here, the reasoning of hip-hop’s critics and defenders manifests the lack of recognition for the artistic value of the culture. Murray agrees that debating hip-hop as a form of social and political commentary

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 1060.

<sup>70</sup> Maurice Crul, Frans Lelie and Elif Keskiner, “The Second and Third Generation in Rotterdam: Increasing Diversity Within Diversity,” in *Coming to Terms with Superdiversity: The case of Rotterdam*, eds. Maurice Crul, Peter Scholten and Paul van de Laar (Springer Open, 2019), IMISCOE Research Series, 59.

<sup>71</sup> Karel Arnaut, “Super-diversity: Elements of an emerging perspective”. *Diversities*, 14, no.2 (January 2012): 1–16.

<sup>72</sup> Jenny Phillimore, Nando Sigona and Katherine Tonkiss, “Introduction: superdiversity, policy and governance in Europe,” *Policy and Politics* 45, no. 4 (2017): 488.

<sup>73</sup> Francio Guadeloupe and Vincent A. de Rooij, “The Promise of a Utopian Home, or Capitalism’s Commodification of Blackness,” *Social Analysis* 58, no.2 (Summer 2014): 60.



and critique denies its artistic value and creative power.<sup>74</sup> This underappreciation of hip hop's creative and innovative potentials has come a long way in hindering the role and status of this art and culture form in cultural landscapes of cities. Due to this lack of recognition hip-hop grassroots organisations, such as HipHopHuis, claim their status and role in some other dimensions, and space is one of them.

Another thing to be taken into account from hip-hop studies is the concept of 'keeping it real' and how this reflects on the city of Rotterdam. There is consistency in discussing hip-hop culture within contexts of displacement, marginalisation and despair coming from an identity crisis due to economic and geographic restructuring.<sup>75</sup> Clay argues that in these conditions 'the hood, the block, or the corner,' wards and projects were places defining biographical narratives of Black and Latino youth. The struggle for authenticity signifies the search for a unified identity defining the community.<sup>76</sup> The need for 'keep it real' rhetoric is therefore immensely significant for understanding hip-hop. However, the rhetoric is not representative of black urban realities as a whole and is often understood in terms of commercialised caricatures.<sup>77</sup>

One of the images of 'keeping it real' merely is to reject what is unreal, often over consumption and luxury. The notion of 'realness' is used to describe Rotterdam, as a narratological tool in building city image, as well as an experience signifier among the hip-hop community. Awareness of hyper-consumerism is related to the status of a contemporary city, and Rotterdam as a port and second city sometimes is seen as real to its main competitor, Amsterdam. The importance of understanding where the 'realness' of Rotterdam comes from, lies in framing the discussion of why the spatial organisation of culture matters, and particularly for grassroots hip-hop.

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<sup>74</sup> Murray Forman, foreword to *That's the Joint! The Hip-Hop Studies Reader* (New York, London: Routledge, 2004), xii.

<sup>75</sup> Andreana Clay, "Keepin' It Real. Black Youth, Hip-Hop Culture and Black Identity," *American Behavioral Scientist* 46, no. 10 (June 2003): 1348.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Rose, *The Hip Hop Wars*, 139.

### 3 Methodology and data collection

With the theoretical discussion in mind and following the main lessons from the historiography of the two fields of study, this thesis combines methodologies in order to gain insights into different layers of the investigated relationship. A combined methodology, tailored to guide this research, provides a multidimensional set of data and knowledge to each analytical direction undertaken here. If we think of Spady's contribution to hip-hop studies in the form of devotion to oral history, Vertovec's claim of the value of the ethnographic approach to superdiversity, and Anthony Kwame's observation that global spread of hip-hop gave birth to a canon of hip-hop ethnographies outside of USA, the choice of the methodology reveals itself. Here, the focus is on participation, personal accounts and narratological-biographical interviews.

Complementing the ethnographic approach narratives are read critically and against the grain. Not only narratives in the interviews but those present in writings of local newspapers about hip-hop and HipHopHuis in Rotterdam. Moreover, narratives active in creating a city image of Rotterdam reveal which groups and cultures are desirable and why. Post-war economic and urban recovery of Rotterdam offered an opportunity to shape the city's identity and accordingly shape modes of representation. Critical reading of the narratives obtained from different primary and secondary resources examines how these components interact and influence one another's decision making.

Cultures and cultural organisation in the city assume particular locations, environments and neighbourhoods. At times this location is specific to the field of their devotion, and the space they take communicates meanings, symbols and history. Rotterdam's Story House Belvédère, nurturing food cultures and independent artistry, immerses into not only the rich history and culture of Katendrecht but that of the particular building preserving cultural forms, community spirit and offering refuge throughout the war. At other times there is clustering, designated areas and quarters of cultural activity, such as the Museumpark in Rotterdam. Accordingly, representing spatial data is valuable. Mapping spatial distribution of cultural institutions, organisations and activities can reveal dynamics between different city parts, and raise questions of whether and why specific distribution patterns appear.

Moreover, when it comes to hip-hop culture and previously discussed undermining of its artistic values and hence susceptibility to early disregard or capping, visualising the spatial layout of

HipHopHuis's audiences could counter derived stereotypes and assumptions of their belonging and identities. Combined with the data from the interviews about the ways people talk about space, how they use spatial discourses and perceive their neighbourhoods to the city, a comprehensive analysis enables critical commentary on the extent to which superdiverse population is part of the Dutch society. References to particular spatial bundles and childhood memories indicate the level of connection youth of different backgrounds has to the city.<sup>78</sup> As discussed in the following chapters, hip-hop culture nurtures a specific relationship with spatial instances of 'where one comes from', and the engagement with HipHopHuis can shape identification processes and foster positive sentiments of belonging.

### **3.1 The 'hood' is from the neighbourhood: the importance of perspective**

Hereafter follows a summary of conceptualising neighbourhoods as a unit of analysis of space in an urban environment. Through a neighbourhood perspective, people's images of the city reflect neighbourhoods' ability to serve as entry points to the more extensive network of the city<sup>79</sup>. The intention is to discuss the conceptual implications of studying a topic through the spatial form of the 'neighbourhood.' Communicative capacities and spatial discourses related to the idea of neighbourhoods that are characteristic of hip-hop culture are discussed later in chapter 7.

Combined research methodologies also implies the need for clarification of the concept of the neighbourhood as it is used both concerning the values of hip-hop culture and in analysing spatial links to the city of Rotterdam. Scholars have at depth discussed the issue of defining the concept of the neighbourhood; however, repetitively concluding that none of the definitions includes all relevant aspects of local environments.<sup>80</sup> Defining neighbourhood in physical, geographical, ecological or social domains did not always serve in the analytical capacity. Understanding people's relationship with space and environment has appeared a lot more complicated. Hence, as Fraser *et al.* suggest the neighbourhood is a dynamic entity and as such, particularly significant to delineate two different lines of methodologies applied here<sup>81</sup>.

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<sup>78</sup> George Glaster, "On the Nature of Neighbourhood," *Urban Studies* 38, no. 12 (2001).

<sup>79</sup> Yodan Rofé, "Space and Community- the spatial foundations of urban neighbourhoods," *Berkely Planning Journal* 10 (1995): 110.

<sup>80</sup> Glaster, 'On the nature of neighbourhoods;' Fraser et al. 'My Neighbourhood.'

<sup>81</sup> Stanton D. Fraser, Tim Jay, Eamonn O'Neill and Alan Penn, "My Neighbourhood: Studying perceptions of urban space and neighbourhood with mblogging," *Pervasive and Mobile Computing* 9, no.5 (2013): 723.

The qualitative and quantitative aspects of analysis are to assume different sets of attributes under the concept of neighbourhood. The former will show how a neighbourhood can be a part of one's social and personal identity, and the latter understand the neighbourhood as a spatial bundle of attributes<sup>82</sup>. For instance, these bundles of attributes also applied as layers onto maps refer to structural and infrastructural characteristics, demography, income, occupation of residents, environmental and proximity characteristics.<sup>83</sup>

### **3.2 Ethnography, interviews and narratives: data collection**

The research methodology aims to fit the positional view of the studied community and its reality that is influenced by the context. Stemming from the research and supporting questions the described research methodology includes the following data collection: (1) participation and observation with ethnographic notes and ethnographies of interaction; (2) semi-structured in-depth interviews; (3) collection of the local newspaper publications; (4) policy documents review; and (5) database creation and QGIS mapping. The intersection of the collected data allows us to understand layers of the studied phenomena and context and links between them.

#### **3.2.1 Ethnography and field notes: participation and observation**

According to a standard definition of ethnography, this methodology includes hands-on learning of the immediate reality that is relevant to the people who are being part of ethnographer's inquiry. With the dominant method of participant observation, the ethnographer aims to immerse him/herself and gain cultural insights.<sup>84</sup>

The limits of ethnography have been extensively discussed within anthropological scholarship, often debating about the implications of an ethnographer being an 'outsider' to the studied culture or engages in studying her/his own culture. As Jefferson Fish argues, it is often more complex than this, as social scientists have various loyalties and belong to many social groups.<sup>85</sup> However, cross-cultural research does present rather exigent challenges upon the methodology.

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<sup>82</sup> Fraser *et al.*, "My neighbourhood," 723.

<sup>83</sup> Glaster, "On the nature of neighbourhoods," 2112.

<sup>84</sup> Mike Allen, "Ethnography," Sage Research Methods, accessed June 1, 2020, <https://methods.sagepub.com/reference/the-sage-encyclopedia-of-communication-research-methods/i4910.xml>

<sup>85</sup> Jefferson M. Fish, "Divided Loyalties and the Responsibility of Social Scientists," *The Independent Review* 9, no. 3 (2005): 375-87.

While this methodology is primarily ethnographic, we should acknowledge that exploring superdiversity and how it is perceived and understood poses some methodological challenges. It is an open question of how to distinguish between local specificity and context on the one hand, and non-local dynamics and connections on the other, within the involvement of the ethnographic work.<sup>86</sup>

Scholars of superdiversity endorse both quantitative and qualitative methods, while it is to be argued that the ethnographic approach to daily interactions offers significant build-up to analysis based on quantitative data. Ethnographic data elaborates on particular choices that intersectionality of quantitative data oversees. Looking at interactions and friendships through the ethnicity lens indicates the levels of inclusion and assimilation but asking why one chooses certain people to be their close friends may reveal that the ethnic background has little or nothing to do with it.<sup>87</sup> In the case of HipHopHuis, this approach illustrates explicitly what kind of interactions cultural grassroots organisation can foster.

Ethnographic methods provide us with an understanding of the relevant perspectives and interpretation of these perspectives by those who find them valuable. Thus, existing language barriers presents a barrier towards understanding and acquiring the knowledge of everyday micro-interactions that shape smaller and bigger decision making. Another aspect of language barrier lies in conducting the interviews; however, most of the respondents have high English language skills. In addition to the level of English in the Netherlands being high, the respondents rather belong to the urban, young community closely connected to hip-hop culture coming from an Anglophone region.<sup>88</sup> During the fieldwork another signifier of the proximity to the English language is the use of English phrases in everyday speech and communication in the office, to express feelings like surprise, excitement or the quality of an entity. For these reasons, here, it is assumed that no more significant methodological challenge is present in conducting in-depth interviews.

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<sup>86</sup> Mette Louise Berg and Nando Sigona, "Ethnography, Diversity and Urban Space," *Identities* 20, no. 4 (2013): 354.

<sup>87</sup> Hans Sieber's study of Dutch classrooms at the university of applied sciences, concluded with findings of ethnic boundaries and groupism. Sieber found that ethnic identity still plays an important role whether as 'disruptive groupness or constructive individuality.' See Sieber, "Does the superdiversity lable stick," 687.

<sup>88</sup> EF English Proficiency Index, <https://www.ef.com/wwen/epi/>

The field exposure started in September upon the arrival to Rotterdam, with an already established interest in hip-hop mainly through dance. The first encounter was during a university organised summer school, within which HipHopHuis founder Aruna Vermeulen and her colleague gave a lecture during what was in our syllabus assigned to be the ‘music day.’ Since this particular moment, cross-cultural comparison took place, as previously acquired experience in a hip-hop community in Serbia, somewhat clashed with the story of HipHopHuis. Followed by few visits to the HipHopHuis at their location in the centre of Rotterdam to attend the hip-hop dance classes and locking workshops during the *Jump off*, the research interest has developed.

This interest took the shape of the research internship starting in January 2020. The research internship includes office hours, as well as working with floor managers and volunteers whose dynamic of work and interaction differ from the organisation’s board meetings and activities. Field notes have the purpose of recording these dynamics, so in retrospective, an analysis might reveal patterns of interaction that could be relevant for perpetuating successful or contested decision making.

### **3.2.2 Interviews and biographies**

Two months of active engagement with HipHopHuis resulted in 15 in-depth interviews, including office staff, floor managers and volunteers who daily contribute to the functioning of HipHopHuis. The interviewees are between 19 and 34 years old and have different roles within HipHopHuis. The interviews lasted between 50 and 90 minutes. They were semi-structured with general focuses and groups of questions as outlined below. Early fieldwork insights shed light onto different categories of respondents, namely, culture experts who are knowledgeable about hip-hop history and hip-hop community in the Netherlands; HipHopHuis’ longstanding members involved with the organisation for many years and finally volunteers who are just now gaining their experience of HipHopHuis and learning through storytelling. With their knowledge and experience, the first two groups contributed to the oral history aspect of this research, while accounts of the third category will eventually belong to the oral history of HipHopHuis.

Despite different experiences, roles and statuses that led to the recognition of several types of interviewees, the semi-structure of the interviews included following commonplaces:

- Biography and life story questions set off with general inquiry about interviewee’s name, age, place of birth, family relationships, education and work experience. An

open question as an invitation for the respondent to tell his/her life story and introduce oneself in any desirable way was a fruitful approach to superdiversity. It resulted in many different identities and loyalties appearing as images of the self. In this way, people's preferred identities surface while narratives about their lives are selective and reflect cultural influences.

- Hip-hop appears as an essential part of interviewees lives; thus, the second group of questions surrounds their first contact with the culture. The recollection of the first time they have heard a hip-hop song or R&B song on the television or the first time they attended a dance class also reveals the social context of these events. As this line of questions discusses hip-hop in more general terms, topics of the global spread of hip-hop, cultural appropriation and commercialisation find their place in this part of the conversation. More importantly, asking what hip-hop is about and why it is part of their life and identity shows the extent to which common and shared knowledge exists in this community.
- The third thematic cluster focuses on HipHopHuis in particular. Interviewees are prompted to share their first memory of HipHopHuis, the experience of the first day working or volunteering or what does it look like to spend a day in HipHopHuis. They reflect on the importance of HipHopHuis for their friends and generation in general.
- Inductively the questions move towards the relationship between HipHopHuis and Rotterdam. 'What is the role and importance of this organisation for Rotterdam's youth and population in general', 'whether HipHopHuis receives support and recognition for the work it does,' and 'what does it entail to lead, manage, work for a grassroots organisation' are only some examples. A valuable discussion about the location of HipHopHuis takes place by asking to imagine HipHopHuis at a different place in the city, where would this be and whether something would change.
- As conducting interviews cumulates knowledge and prompts learning about events, people and stories, the repetitive ones were deemed relevant and introduced as questions. For instance, many people talk about the new opening of HipHopHuis in the city centre. As it is a significant moment for the organisation, people often remember it lively or have otherwise heard about it. Furthermore, inquiring about

the challenges HipHopHuis encountered in almost twenty years of existence unveils which stories persist and explores their role and meaning. If an interviewee is involved with a programme, project or event, questions encircle the latter in order to explore visions, ideas and agency. For instance, the ‘Make-a-Scene’ festival was designed to revive the hip-hop scene in Rotterdam after one of the most significant hip-hop events moved out of the city. The assumption is that the programme and activities of the HipHopHuis reflect this logic and mirror broader and contextual changes.

- Finally, each interview ended with a doodle exercise when respondents drew in concentric circles their network of people. The criteria for assigning people to a particular circle was the frequency and intensity of interactions, i.e. from closest friends to occasional exchanges with other members. While drawing on a paper, interviewees were explaining why they are close with that person or how they interact with those who are not the closest to them.

### **3.2.3 Critical and reading against the grain: other primary sources**

HipHopHuis started in 2002 out of a smaller crew activity and broader organisational setup, known as SKVR, and while going through successes, challenges and failures, different periods conditioned different resilience and negotiation practices. HipHopHuis was not always of the same magnitude, capacity and status it is today. For these reasons, the question of the availability of documents, policies, reports and data collection indicates a pattern in a lifecycle of a non-mainstream, urban cultural organisations. Combined with its artistic impulses and growing unfiltered popularity, hip-hop communities sometimes struggle to gain recognition and establish their role in the landscape of activities offered in culturally rich urbanities. Consequently, we should ask why there is no consistent or chronological documentation about the organisation’s activities, or when they do exist, what was their purpose in that particular moment. Gathered newspaper articles, documents and policies will be read critically looking for alternative perspectives, sub-discourses, voices and silences.

#### *3.2.3.1 Newspapers and magazines*

The same applies to address representation practices around hip-hop culture and HipHopHuis in Rotterdam. To deconstruct the narrative of its development, we have looked into 300 press



releases, news and articles about HipHopHuis from 2002 until 2020. These were obtained from Nexis Uni and Press Reader databases. Within more than 500 results from the cursory search, around one third were mentions of HipHopHuis as venue or contributor to events, and many articles overlapped with the content or they were the same publication.

### *3.2.3.2 Policy documents*

The data for discourse analysis is complemented by two types of documents from HipHopHuis: annual reports and policy plans for four years. This was complemented by the introductory reading of the advice from Culture Council (De Raad voor Cultuur), The Culture Survey, International Advisory Board's advice for the culture sector, and a cursory search of Rotterdam's cultural policies since 2000.

## **3.3 Methodology: an epilogue**

After gradual immersion into the field by attending classes and workshops and starting the research internship in mid-January 2020, the global pandemic reached the Netherlands in late February resulting in the closing of many cultural spots, including HipHopHuis. As a consequence, the field and ethnographic work were significantly hindered. While the digital online realm took over social interactions, and unequivocally changed the experience of social contact, conducting interviews online remained the least affected aspect of the methodology. However, the barriers to providing and connecting with employees and volunteers of HipHopHuis came from the impossibility of being present and sharing the space. At the moment of closing HipHopHuis due to the pandemic, a substantial part of the fieldwork remained unrealised. It included volunteering and participating in yet another valuable part of being there. The dynamic of volunteer's work shows mobility, accountability, collaboration but also having fun, learning and communicating.

In light of the takeover of social media throughout the pandemic, a niche for digital ethnography appeared. The strategy HipHopHuis adopted reflects their overall intention to bring about social awareness and empowerment to young people. Without reaching for providing online dance and deejaying classes, they offered a series of conversations between culture and community leaders. In this way, one stayed in touch with exchanges that daily happen in the living room, office, entrance and dance studios of HipHopHuis. Sometimes of fun character, these conversations address artistic, social and individual's wins and struggles.

Finally, it was undoubtedly the pendulum of adopted methods requiring an opening towards an alternative, online-based gathering of data and maintaining observational and participatory activities. The following chapters incorporate the above-discussed methodologies towards a multilayered analysis of superdiverse population and hip-hop culture in perspective of HipHopHuis.

## 4 The Rotterdam way: contextualising the culture of diversity

Post-war Rotterdam is often discussed in terms of its power and strength to rebuild itself and transform the act of ruination into a narrative of resilience. The trajectory of economic and cultural regeneration was long, but Rotterdam has experienced strong post-war growth.<sup>89</sup> In hindsight, contemporary narration around Rotterdam's diverse and young population, and international culture embedded in the city's DNA arrived after what some call a period of an identity crisis.<sup>90</sup> This crisis is arguably a result of tensions between images of Rotterdam as a port, industrial or city of work, and increased competition between cities for the more prosperous cultural offer and attention of important stakeholders.<sup>91</sup>

For Sharon Zukin, since the 1970s symbolic economy became increasingly important in representing the city through images as simulacrum of the city.<sup>92</sup> It was in the period between the 1970s and 2000s when Rotterdam's urban and cultural climate changed, culminating with the nomination for European Capital of Culture in 2001.<sup>93</sup> Culture has extensively become 'the business of cities' operated through strategies and projects of urban and cultural redevelopment and intertwined with identity in the process of producing the city.<sup>94</sup> In the 1990s, Rotterdam saw the rise of clusters of telecommunication, design, audio-visual services and media which ushered its trajectory towards a 'cultural city.'<sup>95</sup> The competition with Amsterdam and Rotterdam's categorisation as the second city stimulated further development in this direction.

Moreover, Sharon Zukin writes that the 1970s were a decade when the approach to culture in local governing took the shape of entrepreneurial and business visions and endeavours. In a post-war economy in American and European cities, the rise of landmark architectural constructions, often modern art museums, implied the capacity and capability of the financial sector. It was mainly the absence of financial sector that according to Hodos' understanding of

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<sup>89</sup> Greg Richards and Julie Wilson, "The Impact of Cultural Events on City Image: Rotterdam, Cultural Capital of Europe 2001," *Urban Studies* 41, no. 10 (September 2004): 1938.

<sup>90</sup> Patricia van Ulzen, *Imagine a Metropolis: Rotterdam's Creative Class, 1970-2000* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2007), 8.

<sup>91</sup> Richards and Wilson, "The Impact of Cultural Events."

<sup>92</sup> Sharon Zukin, *The Cultures of Cities* (London, Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1995), 8.

<sup>93</sup> Van Ulzen, *Imagine a Metropolis*, 7.

<sup>94</sup> Zukin, *The Cultures of Cities*.

<sup>95</sup> Van den Berg et al. *The attractive city*. R200-1 (Rotterdam: EURICUR, 1999).

second cities and Sassen's global cities perspective marks second cities apart from global cities.<sup>96</sup> In the 1990s some of Rotterdam's landmarks emerged, namely the National Architecture Museum, the Kunsthal art museum, the Museum Quarter and the Witte de With cultural quarter.

Zukin adds waterfront regeneration as another hinge between entrepreneurial logics and the city's image addressing attractiveness of the city to professionals and creatives.<sup>97</sup> A significant notch on Rotterdam's cultural and urban redevelopment plan was the Kop van Zuid project in the 1990s. The area of Kop van Zuid, initially designated as an overspill area for the urban renewal, after in 1970s port activities centred in Kop van Zuid moved toward the west. However, Kop van Zuid was eventually recognised as pertinent to the building image of the new Rotterdam.<sup>98</sup> Van Ulzen interprets the development of Kop van Zuid as a 'materialisation of a dream' or the 'crowning achievement' of creating a new perspective of the city, closely linked to the presence of the creative class.<sup>99</sup> For the complete realisation of the project, another Rotterdam's landmark was erected connecting two main boulevards, Coolsingel and Schiedamsedijk, namely the Erasmus Bridge. This new connection between the north and the south side of the city has undoubtedly spurred the development of the immediate areas south of the Maas. The example of this is Whilleminapier and the Hotel New York hosting many cultural events and activities like art fairs and exhibitions in the old warehouse Las Palmas, new Luxor Theater (2001) and Nederland Fotomuseum (2007).<sup>100</sup>

However, the development of Kop van Zuid was a piece of rebuilding the city and its image. It aimed to transform the city as a whole, and not only the dock area. Hence, to deduce, the Erasmus bridge and Kop van Zuid had the role in connecting neighbourhoods of the Southside with the Northside. Through this, the project was also aiming at issues of unemployment, social inclusion and perceived division within the city. In this regard, the question of how successful the project was, remains.

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<sup>96</sup> Scholten, Crul and van de Laar, "Introduction," 9.

<sup>97</sup> Zukin, *The Cultures of Cities*, 12.

<sup>98</sup> Van Ulzen, *Imagine a Metropolis*, 109.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 30, 185.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

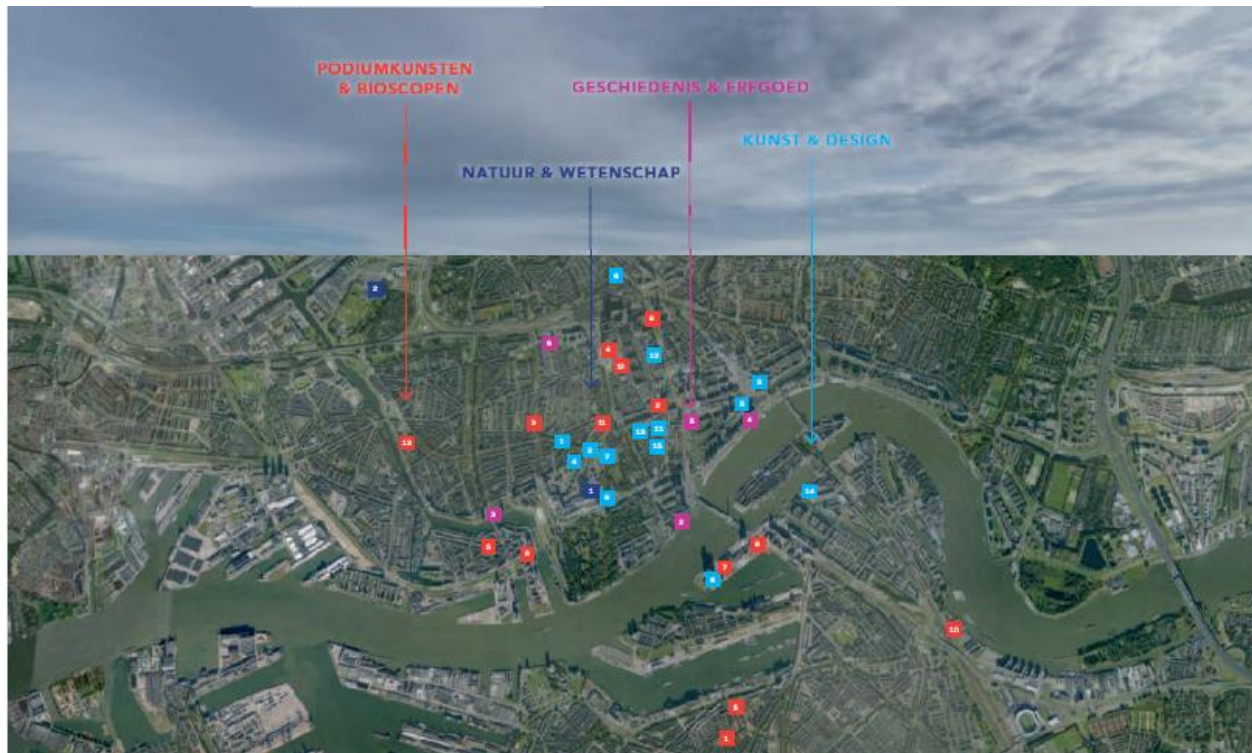


Figure 1. *Institutionele positie. Cultureel landschap Rotterdam* (Museum Rotterdam, 2017).<sup>101</sup>

While the opening of the Kop van Zuid to the activities from the service sector made the area attractive to many cultural activities as explained, observing the presence of the cultural institutions and organisations settled on the Southside raises some questions. At this point, culture has expanded beyond its traditional understandings to encompass popular culture, fashion and what Arjun Appadurai calls ethnoscapes, or people in flux.<sup>102</sup> For instance, street art increasingly participates in framing the visual consumption of space and intensifying the idea of the presence of creativity in the city. The interplay between street art and urban development inflects the changes in that particular art or cultural form and how it is being perceived. Some of Banksy's pieces increased the value of the property.<sup>103</sup> Street art and muralism have become significant

<sup>101</sup> "Meerjarenbeleidsplan Museum Rotterdam 2017-2020," Museum Rotterdam.

<sup>102</sup> Arjun Appadurai, "Disjuncture and difference in the global cultural economy," in *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalisation and Modernity*, ed. Mike Featherstone (London: Sage, 1990).

<sup>103</sup> Virág Molnár, "The Business of Urban Coolness: Emerging Markets for Street Art," *Poetics* 71, (2018): 43-54.

players in challenging urban moral codes.<sup>104</sup> Nevertheless, there is another side to this relationship. Dave Vanderheijden, the founder of Rotterdam based grassroots organisation, Rewriters, said:

‘The city council and policymakers weren’t too keen on this project. They were afraid that this project would increase illegal graffiti. That is why we don’t use the term graffiti but call it street art. That is when we noticed that those involved looked at it differently.’<sup>105</sup>

While *aconsensuality* was emblematic of street art and graffiti, contemporary street art galleries and legal walls in creativity paradigm give new social context to these art forms in Rotterdam.<sup>106</sup> Street art often implies a collaborative effort between property owners, neighbours and artists. The West Kruiskade street, earlier mentioned in the context of the video installation showing hip-hop and fashion relationship timeline, is Rotterdam’s street art open-air museum.

This grassroots organisation, the Rewriters, resides in the same building as HipHopHuis. Located on the brinks of the newly renovated Rotterdam Central Station, today HipHopHuis has its own space right next to the Schieblock- once an office space, now a multi-tenant cultural building.<sup>107</sup> As a joint project by the municipality of Rotterdam, the owner of the building and ZUS architects, Schieblock houses artists and cultural entrepreneurs, and it was only the beginning of the district renovation. In 2015, ZUS architects designed Annabel as the centre of the new entertainment complex at Delftsehof in that area. Around the corner, in Delftsestraat, lies HipHopHuis. Schieblock, the Luchtsingel and Delftsehof area, as part of Central District’s development, framed a new attractive place in the city. Before the completion of these projects in 2015, Aruna, the founder and director of HipHopHuis, recalls the way this area was:

‘[...] And we were very lucky that the area we were in started to develop. [...] There was nothing, no Biergarten, no Annabel. There were no clubs. It was just us, and Hollywood Music Club that was closing. [...] There was the Schieblock initiated by ZUS Architects, and they are really good at what they do. They squatted the building and found a model

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<sup>104</sup> Cameron McAuliffe, “Graffiti or Street Art? Negotiating the Moral Geographies of the Creative City,” in *The Globalizing Cities*, eds. Xuefei Ren and Roger Keli (New York: Routledge, 2017), 375. According to this author moral codes refer to graffiti criminalization.

<sup>105</sup> Interview with Dave Vanderheijden: <http://instagrafite.com/an-interview-with-dave-vanderheijden-festival-director-of-powwow-rotterdam/>, accessed on November 21, 2019.

<sup>106</sup> Sondra Bacharach, “Street Art and Consent,” *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 55, no. 4 (2015): 481.

<sup>107</sup> Lotte Haagsma, “Adaptive urbanism by ZUS”, accessed June 1, 2020, <https://www.archined.nl/2010/10/adaptive-urbanism-by-zus/>

where they would rent out the building to cultural entrepreneurs, mostly professionals in the field of architecture and digital culture. They were innovative, they started Biergarten, then there was BAR, so it was really good for the area. But first, they made a map. And we were the first one to be there, from the new generation of creatives, but they didn't mention us on their map.'<sup>108</sup>

Later, Aruna explained, the ZUS architects started to include HipHopHuis due to the diversity and inclusion momentum that became intrinsic to Rotterdam's identity narratives. Rotterdam being a superdiverse city with large scale immigration in the aftermath of the Second World War and during the 1970s, started naming and accentuating diversity and cultural differences as core values.<sup>109</sup> With 169 different nationalities and their cultures, Rotterdam was announcing its multicultural character to spur creativity and nurture talent.<sup>110</sup> Gradually, this heterogeneity and diversity became chromosomes of Rotterdam's DNA.

The DNA narrative remains influential in exchange with other narratives, particularly those referring to culture. The International Advisory Board (IABx) suggests 'Rotterdam, stay close to what you are!' in order to strengthen its role on the international stage<sup>111</sup>. Belabas and Eshuis observed that international positioning imprints onto branding strategies and narratives that encircle Rotterdam.<sup>112</sup> The IABx concluded that the DNA narrative is immensely important for the 'local pride' and to empower small grassroots which sometimes are home to globally recognised artists.

However, the emphasis and insisting on diversity and difference narratives do not go without a downside calling us to take heed. Essed alerts that cultural difference paradigm and its code of conduct, bringing knowledge and understanding of different cultural backgrounds to the mainstream can result in not tackling the relations of power at all.<sup>113</sup> Quite the opposite, here, the difference is understood as an addition to the accepted norm of cultural value and tolerance. Hence,

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<sup>108</sup> Aruna Vermeulen, interview with the author, June 23, 2020.

<sup>109</sup> Warda Belabas and Jasper Eshuis, "Superdiversity and City Branding: Rotterdam in Perspective," in *Coming to Terms with Superdiversity: The case of Rotterdam*, eds. Maurice Crul, Peter Scholten and Paul van de Laar (Springer Open, 2019), IMISCOE Research Series, 214.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> "Rotterdam, stay close to what you are! Becoming an international cultural hotspot, starts with authenticity," (Rotterdam: International Advisory Board, 2017).

<sup>112</sup> Belabas and Eshuis, "Superdiversity and City Branding," 215.

<sup>113</sup> Essed, "Cloning Cultural Homogeneity," 7-8.

the impact of the knowledge of cultural differences is limited as the underlying premise of the norm is not questioned.



## 5 Narratives in history and discourses in perspective

### 5.1 HipHopHuis (2002-2020): From Art to Culture

‘Rotterdam will have a hip-hop house’ read the headlines of the city’s local newspapers on July 25, 2002.<sup>114</sup> As a part of the artistic and cultural organisation, known as SKVR covering a broad range of artistic forms, HipHopHuis, primarily known as ‘The Foundation’ was supposed to be the cradle of hip-hop art forms: ‘They do what we do for a bigger, broader art pallet. And we were just a branch of SKVR when we started.’<sup>115</sup>

The influence and size of hip-hop culture could not be ignored, and demand had to be addressed. As previously discussed, accounts of hip-hop’s rich history are ample, and the testimonies of pioneers and milestones of the culture are well known in the birthplace of hip-hop as well as around the globe. Several years after the renowned 1979, the Dutch media reports on the tremendous hype that The Rock Steady Crew spiked among the Dutch youth in 1984, with their same name musical hit<sup>116</sup>. However, what struck as main attraction and point of interests were acrobatic-like ‘moves’ and dance, referred to in newspapers as ‘breakdance.’ The first contact with hip-hop was an era of breaking, and the Dutch youth grew into ‘break dancing’ and electric-boogie dance.

The media were not reluctant to report on the appeal this influential dance form was having and the new cultural scene it was fostering. It is to be argued how broad the public understanding of hip-hop was as a culture as early narratives often evolve around breakdance, wide pants and reverse caps. The 1980s were a time of crew culture in the Netherlands, and Rotterdam gathered some of the most influential crews: “Everyone wanted to break in Rotterdam. So me too. After a few months of practice, I was already in a crew,” remembers Maikel Walker, member of *010Bboyz* crew from Rotterdam.<sup>117</sup> The founder trio of HipHopHuis, Lloyd Marengo, Bennie Semil and Aruna Vermeulen, was in *Free Zone* crew.

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<sup>114</sup> Eva Crouwel, “Rotterdam krijgt een hiphophuis (Rotterdam will have a hip-hop house),” *Rotterdams Dagblad*, July 25, 2002, Nexis Uni.

<sup>115</sup> Vanity, interview with the author, February 20, 2020.

<sup>116</sup> Crouwel, “ ‘Breakdance draait om respect’ ; Ervaren Bboys hameren op waardige revival (Breakdance is all about respect; Experienced b-boys insist on worthy revival),” *Rotterdams Dagblad*, August 29, 2002, Nexis Uni.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

Following Ewoodzie's analysis of how early years of hip-hop looked, and how hip-hop scenes emerged, who made rules and conventions, who challenged and changed them and how, the dynamics between existing crews and the exchange that was often happening through competitions, exert influence on what this community is about and to which rules and conventions new member have to abide.<sup>118</sup>

From the beginning, Aruna and the members of her crew had high hopes for the hip-hop culture in Rotterdam. While Lloyd's passion for hip-hop in theatres started when he saw Rennie Harrison's *Puremovement* performance in The Hague in 1998, Aruna knew from the start hip-hop was going to grow bigger in Rotterdam. Just a year after opening HipHopHuis in 2002, Aruna deemed their current location 'too small.'<sup>119</sup> Hip-hop needed a bigger space for all of hip hop elements to find their spot in the house. Bennie Semil, at the time thirty-one years old, explained:

'Hip-hop, in all its facets lives in Rotterdam. Both old and young. But all forms lead their own lives. You have groups of breakdancers, rappers. With this initiative, we want to bring together all forms of hip-hop, so the entire culture: b-boying, deejaying, mc-ing (rapping) and graffiti.'<sup>120</sup>

First breaking crews in Rotterdam were present in the 1980s, there were dozens of them, and their activity made Rotterdam an essential factor in the Dutch hip-hop scene. Culture sections and rubrics in local papers reported on hip-hop's international identity and described the multicultural character of the dance as 'textbook of multiculturalism.'<sup>121</sup> The narratives built around hip-hop in Rotterdam and early years of HipHopHuis reflect a strong tendency to understand hip-hop as an attractive art form, providing a lively, colourful, youthful and urban atmosphere to the city. The torn of lightly taken influence of hip-hop was evident several years later when the explicit language of some genres of rap music stuck with the public discourse of what culture was supposed to be. It would be an overstatement to say this was a general public opinion, but it was far from where hip-hop in Rotterdam stands today.

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<sup>118</sup> Joseph Ewoodzie, "Crews and Outside Influences," in *Break Beats in The Bronx. Rediscovering Hip-Hop's Early Years* (Chapel Hill: Univeristy of North Carolina Press, 2017), 109, [www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9781469632766\\_ewoodzie](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9781469632766_ewoodzie).

<sup>119</sup> Marieke Kolet, "Beatjugglen in hiphophuis The Foundation," *Rotterdams Dagblad*. June 7, 2003, Nexis Uni.

<sup>120</sup> Door Rogier van Hout. "Hiphop in de House". *BN/DeStem*. October 5, 2002, Nexis Uni.

<sup>121</sup> Robbert Ophorst. "Jongerencultuur: niet dissen maar dansen," *Elsevier*, July 17, 2004, Nexis Uni.

Aside from setting an ambitious path for the future of hip-hop in Rotterdam, the founders of HipHopHuis were from the start aware of narratives of diversity and the social context of their local community that will impinge on hip-hop values in Rotterdam. ‘Everyone is welcome to the HipHopHuis’ was a sentence heard fifteen years ago, as well as it is today; however, the question is if the meaning remained the same? The Netherlands’ evening paper records that among Surinamese and Antillean, there is a lot of Turkish and Moroccan youth coming to HipHopHuis. In the early 2000s, members of Rotterdam’s hip-hop community would often articulate their understanding of culture: ‘[...] it is not an issue that I am half Hindustani. In hip-hop, you are not judged on your background,’ said Aruna while explaining that being the only woman in her crew is not an issue as well as one’s ethnicity is not an issue either.<sup>122</sup> Sasha Dees, a producer who also organized the hip-hop film festival ‘Black Soil’ sees the culture as: ‘Hip-hop has no colour. It is pre-eminently a culture that easily builds bridges between population groups.’<sup>123</sup> On another occasion, Aruna also said:

‘You can find breakdancers in all nationalities and all colours. I myself have a Surinamese mother. People sometimes ask ‘are you an immigrant?’ or ‘are you half-blooded?’ But I was born and raised in Rotterdam. And I am very proud of that.’<sup>124</sup>

It was clear from the start that hip-hop in Rotterdam, including the presence of one of its prominent representatives, HipHopHuis, speaks to an array of identities and that this diverse audience will nurture the enormous talent pool Rotterdam believes to have. However, these talents as any other rely on leadership and community guidance, nowadays primarily embodied in HipHopHuis, but the influences on the vision about what this grassroots are going to be about are at some instances directly inspired by hip-hop’s hometown, New York City.

It was in 2001 when Aruna Vermeulen travelled to New York and came back fuelled with ideas for a shift in her hometown hip-hop community; this visit to New York has possibly changed Aruna’s understanding of hip-hop. ‘Hip-hop is normal there’ she said for Rotterdam Dagblad in June of 2003, determined to capture positive aspects of hip-hop’s system of value and lifestyle.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Dijlan van Vlimmeren, “Hiphophuis goes to Athene ; Hollandhuis beseft: Nederland is meer dan klompendans,” *Rotterdams Dagblad*, June 2, 2004, Nexis Uni.

<sup>123</sup> Door Seada Nourhussen and Wieteke van Zeil, “‘Hiphop heft geen kleur’; I Festival Black Soil wil jonge regisseurs platform bieden,” *de Volkskrant*, November 27, 2003, Nexis Uni.

<sup>124</sup> Saman, “Aankondigingen kunst en cultuur”, *Algemeen Nederlands Persbureau ANP*, August 28, 2002, Nexis Uni.

<sup>125</sup> Kolet, “Beatjugglen in hiphophuis The Foundation,” *Rotterdams Dagblad*. June 7, 2003, Nexis Uni.

This revelation mainly included a shift from ‘moves to movement.’ Rotterdam dance community focused on developing their skills and artistic expression neglecting the role knowledge and leadership have in materialising full potential of the culture.

Six years later in a matter of building a new stage for rap music performances, officials from Leefbaar Rotterdam contemplated that government should not be funding such ventures as the music is explicit and violent, mainly referring to lyrics from Tupac’s ‘R U Still Down’ album from 1997<sup>126</sup>. As Aruna bluntly commented to this reaction, ‘He (Sørensen) does not know what that culture means.’<sup>127</sup> The role of HipHopHuis was also to offer a safe space for youth, but it was never going to be a simple community centre.

After becoming an independent entity in 2009, HipHopHuis has continued to grow until in 2012 it finally ‘grew out of its jacket,’ moving from Coolhaven 100 in Rotterdam West to Delfsestraat 19a in the city centre. In the period between 2012 and 2016, HipHopHuis has doubled its activities. However, the year of 2014 put many challenges forward. With no structural budget as a consequence of arts and culture budget cuts, HipHopHuis has never had a more challenging time accounting for its costs. This year, some members remember as the year in which ‘community came through.’

‘When we came in at this location, there wasn’t any money for the floor. We did some crowdfunding, community kind of thing, and everybody that paid a little piece- their name is on the floor. So that is the story of the floor. And that is also the power of HipHopHuis because if we don’t have any money anymore, we can always ask the community.’<sup>128</sup>

On the other side, the grand opening was of great importance for HipHopHuis to establish its role in the city, also by claiming a central location. Recalling the grand opening of new HipHopHuis, Aisha, who has been volunteering in HipHopHuis since 2012 as part of the street team, describes:

‘It was amazing. It was on August 31. I remember because it was the first time I was introduced to the community. There was a DJ and food. For example, there was bread, but it was a bit hard to

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<sup>126</sup> BdV, “Leefbaar rapt tegen de rappers,” *de Volkskrant*. February 8, 2007, Nexis Uni.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Vanity, interview with the author, February 20, 2020.

break it, so you had to break it- break bread, breaking bread. You know? There were also beef bites with faces of Tupac and Biggie on them, like East-West beef.’<sup>129</sup>

Interestingly enough, this choice of food could be interpreted as more symbolic and communicative than it might be evident on the first glance. In the recent interview for *NRC Handelsblad*, conveying her views on the Dutch cultural sector and issues of cultural hegemony, Aruna addressed the matter she illustrated as ‘people of colour, in front of the white audience, by a white organisation.’ The conclusion was that co-creation and collaboration must be on all levels, concluding with the fact that *bitterballen* (Dutch meatballs) are always served at the entrance to these events<sup>130</sup>. The grassroots character of HipHopHuis is evident at every step.

With a significant amount of financial support collected through the fundraiser, HipHopHuis has come out of the crisis. Following the narrative present in public discourse, local papers started to report about HipHopHuis alongside ballet companies, dance ateliers and museums. Also, HipHopHuis had made a decisive turn towards cultural activity rather than providing just leisure and recreation, to which testify references to this organisation in the context of criticising cultural policies.<sup>131</sup> For instance, a critique towards the failure of cultural policies to diversify the cultural sector, and give more space for the representation of stories that are part of the city’s identity. While this is not entirely missing, considering collaborations or co-curations in creating museum collections, archives and exhibitions, the endeavour to diversify is still project-based. The programme director of HipHopHuis agrees that it is ‘not about giving more money, but about giving up cultural hegemony’:

‘I know this first hand. These power dynamics are part of every day. They ask me ‘how do we get more young, coloured, inclusive and diverse cultural sector?’ I give them the same answer. I say it is very simple: here is your bag with money, you either spread out the money more evenly or there has to be more money [...] And funding is a lot more than just money. It is an opportunity; it is everything.

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<sup>129</sup> Aisha, interview with the author, April 10, 2020. In slang, beef stands for an argument or a problem. In hip-hop culture beef signifies rivalry, a hip-hop feud between artists that engage in manifesting their grudge against each other through their music, and otherwise. The most infamous and tragic beef was that between Tupac and The Notorious B.I.G. (Biggie Smalls), sometimes abstracted as the East Coast versus West Coast rap beef.

<sup>130</sup> Arjan Paans, “Het succes benoemen, maar ook de fouten,” *NRC Handelsblad*, March 21, 2020, PressReader.

<sup>131</sup> Clayde Menso, Melle Daamen. “Maak plaats, witte bestuurders; Stop met opdringen witte cultuur ; Diversiteit Stop met opdringen witte cultuur ; Cultuurpubliek is nog altijd wit, stads, en vijftigplus. Tijd voor verandering, schrijven Clayde Menso en Melle Daamen ,” *NRC Handelsblad*, August 24, 2019, Nexis Uni.

[...] If you have five meals per day for five people in the house, and the situation right now is like this: one person eats four dishes, and the remaining dish is spread out to four people. Who gets to decide this? And what are the criteria? Because for me, this means that I am less of a Dutch or Rotterdam citizen than somebody else? Or is it because they were here before me?<sup>132</sup>

## 5.2 Critical Reading: Hip-hop as a means of debating cultural hegemony

This section explores hip-hop culture in Rotterdam as a medium to question cultural hegemony, as one of the newspaper articles marks it; and HipHopHuis as a player in the cultural field, illuminating and challenging the hegemony or the dominance of homogeneity in the form of expression. Here the focus is on the language as a ‘critical tool for organising and expressing the past through narratives’<sup>133</sup> Observing how discourses of ethnicity, race, national identity and gender interact and what narratives come out of this interplay is relevant in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of what influenced decision-making.

This part of the analysis is especially significant for the following chapter as here identified discourses, and master narratives are often a source of intertextuality in many of the interviews that contributed to this thesis. The specific city-based-narration along the lines of ‘rawness,’ ‘realness’ and ‘straightforwardness’ is analysed concerning place-making and spatial discourses in chapter seven. What follows from the previous section is that discourses of cultural difference, race and diversity anchor a significant part of narration about the importance of having a grassroots hip-hop organisation in Rotterdam.

The global acceptance of hip-hop culture and the presence of hip-hop artists in mainstream and pop culture speaks to many social groups. The discourse of diversity in HipHopHuis is accepted as a point along which members connect over similarities rather than differences, but in reference to the city and its cultural landscape, HipHopHuis takes the position of middle ground. While diversity indeed might be the way to connect, it is also directly built into the resilience of HipHopHuis as it will be explored hereafter. Reinforcing its connecting role between the youth and high and low threshold institutions, being a powerhouse for knowledge and a platform for cultural entrepreneurship, HipHopHuis assumes its subject position within the city but also within

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<sup>132</sup> Leal, interview with the author, May 11, 2020.

<sup>133</sup> Robyn Fivush, “Speaking silence: The social construction of silence in autobiographical and cultural narratives,” *Memory* 18, no.2 (2010).

the local hip-hop community. When asked where does HipHopHuis stands on the continuum underground- mainstream, many of its members agree that it is in the middle. Balancing between the commercial forces and the needs of the grassroots community requires HipHopHuis to have established points of association and identification. From the previous section follows that these points are discursively shaped concerning ethnicities, cultural difference and notion of community. Cultural difference and diversity in an interplay provide for authentic urban environment hip-hop absorbs its realness from and throughout the almost two decades of the existence of HipHopHuis, the perpetrators of the community call upon ethnic and cultural diversity to frame what is the marker of this community.

Opposite to this dominant discourse, in the previous section, the discourse of gender is employed rarely or at least implicitly; it appears as a subdominant discourse. The matter of gender is always a relevant topic within hip-hop culture; however, in Rotterdam's community, it appears to be subdued to the notion of difference and diversity. Arguably, this is not the case of HipHopHuis today. In interviews, the respondents in the majority convey the consciousness of gender discourse by talking about voguing and ballroom scene's collaboration and exchange with HipHopHuis.<sup>134</sup> These mentions of vogue culture could be interpreted as manifesting the longstanding tensions there are between hip-hop and gender roles, and which HipHopHuis is trying to refute in their activity.

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<sup>134</sup> The emergence of vogue, or voguing, as a dance style marked the 1980s, however it originates from the 1960s ballroom culture in Harlem, New York. Harlem being the spot of LGBTQ+ art and activism, the dance too was an expression of Black and Latin American queer movement, and it was popularized in the 1990s in Madonna's music video 'Vogue,' and in Jennie Livingston's documentary "Paris is Burning." Voguers compete in vogue balls that originated from 'elaborate pageantry' to explore black imaginative aesthetics. See "A Brief History of Voguing," Smithsonian, accessed July 22, 2020. <https://nmaahc.si.edu/blog-post/brief-history-voguing>

## 6 Understanding identity in superdiversity: Who lives in Rotterdam's HipHopHuis?

### 6.1 Identity

When Stuart Hall explores the concept of identity, he goes beyond deconstructive critique and barriers to thinking consequential to the workings of these critiques. In doing so, he is instigating a shift from identity as a category to identification as a process.<sup>135</sup> Identification is happening alongside the points of attachment which are shaped by discursive practices, meaning that subjects take upon these positions as parts of their identities.<sup>136</sup> Hall's approach starts with the idea that identity and identification are one of the least well-understood concepts. However, his approach is valuable at this point because of the connection it makes to discursive practices.<sup>137</sup> Hall recognises that identification is grounded in material and symbolic resources that sustain it and diminish the idea that although always in process, identities are subject to be lost or won anew.

Accepting this view on identities as a starting point, the first subsection of this chapter offers succinct biographies of the people who make HipHopHuis. By pinpointing how they identify themselves, relative to others, to the city, to the idea of being a Dutch citizen, as well as by observing what parts of their identities and their life stories they decided to share, provides an image of how they want to be perceived and how this perception reflects certain discourses.

Following paragraphs are edited and concise interview excerpts. They are all, however, answers to the same questions about identity, about their life story and trajectory. The first question was to identify oneself in one sentence or along with five identity points, with the second question asking for their life story and that of their family. At this point, most of the interviewees start talking about their family and origins, place of birth, home countries and interests. It is important to note that different interpretations followed the asked questions. While some were identifying themselves

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<sup>135</sup> Stuart Hall, "Introduction: Who needs identity?"

<sup>136</sup> Ibid,6.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.2.



with characters, traits and virtues, others were putting forward their gender, age and job or talking about their ethnicity and racial identification.

The idea of this section follows from anthropological commonplaces of what ethnographic work and encounter mean. Vertovec's point that ethnographic work is indispensable to understanding superdiversity and mostly daily interactions that happen in this context, meets Nigel Rapport's understanding of social interactions. According to Rapport, and following the commonplace mentioned above, the ethnographic reality is actively constructed by the ethnographer's presence. Rapport claims that people's biographies are brought into daily interactions and extended through interacting- sitting, eating, talking, dancing- with one another. Interacting biographies reinforce collective behaviour forms while allowing diverse meanings to be expressed. In other words, being and belonging to HipHopHuis assumes certain conventions of behaviour that stem from values of this culture. The exploration of many diverse biographies through interacting in these forms of behaviour, the conventions are maintained but also modified to accommodate new worldviews. The resilience of HipHopHuis flourishes from the ways of employing one's biography, but also histories, cultures and languages. Hence, the purpose of the following section is to illustrate the extent of diversity in interacting biographies. This diversity is not only, ethnic, generational, geographical, educational, but is also evident in a multiplicity of ways people plunged into hip hop culture.

## 6.2 Biographies

'Observation of everyday life is not a substitute for systematic analysis. But it works the other way around, too: systematic analysis is not a substitute for observation of everyday life. We begin, therefore, with the concerns of actual individuals speaking in their own voice.'<sup>138</sup>

Upon the arrival to my first day in HipHopHuis, **Vanity** whom I have met a few days earlier as the contact person for my research internship seated me on a large desk next to her. She proceeded to familiarise me with how things function around the office and to provide all of the credentials and information I may need. Vanity is the creative producer and marketing manager in HipHopHuis. She is 33 years old, and she stayed in school until she was 27 studying applied art

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<sup>138</sup> Verkuyten as cited in Paul M. Sniderman and Louk Hagendoorn, "Multiculturalism and Its Discontents in the Netherlands," in *When Ways of Life Collide* (Princeton University Press 2007), 71.

and technology. Born and raised in East Holland, in a small town near Enschede, Vanity's family members were music producers and dancers. Thirteen years ago, she started DJing:

'I was already buying records, so one day I just walked into one of my favourite shops, and I had like a little crate with the records, and I bought them randomly. Then I found out that my mom had a record player. I bought more and more, so I thought, what should I do with this? Then I bought my DJ set, and I just started playing.'

'Hip hop was in my upbringing,' she says while recalling the time when she visited her uncle, at the age of seven or eight and found his 'black book' with graffiti writings. Writers' 'black book' or 'piece book' is to practice and perfect their style but also to collect tags and pieces by other graffiti writers. Opening scenes in the 1983 documentary 'Style Wars' show graffiti writers exchanging their black books suggesting their value in historical perspective but also as records of personal styles and hence, testimonies of one's identity.

Before joining HipHopHuis in 2017, Vanity produced and organised many *jams* within the b-boy scene and photographed for blogs and magazines on the Rotterdam scene. Her knowledge, about hip-hop artists and community leaders, their successes and whereabouts, is extensive; from knowing the winners of the Dutch b-boy championship fifteen years ago and listing music producers, DJs and spoken word artists active in Rotterdam at the moment.

Vanity usually comes in around nine or ten o'clock in the morning, meaning she would often be the first one there, and until **Henk** arrives, the desk across her's is empty. When asked, Henk introduced himself as 'a 32-year-old male and business leader at HipHopHuis.' His story begins with growing up in a 'white community, with white Christian parents' in a small place called Alblaserdam. While narrating Henk reflects his life choices and life events singling out his travels to Surinam as central to shaping his identity. Travelling is an essential part of Henk's life, but staying in Surinam as a mason helped him understand better the experience of being a Dutch citizen. Cultural differences, realities and truths they entail, are matters Henk reflects about a lot. Before receiving an education in business economics, he worked as a bricklayer for five years. In Rotterdam, South is his neighbourhood where he participated in several housing projects providing gathering points and places for local arts and culture.

Henk too, was involved in hip-hop culture through one of its elements, namely b-boying. A group of his friends from Alblaserdam started *breaking*, and he joined. At the time, they did not know much about the culture: ‘I never knew where the dance was from, I just knew this felt good to me.’ Soon, Henk learned about the history and social context of hip-hop culture.

Another knowledgeable, yet the youngest member of the team, is **Matteo**. At the age of nineteen, he is now interning in HipHopHuis for almost one year. Usually sitting next to Henk, Matteo works closely with Vanity who once revealed about Matteo: ‘He is my communication sidekick. I can’t go without him.’

While living in Zoetermeer, studying in Utrecht, and daily commuting to Rotterdam, Matteo identifies himself as ‘...Indo. Just Dutch Indonesian.’ His grandfather moved from Indonesia to the Netherlands in the late 1960s and met his British wife. When he is in the Netherlands, he sees himself more as Dutch Indonesian, but in Indonesia, he is just Dutch or western. Matteo’s sense of fashion stands out, and he shows detailed knowledge about fashion trends in hip-hop. His curiosity is the baseline of his personality. Once Matteo was telling me a story of Patta, an Amsterdam based Dutch streetwear brand and how they started by importing sneakers, and soon he proceeded to inquire about brands and streetwear from my home country. A committed learner and hip-hop lover, Matteo wishes to start a media platform following hip-hop culture news. N.W.A and 50 Cent were artists who introduced Matteo to hip hop culture: ‘I discovered hip hop culture when I was 9, in 2010. I have already heard some songs from my sisters’ rooms, like R&B and hip-hop and saw some glimpses of some clips because I was not allowed [to watch] because of all the women and gangsters.’ Matteo also volunteers in HipHopHuis, and thus sometimes he spends the whole day there.

In the afternoon arrives **Akef**. The atmosphere changes when Akef walks in and greets everyone; for the morning and early afternoon, it is calmer and quiet, his arrival often announces more conversation and interaction. In HipHopHuis he is the facility manager who first arrived as an intern five years ago. This internship was part of Akef’s media and communication bachelor degree, and afterwards, he stayed as a volunteer.

Now, he is twenty-four years old and lives in Rotterdam with his friends, where he moved to at the age of four. Akef was born in Utrecht to Afghan parents who arrived in the Netherlands in

1995, after previously moving to Pakistan and Russia. In Rotterdam, he grew up in IJsselmonde in South of Rotterdam:

‘It is like everything you can find there. All the ethnicities, all the social classes, everything is sort of next to each other. [...]growing up it (hip-hop) was all around me, dancing in my living room, watching videos, sometimes with friends, you know what I mean, dancing with each other. [...] rappers, people (were) producing, DJs, dancers, everybody in my neighbourhood. It was never something strange. In my class, my elementary school class, where I grew up, two people are in the music industry. There was always some part of hip-hop culture. It’s just back then I wouldn’t have called it that. It was just normal.’

Complementary to Akef’s contribution to the office atmosphere, **Kanvie** brings about liveliness through genuine interest in everyone’s wellbeing that day. She is twenty-eight years old and a committed educator. On the first day, I have met Kanvie in HipHopHuis, she and some colleagues have just returned from a day of workshops with school kids. While summarising her impressions through office chat, one of the conversations sparked an idea, and she had momentarily stopped to write it down. For Kanvie, education through hip-hop is playful, and music is an unequivocally fruitful way of internalising values of ‘being real and down to earth.’ She grew up in the East part of the country, having moved twice as a child at both towns she felt like ‘that extraordinary black girl.’ ‘I am African, Liberian woman, but born and raised in Holland,’ she explained. Her parents were the first generation to come to the Netherlands, gradually in 1985 and 1990. During high school, she started listening to much of Dutch hip-hop, but also NAS, Tupac, and she started dancing to Missy Eliot: ‘She just had it all. For me, she was my hip-hop.’

For **Aisha**, hip-hop also came in the form of popular MTV hits, but what drove her to HipHopHuis were local and famous crews such as Poparazzi, she had seen on the television. Hip-hop,

‘[...]was always around from growing up, my uncles and my cousins; they always used to listen to hip-hop. My cousins, they used to rap just for fun. But my mother's brothers, they

really were a rap deal, and they really had a thing going on back in their days. So I was kind of raised on it. Riding in the cars, we used to put in CDs and cassettes and radio.’

When she was fourteen, she started dance classes at another dance school. When she was sixteen in 2012, Aisha already knew about HipHopHuis, and once she and her friend saw an add HipHopHuis is looking for volunteers, they applied straight away, and they never left. Now Aisha is twenty-five years old, and even Aisha’s mother revealed that she wanted her kids to go to HipHopHuis. Her family is from Surinam, and both of her parents were born and partially raised there, but she is an Amsterdam born, and Rotterdam raised, loyal and open-minded young lady, as she puts it. She spent part of her childhood in Rotterdam West and her teens in Rotterdam South. She works as a floor manager in HipHopHuis, mostly on Tuesdays, and she has recently decided to commit to making music under the leadership of Rass, a vocalist, musician and music producer.

**Leal**, the programme creator for HipHopHuis, himself a dancer, was a member of Poparazzi crew whose appearance on the Dutch television brought Aisha to HipHopHuis. Leal started dancing when he was twenty years old and has now been coming to HipHopHuis every week for fifteen years.

‘Poparazzi crew actually started as a popping crew of Lloyd, one of the founders (of HipHopHuis) and his best students, they founded the crew, and that grew to a crew that became like a leading force within the popping community and in the battle scene and the performing scene. Also, they were bringing knowledge from outside in because back in the day we still called popping electric boogie here in Holland. That generation really opened up the style here, and I am the second generation.’

Soon after his crew had gained popularity, Leal started engaging with event planning and building up the community, ‘building the stage in the spotlight for other people,’ because he sees hip-hop as a strange force allowing people not only to overcome their struggles but to turn them into the most powerful youth culture in the world. Broederliefde, a Dutch rap group, whose members came from Leal’s neighbourhood, in 2016 became top of the charts in the Netherlands and stayed there

for three months. Moreover, this is what hip-hop does, explained Leal, ‘people take their struggles and turn them into gold; like alchemists.’

Leal grew up in what he describes as ‘one of the poorest neighbourhoods in the country - Spangen, in the West (of Rotterdam). It was like one of Holland's first no-go zones back in the day.’ Music, dance and culture were part of his upbringing; however, the perception of black culture has changed since. ‘I am Cape Verdean, born and raised in Rotterdam. When I grew up, it was not cool to be African. Even within migrant groups.’ Now, Leal observes cultures coming from Africa are perceived as cool, and eventually, the love for hip-hop as a black culture will diminish the differences within Dutch society.

For Leal, **Debelien** once said that although they do not talk very often, she believes she can always come to him and have serious conversations when needed. Debelien was too born and raised in Rotterdam, in Delfshaven where she still lives. Growing up in Delfshaven was fun, she recalls but also to an extent dangerous. Same as Leal, Debelien does not remember experiencing lack of safety as a child, neither she explains, her mother had to worry about their safety. However, in retrospective, Debelien concludes she would most likely raise her children somewhere else. Debelien’s parent came from Cape Verde to the Netherlands in the 1980s, while most of their siblings moved to Europe and some to Brazil.

It was an internship that brought her to HipHopHuis while she was studying international media and entertainment in Breda.

**Noël** is from Oude Tonge, and she lived there before moving to Rotterdam to study. Her father is from Rotterdam, her mother from Oude Tonge, and she has thirteen brothers and sisters; six of them are foster. When Noël was twelve, her family had decided to adopt their first child. She is passionate about helping people and listening to them, so together with her brother, they started doing social work.

When it comes to hip-hop, her interest developed gradually from dancing: ‘my neighbours had this really small area where you can dance, and someone teaches you jazz ballet.’ She continued to dance through the high school but has not yet discovered hip-hop in that form. Her engagement with HipHopHuis, as a volunteer started in 2012, and she recalls Aisha and Macy being her first friends there.

‘I was this white girl who is going to come to hip-hop culture with all kinds of ethnicities, and all kinds of cultures. That was the first time I had to learn about other people and other cultures. I always had only white people around me. It was a big challenge. I didn’t know how to act. I am white, and it was easier for me, so I had to learn about the other side of the story.’

**Parisa** is a twenty-four years old communication student and volunteer at HipHopHuis. Born in Iran, when she was six, she moved with her family to Almere and lived there for several years. In 2009 they moved to Katwijk. The reasons for their decision to come to the Netherlands were, as Parisa explains, a mixture of political and economic motivations. Finally, in 2017 she found Rotterdam to be a perfect place for her. Parisa recalls the living experience in Katwijk: ‘It’s a town. [...] My problem was that it was very Christian and very white. Eventually, it became too small for me.’ After three years of studying interior design in Utrecht, she changed her major and moved to Rotterdam, where she lives in the East. ‘Growing up in asylum places where you are exposed to a lot of different ethnicities and cultural backgrounds’ implicated various music cultures that Parisa was not used to in her home country. One day sitting in class and gazing through the window, across the railway, Parisa saw Biergarten, Annabel and then spotted the sign for HipHopHuis. ‘After class, I just decided to walk in and check it out. It was maybe Tuesday night. I was looking around and thought it was nice. I started following classes the week after, hip-hop classes.’ Later, Parisa enrolled in the volunteer programme.

The first time I met **Myriam** was during our scheduled Zoom call, without having the chance to meet her in HipHopHuis. However, Myriam came up in several conversations as someone who knows a lot about the culture, the dance, and HipHopHuis. She is from France and has moved around the country with her parents and while pursuing her studies: ‘there were not really places where I settled in, I just kept going this way because I have never really felt attached to one place.’ Myriam has studied art and design, and arrived in Rotterdam in 2015 to participate in an art programme Root and Routes:

‘HipHopHuis was my first house. When I arrived here, I was staying and working in a youth hostel; cleaning rooms and carrying tons of bedsheets. Then when I was finished with that, I would go dancing. [...] When you are from abroad, and your financial means are limited, you get into some crazy things with housing, and that is a journey to feel stable and comfortable here. [...] Feeling comfortable somewhere is not always easy.’

In Lille, Myriam first started with a hip-hop community and locking dance, moving through funk styles, finally reaching her voguing era where she now holds the title of the ‘overseer.’

**Roberto** used to be a chef, specialising in Chinese and Indonesian dishes for almost ten years, since the age of fifteen: ‘It paid well, it fed me.’ Now he is a twenty-eight years old photographer who studied communication and event management as he always knew he wanted to be involved with art. Roberto marks his involvement with HipHopHuis as a turning point in making his decision to pursue photography. While in his teens he tried himself out in music, illustration, painting and dancing. After getting an internship in HipHopHuis and receiving support from the community, Roberto started to develop his photography skills. Hip-hop culture offered guidance to him:

‘I was first conscious about hip-hop when I was sixteen when I really tried to think about what kind of music I listen and what kind of place I should give it in my life. I started taking art more seriously, and hip-hop just became the symbolism of growth and resistance.’

He grew up in Rotterdam South and remembered it as enjoyable and everything one could want ‘from football courts to elderly people playing chess.’

**Louisa** is a dancer, a thinker who likes listening and exploring people and a psychology student. Originally from Berlin, pursuing her wish to learn and explore, she spent one year in Ghana after high school graduation, and eventually found her way to Rotterdam. In Berlin, Louisa went to an international school where she met her Ghanian friends and fell in love with the music and dance. Travelling to Ghana was part of her vision to learn and help make a change; however, looking back, Louisa conveys a degree of self-criticism towards the understanding of her role in Ghanian society. Nevertheless, this travel intensified her affection towards dance. In comparison to Berlin, which is a ‘multicultural city’, Rotterdam is more diverse, and to Louisa, this directly reflects on the variety and authenticity of available dance cultures.

### **6.3 Shifting identities and diverse biographies: united in hip-hop?**

From the outlined biographies of HipHopHuis’s members, patterns of similarity and difference emerge. The discussed superdiversity here is evident in motivational and generational instances of migratory backgrounds that are part of one’s biography. The implications of superdiversity are the social context in which people have decided to immigrate and consequently, the social and



economic context of reception in the Netherlands. From grandparents who have arrived in the Netherlands in the aftermath of the war, and parents who were trailblazer and seek improved economic conditions, or were led by the example of their other siblings, to politically motivated moves to preserve well-being. The environment to which families arrive, the social and cultural conditions that accommodate the first contact in the new country, also count toward what Vertovec defines as superdiversity. Some of the interviewees and their families settled down in the city of Rotterdam, others in smaller towns and culturally homogenous communities shaping their perception of the self and the experience of belonging. After initially living in the Hague, Kanvie moved twice, to Almelo and New Amsterdam:

‘...both in the east of the country, both were mainly white. When we were in New Amsterdam, we were the only black family there. I also noticed a lot of people would say things to us and pick on us. High school was a really nice period. I felt good in that period. [...] Then I found out, after a couple of years that east side (of the country) is not for me. I needed to move to Rotterdam because I am not so much surrounded by black people.’

In Myriam’s experience, who arrived in Rotterdam five years ago, settling down was difficult because the competitiveness of the housing market combined with the financial insecurity intensified the struggle with belonging to an entirely new society. Henk, on the other hand, perceives his identity through belonging to a predominantly white and privileged community. For this reason, learning about other cultures and realities, Henk saw as essential to understanding who he is and what it means to be a Dutch citizen. ‘I was born and raised in Rotterdam’ usually preceded by the connector ‘but’ reveals the tension in need to reiterate the identities and belongings of those who are Dutch citizens and have a migrational background.

The variety of responses emerged when it comes to the first experience and contact with hip-hop culture. For some, it was impossible to place this contact in an exact moment; however, it is traceable to channels and vessels of its distribution. As illustrated, global media platforms, such as MTV, were a source of hip-hop and R&B tastes for many. Dancing with friends and family to MTV hits was a memory of many, and while for Akef and Louisa it was a daily after-school practice, Matteo recalls he was not initially allowed to listen to this music. Another side of immersion into hip-hop differentiates those who claim hip-hop was part of their reality, from those who remember being attracted to its popularised elements such as breaking and hip-hop dance.

Growing up in a diverse environment appeared to imply hip-hop culture as intrinsic to everyday life or at least inseparable from cultural exchanges.

What becomes evident throughout the interviews is that for many, the entry point to HipHopHuis was an internship, after which they would often stay as volunteers. All the interviewees have strong affection toward some form of artistic expression, whether it is dancing, deejaying, music production, photography or fashion. As a dominant field of their interest emerged communication studies, event planning and marketing. However, it was not a one-way journey to HipHopHuis; exploring and challenging master narratives is a common denominator. Henk, Debelien, Parisa, Kanvie, Louisa were not reluctant to take a year or five before continuing their education after high school and pursue their chosen education trajectory after trying themselves out in a different study field.

To start from particularities that characterise belonging in hip-hop culture, Leal's reflection about how hip-hop culture drives one to assume different identities, of an activist, community leader, artist, aptly introduces the notion of negotiating. More than merely the roles one plays, Leal explained that being an artist and creating within the values of hip-hop entails different levels of participation and extents of attaching to this subject position. Which identities belong to hip-hop culture is an entanglement, rooted in different principles of inclusion and exclusion. In order to untangle the tenets of belonging, interviews were analysed to identify the recurring topics implying the belonging criteria.

## HIP-HOP VALUES

'Hip-hop is for everyone' might seem like a categorical answer to the question of whose culture is this, corresponding to the contemporary global influence of hip-hop. Among the culture lovers in HipHopHuis, there is a consent that hip-hop culture can accommodate everyone and everyone is welcome as long as they are thirsty for knowledge and want to know the culture as a whole. Discussing cultural appropriation within hip-hop culture often calls upon this dominant narrative; recognising the culture's origins, values, and not divorcing it from its socio-cultural context for purposes of commodification and profits, should place one on the safe side of the debate. The rhetoric of values is widely present in the accounts of the interviewees. For instance, to Leal, the power of hip-hop lies in providing a vessel to transform troubles and distress into the source of creativity and opportunity. This power comes from what Roberto sees as a hip-hop value, that is

to be ‘faulty and fragile.’ Who is welcome and who can find oneself aligned with the values of hip-hop culture is one of the questions asked throughout in-depth interviews. With inclusiveness in mind, the carriers of HipHopHuis’s activity tend to implicate openness of the culture to a wide array of identities. To reiterate this point, the notion of struggle appears regularly.

## STRUGGLE

Reasoning the global spread and appeal of hip-hop often elicits the narrative of marginalisation and lack of power to voice struggles. While in the history of hip-hop, the marginalisation implied groups in social and economic distress, voicing their increasing consciousness of the realities of their immediate surroundings, the question is how is marginalisation manifesting in contemporary cities. The idea of marginalisation and struggle derives from the social context of hip-hop culture; however, around the globe, it offers a space for the exploration of ‘their issues of marginalisation.’<sup>139</sup> Osumare calls this ‘connective marginalities’ globally resonating with hip-hop, and they can be of all kinds: class, oppression and peripheral status of youth.

## DIFFERENCE AND DIVERSITY

The discourse of cultural difference surfaces on several occasions, sometimes mistakenly understood as diversity and multiculturalism. In the case of some interviewees, there appears to be a master narrative of exploring other cultures through travelling; nevertheless, difference is also part of the shared knowledge and common understanding that hip-hop is ‘black culture.’ Racial identification emerges as part of understanding difference. Moreover, while the issues of gender remain contested in commentary about hip-hop, interviewees usually point out the conviviality between HipHopHuis and the voguing community originating from transgender communities.

### **6.4 Biographies interacting: A day in HipHopHuis**

These biographies relate to each other almost daily in HipHopHuis. Different organisational levels influence when and where conversations and interactions are happening. In the mornings, the office space is usually quiet, and the atmosphere is fit for work. The office door remains open throughout the day, but apart from occasional glimpses, peeks and greetings from the other residents of HipHopHuis, and scheduled meetings, not much is happening in this part of the day.

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<sup>139</sup> Halifu, Osumare. “Beat Streets in the Global Hood: Connective Marginalities of the Hip Hop Globe.” *Journal of American & Comparative Cultures* 24, no. 1-2 (2001): 172.

It is usually after three in the afternoon when the dynamics of the office space change. Coming by the office, greeting everyone, having lunch, and then engaging in many enticing conversations is the image of late afternoon in HipHopHuis. The moment of change from one atmosphere to another often follows when Akef arrives, for he has a remarkable ability to engage everyone sometimes by modestly getting around. For many, interactions are part of building up their skills as dancers and artists, hence often seeking for support in the process of learning and training.

Yanira explained that her belonging to HipHopHuis and hip-hop culture depended on the interaction and exchange with other dancers whose skills and art shaped the community. Kevin Paradox and Hassani, two renowned hip-hop dancers, locally and internationally, practised and danced with Yanira. Coming from contemporary dance, she did not feel like she belongs and has 'the right' to dance hip-hop. After exploring her specific artistic sensibilities and receiving validation from these dancers, Yanira comprehended her role in HipHopHuis and its community.

Noël remembers her teenage years in a precise manner describing herself as impatient and disengaged until she met Aisha. Upon Noël's arrival to HipHopHuis for the first time, coming from a culturally homogenous environment, she encountered an immense variety of people, stories and personalities that pushed her to listen more carefully and learn from others' experiences. Ultimately, all of them bring their particular understandings of hip-hop and dance, looking to further them through interactions.

An excellent example of biographies interacting is now a year old 'Take A Seat' initiative that started by the simple exchange at the shared space in HipHopHuis' still not renovated space:

'Before HipHopHuis renovated the place, we were all sitting downstairs, chilling. And we would always talk topics nobody would talk about, like menstruation pain and your parent being raised black, and all of those. [...] We can't be the only ones talking about this, there must be more people who want to talk about this stuff but can't because of their culture or the way they have been raised.'

It was Debelien and Susa who put the idea forward. Their connection comes from the idea of 'breaking the cycle,' Debelien explains. They were inspired by each other's life stories that challenged the cultural master narratives of Dutch society.

## 7 Rotterdam is the Hood: space in superdiversity

This chapter discusses and critically assesses yet another aspect of superdiversity, and explores the extent to which having a superdiverse population inflects on the spatial organisation of the city. Two previously mentioned topics are relevant for the framing and contextualising the argument of this chapter.

First, the spatial pattern linked to Rotterdam's superdiversity that Vertovec explored, namely the 'halo effect' refers to the areas outside of the superdiverse one. Vertovec's contemplation is of political matter. He observed that there are three areas with the highest vote for the right-wing PVV (Partij voor de Vrijheid; Party for Freedom) party in the Netherlands, and two of these municipalities are on the brinks of Rotterdam. Schiedam and Nisserward are indeed different social contexts, notes Vertovec, as the former saw a rapid ethnic change and the latter is predominately white and homogenous. In these terms, spatial response to superdiversity refers to the outside of the area designated as superdiverse. Nevertheless, how does superdiversity organise space within the city?

Second, chapter four followed the urban development of Rotterdam with insights into its relationship with the parts of the city south of the river Maas. Regardless of different scale endeavours to spur the development of Rotterdam South, the map of cultural institutions still manifested underrepresentation of this part of the city. In superdiversity, the multidimensional diversification of the Dutch society cancels the ease of contemplating assumptions about particular migrant groups; thus, it could be expected that spatial ethnic clustering would diminish in its intensity.

In 2015, Rotterdam ceased to exist as a minority-majority city. While this was evident in the diversification of neighbourhoods, there was still a clear division in more ethnically diverse parts of the city from those with predominantly Dutch descent residents. According to Entzinger, 45% of the Dutch-descent population in Rotterdam would have to move in order to make the distribution of ethnically Dutch and non-Dutch descent residents proportional.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Entzinger, "A Tale of Two Cities", 177.

Concerning these two premises, the following chapter makes an argument for spatial representation of superdiversity to reflect existing power structures. Communicating power through space and spatial discourses is an essential element of hip-hop culture, and HipHopHuis' choice to assume a central location has little to do with its audience that is assumed to arrive from particular, ethnically embedded parts of the city. To illustrate this point more convincingly the maps show the distribution of HipHopHuis' audience and contribute to the argument of spatial dynamics within the city while reflecting power structures in the cultural setting.

## 7.1 A Place in Space: HipHopHuis in the city

Referring to the usual theorists of the social production of space and the idea of space as a stakeholder in social interactions contends space as a powerful means of understanding urban realities.<sup>141</sup> Authors such as Sharon Zukin divide urban space into 'spaces of everyday life' and 'spaces of capital-driven power' which contest in the built environment of cities.<sup>142</sup> For Harvey, capitalism led urbanisation fuelled by the need to manage capital surplus, leads toward entrepreneurial urban governance, but not only that. It is not solely the transformation of tangible urban space and infrastructure, but the emersion of 'new urban persona' and new lifestyles.<sup>143</sup> More than shaping the urban experience of life, space also produces the difference and 'otherness' by unequal investments.<sup>144</sup> For it is that 'city only exists for those who can move around it,' and that consequently, we see cities within cities, Tricia Rose sees hip-hop culture as a vessel to address tensions of urban spaces.<sup>145</sup> While spaces in cities are two-coined, working on principles of unifying and differentiating, spatial relationships are interpreted as hegemonic: organized along the continuum of subordination and dominance.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> See Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford, Cambridge: Blackwell, 1991); Marc Augé, *Non-Places. Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (New York, London: Verso, 1995); David Harvey, "Between Space and Time: Reflection on the Geographical Imagination," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*

80, no. 3 (September 1990): 418-434; Setha Low, "Towards an anthropological theory of space and place," *Semiotica* 175, 1-4: 21-37.

<sup>142</sup> Zukin, "The city as a landscape of power: London and New York as global financial capitals," in *The Globalizing Cities*, eds. Xuefei Ren and Roger Keil (New York: Routledge), 83-90.

<sup>143</sup> David Harvey, "The right to the city," in *The Globalizing Cities*, eds. Xuefei Ren and Roger Keil (New York: Routledge), 290-295.

<sup>144</sup> Murray Forman, "Space Matters. Hip-Hop and the Spatial Perspective," in *The 'Hood comes first: Race, Place and Space in Rap and Hip-Hop* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1997), 6.

<sup>145</sup> Teresa Caldeira, "Sao Paulo: The city and its protests," in *The Globalizing Cities*, eds. Xuefei Ren and Roger Keil (New York: Routledge), 302-307.

<sup>146</sup> Forman, "Space Matters," 6.

Recalling Galster's definition of neighbourhoods as bundles of attributes, both material and social, one must ask, if the social and symbolic quality of the neighbourhood is a consequence of who consumes the neighbourhood (this is also who produces it), why certain social groups are more eager to consume specific spaces than others? Not far from previous understandings, for Glaster too this is the matter of resource flow that depends on an array of factors such as regional economy, policies, but also population, migration, technology and innovation.<sup>147</sup> Adding to this equation, Soja postulates that global city trends influence local decision-making and urban microdynamics conditioned by the demand for beautification projects and culturally driven urban economies.<sup>148</sup>

Glaster wrote about 'the degree of presence of neighbourhood' to signify two poles between which the understanding of this concept stretches.<sup>149</sup> A built neighbourhood without its residents is still a neighbourhood and is likely to possess some attributes that define it. However, which attributes this will be, depends on neighbourhood consumers, namely residents, business owners and other landowners. The degree of presence of neighbourhoods can vary across urban space, and it has to do with specific bundles of features being absent from the locality.

In Rotterdam, population and migration are certainly dominant attributes in the social shaping of the city's spaces seen as neighbourhoods. Which parts of the city are spaces closer to the subordinate pole of the continuum mentioned above? For Vertovec, the spatial component of urban diversity, often indicating the fear of diversification, is known as the 'halo effect.' 'Halo effect' for Vertovec signifies predominantly white areas at the borders of diverse space, often accounting the greater city area.

Spatial distribution of members and visitors of HipHopHuis across the city explores the versatility of spaces cultural activity of HipHopHuis reaches. It also investigates whether there are clusters in particular neighbourhoods that are for their ethnic and social composition assumed to be fertile ground for hip-hop culture. Furthermore, class, particularly economic statuses, sometimes become blurred when using superdiversity lens. The maps include the data about income distribution around Rotterdam's neighbourhoods and intersect with the youth that engages with HipHopHuis' activities.

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<sup>147</sup> Glaster, "On the nature of neighbourhoods."

<sup>148</sup> Edward Soja, "The stimulus of a little confusion: a contemporary comparison of Amsterdam and Los Angeles," in *The Globalizing Cities*, eds. Xuefei Ren and Roger Keil (New York: Routledge), 98-106.

<sup>149</sup> Glaster, "On the nature of neighbourhoods."

### 7.1.1 Data collection

Data for creating a visual representation of HipHopHuis's relationship with the city's spatial configuration included several stages. In 2017 HipHopHuis has introduced a new way of registering their members' activities by using MindBody software. This software was the primary source of data collection for mapping.

The total number of registered members at HipHopHuis at the beginning of the year 2020 was 5250 people, rendering the representative sample at 358 members. The random sample was obtained from the list of all members older than eighteen who had an address in Rotterdam. There was no upper age limit set. While hip-hop is a youth culture, the pioneers, also known as OGs, remain influential in cultural activities and are valuable community members. There is also no upper age limit for taking dance classes in the HipHopHuis; however, for some dance styles, there is a recommendation for being older than eighteen. Finally, some of the most popular teachers at HipHopHuis are at the brink of their forties, pushing the age limit even further past the definition of youth. The final dataset included 89 members and visitors older than 30, leaving 269 members bellow that age, with 100 out of 269 being in the age group 18-22.<sup>150</sup>

The dataset categorizes members according to the length of their involvement with HipHopHuis, and accordingly, the map shows members engagement for more than a year, less than a year and one-time visits. In the database of HipHopHuis and the randomised sample, not all data is complete. For some members, the information about the first and last visit is not available. However, as the focus is on the spatial dimension, the data of these members are still relevant. The timespan of collected data is between 2017 and 2020, concluding with January 2020. The one-time visits in February and at the beginning of March 2020 are not on the list. The reason is the global pandemic of 2020 that hit the Netherlands in February, likely conditioning these first visits to become the last as well.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Defining youth, especially the exact age at which youth starts and ends, is rather complex and varies. Youth is often characterized as period between childhood and adulthood when the social roles and identities can be explored without social pressure of responsibility. The UN defines youth in the age gap of 18-24, but recognizes that this category could be expanded up to the age of 30. In Rotterdam's neighbourhood statistics the youth is placed between ages 18 and 22, hence this is accepted above.

<sup>151</sup> This means that it is considered that the members who first visited HipHopHuis in late February and early March 2020 were likely to come again if conditions had allowed so. The number of these visits was 5.



All of the spatial data was anonymised. While the dataset includes exact addresses, the coordinates mapped onto the map are those of the middle of that particular street, but not the exact house number, as this thesis adopts the neighbourhood perspective. The anonymization also applies to the larger streets crossing different neighbourhoods. For instance, Nieuwe Binnenweg street crosses three different neighbourhoods. In this case, the exact address determines the neighbourhood; then, the coordinates were extracted for the middle of the street section in that neighbourhood.

Finally, neighbourhood data was completed from the statistical data of the Municipality of Rotterdam.<sup>152</sup> For the neighbourhood population, the latest figures are from 2020, and the data about migratory backgrounds, economy and income, cultural activity and neighbourhood contact is retrieved from the years 2017 and 2018.

### **7.1.2 Interpreting the results: mapping audiences**

Visualising the outreach of HipHopHuis does not provide for generalisations about its members and audience; nevertheless, it indicates which aspects of space are essential for understanding the relationship HipHopHuis has with the city. In light of the discussion about the North-South polarization of Rotterdam, and the neighbourhood perspective, maps represent most ethnically diverse areas in order to underpin the discussion about images, associations and reputation of some neighbourhoods.

The first map (Figure 2.) shows the distribution of HipHopHuis's longstanding members and one-time visitors in the intersection with spatial data about the most percentage of residents with a migration background, both 'western' and 'non-western'. The spatial representation of HipHopHuis members shows a somewhat scattered outline, however with some clustering evident in the central, western and northern part of the city and their neighbourhoods.

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<sup>152</sup> Research 010, Gemeente Rotterdam, accessed July 13, 2020, <https://onderzoek010.nl/>.

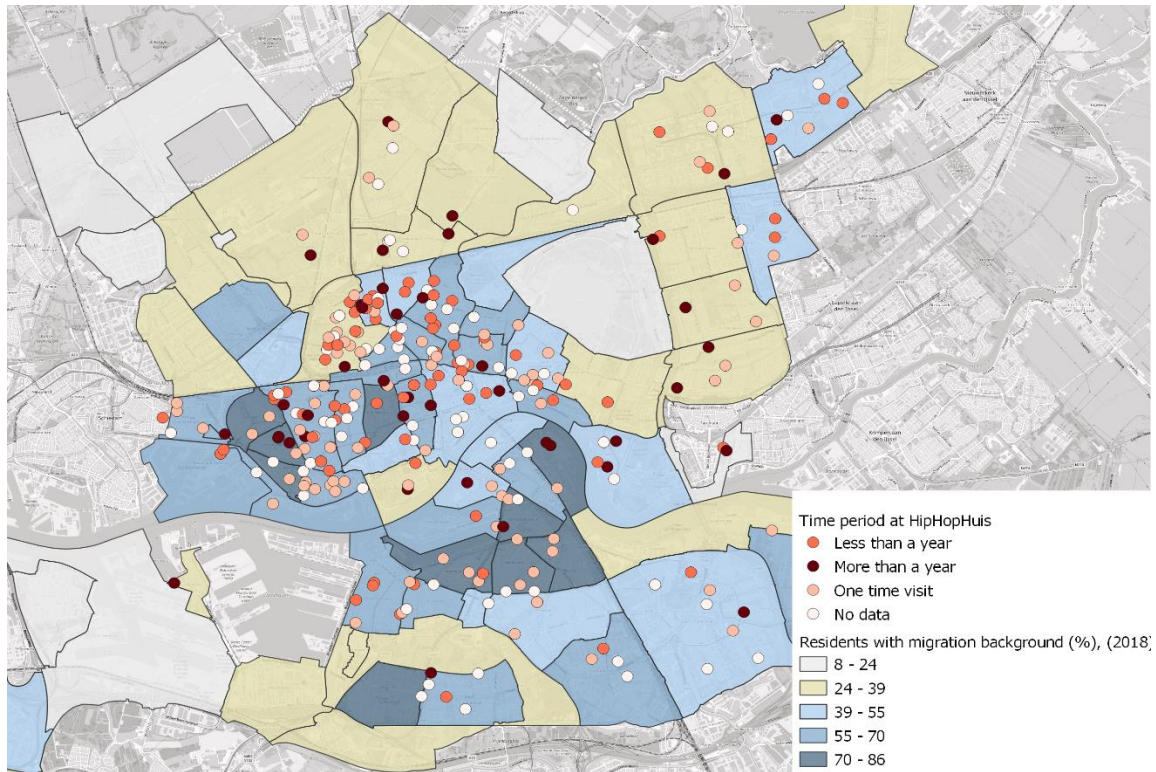


Figure 2. *Distribution of HipHopHuis' audience in Rotterdam, 2017-2020, by the author.*

Rotterdam West, with its prominent neighbourhood Delfshaven is regarded as one of the city's ethnically most diverse neighbourhoods. During the first decade of 21<sup>st</sup> century, newly rebuilt neighbourhoods, mostly in the South, Charlois, IJsselmonde, and Prins Alexander, grew exponentially and became home of a large number of so-called 'non-western migrants'. Rotterdam South is also the destination for intra-national migration. The South became a place for many projects and initiatives, and while 'living in projects' was a significant experience in forming hip-hop movement in the Bronx, South never became home of HipHopHuis. Reading from the map, it appears that the majority of members and visitors live in Rotterdam North, and predominantly towards Rotterdam West. In the biographical account of the interviewees, those who were born and raised in Rotterdam South, unanimously describe hip-hop culture, music and dancing as part of their upbringing and organic to the ethnic diversity of their neighbourhoods. The majority of neighbourhoods with the larger presence of HipHopHuis' members records between 39-70 % of residents with a migration background. However, with increased diversification, rapid social and urban changes, figure 2 testifies to a variety of audiences and social groups HipHopHuis gathers.

What does the still evident underrepresentation of the South signify? The next map (figure 3.) shows Rotterdam's neighbourhoods classified by the number of households with low disposable income, and HipHopHuis' members and visitors categorized by the duration of their engagement. The map on the left represents those whose presence has been noted for more or less than a year, with the map on the right showing one-time visitors, who would not return to HipHopHuis after the first free tryout session.

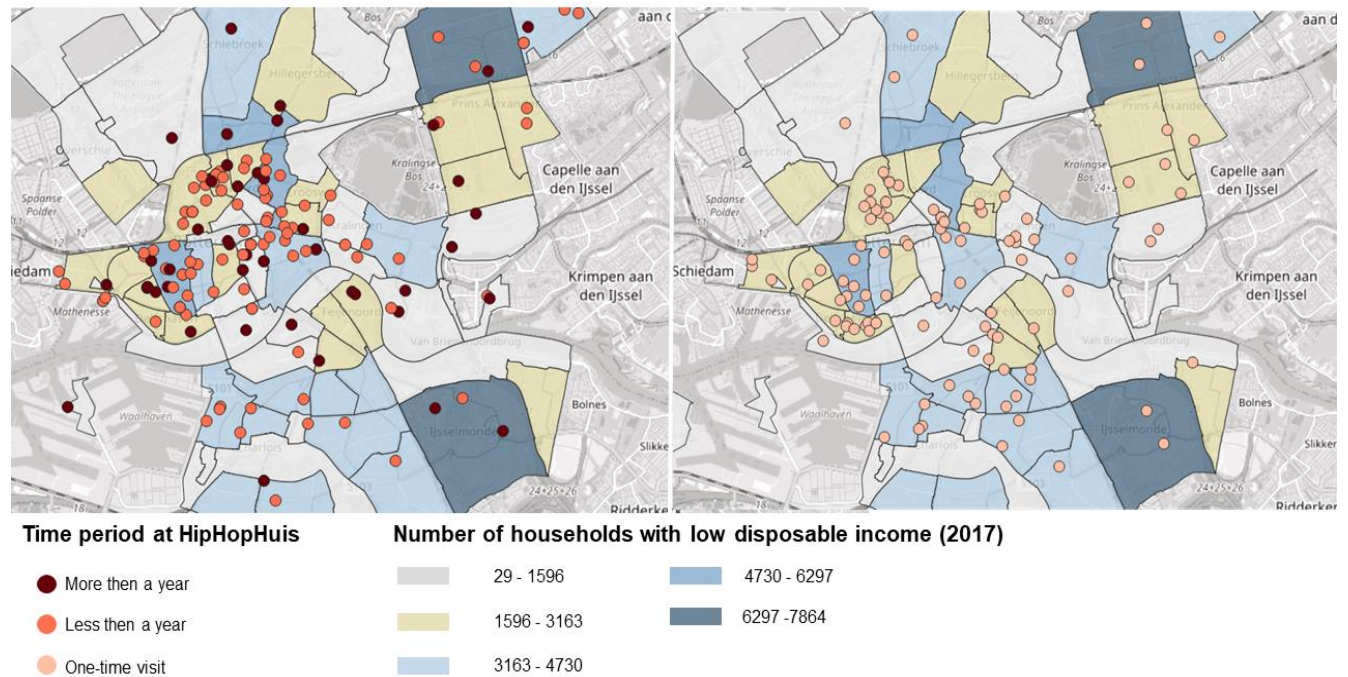


Figure 3. Comparison of returning members and on-time visitors, on the household income layer.

The method of mapping and its results suggest that understanding the role of hip-hop culture and HipHopHuis in Rotterdam goes beyond the interpretation of the 'marginalised' and 'ghettoized'. The designated 'ghetto' in Rotterdam is not missing. South appears to be as diverse as the other parts of the city; however, the most diverse neighbourhoods are located in the South, and Rotterdam West. To further explore these insights into neighbourhood image, ethnic diversity and hip-hop, the following section focuses on experiences of the interviewees. If it is not solely the matter of audience, accessibility and vicinity of all the relevant modes of transportation, and the

fact of having the central position, what are the reasons for space and place to become yardsticks of HipHopHuis' identity and belonging to the city?

## 7.2 'Straight outta Rotterdam': communicating through place and space

The conception of an urban experience and perceptions of the city often have to do with a particular area or part of the city, or even with another city. In addition to the neighbourhood perspective, city parallels shape the spatial discourse in Rotterdam. In this parallel, Rotterdam often stands against Amsterdam in order to heighten the city's characteristics of 'realness' and 'rawness.' In literature, Rotterdam receives the title of the second city, as it is not anchoring international finance activities in addition to its rich migration and cultural history, trade and industrial production.<sup>153</sup> Rotterdam's identity in dialogue with Amsterdam usually takes consumerism, tourism and performativity as elements to be excluded.

'When I think about Rotterdam, and I maybe compare it to, for example, Amsterdam. There is something unpolished about the vibe here in the town, and people are really straight up with you and real. When I am sometimes in Amsterdam, I see that people really want to show off being at certain parties. I don't know, they are a bit more shiny, compared to Rotterdam.'<sup>154</sup>

'Compared to Amsterdam-Amsterdam is really focused on events and nightlife, tourism- and comparing to Amsterdam, I feel there is much more hood here. [...] Like Southside Rotterdam hood, that's what I am talking about! Also, when you look at the dynamics between LA and Compton in America. Compton is known to be the hood.'<sup>155</sup>

'You know, sometimes I hear people say, you know hip-hop was created in New York, so Rotterdam is like New York, and Amsterdam is LA. Like no work is in Amsterdam, but the hard work is here.'<sup>156</sup>

The perception and the experience of the city originate from the neighbourhood shaped reception of immediate surroundings. Some spatial representations heavily rely on the 'outsider perspective:'

'There is a place called Afrikaanerplein, Afrikaanerwijk. That is the place where I live now. I was born and lived there for six years, and then we moved further down south of Rotterdam, to Ijsselmonde. [...]

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<sup>153</sup> Hodos, J. I. *Second cities: Globalization and local politics in Manchester and Philadelphia*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011).

<sup>154</sup> Vanity, interview with the author, February 20, 2020.

<sup>155</sup> Parisa, interview with the author, May 5, 2020.

<sup>156</sup> Aisha, interview with the author, April 10, 2020.

until I was thirteen, I lived in Rotterdam, and until eighteen in Ridderkerk, just outside of the city. Compared to Rotterdam it is a really different place, although only one kilometre apart. [...] Most people wouldn't recommend those places on the south side of the city; I didn't see it or experience at all...because it had a reputation of being kind of *ghettoish*. It is a bit more diverse (now). I see a lot more Turkish people around here, but it feels more calm.

[...]

In my head, it (South) was always part of the city, but it had a certain feel to it, certain reputation. But I didn't think of it as bad. Whereas now, people want to tackle that bad reputation, so they got a sense they have to build more new structures just to give it some boost when it comes to the image. I never saw it that way. [...] To most people, it is just a home.'

It was not a rare occurrence to describe Rotterdam South as the 'hood' and use the notion of 'ghetto' to signalise some characteristics of this space and its neighbourhoods. Note that South is often observed as a homogenous and unified entity, while the north side rarely replaces naming the city centre, Westside and Delfshaven, Eastside and Kralingen. As argued thus far, social groups inhabiting particular space, not only consume that space but produce it in return. The settling of cultural and creative forces around Rotterdam, and primarily, as observed, north of the river Maas, produces this area further as normative for cultural activities (see Chapter 4). With the clustering of cultural institutions, Aruna explains:

'For me, it was all about positioning; having a position in the city means you get to be where the action is, where people are and where they can reach you, of course. But once there was a period when we were in Coolhaven area when the bridge was broken, so they were fixing the bridge for like a month, and there was a boat going up and down, and it took maybe half an hour more to get there. You would think we would lose people because of that? No. People kept coming. I am not afraid that if we move, we will lose the people, but we will lose our position.'<sup>157</sup>

The reasoning behind this has to do with the power struggle, Aruna explained. Elaborated methods of place-making are in play here. The place is construed in the dialectic relationship between two different spaces, in this case, north of the Maas, and south of the Maas. One of the elements producing the perception and identity of a place, and participating in this dialectic relationship, is the distribution of cultural activities, institutions and organisations.

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<sup>157</sup> Aruna, interview with the author, June 23, 2020.

### 7.3 Keeping it real: HipHopHuis and belonging in Rotterdam

What does thinking in terms of neighbourhoods brings forth? Why do neighbourhoods delineate some sort of identity or line of identification? Why is urban comprehended in this category, and is it specifically useful to adopt it in case of Rotterdam and hip-hop culture? Having a hip-hop powerhouse at a central location in the city where poles of South and North are conspicuous, signifies the possibility to negotiate fluid identities and belongings- it is after all the fluidity, fusion and negotiation what we need to grasp and not multiculturalism and diversity.<sup>158</sup> The inquiry here is about how the hip-hop community in Rotterdam develops positive spatial affiliations, and how a place, in this case, Rotterdam as a city, by the medium of HipHopHuis, construes identities and sentiments of belonging.

‘I started break dancing in the 1980s. On Middellandstraat, on Schermlaan to be precise. At the time, I didn't know what Cape Verdeans or South Africans were. We were all brown people together in the Schermlaan, and you just got along. I was a neighbour of Paulo Nunes, a Dutch breakdancer, who lived several houses away from me. I was ten, maybe eleven years old when a hype spread from America to Europe. I saw a lot of people breakdancing around me.’<sup>159</sup>

‘People who live in the West don't really have to go. You got everything here. It starts with mini Chinatown and goes to Surinamers, Turks, Indonesians. I love this multicultural thing. In HipHopHuis, I recorded my first CD. This is where culture is lived: dancing, breaking, scratching, turning. And people help each other. Not only professionally, but also just for a can of Coke. You can't find such an atmosphere of co-existence.’<sup>160</sup>

Forman interprets the use of spatial discourses in rap music as sources of addressing specific social experiences that are often neglected in comprehending the urban.<sup>161</sup> In this context, as discussed, the concept of ‘real’ emerges in hip-hop culture. Considering the fast and worldwide spread of hip-hop, in particular through popular music, the concept of ‘real’ has persisted to delineate underground, alternative and authentic forms of culture from those that are perceived inauthentic.

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<sup>158</sup> Zukin, *The Cultures of Cities*, 290.

<sup>159</sup> Interview with Lloyd Marengo, HipHopInJeSmoel, accessed June 1, 2020, <https://www.hiphopinjesmoel.com/interviews/choreograaf-lloyd-marengo-strijdt-voor-hiphop-in-het-theater/>

<sup>160</sup> Door Anneke Kortleve. “ ‘Hè hè, eindelijk thuis, denk ik op de Kruiskade’; WEST-KRUISKADE,” *NRC Handelsblad*, December 12, 2014. Nexis Uni.

<sup>161</sup> Forman. “Space Matters,” 5.

Gatekeepers of ‘realness’ allude to hip-hop’s history, cultural influences and production of knowledge.

It was not on a single occasion that the concept of ‘real’ was used to describe Rotterdam and its hip-hop community, sometimes without further explication. This occurrence could be understood as a position of power. The silence following the articulation that Rotterdam is real, or sometimes ‘real’ in comparison to Amsterdam, elucidates power in voicing a shared understanding among the community members of why this is the case. Rotterdam is ‘raw, unfiltered, honest’, and although these adjectives do not necessarily refer to its spatial dimension, but are an abstraction of what the city of Rotterdam represents- the polarization and segregation resonate with the particular location of HipHopHuis. Rendering Rotterdam as ‘real and raw’ alludes authenticity of that particular urban experience.

In as Murray calls it, the postmodern ‘global’ city, the roots of realness shift. While Amsterdam is ‘less real’ because its cultural offer is performative and tourism-oriented, focused on large events that call for much attention, Rotterdam is about talent and small scale endeavours to generate opportunities for artists. If anything, HipHopHuis takes upon nurturing cultural entrepreneurship. This aspect is likely a consequence of what it means to be a grassroots cultural organisation in contemporary cities. In enlarging the realm of cultural economics and cities as epicentres of cultural activities, young creatives often appear as necessary good. It is irrefutable that HipHopHuis offers opportunities to learn and occasionally employment opportunities, anchoring the youth to their chosen trajectories. Although a local actor, HipHopHuis, has nurtured some of the globally known artists.

While HipHopHuis is the major cultural organisation of this kind, pertaining strong focus on knowledge, cultural and social values of hip hop, representing itself as a middle ground in the city’s cultural landscape, their ‘realness’ does not come from a particular neighbourhood. It is the entire city that is the ‘hood’ for this hip-hop community. For some being a Rotterdammer relates to belonging to HipHopHuis, for others it was in HipHopHuis where they had the first contacts with the city.

## 8 Conclusions

HipHopHuis, established in 2002, the missing link in Rotterdam's cultural landscape, challenges many premises of Rotterdam as a superdiverse city. Lessons from the globalised culture, known as hip-hop, never cease to provide means to debate and rethink local social contexts. Hip-hop as a self-empowered force to criticise but also to create and explore uniquely flexible cultural logic that flourishes amidst cultural exchange and difference. While hip-hop is exclusive to some identities, local tastes are the new drivers of its global popularity, shaping the culture in return.

With regard to popular music and hip-hop's rise as a lucrative cultural industry blurring the boundaries of the culture, local varieties of hip-hop became indispensable actors in cultural globalisation. The consequential scholarly attention to world-wide hip-hop communities hence does not come as a surprise. Expanding the interdisciplinary dialogue, the hip-hop studies expand the body of knowledge and available topics within hip-hop culture. While the research focuses and approaches proliferated, the threat of academic canonisation remained. Vibrant and dynamic, hip-hop culture asks for the multiplicity of voices and diverse pools of primary resources. Hence the choice for ethnography and oral history to illustrate the need to preserve local colourations to hip-hop.

The first two analytical chapters, namely chapters 4 and 5, explore dominant narratives and discourses of Rotterdam's superdiversity and the role of hip-hop and HipHopHuis in it. There is a line of narration about diversity, race, migration and multiculturalism connecting to the narrative of Rotterdam being a 'second city,' 'raw, real and unfiltered' that relates directly to the idea of 'keeping it real' in hip-hop culture. In this, and many other ways, the global-local exchange persists. The relevance of space and place in hip-hop, Murray Forman explains, permeates the culture in almost all of its forms. While the dualisms as 'empowered- ghettoized' and 'dominant-marginal' reveal an extent of reductionism towards understanding identities, their relevance to spatial analysis is not to be entirely disregarded. The last chapter, with its spatial analysis, shows that there is no particular clustering in parts of the city that people usually described as 'ghettos' or where according to the history of the development of Rotterdam, socially marginalised groups would be found.



The conclusions of this thesis are fourfold and introduce two relevant debates when it comes to the interplay between hip-hop, HipHopHuis and superdiversity. The four lines of conclusions are as follows.

First, from observing the change in the city since the 1970s, it is evident that by the time HipHopHuis began with its early activities in 2002, Rotterdam has shifted towards building a new image, identity and set of narratives. This shift originates from Rotterdam's history as a port and industrial city, global urban trends and inter-city competition. Rotterdam's urban redevelopment in the postwar economy extensively focused on the South bank and the cultural regeneration. The latter culminated in Rotterdam becoming European Capital of Culture in 2001, creating a momentum for the rise of urban cultures. The other element of Rotterdam's rebuilding was investing in the area south of the river Maas. Rotterdam South was relevant for the analysis due to its reputation and representation, especially before the pivotal construction of Erasmus Bridge. With the undoubted effort to land projects, programmes, events and festivals to Rotterdam South, this part of the city remained underrepresented, with North Bank accommodating the majority of cultural institutions. Considering HipHopHuis' strong message that only diverse leadership and cultural organization can be representative of Rotterdam's youth and their needs, this grassroots organization alludes to the immense importance of claiming space in the centre of Rotterdam.

Before knitting tightly around the symbolism and power dynamics of urban space, HipHopHuis's trajectory reveals dynamic growth and strengthening of hip-hop values in the local context. Hence, the second line of conclusions argues that from the first commercially-driven channels through which hip-hop arrived in the Netherlands, until today, hip-hop grew into the realities of the local. Soon after the initial 'hype' about attractive elements of hip-hop, local crews and community leaders grasped the abundance of knowledge, history, creativity and innovation within the culture. The fifth chapter illustrated the longstanding link between diversity and HipHopHuis, perceived through lived experiences of its leaders and influences the city image and the narration inflected.

The contested views on superdiversity emerge in biographies and ethnographies of interaction in chapter six. While superdiversity is evident from the life stories of HipHopHuis's employees and volunteers, according to hip-hop values, the accent is on 'what connects us, not what set us apart.' Interestingly, although this claim is part of their shared knowledge, many engage in rethinking and grasping cultural difference.

Contrary to Hans Siebers findings in Dutch classrooms, in Dutch HipHopHuis, there was almost no mention about other peoples ethnicities as a cause for interacting or grouping. Ethnicities are mostly called upon in conveying one's belonging and identity within Dutch society. Regardless of whether diversity is a common topic around HipHopHuis when people interact, they bring their biographies into these interactions.

Superdiversity in the microcosm of everyday life in HipHopHuis extends meaning-making and intercultural exchange, however, the last chapter questioned whether this is the case on the larger city-scale. Looking into the cultural landscape, despite increased diversification of neighbourhoods around the city, there is a spatial pattern gathering institutionalised cultural activities in the area north of Maas. With its audience all around the city, with some clusters of visitors on the west side, HipHopHuis positions itself centrally to navigate power relations embedded in the space, but also obscured by it.

Finally, not merely its implicit social commentary to the understandings of culture in superdiversity, HipHopHuis gathers testimonies and experiences of social, cultural and economic changes that happened over time in the city of Rotterdam. As a middleground of cultural exchanges, HipHopHuis also opens to many research inquiries regarding entrepreneurship and managing creativity, community leadership, dynamics in creative and cultural industries and cultural policies. For the hip-hop scholarship and preserving of oral histories and material culture, HipHopHuis gathers an extensive network of artists, knowledgeable individuals and pioneers who shaped the local hip-hop community.

## **8.1 The beef: diversity versus difference**

Thomas Hylland Eriksen, a Norwegian anthropologist, brilliantly captured the distinction between cultural diversity and cultural difference. Eriksen sees 'diversity as largely aesthetic, politically and morally neutral expressions of cultural difference.'<sup>162</sup> For this reason, diversity is never fully reconciled with social solidarity.<sup>163</sup> In the context of superdiversity, Vertovec claims that these socially and culturally complex societies often foster 'neutral attitudes' towards diversity, and

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<sup>162</sup> Thomas Hylland Eriksen. "Diversity versus difference: Neo-liberalism in the minority debate," in *The Making and Unmaking of Difference*, eds. Richard Rottenburg, Burkhard Schnepel, Shingo Shimada (Bielefeld: Transaction, 2006), 13-36.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid*, 14.

‘tolerance instead of acceptance.’ Scholars of superdiversity emphasize its migrational characters as the primary driver of complex intrasocietal diversification; however, they do not exclude culture, lifestyles, beliefs and values as part of superdiversity.

The reasoning behind testimonies such as ‘people love black culture, but not black people,’ or often comparisons of hip-hop’s institutionalisation with that of ballet’s, directs us towards what Essed called cultural norm to which diversity is only an ‘add-on.’<sup>164</sup> What lies beyond diversity are undesirable differences.<sup>165</sup> In the case of hip-hop culture, these undesirable differences- explicit language, images of violence, and particular topic choices- obfuscate its artistic and creative values. While this can lead towards underappreciation of hip-hop’s potentials, hip-hop, and as discussed, HipHopHuis reclaim their power through space.

## **8.2 Space discussion: where to next?**

Vertovec discussed the spatial response to superdiversity as ‘halo effect’ happening on the outside or the brinks of superdiverse cities and areas. However, what happens within the superdiverse place? Through maps and personal accounts, Rotterdam South surfaced as the ‘hood’ and the ‘ghetto’ of the city. Most accounts about Rotterdam South touch upon ethnic diversity and the social context it evokes. Rotterdam undoubtedly saw the diversification of its neighbourhoods; nevertheless, some are still produced as parts of the polarized city organization. Hence, the question is whether there are patterns of spatial representation of superdiversity? Which factors shape the space in superdiverse cities and whether the ethnic lens is still a significant factor? Recognizing these factors would improve the exploration of the superdiversity as a living experience. Although it is the city that carries the label of superdiversity, the spaces within the city appear to carry characteristics derived from a single dimension of superdiversity, such as ethnic pluralism. In these terms, further research needs to explore how superdiverse population shapes the spatial organization of the city and which aspects of superdiversity produce space, its social meanings and symbols.

It is in this context that HipHopHuis by positioning in the centre provides space for imagining the city and developing sentiments of belonging through spatial discourses of hip-hop culture. The

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<sup>164</sup> Essed, “Cloning cultural homogeneity,” 8.

<sup>165</sup> Hylland Eriksen, “Diversity versus difference,” 5.

positioning of HipHopHuis produces it as an active participant of the cultural landscape, drawing power from the spatial dynamics. Further research should focus on grassroots organisations and their understanding of positioning and spatial hierarchies in the cities as essential for their existence. It would unveil which associations, images and bundles of characteristics are attached to particular space and raise the question of 'why.' This thesis suggests space as a means to explore the extent and influences of the superdiverse population on the urban lived experience.

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