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Summary

In Westland, Netherlands we observe a contrasting trend of socio-spatial segregation, where despite a diverse population of migrants, the interaction between them and the ethnic Dutch residents remains limited. With the growing labour migrant influx in the Netherlands and heightened fears towards change it is essential to explore the factors impacting social cohesion specifically between interdependent communities in rapidly urbanising peri-urban areas.

The thesis explores the correlation between community social cohesion and open public spaces, exploring certain factors in planning that play a key role in social processes. While there is ample demographic data about the composition and planning of such areas there is little critical analysis on the impact of such commodity-driven urban planning from the perspectives and attitudes of the local communities and planners. Given the pivotal role of public spaces in promoting social cohesion, the primary research inquiry is: **"What factors play a key role in the planning of public spaces for social cohesion between ethnic Dutch residents and labour migrants in Westland?"**

The thesis expands on two parks in Naaldwijk as a case study using in-depth, observations, semi-structured interviews and questionnaires from the visitors on-site supported with interviews from professionals at different planning level.

The research findings expand on concepts such as built space, social networks and institutional support and assesses how they impact intergroup cohesion based on indicators explored in literature such as shared goals, familiarity and accessibility. Findings showed that many of these aspects were mainly influenced by institutional support which was based on private and government organisations' interests. Planning focused more on maximising labour workforce numbers rather than integration in the community, leading to segregation in-built public spaces and social networks. The lack of contact between communities has reduced representation, exposure and awareness of differences. The uneven participation in planning among stakeholders, creates gaps in knowledge and services that can enhance social cohesion and instead further contribute to the negative framing of migrants. By examining the current relationship between ethnic Dutch residents and migrants in public spaces and analysing them in tow with the municipality, provincial government, and private actors' opinions, this thesis provides a holistic and comprehensive analysis of the factors that impact public space planning for enhancing community social cohesion in Westland, Netherlands.

Keywords

Social cohesion, Public spaces, Contact zones, Westland, Labour Migrants, Peri-urban regions, Institutional support.

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I would like to thank my grandparents Rashida, Noor Jehan, Shams and Ali for bestowing a rich inheritance for my history and heritage. A love for the world and a heart for all its people. I would like to thank my parents who made every day the best, my sister is the only voice of reason in most situations, and I find it very annoying, but my Supervisor for her guidance and calmness made meetings something to look forward to.

Lastly, I would like to thank Mirza Ghalib for this quote

“Don’t go by the lines on the palm of hand Ghalib, Luck is bestowed even on those who don’t have hands.”

This year was full of silent battles and I pray one day we all dare to know right from wrong. In memory of my sisters and brothers who lost their lives in the conflict, gone but never forgotten. Your names are etched on stone, remembered on dark nights and whispered in hardships and happiness. May the world never be silent.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background information and problem statement

In 2022, the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS, 2022) reported a significant influx of migrants into the Netherlands, with their population reaching approximately 403,108 individuals—a notable 60% increase compared to preceding years. The increase, coupled with rising inflation and a housing crisis, has led to growing animosity between the ethnic Dutch and the migrant population, which has become increasingly apparent through documented support for right-wing parties with rigidly anti-immigration policies. (Boztas, 2023) The surge particularly pronounced in South Holland with its horticulture clusters and one of the most diverse populations of seasonal and labour migrants, prompts a detailed examination of the region's social integration planning.

In contrast to cosmopolitan hubs like Rotterdam which are more adept at handling an influx of migrants from diverse backgrounds; peri-urban regions such as the horticulture clusters within Westland present a unique challenge with their tightly-knit ethnic Dutch community networks. The region, well known for its use of greenhouses, has a dispersed population and is currently experiencing a trend of younger individuals migrating to urban centres for better job opportunities. This has left the older demographic grappling with a labour market void in the greenhouse industry, which is gradually being filled by both skilled and unskilled migrants (EURES, 2022; Gallent et al., 2007).

The Westland region in the Netherlands is well-known for continuously upgrading its production systems to enhance economic viability and efficiency for horticulture. The planning goals primarily prioritize private interests aimed at workforce maximization, often neglecting community social cohesion. Consequently, regional planning has increasingly focused on economic growth and spatial development to accommodate the greenhouse industry's needs, resulting in fragmented mono-functional clusters and poorly planned, limited public spaces. (Meyer et al., 2018; Gallent et al., 2007). This focus on economic priorities has led to a contrasting trend of socio-spatial segregation in Westland, where despite a large population of labour migrants, meaningful interaction between ethnic Dutch residents and migrants remains strained.

The lack of free public amenities, such as parks, hinders social interaction between different groups, raising the question of whether community social cohesion correlates with the planning of these public spaces. While most literature on public spaces emphasizes their role in community building, it is crucial to highlight that planning and institutional structures primarily create and shape the channels required for positive interactions within them. (Sandercock, 2000)

1.2 Relevance of the research topic

In the Netherlands, a 'dispersal law' allocates asylum seekers across the country to ensure their equal distribution based on the number of inhabitants and the prosperity of municipalities. This has compounded the pressure on South Holland to integrate refugees along with migrants into the region, escalating tensions in the Westland as ethnic Dutch cite concerns about disruptions to their social order (Language, 2024). This thesis explores the planning factors that impact social cohesion and emphasizes the need to move beyond simplistic approaches like creating more housing and jobs. Instead, it advocates for a holistic perspective, stressing the importance of understanding the nuances of resistance to changing demographics within the community's socio-spatial values.

As our cities become increasingly commodified, planning for social cohesion is imperative to overcome divides in how we perceive individuals—not just as workers, residents, and migrants but as integral parts of our communities. (Amin, 2012). Sandercock (2000, 29) states this as “the work of planners in managing difference”, which involves negotiating fears and facilitating transformation. Public spaces

such as parks play an essential role by providing a neutral forum where these chance interactions can take place and a sense of anonymity can be maintained about one's background, allowing individuals to come together on an equal footing. (Young, 2002)

Based on these studies, the research critically analyses social cohesion in interdependent communities through their use of public amenities such as parks. In the context of globalization, discerning this phenomenon becomes more challenging, particularly in peri-urban centers characterized by constant transformations and industrialization. Westland, therefore, provides an ideal case study, as a region impacted by such changes with the greenhouse sprawl and a growing diverse labour force. (Korthals Altes et al., 2013) By collecting data on perspectives and attitudes in shared public spaces from community ethnic Dutch residents, labour migrants and government representatives, the study will highlight the diverse needs for a cohesive community and how they can be reflected in social policies, possibly influencing them in return as well.

Ultimately, the findings can contribute to urban planning literature, advocating for just and sustainable community development based on social processes that can address fractures and divisions wrought by changing demographic trends.

1.3 Research Objectives

According to the Westland municipality, of the estimated 12,000 migrants who work in Westland, approximately 4,500 live within the municipal boundaries, with the number growing to 16,000 during peak seasons (Gemeente Westland, n.d.). According to the planners some migrants have even preferred living outside the region only to avoid the social alienation experienced in small towns, leading them to commute long distances to work in the greenhouses. (Cremers, 2018). While policies are being developed to promote better integration, Putnam (2007) argues that increased diversity can also accentuate differences between in-groups and out-groups as they cling to familiar identities. Ensuring community cohesion across groups requires adherence to certain principles such as institutional support, trust, equal status, and shared goals (Allport, 1954). The thesis aims to understand the significance of these principles in the current context.

This research identifies factors influencing social cohesion among these interdependent communities and analyses how they enhance or hinder interactions between ethnic Dutch and migrant communities. Using two parks in Naaldwijk, Westland, as case studies, the thesis examines the built environment, social networks, and institutional support—factors commonly cited in planning literature that play a key role in impacting interactions between diverse groups. Based on these, the objective is to explore the correlations between community social cohesion and planned public spaces in depth, aiming to highlight nuanced connections between the two rather than direct causation.

1.4 Main research question and research sub-questions

This leads to the main research inquiry **“What factors play a key role in the planning of public spaces for social cohesion between ethnic Dutch residents and the labour migrants of Westland?”**

It's imperative to evaluate existing public spaces to identify factors that hinder or facilitate social cohesion for future planning strategies. The investigation therefore delves into the role of context, design, and planning in shaping public spaces within fragmented communities, aiming to address the following sub-questions:

- 1. What role does the current shaping of public space play on community social cohesion in Westland?**
- 2. What is the impact of the social network on how shared amenities such as parks are utilized?**
- 3. What role does institutional support play in planning for social cohesion in Westland?**

2. Literature review and hypotheses

This section reviews existing literature on the key concepts related to the main research question: social cohesion and its connection to the planning of public spaces. It also expands on how this research aims to add to or fill gaps in this literature

The first part elaborates on the significance of public spaces as contact zones and why they are essential in bringing communities together. It contextualises their relevance expanding on planning issues in Peri-urban areas.

The second part examines interethnic community dynamics through biopolitics, focusing on rising fears towards migrants in Europe and peri-urban areas. Drawing primarily from Ash Amin's (2012) work, these concepts establish the research's conceptual framework for analyzing social cohesion.

The third part then defines the multiple dimensions of social cohesion and the key factors affecting it, in three sub-sections based on overlapping literature. The first section on built spaces explores how design influences accessibility, scale, and the porosity of interactions. The second section on social networks emphasizes joint activities, community and inclusivity. The final section discusses institutional support through interactive programming in public spaces and increased participation in planning.

2.1 The Intersection of Public Space Planning and Social Cohesion

With its growing diverse population, the Netherlands, as a place making model, faces the challenge of aligning its functional planning practices with the community-building needs of social production. (Karszenberg et al., 2016). According to Putman (2007) increased immigration and ethnic diversity tend to reduce social cohesion between different communities as they develop stronger bonds within their ethnic groups when trying to establish roots in a new place. Social theorists such as Sandercock (2002) in her paper "Managing Cities of Differences" argue that this decrease in trust, altruism, and community cooperation is often the result of poor planning, suggesting that in the long term, this can be mitigated by policies that promote positive interactions between inter-ethnic groups, fostering acceptance over fear and bridging divides between communities. (Amin, 2006; Cattell et al., 2008).

In a multiethnic and multicultural city, daily urban life involves the habitual negotiation of differences, typically without conflict. This is most evident in public spaces and shared workplaces, where co-dwelling and shared labour normalises being around strangers (Amin, 2006). According to Amin (2012), social cohesion within communities is not solely dependent on communal bonding but is heavily influenced by material conditions and the biopolitics of integration, which involve the excessive regularization of citizen populations. Allport (1954) supports this by stating that increased interactions between different groups can reduce prejudice, provided there is trust, equal status, shared goals, and institutional support. Mary Louise Pratt, in her book "Imperial Eyes" (2007), adds another layer to this theory with the concept of contact zones—spaces where cultures meet, clash, and interact, often under conditions of unequal power. For Pratt, these interactions foster knowledge and cultural exchange through transactional activities or discourse (p. 34)

Public spaces such as parks play an essential role in enhancing such social processes by serving as frequent zones of contact and exchange where interactions occur even if groups do not outwardly mingle (Pratt, 1991; Cattell et al., 2008; Peters et al., 2010). As free amenities, they offer diverse functions and act as neutral zones, facilitating encounters among different groups without social or economic barriers (Young, 2000). These spaces foster a sense of community and ownership, linking the protected space of home with the larger urban area, and are therefore crucial in bridging communities and individuals in cities (Peters, 2010).

According to Cattell and Dines (2008), there is a need to explore how public spaces impact social relations and well-being, focusing on the positive social engagement between communities within them rather than assuming it is due to a decline in public spaces. These spaces should be viewed as "sites of civic promise" where meaningful social interactions can occur (Amin, 2006, p.1020) Instead of focusing on increasing the number of public spaces, the more apparent need is to explore the factors that can play a key role in their planning to enhance social cohesion between communities. Characteristics that influence how successfully and frequently these factors impact interactions become measurable variables to observe community social cohesion in day-to-day life (Jacobs, 1992; Aelbrecht & Stevens, 2019). This connection between the planning of public spaces and social cohesion leads to my main hypothesis: ***“Planned Public spaces as shared amenities for social interaction, support social cohesion between ethnic Dutch residents and migrants.”***

The thesis will expand on this hypothesis by analysing the connection between planned public spaces and social cohesion using concepts from the built environment, social networks and institutional support further elaborated in the literature and methodology section.

2.1.1 The Greenhouses sprawl, Peri-urban areas and fragmented spatial planning

Westland is a region well known in the Netherlands due to its horticulture in greenhouses and is labelled as the glass city. Its close borders with big cities such as Rotterdam, Delft and Hague give it a blurred boundary in terms of planning and land use. Due to their agricultural identity combined with an urban appearance, greenhouse regions exemplify peri-urban land use and present a challenge for planners to categorize. (Altes et al. 2013) Consequently, there needs to be clearer policies and regulations, which can effectively promote the landscape's value in terms of economic development and meeting the needs of local communities. Planning theorists have described such regions as being challenged by a 'blurring of the urban edge.' (Gallent et al., 2007, 620; Hornis and Van Eck, 2008)

This phenomenon has led the region's spatial planning to be dominated by fragmented monofunctional zones with commodity-centric plans dictated by private interests, focused on maximising workforce efficiency rather than focusing on community development needs, increasing animosity and divides between communities. (Altes & van Rij, 2013; Cremer, 2018) Consequently, there have been efforts by the Dutch government in the regional plan to promote positive inter-ethnic interactions by subsidizing activities that facilitate public spaces especially green areas like parks, to encourage spontaneous meetings and better networks, yet the response has been disappointing. (RMO, 2005; Bonjour 2015). These efforts as part of the Dutch 'social mixing' policy evolve more around employment, housing, integration and neighbourhood diversity needs instead of focusing on the behavioral or contextual perspectives that may shape the divisions. (Uitermark, 2003)

Public spaces such as parks funnel diverse groups for leisure and escape within the monofunctional landscapes. Their utility and accessibility make them key spaces to assess social cohesion amidst the fragmented planning in this study.

2.2 The Biopolitics of Migrant influx and fear of the other

While planners like Jacobs (1992) argue that increasing diversity creates socio-economic opportunities and fosters understanding between communities, others argue it can also lead to fear and divides due to in-group and out-group formations (Putnam, 2007; Amin, 2012). In-groups receive positive views and preferential treatment, while out-groups are viewed negatively and as 'outsiders'. (Wessel, 2016). Putnam (2007) explains that without conditions that encourage positive interactions, groups tend to 'hunker down', as in remaining within their familiar communities and avoiding outreach.

The understanding of social interactions and behavioural norms within public spaces provides a foundation for examining broader social dynamics behind rising animosity between local and migrant communities. Amin (2012) states in his book "Land of Strangers" that there is rising politics of antipathy spreading across Europe where right-wing governments particularly in older migration countries like

the Netherlands, exploit public anxieties over jobs and welfare. They channel these fears into campaigns against immigrants and minorities, portraying them as threats to the community, “*by presenting itself as the champion of a majority population neglected by the political mainstream, the Right has got away with this pretence...*” (Amin, p.2).

Governmental and non-governmental tools to manage society significantly impact how diversity is experienced and how strangers are perceived. These techniques, known as **biopolitics**, can amplify or mitigate existing prejudices. When biopolitical controls are intense, they heighten societal biases, affecting state institutions and public behaviour. Conversely, weaker controls lead to greater acceptance and positive interactions with diverse groups. Thus, **societal regulation** influences the embrace or rejection of diversity, exacerbating or reducing prejudices towards marginalized groups. (Amin, 2012)

The Emerging catastrophist biopolitics is marked by deep insecurity about the future, driven by concerns about social fragmentation and economic instability. This perspective views the future as dangerous and uncontrollable, prioritizing risk management over societal integration. It involves as shown in **Figure 1** identifying and monitoring potential threats, strengthening state security, and fostering a resilient community based on strict regulation which in turn influences how contact between groups takes place in public spaces and the conditions it impacts. In this framework, strangers are seen as threats to survival and community cohesion resulting in low trust, shared goals and institutional support. (Amin, 2012; Young, 2020).

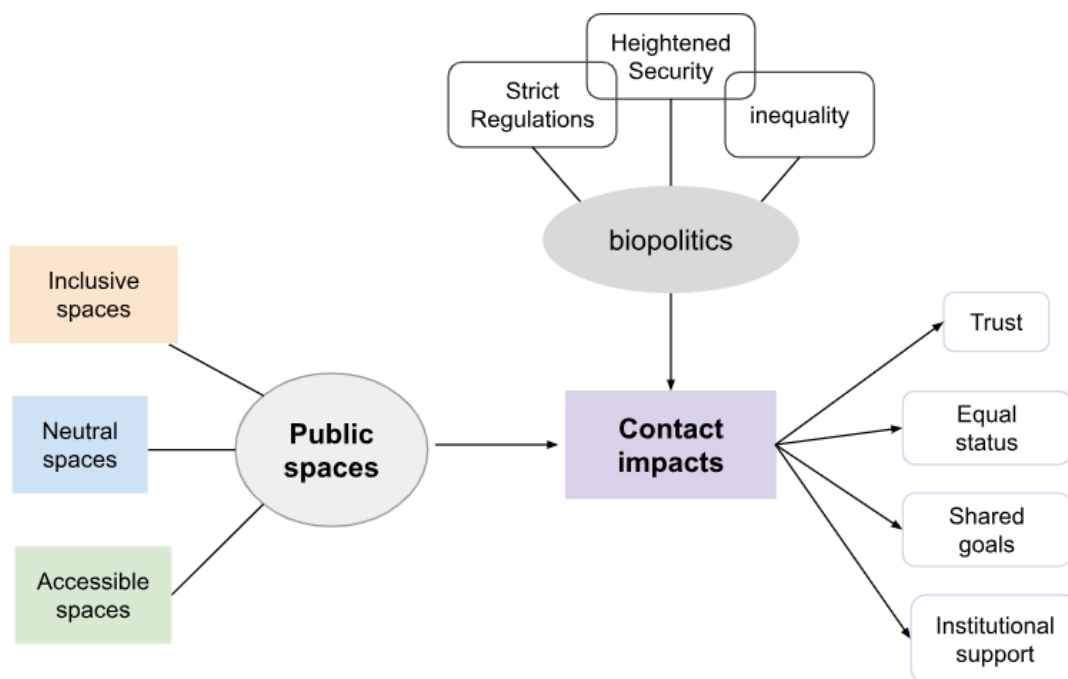


Figure 1: The contact made in public spaces is impacted heavily by biopolitics, influencing community trust, status, goals and support

Amin (2012) argues that material conditions, social inequality, participation in public life, and biopolitics play a more significant role in creating meaningful interactions than mere social relationships or encounters with diversity. However, these principles can only be realized when opportunities and incentives address the social divisions and aim to bridge them. It is essential to first create conditions to foster mutual awareness and a sense of obligation towards shared values and goals. Communities need a purpose to step outside their safe social milieus, for recognition to emerge from cross-ethnic interactions. (Duncan, 2004)

2.3 The conundrum of defining social cohesion in planning

With globalization and increasing diversity, social cohesion has become a significant concern in multicultural cities, involving ideas of shared values and collective togetherness. As discussed later in the literature review due to the term flexibility social cohesion is recognized as a multi-dimensional phenomenon defined by multiple factors dependent on contextual characteristics which guide its operationalization. This ambiguity in its definition has sparked an extensive debate in terms of its effective use in policy-making and academia. (Forrest & Kearns, 2001; Chan et al., 2006; Jenson, 2010)

Despite lacking a single clear definition, it is viewed as essential for a functional society, referring to the commitment of group members to work towards common goals and characterized as “a descriptive attribute of a collective, indicating the quality of collective togetherness” (Schiefer & Noll, 2017). Cohesive communities are inclusive and supportive, demonstrating strong civic participation, provision of public goods, and financial institutional support. The decline in community social cohesion in Europe has been attributed to economic changes, growing migration, new technology, and the inclusion of additional EU member states with distinct integrational needs. (Hunt, 2005). Historically policymakers therefore often measure social cohesion based on social or economic equity policies or understand it in connection to multiculturalism in cities. Given the concept's non-material nature and vagueness, it is often defined by welfare needs and balancing disparities such as language, jobs, and social housing rather than the quality of social bonds within the community based on ideas of inclusion, common goals or belonging. (Chan et al., 2006; Jenson, 2010).

Theorists Schiefer and van der Noll (2017) describe social cohesion as a gradual phenomenon which can vary with the attitudes and behaviours of individuals depending on their relationships to a social entity or context. **Figure 2** below elaborates the six of the most common dimensions from overlapping literature identified by them as **social relations, identifying an attachment to a social entity, orientation towards the common good, shared values, quality of life, and (in) equality**.

Social relations, identification and orientation towards the common good and shared values can be defined as more ideational and relational dimensions, focusing primarily on norms, values, relationships, and ties between communities. In contrast, the quality of life and [in]equality present more tangible and distributive dimensions, relating to the distribution of resources such as physical, economic, social, spatial and even cultural assets.

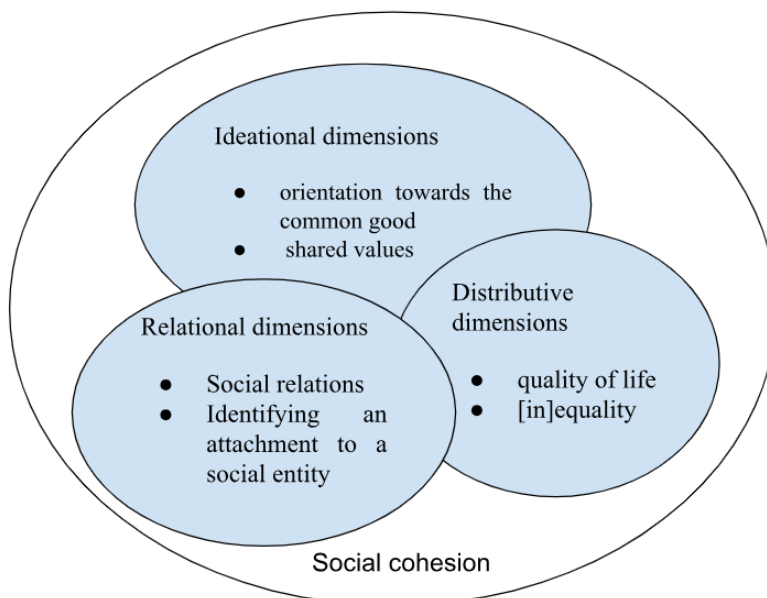


Figure 2: Social Cohesion dimensions as described by Schiefer and Van der Noll

Despite the work of multiple theorists, there is no unified, clear operational definition for social cohesion, and its determinants vary from case to case based on what bonds keep the groups together. (Chan et al., 2006) This has caused concern among practitioners who see this as an obstruction to achieving more clear and concrete social policies (Jenson, 2010; Aelbrecht & Stevens, 2019). Larsen (2014) proposes a reductive method of contextually analysing factors that lead to social decay instead of precisely ascertaining the bonds that keep societies together and using them as variables.

For the relevance of this study, the thesis therefore focuses on the operationalization variables used by social theorists for measuring social cohesion in public spaces. It identifies three main concepts in the literature that significantly influence social cohesion: **the built environment, social networks, and institutional support.**

2.3.1 Built Environment

Urban theorists argue that spatial design plays a key role in how socio-contextual factors can be used to mitigate some of the broader structural dynamics such as power, fear and cultural exclusions by influencing the **frequency and transparency of the interaction, allowing a sense of security and familiarity in** the exchanges conceived between two groups. (MacDonald et al., 2019) The physical design accessibility and scale can shape the porosity in these interactions, creating comfort and belonging within the shared space. (Stevens & Aelbrecht, 2015)

Accessibility

Jacobs (1992) highlights the importance of neighbourhood parks as public nodes, emphasising their visibility and accessibility. Parks must be well-connected to paths and centrally located to ensure frequent use, especially in low-income areas, where walkable access offers inexpensive social opportunities. Increased park usage by diverse groups enhances safety through the presence of more "eyes on the street" and fosters growing familiarity between different group routines (Duncan, 2004). Public space accessibility can be expanded on in terms of agency and interest by subcategories such as physical access, access to activities, access to information, and access to resources. (Dang et al., 2022, 481). The public or private control on the type of access defined fundamentally shapes the level of intergroup exposure and participation.

Scale and Porosity

Connection to the neighbourhood, public streets, footpaths, and even distances within the park can impact park usage and may create a hostile environment if there is a lack of flow between spaces. This can reduce the usage of certain areas and attach negative connotations to them. Scale and visibility in such spaces are significant built characteristics that can create boundaries if there is a lack of visual porosity between different groups. People might avoid certain areas or frequent others more, dispersing within their familiar groups and avoiding zones occupied by the "other" (Duncan 2004; Harvey, 2005). Connecting design elements in controlled, scaled, and open areas provides opportunities for natural surveillance that "allows neighbours to distinguish between a neighbour and an intruder." (Macdonald et al, 2019)

Infrastructure Maintainance

Social cohesion in public spaces is significantly influenced by their quality and upkeep. People avoid public areas that are poorly maintained, leading to a lack of recognition and attachment towards them.

(Low & Smith, 2013). Duncan (2004) argues that individuals in similar social and geographic environments develop shared aesthetic preferences, which strengthen their sense of belonging and identity with a particular place while distinguishing them from those who do not share the same preferences. As a distributive dimension, the maintenance of a built public space adds to its aesthetics, establishing the area around it as a high-quality zone. This encourages a sense of ownership to avoid labels and divisions caused by unequal provisions. (MacDonald et al., 2019, 60; Schiefer et al., 2017)

Conversely, when communities take ownership of public spaces, it fosters positive interactions and strengthens community ties. For example, a study conducted in Philadelphia from 1999 to 2008 illustrated that replacing vacant parking lots with green spaces reduced crime. This transformation was attributed to improved infrastructure maintenance practices that prevented the areas from becoming neglected and isolated with negative associations. This increased community ownership, leading to more participation in outdoor activities and stronger relational attachment among different groups (Macdonald et al., 2019, 91)

2.3.2 Social Networks

According to Jacob (1992), the quality of communal life can either enhance or diminish how public spaces are utilised. While regular interactions are essential, they may not resolve conflicts rooted in deep-seated inequalities and power imbalances. Understanding a network's impact on community social cohesion requires examining how broader patterns of inequality affect interactions between groups and individuals, considering aspects such as their backgrounds, current contexts, and shared goals (Wessel, 2009; Powers et al., 2011)

Shared activities: time and goals

One's attachment to the place or a social entity develops by the amount of time spent in a familiar context and shared activities in a social milieu. (Cattell et al., 2008) For individuals to venture out from an in-group it is essential to incentivise the interaction by some shared goals. (Duncan, 2004) This could be playing football with an opposing team on the same pitch and time, the goal being to play every week on Fridays. This allows the network composition to grow more diverse and the relationships to transcend from bonding in groups to bridging across groups. (Putman, 2006)

According to research, this is only possible if enough **time** is put in towards shared goals as the regularity builds on **familiarity and commitment** which corresponds to the ideational dimension of social cohesion, an orientation towards shared values. (Schiefer et al., 2017) This builds a network of trust in neighbours who may have similar goals of for example keeping the street clean or park safe. (Larsen, 2014)

Sense of community

Increased familiarity with different groups' routines fosters a greater sense of community, as individuals understand shared dynamics and feel comfortable contributing and participating, such as through simple acts like walking dogs on the same path. (Wessel, 2009). Expecting predictable behaviours from others increases trust in positive intentions and strengthens group unity, crucial for relational cohesion (Larsen, 2014; Schiefer et al., 2017).

According to Sandercock (2000), including options in different languages and creating awareness of various cultural norms can enhance belonging and create equal footing among inter-ethnic groups. Conviviality in these settings does not stem from civic duty or mutual recognition but rather from navigating diversity and exchanging knowledge when interacting with unfamiliar others in contact zones. While differences may be acknowledged or disliked, they are often subordinated to the

collaborative discipline necessary in public interactions. These relational practices can cultivate shared identities and a sense of community. (Sandercock, 2000)

Inclusive network and (in) equality

Research has demonstrated economic inequality plays a key role in how inclusive a social network can be. The (in) equality dimension to social cohesion, therefore, can be described in two components, the first being the distribution of material and immaterial resources and the second being composition or the fractionalization of groups in terms of their social, religious, cultural or ethnic backgrounds. (Jenson, 2010 in Schiefer et al., 2017)

While the first factor mostly addresses resource needs such as education, health, housing, and income, which can create class disparities; the second factor is more organizational, focusing on how social diversity is portrayed. This portrayal can either enhance inclusion by changing group compositions and acceptance rates or create divides through social exclusion and segregation. Hence, cohesion in inclusive networks is undermined by segregation rather than diversity.

2.3.3 Institutional Support: Programming and Participation

While enhancing diversity may increase the familiarity between groups and bridge their networks, it is argued that allowing groups to interact and bond meaningfully can only be achieved if there is a sense of equal ownership, contribution and access to public facilities. (Feinstein, 2005). Institutional support can create a just and equitable zone for contact, given the groups have equal status in interaction. (Young, 2002)

Programming

Government and private institutions play a key role in supporting the planning and programming of public amenities, which are essential for creating inclusive activities that can shape community interactions. (Soja, 2009) Social interactions among ethnic groups can be cursory and informal, but external stimuli can provide the necessary linkage for different groups to interact more meaningfully based on them, a process known in the literature as **triangulation** (Wessel, 2009). The choice, planning and arrangement of the various stimuli are referred to as **programming** in this thesis, which initiates the triangulation process. The programming could involve events or amenities designed around shared interests or situations in which groups are incentivised to work together.

Due to the complexity and multiplicity of group identities engaging various communities in the programming process is essential for knowledge building. Critics argue that institutional partnership arrangements often overlook these complexities, which are crucial for understanding the layers of meaning and attachment to social belonging (Young, 2002, Blokland, 2014). Therefore, programming public spaces relies heavily on understanding the deeper relationship dynamics of different groups.

Participation

According to De Magalhães (2010), institutions play a key role in primarily shaping publicness through access, use and control mechanisms and therefore to allow all voices to be heard, they hold the responsibility to empower citizens especially marginalized communities to take part in planning processes. Participation and the process of engagement reduce the feeling of anonymity between diverse groups and increase the sense of ownership. (Arnstein, 2007)

While **formal participation** is more representational, dependent on organized activities and structured engagement processes emphasizing the interaction between a group and an individual, **informal participation** is more deliberative and can be accommodated through programming that allows enhancing interaction and discourse opportunities between individuals for example when neighbours

work together. Informal participation often forms based on triangulation of networks creating a sense of belonging and security in especially marginalized groups. (Albrecht et al., 2006)
 Shared public spaces are assets to foster this sense of communal belonging through processes of democratic inclusion rather than changing individual identities or “building inter-subjective empathy” based on recognition alone. (Amin, 2012)

2.4 Conceptual Framework

This thesis, as shown in the conceptual framework in **Figure 3**, analyzes three factors in planned public spaces that influence social cohesion between different communities: built space, social networks, and institutional support. These conditions are identified based on the main detriments in planning literature that enhance positive community social interaction between diverse groups in public space.

It is important to highlight that the variables to assess the factors are not viewed in isolation but based on their influence on different dimensions of social cohesion shown in **Figure 4** (theoretical framework). The framework emphasizes the dimensions connection to the planning of public spaces and their significance as key indicators for positive interactions between diverse groups.

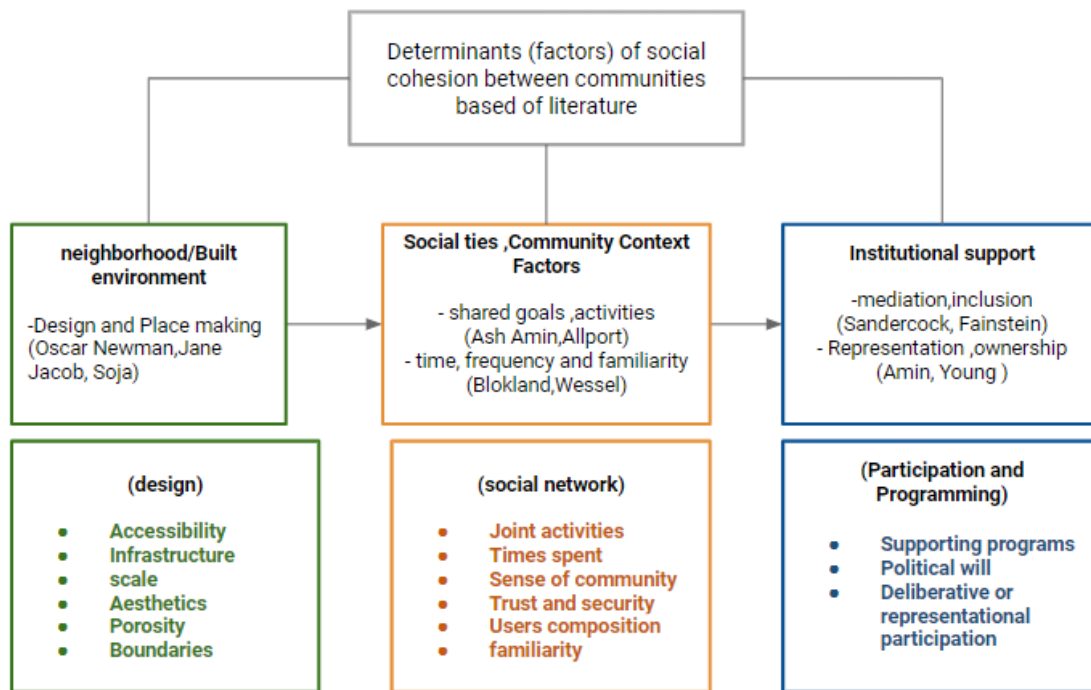


Figure 3: a conceptual framework based on factors explored from overlapping literature
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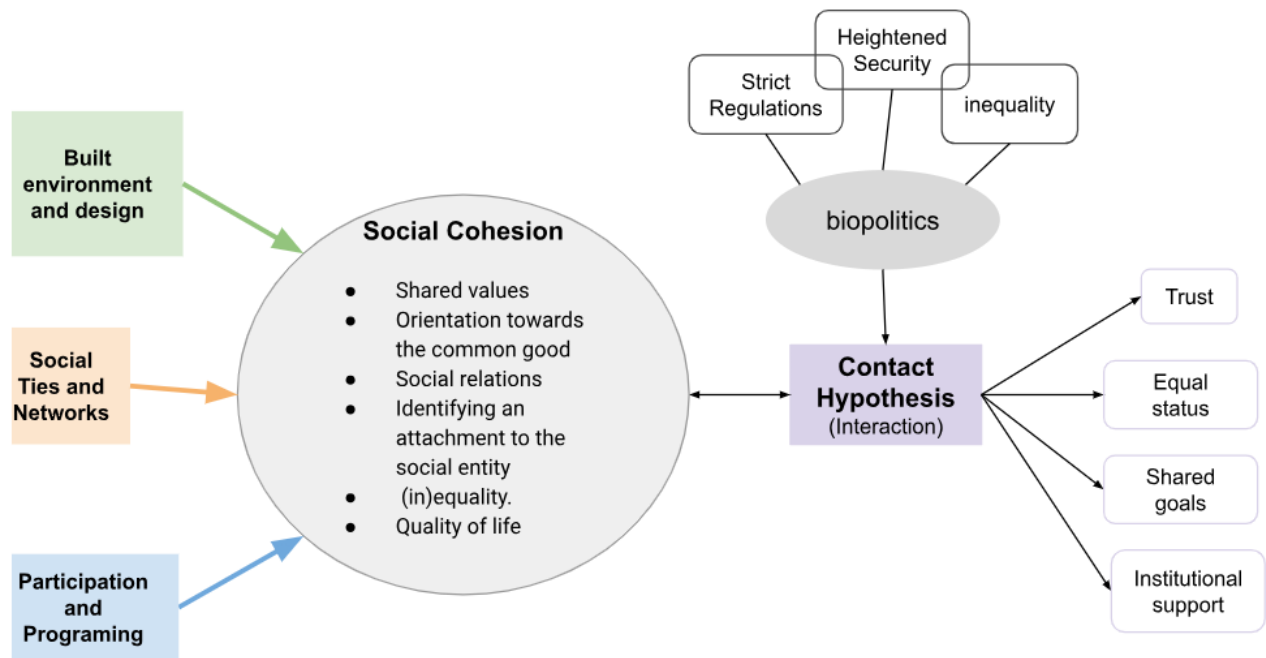


Figure 4 : Theoretical framework Designed by author (2024)

3. Research design, methodology

This chapter breaks down the research design and methodology based on its connection to the context of Westland in the Netherlands. It describes the sample groups and research type with sub-questions. This sets a clear basis to expand on the operationalisation variables and data collection strategy employed according to the selected case study. Finally, the chapter concludes by discussing the validity, reliability and limitations of the methodology.

3.1 Research Type

The objective of this research is to determine what factors influence the planning of public spaces for social cohesion despite their significance in creating contact between inter-ethnic communities. The **dependent variable for the study will be social cohesion** which according to the literature is composed of several dimensions but the main focus will be on shared values, social relations, quality of life and attachment to a social entity. The **independent variables are the factors that may enhance or hinder the planning of public spaces for social cohesion** under the concept of built space, social networks and institutional support. Through qualitative research, the thesis takes an explorative case study focusing on analysing two parks of varying scales and locations in the town of Naaldwijk in Westland. The research draws on a similar methodology used by Peters (2010) for socio-spatial analysis in urban parks, involving in-depth observations, visitor perceptions, and interviews with professionals involved in community development. This qualitative approach offers a comprehensive understanding of the roles, interpretations, and attitudes of diverse stakeholders. (Thiel, 2022)

3.2 Design and Context: Social Cohesion in Westland

Naaldwijk in Westland serves as an ideal case for empirical observation due to its status as a peri-urban region facing scrutiny for its refusal to integrate refugees and the local ethnic Dutch community's

backlash against migrant worker housing (Language, 2024). Westland hosts a significant number of intra-EU migrants, especially from Poland and Ukraine, who contribute to the low-skilled labour market, particularly as seasonal workers. With approximately 107,492 inhabitants, Westland has the highest number of lower-skilled migrants per 10,000 inhabitants in the Netherlands (Bonjour et al., 2015).

As a horticulture town experiencing landscape transformation due to greenhouse expansion, Naaldwijk is home to close-knit local farm communities reliant on migrant labour. The town also attracts new migrants seeking affordable housing outside South Holland's busy city centres (Cremers, 2018). The influx has put immense pressure on Westland municipality's integration policies which primarily commit to areas involving housing, registration and information provision for privately employed labor migrants, with little emphasis on bridging bonds between migrants and ethnic Dutch residents.

This research aims to **identify factors influencing the planning of public spaces that impact social cohesion**. Public spaces, intended as zones of contact, are observed to understand how planning practices affect cohesion between these interdependent communities.

3.21 Sampling and Study Methods

Focusing on the first sub-question *“What role does the current shaping of public space play on community social cohesion in Westland?”* The research studies two main parks in the region identifying their significance through literature and questioning of groups and individuals that utilize it. The two parks have varying built environments and social processes surrounding them which allows the results to provide a clearer understanding of their significance in community building. The initial data was collected first-hand through observation notes, photographs and checklists on site.

The observation study was an hour away from Rotterdam and was visited at varying times between morning and evening. For reliability 20 observation visits were conducted at different times and weekdays, lasting an average of 3 hours. One of our key indicators was observing the social groups present and where they spend their time in public spaces. Observations used a scheme focusing on different genders, ages, interactions, activities and origins, many of the interviews snowballed from these observations and provided sub-variables for more contextual analysis.

For feasibility purposes only two open public spaces were selected as initial case studies in Naaldwijk, the first **Case A (Image 1)** is a park 10 minute walk from the main bus stop into town selected mainly due to its accessibility, scale and immersed connection to the surrounding residential area known as “Park Pijletuinen\ Skatepark” and the second **Case B (Image 2)** is a recreational park on the outskirts of the town amidst greenhouses known as “The Prinsenbos”. It was selected based on its similar scale to Case A and its renown among the residents in and out of town.

The Site observation used the operationalization table framework as a checklist while additional Semi-structured interviews were used to collect qualitative data for variables where site observations required further investigation. The interviews from case study sites were kept open-ended and a non-probability sampling method was used in which participants were selected based on their availability and usage of the parks.

To allow for efficiency and flexibility in the collection of onsite interviews a questionnaire was also used based on a social cohesion assessment model by the World Bank (Grootaert et al., 2004) this allowed on-site interviewees freedom in responses without observer scrutiny. In the limited time around **20** individuals on site were interviewed of which **12** were ethnic Dutch residents and **8** were migrants this included **3** seasonal migrants. Only **17** of the participant chose to answer the questionnaire, and their responses were recorded in charts and notes. The exchanges were **10 to 20** minutes long and ages ranged from **16 to 75** years in which approximately **12 out of 20** interviewees were women.

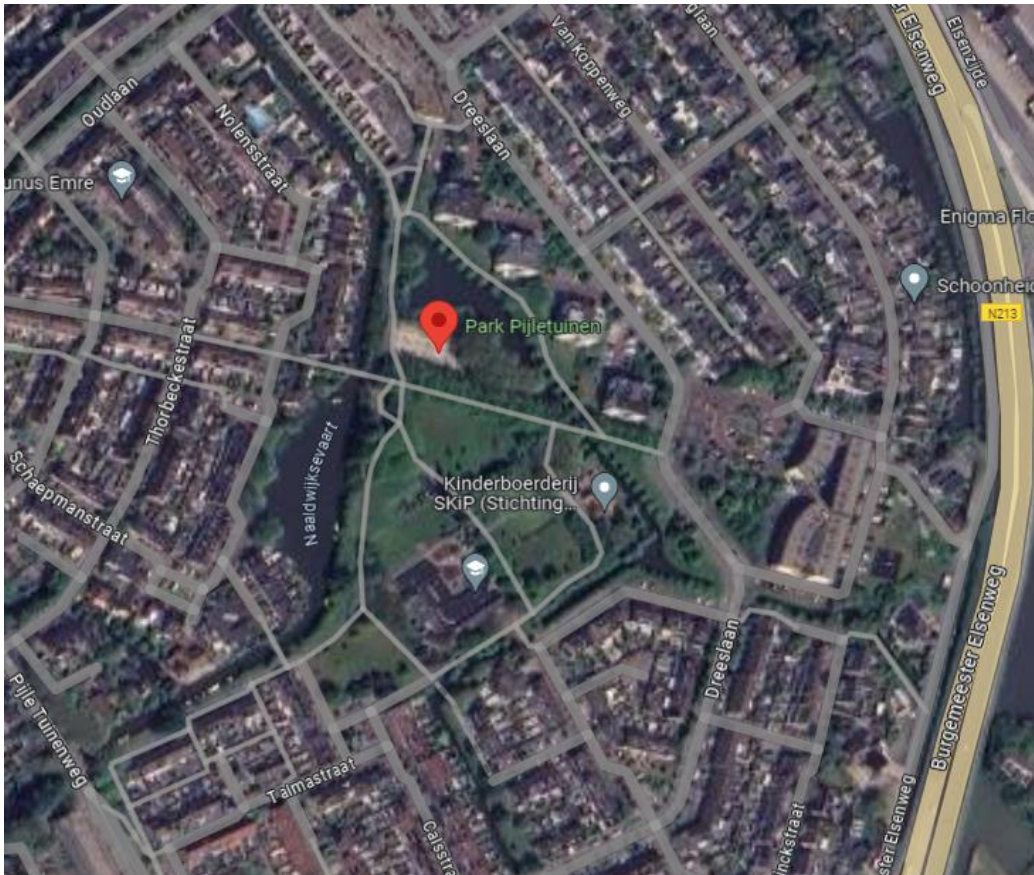


Image 1: Park Pijletuinen\ Skatepark (Case A) Taken from: Google Maps (2024)

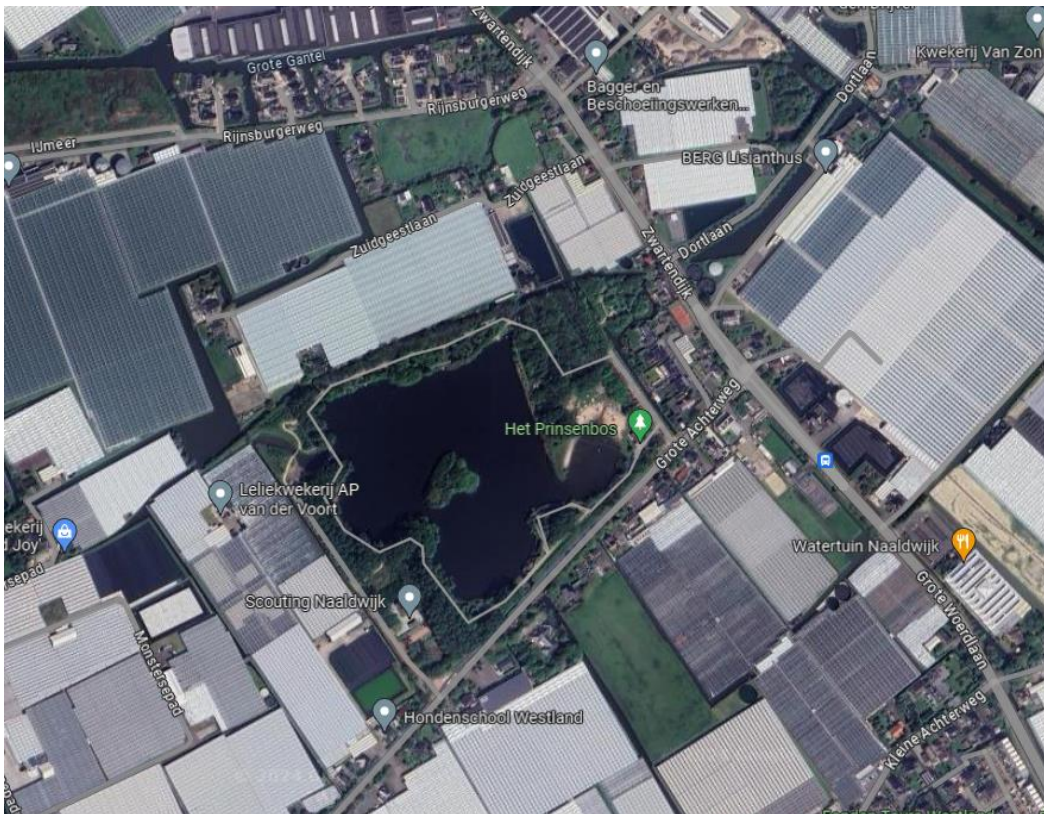


Image 2: The Prinsenbos (case B) Taken from: Google Maps (2024)

The combination of questionnaires, interviews, and observations allowed for a focused ethnographic investigation into the second sub-question: *“What are the current relationships and perspectives between ethnic Dutch and working labour migrants in the area?”* The approach enabled the study to gauge both verbal and non-verbal behaviours in social interactions fully, minimising preconceived biases and allowing for an in-depth examination of factors identified in previous literature, specifically within the context of the case studies. (Low et al., 2008)

To understand the impact of external factors such as government policy, provincial/national agenda, and private institutional roles, data was then triangulated through semi-structured open-ended interviews with professionals. As part of a thesis lab in partnership with the Province of South Holland (PZH), I was able to interview a spatial planner from the Province and one from Westland municipality involved in sensitive community projects, the responses eventually led to an interview with a representative from Greenport, a private organization focused on stakeholder engagement and collaboration. The snowball approach to interviews provided a broader understanding of the relationships between institutions for the sub-question: *What role does institutional support play on planning for social cohesion in Westland?*

Due to scheduling issues, some interviewees chose to sit together for a cross-discussion and this revealed nuanced perspectives on social cohesion at multiple governance levels and their influence on regional biopolitics. For example, the semi-structured interview with the Greenport representative, who manages migrant worker cases regarding labour conditions, addressed many queries about shared goals between the migrant and ethnic Dutch communities. She discussed the dynamics of owner-worker relationships, particularly the roles of private institutions and government in the planning of the region. The interviews therefore helped identify any additional factors that might have been harder to decipher from only on-site observations and interview analysis.

The sub-questions guided the methodology, as illustrated in **Figure 5** below, by examining physical aspects to social and then institutional. This approach effectively triangulates the data, allowing for an understanding of variables across all three dimensions using the chosen methods.

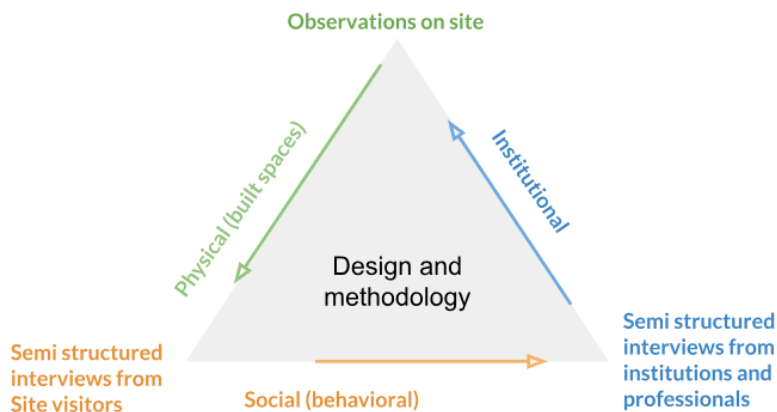


Figure 5: methodology Designed by author (2024)

3.3 Operationalization: Variables, indicators

The concepts from the conceptual framework are operationalized based on how they answer the sub questions. The indicator variables are drawn from overlapping literature, site observations and interviews so they are relevant to the context case study of public spaces.

Table 1: Operationalization Table

Concept	Variable	Sub Variables	Definition	Indicators
The built environment in public space	Accessible design	Proximity	Closeness to the main nodes	Distance from Work\ home, zoning
		Walkability	Can it be reached easily on foot	public transport, direct pathways
	Scale	Boundaries	The design creates a disjointed and unwelcoming space for outsiders.	Gated, secluded space, open
		Porosity	Lack of flow with segregated spacing and limited transparency	Open park design, visibility. transparency
	Infrastructure	Safety	It shapes how the space is perceived and what inhibits or facilitates its use.	Lighting, Footpaths, overgrowth, visibility, number of people
		Maintainance	Appealing space has more positive connotations	Well-maintained, Variating facilities, visual appeal
Social Networks and ties	Joint activities	Times spent	The amount of familiarity with the area\ and interacting with people	Frequency of visits, time spent, routine
		Shared goals	If the activities are inclusive of different groups	Diversity in participation, mutual motivations
	Sense of community	Trust	feeling safe and understood, positive association with behaviours and patterns	Familiarity with space, routines Negative associations with any groups or disruptions
		Comfort (welcoming)	diverse individuals' dynamics are understood, they feel included and welcomed	Familiarity with diverse community practices, language, signs and cultural sensitivity
	Inclusive network	socio-economic restrain	Differences in financial background restraining the quality of access	New residents, background limitations, frequency of visits

		Users composition	The group demographics mainly visiting the public spaces, how diversity impacts cohesion	Families\ friends compositions, individuals who take part in activities, transitional users
Institutional support	Programming	Political will	Efforts by institutions to activate public space through programs	Town halls, government surveys, activities
		Planning or Policy	Any special programs to facilitate interaction in public space	Impacts of policy or practice over the years due to demographic change,
	Participation	Engagement	Being actively engaged as a member or institutional channels to engage participation	Programs introduce, methods of engagement (deliberative\representational)
		Time and effort	People's willingness to put in time and effort in community	obstacles that prevent their participation

The variables are incorporated in the interviews, questionnaire or observation checklist through the use of assessment indicators. Some of the variables have been subdivided later based on results analysis to gauge a more holistic understanding. For example, accessibility has been identified as a variable for built space but after some on-site interviews, it was also identified as an important measure in the institutional support and social ties category in terms of awareness or access to information.

3.4. Validity and Reliability

The questions for the variables were constructed focusing on key indicators, and a few preliminary interviews helped refine them. Some structured questions, translated into English and Dutch, were pretested on Dutch students for accuracy and reliability. Due to the abstract nature of some concepts, the language barrier often posed a challenge when participants wanted to elaborate in interviews. Therefore, the questionnaire, which could be QR-scanned and viewed in any language, was used for more accuracy. To enhance validity and reliability, alternative descriptions or questioning styles for abstract variables like comfort or trust were employed, based on concrete indicators such as familiarity and time to elicit clearer responses.

For professionals, separate questions focused on institutional support and understanding of planning processes were used. These were based on the responses from public space users, enhancing reliability by confirming or discerning rationales behind certain variables.

3.4.1 Limitations

The number of observations was limited by unpredictable summer weather, although park usage increased on sunny days. Site visitor interviews presented a challenge as many participants were

reluctant to be recorded or paused during activities. Consequently, the study relied on field notes and quick questionnaires to capture their responses.

Time constraints and a limited number of field researchers restricted the analysis to a few accessible public spaces, mainly parks. Although markets and bars also offered potential insights, they were not included due to the study's timeframe. Naaldwijk, being the primary urban area in the region, may not represent the full diversity of public spaces found in other towns within Westland. This limitation suggests that findings could vary significantly across different locales.

4. Results, analysis and discussion

The analysis of the findings evaluates the factors that influence the planning of public spaces and how they impact community social cohesion based on three hypothesised factors drawn from literature to help explain the connection.

1. Built environment shapes community social cohesion in Westland public spaces.
2. Current Social networks influence the degree of cohesion between different groups.
3. Institutional planning and regulations hinder community cohesion in public spaces.

The section starts by presenting findings from existing public spaces used as case studies and then expands on analyzing the rationales that promote social cohesion in the area. The discussion unfolds in three parts: observations from case studies, in-depth analysis of locals' and planning professionals' perspectives, and the incorporation of new findings from site observations and discussions. The variables from operationalisation are the main focus of the analysis, but variables identified during site observations and discussions are also incorporated to highlight any new findings.

4.1 Observation Findings

4.1.1 Park Pijletuinen\ Skatepark (Case Study A)

This park is situated in a highly residential area of the town and features several small paths connecting three neighbourhoods. (Refer to **image 4**) However, the park's main entrance, which includes a parking area, is rarely used. This is primarily because it is located at the back end of the park, making it convenient mainly for those arriving by car. Visitors who do not live near the park must walk through residential streets in intimate neighbourhoods to access it. (**Image 3**)The park lacks visibility and open access from street level and can only be viewed once visitors are inside its perimeter, giving it a very private feel. Additionally, many residents' backyards open into the park, highlighting its close integration with the surrounding neighbourhood as highlighted on the map in **Image 4**.



Image 3 :Park Pijletuinen (Case A) access through residential streets. (2024)

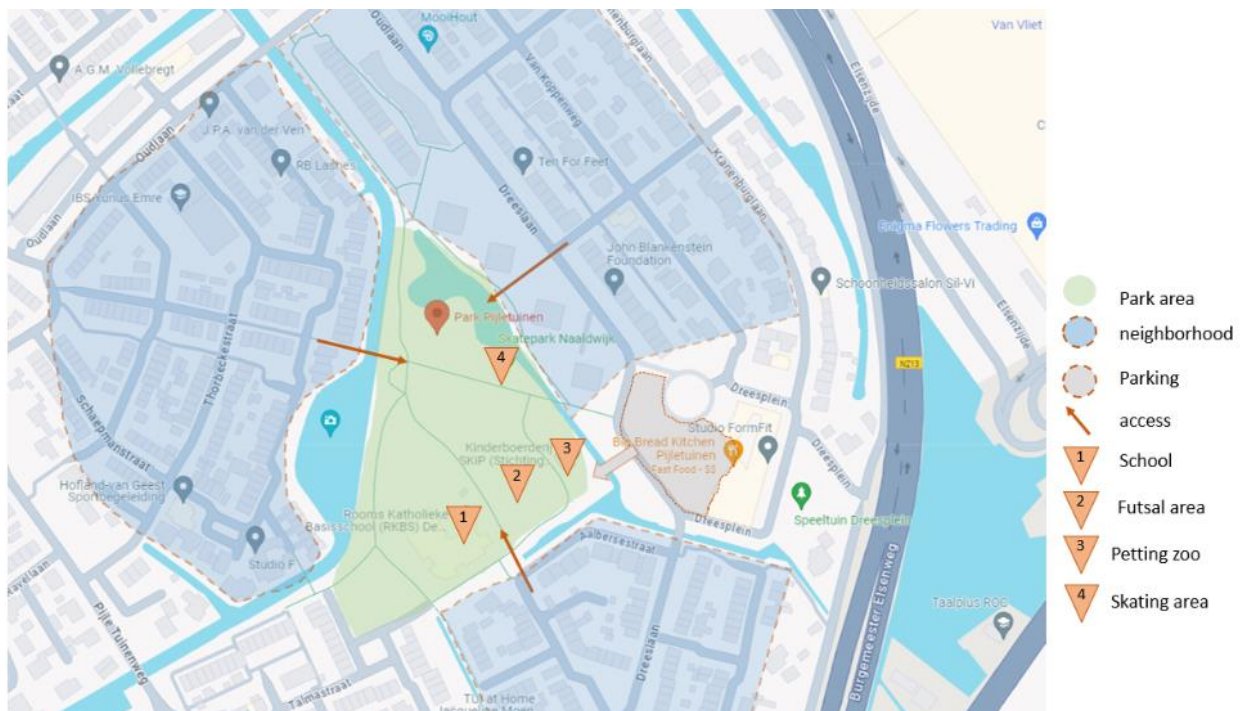


Image 4 Case Study A with its marked zones from observations. Edited: Google Map by author (2024)

The park is expansive, featuring a lake and various amenities such as a children's petting zoo, a skating rink, a badminton/futsal court, a play gym, and extensive tree plantations. (Image 4) While families with children tend to gather around the play areas, the quieter zones towards the lake attract visitors out for walks or fishing. Due to its secluded location nestled amongst residences, the park primarily sees daytime use, with dog walkers comprising a significant portion of the visitors. Interviews indicate peak activity occurs after school hours when children from a nearby kindergarten pass through with their parents, as well as between 6 to 7 pm after work. Approximately 80% of park users are from the surrounding neighbourhood, visiting regularly or weekly. The park's user base is diverse, consisting of both ethnic Dutch residents and migrant families. Based on the observations and interviews with visitors it was noted most of them were from the neighbourhood and maintained casual relationships with the regular visitors, often greeting and engaging in activities together beyond their immediate family circles especially those with children or pets.

Despite its popularity, park maintenance emerges as a concern among interviewees, particularly regarding safety. Issues cited include poor visibility due to overgrown vegetation and inadequate signage for proper park usage. Residents whose homes open into the park report disturbances on some nights, such as groups of youths drinking or smoking in secluded areas. Respondents generally express a preference for stricter regulations and increased monitoring to enhance park safety, emphasizing the importance of having "more eyes in the park".

4.1.2 The Prinsenbos (Case Study B)

Case B, in contrast to Case A, is a renowned recreational area in the Westland region, attracting visitors not only from Naaldwijk but also from surrounding areas. Situated on the town's outskirts (image 2), the park features a main entrance connected to a major road with parking facilities. It offers a small seating area overlooking a lake with a children's play space in the water, while the remainder is dedicated to a nature trail circling the lake. (Image 5) The trail's layout along the lake (Prinsenbos) limits interactions among visitors, both visually and physically leaving the edge as the only space for gathering.



Image 5: Case Study B aerial view of the front edge near the entrance. Edited: Google Maps by author (2024)

The municipality actively organizes nature-related excursions and educational activities along the trail, ensuring year-round maintenance and attractiveness. The park is conducive to small group gatherings, with most visitors choosing to stay near the entrance with their children or walk along the trail. While residents of neighbouring villages like Monster and De Lier frequent the park for recreation, Naaldwijk residents tend to prefer parks closer to the town centre or their neighbourhoods, offering additional physical activities that cater to children not interested in water play and also various options for adults. Due to its tails scale and location, the park is well-lit in the evenings and according to interviews with residents, it is popular among the town teenagers and children seeking a place to socialize without disturbing nearby residents. Despite hosting a diverse range of visitors, interactions among them are less frequent compared to Case A. Visitors in Case B are often unfamiliar with each other, primarily visiting for family-oriented recreation. This hesitancy to mingle is observable, with different ethnic groups forming small clusters near the park's entrance where children instead mingle and play together while the parents maintain their distance from each other.

4.2 Findings Analysis

4.2.1 Built environment shapes community social cohesion in Westland public spaces

Using observations with in-depth interviews from the site visitors allowed the analysis of community social cohesion to be more clearly understood concerning the variables. Some of the key observations drawn were on Accessibility, Scale and Maintenance impact on how people interacted or preferred to use the built space together.

Accessibility

Among the 20 interviewees, 8 were migrants who found parks to be comfortable public spaces to relax after a long day. The interviewees were from Turkish, Polish, and Iranian backgrounds and lived in flats near the parks and lacked private gardens. These ethnic groups were frequently observed in public spaces in Naaldwijk as well, consistent with data on the labour migrant population in Westland. (Cremers, 2018) Their reasons for visiting parks frequently were mainly due to the open space they provided, compensating for the absence of private gardens.

14 out of the 20 respondents preferred walking or biking to the parks as part of the outdoor experience but for the rest, it was not a choice as they lived quite far from any recreational spaces or lacked the time or means to commute regularly anywhere else. The neighbourhood parks were an economical option that allowed them to go out without investing in anything, especially for visitors without families. While most Dutch residents used the space openly for dog walking, running, fishing, and sunbathing, other visitors, mainly new residents and those from out of town, seemed more reluctant to venture into less populated areas of the parks. It was observed that the parks closer to the market seemed more frequently used and full compared to the case study areas. According to a migrant mother, the open and visible space made her feel less intrusive compared to the neighbourhood parks, where she felt alienated and submerged amongst residences, stating, *“I am surrounded but alone.”* In contrast, a Dutch mother of three, who had attended the kindergarten in Park A during her youth, felt safer in the neighbourhood park due to the presence of familiar faces, stating, *“There are a lot of people around who I know in the neighbourhood.”*

Scale

With limited social circles and hectic routines, parks were used more like spaces of refuge for interviewed migrants who preferred the quieter and bigger “Skatepark” (Case A) where they liked to walk alone and enjoy the views. The scale allowed boundaries between the space’s usage but due to the open design, the bigger park also offered more opportunities for chance and purposeful interaction based on joint activities. The Futsal area in the skater park was often used as a zone where the fathers from different groups would join the children's football games and the mothers on the side would cheer or simply watch. Similar observations from site visits consistently showed visitors engaging in the skating area in Case A or the water play area in Case B. Participants didn't necessarily engage in conversation, but the design offered visual and physical porosity, allowing them to pause and join or watch when they walked or sat near the spaces.

According to Duncan (2004) Zoning, form and function can enable the interaction of different groups on shared interests, aesthetics or even geographies. Yet when asked, *“How often do visitors try meeting new people at the park?”* the questionnaire results (**Chart 1**) showed that 58 % were hesitant to meet new people.

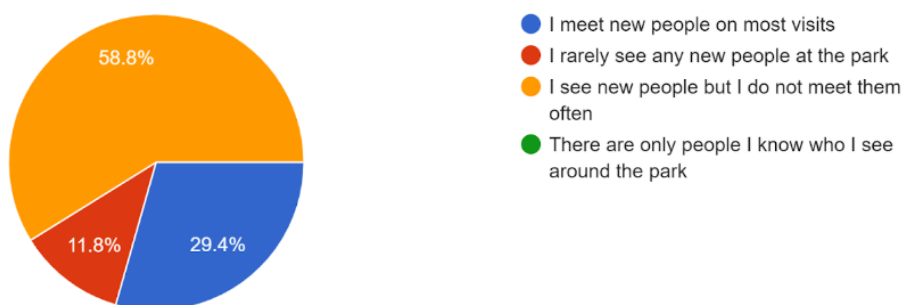


Chart 1: How often do visitors try meeting new people at the park?

In Skater Park (Case A), it was notable that residents who were neighbours or frequent visitors exchanged greetings and engaged in activities, such as walking or taking their kids to the petting zoo together. This contrasted with the visitors' experience in Prinsenbos (Case B) where the interviews showed many of the visitors were not even from the same town and stayed restricted to the park edge or trail where the children played. The limited small scale of gathering spaces in **Case B** created a larger and more obvious boundary between groups, whereas in **Case A** it was observed that the larger scale and open design made the divide between groups less obvious and ignorable. It puts people at ease to move around without cautiously trying to evade boundaries. Indicating that larger-scale neighbourhood parks, like Case A, can offer diverse activities that facilitate opportunities for social exchange and create a network of voluntary controls for ensuring safety and inclusion among strangers due to their high visual and physical porosity. (Harvey, 2005; MacDonald et al., 2019)

Infrastructure

For most Dutch interviewees living near the parks, maintenance and safety were crucial factors influencing their interaction with the space. Residents with backyards connected to the parks felt particularly responsible for the area's upkeep and monitored its usage, especially older ethnic Dutch residents who were retired and actively engaged with the municipality for maintenance. One 70-year-old ethnic Dutch resident who regularly trimmed hedges near the park (case A) fence complained in the interviews that the space was often misused when "*the Turkish boys trespassed and didn't follow the rules.*", he felt these individuals didn't care about the space, which threatened the safety of others as they rode electric scooters on footpaths or drank in the park at night hiding in the bushes.

According to an interview with the Westland municipality project manager for sensitive cases, this behaviour is often attributed to seasonal workers without families who, with limited funds, find public spaces to be common gathering points. Due to incidents where signage has been misunderstood, groups of migrants have been labelled as "*not respecting the infrastructure*" by littering, trespassing, and even cooking BBQs in restricted areas. This has created stereotypes and low trust between Dutch residents and migrant groups, who are seen as unruly and disruptive (Project Manager, Westland Municipality). "*Overgrowing bushes provide them space to hide at night,*" complained a Dutch resident from Case A, while another Dutch woman from Case B stated she avoided parks at night and never left her children alone. In contrast, interviewees from migrant backgrounds were more relaxed in their use of the space and had more positive connotations towards public parks, though they were hesitant to engage with Dutch residents when approached. A clear segregation in space could be observed during visits when the two groups were forced together in limited areas, such as the front of the Prinsenbos (Case B) water park on a hot summer afternoon. Dutch residents preferred avoiding the limited or rundown infrastructure, opting instead to drive to the beach, go to the local pub, or, as one elderly Dutch interviewee mentioned, "*Leave for Portugal after retirement*". Financial constraints prevent this option for most migrants, leading to greater satisfaction with their limited surroundings.

Observations indicated that migrants, depending on their family networks and cultural backgrounds, were less reliant on physical facilities or socializing opportunities. For instance, an Iranian mother saw no need to venture beyond local parks, despite her husband's weekly commute to Amsterdam, stating, "*My parents from The Hague join us often; we keep each other entertained with the kids.*" Similarly, in interviews, a Turkish father stated he preferred the local mosque for organizing gatherings. In contrast, a Dutch couple mentioned having a large social group of childhood friends in the town and often used the local parks for their reunions.

4.2.2 Social networks influence perceptions between different groups

As mentioned in section 3.2, the Dutch municipality of Westland hosts one of the largest numbers of lower-skilled migrants in the Netherlands. Many moved to the region from Turkey and the Middle East due to labour shortages in the 1960s. Over the years, the number has drastically increased with the

arrival of refugees and intra-EU seasonal migrants (Cremers, 2018). To understand the perceptions of different groups, questions were focused on public familiarity with park routines and the level of comfort in public interactions, as indicators of group associations.

Joint activities

In the interviews, Dutch residents expressed wariness of public spaces frequented by migrants, describing interactions between the two groups as unnecessary. Approximately 60% of Dutch interviewees reported that they did not engage with new people at the park, even if they saw them. In contrast, migrant respondents were more eager to learn about their surroundings but were hesitant to engage. They felt more comfortable when they had contact points such as their children or participated in group sports, which provided more incentive to engage. Even in Case B near the lake, the Iranian mother felt it would be nice to have a *“coffee spot where we can sit and watch kids with other mothers”*

On most visits, it was observed that parents would engage in their children's activities and only converse if necessary. For example, in Case A, which had a kindergarten, parents waiting to pick up their children often paused to talk as the children gathered around the petting zoo. Additionally, a Dutch mother mentioned that on Wednesdays, all workers, especially parents in Naaldwijk, got off work early for the town centre market. This enhanced parental interaction when their children were from the same school or neighbourhood, illustrating the concept of triangulation. When asked if they enjoyed engaging in conversation with someone their age, 68% of respondents, especially those with families, remained ambivalent; they did not mind but did not particularly look forward to it during most park visits. The younger the children, the more the parents were involved in entertaining them rather than participating in other park activities.

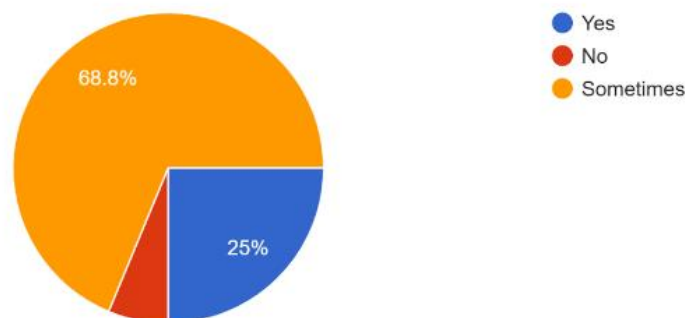


Chart 2: Do you enjoy talking/communicating to other parents or people your age when you visit the park alone?

Common themes in responses about why people did or did not enjoy communicating with others were based on shared interests, such as football or running. Language barriers were a significant point of hesitation for both groups, as the effort to explain oneself often led to misunderstandings. For example, one Dutch mother, despite her children playing with a Turkish group, felt the fathers were rude, stating, *“Our kids interact so it's good to chat and sometimes to know them better especially if they are Dutch. With people who don't know the language they are a bit rude”* Further questioning revealed that this perception was mainly due to the father speaking Turkish loudly and knowing very little Dutch. Conversely, when asked the same question, the Turkish father felt his efforts at joint activities depended on *“...if people want to talk or understand me”*

Onsite Interviewees especially the ones without children mentioned preferring to enjoy their quiet time for relaxing activities such as walks, fishing or as most elderly park visitors were observed ‘people watching’ from their backyards. This was especially obvious in Case A where residents' backyards connected to the park and in the afternoon they would sit there enjoying the lake. One of the older Dutch residents felt it was his duty to *“...keep an eye on everyone”*

The reluctance of different groups to engage with each other also indicates a lack of shared goals and values. When asked why they visited the park, most migrants referred to it as a chance to relax, escape, or spend family time. They often took picnics and spent several hours with extended family members such as grandparents. In contrast, Dutch respondents primarily visited the park to walk the dog or for the children. For recreation or relaxation, they preferred driving to the nearby beach or socialising with their comparatively larger social circles in spaces such as their backyards bars, clubs or house gardens.

It was observed that the activities organised by private institutions and the municipality in both parks were predominantly Dutch-oriented, requiring knowledge of the language or prior registration. (Refer to **chart 3**) For example, a 5km walk is organised every summer through the skater park (Case A) but primarily catered to only Dutch participants. When migrants watching the walking trail were asked why they were not participating, 57% responded that they were not informed or aware of such events.

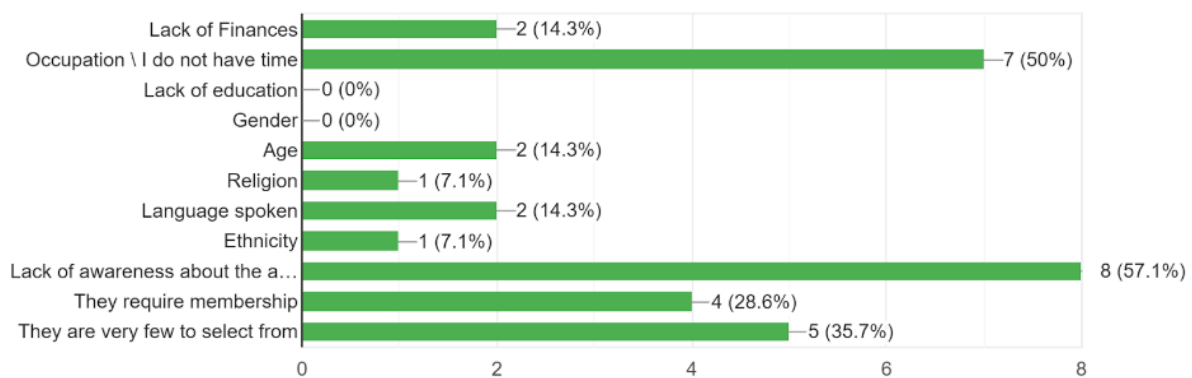


Chart 3: Reasons for lack of participation in joint activities

Despite the municipality's active integration programs at the town library and sports complex, which provide language learning aids and skill-building activities for children such as cooking and shopping, as well as socialization activities for adults like volleyball and football teams, these programs rarely bridge different groups as they remain community-centric. The lack of cross-communication between the two community groups creates a segregation of activities into "their" activities and "our" activities (Young, 2002). This divide is partly due to migrants' limited time in the community, as shown in **Chart 3**, which restricts their awareness of routines and public amenities, thus reducing their chances of inclusion in joint activities outside their immediate groups.

In the interviews, it was noted that municipality planners did not feel the need to create programs fostering activities for Dutch residents to improve familiarity with migrant cultures, especially seasonal migrants, as they viewed these migrants as temporary residents who would eventually leave. This perspective has led to negative connotations for labour migrants, branding them as 'outsiders' and a security risk to the town. A project manager mentioned that one of the municipality's solutions has been to increase security and facilities at migrant hostels to prevent local community disturbances and encourage migrants to stay inside their residences instead. These heightened negative connotations toward migrants are reflected at the community level, where residents do not accept them as part of the community but rather as visiting guests or nuisances.

Sense of community

For abstract concepts such as a sense of community, a questionnaire was used to gauge respondents' level of trust and comfort in shared spaces, both of these were often associated with feeling welcomed and safe in public spaces.

Does the park feel welcoming and comfortable to spend time in when you visit?

17 responses

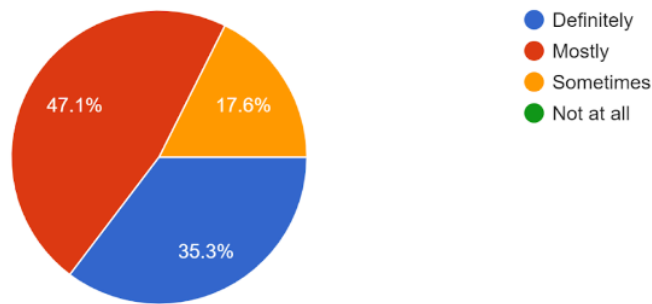


Chart 4: Welcoming and Comfortable

Chart 4 shows that 47.1% of participants felt that they were mostly welcomed and comfortable, while only 35% felt that the public spaces were definitely welcoming. When asked how or why, the most common response among all respondents was that “*they had never felt unsafe*’, the spaces were close to their homes and relaxing. Migrants, in particular, supported this view, often seeing the parks as extensions of their homes, especially if they lacked space at home. One participant, a 14-year-old Syrian girl, stated, “*I have 4 other sisters and a brother. We live in a 2-bedroom apartment; it’s nice to get away from everyone.*”

In contrast, Dutch respondents associated feelings of safety and comfort with surveillance and security. One mother stated, “*I can see everyone and everything. I would though, want more strictness and someone to oversee who comes in and out...*” Another Dutch resident near Case A described how comfortable he felt because of the security measures he installed: “*I keep a surveillance camera and have worked hard to maintain a boundary so no one enters from the back. And I have an app, we all have one where we can immediately report to police in case of any incident.*”

A key analysis from these responses was that feeling **welcomed and comfortable**, sub-variables for a sense of community, were associated by both groups with **familiarity and security**. The more they engaged with or understood the routines of the other group, the more secure and trusting they felt. For example, a Dutch mother felt a high level of trust in a Turkish father who often played futsal with the kids, despite finding him rude because she knew his daughter and the kids attended the same school.

Another observation from participants' responses showed that individuals felt more comfortable engaging with others when more people were in the vicinity. This perspective was similarly reflected in the ethnic Dutch community's responses regarding joint activities, where individuals were more likely to join an activity with a diverse and larger group.

From these responses, a theme emerged showing a close correlation between comfort and feeling safe, which is enhanced by familiarity and numbers. Literature supports this observation, indicating that discomfort in public spaces often arises when individuals or groups feel isolated. According to Sandercock (2000), isolation often leads to fear of not fitting in or being able to navigate social processes. One on-site interview respondent, a Polish migrant, explained her discomfort: “*I can come here anytime but feel better if my husband is with me. I am not comfortable alone without a translator or someone I know (familiar company)*”

Language barriers and the need for familiarity made her dependent on her partner's company, hindering her ability to trust and interact comfortably with others in the park. This observation contrasts with her husband's experience, who had migrated six months before her and had grown more confident with his surroundings despite language barriers. Over time, her familiarity with park routines and positive interactions can build similar trust and comfort. Therefore, **time spent** becomes a key variable for enhancing a sense of community.

Inclusive networks

The findings on user composition revealed a more diverse community than anticipated. Dutch residents were less frequently observed in parks, preferring other public spaces such as markets and bars. This underscores the significance of socio-economic factors, such as financial resources and community networks, in determining recreational activities. Labour migrants, coming from lower socio-economic backgrounds, often lack both these resources and thus have limited access to a broader range of public spaces. (Peters, 2010)

When questioned about their reasons for visiting parks, most migrants described them as places to relax and unwind away from the "noise," referring to the hustle and bustle and city stress. These respondents were generally not seasonal migrants but rather those living in the town and working in the city. They chose parks because of their proximity and family-friendly environment. In contrast, Dutch residents, who had larger social circles and often owned homes with gardens, did not view parks as networking spaces but rather as places for occasional walks or family outings. Consequently, their need for park visits was less frequent compared to migrant families living in flats.

During the daytime, markets and bars were vibrant with activity, primarily populated by older, retired ethnic Dutch residents who had long been part of the community. This further highlights the socio-economic divide in public space utilization, where long-term residents with more established social networks and financial stability have broader recreational options compared to newer, less affluent migrant families.

People with pets, children, or similar routines were more open to interaction, as these factors served as engagement assets facilitating chance interactions. These brief encounters allowed for the potential expansion of social networks. For example, a Turkish father participating in a children's football match or a Dutch resident walking his dog at 8 pm every night through the park, creating a routine interaction with a Polish visitor who walks there after work. It was noted that more than 50% of the community felt their space was characterized by differences in ethnic background, social standing, and religious beliefs, which impacted the inclusivity of their social network composition. The interview analysis revealed a common theme of language barriers preventing groups from having meaningful, longer interactions that could foster inclusive networks.

A migrant father eager to make friends in the town felt dependent on his child stating *"I am a new learner for Dutch so it's hard to communicate and often not clear. But my daughter is fluent as she is in a Dutch school and can speak English quite well too. Sometimes they are not very open to interacting with me"*. It was interesting to see how this pattern of differences didn't apply when the groups had similar interests and goals for example the callisthenic open gym near the centre of town was always full and engaged with people talking in gestures as they tried different exercises and challenges. It was noted language didn't matter when the activity goals were clear and engaging.

4.2.3 Institutional planning hinder community cohesion in public spaces

Initially, institutions' roles were perceived as mainly involving participation and programming in the planning process. However, site observations and in-depth interviews with government and private sector spatial planners revealed their wider significance in shaping the region's social, political, and cultural perspectives. Institutions in this study include provincial, municipal, and private organizations involved in the employment, housing, and integration of labour migrants in the horticulture sector. These three entities work closely to facilitate the integration of migrants in the region.

The interviews confirmed despite greenhouse horticulture accounting for 83% of agriculture in Westland and playing a vital role in its economy, there has historically been a lack of Dutch job seekers in the sector, making it dependent on intra-EU labour. (Cremers, 2018) These workers are preferred due to simpler registration, visa, and employment processes (PZH Spatial Planner, 2024). The acknowledgement of their contribution by the local government has led to the municipal council in 2009 giving them the same rights and duties as Dutch citizens and major changes in regional policy to create flexible and quick processes to accommodate them.

Participation

Since the development of the regional policy in 2015, participation has been a key focus of the Westland Council. (Bonjour, 2015) The policy aims to improve migrant integration into the social network by encouraging the learning of Dutch, fostering improved contact with neighbours, and promoting membership in local clubs and associations (Cremers, 2018). These steps have made Westland desirable for many migrant families by creating a sense of community and home. A Turkish father who had moved to the area two years ago expresses *"We have the club, my daughter goes to the library for courses...people are very nice...I plan on buying a house here one day"*

However, on-site interviews indicate that labour migrants, especially those seeking seasonal work, do not actively seek participation. One worker stated, *"I am here for work; I do not have time for anything else...if I am free I will go to Hague or Rotterdam"*

There have been programs to introduce migrant participation in the community by forming neighbourhood prevention teams or volunteering at the local petting zoo and information meetings but the turnout has been disappointingly low. (Regional plan, 2015; Municipality Project Planner, 2014) According to the Project manager from Greenport and the PZH representative, this is mainly because many migrants avoid registration to evade taxes and, as a result, are not recognized by the municipality. This lack of recorded knowledge creates significant issues in designing engagement processes or targeted programs for social cohesion.

Despite having adequate processes to collect data on diverse communities and their needs, interviews from the municipality displayed reluctance to engage migrants in community development processes unless time and budgets allowed, resulting in a knowledge vacuum for designing inclusive projects and programs, stating, *"... it must be paid out of order ...out of a relatively small budget like we don't have very deep pockets to do this. And for the contact with the workers themselves ... we do have contact with the job agencies..."* (Municipality Project Planner, 2014)

Planning and Programming

The interdependency between government and private actors in the horticulture sector has facilitated close cooperation between private employers and government institutions. Due to the bottom-up governance system in the Netherlands, a significant portion of planning is carried out at the municipal level, with provincial and national governments only providing guidelines. (Spatial Planner PZH, 2024). This bottom-up approach has led to close collaboration between local authorities and private employer organizations, focusing on contributing a low-skilled workforce to the local economy. This has created a power imbalance in the policy processes, where the main actors—the labour migrants themselves—are not actively engaged. As a result, planning has prioritized workforce facilitation over community development, leading to socio-spatial segregation.

Planning efforts focus on maximizing workforce efficiency with limited space and funding, resulting in migrant housing projects near greenhouses or away from residential communities. An example is the new De Lier project, one of the largest developments on the outskirts of Westland. (Westland Planner, 2024). These projects, based on separation and utility, significantly impact migrants' chances of integrating into planned public spaces, causing a decline in community social cohesion.

"We check, of course, that if they're (migrants) not to be put away somewhere behind. I think it's important that there is some oversight for these people so that they don't get misused by their bosses ... We'd like to check things like a distance of 1 kilometer to a supermarket or similar things. Because in the past, things did go wrong on this part. That people got isolated ... That's not what we want..." (PZH Spatial Planner, 2024)

Despite oversight by the Province and municipality, they have limited influence over the planning and structure of these hostel projects. The municipality prioritizes the needs of private companies vital to the regional economy and makes efforts to balance the demands of local citizens, many of whom oppose migrant housing in their small towns. Consequently, migrants have minimal representation in policy processes, ending up at the bottom of the power and participation ladder.

A municipality project planner summarized the challenge as “... quite difficult because there's very little space for them (migrants) and a lot of resistance from local people that don't want them in their tiny Village. So there's also from the politics in Westerns a lot of anxiety to agree with new policies, even if we like a policy.”

4.3 Biopolitics, Framing and Social Cohesion?

Despite considerable discussion about migrant rights and integration, the interviews show that little action has been taken to involve these stakeholders in a deliberative planning process. This has created a power imbalance where although overall employment rates in the region are low, local resistance predominantly stems from the perception that migrants “take jobs” (Bonjour et al., 2015). By framing migrants as a replacement workforce for low-skilled labour needs, municipalities and private institutions restrict their access and foster local resistance. Segregated housing communities, like greenhouse hostels, exacerbate disparities, reducing familiarity, trust, and community cohesion.

Programming public spaces can incentivize joint activities and participation. However, inclusivity within social networks largely depends on individuals' backgrounds and opportunities, influenced by policies and identities. (Putnam, 2007; Sandercock, 2000). Indicating socioeconomic inequality significantly impacts group interactions and participation. Those with limited options maximize their current circumstances, while individuals with more resources can advocate for their rights and access alternatives. It is crucial to recognize that these options are often inaccessible to those lacking financial means or sufficient time.

Due to the lack of representation, most public spaces are designed by individuals with limited knowledge of other cultures and routines, often catering to a specific segment of the population. The duration individuals have spent in a community increases their association with their surroundings, while these spaces can be intimidating and unwelcoming to those from different cultural or social backgrounds. It is important to highlight that no single group is homogeneous. Even among migrants, there are multiple subdivisions, each with distinct characteristics such as children or those with large families, which facilitate their participation in community life through informal routes. In contrast, other groups, such as low-skilled migrant bachelors with large language barriers, may rely more on formal structures for participation. The challenge lies in reconciling diverse socio-cultural needs and addressing the negative perceptions through policies and approaches that embrace diversity in the sense of exposure without expecting minorities to conform excessively.

4. Conclusions

This study analyzed three main themes—built space, social networks, and institutional support—to systematically approach the hypothesis that *planned public spaces as shared spaces for social interaction, support social cohesion between ethnic Dutch residents and migrants*. Highlighting why, despite the existing public spaces, the planning does not adequately cater to the social cohesion needs of the region.

The flexibility of the dimensions defining social cohesion in planning allow the study to expand on the factors based on their cause-and-effect relationship in public spaces. Underlining planned public spaces not only impact social cohesion but the interactions within them may also be the result of wider policies and structures that shape social processes.

The Negative perceptions of migrants in the ethnic Dutch community often stem from a lack of exposure, excessive policing, and exclusive programming of built spaces. It is crucial to focus on the processes that shape these spaces and who controls them. The challenge lies in balancing conservative and progressive approaches to social integration with policies that avoid segregation and forced interaction. Recommendations include fostering an inclusive public sphere through awareness, knowledge exchange and shared activities across different groups rather than focusing on one facet of the community. Active and equal use of these spaces by all community members will increase porosity and aid in monitoring its usage relying on people to adopt and take ownership of its well-being, enhancing social cohesion.

Secondly, the impact of social networks on social cohesion is validated by the way perspectives between different groups shape their interactions and influence the activation of public spaces. These networks foster familiarity with diversity and facilitate knowledge sharing. They also shape demographic considerations in policymaking and determine how the sense of community is experienced in planned public spaces. In peri-urban small towns like Naaldwijk, social networks often lack knowledge about communities outside the dominant group due to insufficient representation. Addressing these disparities can shape inclusive networks with more opportunities for joint activities at different levels. Managing these spaces discreetly and moving beyond mono-cultural setups can incentivize diverse groups to share spaces and participate in organizing them, fostering a sense of partnership, ownership and community, increasing the possibilities of interaction and cooperation with local residents

Lastly, compared to other factors, institutions arguably play the most vital role in shaping both the built environment and social networks within the region. Their planning and participation policies influence community dynamics socio-economically and politically. Over-regulating design and planning for security limits community relationship growth and fails to acknowledge the heterogeneous nature of groups. Analyzing how different stakeholders form established structures can help achieve systemic change. Incorporating multi-level perspectives acknowledges the dynamic nature of group relationships and identities. More innovative and deliberative methods must be used to increase participation. Achieving small, fixed goals over time can establish trust in the system and create pathways for underrepresented voices to be heard. Efforts by private organizations as neutral mediators can aid in realizing partnerships, but goal implementation responsibility lies at the municipal level.

Public spaces emerge as crucial arenas for fostering exposure to diversity and promoting community social cohesion through knowledge exchange and familiarity. Institutions play a key role in creating opportunities for inclusive participation and programming within these spaces. Due to time limitations, more public spaces could not be incorporated in this study but future exploration can incorporate a larger sample size and different context public space case studies such as markets to assess the operationalization framework and further expand it. Given the limited contact zones and growing disparities between groups with rapid urbanization, understanding and addressing the factors that influence social cohesion in public spaces can be an imperative tool in future planning strategies to understand complex socio-spatial dynamics.

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Appendix 2: Question guide for Semi-structured Professional interviews

(Note: The questions varied and adapted according to responses)

Planning

1. Is the development of public spaces considered significant in spatial planning? Why or why not?
2. What regulations and guidelines govern the planning and design of public spaces in Westland?
3. What measures are taken by planning departments to make public spaces welcoming for labour migrants?
4. Does the municipality collaborate with migrant organizations and local businesses to provide social and recreational opportunities for labour migrants?
5. How do you ensure area development plans are inclusive and accessible for all residents, including marginalized groups? How are their needs recognized and addressed?
6. What steps are taken to facilitate social connections and networks among migrants?
7. Is the planning criteria different for public spaces in highly diverse neighbourhoods? Why or why not?
8. How do you measure the effectiveness of your projects in improving community social cohesion, and what metrics do you use to assess their success?

Participation

1. Does the municipality collect data on migrants in South Holland? Are different groups of migrant workers distinguished in this data collection?
2. How do you involve the labour workforce in community development? Is there a priority to involve more locals or migrants, and why?
3. Can you describe any initiative or policy by the municipality to promote interaction and social integration among labour migrants and the ethnic Dutch community?
4. How does the community participate in the decision-making process on these matters?
5. What significant barriers or challenges hinder labour migrants' social integration, especially in regions where migrants are seen as a threat, like the Westland horticulture cluster?
6. Does the reluctance in regions like Westland to welcome more migrants and refugees hinder community development reforms?
7. How do you balance the resistance from local ethnic Dutch residents against the necessity of labour migrants, ensuring their integration into the community while advancing spatial plans?

Appendix 3: Question guide for Site interviews with park visitors

(Note: These questions varied according to the information received)

Frequency

1. How long have you been living in Westland, Netherlands?
2. How often do you visit this park?
3. In your opinion, what is the best time and day to visit the chosen park? Why? What is the average time you spend in one park visit?

4. How do you commute here?
5. Why do you come to the park? What do you like most about this park compared to the others?

Networks

1. Who do you visit the park with?
2. About how many close friends do you have these days in the area? These are people you feel at ease with, can talk to about private matters, or call on for help.
3. How often do you meet new people at the park?
4. Do you enjoy communicating with other parents or people your age when you visit the park alone? Can you describe why?

Language

5. How often do you ever meet new people at the park?
6. How many languages can you speak?
7. Do you find it difficult to mingle with people due to any language or cultural barriers? Can you describe how?

Infrastructure: aesthetic and security

1. What do you like most about this park compared to the others?
2. Do you feel safe coming here alone? Can you tell us why?
3. Does the space feel welcoming, somewhere you can come anytime and do anything?

Social Inclusion and Differences

1. How strong is the feeling of togetherness or closeness in your neighbourhood?
2. There are often differences in characteristics between people living in the same neighbourhood. For example, differences in wealth, income, social status, ethnic background. To what extent do any such differences characterize your neighbourhood?
3. Do any of these differences cause problems in your visits to parks? Which differences most often cause problems?

Activities

1. What are some of the activities you like to enjoy in the park? Why do you enjoy them here?
2. Are there any community activities in which you cannot participate? Why?
3. Can you describe how the park activities could be made more inclusive?
4. In the last three months, how many times have you got together with people to play games, sports, or other recreational activities? (drinks, walks or even a chat)
5. In your opinion, is this Park generally peaceful or marked by disturbances preventing you from certain activities?
6. Why do you think there has been a change or no change in the amount of people who visit the park?
7. Would you like the park to be a place where you can meet new people?

