

Resistance towards the asylum seekers' center in the Municipality of Montferland

Explanations and the role of municipal action

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Abstract: Because of the dispersal law the municipality Montferland has made plans to place an asylum seekers center (AZC). This has evoked negative responses among residents. This qualitative research explores the reason behind this local resistance to asylum seekers reception. Furthermore, it explores whether the municipality can alleviate this resistance by justifying and legitimizing the placement of the AZC. To do this different data sources have been analyzed in which residents of the municipality share their experiences surrounding the placement of the AZC and how they perceive the actions of the municipality. The results show that the resistance largely originates from threats that residents experience on their safety, socio-economic position and culture through the arrival of an AZC. Furthermore, residents share concerns over the integrity of the municipality. Most concerns cannot be alleviated through the actions of the municipality in the placement of the AZC, however acceptance of the decision can be increased when residents perceive the decision to place the AZC as their own.

Key words: asylum seekers reception; dispersal law; local resistance; municipal action;

1. Introduction

For the municipality of Montferland, the dispersal law (*spreidingswet*) means they have the task of accommodating 201 asylum seekers (Gemeente Montferland, 2024). To realize the necessary reception places, the Montferland municipality has made plans to establish an AZC which provides 250 places in or around the core of the municipality, namely Didam (Gemeente Montferland, 2024). This has evoked negative responses among a proportion of the residents. A signature campaign was held (Petities.nl, n.d.) and various protests at council meetings erupted pleading against the AZC (Hazelaar, 2024a; Hazelaar, 2024b). Such resistance towards local asylum seekers' reception presents a growing challenge for municipalities, which are expected to adhere to national asylum policies while maintaining local support (NOS, 2025a). Previous research on this topic has not yet examined how the asylum policy, the dispersal law, might influence the attitudes towards local AZC's. Consequently, I will identify the reasoning behind local resistance. In addition, I will examine whether the municipality of Montferland can mediate in these processes of resistance. By obtaining more information on this it will be possible to gain insights into both the underlying explanations for local resistance and how the municipality can effectively respond to those.

Previous research on resistance towards local AZC's mostly focuses on which aspects can predict local resistance. It shows how individuals want to maintain their privileged position in their neighborhood and therefore want to shield themselves from outsiders who present themselves as a threat towards this (Hubbard, 2005a; Hubbard, 2005b). Especially individuals with a lower socio-economic position oppose local AZC's, as these individuals mostly perceive competition from outsiders, on e.g. social housing (Zorlu, 2016; Lubbers et al., 2016). Furthermore, when individuals perceive asylum seekers as a threat to their safety (Segers, 2022; Hubbard, 2005a; Klapwijk, 2016) and/or culture (Zorlu, 2016; Segers, 2022; Hubbard, 2005a; Hubbard, 2005b) this will manifest into negative attitudes towards local AZC's. Lastly, the closer someone might come to live to an AZC the more they will resist the arrival of it (Zorlu, 2016; Segers, 2022; Klapwijk, 2016).

This research will build forth on these findings, using theories which present explanations for them. Consequently, a theoretical framework will be employed in order to explain local resistance towards AZC's which combines integrated threat theory (Stephan & Stephan, 2000), not in my back yard framework (Hermansson, 2006) and collective psychological ownership theory (Martinovic & Verkuyten, 2017).

Previous research further indicates that this resistance can be prevented by justifying and/or legitimizing authorities (e.g. the municipality). When individuals view the procedures that the authorities follow and the outcomes of their choices as justifiable and legitimate this is associated with having greater support for them (Cook & Hegtvedt, 1983; Tyler & Lindt, 2001; Almekinders, 2016). The Montferland municipality has drawn up several methods to achieve these goals by actively allowing residents to participate. These methods include the spread of information, sending out a survey, organizing walk-in moments to engage with residents and implementing an advisory resident council (Gemeente Montferland, 2024). Despite these efforts, many residents of Montferland still share concerns over the placement of an AZC (Petities.nl, n.d.; Hardemann & Rietman, 2025). This research will help fill the knowledge gap in how it is possible that despite the participation methods of the municipality, residents still actively resist the placement by mapping out the experiences of residents with actions of the municipality.

In addition, a new dynamic has come into play since the introduction of the dispersal law on February 1, 2024. This law determines how many asylum seekers should be accommodated per municipality in the Netherlands. Its aim is to provide structural reception places for asylum seekers and to distribute this evenly throughout the Netherlands (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2024). Although the current Dutch cabinet is outgoing and had announced plans to repeal the law, the legal process of withdrawing it can take several months (ANP, 2024). Moreover, it remains unclear whether the new cabinet will continue with the repeal (NOS, 2025b). As a result, municipalities are operating in a state of legal uncertainty (ANP, 2024).

This new dynamic possibly impacts local resistance in several ways. On the one hand, the uncertainty surrounding the duration of the law has been cited as a contributing factor to growing unrest around the establishment of AZC's across the Netherlands (NOS, 2025a). On the other hand, the national distribution of asylum seekers may justify the AZC's arrival for residents (Solodoch, 2024). Furthermore, now that municipalities must fulfill national obligations, the available room for letting residents participate in their procedures is more constrained (ANP, 2024).

In order to create tools to tackle the growing unrest it is important to know where it originates from (Bellaart et al., 2016) and thus how the dispersal law might influence the reasoning behind the local resistance. In addition, as a result of the limited space to maneuver for the municipality it is extra important to understand how residents perceive different forms of participation (ANP, 2024). This can create insights into which participatory tools are

considered most effective under these conditions, so that the municipality can employ these when targeting the growing unrest (Bellaart et al., 2016).

Previous research on this subject has been conducted before the introduction of the dispersal law, before municipalities were obliged to provide places for the reception of asylum seekers and thus do not address this tension between national obligation and local unrest (Almekinders, 2016; Hubbard, 2005a; Hubbard, 2005b; Segers, 2022; Stenfert, 2016; Lubbers et al., 2016; Klapwijk, 2016; Zorlu, 2016). Therefore, this research will build on existing literature on local reception of asylum seekers while taken this new dynamic into account. Consequently, the research questions are:

What are the reasons for resistance to the placement of an asylum seekers center among opposing residents of the municipality of Montferland? And how can the municipality's way of acting influence this resistance according to these residents?

To provide an answer to these questions, the following sub-questions will be answered:

1. *What are the reasons for resistance to the placement of an AZC according to opposing residents of the Montferland municipality?*
2. *How are the actions of the Montferland municipality surrounding the placement of the AZC experienced by concerned residents of the Montferland municipality?*
3. *How is resistance to the placement of an AZC influenced by the municipality's actions according to concerned residents of the Montferland municipality?*

To fully address these questions this study combines multiple sources of data, including resident interviews, municipal council meetings, Facebook posts, results of a resident survey shared by the municipality and a resident speech. This triangulated approach helps to better capture the experienced local resistance, which may not be fully understood through a single type of source.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Perceived threats

As beforementioned, to explain where resistance towards local AZC's originates from I will use a combination of theories that build forth on research on this topic. Specifically, this research employs integrated threat theory (ITT), the not in my back yard (NIMBY) framework, and the theory of collective psychological ownership (CPO).

The key point of overlap between the theories is that they all understand resistance as originating from perceived threats, which manifest into negative attitudes toward the assumed source of that threat, in this case the planned arrival of an AZC (Stephan & Stephan, 2000; Hermansson, 2006; Martinovic & Verkuyten, 2017) .

The difference between the theories can be found in where the threats originate from and to a lesser extent in their consequences. Here ITT presents the general structure of how perceived threats can translate into negative attitudes. It specifically focuses on people, meaning that it examines who is the out-group and if they are threatening to an individual based on e.g. social or cultural differences (Stephan & Stephan, 2000). NIMBY extends to this, by focusing on place-based threats, so the expected local consequences of hosting a facility, instead of on intergroup dynamics (Hermansson, 2006). CPO also builds on the general structure of ITT, however here negative attitudes arrive when individuals perceive threats on their sense of ownership of a certain territory (Martinovic & Verkuyten, 2017).

In the following sections I will explain the mechanisms behind these theories and consequently formulate what this would mean when applying them to resistance towards local AZC's.

2.1.1 Integrated threat theory

The integrated threat theory (ITT) explains how people perceive threats from people in their out-group and convert these into negative attitudes towards them. Here, the out-group refers to a group of people with whom someone does not identify, e.g. because they have a different ethnicity (Verkuyten, 2009). For residents of the Montferland municipality, asylum seekers can be part of their out-group. Within the theory, two different types of threat are outlined that predict the behavior towards an out-group: realistic threats and symbolic threats (Stephan & Stephan 1993; Stephan & Stephan, 1996; Stephan et al., 2000; Stephan et al., 2015; Croucher, 2017).

When an individual experiences one or both types of threats from an outgroup, this will influence the emotional, behavioral, and cognitive level. On an emotional level, they can lead to negative emotions, such as fear, hatred, or contempt for the outgroup. On a behavioral level, they can lead to discrimination or protest. On a cognitive level, threats can translate into negative perceptions of the outgroup, which can then lead to stereotypes (Stephan et al., 2015; Croucher, 2017).

The concept of realistic threats is based on the realistic group conflict theory (Sherif & Sherif, 1969; Stephan et al., 2000). This theory states that competition over scarce resources, such as houses or jobs, creates prejudice and/or discrimination. ITT goes beyond this by assuming that all threats from the out-group to the economy, political power and the physical and material well-being of the in-group factor into this, regardless of whether they are real or merely perceived. Because the threat only needs to be perceived, there does not have to be a valid reason for the development of negative attitudes (Stephan et al., 2000). Symbolic threats refer to the differences experienced by the in-group in norms, values, beliefs and customs with the out-group. More negative attitudes towards the out-group will be developed when more differences are experienced (Stephan et al., 2000).

2.1.2 Not in my back yard

Not in my back yard (NIMBY) refers to the negative attitude that characterizes a community when plans are made to construct a facility (e.g. an AZC) nearby that is perceived to impose certain burdens to the community. These perceived burdens can take different forms, e.g. financial costs or negative portrayal in media (Hermansson, 2006; Dekker et al., 2021; Hubbard, 2005a; Hubbard, 2005b; Maney & Abraham, 2008; Ferwerda et al., 2017).

Besides the direct perceived costs, NIMBY also takes judgements of fairness of burden distribution into account (Hermansson, 2006). Residents may oppose a facility not because of who will use it, but because they feel their community is being unfairly targeted to bear a burden that should be more evenly distributed across regions. Consequently, individuals may resist the facility not necessarily out of hostility toward its users, but in the hope that it will be located elsewhere, therefore sparing their own community the perceived burdens (Hermansson, 2006).

2.1.3 Collective psychological ownership

Collective psychological ownership (CPO) refers to the sense of ownership felt by a particular community over a territory (Martinovic & Verkuyten, 2017). The territories over which these feelings are felt can take on different sizes, e.g. national, municipal or domestic (Lyman & Scott, 1967; Martinovic & Verkuyten, 2017; Brown et al., 2005; Toft, 2014). When the certain community experiences a sense of ownership over an area, this would be accompanied by self-proclaimed rights that they would have over this area. The most prominent is the right to regulate access and use of the area by others, also called the gatekeeper right. This right provides reason to prevent unwanted intrusion and to exclude others, resulting in the discouragement of

people in the out-group of the perceived owners to access this area (Merill, 1998; Martinovic & Verkuyten, 2017; Nijs et al., 2020).

The perceived owners may perceive threats to their ownership over an area, leading to defensive behavior e.g. exclusionary regulation or the placement of fences (Dreu & Knippenberg, 2005; Martinovic & Verkuyten, 2017). When the group gets the feeling that they might lose their ownership, e.g. due to the arrival of an out-group such as asylum seekers, they will adopt exclusionary attitudes towards the source of this threat (Martinovic & Verkuyten, 2017; Nijs et al., 2020).

2.1.4 Expectations

When an AZC arrives, new people move into the municipality of Montferland (Gemeente Montferland, 2024). The residents could perceive this as a threat to their safety or their socio-economic position (Maney & Abraham, 2008). The idea of having an AZC in the area could also bring concerns for direct residents about certain costs that this could entail for them. Important here is that these concerns do not have to be empirically substantiated in order for them to be experienced (Stephan et al., 2000). For example, concerns could arise that estate prices and the quality of life of residents may decrease, while unemployment, taxes and crime may increase (Maney & Abraham, 2008; Coenders et al., 2004). In addition to this, the AZC will bring people with different cultures, norms and values into the municipality. When these elements are experienced as different by the residents of the municipality, this could also manifest into perceived (symbolic) threats. Lastly, the arrival of new people can provide perceived threats to the residents' feelings of ownership (Martinovic & Verkuyten, 2017; Nijs et al., 2020).

According to the theories discussed, when individuals perceive threats they will manifest these into negative attitudes towards the source of the threats. As illustrated, the placement of an AZC can go paired with perceived threats to the wellbeing of the residents of the municipality. Therefore, it is expected that these perceived threats will be transformed into resistance towards the placement of the AZC among residents of the Montferland municipality.

2.2 Justifications and legitimacies

Although the aforementioned theories (ITT, NIMBY, CPO) help explain why resistance to local AZC's may emerge, they do not imply that such resistance is fixed or inevitable. Perceptions of threat may shape initial attitudes, but these responses can be influenced (Tyler & Lindt, 2001).

The negative attitudes may intensify or decrease, based on how the decision-making of authorities (e.g. the municipality) is perceived. When individuals view the procedures that the authorities follow and the outcomes of their choices as justifiable and legitimate this is associated with having greater support for these authorities and their decisions (Cook & Hegtvedt, 1983; Tyler & Lindt, 2001). Therefore, it is important to also consider theories of justification and legitimacy in relation to local resistance towards AZC's. This section will thus focus on distributive justice and outcome legitimacy, and consequently on procedural justice and procedural legitimacy.

As will be explained in the next sections these concepts are distinct, with distributive justice focusing on fairness of outcomes and procedural justice focusing on fairness of procedures. However, it is important to keep in mind that they are often experienced as interconnected in practice. A perceived unfair outcome may lead individuals to question the fairness of the process, while a lack of procedural justice can make an otherwise fair distribution feel imposed (Cook & Hegtvedt, 1983; Tyler & Lind, 2001).

2.2.1 Distributive justice and outcome legitimacy

Distributive justice (Cook & Hegtvedt, 1983) refers to whether the outcome of a decision is considered as fair by individuals (e.g. residents of Montferland). This would mean that rights, responsibilities, costs and burdens that come along with this outcome are considered fairly allocated over their population. When the allocation is considered equal, this will create support for the division. However, when the allocation is considered unfair, individuals will try to alter the outcomes of the allocation (Cook & Hegtvedt, 1983). This would mean that if the municipality can justify that the potential rights, responsibilities, costs and burdens of local asylum seekers' reception are allocated fairly, this would consequently legitimize the allocation of the reception places, thus creating more support. If not, the residents may want to alter the outcomes of the allocation by opposing the reception.

2.2.2 Procedural justice and procedural legitimacy

Procedural justice focuses on whether the procedures involved in the decision-making for this outcome are considered fair (Cook & Hegtvedt, 1983). Meaning, whether an individual feels that they are being treated fairly by an authority figure, e.g. when the authority figure acts respectfully and makes fully informed decisions. When authority figures can justify their procedures, the legitimacy of the authorities is perceived as higher (Bottoms & Tankebe, 2020).

When the legitimacy of procedures is undermined, this will consequently lead to resistance towards policies (e.g. the placement of an AZC) that the authority puts forward (Fischer et al., 2008). However when the procedures are perceived as legitimate this can lead to the voluntarily acceptance of decisions that individuals do not agree with (Tyler & Lind, 2001).

To promote procedural justice literature formulates four components. First, when an open dialogue is created, through which individuals can share their perspective on matters. Second, when individuals perceive authorities' decisions as being information-based. Third, when individuals feel as if they are treated with respect and dignity. Lastly, when individuals trust the motives of the authorities (Lind & Tyler, 1988; Worden & McLean, 2016). These components primarily promote perceived procedural justice when they precede the decision-making of the authority (Mazerolle et al., 2013). This would mean that to create more acceptance to the placement of an AZC, the municipality of Montferland would need to invest in making their procedures be perceived as just.

2.2.3 Justifying the dispersal law

According to distributive justice logic, public support for decisions such as the placement of an AZC increases when individuals perceive that the distribution of responsibilities and burdens is fair (Cook & Hegtvædt, 1983). This is in line with the idea that local resistance to asylum seekers could be reduced by a clear distribution of reception places across a country (Solodoch, 2024). Here it is important that the places are distributed proportionally or that a limit of places is set per area. Through proportional distribution that is controlled by a government, individuals will have assurance that people in municipalities where no AZC would be placed cannot free ride, while municipalities that host an AZC would have to bear the burden that is perceived to come along with this. As a result, individuals would be more willing to agree to host and integrate asylum seekers in their immediate vicinity (Solodoch, 2024). This would mean if distribution of the dispersal law is seen as proportional, there would be more acceptance of the arrival of an AZC.

However, even a proportional distribution may still face resistance if local communities feel the process lacked fairness (Mazerolle et al., 2013). Public debate illustrates how uncertainty surrounding the continuation of the dispersal law can undermine both forms of justice (NOS, 2025a). If the future of the law is in doubt, residents may question whether the placement of an AZC will result in them being treated unfairly in the long run, as other municipalities may not continue with providing reception. In addition, when the legitimacy of

the law itself is no longer guaranteed due to the uncertainty surrounding it, this may lead residents to question the fairness of the law in general regardless of how evenly responsibilities were allocated (NOS, 2025a). This instability can thus erode trust not only in the outcome, but also in the procedures behind it, resulting in opposition.

2.2.4 Expectations

Based on the combination of these concepts, different expectations follow. First, if residents of Montferland perceive the dispersal law as distributing responsibilities fairly this should enhance outcome legitimacy and reduce opposition to a local AZC. However, uncertainty surrounding the future of the dispersal law might undermine the justification. If residents doubt the stability of national allocation rules, they may not only question whether the outcome is fair, but also whether the procedures used to justify that outcome were meaningful or trustworthy (NOS, 2025a). Second, if the municipality actively involves residents in the process, listens to their concerns, and communicates decisions transparently, this should increase procedural justice and thereby increase voluntary support, even among those who may not initially favor the reception.

3. Methods and data

3.1 Research design

For this study data collection has taken place in the period from February 2025 to June 2025. A qualitative research method was chosen as this provides insights into people's experiences around a certain topic (Reulink & Lindeman, 2005). Furthermore, a phenomenological research approach was used (Knaack, 1984), meaning that the experiences around the placement of the AZC were described and interpreted from the perspective of the participants, here the municipality's residents.

Attitudes towards asylum seekers, have become more polarized over the years (Carmines & Nassar, 2021). Although people might have an opinion on the topic, this can cause them to be reluctant to share it. Individuals, who have anti-immigration attitudes usually express these sentiments less in interviews than in their personal lives (Carmines & Nassar, 2021). Therefore, to still be able to explore the full experiences and feelings of the citizens of Montferland on the topic of asylum I chose to use multiple data sources (table 1). This approach has allowed for the triangulation of information, meaning that the collected information was cross-checked (Ahmed, 2024).

Table 1.*Data sources and labels*

Data source	Label/pseudonym
Council activity 28.11.2024	CA/council activity
Council deliberation on society & organization 02.12.2024	CSO/council deliberation
Facebook post	FB/Facebook
Municipality survey meeting 15.04.2025	QM/survey meeting
Municipality survey results 26.03.2025	QR/survey results
Resident speech 10.04.2025	RS/resident speech
Respondent 1	Peter
Respondent 2	Ingrid
Respondent 3	Sophie
Respondent 4	Linda
Respondent 5	Naomi

After collecting the data, a thematic analysis was performed using Atlas.ti. This means that themes are derived from the collected data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Mortelmans, 2020). The themes were then placed in a code book to create an overview of the data and to discover connections (Appendix A). While the analysis was informed by the theoretical framework (deductive), an open approach was used to allow for the emergence of unanticipated insights (Khandkar, 2009).

3.2 Concerns raised to municipality (CSO, CA, QM, RS, QR)

The different data sources have been analyzed in a specific order. First, data sources have been examined that show which concerns residents raise with the municipality itself. These include all public meetings of the municipal council of the municipality of Montferland (CSO, CA, QM) in which residents were invited to give input on the placement of the AZC (Raadsactiviteit, 2024; Raadsberaad Maatschappij & Organisatie, 2024; Resultaten vragenlijst opvang asielzoekers, 2025). As a result, a total of two and a half hours of municipal council meetings were analyzed. The recordings of these meetings were put online by the municipality and were subsequently manually transcribed by me. Since the meetings included both residents and municipal council members, it was recorded whether the speaker was a resident or a

councilmember. The personal information of the individuals were removed from these transcriptions to ensure anonymity.

Moreover, a resident's speech (RS) given before a municipal council meeting on April 10th, 2025, in which they addressed concerns about the placement of the AZC was used. A transcribed and anonymized version of the speech was shared by a member of the action group against the AZC who shared it in the Facebook group 'Geen AZC in Montferland/Didam e.o' on April 11, 2025.

Lastly, a municipality survey for residents, entrepreneurs and organizations in the places Didam, Loil and Nieuw-Dijk (QR), in which they could express what they find important in the placement of the AZC (Hardemann & Rietman, 2025) was analyzed. The answers to the questions of the municipal survey were analyzed if they addressed the research questions of this research. This led to the analysis of three questions: what the respondent finds important in the reception of asylum seekers, what they find important when living together in the municipality with asylum seekers, and what concerns they have when it comes to the reception of asylum seekers. The results of the municipal survey have been transcribed and anonymized by the municipality.

3.3 Resident interviews (Respondent 1, 2, 3, 4, 5)

Subsequently, interviews with residents were performed. These interviews provided an opportunity for residents to elaborate on the concerns that were previously expressed to the municipality. While residents may also withhold certain views in an interview setting, the confidential nature of the interviews may have encouraged more open responses than in public settings.

A total of five interviews were conducted with residents of the municipality of Montferland. The selection criteria for the sample were, 1) being resident of the municipality Montferland, and 2) having concerns either about the placement of the AZC or about how the municipality handles this placement. This group of respondents was recruited in various ways¹. First, people were selected within my (in)direct contacts. Then, contact was made via public contact details of individuals who are part of the protest group against the AZC. Finally, flyers

¹ Not all methods were successful. Unsuccessful methods include calls via personal social media accounts, calls via public Facebook groups targeting residents of the Montferland municipality at different moments throughout the data collection process and putting up flyers at places in the municipality such as supermarkets, the library and apartment complexes (Appendix B).

(Appendix B) which provided information about the research were put through the letterboxes of people living in Didam.

For the interviews a semi-structured topic list was drawn up (Appendix C). The semi-structured manner allowed for the retention of focus while also providing room to delve deeper into themes that arise in the respondents' given answers (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). After drawing up the topic list, practice interviews were conducted, during which the duration, accessibility and completeness of the topic list were tested.

The duration of the interviews varied from thirty to sixty minutes. Two of these took place online, one in the house of the respondent and two in the local library. Recordings were made during the interviews, which were afterwards transcribed. For the interviews that took place online, Microsoft Teams was used to make a transcription of the interview, which was then manually checked. No software was used for the transcription of the offline interviews. When transcribing, the transcription was verbatim, ignoring hesitations, filler words and stuttering.

Several measures were taken to ensure the safety of the respondents. Pseudonyms were given to the respondents. A checklist was filled out on the ethical and privacy aspects of the research (Appendix D). An informed consent form was drawn up that was signed by all respondents before participating in an interview and after the research was completed, all recordings of interviews were deleted.

3.4 Facebook (FB)

Lastly, the posts from two Facebook groups of the local action group against the AZC have been analyzed (FB). It was checked if these posts provided new concerns or whether they were already brought up in the data collection. When no new information was gathered anymore, it was apparent that saturation of information was reached. The first group is called '*Geen AZC in Montferland/Didam e.o*' (No AZC in Montferland/Didam and surroundings). This is a private group, meaning that the posts are solely visible to members of the group. I have been granted access to this group by requesting it on their page. The second group is called '*Montferland zonder azc*' (Montferland without AZC), this is a public group.

The Facebook posts that were examined include all the posts posted in the groups in between December 12, 2024, and May 12, 2025. These dates have been selected as the local municipal council voted on December 12, 2024, in favor of going ahead with the plans to place

the AZC (De Jong, 2024). The end date, marks five months after this decision and was chosen because it coincides with the point at which the analysis for this research began.

3.5 Positionality and reflexivity

As stated before, the local reception of asylum seekers is a sensitive subject, therefore it is important to be aware of the researcher's positionality. While I do not reside in the municipality of Montferland, I did grow up in the Achterhoek region. This shared regional background may have helped reduce analytical distance, as it could have contributed to a sense of familiarity during the interviews, which can encourage openness and trust (Mullings, 1999).

At the same time, the interviews were conducted for a master's thesis project, and my position as a student at Erasmus University was mentioned at the start of each interview. This could have marked me as an outsider, which can cause closure and distrust (Mullings, 1999).

Furthermore, I am white and do not have a migration background. Some respondents may have therefore perceived me as part of their ethnic in-group, which could have encouraged them to speak more freely as they might assume shared perspectives, especially in expressing negative sentiments about asylum seekers.

This positioning could have introduced social desirability bias, whereby residents adjusted their responses to align with what they believed I wanted to hear. To overcome this, I communicated before each interview that there were no right or wrong answers, that the goal was to understand their perspectives and that my opinions on the subject would not be included in the research. Additionally, leading questions were avoided. Furthermore, the findings were derived directly from the transcripts, avoiding subjective assumptions.

4. Results and analysis

4.1. Consequences for the municipality

From the analyzed data three main types of perceived threats regarding the arrival of the AZC emerged: safety, socio-economic and cultural threats. These concerns were prominent among most interviewees (Peter, Ingrid, Linda, Naomi) and in the public discourse (CA, CSO, RS, FB). However, not all residents shared these concerns. A minority of residents expressed positive expectations regarding the AZC. One of the five interviewees (Sophie), and three out of eight residents who spoke during the council deliberation, mentioned opportunities for local

enrichment. These individuals are still included in this research for their opinions on how the municipality acts.

4.1.1 Safety threats

Residents opposing the AZC expect that the arrival of asylum seekers will bring different forms of nuisance. They fear that it will increase criminality, e.g. theft, street intimidation and drugs criminality. Especially women, children and the elderly would be the target in the beforementioned street intimidation. This concern is shared by residents of all genders and of different age categories, meaning it was not limited to the demographic groups that they believe would be targeted (Peter, Ingrid, Linda, Naomi, CSO, QR, RS, FB, CA). The residents further expect that asylum seekers will loiter around the streets and will dominate public places such as play areas and parks. These worries are deepened by experiences that are overheard of residents living in nearby municipalities in which an AZC was placed in recent years (Peter, Ingrid, Linda, CSO, RS, FB). Residents explain that they think that the municipality of Montferland does not have sufficient police force to tackle these kinds of issues if they occur (Peter, Ingrid, Linda, Naomi, CSO, QR, RS, FB, CA).

“For example, in our neighborhood municipality Zevenaar, there’s also out of the sudden an AZC. That is why we are incredibly worried [...] And those people experience a lot of nuisance now. So also the entrepreneurs in the city, Zevenaar, that there is theft. People have already had to install roller shutters, cameras. People can no longer go out in the evening to walk their dogs, especially women, because then they come after them and they make nasty remarks in Arabic, which they cannot understand. Or it is a word with a k in front of it, you know what I mean. Especially for girls. And also that there is intimidation, for example that people sit in playgrounds and they look inside people’s houses. The police does nothing about it, because there is not enough police. So they say, well, then you should just walk another way when you walk your dog, or then just don’t go out when those young people are sitting in front of your door. But that is too crazy for words. I just find that very threatening. And we are afraid that those kinds of situations will arise here too.” (Ingrid)

According to Sophie the AZC might bring about more petty theft, however for her this is not a negative consequence. She explains how it is innocent and that it will not impact the safety of

the municipality since there will be enough security systems. In addition, according to her petty theft is not restricted to asylum seekers, but is also executed by white people.

“And there are thieves [...] but for me personally it’s not so big. You know, there are plenty of cameras of course. But also, I find it something that’s still pretty innocent. [...] And it’s also white people.” (Sophie)

4.1.2 Social-economical threats

Residents express how according to them the placement of an AZC will bring extra pressure on healthcare, educational systems and the housing market in the municipality (CA, CSO, RS). They question why asylum seekers will be given priority for these facilities over the people that are already residing in the municipality. They fear that this will lead to the children of the residents and for the people that are in need to not being able to find a house for themselves anymore. In addition to this, they expect that indirectly they will have to pay for the asylum reception, either through taxes or through cut backs on other municipal facilities (Peter, Ingrid, Linda, Naomi, QR, RS, CSO, CA, FB).

“What do these people actually owe this exceptional position to, that makes them get priority over everything and the Montferlanders don’t? Our young people who have to live with their parents until they retire and have no future prospects and can no longer start a family, but they can?” (Resident speech)

“The pressure on healthcare can become a big problem, the pressure on education too.” (Council activity)

“So at the moment that this [the AZC] costs money. Then that is paid, or by cutting facilities. [...] Or it is raising taxes. I think it is one of the two. Because I do not see the national government picking up the price tag for this.” (Peter)

4.1.3 Cultural threats

Residents explain how they fear that the culture of asylum seekers might clash with their culture. They expect that these people will not try to adapt to the culture, norms and values in the municipality, by e.g. refusing to learn the Dutch language and wearing hijabs. According to

these people the cultural clash does depend on what the demographics of the asylum seekers are (Peter, Ingrid, Naomi, Linda, FB, RS, QR). They believe that young men coming from the Middle East and Africa will be less prone to adapt than families coming from Ukraine (Peter, Ingrid, Linda, FB) or the Moluccas (Peter).

“For example, I have colleagues of Moluccan descent. You don’t notice that they have a different ethnic background. [...] They have adapted. But they also work for the Dutch government. But you don’t see that happening with those with a headscarf. They don’t adhere to Dutch values.” (Peter)

4.1.4 Enrichment through diversity

Some residents express how the municipality can be enriched by the arrival of an AZC. The arrival of people with diverse cultures and skin tones would bring more liveliness to the municipality according to them. Additionally, they argue that it provides the ability to learn from different cultures (Sophie, CSO). Lastly, the diversity might stimulate the economy by motivating entrepreneurs who want to start cultural businesses e.g. restaurants to Montferland (Sophie).

“As a [refugee integration] volunteer you also learn about them. About their culture and background. But also understand our own language better. The meetings are also an enrichment for us. And give us positive energy.” (Council deliberation)

“If it [the AZC] is going to come. Then we get more color. And more customers. So the shops here will profit of that as well. And people, entrepreneurs, will think, ‘hey now I can do it’. Because there are probably enough people with entrepreneurial spirit, but who now think like ‘Didam is so white, that’s not going to work’. (Sophie)

4.1.5 Distance to municipality

Residents express that they expect that if the AZC would be placed closer to their home, they will experience the previously explained consequences more intensely. For the residents who expect that there will be mostly negative consequences, this means that they prefer to have more distance between them and the AZC (Peter, Ingrid, Linda, Naomi, FB). For Sophie who sees

benefits in the arrival of an AZC this means that she would prefer if the AZC would be placed within the municipality.

“We don’t want those “refugees” and their troubles in Didam.” (Facebook)

“I just love Didam. But it [an AZC] would make it more pleasant for me.” (Sophie)

4.2 Actions of municipality

4.2.1 Critique national (dispersal) policy

Residents critique the national asylum policy that the Montferland municipality enacts. They think that the Netherlands is already too full of people, and thus there would be no possibility to host asylum seekers or other migrants (Peter, Ingrid, Linda, Naomi, RQ, CA, CSO, FB, RQ, RS). Some mention that they would prefer if therefore the asylum seekers would be hosted more nearby their place of origin, instead of in the Netherlands (Ingrid, Linda).

“It’s not possible, you already can’t take care of your own people. [...] You can’t bring any more people here, whether they’re from Syria or America.” (Council deliberation)

“I think it is fine if refugees from war zones are taken in. But I’d mainly focus on their own region. There are always areas in their own region where they are safe.” (Ingrid)

This sentiment is deepened by the belief that most asylum seekers are not “actual” refugees. Residents think that these people originate from or travel through safe countries to reach the Netherlands in order to, e.g. draw financial benefits (Peter, Ingrid, Linda, RQ, CA, CSO, FB, RQ, RS).

“Of course, it’s all very sad if they’d be real asylum seekers. Then I’d take them in my house. But they aren’t asylum seekers. They are fortune seekers. Because they first pass through three, four safe countries to get into the Netherlands.” (Council activity)

Residents think that the national dispersal law was the reason for the municipality to initiate the AZC plans. The political debate about the possible dismissal of this law goes hand in hand with uncertainty and disagreement in the municipality. The residents who oppose the AZC plans

express negative sentiments about the dispersal law. They give examples of issues with asylum seekers that they hear about in the media and through their contacts and postulate that the dispersal law will only spread these issues over the country (Peter, Ingrid, Linda, CA, CSO, FB, RQ, RS). In addition to this, Peter fears that the law will put an extra burden on places in the East of the Netherlands, as opposed to the Randstad. The residents further belief that because of this law it is not possible anymore for the municipality to listen to its residents, as they have to fulfill the national obligation. They would therefore want the municipality to hold off from the plans, in case the dispersal law refutes (Peter, Ingrid, Linda, RQ, CA, CSO, FB, RQ, RS).

“The dispersal law solves absolutely nothing; the Netherlands simply continues to flood with asylum seekers! When will this madness stop?” (Facebook)

“Why should we deal with asylum seekers? Just put up a tent camp on the museum square. Let’s see how much fun that is. Because we are on the wrong side of the IJssel.” (Peter)

“Why does it all have to be pushed through at once? Are you [the municipality] afraid that the distribution law will be taken off the table? [...]. It’s probably all about money. But it’s time you look at the people. What the people want.” (Council activity)

4.2.2 Participation methods

The municipality has employed several tactics to promote participation among residents. These include the spread of information, sending out a survey, organizing walk-in moments to engage with residents and implementing an advisory resident council (Gemeente Montferland, 2024). The experiences with the methods differentiated per resident.

Some residents did fill in the survey and express that they would like to participate in the walk-in moments and advisory council (Peter, Linda), others did not (Sophie, Naomi). The residents that want to participate express that they want to use these methods to make it known to the municipality that they oppose their plans (Peter, Linda).

“I did indeed participate in this [the survey], because I already had some opinions at that point that I wanted to share. That I just don’t want the asylum seekers center.” (Linda)

The residents that did not participate share different reasons for this. Sophie expresses that she was afraid that she would be one of the only people who would support the plans for the AZC and therefore would get bullied. If she would participate she would therefore not express her actual opinions, but the opinions she expected that others would like to hear. Consequently she refrains from participating at all. Naomi on the other hand explains how she does not care enough about the plans to participate in the different methods.

“I’m like never mind, because everyone is probably against it [the AZC], and I’m for it and then I’ll probably get bullied. [...] Because in a group I’ll give socially acceptable answers, then I’ll go people pleasing.” (Sophie)

“I don’t really care about all that. I have enough things, and I’m busy enough, so no.” (Naomi)

4.2.3 Integrity of the municipality

Residents, both who oppose the AZC and are for it, indicate that they question the integrity of the municipality (Peter, Ingrid, Sophie, Linda, FB, CA, CSO, RS). The questioning of the integrity is paired for multiple residents with the thought that the municipality does not act neutral, does not take its residents serious and with distrust among residents towards the municipality (Peter, Ingrid, Linda, FB). They indicate that according to them the participation methods of the municipality are only presented as if they allow residents to participate in the process. They think that the municipality in reality has already made its decisions and therefore does not allow real participation (Peter, Ingrid, Sophie, Linda, FB). Reasons that residents express for the municipality to desire the placement of the AZC include: financial benefits that the municipality and its workers will receive from the government (Ingrid, Linda, FB) and the refusal to deviate from national (dispersal) law (Peter, FB).

“I don’t have a lot of faith in the municipality anymore. Because they’ve already done so much that I really think they’re idiots.” (Linda)

“The municipality must be getting money for it somehow... Why else would they push it when everyone’s clearly against it?”. (Facebook)

“Look, I can imagine that you do it because you have to. You are the government and your higher boss requires it.” (Peter)

The sentiment that the municipality does not listen to its residents is deepened by the belief that the choices in which residents are invited to participate lack genuine options. Examples are given of how residents are invited to think about which location would be well suited for the AZC. Residents express that due to the small size of the municipality there are only a few places which are even possible, therefore there is not an actual choice to make (Peter, Ingrid, Linda, FB).

“[About locations for the AZC] Actually there are about three options and most likely it will just be the old municipal building. [...] They have already shaped it in a mold, cast it in a mold, so there is actually little left to really determine.” (Linda)

Other reasons for questioning the integrity of the municipality include the unclarity in the decision-making process of the municipality. Residents give examples of how certain municipal council meetings which focus on this subject are not shared with the general public (FB) and of rumors which circulate the municipality (CA, CSO, QM, FB). The residents also give examples of how municipality workers have spread false information according to them (Ingrid, FB, CSO). On occasions residents actively attempted to get more clarity about decision-making by requesting the publication of council meetings, government orders and clarifications of decisions (Ingrid, Linda, FB, CSO).

“From reliable sources we heard that there is talk about the arrival of an AZC on the Heesweg in Didam. Municipality of Montferland, why is this not communicated to the residents?” (Facebook)

Despite seeing benefits in the arrival of an AZC, Sophie also expresses concerns over the municipality's actions. She criticizes the slow pace and the money spent on discussions. Due to the tone that the municipality communicated with she believes that they assumed that they expected opposition from the beginning. She believes that this reflects a lack of commitment and that the municipality will eventually opt out of the plans to prevent resistance. While she acknowledges the importance of listening to residents, she argues that cancelling the AZC

would only shift the responsibility to another municipality. She therefore sees benefits in the national obligation set by the dispersal law.

“The municipality immediately writes like this in advance because they sense that the people are going to be against it. So the municipality is actually already going along with the people. [...] While the municipality can also say, no, we are in favor. But you also get a taste of it in the letter, it is not nice to tell you, but an asylum seekers center is coming.” (Sophie)

“But I really think it's just too ridiculous for words. If it doesn't happen, just because the population doesn't want it. I think, as if Arnhem wants it. As if Rotterdam wants it.” (Sophie)

Naomi, on the other hand, does not question the integrity of the municipality. She explains that she is neutral towards the municipality. She trusts the municipality to listen to its residents, as it is their function.

“I'm actually very neutral in that [trusting the municipality]. [...]. I think it'll just work out. Because I assume they care about their community too. So you have to trust them.” (Naomi)

4.3 Acceptance of the AZC

Several residents who are against the arrival of the AZC indicate that their concerns about the AZC cannot be alleviated by the municipality, also not by letting them participate (Peter, Ingrid, Linda).

“Look, the center is something I worry about anyway. [...] And I am also frustrated about the municipality. But these are separate things. And the municipality will not take these worries away.” (Linda)

Several residents express frustration that the municipality decided to place an AZC before involving the public, which makes it feel to them as if the decision is being forced upon a population that opposes it. They would have preferred to be consulted from the beginning on whether to place an AZC at all (Peter, Ingrid, Linda). Some residents indicate that if there were to be a referendum now that showed that the population does want an AZC, they would feel

more acceptance towards the decision (Peter, Linda, Naomi). However, Ingrid indicates that if a referendum were to be held now, she would distrust these results.

“Look, I don’t want it [the AZC]. But then [if there is a referendum] I accept it. Yes, take the elections for example. If my party doesn’t have the majority in the House, I think that’s a great shame. But I accept that.” (Peter)

“[About a voting] Well, you know what it is? You can’t check it. That’s often the case. So if you have the survey, and the majority say yes, for example. You can never check it. I think people have also lost confidence in the government.” (Ingrid)

Naomi on the other hand does indicate that the municipality can play a role in resolving her concerns. According to her, this can be done by actively discussing with residents who have strong opinions regarding the AZC. She continues saying that she does not have a big enough opinion on the topic to voice this to the municipality.

“[About whether the municipality can diminish her concerns] yes they can. It’s good that they ask people things and listen. Because, you know, you can put some big shots together so that they will make the choice for everybody. But I just think, we can all just talk about it with each other.” (Naomi)

Sophie does not have concerns over what consequences the AZC would have for the municipality. Therefore, the municipality cannot play a role in diminishing these concerns. She does share concerns about whether the municipality would push through with the plans, for Sophie these could be alleviated by showing more determination in their actions.

“What I’m a little afraid of is that the municipality will give in to the people who don’t want it and that the plans will be completely scaled back to ninety asylum seekers or something. While I think, Didam come on, say. Kick in the ass. You’re already a hundred years behind.” (Sophie)

5. Discussion

This qualitative research into the local resistance to the placement of an AZC in the municipality Montferland since the introduction of the dispersal law has tried to explain the reasoning behind this resistance. Furthermore, I have looked into whether the municipality can alleviate this resistance. To do this different data sources were used in which residents of the municipality who have concerns either over the placement of the AZC. The findings in this research mostly align with the predictions.

Many residents fear that the placement of an AZC will bring threats to their safety, socio-economic status, and cultural identity. This finding supports integrated threat theory (Stephan & Stephan, 1996; Stephan et al., 2000; Croucher, 2017), which argues that individuals are more likely to resist out-groups, e.g. asylum seekers, when they believe their arrival poses realistic (e.g., theft, housing shortages) or symbolic (e.g., not adopting cultural norms) threats.

For residents opposing the AZC the socio-economic threats mean that they fear that asylum seekers will be given priority over certain facilities (e.g. housing, education, care). This aligns with collective psychological ownership theory (Martinovic & Verkuyten, 2017), which poses that individuals want to defend their sense of ownership over a certain area and want to maintain rights and privileges, e.g. priority in education, that come along with this perceived ownership.

Opposing residents expect that threats will become more noticeable for them if the AZC would be placed closer in their vicinity. However, all these residents also oppose asylum reception in the Netherlands in general. This suggests that local opposition is not only grounded in a not in my back yard (Hermansson, 2006; Hubbard, 2005a) mindset, which would mean that residents only reject the AZC if its placed nearby (Zorlu, 2016), but also stretches beyond this. This general opposition can possibly be explained by the image that individuals have of asylum seekers. When asylum seekers are described (e.g. in media) as being voluntary migrants or fortune seekers, this is associated with less public support for their accommodation (Verkuyten et al., 2018).

The residents opposing the AZC plans express negative sentiments about the dispersal law. They argue that the municipality can no longer listen to what the residents want due to this national obligation. This perception that local democratic processes are being undermined, thus undermines the procedural justice (Lind & Tyler, 1988; Worden & McLean, 2016). Moreover, uncertainty surrounding the law's permanence intensifies this procedural distrust. Residents

argue that if the law might be withdrawn later, the municipality should delay taking action in the meantime.

The negative image of the dispersal law is further intensified by the idea that issues caused by asylum seekers' reception that residents hear about in the media and through their contacts will disseminate over the country as a result of this division. This sentiment is reflected in the broader current debate in which individuals question whether the placement of an AZC will result in them being treated unfairly in the long run, as other municipalities may not continue with providing reception. If other municipalities refuse to comply, this would require the municipalities that did adhere to bear a disproportionate share of the perceived costs (NOS, 2025a). This reflects a failure of distributive justice, as the division of responsibility is not broadly perceived as fair (Cook & Hegtvedt, 1983; Solodoch, 2024). Rather than legitimizing national asylum policies, the dispersal law appears to generate a sense of hostility.

Furthermore, most opposing residents express distrust towards the municipality. They feel ignored during the decision-making process. This lack of communication and trust undermines the municipality's ability to legitimize its decisions in the eyes of residents, making it difficult to create local support. Residents also note that acceptance of the AZC would likely be higher if the municipality had involved them at an earlier stage. Specifically, by consulting the community before any concrete plans were made. This sentiment strongly aligns with the principles of procedural justice, emphasizing the importance of early and meaningful participation in policy decisions that affect the local community (Lind & Tyler, 1988; Worden & McLean, 2016).

The current participation approach of Montferland municipality is mostly focused on informing and consulting (e.g. on the location of the AZC). While these individuals emphasize dissatisfaction with the municipality's handling of the process, it remains unclear whether they would have accepted the AZC had the procedures been more participatory, by e.g. involving residents in decision-making (Wilcox 1994). Many residents appeared fundamentally opposed to any form of asylum reception in their municipality and deemed the municipality's actions as only part of the reason for their opposition, suggesting that opposition may have persisted regardless of when or how they were involved. Future research could investigate whether these procedural concerns are truly independent of broader opposition to asylum reception, or whether they serve as a socially acceptable way to express underlying objections related to perceived threats. This can be done by researching whether individuals who would be actively involved in decision-making since the start of the process would still oppose asylum seekers

accommodation. This distinction is important, as it influences how municipalities can effectively address resistance.

Important to note is that the opinions of the interviewed resident who is in favor of the AZC differentiated to those who opposed it. This resident expresses that she thinks the municipality will be enriched through the arrival of diverse individuals in the case of the arrival of an AZC. She further expressed positive sentiments towards the dispersal law, as this will stimulate more municipalities to initiate AZC plans. It is notable that despite the different views on asylum seeker reception, this person did also have serious concerns about the approach of the municipality. However, her concern was that Montferland's approach would lead to a discontinuation of the plans, thus leaving the task of reception to other municipalities.

This research has focused primarily on individuals in the municipality who experience concerns over the placement of the AZC. The discrepancy in answers might therefore be explained due to the fact that this interviewed individual was the only one who did not have concerns in relation to the consequences that the AZC might have, but solely over the actions of the municipality. Therefore for follow-up research it would be relevant to study whether opponents of asylum reception are disproportionately visible in public discourse, and to what extent their views reflect broader public sentiment. Understanding this is relevant for policymakers and municipalities, as it helps ensure that decisions are based on a balanced perspective rather than being driven by the most outspoken voices alone.

Another valuable direction for future research would be to explore the origins of certain dominant narratives among residents, such as the belief that asylum seekers primarily come for financial gain or that their presence leads to unsafe situations. These perceptions are not always based on direct experience, e.g. stories shared by acquaintances from neighboring municipalities. It would be interesting to examine whether these municipalities indeed face increased nuisance levels, or whether such stories reflect perceived rather than actual experiences. This distinction is relevant because concerns rooted in direct experience may require different policy approaches than those based on indirect information. For example when concerns do originate from direct experiences, concrete policy changes are proven to be more helpful to create structural changes, while for indirect information reframing the debate is more effective e.g. by debunking misinformation (Butcher & Neidhardt, 2020).

The reader should bear in mind that there was reluctance of individuals to participate in interviews on this sensitive topic. As a result, the number of interviews conducted was limited. Nevertheless, this limitation was addressed by actively supplementing the data with additional sources. This triangulation of data provided a deepened understanding of the perspectives in the

municipality, strengthening the validity and reliability of the findings. While future research with a broader set of in-depth interviews could offer even more nuanced insights, the current approach already resulted in representative results.

It is also important to acknowledge that this research has focused on concerns over the placement of an AZC in the Montferland municipality. Therefore findings are most applicable to concerned residents in this specific municipality. However Montferland shares key characteristics with other rural municipality, such as strong community ties and limited previous exposure to asylum reception (Raad Oude IJsselstreek, 2023). Findings of this study may therefore be relevant to these similar contexts in the Netherlands. Still attention should be paid when attempting to generalize them to other municipalities as local dynamics may vary.

6. Conclusion

To conclude, by being aware of which concerns circulate within the municipality regarding the placement of the AZC, the municipality of Montferland will be better equipped to navigate local resistance within the boundaries of national asylum policies. The findings highlight that resistance is not only driven by fears about safety, socio-economic status, and cultural clashes, but also by mistrust in how decisions are made and communicated by the municipality. The dispersal law deepens this mistrust, as residents believe it prevents the municipality from being able to listen to its residents. According to residents the municipality will not be able to take away these concerns by changing their actions. However they are able to create more acceptance to their decision-making among residents who oppose the AZC.

Acceptance can mostly be created by involving residents earlier in the decision-making process, specifically before major decisions are finalized. Further policy suggestions to achieve more acceptance would be to implement a communication strategy that addresses concerns over asylum seekers reception, emphasizes facts and shares positive experiences from comparable municipalities. Lastly procedural transparency should be enhanced by clearly communicating the boundaries of public influence to prevent false expectations and reduce frustration. This can be done by distinguishing between aspects that are fixed (e.g., national dispersal quotas) and those that are open to local input (e.g., location details). This can be reinforced by publicly sharing government orders.

Using these findings the municipality will be able to create more local acceptance for future initiatives and in the meantime rebuild trust between residents and the Montferland municipality.

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Appendix A

Codebook

Code name	Definition	Example
Safety threats	Perceived threat from asylum seekers on safety in municipality.	“People have already had to install roller shutters, cameras. People can no longer go out in the evening to walk their dogs, especially women, because then they come after them and they make nasty remarks in Arabic, which they cannot understand.” (Ingrid)
Socio-economic threats	Perceived threat from asylum seekers on housing, healthcare, education or municipality finances.	“Our young people can’t even find a house, and now suddenly there’s space for asylum seekers? It just doesn’t feel fair.” (Resident speech)
Cultural threats	Perceived threat to local norms, values, or lifestyle due to cultural differences.	“They don’t adapt to Dutch culture. They live by their own rules, and that creates tension. We already saw that in other municipalities.” (Peter)
Enrichment	Perceived ways in which the municipality would be enriched because of an AZC.	“You also learn about them. About their culture and background. But also understand our own language better. The meetings are also an enrichment for us. And give us positive energy.” (Council deliberation)
Colonialism	Statements referring back to colonial times or leaders.	“I think that these people who gave their lives for our freedom, if they saw the state our country is in and the new occupation taking place here, they would turn in their graves.” (Resident speech)
Distance	The ways in which distance to the AZC impacts the attitudes towards it.	“Didam will get an asylum seekers center, then it’s getting closer.” (Peter)

National asylum policy	Opinions of national asylum policies (excluding dispersal law) and what it means for the municipality.	“You can’t bring any more people here, whether they’re from Syria or America.” (Council deliberation)
Dispersal law	Opinions of dispersal law and what it means for the municipality.	“Why does it all have to be pushed through at once? Are you afraid that the distribution law will be taken off the table?” (Council activity)
Participating in methods	How and why did residents participate in the participation methods.	“I did indeed participate in this, because I already had some opinions at that point that I wanted to share. That I just don’t want the asylum seekers center.” (Linda)
Not participating in methods	Why did residents not participate in methods.	“I don’t really care about all that. I have enough things, and I’m busy enough, so no.” (Naomi)
Evaluation of participation	Opinions on whether the participation methods are effective.	“[About locations for the AZC] Actually there are about three options and most likely it will just be the old municipal building. [...] They have already shaped it in a mold, cast it in a mold, so there is actually little left to really determine.” (Linda)
Decision-making right	Opinions on who should be make decisions (municipality vs. residents).	“I think that citizens have more right to decide than the municipality, yes. Otherwise I would not be in favor of a referendum.” (Peter)
(Dis)trust in municipality	Statements on whether individuals experience the municipality as trustworthy or neutral.	“I don’t have a lot of faith in the municipality anymore. Because they’ve already done so much that I really think they’re idiots.” (Linda)
Reasons municipality to (not) want AZC	Statements on why municipality would want to place an AZC or not.	“Look, I can imagine that you do it because you have to. You are the

		government and your higher boss requires it.” (Peter)
Clarity of decision-making	Statements on how clear the decision-making of municipality is and how residents deal with this.	“October 17 th there will be another private meeting in our open municipality. You wonder what there has to be talked about, so secretly. I’ve looked into in what kind of cases a meeting may be closed, however tricking residents isn’t one of them...” (Facebook)
Further critique municipality	Critique of municipality, which are not reflected in other code groups.	“Suppose they have three hundred residents here. Asylum seekers, refugees. That should have been three thousand a long time ago. But we're overlooking that. “ (Sophie)
Alleviate concerns	Statements on whether municipality can alleviate concerns and how.	“Yes they can. It’s good that they ask people things and listen. Because, you know, you can put some big shots together so that they will make the choice for everybody. But I just think, we can all just talk about it with each other.” (Naomi)
Create acceptance	Statements on whether municipality can create more acceptance and how.	“Look, I don’t want it [the AZC]. But then [if there is a referendum] I accept it. Yes, take the elections for example. If my party doesn’t have the majority in the House, I think that’s a great shame. But I accept that.” (Peter)

Appendix B

Recruitment flyers

Flyer 1 (used to post through letterboxes):

GEZOCHT: Bewoners Montferland voor interview over azc-plannen

De gemeente Montferland heeft plannen om een asielzoekerscentrum (azc) in Didam te plaatsen. Voor mijn afstudeeronderzoek wil ik bewoners interviewen die vertellen over hoe zij dit ervaren. Ik ben benieuwd naar jouw mening over hoe de gemeente omgaat met zorgen over de komst van het azc.

Maak jij je zorgen over het azc?

Voel jij je betrokken bij de besluitvorming?

Wat vind jij belangrijk?

- Interviews vinden plaats in april/mei
- Interviews kunnen bij jou in de buurt, bij mij, of online
- Is helemaal vertrouwelijk en anoniem

Even iets over mijzelf: Ik ben Renée de Jong (22), wonende in Doetinchem. Momenteel ben ik bezig met het afstuderen van een universitaire masteropleiding. Hiervoor doe ik dit onderzoek.

Wil je meedoen of eerst meer informatie? Stuur me een berichtje:

 rnhdjong@gmail.com

Flyer 2 (used to put up in public places):

GEZOCHT: Bewoners Montferland voor interview over azc-plannen

De gemeente Montferland heeft plannen om een asielzoekerscentrum (azc) in Didam te plaatsen. Voor mijn afstudeeronderzoek wil ik bewoners interviewen die vertellen over hoe zij dit ervaren. Ik ben benieuwd naar jouw mening over hoe de gemeente omgaat met zorgen over de komst van het azc.

Maak jij je zorgen over het azc?

Voel jij je betrokken bij de besluitvorming?

Wat vind jij belangrijk?

- Interviews vinden plaats in april/mei
- Interviews kunnen op een locatie naar keuze of online plaatsvinden
- Vertrouwelijk & anoniem

Even iets over mijzelf: Ik ben Renée de Jong, 22 jaar, wonende in Doetinchem. Momenteel ben ik bezig met het afstuderen van een universitaire masteropleiding. Hiervoor doe ik dit onderzoek.

Wil je meedoen of eerst meer informatie? Stuur me een berichtje!

 rnhdejong@gmail.com

Interesse? Neem contact op: rnhdejong@gmail.com
Interesse? Neem contact op: rnhdejong@gmail.com
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Interesse? Neem contact op: rnhdejong@gmail.com

Appendix C

Topic list for resident interviews

Introduction

- Master thesis for Governance of Migration and Diversity at EUR
- Goal: Research the concerns about the arrival of the AZC in the municipality of Montferland and the opinions about how the municipality is handling the placement of the AZC
- Safety: Anonymous, objective, can stop at any moment and do not have to answer all questions
- Sign informed consent
- Agreement to record conversation
- Are there further questions?

Knowledge check

What do you know about the plans of the municipality of Montferland to place an AZC?

Explain plans: 250 places for asylum seekers, in or around in Didam, in 2025/2026

Reasons for resistance

What do you think are the consequences of these plans for the municipality of Montferland?

- What disadvantages do you think the arrival of an AZC will bring for the municipality?
- To what extent do you think the arrival of an AZC will have consequences for the safety of the municipality?
- To what extent do you think the arrival of an AZC will have economic consequences for the municipality?
 - o Probing questions: you can think of 1) houses, 2) jobs, 3) costs for the municipality
- To what extent do you think the arrival of an AZC will have consequences for the culture in the municipality?
 - o Probing questions: you can also think of 1) the Montferland identity, so the way of thinking and doing and the norms and values in the municipality of Montferland and 2) the Dutch identity, so the way of thinking, doing and the norms and values in the Netherlands

Imagine that an AZC with the same capacity (250 people) would be built at another location outside the municipality of Montferland. To what extent would your opinion differ on the arrival of that AZC, and why?

- To what extent does the distance between the AZC and the municipality of Montferland play a role in your opinion, and why?

Dispersal law

Explanation: The reason for the plans was the dispersal law, this is a law that came into effect last year. This law distributes places for asylum seekers across municipalities in the Netherlands based on the population size and socio-economic scores of the municipalities.

To what extent do you think it is fair that these places are distributed across municipalities in this way?

- To what extent do you think that the burdens (such as pressure on facilities, safety) are distributed fairly across municipalities?
- As a result of the distribution, 221 places for asylum seekers must be made available in the municipality of Montferland. You indicated earlier in this interview that you ... think about this. To what extent does this distribution of asylum places across the Netherlands influence your opinion about the arrival of an AZC in Montferland?

If the law no longer needs to be implemented, but the municipality continues with the plans, what would you think about that?

Municipal communication and citizen participation

How were you informed about the plans for the AZC?

- Did the municipality play a role in this? If so, in what way? If not, would you have liked to see it differently?

Explanation: The municipality has drawn up a communication and participation plan to involve and communicate with the residents of the municipality of Montferland about the plans for the AZC. I will list various ways that are discussed in this plan to involve the residents. I am curious to know whether the municipality has reached you in this way and what your opinion is about this way of involving residents.

- The municipality has made information about the plans available via online media, so via 1) their website, 2) their social media, 3) the press. How did you experience this?
- The municipality has also made information about the plans available via offline media, such as the Montferland news. How did you experience this?
- In the towns of Didam, Loil and Nieuw-Dijk, a survey was sent out to residents, entrepreneurs and organizations in February. By completing this survey, they can help think about suitable reception locations and concerns can be expressed. How did you experience this?

- After processing the results of the survey, the municipality plans to organize walk-in moments, where residents can discuss the results. What is your opinion about this?
- A sounding board group will also be set up, this is a kind of advisory council that can communicate the interests of the residents to the municipality. With this sounding board group, an existing AZC will be visited and it will be examined how an AZC can be realized in Montferland. What is your opinion about this?

To what extent do you feel involved in the plans for the arrival of an AZC through these strategies?

- Which strategies help in particular?
- What could make you feel more involved?
 - o Probing questions: you could think of dinner table discussions, receiving information letters, a special telephone number for questions/input, neighborhood meetings

To what extent do you feel that you have had the opportunity to express your opinion about the arrival of the AZC?

To what extent do you feel that the municipality takes your opinion seriously when it comes to the arrival of the AZC?

To what extent does the way in which the municipality communicates and involves you influence your opinion about the AZC plans?

To what extent does the communication/participation strategy strengthen or weaken your concerns about the AZC?

Decision-making of municipality

Explanation: The municipality of Montferland has decided a number of things that are fixed with regard to the AZC, namely that it should be able to accommodate 250 asylum seekers and that it will be placed in Didam. Residents of the municipality are allowed to have a say in the further decisions within this, such as whether it should be one or more locations and how they are set up.

What do you think of this division between municipal decisions and citizen participation?

- To what extent should residents have more right to determine what happens in the municipality of Montferland, with regard to the arrival of an AZC than the municipality itself and why?
- To what extent should the municipality of Montferland itself be able to determine what happens in the municipality of Montferland, with regard to the arrival of an AZC, and why?

To what extent do you have the idea that the municipality is open/transparent about the placement of the AZC?

To what extent was it clear to you how the municipality arrived at its decisions about the AZC?

To what extent do you trust the decision-making process of the municipality regarding the AZC?

To what extent do you feel that the municipality acts neutrally when organizing residents' participation in the arrival of the AZC?

To what extent does the decision-making process of the municipality influence your opinion about the AZC plans?

To what extent does the decision-making process strengthen or weaken your concerns about the AZC?

Conclusion

Are there any things that we have not yet discussed that you would like to mention?

- If you think of something later, you can contact me via this email address
- Thank you for participating

Resident factsheet (respondent can fill this in after interview):

Name:

Age:

Place of residence:

How long have you lived in the municipality of Montferland:

Would you like the survey to be sent to you? Yes/no

If yes, what is your email address?

Appendix D

Checklist ethical and privacy aspects of research

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'W. J. R.', written over a horizontal line.

CHECKLIST ETHICAL AND PRIVACY ASPECTS OF RESEARCH

INSTRUCTION

This checklist should be completed for every research study that is conducted at the Department of Public Administration and Sociology (DPAS). This checklist should be completed *before* commencing with data collection or approaching participants. Students can complete this checklist with help of their supervisor.

This checklist is a mandatory part of the empirical master's thesis and has to be uploaded along with the research proposal.

The guideline for ethical aspects of research of the Dutch Sociological Association (NSV) can be found on their website (http://www.nsv-sociologie.nl/?page_id=17). If you have doubts about ethical or privacy aspects of your research study, discuss and resolve the matter with your EUR supervisor. If needed and if advised to do so by your supervisor, you can also consult Dr. Bonnie French, coordinator of the Sociology Master's Thesis program.

PART I: GENERAL INFORMATION

Project title: Weerstand tegen het azc in de gemeente Montferland: Verklaringen en de rol van gemeentelijk optreden

Name, email of student: Renée de Jong, 747021rj@eur.nl

Name, email of supervisor: Wybren Nooitgedagt, nooitgedagt@essb.eur.nl

Start date and duration: 14/01/2025 – 22/06/2025

Is the research study conducted within DPAS YES

If 'NO': at or for what institute or organization will the study be conducted?
(e.g. internship organization)

PART II: HUMAN SUBJECTS

1. Does your research involve human participants. YES

If 'NO': skip to part V.

If 'YES': does the study involve medical or physical research? NO

Research that falls under the Medical Research Involving Human Subjects Act ([WMO](#)) must first be submitted to [an accredited medical research ethics committee](#) or the Central Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects ([CCMO](#)).

2. Does your research involve field observations without manipulations that will not involve identification of participants. NO

If 'YES': skip to part IV.

3. Research involving completely anonymous data files (secondary data that has been anonymized by someone else). NO

If 'YES': skip to part IV.

PART III: PARTICIPANTS

1. Will information about the nature of the study and about what participants can expect during the study be withheld from them? NO
2. Will any of the participants not be asked for verbal or written 'informed consent,' whereby they agree to participate in the study? NO
3. Will information about the possibility to discontinue the participation at any time be withheld from participants? NO
4. Will the study involve actively deceiving the participants? NO
Note: almost all research studies involve some kind of deception of participants. Try to think about what types of deception are ethical or non-ethical (e.g. purpose of the study is not told, coercion is exerted on participants, giving participants the feeling that they harm other people by making certain decisions, etc.).
5. Does the study involve the risk of causing psychological stress or negative emotions beyond those normally encountered by participants? NO
6. Will information be collected about special categories of data, as defined by the GDPR (e.g. racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade union membership, genetic data, biometric data for the purpose of uniquely identifying a person, data concerning mental or physical health, data concerning a person's sex life or sexual orientation)? YES
7. Will the study involve the participation of minors (<18 years old) or other groups that cannot give consent? NO
8. Is the health and/or safety of participants at risk during the study? NO
9. Can participants be identified by the study results or can the confidentiality of the participants' identity not be ensured? YES
10. Are there any other possible ethical issues with regard to this study? NO

If you have answered 'YES' to any of the previous questions, please indicate below why this issue is unavoidable in this study.

Considering this is a study on negative attitudes towards local asylum seeker centers it is unavoidable to ask for people their political and philosophic beliefs. In addition to this the study will focus on how municipalities can mediate these attitudes. To know this it will be needed to interview municipality workers. It might be possible to identify the identity of the municipality workers by the study results. However, no personal opinions of the municipality workers will be asked, only about the work processes of the municipality. There are no other risks for ethics.

What safeguards are taken to relieve possible adverse consequences of these issues (e.g., informing participants about the study afterwards, extra safety regulations, etc.).

I will ensure that the people who are asked for their own political and philosophical beliefs remain anonymous, and it will not be possible to identify them. For the municipality workers I will ensure that no personal data or characteristics such as gender or age will be part of the study results, so that it is less likely to identify them. I will ask every participant to give conformed consent before taking part in the interview. I will emphasize that the participants can opt out at any moment and can also withdraw their consent at a later moment. Lastly, data will not be shared with anyone unless it was addressed to the participants.

Are there any unintended circumstances in the study that can cause harm or have negative (emotional) consequences to the participants? Indicate what possible circumstances this could be.

No

Please attach your informed consent form in Appendix I, if applicable.

Continue to part IV.

PART IV: SAMPLE

Where will you collect or obtain your data?

The Netherlands, municipality Montferland through interviews

Note: indicate for separate data sources.

What is the (anticipated) size of your sample?

8 citizens of the municipality Montferland, and 2 workers for the municipality.

Note: indicate for separate data sources.

What is the size of the population from which you will sample?

36.031 citizens of municipality Montferland, and around 330 workers for the municipality Montferland

Note: indicate for separate data sources.

Continue to part V.

Part V: Data storage and backup

Where and when will you store your data in the short term, after acquisition?

For both the interviewed groups the recordings and data will be stored on my own computer and phone. This will be from April 2025 till June 2025.

Note: indicate for separate data sources, for instance for paper-and pencil test data, and for digital data files.

Who is responsible for the immediate day-to-day management, storage and backup of the data arising from your research?

The researcher.

How (frequently) will you back-up your research data for short-term data security?

Once. This backup will be stored on a usb-stick, so that it can be stored in a different place than on the computer of the researcher.

In case of collecting personal data how will you anonymize the data?

I will use pseudonyms. I will not include personal information in the results, such exact address, date of birth, gender or age. Answers to questions regarding personal details such as name or job of the participant will be written down instead of recorded and thus kept separated from the rest of the data.

Note: It is advisable to keep directly identifying personal details separated from the rest of the data. Personal details are then replaced by a key/ code. Only the code is part of the database with data and the list of respondents/research subjects is kept separate.

PART VI: SIGNATURE

Please note that it is your responsibility to follow the ethical guidelines in the conduct of your study. This includes providing information to participants about the study and ensuring confidentiality in storage and use of personal data. Treat participants respectfully, be on time at appointments, call participants when they have signed up for your study and fulfil promises made to participants.

Furthermore, it is your responsibility that data are authentic, of high quality and properly stored. The principle is always that the supervisor (or strictly speaking the Erasmus University Rotterdam) remains owner of the data, and that the student should therefore hand over all data to the supervisor.

Hereby I declare that the study will be conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the Department of Public Administration and Sociology at Erasmus University Rotterdam. I have answered the questions truthfully.

Name student: Renée de Jong

Name (EUR) supervisor:

Date: 15/3/2025

Date: 2025-03-20

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Renée de Jong', with a stylized, cursive script.A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be a stylized 'WJ' followed by a horizontal line, likely representing the supervisor's name.

APPENDIX I: Informed Consent Form (if applicable)

Informatie onderzoek en consent formulier

Waar gaat het onderzoek over?

In de gemeente Montferland worden er plannen om een asielzoekerscentrum te plaatsen in of rondom Didam. Verschillende bewoners geven aan dat ze het hier niet mee eens, onder andere door middel van protesten en handtekeningenacties. Met dit onderzoek zal er worden gekeken naar wat de redenen zijn voor de weerstand tegen het asielzoekerscentrum. Verder zal er worden gekeken naar hoe bewoners de manier van optreden van de gemeente rondom de plaatsing van het azc ervaren.

Door wie wordt het onderzoek uitgevoerd?

Het onderzoek wordt uitgevoerd door Renée de Jong, als onderdeel van haar masterthesis. Deze masterthesis wordt uitgevoerd aan de Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam binnen de faculteit sociale- en gedragswetenschappen. Voor het contacteren van de onderzoeker kan het emailadres rnhdjong@gmail.com worden gebruikt.

Wat houdt meedoen aan het interview in?

Het interview zal dertig tot zestig minuten duren. Hierbij zal een audio-opname worden gemaakt voor de verwerking van de data. Deze opname zal worden verwijderd na het afronden van het onderzoek. In het onderzoek zal uw data worden geanonimiseerd met behulp van pseudoniemen. U heeft recht op verschillende dingen bij het meedoen aan het onderzoek:

- U kan altijd toegang krijgen tot deze opname.
- U kan altijd uw data corrigeren of verwijderen.
- U kan op ieder moment uw consent intrekken.
- U kan op ieder moment stoppen met het interview.
- U kan een klacht indienen bij de toezichthoudende autoriteit: Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam.

Voor verdere vragen over hoe er met de data zal worden omgegaan kan u de EUR data beschermingsofficier bereiken via privacy@eur.nl.

Door dit formulier te ondertekenen geeft u toestemming aan mij om u vragen te stellen over uw politieke meningen en filosofische overtuigingen.

Naam:

Datum:

Handtekening: