Conclusion

Enabling inclusion by creating discursive space

Being inclusive across cultural and ethnic differences continues to be an important and topical challenge for public services in European societies that host large immigrant communities and that are facing new immigration flows. Concurrently, welfare states are changing, and often, as in the Netherlands, a more active role for citizens as well as partnerships between government, professional expertise and civil society are deemed crucial for the welfare state’s survival. If the ideal of citizen responsibilization is to be pursued in a fashion that is also inclusive, this requires European societies to engage with ‘difference’ in a way that departs from the idea that immigrants and refugees must be seen primarily as vulnerable groups in need of help and lacking the resources to fully contribute to host societies.

In the Netherlands, as elsewhere, the way citizens relate to and participate in society can be very different, and civic participation surely need not be constructed along ethnic lines. On the contrary, many immigrant citizens construct their civic identity on different hinges and do not wish to be constantly addressed with reference to their foreign roots. But, simultaneously, others organise in community associations that arise around various themes of commonality with other immigrant citizens: be it ethnic, religious or cultural ties, hopes for a better societal position, experienced marginalisation or insecurities about how to relate to (certain aspects of) Dutch society, immigrant organisations unite people around specific themes that are often relevant to (neighbourhood-based) social work. Including these civil society actors in the process of ‘crafting communities’ (Trommel, 2013; see chapter 5) means finding new ways in which professional services and (local) government can connect to them in a balanced interplay. Socio-scientific research can offer an important contribution in creating these connections, as I hope to have shown throughout this dissertation.

This dissertation should be seen in the context of this social challenge. In the following, I will reflect on the outcomes of my quest, highlighting the contributions of my work as it relates to the notion of enabling knowledge, elaborated in chapter 5.

Enabling research and technologies of humility

Social scientists face new challenges in the current context of scientific knowledge production. In chapter 5 the phrase ‘support-oriented science’ is introduced to denote scientific research that intensifies its relation with social actors. Rather than being governed primarily by the paradigms of traditional scientific disciplines, this type of research arises out of and develops in relation to (local) problems and in conversation with relevant social actors. It is scientific knowledge that develops
its social relevance ‘through the vociferous presence of “people”’ (Nowotny et al., 2001, pp. 118–119). This, however, does not necessarily mean that scientific research should take over problem definitions and directions for finding answers to those problems from societal actors who struggle with them.

To pursue the ideal of co-production between researchers and societal actors and to search for productive techniques that allow for co-production, we should abandon the idea that support-oriented research cannot act as a ‘game changer’ but can only ‘search for applicable solutions, departing from existing products and existing principles’ (as stated in the excerpt from Hans Clevers reported at the beginning of chapter 5). Taking into account the needs of society and the knowledge of other actors does not (need to) imply that science can develop only existing assumptions into applicable products. Instead, it means creating a connection between the scientific field and other societal fields in the contexts of research agenda setting and knowledge production and implementation rather than only creating that connection during dissemination or application. This in no way contradicts the idea that it is science’s task to critically consider given practices or the assumptions they imply and to look for innovative ways to connect the existent body of knowledge with analyses of how questions are framed and data are interpreted.41

On the contrary, Jasanoff’s (2003) call for technologies of humility reminds us of the crucial role of (social) science in making explicit the normative assumptions of ‘factual’ scientific research, stressing the importance of framing and uncertainty, which becomes possible through involving societal actors in a process of reflection and learning.42 Chapter 5 argues that social sciences contribute to this task by virtue of their ability to create enabling knowledge. As defined there, enabling knowledge is knowledge that generates new conceptualisations of a specific reality and that shows new possible courses of action based on existing conditions. It is not a knowledge that provides the final answers to societal questions, taking over the deliberating role of politics, but a knowledge that enables people and institutions to find solutions, by providing new directions of thought, revealing and including different perspectives, and allowing for novel connections between those perspectives. To examine the extent to which the research presented can be considered enabling, I will consider first the outcomes of the research and then the process of research and the context in which it was produced.

**Limitations**

Before proceeding with the review, I will take a moment to point out two limitations of this research. First, although the participatory part has provided an additional dimension to the empirical inquiry, making this investigation thicker, the empirical research that underlies this work is relatively small. A large effort has been dedicated to contextualising this empirical work, connecting narratives with theoretical perspectives and conceptualising the relation between the participatory sub-parts and the overall research, so contributing to theoretical development on the role of participatory projects in support-oriented research. Although the somewhat restricted scale

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41 What it does contradict is the idea, also conveyed in the excerpt from Hans Clevers, that game-changing, innovative science must come from the independent genius of an individual scientific mind. That this is how science works is a myth that has long been debunked by the socio-scientific study of science itself (Shapin and Schaffer 1987, Latour 1987, Kuhn 1962 are some classical works in this area).

42 See the introduction for an explanation of the notion of technologies of humility.
of the empirical study can be seen as a limitation, it should also be noted that it this circumscribed character that has made co-creation possible.

Second, the research Disclosing Cooperation could have been strengthened by involving more than one researcher in the process of data collection and analysis. Excluding recurrent exchanges with other Kenniswerkplaats-Tienplus researchers in meetings and informal talks, the bulk of the data collection and analysis was done by one researcher only. This stand-alone position brings an element of fragility to this project. Of course, the stand-alone position was counterbalanced by the dialogue with practitioners in the participatory sub-parts of the research. However, the central role given to the participatory process in the data analysis might make the reader wonder whether the focus on actor’s categories does not compromise the ability to provide deeper insight in those aspects of reality that are not captured by actor’s understanding: Isn’t the ability to provide critical insights tied to the ability to use external analyst categories that assess and possibly question actors’ categories? Although, in this study, the distinction between actors’ categories and analyst categories becomes partly blurred43, the critical potential lies in the dialogical relation between different viewpoints of different actor’s groups. Participatory research strives to move the critical potential (that in non-participatory research appears in the knowledge product) within the research process itself, as part of a process of discussion and reflection that advances’ both researchers’ and participants’ understanding of their own practice. In this research, this aim has been pursued, as extensively described in chapter 4. The research output does indeed reflect the categories of actors (volunteers and professionals), but these categories are also challenged through making visible and relating opposed discourses. Still, the fact remains that this process would have benefitted from involving different researchers in the project.

Two aspects of enabling knowledge

In the following, I will review the research presented in the chapters by first considering the results and then the context of production and the local impact of the research process. More explicitly, this concluding section will be organised into two parts, examining two different questions regarding enabling knowledge:

- **Research product as enabling.** Can the knowledge resulting from this research, by its nature and the way it was produced, be regarded as enabling? This is the case when the knowledge produced can potentially lead to change because it reflects different viewpoints and builds further on existing practices by conceptualising their prospects in novel ways, and connects local relevance with supralocal, scientific relevance.

- **Research process as enabling.** Does the process through which the knowledge is produced and disseminated foster change at a local level? Here I examine whether the research has actually led to change through the process of research itself. This is the case when research involves societal actors in a way that promotes ownership of knowledge outcomes and when production and dissemination connect this knowledge to practice in such a way that it becomes directly meaningful for the actors involved.

43 As is prescribed by a participatory methodology (see chapter 4).
Research product as enabling

The research Disclosing Cooperation shows that rethinking the position of immigrant organisations in the social policy domain can contribute to creating an inclusive system of social support. The enabling character of the research product must be located in making visible the practice and framing of MVCOs (Migrant Voluntary Community Organisations), contrasting these with the dominant framing of MVCOs’ role in the formal field of parenting support and youth policy, and connecting them with broader ambitions of the youth policy. In the current Dutch policy, social work should be responsive, tailored and functioning in a productive interplay with informal and voluntary support. This idea is linked with the ‘participation society’, a phrase that in the Netherlands indicates the ‘shift towards civil society’ that is taking place in many European countries. Like other societal actors who combine creating local communities for mutual support with motivating citizens in sharing and articulating their needs and experiences, MVCOs have important resources to contribute to the development of such a system. These resources go beyond linking mainstream services with immigrant communities.

It may seem obvious that MVCOs should be seen as relevant social actors in a policy context that pursues the reinforcement of communities, the contribution of civil society in defining parenting agendas and the involvement of citizens in mutual support. Disclosing Cooperation shows how in reality this is not the case and how divergence in understanding MVCOs’ role impairs the possibility of cooperation between MVCOs and professionals. As discussed in chapter 3, differences in how the need for cooperation and the type of cooperation desired are framed affect MVCOs’ and professionals’ attempts to link with each other, actually weakening their ability to reinforce each other’s efforts to support immigrant families.

Professional workers in public services often conceptualise cooperation with immigrant organisations from what I have called the frame of access, a frame that emphasises only the bridging role of those organisations. This frame clearly resonates with the established view of immigrant organisations’ contributions to social policy aims, identified in chapter 2 as ‘the axis of social unity’.

Disclosing Cooperation shines a different light on the role of MVCOs by making visible the (less explicit) frame of shared spaces, which is more in tune with ‘the axis of local empowerment’ identified in chapter 2. Within this frame, immigrant organisations’ most important contribution concerns their generating conditions for the social support of immigrant families based on ‘active citizenship’. Although the idea of active citizenship, a central slogan of current Dutch policy discourse, has many different meanings and has itself been deconstructed and problematised (for instance by Hurenkamp et al., 2012), I use it here to indicate the role that citizens are expected to take in relation to their own wellbeing and in interacting with social support services. According to current policy views, citizens can no longer rely on the state to act as supreme guardian of their wellbeing, but must take a front role in creating the conditions for the type of wellbeing they envisage and towards which they can work, together with institutions, professional services and fellow citizens. By response, professionals offering support should become competent in connecting their expertise with citizens’ own definitions of wellbeing, their own wish for positive
change and their own ability to work towards that change together with their social environment (Vlaar et al., 2013).

In itself, this sounds like a promising prospect. But, at the very least, it presupposes citizens whose views, wishes, perspectives and possibilities are articulated or can become articulated in dialogue with professionals. In the case of immigrant families from ‘marginalised’ communities, Disclosing Cooperation offers a view of immigrant organisations as catalysts for the ‘preliminary work’ that is necessary to making this dialogue possible. It also helps professionals and policymakers visualise MVCOs as actors who are building educative communities and who are offering professional parenting support a chance to reinforce those communities—an aim that is a cornerstone of the novel Dutch youth policy.

‘Positive parenting’44 in a negative discursive environment?

The frame of shared spaces, which emerges from the analysis in chapters 2, 3 and 4, provides a picture of cooperation between MVCOs and social services that discloses the ideals and worldviews of MVCOs, brought to the surface in Disclosing Cooperation. In this view, professionals and MVCOs participate in a process that is mainly aimed at consciousness raising. As a natural part of the community work provided within their organisations, volunteers support groups of parents in actively reflecting on parenting issues, making these a subject of mutual exchange, and formulating questions or voicing insecurities from their own perspectives and priorities. Professionals connect to the work of volunteers by making their expertise available (regarding developmental issues and parenting techniques), deploying it to strengthen the process initiated and fuelled by MVCOs. The frame of shared spaces is rooted in a pluralistic view that emphasises the difference in starting points from which a specific demand is formulated (a demand that might, or might not, find an answer in the services and knowledge currently offered by professionals).

In the picture that unfolds through the frame of shared spaces, the collective dynamic within the MVCO is crucial to making communication around parenting issues possible and to reviving ownership and responsibility concerning parenthood in groups of both mothers and fathers. Some of the barriers that need to be removed are understood by volunteers in culturalist terms: they are seen as depending on cultural norms, such as taboos on discussing personal problems or models of parenthood that do not match the social context in which children are growing up. At the same time, however, an important aspect that should not be overlooked is the idea that immigrant parents’ ability to reflect on parenting problems and, even more, to share them with an institutional counselling figure is severely hindered by what may be described as ‘marginalised parenthood’: the negative meanings attached to immigrant parenting in dominant societal discourses. This notion connects to studies showing how ‘citizenship agendas’ (the framing of citizenship that prescribes appropriate behaviour, norms and values; De Koning et al., 2015) are increasingly defined in ethnic-specific ways, producing mutually exclusive categories of national self and migrant other (Schinkel & Van Houdt, 2010), and how parenting practices occupy a central position in this definition (Bonjour & De Hart, 2013; Van den Berg & Schinkel, 2009).

44 ‘Positive parenting’ is a phrase that refers to the parenting support program that is widely used by public parenting support services in the Netherlands (see Sanders 1999).
The negative effects of this marginalised position can be described on two levels, which are both addressed by MVCOs’ community work: First, it hampers the basic sense of confidence that is needed to question one’s own intimate relations and parenting practices. Second, it hinders the articulation of a personal perspective on one’s values, goals and normative orientation in parenting, which, in the current youth policy, should be the basis of exchange and discussion (among citizens and in relation with parenting experts). In this research, MVCO volunteers’ experiences and knowledge on this subject have been rephrased, employing the notion of \textit{safe spaces} and its theoretical background (Collins, 1991; Janssens & Steyaert, 2001). The participatory research discussed in chapter 4 had a central role in using dialogue to connect this notion with volunteers’ experiences.

\textbf{Silence and rebuilding positive parenthood within safe spaces}

The quote from one MVCO chair in chapter 3 (Leyla, page 84) eloquently expresses the idea that \textit{silence} is a precondition for mothers from her community to start finding ways to discuss parenting. In her description, she refers to silence from the side of (professional) counselling, which must make space for mothers’ own dynamic of exchange and for mothers’ own voices to emerge before entering into dialogue with them. On another occasion, an MVCO volunteer stated that the YFC (Youth and Family Centre) could invite mothers to a coffee morning as long as there would be no schedule: the mothers needed to have the chance to figure out ‘what this place means for them’, through spontaneous conversation with each other, before hearing what it could offer them from a YFC professional.\footnote{This quote is not included in the chapters but is reported in Ponzoni, 2012, p. 85.} Once again, the interchange must begin with silence from the institutional side. This silence is needed to give parents a chance to find their own position in the sphere of parenting discussions and in relation to professional parenting counselling. Building a collective positive image, which distances immigrant parents from the negative discourses of parental failure, marginalised parenthood and inadequate citizenship, is a precondition to taking responsibility, capitalise on one’s abilities and enhance these using available resources\footnote{A recent study of parenting strategies of immigrant parents connected with local MVCO’s in Dutch cities, shows that these parents make connections between different resources of parenting strategies (both from their own ethnic community and from the native Dutch environment) and between different networks of support. In this way they build a hybrid, intercultural parenting capital (Haan et al 2014).}. Chapters 3 and 4 show that an essential MVCO contribution to inclusive parenting support is their ability to catalyse and make space for this process of emancipation from negative self-images produced by the societal context. This process, when successful, produces shared narratives that professional counsellors can relate to and discuss. This can counter the dynamic of insecurity, defensiveness and distrust that impairs the relation between marginalised immigrant parents and mainstream parenting services.

The concept of safe spaces was very useful for describing in a more theoretical and articulate way the process described by volunteers. Rather than indicating a space that protects or fences off communities from society, the concept suggests a space for critical understanding of one’s position in that society, a space that makes it possible to counter dominant definitions of the self with positive self-definitions. Within this space, MVCOs strive to promote collective responsibility and
mutual support as well as dialogue about the moral, value-based direction of the education of children.

This links well with De Winter’s (2012) idea that policies focusing on the improvement of parenting conditions should focus more on the (now implicit) moral order of parenting—an idea that resonates with the premise of current Dutch youth policy. According to this premise, making the normative order of parenting a subject of democratic exchange and reflecting on one’s own position as a parent in society (in discussion with others who can contribute to creating a fruitful educative environment) is the task of the ‘good parent’ of the future. This translates to a need for fora that enable not only immigrant parents but, ideally, all parents to reflect on what parenthood means in the context of societal tension between ‘self’ and ‘other’ that is becoming more and more pervasive.

**Diversity and inclusion as polyphony**

Diversity and inclusion are presently contested notions in the Dutch political agenda. This holds for current municipal social policy and youth policy, where diversity is easily associated with old-fashioned ‘doelgroepenbeleid’ (policy targeting specific ethnic groups), which has been deemed as contributing to maintaining divisions between groups instead of removing boundaries. As we saw in chapter 2, policies targeting ‘minorities’ have always done so from a rather monocultural stance meant to tackle sociocultural disadvantages. The work presented in this dissertation does not suggest a revival of separate policies for immigrant parenting but points to a ‘dialogical’ understanding of diversity and inclusion challenges in which MVCOs are seen as a serious interlocutor. In this sense, I see the perspective on diversity endorsed in this dissertation as connecting with the idea of ‘diversity as polyphony’ that has recently emerged in organisation studies (Trittin & Schoeneborn, 2015). Translated to the context of youth policy, this entails adopting a pluralistic stance, where ‘pluralistic’ denotes not a plurality of ethnic or sociodemographic groups/identities but rather a ‘plurality of voices’: that is, the range of discourses that get expressed and can find resonance in the institutional setting.

**Enabling potential of the research**

The research presented here has produced enabling knowledge in so far as it has provided tools to support fruitful connections between MVCOs and professional services that are rooted in a reconceptualisation of the meaning of cooperation, obtained in dialogue with parties from the field of practice itself. The impasse the two parties experienced, as well as their perspectives on possible solutions, were connected with academic bodies of knowledge from different streams (including frame analysis, feminist theory, critical diversity management, literature on voluntary work and literature analysing Dutch integration policy and the position of immigrants in the Netherlands). The distinction between the axis of social unity and local empowerment enriches the discussion on the role of MVCO’s that is held in migration and ethnic studies and that mainly focusses on their contribution to integration (see chapter 2), connecting it to insights from studies of the voluntary sector in social geography.

From this framework, my research provides direction for rethinking the role of immigrant organisations but also the role of professionals. It implies, for instance, that professionals become competent in facilitating efforts made within voluntary organisations and informal networks to
make explicit the themes that immigrant parents experience as crucial but which are not yet articulated—not in the dialogue between parents and not in the expertise of professionals. This is a relevant insight for research in social work focussing on critical reflective practice, which emphasises the importance of workers recognising their social position in racial, gender, class and ethnic relations of dominance (Brookfield 2009, Gartner 2009, Hickson 2011). My research shows how immigrant organisations can potentially play an important role in this process of reflection, making it dialogical. It also contributes to the search for the necessary conditions for this dialogue to succeed, emphasising that strategies based on creating an open communicative setting, like frame reflection and cross frame discourse (Schön and Rein 1994), must be coupled with reflection on factors that transcend the communicative setting itself: The societal position of the actors (professionals and MVCO volunteers) involved in the dialogue, the broader discursive context that informs their role and image and the power differences that make some discourses marginal.

This framework can also be translated into practical tools that help volunteers and professionals reflect on their views of cooperation, enrich these views with additional understandings of cooperation, and translate them into concrete, innovative plans, as was recently done in the *Onderzoekswerkplaats Opvoedondersteuning in de Multi-etnische Wijk*47 (Interactive Research Workshop on Parenting Support in Multi-ethnic Neighbourhoods), described by Ponzoni and Distelbrink (2016). This project, which involved nascent cooperatives between MVCOs and parenting support services from five Dutch cities together with four researchers, is an example of the enabling potential of this work. Here, researchers and participants elaborated on (a simplified version of) the framework provided by this dissertation to define an array of roles that both parties could play and of forms that cooperation could take to reinforce and support immigrant families and their social environment. In addition to indicating a different direction for linking MVCOs and mainstream parenting and youth services, the research process itself became an example of one way to overcome frame divergence, as will be elaborated in the next section.

**Research process as enabling**

The second way in which this research can be described as enabling regards the process of knowledge production. My search for forms of research that support practice through the research process itself began with the research and development project conducted in the masterclass Diversity in Organisations, described in chapter 1. That chapter outlines the methodologic challenge of using research as a site of inclusion, a technique continued in Disclosing Cooperation. The masterclass provided an experiment in participative research in which theoretical tools were shared with participants and were used to shed light on their position in a discursive field. Specifically, the analysis concerned dominant discourses that have a negative impact on refugees’ inclusion in the labour market. The limiting effect of such discourses actually affected both majority and minority members.

Chapter 1 provides examples of participants who challenged their own discursive positioning through theoretically informed reflection and sharing analyses of their own experiences of inclusion/exclusion with others. While more extensive data collection and, especially, additional

47 This project was developed by the Kennisplatform Integratie en Samenleving (KIS; Knowledge Platform Integration and Society) in 2015.
monitoring of the effect on individual participants would have made it possible to take the implications of this kind of work even further, what made this project special was the combination of theoretical deepening with the inclusion of participants who are normally distant from the academic world of knowledge production and who occupy opposed positions in the societal challenge of refugee inclusion. The narrative approach gave participants the freedom to link their stories to the theoretical knowledge and concepts in an unconstrained fashion instead of having to fit their stories into pre-structured theoretical categories through more classical methods of data analysis. This approach offered opportunities to create interspaces for interaction between participants across different discursive positionings, providing common ground for linking the experiences of groups that perceived each other as distant. It enabled creating alternative forms of connection and achieving a collective sense of participant solidarity and engagement with which to challenge the negative assumptions regarding refugees within society.

Also, for some participants, seeing themselves as contributors who could provide their own lived experiences as illustrations of theoretical notions that had first seemed complicated and abstract had an empowering effect. For the researchers, combining these two levels (narration of participants’ experiences and sharing a theoretical framework with participants) proved valuable because it provided insights into the ways that a power-sharing environment can be created through critical reflection. The limiting effects of negative discourses about refugees emerged, by contrast, through the positive effects on agency and connection that were achieved when participants succeeded in reflecting on and distancing themselves from those discourses.

In Disclosing Cooperation this path was taken further, although in a different way. Here, the initial discursive framework provided within the Diversity in Youth Policy program, which informed the original research description, was partly challenged and broadened as a result of the co-generative dialogue with participants in the participative parts of the project, especially in the YFC on the Spot project, the Participatory Action Research (PAR) project described in chapter 4. The local effects of this process on the research site are described in that chapter, but I will summarise them here. While chapter 3 shows the impossibility of overcoming frame divergence, due to the power imbalance between volunteers and professionals, chapter 4 offers a way out of this impasse, one created within the research setting itself.

Crucial in this process was recognition of the asymmetry between the contributions of participants from the two fields (the professional field and that of MVCOs). Where professionals could employ a shared, familiar discourse about the envisaged relationship between statutory services and immigrant organisations, volunteers appeared to lack a standard discourse that could position their experiences and views in an organic and recognisable system of meaning. Consequently, they first appeared ‘unable to speak’, as it were, and their contributions to discussions frequently had the effect of being ‘disruptions’. We tackled this issue with a methodological strategy I called ‘cycles of interpretation’, which was based on researcher and participants alternatingly providing reinterpretations of each other’s descriptions until an agreed upon understanding was reached. One relevant insight provided by the research on this matter was that immigrant participants belong to a group of actors whose interests and values are not yet fully articulated in the available social discourses on cooperation in the pedagogic field. Only after recognising this unequal positioning
of participants in the discursive field did it become possible to weave different perspectives into a shared story.

During the Participatory Action Research process, participants’ views became noticeably attuned. Their use of newly coined expressions and concepts to describe the aims of cooperation and reciprocal roles was evidence that a new, shared narrative was being created. In this narrative, immigrant participants’ original understanding, which had gradually become articulated in explicit descriptions, was rather dominant. In the end, YFC participants had not only understood the immigrant organisations’ views regarding the meaning of their contributions but also partly adopted those views.

This result shows the potential of MVCOs to act as sites of resistance to marginalising discursive structures, an example of which are the ‘civilizing offensives’ and paternalising tendencies found to be active in parenting programs directed at immigrant women (Van den Berg & Duyvendak, 2012). But it also underscores that settings that explicitly invite, promote and supervise (theory informed) reflection, such as that produced by the participatory project, are needed to achieve that potential. As argued in chapter 3, these sites must go beyond the prescriptions of communicative rationality (like openness, empathy, rationality and trust), taking into account the (discursive) power imbalance between actors. Participative research represents a chance to capitalise on MVCOs’ contributions to inclusive parenting support by organising a dialogue with statutory services, which might involve conflict and divergence, but which can eventually benefit the system of parenting support in its entirety. Making space for dialogue in which marginal positions can become articulated is one of the most important challenges for social policy that strives to become inclusive.
References


