Participation of Immigrant Churches in Dutch Civil Society

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Introduction

How do Christian congregations of immigrants participate in society? Answering this question is the main aim of our research project Participation of Immigrant Churches in Dutch Civil Society (Partim Ducis). In this paper we will present how we have set up our research project to answer this question and will present some preliminary results of our project. We distinguish different styles of participation within immigrant churches and link these styles to factors – usually characteristics of congregations – that influence participation.

Are immigrant churches connecting communities?

Empirical research shows that religious congregations in general are communities that connect people to the democratic community. Not only do they promote ‘standard’ democratic practices such as voting (Brown et al. 2003; Campbell 2004), they also provide people with a comprehensive moral worldview on which they base their political considerations (Weithman 2002). Religious congregations stimulate the development of civic skills (Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995), and inspire participation in many political, civil, and public activities (Becker et al. 2001; De Hart 1999; Ruiter et al. 2006; Schwadel 2005; Wuthnow 2004). Paul Weithman (2002) argues that congregations contribute to “realized citizenship”: they help to fulfil the objective (e.g. opportunities to participate) and subjective (e.g. motivation) conditions of democratic participation (Ibid. 42).

Only a small amount of research has been conducted on the question whether immigrant religious organizations have the same connecting quality. Do they promote or hinder participation, do they differ from non immigrant congregations and if yes, how? Recent studies conducted in the USA suggest that immigrant congregations function in similar ways (cf. Hoge and Foley 2007, Jamal 2005). In the Netherlands there is some research on the religions immigrants bring with them, but usually under the heading of the study of ethnic minorities. Religion is only a secondary focus in these studies, and most of this attention is exclusively focused on Islamic immigrants. Our research project Participation of Immigrant Churches in Dutch Civil Society (Partim Ducis) is an attempt to fill the gap in our knowledge of Christian immigrants and participation of Christian immigrant churches in the Netherlands.

Before we return to the question how Christian immigrant congregations participate, let us first give an overview of the phenomenon we’re talking about, and explain some of the definitions and concepts we use.
Facts and figures about Christian immigrants and immigrant churches in the Netherlands

How many Christian immigrants live in the Netherlands? In the literature we find estimations of the number of non-Western Christian immigrants and their children in the Netherlands varying from 640,000 (Wijsen, 2003) to 800,000 (Ferrier, 2002). Our estimation of the total number of non-Western Christian immigrants is somewhat lower (516,500), but if we add another 798,000 Christian immigrants and their children from European countries (Germany, Belgium, the United Kingdom, Poland, the former Soviet Union etc.), we arrive at a total of 1,314,500 Christian immigrants. Of course, these figures do not reflect the degree of personal commitment of these immigrants to Christian beliefs and Christian churches. The value of these estimations is that they give an indication of the potential membership of immigrant churches and Dutch initiatives which focus on immigrants. In Table 1 we have estimated the numbers of both Western and non-Western Christian immigrants in the Netherlands (first and second generation), based on a combination of official immigration statistics (CBS, 2004) and the percentage of Christians in the countries of origin (World Christian Database, 2006). Calculations in the last column are based on the assumption that the percentage of Christian immigrants in the Netherlands equals the percentage of Christians in their native country. This assumption, of course, will be wrong if Christians – for whatever reason – are over- or underrepresented among immigrants from a certain country. In the cases of Turkey and Iraq, we have corrected the originally calculated numbers of 1,400 Turks and 1,100 Iraqis, because of more detailed knowledge about the number of Christian immigrants from these countries. Another factor of uncertainty is the degree of secularization or perhaps Christianization among successive generations of immigrants. Some survey data on Surinamese and Antillean people show that the second generation tends to have a lower commitment to organized forms of religion than the first (SCP, 2002).

Approximately 900 immigrant churches and 200 churches with foreign language services (including Roman Catholic parishes) can be found in the Netherlands, particularly in the larger cities (Van den Broek, 2004). Amsterdam accommodates almost 200 immigrant churches, Rotterdam about 110, and The Hague more than 100. The number and names of these churches fluctuate constantly: they pop up and then disappear, join and split, and sometimes they reappear under another name. It is almost impossible to classify many of these churches along denominational or ethnic lines. Of course, we can distinguish among Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Presbyterian, Reformed, Pentecostal, Baptist, and Seventh Day Adventist churches, but the majority does not belong to a specific denomination, and will probably best be described as Charismatic, Pentecostal, and/or Evangelical. Some of these churches are mono-ethnic, while others are multi-ethnic, often including the term “international” in their name. Many churches were founded by immigrants, while others were founded by Dutch Christians and churches in an attempt to offer hospitality or to evangelize among immigrants. Immigrant churches draw members from immigrant communities but also from among those who only stay temporarily in the Netherlands (students, business people, embassy personnel), and from the native Dutch population.
Table 1. Estimation of first- and second-generations Western and non-Western immigrants in the Netherlands, including an estimation of Christian immigrants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Estimated number of immigrants</th>
<th>% Christians in country of origin</th>
<th>Estimated number of Christian immigrants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>112,000</td>
<td>84.4%</td>
<td>95,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>384,000</td>
<td>74.9%</td>
<td>288,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>34,000</td>
<td>69.3%</td>
<td>24,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>76,000</td>
<td>81.5%</td>
<td>62,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>36,000</td>
<td>82.1%</td>
<td>30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>45,000</td>
<td>96.0%</td>
<td>43,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>31,000</td>
<td>91.3%</td>
<td>28,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former Soviet-Union</td>
<td>42,000</td>
<td>45.8%</td>
<td>19,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former Yugoslavia</td>
<td>76,000</td>
<td>74.0%</td>
<td>56,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Western countries</td>
<td>185,000</td>
<td>82.8%</td>
<td>153,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>36,000</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cape Verde</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td>95.0%</td>
<td>19,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>42,000</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>3,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>19,000</td>
<td>57.5%</td>
<td>10,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>399,000</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
<td>54,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>28,000</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>43,000</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>4,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>306,000</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands Antilles</td>
<td>131,000</td>
<td>94.0%</td>
<td>123,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>25,000</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surinam</td>
<td>325,000</td>
<td>51.1%</td>
<td>166,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>352,000</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>15,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other non-Western countries</td>
<td>341,000</td>
<td>27.1%</td>
<td>92,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undocumented immigrants</td>
<td>100,000</td>
<td>27.1%</td>
<td>27,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total of immigrants</td>
<td>3,188,000</td>
<td>41.2%</td>
<td>1,314,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Dutch population</td>
<td>16,300,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Sources: CBS, 2004; World Christian Database, 2006)

1 An average of the percentage of Christians in the countries of origin mentioned above.
2 About 10% of the Iraqis in the Netherlands are Christian (Choenni, 2002).
3 In the 1970s many Suryoye (Syrian Orthodox) Christians from southeastern Turkey sought refuge in Western Europe. Some people of this group live in the Twente region in the eastern part of the Netherlands (Schukkink, 2003).
4 An average of the percentage of Christians in the countries of origin mentioned above.
5 Estimations of undocumented immigrants vary from 50,000 to 200,000. Again, we took the percentage of Christians in non-Western countries as a basis for estimating the number of undocumented persons with a Christian background.
Recent research among fifty Roman Catholic immigrant parishes showed an average of 200 regular church attendees of a total of 740 members per parish (Castillo Guerra et al., 2006, p. 26f). Many young African churches have less than 100 members. We do not have much information about the religious involvement and participation of most Christian immigrants, but it is clear that a huge gap exists between the estimated total number of Christian immigrants in the Netherlands (1,314,500) and the estimated number of people involved in immigrant churches. How can we explain this gap? Some Christian immigrants have become involved in mono-ethnic or multi-ethnic immigrant churches, others have joined one of the traditional Dutch churches, and still others, perhaps the majority, prefer to keep aloof, maintaining their Christian faith on a more individual base or having no affinity to Christianity at all.

Definitions and concepts
We are interested in how immigrant churches participate on the level of civil society. This can be understood in two ways: a more descriptive and a more normative sense. In the first sense we define participation in civil society as *involvement with another context*. These contexts can be other individuals, organizations, the neighborhood, the government etc. -- all the contexts that make up what we call society. In the second sense civil participation is *involvement that promotes the civility of society*. Generally, theorists use the second sense. The ethicist Weithman sees participation as contributing to and partaking in the "social product" (Weithman 2002, 18), which he understands as an aggregate measure of all kinds of collective goods, such as democratic liberties, schooling etc. His definition of participation contains a strong civic element. It is not just that participation equals involvement: Weithman focuses on participation that conforms to certain quality standards. In their book *Religion and the New Immigrants*, Foley and Hoge (2007) distinguish in a similar manner like us between incorporation and civic incorporation. They define incorporation as "playing a part in a larger society and polity" (Foley and Hoge 2007, 26). Their real interest, however, is to research the extent and the quality of incorporation. Therefore they prefer the term "civic incorporation", "... the degree to which immigrants and the organizations to which they belong, are active in neighborhood and community efforts, their interest in civic affairs, and their participation in the political process." (Idem, 27).

It makes good sense to distinguish descriptive and normative understandings of participation. Congregations may be involved with other contexts in a variety of ways. Focusing only on the activities we define as “civic”, might hinder a full understanding of the dynamic between a congregation and society. In the research of Van der Meulen it proved fruitful to focus on how congregations acquired worship space (more on this later). Acquiring a building to worship is usually in itself not a civic activity, but it tells us a lot about the factors that influence participation, including civic participation (Van der Meulen, forthcoming). Furthermore, a distinction between a normative and a descriptive definition is necessary to show what is included in civic participation and what not. Explicit religious activities such as evangelization are often not seen as civic activities, despite the fact that religious groups tend to see conversion of others as their main contribution to the well being of society. In our theoretical framework we see religious activities directed at other contexts as one form of participation, i.e. religious participation. Whether these activities promote the civility of society is another question – a question which we might or might not tackle within our research project – but it is important to notice that when we talk of civic participation, civic incorporation or
another similar term, we select definitions of civility at least partly based on normative understandings of civility.

The theoretical framework of our research is based in civil society theory. Our definition of civil society has, like participation, two dimensions:

In a minimal sense, civil society is a network of associations of citizens, trying to achieve self-defined, common goals. This network is connected to other societal domains, such as the public sphere, the state, the market and the private sphere. In a stronger sense civil society promotes the “civility” of society.

One last note on the definition of “immigrant church”. We define immigrant churches as churches with a sizable number (20%) of the members who are first or second generation immigrants. The percentage is a rule of thumb coming from religion and immigration expert Helen Rose Ebaugh (personal communication) and is also used by Foley and Hoge (2007, 66; probably they use the same source). The logic behind it is that if a congregation has 20% or more immigrant members it has to take account of this group in its policies and actions. The term “immigrant churches” can refer to mono-ethnic churches, such as the Ghanaian congregations in Amsterdam Southeast, to multi-ethnic churches, such as the Scots International Church in Rotterdam, attracting people from many different countries, or parishes of Dutch churches with a special focus on immigrant groups, such as a Spanish-speaking Roman Catholic parish in The Hague or the International Christian Fellowship congregation in Rotterdam, which is part of the Christian Reformed Churches. Some immigrant churches reject the term “immigrant church”, preferring the term “international church”, because they stress the unity of different ethnic groups in Christ as their main reason for existence. However, the most important organization of immigrant churches in the Netherlands, SKIN (Samen Kerk In Nederland / Being Church Together in the Netherlands), considers itself explicitly to be an assembly of immigrant churches and congregations (see www.skinkerken.nl).

Factors influencing participation
Reading literature and doing research we noticed patterns in the way how immigrant congregations interact with society. For example, a number of studies show how the distribution of immigration generations in a congregation influences which languages are used in the church (e.g. the mother tongue(s) or the language of the receiving country) and how ethnic / cultural boundaries are drawn (e.g. Garces-Foley 2007). Hoge and Foley noticed that rich congregations offer less social service opportunities than poor congregations (Hoge and Foley 2007, 149). There are many other examples. We have drawn a tentative list of factors that we believe can explain differences in styles of participation of immigrant congregations (and probably other congregations too). We are designing a survey to test our model and have formulated a set of hypotheses.

1. SES of congregation – high / low.
   Hypothesis: A higher SES means more participation, a lower SES less participation

2. Denomination – yes / no
   Hypothesis: Denominational affiliation means more participation, no denominational affiliation means less participation
3. Age of congregation – young / old
   Hypothesis: Older churches participate more

4. Use of language of receiving country (i.e. Dutch) – Dutch / English / other language
   Hypothesis: Dutch speaking churches participate more, English speaking churches participate less, and other language speaking churches even lesser.

5. Theology – social / cultural / public / religious elements in theology
   Hypothesis: A theology that is attentive to the social effects of the gospel means more social participation
   Hypothesis: A theology that integrates cultural elements of the own ethnic or cultural group means more cultural participation
   Hypothesis: A theology that is attentive to the political relevance of the gospel means more public participation
   Hypothesis: A theology that is focused on personal salvation means more religious participation

6. Leadership – high / low level of education
   Hypothesis: A pastor with a higher educational background means more participation, a lower educational background means less participation.

7. Ethnic identity – strong / weak
   Hypothesis: A strong ethnic identity means more cultural participation.

8. Size – big / small
   Hypothesis: A higher education means more participation, a lower education means less participation.

9. Immigration generation distribution – young / old
   Hypothesis: churches with more first generation immigrant members participate less publicly and socially and more religiously and culturally. Churches with more second generation immigrant members and non immigrant members participate more publicly and socially and less religiously and culturally.

10. Bonding social capital -- more / less
    Hypothesis: more bonding social capital means less participation.
    Alternative hypothesis: more bonding social capital means more participation.

11. Bridging social capital – more / less
    Hypothesis: more bridging social capital means more participation
Figure 1, a model of factors of participation

We expect that the different factors influence what activities congregations are involved in. We distinguish four types of participation: religious, public, cultural and social. Probably all congregations will participate religiously: they evangelize, they organize religious services etc. Some congregations furthermore mainly focus on social activities, like providing care for poor people. Others will be publically active, by rallying for candidates or contacting politicians to influence political decision making. And some are busy with cultural activities, such as staging choir concerts or offering language courses for the own ethnic groups. So besides four types of participation, we can also distinguish different styles of participation. This has been done before. Penny Edgell Becker (1999) for example distinguished the “House of Worship” style of congregation that mainly focuses on providing religious services and the “Civic Leader”, which is a congregation with a politically active pastor. Within the context of our study we could add more styles, such as the “Ethnic Refuge”, which focuses on providing cultural activities for an ethnic group (see figure 2).
At the moment most of our data is coming from ethnographic and qualitative research. Several of the factors we’ve identified in this list, we see return in our qualitative research. In the first months of 2008 we plan to conduct a survey to test our model. We hope this quantitative data will further refine our model and will give insight in the relative importance of the different factors, and most importantly, which styles of participation we can identify in the group of immigrant churches.

We are also interested in the relation between factors. One of the most interesting findings of our qualitative studies is the importance of interaction between factors. To give an example: in current research on African churches in Amsterdam (Van der Meulen, forthcoming) we found three major factors that influenced how leadership shapes the participation of an immigrant congregation in society: (1) the ideas, views, and ideals, or shortly the theology of leaders and (2) the social capital (Coleman 1988; Putnam 1993, 2000) available to them and (3) the quality of leadership. The interaction between these factors produced different outcomes. Only African churches which used theological concepts that value public participation, had access to relevant networks (e.g. politics, the media) and had leaders who were skillful enough to use these networks and transform theological concepts into practical action, did participate on a public level, for example by giving interviews or by influencing politicians. To give a little more body to the content of our studies, we will delve a little deeper in the subject matter by presenting a case study of how different factors influence the success of African churches in Amsterdam in finding suitable worship space.

Case study: African churches in Amsterdam Southeast competing for worship space
When Joshua and the Israelites finally entered the Holy Land (Josh. 4) they had no difficulties building a place of worship: they took 12 stones out of the river Jordan and build an altar at the first place they put up their camp. Christians who cross the oceans and migrate to Amsterdam, The Netherlands, encounter more difficulties when they want to find a place to worship. Unlike the Israelites, the Christian immigrants have to conform to strict building regulations, buy high-priced property and have to compete with others for scarce worship spaces.

Amsterdam Southeast as arena of competitors for worship space
Many of the immigrants to Amsterdam settle in the South-eastern part of the city. For several months Van der Meulen conducted fieldwork in this area to find out which factors influenced success of immigrant churches in Amsterdam Southeast, measured by the ability to acquire worship space. Due to a scarcity of suitable worship space in this area, Amsterdam Southeast is an arena that tells us a lot which factors make the difference between having a suitable worship space, or having unsuitable or even no space at all. It furthermore tells us much about which factors in general influence how immigrant churches participate in society. Having a (church)building is a first requisite for participating in society, but it is also in itself an example of participation: in order to build, buy or hire property, the congregation needs to get involved with society by contacting government officials, by developing a vision for their mission in a neighbourhood etc. The housing situation of a congregation -- whether it owns a building or not -- is one way to measure its participation in society.

Thanks to its immigrants, Amsterdam Southeast has relatively high levels of religious involvement, in particular Christian religious involvement. When Amsterdam Southeast originally was constructed
nobody expected there would be much interest for religion, so very few religious facilities were built. With the influx of Christian immigrants a great shortage of worship space arose. There are around 100 churches in the area with an estimated 10,000 - 15,000 people who attend church regularly, but there is only one official church center. Most of the congregations had tried to find space for themselves, but that proved to be difficult. There are few 'leftover buildings' (e.g. old office space, abandoned factories) available to cheaply transform into a church. The land prices are high and there are many regulations that make building a church an expensive long term effort that requires a lot of patience, expertise and skills in multi-cultural communication.

If we define successful participation as the acquisition of worship space by a congregation, we can distinguish between different measures of success by distinguishing in quality of the worship space available to a church. We discern four degrees in the quality of worship space: (1) owning a building, (2) hiring a space, (3) being a secondary hirer, (4) having no worship space.

Of course, the best situation for a congregation is to own a building. The congregation can decide for themselves how to use the building, it can be adapted as wished, and used throughout the week for classes, meetings etc. The building furthermore is an asset that can be used as a pledge for loans and investments. The second best option is to be the prime hirer of a building or space. The congregation may not be able to adjust the space, but it still can be used throughout the week and offers a moderate level of independence. A third, not very comfortable option, is to be a secondary hirer of a space. In Amsterdam Southeast most churches that own a building or are a primary hirer rent their space to third parties, when they do not use it for themselves. Secondary hirers are at the mercy of their landlords and can only use the building when it happens to be available. The fourth, worst option is to have no space at all, except maybe the houses of individual members. These churches cannot stage worship services as they want, and can only attract a limited number of members, unless they find a proper space for public worship.

Money and denomination affiliation make the world go round

There are a few churches in Southeast that own a (part of) a building. The Roman Catholic parish, the Protestant Congregation and the Evangelische Broedergemeente (Evangelical Unity of Brethren) together own a church center called Nieuwe Stad (New City). The Pinkstergemeente Amsterdam Zuidoost (Pentecostal Church Amsterdam Southeast) is another church that owns a building, the Lighthouse Chapel. Those congregations are all Dutch speaking, have a predominantly white (with the exception of the Brethren, which is largely Surinamese) membership and are part of denominations which have been established in Dutch society for decades or even for hundreds of years. The fact that these churches are part of denominations seems to be a very important factor. The denominations provided financial support in the early years of the congregations, which enabled these congregations to buy property and establish a visible presence in the area. Additionally, the membership of these churches is relatively affluent, especially compared to the membership of the other churches.

There are also a few African churches that acquired their own building, but this is a very recent phenomenon. The Redemption Faith Ministries, established in 1997, was the first African church in Amsterdam Southeast that acquired a building, in 2007. It bought the building from the local scouting club, with the help of two foundations which provided cheap loans. The Ghanaian Seventh Day Adventists and the Redeemed Christian Church of God, two Ghanaian churches, recently
received money from their denomination to buy their own property, so in a short time there will be more African churches that own a building. Again we see that being part of a denomination is crucial factor for acquiring worship space.

Most of the churches in Amsterdam Southeast are primary or secondary hirers. The *Pentecostal Revival Church International* is in the lucky situation to hire a former office plot, with a large hall for worship services, and offices and rooms for a variety of activities. Despite the fact that they use their space for 5 hours on Sunday midday and every evening throughout the week for worship services, they manage to provide space to thirteen (!) other churches. Many churches hire space from the congregations which own a building, usually during the off hours throughout the Sunday and other days of the week.

To sum up: churches with an affluent membership and / or support from a mother denomination are able to acquire and to manage property. But, there are many grades of success in worship space, as I identified in the first part of this case. How do congregations with limited financial resources and a lack of denominational support acquire worship space, and why are some more successful than others? There are other factors that begin to play a role in this situation of scarcity.

**Social capital: poor mans gold**

At the end of the nineties of the 20th century, a group of Ghanaian, mostly Pentecostal pastors started an initiative to pool resources and build a church center with multiple worship halls, offices and meeting rooms. Even when they pooled their resources, they didn’t have the resources by themselves to build a church, so they cooperated with the municipality and a housing association to build this center. The municipality and the housing association acknowledged the problems the congregations experienced in Southeast, and were willing to help the churches. The trajectory of the multi church center from the first ideas to the opening of the center was long and fragile, taking more than 10 years to finish. The whole process in the end came to a finish because of two factors: excellent leadership by two pastors and the growth of social capital during the process which was carefully managed by the Ghanaian pastors.

The biggest threat to the project was of course the financial situation. Although the housing association and the government were friendly and willing to help, they did not or could not subsidize the congregations. The Ghanaian churches still needed to provide the funds themselves. In the early stages of the project an investigation was done in the financial situation of the churches. This already proved difficult. Many churches did not keep an administration that conformed to normal Dutch standards. One member of the housing association called the administration of some churches "little more than a shoebox with receipts". Although the churches received stable financial support from its members, and could prove they had paid their rents for their current worship locations without problems, this was not enough assurance for their partners. In the words of a representative of the municipality:

"The only thing we knew for sure was: they can pay the rent. So we could look forward one month. In a long term planning process of several decades this is a big risk."
In 2001 it became clear to the municipality and the housing association that there would be a big exploitation deficit. The churches just could not bear the financial burdens of the project. Instead of quitting the project, the municipality and the housing association decided to change it. The project received its first major revision: the congregations would no longer become the owners of the church center, but would hire it. The center would be owned by the housing association. Furthermore, it would no longer be just a church center, but a community center. To make the building financially profitable, a number of apartments would be build on top of the building and additional space was added for non religious social and commercial activities. The congregations regretted this decision. They wanted maximum attention for their religious mission. The change from a church to a community center would diminish the visible presence of the congregations in the neighborhood. But for the housing association this change was a first of many 'leaps of faith' to accommodate the congregations. Keeping the building in ownership meant they would bear the burden if something would go wrong.

Still, the financial situation remained tight. At one given moment, the churches were pressed to give a financial pledge to prove they would really be able to support the building of the center. At the latest possible moment they provided the funds in cash, which is very unusual in The Netherlands. The only reason that the municipality and the housing association accepted this was because of the trust in the Ghanaian churches and a feeling of obligation and commitment which had developed over the years. One member of the housing association who was involved in the process commented later:

“We are talking about a project of 8 years. It was as strange combination of project leaders and churches. The group became close, and we developed trust in each other. A lot of things happened which normally would have crashed the project. The fact that the project succeeded has to do with a combination of persons within the churches, who believed in the project and who worked very hard to realize the church center. And one project leader, who, because of their enthusiasm and commitment, decided: ‘we need to look beyond our own limits, and really find ways to realize it’. This combination did it.”

Conclusions
In this case the trust in and commitment to the Ghanaian churches proved to make the difference. The trust was vested especially in the leaders of these churches, who proved to be trustworthy because they kept their word and worked very hard to make the project a success. We can see this trust and commitment between the different partners in the project as bridging social capital. Usually bridging social capital is seen as a very important element for the participation of civil society organizations. In this case, social capital is poor mans gold. Churches which had money or were part of a denomination were much more successful in finding suitable worship space. Churches who had no financial or denominational support, had to take recourse to social capital. If you don’t have money, you need social capital to make things work. But, only churches with skilful leaders really managed to transform this social capital into quality worship space. Again we see that the interaction between different factors influences the particular style and outcome of participation.
References


