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Reference:

Otte Hanka.- Bonding or bridging? On art participation and social cohesion in a rural region of the Netherlands
Poetics: journal of empirical research on culture, the media and the arts - ISSN 0304-422X - 76(2019), UNSP 101355
Full text (Publisher's DOI): <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.POETIC.2019.02.006>
To cite this reference: <https://hdl.handle.net/10067/1579950151162165141>

Bonding or bridging? On art participation and social cohesion in a rural region of the Netherlands

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ABSTRACT

One of the reasons for authorities to promote art participation is the supposedly positive effect of art on social cohesion. Based on theories about social cohesion (e.g. Dijkstra et al., 2004; Gittel & Vidal, 1998; Green & Janmaat, 2011; Putnam, 2000; Schnabel, 2000) this assumption is tested by making a distinction between bonding and bridging cohesive behavior. The results of quantitative and qualitative empirical research on regional art participation policy in the Netherlands indicate that there is a correlation between confirmative art and bonding cohesive behavior on the one hand and challenging art and bridging cohesive behavior on the other. When authorities have a better idea of what kind of social cohesion they are aiming for, they can perform a more focused and therefore effective policy.

1. Introduction

In cultural policies, art is often linked to social cohesion. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe states that '... access to the arts and free artistic cultural expression contribute to the development of critical thinking, to enhanced mutual understanding and to mutual respect. Thus, they contribute to reinforcing democratic citizenship and social cohesion...' (Council of Europe, 2016). In Dutch policy documents a different connection is made: these not only speak of the arts, but of culture in a broader sense, referring also to cultural heritage and media. In the policy letter 'Culture connects, a vision on cultural policy', the then Minister of Culture Jet Bussemaker had high expectations of the connecting power of the cultural sector, as cultural activities contribute to community formation and social cohesion, especially those activities that imply active participation of citizens (Bussemaker, 2014). Yet there is not sufficient evidence that there is a connection between cultural participation and social cohesion, or more specifically, between art participation and social cohesion, which is the subject of this article.¹ Art participation here is understood as participating (both actively and passively) in activities consisting of at least one artistic 'language', i.e. visual art, dance, literature, music, new media, or theatre. In the case of active involvement, this concerns non-professionals of all levels: from non-experienced to advanced, sometimes collaborating with professional artists (e.g. community art). The study of the social effects of art participation policy has not yet been sufficiently methodologically developed; there are not enough clear definitions, but most importantly, not enough is known about the relation between the specific qualities of art (intrinsic values) and its possible contribution to social cohesion (Belfiore & Bennett, 2010; Belfiore & Bennett, 2007; Galloway, 2009; Jermyn, 2001; Marceau & Davison, 2005; McCarthy, Ondaatje, Zakaras, & Brooks, 2004; Merli, 2002; White & Hede, 2008). In addition, it remains to be seen whether governments, by opting for an art participation policy, are choosing the right instrument for enhancing social cohesion.

This has led to a twofold research question, addressed in this article, namely how art participation and social cohesion are related theoretically and what effects art participation policy may have on social cohesion. This article starts with a closer look at the concept of social cohesion and the problems that present themselves in defining the term and operationalizing it (e.g. Dijkstra, Hofstra, van, Peschar, & van der, 2004; Green & Janmaat, 2011; Moody & White, 2003; Putnam, 1993, 2000; Schnabel, 2000; Ultee, 2005, 2010).

This results in a model of four possible types of social cohesion and an operationalization of the concept to an individual level on behalf of empirical study: cohesive behavior. Then this article explores how these four types are present in art participation and how art in theory may influence cohesive behavior. (e.g. Caillois, 1961; Gadamer, 1977; Huizinga, 2008; Lizardo, 2006; van Maanen, 2009; Nussbaum, 1997, 2010; van de Vall, 2008; Winnicott, 1971). Finally, the results of a population survey in the Dutch province of Drenthe show that there is mainly a correlation between passive art participation (i.e. attending events) and a bridging cohesive attitude. The correlation between active art participation (i.e. being productive in amateur art) and bridging cohesive behavior seemed to be less strong. In addition, the results of a field study of regional policy on art participation in the same region in the period 2009–2012, show that cultural or art projects are not bonding elements per se. However, if certain conditions (see conclusion) are met, art that challenges one's perception may lead to a bridging attitude, whereas art that confirms perceptions rather seems to strengthen existing relations.

2. Social cohesion

It is noticeable that the term social cohesion is used and interpreted in various ways, often leading to conceptual confusion in (cultural) policy documents (Otte, 2015). Firstly, it is not always clear if the policy is focused on a more internal social cohesion based on coherence and homogeneity, or on a more external social cohesion aiming for heterogeneity and mutual understanding between different (groups of) people. Secondly, policies regularly tend to 'solve problems' in a relational dimension (in terms of physical meetings), while aiming for social change in an ideal dimension (identity) and vice versa. And thirdly, the several levels of social cohesion, from the micro-level of individual behavior to the macro-level of world systems, often are confused.

2.1. Level of analysis

To start with the various levels, this is an important and methodologically complex issue when taking social cohesion under scrutiny (Green & Janmaat, 2011). A distinction can be made between personal networks of people on the micro-level, the organized environment in which people live and work on the meso level and the more abstract macro level of society, which even includes the cohesion among nations (Ritzer, 1996). Important here is that (1) it should be clear on

which level policy aims are formulated and (2) that analysis of social cohesion or evaluation of the policy is done on the same level, as properties of cohesion on the one level do not automatically explain cohesion on a higher or lower level (Green & Janmaat, 2011). The statement of Putnam (2000), the author of the famous publication *Bowling Alone*, that a lot of connections within club life refer to more cohesion in society, therefore is not accurate, which becomes clear when looking at historical facts: '...while club life in the United States was flourishing, communists were hunted, Jewish people were not welcome at golf clubs and black people were not allowed to sit in the front of the bus' (Ultee, 2005, p. 109). It is not the number of members of clubs that determines social cohesion on the level of society, but the heterogeneity of the members. Here it becomes clear that one's social capital (i.e. access to resources from the number of relationships) does not give information about cohesion on a higher level. Not the number of relations but the relationships as such, the positions of actors and what they do in relation to each other, say something about social cohesion. The homogeneous consistency of the clubs Putnam is referring to does correspond to the historical facts: the internal cohesion of the clubs leads to the exclusion of others.

2.2. Internal and external social cohesion

This immediately touches upon the matter of the conception of social cohesion as something positive. Nowadays, more and more governments display a—sometimes nostalgic—longing for forms of social cohesion that coincides with a 'we'-feeling. A form of cohesion that is based on the recognition of and similarities among the individuals who make up a group or community, as was once the hallmark of thriving social life in many local communities, as Putnam points out. However, such an *internal* social cohesion (Forrest & Kearns, 2001; Schnabel & Hart, 2008; Otte, 2015) can easily lead to the exclusion of others. Aiming for different (groups of) people to live or work together is about fostering a social cohesion that is not based on consensus but, paradoxically, on shared dissensus. Not bonding, but bridging differences—literally like a bridge links different sides without merging them in sameness—then becomes the focus; not glossing over contradictions and tensions but learning to acknowledge the Other and learning to live with and next to the Other and that which is radically different (Stavrides, 2016).

This distinction between internal and external social cohesion is important, but is often not made explicit in policy documents. It is imaginable that clubs for amateur art have a socializing function that strengthens the cohesion between the members and supporters of the club, mostly inhabitants of the village. However, fostering cooperation between (citizens of) several villages via clubs for amateur art, means fostering external cohesion. The question here is then to what extent and how (clubs of) amateur arts can act as agents of social change.

2.3. Relational and ideal dimension

Social cohesion often is about connections between inhabitants within a village or neighborhood finding each other in an active club or associative life. Social services, clubs and associations for sports, religion, art expressions, and other hobbies alike are often located in so-called 'village houses' where inhabitants can meet each other daily. At the same time, concerts and parades of the local brass band, the yearly stage performance of the local theater society, and the recitals of the local choir at village events contribute to the local traditions and so to the identity of the village. Joining events to meet people from one's surroundings or to identify oneself with those surroundings are two different things, in the sense that they are about connecting in a relational and an ideal dimension. The relational dimension refers to observable and/or functional relations between people and groups and among groups, while cohesion can also be understood on the basis of shared norms, values, and identities. In the latter case, people do not need to know or meet each other in person. These components are inextricably linked and reinforce each other, but in order to find out how they relate to each other it is useful to analyze both dimensions separately: 'Conflating relational and ideational features of social solidarity in a single measure limits our ability to ask questions about how the relational component of solidarity affects, or is affected by, ideational factors' (Moody & White, 2003, p.106).²

2.4. Operationalization to individual level

As mentioned before, focusing on relationships and positions of actors means that research into social cohesion can be done on the micro level, as long as the context of the individual is taken into account. This is helpful in performing empirical research, which in practice can only be done by interviewing individuals: questioning a group or society as entity simply is not possible. A useful definition of social cohesion on the individual level then is '... the extent to which people in their behavior and experience express their involvement in societal relations in their personal life, as citizens *in* society and as a member *of* society' (Schnabel, 2000, p. 22). This is in fact a definition of 'cohesive behavior' (Dijkstra et al., 2004). The level of *analysis* clearly is the micro level. By studying this cohesive behavior in relation to the behavior of others within the same social context it is possible to determine the extent of social cohesion of a social system. The concept can be further subdivided into bonding cohesive behavior (directed internally or inwards) and bridging cohesive behavior (directed externally), derived from the terms bonding and bridging social capital, first coined by Gittel and Vidal (1998).³ The first term meaning (the behavior of) people who, at one or more levels, are oriented towards people with whom they have things in common and who move in homogeneously composed networks. The second term referring to (the behavior of) people, who at one or more levels, enter into relations with people who are less like them and think differently.

In order to also distinguish between the relational and ideal dimension, one can speak of cohesive behavior and cohesive attitude. Ethnic fraternal organizations, church-based choirs or female reading clubs then can be seen as networks based on bonding cohesive behavior, whereas adhering to a certain religion or identifying oneself with a particular culture, political party, nation state or group can be interpreted as bonding cohesive attitude. Bridging cohesive behavior and attitude then refer to physically or 'mentally' connecting with other groups, networks, or ideal institutions. Good examples of bridging cohesive behavior are worldwide ecumenical religious organizations and civil rights movements such as Amnesty International. Sympathizing with the latter can then be called a form of bridging cohesive attitude. As mentioned before, bonding and bridging are dialectically related: without bonding it is difficult to bridge and bridging often leads to (new) bonding relations. The combination of a high level of both bonding and bridging probably

will provide optimal social possibilities (Halpern, 2005, p. 21). If a person shows bonding cohesive behavior, he or she can thus at the same time show bridging behavior or have a bridging attitude, only not towards the same situation or person. This may seem a futility, but is of importance when analyzing projects for their influence on the cohesive behavior and attitude of their participants. Therefore bonding and bridging conceptually are suggested as opponents, to make a clear distinction between the directions of acting and thinking, as the direction influences social cohesion on a higher level.

2.5. Mapping social cohesion

A combination and confrontation of the abovementioned aspects of social cohesion, together with the operationalization of social cohesion to the micro level, results in a model of four variants of cohesive behavior. In the relational dimension, bonding cohesive behavior leads to sustainable homogeneous social relations (or networks) whereas bridging cohesive behavior, either temporarily or not, leads to heterogeneous relations (or networks). In the ideal dimension, one can then speak of an inward-directed attitude on the one hand and a more open attitude on the other. (Fig. 1) But how are these variants related to art participation, or to be more specific, does art have a distinguishing influence on how people relate to each other and their (or in their) environment?

3. The cohesive function of art

The terms culture and art are often used as synonyms in policy texts. Cultural policies can be about stimulating specific art participation (in the disciplines of music, dance, theater, literature, visual arts, and new media), but may also refer to culture in the much broader sense of habits, customs, or traditions (of certain social groups or populations). Laermans (2002) defines culture as a socially shared fund or repertoire of signs or meanings. Culture then has a socializing role as it '... helps individuals to integrate in a specific social, political and economic order. Culture teaches people existing ways of acting and being in a particular society and in doing so lends meaning to people's lives in that society' (Gielen & Lijster, 2015, pp. 21-22). People feel related to each other when they understand and share the same signs. It gives them a cultural identity, a feeling of belonging to society or a part thereof. A lot of these shared signs can be found or are expressed in cultural products such as architecture, cultivated landscapes, heritage, language, and mass manifestations of folk culture. These cultural expressions confirm national identities and feelings of commitment to a country or region (Schnabel & Hart, 2008). But there are also cultural expressions criticizing the existing societal order or questioning the existing ways of being and acting. In that case they do not help individuals enter an existing or prevailing cultural order, coined by Gielen as culture as measure, but teach them to take an independent or autonomous and sometimes critical position within that order, in other words, to insert 'dismeasure' (Gielen, Elkhuizen, Hoogen, van den, Lijster, & Otte, 2014). In the discourse of cultural policy, this subjectifying role is not immediately related to the term social cohesion. Especially expressions of modern art are often seen as merely opposing or criticizing phenomena like social cohesion. However, without questioning and criticizing cultural habits and the existing social order, a society will paralyze, meaning that people will not be given the opportunity to reflect on the existing social order and to discover or experiment with alternative ways of living together. Although not all art and not only art has the capacity to insert such a 'dismeasure' into the measure of culture, since modernity art has been known for its feature of playing with the measure of culture by breaking existing rules, so 'that it renders accessible what is invisible without it' (Luhmann, 2000, p. 17). How this feature exactly relates to external social cohesion, or rather bridging cohesive attitude or behavior, will be explained later.

3.1. Bonding due to participation as such

Cultural policies with the aim of fostering social cohesion tend not to support expressions of modern art, but rather those of amateur art and folk culture. What effects do they generate: do they especially contribute to existing or internal social cohesion because of their socializing role? Or could this kind of art also benefit external social cohesion? To answer these questions, a first step is to investigate the extent to which the four variants of social relations occur when people participate in art. When people participate in or practice an art form or visit an art activity, they can meet in several ways, as illustrated in the figure below (Fig. 2a).

The dotted lines in this figure suggest a contact with the expression of art, the solid lines indicate contacts in the context in which the artwork is produced or perceived, but not directly through the artwork itself.

Because of the temporary nature of the relations it is important to determine how strong they are. Do they continue outside the context of the art expression? And are they homogeneous or heterogeneous relations? Or, in other words, who meets who in this kind of situation? Big events such as dance, music or theater festivals, soccer games, the Olympic Games or smaller events such as community art projects, neighborhood barbecues, local running races or the yearly Christmas fair all are valued because of the fact that at that particular moment lots of (different) people tangibly participate in harmony. But does this mean that the people who attend will build up social relations just because they have met in that situation? And will this harmonious situation among these participants occur at any other time and in any place? Several kinds of gatherings will generate short and temporary cohesion in the relational dimension, either homogeneous or heterogeneous.⁴ Point is that art activities do not differ relationally from other kinds of (leisure) activities. The connection between art participation and social networks in the relational dimension is determined by participating as such, not by artistic aspects (Claeys, Elchardus, & Vandebroek, 2005; Jeannotte, 2003; Putnam, 2000).

3.2. Bridging due to change of perception

The question remains if artistic aspects do play a role in the ideal dimension, or in other words, whether artistic expressions are related to a different kind of cohesive attitude than other activities. A widely used measure for external social cohesion is tolerance (Forrest & Kearns, 2001; Green & Janmaat, 2011; Jeannotte, 2003; Schnabel & Hart, 2008; Vollhardt, Migacheva, & Linda, 2009), which demands an open-minded attitude toward others or the other. It is exactly in

this open attitude that art can play an important role, for in the confrontation with the unfamiliar, cultivating the imagination can either lead to or require an open attitude (Carroll, 2001; Greene, 1995; van Maanen, 2009; Nussbaum, 1997, 2010). Theoretically, this hypothesis can be confirmed by approaching art as a form of play and comparing it with other forms of play. An important condition for play is a demarcation in time and space between inner reality and external life, also coined as potential space or intermediate zone (Winnicott, 1971). This potential space is provided by religion, rituals, sports, art, philosophy, (creative) science, media such as TV and the Internet, (digital) games, and so on. Art differs from other forms of play as it is characterized by its own, often new order and rules. Usually, violating the rules means interrupting or ending of the game.⁵ But for art, playing with the rules is a main element (cf. supra). Art by all means is a free play, meaning that it is made by not previously composed rules and is constituted as much by the beholder as by the creator (the artist), or as Gadamer puts it: '... if art is determined as the creation of the intellect, it never can be divided from the congeniality of the beholder. Both are a free play' (1977, p. 47). Art is about teamwork between imagination and reason: in order to see something, something has to be thought of that which is being seen. There is always a tension between what is observed and concepts related to what is observed, and as a consequence the beholder needs to give meaning to the artwork, while the expected meaning is based on something that is made according to not previously composed rules and on something never seen before. This process of interpreting the artwork leads to another important element distinguishing art from other kinds of play. It is not about what the artwork is or what it represents, but rather about the meaning of the image inherent to the artwork, which can be interpreted differently by each beholder (van de Vall, 2008). A more adequate term than 'meaning' might be 'aboutness' (Danto, 1973, 1974) as it says something about the reality it represents. But, depending on its own artistic context, the artwork means something else. 'The boundaries between art and reality become ... internal to art itself' (Danto, 1973, p.16). This aboutness of an artwork is an important aspect of the process of a (albeit temporary) modification of existing perceptions. The specific causality between art and cohesiveness now lies in the free play by which art is able to produce a more open attitude toward 'the other' and or 'otherness'. If people can compose or understand new rules according to which they create or perceive something that is new to them, they are likely to be able to understand or at least try to understand other human beings (or their culture) who live by other rules, norms and values (Fig. 2b).

3.3. *Confirming and challenging art*

Art participation now can be understood as the production and/or reception of expressions that come into being through play in the domain of the imagination. An art expression is a play of the imagination in which matter (the perceived reality of the artist and/or the beholder) is given material form (van Maanen, 2009). A work of art always refers to some reality or other and can be interpreted by the use of imaginative power. If the interpretation is imitable, because the rules and the internal order of the play are being recognized as a norm, a measure, one can speak of confirmative art. As soon as the measure is interrupted by something, a dismeasure, that differs from the rules and the internal order—of the own artistic discourse or of the perceived reality to which the artwork refers—the perception needs to be adjusted, leading to an increase of the imagination (van Maanen, 2009; van den Hoogen, 2010; Wilders, 2012). If, related to cohesive attitude, an art expression confirms the perceived concepts of existing relations and emphasizes the correspondences these relations are built on, the cohesive attitude will continue to be directed internally or be strengthened and thus have a bonding effect. If the artistic expression challenges participants to change their perception, this may have consequences for both their attitude and behavior toward each other during an art activity or toward others outside the activity, and so lead to bridging cohesive behavior or a bridging cohesive attitude. For the artwork to be seen as being capable of producing such a critical attitude of the beholder toward his environment, it needs to be approached as relatively autonomous; as a practice generating meaning based on its own terms, but within the norms of the context in which the artwork is made (van de Vall, 2008).

The idea of relative autonomy builds on democratic and emancipating 'radical aesthetics' (Armstrong, 2000) by not denying the reality of social and cultural conflicts, but by restructuring opposites like inner and external reality so they are better understood. Art as play has the capacity to transform the structure of the perception by creating an intermediate zone making it possible to undergo new experiences or experiments. From the perspective of art not being separated from its cultural and social context, in play new experiences are gained making it possible to transform categorical thinking in cultural oppositions. In that sense 'art has political relevance when it stages opportunities for learning to play with contradictions and paradoxes and in this way lays the ground for emancipatory cultural transformations' (van de Vall, 2008).

In the diagram below (Fig. 3) the theoretical causality between art participation and cohesive behavior is drawn.

4. **Effects of cultural policy on social cohesion**

Based on the diagram above, it can be hypothetically posited that art participation can contribute to a bridging cohesive attitude via the reception of challenging art. It is theoretically argued that this is due to the specific, intrinsic value of art, namely that it produces an artistic experience not only appealing to, but also challenging the perception of the artist or beholder (van Maanen, 2009, p. 200). Or, in other words, subjectification by experiencing dismeasure (Gielen et al., 2014). The other variations of cohesive behavior can also be influenced by art participation, albeit that this also happens when participating in other domains. It concerns so-called extrinsic aspects of art participation, which may have even stronger effects when fostered by domains like sports or welfare.

Moreover, conventional encounters and the confirmation of perceived concepts are aspects that merely lead to bonding cohesive behavior and attitudes. These hypotheses were tested by conducting both quantitative and qualitative research, consisting of a population survey in Drenthe and a field research on the Cultural Participation Policy '*Samen Delen!*' implemented from 2009 to 2012 by the Province of Drenthe and its twelve municipalities. This article mainly focuses on the field research, referring to the population survey when necessary. The reason for this is that unlike the population survey the field research gives insight into the nature of the relations between people in one and the same

social context and makes it possible to determine whether art expressions were perceived as confirming or challenging by the respondents.⁶

Five projects from the program '*Samen Delen!*' were selected, in total consisting of eleven activities or events. The first was the Community Art project *EmmerMeerCultuur*, literally translated: More Culture for Emmermeer. This neighborhood in the city of Emmen needed 'social self-reinforcement' and an 'upgrade of social participation', according to policy texts written by the municipal administration together with housing corporations and citizens. This partnership, named *Emmen Revisited*, asked an artist to develop projects that could act as a foundation for new and renewed social structures with self-development and encounters as central features. Based on an exploration of the neighborhood in which she found a certain gap between seniors and juniors, traditional and new inhabitants and between the people of the neighborhood and residents of a caravan park, artist Lies Kortenhorst set up a series of cultural projects around singing (*EmmerMeerZingt*), dancing (*EmmerMeerDanst*) and visualizing how inhabitants see or feel about their neighborhood (*Schatgraven in Emmermeer*), with the aim of fostering cohesion between these separated groups.

The second and third 'projects', which both were followed up, were the music theater spectacle '*De Drentse Bluesopera*' by the regional location theater PeerGrouP and three performances of their youth department PeerJonG. PeerGrouP makes performances in which location and everything or everyone belonging to that location plays a central role.

PeerGrouP emphatically states that what they make is not community art, but 'socially engaged theater.' Inhabitants are actively approached to be involved in the process of making the performance and/or in the performance itself, but do not create the artwork or participate in the performance itself, as is often the case with Community Art. The participant does take part in the artistic experience as a beholder while it is the artist who gives form to the perceived reality (of him or herself and that of the beholder). Both projects had a follow-up because of their ability to (1) realize a bridge between professionals and amateurs and (2) realize a bridge between local inhabitants being entangled in local issues that were (or still are) at hand at the moment PeerGrouP settled down at the location of their choice.

The fourth and fifth project concerned initiatives by two local governments to encourage collaboration between organizations within, but also outside the cultural sector. The idea was that by fostering this kind of collaboration, bridges need to be built and will be built between (groups of) inhabitants of several villages within the municipalities (merged since 1998), as a great number of them are directly or indirectly associated with clubs of amateur art that are historically part of these villages.⁷ Two networks were set up to realize collaborations: *Network Amateur Arts Coevorden* and *Network Amateur Arts Emmen*. The coordinators of both networks were involved in organizing the annual national Week of Amateur Arts in their municipality. Monitoring this event for two and a half year gave a good picture of the effect of the networks concerning existing and new collaborations.

All five projects were followed up by interviewing people who organized the project, both pragmatically and artistically. Besides interviewing these individuals, all producing participants were approached to fill out a digital survey with questions about their leisure time and social life and were interviewed once or twice, together with fellow participants in so called focus conversations. The questionnaire and interviews helped to explore how the participants were related to each other, to the group or club, and to the environment they live in. The participants were asked to tell something about their background and why they participated in the project or club and to talk about the group's performance: how participants treat each other, their experiences of working with professionals and how the project or practicing amateur art is experienced in relation to other participants (when and how is participating experienced individually and collectively). When applicable, the themes of the produced artworks, performances or concerts were discussed, to be able to map how the participants felt about and related to these issues and if the way these issues were given form realized or influenced certain relationships.

Besides following up the producing participants, audience research (receptive participation) was conducted as well, by asking as many visitors as possible to fill out the same digital survey. Visitors were counted at every event and, if possible, they were immediately asked some questions, to get an overview of the audience and their relation with the artists/performers and the environment. By asking both the productive and receptive participants questions about their experience of (making) the particular artwork, performance or concert, it was explored if their perception of their reality was confirmed or challenged and if there was a connection to their cohesive behavior and attitude. By interviewing the productive participants in the beginning, during and after the event it was possible to investigate whether this cohesive behavior and attitude changed during the process of the project. Unfortunately, it was not possible to survey visitors at several moments; it was only possible to capture them during the event. First, the results with respect to the productive participants will be discussed, followed by the results with respect to the visitors, the recipients, of the projects. Both discussions are focused on the question whether and to what extent the projects had the expected effects on bridging between the abovementioned target groups.

4.1. Cohesive effects of productive participation

From the in total 35 interviews with organizers, 20 focus conversations with a total of 59 productive participants and the answers of 276 respondents who filled out the digital survey, it could be concluded that practicing amateur art especially yields bonds in the relational dimension and on micro level. This merely happens based on correspondences. It became clear that members of amateur art clubs often find each other based on gender, residence, or age but that even the kind of singing voice or musical instrument can be conducive to group formation. Or, as one of the singers in a choir said: 'Standing next to each other and singing the same notes, makes you grow toward each other and you become a group [within the choir]' (In: Otte, 2015, p.204). This concerns durable relations, but they are restricted to the moment of rehearsing or performing. Most members do not meet each other outside the club. Although the majority of the members live in the village where the club is located, inhabitants from different villages *do* meet each other by participating in clubs for amateur art, probably as a consequence of a decreasing level of services (Table 1).

So, in that case one can say that there is bridging between inhabitants of different villages, but again, the members do not further develop these relations outside the club. The temporary projects, however, did yield durable bonding relations in the personal lives of some of the participants. Four participants of the Drentse Bluesopera (DB) said they later became friends with one other participant they did not know before and three of them said they still met with nine other participants as 'groupies' of the professional music band that was a spin-off of DB.⁸ Also, two of the young actors of

PeerJonG (PJ) say to have developed close friendships with a couple of the other participants.⁹ Bridging in the relational dimension between (groups of) participants did not occur, which in most cases can be attributed to the procedure and the organization. Even the project EmmerMEERzingt, in which children would sing together with elderly people, failed in that sense. They never met to prepare the concert and at the moment they were all together, due to bad acoustics and bad sound equipment no one could even hear the community singing, neither the choir member themselves nor the audience standing around them. It was kind of remarkable to notice that the amateur players of DB did not mingle at all with the professionals who took part in this performance: I noticed that, unlike with other projects I was involved in, we only rehearsed with the group of amateurs, separate from the others. Our piece was just merged into the performance in the end. We had no clue what happened on the other side. (In: Otte, 2015, p.210)

We now and then felt rudderless and left alone. Because all the attention went to the professional actors and the play. And sometimes I wondered if they realized that if we were not to be included, we would quit and leave. (In: Otte, 2015, p.209)

The consequence of this feeling of exclusion was that the group of volunteering amateurs developed a strong bond. Outside the project though, this group was divided into little groups of people who found each other based on their correspondences and a mutual feeling of understanding.

Maybe it had to do with hiring an external director for this big production, but the method for involving volunteers and amateur artists completely differed from that of PeerJonG. Here, bridging cohesive behavior was definitely shown between both the professionals and the young amateurs, but also between the theater makers and the people connected to the location of the performance. It became clear that not only bringing these groups of people together is of importance, but that good organization also matters. In the case of PeerJonG, this starts with selecting the young amateurs on the basis of having an open-minded attitude. Furthermore, in working together, the boundary between professionals and young amateurs fades: the youngsters are encouraged to take initiative. They make the performance themselves with guidance by the professionals, which basically exists of having this constant dialogue about the process and the result.¹⁰

So, in the case of PeerJonG, the youngsters already had an open-minded attitude toward the unknown, which for PeerGrouP is a condition for making 'socially engaged theater.' However, the good relation between the professionals and young amateurs seemed to be based on bonding rather than on a bridging cohesive attitude. The theater makers from both sides clearly recognized their mutual passion for theater, and also their open-mindedness. Most of the young players said in the interviews that they felt at home because they could be different, be who they were. This was something that some of the players did not experience at school or at home, where they had the feeling they were not accepted. In this sense, the homogeneity is based on the shared characteristic of being openminded toward or accepting others, toward being different. This might be different though for the relationship between the theater makers and the local people involved, but this will be discussed in a next paragraph about the recipients.¹¹ Neither in the other projects, bridges in the ideal dimension among the productive participants have been noted. This is partly due to the fact that the groups to be connected simply were not brought together. There is potential though: it was clearly heard in the interviews that singing and playing together (music or theater) makes borders fade away. During singing it does not matter anymore who the neighbor standing next to you is, where they come from or what they just said a minute ago, even if it was an unfriendly remark: 'At that moment, everybody is tuned in and everybody seems to go right. But in between ... singing and social behavior are separated things' (In: Otte, 2015, p. 216). The question remains though whether this connected feeling is due to the artistic aspect of the cultural expression, or, in other words: is this temporary bridging attitude caused by the perception of the singers being challenged? In both the projects of PeerJonG and the Drentse Bluesopera it became clear that the sense of belonging to the group occurred in between the rehearsals or the scenes. These participants said that the concentration during the performance made all connections to the others fade away.

A population survey consisting of 3688 respondents (cf. supra), showed other results regarding recipients of art.¹² One of the outcomes of the regression analysis that was carried out was that there is mainly a correlation between attending art events and bridging cohesive behavior. Attendants at art events demonstrated an open attitude toward other people or the unknown more often than those who do not attend.¹³ To give an idea of the results of the population survey, the two tables below display the relative chances for art participants (Table 2a) and attendants of art events (Table 2b) for showing a bridging cohesive attitude towards new neighbors, Europe, 'the unknown' and towards 'acting weird'.

From the 28 indicators for bridging cohesive behavior, in the case of 24 indicators there was a positive correlation with attending amateur art (compared to not attending amateur art). A positive correlation with practicing amateur art was found in case of 14 indicators. This means that the difference in the chance of showing bridging cohesive behavior between people *practicing* amateur art and people *not practicing* amateur art, is smaller than the difference in the chance of showing bridging cohesive behavior between people *attending* art and people *not attending* art. In other words: the correlation between receptive art participation and bridging cohesive behavior seems to be stronger than the correlation between productive art participation and bridging cohesive behavior.

Despite the fact that the regressions were controlled for age, sex, education, and employment, the question remains whether this is a causal relation, i.e. does attending art make people more open-minded or do open-minded people tend to consume art more often? By following the five projects from beginning to end, an attempt to answer this question was made, apart from the question whether the difference between practicing amateur art and attending art could also be found here.

4.2. Cohesive effects of receptive participation

In all, 1584 attendants of the five projects (consisting of 11 events) were interviewed on the spot, to determine how conventional or unconventional the encounters had been. 718 of these visitors were willing to fill out a digital survey at home, which was identical to the one used for the population survey. Questions were added to this digital survey to indicate how the art expression was received by the attendant (i.e. whether the art expression was conceived as confirming or challenging their perception). 323 of the respondents were inhabitants of the neighborhood Emmermeer

and can be seen as the audience of the public art project *Schatgraven in Emmermeer*. They filled out a paper version of the questionnaire at home, which was delivered and picked up by students on the same evening.¹⁴

All projects were public events in which unusual encounters with other attendants, artists or people from the environment could occur. However, only the projects of EmmerMeerCultuur and one performance by PeerJonG were organized in such a way that the groups (as audience) who were supposed to be bridged, really came together. The activities in the Week for Amateur Arts were not really successful in attracting audiences (at some of the activities, such as open rehearsals, there were no visitors at all), but also not in attracting people from other villages, as most of the attendants were local residents. 15% of the attendants of the Drentse Bluesopera and 20% of those of the PeerJonG performances met people who were unknown to them, but only in the case of two performances of PeerJonG these concerned encounters between local residents with different views on the subject of the performance (in short: plans for building windmills, closing down a primary school and the possible future use of an empty public building). So, bridging behavior (in the relational dimension) among the receptive participants has only partly occurred and on the spot.

To determine whether the projects appealed to the visitors in such a way that they changed their perception toward certain issues or persons, or, in other words, showed a bridging attitude (in the ideal dimension), the respondents were asked to answer questions about their experience of the expressions of art. The outcome of the analysis of the survey was that a few respondents showed a bridging cohesive attitude, but that this was realized through an *artistic* experience in only one performance of PeerJonG: *Het Vindingrijk* (The Inventive State). For this performance, PeerJonG settled in a former school building, temporarily inhabited by persons under the rules of 'anti-squatting', in the town of Winschoten. The question posed by the professionals to the young theater makers was to dream about and make plans for the future of this building, by doing research and talking to people in and around the building.

Attendants at this performance stated in the survey that they had used their imagination to gain a new perception of the building and its potential. This new perception could have been a consequence of discovering parts of the building the participants normally did not have access to. But would the building itself have appealed to the imagination as the performance apparently did? The various parts of the building were completely integrated in the performance, shaped into new concepts in such a way that participants could give new meaning to the building, which can be interpreted as bridging in the ideal dimension. For example, the kitchen classroom was imagined a restaurant where the visitors were invited in pairs to take a shelf, place it on a crate and sit down on one side of it. The shelf served as both a table and seats, keeping the pair in balance and inviting them to enter into conversation. It even turned out that two months after the performance, several groups of inhabitants of Winschoten initiated new activities and a debate in the building about its future, cooperating with individuals and professionals whom they had not found before (van Dijk, 2011). From the questionnaires filled out by the audience of the Drentse Bluesopera, it can be concluded that DB merely confirmed existing perceptions. *De Drentse Bluesopera* was about the perceived different views held by traditional inhabitants (farmers) and so-called 'newcomers' (internal migrants) about how the landscape should or should not be arranged. For the attendants, the story that was told and the issues that were brought up were primarily recognizable and seemed to confirm their view on the groups involved.

However, they did feel challenged in their perception by the scenery, but only by those stage sets not directly supporting or referring to the context: agricultural machinery (material), designed in such a way that people perceived a totally new concept of a fairground (aboutness) did not refer to any contradictory interests between traditional inhabitants and newcomers. In other words, there was no sense of relative autonomy, meaning that the challenging scenography could not change the participants' perception of (tensions between) farmers and new entrepreneurs. The performance of PeerJonG could be seen as relative autonomous in that sense. All of the material (persons, text, space, and props) was directly related to the context and was used in a unique way to shape a new concept of that context.

5. Conclusion

Apart from the outcomes mentioned in the former paragraph, there has hardly been any change in social compositions in Drenthe as a result of the Drenthe Cultural Participation Policy (2009–2012) of the Province, whereas this was expected in advance. This is because the policy, that is to say nine out of ten total eleven events that were scrutinized in the PhD study, was primarily aimed at confirmative artistic expressions. As a result, mainly those connections that were based on correspondences were realized or¹⁴ The respondents of the different projects that filled out the long version of the questionnaire digitally, did so at home within a week after attending the art expression. enhanced, while the social cohesion remained primarily based on homogeneity. The field study indicates an important difference between confirmative art and challenging art with regard to cohesive behavior. Cultural policy aiming for external social cohesion could benefit more from supporting art that seeks to challenge perceptions, than stimulating people to participate in arts that merely confirm their perception, provided that (1) the government is selective in its choice and (2) a balance between the social context and autonomy of the artist is pursued by both the subsidizer and the artist. The first condition can only be met if the goals of the government are clear; if the aim is to bridge, it will not help to subsidize cultural projects attracting similar people and confirming their similarities. Inviting an artist with the clear goal to challenge people's perception on the other hand, will not help if the relation between the artwork and the social context is completely ignored. In other words, the art project should be relatively autonomous. Whereas artists must be given the freedom by the subsidizer and other stakeholders to create an artwork according to their own, newly composed rules, the artists should be aware of the norms of the social context and relate the artwork to that context. Not to conform to this context, but to bring dismeasure into the measure. In that sense, it might be worth taking note of an art practice coined by Kester (2005) as 'dialogical aesthetics' forming subjectivity through discourse and inter-subjective exchange: "discourse not simply [as] a tool to be used to communicate an a priori "content" with other already formed subjects, but intended to model subjectivity itself" (ibid, p.5).

Productive participation in amateur arts is often associated with social cohesion, because it is conceived as a primarily socializing expression of culture. However, social cohesion is not only about social integration based on

correspondences or similarities. With the enormous growth of what can be called super-diversity (Vertovec, 2007), it becomes even more urgent for people to recognize, understand, and bridge their differences. The difference between confirming art and challenging art can play an important role in relation to cohesive behavior. When authorities have a better picture of what kind of social cohesion they are aiming for, it is possible to implement a more focused and therefore effective policy.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Pascal Gielen and Hans van Maanen for their comments.

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¹ Social cohesion provides another legitimation for the 'spreading policy' for which the Dutch cultural policy is known. In earlier decades up until today, this policy was legitimized based on the so called 'Bildungsideal': the thought that the confrontation with the arts would cultivate one's personality and thus contributes to individual emancipation. A lot of studies on art participation therefor focused on the question whether the arts are equally accessible both vertically (to all social classes) and horizontally (e.g. in every region). This research bypasses this question and focuses on the relation between the arts and social cohesion as such.

² Moody and White use the terms social solidarity and social cohesion as synonyms, as seems to be customary in the literature (Mizuchi, 1992).

³ Gittel and Vidal (1998) stated that bonding social capital brings people who already know (or recognize similarities of) each other, closer together. Bridging social capital then connects people who don't know each other and might have no similarities at all. However, as mentioned before, social capital merely is accumulative and does not say anything about the nature of the connections between the individual and his or her network or how the various relations are connected to each other. Cohesive behavior is a better term to use.

⁴ Empirical research conducted in the Netherlands shows that the relational coherence of both productive and receptive art participation is largely based on homogeneity (Ranshuysen, 2002; van den Broek, 2010; van den Broek, 2013): art does attract a certain audience.

⁵ Huizinga's definition can be applied to both the terms game and play. However, there is a slight difference, which becomes important when distinguishing art from other forms of play. The term play rather refers to the entertainment of spontaneous activity of children and animals (paideia), the term game particularly refers to competition played according to rules and determined by skill, discipline and luck (ludus). (van de Vall, 2008).

⁷ One should think of amateur brass bands, orchestras, choirs, theatre clubs, dance organizations, clubs for amateur visual artists, photographers and filmmakers, reading clubs, but also small clubs of amateur writers of fiction and poetry.

⁸ Before and shortly after the project, 17 of the in total 27 participants filled out a questionnaire. 10 of them were interviewed in focus groups. From these 10 interviewees, 6 responded to a short questionnaire one year after the project had finished.

⁹ Before, during and shortly after the projects, 10 of the in total 16 young participants filled out a questionnaire. 13 of them were interviewed in focus groups. From these 13 interviewees, 5 responded to a short questionnaire one and a half year after the last performance under scrutiny.

¹⁰ The young amateurs here learned to make socially engaged theater. So, they are not the local people about and with whom the performance will be realized, but they learned how to approach and involve these people and to reflect on the local situation.

¹¹ As was explained before, the local people who were involved in the projects of PeerGrouP and PeerJonG were not involved in the artistic process and therefore are seen here as beholders (who in the end play an important role in the artistic experience, cf. supra).

¹² This article refers to three different groups of respondents: (1) 3688 respondents for the population survey, (2) 276 respondents who productively participated in the five projects and (3) 1584 respondents who visited these five projects.

¹³ In total 170 regression analyses were carried out, testing 28 indicators for bridging behavior and attitude on the personal level, the level of the neighborhood and the level of society. For a complete overview of all the regression analyses, I refer to my PhD research, pp. 87–144, to be downloaded from [https://www.rug.nl/research/portal/publications/binden-of-overbruggen\(2d433fe3-c40c-4b62-bd13-2544371eea14\).html](https://www.rug.nl/research/portal/publications/binden-of-overbruggen(2d433fe3-c40c-4b62-bd13-2544371eea14).html).