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Article

Prospects of Refugee Integration in the Netherlands: Social Capital, Information Practices and Digital Media

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Abstract
Integration is a highly contested concept within the field of migration. However, a well-established view of the concept draws from underpinning migration and refugee theories, in which integration is seen as a dynamic, multidimensional, and *two-way* process of adaptation to a new culture and that takes place over time. Most studies have focused on the integration perspective of host societies, in particular how governments' understandings of belonging shape legal frameworks of rights and citizenship and their impact on the process of integration itself. With a focus on refugee migration to the Netherlands, this study analyzes the newcomers' perspectives and experiences of integration and information in the host society, as well as the role of digital media technologies and networks in mediating this relationship. Building on policies and refugee migrant interviews, the article sketches out the ongoing dynamics of social capital during refugees' adaptation processes in the country and puts forward a perception of the role of media in the integration act.

Keywords
digital technologies; information practices; refugee integration; social capital

Issue
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1. Introduction

Integration is a highly contested concept within the field of migration. A generally accepted definition, theory or model of integration is lacking (Castles, Korac, Vasta, & Vertovec, 2002). However, a well-established view of the concept draws from underpinning migration and refugee theories, in which integration is seen as a dynamic, multidimensional, and two-way process of adaptation to a new culture and that takes place over time (Ager & Strang, 2008; Phillimore, 2011). The reciprocal nature of integration places demands on both receiving societies and the individual refugees. While most studies tend to adopt state- and policy-centered perspectives for the analysis of economic and sociocultural integration practices and outcomes for refugees (Da Lomba, 2010), there is still a lack of systematic knowledge about the impact of social connections on the information experiences of refugees in this process (Ager & Strang, 2008; Fisher, 2018)—and even more so in relation to digitally mediated communication practices taking place in this context.

This study analyzes the newcomers' perspectives on integration and information in the host society, as well as the role of social media technologies and networks in mediating this relationship. This article builds on both normative and social constructivist approaches to refugee integration (Ager & Strang, 2008) as well as on Putnam's

(2002) social capital theory to explore the refugees' integration and information practices through the digital (Esses, Hamilton, & Gaucher, 2017).

With a focus on refugee migration to the Netherlands, we will first provide a background overview of current integration policies in the country in order to throw some light on the idea of belonging that prevails in the country. Subsequently, we will conduct an in-depth and localised examination of how new arrivals understand and experience these policies and issues related to citizenship, rights and security as well as information access in the context of their own adaptation process and the part played by media and interpersonal networks in shaping the refugees' information practices. Building on existing policies and refugee migrant interviews, the article sketches out the ongoing dynamics of social capital during refugees' adaptation processes in the country and puts forward a perception of the role of media in the integration act.

2. Towards a Conceptualisation of Integration: A Review

According to the EU Common Basic Principles, adopted in 2004, integration is defined as "a dynamic, *two-way* process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of Member States" (p. 15). Similarly, the 1951 Refugee Convention outlines the rights of displaced people to participate in the social, political, economic and cultural spheres of their new society, and highlights the responsibility of host countries to create the conditions that enable integration (e.g., access to jobs and services) and an acceptance of refugees in the host society (Ager & Strang, 2008). Integration has also been assessed as a multidimensional process, going beyond a two-way conception and supporting an alternative perspective on the relationships that are established between refugees and host communities in which all refugees, individuals, institutions and the society play a role (Ager & Strang, 2008). Phillimore (2011) states that most important in this relationship is the recognition that integration is always ongoing and that the notion of an 'integrated society' is hard to be conceived, since the process of integration requires continuous efforts from both sides.

Following on from the notion of integration as a *two-way* process, more recent attention has focused on the adoption of a research approach that also includes the perceptions and experiences of refugees in this process. Specifically, many scholars have repeatedly emphasized the need to focus on sociocultural dimensions of integration to better evaluate the refugees' perspectives, attitudes and behaviours regarding belonging, especially because government policies are primarily concerned about the objective dimensions of political and economic participation to describe the outcomes of integration for refugees (Korac, 2009). At the same time, in relation to this, it is important to look at the government policies themselves, not only in terms of stories and discourses of integration, but also investigate the indicators that accompany the integration framework. Though, as Cheung and Phillimore (2013) highlight, both in academia and in a policy level, much emphasis has been placed on structure and organisation elements of the system on different aspects of integration, excluding a wider range of dimensions that focus on the interconnectedness and the way policies are experienced.

In order to explore the *two-way* process that was mentioned above, the article brings along the notion of social capital theory by Putnam (2001). The aim is to discuss the benefits and drawbacks of (a lack of) social and cultural exchanges and interactions between refugees and host communities within integration processes with regards to the idea of bridges, bonds and links that define different aspects of social capital. Despite the fact that social capital theory has extensively being associated with the issue of integration, what has been underinvestigated in the literature is the communication and information practices among refugees in relation to information and communication technology (ICT) and how social connections can assist in these processes.

3. Bridges, Bonds and Links: Theories on Social Capital and Refugee Integration

In Putnam's (2001) theory, social capital represents the notion that social networks have value. Like any other capital that is, social capital is an equity which can be invested in or depreciated with networks of relationships among people in a community or society that affects the productivity of individuals and groups in such society or community. The stock of social capital lays on the connections among the individuals and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that ascend from them. In other words, feeling safe and secure, have a trust in the society, not being isolated nor have insufficient contacts among other members of the community or society, with a sense of a civic virtue embedded in a strong network of reciprocal social relations. Therefore, in order to be able to measure social capital, someone needs to principally focus on observing attitudes and behaviours and identify the investment on social capital in terms of participation and civic engagement, community activities, connections in work, religious and political environments, volunteering but also social movements and online platforms; symbolic relations of exchange.

An important distinction is the one between bridging and bonding in terms of forms of social capital (Putnam, 2001; Woolcock, 2003). Bonding, a more selected form, tends to reinforce exclusive identities and homogenous groups (Putnam, 2001, p. 25), in terms of building strong and dense ties in a more relatively closed network, between individuals of primarily common or similar socio-economic status and demographics. Usually associated in the literature with the creation of shared identities and development of solidarity and mobilisation of individuals with a common purpose (Field,

2003; Halpern, 2005; Putnam, 2002). For social bonds to emerge within ethnic groups, community organisations need to be formed in order to strengthen this sense of shared identity and solidarity, something though that may also counter to exclusion from social capital (Zetter et al., 2006). Thus, bonding social capital is interpreted as a key point in order to advance and establish bridging and linking relationships with other groups (Halpern, 2005; Levitte, 2003). Bridging is more about encompassing people across diverse social cleavages (Putnam, 2000, p. 25), Individuals in bridging social capital are less demographically similar and span across different cleavages e.g. ethnicity, race, culture, instilling broader identities and reflecting a generalised trust towards any different type of individuals, that work together to achieve collective objectives and advancing interests. As Dale (2005) specifies, bridging social capital of refugees can be built through dialogue and activity participation, within and between refugee communities, from which collective norms, values and governance processes can emerge. A third type of social capital that extends the bridging/bonding distinction, that is linking social capital, builds on networks across different social hierarchies represented in public institutions and agencies (Healy, 2002), in other words posts and positions of authority and power e.g. NGO's, government agencies, private sector. The main characteristic here is that linking social capital connects people to key political (and other) resources and economic institutions (Woolcock, 2003). In the case of refugees for instance, linking social capital provides the opportunity to gain access to such power and resources and participate in civil society (Elliott & Yusuf, 2014).

Social capital, as pointed above, is an equity based on the sense of belonging. As Portes puts it, in order to have access to use social capital, a person must be related to others, and these others are the actual source of his advantage (1998, p. 7). It is the social networks that provide the platform for social capital establishment. These social networks are formed, operated and preserved by the network members, and are used to share ideas, information, norms and values. The contribution of social capital in the lives of its' members in multiple levels e.g. wellbeing, social support, economic development and outcomes. The quality and therefore the strength of the networks depends on the level of interaction among the members but also on the degree of their maintenance and institutionalisation. As Bourdieu (1983) clarified when referring to networks of social relations, it is 'the product of individual and collective investment strategies within certain social fields, which intended or unintended sustain and create social relations, which promise sooner or later a benefit' (p. 192).

The theory of social capital and the 'centrality of social connection' has been extensively used in order to understand refugee integration in academic and policy making work (Ager & Strang, 2008, p. 596) and as the authors highlight, more specifically the distinction between the three forms of social capital mentioned above: bonds, bridges and links have been broadly developed in the discourse of refugee integration. In an effort to connect functional dimensions and the role of social interactions, Ager and Strang (2008) propose a framework linking various domains as a tool to foster debate and definition regarding normative conceptions of integration in resettlement settings (Table 1).

The four domains of the framework can be utilised from both ways of the two-way process, refugees and host communities, while reflecting on the multidimensional aspect of the process, as discussed above, but also a measuring tool of adequacy of integration policies (Cheung & Phillimore, 2013). The experience from existing cases points to the practicality of supporting asylum seekers and refugees in terms of information, material and other form of resources. That is from providing services e.g. legal, health care, housing, to community development and establishment and effective communication among various involved actors e.g. organisations, institutions, communities, bringing the theory of social capital and its forms of social connection in practice (see Losi & Strang, 2008; Smets & Ten Kate, 2008). What is clear from the ongoing discussion is that more work is required to understand both the benefits of social bonds but also their requirements and responsibilities for the refugee integration. Finally, in relation to this, what also appears to be well-nigh apparent is that social connections and the social capital that is the output of such connections also has a strong impact on the integration process.

Social capital has been reinforcing while having cases e.g. that some kinds of bonding social capital may discourage the formation of bridging social capital. The so-called dark side of social capital in that sense may have high levels within a group, and therefore generating positive returns for the participating members, while at the same time generating negative expanse for other groups and communities. The output of cases as such may contribute to higher crime and discrimination level, and sig-

Table 1. Ager and Strang's (2008) refugee integration framework.

Means and Markers	Employment	Housing	Education	Health
Social Connections	Social bridges	Social bonds	Social links	
Facilitators	Language and Cultural Knowledge		Safety and stability	
Foundation	Rights and citizenship			

nificantly lower level of tolerance, creating and hosting monopoly environments and breeding of negative social norms. As Alesina and La Ferrera (2005) underline, this has relevance for diversity impacts, and in the context of diversity this also applies to cases between e.g. religious and ethnic groups, or in a migration context tensions between domestic and alien groups. The heterogeneity that immigration and diversity bring, foster social isolation and is associated with a distinctive increasement of out-group distrust (Alesina & La Ferrara, 2005; Hooghe, Reeskens, Stolle, & Trappers, 2006; Keller, 2001). In other words, we stick to 'our own' and the less we trust the 'other' (Bobo & Tuan, 2006; Putnam, 2007). Reflecting the issues of diversity among different groups and high levels of multiculturalism, the experience so far points to the lack of effective integration, explained by this dark side of the social capital.

Finally, social capital is about networks that enhance the ability to communicate, socially and emotionally. The advance of technology in general assists the progress of broader and assimilated ways of circulating the information. In line with this, the development of ICT and more specifically, the relation between ICT and social capital has drawn the attention both among scholars and policy makers. And while in Putnam's work (2001) the impact on television in everyday life has contributed to a decline of social capital, others pointed out is the benefits that people can get from these social networks and believe that ICT facilitates social capital building (Yang, Lee, & Kurnia, 2009). By limiting the barriers of time and space, social networks preserve ties and connections that provide social support and information in various forms of relationships, while accelerating the way people behave and operate at their communities (Komito, 2011). In other words, the digital and social media fosters social capital and genuine community. Therefore, as discussed above, in this research, we aim to reflect on the standpoints of trust, civic engagement and sociopolitical participation to examine the role of the digital media technologies in social connectedness and information sharing within an integration environment. This will contribute to the ongoing debate on interaction between social capital and ICT in general while adding to the literature on integration strategies.

4. Digital Media and Information Sharing between Local and Refugee Communities

With the focus still remaining on developing and maintaining trust with regards to the formation of social connections among both refugee and host society actors, in order to build 'bridges' between 'bonded' communities, there needs to be the opportunity for people to exchange resources and information in ways that are beneficial for all actors involved (Voigts & Watne, 2018). This could be interpreted as the effort to over the existing gaps between the government's policies promoting bridging social capital and the bonding social capital empowered by the refugee communities. The issues regarding government communication of these policies and actions towards refugees, as well as in relation to the way integration is perceived and experienced by both actors highlight the necessity of the effective circulation of information from both official and informal sources and the potential role that digital media could play in the process.

When it comes to the information practices of refugees, Fisher (2018, p. 82) states that there is a general lack of systematic knowledge of how they have access to information in their host countries and which technologies are being used to support newcomers. Maitland (2018, p. 209) also argues that it is not always clear which organizations have the capacity to develop and implement policies that can facilitate or hinder refugees' access to relevant information and which technologies are utilized in this process. At the national level, the complexity of refugee policies and frameworks of legal rights in destination countries can increase the information needs of refugees as well as their use of technologies (Ager & Strang, 2008; Maitland, 2018). In most Western European countries, for instance, the procedures, requirements and the multiple actors involved in the settlement makes the process for refugees very complicated with information often being presented in a fragmented, dense and digitalised manner. Access to this information requires not only the adequate use of social support networks by refugees (Fisher, 2018), but also the ability to navigate complex information landscapes online (Kaufmann, 2018).

Existing research on refugees' information experiences during settlement highlights the increasingly important role digital technologies play as tools for addressing discrepancies between refugees' information and integration needs and local community expectations (Fisher, 2018; Maitland, 2018). Overall, refugees are embracing the interactivity of digital platforms and therefore recognize digital media's potential to tackle their integration demands and issues through networks of social connections. This statement is in line with the findings of Dekker and Engbersen (2014), who demonstrated that social media are assisting migrants in maintaining connections with strong and weak ties and establishing a new system of latent ties that are key to the migration process. Specifically focusing on the process of refugee integration, it is now well established from a variety of studies, that social media networks can facilitate the acquisition of all kinds of information (Alencar, 2018; Kaufmann, 2018; Leurs, 2017). In their study about smartphone uses and communication practices of Syrian refugees in Austria and the Netherlands, Kaufmann (2018) and Leurs (2017) found, respectively, that these technologies can foster refugees' exchange of information, intercultural communication with the host community, as well as connections with family, friends and refugee networks in both home and host countries. Similarly, Andrade and Doolin's (2016) research on

refugees in New Zealand showed that their use of ICTs can promote social inclusion and greater access to information that enable refugees to feel both socially connected while at the same time, preserving their own cultural identity.

However, the notion that technologies serve to positively connect refugee and local community networks for information sharing and support has been recently challenged by studies demonstrating the use of online networks by different refugee and host actors to disseminate unreliable and unstable information (Wall, Campbell, & Janbek, 2017), promote hate speech (Fisher, 2018), discrimination (Voigts & Watne, 2018) and surveillance (Gifford & Wilding, 2013). Consequently, the dark side of social capital in relation to technology use may also have negative implications for refugee integration, as social actors engage in information practices that hinder social cohesion on different community levels (Ager & Strang, 2008).

Moreover, the process of integration is not homogeneous among refugee populations within a country and the ways in which they experience social connectedness, information and digital technologies may vary enormously, as refugees have different socioeconomic and educational backgrounds (Van Heelsum, 2017). As stated above, research on refugees' access to relevant information through (mediated) social networks remains fragmented and limited to overly general approaches across different groups and settings (Fisher, 2018). Departing from the specificities of the integration experiences characterising diverse refugee populations in the Netherlands, this study offers some important insights into how they manage to build social capital for accessing relevant information, the challenges they face and the extent to which digital media are used to cope with these challenges.

5. Overview of Integration Policies in the Netherlands

The 2015 'refugee crisis' in Europe has contributed to an unprecedented surge in refugee migration in the Netherlands, with a total of 93,890 applications in the period 2015–2018 (Statistics Netherlands, 2019). For a long time, the Netherlands has been celebrated for its tolerance towards other cultures and religions. Over the past decades, however, the country began to experience many changes in its immigration and integration policies, shifting from a multiculturalist approach to an increased emphasis on assimilatory ideals. At the same time, immigration and integration issues have become increasingly important to Dutch politics, as a consequence of the rise of nationalist and anti-immigration political parties (Scholten & Van Nispen, 2015). The rapid number of asylum applications in the context of ongoing refugee crisis has contributed to further polarize the debate in relation to migration and integration in the country. What continues to be stressed extensively is the need for acceleration and intensification of refugee participation in the Dutch society, while overpassing the rising issues of social and labour market integration and the various responses on the matter in public opinion (Scholten et al., 2017).

In the Netherlands, integration policies state that refugees and migrants have to assimilate the sociocultural values and norms of Dutch society and acquire knowledge of the Dutch labour market in order to be granted admission to the country. Integration courses have been implemented as the country's significant efforts to encourage newcomers to integrate by learning the Dutch language courses and acquiring knowledge of its political system, history and Dutch values to become independent members of the Dutch society in terms of civic integration. Refugees are also required to take integration courses and exams, in order to obtain government benefits and the legal right to remain in the country with the potential of facing fines and exclusion from the permanent status of residence or naturalisation in case of failure (Klaver, Luuk, Arend, & Smit, 2015). Management of refugee integration takes place on central, regional and local level. The Ministry of Social Affairs is responsible for coordinating national integration policies, while municipalities play a crucial role in putting these policies into action and fostering integration at a local level (e.g., support in finding work, participate in the local culture). The type of support provided to refugees may vary, as municipalities have the freedom to shape their local actions regarding the integration.

As mentioned above, the education programme for newcomers is focusing on mainly civic integration, including Dutch language classes but also courses that will elevate the professional skills in a labour market alignment aspect in order to help them orientate in the way of living of Dutch society. There are several organisations that are involved in this stage along with COA, including the Ministry of Education, the Taskforce for the Employment and Integration of Refugees (TWIV) but also a strong corps of volunteers. The organisation of the education programme is directly connected to the labour market participation that will allow and assist the refugees and asylum seekers towards economic independence.

At the same time, various local stakeholders (NGOs, social workers, housing corporations, and civil society actors) are involved in the integration of refugees at a local level. For instance, the accountability for housing accommodation is shared by both the Central Agency of the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA). Refugees and asylum seekers are also eligible to public health care which is mainly arranged by the non-profit provider of Regeling Zorg Asielzoekers (RZA) in collaboration with the COA in order to provide guidance through the health care system. However, according to Klaver et al. (2015), the existing reception system in the country creates high rates of isolation with adverse health impacts an issue that could be addressed by stronger focus on the language availability classes (p. 8).

Altogether, these factors make the Netherlands an interesting study case for analysing the level of interac-

tion between host government's integration policies and the refugees' interpretations of integration, as well as the role of communication and media to bridge the existing gaps of those expectations. This section has provided an overview of Dutch integration policies and notions of belonging and citizenship and how they are communicated and implemented on different levels of the integration process. The next sections of this article focus on presenting the methodology employed and the findings, where the refugees' perceptions and practices of integration are theorised and systematically analyzed in relation to (mediated) social networks for information access.

6. A Note on Methodology

Analysis was based on the lived experiences and expectations of integration among refugees in the Netherlands. In doing so, this research builds on the results of 58 in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted with refugees in the cities of Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague from 2016 to 2018. These interviews form part of a larger research project aimed at investigating how digital technologies shape and are shaped by individual and contextual factors related to refugee integration in the Netherlands. For the purposes of this study, we emphasize and systematically examine refugees' perceptions and practices of integration while at the same time referring to their social connections and information practices and the ways in which digital technologies are shaping these processes. Participants were refugees with diverse socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds coming from Syria ($N = 46$), Eritrea ($N = 9$) and Afghanistan ($N = 3$), of which 33 were male and 25 were female, ageing from 18 to 60 years, and living in the Netherlands between 9 months and 4 years. All names used to describe participants' quotes are pseudonyms. Snowball sampling was mainly used as a method to recruit the refugee participants for this project. We also relied on the assistance of two cultural insiders to contact potential participants and moderate some interviews. Most interviews were conducted in English; three interviews were held in Dutch, two in Arabic and one in Tigrinya. Interviews lasted for 45 minutes on average and took place in different public places (coffee place and restaurants), private homes and refugee centers. They were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The procedures of this project were approved from the Ethics Board Committee of the Erasmus University Rotterdam.

Data management and analysis were performed using thematic analysis. The data was checked with participants when initially collected and analyzed and then checked again at the end of the analytical process for safeguarding validity and reliability. The analysis of social capital building and information practices among different refugee groups in the study was carried out in the context of the refugees' integration experiences. In this study, the refugees' experiences of integration are defined on the basis of four themed categories: (1) integration is not a linear, uniform process; (2) integration is a negotiation process; (3) integration through shared experienced; and (4) integration at the local level. These categories offer sufficient empirical ground for exploring how the three different refugee populations are making using of different forms of social capital (bonding, bridging and linking) to seek, share, and build information and the implications of these practices for their adaptation.

7. Results

7.1. Integration Is Not a Linear, Uniform Process

One important characteristic of integration that has been widely recognized in migration research is that the process of integration for refugees begins upon arrival in the host country (Lewis, 2005). Refugees often report that once reaching their destination society, they are very keen on making progress in learning the culture and language of the host country even before the acquisition of legal status (Losi & Strang, 2008). In general, all participants in this research do not agree that they have to wait until they obtain refugee status to be able to 'integrate'. For instance, refugees showed a great drive to participate within Dutch society, which was reflected in their efforts to learn the Dutch language and culture, getting education, obtaining a job and doing volunteering work. Many participants mentioned that they already used social media apps and websites to learn words in Dutch when they were in the camp and asylum seekers' center. Others revealed they actively reached out to Dutch citizens for the purpose of creating social bonds and learning about the Dutch culture and lifestyle and other employment opportunities in the new environment (Andrade & Doolin, 2016). These connections can be maintained via social media platforms. As Badeed, an 18-year-old high school student from Afghanistan said:

> I knew one Dutch person, I met him by chance, and now we have a contact through WhatsApp and Facebook. I met this person by road, we talked about many different issues for about half an hour, then we gave each other the contacts to communicate, and we communicate periodically.

In line with the findings of Van Heelsum's (2017) study on the aspirations and frustrations of Syrian and Eritrean refugees in the Netherlands, some refugees in this project heavily criticized the fact that they cannot work or study until they are granted asylum. In this regard, Bakker et al. (2014, p. 434) note that authorities do not want to create 'false hope' and therefore discourage asylum seekers from integrating into Dutch society while their asylum request is being processed. At the same time, it is also important to highlight that becoming a status holder does not reduce the barriers to accessing the Dutch labour market and education system, and official government sources do not always provide this informa-

tion in a clear manner. For instance, most refugees taking part in this large project reported not having connections in the host community that could support them in the process of looking for a job. Despite the efforts by formal networks (local municipalities, NGOs, social workers) to provide guidance to refugees and asylum seekers about the Dutch labour market, many still do not know the local community and lack social capital and knowledge of digital initiatives happening in this area. This is very problematic considering the refugees' work eligibility status in the new country and their inability to acquire the adequate resources and guidelines to identify employment opportunities. While all participants agreed that social media networks can help people to obtain relevant information about the job market, they acknowledged limitations regarding the use of social media networks by institutional actors, especially those participants who have been living in the country for a longer period of time.

> It is the responsibility of academic institutions and governments to make extending the role of social media as a strategic objective to help people integrate and to extend the reach of the social media to more segmented people. (Jamal, a 45-year-old Syrian male, health professional who at the time of the study was doing an internship in a pharmacy for one year)

In some cases, however, participants mentioned that the development of informal offline connections among refugees helped mitigate these challenges and ease their access to a range of resources in the course of their adaptation (Phillimore, 2011; Voigts & Watne, 2018). In the case of Rima, a 43-year-old woman from Syria, if she wants to look for information, she will ask a friend who will help her to find the right information.

7.2. Integration Is a Negotiation Process

Many refugees in this study highlighted specific elements that are not necessarily emphasized within Dutch integration policies (Bakker et al., 2014). The values of respect and tolerance are perceived as inherent attitudes of successful processes of integration in the Netherlands. As Amira, a 30-year-old journalist from Syria, said:

> When I have the acceptance I can be flexible easily and I can integrate. When I have the acceptance, for example, when I find something (that is) new to me, I need to respect and accept it. I don't have to oppose this change or this new thing (just) because it's contradictory to my original culture.

This view resonates with a dynamic exchange that requires both parties to treat one and another based on humanistic ideals, such as consideration and respect.

In line with the two-way approach to integration (Ager & Strang, 2008; Berry, 2005), participants believed that successful forms of integration are achieved by means of joint efforts, which promote stronger social connections and familiarization between locals and refugees in order to avoid mutual feelings of alienation (Putnam, 2001). Refugees across the three studies firmly believed that contact and interactions with the local community enable them to acquire knowledge of the Dutch culture, to become more familiar with the ways it differs from their original culture and therefore decreasing cultural shock and isolation. Most of them mentioned that they used social media platforms to socialize with Dutch people as a way to reduce isolation (Leurs, 2017), since constant face-to-face social encounters with local citizens can be more difficult (Van Heelsum, 2017), due to their communication style and the limited amount of time they tend to spend on social interactions.

Similarly, the contact with family, friends and fellow migrants can also function as an online network that can assist them in overcoming feeling of loneliness and separation (Komito, 2011). Arguably, these social connections could impede the process of integration (Putnam, 2002). Contrary to Putnam's assertion, these networks can also help them in accessing relevant information in their new environment. In our research, refugees connected with individuals from their own ethno cultural group, particularly through their voluntary efforts as translators. Jemal from Eritrea, for instance, told us that he started translating material from Dutch to Arabic or from Dutch to Tigrinya with the assistance of Google Translate to help fellow refugees.

In this sense, refugees are not passive subjects whose trajectories are defined exclusively by their new environment through a continuum of assimilation to the host society. On the one hand, it is necessary for refugees to contribute to their host society by being proactive and productive member of society. On the other hand, many participants deemed necessary that, by being a productive member of the host society, refugees have the right to receive governmental support and guidance. In other words, integration should not be a policy goal but an ongoing, long-term process. Much like emphasized by Berry (2005) and Da Lomba (2010), participants perceived integration as a process that places responsibility on both the host country and the newcomers. Overall, refugee participants further argued that integration is only possible when the contact between refugees' culture and the local culture are successfully negotiated. This is illustrated in the following quote by Omari, a 37-year-old Syrian refugee with a background in English literature:

> It will be very nice to make a mutual social media group for both refugees and local community on the level of the municipalities, to be common for Amsterdam for example and those who are interested to join this group. Then you have so many things together, making activities or meetings, it is a local integration on the level of the area. Then we can make this story as a success story on the level of the country.

In line with this, participants expressed the idea that there was a need to re-conceptualize the notion of refugees' integration in the Dutch society. It became clear that the expectations of refugees regarding the dimensions of integration differ from what Dutch legal frameworks expect from them.

> It's something that really needs to be redefined because integration for Dutch people is different. The definition for me, it means that I have a job I have a house, I do my duties to the society and receive my rights without affecting my culture or religious background. (Jemal, from Eritrea, 37 years old, electrician)

Integration was, thus, perceived as a process that needs to be situated in a middle ground, combining both opportunities fostered by the host country and asylum seekers' and refugees' efforts (Da Lomba, 2010), with digital technologies playing a crucial mediating role.

7.3. Integration through Shared Experienced

Knowledge is key in the adaptation process of refugees (Andrade & Doolin, 2016). As stated earlier in the results, participants' social (mediated) connections were able to facilitate cultural knowledge of Dutch society and helped reduce the socio-psychological stress (e.g., cultural shock and social isolation) that the integration process entails when migrants engage in contact with a new environment (Berry, 2005). This comes in line with the argument of Putnam (2000) on how social capital also plays a role on the wellbeing of the members of the community, as it creates a sense of belonging and engagement that minimises the potential of stronger negative psychological situations.

As regards to cultural knowledge, Syrian, Eritrean and Afghan participants greatly emphasized the importance of social media platforms, such as Facebook and Youtube, for learning more about traditions and the daily life in the Netherlands through both local Dutch connections and the experiences of other refugees. By being in contact with Dutch friends and accessing the shared experiences of refugees in both platforms, the participants were able to get to know more about the Dutch culture. There are differences, however, in how female and male refugees in this project make use of social connections, in particular when it comes to learning about the cultural practices of the host society. In contrast to the male participants, the majority of the females do not directly establish social bridges to increase cultural knowledge (Van Heelsum, 2017). Refugee women often learn about their new surroundings through their own family as well as refugee networks online. Although these results are likely to be related to the cultural background of participants, it is also important to highlight the fact that integration policies in the host society may hinder the formation of connections with the local community among refugee women. For instance, integration policies in the Netherlands tend to focus on the most 'promising' individual in the family, and due to the experience of the husband, he is considered the most likely to be able to participate in the host society in the nearby future (Laan Bouma-Doff, 2007).

Aside from cultural learning, social media connections would also share information that can help refugees avoid breaking the rules and regulations in the Netherlands (Leurs, 2017). Participants emphasized the value of sharing bad experiences in these online platforms for making them aware of the existence of such procedures, as illustrated in the following quote:

> You can learn from the mistakes that the others fall. For example, a few days ago I saw on Facebook that somebody have problems with his NS card (public transportation card). I don't know any information about that. And I don't know that my son has to have a NS card so that he can go with the train at this age. Before that, nobody told me that. So I have to order him an NS free card so he can go with the train freely. Otherwise the conductor will come and give me a fine. And I will not be fine after that actually. Nobody can give me this information. (Mohammad, 34-year-old Syrian male journalist)

Finally, refugees' information sharing practices for cultural learning also included a variety of strategies that facilitate this process through offline networks. Contrary to the overall lack of effective professionalization networks fostered by government actors to facilitate knowledge on the labour market, refugee participants mentioned that they often attended events organized by both municipalities and NGOs to share information about the cultural practices in the Netherlands.

7.4. Integration at the Local Level

Several studies have already demonstrated that integration for refugees is more likely to take place at the local level rather than at the national level (Mulvey, 2013). Thus, integration was seen to happen through every day social and information practices (Kaufmann, 2018). Many participants reported seeking, creating and sharing information across social, professional and health online networks. These information practices were often mediated by different forms of online communication, such as google maps for orientation, emailing, WhatsApp and Facebook messaging, and LinkedIn. Similarly, the acquisition of health information and assistance was largely emphasized by participants as an area in which social media networks can be of great help. Most Syrians taking part in this project make use of social media for gathering and sharing practical health information, which can provide them with knowledge of the health system as kind of sociocultural resource. Contact with doctors/health professionals through social media also

emerged as a widespread social media use for health amongst participants.

On the other hand, participants explain that observing what is happening around them they create opportunities to connect with locals and learn about the culture and practices of the host community. One of the interviewees, for instance, plans to visit the Rijksmuseum (national museum) in Amsterdam to learn more about the Dutch culture. For 31-year-old Ajda from Syria, learning about the culture through her surroundings is more valuable than in any other social media network. This local approach was particularly important for one of the illiterate participants from Eritrea. For Tesfay (a 38-year-old Eritrean farmer), observing his surroundings and the environment while engaging in social interactions in those natural settings proved to be the only accessible option that facilitates cultural integration, as many of the other options for instance require (digital) literacy skills.

8. Discussion and Concluding Remarks

The sense of integration lays on the principle that the immigrant and the citizen are assured equality as individuals and are 'entitled to the enjoyment of that security of equality' (Carrera, 2006). Additionally, civic integration reflects the formal obligation for immigrants to familiarise themselves with the civics of the host country/society/community in terms of e.g. language and culture, to be able to forfeit for the social benefits the host country has to offer (Joppke, 2017, p. 1155) and also increase the chances of employment and occupational status, key to successful integration. As seen above, integration is a 'two-way process' one in which both immigrants/refugees and host societies have to actively engage, where 'successful initiatives adopt a pathway to an integration approach that maximises the potential for the interlinkages between integration dimensions while by facilitating a two-way integration process and information practices engaging refugees and wider society' (Philimore, 2011, p. 525).

Social trust and social capital are prerequisites for strong indicators of integration. However, immigration and ethnic diversity tends to lead to a decline in both (see Putnam 2007). And while bonding social capital, including in the form of ethnic networks, can be conducive to integration and knowledge acquisition at the local level, it is essential that it is accompanied by a particular context—or opportunity structure, connected with the form of bridging social capital. In other words 'bonding social capital leads to the establishment of spaces of encounter, which are essential for the formation of bridging social capital' (Kindler, Ratcheva, & Piechowska, 2015, p. 18).

This research by applying the theory of social capital, explored the case of the refugee migration to the Netherlands, looked at current policies of integration, but also the way refugees experience different kinds of information in the context of their integration experiences. The principle regarding policies on integration, in the Netherlands is the one of a faster and effective integration and participation of permit holders through education and employment. As presented above, what is clear in the Dutch case is that the integration model emphasises assimilation ideals of belonging while at the same time involving several actors (NGOs, public agencies, civil society) in the process of refugee integration. The significance of social capital here lies in the big network of public and private actors managing this process. Following the framework of Putnam (2002), it appears that in the Dutch case the strategic action plan in relation to the structure of community development is based on 'bridges' and 'links'. The government seems not to follow necessarily the idea that social bonds are best formed within indigenous (co-ethnic) groups, but rather complementing the need of the balance of social connection from country-of-origin and country-of-residence. The refugees in that sense are not just passive subjects of the government policies but they also build their own online and offline networks for information access and self-support in a non-linear, negotiated, experience-based and localized form.

Regarding the integration process, what has been pointed out by participants, in line with Putnam's theory (2000), is the relation between civic engagement and volunteering and its impact on social capital. Through refugees' participation, the aim is to create opportunities for strengthened social connections between them and the host community. In addition to this, the ineffective circulation of information between the refugees and the formal networks highlight the necessity for more benefiting communication environment for both actors. This is also commended on by the participants, conforming to the two-way process of integration, bringing a stronger sense of a substantial linking social capital.

On the role of the media and ICT technology, questions have been raised about the importance of designing more inclusive online contents that address specific needs of diverse refugee populations as well as barriers of digital access and literacy. Another key aspect is emphasizing the need to ensure that the information provided online is trustworthy due to the perceived lack of professionalism and discontinuity of content that is often shared on social media among informal networks (Leurs, 2017; Voigts & Watne, 2018). Finally, what also arose while evaluating this information is the need for stronger role of the media and interpersonal communication in the process of shaping the sense of belonging and security in the host country. In this case, however, there must be more involvement of key public and private actors in the establishment of initiatives that rely on digital technologies for refugee integration.

This article provides a starting point for further analysis of digital initiatives and how effective they are for communication of policies and existing initiatives, as there is no yet evidence on their forcefulness, something that needs to be yet tested and scrutinised. The main

limitation of the research lays on missing the perspective of integration actors for example policy makers, social workers and practitioners, something that could be addressed by conducting in person interviews to cover more extensively the policy side. Finally, although the focus of the present study was on the Netherlands, the findings could apply to other European contexts provided that more research are conducted on different aspects of refugees' integration.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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