"I Have to Start All over Again." The Role of Institutional and Personal Arrival Infrastructures in Refugees' Home-making Processes in Amsterdam[*]

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Abstract: In this study, we take the concept of arrival infrastructures as a starting point to explore refugees' home-making processes in Amsterdam. This concept allows us to look beyond formal infrastructures set up for refugees and to take a closer look at all (f)actors playing a role in refugees' processes of "starting all over again". Drawing on participatory ethnographic research in a community centre for refugees, we describe the role of institutional as well as personal infrastructures in material and affective terms and show how these are related to refugees' sense of belonging in the city. We illustrate that refugees become entangled in a web of reception/asylum seekers centres and civic integration requirements that facilitate and constrain their home-making processes in a new place. It is more the informal, personal infrastructures that enable refugees to build social and affective ties in the city. Nevertheless, refugees are still struggling with social isolation and a lack of participation due to their limited opportunities and the relatively closed character of Dutch society. This impacts their sense of belonging and comes at the cost of their integration in the city. These insights raise not only questions on the current organisation of arrival infrastructures for refugees, but also show the need to move towards a multidimensional integration model that includes the role of (civil) society in the destination society in the refugees' integration processes.

Keywords: Arrival infrastructures · Home-making processes · Belonging · Integration · Refugees · Cities

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1   Introduction

> "The problem is, I'm not happy. I am only temporary happy. (…) I've lost everything, that is really hard. I have to start a new life, learn a new language. I've grown older but have to start all over again, another time. When I was still in Turkey, I had a house, a wife, a child, a good job. But now, everything is gone and I start from zero. (…) I have to start all over again and it is really hard to get to know new people, adapt to a new culture and learn a new language." (Semih)

The speaker is Semih, a Turkish refugee who arrived by plane in the Netherlands to claim asylum. He was held in what he calls "a prison for one day," after which he was sent to the initial reception centre in Ter Apel where he was registered as an asylum seeker. From there he was send to an asylum seekers centre (AZC) to await his asylum decision. Highly educated Semih spent approximately 22 months in four different AZCs, which he appreciated due to having contact with people from different cultures and the volunteers who helped him learn Dutch. Yet he found it hard to spend so much time there due to the lack of meaningful daytime activities, the limited privacy and the lengthy suspension of his life, something that many asylum seekers are confronted with upon arrival (cf. *Van Heelsum* 2017). When his asylum claim was granted, Semih was allocated an apartment in Amsterdam and tried to build a new home in Amsterdam. This was not as straightforward as Semih had expected. He thought he would feel at home within two years but, to his frustration, he is still struggling with the language, social isolation and a lack of employment at the time of the interview.

Our participatory ethnographic fieldwork among refugees, asylum seekers and unauthorised migrants (refugees from now onwards) between 19 and 37 years of age in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, shows that this is not an isolated case. Other newcomers also say they arrived with the hope and expectation they would find new opportunities upon arrival. They want to feel – perhaps temporarily – at home in the city and become full members of the local community (cf. *Steigemann/Misselwitz* 2020; *Van Heelsum* 2017). They aspire to fully integrate in society. Their aspirations move beyond the common notion of integration used by policymakers which mainly refers to the one-dimensional process of sociocultural and socioeconomic inclusion in a society (cf. *Damen et al.* 2022). By contrast, our empirical findings show that refugees seek emotional and social attachment in their destination country as well. They aim to become part of society and participate in it, to feel they belong in the city (cf. *Ager/Strang* 2008; *Damen et al.* 2022; *Phillimore* 2012). Upon arrival, however, they are confronted with a wide range of difficulties such as lengthy legalisation procedures, strict civic integration requirements and lack of activities in AZCs. In addition, they encounter everyday difficulties in terms of language barriers, discrimination and social isolation. These difficulties hamper newcomers' home-making processes in the Netherlands, the complex process by which newcomers try to establish security and familiarity as well as a sense of control or autonomy in a new place (*Boccagni* 2017).

This raises the questions of how refugees try to build their homes in Amsterdam and what role infrastructures have in these home-making processes. We answer these questions in this study based on the concept of arrival infrastructures, "those parts of the urban fabric within which newcomers become entangled on arrival, and where their future local or translocal social mobilities are produced as much as negotiated" (*Meeus et al.* 2019: 1). This concept enables us to get an inside perspective on how the various layers of this infrastructure are or are not interlinked and how refugees use and experience these infrastructures of the city upon arrival (see also *Boost/Oosterlynck* 2019; *Kreichauf* 2019). In the following, we first elaborate on the concept of arrival infrastructures in relation to newcomers' home-making processes. After a note on methods, we describe and explain refugees' experiences upon arrival and show how various layers of the arrival infrastructure affect their home-making processes in different ways. In the conclusion, we show that these insights raise questions about the current organisation of arrival infrastructures, as these do not adequately contribute to the affective component of refugees' home-making processes. Due to the refugees' limited opportunities and the relatively closed character of Dutch society, refugees are still struggling with social isolation and a lack of participation in the city. This impacts their sense of belonging and comes at the cost of their integration. These insights indicate the need to move towards a multidimensional integration model that allows a more nuanced understanding of integration processes and includes the role of (civil) society in a destination society.

2   Arrival infrastructures and homing in the Netherlands

Arrival infrastructures entail a wide range of (interlinked) institutions, actors, spaces, practices and technologies (*Meeus et al*. 2019; *Xiang/Lindquist* 2014). This includes supportive as well as exclusionary infrastructures at the state and civil society levels. When formal state infrastructures withdraw or fall short, more informal actors may emerge to repair and/or limit the effects of the state's restrictive, exclusionary approach (*Meeus et al.* 2019). These formal and informal – or institutional and personal – actors are not always strictly separated and may form more or less formalised or institutionalised alliances (*Steigemann* 2019). These span a wide spectrum – or continuum – of institutions, people and practices, ranging from top-down approaches enacted by supranational, national or local authorities to bottom-up infrastructures developed by citizens, volunteers, activists and civil society (*Meeus et al.* 2019).

This wide range of infrastructures is assumed to help newcomers to become socially mobile upon arrival in a new place (*Meeus et al.* 2019). We agree with *Meeus et al.* (2019) that the length of arrival is negotiable, but believe that arriving is not only about taking off and becoming socially mobile. In our view, arriving is also about feeling at home in the destination society. *Duyvendak* (2011: 106), for instance, argues that feeling at home – or belonging – is an essential or even existential need for people, which aligns the ideas of *Kale et al.* (2019) that there is a universal need for emotional attachment to a place. *Boccagni* (2017), too, believes that home lies

at the roots of everyday live. This also applies to migrants who left their country for political and security reasons. After they leave their homes behind, they start a process of searching for a new home elsewhere (*Boccagni* 2017). They aspire a new becoming (*Carling/Collins* 2018) and want to become full – perhaps temporary – members of their destination society (*Van Heelsum* 2017). As part of their integration processes, they want to feel they belong in their destination country (*Ager/Strang* 2008). Therefore, asylum seekers may already start to create a home during their temporary stay in a reception camp (*Steigemann/Misselwitz* 2020).

Given the importance of homing, a wide range of studies have been published on "home" and "home-making processes". Myriad definitions of the concept arose (see *Mallet* 2004 for an overview). Generally, home is considered a safe and reassuring place that is characterised by a sense of dignity, safety, trust and familiarity (*Boccagni* 2020; *Duyvendak* 2011; *Mallet* 2004). In these studies, there are some reoccurring factors that are required to feel at home or to feel one belongs in a place. First, values such as security, emotional and cognitive familiarity and autonomy are important to feel at home (*Boccagni* 2017). For refugees in particular, "ontological security" is important given the insecurity in their former homes and the opportunity security offers to start an ordinary life (*Van Liempt/Miellet* 2021). Second, there is an affective or emotional component in home-making processes, which means that someone actually feels they belong in the destination society (*Duyvendak* 2011; *Yuval-Davis* 2006). The hosting society has an important role here given its powers in terms of including newcomers, building relations with locals and bridging differences between newcomers and the host society (*Boccagni* 2017; *Cichocka* 2021; *Yuval-Davis* 2006). Third, material and immaterial artefacts may make someone feel at home, such as (the decoration of) someone's house (*Van Liempt/Staring* 2020), food (*Bailey* 2017), hygiene and healthcare (*Kim/Smets* 2020) and smells or sounds (*Duyvendak* 2011). Finally, the role of space in someone's home-making process is still rather ambiguous as some studies indicate the importance of spaces (*Van Liempt/Staring* 2020) while others show that space is not prerequisite for feeling at home (*Duyvendak* 2011). These interrelated factors are supposed to impact whether someone feels at home in a destination country.

These home-making processes are not merely individual but directly related to broader socio-spatial processes in the host society (*Boccagni* 2017). The city – rather than the state – plays an important role in these refugees' experiences although its exact impact depends on the local conditions and characteristics (*Castaneda* 2018; *Caglar/Glick Schiller* 2018; *Cichocka* 2021). Amsterdam – the focus of this study – is historically known for being a liberal city with a long history of migration and tolerance towards different religions, lifestyles and mentalities, which has led to its current superdiversity (*Uitermark* 2014). It is generally proud to announce its tolerance towards "strangers" and its migration policies has long been an example of what was called "a multicultural approach" (*De Graauw/Vermeulen* 2016). However, the Netherlands started to adopt a "failure of multiculturalism" discourse towards the end of the 1990s. Nowadays, the country is known for its institutionalised and restrictive refugee reception approach (*Rast/Ghorashi* 2018) that is characterised by partly remote reception and asylum centres where asylum

seekers await the decision in their legalisation procedure without being allowed to work or learn the language (*Rast et al.* 2020). Amsterdam took over parts of this national restrictive stance for the integration of asylum seekers although the city also introduced more open local policies that offer a more tailor-made approach and assign case-managers to refugees (the "Amsterdam Approach Newcomers") (*Oostveen et al.* 2019). This approach is meant to facilitate refugees' integration processes in the city.

3   Methods

To understand refugees' home-making processes in Amsterdam, we draw on participatory research in a community centre in the eastern part of Amsterdam that newcomers and volunteers established after the increased influx of refugees in 2015. The centre initially focused on language classes and creating a connection between refugees and citizens of the neighbourhood but now offers a wide range of activities such as language classes, cafés, kickboxing classes and theatre sessions. On weekdays, a hot lunch is served. The centre received about 150 newcomers and volunteers on a weekly basis before the COVID-19 pandemic. The first author conducted 210 hours of participatory fieldwork in this centre from January 2020 up to June 2021 (with some disruptions due to the lockdowns in the COVID-19 pandemic and summer holidays). Initially, she participated in all activities and later, she focused on language cafés and hanging out as well as informally chatting with participants. This approach has resulted in contacts with 77 refugees varying from one single meeting in a language café to over twenty meetings and conversations with the same person. A wide range of topics were discussed in these conversations such as the refugees' experiences upon arrival, their everyday lives as well as their thoughts on the city and their aspirations, experiences and difficulties in the Netherlands. These were all recorded in extensive fieldnotes.

The participatory fieldwork involved 18 semi-structured interviews with newcomers who were all recruited in the community centre.[1] Participants were twelve men and six women who vary in age from 19 to 37 years old. They are refugees, asylum seekers[2] and unauthorised migrants[3] who left their home country out of fear for their safety. They originate from Syria, Eritrea, Sudan and other

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[1]   Given this selection strategy, we may have missed out on contact with refugees who are more isolated and are not willing or capable of making use of these services as well as refugees who are fully active on the labour market.

[2]   This includes asylum seekers with a so-called Dublin claim, i.e., asylum seekers who are registered in another country in the Schengen area after which the Dutch authorities have laid a claim on that country to accept the asylum seeker concerned. If that country does not respond within 18 months, the Dublin claim expires meaning that an asylum seeker is eligible to claim asylum in the Netherlands after all.

[3]   We are aware of the legal differences between these groups but will use the term "refugees" to refer to all respondents as they consider themselves refugees.

countries that are known for their asylum migration. They have spent from half a year to over seven years in the Netherlands. Some came, after their initial reception in a reception centre, straight to Amsterdam, others were housed in the city after their asylum procedure. In the interviews, we discussed all their experiences upon arrival in relation to their aspirations in the city. All respondents were generally able to speak Dutch or English on a sufficient level to be interviewed.[4] They were willing to open up in these interviews, although some were insecure at times due to their language proficiency. Sometimes we made use of a translator app if a question was not entirely clear to them or if they felt they could not sufficiently express themselves. Most interviews were held in a room in the community centre, but one interview took place in the home of the respondent. The interviews lasted between 60 minutes and 4 hours, sometimes spread over multiple meetings. The interviews were recorded and transcribed while observations and conversations were recorded in extensive fieldnotes. All materials were imported in Atlas-ti (qualitative data analysis software) and openly and thematically analysed. For this study, we focused on the representations of arrival infrastructures in the Netherlands in relation to newcomers' home-making processes in Amsterdam.

4 Arrival in the Netherlands

Our respondents told us that they were grateful to arrive in a safe country. However, they considered it frightening as well considering the uncertainty about what lay ahead for them. Most of our respondents said that they reported to random people in the street or went to a police station after which they were offered a day ticket to travel to the main reception centre of the Netherlands in Ter Apel. Ndulu, an Eritrean young person explains that *"I want to go to Ter Apel"* is the most important sentence upon arrival if you do not speak English or Dutch yet. This also comes to the fore in the story of Aziz, a Syrian man who arrived by train at Amsterdam Central Station in the beginning of the "refugee crisis" in 2015:

> "I went to the police office and they gave me a dagkaart [day ticket for public transport] and a map (…): 'Ok, you can go to Ter Apel and this ticket is for free.' (…) I knew how to work with a map, but I didn't know how the train, the tram and metro worked here. And I only spoke a little bit English (…). I started to ask people. In the beginning, I was afraid because I didn't know these people. I had heard that the European didn't like people from the Middle East, especially with black hair, with beard.[5]

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[4] The quotes are translated and, when necessary for readability, revised by the authors.

[5] We observed that respondents themselves reproduce stereotypes in their narratives to illustrate that they felt different from those already living in the Netherlands, which impacted their arrival processes. Especially upon arrival, they think in terms of "us" and "them" as they do not feel part of society (yet).

Maybe they would look at me and think that I'm dangerous. But I didn't have any choice than just to ask. And I asked a man because I was afraid to ask women, maybe women would call the police or something. I didn't know. (…) I asked a man. I felt that this man was not European. And I say, 'Okay, I can ask him.' And, you know, he surprised me by saying, 'I don't know anything.' I told him, 'Please, I need help because I don't know anything.' He said, 'I don't know anything'. And he left. But this woman, I think she's 45 or something, she told me, 'Can I help you?' (…) I wanted to talk with her but I was a little bit afraid. I told her that I wanted to go to this address, to Ter Apel, but that I didn't know how to use the train or metro or something. (…). And she told me, 'Okay, follow me.'" (Aziz)

These random people and the police were usually the first infrastructures respondents encountered upon arrival. Respondents were generally surprised and relieved that these people were so willing to help them, especially as some – such as Aziz – were reluctant to ask for help given the fear they would be considered dangerous. They preferred to turn to people they expected might speak their language or have the same ethnicity, which aligns with the everyday experiences of Muslims in Amsterdam who also feel judged based on their appearance (*Shaker et al.* 2021).

Most respondents felt openly received and positively treated, especially in comparison with their experiences en route in other European countries. However, during the so-called refugee crisis, there were also demonstrations against asylum seekers, something that brought out more negative sentiments. Faisal, an Afghan young person, told us that he came across such a protest group:

"At the train station on his way to Ter Apel, he encountered a protest group that was demonstrating against the arrival of more refugees and asylum centres. He says that this was really shocking for him as he was running from war. However, he was helped by another group of citizens when he got stranded at the same station. They offered him soup and a sleeping bag as he had to spend the night at the train station before he could continue travelling to the reception centre." (Fieldnotes 10/01/2020)

While more respondents make mention of similar negative encounters, their positive experiences generally outweighed the negative. They downgraded these events and considered the people living in the Netherlands quite friendly and open towards refugees.

5 An institutional package at the state level

The reception centre in Ter Apel, a small city located in the northern part of the Netherlands, is a 10-minute walk from the nearest bus stop on a remote street that also houses an asylum seekers' centre and a penitentiary institution for foreign-

national offenders. Once refugees arrive there, they are mainly confronted with arrival infrastructures at the state level that can be associated with what *Goffman* (1961) calls "total institutions" (see also *Larruina/Ghorashi* 2016). These are characterised by interception, waiting and funnelling (cf. *Meeus et al.* 2019). During the increased influx of asylum seekers in 2015 and 2016, the state infrastructures were not sufficiently equipped to receive the increased number of asylum seekers, which *Meeus, Van Heur* and *Arnaut* (2019: 17) consider "a spectacular case of infrastructural failure." In the Netherlands too, the immigration police, the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND) and the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA) lacked capacity for their tasks (*ACVZ* 2017), i.e., the registration and identification, legalisation procedures and housing of asylum seekers. Consequently, asylum seekers had to queue in front of the reception centre while awaiting their registration. Hamza, an Iraqi man who arrived in 2015, explained what happened when it was his turn to register.

> "I entered the door, at the reception desk. They gave me a form, I had to share my personal details, my name and my age. They also took a picture of me. Then they put me in a room, a big room with lots of people. After two days, they brought me to the police station. There, they took my fingerprints and another picture. They searched my bags and clothes, actually everything." (Hamza)

In line with Hamza's story, COA usually offered registered asylum seekers a shared room at the reception centre in Ter Apel to await the IND's decision. However, this reception centre was completely occupied during this so-called crisis. After a day of waiting in uncertainty, asylum seekers were generally assigned to a bus that brought them to ad-hoc emergency accommodations such as sport arenas and event centres all over the country. They could spend the first nights there. During this time, they were brought to special locations of the immigration police who searched them and explored their identity. Refugees told us that they were relieved to be safe, to have a bed and to have some more perspective in terms of legalisation. However, they have rather frustrating memories of this initial period after their exhausting migration journeys given the extended waiting and uncertainty, the tough conditions and freedom restrictions as well as an experienced lack of opportunities to ask questions to clarify what was going to happen to them. The respondents' narratives showed that the organisation of their reception created a great deal of frustration. Imani, a Sudanese young person, therefore said that he *"never wants to go to Ter Apel again."*

After registration, the Immigration and Naturalisation Service decided whether someone was eligible for an (extended) asylum procedure. Dublin claimants – i.e., asylum seekers who were registered and/or claimed asylum in another country in the Schengen territory – could already be rejected in this initial period. This indicates the interception and funnelling of state infrastructures that select and filter wanted from unwanted migrants (cf. *De Haas et al.* 2018). This also applied to Aklilu, an Eritrean man who went to Ter Apel to claim asylum. He said that the Dutch

authorities wanted to lay a Dublin claim on Switzerland as he had applied for asylum in that country first.

> "In Ter Apel, they asked, 'Okay, where do you come from?' 'I come from Switzerland, I was there three years and six months.' 'Okay, that is good. We have some questions for you.' Then they say that I have to wait a year and six months. When I am done with that, I can go to Ter Apel. That is really hard; I don't have a house, I sleep outside, also in the rain. No food." (Aklilu)

Like some others, Aklilu left Switzerland as he feared deportation to Eritrea, which involved severe risks for Eritrean deserters like him (*Here to Support* 2019). His asylum claim was rejected by the Dutch authorities, after which he had to wait for a response from the Swiss authorities. *The Netherlands Court of Audit* (2018), however, shows that only 14.8 percent of such Dublin claims in 2014-2016 resulted in other countries accepting the asylum seekers concerned, meaning that all other Dublin claimants are eligible to claim asylum in the Netherlands after eighteen months after all. During these eighteen months, there were no state infrastructures available for Dublin claimants, meaning that they did not receive any housing or living allowances and were only entitled to necessary health care, legal aid and – until the age of 18 – education. They were thus confronted with a wide range of deprivations, something *Kox, Boone* and *Staring* (2020) refer to as "the pains of being unauthorised." This shows the differentiation in available arrival infrastructures at the state level, which may be explained based on refugees' legal statuses and migration journeys.

Refugees who were eligible for an asylum procedure were usually transferred to an AZC, which are, with some exceptions, located in more remote areas. At the peaks of the "refugee crisis," asylum seekers sometimes had to wait up to twenty months before their procedure started due to the IND's lack of capacity (*Refugee Council the Netherlands* 2019). Given the remoteness of AZCs, refugees were often segregated and subjected to both spatial and temporal suspensions of their lives, something *Kreichauf* (2018) calls "campization." Respondents generally felt they were treated in a friendly manner by the authorities in these centres, but said they faced hard times. For example, they complained of the lack of meaningful activities in the camps as this contributed to the temporal suspension of their lives and resulted in wasted time and boredom. Aman, a former Dublin claimant who was finally eligible for an asylum procedure, explained:

> "I miss Amsterdam! In the AZC, there is nothing I can do. No language cafés, no Dutch lessons, no activities, nothing. I share my room with three others, also an Eritrean guy. These men are nice, but it is boring there." (Aman)

Spatial isolation in the asylum camps also made it rather complicated to participate in city life and build relationships with other people and spaces. As the conditions

did not enable Aman to start to build a life in the Netherlands, he spent most of the time at a friend's place in Amsterdam to start learning the language and building social ties. This was not possible in his AZC, although some AZCs do host (in the opinions of respondents too few) volunteers who provide language support or offer social activities to refugees. The lack of meaningful daytime activities contrasts with the refugees' aspirations as they would like to start to learn Dutch, enter the labour market, engage with Dutch citizens and start to build their homes in the Netherlands as soon as possible. They feel they lost important years of their lives as the Dutch state infrastructures were mainly aimed at containment and offer little participation or affection during the legalisation procedures. The Sudanese Omar explained his time in the camp: *"I cannot say that it was good nor that it wasn't good, it was just no real life there."* Like other respondents, he mainly referred to the lack of opportunities to start engaging with and participating in Dutch society.

6   Arriving at the local level

Refugees reported being held in AZCs until they were granted asylum. Then, they received a five-year residence permit and a one-time housing offer in an allocated municipality. The distribution of refugees among municipalities is based on proportionality (*Van Liempt/Miellet* 2021). Refugees' interests, networks and opportunities at the labour market are assumedly insufficiently included in the Dutch dispersal policies (*Huizinga/Van Hoven* 2018; *Van Liempt/Miellet* 2021). Participants in this study were rather lucky to be housed in the Dutch capital as they preferred Amsterdam over other regions given its multicultural character, the availability of social networks and social organisations and its vibrant atmosphere. Semih, for instance, explained:

> "Amsterdam is the biggest city of the Netherlands with lots of activities. (…) There used to be lots of activities and organisations, but this is less now due to corona. (…) And the people in Amsterdam are beautiful people, very polite. When I walk in Amsterdam, I hear lots of English words, no Dutch. In a café, I hear English. In the streets, I hear English. Amsterdam isn't Dutch, it's a city of the world." (Semih)

It was only when refugees were granted legal status and were placed at the local level that their civic integration formally started. From then onwards, refugees were allowed – and obliged – to learn the language, access the labour market and participate in Dutch society. They had three years to fulfil their civic integration requirements without having to repay their loans for the language lessons.

Informally, however, refugees could start earlier with settling down and interacting with the new environment. Some respondents already had a network in Amsterdam as their stay in the asylum camp in the city kickstarted their arrival. Others had stayed in camps in other regions, meaning that their existing ties were cut off and that they had to start all over to build a home in the city. It was rather complex to

arrive in the city in the heydays of the so-called "refugee crisis" given the lack of sufficient institutional support in that time. Some newcomers had no idea what they should do. Abrihet, a 34-year-old Eritrean woman who got pregnant shortly after she started to live in Amsterdam, explained that the father of her baby was still living in another city and could not move to Amsterdam. She felt completely left on her own, which made it a rather difficult and lengthy process to adjust to the city:

> "Well, I was pregnant and with small kids, no one helped me. I had to stay at home. (…) I didn't like it there. My two kids are born there. I was alone and it was really difficult to go with the kids upstairs and downstairs without an elevator. (…) I didn't go out and stayed inside with my children. They were small and I had to stay at home. But now, if the kids go to school, I go outside. (…) I want to improve my Dutch, that's why I want to go outside, to the school and to have contact with others." (Abrihet)

Abrihet said that she could not make use of day-care and was not offered any assistance at that time, meaning that she was totally unconnected from any type of arrival infrastructure. As soon as her kids went to school, she started to improve her Dutch and outreach to Dutch society. During the interview she explained that she would have liked to have more infrastructures available at the moment of arrival that would have allowed her to directly participate in this way. While refugees were appointed a case manager in the context of the Amsterdam Approach Newcomers, the fieldwork showed that these case managers lacked the time or willingness to actually offer practical support upon arrival. Consequently, some respondents were struggling over how and where to start to build their homes in this city. They became dependent on more personal infrastructures, but – as Abrihet's experience shows – did not always have the capacity or opportunity to reach out to personal services (yet).

Case managers were supposed to support refugees to quickly access the labour market. *Oostveen, Klaver* and *Born* (2019) show that the Amsterdam approach is successful in terms of numbers of refugees who – sometimes temporarily – access the labour market. However, the approach has some weaknesses as well given the case-managers' rather bureaucratic approach (*Oostveen et al.* 2019). Regardless of the aspirations of the refugees themselves, these case mangers mainly focus on fulfilling the civic integration requirements and getting them a job as soon as possible according to *Oostveen, Klaver* and *Born* (2019). Our respondents confirmed this finding. They told us they preferred a job within their field of expertise or interests as this offers more perspective and certainty in the long term, but they were confronted with case managers who wanted them to quickly accept any job. The interviewees' contacts with their case managers were – in their view – mainly about work in the initial period of arrival. In addition, the number of contacts decreased over time, although most respondents continued to feel a need for support given the difficulties they still encountered and/or life events that occurred after the trajectory had been finished. Therefore, several respondents did not feel adequately helped.

Elias, a Syrian young person who worked in several shops over time, complained that it was rather complicated to get in touch with and receive support from his case manager:

> "The municipality, no. I don't know. My contact person is really difficult. Whenever I ask her something, she doesn't help me. (…) The municipality doesn't help you either. If you have a lot of problems, for instance if you don't have a dole, they won't help you. I have been talking to my case manager, but she doesn't talk to me." (Elias)

Elias showed us the Whatsapp texts he had sent to his case manager which remained unanswered. He therefore turned to other, established migrants in the city who were able to offer him a job and provide him the needed support. These migrants are thus part of refugees' arrival infrastructures as well. These more informal and personal infrastructures are important for refugees' home-making processes as the organisation of institutional arrival infrastructures at the local level is mainly aimed at socio-economic integration and focuses less on the aspirations and emotional needs of refugees themselves.

In recent decades, more informal, personal infrastructures have been established to facilitate the arrival of refugees, partly in response to the failing institutional infrastructures. Respondents mentioned a wide range of initiatives, ranging from the public library to community centres, from concerned neighbours to NGOs, from neighbourhood WhatsApp groups to sport clubs, from churches to grassroots organisations, and from language schools to established migrants. Some of these initiatives have become institutionalised over time and receive funding from national or local authorities, others are still run by volunteers. These initiatives contributed to the respondents' language proficiency, access to the labour market and civic integration requirements. They also had an important affective function as they contributed to building relationships between newcomers and/or others living in Amsterdam. Yaman, a Syrian man, for instance, told us that he used to visit the community centre daily and made friends for life there. It "*feels like home, it is my second family,*" he said. Others also indicated the importance of and need for such infrastructures. Without these informal infrastructures, they would not have been able to become attached to both places and people within the city. In addition, these personal infrastructures helped them to cope with the stress of arriving and building a new home in a new place. The importance of these infrastructures was magnified during the COVID-19 pandemic when more institutional infrastructures were not capable of fulfilling the material as well as immaterial needs of newcomers that arose because of the pandemic.

These personal infrastructures were not only occupied with the affective, immaterial aspects of arrival. Some also provided material support to those who could not use available infrastructures given their lack of a legal status. Such support was offered by both organisations and concerned volunteers as the quote by Ali, a Sudanese man who used to be unauthorised, shows:

> "We get help from citizens, but we don't get help from the government. The government is always against us. (…) In the Netherlands, I don't feel welcome from the government side. Apart from that, I do feel welcome because when I am out, I see people. They are happy, they are talking, they are laughing. I don't trust the government though because I know that they have put me in a bad situation." (Ali)

This bad situation refers to him not being eligible for state infrastructures given his lack of a legal status. He felt punished by the Dutch authorities, which is more common among unauthorised migrants (*Kox et al.* 2020). For some unauthorised respondents, the lack of adequate state provisions combined with the availability of such personal infrastructures in Amsterdam was the reason to come to this city in the first place.[6] Given the, in his view, unacceptable situation for unauthorised migrants, Ali started a foundation himself to provide support to other migrants and homeless people after he was eventually granted legal status, meaning that he became part of the personal arrival infrastructures for unauthorised migrants himself.

7 Homing in Amsterdam

The fieldwork showed that respondents aimed to stay – at least temporarily – in Amsterdam. They wanted to participate in terms of work, relationships, and social activities. They could continue to be mobile (*Meeus et al.* 2019) and their home-making processes were not automatically bound to a particular time or place (*Duyvendak* 2011). Nevertheless, they did want to become – temporarily – part of the city. The respondents' narratives show that there are several elements that made them feel at home. That is a sense of security and familiarity as discussed by *Boccagni* (2017). Except for rejected asylum seekers who felt deprived of secure living conditions, most respondents felt rather secure given the – in their view – relatively fair Dutch rule of law and the lack of insecurity. This fostered their sense of belonging. In addition, they felt rather accustomed to the city, although they usually needed an adjustment period to get familiar in the city and learn the Dutch customs (cf. *Van Liempt/Kox* forthcoming). They felt free in comparison with their home countries, which contributed to their level of autonomy. Furthermore, they were rather positive about both material and immaterial artefacts that were available to them upon arrival. However, this all was not sufficient. They wanted to participate in the city as well. This was rather complicated for them, which hampered their sense of belonging. Yasin, a Yemeni man, illustrates:

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[6] They were not offered any housing given the lack of legal status, meaning that they could choose where they live (although they have limited opportunities).

> "Do I belong here? Not yet. If I don't help people, if I don't work, if I don't contribute to the city of Amsterdam, if I don't do anything for humanity, then I can't consider myself part of it." (Yasin)

Our fieldwork showed that personal arrival infrastructures facilitated respondents' arrival processes and contributed to their sense of belonging. However, these infrastructures were not completely able to make all research participants feel at home as they could not help all refugees to actually participate in the city.

Furthermore, a substantial number of respondents were confronted with loneliness and social isolation upon arrival, something that also made them feel they were not part of this society. More personal actors did try to establish relationships between refugees and between refugees and city dwellers, meaning that refugees were being offered several places and opportunities to meet others. Respondents really appreciated these contacts but were – as we discuss elsewhere in more detail (*Van Liempt/Kox* forthcoming) – hardly able to transmit these relationships to their everyday lives. This brought about social isolation and loneliness among refugees, which was considered one of the most difficult aspects of homing in Amsterdam. Amina, a Syrian woman who has a relatively large number of contacts and makes use of the services of several organisations for newcomers explained that she still missed friends that she could call and open up to about her problems. She argued that those contacts at organisations were rather superficial while there was little opportunity to establish more in-depth relationships:

> "I am a social person and I do have friends, but I feel lonely. (…) It is hard to explain. I can drink coffee with a friend, but this is just about killing time. (…) It is superficial." (Amina)

The rather closed society in the Netherlands complicated Amina's search for social contacts, especially during the pandemic. *Vermeulen* (2021) shows that refugees' experiences with the closed society in the Netherlands result in doubts among Syrian and Eritrean refugees about whether they will ever be fully accepted by this society and able to establish close relationships, something that impacts their connectedness with this society in the long run. Despite the availability of a wide range of different infrastructures, refugees need more support and differentiated arrival infrastructures to feel at home in the Netherlands, although there are different experiences among respondents.

8   Conclusion

This study draws on the concept of arrival infrastructures to explore refugees' home-making processes in Amsterdam. This concept allows us to look beyond the formal, institutional infrastructures set up for refugees and to include their everyday experiences upon arrival. Based on our participatory research, we show that refugees aim to feel – at least temporarily – at home in the Netherlands and

to become part of the city. However, they encounter a wide range of difficulties that constrain their home-making processes. These difficulties are directly related to the current organisation of arrival infrastructures at the national *and* local level. At the national level, refugees are initially confronted with a rather institutional state infrastructure that is characterised by interception, waiting and funnelling. They spend a relatively large amount of time without sufficient meaningful, future-oriented activities and cannot learn the language or work (cf. *Ghorashi* 2005; *Engbersen et al.* 2015). The temporal and spatial suspension of refugees' lives in AZCs complicates their home-making processes. It is only when they are granted a legal status and offered housing at the local level that their civic integration formally begins. Then, in the case of Amsterdam, refugees are formally appointed a case manager of the municipality who should help them integrate in the city. Respondents feel that these case managers focus too much on short-term socio-economic integration without taking their own emotional needs, aspirations and capabilities into account. To compensate for the national and local state's shortcomings in terms of (affective) arrival infrastructures, a wide range of more informal, personal arrival infrastructures have emerged over the years. Although these more informal, personal actors aim to facilitate refugees' arrival processes and contribute to their sense of belonging, many of our respondents still encounter difficulties starting all over again in Amsterdam. This brings about experiences of social isolation and makes them struggle to fully participate in society, meaning that they do not yet feel at home in the city.

Refugees are not only looking for socio-cultural and socio-economic inclusion in a society. This study shows that they also seek emotional and social attachment in their destination country to feel at home (cf. *Ager*/*Strang* 2008; *Damen et al.* 2022; *Phillimore* 2012). *Dowling* and *Mee* (2007) illustrate that home-making processes require both physical and emotional energy, which applies in particular to refugees who do not speak the language, are unfamiliar with the country and have encountered insecurity and uncertainty (cf. *Van Liempt*/*Miellet* 2021). Therefore, our respondents invest a great deal of time in their home-making processes by learning the language, looking for jobs and searching for all kinds of connections that may help them to become part of the city. However, they feel only partially rewarded for their investments due to the everyday barriers they experience. They want other citizens to engage with them, the labour market to open up to them and a more open attitude in (civil) society in order to be able to fully participate in society and build affective ties. In everyday reality, they are confronted with limited opportunities and the relatively closed character of Dutch society (*Vermeulen* 2021). This hampers them building affective ties with (citizens in) the city and contributes to their social isolation and lack of participation. The causes for these problems may partly be found in the relatively closed character of Dutch society, meaning that the available arrival infrastructures cannot fully address the refugees' affective needs. This impacts the refugees' sense of belonging and comes at the cost of their integration in the city.

These findings indicate that the receiving society has an important role to fulfil in refugees' home-making processes as well (cf. *Ager*/*Strang* 2008; *Damen et al.* 2022;

Phillimore 2012), especially as the host society seems to have more agentive powers in terms of inclusion than refugees themselves (*Yuval-Davis* 2006). This implies that we need to move towards a multidimensional integration model that allows a more nuanced understanding of integration processes (cf. *Ager/Strang* 2008). The model should move beyond socio-economic and socio-cultural dimensions of integration that policymakers use. It should also include affective and emotional elements in refugees' everyday lives which does more justice to refugees' own home-making and integration aspirations. In addition, this model should include the role of (civil) society in a destination society (cf. *Ager/Strang* 2008). Refugees invest a lot of time in their home-making and integration process, but depend on citizens who want to engage with them, on the labour market opening up and on civil society´s commitment to them. Refugees cannot achieve that all by themselves. Therefore, integration should be considered a two-way process in which both refugees and (civil) society play a role. Considering integration in this manner will contribute to refugees' participation and engagement in the city and will benefit their socioeconomic and sociocultural integration. This requires an arrival infrastructure in which civil society itself has a role as well, and which actually supports refugees in building affective ties in the city of arrival.

Funding

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