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Policy Brief: Institutional changes for establishing social change

What’s the issue?
In recent decades, universities, including those in the Netherlands, have increasingly been criticized for being too detached from society, therefore not sufficiently capable of responding to societal problems (Bhattacharyya & Murji, 2013). For this reason, the VICI-group of Prof. Dr. Halleh Ghorashi is looking into the opportunities, challenges and contributions of engaged scholarship in the Netherlands as a way for coming to a more transformative collaboration between academia and society, specifically in regard to refugee inclusion.

Engaged scholarship was first introduced in 1995, and has grown steadily ever since (Barker, 2004). It strives for social change through a continuous collaboration between academics and individuals from civil society, and can be established in teaching, research or service (ibid.). However, as critics note, throughout the years especially civic engagement, which is characterized by a one-way flow of knowledge from the academy onto the community, became established, rather than a more democratic approach to engagement in which the expertise of practitioners is equally valued and included (Barge & Shockley-Zalabak, 2008; Anderson, 2018; Saltmarsh et al., 2009). Especially the latter holds promising opportunities for a more equal society, however, it also is confronted with several challenges. This research therefore has intended to contribute to the understanding of engaged scholarship in the Netherlands, both its opportunities and its challenges, through in-depth interviews with 19 self-identifying engaged scholars working on refugee inclusion. From the stories of these engaged scholars, it becomes clear that despite the scholars’ efforts, it remains challenging to establish their (democratic) engagement in the current academic environment. They therefore see an important role for universities in making engaged scholarship not only more visible but also more recognized, thereby contributing to social change.

What are the findings?
Important to mention first, is that there is not one set way of being engaged, still three (often overlapping) types of engaged scholar, critically engaged, those who give voice, and democratically engaged, were identified. Democratically engaged research
especially, despite the universities’ increased focus on valorization, still holds a marginalized position. The democratically engaged scholars struggle to find recognition for their work in the highly individualized competitive academic world, which is centered around the production of relevant and quantifiable outcomes. This establishes itself in three main areas: first of all, the marginalized position of these scholars, due to the nature of democratically engaged research, makes it challenging to find funding for their projects. Secondly, democratization of the research process is a time-consuming affair, and time is scarce in universities today. Where the scholars would prefer to devote themselves to their engagement, the university expects them to pick up an increased set of teaching tasks while they are also expected to still publish a certain amount of articles each year in the most prestigious journals. Finally, the scholars experience the university as too closed off of society and therefore not up to date with the realities of communities.

Engaged scholarship, despite its potential to contribute to social change, thus remains known and practiced by only a limited group of scholars. A pity, according to the scholars, as their approach to academic research could potentially bridge the gap between academia and society, and could ensure that the findings of academic research actually reach and benefit the people concerned.

So what could universities change?

1) Universities could first of all reflect on their role in society. This entails a reconsideration of the utility and added value of journal publications that do not reach the people concerned. Instead, they could think of ways of integrating engaged scholarship in their curriculum and thereby prioritizing research designed and conducted in collaboration with communities.

2) In order to reach these communities, universities are advised to embed themselves more in the city they are situated. For this, they can follow the example set by the universities of applied sciences, which work in close collaboration with local stakeholders on issues that emerge in the localities around the institutions.

3) In order to make engaged scholarship more visible and accessible, the university could introduce engaged scholarship to master students and encourage them, for
instance, to apply engaged methods, such as participatory (action) research, in their thesis. After all, they are the scholars of the future!

4) The university could facilitate inspiration sessions in which scholars can exchange about the challenges they encounter, and their ideas about engagement.

5) The university could plea for more funding opportunities to emerge that focus especially on engaged scholarship.

6) The university could actually reject structures by acting otherwise. They could, for instance, support the employment of people with a refugee background, thereby making the university a more inclusive space.

*See Appendix II for a reflection on the received feedback.*

**Bibliography**


1. Introduction

Ever since the so-called European ‘refugee crisis’, which started in 2015, the public and academic debate on refugees and their integration has intensified (Farmaki & Christou, 2018). Also in the Netherlands, refugees’ integration and inclusion continue to be challenging today (Huizinga & Van Hoven, 2018). The main ingredient for ‘successful’ integration, according to the basic assumption in the Netherlands, is fast participation in the labour market and/or education, for which a mastery of the Dutch language is considered crucial (COA, n.d.; Ghorashi & Van Tilburg, 2006). Notwithstanding this goal of fast integration, research has shown that refugees participate substantially less in the labour market than people of Dutch descent and other migrant groups (Dourleijn & Dagevos, 2011; Bakker, Dagevos & Engbersen, 2017). The problem with studies as such, however, is that they often contribute to social exclusion as they (subconsciously) reproduce taken-for-granted assumptions about refugees (ibid.; Ghorashi & Van Tilburg, 2006). This can be explained by the fact that social research in the Netherlands historically has been interwoven with policy, which, as illustrated above, assigns refugees’ minimal participation to their ‘deficits’; it is believed that by acquiring the right skills, they can succeed (De Vries, 2015; Ghorashi & Van Tilburg 2006). It is found, however, that in reality not only refugees’ ‘deficits’, but mainly also the contradictions in the Dutch rules and regulations regarding refugees’ participation in education and the job market, counteract their integration (Dagevos et al., 2018). Furthermore, when addressing the issue from the perspective of newcomers, more critical research has shown that even when refugees do manage to succeed in, for instance, finding a job, they still continue to be treated differently (Ghorashi & Van Tilburg, 2006). This shows that exclusion does not only occur on an institutional level, but also is established through more implicit everyday forms of ‘othering’ (Fangen et al., 2012).

Universities, and more specifically social sciences, could play an important role in contributing to solutions for societal issues as refugees’ inclusion (Ghorashi & Wels, 2009; Saltmarsh et al., 2009). One approach to academic research in particular, called engaged scholarship, could be of value in coming to more effective solutions as it strives for social change through knowledge production in close collaboration with individuals from civil society (Kajner, 2013).
The engaged scholarship movement finds its roots in the United States where it was first coined by Ernest Boyer in 1995, after which it steadily grew and also became practiced in Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom and Ireland (Beaulieu et al., 2018). The movement can be seen as a response to the increased questioning universities had been (and still are) exposed to regarding their role in society, the purpose and outcome of academic research, and their ability to contribute to social transformation (Boyer, 1996; Bhattacharyya & Murji, 2013; Fitzgerald et al., 2016). Having said that, the movement does not aim for a replacement of traditional scholarship, but instead sees opportunities for the deepening of higher education through civic engagement (Barker, 2004). For Boyer (1996), the scholarship of engagement meant “creating a special climate in which the academic and civic cultures communicate more continuously and more creatively with each other” (p.33). He emphasized that academic research must move beyond simply discovering knowledge, and that instead, these discoveries must be integrated in larger social contexts. This entails the sharing of knowledge in different formats accessible for different audiences, and the active application of knowledge in response to issues relevant to society and its members (ibid.).

Ever since Boyer introduced his view, increasingly more universities engaged in broadening and deepening the public functions of academic research (Barker, 2004). Civic engagement, characterized by local partnerships and collaborations, in fact became established in various areas like teaching, service, and research (ibid.). However, as the movement progressed, critics noticed that in reality it often meant that an one-way flow of knowledge, produced by ‘the academic experts’, was applied ‘onto’ communities ‘in need’, through which unequal power relations in fact were reproduced (Saltmarsh et al., 2009). They therefore suggested a reorientation of engagement, called democratic engagement, which is characterized by a more equal relationship as “[i]t adheres to the shared understanding that the only way to learn the norms and develop the values of democracy is to practice democracy as part of one’s education” (Saltmarsh et al., 2009, p.6). In practice this means that democratically engaged scholars strive for social transformation through engagement and co-creation together with (often) ‘marginalized’ communities and all other stakeholders involved (Kajner & Schultz, 2013). In fact, they emphasize that not only supposed ‘expert academics’ can produce knowledge, but also individuals from civil society actually could make meaningful contributions to the process of knowledge production (Barker, 2004; Anderson, 2018).
Such an engaged approach to research together with newcomers instead of about could potentially reject the reproduction of unequal power relations, and is likely to actually meet refugees’ needs and interests, and thereby contribute to sustainable solutions (Doná, 2007).

While the engaged scholarship movement has not yet become as visible in the Netherlands, especially democratic engagement could potentially contribute to more equality (Beaulieu et al., 2018; Saltmarsh et al., 2009). Nevertheless, several challenges could undermine successful democratic engagement. First of all, as already mentioned, engaged scholars too risk falling into the trap of reproducing taken-for-granted assumptions about refugees. Second, neoliberal influences and the marketization of the academic world make the university a business-like place characterized by efficiency, individualization, competition and profit-making (Bourke, 2009). Third, engaged scholars as well can be influenced by subtle exclusionary mechanisms while working with refugees (Fangen et al., 2012). Finally, still little is known about how exactly scholars could escape the complicity of reproducing unequal power relations. All these factors could potentially undermine democratic engagement.

I wrote this thesis as part of the VICI-project of Prof. Dr. Halleh Ghorashi, who sees an important role for the social sciences in establishing a more democratic ideal for the inclusion of newcomers (Ghorashi, 2017b). Having a more profound understanding of the aforementioned mechanisms which can undermine democratization, can contribute to the VICI’s aim of working towards a more transformative collaboration between the academia and society and therewith advance scientific knowledge. Moreover, this study will fill the so far missing gap of the experiences of scholars who actually practice engagement in the Netherlands. An insight into the challenges they encounter, the ways they manoeuvre around those challenges, and the opportunities of engaged scholarship projects, can serve as a source of inspiration and reflection for Dutch higher educational institutions, as well as scholars themselves, to critically evaluate their role in society and the traditional normalized forms of research. By coming to understand the normalized structures these scholars move around in, they could develop more sociological imagination about their situation, and how to change or perhaps even reject it (Wright Mills, 1959). Moreover, this again could benefit society as scholars with that
insight are in the position to help the rest of society in developing more reflective capacities (Bauman, 2000). Through a diversion from the conventional approach to academic research, by actually including refugees’ knowledge and expertise in the process of knowledge production, they could reveal taken-for-granted power imbalances, and reject them at least in research. Such an approach to research could potentially contribute to more effective solutions for a more durable inclusive society.

The research questions to be explored in this study are as follows:

**What are the challenges and opportunities for engaged scholars in the Netherlands in defining and shaping their engagement in their efforts to improve refugees’ inclusion?**

1. How do engaged scholars in the Netherlands define and give shape to their engagement in relation to their aims to improve refugees’ inclusion?
2. What are challenging structures for these scholars in the establishment of their engagement?
3. How do they manoeuvre around these challenging structures?
4. What are the opportunities of engaged scholarship projects?

After this chapter, follows a presentation of the theoretical assumptions through which this research is viewed. I will discuss theories of power and agency, the role of social scientists in establishing social change, and engaged scholarship as defined by the existing literature.

In the third chapter, the methodology, I will present the ways I approached and conducted this research. I will elaborate on my ontological and epistemological stance, the sampling procedure, participant characteristics, the processing and analysis of the data, my role as researcher, and finally, the quality of the data.

Chapter four, the empirical findings, serves as a space to present the patterns that emerged from the data in light of the research questions.

After that follows the conclusion, in which I will answer the research questions, and the discussion, where I will address some final considerations.
2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter serves as a space to lay out the theoretical lens through which the findings of this research were interpreted. The concept of power, based on Foucault’s theory of disciplinary power and Bourdieu’s symbolic power theory, is central to my theoretical framework as it can help us understand the complicity of both the neoliberal university and the reproduction of social exclusion of newcomers. In the first part of this chapter, I will focus on Foucault’s and Bourdieu’s theories of power in more depth. From there, I will address the conditions, opportunities and limitations of agency that follow from these theories. Then, I will move on to a discussion of the role of social scientists and their ability to effect change. Finally, I will lay out engaged scholarship as defined by the existing literature, including the ways in which it is challenged.

2.1. Power

In order to understand the issues at stake in this research, it is helpful to approach power from a Foucauldian point of view. Foucault’s conceptualization of power presents a departure from many theories that long conceived of power as concentrated, where only few actors possess and exercise power while the rest are subjected to it (Cronin, 1996; Gaventa, 2003; Rouse, 2005). By contrast, Foucault proposes an alternative understanding of power, in which power cannot be located in specific actors or contexts but rather is everywhere, going beyond conscious willing subjects, and instead is established through normalization and discourse (Cronin, 1996). According to Foucault, power is thus not possessed by supposed powerful actors and exercised over powerless actors, but in fact is constituted through the re-enactment of social alliances of both those who support it and those who resist it (Rouse, 2005). All individuals and social groups partake in and are subjected to this mechanism, often subconsciously so, leaving both the supposed powerful and the powerless in fact to be powerless (Cronin, 1996). Power, hence, according to Foucault, is everywhere and comes from everywhere (Gaventa, 2003). It is reproduced by discourses and the ways in which these discourses are enacted and embodied by individuals and groups. Taken-for-granted discourses that propagate “normalized” understandings of the world, a view that many uncritically adhere to, obscure both the workings and the reproduction of these mechanisms (Cronin, 1996).
Pierre Bourdieu shares with Foucault the view that power is internalized, but accounts for peoples’ positions in society with the concepts of field, habitus, capital and doxa (Cronin, 1996). Bourdieu conceives of the social world as being organized into different fields – all with their set of unique rules, required skills and knowledge – in which individuals’ social positions are located. An individual’s position in such a field is defined by both their habitus and capital. The latter, one’s capital, which consists of social, economic and cultural capital, is always distributed differentially (Béhague et al., 2008). Capital can be understood as society’s currency; the more capital one has accumulated throughout their lifetime, the more opportunities they are afforded. At the same time, little or no capital makes it more difficult for individuals to manoeuvre their way through life. The former, one’s habitus, is an embodied history of habits, skills and dispositions that guide individuals through these various fields and could help them to “play the game” (Béhague et al., 2008; Cronin, 1996). Habitus is formed and adjusted throughout an entire life course, teaching the individual through implicit cultural schemes about their position in the social order. In this way, habitus does not only impact individuals’ behaviour, but also the ways in which they perceive the social world. Furthermore, through habitus, individuals adhere to what Bourdieu calls doxa. Each field is dominated by the doxa – a shared belief system and common sense worldview – which masks the relations of domination it produces as natural, and leads them to being taken for granted (Cronin, 1996). Habitus thus (re)produces a certain social representation of the world while it is embodied in and enacted by individuals. In this way, structures of inequality are constantly reproduced and, more importantly, remain unquestioned.

Both Foucault and Bourdieu thus consider mechanisms of power to be internalized in individuals who adhere to a certain representation of the social world which they take for granted (Cronin, 1996). While normalization can make life easier as it serves as a practical tool enabling action without thinking, it is precisely this non-reflective reliance on habits which could potentially become problematic (ibid.). Normalization causes individuals to not critically evaluate the status quo, resulting in them unconsciously contributing to the reproduction of the existing power relations and the accompanying normalizing structures that maintain them (ibid.). When examining exclusionary practices of newcomers in light of these theories, it becomes evident that society shares normative beliefs and ideas about newcomers (Ghorashi & Van Tilburg, 2006; Ghorashi,
2017a). By way of illustration, the doxa (or shared belief) in the Netherlands is that newcomers’ integration is measured up to certain norms; it being an understanding of the Dutch culture, the ‘right’ work attitude or a flawless mastery of the Dutch language (Ghorashi & Van Tilburg, 2006). This doxa remains dominant because the taken-for-grantedness causes individuals to not critically question it, instead accepting these assumptions as common sense.

Social scientists as well – despite their critical stance towards the status quo – are subjected to the same dominant discourse as everyone else, and therefore risk falling into the trap of reproducing the same taken-for-granted assumptions about newcomers, and even may never be completely able to escape that complicity.

2.2. **Agency**

Many have argued that Foucault does not leave much room for agency for individuals in his theory of power as the pervasiveness and invisibility of power make resistance seem impossible (Cronin, 1996). How can one resist when it is unclear what to resist exactly? When reading Foucault (1998) more closely, however, it becomes clear that he thinks of power as both constraining and productive. He explains that discourse is not divided between the dominant discourse and the dominated discourse, but instead should be seen as a multiplicity of discursive elements which can be used strategically for resistance: “Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it” (Foucault, 1998, p.101). Taken that discourse is not an absolute given, individuals thus can approach it strategically by, for instance, providing an alternative. Bourdieu’s theory allows a somewhat more straightforward way for individuals to manoeuvre (Cronin, 1996). This is the case only, however, within existing structures as those do not easily change (ibid.). Accordingly, individuals “exploit existing relations of symbolic power in a strategic manner by manipulating accepted representations of the social world” (Cronin, 1996, p.66). And yet, Bourdieu deems this only possible for those who have acquired sufficient capital and know how to “play the game”.

Both Foucault and Bourdieu thus see some possibilities for resistance or agency, yet only up to a certain extent. For this reason, I turn to Giddens (1984) who is somewhat more optimistic as he views structure and agency as mutually dependent. He refers to
this as the duality of structure, meaning that “the constitution of agents and structures are not two independently given sets of phenomena” (Giddens, 1984, p.25). The social structure, according to Giddens, is both the means and outcome of social action, hence the structure is both enabling and constraining. Giddens’ theory provides opportunities for agency as the structure depends on individuals living and reproducing it. Those individuals, according to Giddens, are partially ‘knowing subjects’ as they are not only passively embedded in the structure, but also actively know it and engage with it (Giddens, 1984; Ghorashi et al., 2017). Hence, they could reflect to some degree on their situation and react to it in various ways. They could, for instance, ‘act otherwise’ by intervening in the world, or by choosing to refrain from intervention, both of which can influence processes (Giddens, 1984).

To sum up, if individuals become aware of both the workings of normalization and their own embeddedness in the social structure, they might reflect more likely on their daily taken-for-granted assumptions, either about newcomers or the neoliberal university, and choose to reject them by acting otherwise. This could potentially contribute to more inclusive practices because “the power of normalized discourses is partially constituted by their repetition in daily practice, [therefore] it is the repetition of an individual’s daily inclusive choices in interaction with others which provides the most powerful subverting force against the dominant discourses of othering” (Ghorashi, 2014, p.50).

2.3. The Role of Social Scientists

Wright Mills (1959) saw it as the task of social scientists to help individuals get insight in the above described social structures by enlarging their sociological imagination. Sociological imagination helps individuals to understand their personal situation in relation to larger societal structures. After individuals have come to realize how they are embedded within these structures, they are able to see how they as well take part in shaping and reproducing them. Sociological imagination, thus, provides space for reflection and change.

In line with Wright Mills, Bauman (2000) also sees potential amongst social scientists for increasing society’s sociological imagination, given that they can “learn the trick” of being in exile; of being both inside and outside the societal structure. This position of exile could enable scholars to see and better understand the invisible structures that
surround them. After they have gained this understanding, they could share it with the rest of society by revealing the invisible structures that most individuals perceive as common sense (ibid.).

Michael Burawoy (2005) also argues that the reflexive capacity of sociology has decreased severely in recent decades; it should not be forgotten that social scientists are, for a large part, still subjected to the same normative discourse as all other individuals. Still, he is hopeful for change to come, though he holds that it should come from below, from the social scientists themselves. He believes that we, social scientists, can “make our discipline ourselves, creating the spaces to manufacture a bolder and more vital vision” (Burawoy, 2005, p.18). He envisions a social movement, led by social scientists, which advocates for the importance of sociology beyond the academy. This requires the imagination of social scientists as well as increased recognition of public sociology’s relevance, both of which rely on “a variety of synergies and fruitful engagements” (Burawoy, 2005, p.18).

2.4. **Engagement as defined by the literature**

The three authors, as described above, thus all see an important task for social scientists in bridging the gap between the university and society. But what does this look like in practice? In what follows, I will outline how, according to the literature, engaged scholarship is defined and applied nowadays. First it must be mentioned that there is no singular definition of engaged scholarship. As much as the literature illustrates, engaged scholarship is not an easily mapped or black-and-white concept which stands on its own, but instead is better approached as an umbrella term under which a diversity of methods, that address various social issues, fall (Barinaga & Parker, 2013). Having said that, it is still useful to have a common point of reference. Therefore, I will elaborate first of all on the areas in which engagement mostly is established. From there, I will discuss the values and principles that characterize and inform practices of engaged scholarship. The definition that emerges in this chapter is largely informed by Beaulieu’s, Breton’s and Brouselle’s (2018) elaborate scoping review of the literature that has been published on engaged scholarship in the United States, Australia, the United Kingdom, Canada and Ireland within the previous 20 years, as well as considerations of several other important authors that have written about this topic.
2.4.1 Three Areas of Engagement

Before going into the values and principles, it is first useful to understand the three (often interrelated) areas, as identified by Beaulieu et al. (2018), in which engagement can be established. Starting with engaged teaching, which, according to the authors, is mainly aimed at preparing students for more than just the workplace. It strives for the teaching model to be more anchored in reality, and for classrooms to be spaces of reflection so that students are encouraged to develop into responsible citizens (ibid.). In practice, this is established in community-based learning or internships where the traditional learning format is combined with actual actions in the community. The second area, engaged research is aimed at designing and conducting research in such a way that it is mutually beneficial for both communities and academics, which in practice means that not only theory, but also issues in society inform the emergence of engaged research practices (ibid.). Through, for example, community-based research, are practitioners and other stakeholders then included in the research process, for instance, in identifying research questions. Finally, engaged service includes activities, such as advocacy, outreach, technical assistance or legal advice, in which the scholars apply their experience or knowledge in addressing issues that are relevant for stakeholders other than the university, like policy makers, organizations, and civil society (ibid.).

2.4.2 Values and Principles

According to Beaulieu et al. (2018), the literature on engaged scholarship points to social justice and citizenship as the two core values which emerged from the literature regarding scholars’ approaches to engaged scholarship. While perhaps not always stated explicitly, social justice underlays the work of most scholars, as they advocate for equality and the promotion of well-being – often of marginalized or vulnerable groups. According to Kajner & Schultz (2013), work that is informed by the principle of social justice can lay the groundwork for projects moving towards social transformation. The second value, citizenship, entails that engaged scholars, given that they try to bridge the gap between university and society, leave their ‘ivory towers’ and engage more locally with the community of interest in an attempt to “try to think and act as members of society” (Beaulieu et al., 2018, p.5).
Both the values of social justice and citizenship are realized by a number of guiding principles, such as impactful scholarship, reciprocity, theory and practice, reflexivity, and democratization of knowledge production.

I. Impactful Scholarship

Scholars nowadays are facing an increasingly growing set of tasks and responsibilities as the university expects them to deliver research that is relevant and valuable for both the academic world and civil society (Beaulieu et al., 2018). Therefore, besides meeting the criteria as defined by the academic world, scholars must also ask themselves for whom and to what end they are conducting their research (Bhattacharyya & Murji, 2013). In line with this, scholars are expected to find effective ways to communicate their findings beyond the academy, so that they can also reach the broader public (Beaulieu et al., 2018). For critically engaged scholars in particular, this is a crucial endeavor, given that they are critical of the conventional design of the university, which remains a closed-off institution only accessible to a very limited – mostly privileged – group of people. Mbembe (2016) argues that “[t]he doors of higher learning should be widely opened” (p.30). One way of opening these doors can be found in the practice of both translating academic insights and making them more accessible so that people outside of institutional boundaries can engage with them as well. Some scholars even go a step further as they aspire to democratize knowledge production all together, something I will elaborate on further beneath.

II. Reciprocity

In order to produce outcomes which are relevant for both civil society and the academy, engaged scholars engage in collaborations, partnerships and exchange with practitioners from civil society who can bring in a different understanding of the issues at stake (Beaulieu et al., 2018). Engaged scholars are thus actively invested in searching out and promoting the knowledge and expertise of non-academics. These exchanges and collaborations, both during knowledge production and dissemination, ideally are mutually beneficial, a collective learning experience for both the scholar and the communities involved and thus resemble a certain reciprocity in which other types of knowledge – beyond the purview of academia – become valued as well (Saltmarsh et al., 2009).
III. Theory and Practice

By including practitioners from civil society, engaged scholars make it their priority to address societal issues or issues of salience to the community of interest and in that sense contribute to social change (Beaulieu et al., 2018). They thus try to bridge the gap between university and society, as well as between theory and practice. While traditionally, theory and practice are often viewed as distinct from each other, engaged scholars see the relation between the two as a dialectical one in which theory and practice in fact enrich each other: “Putting theory and practice in relationship with each other is not an intellectual cognitive activity that can be constructed in one’s head; rather, it is an embodied relational activity that necessitates bringing members of scholarly and practitioner communities into conversation with one another. Engaged scholarship privileges the diversity of perspectives that theorists and practitioners bring to making sense of a problem and honors their unique knowledge and expertise as valid” (Barge & Schockley-Zalabak, 2008, p.252).

IV. Civic vs Democratic

While most of engaged scholarship projects are characterized by impactful scholarship, reciprocity and bridging the gap between theory and practice, a crucial distinction can be found between civic and democratic engagement (Saltmarsh et al., 2009). As the authors illustrate, engaged scholarship can vary drastically depending on whether it is informed by democratic or civic dimensions.

Saltmarsh et al. (2009) argue that the term civic engagement is often used to refer to any university activities, organized to encourage responsible citizenship, that relate to issues outside the academy. These activities take place inside communities and range from internships, field work, volunteerism, or research projects, to courses, advice or other services (or engaged teaching and engaged service). According to the authors, however, a focus on the process and purposes of engagement is often lacking in activities of that kind. Instead, the university uses these activities as a way of saying ‘look what the university is doing for the community and her students’, thereby reinforcing, however, the idea of the supposed expert that ‘brings solutions’ to ‘helpless’ communities (ibid.).
By contrast, democratic engagement moves away from such a one-way flow of knowledge and expertise and instead seeks for a democratic collaboration in which scholars, together with the community, generate new knowledge (ibid.). Knowledge, then, can become “widely shared, jointly generated and utilized to help marginalized groups to gain voice, re-frame issues and debates, and expand their visibility and power” (Brown et al., 2003). Engagement with such a democratic dimension requires scholars to adapt critical reflexivity in which they come to view knowledge in a new light.

V. Reflexivity

By approaching scholarship as a joint effort of multiple parties in which practitioners’ expertise is valued equally, democratically engaged scholars divert from conventional one-way flows of knowledge, and solitary and exclusive practices of academic research (Anderson, 2018). In other words, they break down the distinction between expert and receiver; between those who produce knowledge and those who consume it (Saltmarsh et al., 2009).

In order to be able to break down that distinction, however, these scholars must adopt a certain critical reflexivity towards themselves and their positionality, their methodological decisions and their research practices (Barinaga & Parker, 2013). Kajner (2013) advises to develop a relational consciousness, that is, the realization that one’s identity or social position always only exists in relation to others. In other words, scholars are only experts in relation to their subjects, making the subjects equally valuable in the process of knowledge production. Developing a relational consciousness could help reflect on and try to resist the (re)production of unequal power relations, particularly when it comes to knowledge production where questions are raised such as ‘What type of knowledge is produced? Whose knowledge is valued and whose is not? What are the implications of the assumptions it brings to our viewing of the world?’ (Barinaga & Parker, 2013). Such acts of reflexivity are imperative in overcoming “the objectification of people living and working at the site of research inquiries, by moving from making them ‘objects of study’ and transforming ourselves into subjects who can see them as having agency in the production of situated knowledge” (Barinaga & Parker, 2013, p.7).
Having said that, it remains questionable whether scholars will ever be able to establish democratic research as such, given the fact that several challenges potentially undermining its establishment and implementation, could be encountered in society, the academy, and the research field. First of all, engaged scholars still risk falling into the trap of reproducing taken-for-granted assumptions about refugees, especially given the fact that social research in the Netherlands historically has been interwoven with policy, which often is characterized by a deficit approach towards refugees (De Vries, 2015). Second, the academic environment from which scholars design, conduct, write and publish their research is increasingly affected by neoliberal influences (Holland et al., 2010). Universities around the world, including the Netherlands, are encouraged by governments to produce knowledge that is not only relevant for communities, but also for the market (Bourke, 2013; Beaulieu et al., 2018). In practice this means that the university today resembles more a business rather than a public institution, where time equals money and competition for funding is high (ibid.; Bal et al., 2014). Engaged scholarship lags behind seriously in that context, given that critical research in general holds a marginalized position and engaged scholarship in particular requires an intensive time investment (Özbilgin, 2009; Ghorashi, 2014). In addition to that, with the recent focus on the production of relevant knowledge, Dutch universities also increasingly pay more attention to valorisation and outreach. A report by the Dutch Academy of Science (or KNAW), however, showed that the implementation of social research outreach, still often is signified by an one-way flow of knowledge and expertise from the university to the community, therefore reinforcing the traditional idea of participants, or in this case refugees, as ‘passive recipients in need of help’ (KNAW, 2013). In this context, again engaged scholarship does not fit into the set norm as it, because of its nature, is not capable of generating the deliverables, outcomes, and products according to that business-like-norm (Bourke, 2013). In order to be able to resist these neoliberal structures, scholars must develop more sociological imagination regarding their own situation as now “it is as if the parameters for reflexivity are bounded by the individual study, leaving the institutional context in which academic knowledge is produced simply as a taken-for-granted backdrop” (Gill, 2009, p. 40). Third, social exclusion is established through very subtle mechanisms; as a matter of fact, engaged scholars as well could be influenced by those when working with refugees (Fangen et al., 2012). Finally, still little is known about how exactly scholars could
dismantle themselves of the expert role, making it therefore challenging to escape the complicity of reproducing unequal power relations between them and the participants.

Establishing democratically engaged research thus remains a challenging endeavour, in the first place because the desired deconstruction of power relations might be too difficult, as exemplified by Foucault’s theory on power and agency (Cronin, 1996). In the second place, because a deconstruction as such only, might not even suffice in the context of the neoliberal university where opportunities for democratically engaged projects are scarce. Still, engaged scholars might be able to manoeuvre their way around these structures, as the earlier discussed theories of agency suggest; either by developing more sociological imagination about their situation which could enable them to actually ‘acting otherwise’, or by acquiring sufficient capital so that they could change the game whilst playing it (Wright Mills, 1959; Giddens, 1984; Cronin, 1996). In that case, engaged scholars could also help society in creating more sociological imagination by stimulating critical awareness, and establishing more inclusive forms of knowledge production.
3. Methodology

In order to get a more profound understanding of engaged scholarship and what it entails, I have in addition to extensive literature research also tried to get an emic perspective on engagement of scholars in the Netherlands that self-identify as engaged and aim for the promotion of refugee inclusion. In what follows, I will elaborate further on the methodology I used in order to conduct this research.

3.1. Research Strategy

The choice for a research strategy depends upon one’s assumptions about the nature of the social world and how knowledge about that world can be acquired (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). As becomes clear from the theoretical framework, this research assumes the social world not to be an external pre-given, but instead to be constructed through social interaction and under constant revision (Bryman, 2012). Based on this constructivist world view, I take a relativist ontological stance which assumes that “there is no single shared social reality, only a series of alternative constructions” (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p.16).

What follows from this ontology, is that reality can only be understood through an exploration of the plenitude of socially constructed meanings (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Therefore, in order to learn about the social world, I take an interpretivist epistemic stance, meaning that I apply an explorative attitude towards people’s unique individual views, values and understandings of the social world (Bryman, 2012; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). While my research and interview questions were informed by theory, I analysed my data through an inductive approach, “by looking for patterns and associations derived from observations of the world” (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p.14). From these assumptions about the social world and how to understand it, follows my qualitative explorative research method as can be read below.

3.2. Research Method

Taken that I do not believe that there is a pre-given social reality, I did not conduct this research with the intention to reveal the absolute truth about the social world. Neither have I been searching for a right or wrong answer to what engagement entails, nor have I attempted to count or make solid categories. Instead, I consider this research an
exploration of both the existing literature and the different experiences, views and practices of the participants in which I have tried to put central their perceptions. This meant that even though the theory provided me with certain directions, still a flexible and open attitude was required from my side in order to adapt quickly when the participants indicated me to do so (Bryman, 2012).

In order to be flexible and open, semi-structured in-depth interviews are the most suitable method for the exploration of the participants’ experiences and views. In-depth interviews provide the possibility for getting an insight into the participants’ ideas, opinions and experiences (Payne & Payne, 2004). The flexible structure leaves space for further elaboration and the discovery of new knowledges together with the participants. This was especially important in this research since the perspectives of the engaged scholars have not been explored much yet (Gill et al., 2008). In line with that, through semi-structured interviews participants are in the position to share perspectives that are of salience to them instead of the researcher directing the course of the information shared (Barbour, 2008). Having said that, I did work with a predetermined interview guide which was created in collaboration with my supervisor, and based on research literature (see Appendix I). The structured character of the interview guide made it possible to obtain knowledge that was encompassing the subject in its broadest sense so that in a later stages experiences could be compared. Nonetheless, during the interviews the interview guide solely served as a handhold, meaning that we did not always follow the exact order and that there was room for new insights and directions. This approach to interviewing can be seen as a form of co-creation in which knowledge is not given, but instead constructed and negotiated in a collaboration between the participant and researcher (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

3.3. Sampling: the invitation

Engaged scholars were not easy to find since they do not always call themselves engaged scholar. Moreover, we wanted to democratize the research process, that is why we decided to send out an invitation to an online survey, created in Qualtrics, and let scholars decide themselves whether they identified as engaged scholar. The respondents were first of all asked to provide some basic personal details (like name, email, position and institution), then the name, year and short description of their engaged scholarship project(s) on refugee inclusion, reception, participation and/or
integration in the Netherlands, third, their definition of engagement, and finally, whether they knew any other interesting other scholars or projects. We purposefully kept it open for respondents to define engagement in their own way, instead of providing a pre-made definition, as we were interested in their views.

There were four reasons for creating this survey: First of all, we wanted to map the different engaged projects, secondly, we hoped to get an insight into the scholars’ ideas regarding engagement. Third, through this information we already got an idea of which projects the scholars were engaged with, which made not only the selection procedure of interview participants, but also the preparations for the interviews easier. Fourth, we wanted to create a network of engaged scholars working on refugee inclusion in the Netherlands for future collaborations.

The call was spread through several communication channels, being The Refugee Academy, the Migration and Diversity Centre, and the Netherlands Research School of Gender Studies. The call was also sent to several scholars that we already knew or came to our attention. We then also sent the call to the people and projects mentioned by other scholars in the survey of the call. Eventually, as we started interviewing people, new interesting names were mentioned based on which we decided to send out another invitation to those scholars asking them to join our network. However, we only asked scholars to participate in an interview if they reacted to our invitation, and thus self-identified as engaged. When we realize we did not have responses from all universities in the Netherlands, we searched for more interesting people online and also sent those people an invitation. In the end, a total of 91 people had joined the network of which 19 were interviewed.

From the above it becomes clear that we have applied a combination of two sampling methods being first of all, purposive sampling since we strategically sent out the call through specific networks with the research goal in mind as we were looking for participants who were expected to have experiences relevant to answer the research questions (Barbour, 2008; Bryman, 2012). Second, we applied self-selection sampling, as we kept it open for people whether they identified as engaged scholar and whether they were interested in becoming a participant (Saunders et al., 2009).
3.4. **Sampling: the selection**

After the first closing of the online survey, we had received 75 responses. Included in these responses were besides scholars also students, volunteers and scholars doing research outside of academia. The diversity of respondents inspired us to broaden our understanding of ‘scholar’, and to also include some projects outside of the academic world in our sample. Moreover, the scholars who engaged outside academia could tell us more about the challenges and restrictions of the university. Eventually, a provisional selection of 15 participants was made by several members of the research group. These people were selected based on their work with newcomers, their different ideas on engagement, and their different engaged activities like research, teaching and coordination. While making this selection, we also made sure to include scholars of a variety of institutions and cities in order to see whether there are differences between the experiences of these scholars.

3.5. **The Participants**

The participant group of this research exists of 19 scholars in the Netherlands who self-identify as engaged scholar. All but one of these scholars had worked or were still working on projects with refugees, one exception was made as this scholar has a very unique perception of knowledge democratization. The scholars are localized in several places in the Netherlands and hold a variety of positions in the university, the university of applied sciences, or outside academia (see table 1). The activities they engage in vary from research and teaching to advisory boards and supervision tasks. Of the 19 scholars, 12 were born in the Netherlands, and four are male.

*Table 1. Respondent Population*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scholar</th>
<th>Fictitious Name</th>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Esther</td>
<td>Outside academia</td>
<td>Researcher and external PhD candidate</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Dutch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Irene</td>
<td>Interfaculty, University of Applied Sciences</td>
<td>Project manager and Coordinator</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Dutch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Annette</td>
<td>Faculty of Law</td>
<td>Associate Professor</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Non-Dutch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Imke</td>
<td>Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies</td>
<td>PhD candidate</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Dutch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Faculty/Institution</td>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences</td>
<td>Researcher and lecturer</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Dutch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>Faculty of Humanities</td>
<td>Assistant Professor</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Dutch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Nienke</td>
<td>Faculty of Law</td>
<td>Senior Researcher</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Dutch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Rianne</td>
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<td>Dutch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
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<td>Faculty of Law Economics and Governance</td>
<td>Assistant Professor</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Dutch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Daphne</td>
<td>Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences</td>
<td>Postdoctoral researcher</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Dutch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Marjolein</td>
<td>Outside academia</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Dutch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Applied Sciences</td>
<td>Senior Researcher</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Dutch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Alexandra</td>
<td>Outside academia</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Dutch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Jake</td>
<td>Faculty of Social Sciences</td>
<td>Head of Department and Associate Professor</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Dutch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
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<td>Associate Professor</td>
<td>Female</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
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<td>Assistant Professor</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Non-Dutch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Bianca</td>
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<td>Postdoctoral researcher</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Non-Dutch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Sita</td>
<td>Faculty of Management</td>
<td>PhD candidate</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Non-Dutch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>Faculty of Business and Economics</td>
<td>Assistant Professor</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Non-Dutch</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.6. Interview Procedure

This thesis was part of the VICI project of Prof. Dr. H. Ghorashi on engaged scholarship. One PhD candidate of the VICI, who also was one of my supervisors, and I were both doing research on engaged scholars in the Netherlands. It was important that my supervisor got to know and could build a relationship with all scholars, as she would collaborate with them in future stages of her research. Since we did not want to ask scholars to give almost the same interview twice, we decided to develop the topic list and interview guide collectively, and to also conduct the interviews together. Having said that, my supervisor conducted two interviews by herself due to practical issues, and I also conducted one interview alone in order for me to get the experience of conducting an interview by myself. Moreover, we travelled through the whole country to locations of choice of our participants, which were either cafes, canteens or
participants’ offices. One interview was conducted via Skype. The interviews usually lasted between 90 and 120 minutes and 14 were conducted in Dutch, five in English. For this reason, most quotes were translated into English for this thesis, as indicated with an asterisk (*). After each interview, my supervisor and I discussed our experience of the interview and the insights we gathered. Back home I made notes based on those conversations and my own interpretations.

Before every interview, we sent the participants the topic list, an information sheet and consent form by mail so that they would have the opportunity to prepare the interview. We also asked them to bring an object which represented their idea of engagement. We suspected that talking about an object would perhaps be easier than coming up with a definition of engagement from scratch. Additionally, the objects could potentially be of use in later phases of the research where more creative approaches to present the output would be desirable. At the start of every interview, we first chatted informally in order to get comfortable with each other. Then we went through the information sheet and consent form together, after which the participant could decide to sign before or after the interview. We also reminded the participant of the object which we had asked them to bring along. We explained that the participant could bring in the object at any time they found most suiting.

We started the interview by first explaining the VICI-project and by introducing ourselves and our life path. Then we asked the participant very openly about how they became the engaged scholar they are today. From there followed the participants’ stories in which they often naturally touched upon almost all topics we were interested in. For this reason, we often only checked our interview guide towards the end to see if we did not miss anything. Moreover, the fact that the interviews were semi-structured allowed us to sometimes deviate from the initial interview guide and dive deeper into interesting topics the participants mentioned. The topics that were discussed were: their life path towards engagement, their view on the problem with refugee inclusion, their view on engagement, the challenges they encounter, the ways they deal with the challenges, the structures which facilitate their engagement, and finally, their future projects and ideas for necessary changes.

After the interview had finished, we thanked the participant for their time and explained the next steps in the research process. A few days after the interview, we sent
the participant a mail in which we thanked them once more for their participation and informed them more elaborately about the next phases of the research. We also asked them about potential participants with a refugee background, for the further continuation of my supervisor’s PhD. Finally, we referred them to our newly established LinkedIn-group as a space where they could share, for instance, interesting events or articles.

3.7. **Data Processing & Analysis**

The interviews were recorded by means of a recording app on our phone and I subsequently transcribed them verbatim, some directly after the interview, but most of them after most interviews had been conducted. While at first, these transcripts were most literal, I later decided to leave out repetitions and stutters when it was not relevant. Furthermore, I anonymized the transcripts by replacing all personal information which could lead to identification of participants by pseudonyms, like City3, Project1 or Scholar6. Participants’ names in this thesis were replaced by fictitious names. The key containing the solutions was saved in a separate document. Throughout the whole research process, I treated the data with confidentiality.

Before starting the analysis, I read each transcript globally in order to get familiar again with the data (Taylor-Powell & Renner, 2003). To analyse the data, I applied a combination of concept-driven coding and data-driven coding (Barbour, 2008). I started with concept-driven coding as I created a codebook in Word in which I transferred the main topics from the topic list (e.g. ‘Definition of Engagement’ and ‘Challenges’) into code-groups for which I then created several sub-codes based on the interview questions and possible answers that we assumed from the research literature (e.g. ‘Democratically Engaged’ or ‘Time Constraints’). After the design of the provisional codebook, I turned to NVivo, a data analysis software which enables systematic analysis of the data, in which I entered my codebook as it was so far. After having uploaded the transcripts, I coded them one by one based on the code-lists. While doing so, I continuously went back to my Word-codebook to adapt it based on new insights – which I added in a different colour (e.g. ‘Publication Pressure’). Given the fact that most of the codes were based on the topics of the interview guide, the codes were already quite structured which enabled quick insight in the patterns. Moreover, analysis software such as NVivo, should mainly be seen as an aid, as the actual analysis still
requires the intellectual involvement of the researcher (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). The final step in the analysis therefore was to make connections between codes manually by continuously rearranging post-it’s on my living room wall. I first identified the problems with inclusion according to the scholars, then I was able to identify different types of engaged scholars in response of these various problems. From there, followed their definition of engagement in relation to that problematization and the way they put this in practice. Challenges, coping strategies and contributions were harder to ascribe to a specific group of scholars, which led me to analyse these more generally.

3.8. My Role as Researcher

A frequently asked question in academic research is to what extent it can be said to be objective (Bryman, 2012). However, even though the researcher can always try not to let their personal judgement intrude too much with the research, complete objectivity is almost impossible in social research as it cannot be denied that “[a] researcher's own ascribed and achieved characteristics influence the way their subjects respond to them in the field, as well as the way they analyze the social language and behavior they encounter” (Babb, 2006, p.50). The process of social research hence is interactive, meaning that researcher and participant cannot be seen as two solid categories, but instead interact and influence each other (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003), eventually leading to a double interpretation where “the researcher is providing an interpretation of others’ interpretations” (Bryman, 2012, p.31). In addition to that, researchers bring multiple “selves” into the research process which should not be seen as standing in the way of objective research, but instead can be viewed as tools for mobilizing connections (Reinhard, 1997, as cited in Babb, 2006). For these reasons, I cannot but recognize and elaborate on my own positionality, as it inevitably has influenced this research and thesis.

As a master’s student, writing from a modern institution situated in the Netherlands, I have been part of the academic world for almost four years now, and therefore understand to some extent the opportunities and challenges this environment poses. These four years, however, do not enable me to say anything about the academic world as a whole since they only capture the experiences of myself and other fellow students. This research, therefore, has been a wonderful opportunity to explore the experiences of people situated on the other side of the academic world: the scholars. Since we all
move through the same world, however on different levels, there already was a certain understanding and trust between us. Moreover, the interviews have allowed me to see that despite our different positions, most of these scholars and me have a lot in common: a shared passion for social justice, a genuine curiosity in other people, and a preference for local contact with everyday practice. The process also made me realize that I am not alone in my experiences as a student; scholars too experience a constant pressure to perform. However, that same experience, in combination with the literature study, made that I had developed quite a critical attitude towards the current academic environment. This most likely also has influenced the way I initially entered the research, as I was expected to learn mainly about the challenges. I was therefore pleasantly surprised to learn about the creativity and perseverance with which most of the interviewed scholars still manage to establish their aims. They really have opened my eyes in regard of the possibilities in academic research. For this reason, I came to see this study in a more positive light, namely as a study full of opportunities to learn from, as will also become clear in the conclusion especially.

3.9. **Quality of Data**

The explorative research design, as I have described in the above, enabled me to get an insight in the experiences of engaged scholars in the Netherlands. Even though we had sent the topic list beforehand to all scholars, during the interviews we barely used it. Taken that the interviews were semi-structured, we were open to any direction the scholars indicated us to go. In this way, they were free to tell *their* experiences and issues that are of salience to *them*. Still, most of the scholars touched upon the topics as described in the topic list, though in their own order or manner.

After the interviews, the most important way for me to ensure adequacy of analysis was by a continuous exchange with my supervisor as we took the time to talk about our experience and interpretations of every interview. These discussions enabled us to exchange interpretations and meanings we had assigned to the data, which then again led us both to gather new insights and understandings of the data we had collected collaboratively. This was an ongoing process which continued also during the analysis of the data.
I. Limitations

Like in almost any research design, still some limitations should be mentioned. First of all, we probably have not reached all engaged scholars in the Netherlands with the invitation to the call, given that it was based on self-identification and that engaged scholarship is not that visible yet in the Netherlands. Still, we have tried with our own extra research to reach as many people as possible. Second, some of the transcripts contained many unclarities, mostly caused by the poor acoustics of some of the locations where the interviews took place. In the future, it perhaps would be a better idea to ask participants beforehand to consider the acoustics of their place of choice. Moreover, the interview conducted over Skype in particular contained very little useful data. Perhaps in a more personal setting we would been able to get to a more complete understanding of this scholar’s views and experiences. Furthermore, as we conducted the interviews together, some participants might have been somewhat intimidated. However, we always tried to first chat informally in order to make the participants feel comfortable. This worked out most of the times because the interviews felt often more like conversations, as we also had aimed for. Finally, as already mentioned, I was not present at two of the interviews, despite the fact that my supervisor informed me afterwards of how the interview went, me not being there most likely has influenced my interpretation of the data as I was not familiar with the ways these two participants spoke or how they reacted to certain questions.
4. Empirical Findings

In this chapter, I will present the patterns, supported by illustrative quotes by the scholars, of the journeys the interviewed engaged scholars embark(ed) on. Their journey starts with the identification of the problem with refugees’ inclusion in the Netherlands. From there, they define and give shape to their engagement in relation to that problematization in various ways. Subsequently, there are several challenges the scholars encounter on the way, but they also have a series of ways to manoeuvre around these challenges. Finally, there are a number of opportunities, both visible and nonvisible, of their engaged projects.

4.1. The Problem with Inclusion: No Connection

In order to understand the scholars’ role in relation to refugee inclusion, it was first necessary to get an idea of what in their regard are the challenges and opportunities with refugee inclusion in the Netherlands. According to the scholars, the cause of these problems is a deeply ingrained lack of connection which manifests itself in at least four different ways: a mismatch between the system and the life world; a gap between ‘us’ and ‘the Other’; a lack of connection between the numerous initiatives, and the perseverance of the frequently criticized gap between university and society.

I. Mismatch between System and Lifeworld

According to the scholars, the Netherlands, as well as the asylum procedure, is organized by too many rules and regulations. They continued to argue that these rules and regulations are full of contradictions which basically leave newcomers in a so-called “catch-22” – an impossible situation – because no matter which way they move, their efforts to integrate are never regarded ‘good enough’, as Kevin (Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences) explains:

[There is a] contradiction that lies in the participation law and on the other hand the obligation to integrate. People who depend on benefits must, according to the participation law, go to work as soon as possible […] while the obligation to integrate is of course learning the language as quickly as possible.*

The system hence creates expectations for newcomers which they cannot possibly live up to. One reason for this, as amongst others Alexandra (employed outside academia)
argues, is that institutions think for newcomers, instead of working from their perspective.

[In] the Netherlands we are inapt in asking people themselves what they need. Basically we think we are capable of setting up systems for others and that those others get a lot out of it [... ] we have never really made room for the agency of newcomers to just say: wow you just managed to come here [...] you have been in this country for a year now, what do you actually see? You have ambitions, how do you expect to achieve them?

The scholars point out that even though newcomers are the ones who are expected to integrate, their perspectives too often are not taken into account. This tendency to overlook the perspective of newcomers reoccurs in several fields, as exemplified by the scholars: In the Dutch care system, for example, patients with a refugee background are barely asked about their experiences with the care they receive. In a similar way, intellectual well-being, the newcomers’ competencies and aspirations, is not a priority during the asylum procedure while this, most likely, is important for many newcomers.

Adam (Faculty of Business and Economics) points to the Dutch short-term approach to integration, which most often tends to result in quick, yet unsustainable solutions, as the reason why newcomers’ perspectives are overlooked, for instance, in finding immediate employment for newcomers:

City1 has this view of ‘oh well we have someone over here who has a chicken factory and he has 200 jobs so let’s just put everyone there to work’ versus trying to find opportunities to peoples aspirations and experience.

In conclusion, the scholars hold that the overload of rules and regulations does not serve its purpose as it in fact makes “fast integration” almost impossible. “Fast integration”, here, seems to primarily refer to superficial integration since newcomers often end up being employed beneath their level. In other words, the asylum procedure does not match the lived realities as experienced by newcomers and creates high expectations of society that most newcomers cannot live up to. Most importantly, the system fails to hear and include the voices of newcomers in the design of procedures and regulations.
II. A Gap Between ‘Us’ and ‘the Other’

A second issue standing in the way of refugees’ inclusion, according to the scholars, is that the relations between ‘us’ and ‘the Other’ are characterized not only by a lack of interaction, but also, as some argue, by ignorance.

A lot of people do not know each other and because of that, I think, there is a sort of fear of the unknown in a lot of people.* – Imke, Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies.

The scholars argue that because of the lack of interaction, people most likely only learn about each other via media channels and discourse. This way, the one-sided idea of what ‘the refugee’ is or should be, but which mostly does not match who they really are, dominates. Rianne (Faculty of Geosciences) notes, however, that this ‘us’ versus ‘them’ logic goes both ways:

[T]here are just as many misunderstandings and incomprehension among refugees about the society where they end up.*

III. Lack of Connection Between Initiatives

Not only citizens have trouble connecting, many scholars point out, but larger institutions, initiatives and even nations face similar challenges. Even though several governments and municipalities, universities, social enterprises, community initiatives, and other stakeholders, all located in several European countries, have been working on refugee inclusion in recent years, communication between them is rare or inefficient which, according to the scholars, forces every party to reinvent the wheel over and over again.

In Europe, for example, we are still working in national islands. It may well be that extremely interesting things have happened in Sweden that we could learn from.* – Esther, External PhD.

IV. The Gap Between Academia and Society

Finally, the scholars criticize universities for remaining too closed off from the rest of society, making it difficult to contribute to effective solutions for problems that are situated in that society. The scholars struggle with the remaining gap between the university and society because it often causes research to not be up-to-date and relevant anymore, given that the lives of newcomers change quickly.
Then you sit comfortably in your elitist bubble theorizing with each other, but then I no longer have feedback from the people who it is about, and then you also risk talking about things that have long since passed. [...] So much happens in those lives on a daily basis that if you don’t keep checking ‘hey where are you now’, yes then you are lagging behind as a researcher.* – Esther, External PhD.

Both the scholars working in the university of applied sciences and the scholars working outside academia, however, are better capable of bridging the gap. Reason for this, is that they have a faster connection with society, given that their clients are stakeholders from everyday practice. They work closely with, for instance, municipalities and social enterprises on issues these parties want to be solved.

[B]ecause you talk with society. There is no distance. We are quite equal even because we are useful for them even and so we can collect data that way. I think that is a really big difference.* – Sarah, Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Applied Sciences.

4.2. Towards Social Change: from Critical Research, to Teaching, Giving Voice, and Democratization

As the previous section illustrates, all of the interviewed engaged scholars hold a critical stance towards the current situation with regard to the inclusion of newcomers in the Netherlands. It is therefore not surprising that they also share the same aspiration to contribute to social change – either big or small – through their work. Despite this shared ambition, however, the ways in which the scholars understand and give shape to their engagement in relation to the identified problems, vary. In the following, I will divide these efforts into four groups, which are not mutually exclusive but often overlap each other: critical research; engaged teaching; giving voice; democratization. Finally, I will also address engagement as a form of sticking one’s neck out, which was a recurring theme, yet could not be ascribed to a particular group of scholars.

I. Critical Research

For some of the scholars, engagement entails critical research aimed at either raising awareness about the existence and implications of the dominant discourse on refugees, or at contributing to more effective solutions. The scholars who are concerned with the latter, engage in critical evaluation research or impact measurement of initiatives for newcomers. The former, hope to decrease ignorance by writing and publishing articles
in which they, for instance, critique the Dutch laws and regulations or engage in discourse analysis of media outputs.

II. Engaged Teaching

Most of the scholars also have teaching tasks in which they try to pass on their critical attitude to their students. They encourage them to reflect on what is being said in, for instance, a judicial decision, or to come up with out-of-the-box solutions to problems policy-makers encounter with the design and implementation of integration policies. Martha (Faculty of Social Studies), for instance, who purposefully refrains from doing research with refugees, practices a form of critically engaged teaching, with the goal to make her students aware of the limitations of traditional research as well as participatory (action) methods:

[T]his poster is inviting us to think: where are we positioned across the colonial divide? As researchers, as practitioners, as feminists, whatever we claim to be, whoever we claim to be. And it is also a way of inviting the students to be careful [about] how they claim to represent others.

Some of the scholars are also critical of the limited accessibility of academia and knowledge, and therefore found ways to open up the classrooms of the university to newcomers. Newcomers could, for instance, attend the university to follow regular courses, or they followed Dutch language courses given by students, some of which then again followed Arabic classes given by the newcomers.

III. Giving Voice

A second group of scholars is worried about the ignorance surrounding refugees and migration. Since they identify that a large part of this ignorance is caused by the lack of opportunities for newcomers to speak for themselves, they symbolically “hand newcomers the mic” so that they can finally share their story and decide what people hear about them. One scholar, for instance, engages in biographical interviews, in which the voice of the researcher ideally appears as little as possible.

I try to map their life course, but mainly their own perception of their refugee status [...] In that way you can let people tell themselves as much as possible about how they experience things, [while] trying to steer as little as possible.* – Imke, Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies.
According to another scholar, giving newcomers control about what they want to tell, can also be done by means of less conventional methods, such as drawings. With this medium, newcomers can express themselves, their opinions and ideas without words.

**IV. Democratization: Not About Without**

The third group of scholars identified in this study, holds a critical stance towards traditional forms of research and publishing in which there is a clear distinction between researcher and researched – or between us and them – where the researcher is seen as the expert and the researched as objects instead of subjects.

> [Y]ou are not an all-knowing expert, quite the contrary, you are also searching yourself as a researcher […] and you are allowed to show that. […] Research is not something which stands like a sort of intellectual stronghold or which stands like a sort of institute or which requires expertise that you do not have as an ordinary person.* – Irene, Interfaculty, University of Applied Sciences.

Engagement for these scholars therefore is signified by a reconsideration of their own position in relation to their research participants. This effort, according to the scholars, requires the deconstruction of hierarchical relations between researcher and participant, and the supposed solitary process of knowledge production. The democratization of research processes is one example for such a deconstructive practice. It requires the scholars to leave their position of supposed all-encompassing expertise behind, and instead, acknowledge and accept the expertise of others as equally valuable and necessary.

> [F]irst of all, I think a sort of commitment that it is not that you try to portray people as objects, but more as subjects. Or that people can make contributions to the knowledge that you produce. I think that is one of the most important principles of being an engaged scholar. Producing knowledge together with people with the idea that that could be a basis for change. So it is also about being aware of the importance of generating a certain kind of new knowledge about situations or injustice.* – Robert, Faculty of Humanities.

More so, the scholars stress the importance of making the research mutually beneficial for all parties involved.

> Then I also always wonder about what’s in it for [the newcomers]? Don't assume 'oh you're from somewhere else, I think you have an interesting story so I'm entitled to all that information' […] It's just a reciprocal process.* – Esther, External PhD.
With this ideal in mind, the scholars try to democratize the research process. While none of the scholars managed to democratize the complete research process from design to output, all of them succeeded to democratize at least some parts. Esther (External PhD), for instance, explains how she included newcomers in the research design by means of focus groups so that they could have some say in how they would benefit from the research:

[We included newcomers] in particular when designing, filling in the central themes. It is mainly about living environment and transcultural care, but these are of course super abstract and broad concepts, and the first step we have taken is to start thinking with a number of groups of patients about what does that mean for you in practice.*

Some of the scholars also try to bring in democratization via their methodology, by employing people with a refugee or migration background in their team. Alexandra (employed outside academia), for instance, explained that in her team “at least 30% of the people have a refugee background”. Also for Nienke (Faculty of Law), having a diverse research team was a prerequisite from the start:

I said if, I do it, then I will do it with them and not about them.*

For others, this realization grew throughout the process. One scholar, for instance, initially hired people with a refugee background as interpreters. Yet, when this turned out to lead to many misunderstandings due to language and cultural barriers, she decided to include them in different ways:

So then I thought I am going to train those interpreters as interviewers. So I just taught them the interview skills and then they started doing the interviews themselves and then it really went much better. So that was something that you just learn by doing. […] So then it is also analysis if you discuss those transcripts you also have a lot of discussions already about the interpretation.* – Rianne, Faculty of Geosciences.

Employing people with a refugee background in the research team is one way of democratizing knowledge and its production, however, participatory methods in which newcomers (and other stakeholders) are included, though not in a research role, also serve the purpose of acknowledging and utilizing other forms of knowledge, as exemplified by the scholars. Marjolein (employed outside academia) explains in the excerpt below how she uses the MetaPlan-method in order to make an inventory of what other forms of knowledge are present in, for example, a group session:
Then you bring out the wisdom and insights of the group. And that often produces very surprising results for the people themselves as they see from each other yes we as a group actually have quite a lot of knowledge, and a lot of insight, or a lot of dreams, because you can do anything with that. [...] It is a sort of method to do future vision, vision development and future exploration based on the experiences and insights of the people sitting at the table.*

Just like Marjolein, Alexandra (employed outside academia) stresses that during her discussion sessions it is very important to have a realistic representation of all the people concerned, so not just refugees, present at the table. In addition to that, she designs the discussions in such a way that there are always observers and researchers present so that a holistic view of the discussion is ensured:

So we have agency for newcomers, we have people who are asked to think along as researchers, I am an action researcher who also thinks about what is not being said, do people look at each other, do people interrupt each other, what exactly does that mean. Well and like I said, we do it 11 times, so we also develop knowledge about it at other levels.*

For some of these scholars, democratization goes beyond giving refugees access to academia or including them participatory methods, as they also include refugees in the further steps of the research process like the analysis and publishing. While, according to the scholars, in most faculties, writing and publishing are still tasks reserved for academics solely, some of the interviewed scholars write and publish together with research participants or peer researchers with a refugee background. These scholars thus not only consider methodology, but also ethics; whose knowledge counts and who gets the credit for it?

I really hope that I can publish with [my peer researchers] and such. So it may become articles with six, seven authors sometimes, but yes in medicine that is very normal [laughs]. But I just think they should be there as much as possible as it is their work too and not just about them.* – Nienke, Faculty of Law.

For example, if I work together with an assistant, then I publish as co-authors, for example, so not that you thank people in a footnote, but simply give people full recognition.* – Robert, Faculty of Humanities.

Finally, some of the scholars consider their output and whom it actually benefits. One scholar, for instance, created video CVs together with young newcomers which they could then use in their search for a job. Another scholar engaged in the creation of a theatre piece together with newcomers. These cases are both exemplary for what kind
of products, that are not solely relevant for the researcher, can result from democratized research.

V. Sticking One’s Neck Out

Finally, the literature also defines advocacy as part of engagement (Beaulieu et al., 2018). While some of these scholars indeed engage in, for instance, advisory boards, they also engage in more mundane acts, such as speaking up in daily unjust situations, or taking a political stance when necessary.

You are talking [about] issues that actually influence people who don’t always speak Dutch. But the whole debate was in Dutch! And I was in the audience because I didn’t go as a speaker initially, but I remember also I just took the mic in the end and I just started talking in my mother tongue. – Sita, Faculty of Management.

In fact, some scholars define engagement through these very practices.

I also have the idea that in order to be an engaged scholar you can hardly ignore but taking a political position at a given moment. I now feel that it is happening that as a scholar you also should take your position, should have the courage to take it. – Esther, External PhD.

Some scholars also use their position in order to help newcomers to get a step further, for instance, by guiding them through some of the impossibilities of the Dutch rules and regulations documents, or by connecting newcomers to the right people.

Well, that sometimes from the position that you have or from a place where you then know which button you actually have to press and then it will probably be fine. If you know that, why don’t you do it?* – Irene, Interfaculty, University of Applied Sciences.

4.3. Challenges

As became clear from the interviews, being an engaged scholar does not always come without setbacks. The scholars all encountered several bumps on the road in the process of realizing their engagement. Since the challenges are plentiful, I have classified them into four different areas – being the academic world, the research community, society, and the personal.

I. The Academic World: Who Gets the Funding?

The first obstacle in doing engaged research is being awarded the opportunity to do so. For some of the PhD candidates, for instance, finding a position has posed a significant
challenge, but also for the more senior engaged researchers starting their research remains problematic as they are, just like other scholars, almost always dependent on funding. The difference, however, according to the engaged scholars, is that engaged scholarship holds quite a marginalized position in academia, making the application for funding even more difficult. Most funds, namely, are only short-term and intended solely for research tasks, so not for more creative output or co-creation with other stakeholders, something most engaged projects envision. According to the scholars, it is like the funders speak a completely different language.

It has been a struggle to kind of be able to claim and articulate that kind of research to a field that is still very much dominated by positivist scholarly thinking. – Andrea, Faculty of Arts.

Moreover, according to the scholars, being capable of speaking the languages of funders becomes more and more important for scholars as competition is increasing. This has been the case especially in the field of migration which, ever since the ‘refugee crisis’, has become a trending topic, and is sometimes even referred to as the ‘refugee business’.

Almost all people who are professors or Assistant Professors that you know that hardly ever work with refugees, but have taken this opportunity of ‘look this is a funding opportunity, let me give it a try’ and people get it. And I and several colleagues, who are kind of junior or assistant professor, simply have it in black and white "too little senior experience" [...] as a reason.* – Robert, Faculty of Humanities.

II. The Academic World: Never Enough Time

Once the question of finances has been settled, scholars are confronted with yet another form of scarcity: time. According to the scholars, they are expected to perform ever-increasing responsibilities and tasks, while the available time and money have simultaneously decreased. Even though Sarah jokes about herself working overtime, her comment does accurately sketch the situation many of the other scholars find themselves in today:

As a researcher you can always go on and it never stops. And I find that very difficult [...] But I’m doing my best. So I am not overworked yet [laughs] [...] You never have enough time. And especially because it just always goes on, and in theory I officially work here four days a week, but of course it isn’t, you work a lot more.* – Sarah, Faculty of Economics and Business.
Engagement, for the scholars, simply is a “time-consuming affair”, but because of the increased demands of scholars, they are left with less time to do the things they find important, and to do them in their way. This sometimes means that they cannot do justice to their engagement, as the scholars explain, especially because most of the time, their engaged activities – which are thus not publications in A-level journals – are not awarded by the university in the sense that they account for the progression of their career.

I think we have something like 10 minutes left [...] But that says it right away: time is just such an immense issue because many of the things that you want to do as an engaged scholar, I think, are not included in time schedules or are not recognized as part of your output. So you do it all extra.*
- Robert, Faculty of Humanities.

The university does recognize teaching activities, and yet, the engaged scholars cannot always establish engaged forms of teaching as the available time per student is decreasing as well.

The idea is that you should not spend so much time with students, focus on your research, you just give your lecture and then retire to your ivory tower. I really am the kind of teacher who likes to brainstorm and talk a lot and I constantly have appointments with students, but it is not really possible in this structure.* – Rianne, Faculty of Geosciences.

III. The Academic World: How, Where and What to Present?

The scholars are struggling with the fact that the university predominantly encourages scholars to publish in highly-rated journals, whilst these often are inaccessible for non-academic audiences (in fact, often the people it concerns), and often are not even read by academics.

To me the bubble is that sometimes you may feel that it does not reach those people that you want it to reach.* – Imke, Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies.

Then, besides the difficulty of reaching the right audience, the scholars also have to find ways to make their contributions, which are not always as clear-cut as most traditional academic findings, visible.

On the one hand you want to measure and show things, on the other hand it may also be so simple [...] that you accept that it is not measurable or that it is that simple that it comes across as non-academic if you report the visibility like this.* – Jake, Faculty of Social Sciences.
Some of the scholars do produce more straightforward information which is interesting also for other parties but the university. According to the scholars, the issue with sharing findings with other parties like the government or media, however, is a matter of intentions. Scholars who, for instance, hold sensitive information about newcomers are not always sure whether to share their findings in fear of these findings being misused.

[T]he research you do also creates a lot of knowledge that can also be misused in many different ways, or at least misused in my eyes, but from the eyes of the state can be utilized [...] [it’s an issue of] how many details you give because those details can actually put people in more danger.* – Robert, Faculty of Humanities.

Adam (Faculty of Economics and Business) also struggles with what to present, however, more so because he worries about the way the university usually perceives of research participants, making him hesitant of actually including newcomers in his research:

I think when you are doing this engaged scholarship there is a trap you can fall in to in trying to view everyone you work with as data. And I think it’s a real challenge trying to figure out when you [are] doing things that make sense because you have insights that you want to be sharing, and you are passionate about engaging and understanding the space more broadly versus trying to treat everyone as a research subject. And I think the pressure of the academy sometimes forces you to think of people as research subjects when it doesn’t make sense to be doing things in that way. – Adam, Faculty of Economics and Business.

IV. The Research Community: The Messiness of Research

The university climate, as described by the scholars, thus is characterized by competition, individualization and distance towards the research participants. The scholars also indicated that in that environment, only success stories are shared, while the challenges or failures basically do not seem to exist.

Everything is always perfect, there was trust and 100 interviews were done [...] You read that in articles while you think: there are so many dilemmas and so much goes wrong, [laughs] so many considerations you have to make.* – Rianne, Faculty of Geosciences.

The reality of research as described by Rianne was also referred to as the messiness of research by some of the scholars. They struggled, for instance, with getting access to the closed off research community in asylum seeker centres, the language barriers that occur in the field, a reflection session after a performance where no one showed up, the privacy law which requires the researcher to get a signature that newcomers not always
want to give, the thin line between the formal research relation and friendship, or the harmful impact research can have on participants. According to the scholars, those dilemmas do not have a place in the current competitive environment, and since they remain invisible it becomes very difficult to counter the shared challenges together.

Power relations, as well, belong to the messiness of research. According to especially the democratically engaged scholars, working with a marginalized or vulnerable group like newcomers, inevitably leads to certain power imbalances, even if these scholars attempt to engage in acts of critical self-reflection, they therefore simply cannot ignore their own positionality in relation to newcomers.

[I]f I want to collaborate as a researcher here in the Netherlands with someone who has come here new in any way, then I must not forget that in the meantime I am just a white, highly-educated Dutch woman. And I can’t change that! [...] I still make mistakes and I still sometimes have prejudices of which I catch myself.* – Esther, External PhD.

And even though some try to democratize the research process, they ultimately remain the one with final responsibility.

You are as researcher, me as teacher, or a leader, or whoever, there is always a vanguard who is going to through participatory methods promote conscientisation and promote progressive thinking or address a problem of a community. So there is someone that always possess knowledge and that knowledge is important for the people to be illuminated. – Martha, Faculty of Social Sciences.

V. Society: Communication

As already mentioned earlier, scholars sometimes struggle to understand and apply the language of the funders they are relying on. This feeling of speaking completely different languages was also experienced in other areas, for example, in collaborations with other stakeholders like the government:

I mean it’s just a different world. What surprised me was, I think when I come to trying to understand a space, the first people I come to speak to have been refugees. And doing this stuff in a policy setting I was told that refugees entrepreneurs can’t read policy documents. Which is kind of crazy. – Adam, Faculty of Economics and Business.

Not only parties like the government seem to speak a different language from scholars, but also the different media channels scholars sometimes talk to in order to reach the rest of society. While some of the scholars sometimes try to talk to the media and manage to share their insights or thoughts on certain situations successfully, some of
them also feel shuddered as they have had rather negative experiences where they felt instrumentalized by the media:

I was sometimes a little hesitant, and still am, making statements to the media, for example. I just think because - and I don't mean that arrogantly in the sense that they don't understand - but they are such different discourses that clash and don't understand each other.* – Annette, Faculty of Law.

The fear of being instrumentalized, but also of perhaps saying the wrong thing or not being the right person to do so, keeps some scholars from reaching out to society through media channels.

4.4. **Coping strategies**

Despite the sometimes overwhelming number of challenges these scholars encounter, their drive, creativity and courage motivate them to continue with their engagement. Even though the coping strategies that scholars shared throughout the interviews were plentiful, several overarching themes can be identified, being exchange, pervasiveness and creativity, and withdrawal.

1. **Exchange: Inside and Outside the Academy**

In general, scholars referred to exchange with colleagues as an important way of dealing with most challenges. With the individualized competitive environment in which success stories dominate, these scholars openly share their hardships with one another, exchanging and discussing the difficulties they encounter.

We are all struggling a bit. So also among academics I find it interesting to keep a feeling with the daily reality and to see: what do you encounter? What are your experiences?* – Esther, External PhD

The interviewed scholars also support each other in getting their ideas across in, for instance, meetings, or in trying to figure out what kind of language to use in order to convince other parties.

It's something that you also have to learn from others who are up in the skeleton that believe in what you are doing and trust on your capacity as a researcher for them to educate you in how to speak to an institution because we don't know how to speak to an institution. We have to learn. – Martha, Faculty of Social Sciences.
You learn to strategically think about how to deal with funding, with documents and that kind of stuff.* – Robert, Faculty of Humanities.

For most scholars, this also involves establishing a network of valuable connections, on which one can call when facing an impasse. The realization that any successful project relies on an expansive set of people with different skills is key to these scholars’ efforts.

[If] at the end of the project you really want a certain vision to be good, and if you then meet someone who is not really willing, then you go and look around; who are people who know this person who can influence that? You shouldn’t try too much to do that yourself, but you should others work for you to do that.* - Marjolein, employed outside academia.

Most of the scholars also engage and exchange with people from everyday practice who do not always think alike. For them, this is a way to not only stay I touch with the reality of the people concerned, but also to be challenged in their assumptions. Many of the interviewed scholars are convinced that “the roots” of their engagement are linked to the people they study rather than the theoretical academic world – knowledge is not produced while comfortably sitting in armchairs, but while engaging in everyday interactions with people.

I just want the data and hands on! I just want to know what it’s like and then I link it to theory. But I never start from Derida or Foucault, […] I am a bit critical about that, then I think: but what does that say? What does that mean?* - Rianne, Faculty of Geosciences.

II. Pervasiveness and Creativity

In light of the various challenges these scholars are confronted with on a daily basis, perseverance and creativity are key coping strategies. According to Sita (Faculty of Management):

[I]t’s not all so hopeless as well. I think there are cracks in the wall, there are walls for sure, but there are cracks, and I think now we are operating in those cracks. It’s like the plants that grow on the cracks and as opposed to the real soil, there is no fertile soil there welcoming you and saying ‘do this’ or ‘this is the best way to do it’, but I think there are cracks. – Sita, Faculty of Management.

When the university does not provide the scholars with enough time to work on engaged projects, for instance, they will engage in their own time.

I also have two small children and I also have to work very often in the evenings and weekends.* - Rianne, Faculty of Geosciences.
But that is engagement that you say: I want to do that, I find this so socially relevant that even if it costs me a good night’s sleep I do this because it is essential for those groups.* – Marjolein, employed outside academia.

When the scholars are confronted with the messiness of research, like a language barrier, they together with the refugees think of non-linguistic, somewhat more creative, forms of expressions such as painting or singing. Most of the scholars also show a certain perseverance; when something does not work out, they try to find another way.

You always look for ways to get an opening somewhere. And if the door is very much closed, you may have to go through the back door. You can also try to keep knocking very hard, sometimes that is necessary as well. It differs per situation.* – Marjolein, employed outside academia.

Most importantly, most of them ensure to pursue their personal principles and beliefs, rather than caving into the requirements of the academic world too much.

[In] engagement you should not lose yourself [...] So don’t get carried away with it, stay with yourself, stay with your core ideas.* – Annette, Faculty of Law.

I have already said for me my impact factor is not important, so the number of articles that I publish etc. is not important to me. If I can make a statement in the media or if I can say something at a festival that is just as important to me. So that is what I measure myself against, and that is not appreciated, or was not appreciated at the beginning, but I just continued and now with my request to set up Project1 or to become a professor by special appointment somewhere is already a sign of that they accept that. It took time.* – Jake, Faculty of Social Sciences.

III. Withdrawal

Some scholars choose to avoid difficult situations altogether. For instance, negative emotions or dissatisfaction compel some to completely withdraw from academia, or the media world in fear of otherwise being criticized or instrumentalized.

I don’t really tweet [...] but you could do something like that. And then I think: but who do I reach then? Because I don’t know who I then reach and I also don’t really like getting exposed to buckets of mud.* – Nienke, Faculty of Law.

I just found out that [academic research] is too solitary for me, it is too little in everyday practice [...] So that was a sort of definitive choice for me not to go into science.* – Alexandra, employed outside academia.
4.5. Contributions of Engagement

According to the scholars, contributions or findings of engaged scholarship projects are not always easy to measure or make visible, while the university does expect scholars to do so. Still, some visible, yet mostly less tangible contributions can be identified in the work of these scholars. Interestingly, many of them felt somewhat uncomfortable in assigning actual contributions to their own efforts.

Eh yeah, well, [...] I also find it hard to point out 'yeah, look what fantastic work we did here'. I do not feel comfortable with that.* – Robert, Faculty of Humanities.

I. Diversification

A very straightforward contribution of some of the engaged projects of these scholars, is the fact that some newcomers find a position either within or because of the projects. Robert (Faculty of Humanities) explains that this can benefit newcomers because they now have an occupation which can form a starting point from which they can build their career:

Because you can also just offer people opportunities within science because it is becoming increasingly important to be able to show that you have built up a profile.*

In turn, the presence of newcomers in the team, according to the scholars, contributes to more diverse forms of knowledges and viewpoints to the teams and discussions. Rianne (Faculty of Geosciences), finds it a 'little present' to work with people with a refugee background:

[I]t was a lot of fun and very educational, and also very interesting personally that I learned a lot from them [...] I hear from research assistants that they really like it that I give them the confidence that they can do the interviews themselves. Because they often do an internship where they only interpret [...] And then you see that they are super good, I really like that.*

II. Increased Reflection

The scholars also indicated how diversity in research teams automatically brings diversity into the department or faculty. This then again leads to daily moments of reflection in the workspace where colleagues stimulate each other to reflect critically – either by just being there, and by sharing their story – which is a process that goes both ways. In the excerpt below, Nienke (Faculty of Law) recalls a situation where one of her Dutch-Moroccan colleagues made a Belgian joke:
I was sitting there and I thought something is wrong here. [...] So then we talked about it and then he was like ‘this is it, it slips out’. You think it is normal in the Dutch work environment to make such a joke, and it is, and that is exactly the problem that it is so common. And that is why people don’t realize it. So you have to keep each other sharp all the time like ‘that one is just over the edge’.*

The scholars also see how critical awareness and an understanding of dominant structures is growing amongst their students. They are learning to think out of the box and understand processes as interlinked, deconstruct what entails ‘the refugee’, or realize that Europe has a way longer history of migration then they might think.

One thing that I remember was one of the students really saying ‘this is my story’, so we managed to create that link that it’s not only the other and ‘how poor your life must be, we are doing so much violence to you, and oh my god, I am helpless, what can I do?’ That narrative was totally broken and actually coming to what is under the surface that all of us are implicated in the system. [...] What we do to refugees is only another form of what is happening to all of us. So there it was very important to create this relatedness. – Sita, Faculty of Management.

III. Understanding

According to the scholars, such a realization of relatedness, as described above, can also be created through focus groups, or simply by any opportunity to sit down and share one’s thoughts. The scholars explain that often such sessions lead to the discovery of similarities between people. Realizations of that kind can increase mutual understanding and thereby bring people closer to each other.

They often came to the table a bit grumpy and full of complaints of all that went wrong, and then you saw that by sharing that information with each other about something they were actually all experiencing at that time, they felt heard, also by us, and also by each other.* – Esther, External PhD.

IV. Ordinary Magic

Most of the scholars explained that for them, results do not always have to be scientifically measurable. It is precisely the simplicity and lack of tangibility of these efforts, which makes them so valuable. Jake (Faculty of Social Sciences) explains this with reference to the theory of ordinary magic, as established by Ann Masten:

It’s really about the very simple things; contact with people, that people look you in the eye. If you try to quantify that, make it measurable, then it actually loses all its power because it is precisely in those indescribable simple things.*
For Adam (Faculty of Business and Economics) as well more seemingly minor things are the most meaningful. He recalls, for instance, the moment when a newcomer who had participated in his workshop, came up to him and thanked him as he still used one specific slide of Adam’s presentation.

V. Benefit for Newcomers

Besides Adam, more scholars see how their projects benefit newcomers: some newcomers, for instance, discovered that they enjoy painting at age 70, or became interested in a specific field of study. For others, are happy to share their story or that they can bring in things that are of salience to them and they are taken seriously. In other words, that they are treated and perceived as people like everyone else, which, as some scholars note, makes that the ways they have come to view themselves are slowly changing.

In retrospect it was mainly people with a refugee background who said it was also very nice to be seen as an actor, or as a photographer […] and not so much as this is a project for refugees. Of course it was about refugees, but it was on purpose a diverse mix. […] That you create something together and start from the capacities of people.* – Daphne, Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences.

The scholars further explain that the projects also can contribute to an increased sense of agency for the newcomers, as they projects provide the possibility for newcomers to move away from the receiving position towards one of contributing.

What you also see is that the asylum seekers who participate in that, then finally can say on the one hand: now you can give something back, you can really give back something meaningful instead of always being the one who receives, who has to say thank you, and you can show that you are also capable of something.* – Joyce, Faculty of Law Economics and Governance.

Also writing for sure is very empowering for all of us. You make your own space of what interests you. – Sita, Faculty of Management.
5. Conclusion and Discussion

In this final chapter, I will present the most important conclusions regarding the challenges and opportunities for engaged scholars in the Netherlands, in defining and shaping their engagement in their efforts to improve refugee inclusion. I will do so, by answering the four sub questions on the basis of a discussion of the empirical findings in light of the theoretical assumptions. I will conclude with a discussion of some important considerations.

5.1. Conclusion

How do engaged scholars in the Netherlands define and give shape to their engagement in relation to their aims to improve refugees’ inclusion?

This study has shown that engaged scholars in the Netherlands are critical of the status quo regarding refugees’ inclusion, and that they hope to contribute to a transformation in the situation through their engagement. Their critique mostly comes down to a lack of connection; between regulations and lived realities; between ‘us’ and ‘the other’; between the various initiatives and; between the university and society. In practice this first of all means that refugees’ perspectives are not taken into account in the design of regulations, making integration not as straightforward. Second, the gap between ‘us’ and ‘the other’, caused by a lack of interaction and awareness, leads these groups to unrealistic ideas and assumptions about each other. Third, while many initiatives work on the improvement of refugees’ inclusion, little communication between those initiatives exists. Finally, the university, according to the scholars, is not grounded in the locality of the refugee community, and is therefore not capable of contributing to sustainable solutions.

In order to bring about change regarding these issues, the scholars define and shape their engagement in various (sometimes overlapping) ways. This is consistent with the literature which showed that there is no single definition or format of engagement (Barinaga & Parker, 2013). Still, the literature defined three areas of engagement, teaching, research and service (Beaulieu et al., 2018). In this study, however, I came to identify four different types of engagement; critical research, teaching, giving voice, and democratization.
The critically engaged scholars and those who engage in engaged teaching, are mainly critical of either the Dutch rules and procedures, or the dominant discourse on ‘the refugee’. Therefore, they define their engagement according to what Bauman (2000) and Wright Mills (1959) see as the role of social scientists, that is, to reveal invisible structures, which are regarded as common sense, to individuals from society. By deconstructing these normalized ideas, in either publications or courses, the scholars hope to help individuals and/or students in developing more sociological imagination regarding the dominant discourse on refugees in the Netherlands.

The engaged scholars who want to give voice to refugees, hope to take away some of the ignorance between ‘us’ and ‘the other’ by handing newcomers the mic, through for example biographical interviews, so that newcomers can get the control over what is being said about them and through that, affect the way people come to view them. In that sense, the scholars give newcomers the opportunity to use the dominant discourse, as explained by Foucault (1998), as a side of resistance by providing an alternative to that discourse. Hearing personalized stories, rather than grand stereotypes allows people to see that newcomers most likely are more similar than different to ‘us’.

As might have already become clear, in these aforementioned types of engaged scholar, still a traditional researcher-researched relation persists, as it is the researcher who decides on the research, collects, analyses, and writes about the data. The final type of engaged scholars, the democratically engaged scholars, reject this conventional hierarchy of ‘expertise’ and try to establish research in which newcomers, their issues, experiences, competencies and aspirations are the starting point. In practice, this means that through, for instance participatory methods or employing people with a refugee background in the research team, they divert from the normalized idea that academics are the only ‘experts’ capable of producing knowledge. According to Bourdieu, these scholars know the game of their field, the academic world, and are aware of its doxa, the shared belief that expertise belongs exclusively to academics, they, therefore in fact, try to change the game whilst still playing it (Cronin, 1996). Similarly, according to Giddens (1984), they are partially ‘knowing subjects’ who understand the structure of the academic world and because of they are capable of acting otherwise by going against the conventional ways of doing research: they design, conduct, and publish their research as is expected, however do so slightly different, in ways that are not always
perceived ‘academic’. They are aware that power lays in normalization, in this case traditional forms of research, and by choosing repeatedly not to reproduce research as such but instead making more inclusive choices, they go against the dominant discourse both on academic research and refugees (Ghorashi, 2014).

**What are challenging structures for these scholars in the establishment of their engagement?**

This study already has shown several times, in the literature as well as in the experiences of the engaged scholars, that engaged scholarship does not go without setbacks. This can first of all be ascribed to the *doxa* of the university, which is characterized by neoliberal principles: academic research is expected to be relevant for both society and the market. Especially the democratically engaged scholars, do not always have (or want to have) the right *habitus* to conform to this ideal. Due to the nature of their research, and the dominant discourse of a preference for positivist research, finding enough time, sufficient funding, and recognition for their work remain challenging endeavours. Secondly, engaged scholars require certain reflective capacities regarding their relation with the participants, as well as their own assumptions. This, however, continues to pose a big challenge, given that power is everywhere, as explained by Foucault (Cronin, 1996). Power has become invisible and instead lays hidden in normalization, which means that in order to become aware of unequal power relations, scholars must continuously reflect on their position and their assumptions. Still, even when they do so, their position in society already is determined and therefore cannot simply be disregarded. Finally, the scholars also struggle with the fact that when trying to communicate their findings to the rest of society, this often does not work out as they hoped. Reason for this, is that other parties in society, like the government or media, seem to speak a different language which leads to a clashing of discourses.

**How do they manoeuvre around these challenging structures?**

As the empirical findings have shown, the scholars are very much aware of the challenging structures, and also manage to deal with some of them. Once more, this can be explained by Giddens’ (1984) idea of individuals as partially ‘knowing subjects’; given that the scholars know and understand the structures, they also find ways to manoeuvre around them. In dealing with the increased demands coming from the university, for
instance, they strategically balance out what is expected of them versus doing their engagement how they like it. They thus continue to play the game, as they still write and publish, but do so in a way that suits them better. In response to the norm of individualized successes that dominate the neoliberal university, the scholars look for allies who think alike to exchange ideas, difficulties, and solutions with each other. This shows again, that by knowing the structure, the individualised academy, the scholars also know ways of evading those structures, and therewith claim agency. Moreover, in dealing with all the challenges, or playing the game, most of these scholars stay true to their vision. Some, however, decided to not play the game of the university by leaving the academic world, or through being explicit about not conforming to the norm. Regarding the latter, interestingly enough, for one scholar in particular, the game has actually changed whilst he decided to act in marginalization. This indicates how indeed individuals also can influence the structure, as argued by Giddens (1984), even by simply choosing to refrain. Furthermore, the overarching theme in dealing with the challenges definitely is reflection. The scholars reflect on their own position and they reflect together with colleagues or peer researcher, and by doing so, become more and more aware of the constraining structures. This again enables them to manoeuvre more creatively around them. Finally, most of the engaged scholars also manage to cope with the challenges because of their determination and positivity; they are not too deterred by constraining structures, but always find a way to continue their engagement.

What are the opportunities of engaged scholarship projects?

This study has attempted to give insight not only into the challenges, but also the opportunities of engaged scholarship projects, especially given the fact that engaged scholarship has not gained much visibility in the Netherlands yet. What immediately became clear, is that contributions of engaged scholarship projects are not always visible or measurable, which conflicts with the expectation of the university for academic research to produce relevant and quantifiable results. The engaged scholars do not attach too much value to results as such. Instead, they, see more meaning in moments of ordinary magic, which can be very small. Or, they for instance, have tried to make the university a more diverse and accessible space by employing people with a refugee background. Therewith, they also contributed to more inclusive knowledge production. These scholars thus used their position to give others access to the university and by
doing so, diverted from the normalized structures. More so, this eventually led to increased reflection of the research team members. Increased reflection and more understanding into bigger structures also was achieved through engaged teaching. The scholars thus have done what, according to Bauman (2000) and Wright Mills (1984) should be their task, namely to increase society’s reflective capacities by revealing invisible structures. Finally, the engaged projects have contributed to an increased agency of newcomers who participated in these projects. By becoming part of the process of knowledge production, the newcomers got the chance to resist the dominant discourse on refugees, as they could move away from their role of receivers. If engaged scholarship projects thus would get more space to develop, they could contribute to increased awareness, more inclusive knowledge production, and increased agency for newcomers.

**Engaged Scholarship as a Journey**

Finally, now that I have presented my conclusion in a way as expected by the institution, I would like to end with a realization that came to me when contemplating about the conclusions that can be drawn from this study, but which, however, diverts slightly from the norm of ‘academic’ conclusions: through the experiences and ideas of the interviewed scholars, I came to understand engaged scholarship through the metaphor of a journey in which scholars alternate different sorts of movements. The scholars, first of all, try to bring in delay through their engagement; they create the time and space for refugees’ voices to be heard and included, they recognize and appreciate the value of moments of ordinary magic, and they take the time to dwell upon their own assumptions and positioning. In order to be able to do so, they cross several boundaries; sometimes literally, as they trade in their ‘ivory’ towers for engagement with communities, sometimes more symbolically, as they recognize and include other forms of knowledge, thereby leaving the paved tracks. As also became clear, engaged scholars are encountered with several obstacles on the road. However, most of the scholars know about these obstacles and have become quite creative in finding detours; they, for instance, engage in acts of balancing out what is expected to them, versus what they want to do, or they think of other ways, like finding allies or speeding up, to still achieve their aims. Still, while embarking on detours, the scholars remain embedded in their localities; they stay true to their vision and make it their priority to engage with communities. The opportunities these journeys have to offer are plentiful, though perhaps not always so straightforward.
More space, recognition and appreciation of these journeys could contribute to more sustainable solutions for society.

5.2. Discussion

Now, before actually coming to the end of this thesis, still some important considerations should be discussed. First of all, I do want to mention that not for all the scholars, manoeuvring around the challenges comes as easily. Especially the less senior scholars, like PhD candidates, sometimes still struggle very much in finding their place in the academic world. This can be explained by Bourdieu’s theory on capital: the less experienced scholars have not yet acquired as much symbolic capital as the more senior ones (Cronin, 1996). The more senior researchers have already gained enough trust from their institution, by playing the game of teaching and publishing, and can therefore use their position to help others, or to change the game. Still, as this study has shown, engaged scholarship has the potential to contribute to social change, universities therefore could reconsider the position engaged scholars (both less and more senior) have within the institution.

Moreover, when analysing the data, my supervisor pointed out to me that most scholars laughed when talking about issues like time constraints and publications which remain unread. Even though I did not mention it as a finding, it is an interesting point because it shows how the scholars acknowledge the challenges, but as a way of coping, just laugh them off. This shows how even engaged scholars still somewhat adhere to normalizations.

Furthermore, I also still want to highlight the fact that two of the scholars were employed outside academia. They had taken the conscious decision to leave the academic world, which can also be seen as them claiming agency, and now are way less constrained by structures in giving shape to their engagement. In comparison to the scholars inside the university, these scholars have a much more hands-on-mentality and seem to achieve more results faster. The same goes for the scholars employed by the university of applied sciences; there the gap between the institution and society is bridged more easily as well.

Then, I want to stress once more that even though I classified the scholars in different types of engaged, the contours of engagement are not absolute nor are they exclusive. Many of the democratically engaged scholars, for instance, were also engaged in teaching.
Or, Adam, for instance, defined engagement in a very democratic manner, however, did not implement it in such a way. This raises questions about his sociological imagination regarding engaged scholarship in practice, but also about the possibilities for him to do so in his institution.

Finally, still some limitations of this study should be considered. The most important being the fact that not all of the interviewed scholars made a clear distinction between refugees and immigrants in their research. The results from this study, therefore, cannot only be seen in light of the specific case of refugees. Then, due to the limited time set for this study, a selection of the most important findings had to be made, therefore leaving a lot of data unused. Finally, this study solely focused on the experiences of engaged scholars, for a more complete understanding of the issues at stake therefore, it is recommended to also conduct research with newcomers who participated in the engaged projects and people from the organizations or institutions where these projects took place.
6. Bibliography


Appendix I: Interview Guide

Note: We asked all participants to bring an object that is important to them as engaged scholars (e.g. something that represents their view on / passion for or inspiration for engaged scholarship). They can bring in (talk about) this object at any moment of the interview. If they don’t find a moment that is suited, we will ask them about it ourselves.

Getting to know each other

Introduction of ourselves (life course and development as a scholar; according to the way we would like them to introduce themselves as well)

1. Could you tell us a little bit more about yourself and your development as a scholar?
2. In our survey, you have already briefly told us about your engaged projects on refugee inclusion in the Netherlands. Could you maybe tell us a bit more about these projects?
3. Do/did you also do any projects on refugee inclusion that you did not mention in the survey, but that have an engaged character, for example in your teaching or ancillary activities?

View on inclusion

4. What or maybe who inspired/motivated you to do these projects?
5. What do you mean with inclusion (or integration) of refugees?
6. How do you see your role in this context?

View on engagement

7. In our survey, you have already told us something about your definition of engaged scholarship. Could you maybe tell us a bit more about how you envision engaged scholarship (this can also be an idealized version of engaged scholarship, it does not have to be reality)?
8. How do you see your role as academic in the wider society?

Realizing contributions of envisioned engagement

9. What are the contributions you aim to achieve through your engagement?
10. How do you work towards realizing these envisioned contributions in practice?
11. (How) do you evaluate whether you achieve the contributions that you envision?
   a. (How) do you stay critical about your engagement and contributions?
12. Can you share with us a memorable moment / or memorable moments where you experienced a transformation during your engagement?
13. (How) do you make your contributions visible (in and outside of academia)?

Challenging and enabling structures

14. Now we would like to zoom in a bit more on your situation as an engaged scholar in the Netherlands – in academia, but also in the community/field/society and also between both worlds. What helps you to realize your envisioned engagement? And what are challenges you encounter?

Dealing with the challenges
15. How do you deal with those difficulties / what strategies did you develop?
16. How do you stay true to your vision of engagement? / How do you stay motivated?
17. What are the lessons you have learned in your past engagement?
18. How have you changed as a scholar, or maybe personally, in the past years/through your experiences?
19. What piece of advice would you give aspiring engaged scholars?

LAST MOMENT TO TALK ABOUT THE OBJECT!

Future

20. What are your ideas or plans for future (engaged) projects?
21. What would help you realize these projects? What transformations would need to happen?
22. (Where) do you see openings to push for this kind of transformation? Where are the possibilities for collaboration?

Finally

23. What else would you like to tell us?
24. What do you think is the most important for our project and network in our aim to work towards a more transformative collaboration between the academy and society?
Appendix II: Thoughts on Feedback Policy Brief

On June 20th, I ‘presented’ the first draft of my policy brief during a meeting of the VICI where the initiator, one of the two postdocs, the three PhD’s, and finally, the junior coordinator were present. Note that I write ‘presented’, reason for which is that I had decided to approach this meeting more as an opportunity for discussion, exchange and to get inspired, rather than an one-way flow of knowledge coming from me towards them. I felt more comfortable with this approach first of all, because at that moment the policy brief was still work in progress, and secondly, because the VICI does not resemble the typical stakeholder, given that they are studying the same topic simultaneously to me, therefore making them already quite informed about the topic.

We therefore all started by reading the document and I had asked all of them to come up with remarks and/or suggestions. Some of them commented that they liked the document as it was clear and easily readable by a wider audience than just academics. Subsequently, a lot of useful and interesting recommendations followed, which I will discuss in the below.

An overarching theme in their recommendations was to change my tone of voice; instead of approaching the policy brief as a space to dictate recommendations, it could be better approached as a document in which opportunities for the universities were presented. They suggested, for instance, to replace words as “should” by “could”. This simple and practical advice satisfied me, as I already felt uncomfortable with my tone of voice, however, was not sure how to change it.

In line with that suggestion, I was also advised to put more focus on democratic engagement and its opportunities. They explained that especially valorization, which already is a debate in the university, can be an opportunity for universities to actually integrate democratically engaged scholarship more in the research process. Currently, valorization is still discussed as something “extra”, but more so as an one-way flow of knowledge, the university is supposed to valorize her knowledge to the rest of society. Instead, universities could integrate it in the research process and based on that reward scholars for it. I really liked this suggestion, as it gave me a starting point from where I could restructure my policy brief and also reminded me of the importance to stress the value of democratic engagement in specific.
Then, someone suggested to, instead of speaking of a gap between theory and practice, speak of the gap between academia and society. She explained that while I wrote about ‘bridging the gap between theory and practice’, this does not encompass what engaged scholarship is trying to do, that is, including a diversity of different types of knowledge. I have to admit, I am still struggling to understand her argument completely, however, I have tried to process it in my renewed policy brief.

I then asked the group about how to make a distinction between different types of engaged scholars (critically engaged, giving voice, and democratically engaged) without judging them. It was first of all suggested to present democratic engagement, in comparison to for instance critical engagement, as a more ambitious form of scholarship. Someone else then wondered, however, whether critically engaged and democratically engaged are not just the same given that democratically engaged scholars are critical and critically engaged scholars often also find themselves engaged. After an interesting discussion we concluded that the difference lays in whose voice counts: in critically engaged research, it is the voice of the scholar, in giving voice it is scholars who make space for the voice of refugees, and in democratically engaged it is the voices of refugees that count.

One of the PhD’s, who is also my supervisor, also reminded me of how the university could be more supportive of making the university an inclusive space by actively encouraging the employment of people with a refugee background. Universities, in fact, do not always have to follow the rules or structures of outside! In addition, she suggested the possibility of having separate funds for engaged scholarship projects.

Finally, some smaller suggestions were made to clarify my argument; it was, for instance, unclear what was meant by engaged methods, and if all the interviewed scholars shared similar experiences or whether differences per city or institution could be identified.

I was very happy with all the constructive feedback I received; as I already had hoped, it felt more like a co-creation rather than a formal presentation. Moreover, the team helped me to make my argument more clear and to apply the right tone of voice. When I had written the first draft, I was already a bit unsure about how to approach the policy brief, especially given the fact that I had so many interesting findings to share. The
meeting helped me a lot in deciding from which angle to approach the policy brief. We did not discuss in what way my recommendations were (or not) going to be used by the stakeholder. However, this is because I had directed the policy brief to universities in general and not necessarily to the VICI. After the meeting, I first wrote this reflection and based on that adapted my policy brief: the version as can be read in this thesis thus is a combination (or co-creation) of my work and the recommendations of the other team members!