

# **‘Spaces of hope’ in the Indische Buurt**

## **A story of social innovation and food initiatives in Amsterdam East**

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Amsterdam, April 2015

In November 2004 the Dutch film director Theo van Gogh was murdered by Mohammed Bouyeri while cycling to work on 2 November 2004 at about 9 o'clock in the morning, in front of the Amsterdam East borough office, on the corner of the Linnaeusstraat and the Tweede Oosterparkstraat. In the aftermath there were many retaliatory violent incidents against Muslims. The Dutch Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia recorded a total of 106 violent incidents in November against Muslim targets.

By the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the local government consistently described the neighborhood in terms of drawbacks: high unemployment rates, poor and deficient housing conditions, elevated sense of insecurity in public areas, high rates of drug abuse and domestic violence, high rates of school dropout and low degree of social and cultural integration in Dutch society. This situation was developing since the 1980's when large sectors of Amsterdam East lost most of their middle income population which moved to new urbanizations in the outskirts of Amsterdam. The vacant buildings, in urgent need of repairs, were occupied, legally and illegally, by students and new migrants, mostly refugees and *sans papiers*. These transient newcomers abandoned the neighborhood as soon as they stabilized their situation and regularized

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their citizenship status, leaving the more vulnerable and marginalized households behind. This exacerbated social and cultural dislocation hardened the already existing ethnic boundaries.

It was not until 2007 that the national government came up with a plan to cope with the increasing deterioration of 40 neighborhoods across the country in similar conditions of poverty and social exclusion. In the Indische Buurt (IB), our focus in this research, the plans remained on paper until 2009. By then, the larger housing corporations began to renovate the housing stock and tried to sell houses to diversify the social composition of the neighborhood. However, at that moment, selling houses proved to be difficult because of the bad reputation of the place.

### *This project, this paper*

When we started our fieldwork in November 2014 the tide had reversed. Grassroots initiatives had emerged and were counteracting the forces fueling the downward spiral. These initiatives intervened successfully framing the problems and needs of the neighborhood and broke down the media discourse of 'the clash of civilizations'. The initiatives have established fairly strong transversal links with officials and project leaders in the local public administration, political parties, scholars at universities and high schools, artist collectives, journalists, and private charities.

From 2009 on, multiple urban agriculture initiatives started. Neighbors in Amsterdam East have been remarkably successful enrolling participants and obtaining access to public grounds for gardening. Vegetables grown in public spaces, are harvested and used not only in daily meals but most importantly are cooked collectively and served at neighborhoods feasts and other community meetings. Almost all grassroots initiatives in the IB include in their projects activities connected with food. Teaching children to eat healthier by promoting alternative lunch boxes at schools, women of different ethnic backgrounds cooking and exchanging recipes at the neighborhood houses (in Dutch, *buurthuizen*) and catering lessons to provide single mothers with a means of subsistence are just some examples. In 2014, the statistics from the ministry of health established that one out of three children in the IB scored high in obesity. The city

council put 'healthy eating' high on the agenda of their education portfolio and in the overall welfare program for the neighborhood.

Interviewing grassroots members we asked whether they agreed that things were changing in the neighborhood in terms of the livability and the social sphere and if so how they explained this change. They named two main factors. First, the need to formulate a positive local alternative in face of the polarization in the public debate on the integration of ethnic minorities. They organized meetings to tell the long history of the peaceful and enriching ethnic diversity of the place. These meetings blew a most needed positive wind through the place. Second, the budget cuts and the rise of the cost of living due to the outbreak of the financial crisis in 2009 were also mentioned. Less welfare support and more and larger debts gave somehow rise to mutual help and gave examples of good neighborhood practices. The narratives underscore the sense of urgency and the need for self-organization. Many of these initiatives have been supported and monitored in different ways by the city council.

This paper presents the results of a four-month period of fieldwork in the IB. Our research is far from been completed. We got to know the stories behind the local organizations, their experimentations and learning paths, their imaginings of a better life within and with their community, but we are still at the beginning. In this paper we discuss the methodological challenges we have encountered and the possible paths to follow. The first challenge has to do with the question of how to research social innovation (SI), which conceptual framework is best to research the new in society. The second is to learn how to connect in a productive and conscious way our acquired knowledge of these processes of innovation with the innovation we are researching.

We begin with the discussion of the methodological challenges. First, we reflect and try to give some guidelines to define the field of SI. Building on the notions of Gilles Deleuze (1987[1999]; Smith 2012 [2013]) about the new in society and his "cartography" we reflect on how to actually research these processes of innovation. We follow Jean Hillier's Deleuzian methodology applied to SI (2013). We then apply the first component of Deleuze's cartography, *Tracing*, to discover the circumstances leading to the blooming of SI in the historicities of the IB. Later, we describe four grassroots initiatives to show the process of SI

and its dynamics. Finally, we make our closing remarks where we evaluate our analytical strategy (*Tracing*) and our prospects to follow up with our research.

## **Social innovation, the new in society**

We believe that what we are witnessing in the IB is a process of Social Innovation (SI). In this paper we are using the concept developed by Moulaert et al. who define SI as a process by which a qualitative change is effected in social relationships (Moulaert et al., 2013: 2).

But before we go into the social, what is innovation? Deleuze's conceptualization of the new in society sets the question in place: "The new calls forth forces in thought that are not the forces of recognition but the powers of a complete new model from an unrecognized and unrecognizable terra incognita" (Deleuze in Hillier, 2013: 169). The new, in a generic sense, is following this notion, not effected by adding one element to a known collection. The generic new entails a qualitative difference<sup>2</sup>. At first, new things seem to appear from nowhere. At first sight, they are neither knowable nor traceable back to their origin because they are made of powers that were not there before. To be able to know the new is to be able to notice the changes in the tapestry of the background (the constitutive powers) from where new things pop up.

Using Moulaert's definition, we can translate this generic new into the field of SI: SI involves not only particular actions but also *mobilization-participation processes* and the outcome of actions leading to improvements in social relations, structures of governance and collective empowerment (Moulaert et al., 2013: 2).

Taking this qualitative perspective on social innovation, Hillier adds: innovation *performs an ethical re/making of social space*, which affords people economic, social, governmental and /or political agency in their

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<sup>2</sup> Difference in Deleuze's philosophy refers to things of absolute different order as in the case of body and mind. It refers to the different regimes of organization of reality. Deleuze's notion of difference has its roots in Spinoza's immanent ontology. Body and mind for Spinoza are two expressions of being in the world and express real difference because they cannot affect each other but instead are identical and parallel to each other. The relationship between the regime of the body and the regime of the thought express the notion of difference.

own development. It recognizes the potential power and interrelations of structures (such as capital, class, gender) and agents, both human and non-humans, across space and time and specially how structuring processes affect and can be affected by agents (2013: 169).

The methodology recognizes the mutual affections of structures and agents and it distinguishes the *macro-* and the *micro-political*. Here the political must be understood in the broadest possible sense. The political is conceived as the forces immanent to all things by which they tend to find any possible way and means to assert/affirm themselves. Therefore, the *macro- political* affirms itself by recourse of structures such as norms, governmental systems, class and gender. It works with hierarchies and reproduces itself, makes more of the same. The micro-political is almost invisible; it makes use of the interstices, the little holes and opportunities offered by conflicts within the system, is heterogeneous and experimental and generates qualitative change. It is therefore intrinsically situational and local. Following Deleuze and Guatari's pragmatics, Hillier goes into the questions of what to look for and how to proceed in the research of SI processes (Hillier, 2013: 173).

Deleuze and Guatari use the term *cartography* in which they distinguish four components: *Tracing, Mapping, Diagramming and Machinic*. These components are ways of discovering the forces at play in the constitution of the new<sup>3</sup>. *Tracing* implies collecting the stories of what happened and how the stories are pointing to what might emerge (Hillier, 2013: 173-74). Hillier proposes the term *contextualizing* and *focusing on*: the key characteristics of the socio-economic-political environment, the discourses and manner in which they are actualized. The critical relationships between these characteristics, what people do, say, write, and why? The dynamics of power relations between the actors, the emotions and desires. The affordances of the materials and of the discourses, ideologies, dispositions. What changed and Why? (Hillier, 2013: 176).

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<sup>3</sup> We are not going into the whole strategy now. However the components of the cartography are mostly happening one on top of the other. Mapping is meant to look for the actual situations and the potentialities of different powers (structures and agency) to generate opportunities or blockages for change. Diagramming refers to the activity of connecting ideas with the opportunities or blockages for change produced in the mapping. It appeals to the imagination, it makes ideas to provoke the circumstances for the new situation. The machinic involves learning how to combine differences in a productive assemblage (Hilliers, 2013: 173-74).

Following this strategy we go into the narratives and understandings of the processes and forces in the field. In the next section we explain the circumstances that have heightened the awareness of shared needs and that have led to find collaborative solutions in the neighborhood.

### *Tracing the movement of the structural forces*

- Global and national polarization of interethnic relationships. Media and political discourses hardening the notions of difference and diminished the tolerance towards Muslims minorities.
- National governmental attempts to counteract the effects of ethnic intolerance through material interventions such as the renovation and improvement of public spaces in multiethnic neighborhoods with the aim of triggering gentrification processes.
- The reform of the public administration towards a New Public Management model combined with budget cuts in social welfare, education and the arts.
- The (worldwide) incapability of the national public administration to control the financial powers at play in their own environment and beyond. In 2007, the scandal around the fraudulent accords between the government and the big housing corporations was the icing on the cake.
- The outbreak of the economic crisis in 2009 with more budget cuts.

### *Tracing the frictions between the local and national administration*

To counteract the effects of events such as the murder of Theo van Gogh, the governments came up in 2007 with a list of 40 'problematic' neighborhoods (in Dutch, *vogelaarwijken*) in the Netherlands, without a proper budget allocation which triggered the resistance to the plans by the Provincial and local government. The irritation about the plans due to the preferences shown for the neighborhoods in the larger cities (Amsterdam, The Hague, Utrecht and Rotterdam) was clear.

Civil society became entangled in this heated debate. On the one hand the 'white-Dutch' poor areas in the south and east of the country felt ignored while the subsidies benefitted the migrants and Muslim populations living in those problematic areas. On the other hand the favored areas resisted the publication of the list because of the stigmatization of multi-ethnic neighborhoods.

### *What changed?*

The relations between the national and the local governments were clearly under stress. The program did not have its own implementation money and was unable to mobilize the housing corporations. The city councils were given the responsibility but not the means to undertake the innovative plans. During this process, the city council in Amsterdam East was able to secure the collaboration of some of the housing corporations and started implementing the social and cultural integration plans included in the national plans.

In Amsterdam East the plans covered all social aspects such as controlling and lowering school drop-out, promoting entrepreneurship in the commercial sector, aid for households carrying debt, and lately the healthy food program. Most important, in 2008, the city council created and hired participation agents (in Dutch, *participatiemakelaar*), in charge of organizing neighborhood consultations and promoting the notion of self-organization and mutual aid practices.

### *Why?*

This storyline shows that despite the fact that national politics are mostly directly affected and driven by structural macro-political regimes, the field of governance in state institutions is intertwined with micro-politics. Actors and networks in this environment can mobilize structural power, but they certainly do not control the financial regimes of capital nor the ethnic ideologies. Conflicts and negotiations cross over the field of the national and local government and the relationships between the state and capital. The actors on these fields have an unstable grip if at all of

the structural forces which are accessible to them through the governmental institutions. The micro-political therefore should not be mistaken as appertaining actors and networks outside the institutions. In the city council in Amsterdam East, the tide was also reversing...

### *Tracing the micro-political: mobilization-participation processes*

A proper understanding of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century reforms in the Dutch public administration is crucial for what the neighbors and local organizations in the IB have come to perceive as possible and viable changes in their living conditions and dwelling places. The 1980's and 1990's saw explicit efforts of the nation states to implement a culture of innovation in the Public Administration (Kamark, 2003, in Lévesque, 2013). European states started a paradigmatic shift towards the so-called 'New Public Management' (NPM) (Lévesque, 2013). The NPM approach spurred competition and financial incentives and gave managers more autonomy as a way to encourage innovation. In the Netherlands, the NPM was supported, albeit for diverse reasons, by national coalitions of left and right wing political parties. Each had their own set of criticisms against the traditional administration system and their own sets of desires to change the public administration. Progressively, large sectors of the populations were pushing for reforms in the system of governance (Lévesque, 2013: 28-29). In Amsterdam East the elected members of the council were mobilized by the movement in civil society. Using the national discourse and budgetary means to install the 'participative society' opened up the doors for a transition towards a more collaborative governance that involved and integrated users, allowing for a more 'open' approach to innovation, the so-called, 'Public Value Management' (PVM) (Lévesque, 2013).

### *What changed and why?*

The council coalition formed by the Green Left Party (Groen Links), the social democrat Labor Party (Partij van de Arbeid) and D66, a liberal democratic party, was a lucky circumstance as the representatives were opposing the neoliberal reforms and promoting instruments for social innovation in their own working places and in the neighborhood. At the



moment, the IB is witnessing the transition from the NPM to the PVM approach. This transition reformulates the role of governance, making it a field instead of a framework of SI (Pradel Miquel et al. 2013: 160). Tracing this movement of transition in the city council gave us important insights on the conditions under which social innovation initiatives were emerging in the IB.

Again, we see that the macro- and the micro-political need to be discovered rather than assumed to be attached to pre-defined places and networks. In this sense, ethnographic methods are crucial to understand how the macro and the micro powers are constituent of the field in which the new appears. Thick descriptions, the recording of historicities, attention to the diversity of networks and forces at play are crucial, noticing daily life events such as coffee breaks, feasts, local ritual events, gossip, etc. These ethnographic methods should allow us to avoid using these concepts as a labeling tool.

### *Tracing the paths of grassroots innovation*

In the next section we will present in detail the most illustrative experiments of SI in the IB. We will focus on the questions “How did something come to be? Which knowledge, emotions or desires drove this situation? What relations existed between which actors? Which games of power were played between the actors?” (Due, 2007 in Hillier, 2013: 174).

The narratives about the re-birth and transformation of the neighborhood house the Meevaart shows epic undertones. The story of the building is iconic for the qualitative change in the social relationships between the neighbors, their organizations and the city council. The narratives stress how a group of neighbors came with a ‘really crazy idea’. They envisioned a building made and ruled by the neighbors and for the neighbors. It was not a coincidence that the city council, given its political composition at that moment, used the national mandate to organize the ‘strengthening of the social dominium’ to empower the neighbors. The the council relinquished the control of the building to the initiative group. Today, the Meevaart has a pivotal role in the development and continuity of the grassroots initiatives in the IB.

The aim of the national policy to strengthen the social field foresaw the creation of the role of the participation agent, to act as a broker within the participation model. In Amsterdam East the job was given to Rob van Velen, anthropologist by training. As the task is as broadly defined as it can be, the personal input is of utmost importance. Rob van Velen's input includes the professional skills of a fieldworker and of a professional with analytical training to understand social processes. He is a charismatic, trusty inspiring person, who defines himself as 'the man in the street', looking and listening and making ends fit. He connects needs with resources, people with networks and ideas with the material means to realize those dreams. Remarkably enough is the large number of academics, specially anthropologist and sociologists, who are enrolled in the networks. They are working in grassroots initiatives, as independent social entrepreneurs and some, attracted by the social dynamics in the neighborhood, have become the nexus with academic networks.

Last but not least, something about the pervasive presence of food related grassroots initiatives in the neighborhood. Appaduray speaks of food as endowed by a semiotic virtuosity: "Food in its varied guises, contexts, and functions, can signal rank and rivalry, solidarity and community, identity and exclusion, and intimacy or distance. [...] Food is a constant need but a perishable good. Its daily pressure to cook food [...] makes it well suited to bear the load of everyday social discourse. [...] A fundamental fact about food [...] is its capacity to mobilize strong emotions" (1981: 494). Attending to the anthropological importance of food, the presence of this regime in the field of social innovation in the IB makes it a crucial agent in our research<sup>4</sup>.

## **Ecosystem of food activities in the Indische Buurt**

Most of the food initiatives in the IB are undertaken by social enterprises or nonprofit organizations such as associations, general partnerships and foundations. In the last two-three decades, the nonprofit sector has witnessed increasing entrepreneurial dynamics, as shown in the initiatives described below. Austin states that social enterprises are looking for opportunities in society in order to achieve a public good and

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<sup>4</sup> We are not able in this paper to go into the workings of food other than showing the broad spectrum in which food is present in the field of innovation in the IB. Food will be the subject of forthcoming reports.

to create social value while at the same time promoting entrepreneurial activities (Austin et al., 2006). As a result of these experimentations, social enterprises came up with innovative solutions for providing services or goods to individuals or communities whose needs are neither met by private companies nor by public providers.

In the IB social innovation is emerging within the social enterprises which are becoming more and more entrepreneurial. We use the chart developed by Vicari & Tornaghi (2013: 266) as a tracing tool of social innovation. The chart helps us look at the initiatives in a two-dimensional perspective taking into account the value orientation and the degree of institutionalization of the initiatives. The first one refers to the motivations that encourage social actors to pursue social change (“fuel”) and the second measures the extent to which the initiative has been able to embed itself in a stable governance structure (“engine”).



We divided the initiatives in three groups (see Figure 1). In the upper-left quadrant, there are those fueled by strong motivations and a robust value content but that they do not have (yet) formed stable relationships with the public administration. We say ‘yet’ because we have observed that in the IB most of these small grassroots initiatives are developing strong networks and links with public and nonprofit actors at different

scales. A remarkable case that exemplifies this quick progression is 'Taste Before You Waste'. We will come back to this initiative later on.

The second group of initiatives, located in the lower-right quadrant, exist already for several decades and enjoy strong and formal links with local institutional actors/networks. In the IB, progressive values can be found as well in these initiatives. Although these initiatives seem to enjoy a comfortable (read, less innovative) position, in the interviews they have expressed the need to update themselves in order to meet current societal challenges by experimenting with new activities, updating their programs, etc. Some of them are supporting and empowering the grassroots initiatives located in the upper-left quadrant helping them to gain stability in a multi-level governance framework.

Most of the initiatives analyzed are located in the upper-right quadrant. This group of initiatives have, to a large extent, a progressive and inclusive value orientation and at the same time have strong and formal links with institutional actors in the public, private and nonprofit sector. Crossley (1999) call these initiatives "working utopias" and Harvey (2000) refers to them as "spaces of hope". These definitions do very well suit the emotions that the actors in the IB associate with their activities. Also some of the grassroots initiatives located in the upper-left quadrant are being supported by the initiatives in the upper right quadrant. Three initiatives from this group, which have scored highly in terms of social innovation, will be described next: 'Starters4Communities', 'Dream Support' and 'Oost Indisch Groen'<sup>5</sup>

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The analysis of the next four initiatives helped us tracing processes of social innovation in the IB. These initiatives have been chosen for their ability to combine existing resources and to mobilize networks. They present the quality that Hillier associates with innovation as they perform an ethical re/making of social space, which affords people economic, social, governmental and/or political agency in their own development (Hillier, 2013:169). By analyzing these four initiatives we aim to understand the conditions under which SI emerges in the context of the IB.

### *Starters4communities (S4c)*

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<sup>5</sup> There are no initiatives in the lower-left quadrant because we chose initiatives which showed signs of social innovation, the ones interesting for this study.

S4c was born in 2013. Its initiator saw the potential of combining two social challenges, the high incidence of unemployment among starters, recently graduated BSc and MSc students from very diverse social disciplines, and the increasing number of local entrepreneurial activities, which could use some extra support. Two years later, Starters4communities has become a school of social entrepreneurship.

S4c's motto is 'Connect - Entrepreneurship - Learn - Innovate'. Their aim is to become a platform that *connects* talented starters, citizens, universities, city councils, entrepreneurs, nonprofits and private companies. They want to change traditional top down ways of 'doing things' by teaching social *entrepreneurship*. Future entrepreneurs will *learn* by doing, by applying social entrepreneurial skills to solve problems in real life conditions within existing initiatives, creating at the same time value for themselves and value for the local initiatives. According to them, *innovation* is an essential part of the process. Innovation means discovering together -the professionals and the social entrepreneurs- and experimenting with new ways of thinking, designing and working in order to empower the grassroots initiatives. Some of these innovative social entrepreneurial skills that the starters learn are how to prepare a business model, a pitch for a project, marketing strategies, crowdfunding, impact evaluation methods, etc. (website S4c).

Located at the community center Meevaart, S4c works through different programs. Approximately 15-25 starters participate in each program and about six local initiatives are included in the program. The starters have to pay a small amount of money for the training. Two thirds of the costs for each program are covered through crowdfunding campaigns and one third is funded by an external party, such as the local government, a nonprofit or a housing corporation. The team of S4c, that facilitates the workshops have to make a living with these activities, therefore the programs can only start when all the costs involved are covered. S4c support many different types of social initiatives, some of them related to food as well, such as 'Chutney for Change'. This initiative uses food surpluses to avoid food waste while connecting people and promoting local businesses. In a first step, the initiators collect citizens' recipes and the stories behind the recipes. In a second phase, the neighbors cook together following those recipes and using the surpluses coming from local farmers and local entrepreneurs. Finally, some of the products cooked, such as chutneys, jams, etc., are sold to the local businesses in the neighborhood.

After two years the initiative has gained momentum and it is now being implemented in other neighborhoods in Amsterdam, as well as in other cities in The Netherlands. Their aim is to keep on growing and teaching social entrepreneurial skills to the future generations while supporting existing local initiatives.

### *Dream Support (DS)*

Behind DS there are two pedagogues, Hanne and Wiepke, who since 2007 are developing educational programs to contribute to create a better future for children and young people in the IB. They are social entrepreneurs (under the legal form of a general partnership -in Dutch VOF, *Vennootschap onder firma*) but they prefer to be called a 'neighborhood organization'. They have an extensive network in the IB and collaborate with different local actors depending on the project. DS's organizational model can be defined as 'hybrid'. Diverse stakeholders such as salaried workers, volunteers, users, support organizations, schools and the city council are often involved in the same project. This hybridity can also be observed in the variety of sources used to finance the projects, such as municipality subsidies but also money coming from private services.

DS's mission is organized around different topics, one of them being 'health and sustainable lifestyles'. In the IB one out of three children is considered overweight. This presents a big challenge for the neighborhood. In the last year, DS has developed two interesting projects to improve this situation, '*Tijd voor Groen*' ('Time for Green') and '*Op Gezonde Tour*' ('On a healthy tour'). The aim of the first one was to spur citizens participation and to green one of the poorest squares of the IB by introducing the practice of urban agriculture. In this project, DS collaborated with *peer-educators* (pedagogy students) to enroll the children and young people living around the square in the project. 'On a healthy tour' was an eight month-program which aimed at educating the neighborhood in a healthy lifestyle. During this project, DS trained 'key actors' in the neighborhood (in Dutch, *sleutelfiguren*), making them ambassadors of a healthy lifestyle and trained them to continue sharing the knowledge acquired with the neighborhood after the project was finished.

One of the most innovative strategies developed by DS is the methodology they are using in their projects: the 'Appreciative Inquiry' (AI) methodology, created by David Cooperrider. The projects are

divided in four phases: *Discovery, Dream, Design and Delivery*. The four steps in this methodology resonate with the research methodology of Hillier (2013) based on the Deleuzean Cartography which we discussed earlier on: tracing, mapping, diagramming and machinic. According to Hanne, the AI methodology has proven to be very effective in their projects because it encourages proactivity and mobilizes people towards action.

### *Oost Indisch Groen (OIG)*

In 2012, the city council gave in to the desire of an enthusiastic group of neighbors who wanted to create a meeting point for the neighborhood in the grounds of an abandoned public-works yard. The initiators had the dream of creating a green hub for the IB, a community garden made by and for the residents. Following this dream, and with the economic support of the city council, the team started transforming the site into a community garden with a communal kitchen for the neighborhood.

In 2013, OIG became a foundation (in Dutch, *stichting*). After a year of work, the infrastructure was ready to start growing vegetables and to cook. OIG's defines itself as an informal, inclusive, spontaneous organization, and 'with not too many rules' to give people the freedom to participate in different ways. That allowed a community to start growing around the garden and its kitchen. The original goal of the initiators to connect people using universal themes, such as 'green' and 'cooking' was becoming true.

In 2014, OIG received a generous subsidy from the city council to coordinate the numerous green initiatives, which inspired by the successful story of OIG, were sprouting all over the IB. The city council recognized the importance of OIG as a group able to mobilize the locals. The city council and OIG were traveling contiguous paths of innovation. Here we can see how governance becomes a field of innovation. On the one hand, the city council is willing to support economically and collaborate with these active citizens in the co-creation of the public space if they are able to self-manage in order to reduce costs related to the maintenance of the public space. On the other hand, OIG can share its knowledge with the network of green initiatives and act as a bridge. Based on the shared aim of bringing people together through 'green' and 'food', this collaboration helps achieving both the municipality's and OIG's goals. It is also noteworthy that during an interview with Nevin Özütok, who holds the 'public space' and 'green' portfolios at the city

council, she explains how the council is experimenting with the empowerment of social initiatives. Concretely, she told us that squares and public spaces should be for the use of the people and therefore the neighbors should participate in their design to transform these spaces in community meeting places.

This new coordinating role brings OIG closer to the original dream of becoming the 'Green Hub' of the IB but after three years of experience, the initiators understand better the challenges that that dream entails. The foundation is institutionalizing itself, strengthening the links with the local authorities and other local organizations. They feel now that the challenge is to remain loyal to their first ideas and emotions, the initiative's 'fuel', while at the same time allowing OIG to become more embedded in the governance structure ('engine') of the IB in order to continue producing social innovation. Flexibility is key in this process and OIG is adjusting its mission every year to the new societal demands. Thinking in the present allows OIG to be aware of possible opportunities that might arise.

### *Taste Before You Waste (TBYW)*

TBYW is an informal grassroots initiative whose aim is to counteract food waste and to educate and create awareness on the topic. In 2013, Luana, the initiator of TBYW, decided to go to her local shopping street, Javastraat, which is the food heart of the IB, and started collecting the food that was about to be thrown away to bring it to different nonprofits in the neighborhood.

In 2014, she started studying her Bachelor at the Amsterdam University College (AUC). One of the requirements for this program is to live on campus with the other students. This circumstance helped TBYW to grow quickly in a short period of time and thanks to Facebook, Luana could start building the TBYW community. At the moment, between 30 and 40 volunteers, who are mostly AUC students, are supporting the initiative. Using a cycle carrier (in Dutch, *bakfiets*), they pick up the food from the shops and organize a weekly 'market' on campus. Also, on a less regular basis, a Saturday 'market' takes place in different locations in the city to promote the initiative and rise awareness on the topic. Another interesting activity set up by the TBYW volunteers are the weekly dinners at the neighborhood center Meevaart. Volunteers cook with the food that has been rescued from the shops and prepare a meal in exchange of a 2,5 euros donation.



In just two years the initiative has become well-known and has developed an extensive network with local nonprofits, the neighborhood center Meevaart and especially with the university (AUC), which allows them to use the university infrastructure (meeting rooms, beamers, etc.). Their network includes now other Dutch universities and they belong to an international umbrella network, Food Surplus Network, which gathers knowledge and connects initiatives working on food waste. The city council municipality already knows of their existence and has asked them to facilitate a workshop on the topic of obesity with children from the neighborhood and their parents.

When thinking about the future and the sustainability of the initiative, TBYW is considering becoming a foundation and having a permanent location. Still legal issues of liabilities and new responsibilities that this legal status will bring have to be taken into consideration.

## **Final Remarks**

In this neighborhood a lot is happening at the same time and most of what have happened has effected new opportunities for new connections and has offered new spaces for experimentation. Now most of the initiatives are able to mobilize cultural and material resources to meet targeted needs and are witnessing the emergence and dissemination of new ideas and practices of governance and citizenship.

We started our research collecting the histories of the participants, listening and recording the narratives, desires and imaginations that they connected to their endeavors. We traced the effects of the macro-political forces acting upon the neighborhood before and during the forming and developing of their initiatives. We traced the forces acting in the micro-politics within the local administration and in the neighborhood, which gave us a hint of the possibilities produced by this particular mobilization of forces. Gardening and food are new forces coming into the field of governance. The social initiatives and the city council in Amsterdam East are using the transformative quality of these practices and materials bringing them into the field of governance.

Follow up: in this paper we did not take up the analysis of urban agriculture and food and eating. These are the subjects for the next

fieldwork period. The neighbors in the IB are toiling, planting, growing, harvesting in urban grounds, squares, along the railway and in old working-yards. This ethnography will be focused on the ecological relations involved. This part will go into what Tim Ingold defines as the field of the ecology of the materials. In the urban landscape the materials are co-constitutive of the social relationships of the urban agriculturalist. Next, we will turn to food cooking and eating practices and where they take place: buildings, streets, kitchens but also the characteristics of the culinary bodies. We will look into the movements, the words, the savors, the aromas of different culinary traditions and into the serving, sitting, washing and maintaining the cooking places. In short, the materials, the bodies, the practices and the social dynamics by which gardening and food enter the tapestry of forces that characterize SI in the IB.

In this paper we have focused our efforts on the experimentation with the methodology. Researching SI has to be as revolutionary and challenging as the process it is trying to follow and to know. If it is not, then it has indubitably failed.

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