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# Citizenship in the Netherlands: locally produced, nationally contested

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The Netherlands is often considered an extreme example of individualism and multiculturalism, two factors that many politicians and social scientists consider to be the main causes for the alleged decline in citizenship. In this paper, we examine Dutch citizens' conceptions of citizenship to test these negative expectations. We found the fear that a modern, individualistic, and diverse citizenry only care for their own rights to be misplaced; citizens were willing to exert effort to uphold the society they live in. Their efforts, however, were conditional upon returns in terms of a responsive government and in improvements to their individual lives. Communitarian, local, and rather submissive notions of citizenship were deeply shared – with a liberal twist among many migrants. We also found that 'nationalist' republican notions of citizenship awaken latent uncertainties and divisions among citizens rather than creating 'new' unity. This imagination of citizenship leaves Dutch society wanting for the deliberative, political elements of citizenship.

**Keywords:** citizenship; diversity; social cohesion; The Netherlands

## Introduction

'Citizenship' today is a burning issue. While social and political thinkers hardly used the term in the 1970s, by 1994 it had become their buzzword (Kymlicka and Norman 1994). Another 15 years later, the term enjoys common currency among journalists, policy-makers, and citizens as well. In Western European countries such as Great Britain and the Netherlands, citizenship is now seen as a key policy tool to address issues of social cohesion stemming from immigration, welfare state restructuring, and the gap between citizens and government. Citizenship is expected to offer guidance in cultural clashes, in social policy, and in debates on the future of democracy. The explosive rise in references to citizenship in the Dutch public domain can be illustrated by its use in the media (Figure 1). There is little reason to think that the situation is different in, for instance, Great Britain and Germany – countries that have also introduced citizenship curricula for immigrants and within their schools (Osler 2000, Banks 2007).

What we are witnessing is a slow but certain public appropriation of citizenship. Citizenship is now assigned meaning not only by policy-makers, politicians, and academics, but also by average citizens. Through this process, citizenship is being transformed – not necessarily by the new functions it is being assigned, but by its entry into the everyday lives of people who fill it with their thoughts, emotions, and deeds to negotiate and understand their own lives. Hobsbawn (1993, p. 10) wrote that nationalism is essentially constructed from above, 'but cannot be understood unless also analyzed from

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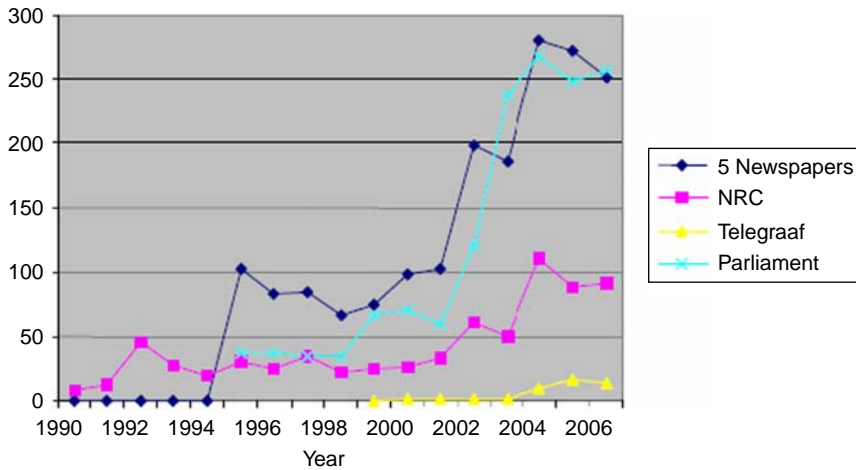
Figure 1.  Citizenship as a buzz word.
Notes: The adding up of the occurrence of the word citizenship in the four largest national Dutch newspapers and one regional newspaper and in parliamentary speech over the period 1990–2006, NRC Handelsblad, *quality newspaper* being a liberal newspaper and Telegraaf being a popular newspaper.

below, that is in terms of the assumptions, hopes, needs, longings, and interests of ordinary people, which are not necessarily national and still less nationalist.' The same can be said of citizenship – in its essence a top-down construction to make a collection of people governable, but which also carries the ambitions and fears of these very people.

Citizenship entered the public spotlight on the back of three developments. First, there is the fear that rising self-centeredness is putting an end to civic engagement, for which a communitarian idea of citizenship is billed as the solution. Second, there is the fear that growing diversity is putting an end to social cohesion. A republican idea of citizenship, stressing nationalism as the new uniting force, is presented here as the answer. Third, growing diversity requires another aspect of republican citizenship: the debating of differences to find a new shared language and new shared solutions.

In this paper, we confront these communitarian and republican interpretations of citizenship with views that citizens themselves hold of citizenship. What, if anything, do citizens make of the plea for more communitarian or republican forms of citizenship, in the neo-nationalist manner or in the desire for more debate on difference, as advocated by the politicians of the Left and Right? In this paper, we examine the rising expectations of citizenship in the Netherlands, which we locate within contemporary theoretical debates, before turning to the views of citizens.

But why the Netherlands as a case study? The answer is simple: the country is a laboratory for debates surrounding citizenship. The Netherlands is in a certain sense an 'extreme' case of the developments outlined above. Regarding communitarian worries about self-centeredness, the Netherlands is often depicted as one of the most individualized, liberal countries in Europe (Ester *et al.* 1993, p. 165, SCP 2000, p. 22). The legacy of 'the 1960s' has taken root in a country with famously lax laws on drugs and euthanasia. Informally organized and with few relevant class distinctions, the only thing that binds the Dutch is fondness for their individuality (Verbrugge 2004). This picture of an over-emancipated country fuels persistent political concern over the lack of norms, values, civic engagement, and sense of duty (WRR 2003).

The Netherlands is also an interesting case for rising diversity and appeals to nationalism and more debate on differences. The Netherlands has long been a country famous for its tolerance and lack of nationalism. The recent 'nationalist' turn in Dutch politics is therefore surprising. Some authors trace it to the failure of a rather specific or even radical Dutch 'model' of multiculturalism, in which collective cultural identities could thrive at the expense of deepening social–cultural cleavages (Koopmans *et al.* 2005, Sniderman and Hagendoorn 2006, Joppke 2007a). In this view, the Dutch tradition of 'pillarization' and the collective trauma of World War II gave birth to cultural policies of accommodation that aimed to avoid conflicts at all costs. Current efforts to build or rebuild national conceptions of citizenship and to articulate and discuss conflicts rather than smother them in consensus are to be seen in the light of the failure of this alleged 'model.' 'In a counterpoint to multiculturalism's tendency to lock migrant ethnics into their separate worlds, the goal of civic integration is migrants' participation in mainstream institutions' (Joppke 2007b, p. 249). Others trace the heated debate in republican–nationalist terms not so much to the multicultural but to the rather monocultural, homogeneous character of Dutch society and the political articulation of a progressive moral majority (Duyvendak 2004, Duyvendak and Hurenkamp 2004, Duyvendak *et al.* 2009). Whatever may be the correct understanding, the Netherlands stands out for this rise in republican notions of citizenship.

So within Dutch politics, citizenship-at-the-rescue consists of two rather classical interpretations of its obligations. More than anything else, the current transformation of citizenship is directed toward the reinstatement of a dutiful, communitarian and at the same time national republican idea of citizenship. The communitarian and the national messages, however, work at cross-purposes. Citizens must acknowledge their duties, which consist of both loyalty and self-sufficiency. They need to identify with the nation-state and be as independent as possible at the same time.

This convoluted path stems partly from the problem-solving character that citizenship has acquired over the decades: to solve class tensions within nation-states (Marshall 1964); to reinstate civic duties in a liberal age (Kymlicka and Norman 1994); and now, most prominently, to solve questions of membership in a time of immigration and globalization. In this respect, the Dutch case is a fine example of broader developments.

There is, moreover, a third development concerning citizenship in the Netherlands that has a broader meaning: the invitation for citizens to engage in dialog and to find new ways of engaging and connecting both nationally and locally. Such efforts have ranged from 'Dialogue Days' and debates on the meaning of the Constitution to, most recently, debates on a 'Charter for Citizenship' around core values such as respect and reciprocity by the Dutch Home Office. Most of these policies and projects aim to find shared meanings, for example, what we (all) understand respect to be.

How Dutch citizens understand and create notions of collectivity in these rather strained circumstances gives us a portrait of grassroots-based conceptions of citizenship and the search for a new 'we' in a country applauded for its age-long tolerance of difference.

## Political expectations of citizenship in the Netherlands

The current buzz around citizenship in the Netherlands can be seen by looking at the growing number of editorials, news pieces, and interviews that have touched upon the subject. We examined how the notion of citizenship has been deployed over the last 15 years (Hurenkamp and Tonkens 2008). While our sample by no means covers everything that citizens do or think about citizenship, it does provide an idea of citizenship's public image in the Netherlands. In the early 1990s, citizenship was hardly mentioned in the

newspapers. If it was, it was by academics and little response would follow. Chances were minimal that an average reader would come across the word, let alone debates on citizenship. This has changed dramatically with both politicians and journalists now regularly citing and debating the need for 'more citizenship' to restore common decency on the streets, to create livable neighborhoods and to explain reigning cultural practices. In the media, citizenship is billed as the solution to the problems of both government and society.

The three aforementioned developments are clearly present in the Dutch media's coverage of citizenship. First, the communitarian fear that citizens are increasingly withdrawing from public life, with dramatic consequences. If we define communitarianism as an analytical position that holds that the balance between autonomy and order is disturbed, and leaning more toward the individual than is good for both the society and the individual (MacIntyre 1984, Etzioni 1996), then this is indeed a very prominent position in the Dutch media. The increased public presence of citizenship in the years from 1995 to 2005 can largely be attributed to 'communitarian' messages. Citizenship here is about taking responsibility by adapting to certain norms and values, by respecting others and one's surroundings. While the republican messages address such cultural themes as shared norms and values as well, they do so by emphasizing loyalty to (Dutch) democracy as the citizenry's quintessential task.

Citizenship as a critical, civic, or even oppositional practice is rarely mentioned and, if so, only by academics. There is hardly any mention of citizenship as a liberating force for individuals. Where a more liberal stance is taken or explained, this is largely confined to the status citizens should have in the European Union. The dominant framing of citizenship thus focuses on duties rather than on rights, on a code of conduct rather than a status or practice. What prevails is a *submissive* understanding of citizenship (Figures 2 and 3).

Communitarianism is clearly reflected in Dutch criticisms of the welfare state as well. The power of centralized bureaucracies over local communities has led to the demise of
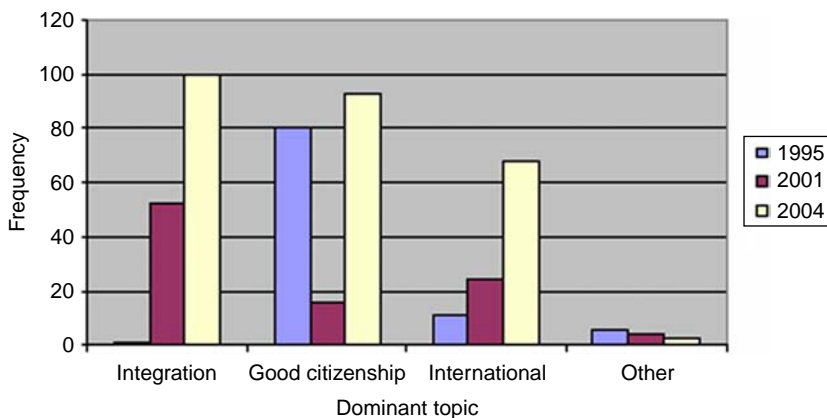


Figure 2.   Content of citizenship in the written media (1).
Notes: The result of our scoring of the context in which the actual word citizenship is deployed in the largest five Dutch newspapers. Integration contains the pieces where citizenship is principally related to questions of migration and diversity in the Netherlands. Good citizenship contains the pieces in which citizenship is chiefly related to values and responsibility in the public domain. International contains the pieces where a mere legal status of citizens, European or cosmopolitan or transnational citizenship is at stake. Other contains the pieces where citizenship is related in the first place to social class, sexuality and care, among others.
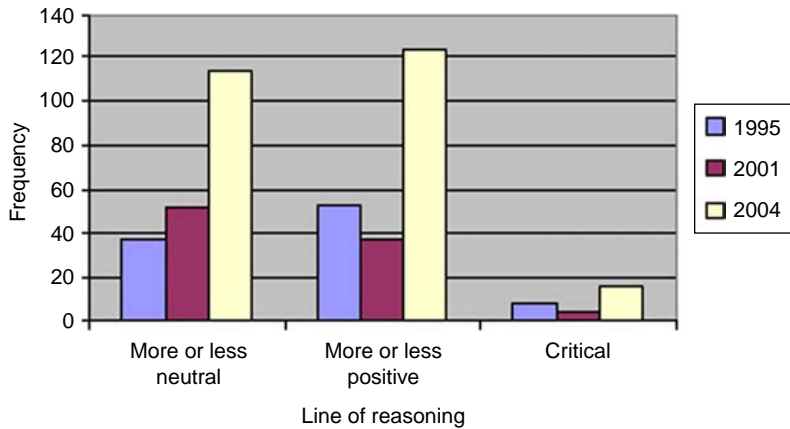
Figure 3.   Content of citizenship in the written media (2).
Notes: Under more or less neutral, we filed the pieces that did not explicitly contain a judgment on citizenship but somehow followed a policy or political statement; under more or less positive, we filed the pieces that explicitly supported proposed solutions of societal problems by means of more citizenship; and under critical, we filed the pieces that argue that citizenship is on the balance not helpful or a bad idea.

private initiative (cf. Mead 1986, Wolfe 1989). Hence, citizens feel powerless and alienated, are obsessed with rights and unaware of their duties, and are discouraged to take social action by regulation or welfare benefits. Self-reliance and personal responsibility must revive awareness of the duty to work that is lost due to the 'nanny state.'

Putnam's (2000) claim that there has been a troublesome privatization of social life has found an even larger following among policy-makers and scholars in the Netherlands. The concern is widely echoed in the Dutch media: without the individual and collective benefits that flow from civic participation (sometimes called 'social capital' but more often 'social cohesion'), the society will sooner or later disintegrate. Academic analyses of declining social cohesion reverberate across the Center-Left and Center-Right in the Netherlands (Bos 2007), as they do more generally in European politics (Blunkett 2002, Schauble 2008).

Over the past decade, Center-Right and Center-Left politicians alike have placed the idea of communitarian citizenship high on the agenda. In response to the idea that rights have grown out of hand, Marshall's idea of citizenship as a status has veered toward citizenship as the task that citizens have to fulfill, or have to learn to fulfill. Citizenship had to be won back from the market and the (welfare) state and be reinstated as a communal or public practice. In this way it would enhance social cohesion, no longer by handing out equal rights to all members of the community, but by creating a level playing field for civic morality. Citizenship in this context is about citizens creating and maintaining communities with as little government interference as possible. In the face of personal or neighborhood problems citizens are expected to rise to the occasion and help each other instead of turning to the government for solutions. The moral duty to participate has a specific meaning: an 'active citizen' is self-reliant and helps the government at the same time.

The ideal of active citizenship is gaining ground in many West European countries (Marinetto 2003, Mayer 2003, Clarke 2005); the Netherlands is no exception. The expectation of citizens' willingness to cooperate is clearly seen in the present Dutch

government's statement on the general direction of policy-making, the so-called 'Coalition Agreement':

> The guideline for policy and performance is the human dimension. In small scale associations, people find both familiarity and dynamics. People deploy initiatives more easily in neighborhoods, districts, organizations and companies than in large anonymous associations . . . Government gives citizens scope to take initiative and equips them to participate fully . . . Civic engagement will be stimulated as much as possible . . . More room will be given to civic organizations, private initiative and volunteering.

The second source of citizenship's rise to buzz status in the Netherlands has to do with the growing diversity of the population. Ethnic diversity is seen as fueling social disintegration. Putnam (2007, pp. 149–150) argued that 'diversity seems to trigger *not* in-group/out-group division, but anomie or social isolation. ( . . . ) Inhabitants of diverse communities withdraw from public life.' This leads to the lower likelihood of citizens in diverse neighborhoods working on a community project, giving to charity or volunteering. These American findings were fervently debated in the newspapers and are mostly confirmed by studies in the Netherlands (Lancee and Dronkers 2008).

In response to this, different 'republican' ideas of citizenship have been forcefully revived – republicanism being a contested and layered concept that, for the sake of this article, can be understood as the idea that the quintessential duty of citizens is to participate in the public domain (Arendt 1958). There are many directions this republicanism can take. It ranges from a somewhat nostalgic longing for more uniformity and predictability in the public sphere (Scheffer 2007) to forceful pleas for more public-spirited actions and rituals (Debray 2009) to reappraisals of the army as a colorblind, solidarity-creating institution (Putnam 2007). As republicanism again rises to prominence, nation-states become the crucial locus for reframing citizenship (Koopmans *et al.* 2005, Sniderman and Hagendoorn 2006, Joppke 2007a). Solutions are mostly sought through augmenting national unity or, as it is often framed in an apparently more innocent language, in creating 'a new we.' As an antidote to declining social cohesion, citizens, and especially immigrants, are more or less required to actively identify with the nation-state. The nation-state (again) becomes the critical forum for integration.

This 'nationalist turn' in the Netherlands is visible in the revival of national history, seen in the founding of a national history museum in 2007, and in the obligatory teaching of a 'national history canon' in high schools from 2008. It was also evident in the 2005 Dutch veto on the European constitution. The various nationalist–populist political parties that have emerged since 2001 can count on up to 20% or more of the votes in polls and actual elections. The former Minister of Integration, Rita Verdonk, views Dutch nationality as 'the first prize' for immigrants, while virtually all political leaders in their speeches refer to 'patriotism.' New accounts of Dutch identity focus on the unity and like-mindedness of the nation, and show little or no interest in the often centuries-old tradition of regional and religious disputes (Fortuyn 2001). Citizenship as self-organization or self-reliance is repudiated if it is at odds with this national identity; immigrants who organize to defend their cultural identity are seen as threats rather than as active citizens.

Internationally, the republican turn also takes another shape, in line with the aforementioned third concern over the demise of citizenship: the lack of political engagement, debate, and discussion. Quantitative research on Dutch public perceptions of citizenship shows, however, that this turn has limited resonance. In the Netherlands, citizenship is mostly understood as a social rather than a political concept (Dekker and De Hart 2005) – a finding that echoes older traditions of Dutch citizenship (Kennedy 2008). There is one notable exception: a re-interpretation of republicanism – 'neo-republicanism' –

that has been advanced by Dutch academics like van Gunsteren (1998) and van den Brink (2007). Here, the core business of citizens is to find ways to bear their differences with other citizens. As citizens find themselves in a community of fate rather than in kinship-based communities, they have little choice but to master a certain civic competence.

In all of this talk about citizenship among policy-makers and social scientists as well as the media the views of the citizens have largely been absent. This is surprising for several reasons. First of all, there is a normative argument to be made that it matters what citizens themselves make of these notions. Instructing citizens on how to behave as citizens is self-contradictory; the essence of citizenship is allowing competent members of a community to govern that community. Second, there is a more practical argument to be made. If the whole idea of citizenship lands on arid ground or is understood as something very different from its political underpinnings, moderation in its top-down use would be advisable. For example, in Germany and the Netherlands, the equivalent terms (*burgerschap*, *Burgerschaft*) invoke the dullness and compliance of the bourgeois rather than the commitment and competence of the *citoyen*. What do politicians mean when they advocate stronger 'burgerschap'? And how is this understood by ordinary citizens? It is thus all the more urgent to examine public understandings of citizenship.

Hence our questions: What do Dutch citizens themselves make of citizenship? How far are they willing and able to reproduce ideals and aspirations envisioned in what Marshall (1964) famously called 'the status of full members of the community'? How do people 'negotiate' with increasingly prominent political and media messages regarding citizenship? (Gamson 1992)

Studies on citizenship have paid some attention to this topic. Conover-Johnson *et al.* (1991) have compared the historical differences between American and British views on citizenship; Lister *et al.* (2003) have studied how British youths who feel included or excluded interpret its new forms; whereas Miller Idriss (2006) has studied the meanings that young Germans attach to the concept.

In the Netherlands, some interesting quantitative research (Dekker and de Hart 2005) has been done. Our research builds on this, but is mostly qualitative, as we are interested in how citizens talk about citizenship. We take citizenship to be a discursive practice in the sense that citizens actually talk citizenship into being – by defining, including, and excluding certain people and practices. We moreover view citizenship within everyday life, in the sense that citizens attach certain meanings to their to-ing and fro-ing in the neighborhood, on the Internet and in the voting booth.

## Methods

To find out if the debate on citizenship in the media and among policy-makers and social scientists is resonating, contradicted, or simply dismissed among citizens, we use two data-sets. These mainly consist of active citizens or those who are active within citizens' groups or organizations, ranging from groups that organize neighborhood activities to organizations of particular migrant groups. These active citizens are of course not representative of average citizens; they are generally more highly educated and are also more often native Dutch (though this is complemented by an over-representation of migrants in the focus groups). On average, one-third of Dutch citizens are active as volunteers (Bekkers 2004). We focused on active citizens because it is in their activities, dreams, and hopes that we can find the actual meaning of citizenship in the Netherlands today.

The first data-set consisted of 386 'small-scale citizen initiatives' (which we will refer to as 'citizen groups' to avoid confusion with citizen initiatives proposing legislation)

Table 1.  Engaged citizens are older.

| Age | Percentage | Valid percentage |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 0–19 | 0 | 0 |
| 20–29 | 4.4 | 4.5 |
| 30–39 | 14.5 | 14.7 |
| 40–49 | 22.0 | 22.3 |
| 50–59 | 27.2 | 27.6 |
| 60 and older | 30.6 | 31.0 |
| Missing | 1.3 | |

Note: $N = 386$.

(Hurenkamp *et al.* 2006). These groups embody what both liberals and conservatives applaud: self-reliance and socially oriented civic participation. Initiatives to make neighborhoods more livable included caring for the elderly through informal surveillance networks, organizing local festivities for the whole neighborhood or embroidery evenings for immigrant women, proposing alternative policy on speed bumps and playgrounds, etc. Through three different databases of initiatives (courtesy of http://www.zestienmiljoen mensen.nl, the volunteer-supporting organization Civic and Utrecht City Hall), we compiled a database of over 3000 initiatives. Excluding associations with over 20 members and those with formal links to existing social policy institutions, this produced a set of over 1000 addresses that we tried to contact.

All in all, we managed to talk to representatives of 386 initiatives over a period of six weeks in early 2006. We did this by phone, using a mostly structured list of half-open questions. We asked the members of these initiative groups about their goals, motives, contacts, grievances, ideas on citizenship, other connections to civil society, the amount of time invested, and whether or not they considered quitting their group.

The actual number of groups and initiatives – whether temporary or long-lasting – was such that the whole idea of 'a lack community' cannot be substantiated. Based on the 70 small informal groups we found after extensive snowballing in the rural village of Smilde (Drente), we can make a rough estimate of the total number of such groups in the Netherlands: between 200,000 and 300,000.

We found that citizens active in these small groups are indeed generally highly educated and older (Tables 1 and 2) and thus are more or less savvy practitioners of civic engagement. But they can and will exercise choice when practicing citizenship – when their lives get too busy, when their efforts do not pay off, or when they want to try something new. Most respondents did not consider stopping their voluntary work as a serious option or would only stop when the goals of the group had been attained (Table 5). When asked what kind of event originally motivated their activity (their choices were

Table 2.  Engaged citizens are higher educated.

| Education | Percentage | Valid percentage |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Elementary | 2.1 | 2.1 |
| High school | 14.2 | 14.5 |
| Vocational | 19.9 | 20.3 |
| Higher | 62.2 | 63.2 |
| Missing | 1.6 | |

Note: $N = 386$.

Table 3.  Engaged citizens act not strictly egoistic.

| Motives | Percentage | Valid percentage |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Own experience | 32.4 | 33.5 |
| Experience of others | 27.5 | 28.4 |
| Public experience | 33.7 | 34.9 |
| Don't know | 3.1 | 3.2 |
| Missing | 3.4 | |

Note: $N = 386$.

personal experience, experience of an acquaintance, or an event heard about through the media or the public sphere), most answered that their motivation was not directly personal (Table 3).

In addition, we assembled a second data-set. We visited and interviewed 20 individuals and spoke with them for 1–2 hours about the aims and frustrations of their informal association. Normally, there can be disadvantages to this method. Our study, however, does not claim to be fully representative of all types of civic (dis)engagement, but to better understand the meaning and dynamics of small-scale initiative participation. In the village of Smilde, we had contact with those groups with the most free-flowing initiatives, while the databases led us to groups with at least a minimal ambition to engage with the outside world (otherwise they would not have taken the trouble to present themselves on a website or one of the other platforms).

In addition to these two data-sets on small-scale initiatives, we formed a third data-set on the basis of 10 focus group discussions we held in two Dutch cities – Amsterdam and Arnhem – over a period of 4 months in 2007. Focus groups are not common in social science. However, this method has clear advantages in this particular area as the

Table 4.  Engaged citizens want to help out, not protest.

| Goal | Percentage | Valid percentage |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Liveability | 23.3 | 23.7 |
| Multicultural | 7.3 | 7.4 |
| Nature | 6.5 | 6.6 |
| Self deployment | 15.5 | 15.8 |
| Solidarity | 35.0 | 35.6 |
| Sports | 7.8 | 7.9 |
| Other | 2.8 | 2.9 |
| Missing | 1.8 | |

Note: $N = 386$.

Table 5.  Commitment of active citizens.

| Quitting | Percentage | Valid percentage |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Soon | 6.7 | 7.2 |
| In a few years | 22.8 | 24.3 |
| When goal is reached | 7.0 | 7.5 |
| Don't think about it | 57.3 | 61.0 |
| Missing | 6.2 | |

Note: $N = 386$.

Table 6.  Types of citizenship and citizen groups.

| | Citizenship | Social | Political | Else | Don't know |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Groups | | | | | |
| Loose | | 16 (48.5%) | 10 (30.3%) | 4 (12.1%) | 3 (9.1%) |
| Thin | | 29 (50.0%) | 19 (32.8%) | 8 (13.8%) | 2 (3.4%) |
| Comfort | | 38 (56.7%) | 20 (29.9%) | 5 (7.5%) | 4 (6.0%) |
| Strong | | 108 (59.7%) | 42 (23.2%) | 23 (12.7%) | 8 (4.4%) |

Notes: Values are in absolute numbers and percentages, $N = 386$, missing $= 47$. Loose groups are the groups with little mutual contact among members and little contact with local institutions, thin groups are groups with little mutual contact and some contact with local institutions, comfort groups are the groups with abundant contact among members and some contact with local institutions; and strong groups are the groups with abundant contact among members and with local institutions.

discussions are among equals and allow participants to use their own language, rather than react to an interviewer (Morgan 1997). 'Focus groups have a unique niche for obtaining information as tension between groups begins to rise. Surveys and other ways of obtaining information may be ineffective because neither party trust the other's intentions' (Kitzinger 1994). Six of these focus groups were among active citizens, i.e. citizens participating in a formal or informal civil society organization. Two were among citizens not participating in civil society; another two were among policy-makers concerned with citizenship issues (Table 10). Amsterdam, the national capital, has 700,000 inhabitants and a metropolitan character. Arnhem is a provincial capital with 150,000 inhabitants. Amsterdam has the largest migrant population of all cities in the Netherlands, while Arnhem's migrant population – in percentage terms – is the sixth largest in the country (Figure 4).

Table 7.  Answer to the question what the word 'citizenship' means.

| What is 'citizenship'? | Percentage | Valid percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Responsibility | 15.0 | 15.3 |
| Solidarity | 23.1 | 23.4 |
| Involvement | 17.4 | 17.6 |
| Member of society | 13.7 | 13.9 |
| Respect | 1.3 | 1.3 |
| Rights and obligations | 5.7 | 5.8 |
| Political involvement | 4.7 | 4.7 |
| Else | 12.2 | 12.4 |
| Don't know | 5.4 | 5.5 |
| Missing | 1.6 | |

Note: $N = 386$.

Table 8.  Type of citizenship for every type of groups.

| | Citizenship | Social | Political | Else | Don't know |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Groups | | | | | |
| Loose and thin | | 45 (49.5%) | 29 (31.9%) | 12 (13.2%) | 5 (5.4%) |
| Comfort and strong | | 146 (58.9%) | 62 (25.0%) | 28 (11.3%) | 12 (4.8%) |

Notes: Values are in absolute numbers and percentages, $N = 386$, missing $= 47$.

Table 9.   Characteristics of multicultural and migrant groups.

|  | Contact with politicians (%) | Asked to become politically active (%) | Social citizenship (%) | Political citizenship (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Multicultural and migrant groups ($N = 45$) | 82.2 | 44.4 | 44.4 | 31.1 |
| Others ($N = 341$) | 68.6 | 24.6 | 56.9 | 24.6 |

Table 10.   Participants in focus groups.

|  | VR | VG | NE | VO | PM |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Amsterdam | 6 | 8 | 7 | 8 | 5 |
| Arnhem | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 7 |
|  | *13* | *16* | *16* | *18* | *12* |
| Total participants | 75 |  |  |  |  |

Notes: VR = citizens with a migrant background active on a religious basis; VG = citizens with a migrant background active on a public basis; NE = non-engaged citizens; VO = active citizens without a migrant background; PM = policy makers.

Each of the 10 groups debated 10 questions. Six involved hypothetical dilemmas and four involved open questions. Group discussions lasted 2 hours with a 15-minute introduction. During these sessions, we operated with informed naivety. The six hypothetical dilemmas had a close link to participants' daily lives and began relatively simply, though in the course of the debate we rendered them more complex by introducing carefully planned events. We did this because we wanted to know not only what people thought about our dilemmas, but also how they reasoned and what influenced their ideas and attitudes. We analysed up to 40 pages of typed text generated from each meeting, focusing on the moral and practical bandwidth that different participants maintained when explaining the conditions under which they thought participation was useful. We further looked at the degree to which citizens identified with areas on different geographical scales and the conditions governing their identification.

On the basis of the material collected in researching the 386 citizen groups and the 10 focus groups, we can garner an idea of what (mostly active) citizens make of
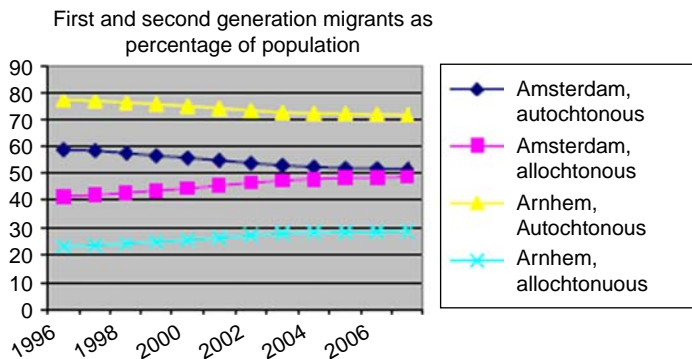


Figure 4.   Population of migrants in Arnhem and Amsterdam (data: Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, *Central bureau for statistics*).

citizenship. What do they conceive to be the duties and rights of citizens? What prompts a citizen who initially does not feel the urge to act in a given situation? What strengthens his or her conviction that something is 'wrong'? Where does he or she feel at home, and why? What arguments crop up? How do (active) citizens define citizenship? What differences are there in this respect between active and more or less passive citizens, and between migrants or children of migrants and native-born Dutch?

In Sections 'The communitarian fear: the demise of social cohesion', 'The republican reality I: the nationalist turn,' and 'Republican reality II: the lack of deliberative citizenship', we report on our findings, focusing on the extent to which the fears and hopes of both communitarians and republicans are found among Dutch citizens.

## The communitarian fear: the demise of social cohesion

How do these findings relate to the communitarian fear that we are witnessing increasing egoism among citizens today? When Kymlicka and Norman (1994, p. 335) wrote: 'For most people, citizenship is, as the US Supreme Court once put it, the right to have rights', they are expressing the widespread idea that citizens, when thinking about society, emphasize their rights over duties. Relations in this vision are typically contractual; identities are stereotypically thin with society only occupying a small part of the self. Hence, participation in society is seen as predominantly instrumental and plays only a minor role in individual life.

This emphasis on rights rather than duties was not confirmed by our findings. Among our respondents in both the interview and the focus groups, hardly any direct claims were made to the rights of freedom of expression, voting, property, or protesting. Duties were more easily discussed than rights; respondents felt more secure talking about the things one has to do than about the things one can claim. The idea that egoism characterizes modern citizenship thus has to be repudiated without being naïve about the circumstances in which citizens will and will not follow their moral compass.

Only after serious prompting – which we could only do in the focus groups – were classical rights mentioned. Discussants mentioned the right to a job, the right to safety, to respect, and even to a livable environment. Prominently expressed rights invariably had a social character, such as 'the right to participate in society.' When delving into the question of what makes a good citizen, discussants from our different groups pointed to the duty to obey the law, to refrain from causing trouble, to pay taxes, to behave modestly, and to do what is expected of you. Although 'good' citizenship can also be framed in a more virtuous manner – aiding the needy, participating in policy processes – the more legalistic view of duties prevailed. Participants felt comfortable discussing these duties; they invariably found more words and more examples and took more time to talk about duties than about rights and virtues. This was true for the active citizens as well as for those who were not active in any organization or citizens' group.

This idea of citizenship, however, was not advanced entirely without conditions. When faced with questions focusing either directly or indirectly on the rights of citizens ('What rights do you think you have?'), respondents tended to switch rather quickly to the conditionality of these rights: you have to be a good citizen to deserve them. Not causing trouble is not enough, you have to be helpful, respectful, and polite. You have to take care of your local community. 'You have to do what is expected of you by your neighbors, your fellow men, what another person expects from you.' In short, the prevailing view was that social rights had to be earned. Rights were seen in terms of an exchange, not a free lunch – not so much because one pays taxes for them (the liberal response), but because one earns

them by behaving as a good citizen. The line of reasoning, though containing a contractual element, is embedded in the social environment. Here, Dutch citizens' conceptions of citizenship appear closer to that of British citizens (with their emphasis on social rights) than Americans (who would first understand their citizenship as an individual status) (Conover-Johnson *et al.* 1991, p. 813). There was no meaningful difference between the various participants in this respect. Active and non-active citizens, immigrants, and native Dutch all tended to argue along the same lines. There was only one exception: religiously organized immigrants were more explicit about the individual right to practice a religion.

An important motivation for acting as a social citizen was the prospect of progress in one's personal life. The rights one deserves in return for helping out include chances to improve one's or one's family's position in society. 'My right is that my kids go to college; that they can study without having to worry about money.' The perceived causal connection between local responsibilities and rights contradicts the idea of the purely calculating citizen, at least in the sense that there is a certain order in the calculation: you have to do something to be able to ask for something. Citizenship is interpreted as taking responsibility for the local community and has a reciprocal character. It is not necessarily out of pure benevolence that good citizenship is valued; it is also perceived as a rational strategy to make personal progress possible.

Participants understood citizenship in a broad social fashion, echoing rather than contesting the social cohesion agenda. Rights only came up when dire choices had to be made. Overall, migrants and native Dutch shared this communitarian conception of citizenship. While the activities of migrant groups were slightly more politically oriented, this was largely due to the politicization of their identities by others.

All of this does not rule out the possibility that our respondents also had egocentric motives to be active. But the communitarian critique, which emphasizes (rampant) individualism, is hard to substantiate. There was no sign that selfishness or egocentrism dominated our respondents' motives. While research on volunteering suggests that modern citizens tend to hop from one engagement to another, and are motivated more by the possibility of self-deployment ('what's in it for me?') than by 'true' altruism, our data do not confirm this picture. The quality of citizenship in these communities has not been damaged by opportunistic behavior as feared by communitarians.

These citizens are connected, albeit loosely (Wuthnow 1998). They are participating in or forming groups according to their preferences and organizing action when necessary (Schudson 2006). Rather than speaking of a 'lack of community,' it would make more sense to frame these groups as 'light communities' (Duyvendak and Hurenkamp 2004), communities with an abundance of choice that nevertheless function as communities.

Through subsidies, use of office space, administrative assistance, and local structures of consultation, these citizen groups are linked to social workers, aldermen or members of the city council, local companies, pastors, and so on. And though many of these citizens' groups complain about the government, their goals clearly 'help government' rather than 'fight government' (Table 4). Where they are angry, citizens in these groups try to steer rather than demolish the institutional objects of their anger. All in all, these groups perform routines rather than protests and are 'celebrating community' rather than challenging the existing system (Sampson *et al.* 2005).

## The republican reality I: the nationalist turn

We examined the nationalist turn by asking whether citizens felt their citizenship was attached primarily to the city or the country in which they lived. We also asked two

culturally oriented questions concerning the presence of alcohol at work-related meetings and a possible swap of a Christian religious holiday for a Muslim one. This produced two distinct patterns: a liberal response from immigrants who would rather opt for choice than pinpoint themselves or others on matters of loyalty or the acknowledgment of cultural rights, and a rather defensive set of reactions from native Dutch citizens. Immigrants gave their communitarianism an explicitly liberal turn in matters of identity, arguing that choice rather than (more) dialog or (more) protest is the solution to contestation produced by diversity. The native Dutch, on the other hand, gave the republicanism on offer a clearly more assimilationist character.

### *Feeling Dutch*

The choice between local or national attachment awakened the native Dutch citizens in the focus groups, who all had strong feelings but vague ideas about Dutchness. They were very sure that they are Dutch and feel Dutch. When asked about the geographical area with which they identified as a citizen, native-born Dutch chose the nation and sometimes their region of origin or residence. They felt Dutch, or maybe 'Twents' (a Dutch region), or a combination of these. The city was merely a place to live, whereas the nation carried emotional attachment.

Most of the respondents had moved at least once in their lives from one place in the Netherlands to another. They considered attachment to the city they lived in as something more or less natural. It was not that it had no meaning at all. The longer the respondents lived in a certain area of Amsterdam or Arnhem, the more they would express the unique characteristics of that area vis-à-vis the rest of the city. At the same time, they described changes in their neighborhoods mostly in negative terms, with the influx of young rich couples, migrants, or big supermarkets diminishing the neighborhood's character. All in all, the meaning that the respondents ascribed to their city was unimportant compared to their attachments to the nation.

Respondents unambiguously stated that the nation was a much more important source of feeling at home than the city. Being Dutch was something to be proud of, whereas almost anyone can call him or herself an 'Amsterdammer.' Though very few actually had a clear idea of what being Dutch entailed, they all felt strongly about it. They related to the famous Dutch tolerance, either via historical examples or via present liberal policies regarding drugs. They considered this tolerance lost, due to the rise of the new right-wing parties or the arrival of not so tolerant immigrants. They related to the high level of care and emancipation and talked about the Netherlands as a place where everyone can be himself and no one is left out. But respondents came up with many different understandings of Dutchness, argued among one another and concluded that the arguing itself constituted a substantial part of the national identity. Most of all, respondents were happy talking about feeling Dutch because they felt it was important to talk about.

The idea that Dutchness was under threat was expressed forcefully several times. Highly mediatized examples of 'un-Dutch' practices such as wearing the *burqa* and headscarf were cited, as was the power of the European Union, and the lack of ambition to educate children about the Netherlands. Dutchness has a certain paradise lost quality to it, as respondents would rather talk in the past tense about things that used to be better. Dutchness is above all something to be defended, not necessarily against intruders with bad intentions, but against the weakness, unawareness and unwillingness of politicians, public servants, teachers, and migrants to live up to Dutch standards. Appreciation of national identity

becomes relevant as a frame to understand loss, belonging and feeling at home in an apparently rather diverse society, a way to distinguish between good times and bad.

### Local attachment

As might be expected, the nationalist turn is more problematic for migrants because even the native Dutch do not know what Dutchness is, except that it is something migrants are not really part of.

We found migrants to be largely in favor of local forms of citizenship. Migrants living in Amsterdam had no difficulty in feeling they were 'Amsterdammers.' For the most part, they felt proud of the city. Some claimed that there were meaningful differences between 'Moroccans from Amsterdam and Moroccans from Enschede [in the East of The Netherlands]' or even between 'Moroccans from the East versus the West of Amsterdam.' Whereas native Dutch respondents often argued in broad, abstract terms – Dutch culture, Dutch ideas, Dutch ways of doing things – migrants argued more from personal experience. The recently introduced city hall ceremonies confirming legal attainment of citizenship were highly appreciated by those who participated because they were considered 'welcoming.' When treated helpfully by a housing corporation, this would immediately contribute to a certain place attachment. Musical festivals, historical remembrances, monumental buildings, and bridges were cited as sources of pride and joy – all echoing in one way or another Durkheim's classical idea of collective effervescence, the notion that the social unit has to express itself tangibly to create and heighten solidarity (Durkheim 2001, p. 231).

The issue of national citizenship was something that migrants in particular wished to keep at bay. The nation was generally met with a shrug. You can be members of at least two nations, was the dominant reasoning – but only after serious prompting. 'You don't have to choose, your heart belongs to your family, to the place where you were born and to the place where you live,' was a repeated answer. Respondents appeared to be aware of the inflammability of the topic; they either considered the discussion not worthwhile given the present political climate, or perhaps did not trust the focus group setting enough to show their deepest emotions.

### A liberal answer from immigrants

The cultural split between immigrants and native Dutch was clearly visible in another context. We presented the focus groups two questions on cultural practices. The first concerned trading official public holidays. The argument we presented held that this would be reasonable as a diminishing public knew what Pentecost or Easter was about, while a growing part of the population celebrated other events such as the Muslim sugar feast or fast-breaking day. After all, shared holidays are often thought of as a means of integrating different groups in society, as 'seedbeds of virtue' (Etzioni 2001, pp. 113–140). The second case concerned alcohol. The question here was what would you do if several colleagues refused to come to the end of the week social meeting at work, apparently because there is alcohol and their religion forbids them to be present in the room?'

Among the native Dutch, the answers varied between a substantial majority who felt that enough room had already been given to newcomers. 'They have to keep their hands off my holidays, even if I don't know what they stand for,' was a repeated answer. 'If we start with the Muslims, the Buddhists and what have you will follow,' was also common. These holidays were part of the national identity. Christian culture in this respect appears to have been dissolved within national identity; it is less tangible but can still be perceived.

Exchanging holidays was not considered a good idea, while several participants expressed the fear that it would happen anyway.

There was also a smaller group, composed mostly of highly educated participants, who felt that some negotiation or even trade-off was in order. They often gave pragmatic reasons, such as they did not like Christmas in the first place, or that as long as the number of holidays stayed the same it made no difference to them. The argument for the trade-off was considered legitimate. The discussion in these groups tended to focus on *which* holiday to trade, with a clear preference for exchanging a religious holiday and not a civic one (the Queen's official birthday or Liberation Day). However, all participants felt that there was a problem that needed a solution – either by explaining to immigrants once and for all what the practices are (and then they can choose to adapt or keep quiet), or by engaging in a dialog to find a way out.

In the case of the Friday drinks and the missing colleagues, Dutch respondents who favored dialog argued that one is morally obliged to try and find an alternative or at least to talk to the absent colleagues about their motives. They were quick to offer examples such as alternating drinks with tea-and-cake meetings, or bringing in drinks only after a certain hour. Respect, in their interpretation, has to do with meaningfully shaping reciprocity (Sennet 2003). It is an expression of the need to take other people seriously. Dialog is a crucial social ritual. If it does not help to find a compromise, it at least helps people to get along through better understanding. But as stated, this position was held by a minority of respondents.

Immigrant respondents, however, denied that there was a problem. Discussants of migrant origin offered rather sophisticated accounts of why they would *not* take action in case of the Friday afternoon drinks. By and large, most migrants argued in a more strictly liberal sense. They would point out that in the first place, there is no religious need to stay away from such get-togethers. And if someone does perceive a need to remain absent, it is his or her personal choice. Reasoning about religion in this context is perceived as threatening because it reduces their identity to a single characteristic. 'It would make me very angry if my colleagues assume I'm not present because of the alcohol when I'm actually picking my kids up from school.' These migrants value the community of the workplace and take personal responsibility for making their own participation possible; (not) drinking alcohol has very little to do with it.

Similarly, migrants foresaw more conflict than harmony when debating the change of public holidays. The fact that they can get a day off from work if they want it (as stated in most collective labor contracts), sufficiently acknowledges their identity, they argued. Their responses reflected the aversion to exchanging holidays present among the other citizens.

This strong liberal element in migrants' ideas of citizenship and belonging is striking. They present choice as a strategy to solve cultural matters, not based on political ideology but on collective or individual experience. They want the right to opt out, to keep quiet, and to be left alone when their identity is at stake. They would rather not define situations in which their identity is publicly made problematic. To what extent this liberal twist is the product of several years of heightened debate in the Netherlands cannot be answered here. Nevertheless, it shows a real difference between natives and immigrants.

There is little will on either side to engage in dialog over differences. With migrants making political claims – the right to exit – structured around individual experiences and natives predominantly making cultural claims structured around nostalgic feelings, the frames around which citizenship revolves are out of sync.

Table 11.  Good citizenship.

|  | Native population | Ethnic minorities |
|---|---|---|
| Support people worse off | 7.42 | 7.69 |
| Vote in elections | 7.53 | 7.52 |
| Always obey laws/regulations | 7.28 | 7.59 |
| Form independent opinion | 8.21 | 8.07 |
| Active in voluntary organisations | 5.79 | 5.58 |
| Active in politics | 4.19 | 4.95 |
| *N* | 2364 | 98 |

Notes: European values study 2002/2003. Dutch answers to the question: 'To be a good citizen, how important would you say it is for a person to . . . ' (own processing).

### Republican reality II: the lack of deliberative citizenship

Our respondents in the quantitative data-set interpreted citizenship to mean 'taking responsibility' or 'showing responsible behavior,' 'caring for others,' and 'being a member of society.' They took citizenship to mean all kinds of social rather than political things. Only a small minority of respondents were oriented toward dialog, mainly found among citizens who were also professionals working in deprived areas.

The prevalence of this social, non-political idea of citizenship is confirmed by research on the general Dutch population (Dekker 2005). As such, the outcome is valid beyond the sample, being more or less in line with average opinion in the Netherlands. Voting, party membership, and participation in political debates are seen as far less important than being a good neighbor or obeying the law. It is also more or less an echo of Dahl's famous finding that most people care little about politics as it has nothing to do with their primary activities, such as 'food, sex, love, family, play, shelter, comfort, friendship, social esteem, and the like' (Dahl 1961, p. 279, cited in Schudson 2006). While it could be argued that all these topics have been politicized over the past decades, this growing awareness does not spontaneously find its way into citizenship discourse.

This more-social-than-political notion of citizenship was not equally strong among our respondents. The groups concerned with multicultural issues and/or consisting of immigrants held slightly more political views of citizenship (Table 9). They more often interpreted citizenship politically and stressed the need to participate in politics and to deliberate on issues of justice, etc. These groups have more contact with political parties than the other groups in our sample; citizens engaged in these organizations are also more frequently asked to become politically active. The causal relationship is not one way; immigrants may well have a more politicized view of life. They may perceive a greater need to deploy their citizenship politically since their identities are politicized by anti-immigrant parties. They may also attach more power to politics as an agent of change. These divergent views on citizenship have been confirmed in a large-scale European values study comparing the native Dutch population with ethnic minorities (Table 11).

### Conclusion

In light of our findings, the expectations of policy-makers and politicians concerning citizenship strike one as rather high and their esteem of citizens rather low. They see political engagement as the essence of citizenship, and hope civic engagement will spur participation in the public domain as well as dialog to create new solidarities among a dispersed public. Pessimism about the state of society thus goes hand in hand with

optimism about the functions at hand. The combination is quite paradoxical: out of a hopeless situation something good will arise.

Our findings provide reason to turn this on its head: grounds for substantial confidence in the state of citizenship, but also for more modest, street-wise expectations of what citizens' engagement can bring.

First, the idea that most citizens have a better developed sense of their rights than duties is not confirmed by our data. The subservient conception of citizenship that policy documents and media articles hope for is already in place, not only among active citizens but also among non-active ones. The essence of communitarianism was 'return from contract to community,' the idea being that individuals claim too much and give too little. But this we did not find. Most citizens consider duties a logical attribute of their citizenship.

The individual rights discourse and liberal conceptions of citizenship are only carried by a minority of citizens. At least when thinking about their own role, most citizens aspire to be good neighbors, to be caring in case of need, and to follow the rules. Their focus is on personal proximity, locality, small groups, and personal responsibility.

However, contrary to the expectations of communitarians, most citizens do not consider their duties to be unconditional; rather, they see them as a result of tit-for-tat cooperation with government, other citizens, and civil society. You do what you can and as a result you get a reward. Instead of viewing citizenship as a trade-off between contract and community, most citizens see community as a contract. Choice – the right to opt out – is always there but is not the preferred option.

Second, the fear that diversity drives citizens apart – and that cultural differences keep them at home, away from the public sphere – was not confirmed. The conflicts we witnessed were hardly the result of a diverse or fragmented citizenry. Decades of emancipation policy and rising living standards notwithstanding, Dutch citizens' attitudes and behavior remain surprisingly homogeneous (Duyvendak 2004, De Beer 2007). The conflicts were the result of a more or less homogenous majority confronting a more or less homogeneous minority on cultural matters and of uniformity on preferences for social over political matters.

Native Dutch strongly identify with the nation, despite their lack of clear ideas on what being Dutch means. Immigrants, on the other hand, hesitate to identify themselves as Dutch. They prefer to stay out of the heat of the political kitchen, just as they avoid public debate and deliberation on matters of identity at the micro-level of the neighborhood and the workplace.

Insofar as a notion of 'we' can be discerned in Dutch society, it materializes more through shared ideas about local duties than through shared ideas about nationally derived rights. The political community envisioned by many citizens does not reflect their relatively placid social communities, but worries and emotions that rest at deeper levels within people's minds. It is not necessarily the 'dark side' of citizenship (Theiss-Morse and Hibbing 2005) that citizens bring to the fore, but rather several gray sides. Most Dutch citizens are not reasoning in anti-democratic ways. Citizenship is too elaborate (or vague) an instrument to serve overtly racist or misogynist agendas. It carries nostalgia rather than hate.

Third, most citizens' political expectations are limited. Many would rather opt out of conflicts than talk them through. Citizens in our research were hardly the political animals that republicans and communitarians understand them to be. As a practice, citizenship in the Netherlands is a social affair. As an identity, it is a cultural matter. In both cases, the civic side of citizenship – engaging in debates and meetings, voting, participating in politics – comes in a distant second.

While communitarianism prevails, liberal or republican ideas on citizenship are also to be found. But these are expressed only after prompting, and as exit strategies. The liberal route – the focus on rights – is resorted to when citizens, particularly immigrants, feel that they are not being recognized as citizens. The republican route is employed to shift the primary locus of citizenship to the nation.

Social cohesion depends on successful cooperation between individuals, communities, and institutions. What seem to be missing are connections between the different communities in which people maintain their citizenship. The Dutch are in desperate need of occasions where citizens can peacefully but passionately debate citizenship, not just in terms of unity and similarities but also in terms of dissensus and difference.

Finally, we conclude that very general claims about citizenship decline are not corroborated by the Dutch findings and therefore deserve reconsideration.

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