

# Research Report

# Food in Times of Crisis



A Practical Theological Study on Emergency Relief  
Provided by Churches in Amsterdam Zuidoost  
during the Covid-19 Pandemic



Protestantse Theologische **Universiteit**

# Colophon

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Foto: Bas Uterwijk

# English Summary

Before the Covid-19 crisis, churches organized many activities in *De Nieuwe Stad* in Amsterdam Zuidoost, including serving free meals for everyone who wanted them. When this was no longer possible because of the Covid-19 measures, the international church, Treasures International Ministries, and *Diaconie Evangelisch Lutherse Gemeente Amsterdam* decided to work together and start delivering meals to people's houses. Some of these recipients were enlisted through the network of one of the churches, but most were enlisted by care organizations. As one, relatively small project, operating alongside other aid initiatives, the meals project soon received many more enlistments than anticipated, and the Covid-19 crisis lasted longer than expected, which raised questions regarding the underlying needs and how to proceed in the long term. Together with the Protestant Theological University, they decided to research the question:

*How does the meals project of Treasures and Lutherse Diaconie expose structural needs in Amsterdam Zuidoost, and how can these needs be addressed in a sustainable manner?*

This research is composed of two parts. For the first part, a participatory action research study was conducted, in which two researchers were actively involved in the meals project and aimed to explore possible answers to the research question together with a group of co-researchers: experts from the field. The project team (i.e. researchers and co-researchers) appears to be convinced that they are only helping people who really need the meals and that there are structural needs behind this; that the meals project is not just about meals, but that the meals are also a means for social contact with the recipients and for showing them love; that the project team fears they will have to stop the meals project because of limited financial means; and that the meals project turns out to be of high importance for the volunteers themselves, partly because some of them have gone from being receivers of help to providers of help.

The second part concerns a research study on the views of different stakeholders, based on interviews. Care organizations appear to be glad that their clients will have at least two healthy meals a week, and value the signaling function of the meals project highly. They would like to strengthen their cooperation to improve the situation for vulnerable people in Zuidoost. Interviews with representatives of some of the charitable funds make clear that they attach importance to

providing support for emergency aid initiatives, yet this is beyond their regular strategy. Faced with a high number of applications in times of Covid-19, they seek to distribute their resources wisely (e.g. by working together with parties that are able to negotiate sharp prices for bulk procurement of foodstuffs). They encourage meals projects like this to critically look at whom they offer meals, and to refer those eligible to governmental social services whenever possible. They offer support in times of crisis, but not endlessly: the structural needs in Zuidoost call for structural solutions.

This report discusses a number of vital issues and questions brought to light by the analysis of data collected in both parts of the research: whom to help? scaling up or scaling down? cooperation with other parties; reducing dependency and promoting empowerment; workload and room for reflection. Viewed in the wider context of diaconia and its core values, the meals project turns out to reflect eight typical and recurring tensions in diaconal projects. The study concludes that as a result of the meals project 1. people receive food aid who would lack food otherwise; 2. people involved are empowered and lead more meaningful lives; 3. structural need and injustice becomes visible; and 4. the unique role of churches, the importance of their social capital and network of relationships in Amsterdam Zuidoost, becomes apparent. It recommends stakeholders in this project as well as in the broader field – funds, diaconal organizations, the government, care organizations and organizations of social welfare – 1. to get around the table and continue or start the dialogue on signals of social needs coming from these emergency aid projects; 2. to make sure that emergency aid projects are accompanied by an independent advisory board from the onset, to help projects with the reflection they long for; 3. to cooperate in structurally collecting signals about existing needs.



# Dutch Summary

Voor het uitbreken van de coronacrisis vonden in kerkverzamelgebouw De Nieuwe Stad in Amsterdam Zuidoost verschillende activiteiten plaats, waaronder een open maaltijd op maandagavond. Toen dit door de coronamaatregelen niet langer door kon gaan, besloten de Diaconie van de Evangelisch-Lutherse Gemeente Amsterdam en de internationale kerk Treasures International Ministries de handen ineen te slaan en maaltijden bij mensen thuis te gaan bezorgen. Een aantal van de mensen die deze maaltijden ontvangen kwamen op de distributielijst via het netwerk van deze twee kerken, maar verreweg de meeste aanmeldingen kwamen binnen via zorgorganisaties. Voor dit relatief kleine project, dat ontstond naast andere initiatieven en noodhulpprojecten, liep het aantal aanmeldingen snel veel hoger op dan verwacht. Daarnaast bleek de corona-crisis langer te duren dan in eerste instantie werd verwacht. Dit riep de vraag op naar de onderliggende noden van de ontvangers, en ook de vraag 'hoe verder?' op de lange termijn. In samenwerking met de Protestantse Theologische Universiteit besloten de projectleiders van het maaltijdproject de vraag te onderzoeken:

*Hoe onthult het maaltijdproject van Treasures en de Lutherse Diaconie structurele nood in Amsterdam Zuidoost en hoe kunnen deze noden op een duurzame manier worden geadresseerd?*

Dit onderzoek bestaat uit twee delen. Voor het eerste deel werd participierend actieonderzoek verricht, waarbij twee onderzoekers actief betrokken waren in het maaltijdproject, om mogelijke antwoorden op de onderzoeksvraag te verkennen. Dit deden zij in samenwerking met een groep co-onderzoekers: experts uit het veld. Het projectteam (de onderzoekers en co-onderzoekers) blijkt ervan overtuigd dan zij alleen mensen helpen die deze maaltijden echt nodig hebben, en dat hieronder structurele problemen liggen; en daarnaast dat het maaltijdproject niet alleen om maaltijden draait, maar dat deze maaltijden vooral ook een manier zijn om contact te maken met deze mensen en in liefde naar hen om te zien. Het projectteam vreest met het maaltijdproject te moeten stoppen vanwege een tekort aan financiële middelen. Verder blijkt het project heel belangrijk te zijn voor de vrijwilligers die erbij betrokken zijn, deels ook doordat sommigen van 'ontvangers van hulp' tot 'verleners van hulp' geworden zijn.

Het tweede deel bestaat uit een onderzoek naar de zienswijzen van verschillende stakeholders, op basis van interviews. Zorgorganisaties zijn verheugd dat hun cliënten door het

maaltijdproject tenminste tweemaal per week een gezond maaltijd ontvangen. Zij schatten de signaleringsfunctie van het initiatief op hoge waarde. Ze zouden de samenwerking graag versterken om de situatie van kwetsbare mensen in Amsterdam Zuidoost te verbeteren. Uit interviews met vertegenwoordigers van enkele diaconale fondsen blijkt dat zij noodhulpinitiatieven zeer belangrijk vinden. Noodhulpfinanciering behoort echter niet tot hun core business. Geconfronteerd met een zeer groot aantal subsidieaanvragen in coronatijd, zoeken zij hun financiële middelen verstandig in te zetten (o.a. door samenwerking met partijen die scherp kunnen onderhandelen over grootschalige inkoop van voedingsmiddelen). Zij raden maaltijdinitiatieven als die in Zuidoost aan om kritisch te kijken wie gratis maaltijden echt nodig hebben en om waar mogelijk mensen die in aanmerking komen voor gemeentelijke en andere voorzieningen daarnaar door te verwijzen. Ze bieden financiële steun in crisistijd, maar niet eendeloos: de structurele noden die zich in Zuidoost voordoen vragen om structurele oplossingen.

In dit rapport wordt een aantal belangrijke kwesties en vragen besproken die oplichten in de analyse van de data die in beide delen van het onderzoek verzameld zijn: wie hebben hulp nodig? moet noodhulp worden opgeschaald of afgeschaald? samenwerking met andere partijen; afhankelijkheid verminderen en empowerment bevorderen; werkdruk en de noodzakelijke ruimte voor reflectie. Gezien tegen de achtergrond van diaconaat en van diaconale kernwaarden weerspiegelen zich in het maaltijdproject acht typische en steeds weerkerende spanningen die zich in diaconale praktijken voordoen.

Het onderzoeksrapport concludeert dat als gevolg van het maaltijdproject: 1. mensen voedselhulp ontvangen die anders geen voedsel zouden hebben; 2. mensen hun waarde en kracht (her)vinden en zin in het leven ervaren; 3. structurele nood en onrecht zichtbaar wordt; en 4. de unieke rol van kerken, het grote belang van hun sociale kapitaal en hun netwerk van relaties in Amsterdam Zuidoost zichtbaar wordt. Het rapport adviseert stakeholders in dit project en in het bredere veld – fondsen, diaconale organisaties, de overheid en zorg- en welzijnsorganisaties – om 1. met elkaar rond de tafel te gaan om het gesprek over de signalen van sociale nood die uit deze en andere noodhulpinitiatieven voortvloeien aan te gaan of voort te zetten; 2. ervoor te zorgen dat noodhulpprojecten vanaf het begin worden bijgestaan door onafhankelijke adviesraden die projecten helpen met de reflectie waar zij zelf ook behoefte aan hebben; 3. om bij het structureel signaleren en aankaarten van bestaande nood samen op te trekken met andere partijen.

# Fact Sheet

## Distributed meals per week



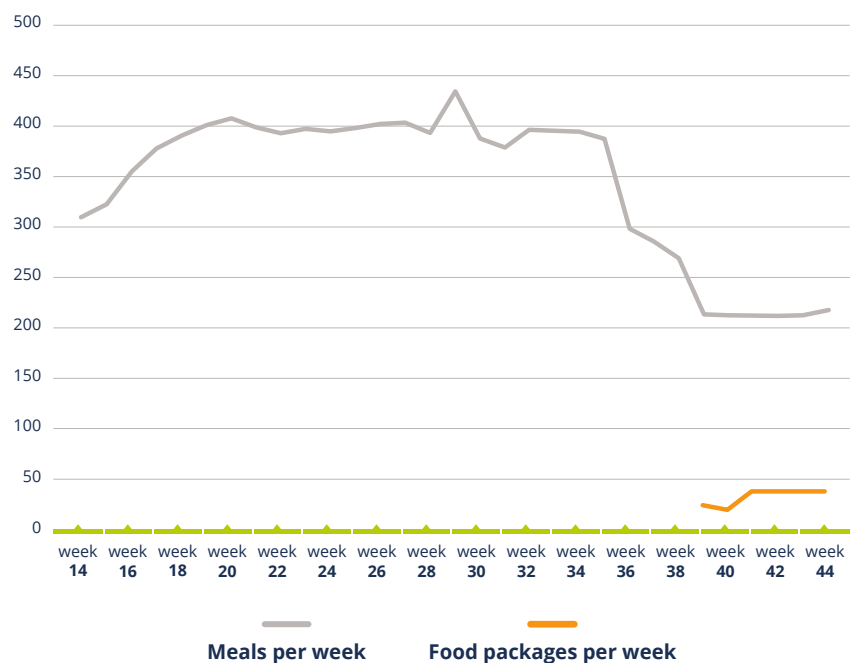
**10.662**  
meals delivered

**€ 57.321**  
spent

Every Monday / Friday  
**120 meals**

Every monday  
**50 food packages**

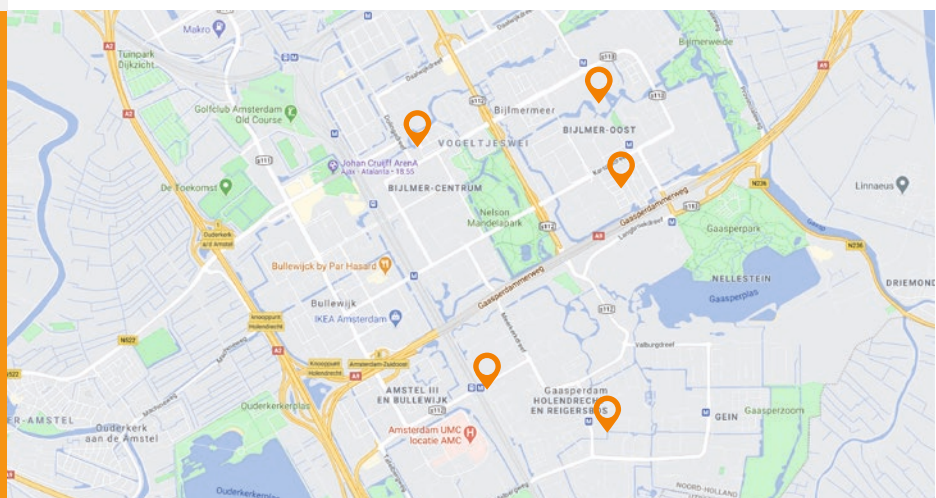
Figure 1 from week 36 onwards the project stopped delivering meals on Thursdays



### Organization

- 2 project leaders
- 4 cooks/cooking teams
- 7 deliverers
- 6 routes
- 2 people who pack the food packages

### Areas



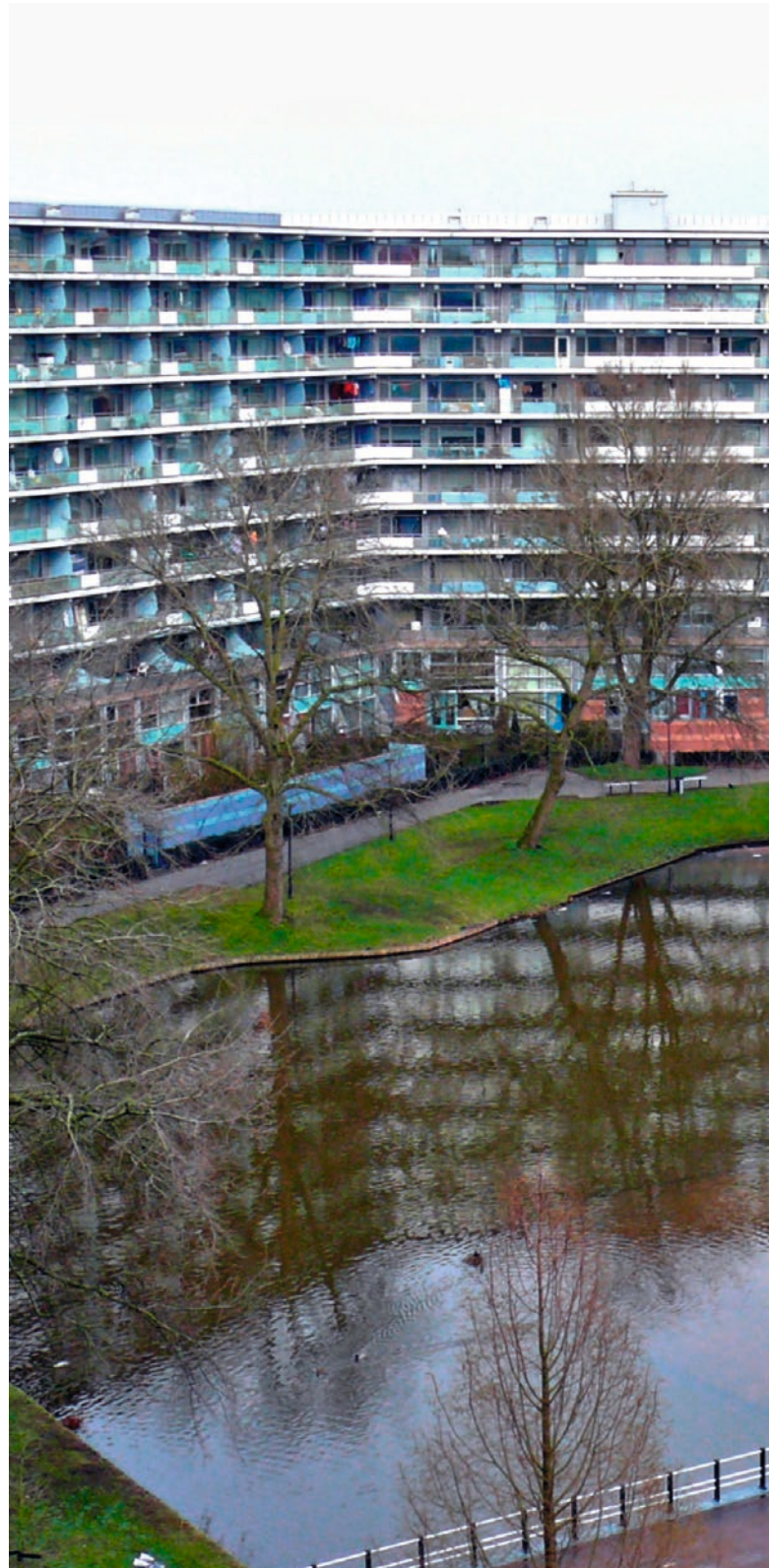


# Preface

The present research project was carried out by two researchers from the Protestant Theological University in autumn 2020, guided by a supervision team. This practical theological research focused on a meals project of Treasures International Ministries and *Diaconie Evangelisch-Lutherse Gemeente Amsterdam* in Amsterdam Zuidoost. The research aimed to uncover what structural needs in Amsterdam Zuidoost are exposed and how they can be addressed sustainably in the long term.

Together with cooks, deliverers, and project leaders, the researchers explored how the meals project is organized, who it is helping, and what its future may look like. The researchers and the supervision team want to express their great gratitude for the cooperation of the project team and all the other people who participate in the meals project, for welcoming the researchers with open arms and giving them a unique peek into their meals project. Alongside the process with the project team, the researchers spoke with stakeholders involved in the meals project, such as care organizations that enlist recipients and funds that finance the meals project. Furthermore, a sounding board of experts in the field of funding, politics, and church gave their perspectives on the most important findings at a later stage of the research. Each and every one of these additional perspectives on the practice of the meals project and of the context of Amsterdam Zuidoost have contributed to new insights into the complex reality of diaconal projects, structural issues in Amsterdam Zuidoost, and policy-making of funders, care organizations and politics.

The researchers and the supervision team express their gratitude to the stakeholders and experts in the sounding board for the time and insights they have offered. We wish to express our special thanks here to the funding bodies that have financed the present research: *Haëlla Stichting*, *Stichting Roomsche Katholiek Oude Armen Kantoor (RCOAK)*, and *Konferentie Nederlandse Religieuzen – Projecten in Nederland (KNR-PIN)*.



# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction

The present research report describes the findings of a three-month practical theological research project - consisting of two months of fieldwork and two months of analyzing and reporting the findings - that investigated a meals project in Amsterdam Zuidoost, initiated by two churches: Treasures International Ministries and Maranatha Community Transformation Center, in cooperation with the *Diaconie* of the *Evangelisch-Lutherse Gemeente Amsterdam*, to meet urgent challenges of Covid-19 pandemic. Like many other initiatives in Amsterdam and the rest of the country, this meals project started as an emergency relief project during the first wave of Covid-19 in March until June 2020, and was intended to be a short-term program. The project leaders and the funders soon acknowledged that many people were going to make an appeal for this form of food aid for a longer period of time. It was not anticipated however that this diaconal project, as a relatively modestly-sized undertaking, initiated and carried out by four comparatively small partners and operating alongside other and larger projects, would address and expose so many structural and persistent needs in Amsterdam Zuidoost.

The project team of the meals project was confronted by an increasing number of people who benefited from the meals project. This raised the question of how to address these needs in a structural and sustainable manner. The funds, who were supporting the meals project from the outset, raised questions about the future of the meals project, being an emergency project. They pointed at the necessity of transforming this (and other) emergency relief projects at some point into forms of structural help that work towards structural justice, partly prompted by the fact that their resources are limited. This aim to transform emergency aid (charity) into a structural change of social circumstances (justice) is also one of the core values of diaconia. These considerations led to the question of how the meals project can start working towards structural solutions for the long term.

The idea to conduct this research emerged out of these questions in an ongoing dialogue between the academic supervision team of this research, the project leaders of Maranatha Community Transformation Center (Maranatha), Treasures International Ministries (Treasures), and *Diaconie Evangelisch-Lutherse Gemeente Amsterdam* (*Lutherse Diaconie*), and is supported and encouraged by three funders. This dialogue ensured the agency of the involved practitioners, which resulted in a research design that could benefit both diaconal practice and theory.

### 1.2 Aim of the Research and Research Question

The aim of this research is to explore how the structural needs that are exposed by the meals project can be addressed in a sustainable way, so that the position of vulnerable people can be improved structurally. In order to research this, the needs that are exposed by the meals project need to be identified first. To reach this research aim, the research question of the present report reads:

*How does the meals project of Treasures and Lutherse Diaconie expose structural needs in Amsterdam Zuidoost, and how can these needs be addressed in a sustainable manner?*

To achieve this, the research sought to address the following questions:

1. Why and how is the meals project organized? Who are the practitioners and why are they involved in the project (project leaders, deliverers, cooks, care organizations, and funding bodies)?
2. Who are the beneficiaries and why do they ask for these meals?
3. How can the exposed needs be addressed in a sustainable way?

### 1.3 Research Design

The present research is composed of two parts. For the first part of this research the method of participatory action research has been chosen since it forms a suitable bridge



*First meeting of the project team in De Nieuwe Stad*

between practice and academic knowledge. This type of research honors and utilizes the knowledge of the practitioners of the field. From an early stage, practitioners from the field – that is, the project leaders – have been involved in the design of the research project.

Van Lieshout et al. note that participatory action research is an approach to research that aims both to improve existing practices and to produce new academic knowledge. Researching together with (representatives of) people who are involved in the practice that is being researched is key to participatory action research. Researchers work together with people from the field in order to understand the practice and to come up with proposals for improvement.<sup>1</sup> To achieve this, the researchers should immerse themselves in the practice in order to identify the gaps between what is happening and what should be happening, according to the views of the different parties involved.<sup>2</sup>

In line with Van Lieshout's notion of participatory action research, this research is designed to gain understanding of what is happening in the meals project and why: who are the beneficiaries and why do they ask for these meals? And who are the deliverers and cooks and why do they participate in this project? At the same time, it also aims to collectively explore with co-researchers – practitioners in the field – how the meals project exposes structural needs in Amsterdam Zuidoost and how these can be addressed in the long term. The fieldwork for this research was carried out during the short period of two months.

The second part of the research aims to uncover the perspectives of other stakeholders on the meals project, the needs in Amsterdam Zuidoost, and how they can be addressed in a sustainable manner. These include the perspectives of care organizations, funders, recipients, and project leaders. The information for this part is derived from interviews with representatives of these different stakeholders.

The next chapter of the research report will further elaborate on how the research was designed and what research methods were used. The third and fourth chapters will respectively provide the results of the first and second parts of the research. In the fifth chapter – the analysis – the voices of the project team and the stakeholders will be brought together, and tensions will be identified. For the analysis, a sounding board meeting was organized with experts in the fields of (local) politics, religion (mainline and international churches), healthcare and funding, who are not actively involved in this particular project. Some of their remarks on the tentative conclusions are portrayed in chapter 5 as well. In chapter 6, a theological reflection on the analysis in chapter 5 will be offered, based on core values of diaconia and recurring tensions in diaconal work. Finally, in chapter 7,

conclusions, recommendations and perspectives for further research will be presented.

## 1.4 Roles and Names of the Parties Involved

- Project team:* the project team is the small group of volunteers, professionals working in the meals project, and the two researchers who investigated the possibilities to improve and transform the meals project in the future, in the action research setting.
- Project leaders:* the project leaders of the meals project. They were part of the project team.
- Researchers:* the two researchers who performed both parts of the research project. In the first part they were participant coaches of the project team. In the second part they conducted the interviews with the stakeholders.
- Co-researchers:* the members of the project team.
- Stakeholders:* the partners involved, like the churches, the diaconal organization, the funds, the care organizations, and the local government.
- Supervision team:* the supervisors of the researchers.

## 1.5 Presenting the Case

Before we turn to how this research has been carried out, we will further elaborate on the context of the meals project. The information provided in this section is derived mainly from interviews with project leaders, the analysis of the list of recipients, and two research reports published by the government bodies named below.

### 1.5.1 The Context of Amsterdam Zuidoost

The meals project that is the subject of this research is situated in Amsterdam Zuidoost. This neighborhood is well known for its cultural diversity, but also for the issues that its inhabitants experience. The Amsterdamse Armoedemonitor 2019 – a report published by the municipality of Amsterdam – and the report *Sterk en Zwak* in Amsterdam 2018 – a report published by the municipal health service (GGD) of Amsterdam – investigated the structural problems that are present in Zuidoost, and particularly in the areas where the meals project operates: Bijlmer Centrum and Bijlmer Oost. The latter report has established that there are structural problems in Zuidoost in the following domains: finances, work and education, domestic violence, mental health, physical health, social networks, and criminality.<sup>3</sup> Both research reports portray a view of the situation in Amsterdam before the Covid-19 crisis. How the Covid-19 crisis affected the previously identified problems is yet to be seen, but the subsequent edition of the *Armoedemonitor* – which was published in August 2020 – notes that groups with limited financial resources will definitely

<sup>1</sup> Famke van Lieshout, Gaby Jacobs and Shaun Cardiff, *Actieonderzoek: principes voor verandering in zorg en welzijn* (Assen: Uitgeverij Koninklijke van Gorcum, 2017), p. 2-3.

<sup>2</sup> Van Lieshout et al., *Actieonderzoek*, p. 90.

<sup>3</sup> GGD Amsterdam, *Sterk en Zwak in Amsterdam: een analyse van 11 leefdomeinen in 22 Amsterdamse Gebieden* (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2018), p. 3.



grow because of the Covid-19 crisis. The report argues that before the Covid-19 crisis there were few chances for a better situation for people who were experiencing financial difficulties, and the Covid-19 crisis will only worsen their opportunities for structural improvement.<sup>4</sup> The same could be argued for the other structural problems identified above.

Now follows a more detailed description of the structural problems in Zuidoost identified by the Armoedemonitor and Sterk en Zwak. According to the Armoedemonitor, 25% of the population of Amsterdam Zuidoost lives in poverty. This percentage includes:

1. People with a non-Western migration background.
2. Children: 26% of the children living in Amsterdam Zuidoost are growing up in poverty.
3. Single people older than 66 years of age: this group is made up mostly of women (58%).
4. Single-parent families of whom the parent in most cases is female (94%).

These groups do overlap.<sup>5</sup>

These challenging financial situations correlate with the fact that people in Zuidoost are most often unemployed and have received less education in comparison with the rest of the population of Amsterdam.<sup>6</sup>

Apart from the challenging financial situation of the inhabitants of Zuidoost, *Sterk en Zwak* adds that the physical and mental health of people in Zuidoost is worrisome. The number of people with a chronic disease is above average. In particular, obesity and a lack of physical exercise result in people experiencing difficulties with their physical health, which are likely a result of the lack of sufficient financial resources.

An additional issue that is touched upon in the present research report is social networks. *Sterk en Zwak* shows that there is more severe loneliness in Zuidoost and there is less social cohesion in comparison with the rest of Amsterdam. *Sterk en Zwak* highlights the fact that there are a lot of tensions between different social groups in Amsterdam Zuidoost. The various challenges faced by inhabitants reciprocally reinforce each other, thereby exacerbating vulnerability and creating structural problems.

Even though both reports show many structural problems in Amsterdam Zuidoost, *Sterk en Zwak* also notes that the societal participation in Zuidoost is the highest of the whole of Amsterdam. The district has the highest percentage of adults who are volunteering at social organizations, and who are committed to serving the neighborhood in organizational and informal ways.<sup>7</sup> This is a hopeful sign of resilience in the district, and the meals project that is central to the present research is a good example of this. This shows that

vulnerabilities in the spheres of health, economic possibilities, social options and the like do not automatically translate into reduced resilience.

At the same time, a lot of undocumented people are living in Zuidoost. They are not entitled to make an appeal to governmental social services, apart from when they are willing to cooperate in a procedure to return to their homeland. It is estimated that there are between three- and ten thousand undocumented people living in Zuidoost. This group is not mentioned in the research reports that are used for this presentation of the context, but it is a group that is present and vulnerable. If they were taken into account in formal statistics, the picture would likely be even more evident. Undocumented people are very much present in the neighborhood and number in the thousands, however, the issue is too big and too complex to address sufficiently here. The present report will refer to undocumented people but will not address the full extent of their situation.

### **1.5.2 De Nieuwe Stad and Church Organizations Involved**

*De Nieuwe Stad* is a church center, which aims to serve the neighborhood, that is used by 13 different churches. Before the Covid-19 crisis, different projects were organized by these different churches. Treasures had initiated Soup Kitchen – a project that handed out free meals for people in the neighborhood in *De Nieuwe Stad* every Monday – and six other church organizations, including *Lutherse Diaconie*, organized various activities for children, old people, migrants, and other people on the same day. All the projects shared the space, and their activities were complementary. Over the years, the cooperation between the Monday activities in *De Nieuwe Stad* grew: the people who came to Soup Kitchen for food became volunteers for the children's projects, old people who came to Soup Kitchen in search of company could teach the volunteers how to speak Dutch, etc. In other words, people who were receiving help also became people who were giving help in these projects.

The cooperation between Treasures and *Lutherse Diaconie* thus arose through using the same building, which has proven to be an excellent breeding ground for further cooperation. This is not self-evident since both church organizations have rather different characters. Treasures is a Pentecostal international church that holds church services in Abcoude, a village close to Zuidoost. When the church initiated its Soup Kitchen project, it was located in Amsterdam Zuidoost. It continued to serve this neighborhood when they could not make use of their building in Zuidoost anymore and its church services had to be held elsewhere. Their pastor, who lives in Zuidoost, is one of the project leaders of the meals project.

The *Lutherse Diaconie* is the diaconal organization of the Lutheran church in Amsterdam. The Lutheran church is one of the congregations that holds church services in *De Nieuwe Stad* and the *Lutherse Diaconie* is its diaconal organization that operates more or less independently from the congregation.

4 Gemeente Amsterdam, *Amsterdamse Armoedemonitor 2019: Onderzoek, Informatie en Statistiek* (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2020), p. 5-6.

5 Gemeente Amsterdam, *Armoedemonitor 2019*, p. 32-42.

6 GGD, *Sterk en Zwak*, p. 36.

7 GGD, *Sterk en Zwak*, p. 14.

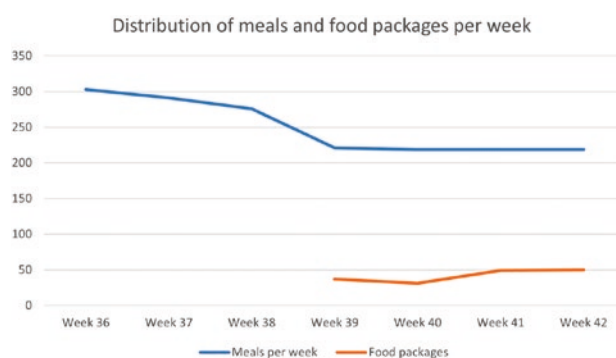
However, congregants are involved in the activities of the *Lutherse Diaconie* as volunteers. The *Lutherse Diaconie* has appointed one diaconal worker to make *De Nieuwe Stad* a building that serves the neighborhood; a building where people with different needs and talents meet each other. Treasures and *Lutherse Diaconie* are thus church organizations with different confessional, cultural, and organizational characters. Yet, they have found a way to work on projects together with each other, and with volunteers from their own churches, as well as with volunteers from other churches and different religious backgrounds.

### 1.5.3 The Start of the Meals Project

In March 2020, *De Nieuwe Stad* was closed because of the lockdown, and Treasures and *Lutherse Diaconie* therewith lost the location to organize their activities. Because they were convinced that the people who would usually join their activities were in need of food and social contact in these times, they decided to join forces and to start a project that distributes pre-cooked meals to people's homes in Amsterdam Zuidoost. The announcement that this project would start was initially sent via WhatsApp to the people who had joined their former activities. At first, this resulted in 50 to 60 enlisted recipients, but this grew rapidly during March to 170 and in April to 180 recipients. The meals project was contacted by many care organizations – these include mostly secular healthcare organizations – who wanted to enlist people in their networks for the meals project. The number of recipients is equivalent to the number of distributed meals. The number of addresses is lower, because, for example, some recipients are in families who live at the same address. At the same time, another international Pentecostal church decided to join the project: Maranatha, which, due to the temporary cessation of some activities, had additional resources. Maranatha, Treasures and *Lutherse Diaconie* agreed to allocate three weekdays among themselves to deliver meals. Maranatha prepared and delivered meals on Thursdays, and Treasures and *Lutherse Diaconie* prepared and delivered meals on Mondays and Fridays. The initial idea



Deliverers are ready to start their delivery routes



was to carry on with this project until June 1, expecting this would be the end of the first wave. Some of the recipients had by then indicated that they no longer needed to receive the meals. However, the majority of the recipients still wanted to receive meals and new enlistments kept coming in. The organizing team decided to carry on until September 1, but when they reached that date they were still distributing 150 meals on Mondays and Fridays. It was also clear that Covid-19 was not over yet, therefore, they decided to continue the project. The project has continued in January 2021, because there are still people who call upon it. Furthermore, there is no indication that all recipients will unsubscribe from the project when the Covid-19 crisis is over.

### 1.5.4 Changes in the Project since September 2020

The fieldwork for this research project was carried out from September 7 until November 6. A few changes were made to the original concept of the project in September, which were carried out in the subsequent months.

First, with the start of the new school year and the resumption of class room teaching, Maranatha was confronted with the need to restart its breakfast project. Before the Covid-19 crisis, volunteers of Maranatha had handed out breakfast for children in the neighborhood on their way to school on Tuesdays and Thursdays. They had noticed that a lot of children were going to school without having had a decent breakfast or without healthy food for the lunch break. Therefore, they made the decision to offer children breakfast on the route to two primary schools. They served approximately 60 children with this project. The cessation of classroom teaching during the first Covid-19 wave permitted Maranatha to reallocate resources to the meals project. Yet, the opening of schools in September required continuing its commitment to the children of Zuidoost. In doing so, Maranatha hopes to contribute to a better future for the new generation of the neighborhood. This decision implied that Maranatha needed to reallocate its resources accordingly. This also led to reducing involvement in the meals project. This considered decision is indicative of the commitment to previous commitments, even in the context of crisis, of the multiplicity of needs in Zuidoost, and of the high pressure on the available - sorely limited - resources. With this adjustment, Treasures and *Lutherse Diaconie* have continued to organize the meals project on Mondays and Fridays. The breakfast

project addresses and highlights very specific needs. The fact that so many children in Amsterdam Zuudoost do not have enough food is an eminent problem that calls for further research of its own. Accordingly, this project could not be included in the present research and report.

Second, in mid-September three funding bodies contacted the leaders of the meals project and expressed their wish to focus on providing food for undocumented people and others who could not go to the “regular” food banks and whose financial resources were limited. They offered to provide the products for food packages via Human Aid Now, an organization that was able to negotiate about sharp prices for the food products. The work of Human Aid Now is done by volunteers, a relative small number of people take care of a huge amount of food without significant overhead costs. The food packages are handed out to those recipients who are physically able to cook for themselves. Because Human Aid Now only delivers large numbers of products at the same time, Treasures and *Lutherse Diaconie* cooperate with other churches to make use of this service. Contact was made between the funding bodies and four church organizations for this initiative: Treasures, *Lutherse Diaconie*, Maranatha, and Love Christian Center. The latter church had already been handing out food packages since May 2020.

From mid-September onwards, the products for 200 food packages have been divided among the four church organizations: 100 for Love Christian Center, 50 for Maranatha, and 50 for Treasures and *Lutherse Diaconie*. The products for the 50 food packages that Treasures and *Lutherse Diaconie* can distribute are received on a weekly basis and handed out on Mondays. The food packages are packed by one of the deliverers and another volunteer who is connected with Treasures. On the one hand, there are approximately 30 people who were receiving meals and who have now chosen to receive these food packages. On the other hand, this new aspect of the meals project has also resulted in 20 new recipients who receive the food packages. The food packages are picked up by the recipients at *De Nieuwe Stad* on Mondays or distributed by the deliverers, cooks, and project leaders. The composition of the food package has changed over the past few months, but it should be enough for a household of 3.5 people.

### 1.5.5 Description of the Current Meals Project

The current project that is run by Treasures and *Lutherse Diaconie* delivers meals to people on Mondays and Fridays. Here follows a description of the organization of the project, of the people who are involved, and of the different responsibilities of people in the project.

The cooks shop for groceries in the days before cooking. They mostly go to supermarkets for their products, and they sometimes go to a small shop for some special products and for the containers to pack the meals in. There are three volunteers who cook individually at their homes. In addition, there is one home where a team of cooks prepares the meals

and where another volunteer brings her meals to. The meals that are cooked at these locations are used for the delivery. In addition, there is one cook who cooks at *De Nieuwe Stad* for all the deliverers and for other people who come to *De Nieuwe Stad* to collect a meal on Mondays. This cook prepares approximately 15 meals. He also has become one of the deliverers through the course of the research project himself.

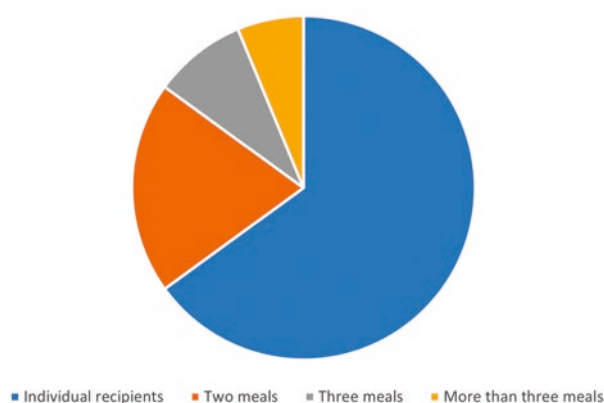
The meals needed for the deliveries on Mondays and Fridays are distributed over the four previously mentioned locations. Two of them cook on Mondays, one cooks on Fridays, and one of them on both Mondays and Fridays. The number of cooked meals differs per cook. Some of them cook with a team and prepare up to 100 meals a day that are distributed on four delivery routes, whereas other cooks prepare meals for only one of the two other routes (i.e., 20 meals). The meals are prepared and packed at their homes. On Mondays, the meals are brought to *De Nieuwe Stad* and distributed by the deliverers from there and on Fridays the deliverers go to the houses of the cooks to pick up the meals and start the distribution.

Some of the cooks are part of one of the involved churches or know the project leaders and see this as a way to live out their Christian faith. Another cook heard about this project via social media and she was really glad to have something useful to do, since she could not do much at her own job. The cooks receive five euro per meal. This should cover the costs of the ingredients, the use of gas and cooking utensils, the packing material, and a volunteer’s allowance.

The meals are distributed via six routes. Most of the deliverers distribute the meals by bicycle, and one deliverer does this by car. Most deliverers work alone; there is only one duo. The deliverer who uses a car for distribution is a member of Treasures, and the other deliverers are asylum seekers. Two of them had already been involved for a long time with the activities of *De Nieuwe Stad*. They introduced the other deliverers to the meals project. The project leaders and the deliverers eat together in *De Nieuwe Stad* before doing the deliveries on Mondays. The deliverers receive a volunteer’s allowance of 20 euros per afternoon.

The project is coordinated by the pastor of Treasures and the diaconal worker of *Lutherse Diaconie*. They have contact with the care organizations that enlisted the recipients, and

Number of meals per address week 40





with the recipients themselves. The coordinators arrange the schedules for the different delivery routes, have contact with the cooks about the number of meals they need to prepare, and help where needed. The two coordinators are furthermore responsible for finding financial support for the project. Since the start of the meals project, it receives or has received financial support from 18 different funds and faith-based organizations, and by the involved churches themselves.

The recipients are usually enlisted for the meals project by care organizations. When they know that there are clients who can use this form of help, they contact the project leader to add them to the list of recipients. This may concern sick or old people who are on a waiting list for homecare, or people who do not meet the requirements of the food bank. There are 23 different care organizations that have enlisted recipients. Most of these organizations aim to help old people, people with physical or mental health issues, people with limited financial resources, undocumented people and/or homeless people. These categories do overlap. There are care organizations who have enlisted only one or two recipients, and others have enlisted up to 13 or 14 recipients. The project leaders maintain close contact with the care organizations regarding the recipients. When the recipients want to communicate feedback to the organizers of the meals project, they do this either via the care organizations or they contact

one of the project leaders directly. Furthermore, the project leaders can contact the care organizations when the deliverers notice that the recipient is not doing well or is often not home. In this way, a social network is created around the recipients through the meals project.

In total, as it stands at the time of writing this report, the project distributes around 120 meals every Monday and Friday, and 50 food packages every Monday. The food packages go predominantly to families, and the pre-cooked meals go predominantly to individual recipients. These include mostly people with a migration background and old people, of which the majority are women. They are located in the following areas in Amsterdam Zuidoost: Holendrecht, Reigersbos, H-buurt, Venserpolder, G-buurt en K-buurt (Bijlmer Oost and Bijlmer Centrum).

## 1.6 Conclusion

The present chapter has introduced the current research and the meals project. We have shown that the meals project emerged in turbulent times as an emergency relief project that stumbled upon more structural needs in Amsterdam Zuidoost. This raised the question of what these structural needs are and how to find a sustainable solution for the long term. The next chapter will expand on the research methods that are used to address these questions.



*A volunteer is cooking for all the people in De Nieuwe Stad*

# Chapter 2

## Methodology

### 2.1 Introduction

The aim of this research is to explore how the meals project, as an emergency relief project, can be transformed into a project that addresses structural needs in such a way that the beneficiaries' vulnerability will be reduced. In order to research this, the needs that are exposed by the meals project should first be identified.

Two researchers were appointed to carry out the fieldwork, to analyze the research data and to write the research report. In the first three weeks of the fieldwork they explored the field to become familiar with the meals project and all the people and parties involved. Thereafter, they put together a project team of co-researchers for the first part of the research: participatory action research. As stated in the introduction, the aim of participatory action research is on the one hand to produce knowledge, and on the other hand to improve existing practices by acknowledging and using the knowledge and experience of the practitioners as co-researchers. It is intended to help the practitioners benefit from the research. The project team was composed of the two project leaders and four volunteers, with whom they explored the current meals project, and how the structural needs of the neighborhood might be addressed in a sustainable way. This included reflections on how the meals project might be organized in the long term in a way that is empowering for the recipients.

Alongside this process with the project team, the researchers conducted interviews with different stakeholders for the second part of the research. This was aimed at understanding their views on the meals project, the needs in Amsterdam Zuidoost and how these might be addressed in a sustainable manner.

Sections 2.2 and 2.3 introduce the research methods that were employed to provide a better understanding of the context and organization of the meals project. Section 2.4 describes the research process, both with respect to the project team meetings with the co-researchers and the meetings with the supervision team. The results of these methods concern the first part of this research. The research methods that were employed for the second part of this research are introduced in Section 2.5, and the sounding board that was used for the analysis of the results is introduced in Section 2.6. Lastly, the researchers give an account of and reflect on their positionality and their experiences during the research process in Section 2.7.

### 2.2 Participant Observation

The participant observation took place over nine weeks, from September 7 until November 6, 2020. This method was used for two purposes: on the one hand it allowed the researchers to collect data on the ins and outs of the meals project, and on the other hand the researchers were immersed in the project, which helped their process with the project team of co-researchers. After every activity, the researchers made field notes of their observations. The field notes contain what they observed and heard, but also what they thought and felt about the activities, and how the observation could contribute to the goal of the research project as a whole. A description of the different activities that were part of the participant observation will be presented below.

#### 2.2.1 Delivering

Every Monday the researchers were present in *De Nieuwe Stad* to have lunch with the project leaders, the deliverers, and others who came to *De Nieuwe Stad* for food and social contact. Every Monday and Friday the researchers accompanied one of the deliverers on their delivery route and the researchers



*One of the researchers joins the cooking team*



sometimes did a delivery route by themselves by the end of the fieldwork period. In the end, the researchers have been on all the routes multiple times in order to get a sense of who the recipients and the deliverers are. The aim of doing the routes multiple times was to become familiar with the recipients and the deliverers, so that they might share their personal experiences of the meals project and their needs. The aim of joining the deliverers was thus to get a better understanding of who the recipients and the deliverers are, but also of how the meals project itself is organized. This allowed the researchers to see the many practical elements of the project: for example, how the meals are transported by bicycle, how the deliverers approach the recipients, and what happens when the recipient is not home.

### 2.2.2 Cooking

The researchers both joined the cooking team on two separate Mondays, and one of the researchers joined one of the other cooks on a Monday. This has allowed the researchers to see how the meals are prepared and packed, and to talk with the cooks about their experiences with volunteering in the meals project. Because most of the cooks work from home, it was difficult to make an appointment with the remaining cooks. Some cooks did not feel comfortable with inviting people into their homes when they were cooking because of Covid-19; their kitchens are not big enough for social distancing.

### 2.2.3 Food Packages

The distribution of the food packages was an element that was added to the meals project during the fieldwork phase.



*The composed food packages*

The researchers were present at one meeting with Human Aid Now – a Dutch non-governmental organization (NGO) that helps refugees across Europe, operating predominantly in the Netherlands since the start of the Covid-19 crisis, and which provides the products for the food packages on request of the three funders – and the project leaders of Maranatha, Love Christian Center, Treasures and *Lutherse Diaconie*, where the plan to implement the distribution of food packages into the meals project was formed; and at two other meetings with the project leaders to discuss the practicalities regarding the distribution of food packages and to evaluate the first weeks. Furthermore, the researchers were present when the products for the food packages were delivered for the first time, and three times when the food packages were packed on Monday mornings and distributed from *De Nieuwe Stad* during the rest of the day. This allowed the researchers to observe this new element that was added to the meals project from the beginning of its implementation.

### 2.2.4 The Breakfast Project

In the first weeks of the research, the researchers were present at the breakfast project organized by Maranatha on one Tuesday and one Thursday. The researchers participated in preparing the breakfast and handing it out to the children on their way to school. After these two days, we decided not to include the breakfast project in this research on the meals project. The short period of three months in which the present research needed to be conducted did not allow this. The breakfast project is a project on its own – with its own volunteers, organized by one church organization, and with a specific target group – which requires a research project of its own to do right by the project.

## 2.3 Analysis of the List of Recipients

The researchers analyzed the list of recipients of April, August, and September in order to gain a better understanding of who the recipients are, of which care organizations are involved and to what extent, of how the number of recipients has developed during these months, and of how the different delivery routes are organized.

In this list, the researchers looked at the number of meals per address – are there mostly individual receivers, or are there more couples or families? – the recipients' gender, structural changes in the group recipients and deliverers, the areas in which the recipients live, and the care organizations that have enlisted recipients.

The insights from the analysis of the list were used to compose the fact sheet and for the description of the context in chapter 1.

## 2.4 Project Team

Key to participatory action research is to compose a team of practitioners who become co-researchers in the research project. Together with the researchers, they formed a project team that aimed to answer the research question.

The project team had five meetings and the researchers gave one concluding presentation, during which the researchers shared and discussed the findings of the five meetings with the project team. The findings of the process with the project team will be portrayed in chapter 3.

Before the first meeting, the researchers informed the co-researchers that the deliberations, discussions, proposed, conducted and evaluated actions of the project team would be the content of the research report. The co-researchers agreed that their contributions to the project team meetings could be used, on the condition of anonymity.

#### **2.4.1 Short Description of the Project Team Meetings**

In the first meeting, the project team discussed the practice of the current meals project in order to mark the starting point of the process as a team. It was relatively easy to define together what was currently happening in the meals project. With the second meeting, the researchers aimed to evaluate the current meals project. During this meeting, the researchers noticed that the project team was strongly focused on making short-term practical improvements to their own tasks in the meals project. In the third meeting, the researchers tried to facilitate a meeting in which the project team could think about the long term: what were their dreams for the future? During this meeting, the researchers observed that the project team mainly spoke of the receivers and their needs in a passive mode. This passive role that the recipients were given in the meals project could stand in the way of offering them sustainable help that reduces their vulnerability, according to the researchers. Therefore, the researchers decided to discuss this with the project team by starting the fourth meeting with the question: "How would you feel if you were one of the recipients?" The project team did not recognize that the meals project was making people (more) dependent and would rather speak about the empowerment of the recipients. Thereafter followed a discussion on what concrete steps could be taken to empower the recipients. During this conversation, and during their participant observation, the researchers observed that the overall responsibility for the meals project lies with one of the project leaders and not with the other practitioners. The project team assumed that the idea to empower recipients, which the project team came up with, was also to be carried out by this project leader. The question, "Who is responsible for what?" was therefore central to the fifth meeting. A more in-depth description of these meetings will be given in the next chapter.

#### **2.4.2 Concluding Presentation**

After these five meetings, the researchers organized a concluding presentation for the project team so that the co-researchers could assess the end result of the project team meetings. Van Lieshout et al. write that it is important to also involve the co-researchers in this part of the process, to create an environment of open communication about the observations and interpretations of the researchers. Since



*Start of the concluding presentation*

the meals project should benefit from the action research, it is important to give the practitioners the opportunity to share their views on the findings of the researchers. In this way, the research can be closely tailored to the values and needs of the practice it is researching.<sup>8</sup>

During this concluding presentation, the project team mostly confirmed that the researchers had described the project team meetings in an accurate manner. Furthermore, the presentation sparked further reflections on the current project and ideas for improvement in the long term. These included the need for financial stability and the critical assessment of the final responsibility of one of the project leaders. For the project team the concluding presentation also led to more appreciation and understanding of their own work.

#### **2.4.3 Weekly Meetings with Supervision Team**

The researchers had weekly meetings with their supervision team to discuss the progress of the project team. They facilitated critical reflection on the process and therewith helped to gain new insights into the process of the project team; also, the meetings offered a space for discussing (potential) difficulties in the process and the planning of next steps in the research. These meetings reflect common practice; as Van Lieshout et al. note, in the dynamic practice of participatory action research, it is important for researchers to discuss the process with the supervision team, in order to define and redefine the strategy for the project team meetings and to add a critical reflection of the process.<sup>9</sup>

Apart from providing a critical reflection of the project team meetings, the supervision team also advised on the stakeholders' research.

<sup>8</sup> Van Lieshout et al., *Actieonderzoek*, p. 109.

<sup>9</sup> Van Lieshout et al., *Actieonderzoek*, p. 100-101.



## 2.5 Interviews

For the second part of the research, the researchers conducted interviews with representatives of the stakeholders in the meals project in order to understand their views on the project; what are their motives for participation, what would they identify as the added value of the meals project and how have they experienced it thus far? These voices were used partly to acquire information about the broader context in which the meals project takes place, and partly to find possible answers to the research question from the perspective of different stakeholders.

Interviews were conducted with representatives of five care organizations that enlisted recipients for the meals project. The interviewed care organizations are *MEE Amstel en Zaan* (*MEE-AZ*), *Cordaan*, *ProFor*, *Ouder- en Kindteam* (*OKT*), and one assistant practitioner for old people (*praktijkondersteuner ouderen*) at the general practice at *Medisch Centrum Koornhorst*. Three additional care organizations were contacted for interviews, but they did not respond to emails or calls.

The researchers conducted interviews with two recipients who had unsubscribed from the meals project and with one professional of *Samen Doen* who enlisted and unsubscribed a recipient. These interviews provided a better understanding of why some recipients decided to stop receiving meals.

The researchers interviewed representatives of three funders, namely *Haëlla Stichting*, *RCOAK*, and *Kansfonds*. A representative of *Ars Donandi* sent information via email. Apart from *Kansfonds*, these funding bodies have supported the meals project since its very beginning. *Kansfonds* started to support the meals project in the second project period (June 2 until September 1, 2020). *Haëlla*, *RCOAK*, and *Kansfonds* are the funders that initiated the implementation of food packages via Human Aid Now. The researchers were particularly interested to know why they decided to finance the meals project, how they perceive the meals project, and why they decided to initiate the food packages. In addition, interviews were conducted with the project leaders of *Maranatha*, *Treasures*, and *Lutherse Diaconie* in order to gain understanding of why and how they are organizing the meals project.

Lastly, an interview was conducted with a strategic consultant of the municipality who is specialized in the situation of undocumented people in Amsterdam. He provided insight into how this problem manifests itself in the context of Amsterdam.

## 2.6 The Sounding Board

After the fieldwork was finished the researchers started to analyze the findings. In this process, they invited seven people to join in a sounding board meeting. These invitees were experts in the fields of (local) politics, religion (mainline and international churches), healthcare and funding who are not actively involved in this particular project. All seven of them were willing to join this meeting, but it was only possible for five of them to meet at the same time. A digital meeting was

held on Friday, November 20 with the five experts and the two researchers. The researchers briefly introduced the meals project – some of the experts were already familiar with the project and others were not – and introduced six tentative conclusions to discuss together. The insights and reactions of the experts during this meeting were used by the researchers to critically evaluate their research results and to add some of the remarks in the analysis and reflection in chapter 5.

## 2.7 Positionality and Experiences of the Researchers

The two researchers who conducted this participatory action research both have a background in Christian theology. They are both white, university educated women in their mid-20s, and they and their parents were born in the Netherlands. One of the researchers grew up in smaller cities, has lived in Belgium for studies and then moved to Amsterdam for studies. The other researcher grew up in a village, moved to Amsterdam for studies and has lived in South Africa for studies.

### 2.7.1 Background of the Researchers

As researchers, we were both confronted with our privileged positions throughout this research. We have never been in a position in which we were deprived of food or social contact. We have never been dependent on care of projects like these. Our own background – white, middle-class, European – plays a large role in the fact that we have never been in these situations, which made us feel uncomfortable at times.

Furthermore, for both of us, this was the first time we had conducted a participatory action research. This meant we were very excited to start this research, but also inexperienced. During the process of the research, we noticed that our previous formal and informal experiences with intercultural interaction helped us to quickly immerse ourselves in the field. Furthermore, we experienced that our knowledge of religious convictions and our critical thinking skills – which we had acquired because of our academic theological training – came in handy. In addition, we very much appreciated our supervision team and their feedback on the process. We learned from them and our experiences with this research project in multiple ways. We learned to be flexible and to be able to make adjustments when working with a project team like this, so that the research goals could be achieved. Besides, the method of participatory action research itself opened our eyes to how the expertise of practitioners in the field can be used in research, by making them co-researchers. It helped us realize that the gap between academy and praxis doesn't have to be big; research can have both academic and practical interests as its focus and can be both academically and socially relevant.

### 2.7.2 Experiences in the Field

As researchers, we were welcomed with open arms by all the people involved in the meals project. Of course, it took some

time to build trust and to find ways to work together, but by the end of the fieldwork phase we truly felt part of the family, as one of the project team members stated during the final presentation. We enjoyed the cultural diversity in the project, having conversations and joking around with the deliverers, and the welcoming ambiance at *De Nieuwe Stad*. Most of the deliverers are people without a permanent place of residence and without a permanent job; a reality that is very different from our own. We noticed that they have little prospect of permanent housing and jobs, whereas they are very willing and able to work and participate in society. We were moved by and concerned about the situation of the deliverers and hope that they can find permanent solutions.

Second, we are both vegetarians and we realize that it is a privilege to make that choice. Through the course of our fieldwork, people did offer us meals with meat. At times, we felt comfortable to say that we are vegetarians, and people were happy to serve us a plate without meat. At other times, we felt uncomfortable and ungrateful in refusing a meal. Hospitality is a central value of this project, and offering someone a meal is a key sign of this hospitality. Refusing to eat (part of) their meals sometimes felt like we were rejecting people's hospitality.

Third, in any participatory research, it is necessary to find a balance between being a participant and being a researcher. Because we felt part of the team, it was not hard for us to act like participants in the field. At the same time, reflecting on our experiences in our field notes, when we cycled back home after a day in Amsterdam Zuidoost, and during our weekly meetings with the supervision team, kept us and our observations sharp.

Last, the contact with the recipients was one of the frustrating aspects of the fieldwork. As will be described in the next chapter, it was really hard to get in contact with the recipients. We wanted to know much more about them: What do they eat on the other days of the week? Why do they need this pre-cooked meal delivery service? Are there ways they can contribute to the meals project or are there ways in which they themselves can help others? What are suitable ways to empower them? We were happy that the project team proposed conducting a questionnaire among the recipients, which provided answers to how the recipients like the meals, whether they think the meals are healthy and whether they think the size of the meals is good. This allowed us to gain a little more insight into the experiences of the recipients, even though it did not answer all of our questions.

### **2.7.3 Experiences with the Project Team Meetings**

The project team meetings were challenging. Our motto was, "This never goes as we planned". We experienced that participatory action research is indeed a form of research that requires a lot of flexibility from the researcher. We tried to move along with the team and to listen to what they were saying: What do they find important? Why do they do what they do? It challenged us in continuously finding new ways

to discuss the topics we wanted to address. This also raised the question of whether the topics that we wanted to discuss were also the topics that are important to the co-researchers, and how to get closer to the perception of the co-researchers. In the end, we concluded that our research agenda – and particularly the part in which we aimed to find practical steps that can be taken to empower the recipients – might not be shared by the project team. The project team challenged us to look critically at our own research aim, and we came to the conclusion that the project team was right: at this point there is no space to think about ways of empowering the recipients, and there are still many needs yet to be uncovered in Zuidoost.

We were happy and surprised to see that, during the process with the project team, some improvements were made to the meals project, even though these particular improvements were not our primary intention nor did we decide on the matter as a team. Several co-researchers expressed, for example, their appreciation that these project team meetings forced them to sit down together, to spend time with each other, and to reflect on their own project. In this way, they got to know each other and their own project better. Furthermore, the project team meetings provided a space for exchange among the different volunteers, and especially among the cooks who would usually work individually in their own homes. One of the cooks noticed that another cook always packed her meals in boxes and in small plastic bags. The deliverers said that they like this, for they can hang the plastic bag on the door handle when a recipient is not at home. Now, the deliverer who delivers the meals of the first cook has plastic bags with him, so that he can hang the meals on the door handle too, if necessary.

All in all, the experience of conducting fieldwork in such a valuable project with passionate people was very rich. To conduct this research was a positive experience for us, which allowed us to look beyond our usual contexts and to practice and refine our research skills. Furthermore, we have gained insight into the complexity of the practice of diaconal projects, which will enrich our careers as young theologians.



# Research Results - Part One: Participatory Action Research with the Meals Project

### 3.1 Introduction

As part of the participatory action research, a group of co-researchers was formed to join the two researchers. These co-researchers were people from the field who participated in the meals project and who were willing to join in the research. To achieve good representation of the project team, two cooks, two deliverers and the two project leaders were asked to join. They were asked after the first three weeks of the research and they were immediately all very willing to join the research. The background of the project team is extremely diverse: there are people from Ghana, Gambia, Indonesia, Egypt, and the Netherlands.

Because of the short time frame of the research project and the busy schedules of some of the co-researchers, only five meetings could be planned. The group decided to hold these five meetings on Mondays at 12:30 at *De Nieuwe Stad* for 45 to 60 minutes. This was a suitable time for both the cooks and for the deliverers, because it was just after cooking and before delivering. The first two meetings were at *De Nieuwe Stad* and, due to tightened Covid-19 measures issued by the government, from the third meeting onwards a combination was used of meeting live as well as through the Zoom online meeting platform. After those five meetings there was one last meeting, in which the researchers presented the results of the five meetings to the co-researchers so that the co-researchers could reflect on these and add to the conclusions. This last, and live, meeting took place on Monday, November 2 at 19:30, also at *De Nieuwe Stad*.

### 3.2 Meetings

Below, a short overview is given of the five meetings and the main themes addressed during those meetings. This provides an impression of the process that the project team went through.

#### 3.2.1 First Meeting

The first meeting was mostly about the recipients – who are they and what are their needs? Many explanations came up for why it is difficult to get to know the recipients:

*some are undocumented and anxious and have little trust in the government, others are ashamed that they are dependent on the meals, and others suffer from mental or physical impairments.*

After talking about those difficulties one of the team members said:

*There is already a lot of trust between the team and the recipients. Maybe already for 90 % in this neighborhood you do not open the door to everyone. That they open their doors to us already shows that they trust us and the meals we bring.*

After speaking about the recipients and how to get to know them better, the project team also spoke about the importance of the project and their wishes to expand it. The project team expressed that they were convinced that everyone receiving the meals needs the meals:

*This is one of the poorest places in the Netherlands and sometimes we are really shocked by what we see at the places where we bring the food. That is why this project is so important.*

We closed the meeting concluding that no WhatsApp group was needed and we would meet the next week at the same time and place. This first meeting had already provided a clear



*A deliverer hands over a meal to a recipient*



*A cook is chopping vegetables*

view about some main convictions of the project team and the project itself. Because of this, the researchers decided to look at the project more closely in the next meeting and to see whether any changes could or should be made.

### **3.2.2 Second Meeting**

The theme of the second meeting was “Changes”. What changes had been made already and what changes might be good for the future? One of the cooks came up with the idea to conduct a questionnaire among the recipients of the meals. In this way the project team would be able to get to know the recipients a bit better and get a clearer idea about how they appreciate the food. The project leaders in particular had some doubts about conducting a questionnaire. They were afraid of creating false expectations among the recipients or coming too close to them. The cooks, however, really wanted to have this questionnaire and to get more information:

*How do I know the people like my food and it will not go to waste?*

One of the cooks mentioned that she had already received some feedback about the way she packed the meals. She had changed this so it would be easier for the deliverers. She mentioned:

*Small feedback makes great improvements.*

The theme came back to the question of the previous week: are all the recipients in need of the meals? One of the team

members expressed his certainty that those people indeed need the meals:

*They are enlisted through care organizations and some of them have already unsubscribed. The people who are now on the list are really in need of those meals for all different reasons.*

The project team also spoke about the transition to food packages instead of pre-cooked meals. They concluded that these packages should be differentiated because some of the families are much bigger than others. The researchers saw that the project team was strongly focused on making short-term practical improvements to their own tasks in the meals project. This was why they wanted to focus on the long term in the next meeting, to see whether the project team had any ideas about changes for the long term as well.

### **3.2.3 Third Meeting**

In light of the need for changes in the long term, the researchers decided in the third meeting to speak about “Dreams for the future”. The project team came up with ideas for the future in which this project goes on for as long as people need it. The problems in Zuidoost are big, and many people need help. The team wants to help more people, grow as a team, and grow professionally. When asked what would be needed for this, the project team responded: *Money!*

When one of the researchers replied that some of the funders only want to give money for those who really need it, the team responded critically:

*How can we filter who really needs the meals and who does not?*

And someone else said:

*All people would rather take care of themselves than be dependent on help. Asking for help is a really big thing, so, when people ask for meals, they really need it.*

And another team member from a non-Dutch background added to this:

*This society is very egoistic. The special thing about this project is that people are taking care of each other, and young people are not only focused on themselves, but also taking care for the old people.*

The meeting ended with one of the team members expressing his fear that the organization is not professional enough and the funding bodies would only support organizations that work faster and cheaper, risking forgetting that other values are important too.

The researchers observed during the first three meetings that the project team spoke about the receivers and their needs



in a rather passive mode. According to the researchers, this may stand in the way of offering them sustainable help that reduces their vulnerability. Therefore, they decided to address the empowerment of the recipients in the following meeting.

### 3.2.4 Fourth Meeting

To place ourselves in the position of the recipients of the meals, the question of this fourth meeting was “How would you feel if you received meals every week?”. The first reaction was:

*I would feel very loved, and I would feel the love of everyone working on this project.*

Some of the others agreed and said that it is much more normal to cook for each other in their cultures. But other reactions also came up:

*I would like it if I was sick or had no other options, but I would rather do it myself if I was able to.*

Some of the co-researchers agreed with this idea and they said it would be nice for the short term, but not if you need it all the time.

The next topic of this meeting was the question of how to empower the recipients of the meals. It was difficult to think of ways to do this. One of the team members came up with the idea of a telephone social circle. In this way the people who wanted to could call each other to have a chat and listen to each other. One of the other team members was very positive and saw her own role in this:

*I don't have grandparents here, so I would be happy to volunteer and participate in this and talk with them.*

The project team decided to wait for the results of the questionnaire before arranging something that would perhaps meet a non-existent need. During this conversation and during the participant observation, the researchers observed that the overall responsibility for the meals project lies with one of the project leaders. The question, “Who is responsible for what?” was therefore central to the fifth meeting.

### 3.2.5 Fifth Meeting

Before coming to the theme of responsibility, in this last meeting the researchers gave a short overview of the conclusions from the previous meetings. One of the co-researchers summarized this as follows:

*You do have a complete view. We fight against hunger and loneliness.*

From this summary they moved to the topic of responsibility. What are the different responsibilities of the team members

and what are the responsibilities of the recipients of the meals? The project team expressed the fact that they felt very responsible, for cooking healthy and tasty meals, for delivering them to the right people with love and respect, and for the project to keep going. About the recipients, it was said that they are responsible for being home or contacting the project leaders about what to do with the meals. They are also held responsible for not throwing away food:

*It would be sad if the food would go to waste. They have the responsibility to not throw it away when they cannot finish it. They can maybe give it to their neighbors or save it for another day.*

By the end of this meeting, we came back to the idea of a telephone social circle. The project team decided that this might be something to organize in the future, but at this moment it is difficult enough to take care of the project itself and safeguard the financial support. Concluding the meeting, the project team came back to the time and date for the final meeting in which the researchers would present the conclusions of the project team and give them the opportunity to add to or critically comment on these.

## 3.3 Recurring Themes in the Meetings

Having described the process of the five project team meetings, the researchers now offer a description of the recurring themes during these meetings.



*A volunteer is ready to deliver a meal*

### **3.3.1 All Recipients Need the Meals**

The project team is convinced that everyone who asks for a meal really needs one. They do not want to refuse a meal to anyone asking for it, nor ask difficult questions about why people need this meal. There are no official criteria anyone should meet before receiving a meal. The meals are also a means to connect with people and to show them that people are caring for them.

The meals project provides a meal for people who cannot cook themselves or who do not have the financial means to buy food, but also helps to prevent loneliness by being at someone's doorstep twice a week and thereby showing that there are people that care for them. The meal is a symbol of the love of all the people involved in the project for their fellow-human beings.

### **3.3.2 Poor Conditions in Zuidoost**

Covid-19 is revealing existing social distress and poverty through the meals project. The project team has witnessed that there are many people living in poor conditions in Amsterdam Zuidoost, and that there are people who are lonely. For some of them the contact with the deliverers is the only social contact they have in a day. The team is moved and shocked by these cases. Some of them did not expect things like this to happen in the Netherlands.



*A cook who had been cooking all morning presents her meals*

### **3.3.3 Grow as an Organization**

The project team believes that there are more people in Zuidoost who need to be helped, and therefore they want the project to grow and expand. They are aware that more money and more capacity are required to accomplish this.

### **3.3.4 The Project Means a Lot to the Team Members Themselves**

This project is not only about caring for the people receiving the meals, but also for the whole team. They have repeatedly expressed that working on this project provides joy. They like what they are doing and they like spreading love by helping others. It has created a strong bond between the team members. For some of them the volunteer fee they are receiving is also an important (and for some, their only) source of income.

### **3.3.5 The Project Runs Smoothly Now**

When Soup Kitchen made the transition from providing meals at the church premises to delivering meals at the beginning of the Covid-19 crisis, there were some hiccups, but the team learned and improved their practices in these early months. They are happy with the way it is working now. Everyone has found a routine and is determined to let this project run smoothly. This goes for the cooperation between the team members, but also for the cooperation with the different care organizations that have contact with the receivers. The team recognizes that there are some key elements in this project that would not have been there without Covid-19, such as the importance of cooking from home.

### **3.3.6 Meeting the Needs of the Recipients Better**

In some cases the team expressed their wish to have more contact with the recipients; the cooks want to know what they think of their meals, and the project leaders want to know whether they are home and have any dietary restrictions. Besides this practical information, they also like to know how the recipients are doing and what their needs are, so that they can meet these needs the best they can. This is one of the reasons why a questionnaire was conducted among the recipients. Some project team members added here that it might be hard to gain more contact with the recipients, for people may be ashamed to admit that they are in need of food or company.

## **3.4 Final Meeting**

The researchers decided to invite the co-researchers for a final meeting on November 2 to present the results of the five meetings and to get their comments (one of the project leaders could not attend). The researchers presented their impressions and the recurring themes. There was much recognition by the co-researchers and some comments and critical remarks were added to the summary.

Throughout the process with the project team, we – as researchers – noticed that there was a tension between the



aim of our research and the ideas of the project team. As part of our participatory action research, we hoped to identify concrete actions to empower the recipients together with the project team. However, our time to do this was limited and, as our final meeting was approaching, we felt the pressure to make a last attempt to cause constructive friction. Therefore, we decided to share the mismatch we had noticed with the project team, expecting that this might cause some tension between us and the project team.

The researchers introduced a few possible reasons for what they called the “mismatch”, and asked the project team to indicate whether they recognized each reason:

The aim of the research does not fit this project; the project is good as it is and can be carried on like this for the long term. This project is not suited to making people less dependent.

All the receivers really need to receive these meals, they need love, care and food. They are people in need of help, and therefore we should give it to them, and not ask what they can contribute to this project or what they can give in return.

It is hard to think about what is needed to run this project in the long term, and to think about what additional things this project can do (besides providing meals), when you are so involved in organizing this project every week. There is this big idea of expanding, but what the next steps are to get there is not clear.

The hours the project leaders can invest in this project, and the financial means, are limited. They are responsible for the organization of this project, which makes the project very dependent on them. This can stand in the way of expanding or transforming the project.

Covid-19 stands in the way of organizing this project for the long term and finding alternative ways of empowering receivers. For example, because of Covid-19 we cannot receive a lot of people in *De Nieuwe Stad* and cannot serve dinner to a lot of people. The ways in which we can interact with others is limited due to Covid-19, which makes it difficult to see what people can offer.

These five meetings we had did not give us enough time to really think about these big questions.

These conclusions were partly shared by the project team. The first two reasons in particular were recognized by the team, although they had some additional comments. They recognized that they were convinced that they are only helping people in need, and that this project does not add to people being dependent. Those people are already in a dependent situation and this project only helps a bit in ways the government and other projects cannot or will not do. That does not mean that the project team doesn't want to look at ways to empower them, but it is difficult to see ways in which this can happen. The project team also expressed their conviction that they are learning from the recipients of the meals, and that the help is not one-way: the recipients have, for example, a lot of life experience, which is sometimes shared with the deliverers.

The third and fourth reasons were mostly recognized by the project leader, who was present. She felt very responsible for the whole project and had the idea that she was the only one responsible for coming up with new ideas for the future while, at the same time, she is very busy with the daily organization of the project. She does not feel she has the space to think about this project in the long term. This statement developed into ideas from other team members about arranging crowdfunding projects or going to businesses in their neighborhood to ask for support. One of the team members also said that the financial aspect brings a lot of uncertainty. It is not clear for how long the project can go on this way:

*It is always short term, short term, short term.*

This means the project leaders cannot guarantee the cooks and deliverers that their jobs will still be there in a month or so, and they cannot expect the volunteers to be available all the time when their jobs are so insecure. The difficulties of this insecurity are shared by the rest of the team.

The fifth reason is not recognized by the project team. They said that they only exist because of Covid-19 and are able to continue with this project even when *De Nieuwe Stad* has to close. It has even brought something good, because they met people at their houses and the threshold is lower to ask for help in this way. Also, the contact can be very personal because you meet one-to-one.

The project team does not have many comments on the last reason. One of the team members mentioned that this is something for the researchers themselves to decide.

In this last meeting the project team came up with new ideas about how to arrange the funding in different ways and to make the project less dependent on the funders and on the two project leaders. One of the project leaders further mentioned that it may be good to have more of these kinds of project teams in the future as well, so that they can think about the future of the project together.

The reaction of the project team to the possible reasons for the mismatch was surprising, as we, the researchers, had imagined that they would be taken aback. The first reaction of one of the project team members when we introduced the mismatch was: “And what do you think should be the aim of the research?” This invited us to look critically at our own research goals. The insistence of the project team on the conviction that everyone who asks for a meal needs one showed us that they are deeply convinced that their project is a good project, which should continue in the future. It is helping a lot of people and not making people dependent. This made us wonder afterwards whether we were trying to find a quick fix for structural needs that cannot be easily solved in our five weeks with the project team. The project team, however, already knew this and this may be one of the reasons why they did not come with concrete proposals to empower the recipients. This does not mean that they did

not want this for the recipients, but that they see that the needs in Zuidoost are too high at this moment to think about structural empowerment.

### 3.5 Questionnaire

As mentioned above, the project team came up with the idea to conduct a questionnaire. After some discussion they decided to act on this idea and the co-researchers asked the researchers to prepare a form. The researchers came up with a questionnaire, had this checked with the project leaders, and translated it into Dutch, English, and Spanish, the languages spoken by the recipients. The deliverers distributed 58 questionnaires to all households, as well as about 25 questionnaires to the people who had changed from receiving meals to receiving food packages.<sup>10</sup>

Thirty-four questionnaires, almost 60% of those given to the households receiving meals, came back in the two weeks after handing them out. The results were mostly positive and had a lot of variants on "Thank you for doing this" in the comments. Of course, this may be influenced by the fact that they are receiving the meals from the meals project and for this reason did not dare to be too critical. However, there were a few critical remarks and some comments about food preferences, and two comments from people who wanted to be unsubscribed. The results of this questionnaire were shared with the project team at the final meeting on November 2. From the 25 questionnaires about the food packages, 15 were returned.

### 3.6 Conclusions

First, the project team is convinced that their project is good and important, and is helping a lot of people in need of food and social contact. The project team sees that there are many structural problems in Zuidoost and they want to help these people. They want to go on with what they are doing and they would even like to expand and help more people because they see so many needs around them. They are convinced that everyone deserves a meal and that this is a way to help the people in the neighborhood. This is why they are worried about this project having to stop for financial reasons. For the future, the project team hopes to become more financially stable so that they do not have to be afraid that the project will suddenly come to an end.

Second, the project team believes that it is a bad idea to ask the recipients of the meals to prove that they are really poor, undocumented, or otherwise, as a condition for receiving the meals. They believe that such criteria are always too strict, because individual situations are usually more complex than a set of criteria. They want to stay accessible to everyone who is in need. They believe it is their strength that some people, who do not dare to ask for help at official organizations, come to

them to ask for help. They do not judge people and will not ask whether people do or do not have residence permits.

Third, the project team wants to grow professionally and as a team and continue working together with other care, faith based, and non-governmental organizations. The cooperation with other organizations is also something that the project team identifies as one of the strengths of this project: the meals project receives information from other organizations about what people need meals or food packages and at the same time the meals project can inform these other organizations when the recipients are experiencing difficulties.

Fourth, the project team has the ideal of empowering the recipients. This coincides with their way of working before Covid-19, when all the people who came to *De Nieuwe Stad* could both provide and receive help through the various activities that were organized by different church organizations. However, they do not yet feel they have the time or space to think about ways of doing this, because they are busy with the project itself to address the exposed needs. For now, the project is providing emergency help and is working on little improvements at a time. This is what is needed now.

Fifth, the project team feels responsible for the project and their different tasks. They are willing to work hard and to give a lot of time and effort to this project. This does not prevent the fact that a lot of the responsibility falls on one of the project leaders, which makes it hard to think about this project for the long term. However, their time and capacity are limited.

Lastly, the project team expressed the opinion that the meals project also means a lot to themselves. It is about much more than delivering meals. The project team experiences a lot of love and passion for the recipients while cooking, delivering or organizing this meals project. They also enjoy working together and being part of a "family". This makes clear that, for those involved, the meals project is a way to make sense of life.

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<sup>10</sup> The questionnaire and additional information about the results can be found in the Appendix.



## Chapter 4

# Research Results - Part Two: Vision of the Stakeholders

### 4.1 Introduction

The second part of the research study intended to acquire more insight in the context in which the specific meals project is carried out. This chapter presents the perspectives of the stakeholders on the meals project, the needs in Amsterdam Zuidoost, and possibilities of addressing them structurally. It includes the most important findings on the viewpoints of care organizations, (unsubscribed) recipients, funds, and project leaders. The information of the representatives of the stakeholders will be used in chapter 5 in order to put the insights and the advice of the project team into broader perspective, and to better understand the tensions in which the practice is conducted. This is needed in order to be able to provide adequate advice to the meals project and its stakeholders, with respecting their specific roles and responsibilities.

### 4.2 Care Organizations

The researchers conducted interviews with five care organizations that enlisted recipients for the meals project. The care organizations we interviewed were *MEE Amstel en Zaan (MEE-AZ)*, *Cordaan*, *ProFor*, *Ouder- en Kindteam (OKT)*, and one assistant practitioner for old people (*praktijkondersteuner ouderen*) at the general practice at *Medisch Centrum Koornhorst*. Themes relevant for this research project are addressed below.

#### 4.2.1 Contact between the Care Organizations and the Meals Project

All the interviewed care organizations had heard about the meals project via social media or email. Some of them had received a message from one of the project leaders directly, and others had received a message about the meals project via another care organization. The care organizations highly appreciate the meals project itself, and the contact with the project leaders. To cite one of them:

*It's fantastic that this project is there! People receive food, but also have a moment of social contact. That's a huge added value.*

A representative of another organization mentioned that the project gave some relief to her professional care team about the situation of their clients:

*There are many more needs than you can meet. Our team was relieved when we heard about this project. In this way we could send some of our clients to this project, so they could have a good and healthy meal twice a week.*

One of them mentioned the importance of the meals project for its signaling function, especially in times of Covid-19:

*I kept in contact with one of the project leaders. She called us to inform us that one of our clients was not opening her door for the deliverers anymore and the situation seemed worrisome. Then we decided to immediately visit that house. When we arrived, it appeared that we had to hospitalize her. When she came out of the hospital, she asked to be enlisted again.*

All the care organizations spoke about their appreciation for the meals project and the benefits of the contact with the project leaders: they are glad that the project exists, as can be seen in the quotes above.



*The meals that are distributed*

#### 4.2.2 Issues in Amsterdam Zuidoost

It has already been stressed that there are many issues in Amsterdam Zuidoost. In the interviews with the care organizations, this was also one of the themes spoken about. The assistant practitioner for old people shared the fact that her job would usually concern people from the age of 75 and above. Because Zuidoost is a deprived neighborhood, she takes care of people from the age of 65 and above, showing that health problems occur at an earlier age than usual in Zuidoost.

Apart from mental and physical health problems, loneliness and difficulties in understanding how the system works are problems that care professionals encounter:

*Zuidoost is a city district with a lot of problems. There are many old and lonely people who cannot find their way in the system. This is an issue that needs attention all the time, but especially in this time of Covid.*

An additional problem is the financial situation of people living in Zuidoost, according to the interviewed care organizations. They shared the fact that many people have debts and can therefore not enjoy their retirement, for example. Furthermore, the financial problems of families result in a lack of food for children:

*There is so much poverty. Much more than we see. Families who cannot take care of a meal for their children or only very unbalanced meals. Many children go to bed without a hot meal or go to school without breakfast. That happens more than you see. Also, families are not eating fruit and vegetables because it is too expensive.*

These difficulties in Zuidoost are mostly structural, but they have become worse and more urgent to address in times of Covid-19.

#### 4.2.3 Enlistments

The interviewed care organizations identified different target groups, when asked about the clients they had enlisted for the meals project. These target groups may overlap; there are old people and undocumented people who are also in financial need, and there are old people who are vulnerable because of physical and mental illness, for example.

##### *Old People*

Most interviewees answered that they have enlisted especially old people, who were afraid to buy groceries themselves because of Covid-19, who did not have a social network or had lost theirs because of Covid-19, who were already unable to shop for groceries or cook for themselves and/or whose help had stopped because of Covid-19 (e.g., people who previously received help with groceries, *Boodschappenmaatjes*). Furthermore, some old people are on a waiting list for more structural help that is not available yet.

##### *People in Financial Need*

Another group mentioned by the care organizations are people in financial need, some of whom lost their jobs because of Covid-19. They were suddenly confronted by financial needs. One of the organizations also helps those people to see whether they have a right to support from the government. Self-employed workers (*ZZP'ers: Zelfstandigen zonder personeel*) are spoken of as a new group asking for help. For others the financial need is not sudden but has already been there for a long time. Poverty is a subject in all interviews. Interviewees said that there is a lot of poverty in this part of Amsterdam, much more than is visible.

##### *Undocumented People*

This group of people is also mentioned by all the interviewed organizations. Some of these people also lost their income due to Covid-19; those who had jobs in the grey market in cleaning, delivering, and other areas have lost their jobs and they cannot go anywhere for support. In one of the interviews it was put very straightforwardly:

*These people have no rights at all.*

Undocumented people are, however, known by professional care organizations like those interviewed here. These organizations ask themselves how they can help these people in the best way.

##### *Sick People*

The interviewed care organizations mostly spoke of “sick people” who belong to the group “old people”. Sometimes they mentioned younger people with chronic illnesses as well to be enlisted to the food project. The people in this group cannot shop for groceries or cook for themselves.

#### 4.2.4 Unsubscribed Recipients

Next to the enlistment of clients, the care organizations also unsubscribe their clients when it is not necessary anymore. In particular, clients who were enlisted because of their fear of doing grocery shopping and their network who did not dare to come anymore, are unsubscribed now. There are people who can do their own grocery shopping again, who can again rely on the social network they had before Covid-19, or who have found a new job. The care organizations feel responsible for unsubscribing those clients who can take care of themselves again. Along with the people who needed the project because of Covid-19, there are also people with structural needs. These people will not be unsubscribed in the near future because they have no network at all and/or their problems are too big.

#### 4.2.5 Feedback from the Recipients of the Meals

Most feedback about the meals project that the care organizations have received from their clients is very positive: the deliverers are friendly, they come at the agreed time, and the meals are good and tasty. One of the interviewees said:





*A cook is serving rice from the rice cooker*

*People are happy that they can go to bed with a full stomach, even though they have no income. They are happy and thankful. The meals are tasty and nutritious. I did not get any complaints. I am especially happy that children do not have to be without food during this crisis.*

There were also a few critical remarks. One of the recipients did not like the fact that the meals were very different every time and she did not like all of them. More recipients thought the meals included too much rice every time. One of the recipients said that this does not go well with her intestinal problems. In addition, one of the recipients thought the portions were too big, but he is able to save half of it for another day.

Cultural differences were also mentioned. For one Surinamese woman it was a big issue that the container with her food was put on the ground. For her it was very important to treat food with respect. The deliverer did not understand why it was such a big problem. This woman wished to be unsubscribed from the meals project, but her healthcare worker convinced her to stay because she is very weak due to her illness and it is important for her to eat. The conclusion of the interviewed care professional was:

*It is important to treat the meals and the recipients with respect. A happy smile and a short chat are as important as the meal itself.*

#### **4.2.6 Alternatives**

One of the themes in the interviews was whether there are any other places where the recipients can go. Informal initiatives exist that care for old or sick people. The formal help that is given is usually not focused on groceries and cooking, although there are exceptions:

*The home care (Thuiszorg) is not meant for groceries and cooking, that is not in their job description. In Zuidoost there are many caregivers doing more than they need to do. They go for groceries for these people on their free days. Many caregivers take an extra step and much more than what is asked for in their job description and the hours they are paid for.*

But often, even this help is not sufficient. A representative of another care organization said that there are many options when one has the money. She spoke about *Apetito*, and *Vers aan Tafel*. These are places where you can order a meal that you like. But most people in Amsterdam Zuidoost cannot afford to order their food there.

The food bank was also mentioned as a possible alternative, however, the opinions on this subject differ. Some of the representatives are very happy the food bank is there and send a lot of people to the food bank. Another representative said that the food bank is not taking the specific situations of people into account enough, and only offers one standard package for everyone:

*They do not look at the family situation or dietary restrictions because of sickness or something else. [...] Sometimes people earn only 50 euros more than the maximum to be allowed to go there. The official food bank of the government does not look at the situation that people find themselves in. Some people may have more income, but they have huge debts and a very high rent. Then, projects like the meals projects are the only option.*

A few representatives also mentioned that some people are not going to the food bank because they are either too ashamed or too proud, and that undocumented people have no rights to go there for help.

#### **4.2.7 The Future of the Meals Project**

Many of the representatives from the care organizations mentioned that they would enlist people again when Covid-19 gets worse (the interviews were mostly conducted before the peak of the second wave that started in September 2020) or when clients in their network could be helped by this project. As long as the project is there, they will probably use it for their clients. Asked about their ideas for the future of this project, a few aspects arose. One of the representatives thought that the meals project should decide on whether to offer emergency help or structural help and what target group to focus on:

*The project needs to decide whether they want to be emergency help or structural help or both. If they want to go to a more structural way of help, we would like to work more together and add the project to our social map. If they want to help people more structurally, they need to decide whether they have a target group and what the criteria are for people to use the project. It would be a good idea to show your face at the neighborhood teams (buurtteams). In this way formal and informal help can work together.*

The interviewed care organizations expressed the opinion that the meals project was a good step in times of Covid-19 (which is still ongoing), and also shows up more structural needs:

*Some of the people are using the meals project because of Covid. For them it would be alright if you stop this project when Covid-19 is finished. But there are also many people with structural problems using this project. That will not stop when Covid-19 stops. They are permanently dependent on the goodness of people around them. For them, a project like this is very important.*

In addition, one of the care organizations mentioned that if the meals project wants to offer something structural, it may be good to think about more publicity:

*The meals project needs to get more publicity. That is important for the long term. If they continue to send mails to care organizations, we will be reminded of this option for our clients. Another thing for the future is to keep variety in the meals and maybe add fruit as well. Especially for children this is very important. And it is a project where you want all the people working on it to do it with their whole hearts.*

All the care organizations mentioned that they would like to do more work together with this meals project and that they believe it brings added value to Amsterdam Zuidoost.

#### **4.2.8 Conclusion**

The care organizations highly appreciate the meals project. They feel relief that their clients have some social contact and receive two healthy meals a week. Some of their clients are dependent on the meals project only because of Covid-19, while for others there are structural needs underlying this question of meals. They see that there are a lot of problems in Zuidoost and are not capable of addressing all of them – even though some of the professionals work (unpaid) extra hours to help their clients. The meals project is for them a welcome and necessary relief.

The care organizations imagine a structural role for the meals project if they want to continue. The care organizations would continue to enlist clients for this project, for they are convinced that this project could be of help for quite a number of people in the long term. In the future the organizations would like to do more work together with the meals project

and inform each other about helping the people in Zuidoost in even better ways.

### **4.3 Recipients**

The researchers conducted interviews with two recipients who were unsubscribed from the meals project and with one professional of *Samen Doen* who enlisted and unsubscribed a recipient. In addition, the questionnaire that was conducted upon the request of the project team provides some additional information on how the recipients experience the meals project.

#### **4.3.1 Reasons for Unsubscribing**

One of the recipients lives in a community building where she, and some other people living there, were receiving meals from the meals project. All of them unsubscribed because they thought they had to pay for the meals from September onwards. Furthermore, they thought that they would have to pick up the meals from *De Nieuwe Stad* from then on, and none of them has a car.

Another recipient said that she was hospitalized for some time and therefore she unsubscribed. Having returned from the hospital, she now has acquaintances bringing meals to her. They were already bringing her meals on some of the other days of the week, and now they are doing it every evening.

The professional from *Samen Doen* explains that her client is a single mother with non-congenital brain damage. She is easily tired and physically weak. Normally she had managed to take care of herself and her children, but because of Covid-19 her life was disrupted. This was the reason for looking for some extra help like the meals project. Now that things are getting back to normal, she can take care of herself again. This is her reason for unsubscribing from the meals project.

#### **4.3.2 Appreciation for the Meals Project**

The three unsubscribed recipients were all very positive about the meals project. They were really glad of this option for practical help in their difficult situations. They had some small remarks about the meals, but in general the meals were appreciated as being healthy and tasty. They also speak very highly about the deliverers. One of the recipients mentioned that she gave her phone number to the deliverer so they could have contact if something went wrong.

This is also reflected in the results of the questionnaire [cf. the Appendix. Most recipients expressed the view that the meals are healthy and tasty. They were positive about the amount of food they are given, and the people who now receive the food packages are very happy with this transition. The critical remarks that the care organizations heard from their clients were also mentioned in the questionnaire by the recipients. These mainly concern the amount of rice in the meals, and some individual issues like intestinal problems or not being able to finish the meals.

### 4.3.3 Conclusion

Although the perspective of the recipients entails much more detail and could be researched more thoroughly than is done in the present research, this section provides information about why recipients unsubscribe (or are unsubscribed by their care organizations) and provides a rough idea of how the recipients value the meals project. Overall, the recipients appear to be happy with the services that the meals project provides. Some have suggestions about the meal size and nutrient composition.

Some of the unsubscribed recipients do not need to make use of the meals project anymore, because the lockdown is not as radical as in March and April 2020 and/or because their own social network can support them again. Others would still like to make use of the meals project, but unsubscribed because they were convinced that they had to pay and to pick up the meals from *De Nieuwe Stad* from September onwards. The latter shows how, for some recipients, it is essential that the meals are free and brought to people's doorsteps.

## 4.4 Funds

The meals project receives or has received financial support from 18 different funds and faith-based organizations, and by the involved churches themselves. Interviews were conducted with representatives of three funders and a representative of an additional fund has provided information by email about why they support the meals project. The researchers interviewed representatives of *Haëlla Stichting*, *RCOAK*, *Kansfonds*, and *Ars Donandi*. Apart from *Kansfonds*, these funding bodies have supported the meals project since its very beginning. *Kansfonds* started to support the meals project in the second project period (June 2 until September 1). *Haëlla*, *RCOAK*, and *Kansfonds* are among the funders who initiated the implementation of food packages via Human Aid Now. The themes addressed in these interviews will be presented below.

### 4.4.1 Funding Projects in the Covid-19 Crisis

Shortly after the lockdown in March 2020, different categories of people started to experience difficulties due to Covid-19. Many funds observed that a lot of small emergency aid projects applied for funding. Together with *Fonds 1818*, *Haëlla Stichting* therefore rapidly initiated the so-called *Kleinecoronahulp*. They formed a collective, meanwhile including more than 20 funds, to support initiatives that aim to counter problems related to loneliness, homelessness, and (lack of) food in times of Covid-19.<sup>11</sup> They distinguished in delivering the financial support in a quick and flexible way. *Kleinecoronahulp* is one of the funding bodies that has provided financial support for the meals project.

The funders stress that they are not specialized in supporting emergency relief: normally they do not finance short-term emergency relief projects. Yet, they wanted to be sensitive to the urgent and actual needs arising in this situation of crisis, and for this reason they joined forces in *Kleinecoronahulp* and changed their way of working:

*Because of Covid, we started a very quick procedure for new projects. This procedure aimed to act quickly, because that is really necessary in these times.*

### 4.4.2 The Needs that are Met through Funded Projects

The funders noticed that, due to Covid-19, more people were in need. They received many applications - particularly in Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague - for food projects and emergency relief for undocumented people. Especially in Amsterdam they noticed that applications regarded the combination of food aid and support of undocumented people; Treasures and Maranatha were among those applicants, although their target group was broader than just undocumented people. The funders thus observed that new groups, who normally do not ask for money, started to apply for funding. One of the representatives illustrated this with an example:

*Remarkably, groups of migrant workers who had never been in need of support, now lost their jobs in the catering or cleaning industry have become dependent on aid.*

Undocumented people who had been able to live off their earnings from jobs in the grey circuit, were the first losing their jobs and therefore relying on emergency aid. Most of them knocked on the doors of non-governmental projects. Projects such as the meals project provide help for these people who cannot afford their own food anymore. Some of them deliberately have not turned to governmental provisions such as the 'bed, bath, bread', give a sense of wariness of governmental organizations.

### 4.4.3 The Future of Smaller Meals Projects

Since everyone expected this kind of emergency relief to be necessary only for the short term in the beginning of the Covid-19 crisis, the funders were able to grant money to all eligible projects. Yet, as times went by and the pandemic lasted, it turned out that they needed to become more strict in deciding which projects would receive financial support and which ones would not. For the funders, this is not a sustainable situation due to limitations of their financial resources and the responsibilities they have for supporting other projects. Moreover, it was and is neither their expertise nor their aim to support emergency relief. With regards to the need of undocumented people, one of the representatives mentioned:

*As funders we have filled the gap, but it is absolutely essential that structural solutions are found.*

<sup>11</sup> For more information about this unique collective of more than 20 funds, see *Tussenrapportage van 6 maanden Kleine Corona Hulp*. Den Haag: Haëlla, Oktober 2020. <https://www.haella.nl/wp-content/uploads/Kleinecoronahulp-alle-tussenrapportage.pdf>. Last accessed January 14, 2021. In the time of writing more than 30 funds were involved.



Meanwhile, just like professional care organizations, they ask themselves how they can help in the best way:

*As funding bodies, we now tell food projects to pay more attention to whom they help. Some people, for example, older people whose needs are social, can pay for the food. [...] In Amsterdam, we have involved Human Aid Now, who are able to purchase foodstuffs for a very good price: we have asked them to coordinate the procurement. They do not take over all these projects, but make sure that they are provided with food. Organizing elements of the projects this way enables a more structural tackling [of the issue]. We observed that a lot of money leaked away due to inefficient purchase of food. I do understand that this can be tense for Treasures and Maranatha, because it is a different way of working.*

The funders also think about the existing structural needs that are (only) exposed by projects like the meals project. In the long term, they argue, projects need to look critically at who they are giving meals to. The projects need to ensure that they are not putting or keeping people unnecessarily in a position of dependency. Moreover, according to the funds, diaconal projects should refer people to regular social services if they are entitled to make an appeal to those services. This is partly prompted by the limited character of the financial resources of the funders and partly by their conviction that emergency help is intended for those who cannot rely on other forms of support. Therefore, the funders stress that it is important

to identify who needs food aid the most. In their opinion, people who are entitled to receive foods from the food bank should present themselves there for structural help. People who are not able to go to the food banks for help (e.g. due to the absence of the right documentation) could be a structural target group, according to the funds. People with sufficient financial means to buy food, but who are not able to prepare meals for themselves, can be asked to financially contribute to the project. A representative of one of the funds said:

*You don't have to give people a free meal when they are able to pay for it. [...] That creates dependency and an unaffordable system.*

Apart from making people dependent on help, some of the funders highlighted that there are also people who take advantage of projects like the meals project; people who are not actually in need, but who do ask for meals. However, they think that this concerns only a small number of people, and therefore they do not perceive this as a problem for the long term. The biggest problem they identify in the long term is making people unnecessarily dependent on free meals. Therefore, they argue that such forms of emergency relief need to be downscaled as soon as the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic are over.

The funders do see an additional role for the meals project to address the structural problems it exposes in Amsterdam Zuidoost. They argue that the meals project can gather information about the neighborhood and communicate this to the municipality and the Red Cross.

*In the first place, this is about making needs visible: to tell the municipality what the volunteers of the meals project have witnessed and what is needed, and to show the municipality that the meals project and its volunteers cannot solve these needs in the long term.*

#### 4.4.4 Food Packages

Haëlla, RCOAK, and Kansfonds consider the food packages that Human Aid Now provides to the meals project as a step towards meeting the need for food of people with limited financial resources. This applies in particular to those who cannot present themselves at the food bank in Amsterdam Zuidoost and contributes to meeting this need in an efficient and structured manner. These funds have not only called on Human Aid Now for this meals project, but have sought to implement the service of Human Aid Now across projects in Amsterdam at large. Furthermore, they point out that the implementation of food packages via Human Aid Now reduces the costs of the meals project. One of the interviewees explained:

*We want to help as many people as possible for as little cost as possible. Accordingly, we contacted Human Aid Now. By*



Two volunteers are composing the food packages

*applying bulk procurement, they are able to acquire a lot of food for a keen price.*

#### **4.4.5 Conclusion**

Due to the crisis, more people are in need, and the interviewed funders acknowledge that projects offering emergency relief in the form of food aid are important and necessary. For this reason, they have granted a lot of money to these emergency projects. Yet, they cannot keep on offering emergency relief on a broad scale in the long term, due to limited financial resources and because supporting emergency relief is not a core element of their mission statements. On the other hand, they recognize that projects such as this meals project may function as a point of entry to get to know the needs of the neighborhood. They encourage small projects to get in touch with each other and with the food bank, in order to cooperate with them. They also stimulate projects to share information about structural needs with, for example, the municipality or large NGOs, so that problems can be addressed in a sustainable manner. They are cautious about creating dependency on food aid: those who are not dependent on such meals projects should not be made dependent on it either. Therefore, they do not opt for a structural role for the meals project.

### **4.5 Project Leaders**

Multiple interviews were conducted with the two current project leaders of the meals project throughout the course of the fieldwork. In addition, one interview was conducted with the project leader of Maranatha. These interviews were conducted to gain a better understanding of the views of their church organizations on the project.

#### **4.5.1 The Role of the Church in the Neighborhood**

The project leaders believe that as churches they have a responsibility towards the people in Zuidoost. One of the project leaders believes that God has called his church to organize projects that feed the neighborhood. Key to these projects – as it is to the current meals project – is that providing food is a way to get in contact with people. He commented:

*We are called to be a giving church and that is why we started Soup Kitchen.*

The project leaders thus believe that their churches need to serve the neighborhood in more ways than food aid, but also to deliver social and pastoral support. The projects that Maranatha, Treasures, *Lutherse Diaconie*, and other churches who make use of *De Nieuwe Stad* had organized already before Covid-19 therefore aimed to address different target groups: children who don't have access to (healthy) food and daycare, (old) people who are lonely, people who are sick, and undocumented people. One of the project leaders argued:

*We have to live our Christian faith. You are not only a Christian on Sundays, but the whole week. [...] There are so many needs in this neighborhood, but you can only address that if you have the people and you have the money.*

However, the project leaders still want to do as much as they can. One of them identifies this as the core of a church that seeks to follow Jesus: helping others like Jesus did and thereby showing love for the other. That is how a church can be a blessing for its neighborhood.

The project leaders are very occupied with serving the neighborhood, but those who are pastors of international churches often feel unacknowledged. They argue that they know what the people in the neighborhood need, because they undertake a lot of effort to get in contact with these people. However, large NGOs, funders, and the municipality often come up with ideas for helping people that differ from the ideas of the project leaders of small projects like those in which contact with the recipients is central. One of the project leaders expressed his fear that these organizations think that church projects are not professional enough.

Maranatha, Treasures, and *Lutherse Diaconie* have the same interests in serving the neighborhood, yet, their cooperation has been reshaped since September. As we mentioned earlier, this was due to the fact that Maranatha was faced with the need of restarting its breakfast project that is serving the children in the neighborhood, so that they should not have to go to school with an empty stomach. This development is indicative of faithfulness to ongoing commitments, the many needs in the neighborhood and the strain on resources.

Accordingly, the following sections will include mainly the voices of the current project leaders of Treasures and *Lutherse Diaconie*, since it concerns reflections on the current project and its future.

#### **4.5.2 Reciprocity**

As noted, in the eyes of the project leaders the relational aspect of the meals project is very important. Through this relational dimension they are able to find a balance between providing meals in an efficient way and creating places of encounter, in which everyone's talents can be valued. One of the project leaders expressed that anyone who enters *De Nieuwe Stad* is regarded as someone who may contribute something and at the same time as someone who may ask for help. That was a strong component of the activities in *De Nieuwe Stad* before Covid-19 and this conviction is still present in the current project with regard to the role of the volunteers and in the implementation of food packages: people who are in need are offered opportunities to take on an active role by distributing the meals or by restarting to cook their own meals and thereby to explore ways to discover their own empowerment.

#### 4.5.3 Diversity

The project leaders of Treasures and *Lutherse Diaconie* recognize that there is a unique cooperation with people of different religious, institutional, and cultural backgrounds in the meals project: Christians work together with Muslims, Pentecostals work together with Lutherans and Copts, and Ghanaians work together with Dutch, for example. One of the project leaders stated that he does not want to differentiate between backgrounds, either for the recipients or for the volunteers. He expressed his view:

*Every life matters, regardless of your background. There is unity in diversity. The differences in doctrine are not an obstacle.*

The project leaders both argue that communication between the different cultural and religious groups has been challenging at times, but they have grown towards each other as a team that provides an open and welcoming space for everyone. In the practice of the meals project mutual trust and respect is grown.

#### 4.5.4 Cooperation and signaling

Notwithstanding their busy job and the turmoil of meeting the everyday challenges the project leaders succeeded in establishing and maintaining contacts with other parties, to show the urgency and importance of the meals project in the public domain, to bring the emergent and structural needs to the attention of the local government, and to discuss with other parties forms of cooperation. Remarkably often, various media (television reporters and journalists working for radio and newspapers) approached the meals project. Several meetings with local councilors and politicians have taken place. They also participated in the consultation meetings with other churches and food projects, coordinated by the local Council of Churches, and in the *Platform NietAlleen of Kerk in Actie*.

#### 4.5.5 Future and Finances

As emphasized by one of the project leaders in 4.4.1, money is needed to serve people. For the future, one of the project leaders imagines that they will implement a revenue model, in which people who can afford it will pay for the meals. In that scenario, the funds could be only an addition to the incomes that the project already generates itself. However, she does not want to make this obligatory or to start using certain criteria. She argues:

*If people ask for a meal, you cannot say no. People have to cross a threshold to ask for a meal. When they have crossed that line, there are only a few people who abuse this.*

Differences in financial means between church organizations were also mentioned by the project leaders. Until now, they have not asked the funds to cover the working hours of the project leaders. One of the project leaders pleads for more

working hours for the other project leader and possibly to add a third paid project leader. The *Lutherse Diaconie*, as a traditional church, pays its employees, but Treasures, as a relatively new international church, does not have the means to do so. There is also a different mentality regarding this topic. The project leader of Treasures argued:

*This is servanthood. We will get our reward in heaven.*

#### 4.5.6 Conclusion

The project leaders believe that they are living out their Christian faith by serving the neighborhood with this meals project. They argue that it is the calling of the church to address the needs of the community. In this, building relationships with both volunteers and recipients is essential for the character of the meals project. Thereby, they are able to nurture the reciprocity and diversity that can be found in the project. To address more needs in the neighborhood, more financial means are necessary. Furthermore, the project leaders identified different financial possibilities for the future of the project, such as a higher salary for one of the project leaders and incorporating a revenue model into the meals project. They have no thought of quitting the project, since they are convinced that they are serving the neighborhood and perceive this as an essential part of their Christian faith.



## Chapter 5

# Analysis and Reflection

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### 5.1 Introduction

The preceding chapters have presented the results of a participatory action research study with a project team of co-researchers who are actively involved in the meals project. In addition, the results of interviews we conducted with the stakeholders of the meals project have been presented, to gain an understanding of their view of the current project, the needs in Amsterdam Zuidoost, and how they may be addressed in the long term.

We have analyzed the results and subsequently identified tensions in the practice of emergency relief in times of Covid-19 in the case of the meals project. We have focused on these tensions, because they can point at areas where there is room for advancement regarding addressing the needs in Zuidoost in a sustainable way. To validate our findings, we presented the identified tensions to a sounding board of experts and asked them whether they recognized these tensions and how they would assess them. In the current chapter we will present the tensions from different positions, looking at the tensions that were found in the results of this research, and the reflections of the sounding board.

### 5.2 Whom to Help?

#### 5.2.1 Viewpoints of the Project Team and the Stakeholders

The first tension concerns the target group of the meals project. Whom does the meals project intend to reach and to include and whom not? The project team and the different stakeholders agree on the fact that there are a lot of huge and different needs – social, financial, and structural – in Amsterdam Zuidoost. They all are willing to help vulnerable people, but there are different opinions about how and whom to help (first).

The project team is deeply convinced that everyone who asks for a meal needs a meal. In their opinion, people will not ask for help if they do not need it. Therefore, they want to provide a meal to everyone who asks for it. The meals project is helping people with financial, social, and health problems, who do not receive sufficient support from the government for one reason or another, as well as a group of undocumented people. The project team does not want to set fixed formal criteria for people who wish to be enlisted as recipients. They want to be loving and welcoming to everyone who knocks on their door. In this way, they can nurture the relational approach of the project. The project team further notes that

it is already a big step for people to ask for a meal or other kinds of help; they presume that there is a barrier of shame that one needs to cross. According to the project team, mutual trust is therefore essential in the project. The people of the meals project trust that people are not abusing their service, and the people who are enlisted trust that the people of the meals project will help them in a dignified way. In their eyes, the presumption of real need is firmly based on the shame threshold and trust.

The care organizations are happy with the meals project because they are a necessary supplement to what they can offer and because the meals project is very easily accessible to them. Some of the caretakers are already doing more than what they are contracted for and the food project is a welcome relief. Some of the needs of their registered clients were directly caused by the Covid-19 crisis, but most of the needs are structural. The meals project offers a way to help these clients when the caretakers are not able to do it themselves. One representative of a care organization does think that if the meals project could identify a target group, it would be easier for the care organizations to decide whether or not to enlist their clients to this project.

The funds agree with the project team and the care organizations that food aid is urgent and sorely needed in these times. They are very well aware of the many needs in Amsterdam Zuidoost, as well as in other parts of Amsterdam and the Netherlands. Far too many people in the Netherlands live in poverty and are not able to provide (healthy) meals for themselves (and their families) on a daily basis. Because the funds have, naturally, limited financial means and need to exercise responsible stewardship, while intending to offer emergency aid, they ask for clear criteria for the recipients of aid of *Kleine coronahulp*. This also goes for the meals project. The financial resources of the funding bodies are limited, and in this way they hope to spend their money purposefully and efficiently. Because of the limited financial resources, funds sometimes need to make difficult choices about what projects they want to support. Therefore, they assess whether the projects' aims correspond with the funders' aims. The funds mainly identify the target groups of undocumented people and people who do not meet the criteria of the regular foodbanks. These are the people who are the most affected by the Covid-19 measures and should be eligible for food aid in the first place, according to the funders.

The interviews with (caretakers of) unsubscribed recipients show that the recipients are happy to receive help from

the meals project and that at least some of the recipients inform the meals project when they do not need to receive meals any longer. Furthermore, the fact that some recipients unsubscribed because they thought that they would have to start paying for and collecting the meals themselves shows that, for these recipients, it is important that the meals are free and delivered to their homes. Reasons for this can be diverse, including a lack of financial means, an avoidance of the shame of visibly collecting meals, or a physical inability to do so. It is possible that these people simply desire convenient and free meals, but this is not necessarily the case.

### 5.2.2 Reflections of the Sounding Board

As stakeholders, the members of the sounding board are very well aware of the enormous number of social needs in Zuidoost. A member of the sounding board underlined the statement of the project team that everyone who asks for a meal needs one:

*If someone in Zuidoost is asking for food, then there are no other options. You have to assume that the application is rightfully done. This situation [of Covid-19] is a long-term situation. Important employers like Schiphol [Airport] and the flower market are gone, so there is a lot of unemployment.*

To strengthen this statement, he added that many informal food banks have opened since the start of the crisis, but they all have waiting lists now.

Knowing this background of the meals project, they recognized the different viewpoints in the tension mentioned. On the one hand, they recognize the position of the funds, since they need to be accountable and have a justifiable policy on how to distribute their grants. They do not only fund this project, but many others as well. On the other hand, they understand the aspiration of the meals project to be highly accessible in order to reach as many needy people as possible, being a diaconal project. The sounding board also mentioned that for some people the threshold for asking for help from official organizations is very high, and projects like the meals project, that do not ask many questions, are much more accessible. The members of the sounding board mentioned that the consequence of this ideal may be that they will lose funding in the long term because of a different view on who should benefit from this kind of emergency aid. They also recognized that there is already some form of selection of recipients active in the meals project. There is an indirect selection, because most of the recipients of the meals are enlisted by care organizations. This means that these care organizations are already convinced that their clients are in need of the meals project, according to the sounding board. One of the members of the sounding board suggested that the care organizations can be used to give more direction about whom to give meals to, while maintaining an open attitude towards the people who ask for a meal. He suggested letting

the care organizations confirm every two months that their recipients still want to receive the meals.

### 5.2.3 Conclusion

In sum, the project team, different stakeholders and the sounding board are all convinced that there are many profound needs in Zuidoost. Emergency food aid is necessary at this moment of crisis. However, it is also acknowledged that the problems that are encountered in Zuidoost did not arise just because of Covid-19, but are more structural and complex. The emergency project touches upon these profound structural and complex needs among many people living in Zuidoost. People who were not originally meant to be included in the Covid-19 emergency food project make grateful use of the supplied meals. The tension in the meals project arises over the question of whom to help. For the volunteers who personally know the recipients through the meals project, this is a hard question.

In their view, the threshold for asking for help is already high and they emphasize the worth of the low threshold and the open and welcoming atmosphere of the meals project. They do not like to introduce fixed criteria for the recipients. However, the financial resources are limited and the needs are high. The different parties involved thus ask themselves how the help for these huge structural needs can be organized in the long term, and which stakeholders are responsible for this. This tension calls for a further dialogue between the different parties involved, for which we will provide recommendations in Chapter 7.

## 5.3 Scaling Up or Scaling Down?

### 5.3.1 Viewpoints of the Project Team and the Stakeholders

One of the aims of this research project is to explore how the transition from emergency relief to structural help may take shape. The tension we identified is that the project team, on the one hand, wants to expand the current project for a longer period of time, since it meets the manifold needs in Zuidoost. The funds, on the other hand, perceive the meals project as an emergency relief project related to the Covid-19 measures. This leads to the question of when and how the project should be scaled down.

The project team has described and evaluated the current meals project and concluded that the project meets their goals. According to them, improvements are possible, but they are limited in scope. For the long term they do not envision ways to scale down the meals project; on the contrary, they want to scale up. After all, there are many more people in Amsterdam Zuidoost who are in need of this kind of help. The project team sees the lack of financial resources as the most important obstacle to scaling up the project in the future. Furthermore, the project team identified the signaling function of the meals project as one of the unique characteristics that, in their view, should be preserved in the long term; the

meals project bridges a gap between the community and the government or care organizations. The meals project is easily accessible. Importantly, the volunteers of the project literally visit the people at their front doors. In that way they gain insight into what the needs really are and communicate these with other organizations that may be of help, according to the project team. This has already proved to be effective: the project leaders contact care organizations when they suspect the recipient is not doing well. For example, when volunteers of the meals project notice that there is a large family with financial struggles, they could contact OKT to visit that family. In that way, people in need can get in contact with the right care organization.

Both the funds and the care organizations have noticed the potential of the signaling function of the meals project for the future. They believe that signaling can and should be further developed. The fact that volunteers of the meals project visit people at their homes is helpful in identifying specific needs of recipients that are not yet known – particularly of the recipients who are not enlisted by care organizations. The cooperation of the meals project with care organizations in operation in Zuidoost could be strengthened and the signaling function could be used to its utmost. The funds argue that the meals project could communicate the needs that they signal in the neighborhood to larger NGOs such as the Red Cross, and to the local government. This helps to create awareness, so that larger NGOs and the local government can address those needs structurally.

The funds consider the food project as an emergency relief project, and therefore emphasize the need to think about downscaling or transforming the project in the future, when the stress caused by the Covid-19 measures is over. They argue that the responsibility to provide structural help is the responsibility of the local government or care organizations, rather than the responsibility of meals projects like this; recipients should make use of public social services for structural help. In the meantime, they continue to support projects helping people who cannot go for help anywhere else, like undocumented people or people who do not meet the requirements of the governmental food banks.

### **5.3.2 Reflections of the Sounding Board**

The sounding board also discussed this tension between scaling up and scaling down and the different responsibilities. The sounding board endorses the idea that the meals project should be organized in a sustainable manner that has a plan for the long term, but structural help – aid that helps people to get back on their feet – should be provided by the government. At the same time, as one of the attendees noted, the government has already excluded one group from structural help: undocumented people. They rely on these kinds of projects.

The signaling function of the meals project may be very important, according to the sounding board. One of the members of the sounding board mentioned:

*In that way, the diaconal project can have a critical voice in society: these are the urgent needs, these people fall by the wayside.*

The members of the sounding board stressed that churches and diaconal projects are highly influential in Amsterdam Zuidoost and could therefore be a useful partner for the local government. A member of the sounding board further noted that churches – and particularly church leaders – often play a larger supporting role in the community than the government. Although there are governmental social services that help people with financial issues, these are not always trusted by people in need. They do trust churches and diaconal projects, and therefore these projects gain a lot of useful information about the neighborhood that the government cannot collect. One of the attendees argued:

*It would be good if the relations between pastors and the local government could be normalized. Not as church and state, but as an appeal that it is very important to identify community leaders and to start to consult them. Especially about societal issues.*

The meals project could expand their efforts to inform the local government and larger NGOs about the needs in the neighborhood, in order to address the issues structurally. Furthermore, the meals project should invest in referring people to governmental social services that should address these issues structurally.

### **5.3.3 Conclusion**

In the preceding description of the question of whether to scale up or scale down, the many needs in Zuidoost come to the fore again. Emergency relief meets and reveals structural needs, and the project team does not yet envision ways to scale down or transform the project in the future, especially not while the Covid-19 crisis is still ongoing. The needs seen by the meals project may be just the tip of the iceberg. The meals project is discovering more and more vulnerable people who are in dire need of emergency relief. Therefore, the members of the project team want to continue the meals project and even dream of expanding it so that they can help more people. The funders emphasize the importance of exploring the possibilities of downscaling the emergency project and looking for structural solutions in the future, for example, by increasing the government's awareness of the situation in Zuidoost. The funders and the care organizations both see an important role for the meals project in their signaling function and believe that the potential of this is not yet being fully used. The sounding board group argues that good communication between the local government, governmental social services, and churches and diaconal projects like the meals project is necessary for reaching structural solutions.



## 5.4 Cooperation

### 5.4.1 Viewpoints of the Project Team and the Stakeholders

The meals project was initiated by two local churches and the *Lutherse Diaconie* and is enabled by the financial contributions of 18 different funds and faith-based organizations.

The project team is aware that these financial resources are limited and that the project will have to transform itself in the future, when Covid-19 is over. Meanwhile, the meals project is providing support to many people, including people who needed help even before the outbreak of Covid-19. Professionals of the care organizations are relieved to enlist people whom they think will be helped by the meals project. In a strict sense, these people do not meet the criteria of “lockdown related emergency aid”. The project team expressed their conviction that all these people really do need this help and that it will take a lot of time, effort, and attention to help them get on their feet again. Accordingly, their ambition is to continue the project for as long as possible, and even to extend the project. The project team also expressed their worry that the funding collective is not willing to support this project in the long term. They fear that they will not be assessed to be professional or efficient enough. Some of the project team members perceive the action of the funders in contacting Human Aid Now to purchase food packages as a sign of an assumed critical attitude of the funding collective. They are concerned that important aspects such as sharing love, fighting loneliness, and building bridges between people from different layers of society will become secondary when the focus turns to the delivering of food only. In order not to be dependent on the vision of funds, the project leaders and project team are searching for ways to be more financially stable. They envision organizing a crowdfunding action or implementing a revenue model in the meals project, for example.

A representative of the funds underscores that the help they offer in the Covid-19 crisis via financial contributions and Human Aid Now is emergency aid, with a special focus on undocumented people, migrant workers and people that fall through the cracks because they do not meet the criteria of the regular food banks. The funds do not want to establish forms of support that make people dependent. Emergency projects should be scaled down when the pressure of the Covid-19 pandemic is over. They initially thought their supporting activities would last for three months. At the time of writing, they have already prolonged their activities to March 2021. They are aware that the initiatives of Treasures and Maranatha revealed the needs of people that had not been in the picture before. This representative reports that all the funds pose themselves the question of what to do if the need for food and other support turns out to be structural. Then it will no longer be emergency aid. Their suggestion is that the local government and governmental organizations should take up their responsibilities. Funds cannot afford to

support structural support on this large scale by themselves. They are in contact about these issues with the local administration and with organizations like the Red Cross. They recommended that small initiatives, like the meals project, should reach out to each other and to the regular food banks in order to collectively report the signs of the existing needs to the local government. That is the appropriate way to achieve structural change.

The decision to purchase food packages via Human Aid Now was meant to improve the efficiency of this and other projects in Amsterdam: in this way more people can be helped at less cost. The care organizations welcome the meals project as a useful complement to the care they deliver. They also suggest that the meals project should be part of the cooperative chain of care in Amsterdam Zuidoost. Volunteers of the meals project could also inform the care professionals if a situation is deteriorating. Unverified assumptions and diverging expectations of the parties involved seem to hinder the commonly shared urgency to collectively address the signals of structural needs at the local government level.

### 5.4.2 Reflections of the Sounding Board

The sounding board acknowledged that more cooperation with larger organizations is needed. This requires an adequate infrastructure and trust among the diverse stakeholders, including the local government(s). This still needs to be strengthened in the case of the meals project. One of the members of the sounding board indicated that there seems to be a lack of trust among organizations, local government, and churches, a phenomenon that is also seen in other places. Churches or diaconal projects do not always trust that the information they provide about the neighborhood to the local government will be handled carefully, according to the sounding board. The same counts for referring people to governmental social services. At this moment, trust is fragile: church leaders are often unacknowledged by the local government and large NGOs in their role as gatekeepers of the community – people who know what is needed in the neighborhood.

Furthermore, the members of the sounding board acknowledged that, on the one hand, it is important that diaconal projects have ownership of their own project. In this case, the implementation of food packages via Human Aid Now can indeed seem like a sign of distrust of the vision of the meals project to determine whom to help and how. On the other hand, the sounding board finds it understandable that funders want to know how their money is used. One sounding board member explained that it is too often not clear to funders how projects spend their money, based on written reports. The sounding board advises the meals project to invite representatives of funds to visit the project so they can better understand what the project is about. This has proven to be valuable in other projects.

### 5.4.3 Conclusion

An important condition for the future of the meals project and for paving the way to collectively present structural needs to the government lies in closer cooperation between government, care organizations, social service organizations, diaconal organizations and projects, and funds. It can also be concluded that there is room for intensifying the communication between the meals project and larger organizations like the municipality, care organizations and funds, in order to facilitate the clarification of implicit assumptions and to appreciate each other's distinct expectations and ambitions.

The role that church leaders play in Amsterdam Zuidoost is very large and they are regarded (and are to be regarded) as experts in the needs of their neighborhood. They are also the ones who are trusted by the people of the community when official organizations are sometimes not. Assuming the assessment of the sounding board to be correct, church leaders are not always trusted by official organizations as important informants about the community. At the same time, churches often do not trust the intentions of official organizations.

## 5.5 How to Reduce Dependency and Promote Empowerment?

### 5.5.1 Viewpoints of the Project Team and the Funds

One of the aims of the present research project is to see how the meals project can be transformed from emergency aid into a project that can help people to become less dependent and to get them on their feet again. Therefore, one of the questions spoken about with the project team was: how can the recipients be empowered? As concluded earlier, it was difficult for the project team to come up with ideas for how to do this. The tension identified is the question of whether this aim of the research was realistic and timely.

In the first meetings with the project team, one topic was making recipients of the meals "less dependent". Many members of the project team did not like this term, out of the conviction that the meals project does not cause or maintain people's dependence: they already are dependent. The project team preferred to think about how to empower recipients. This is, according to them, a more positive approach, which aims to see the strengths of the recipients as well. It fits the ideals of the project team to see everyone as a worthy person who is able to add something to the whole. They have not yet presented plans on how this value is to be given form in practice. They point to the fact that there are still many people who need this meals project. Thinking about ways to empower recipients thus turned out not to be the first priority of the project team. Furthermore, they think that there are a lot of people who are in such desperate situations that they are not able at present to take on an active role in the meals project as a way to empower themselves. The project team, however, pointed out that some form of empowerment is going on,

especially in the personal exchange between deliverer and recipient. The meals project is empowering people other than the recipients because many of the volunteers were (or still are) people in difficult situations due to financial insecurity, unemployment, dissatisfaction with their job, or being asylum seekers.

As mentioned before, the care organizations recognize that there are so many needs in Zuidoost that they cannot provide help for everybody. They affirm that there were already many people in Zuidoost dependent on the help of others before the Covid-19 pandemic. The funds also are fully aware of the scope of the needs in Zuidoost and they emphasize the importance of structural solutions. They expressed their concern that providing free pre-cooked meals to recipients who are able to cook or pay for their meals themselves runs the risk of creating or maintaining dependency. Furthermore, they think that emergency aid programs should be temporary in character and thus there must be some perspective on transforming or terminating this kind of project in the foreseeable future.

### 5.5.2 Reflections of the Sounding Board

As previously noted, the sounding board acknowledges that the meals project encountered the structural needs in Zuidoost. Attendees of the sounding board recognize that these needs are so huge and complex that structural solutions cannot be found easily. In the meantime, it is important to empower receivers of help where possible. The meals project does not have to reinvent the wheel itself in this matter. One of the attendees proposed that projects like the meals project could make use of the expertise of other organizations when it comes to empowerment. Some organizations are focused on empowering people by helping them to do voluntary work and to create a social network. They identify what skills people have, and how they can use them in projects in the neighborhood. In this way, projects like the meals project do not have to do everything themselves, but they could refer those recipients who want to take on an active role in the neighborhood to other organizations as a means to empower the recipients. Finally, some members of the sounding board underscored the fact that the meals project facilitates a special kind of empowerment and social inclusion by bringing very different social groups into contact with each other.

### 5.5.3 Conclusion

The wish to empower people is shared by all parties involved. However, this is not easily done. The meals project – as an emergency relief project – encountered structural needs that were already present in Zuidoost before the Covid-19 crisis and were revealed by the pandemic. The many needs in the neighborhood put intense pressure on projects like the meals project and the care organizations.

Different kinds of logic are used concerning the portrayed ideas about the empowerment of recipients. The project team believes that the structural needs are extremely complex, so the question of how to empower vulnerable people cannot

yet be answered. As an emergency relief project, they perceive that there is more emergency relief necessary for the needs that have existed in Zuidoost for a long time and for which no easy solution can be found. Another type of logic is used by the funds: emergency relief can create dependency and can therewith maintain injustices, which must be avoided. A third type of logic is added by the care organizations: the official organizations are overloaded and do not have the capacity to sustainably address the needs in Zuidoost. They welcome the meals project as a useful addition to the chain of care. Finally, the sounding board suggests learning from and cooperating with existing initiatives specialized in empowering people in socially vulnerable situations.

## 5.6 Workload and Room for Reflection

### 5.6.1 Viewpoints of the Project Team and the Project Leaders

The last two areas of tension are internal to the meals project itself. The first is about the workload within the project.

Since the project started, the project team has discovered more and more needs in Zuidoost and they do not expect these to decrease in the foreseeable future. Because of the huge scale of the needs the volunteers and the project leaders invest a lot of time in taking care of the practical parts of the project. They perform this work with passion and willingness. Little time is left to reflect on the project itself. They understand that their own financial resources and the resources of the funds are limited, but they also feel a great responsibility not to abandon the people of Zuidoost that are in need. The project team is aware of the tension this creates in the project. One of the project leaders herself mentioned:

*I am always busy with the lists every week and the short-term, so I do not feel any space to think about the long term. I've got the idea that the whole idea of growing as a project falls on my shoulders, but I don't know how this could be realized, so nothing really happens.*

This project leader therefore thinks that more human capacity is needed to be able to help (more) people who need it. Furthermore, she believes that one of the project leaders should be assisted to make space and time for reflection about the goals of the meals project and its future form.

### 5.6.2 Reflections of the Sounding Board

The sounding board recognized this tension as inherent to new initiatives: in many such initiatives there is a lot of energy in the beginning, but when the needs keep on growing, it's hard to keep on going. They also recognize the described pattern, that a lot of work comes down to the person(s) who initiated the project. After the pioneer phase, project leaders need to be given or create room to reflect about the project, taking a long-term perspective. The sounding board came up with suggestions of having a leadership team or a group of people around this project to think with them about the long term:

*With a project like this you hope for a kind of an "advisory board" of people with experience in the domains of diaconate or undocumented people who can regularly think along with the project leaders and look at the long term.*

### 5.6.3 Conclusion

There is a tension within the meals project created by the increasing requests for help, the deeply felt responsibility to help others and the actual availability of human and financial resources. A lot of the workload rests on the shoulders of the project leader. It does not seem realistic to expect that the volunteer team members will take the initiative in tackling the long-term issues of the project.

## 5.7 The Importance of the Meals Project for the Volunteers

### 5.7.1 Viewpoints of the Project Team

As mentioned earlier in the report, the meals project is particularly significant and meaningful to the project volunteers, for various reasons. First, the volunteers appreciate the relational aspect of the project. The project team expressed once again that they would like to hear the feedback of the recipients and to get in contact with them. The volunteers therefore stand very close to the recipients and their needs. Second, the project team experiences their participation in the project as meaningful: they feel they are part of a family of volunteers of the meals project, they have a meaningful job to do, and the project provides the possibility of living out their faith and expressing love for their fellow human beings. Sharing love is one of the key motivational



*A note that one of the meal delivery drivers attached to the meal. "You do not deliver a meal without a greeting or a blessing."*



aspects for the members of the project team to become involved in the meals project. In addition, many volunteers were (or still are) in socially vulnerable positions themselves and the project gives them the opportunity to use their skills to help others and to receive some financial consideration. The importance of the project for the volunteers may lead to an internal tension: how much room does this involvement leave for critical reflection on their own project, being an emergency aid project, including questions about its transformation and termination?

### 5.7.2 Reflections of the Sounding Board

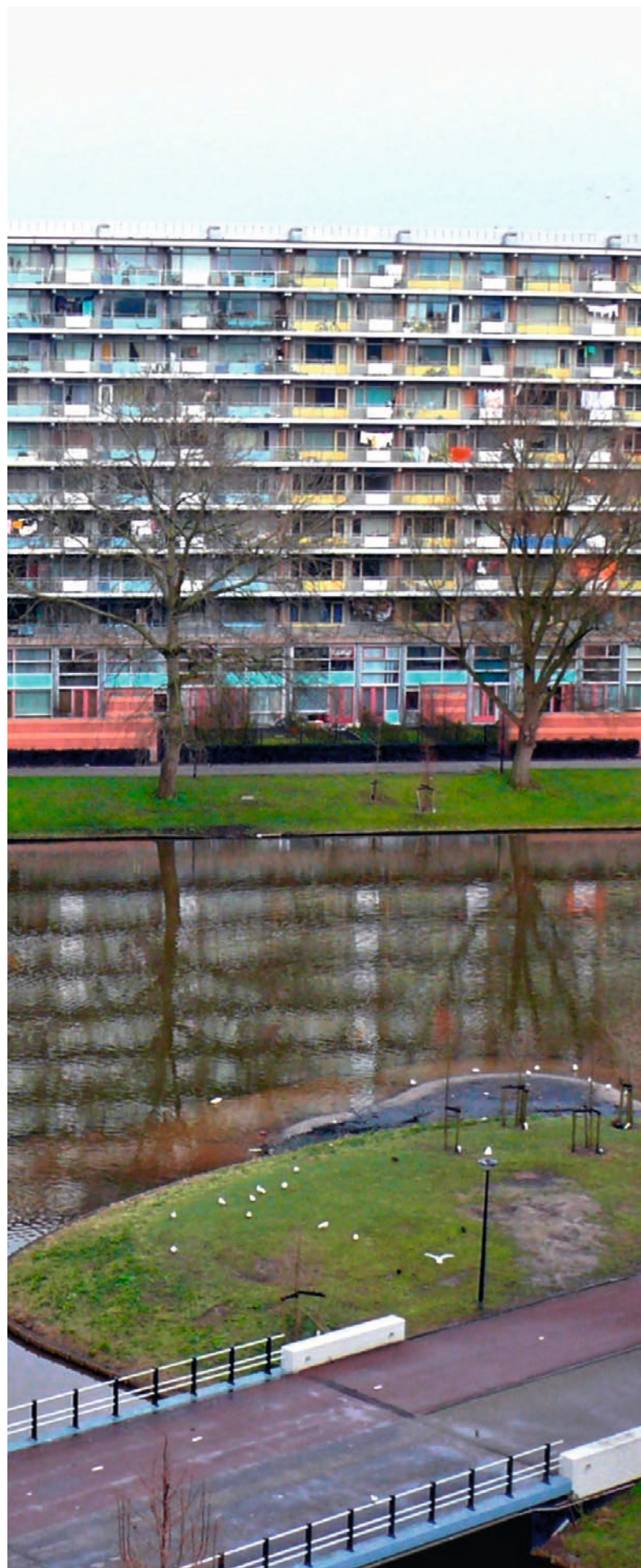
The sounding board recognized that such projects can mean a lot to the volunteers involved. One of the members of the sounding board said:

*The motivation comes from being moved by your fellow human being and from there you want to act. As churches it brings you close to your diaconal heart. It suddenly is not about helping people in another country, but it becomes very concrete again: the need is around the corner.*

Attendees of the sounding board argued that it is indeed important to consider if the importance of the project for the volunteers themselves makes it difficult to think about how the project might be transformed. However, because of the many needs in Zuidoost it is unlikely that the project exists only for the benefit of the volunteers themselves.

### 5.7.3 Conclusion

The importance of the project for its volunteers is an aspect of added value of the meals project. The volunteers are themselves empowered by the project. Furthermore, their emphasis on the relational aspect of the project ensures that they know the recipients and their needs very well. Their involvement may also be a barrier to looking critically at their own project, when so much is at stake for them. The suggestion of the sounding board to add an advisory board to the project may be helpful in managing this tension as well.



## Chapter 6

# Diaconal Reflection

After a brief introduction to diaconia, its key values and its principles (6.1), this chapter describes eight typical and recurring issues inherent in diaconal practices, and considers the identified tensions presented in Chapter 5 from the perspective of these recurring issues (6.2). The aim of a diaconal reflection is to gain a better understanding and valuation of these tensions: are they inherent in regular diaconal practice, or characteristic of this specific project, or is something else at stake? Looking deeper into tensions helps in discovering where boundaries may be pushed and where new knowledge may arise. We hope these comments will stimulate all stakeholders involved in the meals project and other interested readers to reflect on this studied case as well as on the implications for other diaconal projects.

The overall aim of this practical theological research project is to learn lessons from this actual project in exceptional circumstances for the broader field of diaconal practices. We realize that reflecting on the identified tensions from only a diaconal perspective implies a narrowing of scope: relevant insights from other perspectives (e.g., governmental practices or practices of professional care) are not taken into account. We trust that these diaconal reflections can nevertheless form the start of a useful dialogue between the representatives of the different practices.

### 6.1 Diaconia

Diaconal projects are being performed in light of the expectation of a new world of peace and justice coming.<sup>12</sup> This peace and justice sometimes becomes visible in the present time. Participants of diaconal practices hope and pray that they may be instruments of this coming peace. This cherished hope of the coming of peace between all humans, in all their diversity, entails that diaconal projects focus on maintaining, creating, or restoring equal and meaningful relationships. This relational dimension is an essential characteristic of diaconal practices.

#### 6.1.1 Key values of Diaconia in the Context of Dutch society

In the Netherlands, the theological discourse on diaconia takes three core values as its point of departure: charity, justice and community/reconciliation.<sup>13</sup> Charity can be interpreted as loving concern for people in need, resulting in concrete supporting activities (e.g., emergency help in the form of giving food to the hungry and shelter to the homeless). Charity is described as something valuable, but it is also critically discussed. When people are dependent on charity over too long a period, this will likely undermine their personal dignity. The abundant presence of charity could be an indicator of existing unjust social relationships that are sometimes deeply rooted in society. Emergency aid, inspired by charity, almost inevitably reveals unjust structures that ask (or cry) for structural measures.

As too much charity can easily contribute to maintaining unjust social structures, charity should always be accompanied by efforts to create or restore justice and to improve just societal relationships. Contributing to structural justice is a second diaconal key value. Usually, churches and diaconal organizations do not have the power to realize changes of a structural kind on their own. Hence, churches and diaconal organizations bring the structural need to the attention of governments and administrative organizations, insisting that these forms of societal injustice are transformed into just relationships, in order to reduce the risk of individuals and groups becoming unemployed, poor, hungry, and so on. In the last few decades, this approach has become known as “helping under protest”.<sup>14</sup>

Reconciled community, being the third key value, entails that diaconia should neither be restricted to the merciful alleviating of immediate needs, nor promoting just societal relationships and supporting the empowerment of people.<sup>15</sup> This value points out that diaconal activities derive their significance from

12 ‘Diaconia’ or ‘diaconate’ refers to the practice of churches and individuals, organizations, and other groups inspired by the Gospel, to be present for and with individuals and groups in need, by preventing, ending, diminishing, and/or enduring their suffering, and to create more just societal structures. See: Hub Crijns, Wiele Elhorst, Ploni Robbers-van Berkel, Lützen Miedema, Herman Noordegraaf, Sake Stoppels, and Herman van Well (eds.), *Barmhartigheid en gerechtigheid. Handboek diaconiewetenschap* (Kampen: Kok, 2004), 13. 392 (text translated from the Dutch).

13 Op. cit.

14 Eurich, J. (2020). The church and diaconia as local partners in the social space: Challenges and opportunities. *HTS Theologische Studies / Theological Studies*, 76(2). <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v76i2.6085>. See also Crijns, H., Hogema, E., Miedema, L., Noordegraaf, H., Robbers-van Berkel, P., van Well, H., Hoekstra, T., Wissink, J., & Arts-Honselaar, H. (eds.). (2018). *Diaconaal doen doordacht. Handboek diaconiewetenschap*. (Utrecht: Kok 2018. Part III ‘Reflecties over diaconaal zijn en handelen’, p. 193-255.

15 The value of community is also referred to with notions such as “reconciliation”, “belonging”, or “inclusion”. See, for “reconciliation” and “community”: Hub Crijns, Ellen Hogema, Lützen Miedema, Herman Noordegraaf, Ploni Robbers-van Berkel, Herman van Well, and Jozef Wisselink (eds.), *Diaconie in beweging. Handboek diaconiewetenschap* (Utrecht: Kok, 2011), p. 31-42. Cf. Carlos Emilio Ham, *Empowering Diakonia. A Model for Service and Transformation in the Ecumenical Movement and Local Congregations* (Amsterdam: Vrije Universiteit, 2015).

the perspective of a peaceful co-existence of all people, and are geared towards a world in which the dignity of all people is acknowledged. Community thus most clearly emphasizes the “relational dimension” of the diaconal practice. This implies that diaconal practices should embrace – or perhaps even actively seek – cooperation with people and organizations working on the basis of a compatible mission and sharing a matching approach.

### 6.1.2 Principles of Diaconia

To characterize the (ideal) typical diaconal approach, the following style features are often mentioned.

1. An attitude of solidarity. Diaconal workers and volunteers do not stand above or opposite the people in need; they stand beside the people with and for whom they work. Solidarity is important, because every person is a creature of God, and therefore valuable.
2. A focus on equality, reciprocity and empowerment. Unequal power relations, created by differences in possessions, knowledge, or social status, are inevitable in diaconal practices. Therefore, continuing reflection on power balances is essential in diaconal practice. This means that in every diaconal project or case one should be alert to possibilities for role reversals: everybody who is receiving, has something to give, and everyone who is helping must be prepared to receive something. A focus on equality and reciprocity is a reminder that all people in diaconal practices are equal, and that terms like “helpers” or “recipients” may easily blur this fundamental principle and reinstate the very relationships of dependence that diaconia seeks to overcome. Hence, in diaconal practice there is no room for ulterior motives like social discipline or religious evangelization.
3. An altruistic working mode, based on trust. Diaconal practices are in essence concerned about the welfare of others and take trust as a starting point. That does not imply that no boundaries should be demarcated or that no criteria can be set. In cases of violence or abuse of facilities, for example, a line must be drawn. Setting criteria that indicate the amount and duration of support is often indispensable. Here too, specifying boundaries continually calls for critical reflection on the relationship between establishing criteria, on the one hand, and diaconal core values like accessibility and hospitality, and so on, on the other hand.

## 6.2 Typical and Recurring Diaconal Issues

Extant literature in diaconal studies has identified a number of typical and recurring issues inherent in diaconal practices.<sup>16</sup> We present here eight issues and consider the tensions that were

identified in the research and presented in Chapter 5 from the perspective of these recurring issues.

### 6.2.1 Immediate Needs Reveal Structural Needs

Every organization involved in emergency aid inevitably encounters structural needs. This is natural, as immediate needs and structural needs (that are always bigger and more stubborn than what emergency aid aims to relieve) are closely related and often intertwined. This can be called the “revealing function” of diaconia. Enduring the tension between identifying structural needs and being able to offer only limited support is an issue that deserves constant attention. Offering emergency relief in cases of urgent need is a just practice, yet reflections on how a diaconal project will develop in the future, and when or how it will be brought to an end, are crucial and should be part of the project from the outset.

The meals project in Amsterdam Zuidoost seems to be a classic example of the dynamics between emergency relief and structural needs. All parties involved in the project indicated that they were aware of the presence and size of structural social needs in the area. The project has further increased the insight into these needs. In the meals project, this tension returns in the discussion on supply and demand: the project grows and the question of the capacity of the project, both in terms of volunteers and money, is on the agenda. The meals project has the potential to grow into a structural amenity, yet it was not intended as such at the start of the delivery service in March 2020. Members of the project team are aware of the necessity to think carefully about the future of the project and have already started this process during the action research study. The sounding board’s suggestion of adding an advisory board to the project is in line with the “diaconal wisdom” to reflect on the development of a project from its inception.

### 6.2.2 A Practice of Volunteers

Diaconal professionals in the field and professional diaconal organizations, on grounds of principle, cooperate with very high numbers of volunteers. These volunteers by no means all hold Christian worldviews, but nearly always are driven by high ideals such as neighborly love, presence, compassion, mercy, proximity, justice, and respect for each and every human being, which is the driving force of every diaconal practice. Often, the downside of these high ideals is equally high ambitions, desires, and hopes, which leads to identifying, and wishing to address, more needs than a project can support. Bearing the tension of morally and religiously driven ambitions and the unruly reality that comes with offering support is often an issue in diaconal practices. The fact that many volunteers are involved often also leads these volunteers to being close to people who receive aid, often both physically and culturally. This is often considered a powerful element of diaconal practices: standing beside people builds trust. For many volunteers, their involvement in a diaconal practice is an embodiment of their (religious or secular) faith or the ideals they live by. They will not impose their convictions on

<sup>16</sup> Op. cit. Cf. Stephanie Dietrich, Knud Jørgensen, Kari K. Korslien, & Kjell Nordstokke (eds.). *Diaconia as Christian social practice. An introduction.* (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2014).



others, but they are allowed to be open about the reason for their commitment. Careful attention to faith as a motivation of volunteers, the worldviews of beneficiaries, and respect for the worldviews of all people involved is an important dimension of diaconal practice.

In light of this, the meals project appears as a classical diaconal practice: the number of volunteers, their fervor and ambition, the close contact with the people concerned, including the fact that this is of great value, and the tension of wanting to do more than possible. Also, quite a number of volunteers relate their work to their religious faith (whether Christian or otherwise), which inspires them to be involved.

### **6.2.3 The Perspectives of the People Concerned**

For any diaconal practice, the perspectives of the people concerned are crucial: who are they, what gives them dignity, what does it mean to them that life is the way it is, that it hurts and needs to change? To keep this perspective is tough, because problems, labels and stigmas easily tempt aid workers to regard the people concerned as objects of charity. This may hinder the flourishing of respectful human contact. For each diaconal practice and project, it remains important to listen to the voices of the people concerned and to do them justice, in order to speak with, rather than speak about, them. This underlines the importance of finding opportunities to meet and connect, particularly as this is one of the angles that can easily get overlooked.

One of the aims of the action research study – and one consistent with this diaconal principle – was to get in touch with those who received the meals, in order to listen to their voices: why did they need these meals and what would help them in terms of support to put the situation of dependency behind them? In difficult times, the project team made the effort to realize this contact with the people concerned, since the team highly values this contact: it emphasizes the human dignity of every person. A change of perspective remained difficult: the feedback of recipients to those who provided the meals was all they got. The sounding board made the suggestion of (at some point) contacting voluntary organizations in order to learn from and cooperate with those specialized in empowering people in socially vulnerable situations. This connects with this typical and recurring diaconal issue.

### **6.2.4 Connection to the Church Community**

Diaconal practices are sometimes called “the eyes and ears of the church”. (Too) many churches and people involved in church life have little knowledge of the needs that exist in society. Those involved in diaconal practices do have this knowledge, from first-hand experiences, and they often want to bring these needs to the attention of churches. To their own frustration, they seldom obtain a hearing for their message. As a result, and all too often, diaconal practices become a specialty of those who have (developed) a diaconal sensitivity.

The meals project distinguishes itself by a close connection to local churches firmly rooted in Amsterdam Zuidoost. It is also connected to other diaconal food projects of these churches. The research results do not reveal to what extent this meals project really is an integral part of the practices of these congregations, nor do we know anything about the lack of awareness of social needs in these communities. Yet, some comments made by the project leaders and the sounding board do suggest that this faith-based initiative is indeed closely connected with and strongly supported by local churches in Amsterdam Zuidoost. Frustrations about a lack of support of church communities have been expressed by no-one. Seen from a diaconal perspective this is valuable.

### **6.2.5 Raising Issues of Structural Needs or Societal Injustice**

Participants in diaconal practices also feel prompted to bring the needs they have seen from close-by to the attention of governments, policymakers and the media, whilst urging them to address these needs. They often lack the right channels and don't always find listeners willing to pick up on their signals. This can add to feelings of frustration and being alone in this. Cooperating and joining forces with others, especially regarding the matter of raising issues of structural needs or societal injustice, is therefore of the utmost importance. However, this is by no means common practice.

The research on the meals project has shown that emergency relief is entangled with structural needs. It has made clear that the project team keeps in regular contact with the local municipality and care organizations to bring the structural needs to the attention of those parties. It turns out that all stakeholders involved were very well aware of the character and size of the structural social needs in Amsterdam Zuidoost. This has not been caused by Covid-19 but has existed for a long time; this applies both to the meals project as well as to Maranatha's breakfast project that predates the meals project. An important question is how the signals are taken up by the responsible parties, such as the government and governmental organizations. The research did not provide information on this topic. Neither can we draw conclusions about the way the consultation with other churches and food projects resulted in issuing alerts to the government.

### **6.2.6 Sensitivity and Diplomacy**

Drawing attention to needs requires prudence and diplomacy. Not every observation can (simply) be shared with others or be made public. Drawing attention to the position of people in a socially vulnerable position, such as so-called undocumented people, people seeking reintegration after a time of incarceration, or those who have gotten into trouble by their own hand, can have an adverse impact. Not everyone who participates in diaconal practices wishes to see their “problems” be known to others, for several reasons, and shame is not the least of these. A lot of diaconal work is therefore discreet and takes place under the radar, also in

order to be able to stay trustworthy to the people concerned. Discretion and trust go hand in hand. How to facilitate transformation for people in a vulnerable situation without lording it over them – by, for instance, voicing criticism in an insensitive manner, instead of doing so in a trustworthy and credible manner – is for churches and diaconal organizations to consider in each situation.

Members of the project team and other volunteers involved in this meals project are deeply concerned with the wellbeing of those to whom they deliver meals and food packages. They explicitly mentioned that they felt trusted by (most of) these people, and that they would hate to betray this trust. This makes them reluctant to employ criteria: they take the line that “Everyone who asks is in need”. This generosity characterizes diaconal projects. It is necessary for all those involved in this diaconal practice – the project team as well as other stakeholders, such as care organizations that refer the persons concerned and the funds that provide financial support – to have a tactful conversation about the fact that resources are limited. This conversation requires subtlety on the part of all stakeholders, and will be most fruitful if the trust of the persons concerned in the diaconal practice is carefully factored in. After all, besides the shared objective to provide emergency aid in this urgent situation of need, every party involved has its own, specific interest, whether it be continuation of the projects, dealing responsibly with the allocation of funds, a diaconal presence in Amsterdam Zuidoost or being faithful to those in vulnerable positions who have been involved. Has this dialogue already started and, if not, who takes the initiative: the initiators of the project, the project team, the church communities related to the meals project or the supporting funds?

### **6.2.7 Cooperation in the Chain of Social Welfare and Healthcare**

Although it may seem obvious for diaconal organizations and diaconal projects to join the collaborations that exists in the formal chain of social welfare and healthcare, they are often reluctant to enter into such collaborations. The logic of legal contracts in professional care (the so-called “rights discourse”) does not run parallel to the logic of diaconal practice (a discourse of care) that wants to offer help and support using an altruistic working mode based on trust. It would be inappropriate to disqualify either of these types of logic. Yet it is worth emphasizing that the formal approach of the healthcare system and of services in the context of the Social Support Act (*Wet Maatschappelijke Ondersteuning*), including its complex digital procedures, is in fact the reason why the people concerned do not make use of them. This is one of the reasons why these people end up with diaconal organizations and projects. This partly explains the frequent reluctance of diaconal organizations to comply with the appeal to join the formal chain of social welfare and healthcare. When applying for/acquiring state aid or financial support of funds that make a considerable part of their diaconal work

financially possible, diaconal organizations critically consider the use of specific criteria such as registration requirements or revenue obligations. Diaconal practices highly value autonomy, ownership and responsibility on their own terms, in order to preserve the diaconal identity.

These dynamics are reflected in the meals project. The project team has asked itself whether all those who receive their meals really need these meals, or if it would be possible for these people to receive meals through other or their own channels. Their conclusion was that people do not easily ask for meals: when they ask, they have already crossed a threshold. Care professionals indicated that they had identified the need for meals among those whom they refer to the meals project. Offering meals to those who ask for meals, trusting that these people indeed need these meals and taking for granted the risk that some people take advantage of this working mode, is a response to the logic of diaconal practice. The project team has pointed to the possibility that some of those who receive meals are wary of formal aid. This ties in with the diverging types of logic described above. Resistance to employing criteria to establish who should and should not receive meals also seems to occur in the project team. In their view, making contact with the people concerned to discover what it means to them to receive these meals (including the aspect of contact that comes with receiving them) and to find out how, in due time, they could provide themselves with their basic needs, is a better alternative. This too fits the diaconal working style. Thinking about the future of the project, the option of restricting the supply of meals to those who do not meet the criteria of existing care facilities has not been further explored. This is at odds with the fact that the project team is well aware that financial support for the project in the long run is limited. For this emergency relief project – that appears to be relevant to a target group bigger and wider than initially intended – to get the future straight, an ongoing conversation with all stakeholders involved is essential. This was also put forward by the sounding board.

### **6.2.8 Beware of Filling the Gaps**

The critical attitude of diaconal organizations and projects towards collaborations in the chain of care does not arise only from diverging types of logic, but also from the opinion that they do not want to step into the gaps created by society. Diaconal practices help those who have no helper, yet they want situations to develop in such a way that their help is no longer necessary. Their critical view is unique, yet does not always further good communication with other players in the fields of social welfare and healthcare. Investing in and establishing good lines of communication, with respect for the uniqueness of the perspective and corresponding logic and responsibilities of each party, is something that is much needed.

In the meals project, the care organizations consider the possibility of registering their clients for the meals project as a valuable addition to their own care services. They are





unreservedly happy with this possibility and acknowledge the added value of the contact between “their” clients and the volunteers in the meals project, which allows the former to alert the latter in case of emergencies. Although this looks like a win-win at first sight, in so doing the meals project takes on a responsibility that belongs to another stakeholder. This does not rule out collaboration, but it should be clear that the meals project meets a demand that other parties eventually should take over. In light of the need for justice, continuing silently is not advisable.

### 6.3 Conclusion

From a diaconal point of view, the meals project arises as a fully-fledged diaconal project. Almost all the features of diaconal practice show up in this project. The tension in the

project, that clearly should not be evaluated negatively as they are inherent in emergency relief projects, on the one hand originates from the engagement and passion of the project team and its volunteers, who are invested with the people concerned, the structural need that the project reveals, the resistance against setting up and employing eligibility criteria, and the intention and efforts not to disgrace those who receive meals. On the other hand, the tension in the project follows from a (future) lack of resources, lack of space for reflection on the future of the project and, as yet, the absence of a regular and ongoing dialogue with all stakeholders involved, concerning the needs the project touches upon.

Conclusions and recommendations to be drawn on the basis of this reflection, for the meals project as a whole, are presented in the next chapter.



## Chapter 7

# Conclusions, Recommendations, and Perspectives for Further Research

In this concluding chapter, we summarize the results of the meals project, present the answers to the research question, and offer some practical recommendations regarding the meals project. Thereafter, we draw together a number of perspectives for further research, seeing the current situation – at the end of this research report and while the meals project is ongoing – as a unique opportunity for researching the need in Amsterdam Zuidoost even more thoroughly.

### 7.1 The Results of the Meals Project

Shortly after the lockdown in March 2020, the meals project moved fast and has thus been able to offer emergency relief to a significant number of people who had started to experience difficulties due to Covid-19. Their initiative has been enabled by 18 funds and faith-based organizations, a result of them taking action quickly and effectively in order to be able to financially support small initiatives offering emergency relief. The meals project is an impressive and admirable result of all the stakeholders joining forces in times of crisis.

Although it is not usual to talk about ‘the return on investment’ of diaconal projects, we have observed that the investment of time and money of the diaconal work of local churches, in cooperation with local care organizations and supported by funds, has led to significant results at four layers:

1. people receive food aid who would lack food otherwise;
2. people involved are empowered and lead more meaningful lives;
3. structural need and injustice become visible;
4. the unique role of churches, the importance of their social capital and network of relationships in Amsterdam Zuidoost, becomes apparent.

These results were achieved thanks to the cooperation of the parties involved.

### 7.2 Answering the Research Question

Having summarized these results, we answer the research question addressed, that reads:

*How does the meals project of Treasures and Lutherse Diaconie expose structural needs in Amsterdam Zuidoost, and how can these needs be addressed in a sustainable manner?*

#### 7.2.1 How Does the Meals Project Expose Structural Needs?

The meals project started as a hands-on emergency relief project that aimed to provide food for people who were

affected by the Covid-19 measures. Initiated as an emergency aid project – supported by 18 funds and faith-based organizations, and with the help of Human Aid Now – the meals project transformed throughout the months into a project beneficial to many people who did not strictly meet the criteria of “urgent need caused by the Covid-19 measures”, but who had already been in a socially vulnerable position before the pandemic. Thus, the meals project has not only alleviated urgent needs, but has also revealed the many existing needs in Amsterdam Zuidoost. Although this finding may not be a surprise, even the members of the project team, who are familiar with the social conditions in Amsterdam Zuidoost, were shocked to meet so many people living in poverty and other adverse conditions.

We assume that the individual approach, combined with the accessibility of the meals project, explains why the meals project reveals so many needs of people who were not in the picture before: people with limited financial resources, lonely people, people who lack a social network, people with physical and/or mental illnesses, people with little trust in the government – or with little knowledge about or trust in regular social services – migrant workers, and undocumented people. Although our research does not provide hard evidence for this claim, we presume that a lot of people, living in these socially and economically vulnerable positions, were the first to experience the impact of the Covid-19 crisis. These



*One of the cooks preparing ravioli in her home kitchen*

people found their way to the meals project and most likely will continue to call on projects like it, simply because their needs are structural, entrenched and therefore not easily solved. This corresponds with the research reports referred to in the introduction, the statements of the representatives of the different stakeholders, as well as the comments of the members of the sounding board.

### **7.2.2 How can These Structural Needs be Addressed in a Sustainable Manner?**

The meals project, being an emergency aid project, has revealed structural needs. The meals and food packages reached people who were already in vulnerable positions, only worsened or intensified by the Covid-19 crisis. According to the members of the project team, all those who asked for help actually needed the meals or food packages. Although not all of these people qualify to receive help from existing regular services, the project team nonetheless considers the help necessary. During the research period they were asked and stimulated to envision ways to empower the people receiving the meals and food packages, so that they would not remain dependent on these services for too long. In the eyes of the project team this aim simply seems to be too high. They stressed that being there for these people embodied their respect for them as human beings. They valued the courage of the recipients of the food, because in their eyes many of them had to overcome shame before asking for help. Getting in contact is the first step in acknowledging the dignity of the people concerned. So their main goal was to continue the project, and maybe even to expand it. In this way they are able to alleviate the needs, to invest in trust and dignity. According to them, these are the conditions for empowerment.

All the other stakeholders clearly stated that these structural needs require an integral and long-term approach in which the local government, being primarily responsible, should take the lead. This is affirmed by the members of the sounding board. As the politician said in the sounding board meeting, ideally food banks would not exist and the social care provided by the government should be enough. Bundling the signals of the perceived needs, analyzing the specific characteristics of the needs and the barriers people in need encounter, and addressing them at the right place, and emphasizing the scale and urgency of the needs, is essential. The meals project, as a diaconal project, can play a special role in this process, because the volunteers stand close to the people concerned. The people concerned seem to have a great deal of confidence in the participants of the meals project. They function as the eyes and ears of the church. The question is whether they can fulfill this role with respect to the government, without losing the confidence of the people involved. It is beyond the scope of this research project to answer the question of how government and regular services for social welfare and care could actually improve the social circumstances in Amsterdam Zuidoost. This research project indicates that such an approach must seriously consider the lack of

confidence that some (exactly how many is unclear) of the people concerned have in the local government, governmental and regular organizations. And such an approach must also face the fact that the ways to organize help and support for themselves are for some (exactly how many is unclear) of the people concerned, complex and difficult to understand.

A promising approach therefore begins with listening to the voices of these people, with sensitivity to the specific cultural aspects and with the intention to work from the premise of trust. In the meantime, we presume that aid facilities like the meals project, the breakfast project and so many other initiatives, will be necessary, even when the Covid-19 crisis is behind us. The existence of these particular aid programs does not absolve the government and regular organizations of the responsibility to take action. Continuing a constructive and open dialogue about the social issues with all parties involved, including representatives of churches and diaconal projects and funds, is therefore recommended.

In the meals project, undocumented people play a special role, as receivers of food and also as participants in the project. These people still have no hopeful prospect of living a good life. We are fully aware of the delicate political circumstances that hinder open discussion of this issue, but we think that, in consultations on this poignant issue, the parties mentioned should also be involved.

## **7.3 Recommendations**

Based on the two-part research study that was conducted, and having answered the research question, we formulate three recommendations for both the stakeholders of the meals project, and the wider field of funds, diaconal organizations, the government, care organizations and social welfare organizations. These recommendations go beyond the scope of the meals project in Amsterdam Zuidoost, and thus do not specifically address the design or improvement of the meals project: they regard the broader context in which this meals project is taking shape and is being executed.

### **1. Get Around the Table**

Start or continue the dialogue between representatives of all the parties involved: government, care organizations, churches, diaconal and other aid projects and funds, in order to discuss the signals of social needs coming from these emergency aid projects. Because every party involved has its own, specific interests, responsibilities, loyalties and resources, we advocate that this dialogue is performed with caution and mutual respect for each other's logic, roles and responsibilities. Improving or intensifying forms of cooperation may be the result of this dialogue, but should not be its objective. Appreciative listening is important to understanding the specifics of the needs that are revealed and reported. Stakeholders should get in touch and discuss who will take the initiative to commence such a dialogue. Such forms of consultation and common deliberation are advisable, even (and

particularly) for relatively small initiatives. The meals project has been initiated and is being carried out by four partners with limited resources, yet with a strong social capital. In analyzing this, the current research study shows the added value (being able to help where other organizations cannot) of diaconal projects, such as the meals project, and the high “return on investment” in it, both in terms of aid delivered and in terms of people both aided and empowered through it.

## 2. *Ensure that Emergency Aid Projects are Accompanied by an Advisory Board*

We adopt the advice of the sounding board to invite an independent advisory board to think along with the project team about the goals, the progress, questions about scaling up or scaling down of the project, finances and reporting and accounting to the funders. Such an advisory board serves the project as a “critical friend” and pertinently not as a supervision board. Thanks to its relative distance, an advisory board can facilitate the reflection of the project leaders about their initiatives. They could also advise about ways for project teams to send out signals about the perceived needs to the responsible authorities. Too often, project teams are so involved in practically managing the everyday challenges that the time and space for the reflection they long for is constrained.

## 3. *Cooperate in Structurally Collecting Signals about Existing Needs*

Emergency aid meets and reveals structural social needs. In order to embody the diaconal slogan “helping under protest”, the signals about existing needs should be collected, bundled, explained, and addressed at the right place. In structurally collecting these signals in order to voice the protest aspect of the slogan, close cooperation between (collectives of) funds, aid projects, and churches is crucial. Diplomatic handling of the information about the people concerned is essential to preserve their confidence in the diaconal organizations they have learned to trust. This delicate balance between the need to collect such signals and sustaining relationships of trust (needed to reach the most vulnerable) is of importance in general. Yet it is particularly important in projects of the size of the meals project, given that they operate on the basis of an intricate social network and may well be able to provide insight into situations that would otherwise remain invisible.

## 7.4 Limitations

In interpreting the results, it is important to bear in mind some specific limitations of this study.

The first limitation pertains to the short timeframe of the research project. Due to this, the action research character of Part One could not be completed as intended. The project team was able to complete just one action research loop (describing, analyzing, action planning, action taking,

evaluating). The Covid-19 measures prevented the start of a second loop. It is therefore quite conceivable that the project team would have further developed and improved their practice if more time had been available. We nevertheless regard the results as valid, because it is not to be expected that over a longer period of time the project team’s view on the specific diaconal character of the meals project would have changed.

The second limitation is that the research in Part Two was initially not foreseen as part of the design. The interviews with stakeholders were intended to outline the context of the meals project. However, the researchers found out that the context was vital to understanding the dynamics of the meals project. For this reason, they decided to map the tensions in and around the meals project, related to the context.

A foible of this study is that the sample of the respondents of the stakeholders is not representative at all. A representative sample would certainly have enriched and refined the perspectives of the various stakeholders.

## 7.5 Perspectives for Further Research

The above conclusion and recommendations give rise to a number of perspectives for further research. Naturally, perspectives look beyond the situation as it is; they also take their cue from situations and dimensions that offer opportunities for growth, building on the good things that are there, and exploring how they can grow into the future. The research project is in a good place to think about further research on diaconal practice.

A first perspective is the fact that ideals and religious faith are of vital importance for the functioning of diaconal work. This makes it inviting to further explore which values, convictions and passions are actually involved, how these motivate and activate people, and how they are negotiated in the context of a diversity of idealistic and religious worldviews.

Secondly, the complex question of how to address structural needs with the responsible authorities is well worth further investigation. The initiative of the breakfast project by Maranatha would offer an outstanding case to study this, as the project meets the needs of a particular group, namely children who grow up in poverty in families with a shortage of (healthy) food. Although the damaging effects of this problem have been known for decades, this is still an issue today, and one that urgently needs the attention of the responsible authorities. Another group worth studying is undocumented people, yet, for ethical reasons, we are not sure how research on this group could contribute to reducing their vulnerability and ameliorating their situation.

Thirdly, this research study indicates that local international churches make a unique contribution to the quality of life of people living in Amsterdam Zuidoost, because they are standing close to the people concerned and feel committed to them. This research does not yield insight into the specifics of how they make this contribution, but its strength is worth further exploration.







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# Appendix: Questionnaires

## Questionnaire: Recipients' Meals<sup>1</sup>

Dear recipient,

We have been delivering meals to people for a few months now, and we enjoy what we are doing very much. We are happy that we can offer some help in these difficult times. We are curious to hear how you have experienced the meals. Would you therefore be willing to answer the following questions?

Name:

(Please leave this blank if you want to remain anonymous)

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
I like the meals	1	2	3	4	5
I think the meals are healthy	1	2	3	4	5
I like it when I receive the same food every time	1	2	3	4	5
I think the portions are	Too small		A good size		Too big

Do you have any other remarks about the food or the delivery?<sup>2</sup>

You can return the filled in form to one of the deliverers on Monday. Thanks a lot for your help by filling in these questions!

## Results of Questionnaire: Recipients' Meals

	Dutch	English	Spanish	Total
Completed surveys	30	2	2	34

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Blank
I like the meals	1	1,5 <sup>5</sup>	8	9	12,5	2
I think the meals are healthy	1	2,5	6	12	10,5	2
I like it when I receive the same food every time	6	13	7,5	4	1,5	2
I think the portions are	Too small	A good size	Too big	Blank		
	3	28	1	2		

<sup>1</sup> The questionnaire was handed out in Dutch, English, and Spanish.

<sup>2</sup> The answers to this question are not included in the results below for privacy reasons.

<sup>5</sup> The half points are respondents who circled two numbers for one question, for example both 4 and 5.



### Questionnaire: Recipients' Food Packages<sup>3</sup>

Dear recipient,

We have been delivering meals to people for a few months now, and we enjoy what we are doing very much. We are happy that we can offer some help in these difficult times. We are curious to hear how you have experienced the meals, and how you have experienced the transition to food packages. Would you therefore be willing to answer the following questions?

Name:

(Please leave this blank if you want to remain anonymous)

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
I liked the meals	1	2	3	4	5
I think the meals were healthy	1	2	3	4	5
I liked it when I received the same food every time	1	2	3	4	5
I think the portions were	Too small		A good size		Too big
I like the transition from meals to food packages	1	2	3	4	5

Are there products in the food packages that you do not use?

Do you have any other remarks about the food or the delivery?<sup>4</sup>

You can return the filled in form to one of the deliverers on Monday.

Thanks a lot for your help by filling in these questions!

### Results of Questionnaire: Recipients' Food Packages

	Dutch	English	Spanish	Total
Completed surveys	0	7	8	15

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
I liked the meals	0	0	0	1
I think the meals were healthy	0	0	0	0,5
I liked it when I received the same food every time	0	0	0	7
I like the transition from meals to food packages	0	0	0	2
I think the portions were	Too small	A good size	Too big	Blank
	1	6	6	2
Are there products in the food packages that you do not use?	Yes	No	Blank	
	0	3	12	

<sup>3</sup> The questionnaire was handed out in Dutch, English, and Spanish.

<sup>4</sup> The answers to this question are not included in the results below for privacy reasons.



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