

Meaning of public spaces for social integration within the context of leisure

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Outline

- Background: 3 key trends
- Research question and objective
- Theoretical perspective
- Methods and case studies
- Results
- Discussion & conclusion



Three key trends

- recent political and social debates related to issues of multiculturalism, migration and social integration
- the nature of contemporary experience society in which leisure plays an important role both economically as well as for expressing ones social and individual identity and which often occurs in public spaces
- the political perception of public spaces as places of encounters through which social integration can be stimulated



Dutch population (2008)

	Persons	% of total population
Migrants total	3 216 255	19
- Western	1 450 101	
- Non-western	1 766 154	11
- Turkey	372 852	
- Morocco	335 208	
- Surinam	335 679	
- Dutch Antilles and Aruba	131 387	
Inhabitants total	16 404 282	100
Amsterdam	35% inhabitants non-western countries	

Statistics Netherlands, 2008

Research question and objective

Main research question

- What is the meaning of public space for different ethnic groups in terms of social integration within the context of leisure?

Objective

- to understand the role of public spaces as a domain for social integration within the context of leisure



Four research questions

- How do people with different ethnic backgrounds use public spaces for leisure? Is there inter-ethnic interaction in public spaces during leisure activities?
- What is the meaning of different public spaces for people with various ethnic backgrounds?
- To what extent is use and meaning of public spaces an indication for social integration?
- How can differences in social integration be explained in terms of use and meaning of leisure in public space?



- Theoretical notions: Connecting public space, leisure and social integration

Public spaces - relevance for social integration

- Ethnic diversity visible in urban public domain
- What is the public domain? (Jacobs, Lofland, Zukin)
 - Public spaces are not only physical patterns
 - Space interrelates with social-cultural values and perceptions
 - Manifestation of diversity
 - Contested spaces or sites of harmony

Leisure in public spaces

- Leisure in public spaces is of importance because the meaning of multiculturalism and the negotiation of multiple cultural identities occurs in public spaces (Wood and Gilbert, 2005).

Leisure (1)

- When people spend their leisure time, they construct their identities by using spaces, by expressing themselves, and in interaction with others. (see for example Aitchison, Ateljevic).
- Urban public space is one of the spaces where identity is created.

Leisure (2)

- During leisure activities identities can be negotiated and constructed more consciously than during work. When these leisure activities happen in public space it even offers more opportunities for people to show their identities, e.g. by wearing specific clothes or displaying other distinctive appearances (Soenen 2006:79).

Social integration

- The established patterns of human relations in any given society across different ethnic groups. By defining social integration as such this research aims at a further understanding of operationalisation and measurement of the social integration.
- Three domains of social integration can be distinguished: political, socio-economic and socio-cultural.
- Focus on socio-cultural domain

Understanding social integration: interactions (1)

- Interaction encompasses more than direct verbal communication. Interaction is occurring in any social situation in which persons are acting in awareness of others and are continually adjusting their behaviours to the expectations and possible responses of others. In this sense, avoidance is also a form of social interaction (Karp et al 1997)

Understanding social integration: interactions (2)

- Focus on informal, everyday activities and interactions
- Not on the structures that are associated with large scale and relatively fixed social forces and laws

Meeting Places?



- Reasons for having contact: mothers and dog owners
- Events stimulate contact

Understanding social integration: meaning of public space (1)

- Place attachment and place identity -> intimately linked, dynamic and susceptible to disruption (Chow and Healy, 2008).
- Place attachment defined as a persons' relationship to a place, incl. cognition, emotion and behaviours.

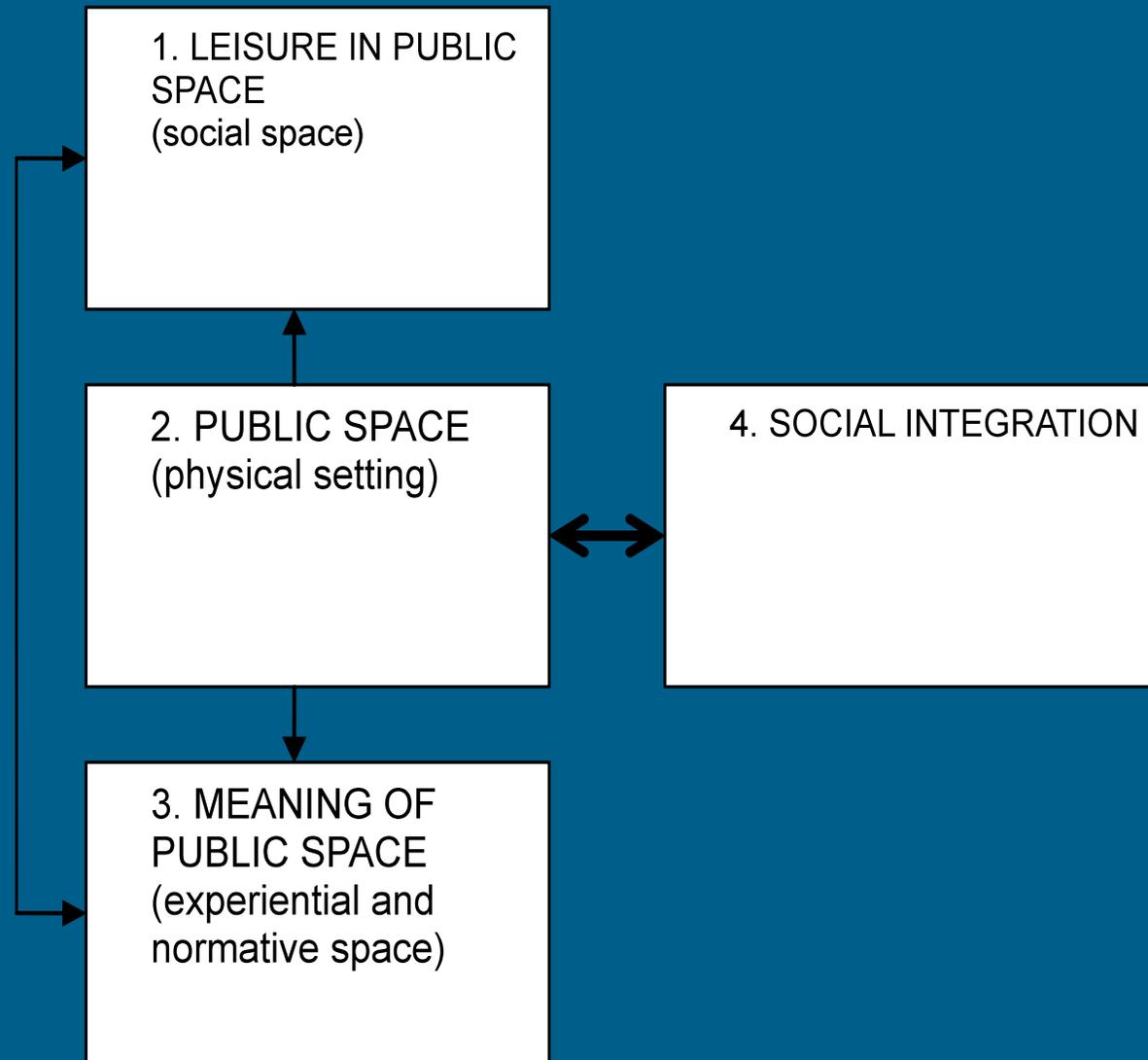
Understanding social integration: meaning of public space (2)

- Place identity is theoretically conceived as an individual's strong emotional attachment to a particular place or environmental setting, which comprises of “clusters of positively and negatively valenced cognitions of physical settings...[that] help to define who and of what value the person is both to himself and in terms of how he thinks others view him” ([Proshansky et al., 1983, p. 74](#)).

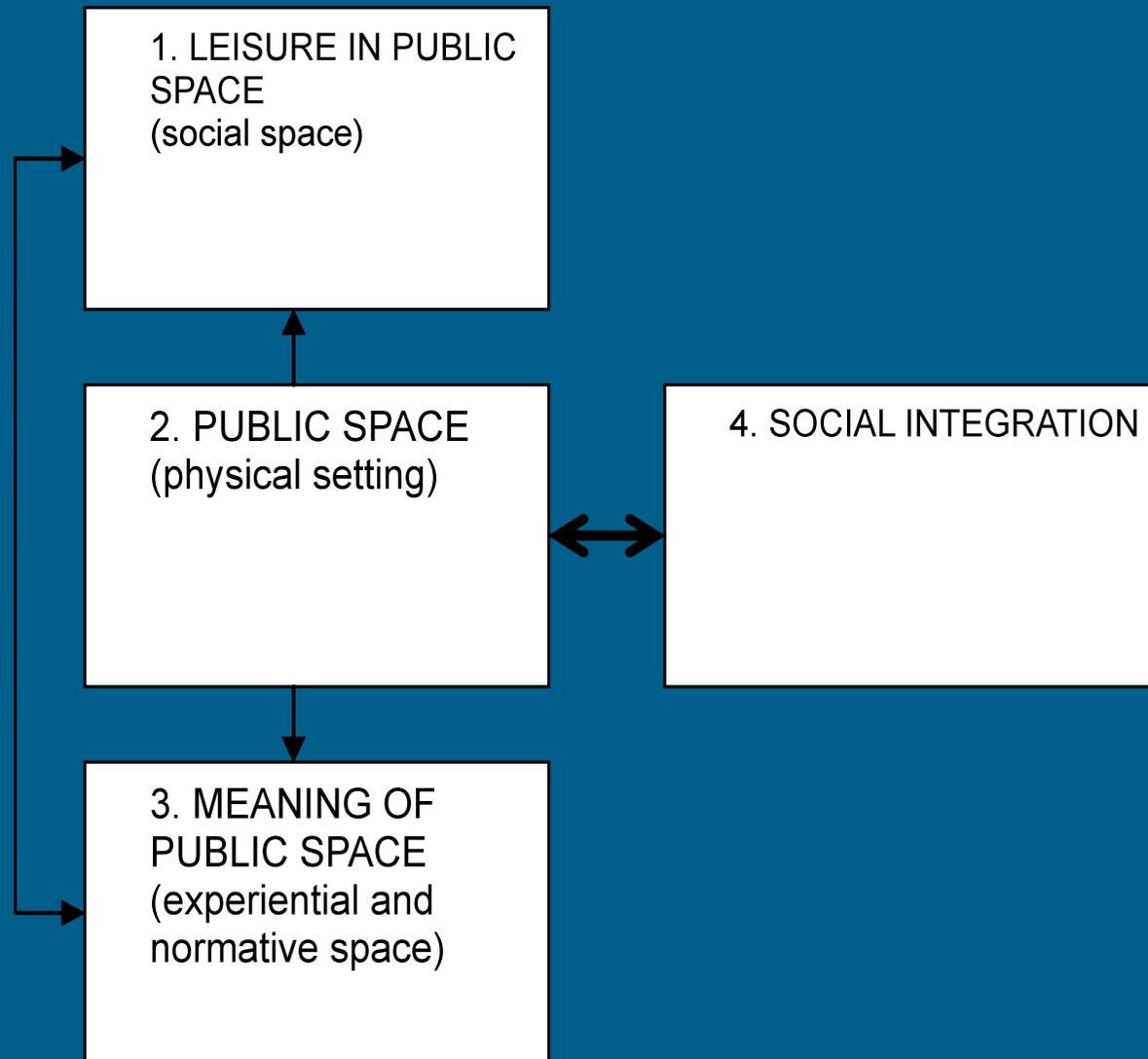
Understanding social integration: meaning of public space (3)

- Dimension of cultural conformity in order to express “the sharing by individuals of value systems and therefore of attitudes of ‘consensus’ -> insight in the shared expectations and possible conflicts of the use and meaning of public space.
- It refers to expectations and views on what is perceived as being ‘normal’ and acceptable (normative space). (Pollini, 2005)

Conceptual framework



First phase: focus on 1, 2 and 4



The research projects

Qualitative study

- Two urban parks in Nijmegen (Netherlands)
- Inner-garden in Amsterdam (re-designing)

Methods

- Observations (N=24 days)
- Interviews (N=43)
- Expert interviews (N=7)

Results: use of urban parks

- Walking and cycling equally participating, native people (slightly) more frequently
- Having a picnic/barbecue and meeting other people: ethnic > native people
- Differences between the parks:
 - function (neighborhood – city level)
 - design (facilitate specific activities)
 - image

Results: meaning of urban parks

- Interactions in the city park are less personal than in the small neighborhood park
- The city park is an open space; everybody feels welcome:

*“Many different people are coming to the park:
people with dogs, families with children,
youngsters that play soccer.”*

(Dutch women, 40 years)



Results: meaning of urban parks

- The small park is less felt as a public space; more a private space:

“people like to be on their own”

“I’d like to go to the park and I have small conversations with many people. But people do not interact much with each other.”

(Antillean women, 55 years)

Results: use of public spaces Amsterdam

- The inner-garden is not used at the moment.
- The children are playing on the streets till late at night.

Results: meaning of public spaces Amsterdam

- The inner-garden can stimulate more social cohesion within the neighborhood
- However, there are many risks: maintenance, responsibility, language

Results: social interaction in urban parks

Watching/meeting other people

- Ethnic > native people, Mor. > Turk., younger more than older,

Meeting familiar people

- Park as meeting place: people they know

Unexpected encounters

- Talking to strangers (specific issues, every day talk)
- Ethnic people wish for more contact
- Triangulation: balls, dogs, children
- Tensions between user groups



Results: attachment in urban parks

Differences between the parks:

- **function** (neighborhood – city level)
 - Neighborhood park = feeling at home
 - City level = world of strangers
- **image** (famous/attractive – ‘everyday’)
 - Everyday place
 - Attractive = place to be, everybody comes there (age, multi-ethnicity, etc.)

Results: social interaction in public spaces

Watching/meeting other people

- Saying hello and good bye

Meeting familiar people

- Not in the inner-garden, but outside on the street

Unexpected encounters

- Not many; language is a constraint
- Perception of different ethnic groups: norms and values
- Ethnic people wish for more contact

First conclusions (1)

- Urban parks are inclusive places
- Social interaction (active) = cursory
- Social interaction (passive) = important
- Ethnic > native people more social interaction
- Apparent paradox: being on your own, but close to others → contribution to social cohesion
- Use and involvement → feelings of attachment and familiarity → social cohesion

First conclusions (2)

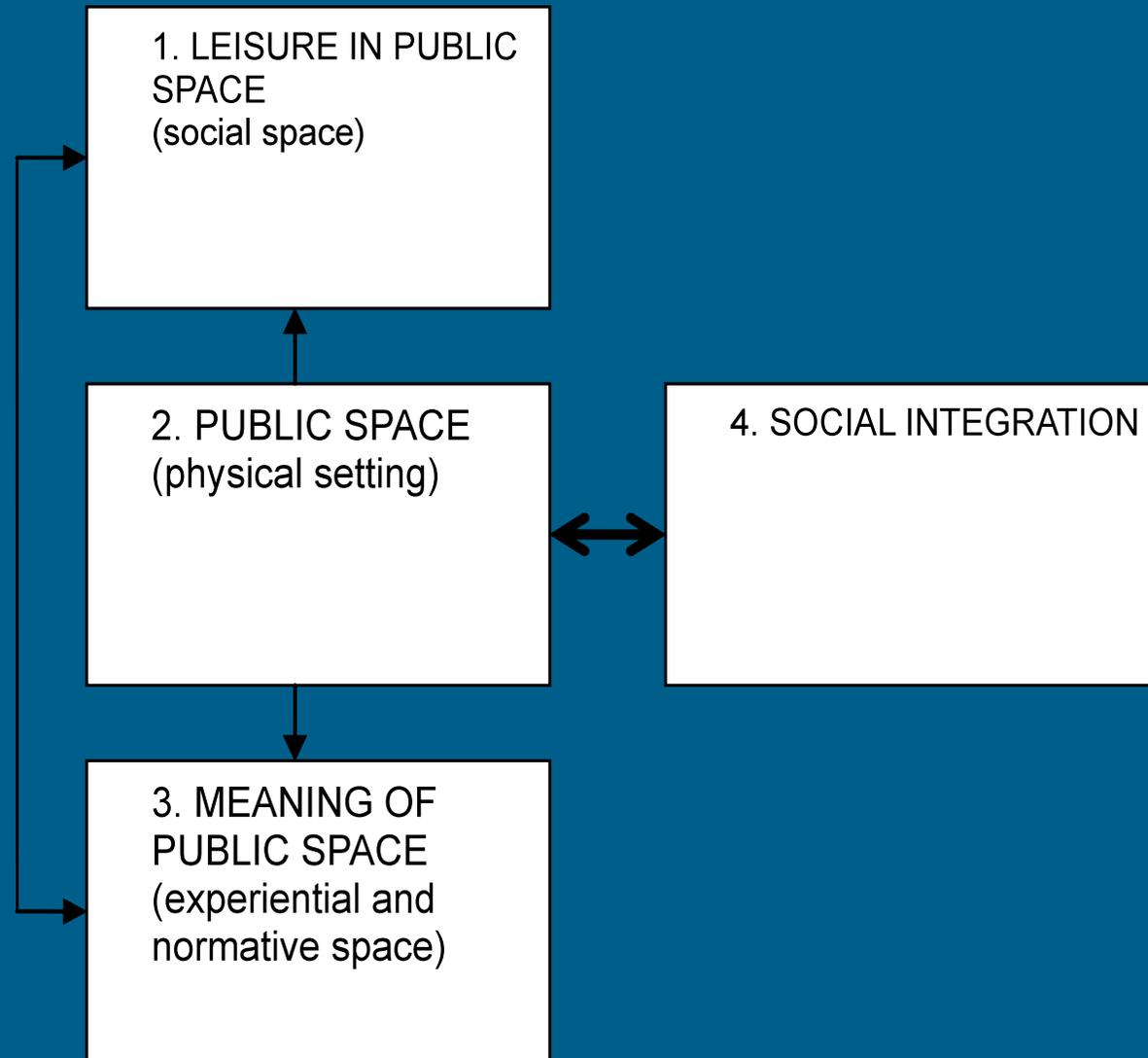
Seeing and meeting people is important in getting acquainted with people and space. It gives people information about their neighbourhood (cf. Blokland).

This will stimulate attachment to places and thus stimulates social cohesion.

Next phase

- Research in Lombok, Utrecht
- Focus on meaning of various public spaces
- In-depth interviews among various ethnic groups

Second phase: focus on 2, 3 and 4



Questions/Discussion

- How to link meaning to social integration?
- Focus on experiential and normative space

Thank you!

Time for questions and discussion

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