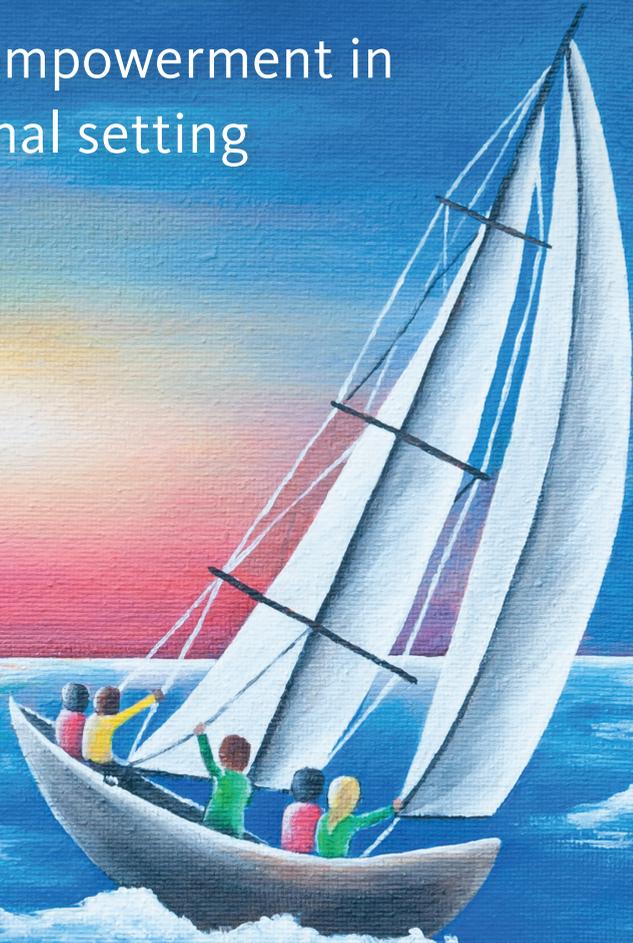


# Sailing on self-management

Organizing empowerment in  
an institutional setting



Max A. Huber



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Colofon

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**SAILING ON SELF-MANAGEMENT**

Organizing empowerment in an institutional setting

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## Preface

For many of the social workers involved with JES and other self-managed programs, self-management was their first work experience as a social worker, which led one social worker to the statement that he 'was raised by self-management'. To some extent the same can be said about me. JES was my first substantial research project, and together with research into similar projects, self-management forms the majority of my research experience thus far. Over the years, my fascination for self-management has only grown over the years. As you will see at the very end of this thesis, the list of possible subjects I would like to study further is substantial. The fascination is both academic, practical and personal.

Academically, self-management has allowed me to study the intersection of many important themes in sociology (structure-actor interaction), psychology (capacity development), pedagogy (social learning), political theory (development of democratic citizenship), philosophy (conceptions of freedom) and critical theory (development of subjectivity) and their interactions in all their complexity. During my research, especially in the analytical and writing phase, I have struggled to reduce the number of potential angles to approach the subject, though I believe that employing these different academic disciplines is necessary to grasp an understanding of self-management.

Professionally, self-management appears at first hand to fit well with the current developments in social work and social care: strength oriented, collective and focused on participant choice. At the same time, it challenges many of these developments and the unique setup of participants running their own institutional program offers learning potential for regular institutional programs and the role of social workers and peer workers in supporting empowerment. By engaging with self-management, I have been able to explore how participants develop freedom, in interaction with others.

Personally, being raised myself from an anarchistic perspective on life (figure it out yourself), I am both fascinated and obsessed by how people define and develop freedom. During the time that I have been doing the research described in this thesis, I have become a father myself. At multiple times I have been struck by the similarities between themes that occurred in my research and in trying to raise children. Examples include the balance between offering guidance and freedom of choice and between asking too much of them and challenging them to develop themselves, including the frustration that comes with learning new skills. At the same time, I also experience the joy of seeing them grow and the satisfaction they derive from mastering a new skill. Having children also forced me to, grudgingly and preliminarily, accept that it is very hard to make them do something they do not want to do.

Developing freedom is a complex process that has been, and probably will be, a main theme in both my personal, professional and academic life. This thesis describes my progress so far.

Over the years I have collected a series of quotes from literature, philosophy and music that touch upon the subject of freedom. Each chapter starts with one of these quotes.

*When the broken window was repaired and the stove began to spread its heat, something seemed to relax in everyone, and at that moment Towarowski (a Franco- Pole of twenty-three, typhus) proposed to the others that each of them offer a slice of bread to us three who had been working. And so it was agreed. Only a day before a similar event would have been inconceivable. The law of the Lager said: "eat your own bread, and if you can, that of your neighbor," and left no room for gratitude. It really meant that the Lager was dead. It was the first human gesture that occurred among us. I believe that that moment can be dated as the beginning of the change by which we who had not died slowly changed from Haftlinge to men again.*

Primo Levi



# 1

# Introduction

In 2008, a self-managed homeless shelter called *Je Eigen Stek* (Your own place, JES) started. According to the founders there was a shortage in low threshold shelter, existing shelters were paternalistic and homeless people were better able to manage a shelter themselves.

## Societal context

The start of JES, and other self-managed programs, can be seen as part of the transformation of the Dutch welfare state towards more community care, also called a 'participatory society'. The idea of community care is that people become more self-reliant and offer support to each other, a shift away from a protective welfare state. The development of community care has been a policy goal since the 1980's in the Netherlands and internationally (Fakhoury & Priebe, 2007; Kroon, Van Weeghel, et al., 2016; Kwekkeboom, 2004). In homeless and mental health care, the aim of community care is coupled with a new wave of deinstitutionalization, building on the first wave in the 1980's (Blok, 2004; Kwekkeboom, 2004; Tuyenman & Planije, 2014).

The call for more community care from the government is coupled with budget cuts, causing tensions between people in need of support, their social network, professionals and policy makers (Linders, 2010; Metze, 2015; Trappenburg, 2009; Verhoeven, Verplanke & Kampen, 2013). Research found that citizens in the Netherlands often prefer independence above professional support, though in their experience, professional support limited their independence less than dependency on social support from family and friends would (Bredewold et al., 2018; Linders, 2009; Metze, 2015; Steyaert & Kwekkeboom, 2010). Some authors argue that through the changes in the welfare state, people in vulnerable positions risk being neglected (Abma, 2017; Bredewold et al., 2018). The Netherlands Institute for Social Research warns that there is a risk of an increase of loneliness and a decrease of social support among people who are care dependent (Pommer et al., 2018). There is considerable debate on whether community care is desirable and realistic and to what extent the current model of organization and financing is suited for the development of community care (Abma, 2017; D. Bos et al., 2013; Stam, 2013; Tonkens, 2014; Van Regenmortel, 2011).

Specifically within homeless- and mental health care, several authors point out that not all former clients benefited from deinstitutionalization out of psychiatric hospitals, because they became homeless, incarcerated, or were neglected and socially isolated (D. Bos et al., 2013; Fakhoury & Priebe, 2007; Kwekkeboom, 2004; Verplanke & Duyvendak, 2010). Part of the group that lived in mental health institutions moved into homeless programs or forensic institutions, a form of *reinstitutionalization* (Fakhoury & Priebe, 2007), because they were unable to obtain or maintain independent housing. Reinstitutionalization is seen both in the Netherlands and internationally (Fakhoury & Priebe, 2002; Kroon, Michon, et al., 2016). The inflow of people with psychiatric issues into homeless care enticed the

Dutch government to professionalize homeless care, which was up to that point mostly focused on offering bed, bath and bread (Van Doorn, 2002). As a consequence homeless care and mental health care have grown towards each other (Wolf, 2015).

Although there is increasing attention to empowerment oriented care from organizations for homeless care and mental health care in the Netherlands and other Western welfare states, institutional care programs struggle to put this to practice (Boumans, 2015; Desain et al., 2013; Slade et al., 2014). In youth care, and to some extent in mental health care, steps have been made to improve the quality of institutional care, focusing on a positive, development oriented group climate, in both the period before the deinstitutionalization in the 1980's and in recent years (Blok, 2004; Boendermaker et al., 2010; Van Der Helm, 2011; Wolins & Wozner, 1982). Authors disagree on whether these experiments contributed to empowerment or were an alternative form of ongoing social control (Bierenbroodspot, 1974; Bloor, 1986; S. Scott, 2010). Self-managed programs can be seen as part of the ongoing attempt to enable empowerment in an institutional setting.

The dominant social policy in the Netherlands for people living in clinics, shelters or sheltered living facilities remains that they should move to (semi-) independent housing (Kroon, Van Weeghel, et al., 2016; Tynman & Planije, 2014). Nevertheless, the number of people staying in some form of institutional care (including forensic care) has barely decreased since the eighties. People remain in or return to institutional care, due to a lagging development of (professional) care in the community and insufficient preparation for independent living in institutional care (Boumans, 2015; Kroon, Van Weeghel, et al., 2016; Van Ewijk, 2010), though recent years show a slight decrease (Kroon, 2018). Many homeless people lose their home because of issues with living independently and a lack of adequate support (Boesveldt, 2019a; Van Doorn, 2002). Many of the people currently staying in homeless shelters have been homeless before, got a house and then lost their house due to inadequate preparation and social support (Boesveldt, 2019b; Van Doorn, 2002; Van Regenmortel et al., 2006). The mentioned difficulties are not unique to the Netherlands (Fakhoury & Priebe, 2002, 2007), though the Netherlands does have a high percentage of people using institutional care in comparison to other western countries (Boumans, 2015; Kroon, Van Weeghel, et al., 2016; Van Ewijk, 2010). The number of homeless people is rising, in both the Netherlands and Europe, as a consequence of the financial crisis, budget cuts in the welfare state and a shortage in affordable housing (Rekenkamer Metropool Amsterdam [Audit room Amsterdam metropole], 2017; Trimbos, 2019; Wit et al., 2019).

In recent years, Housing First has become the model of choice of many Dutch municipalities, as well as throughout Europe (Pleace et al., 2019). Housing First is a model that aims to help homeless people enter independent housing as quickly as possible, and which shows high levels of housing retention (Padgett et al., 2016; Pleace et al., 2019). In practice however, because of housing shortage, there are substantial waiting lists to

enter Housing First. Homeless people have to wait in shelters for housing to become available. Some homeless people themselves state that they would prefer to live in a small group, either permanently or as preparation for independent living (Pleace et al., 2019; Van Doorn, 2002; Van Straaten et al., 2016; Wit et al., 2019). People without severe mental health issues are not allowed to enter Housing First programs.

In current Dutch policy, homeless care is only for people with public mental health issues (De Vries, 2019; Tuynman & Planije, 2014). Increasingly, homelessness has shifted from a social welfare issue to a medical care issue, partly as a consequence of an increase of people with mental health issues in homeless care (De Vries, 2019; Wolf, 2015), similar to the USA. The focus in homeless care has shifted towards individual deficits (mental health, substance abuse, learning disability) from societal factors (housing shortage, poverty) in homeless policy (De Vries, 2019; Wright, 1997). In recent years some attention has been spent on people who are homeless but do not have severe mental health issues, although they are still not able to enter permanent housing programs. Both the College for human rights and other organizations have pleaded for the importance of housing options for so called self-reliant homeless people (De Vries, 2019; Rekenkamer Metropool Amsterdam [Audit room Amsterdam metropole], 2017; Wit et al., 2019), the original target group of JES.

## JES, a very short history

At first glance, JES fits with the purpose of community care, focused on stimulating self-reliance, participants supporting each other and little professional interference. In theory, the setup of self-management might be better equipped to facilitate empowerment than regular institutional care, which is also what its founders claim. JES wants 'to help people without a home, get a home', by offering shelter for people who want to work on their own problems in their own way. There is room for sixteen people. Potential participants have to be able to take care of themselves. JES is funded by Amsterdam municipality and is still part of HVO-Querido, a large organization for homeless care and sheltered living in Amsterdam.

### **Starting JES**

The initiative to develop a self-managed shelter was taken at the end of 2007 by HVO-Querido, inspired by self-managed shelters in Nijmegen and Utrecht. Both the shelter in Nijmegen and in Utrecht started in the nineties of the last century out of a collaboration between homeless people, critical social workers and squatters, though both later on merged with a regular homeless care organization. The CEO of HVO-Querido asked a policy advisor, who used to be a social worker, and the facilitator of the client council, to find a group of people experiencing homelessness to develop a self-managed shelter. An interested group was found, who requested a building, because 'in a park you cannot make plans for a shelter'. HVO-Querido had a building available, and to this day, JES is housed

in this building. Although they shortly explored whether they could form an independent organization, the municipality of Amsterdam would only fund the project if it remained part of HVO-Querido. In January of 2008, the founding group moved into the building.

Together, the participants were responsible for equipping the building to become a shelter and supported by the policy advisor/ social worker, another social worker and a management consultant, the participants made plans for further development. Because the participants acknowledged that it might become hard to work together, they hired an independent coach. At the same time the participants ask two of the participants to leave, because, according to the remaining participants, they used too much drugs. The participants who left denied this. The supporting professionals from HVO-Querido said they struggled with how to deal with this, though when they concluded that reconciliation was not possible, went along with the majority of the group, and found alternative shelter for the participants who left. In the fall of 2008, JES officially opened, though not without a crisis and a show of improvisation. The chairman at that time stole the safety box with the cash for the opening party. Luckily, one of the other participants used to be a cook and with very little budget, JES was able to host the opening. From the original eleven participants, seven were there to host the first official participants. The remaining seven participants formed the first 'management group'.

### **Participants and engagement**

From the fall of 2008, sixteen participants could stay at JES, mostly men, at times exclusively men. In the first project plan in 2008, the founders stated the purpose as: 'to help people without a home, get a home'. JES has criteria for new participants. They cannot have serious care needs, no serious psychiatric or substance abuse problems and they need to speak Dutch. These criteria were formulated both because there are no (round the clock) professionals to offer support and because, according to the founders, there were enough places for people with serious problems, so JES should focus on people who are homeless without other problems. Interested participants are also asked whether they are motivated to work on their problems and whether they are willing to contribute to JES and the group. Most participants are dependent on welfare, some have a job. On average, participants stay for around one and a half years, although this varies from several weeks to several years. In JES, participants and peer workers are in charge of both the day-to-day affairs as well as the strategic development of the program: from household to entrance and exit of participants and strategic issues. Participants choose a chairman among themselves, to lead meetings and represent JES in external affairs, together with other participants. The management group of participants, founded at the formal opening, was dissolved in the summer of 2009, to encourage the engagement of new participants. The weekly meeting on Monday evening with all participants was now the main forum for discussing and decided on issues within JES, with all participants. At times, working groups were formed by active participants, focused on both specific projects and the general management of JES. After some time, ranging from several weeks to several months,

these groups dissolved, either out of inactivity or due to conflict with other participants who felt that the active group became too dominant (the active group often stated that the other participants were too passive).

### **Peer workers and social workers in JES**

In the spring of 2009, JES hired one of the founding participants as an administrative supporter, though opinions differed on the extent to which this also involved supporting the development of self-management. In 2013, he retired and was succeeded by a former chairman of JES, who recently moved out of JES and who had a more active approach and calls himself supporter of self-management and peer worker, working on the basis of his experiences with homelessness and self-management.

The independent coach that was hired at the start of JES, was not involved after the opening of JES, because it was 'too much talk', according to new participants. The contact with both one of the advising social workers and the management consultant was broken off, respectively because of a conflict with the group and because of a new job. The policy advisor/ social worker remained involved, as an advisor, though at a distance. A local social work organization was hired to support participants in JES, mainly through holding office hours in JES, and staying involved with participants after they moved out. The collaboration with this organization was stopped in 2010. Participants argued that the social workers were too passive in offering services to participants in JES, and too lax in the guidance of former participants of JES, some of whom struggled to maintain the independent housing they obtained via JES. The social workers themselves stated that participants should ask for support themselves, with reference to self-management.

A former participant, who also used to be a social worker, temporarily took over the support. After a few months and after the different perspectives of JES participants and the social workers were clarified, social workers re-started their support for participants in and after JES. JES actively encouraged participants to use the support of social work, to prepare for independent living. JES also decided to hire a social worker, to work part-time in the program, because JES participants felt more support was needed than an external social worker could offer. The social worker they hired already knew JES through his participation as a student-assistant in our research into JES. He later wrote his master thesis on supporting self-management, while working at JES. In 2016 he was replaced by a new social worker.

### **Housing after JES, within or outside of the system**

Participants can stay in JES as long as they need to, though most participants aimed to move into independent housing. In Amsterdam, there is a shortage in affordable housing and the waiting list is more than ten years. Initially, JES obtained five temporary houses for former participants to stay in. However, they quickly decided that they did not want to kick out former participants and offered permanent contracts. In doing so, they closed

down a path to independent housing. Some participants found alternative housing and some were on the waiting list long enough, though most were dependent on JES to access independent housing.

The municipality of Amsterdam has centralized the inflow of homeless people into homeless care, and the outflow out of homeless care into supported affordable housing. JES refused to subject to this centralization. This refusal is both in relation to handing over autonomy concerning who can enter JES, and who can leave JES to enter independent housing, and in relation to its bureaucratic nature, consisting of a large form pertaining all aspects of a person's life, history and (mental) health. JES wanted to focus on homeless people without severe mental health and substance abuse problems and not subject participants to a 'medicalized' approach to homelessness.

Housing organizations and the local municipality stated at that time, 2010/2011, that they saw the worth of JES and they offered JES five places per year to give to participants who were ready to move out. This came as relief to participants ready to move out, though the participants still aimed to increase opportunities to access independent housing. One of the opportunities they started exploring was to move to a bigger building, with more opportunities to offer semi-independent housing. They spoke with housing organizations, explored possibilities to transform empty office buildings and met with experts and project developers. However, they lacked persistence, because participants who became active for some time, were disappointed by the slow progress and focused on moving on themselves.

In 2012, the local municipality announced that the arrangement was only temporary, to explore whether JES could join the regular system of outflow out of homeless care. The municipality decided that, because JES focusses on people without severe mental health or substance abuse problems, they were not considered part of the homeless care system and should be able to find alternative housing themselves. JES argued that, although JES did not emphasize mental health issues, most participants have stayed in regular homeless care and therefore do meet the criteria. If they would have stayed in regular homeless care, they would have been allowed to enter independent housing. Furthermore, JES stated that they used much of the same criteria as the municipality does for deciding whether someone is suited to enter independent housing (financial and personal stability, no alternative options to enter housing). At first the municipality agreed to prolonging the arrangement, but then again wanted to stop the arrangement, after which JES visited the council of the municipality, where they successfully pleaded their case. The ongoing insecurity on whether participants would be able to obtain independent housing created unrest within the group of participants and stride between participants on who could obtain the last housing opportunities.

In 2016, the municipality decided that JES had to choose: either join the regular care system, or leave the system, forgoing both the housing opportunities for participants

and funding for JES. Advocating with the municipality and the council did not work the second time around, though JES was able to obtain housing for all current participants. JES entered the regular care system and from that moment on, only homeless people screened by the municipality could enter the program, and the municipality would decide whether a participant was ready to move out. Shortly after, the municipality of Amsterdam embraced Housing First, aiming for all homeless people, with serious mental health and/ or substance abuse problems, to enter independent housing as quickly as possible. Now, participants in JES no longer need to work on their problems before being able to enter independent housing, they just have to wait until it is their turn on the waiting list. For JES this meant they had to, once again, reinvent themselves.

## Self-management from a theoretical perspective

Relatively little research has been done into self-managed programs (Tuyman & Huber, 2014). More is known about other self-organized programs in mental health and homeless care, from consumer run centers to peer run respite houses. Self-organized programs share a number of principles: management by participants and peer workers, and an emphasis on free choice, voluntarism and empowerment (Brown, 2012; Ostrow & Croft, 2015; Segal & Hayes, 2016). In self-organized programs, participants who use the program, and/ or their peers are in charge of both day to day affairs and strategic decisions (Brown, 2012; Ostrow & Croft, 2015; Tuyman & Huber, 2014).

Research into self-organized care focusses mainly on psychological processes (Brown, 2012; Ostrow & Croft, 2015; Segal & Hayes, 2016). Research shows that consumer run centers that offer opportunities to drop in and participate in day-activities can contribute to an increase in general wellbeing, self-efficacy, hope, social functioning, social support, role development, role skills and locus of control, and a decrease in clinical problems and clinical care, all associated with psychological empowerment (Brown, 2012; Segal & Hayes, 2016). The level of participant engagement influences potential benefits. Participants who are less engaged with activities, the community in the program and the management of the program, experience less benefits (Brown, 2012; Brown & Townley, 2015; Segal & Hayes, 2016).

Peer run respite houses offer an alternative to clinical psychiatric care for people who have a mental health crisis. The little research there is on respite houses suggests that participants become socially engaged and are less often admitted into a psychiatric hospital (Ostrow & Croft, 2015). Oxford houses are recovery homes for people with substance abuse problems, run by participants. Research shows that Oxford houses contribute to self-efficacy, social functioning and employment (Jason et al., 2001; May et al., 2016). Both the outcomes attributed to peer run respite houses and to Oxford houses are associated with (parts) of psychological empowerment.

The research on consumer run centers, peer respites and oxford houses offers insight into possible benefits for participants. It is not known to what extent these are similar in self-managed institutional programs, especially since most of the research done is into mental health care, not into homeless care. Relatively little attention is paid in research into self-organized care to the role of peer workers and social workers, partly because in most programs no social workers are actively involved.

An important difference between consumer run centers and self-managed programs is the institutional aspect of the latter, offering people, who don't have a (suitable) home, a place to stay. Respite houses and Oxford houses do share the institutional context with self-managed programs, although this institutional context is not explicitly discussed in literature (May et al., 2016; Ostrow & Croft, 2015). Oxford houses and respite houses differ from each other and from JES in both target group and setup (respectively people who experience a mental health crisis and who stay at the respite house for a short period and people who are recovering from substance abuse and who stay at an Oxford house indefinitely). To what extent the outcomes of the research into Oxford houses and respite houses translate to JES is unknown and subject of this research.

To better understand these gaps in knowledge on self-organized care, we build on two theoretical frameworks: empowerment theory and institutional theory. Empowerment theory is commonly used to describe self-organized care and. Institutional theory is used to understand the influence of the institutional setting on self-management and empowerment. Both frameworks proved to be a good fit for analyzing our empirical data. Although we have employed other theories, they offered less new insights, though some have been used as additional lenses, as described in the empirical chapters. In the methodological section, I reflect shortly on how theory was used in this research.

### **Empowerment theory**

Empowerment is a commonly used theory to describe the experiences of participants and peer workers in self-organized programs (Brown, 2012; Ostrow & Croft, 2015; Segal & Hayes, 2016) and is often referred to by participants, peer workers and other stakeholders of JES and other self-managed programs in the Netherlands. Empowerment theory is used in this research to describe individual perspectives on the development of empowerment within JES and to describe how individual empowerment and community empowerment interact.

According to Rappaport 'empowerment is a process, a mechanism by which people, organizations, and communities gain mastery over their affairs' (1987, p. 122). Empowerment is described in the literature as a multifaceted and layered theory, or even a paradigm, that entails both vision, process and outcome, on an individual, collective, organizational and political level. Different empowerment levels are related to, and can influence, one another, both strengthening and limiting each other. Relatively little is known about how the different levels interact. Developing critical awareness is seen as a crucial element on

all levels. Critical awareness consists of individuals and groups becoming aware of how society influences their lives and how they in turn can influence their societal circumstances (Boumans, 2012; Rappaport, 1987; Speer & Hughey, 1995; Van Regenmortel, 2011).

Rappaport (1981) forewarns two risks of empowerment. First the risk of too much attention to the right to freedom of choice, with too little attention to support. Secondly, too much attention to support needs and too little attention to the right to choose. Therefore, Rappaport states that empowerment should be a dialectical concept, balancing the two described risks. By framing empowerment as a dialectical concept, Rappaport seemingly tries to integrate positive and negative liberty, as described by Berlin (1969). Negative liberty focusses on freedom of choice, less interference and less external limitations, while positive liberty focusses on the ability to achieve what you want to achieve with the support of others. Each form of liberty describes different barriers to achieve it. The first barrier is outside interference that hinders individual freedom of choice. The second barrier is a lack of interference that hinders the ability to overcome inequality (Berlin, 1969; Hirschmann, 1996). In recent literature, empowerment is often framed less dialectical. Multiple authors argue that the development of mastery (positive liberty) contributes to the ability of individuals and communities to gain influence (negative liberty), although the emphasis commonly lies on positive liberty and psychological aspects of empowerment (Boumans, 2012; Rapp & Goscha, 2006; Van Regenmortel, 2011; Van Regenmortel & Fret, 1999; Zimmerman, 1995). Zimmerman (1995) argues that although power and psychological empowerment are closely related, factual power is not a necessary pre-condition to develop psychological empowerment. A risk of not being explicit about the importance of freedom of choice as part of empowerment, is that freedom of choice can be disregarded, contributing to disempowerment.

Empowerment has evolved from an emancipatory movement into public policy and mainstream thinking. Some authors warn that psychological empowerment and positive psychology are instrumentally used as new forms of social control. Achieving self-sufficiency, resiliency and ongoing self-improvement have become new norms (Abma, 2017; Bell, 2012; Bredewold et al., 2018; Ehrenreich, 2009; S. Scott, 2010; Verhoeven et al., 2013). Empowerment as an obligation rather than as emancipation contributes to disempowerment and goes against the principles of empowerment as described by most authors (Boumans, 2012, 2015; Israel et al., 1994; Maton, 2008; Peterson & Zimmerman, 2004; Rapp & Goscha, 2006; Rappaport, 1987; Van Regenmortel, 2011; Van Regenmortel & Fret, 1999; Zimmerman, 1995). Some also associate empowerment with the transition from welfare to workfare, using empowerment as legitimization for budget cuts in the support of people in vulnerable positions (Askheim, 2003). Individuals might be less interested in psychological empowerment, especially if psychological empowerment is not combined with an increase in freedom of choice. Therefore, individuals might opt to use the freedom of choice they do have to refrain from engagement with programs that try to encourage empowerment (Abma, 2017; Duyvendak, 1999; Duyvendak & Uitermark,

2005; Freire, 2005; Tonkens, 2008; Van Regenmortel, 2011). In my research I will explore how the potential risks described here play out in JES.

On an individual level, empowerment 'conveys both a psychological sense of personal control or influence and a concern with actual social influence' (Rappaport, 1987, p. 121). Zimmerman (1995, p. 588) further distinguishes between three components of individual empowerment: internal (motivation, perceived control), interactional (resources, critical awareness) and behavioral (social participation). Many authors argue that individual empowerment is only possible in interaction with a social environment (other people, organizational context, community) that enables empowerment (Boumans, 2012, 2015; Israel et al., 1994; Maton, 2008; Peterson & Zimmerman, 2004; Rapp & Goscha, 2006; Rappaport, 1987; Van Regenmortel, 2011; Van Regenmortel & Fret, 1999; Zimmerman, 1995). An organization/ community can also be a source of individual empowerment through offering supporting social relations, opportunities for individual development, and an empowering collective identity (Israel et al., 1994; Maton, 2008; Peterson & Zimmerman, 2004; Rapp & Goscha, 2006; Van Regenmortel, 2011). How a setting influences empowerment and how individual and collective empowerment interact is the second application of empowerment theory in this research.

Some authors focus specifically on an organizational or community level, describing how individuals influence their own lives through an organization/ community, how much influence individuals have on an organization/ community and how much influence an organization/ community has as a collective towards other organizations and/or the larger society (Israel et al., 1994; Maton, 2008; Peterson & Zimmerman, 2004; Rapp & Goscha, 2006; Van Regenmortel, 2011). Several frameworks describe the interaction between individual empowerment and environment, such as *empowering community settings* (Maton, 2008), *organizational empowerment* (Peterson & Zimmerman, 2004) and *enabling niches* (Taylor, 1997). Maton's (2008) empowering community setting includes a shared vision on empowerment, diversity in role opportunities, leadership and a learning organization. Organizational empowerment (Peterson & Zimmerman, 2004) is related to empowering community settings, although it emphasizes the importance of an empowered organization in relation to other organizations and society (Peterson & Zimmerman, 2004).

Taylor's (1997) theory on enabling niches is mostly similar to the mentioned frameworks, although it emphasizes identity development and adds the counterpart of an enabling niche, an entrapping niche, associated with stigma, social exclusion and a lack of growth opportunities. In the different frameworks, relatively little attention is paid to the role of physical and organizational space, although others emphasize the importance of space for the development of participation and engagement (Case & Hunter, 2012; Renedo & Marston, 2015). Especially in institutional care settings such as a self-managed homeless shelter, where participants live and work together, physical space can be an important factor (Goffman, 1961; Wolins & Wozner, 1982).

Self-organized care can be seen as an example of how a setting can contribute to empowerment (Brown, 2012). To understand how consumer run centers contribute to empowerment, Brown (2012) developed a role framework, which describes how participants develop roles and relations through person-environment interaction.

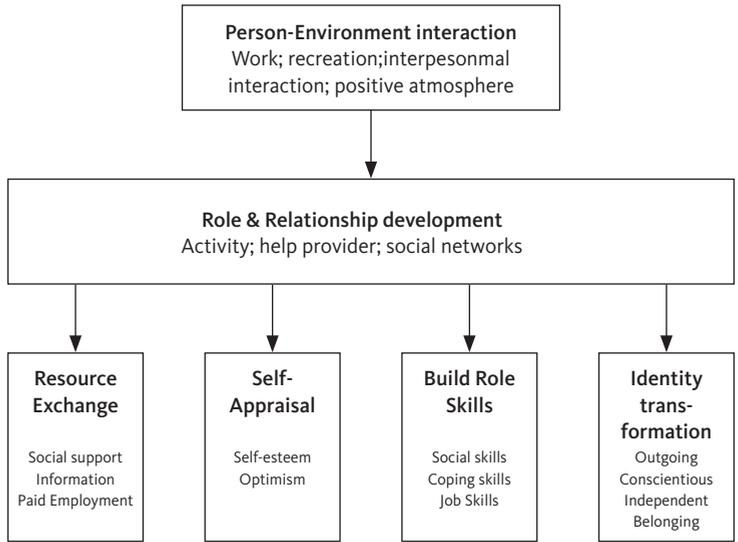


Figure 1. Brown’s (2012, p. 42) role-framework

The different frameworks build on what in psychology is known as behavior-setting theory (Brown, 2012) and in sociology as institutional theory (W. R. Scott, 2005), describe how behavior is influenced by a social structure or setting, and in turn how social structure is influenced by behavior. This brings us to the second theoretical framework.

**Institutional theory**

Using insights from institutional theory and research on institutional care we aim to understand the influence of an institutional context on the experiences of participants, peer workers and social workers with self-management. Although institutional theory helps to understand the relation between a setting and empowerment, institutional care is often more associated with disempowerment (Abma, 2010; Chow & Priebe, 2013; Goffman, 1961; Van Der Helm & Schaftenaar, 2014; Van Regenmortel et al., 2006). Goffman describes institutional care programs as *total institutions*: ‘a place [...] where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered [...] life’ (1961, p. xiii). These total

institutions have long been scalded for *mortifying* (Goffman, 1961) individuals and being instruments of social control (Blok, 2004).

Some argue that all institutional care settings are essentially similar, dealing with similar issues (Wolins & Wozner, 1982) and are focused on two main tasks: developing skills (voluntary or forced) and offering a place to stay for residents, either voluntary or involuntary (Wozner, 1990). Which task is dominant differs, depending on several aspects of the setup: broad to specific target group; complete to no care; voluntary to forced stay; short to permanent stay and as a consequence of the latter: varying or stable population (Wolins & Wozner, 1982; Wozner, 1990). The process of institutionalization in an institutional setting has also been described in elderly care (Abma, 2010), youth care (Hanrath, 2013) and even tourist locations (e.g. resorts, cruise ships, amusement parks), because, although voluntary and short term, the period that tourists spend there, is highly regulated (Ritzer & Liska, 2004).

Recent institutional theory argues that the influence between institutions and individuals is bidirectional (W. R. Scott, 2005). Individuals have an influence by conforming to, reproducing or rejecting a structure (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Giddens, 1984). Especially when roles are unclear, changing or conflicted, (creating) structure can offer control and certainty (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Giddens, 1984; Kruijer et al., 2008). Stress, ambiguity and insecurity are inherent in the work of staff in institutional care. The staff is simultaneously responsible for individuals, a group and order while their clients combine complex personal problems with negative coping strategies and negative experiences with care (Enarsson et al., 2008; Goffman, 1961; Keigher, 1992). Staff and clients can get stuck in vicious circles of distrust; negative behavior results in rule enforcement, leading to more negative behavior and a growing divide between staff and inmates (Goffman, 1961; Van Der Helm & Schaftenaar, 2014; Wolins & Wozner, 1982). Hanrath (2013) describes how staff and inmates both try to gain and maintain control by interpreting each other's behavior and anticipate interpretation.

Therapeutic communities, like self-managed programs, started as an alternative to regular institutional programs, using living together as treatment, although critics say therapeutic communities are a subtle form of social control (Bloor, 1986). Scott (2010) calls alternative forms of support, such as self-help programs, reinvented institutions, because they still aim to stimulate identity transformation. In this reasoning, rituals in reinvented institutions are subtle forms of self- and social control. Staff is no longer needed, because participants have internalized self- and social control (S. Scott, 2010).

While organizational interventions are commonly associated with stimulated institutionalized behavior, organizational interventions can also help break through institutionalized behavior, such as enforcing consumer rights, offering role certainty and predictability for both clients and staff, creating transparency, and offering opportunities for participation

(Hojtink & Oude Vrielink, 2007; Kruijer et al., 2008; U. K. Schön et al., 2018; W. R. Scott, 2005). It is argued that higher levels of opportunity for participation for both clients and staff, custom made care and staff satisfaction are associated with better outcomes for clients (Jongepier et al., 2010; U. K. Schön et al., 2018). Staff satisfaction is stimulated by institutional and practical support (Chou & Robert, 2008). Structure can help staff to maintain a feeling of control in their daily existence and the insecurities they face (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Giddens, 1984; Kruijer et al., 2008).

Institutional theory describes how social structures, such as rules, norms and routines, influence social behavior and how social behavior in turn influences social structures (W. R. Scott, 2005). The influence on behavior can be perceived as negative, a form of social discipline (S. Scott, 2010) or entrapment (Goffman, 1961; Taylor, 1997). The influence of social structure can also be experienced as positive, offering certainty (W. R. Scott, 2005) and opportunities, as the different empowerment frameworks suggest (Brown, 2012; Maton, 2008; Taylor, 1997). Little to no attention is given in literature on self-organized care to institutional influences (Brown, 2012). Using insights from institutional theory and research on institutional care we aim to understand the influence of an institutional context on the experiences of participants with self-management. We also explore the experiences of peer workers and social workers.

### **Social work, peer work**

Almost all Dutch self-managed programs have hired a social worker to support the program. Social workers have been criticized for a long time for contributing to disempowerment of clients, rather than supporting empowerment (Klaase, 2017). The role of social workers in what the Dutch government calls a *participatory society* (Stam, 2013), has come under even more scrutiny. Some argue that social workers do too little to stimulate emancipation and self-sufficiency of people they work with, others argue that social workers do too little to help people who need help (Hayes & Houston, 2007; Klaase, 2017; Tonkens, 2008; Weele et al., 2018). Authors argue that Dutch social work should focus on a more politicized approach to social problems, rather than a focus on individual needs and behavior (Spierts, 2017).

Conceptually, the purposes of social work and empowerment appear to be a good fit (Boumans, 2015; Van Regenmortel, 2011), though social workers have to deal with an 'empowerment paradox' (Van Regenmortel, 2011). Social workers want to contribute to empowerment of people they work with, without hurting that same empowerment process, through doing something a person himself should/ could do (Rappaport, 1987; G. Van Der Laan, 1990; Van Regenmortel, 2011). To overcome this dilemma, several authors argue for a dialogical approach, wherein stakeholders together shape empowerment processes, acknowledging the different forms of knowledge (experiential, practical, theoretical) stakeholders bring to the table to shape empowerment processes (Abma, 2010; Duyvendak et al., 2009; Stam, 2013; Tonkens, 2008; Van Regenmortel, 2011). Van

Regenmortel (2011) suggests social workers should try to both merge on a personal level into a relationship with the people they are working with, and add their professional knowledge and skills to that relationship.

Beyond the general issue of how to support empowerment practices, social workers also need to take the institutional context into account. We know from literature on regular institutional care that social workers in an institutional context have to work on an individual, interactional, group and organizational level at the same time (Boendermaker et al., 2010; Chow & Priebe, 2013; Van Der Helm & Schaftenaar, 2014; Wolins & Wozner, 1982). As a consequence, Hanrath (2013) calls social workers in an institutional setting *balance-artists*.

To integrate the different views on what social work should focus on and acknowledging the individual-structural interaction, Van Ewijk (2010) argues for a 'contextual-transformative approach' in social work. This approach focuses on both the individual, the direct living environment and acknowledged structural influences on both the individual and the direct living environment.

Social workers work together with peer workers, who work on the basis of their experiences with homelessness and/or mental health issues. JES employs one paid peer worker, who has been a participant before becoming peer worker, although he does not live there anymore. The employment of peer workers in regular mental health and homeless care is on the rise, though peer workers struggle to find their role, individually in relation to clients and colleagues, and collectively, within organizations that are not recovery oriented (Boumans, 2015; Desain et al., 2013; Keuzekamp, 2010; Slade et al., 2014). In literature on consumer run centers, the specific role of peer workers is seldom described (Brown, 2012). In most respite houses in the USA, the 'Intentional peer support' (IPS) approach is used, developed by Mead (2014). Mead developed this method based on her own experiences working in and developing respite programs. At the core of the IPS model is mutuality and a shared learning experience for both the participant and the peer worker, based on the perspective and world view of both (Mead, 2014). Mead developed the IPS model because she found that peer workers struggled to offer peer support within respite programs. She saw a reproduction of the way (power-) relations were shaped between residents and professionals in regular institutional programs, because both peer workers and participants were used to these relations and did not know how to change them. Through formulating the IPS approach, Mead hoped to offer peer workers tools to find alternative, more empowering ways of working with participants.

The different theoretical perspectives will be explored, both independently and together, in the empirical chapters.

## Purpose of this research

Self-managed programs claim to be an alternative to regular programs that offers more empowerment, while it is not known how and to what extent they do this, how empowerment is influenced by the institutional setting and what the role of social workers and peer workers is.

Based on the introduction so far we distinguish three purposes of this research:

- Empirically: describing and understanding how participants, peer workers and social workers shape processes of empowerment and disempowerment within an institutional self-managed shelter (1)
- Theoretically: contributing to theoretical understanding and conceptual development of empowerment and disempowerment of people experiencing homelessness within an institutional setting and the interaction between empowerment and the institutional setting (2)
- Practically: contributing to the development of self-managed institutional programs in homeless and mental health care and the development of the role of social work in a changing welfare state, specifically within homeless and mental health care (3).

We aim to meet these purposes through answering the following research question:

*How do participants, peer workers and social workers experience and shape processes of empowerment and disempowerment in a self-managed institutional homeless shelter? To answer this question, an empirical study was executed, which is described in this thesis.*

## Methodology

The empirical data for this study stem from a longitudinal participatory case study (2009-2016) (Abma & Stake, 2014) of empowerment processes of participants in JES. The research is part of the Collaborative Center for the Social Domain (Werkplaats Sociaal Domein) at the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences and associated with the Academic Collaborative Centre Social Work, part of Tranzo Tilburg University.

Using a case study methodology does justice to the complex nature of a self-managed shelter and fits with the social-constructivist approach of our research, aimed at understanding the unique experiences of participants and other stakeholders (Abma & Stake, 2014; Hyett et al., 2014). A social-constructivist approach is also fitting with research into empowerment process (Van Regenmortel, 2011). In line with our social-constructivist

approach, we followed the principles of *responsive evaluation* (Abma et al., 2009, 2017), where stakeholders are engaged in the process of evaluation (Abma, 2019b). Responsive evaluation can be seen as a form of participatory action research (PAR). PAR focuses on exploring issues around power and complexity together with stakeholders (Abma et al., 2009, 2019; Kunneman, 2017). Issues of concern of stakeholders in relation to the meaning of self-management formed the starting point for a dialogue to develop mutual understanding, articulate different perspectives and determine the merit of practices to improve quality of the research.

The evaluation has been executed by a diverse team of researchers, including researchers with lived experience with homelessness. Participants, peer workers and social workers from JES engaged in co-designing the research, developing topic-lists, recruiting respondents, co-interviewing, discussing the outcomes of analysis and contributing to publications.

### **Data Collection**

The formal data consists of interviews with participants (N=27), peer workers (N=3), social workers (N=2) and other stakeholders (N=10), the latter were either policy advisors from the mother organization which JES is part of, who supported the development of JES, or representatives from partner organizations such as housing organizations, the municipality and local social work organizations). Several of the participants, peer workers and social workers were interviewed multiple times, resulting in 56 interviews. Eight participants were interviewed during their stay at JES, most were interviewed afterwards, varying from several weeks to several years after they left JES.

The interviews were part of two sub-projects. The first was a case study into JES (2009-2010), for which open interviews (Bryman, 2008) were held. Interview questions aimed at understanding the perspectives of stakeholders. Questions were among others: what is the current purpose of JES according to you? What are causes for some participants to participate more than others according to you? The second sub-project (2013-2014) focused on how former JES-participants looked back at their participation using a semi-structured topic-list (Bryman, 2008), and how their lives developed on several life domains (e.g. housing, finances, social contacts, day activities). Questions included: how did you spend your days during your stay at JES? How would you describe your interaction with other participants?

Interviews for the first study were held by two academic researchers, one of whom is the author of this thesis. Interviews for the study into former participants were held by couples of participants and students, under the supervision of experienced researchers, one of whom is the author of this thesis. All interviews, both from the first and second study, were recorded and transcribed. In addition to the interviews, documents delivered by respondents to the first author were analyzed (e.g. documents containing current and future developments of the program and auto-publications by participants).

In the first five years of JES (2009-2014), 72 people joined, from less than a day to multiple years. If we exclude those who leave (almost) immediately (stay less than three months), the average length of stay is around fifteen months. Of the 72 participants, 51 stayed for more than three months, of whom 32 were explicitly included in our research (through interviews or informal meetings), from seventeen others we have secondary information (from informal meetings, key informants and administrative data), such as their next place of stay and reason for leaving (e.g. conflict, debt, found alternative place to stay).

From the start of the first study up until the present, the first author engaged with participants, peer workers and social workers from JES, based on an ethnographic and participatory approach (O'Reilly, 2012). The prolonged engagement and persistent observations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) allowed the first author to gain a deeper understanding of the interview data and to observe changes overtime and the interaction between participants, peer workers and social workers among themselves and with outsiders (including the researchers). The interactions and observations done in this time focused on gaining more insight into how participants and other stakeholders experienced self-management over time. Because they were not collected as (structured) observational data, they have not been used for the primary analysis. In the methodologic chapter I reflect more extensively on engaging with and participation of JES in the research.

## Analysis

In our analysis we went back and forth between our empirical data and the theory, using a combination of interpretation and systematic coding, assisted by MAXqda. To manage our large dataset, we started by creating thematic categories. We developed working hypotheses to guide our focus, based on both an open coding of the empirical data by different researchers, including myself, and different theoretical concepts (O'Reilly, 2012). Inspired by the *plugging in* approach of Jackson & Mazzei (2013), we explored core themes in literature relevant to self-management, as described in the theoretical section of this introduction, to increase our understanding of the data. Building on the themes defined out of the data and the literature, a code-tree was developed and refined through axial coding, starting with open coding within a theme, defining and adapting subthemes as we went along, and then going back to refine earlier coding. Our analysis was neither deductive nor inductive. Rather, it was iterative, which is a back-and-forth movement between data and interpretations, using empowerment theory and institutional theory as lenses for understanding the data (O'Reilly, 2012). The analysis has been executed by the author of this thesis. Through the different phases in and approaches to our analysis, we have developed a *thick analysis* (Van Staa & Evers, 2010).

The richness of perspectives and the different theoretical approaches allowed us to make room for competing explanations (Abma et al., 2009). We strived for an authentic and recognized representation of the different perspectives involved with JES (Abma & Stake, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), paying explicit attention to the risk of overrepresentation

of more reflexive respondents (Bryman, 2008). We used several forms of triangulation: different types of data gathering, different researchers and different analytical approaches to limit the risk of bias (Denzin, 1989). Through triangulation, a transparent method description and describing our rationale for selecting this case, we aimed to improve the quality of our case study (Hyett et al., 2014).

Throughout the analysis we have remained in contact with JES, discussing preliminary analyses and working hypotheses with participants, peer workers and social workers in multiple sessions. This sharpened the analysis and increased the authenticity and a shared understanding of the core findings (Doyle, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For both studies we discussed a draft version of a report with respondents and other stakeholders in focus groups. Member checks were performed at various stages: both preliminary findings, working hypotheses and draft versions of conclusions were discussed with both respondents and other participants, peer workers and social workers involved, and their input has been processed. This is in line with Lincoln and Guba (1985) who see member checking as a process that occurs continuously during the research project, both informal and formal, and comprises the testing of data, analytic categories, interpretations and conclusions with members of the stakeholder group(s). Agreement of the respondent group establishes the credibility of the researcher's work and is a 'strong beachhead toward convincing readers and critics of the authenticity of the work' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 315). Member checking fits with our participatory evaluation approach (Abma, 2019a).

### **Ethical considerations**

Our research meets the requirements of anonymity, consent, confidentiality and safety of the participants and was guided by the ethical principles autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice. Participants were verbally informed on the purpose of the research and our use of their information. Written consent at one point in time fits less well with participatory research into marginalized groups (Abma et al., 2019; Miller & Bell, 2002). In providing consent, respondents were given the option to withdraw their consent at any time, which was done by one participant, whose interviews were deleted.

### **Overview of the thesis**

Including this introductory chapter, this thesis consists of eight chapters (excluding the summary). After this introductory chapter there are five empirical chapters. Each chapter has a specific angle, combining different theoretical approaches with different aspects of the empirical data. Though the angles are different, the chapters build on each other and several themes recur throughout, approached from different perspectives. Each chapter aims to contribute to empirical understanding, theoretical development and self-management as a practice.

In the first empirical chapter, I start by focusing on the motivation and experiences of participants and peer workers. I distinguish between three groups of experiences in relation

to benefits of living and managing together. These experiences are influenced by different interpretations of what self-management means and drawbacks of living together within the program. The role of social work and peer work are unclear. These issues are further explored in the second and third empirical chapter.

The second empirical chapter focuses on the influence of the institutional context on the experiences of participants, building on the significance participants described to this influence in the first empirical chapter. Although JES presented itself as an alternative to regular homeless programs, aspects of regular programs appear to be reproduced. To some extent, the context of JES and regular programs is similar, which could explain this mimicry. At the same time, institutionalization within JES appears to be more fluid than in regular programs and participants individually and collectively experience more freedom. Several aspects of self-management are institutionalized in the structure of JES. Some participants and peer workers appear to be more attached to institutional structure than social workers. Therefore, the next chapter focusses on the role of social workers and peer workers.

The third empirical chapter builds on the common reference in the discourse on the welfare state to making room within the system for the lifeworld, based on Habermas' conceptual framework. Social workers present the system, in this frame. To some extent, this frame is used in JES as well. In this chapter we find that the interaction between system and lifeworld and the role of power is more complex, especially if we look at the role of social workers and peer workers. The concept of communicative action, proposed by Habermas, fails to capture these complex power dynamics. The critical pedagogy of Freire offers a more useful framework to understand the role and actions of social workers and peer workers and appears to do more justice to the role of social workers in supporting self-management and empowerment.

In the fourth empirical chapter, we zoom out a bit and reflect on the influence a participatory space can have on the development of individual, relational and democratic citizenship. Citizenship of people who are homeless is often underdeveloped. JES as a participatory space contributes to the development of individual, relational and democratic citizenship, albeit on different levels and in different ways.

In the final empirical chapter, we explore the influence JES as a setting has on empowerment and disempowerment of participants, incorporating the outcomes of the other empirical chapters and building on the role-framework that Brown developed. While this framework sheds light on empowerment and disempowerment processes within JES, several additional aspects come to the fore in our analysis. Most importantly, participants experience empowerment in different ways, which can be at odds with a single framework. Intrinsic tensions within JES create power struggles, though they ensure ongoing development of JES.

In the seventh chapter, we reflect on the process of participatory research and shared learning on different levels. This research has a triple aim (empirical, theoretical and practical) and although this combination has had many benefits, it also created dilemma's with regards to how the research was designed and executed, how we reflected on (dis) empowerment and how I engaged as a person and was both object and subject of power.

In the discussion, the final chapter, I reflect on the insights arising from our study in relation to the purposes of this research and the research question. Specifically, I discuss insights that empowerment and institutional theory brought to light, how these theories relate to each other, and new insights from my research that contribute to our understanding of (limitations to) these theories. I also discuss how PAR enabled me to engage with the complexity of empowerment processes within an institutional setting and my own role in practicing PAR and shaping the interaction between data and theory.

*There was a time in our lives when we were so close that nothing seemed to obstruct our friendship and brotherhood, and only a small footbridge separated us. Just as you were about to step on it, I asked you: 'Do you want to cross the footbridge to me?' - But then you didn't want to anymore; and when I asked again, you were silent.*

Friedrich Nietzsche



## 2

# Exploring empowerment of participants and peer workers in a self-managed homeless shelter

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## Introduction

People without a home started self-managed homeless shelters in the Netherlands, together with social workers, as a protest against a lack of shelter and a perceived paternalistic approach in regular shelters (Tuyman & Huber, 2014). Self-managed shelters reach people who are not (yet) able to access housing or a Housing first program (Tuyman & Huber, 2014), although they share with Housing first an emphasis on self-determination (Padgett et al., 2016). Participants and peer workers are in charge of daily and strategic affairs in self-managed shelters (Tuyman & Huber, 2014). Little research has been done into self-managed shelters (Tuyman & Huber, 2014). More is known about other self-organized programs, from consumer-run centers (Brown, 2012) to peer-run respite houses (Ostrow & Croft, 2015). Self-organized programs are managed by participants and peer workers and emphasize empowerment (Brown, 2012; Ostrow & Croft, 2015). In this paper we explore how participants and peer workers in JES experience empowerment within the context of self-management. Stimulating and facilitating empowerment is an important purpose of social work (Lee & Hudson, 2017).

### Empowerment

Empowerment is described as a paradigm that operates on an individual, organizational, and political level (Van Regenmortel, 2011). Different empowerment levels are interdependent, strengthening or limiting one another (Peterson & Zimmerman, 2004). As a consequence, empowerment has many dimensions. We focus on the individual level.

Individual empowerment entails “a sense of personal control or influence and a concern with actual social influence” (Rappaport, 1987, p. 121). Zimmerman (1995, p. 588) distinguishes between aspects of individual empowerment: internal (motivation, perceived control), interactional (access to resources, critical consciousness) and behavioral (social participation). Critical consciousness describes individuals and groups becoming aware of how society influences their life and how they can influence their societal circumstances and is seen as a starting point for empowerment (Freire, 2005).

Individual empowerment is only possible in a social environment (other people, organizational context, community) that enables empowerment by offering supportive social relations and opportunities for development (Peterson & Zimmerman, 2004; Van Regenmortel, 2011).

There is also a dialectical tension within the concept of empowerment (Rappaport, 1981). Specifically, a tension that requires delicate balance is between freedom of choice (control) and capacity development (roles, skills). Recent literature frames empowerment less dialectically, arguing that capacity development contributes to freedom of choice, although the emphasis commonly lies on capacity development (Van Regenmortel, 2011; Zimmerman, 1995). Capacity development is related to the strength based approach in social work (Van Regenmortel, 2011).

Developing self-sufficiency and self-improvement, has evolved into public policy and mainstream thinking (Abma, 2017; Van Regenmortel, 2011). Some authors warn that empowerment is instrumentally used as a new form of social control (Rivest & Moreau, 2015; Solvang & Juritzen, 2020). In the Netherlands there has been an increase in budget cuts and calls from the government for people to become more self-sufficient and offer support to each other (Metze, 2015; Stam, 2013). As a consequence people in vulnerable positions risk being neglected (Abma, 2017; Pommer et al., 2018).

Empowerment, stripped down to becoming self-sufficient and working on self-improvement, as an obligation rather than as emancipation, goes against empowerment principles (Peterson & Zimmerman, 2004; Rappaport, 1987). Individuals in a vulnerable position might not be interested in developing self-sufficiency and psychological empowerment, especially if not combined with an increase in power (Abma, 2017; Duyvendak, 1999). Therefore, they might opt to refrain from engagement with programs that encourage empowerment (Duyvendak, 1999; Freire, 2005). Participation in empowering practices by individuals in a vulnerable position might be hindered by barriers such as a lack of skills or resources (Boone et al., 2019).

Empowerment theory was in part developed by studies into self-organized care (Rappaport, 1987) and research into self-organized care builds on empowerment theory (Brown, 2012). Self-organized care can contribute to a feeling of competency, hope, social functioning, social support, role development and skills and a decrease in psychiatric care (Brown, 2012; Segal & Hayes, 2016). Participants who engage less with activities, social life, and program management, experience fewer benefits (Brown, 2012; Ostrow & Croft, 2015; Segal & Hayes, 2016). Self-organized care entails freedom of choice and capacity development, although research focuses on the latter (Brown, 2012).

To explore how participants and peer workers experience empowerment processes within self-managed programs, we use data from our study into *Je Eigen Stek* (Your Own Place, JES). JES is a self-managed shelter that started in 2008 in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. The program serves people who are homeless and are not yet able to obtain independent housing. Self-managed shelters claim to be an alternative to regular shelters, in offering more freedom to participants.

Although research on self-managed shelters is lacking, research into other self-organized programs suggests that they are associated with psychological empowerment (Brown, 2012). Our purpose is to describe how participants and peer workers experience empowerment processes in a self-managed shelter.

## Method

The empirical data for this paper stems from a 8-year participatory case study (2009-2016) (Abma & Stake, 2014) into empowerment processes in relation to self-management. The research is part of the *Collaborative Center for the Social Domain* at the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences. In our research we have complied with APA ethical principles in the treatment of individuals. Executives of participating organizations assessed the legal and ethical implications of the study, and approved the procedures.

In our design we followed the principles of *responsive evaluation* (Abma et al., 2009), where stakeholders are engaged in the process of evaluation. Stakeholder issues form the starting point for a dialogue to develop mutual understanding, articulate different perspectives, and determine the merit of different practices, as part of an effort to improve evaluation quality.

The evaluation has been executed by a diverse research team, including researchers with lived experience. Participants, peer workers and social workers from JES engaged in co-designing the research, developing topic-lists, recruiting respondents, co-interviewing, discussing the analysis and contributing to publications.

### Study Setting

JES aims 'to help people without a home, get a home' through housing sixteen people, who want to work on their problems in their own way. Prospective participants have to be able to care for themselves. The majority of participants were male and single. Participants were of adult ages, with a few exceptions of late adolescents. JES did not register ethnicity. Most participants are dependent on welfare, some have a job. The sixteen participants together are responsible for the program management, from household to entrance and exit of participants and strategic issues. Participants choose a chairman among themselves, to chair meetings and represent JES in external affairs, together with other participants. JES is funded by the municipality of Amsterdam and is part of a larger regular homeless care organization. Unlike most self-organized programs, JES hired a social worker to support participants, the group and the program. The social worker collaborates with a peer worker, who has lived experiences with homelessness and who was a participant before becoming a peer worker, although he does not live there anymore. Both the social worker and the peer worker are paid by JES and both are hired by the participants through a vote at a meeting.

In the first five years of JES (2009-2014), 72 people stayed there, from less than a day up to multiple years, fifteen months on average (excluding those who stay less than a week). Of the 72 participants, 51 stayed for more than three months, of whom 32 were explicitly spoken to (in an interview or through informal meetings), from seventeen others we have (some) secondary information.

## Data Collection

Our formal data consist mainly of interviews, with participants (N=27), peer workers (N=3), social workers (N=2) and other stakeholders (e.g. policy advisors from the mother organization, managers from partner organizations) (N=10). Several participants, peer workers and social workers have been interviewed on two to four instances, resulting in 56 interviews in total. The interviews come from two sub-projects. The first was a narrative study into experiences with JES, in 2009-2010, based on the *learning history* method (Kleiner & Roth, 1996), focused on the experiences of stakeholders over time. Narrative interviews explored what participants saw as the purpose of self-management, what their own motivation was, and how they experienced living/working in self-management. The second sub-project, in 2013-2014, focused on how former JES-participants looked back at their participation, using a semi-structured format (Bryman, 2008). The interviews with former participants focused on several life domains (e.g. housing, finances, social contacts, day activities), at three points (before, during and after their stay at JES).

The interviews from the first narrative study have been done by two academic researchers, one of whom is the first author. The interviews in the study into former participants were done by couples of participants and students, supervised by experienced researchers, among who the first author. All interviews from the first and second study were recorded and transcribed. In providing consent, respondents were given the option to withdraw their consent at any time, which was done by one participant, whose interviews were directly deleted.

In the result section we describe different subgroups of participants and how they are represented in our data-collection. We included as many participants as possible, though those who were negative and less engaged are underrepresented, because they did not want to participate in the research. In our analysis, we paid specific attention to this underrepresentation. We interviewed participants from all years between 2008 to 2014. Some were interviewed during their stay, most were interviewed after their stay. We found no substantial differences between participants from different years.

Several additional measures ensure the diversity and representativity of the interviews. Documents were analyzed (e.g. project-plans, auto-publications by participants) and we processed administrative data recorded by JES on participant' demographics and length of stay. For both studies a draft version was discussed with respondents and other stakeholders (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 315). Finally,

from the first study up until the present, the first author engaged with JES, based on an ethnographic and participatory approach (O'Reilly, 2012). Developing long lasting relations with participants, peer workers and social workers involved with JES from 2009 to the present allowed the first author to observe the interaction between participants, peer workers and social workers among themselves and with outsiders (including the research-

ers). The interactions and observations done in this time focused on gaining insight into how participants and other stakeholders experienced self-management over time. The prolonged engagement and persistent observations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) allowed the first author to gain a deeper understanding of interview data and the representativity of the interview data, and to observe changes over time.

### **Analysis**

In our analysis, we employed an iterative approach, going back and forth between empirical data and the discussed theory, combining interpretation and systematic coding, using MAXqda (Abma et al., 2019; O'Reilly, 2012). We started with a preliminary open analysis. Based on the 'plugging in' approach, proposed by Jackson & Mazzei (2013), we employed several theoretical lenses to increase our understanding of the data and to enrich the data. Empowerment theory appeared to be the most fruitful for the purpose of our paper. To manage our large dataset, we started by creating thematic categories, based on the preliminary open analysis and the concept of empowerment, to guide our focus (O'Reilly, 2012). Based on the coding of the first interviews, our code-list was revised, applied to new interviews and so on, until code-saturation was achieved, after which the first interviews were recoded with the final code-tree (Bryman, 2008; O'Reilly, 2012). The analysis has been executed by the first author, under supervision of the other authors.

The richness of perspectives and the different theoretical approaches, allowed us to make room for competing explanations (Abma et al., 2009). We strived for an authentic and recognized representation of the different perspectives involved with JES (Abma & Stake, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), paying explicit attention to the risk of overrepresenting more reflexive respondents (Bryman, 2008). We used several forms of triangulation: different types of data gathering, different researchers and different analytical approaches to limit the risk of bias (Denzin, 1989; Kimchi et al., 1991).

Throughout the analysis we remained in contact with JES, discussing preliminary analyses and working hypotheses with participants, peer workers and social workers, sharpening the analysis and increasing the authenticity and shared understanding of core findings (Doyle, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

## **Results**

The result section entails two smaller themes (practical benefits and freedom of choice) and three larger themes (different clusters of experiences, living together and engaging with self-management). The results described in this paper are based on statements made by participants and peer workers. Statements from social workers are explicitly mentioned. The cited respondent quotes are translated from Dutch by the first author. The quotes from participants are numbered. Participants 15, 17, 19, 21 & 24 were interviewed

in the first sub-project, participants 1, 2, 4-6, 8-14, 16, 18, 20, 22, 23 were interviewed in the second sub-project.

### **Practical benefits**

All participants described various practical benefits they experienced and appreciated (to various degrees), and for most this was an important goal for joining JES. Examples included stable shelter (in comparison to night-shelters or sleeping outside), low living costs, access to computer and telephone and, if desired, practical assistance. JES provided access to independent housing for a substantial number of participants. These practical benefits are often lacking in regular shelters, although they can be achieved there as well.

### **Freedom of Choice**

Most of those involved with JES expect and want JES to be an alternative to regular care with less interference from group workers and more freedom for individual choice. Participants and peer workers in JES stated that self-management offers (or should offer) freedom of choice and that they appreciated and benefited from the freedom of choice JES offered. Freedom of choice is symbolized in JES through a key that all participants get, allowing them to come and go at any given time. Symbolically, the key represents the choice participants have to work on problems in their own way. According to multiple participants and peer workers, in self-management, you “have to do it yourself”. For a substantial number of participants, JES was a negative choice. They either did not have access to or were fed up with regular shelters, because of a perceived lack of choice and perspective. One participant (#2) for instance states:

*“You had more freedom [in JES] than in regular care. [...] [In regular homeless care] they are constantly watching you, to see if they can tell you off, and you are obligated to get up at a certain time, and you have to be back at a certain time.”*

### **Three Clusters of Individual Experience**

We categorized experiences of participants and peer workers in three clusters of stories. The first cluster is enthusiastic and engaged with the program, the second cluster is moderate to critical and minimally engaged. The third is mostly negative and disengaged. The clusters overlap and participants move between clusters, e.g. start active, get disappointed and focus on themselves, or get stuck, drop out, come back and become very active. The three described clusters give different interpretations to freedom of choice.

From 53 of the 72 participants who stayed at JES during the first five years (2009-2014) we have sufficient information to say with some certainty to which cluster they belong. The first cluster (engaged) consists of 27 (of 53) participants. Ten participants of the first cluster (temporarily) moved to cluster two or three. Members of the first cluster stayed longer at JES than members of the second cluster. The second cluster (moderately critical and minimally engaged) is the second best represented in our data-collection, with

seventeen members (of 53), four of whom started out in cluster one. The third cluster (negative and disengaged) had nineteen members (of 53), of which six started or ended in the first cluster. It is also the cluster of which we know the least, as members of the third cluster typically stayed at JES for less time and were less likely to participate in interviews.

**Engaged cluster.** Participants and peer workers belonging to the enthusiastic cluster described how interaction with others helped them. Participants for instance mentioned that when they saw someone with whom they identified preparing to move to independent housing, they got active themselves.

Processes of social support, social comparison and social motivation enabled these enthusiastic participants to make choices and become active. Several participants stated that, through participating in JES and gaining independent housing, they developed hope and perspective for the future: “[my life] went wrong, but through JES I got back on track” (participants #4). In that process, they developed practical skills (such as organizing their administration) and increased their ability to self-direct their life.

**Moderate cluster.** Members of the second cluster, who were less engaged with the program, emphasized the importance of self-reliance and the absence of interference from other participants and workers. They appreciated freedom and practical opportunities. In JES they could work on their problems in their own way, as illustrated by this participant (#5): “JES for me was a bridging place, so I could get my affairs in order”.

They didn’t want others to support them, and they didn’t want to support others. Participants in this cluster, argued that if you are not able to take care of yourself, you are not suited for self-management.

A minority of participants got stuck in what peer workers and social workers called the “fyke [trap] of self-management”, a term describing participants who appeared to have adapted to life in the program. A participant (#8) stated:

*“There were people, who did nothing, truly nothing, to improve their situation. They didn’t want to move on. They resigned themselves. They had food, they could sleep, could watch television and it cost them almost nothing.”*

Participants stuck in the fyke of self-management did not use the freedom JES offered to work on their problems. Respondents had different views on whether participants got stuck out of convenience, lack of skills or resistance to interference from others. Over time, these participants dropped-out or became active again, inspired or urged by other participants.

Participants from the different clusters and peer workers pointed out that participants have to follow their own unique trajectory, in their own time. To what extent the trajectory can be stimulated and articulated, was subject to discussion. Some participants argued that participants have to initiate progress themselves:

*“I had no pressure, you are not obligated to do anything at JES, it is your mess. If you do not want to be helped, or you don’t do anything, you are burning your fingers, because the longer you wait to get your affairs in order, the longer you have to wait for a house. That is a good incentive”* (participant #10).

**No benefits cluster.** Members of the third cluster, who experienced no apparent benefits, mostly emphasized conflicts with others. One participant (#11) for instance said: *“I was labeled a thief, and I wasn’t allowed to have a say, because they already had their judgement ready: you have to go, and there I was outside”*. Other participants and peer workers point out that self-management was not a good fit for participants who left, because they could not deal with the freedom self-management offered, were not able to adjust to living with other people, or had overwhelming personal problems.

*“It won’t work for everyone. There are people who drop out, because they think that, within their private space in their room, they can do things [e.g. consume drugs, alcohol] that were in fact a cause of their homelessness”* (peer worker).

Several participants and peer workers stated that being homeless causes traumas that are an important factor in dropping out.

Members of the three clusters described different views on what self-management means and how participants should use the offered freedom. One cluster pleaded for the importance of being left alone, others argued for the value of offering social support, and a minority stated that more push should be given towards people who by themselves do not make progress. Several participants used their freedom to deflect from working on their problems. Respondents disagreed on whether participants should engage with the program or that they should focus on their individual life.

### Living Together

In self-managed programs, participants live together. How participants experienced living together varies substantially.

**Benefits of living together.** Enthusiastic participants appreciated sharing practical resources (information, suggestions) and lived experiences, while developing experiential knowledge. *“Often people fill out forms for each other. Or they make a call, look on the internet or suggest someone to talk to for advice”* (participant #12). Another participant (#13) stated: Although they had conflicts with other participants, they saw these conflicts

as part of living together and adapting to each other, or as a participant (#13) states: *“even if you don’t get along, you have to help each other.”* They were often able to solve conflicts themselves.

**Drawbacks of living together.** Participants who were less enthusiastic about self-management described how they kept a distance from other participants, because they wanted to focus on their own life and / or because they did not trust other participants: *“I went my own way”* (participant #14). These participants experienced interactions as social control. They complained about always being watched and being reproached by other participants and not having space for their individual choices as a consequence of living together. *“Sometimes you just want to be alone. Well, you can’t”* (participant #15). The lack of private space was mostly experienced by participants who were negative or moderately enthusiastic, though even some of the enthusiastic participants were critical on this subject. Participants who were less enthusiastic about self-management tried not to bother others, although they experienced being bothered by others. Example nuisances included having to share a room and a general lack of privacy.

Enthusiastic participants struggled to interact with participants who are more individually oriented and less keen on adapting to social life in JES:

*“If you mean well, then you can say something to someone else, but they can experience it as unwanted interference [...] even though you mean it well, the other person can experience it very differently, and then you have friction”* (participant #16).

**Dealing with vulnerability of other participants.** Participants and peer workers struggled with vulnerabilities, including problems with mental health and substance abuse, that might lie behind conflicts and complicated behavior (aggression, irrational behavior). Several participants acknowledged the negative influence that having been homeless and still being in a financially and socially vulnerable position has on participants’ ability to work, live and learn together. *“Those people are all individually oriented, from the streets, have their own worries, are shaped a certain way, and are there for their own benefit”* (peer worker). Another peer worker adds that he hopes that through living together, participants become more socially oriented: *“it is about becoming aware: I don’t live alone anymore, I live in a group. In the group it is give and take, and more often than not, more giving than taking”*.

Social workers, most peer workers and several participants repeatedly pleaded for including struggling participants, referring to the experience of exclusion that most participants share. *“Participants are very critical and harsh towards each other, judging each other, why people don’t fit in this system [JES], while they themselves dropped out and were forced out the system, it repeats itself”* (social worker). Other participants felt that if a participant cannot behave or follow the rules, he should be evicted. *“If you don’t abide to the rules, then you are done. We’re not giving you another month, no, right away”* (participant #6).

Participants from the enthusiastic cluster, peer workers and social workers claimed that even those who did not like living together benefited from it, because it helped to socially prepare them for independent living. In interviews, critical participants stated they received no social support and no social benefits, while a few minutes later sharing how they appreciated talking about the day with their roommate or how they learned to deal with different opinions.

### **Engagement in Program Management**

Participants met every Monday evening to discuss all relevant program aspects, from day to day affairs and deciding who gets to enroll to strategic decisions on moving to a different location and hiring a social worker. Participant #9 describes his experiences: *"I decided on all important issues [...] every Monday in the meeting [...] discussed, votes counted and then we simply make a decision"*. Another added: *"I thought it was one of the most important aspects of JES. That you have insight into what's going on"* (participant #4).

Participants were expected to partake in meetings, although there were few consequences for those who did not. Only a minority was enthusiastic about these Monday evening meetings, though a majority appreciated the concept of shared program management and several participants felt ownership and developed organizational awareness (financially, strategically). The latter often became an (informal) peer worker and / or chairman (chosen by the participants). JES had little formal hierarchy, although active participants sometimes formed working groups. Participants who were active often engaged in advocacy for JES or individuals. Advocacy focused on access to housing, fighting financial constraints or creating awareness about the plight of homelessness and the possibilities of self-management. *"M. [social worker] asked: the district attorney wants to meet with people from JES and find a solution. So I said ok [...] and I asked S. [another participant] to join [...] ever since we have been doing things I would normally never do"* (participant #17).

**Capacity-building for self-management.** Participants and peer workers described how they tried to stimulate capacity development, participants talents and strengths and use existing participant capacities. One participant for instance had a background in accounting, another used to be a social worker and a third used to be a cook. *"It was already you. Only now it showed. Maybe that is what I learned, recognizing and acknowledging your own talents"* (participant #6).

A peer worker stated: *"don't focus on what you can't, focus on what a person can do. And then let him do it."* Another participant (#18), who claimed to be neither good at reading nor physically well, said: *"someone needed to stay at the house at all times. I was often inside, or I sat outside, but someone always had to be there."* This participant contributed within his ability. Participants who were able to develop and employ their capacities experienced this as positive and as contributing to their self-image. *"It is so important*

*that you show that people have talents themselves. That they can do things themselves. That definitely happened at JES” (participant #6).*

Participants either offered their skills themselves, or were invited to do so by other participants, peer workers or a social worker. A number of participants felt their capacities were underappreciated by participants, peer workers and social workers. One participant who offered to contribute said: *“There is no reaction, it fell on deaf ears” (participant #19).* Several interpretations are given by respondents on why some capacities were not recognized or employed: as a consequence of conflict, carelessness of peer workers and social workers and/or participant's distrust and insecurity. A participant (#8) realized when he left:

*“that you can underestimate people, of what they are capable of. You have people who look a bit sluggish [.....] and then you get to know someone a bit better and you see that in fact he does have something to offer. That is something I have learned.”*

Less than half of the participants actively engaged in program management, beyond partaking in the weekly meeting. Those who did, stated that it contributed to their self-worth, a form of helper-therapy (Brown, 2012). Besides their self-worth, several participants stated that managing together contributed to their self-confidence, personal insight, their ability to make choices and developing social and role specific skills (for instance in leading meetings or negotiating with managers). *“You need to talk, listen, share an idea, use an idea” (participant #20).*

*“[you learn to] become more patient with other people's opinions, you become more lenient. You have to understand that your opinion is not the opinion of everyone else, even when you think ‘I see it this way, and that's the way it is’, no that is not the way it is” (participant #21).*

Most peer workers emphasized the importance of participants engaging with program management: *“you need to keep involving people, you shouldn't give up” (peer worker).* Those participants who were less engaged, experienced fewer explicit benefits.

**Barriers to self-management.** All participants and peer workers described negative aspects of managing the program together, even those who were enthusiastic about self-management. *“We got really tired of all those meetings” (participant #16).* *“If these meetings would have content [.....] but it was about nothing. We were talking about meeting with the municipality, and then someone brought up a small hook in their bathroom that was tilted” (participant #2).*

The level of participant engagement was not fixed. Several participants started hesitant, because of an overly active management-group, which eventually dissolved, after which the newcomers grew to become active members as well. Others started very enthusiastic, taking up different roles and activities, after which they were disappointed by other

participants who did not share their enthusiasm or because of external factors (such as unsuccessfully advocating for JES). At multiple points in time, the collective management process was experienced by respondents as stuck, for which several causes are mentioned. Firstly, several participants and peer workers stated that it was difficult to find capable and motivated participants. Participants who stated that they were motivated and capable to contribute at the start, turned out, according to others, to be less motivated and / or capable. Some participants explicitly stated that they had no interest in contributing to self-management. *“You have a lot of people who do many things for JES. And that is not me, I focused on my own things”* (participant #23). Participants also mentioned they lost motivation because they felt too many other participants contributed too little. Another participant (#6) added:

*“And then I noticed that there are other participants who seem to think ‘I’m here but I don’t care for JES, as long as I have a room and can move to my own place in a bit’. And that is discouraging.”*

**Informal leaders and followers.** Several participants said they started motivated, but lost that motivation because of (perceived) hierarchy by the “bosses of JES”, a term used by multiple participants, referring to an informal group of active participants. *“There is no room allowed to participate. In the beginning I said that I wanted to do it ...it was a specific group who were in charge, and who took a lot away from the other participants”* (participant #19).

A divide between leaders and followers also leads to stereotyping (they decide everything vs. they don’t do anything). One group of participants said they did not feel heard, others said that there were too many opinions, not enough actions. Participants who belonged to the management group, stated that a stronger focus on rules was necessary: *“it should have been stricter. If you neglected your duties, it took quite some time before action was undertaken”* (participant #2).

Multiple respondents described power play and cronyism, or described how they distrusted the motives of other participants or how others distrusted their motives: *“people thought I had a hidden agenda”* (peer worker). Others emphasized that JES’ strength was its openness: *“it happens openly, everyone can hear it, experience it. [...] there is no hidden agenda, it really is in your face”* (participant #1). A divide between leaders and followers, a focus on rules and regulations, and distrust towards the ‘other’ party’s sincerity resembled the relations between group workers and residents in regular institutional programs. Participants mentioned this resemblance themselves, stating *“[in the previous program] I had much more opportunities and choices”* (participant #11). Another participant states:

*“The risk of course is that you make too many rules, just like in regular shelters [.....]. But you have to keep in mind, the rules that you make, they are meant to stimulate, to move forward, to help people get back in to society” (participant #6).*

**Conflict in self-management.** The way participants and peer workers experienced self-managed programs was influenced by stress and conflicts caused by living, working and managing together. A substantial number of participants and peer workers were disappointed by the complications of self-managing a program. One stated: *“JES just doesn’t work, it turned out it was an utopia”* (participant #24) The few participants that left involuntary or after a conflict were especially negative, although several stated that their negativity was mostly related to the behavior of and conflicts with specific individuals, rather than self-management in general. Other participants were more positive about self-management. One participant (#12) even stated: *“self-management is the way to go, self-management is the future.”*

Through managing the program together, gaining control and developing capacities come together. Multiple participants and peer workers described how, through participating in management, they gained skills, self-esteem and social roles. Other participants used their individual choice to not participate in program management, either out of disinterest, focus on individual interest, resistance to perceived social control, disappointment in the managing process, or an experienced lack of encouragement from others.

**Role of social workers in self-management.** Participants and peer workers in JES regularly pointed to the important role social workers play. Social workers supported and advocated for individual participants, which the participants appreciated. Social workers also facilitated the process of self-management and related group processes. According to participants in JES, social workers tended to be too idealistic in their focus on inclusion and deliberation and should be more interventionist when it comes to conflicts. Social workers stated that their role was to facilitate, not guide.

## Discussion

In this paper we described participants and peer workers experiences with JES, a self-managed shelter, in relation to empowerment processes. Although our analysis reveals several issues related to experiences with self-management, discussed below, it is worth noting that people who are homeless appear to be able to self-manage a shelter. The freedom of choice JES offers, in combination with material benefits (stable shelter, low cost), makes JES a preferred choice for most participants, even for participants who were generally negative about JES. A majority of participants we have information on are (moderately) positive about JES.

We distinguish three clusters of experiences: 1) positive, 2) moderate, and 3) negative, each with a related level of engagement, respectively high, moderate to low, and no engagement. Participants in the first cluster described experiences that are similar to those in other self-organized programs, like improvement in self-image and role- and skill development (Brown, 2012). The second moderate cluster used JES to work on their problems in their own way, although it is suggested they also implicitly develop social skills. The third cluster of participants does not (directly) benefit from participating in the program. The powerlessness most participants experienced in regular homeless care, which was the reason for starting JES, remained problematic for a number of participants within JES. The position of participants sometimes changed over time, from negative to more enthusiastic, and vice versa. Our findings support the proposed relation between level of engagement with JES and the explicit benefits (Brown & Townley, 2015; Segal & Hayes, 2016). JES served as a space to work on individual problems, even without (active) engagement in JES. Although self-management was empowering for a majority of participants, it was not helpful for everyone. Future research is needed to identify individual characteristics that increase the likelihood of benefitting from JES.

Unlike in most self-organized care, participants of JES live together. Enthusiastic participants described living together as a positive experience, both the casual interactions and social learning (Brown, 2012), although they acknowledge challenges such as adapting to other participants. Other participants described having to adapt as problematic, interfering with their ability to make individual choices. Participants in the moderate and negative cluster experience social processes in JES as social control. For the negative cluster of participants, living and managing together was a reason to drop-out. More study is needed into negative experiences related to living together, especially to understand how rules are made, shaped, changed and experienced within JES.

The different experiences of social processes echo Berlin's (1969) distinction between positive and negative freedom: one participant experiences freedom as being left alone without interference from participants and peer workers (negative freedom), while another participant experiences freedom as helping each other (positive freedom). According to respondents, the former position might be caused by an inability to form supportive social relations with others and might be a coping strategy to deal with traumas that are caused by homelessness. Critical participants themselves stated they left regular care because they did not want to work on alleged mental health problems and continued to refuse at JES, in line with Scott's (2010) argument that self-help programs risk becoming *reinvented institutions*, enacting subtle social control.

In some cases, exclusion processes were reproduced. Although all participants have experienced social exclusion, only few shared these experiences with others and a substantial number of participants reproduced social exclusion by rejecting participants who struggled to fit in. Researchers and practitioners must critically reflect on how to label respondents

who refuse to acknowledge vulnerability, as it may be a coping strategy or a strategy to resist social control.

Most participants experience control over their own life within JES and, in various levels, over the program. For some, experiencing control has a positive influence on capacity development, although other participants use their control to deflect from (explicitly) working on their capacities. JES emphasizes control by participants, rather than capacity development. While it is argued that empowerment without control cannot be empowerment (Rappaport, 1987; Van Regenmortel, 2011), our analysis shows that having control does not automatically lead to capacity development either. Attempts to start working on empowerment beyond control are rejected by some participants, who use their control to avoid unwanted capacity development. Those who focus mainly on their control still can benefit from participating in JES. Our findings support Rappaport's (1981, 1987) description of empowerment as a dialectical concept, of which researchers and practitioners need to be aware.

The role of social workers and peer workers in JES is contested, especially in relation to program management and in dealing with participants who are less able to work on their problems or to engage in social life. Social workers and peer workers regularly pleaded for inclusion, even though multiple participants pleaded for less tolerance. Some participants wanted more intervention from social workers, while social workers wanted to focus on facilitation. Social workers and peer workers wanted to promote freedom of choice and wanted to offer support needed to develop capacities, which created tensions in relation to participants who did not want support. Facilitating both aspects of individual empowerment (freedom of choice and capacity development) is an important purpose of social work in general (Lee & Hudson, 2017). JES offers an unique perspective on how social workers balance the dialectical nature of individual empowerment and a focus on individual needs with the importance of social change (Boone et al., 2019; Lee & Hudson, 2017).

Further study is needed into the role of social workers and peer workers, as the literature on self-organized care gives this issue little attention.

### **Limitations to the study**

Our data is predominantly narrative, with an emphasis on respondents reflective and verbal capacities, which entails the risk of underrepresentation of less verbal respondents (Bryman, 2008). Participants who were less enthusiastic about JES are underrepresented in our data, because they were more difficult to approach and less willing to be interviewed. In our analysis and our presentation of the data we emphasized the perspective of less verbal and of critical participants, to counter underrepresentation, and to explore alternative and competing explanations in the analysis (Abma et al., 2009). Non-verbal or more structured (less reflexive) data gathering in future research can triangulate our findings (Bryman, 2008). A strength of our research is the first author's prolonged engagement

with JES, which enabled him to observe developments, gain insight into the dynamics of self-management and increase the representativity of observations (Bryman, 2008). Engagement of participants, peer workers and social workers in the research increased the authenticity of our findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### **Conclusion**

Our data suggest engagement in self-management promotes empowerment. People who are homeless are able to manage a shelter together, which is preferred by most participants over regular care. Participants chose their own trajectory within JES. To what extent other participants, peer workers and social workers are able and allowed to support the development of empowerment, remains subject to ongoing discussion. To create individual opportunities for empowerment, it is important that social workers, peer workers and participants stimulate (other) participants to engage with self-management. Participants can benefit from JES without engaging. Our analysis shows the importance of offering people in a vulnerable position freedom of choice and stimulating engagement with capacity development. Our study contributes to the knowledge on empowering social work practices (Lee & Hudson, 2017). Our research articulated the dialectical nature of self-management, entailing capacity development and freedom of choice. Social workers and peer workers need to be aware of this dialectical nature in supporting and eliciting empowerment processes.

*It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then,  
and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.*

Paulus



## 3

# Self-managed programs in homeless care as (reinvented) institutions

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## Introduction

In self-managed institutional homeless care, participants and their peers are responsible for both day to day affairs and strategic decisions, such as whether to move. Professionals give advice, they have no formal say (Tuynman & Huber, 2014). Self-managed homeless care is a form of self-organized care, which is associated with individual and collective empowerment (Brown, 2012). An institutional context appears to influence self-management (Huber, Brown, Metzke, Stam, Van Regenmortel, et al., 2020), in line with the influence of the institutional context in regular institutional care (Abma, 2010; Enarsson et al., 2008; Wolins & Wozner, 1982). Goffman described care institutions or *total institutions* as: 'a place [...] where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered [...] life' (1961, p. xiii). The dominant policy in the Netherlands and other Western countries is to stimulate deinstitutionalization of people living in clinics, shelters or sheltered living facilities, however, many former institutionalized residents struggle to sustainably do so (Kroon, 2018). There is increasing attention for supporting recovery within institutional care, though organizations struggle to put this to practice (Kroon, 2018; Slade et al., 2014).

Using insights from institutional theory and research on institutional care (Goffman, 1961; S. Scott, 2010; Wolins & Wozner, 1982) we aim to understand the influence of an institutional context on self-management. Institutional theory describes how social structures, such as rules, norms and routines, influence social behavior and how social behavior in turn influences social structures (W. R. Scott, 2005). Little to no attention is given in literature on self-organized care to institutional influences (Brown, 2012). We aim to further our insight into the meaning of self-managed institutional programs compared to regular programs from the perspectives of multiple stakeholders, including participants, peer workers and social workers. We expect that using self-managed programs as an outlier case (Gerring, 2007) will offer new insights into regular institutional care.

### **Total institutions and institutional theory**

Goffman describes total institutions as 'social hybrids, part institutional community, part formal organization' (1961, p. 12), organizing every part of daily life. There is a strong focus on maintaining order among large groups of residents (Goffman calls them *inmates* in all contexts), with little staff and limited resources. Total institutions are 'staging a difference between two constructed categories of persons' (1961, p. 111), forcing a *binary division*, you are either staff or inmate (1961, p. 7), enforced by different dress codes and different required behavior. During *role releases*, the social distance between staff and residents becomes smaller and residents have more freedom, but they are also expected to behave better (Goffman, 1961). Compliance from residents is sought from the entrance, where residents have to hand in personal belongings, *stripping identity* (Goffman, 1961). Staff has more information than residents, both in general and concerning residents, which stimulates compliance. Reduction of an individual to a sole role of inmate, *mortification*

(1961, p. 21), harms the self-image of residents and stimulates adaptation to the workings of the institution, to the extent that it hinders the ability to function outside the institution (Goffman, 1961).

Residents live in *batches*: they eat, recreate and sleep together, at regulated times. Individual needs or desires cost more time and make it harder to maintain order for staff. Rules, privileges and withdrawal of privileges are used to stimulate compliance. Residents with different levels of privileges may harm each other's privileges. Having more people within a program increases the risk that residents with varying degrees of privilege live together, which in turn increases the need for control and limits customized care (Goffman, 1961). In shelters, authors refer to *shelterization* (Grunberg & Eagle, 1990; Keigher, 1992; Stark, 1994). Either out of efficiency (Keigher, 1992), pessimism and cynicism (Grunberg & Eagle, 1990) or safety (Stark, 1994), it is argued that staff in shelters focus on rules, routines and regulations, through privileges, punishment and a prohibition on disturbing efficiency (Grunberg & Eagle, 1990; Keigher, 1992; Stark, 1994). Institutionalization can be stimulated by external bureaucratic demands, such as financial changes, enforced protocols or required accountability (Cain, 2019; Goffman, 1961; Wolins & Wozner, 1982). Physical aspects of an institution can strengthen negative influences, for instance through a lack of private space (Goffman, 1961).

Some argue that all institutional care settings are essentially similar, dealing with similar issues (Wolins & Wozner, 1982) and focused on two main tasks: developing skills (voluntary or forced) and offering a place to stay for residents who want to, are forced to or who are not able to stay anywhere else (Wozner, 1990). Which task is dominant differs, depending on several aspects of the setup: broad to specific target group; complete to no care; voluntary to forced stay; short to permanent stay and as a consequence of the latter: varying or stable population (Wolins & Wozner, 1982; Wozner, 1990). The process of institutionalization in an institutional setting has been described in closed programs such as prisons (Wolins & Wozner, 1982), homes for older people (Abma, 2010) and youth (Hanrath, 2013) and even tourist locations (e.g. resorts, cruise ships, amusement parks), because, although voluntary and short term, the period that tourists spend there, is highly regulated (Ritzer & Liska, 2004). In this chapter we define institutional programs as physical places where unnatural groups stay in a (more or less) structured fashion for a similar purpose: to develop skills and/or a place to stay (Goffman, 1961; Wolins & Wozner, 1982).

Recent institutional theory argues that the influence between institutions and individuals is bidirectional (W. R. Scott, 2005). Individuals have an influence by conforming to, reproducing or rejecting a structure (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Giddens, 1984). Especially when roles are unclear, changing or conflicted, (creating) structure can offer control and certainty (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Giddens, 1984; Kruijer et al., 2008). Stress, ambiguity and insecurity are inherent in the work of staff in institutional care, they are simultaneously responsible for individuals, a group and order while their clients combine complex

personal problems with negative coping strategies and negative experiences with care (Enarsson et al., 2008; Goffman, 1961; Keigher, 1992). Staff and clients can get stuck in vicious circles of distrust; negative behavior results in rule enforcement, leading to more negative behavior and a growing divide between staff and residents (Goffman, 1961; Van Der Helm & Schaftenaar, 2014; Wolins & Wozner, 1982). Hanrath (2013) describes how staff and residents both try to gain and maintain control by interpreting each other's behavior and anticipate interpretation.

Organizational interventions can help break through institutionalized behavior, such as enforcing consumer rights, offering role certainty and predictability for both clients and staff, creating transparency and offering opportunities for participation (Hojtink & Oude Vrielink, 2007; Kruijer et al., 2008; U. K. Schön et al., 2018; W. R. Scott, 2005). It is argued that increased space for participation of both clients and staff, more custom made care and higher staff satisfaction is associated with better outcomes for clients (Jongepier et al., 2010; U. K. Schön et al., 2018). Staff satisfaction is stimulated by institutional and practical support (Chou & Robert, 2008). Structure can help staff to maintain a feeling of control in their daily existence and the insecurities they face (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Giddens, 1984; Kruijer et al., 2008).

Therapeutic communities, like self-managed programs, started as an alternative to regular institutional programs, using living together as treatment, although critics say therapeutic communities are a subtle form of social control (Bloor, 1986). S. Scott (2010) calls alternative forms of support, such as self-help programs, *reinvented institutions*, because they still aim to stimulate identity transformation. Rituals in reinvented institutions are subtle forms of self- and social control, according to S. Scott (2010), for example when participants press each other to conform to house rules. Staff is no longer needed, because participants have internalized self and social control (S. Scott, 2010).

In the Netherlands, where we did our research, the first two self-managed programs started in the nineties, building on earlier experiences with alternative institutional programs (Tuyman & Huber, 2014). Together with squatter groups, homeless people themselves started self-managed homeless shelters as a protest against a lack of place in shelters and a perceived paternalistic approach in regular shelters. Their claim was (and is) that people who are or have been homeless themselves, are better able to run a homeless shelter than professionals in regular homeless care organizations. These grassroots level programs initiated by people themselves still exist, although both became part of a regular homeless care organization. New self-managed programs are most often initiated by or together with regular care organizations. In the first and the second decennium of this century, many new programs were started in the Netherlands, although some already ended as well (Tuyman & Huber, 2014).

Self-managed shelters reach people who are not (yet) able to access housing. Participants and peer workers are in charge of daily and strategic affairs in self-managed shelters (Tuynman & Huber, 2014). Relatively little research has been done into self-managed shelters (Tuynman & Huber, 2014). More is known about other self-organized programs, from consumer-run centers (Brown, 2012) to peer-run respite houses (Ostrow & Croft, 2015). Self-organized programs are managed by participants and peer workers and emphasize empowerment (Brown, 2012; Ostrow & Croft, 2015). Those who initiated self-managed shelters claim that these settings are an alternative to regular shelters, in offering more freedom to participants. Although research on self-managed shelters is lacking, research into other self-organized programs suggests that they are associated with psychological empowerment (Brown, 2012).

Self-managed institutional programs in homeless care started as an alternative to regular institutional care, while at the same time sharing institutional characteristics. In this chapter we aim to explore the experiences of stakeholders with the institutional aspects of a self-managed program by answering the following research questions: To what extent do stakeholders experience a self-managed shelter as an alternative for regular shelters? Which similarities and which differences are experienced by stakeholders between a self-managed shelter and a regular shelter? And how do stakeholders experience processes of structuration within a self-managed shelter?

## Method

The empirical data for this chapter stems from a longitudinal participatory case study (2009-2016) (Abma & Stake, 2014) of empowerment processes of participants in Je Eigen Stek [Your Own Place, JES], a self-managed shelter, that started in 2008 in the Netherlands. The research is part of the Collaborative Center for the Social Domain (Werkplaats sociaal domein) at the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences.

Using a case study methodology does justice to the complex nature of a self-managed shelter and fits with the social-constructivist approach of our research, aimed at understanding the unique experiences of participants and other stakeholders (Abma & Stake, 2014; Hyett et al., 2014). A social-constructivist approach is also fitting with research into empowerment process (Van Regenmortel, 2011). In line with our social-constructivist approach, we followed the principles of *responsive evaluation* (Abma et al., 2009, 2017), where stakeholders are engaged in the process of evaluation (Abma, 2019b). Issues of concern of stakeholders in relation to the meaning of self-management form the starting point for a dialogue to develop mutual understanding, articulate different perspectives and determine the merit of practices to improve quality of the evaluation. The evaluation has been executed by a diverse team of researchers, including researchers with lived experience with homelessness. Participants, peer workers and social workers from JES

engaged in co-designing the research, developing topic-lists, recruiting respondents, co-interviewing, discussing the outcomes of analysis and contributing to publications.

### **Study setting**

JES serves people who are homeless and are not (yet) able to obtain independent housing, because of financial and personal problems and / or issues in accessing housing because of a shortage in social housing (Padgett et al., 2016; Tuijnman & Planije, 2014; Van Straaten et al., 2016). A specific motivation of participants for starting and joining JES was a dissatisfaction with perceived paternalism and fragmentation in regular shelters.

JES has room for sixteen people, mostly men, who want to work on their own problems in their own way and are able to take care of themselves, according to themselves and other participants. The stated goal of JES is 'to help people without a home, get a home.' Most participants are dependent on welfare, some have a job. The participants are responsible for the management, from household to entrance and exit of participants and strategic issues. JES is funded by the municipality of Amsterdam and is part of a larger organization which offers regular homeless care. JES has hired a social worker to support individual participants, the group and the program, besides the social worker that facilitated the development of JES and is involved at a greater distance. The social worker collaborates with a peer worker, a former participant, both are paid.

In the first five years of JES (2009-2014), 72 people joined, from less than a day to multiple years. If we exclude those who leave (almost) immediately (stay less than three months), the average length of stay is around fifteen months. Of the 72 participants, 51 stayed for more than three months, of whom 32 were explicitly spoken to as part of our research (interview or informal meeting), from seventeen others we have secondary information (from informal meetings, key informants and administrative data), such as next place of stay and reason for leaving (e.g. conflict, debt, found alternative place to stay).

### **Data collection**

Our formal data consists of interviews with participants (N=27), peer workers (N=3), social workers (N=2) and other stakeholders (N=10), the latter were either policy advisors from the mother organization of which JES is part, who supported the development of JES, or representatives from partner organizations such as housing organizations, the municipality and local social work organizations). Some of the participants, peer workers and social workers have been interviewed multiple times, resulting in 56 interviews. Eight participants were interviewed during their stay at JES, most were interviewed afterwards, varying from several weeks to several years after they left JES.

The interviews come from two sub-projects. The first was a case study into JES (2009-2010), for which open interviews (Bryman, 2008) were held. Interview questions aimed at understanding the perspective of stakeholders. Questions were among others: What

is the current purpose of JES according to you? What are causes for some participants to participate more than others according to you?

The second sub-project (2013-2014) focused on how former JES-participants looked back at their participation using a semi-structured topic-list (Bryman, 2008), and how their life developed on several life domains (e.g. housing, finances, social contacts, day activities). Questions included: How did you spend your day during your stay at JES? How would you describe your interaction with other participants?

Interviews for the first study have been done by two academic researchers, one of whom is the first author. Interviews from the study into former participants have been done by couples of participants and students, under the supervision of experienced researchers, one of whom is the first author. All interviews, both from the first and second study, were recorded and transcribed. In addition to the interviews, documents delivered by respondents to the first author were analyzed (e.g. documents containing current and future developments of the program and auto-publications by participants).

From the start of the first study up until the present, the first author engaged with participants, peer workers and social workers from JES, based on an ethnographic and participatory approach (O'Reilly, 2012), to developing long lasting relations, from 2009 to the present. The prolonged engagement and persistent observations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) allowed the first author to gain a deeper understanding of the interview data and to observe changes overtime and the interaction between participants, peer workers and social workers among themselves and with outsiders (including the researchers). The interactions and observations done in this time focused on gaining more insight into how participants and other stakeholders experienced self-management over time. Because they were not collected as (structured) observational data, they have not been used for the primary analysis.

### **Analysis**

In our analysis we went back and forth between our empirical data and the theory, using a combination of interpretation and systematic coding, assisted by MAXqda. To manage our large dataset, we started by creating thematic categories. We developed working hypotheses to guide our focus, based on both an open coding of the empirical data by different researchers, among who the first author, and different theoretical concepts (O'Reilly, 2012). The analysis presented in this chapter is part of a broader analysis of empowerment processes within JES. During the broader analysis we recognized that JES was less of a radical alternative to regular programs than suggested by the initial instigators and proponents of self-management, which we decided needed specific analysis. Themes that emerged out of the data included a focus on rules and procedures, a lack of private space and respondents explicitly comparing aspects of JES with regular shelters. Inspired by the 'plugging in' approach of Jackson & Mazzei (2013), we explored

core themes in literature on institutional care and institutional theory to increase our understanding of the data. Themes that we used from the literature include mortification, influence of actors on institutionalization, fluidity vs. rigidity of structures and the role of space. Building on the themes defined out the data and the literature, a code-tree was developed and refined through axial coding, starting with open coding within a theme, defining and adapting subthemes as we went along, and then going back to refine earlier coding. Our analysis was neither deductive nor inductive, rather it was iterative, that is a back-and-forth movement between data and interpretations, using the institutional theory as a lens for understanding the data (O'Reilly, 2012). The analysis has been executed by the first author, under supervision of the other authors. The final code tree has been tested by the second author. Main themes on the code tree are: mimicry of regular programs; fluidity vs institutionalism; influence of institutional setting on empowerment; setup of the program; management of the program; actors. Through the different phases in and approaches to our analysis, we have developed a thick analysis (Van Staa & Evers, 2010).

The richness of perspectives and the different theoretical approaches, allowed us to make room for competing explanations (Abma et al., 2009). We strived for an authentic and recognized representation of the different perspectives involved with JES (Abma & Stake, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), paying explicit attention to the risk of overrepresentation of more reflexive respondents (Bryman, 2008). We used several forms of triangulation: different types of data gathering, different researchers and different analytical approaches to limit the risk of bias (Denzin, 1989). Through triangulation, a transparent method description and describing our rationale for selecting this case, we aimed to improve the quality our case study (Hyett et al., 2014).

Throughout the analysis we have remained in contact with JES, discussing preliminary analyses and working hypotheses with participants, peer workers and social workers in multiple sessions. This sharpened the analysis and increased the authenticity and a shared understanding of the core findings (Doyle, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For both studies a draft version of a report was discussed with respondents and other stakeholders in focus groups. Member checks were performed at various stages: both preliminary findings, working hypotheses and draft version of conclusions were discussed with both respondents and other participants, peer workers and social workers involved and their input has been processed. This is in line with Lincoln and Guba (1985) who see member checking as a process that occurs continuously during the research project, both informal and formal, and comprises the testing of data, analytic categories, interpretations and conclusions with members of the stakeholder group(s). Agreement of the respondent group establishes the credibility of the researchers work and is a 'strong beachhead toward convincing readers and critics of the authenticity of the work' (Lincoln & Guba 1985: 315). Member checking fits with our participatory evaluation approach (Abma, 2019a). The datasets generated during the current study are not publicly available due to confidenci-

ality issues, pertaining to the qualitative and personal nature of the interviews. Datasets are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

### **Ethical considerations**

In our research we have complied with APA ethical principles in the treatment of individuals. Executives of participating organizations assessed the legal and ethical implications of the study, and approved the procedures. Our research meets the requirements of anonymity, consent, confidentiality and safety of the participants and was guided by the ethical principles autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice. Participants were verbally informed on the purpose of the research and our use of their information. Written consent at one point in time fits less well with participatory research into marginalized groups (Abma et al., 2019; Miller & Bell, 2002). In providing consent, respondents were given the option to withdraw their consent at any time, which was done by one participant, whose interviews were deleted.

3

## **Findings**

Our findings sections consists of four parts, following the stages in our analysis. Firstly, we explore to what extent JES is an alternative to regular programs from the perspectives of multiple stakeholders, outlining similarities and differences that are further explored in the second and third part. Following themes described in the literature and emerging in our data, we compare similarities and differences between JES and regular programs. Finally, inspired by recent institutional theory on structuration, we explore how structuration took place in JES. The cited quotes of respondents are translated from Dutch by the first author.

### **JES as an alternative to regular programs**

JES was started for participants who wanted more freedom than was offered in regular programs. To our surprise it emerged in our data that JES was less of a radical alternative than the initiators originally expected. In this first part we explore the lived experiences and to what extent the stakeholders experienced JES as an alternative to regular programs.

Participants loathed regular programs for an abundance of rules, unwanted interference from staff and a lack of acknowledgment of their capacities.

*'You had more freedom than in regular care [in JES][...][In regular homeless care] they are constantly watching you, to see if they can tell you off, and you are obligated to get up at a certain time, and you have to be back at a certain time' (participant).*

*'In regular shelters, everyone gets the same standard package of care. Everyone is treated as a baby' (participant/peer-worker).*

In JES there was a strong emphasis on freedom of participants. Participants experienced self-management in different ways. On one end of the spectrum, participants experienced JES as very empowering.

*'It was a delight. You get your own keys, you can enter when you want. You can have input to everything concerning JES, in project groups, during meeting. Yes that was nice, that you could contribute'* (participant).

On the other end of the spectrum participants were negative, sharing disappointment about JES, both in relation to other participants and to a lack of freedom. In between those two ends of the spectrum were participants who were not engaged with social processes and the management of JES, although they enjoyed the freedom JES offered to work out their problems in their own way. The same freedom led to some participants getting stuck in what participants call 'the fyke of self-management' (the trap of self-management), they adapted to live within JES, without making progress, similar to the process of hospitalization.

*'There were people, who did nothing, truly nothing, to improve their situation. They didn't want to move on. They resigned themselves. They had food, they could sleep, could watch television and it cost them almost nothing'* (participant).

All participants, even those who were in general positive, (also) described negative aspects of self-management, often in relation to having to live and manage together. Many of the experienced negative aspects mimicked the described critique of regular institutional care, such as a focus on rules, lack of acknowledgement of capacities and interference from others (albeit peers rather than staff).

*'The new group [of participants] got no chance [...] They behaved like in all shelters; there was no ownership, it didn't feel like they had any influence [...] so they did nothing'* (coach).

The mimicry was a surprise to us and to some of the participants.

### **Similarities between JES and regular institutional programs**

Although a surprise at first sight, further exploration of the data, in interaction with themes stemming from literature, revealed several similarities with regular programs such as the participants living together within a shared space, being part of a formal organization and the development of social distance between participants.

Both JES and regular programs consist of a physical space, where people live together in an unnatural group. Participants had personal problems, both pre-existing, caused by being homeless or as a consequence of mortification in previous care. Many participants

described forms of learned helplessness and a general distrust towards others, either about themselves or others.

*'You have to have a thick skin, because the people that are here, they are all homeless for a reason. [...] They have a past, of which, sometimes, they are not proud, so they are suspicious [...] waiting how the wind blows. They try to go for their own benefit'* (participant).

JES is relatively small compared to regular shelters that in the Netherlands host up to 60 people. Nevertheless, participants mentioned that living *'with sixteen men with backpacks full of pain and sorrow [...] all those emotions, at a certain point, is bound to collide'* (participant). Participants of JES lived in a shared building, with shared facilities, a shared living room and often a shared bedroom, which caused tensions. Participants varied though in both what they experienced as negative about living together and to what extent they experienced it as negative. Some participants complained that they were forced to do the dishes, others complained that they had to reproach fellow participants about doing the dishes. Similarly, some participants complained that there needed to be more rules, on household chores, substance use and likewise issues, while others complained that there were too many rules.

*'... it seemed like there were more rules than in a shelter [...] with food, you had to be there in time. If you were five minutes late, they wouldn't serve you food, as if you were a small child'* (participant).

*'I think you have to be clear in the rules [...] And if you don't follow the rules, then we're done'* (participant).

Many participants of JES complained they had too little private space and that there *'are always people, you are never alone'*, possibly even more so than in a larger program with more opportunities for withdrawing. A majority of the participants we spoke to after they moved to independent housing relished their new privacy. Some stated that they missed the company of participants. The latter were positive on social life within the self-managed programs. Other participants explicitly referred to distrust in their communication with participants. *'I know exactly how much I can tell, and how much I can't tell. Because if you told something in confidence, within 10 seconds someone else knew it as well'* (participant).

JES was forced by the municipality to become part of a regular organization, to be eligible for welfare funding, which founding participants and social workers loathed. JES was confronted with similar organizational influences as regular programs, such as having to adhere to safety regulations, being financially accountable and handing over some control to the mother organization, although JES appeared to have a high level of discretionary space. As a consequence of the housing shortage in Amsterdam, the municipality issued guidelines as to who could get housing through JES, thereby influencing who could enter

JES. Several of the participants stated that they felt powerless and distrustful toward large organizations. *'We have no say, you know. [...]. They [housing corporations, policy advisors] have certain ideas. [...] They say [...] we'll take it into consideration, but in the end, they decide for themselves'* (participant).

A final point of mimicry was (perceived) social distance between participants. Many participants did not engage in self-management, beyond joining house meetings. Often only a small group actually managed JES. Some participants and peer workers were happy with the division, stating that *'somebody needs to be the boss'* (peer worker), a viewpoint that was mostly shared by those in charge, with support of several of those not in charge. Some of those less engaged, were satisfied with not having to manage the program themselves, as long as those who were, did not interfere with their freedom. Others however stated they disengaged because they felt unwelcome, stating that *'the bosses of JES' decided everything and were not interested in the opinion of other participants. 'I asked the chairman if I could help and he said 'no''* (participant).

Those managing the program stated they were welcoming to participants, even though they did not come to meetings, did not contribute ideas or were unreliable. Therefore, they had to manage the program themselves. New participants joined an existing program, with established rules and norms, which they could not easily change by themselves, limiting a feeling of ownership. *'There was already something there, so their beds were made, and that makes it harder to get the process going'* (peer worker). Having the opportunity to engage in the management of a program is associated with empowerment, according to our findings and others (Brown, 2012).

The engagement of participants changed over time. The participant who said that he was disappointed because he was not able to engage, later said: *'[now] I get the chance to get involved'*. Over time the first author has observed multiple instances of an established group of participants moving out and a new group becoming established. Or as one participant states: *'I've been here for three years, so it's been good, constructive, supportive, bad. I've seen it all'*.

## Differences

Although JES and regular programs share several characteristics, two differences distinguish JES from regular programs: a higher degree of (experienced) freedom individually and collectively and more fluidity in structures that do arise. The freedom is symbolized by a key all participants in JES got.

*'That I had my own place. That I had my own key. And that I could decide for myself what I did in life, you know, the personal freedom you have [...] In other shelters, you were tight to schedules and don't you dare be late, you don't have that [at JES].'* (participant)

Participants had different conceptions of what freedom in self-management meant and to some extent were free to make their own use of the offered freedom, as discussed in the previous sections.

Participants made, enforced and dissolved rules together. Both participants who found rules to harsh or not strict enough, were able to discuss and decide on the rules together. Structures and interaction patterns, such as division of roles, appeared to be relatively fluid. Participants could choose from an array of roles (passive, active, specific tasks, general management, advocacy) and developed and changed their role over time. The roles peer workers had and how they used their lived experience differed, from facilitating self-management to maintaining order. In some periods, the relation between peer workers and participants mimicked the relation between staff and clients in regular programs, both positive (support, advice) and negative (rule enforcing, paternalism). 'The peer worker] wants to do everything. He almost wants to run your life' (participant).

Facilitators (social workers) were hired by participants and had to account for their functioning towards participants and not towards the mother-organization. As a consequence, facilitators experienced a high level of discretionary space in. Almost all facilitators in JES were academically trained social workers, who believed in self-management, more so than most participants and peer workers. Facilitators had no formal say in the management of JES and focused on supporting participants and peer workers individually and collectively with self-management. In practice, facilitators struggled to refrain from reproducing the role of group workers in regular programs, especially if participants and peer workers did not share their vision of collective self-management or if participants got stuck in the afore mentioned fyke (trap) of self-management. When participants and peer workers were struggling with conflicts or were complaining to facilitators, facilitators had to remind themselves, participants and peer workers that they were not in a position to intervene.

*'Participants disagree to what extent I as a facilitator should interfere with people who, in the eyes of other participants, do not move forward [...] I find that difficult [...] they need to come to me [...] but if someone keeps on struggling [...] when is it legitimate to interfere?' (facilitator).*

### **Structuration**

Following from our exploration of the meaning of JES and the similarities and differences between JES and regular programs from the perspectives of stakeholders, our next step was to explore to what extent processes of structuration are described by members of stakeholder groups. Different views on the desirability of structuration were found, as were several structurations of the values of self-management.

Whether JES needed more or less structure was subject to heavy debate among those involved. Structuration is seen as both positive (not reinventing the wheel) and negative (less opportunity for influence for new participants).

*'JES needs to move ahead. [...] That they are still talking about that cleaning is a problem, groceries are a problem [...] we have been talking about that for years [...] Rules that were made in the past, are now being changed. Is that better?'* (participant).

*'There used to be a group who were there for a long time. And they had their way of self-management. But the moment people start to move out, other people come, comes a whole different, new society, with ever different participants'* (participant).

Rules and procedures were constantly discussed and changed, to the dismay of some of the participants and peer workers but to the benefit of those who wanted to have influence on the program. The level of structure fluctuated over time, enabled by the fluid setup of JES. Some peer workers and participants emphasized the support some of the participants needed to get their affairs in order and the importance of rules that allowed participants to focus on their own life. Others preferred less structure, either because they felt that too much structure was a reproduction of regular programs and/or because too much structure limited the possibility for participants to develop new roles and skills.

*'I see a lot of people abusing that freedom. [...] If you don't want that, then you should intervene hard, but we don't want that, because we like to keep our freedom'* (participant).

Participants, peer workers and facilitators referred to an unpredictable and unique trajectory that each participant goes through, *'which can't be steered'* (peer worker), although they also mentioned examples of encouragement and stimulation, for instance by processes of social comparison with and social learning from other participants who are making progress.

We found several examples of how self-management was embodied in the structure, including a key all participants had and a set Monday meeting with actual influence on all aspects of JES, from household to hiring and redecorating. Rituals within JES were far less codified compared to for instance self-help groups (Brown et al., 2014). The structure of self-management appeared to allow attuning to the wishes and needs of participants. Participants were able to work on their own problems in their own way and in their own time.

## Discussion

In this chapter we explored the meaning of self-managed shelters compared to regular institutional shelters from multiple stakeholder perspectives. We have analyzed JES, a

self-managed institutional homeless programs, as an institution, which is given little to no attention in literature on self-organized care (Brown, 2012). Our analysis provided new insights into self-management and into how JES was similar to and different from regular institutional care, which also offered new insights into regular institutional care. For our analysis we build on Goffman's concept of a total institution (1961) and institutional theory, describing how an institutional setting influences behavior and how behavior in turn influences an institutional setting.

The main similarities between JES and regular homeless care follow from the institutional character of JES, although this was not expected. Participants in JES lived together with people whom they did not choose themselves and with whom they mainly shared a background in homelessness. Having to share space and facilities (kitchen, bathroom), in combination with a vulnerable background that participants shared, caused various tensions, such as an ongoing discussion on rules and enforcement of rules and participants withdrawing from social processes. The description of communication that was given appears to echo the description of strategic interaction, focused on distrust and power, that others described in regular programs (Goffman, 1961; Hanrath, 2013). In periods, there was increasing social distance between those more and less engaged. JES is also part of a larger organization, financed by the municipality and dependent on the municipality and housing organizations for access to independent housing, although JES appeared to have a high level of discretionary space. A major difference between JES and regular programs was the personal and collective freedom of JES participants, symbolized through a key all participants had. Another difference was fluidity in the structure and interaction patterns in JES, which allowed roles and positions to develop and new participants to re-discuss rules they felt were not suited.

Compared to Goffman's (1961) description of institutional care, participants in JES were much less confronted with processes of mortification, although some participants did behave similar with mortification, e.g. passive and focused on rules, possibly because of learned helplessness in previous regular programs. Influencing learned helplessness of homeless people is a complex effort (Van Regenmortel et al., 2006). Other institutional processes were reproduced in JES as well, which can be partly explained by similarities in the setup. Changing the management structure of the program to self-management can create more individual and collective freedom and fluidity, although it is not enough to diminish institutionalization, in line with the theoretical argument that individuals reproduce and strengthen institutions themselves (Giddens, 1984). Further research is needed to better understand the role of social workers and peer workers.

From a critical perspective, it could be argued that processes of social control appeared internalized by participants and peer workers, possibly because participants have internalized the need for control from regular programs. Developing structures appeared to be stimulated to some extent by external pressures and an unnatural setting of strangers

living together based on a shared vulnerability. JES promotes moderate identity transformation of participants, like regular programs, albeit towards empowerment. Some participants experience identity transformation as positive, while others echo state that identity transformation is unwanted social control. Others respondents and authors argue that empowerment is an acceptable balance between freedom of choice and offering support (Rappaport, 1981). Overall, most participants prefer JES over regular homeless care, even those who are critical of the institutional aspects of JES as discussed in this chapter.

### **Strengths and limitations**

Our data is predominantly narrative, requiring reflective and verbal capacities, which risks underrepresentation of less verbal respondents (Bryman, 2008). Participants who were less enthusiastic about JES are underrepresented in our data, because of limitations in recruitment. In our analysis and our presentation of the data we emphasized an authentic representation, especially of less verbal and / or critical participants, to counter underrepresentation, and to explore alternative and competing explanations (Abma et al., 2009). Non-verbal or more structured (less reflexive) data gathering in future research can triangulate our findings (Bryman, 2008). We did not use data specifically collected with a focus on institutional factors, nor did we collect data specifically focused on interaction patterns, future research focused specifically on the issues described in this chapter might provide further insights. A strength of our research is the first author's prolonged engagement with JES, combined with peer debriefings, which enabled him to observe developments over time, gain insight into the dynamics of self-management and increase the representability of observations (Bryman, 2008). Engagement of participants, peer workers and social workers in the research increased the authenticity of our findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In future work we will reflect more on our methodology and the role of researchers and participants in facilitating learning through our research.

### **Practical implications**

JES started with an ambition to have very little structure. Over the years, it has developed some structures that are beneficial (regular meeting, clear decision structure) and fluctuated with other structures, supporting the argument that participants do influence institutionalization (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Giddens, 1984) and that structures can be enabling as well (Adler & Borys, 1996). Our research also offers some nuance to critics of staff in regular institutional programs, who are only a part of the actors and influences in processes of institutionalization, since several aspects of institutionalization appeared tied to an institutional context, rather than to staff. JES revealed opportunities for introducing freedom of choice and fluidity in structure, rules and roles within an institutional setting, facilitating unique individual processes of empowerment.



*Liberty on its own kills equality; equality imposed as a unique principle kills liberty. Only fraternity allows us to support liberty while fighting against inequalities.*

Edgar Morin



Stimulating critical reflection  
in a zone of interference  
between system and lifeworld.  
The role of social workers and  
peer workers in a self-managed  
homeless program from a  
Habermassian and Freirean  
perspective

## 4

## Introduction

In self-managed homeless shelters, participants and peer workers are in charge of both day to day and strategic affairs (Tuyman & Huber, 2014). Self-managed programs were started as alternatives to regular shelters, which can be disempowering (Padgett, Henwood, & Tsemberis, 2016; Author, 2006). Housing First is the official policy for most Dutch municipalities and throughout Europe (Pleace et al., 2019). Self-managed shelters share with Housing First an emphasis on self-determination and the absence of pre-conditions (Padgett et al., 2016; Tuyman & Huber, 2014), but they reach people who are not (yet) able to access housing or a Housing First program (Tuyman & Huber, 2014).

Self-management is a form of self-organized care, though unlike most self-organized care (Brown, 2012), almost all Dutch self-managed programs hired social workers (Tuyman & Huber, 2014). The role of social workers and peer workers within self-managed programs is seldom described in literature on self-organized care (Brown, 2012). Social workers in general have been criticized for doing too little to stimulate empowerment (Askheim, 2003; Klaase, 2017; Tonkens, 2008). The role of social workers in what the Dutch government calls a *participatory society* (Stam, 2013), is heavily debated, as it is throughout Europe (Askheim, 2003; Rode, 2017). In regular shelters, social workers struggle to support empowerment and are more oriented on maintaining order (Van Regenmortel et al., 2006).

Peer workers are increasingly employed alongside social workers, to support recovery, based on their own lived experience (Davidson et al., 2018). Peer workers in institutional self-organized care can struggle to offer peer support, and peer workers and participants reproduce power relations between clients and group workers in regular institutional programs (Mead, 2014). The power dynamic between participants, peer workers and social workers is different in self-management than in regular institutional programs (Davidson et al., 2018), at least in the setup.

This chapter aims to describe the role of social workers and peer workers in self-managed programs. Self-management can also offer new insights into the role of social workers and peer workers in regular settings. Inspired by the *plugging-in* method (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013), we use both Habermas' theory of communicative action and Freire's theory of critical awareness and empowerment for our analysis to increase our understanding of the role of social workers and peer workers.

### **Habermas**

Authors regularly refer to Habermas, stating that an increasing focus on system logic causes alienation between providers and care recipients (Stam, 2013)(Author, 2013). Although Habermas' work is highly theoretical, we focus on a practical application of his ideas.

Habermas (1970, 1991) describes the system as a combination of bureaucratic state, market and power relations, in which a *purposive-rational* logic is dominant, consisting of instrumental and strategic action. The focus is on goals (material, power), rationality, bureaucracy (rules, procedures) and hierarchy. Opposite is the *lifeworld*, a social context that enables cooperation, based on a sense of community, including *communicative action*, focused on shared sensemaking. A precondition for communicative action is that all stakeholders in a certain issue should be able to participate, make a statement and question and respond to statements of others, requiring equality between participants (Habermas, 1970, 1991). Habermas (1970, 1991) argues that system logic is colonizing lifeworld logic, which could be undone by pushing back system logic and stimulating communicative action (Habermas, 1970, 1991).

Garret (2009, p. 871) calls Habermas' lifeworld 'an overly idealized and harmonious social space', ignoring power struggles and processes of oppression within the lifeworld, for instance in and between families and communities. Pols (2016) adds that existing inequalities between more and less socially vulnerable people might be reproduced. Others argue that processes of oppression do not disappear, nor does participation appear, if a system is pushed back (Freire, 2005; Tonkens, 2014). Boumans (2012) states that the lifeworld is also limited by an internal system within a person, constraints such as handicaps, lack of skills or negative mental frames.

Kunneman (1996) describes a *zone of interference* in-between system and lifeworld, where both system and lifeworld are present without one being dominant. Social workers, who are commonly described as being part of the system, often operate in this zone of interference, mediating between system and lifeworld (Duyvendak & Uitermark, 2005; Kunneman, 1996; Rode, 2017). There is no clear description for facilitators, while supposedly neutral facilitators (non-professionals) can influence communicative action (Garrett, 2009). Practices of communicative action are often facilitated by social work (Garrett, 2009). A pre-condition for communicative action is participants being able to state their needs and desires (Habermas, 1991), while for people in a vulnerable position this might not always be possible. Because focusing on clearly stated desires rather than on interpreted needs might lead to neglect, social workers have to interpret which actions are needed (Klaase, 2017; Pols, 2016; Tonkens, 2008).

Communicative action can be used strategically or instrumentally, which both can contribute to strengthening the lifeworld (Klaase, 2017; Kunneman, 1996; G. Van Der Laan, 1990). Whereas communicative action assumes sincerity, strategic action is not necessarily intended with bad faith (Chriss, 1995; Kunneman, 1996). A systematic approach can be very useful for all those involved by making services more efficient or by offering an enabling structure (Brown, 2012; Kunneman, 1996).

Habermas' theory is both often used and often criticized. An alternative yet related theory is based on Freire's work on critical awareness and empowerment (Freire, 2005).

### **Freire and Empowerment**

Freire (2005) published 'Pedagogy of the oppressed' in 1970, in which he describes how citizens in vulnerable positions experience their situation as destiny, rather than as something that is influenced by society and themselves. People should develop critical awareness of limiting influences from state, market and other forms of oppression, their mental limitations (I can't influence this) and their own oppression of others (e.g. children, women) (Freire, 2005). Freire (2005) warns that people need an alternative approach to living together, or they might reproduce repressive structures they have been the object of. Freire's approach includes reflection through dialogue, action and experiential learning. He argues that through critical reflection participants develop mastery of their life (Freire, 2005). Current applications of Freire's work focus on reflection rather than on action and mostly on structural oppression rather than oppression within and between participants (Boumans, 2012).

Freire pleads for the importance of an *educator* who facilitates critical reflection, which is, according to critics, a subtle paternalism (Morrow & Torres, 2002; Roberts, 2010). By focusing on experiential learning and teachable moments, Freire makes everyday life susceptible to professional interference, which is seen as undesirable (Illich, 1982; Morrow & Torres, 2002; Roberts, 2010). Illich (1982) claims Freire legitimizes social discipline, masked as empowerment. Social workers are similarly criticized for having a negative influence on their clients (Klaase, 2017). The relation between professionals and clients is often incorrectly portrayed as a zero-sum power-relation, in which only one can be in charge (Tonkens, 2008).

Elements of Freire's theory are related to Habermas, such as the division between oppressors (system) and oppressed (lifeworld) and the importance of dialogue (communicative action) (Boumans, 2012; Morrow & Torres, 2002). Habermas and Freire complement each other: Freire includes the actors and processes missing in Habermas' theory (Morrow & Torres, 2002) and Habermas explicates the interaction between system and lifeworld, hindering empowerment (Boumans, 2012). Empowerment theory is partly based on Freire's work (Rappaport, 1987).

Empowerment is a commonly used framework in research on self-organized care (Brown, 2012) and is often referred to by respondents in our research. Empowerment fits well with social work, combining attention for individuals' needs with contextual and structural aspects (Van Regenmortel, 2011). According to Rappaport '*empowerment is a process, a mechanism by which people, organizations, and communities gain mastery over their affairs*' (1987, p. 122), promoting both freedom of choice and support for people in a disempowered situation. Zimmerman (1995) argues that developing critical awareness creates understanding of how the different levels of empowerment are interrelated.

Some also associate empowerment with the change from welfare to workfare, using empowerment as legitimization for budget cuts in the support for people in vulnerable positions (Askheim, 2003). Yet, empowerment as a norm goes against the principles of empowerment (Boumans, 2012; Rappaport, 1987). Not all individuals are equally interested in empowerment, especially if empowerment is not combined with an increase in power. Individuals can opt to use the power they do have to refrain from engagement with programs that encourage empowerment (Askheim, 2003; Freire, 2005). Van Der Laan (1990) argues that empowerment and discipline are related and that if someone becomes more empowered, this leads to more social interaction which also means more social adaptation to others. The other way around, offering or forcing structure to people in a vulnerable position can help (re-)gain a sense of control over their own life, which is associated with empowerment (G. Van Der Laan, 1990).

In comparison, while Habermas is criticized for paying too little attention to power within communicative action and the lifeworld and leaves little room for professionals, Freire and empowerment are criticized for legitimizing social control. We explore how both theories help us understand the role of social workers and peer workers in self-management.

## 4

## Method

The empirical data was gathered in a longitudinal (2009-2016) participatory case study (Author, 2014) into empowerment processes in JES, a self-managed shelter which started in 2008 in the Netherlands. The research is part of the Collaborative Center for the Social Domain (Werkplaats sociaal domein) at the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences.

In our design we followed the principles of responsive evaluation (Author, 2009). Stakeholders were engaged in the process of evaluation and their issues in relation to self-management formed the starting point for a dialogue to develop mutual understanding, articulate different perspectives.

The evaluation has been executed by a diverse research team, including researchers with lived experience and student-assistants. Participants, peer workers, and social workers from JES were engaged in co-designing the research, developing topic-lists, recruiting respondents, co-interviewing, discussing the analysis and contributing to publications.

### Study Setting

JES houses sixteen people, who are homeless and unable to obtain independent housing because of financial or personal problems. JES wants *'to help people without a home, get a home'*, by offering shelter for people who want to work on their own problems in their own way. Potential participants have to be able to take care of themselves. The majority of participants was male and single, although some relations developed in JES. Partici-

pants were of adult ages, with some minor exceptions of late adolescents and some early seniors. JES did not register ethnicity. Most participants were dependent on welfare, some had a job. Participants are responsible for program management, from household to entrance and exit of participants and strategic issues. Participants choose a chairman among themselves, to chair meetings and represent JES in external affairs, with other participants. JES is funded by Amsterdam municipality and is part of a larger organization which offers regular homeless care. JES hired a social worker to support individual participants, the group and the program. The social worker collaborates with a peer worker, who is a former participant but does not live there anymore. The peer worker is responsible for administrative tasks, communication with the mother organization and supporting individuals, the group and the program. Both the social worker and the peer worker are paid and both are hired by the participants.

In the first five years of JES (2009-2014), 72 people stayed there, from less than a day up to multiple years. After excluding those who leave immediately, the average length of stay is around 15 months. Of the 72 participants 51 stayed for more than three months, of whom 32 were explicitly included in our research (in an interview or through informal meetings). From seventeen others we have (some) secondary information.

### **Data Collection**

Our formal data consist mainly of interviews, with participants (N=27), peer workers (N=3), social workers (N=2) and other stakeholders (N=10). Several respondents were interviewed on multiple instances, resulting in 56 interviews in total.

The interviews were held within two sub-projects. The first was an exploratory case-study into JES, in 2009-2010. For this project, we used the learning history method (Kleiner & Roth, 1996), with narrative interviews focusing on the experiences of stakeholders over time. Interview questions aimed at understanding the perspective of stakeholders on issues such as the purpose of JES and (in-)formal roles they saw in the program. The second sub-project focused on former JES-participants looking back on their participation, in 2013-2014. The interviews with former participants focused on their experiences with JES and on several life domains (e.g. housing, finances, social contacts, day activities) at three points in time (before, during and after their stay at JES), using a semi-structured format (Bryman, 2008). Questions aimed at understanding what motivated participants to apply for JES, how they experienced self-management in JES and what that meant for them. The interviews from the first study were carried out by two academic researchers, one of whom is the first author. The interviews from the second study were carried out by couples of participants and students, under the supervision of academic researchers, one of whom is the first author. All interviews were recorded and transcribed.

In addition to the interviews, documents were analyzed (e.g. project-plans, auto-publications by participants such as contributions to research publications). Additionally, we held

a focus group session with social workers and peer workers from JES and other self-managed institutional programs in the Netherlands. Two focus groups were homogeneous, with only social workers or only peer workers, two were heterogeneous.

From the start of the first study (2009) until the present, the first author engaged with participants, peer workers and social workers from JES, based on an ethnographic (O'Reilly, 2012) and participatory approach (Author, 2019). Informal conversations and observations focused on gaining insight into how participants and other stakeholders experienced self-management over time. Developing long lasting relations with all stakeholders allowed the first author to observe the interaction between these stakeholders and with outsiders (including the researchers), and provided insight into changes overtime. The prolonged engagement and persistent observations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) resulted in a deeper understanding of our data.

In our research we have complied with ethical principles in the treatment of individuals participating in the research. For this study, executives of participating organizations assessed the legal and ethical implications of the study, and approved the procedures. Participants were informed and consented on the purpose of the research and their right to withdraw, which was done by one participant, whose interviews were deleted.

### **Analysis**

The analysis presented in this chapter is part of a broader analysis of JES. In our analysis we went back and forth between our empirical data and the theory, combining interpretative and systematic coding in MAXqda. To manage our dataset, we started by creating thematic categories, based on empirical data and various theoretical concepts (O'Reilly, 2012). The analysis was executed by the first author, under supervision of the other authors. Inspired by the *plugging-in* method (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013), we use both Habermas' theory of communicative action and Freire's theory of critical awareness and empowerment for our analysis to increase understanding of the role of social workers and peer workers. Through exploring core themes in literature (such as strategic action) in comparison to empirical data, a code-tree was developed, and further refined through axial coding. Our analysis was iterative, meaning a back-and-forth movement between data and interpretations (O'Reilly, 2012).

The richness of perspectives and the different theoretical approaches allowed us to make room for competing explanations (Abma et al., 2009). We strived for an authentic and recognized representation of different perspectives on JES (Author, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), paying explicit attention to the risk of overrepresenting more reflexive respondents (Bryman, 2008). We used several forms of triangulation to limit bias: different types of data gathering, different researchers and different analytical approaches (Denzin, 1989; Kimchi, Polivka, & Stevenson, 1991).

Throughout the analysis we remained in contact with JES, discussing preliminary analyses and working hypotheses with all stakeholders in multiple sessions. This sharpened the analysis, increased the authenticity and achieved a shared understanding of the core findings (Doyle, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For both studies a draft report was discussed with respondents and other stakeholders in focus groups (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The datasets are not publicly available due to confidentiality issues, pertaining to the qualitative and personal nature of the interviews. Access to datasets is available through the corresponding author on reasonable request.

## Results

Our results are divided in two parts, using firstly a Habermasian framework and secondly Freire's framework and empowerment. Cited quotes are translated from Dutch by the first author.

### **System versus Lifeworld in JES**

At first glance, JES fits in a system vs. lifeworld framework. JES was started as an alternative to regular shelters that focused on rules and had too little attention for participants' needs, strengths and preferences. In Habermasian terminology: participants wanted more room for their lifeworld. '[In JES] I took back the steering wheel and I could start building and I could use my talents' (participant). Some participants and peer workers referred to JES as a family or community, archetypical lifeworlds. Participants describe sharing information and experiences, gaining new insights and offering social support to each other.

In interactions between JES and formal organizations, we saw a clear struggle between lifeworld and system logic. However, some managers and policy advisors wanted to make room for JES within the system. '....it had to be easy for you [JES] [...] that we are useful for you' (manager public health department). Self-management is in itself an example of how a strategic action (giving power to participants) enlarged space for communicative action and the participants' lifeworld. Participants meet weekly on Monday evening, which was (and is) the only place where formal decisions can be made and where all participants have a say, another example of an instrument (regular meeting) that facilitates communicative action.

Within JES, several issues hindered communicative action. While many participants engaged in the program, others focused on their own lives or dropped out. Much attention in JES and in interviews was spent on house rules, which were made, enforced (or not) and changed by participants. 'Homeless people are no better or worse than other people, they are going to formalize or protocolize, in their own way, even though they reject it' (social worker). Some participants claimed there were too many rules and they

were enforced too strictly, while others claimed the opposite. Although we found some instances in which a shared understanding was developed, most participants focused on their individual interests. Unlike the ideal of communicative action, steps were rarely made to explore each other's claims and gain new insights.

*'They are very critical of each other [.....] So I asked: do you know the cause? They did not share much, let alone empathize [....] They are harsh, in judging, why you don't fit [....] all the while they all fell out of the system, were pushed out. It repeats itself.'* (social worker).

In most self-organized care, sharing vulnerabilities is used as a source of learning (Brown, 2012). However, several participants stated that their personal issues and vulnerabilities were private and they should not be discussed with other participants, which limited shared sensemaking.

Those involved with JES described several forms of strategic and instrumental actions by participants and peer workers, such as power struggles and cronyism allegations. According to some participants a clearer leadership arrangement was necessary, because they did not believe in egalitarian decision making. Participants, peer workers and social workers described distrust among participants toward each other and towards peer workers as a major issue. Participants claimed others were dishonest or others mistrusted them.

Respondents suggested that the strong egocentric orientation of participants, infused by their homelessness experience, was a cause for participants to act and reason within a strategic and instrumental logic. Being homeless causes traumas and shame and means being socially excluded, having no steady access to basic human needs and having to fend for yourself without being able to trust others, according to both respondents and literature (Author, 2006). 'The homeless world is not really one of the most sympathetic worlds or the most understanding [.....] There is only one thing of importance for a homeless person: himself. The rest does not really matter' (peer worker).

A second possible cause for instrumental and strategic behavior is living in an institutional setting. Participants share facilities, living space and their bedroom with people they do not choose. One participant stated that if he leaves his room, he 'puts on his mask'. Multiple other participants added that you 'cannot really be yourself in JES'.

### **Social work in a zone of interference**

The examples mentioned in the previous paragraphs fit Kunneman's (1996) zone of interference, where system and life world interact, limiting and stimulating each other. Participants, peer workers and social workers operated in this zone of interference and often got stuck between lifeworld and system logic. One of the three social workers who helped JES start regularly had to communicate information between participants and the mother organization, of which JES is a part. After multiple messages that participants

perceived as negative, he was fired by the participants. Another social worker was hired directly by JES, because he refused to get stuck between JES and the mother organization. Later social workers have all been hired independently by the participants, which relieved some tensions that social workers experienced.

The role of social workers and peer workers remained disputed in relation to dealing with participants who struggled to get along, either because they needed more support to deal with their issues or because they had trouble adapting to social life in JES. Social workers and some peer workers stated they struggled between acknowledging participants' freedom of choice and acknowledging their vulnerable position. Social workers and peer workers tried to elicit communicative action to learn from each other's experiences with vulnerability and finding other ways to deal with vulnerability beyond rules and exclusion. Social workers feared being accused of being too therapeutic, which they and participants associated with system logic. In some cases, social workers explicitly stated they acted against their professional judgement. 'Before you know it, you become some kind of coach or care taker, and that is something these men and women are very allergic to. So I think you have to be very careful' (social worker).

A specific example that illustrates social workers' struggle with freedom of choice is the issue of participants' privacy, specifically with regard to issues that participant did not want to discuss publicly. 'I feel like, shouldn't you discuss this [a debt with JES] with the person? Because I'm telling you, it makes me feel uncomfortable [....] I think it is rather mean if it is discussed [at the house meeting]' (participant).

Social workers and peer workers were hesitant in sharing issues that participants discussed with them, even those that were relevant for the group, for instance an explanation for why someone acted frustrated, which might create more understanding. Participants and some peer workers stated social workers should share relevant information about other participants, for instance their financial situation. Besides confidentiality and trust issues, creating openness about an issue might also backfire for a social worker. One social worker who tried to create openness became a scapegoat. An individual approach to personal issues and privacy hindered social workers' ability to elicit communicative action.

Most participants described the practical support they received from social workers, even those who were less engaged with JES. Participants varied in the extent to which they said to have used support, from 'I didn't really need it' to 'he took care of it'. Most participants were enthusiastic about (the availability of) social workers. The participants who emphasized a strict enforcement of rules also wanted social workers to intervene more in the group process and towards struggling participants, by pushing support on to, regulate behavior of or exclude participants who struggled. These participants preferred order and / or did not want vulnerable participants to be neglected, which, according to these participants, trumped freedom of choice and self-management.

Social workers and peer workers questioned their role in relation to self-management, their care ethics in relation to participants' traumas and their relation to participants managing the program. They tried to make room for the lifeworld, by pushing back hindering external system logic and system logic within participants (self-oppression and oppression of others). Habermas' framework offers insights into these issues, but no clear perspective on the role of social work and peer work in relation to self-management.

### **Facilitating critical awareness and social action**

An alternative way of looking at the role of social workers and peer workers is through Freire's framework. Freire suggests critical reflection by participants and peer workers is necessary to stimulate empowerment. Participants tended to be critical (and distrustful) of institutions and society in general, which was a reason they chose to join JES. Developing critical awareness in JES focused on creating (awareness of) opportunities to act. JES facilitated participants to advocate for their own interests, and those of JES, JES participants and homeless people. Several participants described how they negotiated with housing organizations and the municipality, including the city council and the district attorney, the latter to reduce so called *homeless fines* (e.g. for sleeping rough). Advocacy and social action by participants and peer workers mostly focused on practical and material issues, such as debts and access to housing.

Social workers played an important role in inducing social action by participants, through creating and facilitating an environment (JES), together with participants and peer workers, that offered participants the opportunity to advocate. Social workers and other professionals offered participants contacts with, and made introductions to, organizations and stakeholders. Social workers suggested opportunities for advocacy, for instance at the municipality council meeting, and in doing so enlarged the participants imagination for opportunities to improve their situation. 'M. [social worker] asked: the district attorney wants to meet with people from JES and find a solution. So I said ok [...] and I asked S. [another participant] to join [...] ever since we have been doing things I would normally never do' (participant).

The advocacy results were not always evident, which caused some participants to withdraw and fall back on their distrust towards institutions, especially if they moved out of JES. Social workers balanced between stimulating direct contact between participants and organizations and intervening to achieve advocacy objectives for the benefit of JES as a program.

### **Capacity building through engagement**

Both participants, peer workers and social workers emphasized the importance of a capacity-oriented approach: 'Focus on what people can do, rather than on what they can't' (peer worker). Self-management enabled participants to work on their own life, contribute to the program and in doing so develop skills, roles and their self-image. Using

the freedom JES offered, some participants chose not to engage with JES as a program, either because they did not want to, were not able to and/ or felt they were not welcome to. Participants sometimes changed from enthusiastic to negative and vice versa, inspired by others or out of disappointment.

Social workers, peer workers and some active participants tried to engage (other) participants with the program but struggled in dealing with participants who refused to engage. For some participants, not engaging was an active choice, for others it appeared they needed more encouragement and structure. Social workers focused on inducing engagement rather than direct stimulation, by creating opportunities to engage, encouraging participants to share positive experiences and linking participants together. They also stressed the importance of participants living together, so participants had to interact with each other and find ways to co-exist within the same space and thus develop social skills that helped them to socially integrate after they moved out.

According to respondents, JES was focused on experiential learning and self-directed development. Respondents suggested that too strong a focus on explicit development would harm the freedom of choice principle and meet resistance of participants who were weary of therapeutic interventions. Those involved stated not all participants benefit equally from the implicit approach and some participants wanted a more directive approach from social workers, especially toward those who struggled to maintain themselves in JES. For social workers this caused the dilemma that they felt morally responsible, although caring for participants was not their task.

### **Vulnerability and social exclusion**

Social workers emphasized the importance of inclusion and deliberation, rather than ignoring or excluding participants who were struggling or who caused conflicts. Through stimulating mutual insight and referencing to a shared previous social exclusion experience, social workers aimed to increase the participants willingness to find other ways of dealing with vulnerability. Participants and peer workers stated that social workers were too idealistic in their approach to vulnerability. Most participants refused to share their vulnerabilities, some stating 'nothing was wrong with them', others said they did not trust the other participants enough, they came to JES because they did not want to be asked about vulnerabilities, it was their own choice whether they wanted to share, or their vulnerabilities were a private matter, not to be discussed with other participants. Feelings of social exclusion and shame about being homelessness were not often discussed, at least not openly.

As mentioned, several participants and most peer workers and social workers argued that experiencing homelessness caused distrust among many participants. 'Participants are very hard on the outside, and very soft on the inside' (peer worker). Participants did not always have time and mental space to deliberate on the approach to conflicts and

vulnerability, as a consequence of their individual issues and ongoing issues caused by living together. A social worker shared a common complaint from participants: 'please, no more talking about this'. Participants preferred issues to be quickly dealt with. Social workers argued that in abstaining from deliberation, learning opportunities for participants were missed.

Peer workers could be a role model for other participants in dealing with vulnerabilities (Mead, 2014). Peer workers in JES did reflect on participants' vulnerabilities which caused or were caused by homelessness. They seldom shared their own experiences in interviews and during meetings. Some participants said they appreciated being supported by someone who shared their experiences, others were more neutral, preferred support from social workers or were distrustful towards peer workers.

### **Balancing values and relation with the group through building trust**

Social workers had to balance values of inclusion and deliberation against the dominant opinion in the group. The principle of self-management prohibited social workers from making decisions for the group and participants could fire social workers. Social workers had to rely on relational influence. Many participants described how social workers, through being available and reliable, gained trust, both from individual participants and the group. 'I think it depends [...] on your own attitude, how humble can you be, how casual can you be, how much do you dare to open up to people and how honest can you be' (peer worker). Not all participants trusted social workers and the trust they had appeared fragile, a consequence of mentioned vulnerabilities caused by being homeless. The established trust from participants provided social workers with some leeway to be critical towards participants and the group, to stress the importance of dialogue, even when participants were less interested.

## 4

## Discussion

In this chapter we studied the role of social workers and peer workers in a self-managed homeless shelter, a form of self-organized care. Both social workers and peer workers are rarely described in literature on self-organized care (Brown, 2012). Self-management also sheds light on the role of social workers and peer workers in what is called a *participatory society* (Author, 2013). We compared a Habermasian analysis with a Freirean analysis of JES, a self-managed homeless shelter.

The role of peer workers remained relatively under articulated in our analysis. In most cases, the perspective of peer workers was similar to either that of participants or that of social workers. In self-management, the distinction between peer workers, social workers and participants is less clear and the role of peer worker is not articulated through for instance the Intentional Peer Support model (Mead, 2014). Because in self-management

social workers are the minority, their perspective is more distinct than in a team with predominantly social workers, where the peer worker perspective would be unique, although the unclarity on the specifics of the role of peer work are present in regular programs as well (Davidson et al., 2018).

Although we found clear examples of system logic negatively influencing self-management and examples of communicative action, a closer look reveals complexities. Participants regularly argued in a strategic or instrumental fashion, while being hesitant of communicative action. Social workers and peer workers got stuck in a zone of interference, trying to elicit communicative action without being associated with a system logic. The ideal of communicative action was hindered by participants who were less interested in gaining mutual understanding. Habermas' theory does not offer a clear role for professional action to support participants who were struggling or to intervene on power disbalances and exclusion processes that occurred, in line with theoretical critique on Habermas (Garrett, 2009; Kunneman, 1996).

A Freirean analysis showed how social workers and peer workers facilitated critical awareness, social action and participants' capacity development. Social workers often acted indirectly, creating opportunities for participants to engage, focusing on capacities, inducing engagement and suggesting possibilities. Not all participants were interested in, and engaged with, self-management. Social workers and some peer workers and participants emphasized the importance of deliberation on and inclusion of struggling participants. The Freirean framework offers a more clear role for actions of social workers and peer workers, although support from social workers was regularly framed as limiting self-management, like Freire was critiqued for opening up opportunities for social control (Illich, 1982; Roberts, 2010).

Difficulties caused by combining freedom of choice with offering support are present in both frameworks. Fear of being too therapeutic or too active stimulates social workers in JES to refrain from intervening and using therapeutic knowledge, sometimes leading to inertia, while actions of social workers and peer workers did appear to contribute to participants' empowerment.

### **Strengths and limitations**

Our data is predominantly narrative, requiring reflective and verbal capacities, which risks underrepresentation of less verbal respondents (Bryman 2008). Participants who were less enthusiastic about JES are underrepresented in our data, because of limitations in recruitment. In our analysis and data presentation we emphasized an authentic representation of different views among respondents, especially of less verbal and/ or critical participants, to counter underrepresentation, and to explore alternative and competing explanations (Author, 2009). Non-verbal or more structured (less reflexive) data gathering in future research can triangulate our findings (Bryman 2008). A strength of our research

is the first author's prolonged engagement with JES, combined with peer debriefings, which enabled him to observe developments over time, gain insight into the dynamics of self-management and increase the representability of observations (Bryman 2008). Engagement of participants, peer workers and social workers in the research increased the authenticity of our findings (Lincoln and Guba 1985). In future work we will reflect more on our methodology and the role of researchers and participants in facilitating learning through our research.

### **Practical implications**

Self-management, like empowerment, balances freedom of choice with offering opportunities for capacity development. Reflection on intention, perception and outcome of (inter-)actions is necessary to distinguish between empowering and oppressive practices (G. Van Der Laan, 1990). Our analysis offers considerations social workers and peer workers can use in balancing strategic and communicative actions and inducing deliberation and engagement in a zone of interference to facilitate empowerment in self-management. Breaking through inertia in working with citizens in a vulnerable position caused by a simplistic interpretation of freedom of choice in the lifeworld, by considering opportunities for inducing deliberation and engagement might prove useful for social workers and peer workers in other settings as well.

*The trouble with socialism, is that it takes up too many evenings.*

Oscar Wilde



# The role of a participatory space in the development of citizenship

## 5

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## Introduction

Dutch mental health- and homeless care is focused on an ideal of community care, aiming for people to live as independently as possible, in and with support of a community (Kal, 2001; Kwekkeboom, 2004; Pols, 2016). Community care is in line with a transition towards a 'participation society' in the Netherlands, in which the Dutch government expects all Dutch citizens to be able to take responsibility for their own life, become socially active and achieve full citizenship, which is subject to political and academic debate on desirability and feasibility (Abma, 2017; Metze, 2015; Pols, 2016; Stam, 2013; Tonkens, 2014; Van Regenmortel, 2011). People who are using mental health and homeless care have difficulties integrating in the community, which limits their ability to become socially active and develop their citizenship (Abma, 2017; Kwekkeboom, 2004; Pols, 2016; Veldboer, 2018). Community integration is hindered by a lack of social skills of people integrating and by processes of social exclusion and increasing social complexity (Kal, 2001; Meininger, 2013; Pols, 2016; Van Ewijk, 2009; Veldboer, 2018). In general, citizenship of people using mental health- or homeless care is underdeveloped (Boumans, 2012; Pols, 2016; Van Regenmortel, 2011). Therefore, Pols (2016) argues for the worth of 'social spaces' (p.177) in which participants can develop 'relational citizenship' (p.178). In this chapter, we will explore the relation between space and different forms of citizenship both theoretically and with the use of empirical data, stemming from a longitudinal study into JES, a self-managed homeless shelter. We build on Pols' (2016) argument and the work of others on the relation between a participatory space and citizenship (Memarovic et al., 2014; Oldenburg, 1996; Renedo & Marston, 2015; Soja, 1996; Wexler & Oberlander, 2017). We conclude with the suggestion to study and develop the quality of participatory spaces, the characteristics of participatory spaces that stimulate or hinder development of citizenship.

### **The role of a participatory space in the development of citizenship**

According to Pols (2016), homeless and mental health care is until now primarily based on principles of classical, individually oriented, citizenship. We define individual citizenship as the space to make individual choices, with as little outside interference and limitation as possible (Pols, 2016), also known as 'negative liberty' (Berlin, 1969). Individual citizenship is contradictory to life in residential care, where participants are not required or allowed to make individual choices (Blok, 2004; Goffman, 1961; Pols, 2016). Individual citizenship presumes the ability to make individual choices, while it is argued that people need interaction with others to make individual choices (Abma, 2010; Metze, 2015; Van Regenmortel, 2011).

Developing individual citizenship, a life outside of residential care and (physically) in the community is only the first step in developing community care, according to Pols (2016). The next step is to develop 'relational citizenship', which entails 'living successfully with others' (2016, p. 178). Pols argues that 'social spaces' (2016, p. 177) are necessary to facilitate development of relational citizenship, in addition to individual citizenship, where

people in a vulnerable position can develop social skills, relations and networks and in doing so can become part of a caring community of similarly situated people (Kal, 2001; Meininger, 2013; Pols, 2016).

Pols' plea for social spaces ties into a broader argument for the worth of 'participatory spaces' (Renedo & Marston, 2015), 'third spaces' (Soja, 1996) or 'third places' (Oldenburg, 1996), a physical, social, temporal and figurative area, beyond home (first space) and work (second space), where people can meet informally. Authors give different meanings to the terms space and place. Pols (2016) refers to social spaces as a physical building, focused on bonding contacts and individual benefits, where Soja (1996) uses third space to describe any publicly accessible area. Oldenburg's third place (1996) refers mostly to semi-public locations, such as cafés. Both Soja and Oldenburg appear to be more oriented on bridging contacts, contributing to the development and maintenance of a community. For readability, in the rest of the chapter, we will use the term participatory space, entailing both the physical, social, temporal and figurative meaning of the concept.

The concept of participatory space has been applied to settings that are communitarian (e.g. church, welfare), commercial (e.g. the coffee corner in a mall) and digital (which can be both communitarian or commercial) (Wexler & Oberlander, 2017). Others point out that any confined area, such as a group of people standing in a circle on the street, can become a participatory space (Memarovic et al., 2014). Common in the description of participatory spaces, third spaces, social spaces and third places is that in them, participants develop, maintain and share social relations and social norms that help strengthen the community. Furthermore, these spaces can be a stepping stone toward participation in the larger society and form an anchor for the community (Meesters, 2018; Oldenburg, 1996; Renedo & Marston, 2015; Soja, 1996; Wexler & Oberlander, 2017). Oldenburg (1996), in a Habermasian argument, claims that third places contribute to democratisation and civil society, by offering participants a place where they can discuss public affairs. Renedo and Marston similarly argue that in participatory spaces, participants can develop their citizenship through 'engaging, negotiating and reconstructing space' (Renedo & Marston, 2015, p. 491).

In the literature on the relation between space and citizenship, there is little attention for the interaction between individual and relational citizenship, while it is known that tensions often occur between individual and relational collective interests (Berlin, 1969; Kruijer, 2010; Mouffe, 1994). Weighing individual and relational interests, having a say and having to share that say with others, can contribute to the development of democratic citizenship (Kruijer, 2010, p. 137; Mouffe, 1994; Sie Dhian Ho & Hurenkamp, 2011). Through participation in democratic processes, in this case the management of a program, people can develop their democratic skills and their knowledge about deliberation and decision making and as a consequence their acceptance of the outcomes (Dzur, 2004; Kruijer, 2010; Mouffe, 1994; Sie Dhian Ho & Hurenkamp, 2011). Dzur (2004) focuses specifically

on the role of public professionals, such as social workers, in democratizing the public domain and facilitating deliberation on public issues. Democratization is at the heart of social work (Spierts & Oostrik, 2014; Van Ewijk, 2009).

In this chapter we explore how a participatory space can influence development of citizenship. While the discussed literature focusses mostly on the development of relational forms of citizenship, we will also include individual and democratic citizenship. We look specifically for characteristics that hinder or stimulate the development of citizenship, what we would like to call the quality of participatory spaces. We will use empirical data from our research into JES, a self-managed homeless shelter.

### **JES & self-management**

Je eigen stek (Your own place, JES) is a self-managed transitional program for people recovering out of homelessness. The program is located in Amsterdam, as part of HVO-Querido, a traditional provider of homeless and mental health care. Although JES is part of HVO-Querido it has a relatively high level of discretionary space, which we will discuss more extensively below. JES is financed by the municipality of Amsterdam. Participants are homeless people, who do not need intensive professional support and who feel that regular homeless care does not offer them enough freedom to work through their problems in their own way. Participants enter JES voluntarily and stay a year to one and a half years, although they can stay indefinite. During their stay, participants can work on their problems, with support from fellow participants and others. JES has room for sixteen participants, who manage the program together, with support from two facilitators, one trained as peer-expert and one trained as a social worker. Most of the Dutch self-managed programs are supported by a social worker, called 'facilitator', who has no formal say in the management of the program.

Self-management in the case of JES means that participants are responsible for both the day to day affairs (i.e. household), the flow through (who gets to enter, who cannot stay and who gets access to independent housing) and strategic development (like moving to a bigger building). Other self-managed programs vary in purpose, target group, size and length of stay, although all are developed around values such as freedom of choice, shared responsibility, having a say, voluntariness and focus on individual strength and responsibility ((Tuynman & Huber, 2014). Mead (2014) describes self-managed programs as micro-communities, where participants prepare for participation in the larger community, in line with the description of a participatory space.

## Methodology

The empirical data for this chapter stems from a longitudinal participatory case study into the process of self-management within JES. In the same period, we also studied several other Dutch self-managed programs to deepen and broaden our understanding through smaller case-studies, focus-groups and invitational conferences. In this chapter we will focus on the study into JES. We gathered our data between 2009 and 2016. The research is executed as part of the 'Collaborative center for the social domain' (Werkplaats social domein) at the Amsterdam university of applied sciences.

In our research we have followed the principles of '*responsive evaluation*' (Abma et al., 2009) with a strong emphasis on participation and interaction, focused on stimulating a dialogue between participants that is benefiting both practice and research. Our research has been executed by academically trained researchers, researchers with lived experience, co-researchers from the studied programs (participants, peer workers, facilitators) and students. Participants and peer workers took on several roles, such as co-designing sub-studies and topic-guides, engaging respondents, co-interviewing and contributing to publications.

An important aspect of the design of our research was the inclusion of most of the perspectives in and around the self-managed programs. Our formal data consist of narrative interviews, (semi-) structured interviews, focus-groups and document-analysis (e.g. project-plans, auto-publications by participants such as contributions to research publications). The research team interviewed participants (N=27), peer workers (N=3), facilitators (N=2) and other stakeholders (N=10). Several of these persons have been interviewed on two to four instances, resulting in 56 interviews in total. The first author also gathered informal data through ethnographic and participatory approaches. By developing long lasting relations with JES, the first author was able to observe development over time and the interaction between participants, peer workers and facilitators and between participants and others (including with researchers). Both the observations of the interactions and the development over time enabled us to gain a deeper understanding of the formal data.

In the analysis, we aimed for equal representation of different perspectives and competing explanations (Abma et al., 2009) findings from our analysis and draft versions of research publications have been discussed with representatives from JES as a group member-check to improve the credibility of our findings. An earlier version of this chapter has been discussed with the current peer worker and facilitator of JES.

## Results

### Individual citizenship

Individual citizenship is understood as the space for individual choice, unconstrained by external factors (Berlin, 1969; Pols, 2016). Although individual citizenship is not discussed in the literature, in our research we found that having space for individual choice was an important motivation for participants to start JES and is an important motivation for participants to join JES. Participants and peer workers missed space for individual choice in regular residential programs.

Respondents state that the setup of JES stimulates participants to take and maintain control of their own lives. Participants join self-managed programs voluntarily and they are, to a large extent, free to decide for themselves how they want to spend and organize (or not organize) their day. The basic assumption of those involved with JES is that participants are capable to take care of themselves. Normal life is maintained as far as possible, i.e. participants do the household and groceries and maintain and develop social and societal activities. A participant states: 'if you're not making a sandwich, you have no food.' Participants can choose for themselves what they want to work on (or don't want to work on), during their time with the program, which is appreciated by participants. 'I felt like: I'm living again' (participant).

Participants of JES emphasize the literal and symbolic value of having their own key to the door of the program, so they can come and go when they want. JES does not have a limit to how long participants can stay. A participant states: 'homeless people need security. They need to know, these are my keys, here I can get some food, there I can find my bed, we need that structure. Otherwise it would be like, what do I do tomorrow? How do I get food?' The physical space JES offers to participants contributes to their mental space to make individual choices. People in severe vulnerable positions (poverty, homelessness) often lack this space (Mullainathan & Shafir, 2014; Van Regenmortel et al., 2006).

Not all participants benefit from the space for individual choice JES offers. Participants who do not want or who are not able to take control over their life, stagnate in their development or drop out. Respondents call the process of stagnating the 'fyke of self-management', because participants use the freedom of choice, including the absence of a time-limitation, to do nothing. In many cases, participants caught in the fyke of self-management become active over time, because they see other participants achieving progress (social comparison) or they are being pushed by others (social control). The processes of social comparison and social control described by respondents support the argument of Pols (2016) and others that the development of individual citizenship is related to the social environment.

### Relational citizenship

Based on the literature, we understand relational citizenship as the development of social functioning (Pols, 2016). As a participatory space, JES might contribute to developing social support, social roles and social skills, according to the literature.

Many of the participants and peer workers that are involved with JES have experienced social exclusion and marginalization. The degree to which they describe themselves as being socially excluded differs, as does the interest in developing relational citizenship. Some participants describe themselves as springing back to life within the 'family' or 'community' that JES is to them. By participating in JES, they have (re-) developed social roles and skills. Other participants are less interested in developing relational citizenship. According to peer workers and facilitators, the latter can and do still benefit from JES, because they develop skills and experiences, by living and working together, which benefit their social functioning outside the program.

Living and working together in a shared space, has a two-sided influence on the development of relational citizenship. On the one hand, respondents argue that participants are reluctant to be open about themselves and show vulnerability, because they have little room to avoid confrontation afterwards. 'It regularly occurs that one participant tries to reproach another participant [...] after which the reproached participant starts to act intimidating towards the first participant. This causes the first participant to think: never mind, I see him every day, I have to live with him every day' (facilitator). On the other hand, respondents state that living and working together forces participants to have to deal with each other, which contributes to their social skills. Living together in the same space, also creates opportunities for informal exchanges and support. A participant states: 'if I had a bad day [...] if I didn't feel good, I came downstairs [in the living room], there would always be some who said, hey, cheer up, I used to be there and everything will be all right, after the rain comes the sun, and that would calm me down'.

The literature on self-managed programs and self-help argues that through a relational approach to problems, i.e. sharing and discussing problems, participants and peer workers give and receive social support (Brown, 2012; Steyaert et al., 2014). For similar reasons, some of the participants and peer workers and all of the facilitators in our research argue that a relational approach to problems is very important. Other participants and peer workers state that individual problems are private and that others should not interfere. They prefer to fix their problems themselves or ask a peer worker or facilitator to help them individually. The resistance against a relational approach is also found in other Dutch practices of informal care (Linders, 2009; Metze, 2015).

Facilitators and peer workers state that they try to elicit social support through subtle approaches, because trying to force social support does not fit with the principles of self-management. Although explicating social support is met with resistance, all kinds of

informal social support do occur, according to respondents. Interviews with participants support this: participants told us they did not receive any social support, while throughout the same interview mentioning various forms of informal social support, such as 'she gave me advice' and 'he asked me how my appointment went'.

A participatory space might also function as a source of bridging contacts. For participants and peer workers, JES can be a stepping stone towards other forms of social participation. Several former participants of JES said they have reconnected with family and friends during and through their stay in JES. Some started participation in other organizations, as a volunteer or as an employee. Nevertheless, many former participants of JES stated that they dealt with feelings of loneliness after they left JES. Very few of the respondents remained in contact with other former participants or with JES. Where it is argued that a participatory space might contribute to bonding and/or bridging social contacts (Oldenburg, 1996; Pols, 2016; Wexler & Oberlander, 2017), in JES neither one is convincingly achieved.

In line with the arguments found in the literature, JES as a participatory space contributes to the development of relational citizenship, albeit in varying degrees. Not all participants are equally experiencing or interested in the development of relational citizenship, claiming a focus on their individual interests.

### **Democratic citizenship**

We define democratic citizenship as participating in a deliberative process on weighing individual and collective interests (Kruiter, 2010; Mouffe, 1994). Although democratic citizenship is not included in the literature on participatory spaces, we found that in the case of JES, self-managing a participatory space can contribute to the development of democratic citizenship.

In JES, participants not only live and work together, they collectively manage the space they are living and working in. Participants, peer workers and social workers deliberate continuously in JES on how to live and work together, on how to distribute and expand the available resources (shelter, support, access to housing) and on what to deliberate on. There is a weekly meeting in JES on Monday evening, the only place where formal decisions can be made. Participants come together to discuss current affairs, from the household schedule and new participants, to possibly moving the program to a larger building. The agenda for the meeting is made by the participants, in interaction with other stakeholders (i.e. the facilitators, the mother organization). Both the peer worker and the facilitator have no formal vote in decisions, although they do weigh in their opinion during the meeting. For participants who are used to life being something that happens to them, it is a new experience to have a say on their living environment, and having to share that say with other participants. Several participants express pride on managing the program and the space themselves: 'Because what we are doing, it is pretty unique' (peer worker).

A recurring theme in conversations between participants, peer workers and facilitators is how to deal with people who (passively) choose to not move forward, and with people who put their individual interest before the collective interest, such as contributing to the household or management. By being responsible for the space together, participants have to work out a solution together, for instance by reproaching participants who neglect their responsibilities for the collective interest. Facilitators prefer that participants and peer workers solve problems themselves, although if the process of self-management is threatened, the facilitator will interfere as well.

Not all involved have the same vision on the development of democratic citizenship within self-managed programs. The facilitators and some of the participants and peer workers ascribe to the ideal of deliberative decision making. A peer worker states: ‘...every new participant, you need to involve him, so that he grows along the process of ensuring the continued independent existence of JES’. Together with participants and peer workers, facilitators engage in deliberative processes on alternative solutions to tensions between collective and individual interests. Other participants and peer workers emphasize the importance of having structure and order, including clear leadership. ‘JES needs to move ahead. [...] That they are still talking about that cleaning is a problem, groceries are a problem [.....] we have been talking about that for years [.....] Rules that were made in the past, are now being changed. Is that better?’ (former participant). In response to an earlier version of this chapter, a facilitator states that self-management demands a lot of engagement, time and social skills from peer workers and participants. Combined with the stress participants experience from their individual problems, one of the facilitators argues that the desire for structure and leadership is understandable. Participants who are not involved with the management of the program can still benefit on an individual and a relational level, although the development of democratic citizenship is limited, according to respondents and the observations of the first author.

Through the model of self-management, participants of JES, in interaction with peer workers and facilitators, have a say over the space they live and work in, a say which they have to share with others. Through the process of self-management, participants can develop their democratic citizenship. Both participants, peer workers, facilitators and managers stress the importance of participants being in control, to prevent tokenistic processes, a point that is also emphasized in literature on citizen participation (Arnstein, 1969; Crocker, 2007).

### **Interaction between the development of citizenship and the organizational and societal context**

The functioning of JES as a participatory space is influenced by and has influence on the organizational and societal context in which it operates.

JES is part of a regular care organization, is financed out of regular care budgets and has to adhere, to a certain degree, to regular bureaucratic conditions, such as organizational limitations to who can join the program. However, the degree to which space is created for collective self-management in JES by HVO-Querido appears to be substantial in comparison to other self-managed programs. The amount of discretionary space that is offered to JES is appreciated by participants, peer workers and facilitators and, according to the respondents and the observations of the first author, allows JES as a participatory space to contribute to the development of the various types of citizenship. Nevertheless, tensions between self-management and organizational processes within HVO-Querido do occur.

Individually, the prolonged vulnerable position that participants are in, financially and socially, causes stress, distrust towards other participants and institutions and a focus on individual interest, according to respondents. In turn, the individual orientation, stress and distrust hinder the development of the different forms of citizenship. As described, JES offers participants the space to relieve stress. Facilitators and peer workers try to counter distrust and an individual orientation of participants by stimulating the development of relational and democratic citizenship. In doing so, the facilitators and peer workers are met with the same distrust and individual orientation they are trying to counter.

Facilitators and peer workers also try to stimulate collectivizing individual problems of participants, finding shared issues, and using the collective issue as a starting point for collective action. JES for instance successfully started a project to remit so called 'homeless fines', such as for sleeping rough or public urination. These fines hindered the start of debt relief. Several participants of JES were involved in the project, talking to the district attorney and other stakeholders, although the facilitator played a crucial role by involving his network and coaching the participants. Through this project, JES offered space to develop collective action.

To prevent advocating for, but without participants, facilitators try to stimulate participants and peer workers to advocate for themselves. Participants make movies about themselves and the programs, meet with policymakers and public officials and participate in meetings of the local council. In doing so, they have limited administrative pressure and gained access to housing, among other results. For participants, it is a powerful experience to advocate for their own interest and the interest of the program: 'Last year I was freezing in a boat, now I'm talking to the local council'. In doing so, participants become active in the larger democratic process of society. Other participants say they are inspired by seeing their peers advocate for JES.

Although we focus on the development of citizenship within a participatory space, the organizational and societal context should be taken into account, as the context can both hinder or stimulate the development of citizenship.

## Discussion

In this chapter we reflect on the influence a participatory space can have on the development of individual, relational and democratic citizenship, using a case-study into JES, a self-managed program. We build on the work of others who have explored the relation between citizenship and a participatory space (Memarovic et al., 2014; Oldenburg, 1996; Pols, 2016; Renedo & Marston, 2015; Soja, 1996; Wexler & Oberlander, 2017). While other authors focus mainly on the development of relational citizenship, we included individual and democratic citizenship and focused on characteristics of participatory spaces that stimulate or hinder development of citizenship.

Our analysis shows that JES offers a participatory space for developing individual citizenship, which is greatly appreciated by participants and peer workers, especially as an alternative to regular residential care. A number of participants develop individual citizenship in interaction with others, through social comparison and social control. Not all benefit equally from the space for individual choice. The development of relational citizenship is desired and experienced less by participants, although most participants and peer workers say they have experienced some form of social learning, support and development of relations and participation. Living together in a participatory space forces the development of social skills, although it can also hinder the development of social relations. Development of democratic citizenship is viewed by facilitators and some participants and peer workers as an important part of self-managed programs, although not all agree. Managing a participatory space together stimulates participants to weigh individual and collective interests, contributing to their democratic citizenship. JES also offers space for participants, peer workers and facilitators to initiate collective action, through which some of the participants and peer workers gain experience with advocating for themselves and the program. Self-managed programs offer participants a literal and figurative space to develop several forms of citizenship, to the degree participants aspire.

The argument of Pols (2016) and others that a physical space can be a facilitator for citizenship, besides a participatory space in the figurative meaning, is supported by our analysis. Examples that we encountered are the important role of having a key, informal meetings in the hallway as a consequence of living in the same space and the meaning derived from being part 'owner' of the space in which the program is run. More attention is needed for the conditions of the physical space that facilitate or hinder the development of citizenship, for instance balancing private and public space.

Our analysis revealed several characteristics that influence development of citizenship in a participatory space. To what extent participants and peer workers do develop the different forms of citizenship appears to depend in part on whether the setup of self-management is suited for them. According to participants, peer workers, facilitators and the observations of the first author, JES as a participatory space pressures participants

to develop individual, relational and democratic citizenship, because participants have to make individual choices, have to find ways to live together and have to manage the program together. Different forms of citizenship both hinder and stimulate each other, for instance a participant who chooses to withdraw from the collective process or the peer supporter who encourages participants to become politically active. As Tonkens (2014) argues, the development of citizenship is not a spontaneous process. Developing citizenship requires work from participants, peer workers, facilitators and organization.

In this chapter we have reflected on the influence a participatory space can have on development of citizenship using the outcomes from our research into self-managed programs. Future research which further conceptualizes both participatory space, the different forms of citizenship and the afore mentioned characteristics in the process of data gathering and analysis, might find more specific outcomes. We focused mainly on the development of citizenship within a participatory space, although in the last section we shortly described the interaction with the societal and organizational context. As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, processes of social exclusion and social complexity make it harder for people in vulnerable positions to develop their citizenship (Pols, 2016; Tonkens, 2014; Van Ewijk, 2009). Through a participatory space, participants might become better equipped to develop their citizenship outside of the participatory space, although further research is necessary to explore the relation between citizenship in and outside a participatory space.

Looking at the quality of participatory spaces in relation to the development of citizenship, can contribute to both practice and research into the development of citizenship within participatory spaces. This chapter provides a preliminary framework for further development.



*Ground yourself in liberty, through the mastery of self*

Michel Foucault



# Understanding how engagement in a self-managed shelter contributes to empowerment

## 6

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*Maybe nothing is completely true, and not even that*

Multatuli

*Those who feel it, know it.*

Bob Marley



# Opening the black box. Reflections on the swampy lowlands of participatory action research

## 7

## Introduction

Participatory action research (PAR) includes stakeholders in all parts of the research and aims for local impact, besides academic purposes or as the sole purpose (Abma et al., 2019). PAR integrates '*action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities*' (Reason & Bradbury, cited in: Reason, 2006, p. 189). Although PAR is on the rise, few authors publish on the challenges and pitfalls of PAR, possibly out of fear of hurting the trustworthiness of the research or discouraging others (Abma et al., 2019; Lenette et al., 2019). Active engagement of stakeholders in the research process means sharing control and collaboration among people who may have diverse interests and values. PAR projects can contribute to learning and knowledge development on a subjective (personal), intersubjective (interpersonal) and objective (beyond personal) level (Chandler & Torbert, 2003; Reason, 2006). Through facilitating communicative action and mutual inquiry, participants and researchers reflect and learn together (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2007; Reason, 2006). Ideally, communicative action is free from power differences, though in practice power does interfere with communicative action (Abma, 2019c; Woelders & Abma, 2019).

PAR adds social, relational and moral dimensions to the research practice, and requires interpersonal, negotiation and reflection skills from the participatory researcher. Wright (cited by Lenette et al., 2019, p.5) states that 'the "behind-the-scenes" emotional work of preparing for research, building relationships and rapport with others, [...] is typically removed from conventional academic accounts'. Consequentially, those executing PAR 'are often "on their own" when deciding on the best course of action' (Lenette et al., 2019). Researchers, and in particular 'novices' in PAR, may get trapped in their own beliefs and prejudices, and being mindful of one's own personal involvement can be a challenge (Snoeren et al., 2015; Woelders, 2019). Lenette et al. (2019) plead for more openness from researchers on the ethical, relational and power issues they struggle with in PAR. We are inspired to respond to this challenge.

We believe that difficult situations offer a rich learning potential for participatory action researchers to develop their moral compass and craftsmanship. The purpose of this article is to deepen our understanding of these complex situations and offer insights to navigate in these situations as participatory researchers. We therefore reflect on the experiences of the first author in engaging in a PAR study into and with Je Eigen Stek (your own place, JES), a self-managed homeless shelter in one of the largest cities in The Netherlands. We describe how the research was designed and executed with specific attention to decision making between the researcher and JES, and within JES, balancing democracy, inclusion and local impact, all core principles of PAR (Abma et al., 2019). The question who determines the focus and shapes the research is a recurring issue as well as the personal engagement of the researcher. In the discussion we share some learned

for future research. This chapter is in part written from the perspective of the first author who initiated and conducted the PAR study, which is acknowledged by writing the main section as a first-person account, in collaboration with the supervisors of the study.

### **Doing PAR in ‘Swampy Lowlands’**

Over the past ten years, the first author has executed a PAR study into a self-managed homeless shelter, under the supervision of the other authors. The study presented was carried out with a marginalized group in society, namely homeless people, and peer workers and social workers who supported them in a self-managed program set up by homeless people themselves (Huber, Brown, Metze, Stam, Van, et al., 2020). The program offers power to people who often experience powerlessness. The program intends *‘to help people without a home, get a home’*. Potential participants have to be able to take care of themselves, and are responsible for program management, from household to entrance and exit of participants and strategic issues. The program is funded by the Amsterdam municipality and is part of a larger organization which offers regular homeless care. A paid social worker and peer worker are hired by participants to support individual participants, the program and the program.

The first author (from now on in the voice of the first person: ‘I’) and other researchers, with backgrounds in academia and/ or lived experience with homelessness, initiated the study, together with participants, peer workers and social workers of JES, who engaged with all aspects of the research. Additionally, I used documents (administrative data, auto-publications by stakeholders, etc.), and I engaged for over ten years with JES through visits, informal meetings, and participation in think-tank sessions. As a consequence of ongoing deliberations on all aspects of the research and our iterative approach, regular formal forms of consent, filled out at one point in time, were less appropriate. In PAR, consent needs to be achieved continuously, both individually and collectively (Abma et al., 2019; Miller & Bell, 2002). Respondents and JES had the permanent option to opt out and one of the respondents has used this option. During informal meetings I have always introduced myself as researching self-managed programs. Although this might have hurt my ability to blend in, I felt it unethical to not disclose my role (Bryman, 2008).

The research started from an open interest in self-management and the experiences of those involved. The study aimed to be both academically relevant as well as of practical relevance for the people involved. To enable maximum participation and influence of stakeholders, we chose an iterative and emergent approach, rather than a grand design preordained by researchers as experts. As a consequence, fellow researchers and I had to share our influence and power with other stakeholders in the setting. Relationally, however, there was a complex interaction between participants, others involved, and myself, wherein the participants were not just vulnerable and dependent, but also active agents using their power to realize their own agenda. Balancing these various interests, including my own agenda, and mutual interdependencies, appeared a recurring issue in

this particular setting, an issue that is not described extensively in the literature. As a result our research could not be controlled in advance and went through periods of what others have called messiness (Cook, 1998). Schön's metaphoric description of swampy lowlands (D. A. Schön, 1983), although originally proposed to describe the work of reflective practitioners, rings very true to our approach to the research.

*'.....there is a high, hard ground where practitioners can make effective use of research-based theory and technique, and there is a swampy lowland where situations are confusing "messes" incapable of technical solution. [...] in the swamp are the problems of greatest human concern. [...] There are those who choose the swampy lowlands. They deliberately involve themselves in messy but crucial important problems and, when asked to describe their methods of inquiry, they speak of experience, trial and error, intuition, and muddling through'* (D. A. Schön, 1983, p. 42).

The swampy lowland confronts practitioners with complexities that cannot be fixed and solved with checklists, rational decisions, and protocols. Schön (1983) emphasizes that practitioners have to muddle through these situations to deal with the complex issues at stake instead of choosing the route of the *high ground*. This conceptualization of the work of practitioners has not yet been related to relational and power issues within PAR, but seems to be very useful and innovative to apply as a lens for understanding the complexities experienced in our PAR study with homeless people and other participants.

Our research went through periods in which tensions arose, roles became diffuse and the next step in the research was often not evident, as is the case with many PAR studies (Banks & Brydon-Miller, 2018). Rather than trying to avoid these messy periods, we embraced them as essential to our purpose. Periods of messiness force stakeholders (e.g. participants, professionals, researchers) to reflect on their regular patterns of behavior and develop new patterns (Cook, 1998). Yet, there is often the tendency to deny the complexities and fall back on 'high ground' solutions to fix problems at hand (Kunneman, 2017). We suspect these tendencies are also part of our field, as Lennette et. al (2019) suggest, and we find it relevant to explore the complexities and embrace them, rather than deflect from them (Kunneman, 2017). Well established guidelines and ethical principles (Banks & Brydon-Miller, 2018; International Collaboration for Participatory Health Research (ICPHR), 2013) offer us a compass (Hyde, 2018) but we agree with McGrath (McGrath, 1981) who suggests that 'the research process is to be regarded not as a set of problems to be "solved", but rather as a set of dilemmas to be "lived with"'.

In the next sections my co-authors and I reflect on issues encountered in the swampy lowlands. For this reflection, we have re-read field notes and written communications with other involved researchers, analyzed statements made in the interviews, and reflected both informally and formally with stakeholders and co-researchers. My co-authors and I have discussed these issues over and over to develop an enriched understanding by plug-

ging-in (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013) the conceptualization of Schön's swampy lowlands and high ground solutions. The current peer worker and social worker, and the social worker who was involved with the start of the shelter and is still involved, have commented on a draft version of this chapter.

## Shared Decision-making and Struggles over Who Determines

PAR emphasizes equality between researchers and other stakeholders. In practice, *'researchers [...] often find themselves in a matrix of competing hierarchies and expectations'* (Lenette et al., 2019). The influence of stakeholders on the research varies (Lenette et al., 2019). I encountered several power struggles around determining the focus, framing and execution of the research and the inclusion and exclusion of respondents (Abma et al., 2019; Banks & Brydon-Miller, 2018; Lenette et al., 2019). In this first part I explore how these struggles emerged in my research, specifically in relation to designing the research, determining the focus and reflecting on vulnerabilities and empowerment.

### **Designing the research and determining the focus**

PAR aims at questions that are of relevance for the people whose life or work is at stake. Through open dialogue, consensus on the focus and design of the research should be reached between all stakeholders (Abma et al., 2019). Our research aimed to facilitate learning in, and development of, the shelter and to generate knowledge on how empowerment processes were shaped. In practice, the experiences of my fellow-researchers and I resembled the swampy lowlands Schön (D. A. Schön, 1983) described, in which all kinds of power processes influenced the decision making. During our first meeting, in 2009, it became clear there were tensions between new participants and longer-term participants, the 'managing group' and social workers, individual participants, the chairman and some of the other participants, the shelter and the municipality, and the shelter and the mother organization. Furthermore, the roles of the social workers and peer workers were unclear. These tensions formed the context in which I had to design the research. Together with participants, peer workers and social workers we determined to focus on empowerment processes and tensions occurring within self-management.

By focusing on self-management and empowerment, I expected the research would be able to contribute to the development of the shelter. Developing the program was also an explicit motivation for some of the participants, who stated that they wanted to contribute to the program in a way that made the program better for future participants. One participant said, at the end of an interview: 'I hope I helped you get a picture of what JES [the shelter] is [...] Self-management has helped me and I am very grateful for that. I hope self-management becomes bigger, so we can help more people'.

Other participants were less interested in the focus on self-management. According to them, the research had no direct relevance for their own interest (finances, housing). Furthermore, not all participants involved were interested in reflecting on their experiences and/ or some stated that my fellow researchers and I should not research self-management but rather focus on creating housing opportunities. Our research was limited in its means, so I was hesitant to include all possible concerns. In hindsight more attention might have been spent on how to include these concerns, although my fellow researchers and I have tried, with varying success, to initiate and facilitate side-projects focused on these issues.

The ongoing in- and outflow and changing levels of engagement of participants, meant the focus of the research was re-discussed from time to time. The social worker who founded JES said, in reflecting on this chapter: 'There is no such thing as JES [in the sense of a coherent community], other than the ever-temporary outcome of deliberations between the current group of participants, peer workers and social workers'. For peer workers and social workers and some participants, my research also had the purpose of legitimizing self-management towards the mother-organization and the local government, according to the current peer worker. The current peer worker argued that even if individual participants might be less interested in reflection on their experiences with self-management, it was (and is) in the interest of JES to participate in research into JES.

Researchers need to be very aware of subtle mechanisms through which they use their power (privilege, persuasion) to steer research in their direction (Janes, 2016; Smith et al., 2010). Engagement of both the program and participants has been subject to ongoing deliberation in which I have encouraged participants to voice their ideas, suggestions and demands. If possible I included these, even if it went against my own judgement. An example of the latter is the choice to not interview a social worker that was fired by the participants, at the request of the participants. In situations where the research focus was discussed, when participants were less motivated to engage or I ran into a practical constraint, I used relational skills to (re-)gain and maintain trust, relations and research engagement. Or as Foster states: '[PAR demands] extensive emotional labor in terms of forging and maintaining meaningful relationships' (quoted by Lenette et al., 2019, p. 3).

In the swampiness of JES, my fellow researchers and I had to deal with what Smith et. al. (2010, p. 413) refer to as the micropolitics of making contact. Who could get us access, who is trusted by others and can therefore lend us trust by proxy, who is reliable, both in information and in keeping his promises? During periods in which the power struggles between the different stakeholders (longer term versus new participants, chairman versus participants, etc.) within the program were more intense, the micropolitics of making and maintaining contact became more complicated. The social worker who also worked as our colleague had to intervene regularly as mediator and key informant, for instance when the mood in the group became more negative towards the research. In an early interview he said: 'Everything is connection. The same goes for you [researchers]. Exactly the same.'

If you don't connect, you won't get a grip on what is happening'. My struggle in building and maintaining relations and trust was parallel to the struggles of others involved (policy advisors, partner organizations). They recognized my dilemma's in trying to build and maintain relations and trust: 'For you it is exactly the same of course' (policy advisor).

At multiple moments I have pushed somewhat to keep the research focused. While ongoing consensus was desirable (ethically) and necessary (practically), I accepted that not all participants would be equally enthusiastic about the research focus. Rather than striving for consensus, I had to accept and embrace that all aspects of the shelter and research into the shelter were (and are) subject to ongoing deliberation. This offered opportunities for learning for all, though it also meant that I had to compromise on some aspects of the research. In the swampiness of the powerplay described in this section, the rational and theoretical guidelines from both academic and participatory research were only partially helpful in designing the research. However, in the end both the social worker who founded JES, the current social worker and the peer worker stated that my engagement as a researcher has contributed to the development of self-management in JES, both through reflection and through what Reason (Reason, 2006) calls enlightenment of practice through theory. Or as the peer worker stated it: 'you [I] have left your fingerprints on JES'.

### **Reflecting on Vulnerability and Empowerment**

PAR enables participants to collectively reflect on issues in their lives from an empowerment-based perspective. Through facilitating communicative action, participants can explore their own experiences and those of others, and learn with and from each other (Author, 2019). Peer workers, social workers and some participants strived for shared learning, though many participants were hesitant or outright negative, especially in discussing vulnerabilities that influenced individual and collective empowerment. According to social workers, peer workers and some participants, experiencing homelessness for a longer period of time caused trauma. A participant stated: 'It is difficult, because I noticed [...] if you have lived on the streets for so long, it leaves its marks'. Many participants said they did not want to discuss their experiences, either because 'nothing was wrong' with them, or because they chose the program to not have to talk about their feelings. In situations of conflict, rather than discussing vulnerabilities and exploring how these vulnerabilities influenced how they perceived conflicts, many participants preferred to focus either on their own lives or on creating house rules that regulated how conflicts should be dealt with.

Not being open about vulnerabilities hindered both individual and collective empowerment, according to social workers, peer workers and some participants. Empowerment focusses on the development of both capacities and control (Van Regenmortel, 2011). Societal precarity (insufficient means, no access to housing, stigma) contributes to disempowerment (Van Regenmortel, 2011). From an empowerment perspective, I under-

stand vulnerability of participants not as an individual deficit but as a logical reaction to disempowering circumstances, though in turn these vulnerabilities hinder empowerment (Boumans, 2012). It is important to acknowledge the collective and political nature of these vulnerabilities, though I saw that in many cases JES participants denied these vulnerabilities, which prohibited making these vulnerabilities collective and political. It is a form of control to be able to choose not to acknowledge or deal with vulnerabilities, though it hindered both individual and collective empowerment.

Social workers and peer workers struggled to have a conversation with participants on their experiences with being homeless and how these experiences influenced their lives and their engagement with self-management. At the same time, social workers emphasized the importance of 'by the way', implicit approaches to reflecting on and learning from vulnerabilities, critiquing both the focus on reflection in regular care (Snoeren et al., 2015) and acknowledging participants' refusal to explicitly focus on vulnerabilities. Both participants, peer workers and social workers pointed out that all kinds of informal exchanges took place between participants on vulnerabilities, and to some extent these informal exchanges were also noticeable during house meetings. The implicit and informal approach appears to be beneficial for participants who dropped out of regular programs.

At the start of the research, I invited participants to share their experiences through open questions, co-designed with participants and peer workers. The open questions left ample room for participants to deflect from talking about issues they struggled with, though they were more forthcoming about issues of other participants. In a later subproject, I hoped that by engaging participants to talk with others, we might gain more insights. The participants who did the interviews were ambivalent on the added value of them doing the interviews. One said he thought that participants still refused to be open about themselves, while another one said that people would not tell him 'bullshit' and that maybe former participants were more at ease with him. Co-designing and co-executing the research helped somewhat in asking questions that met less resistance from former participants though it did not diminish resistance.

Even though I invested time and energy in building and maintaining relations and trust, I still had a hard time breaking through the silence of some of the participants. I struggled to specifically describe how informal exchanges on vulnerabilities took place. The founding social worker, in reflecting on this article, suggested that if I had spent more time at JES, for instance as a supporting social worker, blending my research role with a practicing role, I would have gotten more grip on informal exchanges between participants on vulnerabilities. This might have been true, though both practical, ethical and functional considerations led me to not pursue this option. Some participants suggested not wanting me around all the time, since JES was their home.

It would be beneficial for our understanding of self-management to get more insights into how participants informally exchanged on vulnerability, though I have and had to respect the agency of participants choosing not to reflect on this. Maybe the complexities of self-management and its participants cannot be fully understood rationally, in line with the epistemic stand point of (participatory) action research that knowledge that cannot be articulated is important as well (Bradbury, 2015)

### **First Reflections on Swampy Communicative Action**

I aimed to co-design the research and facilitate communicative action, including the swampiness and complexities of JES. The swampiness of JES both hindered and enriched communicative action. Communicative action presumes the possibility of consensus, if power influences are limited (Garrett, 2009; Habermas, 1991; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2007). My fellow researchers and I found that acknowledging the diversity in perspectives from stakeholders and accepting the insolvability of some issues was both necessary and fruitful. We embraced complexity (Kunneman, 2017) and were rewarded with enriched insights into JES.

Processes of power, vulnerability and differences in interest interfered with our ambition of shared learning. Through ongoing deliberations, I involved participants, peer workers and social workers, though some participants were hesitant to engage with reflection. In facilitating collective reflection my fellow researchers and I tried to adhere to the principles of communicative action, with an emphasis on equal opportunity for all to participate. Power processes hindered shared learning. My colleagues and I had to deal with inequalities between participants and a dis-balance between participants and social workers. While social workers are, on average, more verbally skilled, participants had more position power (based on the principle of self-management) and some claimed that because they had lived experience, only they were allowed to discuss vulnerabilities.

Together with peer workers and participants who were interested in shared learning, we, stakeholders and researchers, were at multiple times able to overcome these issues and could have open reflective sessions that contributed to new insights for all. Over the years, participants' general acknowledgement of the worth of the perspectives of all different stakeholders grew. By engaging with this swampiness and inviting participants, peer workers, social workers and others to engage, our research enabled reflection on and learning from different perspectives by and with all those that were willing to engage. Through articulating individual and collective empowerment processes within self-management, reflecting on these processes and contributing to the development of an institutional memory, my engagement with JES contributed to the development of JES as an established program.

In hindsight I might have spent more attention on how to include more perspectives on the research focus. I did make an effort to explore why some participants did not want to engage with the research, though with varying success. Because participants, individually and as a group, had the power to quit the research, I was hesitant to press these issues. Even if I would have been able to connect with hesitant participants, a few weeks or months later, there would be a new group, with new participants who were hesitant about the research.

Ideally, PAR projects start and continue on the basis of consensus and it is argued that not gaining this consensus at the start can cause problems later (Wicks & Reason, 2009). The complexities of JES have convinced me that even if I would have achieved complete consensus at the start, these issues would have arisen anyway, because they are part of the swampy lowlands of JES and therefore cannot (and maybe should not) be solved.

Over the years, I as a researcher have become more aware of my own influence on the research. Therefore, in the next section, I turn the lens inward.

### **Making it personal**

Although it is widely acknowledged that the person of the researcher influences the research, especially in qualitative research and ethnographic approaches (Bryman, 2008), how this influence relates to the research quality is debated (Roulston & Shelton, 2015). The importance of minimalizing 'researcher bias' is dominantly argued (Bryman, 2008), though there is a body of literature on more reflexive approaches in which the experiences and influence of the researcher are seen as part of the data collection (Råheim et al., 2016; Roulston & Shelton, 2015). Some auto-ethnographers employ their experiences as a source of data (G. F. Bos, 2016; Wacquant, 2004; Woelders, 2019). PAR scholars argue that personal experiences stemming from researcher engagement offer an important source of knowledge (Abma et al., 2019). Dodson et al. (cited in Lenette et al., 2019, p. 25) state that 'researchers must grapple with power and vulnerability—both those of other people as well as their own'. In this section I want to reflect on how I as a person engaged with the swampiness of JES, how I influenced the research and how the research influenced me.

My identity, and how it was perceived, influenced my research, similar as to how personal identities influence the work of social workers (Banks, 2016). At the start of the research, some of the participants and peer workers saw me as an inexperienced researcher (which was true at the time) who knows nothing about vulnerability (which was not true). 'She [a peer worker] can talk about vulnerability, because she knows what it is like. You [I] don't, so you can't' (participant). In those situations, I withdrew to a rational high ground, rather than engage in swampiness, because I was, at that time, not able to fully engage. Sharing more about myself, and engaging as a person and not only as a researcher, might have helped in reducing distrust. However, at the start of my engagement with JES, I probably was not ready to, naturally, share my personal experiences, as the founding social worker,

with whom I have worked closely, pointed out. He argued that, would I have forced myself to be more open at that time, it would have appeared unnatural and strategic, which according to him, would not have been accepted by the participants of JES.

I was trained as a social worker. Both in training and practice I experienced the struggles that social workers in self-managed programs describe, between offering support and letting people do it themselves and between compassionate care and freedom of choice. When I started in 2009 with the research into the shelter, I just started as a 'researcher in training'. My education up until that point was mostly applied and I had only recently started my graduate program. I came out of a long period of vulnerability, hopelessness and social exclusion and dependency on mental health support.

It is important to notice how, over the last ten year, the appreciation of experiential knowledge has skyrocketed. In 2009, experiential knowledge was a marginal phenomenon, acknowledged by the recovery movement and some progressive professionals and policy makers. Due to the dominant paradigm of (semi-)objective approaches to research (Abma et al. 2019), very few researchers are open about their own experiences and how these experiences influence the way they do their research. In recent years I have been experimenting with being more open about my own experiences, although I still experience self-stigma when identifying as a person who has struggled with vulnerability and I still feel the urge to withdraw to a 'save' academic high ground.

My struggle on how to deal with my personal experiences as a researcher is complicated by intersectionality (Huber & Karbouniaris, 2017): although I have experienced vulnerability, I don't share other characteristics with many of the participants and peer workers I interviewed. I come from an intellectual middle-class family, I have a master's degree, a steady job and a middle-class salary. In that sense I am not a peer to people who have different backgrounds, especially those who are still struggling with their situation. Having a shared experience with vulnerability is not always enough to find a common ground, as some painful experiences with discussing my personal background with persons who felt they have had it worse, have taught me.

Over the years I have struggled to let go of (my perception) of how an academic researcher should relate to the research object as prescribed in most qualitative research text books (i.e. keeping a distance, striving for minimal influence) (Bryman, 2008; Roulston & Shelton, 2015). The first step, for me, was acknowledging, rather than denying, that my experience influences the way I connect with and talk to respondents and how I interpret what they say and do. This influence is both helpful and something to be aware of. I personally benefited greatly from reflection, therapy and focused work on my issues. The hope I have developed that issues I struggle(d) with can be overcome is very important for me. Participants choosing not to talk about their vulnerabilities and to not work on their issues poked holes in my conviction of overcoming issues through reflection and working on them.

I was aware, and have become more aware over the years, that empowerment consists of unique processes that cannot be steered and that being able to choose to not work on your problems is an important part of (negative) perceptions of freedom (Huber, Brown, Metze, Stam, Van Regenmortel, et al., 2020). Some participants' refusal to explicate empowerment processes confronted my own views on and experiences with empowerment, which was both difficult and an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding about myself and empowerment. The standpoint of participants forced me to explore my own views, even if, as in most cases, participants were less interested to explore their own views. The messiness and complexities of engaging with JES has forced me to change (Cook, 1998). I have become more open about myself, while I have been more able to accept JES participants not being open about themselves. Participatory action research aims at participant empowerment (Abma et al., 2019; Bradbury, 2015) and I have learned to accept, that empowerment means different things to different people.

Over the years, I reduced the distance between my professional and my personal identity. By engaging more as a person, I'm better able to make contact with participants and I can contribute to a space in which participants feel able to be more open about themselves. My personal passion for empowerment and the issues relevant to self-management have helped me to stay engaged with JES. I have become more open about my own experiences. In informal interactions with participants and peer workers of JES, sharing my own experiences has facilitated others to be more open about themselves.

Through working closely together and getting to know each other, I have developed friendly relations with social workers, peer workers and some participants, similarly to what others have called 'professional friendship' (Berggren, cited in Van Ewijk, 2010, p. 24). The current social worker stated, in reaction to the issues described in this section, that she appreciated the conversations with me, as an opportunity to reflect on questions and insecurities she dealt with. Over the years I have become friends with the social worker who initiated JES and with the student turned social worker. This friendly engagement is beneficial for both the participatory and academic purpose of my research. Friendly engagement also causes ethical dilemmas with regard to when something is shared informally, especially during drinks, that is relevant for my understanding of JES. I have only used these insights as background information.

Looking back at my own experiences over the last year, and comparing these experiences with other researchers around me, it is troublesome how the researcher role is often left out of research accounts. Acknowledging my own role, both the good and the bad, helped me to better engage with participants, peer workers and social workers and helped me to better understand the shelter and its participants. In writing up and reflecting on my experiences with the other authors and stakeholders in the research, I can understand why researchers choose to leave out their own role, besides rational references to bias. Turning the lens inward, to better understand our role as researchers in relation to our-

selves as persons can be painful (Abma et al., 2020). At multiple times (all the time) I felt the urge to withdraw to the high ground of rationalizing and defending my choices towards my supervisors, sometimes feeling attacked when I felt their questions were unfair or unjust. I have tried to stay true to the purpose of this chapter and acknowledge the good, the bad and the complex of doing research in the swampiness of JES, which is better than leaving it unspoken.

## Discussion

This chapter's purpose was to gain a better understanding of the complexities of doing PAR through the lens of what others have called *messiness* (Cook, 1998) or *swampy lowlands* (D. A. Schön, 1983). These periods are essential to PAR (Cook, 1998), though they are often omitted from academic publications, hurting these publications' trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and leaving future researchers to fend for themselves (Lenette et al., 2019).

By engaging with the swampiness of self-management and the participants within the program, the first author was able to grasp the complexities of empowerment, especially concerning the issue: what to do if people use their power to refrain from explicitly working on empowerment? Though empowerment as a central concept emerged out of the engagement with JES and was not a predetermined research focus, many participants were not or less interested in reflection on empowerment processes in self-management and chose not to participate in the research. This conflicted with PAR's purpose of enabling people to reflect on their experiences. It raised the question on how far a researcher can and needs to go in persuading others to engage in reflections, and to what extent reflection is a shared purpose or primarily a research purpose. Part of the empowerment that PAR propositions, might be that participants have the agency to not engage with the research.

Ideally, PAR contributes to participants developing their subjective being, gaining insights into their lives and thereby increasing their mastery (Abma et al., 2019). Researchers, and participants, peer workers, social workers and other stakeholders, struggled with how to deal with participants' vulnerability. Participants did not want to be reduced to being vulnerable and an object of therapeutic interventions. Not ignoring vulnerabilities is an important part of empowerment, though it is also important to acknowledge disempowering societal precarity and the control participants should have on what they do and do not want to share (Author, 2011). Researchers have to be aware of their framing power (Janes, 2016), especially when researching marginalized groups (Author, 2019). Wright (1997) argues that research into homelessness is too focused on individual issues, contributing to framing homelessness as an individual and medical problem. Research into homelessness should focus on the social aspects of problems and collective empowerment (Wright, 1997). The problems that JES participants dealt with were substantially influenced by societal factors (e.g. housing exclusion, social exclusion, poverty), though in turn these

experiences caused distrust and *learned helplessness* (I have no influence over my life) (Van Regenmortel et al., 2006). Researchers balanced acknowledging participants' claim that nothing was wrong with them with the claims of others and observations by the researchers, describing the different experiences with self-management. Working with co-researchers helped to gain insights into these issues.

In facilitating shared learning, the researchers, peer workers, social workers and other participants struggled with participants' refusal to discuss some of their vulnerabilities that hindered self-management. Power imbalances between participants and a negative appreciation of social workers' perspectives by some participants also had a negative influence on shared learning. Through the work of more inclusive participants, peer workers and social workers and the researchers' relational skills, shared reflection and developing new insights were possible. Researchers spent a substantial part of their time on engaging with and inclusion of participants. At times, choices were made against the interest of keeping focus or including all perspectives, to meet participants requests and/or to maintain the working relation.

Over the years, as the first author developed a more stable relation with people in the shelter and engaged more on a personal level, maintaining contact became less complicated. Personally engaging as a researcher is at odds with dominant views on the researcher's role (Author, 2019; Bryman, 2008). The first 3 has changed from remaining personally reserved at the outset of the research to developing friendly relations with participants, peer workers and social workers and employing his own lived experience with vulnerability and social exclusion to facilitate shared reflection. Although engaging as a person is part of PAR (Chandler & Torbert, 2003), very few researchers openly discuss how their own lived experiences influence their research, or how their research influences them. Engaging more on a personal level and sharing more about the researchers' own experiences in an earlier research phase might have contributed to participants' willingness to share more about themselves (Abma et al., 2019; Chandler & Torbert, 2003).

Engaging with the swampy lowlands through PAR has increased both the practical and scientific value of our research. Researchers gained more insight into the shelter and the underlying process by engaging, and if the researchers had not engaged, they probably would have gotten far less access to participants and backstage processes. The other way around, the research contributed to the development of both the program and other similar programs, through facilitating reflection, articulating empowerment processes within self-management and substantiating self-management as a legitimate alternative to regular programs.

### **Practical implications**

We derive four lessons for future work on PAR-projects. Firstly, the importance of engaging personally as a researcher, by sharing personal experiences with vulnerability. Although this goes against many formal and informal research standards, engaging helps in building trust and relations and gaining access to backstage processes that might be missed by not engaging. Secondly, articulate different purposes and interests of participants explicitly at the start and continuously deliberate on which ones can and cannot be included within the current project. Thirdly, invest more in participants' research mindedness and reflectiveness by showing the PAR's value for both themselves, the program and future participants and finding ways of doing PAR that are a fit for participants, while also acknowledging that some participants, might be less interested in shared learning. Finally, PAR offers unique possibilities for gaining informal data on backstage processes, observing and experiencing interactions, and allowing insights into the swampiness of individual and collective empowerment processes, that would be missed in less engaged research. In future research, we should acknowledge the scientific worth of this informal data more so we can both collect and use it more systematically to benefit both the participants, the program and our general understanding.

We have critiqued of both the researcher's role of researchers and on issues that occur when facilitating shared learning in swampy lowlands, not to discourage PAR, but because we are convinced of its worth of it and hope that others can learn from our experiences.

*There are some enterprises in which a careful  
disorderliness is the true method.*

Melville



## General discussion

## Introduction

When sailing, you have to be very sensitive to the weather, waves, specifics of your boat and the interaction between these elements. You have to continuously adjust your actions with regards to all this information and with regards to reactions to your choices. Actions that at one point help you move forward, can at another moment make your boat flip over, if you do not pay attention. In self-management, like in a sailboat, you have to find a balance between all kinds of factors and processes. The metaphor of sailing in self-management first occurred when we as researchers together with social workers and peer workers from different self-managed programs tried to describe how they (the workers) facilitated and supported self-management. Every choice they made, they made in reaction to what they assessed would benefit the situation the most, in relation to the values and principles of self-management. They sail in self-management, trying to influence where they can while acknowledging they are only a part of the equation. Participants, peer workers, social workers and others involved have been constantly looking for a balance, as described in the five empirical chapters. At the same time, the metaphor of sailing reminds us also of the quote: 'If you want to build a ship, don't drum up people to collect wood and don't assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea.'

While the main title of my thesis refers to the craftsmanship of those facilitating self-management, the subtitle refers to the apparent contradictio in terminis and complexity of organizing empowerment. Similarly, Boutellier (2010) refers to *organizing freedom* and Rijshouwer (2017) called Wikipedia *organizing democracy*. I build on the work of others who have articulated the virtue of exploring the complex interaction between freedom of choice and capacity development (Berlin, 1969; Rappaport, 1981), freedom and discipline (Foucault, 1987; G. Van Der Laan, 1990), structure and empowerment (Maton, 2008; Peterson & Zimmerman, 2004) and lifeworld and system (Kunneman, 1996).

The setup of Je Eigen Stek (Your Own Place, JES), founded on the premise that homeless people are better able to manage a shelter themselves, enabled me to study the facilitation and organization of empowerment, supported by Schön. He encourages us to engage with '.....swampy lowland where situations are confusing "messes" incapable of technical solution. [.....] In the swamp are the problems of greatest human concern' (1983, p. 42).

My research focused on the question:

*How do participants, peer workers and social workers experience and shape processes of empowerment and disempowerment in a self-managed institutional homeless shelter?*

1. Though this quote is often ascribed to Antoine de Saint-Exupery, it is at best a paraphrase, the origin of this specific quote is unclear.

With this question I aimed to achieve three purposes:

- Empirically: describing and understanding how participants, peer workers and social workers shape processes of empowerment and disempowerment within an institutional self-managed shelter (1)
- Theoretically: contributing to understanding and conceptual development of empowerment and disempowerment of people experiencing homelessness within an institutional setting and the interaction between empowerment and the institutional setting (2)
- Practically: contributing to the development of self-management institutional programs in homeless and mental health care and the development of the role of social work in a changing welfare state, specifically within homeless and mental health care (3).

In this discussion, I reflect on insights that empowerment and institutional theory brought to light, how these theories relate to each other and new insights from my research that contribute to our understanding of (limitations to) these theories. Initially, I intended to make equal use of both theories. Over the course of my analysis, empowerment became the main theory, because empowerment appeared to be a better fit with both the nature and the content of the empirical data I gathered. In the methodological discussion I reflect on how different data might have enabled a more thorough analysis of institutional aspects of self-management.

I used institutional theory mainly as a contrast to empowerment theory and to understand the interaction between (dis-)empowerment processes and an institutional setting. Institutional theory helped me to understand and describe the interaction between an empowering setting and empowerment of individuals and groups. Together with the work of authors that are critical of empowerment, institutional theory also helped me to analyze processes of disempowerment. By combining the two theories (empowerment and institutional theory), I was able to highlight enabling aspects of an institutional setting, which were underarticulated in institutional theory. The other way around, I was able to highlight hindering aspects of an empowering setting, which were underarticulated in empowerment theory. I also analyzed two underarticulated elements in both empowerment and institutional theory: the interaction between enabling and hindering aspects (1) and the role of individual preferences and characteristics of participants that influence how they perceive the setting (2).

In my research I was confronted with the complexity of empowerment processes within an institutional setting. Rather than trying to observe it from the outside, I engaged with the 'relational complexity' (Kunneman, 2017; Woelders, 2019), to understand it from within. Employing a participatory action research approach (PAR) enabled me to do this, especially because of the questions PAR raises around power, counter power and the role of the researcher (Abma et al., 2019). Using PAR allowed me to gain insights into complexity

beyond the 'high ground' of theories. At the same time, using PAR made it all the more important to reflect on my own role, how I engaged with JES and how I shaped the interaction between data and theory. The issues I touched upon in the previous paragraphs are elaborated on in the rest of this chapter. I reflect on several core issues following from my research in relation to empowerment and institutional theory, the main research question, and the different purposes (empirical, theoretical, practical) of my research. I start with a methodological discussion and reflection on my own role. The discussion ends with some practical implications, suggestions for future research and final remarks.

## Methodological discussion

Through a longitudinal participatory research approach and a thick analysis, employing multiple strategies and plugging in multiple theories to understand my data through different theoretical lenses (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013), I aimed to achieve the different purposes my research has.

My research into JES lasted for over ten years, through two sub-projects (an exploratory case-study and a follow up study into former participants) and prolonged engagement in between and after these projects, up to this day. Participants, peer workers and social workers of JES engaged with all aspects of the research: design, recruitment, data collection, analysis and publication.

### **Purpose of the research**

I aimed for the research to be both academically relevant and useful for the development of JES. While these two purposes are not mutually exclusive (Andriessen, 2014), they can be at odds with each other, especially in relation to a complex practice with many stakeholders with different points of view. Both stimulating local impact and collaborating on all parts of the research are part of PAR (Abma et al., 2019). We aimed to co-design the research and use it as a communicative space (Abma et al., 2019), though in practice the ideal of power free communicative action (Habermas, 1970) was both complicated and enriched like the swampy lowlands that Schön (D. A. Schön, 1983) described. Processes of power, vulnerability and differences in interest played an important part in our attempts to facilitate shared learning. While ongoing consensus was desirable (ethically) and necessary (practically), we accepted that not all participants would be equally enthusiastic about the research focus. Rather than striving for consensus, I acknowledged and embraced that all aspects of JES and research into JES were (and are) subject to ongoing deliberation. This ongoing deliberation offered opportunities for learning for all. The research contributed to the development of both the program and other similar programs, through facilitating reflection, articulating empowerment processes within self-management and substantiating self-management. In chapter 7 and below I reflect on my own role and the interaction between the participatory and practical purposes of my research.

### Strengths and limitations

My prolonged engagement with JES and the participation of stakeholders in the research contributed to the authenticity and trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of my research. Throughout the research I have employed several forms of triangulation to increase the quality of the research, specifically triangulation of theoretical frameworks, data-sources, researchers, perspectives and analytical approaches (Abma & Stake, 2014; Denzin, 1989; Kimchi et al., 1991). During the time I researched JES, we also executed several smaller case-studies into similar programs, summarized in Huber (2016). Furthermore, my colleagues and I organized exchanges between JES and many other similar programs, both nationally and internationally, through meetings, site visits and invitational conferences. Although, for clarity and transparency, my thesis focusses on JES, the exchanges and comparisons with others programs benefited my understanding of JES through contrast and similarity. Some of the case-studies were used in an early phase of the analysis and in developing the theoretical framework. An extensive description of the execution of the research is included in the different empirical chapters. The different forms of triangulation together with the exchanges with other similar projects contribute to transferability of this research, meaning other similar projects might find the outcomes of this research useful for reflecting on and developing their project.

As I further describe in the discussion of my findings, I have struggled with pinpointing empowerment processes, and with the desirability of pinpointing empowerment processes. The interviews I conducted were predominantly open and focused on constructing narratives of stakeholder experiences, which fits well with the argument that empowerment research should focus on unique processes of those involved (Rappaport, 1987; Van Regenmortel, 2011; Zimmerman, 1995). Narrative research however presumes that people are able to articulate their experiences, which risks overrepresenting those who are more articulate (Bryman, 2008) and missing empowerment processes of people that cannot put them into words. Many structured questionnaires have been developed to study empowerment, in which people can agree or disagree (on a scale). It has been suggested that using more structured questionnaires could help describe empowerment processes of people who were not able to articulate their experiences themselves. However, using a structured approach would go against the opportunity for people to put their experiences in their own words and would force me as a researcher to operationalize how I would expect them to experience empowerment (Boumans, 2012).

Using more structured questionnaires would not solve what Kunneman calls 'voids in our language' (2017, p. 18, translation MH), subjective experiences that are hard or impossible to put into words, though they are crucial to ourselves and therefore to processes of empowerment. I have used observations from others (peer workers, social workers, fellow participants) and myself to describe, with some restraint, the experiences of empowerment and disempowerment of participants that struggled to formulate their experiences themselves. Verbalizing non-verbal experiences of participants felt to some

extent as a form of violence towards them (G. F. Bos & Woelders, n.d.). At the same time, being able to tell your story and have your story heard, even if assisted by others, can be an empowering experience (Boumans, 2012; Van Regenmortel, 2011). Non-verbal forms of data-collection, like photovoice, might be employed in future research, though non-verbal data is often still verbalized in analysis and in writing up the research.

Though I engaged with participants, peer workers and social workers in JES, I did not participate in daily life within JES. As a consequence, I have little observational data on how power relations were shaped in daily life. Based on the interviews and my observations from my engagement with JES, I am able to shed some light on how power relations within daily life were perceived, as I have described in several of the empirical chapters (especially chapter 3) and in the discussion below. Structured and semi-structured observational data is necessary to employ Goffman's framework (1961) for describing everyday life within an institutional setting. Doing so will shed more light on interactions and rituals that contribute to or hinder empowerment within JES. Though this too raises the question: who determines what is seen and not-seen: the researcher or the participants?

In writing up this research I have tried to do justice to the complex and multilayered nature of JES and the many perspectives on JES. I firmly concur with Goffman's (1961) argument, that each persons' actions are logical from his point of view and that we need to study these perspectives, to fully comprehend what is going on. In the research my colleagues and I aimed to describe the different perspectives and *competing explanations* (Abma et al., 2009), rather than reach consensus between stakeholders in order to do justice to various perspectives, interests and values.

To acknowledge and grasp the complexity of self-management I engaged with the complexity, while at the same time taking a step back to reflect on the complexity (Kunneman, 2017), through PAR.

### **Practicing PAR and relational complexities**

In the final stages of my research I became more aware that I as a researcher was sailing as well, on different theoretical and empirical perspectives, through the complexity of self-management in balance with (the demands of) academic rationality. I balanced the complex group dynamics in JES with keeping my research focused and I searched for an adequate level of engagement. In an aptly titled editorial ('Tell it like it is'), *Nature Human Behavior*, pleaded against research publications with 'conclusive narratives that leave no room for ambiguity or for conflicting or inconclusive results' ("Tell it like it is," 2020). Rather, scientists should acknowledge that 'Science is messy, and the results of research rarely conform fully to plan or expectation' ("Tell it like it is," 2020). At the same time, 'telling it like it is', is not easy within an academic culture and a dominant paradigm in social sciences focused on creating objective knowledge independent of the creator of that research where talk about the messiness of doing social research is scarce (Abma et al., 2019; Roulston & Shelton, 2015).

Looking back at my own experiences over the last year, and comparing these experiences with other researchers around me at conferences and during informal meetings, it is troublesome how the role of the researcher as actor in research processes is often left out of the equation, especially in presentations and publications.

PAR aims to stimulate learning of those involved, to contribute to their emancipation. Practicing PAR enables researchers to engage with relational complexity, to study it from within (Abma et al., 2019; Kunneman, 2017). Through PAR, I was able to study empowerment as a practice rather than a theory with much more depth than if I had studied it from the outside. I became entangled in the relational complexity of JES and realized I was both object and subject in the research process. This generated questions such as: was I willing to place myself under the microscope? How was I using my power as a researcher, and when was I subjected to the power of those working with me in the research?

With its roots in the work of Freire and Habermas, PAR has a strong focus on processes of power, especially between so called 'silenced voices' (people in a vulnerable position, to a lesser extent professionals) and 'dominant voices' (policy makers, managers) (Abma et al., 2019). Only recently, more attention is spent on power relations among people in a vulnerable position in a PAR project, and between people in a vulnerable position and researchers (Groot et al., 2018; Lenette et al., 2019). PAR appears to fit with the emancipatory slogan 'nothing about us without us' (Abma et al., 2019; Stam, 2013), though not all participants in my research were interested in participating in PAR. What did this mean for me as a researcher? Should I still stimulate and try to engage them in my research, or should I respect their will and choice not to join the research?

### **Positive dialectics in PAR revisited**

PAR can be understood as a form of positive dialectics, envisioning progress through increased understanding (Van Den Bersselaar, 2003), because of both the focus on joined sense making and the ambition to use this joined sense making as a source of emancipation of people in a vulnerable position (Abma et al., 2019). In this sense, PAR fits closely with both my own vision on research, social work and life in general and with my dominant coping strategy. In this study I was confronted with suffering and people not willing to 'work' on their situation. This was troublesome for me. Not to be able to intervene or fix a situation. Usually, I want to work on it, most often through reflection. In doing so, I have been able to help both myself and many others. I find it hard to witness suffering without doing something, at least in part because it confronts me with all unsolved suffering of both myself and others. This means that the study confronted me with my limited power. In a sense it was a disempowering experience, and one I struggled with.

In retrospect, I realize I was not raised within a religious or alternative framework that could help me make sense of suffering. Similarly, during my academic education in a sociology master program, the emphasis was on critical theory, focused on dissecting processes

of power and exclusion, without offering solution oriented alternatives. However, during the various therapies I participated in and in my education as a social worker, I was offered tools to reflect and analyze in a constructive, positive manner. In doing so, I gained hope and opportunities to develop myself and support others in their empowerment. Based on my personal, professional and academic experiences, I have developed an ever growing distaste for critical theorists who, from a moral high ground, point out the risks of positive ideals on betterment of people. Research that solely functions to dissect these risks, without offering alternatives, is a poor ideal from my point of view, which leaves both people in a vulnerable position and practitioners to fend for themselves.

My resistance against critical theory and my embracement of positive theory, comes with risks. I was aware of the first risk, the negative consequences of positive theory. For every positive theory runs the risk of prescribing a certain desired reality or ideal, thereby overruling the wishes and desires of those involved. The road to hell is paved with good intentions, as they say, and that goes for social workers, PAR-researchers and for me. While we, as social workers or PAR-researchers, might be convinced of the worth of emancipation through reflection, it is important to acknowledge and respect that not everyone is interested in more insight into themselves and that sometimes material support, political action or doing nothing, is better suited. Although I tend to struggle with this first risk, I have become better at dealing with it.

The second risk, which I only recently have become fully aware of, is that I may have had too little attention to acknowledging and appreciating experiences of vulnerability and disempowerment as fruitful ground for making connections and developing social relations. In my personal life, sharing negative experiences with others, with a tear and/or a laugh, is a source of what Kunneman calls 'relational richness' (2017, p. 264, translation MH). In fact, much of the (potential) worth of peer support is based on sharing experiences around vulnerability (Mead, 2014). In my work as a researcher (and earlier as a social worker) I have been hesitant to explore the potential of developing relations based on shared experiences with vulnerability. This was partly out of (outdated) ideas on what is appropriate and partly because I was still struggling to make sense of my own experiences, which hindered my ability to share them in a productive fashion. On an existential level, as mentioned, I struggle to engage with suffering without intervening, which also hindered my ability to acknowledge and appreciate the relational potential of vulnerability.

On the side of the participants of JES, I perceived a lack of interest in engaging and exploring vulnerability. From the first contact, participants, peer workers and social workers of JES made it clear that many participants were not very interested in exploring vulnerability. In part, this lack of interest was due to personal reasons of participants, though the conditions for exploring experiences with vulnerability were less than ideal even if participants would be interested. As a group, participants were hesitant to discuss vulnerability with

each other, let alone with outside researchers. My involvement with JES was limited, in the sense that I only visited, I did not become part of the group, especially because the group changed every few weeks because of people joining and leaving. I was able to build a relation with peer workers and social workers with whom I had longer lasting exchanges and who, out of the nature of their role, were more interested in reflection. With the social workers and peer workers I spoke extensively on both their own vulnerability and their experiences with vulnerabilities of participants.

Acknowledging my own role and influence, both the good and the bad, helped me in engaging more with participants, peer workers and social workers and helped me gain more understanding of JES. Over the years, participants, peer workers and social workers of JES and I have found a way of working together and I as a researcher have learned to engage more as a person. Practicing PAR offers opportunities for researchers to develop their own role, through the development of the research (Baur, 2012). Over the years, my role has changed from curious observer and listener to facilitator of communicative action and knowledge exchange and consultant for JES and supervisor/ coach for other (co-)researchers.

I have chosen to write my dissertation in English and publish the empirical chapters in academic journals, which will most likely never be read by those involved with the research. The structure of a journal article demands that complex processes are brought back to comprehensible results. I have strived to include those involved with JES in all parts of my research, though academic journals are not accessible for non-academics, because of both paywalls and the academic nature. I have made sure that the results of my research were shared with and are used by JES. I am convinced of the importance to share the complexity of (dis)empowerment processes with the academic community, though it sometimes feels disenfranchising toward JES to write about JES, without JES.

Empowerment is a complex theory to get a grasp of. During my research I have discussed my struggles with fellow researcher involved with similar research and similar struggles. Many of them have chosen to focus on one sub part. I, in the words of one my supervisors, have chosen to 'fully dive into the complexity'. I am glad I did, though it resulted in more questions than answers.

The uncertainties connected with research into empowerment, demand both an epistemic and policy re-evaluation. Stakeholders in the social domain need to learn how to deal with uncertainty as an inspiring challenge, rather than as an undesirable state of mind (Stam, 2013). At the same time, it is important to search for and acknowledge structures that do enable empowerment (Boutellier, 2010). With this research, I aimed to contribute my part.

## Empowerment processes in an institutional setting: core issues

In this section I discuss the core issues that came out of my research. The first issue focuses on a conceptual discussion, while the other issues are more empirically oriented.

### **1. Rigid conceptions of self-management, freedom and empowerment bring us nowhere**

Over the years, misconceptions of how freedom was developed through empowerment and self-management have led to many misunderstandings and conflicts in and around JES. Does self-management mean doing it yourself, deciding it yourself, developing yourself? And is it 'yourself' or 'ourselves'? Participants, peer workers, social workers and others involved have been searching for what self-management meant in relation to their own role the role of others. Many, if not most, of the conversations I have had over the years on self-management have touched upon how that person understands self-management. I have learned from studying JES, and other self-managed programs (Huber, 2016), that nuance is necessary to understand processes of self-management and empowerment. These issues tie into a broader philosophical, scientific, political and practical debate around the relation between empowerment of people in a vulnerable position, social work and the welfare state.

With the publication of the 'Market of wellbeing and happiness' (de Markt van welzijn en geluk), Achterhuis (1981) had a major influence on how policy makers and social workers thought about social work in the Netherlands (Duyvendak, 1999; Kwekkeboom, 2010). Achterhuis argued that social workers made people in vulnerable positions more vulnerable and that any limitation to individual autonomy was undesirable, based on the work of Illich and Foucault (Achterhuis, 1981; Duyvendak, 1999).

A fear of hurting individual autonomy has been the predominant leitmotiv for social workers and a core issue in social policy, both as a normative stance and as a legitimization for budget cuts in social welfare (Bredewold et al., 2018; Duyvendak, 1999; Kwekkeboom, 2010). It is argued that overemphasizing autonomy can and does lead to neglection (Abma, 2010; Pols, 2004; Tonkens, 2008; G. Van Der Laan, 1990; Van Regenmortel, 2011). Although a plea was made for more compassionate interference with people who were at risk through the focus on individual autonomy, this has not changed the dominant discourse in social policy (Bredewold et al., 2018; Kwekkeboom, 2010). Based on the same reasoning as Achterhuis, the Dutch government, like many Western governments, has adopted a workfare regime (Kampen & Tonkens, 2019), aiming for people in a vulnerable position to become active and self-sufficient, more or less explicitly legitimizing this aim with the concept of empowerment (Kampen & Tonkens, 2019; Rivest & Moreau, 2015).

It is clear that forcing people to develop self-sufficiency goes against the principles of empowerment (Rappaport, 1987; Van Regenmortel, 2011). I understand empowerment as consisting of both freedom of choice and capacity development (Rappaport, 1981; Van Regenmortel, 2011). It is argued that freedom of choice and capacity development strengthen each other: the more capacities you develop, the more freedom you can achieve (G. Van Der Laan, 1990; Van Regenmortel, 2011; Zimmerman, 1995) and that legitimizes stimulating capacity development, because in the end it contributes to empowerment (Kampen et al., 2013; G. Van Der Laan, 1990). In that reasoning, interventions from others (e.g. social workers) can stimulate rather than diminish your empowerment. This argument relies on the presumption that you need capacities to develop freedom. However, emphasizing freedom of choice over capacity development is a well-established normative (libertarian) position (Berlin, 1969), which delegitimizes the push for capacity development as a step towards developing freedom.

I prefer to define empowerment as a dialectic concept, where the elements of freedom of choice and capacity development balance each other out. I refer to dialectics, because it allows me to explore the intrinsic contradiction within empowerment between freedom of choice and capacity development, and how these two elements contribute to and limit each other. The intrinsic contradiction is that the one part (empowerment is about freedom of choice) can never be completely true if the other part (empowerment is about capacity development) is also true. Or, to make it even more abstract: both 'I am free' and 'I am not free' are never completely true. So if we interpret the two statements as a thesis and antithesis, every synthesis following out of it, will unavoidably call out its own antithesis. Framing empowerment in a dialectical way helps us to navigate away from both criticisms of empowerment theory.

If empowerment was only focused on capacity development, the focus on the development of freedom of choice would suffer, as we see in the development of self-sufficiency as an obligation. Empowerment in this definition would legitimize social discipline: it is good for you to develop your capacities, and therefore, you must, even if you do not want to. Critical theorists like Berlin, Achterhuis and Illich have since long pointed out the risks of good intention, arguing that all positive theories, i.e. aimed on the betterment of life, contain the risk of violence (physical, material or otherwise) towards people who do not comply (Berlin, 1969; Van Den Bersselaar, 2003). Therefore it is important to include freedom of choice as an integral part of empowerment. The freedom of choice of the person in question can be used, at least theoretically, as a brake and correction to violence stemming from a too positive interpretation of empowerment, i.e. too much focus on development of capacities, without attention to freedom of choice.

While the arguments presented in the previous paragraphs are quite abstract, they are very concrete within JES and other self-managed programs. Participants choose self-management over the lack of freedom of choice in regular programs, in which organizations

and professionals decide for them. The participants appreciate the freedom of choice self-managed programs offer them. A substantial part of the participants use their freedom of choice to not explicitly work on capacity development. Because some lack the capacities to work on their own problems, they get stuck. In those situations, others participants, peer workers and social workers have to balance freedom of choice with emphasizing the importance of capacity development. Theoretically, empowerment can be criticized for legitimizing neglect (do it yourself) or social discipline (you have to develop yourself) or embraced for being a worthwhile ambition. In the swampy lowlands of self-managed programs, these arguments are less clear.

Authors who argue that freedom can be achieved by pushing back external interference from professionals or the government, often ignore internal limitations to people's ability to use freedom and processes of oppression within and between people, both of which do not disappear by limiting external interferences (Boumans, 2012; Foucault, 1987; Freire, 2005; Tonkens, 2008). In both scientific and professional literature, common reference is made to a lifeworld of (groups of) citizens that would flourish if only professionals and the system would step back (Boumans, 2012; Hayes & Houston, 2007). My research shows that, as others have argued theoretically (Boumans, 2012; Foucault, 1987; Freire, 2005; Tonkens, 2008), all kinds of power struggles occur within lifeworlds, that hinder empowerment of both individuals and collectives, and that not all participants are automatically interested in empowerment processes for themselves or others. Others argue that adapting yourself to others, especially in a non-natural setting, is an extended form of unwanted discipline (Bloor, 1986; S. Scott, 2010). While critical thinkers are rightly pointing out the risks of positive theories, their criticism offers no alternative, and in practice legitimizes neglect and inequality and ignores the downsides of emphasizing freedom of choice (Boumans, 2012; Duyvendak, 1999; Van Den Bersselaar, 2003).

The mentioned themes resonate in the way JES participants experience JES. One participant of JES for instance said: 'it is so pleasant that there is always someone to talk to in the living room and people keep an eye out for you'. Another one says: 'you are never alone and people are watching your every move'. Participants, peer workers and social workers in JES and other self-managed programs had very diverse views on how participants should relate to each other and whether participants should adapt to each other.

So far I have mentioned two issues that are often underarticulated in the literature on empowerment. Firstly, empowerment consists of both freedom and capacity development, and while ideally they strengthen each other, in practice they can also limit each other. Secondly, empowerment is limited by people themselves, both between people in a vulnerable position and within themselves. A third issue is the relation between empowerment and disempowerment. While Van Regenmortel (2011) argues that acknowledging vulnerability is an integral part of empowerment, in most publications it remains unclear how empowerment and disempowerment relate to each other. Focusing on empowerment

implies that disempowerment is a state of being that should be avoided. From an ethics of care point of view, a counter point could be made.

Social workers in JES and other self-managed programs work with an approach called 'being there' (Bart, 2001), which is based on care ethics and focuses on establishing trust and a relation with people in a vulnerable position and acknowledging their vulnerability. The 'being there' method has similarities with Mead's plea for 'sitting with discomfort' (2014) as a crucial part of peer support and the common phrase in the recovery movement 'meeting people where they are'. In my methodological reflection I mentioned Kunneman's plea for 'relational richness' (2017) arising out of sharing vulnerabilities and finding ways of living together within the swampiness of everyday life. The shared experience of homelessness and all that it entails is in itself a source of social connection for many participants in JES. Both the worth of this relational richness arising out shared experiences with vulnerability and the importance of acknowledging disempowerment as a place where people are, at least in that period of their life, are important additions to empowerment (Duijs et al., 2019). While this is not antithetical to empowerment, at least in the way I understand it, it is often overlooked in publications on empowerment.

There are two nuances to the argument made in the previous paragraph. Firstly, there is a social justice issue at stake. Within society, the chances of ending up in a vulnerable position and working your way out of that position are unequally distributed (Van Regenmortel, 2011). Acknowledging someone's individual disempowerment, should not divert from someone's societal disempowerment and unequal allocation of financial, social and cultural capital. Secondly, Wolf (2004) points out that acknowledging vulnerability and focusing on being there entails the risk of neglecting issues that are solvable through interventions, either on a personal or societal level.

Empowerment of people in a vulnerable position is a complex process with multiple layers, balancing freedom of choice and capacity development, and being there and intervening. Rigid interpretations of self-management, empowerment and freedom do not bring our understanding and the potential benefits of self-management any further, whether these rigid interpretations are welcomed or rejected. Breaking through rigid interpretations to continuously deliberate on and expand our understanding of concepts is an aspect of JES that made JES a very interesting practice for me and many of those involved. To me, being involved with JES was a positive dialectical process, the idea (or maybe the hope), that the ongoing processes of formulating a thesis, an anti-thesis and a synthesis, stimulate the possibility of progress (Van Den Bersselaar, 2003). In my research I have studied the experiences and views of those involved in relation to self-management and (dis)empowerment, from different perspectives, different theories and at different programs. In a way, my research was an ongoing conversation between those involved, me and theoretical insights, to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences with (dis)empowerment within self-managed programs.

## **2. Participants can benefit from self-management without articulating empowerment**

Almost all participants of JES said they benefited from the freedom of choice and practical support that JES offered and many participants appreciated the empowerment-oriented approach of JES. Participants were assumed to be competent to take care of themselves and make their own choices, rather than in regular programs, where most participants felt they were treated as being incompetent and were given very little freedom of choice.

Participants of JES, like all people who are homeless (Padgett et al., 2016; Van Doorn, 2002), experienced extreme forms of scarcity and precarity in relation to basic human necessities such as food, shelter, safety, access to bathrooms and social support. JES offers participants material benefits in the form of steady shelter, practical support, and access to phone and internet. Nevertheless, most participants remained in a marginal financial position and were unsure of their ability to obtain a house. It is known that scarcity hinders the ability of individuals to work on their empowerment (Mullainathan & Shafir, 2014) and it might have also hindered participants' ability and interest to work on capacity development, because they were still too focused on improving their own quality of life. Offering steady shelter to participants of JES, did enable freedom of choice for participants, even if they did not engage with self-management.

Societal precarity and scarcity (insufficient means, no access to housing, stigma) contributes to disempowerment (Van Regenmortel, 2011). Although other issues are intertwined with this precarity, like mental health or substance abuse issues, it is important to notice that being homeless is in itself a traumatic experience (Padgett et al., 2016; Van Doorn, 2002; Van Regenmortel et al., 2006). In the experience of JES participants, and in the literature, the policy around regular shelters struggles to counter this precarity and offer little possibilities for homeless people to work on empowerment, while they are subject to extensive screening on individual deficits (Padgett et al., 2016; J. Van Der Laan et al., 2018; Van Doorn, 2002; Van Regenmortel et al., 2006).

Literature on self-organized care suggests that processes like social learning (including social motivation and social comparison), social support, development of experiential knowledge and the development of roles, skills and self-image are important aspects of empowerment within self-organized care (Brown, 2012). Although these processes were seen in JES as well, facilitated by living and managing together, in most cases participants were reluctant to explicate these benefits. This reluctance has both epistemic (discussed in the methodological section), political (discussed below) and personal consequences, which I focus on in this section.

In JES, many participants refused to talk about vulnerabilities and empowerment processes, because 'nothing was wrong with them, they only needed a house'. It is suggested by some respondents that it is empowering for participants to reject a focus on vulnerabil-

ities and trauma's, to be free from a 'medical gaze' (Foucault, 1973), especially in homeless care that is too focused on individual deficiencies (Wright, 1997). From an empowerment perspective, I understand vulnerability of participants not as an individual deficit but as a logical reaction to disempowering circumstances, though in turn these vulnerabilities hinder empowerment (Boumans, 2012). It is important to acknowledge the collective and political nature of these vulnerabilities, though in JES I saw that in many cases, JES participants denied these vulnerabilities, which prohibited making these vulnerabilities collective and political. It is part of their freedom of choice to be able to choose not to acknowledge or deal with vulnerabilities (Rappaport, 1981), though it hindered both individual and collective empowerment and the possibilities of developing more relational richness within JES. The latter was acknowledged by many respondents, including those who warned for the risk of JES becoming too therapeutic.

In the final stages of my research I have, on multiple occasions, discussed with participants, peer workers and social workers whether being more explicit about possible benefits and hindering vulnerabilities, could be beneficial to participants. Both participants, peer workers and social workers stated that while being explicit about benefits might be beneficial for some participants, it might also be experienced as therapeutic. A therapeutic approach does not fit with the principles of self-management according to participants, social workers and peer workers and might scare off participants who joined JES to stay away from social workers who want to talk about their feelings in regular programs. The indirect approach of JES, through living together, interactions with similar situated participants, implicit social learning and subtle support from social workers and peer workers, appeared to be a better fit than an explicit approach to empowerment. In that sense, empowerment in JES might be similar to the riddle: what breaks if you name it?<sup>2</sup>

Participants who engaged with the process of self-management and social life experienced more benefits that can be articulated, similar to findings from other programs that argue that more engagement offers more opportunities for empowerment (Brown & Townley, 2015; Segal & Hayes, 2016). It is important to acknowledge that for other participants, who were less engaged, JES still offered opportunities to implicit forms of empowerment. Many participants experienced *kairos* (Van Den Bersselaar, 2009), a moment of change between an old life and a new one. *Kairos* is a moment that cannot be steered and can only be identified in hindsight (Van Den Bersselaar, 2009). For many participants, JES was the moment between the old homeless life of insecurity, marginalization and the new life of stability and social reintegration. Acknowledging the worth of *kairos* and the unarticulated nature of empowerment for some goes against the tendency in social policy to measure explicit personal progress. While there are benefits to articulating progress, many participants appreciate JES for not having to articulate theirs.

Interestingly, I found that in other self-managed programs aimed at homeless care, the debate on talking explicitly about vulnerability was similar to that in JES, while in self-managed programs in mental health care, participants were more open about capacity development and vulnerabilities, and less focused on freedom of choice (Huber, 2016). There are several possible explanations. It might be related to different cultures within homeless care and mental health care or to gender differences. In mental health programs, more women participated, in homeless care programs most participants were male. Or it might be related to the fact that for homeless people, the focus is on obtaining a home and a safe place, before they can talk about vulnerabilities, while participants in mental health programs often had a home to get back to. Further study is needed to understand these differences.

While much of the literature on self-organized care focusses on explicit empowerment of participants, my research shows that participants can (also) benefit practically and implicitly from self-management.

### **3. The structure of self-management contributes to empowerment**

The development of structures within institutional care settings is often seen as disempowering, both within literature (Abma, 2010; Goffman, 1961; Wolins & Wozner, 1982) and by respondents in this research, for instance when it comes to strict house rules, limitations to individual freedom of choice and social distance between residents and professionals. However, some authors argue that structures can be enabling as well (Adler & Borys, 1996; Hoijtink & Oude Vrielink, 2007) and that a setting can be designed in an empowering fashion (Brown, 2012; Maton, 2008; Peterson & Zimmerman, 2004; Taylor, 1997).

Choosing self-management as the structure of a program offered participants of JES opportunities for individual and collective empowerment. Individually, participants experienced the physical and figurative space to work on their problems in their own way. The engagement of participants with the management of JES offered them the ability to influence their own life and living environment. Having influence had an empowering effect on the development of their skills, roles and self-image. Through the structural intervention of making the group of participants responsible for the management of the program and making the weekly meeting the primary forum for making decisions, JES as a setting enables collective empowerment. Participants discuss ideas and opinions, weigh options and interests and make a decision.

The physical structure of JES in itself offered opportunities for the empowerment of participants. Examples that we encountered are the important role of having a key (which most participants in regular programs do not have), informal meetings in the hallway as a consequence of living in the same space, and the meaning derived from being part 'owner' of the space in which the program is run. However, living together within an institutional

setting also has its drawbacks, according to participants. These drawbacks include having to share facilities and living space and having to deal with different life styles and preferences, e.g. one person works, goes to bed early, has to get up early, wants to have breakfast in a clean kitchen, while another one does not work, stays up late with a drink and some music, does not want to clean the kitchen in the evening and wants to sleep in late. Though JES aimed to be a radical alternative to regular institutional programs, the issues caused by living together are similar to those in regular programs.

Participants, peer workers and social workers had quite varying views on the development of structures (i.e. rules and procedures) within JES. Some saw structures as supporting the development of empowerment in interaction with others, and some saw them as desirable to support individual freedom by limiting nuisance from others and by limiting the needs for 'endless' deliberation on issues. Others saw structures as undesirable because they hindered their individual freedom (you can't do anything) or because it nullified the need for deliberation. Social workers mostly emphasized the importance of nuance, deliberation and little structuration, while a substantial part of the participants and peer workers emphasized structure and clarity. The variety in viewpoints nuances the common distinction between citizens engaging in open communicative action in the lifeworld versus professionals emphasizing instrumental action (Garrett, 2009; Habermas, 1970; Hayes & Houston, 2007).

The lack of formal structure in how to work on their issues, caused some participants to struggle within JES. While some participants argued for developing a more structured approach in working on their problems, others argued that if participants were not able to cope with the freedom that JES offered and caused nuisance, they should be excluded. JES participants, like all people in a vulnerable position (Foucault, 1987; Freire, 2005; Lipset, 1959; Tonkens, 2014), are not automatically inclusive towards other people in a vulnerable position. Social workers and peer workers advocated in these instances for inclusion and emphasized the necessity of discussing with the person involved whether alternative approaches were possible, rather than simply excluding the person with reference to rules that were broken.

Choosing self-management as a structure is not enough to diminish institutionalization, which is in line with the theoretical argument that individuals reproduce and strengthen institutions themselves (Giddens, 1984). JES started with an ambition to have very little structure. Over the years, JES has developed some structures that contribute to empowerment (regular meetings, a clear decision structure), and fluctuated with other structures (e.g. more or less house rules, more or less explicated division of labor and power), supporting the argument that participants do influence institutionalization (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Giddens, 1984). Our research shows that several aspects of institutionalization for which regular institutional care is critiqued, are present in JES as well.

While my research reveals insights into the relation between structure and (dis)empowerment, especially in comparison with other self-managed programs in which similar issues occur (Huber, 2016), different data is necessary to understand how the interaction between participants influences processes of empowerment and disempowerment. Goffman's 'total institutions' (1961) offers the framework to setup and analyze (semi)structured observation of everyday life within self-managed programs.

The development of structures within JES was to some extent enforced by external factors, such as the mother organization wanting one person they could talk to rather than a group, and the municipality demanding accountability (to some extent). Some structures needed to be developed to maintain continuity, like in many grass roots self-organized care facilities (Brown, 2012). Though JES was, over the last years, able to maintain a relatively autonomous position, both within the mother organization and in relation to the local government, JES has had to conform to both. The discussion with the municipality focused on the criteria for who can join the program and deciding how participants can obtain housing after JES. JES has had to cave on both points and, as a consequence, now has less to say on who can join and is dependent on the municipality for housing. More paperwork is demanded from social workers on individual participants. The lack of influence on access to housing opportunities hurts the process of collective empowerment (see next issue). In other self-managed programs, the level of paper work required and the desire of line-management, dominant in mother organizations, forces hierarchy within the program. Regular care organizations appear to struggle with delegating autonomy to programs and relating to collective decision making (Huber, 2016).

Thinking about structure and about instrumental rationality as something that is both unavoidable and as something that can enable empowerment, rather than something that can and should be avoided, can contribute to the development of self-management. However, as Van Den Bersselaar (2009) argues, the development of structure and technical-rational actions should not be used to hide an inability to enter a dialogue (as in the case of the exclusion based on an inability to follow the rules).

The way JES as a setting is organized and managed consists of multiple intrinsic contradictions, between individual freedom and social support, between a social and an individual orientation, between the individual and collective interest and between individual freedom and social structures. These contradictions force participants, peer workers and social workers to continuously deliberate on what self-management means to them and how they want to shape it, which creates fluidity in structures and offers opportunities for custom made solutions, ownership and development of skills, roles and self-image. Their experiences nuance both optimism over empowering settings (Brown, 2012; Maton, 2008) and pessimism over institutional care settings (Goffman, 1961; Wolins & Wozner, 1982).

#### 4. Collective empowerment remained a struggle

JES as a concept, through its collective approach to the problem of homelessness, challenges the dominance of the individual focus in homeless care. At the same time, participants emphasize an individualistic approach, wherein their problems are theirs and should not be made collective, for instance through sharing them during meetings.

JES offered the opportunity for participants to develop democratic citizenship, by being able to influence their own living environment, having to share that influence with others and being able to advocate for individual and collective interests. Being able to develop democratic citizenship is important for people in a vulnerable position who often have and experience little influence on their own lives (Kruiter, 2010; Sie Dhian Ho & Hurenkamp, 2011; Tjeenk Willink, 2019). Democratization however also means balancing majority ruling with inclusion and rights of individuals, which can be at odds with each other (Kruiter, 2010; Mouffe, 1994). People who participate in a democratic process might become more democratic, i.e. more skilled in and knowledgeable of deliberation and decision making, and as a consequence more accepting of the outcomes (Dzur, 2004; Kruiter, 2010; Mouffe, 1994; Sie Dhian Ho & Hurenkamp, 2011). A substantial part of participants however said they wanted less deliberation and more action towards people who were not able to maintain themselves in JES, and they preferred a clear hierarchy. Especially participants who were focused on their individual interests complained that collective management takes too much time.

For those participants who were interested, JES offered the opportunity to initiate collective action, through which some of the participants and peer workers gained experience with advocating for themselves and the program. Nevertheless, most participants, even those who acknowledged that external factors, such as limited access to housing, hurt their interests, were more focussed on their individual interests than on collective action. For example, JES has wanted to move and expand since 2011-2012. However, JES has been unable to form a group of (former-)participants with the persistence to achieve this, even though opportunities have arisen.

JES has resisted medicalization and acceptance of the procedures of regular homeless care with regards to who could enter JES and who could access independent housing afterwards. In the end JES had to accommodate to the demands of the municipality. Having to accommodate to general policy appears to be partly caused by the lack of collective action. JES has lobbied with both public officials and the municipal council, at first with some success but in the end, they had to admit defeat. Though, to be fair, the other way around the procedures that were instituted by the municipality appeared to be very resistant to the changes JES wanted to make. The focus of municipal policy remained on individual deficits rather than collective solutions in homeless care, in part instigated by a lack of affordable housing and homeless care. It might have helped if former participants would have been more explicit about the benefits they experienced from their stay in JES. While

from an individual perspective it might not be necessary to articulate empowerment, for the collective empowerment it might have been helpful. In my research I focused mostly on processes within JES, partly because those processes were interesting enough in themselves, though mainly because JES itself was mostly oriented on itself.

JES was unable to build a community of participants that went beyond the group of participants staying at the program, besides individual friendships. Former participants seldomly remained involved, and if they did, in most cases conflicts arose between current and former participants, often around who knew best what to do. As a consequence, little institutional memory has been built, besides my research. Former participants, who might be less preoccupied with their individual interests, were seldom employed to contribute to the development of collective empowerment, at least explicitly. The other way around, multiple former participants said they did not want to have contact with JES anymore because that period (of homelessness) lay behind them and they did not want to be reminded of and/or associated with that period.

Ideals of inclusion, solidarity and hope of empowerment for all, even for struggling participants, were unequally distributed among stakeholders of JES. Social workers and some peer workers were seen as 'idealists', while only a few of the participants shared these ideals and many were outright cynical about these ideals. Social workers and peer workers tried to stimulate these ideals among participants, though with varying success (see next point).

Managing a shelter together while working on your individual's problem is an accomplishment in itself, though the hope that JES would be a 'trojan horse', changing the system of homeless care from within, proclaimed by the CEO of the mother organization JES is part of, has not been met. Conceptually, the individual empowerment of participants, including their freedom of choice, in JES appears to hurt the collective empowerment of JES, although some participants developed their individual empowerment through engaging with collective empowerment.

### **5. Social workers and peer workers facilitated empowerment of participants in self-management**

Social work, as a profession, has long been criticized in the Netherlands, and elsewhere, for contributing to dependency rather than empowerment of people they work with, so in practice social workers in recent years tended to focus on explicitly stated requests of people they work with (Klaase, 2017; Tonkens, 2008). Similarly, in a rigid interpretation of self-management, there would be no active role for social workers, except if participants ask for this explicitly and continuously. In the first period of our research, both social workers and participants made statements along these lines, out of fear that the initiative of participants would be limited by social workers' actions.

Participants, earlier than social workers themselves, were willing to let go of this rigid interpretation of self-management. After the first period, the role of social workers became clearer, in part through discussions following our research, though social workers remained very cautious and hesitant in their actions.

Social workers in JES tried to stimulate democratization in multiple ways, contributing to the development of social work as a democratic and democratizing profession (Duyvendak et al., 2009; Spierts & Oostrik, 2014; Van Ewijk, 2009). They emphasized the influence participants had on their own life and the program and the importance of collective deliberation and shared decision making between participants. Social workers also paid attention to, and stimulated, collective action towards improving the societal position of (participants of) JES.

Social workers involved with JES tried to stay ideologically pure, emphasizing the participants' freedom of choice and trusting that participants know best how to work through their issues themselves, both individually and collectively. This approach is in line with critical thinkers such as Illich (1982) and Achterhuis (1981), who argue that external interference from professionals who 'know better' should be minimized. Illich critiqued Freire, one of the founders of empowerment theory, for introducing subtle forms of social control and inequality by stimulating engagement of professionals with everyday life of citizens (Illich, 1982; Kahn & Kellner, 2007). However, the ideological purity of social workers in JES also led to periods of inertia and action shyness in dealing with inequalities (vulnerabilities, capacities, assertiveness) between participants and between participants and general society. Social workers had to balance between on the one hand taking claims of participants (nothing is wrong with me) to be a priori truthful (in a Habermasian sense of communicative action) (Habermas, 1970), with trying to understand deeper motivations for behavior and trying to engage participants in critical reflection (in a Freirean and care ethics fashion) (Abma, 2010; Freire, 2005; Pols, 2004). Or as a social worker described JES participants: [they] want to be left alone, but not completely'.

A complicating factor for social workers was that many participants of JES were distrustful, both towards social workers who 'did nothing' and towards social workers who wanted to interfere. To circumvent this distrust, social workers in JES worked on a basis of 'being there' (Bart, 2001), to develop trust and a working relation with participants. Social workers balanced presence and intervention, though they were more inclined to the former than the latter. Fear of being too therapeutic or too active caused social workers in JES to refrain from intervening and using therapeutic knowledge that could benefit empowerment. Time appeared to be an important factor, both in allowing the social worker to build trust and a relationship with the participant, and for the participant to develop an interest in working on issues.

Social workers strived for collective learning and shared decision making by the group of participants, though they were afraid of being too therapeutic in their approach. A social worker quoted a participant who said to the social worker: 'not everything needs to be discussed always'. Social workers and peer workers emphasized the importance of deliberation on and inclusion of struggling participants. Social workers in JES, who worked on the basis of trust from participants who were distrustful, had to balance emphasizing a moral standpoint of inclusion with gaining and maintaining participants' trust and accepting participants' focus on their individual needs. While social workers emphasized societal influences that hinder empowerment of participants, such as social exclusion and poverty, they were hesitant to talk about internal issues (like vulnerabilities) that hindered empowerment of JES participants.

The role of peer workers in JES was not clearly defined. Some developed their role similar to the role of social work (in one case because the peer worker used to be a social worker), others chose a more administrative role or reproduced the role of group worker in regular settings (maintaining order). The role of peer workers remained relatively under articulated in our analysis because in most cases, the perspective of peer workers was in line with either participants or social workers. Peer workers could be a role model for other participants in dealing with vulnerabilities (Mead, 2014). Peer workers in JES did reflect on participants' vulnerabilities which caused or were caused by homelessness. They rarely publicly shared their own experiences with vulnerability in interviews and during meetings. Some participants said they appreciated being supported by someone who shared their experiences, others were more neutral, preferred support from social workers or were distrustful towards peer workers. Compared to mental health care and substance abuse care, peer work in homeless care and support for people in poverty is underarticulated (Desain et al., 2013; Keuzekamp, 2010). Further research is needed to understand the unique perspective and role of peer workers in homeless care, in relation to roles peer workers could have and specific knowledge derived from their lived experience that contributes to the empowerment of people who are homeless. A specific point of focus should be how peer workers could contribute to the development of hope among participants.

Individual, collective and political empowerment of participants was facilitated by social workers and peer workers and they contributed to the maintenance of JES as a setting that enables participants to work on their empowerment. Social workers and peer workers facilitated critical awareness, social action and participants' capacity development. They often acted indirectly, creating opportunities for participants to engage, attention for capacities, inducing engagement and suggesting possibilities, rather than directly stimulating behaviour.

Social workers and peer workers based their actions on their perception of the situation, the level of suffering of participants, the possibilities for support and the consequences of their actions in offering support, engaging with the swampy lowlands of empowerment, rather than the moral high ground of a simple focus on freedom of choice or an instrumentalized

method (D. A. Schön, 1983). The work of social workers and peer workers can be seen as a form of normative professionalization, based on both values and striving for the realization of those values (Kunneman, 2017; Van Ewijk, 2010). They weighed their own normative framework with the normative frameworks of participants. As a consequence, the role of social workers and peer workers in JES will and must always be 'imperfect' (Roose, 2019). Acknowledging the role of social workers and peer workers in empowerment is important to break through inertia caused by a simplistic interpretation of freedom of choice in the lifeworld. To overcome inertia, reflection on intention, perception and outcome of (inter-) actions is necessary to understand the relation and interaction between empowering and oppressive practices (G. Van Der Laan, 1990).

### **Conclusion: self-management, empowerment and freedom**

In this study I aimed to understand how (dis)empowerment processes were shaped and experienced in JES, to further the experienced freedom of participants and to develop social work as a normative practice using insights from JES. Social work is a normative practice because it does not only aim for certain effects using interventions, it strives for values as inclusion, democracy, existential security and empowerment. In our research we therefore looked beyond the direct outcomes for participants, into underlying values and the contribution of social workers (and peer workers) to those values.

Our data suggests that engagement in self-management promotes individual empowerment and most participants prefer JES to regular care. JES, in line with a strength-based approach, presumes participants are, in principle, capable of taking care of themselves, which is appreciated by most of the participants, especially in contrast with the experiences of participants in regular shelters.

While regular homeless programs tend to take care of and decide for participants, this research shows that people who are homeless are able to manage a shelter together and in doing so facilitate freedom of choice and development of capacities, which is lacking in regular shelters. Participants of JES experienced freedom of choice and influence on the program they are living in. JES offered opportunities for social and organizational engagement, through which participants developed roles, skills and their self-image. JES' fluid nature prevented rigid hierarchies and allowed participants to adapt the program to their desires and needs. Although participants benefited from JES in different ways, most of them preferred JES over regular shelters.

Both practical benefits and the importance of freedom of choice are underarticulated in current literature on self-organized care (Brown, 2012; May et al., 2016; Ostrow & Croft, 2015). Almost all participants described various practical benefits they experienced and appreciated (to various degrees), and for most this was an important goal for joining JES. These practical benefits are often lacking in regular shelters, although they can be achieved there as well.

My research articulated the dialectical nature of self-management, entailing both capacity development and freedom of choice, of which both participants, peer workers and social workers in self-organized care need to be aware. Current literature on self-organized care focusses mostly on capacity development, while freedom of choice appeared to be of equal or higher importance for participants of JES. In a broader sense, our analysis shows the importance of offering people in a vulnerable position freedom of choice. Conceptually, the research into JES also shows the importance of freedom of choice as part of empowerment and the tension between freedom of choice and capacity development. A new insight in relation to the existing literature is that participants can also benefit from self-organized care, at least in the case of JES, without engaging with social life and self-management within the program. Further research is needed on processes and experiences of disempowerment within self-managed programs in relation to the development of relational richness.

On a more abstract level, more attention is needed, in practice, policy and research, for the dialectical relation between freedom of choice and capacity development in empowerment processes, limitations to empowerment within people and communities, and the importance of acknowledging disempowerment, both in itself and as a source of relational richness.

Specifically, for institutional forms of self-organized care, more attention is needed for the enabling and hindering influences of the institutional settings. More attention is also needed to the interaction between personal factors and setting factors that influence setting-empowerment. Enabling and entrapping factors are less dialectical than sometimes proposed in the literature. JES as an 'outlier case' shows the robustness of institutional theory and institutional care processes, like the discussions on rules, hierarchy and the fyke (trap) of self-management show. At the same time, this research also shows that empowerment within an institutional setting is possible through introducing freedom of choice and fluidity in structures.

Social workers and peer workers can play an important role in facilitating empowerment in self-organized care. Our research into JES shows that empowerment is not zero-sum, more actions from social workers does not automatically lead to less empowerment of participants. Social workers and peer workers can mitigate experienced tensions between freedom of choice and capacity development and between collective management and individual choices. Social workers and peer workers ensure that self-management does not run ashore but continuous to sail, adjusted to participants who find their own course. Social workers and peer workers weighed their own normative frameworks with those of participants.

While JES was not all things, for all men, by offering practical benefits, freedom of choice and opportunities for capacity development, JES was many things for many people.

## Practical implications

There are several practical implications following this research.

Firstly, this research supports the plea from participants, peer workers and social workers for the development of new self-managed programs as an alternative for people who want more freedom than regular institutional programs offer and who can't or won't stay at a or their house and are not (yet) eligible for or don't want Housing First.

Secondly, self-managed programs like JES need to find a balance between structure and fluidity, and between an individual and a collective orientation. The ongoing balancing act needed from social workers, peer workers and participants offers opportunities to:

- meet specific desires and needs of individual participants and groups
- learn with and from each other
- break through individual and group patterns
- discuss and develop the values of self-management

Thirdly, JES, like many other self-managed programs, is part of a regular care organization. Over the years, JES has developed quite a high level of autonomy (compared to regular programs) while the organization functions as a health shield towards pressures from outside. However, the mother organization has not been able to negate the structural problem that homeless care, in the Netherlands and elsewhere, is financed on an individual level and based on the level of health problems rather than being socially and strength focused. JES has been able for many years to operate on the edge of this system, but over the last years has handed over some autonomy towards the municipality, with regard to who can and cannot enter. According to those involved, JES would thrive without these regulations, though it would not be able to get public funding. Forming a technical assistance organization, together with other self-managed programs, might be beneficial, similar to experiences in the United States (Brown, 2012).

Fourthly, while JES aimed to be a radical alternative to regular institutional programs, this research shows that it shares many similarities and that, based on these similarities, aspects of JES might also be introduced in regular programs, such as emphasizing freedom of choice and fluidity of roles and structures.

Various potential implications which follow from our analysis, such as selecting participants based on their willingness to engage with self-management or emphasizing the importance of social support, have been met with some criticism from participants, peer

workers and social workers of JES. They maintain that, in principle, each prospective participant should have the opportunity to find out for him- or herself whether self-management is a fit. Emphasizing social support would go against the freedom of choice of individuals and risk alienating participants who are weary of social relations. Our analysis helped articulate questions to ask prospective participants to help them make a more informed choice on whether to join, such as whether the prospective participant was able and willing to engage in individual and collective self-management, to take on the responsibilities that are part of self-management, and live together with and adapt to other participants.

## Future research

As a consequence of the open and exploratory nature of the research presented in this thesis, many subthemes revealed themselves during the research that need further study. They can be categorized in three main themes.

The first theme is further research into the inner working of self-managed programs in relation to individual experiences and outcomes, for instance in relation to different forms of self-management, the influence of personal characteristics, more or less explicit focus on empowerment, the size of the program and differentiation of roles, more or less time pressure and the physical design of programs. Together, these themes contribute to the understanding of what works for whom in relation to self-managed programs, building on the work of Brown (2012) and this thesis.

The second theme focusses on the micro-sociological aspects of self-management, in relation to processes of empowerment and disempowerment. A first subtheme is the role of different forms of power and capital that are used by participants, peer workers and social workers, building on the work of Weber and Bourdieu. A second subtheme is the role of rituals in self-managed programs, guiding initiations, transformation, hierarchy and community development, building on the work of Goffman and Collins. A last subtheme is the interaction between common resource management, democratization and community empowerment. We found some suggestions that through shared management of JES, a resource, participants developed democratic skills and community empowerment, although further research is needed to better understand this relation.

The third and final theme focusses more on the organizational and societal context. Subthemes include the relation with external organizations and administrative pressure on self-managed programs, the impact on the larger society through advocacy and connections with other self-managed programs and the development of a shared platform for technical assistance.

In my research, PAR proved to be a fruitful approach to engage with relational complexity, creating insights that would have been difficult to gain from a theoretical high ground. At the same time, for future research, more methodological reflection and development is needed to understand relational complexity within PAR.

In all themes, specific attention should be paid to the consequences for participants, peer workers and social workers.

## Final remarks

As a researcher, and a person, I have struggled to acknowledge that there is a certain ineffable nature to some elements of empowerment, at least in relation to people who are severely resistant to any therapeutic approach. I have also struggled with discussing vulnerability of participants, both with participants and in writing up the research. Are vulnerabilities discussed to stimulate insights as a precondition for mastery? Or are vulnerabilities discussed to stimulate social disciplining of the individual? And who can tell the difference? Ongoing deliberation and calibration is needed between stakeholders to find the right balance between neglecting vulnerabilities and overemphasizing them.

My prolonged engagement with JES, the multiple perspectives I explored, the different theoretical lenses, the participation of stakeholders in the research and the comparison with other programs have forced and encouraged me to explore the complex and multi-layered nature of empowerment. Rappaport, one of the founders of empowerment theory, stated that social scientists should work on the 'unraveling of the complexities of social life'. As a researcher, social worker and person, I am more prone to Rappaport's statement than to so called critical scientists who warn for the risks of social discipline (Achterhuis, 1981; Illich, 1982), without offering an alternative for social workers on how to deal with existing vulnerabilities, leading to inertia. The other way around, empowerment and concepts derived from empowerment (self-sufficiency, resilience) are misused by policy makers (who embrace them as legitimization for budget cuts) and social scientists who warn for the risks of over emphasizing self-sufficiency without acknowledging the importance of freedom of choice and capacity development for people in a vulnerable position. Empowerment theory, if used in its full meaning, offers a framework for understanding the complexity of support for people in a vulnerable position. In my research I have aimed to authentically report on a developing practice in which many of the current challenges in our social system are present. In doing so, and in the way I did the research, I hoped to contribute to the empowerment of people in a sustained vulnerable position, the opportunities for social workers to facilitate empowerment, and general knowledge on both.

I have been hesitant to include the moral concept of 'good' in this thesis. Here, in the final pages, I want to reflect on this concept, though shortly because others have written

extensively and convincingly on moral issues and social work (Abma, 2010; De Jonge, 2015; Kunneman, 2017; Pols, 2004; Van Den Bersselaar, 2009). Libertarian thinkers (Achterhuis, 1981; Berlin, 1969; Illich, 1982) would loath any reference to a moral good as a legitimization for interference by social workers, as do a substantial part of JES participants. My counterargument would be that while on a high moral ground it is easy to point out possible sliding slopes of external interference, in the swampy lowlands of facilitating empowerment of people in a vulnerable position, a moral compass is needed to interpret a situation and to decide on a course of action. Empowerment and its dialectical nature, offers a strong moral framework of what is good: stimulating free choice and control (including the limitation of precarity that hinders free choice) while at the same time focusing on development of capacities (Rappaport, 1981; Van Regenmortel, 2011). The dialectical nature forces social workers, peer workers and others to constantly reevaluate, propose a thesis, an anti-thesis and a synthesis, automatically leading to a new anti-thesis and onwards, weighing morals, perspectives and interests.

In its *Liberal manifesto*, the Economist (2018) claimed that liberalism shuns permanent social and political solutions and embraces liberalism's internal contradictions as a source of ongoing individual and societal development. A similar argument can be made for self-management. Its intrinsic contradictions force participants, peer workers, social workers and others involved to rethink self-management continuously. I have been recurrently amazed by the power of groups of participants to reinvent themselves, start over and find new ways to deal with the challenges and opportunities offered. While I'm finishing this manuscript, JES is once again reflecting on its future, reacting to changing contexts and new participants. Though I'm curious how this will influence JES, I have faith in the resilience of JES as a program to adapt. JES remains a case with a great deal of learning potential, for empowerment of participants, for (normative) professionalization of social workers and peer workers and for all those interested in the organization of empowerment processes.



# Appendix

# Summary

## Introduction

Ten years ago, Je Eigen Stek (Your Own Place, JES) started as a grass roots initiative from people who were homeless. The initiators did not want to be homeless anymore, including the extreme forms of existential insecurity that is part of being homeless. They did not have a place in regular shelters, both literally and figuratively. Literally, because there was a shortage in beds, especially for people with severe psychiatric or substance abuse issues. Figuratively, they felt there was little room to end their homelessness in their own way, making their own choices and employing their own capacities. Therefore, they started their own self-managed shelter, facilitated by social workers and HVO-Querido, a homeless care provider. JES is founded on the premise that regular shelters offer to little freedom of choice and that homeless people are better able to manage a shelter themselves. Over the last ten years, I have been studying this premise.

### **Societal and policy context**

The motivation of participants to start JES and other Dutch self-managed homeless programs was fueled by societal changes. Over the last thirty years, homeless care has become more medicalized and professionalized, in the Netherlands and other countries. The medicalization (and professionalization) was caused by the transfer of people out of mental health institutions into homeless care and by a shift in public policy, only allowing those who have mental health issues into homeless care (Tuyman & Planije, 2014; Van Doorn, 2002; Wright, 1997). The participants who started JES stated that 'there is nothing wrong with us, we just need a house'. Although there are some nuances to be made to this claim, their refusal to be diagnosed and be labeled as someone with mental health issues ties into a broader critique on the medicalization of social problems (Foucault, 1973; Wright, 1997).

The founders of JES were also critical on the lack of space for individual choices and the lack of use of capacities of homeless people in regular shelters. The critique on regular shelters and institutional care in general is not new (Blok, 2004). Alongside the rise of the welfare state in the post second world war period, more and more researchers and practitioners became critical of institutional care, especially the negative influence institutional care has on the empowerment of participants (Goffman, 1961; Wolins & Wozner, 1982). Alternative forms of institutional care were developed within regular institutions, in the form of therapeutic communities. Riding on the wave of both a do it yourself mentality and general societal critique on social control through institutions, grass roots organizations developed alternative programs outside of regular care, in some cases together with broader social movements, like the squatters movement (Boumans et al., 2012). The current rise of recovery oriented care and the employment of peer workers

stem from these grass roots initiatives (Boumans, 2012). Empowerment theory, at least in its development by Rappaport (1987), is partly build on these grass roots and self-help initiatives. The other way around, by giving participants a voice in their own trajectory and the programs they use, these programs are associated with individual and collective empowerment (Boumans, 2015; Brown, 2012).

Paradoxically, the Dutch government itself wants to demedicalize and deinstitutionalize the welfare state, through moving people out of institutional programs and into communities (Blok, 2004; Kwekkeboom, 2004), transforming the welfare state into more community care, meaning that people should take care of themselves and others around them (Abma, 2017; Stam, 2013). However, possibly as a consequence of individualization, people are reluctant to take on (more) care for people in a vulnerable position and people in a vulnerable position in many cases prefer to receive professional care rather than burden their family and neighbors, possibly as a consequence of individualization and perceived importance of autonomy and self-sufficiency (Linders, 2009; Metze, 2015). As a consequence tensions arise between people in a vulnerable position, their informal care network and professionals on who is responsible for what and who could and should offer which care when (Abma, 2017; Linders, 2009; Metze, 2015; Veldboer & Hoijtink, 2019).

Many former residents of institutional care settings were not able to obtain and maintain independent housing. An earlier wave of deinstitutionalization in the 1980's regularly led to reinstitutionalization in shelters and jails (Fakhoury & Priebe, 2007; Kroon, Michon, et al., 2016; Van Ewijk, 2010). Many of the people currently staying in homeless shelters have been homeless before, got a house and then lost their house due to inadequate preparation and social support (Boesveldt, 2019b; Van Doorn, 2002; Van Regenmortel et al., 2006). Research into regular homeless care shows they struggle to facilitate empowerment of participants (Van Doorn, 2002; Van Regenmortel et al., 2006).

In recent years, the number of people living in some kind of institutional care appears to decrease (Kroon, 2018), for the first time in thirty years (Kroon, Michon, et al., 2016; Van Ewijk, 2010). The number of homeless people however has doubled over the last ten years (Centraal bureau voor statistiek [Central agency for Statistics], 2019). Many Dutch cities have adopted the Housing First model, aiming at people who are homeless to move into independent housing as quickly as possible (Gemeente Amsterdam [Municipality of Amsterdam], 2016; Padgett et al., 2016). In practice however, there is a shortage of housing and not all homeless are allowed to enter Housing First (because they are deemed 'self-reliant') (De Vries, 2019; Rekenkamer Metropool Amsterdam [Audit room Amsterdam metropole], 2017).

### **Self-management and self-organization**

Participants staying at JES, together with peer workers, are in charge of both day to day affairs and strategic management, similar to other self-managed institutional crisis

alternatives, that offer a place to stay for people who can't or won't stay at (a) home (May et al., 2016; Ostrow & Croft, 2015). JES also offers a place to stay for people who cannot or do not want to join a Housing First program. The institutional character, living in and sharing facilities of the program, differentiates JES and other crisis alternatives from non-institutional forms of self-organized care like mutual help groups and drop-in and day activity centers (Brown, 2012). Research shows that self-organized care is associated with empowerment (Brown, 2012; Ostrow & Croft, 2015).

While self-organized care in general is associated with empowerment, little is known on how participants, peer workers and social workers shape empowerment and disempowerment processes in an institutional self-managed shelter. Specific aspects that I studied are the influence of the institutional setting on (dis)empowerment processes and the role of social workers and peer workers in relation to (dis)empowerment and self-management. This research contributes to how participants, peer workers and social workers shape processes of empowerment and disempowerment within an institutional self-managed shelter and our understanding and conceptual development of (dis)empowerment of people experiencing homelessness within an institutional setting and the interaction between (dis)empowerment and the institutional setting. Practically, this research contributes to the development of self-management institutional programs in homeless and mental health care and the development of the role of social work in a changing welfare state, specifically within homeless and mental health care.

### **Theoretical framework**

To better understand self-management of a shelter, I've employed two 'grand theories': empowerment and institutional theory. Inspired by the 'plugging-in' approach proposed by Jackson & Mazzei (2013), letting these two theories 'talk' with the data and with each other enriched both my insights in to the data and my insights into these theories.

Empowerment theory was in part developed by Rappaport (1987) and Zimmerman (1995) based on their work with grassroots organizations and mutual help groups. The other way around, empowerment, and sub-concepts, are often used to research and describe self-organized care (Brown, 2012). It is argued that different forms of self-organized care contribute to individual empowerment of participants and a reduction of the use of formal care (Brown, 2012; May et al., 2016; Ostrow & Croft, 2015).

Empowerment as a concept is broad, some even call it a paradigm, consisting of both vision, process and outcome on an individual, collective and political level (Van Regenmortel, 2011). Rappaport (1981) states that empowerment has a dialectical nature. On the one hand Rappaport emphasizes the importance of freedom of choice and influence on your own life, on the other hand he also emphasizes the importance of developing capacities to use freedom of choice. Empowerment is sometimes narrowed down to a focus on self-reliance and a social norm to continuously improve yourself, both by policy

makers and by social scientists who want to critique policy makers (Trappenburg, 2019; Van Regenmortel, 2011). By only focusing on self-reliance and self-development, developing capacities is disconnected from freedom of choice, going against the concept of empowerment and contributes to disempowerment (Boumans, 2015; Van Regenmortel, 2011). However, in emphasizing freedom of choice, people can also decide to not work on their lives, even if they are in a very vulnerable position (Abma, 2017; Duyvendak, 1999; Rivest & Moreau, 2015). Developing freedom of choice and capacities can strengthen each other, if those involved choose to do so themselves.

On an individual level, empowerment entails 'a sense of personal control or influence and a concern with actual social influence' (Rappaport, 1987, p. 121). Individual empowerment is only possible in interaction with a social environment (other people, organizational context, community) that enables empowerment by offering supportive social relations, opportunities for individual development, and an empowering collective identity (Maton, 2008; Peterson & Zimmerman, 2004; Van Regenmortel, 2011). Community or organizational empowerment describes how individuals influence their situation through an organization or community and the influence individuals have on an organization/community (Maton, 2008; Peterson & Zimmerman, 2004). Different authors have developed frameworks for understand the interaction between organizational setting and individual empowerment like *empowering community settings* (Maton, 2008), *organizational empowerment* (Peterson & Zimmerman, 2004) and *enabling niches* (Taylor, 1997). For the purpose of this thesis, the *role-framework* of Brown (2012) is especially relevant. The role framework was developed to understand both the process and outcomes of self-organized care and describes how through person-environment interaction participants in self-organized care develop roles and relations.

Underlying the interaction between setting and empowerment is what is called *behavior-setting* theory in social psychology (Brown, 2012) or *institutional theory* in sociology (W. R. Scott, 2005), the second grand theory I used. Institutional theory focusses on how the behavior of individuals is influenced by an institutional setting and how an institutional setting is influenced by the behavior of individuals in that setting (W. R. Scott, 2005). Institutional theory is the (implicit) foundation for most critique on institutional care: residents of institutional care are *mortified*, stripped of their identity as a person, because of the way the institution functions (Goffman, 1961; Wolins & Wozner, 1982). Later theorists argued that the influence between institutional settings and behavior is bi-directional. Institutional settings influence behavior, though people in an institutional setting have the choice to conform, reinforce, resist or (try to) alter the institutional setting (W. R. Scott, 2005). Institutional patterns are difficult to change (W. R. Scott, 2005), and role rigidity can occur easily, especially in a binary relation of a dominant and a submissive role, and a loop of one person wanting to reinforce the setting versus another person wanting to resist or alter the setting (Goffman, 1961; Hanrath, 2013; Wolins & Wozner, 1982). Nevertheless, though many have critiqued the negative influence of an institutional care setting

on empowerment, others point out that an institutional setting can also offer structure, certainty and opportunities for empowerment (Adler & Borys, 1996; Hoijtink & Oude Vrielink, 2007; W. R. Scott, 2005). Similarly, the different empowering-setting frameworks describe how a setting can contribute to empowerment of participants.

In critical literature on institutional settings social workers are often described as contributing to disempowerment (Goffman, 1961), tying into a broader critique on social workers as contributing to dependency of people in a vulnerable position rather than contributing to their empowerment (Klaase, 2017; Tonkens, 2008; G. Van Der Laan, 1990). Unlike many other self-organized programs (Brown, 2012), JES has hired a social worker to support participants, the group and the program. Theoretically, empowerment and social work fit well together in vision and way of working, specifically in the form of the *strength based approach* (Boumans, 2015; Van Regenmortel, 2011). In practice many social workers struggle to find a balance between not neglecting people in a vulnerable position by emphasizing freedom of choice and not disempowering people by deciding what is good for them (Duyvendak et al., 2009; G. Van Der Laan, 1990). Authors argue for a dialogical approach, wherein people in a vulnerable position and social workers each bring their own ideas and experiences and together steer the direction of the support (Duyvendak et al., 2009; Van Regenmortel, 2011). This dialogical model is undermined by social policy directing social workers to focus on stimulation self-sufficiency of people they work with (Bredewold et al., 2018). Specifically in institutional settings, institutional patterns and considerations of safety and stability can hinder social workers ability to employ a dialogical approach to their work (Huber & Bouwes, 2011; Van Der Helm & Schaftenaar, 2014). Little is known on the role of social workers in self-organized care (Brown, 2012; Ostrow & Croft, 2015).

In JES, the social worker works alongside a peer worker. Peer support was developed in grass roots mutual help groups, though peer workers are increasingly employed alongside social workers, to support recovery, based on their own lived experience (Davidson et al., 2018; Desain et al., 2013). Peer workers in institutional self-organized care can struggle to offer peer support and peer workers and participants reproduce power relations between clients and group workers in regular institutional programs (Mead, 2014).

## Research focus

While self-organized care in general is associated with empowerment, little is known on how participants, peer workers and social workers shape empowerment processes in an institutional self-managed shelter. Specific aspects that need further study are the influence of the institutional setting on empowerment processes and the role of social workers and peer workers in relation to empowerment and self-management. The overall research question is:

My research focused on the question:

*How do participants, peer workers and social workers experience and shape processes of empowerment and disempowerment in a self-managed institutional homeless shelter?*

With this question I aimed to achieve three purposes:

- Empirically: describing and understanding how participants, peer workers and social workers shape processes of empowerment and disempowerment within an institutional self-managed shelter (1)
- Theoretically: contributing to understanding and conceptual development of empowerment and disempowerment of people experiencing homelessness within an institutional setting and the interaction between empowerment and the institutional setting (2)
- Practically: contributing to the development of self-management institutional programs in homeless and mental health care and the development of the role of social work in a changing welfare state, specifically within homeless and mental health care (3).

## Methodology

Through a longitudinal participatory research approach and a thick analysis, employing multiple strategies and plugging in multiple theories to understand my data through different theoretical lenses (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013), I aimed to achieve the different purposes this research has.

The research was executed as part of the Collaborative Center for the Social Domain (Werkplaats sociaal domein) at the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences, in association with the Academic collaborative center for social work at Tranzo/Tilburg University. We followed the principles of responsive evaluation (Abma et al., 2009). Stakeholders were engaged in the evaluation process and their issues with regards to self-management formed the starting point for a dialogue to develop mutual understanding and articulate different perspectives. The responsive evaluation approach can be seen as a form of participatory action research (PAR), which focusses on working with stakeholders on themes around power and complexity (Abma et al., 2019).

My research into JES lasted for over ten years, through two sub-projects (an exploratory case-study and a follow up study into former participants) and prolonged engagement with JES as a researcher, in between and after these projects, up to this day. Participants, peer workers and social workers of JES engaged with all aspects of the research: design, recruitment, data collection, analysis and publication, in line with PAR.

### **Study Setting**

JES wants 'to help people without a home, get a home', offering shelter for people who want to work on their own problems in their own way. JES serves people who are unable to obtain independent housing, because of financial or personal problems. Potential participants have to be able to take care of themselves. Most participants are dependent on welfare, some have a job. JES houses sixteen people. Participants are responsible for program management, from household to entrance and exit of participants and strategic issues. Participants choose a chairman among themselves, to lead meetings and represent JES in external affairs, together with other participants. JES is funded by the Amsterdam municipality and is part of a mother organization which offers regular homeless care. JES hired a social worker to support individual participants, the group and the program. The social worker collaborates with a peer worker, who is a former participant. Both the social worker and the peer worker are paid and both are hired by participants through a vote at a meeting.

In the first five years of JES (2009-2014), 72 people stayed there, from less than a day up to multiple years. After excluding those who left within a few weeks, the average length of stay is around 15 months. Of the 72 participants, 51 stayed for more than three months, of whom 32 were explicitly spoken to as part of our research (in an interview or through informal meetings). We have (some) secondary information from seventeen other residents, such as length of stay and way of leaving. The majority of participants were male and single. Participants were of adult ages, with a few exceptions of late adolescents. JES did not register ethnicity.

### **Data collection**

The evaluation has been executed by a diverse research team, including researchers with lived experience. Our formal data consist mainly of interviews. Interviews were held with participants (N=27), peer workers (N=3), social workers (N=2) and other stakeholders (e.g. policy advisors from the mother organization, managers from partner organizations) (N=10). Several participants, peer workers and social workers were interviewed multiple times, resulting in 56 interviews in total. For both studies we discussed a draft version of a report with respondents and other stakeholders in focus groups.

In addition to the interviews, documents were analyzed (e.g. project-plans, auto-publications by participants such as contributions to research publications) and administrative data recorded by JES on participants demographic background and length of stay was processed, both for contextual information on the program and as secondary information on participants. Additionally, a social worker and a peer worker from JES participated in four focus groups with social workers and peer workers from other self-managed programs in the Netherlands.

All throughout the research, including in between and after the sub-projects, I have engaged with stakeholders of JES, through participation in meetings, informal contacts with participants, peer workers and social workers and joined participation in gatherings and site visits. I have collaborated with several stakeholders in publications on JES. My prolonged and extensive engagement with JES has offered me a deeper and extended understanding of the formal data.

### **Analysis**

In our analysis we went back and forth between our empirical data and the theory, using a combination of interpretation and systematic coding, assisted by MAXqda. Inspired by the 'plugging in' approach of Jackson & Mazzei (2013), we explored core themes in literature relevant to self-management, as described in the theoretical section of this summary, to increase our understanding of the data. Our analysis was iterative, a back-and-forth movement between data and interpretations, using empowerment theory and institutional theory as lenses for understanding the data (O'Reilly, 2012).

### **Quality of the research**

The richness of perspectives and the different theoretical approaches allowed us to make room for competing explanations (Abma et al., 2009). In writing up this research I have tried to do justice to the complex and multilayered nature of JES and the many perspectives on JES. In the research my colleagues and I aimed to describe the different perspectives and 'competing explanations' (Abma et al., 2009), rather than reach consensus between stakeholders. We strived for an authentic and recognized representation of the different perspectives involved with JES (Abma & Stake, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), paying explicit attention to the risk of overrepresentation of more reflexive respondents (Bryman, 2008). Throughout the research I have employed several forms of triangulation to increase the quality of the research and limit the risk of bias, specifically triangulation of theoretical frameworks, data-sources, researchers, perspectives and analytical approaches (Abma & Stake, 2014; Denzin, 1989; Kimchi, Polivka, & Stevenson, 1991). Through triangulation, a transparent method description and describing our rationale for selecting this case, we aimed to improve the quality our case study (Hyett et al., 2014).

Throughout the analysis we have remained in contact with JES, discussing preliminary analyses and working hypotheses with participants, peer workers and social workers in multiple sessions. This sharpened the analysis and increased the authenticity and facilitated a shared understanding of the core findings (Doyle, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checks were performed at various stages: both preliminary findings, working hypotheses and draft versions of conclusions were discussed with respondents and other participants, peer workers and social workers involved, and their input has been processed. Agreement of the respondent group establishes the credibility of the researcher's work (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checking fits with our participatory evaluation approach. My prolonged engagement with JES and the participation of stake-

holders in the research contributed to the authenticity and trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of my research.

During the time I researched JES, we also executed smaller case-studies into similar programs. My colleagues and I also organized exchanges between JES and many other similar programs, both nationally and internationally, through meetings, site visits and invitational conferences. Although, for clarity and transparency, my thesis focusses on JES, the exchanges and comparisons with others programs benefited my understanding of JES through contrast and similarity. The different forms of triangulation together with the exchanges with other similar projects contribute to transferability of this research, meaning other similar projects might find the outcomes of this research useful for reflecting on and developing their project.

### **Ethical considerations**

Our research meets the requirements of anonymity, consent, confidentiality and safety of the participants and was guided by the ethical principles autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice. Participants were verbally informed on the purpose of the research and our use of their information. Written consent at one point in time fits less well with participatory research into marginalized groups (Abma et al., 2019; Miller & Bell, 2002). In providing consent, respondents were given the option to withdraw their consent at any time, which was done by one participant, whose interviews were deleted.

### **Limitations to the research**

The interviews I conducted were predominantly open and focused on constructing narratives of stakeholder experiences, which fits well with the argument that empowerment research should focus on unique processes of those involved (Rappaport, 1987; Van Regenmortel, 2011; Zimmerman, 1995). Narrative research however presumes that people are able to articulate their experiences, which risks overrepresenting those who are more articulate (Bryman, 2008). It also risks missing empowerment processes of people that cannot put them into words. Non-verbal forms of data-collection, like photovoice, might be employed in future research.

In my research I was confronted with the complexity of empowerment processes within an institutional setting. Rather than trying to observe it from the outside, I engaged with the 'relational complexity' (Kunneman, 2017; Woelders, 2019), to understand it from within. Employing a PAR approach enabled me to do this, especially because of the questions PAR raises around power, counter power and the role of the researcher (Abma et al., 2019).

Using PAR allowed me to gain insights into, in Schön's (1983) terms, the complexity of the 'swampy lowlands' of JES and self-management, beyond the 'high ground' of theories. There is a lot to learn in those swampy lowlands, which I did (Kunneman, 2017). At the same time, using PAR makes it all the more important to reflect on my own role, how

I engaged with JES and how I shaped the interaction between data and theory. In both chapter 7 and the discussion I reflected extensively on my own role.

As I further describe in the discussion of my findings, I have struggled with pinpointing empowerment processes, and with the desirability of pinpointing empowerment processes. Through my research, both empirically and theoretically, I have become convinced that empowerment has an 'unknowable' character, at least to some extent.

The unknowability of empowerment, and the uncertainty and swampiness that come with that unknowability, demand both an epistemic and policy re-evaluation. With this research, I aim to contribute my part.

## Empirical chapters

In five empirical chapters I explored different perspectives on and elements of self-management.

### **Experiences of participants and peer workers (chapter 2)**

In this chapter we described the experiences of participants and peer workers with empowerment processes in JES. We distinguish three clusters of individual experiences: 1) enthusiastic, 2) moderate to critical, and 3) negative, respectively associated with decreasing engagement with social life in and management of JES. Those not engaged can still benefit materially and from the freedom of choice JES offers, which is generally appreciated. Empowerment provides a useful framework to understand JES and JES in turn offers new insights in to the dialectical nature of empowerment. Conceptually, empowerment consists of freedom of choice and capacity development and neither should be emphasized over the other. Authors warn for an over-emphasis of capacity development, while in JES, the emphasis is on freedom of choice, participants can work on their problems in their own way, or choose not to work on their problem. Offering freedom of choice does not automatically lead to developing capacities, though a substantial number of participants (re-) develop roles and skills. Social workers try to balance both aspects of empowerment, from a normative point of view that both aspects are equally important. Our analysis shows how offering freedom of choice can contribute to empowerment, although social workers need to be aware that participants might opt to not (yet) work on capacity development, which can create tensions with the normative framework of social workers. Further analysis is needed to understand the influence of the institutional setting and the role of social workers and peer workers, which is described in the next chapters.

### **Self-management of an institutional setting (chapter 3)**

Self-managed institutional homeless programs started as an alternative to regular shelters. Using institutional theory as a lens, this chapter explores the experiences of participants,

peer workers and social workers with the institutional aspects of a JES, such as sharing and managing the living environment. Our analysis revealed mimicry between JES and regular shelters, stemming from institutional similarities. Participants shared space and facilities with sixteen people, which caused an ongoing discussion on (enforcement of) rules. Participants loathed the lack of private space. However, participants experienced freedom of choice over both their own life and management of JES and structures were experienced more fluid than in regular care. Peer workers and social workers emphasized the importance of fluidity, while some participants pushed peer workers and social workers to contribute to the enforcement of rules and structures. Some structures also appeared to stimulate self-management, such as the installment of the participant meeting as the main forum for making decisions and offering all participants a key (unusual in regular shelters). Our analysis showed how an institutional context influences self-management and suggested opportunities for introducing freedom and fluidity in institutional care.

#### **The role of social workers and peer workers (chapter 4)**

This chapter focusses on the social workers and peer workers in JES, shedding light on the role of social workers and peer workers in a changing welfare state. The position of peer workers in mental health care and social support is still in development, while the position and the normative framework for social work is subject to ongoing debate. We employed two analytical frameworks: Habermas' theory on communicative action and Freire's work on critical pedagogy. Habermas offers insights into tensions between system and lifeworld, though he does not offer a clear role for professional action with regard to struggling participants and participants and peer workers acting strategic and instrumental. Freire offers a different perspective, including a clearer role for social work, although support from social workers was regularly framed as limiting self-management, by participants but mostly by social workers themselves. Difficulties with combining freedom of choice with offering support is present in both analyses. Fear of being too therapeutic or too active caused social workers to refrain from intervening. They emphasized freedom of choice, though mentioning the importance of capacity development. Our analysis shows that their actions appeared to contribute to participant empowerment. Our analysis offers insights for social workers and peer workers in balancing strategic and communicative actions and inducing deliberation and engagement. These considerations might prove useful for social workers and peer workers in other settings.

#### **The role of a participatory space in the development of citizenship (chapter 5)**

In this chapter we describe the role of physical, social and mental space in the development of individual, relational and democratic citizenship. Research and policymakers are paying increasing attention to the development of citizenship, stimulated by the transition towards a participatory society. In this chapter we focus specifically on citizens in homeless care, whose citizenship is often underdeveloped. People who are homeless often have little freedom of choice (individual citizenship), are socially marginalized (relational citizenship) and rarely or never participate in democratic decision making.

Authors endorse the need for a participatory space outside home or work where people in a vulnerable position can develop relational citizenship. We reflect on the influence a participatory space can have on the development of individual and democratic citizenship besides the more commonly described relational citizenship. We specifically focus on characteristics of a participatory space that can influence the development of citizenship. JES as a participatory space contributes to the development of individual, relational and democratic citizenship, even though not all participants benefit equally. The different forms of citizenship both hinder and stimulate each other, for instance if someone chooses (individual citizenship) to not engage in social relations (relational citizenship). This chapter brings to light aspects of a participatory space that can influence the development of individual, relational and democratic citizenship. We also found indications for the importance of looking at physical aspects of a participatory space in relation to the development of citizenship.

We conclude that citizens in homeless care are able to develop citizenship by having freedom of choice, having opportunities to engage with each other and others and democratically shaping the program. Developing citizenship is supported by a participatory space, if adequately facilitated by social workers and peer workers. It is therefore important to assess the quality of the participatory space.

### **Understanding how self-management as a setting contributes to empowerment (chapter 6)**

Participant empowerment is a foundational goal of self-organized mental health and homeless care and of the peer workers and social worker that support self-management. In this final empirical chapter, we aim to understand how a self-organized setting contributes to participants' empowerment.

JES participants experienced freedom of choice and influence on their living environment. JES' fluid structure allowed participants to adapt the program to their desires and needs, though participants were sometimes negative about having to live together. Most participants preferred JES over regular shelters. Unlike empowerment literature, participants mostly emphasized freedom of choice over capacity development. JES offered opportunities for social and organizational engagement, through which participants developed roles, skills and self-image. A limited number of participants developed leadership roles through self-management. Empowering setting theory suggests setting aspects (e.g. size, freedom of choice) to be either enabling or entrapping. We found some aspects could be entrapping or enabling, depending on personal factors.

Our analysis revealed several core aspects of JES that contributed to the empowerment of participants, starting with offering individual freedom of choice and balancing freedom of choice with support. JES also offered opportunities for engagement and fluidity in program management. Support from peer workers and social workers based on empowering normative framework also contributed to participants' empowerment.

## Reflections on the swampy lowlands of participatory action research (chapter 7)

In between the empirical chapters and the general discussion, I included an extend reflection on the design and execution of my research. The chapter is in part written from a first-person perspective, to do justice to the researcher as actor and enable reflection.

Participatory action research (PAR) enables shared learning for stakeholders to facilitate empowerment. Though PAR is on the rise, little is published on the pitfalls and dilemmas. PAR, like social work, is a normative practice and therefore it is important to reflect on the underlying values and how these take shape in and influence the research. We employ Schön's 'swampy lowlands' (1983) to reflect on practicing PAR. Swampy lowlands are places where regular guidelines do not suffice and problems are contradictory or unclear. We believe that difficult situations offer a rich learning potential for researchers to develop their moral compass and craftsmanship, similarly as for social workers. Our purpose is to deepen understanding of complex situations and offer insights to navigate these situations.

We describe how the research was designed and executed with specific attention to decision making between the researcher and JES and within JES, balancing democracy, inclusion and local impact. We also reflect on the researcher's personal engagement and share learned lessons for future research.

We are critical of both the role of researchers and on issues that occur when facilitating shared learning in swampy lowlands, not to discourage PAR, but because we are convinced of the worth of it and hope that others can learn from our experiences.

## General discussion

The metaphor of sailing in self-management first occurred when we as researchers together with social workers and peer workers (former participants) from different self-managed programs tried to describe how they (the workers) facilitated and supported self-management. Every choice they made, they made in reaction to what they assessed would benefit the situation the most, in relation to the values and principles of self-management. They sail in self-management, trying to influence where they can while acknowledging they are only a part of the equation. Participants, peer workers, social workers and others involved have been constantly looking for a balance between the different values of self-management and mainly between the two aspects of empowerment: freedom of choice and capacity development, as described in the five empirical chapters.

In this study I aimed to understand how empowerment processes were shaped and experienced in JES, to further the experienced freedom of participants and to develop social

work as a normative practice using insights from JES. Social work is a normative practice because it does not only aim for certain effects using interventions, it strives for values as inclusion, democracy, existential security and empowerment. The work of social workers and peer workers therefore can be seen as a form of normative professionalization, based on both values and striving for the realization of those values (Kunneman, 2017; Van Ewijk, 2010).

In our research we therefore looked beyond the direct outcomes for participants, into underlying values and the contribution of social workers (and peer workers) to those values.

Our data suggest that engagement in self-management promotes individual empowerment and most participants prefer JES to regular care. JES, in line with a strength-based approach, presumes participants are, in principle, capable of taking care of themselves, which is appreciated by most of the participants, especially in contrast with the experiences of participants in regular shelters.

While regular homeless programs tend to take care of and decide for participants, this research shows that people who are homeless are able to manage a shelter together and in doing so facilitate freedom of choice and development of capacities, which is lacking in regular shelters. Participants of JES experienced freedom of choice and influence on the program they are living in. JES offered opportunities for social and organizational engagement, through which participants developed roles, skills and their self-image. JES' fluid nature prevented rigid hierarchies and allowed participants to adapt the program to their desires and needs. Although participants benefited from JES in different ways, most of them preferred JES over regular shelters. Social workers and peer workers played an important facilitating role.

My research articulated the dialectical nature of self-management, entailing capacity development and freedom of choice, of which both participants, peer workers and social workers in self-organized care need to be aware. Current literature on self-organized care focusses mostly on capacity development, while freedom of choice appeared to be of equal or higher importance for participants of JES. The importance of freedom of choice is underarticulated in current literature on self-organized care (Brown, 2012; May et al., 2016; Ostrow & Croft, 2015). In a broader sense, our analysis shows the importance of offering people in a vulnerable position freedom of choice. Conceptually, the research into JES also shows the importance of freedom of choice as part of empowerment and the tension between freedom of choice and capacity development. A new insight in relation to the existing literature is that participants can also benefit from self-organized care, at least in the case of JES, without engaging with social life and self-management within the program.

Further studies into processes and experiences of disempowerment within self-managed programs, and how they contribute to the development of relational richness, are necessary. On a more abstract level, more attention is needed, in practice, policy and research, to the dialectical relation between freedom of choice and capacity development in empowerment processes, limitations to empowerment within people and communities, and the importance of acknowledging disempowerment, both in itself and as a source of relational richness.

Specifically, for institutional forms of self-organized care, more attention is needed for the enabling and hindering influences of the institutional settings. More attention is also needed to the interaction between personal factors and setting factors that influence setting-empowerment. Enabling and entrapping factors are less oppositional than sometimes proposed in the literature, some factors can be both enabling or entrapping, depending on the participants characteristics. JES as an 'outlier case' shows the robustness of institutional theory and institutional care processes, like the discussions on rules and hierarchy show. At the same time, this research also shows that empowerment within an institutional setting is possible through introducing freedom of choice and fluidity.

Social workers and peer workers can play an important role in facilitating empowerment in self-organized care. Our research into JES shows that empowerment is not zero-sum, more actions from social workers does not automatically lead to less empowerment of participants. Social workers and peer workers can mitigate experienced tensions between freedom of choice and capacity development and between collective management and individual choices. Social workers and peer workers ensure that self-management does not run ashore but continuous to sail, adjusted to participants who find their own course.

As a concept, JES, through its collective approach to the problem of homelessness, challenges the dominance of the individual focus in homeless care. At the same time, participants emphasize an individualistic approach, wherein their problems are theirs and should not be made collective, for instance through sharing them during meetings. Social workers and peer workers emphasized the importance of relational and democratic citizenship, through forming connections and shared decision making. Social workers and peer workers weighed their own normative frameworks with those of participants.

JES offered the opportunity for participants to develop democratic citizenship, facilitated by peer workers and social workers. Managing a shelter together while working on your individual's problem is an accomplishment in itself. The individual empowerment of participants, including their freedom of choice, in JES appears to hurt the collective empowerment of JES, although some participants developed their individual empowerment through engaging with collective empowerment.

Almost all participants described various practical benefits they experienced and appreciated (to various degrees), such as stable shelter, access food, drinks, bathrooms, phones and computers. These practical benefits are often lacking in regular shelters, although they can be achieved there as well. For most participants this was an important goal for joining JES. These practical benefits are not discussed in literature on self-organized care, though they contribute to the development of existential security of participants.

Like many other self-managed programs, JES is part of a regular care organization. Over the years, JES has developed quite a high level of autonomy (compared to regular programs) while the organization functions as a health shield towards pressures from outside. However, the mother organization has not been able to negate the structural problem that homeless care, in the Netherlands and elsewhere, is financed on an individual level and based on the level of health problems rather than being socially and strength focused. JES has been able for many years to operate on the edge of this system, but over the last years has handed over some autonomy towards the municipality, with regard to who can and cannot join the program. According to those involved, JES would thrive without these regulations, though it would not be able to get public funding. Forming a technical assistance organization that supports obtaining and maintaining funding, together with other self-managed programs, might be beneficial, similar to experiences in the United States (Brown, 2012).

Future research could focus on both the inner working of self-management and individual experiences, micro-sociological and community empowerment processes and the organizational and societal context. In all themes, specific attention should be paid to the consequences for participants, peer workers and social workers. In my research, PAR proved to be a fruitful approach to engage with relational complexity, creating insights that would have been difficult to gain from a theoretical high ground. At the same time, for future research, more methodological reflection and development is needed to understand relational complexity within PAR.

## Final remarks

While JES was not all things, for all men, by offering practical benefits, freedom of choice and opportunities for capacity development, JES was many things for many people. JES' intrinsic contradictions force participants, peer workers, social workers and others involved to rethink self-management continuously. I have been recurrently amazed by the power of groups of participants to reinvent themselves, start over and find new ways to deal with the challenges and opportunities offered. JES remains a case with a great deal of learning potential, for empowerment of participants, for (normative) professionalization of social workers and peer workers and for all those interested in the organization of empowerment processes.

# Samenvatting

## **Zeilen op zelfbeheer.**

## **Het organiseren van empowerment in een institutionele omgeving**

## Inleiding

Tien jaar geleden is Je Eigen Stek (JES) gestart als bottom-up initiatief vanuit een groep mensen die dakloos was. De initiatiefnemers wilden een einde maken aan hun dakloosheid en de bijbehorende extreme bestaansonzekerheid. In reguliere opvangvoorzieningen vonden zij geen plek, zowel letterlijk als figuurlijk. Letterlijk omdat er een tekort was aan opvangplekken, zeker voor mensen zonder ernstige psychiatrische of verslavingsproblematiek. Maar ook figuurlijk, omdat zij hun dakloosheid wilden beëindigen op hun eigen manier, met ruimte voor hun eigen keuzes en met inzet van hun eigen krachten. Daarom startten zij een eigen opvang in zelfbeheer, gefaciliteerd door sociaal werkers en HVO-Querido, een maatschappelijke opvang organisatie. JES is gebaseerd op het uitgangspunt dat dakloze mensen een opvang beter zelf kunnen beheren. In de afgelopen tien jaar heb ik dit uitgangspunt bestudeerd.

### **Opkomst van Je Eigen Stek**

De motivatie van deelnemers om JES en andere Nederlandse zelfbeheerde daklozenprogramma's te starten heeft te maken met een verschuiving in de heersende visie op de maatschappelijke opvang. In de afgelopen dertig jaar is de maatschappelijke opvang in Nederland en andere landen meer geprofessionaliseerd en gemedicaliseerd. De verschuiving werd veroorzaakt door de instroom van mensen uit GGZ-instellingen naar de maatschappelijke opvang en door een verschuiving in het sociaal beleid, waardoor alleen mensen met psychiatrische en/of verslavingsproblemen gebruik kunnen maken van de maatschappelijke opvang (Tuynman & Planije, 2014; Van Doorn, 2002; Wright, 1997). De deelnemers die JES begonnen stelden dat 'er niets mis is met ons, we hebben gewoon een huis nodig'. Hoewel dat in de praktijk genuancerdeerder ligt, past hun weigering om te worden gediagnostiseerd als iemand met geestelijke gezondheidsproblemen in een bredere kritiek op de medicalisering van sociale problemen (Foucault, 1973; Wright, 1997).

Daarnaast hadden de de initiatiefnemers van JES kritiek op het gebrek aan ruimte voor keuzevrijheid en eigen kracht in reguliere opvangvoorzieningen. Hun kritiek op reguliere opvangvoorzieningen en institutionele zorg in het algemeen is niet nieuw (Blok, 2004). In de periode na de Tweede Wereldoorlog, werden steeds meer wetenschappers en professionals kritisch over institutionele zorg, vooral over de negatieve invloed die institutionele zorg heeft op de empowerment van deelnemers (Goffman, 1961; Wolins & Wozner, 1982). Binnen reguliere instituties werden alternatieve vormen van zorg ontwikkeld, in de

vorm van therapeutische gemeenschappen. Grass roots organisaties ontwikkelden alternatieve programma's buiten de reguliere zorg, in sommige gevallen samen met bredere sociale bewegingen, zoals de krakers beweging, aansluitend bij de opkomst van zowel een doe-het-zelf mentaliteit als bredere maatschappelijke kritiek op sociale controle door instituties (Boumans et al., 2012). De huidige opkomst van herstelgerichte zorg en de inzet van ervaringsdeskundigen vloeien voort uit deze grass roots initiatieven (Boumans, 2012). De empowerment theorie, althans in haar ontwikkeling door Rappaport (1987), is deels gebaseerd op deze grass roots en zelfhulp initiatieven. Andersom, door deelnemers een stem te geven in hun eigen traject, dragen deze programma's bij aan individueel en collectief empowerment (Boumans, 2015; Brown, 2012).

### **Beleidscontext**

Paradoxaal genoeg wil de Nederlandse overheid zelf de verzorgingsstaat demedicaliseren en deïstitutionaliseren, door mensen uit instituties naar en wijken en gemeenschappen te verhuizen (Blok, 2004; Kwekkeboom, 2004). De overheid wil daarmee de verzorgingsstaat transformeren richting meer gemeenschapszorg, wat betekent dat mensen een verantwoordelijkheid krijgen om voor zichzelf en anderen om hen heen te zorgen (Abma, 2017; Stam, 2013). In de praktijk blijken mensen terughoudend om (meer) zorg voor mensen in een kwetsbare positie aan te bieden en mensen in een kwetsbare positie geven in veel gevallen de voorkeur aan professionele zorg om hun omgeving niet tot last te zijn, mogelijk als gevolg van individualisering en overgedragen ideeën over autonomie en zelfredzaamheid (Linders, 2009; Metze, 2015). In de praktijk ontstaan spanningen tussen mensen in een kwetsbare positie, mantelzorgers en professionals over wie verantwoordelijk is voor wat en wie welke zorg kan en moet bieden, en op wat voor moment (Abma, 2017; Linders, 2009; Metze, 2015; Veldboer & Hoijtink, 2019).

Veel voormalige bewoners van institutionele zorginstellingen hebben moeite met het krijgen en houden van zelfstandige huisvesting. Een eerdere golf van deïstitutionalisering in de jaren '80 leidde regelmatig tot reïstitutionalisering in opvangvoorzieningen en gevangenissen (Fakhoury & Priebe, 2007; Kroon, Michon, et al., 2016; Van Ewijk, 2010). Een substantieel deel van de mensen die nu dakloos zijn, zijn eerder dakloos geweest, kregen een huis en zijn vervolgens hun huis weer verloren als gevolg van onvoldoende voorbereiding en ondersteuning (Boesveldt, 2019b; Van Doorn, 2002; Van Regenmortel et al., 2006). Uit onderzoek naar reguliere daklozenzorg blijkt dat opvangvoorzieningen moeite hebben het faciliteren van empowerment van deelnemers (Boumans, 2015; Van Doorn, 2002; Van Regenmortel et al., 2006).

In de afgelopen jaren lijkt het aantal mensen dat in een vorm van institutionele zorg woont, af te nemen (Kroon, 2018), voor het eerst in dertig jaar (Kroon, Michon, et al., 2016; Van Ewijk, 2010). Het aantal daklozen is de afgelopen tien jaar echter verdubbeld (Centraal bureau voor statistiek, 2019).

Veel Nederlandse steden hebben het Housing First-model overgenomen, gericht op het zo snel mogelijk huisvesten van daklozen in een zelfstandige woning (gemeente Amsterdam, 2016; Padgett et al., 2016). In de praktijk is er echter een tekort aan woningen en mogen niet alle daklozen Housing First in (omdat ze als 'zelfredzaam' worden beschouwd) (De Vries, 2019; Rekenkamer Metropool Amsterdam, 2017). JES biedt een plek voor mensen die (nog) niet kunnen of niet willen deelnemen aan een Housing First-programma.

### **Zelfbeheer en zelforganisatie**

JES is in opzet vergelijkbaar met andere zelfbeheerde institutionele crisisalternatieven, die mensen die geen huis of thuis hebben of daar tijdelijk niet kunnen verblijven, een plek bieden om te verblijven voor mensen (May et al., 2016; Ostrow & Croft, 2015). Deelnemers aan JES zijn samen verantwoordelijk voor dagelijkse zaken en strategisch management. Het institutionele karakter, het samen leven in JES en het samen delen van voorzieningen, onderscheidt JES en andere crisisalternatieven van niet-institutionele vormen van zelfgeorganiseerde zorg zoals zelfhulpgroepen en drop-in en dagactiviteitencentra (Brown, 2012). Onderzoek laat zien dat zelfgeorganiseerde zorg kan bijdragen aan empowerment van deelnemers (Brown, 2012; Ostrow & Croft, 2015).

Hoewel zelfgeorganiseerde zorg in het algemeen wordt geassocieerd met empowerment, is er weinig bekend over hoe deelnemers, ervaringswerkers en sociaal werkers processen van empowerment en disempowerment vormgeven en ervaren in een institutionele zelfbeheerde opvangvoorziening. Specifieke aspecten die ik nader heb bestudeerd, zijn de invloed van de institutionele setting op (dis)empowermentprocessen en de rol van sociaal werkers en ervaringswerkers bij (dis)empowerment en zelfbeheer. Daarmee draagt dit onderzoek bij aan onze kennis over hoe deelnemers, ervaringswerkers en sociaal werkers processen van empowerment en disempowerment ervaren en ontwikkelen binnen een institutionele zelfbeheerde opvangvoorziening en hoe (dis)empowerment en institutionalisering op elkaar in spelen. Het onderzoek draagt ook bij aan de ontwikkeling van zelfbeheerde institutionele programma's in de opvang en geestelijke gezondheidszorg en de ontwikkeling van de rol van sociaal werk en ervaringswerk in een veranderende verzorgingsstaat, met name binnen de maatschappelijke opvang en geestelijke gezondheidszorg.

### **Theoretisch kader**

Om het zelfbeheer van een opvangvoorziening beter te begrijpen, heb ik twee 'grand theories' gebruikt: empowerment en institutionele theorie. Geïnspireerd door de 'plugging-in'-aanpak die Jackson & Mazzei (2013) bepleiten, heb ik deze twee theorieën gekoppeld aan de data om zo zowel mijn inzichten in de data als mijn inzichten in deze theorieën te verrijken.

De empowermenttheorie is samen met de praktijk ontwikkeld door Rappaport (1987) en Zimmerman (1995) op basis van hun werk met grass roots organisaties en zelfhulpgroepen. Andersom worden empowerment, en sub-concepten, vaak gebruikt voor onderzoek naar

zelfgeorganiseerde zorg (Brown, 2012). Onderzoek laat zien dat verschillende vormen van zelfgeorganiseerde zorg bijdragen aan individueel empowerment van deelnemers en aan een vermindering van het gebruik van formele zorg (Brown, 2012; May et al., 2016; Ostrow & Croft, 2015).

Empowerment als concept is breed, sommigen noemen het zelfs een paradigma, bestaande uit visie, proces en resultaat op individueel, collectief en politiek niveau (Van Regenmortel, 2011). Rappaport (1981) stelt dat empowerment een dialectisch karakter heeft. Rappaport benadrukt enerzijds het belang van keuzevrijheid en invloed op het eigen leven en anderzijds het belang van het ontwikkelen van vaardigheden en capaciteiten om gebruik te maken van keuzevrijheid. Empowerment wordt soms teruggedbracht tot een focus op zelfredzaamheid en een sociale norm om jezelf continu te verbeteren, zowel door beleidsmakers als door sociale wetenschappers die beleidsmakers willen bekritisseren (Trappenburg, 2019; Van Regenmortel, 2011). Een smalle focus op zelfredzaamheid en zelfontplooiing, zonder aandacht voor keuzevrijheid past niet bij empowerment en draagt bij aan disempowerment (Boumans, 2015; Van Regenmortel, 2011). Echter, bij het benadrukken van de keuzevrijheid, kunnen mensen ook besluiten om niet aan hun leven te werken, zelfs als ze zich in een zeer kwetsbare positie bevinden (Abma, 2017; Duyvendak, 1999; Rivest & Moreau, 2015). Het ontwikkelen van zowel keuzevrijheid als capaciteiten kan elkaar versterken, als de betrokkenen daarvoor kiezen.

Op individueel niveau betekent empowerment 'a sense of personal control or influence and a concern with actual social influence' (Rappaport, 1987, p. 121). Individueel empowerment is alleen mogelijk in interactie met een sociale omgeving (andere mensen, organisatorische context, gemeenschap) die empowerment mogelijk maakt door ondersteunende sociale relaties, mogelijkheden voor individuele ontwikkeling en een empowerende collectieve identiteit (Maton, 2008; Peterson & Zimmerman, 2004; Van Regenmortel, 2011). Gemeenschaps of organisatie empowerment beschrijft hoe individuen hun situatie beïnvloeden via een organisatie of gemeenschap en de invloed die individuen hebben op een organisatie/gemeenschap (Maton, 2008; Peterson & Zimmerman, 2004). Verschillende auteurs hebben kaders ontwikkeld voor het begrijpen van de interactie tussen een (organisatorische) setting en individuele empowerment, zoals *empowering community settings* (Maton, 2008), *organizational empowerment* (Peterson & Zimmerman, 2004) en *enabling niches* (Taylor, 1997). Voor deze thesis is specifiek het *role-framework* van Brown (2012) relevant. Het role-framework is ontwikkeld om zowel het proces als de resultaten van zelfgeorganiseerde zorg te begrijpen en beschrijft hoe deelnemers door persoon-omgeving interactie in zelfgeorganiseerde zorg rollen en relaties ontwikkelen.

Onderliggend aan de interactie tussen setting en empowerment is wat in de sociale psychologie *gedrag-setting* theorie wordt genoemd (Brown, 2012) of in de sociologie *institutionele theorie* (W. R. Scott, 2005). Dit is de tweede grand theory die ik gebruik. Institutionele theorie richt zich op hoe een setting het gedrag van individuen beïnvloedt

en hoe het gedrag van individuen een setting beïnvloedt (W. R. Scott, 2005). Institutionele theorie is de (impliciete) basis voor de meeste kritiek op de institutionele zorg: bewoners van de institutionele zorg raken *mortified* (Goffman, 1961), ontdaan van hun identiteit als persoon, vanwege de manier waarop de instelling functioneert (Goffman, 1961; Wolins & Wozner, 1982). Latere theoretici betoogden dat de invloed tussen institutionele instellingen en gedrag bidirectioneel is. Institutionele settings beïnvloeden gedrag, maar mensen in een institutionele setting hebben de keuze om mee te gaan in die invloed (en daarmee de setting te bevestigen), daar aan bij te dragen, weerstand te bieden of de setting te proberen te veranderen (W. R. Scott, 2005). Institutionele patronen zijn moeilijk te veranderen (W. R. Scott, 2005), en rolrigiditeit kan gemakkelijk optreden, vooral in een binaire relatie van een beheersende en een volgende of juist opstandige rol. Een negatieve feedback cyclus kan ontstaan tussen een persoon die de setting wil versterken ten opzichte van een andere die zich wil verzetten of de setting wil veranderen (Goffman, 1961; Hanrath, 2013; Wolins & Wozner, 1982). Hoewel velen de negatieve invloed van een institutionele zorginstelling op empowerment hebben betoogd (Goffman, 1961; Wolins & Wozner, 1982), wijzen anderen erop dat een institutionele omgeving ook structuur, zekerheid en mogelijkheden voor empowerment kan bieden (Adler & Borys, 1996; Hoijsink & Oude Vrielink, 2007; W. R. Scott, 2005). Ook de empowerment-setting frameworks wijzen op hoe een setting een positieve invloed kan hebben op empowerment van individuen.

In kritische literatuur over institutionele instellingen worden groepsworkers vaak omschreven als bijdragend aan disempowerment (Goffman, 1961). Die kritiek is parallel aan een bredere kritiek op sociaal werkers die bij zouden dragen aan de afhankelijkheid van mensen in een kwetsbare positie in plaats van aan hun empowerment (Klaase, 2017; Tonkens, 2008; G. Van der Laan, 1990). In tegenstelling tot veel andere zelfgeorganiseerde programma's (Brown, 2012) heeft JES een maatschappelijk werker ingehuurd om deelnemers, de groep en het programma te ondersteunen. Theoretisch passen empowerment en sociaal werk goed bij elkaar in visie en manier van werken, met name in de vorm van het krachtgericht werken (Boumans, 2015; Van Regenmortel, 2011). In de praktijk hebben veel sociaal werkers echter moeite om een evenwicht te vinden tussen het niet verwaarlozen van mensen in een kwetsbare positie door de keuzevrijheid te benadrukken en het niet overnemen van de eigen regie van mensen door te beslissen wat goed voor hen is (Duyvendak et al., 2009; G. Van der Laan, 1990). Daarom pleiten verschillende auteurs voor een dialogische aanpak, waarbij mensen in een kwetsbare positie en sociaal werkers elk hun eigen ideeën en ervaringen inbrengen en samen de ondersteuning inrichten (Duyvendak et al., 2009; Van Regenmortel, 2011). Dit dialogisch model wordt ondermijnd door sociaal beleid dat sociaal werkers eenzijdig aanstuurt om zich te richten op het stimuleren van zelfredzaamheid van mensen met wie ze werken (Bredewold et al., 2018). Met name in institutionele omgevingen kunnen institutionele patronen en overwegingen van veiligheid en stabiliteit het vermogen van sociaal werkers belemmeren om dialogisch te werken (Huber & Bouwes, 2011; Van Der Helm & Schaftenaar, 2014). Over de rol van sociaal werkers in zelfgeorganiseerde zorg is weinig bekend (Brown, 2012; Ostrow & Croft, 2015).

In JES werkt de sociaal werker samen met een ervaringswerker. De inzet van ervaringsdeskundigheid is ontwikkeld in zelfhulpgroepen. Ervaringsdeskundigen worden steeds vaker naast sociaal werkers worden ingezet, om herstel te ondersteunen, op basis van hun eigen doorleefde ervaring (Davidson et al., 2018; Desain et al., 2013). Ervaringswerkers in institutionele zelfgeorganiseerde zorg kunnen moeite hebben om vanuit ervaringsdeskundigheid ondersteuning te bieden en soms reproduceren ervaringswerkers en deelnemers dan machtsverhoudingen tussen cliënten en groepswerkers in reguliere institutionele programma's (Mead, 2014).

### Onderzoeksfocus

Hoewel zelfgeorganiseerde zorg in het algemeen wordt geassocieerd met empowerment, is weinig bekend over hoe deelnemers, ervaringswerkers en sociaal werkers empowermentprocessen vormgeven in een institutionele zelfbeheerde opvangvoorziening. Specifieke aspecten die ik nader heb bestudeerd, zijn de invloed van de institutionele setting op empowermentprocessen en de rol van sociaal werkers en ervaringswerkers bij empowerment en zelfbeheer. De overkoepelende onderzoeksvraag is:

*Hoe ervaren en ontwikkelen deelnemers, ervaringswerkers en sociaal werkers processen van empowerment en disempowerment in een zelfbeheerde institutionele opvangvoorziening om de vrijheid van deelnemers te bevorderen?*

Met deze vraag streef ik naar drie doelen:

- Empirisch: beschrijven en begrijpen hoe deelnemers, ervaringswerkers en sociaal werkers processen van (dis)empowerment ervaren en ontwikkelen binnen een institutionele zelfbeheerde opvangvoorziening (1)
- Theoretisch: bijdragen aan conceptuele ontwikkeling van empowerment en disempowerment van mensen die dakloos zijn in een institutionele setting en de interactie tussen empowerment en de institutionele setting (2)
- Praktisch: bijdragen aan de ontwikkeling van zelfbeheerde institutionele programma's in de opvang en geestelijke gezondheidszorg en de ontwikkeling van de rol van sociaal werk in een veranderende verzorgingsstaat, met name binnen de maatschappelijke opvang en geestelijke gezondheidszorg (3).

## Methodologie

Door middel van een longitudinale participatieve onderzoeksplan en een 'thick analysis', waarbij ik meerdere strategieën en verschillende theoretische lenzen gebruik om mijn data te begrijpen (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013), streefde ik naar het bereiken van de verschillende doeleinden die dit onderzoek heeft.

Het onderzoek is uitgevoerd in het kader van de Werkplaats Sociaal Domein van de Hogeschool van Amsterdam, in samenwerking met de Academische werkplaats sociaal werk van Tranzo. We volgden de principes van de responsieve evaluatie (Abma et al., 2009). Belanghebbenden waren betrokken bij het evaluatieproces en hun problemen met betrekking tot zelfbeheer vormden het uitgangspunt voor een dialoog om wederzijds begrip te ontwikkelen en verschillende perspectieven te formuleren. De responsieve evaluatie benadering kan gezien worden als een vorm van participatief actie onderzoek (participatory action research, PAR), wat zich richt op samen met stakeholders kwesties rondom macht en complexiteit onderzoeken (Abma et al., 2019).

Mijn onderzoek naar JES duurde meer dan tien jaar en bestond uit twee deelprojecten (een verkennende case-study en een follow-up studie naar voormalige deelnemers) en langdurige betrokkenheid, als onderzoeker, bij JES, tussen en na deze projecten, tot op de dag van vandaag. Deelnemers, ervaringswerkers en sociaal werkers van JES waren betrokken bij alle aspecten van het onderzoek: ontwerp, werving, dataverzameling, analyse en publicatie, passend bij PAR.

### **Beschrijving JES**

JES wil 'mensen zonder huis helpen, een huis te krijgen' door onderdak te bieden aan mensen die op hun eigen manier aan hun eigen problemen willen werken. JES richt zich op mensen die door financiële of persoonlijke problemen geen zelfstandige huisvesting kunnen krijgen. Potentiële deelnemers moeten voor zichzelf kunnen zorgen. De meeste deelnemers zijn afhankelijk van een uitkering, sommigen hebben een baan. JES heeft plek voor zestien mensen. Deelnemers zijn verantwoordelijk voor het beheer, van huishouden tot intake en uitstroom van deelnemers en strategische vraagstukken. Deelnemers kiezen een voorzitter onder elkaar, om vergaderingen te leiden en JES te vertegenwoordigen in externe contacten, samen met andere deelnemers. JES wordt gefinancierd door de gemeente Amsterdam en maakt deel uit van een moederorganisatie die reguliere maatschappelijke opvang biedt. JES huurde een sociaal werker in om individuele deelnemers, de groep en het programma te ondersteunen. De sociaal werker werkt samen met een ervaringswerker, die een voormalige deelnemer is. Zowel de sociaal werker als de ervaringswerker worden betaald en beide werden door deelnemers aangenomen via een stemming op een vergadering.

In de eerste vijf jaar van JES (2009-2014) verbleven er 72 mensen, van minder dan een dag tot meerdere jaren. Met uitzondering van degenen die binnen een paar weken vertrokken, is de gemiddelde duur van het verblijf ongeveer 15 maanden. Van de 72 deelnemers bleven er 51 langer dan drie maanden, waarvan er 32 expliciet zijn gesproken in het kader van ons onderzoek (in een interview of via informele bijeenkomsten). We hebben (wat) secundaire informatie van zeventien andere bewoners, zoals de duur van het verblijf en de manier van vertrekken. De meerderheid van de deelnemers was mannelijk en alleenstaand. Deelnemers waren volwassen, met een paar uitzonderingen van late adolescenten. JES registreerde geen etniciteit.

### **Datageneratie**

De evaluatie is uitgevoerd door een divers onderzoeksteam, waaronder onderzoekers met eigen ervaring. Onze formele gegevens bestaan voornamelijk uit interviews. Er werden interviews gehouden met deelnemers (N=27), ervaringswerkers (N=3), sociaal werkers (N=2) en andere belanghebbenden (bijvoorbeeld beleidsadviseurs van de moederorganisatie en managers van partnerorganisaties) (N=10). Verschillende deelnemers, ervaringswerkers en sociaal werkers werden meerdere keren geïnterviewd, wat resulteerde in 56 interviews in totaal. Voor beide deelstudies bespraken we een conceptversie van het rapport met respondenten en andere belanghebbenden in focusgroepen.

Naast de interviews werden documenten geanalyseerd (bijvoorbeeld projectplannen, eigen publicaties van deelnemers, zoals bijdragen aan onderzoekspublicaties) en werden administratieve gegevens die door JES werden geregistreerd over de demografische achtergrond van deelnemers en de verblijfsduur verwerkt, zowel voor contextuele informatie over het programma als voor secundaire informatie over deelnemers. Daarnaast namen een sociaal werker en een ervaringsdeskundige van JES deel aan vier focusgroepen met sociaal werkers en ervaringsdeskundigen van andere zelfbeheerde programma's in Nederland.

Gedurende de looptijd van het onderzoek, ook tussen en na de twee deelstudies, heb ik uitgebreid contact gehad met betrokkenen bij JES, zowel door participatie in vergaderingen, als tijdens informele contacten met deelnemers, ervaringswerkers en sociaal werkers en gezamenlijke participatie in bijeenkomsten en studiebezoeken. Met een aantal betrokkenen heb ik ook samengewerkt aan publicaties over JES. De uitgebreide en langdurige betrokkenheid heeft mij een dieper en aanvullend begrip van de formele data geboden.

### **Analyse en duiding**

In onze analyse gingen we heen en weer tussen onze empirische gegevens en de theorie, met behulp van een combinatie van interpretatie en systematische codering, uitgevoerd met MAXqda. Geïnspireerd door de 'plugging in' benadering van Jackson & Mazzei (2013) onderzochten we kernthema's in de literatuur die relevant zijn voor zelfbeheer, zoals beschreven in het theoretische gedeelte van deze samenvatting, om ons begrip van de

data te vergroten. Onze analyse was iteratief, een heen-en-weer beweging tussen data en interpretatie, met behulp van empowerment theorie en institutionele theorie als lenzen voor het begrijpen van de gegevens (O'Reilly, 2012).

### **Kwaliteit van het onderzoek**

Vanuit de rijkdom aan perspectieven en de verschillende theoretische benaderingen hebben we ruimte kunnen maken voor 'competing explanations' (Abma et al., 2009). Bij het schrijven van dit onderzoek heb ik geprobeerd recht te doen aan het complexe en gelaagde karakter van JES en de vele perspectieven op JES. In het onderzoek wilden mijn collega's en ik de verschillende perspectieven en competing explanations beschrijven, in plaats van consensus te bereiken tussen stakeholders. We streefden naar een authentieke en erkende weergave van de verschillende perspectieven die bij JES betrokken zijn (Abma & Stake, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), met expliciete aandacht voor het risico van oververtegenwoordiging van meer reflectieve respondenten (Bryman, 2008). Gedurende het onderzoek heb ik verschillende vormen van triangulatie gebruikt om de kwaliteit van het onderzoek te verhogen en het risico op bias te vergroten, met name triangulatie van theoretische kaders, databronnen, onderzoekers, perspectieven en analytische benaderingen (Abma & Stake, 2014; Denzin, 1989; Kimchi, Polivka, & Stevenson, 1991). Door middel van triangulatie, een transparante methodebeschrijving en het beschrijven van onze beweegredenen voor het selecteren van deze zaak, streefden we naar het verbeteren van de kwaliteit van onze case study (Hyett et al., 2014).

In meerdere sessies hebben we voorlopige analyses en werkhypothesen besproken met deelnemers, ervaringswerkers en sociaal werkers en daarmee onze analyse aangescherpt, de authenticiteit vergroot en een gedeeld begrip van de kernbevindingen gekregen (Doyle, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). De member-checks werden in verschillende fasen uitgevoerd: zowel voorlopige bevindingen als werkhypothesen en conceptversies van conclusies werden besproken met respondenten en andere deelnemers, ervaringswerkers en sociaal werkers die betrokken waren, en hun inbreng is verwerkt. Instemming van de respondentengroep draagt bij aan de geloofwaardigheid van het onderzoek (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Deze participatieve member-check past bij onze responsieve evaluatieaanpak. Mijn langdurige betrokkenheid bij JES en de deelname van stakeholders aan het onderzoek droegen bij aan de authenticiteit en betrouwbaarheid (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) van mijn onderzoek.

Gedurende de tijd dat ik JES onderzocht, voerden we ook kleinere case-studies uit naar soortgelijke programma's. Daarnaast organiseerden mijn collega's en ik uitwisselingen tussen JES en vele andere soortgelijke programma's, zowel nationaal als internationaal, door middel van vergaderingen, locatie bezoeken en invitational conferences. Hoewel, voor eenduidigheid en transparantie, mijn proefschrift zich volledig richt op JES, hebben de uitwisselingen en vergelijkingen met andere programma's bijgedragen aan mijn begrip van JES door zicht te krijgen op contrasten en overeenkomsten. De verschillende vormen van triangulatie samen met de uitwisselingen met andere soortgelijke projecten dragen

bij aan de overdraagbaarheid van dit onderzoek. Andere, soortgelijke projecten kunnen mogelijk gebruik maken van dit onderzoek om na te denken over (de ontwikkeling van) hun eigen programma.

### **Ethische overwegingen**

Ons onderzoek voldoet aan de eisen van anonimiteit, toestemming, vertrouwelijkheid en veiligheid van de deelnemers en werd geleid door de ethische principes autonomie, welwillendheid, niet-schadelijkheid en rechtvaardigheid. Deelnemers werden mondeling geïnformeerd over het doel van het onderzoek en ons gebruik van hun informatie. Schriftelijke toestemming op één moment past minder goed bij participatief onderzoek naar gemarginaliseerde groepen (Abma et al., 2019; Miller & Bell, 2002). Bij het verstrekken van toestemming kregen de respondenten de mogelijkheid om hun toestemming in te trekken op elk gewenst moment, wat werd gedaan door één deelnemer, wiens interviews zijn verwijderd.

### **Beperkingen van het onderzoek**

De interviews die wij hebben gehouden waren overwegend open en gericht op het construeren van narratieven van stakeholders, wat goed past bij het argument dat empowerment onderzoek zich moet richten op unieke processen van betrokkenen (Rappaport, 1987; Van Regenmortel, 2011; Zimmerman, 1995). Narratief onderzoek veronderstelt echter dat mensen in staat zijn om hun ervaringen te articuleren, waarmee het risico ontstaat van overrepresentatie van degenen die hun ervaringen kunnen articuleren (Bryman, 2008). Daarmee ontstaat ook het risico dat empowermentprocessen gemist worden van mensen die ze niet onder woorden kunnen brengen.

Non-verbale vormen van het verzamelen van gegevens, zoals photovoice, kunnen worden gebruikt in toekomstig onderzoek. Een alternatief zou ook kunnen zijn om meer gestructureerde vragenlijsten te gebruiken, waar mensen het eens of oneens kunnen zijn met stellingen (op een schaal), in plaats van hun ervaringen te moeten verwoorden. Een gestructureerde aanpak zou echter ingaan tegen de mogelijkheid voor mensen om hun ervaringen in hun eigen woorden te vertellen en dwingt onderzoekers om te operationaliseren hoe zij verwachten dat mensen empowerment ervaren. Ik heb geworsteld met het grip krijgen op empowermentprocessen, en met de wenselijkheid van het hierop grip krijgen. Door mijn onderzoek, zowel empirisch als theoretisch, ben ik ervan overtuigd geraakt dat empowerment een 'onkenbaar' karakter heeft, althans tot op zekere hoogte.

In mijn onderzoek werd ik geconfronteerd met de complexiteit van empowerment processen in een institutionele setting. Ik ben deze 'relationele complexiteit' (Kunneman, 2017; Woelders, 2019) aangegaan, in plaats van het van buitenaf te bestuderen, om de complexiteit van binnenuit te bestuderen. Het werken vanuit een PAR benadering maakte dit mogelijk, vooral vanwege de vragen die PAR oproept rondom macht, tegenmacht en de rol van de onderzoeker (Abma et al., 2019). Door PAR heb ik inzichten gekregen in, in

de termen van Schön (1983), de complexiteit van de 'moerassige laaglanden' van JES en zelfbeheer, voorbij de 'hoge grond' van theorieën. Juist in die moerassige laaglanden is veel te leren en heb ik ook veel geleerd (Kunneman, 2017). Tegelijkertijd maakt het werken met PAR het noodzakelijk om te reflecteren op mijn eigen rol, hoe ik heb gewerkt met JES en hoe ik de interactie tussen empirie en theorie heb vormgegeven. In zowel hoofdstuk 7 als de discussie heb ik hier uitgebreid bij stil gestaan.

De onkenbaarheid van empowerment, en de onzekerheid en moerasigheid die gepaard gaan met die onkenbaarheid, vragen zowel een epistemische als een beleidsherevaluatie. Met dit onderzoek wil ik mijn steentje bijdragen.

## Empirische hoofdstukken

In vijf empirische hoofdstukken verkende ik verschillende perspectieven op en elementen van zelfbeheer.

### **Ervaringen van deelnemers en ervaringswerkers (hoofdstuk 2)**

In dit hoofdstuk beschrijven we de ervaringen van deelnemers en peer workers met empowerment processen in JES. We onderscheiden drie clusters van individuele ervaringen: 1) enthousiast, 2) matig tot kritisch, en 3) negatief, respectievelijk geassocieerd met afnemende betrokkenheid bij het sociale leven in en het beheer van JES. Deelnemers die minder betrokken zijn, kunnen nog steeds profiteren van de keuzevrijheid en materiële ondersteuning die JES biedt, wat over het algemeen wordt gewaardeerd. Empowerment biedt een nuttig kader om JES te begrijpen en JES biedt op zijn beurt nieuwe inzichten in de dialectische aard van empowerment. Conceptueel bestaat empowerment uit keuzevrijheid en capaciteitsontwikkeling en beide elementen zijn even belangrijk. Waar in de literatuur wordt gewaarschuwd voor een te grote nadruk op capaciteitsontwikkeling, ligt de nadruk in JES op keuzevrijheid, deelnemers kunnen op hun eigen manier aan hun problemen werken en er ook voor kiezen om dat niet te doen. Die keuzevrijheid leidt niet automatisch tot het ontwikkelen van capaciteiten, hoewel een substantieel deel van de deelnemers wel rollen en vaardigheden (her-)ontwikkelt. Sociaal werkers proberen beide aspecten van empowerment in evenwicht te brengen, vanuit een normatief standpunt dat beide aspecten belangrijk zijn. Onze analyse laat zien hoe het bieden van keuzevrijheid kan bijdragen aan empowerment, hoewel sociaal werkers zich ervan bewust moeten zijn dat deelnemers er misschien voor kiezen om (nog) niet te werken aan capaciteitsontwikkeling, wat spanningen kan veroorzaken met het normatieve kader van sociaal werk. Verdere analyse is nodig om de invloed van de institutionele omgeving en de rol van sociaal werkers en ervaringswerkers te begrijpen, wat in de volgende hoofdstukken wordt beschreven.

### **Zelfbeheer van een institutionele setting (hoofdstuk 3)**

Zelfbeheerde institutionele opvangvoorzieningen zijn bottom-up gestart door mensen die dakloos zijn, als alternatief voor reguliere opvangvoorzieningen. Met behulp van institutionele theorie als een lens ter duiding van de bevindingen, verkent dit hoofdstuk de ervaringen van deelnemers, ervaringswerkers en sociaal werkers met de institutionele aspecten van JES, zoals het samen beheren van de leefomgeving en het delen van voorzieningen (keuken, woonkamer, sanitair). Onze analyse bracht overeenkomsten tussen JES en reguliere opvangvoorzieningen aan het licht, die voortvloeien uit institutionele overeenkomsten. Deelnemers deelden ruimte en faciliteiten met zestien personen, wat leidde tot een voortdurende discussie over (handhaving van) regels. Deelnemers waren negatief over het gebrek aan privéruimte. De deelnemers kregen echter keuzevrijheid over zowel hun eigen leven als het beheer van JES en structuren werden vloeiender ervaren dan in de reguliere zorg. Ervaringswerkers en sociaal werkers benadrukten het belang van die vloeibaarheid, terwijl deelnemers van hen vroegen om actief bij te dragen aan de handhaving van regels en structuur. Sommige structuren bleken zelfbeheer juist te stimuleren, zoals het instellen van de deelnemersvergadering als besluitvormend orgaan en het geven van een sleutel aan deelnemers (ongebruikelijk in reguliere opvang). Onze analyse laat zien hoe een institutionele context het zelfbeheer beïnvloedt en welke mogelijkheden er zijn voor het introduceren van vrijheid en vloeibaarheid in een institutionele setting.

### **De rol van sociaal werkers en ervaringswerkers (hoofdstuk 4)**

Dit hoofdstuk richt zich op de sociaal werkers en ervaringswerkers in JES, bijdragend aan de discussie over hun rol in een veranderende verzorgingsstaat. De positie van ervaringswerk in zorg en welzijn is nog volop in ontwikkeling, terwijl de positie en het normatief kader van het sociaal werk al langere tijd ter discussie staan. We gebruikten twee analytische kaders: Habermas' theorie over communicatieve actie en Freire's werk over kritische pedagogiek. Habermas biedt een helder inzicht in de spanning tussen systeem en leefwereld, maar biedt geen duidelijke rol voor professionele actie met betrekking tot worstelende deelnemers en deelnemers en peer workers die strategisch en instrumenteel handelen. Freire biedt een ander perspectief, met een duidelijkere rol voor sociaal werkers, hoewel de steun van sociaal werkers regelmatig werd benoemd als beperkend aan zelfbeheer, door deelnemers maar vooral door sociaal werkers zelf. In beide analyses komen worstelingen naar voren in het combineren van keuzevrijheid met het bieden van ondersteuning. Angst om te therapeutisch of te actief te zijn zorgde dat sociaal werkers zich inhielden en keuzevrijheid benadrukten hoewel ze tegelijkertijd het belang van capaciteitsontwikkeling benoemden. Uit de analyse blijkt dat hun acties bijdragen aan empowerment van deelnemers. Onze analyse biedt inzichten voor sociaal werkers en ervaringsdeskudigen in het balanceren van strategische en communicatieve acties en het stimuleren van deliberatie en betrokkenheid. Deze overwegingen kunnen nuttig zijn voor sociaal werkers en ervaringswerkers in andere instellingen.

## **De rol van een participatieve ruimte in de ontwikkeling van burgerschap (hoofdstuk 5)**

In dit hoofdstuk beschrijven we de rol van fysieke, sociale en mentale ruimte, in de ontwikkeling van individueel, relationeel en democratisch burgerschap. Onderzoek en beleidsvorming besteden steeds meer aandacht aan de ontwikkeling van burgerschap, gestimuleerd door de overgang naar een participatie samenleving. In dit hoofdstuk richten we ons specifiek op burgers in de maatschappelijke opvang, wiens burgerschap vaak onderontwikkeld is. Mensen die dakloos zijn hebben vaak minder keuzevrijheid om zelf vorm te geven aan hun leven (individueel burgerschap), zijn sociaal gemarginaliseerd (relationeel burgerschap) en participeren niet tot nauwelijks in democratische besluitvorming.

We reflecteren op de invloed die een participatieve ruimte kan hebben op de ontwikkeling van individueel en democratisch burgerschap, naast het vaker beschreven relationele burgerschap. We richten ons specifiek op kenmerken van een participatieve ruimte die de ontwikkeling van burgerschap kunnen beïnvloeden.

JES als participatieve ruimte draagt bij aan de ontwikkeling van individuele, relationele en democratische vormen van burgerschap, ook al profiteren niet alle deelnemers evenveel. De verschillende vormen van burgerschap kunnen elkaar zowel hinderen als stimuleren, iemand kan bijvoorbeeld kiezen (individueel burgerschap) om niet te participeren in sociale processen (relationeel burgerschap). Dit hoofdstuk brengt aspecten aan het licht van een participatieve ruimte die de ontwikkeling van individueel, relationeel en democratisch burgerschap beïnvloeden. We vonden ook aanwijzingen voor het belang van het kijken naar fysieke aspecten van een participatieve ruimte met betrekking tot de ontwikkeling van burgerschap.

We concluderen dat burgers in de maatschappelijke opvang in staat zijn burgerschap te ontwikkelen, doordat ze meer keuzevrijheid hebben, mogelijkheden hebben om met elkaar en met anderen sociale verbindingen aan te gaan en met elkaar democratisch vormgeven aan het beheer van de voorziening. De ontwikkeling van burgerschap wordt mogelijk gemaakt door JES als participatieve ruimte, gefaciliteerd door sociaal werkers en ervaringswerkers. Het is daarom belangrijk om de kwaliteit van de participatieve ruimte te onderzoeken.

## **Begrijpen hoe zelfmanagement als instelling bijdraagt aan empowerment (hoofdstuk 6)**

Empowerment van deelnemers is een fundamenteel doel van zelfgeorganiseerde geestelijke gezondheidszorg en maatschappelijke opvang en van de ervaringswerkers en sociaal werkers die zelfbeheer ondersteunen. In dit laatste empirische hoofdstuk analyseren we hoe een zelfgeorganiseerde setting bijdraagt aan de empowerment van deelnemers.

JES-deelnemers ervoeren keuzevrijheid en invloed op hun leefomgeving. De vloeibare structuur van JES stelde deelnemers in staat het programma aan te passen aan hun wensen en behoeften, hoewel deelnemers soms negatief waren over het moeten samenwonen. De meeste deelnemers hadden een voorkeur voor JES boven reguliere opvangvoorzieningen. In de literatuur over empowerment en zelfgeorganiseerde zorg is vooral aandacht voor capaciteitsontwikkeling, maar deelnemers benadrukten vooral de keuzevrijheid binnen JES. JES bood kansen voor sociale en organisatorische participatie, waardoor deelnemers rollen, vaardigheden en een positiever zelfbeeld ontwikkelden. Een beperkt aantal deelnemers ontwikkelde ook leiderschapsrollen door participatie in de organisatie van zelfbeheer. Theorie over collectief empowerment suggereert dat setting factoren ((bijvoorbeeld grootte van de voorziening, keuzevrijheid) of stimulerend of beperkend werken. Wij vonden dat sommige factoren zowel stimulerend als beperkend kunnen zijn, afhankelijk van individuele kenmerken van deelnemers.

Uit de analyse komen verschillende kernaspecten van JES als empowering setting. Allereerst het faciliteren van individuele keuzevrijheid en het balanceren van die keuzevrijheid met ondersteuning. Daarnaast biedt JES mogelijkheden voor sociale en organisatorische betrokkenheid, vloeibaarheid van de organisatiestructuur. Ook de ondersteuning van sociaal werk en ervaringswerk vanuit een op empowerment gericht normatief kader draagt bij aan JES als empowering-setting.

### **Reflecties op de ‘swampy lowlands’ van participatief actieonderzoek (hoofdstuk 7)**

Tussen de empirische hoofdstukken en de algemene discussie in heb ik een uitgebreide reflectie opgenomen over het ontwerp en de uitvoering van het onderzoek. Het hoofdstuk is gedeeltelijk geschreven vanuit een eerste-persoon perspectief, om recht te doen aan de persoonlijke aard en de onderzoeker als handelende actor

Participatief actieonderzoek (PAR) faciliteert gedeeld leren van belanghebbenden en daarmee empowerment (Abma et al, 2019). Hoewel er steeds meer PAR-projecten zijn, wordt er weinig gepubliceerd over de valkuilen en dilemma's. PAR is, net zoals sociaal werk, een normatieve praktijk en daarom is het belangrijk om te reflecteren op onderliggende waarden en hoe die vorm krijgen in en invloed hebben op het onderzoek. We gebruiken Schöns (1983) concept van ‘swampy lowlands’ (moerassige laaglanden), om na te denken over het uitvoeren van PAR. Moerassige laaglanden zijn plekken waar tegenstrijdigheden en onduidelijkheden dominant zijn en eenduidige richtlijnen te kort schieten. Wij geloven dat die moerassige laaglanden rijk leerpotentieel bieden voor onderzoekers om hun moreel kompas en vakmanschap te ontwikkelen, net zoals dat voor sociaal werkers geldt. Ons doel is om het begrip van complexe situaties te verdiepen en inzichten te bieden om door deze situaties te navigeren.

We beschrijven hoe het onderzoek is ontworpen en uitgevoerd met specifieke aandacht voor de besluitvorming tussen de onderzoeker en JES, en de besluitvorming binnen JES, met een balans tussen democratie, inclusie en lokale impact. We reflecteren op de persoonlijke betrokkenheid van de onderzoeker en delen geleerde lessen voor toekomstig onderzoek.

We zijn kritisch op zowel de rol van onderzoekers als op kwesties die optreden bij het faciliteren van gedeeld leren in moerassige laaglanden, niet om PAR te ontmoedigen, maar omdat we overtuigd zijn van de waarde van normatieve reflectie ten behoeve van het vak van de PAR-onderzoeker, en we hopen dat anderen kunnen leren van onze ervaringen.

## Algemene discussie

De metafoer van zeilen in zelfbeheer kwam naar voren toen wij als onderzoekers samen met sociaal werkers en ervaringswerkers (voormalig deelnemers) van verschillende zelfbeheerprogramma's probeerden te beschrijven hoe zij (sociaal werkers en ervaringswerkers) zelfmanagement faciliteerden en ondersteunden. Elke keuze die ze maakten, maakten ze als reactie op hun analyse van de situatie en wat die situatie het meest ten goede zou komen, gebaseerd op de waarden en principes van zelfbeheer. Ze zeilen in zelfbeheer, proberen te beïnvloeden waar ze kunnen, terwijl ze tegelijk erkennen dat ze slechts een deel zijn van een groter proces. Deelnemers, ervaringswerkers, sociaal werkers en andere betrokkenen zijn voortdurend op zoek naar een evenwicht tussen de verschillende waarden van zelfbeheer en vooral tussen de twee aspecten van empowerment: keuzevrijheid en capaciteitsontwikkeling, zoals beschreven in de vijf empirische hoofdstukken.

In deze studie wil ik begrijpen hoe empowermentprocessen werden vormgegeven en ervaren in JES, om de ervaren vrijheid van deelnemers te bevorderen en de normatieve praktijk van het sociaal werk te verrijken met inzichten vanuit JES. Het gaat sociaal werkers niet alleen om het toepassen van interventies om een bepaald effect te bereiken. In hun werk streven zij naar zaken die zij waardevol vinden, zoals empowerment, inclusie, bestaanszekerheid en democratische besluitvorming. Het werk van sociaal werkers en ervaringswerkers is dan ook te zien als een vorm van normatieve professionaliteit, zowel gebaseerd op waarden, als op het streven die waarden te realiseren (Kunneman, 2017; Van Ewijk, 2010).

In onze studie naar JES hebben we daarom niet slechts gekeken naar de effecten op de deelnemers, maar hebben we ons de vraag gesteld wat waardevol is om na te streven en hoe sociaal werkers daar op een reflexieve wijze mee omgaan. De uitkomsten van onderzoek suggereren dat betrokkenheid bij zelfbeheer de individuele empowerment bevordert en dat de meeste deelnemers JES verkiezen boven reguliere opvangvoorzieningen. JES, vanuit een krachtgerichte orientatie, veronderstelt dat deelnemers in principe

in staat zijn om voor zichzelf te zorgen, wat de meeste deelnemers waardeerden, vooral in tegenstelling tot hun ervaringen in reguliere opvangvoorzieningen. In die reguliere opvangvoorzieningen is de neiging om voor deelnemers te zorgen en voor hen te beslissen.

Een belangrijke bevinding van dit onderzoek is dat mensen die dakloos zijn, samen een opvang kunnen beheren en daarmee keuzevrijheid en capaciteiten ontwikkelen. Deelnemers van JES ervoeren keuzevrijheid en invloed op het programma waarin ze leefden. JES bood kansen voor sociale en organisatorische betrokkenheid, waardoor deelnemers (burgerschap)rollen, vaardigheden en hun zelfbeeld ontwikkelden in samenspraak met elkaar. JES' vloeibare structuur verhinderde rigide hiërarchieën en stelde deelnemers in staat het programma aan te passen aan hun wensen en behoeften. Hoewel de deelnemers op verschillende manieren van JES profiteerden, verkozen de meesten van hen JES boven reguliere opvangvoorzieningen. Sociaal werkers en ervaringswerkers hadden daarbij een belangrijke faciliterende rol.

Met het onderzoek articuleerden wij het dialectische karakter van zelfbeheer, de combinatie van zowel keuzevrijheid als capaciteitsontwikkeling, waarvan zowel deelnemers, ervaringswerkers als sociaal werkers in zelfgeorganiseerde zorg zich bewust moeten zijn. De huidige literatuur over zelfgeorganiseerde zorg richt zich vooral op capaciteitsontwikkeling, terwijl keuzevrijheid voor deelnemers aan JES van even groot of groter belang bleek te zijn. Het belang van keuzevrijheid is in de huidige literatuur over zelfgeorganiseerde zorg niet tot nauwelijks beschreven (Brown, 2012; May et al., 2016; Ostrow & Croft, 2015).

Een nieuw inzicht ten opzichte van bestaande literatuur is dat deelnemers ook kunnen profiteren van zelfgeorganiseerde zorg, althans in het geval van JES, zonder zich bezig te houden met het sociale leven en het zelfbeheer binnen het programma. Onze analyse toont het belang en de mogelijkheid van het bieden van keuzevrijheid aan mensen in een kwetsbare positie. Deze keuzevrijheid is belangrijk voor de empowerment van deelnemers. Conceptueel toont het onderzoek naar JES ook het belang aan van keuzevrijheid als onderdeel van empowerment en de spanning tussen keuzevrijheid en capaciteitsontwikkeling.

Verder onderzoek is nodig naar processen en ervaringen van disempowerment binnen zelfbeheerde programma's en hoe die bijdragen aan relationele rijkheid. In het algemeen is er in zowel praktijk, beleid als onderzoek meer aandacht nodig voor de dialectische relatie tussen eigen regie en ontwikkeling van krachten, beperkingen aan empowerment in mensen en gemeenschappen en het erkennen van disempowerment, zowel op zichzelf en als een bron van relationele rijkheid.

In institutionele vormen van zelfgeorganiseerde zorg is aandacht nodig voor stimulerende en belemmerende invloeden van de institutionele omgeving. Er is ook meer aandacht nodig voor de interactie tussen persoonlijke factoren en setting factoren die empowerment beïnvloeden. Stimulerende en beperkende factoren zijn minder eenduidig dan

soms in de literatuur wordt voorgesteld, factoren die voor ene deelnemer beperkend zijn, kunnen voor een andere deelnemer juist stimulerend zijn. JES als bijzondere case toont de robuustheid van de institutionele theorie en van institutionele zorgprocessen, zoals de discussies over regels en hiërarchie laten zien. Tegelijkertijd toont dit onderzoek aan dat empowerment binnen een institutionele setting mogelijk is door de invoering van keuzevrijheid en vloeibare structuren.

Sociaal werkers en ervaringswerkers kunnen een belangrijke rol spelen bij het faciliteren van empowerment in zelfgeorganiseerde zorg. Zo laat het onderzoek naar JES zien dat empowerment geen zero-sum is waarbij meer inzet van sociaal werkers automatisch leidt tot minder empowerment. Sociaal werkers en ervaringswerkers kunnen deelnemers helpen om te gaan met de ervaren spanning tussen keuzevrijheid en capaciteitsontwikkeling, tussen de spanning van samen beheren en eigen keuzes maken. Sociaal werkers en ervaringswerkers zorgen dat zelfbeheer niet strand, maar al zeilend verder gaat, op maat van elke bewoner die zijn eigen koers wil varen.

Als concept daagt JES, door haar collectieve aanpak van het probleem van dakloosheid, de dominantie van de individuele focus in de maatschappelijke opvang uit. Tegelijkertijd benadrukken deelnemers een individualistische benadering, waarbij hun problemen van hen zijn en niet collectief mogen worden gemaakt, bijvoorbeeld door ze te delen tijdens vergaderingen. Sociaal werkers en ervaringswerkers benadrukken het belang van relationeel en democratisch burgerschap, in de vorm van het aangaan van verbindingen met elkaar en het samen besluiten nemen. Daarbij wegen sociaal werkers hun eigen normatief kader met die van deelnemers.

JES bood de deelnemers de kans om democratisch burgerschap te ontwikkelen, gefaciliteerd door sociaal werkers en ervaringswerkers. Het samen beheren van een opvang en tegelijkertijd werken aan eigen individuele problemen is een prestatie op zich. De individuele empowerment van de deelnemers van JES, vooral hun keuzevrijheid, lijkt de collectieve empowerment van JES te beperken, doordat deelnemers ook kunnen kiezen om niet aan het collectief bij te dragen. Aan de andere kant ontwikkelden sommige deelnemers hun individuele empowerment juist door hun inzet voor collectief empowerment.

Bijna alle deelnemers beschreven verschillende praktische voordelen die ze ervoeren en waardeerden (in verschillende mate), zoals stabiel onderdak, toegang tot eten, drinken, sanitair, telefoon en computer. Deze praktische voordelen ontbreken vaak in reguliere opvangvoorzieningen, hoewel ze daar ook kunnen worden geboden. Voor de meeste deelnemers was deze praktische opbrengst een belangrijke motivatie voor toetreding tot JES. Deze praktische voordelen zijn niet beschreven in de literatuur over zelfgeorganiseerde zorg, hoewel ze een belangrijke bijdrage leveren aan herstel van bestaanszekerheid.

JES maakt deel uit van een reguliere zorgorganisatie. In de loop der jaren heeft JES een vrij hoog niveau van autonomie ontwikkeld (in vergelijking met reguliere programma's), terwijl de organisatie functioneert als een hitteschild voor druk van buitenaf. Dat neemt niet weg dat JES beperkt wordt door de individuele en probleemgeoriënteerde focus van financiering van ondersteuningstrajecten in de maatschappelijke opvang. JES is al vele jaren in staat om aan de rand van het opvangsysteem te opereren, maar heeft de afgelopen jaren enige autonomie overgedragen aan de gemeente, met betrekking tot wie wel en niet bij JES mag wonen. Volgens de betrokkenen zou JES beter gedijen zonder deze regelgeving, hoewel JES dan niet in staat zou zijn om overheidsfinanciering te krijgen. Het vormen van een organisatie gericht op ondersteuning bij het verkrijgen en verantwoorden van subsidie en het waarborgen van veiligheids- en kwaliteitseisen, samen met andere zelfbeheerde programma's, kan nuttig zijn, weten we uit de Verenigde Staten (Brown, 2012).

Toekomstig onderzoek kan zich richten op zowel de werking van zelfbeheer, als individuele ervaringen, micro-sociologische en collectieve-empowerment processen en de organisatorische en maatschappelijke context. Voor al deze thema's moet gekeken worden naar de gevolgen voor deelnemers, ervaringswerkers en sociaal werkers.

In mijn onderzoek bleek PAR een vruchtbare benadering om relationele complexiteit aan te gaan, waardoor ik inzichten heb gekregen die ik niet vanuit een theoretisch afstandelijk perspectief had gekregen. Tegelijkertijd is het nodig dat er meer methodologische reflectie en ontwikkeling plaatsvindt om relationele complexiteit binnen PAR projecten te begrijpen.

### **Tot slot**

Hoewel JES niet alles was voor iedereen, was JES veel dingen voor veel mensen, door praktische voordelen, keuzevrijheid en mogelijkheden voor capaciteitsontwikkeling aan te bieden. De intrinsieke tegenstellingen van JES dwingen deelnemers, ervaringswerkers, sociaal werkers en andere betrokkenen om zelfbeheer voortdurend te heroverwegen. Ik ben telkens verbaasd over de kracht van groepen deelnemers om zichzelf opnieuw uit te vinden, opnieuw te beginnen en nieuwe manieren te vinden om om te gaan met de uitdagingen en kansen die worden geboden. JES blijft een voorziening met veel leerpotentie, voor empowerment van deelnemers, voor (normatieve) professionalisering van ervaringswerkers en sociaal werkers en voor allen die geïnteresseerd zijn in het organiseren van empowerment processen.

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## Biography

Max was born in Amsterdam (in 1985) and raised in a small village outside of Amsterdam. He attended, and dropped out of, several high schools. After finishing high school, he moved back to Amsterdam, to obtain a bachelor in social work and a master in sociology (track: social problems and social interventions). During and after his studies he worked as a social worker, with various at risk groups.

After finishing his bachelor he was asked to become a researcher in training at the research group 'Outreach work & Innovation' (in 2016 renamed to 'Urban social work'), part of the Amsterdam university of applied sciences. There he started his studies into JES and other self-managed programs. He also studied community outreach teams, community organizing, community integration of at risk groups, recovery support and peer work. He is particularly interested in how individuals and groups define, experience and develop empowerment. His own lived experiences with vulnerabilities and using mental health support, his own education and work as a social worker and his role as researcher both inspired and forced his interest in how lived experience, tacit social work experience and scientific knowledge relate to each other.

Since 2011 he increasingly became involved as a lecturer with the bachelor program of social work. He gave guest lectures on various subjects and developed and taught programs on research in and on social work. He worked on developing collaboration between practice, educational programs and research. He played an active role in the development of a new curriculum for the bachelor social work, specifically through organizing programs where practitioners, citizens, students, teachers and researchers collaborate on grand challenges for social work.

On the various subjects he is interested in, he regularly gives talks and workshops, both invited and at various national and international conferences. He organized various smaller and larger meetings and conferences, including a two day international conference on 'Ending homelessness' and instigated a 'stories from the street' project, enabling people who had been or were homeless to tell their stories.

Interested in the roots of both the recovery movement and grass roots self-organized care, Max organized various study trips with teachers, professionals, researchers and peer workers to the United States. They visited innovative programs on self-organized care, progressive care providers and universities and met with peer workers, innovators, people with lived experience, researchers and policy consultants. These study trips influenced various of his project, most prominently, the start of the respijthuis Amerbos, a respite program.

Besides his work at the university he was involved with the 'Eropaf' foundation, where he organized fundraising for both the foundation in general and a support line for people at risk of evictions. He also worked as a client advocate for people experiencing homelessness and/or mental health problems. He is currently on the board of a client advocacy organization called 'de Daklozenverbond' (the homeless union).

In 2019 Max joined HVO-Querido, a large organization for homeless and mental health care. He previously worked with this organization on JES, recovery support and the development of a respite program. Together with a colleague he runs the research department and he is developing a center of expertise on self-management, together with self-managed programs.

Max is married and has three children. Together they enjoy gardening, carpentering, swimming, nature, traveling, cooking and art (in all forms).

## Biografie

Max is geboren in Amsterdam (in 1985) en opgegroeid in een klein dorpje buiten Amsterdam. Hij bezocht, en verliet, meerdere middelbare scholen. Na het behalen van een HAVO diploma verhuisde hij terug naar Amsterdam. Daar studeerde hij Maatschappelijk werk en dienstverlening (bachelor, aan de Hogeschool van Amsterdam) en Sociologie, specialisatie 'social problems and social interventions' (master, aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam). Tijdens en na zijn studie werkte hij als sociaal werker met verschillende doelgroepen.

Na het behalen van zijn bachelor werd hij gevraagd om als 'hogeschool onderzoeker in opleiding' te komen werken bij het lectoraat 'Outreaching werken en innovatie' (in 2016 hernoemd tot 'Stedelijk sociaal werken'), onderdeel van de Hogeschool van Amsterdam. Daar deed hij onderzoek naar JES en andere zelfbeheerde programma's, naast onderzoek naar wijkteams, opbouwwerk, sociale inclusie van kwetsbare groepen, herstel ondersteuning en ervaringsdeskundigheid. Hij is specifiek geïnteresseerd in hoe individuen en groepen empowerment definiëren, ervaren en ontwikkelen. Zijn eigen ervaringen met kwetsbaarheid en het gebruik van geestelijke gezondheidszorg, zijn eigen opleiding en werk als sociaal werker en zijn rol als onderzoeker inspireren en stimuleren zijn interesse in de combinatie van ervaringskennis, professionele handelingskennis en wetenschappelijke kennis.

Sinds 2011 is hij steeds actiever geworden als docent bij de bachelor social work. Hij gaf gastlessen over diverse onderwerpen en ontwierp en gaf programma's over onderzoek in en met sociaal werk. Hij werkte aan de ontwikkeling van samenwerking tussen praktijk, onderwijs en onderzoek. Hij speelde een actieve rol in de ontwikkeling van een nieuwe bachelor social work, specifiek door het organiseren van een programma waarin professionals, burgers, studenten, docenten en onderzoekers samen werken aan grote uitdagingen voor het sociaal werk.

Over de verschillende onderwerpen waar hij aan werkt geeft hij regelmatig lezingen en workshops, zowel op uitnodiging als tijdens diverse nationale en internationale conferenties. Hij organiseerde ook zelf verschillende kleinere en grotere bijeenkomsten en conferenties, inclusief een tweedaagse internationale conferentie over 'Ending homelessness'. Hij stond ook aan de wieg van het 'Verhalen van de straat' project, waarbinnen mensen die dakloos waren hun verhaal konden vertellen.

Vanuit zijn interesse in de wortels van de herstelbeweging en zelforganisatie heeft Max verschillende studie reizen georganiseerd naar Amerika voor en met docenten, professionals, onderzoekers en ervaringsdeskundigen. Ze bezochten innovatieve programma's gericht op zelforganisatie, progressieve zorgorganisaties en universiteiten en ontmoeten ervaringsdeskundigen, innovators, onderzoekers en beleidsadviseurs. Deze studiereizen beïnvloedden verschillende projecten waar hij bij betrokken was en legde de basis voor het respijthuis Amerbos in Amsterdam.

Naast zijn werk aan de Hogeschool van Amsterdam was hij een tijd betrokken bij de stichting Eropaf!, waar hij onder andere werkte aan fondsenwerving en een steunpunt voor mensen die met huisuitzetting bedreigd werden. Hij werkte ook als belangenbehartiger voor mensen die dakloos waren en / of geestelijke gezondheidszorg gebruikte. Hij is nu bestuurder bij de Daklozenvakbond.

In 2019 ging Max werken bij HVO-Querido, een grote organisatie voor maatschappelijke opvang en begeleid wonen. Hij werkte al eerder met deze organisatie voor zijn onderzoek naar JES, herstelondersteuning en een respijthuis. Samen met een collega geeft hij leiding aan een onderzoeksbureau. Bij HVO-Querido werkt hij ook aan het opzetten van een expertisecentrum rondom zelfbeheer, samen met JES en andere zelfbeheerde voorzieningen.

Max is getrouwd en heeft drie kinderen. Samen genieten zij van tuinieren, timmeren, zwemmen, natuur, reizen, koken en kunst (in alle vormen).

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Ten years ago, Je Eigen Stek (Your Own Place, JES) started as a grass roots initiative from people who were homeless. The initiators did not want to be homeless anymore, including the extreme forms of existential insecurity that is part of being homeless. They did not have a place in regular shelters, both literally and figuratively. Literally, because there was a shortage in beds, especially for people with severe psychiatric or substance abuse issues. Figuratively, they felt there was little room to end their homelessness in their own way, making their own choices and employing their own capacities. Therefore, they started their own self-managed shelter, facilitated by social workers and HVO-Querido, a homeless care provider. JES is founded on the premise that regular shelters offer too little freedom of choice and that homeless people are better able to manage a shelter themselves. Over the last ten years, Max Huber has studied this premise, together with JES and others. He spoke with participants, peer workers, social workers and other stakeholders and organized focus groups, observations and participatory action research. In this thesis, he described the results from this engaged research.

While JES was not all things, for all men, JES was many things for many people, by offering practical benefits, freedom of choice and opportunities for capacity development. JES' intrinsic contradictions force participants, peer workers, social workers and others involved to rethink self-management continuously. The power of groups of participants to reinvent themselves, start over and find new ways to deal with the challenges and opportunities offered, is a constant source of amazement for others involved. JES remains a case with a great deal of learning potential, for empowerment of participants, for (normative) professionalization of social workers and peer workers and for all those interested in the organization of empowerment processes.