

LIFE ON HOLD?

Experiences of Liminality and Personal Development of Asylum-Seekers in Rural, Shrinking Areas in the Netherlands

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ABSTRACT

In the Netherlands, asylum-seekers reside in segregated centers called AZCs, where they are subject to a highly regulated living environment with little rights and many restrictions. This places them in between their former life in the country of origin and their future life in the Netherlands. This in-betweenness is also called *liminality*. While staying in the AZC, there are not many opportunities to develop oneself. As AZCs are often located in rural areas, the restrictions on personal development can even be exacerbated.

This research was designed to investigate how the concept of liminality influences the experience of personal development amongst asylum-seekers in rural, shrinking areas of the Netherlands. In doing so, this research sheds light on a currently underrepresented topic, by connecting liminality with meaningful personal development experiences of asylum-seekers. By applying a qualitative research approach that combines in-depth interviewing with participant photography and secondary data analysis, experiences of personal development amongst asylum-seekers (or *AZC-residents*) are investigated. This thesis clearly shows a contrast in the experience of personal development amongst asylum-seekers, as liminality both constrains and enables asylum-seekers to experience personal development while living in an AZC. A liminal position constrains personal development due to legal restrictions, unavailability of activities and geographical distance, while simultaneously creating space for meaningful practices and reconsideration of life-goals, amongst others.

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With this thesis, the Master International Development Studies comes to an end for me. This research period has allowed me to engage with many interesting people and helped me understand a very specific state of being, namely liminality.

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NB: I asked every (former) AZC-resident to summarize our conversation about personal development in three words. These words are shown in the word cloud at the frontpage. It highlights the personal development of AZC-residents that participated in this research in a nutshell.

Finally, I would like to thank my supervisor Jana Finke for her helpful feedback, thoughts and guidance throughout this thesis process. I also want to thank my IDS colleague Liza for providing me with refreshing insights, feedback and support when I most needed it. Thank you both, I appreciated it!

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Abbreviation</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Translation (if needed)</i>
AZC	Asielzoekerscentrum	Reception center
COA	Centraal Orgaan opvang Asielzoekers	Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum-Seekers
GZA	Gezondheidszorg Asielzoekers	Healthcare Asylum-Seekers
IND	Immigratie en Naturalisatiedienst	Immigration and Naturalisation Services
LGBTI+ community	refers to people outside the scope of heteronormativity such as lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgenders and intersex persons and others	
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization	
SDT	Self-Determination Theory	

1. INTRODUCTION

I think personal growth, adaption and strength describes the majority of people living here. From the kids to the oldest person.

- Robert, AZC-resident from Nicaragua

Throughout our lives, we grow as individuals. We learn how to deal with new situations and we acquire skills that we can use in both our personal and professional life. This growth can also be referred to as *personal development*. But how do you experience personal development when you are an asylum-seeker living in an asylum center in a rural, shrinking area in the Netherlands? This thesis will focus on that question, and as will become clear, growth, adaptation and strength, as mentioned in Robert's quote are keywords when it comes down to personal development of asylum-seekers. In this thesis, personal development is understood as *"Becoming better in a personally meaningful way through the growth or improvement of one's qualities and abilities, that enhance the quality of life and contribute to the realization of dreams and aspirations"* (inspired on: American Psychological Association, 2020; Cambridge Dictionary, 2021; Vittersø 2014).

Asylum-seekers are individuals who have come to a country in search of protection, but whose claim on asylum is not yet granted (Parker, 2020). In the Netherlands, asylum-seekers reside in reception centers called AZCs that are managed by the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum-Seekers, the COA. In general, the presence of migrants in urban areas is more frequently researched than the presence of migrants in rural regions (van Liempt & Miellet, 2020). However, AZCs are often located in remote or rural areas (Bakker, Cheung, & Phillimore, 2016; Damen, Dagevos, & Huijnk, 2021; Grzymala-Kazłowska & Phillimore, 2018; Kloosterboer, 2009). In the context of the Netherlands, a rural area is mostly considered to be a spacious place with agriculture, grasslands, forests and small villages (Haartsen, Huigen, & Groote, 2003). In some rural areas, population decline leads to shrinkage processes, whereby more people leave than settle in the area (Hospers, 2012). The location of AZCs in rural areas may mean that little recreational activities are available and leads to a lack of interaction between asylum-seekers and natives, which refrains asylum-seekers from creating a network that fosters

social and economic opportunities (Damen, Dagevos, & Huijnk, 2021; Kloosterboer, 2009; Larsen, 2011). This may be exacerbated in shrinking areas, as facilities diminish there (CBS, 2019).

Little is known about how asylum-seekers experience their personal development. Regarding personal development of asylum-seekers mostly some kind of integration theory is applied, for example described in terms of labour market potential and (economic) integration (Bakker, Cheung, & Phillimore, 2016; Grzymala-Kazłowska & Phillimore, 2018; Schapendonk, Bolay, & Dahind, 2020; Van Heelsum, 2017). Integration is one of the most prevalent concepts in academics and migration policies, whereby the perspective of the receiving countries seems to be dominant (Grzymala-Kazłowska & Phillimore, 2018; Van Heelsum, 2017; Schapendonk, Bolay, & Dahind, 2020). One of these dominant perspectives is the threat asylum-seekers pose to the receiving country due to failing integration, which leads to eroding norms and values and financial burdens, according to the Dutch government (ACVZ, 2018). Restrictive policies are therefore at play in the Netherlands (Mattei & Broeks, 2016), whereby asylum-seekers are seen as undeserving migrants that come to the Netherlands to profit economically (Bonjour & Duyvendak, 2018; Mavroudi & Nagel, 2016).

The Dutch government states since recently that integration ‘cannot begin early enough’, as quick integration of asylum-seekers is of uttermost importance. This integration is preferably achieved through language-learning and paid labour (Rijksoverheid, n.d.-A).

Even though the Dutch government wants rapid integration, integration of asylum-seekers mostly takes place after having received a refugee status, since asylum-seekers are living in a highly regulated environment, and are mostly not permitted to conduct activities that normally would lead to personal development, such as studying or working full-time (Alencar & Tsagkroni, 2019; Bakker, Dagevos, & Engbersen, 2017; Damen, Dagevos, & Huijnk, 2021; Van Heelsum, 2017). This leads to the description of AZCs as places where people become bored, passive and hopeless (Damen, Dagevos, & Huijnk, 2021; Larruina & Ghorashi, 2016). It is known however, that the first few years in a new country, are crucial for successful integration (Damen, Dagevos & Huijnk, 2021; Phillimore, 2011; Walther et al., 2019) and for personal future success (Damen, Dagevos, & Huijnk, 2021; Ghorashi, 2005). As asylum-seekers sometimes spent years

in the AZC (VluchtelingenWerk Nederland, n.d.-A), it is relevant to investigate how they meaningfully give substance to these essential first few years.

Reflecting the demands of the asylum process, wherein asylum-seekers have to prove that they are deserving of their stay, stereotyping of asylum-seekers as 'tellers of sad stories' occurs in academics (Forkert, Oliveri, Bhattacharyya, & Graham, 2018). Therefore, Forkert, Oliveri, Bhattacharyya and Graham (2018) describe the need of learning to hear differently. Hereby researchers can focus on characteristics of asylum-seekers such as faith or self-organization to counter stereotyping of this group in research (Forkert, Oliveri, Bhattacharyya, & Graham, 2018).

Personal development is crucial for the well-being of individuals (Ryff, 1989), especially for asylum-seekers who find themselves in an insecure position and wonder what will become of them (Ghorashi, 2005). It should be noted that asylum-seekers can be subject to physical and psychological effects of their flight, that influence their well-being and personal development. Think for example of traumas or post-migration stressors such as living in a highly-regulated environment (Damen, Dagevos, & Huijnk, 2021). However, it is not uncommon for personal development to occur after a stressful life event, as new opportunities, aspirations, hopes and personal growth arises (Park & Al, 2006). This growth can either be profound, such as reconsidering priorities and life goals, but it can also be more low-key, such as taking better care of oneself, engaging in spirituality or learning new things (Park & Al, 2006; Park, 2010). Personal development is also closely linked to Self-Determination; a concept that refers to the degree to which someone is in charge of one's own life (Ryan & Deci, 2000). For asylum-seekers, being in control of their own life is challenging (O'Reilly, 2018). For example, because bureaucracies concerning asylum applications can take a long time. This subjects asylum-seekers to a long period of suspense and uncertainty in which they find it difficult to invest in themselves or make progress for their future (Anderson, 2019; VluchtelingenWerk Nederland, n.d.-A). In this sense, Anderson (2019) notes, "immigration status matters", since it has severe impacts on someone's life. The condition of asylum-seekers is also described as 'being on the threshold' or in-between structures. They are not present in their country of origin anymore, nor are they officially part of the Dutch society yet, until their asylum procedure is finished (Damen, Dagevos, & Huijnk, 2021; Ghorashi, De Boer, & Ten Holder, 2018). This state of being

is also known as *liminality* (Ghorashi, De Boer, & Ten Holder, 2018). Now, during the COVID-pandemic, asylum procedures have been extended with 6 months due to corona measures (IND, 2020). This means that people awaiting their procedure are even longer subject to a state of liminality. Possibly this also has consequences for personal development.

Objective of the thesis

The literature review provided above highlights a void in the literature regarding asylum-seekers in rural areas and shows that a bottom-up approach on personal development of asylum-seekers in the Netherlands is currently underrepresented.

Therefore, research on the spatial conditions that either foster or undermine personal development has both academic and empirical significance as it contributes to knowledge about human behavior, but also to knowledge about the social and geographical environment that can optimize personal development and well-being.

This thesis aims to contribute to literature about asylum-seekers in rural areas and their personal development experiences beyond (economic) integration. This is done by means of the following research question:

How does liminality shape the experience of personal development amongst AZC-residents in rural, shrinking areas in the Netherlands?

Outline

The thesis is based on the concept of liminality and the Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), which will be explained in the Theoretical Framework. The approach for this thesis is to co-construct knowledge with asylum-seekers living in AZCs in rural, shrinking areas in the Netherlands, through interviews and participant photography. Also, the perspective of relevant organizations involved in the personal development of asylum-seekers will be taken into account. Findings of the collected data will be elaborated on in the analysis, which covers 4 themes: (1) the local context and liminality; (2) preconditions of self-determination; (3) self-determined practices, and; (4) liminality and aspirations.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In order to investigate the personal development of asylum-seekers in the Netherlands, it is important to understand the concepts that apply to this. Therefore, the theoretical framework first focusses on the concept of liminality and the local context of AZCs. After that, the preconditional needs for personal development are described through an elaboration of the *Self-Determination Theory*. Finally, the theoretical framework briefly touches upon what is known about personal development practices and aspirations of asylum-seekers in the Netherlands. The theoretical framework is then followed by the conceptual model.

DEFINING PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Personal development may evoke many meanings. According to Sen (1999), development is that what contributes to “living the life one has reason to value”. This can differ per individual. Therefore, in this research, personal development can be defined as: *“Becoming better in a personally meaningful way through the growth or improvement of one’s qualities and abilities, that enhance the quality of life and contribute to the realization of dreams and aspirations”* (inspired on: American Psychological Association, 2020; Cambridge Dictionary, 2021; Vittersø 2014).

LIMINALITY AND LOCAL CONTEXT

As asylum-seekers in the Netherlands live in a specific structure and are subject to rules and regulations, this has influence on their personal development. This section will explain how the concept of liminality and the local context are linked.

THE CONCEPT OF LIMINALITY

Asylum-seekers in the Netherlands are living in shelters (AZCs) that are often located in rural areas (Bakker, Cheung, & Phillimore, 2016; Damen, Dagevos, & Huijnk, 2021; Grzymala-Kazłowska & Phillimore, 2018; Kloosterboer, 2009). As mentioned before, residing in the AZC is like standing on a threshold, between one’s old and new life: a state of ‘in-betweenness’

whereby asylum-seekers are “cut off from the past, unsettled in the present and unsure of the future” (Ghorashi, 2005, p. 182). This state is also referred to as liminality (Ghorashi, De Boer, & Ten Holder, 2018). According to Turner (1967), liminality can be characterized by certain aspects. For example, the individual that is subject to liminality, is socially or even physically invisible, and has little or no rights. Moreover, liminality is described as a phase of reflection upon oneself and the society (Turner, 1967).

This phase of reflection can be seen as a disruption of one’s sense of self and one’s place in society and may therefore lead to identity reconstruction in a meaningful way (Beech, 2011; Ghorashi, 2005). Additionally, Stenner (2017) describes liminal experiences as a starting point from where one can take new directions in life. Think for example of redirecting life goals.

Liminality and asylum-seekers

For asylum-seekers, liminality is policy-imposed (Parker, 2020). Migration policies that lead to placement of asylum-seekers in remote centers such as AZCs subject asylum-seekers to liminality in at least three ways (O’Reilly, 2018). To start with, liminality occurs in terms of *geographical location* as reception centers are often segregated places. On that note, Diken (2004) has referred to AZCs as ‘non-places’, because they are physically segregated from the Dutch society. Next, liminality occurs in terms of *status*: not having a legal status leads to less rights (O’Reilly, 2018; Turner, 1967). Asylum-seekers in the Netherlands have for example limited access to study or work facilities (Alencar & Tsagkroni, 2019; Damen, Dagevos, & Huijnk, 2021; Van Heelsum, 2017). Damen, Dagevos and Huijnk (2021) therefore also describe liminality as a ‘stand-by situation’. The lack of status has been linked to feelings of insecurity, as all some AZC-residents can think of is their immigration status (Ghorashi, De Boer, & Ten Holder, 2018). Last, liminality arises in terms of *time* as waiting in the AZC on a decision on the asylum claim can take up to years (VluchtelingenWerk Nederland, n.d.-A). In this liminal position, asylum-seekers are subject to a long period of suspense and uncertainty. During this time, it can be hard to invest in oneself or orientate on the future (Anderson, 2019; VluchtelingenWerk Nederland, n.d.-A) Moreover, it is known that a lengthy asylum procedure reduces well-being and leads to a more passive attitude amongst asylum-seekers (Bakker, Dagevos, & Engbersen, 2017; Damen, Dagevos, & Huijnk, 2021; Laban, Komproe, Gernaat, & De Jong, 2008).

Liminality applies to asylum-seekers in multiple ways. The concept of liminality helps understand AZC-residents' challenges more in-depth when turning to personal development. As rural areas generally have little facilities and these facilities may disappear due to shrinkage processes (CBS, 2019), the placement of AZCs in the context of rurality and shrinkage might pose even more challenges in personal development for asylum-seekers, due to the distance to the local community and the availability or absence of personal development activities provided.

PRECONDITIONAL NEEDS FOR PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Before personal development can take place, there are needs that have to be satisfied. In *a Theory of Human Motivation*, Maslow (1943) describes what basic human needs need to be fulfilled in order to be able to fulfill other, more advanced needs, such as personal development. At the base of all needs are physiological needs such as nutrition, water, shelter or clothes. Subsequently this is followed by safety and security, including health, property, family and social stability. After that, the needs love and belonging, self-esteem and self-actualization follow (Maslow, 1943). The latter, self-actualization, refers to becoming the *best one can become* and is strongly related to well-being and personal development (Kaufman, 2018).

The Self-Determination Theory (SDT) of Ryan & Deci (2000) is inspired on a Theory of Human Motivation and focuses in-depth on the science of well-being and personal development. Self-determination can best be understood as “the process by which a person controls their own life” (Lexico, 2021a). The SDT is an approach to human motivation and personality that highlights the importance of one's abilities for personal development, self-regulation and well-being (Kaufman, 2018). The SDT investigates individuals' inherent growth-tendencies and describes the corresponding psychological needs that are at the base of self-determined personal development. These are: *autonomy, competence and relatedness*. These needs were derived from studies of well-being such as the Model of Psychological Well-Being of Ryff (1989), wherein the concept of self-determination is also described as an important dimension of well-being, along with relatedness and autonomy. Therefore, it can be said that personal

development is not only a matter of growth, but also intrinsically linked to the well-being of individuals.

AUTONOMY, COMPETENCE AND RELATEDNESS

According to the SDT these preconditional needs autonomy, competence and relatedness need to be met to let intrinsic motivation and well-being of individuals flourish (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000). But what do these concepts mean?

Autonomy is the desire to self-organize experience and behavior. It also refers to the subjective experience of psychological freedoms (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Bate, 2017). For example, autonomy is having a sense of control over goals and the actions that lead to achievement of these goals (Cherry, 2021). Next, *competence* refers to the desire to feel effective within the environment. For example, by testing and expanding skills (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Lastly, *relatedness* refers to the desire to feel connected to others, and to give and receive mutual care (Deci & Ryan, 2000). For instance, building a social network and having friendships, leads to a sense of belonging and the feeling of being valued by others (Cherry, 2021; Niemiec & Ryan, 2009).

Meeting autonomy, competence and relatedness

According to the Self-Determination Theory, people strive for development and are proactive. However, to attain this development, positive support from the environment is needed. Intrinsic motivational tendencies, for example to conduct self-determined activities that enhance personal development, require supportive conditions in which the needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness are met. If the needs are thwarted, the motivational tendencies are disrupted and passivity and demotivation takes place. This happens for example in nonnurturing schools or homes (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Adams, Little, & Ryan, 2017). In other words: personal development and Self-Determination can flourish if the circumstances allow it to. However, the degree to which people experience the satisfaction of these needs, differs. It is the dynamics between people's subjective experience and social contexts that either fulfills or frustrates the needs (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Turning to personal development of asylum-seekers, it can be stated that AZC are highly regulated environments, that are often located in rurality (Damen, Dagevos, & Huijnk, 2021). It

is this local context, the AZC in a rural location as place of residence, as well as the rules and regulations that apply to asylum-seekers, that can either satisfy or frustrate the needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness.

SELF-DETERMINED PRACTICES OF ASYLUM-SEEKERS

How and whether the preconditional needs for self-determination are met, influences the degree to which asylum-seekers can self-determine what steps they take to achieve personal development. As asylum-seekers find themselves in a liminal position, rules and regulations restrict them from conducting certain personal development practices such as studying or expanding professional skills through proceeding their careers (Alencar & Tsagkroni, 2019; Damen, Dagevos, & Huijnk, 2021; Van Heelsum, 2017), thus impacting the need of competence negatively. As stated by Adams, Little and Ryan (2017), not meeting the needs for self-determination leads to demotivation. A phenomenon that has been described regarding asylum-seekers in terms of passivity and boredom (Damen, Dagevos, & Huijnk, 2021; Larruina & Ghorashi, 2016; Strijk, Van Meijel, & Gamel, 2011). However, for asylum-seekers, it is especially important to engage in activities as this contributes to a sense of self-confidence, competence and control over one's life, which may break this passivity (Bakker, Dagevos, & Engbersen, 2017; Damen, Dagevos, & Huijnk, 2021; Ghorashi, 2005). Activities can for instance be provided in the AZC by the COA. However, Strijk, Van Meijel and Gamel (2011) have reported that needs of asylum-seekers regarding day time activities are not met in AZCs. This necessitates self-determined activities of asylum-seekers, may they want to develop themselves.

In research of Ghorashi, De Boer and Ten Holder (2018), it is shown that the time in the AZC is filled by asylum-seekers with meaningful choices they can make within the structure of liminality, such as changing one's religion or exploring a new place. In other words, given the constraints, alternative forms of agency shape personal development of asylum-seekers. Hereby Ghorashi, De Boer and Ten Holder (2018) mention it is important to understand that both structure and agency influence the opportunities for personal development while living in an AZC. Structure being the AZC, migration policies and restrictions, whereas agency refers to the capacity to be reflective about the situation one is living in. For asylum-seekers this means

acting in the way the asylum-system allows them to. For example, in autonomously conducting activities that enhance personal development.

ASPIRATIONS OF ASYLUM-SEEKERS

An important aspect linked to personal development is the realizations of aspirations. When residing in an AZC, asylum-seekers already coordinate on their future (Koikkalainen, Kyle, & Nykänen, 2019). Aspirations can be seen as “a hope or ambition of achieving something” (Lexico, 2021b). Van Meeteren (2012) mentions how aspirations form a conceptual bridge between structure and agency, as the achievement of aspirations depends on both. Little is known about future aspirations of asylum-seekers. However, it is known that asylum-seekers desire a ‘normal life’ (Strijk, Van Meijel, & Gamel, 2011). Also, expectations of the reception period and aspirations regarding paid employment and study during the time in the AZC are not met (Van Heelsum, 2017). Furthermore, Ghorashi, De Boer and Ten Holder (2018) have reported on future aspirations of asylum-seekers that are considered unfeasible, such as becoming a professional football player or nobel prize winner.

Given the fact that liminality is also described as a phase of reflection, wherein new directions in life are turned to (Turner, 1967; Stenner, 2017), the liminal structure asylum-seekers find themselves in may possibly have influence on their aspirations.

CONCLUDING REMARK

Liminality, the placement of the AZC, the satisfaction of autonomy, competence and relatedness and the self-determined practices of asylum-seekers to achieve their aspirations all play an important role in the personal development of asylum-seekers in rural, shrinking areas in the Netherlands.

The next section provides a conceptual framework that explains how the most important concepts of the theoretical framework relate to one another.

3. CONCEPTUAL MODEL, RESEARCH OBJECTIVE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The conceptual model below shows how personal development for AZC-residents may take place in rural, shrinking areas in the Netherlands.

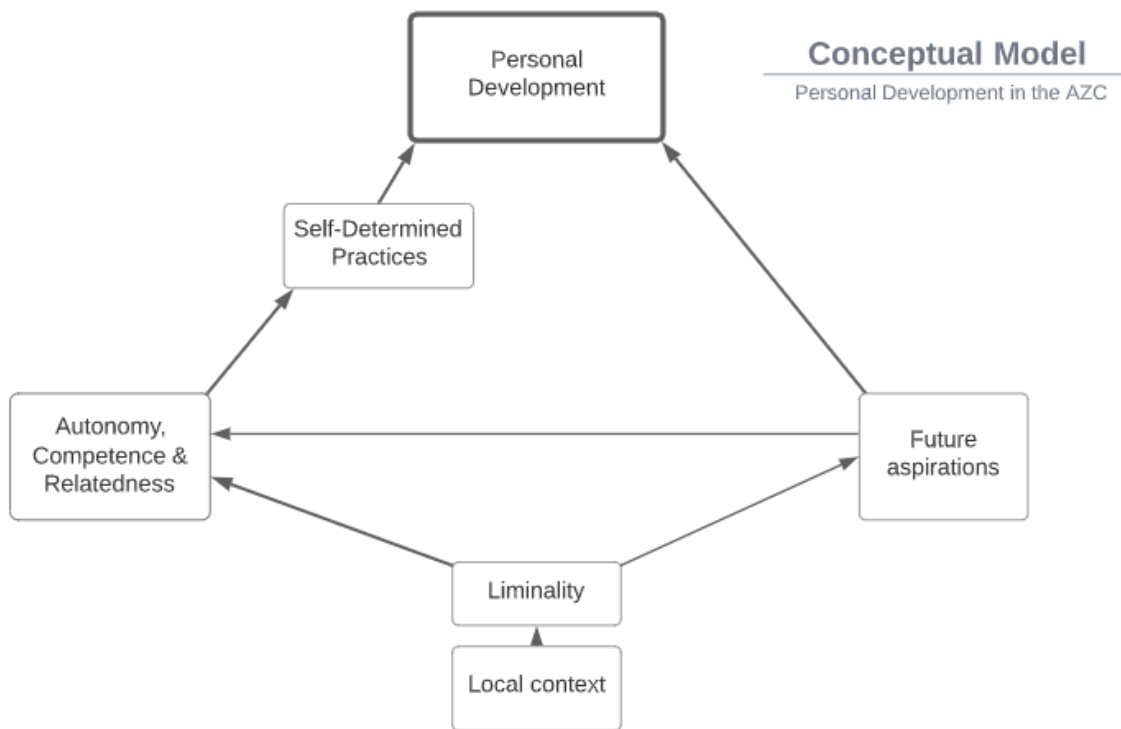


Figure 1: Conceptual model

Personal development of AZC-residents might be influenced by the local context which entails the location of the AZC including aspects of rurality and shrinkage processes. The local context also entails migration policies that apply to asylum-seekers. In general, asylum-seekers find themselves in a liminal position due to a geographical segregated location, lack of legal status and waiting time (O'Reilly, 2018). Through the geographical location of AZCs in rurality and shrinkage, the liminal position may be reinforced. For example, due to absence of activities. The local context and liminality therefore lay close to each other in the conceptual model and together they influence the preconditional needs of the Self-Determination Theory and aspirations.

The degree to which the preconditional needs autonomy, competence and relatedness of the Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) are satisfied, determines to what extent self-

determined practices can take place. Self-determined actions can be seen as the important actions or choices an AZC-resident makes to achieve personal development.

Lastly, liminality can also influence aspirations for the future. Liminality is known as a period of reflection and can lead to new directions in life (Turner, 1967; Stenner, 2017), this means that a liminal position may lead to reconsideration of aspirations. Whether and how an asylum-seeker can already proactively work on these aspirations while residing in the AZC, again depends on the satisfaction of autonomy, competence and relatedness.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

By using the different concepts and theories described in the theoretical framework, the objective of this research is to investigate how liminality influences asylum-seekers' experiences of personal development, by combining the concept of liminality with the Self-Determination Theory. This is done by co-constructing knowledge with asylum-seekers (who will also be called *AZC-residents*) through interviews and participant photography. The perspective of former AZC-residents and relevant organizations involved will also be taken into account. In doing so, this thesis aims to contribute to fill the literature gap that exists regarding (1) asylum-seekers in rural, shrinking areas, and; (2) personal development of asylum-seekers beyond (economic) integration. By focusing on experience of asylum-seekers, this research aims to 'hearing differently' as proposed by Forkert et al., (2018). Hereby the personally meaningful changes and aspirations of asylum-seekers will be central, which leads to a relatively unheard narrative of personal development.

Additionally, this thesis may also contribute to the Welcoming Spaces research project. To merge two policy challenges, the 'Welcoming Spaces' research project aims to combine revitalization of shrinking regions in the EU while providing a 'welcoming space' for migrations from outside of the EU, such as refugees. Demographic change and population decline require new strategies in policies and practice in order to deal with the population change and thus also a declining region (Welcoming Spaces, n.d.). By focusing on the experience of asylum-seekers in rural, shrinking areas this research can help identify what is needed in shrinking areas, to be an attractive place of residence for asylum-seekers after their asylum-procedure.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The objective described above is to be achieved by answering the following main research question:

How does liminality shape the experience of personal development amongst AZC-residents in rural, shrinking areas in the Netherlands?

This question will be answered by the means of four sub-questions:

1. How does the local context contribute to a liminal position of asylum-seekers in rural, shrinking areas of the Netherlands?
2. How does the local context facilitate or constrain the satisfaction of the preconditional needs of the Self-Determination Theory?
3. What self-determined practices of asylum-seekers in rural, shrinking areas of the Netherlands contribute to a sense of personal development?
4. What future aspirations for personal development do asylum-seekers in rural, shrinking areas have, and how is this related to liminality?

The sub-questions will be answered in the analysis, that consists of four chapters, in which each chapter corresponds to a sub-question.

Sub-question 1 allows for a deeper understanding on what factors shape a state of liminality for asylum-seekers in rural, shrinking areas in the Netherlands. This provides context that helps understand the conditions under which asylum-seekers may develop themselves. Then, sub-question 2 elaborates on this liminal context by focusing on the satisfaction of the preconditional needs autonomy, competence and relatedness. This is done by exploring personal development activities that are provided in AZCs and by investigating asylum-seekers' experiences of these needs. Next, sub-question 3 zooms in on the personal development practices that asylum-seekers do autonomously, despite the facilitators or constraints on personal development in the AZC. Lastly, sub-question 4 focusses on the future aspirations of asylum-seekers and whether and how these are influenced by the state of liminality.

4. METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this qualitative research is in-depth interviewing combined with participant photography and secondary data analysis. This chapter consists of the following parts: *rationale for the suitability of methods, data collection and sample, data processing and reflection*. The latter will include reflections on the sample, research design and positionality of the researcher.

RATIONALE FOR SUITABILITY OF METHODS

As this research focuses on liminality and the personal development experiences of asylum-seekers, in-depth interviews combined with participant photography is a suitable research type. According to Hennink, Hutter and Bailey (2020), in-depth interviews are used when wanting to identify *decision-making, one's own perceptions, motivations, feelings and emotions*. It is those aspects that relate with the concepts of the research questions and theories employed. Through participant photography participants are encouraged to document personal experiences. This is a technique used for empowering populations of whose voice rarely become heard, such as asylum-seekers (Allen, 2012). According to Murray & Nash (2017), the inclusion of photography is beneficial to giving one's own perspective during interviews, especially when the photography is taken by the participant. Additionally, photographs capture experiences that cannot be expressed purely by language alone. Thus, combined with in-depth interviewing, photography forms a powerful instrument in understanding human experiences (Miller & Happell, 2009). Herein a clear link with the definition of personal development of this research can be found as participant photography facilitates meaning-giving and awareness of living a "valued life" which is important when conducting research with vulnerable and marginalized populations (Murray & Nash, 2017). Through participant photography, the research participants become co-collaborators in knowledge-creation processes (Allen, 2012). In this way, the methodology contributes to the research aim of learning to hear 'differently' as is suggested by Forkert et al. (2018).

DATA COLLECTION AND SAMPLE

To acquire insights on how liminality influences personal development experiences, 4 different sources of information have been consulted. AZC-residents and former AZC-residents living in rural, shrinking areas, employees of organizations that contribute to personal development of asylum-seekers, and literature sources. The research process is elaborated below.

EXPLORATORY RESEARCH AND SECONDARY DATA COLLECTION

Reading literature and collecting secondary data, helped orientating on the subject and provided context for the construction of interview guides. Moreover, by diving deeper in the literature, it became clear that the concept of liminality plays a significant role in personal development. This has led to an adaptation of the research question from covering solely personal development to the link between liminality and personal development.

As for secondary data analysis, 8 documents were coded and analyzed. These include policy documents, reports and academic literature from both governmental, non-governmental (e.g. of NGOs) and academic sources. An overview of these literature sources can be found in *appendix 1*.

PRIMARY DATA COLLECTION

Semi-structured in-depth interviews with (former) AZC-residents and employees of organizations were conducted in the period of March – June 2021. Due to COVID measures, all interviews took place online. Details of the research sample are provided below.

Interviews with AZC-residents

In-depth interviews with 7 AZC-residents (male/female between 19-40) have been conducted. This resulted in 14 conversations of 60 to 90 minutes. Participants were recruited through a snowball-method, as well as through community groups on social media. To establish trust, an information letter with details about the research as well as the researcher (including a photo of the researcher) was sent to participants beforehand. Interviews took place online and were conducted in English or Spanish.

With each AZC-resident, 2 interviews have been conducted. The first one functioned to get acquainted with the subject and to build rapport. This first interview also allowed for an explanation of the participant photography. Photos were made by participants in between the two interviews. Then, the second interview went in-depth on topics briefly discussed in the first interview, with the photographs taken by the participant as guideline for the conversation. The interview guides for interviews 1 and 2 with AZC-residents can be found in *appendix 2*. The table below shows an overview of the participating AZC-residents, including details such as their legal status (positive means a refugee status has been granted, negative means the asylum-application has been denied). The map underneath shows where the AZCs of both AZC-residents and Former AZC-residents are located.

Table 1: Overview of participating AZC-residents

<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Gender & Age</i>	<i>Country of Origin</i>	<i>Location of AZC</i>	<i>Time spent in NL in years</i>	<i>Status</i>
Jeff	M/27	Venezuela	Echt	1,5	Waiting
Manuel	M/19	Venezuela	Echt	2	Waiting
Robin	F/26	Ukraine	Budel	7 years, since 7 weeks in AZC	Negative
Mia	F/28	Armenia	Hardenberg	4	Positive
Robert	M/39	Nicaragua	Echt	2	Positive
Gloria	F/23	Peru	Echt	2	Positive
Ali	M/36	Syria	Gilze-Rijen	2 months	Positive

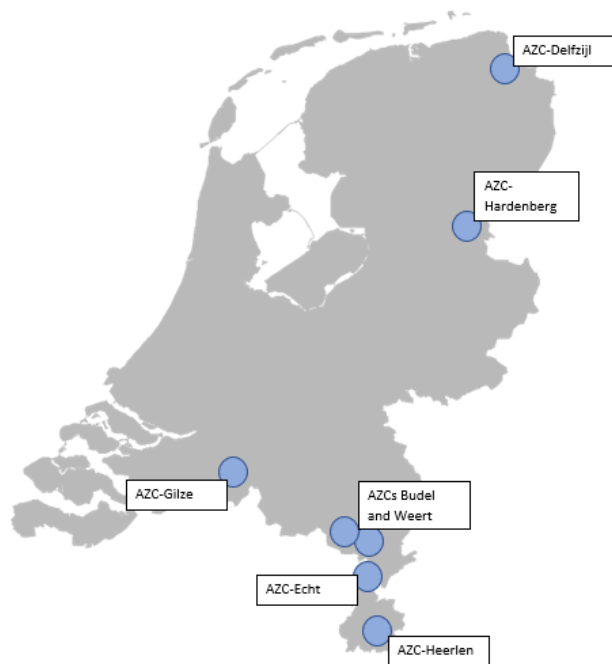


Figure 2: Locations of AZCs of (former) AZC-residents

Interviews with former AZC-residents

In-depth interviews with 5 former AZC-residents (male/female 29-40) have been conducted, resulting in 5 conversations of 60-90 minutes. Participants were recruited through a snowball-method, as well as through community groups on social media. Interviews took place in English or Dutch. The interview guide for former AZC-residents can be found in *appendix 3*.

The perspective of former AZC-resident allowed for retrospective on living in the AZC in the context of rurality and shrinkage, as well as activities available over a longer timeframe. The participating former AZC-

residents are shown in table 2. In general, former AZC-residents could participate if they had recently left the AZC (2018 or after). There are some exceptions on this, for example if the participant was still involved in life at the AZC, through volunteering or activism related to personal development in AZCs and therefore had meaningful and analytic insights.

Table 2: Overview of participating former AZC-residents

<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Gender & Age</i>	<i>Country of origin</i>	<i>Location of AZC</i>	<i>Time spent in AZC</i>	<i>Status</i>
Sascha	F/36	Azerbaijan	Hardenberg/Delfzijl	2 years in AZC, 2016-2018	Positive
Aicha	F/40	Syria	8 locations	2 years in AZC, 2014-2015	Positive
Kyle	M/32	Russia	Weert	2 years in AZC, 2017-2019	Positive
Didi	F/29	Armenia	Budel, Heerlen, Weert	2 years in AZC, 2019-2021	Negative
Maru	M/29	Egypt	Delfzijl	1 year in AZC, 2020-2021	Positive

Interviews with organizations

In-depth interviews with 9 employees of 5 different organizations involved in the personal development of AZC-residents were conducted. Hereby the interview guides were adapted to the specific activities conducted by the organization, while the themes in the interviews were always the same: personal development and well-being of AZC-residents and the contribution of the organization interviewed in this. The perspective of organizations involved allowed to investigate the context that asylum-seekers are subject to. The interview guide for organizations can be found in *appendix 4*.

Table 3: Overview of participating organizations

<i>Organization</i>	<i>Names or pseudonyms</i>	<i>Function</i>
COA Hardenberg	Arjan & Frederik	Project managers
De Vrolijkheid Heerlen	Ilona	Project coordinator
De Vrolijkheid Baexem	Hanneke	Project coordinator
De Vrolijkheid Delfzijl	Thomas & Afsaneh	Project coordinator
GZA BAMBOO	Maya	BAMBOO trainer and nurse
Buddy to Buddy Bronckhorst	Diane	Coordinator
Vluchtelingenwerk Rijswijk	Joost	Employee legal department

DATA PROCESSING

While interviewing, consent has been asked to record the interview, as well as to use quotes and the photographs for the purpose of the thesis, the 'Welcoming Spaces' research project and communication purposes. Some photographs are left out of the analysis because they recognizably show individuals. The interviews are transcribed semi-verbatim, to grasp emphasis and meaning. For the sake of privacy, traceable details of participants have been left out of the transcripts upon request of interviewed participants. Through coding, the transcripts of AZC-

residents, former AZC-residents, organizations and secondary data have been analyzed through the software NVivo. Both inductive (e.g. feelings/emotions and specific experiences) and deductive codes (e.g. liminality autonomy, competence, relatedness) have been used to analyze the transcripts and documents. Please find a part of a transcript, including coding in *appendix 5*. The codebook can be found in *appendix 6*.

REFLECTION

Reflection is important for the research process. This section touches upon reflections on sampling, strengths and limitations of the research design, and positionality of the researcher.

REFLECTION ON SAMPLING

The (former) AZC-residents interviewed are an interesting mix of participants. Two dominant groups can be noted in the sample: (1) Latin-American participants, and (2) LGBTI+ participants. The reason for the common characteristic of the sample may be due to the snowball-sampling, especially regarding the Latin-American participants. Another explanation could be the fact that the subject of the research is appealing to certain individuals who are actively involved in their personal development. This mostly applied to LGBTI+ participants.

Furthermore, it should be noted that the participants do not correspond with the most common nationalities in the AZCs, namely: Syria, Iran and Eritrea (COA, 2021). This means that the most prevalent groups of asylum-seekers largely remain unseen in this research. However, this allows for acquisition of knowledge amongst a less-known group of asylum-seekers in the Netherlands.

It should also be mentioned that most participants spoke either English or Dutch fluently and had an educated background, meaning that their personal development and aspirations might differ from people who are less educated. As the reason of their flight can be a precarious subject, it was not explicitly discussed in the interviews. Therefore, it is not clear of all research participant what type of asylum they have requested. However, it should be noted the type and length of the asylum-procedure influences well-being and personal development experiences, and this is not analyzed in-depth in the research.

The interviewed organizations were mostly NGOs involved in the personal development of AZC-residents. They allowed for gaining a better understanding of possibilities for personal development of AZC-residents in rural, shrinking areas. However, none of the (former) AZC-residents interviewed have participated in the activities of the interviewed NGOs. The experience of AZC-residents with these organizations could therefore not be taken into account. This resulted in data of organizations being used mainly as context.

REFLECTION ON STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH DESIGN

To reflect on criteria that enhance or limit the overall methodological quality of this research, the overview below has been created. Left, it shows the criteria for qualitative research as provided by Lincoln and Guba (1985), as well as the conventional equivalent. On the right the criterion as applied in this research is assessed. After the overview, a short reflection on alternative approaches is given.

Table 4: Overview of Strengths and Limitations

<i>Criterion</i>	<i>Assessment of criterion in conducted research</i>
<i>Dependability – reliability</i>	<p>Limitations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The current situation regarding COVID-19 might have influenced the perception of participants upon personal development opportunities provided <p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The perspective of long-term residents, who already lived in the AZC before, as well as the perspective of former residents provide insights on personal development in the AZC beyond the COVID-19 pandemic - Participants have been asked the same thematic questions to ensure reliable outcomes. By using a code book, the data then has been categorized systematically.
<i>Credibility – internal validity</i>	<p>Limitations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Physical interviews could not take place due to COVID-measures, which could have impacted rapport and trust building negatively. <p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To overcome the point above, it is tried to ensure building of rapport and trust in conducting research online, by taking the following steps: an information letter including information about researcher has been provided beforehand. Moreover, 2 interviews instead of 1 were conducted with AZC-residents to build rapport. - Online interviewing ensured that participants have been interviewed in a location of their preference, such as the park or living room. Herewith the ecological validity is enhanced. - Through data triangulation, data from multiple viewpoints have been collected, providing a thick description of the context concerning personal development and AZC-residents.

<i>Transferability – external validity</i>	<p>Limitations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - As this research describes the specific experiences of AZC-residents in rural areas in the Netherlands, the transferability, or external validity is limited. - The sample does not represent the majority of asylum-seekers in the Netherlands <p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To ensure transferability, it is tried to provide a thick description of the context that asylum-seekers are subject to. This also allows for better understanding of their behavior regarding personal development. This done based on literature sources and experiences of participants. - As interviewed AZC-resident were located in a diversity of AZCs, this provides insights on similarities and differences between AZCs.
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<i>Confirmality – objectivity</i>	<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - By being transparent on the research steps taken, it is aimed to provide trackability of the research approach. - By reflecting on the researcher positionality, choices regarding the research design became clear
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Alternative Approaches

A possible additional approach to this research that may have led to better results could have been a focus group discussion, so that feedback between participants could lead to insights on common experiences of asylum-seekers regarding personal development in the AZC. This also would have allowed for a stronger external validity.

An alternative approach that could have led to deeper insights on practices and experiences of personal development would be participant observation, as this allows the researcher to see and experience practices of research participants from nearby and reflect on the spot. This way, the context of the AZC could also be described more. However, physical fieldwork was not possible due to COVID-19.

POSITIONALITY OF RESEARCHER

It is important to acknowledge one's positionality as a researcher, as it can impact the entire research process (Holmes, 2020).

Personally, I am interested in humanism and philosophy. Therefore understanding what is meaningful in life for others and why is crucial for my work. This has influenced the research design in in such a way that experiences of asylum-seekers form the narrative, as well as that co-creation was endeavored through participant photography to be able to understand

experiences regarding personal development. This personal lens also led to the fact that I tried to portray the diversity of personal development experiences in the analysis.

As a female researcher, white, highly educated, cisgender and heterosexual, there were often many contrasts between me as a researcher and the participant. Especially when it concerned the LGBTI-community. Therefore, I have tried to create a safe environment during the interviews, by having an open attitude towards research participants. This led to the interviews having an informal atmosphere, whereby research participants have also asked me questions, which resulted in a reciprocal exchange of details about daily life, such as hobbies, the household and plans for the weekend, for example.

Due to my position as an outsider, I cannot fully comprehend the constraints and frustration that AZC-resident have to cope with, nor can I feel the multifaceted discrimination asylum-seekers (and especially those part of the LGBTI+ community) face. Therefore, the research design allowed for co-creation of knowledge. There where my own knowledge ended, lived experiences of participants complemented the insights into a holistic understanding of how personal development works in the AZC.

5. ANALYSIS: INSIGHTS ON PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT EXPERIENCES OF ASYLUM-SEEKERS

Speaking to AZC-residents, former AZC-residents and involved organizations, this analysis has become a narrative of contrasts from which becomes clear that a state of liminality both constrains and enables personal development. This analysis consists of 4 chapters. Chapter 5.1 and 5.2 will demonstrate how liminality leads to the experience amongst asylum-seekers that their personal development is constrained. This is done by focusing on the local context (including a regional framework of the Netherlands) and by investigating the satisfaction of the preconditional needs of the Self-Determination Theory. Then, chapter 5.3 and 5.4 will demonstrate how liminality also enables personal development for asylum-seekers, by focusing on self-determined activities and future aspirations of research participants.

For the purpose of interviewing, participating AZC-residents were asked to take 3 photographs: (1) of a location where they like to go, (2) of something they are proud of, and; (3) of something that grasps their aspirations for the future. Some of these photographs are included in the analysis, and shown in chapters 5.3 and 5.4.

5.1 SETTING THE CONTEXT

As theories regarding personal development have been discussed, it is also important to zoom in on the local context of the Netherlands, to describe the context wherein asylum-seekers' personal development may take place. The purpose of this chapter is twofold: (1) to provide the reader with a regional framework of the Netherlands, by zooming in on the concrete context where asylum-seekers in rural, shrinking areas in the Netherlands are subject to and the playfield this leaves for personal development, and; (2) to answer sub-question 1: *How does the local context contribute to a liminal position of asylum-seekers in rural, shrinking areas of the Netherlands?*

This chapter includes the following sections: *General information about asylum-seekers and migration policies in the Netherlands; The place of personal development in migration policies; The geographical context of the AZC; The experience of the AZC as a physical place and*

Experiences of liminality. Both literature sources and experiences of asylum-seekers participating in this research are used to highlight this.

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT ASYLUM-SEEKERS AND MIGRATION POLICIES IN THE NETHERLANDS

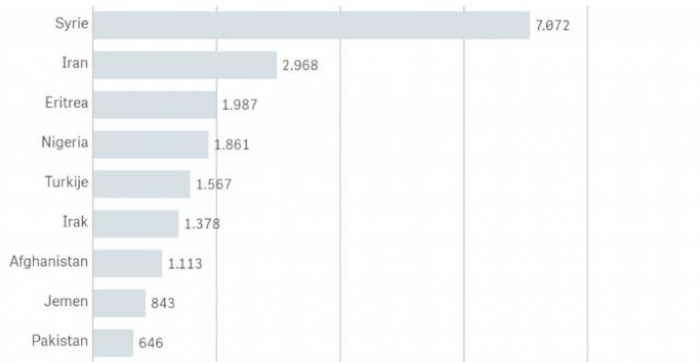


Figure 3: Top 10 countries of origin of asylum-seekers in the Netherlands. Source: COA (2021)

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As per January 2021, 27.811 asylum-seekers reside in the Netherlands. As shown in figure 3, the main countries of origin are currently Syria, Iran and Eritrea. 65% of asylum-seekers in the Netherlands are male (COA, 2021), and 75% of asylum-seekers are under the age of 35 (CBS, 2020).

Upon arrival in the Netherlands, asylum-seekers are transferred to asylum-seeker centers (AZCs). These centers are managed by the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum-Seekers (COA). In AZCs asylum-seekers wait until a decision has been made on their asylum application. This decision is made by the Immigration and Naturalization Services (IND). Waiting in the AZC can take months, sometimes even years (VluchtelingenWerk Nederland, n.d.-A). Sometimes, asylum-seekers are relocated from AZC to AZC (CBS, 2020). After receiving a refugee status, AZC-residents are moved to a municipality that fosters their needs best (COA, n.d.).

MIGRATION POLICIES IN THE NETHERLANDS

Part of the local context is the political discourse asylum-seekers are subject to. This is briefly described below.

Since the 1990s and 2000s, multicultural migration policies have been exchanged for assimilation (Mattei & Broeks, 2016). Consequently, asylum-seekers are often perceived as undeserving migrants with economic aspirations (Mavroudi & Nagel, 2016). As an effect, Dutch

migration policies have become stricter. These stricter migration policies are used to keep out the 'migrant with poor prospects'; Bonjour & Duyvendak (2018) describe who these 'migrants with poor prospects' are, based on the discourse of the government: the migrant with poor prospects is low-skilled with a chance of future unemployment and consequently dependence on welfare. This constructed image of the profiting migrant is mainly male, and often Muslim. Looking at the population of asylum-seekers residing in the Netherlands (as presented in figure 3) who are mostly male and from Islamic countries, and the fact that asylum-seekers depend on welfare, it can be stated that asylum-seekers generally are considered migrants with poor prospects. In general, the discourse is that asylum-seekers are having negative consequences for the Dutch society as their presence supposedly leads to eroding norms and values and financial burdens for the state (ACVZ, 2018). This discourse is reflected in how asylum-seekers are perceived by the Dutch population. Especially rural populations in the Netherlands are generally less tolerant towards refugees (Bakker, Cheung, & Phillimore, 2016; Kloosterman, 2018). O'Reilly (2018) notes in this sense that the perception and stereotyping of natives, can increase the liminal position of asylum-seekers.

THE PLACE OF PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT IN POLICY

The stricter migration policies have led to the Dutch citizenship becoming something an asylum-seeker needs to deserve (van Houdt, Suvarierol, & Schinkel, 2011; van Liempt & Miellet, 2020). The Dutch Integration Act of 2013 states that the responsibility for integration is upon the immigrants themselves (Mattei & Broeks, 2016; Van Houdt, Suvarierol, & Schinkel, 2011; Van Liempt & Miellet, 2020). This responsibility is reflected in how the reception of asylum-seekers is arranged around the concept of *zelfredzaamheid* or 'self-sustainability' in the Dutch society. Self-sustainability can be reached by learning Dutch, working, being an active member of the community and respecting the Dutch freedoms and equalities, which are noted in the constitution (Rijksoverheid, n.d.-A). The New Integration Act, that will come at play in 2022, demands even quicker integration and a higher language level (Rijksoverheid, 2020). Even though self-sustainability is promoted, restrictions apply to asylum-seekers regarding opportunities that enhance personal development. For example, asylum-seekers are generally not allowed to work or study officially (Alencar & Tsagkroni, 2019; Damen, Dagevos, & Huijnk, 2021; Van Heelsum, 2017). Meaning that concretely, there is little space for personal development of asylum-seekers in migration policies.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES IN THE AZC

What space is left for personal development in the AZC? Based on interviews with (former) AZC-residents, employees of several organizations and literature sources (such as: Larsen, 2012; Rijksoverheid, n.d.-B), the table below was constructed;

Table 5: Overview of personal development activities in the AZC

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Conditions or restrictions</i>
<i>Voluntary jobs</i>	No restrictions, encouraged to enhance self-sustainability.
<i>Paid jobs</i>	24 weeks a year, after having received the social security number (BSN) Costs of stay in the AZC are deducted from salary
<i>Organized activities In/near the AZC</i>	Depends on the local COA-employees Depends on NGOs: e.g. Vrolijkheid, Buddy projects, GZA BAMBOO Depends on geographical location and mobility of asylum-seeker
<i>Study opportunities</i>	Languages classes available after having received positive status or being likely to receive a positive state Studying at university is not possible Limited study facilities such as books, library
<i>Sports and recreative facilities</i>	Depends on the COA location Waiting lists
<i>Self-initiated activities</i>	Depends on mental health of individual Can be fostered or constraint by COA Within the rules and regulations of the AZC

The implications of COVID-19 on personal development activities

When speaking with AZC-residents and COA employees, they mention that due to COVID-19 measures activities have been limited or stopped completely. It should be noted however, that participants that have lived in the AZC before and during the corona crisis, such as Robert (39, Nicaragua) and Maru (29, Egypt), mention that before March 2020 the activities provided were

also quite limited. Also, when speaking to former AZC-residents, such as Didi (29, Armenia), Aicha (40, Syria) or Kyle (32, Russia), who all have lived in the AZC before the corona crisis, mention that ‘there is nothing to do’ in the AZC. Thus, it seems that COVID-19 has exacerbated the limitation of activities offered while living in the AZC.

GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT OF THE AZC

As mentioned before, shelters for asylum-seekers (AZCs) are often located in remote areas in rurality such as forests or in socially deprived urban areas, where residents suffer marginality (Van Liempt & Miellet, 2020; Damen, Dagevos, & Huijnk, 2021). This has implications for the well-being and personal development of migrants, since they cannot fully participate in the Dutch society or personal development due to the distance between the AZC and other facilities (Kloosterboer, 2009; Van Heelsum, 2017). For the sake of personal development, shrinking areas pose another challenge, as activities that enhance personal development are dispersed over a larger area (Larsen, 2011).

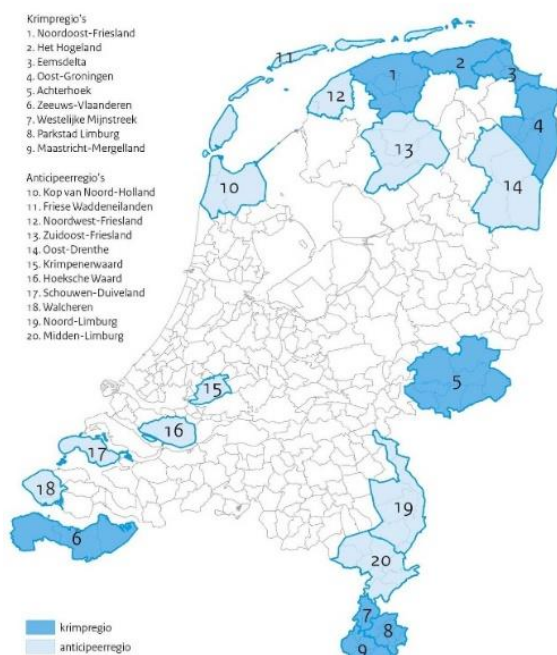


Figure 4: Shrinking Regions in the Netherlands. Source: Rijksoverheid (n.d.- C)

being located in rural areas in the Netherlands may mean being located in a shrinking area. Shrinking regions cope with a decreasing amount of residents. In figure 3 the shrinking regions in the Netherlands are displayed. The dark blue portrays the regions that are currently shrinking, whereas the lighter blue areas are regions that will be shrinking in the future (Rijksoverheid, n.d.-C).

Mostly, shrinking means that the older cohorts of the population stay behind, leading to demographical change as *aging* takes place. Consequences of shrinkage are for example vacant houses and decreased amount of facilities (CBS, 2019). Combined with aging this leads to new challenges for local communities. Hospers (2012) mentions, that even though

some areas are shrinking, they are part of a globalized world. If these areas manage to attract new residents, there might be a bright future for these regions (Hospers, 2012). It should be noted however, that people living in a shrinking region should be mobile enough to transfer themselves towards other places or facilities (Hospers, 2012; Verwest, Van Dam, & Daalhuizen, 2010).

EXPERIENCES OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS REGARDING ASPECTS OF RURALITY AND SHRINKAGE

The AZCs of research participants are located either in rural shrinking areas, or shrinking areas. Most AZCs of research participants are located in grasslands or near forests. The interviewed AZC-residents value the surroundings of the AZC ambivalently. On the one hand, they find the area boring and quiet, with little entertainment. On the other hand participants enjoy the meadows, the forests and in particular the presence of animals, such as cows, deer and birds. In the case of Manuel (19, Venezuela) living in AZC Echt, this contributed to a sense of home. Mostly, the distance to the village or town is between 10 to 20 minutes by bike. Mia (28, Armenia) mentions that this distance is large when one doesn't know how to ride a bike. Moreover, former AZC-resident Aicha (40, Syria) mentioned that asylum-seekers do not always have money for public transport, something that has been reported by Strijk, Van Meijel and Gamel (2011) as well. This means that the mobility needed for living in rural, shrinking areas as mentioned in the previous section, is restricted for asylum-seekers. One employee of the NGO de Vrolijkheid, an organization that organizes art projects in AZCs, has mentioned that shrinking areas pose difficulty in finding employees or volunteers.

EXPERIENCES OF AZC-RESIDENTS IN THE PHYSICAL SPACE OF THE AZC

The AZCs are described by (former) AZC-residents and employees of organizations as mostly old, unused locations such as monasteries or army bases. It can also be a temporary building made of containers, for example. The AZC has several units that consists of rooms that share a kitchen and a bathroom.

Inside the AZC, people share a room. Either with their family, or with other single residents. Up to five people can live together in one room. All participants describe how staying inside the room is bad for their mental health. Mia (28, Armenia) explains that the room is the only private

place in the AZC . However, it is shared with others and worries about the asylum-procedure often arise here. Also, research of Damen, Dagevos and Huijnk (2021) shows that lack of privacy contributes to mental health issues.

Interviews with the IND are also considered as stressful according to interviewed AZC-residents. They mention how the waiting period between the interview and the decision on the claim leads to mental health issues. Mia (28, Armenia) and Gloria (23, Peru) describe how the IND is working through a system that tries to prove that you are lying, something that resonates with the perception of asylum-seekers as undeserving migrants (Mavroudi & Nagel, 2016). The IND focuses on the credibility of the story rather than the implications for safety of the individual upon return (LGBT Asylum Support, 2020).

In the AZC there are recreation rooms with a TV or table, where people can meet. Depending on the location, AZCs have sport facilities or workshops, such as a woodshop or bike repair shop.

However, the AZC is considered an unpleasant place by all AZC-residents interviewed. This is illustrated by Jeff (27) from Venezuela. He says about the AZC:

I think it's a place with a lot of problems together. Because when you for example walk the halls or the building for the AZC, you can feel that. It is a really bad atmosphere. I don't know why, I am really grateful I have a bed for sleep and bathroom for take a shower, but when you stay there the atmosphere is really sad.

The lived experiences of co-residents are felt by the participants. Not only is the atmosphere 'sad', it can also be unsafe. This is proven by the recent incident in AZC, whereby several people were stabbed (See: NOS, 2021). Four participants living in AZC Echt, have all experienced suicides in the AZC. Other (former) AZC-residents, such as Didi (28, Armenia) and Sascha (36, Azerbaijan) have been assaulted by co-residents. The unexpected behavior of co-residents inside the building influences the well-being of AZC-residents and can form a restriction on their behavior. They can for example become less engaged with other people in the AZC and choose to not join any activities, as they fear problems with co-residents might impact their procedure.

Therefore, research participants mention spending time outside the AZC as this is better for their mental health.

AZC-buildings are managed by the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum-Seekers (COA). Based on interviews it becomes clear that many misunderstandings exist between AZC-residents and COA-employees, as is mentioned by both COA-employees Arjan and Frederik, as well as AZC-residents. Former AZC-resident Kyle (32, Russia) mentions about this: “In the AZC, you ask a question to an employee and you get an answer. But with another employee, a totally different answer. With every employee there is a different answer. But which one is right?”

Another experience of interviewed AZC-residents with the COA that should be noted, is the omnipresent feeling amongst asylum-seekers that COA-employees can influence their procedure. For example, one research participant mentions the phenomenon “living in the aquarium” or the fact that someone is always watching you as an AZC-resident. AZC-residents fear that COA-employees are watching them the whole time and that they share details about their life with the IND to deny the asylum-application. This has to do with the fact that the COA is not an independent party, as it is a governmental institution. The distrust of asylum-seekers towards COA-employees makes the AZC a particularly complicated living space, as AZC-residents have the feeling they need to be on guard all the time.

EXPERIENCES OF LIMINALITY

Based on the conducted interviews, it becomes clear that AZC-residents actively experience liminality. For example, Robin (26, Ukraine) mentions how living in the AZC feels like someone has moved her into the past. Mia (28, Armenia) says that waiting for the IND feels like someone pressed the “pause button” of life. While staying in the AZC, daily life is about waiting for the IND to decide whether you can stay in the Netherlands. Something that is also exemplified by Al Galidi’s novel that is based on real-life experiences of asylum-seekers in the Netherlands (2017; p. 267):

The most painful in the AZC was the fact that it was opened 24 hours a day. Precisely that reinforced the feeling of powerlessness. Because, I am here, wandering around in a building with open doors, waiting for an officer, somewhere, until he lets my life begin.

Moreover, the AZC as a place is described by five participants as ‘not the Netherlands’. This is captured vividly by former AZC-resident Kyle (32, Russia): “The AZC is a different country. It is not the Netherlands, it is a completely different country. With its own rights, rules, its own inhabitants”. This resembles the idea of Diken (2004) of the AZC as a ‘non-place’ due to the spatially segregated and sometimes even excluded locations of the AZCs. The fact that the AZC does not feel like the Netherlands according to AZC-residents, proves that the AZC embodies the concept of liminality.

CONCLUSION OF CHAPTER

This chapter has provided some insights of the context asylum-seekers in the Netherlands are subject to. As migration policies have become stricter, asylum-seekers are seen as migrants with poor prospects. The burden of integration has been placed upon them, through the concept of self-sustainability. However, due to restrictions there are limited opportunities and activities for personal development.

AZC-residents participating in this research, experience the AZC as an unpleasant place with a sad and unsafe atmosphere. There is a lack of privacy and a sentiment of always having to be on guard for co-AZC-residents and COA-employees. AZC-residents therefore prefer going outside of the AZC.

To answer sub-question 1: *How does the local context contribute to a liminal position of asylum-seekers in rural, shrinking areas of the Netherlands?* Several aspects have to be pointed out. First, waiting for a decision on the asylum-claim means having little rights, which simultaneously contributes to a liminal position and decreased opportunities for personal development. Second, as asylum-seekers reside in AZCs, this leads to social and physical invisibility, which is characteristic for liminality (Turner, 1967). However, the specific geographical location of AZCs in rurality and shrinkage can reinforce liminality. For example, by the limited mobility of AZC-

resident to move themselves to other places due to not being able to ride a bike or having no money for public transport. Moreover, activities that contribute to personal development may be dispersed over a larger area in rural regions, making the density of personal development opportunities smaller (Larsen, 2011). Furthermore, rural populations in the Netherlands are generally less tolerant towards refugees (Bakker, Cheung, & Phillimore, 2016; Kloosterman, 2018), which can lead to reinforcement of liminality (O'Reilly, 2018).

5.2 AUTONOMY, COMPETENCE AND RELATEDNESS

In order to develop oneself, self-determined actions are required. For this, the satisfactions of the needs autonomy, competence and relatedness are preconditional (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This chapter corresponds with sub-question 2: *How does the local context facilitate or constrain the satisfaction of the preconditional needs of the Self-Determination Theory?*

This chapter is structured through 3 sections that correspond to the preconditional needs *autonomy, competence and relatedness* of the Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Each section highlights activities provided by organizations that are important for personal development of asylum-seekers. Also, each section focusses on how the needs are experienced by the interviewed AZC-residents.

AUTONOMY

Autonomy is the desire to self-organize experience and behavior. It also refers to the subjective experience of psychological freedoms and choices when acting and engaging (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Bate, 2017). According to the Dutch Council for Refugees, *VluchtelingenWerk Nederland* (n.d.-B), it is fundamental in human dignity to have autonomy. Autonomy of residents of asylum centers should therefore be central. Arjan and Frederik, two COA-employees of AZC Hardenberg, explain how they achieve retainment of autonomy amongst asylum-seekers by focusing on self-sustainability. For instance, by letting residents solve their own problems, or coaching them in making choices and doing activities such as sports or learning Dutch online. Frederik mentions: “It can be that someone wants to take off everything off your hands. But that is not the purpose; people have to arrange and learn things themselves”.

EXPERIENCE OF AUTONOMY AMONGST INTERVIEWED AZC-RESIDENTS

Interviewed AZC-residents mention that they want to be active and therefore initiate activities in the AZC. However, Robert (39, Nicaragua) mentions how initiatives of AZC-residents are sometimes being denied by the COA because it might be too costly or too difficult to facilitate. This way, autonomy of individuals is limited. A finding that also becomes evident from the research of Ghorashi, De Boer & Ten Have (2018); in their research, a AZC-resident spoke of

the lack of activities in the AZC and the constant barrier that the COA couldn't provide or organize activities. They portray this with an example of the initiative of an AZC-resident to arrange a library in the AZC which was not approved by the COA, that merely spoke of procedures and rules. Likewise, research of Strijk, Van Meijel and Gamel (2011) shows that needs regarding daytime activities are not met in the AZC., due to the fact that legal restrictions limit asylum-seekers' range of possible activities.

When speaking to AZC-residents, it becomes clear that liminality impacts autonomy. Not being able to study or work due to regulations is withholding many research participants from their desired personal development. For example, Jeff (27, Venezuela) mentions how there are little opportunities to study in the AZC, while expressing a strong desire to enroll at a university at the same time. Also Mia (28, Armenia) mentions how she asked for Dutch classes for over 4 years, but couldn't participate because she did not received a positive decision yet. Something also experienced by former AZC-residents Aicha (40, Syria) and Maru (29, Egypt) who both waited a long time before they could start to learn Dutch. Even though asylum-seekers are keen on progress, being in charge of this progress is hard while living in the AZC. This finding is in line with research of Alencar & Tsagkroni (2019) and Van Heelsum (2017), that have described the prohibition to study or conduct paid employment as a major frustration amongst asylum-seekers.

In contrast to the experience of autonomy frustration, Robin (26, Ukraine) experiences the AZC as a place where you can do what you want and grow as a person. She mentions about the AZC "It is a place where you need to grow! Because you don't have work, but you can do what you like, your hobby or what you do before". Discussing the activities she conducts, such as sports, studying Dutch online and playing music, it becomes clear that she feels a strong sense of autonomy.

ACTIVITIES IN THE AZC

Given the liminal structure of the AZC and the impact this has on autonomy, asylum-seekers can choose to employ their agency by participating in activities provided by the COA or a non-governmental organization (NGO) such as the BAMBOO training, activities of the Vrolijkheid or a Buddy project (projects that will be discussed later on). However, availability of activities differ from place to place. For example, former AZC-resident Kyle (32, Russia) mentions presence of

a 'job center' in AZC Weert where volunteers actively helped AZC-residents find voluntary jobs inside and outside of the AZC. However, not all AZCs do have such a center, meaning AZC-residents that are interested in volunteering need to find voluntary jobs on their own. Many research participants experience the COA as being reluctant to organize activities for AZC-residents, which consequently limits the personal development opportunities for asylum-seekers living in that particular AZC.

Depending on the location of the AZC, there can be sport and recreation facilities, but this too differs per location. The AZC in Budel has a plethora of sport facilities, according to Robin (26, Ukraine) and Robert (39, Nicaragua), whereas AZC Echt or Hardenberg have little facilities. When such facilities are available, it can occur that there is a waiting list, explains former AZC-resident Maru (29, Egypt). He waited over 6 months to be able to go to the gym. Moreover, even when there are activities available in the AZC, AZC-residents might feel barriers to participate. Jeff (27, Venezuela) mentions that tension between residents prevent people from participating in activities as they fear tensions instigate fights between residents.

CONCLUDING REMARKS REGARDING THE NEED OF AUTONOMY

In general, it can be stated that AZC-residents have the desire to self-organize their experience and behavior, for example in studying, but this can be constrained because of regulations that apply to asylum-seekers. It should be noted that the COA tries to let AZC-residents retain their autonomy. This is partly policy implied through the concept of self-sustainability, and concretely done by COA employees letting them solve problems on their own. However, self-sustainability should not be confused with autonomy considering the 'psychological freedoms and choices' that are important in autonomy, according to the Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000). It should be noted 'that solving problems on your own', contributes little to autonomy considering the fact that freedoms and choices of AZC-residents are mostly restricted while living in the AZC.

Engaging in activities is another way of employing autonomy. As not all activities and facilities are available in every AZC, the degree to which autonomy can be fostered by the local context depends on which AZC an asylum-seeker is situated.

COMPETENCE

Autonomous decision-making, or lack thereof, impacts the sense of competence amongst interviewed AZC-residents. *Competence* refers to the desire to feel effective within the environment, to test and expand one's skills (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Not being allowed to study or work, presses the expansion of skills according to all participants interviewed. However, the liminal position of AZC-residents can also allow for competences to expand or arise. In this section, the offer of activities that enhance competence will be discussed first, followed by the experience of competence according to AZC-residents interviewed.

ACTIVITIES PROVIDED BY THE COA

There are programs offered in AZCs to develop competences. In general, the COA provides several programs through which AZC-residents can learn something. These programs are linked to self-sustainability and can have the purpose to inform the resident, such as the course 'living on a COA location'. Other courses are more specific and focus on life in the Netherlands, such as bike riding classes, and courses as 'Knowledge of the Dutch Society' and 'Orientation on the Labour Market'; something that reflects the government's discourse on integration and labour market potential regarding newcomers. Arjan and Frederik, employees at AZC Hardenberg, mention that the holistic offer of COA programs together give shape to well-being and personal development. Through the courses, AZC-residents develop a personal information file, which includes information about one's network, background and interests (COA, n.d.). Whenever a resident moves from the AZC to a municipality, a COA-employee discusses the personal information file with the municipality, so that the future aspirations of the AZC resident can be realized accordingly (COA, n.d.).

BAMBOO TRAINING

Next to the COA, there are other organizations that offer programs that contribute to competence development. One of these programs that deserves attention in the light of personal development and well-being is the BAMBOO-training. This is a program offered by the organization that provides health care for asylum-seekers: '*Gezondheidszorg Asielzoekers*'

(GZA). It is not a standard program in every AZC: sometimes AZC-residents have to travel to another location to follow the program.

The BAMBOO-training focuses on personal development and well-being from a positive psychology perspective and is provided in one's own language and in different age categories. Maya, a nurse who guides the BAMBOO-training, explains why the program is called 'BAMBOO': "it comes from real bamboo, because bamboo has the qualities of being strong, flexible and resilient and it is fast-growing. That is also what we find in each individual. Every person has these qualities, right". The program contributes to these mentioned qualities through 5 workshops of 2 hours, whereby participants focus on resilience, qualities and aspirations, amongst others. Maya, explains how the training is simple, yet beneficial for the rest of one's life as it leads to the development of small, concrete skills that are an asset to any life event.

The program contributes to personal development, for example by challenging people to set feasible goals with small steps. Also, participants gain insights on the competences they have or wish to have. According to Maya, by means of the training, psycho-somatic problems such as fatigue or headaches can be treated with one's own resilience. Moreover, participants of the program can autonomously decide to make small changes that enhance their well-being within the reality they are living in the AZC.

EXPERIENCES OF COMPETENCE AMONGST INTERVIEWED AZC-RESIDENTS

While addressing concrete skills one can develop in the AZC in the interview, the frustration of not being able to study or work is frequently mentioned amongst participants. They mention having acquired skills such as 'knowing how it works in the Netherlands', drawing, dancing, cleaning and basic knowledge of the Dutch language. Following the desire to develop certain competences, participants mention it is hard to learn new skills as an autodidact. They ascribe this to the atmosphere in the AZC, which is not always ideal for learning and developing. For example, because the private space where studying takes place - the room - is shared with others, or because the atmosphere in the AZC is too sad. In particular the waiting period between the interviews with the IND and the decision on their asylum application impacts the degree to which activities related to competence development can be conducted, as this waiting period negatively impacts research participants' mental health.

Use and acquisition of competences

It should not be forgotten that AZC-residents already possess competences upon arrival in the AZC. The AZC-residents also use these competences during their time in the AZC. For example, former AZC-residents Aicha (40, Syria) and Didi (28, Armenia), used to be translators in the AZC because they both speak English well, next to Russian and/or Arabic. Also, former occupations such as being involved in Social Work, allow AZC-residents to engage with, and help co-residents in the AZC. Using skills they already possess, it can be stated that research participants *do feel effective* in the AZC, as is an important condition in the definition of competence (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

However, when talking in-depth about testing and expanding skills and competences, it was not so much concrete skills participants mentioned they had expanded. Rather, participants described mindset shifts and intercultural knowledge as competences they acquired in the AZC, on top of the competences they already had. Jeff (27, Venezuela) mentions for instance, how staying in the AZC has given him more empathy. The main thing he learned is to be tolerant, patient and knowing how to cope with frustration. This is clearly linked to the liminal position; the fact he has to wait for the decision of the IND. Because, as he says:

I learned that because I was there in that moment. I cannot choose go to other site. So in that moment I have two options: or I am trying to learn something about the bad experience or I only say *'oh yeah I feel frustration, I feel bad'*. But I prefer the first one. Okay I can improve something and I can learn something about this situation.

'Focusing on the positive', is also something that participants have described as a newly acquired skill. Due to their liminal position as AZC-residents, they often have to deal with prejudice and negativity of locals for example in the supermarket. Also, problems and prejudice of co-residents in the AZC can pose a problem. For LGBTI+ AZC-residents, this forms an extra challenge, especially when it is known in the AZC that someone is part of the LGBTI+ community. Focusing on positive experiences contributes to their well-being. For example, former AZC-resident Sascha (37, Azerbaijan) used to volunteer and teach children in the AZC. She was aware of her positionality as a transgender and mentions how she had to cope with prejudices of parents of children she was teaching in the AZC. However, the positive experience

of teaching children reinforced her sense of competence as she contributed to the children's knowledge.

Robert (39, Nicaragua) Gloria (23, Peru) and Manuel (19, Venezuela) mention how they learned to communicate and live with different people of diverse backgrounds. For example, respecting and understanding culturally diverse customs and actively applying knowledge of these cultural customs to create a comfortable space for everyone (think for example of making sure food is halal, so others can eat it as well). The cultural competences are seen as a big asset in one's skills by participants. Gloria (23, Peru) even mentions how it will help her in the future, after her life in the AZC. She states about this:

And you learn that we are one, we are human beings, we are persons that passed a lot of bad things. And we find a way to live together with a lot of respect, with a lot of patience. Nowadays in your life, after the camp, I think it helped you how to communicate with people. How to interact. I think it helps you a lot.

Gloria sees the time spent in the AZC as meaningful for her communication skills. In general, these new competences regarding cultural competences and mindset shifts are illustrative of how a state of liminality can lead to meaningful identity construction, as mentioned by Beech (2011).

CONCLUDING REMARKS REGARDING THE NEED OF COMPETENCE

Looking at the availability of activities in the AZC, it should be noted that programs of the COA contribute to general knowledge about the Dutch society and not so much contribute to concrete skills. Projects such as the BAMBOO-training and similar activities allow asylum-seekers to autonomously decide to take part in activities that enhance competences of asylum-seekers, thus contributing to the need of competence. However, it should be noted that the availability of such activities differs per AZC, meaning that whether and how the need of competence is facilitated differs per location.

Regarding the experiences of competence amongst interviewed AZC-residents, several aspects can be noted. To start with, AZC-residents experience policy-imposed restrictions upon studying and work to be frustrating the need of competence. Next, AZC-residents describe the AZC as a non-ideal place to expand competences autonomously due to the sad atmosphere in the AZC and uncertainty about the legal status. Moreover, AZC-residents possess skills already, that they employ to engage with the local context, leading to feeling effective within the environment, as an important condition according to Ryan and Deci (2000). Lastly, due to a state of liminality, AZC-residents experience changes in character and skills that are valued as meaningful competence by the AZC-residents. These include focusing on the positive and being culturally competent.

RELATEDNESS

Interacting with people of different backgrounds in the AZC, not only contributes to competences, but it also links to the need of relatedness. *Relatedness* refers to the desire to feel connected to others, and to give and receive mutual care (Deci & Ryan, 2000). This section will first discuss two organizations that contribute to the need of relatedness. This is followed by the experience of relatedness according to AZC-residents interviewed.

STICHTING DE VROLIJKHEID

One organization, that contributes to both autonomy and competence, but especially relatedness, is Stichting de Vrolijkheid (Vrolijkheid means 'happiness' or 'cheerfulness'). The organization organizes art projects and workshops for children and youth in 28 out of 60 AZCs. In their projects, participants can develop their creative talents, gain confidence and build relationships. Through the activities provided, a community arises wherein residents and former-residents form a professional network (De Vrolijkheid, 2020).

According to the Vrolijkheid (2020) there are insufficient possibilities to be a child in the AZC, as there is a lot of stress and little structure. Therefore, according to employees of the Vrolijkheid, the goal is mainly to "let children be children". Also, projects whereby children and parents work together are organized to enhance their natural relationship. De Vrolijkheid works with volunteers and artists to organize series of 10-12 workshops with a certain theme. Often,

the products made in a workshop series tell a certain story. As mentioned by employees of the organization, an important goal to portray the outcomes of the projects; it is a way of showing what one has accomplished or learned, or simply to share something one is proud of. Something that enhances the need of competence, too.

BUDDY TO BUDDY

The distant locations of AZCs in rural areas makes it hard to spontaneously meet new people outside of the AZC. Buddy projects can therefore be seen as the access to society. Hereby the interplay of social, cultural and economic relationships can lead to integration in the receiving society (Pharos, 2019; Stegeman, 2020). The organization Buddy to Buddy matches Dutch locals and AZC-residents or refugees to do something together once a week, for a period of 4 months. There are departments of the organization throughout the Netherlands. According to Diane, an employee of Buddy to Buddy in the shrinking municipality of Bronckhorst, the importance of buddy projects is great. She mentions that the type of relationship AZC-residents have with locals is mostly functional: “all contact of newcomers with Dutch locals is functional. Either to learn the language, going to the municipality, filling out a form, asking for financial support or, well you name it”. She illustrates the importance of Buddy projects regarding rurality and shrinkage. She explains that in Bronckhorst, even though distances between villages might not be that big by car (30 minutes, for example), they can be big by bike or public transportation (1,5 hours or more). Diane points out that this leads to isolation, which Buddy to Buddy tries to counter. Diane mentions how the rural local community can be rather closed for non-locals. She says: “that it opens up for each other, is not so common. I notice that Buddy to Buddy really contributes to that and people are grateful for that. It applies not only to their culture, but also to ours”. The positive effect of the project goes two ways: it creates mutual cultural understanding and contributes to relatedness for both refugees and the local population.

EXPERIENCE OF THE NEED OF RELATEDNESS AMONGST INTERVIEWED AZC-RESIDENTS

Different experiences of relatedness exist inside and outside the AZC. In general, it can be stated that research participants maintain transnational relationships with friends and family through Whatsapp or by calling, and thereby experience love and relatedness from a distance.

Based on the interviews, it becomes clear that AZC-residents feel a strong desire to engage with the local community. Yet, it is hard to connect with natives. Especially as the places where one can meet new people are scarce. Mia (28, Armenia) mentions: “Where do you meet new people? Mostly in study, in the work, because of work, because of all that connections going. So when there is no such opportunity it is really hard to meet new people”. Additionally, distrust and prejudices about AZC-residents form a barrier in connecting with them. Also, people are rather closed towards AZC-residents as is mentioned by Jeff (27, Venezuela), Robert (39, Nicaragua) and Mia (28, Azerbaijan). VluchtelingenWerk Nederland (n.d.-B) explains that this is due to language barriers, lack of meeting places and framing of asylum-seekers. Another explanation might be the distant location of the AZC (Van Heelsum, 2017). In general, rural populations in the Netherlands have a less positive judgement of asylum-seekers (Kloosterman, 2018), something that may increase their liminal position (O’Reilly, 2018; Bakker, Cheung, & Phillimore, 2016).

Next to general obstacles regarding relatedness such as mentioned above, the personal circumstances of AZC-residents interviewed also influence the degree of relatedness both inside and outside of the AZC.

Considering identity is a multi-layered feature, prejudices and discrimination can apply to different aspects of one’s identity. For example, someone can be discriminated on being an asylum-seeker, as well as being a woman and homosexual. This is exemplified by Mia (28, Armenia) who mentions that in Hardenberg, where she is living, all natives know each other. Therefore it is obvious she comes from the AZC. Since the area is quite conservative and religious, this adds another barrier for her in reaching out to meet new people because she is part of the LGBTI+ community. Additionally, being an LGBTI+ community member leads to constraints regarding relatedness inside the AZC, as people may stumble upon discrimination and unsafe situations. Research participants such as Mia (28, Armenia) and former AZC-residents Sascha (36, Azerbaijan) and Didi (28, Armenia), have faced assaults and violence and due to being part of the LGBTI+ community. Research of Alessi et al. (2018) shows that for LGBTI+ asylum-seekers there is a double threshold in establishing relationships with others: next to the asylum-seeker status, they are part of the LGBTI+ community. Not only discrimination of co-AZC-residents is prevalent, also that of the diaspora. Another important

point regarding this was mentioned by COA-employee Frederik, as he states that discrimination of the LGBTI+ community also exists in the Netherlands.

A sharp contrast regarding the experience of relatedness applies to AZC-residents that live with their family in the AZC. Ali (36, Syria), Robert (39, Nicaragua) and Gloria (23, Peru), mention that the AZC feels like a family. They have become friends with parents of their children's friends and look out for each other. For example, in taking care of each other's kids, sharing foods and sharing stories and experiences. Gloria, but also Robert even mention being very proud of these relationships. Robert says about this:

I am very proud that we were able to escape what we were living and that we were able to adapt here. I mean, because living in the AZC and being able to communicate with other people, have a sense of community maybe, with other people. I am really proud of the kids, of my son to be like a, sometimes like an older brother for the other little kids. So, I am proud of the sense of community and being able to adapt to the circumstances that we are in.

Similar to what previously was mentioned about cultural competences being developed in the AZC, living together with different people can lead to a sense of community, thus fostering the need of relatedness. Hereby children function as bridgebuilders in connecting with each other.

CONCLUDING REMARKS ON THE NEED OF RELATEDNESS

There are activities provided by organizations that contribute to a sense of relatedness. As these activities are not available in every AZC, the environment does not foster the need of relatedness. Moreover, regarding relatedness the following aspects can be stated: Connecting with new people and locals is hard due to restrictions, prejudices and distant location of the AZC. Furthermore, prejudices and unsafe situations in the AZC can impact the need of relatedness negatively. Lastly, living in liminality with others leads to a sense of connection amongst interviewed AZC-residents with children.

CONCLUSION OF CHAPTER

By taking into account a selection of available activities and experiences of AZC-residents, this chapter aimed to answer sub-question 2: *How does the local context facilitate or constrain the satisfaction of the preconditional needs of the Self-Determination Theory?*

The interviewed AZC-residents can be described as proactive. This reflects the assumption that people are naturally keen on progress, as made by Ryan and Deci (2000). Turning to the AZC as a place where personal development may take place, it should be mentioned that the AZC does not foster the preconditional needs autonomy, competence and relatedness sufficiently. Activities provided by the COA, parallel with the governments' ideas of integration, as there is a clear link with the labour market and self-sustainability. NGOs however, contribute positively to the preconditional needs by providing programs or trainings to AZC-residents. Nonetheless, whether asylum-seekers can take part in such activities, heavily depends on the availability of activities in the AZC, as these NGOs are not operative in every AZC.

Even though self-sustainability of asylum-seekers is advocated by the COA, this should not be mistaken for autonomy. The autonomy of AZC-residents, in the sense of freedoms and choices is clearly restricted by regulations. This frustrates research participants particularly when it comes down to studying or work. Subsequently, this influences both competence and relatedness. This also highlights a paradox, as the self-sustainability as demanded by the government cannot be reached in the reception period, since the proactiveness of asylum-seekers to learn the language, study or work is not fostered.

However, it should be mentioned that, despite the systematic constraints, residents themselves find ways to act autonomously, develop their competences and relate with others. This is done for example by using the competences they already have in connecting with co-residents and the local community. In doing so, they acquire new competences and form relationships. Newly developed competences and relatedness are acquired because of liminality, as research participants ascribe those to being bound to the AZC and its residents. These autonomous ways will be explained further in the following chapter.

5.3 PRACTICES OF PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

In the context of the AZC, with its constraints and opportunities, AZC-residents conduct self-determined activities that may contribute to their personal development. This chapter corresponds to sub-question 3: *What self-determined practices of asylum-seekers in rural, shrinking areas of the Netherlands contribute to a sense of personal development?*

The chapter focuses on the activities that research participants conduct autonomously that lead to personal development, either directly or in retrospective. First, some general findings related to this sub-question are discussed. By the means of participant photography, some of these findings will be illustrated and explained. Then, a reflection on the practices in the AZC will be provided.

ACTIVITIES OF AZC-RESIDENTS

In discussing the different activities conducted by asylum-seekers, some common denominators can be noticed. First, volunteering inside or outside the AZC is a frequently mentioned activity amongst interviewed participants. Second, learning Dutch independently is done by all participants. Third, recreational activities are described. These three activities will be explained below.

VOLUNTARY WORK

Voluntary work is a frequently mentioned self-determined activity amongst research participants. It can take place inside or outside the AZC. Inside the AZC, asylum-seekers can volunteer for an NGO or for the COA. Maru (29, Egypt) has volunteered with the Vrolijkheid, whereas Aicha (40, Syria) and Sascha (36, Azerbaijan) were translators for the COA during the time they lived in the AZC. Aicha states about this: “use us for us” by which she means that the refugee community can help the refugee community best. Research participants find it important to contribute to the living environment of the AZC and they do so by employing competences they already possess, such as translating or teaching as mentioned in the previous chapter. Other tasks in the AZC are for example cleaning in exchange for a small reimbursement. Also outside of the AZC, voluntary work takes place. During the corona

pandemic, many research participants have volunteered at supermarkets, cleaning the karts or helping elders do their shopping. Volunteering outside the AZC contributes to connecting with the local community, thus enhancing the need of relatedness. So does the following activity, which is learning the language.

LEARNING DUTCH

Standing out is that almost all participants learn Dutch independently. They view learning Dutch as essential in achieving their goals in the Netherlands and as an asset to be able to quickly integrate. Paradoxically, even though the Dutch government wants refugees to integrate quickly, as mentioned before, the autonomy and motivation of asylum-seekers to do so officially is constrained by policies and regulations. One of the constraints in wanting to learn the language is that attending language classes in the AZC is not allowed until a positive status has been granted unless the asylum-seeker has a high chance of receiving a positive status (Rijksoverheid, n.d.-A). Within these barriers, asylum-seekers find autonomous solutions to acquire knowledge of the Dutch language, such as illustrated by Jeff (27, Venezuela):

I search for myself, I posted in one group of Facebook, about 'hey I am here in Netherlands, I want to learn Dutch, if somebody wants, I can help you with Spanish and you can help me with Dutch'. That is the first thing I did when I was in the AZC, then I searched volunteer jobs in other website.

Actively reaching out to learn the language is what Jeff did to be able to learn Dutch. In doing so, he also provided himself with a sense of relatedness and competence, as he proposed a reciprocal learning dynamic whereby he learned Dutch and could help others learning Spanish, meaning he both expanded and used his skills.

Other manners to learn the language involve volunteering outside of the AZC. Also other participants mention autonomous learning, for example online, through purchased books or by going to language cafés. Photographs taken by research participants resembling pride or future aspirations, often showed Dutch textbooks. Manuel's (19, Venezuela) photograph is shown below.

Learning the language contributes to personal development as it seen as an asset for future aspirations. Manuel (19, Venezuela) is proud that he is learning Dutch. He sees learning Dutch

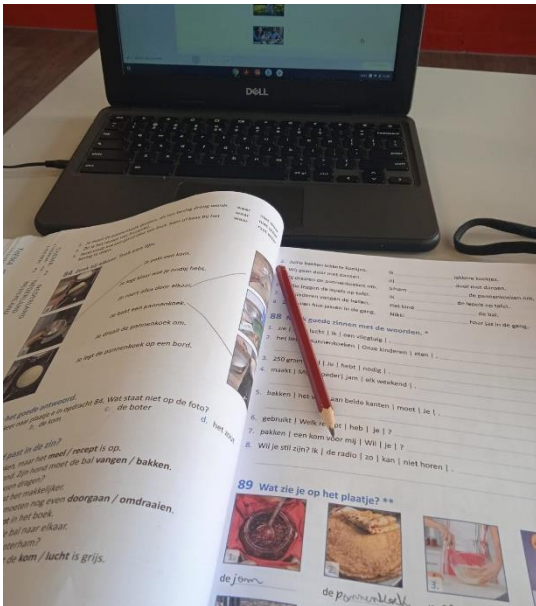


Figure 5: Manuel's Textbook

as a way to achieve his future aspirations: “It is one of the first steps I am taking for my future. It is of great importance, because I start, and I improve ever since I started learning the language. This helps me reach my goals for the future”. However, Manuel explains that it also contributes to a sense of competence and pride for him: “When I am applying my knowledge [of the language] on the streets or with someone, this book and my computer have helped me explain myself. Then, I feel proud and grateful to this book”.

-quotes translated from Spanish

Through self-determined language learning, research participants give substance to the need of competence, by filling the void they experience regarding this need in the AZC. Language learning has other effects, such as sense of pride and the feeling that it contributes to achieving aspirations. Moreover, it helps in relating with locals.

RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Next to concrete activities such as volunteering or learning Dutch, recreational activities also lead to personal development, albeit somewhat unexpected. Many participating AZC-residents have spoken of activities they conduct to be outside of the AZC. Examples include visiting the beach, walking in the park, running in the forest or going to a lake. These are activities research participants started to do in the AZC, mostly as a time passing. They enhance personal development and well-being in the context of liminality and rurality. Below, some of these activities are elucidated through photographs of participants. As will become clear, the meaning of personal development differs per person.

Mia's Writing

One activity Mia (28, Armenia) started doing in the AZC was writing. She explains that writing is a way to be 'mentally' outside of the AZC. Moreover, writing also helps her with regulating emotions.

Mia often feels like she should have accomplished many things during the 4 years she has already spent in the AZC:

I felt like I didn't do enough as a person to, at least for myself, to develop myself. Sometimes I think to myself *'oh, by this time I needed to know the Dutch very good already, or I needed to have an achievement already'* like I am very often, having the feeling that I could have done more, but I didn't.

In retrospective Mia notes that she could not have accomplished these expectations of herself due to the circumstances she was in; she suffered from a depression during the asylum-procedure.

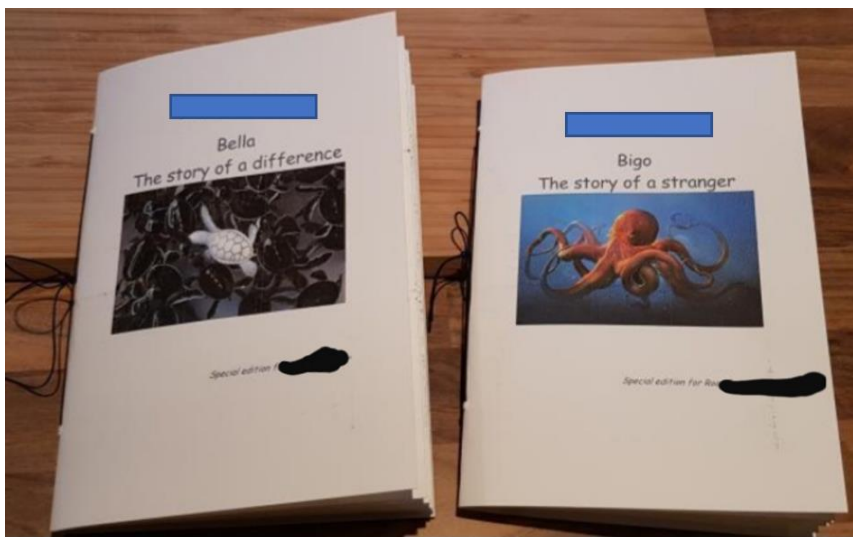


Figure 6: Mia's Stories

However, in this difficult time, she did have an achievement. Mia wrote the stories of Bella and Bigo (shown in the photograph on the left). Both stories are tales of sea creatures that are different than their friends. The stories are inspired on her own life

experiences and are therefore intrinsically personal. Mia explains that writing helps her regulating her emotions, and is a manner to be mentally away from the AZC. Given the fact she

has not accomplished as much as she would have wanted due to the emotional circumstances she was in, she feels proud of these stories:

This is a thing that I have done, and I am proud that during that situation I did something. And whenever people reading it, the stories, they like it. They like the story line and mostly they understand what is it about. So, this is kind of thing, that is reminding me that anyway I was physically and mentally feeling bad, anyway I did something that I like and other people also like.

Considering the writing as a personal development practice, a few important things should be highlighted. First, the writing functions as a coping mechanism for Mia, whereby she can 'write-off' her emotions and be mentally outside of the AZC. This contributes to her well-being. Second, the stories reflect her own experiences and therefore also shape her processing of the past. Third, the writing contributes to a sense of competence as she mentions she is proud that she managed to conduct this practice in her liminal situation.

Robin's Unity in Nature

Robin's (26, Ukraine) AZC is located in Budel and is surrounded by forest. At the time of the interview Robin has spent 7 years in the Netherlands, but since 7 weeks she resides in the AZC. In the picture below, Robin is sitting in a tree, reading a book. To relax she goes outside of the AZC and into the woods, preferably sitting in a tree. She describes the importance of this activity as follows:

I like to be in touch with nature, it is the same for me as necessary like connect with people, like touching, talking, changing in energy. It is the same with trees. And also, because I don't know why, but I sometimes like to be top and not touching the ground. Just sitting in the top and watching, because my life is activity. I always move, running, do something.



Figure 7: Robin reading a book in a tree

For Robin, being in nature is essential to recharge her energy and it is therefore a practice of well-being. However, as Robin is religious, being out in nature is also a spiritual practice. She appreciates all little details of the creation, such as sunsets, clouds and animals in which she experiences unity and transcendence, as becomes clear in her following statement:

I see the trees, how they move. It is like, I try to understand what they talk, it sounds crazy. But when I am in nature I am the same, the same as trees, I am not human there. I am also nature there.

In the AZC Robin started conducting many activities that contribute to personal development, such as studying Dutch or doing sports. However, this picture of her being out in nature represents her personal development best, as connecting to other life forms, Robin finds profound joy and self-love. Robin explains how she has suffered from a depression for a long while, but ever since she came to the AZC, she has found the time and space to understand herself and to be “full with kindness and love” as she calls it. The picture she shared that represented something she is proud of, was a picture of herself with a big smile. She is proud of herself, because she has changed so much. She achieved this while being in the AZC, because she mentions that the AZC “is a place where you have to open yourself”. From being depressed and ‘doing nothing all day’, she now self-educates and has a healthy and active lifestyle:

In Ukraine I was living depressed. When I moved, I started other life. And here I need more, care about myself. (...) My way was so long, 7 years I spent step by step. I did a lot of things, open myself. Because I never dream about money, house, car or something. I just dream about understand myself and love myself.

As becomes clear, personal development for Robin means understanding and loving oneself.

Looking at spending time in nature as a practice of personal development, the following should be pointed out: the activity contributes to slowing down from Robin's busy daily life, making it a practice of well-being. Next, experiencing being part of nature and feeling profound love and kindness towards the creation and oneself helps being at peace and understanding oneself.

Gloria's Unexpected Courage



Figure 8: Photograph taken by Gloria while mountain-biking

Gloria (23) from Peru, has been living in AZC Echt for 2 years. One of the activities she conducts is mountain biking in the forest, a place she has come to appreciate:

I like to be there. It is really a love-hating because I like to practice with the mountain bike and I really distract myself for a few hours. But it is also a feeling of challenge for myself, because you have to learn and you have to fall to learn. So, I had a lot of falls! But after that you feel great because you did it.

At first sight, mountain biking is a practice of well-being for Gloria. She mentions mountain biking started as a way to distract herself from waiting for a decision on her asylum-application:

You have to find the way to distract yourself. Because if you don't, you will probably be depressed. Because you think too much. You are thinking '*where is going my life? I am here waiting, I can't do anything*'.

Mountain biking therefore contributed to her mental health. However, speaking in-depth about this activity it becomes clear that learning to mountain bike has brought her more:

When I start the activity, the sport. I really don't think that I am going to do that and it was the beginning of the new me, because I started to feel a little bit confident on myself. And that encouraged me to apply to university. Because I thought *'if I can do this, I can do whatever'*.

For Gloria, mountain biking was the impetus to enroll in a study in Social Work, something that she was able to do because she recently received her positive status. So, where, mountain biking started as a time passing activity that enhanced Gloria's well-being by being active outside of the AZC, the activity led to increased self-confidence, which encouraged her take a new step in her personal development, namely applying to a university.

REFLECTION ON SELF-DETERMINED PRACTICES IN THE AZC

It should be noted that it is not self-evident for asylum-seekers to conduct activities that lead to personal development. While talking to AZC-residents, it became clear that research participants think and worry about their procedure. This was explained by Mia (28, Armenia) and Gloria (23, Peru) who both mentioned all they could think of was their interview or status. Thinking about the status all day long, is also recognized by Ghorashi, De Boer and Ten Holder (2018) as being clearly linked to feelings of insecurity and passivity. Given the fact that the needs autonomy, competence and relatedness are not met in the AZC, this can reinforce the sentiment of passivity (Adams, Little, & Ryan, 2017), thus leading to not being able to conduct self-determined activities. In that sense, COA-employee Arjan mentions: "you need to have self-discipline, if you want to study in your little room, where 3 other people are living as well".

As mentioned before, the AZC is considered a sad place, where the stories and behavior of other residents impact the lives of interviewed AZC-residents. This also leads to less 'mental space' to conduct activities that lead to personal development. The following quote of the fictional character in Al Galidi's novel (2017) illustrates how he has to share his mental space: "Inside my head, I shared my mind with others: the reception, the IND, the alien police, social services and all those asylum-seekers" (p.364).

In general, the self-determined activities of research participants are a way to be active and away from the AZC, which is described as necessary to remain mentally healthy. This is in line with research of Damen, Dagevos and Huijnk (2021) that states that engaging in activities not

only is a distraction from living in a shelter, it also leads to a sense of control over one's life and therefore contributes to well-being.

CONCLUSION OF CHAPTER

Living in liminality means that certain practices that lead to personal development, such as studying and working, cannot be conducted. As mentioned before, this is seen by AZC-residents as a barrier in personal development. Where the local context mostly fails to satisfy the needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness, research participants find ways to give substance to these needs through self-determined activities. To answer sub-question 3: *What self-determined practices of asylum-seekers in rural, shrinking areas of the Netherlands contribute to a sense of personal development?* It can be stated that these activities are often a way to 'be outside of the AZC' either mentally, physically, or both. Being away from the AZC has a positive influence on their well-being, according to participants.

Some of the activities conducted by AZC-residents directly lead to personal development, such as learning the language. Other activities enhance well-being first, such as mountain-biking, writing or reading. This spontaneously enhances skills, identity construction, well-being and self-confidence, thus leading to personal development. This can lead to new aspirations that will contribute to personal development in the future, something that will be discussed in the next chapter.

In sum, personal development is not necessarily a straightforward result of activities conducted by AZC-residents. Rather, the personal development arises more spontaneously alongside self-determined activities that principally enhance well-being first.

4.4 ASPIRATIONS

Even though staying in the AZC means living in liminality, when it comes down to personal development, it is important to take a look at one's aspirations for the future. This chapter investigates whether and how liminality influences the aspirations of asylum-seekers. It therefore links to sub-question 4: *What future aspirations for personal development do asylum-seekers in rural, shrinking areas have, and how is this related to liminality?*

First, some general findings related to this sub-question are discussed. By the means of participant photography, some of these findings will be illustrated and explained.

ASPIRATIONS OF AZC-RESIDENTS

All research participants have aspirations for the future, and a few similarities in aspirations are visible. To start with, most participants mention wanting to study, which links to the desire to have a certain job. Next, participants mention the desire to proceed the career they had previously. Nonetheless, mostly openness to another profession is also expressed. In particular, research participants mention they want to work in a social occupation, such as Social Work, Therapy, or as COA-employee.

Research participants also mention that their aspirations have changed. For example, because the things they used to value as being very important before their flight, are no longer important to them. Hereby one can think of a desired house, status or job. Instead, 'just' having a home, family and a good life is aspired. Also being a good person and living with kindness for others is frequently mentioned as an aspiration for the future.

ASPIRATIONS IN THE LIGHT OF LEGAL STATUS

It should be noted that the immigration status of the AZC-resident plays a role in the degree of concreteness when it comes down to expressing aspirations. Research participants that are still waiting for a decision on their asylum claim often have not orientated on the steps that are needed to achieve their aspirations. Mia (28, Armenia) has already spent 4 years in AZC Hardenberg. Not knowing when and where she these goals were to be achieved, she noticed she stopped having aspirations and hope in the period she had to wait for the decision of the

IND. Only after receiving a positive status, she started to have aspirations for the future again. Other AZC-residents still awaiting their decision, mention they do have aspirations, but clearly express that achieving these aspirations depends on receiving a positive status.

AZC-residents with a positive status often have a plan to achieve a certain aspiration. In all cases, AZC-residents mention good proficiency of the Dutch language and validating their degree or studying to obtain a degree is important to achieve aspirations in the Netherlands.

ASPIRATIONS DEPICTED

Participating AZC-residents took photographs of something that grasps their aspirations for the future. Beyond discussing goals, these photographs led to a deeper conversation about change in aspirations. Thereby a profound link with life in liminality can be seen. The aspirations of Jeff, Robert and Gloria are illustrated by the photographs they took.

JEFF'S AIRPLANE



Figure 9: Jeff's Airplane

Jeff used to be a military pilot in Venezuela. He made this picture because one of his goals is to fly again. However, when he was asked what the meaning of this picture is, he said the following: “Oh, I think the future, when I can have my family again together. I think is the most important thing. Because it’s [the plane] the only way to come to the Netherlands”.

When asking Jeff if his aspirations changed since his time in the AZC, he answered: “I think my complete plans changed” then followed by the reason why his plans have changed: “Especially when you hear also the stories in the AZC about people who doesn’t have never nothing”.

The stories of different people in the AZC have changed Jeff’s view on himself and life. He now describes himself as more human and more empathic. This resulted in a change of his

aspirations. He mentions how he previously aspired to be a fighter pilot, have several houses and a big car. Now, he says his goals are smaller. He even mentions that he can work other jobs: “If I have my family, I don’t need the rest. You know? If they are here, safe, I don’t need the rest. It is not important if I am fighter pilot, I can be other things, I can do other things”. Amongst those other things, Jeff mentions that he would like to work with the COA, or have his own business working with refugees to make a difference for people.

Jeff’s photograph seems to depict the desire to proceed his career as a pilot. However, as living with others in the AZC, has led to a changed view upon himself and his aspirations, the aspiration of being a pilot again seems to have become less urgent. In the end, this photograph actually represents the goal to be reunited with his family.

ROBERT’S GUNS N’ ROSES



Figure 10: Robert's Guns N' Roses

The picture above is an advertisement of a concert in the city of Groningen. Having a background in event production, it is Robert’s dream to organize a concert of his favorite band, Guns ‘N Roses. Even though he has experience in this branch, he wants a Dutch degree to have a better chance on the labour market. As he already received a positive status, he enrolled at an academy to achieve this. However, there is a plan B: if working in music and concert production does not work out, Robert would like to work with the COA, because he already experienced how it is it live in the AZC.

Robert explains the difference of aspirations in his home country Nicaragua, and the aspirations in the AZC. In Nicaragua, the status of studying or being a business man is important. However, in the AZC this status seems to be absent, he says: “So, here [in the AZC] you don’t actually talk to someone and ask ‘what did you study, what did you work in’ nobody cares about that. It is not like no one cares, but it is not important”. He notices a change in his identity and mentions he is more open-minded. He says: “The experience of being in exile and living in this type of community makes people humble”.

Robert also mentions changes in his aspirations ever since he lives in the AZC: “So, yes goals have changed a lot. Because of being here. You know what is important in your life now”. For Robert the following things are important now:

For me, more important is to be able to have a good life. A comfortable life. To be able to get the residence permit, doing the exam. That is like the first goal, doing the B1 exam. And then, having a nice life. Being able to maybe buy a house. And just live.

Robert’s photo depicts his aspiration to proceed his career as an event producer. To be able to do so in the Netherlands, he has made concrete plans including obtaining a Dutch degree and learning the language. However, there is a plan B. As status has become less important while living in the AZC, Robert’s main goal has become ‘having a good life’.

Gloria’s Window to the Future



Figure 11: Gloria’s Window to the Future: a community event in the AZC

The photograph above shows a community activity in the AZC. It is “a window to the future” according to Gloria. In the AZC, she aspires to be the person helping others one day. As Gloria already received her positive status, she enrolled for the study of International Social Worker at the HAN University of Applied Science. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the activity of bike riding helped Gloria strengthen her self-confidence and this was the impetus to apply for a study. To the question what her motivation is to become a Social Worker, she answers:

Because I was like them. I have to say that I didn't have a good childhood. I am not going to be dramatic, but I didn't have a good life. I passed through a lot of bad things. My parents did their best for me, but I would have loved to have a person, when I was a child or teenager, that helped me to build myself for the future.

Also Gloria mentions how she changed as a person in the AZC, because she has to live and communicate with a diversity of people:

This experience [living in the AZC], it changes for good. My thinking is different, I am more open, I think more open-minded than before. And now I think that I am the type of person that always is stressful because of small things, I used to think that my problems were really big. But here, I meet a lot of people in the AZC and outside. And I knew that my problems were really small. There are people that are living worse than me. Political problems, etcetera. Now I think that there is always a person having it worse than me. So, that helped me to not stress myself, to find a solution, to be empathic. More empathic. And yeah to change and never give up.

For Gloria, staying in the AZC functions as a phase of reflection wherein she consciously notices change. Personal experiences and retrospective of having needed someone in the past, helped her redirecting her professional goals. Also, she experiences herself to be more open-minded due to her stay in the AZC.

CONCLUSION OF CHAPTER

This chapter has aimed to answer sub-question 4: *What future aspirations for personal development do asylum-seekers in rural, shrinking areas have, and how is this related to liminality?*

Aspirations of AZC-residents participating in this research apply to professional and personal levels. They range from becoming a Social Worker to being a good person. Regarding professional aspirations, participants have a clear overview of their aspirations and the steps they need to take to achieve this, including awareness of Dutch proficiency and the importance of getting a Dutch degree. Their perceived capabilities to be able to reach this goal often link to competences they already possess or have acquired during their time in the AZC. Nonetheless, research participants have an alternative in mind in case their first aspiration does not seem to work out.

Liminality is also considered a phase of reflection (Turner, 1967). Due to their liminal position, aspirations of research participants have changed. Status linked to a certain career or property, that might have been important in the country of origin, has disappeared in the AZC. This is attributed to the overall experience of 'being an asylum-seeker' but also to living in an environment with other asylum-seekers. Hence, aspirations for the future have changed.

Also, lived experiences in the AZC are incorporated in the aspirations by re-directing professional aspirations towards social occupations whereby one can help others. But, above all, the realization of what is truly important in life to research participants has meant that aspirations have become more attainable in general. Describing oneself as being more open-minded and humble and redirecting life goals to having a home, family and good life is in line with both Beech (2011) and Stenner (2017) who describe that liminality can lead to a meaningful construction of identity and new directions in life.

CONCLUSION

By applying a qualitative research approach, this thesis aimed to contribute to closing the literature gap on personal development of asylum-seekers in rural, shrinking areas in the Netherlands by answering the research question: *How does liminality shape the experience of personal development amongst asylum-seekers in rural, shrinking areas in the Netherlands?*

It can be stated that liminality leads to contrasting experiences of personal development amongst asylum-seekers in rural, shrinking areas in the Netherlands, as liminality simultaneously constrains and enables personal development. On the one hand, a state of liminality constrains personal development, on the other hand a state of liminality facilitates space and time that enables reflection that leads to personal development in a personally meaningful way.

In the Netherlands, asylum-seekers generally have a liminal position due to the physically separated locations of AZCs, the waiting time during the asylum-procedure, and the lack of legal status. Rurality reinforces this liminal position by a larger physical distance, the dispersion of personal development activities over a larger area, and possibly less generous judgement of the rural population. Research participants thus have described their place of residence as 'not in the Netherlands' and refer to liminality as if someone has pushed a 'pause button' of life.

This liminal position prevents the preconditional needs for self-determination autonomy, competence and relatedness from being met for asylum-seekers in rural, shrinking areas. The availability or absence of activities in the environment of the AZC, that may contribute to these needs or to personal development differs per location. Autonomy, competence and relatedness are especially limited by the legal status when it comes down to not being allowed to study or work. This is particularly frustrating according to research participants, who prefer to be proactive and connect with new people.

When considering the self-sustainability the Dutch government demands from asylum-seekers, it is paradoxical that asylum-seekers' self-determination and proactiveness is restricted. This means that the self-determination, or control they can exercise over their own life is severely limited.

However, within their state of liminality, asylum-seekers find ways to conduct self-determined practices whereby they provide themselves with a sense of autonomy, competence and relatedness. Some practices directly lead to personal development, such as language-learning and volunteering. However, the biggest growth participants describe, applies to personality changes. Staying in the AZC means being in a liminal position whereby a lot of waiting is involved. Recreational activities, that often take place outside of the AZC, reduce the burden of waiting and indirectly lead to personal development, as these activities supply the asylum-seeker with a sense of reflection, new skills and self-confidence. This subsequently allows for personally meaningful development for the research participants. For example, research participants describe that the experience of being an asylum-seeker and living in a culturally diverse group contributed to cultural competences and led to becoming more humble and open-minded. This demonstrates a changed view upon the self.

Connected to becoming more humble and open-minded, liminality also leads to a change in aspirations, as a sense of self and the place in society are being reconsidered. For example, lived experiences from the past and of being an asylum-seeker are incorporated in professional aspirations of research participants. Their professional aspirations have shifted towards social occupations, such as becoming a Social Worker or COA employee. However, thinking of oneself in retrospective has led to a change in personal aspirations, whereby having a 'normal' or 'good' life is prioritized. For asylum-seekers, life in liminality can clearly be seen as a phase of reflection and a place where new directions in life are being taken.

Considering liminality as a threshold or as a stand-by situation is understandable and surely accurate, especially when looking at the legal status and the barriers this poses to personal development for asylum-seekers. Yet, one should be careful not to generalize the period spent in the AZC as time lost, as this may overlook the personally meaningful development that arises amongst the residents of the AZC. Because, as Robert's quote emphasized in the introduction, *"personal growth, adaptation and strength describes the majority of people living here. From the kids to the oldest person"*.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

This research has contributed to knowledge on personal development amongst asylum-seekers beyond the concept of (economic) integration. Even though personal development experiences linked to (economic) integration is outside the scope of this research, I would like to elucidate how these two can be connected.

This research has emphasized the relevance and need of personal development opportunities for asylum-seekers in the reception period. Not only does this benefit the asylum-seeker regarding personal development and well-being, enabling asylum-seekers to develop themselves may also lead to better and quicker integration since the first few years after arrival are most crucial for further improvements and integration. Therefore, providing sufficient personal development opportunities to asylum-seekers during their time in the AZC does not only let asylum-seekers retain a sense of control over life, it is also a matter of self-interest for the Dutch government if they want the self-sustainability and integration to succeed.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This research has provided interesting insights on the connection between liminality and personal development of asylum-seekers. Methodological strengths and limitations have been discussed in-depth in the methodology chapter. However, there are some aspects to take into consideration further. The impact of the type of asylum-procedure (e.g. a Dublin procedure, humanitarian or political asylum) as well as the length of the asylum-procedure and the concrete influence this has on personal development mostly remained underresearched in this thesis. Nevertheless, these can have significant impact on the well-being and personal development of asylum-seekers. Moreover, as this research focused on AZCs in rurality and shrinkage, this means that a comparison with the experience of personal development amongst asylum-seekers in urban areas is missing.

Therefore, a recommendation for further research would be to conduct a mixed method research over a longer period of time, whereby both urban and rural areas are involved. Methods could include a survey, participant observation, and a focus group discussion. Setting up a survey about experiences in the AZC regarding personal development and well-being and asking research participants to fill out the survey over the duration of their asylum-procedure

will allow to measure the influence of the length of the asylum procedure on personal development as well as the differences between several variables, such as urban/rural areas and the type of asylum-procedure. Then, participant observation will allow to investigate differences between different groups of participants. Moreover, it will help to obtain deep insights on personal development practices of asylum-seekers, as well as their physical surroundings. Lastly, focus group discussions may lead to insights of common experiences amongst asylum-seekers, about the greatest facilitators and limitations for personal development while living in an AZC. Subsequently, that can help to set up policy recommendations if needed.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX 1: OVERVIEW OF ANALYZED SOURCES

<i>Type of document</i>	<i>Document title in English</i>	<i>Original title</i>	<i>Organisation/author</i>
Research report	Cohort Study Asylum Seekers and statusholders Asylum and Integration 2020	Cohortonderzoek asielzoekers en statushouders Asiel en Integratie 2020	CBS (Statistics Netherlands, 2020)
Year report	Year report 2020	Jaarverslag 2020	De Vrolijkheid (2020)
Research report	We Feel Unsafe: Unsafety in AZCs for LGBTI Asylum-Seekers	We Feel Unsafe: onveiligheid in azc's bij LHBTI-asielzoekers	LGBT Asylum Support (2020)
Vision statement	Vision on Reception	Visie op opvang	VluchtelingenWerk Nederland (n.d.-B)
Novel	How I Got Talent for Life	Hoe ik talent voor het leven kreeg	Rodaan Al Galidi (2017)
Paper	Health and Social Needs of Traumatized Refugees and Asylum Seekers: An Exploratory Study		Strijk, Van Meijel & Gamel (2011)
Paper	Unexpected agency on the threshold: Asylum seekers narrating from an asylum seeker centre		Ghorashi, De Boer & Ten Holder (2018)
Website	COA (general information on COA-website)		COA (n.d.)

APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW GUIDES AZC-RESIDENTS

Topic list 1 AZC-residents,

Welcome! Thank you for participating in this research. Let me introduce myself. My name is Eline and I am a master student in International Development at Utrecht University. In my studies I focus a lot on migration, and one of the migrant types I am especially interested in people who are living in AZCs

This research in particular focuses on the personal development and well-being of people living in AZC's. In our conversation we will talk about all your interests, the activities you do,

I am wondering: could I record the interview? This way I can easily listen back the recording for data analysis afterwards. The recording is just for myself, and will not be heard by others.

It is good to know that everything you say or show will be anonymous; nothing in the final thesis can be traced back to you: others will not know your name or other personal data.

After recording has started:

Do you consent to take part in this research? Do you have any question before we begin?

➔ If not so, no problem I will take notes.

Introductory questions

Can you introduce yourself?

- Age, country of origin, prior occupation or studies, time spent in NL, alone or with spouse/family, hobbies & interests

Can you tell me something about the place where you live?

- AZC? What kind of living situation? People of the same country? Roommates?
- Rural situation
- What is nice/not nice?

What does a day look like for you?

- In the AZC, or outside? Hobbies/activities? Connection to the local area?

How do you make yourself comfortable in daily life?

- Routines, activities, transnational contact, AZC?

Core questions:

Autonomy & Competence

Do you organize activities for yourself, such as doing sports, studying/working, reading?

- Example? Conditions? Motivations? ➔ what do you like about it?
- Feeling/well-being?

What activities are organized in the AZC?

- Do you participate?

What are things/skills that you are good at?

- Developed how/when?

Have you developed new skills/hobbies while living in an AZC?

- How?
- Activities of the AZC?

Can you decide what you want to do and when/in what way while staying in the AZC?

- Example, asylum-procedure, restrictions, duty to report?
- When talking about restrictions → is this holding you back on doing the things you desire?

Competence:

What things/skills/abilities do you want to be good at in the future?

- Why? What for?
- Abilities or skills regarding hobbies, interests or jobs?
- What is needed to achieve this?

Are you work on this skill right now?

- Do you think you can develop this skill while staying in the AZC?
- Why?
- Activities in the AZC, participation?

What do you do to practice this skill?

- New skills?
- Alone/with others?
- Contribution to well-being?

Relatedness:

How would you describe the relationship with people around you?

- People in the AZC: roommates, family, neighbors, or local community?
- More distantly: friends/family abroad?
 - How do you keep in contact? Frequency? Meaning of contact?

Would you like to be in contact with more people?

- Why? With whom? Relatedness? Network?

Which places do you feel connected to?

- People, local-rural area, places outside of locality?

aspirations & personal development

What are your goals in life?

- Orientation: Professional/social/spiritual etc.

Do you think you are moving closer to your goal right now?

- Barriers/ facilitators? Social environment: politics, local community
- Rural, remote area ?

I have 2 questions left in our conversation, then I will explain the our next conversation. For now is there something you want to say or add to what we just discussed?

Closing questions

What is your favourite TV show/book/football club/dish?

What is your plan for today?

Now, the recording has been turned off, do you want to share anything else?

Let me explain the next talk we will have, which will include photography.

NB: The following information has been sent to participants as well.

In this research we work together to create knowledge about the personal development of asylum-seekers. This is mainly done by talking. Part of this is that you take photos of several objects, things, and activities that are connected to your personal development and well-being. This is done before we have our second talk.

Why?

Your photos are relevant because it will help us talk about the things that are important to you.

When: Before we have the second talk, you can take the photos and send them to me by email or WhatsApp. My contact information is given in this letter.

What do you need?: All you need is a camera. The camera on your mobile phone is sufficient!

What should be on the photo?

You take photos of 3 things:

- A place in or near your AZC where you like to go
- Something that reflects a goal for the future
- Something that makes you proud

A photo can be of everything: it can be: a picture of a location, a statue, a necklace, a photo of a photo, a book, a bed, an animal, a type of food, it can be anything. *There are no 'wrong' answers or 'bad' photos!* 😊

What will be done with the photos?

In our conversation we will talk about the photos. For example about what is on the photo, and what the things on the photos mean to you. This is the most important part.

With your consent the photos can be used in the thesis and in articles; the photos will not be traceable to you. If this is not comfortable for you, the pictures will only be used to talk about your personal development when we talk. Without your consent they are not shown to anyone else but me.

Topic list 2 AZC-residents (including photography)

After our last conversation, I have explained that you could take 3 photographs for our next meeting. You have made a picture of 3 things and sent them to me. Thank you for that!

- You have made a picture of a place in or near the AZC where you like to go.
- You have made a picture of something that makes you proud
- You have taken a picture of something that reflects a goal for the future

You already shared the pictures with me. Can I use the pictures in my thesis?

➔ If not so, that is no problem at all, we will just discuss the picture.

Introductory questions

How are you?

What do you think about our last conversation?

How was it to take the photographs?

- Difficult/easy?

Core Questions

Autonomy, competence, relatedness

You made a photo of a place in or near your AZC where you like to go.

Can you explain what place I see on the picture?

- Why did you take this picture?

Why do you like to go to this place?

- What feeling does this place give you?
- What do you do at this place? ➔ related to autonomy/competence/relatedness?

- Alone/others?
- Is that something you did in your home country as well?
- Does this place/activity contribute to well-being?

What does the object/situation/location on the photo mean to you?

- Can you elaborate?

Personal development

You have made a picture something that makes you proud

What is visible on the photo?

- Where/under what conditions taken?
- Link with former picture about locality?
- Why did you take this picture?
- why proud? Activity or concept? Meaning?

Next to this practice, what activities do you do that help you feel proud about yourself?

- Several? Since when?
- Focus on well-being/career/other?

Aspirations & personal development

You have taken a picture of something that reflects your hopes and goals for the future, can you explain to me what is visible on the picture?

- Why did you take this picture?
- Link with picture of proud/locality?
- Meaning of the picture?

Have your aspirations or goals in your life been changed after leaving your country?

- Before/after? Opinion on this? Why? Meaning?

How do you plan to achieve this aspiration?

- Activities? Network?

What new opportunities for hobbies, skills, or personal development have there been while living in an AZC?

- How?
- Waiting period?
- Meaningful?

Is the current situation, living in an AZC, in a rural area, allowing you to reach your aspirations?

- Social environment: politics, local community
- Rural, remote area

Closing questions

If you could sum up the most important topics that we talked about in 3 words, what would they be?

Closing question adjusted to the interests of the participant.

APPENDIX 3: INTERVIEW GUIDE FORMER AZC-RESIDENTS

Topic list former-AZC residents

Welcome! Thank you for participating in this research. Let me introduce myself. My name is Eline and I am a master student in International Development at Utrecht University. In my studies I focus a lot on migration, and one of the migrant types I am especially interested in people who are living in AZCs

This research in particular focuses on the personal development and well-being of people living in AZC's. In our conversation we will talk about all your interests, the activities you do, and how you could express this in the AZC.

Before you introduce yourself: everything you say is anonymous: nothing can be traced back to you, I will use the information to write my master thesis. But to do so I was wondering if I could record our conversation. I am wondering: could I record the conversation? This way I can easily listen back the recording for data analysis afterwards. The recording is just for myself, and will not be heard by others.

It is good to know that everything you say or show will be anonymous; nothing in the final thesis can be traced back to you: others will not know your name or other personal data. And if you wish to

After recording has started:

Do you consent to take part in this research? Do you have any question before we begin?

Introductory questions

Can you introduce yourself?

- Interests/hobbies

Where did you stay in an AZC?

- Location
- Duration of stay

Where do you live now?

- Conditions?

Core questions

How would you describe your time in the AZC?

- Workers from COA/VWN?

What type of activities could you do in the AZC?

- Organized by the COA/NGO?

What activities did you organize for yourself while staying in the AZC?

- Alone/with others?

Have you learned new things in the time that you stayed in the AZC?

- Examples?

Did you have any friends when you stayed in the AZC?

- People from the same country

You now live in.... [place of residence] how is living there different from living in the AZC?

- Why?
- Difference urban/rural?

My research is about personal development and well-being for people that live in AZCs.

What are things AZC-residents need in order to grow as a person, or feel good?

What should be changed in AZCs to make it a more comfortable place to stay?

- How can this be arranged?

Closing questions

Is there something we have not yet discussed, that you still want to say?

If you could describe your stay in the AZC in 3 words: what would they be?

Do you have any plans for the future? Goals?

Do you have any plans for this weekend?

APPENDIX 4: INTERVIEW GUIDE ORGANIZATION

Topic list de vrolijkheid

Goedendag, mijn naam is Eline Heirman en ik ben student aan de master International Development Studies. Momenteel doe ik onderzoek naar de persoonlijke ontwikkeling en het welzijn van AZC-bewoners in plattelandsgebieden/rurale gebieden/krimpgebieden. Dit doe ik in samenwerking met het onderzoeksproject 'Welcoming Spaces'.

De data die verkrijgt middels dit gesprek zal ik gebruiken om mijn masterthesis te schrijven. De resultaten worden gedeeld met de universiteit en de onderzoekers van Welcoming Spaces.

Fijn dat we een gesprek konden inplannen. Ik zou het gesprek graag willen opnemen, is dat akkoord? Zo niet, dan zal ik notities maken.

Voor de opname: bent u akkoord met deelname aan dit onderzoek?

Introductievragen

Kunt u iets over uzelf en uw taak bij de Vrolijkheid vertellen?

Wat is volgens u in een notendop het doel van de Vrolijkheid?

- Bijdrage aan welzijn van AZC-bewoners

Kunt u iets vertellen over de activiteiten die de Vrolijkheid organiseert?

- Welzijn/ontwikkeling van AZC-bewoners

Kernvragen

Component: autonomie en competentie

Kunt u iets zeggen over het leven in het AZCs en de mogelijkheden voor asielzoekers om zichzelf te ontplooien?

- Eigen keuze?
- Hobbymatig/interesses
- Vaardigheden/studie/ voorbereiding op de toekomst?
- De rol van De Vrolijkheid
- Locatie van het AZC?

Component: relatie

De missie van de Vrolijkheid is onder andere de inclusie van AZC-bewoners in de Nederlandse samenleving.

Wat verstaat u onder inclusie?

- Kunt u een voorbeeld geven van inclusie?
- Het belang van inclusie?

- Is de inclusie even groot zonder de Vrolijkheid? Verband met locatie AZC?

Component: persoonlijke ontwikkeling en liminaliteit

Jullie visie omvat onder andere middels kunst bij te dragen aan de ontwikkeling van AZC-bewoners.

Wat voor soort ontwikkeling moet ik mij hierbij voorstellen?

- Persoonlijk?
- Concreet voorbeeld?

Welke mogelijkheden of barrières m.b.t. persoonlijke ontwikkeling zijn er in een AZC?

- Het belang van kunst
- Zonder Vrolijkheid?
- Ontstaan door het leven in een AZC, nieuwe kansen en ontwikkelingen voor bewoners?

Wat is volgens u een belangrijke voorwaarde waaraan voldaan moet worden voordat AZC-bewoners zich kunnen ontwikkelen?

Ik heb nog een afsluitende vraag, voordat ik die ga stellen; is er nog iets wat we niet besproken hebben, maar wat u wel zou willen delen omtrent de ontwikkelingen en het welzijn van asielzoekers?

Afsluitende vragen

Wat is uw bijzonderste ervaring bij de Vrolijkheid?

- Kunt u een voorbeeld geven?

APPENDIX 5: PAGES OF TRANSCRIPT INCLUDING CODING.

On the **next 3 pages**, a part of the transcript of AZC-resident Jeff is shown. The upperpart shows the codes, whereas the bottom part shows the conversation (please note that this part is turned) the text shown in italics represents the research participant.

NB: AS CONFIDENTIALITY WAS PROMISED TO PARTICIPANTS, THE TRANSCRIPTS WERE SHOWN TO THE SUPERVISORS BUT REMOVED FROM THIS OPEN-ACCESS DOCUMENT.

APPENDIX 6: CODEBOOKS

This appendix includes the codebook for interviews with participants (AZC-residents, former AZC-residents and organizations), and the codebook that was used for secondary data analysis.

Codebook interviews with participants

Nodes

Name	Files	References
Actively searching for opportunities	1	1
Activities	10	29
Daily routine	5	7
Hobbies-interests	3	5
Learning-studying	1	2
Language	1	1
Spend time with friends- acquaintances	1	2
Sports	1	1
Work	1	1
Volunteer work	1	2
Activities after having status	5	11
Activities in the AZC	14	54
activities for children	2	2
Competence	2	2
learning and study activities	1	2

Name	Files	References
bike riding classes	1	1
Dutch classes	1	1
participation in activities	2	2
motivations to (not) participate	1	1
sport activities	1	2
Aspirations and goals	7	19
Work-Occupation	1	2
Autonomy	3	3
Barriers	6	14
Competence	10	20
Expression of competence or skill	2	3
Skills	2	2
Skills in the future	1	1
COVID impact	4	5
Down skilling	1	1
General information	10	13
age	2	2
Current living situation	2	6
Location in NL	1	1
occupation	4	5
Time spent in NL	1	1

Name	Files	References
General remarks about the Netherlands	1	3
Immigration Status	2	5
Impact on opportunities	2	3
Improvements to be made	4	10
Liminality	7	22
Change during waiting	4	12
Locality	6	7
Connectedness to locality	1	2
Contact with locals	9	14
Description of locals	5	10
Difference rural-urban situation	8	15
Opinions of locals on AZC-residents	5	8
Opinions on the local area	8	11
Negative opinion	0	0
Positive opinion	2	2
Beautiful physical surroundings	2	4
preferred place of residence	4	4
Migrantification	3	3
Motivations	2	3

Name	Files	References
Organizations	0	0
Mission vision	6	29
Outside of NL remarks	5	5
Personal Development	9	17
Learning-studying	1	2
lack of activities in the AZC	1	1
restrictions on learning-studying	1	1
immigration status	1	1
Positive thinking in negative situations	1	1
Social aspects	1	1
Work	1	1
Growth	1	1
Photo 1 place	0	0
activities at place	6	10
Barriers	2	2
Coping with situation	4	9
Deeper meaning	5	13
Feeling	6	11
Memories - sense of home	2	3
Photo 2 proud	0	0
Deeper meaning	4	9

Name	Files	References
effect of activity	3	4
Motivation	5	8
Other activities	3	6
Photo 3 goal	0	0
Deeper meaning	5	10
Motivation of goal	6	10
Relatedness	8	27
Relatedness	2	6
Own initiative in building relationship	1	2
Transnational relations	4	8
Remarks about fleeing	2	3
Rules for asylum-seekers	2	5
biometric ID	2	2
Experience with the rules	1	3
emotions regarding rules	1	1
Fear	1	5
regulations in the AZC	2	5
Staying in the AZC	3	4
Experience with AZC-residents	12	52
Relationships with fellow AZC-residents	1	1

Name	Files	References
Experience with the AZC as a building	12	26
Experience with the procedure	7	15
Experience with the room	3	9
Experience with workers and volunteers	11	50
Summarized 3 words	8	8
Well-being	6	23

Codebook secondary data review

Nodes

Name	Files	References
About the COA	3	9
Activities	1	4
autonomy - competence - relatedness	2	7
Development	2	5
Facilities regarding personal development	1	2
General info AZC-residents	3	5
Geographies or spaces	3	3
Government	1	2
Impact activities	1	6
Impact corona	1	2

Name	Files	References
Impact of procedure on resident	1	4
Impact opvang on AZC residents	4	10
Liminality	2	3
Mission or vision	5	13
Need for action	1	1
Needs of AZC residents	1	1
Relationship AZCs - locals	2	3
Suggestions for improvements	2	3
System or context	6	24