FACULTY OF POLITICAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

Tackling the shackles of social exclusion

The importance of local volunteer organizations and social connection to alleviate the experience and consequences of social exclusion in Kontich, Flanders

Word count: 24495

Kato Schuddinck
Student number: 01814918

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Jeroen Cuvelier,
Co-Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Jeroen Adam

Academic Dissertation

A dissertation submitted to Ghent University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Conflict and Development Studies

Academic year: 2023-2024

GHENT UNIVERSITY

Abstract

Social exclusion remains a pressing issue in Belgium and Flanders, despite numerous policies and aid programs. These initiatives often overlook the multi-dimensional and complex nature of social exclusion, failing to address its root cause, which is the inability to fully participate in society and access its opportunities. Local volunteer organizations are crucial to address this issue through community-building. This research therefore delves into the experience of social exclusion in Kontich, a Flemish village, and the effectiveness of local volunteer organizations focused on community-building. Interviews were conducted with four volunteers and four individuals experiencing social exclusion. They participate in Welzijnsschakels, a Belgian organization composed of local individual groups in different municipalities.

The participants highlighted the importance of social connections and networks. Unlike organizations like the OCMW, which primarily offers practical aid, Schakel, as a local volunteer organization, prioritizes socialization and community connections. Schakel fosters individuals' need to belong and mitigates social isolation. Overcoming social exclusion is challenging due to intense negative emotions such as shame, distrust and pride. However, Schakel and the established relationships among individuals experiencing social exclusion help counter these emotions. Schakel therefore serves as an essential third place. However, the survival of Schakel Kontich, being a small local organization dependent on volunteers, is not guaranteed. The volunteers indicated that it is challenging to find new and younger volunteers. Moreover, effectively addressing social exclusion requires significant commitment and time. Time constraints, such as full-time employment and caregiving roles, prevent many adults from profound volunteering.

Sociale uitsluiting blijft één van de grootste uitdagingen in België en Vlaanderen. Ondanks de vele beleidsmaatregelen en hulpprogramma's, vergeten deze initiatieven vaak de multidimensionale en complexe aard van sociale uitsluiting. Ze pakken hierdoor niet de kernoorzaak van uitsluiting aan, namelijk het onvermogen om deel te nemen aan de samenleving en haar vele mogelijkheden. Lokale vrijwilligersorganisaties zijn belangrijke instanties om dit probleem aan te kaarten door middel van community-building. Dit onderzoek richt zich daarom op de ervaring van sociale uitsluiting in Konitch, een Vlaams dorp, en de effectiviteit van lokale vrijwilligersorganisaties die zich richten op

community-building. Vier vrijwilligers en vier personen die sociale uitsluiting ervaren werden geïnterviewd. Zij zijn leden van Welzijnsschakel, een Belgische organisatie bestaande uit lokale groepen in verschillende gemeenten.

De deelnemers benadrukten het belang van sociale connecties en netwerken. In tegenstelling tot organisaties zoals het OCMW, die voornamelijk praktische hulp bieden, legt Schakel als lokale vrijwilligersorganisatie de nadruk op socialisatie en connecties met de gemeenschap. Schakel bevordert de behoefte van individuen om erbij te horen en vermindert sociale isolatie. Uit sociale uitsluiting geraken is moeilijk door de belevenis van negatieve emoties zoals schaamte, wantrouwen en trots. Schakel en de nieuwe sociale contacten gaan dit tegen. Schakel dient daardoor als een ‘Third Place’. Aangezien Schakel een kleine vrijwilligersorganisatie is, is er geen bestaanszekerheid. De vrijwilligers gaven aan dat nieuwe en jonge vrijwilligers moeilijk te vinden zijn. Werken rond sociale uitsluiting vergt veel inzet en tijd, wat voor vele volwassen mensen moeilijk is door tijdsbeperkingen zoals voltijds werken en zorgtaken.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

For European welfare states like Belgium, social exclusion and economic deprivation continue to be one of the most urgent issues, exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic (Greiss & Schoneville, 2023). The United Nations defines social exclusion as following: "Social exclusion describes a state in which individuals are unable to participate fully in economic, social, political and cultural life, as well as the process leading to and sustaining such a state" (2016, p.18). Consequently, social exclusion is the process of not having the same opportunities as the majority of society (O'Donnell et al., 2021; Richmond, 2002). When individuals are not able or not permitted to participate in society at the same level as others, they experience social exclusion, which operates at multiple levels (van Bergen et al., 2014).

Social exclusion is a complex and multi-dimensional concept. People are not directly socially excluded solely due to deprivation in one dimension, however, every aspect of life influences another (Jehoel-Gijsbers, 2004). For instance, losing one's job and stable income can lead to reduced access to healthcare, having bad health can in turn diminish social contact, creating a vicious cycle in which individuals become trapped (van Bergen et al., 2014). Furthermore, social exclusion can be influenced by various actors: the government through policies, society and its societal norms, even individuals who put themselves in a position of exclusion. Identifying the roots of social exclusion and devising strategies to address it is therefore difficult (Silver & Miller, 2003; Jehoel-Gijsbers, 2004). Social exclusion is thus relative to its context, shaped by national laws, global policies and politics, and cultural understandings at the community level. These contextual factors can intertwine to create situations where social exclusion persists and impacts people's lives (Silver, 2007).

Since the concept of social exclusion was born, it has often been exclusively connected to economic hardship. When there is economic instability, there is an increase in social exclusion (Pirani, 2011). However, the growing urban population, which often experiences social segregation, also contributes to social exclusion. For instance, migrants residing in predominantly migrant neighborhoods often find a sense of community and cultural connection. However, this can negatively affect integration with native citizens (Vela-Jiménez & Sianes, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic also exacerbated social inclusion. People residing in small apartments had limited outdoor

time compared to those with access to gardens, impacting both physical and mental health. Various societal changes and crises can influence social exclusion and its consequences (Vela-Jiménez & Sianes, 2021).

Furthermore, the COVID-19 crisis highlighted the preexisting problems and consequences of social exclusion while simultaneously exacerbating them. The pandemic amplified disadvantages across society, affecting health, housing and education. Consequently, an entire younger generation, particularly racial and ethnic minorities and impoverished youth, was pushed into the cycle of exclusion (Tsolou et al., 2021). In response to the crumbling social rights of its most vulnerable citizens, the European Union developed funding and aid programs to support its member states. However, these programs do little to address failing social rights, promote social citizenship, or foster community connections among those in need (Greiss & Schoneville, 2023). While the provided aid may assist individuals in coping with the consequences of social exclusion, it fails to address its root causes. Another problem in combating social exclusion is that the voices of people who experience exclusion are barely or not heard in the debate. While many urban municipalities and civil society actors actively advocate for a more inclusive society, policies often overlook the people that are excluded in decision-making processes and campaign directions. Therefore, organizations focusing on individual empowerment and precise actions to foster inclusion and connection may elicit greater contentment from excluded people than loud and striking campaigns (Lambert & Swerts, 2019). Social exclusion can manifest on various levels. Research on exclusion in Belgium and Flanders suggest that this multidimensionality is often forgotten when creating measurement tools to assess its prevalence. Consequently, this results in one-size-fits-all policies that fail to incorporate the very individual and personal nature of social exclusion. While policies addressing social exclusion may benefit some, they may prove ineffective for many others, particularly the most extreme cases of social exclusion (Gubrium et al., 2017; Robben et al., 2023; Van Regenmortel, 2017).

Due to these shortcomings in addressing social exclusion, informal social support plays a crucial role in aiding individuals through social exclusion. In many cases, this informal support network comprises family, parents, friends and partners, but it can also extend to external and more organized forms. While formal support, such as welfare policies and institutions, may provide material and

financial assistance, informal support is essential for offering informational and emotional support. Access to such support can be a protection against economic hardships and social exclusion (Meo et al., 2021). Informal safety nets are vital for all groups vulnerable to social exclusion, as social exclusion and its disadvantages cannot solely be tackled through innovation, technology or policy interventions. Therefore, informal support systems and community building play significant roles in addressing issues like social exclusion (Ainscow, 2020). While there have been many attempts at different levels of society to tackle social exclusion, desired outcomes are not always achieved. Often, the root problem of social exclusion, people's disconnection from their community and their inability to participate fully in society, is overlooked. This study will thus focus on community building at a local and personal level, involving groups and individuals experiencing social exclusion. Furthermore, while there is extensive research on social exclusion both within and outside of Belgium, there is a notable gap in understanding the importance and effectiveness of local NGOs working around the issue of social exclusion in Flanders. In Flanders, 11,2 % of citizens live in poverty or social exclusion, with the province of Antwerp having the highest percentage at 14% (EU-SILC Statbel, 2022). Unemployed individuals or those born outside of the European Union are more likely to live in poverty or social exclusion (Statistiek Vlaanderen, 2023). The following research question will be answered:

How is social exclusion experienced by members and volunteers of a local volunteer NGO working around the issue of social exclusion in Kontich (a Flemish village) and in which ways can such an organization assist people who experience social exclusion?

With the following sub questions:

- *What kinds of social exclusion are present and which consequences do they have on the daily life of individuals?*
- *How do individuals cope with social exclusion and how do they reconnect to society?*
- *How does Schakel alleviate the experience of social exclusion?*
- *Which role does Kontich's locality play in social exclusion?*
- *How do volunteers cope with such sensitive topics and what are some of the difficulties they encounter?*

There are various organizations in Flanders and Belgium who are concerned with social exclusion, one of them is Welzijnsschakels. Welzijnsschakels is a volunteer organization in Belgium that fights against social exclusion, poverty and discrimination, through group activities, personal and practical support, and connection to other social institutions. They want to create a just and sustainable society where everyone is of importance (Welzijnsschakels, n.d.). The organization is made up of 188 local volunteer groups who together reach more than 30.000 people. Volunteers and families meet each other in their own municipalities and neighborhoods. The organization places importance on the participation, involvement and agency of individuals and families that experience exclusion themselves, with a focus on community and social contact (Welzijnsschakels, n.d.).

To answer the research question, semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight people from the Welzijnsschakel group in Kontich (a village in the province of Antwerp). Four volunteers and four people who experience social exclusion participated. Through these interviews an extensive picture is made of the workings of social exclusion in a Flemish village and how an informal volunteer organization such as Schakel aids those who experience social exclusion. The research is of value towards a better understanding of social exclusion and how to combat exclusion in Belgium. Since Flanders is densely populated and built, with many villages connected to each other, it deviates from a strict geographical separation between urban and rural places. Kontich is therefore an interesting case study since it is neither an absolute urban or rural municipality and has aspects of both.

Before this thesis delves more into the research methodology and results, a brief overview of the literature and concepts is presented.

2. Literature study and conceptual framework

2.1. Social exclusion

It is often assumed that exclusion is primarily a material condition, where people live in poverty and are deprived of basic necessities such as housing. However, it is not merely poverty that produces social exclusion, various aspects and processes of deprivation must be considered. Following this view of exclusion, people are deemed socially excluded if they endure multiple forms of deprivation. This includes economic exclusion, as well as the inability to participate socially or adhere to mainstream social norms (Bailey et al., 2017; Vrooman & Hoff, 2013). Social exclusion can be embedded within society and its institutions, for instance, migrants or refugees may face language barriers, and public places may be inadequately adapted for people with disabilities. These barriers inhibit vulnerable groups from realizing their full potential both socially and economically (Raitano et al., 2021; Department for International Development, 2005). Moreover, social and economic exclusion often leads to political exclusion. Individuals cannot engage politically through different barriers (e.g. language), or they may be preoccupied with survival and lack the energy to participate politically. Nevertheless, political engagement can serve as an important tool for soliciting change and fostering integration within communities (National Democratic Institute, n.d.)

Social exclusion as a concept emerged in Europe during the 1970s in response to poverty and economic changes. While people were being deprived of material services and resources, social cohesion diminished and various groups across society stayed behind on social development (Labonté et al., 2011). To better capture the alienation or exclusion experienced by individuals also facing economic and financial challenges, there was a shift towards a stronger focus on social relations and processes. Laparra et al. state the following concerning the emergence of the concept of social exclusion: "Its use extends throughout Europe as an alternative to a purely economic and static conception of poverty studies. Since then, there has been a fairly broad consensus regarding the need to contemplate a multidimensional and dynamic perspective of social exclusion processes" (2021, p.638). When asked, people indeed mention the lack of contact with their immediate surroundings, other people and society in general, or the inability to conform to social rules, as essential aspects of social exclusion, in addition to material and economic deprivation (Vrooman & Hoff, 2013). Whereas most researchers accepted the development of social exclusion as a concept,

not everyone agreed. Saunders and Tsumori (2002) are skeptical about the transition from poverty towards the then new concept of social exclusion. They argue that the concept change can lead to victimization, as being "socially excluded" implies that something is happening to individuals, shifting responsibility away from them and onto others.

Dealing with inequalities and exclusion earlier in life often leads to similar challenges later on. Disadvantages at every stage of life influence each other, resulting in many individuals experiencing a lifetime of social exclusion (Van Regenmortel et al., 2021). Groups that are particularly vulnerable to social exclusion include low-income groups, migrants or refugees (especially those from non-Western origins), individuals with lower levels of education, and single parents. These groups often find themselves living in social exclusion or on the brink of it. The lack of social connections they experience because of their situation is often not their fault. Nevertheless, such connections are imperative for dealing with and overcoming social and economic exclusion (Vrooman & Hoff, 2013).

2.1.1. Neoliberalism

Social workers have indicated that there currently is a trend of minimizing big societal and structural problems, concerning social exclusion, into individual responsibilities. There are numerous instances where people are blamed for their own condition: child poverty is the fault of the parents and their parenting, people with debt spend too much while they actually have to survive on minimum wage, migrants do not try to integrate, while there might be no available opportunities that help them learn the language. Furthermore, they argue that community-based care can only be effective when the responsibilities are shared between the community, government and citizens (Horsell, 2006; Vandekinderen et al., 2019). This emphasis on individual responsibilities may be a result of neoliberalist ideologies.

In neoliberalism, there is a demand for a competitive economic market, ensuring that people can choose their individual economic activities. Furthermore, this is a system where individuals are rewarded based on their merits and achievements (Betacche et al., 2020; Hedegaard-Soerensen & Grumloese, 2018; Marron, 2013). According to this idea, the current social hierarchy exists due to innate qualities and the responsibilities individuals undertake. Exclusion is the result of one's own

actions rather than being a product of systematic exclusionary processes (Muñoz Arce & Pantazis, 2018). This mindset allows a certain inequality to exist. It frames ideas, biases and behavior towards people. There is a lack of understanding, ignorance and low solidarity towards the social exclusion of people who are disadvantaged in the system, making people more tolerant towards social inequality (Ashurst & Venn, 2014; Bettache et al., 2020; Charmaz, 2019). Neoliberal reforms diminished individuals' ability to mitigate their own inequality, leaving them stuck in a global system of inequality (Heron, 2008).

2.2. The experience of social exclusion

People are vulnerable to social exclusion for various reasons. These may include personal characteristics such as age or ethnicity, geographical location, economic status, or societal changes. Nevertheless, all of these factors can significantly impact well-being, mental and physical health, feelings of belonging, consequently, lead to isolation or other negative emotional responses.

2.2.1 Forms of social exclusion

Migrants and ethnic differences

Many prejudices and discriminatory practices still affect individuals from diverse backgrounds, excluding them from participating in everyday life. Migrants and ethnic minorities deal daily with microaggressions in Western countries, while still experiencing unequal treatment and exclusion. This leads to isolation and social withdrawal. Furthermore, discrimination limits opportunities on all levels: the labor market, housing market, financial support institutions, healthcare, social events, cultural and political life (Beech et al., 2021; Bracic, 2022; Brown et al., 2023; Elias & Paradies, 2021; Tankosic & Dovchin, 2021). These practices impact both physical and mental well-being as well as the ability to establish meaningful social relationships and a sense of belonging (Brondolo et al., 2012; Misra et al., 2021). The fear of possibly getting excluded is permanent and discrimination can worsen quickly at any given time (He et al., 2020).

Migrants face significant challenges in the labor market, including prejudices and language barriers. Even when they secure employment, it often falls within lower-paying tiers with limited job security, resulting in economic deprivation (Schierup & Jorgensen, 2016). In Belgium ethnic minorities still indicate inequalities concerning education and employment. Especially with the ban

on the headscarf, many women are forced to choose between entering the workforce or their religion and self-realization. Through islamophobia embedded in the social institutions of Belgian society, many muslims experience unequal treatment that limits their choices in education, employment and life in general (Van Raemdonck, 2023).

Furthermore, migrants or refugees are more likely to decline aid, since they are scared about their legal status or experience restricted mobility. During the Covid-19 pandemic, accessing aid or important information became more difficult for migrants due to inaccessible or complex communication channels (Bobek & Sandström, 2024). Moreover, the legal or illegal status of migrants highly influences their social rights and right to work, rendering them more vulnerable to accidents and lacking general protection (Karazman-Morawetz & Rönneling, 2003). Besides migrants declining aid themselves, not all healthcare institutions and professionals are equipped to effectively assist immigrants or reach this group adequately. Furthermore, healthcare often involves extensive bureaucratic and administrative procedures that are not always available in a language they understand (Côté et al., 2023). Belgian healthcare is dealing with grave disparities concerning migrant and ethnic minorities, noticed through the low number of migrant and ethnic minorities in psychiatric healthcare (De Kock, 2022).

Language

When individuals do not speak the language of their host country, expanding networks and social contacts becomes challenging because clear communication is one of the cornerstones for successful relationship building (Flint et al., 2018; Piller et al., 2020). This language barrier also impedes participation in general or mainstream society, as communication with natives or institutions becomes difficult, potentially provoking social exclusion (Xu et al., 2023). Consequently, migrants and refugees who do not speak the host society's language are often automatically excluded in some capacity (Corral-Granados et al., 2023). To learn a new language, communication with locals is necessary since this entails real life practice and examples. Daily informal subjection to the language is beneficial for migrants learning the new language. However, being completely new to everything and dealing with exclusion can hinder language acquisition. (Kosyakova et al., 2021; Troesch et al., 2020). Furthermore, being less proficient in the host society's language can induce fear of talking and expressing yourself. People may fear negative remarks and opinions of others, which causes

people to withdraw from situations where they have to speak the language (Xu et al., 2023). Language insecurity can lead to deteriorating well-being and a diminishing sense of belonging (Montemitro et al., 2021; Pot et al., 2018).

Disability

Having a physical or intellectual disability increases the risk of social exclusion in various aspects of life.

Having a physical or intellectual disability can lead to economic hardship. In severe cases, a disability can severely limit employment opportunities, thereby excluding disabled individuals from the primary source of incomes as well as a means of social contact and network building (Sloane & Jones, 2011). Having a disability can exclude you not only from work opportunities, but also from education, health services and other activities in society (Gomez Monedero et al., 2014). Additionally, having issues with mobility and access to transport is one of the biggest exclusionary factors for people with physical and intellectual disabilities (Casas, 2008).

Having an intellectual disability increases the chances of experiencing other health issues, potentially leading to higher or earlier mortality rates. This is often due to inaccessible health information and clinical research (Spaul et al., 2020). Additionally, people with intellectual disabilities face challenges in forming friendships and maintaining meaningful social connections, leaving them vulnerable to social exclusion. Therefore, social workers and volunteers providing support are crucial for fostering a sense of value and belonging (Robinson et al., 2018). Furthermore, support groups play a vital role in facilitating social relationships, promoting societal participation and sharing crucial health-related information. Thus, contributing to improved well-being and a greater sense of belonging among participants (Wilson et al., 2016).

Older people

Older people are more vulnerable to social exclusion. Due to their declining physical health, such as issues with mobility or other illnesses, many elderly individuals are dependent on other people (Maresova et al., 2019). Becoming dependent often triggers feelings of shame. People delay seeking assistance from their closest network out of fear of burdening others (Bredewold et al., 2019). Aside

from this, they also struggle with diminishing social networks and relationships, resulting in limited informal support (Hansen, 2020; Holmén & Furukawa, 2002). Lack of social support networks can detrimentally affect the health of older individuals, leading to feelings of isolation and loneliness (Drennan, 2008).

Besides the social network and dependency issues, availability and accessibility of services and infrastructure are significant exclusionary factors for older people. Especially in rural areas, access to healthcare services and services such as shops or post offices is often threatened by spending cuts. To access these services, older people have to travel further away. However, in rural places limited public transport is available and may be restricted in terms of frequency and accessibility towards individuals with declining physical health. A car is therefore critical to get around, but in this instance many older people are dependent on others driving them (Abbott & Sapsford, 2006; Walsh et al., 2020). It is essential for older people to have suitable and well working (public) transport to access networks, services, activities and society in general (Cass et al., 2005). Feelings of community and social cohesion also falter in rural spaces, resulting in less community support and more isolation. Such social exclusion has a significant impact on the subjective well-being of elderly people (Lee, 2020).

Moreover, the Covid-19 pandemic has highly impacted vulnerability to social exclusion. The fast and profound switch towards digitization of everyday life has left many elderly people behind. However, one of the most exclusionary practices during those times was prioritizing younger and healthier patients when caregivers or resources were scarce. At the same time, these policy decisions sparked discourse in which elderly individuals were perceived as taking away scarce resources from more ‘productive’ members of society. In general, the discourse around elderly people often, unintentionally or not, turns to their productivity and their value to society. Endangering solidarity for older generations and their treatment as equal citizens with valuable lives (Brooke & Jackson, 2020; Walsh et al., 2021).

Technology

Technology serves as an effective tool against social exclusion, as it can mitigate isolation and loneliness without requiring individuals to put in significant effort. Communication technology is

particularly beneficial for individuals who may be confined to their homes. Through phone calls, email and social media, people stay connected to family, friends and support networks (Lee, 2020; Sen et al., 2021). Communicative technology can maintain relationships but is also a helpful tool to access resources and information. During the Covid-19 pandemic technology was imperative to keep up with social contacts, society, support services and essential information (Sen et al., 2021; Shah et al., 2020; Xie et al., 2020). While technology offers numerous positive applications, it can also serve as an exclusionary factor, as not all elderly individuals can deal with such advanced digitalization. Technology can therefore be both inclusionary and exclusionary (Mubarak & Suomi, 2022; Seifert et al., 2021).

Transport

As mentioned above, (public) transport is crucial to access society and its services. Not having access to (public) transport reinforces social exclusion because it withholds individuals from acquiring all the opportunities a society has to offer, leading to transport poverty (Allen & Farber, 2021; Simcock et al., 2021). The inaccessibility of public transport can result from financial constraints and physical limitations experienced by individuals, as well as from underdevelopment and poor connectivity of public transport infrastructure itself (Luz & Portugal, 2021). Particularly, individuals who depend on public transport daily are vulnerable to transport poverty and thereby more vulnerable to social exclusion (Hantson et al., 2023). People who have adapted their lives to uncertain use of transportation are more likely to live in partial isolation (Ward & Walsh, 2023).

Public Housing

Housing is one of the major concerns for people facing economic exclusion. There are long waiting lists for public housing. The uncertainty of the living situation results in considerable stress and deteriorating mental health. Furthermore, the quality of public or affordable housing may fall short of standards, with low quality living conditions having detrimental effects on mental health, potentially leading to depression (Baker et al., 2020; Chung et al., 2019; Flanagan et al., 2020; Shah et al., 2018; Sieg & Yoon, 2020). Small spaces with no access to a quiet study space or privacy also create disadvantages for children (Becevic & Dahlstedt, 2021).

Urban vs. rural

Social exclusion in Belgium and Flanders is still very present across various aspects of daily life. Depending on where you live, the manifestation of social exclusion varies. There are different risk factors associated with the location you reside in, such as urban versus rural areas (Tsakloglou & Papadopoulos, 2002; Van Regenmortel et al., 2021).

Social exclusion is notably visible in urban areas. Belgian cities exhibit a significant level of spatial isolation, as can be seen in neighborhoods predominantly inhabited by ethnic minority groups, comprising primarily non-European migrants. (Andersson et al., 2018; Costa & de Valk, 2018). Besides this ethnic divide, there is a clear segregation on a socioeconomic level. Belgian cities show higher levels of poverty, low employment and low education levels concentrated in certain neighborhoods (Haandrikman et al., 2021; Musterd et al., 2016). A study (Schuermans et al., 2016) conducted in Ghent and its surrounding suburban towns concludes that the white middle-class avoids living in culturally diverse, impoverished neighborhoods. They prefer avoiding contact with ethnic minorities or poorer people and because of this choose to live in the "whiter" suburban towns instead of the city. However, social exclusion in urban areas can occur in less overt ways and may be an unintended consequence of other policies. An example of this are the LEZ zones in Belgian cities. Such policies, although an effort to clean the cities of excess air pollution, have adverse effects on the reachability and mobility of people. People who are clustered to their home in such a zone, lose regular social contacts, because people cannot enter the zone. Moreover, people who live on a low budget may not be financially strong enough to upgrade their car, excluding them from an important tool for mobility (De Vrij & Vanoutrive, 2022).

Solutions to counter this segregation have not been very successful. In Flanders there is a history of encouraging homeownership, preferably single-family houses, that has ingrained itself in the Flemish ideas of success. To counter this and the high segregation of ethnic minorities and poor people in neighborhoods, urban policy makers popularized the concept of social mix. Social mix includes various spatial scales and various social groups with the purpose of creating mixed living communities and enhancing integration in society. Nevertheless, realization of the concept was not accomplished by policy measures (Loopmans et al., 2010).

In Europe, people residing in rural areas are more at risk of experiencing economic hardship and social exclusion. They often live in remote areas with limited access to services and face shortages of (public) transport. They often live in small communities that are emptying out, which further diminishes social support networks and restricts economic and social opportunities (Binder & Matern, 2019; Kalinowski & Rosa, 2021). While in most European countries people in urban areas have a higher income, this is not true for Belgium and some other Western/Northern European countries. While poverty may be less significant in Belgian rural areas, there are other forms of social exclusion present (Kalinowski & Rosa, 2021). In Flanders a greater proportion of older people live in rural areas. As people age, they often rely on informal care from children or neighbors. However, in rural places, relying on children for care is not evident, as many younger people move out of rural places. Neighbors and communities are not always strongly connected in Flanders, meaning many older people cannot fall back on informal care in rural areas (Volckaert et al., 2020). Migrants who live in Belgian rural places often miss out on ethnic support groups and infrastructure/services that aid with integration, which are more available in urban areas (Moris, 2020).

2.2.2 Effects of social exclusion

Belonging

The need to belong is a fundamental aspect of human nature (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). As suggested by Valcke et al. (2019), this need encompasses discomfort with social exclusion. Humans are social beings and yearn for inclusion and a sense of belonging. Failure to fulfill these needs can significantly impact their well-being and (mental) health. Additionally, since social exclusion has a negative impact on the feeling of belonging, people who experience social exclusion often resort to self-defeating behaviors (Twenge et al., 2002). Belonging is not solely measured by the number of personal contacts or group affiliations one possesses. It is a subjective and personal feeling. Therefore, individuals may still feel a sense of non-belonging despite taking part in multiple networks and relationships (Allen, 2021).

To counter the feeling of not belonging, positive, reassuring and trustworthy interpersonal relationships and social networks are essential. Maintaining a sense of belonging is crucial to preserve good health and overall well-being (Cohen, 2004; Pardede & Kovac, 2023). Allen et al.

(2021) identified four core concepts essential for fostering the feeling of belonging: competencies for belonging, opportunities to belong, motivations to belong, and perceptions of belonging. While competencies and motivation relate to one's personal abilities and desires to belong, opportunities are dependent on environmental factors. Certain groups, such as migrants, are easily excluded from these opportunities despite exhibiting the competencies and motivations for belonging. Furthermore, perceptions of belonging are highly influenced by one's past experiences (Coie, 2004). Individuals with a history of rejection may struggle to feel a sense of belonging, even if they possess the other three concepts.

In continuation on the issue of perceptions of belonging, individuals who already have experienced exclusion anticipate further rejection. This anticipation is particularly heightened among those who already experience lower feelings of belonging. This expected rejection significantly lowers one's happiness levels, rendering them more vulnerable for mental distress (Sjastad, 2020). The fear of not belonging produces emotional distress, such as anxiety. Simultaneously, individuals facing a higher likelihood of exclusion or who are in the process of being excluded are more likely to struggle with feelings of anxiety and stress (Baumeister & Tice, 1990). Exclusion and the sense of not belonging are deeply intertwined. The feeling of not belonging induces a sense of inauthenticity, where people feel unable to express their true selves. Moreover, feelings of social exclusion lead to negative emotions like sadness and anger. Both inauthenticity and intense negative emotions have detrimental effects on well-being (Slepian & Jacoby-Senghor, 2020).

Isolation and loneliness

Social isolation is the absence of social connectedness and the inability to engage in mainstream societal activities and institutions (Barry, 1998; Smith & Lim, 2020; Zavaleta et al., 2017). Involuntary isolation which is caused beyond the control of those encountering it, is often a result of social exclusion (Barry, 1998). Conversely, people may also choose to isolate themselves as a coping mechanism for the negative feelings elicited by social exclusion (Williams & Nida, 2022). Over the past few years, isolation and feelings of loneliness have gotten significantly worse due to the The Covid-19 pandemic. Especially due to the strict quarantine and social distancing measures, which have led to diminished social interactions for many (Hwang et al., 2020).

Whereas social isolation is more objectively defined as the (near) absence of social relationships, loneliness is coined as a subjective and negative feeling based on one's perception of the quantity and quality of their social connections (de Jong-Gierveld et al., 2006). While loneliness does not inherently imply social exclusion, it can heighten the chance of experiencing exclusion in the future. Loneliness occurs when individuals lack a social network and personal relationships and contact. This loss can evoke feelings of unworthiness for societal participation. Consequently, individuals who no longer participate in society can experience social exclusion (Huxhold et al., 2022). However, having a partner or spouse decreases the likelihood of experiencing loneliness, particularly in later stages of life. Even a single meaningful relationship can mitigate feelings of loneliness (Dahlberg et al., 2018).

Some people who experience isolation or self-isolation may no longer seek social contact, avoiding or even completely declining occasions for social interaction or participation (Menec et al., 2020). Nevertheless, humans are a social species and need social connections for survival. Evidence suggests that both social isolation and loneliness leads to grave physical and psychological consequences (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015). Physical implications of social isolation include decreasing immunity and sleep, inflammation, and an increased risk of cardiovascular disease. These physical manifestations often stem from factors such as health illiteracy, limited access to healthcare, and biased treatment of health professionals. Besides, social isolation and loneliness lead to psychological decline such as depression and even suicidal thoughts, as well as behavioural practices such as poor diet, substance abuse, medication misuse, and less exercise. These are all practices that significantly impact a person's health (Cacioppo et al., 2011; Hodgson et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2020). Individuals experiencing social isolation, loneliness and who have a low socioeconomic status exhibit more health-risk behaviors (Algren et al., 2020). Moreover, prolonged social isolation heightens stress levels, provoking higher chances of cerebrovascular and neurological diseases (Friedler et al., 2015).

Ostracism over a short time frame can evoke emotional distress. Over a longer time period exclusion leads to profound negative emotions such as feelings of worthlessness and depression. These feelings can escalate into feelings of loneliness and resignation, trapping people in isolation for extended periods (Williams & Nida, 2022). Isolation not only causes negative emotions and

deteriorating mental health but can also result from these factors. Research indicates a close link between depression and social isolation, creating a vicious circle that is difficult to break free from (Elmer et al., 2020; Reinhard et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2023).

Social isolation impacts various facets of life, with the elderly being particularly vulnerable. Older people may face challenges leaving their homes due to physical decline or dependency on others. This results in fewer and less frequent social interactions and ultimately leads to social isolation. Therefore, many older people feel they are isolated and experience loneliness. (Huisman & van Tilburg, 2021; National academies of sciences, engineering and medicine, 2020).

Moreover, isolation plays a significant role in the cycle of unemployment and economic hardship. Gallie, Paugam and Jacobs (2010) and Halleröd and Larsson (2007) argue that unemployment leads to poverty and economic exclusion, making it harder to secure employment. This perpetuates a cycle of poverty-induced isolation. This economic exclusion can lead to overall social isolation and exclusion by obstructing opportunities for societal participation (Jiang & Ngai, 2021). Unemployed individuals who are also socially isolated experience heightened financial stress, since there are less or no options for financial support. Distress caused by financial hardship and social isolation negatively impacts psychological health, which makes it harder to overcome unemployment as well (Gallie, 2013).

Negative emotional responses

Social exclusion and exclusionary practices evoke a range of emotions and responses, such as anger, guilt, shame, pride and distrust. Such intense emotions can deter people from seeking aid, feeling like they belong or lead to isolation.

Chow, Tiedens and Govan (2007) conclude that when social exclusion evokes anger as an emotional response, individuals are more likely to exhibit antisocial behavior. Furthermore, when rejection and exclusion elicit antisocial behavior, empathy and willingness to cooperate with others reduces as well (Twenge et al., 2007).

Guilt is a common emotion among people with children, especially single parents, who may experience social exclusion due to financial constraints or time limitations in caring for their children and themselves. Being the sole responsible parent for all those tasks highly impacts their mental health. This leads to feelings of guilt for not being able to provide adequately for their children or for not being able to offer more opportunities (Kim et al., 2023).

Shame, concerning poverty and social exclusion, is a universal emotion. Research conducted in various countries, such as low-income countries Uganda and Pakistan and high-income countries United Kingdom and Norway, finds that shame is almost always present when experiencing poverty (Walker et al., 2013). Shame is often accompanied by depression, self-isolation, self-loathing, and feeling different from the rest. These feelings are detrimental to one's well-being and hinder the willpower to overcome social and economic exclusion (Mills & Zavaleta, 2015; Walker et al., 2013).

Thomas, Wyatt and Hansford (2020) argue that feelings of shame and failure associated with poverty and social exclusion are imposed by and ingrained through the neoliberal notion of self-responsibility. This idea fosters mental distress and a sense of failure, making individuals ashamed and reluctant to seek welfare assistance and accept what they are entitled to. Furthermore, shame also reduces one's feeling of belonging, as people who are socially excluded experience shame when the social groups they aspire to belong to reject them (Pardede & Kovac, 2023).

Some individuals who experience poverty and social exclusion may deny their circumstances as a coping mechanism, evoking feelings of pride for being able to handle such hardship without seeking additional support. By maintaining their independence, they distance themselves from the label of being "poor" and the associated shame. There is pride in presenting yourself as normal and independent (Shildrick & MacDonald, 2013). However, such pride can inhibit them from seeking necessary assistance, because asking for help is perceived as a blow to their self-reliance and societal contribution. Eventually, swallowing one's pride is inevitable when there is no other option to survive, but it is often a painful process (Chase & Walker, 2012; Scheff, 2002).

Individuals who experience social exclusion or socioeconomic inequalities often exhibit higher levels of social anxiety and decreased feelings of social trust (Hansen et al., 2021; Saasa et al., 2021).

High levels of distrust stems from an internalized negative worldview developed through experiences of social exclusion. They view others as selfish or having ill intentions. Consequently, such distrust can lead to diminished interest in others and their intentions and in general can induce less prosocial behaviors (Choy et al., 2021; Raudenbush, 2016; Stavrova & Ehlebracht, 2016). In most cases of social exclusion there is a point where people will seek support or aid, however, due to their distrust, they keep their social circles minimal (Raudenbush, 2016).

Trust is crucial in establishing social relationships and support networks. People with low levels of trust towards others encounter more difficulties forming new social contacts and engaging in community activities. This leaves individuals even more vulnerable for further social exclusion (Hansen et al., 2021; Prattley et al., 2020).

2.3. Coping with social exclusion

There are various factors that mitigate the disastrous consequences of experiencing social exclusion, feelings of not belonging, isolation and physical and mental distress. The importance of qualitative social connections and relationships in this process is highlighted.

2.3.1 Third places

People require accessible, affordable and "easy to get there" places outside their homes and workplaces to foster human connections and interactions. These places, often informal and public, enhance community life, by providing a break from the work-home-work routine (Oldenburg & Brisett, 1982). According to Oldenburg (1997), these "third places" are crucial for maintaining civil society and promoting civic engagement. Such places facilitate community participation and neighborly communication. They serve as spaces for leisure, relaxation, and socialization. Examples include coffee shops, public parks, community centers, gyms, public libraries, and theaters. However, in recent years, virtual spaces have emerged as an alternative third place. Here people can meet and socialize online (Crick, 2011; Ferreira et al., 2021; Hickman, 2013; Jeffres et al., 2009). Moreover, third places can address the problem of declining social networks, by fostering public gatherings where new connections and social networks can form (Yuen & Johnson, 2016). Especially in deprived neighborhoods promoting social contacts and community building through

third places can be beneficial, as they also serve practical functions by offering services, goods, advice, and information (Hickman, 2013). In general, regular meetings in third places often lead to friendships and the formation of support groups, which heightens solidarity and willingness to help one another. Third places may vary for different residents of a neighborhood or village depending on how long the residents have lived there. Long-time residents may prefer familiar establishments like an old bar, while newcomers may gravitate to an entire other place such as a public park (Mehta & Bosson, 2009).

Oldenburg (1997) emphasizes verbal and profound interactions as essential for social cohesion, however social interaction does not need to be verbal to have a positive effect. Simple acts like seeing or passing by others or recognizing a familiar face can already be beneficial (Hickman, 2013). Additionally, whereas Oldenburg focuses on the social aspects of third places, Mikunda (2004) argues that third places can be temporary and fulfill other emotional needs beyond social contact. In this type of third place, like landmarks or museums, individuals can act as spectators, providing an escape from stress and a chance to relax. This definition offers another view on third places and highlights other benefits that third places can offer.

Given that third places propel community, social interaction, and tranquility, they foster feelings of belonging and protect against possible loneliness and stress. Accessible third places or believing third places are present, therefore positively impacts well-being and health. Moreover, third places increase the quality of life in communities or municipalities and are important to its citizens (Finlay et al., 2019; Jeffres et al., 2009).

2.3.2 Network

Humans have an inherent need for social contacts and relationships. Experiencing social exclusion can threaten this need, resulting in decreased well-being, health, feelings of belonging and self-esteem (Wesselmann et al., 2016). Therefore, supportive social networks are important for people experiencing social exclusion. Self-organized organizations dedicated to addressing social inequality and exclusion are a great resource of support and solidarity. These organizations are typically community-based and help bridge the gap between communities and individuals undergoing such inequality or exclusion. Those who participate in these groups are likely to regain

a feeling of empowerment, agency, and collective strength (Villena et al., 2020). Research (Banulescu-Bogdan, 2020; Low & Shah, 2023) on refugee women in the UK and Europe found that the creation of a support group for these women, improved their agency and integration. Such a support group allows for the establishment of profound social relationships, where women with similar life stories, issues, and experiences can find support in one another. While engaging in group activities, the women broaden their cultural skills, such as language acquisition, and in extension thereof their opportunities in their new home country. Migrants often experience more severe consequences of persistent social exclusion when their social networks are limited to other migrants. However, when their networks expand to include native people, feelings of resignation and depression diminish (Marinucci & Riva, 2020).

To give socially excluded people an equal chance of participation in society, accessible information is necessary. It can be assumed that people who experience isolation, poverty, language differences or digital exclusion do not always possess or are reached by mainstream channels of information. Dialogue and involvement with socially excluded individuals is necessary to foster more democratic and political equality (Claeys et al., 2001). Another example is the growing mental health issue in the migrant community. High quality health care is not equally accessible in all of Belgium. There is a need for a more accessible network of information that can bridge the gap between the healthcare system and migrants or people from diverse ethnic backgrounds with different ethnicities (Duveau et al., 2023). When a state is not capable of assisting socially excluded groups, nonprofits often serve as an effective substitution for providing assistance or information (DeVerteuil, 2017). Smaller NGOs who focus on agency and network building seem critical to combat exclusion (DeVerteuil et al., 2021).

Nonprofit and volunteer organizations take on the responsibilities that the public and care sectors are unable to sustain. They fill in those gaps by supporting excluded people so they can obtain meaningful participation in society (Warin, 2002). Given the complexity of social exclusion, no single agency or organization can address these issues on their own. Effective social work practices require integration and cooperation between different actors and organizations. It is essential to establish connections between these stakeholders, with communities, governments, and even citizens taking up their respective responsibilities. Social workers and individuals working on social

exclusion play a vital role in building networks and relationships between social institutions and those experiencing exclusion. (Raeymaeckers, 2016; Vandekinderen et al., 2019). More informal organizations that work without compulsory formal qualifications to join have a lower barrier of entry and can therefore reach a more diverse and open target group of socially excluded people (Banulescu-Bogdan, 2020). Community-based programs are crucial to tackle multiple levels of inclusion. When social workers work together with individuals, families and communities in their interventions, new pathways to inclusion can be achieved. More personal community-based social work can highlight issues and simultaneously solutions that would otherwise be overlooked (Cedeño, 2023). Furthermore, social workers and volunteers participate in combating social exclusion. They achieve this by sharing their knowledge and serving as a bridge between those at risk of social exclusion and social institutions and actors (Ward, 2009). Activities powered by local residents that are available to the entire community are enhancing the quality of life, for the local community in general but also for their disadvantaged and socially excluded residents (Murray & Crummett, 2018). Volunteering at the local level is therefore an important aspect of community building.

2.4 Volunteering

2.4.1 Retaining volunteers

Volunteering is essential for sustaining the function and workings of the public sector, it is an indispensable aspect of public and care services. It is therefore important to retain volunteers. To realize this, it is important to address the psychological needs and personal goals of volunteers. The fulfillment of needs and attachment to the institution are grounds on which volunteers stay. Volunteers appreciate being involved in decision-making processes, being kept up to date, and participating in activities. When these aspects are fulfilled, they are more likely to remain committed to their organization (Huang et al., 2019).

Therefore, a critical aspect of retaining volunteers is the satisfaction they get out of their volunteering labor. However, achieving this can be more challenging with younger volunteers. Even if they are satisfied, they are often occupied with expanding their skills and opportunities for paid labor. Involvement in volunteer organizations is nowadays used by younger people as an instrument

for employment and distinguishment of others (Bang, 2015; Dean, 2021). Older volunteers often find themselves in a stronger position, financially wise, meaning they do not look for the self-development aspect in volunteering as much as younger people. Satisfaction and fulfillment in their volunteering role is imperative to keep older volunteers and also indicates a higher chance of retention when they retire (Bang, 2015; Erlinghagen & Hank, 2006). Furthermore, the attraction to volunteering can be reinforced by religion. Religious individuals may feel a sense of duty towards volunteering practices, as they are often part of a community that encourages such actions (Southby & South, 2016).

People are less likely to start volunteering when they are practicing the role of caregiver. This can include care for parents, very young children or spouses when they are older. Such a caregiving role, on top of having to financially contribute to the family, can amount to stress and significantly less spare time. This prevents people from volunteering (Choi et al., 2007). There is an increase of volunteering among parents of school-aged children. Their increased involvement in school life and the school community often leads to volunteering activities that are closely tied to school-related activities. However, other forms of caregiving, such as caring for a baby or elderly parent, are more private affairs and less directly connected to societal engagement (Butrica et al., 2009; McNamara & Gonzales, 2011). Many volunteers are retired or still studying, which is a consequence of time restraint through employment. For working adults, there is little spare time left after work. Therefore, possible volunteering ends up between caring for a family and a home, hobbies, seeing friends, sport and taking care of yourself. Since time is highly important for profound volunteering, many working adults cannot take up such a role (Southby & South, 2016; Taniguchi, 2006). Young people indicate they also have other commitments, such as school, meaning they have little time left over for volunteering. Additionally, among young people there is a higher chance that volunteering has the negative connotation of being boring and un-cool (Smith, 1999).

2.4.2 Benefits of volunteering

While younger people indicate that volunteering can be conceived as uncool, volunteering when younger and also in later life has many positive outcomes. Volunteering creates bigger social networks and better interpersonal skills (De León et al., 2020).

There are many benefits linked to volunteer work. Volunteering allows individuals who experience social exclusion or low social interaction to expand their network and their ability to participate in society (Baron, 2004; Low & Shah, 2023). Engaging in voluntary work enables individuals to lead a more structured life. Having a structure or routine allows for participation in daily society. It perpetuates the idea of having a goal in your life and reduces time spent stuck at home. Besides these benefits, volunteering also increases self-worth and creates the feeling that one is a useful part of society. Feeling useful and an asset to society has considerable benefits on mental health and well-being (Kruithof et al., 2021). Through these positive feelings of self, people create a better view of their own identity and how other people might perceive them (Tierney et al., 2021).

For people who no longer have access to the labor market, volunteering can be a partial replacement. Employment encourages independence and participation on a cultural, political and material level. Meaning it actively contributes towards someone's social integration. Volunteering on the other hand does not increase this independence but does positively impact the opportunities for participation and in this way contributes to social integration (Strauß, 2008).

Volunteering possibilities for older people are effective precautions against loneliness. Through retirement and older age, many older people may lose a significant part of their network and a fulfilling way to fill their days. Volunteering can alleviate these events (Lee, 2021). Volunteering positively benefits this transition from work to retirement, it allows people to retain discipline, daily routine and a meaningful way to spend the days (Filges et al., 2020). There are mental and physical health benefits that can be gained from volunteering. For elderly people, the benefits can lead to better functioning and productivity of the body and mind. In general, not just for older people, social referrals to participate in volunteer work are advised (Nichol et al., 2023).

However, research (García-Mainar et al., 2014; Lee & Brudney, 2012; Plagnol & Huppert, 2010; Smith, 2012; Youssim et al., 2015) also argues that social exclusion can result in exclusion from volunteering opportunities. This is because volunteering requires time and (financial) resources that excluded individuals may lack. Adding to this, volunteering practices and organizations are embedded in larger society, meaning they also take over exclusionary processes that are part of larger society. Dominant groups are consequently more represented in voluntary work (Hustinx et

al., 2022). There is a personal benefit attached to volunteer work, improving yourself through newfound skills, networks and fulfillment. Further societal divisions are being promoted when already excluded or partly excluded people miss this opportunity for such self-improvement (Bonnesen, 2019).

To conclude this literature review, there are various groups and individuals who suffer from the inability to participate in society in all its facets. This non-participation, unequal treatment and the loss of social connection to their communities causes social exclusion. This endangers people's need to belong and provokes isolation as well as other negative emotions and deteriorates their well-being. To counter this, social connection, networks, third places and volunteer organizations are crucial coping mechanisms.

3. Methodology

When trying to understand social change and development, it's essential not to overlook human action and consciousness. Actor-oriented research or analysis regards research participants and other actors as active agents who deeply and personally influence their own or other's lives and circumstances. Rather than viewing people as passive participants subjected to structural conditions with similar outcomes for all those affected. Acknowledging agency and individual power can significantly enhance our understanding of possible different outcomes and can assist in explaining social exclusion from a bottom-up perspective, as opposed to the structuralist top-down perspectives (Long, 1990). Furthermore actor-oriented approaches in academic research emphasize human agency when creating "new" knowledge. Since knowledge processes are inherently social processes, it is imperative not to disregard everyday social processes. When examining social exclusion, development, conflict, and power inequalities, phenomena that are profoundly socially constructed, academic research can benefit from actor-oriented approaches. Since they specifically focus on these social relations, behaviors and processes (Leeuwis et al., 1990).

There has been a shift from focusing solely on materialistic and economical poverty to the broader concept of social exclusion. This shift has influenced how research is conducted and social issues are analyzed, with a preference emerging for an individual or agency-oriented approach. How actors handle their circumstances and experiences of exclusion is a deeply individual process. Their interpretation of social exclusion and their emotional responses to it can vary across different times and spaces (Vobruba, 2002). Research on social exclusion often focuses on top-down policies, how they manifest and on what the "excluded" need to do to achieve inclusion. However, this approach often overlooks the extreme dynamic and changing nature of exclusion over time and space, and the various actors who can influence this exclusion. Thus, actor-oriented approaches offer a more dynamic and nuanced perspective on the complex issue of social exclusion (Davidsson & Petersson, 2017).

This thesis relies on qualitative research through semi-structured in-depth interviews. It therefore focuses on the lived experiences of the interviewees and is less concerned with predicting when social exclusion arises or why social exclusion happens (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

In-depth interviews can almost be seen as a conversation about a specific research question (Ompad et al., 2008). The purpose of in-depth interviews is to collect data in the form of experiences, opinions and ideas about a certain topic, most importantly in a respondent's own words. Qualitative interviews, like in-depth interviews, include open-ended questions. This encourages the interviewee to talk about a topic freely and in his or her own way (Ompad et al., 2008; Jennings, 2005). By conducting in-depth interviews with people who deal with social exclusion and thus experts on the topic, a strong account of the reality is given (dell'Olio et al., 2018). There are many advantages concerning in-depth interviews, they allow for a deepness that other methods cannot achieve. In-depth interviews allow a look into someone's entire thought process and the ability to ask people to clarify and explain their answers further. On the other hand, in-depth interviews take time, both during conducting the interview and analyzing it. This means you have less diverse data which you can make generalized statements from (Jennings, 2005).

The interviews are semi-structured, this way of questioning is helpful for conducting in-depth interviews (Longhurst, 2009). There is a list of predetermined questions or themes, but there is an openness that allows for steering away from the questionnaire to follow-up questions that could highlight new or interesting information (Magaldi & Berler, 2020). By adhering to a semi-structured framework, the interview will start to look like a conversation, making the interviewees comfortable enough to talk about topics or opinions they feel are important. Since there is space left to explore different questions or themes than previously decided on, semi-structured interviews are good to research more complex issues, emotions or experiences like social exclusion (Longhurst, 2009). Similar to in-depth interviews, semi-structured interviews can result in complex analysis, as each interview has the potential to take a unique direction. Consequently, it is challenging to formulate generalized statements from the collected data. However, they are great if you aim to understand the individual thoughts, behaviors and experience of different people in one group (Adams, 2015).

I opt for a semi-structured interview, to minimize imposing my prior knowledge and ideas about the topic on the interview by creating and adhering to a strict set of questions. Since I have never had to deal with social exclusion throughout my life or through my surroundings and I live a rather

privileged life, it is important to keep this in mind when conducting my interviews and analyzing them.

A thematic analysis via NVIVO was used to analyze the in-depth interviews. Thematic analysis is used to identify and interpret patterns and themes in text, in this case interviews. When coding the interviews, different themes will arise in each interview. Afterwards recurring themes from different interviews can be taken together to form new insights in the ideas and experiences from the interviewees (Clarke & Braun, 2016). Clarke and Braun (2006) created a six-step program to effectively use thematic analysis. First, you must acquaint yourself with the data. Second, initial codes are generated through identifying interesting features and gathering data for those. Third, in these codes you search for overarching themes. Fourth, the themes are reviewed, and a thematic map is created. Fifth, defining and naming themes, going over the specifics of each theme and finally producing the report. In this step there is a final chance for analysis, using examples from your data to support your themes and their relation to the literature and the research question.

The chosen methods and analysis can be linked to the Grounded Theory approach. This is an inductive way of research that generates different themes and information from the data to achieve new theory (Keddy et al., 1996). Grounded Theory does not test predetermined hypotheses but generates new theory and knowledge out of the gathered data, in this case interviews. Since it does not follow these hypotheses, it ensures an open-mindedness that leaves room for different outcomes of the research and thus more chances to achieve new knowledge (Strauss & Corbin, 2014; Charmaz, 2014).

Over the course of two months, I interviewed eight women between the ages of 40 and 80. Four of these women are volunteers and four experience social exclusion, all in the context of Schakel Kontich. I got into contact with the participants through Cecile, the leading volunteer at Schakel. In this regard she operated as a gatekeeper. In research on health, education and social sciences, gatekeepers often have the important role of facilitating the access of potential research environments and participants. While gatekeepers can be a great help accessing vulnerable and delicate sites or participants, they can also easily deny or limit access (Clark, 2010; McFadyen & Rankin, 2016). People who experience social exclusion are often hard to reach, gatekeepers are

therefore a significant middleman (Emmel et al., 2007). Gatekeepers who have a longstanding trustful relationship with people who experience social exclusion may foster trust between researcher and participant, accessing the target group through this kind of gatekeepers is recommended. Trust is easier established and potential participants are more willing to share their experiences and ideas (Emmel et al., 2007). When gatekeepers choose participants with their well-being and vulnerability in mind, there is a possibility that some potential participants are not even considered, which can lead to a biased sample group (Dempsey et al., 2016).

I knew Cecile and the organization of Schakel before, so getting into contact with the 'gatekeeper' was not difficult. The more challenging part was awaiting the answers of possible participants. For this research there was opted for purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling refers to choosing participants for your research based on specific characteristics they possess. These criteria can be knowledge, experience, membership to a group, characteristics that can give a deeper understanding of the topic (Campbell et al., 2020; Coyne, 1997; Palinkas et al., 2013). Patton (2002) calls this selecting information-rich cases meant for achieving in-depth understanding and insights as results. In the case of this research, all the participants had to be a member of the Schakel group in Kontich. Furthermore, they need to experience social exclusion themselves, be a volunteer or both. Schakel Kontich itself is not a very big group, with few volunteers who are actively involved and twenty individuals/families who actively participate in activities. So, the participant pool was limited. However, by going through Cecile, it was easier to get into contact with the individuals who were willing to talk about such a sensitive subject.

With Cecile as my gatekeeper, there was little involvement in choosing participants on my side. Nevertheless, Cecile is for many a trusted person and can therefore create more willingness when she approaches possible participants. Since we are dealing with vulnerable people and delicate problems and stories, having Cecile recommend me fostered a more equal and trustworthy relationship between the participant and me as researcher.

There were two sets of interview themes and questions prepared. One for the volunteers and one for the people who experience social exclusion. The questionnaires were adapted to the role of the

participant, but both focused on the lived experience of social exclusion and which role Schakel plays in this. The questionnaires can be found back in the appendix.

This research does not start from strictly defined hypotheses and testing those but tries to paint an honest picture of the daily lives of excluded people, their ideas and views on their own lives and place in our society. By focusing on their agency as people, this research hopes to amplify their voices and their knowledge and insights on social exclusion.

4. Results and discussion

4.1 The experience of social exclusion through the eyes of Schakel members and volunteers

4.1.1 The intersectionality of social exclusion

The participants shared many different forms of exclusion they have experienced throughout their lives and how these events impact their daily lives and quality of life. Experiencing social exclusion can make people feel like they no longer belong to their social groups and networks. Furthermore, exclusion often leads people to willingly or unwillingly isolate themselves, to reduce the daily confrontation with exclusion.

Frequently cited in the data is the exclusion of elderly people. They are more vulnerable to the decline of their physical (and mental) health, which makes them dependent on other people (Maresova et al., 2019; Walsh et al., 2020; Wenger, 2021). An example of such issues is mobility and the availability of transport. Older people who cannot drive anymore rely on someone else driving them or need to rely on public transport. However, public transport is often not adjusted to accommodate people with physical health issues. Elderly people easily become confined to their homes when they do not have the support to go out. The issue of transport is not only exclusionary towards the elderly; people with disabilities can also face challenges accessing public transport. Those living in areas with limited public transport are more likely to miss out on opportunities that society has to offer. The issue of (public) transport poverty and its consequences on the ability to participate in society and isolation is well-documented in academic research (Hantson et al., 2023; Luz & Portugal, 2021; Ward & Walsh, 2023).

"But being old is already an exclusion in all possible and impossible areas. You have to take public transport, but in many cases, public transport is not accessible for people who have difficulty walking, who use a walker, or people with a stroller who want to get on the train, and that's not just for older people." (Irina, member, who is older and feels excluded because of her age)

In general, older people struggle more with everyday tasks and events. One participant mentioned feeling discarded like trash because of her age, no longer feeling valuable to society. She mentioned issues such as being unable to pay with cash or having official documents available only in digital

formats. While these may seem like small and easy changes for a large part of society, they pose significant challenges for older individuals who have difficulties with the digitalization of daily life, leading to social exclusion. Research from Mubarak and Suomi (2022) and Seifert, Cotton and Xie (2021) supports this, noting that while technology has brought many positive changes, it also elicits social exclusion and non-participation among older people due to extensive digitalization.

“A lot has become digitalized in a very short time. I remember when there was only one phone in the street that everyone had to use, one car in the street. For me, especially, that digitization is a big handicap. These are all forms of exclusion, especially for older people.” (Irina, member, on the digitalization of daily life)

Moreover, older people who are more dependent on their social network may suddenly lose members of that network. Family and friends from their generation or older may pass away, leaving them with a smaller or nonexistent support network. This loss of relationships and social connections often leads to loneliness or reduced social contact, making them more vulnerable to isolation and social exclusion (Burholt et al., 2019; Huisman & van Tilburg, 2021; Lee, 2020).

"We notice that every day with our clients, my oldest is 97, so we notice it very quickly. When the siblings and the entire circle of friends are gone, they say, 'I am all alone.'" (Maya, volunteer, works with older people)

The same issues can be found in people with physical or intellectual disabilities, as society is often not adapted to their needs, making them dependent on their social network. This can cause problems when their network is small or of low quality (Robinson et al., 2018; Wilson et al., 2016). Disability or one’s health can also be a factor that excludes people from employment, increasing the likelihood of living on a smaller budget and experiencing economic exclusion (Gomez Monedero et al., 2014; Sloane & Jones, 2011).

- *"I have autism and poor motor skills."*
- *"There are few options for you to work?"*

- *"It's all against the clock, that's the problem. Everything has to happen as quickly as possible." (Sarah, member, who cannot work because of her autism and physical disability)*

In the interviews, it emerged that language is a significant exclusionary factor for migrants and newcomers. Not knowing the language of the host society is one of the biggest barriers to assimilation in that society and also affects people's employment opportunities (Corral-Granados et al., 2023; Xu et al., 2023). For example, a man who worked as an accountant in his home country can only find work in cleaning services in Belgium. This made him feel worthless and rejected. While it is normal to expect individuals to learn the language of the country they reside in, mastering a new language is not easy, especially if their contacts with the local population are limited. Research emphasizes the importance of local contacts in language acquisition (Kosyakova et al., 2021; Troesch et al., 2020). Additionally, many migrants grapple with the emotional burden of leaving behind their home, culture and social network, which complicates their assimilation into the new society. Generally, newcomers, whether they speak the language or not, face fewer job opportunities and are more likely to experience economic exclusion as a group (Schierup & Jorgensen, 2016).

"Now we have people from Syria who can work at 'Opnieuw & Co', they can work for so many hours before they get a certificate. Then there's no network left for them; they have to find work themselves with that certificate. Imagine starting here as a foreigner, not fully proficient in the language, trying to ask for work." (Cecile, lead volunteer)

"Also learning a new language is difficult, you don't know anyone here. You really need someone to say: come on, let's go to the store together, so you can gradually settle in. They've left everything behind, there's no turning back. I think that's partly frightening." (Maya, volunteer, on the difficulties of being an immigrant)

Some participants also discussed the racism and prejudices they faced. Discriminatory practices, systems and treatments are well-documented in academic research (Beech et al., 2021; Brown et al., 2023; Elias & Paradies, 2021). One participant, who is half Aruban and thus has a darker skin tone,

mentioned that she has no contact with her family due to their racism. Since the death of her mother, her support network mostly consists of people in Schakel.

"I don't really fit in with my family (points to her hand, she has dark skin). I wasn't welcome from the beginning." (Sarah, member, on her family who is racist towards her)

Another participant of Polish descent mentioned experiencing continuous ostracization throughout her childhood and adult life. Despite having lived her entire life in Belgium, she has often felt inferior and like she does not belong here due to discriminatory comments.

"I once went to the town hall, years ago, I needed some paperwork done so I could go to Poland. There I was told, 'I have nothing but trouble with all these foreign lice.' I put that person in their place, but those are things that hit very hard. At that moment, I'm very outspoken, but when you come home, you're in despair." (Irina, member, of Polish descent on racism she experienced in Belgium)

Dealing with racism and unequal treatment has left its mark on the way they feel and behave in social groups. These are common feelings and reactions for individuals who face discrimination, and such behavior significantly impacts well-being and participation in society (Brondolo et al., 2012; Misra et al., 2021).

Most participants who experience social exclusion also face economic exclusion. An impactful result of this financial hardship is the necessity to rely on public housing. One participant expressed feeling guilty that she could not provide her children with a garden and talked about the stress she experienced while on the waiting list for public housing. While grateful for having a roof over her head, her experience with public housing negatively affected her mental health. There is ample evidence in academic research that dependency on public housing leads to mental health issues and prolonged stress (Baker et al., 2020; Chung et al., 2019; Shah et al., 2018; Sieg & Yoon, 2020).

"The fact that I have nothing of my own influenced my mental state. For example, I'm currently renting an apartment, which is now a social housing unit. But that also made it difficult for me and

caused some exclusion because I had to be on those waiting lists, and that's not pleasant, of course." (Louise, member, on dealing with public housing)

"If they could just do something about those houses, it's really distressing. When we have a bad day, we can come home to our cocoon. But if you come home and you end up in a house full of mold and dampness and cold, and you already don't feel at home in your house anymore. That's the greatest form of exclusion." (Anne, volunteer, on public housing)

Economic exclusion also manifests in smaller inequalities. A participant explained that when she goes to a cafe with her friends, she can only afford one coffee instead of multiple. Sometimes, she skips activities that are too expensive for her budget, leading to exclusion from her friend group. Moreover, even when participants have the opportunity to participate in activities that are free or cheaper than usual, exclusion still occurs due to additional expenses such as prices for food and beverages.

"Recently there was a brunch organized by the KWB, 20 euros, that's too expensive for me, I told them honestly, it's too expensive for me, I could eat for a week with that amount." (Eva, member, who has few financial means)

"Poverty itself is not exclusion for me, it's a limitation of your life and that can lead to exclusion because you can't participate in things like swimming, seeking relaxation." (Cecile, lead volunteer)

Individuals who face exclusion from work due to factors such as language barriers, disabilities, health issues, or low educational attainment often experience financial exclusion as well (Gallie et al., 2010). On top of that, they feel ashamed that they cannot participate in an activity most other people can do. Moreover, financial limitations make it challenging for them to engage with society at large, leaving them at the edge of society.

The stories shared by the participants reveal that most people rarely experience one well defined form of exclusion, but an intersection of exclusionary factors. For example, one participant, unable to work due to health reasons, is also a single mom and struggles with depression. Another

participant of Polish descent has faced exclusion throughout her life due to her ethnicity, low education levels, economic situation, and now because of her age. The participant who experiences racism from her family, has autism and weak motor skills, leaving her unable to work. For some participants, childhood experiences of social exclusion persist into adulthood. Social exclusion in this group and in general is a complex problem (Van Regenmortel et al., 2021).

When asked what social exclusion means to them, participants agreed that social exclusion is versatile and can happen in every aspect of your life simultaneously. They highlighted its profound impact on mental health, often resulting in intense negative emotions.

"I think exclusion is a multifaceted monster, with many factors contributing to why you end up on the fringes of society. It's also a feeling, and you don't always easily shake it off." (Cecile, lead volunteer)

4.1.2 City vs Village

There are notable distinctions in the experience of social exclusion between urban and rural areas. Depending on the place you live, exclusion manifests in diverse forms (Tsakloglou & Papadopoulos, 2002; Van Regenmortel et al., 2021). A participant highlighted the ease of locating individuals facing poverty and exclusion in the city. They tend to congregate in underprivileged neighborhoods, stations, or specific meeting spots. Cities also house more organizations dedicated to tackling social exclusion and seeking out marginalized people. It is well-documented that Belgian cities exhibit high levels of segregation. Non-European migrants often find themselves together in specific neighborhoods (Andersson et al., 2018; Costa & de Valk, 2018). Additionally, socioeconomic segregation is prevalent, with poverty concentrated in specific neighborhoods (Haandrikman et al., 2021; Musterd et al., 2016). Whereas local-level exclusion and poverty are more concealed and thus harder to detect. In larger cities, individuals and events are more anonymous, allowing people to cope with their exclusion more privately. One participant noted that in Kontich, the neighborhood and people immediately were aware of and talking about her accident. Moreover, accessing services such as the OCMW, food banks or a Sociale Kruidenier (a grocery store where people with limited financial means can buy food at a lower price), is more public in villages. Neighbors are more likely

to witness people queuing or leaving such places. This can discourage individuals from seeking assistance.

“Detecting existential insecurity, poverty at the local level is really not easy. Here locally, I find it very difficult; it's more hidden, I think. I find it very difficult to know which people are having problems.” (Michelle, volunteer, who previously worked with social exclusion in cities)

“I’m a fan of the Sociale Kruidenier, but I also find that it's a form of exclusion. I think people have to line up, and it's also visible. Some people may be deterred by that. Because they think, "Yeah, people will see that I go to the Sociale Kruidenier." (Anne, volunteer)

On the other hand, neighborhoods in villages are often better acquainted with one another and provide greater mutual support. The likelihood of encountering people you know is higher in villages. This can increase social contact with neighbors and fellow residents. The possibility of frequent interaction with familiar people enhances daily social interactions, community and connection.

“Here, you do something, and everyone knows about it. It has its pros and cons. When everyone knows you, even at the bakery, that's nice. You run into someone on the street more often, and you can have a chat, which is nice, and I didn't have that before.” (Louise, member, on living in Kontich, a village, when she lived in a city before)

Kontich cannot be defined as an urban place, concerning social exclusion, since exclusion is more hidden and not congregated in specific neighborhoods. Also, the experience of exclusion is less anonymous as opposed to the experience in bigger cities. However, it cannot be considered a rural area either. Unlike rural places, there is no loss of or dwindling community. Furthermore, services, care and support groups are all present and accessible, meaning opportunities for social connection are there. Kontich, in the case of social exclusion, falls in between the dichotomy of urban versus rural.

4.1.3 Guilt, social isolation and the need to belong

Many individuals who experience social exclusion grapple with feelings of guilt, especially (single) parents raising children. They want their children to live fulfilling lives without the hardships associated with social and economic exclusion. However, they often find themselves unable to provide their children with the opportunities and resources they desire. This sense of guilt worsens when the children are confronted with privileges their peers enjoy, such as going on holiday, while they cannot. This situation can cause parents to experience profound feelings of guilt and sadness (Kim et al., 2023). Furthermore, parents want to protect their children from their harsh reality, but that is not always possible. Sooner or later children will understand their family's circumstances and may experience exclusion themselves.

"I notice, for example, with my children that they can't go on school trips. It has improved now, but you can't always do things that others do, like traveling more extensively, for example. My children sometimes come home with stories that their friends went skiing and they can't. I always have to save for a few years, and that's how we managed to go to the seaside for a week last year. I do feel a bit excluded because I can't always provide everything, and I find that very difficult. "I try to spare them as much misery as possible, but we do support each other every day. I try to spare them from as much misery as possible, but we do support each other every day." (Louise, member)

"When I look at young people, families, it's sort of this struggle of wanting to give their children more and not being able to." (Cecile, lead volunteer)

The participants expressed how they feel different from others. They feel like they do not belong in society or are treated disparately. Many factors can contribute to this feeling of not fitting in. For instance, having a different nationality can set someone apart from the moment they are a child. Experiencing financial hardship and relying on food banks or wearing worn-out clothes are experiences that a big portion of society never encounters. As a result, such actions can make individuals stand out from the crowd.

"You had to say your name in class as a child, and you were already put into a box, and you carry that with you for the rest of your life. That you're just excluded in the sense of not belonging with us." (Irina, member, who is of Polish descent and has a Polish last name)

"If you don't have money for a uniform sweater, you stand out, you're already excluded because you're different from the rest." (Anne, volunteer, who was a schoolteacher and who saw the result of economic hardship in her class)

These are significant aspects that can impact a person's sense of belonging. However, feelings of belonging or not belonging are subjective and can be triggered by various events (Allen, 2021). Belonging is one of human's most essential needs according to Baumeister and Leary (1995), as well as Valcke et al. (2019), and has a significant influence on well-being and psychological health.

"But, for me, a person needs to be needed and I need that as well" (Eva, member, on why she likes to help people and volunteer)

Social exclusion exacerbates this feeling of not belonging. Low feelings of belonging bring forth a whole range of negative emotions, stress and self-doubt (Baumeister & Tice, 1990; Slepian & Jacoby-Senghor, 2020). Participants described their inability to keep up with society, such as being unable to participate in activities like work, which made them feel worthless. This caused participants to isolate themselves from social interactions because they felt different from the group and believed they no longer belonged in society.

"I've had a very tough experience. In 2014, for medical reasons, I had to stop working, and since then, I've really had a few years of feeling lost, locking myself indoors. Staying inside, truly feeling excluded by society, because I didn't fit into any mold." (Louise, member, on the impact of being unemployed)

People who are isolated or confined to their homes deteriorate mentally, which also affects their motivation to establish new social contacts. Prolonged periods of isolation lead to higher levels of stress and an increase of mental health disorders (Algren et al., 2020; Friedler et al., 2015). There is

fear of going outside and encountering exclusion. Being confronted with other people's opinions is scary. So, individuals prefer to stay inside to avoid being reminded of their issues or exclusion. People opt for self-isolation to avoid stressful social interactions (Barry, 1998; Menec et al., 2020). One participant noted that her social life suffered due to financial constraints, highlighting how it can easily lead to loneliness.

"When you go out for rehabilitation with a cane or crutches, you hear people talking about it. That pulls me back into isolation because I think I'll just stay inside, then they won't know." (Louise, member, on why she isolates herself)

"If your wallet doesn't allow it, you won't go to concerts, the theater... You no longer have a social life or it becomes very minimal, that's exclusion and then you become lonely." (Irina, member, who experiences social exclusion)

Two participants expressed how they were depressed because of their exclusionary situation, which led them to staying indoors. Williams and Nida (2022) argue that depression resulting from social exclusion leads to higher levels and longer periods of isolation, which exacerbates depression. Socioeconomic problems and stress significantly impact mental health. Losing a job, being on a waitlist for public housing, going through a divorce, or being a single parent - all of these contribute to negative feelings and mental health issues. Moreover, individuals facing such challenges rarely get a break from their problems, as they are confronted daily with their situation and exclusion.

"Back to the social welfare office, back to the court. There are those who have to go from one thing to another. They don't have a free life and are stuck in that cycle. It leads to social exclusion in their everyday lives. They can't breathe freely and go where they need to be for their children." (Cecile, lead volunteer, on the bureaucratic and administrative struggle people who experience exclusion, deal with)

Such severe mental health issues often lead to self-isolation and a withdrawal from participating in social relationships.

"There are also people who don't want social contact, you know. Someone who is depressed sometimes doesn't want to see anyone either." (Eva, member)

"Yes, because I had to undergo rehabilitation for a year, I then went to the VDAB for potential in-demand professions, but there was really nothing, because I encountered stops everywhere: you don't have the diploma or you don't have this or due to your medical history, you can't do that. And that pushed me even deeper into a negative spiral, making me think I might as well just stay indoors because I'm not good for anyone." (Louise, member, on the difficulties of finding a job)

The role of unemployment and its implications on isolation and deteriorating mental health is cited in the literature as well (Gallie et al., 2010; Gallie, 2013). The negative consequences of unemployment make it harder to find a new job and actually return to work, leaving many unemployed people stuck in a vicious circle.

Some participants also explained how they experience feelings of unfairness regarding the distribution of aid. They do not envy those who get quicker access to aid, but they feel the system is unfairly biased against them. As mentioned, one participant felt discarded like trash, because she was no longer productive as an older individual. This feeling has been documented in the literature as well. There is a discourse surrounding the elderly where they and the surrounding policy are reduced to ideas about their productivity (Brooke & Jackson, 2020; Walsh et al., 2021).

"I've made peace with that now. I still go there to help out at the food bank in the mornings, but actually, none of it is fair. That's how it is too; they look at what a person receives, but they don't consider what they have to spend, on doctor's bills, on medication; none of it adds up." (Eva, member, who is no longer allowed to go to the Sociale Kruidenier because she has some money saved up, while others who apparently have more expensive material goods are allowed to go)

"This might be a strange example, but I know some people who came from Ukraine. They come to Belgium, have three children, and are given a house with a large garden, and then you think, 'Well, here I am living in a small apartment.' With only two bedrooms because my sons also share a room." (Louise, member, who feels there is unfair treatment of social aid)

4.1.4 Distrust, insecurity and their impact on self-isolation

Participants who have undergone or are still experiencing social exclusion talked about feelings of distrust and insecurity. These feelings are common in research on the topic of social exclusion (Hansen et al., 2021; Saasa et al., 2021). Such feelings cause participants to withdraw from participating in society or groups, making them more susceptible to social isolation. Furthermore, feelings of distrust and insecurity make it difficult to ask for or accept help. These feelings are often ingrained in participants from traumatic experiences and can often be traced back to their youth and upbringing. Such feelings leave a serious impact on mental health, making it harder for individuals to recover from further social exclusion.

One of the participants, who is now retired and a grandmother, has felt like an outsider since she was a young child due to her Polish descent. This expressed itself in the form of racism, where people treated her differently because of her last name and nationality. Additionally, her nationality prevented her from participating in opportunities other children enjoyed, such as trips outside of Belgium. Furthermore, she had to drop out of school at twelve years old to take care of her younger siblings. This further exacerbated her sense of being different from her peers. Education plays a significant role in later life, causing vulnerability to social exclusion and insecurity. Individuals with low levels of education have a greater chance of experiencing socioeconomic inequalities later in life (Ogg, 2005).

"I only went to school until I was twelve years old, then I had to stay home. I'm the oldest of seven, and all the others have studied, which is also a handicap for me. You get stuck at that point, and it's just a disaster in every way." (Irina, member, on how her short education limited her later in life)

Another participant recounted how she grew up extremely insecure because of how her mom raised her, a feeling she carried for a large period of her life. Both women have doubted themselves for a significant part of their lives and positioned themselves at the edges of their social networks. They were scared to say or do the wrong thing, fearing that the group might not accept them. Always having to be mindful of their behavior made them less inclined to participate in social events and led to growing distrust towards people. This aligns with the research of Prattley et al. (2020) who

argue that low levels of trust translate into low levels of social participation, causing people to exclude themselves.

"You feel less than others, that does indeed have an impact, because you always keep to yourself in the background, afraid that you'll say something wrong otherwise." (Irina, member, who is afraid of being herself and exclusion after experiencing exclusion her entire life)

"Because I used to be someone who, I don't know if I should tell you all this, thought 'what will people think of me?' Or when there was a meeting, 'I better not say that, because it won't be good.' In school, when we had to choose between red and green and I liked green, but the others said red, then I said red too. It was that bad. They were rope skipping and I was too afraid to ask if I could join, so I never jumped in. I had a very strong sense of inferiority. That's how I was brought up." (Eva, member, on how insecurity influenced her life and exclusion)

In general, many individuals who experience social exclusion feel a great distrust towards people because of how they have been treated by their environment. For the participants, this entails losing work, divorce, racist statements, and not being helped or listened to. Raudenbush (2016) and Choy, Eom and Li (2021) argue that people who struggle with distrust assume other people have malicious intentions towards them. Such ideas about other people cause them to reduce their prosocial behavior and decrease or entirely remove the number of social contacts. Previous misfortunes at both societal and personal relationships level made the participants feel like they were alone in dealing with their feelings and problems, and therefore, more quickly inclined to retreat into their own world/home.

"I have to be honest, I'm not really a social person either. I make friends, and that's about it. It takes a long time for me to trust someone, really long. The more weaknesses you have, and the more people know about them, the more they'll take advantage of it, the easier it is for you to get hurt. Because the more people know about you, the more you get excluded." (Irina, member, on how she has difficulties trusting people after dealing with discrimination)

"I also got divorced in 2016, and since then, I've become somewhat distrustful of other people because they have taken advantage of me. Especially reconnecting with others and learning to trust people again. That was gone for me; it used to be me against the world. Now I still feel that way occasionally, but it's getting better." (Louise, member)

This buildup of insecurity and distrust leads to severe mental health issues, such as depression. Two participants testified that they isolated themselves because of this depression and found it extremely difficult to ask for help in such a situation. In both cases, the participants have children and some familial support, which gave them the courage to seek the help they needed. However, these feelings of distrust still surface from time to time.

Traumatic experiences while growing up or other events in their lives made the participants feel insecure and distrustful, worsening their mental health. The participants were caught in a vicious circle, where exclusion led to isolation and poor mental health, which in turn caused more isolation and more exclusion. Research (Elmer et al., 2020; Reinhard et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2023) agrees that depression and social isolation are closely linked and can create an interaction that is difficult to escape from.

4.1.5 Shame, pride and the difficulty of accepting aid

As mentioned, there are complex and difficult feelings involved when people experience social exclusion. Participants discussed how such feelings often prevent them from seeking the help or support that is available to them. Insecurity makes them feel worthless and undeserving of participating in society, while feelings of distrust lead them to believe that people will mistreat them. Both emotions cause people to reject additional support or aid.

Other emotions named by the participants that are connected to social exclusion were shame and pride. People feel ashamed or too proud to admit they have problems. Participants mentioned how they are ashamed that they cannot keep up with or contribute to mainstream society, and thus feel invaluable. Thomas, Wyatt and Hansford (2020) argue that these strong feelings of shame are reinforced by the neoliberal idea of self-responsibility, meaning people who cannot contribute to society owe this to their own failures. Like insecurity and distrust, shame is a feeling that is deeply

ingrained and present from an early age. For example, children who live in public housing might be afraid of the opinions of their peers.

"They never invite friends over either, that's also social exclusion; they feel ashamed inside." (Anne, volunteer, on children who live in public or cheap housing)

Admitting they are not doing well socially, financially or health-wise is a shameful practice for many. People are scared to show society that they are struggling. Therefore, it is easier to isolate themselves from society and social contacts. Participants feel ashamed because they are scared of what other people would think or say about them, so there is a big incentive to keep their problems hidden.

"Yes, I found that very difficult. I also felt a lot of shame about it. How would people then view me? I wouldn't even mention it at work, I'd try to conceal it a bit. That shame is really deeply ingrained." (Louise, member, on how she was ashamed because of her problems)

Shame is a universal feeling (Pardede & Kovac, 2023; Walker et al., 2013) when experiencing socioeconomic exclusion and causes isolation. Individuals develop a strong awareness of being different from the mainstream group. Participants recounted feelings of shame associated with going to the Sociale Kruidenier or food bank, since this separates them from the mainstream group who can afford normal groceries. Such actions draw attention to their circumstances and make them stand out from the group. Additionally, when people can see them entering such stores, it is challenging to keep their problems a secret. This issue is more accentuated in a village because it is more likely to encounter people who know you or live near you.

"But I am convinced that exclusion itself carries an enormous sense of shame, and being unable to bridge that gap to society, to ordinary people anymore. We often see that people retreat into their shells due to exclusion." (Cecile, lead volunteer)

"So, if there's a long line, then you can see who is queuing up to go to the Sociale Kruidenier. So, some people might be deterred because they think, 'Yeah, people will see that I'm going to the Sociale Kruidenier.'" (Michelle, volunteer)

The same thing happens with pride. Situations in which people show their reliance on aid will be actively avoided because of pride (Chase & Walker, 2012; Scheff, 2002). People are too proud to accept help or to relinquish control.

"They need to dare to go, you know, there's hesitation. Whether it's about going to food distribution or the Sociale Kruidenier, there's hesitation. People are too proud and don't want to show that they're dependent." (Maya, volunteer, on why people do not go for aid)

"Help is a big word, you still have your pride to step over that threshold. I'm not going to step over that threshold now to go to a theater." (Irina, member, on why she does not easily ask for aid)

Pride is often employed as a coping mechanism for dealing with financial hardship. Being able to manage such hardship without additional help is viewed as an accomplishment to be proud of, representing a more positive outcome compared to being categorized among the excluded and struggling people (Shildrick & MacDonald, 2013). For example, elderly individuals facing physical health challenges may have difficulties with relying on others for tasks they used to manage themselves, leading to reluctance in seeking help. When people go to the OCMW for budget guidance, they have to give up their financial decision-making almost completely. It hurts their pride to relinquish that autonomy. Nevertheless, many individuals reach a point where swallowing their pride becomes necessary for survival (Chase & Walker, 2012). However, one participant mentioned that even though it was a difficult decision, she is happy with the outcome of seeking budget guidance. She now has more breathing room financially and is gradually taking back the financial decision-making.

"That step was also very difficult for me because you go from trying to do everything yourself to having to give everything away. Now I do some things myself again, but at that time it was sink or

swim for me: 'Please put aside your pride and just go for it.'" (Louise, member, about going to the OCMW)

The participants agreed that these emotions and the ability to set them aside is an individual responsibility. While support and encouragement can be provided, accepting assistance to change the situation ultimately is an individual step.

"Well, what I'm going to say might not be nice. It might be the people's own fault. That's very harsh, isn't it? Because they don't dare to take that step, because they feel inferior, because they don't have anyone to pull them along." (Eva, member, on the responsibility of social exclusion)

They still have some reservation or shame, that they don't have much, but also lack that courage. You're not obligated to say anything, everyone does what they want. But sometimes I notice that people drop out because of social pressure, which actually isn't there. I think that's more self-preservation, self-protection." (Maya, volunteer, on why people stop going to Schakel)

Social exclusion is a multi-dimensional problem that often appears in a vicious cycle. People feel like they no longer belong and experience shame, distrust and guilt. When people can no longer deal with these feelings and the exclusion, they get isolated and suffer from deteriorating mental and physical health. However, asking for help is not easy, shame, pride, fear and prolonged isolation hinders this. While the consequences of social exclusion are grave, there are possibilities to counter or mitigate these feelings and consequences. Social connection and local aid organizations such as Schakel are highly important for coping with social exclusion.

4.2. Coping with social exclusion and the role of Schakel

There are various ways how people in Kontich and Schakel cope with their social exclusion. Through network and social connections, a sense of belonging is restored. To foster these connections, third places are essential. Schakel serves as such a third place, moreover, they invest in socialization and empowerment. Whereas organizations such as the OCMW or the Sociale Kruidenier provide practical aid, Schakel serves as a coping mechanism against isolation and

profound negative emotions. Socially excluded individuals often turn to volunteering as well. These are opportunities to establish social networks and to retrieve the feeling of being valuable.

4.2.1 Importance of network and social relationships

Having a qualitative social network serves as a safety net against social isolation, feelings of not belonging and social exclusion. Participation in groups and having meaningful social relationships, especially with individuals facing similar issues, mitigates those issues. Positive social connections are essential for well-being and fulfilling the need to belong (Cohen, 2004; Pardede & Kovac, 2023; Wesselmann et al., 2016). A social network, or even a single social contact, can bridge individuals and society. Community-based organizations serve as effective tools for reintegrating socially excluded individuals into society (Villena et al., 2020).

While family typically serves as the primary social network, many participants and other members of Schakel lack this first support line. Whether due to distance, a passing, or divorce, individuals find themselves suddenly without social or financial support.

"I got to know Schakel when I found myself alone. Also, through acquaintances who already came here, so that helped me a bit, that togetherness. You know you're not alone, even though I didn't really need it financially because I was still working. But when you find yourself alone after more than 33 years, that can be quite overwhelming." (Maya, volunteer, who first became a member of Schakel and afterwards joined the core team)

Additionally, when people have few or no friends close by new relationships must be established. This can be a challenging task for those facing social exclusion (O'Connor & Gladstone, 2015). Nevertheless, social networks are highly important. Beyond offering emotional support and fulfilling the need for social interaction, a social network can serve various other purposes. Financial and administrative support, childcare, elderly care, and more is often provided within one's network. Receiving support in those aspects relieves the daily stress that people may experience.

"My family doesn't live here anymore; they moved to the Netherlands. I'm the only one left here, so it's nice to know some people in your surroundings. That way, you can go out and have a chat

sometimes. It has been very difficult; your network is gone, so you have to start looking for childcare for the children. It's not simple." (Louise, member, on the importance of having a social network)

Furthermore, social networks or contacts are a significant source of information. People who experience social exclusion are not always reached through mainstream channels of information. Hence, it is crucial that they can receive information through other channels (Claeys et al., 2001). Informal or non-profit organizations can fill this information gap (DeVerteuil, 2017). People often discover instances such as Schakel, Rap op Stap, or the Sociale Kruidenier through their network. Organizations like Schakel also share their knowledge about other useful organizations and resources.

"Through Schakel, I found the Social Grocery Store here, which is a budget-friendly shop for people with a low income. Through people from Schakel and also through the OCMW I ended up at the food bank. It's nice that you can turn to those organizations because initially, I didn't know about them at all. Now that I know about them, I make good use of them." (Louise, member, on how she discovered aid services)

"It's often not just Schakel where they participate, they also go to Den Alf. That's a service center, meeting, and service center. We don't need to have a monopoly; I'm happy when they take that step towards another organization, it means they are ready to make that contact, to expand their network." (Cecile, lead volunteer)

Organizations that are not specialized in one particular topic or service and maintain an open, holistic view, tend to be more successful in addressing complex problems. They are better at providing detailed and extensive information and in mediating between different actors (Raeymaeckers, 2016). Additionally, due to Schakel's deep integration in the community, they have an extensive understanding of more practical matters such as paperwork and language courses. While the OCMW also tries to implement this kind of informational support, they are often understaffed and lack the resources to provide the kind of network building Schakel does.

"*Cecile also helps them with paperwork, for the municipality, for integration, language courses… They do get all that information, but what do they do with it? Here they can ask additional questions." (Maya, volunteer, on how Schakel is a good source for information)*

The participants not only emphasized the importance of social networks and groups but also the significance of strong one-on-one relationships. A trusted individual is often enough to push people a little further out of their comfort zone and therefore avoid loneliness and isolation (Dahlberg et al., 2018). One participant shared how a friend encouraged her to get out of her isolation and participate in social gatherings like those organized by Schakel. For newcomers, having another person from their home country is often enough to introduce them to new people and society. Volunteers from Schakel assisted people by accompanying them to the OCMW when they felt afraid about going alone.

"Rita, she was my best friend. She dragged me along. She was also at Schakel, and she also dragged me along, saying that I had to come with her and that I also felt safe. Sometimes she forced me to go along, you know." (Eva, member, on how she got aid from services and organizations)

"We used to go with people who took their first step towards the OCMW because that was also a barrier. I know people who have gone back and forth at least 3/4 times before they walked in." (Cecile, lead volunteer, on assisting people who had difficulties going to the OCMW for the first time)

"It's often enough if they see a compatriot or someone they know. Who else should they approach? You really need compatriots or neighbors, people who can give information or say, "Go there," who can help, and then somehow make it here through connections." (Maya, volunteer, on how migrants and newcomers find new social networks and gather information)

This one individual can provide the little push someone needs to initiate change. Such a person can also offer a listening ear. People do not always need practical assistance, sometimes they simply need an outlet to express their concerns. An attentive listener can make people feel seen, understood, and valued. Being a listening ear fosters trust and a willingness to open up. Besides emotional

support, physical contact can help alleviate stress. Just a simple hug can improve one's emotional state and overall well-being.

"In the beginning, I used to call Cecil more often saying, "I'm not going to come after all," or "I don't feel too good," or "I don't want to be around people." But she always understood that, and I thought that was pretty cool. That someone listens to me for a moment, and then Cecile herself would come to my home saying, "Now, I'm here alone, tell me what's wrong." That's the nice thing about Schakel." (Louise, member)

"Being a listening ear, I regularly receive calls from people who are feeling down, so they can let it all out. They're always so happy when we've called, having a conversation with someone really brightens their day." (Anne, volunteer)

Individuals like to be part of a group or have a network they can rely on. The volunteers mentioned how some members of Schakel almost never come to activities. Nevertheless, they want to remain members, receive updates and stay connected. By staying a member, they retain a social network, or at least the idea of having a network, to fall back on. Additionally, being accepted by a group makes them feel as if they belong somewhere.

"Those are people we only see maybe once a year. Yet, they still want to belong." (Cecile, lead volunteer, on members who barely participate in Schakel activities)

There are also members who are glued to their homes but like to stay in contact via email or phone calls, just so they can feel connected. Technology is an effective way to keep and maintain social connection, especially when leaving the house is difficult (Sen et al., 2021; Shah et al., 2020; Xie et al., 2020).

"There are also people who are completely tied to their homes but still seek contact by phone or send an email. There are indeed people who, even if they don't visit much, like to feel that they can rely on someone or still have a network somewhere." (Cecile)

4.2.2 Volunteering and third places

Research suggests that volunteering opportunities are often inaccessible for socially excluded individuals, or that volunteering organizations may uphold the unequal systems in society (Hustinx et al., 2022; Lee & Brudney, 2012; Plagnol & Huppert, 2010; Smith, 2012; Youssim et al., 2015). However, this was reflected in the participant group. Two participants, who have experienced or are currently experiencing social exclusion and are members of Schakel, volunteer themselves in other organizations. Numerous positive outcomes are associated with volunteering (Baron, 2004; Kruithof et al., 2021; Lee, 2021; Low & Shah, 2023; Nichol et al., 2023). It serves as a means to expand and maintain networks and social contacts, encourages socialization, and provides fulfillment and purpose. For one participant who can no longer work, volunteering instills a sense of value and worthiness. This allows her to participate in society and regain productivity. Many people find fulfillment in helping others or just by engaging in nice little interactions. When one participant feels bad, she seeks out small and friendly social interactions with unfamiliar people.

"I've also been doing volunteer work for about a year now. I got into this volunteer work through Schakel, and it gives me some satisfaction and a real sense of purpose for the week. Through volunteering, I do feel like I still matter and I'm good for something, because I help people." (Louise, member)

"When students are eating, I say, 'Enjoy your meal.' I also say good day to everyone. We've never spoken to each other, right? I think that's nice. When I'm feeling a bit down, I say, 'good day' and then I feel a bit better. Sometimes you can trick yourself." (Eva, member, on coping with bad days and feelings)

Some participants described how they go out walking or biking to find some peace and solitude. Stepping outside and immersing themselves in their surroundings helps relieve stress for a while. When the weather is nice, they enjoy sitting in the park with a book or a picnic, which helps them clear their minds and let go of their worries. One participant mentioned how she always went to the graveyard with her mom, she still regularly goes there to find some rest. These third places (often a green environment) are important for relaxation and a bit of fresh air, something they might not

enjoy at home. Third places have a positive impact on one's community and quality of life. They alleviate stress and allow for a temporary period of rest, improving one's well-being (Finlay et al., 2019; Hickman, 2013; Jeffres et al., 2009; Mikunda, 2004). Having access to public spaces like parks is therefore highly important for people who might not have a garden of their own. Which is often the case for people with little financial means or who are dependent on public or affordable housing.

"When the weather is nice or dry, I just go for a little walk around the block. Then I also tell my children to leave me alone for half an hour, I leave my phone at home, and they know that, and then it's just a walk. Then it's about looking at the birds and the trees, the cars and cyclists passing by. But when I come back inside, those problems still overwhelm me, but then I still think, "I did have that half hour of peace."" (Louise, member, on coping with social exclusion)

"The cemetery, for many, it is a gloomy place, but when my mother was still alive, we used to go to the cemetery every day. And when she passed away, I continued to do so. But now I dare to skip a day occasionally. When the weather is nice, I walk around the cemetery, I feel good there. And then in the summer, I sit on the bench with a book." (Eva, member)

The literature gives a very bleak picture of social exclusion, where individuals are victims of negative feelings and poor well-being. While the participants acknowledged they all experience these negative emotions, they also acquired a positive and persistent mindset to progress in their lives. They are not just poor victims of their own emotions. Participants mentioned that they are happy if they have a roof over their head, food on the table and some close relationships. They take comfort in knowing they have those essentials even if their lives are rather stressful and difficult. This thought process enables them to relativize the social exclusion they experience. Besides this, children are often a motivating factor to cope with exclusion. People want and need a better life for their children.

"They really talk about it at Schakel. They dare to say that they fall short every month, but everything is for their children. Certain individuals are really strong in life, with their feet on the ground, and

they manage, which is admirable. You can let it get you down, but you can also say: let's move forward with it." (Anne, volunteer, on the mental strength of members of Schakel)

"In my opinion, everything that money can't buy is important. If you have that, you're a wealthy person, and that's love, affection, and fondness." (Irina, member, on her mindset for dealing with social exclusion)

A positive mentality is highly necessary when coping with social exclusion. All the interviewees mentioned that reaching out to people who are socially excluded and giving them a safe space is vital to get them out of their isolation. However, it is one's own responsibility to expand their network or accept additional help.

"People need a lot of positive things, and we try that too, even in our booklet, putting in nice things that can uplift them a little. Being able to look at the world and themselves positively, there are people who are in the same predicament but are so positively inclined that they manage to overcome it more easily." (Cecile, lead volunteer)

4.2.3 The role of Schakel

There are various reasons why people participate in Schakel. One of the most significant motivations is the opportunity to broaden their social network, to have individuals and a community they can rely on for support. Many participants joined Schakel because they felt alone, often in combination with other challenges such as mental health issues and financial difficulties. Schakel is an accessible group, with low entry barriers and is focused on the humane and social aspects of support. Whereas organizations such as the OCMW or the Sociale Kruidenier are more formal and lend themselves less to social relationship/network building. Participants applauded Schakel for being a judge free space, where individuals can be themselves in good and bad times. Some participants mentioned how they kept participating because they appreciate the hard work of the volunteers.

"We actually stand for, by, with people who are struggling in their lives for whatever reason. Society often sees us as the organization for poor people. Mainly, it's people who can't live generously, but we also have many people who are lonely, people who don't have a network or have a limited

network, and they ask, for one reason or another, "Well, I'm alone, and I would still like to be part of a group," yes, they are welcome." (Cecile, lead volunteer, about Schakel)

Schakel focuses on restoring the sense of being a valued and integral member of society. They assist people in overcoming their problems and exclusion but leave the agency of its members intact. They will support and provide them in the search for solutions to solve their problems, however, final decision-making or implementation always remains the responsibility of the person itself.

We've learned that you should never give everything away for free. It's not appreciated. It's better to ask for a small contribution; that's more valued. It also makes them feel more human, and it's always about maintaining and promoting human dignity for us. We know they have a small budget, but the contribution we ask for is really minimal. That was also the intention of the Sociale Kruidenier, not a food bank, not just coming to pick up their products. They pay for what they buy; they're simply part of society. (Cecile, lead volunteer)

"At Schakel, you tell your story, but they won't impose things on you; they'll search with you. But I find the solution myself; they will offer you things, but they will never tell you, "You have to go there or there." They give you options that you as a person can still choose. And through Schakel, that also gives me back the courage. I am helped, but I still have the control in my own hands. (Louise, member, on the agency that Schakel leaves intact)"

Community-based organizations are proven to be effective in creating and retaining empowerment, agency and collective strength (Low & Shah, 2023; Villena et al., 2020). Furthermore, Schakel emphasizes the importance of socialization. They organize activities where people are required to work together, creating a sense of togetherness and solidarity.

"On Sunday, we're having an Easter brunch, then they'll laugh again. We also do that with the pumpkins in the fall. There are four groups, and each one makes a part of the menu, cooking together, cleaning up, setting the table. Everything together, they really enjoy that. There's a sense of togetherness." (Anne, volunteer)

- "I have autism, so I also have difficulties with social contact.
- Is going to Schakel then a way to get in touch with people?
- Yes." (Sarah, member)

4.2.4 How Schakel fosters social connection

Schakel is a social event where individuals can engage in conversations over a cup of coffee. It serves as a space where people encounter peers who share similar backgrounds or face similar problems. Individuals are confronted with the fact that they are not the only ones who experience exclusion. This can mitigate the feeling of loneliness and provide new and strong social connections.

"Recently we had an activity where there was a lot of talk about feelings, and there was someone there with borderline personality disorder who talked about it, and then someone else said, "Oh, me too." Then they were together, strengthened in their thing, and that's how it is with many things." (Anne, volunteer, on members forming connections through Schakel activities)

Sometimes members of Schakel form strong bonds with each other, becoming friends and continuing the relationship outside of Schakel. Schakel is an effective tool to expand social networks and build profound social connections. Schakel can be seen as having a third-place function, it is an accessible place away from home, where people can engage in social contacts and community. There is the opportunity to build new relationships, which positively influences one's well-being (Crick, 2011; Ferreira et al., 2021; Finlay et al., 2019; Yuen & Johnson, 2016). For migrants, Schakel is a place where people from the same country or who speak the same language can find each other. Schakel actively encourages language acquisition, by speaking Dutch in their meetings. However, having a connection to their home country or the ability to speak their native language is beneficial for their well-being too.

"Making new contacts. That can happen over a cup of coffee or tea, or while playing a game. There's always someone to talk to. You're not obligated, but if you're open to it, then there's a good chance you'll feel more at home there." (Maya, volunteer, on the workings of Schakel)

“We have a few Syrian families, so they still have each other. That's the only thing they have left in a foreign country, that they can speak their language with each other again. When we go on an outing by bus, they stick together; that's normal, isn't it?” (Anne, volunteer)

Schakel is not only a support group, but they also organize other activities such as fun excursions, cultural activities, holiday festivities and more. For many members these activities are a short relief from their often difficult lives. They have a relaxing moment, where they are surrounded by other happy people and therefore can forget about the problems and exclusion for a while. One participant mentioned how she can visit art exhibitions again through Schakel, something she has always loved. Others who have (grand)children can take them to the seaside for a day, something they otherwise do not have the budget for. The ability to offer their children an excursion like that and seeing them having fun is highly valued by many. For parents who consistently prioritize their children or other family members first, there are also some relaxing activities available. For instance, they organized a workshop on makeup and hair, allowing people to prioritize themselves and their well-being for a change.

"Especially the annual outing, last year we went to Boudewijn Seapark at a budget-friendly price, because I'm not financially well-off. I'm also a mom of two children, so I'm happy that I can offer them that at a reasonable price, and both myself and they had a blast there. The smile on their faces, that makes it all worth it." (Louise, member, on how Schakel helps her)

"Every time they come, they're happy, you see smiling faces. Then they have something to think about at home, because most of the time they're stuck in a spiral of sadness, loneliness, and money." (Anne, volunteer, on the members of Schakel)

4.2.5 Connection to other social organizations

It can be challenging to seek assistance from instances like the OCMW. They are formal governmental organizations that typically require individuals to provide detailed explanations of their problems and circumstances before setting up a plan to offer support. Additionally, there is a heightened risk of losing control over certain aspects of one’s life, such as when placed under budget guidance. Whereas asking for help from non-governmental, non-profit or more informal

organizations such as Schakel or Den Alf (a service and community center) is without obligation. Organizations that have fewer or no compulsory qualifications needed to join are more accessible towards a diverse group of excluded people. They have a low barrier of entry and require less commitment from the target group (Banulescu-Bogdan, 2020).

"Oh yes, some are there for budget guidance, yeah, that's not easy, they have to keep showing up, also justify what they've done with it. That's very tough and very difficult in the beginning." (Cecile, lead volunteer, talking about the OCMW)

"What Schakel can do is guide people to go to the OCMW or ask for more help from social services. It could be that if the social service of the OCMW comes knocking on your door, that can have a big impact right away, it makes people scared to some extent. Schakel is another word and from here, I think Cecile is good at that, she can refer to various organizations." (Maya, volunteer, on how Schakel is a bridge towards formal aid services)

At Schakel there are opportunities to share one's experiences with social exclusion. Sharing your story allows you to connect with others who are facing similar challenges, fostering a sense of solidarity and togetherness. However, Schakel does not oblige individuals to share anything they are not comfortable with. For this reason, many people find it easier to approach more informal organizations such as Schakel and then through Schakel they can receive support and encouragement to go to the OCMW or the Sociale Kruidenier. For one participant, assistance through the OCMW with paperwork and bills alleviates some of her stress. This change made it possible to focus more on her children and their lives. Even if it was challenging, she is glad she took the step towards the OCMW.

"Now I have someone from the OCMW who helps me with that, who also does budget guidance and paperwork. So that I can also focus more on my children and their school, so I can pass on some of that administrative stress." (Louise, member)

Schakel at Kontich relies on few volunteers, since the lead volunteer is thinking about stepping down, Schakel may disappear. Therefore, they are making a conscious effort to introduce members

to as many other organizations as possible. De Wilg and Den Alf are both service centers where people can go for social activities, workshops or informative sessions. Rap op Stap is an organization that offers budget friendly vacations and activities. Should Schakel cease to exist, the connection with those other organizations is made and people are aware of their existence.

"I look beyond Schakel to other organizations, for example, De Wilg, which also provides very good training sessions. Then we also include that in our calendar; currently, it's about seniors and safety. I try to open it up as much as possible so that it's not just limited to Schakel. But it's also about getting a sense of the other aspects of the village, of society, of communities. So that they also come to a different place for once and become integrated." (Cecile, lead volunteer, on introducing Schakel members to other organizations)

The importance of networks, social connections and third places where such social relationships can be fostered are crucial for people who experience social exclusion. Schakel serves as such a place, it is an accessible organization that is deeply ingrained in the community and has strong ties with the municipality and other organizations or services. Their ability to support, inform and empower people is thanks to the committed volunteers. However, Schakel faces its own issues concerning volunteers and reaching its target group.

4.3. Difficulties of reaching new volunteers and people who experience social exclusion

During the interviews with the volunteers, two main problems were observed. On the one hand there are difficulties with recruiting new volunteers, on the other hand there are difficulties reaching people that experience social exclusion.

4.3.1 Composition of Schakel and time constraints of volunteering

The core team of volunteers in Schakel Kontich is rather small, there are four to five people who take on the majority of responsibilities in the organization. There are other local Schakel groups who have bigger core teams, but the composition of the teams and the number of volunteers is managed by each local Schakel itself. They also try to recruit volunteers in the target group of Schakel, since they have experienced social exclusion and are therefore 'experts' on this topic.

“We are only four people really in the core team, right, and this year we also added someone from the target group. There is still someone we think would fit well. That is important, then you have a different perspective when we have meetings, they highlight different things. They are actually experts by experience, which is also necessary.” (Anne, volunteer)

Schakel Kontich can rely on other volunteers as well. These are individuals who like to help out with an activity (eg. catering during a party) or who do not mind repairing something small in a home. However, the bulk of the organization, which includes time consuming activities such as monthly support groups and getting to know members, is the responsibility of the core group. Since this is a small group, each individual has to contribute a considerable amount of time to the organization.

"There are still permanent staff members we can rely on for larger gatherings, but it has always been our dream that they attend a regular meeting, that they mingle with people, because that's also the principle of Welzijnsschakel, being among and with people. We haven't achieved that here in Kontich. They do great work, they volunteer when asked, but few of them come to a meeting/activity and just participate. Sometimes they come because they like the topic, but really, to serve Schakel, they need to truly engage with people." (Cecile, lead volunteer)

At Schakel Kontich, the average age of the volunteers is quite high. Most volunteers are retired or are close to retiring. Since volunteering requires a lot of time it is easier to participate when older. The inability to find new and younger volunteers is not only a problem within Schakel. Other volunteer groups in Kontich, like Samana, also have a rather old team (Samana works with people who experience chronic illnesses and need additional care, this can also include older people who need additional care). While it is imperative for the survival of such non-profit organizations that new and younger people join, it is not a bad development that many older people turn to volunteering. According to Lee (2021) volunteering is an effective tool against loneliness in older individuals. Furthermore, it absorbs the loss of network and daily routine when people retire, creating the possibility for meaningful contribution towards society (Filges et al., 2020).

Various activities Schakel organizes are during the weekdays. A lot of the members that participate in Schakel do not work or do not have a permanent or full-time job due to their socioeconomic situation or because of their age. Therefore, it is possible to organize activities during the week itself, this breaks up the week for people who are stuck at home otherwise. This of course leads to less involvement of or opportunities for involvement for volunteers who still have responsibilities such as work.

"Over the years, they asked if I wanted to be part of the core team. It was difficult with my job and other hobbies, but this year I said I would join. I promised that I would do my best, but I work full-time so I can't always participate in activities, but I can help organize them." (Maya, volunteer, who first was a member of Schakel before becoming a volunteer)

Moreover, Schakel organizes a whole range of different activities. Besides their conversation moments and gatherings every month, they regularly organize festivities such as an Easter brunch, Christmas party, BBQ, Bingo and more. Furthermore, they plan some activities outside of Kontich such as cultural or fun excursions like visiting a museum or going to an amusement park. They also make brochures to update all their members about the planned activities and further information. Schakel volunteers put a lot of effort and planning into their program. However, since they have a rather small core team, it is difficult to distribute and organize all of this work among the few volunteers. The participants admitted that it can be compared to almost a full-time job. Cecile, the lead volunteer, says she puts so much time into Schakel, trying to stay informed on every member, she hardly has any free time left.

"I invest a lot of time in it, too much I think, to still have enough free time for relaxation or to do something outside the house, but well, that's just the way it is. We used to have two leaders, but we also had a good and larger team back then. But where do you find volunteers now, and of what age?" (Cecile)

This implies that volunteering for Schakel, especially being part of the core team, demands a significant time commitment. The volunteers acknowledged that it can be challenging for individuals who are employed full-time or responsible for caring for a family to engage in

volunteering, given their limited available time. This notion follows the research of Southby and South (2016), who argue that full-time employment and/or having to take care of a family is a strong barrier to volunteering. Since those are demanding responsibilities they take precedence over secondary activities, such as volunteering. When spending a big portion of your free time volunteering, there will be little time left to invest in hobbies, friends, family, and self-care. For this reason, it is difficult to convince (younger) people to start volunteering or to take on a position with considerable responsibilities. Even for people who are retired this is a demanding position, since they are often young grandparents and take up a caregiving role for their grandchildren.

"I have very good team members, wonderful people who are always there when you ask. Running the whole show, though, is another matter. I'm exempt from that because I don't have a family; other people are grandmothers who want to take care of their grandchildren." (Cecile, lead volunteer)

"In general, many associations deal with this. Well, in most households, both partners work full-time, and then you have those young retirees who are taking care of their grandchildren. Yeah. It's really not easy to find volunteers." (Michelle, volunteer, on why there are few volunteers)

Choi et al. (2007), McNamara and Gonzales (2011) and Taniguchi (2006) all researched the roles of caregivers and came to the same conclusion: people who have to take care of spouses, elderly, young kids or other family, have less time to volunteer. The impact of having such a caregiving role on an individual's spare time and stress levels is big. It impedes people's ability to free up enough time for profound volunteering.

Aside from the willingness and feasibility to give up personal time, the volunteers agreed that to adequately help and support people who struggle with social exclusion in any form, you need to be able to invest time in getting to know the people and families you are supporting and advising. Not just time, but enough volunteers are needed to gather the right knowledge and information on every member as well.

"Especially families with children, single parents with children, those are the toughest cases. Sometimes you can give a little extra for school supplies or a coat, but we do that quietly. You need

a lot of staff for that because you don't always see or hear the same things, and that's a bit of a sore point right now, that we are few in number." (Cecile, lead volunteer)

"When you deal with people who really have problems, basically with social exclusion, with poverty. That's actually a very continuous process, you know. So, if you really want to assist those individuals, then it requires a lot of investment and reaching out to different services." (Michelle, volunteer)

Additionally, a good understanding of the workings of other organizations and institutions in your village means a better cooperation between those can be fostered. Again, this all takes a generous amount of time and commitment. In the interviews it appeared that Schakel Kontich created a strong cooperation between themselves and other actors such as the OCMW, the Sociale Kruidenier, and Den Alf and even the municipality. This strong connection between actors is necessary to foster effective social work and results, additionally, social workers or volunteers are imperative to create such bonds (Raeymaeckers, 2016; Vandekinderen et al., 2019). The strong collaboration with and integration in the community and municipality in Kontich is mainly due to Cecile's commitment to spend years building trust between these organizations. She has gathered a lot of knowledge on the local playing field and the people she aids. Many of the other volunteers at Schakel have a background in education, healthcare or the social sector, this ensures that they already have some background knowledge. However, they mentioned that the information, knowledge and relationships Cecile has accumulated is something that even for them would take a long period of time to learn and adopt.

"Cecile also knows all those families and what is going on within those families. That's not something you know right away, so all those years that she has been doing that. I already know a lot, but not as much. She also knows honesty, the character of the people, do they exaggerate or not? For working people, that's not always so simple." (Anne, volunteer, who is just retired)

So, time is of essence. On the one hand younger people are often too occupied by their work and family to take on volunteering with many responsibilities. On the other hand, to actually assist people dealing with these kinds of problems, a lot of effort needs to be put into getting to know the

people, other organizations, the municipality and other actors. Even if people put a lot of effort and added time into volunteering, it takes time to achieve such knowledge. This is in general not a problem if there are enough volunteers to learn from. In the case of Kontich where there is a small team and the leading volunteer is thinking of taking a step back, there is a bigger chance of losing such information and connections.

However, the volunteers of the core team mentioned that they gladly give up their spare time, because volunteering gives them fulfillment and energy. These are crucial feelings needed to retain and motivate volunteers. The research on retaining volunteers in nonprofit organizations (Bang, 2015; Erlinghagen & Hank, 2006; Huang et al., 2019) highlights this importance of fulfillment and satisfaction. Individuals need to be valued by their organizations and fulfill their needs of self-development and active involvement in the organization's activities and decision-making. If this feeling is not present, volunteers will struggle with keeping up their volunteering work.

"All free time, even if it's just half an hour, I take my dogs for a walk when I go out to post flyers. I do it with pleasure. I do get satisfaction from it, but I just kind of fell into it; they simply came and asked me." (Maya, volunteer, on how much time volunteering requires)

"I'm not someone who does nothing either; you have to enjoy it, then it gives you positive energy. If you're a volunteer and you do something you don't like, you should stop." (Anne, volunteer, on why she volunteers)

4.3.2 Reachability of the target group

The second problem Schakel runs into, as well as other volunteer groups in Kontich, is reaching their target group. How can the volunteers know if someone faces social exclusion, is lonely, or is isolated?

One of the interviewees who also volunteers at Samana said that since the laws surrounding privacy changed, they have difficulties identifying who falls into the category of needing additional care. Schakel or Cecile sometimes get tips from the OCMW or the municipality about certain people or

families who experience social exclusion, due to their long-standing cooperation. However, many people need to find their own ways to nonprofit organizations.

- "So, the collaboration between Schakel, the municipality, and the OCMW is going well?
- I think so, you can provide more targeted help. That's how we also get some of our people, how else can you know?" (Maya, volunteer, on how Schakel reaches people)

In the train of thoughts on how to reach the target group, it was brought up that one person can be enough to encourage others to join NPOs like Schakel. It was mentioned by the volunteers that newcomers who have little knowledge of the new host country or community can benefit from just one fellow countryman, who can show them the ropes. Many people end up in Schakel because they tagged along with another member. In this aspect, one individual can have an impactful influence in reaching the target group.

"A little over a month ago, we had something to do, and then there was someone with us, a newcomer, and they had come together with someone from the target group." (Anne, volunteer, on how new members get to Schakel)

"You also have people who go to Schakel, who are struggling, and who then know someone and say, 'come along.'" (Eva, member)

However, the participants agreed that for most individuals it remains partly their own responsibility to take the necessary steps towards support. The participants indicated that there is a lot of shame, pride, insecurity and/or distrust involved when dealing with social exclusion. These are feelings that people who experience exclusion need to be able to put aside before they can reach out towards support. There is a lot of courage needed to talk to and reach out to other people, even if a hand is already extended to them. The volunteers mentioned that they are aware they probably do not reach the worst cases of social exclusion and isolation. However, they can only keep reaching out to suspected excluded people, after that only these people themselves can accept the offered assistance.

"We need people to guide them, because otherwise, it's not easy to reach them. They seek contact with people who are friendly, who then invite them, who always make an offer. We only make an offer, that's also a bridging (Schakel) function, providing an offer, and then it's up to the people to take that step." (Cecile, lead volunteer, on how to reach out to socially excluded people)

"Yes, Schakel is very useful. You have to find the people, because they don't come on their own. That's still a problem. People don't come voluntarily. But I still see new faces regularly. But that's a first step, to then dare to talk to others and arrange to do something together." (Eva, member)

"There aren't many who dare to take that step towards help, and then you simply don't know them. If they don't want to, we can't reach them; they all have their pride." (Anne, volunteer, on socially excluded people)

Chow, Tiedens and Govan (2007), Menec et al. (2020) and Twenge et al. (2007) give a possible explanation on why the success rate of reaching socially excluded people is rather low. People who experience social exclusion often demonstrate antisocial behavior. A range of negative emotions, including anger, can elicit such antisocial behavior, this antisocial feeling negatively impacts willingness to cooperate and socialize with other people. The same can be said for people who isolate themselves, for many it is a choice, because of trauma or other negative ideas, to no longer participate in social relationships. They actively decline socialization.

It is an ongoing problem that remains solution less for the volunteers in Kontich. Moreover, Schakel noticed that after the Covid-19 Pandemic, less people returned to Schakel and people were more difficult to reach, since they experienced longer periods of isolation. Following the research of Hwang et al. (2020) many people got extremely disconnected because of the social distancing rules, creating an isolation pitfall.

"Since the Corona situation, we've been able to reach far fewer people; they've had nothing for two years. Now, there's actually a core group that we always see again, and many people we haven't seen again. That's the case with many associations." (Anne, volunteer)

Some interesting considerations were made. For example, in a bigger city, issues such as exclusion and poverty are more noticeable. There are clearly defined disadvantaged neighborhoods or specific spots where people gather, because of this, it is easier to approach those people. In a village this problem is more hidden. This is in line with the research mentioned in the literature study, suggesting that there is a high segregation in Belgian cities, separating ethnic and socioeconomic communities (Andersson et al., 2018; Costa & de Valk, 2018; Haandrikman et al., 2021; Musterd et al., 2016).

Furthermore, people who experience extreme exclusion may not be in the right headspace to react to a nonprofit such as Schakel. Participants said that when someone is so consumed by their problems or keeping a family/children afloat, it is easy to forget about activities or support groups they are invited to. Some of these individuals are constantly trying to solve problem after problem and do not have the energy for secondary activities.

"Now with the Easter brunch as well, many people haven't responded, and these are the people we thought would come. They're often quite nonchalant. Their priorities may be different; I think they have so much on their minds to keep their families running and to bring home food and income, that they might forget about the rest." (Anne, volunteer, about socially excluded people)

"People who are really struggling with a lot of problems, they sign up, but at the last moment something comes up with the children or something, and then they don't come, that's how it goes." (Michelle, volunteer, on why excluded people do not show up to activities)

Schakel occupies an important role in the community of Kontich, aiding many people. Nevertheless, their workings and future depend on the volunteers and their ability to reach the target group. Volunteering at Schakel requires time and effort, which makes it difficult to attract new volunteers. There is thus a risk that this local Schakel group will disappear.

5. Conclusion

This thesis tried to answer the question: How is social exclusion experienced by members and volunteers of a local volunteer NGO working around the issue of social exclusion in Kontich (a Flemish village) and in which ways can such an organization assist people who experience social exclusion?

After an extensive literature study on social exclusion and its related concepts, it can be concluded that social exclusion is a very complex and multi-dimensional concept. It is a vicious process that influences every aspect of someone's life and has detrimental consequences for their well-being and health. People feel like they no longer belong or are valuable, get stuck in isolation and experience negative feelings such as shame and distrust. They have a hard time staying connected to and participating in society. These findings were repeated in interviews with volunteers and members of Schakel, a volunteer organization in Kontich. The research participants talked about their encounters with ageism, racism, discrimination in general, financial hardship and loneliness. They suffered from limited or no social networks and relationships and felt they were thrown aside by society. This study raised four interesting points, answering the sub questions:

First, how do individuals cope with social exclusion and how do they reconnect to society? Social connection and support are incredibly important for individuals experiencing social exclusion. Having someone to relate to or who listens to you is often enough to alleviate feelings of loneliness and isolation. Third places play a significant role in this aspect, since such places allow for social connection and community building. Furthermore, third places serve as places where individuals can temporarily escape their problems and find some rest. Consequently, third places can relieve stress and enhance well-being. Social excluded individuals turn to volunteering as well, as volunteering can create new social networks. Moreover, volunteering increases fulfillment and a sense of being valuable again.

Second, how does Schakel alleviate the experience of social exclusion? Schakel serves as a third place. Here, individuals facing social exclusion may connect with others experiencing similar circumstances. Schakel focuses on this social connection to create togetherness and overall support.

Schakel is an accessible organization with low entry barriers, therefore they can reach many people. In Kontich they serve as a bridge between socially excluded individuals, community and more formal aid institutions. Due to their strong connection with and within the municipality, they are a strong support network for people who struggle with social exclusion in all its facets.

Third, what are some of the difficulties volunteers encounter in their work? Schakel is based on volunteers. However, they have noted that it is difficult to attract new volunteers, especially younger ones. Adults who are fully employed and need to take care of their family do not have the time for profound volunteering which is needed when working around social issues. Schakel therefore has a small and rather old core team, this endangers the continued existence of the Schakel group in Kontich.

Fourth, which role does Kontich's locality play in social exclusion? Kontich is not a complete urban or rural village, it falls somewhere in between. Participants mentioned that social exclusion is more hidden in Kontich since there are no strictly defined neighborhoods or spots where excluded people gather, such as in urban places. Moreover, the experience of social exclusion is less anonymous than in urban places. Visiting places that offer aid in a village where many neighbors know each other is more notable. Nevertheless, it cannot be considered as a rural place either, since it does not deal with the issues of remote living, such as having no available transport, services and healthcare.

These results cannot be generalized in any manner, not even to other villages in Flanders or Belgium. The sample was rather limited to begin with, since the target group was one specific Schakel group located in Kontich. Furthermore, participants were picked by a gatekeeper, which can be biased and influence the results. Entirely different stories and experiences can arise when researching other Schakel groups. In this way the research is rather limited. Nevertheless, the study does depict real lived experiences of social exclusion and can therefore be significant in understanding processes of exclusion and inclusion in Flanders. More case studies can be conducted in other Flemish villages to research the workings of exclusion in places that do not entirely belong to the urban and rural division. Furthermore, the influence of local and 'informal' volunteer organizations on the experience of social exclusion seemed significant in this research and is therefore an interesting topic to conduct more research on.

More personally, this thesis is a great reminder of the importance of social and human connection and solidarity with fellow humans, especially in such turbulent and polarizing times.

6. Bibliography

Abbott, P., & Sapsford, R. (2006). LIVING ON THE MARGINS: Older People, Place and Social Exclusion. *Policy Studies*, *26*(1), 29–46. https://doi.org/10.1080/01442870500041660

Adams, W. T. (2015). Conducting Semi-Structured Interviews. *Handbook of Practical Program Evaluation*, 492–505. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119171386.ch19

Ainscow, M. (2020). Promoting inclusion and equity in education: lessons from international experiences. *Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy*, *6*(1), 7–16. https://doi.org/10.1080/20020317.2020.1729587

Algren, M. H., Ekholm, O., Nielsen, L., Ersbøll, A. K., Bak, C. K., & Andersen, P. T. (2020). Social isolation, loneliness, socioeconomic status, and health-risk behaviour in deprived neighbourhoods in Denmark: A cross-sectional study. *SSM, Population Health*, *10*, 100546. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssmph.2020.100546

Allen, J., & Farber, S. (2021). Suburbanization of Transport Poverty. *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, *111*(6), 1833–1850. https://doi.org/10.1080/24694452.2020.1859981

Allen, K. (2021). *The Psychology of Belonging*. Routledge. https://www.routledge.com/The-Psychology-of-Belonging/Allen/p/book/9780367347529

Allen, K., Kern, M. L., Rozek, C. S., McInerney, D. M., & Slavich, G. M. (2021). Belonging: a review of conceptual issues, an integrative framework, and directions for future research. *Australian Journal of Psychology*, *73*(1), 87–102. https://doi.org/10.1080/00049530.2021.1883409

Andersson, E., Malmberg, B., Costa, R., Sleutjes, B., Stonawski, M., & De Valk, H. (2018). A Comparative Study of Segregation Patterns in Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands and Sweden: Neighbourhood Concentration and Representation of Non-European Migrants. *European Journal of Population*, *34*(2), 251–275. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10680-018-9481-5

Arce, G. M., & Pantazis, C. (2018). Social exclusion, neoliberalism and resistance: The role of social workers in implementing social policies in Chile. *CSP. Critical Social Policy/Critical Social Policy*, *39*(1), 127–146. https://doi.org/10.1177/0261018318766509

Ashurst, F., & Venn, C. (2014). 'No More Excuses': Neoliberalism and the New Exclusion. In *Inequality, Poverty, Education* (pp. 155–177). Palgrave Macmillan, London. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137347015_9

Bailey, N., Fahmy, E., & Bradshaw, J. (2017). The multidimensional analysis of social exclusion. In *Poverty and Social Exclusion in the UK* (pp. 311–342). Bristol University Press. https://bristoluniversitypressdigital.com/display/book/9781447334262/ch013.xml

Baker, E., Lester, L., Mason, K., & Bentley, R. (2020). Mental health and prolonged exposure to unaffordable housing: a longitudinal analysis. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, *55*(6), 715–721. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00127-020-01849-1

Bang, H. (2015). Volunteer age, job satisfaction, and intention to stay. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, *36*(2), 161–176. https://doi.org/10.1108/lodj-04-2013-0052

Banulescu-Bogdan, N. (2020). Beyond Work: Reducing Social Isolation for Refugee Women and Other Marginalized Newcomers. In *Migration Policy*. Migration Policy Institute. https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/reducing-social-isolation-refugee-women-newcomers

Baron, S. (2004). Social Capital in British Politics and Policy Making. In *Politics, Trust and Networks: Social Capital in Critical Perspective* (pp. 5–16). London South Bank University. https://www.lsbu.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/9372/politics-trust-social-capital-families-research-working-paper.pdf

Barry, B. (1998). Social Exclusion, Social Isolation and the Distribution of Income. *LSE Research Online Documents on Economics*. https://ideas.repec.org/p/ehl/lserod/6516.html

Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, *117*(3), 497–529. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.117.3.497

Baumeister, R. F., & Tice, D. M. (1990). Point-Counterpoints: Anxiety and Social Exclusion. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, *9*(2), 165–195. https://doi.org/10.1521/jscp.1990.9.2.165

Bečević, Z., & Dahlstedt, M. (2021). On the margins of citizenship: youth participation and youth exclusion in times of neoliberal urbanism. *Journal of Youth Studies*, *25*(3), 362–379. https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2021.1886261

Beech, B. M., Ford, C. L., Thorpe, R. J., Bruce, M. A., & Norris, K. C. (2021). Poverty, Racism, and the Public Health Crisis in America. *Frontiers in Public Health*, *9*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2021.699049

Bettache, K., Chiu, C., & Beattie, P. (2020). The merciless mind in a dog-eat-dog society: neoliberalism and the indifference to social inequality. *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences*, *34*, 217–222. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cobeha.2020.06.002

Bevolking in armoede of sociale uitsluiting. (2023). Statistiek Vlaanderen. Retrieved November 13, 2023, from https://www.vlaanderen.be/statistiek-vlaanderen/inkomen-en-armoede/bevolking-in-armoede-of-sociale-uitsluiting

Binder, J., & Matern, A. (2019). Mobility and social exclusion in peripheral regions. *European Planning Studies*, *28*(6), 1049–1067. https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2019.1689926

Bobek, A., & Sandström, L. (2024). Pandemic Stories From the Margins: Migrant Experiences of Social Exclusion During COVID-19. *Critical Sociology*. https://doi.org/10.1177/08969205231224252

Bonnesen, L. (2019). The Unlikely Altruist: Practices of Exclusion in Volunteer-Based Social Work. *Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics*, *16*(2), 53–69. https://portal.findresearcher.sdu.dk/da/publications/the-unlikely-altruist-practices-of-exclusion-in-volunteer-based-s

Bracic, A. (2022). Ethnicity and Social Exclusion. *Nationalities Papers*, *50*(6), 1045–1056. https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2022.72

Bredewold, F., Verplanke, L., Kampen, T., Tonkens, E., & Duyvendak, J. W. (2019). The care receivers perspective: How care-dependent people struggle with accepting help from family members, friends and neighbours. *Health & Social Care in the Community*, *28*(3), 762–770. https://doi.org/10.1111/hsc.12906

Brondolo, E., Libretti, M., Rivera, L. M., & Walsemann, K. M. (2012). Racism and Social Capital: The Implications for Social and Physical Well-Being. *Journal of Social Issues*, *68*(2), 358–384. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.2012.01752.x

Brooke, J., & Jackson, D. (2020). Older people and COVID-19: Isolation, risk and ageism. *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, *29*(13–14), 2044–2046. https://doi.org/10.1111/jocn.15274

Brown, J., Acey, C. S., Anthonj, C., Barrington, D., Beal, C., Capone, D., Cumming, O., Fedinick, K. P., Gibson, J. M., Hicks, B., Kozubík, M., Lakatosova, N., Linden, K. G., Love, N. G.,

Mattos, K., Murphy, H. M., & Winkler, I. T. (2023). The effects of racism, social exclusion, and discrimination on achieving universal safe water and sanitation in high-income countries. *The Lancet Global Health*, *11*(4), e606–e614. https://doi.org/10.1016/s2214-109x(23)00006-2

Burholt, V., Winter, B., Aartsen, M., Constantinou, C., Dahlberg, L., Villar, F., De Jong Gierveld, J., Van Regenmortel, S., & Waldegrave, C. (2019). A critical review and development of a conceptual model of exclusion from social relations for older people. *European Journal of Ageing*, *17*, 3–19. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10433-019-00506-0

Butrica, B. A., Johnson, R. W., & Zedlewski, S. R. (2009). Volunteer Dynamics of Older Americans. *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B*, *64B*(5), 644–655. https://doi.org/10.1093/geronb/gbn042

Cacioppo, J. T., Hawkley, L. C., Norman, G. J., & Berntson, G. G. (2011). Social isolation. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, *1231*(1), 17–22. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-6632.2011.06028.x

Campbell, S., Greenwood, M., Prior, S., Shearer, T., Walkem, K., Young, S., Bywaters, D., & Walker, K. (2020). Purposive sampling: complex or simple? Research case examples. *Journal of Research in Nursing*, *25*(8), 652–661. https://doi.org/10.1177/1744987120927206

Casas, I. (2008). Social Exclusion and the Disabled: An Accessibility Approach∗. *The Professional Geographer*, *59*(4), 463–477. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9272.2007.00635.x

Cass, N., Shove, E., & Urry, J. (2005). Social Exclusion, Mobility and Access. *Sociological Review*, *53*(3), 539–555. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954x.2005.00565.x

Cedeño, D. (2023). Social Exclusion and Inclusion: A Social Work Perspective. *Families in Society*, *104*(3), 332–343. https://doi.org/10.1177/10443894221147576

Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing Grounded Theory* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications. https://uk.sagepub.com/en-gb/eur/constructing-grounded-theory/book235960

Charmaz, K. (2019). Experiencing Stigma and Exclusion: The Influence of Neoliberal Perspectives, Practices, and Policies on Living with Chronic Illness and Disability. *Symbolic Interaction*, *43*(1), 21–45. https://doi.org/10.1002/symb.432

Chase, E., & Walker, R. (2012). The Co-construction of Shame in the Context of Poverty: Beyond a Threat to the Social Bond. *Sociology*, *47*(4), 739–754. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038512453796

Choi, N. G., Burr, J. A., Mutchler, J. E., & Francis, G. (2007). Formal and Informal Volunteer Activity and Spousal Caregiving Among Older Adults. *Research on Aging*, *29*(2), 99–124. https://doi.org/10.1177/0164027506296759

Chow, R. M., Tiedens, L. Z., & Govan, C. L. (2007). Excluded emotions: The role of anger in antisocial responses to ostracism. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *44*(3), 896–903. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2007.09.004

Choy, B. K. C., Eom, K., & Li, N. P. (2021). Too cynical to reconnect: Cynicism moderates the effect of social exclusion on prosociality through empathy. *Personality and Individual Differences*, *178*, 110871. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2021.110871

Chung, R. Y., Chung, G. K., Gordon, D., Mak, J., Zhang, L., Chan, D., Lai, F. T. T., Wong, H., & Wong, S. Y. (2019). Housing affordability effects on physical and mental health: household survey in a population with the world's greatest housing affordability stress. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, *74*(2), 164–172. https://doi.org/10.1136/jech-2019-212286

Claeys, A., Coussée, F., Heiden, S., Merckaert, A., & De Grande, L. (2001). Engaging the poor in policy-making on poverty and social exclusion in Flanders (Belgium). In *Citizens as Partners. OECD Handbook on Information, Consultation and Public Participation in Policy-making* (pp. 125–144). OECD. http://hdl.handle.net/1854/LU-146632

Clark, T. (2010). Gaining and Maintaining Access. *Qualitative Social Work*, *10*(4), 485–502. https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325009358228

Clarke, V., & Braun, V. (2016). Thematic analysis. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, *12*(3), 297–298. https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2016.1262613

Clarke, V., & Braun, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Cohen, S. (2004). Social Relationships and Health. *American Psychologist*, *59*(8), 676–684. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066x.59.8.676

Coie, J. D. (2004). The impact of negative social experiences on the development of antisocial behavior. In *Children's peer relations: From development to intervention* (pp. 243–267). American Psychological Association. https://doi.org/10.1037/10653-013

Corral-Granados, A., Smeplass, E., Rapp, A., & Isaksen, G. H. (2023). A study on Children perceptions of social exclusion and the structural drivers of discrimination in Norwegian elementary schools. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *154*, 107063. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2023.107063

Costa, R., & De Valk, H. (2018). Ethnic and Socioeconomic Segregation in Belgium: A Multiscalar Approach Using Individualised Neighbourhoods. *European Journal of Population*, *34*(2), 225–250. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10680-018-9480-6

Côté, D., White, B. W., Dubé, J., & Gravel, S. (2023). Are Healthcare Systems Failing Immigrants? Transnational Migration and Social Exclusion in the Workers' Compensation Process in Québec. *The International Migration Review*. https://doi.org/10.1177/01979183231180192

Coyne, I. (1997). Sampling in qualitative research. Purposeful and theoretical sampling; merging or clear boundaries? *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, *26*(3), 623–630. https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1365-2648.1997.t01-25-00999.x

Crick, A. P. (2011). New Third Places: Opportunities and Challenges. In *Tourism Sensemaking: Strategies to Give Meaning to Experience* (Vol. 5, pp. 63–77). Emerald Group Publishing Limited. https://doi.org/10.1108/s1871-3173(2011)0000005006

Dahlberg, L., Andersson, L., & Lennartsson, C. (2018). Long-term predictors of loneliness in old age: results of a 20-year national study. *Aging and Mental Health/Aging & Mental Health*, *22*(2), 190–196. https://doi.org/10.1080/13607863.2016.1247425

Davidsson, T., & Petersson, F. (2017). Towards an actor-oriented approach to social exclusion: a critical review of contemporary exclusion research in a Swedish social work context. *European Journal of Social Work*, *21*(2), 167–180. https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2017.1286297

De Jong-Gierveld, J., Van Tilburg, T. G., & Dykstra, P. A. (2006). Loneliness and Social Isolation. In *The Cambridge handbook of personal relationships* (pp. 485–500). Cambridge University Press. https://research.vu.nl/ws/portalfiles/portal/2173239/2006+Handbook+Loneliness+dJG+vT+D.pdf

De Kock, C. (2022). Equitable Substance Use Treatment for Migrants and Ethnic Minorities in Flanders, Belgium: Service Coordinator and Expert Perspectives. *Substance Abuse*, *16*. https://doi.org/10.1177/11782218221097390

De León, M. C. D., Negueruela, M., & Sánchez-Izquierdo, M. (2020). Benefits of Volunteering in Young People at Risk of Social Exclusion. *Irish Journal of Applied Social Studies*, *20*(1). https://arrow.tudublin.ie/ijass/vol20/iss1/5/

De Vrij, E., & Vanoutrive, T. (2022). 'No-one visits me anymore': Low Emission Zones and social exclusion via sustainable transport policy. *Journal Environmental Policy Planning/Journal of Environmental Policy and Planning*, *24*(6), 640–652. https://doi.org/10.1080/1523908x.2021.2022465

Dean, J. (2021). Informal Volunteering, Inequality, and Illegitimacy. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, *51*(3), 527–544. https://doi.org/10.1177/08997640211034580

dell'Olio, L., Ibeas, Á., De Oña, J., & De Oña, R. (2018). Public Participation Techniques and Choice of Variables. *Public Transportation Quality of Service*, 33–47. https://doi.org/10.1016/b978-0-08-102080-7.00003-3

Dempsey, L., Dowling, M., Larkin, P., & Murphy, K. (2016). Sensitive Interviewing in Qualitative Research. *Research in Nursing & Health*, *39*(6), 480–490. https://doi.org/10.1002/nur.21743

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2011). Introduction: The discipline and practice of Qualitative research. In *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (pp. 1–21). Sage Publications. https://books.google.be/books?hl=nl&lr=&id=AIRpMHgBYqIC&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&dq=Denzin,+N.K.+%26+Lincoln,+Y.S.+(2011).+Introduction:+the+discipline+and+practice+of+qualitative+research.&ots=kqzRCKgAhc&sig=mk6BjhnwIvgMafNcbK7eY1aomBg#v=onepage&q&f=false

Department for International Development. (2005). Reducing poverty by tackling social exclusion. In *Department for International Development*.

DeVerteuil, G. (2017). Post-welfare city at the margins: immigrant precarity and the mediating third sector in London. *Urban Geography*, *38*(10), 1517–1533. https://doi.org/10.1080/02723638.2017.1286840

DeVerteuil, G., Golubchikov, O., & Sheridan, Z. (2021). Disaster and the lived politics of the resilient city. *Geoforum*, *125*, 78–86. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2021.07.004

Drennan, J., Treacy, M., Butler, M., Byrne, A., Fealy, G., Frazer, K., & Irving, K. (2008). Support networks of older people living in the community. *International Journal of Older People Nursing*, *3*(4), 234–242. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1748-3743.2008.00135.x

Duveau, C., Smith, P., & Lorant, V. (2023). Mental health among people with a migration background in Belgium over the past 20 years: how has the situation evolved? *Archives of Public Health*, *81*, 176. https://doi.org/10.1186/s13690-023-01187-z

Elias, A., & Paradies, Y. (2021). The Costs of Institutional Racism and its Ethical Implications for Healthcare. *Journal of Bioethical Inquiry*, *18*(1), 45–58. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11673-020-10073-0

Elmer, T., Geschwind, N., Peeters, F., Wichers, M., & Bringmann, L. F. (2020). Getting stuck in social isolation: Solitude inertia and depressive symptoms. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, *129*(7), 713–723. https://doi.org/10.1037/abn0000588

Emmel, N., Hughes, K., Greenhalgh, J., & Sales, A. (2007). Accessing Socially Excluded People — Trust and the Gatekeeper in the Researcher-Participant Relationship. *Sociological Research Online*, *12*(2), 43–55. https://doi.org/10.5153/sro.1512

Erlinghagen, M., & Hank, K. (2006). The participation of older Europeans in volunteer work. *Ageing and Society*, *26*(4), 567–584. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0144686x06004818

Ferreira, J., Ferreira, C., & Bos, E. (2021). Spaces of consumption, connection, and community: Exploring the role of the coffee shop in urban lives. *Geoforum*, *119*, 21–29. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2020.12.024

Filges, T., Siren, A. K., Fridberg, T., & Nielsen, B. C. V. (2020). Voluntary work for the physical and mental health of older volunteers: A systematic review. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, *16*(4). https://doi.org/10.1002/cl2.1124

Finlay, J., Esposito, M., Kim, M. H., Gomez-Lopez, I. N., & Clarke, P. (2019). Closure of 'third places'? Exploring potential consequences for collective health and wellbeing. *Health and Place*, *60*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2019.102225

Flanagan, K., Levin, I., Tually, S., Varadharajan, M., Verdouw, J., Faulkner, D., Meltzer, A., & Vreugdenhil, A. (2020). Understanding the experience of social housing pathways. In *APO Analysis & Policy Observatory* (Issue 324). Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute. https://doi.org/10.18408/ahuri-4118301

Flint, P., Dollar, T., & Stewart, M. A. (2018). Hurdling Over Language Barriers: Building Relationships With Adolescent Newcomers Through Literacy Advancement. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, *62*(5), 509–519. https://doi.org/10.1002/jaal.927

Friedler, B., Crapser, J., & McCullough, L. D. (2015). One is the deadliest number: the detrimental effects of social isolation on cerebrovascular diseases and cognition. *Acta Neuropathologica*, *129*(4), 493–509. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00401-014-1377-9

Gallie, D. (2013). Unemployment and social exclusion in the European Union. *European Societies*, *1*(2), 139–167. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.1999.10749930

Gallie, D., Paugam, S., & Jacobs, S. C. (2010). UNEMPLOYMENT, POVERTY AND SOCIAL ISOLATION: Is there a vicious circle of social exclusion? *European Societies*, *5*(1), 1–32. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616690320000057668

García-Mainar, I., Servós, C. M., & Gil, M. I. S. (2014). Analysis of Volunteering Among Spanish Children and Young People: Approximation to Their Determinants and Parental Influence. *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, *26*(4), 1360–1390. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-014-9487-5

Greiss, J., & Schoneville, H. (2023). The Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived and social citizenship: Case study research in Belgium, Lithuania and Portugal. *Journal of European Social Policy*, *33*(5), 540–554. https://doi.org/10.1177/09589287231207543

Gubrium, E., Leibetseder, B., Dierckx, D., & Raeymaeckers, P. (2017). Investing in work: exclusionary inclusion in Austria, Belgium and Norway. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, *37*(9/10), 605–622. https://doi.org/10.1108/ijssp-01-2017-0001

Haandrikman, K., Costa, R., Malmberg, B., Rogne, A. F., & Sleutjes, B. (2021). Socio-economic segregation in European cities. A comparative study of Brussels, Copenhagen, Amsterdam, Oslo and Stockholm. *Urban Geography*, *44*(1), 1–36. https://doi.org/10.1080/02723638.2021.1959778

Halleröd, B., & Larsson, D. (2007). Poverty, welfare problems and social exclusion. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, *17*(1), 15–25. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2397.2007.00503.x

Hansen, K. V. (2020). Loneliness among Elderly People: Can Food and Meals Change this Situation? *Journal of Population Ageing*, *15*(2), 413–423. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12062-020-09298-z

Hansen, T., Kafková, M. P., Katz, R., Lowenstein, A., Naim, S. P., Pavlidis, G., Villar, F., Walsh, K., & Aartsen, M. (2021). Exclusion from Social Relations in Later Life: Micro- and Macro-Level Patterns and Correlations in a European Perspective. *International Journal of*

Environmental Research and Public Health/International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, *18*(23), 12418. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph182312418

Hantson, M., Caset, F., Boussauw, K., & Keblowski, W. (2023). Understanding the role of on-demand public transport in low-density regions: Insights from Flanders. In *Proceedings of the BIVEC-GIBET Transport Research Days 2023*. https://researchportal.vub.be/en/publications/understanding-the-role-of-on-demand-public-transport-in-low-densi

He, J., He, L., Zhou, W., Nie, X., & He, M. (2020). Discrimination and Social Exclusion in the Outbreak of COVID-19. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health/International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *17*(8), 2933. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17082933

Hedegaard-Soerensen, L., & Grumloese, S. P. (2018). Exclusion: the downside of neoliberal education policy. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *24*(6), 631–644. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2018.1478002

Heron, T. (2008). Globalization, Neoliberalism and the Exercise of Human Agency. *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society/an International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, *20*(1–4), 85–101. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10767-007-9019-z

Hickman, P. (2013). "Third places" and social interaction in deprived neighbourhoods in Great Britain. *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment*, *28*(2), 221–236. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10901-012-9306-5

Hodgson, S., Watts, I., Fraser, S., Roderick, P., & Dambha-Miller, H. (2020). Loneliness, social isolation, cardiovascular disease and mortality: a synthesis of the literature and conceptual framework. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, *113*(5), 185–192. https://doi.org/10.1177/0141076820918236

Holmén, K., & Furukawa, H. (2002). Loneliness, health and social network among elderly people—a follow-up study. *Archives of Gerontology and Geriatrics*, *35*(3), 261–274. https://doi.org/10.1016/s0167-4943(02)00049-3

Holt-Lunstad, J., Smith, T. B., Baker, M. D., Harris, T., & Stephenson, D. (2015). Loneliness and Social Isolation as Risk Factors for Mortality. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, *10*(2), 227–237. https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691614568352

Horsell, C. (2006). Homelessness and Social Exclusion: A Foucauldian Perspective for Social Workers. *Australian Social Work*, *59*(2), 213–225. https://doi.org/10.1080/03124070600651911

Huang, Y., Bortree, D. S., Yang, F., & Wang, R. (2019). Encouraging Volunteering in Nonprofit Organizations: The Role of Organizational Inclusion and Volunteer Need Satisfaction. *Journal of Nonprofit & Public Sector Marketing*, *32*(2), 147–165. https://doi.org/10.1080/10495142.2019.1589624

Huisman, M., & Van Tilburg, T. (2021). Social exclusion and social isolation in later life. In *Handbook of Aging and the Social Sciences* (9th ed., pp. 99–114). Academic Press. https://doi.org/10.1016/b978-0-12-815970-5.00007-3

Hustinx, L., Grubb, A., Rameder, P., & Shachar, I. (2022). Inequality in Volunteering: Building a New Research Front. *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, *33*(1), 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-022-00455-w

Huxhold, O., Suanet, B., & Wetzel, M. (2022). Perceived Social Exclusion and Loneliness: Two Distinct but Related Phenomena. *Sociological Science*, *9*, 430–453. https://doi.org/10.15195/v9.a17

Hwang, T., Rabheru, K., Peisah, C., Reichman, W. E., & Ikeda, M. (2020). Loneliness and social isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic. *International Psychogeriatrics*, *32*(10), 1217–1220. https://doi.org/10.1017/s1041610220000988

Jeffres, L. W., Bracken, C. C., Jian, G., & Casey, M. F. (2009). The Impact of Third Places on Community Quality of Life. *Applied Research in Quality of Life*, *4*(4), 333–345. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11482-009-9084-8

Jehoel-Gijsbers, G. (2004). Sociale uitsluiting in Nederland. In *Sociaal En Cultureel Planbureau*. Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau. https://repository.scp.nl/handle/publications/1059

Jennings, G. R. (2005). Business, Social Science Methods Used in. *Encyclopedia of Social Measurement*, 219–230. https://doi.org/10.1016/b0-12-369398-5/00270-x

Jiang, S., & Ngai, S. S. (2021). Effects of structural-economic and socio-relational exclusion on well-being of Chinese migrant children. *Health & Social Care in the Community*, *30*(5), 1847–1857. https://doi.org/10.1111/hsc.13564

Kalinowski, S., & Rosa, A. (2021). Sustainable development and the problems of rural poverty and social exclusion in the EU countries. *European Research Studies Journal*, *24*(2), 438–463. https://www.um.edu.mt/library/oar/handle/123456789/82063

Karazman-Morawetz, I., & Rönneling, A. (2003). Legal Exclusion and Social Exclusion: 'Legal' and 'Illegal' Migrants. In *Welfare Policy from Below*. Routledge. https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781315234212-24/legal-exclusion-social-exclusion-legal-illegal-migrants-inge-karazman-morawetz-anita-r%C3%B6nneling

Keddy, B., Sims, S. L., & Stern, P. N. (1996). Grounded theory as feminist research methodology. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, *23*(3), 448–453. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.1996.tb00005.x

Kim, A., Jeon, S., & Park, I. (2023). Influence of Parenting Guilt on the Mental Health among Single-Parent Women: Multiple Additive Moderating Effect of Economic Well-Being and Level of Education. *Healthcare*, *11*(13), 1814. https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare11131814

Kosyakova, Y., Kristen, C., & Spörlein, C. (2021). The dynamics of recent refugees' language acquisition: how do their pathways compare to those of other new immigrants? *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *48*(5), 989–1012. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183x.2021.1988845

Kruithof, K., IJzerman, L. M., Nieuwenhuijse, A., Huisman, S., Schippers, A., Willems, D. L., & Olsman, E. (2021). Siblings' and parents' perspectives on the future care for their family member with profound intellectual and multiple disabilities: A qualitative study. *Journal of Intellectual & Developmental Disability*, *46*(4), 351–361. https://doi.org/10.3109/13668250.2021.1892261

Labonté, R., Hadi, A., & Kauffmann, X. E. (2011). Indicators of Social Exclusion and Inclusion: A Critical and Comparative Analysis of the Literature. *Population Health Improvement Research Network*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/235443128_Indicators_of_Social_Exclusion_and_Inclusion_A_Critical_and_Comparative_Analysis_of_the_Literature

Lambert, S., & Swerts, T. (2019). 'From Sanctuary to Welcoming Cities': Negotiating the Social Inclusion of Undocumented Migrants in Liège, Belgium. *Social Inclusion*, *7*(4), 90–99. https://doi.org/10.17645/si.v7i4.2326

Laparra, M., Mutilva, N. Z., & Lautre, I. G. (2021). The Multidimensional Conception of Social Exclusion and the Aggregation Dilemma: A Solution Proposal Based on Multiple

Correspondence Analysis. *Social Indicators Research*, *158*(2), 637–666. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-021-02707-6

Lee, S. (2020). Social Exclusion and Subjective Well-being Among Older Adults in Europe: Findings From the European Social Survey. *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B*, *76*(2), 425–434. https://doi.org/10.1093/geronb/gbaa172

Lee, S. (2021). Volunteering and loneliness in older adults: A parallel mediation model. *Aging and Mental Health/Aging & Mental Health*, *26*(6), 1234–1241. https://doi.org/10.1080/13607863.2021.1913477

Lee, Y. J., & Brudney, J. L. (2012). Participation in formal and informal volunteering: Implications for volunteer recruitment. *Nonprofit Management & Leadership*, *23*(2), 159–180. https://doi.org/10.1002/nml.21060

Leeuwis, C., Long, N., & Villarreal, M. (1990). Equivocations on knowledge systems theory: An actor-oriented critique. *Knowledge, Technology & Policy*, *3*(3), 19–27. https://doi.org/10.1007/bf02824946

Long, N. (1990). From Paradigm Lost to Paradigm Regained? The Case for an Actor-oriented Sociology of Development on JSTOR. *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, *49*, 3–24. https://www.jstor.org/stable/25675467

Longhurst, R. (2009). Interviews: In-Depth, Semi-Structured. *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*, 580–584. https://doi.org/10.1016/b978-008044910-4.00458-2

Loopmans, M., De Decker, P., & Kesteloot, C. (2010). Social Mix and Passive Revolution. A Neo-Gramscian Analysis of the Social Mix Rhetoric in Flanders, Belgium. *Housing Studies*, *25*(2), 181–200. https://doi.org/10.1080/02673030903561826

Low, C., & Shah, B. (2023). Refugee Women's Volunteering as Resistance Practices to Micro-Aggressions and Social Exclusion in the UK. *Social Inclusion*, *11*(2). https://doi.org/10.17645/si.v11i2.6309

Luz, G., & Da Silva Portugal, L. (2021). Understanding transport-related social exclusion through the lens of capabilities approach. *Transport Reviews*, *42*(4), 503–525. https://doi.org/10.1080/01441647.2021.2005183

Magaldi, D., & Berler, M. (2020). Semi-structured Interviews. *Encyclopedia of Personality and Individual Differences*, 4825–4830. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-24612-3_857

Marešová, P., Javanmardi, E., Baraković, S., Husić, J. B., Tomsone, S., Krejcar, O., & Kuča, K. (2019). Consequences of chronic diseases and other limitations associated with old age – a scoping review. *BMC Public Health*, *19*, 1431. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-019-7762-5

Marinucci, M., & Riva, P. (2020). How intergroup social connections shape immigrants' responses to social exclusion. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, *24*(3), 411–435. https://doi.org/10.1177/1368430219894620

Marron, D. (2013). Governing Poverty in a Neoliberal Age: New Labour and the Case of Financial Exclusion. *New Political Economy*, *18*(6), 785–810. https://doi.org/10.1080/13563467.2012.753043

McFadyen, J., & Rankin, J. (2016). The Role of Gatekeepers in Research: Learning from Reflexivity and Reflection. *GSTF Journal of Nursing and Health Care*, *4*(1), 82–88. https://research-portal.uws.ac.uk/en/publications/the-role-of-gatekeepers-in-research-learning-from-reflexivity-and/

McNamara, T., & Gonzales, E. (2011). Volunteer Transitions Among Older Adults: The Role of Human, Social, and Cultural Capital in Later Life. *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B*, *66*(4), 490–501. https://doi.org/10.1093/geronb/gbr055

Mehta, V., & Bosson, J. K. (2009). Third Places and the Social Life of Streets. *Environment and Behavior*, *42*(6), 779–805. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013916509344677

Menec, V., Newall, N. E., Mackenzie, C. S., Shooshtari, S., & Nowicki, S. (2020). Examining social isolation and loneliness in combination in relation to social support and psychological distress using Canadian Longitudinal Study of Aging (CLSA) data. *PloS One*, *15*(3). https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0230673

Meo, A., Ricucci, R., Schlee, C., Helemäe, J., & Kazjulja, M. (2021). The role of informal social support for young people in unemployment and job insecurity in Italy, Estonia, and Germany. In *Social Exclusion of Youth in Europe* (pp. 239–262). Policy Press. https://doi.org/10.47674/9781447358756

Mikunda, C. (2004). *Brand Lands, Hot Spots and Cool Spaces: Welcome to the Third Place and the Total Marketing Experience*. Kogan Page Publishers. https://books.google.be/books?hl=nl&lr=&id=zBLziB4ciz8C&oi=fnd&pg=PP15&dq=spectacular+third+spaces&ots=v6JP3i0OWL&sig=DsQ-ydOVqU9quB_L71We1Ki3ES8#v=onepage&q&f=false

Mills, C., Zavaleta, D., & Samuel, K. (2015). Shame, Humiliation and Social Isolation: Missing Dimensions of Poverty and Suffering Analysis. In *World Suffering and Quality of Life* (Vol. 56, pp. 251–266). Springer, Dordrecht. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-9670-5_19

Misra, S., Kwon, S. C., Abraído-Lanza, A. F., Chebli, P., Trinh-Shevrin, C., & Yi, S. S. (2021). Structural Racism and Immigrant Health in the United States. *Health Education & Behavior*, *48*(3), 332–341. https://doi.org/10.1177/10901981211010676

Monedero, J. a. G., Cuesta, C. U., & Angulo, B. F. N. (2014). Social Image of Disability. Vulnerability of the Dignity of Women with Disability and Social Exclusion Contexts. *Procedia: Social & Behavioral Sciences*, *161*, 115–120. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.12.019

Montemitro, C., D'Andrea, G., Cesa, F., Martinotti, G., Pettorruso, M., Di Giannantonio, M., Muratori, R., & Tarricone, I. (2021). Language proficiency and mental disorders among migrants: A systematic review. *European Psychiatry*, *64*(1). https://doi.org/10.1192/j.eurpsy.2021.2224

Moris, M. M. (2020). Belonging from the margin: The changing village and its others. *Journal of Rural Studies*, *87*, 474–481. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2020.03.005

Mubarak, F., & Suomi, R. (2022). Elderly Forgotten? Digital Exclusion in the Information Age and the Rising Grey Digital Divide. *INQUIRY: The Journal of Health Care Organization, Provision, and Financing*, *59*. https://doi.org/10.1177/00469580221096272

Murray, M., & Crummett, A. (2018). Combating social exclusion through community arts. In *The New Dynamics of Ageing* (Vol. 1, pp. 129–146). Bristol University Press. https://bristoluniversitypressdigital.com/display/book/9781447314752/ch007.xml

Musterd, S., Marcińczak, S., Van Ham, M., & Tammaru, T. (2016). Socioeconomic segregation in European capital cities. Increasing separation between poor and rich. *Urban Geography*, *38*(7), 1062–1083. https://doi.org/10.1080/02723638.2016.1228371

National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine. (2020). *Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults: Opportunities for the Health Care System*. The National Academies Press. https://doi.org/10.17226/25663

Nichol, B., Wilson, R. G., Rodrigues, A., & Haighton, C. (2023). Exploring the Effects of Volunteering on the Social, Mental, and Physical Health and Well-being of Volunteers: An

Umbrella Review. *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, *35*, 97–128. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-023-00573-z

O'Connor, K. M., & Gladstone, E. (2015). How social exclusion distorts social network perceptions. *Social Networks*, *40*, 123–128. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socnet.2014.09.002

O'Donnell, P., Moran, L., Van Geelen, S., O'Donovan, D., Van Den Muijsenbergh, M., & Elmusharaf, K. (2021). "There is people like us and there is people like them, and we are not like them." Understating social exclusion – a qualitative study. *PloS One*, *16*(6), e0253575. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0253575

Ogg, J. (2005). Social exclusion and insecurity among older Europeans: the influence of welfare regimes. *Ageing and Society*, *25*(01), 69–90. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0144686x04002788

Oldenburg, R. (1997). Our Vanishing "Third Places." *Planning Commissioners Journal*, *25*. https://plannersweb.com/1997/01/our-vanishing-third-places/

Oldenburg, R., & Brissett, D. (1982). The third place. *Qualitative Sociology*, *5*(4), 265–284. https://doi.org/10.1007/bf00986754

Ompad, D. C., Galea, S., & Vlahov, D. (2008). Urban Health Systems: Overview. *International Encyclopedia of Public Health*, 463–470. https://doi.org/10.1016/b978-012373960-5.00323-3

Over ons | Welzijnsschakels. (n.d.). Welzijnsschakels. Retrieved January 16, 2024, from https://www.welzijnsschakels.be/

Palinkas, L. A., Horwitz, S. M., Green, C. A., Wisdom, J. P., Duan, N., & Hoagwood, K. (2013). Purposeful Sampling for Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis in Mixed Method Implementation Research. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health*, *42*(5), 533–544. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10488-013-0528-y

Pardede, S., & Kovač, V. B. (2023). Distinguishing the Need to Belong and Sense of Belongingness: The Relation between Need to Belong and Personal Appraisals under Two Different Belongingness–Conditions. *European Journal of Investigation in Health, Psychology and Education/European Journal of Investigation in Health, Psychology and Education*, *13*(2), 331–344. https://doi.org/10.3390/ejihpe13020025

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods* (3rd ed.). SAGE. https://books.google.be/books?hl=nl&lr=&id=FjBw2oi8El4C&oi=fnd&pg=PR21&dq=MQ+patton+purposeful+sampling&ots=bym1izOIwN&sig=7Z4C-sFrnTE3bDOmO6FSEH_XZdM#v=onepage&q&f=false

Piller, I., Zhang, J., & Li, J. (2020). Linguistic diversity in a time of crisis: Language challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Multilingua*, *39*(5), 503–515. https://doi.org/10.1515/multi-2020-0136

Pirani, E. (2011). Evaluating contemporary social exclusion in Europe: a hierarchical latent class approach. *Quality & Quantity*, *47*(2), 923–941. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-011-9574-2

Plagnol, A. C., & Huppert, F. A. (2010). Happy to Help? Exploring the Factors Associated with Variations in Rates of Volunteering Across Europe. *Social Indicators Research*, *97*(2), 157–176. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-009-9494-x

Political Inclusion of Marginalized Groups. (n.d.). National Democratic Institute. Retrieved November 12, 20213, from https://www.ndi.org/political-inclusion-of-marginalized-groups

Pot, A., Keijzer, M., & De Bot, K. (2018). The language barrier in migrant aging. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, *23*(9), 1139–1157. https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2018.1435627

Prattley, J., Buffel, T., Marshall, A., & Nazroo, J. (2020). Area effects on the level and development of social exclusion in later life. *Social Science & Medicine*, *246*, 112722. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2019.112722

Raeymaeckers, P. (2016). A specialist's perspective on the value of generalist practice: A qualitative network analysis. *Journal of Social Work*, *16*(5), 610–626. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468017316644693

Raitano, M., Gallo, G., Jessoula, M., & Pagnini, C. (2021). Fighting poverty and social exclusion. In *European Parliament*. European Parliament.

Raudenbush, D. T. (2016). "I Stay by Myself": Social Support, Distrust, and Selective Solidarity Among the Urban Poor. *Sociological Forum*, *31*(4), 1018–1039. https://doi.org/10.1111/socf.12294

Reinhard, M., Dewald-Kaufmann, J., Wüstenberg, T., Musil, R., Barton, B. B., Jobst, A., & Padberg, F. (2019). The vicious circle of social exclusion and psychopathology: a systematic review of experimental ostracism research in psychiatric disorders. *European Archives of Psychiatry and Clinical Neuroscience*, *270*(5), 521–532. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00406-019-01074-1

Richmond, A. H. (2002). Social Exclusion: Belonging and Not Belonging in the World System. *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees*, *21*(1), 40–48. https://www.jstor.org/stable/48648491

Risico op armoede of sociale uitsluiting. (2022). Statbel. Retrieved November 13, 2023, from https://statbel.fgov.be/nl/themas/huishoudens/armoede-en-levensomstandigheden/risico-op-armoede-sociale-uitsluiting#figures

Robben, L., Roets, G., Wagener, M., Van Lancker, W., & Hermans, K. (2023). Including the Most Excluded? A Qualitative Study on the Address Registration for People Experiencing Homelessness in Belgium. *Administration & Society*, *55*(6), 1093–1117. https://doi.org/10.1177/00953997231162538

Robinson, S., Hill, M., Fisher, K. R., & Graham, A. (2018). Belonging and exclusion in the lives of young people with intellectual disability in small town communities. *Journal of Intellectual Disabilities*, *24*(1), 50–68. https://doi.org/10.1177/1744629518765830

Saasa, S., Okech, D., Choi, Y. J., Nackerud, L., & Littleton, T. (2021). Social exclusion, mental health, and social well-being among African immigrants in the United States. *International Social Work*, *65*(4), 787–803. https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872820963425

Saunders, P., & Tsumori, K. (2002). Poor concepts: "social exclusion", poverty and the politics of guilt. *Policy: A Journal of Public Policy and Ideas*, *18*(2), 32–37. https://search.informit.org/doi/abs/10.3316/ielapa.200207509

Scheff, T. J. (2002). Shame and the Social Bond: A Sociological Theory. *Sociological Theory*, *18*(1), 84–99. https://doi.org/10.1111/0735-2751.00089

Schierup, C., & Jørgensen, M. B. (2016). An Introduction to the Special Issue. Politics of Precarity: Migrant Conditions, Struggles and Experiences. *Critical Sociology*, *42*(7–8), 947–958. https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920516640065

Schuermans, N., Meeus, B., & De Decker, P. (2016). Geographies of Whiteness and Wealth: White, Middle Class Discourses on Segregation and Social Mix in Flanders, Belgium. *Journal of Urban Affairs*, *37*(4), 478–495. https://doi.org/10.1111/juaf.12155

Seifert, A., Cotten, S. R., & Xie, B. (2021). A Double Burden of Exclusion? Digital and Social Exclusion of Older Adults in Times of COVID-19. *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B,*

Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences, *76*(3), e99–e103. https://doi.org/10.1093/geronb/gbaa098

Sen, K., Prybutok, G., & Prybutok, V. R. (2021). The use of digital technology for social wellbeing reduces social isolation in older adults: A systematic review. *SSM, Population Health*, *17*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssmph.2021.101020

Shah, S. G. S., Nogueras, D., Van Woerden, H., & Kiparoglou, V. (2020). The COVID-19 Pandemic: A Pandemic of Lockdown Loneliness and the Role of Digital Technology. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, *22*(11). https://doi.org/10.2196/22287

Shah, S. U., Fossa, A., Steiner, A., Kane, J., Levy, J. I., Adamkiewicz, G., Bennett-Fripp, W. M., & Reid, M. (2018). Housing Quality and Mental Health: the Association between Pest Infestation and Depressive Symptoms among Public Housing Residents. *Journal of Urban Health*, *95*(5), 691–702. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11524-018-0298-7

Shildrick, T., & MacDonald, R. (2013). Poverty Talk: How People Experiencing Poverty Deny Their Poverty and Why They Blame 'The Poor.' *Sociological Review*, *61*(2), 285–303. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-954x.12018

Sieg, H., & Yoon, C. (2020). Waiting for affordable housing in New York City. *Quantitative Economics: Journal of the Econometric Society*, *11*(1), 277–313. https://doi.org/10.3982/qe1160

Silver, H. (2007). The Process of Social Exclusion: The Dynamics of an Evolving Concept. *Social Science Research Network*. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1087789

Silver, H., & Miller, S. M. (2003). Social Exclusion: The European Approach to Social Disadvantage. *Indicators*, *2*(2). https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://www.humiliationstudies.org/documents/SilverSocialExclusion.pdf&ved=2ahUKEwiGpZaH64WDAxV6gv0HHVg4ASIQFnoECBMQAQ&usg=AOvVaw3Op592SggMPpayRklVAWUj

Simcock, N., Jenkins, K., Lacey-Barnacle, M., Martiskainen, M., Mattioli, G., & Hopkins, D. (2021). Identifying double energy vulnerability: A systematic and narrative review of groups at-risk of energy and transport poverty in the global north. *Energy Research & Social Science*, *82*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2021.102351

Sjåstad, H., Zhang, M., Masvie, A. E., & Baumeister, R. F. (2020). Social exclusion reduces happiness by creating expectations of future rejection. *Self and Identity*, *20*(1), 116–125. https://doi.org/10.1080/15298868.2020.1779119

Slepian, M. L., & Jacoby-Senghor, D. S. (2020). Identity Threats in Everyday Life: Distinguishing Belonging From Inclusion. *Social Psychological & Personality Science*, *12*(3), 392–406. https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550619895008

Sloane, P. J., & Jones, M. K. (2011). Disability and Social Exclusion. In *Social Exclusion: Short and Long Term Causes and Consequences*. Physica, Heidelberg. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-7908-2772-9_7

Smith, A. D. K. (2012). The Changing Effects of Community Characteristics on Volunteering in Canada. *Canadian Public Policy*, *38*(3), 361–373. https://doi.org/10.2307/41756299

Smith, B. J., & Lim, M. H. (2020). How the COVID-19 pandemic is focusing attention on loneliness and social isolation. *Public Health Research & Practice*, *30*(2). https://doi.org/10.17061/phrp3022008

Smith, J. D. (1999). Poor marketing or the decline of altruism? Young people and volunteering in the United Kingdom. *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, *4*(4), 372–377. https://doi.org/10.1002/nvsm.89

Smith, M. L., Steinman, L., & Casey, E. A. (2020). Combatting Social Isolation Among Older Adults in a Time of Physical Distancing: The COVID-19 Social Connectivity Paradox. *Frontiers in Public Health*, *8*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2020.00403

Southby, K., & South, J. (2016). Volunteering, inequalities and barriers to volunteering: a rapid evidence review. In *Leeds Beckett*. Volunteering Matters. https://eprints.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/id/eprint/3434/

Spaul, S. W., Hudson, R. L., Harvey, C., Macdonald, H., & Pérez, J. (2020). Exclusion criterion: learning disability. *Lancet*, *395*(10223). https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736(20)30051-9

Stavrova, O., & Ehlebracht, D. (2016). Cynical beliefs about human nature and income: Longitudinal and cross-cultural analyses. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *110*(1), 116–132. https://doi.org/10.1037/pspp0000050

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (2014). *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory* (4th ed.). Sage Publications. https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/basics-of-qualitative-research/book235578

Strauß, S. (2008). *Volunteering and Social Inclusion*. VS Research. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-8350-5573-5

Taniguchi, H. (2006). Men's and Women's Volunteering: Gender Differences in the Effects of Employment and Family Characteristics. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, *35*(1), 83–101. https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764005282481

Tankosić, A., & Dovchin, S. (2021). (C)overt linguistic racism: Eastern-European background immigrant women in the Australian workplace. *Ethnicities*, *23*(5), 726–757. https://doi.org/10.1177/14687968211005104

Thomas, F., Wyatt, K., & Hansford, L. (2020). The violence of narrative: embodying responsibility for poverty-related stress. *Sociology of Health & Illness*, *42*(5), 1123–1138. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9566.13084

Tierney, S., Mahtani, K. R., Wong, G., Todd, J., Roberts, N., Akinyemi, O., Howes, S., & Turk, A. (2021). The role of volunteering in supporting well-being – What might this mean for social prescribing? A best-fit framework synthesis of qualitative research. *Health & Social Care in the Community*, *30*(2). https://doi.org/10.1111/hsc.13516

Troesch, L. M., Segerer, R., Claus-Pröstler, N., & Grob, A. (2020). Parental Acculturation Attitudes: Direct and Indirect Impacts on Children's Second Language Acquisition. *Early Education and Development*, *32*(2), 272–290. https://doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2020.1740640

Tsakloglou, P., & Papadopoulos, F. (2002). Aggregate level and determining factors of social exclusion in twelve European countries. *Journal of European Social Policy*, *12*(3), 211–225. https://doi.org/10.1177/0952872002012003394

Tsolou, O., Babalis, T., & Tsoli, K. (2021). The Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Education: Social Exclusion and Dropping out of School. *Creative Education*, *12*(03), 529–544. https://doi.org/10.4236/ce.2021.123036

Twenge, J. M., Baumeister, R. F., DeWall, C. N., Ciarocco, N. J., & Bartels, J. (2007). Social exclusion decreases prosocial behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *92*(1), 56–66. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.92.1.56

Twenge, J. M., Catanese, K. R., & Baumeister, R. F. (2002). Social exclusion causes self-defeating behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *83*(3), 606–615. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.83.3.606

United Nations. (2016). Leaving no one behind: the imperative of inclusive development. In *United Nations*.

Valcke, B., Van Hiel, A., Van Assche, J., Van Roey, T., Onraet, E., & Roets, A. (2019). The Need for Inclusion: The relationships between Relational and Collective inclusion needs and psychological well-and ill-being. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, *50*(3), 579–596. https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2641

Van Bergen, A. P. L., Hoff, S., Van Ameijden, E. J. C., & Van Hemert, A. M. (2014). Measuring Social Exclusion in Routine Public Health Surveys: Construction of a Multidimensional Instrument. *PLOS ONE*, *9*(5). https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0098680

Van Raemdonck, A. (2023). Incomplete lives: experiences of Islamophobia as governmentality in education and employment in Flanders, Belgium. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *47*(4), 831–851. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2023.2224853

Van Regenmortel, S., De Donder, L., Smetcoren, A. S., Lambotte, D., De Witte, N., & Verté, D. (2017). Accumulation of Disadvantages: Prevalence and Categories of Old-Age Social Exclusion in Belgium. *Social Indicators Research*, *140*(3), 1173–1194. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-017-1817-8

Van Regenmortel, S., Winter, B., Thelin, A., Burholt, V., & De Donder, L. (2021). Exclusion from Social Relations Among Older People in Rural Britain and Belgium: A Cross-National Exploration Taking a Life-Course and Multilevel Perspective. In *International Perspectives on Aging: Social Exclusion in Later Life* (Vol. 28, pp. 83–98). Springer Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-51406-8

Vandekinderen, C., Roose, R., Raeymaeckers, P., & Hermans, K. (2019). The DNA of social work as a human rights practice from a frontline social workers' perspective in Flanders. *European Journal of Social Work*, *23*(5), 876–888. https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2019.1663408

Vela-Jiménez, R., & Sianes, A. (2021). Do Current Measures of Social Exclusion Depict the Multidimensional Challenges of Marginalized Urban Areas? Insights, Gaps and Future Research. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *18*(15), 7993. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18157993

Villena, A. M., Martín, P. M., & Mestre-Miquel, J. M. (2020). Community work and citizen activism as a response to the crisis in Spain: gender, poverty and social exclusion. *European Journal of Social Work*, *24*(6), 951–963. https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2020.1793106

Volckaert, E., Schillebeeckx, E., & De Decker, P. (2020). Beyond nostalgia: Older people's perspectives on informal care in rural Flanders. *Journal of Rural Studies*, *87*, 444–454. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2020.07.006

Vobruba, G. (2002). Actors in Processes of Inclusion and Exclusion: Towards a Dynamic Approach. *Social Policy & Administration*, *34*(5), 601–613. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9515.00213

Vrooman, J., & Hoff, S. (2013). The Disadvantaged Among the Dutch: A Survey Approach to the Multidimensional Measurement of Social Exclusion. *Social Indicators Research*, *113*(3), 1261–1287. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-012-0138-1

Walker, R., Kyomuhendo, G. B., Chase, E., Choudhry, S., Gubrium, E., Nicola, J. Y., Lødemel, I., Mathew, L., Mwiine, A. A., Pellissery, S., & Ming, Y. (2013). Poverty in Global Perspective: Is Shame a Common Denominator? *Journal of Social Policy*, *42*(2), 215–233. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0047279412000979

Walsh, K., O'Shea, E., & Scharf, T. (2020). Rural Old-age Social Exclusion: A Conceptual Framework on Mediators of Exclusion across the lifecourse. *Ageing and Society*, *40*(11), 2311–2337. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0144686x19000606

Walsh, K., Scharf, T., Van Regenmortel, S., & Wanka, A. (2021). The Intersection of Ageing and Social Exclusion. In *International Perspectives on Aging: Social Exclusion in Later Life* (Vol. 28). Springer Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-51406-8

Ward, C., & Walsh, D. (2023). "I just don't go nowhere:" How transportation disadvantage reinforces social exclusion. *Journal of Transport Geography*, *110*, 103627. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jtrangeo.2023.103627

Ward, N. (2009). Social Exclusion, Social Identity and Social Work: Analysing Social Exclusion from a Material Discursive Perspective. *Social Work Education*, *28*(3), 237–252. https://doi.org/10.1080/02615470802659332

Warin, P. (2002). The role of nonprofit associations in combating social exclusion in France. *Public Administration and Development*, *22*(1), 73–82. https://doi.org/10.1002/pad.208

Wenger, G. C. (2021). *The Supportive Network*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003206989

Wesselmann, E. D., Grzybowski, M. R., Steakley-Freeman, D. M., DeSouza, E., Nezlek, J. B., & Williams, K. D. (2016). Social Exclusion in Everyday Life. In *Social Exclusion* (pp. 3–23). Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-33033-4_1

Williams, K. D., & Nida, S. A. (2022). Ostracism and social exclusion: Implications for separation, social isolation, and loss. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, *47*, 101353. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2022.101353

Wilson, N. J., Jaques, H., Johnson, A., & Brotherton, M. (2016). From Social Exclusion to Supported Inclusion: Adults with Intellectual Disability Discuss Their Lived Experiences of a Structured Social Group. *JARID. Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities/Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities*, *30*(5), 847–858. https://doi.org/10.1111/jar.12275

Xie, B., Charness, N., Fingerman, K. L., Kaye, J., Kim, M. T., & Khurshid, A. (2020). When Going Digital Becomes a Necessity: Ensuring Older Adults' Needs for Information, Services, and Social Inclusion During COVID-19. *Journal of Aging & Social Policy*, *32*(4–5), 460–470. https://doi.org/10.1080/08959420.2020.1771237

Xu, L., Li, J., Mao, W., & Chi, I. (2023). Exploration of Social Exclusion among Older Chinese Immigrants in the USA. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health/International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *20*(3), 2539. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20032539

Youssim, I., Hank, K., & Litwin, H. (2015). The Role of Family Social Background and Inheritance in Later Life Volunteering. *Research on Aging*, *37*(1), 3–17. https://doi.org/10.1177/0164027513519450

Yuen, F., & Johnson, A. J. (2016). Leisure Spaces, Community, and Third Places. *Leisure Sciences*, *39*(3), 295–303. https://doi.org/10.1080/01490400.2016.1165638

Zavaleta, D., Samuel, K., & Mills, C. (2017). Measures of Social Isolation. *Social Indicators Research*, *131*(1), 367–391. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-016-1252-2

Zhang, K., Kuang, J., Xin, Z., Fang, J., Song, R., Yang, Y., Song, P., Wang, Y., & Wang, J. (2023). Loneliness, social isolation, depression and anxiety among the elderly in Shanghai: Findings from a longitudinal study. *Archives of Gerontology and Geriatrics*, *110*, 104980. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.archger.2023.104980

Appendix

1. Questionnaire volunteers

For whom and what is Schakel? Can you explain how it operates?

- How and by whom does it get decided which activities will take place? Can everybody join?
- Has Schakel changed throughout the years and how?
- Is Schakel Kontich supported by other organizations and what kind of resources are available?
- How does Schakel aid in combating social exclusion?

How do you experience volunteerism?

- How long have you been a volunteer at Schakel and possibly other organizations?
- Has your role in Schakel changed throughout the years?
- Has it become easier or more challenging to be a volunteer during your time volunteering?
- How do you find common ground between yourself and the people that participate in Schakel?
- Is that relation between volunteers and members rather formal or informal?
- How do you find and reach new volunteers willing to commit to Schakel?

What do you understand by social exclusion?

- Which kinds of social exclusion do you see at Schakel?
- How does social exclusion manifest itself in a village like Kontich?
- How do you think people experiencing social exclusion can best be helped?
- Do you feel that Schakel actually can make a difference in the lives of people who experience social exclusion and how?
- Is it easier or more challenging to address social exclusion as a “smaller” organization?

2. Questionnaire members

What do you understand by social exclusion?

How do you experience social exclusion?

- Do you feel that you experience multiple forms of social exclusion?
- How long have you been experiencing social exclusion and what do you think is the cause of the exclusion?
- How do you feel about this exclusion? Does it influence your well-being and health and how?
- What do you tell yourself or what do you do to cope with this social exclusion?
- What is your experience with social exclusion in a village like Kontich?

In which ways are you supported through this social exclusion?

- What is your experience with aid and assist organizations?
- How do you receive helpful information concerning your exclusion?

How did you end up at Schakel and why do you participate in Schakel?

- What are the advantages and disadvantages from participating in an organization like Schakel?
- What activities are you most looking forward to?

Schakel focusses a lot on talking and making new social contacts, does this approach help you and why?

- Have you already been able to make new social contacts at Schakel and how are they supporting you?
- Do you easily establish contact and relationships with unknown people?
- What does your network and social environment look like and how do you maintain this network?

Are there other organizations you participate in and how do they differ from Schakel?

- Do you participate in other activities or groups in Kontich?
- How important is the local community for you?

What are some places you visit if you want to have some time away from your home or that bring you rest?